

STOREREPRESENT



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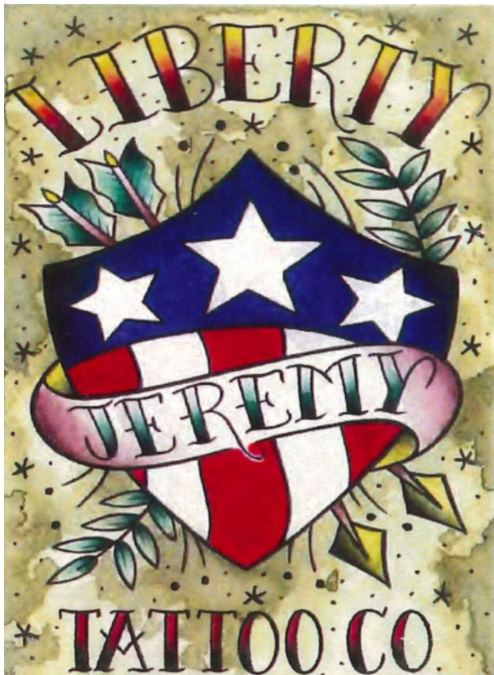


COVID-19 STOLE MY BOYFRIEND

People who know me know I love My recreational activities for the past 30 years have been largely in a van with dirty dudes and chicks going to or coming home from playing rock & roll somewhere. That was my plans for a weekend last month. Fly into Houston, drive up to BCS, hit the road with my band and make rock & roll. Until COVID-19 stole my boyfriend. It's a euphemism, true. But all the same, the corona virus forced me to cancel my rock & roll. I'd been planning this trip for six months. But my employer would have forced me to self-quarantine for two weeks or lose my job Hmmm, that sounded great actually! Oh but you have children at home, and an immune-compromised spouse, and her 75 year old mother-in-law. Can't quarantine at home because you might mess them up with the virus. Well, shit. I can't self-quarantine for two weeks in my van. So I guess I better let ol' COVID steal my good times. I'm certainly sad that I have to postpone doing what I most love doing but really, I don't think I'm enough of a shith-eel to just ignore what's going on out there around me.

I wrote this first portion early in March. By the end of March things had changed nationwide. Missing rock & roll shows became the least of our worries. Governments enforced lockdowns. Employer-enforced telecommuting or, worse, layoffs and furloughs. Thousands more contracted the virus, thousands more died. The country came to a screeching halt. The stock market shed a decade of gains in two days. People hoarded supplies. All non-essential employees were told to go home and stay home. Empaths and extroverts freaked the fuck out. Introverts secretly rejoiced at an enforced staycation. People looked to streaming content, both as a consumer and a creator, to stay connected or merely entertained. People who normally let time and distance grow between each other began calling each other on the phone, facetimeing, skypeing, Zooming to check on one another, to make a connection. People realize now that the Internet is not just another entertainment conduit but is as vital a utility as electricity and water. Yet sadly more people continue to contract the virus, more people are dying from it, more people continue to bury their heads in the Fox News sand and refuse to believe the cure is worth the pain. The rolling disinformation gaslight comedy express of the Trump presidency has proven not only woefully inadequate to the task of dealing with this crisis but actually physically dangerous to its citizens. All of a sudden, all that evil socialism Sanders and Warren and Yang were talking about not only didn't seem so bad but even Republicans adopted some of its principles in ordering a financial bail out to each one of us.

Whatever happens, I believe we are talking about a generation-affecting formative event on par with that of The Great Depression, WWII, Vietnam, 9/11, and The Great Recession. How will that effect us? How will this inform the greater Generation Z experience? Hell, we can't even answer the question of how we can find more toilet paper, ventilators, and sterile masks, let alone something quite so overarching. We will all see in good time. Not like we got anything else to do but sit wait, eh? — **KELLY MENACE**



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DRUNK DETECTIVE STARKNESS



Me waking up to the morning work alarm – none too thrilled with the cotton mouth and extremely full bladder, but still making it nonetheless when I walk into the kitchen.

Me: Oi! Drunk Detective Starkness! What was I doing yesterday, and why is the kitchen such a horrible, horrible mess?

Drunk Detective Starkness: I mean, it doesn't look too terrible. Just a couple pizza boxes and ... oh ... looks like either You, or Blacked Out You started a small grease fire and the stove is pretty jacked up.

Me: I can see that. But we need to know what was happening. Why did I start a grease fire? How did it happen? We clearly made some pizza pies, and I don't see them thrown away, so looks like they were eaten and oven cooked (I hope?)

DDS: Well yeah, I mean, you look like you ate, your morning poop was wayyy more solid than normal, so you probably at least ate the pizza.

Me: Yeah, I remember cooking the pizza around two in the afternoon, laying down for a quick nap and then waking up to take the pizza out of the oven. Everything was fine around two thirty. Had myself a beer and a couple slices and then went back for a nap in the sun on the couch.

DDS: OK, well you woke up in bed, so do you remember anything after the wonderful sun-kissed nap on a Sunday afternoon?

Me: I mean not really, I vaguely feel like I went up to the bar at some point and had a couple cocktails, but nothing really out of the ordinary.

DDS: Alright then Holmes, there are like three Totinos boxes here. Did you invite people over?

Me: Not that I recall, and probably would have gone over to Drunk Friend's house, so as to not disturb the lady.

DDS: Yeah, that tracks. But three Totinos boxes is a lot of Totinos.

Me: I guess we're gonna have to ask Blacked Out Me aren't we?

DDS: It does seem that way. Bank account only has a \$10 pending charge at the bar, so you weren't there that long, and that's the last thing on there. You've got all your cash. I'm stumped.

Me: Oi! Blacked Out Me! Your Detective Brother over here is not helping. Can you come tell me what in the sweet hell you were doing while I try and clean off this stove?

Blacked Out Me: Dammit mang, why can't I just sleep around here? No one ever lets me do nothing.

Me: Yeah. Because you're constantly fucking up something. Spill it. I know we went to the bar, and then I

guess drove home like a fucking idiot, but that's where it ends.

BO Me: Yeah, that tracks. About the time when you were leaving the bar I showed up fuckin' HUNGRY. Thankfully, you had made that Totino's pizza before your wonderful nap on the couch just laying all comfortable in the sun. So I ate the shit out of it. But I was still hungry.

Me: OK, so you made another mini-pizza.

BO Me: You're damn right I did! And I didn't even fuck it up! I put Frank's Hot Sauce all over that bitch, grated some extra cheese. It was nice. But I was still hungry, and so I made another one, but in the microwave. It was not good, so we gave that bad boy to the dog, because we love the dog.

Me: Yeah. We love the dog.

DDS: Yeah. We love the dog.

BO Me: Yeah, so after that, I was still hungry, but you were out of Totino's. Which is a real damn shame if you ask me, next time I'm around you should really make me walk to the store and get a bunch more shitty frozen pizzas.

Me: Yeah, get to the fucking point man. This is getting long.

BO Me: OK yeah, so still hungry, but I remembered that you'd been bitching about spending so much money on delivery, so I started going through the fridge and saw that pack of sausages! And I mean, I guess, for you, sober-ish Starkness, you may have been a little more successful than me.

Me: Yeah, just throw them shits on the grill, or a cast iron, or literally anything, put em on a tortilla with some horseradish, and you're good, because they're braut-wurst, and who gives a shit?

DDS: I see where he's going with this. See those tongs near the sink?

Me: Dammit.

DDS: Yeah, so it looks like blacked out you forgot that pans were a thing and was trying to hold the meats over the stove flames using those tongs. I would assume, because of 'grilling' or some other such nonsense floating around in his head. And as the hot dogs sat over the flames, the drippings started a small grease fire that you're now cleaning before your beautiful significant other wakes up to a charred stove covered in baking soda and just generally destroyed kitchen.

BUT – at least he was smart enough to throw the baking soda onto the fire and not just let it burn down half of an apartment.

BO Me: Yeah! Baking soda my dudes! Baking soda for life. – STARKNESS



HOUSE RESOLUTION 2339

First, a little background. I vape. I used to smoke cigarettes.

Here's what I like about vaping: I don't stink like smoke, I can do it inside my car and house, I can specify how much nicotine I want.

The amount of nic in a cigarette compared to vaping is weird and hard to pin down and has maths, but as a baseline: 1 cigarette will get you about 2-5 mg of nicotine...I think. With vaping, you can get a 3mg juice, and tanks a lot of times are 3-5ml. So, if I go by puffs, it seems to me that a tank is like 10 cigarettes. Again, math, but it's something like that. Whatever. So if you take around 20 puffs (the amount it takes to smoke a cigarette), you will be getting whatever it is that the math says you are getting...depending on the amount of nic. You can get 0, 1, 3, 6, 9, 12 and up. That's not the point...unless you are trying to quit cigarettes, then you can start high and taper down.

This is harm reduction. That's a good thing. Go to the Tooters on Texas and Walton, and you will see a growing wall of half cigarette packs that are pinned to the wall as a type of effigy to the last cigarettes smoked.

Oh, the other thing I like about vaping is I like the flavors.

Enter Juul. These fuckers are 50 nic. This is what teens got their hands on. Easy to sneak, easy to hide, not a ton of cloud. But dang does it get you hooked to nicotine. I had one at one point and it got to a point that I wanted to do it all the time. That's disconcerting because nicotine doesn't feel good necessarily. It works with dopamine and nicotinic receptors and science and stuff, not like, "Ahh!", more like, "OK!"

Anyway, Juuls were sweeping the nation, and moms were getting upset, and understandably so. Did Juul usage turn a bunch of those teens into cigarette smokers? Maybe some, but I suspect a high percentage of them are still Juuling.

Well, bills were passed, smoking age restrictions were changed and Juul flavors were banned. I think they are only tobacco flavor and Menthol. (Just being honest here, Juul flavors are terrible. The Mango was OK, but not even worth it). Then another bill made it so that new vape shops could not mix their own juices, in essence, they could only sell juices from companies they could buy wholesale from. That cut into sales because house made juices are inexpensive to make, and the markup is substantial. (Propylene Glycol, Vegetable Glycerin,

nicotine and flavoring is cheap.)

So, another bill just got voted on (February 27) by the House that is meant to ban vape flavors except for tobacco. It's going to the Senate soon...I think. This is H.R. 2339. This bill will shutter many vape shop doors. And sure, vaping shops are the equivalent of Frozen Yogurt shops a few years ago, but with obvious differences. But it doesn't stop there. Do you smoke Menthol? Those will be banned by this bill. Do you buy cigars online? Those too. Hookah? Those too. Flavored tobacco for your pipe? Nope! So, here's the thing, many people believe this bill came about because of the deaths that were reported to have happened because of vaping, but just so you have the facts straight, the deaths weren't caused by vaping nicotine, they were caused by weed cartridges that some fuckwad dealer, trying to make a buck from, cut with Vitamin E, which doesn't dissolve or get absorbed in the lungs. The CDC at first called out "vaping", but then, because the stoners finally started admitting to the truth, changed their report to call out specifically THC cartridges. But it was too late. It was already in the news cycles and everyone was like, "Oh, Shit." Everyone except for us vapers, who have done extensive research and found almost immediately that it was not vaping nicotine. There are like three ingredients in vape juice, and in fact, it's all food grade stuff, not able to kill. I could tell because of the rhetoric of the news outlets that something was amiss. Something wasn't right about the facts. I am super interested in hearing if some investigation reveals where these bad carts came from. Apparently they went to all 50 states. Who does this! Chronic Carts, Dank Vapes, and West Coast Carts were the culprits, but manufacturers can buy empty packaging and fill them with whatever they want, posing as the real thing. It's also possible that a diluent manufacturing company decided vitamin E was a good idea. Weed carts are pretty big business. You can apparently buy drums of the terpene diluent.

Again, too late. I got quite a few people (my mom and an anesthesiologist included) who told me vaping kills and is worse than cigarettes. It's just not. It can't be. It's basically fog juice that smells like Strawberry Cheesecake, and doesn't have 7000 chemicals and 69 known carcinogens in it.

The idea is that flavors presumably attract the youth to smoking, and that starts them on a path toward a lifetime of smoking, which will end in terrible lung problems and cancer. My point is that as far as we know, vaping doesn't cause cancer, so banning flavors is just a weird way of taking something away that could actually help. I mean, if you want to keep people from the

consequences of smoking, look into harm-reduction practices and products, right?

One of the funny (ridiculous) items on the bill is a requirement for the FDA to research "e-cigarettes". So they are gonna ban flavors, making it so that a bunch of vape shops close (because juice is where the majority of their income comes from), and THEN research vaping? Fuckers.

"The Real Cost", presented by the FDA (government) has ridden on the coattails of this fear mongering and put out some ads called "My Vaping Mistake", and they are fucking ludicrous. I don't know who the audience is. My guess is moms. It shows interviews with teens talking about how they didn't have anxiety before they started vaping, and that a football track was thwarted because of vaping, and social life has been ruined because of vaping. What the actual fuck. They are so dumb. Here are some quotes: "Next thing I knew, I blacked out." "Through vaping, all these anxieties and depression started sprouting out." "I started failing classes."

So it looks like they found some teens that either already had anxiety or depression and got them to pump up their stories and blame it on vaping. Not sure what teen would see that and believe it. The lighting is dramatic, the music is intense, the teens look sincere. What the hell. And if it is actually true and not embellished, I assume they were vaping Juuls. Maybe two at a time? So crazy. I mean, Juuls are crazy. 50 nic!!! That's a ton. So the anxiety was probably that they needed to be Juuling ALL the time but couldn't. Depression? I don't pretend to know what that monster is all about. But yes, I will grant that being super addicted to something and not being able to stop could most definitely cause depression.

Will this bill pass the Senate? Who knows. Probably not like it is. Will Trump sign it into law? Probably. Big Tobacco lobby has massive influence. Will teens keep on Juuling? Yup. Will vapers return to cigarettes? Sadly, some will. I say sadly because if you've ever tried to quit, it's fucking hard. It takes a lot of inner battling, coughing up muck, feeling terrible for a few weeks, then finally, the cravings die down to a manageable level, but it takes a good three months before you can shrug off the want.

I vape a super low nic. If I can't get my Strawberry Cheesecake, I'll quit. I'm not gonna smoke cigarettes again, and I won't vape tobacco flavor. Why would anyone do that? - JORGE GOYCO

AN HEB REPORT

Here's what I saw at HEB in Bryan on Friday, March 13 - essentially, in the beginning:

1. Nearly zero paper products on the tissue aisle. After a woman took a photo of the empty aisle on her phone, a manager approached and said, "Ma'am, I will need to see you delete that photo." She said, "Why? It's funny." He said, "Your photo could deter people from shopping in our store. I will need to see you delete it." I'm not sure that is even legal, but I hovered nearby long enough to watch the lady *actually* do it!

2. On the "Beans and Rice" aisle: only two or three tiny bags of rice. On the "Ethnic Food" aisle: big bags of rice for days.

3. Likewise, zero liquid hand soap in stock. However, help yourself to a vast array of bar-soap, dish-detergent, and people/pet shampoo.

4. Canned good aisles were nearly bare and thick with disgruntled people angrily debating the difference between hominy and corn. Meanwhile, fresh produce bulged over hella high.

5. Preppers with stacked carts talked trash with other preppers about the unnecessary panic of all these dadgum preppers. Ain't that like the duck calling the goose "foul"?

6. Why come nobody in Texas (or, at least, the four employees I asked) has ever heard of polenta? One young lady asked if I was saying it correctly I walked away.

7. I overheard a young man tell his girlfriend that hummus, essentially, was "not tasty bean dip". Well, when you put it that way . . .

8. My cashier, Alexis, said the best thing she'd heard all day was a woman declare, "*But I need this water more than anybody else!*" God bless Alexis.

In the madness, I managed to score a five pound bag of rice, a giant box of Cinnamon Frosted Flakes, a batch of bananas, and a solid elbow to the ribs near the Pickle Rick Pringles. Just the essentials, guys! - KEVIN STILL

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DOING IT

Max and Sheila did it last night. It's pretty obvious. They tried to be all coy about it, you know, sitting with different friend groups at dinner, but then we saw them peel off together on the way back to the dorms. And then this morning when we saw them at breakfast something had clearly changed: they acted more familiar, touched each other more tenderly, spoke fewer words. Sheila's smile was fierce, her face demonstrating a degree of joy we hadn't thought possible for her.

Now that Max and Sheila have done it there really aren't many of us left who haven't. It's a silent minority, because it's not something you can easily tell about a person. But that also means the ones who belong to this minority are unknown to each other.

We are sitting at one of the campus cafes with our best friend Kate. Kate sets her cup of coffee down and looks us in the eye. "I did it with Nick last night," she says.

"Wow, really?" We try to sound neutral but inside we're instantly seething — we'd always assumed Kate would consult us before she went ahead and did it.

"Yeah," she says. "I mean, it's not like he's a perfect specimen but he's good enough. He had that story published in the lit mag last—"

"It wasn't that good," we interrupt. Kate gives us a funny look.

"Anyway," Kate continues, "we did it. Me and him."

We raise an eyebrow. "Really? All of it? Everything?"

"Yup," she says. She actually sounds proud. We seethe some more.

"How did it feel?" we finally ask.

"He was really into it—"

"You know what I mean. The other thing." We can always count on Kate to tell us the truth.

"Yeah that's what I was getting to." Kate takes a breath. "His POV was so focused. It's really scary at first. Then it gets weird but in a funny way. Eventually you can't help but start laughing like crazy, then when you finally get used to it it's over. He wanted to do it again right away but I felt like I needed time to recover." She pauses,

then says almost as an afterthought: "Somehow he felt more familiar than I would have expected." We let this hang in the air, wait for her to continue.

"He told me he hadn't done it before but I'm not sure I believe him," she says. "Maybe I'm being unfair." She takes a sip of coffee. "Anyway, we're gonna do it again on Thursday night since neither of us has class on Friday."

"You're craving it now, aren't you," we try to tease, though in reality we're disappointed that Kate crossed over to the other side so easily without telling us beforehand.

We want her to roll her eyes but instead she just smiles vacantly. "Well yeah," she says. "It's amazing. Sex doesn't come close."

They call it crossing wires, though no actual wires are involved. Basically, there's a way to jailbreak your AR implant so that you directly swap your sensory feed with someone else's: you experience the world through their senses, and vice versa. It's not a full switchover — you still retain some percentage of your own senses underneath it all — so it ends up being like you're inside and outside of your body at the same time. None of this is legal of course; I mean, technically it's not illegal yet either, the hack was only publicized a few weeks ago so there are no studies to tell us what the long-term effects might be. There is one cardinal rule though: they say you should only do it with someone close to you, someone you already have intimacy with. Do it with too many different people and you could lose your own identity completely.

People take this rule as license to do different things. Person A takes this to mean they should wander the earth in search of the one person worthy of doing it with, their one true pairing. Person B chooses the first available just to get it over with. Neither type regrets it after because neither will remember their own individual self. "You should try it," Kate says, and we finally feel a surge of satisfaction.

"I have," we say to Kate. "I did it with Nick last week."

We'd wanted to do it with Kate — desperately so — but didn't know if she felt the same way. Now we are glad because they made their choice, evolving from Person A to Person B to Thing C. One of us. — *STARKNESS*

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SCIFI VS COVID 19

Reading science fiction for about half a century or so has given me something of a unique perspective on the COVID-19 crisis.

My first reaction was – unfortunately – the “Lucifer’s Hammer” response where I was considering preparations for essentially the end to life as we know it. A comet slams into the planet, and pretty much everyone who isn’t killed is quickly left desperately scrambling without the wonders of modern civilization. I was thinking what to do when the power goes off, the water stops running, the gas pumps go dry.

Luckily, I stopped short of becoming “Apocalypse Boy” or stockpiling weapons and freeze-dried foods although I did pull together something of a disaster supply of food and water (and a modest amount of toilet paper). I told myself and my wife that at least we could use it all one of these days.

Watching the cessation of so much of what makes up our lives in America was still something of a surreal experience. If you think about it, some of these are really “First World” problems for all these astonishingly well-paid athletes to not being playing their games. It’s not like they are saving lives or building bridges or growing crops ... unless, of course, you are one of the millions who makes – or made – his or her living from selling hot dogs, parking cars, ushering folks to seats, doing all those support jobs to professional sports.

The science fiction I’ve read over the decades doesn’t really concern itself with the problems of the sports world. I’m also surprised it only marginally has dealt with educational issues. With our current educational system from kindergarten to graduate school violently thrown online, what is going to be the result? Is there going to be a massive dumbing down across the globe, or are the countries where education is seen as important before COVID-19 going to see their youth improve by leaps and bounds while American kids flounder through Minecraft while skipping basic math?

I wonder how science fiction will treat this unprecedented time in our world. I’m also curious to see how science itself will deal with this.

Growing up, I read a great deal of older science fiction even as I started absorbing the new stuff for my time. By older, I mean Sci-Fic of the Fifties that was

enormously influenced by fears of a nuclear holocaust on the heels of the very human costs of Germany’s Holocaust. Much of it was both very bleak and very optimistic. You have the assurance of something like Issac Asimov’s *Foundation Trilogy* along with the harsh practicality of Robert Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers*.

Today’s news is filled with both of these once again as science fiction becomes science fact. The gloomy predictions of COVID-19 killing millions across the planet for months and months to prognostications that something as simple as 80 percent of the population practicing physical distancing could stop the virus in 13 weeks. What will be the final chapter? We don’t know the end yet.

What was new as I became a reader was the experimental science fiction led by Harlan Ellison’s *Dangerous Visions* collections. Nothing was taboo to attack or investigate or explore. They were pretty heady stuff although I could have done without some of the typeface efforts.

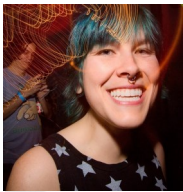
With that experimentation came a grimness that eventually infused much of the science fiction and certainly epic fantasy of the last twenty years. There was Margaret Atwood and her dark gender tales like 1985’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* that became a more recent television series. And of course, there’s *Game of Thrones* also on the tube that began on the page in 1996 as *The Song of Ice and Fire* novel series. George R. R. Martin is probably the best-known creative voice with his sweeping tales of monstrous evils, dying heroes, and suffering seemingly without end.

Hopefully, COVID-19 won’t kill off all the good people while the brutes take over the land. Sure, there is a fatalism that haunts much of recent science fiction as well as our current reality, but the science that informs much of the writing holds promise for the present.

There is a certain irony in the fact that I’m about to begin the final volume of the Remembrance of *Earth’s Past* trilogy by Chinese science fiction author Cixin Liu. The title is a thoughtful one: “Death’s End.” Much of the first book and plenty of the second dealt with Chinese history past and present. The people have survived despite horrific leaders and governments for more than three thousand years. I think our young nation can survive as well. – MIKE L. DOWNEY

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SALACIOUS VEGAN CAT LADY CRUMBS

I live with a perfect precious boy. His name is Toonces. He has white fluffy marshmallow feet and a tail so long and furry that it has a part running down the center. Read in the tone of Babykins by Richard Scarry.

6:25 AM: BEEP. BEEP. BEEPBEEP. BEEPBEEP. I stumble over to the alarm clock snooze for 20 more minutes. Toonces wakes up.

6:45 AM: BEEP. BEEP. BEEPBEEP. BEEPBEEP. As soon as I tell the alarm clock to shut up, Toonces starts meowing. It's the morning, and Toonces needs his pets. He wants to go outside, and he wants pets, and he wants fish gravy all at once. He follows me into the bathroom for bathmat pets and squints his little eyes when I turn on the light. Me too, Toonces. Me, too. I pat his little butt to make him go outside once his pets are done.

7:00 AM: I tip toe past a sleeping Zoot and Michael to find that I've accidentally left a load of bread on the back of the sofa. Wait, it's Toonces! He's been patiently perched, waiting for me to let him out into the atrium. He steps outside, meowing to the void. He hopes that the neighbor's tuxedo cat, Oreo, will show up on the roof!

7:01 AM: Fervent, concerned yeowls come from the atrium. Toonces sees his friend, and he wants to tell me! He wants help! He wants his friend to come down and visit! He wants to go see his friend! But he can't quite climb up the walls of the atrium. He looks sad. Have I imprisoned this cat? Am no better than the Tiger King? Am I just projecting my expected emotions onto sweet Toonces? I cry on the inside for a minute.

7:05 AM: Toonces stops meowing into the void.

7:40 AM: Toonces knows breakfast time is at 8 and meows to come back inside. Toonces likes to pretend he's on the news - And we're back with Toonces on the 8s! This morning, TUna and OHcean WHITEfish FEast! He meows a demanding meow, I'm not sure if it's a verbal whip to make me go faster or genuine excitement for his fish paste. He bats my ankle with his marshmallows as I make the million-Toonces-mile trek to the food bowl. He licks all of the gravy off before eating his mush.

7:41 AM: Toonces is done with breakfast. He'll leave a little morsel so that he can have a snack later.

8:00 AM: I step out of the bathroom, sweet and clean from a shower, and Toonces is sitting in front of the door, waiting for me. He follows me as I get my water and tea for the workday, and finishes his morsel that he left. He follows me back to my office, and sits in front of the back doors. Let me out! he says. LET ME

OUT! Only good boys who can go to the vet and get their shots and who can be picked up by strangers who can read their tag if they get lost get to go to the real outside, Toonces.

8:15 AM: Toonces is tired of demanding to go outside, so he hops up into the lounge chair in my office. He spent his first couple of weeks underneath the chair when he came to live with us. Now he spends his days on top of it. He watches squirrels and birds and Zoot and the neighbor dogs from his chair. He lets his little front arm hang off of the chair.

8:45 AM: Toonces has grown bored of watching the outside TV channel and is curled up, head on his paws, and eyes closed.

9:07 AM: I knock my knee on my desk as I'm untangling my headphones during a team video chat. Toonces wakes up and looks over at me like a tired mom, woken up from her first nap in weeks. I mute my microphone and apologize profusely.

10:13 AM: Toonces stands up, stretches, and lays down on his other side.

11:00 AM: I remember that Toonces needs his flea medicine. I go to the kitchen, open a packet, and stash it in my hoodie so he doesn't suspect anything. I start giving him pets and love, and pull out the flea medicine and try and hold on to him so I get it on the right spot on his neck. He gets scared and wriggles free. He's momentarily scarred.

11:30 AM: Toonces slinks in and instead of sitting on his favorite chair, where the assault took place, he perches on his cat tower in the other corner of the room. He looks sad, deflated, his tail hangs straight down, slack, emotionless.

1:15 PM: It's time for lunch, so I leave the office. Toonces is still perched on his cat tower, looking betrayed. I only talk sweetly and softly to him the rest of the afternoon.

3:00 PM: The trauma of the morning has worn off, and Toonces is back in his favorite chair, curled up, one eye open, wondering why I chose now to be on another video call.

3:45 PM: I'm restless and ready for the day to be over. I get up to grab a coffee, but stop by Toonces first. I tell him he is the sweetest, best boy in the world in soft whispers and give him the most tender of pets. He doesn't need to be told. He knows!

4:50 PM: Toonces is awake and sitting at the backdoor again, meowing to go out. Why Toonces! You're more than an hour early for work! Go back to sleep!

5:30 PM: Zoot and I are ready for a walk. Toonces lays in the middle of the hallway, watching us get ready to go. I tell him how much I wish he would come on walks with us. He lunges for the door. No Toonces!!

5:55 PM: Zoot and I are finished with our walk and making our way up the front path. Zoot likes to slow down to a super mosey here, trying to make her walk last as long as possible. Someone is watching us from the window. He silently mouths "Where have you been?" By the time we reach the door, he has, too. He scolds me. "Why didn't you take me with you?". He greets Zoot. Zoot refuses to acknowledge his presence.

6:00 PM: Toonces shows up for work right on time. He starts meowing - this is his job. Out to the atrium you go, Toonces!

6:07 PM: Toonces is meowing to come back in. Ok, Toonces! Come on in!

6:17 PM: Toonces has gotten a snack and is ready to go back outside. MEOW! MREOW!

6:30 PM: There are meows coming from the atrium, but Toonces is nowhere to be seen.

7:00 PM: While I'm cooking dinner, the oven timer, the microwave, and Toonces all go off at the same time.

7:20 PM: Michael, and I sit down for dinner and a TV show. Zoot sits with us, and puts on her best hasn't-eaten-in-three-thousand-years face, hoping to get a french fry or a hunk of bread or anything but a carrot. Toonces meows. He wants to go out. I put down my napkin and plate, move my makeshift pillow table, take off my blankie and let Toonces out.

7:25 PM: Is that Toonces meowing, or something in the background on the TV?

7:27 PM: A quiet part in the TV show reveals it was definitely Toonces. I put down my napkin and plate, move my makeshift pillow table, take off my blankie and let Toonces back in.

7:35 PM: I hear the tag on his collar stop clinking against his food bowl. He sits behind the sofa, on the landing, licking his chomps and meowing. I peek-a-boo twice from behind the couch cushion. Toonces cannot resist a peek-a-boo - he bites and leaps up on the couch near me. This is the closest he will get to snuggling.

7:37 PM: I was too boring. Now there is a loud meowing coming from the front door. I look behind me and there's a long cat, stretch upward, wrapping his paws around the door handle. I try to ignore him.

7:40 PM: Toonces is meowing at the atrium again. I put down my napkin and plate, move my makeshift pillow table, take off my blankie and let Toonces out.

8:00 PM: On the dot, Toonces is yeowling to come in. It's time for Toonces on the 8s! COD sole-and-shrimp FEast! He meows like he's Mister Burns and I'm Smithers, taking too long to release the hounds, and paws me on the ankle. He slurps his gelatinized bone gravy.

8:01 PM: Toonces has eaten his entire dinner.

8:04 PM: Full of meat gravy and pulverized fish paste, Toonces is ready to go back outside. MEOW! MREOW! Toonces, you are lucky we love you! 8:05 PM - 9:29 PM: Every so often, I'll hear meowing. Sometimes it's in my head, sometimes it's Toonces. He slams into the window trying to catch june bugs.

9:30 PM: Again, a very punctual boy, REOW! Toonces is ready for his nightly treat: goldfish crackers. I let him inside, and grab him a big handful of goldfish, and say, "Oh, no Toonces, I got too much!", just like I do every night. It's never enough. He runs to the living room and patiently waits on the treat corner, the corner of the rug where he gets his treats. He wolfs them down.

9:35 PM: After licking his chomps, he decides he needs to go back out and check on the atrium again. Oreo might be out there.

10:00 PM: Michael and I make our way into the bedroom. I play on my phone and watch TV while Michael plays computer games. We open up the Toonces drive-thru window, which is just pulling up the blinds to Toonces height, so we can see him when he needs to come in.

Every so often, a little ghost comes to the window and wails. I get up from under my comfy, warm blankies and let him in. He runs to the kitchen, and I hear his collar clink against his food bowl. He has come in for a snack. His outdoor activities have depleted him of nutrients and he must replenish. Replenish Toonces, you deserve it!

10:45 PM: Michael closes the blinds and tells Toonces the outside is closed. Toonces meows once more. Ensadened, he goes to his scratching post and all of a sudden, his back legs go limp. Toonces! What has happened?! Have you had an accident?! No, no, Toonces is just starting his night time gig as a scratching pole dancer! He spins around and his head falls, looking at us upside down over his back. Sensual! Toonces, I don't have a single tip for you! Disappointed at my offerings, he stops his scritch tease, and bolts down the hall, ears back, back arched, fur raised. As we drift off to sleep, Toonces pretends to be a pinball. - KATIE KILLER

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ASK CREEPY HORSE

I'm currently sitting in a zebra caftan on my old red velvet couch smoking a bowl and listening to *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust*. Food delivery is on its way. Complete with a gluten free bun, my food will be left on the ground outside the door and a total stranger will text me that my food has arrived. My phone goes off with alerts. My much younger co-workers are freaking the fuck out. We are one week into "quarantine" and they are beyond stir crazy. The phone lights up with positive affirmations, conspiracy theories and even the rare "acceptance" of life in pandemic, "I think I'm going to be a cam girl." I respond, "Get that money mama!" To the aghast of body positive and woke young women.

I've very rarely been on our work group texts. I'll open my phone to find 70-100 missed messages. It's the same rhetoric. Diatribes of politics and fears of singleness in society. They are lost and afraid. If 2016-17 was as quoted by Henry Rollins as being "Time for punk rock, what Joe Strummer had trained us for", 2020 is what Bill Hicks has trained us for.

Upon the initial news of "stay-at-home" advisories, people all around me began to panic, worry and alarm. Sure. I too was understandably put out by the mass pandemic killing all the old people off, but when I really thought about things I wasn't as fazed. I'm poor. That's the truth. So if anything happens to me, I'll most likely die. I don't have insurance or any way of receiving proper medical care. I wouldn't be able to afford the care necessary of a new and exciting viral pandemic. So I did what I felt best to do. I partied my fucking ass off with my closest friends.

For at least a week solid, I've done every drug with every friend willing to hang out under quarantine rules. I spent a couple days solid dropping acid on the beach watching Frank Zappa's claymation and trying to apply layers of makeup over running eyeliner and mascara from the joyful tears I was crying due to the acid. I did harder drugs with a couple I know until the wee hours of the morning (as one does) while watching *Tiger King*, listening to songs and reminiscing the yesteryears of our youth. I ate countless edibles and smoked weed like it was going extinct. I started reading *Naked Lunch* again.

I pleasure sought like no motherfucker has done since the last time I went through hard times and used this as a defense mechanism. But is it pleasure seeking? My smarter friends would most likely say yes and have me committed. But I am barely clinging to the tattered remnants of my gen x umbilical cord. In a conversation with a friend we went on and on about how we've been planning this, self isolation and end of the world antics, our entire lives.

Haven't we? Have we not made Bill Hicks into a meme

form (something he would have surely abhorred) stating throughout social media how outside and indifferent we are? I never felt one of the group. I always felt with society I was standing outside looking in. I never had any interest in being included. If you wanna know why and truly get an understanding watch the *We Are the World* documentary from the 80s. Do you want to be a part of that world? Fuck no.

Anyways, it's the world Bill Hicks painted for us that we couldn't see until decades had passed. When he talked about CNN portraying the worst going on in the world only to look out his own window and see nothing? I feel that. No I don't doubt the Coronavirus and the damage it can do, but this is also not *28 Days Later*. Dumbfucks that begged for a world like *The Walking Dead* and believed they'd be the survivor blowin the brains out of our dead zombie bodies are now the paranoid fucktwits buying up massive amounts of toilet paper and cleaning goods.

I too went to the grocery store. I had Icelandic yogurt and Pepsi to buy. Yeah there was an eeriness to the place, the people moreso. Like nothing was happening, yet people were turned all the fuck the way up to 11. One redneck walked past on his cell phone and said "I better get off and get out of here before someone gets shot" and marched his way to checkout with an urgency that seemed very true to him. I looked around us, all over. Nothing was going on. It was quiet. There was less product out than usual but nothing much else. But society. Society was on edge. People walked around unsure of one another. "Haha. Welcome to my world motherfuckers!" I wanted to say that but I hate a smug little know it all so I kept it to myself and berated myself mentally as I continued to walk the aisles of the grocery store.

I'm doing what I do best right now. Fucking off. Party-ing. Living life. I don't recommend it for anyone but myself. I don't think many could survive being me. I've taken this and turned it into "vacation time". For all the years I worked 80hr weeks, worked two-three jobs at a time and cried because I was so tired, I've done nothing but sleep constantly, read the works of Burroughs and Bukowski, revisited music and movies I haven't had time for and interacted on a level with my friends I haven't been able to in a very long time. I may have even reintroduced myself to society in the process.

At the end of the day, do what you have to to get through this. Whatever it is. Cry. Masturbate violently as you call out your elementary music school teachers name. Pornhub is offering free premium memberships. Discover new music. Watch movies. Spend time with your kids. Call your grandparents. It's your choice to be the best or worst of yourself in this time. Just wash your damn hands and stay away from people.—*CREEPY HORSE*

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JDSmith



JDSmith

XIN CHÀO, HANOI

Getting lost in the fog of self-isolation and unemployment? Here's a quick guide for how to structure your day to maximize productivity:

9:00—Wake up. Make some toast and tea. Read news for 15 minutes until it all becomes too much and the darkness begins to creep in.

10:00—Answer messages from friends and family.

11:00—Slip into some skivvies and sunbathe on your rooftop patio, which shall be henceforth known as “The Beach,” because lying to yourself is self-care, as is the occasional burst of vitamin D you get when the sun breaks through the smog. Listen to *This American Life* until it all becomes too much and the darkness begins to creep in.

12:00—With any luck, there are leftovers in the fridge. Without any luck, find a recipe for some dish you've never made before and hope against hope that you've got all the ingredients, because Lord knows you're not leaving the house to pick up a bottle of freaking nutmeg or whatever garbage Ina Garten seems to find so god-damn important.

1:30—Practice guitar, I guess? Fender has made three months of their online guitar lessons free. While you still suck as a guitarist, the lessons are pretty good and, like, literally what else are you going to do today? The darkness doesn't tend to seep in until you try to play bar chords. Bar chords are the devil's work.

2:30—Cheeky little depression nap.

5:00—Water colors. Water colors can't hurt you.

5:45—Oh god why aren't there any leftovers???

6:00—After having decided that popcorn for dinner is perfectly cromulent, practice coding because you've realized too late in the game that teaching abroad isn't exactly the most secure job on the planet. Practice coding for approximately the next five hours.

6:30—Oh god it's only 6:30???

6:31—Box wine.

7:30—Watch *The Worst Witch* on Netflix, because things like sophistication and high art are meaningless now, and also it's close enough to Harry Potter that you can forget about the creeping darkness for a while.

10:00—You still have friends who love and care about you. They will video call you in a group chat. You will not have showered in three days. They will neither notice nor care. Grow up and drink your box wine, you fucking child.

1:30—You're struck with the urgent realization that there has never been a better time to do karaoke.

9:00 am the next day—OH GOD WHAT YEAR IS IT???

9:01—Tea and toast. Read the bare minimum of news. Probably take a shower today. Do a pushup. Don't let the darkness creep in. This, too, shall pass.

—MARINA BRIGGS

DON'T STAND SO CLOSE TO ME

A theme in Science Fiction dating as far back as an old episode of *The Outer Limits* (but probably going back further back than that) is the idea of an external threat uniting the planet. When confronted with a horrible external threat, squabbling groups of people would put their petty differences aside and unite to face a common threat and hopefully improve the lot of humanity ever so slightly in the process. Unfortunately, the current Covid-19 Pandemic proves that this idea is a bunch of BULLSHIT. Even when faced with a pandemic that could easily mount a death toll in the hundreds of thousands, the political sides remain as mutually hostile and entrenched as ever.

Our President, though being given advance notice of this coming pandemic chose not to take needed steps to at least mitigate the worst part of the pandemic. He initially minimized the potential threat of Covid-19 (calling it a “hoax”) and then lied about minimizing the threat of the pandemic. Yet through this, his supporters remain steadfast; blaming “Libtards” for creating a panic to try to prevent Trump from being reelected. Why the nefarious “Libtards” would allow a virus to spread that is killing people primarily in blue states — New York, California — isn't clear but any scapegoat will do in a storm or pandemic. I wonder if New York would have gotten needed medical equipment more quickly if it had been a Republican state. The fact that such an idea would even occur to me and the notion that such a horrible notion could even pass the laugh out loud test shows how divided this country is. Despite the continued bungling of this crisis at the federal level, I think this country will ultimately survive this pandemic. Whether we survive, the ever deepening political division between left and right is unfortunately an open question; especially if the coming presidential election is “cancelled” or “delayed”. Enough political polemics.....

On a more personal note, I am “working at home”. You will hear no complaints from me given that many people do not have a job at all. Being nagged at a virtual online meeting by your boss is much the same as being nagged in person except I can turn off the camera so they can't see my facial response during the nagging. I used to snicker — out of jealousy mainly — at tech types who “worked at home”. How could that possibly be **WORK**? I am now eating every snarky remark I ever said in that direction daily. Working at home is actually **work**, mainly as I have many more distractions at home: Spotify, You Tube, books I haven't read and a cat who is getting used to having her human slave on hand most of the day.

Local supermarkets have been mostly stocked, though the social isolation rule is followed in its breach. Apparently six feet of distance between people is a very abstract concept when stocking up on White Claw and Pop Tarts. This makes the very rare trips to the supermarket the most hazardous part of my life during this pandemic. Oddly enough, the strictest enforcement of social distancing is I've seen at the local Plasma Donation center. The employees there are all in masks, there are marks on the floor at exactly six feet where folks line up. The social distancing rule is strictly enforced with people thrown out for not following these rules. When the local Plasma donation center has a better handle on the Pandemic than the President of the United States; draw your own conclusions. On the bright side Sirius XM is free for the duration of the pandemic, so you can get all the 1980's nostalgia you want. Spoiler alert: The 1980's sucked. I didn't need a pandemic to tell me that.

—RENTED MULE

ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP



"You sweet little babies are going to look so healthy during the Apocalypse." These are the words you can hear me say on a daily basis now that we are all in quarantine during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Holy fucking shit, y'all. Are you ready to start that commune yet? I kinda felt like a complete and total idiot, locked down in a city with empty shelves and no toilet paper after writing about off grid homesteading for over a year now. Then I remembered what a brilliant fucking badass I am and I got to work. Now more than ever, we should all be growing our own food!

"Plant like your life depends on it because it does." As we continue to fall through this rabbit hole of disreality, more and more of us are trying to find some purpose to establish a new normal. Have you binge watched every episode of *Tiger King*? Seven times? Are you staring out the window into the void and singing "Hold On" by Wilson Phillips? Does your cat hiss at you every time you walk into a room? Please. For the love of all humanity and your own sanity, get outside and dig in the ground.

"Grow plants grow. Because the grocery stores won't have food anymore." Save a portion of your food budget and invest in seedlings from local places like Farm Patch or Producers Co-op and our local Brazos Valley Farmers Market. You can find them as cheap as six plants for \$2.49. Seeds are even cheaper! Don't forget to grab a bag(s) of soil and compost! And raid local landscaping businesses or Lowe's for discarded planting pots. They literally just throw them away! I have recycled so many different things for planters: old boots, buckets, tires, bottle walls, the carcass of my enemy. If you have rad neighbors, ask if they wanna throw in for a community garden box.

"If I have to burn any bodies, I can make some very useful bio-char." Most of the crops that are coming into season right now are going to be for a summer harvest. Some of the plants I have seen available around town are: tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, squash, cucumbers, watermelons, cantelope, strawberries, fig trees, herbs, herbs and more herbs. All of these are great producers during our spring/summer season!

As long as you give them a healthy, robust home and water them daily, they will support you with nutrient dense food.

"One day soon, I will trade my tomatoes for mushrooms."

Start a composting system. Recycle your water. Mulch. Mulch. Mulch. These are all things that I have written about in the past. You know, the articles that only Katie reads. Grab a beer, go back and rifle through the

old 979Represent papers from 2019 and take notes. I survived off grid with nothing more than my own wit, a wheelbarrow and my hori hori knife for three years. You can do a helluva lot more with Lowe's just down the road. Also, buy a chicken.

"Hey sweet baby cluck clucks. I can't wait to see you peck the flesh off Alexis." We have no certainty about what this future holds and how summer will look for our country or our local community. BUT you do have the ability to control what you are doing with your time, energy and money. Can you spend some extra quarantine hours getting your hands dirty and planting some peppers? Absolutely. Do you have 30 minutes a day to water your basil, oregano and mint? Of course. Because we can't go to the bars anymore! Should you organize a community garden and grow food for families who can't afford to buy their own? Goddammit if you don't, I'll feed you to my chickens. —HALEY RICHARDSON



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AMERICA'S HITLER

Writing the phrase "America's Hitler" and knowing every reader – on both sides of the political spectrum -- recognizes it refers to a sitting President is both repulsive and distressing.

However, the connection of Trump and Hitler is not original here – the most cogent argument is by longtime civil rights attorney and author Bert Neuborne in his 2019 book: *When at Times the Mob Is Swayed: A Citizen's Guide to Defending Our Republic*.

Neuborne is no strip-mall litigator. In his half-century of practicing law, he's been part of more than 200 cases that have gone before the U.S. Supreme Court and is a fierce Holocaust reparations lawyer.

Trump emulates Hitler and his rise to power in a democracy in 20 different ways, according to Neuborne. While they are all interesting, this article will just look at a few of the themes that Hitler and Trump share in Neuborne's estimation . . . with a few asides by this writer.

1. Hitler and Trump both were not elected by a majority of democratic voters. Trump lost the popular vote by nearly 3 million, receiving votes by about 25% of eligible Americans. Like Hitler, Trump is a minority leader.
2. Demonizing political opponents was a standard Hitler tactic, something Trump had copied in delirious fashion. Hitler referred to his opponents as scum, criminals, and parasites. Trump has brayed about jailing Hillary Clinton for nearly four years and claims America is infested by aliens. Think of all the bullying nicknames and insults Trump has spewed onto leaders on both sides of the aisle (remember Lying Ted [Cruz], Little Marco [Rubio], "idiot" Lindsey Graham, "pathological" Ben Carson, Rick Perry needing an IQ test?)
3. Mass rallies were popularized by Hitler in the 1930s, and Trump has outdone the Nazis with his constant rallies for his fawning base. While the Trump rallies may have served some purpose during the presidential race leading up to the 2016 election, that they have continued for years points to a desperately-shallow narcissist needing constant adulation . . . just like Hitler.
4. Hitler attacked mainstream media relentlessly, a tactic that Trump has adopted his entire life. Whereas Hitler lashed out at what he called the lying press, Trump has adapted Hitler's term to refer to America's media as "fake news." Of course, "fake" is anything that isn't complimentary to Trump, part of his attack on objective truth. This Hitlerian assault on truth includes undermining science, never so apparent than Trump's appalling ignorance concerning medicine and the COVID-19 crisis.

5. The Adolf preached a misogynistic image of women, valuing them only as wives and mothers while prohibiting their participation in German political and economic life. The Donald is easily the most misogynistic leader in America's history who crassly regards women as sexual objects. Trump's porn star dalliances and pervy constant attacks on all women who dare stand up to him are too long to list here.
6. Hitler used the most modern communication technology of the time to spread his twisted ideas to Germany: radio. The "people's receiver" was a cheap radio tuned to one channel: Hitler's. The daily barrage of Hitler's speeches and Nazi propaganda was free of censorship, a free press, and common sense. Trump has Twitter. With all the grammatical grace of a brain-damaged four-year-old, Trump daily, hourly, vomits every warped lie that flits into his little brain.
7. Making the Jewish people the scapegoats for what was wrong in Germany was Hitler's plan to divide the country along racial and religious lines. Hitler blamed the Jews for everything. Trump, our most racist president since Andrew Jackson (well, Woodrow Wilson was close) never misses a chance to blame and bash people of color for everything: in the NFL, in the NBA, all immigrants (except those from Norway). He couldn't even condemn home-grown neo-Nazis.

Neuborne lists other Hitler-Trump parallels: mass detentions and deportations, attacks on domestic democracy and the rule of law, closing borders, extreme nationalism (MAGA), enriching elites, demanding loyalty oaths, rejecting international norms, and on and on.

The Hitler-Trump bond for Neuborne stems from his contention that Trump studied Hitler's speeches and tactics. Divorce proceedings with Trump's first wife stated, according to Neuborne, that Trump had a book that translated and annotated Hitler's early speeches he kept locked up by his bed. Now, I have trouble believing Trump ever read anything longer than a McDonald's menu, but there you go.

Finally, Neuborne stresses he doesn't want to say the two men are equal since that trivializes Hitler's massive offensive crimes by comparing the German dictator with Trump's ludicrous shortcomings. However, the world was shocked in the 1930s when a screeching clown with a funny moustache transformed one of the greatest democracies in the world into a dictatorship that murdered millions. No one thought it could happen there. Think what a bellowing buffoon with funny hair could do. Vote . . . while we still can. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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SOBRIETY DURING COVID-19

The world is in a tricky place right now. The amount of stress we each are receiving is overwhelming. And if you are in a personal space right now that includes sobriety, it may seem impossible. Here is a list of things I keep close by at all times for whenever being sober feels like the last thing that I want to do.

Be active. Move your body in a way that supports ultimate blood flow, stretching muscles and deep breathing. Dance, run, walk down a forbidden path in the woods, beat your chest like a barbarian screaming into the void. Try tantric masturbation.

Write down why you are turning to your addiction. My therapist suggested this one to me after I decided to spend my Xmas holiday black out drunk and painting a closet. Every time I turn to using, I write down what triggered my desire to numb. Even if I still use, I am aware of why and then I can address those issues on a deeper level at a better time.

Call a friend. If accountability is something that keeps you grounded and sober, collect a circle of friends who support your sobriety, who know your triggers and are willing to be available in a time of crisis. I use the Marco Polo app nearly every day to check in with my key support group and talk through my current struggles of sobriety.

Try meditation. So many people roll their eyes at this one, but it is truly a transformative tool for disconnecting your mind and coming back into your body. It can be frustrating at first especially if you are a manic panic thinker like I am. Keep doing it anyway.

Start a new hobby or rekindle an old one. This year I started a process of reclaiming the hobbies that once sustained my happiness and satisfaction before I turned to using. Now instead of drinking, I draw with graphite for one hour. Instead of hitting a pipe, I crochet the shit out of some beanies. Instead of numbing out, I write a

one act play. Do the things that bring you joy, and do them again and again and again.

Make art. We started an apocalypse pinata on our fourth day of quarantine. Craft out your pain. Reclaim some furniture and paint it a rad new color. Draw a mural on your ceiling. Learn how to make voodoo dolls of all of your least favorite celebrities. Reupholster your couch. Channeling your pain into a physical presence that is apart from you can be a cathartic release in a way that is healthier than using.

Find sober music. I most recently discovered the band Apes of the State, and they are sober musicians supporting other sober musicians. Hearing April Hartman's story of addiction and recovery, helped reinforce my ability to do hard things. Their songs describe some of the biggest challenges and make me feel not so alone.

Get trashed but forgive yourself. Listen. We are in the midst of something that is traumatic for ALL of us. If you decide to spend the whole day drinking a bottle of Jim Beam, wake up three days later and find a little grace for yourself. It's hard right now. We cannot control anything, especially the current world crisis, or the uncomfortable feelings that are rising up inside of us because of it. Know that numbing it out, won't change anything and those same feelings will be there until you find a healthier way to deal with them. Hold yourself accountable, find grace when you need it and try again tomorrow.

We are all in this bat shit crazy whack-a-doodle time TOGETHER and thank you, Kevin, for reminding me of that. Every day we move forward into a new normal that challenges each of us in ways that might feel extremely hard but you ARE NOT ALONE. Reach out. Be a friend. Remind each other that we love and support this community because we are all so fucking rad! And staying sober may be the raddest thing you and I will ever do. —
HALEY RICHARDSON



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GENERATION Z'S 9/11

Most generations have a “defining moment” or three in their lifetimes, some sort of occurrence that news magazines and sociologists alike point towards as touchstones for a common shared experience, a scapegoat for generational failure or for generational inspiration, something we all have in common that somehow or another affected us all in some sort of way. The Greatest Generation shared the challenges of The Great Depression and World War II. The Baby Boomers reaped the economic benefits of their parents and, when not dodging bullets and napalm in Vietnam, dodged the Clap and barbers during the Summer of Love. Generation X felt the emotional fallout of all that free love while latch-keying from one divorced parent’s house to the next. Millennials rose with the personal computer and the Internet, only to watch it blow apart on September 11, 2001. And now Generation Z, already struggling amidst the Baby Boomer’s last pilfering of the economy for their personal gain, will be the hardest hit by Covid-19, the coronavirus. This will be their 9/11.

Most Zeds were infants when the Trade Center towers fell down. They never knew what freedoms the country enjoyed previous to that morning, the rosy future foretold by internet startups and tech stocks, the flattening globalized supply chain, and the mobility afforded by cellular smartphones. They are the first generation without the benefit of upward mobility, that they can launch from their parents’ house forward into the global economy and do better than moms and pops did. They have never known their country to not be at war. They have never known their economy to not be favored to the 1%.

What I mean is that Generation Z has already taken many turns around the country on the struggle bus. This is a generation trying to make households run on service industry jobs not intended to shoulder that load and overloaded with student loan debt. Sure, as digital natives they can do homework, chat with one another, partake in the surrealist absurdism of meme culture, and solve problems for their parents and grandparents all at the same time through the same device without breaking a sweat. But they are also the most likely to be underinsured, underemployed, and overworked. Most jobs lost in the first round of quarantine layoffs are service industry positions. Restaurant servers, store clerks, bartenders, beauticians, tattoo artists, photographers, and others in the self-employed gig hustle were the first to lose their paychecks. And those remaining in the workforce are at the heart of the economy keeping things running while the rest of us are teleworking from home. Hourly grocery store clerks, warehouse workers, and gig economy delivery drivers are working overtime to keep store shelves stocked and food delivered. It remains unclear how much of these jobs will return after the initial wave of the virus washes past and Americans crawl out from the house and get back to work. So many laid off and left unemployed during the late ‘00s Great Recession never went back to work or came back underemployed, earning lower wages than before. How many more will slip through the same cracks this time around? Only time will tell.

Of course, I am talking exclusively about the economic

toll of the pandemic and not the national health crisis side of things. Baby Boomers are the most at-risk for dying from contraction of the virus. It paralyzes respiratory systems and requires a strong, robust constitution to bounce back from the illness. Weak and aged immune systems cannot fight this virus off. While this is not a pretty way to go, it is true that this is the twilight of the Boomers’ time on Earth. The Baby Boomers were expected to die in droves in the coming decade, flooding a weak private health care system not prepared for the burden. The Covid-19 pandemic hastens that avalanche. And while the virus itself has laid waste to the oldest generation, it is the youngest that has spread the disease so quickly.

The quarantine will not stop the pandemic from claiming lives. It is designed to “flatten the curve,” to stretch it out over a longer period of time at a lower rate, allowing hospitals to meet the numbers at a more achievable rate of success, keeping the system from becoming overwhelmed. Already we have seen the virus kicked around as a political football by President Trump, who likened the virus to at first be a “Democrat hoax” and now a “Chinese virus”. Like 9/11, there are many interesting and unproven conspiracy theories about the origins of the virus and the motivations for its use. I must admit, there is enough “truthiness” in such theories that they cannot be 100% debunked and discarded, even if ultimately they smell funky enough to not be embraced. If one were to want to plan the demise of a robust American economy hitting it with a pandemic after the White House dismantled the NSC Pandemic Response Team in 2018 and at the same time Saudi Arabia and Russia colluded to bottom out the cost of oil (effectively pulling the rug out from underneath the last decade’s domestic fracking boom) while simultaneously holding the purse strings to President Trump the business owner for favorable political status. Meanwhile, Trump picked a tariff fight with China last year that has damaged their economy to a small extent and the virus was first discovered in Wuhan, China. There is certainly enough grist in that mill for dorm room scholars to chew on for years to come.

And where will we be post Covid 19? We are social distancing, working from home, and using the Internet for everything that we would normally do face to face. Many of us have assumed that we will “go back to normal” at some point this summer. But will we go back to normal or to a new normal? Many people will refuse to go back out until there’s a vaccine for the virus. Dr. Fauci and other experts have warned about this coming through America in waves and that it may take a year for it to have run its course. It took America a good decade to get over that majority of its collective trauma of 9/11 yet the governmental and social response to it still lingers. The Patriot Act, the hassle of flying, the passport becoming the new drivers license, the ongoing military response and geopolitical dog’s dinner in the Middle East, and the continued winner takes all economy that came out the other side still cast shadows on our realpolitik. We will eventually come back out of our houses, but what long-term effects will come from America’s shuddering halt, to the service sector, or the health care industry? Whatever comes from it, we will all live it and it will likely be complicated. — KELLY MENACE

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NATE WOODS



On March 5th, in a month and time that feels far distant now, Nate Woods was executed at Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore by the State of Alabama. The questions about his 2005 conviction, the denial of his constitutional rights during his trial and appeal, the rejected plea for clemency, the celebrity attention, are important matters deserving of analysis. But something else stood out to me in the stories reporting his death the next day. His final words, given to his sister Pamela with instructions to share upon his execution, were a poem.

I teach poetry. I teach poetry to young people who aren't always interested in the subject. To many of them, it's obscure and confusing and impossibly old-fashioned. I try to make the case that there is some special in the condensed language of poetry and that we turn to poetry to mark important milestones (verses shared at funerals and graduations and inaugurations) and to make sense of life's moments (Hallmark cards and Shel Silverstein). We aren't that far removed from the wealthy Elizabethan dukes who paid Will Shakespeare to pen a sonnet on their behalf. A good poem has left, even when it's slight.

Speaking of 16th century England, during the bloody battles between emergent Protestantism and outlawed Catholicism that ravaged the country and continent, a prisoner named Chidiok Tichborne was sentenced to death for his part in the Babington Plot against the Queen. Young Tichborne also wrote a poem on the eve of his execution in 1586. His three metered stanzas express simply his grief at what awaits him in the morning, including such melancholy lines as these, "The day is past, and yet I saw no sunne, / And now I live, and now my life is done." I've always felt sympathy for poor Chidiok, weeping in the Tower of England, and felt appreciation that he mastered his words and syntax in the last hours of his short life into something lasting.

And Nate Woods clearly felt that same impulse, to wrestle his words into a final poetic message on the eve of his execution. His poem ends with the heartbreaking truth, "No living being knows the time of its end. / Man makes provisions for a hundred years, / yet, knows not that he might die the next minute." Woods poured out his heart in his poem. He feels those words on a cellular level.

And as soon as I saw the title of Nate Woods's poem, "The Man He Killed," I knew that he was referencing Thomas Hardy's 1902 poem of the same title, one I've read in many a literary anthology. Hardy, a giant of British literature, penned his poem in the voice of a soldier returning from the disastrous Boer War. It begins, "Had he and I but met / By some old ancient inn." Nate Woods's first two lines echo Hardy: "Had they and I but met / At some old residence in Ensely." I think he's signaling that he hasn't just written poetry, but read it too. In Hardy's poem, the speaker says of the man killed, a soldier he faced in battle, "I shot him dead because -- / Because he was my foe." In Woods's poem, however, the poet is the man who will be killed. He plainly asserts, "White men's Mentality / Police Brutality / Bent on beating my colored life away."

Most of his poem is actually about the brevity of life and the way we forget the end is inevitable. He tries to remind us that "by and large, we fail to realize its gravity." He wants us to understand and to wake up. He wants his wisdom to count. And it does.

There is much to mourn about Nate Woods's death. And imagining him reading a collection of Thomas Hardy poetry in his narrow prison cell, the beauty of the words contrasting with the austerity of the prisoner's solitary confinement, broke my heart. — ERIN HILL



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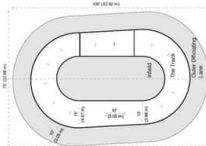
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War Dogs Die By My Sword

For most people, this past month has been crazy due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but one of the worst things to befall me and my buddy Kevin Still is the fact that this damned virus has robbed us of Hell's Heroes III! For those of you who don't know, Hell's Heroes is a huge annual traditional heavy metal festival held in Houston, Texas. Since I received the news of the festival's cancellation, I have been on an obsessive trad metal kick in attempt to medicate myself of the pain of loss.

While searching around YouTube, I came across a premiere trad metal release, titled *Die By My Sword*, from a new band hailing from Spain who call themselves War Dogs. What immediately caught my attention was the old school style artwork of a Medieval battle scene, and it was enough for me to click on it. War Dogs has offered a 10 track, 43 minute album, and I truly appreciate the band giving listeners a longer album, as many of my favorite trad metal records are often shorter, and I feel they end too quickly.

So what's good about *Die By My Sword*? War Dogs keeps the epic sound in the center of the record and balances it with speed, galloping riffs, expert melodies, and quality lead vocals. The band is also very good at creating memorable hooks in chrous such as the titular track, "Castle of Pain" and "Kill the Past". The band has managed to create of sound which has the crusty unpolished guitar melodies of Manilla Road coupled with the borderline operatic vocals of Alberto Rodriguez, similar to that of Jake Rogers from American trad metal band, Visigoth.

So what's bad about this record? The thing that is most problematic is the disconnection in the production. The instruments are damn-near perfect, but the vocals stick out like a sore thumb. Alberto has a very clean voice which can easily soar on its own, but the final mix between instruments and vocals is disharmonious; the vocals are polished so nicely that they overpower the unpolished trad metal vibe conveyed by the instruments. It is as if the vocals are sitting on top of the instruments rather

than flowing through them. What's more is that Albert's accent comes through far too strongly. Don't get me wrong, his vocals are good, very good in fact, but his announcement in English feels forced rather than natural. To be honest, I would have liked to have heard him sing this entire record in Spanish.

For their premiere record, War Dogs has shown that they know how to write good trad metal songs, but the production and vocals took *Die By My Sword* down a notch, in my book. Had the vocals been more blended to match the production of the instruments, and had the band chosen to record this album in Spanish, I believe the final product would have been far better. Nonetheless, the album is good, just not great. For that, *Die By My Sword* gets a 3.5.—**CALEB MULLINS**



Wisdom Cat You Got This

Imagine a world where the current garage rock brigade of Lizard Gizzard Wizard and Ty Seagal worshippers decided that perhaps listening to Deer Tick and learning a thing or two from the country side of bar carousing might actually be a good thing to do. That seems like an inner conversation the dudes in Wisdom Cat had at one point and decided to adopt for their own personal credo. And it's a credo that works well for them on their debut album, *You Got This*. Considering that 2/3 of the band played a particularly driving version of Texas ol' timey music in Desdimona and the other third played anthemic '00s pop-punk in Unicorndog it should come as no surprise that such a racket should come from the three of them together in room. The Unicorndog peaks out in "Friends", the closest thing to a theme song for Downtown Bryan as has ever been made by a local band. The Desdimona as filtered through a rock and roll band comes in through the jangly "Baby Car". "Kites" has a surprisingly gentle and navel-gazing stoned afternoon vibe, "Tom Cat" lists all the endearing characteristics of cats that only cat lovers could love.

If I have one complaint is that the album probably might could have stood for more tonal variety or perhaps have been a little shorter, but it is the band's

first album and it very much is a "live in the studio" sort of document that accurately portrays where these fellas are coming from. And that's a fantastic place, where that is. —**KELLY MENACE**



Myrkur Folkesange

The fact that Amalie Bruun released her new album *Folkesange* under her Myrkur moniker is significant. In a career spanning a mere fourteen years, Bruun has recorded under three names, each projecting a different timbre of her musical voice. As a debut self-titled solo act, Bruun recorded a handful of schizophrenic singer-songwriter "pop" albums that paid homage to an array of artists spanning ABBA, Kate Bush, Bjork, The Beatles, and maybe early career Beyonce(?). These songs were musically quaint and lyrically juvenile, but not necessarily in a good way. In 2013 and 2014, Bruun formed Ex Cops with a forgettable and chisel-chinned male hipster. The duo released two either pop-rock or rock-pop (actually, there is a difference) LPs -- albums as sugary and delightfully easy to sip as chilled Capri-Suns by a mid-summer swimming hole.

However, in 2014 Bruun also unleashed her greatest claim to clickbait fame when she was ousted as the one-woman black metal artist known only as Myrkur. The roar from the internet was both frightening and glorious, so much so that Bruun, like a "trve" black metaler, promptly set ablaze the cathedral of her pop career and her Ex Cops contract with what's his face (see? forgettable). Two EPs, two LPs, a live album, and heaps of polarizing headlines later, Myrkur released *Folkesange* March 20 on Relapse Records, and in doing so reinvented herself again. But this time Bruun didn't bother to change her stage name.

Bias out of the bag: *Folkesange* -- currently my favorite album of 2020 -- is the Myrkur album I've longed for since that controversial 2014 self-titled EP. The Myrkur debut is not by any means a bad album; it just,

plays more like a question mark than a bold statement. And maybe that's why I was drawn to it in a way that I've not been drawn to her other black metal releases since. *Myrkur*, with its choral arrangements halo-ing above slippery tremolo picking-possesses an awkward static energy around its edges, as if Bruun is giddily bouncing outside the production booth murmuring, "Am I really allowed to do this? ". It sounds a bit like a pre-teen cussing for the first time: all the damn words are there, but it's just off enough to be adorable. This past week I've played *Myrkur* on loop alongside *Folkesange*, and I have found the debut both equally inspiring and lacking. It feels like puberty strapped to wax. The image of an artist fantasizing transition.

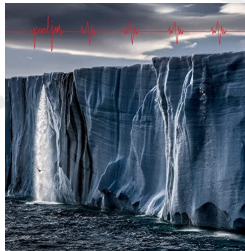
Myrkur's subsequent LPs are not as exciting. When news exploded that Myrkur was a woman -- A WOMAN!!! -- "kvlt" shit hit the fan. The firestorm was fierce and immediate. (Google it. People live wildly luscious lives if *this* is what implodes their world.) But it also put the match under Bruun. She immediately ditched Ex Cops and released a full-length Myrkur album titled *M*, an album that was ill-advised on all levels... except one.

Beginning with 2015's *M*, and even more on 2016's *Mareridt*, Myrkur began experimenting with traditional Danish folk instrumentation. Right there in the opener of *M*, Bruun introduces the knycleharp alongside a romping forest band percussion. Her choral vocals soar over a guitar patch-work of heavy metal riffs and black metal tremolos before simmering into an erratic, serpentine hurdy-gurdy like dream-cycle of cymbal footed unpleasantry. It's the first true statement Bruun made as a musical artist. Unfortunately, it's one she stutters and trips over like a too-quick tongue twister for two albums. But Myrkur's message in that opening track was clear: black metal is folk music and folk music, when played earnestly, is very *black metal*.

This is why *Black Metal* release of *Folkesange* as a Myrkur record is so significant. Since 2014, Bruun has attempted to amplify a folk-ish voice through a black metal filter. But on *Folkesange*, Myrkur finally leans fully into her Danish folk heritage and classical music training. The result is an album more confident and more conviction laden than anything she's released so far, as if the question she asked on the *Myrkur* debut is answered here. It's also a freaking beautiful record. The kind of beautiful that stops you in your tracks and makes you

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take notice. (After recommending it to a few music loving students, one said, "I closed my eyes and saw dragons and castles." That's high praise.) Story songs ("Leaves of Yggdrasil" and "Ramund") slide into dance numbers ("Fager so en Ros" and "Svea"), interspersed with spell-casting mountain spine tinglers ("Tor i Helheim" and "Harpens Kraft") and even a classic Joan Baez number ("House Carpenter"). The bookends -- opening vocal dirge "Ella" and lullaby closer "Vinter" -- greet and release the listener like a trustworthy narrator. From the outset, I am fully present in this record. At the close, I am instantly nostalgic for landscapes my feet have never touched. Surely, Danish folk music purists have a "trve kvlt" that will eat *Folkesange* the same way black metal babies diapered the *Myrkur* debut. Sure and sure. But I'm not that guy. I'm just a delightfully bewitched Myrkur fan, swooning on the kulning calls and choral arrangements of a voice that's finally found itself. For a long-time listener, nothing could be more satisfying. —**KEVIN STILL**



Pearl Jam Gigaton

Pearl Jam released a record for the first time in seven years, *Gigaton*. While my expectations weren't high, I decided to give it a listen and maybe write something for 979 for the first time in months. So, while enjoying some libations, watching *Mad Men* and playing a *Civilization II* emulator, I decided to do this -- a live journal or stream of consciousness of sorts.

The opener, "Who Ever Said," isn't so bad. It sounds like it could have been on *No Code* or *Binaural*. The second track, "Superblood Wolfmoon", also isn't bad either. Pearl Jam's last two records -- 2009's *Backspacer* and 2013's *Lightning Bolt* -- seemed to cement that they were past making anything decent and listenable, but this isn't so bad so far. Maybe it's my low expectations or maybe it's the Benchmark bourbon, but this isn't so bad. I'm not going to go running

down the streets telling the world to listen to it, but I'm impressed that it's not bad. Also, this is a band who has been together for 30 years: a) most bands don't stick together that long and b) if they do, it's usually trash at this point. Making something decent is an accomplishment at this point.

"Dance of the Clairvoyants," the third track and first single, sounds much better in the flow of the record than it did when they put it out several weeks ago on its own. There are synths and Eddie Vedder barks like David Byrne at times. It's a nice little changeup on their sound. There's a dance-y little solo in the middle that feels like it would fit on some early-aughts indie single. This isn't bad. A piece of evidence that this isn't terrible: I am neglecting my *Civilization II* game. I'm in a heated race with Russia and India for world domination.

Granted, the group took seven years off between records, but they sound refreshed [Editor's note: I take this back, as you will read]. "Quick Escape" opens with a good guitar. The chorus is kind of tired, but I don't want to jump in front of traffic. There are some late Zeppelin-sounding guitar licks that kinda save this one. Uh oh, "Alright" sounds like it might have some experimental production. Let's see how this goes. Oh! This isn't so bad. This sounds like it could definitely be on *Yield* or *No Code*. But, again, the chorus feels a bit tired. Let's see how the rest of it goes. I really wasn't meaning to devote all of my attention to this. I wanted to test-drive this record while playing my *Civ II* game and hanging out, but then I had an opinion when I put it on. So, here we are. Yeah, "Alright," isn't so alright. The non-chorus parts are fine, but the chorus is the opposite of inspiring. Go listen to "Alright" by Supergrass or Kendrick Lamar. Those are superior Alright songs.

"Seven O'Clock" starts with Vedder telling some sort of story, and I'm kinda ready to skip it. I can't make up my mind if I need to suffer through this for the integrity of the review. I'd just skip ahead, but I can already predict how the rest of the song will sound -- lame, uninspiring chorus, repeat the boring opener part, etc. Yep, this is getting skipped. I see no way for them to do something here where I'll be like, "Damn, never should have skipped that." This is a clunker. Oh goodness, am I glad I did that. I was at the 2:14 mark, and when I hit that next button, I saw that it was a 6-minute song. Nope. Strong decision, Josh-o. I like

the punchy guitar that "Never Destination" opens with. [I hate ending sentences with prepositions. I was taught that it was weak writing, but this is kinda stream of consciousness, so there you go] This is a good sound for these old dudes. This is what they do well these days. There are guitars. There's tempo. It sounds like The Who. [I don't think I've sat down with a Who record since college.] "Take the Long Way" sounds like it's trying too hard off the bat. Let's see how it goes. This song is ok, but it's boring. It could be a lot worse, but I'm not jazzed about it. Listening to the lyrics, someone could turn this into a good punk song, but this feels tired. I feel like the chorus is meant to be anthemic, but I'm just not interested. This next one is called "Buckle Up." Don't let me down guys. Ok, I like this opening. Ok, this isn't so bad. This isn't so bad. Someone tell Tim Horn to tell Ballegray. [If you actually read this, copy the above sentence and make it a post on Facebook. Let's see if we can make Tim Horn curious about something.] Ok, this song is not the worst. It's not a disaster, so we'll call it not a win, but not a disaster. "Comes Then Goes" is up next. This opening acoustic guitar sounds like it has potential. Ok, I like these early parts, it's like solo Eddie stuff -- *Call of the Wild*.

[PAUSE!! I need more ice] [Ok, we back] This wouldn't be one of the better songs on the *Call of the Wild* soundtrack, but it's not bad. It's fine. Six minutes is about three-and-a-half minutes longer than it needs to be, but if you know when to get out, it's not bad. "Retrograde" just started and I'm already bored. Oh goodness, this is boring. This song is what I was expecting this whole record to be. At 1:29, I am wanting to do a skip. That's disappointing. It's the second-to-last song. This is your second-to-last chance to impress me, and ya fell flat. Hopefully the closer is better. It's just boring. Next. The final song, "River Cross," has a melodramatic opening and it's slow. There's nothing to skip to, so I'm going to stick this out and hope that it builds to something decent.

Again, decent is a win for me with what my expectations were coming in. I loved Pearl Jam through high school and college, but as I have gotten older, I have grown to enjoy other things. But, I can also appreciate their longevity. I can also appreciate that they seem to know what sort of music is appropriate for them to make convincingly at their age -- they're not the 70-year-old Stones trying to seem like their dicks are still as hard as Mick's on the *Sticky Fingers* cover. Ok, this song is tired and boring. This happens. This is what happens. Bands get old and they don't make awesome music anymore, but they still enjoy making music, which is

cool because they are people and people should do what they want to do. As the record finished, Spotify auto-queued "Hail, Hail" off of *No Code*, and I just remembered what they sounded like when they were worthwhile. The lyrics are good, the instruments are driving and now I want to go listen to that record. I'll probably never listen to *Gigaton* again, but I'm glad I did for the sake of writing this. —**JOSHUA SIEGEL**



Mutant Love

Revolution Redacted, Part 1

Mutant Love have been around town for six years, everybody in town knows their songs by heart but have yet until now to release their own recordings. And in true Mutant Love fashion, these recordings have been kicking around for the past two years and the record's not even done. These five recordings represent the first half of what was to be their debut album. So why decide to put something out now? Well, who knows when bands can go to studios and play in front of people in sweaty, packed-in clubs again. What better way to have folks get that feeling from crawling around on a beer soaked concrete floor with Mutant Love than to give them the first five songs right away.

Well, except it doesn't feel like that at all. This isn't live Mutant Love, this is all polished up. Not slick or "sold-out" or such, but you can hear everything that is going on, it's mostly on-key, and there's less ambient beer in the air. Colin's drums fire off with machine gun precision, we can actually hear lan's bass and Brando's tasty guitar fills. What *Revolution Redacted* shows is that Mutant Love knows how to write a song and play it. The Jawbreaker roots are strong. It is hard to hear Justin Honeykutt and not immediately think Blake Schwarzenbach and Mutant Love is definitely a band in that same Bay Area vein. However, I don't think I'd ever hear Jawbreaker write songs with the cracked, dry sense of humor that Mutant Love does. I'm not entirely sure Justin misses "Diane." I'm not entirely sure Blake would write a song about going on a crime spree with his girlfriend. It's a different sense of romance, making the band's name apt. Love, but mutated into something else. —**KELLY MENACE**

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