

the dirtbag times



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**the dirtbag times is a
magazine for dirtbags
by dirtbags.**

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TAKING NAZI SALUTES AT FACE VALUE

I grew up around the Greatest Generation. It seems I spent as much time in funeral homes, "old folks homes," and nursing homes as I did on playgrounds when I was a little kid. My dad played music in VFW halls. My aunt was the social director in her retirement community. I heard lots of old war stories. I learned at a young age that Nazis were bad and swastikas used outside of an historic context were bad.

A handful of years later I began playing music and going to all ages shows. Many of those were punk rock free-for-alls. It shocked me that an active subset of punk rock culture celebrated white supremacy under the swastika. Nazi skins would terrorize punk rock shows in the late 1980s looking for fights. I discovered that some punk rockers, even though they swore they did not support the ideology, would still use Nazi iconography just to piss people off. I understood the sentiment of wanting to make the older generation as uptight as they made you, but I did not agree with their means.

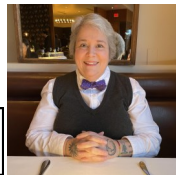
It seems that this idea of using fascist and Nazi propaganda symbolism has now come to middle America by way of President Trump's continued normalization of white supremacy and his close relations with European fascists and a certain South African apartheid-weened billionaire. Trump's former cabinet member Steve Bannon threw a Nazi salute at the Conservative Political Action Convention last month. Elon Musk has now flown the Sieg Heil twice in the last two months. Some conservatives are a little uncomfortable and some love how much it gets under the skin of those offended, just like those punk rockers did in the 70s and 80s. The big difference is that in the 1970s-1980s context most of the populace had lived through WWII and many had fought against the swastika in the armed forces. One did not have to look far to find a veteran of the European theater. Many of them had seen Dachau and Auschwitz. If someone drew a swastika on their jacket or made a Nazi salute it was deeply offensive, if not for the mass death and torture but because it questioned their military service and all it stood for.

40 years later and the Greatest Generation has passed. Americans no longer have a direct connection of memory to World War II. The First Amendment allows all manner of hate speech, while in Europe the use of Nazi iconography is expressly prohibited. Americans have forgotten what the swastika, Nazism, The Holocaust, and Fascism actually means. Millions of Jewish people died under those failed ideals. Sieg heiling is weird, but not gut punch offensive to them. The right wing's embrace of this iconography is especially dissonant, seeing that the right wing also rabidly supports Israel, a country founded because Jews were displaced in Europe by the very acts those icons symbolize.

I tend to believe Nazis when they show you they are Nazis. It is never cool in my book to throw out the straight arm in earnest. Conservatives kid themselves that this is a phase or subversion. Allying oneself even cursorily with movements that murdered millions of innocent people is never subversion. It's just plain evil. — **KELLY MENACE**

JUST CUZ THE WORLD HAS LOST ITS MIND DOESN'T MEAN YOU NEED TO LOSE YOURS

I have come to believe that caring for myself is not self-indulgent. Caring for myself is an act of survival. — Audre Lorde



Yes, I wake up each morning, reach for my iPad, and pretty immediately wish I'd just stayed asleep within 30 seconds. It's like the world has turned into an all-you-can-eat buffet of existential dread, and at this point we are all very full, thank you very much. And yet, I wake up the next morning and do it again. Now, in my defense, my spouse has taken a social media/news-cycle hiatus, but since she is part of a group that has been targeted by the current administration, I feel like I need to stay informed in case there is any immediate action that we might need to take. But, I also know that there is "informed" ... and then there is "doom scrolling" ... and they are not necessarily the same thing. So, some reminders for you ... and me ... and all of us, really.

It's been said before and I'm gonna say it again ... we now need to think of our daily lives as a marathon, not a 100 yard dash. Those of you who know me know that the idea of me using a running metaphor is fairly laughable, but I do know enough about marathons to understand (at least, in theory) that the name of the game is stamina and endurance. That's what we're going to need not just today, not just tomorrow, but in the weeks, months, and years to come. And part of being able to endure next year is engaging in some self-care now.

Touch Some Grass (Literally, If Necessary)

Yes, everything is overwhelming right now ... apparently, that's part of the game plan. But, in reality, even I have to acknowledge that the sun (at least so far) still shows up every day. Find the things that remind you that not everything is falling apart. Find something real that grounds you: your favorite mug, a cozy blanket, the dog that you have to take for a walk ... again. Step outside, take a breath, and remind yourself that the trees do not know who is president, and the birds will keep doing their thing no matter how many pundits scream on television.

Curate Your Doom

Ugh! Social media. Yes, it can keep you *some-what* informed and connected with friends, but it is also a fantastic way to spiral out of control with anger, worry, fear, and depression. Be intentional about what you consume. Set time limits. Mute that one friend whose posts only serve to make you irate every. single. time. Follow accounts that make you laugh, teach you something new, or post nothing but Rico the porcupine (Cincinnati Zoo), derpy cats, or pictures of baby goats in pajamas.

Find Your People (Remember They Are Shell-Shocked Too)

One of the worst parts of the current political climate is the sense of isolation it creates. But

the reality is none of us is all alone – if you're reading this, you're already in a community of some amazing folks! Reach out to others. Check in on those you haven't heard from in a while. Have fun with friends. Do whatever you need in order to remind yourself that community still exists. It's okay to do things that bring you joy. Really. All of the effed up things about the world will still be effed up tomorrow so if you absolutely have to worry about all of it, put that on tomorrow's to do list.

Commit to Small Acts of Defiance (or at Least, Small Acts of Kindness)

You may not be able to fix the entire world, but you can make a difference. Maybe that means volunteering, donating, protesting, calling representatives, or just being an unreasonably kind person in the checkout line. The point is to remind yourself that you still have agency. Even in the smallest of ways, you are pushing back against the chaos. Being fully you may very well be the greatest means of resistance available to you. Use that power to embolden yourself and others.

Give Yourself Permission to Rest

You do not have to be outraged 24/7 to prove you care. You do not have to read every article, respond to every argument, or solve democracy before dinner. Burnout is real, and resting is not the same as giving up. Take a nap. Watch an absurdly bad TV show.

Laugh Whenever Possible

There is a reason that "laughter is the best medicine" became an age-old adage. Laughter, joy, happiness, fun ... these things are essential to our well-being. Plus, those things are just downright enjoyable. Yes, the news sucks in so many ways, but find the absurdity, embrace the irony, and let yourself laugh at how utterly ridiculous it all is. Because if we can't laugh, what else is there? (I mean, I know: existential dread, but we are trying to avoid that, remember?)

Final Thoughts (Or, Another Reminder That You Are Not Alone)

The world is an effing sh*t show right now. Fact. But none of us is called upon to carry the entire weight of it on our own. Stay grounded. Stay connected. Take breaks. Keep fighting in whatever way you can, but also, let yourself breathe. Yes, it's scary... yes, it can be overwhelming, but there is still kindness, there is still beauty, and yes – there is still Rico the porcupine (not kidding, y'all, you need to check him out).

Hang in there, friends. We're all just doing our best. And, one way or another, we'll get through this together. — PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER

THE GREAT AMERICAN POLITICAL FREAK

If you are scared by what's going on in The Great American Political Freak Show, please read these thoughts and join me in changing the way we talk about what's happening in our country. Note: I'm writing this after being engaged in a pretty heated debate, so if I come across as angry, I apologize and assure you, I'm not. I also want to say that I will NOT discuss the current events.

For context, I'm going to be vulnerable: I've spent years in therapy two of which were learning the Internal Family Systems model, which details every person has various "parts" of themselves that emerge from time to time. These parts are not inherently "bad" or "good," but they can affect our behavior, our lives, and all our relationships for better or worse. These parts exist for a reason, which is to say that we acquire them based on personal experiences, events, and history. Like our emotions and trauma, it does no good to pretend these parts are not real or unimportant. In fact, the more you dismiss and suppress them, the more likely they are to appear and demand attention--sometimes in extreme and catastrophic ways. The objective of this therapy is to let your healthy, authentic "Self" govern your behavior/life rather than these lesser "parts." This is achieved by: 1) learning to recognize the parts for what they are, 2) acknowledging and addressing them appropriately, and 3) empowering and teaching your "Self" to lead more effectively.

So here's my question and proposal: What if we learned to view our country through this same lens? What if, instead of dismissing and invalidating the "dumbasses" from whatever political party opposes yours, you acknowledged that it's a REAL part of our country. That it EXISTS FOR AN IMPORTANT AND VALID REASON. That we acquired it because of our country's collective history and experience. What if we dealt with the trauma instead of covering it up with campaign posters and platitudes about "making America great again" and "Punch all Nazis in the face."

Did we, as a nation, ever really deal with the trauma of 9/11? Nope. We called it "a triumph of the American spirit" and then sucker punched the wrong bully. What is the consequence of that nation-wide repression?

The consequence, my friends, is that parts of our population are emerging, en masse, from the

darkest shadows of our nation's trauma. These parts are angry, they are vengeful, they are scared -- and for good reason.

A large part of our country is terrified and ashamed and broken. We're scared of unemployment, we're ashamed of our debt and our inability to make ends meet, we're left broken by a system that is designed for us into perpetual subjugation. We are an entire generation who called "bull" when we got handed a busted economy and a devastating unemployment rate -- not to mention an atrocious healthcare system. You know what happens when an entire generation of adults gets treated like a brood of insolent teenagers? **REBELLION! Revolution! Radicalism!**

The problem, as I see it, is that our country is being run by "parts." There is no togetherness, no integration. No balance. No harmony among radically competing interests. And this problem will continue to escalate, in increasingly extreme and catastrophic ways, for as long as we cling to our name calling, our mud-slinging, our MINDLESS, incessant posting of inane, reductive internet memes that make a barely funny joke out of very real trauma, and our willingness to fight -- **WITH VIOLENCE.**

So, I'll ask my question: What if, instead of all this banner-waving and attempting to silence anyone with a differing point of view or political opinion, we learned to recognize these parts of our country for what they are? What if we learned to acknowledge and address them appropriately? What if we actually dealt with the trauma? What if we asked our parties to sit down and shut up so a healthy, authentic version of our country can come forward and run the show?

I'm not going to tell anyone who to vote for. I honestly don't care who your Team Captain is. What I want, is for all of us to start putting our egos and our pride and our violence and fear aside so we can have an honest conversation about the mess that's ruining our lives.

Mark my words: this is either the end of the world as we know it, or the beginning of its restoration. And if there's one thing I learned in therapy, it's that the only way to HEAL is to get real with your shit.

K. PEACE. I'm out. I love you all. — *TISH JACKSON*

RENTED MULE BECOMES LED ZEPPELIN

For better or worse, Led Zeppelin have had an enormous impact on rock music. The very concept of rock star decadence, pompousness, and pretentiousness comes straight from Led Zeppelin. Without Led Zeppelin, the "classic rock" radio format would be filled with hours of dead air (Before you go "if only" this dead air would likely be filled with the likes of Journey, REO Speedwagon, and Foreigner). Led Zeppelin signaled the transfer of rock and roll from teen rebellion that happened to financially lucrative to corporate rock BIG BUSINESS. Make of that what you will.

Becoming Led Zeppelin covers the start of the band up to their album *Led Zeppelin II*. Their fan base will likely cry "fowl", but it makes sense as this era covers the beginning of the band to their ascent to rock stardom. Rock star fame stories all start sounding alike; VH1 rockumentaries anybody? Further explorations of them as king of the mountain are out there (See the book *Hammer of the Gods* for ample coverage of their rock star era). Also, I would have walked at any mention of the album *Led Zeppelin IV*. If I never hear "Stairway to Heaven" again it will be too soon.

The pre-fame footage of the band members is by far the most interesting. Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones were in demand session men playing for the likes of Shirley Bassey (on the James Bond Theme "Goldfinger" no less), The Kinks, Petula Clark, and The Who. Robert Plant was a hippie ne'er do well vocalist looking for his big break in music. John Bonham was a working musician playing gigs with any number of bands. Unfortunately, there was not much in the way of interview segments with Bonham because not many exist. Unfortunately, he refused to give

interviews.

Jimmy Page's tenure in The Yardbirds gave him further status/experience in rock music. After The Yardbirds imploded, Page put together a band initially called "The New Yardbirds" for a tour of Scandinavia. The footage of this tour is among the most interesting of the documentary; confused fans not sure what to make of this band calling themselves The Yardbirds. The New Yardbirds became Led Zeppelin; a name inspired by Keith Moon.



My big take away from becoming *Becoming Led Zeppelin* was how savvy Jimmy Page was about the business. He shopped around a completed version of Led Zeppelin's first album and only signed a record deal that insured no creative interference from the record label. The film thankfully does not have any talking heads outside of the band members

themselves. Filming the band watching footage they are discussing as they watch it is an inspired touch.

As *Becoming Led Zeppelin* progresses the film becomes less interesting. The more famous they became the less interesting the footage was. There is no need for full song videos of the band's "hits" which are widely played to this day in footage that is probably widely available and frankly not very interesting. The low point was the segment for "Good Times Bad Times," a laughably bad montage of historical events of the 1960s on a par with that ridiculous Billy Joel video "We Didn't Start the Fire".

Overall, I would say wait until it streams to see *Becoming Led Zeppelin* and pay no more than 3-5 dollars for the privilege. — RENTED MULE

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PEP TALK

I don't like all of you. I probably don't like some of you. But YOU, you're cool.

Why do I have to remind misfits we're misfits? What the fuck y'all? We were so fucking opposed to the "norm" we rebelled from innocent childhood to shaving our heads and dyeing our hair crazy colors. Challenging gender norms. We were anti-authority.

We didn't fit in then and we shouldn't fit in now. All these MAGA fucks are just the bullies and dumbasses we went to school with. They outnumbered us. We couldn't stand them then but for whatever reason we give two fucks what they think now. Ewww. Gross.

Years ago, I said America has always been inherently racist and there hasn't been a time of non-racism. I was met with white woke people in bands I was friends with criticizing me for making something out of nothing. Let it be known, Joel Hoyle was the only one that agreed with my comment. If you don't know Joel Hoyle, too bad. He's legit.

I'm currently enrolled in two history classes. One is an honors class "Myth, Rumor and Disinformation in American History" and the other, the Atomic Bomb. EVERYTHING I WAS TAUGHT (in grade school) WAS A LIE.

I have studied over the texts of the Lost Cause and the Confederacy, Jim Crow era white supremacy and the diary of a US President. Our history was molded to mold us. To control us. Americans weren't shown the devastation of the atomic bomb in Japan after it had been dropped. They weren't allowed to distribute images at all in U.S.

The amount of violence Black America and immigrants have been put through in this country is appalling. Police brutality. CIA creating a crack epidemic. Racial stereotypes perpetuated in history and culture by Plantation Owners funding it all the way back in the civil war. Violence against women. The eradication of native peoples from their lands. Look at the history of this country and tell me you are proud to be an American.

Our presidents were garbage. Washington used teeth pulled from his living slaves mouths for his dentures, not the whitewashed story he had wooden teeth. Lincoln was a racist. People act like 45/47 is something new. He isn't. Lots of horrible people built this country. They're the ones with money. If you have money, you have power.

Normal people do annoying shit like drive souped up Jeeps with their fog lights on as they ride your ass. This is okay to them. They are loud and obnoxious and don't give a fuck because that is what being an American is. Blowing up colored explosives, scaring the shit out of wildlife, pets and PTSD folks for our country's birthday while being eaten alive by mosquitos in the back of a pick up truck is American.

That all sounds wretched to me.

Because we are such fucking brats about gun control and free speech, I like to use it to terrorize my fellow Americans. If I am FREE to say what I want and be who I am, guess what? Imma ruin your whole fucking day. I WILL become the name that isn't allowed to be mentioned in your household.

Because Americans have ruined everything I believed America was supposed to be. I used to LOVE America. I considered myself very patriotic, even as a punk rocker. I was raised believing our country was a good, moral and decent society. It was John Wayne. Then we found out how fucking horrible John Wayne was.

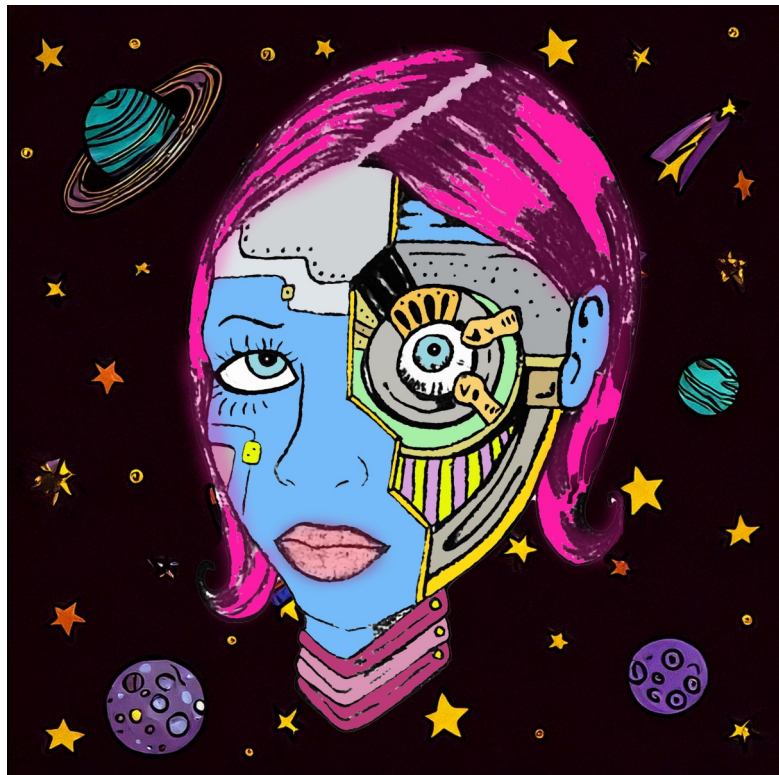
We are the bratty youngest sibling of all nations that pouts when we don't get our way. Fuck that. Read Marxism. Be Nihilism. Dye your hair crazy colors. Don't quit standing up for what you believe in. You are not one of them and you never will be. Life made you think and feel differently. Get out there and be a fucking nuisance. A menace. Make a ruckus. Play loud music. Create art. Do everything you can to make people in this country uncomfortable because at the end of the day, you are after all an American. — *CREEPY HORSE*



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TISH JACKSON





I LIKE BEANS!!!!

I like beans, beans taste good! — The bean-themed Descendents cover band I want to start

Beans rule and I'm here to tell you why so that next time I see you we can talk about BEANS!

Beans are healthy and versatile!

Want protein? Want fiber? Want vitamins? BEANS! They're a nutritional powerhouse and you can have them in any shape: bean shaped, burger shaped, crispy shaped, refried shaped, soup shaped, hummus shaped! If you're wild, you can even make them brownie shaped!

Beans are cheap!

A pound of dried beans is like two bucks. That's like four cans-worth, AND they taste so much better than canned! Plus you can put them in old pasta or pickle jars and have a beautiful rainbow of beans lining your pantry shelves! Everyone will ooh and aah!

Beans can support small farms!

I'm in the Rancho Gordo Bean Club, where I get six pounds of fun beans sent to me every quarter, and a lot of the beans are heirloom beans! The kinda beans that have been grown regionally in Mexico for hundreds of years and are being forced out by bean monocultures! Beans that are grown on only one farm, and buying the farm's crop of fun, rare beans means they can keep growing for another year! Beans benefit us and the people who are growing them!

Beans buck the pervasive meat-eating culture!

I'm sorry, but I do NOT want to smooch someone that eats meat!

Beans are good for the environment!

Did you know that beans can add nitrogen to the soil? They can help repair old, floppy, used up soil! Peanuts do the same thing, thanks legumes! And a pound of beef takes 1800 gallons of water to produce. Beans? Less than a fifth of that!

Beans are delicious!

Especially when you make them from dried! You can add all sorts of flavor that doesn't exist in canned beans (but canned beans are a-ok if that's what your life calls for! Beans are still beans!). Throw in some veggie stock cubes, some garlic, onion, and other fun aromatics, whatever herbs you have lying around that are about to wilt into oblivion, and you have yourself a pot 'o beans!

Learn food from other cultures!

We have some fantastic bean dishes in American culture — cajun red beans and rice, Texas chili (fight me), baked beans, and crispy black bean burgers. But eating beans can open you up to so many more cultures! Falafel and hummus from the Middle East, giant marinated beans from the Mediterranean, cassoulet from France, Italian pasta e fagioli, Egyptian ful mudammas, dal and curries from India, sweet bean desserts from all around southeast Asia, and refritos, pot beans, charros, and all the other amazing beans we get from Central and South America (my personal favorite bean region).

Beans are having a moment!

Have you been noticing beans getting more press lately? New York Times Cooking has been cranking out the fantastic bean recipes lately, Ali Slagle's last cookbook had an entire fantastic chapter devoted to beans, and we've been getting bean-centric books from Joe Yonan and Steve Sando, the Bean King himself! Beans are no longer relegated to the role of peasant food or sad side dish. They're now the main event!

We love soybeans, too!

Soybeans are great! They have TONS of protein and can be turned into all kinds of fun stuff, like soy milk, tofu, TVP, and the world famous Butler Soy Curls! Did you know that something like 95% of the soybeans grown go to animal feed, which is an incredibly wasteful way to get your protein? Skip the middle-cow and eat soybeans!

Beans let you assert your physical presence!

If you're new to beans, your body will tell the world. You're not used to all that fiber, and it's crying out from the trumpet attached to your rump! Use this special power to assert your physical dominance! You're now part of the 3% of the American population that actually gets enough fiber! Toot-toot!

Beans are musical!

And now, a selection of my favorite songs to sing about beans

Beans, Beans, the Magical Fruit

Beans, beans, the magical fruit!

The more you eat, the less you toot!

Here is where it breaks down into a spoken word explanation about how eating more beans and acclimating to having fiber in your diet actually makes you fart less

I like beans!

I like beans! From my head down to my jeans! (To the tune of the I Like Eggs song from the 90s)

You can grow your own!

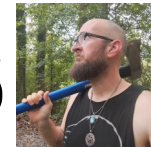
Did you know you can pop a bean into the ground and grow it and have bean babies in a few months?! I bet you did a science project in elementary school where you planted a bean in a clear cup and watched it grow!

Other cool beans!

Coffee and vanilla are also some cool beans! Whenever someone tries to describe something boring as "vanilla", remind them that vanilla is an orchid that can only grow in conditions that are just right, and has to be hand pollinated. She is more valuable than gold, and so are you!

BEANS! — KATIE KILLER

TOYS



I see a storm in the distance,
Nothing but Blue Skies beyond that.
These days I feel indifferent from where I sit.
Looking up at the peaks before me,
I disintegrate into white noise.
Your silence is a protest but bombs make better toys.

And Humanity it SeeMs has lost all it's dreams
As they watch from Every Screen, to be informed by deceit
I look back into Me.

I feel the flood cascading Over.
Let the rain wash the blue away
these days i am feeling humble from where i sit.
Looking down in the valley below me I manifest
all this Noise
now gather lift around and see
OUR LIVES ARE NOT YOUR TOYS

And Humanity it SeeMs has lost all it's dreams
As they watch from Every Screen, to be informed by deceit
Don't look at me....

In this darkness there comes a light
we must understand there's always gonna be a fight.
Let the Revolution come.
OUR LIVES ARE NOT YOUR TOYS
— MOON FROG

MENTAL ESCROW

Slum filled mental corridors
steaming from over-thinking.
Feel free to feel — to heal,
under the microscope
the ameoba divide,
just as your anger does as it thrives...
— WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

STILL IN THE RACE

Rude, crude, and socially unacceptable
Vile & repulsive,
but loveable from a far..
Curator of the obscure
falling forward at it's finest,
someone someday will love you if you try.
Are you famous yet?
Impress them with your prowess,
let them never know,
you acted as though it was all painless.
— WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

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SHIT, SHOES, & FABULOUSNESS

(DON'T GIVE UP THE LAST TWO)

"The times, they are a CLANGING!" said a minstrel once (not). I'm saying it now.

I lived a dark, dark 2024 (relieved only by the min-istering presence of Pam, my son Paul taking me to Wales, and a visit to my daughter Cesara and our amazing grandson, Nicco). So, um, yeeeeee-aaaaahhhh, it was actually a GREAT year, full of light ... that I insisted on missing much of the time because of the great cloud that hung over our country, which cloud is now pouring sheets of piss over all that's decent, natural, and cromulent.

Tending to see things at their worst, I pissed on not just my joy but also my capacity to do something. All around me, the people I know and love treated me to love and light, granting me the energy to act. But I didn't. I worried and fulminated about the doom that was coming.

So why am I not doing a four-year-long Told Ya So dance?

WTF? YUCK!!

Doing that and doing what I did in 2024 didn't console me from psychically abandoning my basic hope, joy, and reason for living. Severing myself from the unique weirdness I generate projected an abstract paradigm that seemed full of heartfelt concern and battling evil, but was ideational masturbation — without the benefit of an orgasm.

I didn't see that my worries and fears were disembodied because Papa Culture taught me that "Kiddo, intelligence is language, ideas run the mind, and formulas put ya ahead of the curve! Fuck your intuition, ya brat!"

Get this, though: This is our civilization's idea of success — boys with ideological and nuclear toys, crashing them into each other (or poor Zelensky).



They sit back and watch how idiots like me, as well as whole tribes and countries, can be overcome by panic and fear that is entirely illusory. They're making atrocity the order of the day.

And, as I found out in 2024, especially November through now, that fuckery will go till I take to heart that, "Hey, Babs! You aren't inside the story they're telling (or mauling)."

I can't offer myself as an example because, HELLO^^, did you just read what I told you about how I mishandled 2024? I can at least see that the world is going through a terrible time right now. So, how do I not internalize that?

By first of all admitting that I'm silly, vulnerable, and all too ready to scream that the sky is falling. Yup. Such a reaction is, well, the right reaction to have. Call shit, "Shit!" and don't spray it with Poopourri, okay? Shitters gonna shit, sometimes right on your shoes. Clean it up if they won't, if only to spare your neighbors the stench. Then remember that each of us does have neighbors ... and friends, family, loves, coworkers, and so many other souls whose shoes are covered in shit.

Call the rabid wolf a rabid wolf. Don't stop speaking truth. I'm not a savior. Neither are you. Yet, you and I are unreplicable souls of beauty, verve, and kick-assness that the world needs to have, otherwise, there's all shit and no shoes. Frankly, I wear some fabulous shoes. I ain't takin' em off. Neither should you!

I love you, Peeps! — BETHANY BEELER

HAVE YOU EVER LISTENED TO TOOL?



The Hammered Carpenter and I are sitting in a dingy sports bar, watching the Fire-Aid Concert live with the sound off. The subtitles are several full minutes off from what's happening on screen. I am trying to tell him something about poetic meter and its expression in modern rap – specifically the evolution from troches to dactyls. We never make it past iambic pentameter. This isn't the first time we've had this conversation, this isn't the first time we've gotten stuck here.

Later, as he drives me back to my car, he tells me – not for the first time – what a great band Tool is. As he rhapsodizes, I say something about just never having given them much focus. I don't say, but I think, "I am never going to 'get' Tool." And then. He says the magic words. The words that Tool fans say. Unintentionally condescending, he says, "It's just that it's music written for *musicians* so you really have to kind of understand that stuff to fully appreciate it." My eyeballs slam into the back of my skull. Tool fans. It's not the Hammered Carpenter's only flaw, but it might be his biggest.

Days later, as I am sifting through the remains of our not-often-enough visit, the lyrical meter conversation and the Tool conversation mush together. We've talked about both of these things so many times, but maybe never on the same day. The seed of a question begins to take root – is it possible Tool's lyrics are as *technically* sophisticated as their drum lines? I don't care about the content, what about the meter?

I pull up the lyrics to "Ænema" because that's the song Hammered Carpenter was trying to sell me on. And there it is, right there after the first verse – "Bullshit three-ring circus sideshow," a non-rhyming spondaic couplet. And it's so aggressive. And well placed. And it wouldn't have worked if they'd used just one unstressed syllable. I keep going. Dactylic dimeter at the refrain, "Fret for your..." and then cretic dimeter at the "learn to swim." This is wild. This is ancient Grecian war poetry. This is fascinating. The verses are too complex for me to count out on my phone, but there's an order there. Is he using four syllable feet? I'm going to have to print several copies of the lyrics and write all over them before I'll feel like I've done this right.

I am pulled down a billion rabbit holes – Shakespeare didn't know he was writing in iambic pentameter, he just really cared about the way it sounded when his words were spoken, and it was in style at the time. Or maybe we made all of this up? Maybe poetic meter doesn't exist, and this is

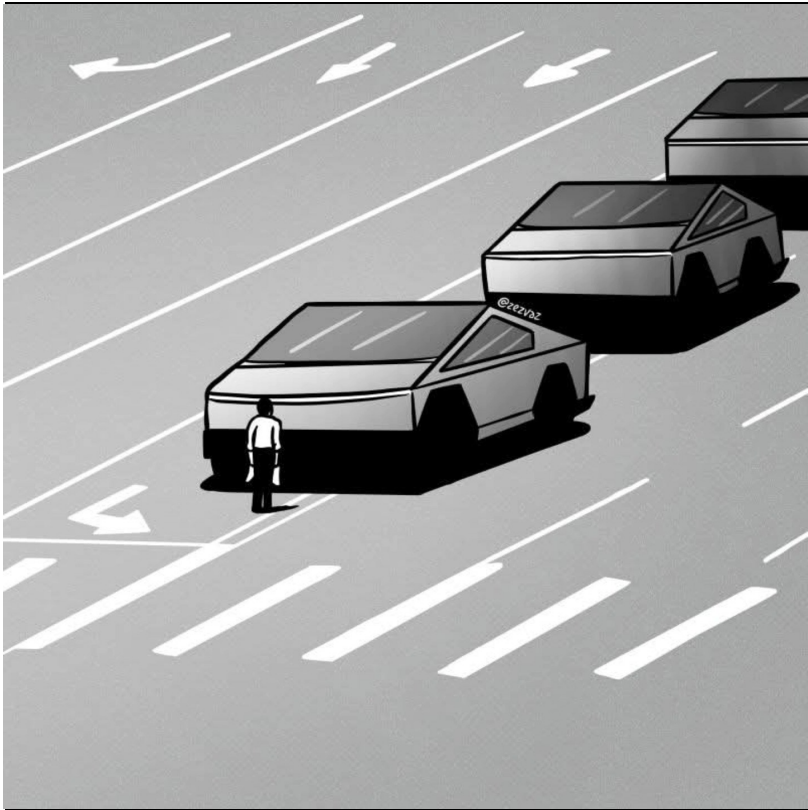
just something a bunch of scholars forced onto old texts just for the sake of making a discovery? Or if meter is real, maybe Maynard James's classical background led him to internalize these rhythms without knowing it? Maybe he's just following the drum lines? If we have a recording of lyrics, what matters more in finding the meter – the way the author sings them, or the actual stresses on the syllables as they are written? In "California Gurls," Katy Perry forces stresses on to every syllable in the word "California," making it into a pair of spondees that line up just right with the actual spondees in "fine fresh fierce." If that's allowed, what are the rules? Are there any? Does any of this even matter anymore?

I spend days chewing on these questions, wishing I had access to a printer, dying to find the meter in the verses. I play "Ænema" on repeat. It's all I can think about. I still think the parts of Tool are greater than the whole, but damn if I haven't stumbled onto a part that interests me.

I am standing at the convenience store after school drop-off later that week. One of my daughter's classmate's dads is in there, buying his breakfast beer. He's easily my favorite school parent. We talk about our kids, about the flu, whatever while we wait in line, but at the back of my tongue the real question is itching. "Hey, have you ever listened to Tool?" I've given thought to one song. I'm not a Tool person. Everyone hates this question. I don't ask him.

I give it some thought later, though – and here's the thing. Tool is an invitation to think more deeply about the art you're consuming. It's an invitation to dig and delve and discover and analyze, to extrapolate the patterns and assess how they fit into everything else you know. It's an invitation to push past the surface of things and really allow yourself to examine the things you find beautiful. And the stupid question – "Have you ever listened to any Tool?" – is a shorthand. It's really saying, "Have you ever thought about the things I am thinking about? Are you asking yourself the same questions I am? Because this weird element that I have latched onto is taking up an enormous proportion of my brain space and I am absolutely dying to parse this out with someone and I really believe you could be the person I share it with. Would you wander into this maze with me?" Or sometimes it's just some bro who thinks he's the first person to catch the Fibonacci sequence thing. — SPRING PEARSON

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MICROMUSING

Hear the one about the two Nazis goosestepping around the Oval Office? Oh, you already heard it.

We know it's useless to fret over the actions of the Fuhrer Felon and the Tweet Nazi anyway. The current cowards in Congress will do nothing, and the Supreme Court is itching to reward their lord.

All we can do is to do the best with what we have control over. Take care of your family and friends, reach out to your neighbors, hunker down until there are options.

Listening to "Your Rules" by Andrew W.K. at high volume on repeat helps too. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**

BRING PURPLE NIGHT

Open the door, bring purple
Night. Lessons in gentle light
Swayed by blossom wing and
Violet array beckon song from far
Awakened day leaves branches un-
Touched, tickle trim in place. No
Trace of memory. Pain into
Fleece lay my head for
Want of dream, something said.
Unsaid.

Open the door, violence slumps along in that
World of the strong, knowing, not unknown.
The bird has flown her
Roost, and we have all night to
Dawdle the stars in our lap,
Lake water tinge and slap
My heart to see you open the door and
Come in.

— **BETHANY BEELER**

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AND THEDIRTBAGTIMES.COM**

THE TAO OF HUBBLE

Hubble, the eldest pupper of *the Dirtbag Times* printmeister Craig Wilkins passed last night. Just a couple days after my birthday.

I have known Hubble since Craig received word that a puppy had been tossed in a field, abandoned and left for dead. I don't think that puppy ever realized how dire his situation was, because shortly after he was in the sole ownership of Craig.

Hubble, Hubble is playing the best game of keep away and Craig has walked into the room to this shitshow. Don't worry, no possums were hurt. Craig was able to get it out of Hubble's mouth and tossed him into the yard where he made his great escape.

Hubble and I would bond more when I stayed with Craig during my last breakup.



I remember inspecting the new foundling. Although he was small in stature due to being a puppy, I was alarmed at the size of his paws. He was going to be so much bigger than this chubby belly with paws no bigger than someone's foot. And boy was he! Hubble, as he was named by Craig's daughter, was a big strong boy.

I would argue with Craig that he should train his dog. I was old school and strict. Craig didn't agree and wanted his dogs to be who and what they were. Hubble and I didn't see eye to eye in his puppy years but he'd train me in time.

He was big and rambunctious. He'd jump all over you. He didn't listen. He did what he wanted. It drove me crazy but now I look back and laugh. How beautiful of a site to see, Hubble in all his glory running up fences chasing squirrels and barking at nothing.

I remember coming over to help poor Craig before his back surgery. He had just laid down and was in so much pain. I had let the dogs out while I was cooking. I could hear Hubble rapping at the back door. I walked from the kitchen to the door to let them in when Hubble came running in with the biggest fucking possum in his mouth. He drops it and it hisses. Oh shit it's alive!!! He picks it back up in his mouth and I'm screaming bloody murder. I don't want this opossum getting hurt, nor the dogs, nor myself. I'm screaming chasing

I'd sit upstairs by myself and cry for hours. Hubble would hang out but we had to do something. I couldn't just sit there and be miserable ALL day. He'd make me active.

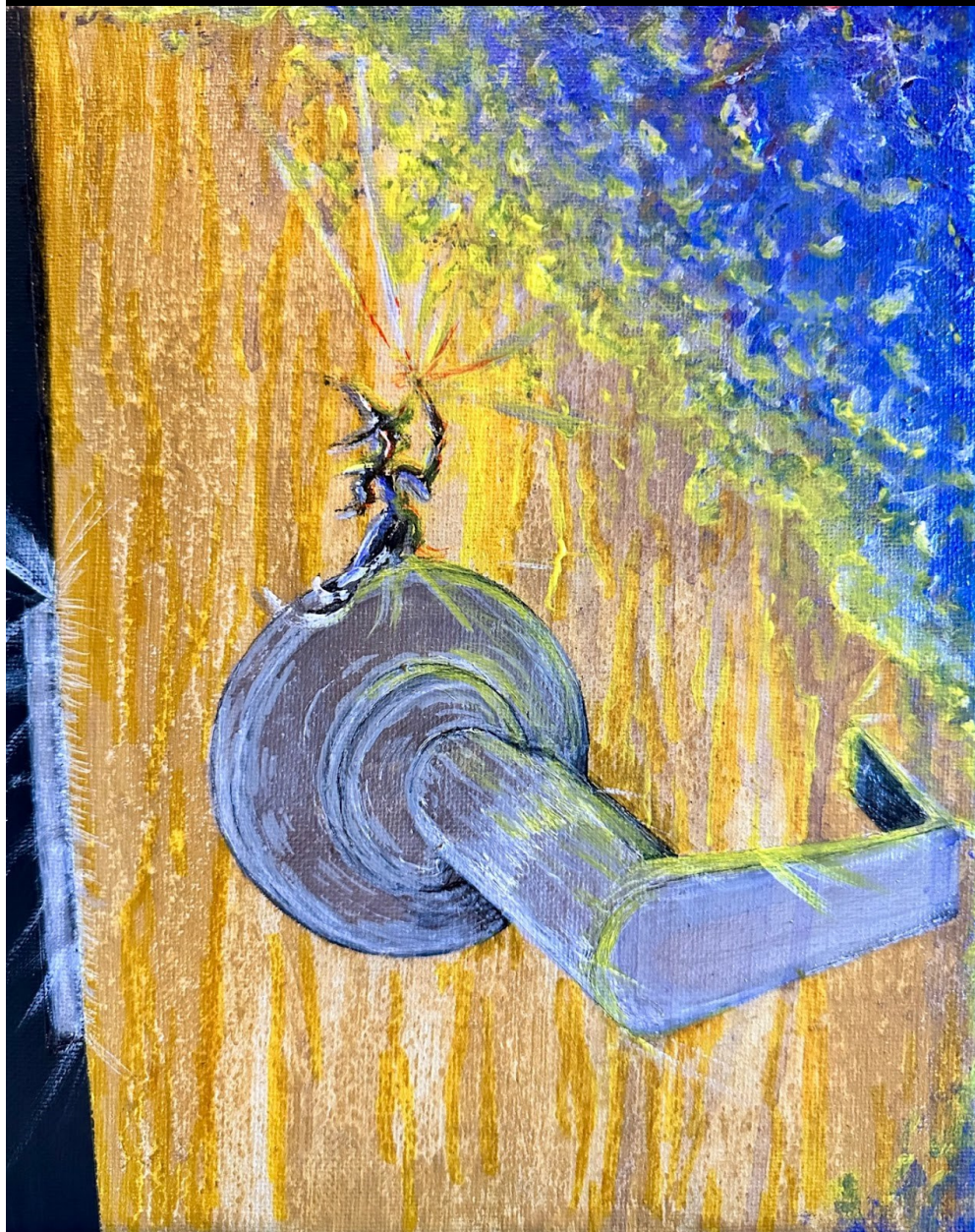
It was my last go with Craig as roommates that I'd fully come to appreciate Hubble. I learned he was afraid of thunderstorms. Such a big, tough magnificent creature and scared enough to cuddle in my bed during storms.

What was the Tao of Hubble? What sets him apart from any other dogs or pets? I feel he was unapologetically true to himself. Hubble didn't give a fuck. If he was supposed to give a fuck, he had no idea. Hubble did what Hubble wanted to do. He'd jump atop his grandfather's designer coffee table and would stand right in your field of vision. If he wanted to be seen, he would be seen. He wasn't a bad dog. He was a very good boy, you just had to understand him.

I knew when I left for Chicago it would be the last time I'd be seeing Hubble. I had to come to terms with that. As upset as I am, he had a great life. He had a father that loved him dearly. Craig's daughter Vera was with him in his final days, his siblings Pepe and Lola and all of us. He was strong. Healthy. Hubble lived a great and wonderful life. I will miss him dearly. Thank you Craig for being the best dog dad. I hope Jennifer was there to meet him at the Rainbow Bridge. —
CREEPY HORSE



MOON FROG
Instagram onionfang14



BETHANY BEELER

RECORD REVIEWS

FACS

"WISH DEFENSE"



FACS
Wish Defense

Most of everyone who has reviewed *Wish Defense*, the new maxi EP/short LP from Chicago noise rock band **FACS** has focused on the fact that this recording is the last session that famed curmudgeon engineer/musician **Steve Albini** worked on before he passed away last year. That has leant a sort of grisly curiosity to this release that has probably gained FACS some unfortunate side publicity to what is truly the first masterpiece of 2025.

Wish Defense definitely has the hallmarks of noise rock. Spare instrumentation, guitars that don't play chords, melodic bass, off-kilter drum rhythms, and a singer that is unhinged and non-melodic. Check for all these. However, there's a menace and unease that FACS brings that is as

much gothic as it is noise rock, and at times bears the influence of both no-wave and post-punk/new wave. At times, FACS sounds like a less manic Christian Death (especially on "Sometimes Only.") Like *Confusion Is Sex* era Sonic Youth on album opener "Talking Haunted" and all twitchy Adrian Belew era King Crimson and Talking Heads on "A Room" and "you Future." And a seasoning of shoegaze glide guitar atop the Thurston and Lee guitar chime on "Ordinary Voices."

Vocalist Brian Case also is a standout. Where many a noise rock vocalist would bellow and shout atop such material, Brian blows cool and helps to lend an overall atmosphere of no-wave detachment to the album. Overall, as a person who loves atonal NYC skronk, 80s worldbeat prog, and batcave gothic postpunk it is almost like FACS made *Wish Defense* just for me. It is a new facet for the noise rock genre and I'm looking forward to other sub Jesus Lizards to walk through this door behind FACS. — **KELLY MENACE**



Cloakroom
Last Leg of the Human Table

A couple of years ago I was casually flipping through records at Voltage Records, one of the handful of righteous local record stores in my town. The sales clerk put on a record and it sounded like metal shoegaze and I was intrigued. I asked her what we were listened to and it was a band called Cloakroom. I looked them up and was greeted to a several album-deep discography of slowcore woozy effects-heavy downtuned heavy goodness with vocals via vocalist/guitarist Doyle Martin that sound a lot like the Pink Floyd sleepiness of M83 principal Anthony Gonzalez. Kinda reminded me of Nothing but heavy and slow. *Last Leg of the Human Table*, the new album for this Indiana trio, is certainly heavy and

woozy, but it ain't slow.

Cloakroom has decided to shake things up a bit and pick up the pace. "Ester Wind" and "Cloverlooper" sounds like 1992 alternative nation with Big Muff'd guitar melodies and sunny vocal harmonies. "Unbelonging" has an almost new wave feel with power pop via Robert Smith chorused guitar arpeggios. "Bad Larry" is reminiscent of The La's classic "There She Goes" and Dwight Yoakam's "Thousand Miles From Nowhere" while still maintaining a bit of the shoegaze cushiony expanse. There's even a touch of wavery theremin wobbling away in the background. There's even a touch of lo-fi 4-track sound in the short "On Joy and Undeserving."

Not to say that the band has stopped doing what they are mostly known for, but they are certainly trying to figure out whether they can be more than just a band to space out to. Are they trying to not be pigeonholed? Seeking a wider audience? I don't think the changes in their sound seem forced or contrived. Cloakroom seems to be out searching for a new expression for their signature sound and have largely found it.. — **KELLY MENACE**



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