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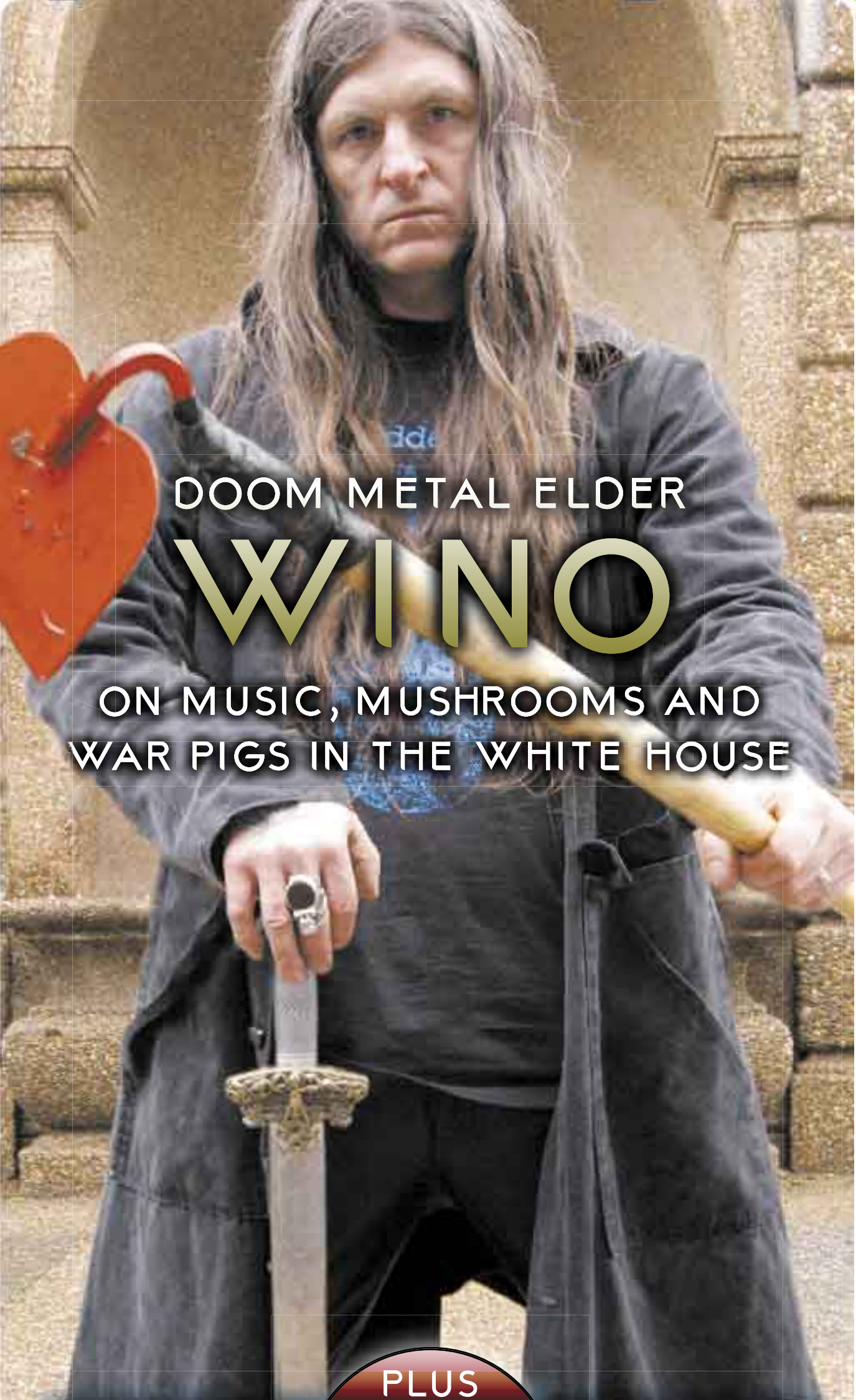
NASCAR of the NORTH

KINETIC SCULPTURE RACING
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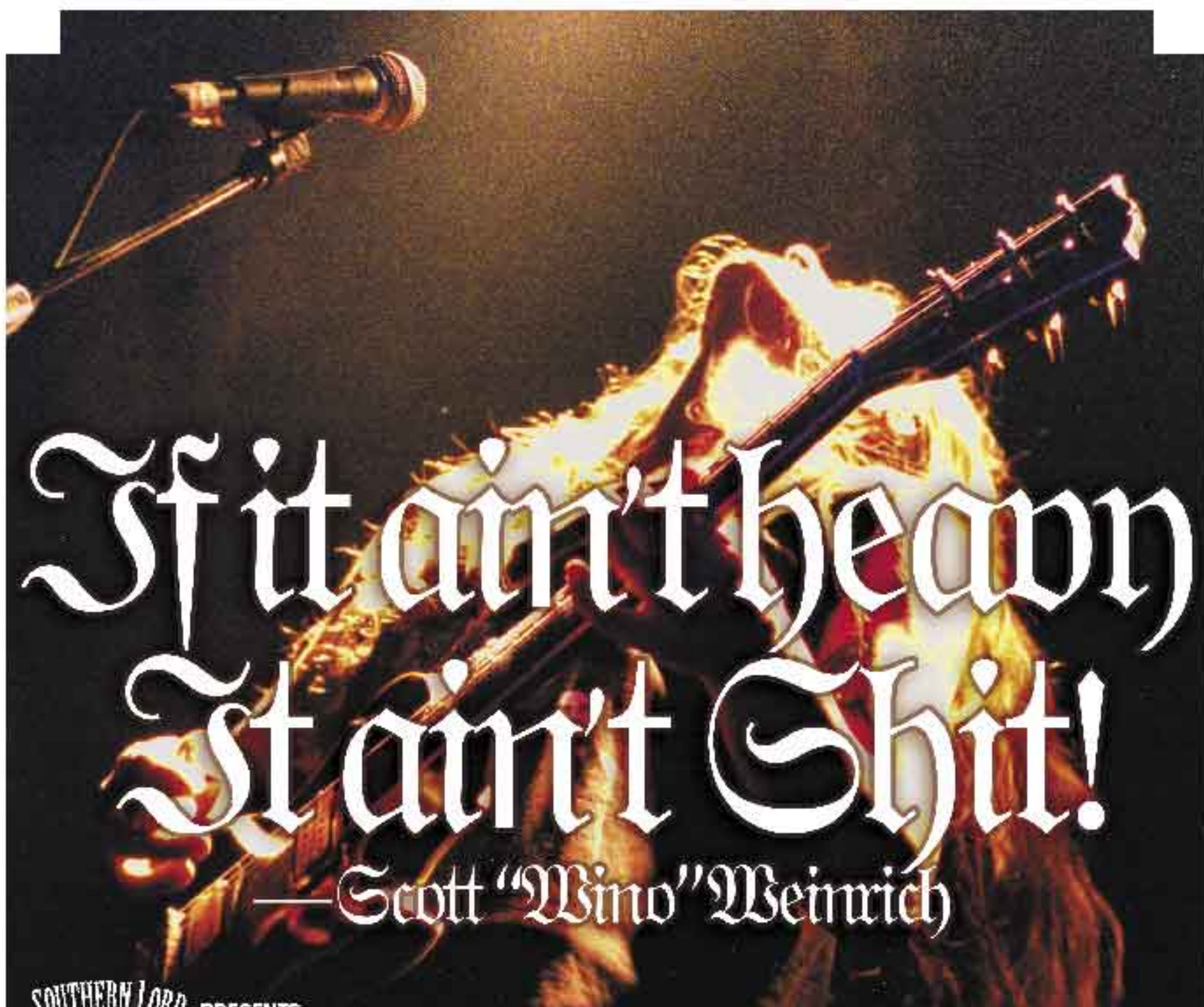
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DOOM METAL ELDER WINO ON MUSIC, MUSHROOMS AND WAR PIGS IN THE WHITE HOUSE

PLUS

HOW **YOU** CAN HELP TEENS STAY OUT OF THE MILITARY!
INSIDE ONE WOMAN'S PIRATE RADIO STATION!
T-MODEL FORD ON BARFIGHTS!
DAVE CATCHING INVITES US INTO HIS KITCHEN!
DANIEL PINCHBECK, BEN KATCHOR, LEIF GOLDBERG
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ISSUE NINE | MARCH 2004 | RESPONSIBLE ADVOCACY

THIS MAGAZINE COULD BE YOUR LIFE

We'd like to give a warm public welcome and a hearty hurrah to author Daniel Pinchbeck, cartoonist Ben Katchor and publisher/cartoonist Tom Devlin, who are all joining the **Arthur** team starting with this issue.

Like every single person associated with **Arthur**, from those listed from top to bottom on the masthead to the right, to those with bylines and credits in the magazine, to the 120-plus folks who distribute 40,000 copies of **Arthur** across North America every two months, these gentlemen are working for **Arthur** for close to nothing. They could be doing something else. They're not. They're putting their time and energy where their heart is.

This is not something unusual: there have always been people like this. Just look at this issue of **Arthur**, with its true stories about pirate radio operators, kinetic sculpture racers and badass revolutionary rock 'n' rollers: like most issues of **Arthur**, its pages are devoted to people who have placed love over gold, in their art and in their craft and in their work and in their lives.

None of them—none of us—are perfect (except maybe T-Model). And sometimes, we at **Arthur** sing in a key we simply can't quite reach, as we try to build something that is a little less compromised, a little less oriented toward greed, a little more loving and open. But we're trying. Trying to make a magazine that reflects and embodies a set of ideals that run absolutely counter to the mainstream culture, which is more diseased, corrupt, demonstrably insane and world-destructive by the day. Sounds like grim work, but it ain't. Cuz the part they never tell you, is this: once you opt out of that terminal culture, you opt in to something much more fun. It's the difference between eating at McDonald's and eating at a backyard barbecue: you know which one is gonna taste better. It's not even that hard to leave the bullshit world behind and strike out on your own—if Laris and I can do it, believe me, anyone can.

So, THANK YOU to all of you who have already helped **Arthur** to its early success. And for those of you who want to play a bigger role, who want to put a little more of your money where your heart is, please buy a subscription, back issues or a T-shirt (see page 41), or support our honorable advertisers, or just tell us where we get some good homebrew when we're in your neck of the woods. —Jay Babcock, Editor

- ➔ **I'M JUST SAYIN'** *Arthur* regular T-Model Ford talks about what to do when someone's dragging your name through mud. **Dave Catching** invites us into his kitchen and shows us how to make New Orleans Soul Red Beans, Rice and Corn Bread.
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LARIS KRESLINS
Publisher
JAY BABCOCK
Editor

W. T. NELSON
Art Director
TOM DEVLIN
Comics Editor

NEEMA ENRIQUEZ
Distribution Director
neema@arthurmag.com

KRISTINE MCKENNA
PAUL CULLUM
BYRON COLEY
JOE CARROCCI
EDDIE DEAN
MARK LEWMAN
Council of Advisors

JOHN COULTHART
Our Man in Manchester

ROBIN ADAMS
Administrative Assistant

COURTNEY HARRIS
Proofreader

ADVERTISE IN ARTHUR
Contact one of our representatives:

LARIS KRESLINS
Advertising Director
917.446.3087
ads@arthurmag.com

JESSE LOCKS
Account Manager
jesse@arthurmag.com

DAN CHAMBERLIN
Account Manager
dan@arthurmag.com

RICHARD GRIMALVA
Account Manager
richard@arthurmag.com

DISTRIBUTE ARTHUR
Contact
neema@arthurmag.com
or call 1-888-843-3385

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ON THE COVER:
Wino, by Brian Liu.

T-Model Knows Better

T-Model Ford says a lot. He says he's 79 years old. He says he's "the Boss of the Blues! TheTaildragger! From Greenville!!!!!!...Mississippi." He says he doesn't need his cane anymore. And he says he can help us. So, every two months, Arthur calls up T-Model and asks him for some advice. T-Model gives his sage answers, then we transcribe the conversation with some interpreting help from Bruce Watson at Fat Possum, the Oxford, Mississippi record label that releases T-Model's shit-hot, original bad-ass records (more info on 'em at fatpossum.com). We love T-Model 'round here: his last album, the Jim Dickinson-produced Bad Man, is still on the Arthur office turntable, 16 months after its release. But whatever. If you've got some non-math questions for T-Model, and we know that you do, email 'em to editor@arthurmag.com and we'll pass 'em along. If they're any good.

ARTHUR: What if you find out that an old friend of yours has been saying bad stuff about you around town. Telling people that you do business with, that you're no good. What should you do?

T-MODEL: Just let him talk, don't have nothing to do with him. They'll find out! That's the way I do. They talk about me, I just let 'em talk. But when they need something, they gotta come to ME.

But what if you were a younger man? You know how younger men get upset: they wanna settle it with a fight. Is that a bad way to go?

Well, you got to study that yourself. Just don't associate with 'em, that's the way I do. They talk about me, I don't associate with 'em. Then when they come running, want to talk, I say: "Well when you had

a chance, you didn't take it, so forget about it." That's the way I do. **Have you always been that way? Or did you handle stuff differently when you were younger?**

No, I've been that way all my life. I go friendly with people if they friendly with me. If they ain't friendly with me, I go my way and they go theirs. You take me, when I go to go somewhere around here, I get in my car by myself. I don't be ridin' nobody. Can't be nobody speaks... If they

TELL somethin', it won't be me, it'll be them, making up somethin', to try to get up somethin'. That's the way it do here. **You ever seen a fight in a bar?**

Yeah, I have seen a fight in a bar. And I have fought in a bar.

You have? But you sound like a peaceful man.

Well, the man was pickin' at ME! He about six foot tall, went snatchin' my cigarette. At that time I was smokin'. Snatched that cigarette out of my

mouth, and come back to start it to me, and I met him. And I said, "Man, what you trying to do? Are you trying to start somethin' with me?" He made a pistol break. That's all he remember.

You didn't walk away.

No.

You stood up for yourself.

I thought he gonna get up but he couldn't. It take a good-hearted person to stand up what I be standing up under, a good one. Yes indeed.

When two men don't get along, do you think they should go to court to settle their differences then? Or should they just let it go.

I just let it go. Go on about my business, and tell 'em, don't follow me.

☺

"I said, 'Man, what you trying to do?
Are you trying to start somethin' with me?'
He made a pistol break. That's all he remember"



Come On In My Kitchen

This issue's chef: Dave Catching of Joshua Tree, California. Dave Catching is a guitarist for **earthlings?**, **Yellow No. 5** and **Mondo Generator** and appears on *Desert Sessions Vol. 9/10*.

Hey y'all, Mardi Gras season

is here and I hope you're lucky enough to be celebrating it with me in New Orleans. If you are, you're probably drunk, still drinking, dancing, chasing members of the opposite or same sex all night, and will be pretty tore up tomorrow. Here's a little recipe I learned from my friend Jimmy Ford at the Jimmy Ford Clinic (thanks for showin' me the way) and my friend Chef Big D, of the now-defunct Harbor Bar and Restaurant (R.I.P.), both of New Orleans, Louisiana. It's easy and oh-so-cheap, which will be helpful while your scrambled brain tries to figure out what you spent all your money on. I'm giving you the vegetarian version here, but it's also killer when cooked with smoked sausage. It ain't my fanciest recipe, but it is great and will cure the meaneast of hangovers for pennies. Regarding Tony Chachere's Cajun spice: if you can't find it in your neighborhood stores, I would recommend a trip to New Orleans. That means you're probably overdue for at least a weekend there anyway...

New Orleans Soul Red Beans, Rice and Corn Bread feeds six tore-up folks

*one pound dried red beans
two cups white rice
one yellow onion
one half red onion
eight cloves garlic
two vegetable bouillon cubes
two tablespoons Tony Chachere's Cajun spice
three pinches salt
two pinches black pepper
one pinch white pepper*

*one cup water
one box Jiffy cornbread mix (I know, but real soul food restaurants really do use this mix)
one jalapeno pepper
six ounces grated cheddar cheese
one egg
one cup milk
optional: one pound smoked sausage cut in one inch length pieces*

Wash and soak red beans overnight and rinse. Add water and boil beans until cooked, then simmer on low. Sauté onions and garlic, with spices. Add onion, garlic and spices to simmering red beans and cook a few hours to taste. Follow rice cooking instructions. Follow Jiffy cornbread mix directions, then add chopped jalapeno pepper and most of the cheese. Sprinkle remaining cheese on top and cook per Jiffy cornbread mix instructions. Serve a mountain of beans (with or without the smoked sausage) on a nice thin bed of rice.

My first taste of this particular recipe was at the Harbor Bar and Restaurant (the best soul food joint anywhere, ever) on Mardi Gras Day, 1993. This was without a doubt one of the best days of my life. I marched with the Lions Carnival Club, starting at 6am, with our second line brass band leading the way, from the sparse uptown gatherings, through to the thousands gathered at Lee Circle with Rex and Zulu, finally reaching the unbridled revelry of the French Quarter at 3pm, our costumes and masks obscuring the awe and joy we all were experiencing, some of us having imbibed many brands and colors of hard alcohol, psychedelics, prescribed and non-prescribed medications, marijuana and, from what I can gather through hearsay and gossip, stimulants of all kinds. In the madness of Frenchman Street at sunset, I met a beautiful stranger, who led me to the Harbor Bar and Restaurant. There, I was saved by the red beans and rice...and a double turkey and seven. ☺

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Astrology by Arthur



Predestination: a concept older than free will and borne out by recent scientific elucidations on historical dialectics, genetics and chemical psychology. Each of us is caught in a tangled labyrinth of circumstance and cosmic programming, acting out our grotesque fate in an awful, ignorant manner.

The restless contractions of the astral bodies affect us in a profound way, each offhand movement of a planet can have enormous repercussions for humanity and our various client species, via magnetic fields, space dust and thoughtless lunar alignment. The moon can likewise be an irresponsible entity, tumbling through the sky carelessly, without regard to the tidal waves it may or may not cause. A correlation could be drawn to our own unthinking rearrangement of art, life, or microscopic organism culture. This column is a transmission then, not only to the Arthur readers (who have star signs), but to the stars as well, an attempt to get them to understand that even their nonchalant actions have repercussions...



Aquarius

Question: Why are you, an air sign, "the water bearer"? Answer: Air "bears" water during rain, I suppose. A drag... no one likes rain. Except for Ronnie Specter, who enjoyed "Walking in the Rain." This was probably because the umbrella provided anonymity and she was embarrassed to be going out with a psychopath like Phil Specter. I guess John Lennon professed that he liked the rain too, in the Beatles song "Rain." And... Yoko Ono is an Aquarius! Wow... Astrology is true.

One-Dimensional Christmas

This Christmas day, in my annual attempt to avoid the holiday spirit, I sat in an underheated cafe in Manhattan's East Village and reread the last chapters of Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*. Probably the most profound critique of modern industrial society ever written, *One-Dimensional Man* attacks the fundamental "irrational rationality" of our present system. Mechanized progress could—and logically should—have led to a reduction in labor time and the creation of a post-work and post-scarcity global society—what Marcuse calls a "pacified" existence. Since World War Two, the response to this deep threat to the ruling elite was the creation of "false needs" in the consumer; the perpetuation of the fear of nuclear war and terrorism; and the use of the mass media to enforce consensus consciousness.

Marcuse wrote: "Perhaps an accident may alter the situation, but unless the recognition of what is being done and what is being prevented subverts the consciousness and the behavior of man, not even a catastrophe will bring about the change." This was clear after 9-11: Awareness opened for a moment, but the media and the government worked overtime to close it and reinforce the usual trance.

The last chapters of *One-Dimensional Man* are tragic—I wept as I reread them. Marcuse realized that with the increasing power of technology, the human imagination—rather than any abstract "necessity"—had become the determining force in creating social reality. Marcuse writes: "In the light of the capabilities of advanced industrial civilization, is not all play of the imagination playing with technical possibilities, which can be tested as to their chances of realization? The romantic idea of a "science of the imagination" seems to assume an ever-more-empirical aspect." If the imagination running a technological society is one of dominance and death and control, then you get what we now have in the world.

The global misery we are currently enduring is not a problem of reality: It represents, in fact, a failure of the human imagination and of human consciousness. The mass culture, advertising, and propaganda industries work to limit consciousness to a low vibration—a frequency of mindless fear and insatiable material greed—to construct the subjects, the workers and consumers and soldiers, who are the "biomass" or fodder needed to feed the technosphere's doom spiral. Yet, as Marcuse puts it, "the chance of the alternative" hovers over every

If our current crisis is one of human imagination, then we require a transformed imagination. We need an imagination that accepts, fearlessly, the responsibility to be happy, and therefore emanates joy rather than misery.

manifestation, every moment, of this dreary dystopia.

A post-Marxist, Marcuse could see no practical or realistic way to transform the society from its doom-orientation to a happier one. In the end, he writes, "The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains negative."

But brilliant as he was, Marcuse was trapped in Post-Marxist materialism. He lacked crucial pieces of the puzzle—the ones that allow us, right now, to look forward to the imminent achievement of a utopian situation on the Earth, when we exert the will to create it.

It is easy for me to empathize with Marcuse, because I grew up as an East Coast intellectual, with a typical Marxist-Freudian orientation. Luckily, I stumbled upon the missing pieces when I studied shamanism—the archaic spiritual technology of many indigenous cultures worldwide. My experiences with shamanic rituals and psychedelic substances are recounted in my book, *Breaking Open the Head*. In that book, I also explored the literature and philosophy around psychedelics, mystical states, and, also, synchronicities—that strange arena in which real-world episodes and psychic events seem to collude, revealing an underlying psychic order to "reality."

If our current crisis is one of human imagination, then we require a transformed imagination. We need an imagination that accepts, fearlessly, the responsibility to be happy, and therefore emanates joy rather than misery. A fully realized imagination—a happy imagination—automatically works to disperse the control mania and doom-orientation of the current collective psychosis.

The negative imagination that has not integrated its own shadow, to use a Jungian term, naturally projects war, depleted uranium, Olestra, and Botox. The material projection of a happy and generous and fully realized imagination would, naturally and automatically, create "heaven on earth." As Marcuse writes: "Rational is the imagination which can become the a priori of the reconstruction and redirection of the productive apparatus toward a pacified existence, a life without fear. And this can never be the imagination of those who are possessed by the images of domination and death." At a more profound level than psychoanalysis, shamanic techniques and rituals can help individuals integrate their shadows rather than projecting them.

Many of us have realized that the current American political system is broken beyond repair. It should be clear to any thinking person that the current Junta can never leave office willingly—the level of corruption and the potential for being tried as war criminals makes that an unacceptable alternative for them. The fixed voting machines that gave us a Republican Congress in 2002 will return Bush to office in 2004—if in fact there are elections at that point.

Personally, I have no more anxiety over this situation. I welcome it, because I recognize that "something else" is happening. We are experiencing the fulfillment of prophecy—including those

of the Maya, the Hopi, and the Biblical Apocalypse. The Mayan civilization focused on the year "2012" as the time when human consciousness will achieve a transformation to a more intensified level. The Hopis recognize this period, right now, as the transition between two incarnations of the Earth. The Biblical Apocalypse describes chaos and devastation before the inception of the "New City" that achieves the integration of Heaven and Earth.

I suspect these prophecies describe an accelerated evolution of human consciousness to a new form of lived experience. This new consciousness recognizes other levels of being alongside the narrow, or one-dimensional, "irrational rationality" of the mainstream—it moves, simultaneously, in the mythic and shamanic realities. This new consciousness realizes a different relationship to time and space and matter. Beyond all appearances, the new consciousness recognizes the presence of origin—a creator spirit, a.k.a. God—shining through matter and winking from behind all of the myriad manifestations of what the Buddhists call Maya. This new consciousness lives from out of that presence, that origin, which is beyond time. This new consciousness—our new consciousness—is fully realized, hence it is happy. As a happy consciousness, all of the projections of its imagination will be happy ones. It does not fear the achievement of even its wildest dreams. It recoils from nothing, and transmutes reality by the clarity of its presence. I feel that I have validated the reality of this new situation through my own personal shamanic and visionary and synchronistic experiences—but of course, I might be wrong.

From this alternative perspective, we can recognize the brief flash of 5,000-plus years of recorded human history, historical time, as the medium in which human consciousness self-organizes—reaching a deeper level of being and knowing. This process is perfectly coordinated with the accelerated evolution of technology, which can be seen as the projection of human consciousness into matter, and its quickly approaching reintegration into this more intensified form of consciousness.

The Toltec and Mayan cultures focused on the year 2012—December 21, 2012, to be exact—as the inevitable point of world transformation. They recognized this through astonishing astronomical calculations, and an intensified use of shamanic visionary technologies. On that date, the Earth and the Sun pass through the "dark rift" at the center of the Milky Way, the "Great Mother" at the center of our galaxy. John Major Jenkins, in his book *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012*, notes that this centerpoint may well be something like a "Galactic Equator." Just as on our Earth, magnetic currents shift above and below the Equator, it might be the case that passing through the center of the Milky Way has real effects—not just on magnetic forces, but on human consciousness itself. The entire cosmology of the Mayan and Toltec civilizations were focused on this date. The ball games played at temple cities like Palenque and Chichen Itza, for instance, were symbolic representations

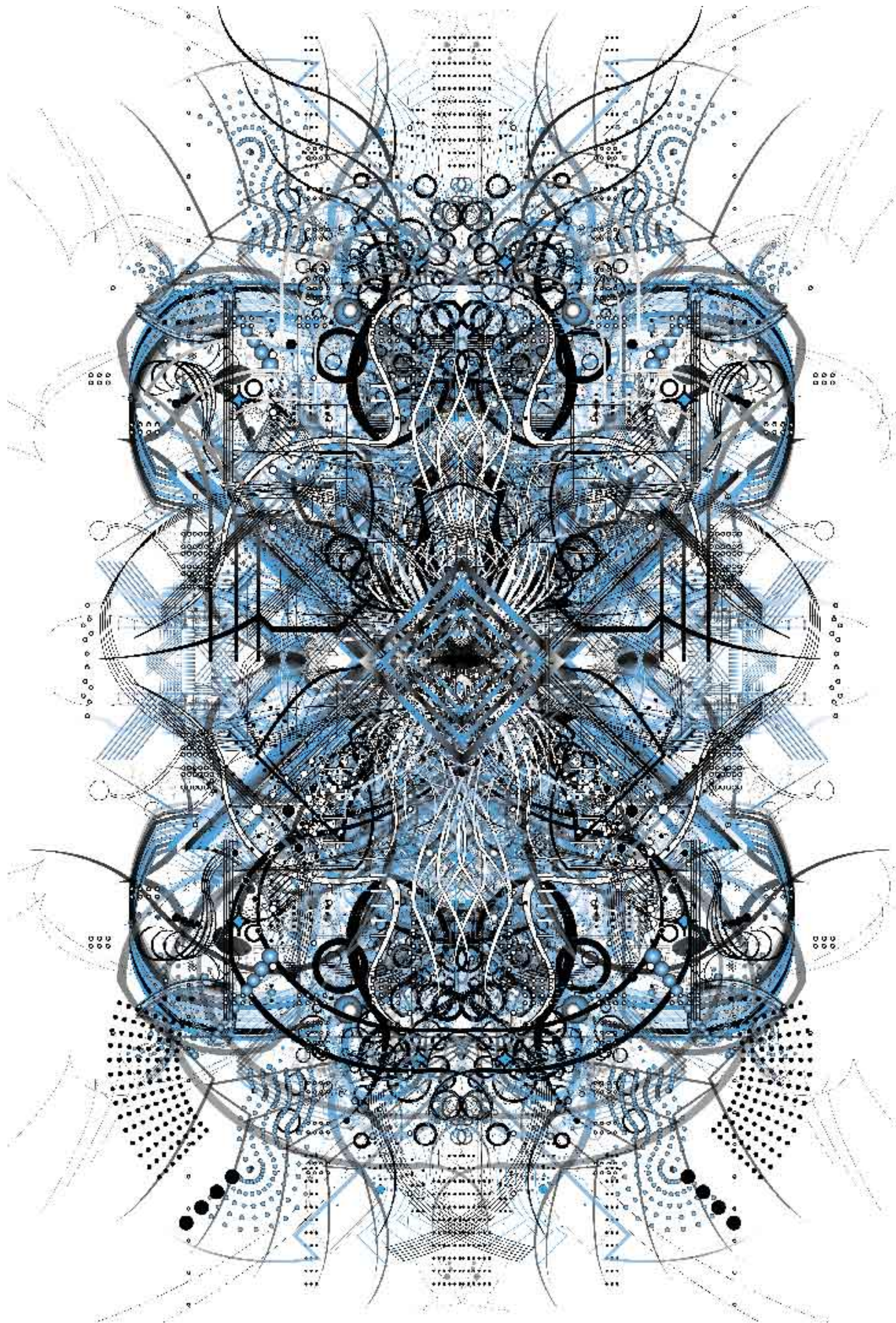
of 2012—the ball going through the ring symbolized the Sun passing through the dark rift at that point in time. Interestingly, it was up to the humans playing the game to make this happen properly—as it is up to us, right now, to create the necessary conditions for the imminent transformation of our global society into a truly utopian situation, based on compassion and pleasure and dharmic law, as the current paradigm continues its inevitable collapse.

That the year "2012" could be a "make or break" point for human consciousness makes perfect sense from many angles—the accelerated ecological destruction of the planetary environment, the increasing threat of chemical and nuclear holocausts, and the evolution of technology itself. Terence McKenna's "time wave zero" continues to resonate, and Jose Arguelles' 13 moon calendar (www.13moon.com) provides a practical tool for navigating through a different lived experience of time. The exponential evolution of technology could be approaching a "conrescence point," as McKenna suggested. The "Stone Age" lasted many thousands of years, the "Bronze Age" lasted a few thousand years, the "Industrial Age" of mechanization was 500 years, the "Chemical Age" or "Plastic Age" has been 100 years, the "Information Age" of digital technology has been 30 years, the "Biotechnology Age" is about five years old. By this calculus, it is possible that the "Nanotechnology Age" will last all of eight minutes—and at that point, humans will have complete control over the planetary environment, on a cellular and atomic level. This will lead either to utter dystopian insanity or utopian rationality—or perhaps both will arrive at the same time.

But forget 2012: The key to approaching our current transitional situation is to concentrate ever-more deeply on what is "Here and Now," on the immanent rather than the transcendent. Through the work of the imagination, new possibilities can be brought to consciousness and then realized—for instance, we require technologies and industries that follow the no-waste principles of natural systems. During a recent trip on the Amazonian psychedelic brew, *ayahuasca*, I received this strong message: "You go deeper into the physical to get to the infinite."

Despite all appearances, the history of the human race up to this point is merely a prehistory. We are on our last self-destructive teenage bender as we approach the threshold of adulthood. I suspect the current process of consciousness intensification will lead us to an age of wonders—as well as entry into the community of galactic intelligence.

☺



Daniel Pinchbeck is a founding editor of Open City Magazine and the author of *Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism* (Broadway Books). His email address is daniel@breakingopenthehead.com



Pisces
Pisces is the Fish. Fish supposedly developed before mammals in the primordial muck and then slowly climbed onto land in the form of tadpole-type creatures which eventually grew legs and started slithering about until they developed into "man" who, through the cumulative labor of hundreds of thousands of years, created what we know as "modern civilization." Pisces: I just wanted to say that, through that entire time and all through those changes, I think it's awesome that you stuck to your guns and stayed a fish!



Aries
The Ram. In popular American songcraft of the twentieth century there is a mythical creature evoked, called Rama-Llama; half Ram and half Llama. This is, for a particular sect, the spiritual rebuttal to the Buddhist's head honcho, the "Dolly Llama," who is the merged progeny of a llama and a kind of push cart. The Rama-Llama sect is called "Aries." A trivial part of the world's population, I'm happy to note. To the Aries, playtime is over. Stop trying to convert the world to your personal vision of Shangri La. Who but you would feel entitled to poison the water supply? Congratulations anyway, it's more than anyone ever thought you would achieve. Maybe all that acid will free our minds and end the war.



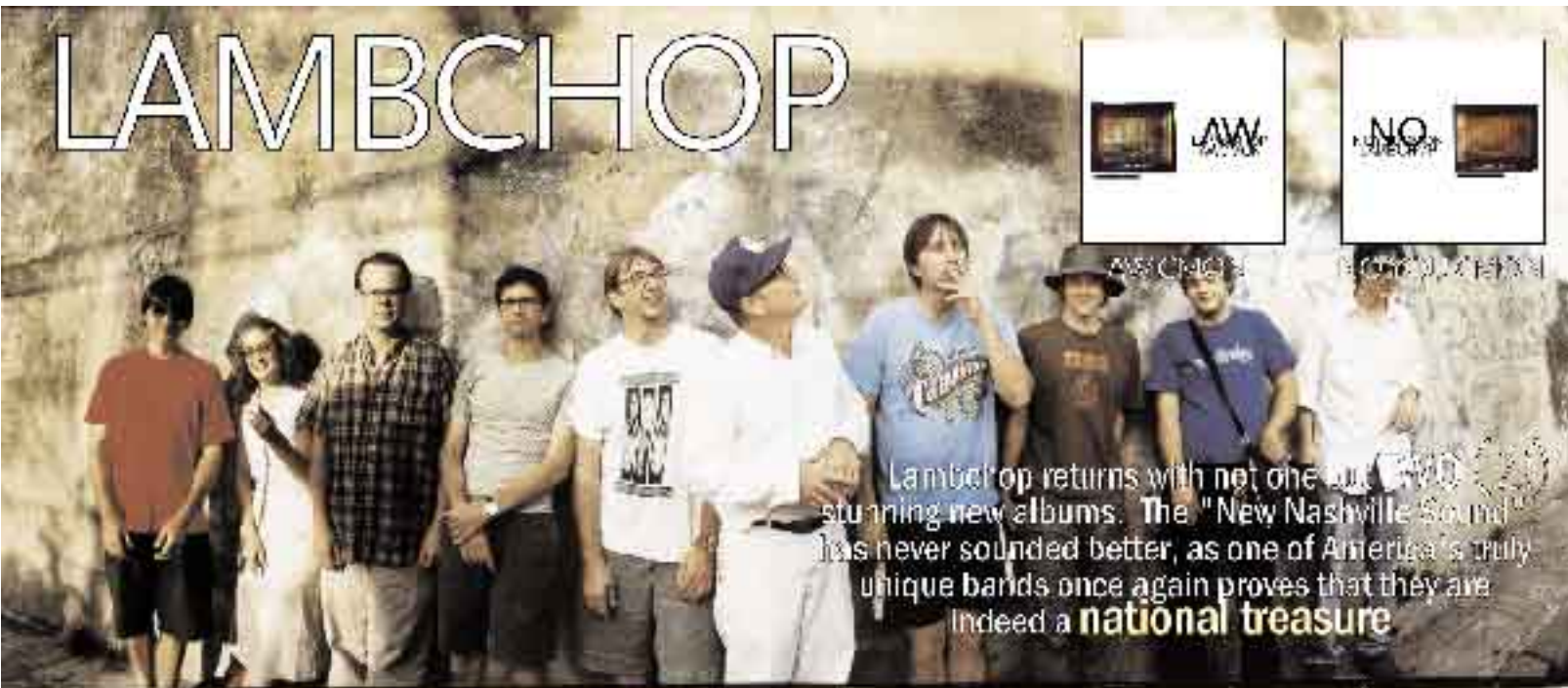
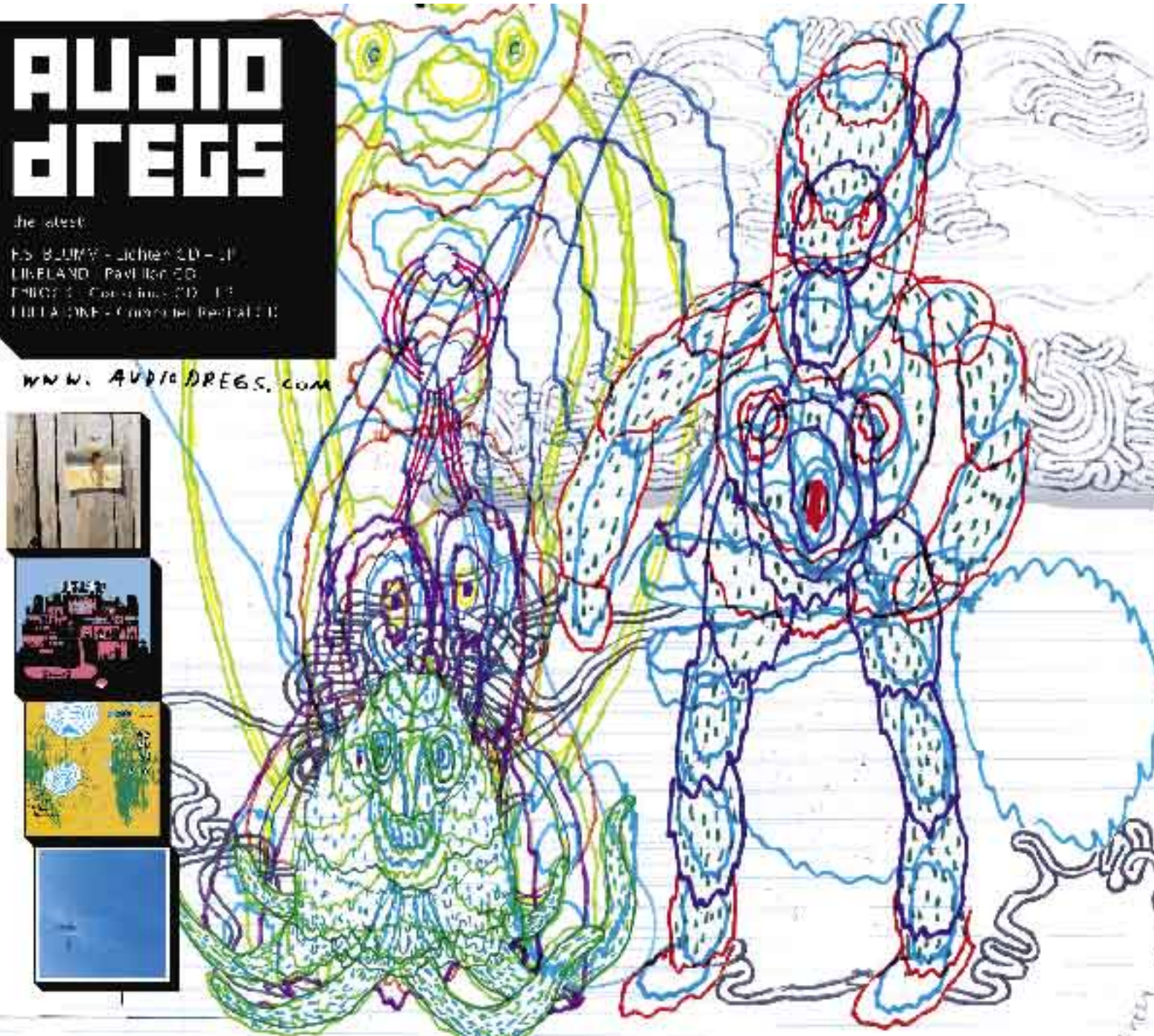
Taurus
The Bull. There is a legend of a bull in a "China Shop." The bull charges about the china shop and destroys precious commodities therein, which can't withstand his legendary girth. This is supposed to illustrate the clumsiness of your breed in gentle and rarified circumstance. It is evoked usually as an insult, but perhaps it is an allegory. Maybe the "Shop" is capitalist or colonial China and you are the peasant army, smashing it to pieces under the guidance of Mao! And maybe this legend is just another insipid bourgeois slight against revolutionary movements.



Gemini
You are, at times, tautological and insane. When you speak, the world feels like a character from Edgar Allan Poe: they can't believe the thoughts that creep into their minds! Do you see them reaching for their knives? As you speak, each word sounds like a deafening tom-tom drum in the jungle, being played by cannibals. They are hypnotized into a state of frenetic fear driven blood lust! For your own sake, maybe you should take a vow of silence for about a million years... Or at least until the cannibals are done eating.



Cancer
You're always whining about what's on the TV. Well, most of the TVs I've seen were equipped with a knob that switched channels; even one to turn it off. Maybe you should go to some uncharted island where they don't have soap and razors.



HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

LIARS make it witchy. **Jay Babcock** finds out why.



LIARS BOILED UP

in the midst of New York City's earliest 21st century underground rock resurgence, when the same style-era of music—angular guitar-driven art-funk circa 1979 a la Gang of Four/Public Image Ltd./Pop Group, etc.—was simultaneously revived by several bands within miles of each other. The whys are tricky but they can also be a distraction from considering what really matters: How was the actual music? How were the performances? Did you witness something that moved you...moved you in the head, moved you in the heart, moved you in the shoulders and in the hips? In other words was this electroclash or was it something significant? Whatever it was, Liars seem to have been the most defensive of all these bands about accusations of slavish borrowing.

"That was brought up a lot, and we had not heard the Pop Group," acknowledges Angus Andrews, on the phone one recent morning from his home in the New Jersey woods. "We went to England and someone gave us a CD of it and we listened to it and we got really depressed about it."

He laughs. Why was it depressing? "It was all these ideas that we had that now we couldn't do! I dunno. I listened to them once, then. Didn't really get that much into it. Maybe it was just because...you start rejecting all these

influences that people tell you that you have."

And so, resentful at being categorized, resentful at being lumped in with a herd of copycaters, resentful perhaps even toward the authority represented by the categorizing itself, Liars made a strategic redirection. They split town and changed their sound, jettisoning a genuinely tuff rhythm section. They worked in the woods, recording in a home studio instead of in a too-sterile studio bunker in the world's capital. Musically they traveled just a little bit laterally: the distance from early Gang of Four and Public Image Ltd. records to further-out, less dancelloor-oriented records from that same era (more or less) by bands like The Fall and This Heat.

"We discovered This Heat very recently," says Angus. "Some guy made a tape of the two This Heat records for us and we ran that tape til it broke. It gave us inspiration to do *anything*, because what made that time period really good is that they did do a lot of mix 'n match."

Liars' other principal, obvious inspiration was one of the few contemporary local bands they dug: Brooklyn's Oneida.

"We'd played with Oneida a bunch and listened to their music quite a bit," says Angus. "I think we like 'em because

they don't give a fuck. They're from Williamsburg and Brooklyn and they are the epitome of not-cool: they're these crazy hippie dudes who are in the middle of this really chic world. We just really liked that. And their drummer is just INSANE."

Oneida invited Liars to do a joint EP, with each band covering at least one song by the other band. It was a challenge.

"I just didn't see how we were actually going to physically play one of their songs, because they're really good musicians," says Angus. "So, we had to re-think [our thing] in order to tackle it. Aaron [Hemphill, the band's guitarist] and I went into a room, sampled ourselves and noises and then completely fabricated this cover of this song, and it worked out fairly well, well enough that we were like, 'This is a whole new way to approach making music.' So we used those things we learned on the new record."

It is a menacing, mournful sound Liars make now. A spooked, sometimes irregular pulse: spectral, flickery, throbbing. Like the band's earlier sound, this may be little more than the sum of its inspirations—but here, consider how much those inspirations have to offer, and how they manifest on *They Were Wrong. So we Drowned*, the band's new concept album. The music isn't just spooky; the music is *about* spooky people... about feeling spooked...about what people do when they feel fear. So yeah, it's a concept album, a "simple sort of fairy tale" says Angus, about the persecution of witches in 16th and 17th century Europe. But it's also about the stuff that's always gone on and always will. About how people deal with Nature, and with things they can't control, and how they place blame where it doesn't belong.

"It happened that Iraq was being invaded when we were making the record, and I felt a little bit connected with that," says Angus. "Here AGAIN the majority was making some sort of ridiculous decision that was going to affect the minority AGAIN. I always feel like whoever is the majority is [always] making bad decisions."

Both of Liars' album titles are written from the point of view of a persecuted collective.

"It's funny, that," says Angus. He muses, with a chuckle that seems kind of

sad, "I guess we identify with whoever's not in the majority."

Which is interesting cuz Angus hails from Australia: a place where indigenous people who perform a form of "folk magic" that is utterly other and incomprehensible (and therefore evil, or backward) have been persecuted by Europeans in much the same way that witches (or accused witches—or single women) were in the 16th and 17th centuries that form the album's setting. In Australia, Aborigines seem to always be viewed with suspicion. They're not to be trusted. They're permanent suspects because of...

"Their whole way of doing things," finishes Angus. "And they're looked at as freaky and they need to be persecuted. I'm almost...I'm at a loss for words, to talk about that situation. All I can say is that I think that maybe things are turning around a bit there at least, y'know? But it's the same thing that happened here, with the Indians."

"I think what's going on is just that there can be this sort of mass mindset and there can be this paranoia that poisons people. In the 16th and 17th centuries, especially in Europe, if your crops failed then the finger was pointed at a witch, or at the devil, or whatever—it's that sort of paranoia that comes with religion. I think there was just severe paranoia and misguided angst. What's interesting is, that's not the only thing that what was going on. Because at the same time you have people writing a lot of stories and telling stories about witches. This fantastic imagination comes into play. And then equally at the same time, you actually had women being *killed*..."

Yikes. "So it's an incredible sort of mix of emotions and imagery, all of that was really useful... It could've been fairly easy to sort of regurgitate similar songs to the first record, but I think it makes it so much more interesting and fun for us when we start again from scratch and forget everything that we know."

So what's next, then? "We're trying to cover the Doors' song 'The Soft Parade,' which is proving really difficult. Aaron and I have both always loved them. When we started recording the record, we got a hold of a DVD of their TV appearances, and the first song that comes on is 'The Soft Parade.' When we saw that, we [were reminded of] how original they were and how difficult it is to even sound at all like them. It's just amazing. It's funny: the Doors, they don't get much credit. They're so...un-trendy."

"Cuz almost every other band gets ripped off, a lot. But I don't know if they did."

Ⓔ



Leif Goldberg lives in Providence Rhode Island. He edits the semi-regular eco-concerned satiric comic anthology, NATIONAL WASTE.



CHARLES CALDWELL REMEMBER ME

"YOU SAY YOU BEEN IN WATER VALLEY FOR
THREE YEARS AND YOU'RE ONLY JUST COMIN' TO
HEAR ME? WHERE THE HELL YOU BEEN?"
- CHARLES CALDWELL

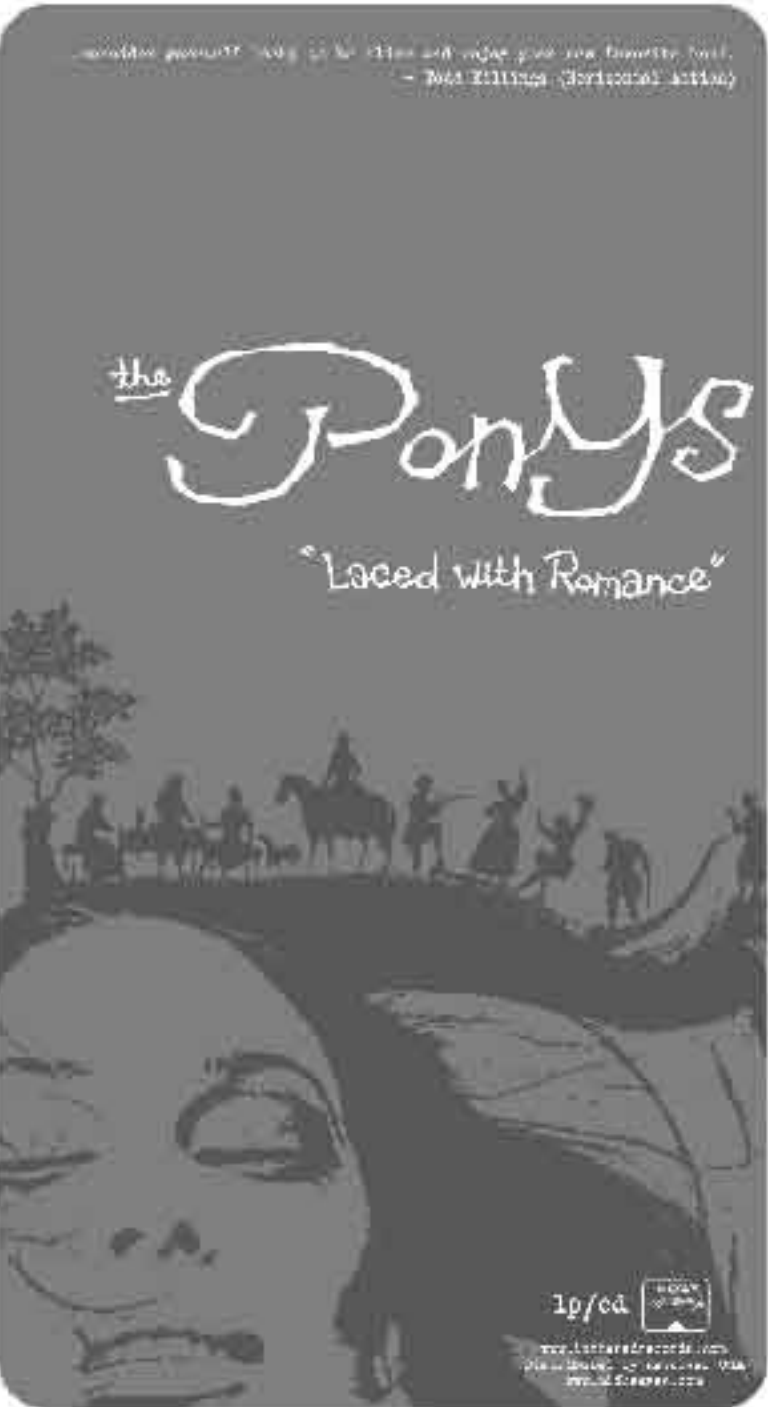
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pulsating, frenetic, only on vinyl



TOM RECCHION
I LOVE MY ORGAS (CD)
Latest from Los Angeles' Fine Music
Society, 'don't underestimate'



MIDNITE SNAKE
S/T (CD)
Heavy and rapid speed all jms
from the Pittsburgh-based scene
Just Put Snake in (Heavy, Loud)

BIRDMAN

Recorded in the studio
1997-1998 by Birdman & Lita
www.birdman.com



Leo
I guess your species must be going
extinct, cause you're trying to
procreate with an old desert mix.
In your imagination your genitals
are crown jewels, best displayed
on Liz Taylor's bosom. In reality
they're like Nazi gold in a Swiss
account: laundered, but with a
sordid history.



Virgo
You are always kneeling on beans
and ruminating about matters
spiritual and ontological. It's OK,
just tell god you were "researching"
all that internet porn.



Libra
The Scales. You've been thinking
about just closing up shop and
shutting down for good. You feel
that your sign hasn't been given
a fair shake. That maybe it was
an afterthought, tacked onto the
astrology wheel just for the sake
of symmetry. You are the only
sign which is an inanimate object
for example, while the other
signs are wild animals or heroes
or hybrid creatures out of myth.
Cosmologically, you feel like the
kid who was picked last for the
team; just standing at the fence
for eternity. Don't worry though,
there's light at the end of the
tunnel. When the inevitable nuclear
holocaust occurs and the oxygen is
pried from every living thing's lips
in a ghastly storm of fire and ash,
non-breathing objects will have the
only chance of surviving. Then you
will have your day!



Scorpio
When you enter hell, there will be
two doors. Behind the first, there is
an IKEA and behind the other there
is a mega mall featuring a Panera,
a Starbucks, a Crate & Barrel and
other such shops. The doors will be
marked accordingly, and I suppose
your choice will be determined by
what you'll need to make your stay
there most comfortable.



Sagittarius
Though you are a centaur, you're
really gotten into Brazilian-style
hot wax treatment on your entire
lower half. So, instead of being half-
horse, you're more half-dinosaur.
You should collaborate with Steven
Spielberg, who loves dinosaurs
and other creatures he can cast as
enormous metaphorical phalluses.
There's apparently a lot of money
in blockbusters and I think it
would be better than running
around with a bow in the woods,
trying to fornicate, but be warned:
your character will probably be a
metaphor for a penis.



Capricorn
The sea goat. You should be given
an award, or made king of the world.
I always thought you were just a
possum, a pig, or that you'd gotten
your persona from watching some
dumb Scorsese movie. But when
you had your chef executed just for
using cum, I had to give you props.
You are totally real.

FOR A MUSICIAN whose music has earned him such respect from his peers, the elusive, grim-faced figure known as Scott “Wino” Weinrich has always existed in a zone far apart from even the darkest cult spectrum of rock’s unsung heroes.

“Wino” grew up around the Washington, D.C., area, and became well-known among the hardcore-punk-loving kids in the early ’80s as “that amazing guitarist” for Warhorse, a local metal band, later to be known as the Obsessed. Wino stood out in any crowd, not only from his formidable rep as a musician, but because he was an imposing, long-haired, denim ‘n’ leather-wearing dude who, appearances aside, expressed solidarity with the burgeoning D.C. punk scene, led by such bands as Minor Threat and the Bad Brains. In return, Obsessed shows were routinely filled with short-haired fans who wouldn’t have been caught dead at an Iron Maiden or Judas Priest concert. Black Flag’s Henry Rollins, Fugazi’s Ian MacKaye and Nirvana’s Dave Grohl were diehard Obsessed fans, reverently viewing Wino with a sense of awe and fear in equal measures.

“Wino plays guitar with that up-all-night-drinking-Clorox sound,” Rollins once said admiringly.

In 1985, Wino accepted an invitation to sing for Californian stoner-rock forefathers Saint Vitus. They were his sole focus of musical attention for the rest of the decade, as the band released several albums and EPs on SST Records, home to so many of that decade’s best bands. Joe Carducci, author of *Rock and the Pop Narcotic*, and Vitus’s SST producer, explained the appeal thus: “What I hear in Wino is a natural who’s not like other musicians. He always has a trailing shimmer on all of his playing, and when he is just doing downstrokes to mark the rhythm, he’s shaping that as well—dragging the rhythm from the guitar.”

Wino’s association with Vitus lasted until the early ’90s, when he reformed the Obsessed and released his first record on a major label in 1994 (*The Church Within*). Sadly, it failed commercially, and would turn out to be the final album for the group. Wino, cut adrift from music for the first time in many a year, spiraled into a life of drink, drugs and depression.

He spent the much of the ’90s with a severe speed habit, homeless in L.A., on the skids, with an injured foot that had been so neglected it nearly was amputated. Somehow, he made his way back home to the East Coast, where he cleaned up and rekindled his passion for music...in a big way. By 1998, he had started a new band, Spirit Caravan, which lasted five years and two albums (and whose works can be found on a new retrospective, *The Last Embrace*, MeteorCity); joined the Tennessee doom-metal band Place of Skulls for one record, *With Vision* (Southern Lord, 2003); and, most important, formed the Hidden Hand, a power-trio that Wino feels has the most potential of any band with which he’s ever worked.

The Hidden Hand, named after the bandmembers’ belief in an unseen socio-economic force pulling the strings of world government, finds Wino (and his fellows) speaking out against the modern era’s dangerously neo-conservative thinking. Over the course of their debut, *Divine Propaganda* (again, MeteorCity) the Hidden Hand express solidarity with a wounded ecology, cast aspersions about the veracity of the mass media, and point an accusing finger at the Commander-In-Chief (“We didn’t elect you/God didn’t select you/We will reject you” goes the refrain in the album’s title track). The album’s traycard includes a list of authors and books that the band endorse, among them titles from political journalist Greg Palast and controversial theorist David Icke.

Both the Obsessed and Saint Vitus were considered wildly out-of-date and moldy, by the standards of the cocaine-fueled ’80s. At a time when music was being sped up faster, by hardcore and speed-metal alike, Wino’s bands were slow, stentorian and somber; lyrics riddled with feelings of doubt and guilt. Most people dismissed them as dirty, druggly, Black Sabbath devotees. But, like Sabbath before them, the Obsessed and Saint Vitus—and now, the Hidden Hand—are true voices from the counterculture, decrying war and injustice while providing a needed alternative to the well-scrubbed suburban mentality that prevailed then, as it does now, in pop music.

Today, in addition to touring with the Hidden Hand, Wino can be found lending his searing guitar leads or lending his distinctively craggy vocals to albums from Clutch and Dave Grohl’s Probot; that’s him in the Probot video, sharing a stage with his British analogue, Lemmy (Motörhead) Kilmister. The good Southern Lord will be re-releasing long out-of-print, vintage Obsessed and Saint Vitus material in the coming months, while the Hidden Hand are readying a split 12-inch EP with Woolly Mammoth on McCarthyism and a new studio album. Two more previously unreleased Hidden Hand tracks are due on compilations from Crucial Blast and *High Times* magazine..

While his famous friends still tend to refer to him as a “living legend,” Wino is remarkably approachable: a doting father to his two sons, happily living in rural Maryland. *Arthur* gave him a ring one afternoon...and he answered.

Legendary doom metal/stoner rock lifer

SCOTT “WINO” WEINRICH lays some typically heavy thoughts about politics, music, hallucinogens and life on **Joshua Sindell**.

HEAVY RIFFING

Arthur: You have some choice words for the current president in the lyrics to “Divine Propaganda.”

Wino: These are very urgent times. I have a happy life, my family has enough to eat and stuff, and I consider myself fortunate. What I don’t want to see is some kind of puppet king sitting up there telling people what they can and cannot do. I’ve always had a problem with authority in my life, but I think as I’ve gotten older, I can tell right from wrong. But the bottom line is, that guy was not elected fairly. Go to the website of someone who I consider a true American hero, Greg Palast [gregpalast.com], or read his book, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*. Bottom line: They stole that election, and Palast shows how they did it with hard documents that turned up on his desk from people who were too afraid to put them out themselves, but knew Palast would. It shows how ChoicePoint Inc., the company in Atlanta that the state of Florida hired to establish their voter rolls, disenfranchised hundreds of voters in Florida by claiming them to be convicted felons, which doesn’t disqualify people from voting in Florida, but still managed to illegally keep people from voting there. He really points out how, in so many ways, that election was stolen in Florida.

No shortage of conspiracy theories these days.

No way. Look at the events of 9/11. Are you familiar with Project For a New American Century? That whole neocon, right-wing organization? They espouse all of these neocon ideals, like war being a necessary tool. One of the things that they’ve talked about for a long time has been the necessity for a Pearl Harbor-like calamity in order to unify the masses and whip up the nationalistic sentiments. It’s fucking scary. I mean, when you start to read some of the non-mainstream publications, like Russ Kick’s Disinformation books and stuff like that, a lot of serious intellectual professors are doing this research into the events of 9/11, and there are so many unanswered questions about that.

I’m sure I’ll be labeled a fucking crackpot for the rest of my life, but I’m gonna say it: I think 9/11 was staged to do exactly what it did, and what it did was to totally allow the neocons to get their talons into things a lot deeper and a lot quicker.

I know that it sounds crazy, and that nobody could ever believe for one second that our own government could ever do something as terrible as that, even with Bush getting up there and crying and everything. But who knows if he had known about it, too?

You’re hardly the first “crackpot” to suggest such a thing.

Exactly. But I love this country and I’m seriously worried about what’s going to happen to us, especially since I have children now. Look at how many people died in the World Trade Center. A few thousand. Well, in another three years in Iraq, those [U.S.] casualties there may be that high. What’s the difference? The government has no qualms about two or three soldiers being killed every single day in Iraq, and in another year or so, we’ll start getting close to those Trade Center numbers. Nine here in a helicopter, 17 there in a helicopter, five more in a road bomb there...I have to ask myself, what’s the difference in their thinking?

What’s the use in using depleted uranium in all of our armor-piercing munitions that the Pentagon and the Army know is giving people cancer? There are all of these GLs—as detailed in a recent issue of *Rolling Stone* [“Is the Pentagon Giving Our Soldiers Cancer?” Oct. 2, 2003], that article will scare the living shit out of you!—all of those people coming back from the first Gulf War who were hit by friendly fire, these people are red-hot, radioactive sick and dying. They can’t work, they can’t serve in the military, and they’re being discharged from the military with no benefits because the Army won’t admit that their radiation poisoning is from their own depleted uranium. They can’t, because it’s their best killing weapon. In Iraq, due to all of this radiation from the Army, the first question out of pregnant women’s mouths to their doctors these

days is, “Is my baby normal?” Basically, what we have here is this whole situation where [we’re saying], “Yeah, we’ll liberate your country, but we’ll fuckin’ poison it along with our own GLs. We don’t fucking care.”

Where does the lying end? What about the chemicals that settled all over lower Manhattan when the towers fell, and New Yorkers weren’t told about the dangers the air posed to their health?

How many fucking lies can people swallow, that’s what I want to know. These people in government are so firmly entrenched now that they can just throw it in your face and say “fuck you.” That’s what Dick Cheney’s doing with the energy committee. Everybody knows that he was in bed with Enron. Everybody knows that Enron manipulated the California energy crisis. These people are now plea-bargaining their way into sweetheart prison sentences. Meanwhile, the poor are being completely exploited as a kind of forced working class. I’ve heard all of these crazy hypotheses, and I’ve heard people talking about the potential of there being slave-labor camps on the moon and all that some day. Sure it sounds like a wild conspiracy theory. But then again, the headline on the cover of The Washington Post this very morning is about Bush proposing that mankind has to start colonizing the moon, basically. It doesn’t sound so crazy anymore.

These brainwashed, Bible-reading, gung ho, “Bomb Baghdad” majority of Americans have their mouths wide open, bellies swelling with all of it, and they’re smiling away. They’re happy to be eating this shit! They think Bush is the greatest thing to ever happen to this country. Well, when their grandchildren are wielding a fuckin’ pick-axe on the Moon, I wonder what they’re gonna be thinking.

The gist of David Icke’s book *And the Truth Shall Set You Free* is that the general people of humanity, the good working folks, are all becoming kind of locked into a vibrational prison. There’s this whole onslaught of media, programming, and media control that is basically serving to lock everybody into self-imposed boxes. You know: Believe everything that the news tells you, and go quietly to the polling place.

How are you a different musician now from that guy who liked to get “out of his head” 15 years ago, in Saint Vitus?

I think that the positive energy was always there. I always wanted to do the right thing. I never wanted to hurt anybody or rip anybody off. I just wanted to make good, positive music that would benefit people’s lives. And that was one of the reasons why it was kind of hard to hang with the Saint Vitus guys after a while. David [Chandler, guitarist] was on such a different trip from me, he was kind of a depressed-type person, and it really shows in his music.

His stuff is like, “I’m locked in this box, can’t you see how bad it is?” thing. Me, I was always looking for a way out. I would tell him, “Don’t you want to play better? Don’t you want to practice to get better?” I would buy records by guys like Allan Holdsworth and get fired up and think, “Wow, maybe I could play like this guy one day! Maybe I should play three more hours a day or something?” I always knew that one day I was going to give up all the crap in my life and dive headlong into music, I always believed that, even back then. Thankfully, I was able to do that.

You recently filmed a video with Lemmy from Motörhead. What’s your history with Lemmy? Was he an influence on the Obsessed?



HIDE THE BEER

Some advice from **Sue Carpenter** about running a pirate radio station out of your own apartment.



The KBLT mascot (above). Jim Reid of the Jesus and Mary Chain mans the turntable. Note beer on shelf (right).



IT TERRIFIED MY PARENTS, amused my friends and inspired the DJs who got involved, but for me, squatting on a piece of prime FM real estate was simply a challenge—to change a system I did not like and break the mold of my overly ordinary, and earnest, existence. Here's what I learned in the three years I was on air with KBLT in Los Angeles:

1. *Don't let a puny record collection and a laughable knowledge of music let you think you can't program a radio station better than the guys who are paid to do it.* I only owned a couple dozen records when I built a radio station from scratch and began broadcasting from my bedroom. I didn't know much about music. I just knew what I liked—and that was exactly the problem. The only music I knew was what I heard on the radio, and most of that was over-produced shlock that was over-hyped and then over-played. In the '60s, commercial FM DJs relied on their own ears to pick music. Now it's one-size-fits-all formats programmed by suits and spun by monkeys. There's a lot of great music out there. If you don't know what it is, there are plenty of people who do who'd be more than happy to clue you in.

2. *Just because you're serious about what you're doing doesn't mean you should lose your sense of humor.* When I went on the air in 1995, all of the other micro radio operators in the Bay Area were broadcasting politics, not music. As a lefty liberal, I was sympathetic to their causes. Pro-environment, anti-establishment and generally angry around the edges, I'm sure I would have learned a lot had I listened to their programs. But I didn't. After tuning in once, I tuned back out, turned off by their overly earnest discussions. Heavy subjects don't need a heavy hand. Lightening up with humor doesn't mean taking the subject lightly.

3. *Don't marry your own plans.* I had a very specific idea of how I wanted the station to sound when I started it. I wanted it to sound like college radio only better. My station wouldn't just play indie rock—it would play only the indie rock I liked. Of course, that plan was contingent on getting a bunch of DJs who shared my musical taste, which was possible. I just had to decide if that was the real purpose of uncensored radio: to impose my musical preferences or to allow the DJs to make those decisions themselves. I decided on the latter and, in the end, wound up with programming that was far more interesting and enlightening than anything I could have dreamed up on my own.

4. *If you open your private home to a public activity, prepare to be unwelcome in your own living room.* Volunteering at a pirate radio station, DJs are prepared to encounter certain things: shoddy equipment, a limited music library, unwelcome visits by the police or FCC. But no one was ready to see the station manager wandering the premises in a baby blue bathrobe and filthy pink slippers. The sight of a freshly showered woman combing out her hair and doling out advice was a little much for some people.

5. *If you're a woman, most people will have a hard time believing you run the show, especially when mechanics are involved.* Whether they work as managers, programmers or DJs, lots of women hold powerful positions in radio. It's easy to understand what they do because the stations that employ them most likely existed before they got there. But when I tell people that my radio station started with me, a motherboard and a soldering iron and grew into a round-the-clock operation staffed with more than a hundred DJs, it's hard for them to believe. Radio stations aren't inherently masculine, but starting one apparently is.

6. *Never keep your refrigerator stocked, especially with beer.* DJs get thirsty.



Sue Carpenter's **40 Watts From Nowhere: A Journey Into Pirate Radio** is published this month by Scribner's. It is her first book.

Mike Watt cradles his beloved original vinyl of *The Who Sell Out* during the first of his many visits to KBLT.



Reviews by
C & D

Guitar Wolf
Red (cd) DVD
(Narnack)
Dr. Hey, I can't make this
DVD work.

The Von Bondies
Pawn Shoppe Heart
(Sire)

D: This is the Detroit
garage guy who had his
face bashed up by Jack
White.
C: Right. Jason Von
Bondie is apparently the
town asshole, or so I've
been told. But, do you
know that song, "Pablo
Picasso"?
D: Of course! Jonathan
Richman and the
Modern Lovers! They
were the best! Singing:
"He could walk down
your street/And girls
could not resist his
stare/Pablo Picasso
was never called an
asshole." But this
doesn't sound like
Jonathan Richman...?
C: (sighs) Okay D, I'll
spell it out for you:
Pablo Picasso was
an asshole. But he
also made some great
paintings.

Franz Ferdinand
Franz Ferdinand
(Domino)

D: This is what the
Strokes and the Rapture
should have done on
their last records. But
they were incapable.
C: Every song is a sure-
hit on the dancefloor.
Plus the guy can sing.
And check out what
they do on this track
(85). 55 seconds....
D: Whoa...
C: The tempo slows
down... And listen to
that guitar playing!
Then here comes that
descending disco
bassline again.
D: This is ridiculous. Can
I use your phone? I've
got to call my financial
advisor. I've got to buy
stock in this band! They
are the new kings!!!
C: I know, eh. It's like all
the those other bands,
including those Interpol
guys, were all just
warm-ups for the Ferds.
Amazing stuff. Album of
the year so far, easy.

The Walkmen
Bows and Arrows
(Record Collection)

D: Ah, I see what you're
doing...
C: Yes, I am Clever Man.
D: These guys, they're
good, they're kind of
like the Ferdinand and
the Strokes and...
C: Dude's got a bit of
the crooner in
him. And he's a more
interesting lyricist than
Julian Casablancas.
Then again, just about
everyone is.
D: Watch it.
C: Oh right, sorry, I
forgot about your inner
14-year-old girl self.
D: ...
C: Um... Okay, sorry,
that was uncalled for.
D: You can be so
ARROGANT sometimes...
(listening) The sounds
they get are so cool.
C: Organs, guitars,
tacked pianos. But
check out this next
track, you're gonna
lose it.
D: (listening to "The
Rain") It's the Strokes
with their pants on fire!
That guy's mad!!!!
C: Wadder than Jack
White. He's fucking
going for it, damn,
and you know, when a
crooner spits blood, you
better look out. Anger
always means more
when it's coming from a
guy who usually...
D: This shit is banging.
"You've got a nerve to
be asking a favor/You've
got a nerve to be calling
my number/I'm sure,
we've been through
this before/Can't you
hear me, I'm beating on
the wall."
C: I'd pay \$15 for this
song alone. And you
know what? There's
ten more songs on the
album!!!!
D: And they're good too.
Shit. This is gonna be
some year.



Onaida
Secret Wars
(Jagjaguar)
C: You wouldn't know this.
D: Again with the arrogance!
C: Well, you wouldn't--
D: Wouldn't what?
C: Wouldn't know what the title is based on.
D: Well...
C: 90 Marvel Comics. Which I read. And I bet you didn't.
D:--
C: So fuck off!
(laughter) Big battles between superheroes and the main guy who summoned them to the "secret wars": The Beyonder.
D: (wistful) Ah, the 90s...
C: Or it's based on something else!
Anyways, I dig this.
D: (Listening to "550 Tea") It's frantic. Hypnotic. Like strobe lights for your ears.
C: But it stretches out too, and there's melodies. It's a lot like that last Primal Scream record, *Evil Heat*. Difference is that Onaida won't let the machines do any work.
D: The Beyonders is the name of my new band.

Weird War
If You Can't Beat 'Em, Ble 'Em
(Drag City)
C: From Secret Wars to Weird War, get it?
D: You are so clever. Almost too clever to bear. I cover before your cleverness.
C: (laughs) As you ought. Now check this shit out...
D: (listening to "Grand Fraud") Is it supposed to sound like that? Listen to all that hiss.
C: Yes, it's nice and raw and funny and kinda fucked up. They used some old mixing board that Sly Stone and later the P-Funk guys used. Um, I guess it's possible...
D: (2:45 into "Grand Fraud") WHOA!!!!
C: That's the shit right there. That's it.
D: Who is the singer?
C: Ian Svenonius, Arthur astrologer, on vocals. He's been around forever. Nation of Ulysses, Cupid Car Club, Make Up, Scene Creomers... The Make Up split up just when they were getting good! Now I think he's got it going on again, especially with this new guitar player, that guy has some tasty chops, as they used to say back in the day. Do you remember, back in the '90s, when it was a point of pride to be less than competent?
D: Stupid indie rockers, I never liked that stuff. Weird War is a weird name.
C: You're right. Like, what do you call the people in the band?...
Weird Warriors?
D: Weird Warriors! (Ears pop up as female voice rapping begins on title track breakdown) Is that Peaches????
C: It's Jennifer from Royal Trux.
D: Whoa, I think she can quit her dayjob! And Peaches should call her lawyers.
C: Always with the lawyers, this guy.

TV On the Radio
Desperate Youth, Blood Thirsty Babes (Touch and Go)
C: Another band with a difficult name.
D: "TV on the Radio"? What does that mean? What are they thinking? This is crazy talk.
C: Just listen to the music. You can't judge a band by its name! The Beatles is the stupidest name ever, right?
D: Yes, okay, (listening) What do you call this kind of music?
C: I have no idea, but I like listening to it.
D: It's dance music, but it's got all this...
C: All these weird elements, used in weird ways. Horns. Backing vocals. Dance grooves.
D: He's got a voice like Peter Gabriel. There's something kind of scary about this stuff.
C: It seems like they're holding it together in the face of something. (Quoting song lyrics:) "You were my favorite moment/of a dead century."
D: This is really good. It's genuinely new--I can't say that I've heard something like this before. And I want to hear it again.

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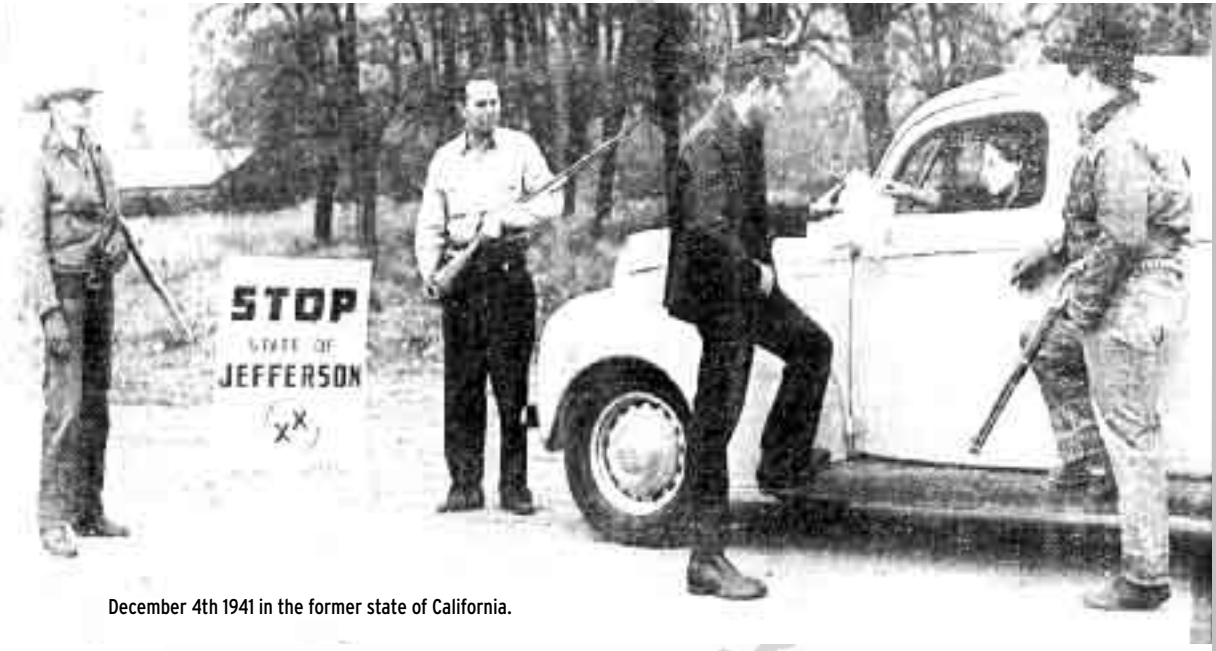


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A SLOW, STRANGE AND GRUELING THING

DANIEL CHAMBERLIN ventures behind California's Redwood Curtain to experience the three-day triathlon of the arts that is the Great Arcata-to-Ferndale Kinetic Sculpture Race.



December 4th 1941 in the former state of California.

IN THE LATE 1930s FRUSTRATED RESIDENTS

of Northern California declared their intention to wage "patriotic rebellion" against California and Oregon. Tired of dealing with state governments that seemed more concerned with distant population centers—and not with repairing the decrepit bridges and mud-choked roads leading to their sparsely populated mining, fishing and timber communities—the people of Northern California and Southern Oregon took steps to secede from their respective states. The new state would be called Jefferson—a name arrived at by way of a newspaper contest—in honor of Thomas Jefferson, third president of the U.S. and patron saint of Libertarians and states' rights crusaders. On December 4, 1941, Jefferson State's residents set up barricades on the highway and elected Judge John L. Childs governor. At his inauguration he was photographed with a bear on a chain that appears to have a severed human hand in its jaws. Three days after Childs' inauguration Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor and the Jefferson State movement was swept aside as the United States entered World War II. Though small in number, benign Jefferson State secessionists still hold meetings, run a Web site and paint slogans on their barn roofs. Recently, they tried to use the California's gubernatorial recall fiasco to drum up support for their cause.

The Jefferson State movement points to a spirit of individualism that thrives in Northern California, especially in Humboldt County. People who live up in northernmost California like being away from it all: there's time to develop interesting ideas, and enough of a community for those ideas to take root. Hobart Brown, a tiny, impish, 69-year-old man who lives in Humboldt, at the southern end of what could've been Jefferson State, is one of those people. He's an aircraft mechanic, astrologer and wild pig hunter. He's also the self-styled "Glorious Founder" of The Great Arcata-to-Ferndale Kinetic Sculpture Race (KSR), an event that has run every year since 1969.

The KSR is a vigorous all-terrain art parade held over the course of Memorial Day Weekend. Participants take three days to travel 38 miles in vehicles known as kinetic sculptures—usually recumbent bicycles frames mounted with some sort of sculptural art that's often conspicuously wacky: poop-filled toilet, braying donkey, KISS Army Camaro, etc. For the 2003 race, the least

noteworthy of the entries appearing on the starting line in Arcata is a gray-haired, bearded guy wearing a suit and riding a bicycle. The most imposing sculpture-vehicle is the 2,000-pound "Surf & Turf," a dramatically psychedelic Day-Glo lobster. A bull's head that bears a close resemblance to the distressed animal in Picasso's "Guernica" is grafted on to the back of its abdomen. Six pilots sit inside dressed as chefs, complete with poofy white hats.

In order to complete the full race course in accordance with all of the rules—to "Ace" the course, in KSR terminology—the machines must maneuver over city streets and sand dunes, navigate across a mile of open water in Humboldt Bay and slog through the murky depths of a backwoods bog. They do all of this at an average speed somewhere around 2-3 mph, meaning the race never gets much faster than the wheelchair-bound vets in the Memorial Day Parade that precedes them at the finish line in Ferndale. The KSR combines the tedious pace and muddy wallowing of a tractor pull with the budget-minded engineering of a demolition derby and the physical punishment of an Iron Man triathlon. Dozens of participants return every year. Some have two decades of consecutive races behind them. The race means many things to many people, but as far as Hobart is concerned its primary purpose is to serve as a weapon against suicide.

You have to be seeking Humboldt County in order to get there. Garberville, the largest town in southern Humboldt, is 200 miles from San Francisco. The two largest towns in Humboldt—Eureka and Arcata—are over 70 miles further north. Though Jefferson State is now mostly history, it is a given with locals that Northern California, particularly Humboldt, is separate from the rest of California. This is attributed to a phenomena known as "the Redwood Curtain." Thousands of people do make the trip to Humboldt though; tourism is one of the area's trademark industries along with timber, fishing, folk art and marijuana cultivation. For his part, Hobart Brown subscribes to the theory that, along with Hawaii, Humboldt is one of the last outposts of Mu, a mythical lost civilization akin to Atlantis.

The best road to Humboldt from the rest of California is U.S. 101, though what is an eight-lane river of traffic down in Los Angeles is a two-lane trickle 500 miles up the coast in Hopland. The same freeway serves as a 25 mph main street further north in Willits and Laytonville. The towns stay charming, but as you move north there are fewer high-priced bistros and more stores selling generators, solar panels and livestock supplies. Outside towns, the road is flanked on either side by acres of farmland and deep forests. Country lanes open up throughout Sonoma and Mendocino Counties, lined by roadside invitations to join the landed gentry in their wine tasting rooms from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Once you're in Humboldt, the grape arbors are mostly gone, replaced by what local drug folklore suggests is the scent of local marijuana crops wafting over the highway. The Eel River rides alongside the 101, and in the summer it's not uncommon to see people pulled off to the side of the road and going for a dip. "Bigfoot Country" coin purses and redwood burl carvings are readily available, and there are several opportunities to drive your car through hollowed-out redwood trees. Local highway cleanup projects are sponsored by the Harley Riders Association, the Humboldt Area Pagan Network and a store called The Blessed Thistle. Logging trucks hauling gargantuan pieces of timber, farmers driving tractors between their fields and rusted VW buses filled with vintage hippies discourage speedy drivers. The archetypal Humboldt vehicle is a mud-spattered 4WD pickup truck with a Grateful Dead sticker and a National Rifle Association decal sharing the same bumper.

In Denis Johnson's metaphysical California noir, *Already Dead*, the suicidal philosopher Carl Van Ness wanders this stretch of highway and describes these remote towns as "like little naps you might never wake up from—you might throw a tire and hike to a gas station and stumble unexpectedly onto the rest of your life, the people who would finally mean something to you, a woman, an immortal friend, a saving fellowship in the religion of some obscure church." I didn't begin to understand the Kinetic Sculpture Race until I was drunk, stoned and stumbling with a party of veteran racers spewing history and KSR gospel in equal measure as they camped on an isolated, driftwood-strewn beach. You don't call yourself a local up here until you've been dug in for at

least a generation, but there's no better description of the appeal of Humboldt life to an outsider—or a more dead-on assessment of the cult that has risen up around the race that Hobart Brown started in 1969—than that of Johnson's troubled pilgrim.

Hobart Brown claims the title of Glorious Founder of the Kinetic Sculpture Race, but race director Bill Croft runs the thing. Croft is a sewing machine repairman who moved to Humboldt County with his wife when he retired from the Coast Guard ten years ago. Although the racers are following an arcane set of rules that Hobart and others have developed over the last three decades, it's up to Croft to make sure the race follows the rules in terms of city permits, traffic safety, insurance and crowd control. In a phone interview a week before the race he tells me that he knows a lot about Porta-Potties, that Hobart is "the worst businessman ever," and that without his organizational assistance it was only a matter of time before the race was going to be shut down.

Croft works with an organization called the Humboldt Kinetic Association (HKA), an alliance of local non-profit groups that purchased the KSR from Hobart last year with the intention of turning a somewhat anarchic event into a smoothly functioning, money-making venture. Croft says they're talking about bringing in a "major corporate sponsor," selling media rights and maybe charging some kind of admission. He would like this to be a more family-friendly event, and for everyone in the family to have a place to go to the bathroom.

A handful of participants don't like Croft or the HKA because Croft comes from the world of non-profits—he was formerly the executive director of Tour of the Unknown Coast, a successful Humboldt County bicycle ride—and not from the ranks of KSR racers. Some participants seem indignant that they guy handling all the bureaucratic shit-work has never raced the course. To Croft's credit, I can't figure out why he'd want the job, seeing as it pays no money and mostly consists of covering the asses of people who seem to resent him.

"Whooo!" says Croft when I ask him what the veteran racers think of him and the HKA. "We're seen as usurpers, like, 'What have you people got buying our race?'" Ironically, given Croft's investor-friendly intentions, the race was flat broke until about a week ago. "This year we took it in the shorts and we lost all our sponsorship," he says, "but we asked everybody in the county to give us a dollar. About eight or nine thousand



Colonel Hobart

people did that."

I let Croft off the phone so that he and his wife can finish programming mobile phones for race volunteers with relevant contact numbers. The next time I see him he's in Hobart's living room welding Ace Awards, the tiny brass medals handed out to participants who complete the course without breaking any race rules.

Like a lot of places in Humboldt, the town of Ferndale offers creepy and quaint in one fog-shrouded package. There are cute fudge shoppes with sweet little old ladies tending the counter and a second-hand bookstore with shelves of sale books sitting on the sidewalk 24 hours a day. Men with radical beards drive pickup trucks up and down the street. A young woman with a fire-engine red ponytail shoves some sort of package into the back seat of a '70s Impala and a teenage punk clothed in tattered black saunters past the bookstore. A sprawling cemetery overlooks the town, its century-old crypts and crumbling headstones spread up the side of a hill like a macabre amphitheater until they fade into a fog-filled forest.

Ferndale bills itself as a charming Victorian village, though when juxtaposed with the gray skies that are a given most of the year in Humboldt, these structures' endless eaves and tiny windows offer many places for the hungry eyes of a mad aunt to peek out from behind attic curtains. The Jim Carrey vehicle *The Majestic* was filmed here, as were parts of the Ebola thriller *Outbreak* and TV movie adaptation of Stephen King's *Salem's Lot*.

Hobart Brown Galleries sits at the intersection of Main and Brown in a two-story red Victorian. Opening the front door sets off a series of bells, but there's nobody answering their clunky chimes. The floor is carpeted and the walls are graying redwood. It feels like the inside of a barn. Hobart's gallery hosts paintings by several local artists, but he's the main draw. His towering works of sculpted brass run down the center of the cavernous bottom story.

Hobart is surrounded by decades of stories, some glowing, others damning. I traveled up here to watch last year's KSR, but I didn't get a chance to speak with him then. He seemed to keep a removed presence during the event, emceeding at the starting line and then following along intermittently in a white stretch limousine. When asked about Hobart, people seemed to either be overcome with a vague sense of awe and gratitude or they just sort of snuffled a bit and muttered under their breath. One guy gave me an open letter to Hobart that begins with the line "You are a lying son of a bitch." Another race participant read a tearful dedication to Hobart thanking him for giving "us this grand stage we call 'The Kinetic.'" A stage on which we, the artists, play out our dreams and passions."

If the downstairs of Hobart Brown Galleries is an art-filled barn, the upstairs is straight hillbilly *Addams*

Family. The walls are hard to make out, as they're covered almost entirely with artifacts of Hobart's life. There is a petrified pork chop, discolored with freezer burn. A picture of a middle-aged woman in '40s-era clothing reads "Mom's Dad" and underneath, in marker, "Not?" In a huge '70s-era picture above Hobart's television set he poses with his pig-hunting spear, a diminutive version of Lynyrd Skynyrd's Ronnie Van Zant. A Vampirella poster is plastered on the ceiling 14 feet above. KSR paraphernalia is everywhere: stickers, posters, ribbons, press clippings, trophies. Three hunting arrows protrude from the wall. A pot-bellied stove sits in the middle of the room.

Hobart welds his sculptures in his living room. Tanks of flammable gas stand behind a furry white sectional couch. Bill Croft and Hobart are sitting and talking when I arrive, and in the middle of our interview, Croft—who radiates his Coast Guard past with a warm vest and a dense beard—fires up a blowtorch and starts melting brass.

The century-old building, Hobart tells me, used to be a brothel. Hobart's living room, kitchen, workshop and dining room are all one space divided into quarters by half walls and support beams. The rest of the upstairs consists of tiny, windowless bunkrooms often inhabited by his many guests. Hobart also mentions that he used to be a prostitute.

We set up for an interview on a coffee table covered in all sorts of paper. Many household items—the TV, the books—are labeled with Hobart's name and a date. One book in the bathroom accuses anyone of having the book in



his or her home of being a thief, as the book was taken from Hobart's toilet. Hobart's bathroom holds a magazine rack, three toilet paper dispensers and a bookshelf filled with books on astrology, EST, world records and Erich Fromm's school of psychology. Copies of *Popular Mechanics* abound here, as well as in the living room. A sign that reads "Farting Room" hangs on the wall. The toilet seat is labeled and dated. There is a guest book in the bathroom as well as in the living room and another downstairs in the gallery.

Hobart is a funny little man. Bill Croft calls him a goof. He wears overalls with blue and white stripes. Some sort of KSR medallion rests on his chest, held there by a blue ribbon. His moustache is uneven, the right strands hanging down longer than the left. His right eye is slightly more squinty than his left and his hair is disheveled. His hands are twisted into arthritic gnarls, and he refers to himself as a "cripple." Hobart has been married twice and has three grown kids—two sons live in Humboldt, a daughter in Pennsylvania. He's currently single, and most of the men who spend time with him seem to be either divorced or widowed.

Hobart has done hundreds of interviews in the 34 years since he started the race. He keeps a list of all the media outlets that have covered him, his folk art gallery or the KSR and gives me a photocopied index. They range from *The Christian Science Monitor*, CBS Evening News and *Smithsonian* to *California Highway Patrolman*, *Senior World* and something called "Simon's Hip Morning Dude Radio Show." My conversation with him is interrupted several times by reporters calling from the *Eureka Times-Standard*. Tomorrow he'll be interviewed for a newsletter in Baltimore. Hobart loves attention.

The genesis of the KSR is a concise, well-rehearsed tale. In 1969 Hobart the folk art gallery proprietor decided to make some adjustments to his son's tricycle. The result was "The Pentacycle," a seven-foot tall, five-wheeled vehicle with two seats. Hobart loved this thing, says he thought he had done his own Sistine Chapel. A friend, Jack Mays, saw the sculpture and decided to make his own. A couple more local tinkers decided they'd like to get in on the fun too. Supposedly it was Mays who came up with the idea to race the sculptures down Main Street in Ferndale—an obscure historical detail that has threatened Kinetic Schism on more than one occasion. On race day Hobart claims 10,000 people showed up, a boast that everyone shares when I ask about the first race. Randall Frost, who curates the Kinetic Sculpture Museum, shows me photos of the event and the figure seems almost believable. Massive crowds lined the streets of Ferndale; spectators crowded on rooftops and there's at least one film crew on the scene. "People don't have much to do up here," says Frost. "And word spreads fast when there's something going on."

In a history that is less easily narrated,



the race expanded to the current three-day triathlon of the arts. The sculptures became rugged orgies of bicycle engineering and folk art rather than the more delicate originals upon which they were modeled, graceful machines that were powered by rocking chairs hooked to drive trains, vehicles that made their way down the street propelled by the downward velocity of running water.

The thing that helps make Hobart such a big deal up here—his Humboldt County celebrity status springs from a history of events including Halloween bacchanals, wild pig hunting expeditions and confrontations with the chamber of commerce—is his willingness to embellish stories from his objectively festive life to anyone who will listen. His claim that he used to be a prostitute, for example, stems from a particularly promiscuous period in his life when he would ask his partners—women friends from around the way, mostly—to give him a dollar each time he had sex with them. He punctuates all of his stories with the sort of mischievous smile that on a younger man might result in just such a bevy of willing partners. And with the kind of laugh—a soft "coo-hoo-hoo"—appropriate to the sexagenarian manifestation of this persona.

Unexpectedly, Hobart isn't that good at telling stories about the KSR. Nobody's that good at telling stories about the race for that matter. It's like asking Deadheads about Grateful Dead shows and ending up with a chronicle of minutiae that misses the overwhelmingly surreal nature of the event as a whole. Hobart is extremely good at preaching the ideals of the race though, revealing the philosophical implications of its arcane rules and guidelines. He turns every little twist of KSR history into an aphorism making the case that the world will be a better place the more people participate in kinetic sculpture racing. It turns race participants into devotees who schedule their lives around the event. I get the feeling he does this with everyone he talks to since within 30 minutes he's already telling me how the KSR holds the keys to humanity's salvation.

"I know what makes an artist," he tells me. "They like to be noticed. I'll prove my point. Name one unknown artist that made it. You can't. So I rest my case." It's not clear where he's going with this, but it's an introduction to his idea of "the artist" as an archetypal hero figure in the Kinetic Philosophy.

"Here's the secret: Artists are the reason that we're gonna save the world," he says. "They're gonna give people purpose, improve quality of life. Get people so they don't want to commit suicide. The way you do that is you give them a sense of purpose. We're adults having fun so kids will want to get older. It works, doesn't it." It's hard to say if it works, actually. Correlating suicide rates and indexes of depression in rural northern California with the frequency of participation in kinetic sculpture racing is not a project anyone has undertaken just yet. But regardless of the lack of research on the subject, talking to Hobart makes me want to believe that it works.

As evidence of the KSR's efficacy, Hobart produces a letter nominating him for the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize written by Richard A. Langford, Ph.D., a professor in Humboldt State University's Department of Psychology. "Such an event as Mr. Brown's Kinetic Sculpture Race," writes Langford, "can be an important social support link in the delivery of services to children and young persons struggling with issues of depression, suicidal behavior, and substance abuse. I applaud his efforts."

Hobart thinks his mother tried to commit suicide when he was growing up in Hess, Oklahoma. One afternoon she told him they were going to take a nap, and that he should lie down and go to sleep. He got thirsty though, and when he went to the kitchen for some water, he found the gas running. He doesn't say much more about the incident or his childhood. He

was raised as a Baptist, and he's named after the town in Oklahoma where his parents are from. Over the course of the '40s and '50s he received training in aircraft mechanics and worked on cars at a drag strip.

His family moved to Los Angeles in the '50s. He took some classes at UCLA and attended a lecture by celebrated sculptor Alexander Calder that had a substantial impact on his life. Like Hobart, Calder pursued technical training over art school, and spent the early 1920s putting his engineering degree to work. Calder may be best known for his "stabiles," massive chunks of angular metal or wood, but he also popularized the idea of kinetic sculpture with what Marcel Duchamp christened "mobiles," a series of kinetic sculptures—non-vehicular—that were propelled by gears and cranks, or by the movement of air currents. In the agrarian climate of Oklahoma, Hobart felt there was no place for him except as a farmer, fieldworker or mechanic. After relocating to California and hearing Calder speak, he began to consider making art the focus of his life.

He moved to Humboldt in 1961, opening what he claims was the area's first art gallery in the town of Eureka. He relocated the gallery to Ferndale, into the building where he now lives, in 1962. Most of Hobart's non-kinetic sculptures on display in his gallery belie his eccentricity. "Bear Necessity" is a diorama of a cowboy staring at a bear that stands between him and his rifle. "The Horse" is a nearly life-size bucking bronco with an \$18,500 price tag. "Duck for Dinner" is a small waterfowl ducking beneath copper rings—signifying ripples—for a morsel.



#2 in the bay.

The centerpiece of Hobart's sculptural catalog is a chunk of copper at least a dozen feet tall called "The Caves of Mercury." It comes with its own allegorical description, handily photocopied and available at a nearby table. "The Caves" depicts a series of mountains inhabited by winged creatures known as Tranzoids. A rickety network of tiny scaffolding and ladders winds around the copper mass, stopping off at ledges and caves that depict various life stages and their accompanying challenges: Descend the ladder past the cave of early death, cross the dangerous bridge of adolescence and you arrive at the cave of rejection. Make it through there and you find early rewards. Resist those and there are more ladders and caves to endure until you end up naked in the cave of self-realization and finally cross the gateway of eternal wisdom. Hobart spends a lot of time thinking about what makes a good life, and how making it through difficult times and solving problems results in an immense sense of fulfillment.

The biggest problem in Hobart's life right now is Bill Neill, a plumber from Oakland. Like a lot of the men involved in the race, he's a slightly plump middle-aged-looking guy with a goatee and a ponytail. He's been involved with the KSR for over 20 years. And he knows that Hobart hates him. So it's kind of a surprise when he walks into Hobart's living room in the middle of the interview. Hobart and Neill haven't seen each other in two years; they each accuse the other being a lying thief and it seems their last communication happened through Neill's lawyer. Hobart turns off the charm and becomes cold and distant. Neill is visibly nervous—his voice wavers and he's jumpy. He tells Hobart he's here to make peace. Hobart replies with a curt "No way."

"I really do want to come up here and bury the hatchet. Not just because of the race but because..." Neill takes a deep breath, "I've settled down. It's been a long time. My dad passing away and all that stuff was not, not good for me."

"I'm sorry that happened to you, but you wrote your own script. I'm sorry Bill."

"Okay. All right. I just wanted to come up here and do it personally. I was going to do it on the phone, way before the race, but..."

Hobart cuts him off again. "Why don't you put that money in the race? All that money you got. You're the only one to ever make money on this race."

"That's what I didn't want to get into."

Hobart sits on the edge of the couch staring off into space while Neill talks to his back. I have no idea what's going on, but Hobart has changed completely. Neill tells Hobart he's going to be emceeing the race with someone named the Burlyman, and Hobart tells him he won't come to any event where Neill is scheduled to make an appearance. Neill offers to step off the stage whenever Hobart wants to speak, but Hobart still refuses.

"You've never seen me get this angry before," says Hobart, "but I got hurt worse than I've ever been hurt before. I included and shared my life with you completely."

Neill offers to talk to Hobart later if he wants, and then leaves.

"He got more money out of the race than anybody," Hobart tells me as Neill retreats down the stairs. "He made me close the [KSR] museum and he waited until I got to Australia before he did it. He got something like \$90,000 out of something we owned together. And he didn't hurt me, because I'm okay. But he claimed that I was a thief. He claimed all kinds of things. So he would love to come back and have everything go back



Monkey's Olds.

I talked to Monkey about the old days of the race, back when it was a "drunken, adults-only" kind of thing, the kind of event where bonfires get out of control and the whole beach ends up on fire.

to normal so he can be a hero again. But I'm not giving him that option."

The Kinetic Sculpture Race is fraught with petty resentments, philosophical schisms and clan warfare that most participants don't talk about right away. Monkey is this big doozy-looking guy with sandy hair, thick glasses and a really weird looking truck. When I came up here in 2002 for my first KSR he opened the whole thing up.

On the second night of the KSR, it's a tradition for the participants to camp at a remote beach north of Ferndale known as Crab Park. They gather together for bonfires, fireworks and inebriated revelry. This is where the real shit goes down when it comes to the KSR, as good a reason to return each year as sweating inside some ridiculous costume while pedaling a thousand pounds of metal, plastic and papier-mâché over sand dunes. The beach is gray and covered with old pieces of driftwood that people drag over to a growing stack of pallets and logs. Small groups on the outskirts set up tents around particularly large pieces of wood that they've set alight where they lay half-buried in the sand. This place

is officially closed to everyone but KSR participants, but given that it's a bunch of hippies and folk artists, it was safe to assume when I came up here last year that the crowd would not be real heavy-handed about following the rules.

Monkey didn't think anybody at Crab Park knew his real name, and he wasn't about to tell me. He did tell me that what I mistook for some kind of decrepit, low-slung pickup truck was actually a 1964 Oldsmobile sedan with 350,000 miles on it. He and a friend tore the back half off and made the back seat and trunk area into a truck bed. The most important thing in the bed was an ice chest stocked with beverages. After that, the generator, something called a wire feed welder, a compressor and a stolen stop sign. In the front seat a CB radio crackled with squelchy chatter. Monkey serves as the head of the pit crew for Area 51, who I will soon learn are basically the Hell's Angels of the race. He had equipment for their rig—the "Devil Fish," a raggedy, fire-red

barracuda of a kinetic sculpture piloted by two heavy-set women—in the bed as well. Monkey helps everybody out with their machines, and on that night there was a constant flow of people cruising by to borrow tools. Monkey is one of those guys who know how to make things work using stuff that you find in the very back of a junkyard: the sort of person who could probably win custom car contests if he gave a shit about things like that. Instead, he follows the West Coast KSR circuit, which includes lesser events in Ventura, California; Corvallis, Oregon; and Port Townsend, Washington.

He's also the guy who wrote the open letter to Hobart that begins with: "You are a lying son of a bitch." I received my own copy of his letter after I talked to Monkey about the old days of the race, back when it was a "drunken, adults-only" kind of thing, the kind of event where bonfires get out of control and the whole beach ends up on fire. Not the most responsible, eco-friendly happening, but a whole lot of fun.

The circumstances surrounding Monkey's letter were sort of unclear, but he basically accused Hobart of being Hobart, of nosing around in all aspects of the race and playing his role as "Glorious Founder" to the hilt. A key component of race fun comes from the



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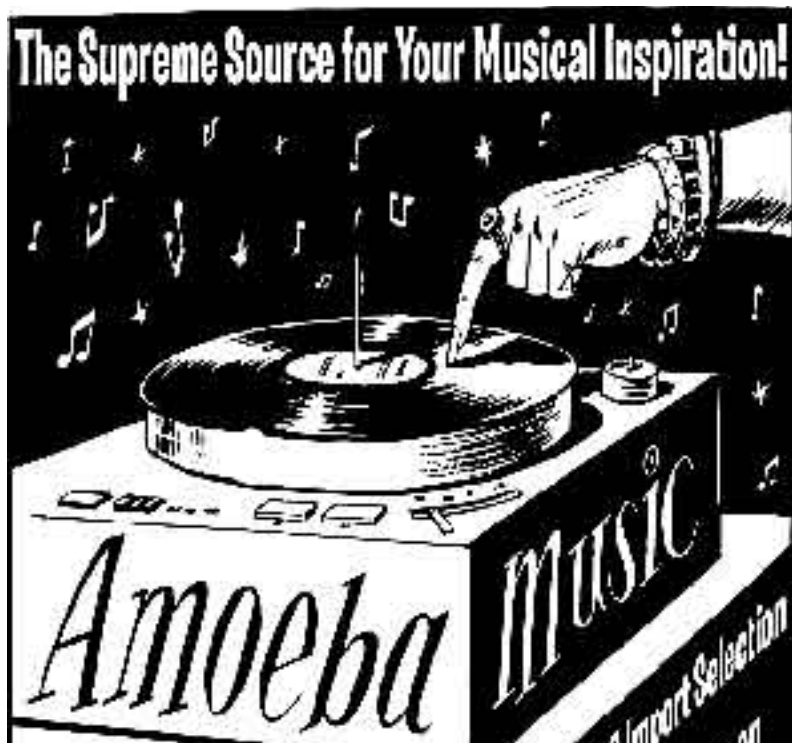
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The Paper Chase
What Big Teeth You Have EP (Southern)
C: Speaking of scary.
D: Super-tension crisis music!
C: Drills. Angst. Space. Rolling bass. Piano stabs. Guitars at angles.
D: It's like a soundtrack to a murder.
C: Reminds me of Jesus Lizard. Drive Like Jehu... But there's an almost... symphonic, I guess... component to it. They're from Texas, they thing big.
D: Violins too. Genuine horror movie stuff! But not in a cheesy way. No organ grinder.
C: You should see the video that's on here; it's like low-budge Lynch meets Cunningham. Okay, onto the next track, which is a Brel cover...
D: Of course. "My Death." Scott Walker did this.
C: The drums are so big on this record. I think it's a Texas thing. Those guys love the big Bonham drum thing down there. Lift to experience. Secret Machines, these guys... Maybe it's from all those years of Flaming Lips coming down to Austin from Oklahoma, that dude is an epic drummer. So is this guy.
D: The guitar is now being strangled. It's almost too much. Psychomatic, just at the edge of being too much.
C: Yes. This last song is a Roger Waters cover from The Pros and Cons of Hitch Hiking. It's massive.
D: Whore-we. We need to keep an ear on these guys!
C: Their next album is gonna be on Kill Rock Stars... A label with a violent name for a band with a violent streak as wide as a Texas mile.
D: They are the new Texas chainsaw murderers, only they use guitars. Murdered by music.

by Hobart Brown to Scott, one of “Surf & Turf”’s six pilots. The team of bridesmaids will pass the course in wedding dresses as well as towering blue Marge Simpson wigs. They’ve choreographed a tap-dance routine to the ‘50s girl-group hit “Chapel of Love.” At the wedding, an oversized gag-ring will be delivered by someone dressed in a small bear suit. The “ring bear,” naturally.

It’s a lot to take, but Moxon is a gas to talk with, smiling constantly and managing to sneak wry asides and jokes into even the most serious of conversations. As for Monkey’s words from last year about the success of the Kinetic Labs machines, she giggles as she does at everything. “It’s no fun to be the one sitting at home cranky at everybody else,” she says. “The only time you really lose is when you don’t do the race, and you just whine about it.”

She’s been friends with both Hobart and Bill Neill for years—joining them for Halloween parties, pig-hunts, canoe trips, even living with Hobart for awhile—and offers a similarly pragmatic take on their falling-out: “It’s just sad, they had been friends for so long. Bill took care of Hobart for a really long time. He made things easier for Hobart. Bill has been an amazing asset to the race. We love him dearly. This is one big family and families have fights. And they have disagreements and financial problems. It’s sad though because Hobart’s in bad health. Pain changes people,” she says. “The person I used to laugh with all the time is not all there now. I don’t mean it in a bad way. You just can’t be.”

Neill is also here at the Kinetic Labs, painting the image of a Kinetic Chicken on this year’s Mediocre Award: an orange, 1979 Ford Pinto with plaid upholstery. He won’t tell me how much he paid for it, only that he bought it for the race. Neill has been master of ceremonies for the KSR for the past 15 years and he is dressed appropriately. The red band on his straw hat matches his red velvet vest. A necklace of heavy metal beads hangs from his neck and he sports a huge piece of turquoise in place of a watch. He is decidedly more confident here, among friends, than

during the awkward confrontation in Ferndale the day before. He pulls a photo album from the back seat of the Pinto and shows me pictures of him posing with topless women at biker rallies and nude women at Burning Man. Neill seems like he’s basically a civilian biker with a way with tools. He’s a plumber by trade, and he’s also got pictures of motorcycles he’s built along with “hatchet-and-torch jobs” where he’s turned old Mustangs into convertibles. “I always manage to go where the naked women are,” he says paging through snapshots of Playboy Bunnies at wet T-shirt contests. These are interrupted by pictures of Neill hanging out with Hobart and company in his Ferndale home, of Neill and Hobart with former California governor Pete Wilson at the KSR, Neill and Hobart posing next to earthquake damage in Ferndale circa 1982.

Twenty-five years of friendship between the two men have been lost to poor bookkeeping and miscommunication. Hobart gets people excited about the KSR gospel, and Neill was no exception when they first met in 1977. Unlike the majority of the participants though, Neill’s enthusiasm translated into a financial investment in the race itself. That’s where things get kind of confusing.

In 1988, Neill and Hobart purchased a building together to house a museum of KSR paraphernalia. Neill also invested in the KSR by purchasing stock in the “Kinetic Corporation,” an entity that defies easy explanation. Trouble began brewing as Neill gradually became unhappy with the real estate portion

of his investment. The property wasn’t making any money—admission to the museum consists of a voluntary donation—and he wanted to sell the building. Around the same time Hobart decided to sell the rights to the KSR to Bill Croft and the Humboldt Kinetic Association for \$80,000, to be paid in \$1000 monthly installments. Croft tells me the HKA basically asked Hobart what he owed in KSR-related debt and settled on that amount as the price. Hobart was happy, but mostly due to reassurances that the sale was based on promises to stay true to his version of Kinetic Philosophy: three-day race, wacky awards, accolades to the mediocre, crusade against suicide, adults having fun so kids will want to get older.

Neill was not so happy with this arrangement. Hobart allegedly neglected to inform Neill—the biggest stockholder in the Kinetic Corporation—that the deal was going down. Hobart felt justified collecting the money from the sale of the rights due to the considerable debts he had amassed over years of basically operating the race with his own credit cards. Neill claims that when he bought into Kinetic Corp. there was no obligation to take over Hobart’s debts since those expenses were not channeled through the corporation in the first place. Therefore when the sale of the building went through, Neill kept funds sufficient to cover the loss he took when Hobart sold the rights. Neill says Hobart ripped him off by selling the rights to the race. Hobart maintains that Neill ripped him off when he kept the bulk of the money from the sale of the KSR museum building. Neill now wants to bury the hatchet and has returned to the KSR as an emcee, while Hobart remains unwilling to “validate Bill’s way of life,” essentially boycotting his own race.

All of this—the amount of money changing hands under the guise of a corporation and the up-front eccentricity of the principals involved—prompts an obvious question: Did it

occur to anybody to hire an accountant? Neill tells me that Hobart hired Arthur Anderson, laughs and then becomes exasperated.

“No,” says Neill. “You know what he used? A cardboard box and he put receipts in it sometimes. I love that.”

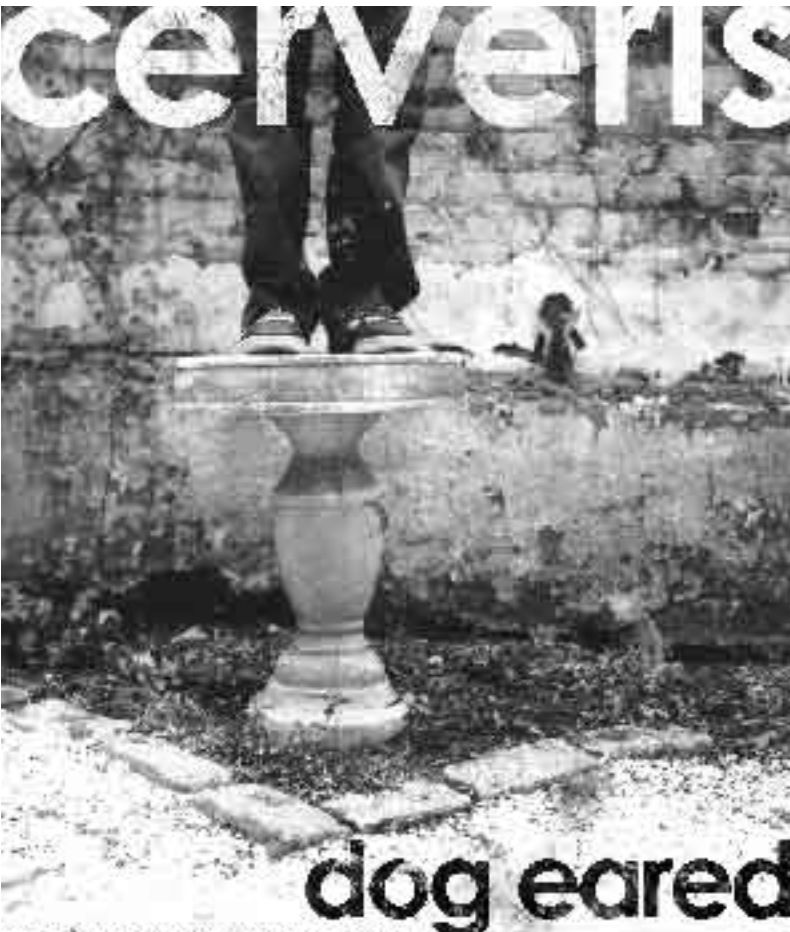
It’s a fiscal fiasco that seems to stem directly from Hobart’s charisma. The wonder of his power is compounded with the knowledge that this has all happened before with different individuals and non-profit groups who have been involved with the administrative side of the race. An article in the May 20, 1999 edition of the Arcata-based newspaper *North Coast Journal* details another confounding financial conflict between Hobart and the Kinetic Arts Foundation, an organization similar to the HKA that attempted to bring organization and structure to the race.

Within 15 minutes of meeting Hobart he told me what an awful businessperson he is, using quotes that pop up verbatim in other KSR profiles that have been written over the last 30 years. “I bought my building for \$10,000,” he tells me of his gallery in Ferndale, “and I only owe \$45,000 on it now. I think that’s pretty good.” And yet people are willing to embark on vague but expensive business ventures with Hobart, knowing full-well—because he tells them—that he lives on financial assistance, files his multi-thousand-dollar credit card receipts in a cardboard box and proudly mis-manages his real estate investments. It’s baffling. It’s more like faith than enthusiasm, and further evidence that the ranks of the KSR are filled with those who—to paraphrase Denis Johnson’s words from *Already Dead*—arrive here in Humboldt in search of the saving fellowship of just such an obscure church.

In recent years Hobart has been spending winters in Australia. He first traveled there in 1979 as an artist-in-residence at Scotch College in Melbourne, but he’s returned since to start a kinetic sculpture race at the invitation of the Perth Rotary Club. He’s helped start other races across the U.S. and also in Poland. But it seems that Australia and New Zealand have some of the highest suicide rates in the world, and he is convinced that he can do something about that.

The Area 51 crew’s garage is an actual garage behind a house in a quiet Eureka neighborhood. A small army of large dogs goes berserk in the backyard when I ring the door bell, and a gruff-looking character in a “Veterans For Peace”

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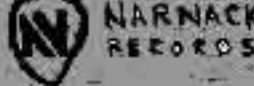
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The Coral
Magic and Medicine (Deltasonic/Columbia)
C: New album from the Coral.
D: Liverpool young guys that sound old!
C: Yeah. This is a solid record, pleasant. More lightly psychedelic folk-country-rock-I dunno. Melodic. But...
D: There's nothing urgent about it.
C: Exactly. It's kind of timeless, but not in a cosmic-eternity Ghost way, it's more just timeless in an England way. You get the feeling these songs might've been written at any time in the last few hundred years, but whenever they were written, they never meant much to anyone.
D: They don't draw blood -- they suck it!
C: [laughs] Well...there's just this distance to them. They have such a warm, welcoming sound, but...well the singer's kinda flat, it's like he never breaks this character he's playing. Safe but harmless. He's no Shane MacGowan.
D: The Pogues!
C: Shane had bite, even when he was gumming it. You wanna be a poet, you can't just sit by your fireplace all the time. You gotta get out there and take some blows for the home team, soak something up, whether it's your own experiences or what you witness. I always get the feeling these guys sit around playing records and watching flicks. That don't do it.
D: You could be wrong, though.
C: Well... As T-Model says, that's true now!

Greg Ashley
Medicine Fuck Dream (Birdman)
D: Is this new? It sounds like early Pink Floyd or...
C: It's new. It's Greg Ashley, he's from Texas, used to be in a band called Mirrors down there (not the Mirrors of Cleveland), and he's got a band in the Bay Area called Grix-Grix, who are supposed to be really good. Reminds me of Flaming Lips' Hit to Death in the Future Head...Sparklehorse, too... Brother JT...Same sources, I guess!
D: Lonely desperate guy singing after hours in an reverbish spooky carnival funhouse about adult fears. I listen to this and I see in my mind's eye scenes from Fellini's La Strada. It's beautiful...
C: There's sadness here, but it's not full of dread or angst--the guy's just trying to get through something by singing, he's not holding his situation against anyone. [Listening to "Deep Deep Down"]
D: The songs have this really solid folk-blues-country foundation, very simple, very hard to do. And there's optimism here too. The dude's got a flair.
D: [musing, eyes closed]...Gelsomina would listen to it every night as she took off her clown makeup. Maybe she'd dance a little, in the shadows, with the leopard man...

Mr. David Viner
Mr. David Viner (Om Mox)
D: Basically it's all traditionals. He does a version of "Corrina, Corrina," which make me want to own this immediately. Just saying those two words aloud makes me warm.
C: It's a romantic record: a romantic idea of music, of folk-blues music, done without flash or glamour or tongue. He's a nice singer: he sings just enough, it's like he's not even there sometimes. It's perfect. Reminds me a little of that John Lurie Marvin Pontiac record, or Robert Plant's last record [2002's Dreamland], only it's more straightforward, of course.
D: I miss John Lurie!
C: I know. You can see why the Soledad Brothers are basically the backing band here. This is their shit, too, so it makes sense.
D: When you're playing songs this old, songs this good, they can take you over, even if you're English!
C: Let's see if he can push it forward, now.

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ARTHUR § MARCH 2004

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mesh baseball cap steps down from a rusty pickup truck and asks if he can help me with anything. The dogs calm down as Beth Dunlap walks to the gate and invites me and Rainbow—the guy from the truck—to join her amid the rolling sea of canines. Tennis balls are everywhere, there's some kind of vintage car up on blocks in a back corner of the yard and an oxygen tank gone crusty with rust hangs from a solitary tree as a sort of lawn decoration.

I spent a fair amount of time with the Area 51 team at last year's race—they took me into their camp at Crab Park and generously shared homebrewed liquor and joints with me, along with all sorts of KSR stories about malfunctioning drive trains, slow-motion wrecks and acid-fried camp-outs. The team has been competing in the race for over a decade and they've earned a reputation as a hard-partying confederation of outlaws and misfits in a field full of outlaws and misfits. Dunlap has been piloting the machine for the last three years and also serves as Area 51's unofficial spokesperson. Monkey—the pit crew boss who offered me that first glimpse of KSR schism at last year's race—is inside the house laid up with bronchitis. People here are bustling around since James Taylor—one of several Area 51 patriarchs and the ringleader of last year's beachfront debauchery—is on the way home from the Veterans Administration hospital. It's his first visit home since having one of his legs amputated due to "poor circulation." The team is undaunted and excited about the return of the man they now call "Zippy," and promise me that while he won't be joining the festivities at Crab Park he will be at the starting line tomorrow morning.

The women of Area 51 are large and tie-dyed and lovely, all smiling and cussing and laughing as they put the finishing touches on their entry in the 2003 race, "The Cosmic Wiener." Dunlap introduces herself as Deth Bunlap, Beth's evil twin sister and launches into their machine's half-rehearsed back-story, something about a Wiener In Space Program (WISP). Sewing machines are running as the foam head of a dachshund is wrapped with star-studded fabric. The machine's body is simple but effective—two recumbent bicycles frames welded together so effectively that they've made it through 15 races—and its decorations are sloppy and fun. The wiener dog has a lolling tongue that flaps in the breeze, ringed planets embroidered on its ears and a tiny alien peeking out of its anus. Everything is paid for from the sales of homemade Area 51 tie-dyes and with the assistance of sponsors including Louise & The Rock & Roll Doctor, Rabid Aqua-Bat, Al's Diner and Sister Mary Vicodin.

"This is people with way too much time on their hands," says Dunlap.

"Either that or they're shirking the stuff they're supposed to be doing. It takes us all year long to catch up with our real lives. Everybody's really pissed at us by the time race time really happens and they don't want to hear about it anymore." The extended Area 51 family encompasses 15-20 people, many of whom work together doing security for concerts and festivals. They get together on Sundays throughout the year, working on the machine intensely for months before the race.

Family metaphors abound when talking about the KSR, but Dunlap uses the more apt comparison of a company of harlequins. "It's wonderful to see theater go out into the real world," she says. "It lets everybody step outside of their comfort zone, their normal reality into . . . well . . . we can make anything possible! It's just really cool." Allusions to Christopher Guest's *Waiting For Guffman* would be easy enough, though the earnest passion that defines so

much of the KSR drama easily eclipses the improvisational histrionics of Guest's cast. I duck out before James arrives home but can't help but wonder how much the scene at Crab Park this year might suffer for his absence.

The irony of Kinetic Sculpture Racing—with its mythological origin story, bitter schisms, financial intrigue and meticulously engineered marvels of mobile folk art—is that the race itself is incredibly tedious.

The race starts in Arcata, home of Humboldt State University and the birthplace of radical environmentalist organization Earth First!. The town of 16,000 people is a Mecca for hippies and hobos: there are

always a few scruffy travelers on the Arcata Plaza, a grassy square in the center of downtown. On 2003's race day—an uncharacteristically sunny Saturday morning—there are literally *thousands* of people milling around. Hippie parents with feral children and environmentalist yuppies with fancy backpacks and Subaru Outbacks join standard Humboldt-variety cranks to ogle at the lysergic gathering of jalopies. One woman with an especially remarkable amount of fabric and beads in her distressed hair sits tossing flowers back and forth with her

Rhino in the fog (right); Main Street pandemonium (below).



Tide fools at Deadman's (left); Race official (above).



Mullet bullet in bay (here); Area 51 offers a bribe (below).



topless boyfriend, a smiling, ruddy-faced woodsman-type with spastic dreadlocks. Another woman in a bikini does the splits on the shoulders of two friends. Nearly half of the gathered crowd is either juggling or hacky-sacking. A marching band bearing battered, bent and dented brass plays Beatles songs. They're clad in tie-dyed dresses, blue camouflage and one member is wearing a cape. They compete with an all-woman kazoo marching band that is dressed entirely in red.

Neill stands on stage with the Burlyman, both reveling in their role as showmen. The machines go through brake tests administered by men in clown suits, French military uniforms and judicial robes. Hobart is nowhere to be seen. At one point the "Albino Rhino" almost runs down a race official, an incident that prompts

Neill and Burlyman to shout "pan-DUH-monium!" Jokes about the "divots" left in the ground where this official's ass impacted are never-ending. The Dastardly Razooly, the official race villain, joins Neill and Burlyman on the stage. Considering so many of the KSR figures stay in character year round, it comes as little surprise that the black-masked Razooly plays hell-raiser offstage too. He owns the Tip-Top Club, a strip club south of Eureka. He had a difficult time obtaining permits for the establishment initially, so he opened it as an RV dealership where half-nude female sales associates peddled Matchbox-car-sized Winniebagoes. He also serves as a perpetual Eureka mayoral candidate, running on a Libertarian Party platform. Anywhere else in the country and he'd be just another crackpot—note: his

legal name is T. Great Razooly—but considering that this is Jefferson State country, the "Mayor's Office" sign he hangs on the door of his office at his club may come in handy some day.

The entire field of entrants—some 30 or 40 machines—circle the square in anticipation of the air raid siren that signifies the start of the race. It sounds around noon and they head for the Manila Dunes. The town of Manila, pop. 1,000, is located on Route 255 just outside of Arcata where it seems like everyone lives in a sand-blown clapboard house. Salt-corroded automobiles are parked next to screened-in porches crowded with bicycles, plants and other detritus. The Manila Dunes are a protected area of coastline with strange grasses crawling over their surface. Signs dot the landscape identifying certain types

of flora, beseeching visitors to stay on the trail so as not to damage the delicate habitat.

On arrival in Manila, racers gather in the parking lot of the Manila Community Center, a low-lying complex of buildings that host pre-school classes during the day and avant-garde noise bands by night. Teams enhance their road wheels with large, flat treads to increase the surface area and help with traction in the deep sand.

Each team leaves the parking lot alone to face the dunes, at which point they begin moving even more slowly. Wheels spin and kick sand, digging deeper into the dune system while the racers sit and sweat. Their slow pace is made painfully evident by the families, loaded down with picnic and beach gear, who stride rapidly past the struggling vehicles. One woman is hollering at her children and aggressively pushing yarrow—an herb found growing throughout the area—to both racers and spectators: "Here. Put this in your mouth. It will keep your saliva glands working and keep you hydrated. Put it in your mouth." Once I'm on the beach there's not much to do but plop down in the sand and watch the slow parade as I fall asleep.

After waking up sunburned, I walk back through the dunes to my car and drive up the 255 to Dead Man's Drop. All of the KSR is characterized by gleeful hyperbole, but the Drop is actually kind of exciting. A sand dune declines at something like a 70-degree angle to a tree-shaded dirt road. One sculpture—the "Albino Rhino"—navigates the hill without assistance, shooting straight down and into the trees. It's quite a rush to watch. But crew members hold on to the sides of most of the sculptures, slowing their descent. It's safe, yes, but hardly exciting: a good crash or two would really liven things up, especially given the mock-fear teams indulge in when speaking of the race's perils. Still, there are several hundred people gathered here to watch, along with heavily tattooed EMTs—Kinetic Medics—on standby. There are also many mosquitoes and shrieking children who take turns

burying each other in the sand. I watch for a good hour or so, and then walk back to my car, passing as I go each sculpture I had just witnessed negotiating the Drop. Pit teams await the machines back out on the paved road, bringing the first day of the race to a close.

Most of the second day is closed to the public as the machines make their way south on the shoulder of the 101 freeway. The mundanity of the day's course is offset by the promise of partying at Crab Park. Tonight there will be a lovingly absurd wedding ceremony, and afterwards a reception replete with cake and wine, fire dancers and fireworks. The safari hunters of the "Albino Rhino" will blast bottle rockets out over the ocean from the barrels of their comedy-sized foam rifles. After the wedding dies down though, most teams will retreat in small groups for quiet conversation. Area 51 isn't here—they're camping at their garage in Eureka to be with their recently hospitalized patriarch—and the scene is far more subdued for their absence.

I'd discovered the Kinetic Sculpture Race several years back while on a Humboldt County camping trip. After visiting the parks in the northern part of the county, my girlfriend and I stopped off in Ferndale, ending up at the KSR museum. A year later I dragged an old friend from Berkeley back for the race. After watching two days of the event, we crashed the racers' party at Crab Park, looking to confirm rumors of debauchery. The rumors were confirmed.

Crab Park sits on the edge of Seven Mile Slough, a stretch of muddy beach found by exiting the 101 in the tiny dairy-

farming town of Loleta and traveling between decrepit barns and melancholy fields on Cannibal Island Road. The racers set up camp around their machines. Pit crews make repairs; cooks break out Tupperware, hot dogs and organic salads. We set up our tent somewhat tentatively on the edge of the campsite, but our neighbors—an extended family of Kinko's employees racing in a snail-shaped machine called "S Car Go"—insisted that we join them for supper. Soon, I was off to find some of the people that pitmaster Monkey thought would have some interesting things to say.

After passing around a pipe full of pot and an old water bottle full of a homemade blend of pink-hued alcohol called "corpuscule," Rob Dog and Jim quickly identified themselves as just the sort of KSR people I wanted to talk to. Rob hails from a tiny town in the mountains of California's northwest corner, Del Norte County. He grew up listening to the race on the radio—local bluegrass station KHUM broadcasts full coverage every year, their reporters embellishing the smallest of events into breathless improvisational theater—and made it down to Humboldt to participate in 1987. He and Jim have raced vehicles, worked as race officials and negotiated with gun-toting farmers in order to gain access to the beloved Slippery Slimy Slope, a backwoods bog that must be navigated by racers on the final day of competition. Their favorite stories involved race officials showing up at this particular farmer's house without the requisite bribe—a case of Budweiser and a jug of cheap wine—and being met with drawn firearms.

They led me back to the Area 51 camp and introduced me to James Taylor, the Area 51 patriarch. Taylor was a gray-haired, mustachioed bear wearing a leather vest adorned with Grateful Dead and biker pins and a top hat decorated with hot-rod flames. He greeted me with a headlock and noogies, and held me in that position while he relayed his family history. He eventually released me and passed the bottle of "fine Jamaican sipping rum" from which he'd already had a tippie or two.

Taylor told me he was born in to circus life in 1949. His mother was the Headless Woman and his godmother was the Snake Lady. He's wasn't the only Vietnam veteran in the small circle of friends that had gathered at the tailgate of his Dodge pickup truck, so there were knowing nods when he discussed his frustration with being in a warzone during the Fourth of July on top of some very serious explosives and being unable to use them to celebratory effect. Area 51 helped contribute to the impressive fireworks that were exploding in the sky above an absolutely raging bonfire. The entire camp erupted in a chorus of howling, and a tiny poodle—its fur dyed with pink and fluorescent green polka dots—came scurrying out of the darkness and jumped into James' lap. Due in no small part to the kif-dusted joints that were making their way through the group, everyone erupted in hysterical laughter.

Strains of conversation floated across the path I stumbled down on the way back to my tent later that night—people talked politics, bemoaned overly toasted marshmallows and played folk songs on guitars. Participants knew each other from years past or from the day's course, and they came calling on far-flung encampments bearing inebriants or team-themed bribes. A couple of guys from Oregon representing team "#2"—a giant toilet whose pilot wore a hat fashioned to resemble a fly-covered turd—handed out small buttons made of poop-colored foam. Under the glare of work lights others toiled until long past midnight, the faint smell of acetylene torches mixing with the briny tang of the nearby ocean. The race is a slow, strange and grueling thing, but I was beginning to understand why people kept coming back.

The third and final day of the 2003 race is relatively short, but difficult. First, the machines must paddle their way across a



(From top) June Moxon, T. Great Razooly, Duane Flatmo and Beth Dunlap

The black-masked T. Great Razooly owns the Tip-Top Club strip club south of Eureka. He had a difficult time obtaining permits initially, so he opened it as an RV dealership where half-nude female sales associates peddled Matchbox-car-sized Winnebagos.

mile of open water—slightly dangerous, but well-supervised by the Coast Guard. Following the water crossing, racers make their way overland to Ferndale. The Slippery Slimy Slope is not included this year, though I'm not sure why. The whole thing looked miserable last year. Miles out into the woods, racers harnessed their entire teams to their machines like mules. They hauled the heavy contraptions through a mosquito-plagued mud bog, their legs sunk up to the knee in a noxious mixture of water, dirt and—given the land's everyday use as pasture—cattle manure. This year, due to a vague map, flooded areas and my own ignorance of the gravel roads linking dairy farms north of Ferndale, I miss the backwoods section and the Captain Morgan's Slew obstacle that replaces Slippery Slimy Slope.

It mustn't have been too difficult though, as machines begin rolling across the finish line in Ferndale around lunchtime. Neill and Burlyman both hold forth on a stage set up in front of Hobart Galleries, and I think I spy the Glorious Founder peeking from his upstairs windows. They re-hash the jokes of the starting line—the race official that was knocked down by the "Albino Rhino" remains a favorite and the divots his ass left in the pavement come up often—and Burlyman growls "pan-DUH-monium" every time another sculpture crawls over the finish line. The theatrical elements of the race are in full effect when, for the benefit of the camera crew recording the race for a television program called *Weird Wheels*, the racers re-enact the finish line as a mad dash for the trophy, rather than the leisurely downhill coast that it is. The "Mullet Bullet"—a gold Camaro whose pilots wear long mullet wigs and blast KISS tunes from a hidden boom box—goes over very well with the crowd. The "Two Ton Trike" recalls past races: it's a vintage tricycle that stands close to 15-feet tall. A huge quad-cycle named "Wet Paint"—huge meaning wheels with spokes that brush the eaves of second-story windows—rolls by with a bagpiper blaring victory hymns from its upper platform. "Pan-DUH-monium!"

The KSR awards dinner is held at the Humboldt County Fairgrounds in Ferndale. A KSR merchandise table with T-shirts, key chains and tiny wooden Kinetic Chickens is set up in the entryway. Three or four hundred people


are gathered here to eat spaghetti and celebrate: race teams, their friends and families as well as the dozens of volunteers who work with Bill Croft and the Humboldt Kinetic Association. In a race filled with puns (as-yet-unmentioned examples include the "Axles of Evil" and "Turtle Recall" teams and a Spectator Award that is a potato covered in specks) the final authority on all KSR award issues is a character named Judge Mental Case.

This hybrid of double-entendre and pun makes me dizzy. I sit alone at the back of the white-walled, fluorescent-lit hall waiting for everything to wind down until Rob Dog spies me on my own and insists that I join him and the rest of the Area 51 up near the stage. Team patriarch Taylor is here and I say hello briefly, but the rowdy biker vet of last year is faded on the meds blunting the pain of his recent leg amputation. Area 51 is just as raucous and excited though. They were the first team to break down in the race and will be taking home the coveted Golden Dinosaur Award.

The race has four categories of winners—speed, engineering, art and miscellaneous awards—and a grand champion. Kinetic Lab master mechanic Ken Beidleman and his "Albino Rhino" team take home the Grand Champion Award. They also receive accolades from most of the other winning teams, half of whom seems to have used machines either borrowed from Kinetic Labs or engineered there with Beidleman's assistance. Appropriately, I hadn't yet seen the overall winner in the speed category, a one-man machine known as "Rocket Boy." The pilots of "Mullet Bullet"—looking like roadies for Judas Priest—whoop it up when their first place Art Award is announced, tossing devil horns in the air and eliciting a standing ovation from the crowd. "We just wanted to give something back to the fans," they say. The Engineering Award goes to a guy named Melvin, by all accounts the racer with the most KSRs under his belt. The bridesmaids from Moxon's "Bridal Trail" win Best Pit Crew, and in lieu of an acceptance speech launch into their tap-music routine while singing "Chapel of Love." The Mediocre Award—the orange Pinto Neill purchased for the race—goes to "Rolli Polli," a beetle-shaped vehicle piloted, ironically, by non-licensed students from Sunny Brae Middle School.

The festivities wind down like a family reunion. "This is the one time of the year

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The Black Keys
The Moan EP
(Alive)
D: New Black Keys?!!
C: Not really... This is on their old label. Looks like odds and ends.
D: It's true, I've heard all of these songs before, I think.
C: According to my calculations, this is what you get here. A version of the lead track "The Moan" was on last year's Fat Possum "Have Love Will Travel" 3-track EP, taken from a John Peel session; another live version of the song was released on a split EP with The Six Parts Seven put out by Suicide Squeeze Records. The Peel version is the best.
D: "Heavy Soul" here is an alternate take of a song from the first album "The Big Come Up, an Alive, which was released on vinyl but not CD. The third track is the Stooges cover "No Fun," which was also available on the vinyl of The Big Come Up, but not the CD. The last track is a cover of "Have Love Will Travel," a later version of which appeared in a different, superior form on their Fat Possum album, thickfreakness.
D: ...
C: My head hurts.
D: Here, have a glass of water.
C: I feel like The Seth Man. Record labels can do cruel things to fans.
D: That is your problem, AGAIN! I think it rocks in the low-down bluesy throaty way that they always do, and it collects a bunch of stuff in one place for the freaks in the audience who need everything. And I am one of those freaks who lives in the Secret Vaults of Rock!

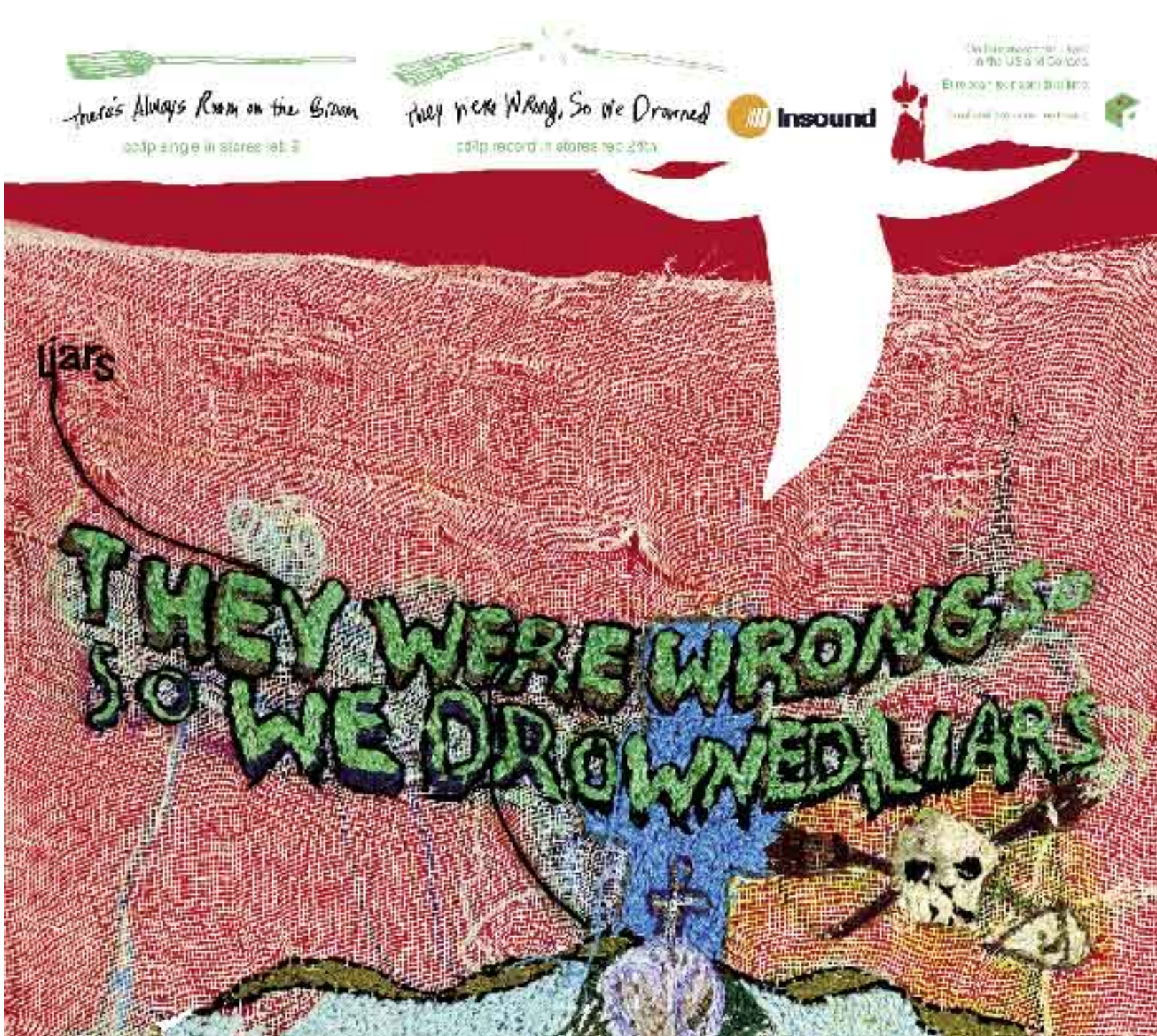
Rocket From the Tombs
Rocket Redux
(Smog Veil)
C: Speaking of vault-digging in Ohio. Or crypt theft. Here's another band from Ohio.
D: I know that!
C: "FRUSTRATION!!!!"
D: Rocket From the Tombs!!!!
But what is this CD?
C: That part on the second song "So Cold" is a straight rip off Alice Cooper's "Sixteen" ...
D: What is this CD?!!
C: It's a new studio recording of the original RTT repertoire by the surviving members.
D: Because they never made an album.
C: Yeah, I don't remember the whole story but yeah the band split in two, into the Dead Boys and Pere Ubu... Who each released versions of most of the songs on here, blah blah. And one of the major guys, Peter Laughner, died.
D: These are STILL amazing angry poetic thrust-rockers from the TENSE heart of CLEVELAND, OHIO IN AMERICA IN THE MID-70S!!! "30 Seconds Over Tokyo," "Sonic Reducer," "Final Solution"!!!! This is the super-shiznit!!
C: It DOES sound awesome. You got David Thomas on vocals of course, plus there's Cheatah Chrome on guitar, and then there's Richard Lloyd from Television also on guitar, filling in for Laughner... [Listening to "What Love Is"] They're doing the same rhythm-riff thing as "Communication Breakdown" but then it goes OFF.
D: So, this was just recorded recently?
C: Yeah. Timeless shit, again, but here it seems like it actually meant something to people at the time. There's a real passion and intellect at operation here, at the same time. Plus air pollution and dead-end jobs and random sex and amphetamines and desperation and all the other necessary stuff.
D: Those timeless twentysomething kicks.



DMZ
DMZ (Sepia Tone)
D: Unbelievable! DMZ!!!!
How can all of this be coming out now, in 2004?
C: We live in a golden era, my friend. All praise Sepia Tone. Speaking of old punks, we were supposed to talk about the new **Mekons** record (Punk Rock, touch and Go), too, but I can't find it... (leaves room)
D: [close up to tape recorder] Mighty super-power...aggressive garage... freakbeat rock that pummels your balls!!!
C: [Returns to the room, empty handed.] 11 songs, 28 minutes, produced by Flo & Eddie of the Turtles, originally released by Sire in 1978. Their only studio album.
D: It puts everyone to shame!!! Everyone else can fuck off and die hard! Goodbye!
C: I think only the Hives might come close to the tight dynamo fury of this stuff right now, and they had to practice really, really hard for years to get there. But these guys...
D: The breakdown on "Don't Jump Me Mother" when it comes back???
C: Unfuckingbelievable, the song just keeps getting more intense.
D: 28 minutes of genius. Incredible production! Sharp and bold and tough! Play it next to the first Ramones records and you will have a revelation: revolution of the brain and heart.

Metal Urban
Anarchy In Parisi (Acute Records)
C: Here's another archive release from the late '70s. Punk rock in French with a drum machine. 24 songs, 71 minutes, really good liner notes.
D: It's cool, aggressive, chanting stuff that you can wash dishes to, or put on at a party, or turn up real loud and put your head through the wall. The machine stuff doesn't sound so good, but whatever. That was always going to be a problem.
C: It's a little like... You know what? This is what that Wire record that came out last year, this is what that Wire record sounds like, only 24 years earlier and in French.
D: In my opinion French should only be sung on record by young women, with certain exceptions.
C: Every time I hear these guys use the word "bourgeoisie" or "fascist" or whatever... I think of the guys in powdered wigs and aristocrat costumes who do those AC/DC-type songs, what's their name?
D: [quoting a song from memory] "Boudoir!"
C: Yes! Upper Crust! The best band without a deal in America? Maybe!

Probot
Probot (Southern Lord)
C: Oh sweet dark god of brutality. Lemmy, Wino, King Diamond from Mercyful Fate, Tom Warrior from Celtic Frost, Eric Wagner from Trouble plus Cronos... Dave Grohl did all the music. He calls it metal fantasy camp. And the camp counselors were...ritually sacrificed on the first night, from the sounds of it.
D: Unbelievable! Unrelenting, joyous, full-on METAL UP YOUR ASS, as we used to say in the olden days.
D: Beavis and Buttthead will rise from their MTV graves, bow down slowly and then stand on the couch and hurt their necks for an hour listening to this.
C: Dave Grohl did it. He didn't have to, but he did. Somewhere, Kurt Cobain is cackling with glee.
D: [singing along with Sepultura's Max Cavalera] "Red war will follow my enemies!!!! YESSSSSSSSSSSS!!!!"
C: There's a song called "Dictatoraurus?" I rest my case: we are in the presence of the metal gods.
D: [still singing along] "Red waaaaaawaaaaaawaaaaa! Red waaaaaawaaaaaawaaaaa!"
C: This could be the soundtrack to the Republican convention in August...



I get to see all these people," one racer tells me in a parking lot full of sweaty, exhausted people exchanging tearful goodbyes. Hobart never shows, which seems sad and uncharacteristically spiteful given the vaunted status he holds with all racers, even those whom he's fallen out with. Kind words are said of him on the microphone, punctuated by Neill pulling open his shirt to reveal a T-shirt proclaiming his membership in the club of KSR pariahs. Extreme Kinetic founder Al Krauss has one, and apparently so does Monkey. It reads "Hobart Hates Me!" and wins hearty guffaws from those friends of Hobart and Neill's who are privy to the inside world of KSR politics.

There's already one book about Hobart's life and the KSR, but it's currently out of print. The day after the awards dinner Hobart asks me to write the next one, his first official biography. He's already got a title picked out—*Recipe For An Artist*—and is supposedly chummy with an Australian publisher for whom he may or may not be working on a comic book about a wheelchair-bound superhero tentatively entitled *Wheeled Angels*. The book that Hobart published in 1990 is just called *Kinetic Sculpture Racing*. The first 200 pages are a guide to starting your own KSR and they read like an Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Manual complete with scoring sidebars, special notes to judges and detailed illustrations of the hardware racers will need in a wide variety of environmental conditions. The second half is an oral history of Hobart's life: His biographer gave him questions, a cassette recorder and transcribed the answers into the large-format paperback that sits on my lap.

I've heard Hobart happily outline his lack of financial skills. I spent the last week talking to people about how difficult Hobart is when you go into business with him. I witnessed the painful real-time breakdown of his friendship with Neill. Prior to this morning's visit with Hobart, I called Bill Croft for a follow-up interview, only to find out from a member of the HKA board of directors that he's resigned as race director, and that he's so fed up with running the KSR that he's left town. Yet I still consider Hobart's offer of business partnership, which includes room and board. He goes on to tell me about the fallout he had with the author of *Kinetic Sculpture Race*, the book's distributors and local booksellers, and I still spend the next few days throwing together a preliminary book proposal. Hobart's not pushy at any point in our conversation—he gives me plenty of opportunities to back out—but it's not until a month of deliberating and transcribing interviews with his long list of previous business partners that I call him and respectfully decline. Hobart doesn't miss a beat and tells me he's already got somebody else lined up for the job.

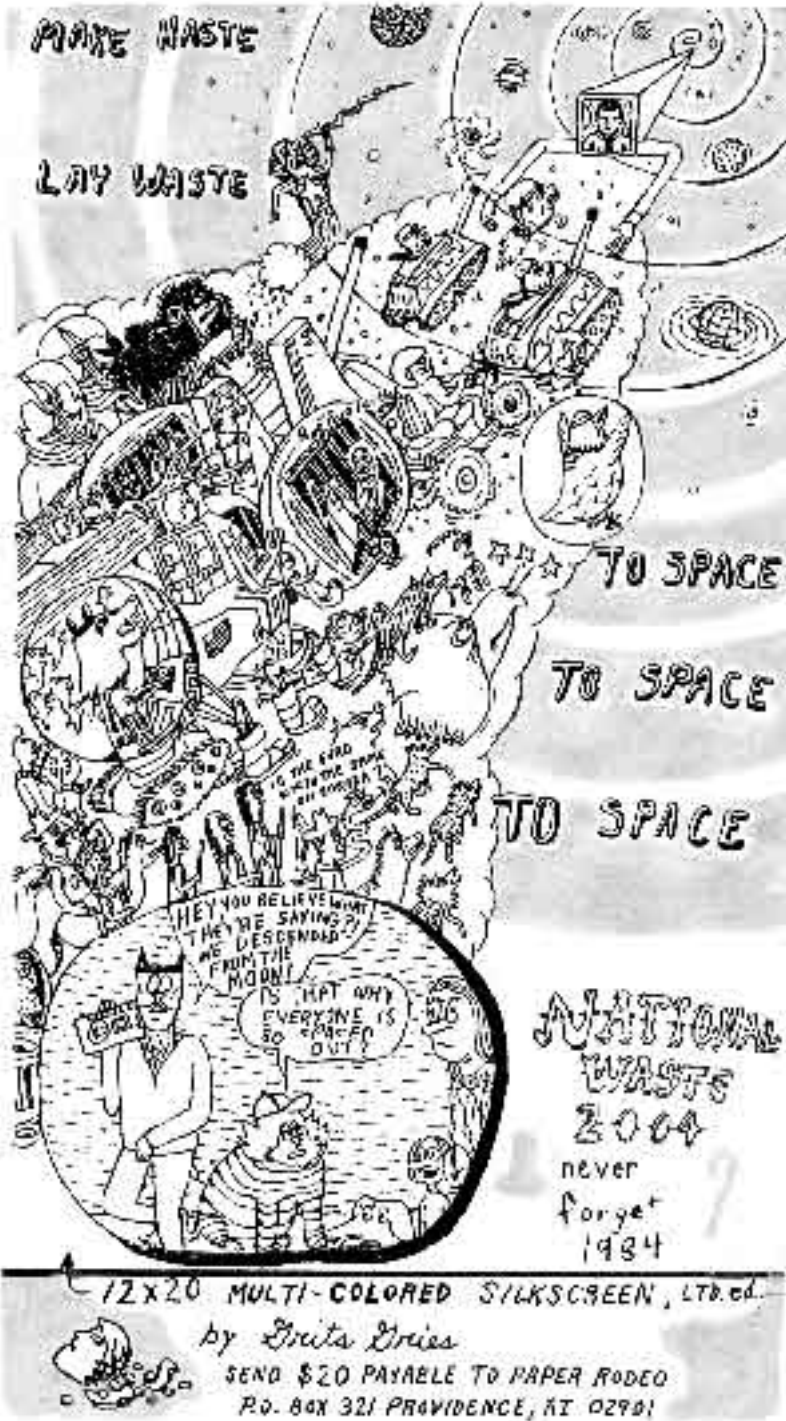
Jefferson State secessionists no longer set up barricades and hand out copies of their declaration of independence to passing motorists. They now rally under the slogan "Jefferson State of mind" and write vaguely Libertarian Web logs. The demand for Northern California resources during World War II meant that the muddy roads and decrepit bridges they were so pissed off about were mostly repaired long ago. Reliably rainy Arcata even got an airport, constructed by the U.S. Air Force in order to train pilots to fly in inhospitable weather. The Kinetic state of mind is far more alive in this part of the country, despite the civil wars that have plagued the KSR over its first 34 years. The race is far too entrenched in a collective spirit of gleeful anarchy to fall prey to bureaucratic bungling, spiteful grudges or financial mismanagement.

I spend my last day in Humboldt at Paradise Flat Farms, the home of Area 51 pilot Beth Dunlap. She's a 41-year-old hippie who moved to Humboldt from the San Francisco Bay Area in 1982. She came into a chunk of money through an insurance settlement and invested it into a fertile six-acre plot of land in the central Humboldt town of Shively. This tiny settlement of timber workers and farmers sits in an impossibly scenic valley at the end of 15 slow, winding miles of timber roads; there are at least two deer for every passing pickup truck and suspender-clad lumberjacks assess my suspiciously non-4WD sedan with wary eyes. Dunlap lives on the far side of the town in an old calf barn that she and friends have retrofitted into a comfortable, if not entirely up-to-code, living space. The walls are clear plastic—keeping the rain out but letting the gray light in—and there are cats and dogs to keep the rats at bay. She missed the Arcata Farmer's Market on Saturday in order to pilot "The Cosmic Wiener," and

she's making up time today plowing the fields with her magnificent John Deere tractor. She has a plastic greenhouse full of organic crops—tomatoes, garlic, basil, squash and a variety of pepper seedlings—that need to be in the ground but she takes an hour or so to show me around the property. We end up eating freshly picked raspberries at a picnic table in her back yard next to a huge parrot living in an equally huge cage.

Hobart is the Glorious Founder and for now the altruistic bureaucrats of the HKA make the rules, but the KSR is perpetuated by people like this: homesteaders like Dunlap, ne'er-dowells like T. Great Razooly, dour savant mechanics like Monkey and giggling artists like June Moxon. The sort of people who consider pedaling art-covered jalopies across muddy bogs and sand dunes to be not just an extension of their chosen lifestyle, but proof of the privileged nature of that lifestyle.

"We get to go out and be awesome and lead extraordinary lives," says Dunlap. "It's fun as hell. Not many people get to ride around in a cosmic wiener."



XBXX
"We Hate the President" single (Narnack)
D: ...or this could.
C: Four tracks, one-sided clear red vinyl. Hardcore with a guy doing a high-demonic screech vocal. The cover images shows a very young girl child kneeling on the sidewalk...on the ground are the words "Fuck it or fight it... it does not matter. While kids die of hunger, you get fat."
D: Yes! Fat fucking Americans need big SUVs to drive around in cuz they can't fit in normal-sized cars cuz of their fast food lardasses! Then they need more oil for their precious Hummers...so they go to war to steal it from people! Fuckfaces!
C: I don't usually like this kind of stuff but: well, nice one, fellas.
D: I hate the president too!!! RAAAAARRGH!
C: Dear Narnack and XBXX, please release this in a format so that everyone can play it all the time on their big mobile stereo speakers in August in New York for the Republican war pigs. I am sure they will appreciate it. Folk music's not gonna cut it, people. We need extreme music for extreme occasions. And yes, the music SHOULD be one-sided!

All Night Radio
Spirit Stereo Frequency (Sub Pop)
C: And now for something completely different, because you can't be angry and aggressive all the time, you have to let the sunshine into your heart and allow for just pure aesthetic beauty in some part of your life. Otherwise, why go on?
D: This is a preview of springtime. Of Utopia.
C: And you don't mean the band.
D: Ha! [smiling] Maybe I do.
C: It's a side project from the Beachwood Sparks guy. Or guys? I'm not sure. Lookit up on the Internet. Super-melodic layered orchestral gauze-pop with harmonies and melodies and solid riffs and soaring George Harrison gentle-ness. Musicboxes, echoes, forgotten vintage sounds. This is what all those Elephant 6 bands wanted to sound like but didn't have the talent for, in the end. A *Magical Mystery Tour* for 2004? Possibly. Kind of like Mercury Rev's first three albums too, especially *See You On the Other Side*.
D: So beautiful. I will be listening to this radio station all night long. What is the word for this? Oh yes: *Sublime*.

Eddie Ruscha is a musician/artist that created these drawings which cloud the borders of infinity and no one's sanity Respond to zoborg2000@earthlink.net IF YOU FUCKIN' DARE.



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"It's like build-up and aftermath, but no actual event. They circle it, skirt its edges...[dreamily] This stuff makes me want to drink wine and light some candles. Or go down to the rain forest and look at the stars and maybe buy a train out of town...O: ...And there's some slide guitar! This is the best! Man..." -ARTHUR

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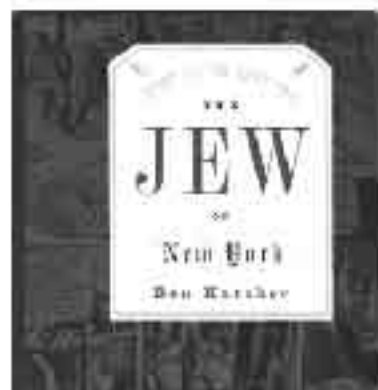
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HIGH FIVE

Detroit's **MC5** played like gods, lived like pigs and freed everyone they touched. Steffie Nelson interviews the directors of the breathtaking new documentary that tells their tale.



Plastic Crimewave

ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1972,

the MC5 took the stage at Detroit's Grande Ballroom, a vast psychedelic venue where they'd held court as the "house band" between 1966 and 1969. Their live shows had been so incendiary, the five band members so arrogant, that even a huge star like Janis Joplin, no slouch in the live department, once refused to go on after them. This gig, their swan song as it were, was sloppy and dispassionate; the ghosts of past glories even more unforgiving than the sparse, cynical crowd. Guitarist Wayne Kramer took off mid-performance to go cop dope, and the MC5 never played again. Kramer and guitarist Fred "Sonic" Smith were 22; singer Rob Tyner and drummer Dennis Thompson were 24; bassist Michael Davis was 26. In the end they'd effectively been "pulled apart by the killer forces of capitalism and competition," which their manager John Sinclair had railed against, perhaps presciently, in the liner notes to their now-legendary debut album *Kick Out The Jams*.

The MC5 hold a curious place in rock history. Their ascendance represented a moment in America when art and commerce converged, when all that was vital and visceral was also the pinnacle of hip. As the flamboyant and badass musical mouthpiece of the White Panther Party, the MC5 embodied the soul of the late '60s counterculture: one foot in the optimistic past and the other in the disillusioned, deadly future; one hand holding a guitar, the other a shotgun. It's an irresistible image, one which was unapologetically co-opted by Levis last spring for a series of T-shirts; a promotional performance in London by the three surviving 5 (Rob Tyner suffered a fatal heart attack in 1991; Fred Smith died of heart failure in 1994) was seen by detractors as a final, sad sellout.

The question of whether or not the MC5 failed at the end of the day is much debated in the riveting new feature-length documentary *MC5: A True Testimonial*, directed by David Thomas and produced by Laurel Legler. All parties agree, however, that for a fleeting, incandescent moment the MC5 were "at the center of the yin-yang," as Michael Davis philosophizes in the film, "and it was our job to keep it going in a positive direction."

But the proverbial yin-yang was already spinning into darkness, and it took the MC5 with it. Like fireworks on the fourth of July, they rose with a bright, beautiful bang and, as far as mainstream America was concerned, disappeared with a puff of smoke into the night. They were, ultimately, sacrificial—the artistic entity that was the MC5 didn't survive more than seven years—but their legacy has continually inspired legions of punks, rockers, artists and freaks, turned on to their music through word-of-mouth, or more than likely though the persistent echo of a call to arms that rings with timeless resonance: "kick out the jams, motherfucker."

As David Thomas says, "The people who know, know. The other people don't get it." The Chicago-based Thomas and his wife Laurel Legler began working on *MC5: A True Testimonial* in 1995, spurred on through financial troubles and licensing hassles by sheer love and respect and the determination to do justice to these American legends. As Legler points out, few bands have received this sort of filmic treatment, and if they have their way *MC5: A True Testimonial* will revise rock history. On the eve of a limited theatrical release and the worldwide release of a nearly four-hour DVD edition of the film (including deleted scenes, complete live performances, interview outtakes and fan testimonials), David Thomas and Laurel Legler are ready to testify.



A typical MC5 gig poster by Gary Grimshaw.

ARTHUR: What was your initial personal attraction to the story?

LAUREL: The impetus for my even looking into this was a close friend of mine who was a rock 'n' roll journalist had made some MC5 compilation tape for me, and he said, "Someday before I die, man, I'd like to see a movie about those guys." And I thought, I don't know what the hell he's talking about. And I started looking into it, and it's like, there's nothing written about these guys, I got nothin' here, what's the deal? And of course that was what piqued my interest—what happened? These guys looked fabulous! They're fabulous and scary and incredible and their music was astonishing. So it started out with a sense of mystery...And the first thing we had to do was contact some of the 5 to find out if they were even interested in having a film made. We didn't presume

anything. We didn't step into this and say, "We're going to make this movie and here we are, deal with us." It was quite the opposite. And everybody said yes. So once everyone was on board it gave us both the permission to pursue the dream and also the responsibility.

DAVID: We really worked with everybody on this. We couldn't have done it without their cooperation. It was really a labor of love, not just from us, but from all the people involved. It actually became something of a healing process because obviously there was a lot of bad blood and a lot of broken dreams.

How do you hope that will impact on the audience? What do you think the film's "message" is?

DAVID: My feeling about this film is that yes, it's the story of a particular group, a particular time and place in American history, but ultimately it's the story of

TEN OUT OF 5

A comprehensive guide to the MC5's recordings, for the curious, the enthusiast and the hopeless completist.

KICK OUT THE JAMS (Elektra, 1969)

Halloween Night 1968, the Grande Ballroom, Detroit. First night of a two-night stand for locals the MC5, who are being recorded by Elektra Records for their major label debut: a live album. According to the Zenta calendar, which has been devised by religious personages close to the band, it is New Year's. Zenta will never quite catch on, but the rap of its chief prophet and warm-up man, Brother J. C. Crawford, is ageless: "BROTHERS AND SISTERS! I WANNA SEE A SEA OF HANDS OUT THERE!" etc. The rabble is roused, and the band kicks off: "Ramblin' Rose," preposterously overdriven blues-rock, with Wayne Kramer's falsetto vibrating like a steam-valve. Can you feel it? Hype, beautiful fucking Dionysian hype, is its own kind of electricity, and The Motor City Five, being electricity addicts, were hype kings. To dig the band was almost an act of faith, an investment in the idea that somewhere in this shrouded world there could exist a gang of strobe-lit blue-collar psychosexual freebooters and political daredevils who played like God, lived like pigs, and freed everyone they touched. Crazy? Oh no no no. The MC5 were it. They were IT. And if they weren't it, you could be certain that nobody else was. They hyped themselves, they hyped each other, they were hyped by their manager John Sinclair and by and by it became the truth—rhetorically inflated and musically bombastic but yes, the truth. They were the only band reckless enough to play to the protesters outside the '68 Democratic Convention in Chicago (moments before the baton charge), reckless enough to harness the dynamics of roots rock in the service of a free-jazz mindblow. Nothing they did was effortless; the MC5 weren't geniuses; they were, by an act of will, supercharged rockstars, and sweating, bellowing exertion is all over **Kick Out the Jams**, desperate showmanship, an enormous PROJECTION. They come on like vast comedians, trading lines, riffs, yells, leads, calling each other "brother," yapping "thankyuh! thankyuh!" The scale of the projection unbalances the music—the rhythm section collapses under it, toppling into a general soup of voltage and scuttled drum-fills. At the core of the record is the astonishing triptych of "Come Together," "Rocket Reducer No. 62 (Rama Lama Fa Fa Fa)" and "Borderline," which taken in sequence describe the arc of a young man's lust, from wanting to getting to the complexities of getting OFF. First "Come Together," "Rocket Reducer No. 62 (Rama Lama Fa Fa Fa)" and "Borderline," which taken in sequence describe the arc of a young man's lust, from wanting to getting to the complexities of getting OFF. First "Come Together," which is the volcanic arousal-chant—"build to a rising! Together, yeah, together in the darkness!" (Research undertaken for this writing has revealed that the line I always heard as "Let me sniff it!" is actually "Nipples stiffen." Oh well.) "Rocket Reducer," named after a favorite brand of glue, is the fucking song, sheer brainless priapic mastery—"I'm the man for ya bay-beh!" is the chorus-engorged self-belief, satin sleeves ballooning, spangles ablaze, just bashing away rama lama with the balls swinging like trophies, but "Borderline," inhabits some sort of quivery-quavery threshold state: "Love is true but I just don't know why/I have to love you so/You're movin' around, pushing me past my borderline"—confusion!—a staggering time signature—falling potency—eddie of the heart—plunging on lost-cocked into desire's sunset. It breaks down to an uncanny electronic ululation from (I think) Rob Tyner, a long and lonesome "0000000000H.....," crooned, nearly feminine, before he summons the band again with a panted "Hey!," a crumping, battering climax ensues, wrung out to the drops, and we settle into the post-coital chug of "Motor City's Burning." Er, ten out of ten, motherfucker. —James Parker

BACK IN THE USA (Atlantic, 1970)

A perfect album, **Back in the USA** is also a riddle of confusion. Partisans hail it either as the group's liberation from the clutches of White Panther Party activist-manager John Sinclair or as their betrayal/sell-out to market forces, embodied by producer Jon Landau. Really, it's the Five in disguise as a bubblegum hop group, but still kicking out the jams like primate warrior philosophers. Fatally misunderstood at the time, we now see how vital and intrinsically subversive this album is, and how it could have set off a bloody cultural revolution had it taken its place next to The Archies' records in America's playpens as was intended. Sadly, the sophistication of the subterfuge was lost on the group's hip adherents, who read it as cynicism and abandonment. After all, to Freak America, the MC5 embodied the rock group as guerilla cadre; a cultural invasion force drawn from the alienated teenage middle-American pisspot. Ho Chi Mihn with a stratocaster. Their music was James Brown and Blue Cheer working through the revolutionary tracts of Coltrane and Sun Ra. The two guitars traded solos like jazzmen on the stand while the rhythm section mercilessly strafed the room. Meanwhile, their singer intoned Arkestra tone poems, boogie standards and original freek anthems. Their manager released broadsides, outlining their total assault on the culture, in their underground newspaper "Rock N Roll Dope." Their gigs were high energy orgies of confrontation between freeks, greasers and management. They performed at political riots and teen discos all over Michigan, burning flags while doing "the camel walk" But when **Kick Out the Jams**, boldly conceived as a live concert postcard in the spirit of James Brown's breakthrough **Live at the Apollo**, failed to break on through, the 5 conceived a different approach to their musical revolt. Employing snot-nosed music critic Jon Landau as producer, the 5 tried to present a more concise, readable version of their highly

individuals who are chasing their dream. And they make some mistakes, and they do some good things and some not so good things. In some ways it's almost like the MC5 story is the archetypal story of artists, creative people who band against the establishment or whatever you want to call it, and the beauty that wells up from their art in spite of all that resistance. It's a little bit about that real human drama that happens to everybody in their own lives. Which was why we worked so closely with all the people, to try to get some sense of their personal loss and their personal accomplishment because those are the things that we all strive for. These guys are, on some level, just like you and I.

Considering the state of our nation, is the MC5 story more relevant than ever, or is it more like some quaint vestige of a bygone era called 'the sixties'?

DAVID: I think it is more relevant than ever. We couldn't have foreseen what's happening in Iraq when we started the project in 1995, but I think that's not unlike what's said in our film: it's all a circle. History is cyclical, and here we are again: embroiled in a war that has divided people in terms of their opinion about it, which could largely be seen as an unpopular war.

LAUREL: Has the country been this polarized since Vietnam? I can't really remember a time that it was, over issues as important as this. The country really was divided. It says in our film that there was a war not only in Vietnam but in the streets here. Unfortunately we don't have a war in the streets here [now]. I wish we did. I talk to people all the time, "Why aren't we in the streets marching?" "I don't know, can't get a permit." It's just ridiculous! ...When we started the film we really thought there would be some elements of it that would be kind of unbelievable to younger people—you know, National Guard troops on the streets in their town—and then suddenly 9/11 happened and we were seeing that for ourselves.

DAVID: Who would have thought, a year ago, that the Dixie Chicks were gonna be ostracized for their political views by the very media that brought them to that popularity? I mean it's not as if the Dixie Chicks are saying 'kick out the jams motherfuckers,' but y'know...

Can there ever be a legitimately revolutionary band again? Can there ever be another youth revolution? In a way it's almost like it's been set up by the media and the culture so that it can't ever happen.

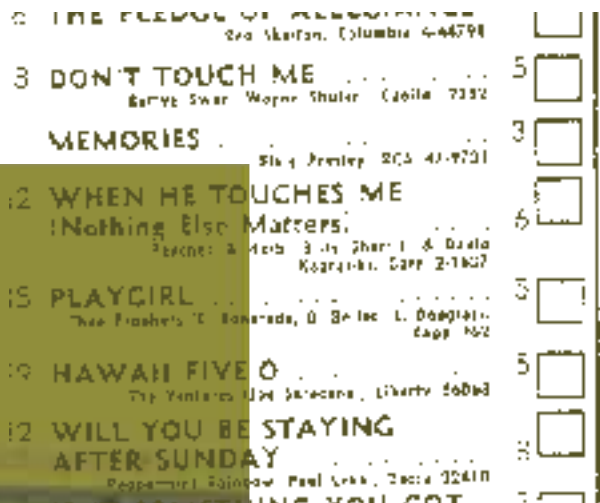
DAVID: I think that's very true, in fact, and that's one of the things that's really interesting about the MC5 story. The story happens at a point when the record companies and the media are all trying to get their arms around this thing which is still kicking pretty wildly. There's no containing it yet, and the MC5 phenomenon occurs before people are aware of the ramifications. I mean, who thought that the Vietnam War would result in Napalm falling out of the sky on villagers, soldiers disabled by chemicals; these are almost futuristic, science fiction kind of ideas. Whereas now, as a culture we've had those kinds of experiences, and there's this continued effort to keep the voice of dissent stifled. The powers of the media and marketing and pop mass culture conglomerations are not the least bit interested in a message that rocks the boat, that bites the hand that feeds it.

What happened with Elektra Records? Danny Fields signs the MC5 and The Stooges at this big "signing party," and then they were dropped six months later. What do you think the label expected from them when they signed them?

DAVID: When Elektra Records signed the band in the fall of 1968 we were just beginning to hear the first rumblings of what came to be called "the revolution." And Danny Fields has told us that Jac Holzman and Elektra Records really saw this revolution as a money-making thing. Here was this group that was the "band of the revolution" and for a brief



Clockwise from above: Fred "Sonic" Smith; Number 82; John Sinclair looks back; Rob Tyner brings it to the kids.



evolved, multi-faceted, crystalline-sonic ectoplasm. In contrast to the first record's Technicolor, collaged, bloody free-Jazz /acid-rock freakout, **Back in the USA** is a highly taut rock 'n' roll concept album about, well, youth life in the USA. Landau was a businessman and formalist, concerned with marketing the band as working class saviors of rock. With **Back in the USA** he tried to draw a circle around the 5's origins, their fans' teeny bop circumstance and the promised rebellion/intrinsic paradox of rock 'n' roll—all the collective forces which had ultimately transformed the 5 into paragons of communal living and "Rock 'N' Roll, Dope, Guns and Fucking in the Streets." As a critic, Landau was a conservative who could only understand things which had gone before, so he encouraged the group to lose their politics in favor of the raucous themes of early rock. Even so, each song is a furious anthem of rebel celebration: "Human Being Lawnmower," "American Ruse," "Call Me Animal," "Tonight," "Looking at You"...all performed with lethal economy. Both a joyful rendition of teeny rock and ironical subterfuge, the record was prescient of "punk" in its schizophrenic celebration and condemnation of middle American trash culture. With 11 songs clocking in at under 27 minutes and its post-modern subversion of bubblegum, **Back in the USA** is **The Ramones** before the Ramones.

The record begins and ends with Little Richard and Chuck Berry covers respectively, which serve as bookends to the masterwork. This "roots" concept coincided with a general trend in rock n roll at the time toward nostalgia and classicist revision, as exemplified by NRBO, Zappa's **Ruben and the Jets**, The Beatles' **Get Back** project (**Let It Be**), Dylan's **John Wesley Harding** and The Rolling Stones **Let It Bleed**. All of these artists were forsaking the expansive psychedelia typical of their immediately previous work for the old rock, doo wop, blues and country forms which had originally energized them in their formative days. (Sha Na Na, featured at Woodstock, had already jumpstarted the '50s fever which would culminate in the next decade with **Grease** and **Happy Days**.)

Like Dylan's electric conversion at Newport, **Back in the USA** was a two pronged gamble. Clean and formalistic, it challenged the MC5 acolyte's limited idea of the group while attempting a more comprehensive conquest over the unenraptured teenybop mass too freaked out by the intensity of their earlier "KICK OUT THE JAMS, MOTHERFUCKERS" attack. After **Back in the USA** "failed" by industry standards, its producer hawked the template of the album to his next client-Bruce Springsteen, for what would be his 1975 breakthrough album, **Born to Run**. The formula was the same: working class savior of rock writes Brill Building-style teen anthems celebrating Americana with a post-modern/world weary edge. Even the album covers are nearly identical! Jon Landau, it seems, had one idea. Unfortunately for the 5, neither the freeks nor the greasers were ready for that idea in 1970, let alone the teeny boppers. Now, after decades of critical debate, we can see **Back in the USA** not as an aberration, but as one part of the MC5's varied oeuvre—a vital facet of one of the most dynamic and influential groups of any age.

Oh, and also it's really trebly. —Ian Svenonius

HIGH TIME

(Atlantic, 1971)

It makes sense. Out of the dialectic of the first two albums—the hyped, throbbing excess of **Kick Out the Jams**, the trimmed observances of **Back in the USA**—emerges the synthesis, **High Time**, in which the MC5 ditch the influences of their father-figures, Sinclair and Landau, and pledge themselves at last to the Goddess. "Sister Anne don't give a damn about revolution!" is the opening lyrical shot, with the boys flinging aside their seditionary pamphlets and going to their knees before some sort of iron-buttocked Catholic Ur-mama who sneers at them through her wimple, a queen of loving punishment. They have failed to change the world (**Back in the USA** didn't even make the top 100), the world indeed has begun to change them, so they come before her humbly. Her gift to the band is discipline—a groove that anchors all their freakishness in solid, primarily familiar rock'n'roll. The playing is hot but precise, snappy. And they can't stop blowing your mind: the twin divining rods of the Smith/Kramer guitars are trained on the old structures and magical spaces are found, little pockets of the future wherein reverbed interludes can occur, fantasias of brass and percussion, and Rob Tyner can ponder the prospect of a "vaccination against castration" while still keeping to verse/chorus/verse. The uniformity of vision means that band members can write their own songs, speak with their own voices as it were, and maintain coherence: everyone but Mike Davis has a song or two, and Fred 'Sonic' Smith has four. Politically too the stance has changed—no more the macho righteousness of ...**Jams**, the phallic boom. This new anger is in the key of confusion. Now hooked (according to the rhetoric of the third phase) on "loving awareness," as opposed to the "defensive awareness" of the old, paranoid days, the 5 open themselves to the general mood, which is a bumper-saturated mess. It's 1971. But they can't stop being funky. "Over and Over" is tired, pissed-off, helpless, a litany of futility with Tyner cracking his voice in a merciless high key, but Fred Smith's quizzical solo takes it somewhere else, empowers it with a kind of lofty bemusement: the cycles of pseudo-revolution may boom and bust, but the 5, says the skewed guitar, will survive. Unfortunately of course they didn't; the band fell apart before **High Time** had made a dent. In the words of Dave Marsh, "an album about the future by a band that did not have one," adrift in time, a little storm of excellence, glimmering with holy possibility.—James Parker

Archival Recordings

So you already own **Kick Out the Jams**, **Back In the USA** and **High Time** and you want to explore the MC5 further through that vast and sprawling landscape of archival or bootleg releases. It's a tough back catalogue to wade through as you ask yourself: "How does this one sound?" and "Is the performance good?" or "Do I really NEED another version of 'Rocket Reducer No. 62'?" and wind up with only one answer: "AAARRGGHH..."

It IS a daunting task because in the two decades since the 5's first archival collection was released (1984's **Babes In Arms**), there's been an inundation of archival MC5 material, now in the

region of two dozen albums. Sometimes comprised of complete show live recordings or stitched together from several different sources at once (live recordings, outtakes, demos or early singles), it is hardly an organized body of work, especially with the extraordinary amount of material that overlaps between many of these albums. And as usual with such affairs, the sound quality runs the gamut from excellent to dreadful.

The three albums released while the 5 were together capture the band's ceaseless evolutions about as much as three stills excerpted from what was their epic film/seven-year rite of passage only could. These archival releases fill in many previously unknown gaps of development, demonstrating that the 5 were a band tirelessly pushing themselves and their music as only the best rock'n'roll does: with defiance, intuition and passion.

This guide seeks to separate the wheat from the chaff by pointing to the location of the best moments that exist within this gargantuan stack of copious releases:

- Live: Sturgis, "Dialogue '68", Saginaw and Elsewhere**
- There are three primary sources of live material that have been recycled over ten (!) albums. They are:
- 1) **Sturgis Armory, Detroit, June 27, 1968**
 - 2) **The First Unitarian Church in Detroit, September 7-8, 1968** (referred to by its original banner, "Dialogue '68")
 - 3) **Saginaw Civic Center, January 1, 1970**

Luckily, the following two CDs pre-empt many lesser titles in both completeness and sound quality: **Starship: Live Sturgis Armory 6/27/1968** and **Teenage Lust** (live at Saginaw Civic Center, Saginaw, MI: January 1, 1970.) Both are as essential as they are radically different in approach. **Starship** is an invaluable live document of the band three months prior to **Kick Out The Jams** that exhibits their "avant-rock" explorations alongside covers of artists ranging from Albert King, Little Richard, The Troggs to James Brown. **Teenage Lust** is a complete show with good sound displaying the band in good humor as they tear through a variety of material gleaned from the imminently-released **Back In The USA** album, with far greater energy. A breakneck medley of "Kick Out The Jams"/"Starship"/"Black To Comm" ends it all magnificently.

The "Dialogue '68" concert is represented by six tracks spread out over three CDs: **Power Trip** ("I Put A Spell On You," "Born Under A Bad Sign," "I Want You"), **The American Ruse** ("I Believe To My Soul", "Black To Comm") and **Live Detroit 1968/1969** ("Come

period all the record companies were really jumping on that bandwagon. I remember there was a Columbia Records print ad at the time that had a picture of a protester inside a jail cell and the caption to it was: "But the Man can't take away our music." And it was really this whole idea of packaging the revolution. What happened, though, as John Sinclair tells us in the film, "We were being the people that we said we were." They meant it. The total assault on the culture: rock 'n' roll, dope, and fucking in the streets—they meant it. And I think that was a little too hot for Elektra to handle.

LAUREL: They weren't good little soldiers for the record company, and as we all know, if you're going to be successful with your record company the record company has to like you. And they would show up at the offices and they would smoke pot and they would be loud and all these things were happening. They were just getting signed and the CIA office in Ann Arbor is bombed [an act that was widely attributed to the Trans Love House, where the MC5's offices were located]... DAVID: ...And they're playing the '68 Democratic Convention [Abbie Hoffman's Festival of Life protest in Chicago], and the FBI is all over them. Even before the record is released, this is a band that has FBI files. People really did see them as a dangerous entity, because on a cultural level they do represent the nexus, the coming together of a white, long-haired, counterculture, anti-war movement and an increasingly militant, revolutionary, armed, black power movement. Obviously, if there had been a true coalition of say, SDS and Black Panther, there really could have been revolution in America at that time. LAUREL: We would be completely remiss as the people who made the



"Even before their first album is released, this is a band that has FBI files. People really did see the 5 as a dangerous entity."

—David Thomas, co-director, *MC5: A True Testimonial*

documentary about the MC5 if we were to attempt to say to people that the MC5's revolution was strictly a political revolution. It wasn't. It was a revolution of the mind. Rob Tyner was interested in the mind, he was interested in how culture can change, how individuals can change, and how that collective mind can change the world around you, what energy can do when it's combined with other energy. So in that sense a revolution is always possible but it seems like it really has to start at home, with the individual making a decision to

turn the television off, to stop buying the motherfucking SUVs and to discover something new, take a stand, go to a political meeting, something. But if I were to go to downtown Chicago right now with a megaphone and call for revolution, my ass is going to jail. Like Michael Davis says, "We didn't wanna have a shootout with the FBI." But he did want to get up on stage and bend minds, he wanted to go out as far as he possibly could with his music and the images and the whole package, the sound, the lights, the music, and change

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04/30/04 The Midtown Paradise Theatre Minneapolis, MN • 04/07/04 Barrington Theatre Madison, WI

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04/18/04 State Theatre Portland, ME • 04/24/04 Odessa Concert Club Cleveland, OH

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Together” along with its introduction by J. C. Crawford.) Despite its amateur recording, those two nights of “Dialogue ‘68” were pretty explosive: all you need to do is listen to “Back To Comm” or the koozedelic slurping/vocal mania of “I Want You” to hear Rob Tyner in one of his most apocalyptic moments of heat, ever, backed by his truly sweaty cohorts giving it all they had...and then some.

Along with the “Dialogue ‘68” tracks, **Live Detroit 68/69** incorporates two tracks from Saginaw, although here they are erroneously credited as being from ‘Westfield Highschool, Detroit’ October 1, 1969. (The 5 DID play Westfield High School on that date, but the Westfield High School in question was in New Jersey, not Michigan. The only reason I know is because it’s my hometown, this gig was common knowledge among all the older music fans in the area and there was a tape of the gig in circulation with the following set list: “Ramblin’ Rose,” “High School,” “Tonight,” “Rama Lama Fa Fa Fa,” “It’s A Man’s Man’s Man’s World,” “Teenage Lust,” “Shakin’ Street,” “Let Me Try,” “Looking At You,” “The Human Being Lawnmower” and “Kick Out The Jams”... Which Tyner introduces with a most resounding “Motherfuckers!”)

The companion piece **Live 1969-70** is kind of a misnomer—it actually begins with an excellent performance from ‘72 of “Kick Out The Jams” from the West German TV program Musikladen. The rest of this multi-sourced collection is of varying quality. Three tracks unique to this comp, credited to a Grande Ballroom, Detroit performance from ‘69 are “Born Under A Bad Sign,” “I Want You Right Now” and “Shakin’ All Over” while the remaining seven tracks are culled from the Saginaw show.

Clocking in with a running time of over 40 minutes, the **Ice Pick Slim** CD is just three tracks in length, all from different performances at The Grande Ballroom in ‘68. The album opens with an excellent sound-and-performance of “Motor City Is Burning” from their recorded October 30-31 stand at the Grande (recordings of which would comprise their first album, **Kick Out the Jams**. Confused yet?), followed by “Ice Pick Slim” and “I’m Mad Like Eldridge Cleaver”: both are extended free-rock workouts informed by avant-garde jazz, blues and soul in very fine quality sound.

The out-of-print vinyl bootleg **Live ‘72 Kick Copenhagen** (Lawnmower Records) is an audience recording and the last chronological recording extant of the MC5. At this point they were more like the MC2+2 as only Kramer and Sonic were left from the original lineup, backed by Derek Hughes on bass and Ritchie Dharma on drums. Here “Empty Heart” along with rock-bottom chestnuts like “Bo Diddley,” “Let It Rock,” “Gloria” and “Louie, Louie” get the work-out, and although only the twin guitar chassis of the original MC5 vehicle remained, the firing-all-cylinders-at-once stamina that had been fueling the band for the past seven years is maintained.

Motor City Meltdown (Liquid Sky) is one of many releases that re-jig the Saginaw set (with sound quality better than average) as well as adding four tracks from “Dialogue ‘68”—“Come Together,” “I Believe To My Soul,” “I Want You Right Now” and “Black to Comm”—that are all, of course, available elsewhere. **Black to Comm** has versions of “Ramblin’ Rose” and “I Believe To My Soul” of unknown origin and rough quality sound (this last named is NOT the “Dialogue ‘68” version) while the rest of the album is comprised of live tracks from both the “Dialogue ‘68” and Sturgis Armory gigs. **Motor City Is Burning** is comprised of live tracks from the Sturgis Armory and Saginaw gigs, with a version of “I Believe To My Soul” available only here and on the “Black To Comm” comp mentioned above thrown in as for good measure. Receiver’s **Looking At You** CD is (once again) Saginaw, but the sound quality is far inferior to **Teenage Lust**. Like **Black To Comm** and **Motor City Is Burning**, **Greatest Hits Live** is a hodgepodge that features the same versions of “I Believe To My Soul” and “Ramblin’ Rose” of unknown location

the way people think.

DAVID: Ultimately that’s the responsibility of the artist, isn’t it? To make people think, to make people question their world. Isn’t that the goal of art?

LAUREL: Was it David Cronenberg, who when asked if the artist has any social responsibility, said that’s where the paradox is: that it’s really an artist’s responsibility to be irresponsible. His exact line was something like, when you talk about social or political responsibility then you’re amputating the best limbs an artist has, you’re plugging into the system already.

DAVID: You know, it’s not as if these artists don’t exist and that there aren’t artists who are taking some kind of a stand.

LAUREL: It’s a two-edged sword: you’re damned if you do and damned if you don’t. You go out on this tour and you decide to do press conferences and discuss the situation and then people call you a sanctimonious asshole and tell you to shut up and just play music.

DAVID: It’s not unlike what John Sinclair said in our film: “On the one hand they tell you it’s a hype, on the other they throw you in jail.”

Let’s talk about the White Panthers. It seems like their history is full of contradictions. Some people say, “Oh, it was just a joke, it was the MC5 fan club,” yet Wayne Kramer denies this. Even the name of the organization: is it true that there was a guy named Panther White?

LAUREL: Yes, there was. He was sort of a con man. “Panther White wasn’t the chairman of a chair!” as John Sinclair would tell us.

DAVID: In a certain sense it’s a con, but there’s a sincerity to it as well—an idealism, a revolutionary spirit. It’s like a carnival Barker: “Step right this way, you’ve got five seconds of decision. Step right up, brothers and sisters.” It’s a jive, it’s a come-on, but it’s not what the media perceived as a hype, because on a certain level they do mean it. LAUREL: Wayne still carries with him the political importance of what the band was trying to do. I think he felt that the White Panther party was important because it was in solidarity with the Black Panthers, that for all their pot smoking, acid-taking and cracked ideas, they did mean it. He says in our film, “We were ready,” and then you see some of the other members of the band and they say, “What do I care if they vote for Republicans or live in a commune? I don’t give a shit.” There was even that sort of division at the time within the band.

DAVID: And even that is a reflection of the culture as a whole. You had people like Martin Luther King saying that peaceful resistance was the way to go, but you also had people like the Weather Underground that were blowing shit up.

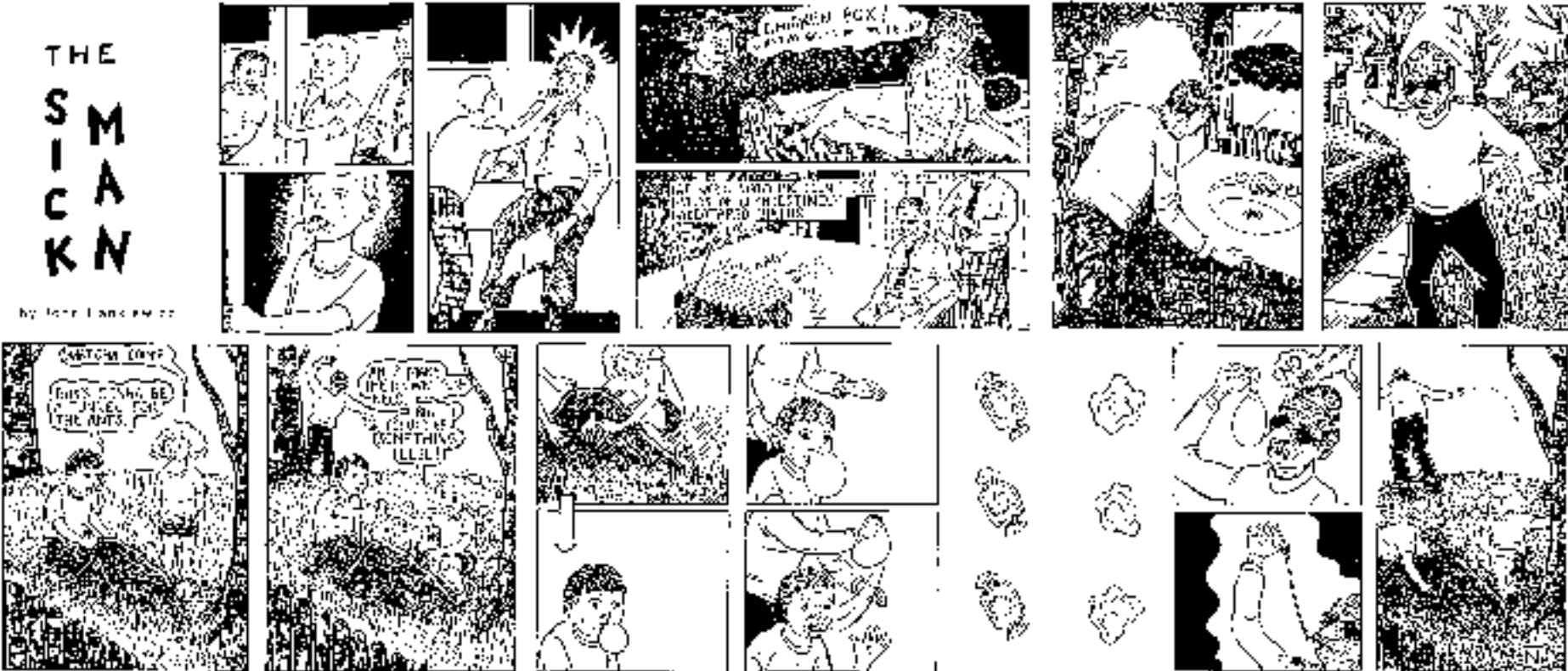
LAUREL: John Sinclair will say things like “We were fearless, we were righteous, we were connected to the universe.” In the sense of a revolution of the mind, a cultural revolution, I think it did have an impact

About Leni Sinclair

All of the photographs in this feature were taken by Leni Sinclair, and appear here with her permission. Born and raised in the former East Germany, Leni arrived in the United States in 1959 and settled in Detroit. While studying geography at Wayne State University in the early 1960s, she helped organize the Detroit Artists Workshop and began documenting the cultural and political history of that time with her camera. Her intense love for music led her to photograph literally thousands of musicians over the next 40 years, covering jazz, blues, rock, reggae, African music and more. Her photographs have appeared in countless newspapers, magazines, and books, as well as on flyers, posters, and LP and CL covers. She may be contacted via her website/archive, located at <http://home.earthlink.net/~lenisinclair/index.html>



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Arthur No. 8 (DEC 03)

Karin Bolender on the secret truths of Dollywood; the Fiery Furnaces, profiled; the cult of Maximon, the Guatemalan patron saints of thieves and whores; Brother JT; T-Model Ford on cars and crack; Holly Golightly, chef; “R.I.P. SUV” by Charles Potts; comics by Gary Panter; Steve Aylett on the Matrix; reviews by Byron Coley & Thurston Moore; horoscopes by Ian Svenonius; doodles by Ed Ruscha, Jr. **(LIMITED QUANTITY)**



Arthur No. 7 (Nov 03)

Cover by John Coulthart and W. T. Nelson; My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields; Sun Ra; underground psych bands Sunburned Hand of the Man, Comets On Fire and Six Organs of Admittance; Ask Peaches; photos by Susannah Breslin; John Geiger on the Dream Machine and the Beats; T-Model Ford on home schooling; Steve Aylett and Brian Evenson on terrible diseases; comics by Sammy Harkham, Gary Panter and Jordan Crane; Byron Coley & Thurston Moore.



Arthur No. 6 (Sept 03)

Iggy & the Stooges, with long interviews with Iggy and the Ashetons, Mike Watt tour diaries and amazing live photos. Plus: Holly Golightly, the L.A. Cacophony Society, the Weather Underground documentary, T-Model Ford, Erin Cosgrove's The Baader Meinhof Affair, Mrs. Nugent's memoirs, Ian Svenonius horoscope, Paul Cullum, Byron Coley & Thurston Moore, and comics by Jordan Crane, Megan Kelso and Souther Salazar. **(LIMITED QUANTITY)**



Arthur No. 5 (July 03)

“Arthur Against Empire” special featuring David Cross, Chris Hedges, Alan Moore, David Byrne, Michael Moorcock, Art Spiegelman, the GLAMericans, Michael Brownstein, Charles Potts, Amy Trussell, Daniel Pinchbeck, Sharon Rudahl, Robbie Conal, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, John Coulthart, Patti Smith & Jem Cohen, Peter Kuper, Megan Kelso with Ron Rege, Bill Griffith and David Lasky. Plus: the Electric Six, June Carter Cash, Paul Cullum, Byron Coley & Thurston Moore.



Arthur No. 4 (May 03)

Alan Moore on art, magic and consciousness; On the road with The Black Keys and Sleater-Kinney; Ask T-Model Ford; Karin Bolender salutes Othar Turner and Bernice Pratcher; Alissa Quart on how corporate marketers target kids; comics by Martin Cendreda, Renee French, Luster Kaboom, Steven Weissman, Johnny Ryan, Jordan Crane and Sammy Harkham. Plus Byron Coley & Thurston Moore.



Arthur No. 3 (Mar 03)

A wake for Joe Strummer, with a lengthy interview by Kristine McKenna and magnificent photos by Ann Summa; The Polyphonic Spree, profiled with portrait by Paul Pope; an excerpt from A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album; John Lurie deals advice; artist Shirley Tse; comics by Sammy Harkham, Jordan Crane, Johnny Ryan, Sam Henderson, Marc Bell and Ron Rege Jr. Plus Byron Coley & Thurston Moore. **(LIMITED QUANTITY)**



Arthur No. 2 (Jan 03)

Unseen photos of the Velvet Underground, Lenny Bruce, Anita O'Day, James Baldwin, Marlon Brando, the Black Panther Party by Charles Brittin; Sue Carpenter joins the circus; Devendra Banhart profiled; Douglas Rushkoff talks with Genesis P-Orridge; Steve Aylett on Jeff Lint; except from Caetano Veloso's autobio; Ask T-Model Ford; comics by Kevin Huizenga, Jordan Crane, Anders Nilsen and James Kochalka and Sammy Harkham; Byron Coley & Thurston Moore; and Peter Relic remembers Jam Master Jay.



Arthur No. 1 (Oct 02)

Premiere issue featuring Mat Hoffman; Peaches interviewed by Ian Svenonius; Daniel Pinchbeck; at home with Arthur C. Clarke, with a portrait by Geoff McFetridge; a frightful fairytale by Dame Darcy; Eddie Dean's Blue Ridge Mountains ice cream truck memoirs; Joe Carducci on contempo culture, with painting by Camille Rose Garcia; one-panel comics by David Berman; a profile of Lift to Experience; Neil Hamburger gives advice; Paul Cullum on Eagle Pennell; and Byron Coley & Thurston Moore.

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and date while everything else is (naturally) tracks taken from the Sturgis Armory and Saginaw shows. **Extended Versions** is a mid-priced release from last year that draws from (yup) the Sturgis Armory and Saginaw shows. **Sonic Sounds From the Midwest** is a vinyl bootleg of the Saginaw show in poor quality.

Although **Phun City, UK** is the only CD where live renditions of "Sister Anne" and "Miss X" exist, frustratingly it is also probably the worst sounding recording in the entire canon of amateur MC5 recordings. Reports of this performance by those who witnessed it were and still are universally glowing, so I'm grateful that this document at least exists, because the heat is still in there under a massive scrim of muddy sound and tape hiss. For maniacs and completists only.

Studio: Singles, Outtakes and Other Rarities

Prior to their three major album releases (and their combined three 45s for Elektra and Atlantic), the 5 recorded thesingles "I Can Only Give You Everything"/"One Of The Guys" on AMG (1966), "Looking At You"/"Borderline" (1968) on A-2. In '69 the AMG single was re-issued with a different B-side, "I Just Don't Know." These five tracks are often used as fill-ins on many of these collections, and are all essential listening. All five of these tracks appear together in one place only once--on the long deleted **Vintage Years** CD (where, incidentally, the other four cuts are live recordings by Rob Tyner, post-MC5. Likewise, the misleadingly MC5-credited, vinyl-only **Do It** album on Revenge is also comprised of live performances by Tyner plus backing band, and not the original MC5.) You can scoop up four out of five of the early singles sides ("One Of The Guys" is AWOL) on Jungle's **Thunder Express** CD, arranged after a six-song performance from France in 1972 recorded live in a studio at Chateau D'Herouville. They churn out a rough-hewn return to roots rock'n'roll that was still nailed down tightly even at this late stage of their career, and the sound is excellent. It also includes one of their last original songs, the title track "Thunder Express."

Leading the pack on the MC5 archival front is the **Alive/Total Energy** label. Besides their superior live collections, their **'66 Breakout!** release gathers all three AMG singles tracks in perfect sound alongside various rehearsals and live performances that represent what the 5 sounded like during their early garage punk phase. **Alive/Total Energy** have also re-released the MC5's second single on the A-2 label, "Looking At You"/"Borderline" as a vinyl single (after years of bootlegging) and it is **ESSENTIAL**. If you don't own a turntable, you need one now in order to fully experience the immense sonic boom that is their first studio release of "Looking At You": direct from the original master with breathtaking depth (it also

and it meant something. But they were nuts. [laughs] They would stay up all night and chew drugs and get up in the morning and try and act out the ideas they thought of the night before.

DAVID: But John was quite serious about the formation of the White Panther Party. [Maybe some of it] was fueled by his legal troubles, because he was looking at going to jail before the White Panther Party was formed. You know, his reaction to the establishment coming down was to become increasingly radicalized and increasingly militant.

Do you think that they needed John Sinclair to survive?

DAVID: What John brought to the band I think was really important. If John hadn't become their manager, would the MC5 just have remained another American garage band? Perhaps. I don't know for sure. But I think that he brought something very special to the group: he gave them a purpose, a direction, a program, for whatever it's worth. But at the same time, the thing that he brought to the equation is the same thing that sowed the seeds of their destruction.

LAUREL: At the point when John Sinclair and the MC5 part ways, they no longer needed John Sinclair. It clearly wasn't working, from a professional or personal standpoint.

DAVID: At the same time they had changed record labels, this guy Jon Landau had come in, and Sinclair had already been convicted, he just hadn't been sentenced yet. He was waiting to go to jail. As Michael Davis says in the film, "Here's our manager. How's he gonna manage our business if he's in jail?" It was pretty ludicrous. And there were people from Atlantic records that were saying, "This whole Trans Love Energy thing, this White Panther thing, this shit ain't working. Fellas, half your money is going to support all these hippies that are living in this commune.

You gotta split from this." And that *Back In the USA* record is a reflection of that change in their aesthetic. John Sinclair's assessment of that record is that it's complete crap. But he made the arrangement that brought in Jon Landau in the first place. He sows the seeds of what the band would continue to be at that point. It's interesting, it's full of contradictions. That ultimately is why we could spend seven years on this film, because the deeper we got into it, the more interesting it became.

LAUREL: I think that we continue to be intrigued and surprised by the complexity of these people, individually and collectively. There was something truly magical that happened when these five guys came together, it's undeniable. I think they tapped into energies, I think they did tap into the universe. I think that had the equation been different

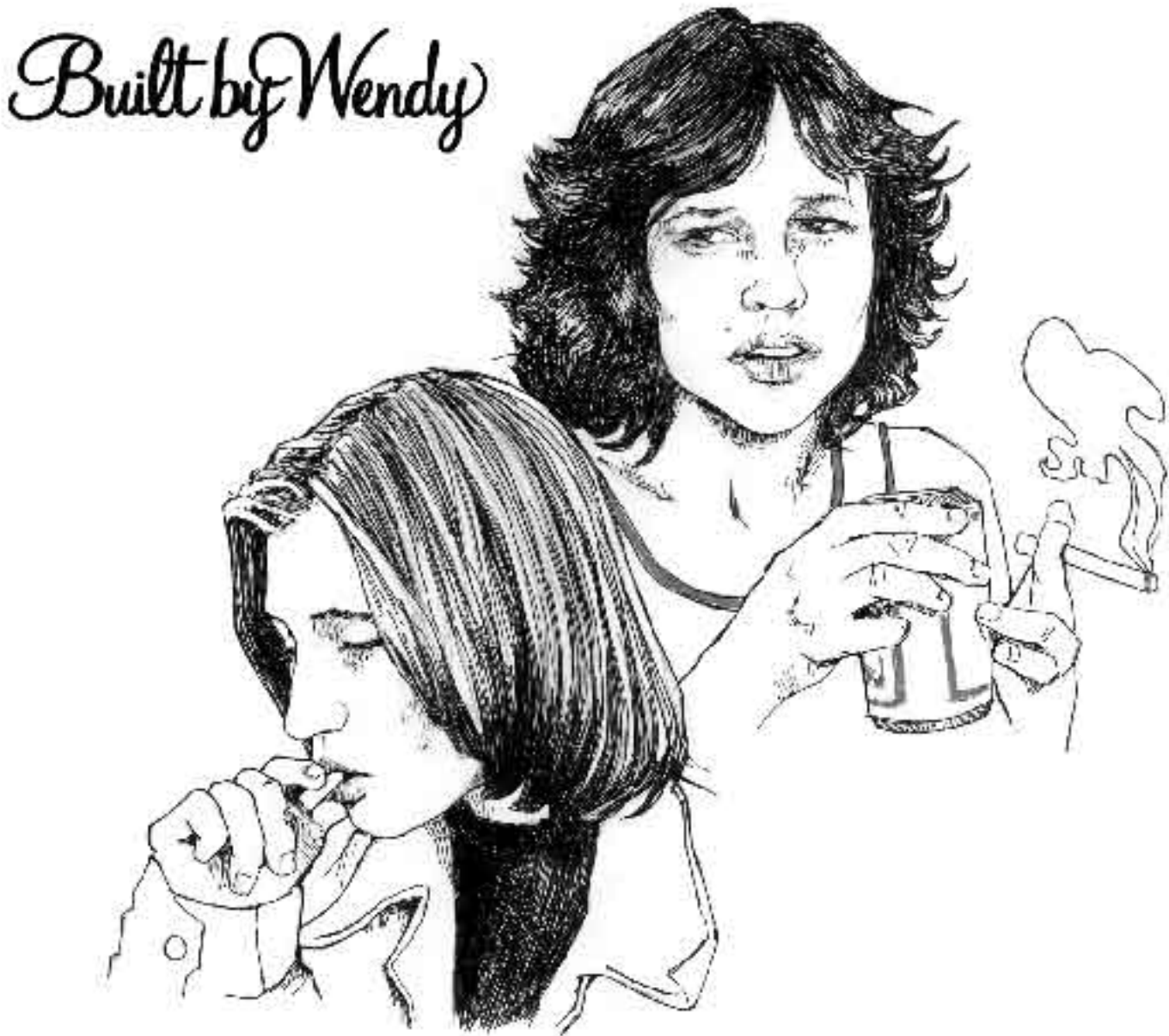
it never would have been the same. I just continue to fall in love with their complexity and their intelligence and their mystical side and their magical side, and they're all still like that today. **You named your film production company Future/Now Films, which is the name of an MC5 song. What do you think they were plugged into 30 years ago that we weren't ready for?**

DAVID: 'Future/Now' is a Rob Tyner-composed song and those are Rob's lyrics, and specifically, the line from the song that we had in mind when we named the company was, "The future's



"There was something truly magical that happened when these five guys came together, it's undeniable. I think they tapped into energies, I think they did tap into the universe."

—Laurel Legler, co-director, *MC5: A True Testimonial*



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made it onto Rhino's starter compilation **The Big Bang!**, but not so for the tempestuous, bottom heavy B-side, "Borderline".) Also worthy of investigation on '66 **Breakout!** is the inclusion of the earliest performance of "Black To Comm," the 5's experimental free-form freak-out centerpiece that even at this stage of the game (1966) was already a sprawlin', searchin' and a-groovin' all over the place improvisation that would only grow in energy and power the more it was performed.

Power Trip was the first MC5 release on Alive/Total Energy and it is just superb: Not only are the performances excellent and sound great but also most of these tracks are unique to this disc only. The three instrumental outtakes from late October/early November '70—"The Pledge Song", "Head Sounds (Part Two)" and an early version of "Skunk (Sonically Speaking)" named "Power Trip"—are all killer 5 moments as is the extended raw, noised-out improv "I'm Mad Like Eldridge Cleaver" and the previously-mentioned tracks from "Dialogue '68" which are trudgeworthy, pre-**Kick Out the Jams** live assaults played at the same ear-splitting volume but at a fraction of the pace. Highly recommended. (Note: although not credited as such, the version of "Black to Comm" on here is from Saginaw.)

The American Ruse is comprised mainly of **Back in the USA** studio outtakes with and without vocals, rounded out by "I Believe To My Soul" and the totally out-there "Black to Comm" from "Dialogue '68." It may not be suitable to throw on during a party, but you can test people's knowledge of MC5 lyrics with impromptu karaoke sessions. I'm serious; just try to sing along and you will soon have even more respect for Tyner's vocal prowess as you realize how tightly on a dime he had those lyrics nailed—especially "Teenage Lust."

Babes in Arms was the very first archival MC5 album, and although in the past 20 years a lot of it has been re-issued with better sound resolution, the alternate take of "Shakin' Street" and the blaxploitational wah-wah moves of "Gold" (an outtake from the film soundtrack of the same name) have never been available else, AND they still sound great.

Okay. After all this razzmatazz, probably the best place to start is with the recent **Human Being Lawnmower** CD, which collects many of the best moments off previous Total Energy releases along with the best sounding live cover version of Ray Charles' "I Believe To My Soul" ever, a brilliant sounding "flat mix" of the A-2 version of "Borderline" and a poignant Sonic Smith acoustic demo of "Over And Over." Rounding it all off is J.C. Crawford's "What Is Zenta?" and well, what more could you ask for? (Besides the tracks they left off **Kick Out The Jams**, the pre-Landau run-throughs at Elektra of "Human Being Lawnmower," "Call Me Animal" and "Teenage Lust," I mean...)

If you dig "What Is Zenta?", then **Music Is Revolution** is a must to check out. Although there is no music, for those with an interest regarding the MC5's White Panther Party affiliation it is very insightful—it's 30 spoken-word tracks made in the late '60s/early '70s of White Panther members and associated revolutionaries rapping and so forth. (Contact: Book Beat Gallery, 26010 Greenfield, Oak Park, MI 48237 or www.thebookbeat.com)

ARCHIVAL RECORDINGS DISCOGRAPHY

ALBUMS	(★ = Recommended)
★ '66 Breakout! (Total Energy NER3023-2) 1999	
★ Babes in Arms (ROIR RUSCD8236) 1998	
★ Black to Comm (Receiver RRCD185) 1994	
★ Do It (Revenge MIG5) 1987	
★ Greatest Hits Live (Purple Pyramid CLP0429-2) 1999	
★ Human Being Lawnmower (Total Energy 3032-2) 2002	
★ Ice Pick Slim (Alive 0008) 1997	
★ Live 1969-70 (NKVD NKVD01) 1991	
★ Live 72 Kick Copenhagen (Lawnmower MOW11) 1990	
★ Live Detroit 68/69 (Revenge MIG8) 1988	
★ Looking at You (Receiver RRCD193) 1994	
★ Motor City Is Burning (Trojan 06076 80213-2) 2001	
★ Motor City Meltdown (Liquid Sky KTO05) 1996	
★ Phun City, UK (Sonic SRCDO00040) 1996	
★ Power Trip (Alive CD0005) 1994	
★ Sonic Sounds From the Midwest (Clean Sound CS1014) 1988	
★ Starship: Live Sturgis Armory 6/27/1968 (Total Energy NER3018) 1998	
★ Teenage Lust (Total Energy NER3008) 1996	
★ The American Ruse (Total Energy NER 2001) 1995	
★ The Big Bang! (Rhino RS79782) 2000	
★ Thunder Express (Jungle FREUDCD71) 1999	
★ Vintage Years (NKVD NKVD02) 1991	
★ Music Is Revolution (Book Beat) 2000	
SINGLES	
★ I Can Only Give You Everything/One Of The Guys (AMG 1001) 1966	
★★ Looking At You/Borderline (A2 333) 1968	
★ I Can Only Give You Everything/I Just Don't Know (AMG 1001) 1969 (reissue with different B-side)	

Ian Svenonius is the acting chairperson for the Rock N Roll Comintern and an auxiliary member of the group Weird War.

James Parker lives in Boston, Mass., with his wife and son. He wrote **Turned On: A Biography of Henry Rollins** and once held the position of official astrologer to the Spice Girls Fan Club.

The Seth Man is a rock'n'roll writ(h)er. Also known as Seth Wimpfeimer, he reviews lotsa Rock albums on Julian Cope's Head (www.headheritage.co.uk) as well as for Cool and Strange Music and New Gandy Dancer magazines. He has so far published two issues of FUZ magazine (copies are available for \$8 apiece/\$12 for both issues so send cash, or money order in US dollars to: Seth Wimpfeimer, P.O. Box 1211, Mountainside, NJ 07092-0211.) He also owns three copies of one of the best albums ever made: Alexander Spence's *Oar*.

yours right now, if you rule your own destiny." And that was the idea we were coming from with this thing, even before we could get funding, that we had to do this. I don't think this was a case where we just said, "Hey, let's do this groovy movie about the MC5!" It didn't really work like that. There was a whole series of synchronistic events, the witnessing of occurrences, everything in our lives had led us to this weird crossroads where we could take five seconds of decision and decide either that we were gonna make this MC5 movie or we were not...My favorite part is the very last line of the song, and Rob Tyner goes, "The key to the mystery..."

[thinking the phone has been disconnected] Hello?

DAVID: Yeah, that's it. Ya get it? Fill in the blank. It's up to you. It's all here for ya, I'm givin' it to you. I think he's really amazing. I think that he was a shaman, and I think that he was a magically inspired person. On the liner notes of the first album, Rob Tyner is quoted as calling the MC5 "a working model of the paleocybernetic culture in action." Right? 1968. What the fuck does that mean? Except that now we are, arguably, paleocybernetic.

What do you think he meant by that?

DAVID: I think that he saw the MC5 and the process that the MC5 was going through as a model for the types of processes that we might actually be going through in the future. For instance an artist could work with other musicians in a tribal and/or communal setting, cut off from the influences of mainstream culture, and develop their individual ideas—compose, record, and actually get their music out to the masses, separate from the corporate power structure.

Do you think that there's something about what happened in Detroit and with Trans Love Energies before they recorded *Kick Out The Jams*—like it was this self-contained universe or laboratory where all this stuff could happen, and then once they took it outside of that environment it lost...

DAVID: ...the energy is dissipated? Perhaps. I mean, I think that there are a lot of really deep and interesting ideas that percolate throughout this whole MC5 thing. There are ideas of music and art as shamanistic and/or magical processes, by which one opens the gates, so to speak, by which one perhaps communicates with other levels of consciousness or being, other energy forms. There are interviews with Rob Tyner from as early as 1967 where he's talking about music and sound's ability to alter the molecular structure of the human body, and in fact we know that to be true now. These theories are confirmed, that if you play tones at the proper level, you can get people to perspire or feel anxious or feel calm. You can in fact affect their consciousness and their physicality. Rob used to refer to it, "They have to get the music in their meat."

That's very William Burroughs.

DAVID: Exactly. And he was a great fan and reader of Burroughs. It's like that Parliament/Funkadelic thing, "Free your ass and your mind will follow." These ideas are all in there. There were ideas within the MC5 performance—not always



Views and Reviews

MC5 Want Revolution

By Dave Martin '89

It would be hard to find a rock band who would be more relevant today than the MC5. They were arguably one of the most important bands of the 1960s.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the MC5 were influenced by the beat movement. As the decade progressed, they were influenced by the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement.

The MC5 were a band that was not afraid to take risks. They were a band that was not afraid to be different.

The MC5 were a band that was not afraid to be loud. They were a band that was not afraid to be rebellious.

The MC5 were a band that was not afraid to be controversial. They were a band that was not afraid to be hated.

The MC5 were a band that was not afraid to be misunderstood. They were a band that was not afraid to be ignored.

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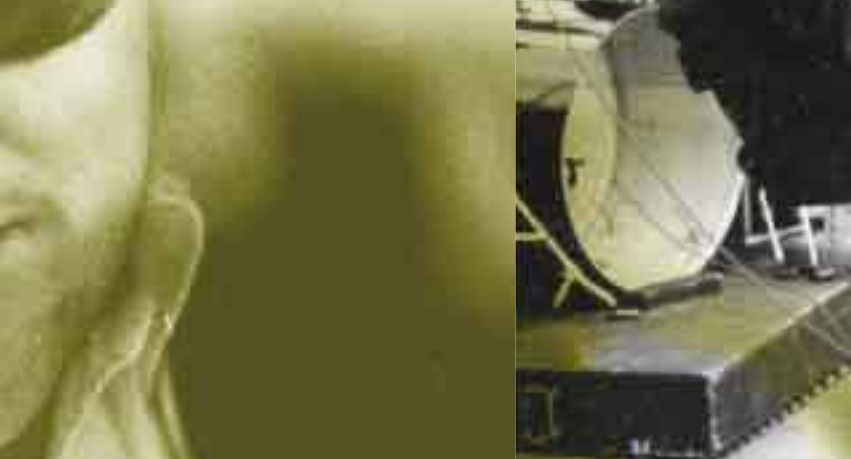
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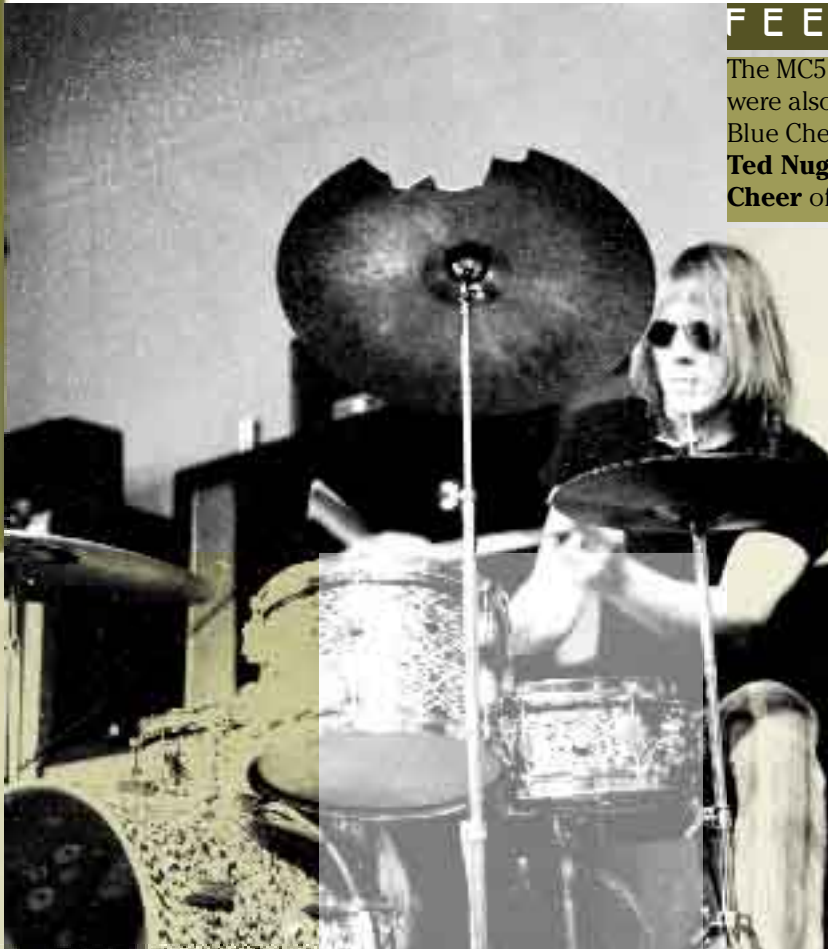
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Clockwise from left: Fred "Sonic" Smith; Dennis Thompson competes with the guitarists, and so the cymbal must pay; Brother Wayne Kramer punches it; Rob Tyner passes the pipe; the press flips out.



FEEDBACK

The MC5 were unbelievably intense live. They were also very, very loud (but not as loud as Blue Cheer). Wayne Kramer, John Sinclair, Ted Nugent and Leigh Stephens of Blue Cheer offer testimony to Jay Babcock.

"Loudness was a big part of the concept," says MC5 manager/chief theorist John Sinclair. "Our concept, as I remember, was that if you gave yourself up to the music, then the loudness wouldn't just go through your EARS, it would go through your entire body. And if you were to immerse yourself in the sound, it wouldn't hurt you: it would just THRILL you..."

"But you could never get loud enough with those damn sound systems! It was always tough for us. You didn't use the amplification on the amps in those days: you just amplified the singer. You didn't mic the drums, you didn't mic the guitar cabinets. Club owners, show promoters, teen center directors? They HATED it. The authorities hated it. They couldn't understand why it had to be so loud. They would pull the power, threaten not to pay."

Eventually the MC5 gained a following that allowed them to play larger local venues where they could do their thing better. Louder.

"The MC5 was the first band in Detroit to get their hands on the new line of Vox amps from England, these Super-Beetle amplifiers," remembers Wayne Kramer, one of the MC5's two guitarists. "They were real 100-watts amplifiers: true power. They had these gigantic speaker cabinets with four twelve-inch speakers and two metal high-frequency horns in them. No one had ever heard anything this loud

before. We ratcheted the level up, we raised the bar considerably. This was when the MC5 was leaving the scale of a club band, a teen dance band, a local community center gig band, and going up to the next level, where we were playing the Grande Ballroom. That was the first place we could play them loud enough to get enough to get a good tone and didn't clear the room. So the next step was the Marshall amplifiers, and they were, I don't know how you quantify it, but they were twice as loud. You had twice as much speaker all of a sudden, and an even more powerful amplifier, so you're pushing twice as much air."

"The technology for amplifiers was progressing faster than for the sound systems," says Sinclair. "So you go from Super Beetles to Sunns to Marshalls. The guitars would get louder and louder, heh heh heh. The singer would always be struggling to be heard in that mess."

"There was no such thing as monitors, so we never heard ourselves sing—ever," says Kramer. "Venues didn't provide PA's in those days. And the PA system would lag so far behind the guitar amplification system that it was ridiculous. So, you had to carry your own PA. We

"As far as street fuck you-ness goes, they definitely had us," admits Nugent. "There was an energy to the 5 that was nothing short of *mesmerizing*. It was their uninhibitedness and the fact that they focused on the sheer unadulterated middle finger quality of all their music."

built three or four PA systems! We had some money coming in, and we'd meet a friend of a friend who was an electronics genius. And what he'd say is, 'What you guys need is 12 of these XL-77 amplifiers' and we'd give the guy a pile of money and he'd come back with this big monstrosity that would catch on fire. Oh well, that wouldn't work. And then the next guy would come along and say, 'No what you need is these new Crown amplifiers.' Okay, let's try those.

What was the point of all this? Why the need to be so loud? "I think it was just a thing of, I need MORE: the teenage fascination with power," say Kramer. "This was a chance to make sure that everybody in the area had to listen to ME. It's all about ME and MY guitar playing. I even had a guy who came down and hooked up some high-frequency industrial metal horns to go on top of my amp to make it even more brutally loud."

"Ah, feedback," says Sinclair. "I loved feedback. Ohhhh man, that was part of the MC5's stock in trade. Feeeedback. Yes! Loud! Penetrating! You know, the social milieu then, everything was so numb. So you wanted to feel something. And the loudness was part of it. That would make you FEEL. I think I can characterize part of our outlook that way. We were trying to shake people up. The goal was to make them feel something, to make 'em enter a new world. Ha! And drop some acid if possible. Heheh."

It was a point of pride for the MC5 that they were louder than every band local band they played with... Bob Seger, the Stooges, and, of course, Ted Nugent and the Amboy Dukes.

"We kicked their asses, hundreds of times," says Sinclair, gleefully.

"We did! We loved it. They would come up pale."

"As far as street fuck you-ness goes, they definitely had us," admits Nugent. "There was an energy to the 5 that was nothing short of **mesmerizing**. It was their uninhibitedness and the fact that they focused on the sheer undulated middle finger quality of all their music. Where the Amboy Dukes, we wanted to make rhythm and blues songs. Really emulated the young Rascals and Stack Tolt and Motown songs. James Brown and Sam & Dave and Wilson Pickett. So we were playing those kind of things. Even though the MC5 came from the same genre, really, they would play it's A Man's World by James Brown and they'd play Papa's Got a Brand New Bag and those kind of songs, but they'd already figured out how to just do it **unlike** the original black artists. They just did it like white idiots. So they were whiter than we were."

"We'd got even louder because we started using two amplifiers on each instrument, and that was the point where it was too much," says Kramer. "But that was the point where I knew... Well, let me tell you how I knew. Blue Cheer had come to Detroit to play at the Grand Ballroom. And they used two hundred-watt Marshalls on their guitar, two hundred-watt Marshalls on their bass. It was TOO loud. I was out in the audience, and the place was kinda empty. It was kinda exacerbated by the fact that they weren't very good. They really just droned on. There was no dynamic to it, it just droned, but it droned at a level that was like a 747 in your face."

"The MC5 didn't reach the levels of volume we did," recalls Leigh Stephens of Blue Cheer. "I really don't know in decibels how loud we were, [but] we were louder than anyone we ever played with, not that that is necessarily a good thing. We were going for... Just the overwhelming pushing of air. If the speakers blew your hair around, it was loud enough. Hey, we were kids, we thought that was cool."

"Blue Cheer were incredibly loud," says Sinclair, "louder than we were, but not as...gratifying. They weren't as interesting musically, I didn't think. But, loudness was a huge part of their aesthetic. It was pretty much what they had to offer. Ha! Nice people, though."

"Just because something is loud doesn't mean that it's powerful," says Kramer. "Intensity doesn't come from volume. Intensity comes from focus, from the application of dynamic. So I knew when I heard Blue Cheer have two 100-hundred watt Marshalls that it was too loud. And we had two guitar players in our band, so we [had to have been] twice as loud as they were. I remember when we played in Boston once, this was at the point where we were into our two 100-watt Marshalls—each and I had people that I knew coming around who really wanted to listen to the band but they had to go stand outdoors! That's too loud. We went through a phase when we were too loud. Too fuckin' loud. Cleared the room. Caused people pain."

Sinclair: "If you stood there and tried to listen to it with your ears, it **would** hurt. It would be 'too loud.' I lost some top end standing there in front of the MC5 every night for a couple of years. But I still hear pretty good, for an old person."

"I don't want to hear nothing that loud now, though! Ha ha ha. Not any more."

conscious—which were drawing upon whole realms of ritual performance, like that whole J. C. Crawford “Brothers and Sisters” speech at the beginning. That was all part and parcel of the shamanistic

thing they were trying to do; they were trying to create this orgiastic, ecstatic union with the audience, whereby they could transcend their earthbound consciousness.

What else might have inspired this?
I know they considered Sun Ra a
mentor...

DAVID: You know what? Can I tell you something? Sun Ra laid his hands on me, about 20 years ago. It was in the early 1980s, I had just come back from England and my girlfriend at the time and I went to see Sun Ra. It was the first time I'd ever seen him and he was playing at the Jazz Showcase here in Chicago at the old Bismarck Hotel, I happened to be sitting on a corner chair on the two aisles, and at some point he did the processional around the room, and as he passed, twice, he laid his hands on my shoulders. And I looked up into his eyes and they were doing "Space Is The Place," and I will never forget the feel of the touch of his hands on my shoulders. It was not as if he pressed down on my body, but when he laid his hands upon my shoulders it was like they weighed a million tons. It was the heaviest physical



touch, and it was the most profound physical touch that I have ever felt.

Wow.
DAVID: Yeah. And a couple years ago I was relaying that story to Michael Davis when we were in Arizona with him. We were talking about Sun Ra and I said, "Michael, you know Sun Ra laid hands on me." And after I told him the story, Michael looked at me with a very sort of piercing look and he said, "You know, maybe that's when this all started."

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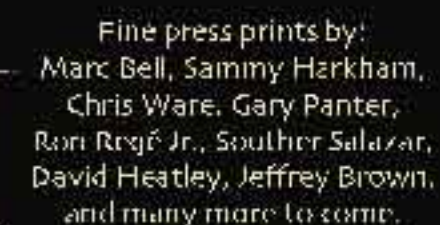
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Bull Tongue

Exploring the Voids of All Known Undergrounds

by CYRON COLEY and THORSTON MOORE
photographs by SETH TISUE

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPERS, or Yod's little dwarfs, or whoever the fuck they are, were busy as beavers this past year. Those wily rascals loaded down our stockings with more treats than you shake a rat's ass at. Thanks guys!

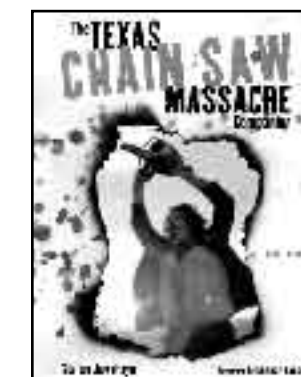
Boston's **Nmperign** are the kings of small improvisational gestures. Early recordings for the Twisted Village label, and collaborations with other members of the New England (and world) underground have been great, but their new double LP, **We Devote Every Effort to Offer You the Best That You Deserve to Have for Your Enjoyment** (SIWA) seems like their best effort yet. The first LP was recorded in France, the second (**I Am Sitting in a Fucking Room**) was done at Wesleyan, and the records are as different as they are similar. Greg Kelley and Bhub Rainey (who ARE Nmperign) mix cuss-like use of extreme breath control with electronic huzzing and screeched vocals like no one else in your carpool. And the French LP is as buttery and dense as some sort of magical cheese that melts in your pillow late at night, while the Wesleyan one creaks and weavils like bedspings after a week of ape-fuck. This is a beautiful piece of sonic exploration that defies genre tags (jazz, noise, free, experimental, whuh) and is packaged in typically gorgeous SIWA style. And if you're second-guessing these toots as hot shots who know **NOT** how to play REAL jazz then we suggest you bite your fuckin' tongue. A challenge was made by Wolf Eyes' Johnny Olson that **Greg Kelley** may play a mean horn but did he **REALLY** know how to play?



"Of course I can REALLY fuckin' play, noise boy!" recanted Kelley and with puffs of steam blowing out his ears he raced home to Eastern Massachusetts and recorded what has to be one of these most fucked documents of obsessive-repetitive jazz dementia since the Charles "Yardbird" Parker Dean Benedetti recordings of 1947. Take after take after take of Kelley just blowing the living crap out of Dizzy Gillespie. 'n Kenney Clarke's "Salt Peanuts" (just the head, mind you), you can hear the spittle flying with each take a brutal and savage point nailed into Olson's brain. And just when you think you're gonna smash your head thru your speakers he runs a few dozen maniacal variant runs thru Bird's own "Donna Lee." The coolest thing is after Kelley fedexed this sonofabitch to Olson, Olson released

it on his label (American Tapes)! Quite a fucking showdown and, needless to say, highly recommended.

Stefan Jaworzyn may be best known to some as a guitarist (Skullflower, Descension, Ascension, solo, etc.) or as the proprietor of one of England's best record labels of the '90s, Shock. But he first made his mark as an amazingly smart and savage writer and editor, covering exploitation and strange art films of all sorts in his magazine, **Shock Express**, as well as via various freelance gigs. He has edited some superb **Shock** anthologies over the past few years, but really seems to have outdone himself with **Texas Chainsaw Massacre Companion** (Titan), which is a fascinating history of the original film, its follow-ups, the work of Tobe Hooper, the movie's creative germ



(Ed Gein), and everything else in the exploit-o universe. There's amazing info on Hooper's pre-**Chainsaw** work, the Austin hippie scene, the mechanics of producing splatter films, jokes at Dennis Hopper's expense, and lots of sharp writing and great pics. Even if you don't like this sort of thing generally, this is a totally wonderful read.

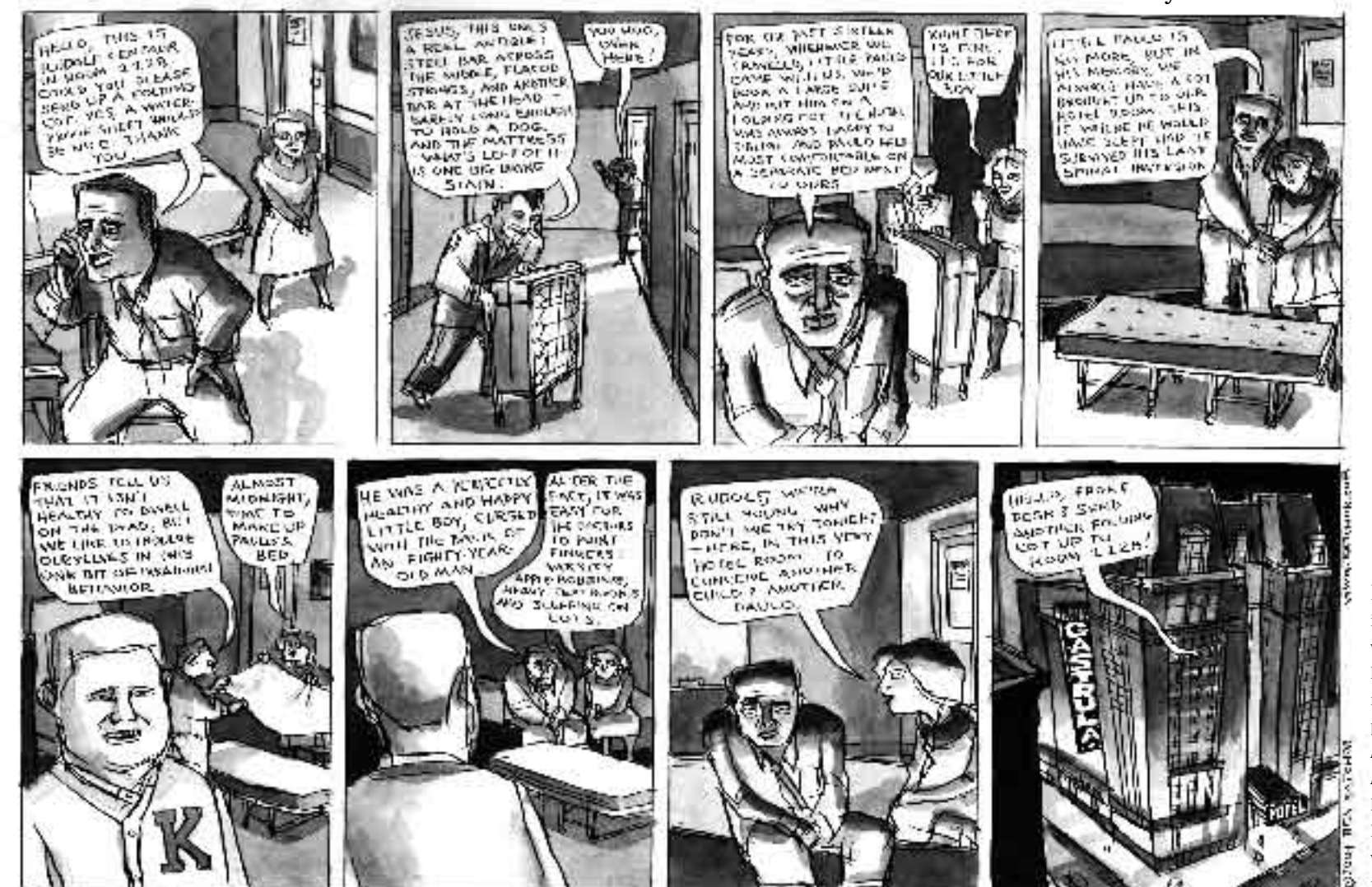
If you wanna watch this kinda thing, rather than read about it. Let us suggest a couple of hot numbers. The first is **The Living Corpse** (Zinda Laash) (Mondo Macabro), which is a long-thought-lost Pakistani vampire film from 1967. It has similarities to some of Hammer's Dracula films, but is full of curious details, and has an absolutely unique feel. Much of it is directed almost like a silent film, and the pacing and lighting mirror that as

well. But there are berserk musical interludes, inferences of baby eating, wild dance numbers and many other mind-blowing touches. If you are a devotee of the psychotronic, this is a must see. As is **Happiness of the Katakuri** (Chimera Entertainment), a Japanese film from 2002, directed by **Takashi Miike**. Colored heavily by the scenes that parody **The Sound of Music**, this movie is an insane mix of horror film, musical, heartwarming family saga, and claymation nightmare. Sorta hard to describe it without going through it scene by scene, but it's a very whacked out story about an extended family that runs a rural hostel in which every guest seems to end up dead. You should just see it, okay?

For reasons of sheer cussedness, we have always considered **Curlew** to be the weakest link in the musical chain forged by Alabama surrealists. By this, we mean that the combo never really seemed like Davey Williams' best unit. Their records were okay, but they were a little too Laswellish in parts to really excite us. But hey, here is an archival live LP by the band, **Gussie** (Roaratorio), recorded at a defunct Minneapolis club in 2001, and it is a monster of soul-churned improv snacks. Everybody seems to be extremely loose and lateral here. George Cartwright's saxes, Williams' guitar, Chris Parker's piano, Fred Chalenor's bass and Bruce Golden's bass are all making great small noises and big splats, and there's none of the surgical riff-handling that marred some earlier records. The freak register reigns in all quadrants, and there are some truly singular squeals here. And

by Ben Katchor

Hotel & Farm



Ben Katchor is collaborating with musician Mark Mulcahy on a new music-theater production, *The Slug Bearers of Kayrol Island*. It opens March 19, 2004 at the Kitchen in NYC. Visit www.katchor.com for details.

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Bangers Versus Fuckers
Republican Party, Democrat Party...fuck that noise its all about the Dance Party. Daggie, fuck & be merry, that's the Coachwhips way...as trashy as you wanna be...this is some blown out chaotic freedom.... Now, kiss me.

MATTHEW DEAR
Leave Luck To Heaven
A milestone album for dance music. Vocal-driven and hypnotic, minimalist techno. Includes the hit single, "Dug Days."

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The always-evolving forebears of modern industrial music, Einstürzende Neubauten, return with their long awaited new studio album, Perpetuum Mobile. Tour dates in Spring 2004!

EL-P
Fantastic Damage
The debut solo album from former Company, Fow, member and Definitive Jux label kingpin EL-P. A sprawling, epicopus of complex, layered beats and introspective, often politically charged rhymes. Big stuff.

FANTOMAS
Delerium Cordis
Showcasing a quiet side of Fantomas. Possibly the soundtrack to a very dark, fever-induced nightmare. The momentary ambience is followed by chaos and confusion. Turn on, Tune in, and Nud out.

JAYLIB
Champion Sound
J Dilla (Jay Dee) and Madlib - 2 Producers/2 MCs rapping over each other's beats. Two of hip hop's best kept secrets both vying for the title, "Best Producer on the Mic."

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(Drag City)
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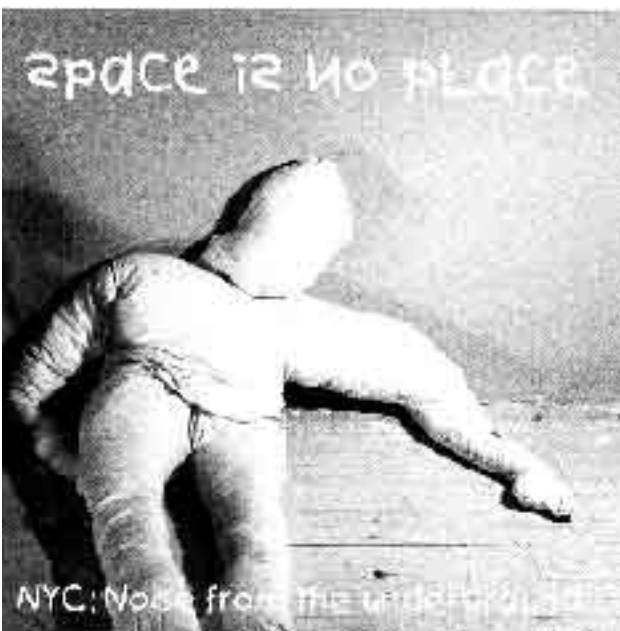
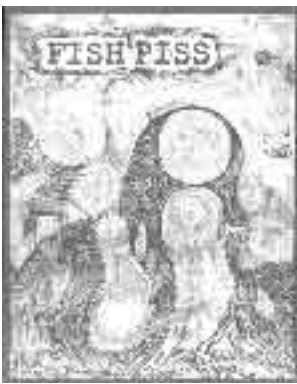
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and is pressed in fidelity that can only be described as dandy. What a treat.

One of the hippest jam records to enter our sphere lately is **The Beast** LP (De Stijl) which pairs the glapsy Midwestern otherness of **Wolf Eyes**, with the solid dunderage of **Smegma**, the band perhaps most responsible (along with the Residents) for a real underground noise continuum in the US of A. Smegma, originally from San Diego, then based in L.A., and then in Portland, have been clucking out their own frantic brand of post-form madness since the early '70s. And it's as untaggable now as it was then. Instruments, random noises, voices, electronics, everything flutters into a big vortex of wet cement, emerging as a perfectly-realized sculpture of confusion. This session happened because Wolf Eyes were touring out in Oregon and wanted to meet their heroes. So they did. And the results are just ducky. This is the first real extended recording we've had of Richard Meltzer vocalizing with Smegma, and he sounds great; almost like hearing Yogi Bear bum-rushing the stage at Company Week. And the combination of the two units' sounds is pretty seamless. You could break your neck trying to figure out where one stops and the other begins, so be careful as hell when you listen to this. But **do** listen, 'cause it's good.

And the only way for us to stop talking about frikkin' Wolf Eyes is maybe talk about some other Michigan madmen. How about this cat, **Charlie Draheim**? No one's too sure who this joe really is, but he has issued a cassette called **March of Slimes** and it has already proven to be one of the best goddamned underground USA noise releases of the last full moon cycle. If, after absorbing Jaworzn's **Texas Chainsaw** opus, you want to know how some kid who grew up with repeated viewings of said film and had to just set his ass-on-fire to MUSIC, then search out Draheim's tape. The only distributor we know who's carrying it right now is Hanson.

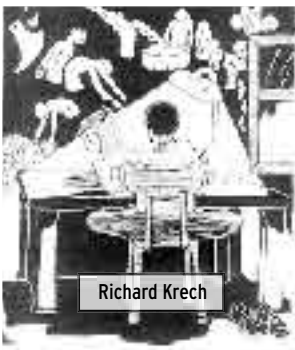
The **Sun City Girls**' organization has moved into new fields of endeavor with their new Sublime Frequencies project. This is more or less an ethnographic odyssey into the music and culture that informs the SCG's own strange trip. The first batch of stuff includes a few CDs (which we haven't played) and a couple of very interesting DVDs (which we have). The vids are both documentaries of musical events from what Capt. Beefheart called "the other side of the fence." **Jemaa El Fna** is a 50-minute film by Hisham Mayet, shot in Marrakech in 2002. It basically documents a strange evening of music and ritual (and very bizarre record cleaning techniques) in a large town square that serves as a meeting place for local musicians. It is very crude, but it is pretty spellbinding anyway, because the music, the scene, the whole goddamn thing is just a weird as anything. And man, those record cleaning scenes are unbelievable! **Nat Pwe** was shot by the band's Alan & Richard Bishop, and Robert Millis, in Burma. What's depicted here are a variety of performances at a festival held every year to celebrate these kind of mean ghosts. The ghosts who are the focus of this particular event seem to have transvestite tendencies, so the film shows a crazy pastiche of sword-music, clog-dancing, cross-dressing, and scotch-juggling. It's another eyeful, lemme tell ya. And both of the DVDs had lotsa digital glitches, but they didn't really distract that much from the otherworldliness of the visuals' flow. Beep.



Smegma & Wolf Eyes



March of Slimes



Richard Krech

Norwegian label Humbug has released some sweet swill these last couple of months. Of particular note is a new 7" by Portland, Maine's leading ladies of electric dada pollution, **Crank Sturgeon, E-Z Voice over Box-Top Living Solutions** (Humbug030). Here we have the Sturgeon alone at his desk in his room shuffling noise clutter around and talking about it out loud. Weird and decidedly warped. There's also the 7" lathe-cut by **Rats With Wings** titled **Black Label 7"** (Humbug025) with nice percolated noisetrunk action courtesy of Australia's **Bill Burston**. A five-inch lathe-cut by **Idm thetable**, **"A just B" B/W "B or A"** (Humbug021), shows off the more flux-mouth music by this Windham, Maine resident (Maine noise rules!) in conjunction with the attached CD (which is more machine/found sound stimulated flux-huff). The identity of this cat is one **Shot Spear** and he's a registered one-man fluxus wrecking crew. A lathe-cut LP by **Edward Ruchalski**, **Having It Out** (Humbug020; edition of 50), lays out superb swathes of mood/ noise using homemade instruments, sound sculptures and motorized string machines. He is also known to incorporate event sounds, primarily recorded from his back porch (family picnics, etc.). Ruchalski resides in Syracuse, NY and has been kicking around the **new music** scene for some time. Like the deep playing of Organum and Mirror, Ruchalski is the real deal. Lastly, there's an LP by **Bill Wood and Fredrik Ness Sevendal**, **Song**

of Degrees (Humbug016; edition of 200). Sevendal is in Slowburn, a hazy Norwage outfit, and used to be in some band called Gom we've yet to catch up with. Wood is a New Zealander who has recorded extensively as the excellent 1/3 Octave Band in his native Kiwi. This dynamic pairing is a freedom ride of various synthesizer and miscellaneous sound improvisations and all rather great. So ask for Humbug at your local record shack.

The latest, greatest book by Canadian poet **Valerie Webber** is called **One Night Stands** (WV). It is a sequence of 20 poems, written in 20 bars, while Ms. Webber enjoyed a rum and coke, and smoked a single cigarette. The results are funny and brutal, a kind of travelogue of the lost, frited with a great tumble of details, and written in Webber's crisp, acerbic style. I guess we should just all be glad that there's still smoking allowed in the bars of Quebec. This book'd taste a lot different without the tang of nic. More Canadian content comes in the form of the new issue of **Fish Piss**, a bi-lingual ('tough mostly Anglo) 'zine from Montreal, which combines strong comic and graphics with an excellent review section, and great features. Of special interest this time are a few inter-related pieces on the recording industry (a general history of the early days, a snazzy bit on K-Tel, etc.) and a fine obit of strongman/street person, The Great Antonio.

Probably named after a bass clarinet player from Sun Ra's organization, **Eloe Omoe** is an

extremely raunchy free-rock duo from Eastern Massachusetts. Using bass and drums (but not drums n' bass), they make little swirls of dirty fever that rise into the munge of the night before collapsing like so much puh-dust on the floor of the warehouse. There are a few tracks on their eponymous debut **MLP** (Infrasound) that seem to have been recorded live, and they kinda remind of what a very stripped-down version of Demo Moe might have sounded like. So perhaps their name is more a tribute to that long-gone NY outfit than it is to anyone who wielded a licorice stick, be it a bass one or not. Stylisht!

Of all the eccentric wildfolk in NYC past present and future not too many can hold a candle to the real life weirdness of **Edgar Oliver**. He's a dramatic actor and prose artiste **cum** urban vampire. He's been stalking the lower depths of Manhattan for well on 30 years. His first book, the novella **The Man Who Loved Plants** (Panther Books), is an astounding journey through obsession and dark desire. Imagine Hubert Selby trading lines with J.T. Leroy and you may come close. Or not. And the voting is in: best broadside poem by a lawyer this issue goes to **The Bodhisattva of the Public Defender's Office** (Remittittur) by **Richard Krech**. Krech has, of course, been producing important and liberation-oriented poetry since the '60s. But his legal work has not been largely documented in artistic ways before. Now, here's a very nice syncretic fusion of two of his main

daughter, **Briana Miller**. Meanwhile, #4 of Miller's own cool mini-comic, **Break** (Break), is also out. This one documents the utter stupidity that befalls poor working retail stiff on a day-to-day basis. Excellent work. And if you contact her, be sure to ask about back issues.

Meerk Puffy is one of the inventors of modern Providence, and his work with Forcefield, as well as his solo efforts, have put a new, more thoroughly stupid (read: American) face on electronic field action. And finally, after a small pantload of releases in other formats, there is a Meerk Puffy LP available to the discerning. **Nung** (Animal Disguise) is a wonderful battlefield of real lockgrooves, fake lockgrooves, sequences collapsing in anger, notes exploding in rage, and all kinds of other throbbing noise. It's a hell of a pleasing platter, and it looks pretty hip, too! And, naturally, another wonderful basket of Providential slunk has arrived from Load Records. There's the eponymous debut LP from **Vincebus Ereptum**. As might be expected from a combo taking its name from Blue Cheer's debut album, the sounds here are as loud as cottage cheese. But unlike some similar volume-mongers, these guys seem to remember what a great band Flipper was. Love live Pet Rock! There's also the debut LP by **Kites** (who were ballyhooed in **Arthur** No. 5). It's called **Royal Paint with the Metallic Gardener from the United Sates of America Helped into an Open Field by Women and Children**, and it mixes alternately skuzzy and static electronic hair-wall-doodles with an aesthetic taken from the meanest playground on Earth. Which is a cool mix of stuffs. The rest of the Load vinyl load (as it were) is from non-Prov artists, but that's not to discriminate against Brooklyn's **USAISAMONSTER**'s new LP, **Tasheyana Compost**, is a brilliant as its two predecessorsDs tylistically reminiscent of some of the Minutemen's most casual Boon tunes crossed with a more spasm-oriented version St. Vitus, plus plenty of uniquely contempo strangeness. What a South Bay concept! And San Francisco's **Total Shceundt!** has released a posh eponymous LP that is partly their patented, staggering, stop-start free-punk fusion, and partly a new, more diffuse, sputsy, post-core atmosphericism. No complaints here.

As regards the world of magazines, **Swingset** #4 is out. Steve Lowenthal puts together a real fine read, with good music stuff (Catpower, Iron & Wine, Susie Ibarra), plus enough art, lit and whatnot to separate from the pack. Issue #4 of **Astronauts** music 'zine from Australia has just been sent over and it's full-on killer. Healthy, revealing interviews with percussion stud muffin Tim Barnes, starksissed folk punk Matt Valentine, soul bunny P.G. Six and Wooden Wand's James Tothe gets deep into the murky psyche of Hall Of Fame. Also, fresh as hell is a solo book of prose by **Matt Valentine**, **Small as Life & Infinitesimally as Pure** (Child of Microtones), which is a wonderfully cracked yarn about record-collecting, Buddha nature, drugs, sex, and many other important topics. If you like his musical work, you will certainly shit yourself sideways reading his fine words. There's also a new issue of **Mineshaft**. Everett Rand's great lit 'zine features art by Crumb, Deitch, Bruce Duncan and **Ace Backwards**, plus a d.a. levy collage, publisher Jeff Weinberg's memories of long ago political vandalism. Also included are poems by Irving Stettner, Wanda Coleman, A.D. Winans, and

plenty more. Duncan and Backwards have also put together the 15th **Telegraph Street Calendar** (Twisted Image), which depicts a year's worth of Berkeley's finest streetnicks. Send one to yr mom. And a companion piece to this is Backwards' **Surviving on the Streets** (Loompanics), which is both a memoir of Ace's journey from New Jersey to the Bay Area and beyond, as well as a good hands-on guide to homeless living. Not brand new, but interesting and useful. And Stettner also has a new issue out of **Stroker**, one of the best, longest-lived underground poetry 'zines around. #76 has a long tribute to Howard S. Levy and a great sample of his work, plus the usual Japanese content, Tommy Tratino investigations, and much else.

Spire's That In The Sunset Rise are a female trio from Chicago who mine the **Wicker Man** tradition better than anyone in recent memory. Their eponymous debut LP (Galactic Zoo Disk/Eclipse) sounds something like Alva pretending to be mid-period Current 93. There is a nice, tense, wheezy otherness to the way that the strings breathe in and out in concord with the harmonium, and that the vocals blend incantational tones with barks right out of Polansky's **Macbeth**. There are other raw touches to the music that bring to mind the early Godz, but the hoot-ritual aura eventually overwhelms any sense of art-anarchy. Which is a pretty hip thing to do, eh? The same label offers the **Flashing Open** LP by **Plastic Crimewave Sound**, another Chicago band, whose previous 45 was a nice slab of futuristic pulse-rock croak. The album is more of the same. Great touches of Krautrock, Hawkwind, Chrome, Pere Ubu and whatnot, draped across a large, echoey avant garage. Park your cup here!

Readers who are fond of silk-screened art and pornography are probably already well acquainted with Le Dernier Cri, long France's most distinguished oddball art press. But should you not have "gotten down" with them as yet, might we suggest seeking out **L'oraison des orifices** by **Quentin Faucompre**. This fine new volume has more bizarre, handsomely-printed pictures of genitals in unusual space than you'll see in a year of regular church going. It's "really" "something." If you have the nerve, they have the images.

In terms of a mighty-fine, one-sided LP series, one would have a tough time naming one superior to the recent set on Table of the Elements. There are six of them. **San Agustin's Triangulation (Hoof and Mouth Blues)** is a fairly clamorous set for this instrumental trio, having, as it does, an opening sequence that approaches as close to rock-action as these guys are likely to get, before ascending into blue clouds and clots of lightning. **Loren Connors' The Murder of Joan of Arc** is a ringing string of electric guitar strikes. It lacks the outright brutality of some of Loren's recent recordings, but has its own devious agenda. It spurts majestic rolling ang barrels that will first knock your legs out from under your ass with gusto, then quiver loudly in a corner. Which is nearly all anyone could ask. **John Fahey's Hard Time Empty Bottle Blues (1-4)**, recorded live in '97, typifies some of his late period pre-hardball beauty motion. This era's languid acousticism was something I used to find particularly spiritual, and that memory seems borne out here. Cool. **Laurie Spiegel's Harmonics Mundi** is a performance of Johannes Kepler's 1619 musical piece, based on the spatial relationship of the planets and their paths in the solar system. Spiegel's computer



Gerald Locklin



Loren Connors



music realization of this swirling set of drones was actually shot into space on a 1977 NASA probe. But now you can enjoy it in the comfort of our own planet as well. **Rafael Toral's Harmonic Series** is just that, a splendid sequence of tones, generated by guitar, analog electronics and computer, surging against each other (and your eardrums) like little tin foil bulldozers skirting the edges of the universe. **Arnold Dreyblatt's Point Source/Lapse** has those two pieces recorded in '97 by two separate groups of young musicians. These performances give the work of this (ostensible) minimalist a shockingly antic quality. Indeed, "Point Source" reminds me of nothing so much as the Theoretical Girls' "U.S. Millie." Sheesh. My only caveat on this series is that the pressings can be a little noisy at times, but that goes with the turf on clear vinyl, silk-screened editions, so clam up.

First issue of **Pitchfork Poetry Zine** we've run across is #10, and it's a good one. Cover image by Loren Connors, poetry by Ira Cohen, Lyn Lifshin, Guy Beining and others, with good graphics and a feature on the wonderful California poet, **Gerald Locklin**. Locklin is probably best known for his long association with Charles Bukowski, but he's a great "street" writer in his own regard and has a ton of books to prove it. The most recent is a prose collection called **The Pocket Book** (Water Row). There is the long title novella and a bunch of short stories (some of them very short), which are



Sixteen Bitch Pile-Up

both funny and sad as hell. Locklin's mature writing is great, like others of his generation of underground writers who have survived to tell their tales. He has a thoroughly great handle on the dynamics of blue collar day-to-day grunting (emotional, intellectual and social aspects, inclusive) and he just nails it time and time again. This would be a great place to start reading him. But be warned, his backshelf is vast! And is you get in touch with Water Row, be sure to check out their stock of new and used underground lit. It is quite staggering.

Also, we must offer a correction on something from a couple of issues back. It was said that Benoit Chaput was the sole driving forced behind Montreal's Slow Movement. "Not so!" Say my readers. It appears that the pressings can be a little noisy at times, but that goes with the turf on clear vinyl, silk-screened editions, so clam up.

CDs are hard to actually pick up and stick inside a CD player, very difficult, but once in a while Bull Tongue takes a

little road trip just to see what's new on the peeps' market. And seeing as how most mid-size rentals have fucking CD players in 'em, we hoist a tote bag or two of CDs into the ride and just fucking wail thru 'em. From South Deerfield, MA to Pensacola, FLA (and back) one weekend we must've jammed at least 2,000 of these shiny repellent pieces-o'-shit into the "player" and y'know, four of 'em weren't half bad:

1. **Sixteen Bitch Pile-up**: B.F.F. (Gameboy Records) Five females who regard themselves as "charalambides possessed by morbid angel mutilating merzbow's bloody corpse with a combine." Whoa. And they're not too far off. An unholy recording of a holy nun's mass saturates the top of this monster and it gets propulsively taken over with guitar feedback, machine terror and turntable destruction. Nice.
2. **MOUTHUS** (Psych-o-Path 6) Mouthus is Brian Sullivan and Nate Nelson of Brooklyn and they absolutely destroy. Super great feedback and overload squall w/ a hep no-wave edge. The label touts them as a brain-gouged cross between Jandek and Fushitsusha but our ears catch something more of a Rudolph Grey-jamming-with-Sightings vibe.
3. Various: **SPACE IS NO PLACE** (Psych-o-Path 5) Wait, another release on the same label? Not fair! But fuck, this is kill city great. It's also the first place we heard Mouthus. Their track on this comp is better than the heavy shit on their own CD. And it's surrounded by excellent other New York area weirdness. Flaming Fire deliver a



John Fahey



bent cabaret-chaos piece, No-Neck Blues Band, Sightings, Axoloti, Enos Slaughter, and the great Breast Fed Yak (featuring Controlled Bleeding's Paul Lemos and Sámias Mammás Manna sitarist Hakan Almkvist). This label not only also released the great Egypt is the Magick # **How Many Pieces Of The Puzzle Can The Mind Go Without?** and the Sightings **Michigan Haters** CDs but reissued the Kraut Klassik **In The Poor Sun** by Zippo Zetterlink. No Shit.

4. Various: **Rap Pouch** (Breaking World Records 35) As Bull Tongue does most of its daily stomping at the foothills of the Berkshires, it's only natural we'd respond to the local flavors of this comp from Hadley, MA. A 3" CDR in a sewn pouch, it contains an amazing tune called **"Rad Metting Plastic Box"** by the already legendary Fat Worm of Error, which comes across as the only Bonzo Dog Band meets GTOs as freezing 21st century noise freedom we've heard to date. There's other goodness here from Barn Owl, Noise Nomads, Josh Burkett and others but that Fat Worm track is haunting us.

So long.

Ⓢ

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About 10,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed since the beginning of the Iraq conflict
(Source: <http://lunaville.org/warcasualties/Summary.aspx>)

78% of women in the military report cases of sexual harrassment.
(Source: *Department of Defense 1995 Sexual Harassment Survey* (Arlington, Va.: Defense Manpower Data Center, December 1996))

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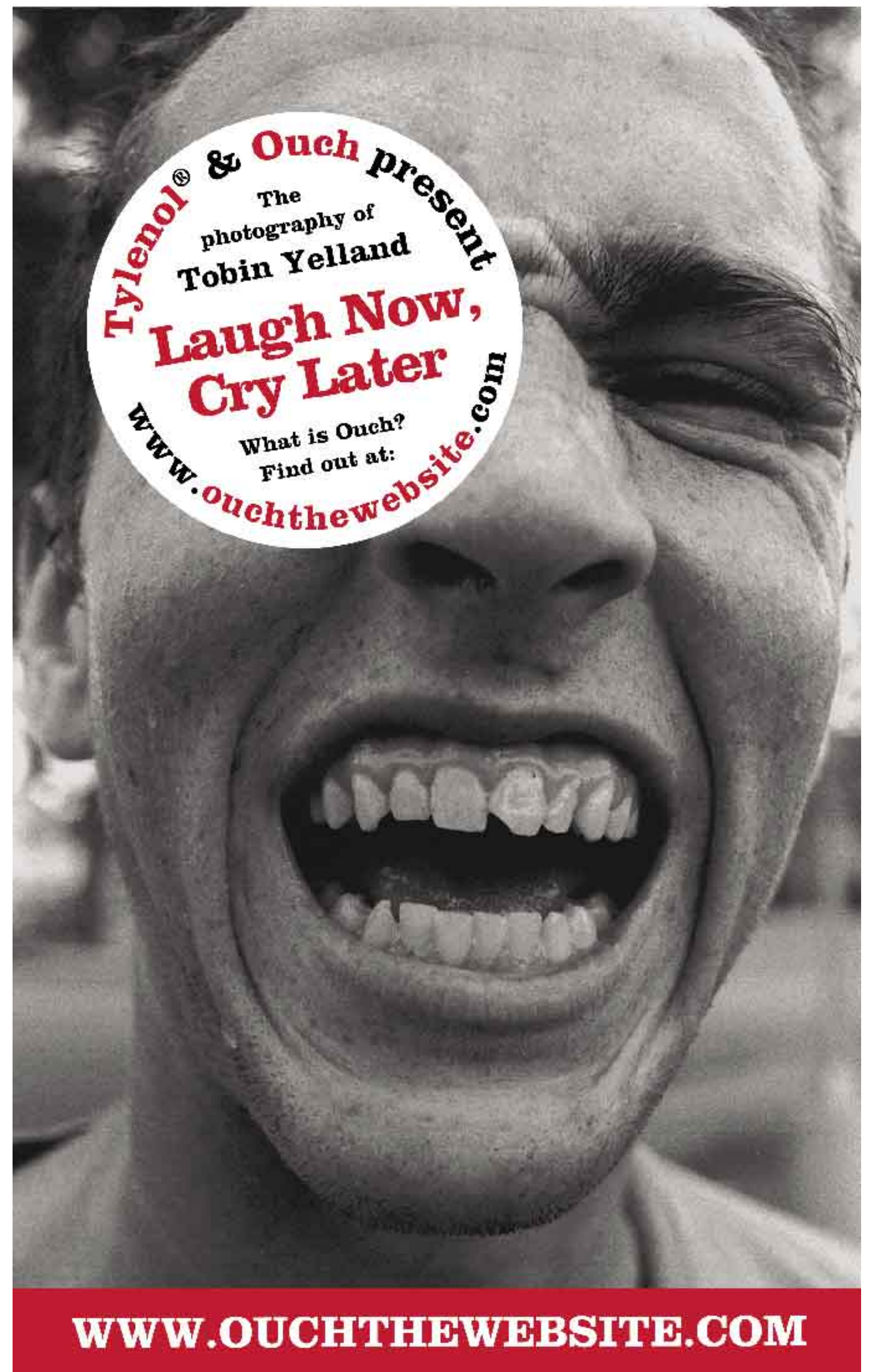
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