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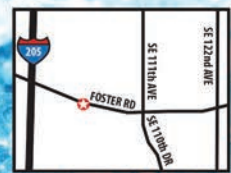
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Published monthly by XMAG LLC.
Circulation: 75,000 per month at 200+ sites
Mailing Address:
818 SW 3rd Avenue, Suite 1324
Portland, Oregon 97204
Telephone: 503.241.4317
Fax: 503.914.0439
Email: info@xmag.com
Exotic Online: www.xmag.com

Publisher
XMAG LLC.

General Manager
Bryan A. Bybee

Editor
Ray McMillin

Copy Editor
Adam J. Burt

Production Manager
Shawna Stephens

Graphic Design
ViDA Creative
Darkstar Graphics

Contributing Photographers
London A. Lunoux • HYPNOX
Ambered

Advertising
Adam J. Burt (503) 804-4479

Distribution
Enrico Carrisco • Adam J. Burt

Contributors
Stoned Cold Sativa Awesome
Clementine Darling
DiscountTherapist
DJ Hazmatt
Ray McMillin
Andy Norris
Esmeralda Rupp-Spangle
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Cover Photography
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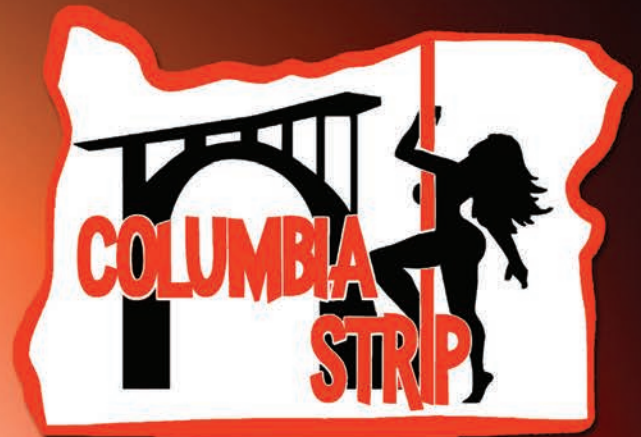
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PHOTOGRAPHY



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The Venue



Stormy
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Interview: Miss Exotic Oregon 2020

Axel

Interview by Ray McMillin | Photos by Hypnox

Off the bat, I've seen hundreds of awesome performances from dancers, with nearly every theme one can think of...but, I've never seen the *A Clockwork Orange* theme. What inspired you to choose the milk bar as a setting for your final performance?

There were quite a few scenes from *A Clockwork Orange* that I incorporated into this performance. The infamous Korova Milk Bar is one of my favorite scenes from the movie—it's the first time you get a good look at all of the droogs, Alex included. I thought about how I could put that on stage and what better way, than to have my droogs pour milk all over me?

Is it coincidental that "Axel" is an anagram for "Alex," from the book/film?

Completely coincidental—quite funny how that worked out.

You ended up in a kiddie pool, covered in what appeared to be milk. Was this real milk? If so, how was the clean-up process? If not, what was it?

It was REAL, 100%, whole milk. I wanted it to look as real as possible and there weren't any substitutes

that would give it the effect that I needed. I used the kiddie pool, with the painted eye logo inside, to hopefully catch all the milk. But, it turns out, when you shake your ass with milk pouring down, it gets everywhere. Cleanup was pretty gnarly—I had milk covering dollars, costumes and my entire body. It took two showers to get it all out of my hair, but I felt like I could still smell milk for the following two days.

How many years (if any) before this one did you compete in competitions?

This is my first competition as a stripper and I have been stripping for four years. As I kid, I was in hundreds of competitions as a ballet, jazz, lyrical, modern and tap dancer—but, that was a long time ago. I have been a backup dancer and choreographer in the past two years of *Miss Exotic Oregon* competitions, so I figured I would give it a try for myself.

What other super dope themes have you used in prior performances and how do you go about choosing something that gets the crowd's attention?

For my preliminary round, I did a



food establishments would you like to promote in print? Go nuts.

Big shout out to my club, Devils Point—this is where Axel was born and I am there every week, from Thursday to Sunday! And, a shout out to the Kit Kat Club, where I DJ every Monday night! I am hoping to be doing more performances, because it is something I love doing—but, at this time, I don't have anything booked. DM me via @NicotineFiend_ on Instagram and I will be sure to cover your stage with real milk (if that's what you are into).

Back to your performance—pole skill is obviously something that you possess. How long have you been dancing and what does it take to feel comfortable on stage?

I have been stripping for four years now. It didn't take long to feel comfortable on stage, because I was a professionally trained dancer—in ballet, specifically—and, had been

number from the John Waters movie *Cry Baby*, as Traci Lords. I can't tell you how many times I have had people tell me how much I look like her, so I thought that would be a fun theme to go with. With both my *Cry Baby* performance and my *A Clockwork Orange* performance, I obviously wanted to pay tribute to those movies, because they are some favorites of mine. Overall, I wanted to put choreography and costuming on stage that would be fun and captivating, visually. I wanted to put on a show that people would remember and walk away saying, "Wow, that was amazing," even if they didn't understand the references or had never seen the movies before.



What advice do you have for dancers who are looking to win the finals at one of our events?

First of all, any dancer planning on winning one of these competitions needs to know how much hard work goes into putting on a performance. Come up with a theme that you know will be fun for you and your audience. And, have a blast with it—even if you don't win, have it be something that you are proud of.

Since you've got our readers' attention, what clubs, gigs, performances, Soundcloud rappers or overrated fast

on many stages before. But, not with a pole and not naked, either, so it definitely took some getting used to. I have never taken a pole class—I just learned through being on stage, trying things that might be cool and watching the dancers that I work with.

What advice would you tell yourself, if you could go back to your first shift as a dancer?

I am not saying I did everything right on my first shift, but I don't think I would have given myself any advice. I needed to learn how to work in this industry—with trial and error. I am proud of how far I have come as a dancer.

Lastly (and, thank you for taking the time to answer some questions for *Exotic*), which ending to *A Clockwork Orange* do you prefer...the book or the film? Will you be able to rehabilitate or will you go back to your old, ultraviolent ways?

Kubrick's ending. "I was cured, all right." But, the old ultraviolent ways never truly die.

A Rendezvous Of Strangers

BY CLEMENTINE DARLING



The waitress sat alone, tucked into a booth in the far corner of the 24-hour diner. Often, the restaurant bustled and buzzed with throngs of late-night diners—drunk and in search of sustenance to ease their transition into an inebriated sleep. But, tonight, the diner had remained mostly empty and though she could have used the tips, she was quietly grateful for the lull. She stretched her legs, her toes barely able to reach the bench on the other side of the table and rested her small, weary feet. Steam rose up from her coffee cup. Two packets of sugar—just enough cream. She watched the color swirl and lighten from nearly black to ruddy caramel. Delicately, she swirled just the tip of her petite pink finger into the mug and gave a little stir. She brought her finger to her lips—red, full and cherubic—and let it linger there, while she slowly slid it between them and gave a long, satisfied suck. She bit down and paused. The diner smelled heavily of maple syrup and bacon—she took a deep and deliberate breath in and closed her eyes, for just a moment. As she opened them and scanned the empty diner,

a deliciously deviant thought crept through her mind.

Between her legs, she felt a hot pulse—her nipples began to tingle and she turned around to check. Was she really alone? Yes. Not a soul nor an eye...she ran her hands up from the back of her knee, to the top of her silky black stocking. With one hand, she cupped her smooth, round thigh, while the other slid gently below her pleated skirt. Lightly, she grazed her panties—she could feel her pussy, a soft mound of warm flesh, beneath the cotton. Rhythmically, her fingers lilted and danced in a smooth, circular motion then up, down and up again...sometimes meandering, to the soft nook between her thigh and panty.

She peered down between her legs and watched as a small, wet spot began to form on the white fabric pressed snugly against her pussy. She let her neck relax and loosen as she leaned her head against the high back of the leather booth. Her brunette locks fell in soft curls, framing her petite face and flushed cheeks—her rosebud mouth fell open as she brought a hand to her small, round breast. Firm and supple, they filled her palm. She pinched her nipples lightly and slid her now soaking wet panties to the side.

Luminous fluid glazed her deep pink labia, and as she pulled the fabric of her panties further away, she saw as it danced like glistening webs. Her lips were full and swollen, her clit throbbed, begging to be touched—her pussy flowed, hot and wet and aching to be filled. She wondered if she should stop—surely if she were caught she would be fired...but strangely, the thought of danger only served to arouse her further. She had always been the model employee—

the good girl. Always punctual, well-dressed, cheerful...but sometimes, she tired of being well-behaved. Sometimes, she thought, even good girls need to be bad.

She brought her dampened finger to her mouth and tasted herself. A deep, sweet musk overwhelmed her tastebuds, she sucked her fingers hungrily. Now that she had made up her mind to proceed, a frenzy grew quickly within her. A small pool had formed on the leather seat between her legs—she let her knees fall away from one another and slid her finger into her hot, wanting, little pussy. Her pussy tensed, pulsed and tightened around her finger. She gasped as she slid herself further inside, her legs now butterflyed and spread wide... she circled her swollen clit, overwhelmed with ecstasy. Small moans bubbled from deep inside of her. She tried to control them, but in spite of herself, she called out with increasing volume and pitch. She pushed a second finger into her opening and began to thrust hard and deep—her hips rocking back and forth, her ass pressed hotly against the leather.

Her small frame began to shiver and shake—the pressure building deep in her pussy. Her body flushed with heat, her breath shallow and rapid as she fucked herself with wild abandon. With one deep inhale, she felt the floodgates release. She bit her lip and suddenly, with more intensity than she'd ever felt, her vision went dark as she gushed, moaned and came—hard. She sat, momentarily stunned. Her breath returned, her long dark lashes fluttered, she opened her eyes and startled. There, seated at the bar, was a man. His eyes twinkled and he smiled, amused..."Don't mind me—I didn't want to interrupt...a table for one, please."



Money, Money, Twenty-Twenty: Predictions For The Portland Music Scene (And Beyond) For The Year 2020

by Blazer Sparrow

BAES Fried Chicken will burn to the ground under mysterious circumstances, but we will all know it's actually the petty and vengeful spirit of Ash St. Saloon, wreaking havoc from beyond the grave. Any future attempt to sully the piss-and-heroin-drenched hallowed halls of Portland's downtown music scene will be met with a similar fate. Stay away, trust fund entrepreneurs—you have been warned!

Lizzo will be virtually unheard of among the white hipster music aficionados. They will have since moved on to the latest pop star that checks off several of their marginalized communities' boxes in one sweep. It should be noted, that in 2021, that same darling pop star w the hipsters declare their new favorite will also be forgotten.

The Network will not reunite to tour their debut (and only) album and it will be a god-damned shame.

The bustling, gentrified strip we know and love as Division Street will become too "mainstream" for the cool kids, so it will be abandoned in exchange for boomer and Gen X tourism (see Hawthorne Street for reference). Construction will begin on Clinton Street, as the new happening boulevard of Portland "weirdness." Clinton Street Theater will be the overpopulated epicenter of this new abomination. The line for midnight screen-

ings of Rocky Horror Picture Show will now stretch all the way to Division Street and the old heads will brag about how they've attended every screening since 2011, while complaining about how it used to be better (and cheaper) in the 2010s.

After sitting empty for a year—with the nursing home endeavor turning out to be a complete flop—The Tonic Lounge will reopen in August of 2020, this time as The Panicked Raven. The sign will be redone with an unnecessarily cartoonish raven in a state of distress. Gaudy Poe-esque décor will litter the bar's interior and the venue will pander to goth, emo and scene kids in what will amount to a pathetic east side answer to Lovecraft. After bad reviews and worse attendance, The Panicked Raven will close and reopen as The New Tonic Lounge. A female-fronted band will be given a non-ideal date for a show and the internet will explode with accusations of sexism in the heavy music scene, perpetuated by the misogynist owners of venues like The New Tonic Lounge. Doors will be permanently closed (again) and covered in graffiti by January 2021.

Fender Jazzmasters will fall out of favor amongst the indie darling rockstars of Portland. They will go the way of the Gibson Les Paul and be considered old head boomer favorites. If you are even seen with a Jazzmaster at any reputable venue, you will be immediately ridiculed for worshipping at the altar of classic rock along with all the other nostalgists who can't let go of the past. Since cheap is cool, the hot new broke vintage gui-



tar lighting up Instagram will be the Danelectro Shorthorn. Naturally, all the hipster stars will only afford the 59DC reissue models, but you will see them everywhere. This fad will be all but gone once the kids find footage of Jimmy Page using one.

Red Fang will release another album. Sales will be good, but not great.

Against all better judgment, a local strip club will start booking rock bands in an attempt to emulate the same vibe as a club from the movies. Although the gimmick will be appreciated by the customers and garner some

media attention, the girls will be mostly annoyed, as the new live music will only draw attention away from them and lower their bottom line. Longtime nemesis of the club and next-door neighbor (another strip club), will retaliate by hosting country, western and bluegrass bands at a makeshift stage in their establishment. The two strip clubs' longstanding feud will reignite in cheesy rock vs. country headline fodder. Both clubs will stop, once the owners stop paying the bands they book and require the dancers to tip out the bands, on top of their already hefty stage fee and tip-out to staff.

Portland will see its first Dead Moon tribute band, known as OG PDX. They will immediately be booed off the stage at their first performance and issued death threats, should they attempt another show.

Although I do not know the name of this young musical group, they will accidentally be booked at Rontoms, because their one radio-friendly Bandcamp single sounded compatible with the other hipster darling groups performing on a certain Sunday Sessions night. The booker, other bands and audience will all be horribly surprised when this young group unleashes a flurry of loud, electric bombast, coupled with raw emotive vocals. Everyone's cocktails will be vigorously interrupted. A mass exodus to the smoking patio will occur. The band will not be booed, because Portlanders are too passive-aggressive for that. Instead, they will be given the cold shoulder and told "good job" in the most condescending way possible. Heartbroken and

distraught thinking that this Rontoms show would be the band's big break, the band packs up and moves to Seattle, hoping to catch fire there. They are immediately signed by Sub Pop, and in a strange full-circle twist of fate, they become the biggest band on the planet for a hot minute, before imploding because of drugs or some shit. People who talked shit about them at the Rontoms show will brag to their friends about how they were at one of the first shows of said band and were into them before they became famous.

Blazerdamus has spoken.



Flower Power In 2020

GREEN ROOM DIARIES BY STONED COLD SATIVA AWESOME

I'm eating a weed chocolate bar right now. It came in a package that included a barcode. I purchased it with a credit card, from a store next to the police station. Legal weed is wonderful...unless, of course, you plan on smoking it. Have we forgotten what we came here to do? Bong rips. Blunt hits. You know, pot. The shit hippies fought for. The stuff that "is just a plant." And, yet, here we are, recharging our Millennial devices and smoking oil from a nail. Did we forget about the boomers who came before us?

Here are three things that we need to introduce to the legal weed arena, immediately. Otherwise, the last fifty years were a waste.

Cannabis Lounges

These used to be around, years ago. In fact, Cannabliss—one of Portland's oldest dispensaries (if not *the* oldest)—was (and, still is) one of the best businesses in Portland, weed-related or otherwise. For those who remember the olden days of the late 2000s, it was possible to roll up into one of a handful of clubs (Cannabliss was one of several), buy some chips, take a gigantic vape hit from a plastic bag and sit on a couch, while some white dude in Rasta hair talked at you during a game of Mario Kart 64.

Then, one day, the clubs all disappeared—save for one or two exceptionally shady spots that didn't do the "good vibes" mantra any good. What happened? To the best of my knowledge, there wasn't an incident in which a stoned driver left a weed club and killed a family on the road. Nor was there a ring of underground cannabis sales that ran through these places—if anything, the scrutiny was over-the-top. As it stands today, I believe there are one or two cannabis lounges in Portland (if not Oregon). So, why did they close? Public safety???

The idea that cannabis lounges pose a danger to the community doesn't make sense. For one, bars have fucking parking lots—big ones. Are we really trying to pretend that dozens and dozens of designated drivers and/or coffee-and-food patrons are filling them up? What about gun ranges? Again, I'm a huge fan—but, I'm not gonna pretend that my bong is more dangerous than the hypothetical firearm I would mention in this column, if gun laws relating to medical marijuana cardholders weren't so fucked up. Hell, there's an "amateur skydiving" place by my old house. That's right—you can skydive if you happen to be bored and have fifty bucks in your pocket. So, go ahead and jump out of a fucking plane while drinking and unloading a pistol—just don't smoke pot in public.

Flower-Friendly Vape Products

Look, I'm 40 fucking years old—I like weed. Not dabs, twigs, bombs, tinctures, widgets, pollywogs or whatever you kids are vaping on my lawn. I want raw, stanky, green nugs. However, I do understand that non-combustion (vape) is the way to go, when it comes to health and retaining THC percentage (apparently, a joint wastes 90% of the good shit, when compared to vaporizing). But, when it comes to devices intended to vape weed (not concentrates, but nugs), the market is crap. You can either purchase a rig that requires a home setup and resembles that hookah thing the caterpillar from *Alice In Wonderland* was using or you can settle for a portable device that is *fucking impossible to turn off quickly*. One minute you're pre-heating your Pax, and the next, mall security is asking you why your pocket is smoking.

Compare these flower vape devices to dab pens, oil rigs and the like. Weed oil cartridge

es and tanks are not only one-button, one-hit and easy to use, but they're straight outta *Star Trek*, in terms of the technology. I have a hard time believing that a decent flower vape isn't being produced (or, better yet, already on the market). Why aren't we hearing about them, then? Is there such thing as "Big Vape," keeping the farmer man down? Who the hell doesn't want to taste some fresh Dogwalker OG, fresh off the trimmer's table? If you're reading this and you know of such a device—something that can vape flower with the same quality as an oil pen—then please, promote that shit now!

Weed-Friendly Outdoor Music Concerts

Last year, I had the pleasure of seeing Ween (a band that is nearly impossible to enjoy for five solid hours in a row, without the help of a little cannabis) at a McMenamins (a venue that is literally covered in weed-related art, serves weed-friendly food and is full of weed-infused staff) on the edge of town, in a field (the place is called "Edgefield," if you need any more of a description). And, of course, in between the dozen outdoor bars and cigarette smoking areas, there were several signs reminding attendees that cannabis is illegal in public and not allowed. So, while tripping balls and drinking Jerry's Still Alive Ale (or whatever it was called), I enjoyed songs about cocaine, juxtaposed against a light show and sung by dudes with eyes redder than a Midwestern state—however, two puffs into a joint that I attempted to sneak behind a restroom, I was immediately rushed by security.

It's 2020. Teenagers are using phones to meet strangers to have sex with. Cars drive themselves into other cars. I'm pretty sure I just bought ammo on Wish. Can we have our legal weed concerts yet? Please?

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Thank the aliens above...the holiday season is over! I am, as most folks know, not the biggest fan of winter. Shit freezes. It gets dark at noon. Consumerism forces families into small spaces for short periods of time, resulting in every party involved wanting to avoid each other for another year. Plus, it never snows when you want it to snow. Thankfully, strip clubs keep naked women warm, employed and happy—we are truly a year-round industry. So, if you're still feeling the leftovers of holiday depression, head over to Club Sinrock's new downtown location or swing by Sinferno and warm up next to the fire shows. Now, on to the news...



Introducing Miss Exotic Oregon 2020, Axel

This year's *Miss Exotic Oregon* competition was nothing short of amazing. By the time the final rounds rolled around, the roster of candidates was beyond impressive—a list of nearly twenty performers, all of whom brought their A-

game to the stage. So, when it came time to crown a new queen, the scores were tight and there was genuine suspense, as the winner was announced. Once the winner was crowned, the crowd went wild and it was clear that folks from Portland were happy with the results of an election—in 2019, that's an accomplishment in and of itself.

Now, it is worth noting that *Miss Exotic Oregon 2020* marked the return of bead-free voting (well, one bead necklace per attendee, with no way to purchase more), meaning that the winner was determined based mostly on score from the judges. Personally speaking, I have never had an issue with how prior pageants have turned out—from Taeya's classic *Granny-Gone-Wild* theme to Annie's visually stunning *Pink Panther* set, I truly enjoyed (and respect the crowns of) previous *Miss Exotic Oregon* winners. But, because *any* election or competition ends up in some sort of dispute—usually based on rumors and hot air—there was an extra element of fairness this year, which means that no one can dispute the new queen's crown (unless your conspiracy theories are deep cuts, involving aliens and the Illuminati—but, everyone already knows we work for both of those parties).

So, who won? None other than Axel from Devils Point, who performed a set based

on *A Clockwork Orange*—complete with an actual milk bath and help from her fellow droogs. In my 25 short years on this planet (give or take a decade and a half), I have never, ever seen a theme so “ultraviolent” or fringe (read the book and watch the movie, if you have not yet already) appeal to a crowd that may or may not be familiar with the source material. This, to me, is the sign of a true performer—someone whose theme and concept is clear cut, but is not necessary for the audience to be familiar with, in order for them to appreciate the show. I don't speak much Spanish, but I enjoy the shit out of some Mexican wrestling—showmanship and dramatics transcend language. So, to Axel, cheers for bringing the Korova to the masses.

Be sure to catch our exclusive Axel interview (as well as some sexy photos) on page 20.

2020 Resolution: Keep Politics Off The Pole

I usually reserve this column for local news and events, but since it's a semi-slow month (aside from *Pirates Of The Caribooty*—peep the dates to your right), I figure I'd take some time to remind folks about what exactly “entertainment” means (at least, when it comes to the kind of entertainment offered by the strip club hub that is Oregon). When a

The logo features a black silhouette of a person in a dynamic, dancing pose to the left of the text "eroticcity spotlight". "eroticcity" is in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font, with "erotic" in red and "city" in black. "spotlight" is in a smaller, black, lowercase, sans-serif font.

performer hits the stage, they are selling a fantasy—an escape from the daily grind, complete with stage names and theme music. If you haven't noticed, strip clubs are the last remaining aspect of entertainment that has not been infused with...you guessed it, politics.

Movies, comic books, video games, television shows and music have all been reduced to an us-versus-them, our-team-against-your-team, shaming competition—from all sides. Considering the turmoil that exists on mainstream news, combined with the fact that 2020 is an election year, I want my fellow DJs, dancers, club owners and club staff to all come together in agreement, that we will continue to be an *escape* from the drama. When people are fed up with the constant barrage of political narrative(s), they deserve an escape and, well, we are that escape. Boobs are bipartisan.

Yes, there are issues like FOSTA/SESTA that are both industry-related and political in nature. But, if you take a closer look, neither of the big teams gives two fucks about the adult industry. We're either a bunch of immoral sinners who don't pay their taxes, or part of the misogynistic patriarchy that keeps all women down—at least, according to the elephants and donkeys. To me, however, the strip club industry is the perfect union between capitalism and socialism—a great way for "both sides" to sit at the same stage and appreciate a strong, independent woman who doesn't mind performing naked for anyone, regardless of how they vote (at least, she pretends to not care, but most customers wouldn't know that). I have seen rival gangs and motorcycle clubs put aside their differences at the rack—so, if that's possible, anything is possible.

And, if you insist on being political as a stripper or strip club employee, at least consider running for office. We need more of our kind in government. I mean, if you're looking for someone who is good with money, knows how to put on a show, can kiss ass and pretend to care when necessary, what better fit than a dancer?

**SAT 4 - DREAM ON SALOON
2020 PARTY**

**SAT 11 - REVEAL LOUNGE
PIRATES OF THE CARIBOOTY ROUND 1**

**THU 16 - CLUB SINROCK
MARYJANE'S BIRTHDAY BASH**

**FRI 17 - DANCIN' BARE
PIRATES OF THE CARIBOOTY ROUND 2**

**SAT 18 - XPOSE
PIRATES OF THE CARIBOOTY ROUND 3**

**FRI 24 - CLUB TEASE
GRAND OPENING PARTY**

**FRI 24 - DESIRE
PIRATES OF THE CARIBOOTY ROUND 4**

**FRI 24 - DEVILS POINT
AXEL & PIXIE'S VAMPIRE BIRTHDAY BASH**

**SAT 25 - STARS CABARET (SALEM)
TRAILER TRASH BASH**

**SAT 25 - DUSK 'TIL DAWN
PIRATES OF THE CARIBOOTY
FINAL QUALIFIER**

**FRI 31 - GUILTY PLEASURES
PIRATES OF THE CARIBOOTY FINALS**

**FRI 31 - TOMMY'S TOO
DAISY DUKE CONTEST**

HOW TO DATE WHEN YOU'RE OLD, GROSS, WEIRD AND NO ONE WANTS TO TOUCH YOU.

BY ESMERALDA RUPP-SPANGLE



You are done with relationships. Who isn't? This is 2020, get on the poly-bus, download Tinder, have some dates, make the sex and stop worrying so damned much.

Mike, I know you're reading this, so deal with it.

As full disclosure, I'm a 39-year-old lady who was in a committed relationship for 15 years. Let's do the math. Given that my relationship ended in 2019, that means I haven't dated since 2004, when Tubgirl was still a thing. After an amicable dissolution, I decided to dip my old, haggard toe into the online dating market. Here's what I've learned.

There are some oft-repeated phrases on profiles that could either be assets or drawbacks, depending on your desires. "Ethically non-monogamous" is a great example. This could mean one of a few things: "What she doesn't know won't hurt her," "Unicorn hunters," "We're in denial about not being attracted to each other anymore" or "Single, but my ego is big enough that I think I can bag more tail than yours." I always swipe left on these—not because I have any objection to the philosophy, but more because the phrase "ethically non-monogamous" grosses me out.

Summing up your personality based on the Meyers-Briggs system seems to be all the rage. I am too A (apathetic) to look your letters up, S (skeptical of your ability to assess your own personality objectively) and S (supremely annoyed that this is how we now classify ourselves.), which makes me an ASS. This seems legit, so I'm putting that on my profile.

There is a vast swath of mysterious daters, who post nothing about themselves whatsoever in their profile. I guess photos are supposed to speak for themselves, but when those photos are of things like "tree," "fancy car," "dog" and "lake," I am 100% convinced that you are ugly and boring. Swipe left.

Do not put pictures of your kid on Tinder. This should go without saying, but somehow, it doesn't. I can't even elaborate on this, but

I've seen it more times than I have fingers, so please stop.

Let's also cool it with the gym pics. I get that you are proud of your physique, but please, I don't personally need to see how many times you've nearly prolapsed your anus dead lifting, brah.

It took me a while to learn, but some of these phrases that turn up again and again are easily translated, and include (but, are not limited to) "In town for the weekend" (let me give you herpes), "We can say we met somewhere else" (no one IRL will date me and I carry terrible shame for having to resort to this, and by proxy, so should you), "feminist" (I'll say anything to get laid), "discreet" (cheating), "give me a reason to delete this app" (oh God, I'm so alone), "great sense of humor" (boring and unfunny, maybe clinical depression) and "musician" (unemployed narcissist).

When you actually find someone who seems like they might not be a complete waste of your time, and, if by some magical event, they reciprocate, someone will now have to say hello. 90% of people are not bold enough to do that, so it's probably on you. You've got nothing to lose, so go for it, but be forewarned—even if you've both made a positive initial assessment of one another (and, made the swipe-left agreement that, "Yeah, you seem less than horrible"), there's still a huge probability that your "hello" will be met with dead air. This remains a bit of a mystery to me, but I'm assuming it has something to do with the abject terror of possibly having a conversation with someone as far out of your league as I am.

When you do actually manage to rope someone marginally interesting or cute into conversation, now the dance begins. What sort of discourse is appropriate? Small talk? Do you jump right into soliciting naughty pictures with courgettes, try to make some actual intellectual conversation or move straight into dumping your emotional train wreck on them? What won't scare them off? I like to ask "would-you-rathers" and see how they react. "Would you rather full on piss yourself every

time you sneezed, or no matter what you do, you always smell aggressively of horses?" is a good conversation starter (or, ender...depending). It may lack the directness and cachet of "Can I put the thing in the thing?" but, it's a good vetting tool.

So, now you've actually agreed to meet up. Good for you. Do you go straight for the no-tell-motel or somewhere where you're less likely to get murdered? When you do meet, after all this elaborate dancing around? What if there's no spark? What if they DO smell aggressively of horses? What if, what appeared to be a charming young lady, turns out to be a mob of angry squirrels in a trench coat? That's always the risk with these things and has been long before the advent of the circus sideshow that is Tinder. Just remember to tell someone where you're going, bring your mace, your strap-on and a sense of optimism. Even if it doesn't go anywhere, the worst thing that will probably happen is some awkward conversation. Best case scenario, everyone gets orgasms and no one gets syphilis—but, more likely, you'll just have something 10% more fun to spend your evening doing than crying alone, getting drunk and watching reruns.

Eventually, as the novelty of the thing wears thin, you'll find yourself considering deleting it. But, now you realize you've completely forgotten how to meet people in any other context. Do singles bars even exist anymore? Is your life just going to be an endless loop of swipe-chat-flirt-abject disappointment? The answer is "probably," but you'll never know, unless you try.

That's why I ultimately deleted it. Because, as it turns out, I'd rather be disappointed in person than online—dating doesn't have to be a Russian roulette of internet algorithms. I can decide off the bat how much I don't like you (because I'm too much of an ASS).

Esmeralda Rupp-Spangle is a writer, marathon sleeper, professional flea trainer and aspiring lumberjack. She can be found on MeWe by name, or on Instagram at @EsmeraldaSilentCitadel (but, not on Tinder—sorry, folks).



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Happy
New
Year

THE MONTHLY

COLUMN

BY WOMBSTRETCHA THE MAGNIFICENT

Yeah, I know—an article about New Year's resolutions. Real original. But, this isn't about what I'm doing (or even what you're doing). It's about how to present yourself as though you have grand and glorious dreams, which you will fulfill in the next year. You won't, of course, but the point is to impress your friends and strike fear into your enemies. Now, your hollow boasting on social media can 100% one-up your friends. We're not talking of the ridiculous-but-practical shit, like most people have. Oh, I'm gonna lose 50 pounds. Oh, I'm gonna get healthy and stop smoking a dozen cigars a day. Oh, I'm gonna look up my long-lost grandma and go visit her in the old country, after seeing one of those genealogy sites. No—none of that garbage. You're gonna tell everyone—but not do—one of the following. Bonus points if you actually do it, but, come on, it's a New Year's resolution. Nothing ever comes of those. Instead, you're just gonna make everyone jealous of your dangerously bold ambition. Tell your friends and family that this year, you're going to...

Breed giant slugs in an attempt to sell their slime as a miracle cure.

Run for political office on a "legalize cocaine" platform.

Buy a convenience store and eat everything inside it within a month.

Go to Africa and wrestle a gorilla.

Stay in the USA and wrestle a gorilla.

Invent a new shower hygiene device, that

cleans "all the crevices, even the squirmy ones."

Win a slam dunk competition, thanks to your patented spring shoes.

Eat one of those giant steaks that, if you can finish it, you get it free—the kind served at one of those steakhouses that cuts off your tie, if you come in wearing one.

Set up the world's biggest ant farm in your living room.

See if you can live off a diet of roots and grubs, like primitive man.

Build a fully livable house out of crabgrass and buffalo shit.

Collect every vintage Garbage Pail Kids card and use them to decorate your car.

Sail around the world in a kiddie pool full of gravy.

Hold a public debate on the merits of artificial insemination, while hurling water balloons full of tapioca at spectators.

Turn your garage into a full-service massage parlor. FULL full service. Wink, wink.

Tame and ride the noble walrus across the ocean, or, at least, a little ways across a good-sized lake.

Start a business selling bath towels with a Soviet Russian theme, which "make wet people sad."

Grow a houseplant that satisfies all your needs.

Figure out what the hell spelt is.

Carry around an expensive wireless mic, everywhere you go, so that when someone inevitably tries to steal it, you can yell "my crophone!"

Write a new Christmas carol that includes the word "bitches" at least three times.

Punch an emu (or any other ratite) right in the goddamned FACE!

Set up a food cart that serves weak, luke-warm coffee called a "depresso."

Pelt a petitioner with at least one egg.

Feel up an alpaca and hear its noise.

Create a new deodorant brand with the flagship scent "baby formula and cognac."

Give a dog a bath at a public park—a dog which does not belong to you. And, also, a bath of liquid caramel.

Give blood. To someone. That isn't yours.

Ride and/or die.

Successfully petition Webster's to add "grundle" to the dictionary.

Shave someone's grundle—someone who needs it.

Write a book about how to cook a lavish dinner, when all you have is a 40 oz of Old English and eight grapes.

Invent a giant, smoothbore dildo cannon, in case Godzilla shows up and you need to fuck him in the ass.

Become an older, dirtier bastard.

DJ a wedding of people you don't know by knocking out the initial DJ and beatboxing into the mic, until they give you a free pass to the bar in order to get you to shut up.

Play God... until it gets boring. Then, play Uno.

Cheat at Uno in ways that will make the experts question why you're completely cor-



rupting a family game.

Develop a mobile app that matches people looking to date with people currently taking a dump.

Find a way to use the phrase "because deez nuts," every single day for the whole year.

Figure out what a "hurgusburgus" is; sell it to others.

Beat up every sudoku player you know.

dump truck of chocolate coins.

Be a better ally to people utterly beaten by Pac-Man.

Climb a mountain made of nothing but rich, creamy nougat.

Crochet a series of novelty condoms out of polyester.

Make the world's most unwholesome plate of nachos.

for yelling at everyone that they're doing things wrong.

Realize that your relationships are as depthless as you are—and, that you will never find happiness with another person, because the characteristics you desire in others are just as superficial as your own. However, because you lack the capability to be self-satisfied, you are thus are doomed to a slow, awkward slog toward death, with at-best mediocre people limply pretending to hold your hand the whole way, until something better comes along.

Get a ball pit for your home.

Get a ball pit for your neighbor's home.

Learn how to recycle all that pee you've been keeping in jars. Someone has to want it...right?

Alright, that's about all I have that will fit. Feel free to pick and choose from the list or mix-and-match. You'll totally wow everyone and make it look like you've got it all on the ball, when you say your resolution is to build a 1:1 statue of Muhammad Ali out of beef jerky (or any of the above).

Knock 'em dead. They won't check next year.

By the way, my resolution is to do another one of these next January.

P.S. If anyone does any of these, drop me a line and let me know.

Wombstretcha The Magnificent is a writer, counter-counter-terrorism expert, Ray Charles impersonator, cat taunter, sushi evangelist and retired rapper from Portland, OR. He can be found at Wombstretcha.com, on Twitter as @Wombstretcha503 and on Facebook (and MeWe, the not-shitty Facebook) as "Wombstretcha The Magnificent."



Master the art of making a perfect Philly cheesesteak in the shower.

Memorize *120 Days Of Sodom* and quote it to people like it were the bible.

Try to market a revolutionary 3"x4" index card.

Sack Rome.

See if you can sell your lawn clippings as an inexpensive, vegan meat substitute.

Bet on sporting events, using nothing but a

Find out where Amelia Earhart's remains are and then use them to digitally model a sex doll with her likeness.

Same with Jimmy Hoffa.

Spend your downtime weeping into the open bell of a tuba.

Dig a hole in the ground and list it on Airbnb.

Make a luxury candle that smells like Screech (Dustin Diamond) from "Saved By The Bell."

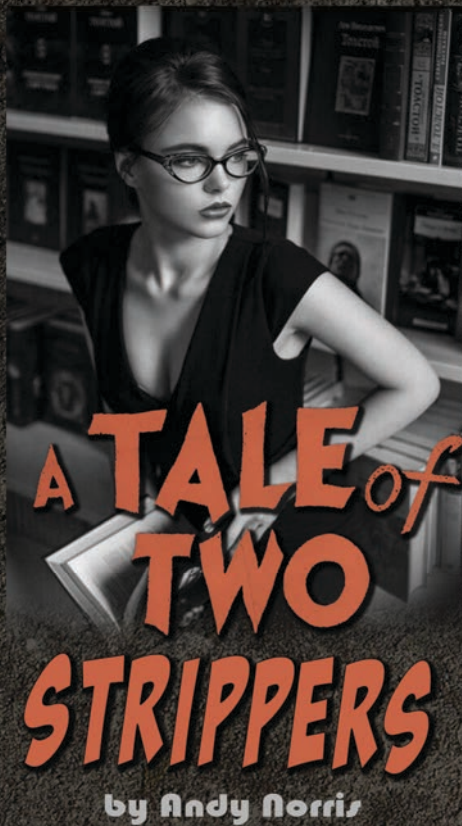
Visit a foreign country and get kicked out,

Axel
Miss Exotic
Oregon 2020
From Devils Point





EXOTIC
PINUP JANUARY
2020



It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It all depended on what you did with the hand you were dealt. Some hands were better than others, of course—but, like it or not, you were in the game.

Mariah opened the door to the taxi and tossed her beat-up canvass rucksack inside. She hopped into the backseat, upbeat and energetic. Her hair was unkempt.

"Hi, how are you today?"

"So far, so good," replied the driver.

She pointed.

"See that guy? He's coming with us."

The man-of-the-day pushed open the glass door and sauntered out of the U-Haul office. He gazed side to side, looking cool, but his cheap sunglasses hid furtive eyes. He slid into the cab next to Mariah, then acknowledged the driver.

"Hey man, how you doin'?"

"So far, so good."

Mariah giggled.

"Is that what you say to everyone?"

"If I didn't, I'd be lying."

The driver pushed the button on the meter.

"Where to?"

Hanna poured four shots of espresso into her travel mug. Today was a big day. She stepped into her combat boots and laced them up. On mornings this cold, she usually drove. But, today, she would take the bus. She expected to spend much of the next few days in jail and didn't want to deal with a parking ticket, on top of all the other impending nonsense. She sprinkled three days worth of food into her fish tank, said goodbye to Herman and George as they rose up to eat and stepped outside into the cold, dark morning.

Mariah bounced excitedly in her seat, as M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes" came on the radio.

"I love this song," she declared. "I used to dance to it at work."

The man-of-the-day looked at her from behind his shades, "At work?"

"Yup, I stripped in this town for years. I won all the awards—all of 'em...I swear, this lady has drums in her soul." She started singing along.

*"I fly like paper, get high like planes,
If you catch me at the border,
I got visas in my name,
If you come around here, I make 'em all day,
I'll get one done in a second, if you wait.
Sometimes I think sittin' on trains,
every stop I get to, I'm clocking that game,
Everyone's a winner, we're making our fame,*

guy who used to come into the clubs selling 'roses for the ladies.' He's dead too. He and his wife were shot, while sitting in their car. Murdered. Something to do with their gangbanger son. *Portland famous.*"

The man-of-the-day was impressed.

"So, you were a star?"

"Baby, I've got more stars than the Milky Way."

*All I want to do is...bang bang bang bang...
and a klik—cha-ching...take your mon-ey,*

*All I want to do is...bang bang bang bang...
and a klik—cha-ching...take your mon-ey.*

Hanna had been an aggressive defender of animal rights for the better part of a decade. She despised factory farms, as well as the destruction of the wild. Any form of animal torture or abuse infuriated her and she made it her business to be well-aware of such occurrences on an international scale. She carried a righteous anger with her on a daily basis, and her friends gave her the nickname, "Mad Hanna."

*"Pirate skulls and bones,
Sticks and stones and weed and bong,
Running when we hit 'em,
Lethal poison, for the system."*

Yale's Skull And Bones Society included members of the timber company Weyerhaeuser, along with many members of the Bush Crime Family and countless other liars, thugs, murderers and thieves. Two summers back, Weyerhaeuser started clear-



bonafide hustler making my name."

"Portland famous, I was," Mariah declared. "Portland famous. Like the guy with the Mickey Mouse ears that begged for dollars on the Hawthorne Bridge. Portland famous, but he's dead now. Suicide. Or, the

cutting eighty-eight acres of pristine, old-growth habitat, with plans to liquidate the timber in Portland's booming construction market. Hanna got wind of this and it made her mad. So, she climbed to the top of an ancient sitka spruce and lived in a tent on a platform, all summer long, so the

tree wouldn't be cut down.

"All I want to do is... bang bang bang bang... and a klik—cha-ching... take your mon-ey,

All I want to do is... bang bang bang bang...



and a klik—cha-ching... take your mon-ey."

Mariah closed her eyes and smiled towards the sun. It warmed her face.

"I have no family. I'm a beam without a sun."

Not long ago, she had a family, and at that very moment, her eight-year old son was sitting in school, wondering what happened to his mama. "What happened to you mama?" he thought. "Mama who used to read me books and snuggle up to me at night. Where did you go mama? What did I do wrong?"

Mariah continued, "I was two years away from a neuroscience degree, but I had to leave all that. Had to be free."

The man-of-the-day thought to himself, "Neuroscience? Yeah right. Crazy bitch..."

But, it was true, Mariah had indeed been two years away from a neuroscience degree.

*No one on the corner has swagger like us
Hit me on my burner prepaid wireless
We pack and deliver like UPS trucks
Already going to hell, just pumping that gas"*

Hanna was going solo on today's action—didn't tell a soul. Usually she worked with others, like when she and friends disguised themselves as construction workers and scaled the World Trade Organization headquarters in Washington, D.C.—hanging a giant banner that called attention to the

evils of the whaling industry. Or, when she was one of a dozen activists that repelled hundreds of feet off the St. John's Bridge and hung suspended in place for more than a day, temporarily blocking a barge trying to deliver an offshore oil rig to the waters of the Arctic Ocean.

*"M.I.A. (Missing In Action)
Third world democracy
Yeah, I've got more records than the KGB
So, uh, no funny business"*

Hanna didn't have more records than the KGB, but the KGB had her records. Nobody at the agency had ever looked at them, but they had them, simply because they had duplicates of all records at the F.B.I. and C.I.A., thanks to a stealthy hack by the Chinese firm Huawei, gifted to Putin by Xi Jinping.

Mariah was alone in the motel room; the man-of-the day had gone to the liquor store. She slid the needle into her vein and pushed the brown liquid inside. It was too much and her knees buckled as she hit the floor with a thud. She could barely move, but she felt so gooooooood. She was a beam without a sun. She managed to crack open her eyelids, inches from the bright, shiny steel of the air conditioner—the last thing Mariah's eyes saw were her own eyes, look-

ing back at her.

Hanna slipped the bike lock around her neck and clicked it into place. She was now locked to the doors of the Oregon Department Of Fish And Wildlife headquarters and nobody was going inside until the agency withdrew yesterday's order to begin killing wolves or the lock was cut off (and she was arrested). Word quickly spread about Hanna's action, and soon, countless other protesters (and the media) showed up. Her mugshot was the most heroic mugshot in the history of mugshots.

While in jail awaiting her arraignment, Hanna was visited by the executive director of a local environmental organization. She was immediately hired to run the organization's wolf outreach program. Having achieved an environmental science degree from Evergreen State College—paid for exclusively from years of hard work as a stripper—it was Hanna's first job in her field. Later that year, one day before her presentation as the keynote speaker at a wolf conference in Yellowstone National Park, Hanna hiked deep into the Lamar Valley. There, she saw her first black wolf—a large, Alpha female, sitting amidst the sagebrush and surveying the lowlands below. Hanna looked through her binoculars and saw the black wolf looking right back at her. After a moment, the wolf turned back toward the lowlands, toward the elk and the antelope and the buffalo, and decided it wasn't yet time to hunt.

*Some some I some I murder
Some I some I let go
Some some some I some I murder
Some I some I let go"*

Hanna watched the wolf disappear into the sagebrush, the woody branches combing the fur on her tail, as it slipped through. Sitting there in the valley, among the sagebrush, amidst the mountains, trees, buffalo and wolves, Hanna felt as close to the Creator as she ever had. And, as for those who happily destroy Creation for their own greed? Oh, what Hanna would do to the evil rich, if she were God.

"All I want to do is... bang bang bang bang... and a...klik—cha-ching... take your mon-ey,

All I want to do is... bang bang bang bang... and a...klik—cha-ching... take your mon-ey."

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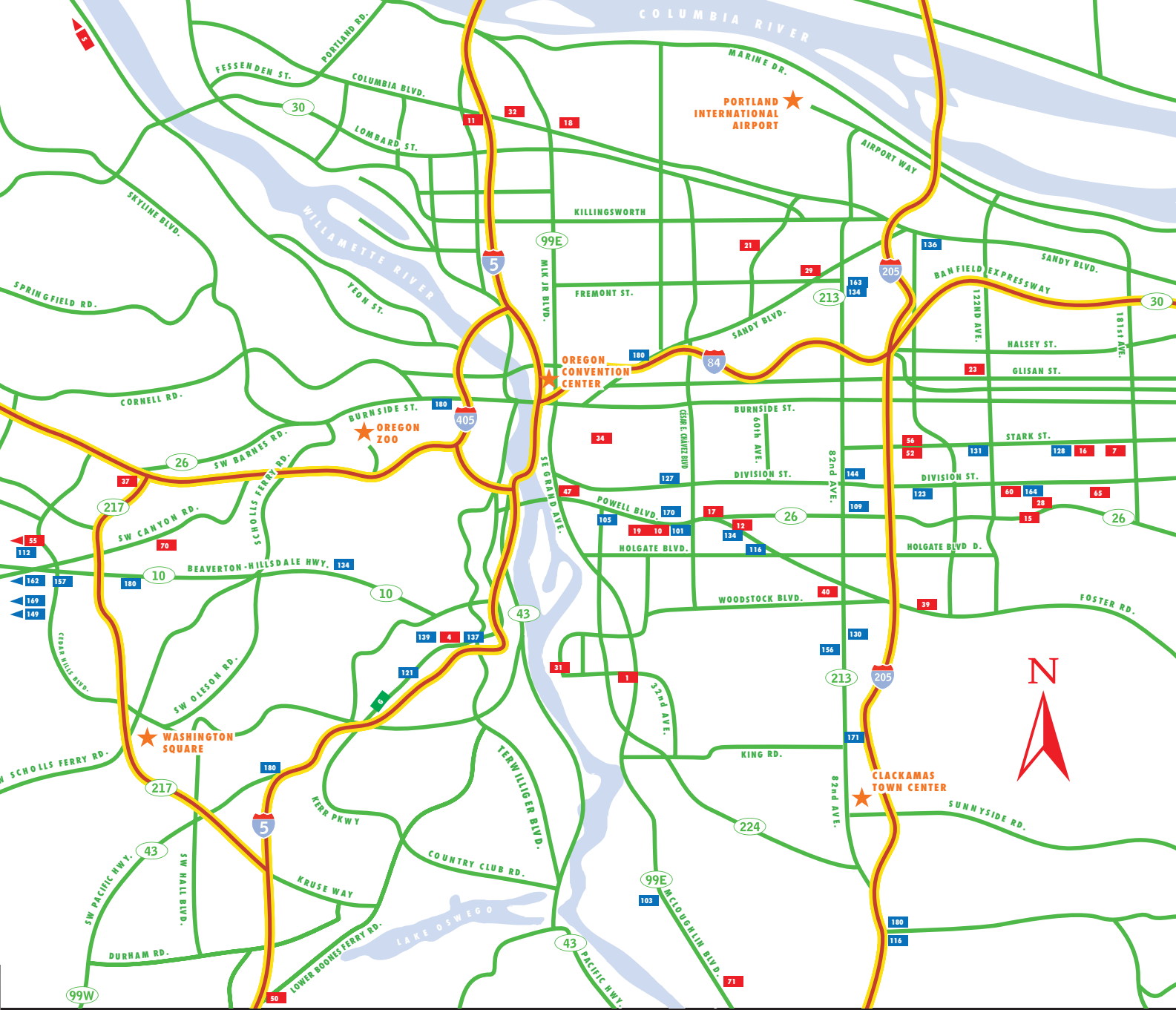
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ASK A BARTENDER

BY DISCOUNTTHERAPIST

They say a bartender acts as a therapist. I decided to make it official. My only credentials involve listening to hundreds upon hundreds of people's problems, over more years than I can admit. Let me wipe the bar down for you, put down a fresh coaster, then pour you a drink. Pull up your stool and tell me all about it. Remember, I've heard it all. If you have a question, please write DiscountTherapist@Yahoo.com. You will remain anonymous. Also, you get what you pay for.

Go To Work, Gotta Get A job

I hate my job. My boss is extremely difficult to work with. All she seems to do is criticize me, knock me down and brow-beat me into submission. I can't seem to do anything right. It seems to have gotten worse since she's gotten pregnant. I need this job, but I'm not sure how to make our work relationship congruent.

-Indentured

Dear Indentured,

First off, work is never going to be fun.

There's always going to be difficult people, aspects of the job you dislike, long stretches of painful boredom and mundanity. People think bartending is a party. Sometimes, it is...but, rarely. My job is a job and most of the time it is hard work. I have to deal with gross stuff, drunk and belligerent people (and also difficult coworkers, at times). Never mind what I do now. You've come to the right person. Before I threw my keys on the break room table and walked out on my last job, I was a high-volume corporate retail manager—for 17 years. Retail was literal hell—as you can imagine—but, they sent us to countless seminars on how to manage. One class I actually taught dealt with the subject of dealing with difficult people in the workplace.

Finally, a question I'm actually qualified to answer.

First, before I give you some tools, ask yourself if you have a problem with authority. Some people don't thrive in the work environment, because they "don't like to be told what to do." If this is the case, you will never succeed or be happy

in a teamwork environment. You need to open your own business or work hard to become the boss yourself, but, even then, there's always *someone* above you. If this is the case, that's your problem, not anyone else's, and I suggest you grow up. Also, ask yourself if you don't like a woman telling you what to do. Some men hate it and I've been there often in my career. Be honest with yourself. Again, if that may be the case, the problem is you.

Let's say those two things are not the issue, which I hope they aren't. You mentioned she was pregnant. She could be dealing with hormonal issues and physical discomfort and that could make things worse. But, it sounds like this problem was going on before the pregnancy. I've worked with a lot of pregnant women in my time and I never knew them to turn into oppressive work nightmares, so let's cross that off.

So, maybe this person really is a horrible boss. You're not doing anything wrong and they don't know how to manage. I have seen a lot of ill-equipped managers in the past, and when I left my career, it

was due to working for a higher-up that was a fucking terror. They exist out there.

Here are some tips I taught in my seminar for dealing with difficult coworkers:

1. When they criticize you—no matter how shitty they say it—thank them for what they said and repeat it back to them calmly, so they know that they were heard. Then, ask them for some things that you are doing right, so you can continue to do them. This will challenge the person to not only see your value, but it shows that you're willing to work with them.

2. Always remain calm. If you appear angry or upset, it will be used against you. It's not subservient, it's taking the high road.

3. Make lists every day of tasks you've completed. If the boss comes to jump down your throat, you can show them a physical record of work you've done and ask them what other things you can add to the list. Also, you now have a record for corporate, in case the boss claims you are slacking (or, if they have unrealistic workload expectations).

4. Have a secret journal and record everything that was said to you (and anything that made you feel unfairly treated). Record conversations on your phone, if you can. These will come in extremely handy if you need to go to court or file for unemployment. This is key. If this person is really shitty, this could also help get them out of there.

Hating your job sucks. We have to spend so much time at our workplace, that it feels like purgatory when it's awful. I left my career and never looked back. I said goodbye to my vacation days, bonuses, 401k, health insurance and torched that immaculate resume, to pour beers and shots. Remember, you can always leave. If you really hate it and you can't work with this person, you can find something else. It's NEVER too late to start over.

-DiscountTherapist

Mortality

Growing up, I was always sheltered from death. My father's mom died suddenly from a brain aneurysm when he was 13 and it was incredibly traumatizing. As you might suspect, this had an impact on my

upbringing. At seven years old, I was not allowed to go to my grandparents funeral—I wasn't even told about it. In college, they put my dog to sleep without telling me. We were never even allowed to light candles, because it reminded him of a funeral parlor. Then, at 27, in some hellish irony, my father got cancer that ravaged his body and he died an awful, painful death. In his final moments, he was clinging to me as his lung filled with fluid...all I could say, through the tears, was "don't be afraid." I was not ready for that. After a couple years of spiraling out of control, leaving a handful of friends and lovers in my wake, I found my footing. Ten years later, I'm still incapable of handling death. Most recently, my ex-best friend's father passed away—he was my father's best friend to boot. Unfortunately, we had a massive falling out two years ago, which seems like a good excuse to avoid the issue. I just can't get myself to pick up the phone or even write him a letter. I feel this trauma has leached into my love life as well...bouncing between relationships, never allowing myself to feel anything too real and ultimately drowning those emotions at the bottom of a bottle. I hate that it seems normal to me now. How the hell do I keep my past from ruining my present and stop myself from turning into a totally repressed, apathetic, isolated asshole?

-Thanatophobic



Dear Thanatophobic,

When I was 18, my father's mother—my grandmother—was found wandering the streets in her underwear, in a bad part of town. She didn't know who she was or where she lived. Two days later,

she died of a stroke. It was the first time I think I'd seen my dad cry. I curled up in his lap in his big easy chair, like I used to do as a child. I had no idea what to say. My dad was so bigger than life, gregarious and 6'4". It scared the hell out of me, to see him this way. I didn't go to the funeral, because I was scared. No one made me. I regret not being there. I'm sure my dad needed me, but I didn't know how to do it.

When I was 22, my mom took her own life. She left no note, no reason and I'm still not sure how to cope with it. Her funeral happened to land on 9/11. I remember waking up that morning, trying to get dressed in something appropriate for a funeral for someone who gave you life—not giving a shit about planes flying into a building. My fucking mother was dead. I didn't even get to say goodbye. I knew my mom was a little mentally ill—that was obvious, even as a child—but, why? I struggle to wonder why she would leave us behind.

After that, shit got weird. I didn't know how to cope with it. I packed it down, like a Christmas sweater under the bed. I went about my business, like nothing had happened. I was exhibiting behaviors that I didn't realize was a result of this, like cheating on my boyfriend with

multiple partners. I would wake up in the middle of the night screaming, feeling like I was choking on my own tongue. I had to move my bed away from the wall, because it felt like I was in a coffin. I would lie awake for hours trying to wrap my mind around the fact that I *will* die

even though it was torture to watch. I'm an only child, so it was up to me. Over the next few years, every time I opened the door to his house, I expected to find him. I tried to move in with him, but he wouldn't let me. My dad was committing suicide, as well. He didn't want me to know that he was purposely drinking himself to death. He passed when I was 27.

I was all alone now.

I went through a lot of fear about death that first year. I put my ass in therapy and quickly lied my way right out of it, convincing everyone that everything was fine. I was afraid to face it. There was so much to unpack. She kept asking about my mother and I couldn't talk about it. I told her what I knew she wanted to hear and she graduated me. This is when I had my very first drink of alcohol. It made everything better. I had never drunk before then. Then came the string of shitty, unavailable and booze-soaked abusive relationships to follow. Because of the deaths, I was scared to have kids. What if something happens to me and I leave a child like this? I vowed to never have one. I also think I purposely pick shitty people to be with, because I can't attach—which you mentioned—and, that is common, according to the therapist I paid to trick. I also literally couldn't function without a drink, following in dad's footsteps. I shared my story with you because I want you to know that the after-effects of unexpected deaths manifest in a lot of similar ways. I want you to take a small comfort in knowing that how you are living your life, your fears and your inability to commit to people is what happens. You aren't strange or broken. You also don't have to feel bad if you feel distant or clinical around friend's struggles with death. I'm either the best or the worst person to talk to on the subject matter. I'll give it to you real, won't sugarcoat it and say the things others *won't* say. It's either appreciated or offensive, and I don't care, either way.

How to cope with death? You've had an entire life of fearing it, either through your father's stigmas and your own

experiences. It is scary for everyone, once they pull the wool off their eyes and realize that this shit is really going to happen, that you are going to be completely alone in that moment and nothing is going to help you. Once you're woke to it, it's hard to go back. Numbing yourself out is the easy option—trust me, I know. It is an option, but life is going to speed by you so fast doing it. I know you can't turn your brain off or "*live, laugh, love*" your way out of this reality. I mentioned I was in therapy for this and they didn't have any really helpful coping mechanisms that worked for me, personally. Therapy could ABSOLUTELY be helpful for you. If you've never discussed these issues with a professional, I recommend you



do, if you can afford to do so. It won't solve your fear of death, but there can be a lot of insight that can be gained and give you more tools to get through these feelings. You have to be ready to be honest, though. If this bartender can fool the therapist, anyone can—and, it's a waste of both your time and theirs. It's like going to rehab with a suitcase lined with drugs. If you're not ready to unpack, don't bother. I will share with you some things that have helped me cope. I cannot say these will work for you, but this is what I do:

1. I'm an alcoholic—self-medicating. This, I do not recommend.
2. I work out a lot. Not for a hot body, but it helps with the debilitating anxiety, PTSD, depression and insomnia. It's definitely not fun, nor easy to want to do, but it helps a little.

3. Prescriptions. I hated them, but a lot of my friends swear by them.

4. Most importantly, this will sound like contrite bullshit, but, slow down and enjoy things. We know we are going to die. Try to enjoy the very small moments that don't suck. Did the St. John's bridge look pretty today? Did someone make you laugh? Are you grateful that you're able to afford the fancy bread? This will sound stupid, but when I wake up and feel my PTSD symptoms, I force myself to list at least a few things that are going well in my life. You know, like I have a nice job that pays me, I have the best dog in the world, I have at least two friends who are amazing and put up with my crap...shit like that.

5. Talk to a person who is much older than you. There's a reason why other cultures revere their elderly. As their life travels on, they really get a frame on what's important and what isn't and it can be inspiring.

6. Try to understand that it's literally going to happen to you, either way—no matter what you do. If you fear it, stress, it will still happen. You can get hit by a Tri-Met bus tomorrow. You could die of old age at 100 years old. If you can cope with that, you'll feel better.

7. Hate life so much, you beg for the sweet release of death. Also not recommended.

The weird thing about being a human, is we all feel so alone and so misunderstood, but we are all so very much the same. Every single person on this planet is afraid of death. Regardless of country or culture. Since the dawn of human existence. That's why the concept of heaven was made—to make us feel like there's a place for us after we pass. The pain of the human experience is knowing our death is eventually on the table. Is that an answer to your question? No, but just know you're not alone. Everyone is scared.

-DiscountTherapist

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TALES FROM THE DJ BOOTH BY DJ HAZMATT



WHY MUSIC SUCKS THESE DAYS

"Back in my day, music used to be good."

Every generation has, at one point in their early 40s, uttered these words.

Naturally, this sentiment can be written off as a natural byproduct of old age. But, aside from boomers being boomers, it's important to note that pop culture (specifically music) is unique, when compared to things that evolve without making the elders angry. For instance, take food. We may have more options than our grandparents did, in terms of vegan, gluten-free and organic choices, but for some reason, you don't hear older folks talking about how "steak used to be good" or "these damn kids and their tofu." This is because, aside from flavor-of-the-minute trends (no pun intended), the meat-and-potatoes basics have not only stuck around, but they've gotten better. If "red meat" was a genre of food, the classics are still getting airplay and the up-and-comers, like fake meat and ass, are active and welcome.

However, you *do* hear a lot of "fast food used to be better," which I will address shortly.

Compare a certain type of food, car, gadget or other commodity to a musical genre (such as "rock," "hip hop" or "techno"), and you will see a different story—the classics grow old and die off, leaving the new generations with modern replacements that don't live up to the genre's name. Put simply, Nickelback will never be Slayer. But, in twenty years, Nickelback will be seen as better than whatever they're passing off as rock in 2040. For some reason, "new music" just keeps getting shittier and shittier (unlike pizza, Teslas or computers). So, if we consider the fact that old people are beyond impressed

with modern Hollywood films, computer animation, digital literature and other forms of media, what is it about music, specifically, that turns us all into conservative traditionalists, yearning for a return to the "golden age" of whatever genre we enjoy?

I have a theory—and, I could be way off here—that, when compared to any other type of media product on the market, music is the easiest to mass manufacture, push on unsuspecting crowds, control the market share and rake in a profit from distributing it. Therefore, it continues to become more and more corporate and watered down as time goes on, with no visible end to the cycle in sight.



What makes music particularly easy to exploit as a commodity, compared to, say, movies or television, is a combination of three factors: ease of consumption (it can play in the background while you do other activities and does not require an active attention span), cost and ease of production

(all music is a combination of eight notes, the structure of which repeats throughout genres as home studios get cheaper) and expanding, centralized control of media companies (a total of *four* parent companies own the vast majority of the market).

This last factor—corporate capitalism—is key. For example, monetizing any form of media on the public requires an attention span, a huge budget and the ability to file a copyright claim against anyone who shares it without paying dues. So, it makes sense that corporate media would be better off pushing a two-minute song and collecting royalties from anyone who uses it as background music in their YouTube video, as opposed to trying to collect royalties on a feature-length film or a three-hundred-page book. Play a copyrighted movie on a screen at your nightclub and no one cares. Play Biggie Smalls without paying BMI or ASCAP first, well, see you in prison.

Unlike music, visual media can be consumed secondhand, at a lower quality, without a significant loss in enjoyment—this is noteworthy, as audio is the hardest type of media to bootleg at consumable levels of quality—Limewire had tons of "theater rips" for movies and "notepad versions" for books, but super-low-bitrate music was rare. Part of this is due to the fact that human ears cannot compensate for things in the same fashion as human eyes (otherwise, people on acid would be hearing voices and not just seeing cool visuals). Put simply, folks can bootleg a movie on a shitty camera or read a poorly photocopied book and still enjoy it, but audio is unique, in that a lower quality makes it almost impossible to consume—a low-resolution film with good audio is watchable, but a high-def film with shitty audio is almost impossible to enjoy. So, the pirated versions of audio recordings are closer (if not equal) to the quality of the source material, which tends to make collecting on illegal sales easier from a legal

standpoint. Basically, there is no “screener copy” or “advanced manuscript” version of the latest hit single—as in, low quality or altered copies aren’t worth reselling—and the only way to share a song with others is to illegally copy and steal the original recording (or suffer a “HOT NEW URBAN SINGLES DOT C-C-COM” drop every ten seconds).

What does this have to do with new music sounding like trash? Well, just think like a corporation—if the goal is to squeeze every nickel you can from a marketable piece of media, it would make sense to target and control the easiest-to-distribute, hardest-to-bootleg-without-a-lawsuit, no-seriously-a-robot-can-tell-the-feds-if-you-steal-a-Metallica-song type of media. Think about it—a three-minute clip of a feature film is called a “teaser” and can be shared among film reviewers and fans alike (all day, without consequence), but a three-minute clip of *All Eyez On Me* is called a “single” and sharing it can result in a huge fine or a lawsuit (even though Pac is technically dead). So, in this aspect, mainstream (as in, barcoded and properly mastered) music is the equivalent of fast food—ready for mass distribution, intellectual property claims and consumption by the masses. But, most importantly, the ability to generate money from licensing fees, copyright strikes and intellectual property claims in the music industry is insane—every time you hear “All I Want For Christmas” in the mall, Mariah Carey sees another comma on her bank statement.

If corporate music is like fast food, consider how hard it is for a mom-and-pop burger shop to compete with McDonald’s—probably the same degree of difficulty that an independent, talented and worthwhile band feels, when attempting to gain popularity in an age of Mumford’s Wife’s Sons or A\$AP Swaggy. So, it’s not that “burgers suck these days”—it’s that the fast food chains are on every corner and *they* are continuously getting worse and worse, because their expanding market share means quality burger joints are becoming more and more rare (possible foodborne illness pun intended).

At first, it makes no sense, that in an age where anyone can record, produce and distribute music for next to free, there are still the same six songs playing on every speaker. That is, until you realize the obvious: music doesn’t suck worse these days—*mainstream* music (i.e. “fast food” music) does. Since the same four companies are pushing the same dozen hit singles through every single speaker possible, this is analogous to fast food becoming more and more avail-

able (which, it is—I had Taco Bell delivered the other night because I wanted to feel like more of a piece of shit than I already am) and also shittier and shittier in quality (seriously, it’s not even cheese at this point). Add to this the age of convenience and the most well-off generation in history (don’t worry... give it twenty years and we’ll pass the title on) and you get the perfect storm of laziness and greed.

Why go to the family Italian kitchen that costs thirty bucks a plate, when there’s a new Kentucky Taco Hut opening at the mall? Why bother seeking out one of the multi-zillion independent and talented rappers, when Spotify can spoon feed you the same four Cardi B songs about boss queens who smoke mad blunts and the fuckboys who love them? I mean, if we’re going for more female representation in hip hop, why are we sending our worst? Young M.A. should be more popular, but the girl at Dutch Bros has no idea who she is. Sorry, that was a tangent—but, you should really look her up (Young M.A., not Skylar).



Going back in history, every fast food chain was, at one time, a local one-off that was focused on making quality food. Remember how Taco Bell tasted better as a kid? Well, that’s because Taco Bell had fewer locations and had to compete with actual taco shops. The Taco Bell website even says that “Glen Bell open(ed) his first Taco Bell restaurant in Downey, CA, serving what his customers called ‘tay-kohs.’” But, as time went on and more locations opened up, Taco Bell lowered their price of a double beef burrito combo meal with fries and a Playstation to \$0.99, which put the Garcia Family Taqueria out of business. The old Taqueria becomes a

new Taco Bell and the cycle continues. This isn’t just Taco Bell—McDonald’s has a history that is so mom-and-pop (well, more like pop-and-pop’s-shady-friend) that movies have been made about it. Without wanting to do any more research regarding the history of fast food, I am only to assume that Wendy is a real person (and not just some troll on Twitter who red pills normies with dank memes) and that Dairy Queen used to serve, well, dairy.

This is exactly how pop music works, as well: grass roots beginnings lead to mainstream domination. Back in the day, the reach was so small that even big companies had to put in effort. At one point in time, “pop” bands had to at least be talented enough to attract new fans almost instantly—partially because there wasn’t a screen or speaker in every house, store, restaurant, car, shower or baby stroller—oh, and the fact that we have tiny computers in our pockets with personalized ring tones doesn’t help. For instance, The Beatles and Elvis were pushed on one of the three television channels

lar bands like The Hollies were still able to make a living, because being “famous” as a professional musician was the exception, not the rule.

Flash forward to 1990, and if it’s not on VH1 or MTV, it’s basically nonexistent. As time went on and a continuously centralized handful of record companies colonized the audio landscape, it became easier to control the airwaves. Instead of record companies seeking out musical acts with the marketable talent required to make money, musical acts started seeking out record companies with the money required to make them talented. Sure, the slave-to-the-record-contract phenomenon has been around for a while—The Beatles were technically a boy band (they just existed in an era where instruments were required to land a gig). But, now that the kids are okay with some computerized beats and pitch-corrected vocal technology, there’s no reason for record companies to prioritize talent over marketability. Take the drums away from Ringo, replace them with a machine and you’ve got a lesser Backstreet Boy—ready to be pushed on teen girls and creepy old men.

Put simply, McDonald’s is no longer serving real hamburgers and pop music is no longer serving up real music. There’s a formula that equals profit, and any deviation from it will be rejected by the corporate gatekeepers. Basically, you know how your favorite taco place is probably a super-hidden spot that your ex-girlfriend showed you, that one time you took back roads instead of the freeway? The one that no one knows about? Well, that’s because there’s a fucking Taco Bell on every corner and people are just too lazy to seek out other options. And, as the world’s population continues to expand and corporate control continues to centralize, this will just get worse and worse—give it ten years and the word “taco” will be intellectual property of Time Warner AOL Soros Weinstein Industries Inc. But, at least there will be a Taco Bell on every corner.

I’m a huge fan of capitalism, but I’m also a huge opponent of corporate control—to address this, I feel like a dollar is the last actual vote that a consumer has, and like votes, folks throw their dollars away on the big names, because they’re too scared to give Andrew Yang’s Noodle Kitchen a shot. To be fair, the trust consumers give to corporations was, at one point in time, justified—in the early days of fast food, when actual ingredients were used, it was nice to know that there were multiple asses (and a possible stock ticker) on the line, in the case

of contaminated food or unwashed employee hands. *Some* regulation and oversight is good (oops, just lost my Libertarian card). But, corporations aren’t in the fast food industry to make tacos taste better, nor are they in the music business to make hit singles sound better. It’s all about finding the formula, automating the production and pushing it on the masses.

This is why we went from “country music sucks” to “Hey DJ, play ‘Old Town Road’” in less than a decade. This is why you can pick up a guitar and accidentally play a Coldplay song. This is why “rhythm and poetry” has become “swag and slurs.” The easier it is to market, the easier it is to push on people and the easier it is to convince the masses that they like it.

So, it is up to you, the consumer, to seek out and support what you actually like (as opposed to just settling with Burger King

as a response to whatever crap we’re being force-fed on the radio.

Is music getting worse? Yeah, but just the fast food kind—let us not forget that there is now organic, free-range, gluten-free, gender-neutral, racially inclusive fast food that can be ordered via iPhone. Corporations will listen to a strong enough market, whether that be Millennial vegans or music fans—we just have to present the demand.

You, as the consumer, can dictate what gets co-opted by the mainstream. Remember, you are half of the feedback loop. If you want to hear good shit on the radio (for a few years, at least, before it becomes watered down a la dubstep), send a message by seeking out and supporting independent (or, at least not well-known) artists. Promote them on your social media pages. Play them for your Tinder dates. Put the baby to sleep to the mixtape you bought



and Ed Sheeran). The consumer—not the record companies—can dictate what the market values. If you need any proof, take a look at the early ‘90s alternative music scene. Some stoners in Seattle decided that glam rock sucked, so they created grunge music and a handful of indie record labels. In no less than a few years, Kurt Cobain’s suicide—due to the depression associated with fame—was being reported by Kurt Loder. If a genre called “alternative” could be repackaged and made corporate (not to mention gangsta rap, punk rock or whatever that new genre of hip hop full of tattooed teenagers with felonies is called), then the corporate machine is unstoppable—but, it will always give in to the independent, grassroots trends that start on their own,

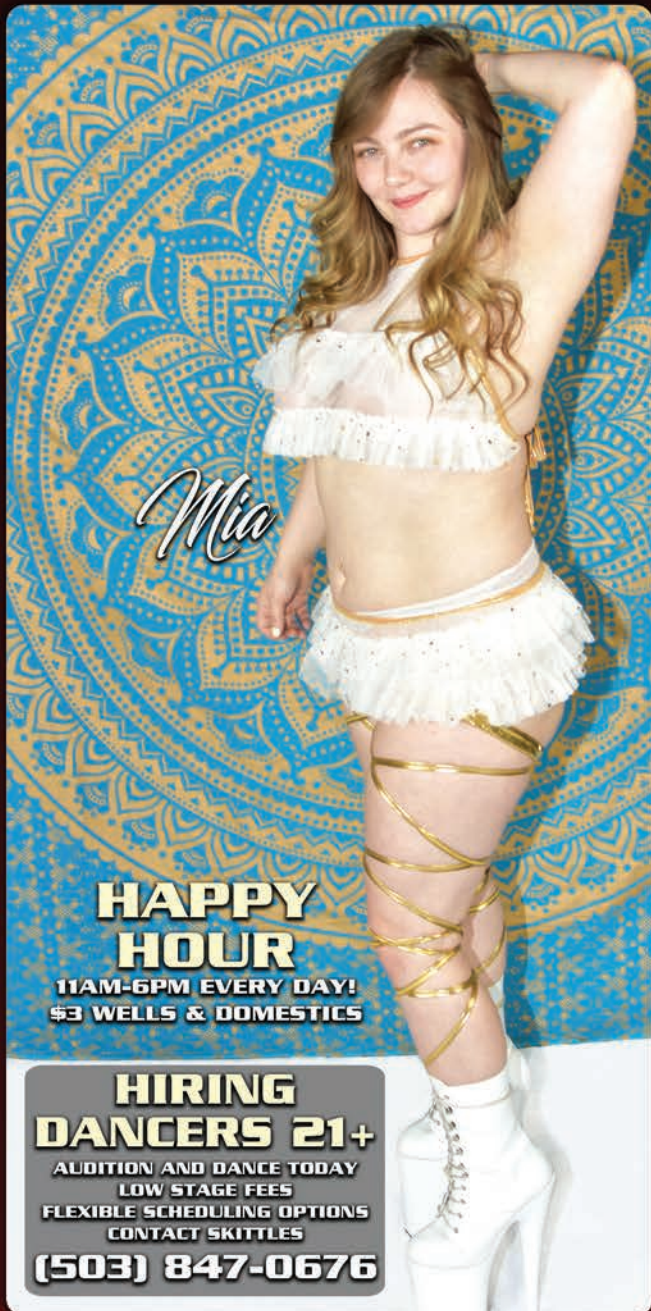
from the guy outside the mall. Eventually, corporate record companies will catch on and your favorite new act will get popular for a week, before they sell out and tour with Ed Sheeran.

Unless, of course, you’re a Juggalo. In which case, congratulations on being part of the only subculture to ever prove itself impossible for the mainstream to digest. Whoop whoop, ninja. Whoop whoop.

I just updated TalesFromTheDJBooth.com with a shitload of archived stories. Bored? Head on over and give the archives a look. And, as always, bookmark Xmag.com for other articles by my aliases.



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