

october 2025
vol. 2 issue 10
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the dirtbag times



*inside: the guilt of privilege - the quiet hope of autumn -
roadblock - the best halloween story ever - mail call -
micromusing - fun comic book themed zodiac costume
ideas - ask creepy horse - a short report from gonerfest*



the dirtbag times is a
magazine for dirtbags
by dirtbags.

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THE QUILT OF PRIVILEGE

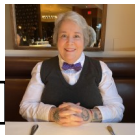
I sat at my desk this month and began writing easily a half dozen times about ICE and posse comitatus and dementia and using the armed forces as a private gestapo and ... I just couldn't make myself finish any of those pieces. It's October. The leaves are turning in the higher elevations, and at foothill level the leaves are falling. The afternoons are still warm but the nights and early mornings are crisp. The apple harvest is in. Most every brewery around Asheville has had their Oktoberfest celebrations. There's football on the weekends and the World Series is just around the corner. They'll be shooting hoops and sticking pucks before month's end. And HALLOWEEN!! So much the spooky ooky and pumpkin spice and I can't believe I'm already trying to figure out our Thanksgiving plans and plotting out fall and winter break schedules on the calendar.

Yeah, life moves on, whether we like it or not. While much of the country is in turmoil and chaos, I still have to go to work every day. I still have to get the decks painted before winter. I still have a garage full of junk to go through. I still have 50 million shows to go to or to play or to work. Bills gotta be paid. Celebrations for birthdays and graduations gotta be planned. There are piles of books to be read. There are small projects, like reassembling my newly rewrapped drums or replacing floor tom brackets on another drum set or tweaking truss rods on other guitars. Recording sessions to book. Columns to write. Y'all feel me. While there are things to be worried about and to not feel good about and to be disturbed or distressed about, there's also the mundane everyday things that continue to occur as well as things that we look forward to and anticipate.

I am mindful of Pamalyn Rose-Beeler's columns from the previous two months talking about finding escape and making peace with that escape. My privilege affords my escape. I assume many of you that pick up *The Dirtbag Times* each month have a similar privilege. ICE hasn't taken you or your family away. Kegseath hasn't ordered the National Guard to put a muzzle against your temple. You weren't fired for whatever comments you made about Charlie Kirk. Stephen Miller did not drone deliver a daisy cutter to your cigarette boat full of Cuban meth. Yet I feel guilty for being able to roll over and go back to sleep. That I feel guilty is good. Were I to wallow in that guilt and let it prevent me from letting the forward momentum of time carry me onward would be unproductive. We haven't even completed a single calendar year of the four we were saddled with. It is a marathon, not a sprint. Self-care is paramount for making it to the finish line. Please find peace with keeping yourself together. We are fortunate that the foundation that uplifts democracy, while it shakes and shivers from the pressure, still holds forth, at least for a little while. — KELLY MENACE

THE QUIET HOPE OF AUTUMN

And at all at once, summer collapsed into fall. — Oscar Wilde



Every year, right around the first week of October, I feel it. The air changes first — less blaze, more breath. Then, the light shifts. Everything takes on that soft golden hue, and the pace of life seems to lighten up a bit, like the world's been holding its breath all summer and finally exhales. And somehow, I do too.

That's probably why I've always loved autumn. Summer is loud — bright and bossy and full of expectations. Autumn just drifts in, quietly rearranges the mood, and says, "Let's calm down for a minute."

When the trees start to turn, I swear I can feel myself slow down with them. The world feels less frantic, more possible. Like an encouraging hug could show up any second.

Fall always reminds me that letting go is natural. The trees aren't sad when their leaves drop — they're just making room. They don't cling out of guilt or nostalgia. They just ... release. Every time I watch it happen, I think, *Okay, universe. I get it. I'll try.*

When the leaves fall, it feels like permission — to drop what's heavy, to stop pretending I can carry everything all the time.

People like to call summer the "happy season," but for me, fall wins. Its joy is quieter, steadier. It smells like cinnamon and coffee and sweaters pulled from the back of the closet. It sounds like leaves scraping down the sidewalk and the kettle

whistling.

The hope of autumn doesn't usually come with fireworks or fanfare. Sometimes it's just a warm cuppa, or rounding a bend and seeing shimmering golden aspens rustling, or even just remembering that good things still exist — even when everything feels uncertain.

Autumn is the gathering season. Apples, people, stories, gratitude. Halloween lets us be weird together. Thanksgiving gives us carbs and connection. Even though daylight doesn't last as long, we seem to find more time for the people and things in our lives that really matter.

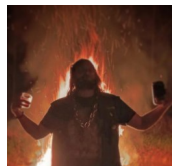
When I was younger, I used to dread this time of year — the early dark, the bare trees, the quiet. Now I see it differently. Autumn doesn't fight the cold that's coming; it trusts it. The trees don't panic; they rest. Autumn just seems to let life happen ... and reminds me that so can I.

And I think that's what I need most these days— permission to rest. To believe that even when things look dark, or bare, or empty, something good is still happening underneath.

So yes, I'll crunch through the leaves on purpose. I'll drink too much tea. I'll pull the blanket up to my chin when the chill sneaks in.

And when I walk under the trees, I'll listen to them whisper what I keep forgetting: *It's okay to let go.*
— PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER





BEHOLD SOME GOOD!!!

This year has already been quite the bull in the china shop in so many ways, and it doesn't seem like it will find the proverbial door any time soon. That said, it can sure be easy to feel overwhelmed by the seemingly endless waves of outrageous events and rhetoric mixed with many other wild events that have already transpired from cultural, to political, to personal and all the many grays in between. It's hard to keep your head up when the world as we know seems like it's crumbling into a gag article from *Mad Magazine* mixed with yet another poignant *The Onion* headline. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves of the many good things that have happened too.

Upon reflection and with the help of the modern digital wayback machine (laptop w/ internet), things begin to seem a little more bearable while we get our bearings and adjust accordingly. Somethings I have been waiting for FOREVER have FINALLY seen the light of day and whether or not I have had the privilege to experience and/or enjoy them yet – just knowing they are out and people are enjoying them at least gives me a lot of hope. In fact when you drown out the news and the endless regurgitated drivel from so many talking heads one can start to remember some of the good seeping back through.

Some of the simpler things I am thankful for aside from the obvious loved ones, their health, and continued existence are quite basic in many regards but meaningful yet still. Many are from the world of the arts: comics, films, shows, music, books, and such. It's also been a real pleasure seeing many of my creative friends and colleagues succeed in their lives and passions. I'm grateful to be able to even type this at this point honestly.

Among the awesomeness to finally see the light of day this year are the long awaited star studded reboot of everyone's favorite mopped crusader the TOXIC AVENGER! Everything about this has been screaming to all that is righteous and sacred! This unrated irradiated cut was shelved a few years back and was feared to be headed to the lost media archives. Another gem and big one for me – *Fantastic Four: First Steps*. I know many of you are saying yay another FF movie – big deal. Well for those of us who grew up reading the First Family of Marvel this is so much more than that – it's the homecoming of the team that kept Marvel alive and gave the world hope decade after decade. Much like *Star Trek* – the *Fantastic Four* gave people an sense of wonder and inspiration about the world around them and facing the many at times overwhelming obstacles of the world through a lens of logic, compassion,

wonder, and science. This film finally gets closer to the comics than many of it's predecessors and sees that the legacy lives on and continues it's powerful impact. Iconic comic pages come to life to bring hope to an era that could certainly use a fresh dose of it! Speaking of which lets not forget James Gunn's *Superman* coming in as a powerful reminder of while people watch comic book movies in the first place and bringing back some heart in the process! What a time to be alive!

With all the huff and puff around laughter is needed as is levity. The long awaited *Naked Gun 4: The Naked Gun* is finally out delivering low blow gut punch laughs around the clock. While it's def not the same without Nielsen, Liam delivers the laughs. Switching formats to the boobtube – *Beavis & Butthead* is back with its third and latest season of it's revival and it does not disappoint! Adult Beavis & Butthead go hard and the show doesn't seem to show any signs of slowing down or laying off lame-ass Stewart. SNL rounded out it's 50th season and has survived to debut it's 51st which is pretty amazing in it's own right and simply down right impressive all things considered. Cheers to 50 more! *The Simpsons* are still swinging for the fences and are actively rolling out season 37 of the long running animated sitcom. It's *Always Sunny in Philadelphia* rolled out it's long awaited 17th season and absolutely killed it yet again proving while they are the long reigning sitcom champs of late-night. *Futurama* just dropped its latest season and is firing on all cylinders which is promising and calming as though maybe things aren't as doomed as they most certainly feel at times. James Gunn's *Peacemaker* Season 2 debuted and is killing it in terms of showing us not only the depths of an old WWF wrestlers acting chops but just what a superhero show can be and rewriting the playbook at the same time. We have another season of the product tie in heavy animated hit *Solar Opposites* which should be a savory late night binge or three. *Star Trek Strange New Worlds* wrapped an amazingly stellar third season minus a little song and dance that couldn't derail the show (and they tried) nonetheless – GOLD TV and TREK in an age where neither seems to very real.

Now October is here and there's so much wonderful creative stuff coming out to be thankful for and to check out I barely had a chance to scratch the surface, so I guess I'll have to continue this next month. Remember it's important to be informed and aware but it's also important to be entertained and in the loop. Don't let them pull the wool of mediocrity over your eyes just yet! Keep up the good fight and cheers! – WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



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A SHORT REPORT FROM GONERFEST 22

last weekend, the sleepy redhead and i made our second pilgrimage to memphis for gonerfest 22. thirty-four bands on the fest stages, not to mention the various afterparties at other venues across town. this year the fest moved into new digs at wiseacre brewing, featuring less seating and shade than the previous venue, but with the additional attraction of a heavily-trafficked railroad line that ran right next to the stage.

if you ever wondered if any given band was louder than a train, it was an ideal opportunity to conduct scientific research. the train schedule was such that just about every band had a train pass by during their set, so it's pretty safe to say that the following results are scientifically valid: of twenty-seven bands we saw at the main site (we missed three sets while grabbing dinner and/or a pre-afterparty nap), twenty-one were louder than the trains. that's a solid 77.7%. yay science!

in the meantime, the redhead was busy studying the application of keyboards in the bands we saw, dutifully noting whether or not the keys were playing an integral part in the music, or were merely a prop. her favorite keyboard-band was **des demonas** (who, like our band, use the keyboard in place of a bass). her least favorite was an "organ-driven" act that held down a key or two infrequently, and knocked the organ on the ground a bunch times over the course of their set.

in addition to doing science, we got to enjoy a lot of really cool music. personal faves by approximate genre categories:

* garage punk: **sleeveens** — nice recovery from

playing their "hit" at the 25 minute mark of their set, only to learn at the end of the song that they had 15 minutes of stage time left. from nashville + dublin.



* post-punk: **nape neck** — loud. tight. angular. the second-coming of the gang of four. from leeds.

* legacy act: **pylon reenactment society** — funky. dancable. played a mix of old pylon songs and new PRS songs. from athen ga

* world: **w.i.t.c.h.** — zamrock that had me dancing and thinking about funkadelic for some reason. from zambia.

* americana: **twisted teens** — lap steel driven folk-punk with dirty lyrics delivered with grit. definitely on my radar going forward. from new orleans.

* uncategorized: **des demonas** — not sure what to say here. they were great! their 2024 LP was one of my favorites of last year, and their live set live up to and exceeded my hopes. from washington dc.

* favorite afterparty set (at lamplighter): **LUNG** — fuzzed and effected cello + orchestral blast beats + operatic vocals = a powerful cinematic set of weirdo punk rock. from cincinnati.

overall, it was a great weekend of live music, and a much-needed escape from the howdy arabian hellscape. we got to see some old friends, make some new ones, and do a bit of band networking and future tour planning. fun and productive. also came home with some new records and t-shirts. the weekend had me missing LOUDFEST, again. — PROFESSOR FUZZ

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FUN COMIC BOOK THEMED ZODIAC COSTUME IDEAS

Taurus: *Reed Richards - Mr. Fantastic*
Stubborn, logical, slow to change, and stretches himself thin for everyone.

Cancer: *Alfred Pennyworth*
Protective, nurturing, and emotionally attuned beneath the dry wit.

Pisces: *Dream (from The Sandman)*
Mystical, poetic, and deeply emotional.

Aries: *Deadpool*
Bold, impulsive, and always ready to fight or flirt.

Gemini: *Harley Quinn*
Dual-natured, witty, and thrives on chaos.

Leo: *Wonder Woman*
Regal, radiant, and always center stage.

Virgo: *Batman*
Methodical, strategic, and always prepared.

Libra: *Storm*
Elegant, justice-driven, and balanced.

Scorpio: *Magneto*
Intense, powerful, and emotionally complex.

Sagittarius: *Star-Lord*
Adventurous, funny, and always on the move.

Capricorn: *Iron Man*
Ambitious, tech-savvy, and always in control.

Aquarius: *Beast (of X-Men)*
Intellectual, eccentric, and future-focused.
— TISHIA JACKSON

MICROMUSING

The stench of the White House permeates America. However, each of us must combat that horror detrimental to *all* Americans. Otherwise, we sink into an angry malaise of hopelessness.

Joy. We must find the joy in all things. Decades ago, they labeled those who sought the positive as "Pollyannas" (from the Disney movie – back when Disney was good). Yes, there are horrible things in motion, and they should not be ignored. Yet, if we dwell on the horror, evil has already won.

Bob Seger sang about "Tiny Victories." The promise of new life to this writer is one. Seek joy.
— MIKE L. DOWNEY

MAIL CALL

Blanket of M, a punk rock trio from Tyler, Texas, took it upon themselves to mail me a copy of their most recent CD, *Feral Fever Dreams*. It contains 13 songs of power chord downstrummed mid-tempo melodic punk rock. Only two of the songs exceeds two minutes in length. Influences range from classic Misfits horror punk on "One Shot" and "Garbage Dump", a touch of Surf Punks surf punk on "Fuck Back" (I appreciate them handclaps, y'all), and '90s Epitaph Records post-grunge pop-punk on "Overdue". The songs are fun and mostly about how much it sucks being in a small redneck town. Having been in Tyler a time or three I'd say they nailed what it's like to live there. All in all, *Feral Fever Dreams* is good old man punk rock. If they come to your town go see them or pop onto blanketofm.bandcamp.com and check them out.



Cozmic Fox is the solo outlet for San Antonio (and briefly Bryan/College Station, TX) punk rocker Valerie Champion. As long as I've known Valerie

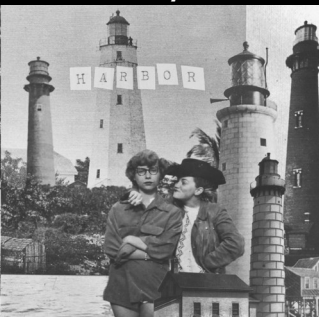


she's been in someone else's band so it's cool to see what Valerie would get up to if she did the whole thing by herself. The *Fufusho* cassette is the first fruits of that solo-mindedness.

Valerie's sound is grunge-influenced. There are moments that remind me of the dirtier, darker indie days of Babes in Toyland and Hole but there's more going on. The melodic laziness of "Picture Perfect" and "Down, Me" gives me Throwing Muses vibes and the more straight-forward punk rock of "Light of Day" has a touch of L7's riff rock. And I dig the trippy, psychedelic hand drumming and echo-laden harmony of "Again" to close out this EP. You can pick up this cassette from Cozmic Fox at cosmicfox.bandcamp.com



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WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

It started as a typically frigid January day and the classrooms were hot as fuck; we were unclear whether the Franciscan Brothers were jacking up the heat to swelter us, separating the weak from the strong among us. As if we had something to prove to them. Whatever the case, I had an oppressive headache that day, so every wave of fluorescent light, every high-pitched vocal frequency, every whiff of body odor emanating from sweaty jocks, every degree of heat beyond natural comfort worsened this ailment, spilling into unbearable. Typically, if the pressure on my temples was bad enough, I could easily duck into a bathroom stall and vomit. And it felt like that might happen. But in that unforgiving all-boys institution, we were encouraged to "tough it out," acquiesce to gender norms, so the idea of asking permission to be sent to the nurse's station was out of the question.

This standard of brash and brawn would come around and bite them on the ass.

I inherited migraine headaches from my mother. As a young boy – with all the undue pressures to succeed to extreme degrees, coupled with the sparse lighting in my room when I did reading, studying and sketching "close work," as the doctors called it – migraines invaded my head space with the frequency and ferocity of a locomotive. And since this abnormality was documented by my doctors, I milked it. Anything for the attention I craved. When the classroom tension grew too thick in elementary school, I would claim it as an escape hatch, informing the teachers I felt sick so they'd send me to the infirmary (in this case, a tiny room with some pill bottles, a stethoscope, and a cold steel table to lay on). Once there, I'd rent space until class ended or, if it was critical, be sent home to recover. What didn't help the situation was that a few minutes later, my best friend Kevin would show up complaining of the same ailment, and we'd both enjoy some time off, bunking in the same quarters.

Eventually, my cover would be blown.

As I rode this unsteady wave all morning, I did my best to conform to the model student status I'd earned. But by Junior year, my grades had taken a dive. The mounting pressures of high school coupled with a healthy interest in rock 'n roll demanded my time, but I was nevertheless considered a good enough student to capture the attention of Brother Michael, whose stern and ominous presence pervaded the school's atmosphere. Students nicknamed him "Roadblock" because of his propensity to disrupt the flow of traffic at the school's major hallway intersection, donning a brown potato sack-like robe, arms crossed at his chest, only matched in intensity by his perpetual scowl. Nobody was able to slink past his watchful gaze. I'm convinced that his sole purpose was to instill the fear of God in each of us.

The bell rang for lunch period, so I ambled down to the mess hall and took my place in line. I wasn't hungry, but I was convinced that even the

ROADBLOCK

waxy cafeteria grub might ward off the throbbing urgency of my headache. Unfortunately, it didn't help much. Even after lunch, as my friends and I listened to the student DJ spin Led Zeppelin songs over the cafeteria's PA, I was still left with queasiness and eventually resigned to plod through the next hour before being shuttled home on the giant yellow social nightmare-on-wheels. With that sober realization, I labored to my final class.

As the heat grew insufferable, my desire to wear clothes lessened; at this stage, I just wanted to feel the respite of cool air against my slender body. Apparel became a hindrance. Though it was a violation of the school's dress code, I untied my work boot shoelaces and untucked my plaid button-down shirt from my corduroy Levi's, fanning my face with its tails. My goal was to somehow plod through the next period. Like a slog through molasses, a bit unsteady, I ventilated myself every few seconds.

As I approached the main intersection, I spied Brother Michael in all his authoritarian aura. I assumed an air of aloofness, trying to blend with the crowd darting to class, but I lagged behind and became an easy target. I was just about clear of his reach when I heard,

"Mr. Day, tuck your shirt inside your pants."

"I have a headache, I feel sick."

I was slightly slurring my words, yet still cogent.

"Mr. Day, I said tuck your shirt inside your pants."

As if repetition was going to somehow convince me to change what I was doing.

"Please, leave me alone, I feel sick."

My tone grew more impatient.

"Mr. Day, stop right there!"

So did he.

As I came to a halt, I watched through slitted eyelids as Brother Michael approached me like a tinderbox awaiting ignition. I pleaded with him to take heart. That I had a headache which was making me ill. That there was family history of this condition. But before all the words spilled from my mouth, he pressed himself against me, the weight of him a clear threat to my safety and security.

"You're on drugs! Open your eyes!"

"I'm not on drugs, I have a migraine. Leave me

alone!"

"Let me see your eyes!"

He pinned me up against the marbled wall, my head ricocheting off it with an audible crack! like a sixteen-pound ball bouncing off a polyurethane bowling lane. With his free hand, his forefinger and thumb pried my eyelids open. All the latent rage I'd stuffed inside, layers of trauma from bullies, parents, and teachers – acquiescing to the mishandling of despotic adults – coalesced in this one moment against a petty, unreasonable fascist dictator.

At this point, I had nothing to lose.

I protracted my arms and with one superhuman thrust, heaved him off me as he stumbled backwards and fell to the cold tile. Fellow students peered from classroom doorways. Our scuffle had attracted some attention, whispers, and muted chuckles abound. Perplexed at my ability to self-advocate, Roadblock teetered to an upright position and lunged toward me. Stubborn facial creases outlined the traffic of his discontent and bitterness. Yanking my earlobe like a rubber band – a common execution by Catholic proctors – I was dragged through my high school's main intersection, then detoured down a cinder-block corridor toward his office.

My ear seared like a five-alarm fire, but he ordered me to "sit down and stay still," punched my mother's phone number, and spat his accusation into the receiver. Sweat pooled on every surface, in every orifice, eyes wide, as I felt the distance from my brow to my hairline diminish. Soon after, the clang of the school bell – a welcomed shrill – informed us that the period was over. He relieved me from his custody and instructed me to think about what I'd done. My only concern, though, was the bludgeoning I would most likely endure at home – like many others – due to my insubordination. With minutes to spare, I ran to the only safety net at my disposal: the giant yellow social nightmare-on-wheels. My heart was severed into equal parts rage and vulnerability. I took my seat and prepared for the inevitable.

As for my retaliation, I was comfortable with that.

Back home, my mother was awaiting my arrival. When she saw the condition I was in – one that she had known many times over – she instructed me to get into bed, that she'd bring a cold, wet towel for my forehead and some aspirin. Shut the blinds, turned off the lights, lowered the volume on her TV. She knew the drill. Fumed by the reality of the situation, she immediately called to scold Roadblock for wrongly accusing me of drugging, and that he should have listened to me

when I told him my condition.

I was grateful for this rare moment of maternal clarity.

Back at school the following day, I was summoned to Roadblock's office. When I arrived, he handed me a slip of paper which relayed that I'd been summoned to two weeks' detention. I glanced at the proposal, a bit perplexed.

"What's this for?"

"For violating school rules, being on drugs, and getting physical with me."

I was stunned at his audacity.

"You realize this started because you didn't listen to me when I told you I had a headache."

"Nevertheless, I'm giving you detention."

"Fine. But I'm not going."

Shrugging off his castigation, I stood and walked out of his office, leaving the conversation unfinished. Then, from the hallway, he cautioned, "Ok, then there will be hell to pay!"

If only I had a dollar for every time I heard a religious drillmaster threaten a student using the word hell.

I went about business as usual; retrieving my assignments from each class, cutting up with my friends at lunch.

"So, did you hear about my run-in with Roadblock?"

"Yeah, it's like front page news. What the hell happened?"

"Oh, man, wait'll you hear this shit!"

I wasted the entire lunch period recounting my tussle to a captive audience of four.

When it was time to leave, I decided to ride with good friend Jack instead of taking the bus; we planned on going to his house to listen to some new records he'd borrowed from his older brother. I was waiting for him on the school's front veranda overlooking the parking lot when I spotted Roadblock in my peripheral vision, inching toward me.

"Mr. Day, you're supposed to be in detention right now."

"I told you I wasn't going. This was your doing."

He spouted off for about five minutes, citing the rules of the school in accordance with Jesus-Christ-Almighty-in-heaven-and-whenever-and-whomever-the-fuck-knows; at that point, I tuned out the particulars. What I did hear him say was that my failure to abide by detention rules

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somehow equated to a general failure in school, which seemed like fabricated, unimpressive, bloated bombast. And I relayed as much to him, though not in those particular words.

Then, I muttered the 10 words that would change things forever. My final release from the restrictions of not only 10 ½ years of Catholic education, but any organized religious affiliation. Freedom from nearly everything associated with past trauma. From strict dress codes and sexist practices. From Conservative ideals and unrealistic expectations. From punitive measures and states of repression. From daily injections of fear-based curriculum, bankrupt belief systems and worldviews, and stringent moral codes.

Most importantly, those 10 words would nudge a slight crack in the doorway to self-discovery that I would thrust open forcefully with great anticipation.

"So, do you want me to clean out my locker?"

I had no idea the gravity of those words. Yet.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I do."

"Great. I'll do that. Thanks!"

When he arrived, I called upon Jack to help free me of this place, something he would do for himself just months later for similar infractions. Fortuitously, we retrieved a large garbage bag from his car trunk, flung open the weighty front door, headed down those cold hallways one last time, opened my locker and spilled its contents into the vessel with one satisfying heave, while Roadblock supervised the entire process.

With a jovial, "See you!" and a defiant middle finger flung in the side view mirror of Jack's Gran Torino to seal the deal, I was on my way to start a new chapter in my young life, where the pendulum would swing far in the opposite direction; a place where I would navigate and negotiate different roadblocks, detours and closures, as well as a few infinite highways that didn't always lead home. — *ALLAN DAY*



venmo

THE BEST HALLOWEEN EVER

In the tiny, sleepy town of Bonney, there lived a fluffy black cat named Midnight. Midnight wasn't just any cat — he was the self-appointed guardian of the whole neighborhood's Halloween. Every October, he made it his mission to inspect every jack-o'-lantern, destroy every fake spider, and nap inside every cauldron.

But this year, something was wrong..

The pumpkins were disappearing. No smashed remains. No gooey guts. No carved faces. Just empty porches and confused people.

Midnight jumped into action. He put on his tiny bat-wing harness (so he would look scary, duh!), recruited Gary the raccoon, and set off on a stakeout.

And what a great stakeout it was! Hiding in piles of leaves and watching the shadows — what fun they had!

Then.... they saw it.

A squirrel in a wizard hat and robe. A squirrel dragging a pumpkin. A squirrel STEALING A PUMPKIN!

Midnight and Gary kept out of the leaf pile and pounced. The squirrel screamed. Gary tripped over a lawn skeleton. Midnight tangled in string lights. Chaos!

Midnight demanded the squirrel explain himself.

Turns out, Sir McNutters was building a throne of pumpkins deep in the woods for his woodland costume ball. The woodland creatures were so busy working, they had made no time for fun. Sir McNutters thought throwing a grand party would be a nice break and reminder to live life and not work yourself to death.

Midnight, moved by the squirrel's story and dedication, suggested a deal: Sir McNutters could keep the pumpkins but only if Midnight and Gary were invited.

Sir McNutters eagerly agreed and continued building his throne.

That Halloween night, Midnight sat atop the Pumpkin Throne wearing a crown made of empty candy wrappers, surrounded by dancing squirrels, raccoons, bears, and one possum in a tutu.

It was the best Halloween ever. — *TISHIA JACKSON*

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ASK CREEPY HORSE

Suppose they gave a war and someone comes.

creepy little cuck to it all.

I've been living in Chicago for a year now. I have marched in protests. I've tasted the foods of Chicago. I've experienced incredible things here in a short time. I sat in the pouring rain for the White Sox and smoked weed with a group of women making huge strides in the marijuana industry.

I only have CTA to use for travel so I've been everywhere a train or a bus can take me in the city my feet can't. I've walked at 2 am in 4 degree weather to get to the blue line for Chicago O'Hare. I ran out into the snow in downtown wearing shorts to search for my phone.

I've seen King Diamond, NASCAR, Riot Fest, and even Lollapalooza from my summer window. I went to Taste of Chicago twice, one Polish festival, Wrestling at a strip club, the three hour extended version of *Caligula* (yeah, that one. They extended it)

I've got a favorite sandwich shop in town. I've had an Italian beef, spicy and wet. The best gyro I've ever eaten. Deep dish and Tavern style Pizzas. The Chicago hot dog. I've also had a cream-filled deep fried twatwaffle. They also sold cockwaffles. Funnel cake batter in imagined shapes. You could also order a bag of dicks. Fun place.

I love this city. It's dirty and grimy, cold and humid. People don't make small talk here. They don't wanna hear it. They take action and follow through.

Now the president has decided to fuck with this city and my former state governor is being a

I was having more and more benefits cut in Texas. As soon as I moved to Chicago, I went out and got my state I.D. and almost immediately I

was awarded insurance care through expanded Medicaid. I have my medical marijuana license. I have access to mental health care and necessary medications. I'm able to get care for my liver because of Chicago.

I love this city. I don't want to leave for shit. I don't know what will happen. Am I really on the eve of Civil War Deux? Is it like Bill Hicks was telling us? I went out earlier to get my meds. I was really hoping to see some shit, somewhere. I live for the chisme. I watched video of Latin Kings running ICE out of a neighborhood in Southside Chicago. Good for them. A very popular tamale lady was seized by ICE and her stand was left behind. People showed up and raised money for her family.

Chicago will take care of Chicago. That I'm sure of to its detriment. I think Trump knows this. He must. The turnout for the No Kings protest was blocks long. Several protests. A governor and a mayor united in protecting its citizens. Citizens united in protecting its citizens.

Chicago is called the Second City because after a fire decimated it, the people came and rebuilt it. It's the history. It's in the blood of these people to fight and rebuild. I think Trump wants to bank on that and much like most of his financial skills, it will fail. Not matter who is sent, Chicago is waiting.

No matter the destruction, they will rebuild. —
CREEPY HORSE

Caverns of Gold
A Benefit for WNC Hurricane Relief
Caverns of Gold
Caverns of Gold



a vibrant coalition of over 280 musicians from western north carolina and beyond has come together to release caverns of gold: a benefit for wnc hurricane relief. this impactful compilation album seeks to raise crucial funds for those affected by hurricane helene, with 100% of the proceeds benefiting beloved asheville, a local nonprofit dedicated to providing immediate assistance and long-term support for those affected by the disaster. artists include r.e.m., steep canyon rangers, kevin kinney, luscious jackson, consolidated, carlin cary, moe., milk carton kids, north mississippi all-stars, richard buckner, the feelies, and many, many others.

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Recently, Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson of the Canadian rock band Rush announced that they would commence a Rush 50 Something tour next year, a fairly lightweight 12-date eight-city four-month affair for Summer 2026. What makes this newsworthy is that Rush has not toured since 2015 when its famed drummer Neil Peart retired from touring. Five years later Peart died from brain cancer. The loss of Peart seemed to have sealed the fate of the band. Yet at every turn the surviving duo of Lee and Lifeson were asked if the two would ever play music again or even perhaps tour as Rush again. Lee and Lifeson often demurred and would not give straight answers ... until now.

Lifeson has continued to play with other projects and Lee has written several books and hosted a television program. The two will both be 73 years old during next year's tour. Yet both Lee and Lifeson have expressed regret that the R40 tour was the band's last hurrah. Neither were ready for that to be the end of the line for the band. How they would have moved forward when it was clear that Peart did not want to tour anymore is uncertain. The Fifty Something tour, however, does have the tacit approval of Peart's widow and his daughter. It also seems that none other than Sir Paul McCartney encouraged them at the Taylor Hawkins Memorial in 2023 (where Lee and Lifeson played Rush songs with Tool drummer Danny Carey and fusion legend Omar Hakim) to get back in the saddle and get back to it.

The biggest question on fans' lips was who could Lee and Lifeson possibly get to play drums with them. Neil Peart is widely considered as one of the most influential rock drummers to have ever sat behind a trap kit, not to mention that Peart wrote most of the lyrics for Rush's songs. To fill those shoes would take someone with a lot of balls. Or apparently no balls, as the case may be. Lee and Lifeson, on recommendation of their bass tech Russ Ryan, called up German drummer and educator Anika Nilles to become the band's new drummer. Nilles is an accomplished player and will undoubtedly put a new fire underneath the band's signature sound. Lee said that many drummers can play Peart's drum fills but no one could capture the "feel" of playing with Peart the way that Nilles has.

How do I feel about this? Well, I don't think the world would have stopped if Lee and Lifeson had not made this announcement. But I tell this anecdote as a bit of an explanation. A handful of years ago I worked the Asheville, NC stop on the Primus tour in which they played all of Rush's 1977 album *A Farewell To Kings*. It was sanctioned by Rush and Lee loaned primus singer/bassist Les Claypool his double neck Rickenbacker bass guitar specifically for the tour. The arena was filled with Rush fans. Claypool is not renowned as a vocalist and he struggled to sing much of the songs but the audience did not care. They made up for this shortfall by singing aloud all the songs for him. I liked the first two Primus albums a lot in high school but I wouldn't consider myself a huge fan of the band. However I am for sure a huge Rush fan and that show was

R50 & THE LIGHTNING YEARS



somewhat magical and definitely cathartic. I was not prepared for how emotional that show (or at least the Rush half of it) turned out to be. It served as a Neil Peart memorial in a way. Lee brings this up in the videos I've seen of them talking about this tour. Peart died in January 2020, a month before the Covid Pandemic came down, and most of the world quarantined in place for the ensuing months. There were no star-studded memorials for Peart and if all had been right in the world there would have been. This tour will serve that purpose as well as give Lee and Lifeson the ability to say goodbye properly.

I'm a big hypocrite. I dodged the R40 tour in 2014 because Lee couldn't sing a full concert anymore. I saw the Time Machine tour in The Woodlands outside of Houston in 2010 and I was good with that being the last time I saw the band live. Rush were at the top of their game that year. But one of the things that struck me most about the Black Sabbath Back To the Beginning show a few months ago was how awesome it was that the world got to say goodbye to Ozzy Osbourne and let him know just how revered he was while he was still alive to enjoy it. I have signed up for the presale for the Cleveland show at Rocket Arena in September 2026. There is a good chance that I won't pull the trigger on a ticket depending upon cost. But my inclination is to go even if perhaps Lee's best years as a vocalist are way behind him. Nilles is an amazing drummer who will undoubtedly inspire Lee and Lifeson. They will not want to be embarrassed by their new drummer. I want to go more so I can show up for Lee and Lifeson. I need to recognize what this band has given me

and in return give some of that back to them. I felt the same way in recent years seeing both Ringo Starr live in 2017 and Paul McCartney live in 2019. Both Ringo and Macca sounded careworn but their bands were top-notch and what better way to recognize the impact The Beatles have made upon my life than to celebrate it with thousands of other cheering fans. It will likely be the same for Rush next year on tour.

Many on social media have dismissed this reunion as merely a cash grab. "How much more of my money do Lee and Lifeson really need at this point?" I would hazard a guess that none of the surviving members or their families really are in need at this point. The band has sold millions of albums and while they were not fuck-you rich they lived quite comfortably and continue to do so. During the tour announcement interview both Lee and Lifeson expressed how much they missed playing the music with each other, how much more precious it seemed after a decade of not playing it with each other, how challenging the music had become to them, and how much fun it was to just play and celebrate this history again with one another. Lee did allow that having an extra keyboardist play with them at the Taylor Hawkins tribute (none other than Beck/Foo Fighters/Taylor Swift producer Greg Kursten) had felt liberating, allowing Lee to enjoy playing bass and not be rooted to a keyboard or pedal synth and Lee said they would likely explore bringing one or two extra musicians out on the road to assist them. That's yet another way to help set this tour aside from any of the others that preceded it. I would love to see them rearrange some of the

material and present it in different ways. I tend to gravitate towards Rush's 80s "synth era" songs these days and I am no keyboard apologist but I do think it might be interesting to see Lee and Lifeson present some of those songs in more of a guitar/bass/drums format. And maybe even perhaps bring aboard someone capable of singing some of the parts that Lee cannot sing any longer. I have fallen in love with Rush tribute band YNOT and they have a female vocalist whose range is not constrained at all, belting out even the highest-keyed Rush songs. I have seen some legacy artists rely on too many extra musicians. I saw Fleetwood Mac in 2014 and I found the show to be too slick. I felt like I was listening to a CD of a performance rather than a live band playing in front of me. Many legacy artists are incapable of performing without an army of extra musicians as well as backing tracks. The Eagles are still out there and are playing to vocal tracks and not doing that great a job of hiding it. KISS does the same. The Rush 50 thing just seems like it will be different.

Would Lee and Lifeson do more than tour if, say, Peart's widow had a pile of his unused lyrics that she would permit for use? Mayhaps. I'd rather they leave that part of their legacy intact. But I also understand the sentiment that there's still one more song to write, one more album to record, that an artist is never done, even if the lightning years are well behind them. I look at an artist like Bob Dylan who has never given the fans exactly what the fans have wanted from him. He is still touring in his 80s and in his two-hour sets he rarely plays any material written before 1990. Fans are expected to follow Dylan wherever his trip takes them, or they can stay home and be content listening to his albums. Robert Plant has made a good career the last 30 years reimagining the Led Zeppelin catalog to allow for his aging voice. Many heritage artists have not followed a similar path and as a result have been expected to continue performing at the same level as they did in their glory days. I think immediately of artists like Vince Neil of Motley Crue who has not been allowed to age or to perform the music in a different way from how he and the band did in the 1980s. During Rush's R40 tour the band would key down a couple of the more particularly hard songs for Lee to sing, but by the end of that tour it was clear that Lee could have benefitted from much of the material being presented in e-flat or perhaps an even lower key. It will be interesting to see if Rush makes some effort to ease performance and let the material age the way the performers have aged. In much the same way I hope Anika Nilles has been given carte blanche to play her way and not just copy Peart. There are some fills and grooves that she will have to play as they are integral to the song but I'm hoping she has the ability to express herself in these performances.

I am optimistic about the R50 tour. We will have to wait nine months until the first shows of the tour, but I think the band will rise to the moment. If not, there will be hundreds of thousands of very opinionated Rush fans to contend with. — KELLY MENACE

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