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Houston

Arts Film Music Technology World & Local News

December 2006
Issue # 74

- Scattered Pages
- Houston Food Not Bombs Getting the Boot
- Holiday Gift Guide for Gamers

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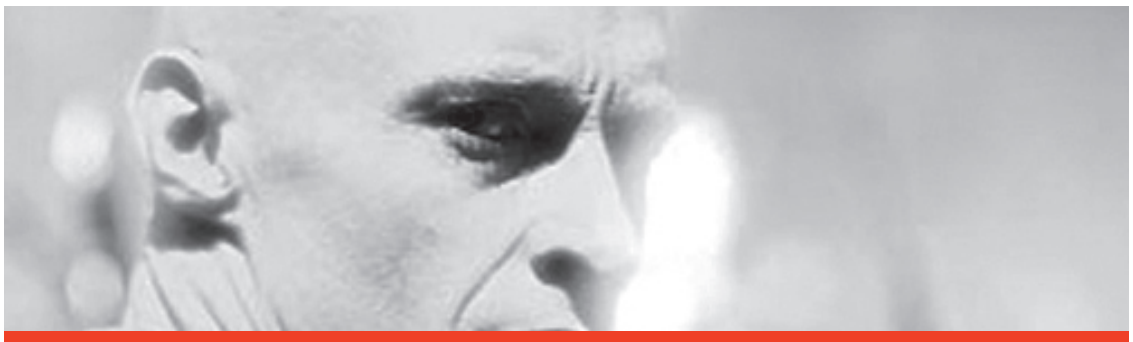
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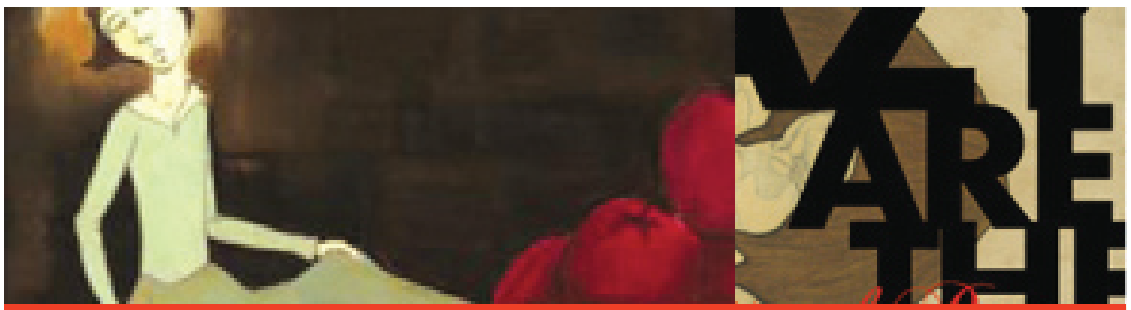
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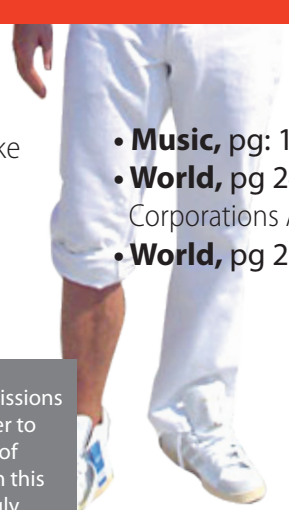
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AWN

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Issue 74 | 12/06

Feel free to take us seriously







My dog died. No joke.

This will be a sad Christmas without him. We found him 5 years ago peeing in the bushes and kicking up grass on Wilcrest road. He was a dirty, street dog. That's why we loved him. No pedigree, no class. He was just a dog that loved us and loved to lick his own butt. Wilcrest, named after the street we found him on, was a loyal dog that enjoyed eating carrots, racing remote controlled cars, and battling our now deceased one-eyed feline. We were so very close when he was an indoor dog and we often shared the couch. Once our second child came along, we were forced to find a larger home. We thought Wilcrest would be ecstatic to have a huge backyard to roam. We were wrong. He just wanted to be next to us. Yeah, he enjoyed chasing the squirrels but he really missed the wrestling matches we had when I would bite his ears. 'Willie' as we called him was brave and loyal as so aptly demonstrated the time he bucked up to our neighbors pit bull when he walked in our apartment once. Nonetheless, his loyalties would sometimes waver. A gas meter guy jumped our fence recently and Willie defended *him* and barked at me as he sensed I was angry and prone to violence. He was a pacifist deep down. Willie has been with the Free Press since the beginning and often accompanied me on delivery runs back then. You may have seen him. He would always make sure noone jacked our car as I ran in to drop off papers while the car was running.

Willie never asked for anything in return. He just enjoyed helping out. He was a good dog like that. He was a good friend like that.

We will miss you Willie.

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Issue 74 | 12/06

Arts

DEBRIS: Floating

by Buffalo Sean

Coming from Switzerland and hopefully leaving a big footprint, Pipilotti Rist should hold a dear place in the heart of anarchists and revolutionaries of Texas. The Contemporary Arts Museum has pulled out all the stops to curate an exhibit of video work bred on the exported 'freedom' of American first felt in the summer of '68 in Paris, Berlin, and Tokyo. The mistaken representation of Jackson Pollock to the Japanese Gutai group of the sixties is updated with a concurrent development of MTV imagery by Rist; even though she professes to be ignorant of the American pop culture of the 80s when she made her first film, *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much*. She speeds up and screws down her performance of a John Lennon tune in this bold first film. She even has her boobs out! Since then she has developed half a dozen formats for her videos, all backing her insatiable will to enlighten and destroy.

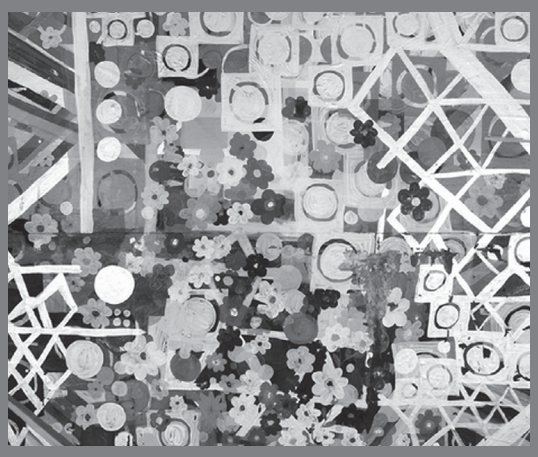
For all the Peter Marzio fetishists and anyone needing to see all the famous paintings the MFAH owns (#2 in US monies among museums), *The Past Made Present* at the Museum of Fine Arts requires a dry sickly perspective usually acquired during the pursuit of an Art History degree. For all its historical weight the show is well held together by the suggestion of how artists struggle with memory, an impossible task mostly involving reassembling debris or creating fractured objects. It is very nice to see the Johns in the show, to notice Neil Jenny and Susan Rothenberg bridging gaps, and to watch Darryl Lauster make his way into museum collections- even if his sandblasted sculpture holds little water in the context.

Apparently there is a growing need to make people who hate art museums walk in the doors. After blazing past three thousand years led by small white signs *Best in Show: The Dog in Art from the Renaissance to Today* sits in the MFAH, opening with Jeff Koonz's Poodle. The no-brow introduction should be seen as a dig at all those who came to see dogs specifically. Emblazoned on the wall is the quote from Samuel Johnson "I would rather have a painting of a dog I have known than all the allegorical paintings you could ever show me."

We are walking down a blind alley with the explosion of globalization and cross cultural acceptance. With the recent explosion of the net worth of Chinese contemporary art the assumption of the mannerist role is complete. A reevaluation of the means and goals of art is necessary. We were supposed to be moving faster. We were supposed to be past this sort of thing. Guess not. Much as the Mannerist painters in the 16th century relied upon the imitation and re-configuration of Renaissance masters, postmodern art has garnered the valued attributes of appropriation and pastiche to fill the space since a truly original individual has labored in the name of art. I thought remix culture was great, the explosion of images and symbols and diversity democratized content and gave everyone a voice. As it has evolved now through Myspace and Youtube and Chamillionaire there is a huge hole where the heart once was in culture. There must be something else, but I have no idea what it is.



remix culture... democratized content and gave everyone a voice. As it has evolved now through Myspace, Youtube and Chamillionaire there is a huge hole where the heart once was in culture.



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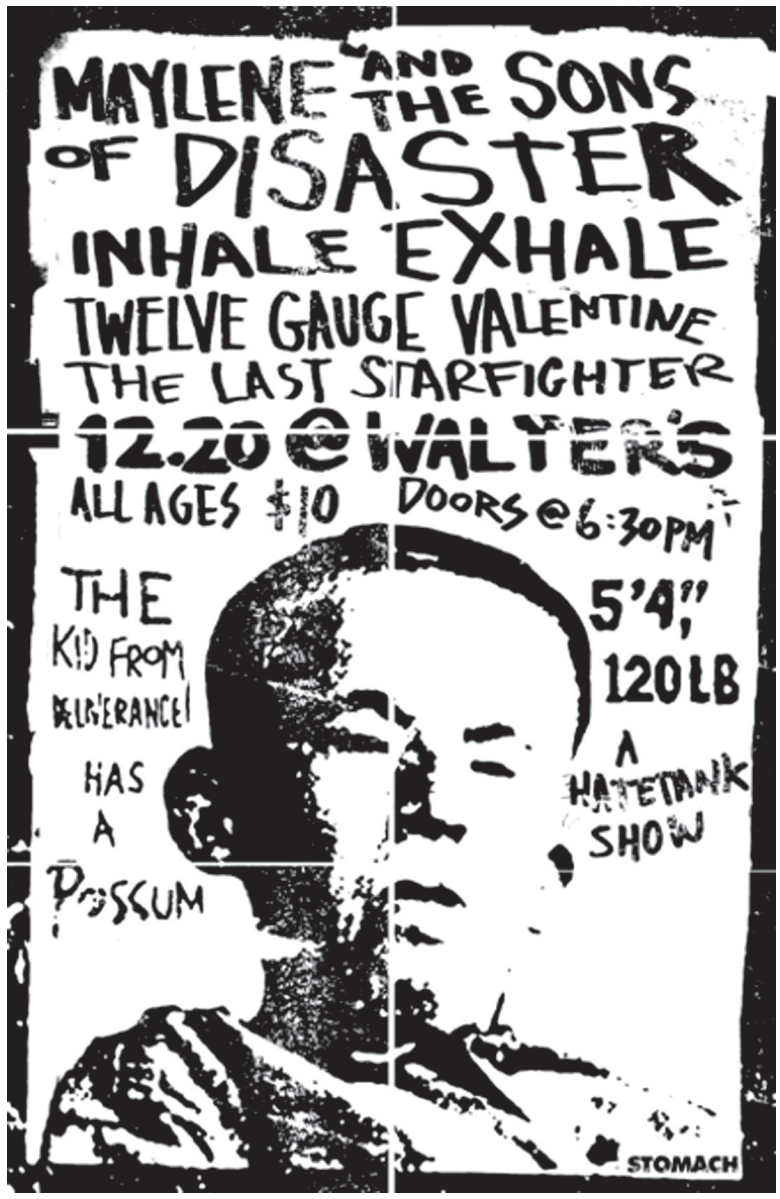


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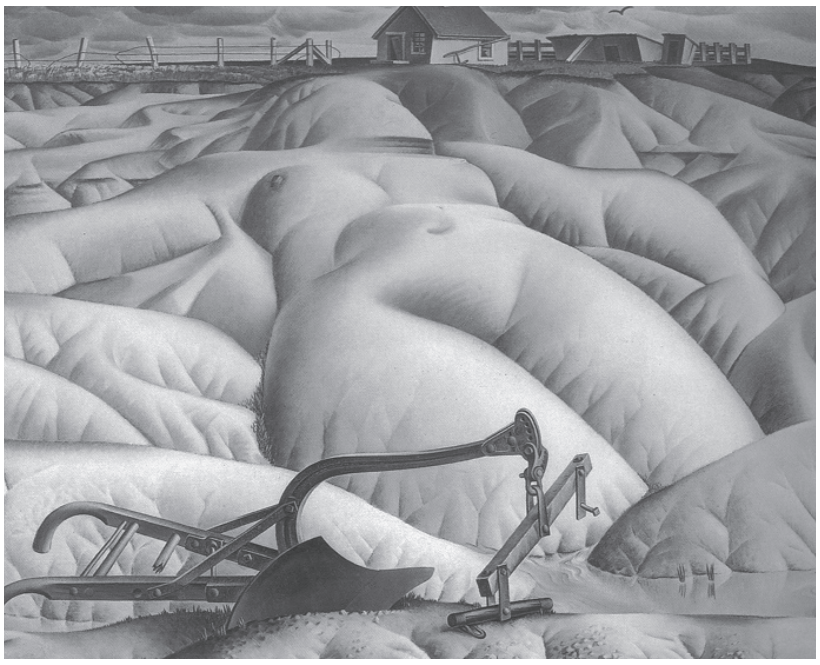




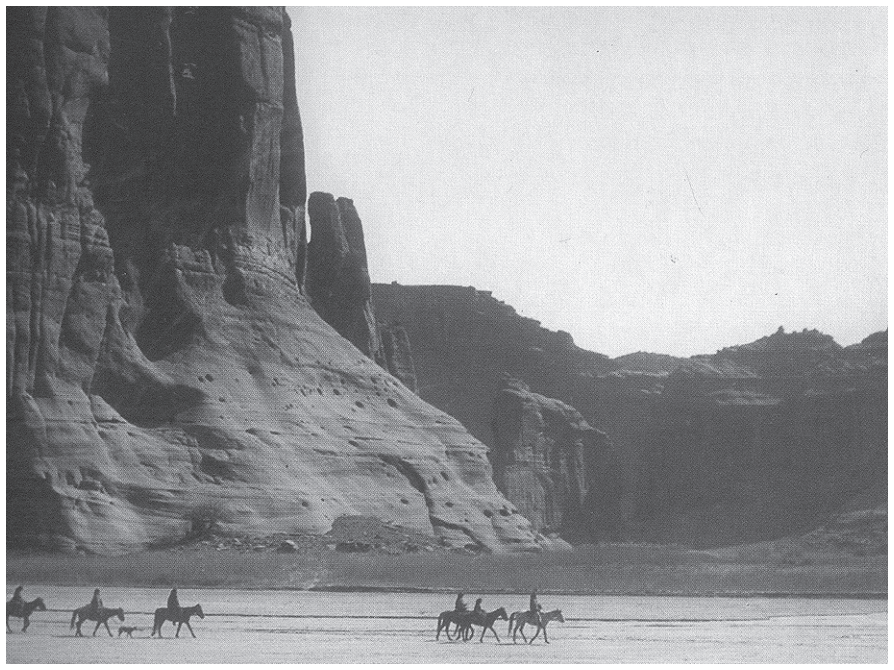
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The Decemberists

by Michael Bergeron



Alexandre Hogue, *Erosions No. 2, Mother Earth Laid Bare (1938)*



Edward S.Curtis, *Canyon de Chelly (gelatin silver photo, 1904)*

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston has a penchant for one-of-a-kind ground breaking exhibits. And frankly that's just the way we like it. The Modern West: American Landscapes 1890 – 1950 displays photography and paintings showing how they progressed over time mirroring the shifting cultural conditions in America.
Gallery after gallery of art evolves through different movements. It seems like the natural state of things for the sheer chasms of the Canyon de Chelly to transform to the surreal swirling boundaries of Jackson Pollock. The Navaho traveling across the canyon floor by horseback depicted in the Edward Curtis 1904 photograph had at that time only been recently allowed back (six years) onto what was their homeland. The toned gelatin silver print shows the Navajo isolated and surrounded by towering rock, almost strangers in their own land.

Emphasis is placed on the contribution of the American Indian to color and pattern and theme and to a subsequent generation of Americans who were displaced by poverty and misfortune. Just as noted artists rejected the popular notion of Indians abandoning their traditions so too they depicted Dust Bowl refugees with compassion instead of neglect. Dorothea Lange photos of a Depression-era migrant mother in makeshift surroundings speak the proverbial thousand words.

Much of the art on display are works that were the first to be seen by the public at large, and thus enforced a romantic view of the unsettled West as both holy and forlorn. The exhibit boldly places two works as centerpieces. In fact one has to walk around both paintings as they dominate the entrance of their respective galleries. The first is Thomas Moran's Mountain of the Holy Cross (1875). Long since dried up, the top of this particular mountain had crevices that allowed the snow to form in the shape of a cross. Moran's painting is huge and composites many elements (stream in the foreground, fog rolling over the peaks) much like a modern day CGI movie landscape. Also dominant is Georgia O'Keefe's Black Cross with Stars and Blue (1929). O'Keefe is heavily represented in this exhibit and her minimal take on the ubiquitous crosses that mark the New Mexico landscape add the right note of poetic melancholy.

There is the requisite Remington, an artist surely well known to Texans, as well as a couple of wall-sized works from Gottardo Piazzoni whose paintings epitomized the California ideal of spacious sea and landscapes. One painting, Thomas Hart Benton's The Hailstorm (1940), is hermetically sealed because the brilliant color comes from oil and egg tempura that cannot be exposed to normal air without losing its vibrancy.

The final gallery contains several Ansel Adams photos and Jackson Pollock's No. 13A Arabesque. A film showing Pollack painting at his outdoors studio, as seen from the point-of-view of the canvas (made in the early 50s), as well as Indians creating a sand painting projects in a corner of the room. (Not oddly Henri-Georges Clouzot made a docu, The Mystery of Picasso, in the mid-50s with the same trick of Picasso painting a glass panel placed in front of the lens.)

An accompanying book by curator Emily Ballew Neff completes the experience by offering a comprehensive list of major art colonies in California and New Mexico and the talent that migrated West in search of new artistic expression. The Modern West remains on display through the end of January. In addition to the show, the film department will screen complimentary movies that tie-in to the themes found in American Landscapes. Films playing in December include Bonnie and Clyde, Little Big Man, Red River, The Unforgiven and The Searchers.

The Houston Museum of Natural Science presents Ben Franklin: In Search of a Better World, currently on display and running until January 21 of next year. The show has a simple way of portraying a very complex man. Notably much of the exhibit has an ergonomic hands-on feeling. For instance, the attendee constantly comes across do-it yourself puzzles and mind twisters that were among Franklin's many trademarks. A lighted map shows how far and scattered Franklin's postal stores extended across the new world.

Spread throughout are inviting colonial style chairs with foot pedals that activate a rotating fan, or audiovisual recreations of Franklin stories based on diaries and letters. One such scenario recounts Franklin and John Adams (taken from Adam's journal) sharing a bed while traveling in France. Franklin keeps opening the window for fresh air, and Adams keeps getting out of bed to close it. This goes on for a while until Franklin starts lecturing Adams on the benefits of fresh air. Adams falls asleep listening to Franklin's long-winded diatribe, so you could say that Franklin won that disagreement.

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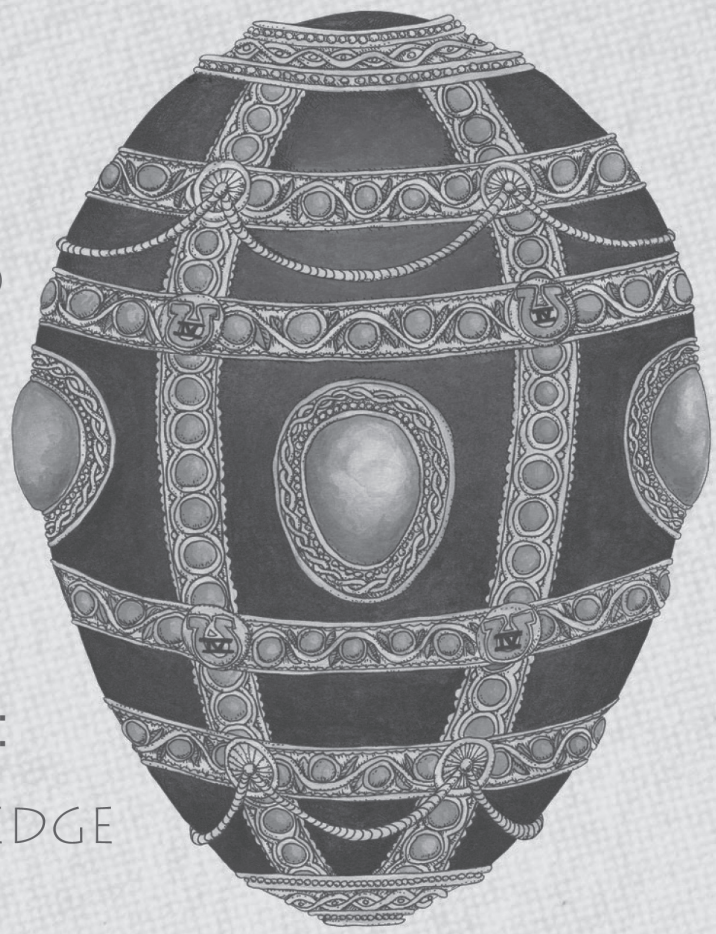
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Film

Big Screen Little Screen

by Michael Bergeron


The Foutain

Come Present Day a likely stocking stuffer will be the readily available DVD. There are more DVDs released than theatrical events (most of them were theatrical to begin with) and VHS is officially dead. Yeah, and vinyl is dead too only nobody told my record player. DVD has but a short time in this world as the new competing formats High Def DVD and Blu-Ray DVD will eventually rock-em sock-em out at the counter.

A person can't really want to watch a movie like Apocalypto or The Fountain on DVD but it isn't always about what you like. Actually films like Apocalypto and The Fountain are the kind that best unreel on a big screen playground. They are also films that offer delight to the cineaste while not really playing to the popcorn crowd. Apocalypto offers the kind of primitive cinema found in Werner Herzog's Aguirre Wrath of God or Terence Malick's The New World, yet all three of those films, other than evoking protagonists who live in a kind of harmony with nature, also exist diametrically apart.

Mel Gibson's film takes us from an idyllic, a virtual utopian, Mayan life in the forest that goes horribly wrong when the village is pillaged by Mayans from the big pyramid. When the remaining captives are brought before the king, the best thing they can hope for is to be sold as slaves. In Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom we got the PG-13 version of a beating heart being ripped from a sacrificant's body, in Apocalypto we get the R rated version.

Truth be told, utopian societies are by function more barbaric than our present dystopian society. In a manner similar to films as diverse as V For Vendetta or Children of Men, Apocalypto offers a less than rosy critique of present society while portraying the same as a version of the past or future. Emerging the lone survivor of all the prisoners, Jaguar Paw escapes and the ensuing chase through the dense woods provides movie action with hardly a chance for the viewer to catch a breath. If you've ever wondered how to make a lethal weapon from any three objects in a jungle this film provides the template.

Apocalypto never states as much but there were Mayan metropolises at locations as central to North America as St. Louis (Cahokia, 800-1400 A.D.) Likewise The Fountain never mentions once what the date of its various segments are, although all The Fountain's ads and reviews designate a 1000-year span.

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Hugh Jackman and Amanda Weisz are soul mates that cross paths during the Spanish Inquisition, at a modern cancer ward, and in a resplendent cosmic future. Filmmaker Darren Aronofsky mixes time back and forth and the entire meaning doesn't become quite clear until nearly the end if not well after the voyage through space in a bubble. Perhaps not the ideal entertainment for the couch, but on the big screen of the cinema the meaning is quite clear. The Spanish explorer finds the Garden of Youth, partakes from the tree and is assimilated by the tree. In the present day the bark of the tree suggests a cure for cancer. The last segment consists of a shaved Jackman in a yoga position voyaging through the galaxy with the tree in a clear round space vehicle. Could anything make more perfect sense?

DVDs do have their absolute pleasures, and much of that consists of extras and an awareness of nostalgia. If you're confined to your TV with an ankle bracelet then Essential Arthouse: 50 Years of Janus Films would be your cup of java. Janus was a foreign film distributor back in the day and this 50-disc set consists of most of the sound titles that constituted world cinema before the arrival of today's Miramaxs and Sony Pictures Classics. That should keep you busy for a half a year.

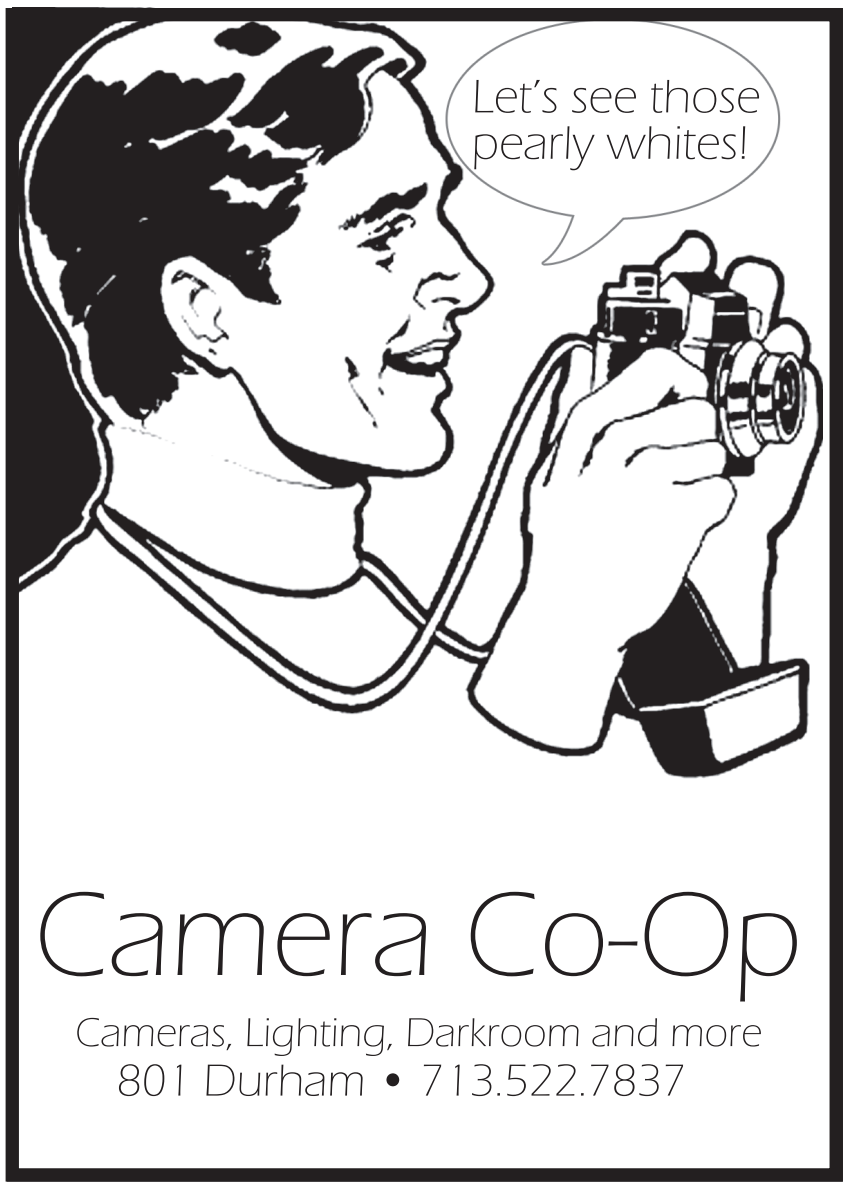
Recent releases that deserve scrutiny for worthy commentaries include Michael Moore The Best of Awful Truth (gone but not forgotten), That Girl Season 2, and SCTV Best of the Early Years. The latter, a 3 disc set, showcases a featurette on the McKenzie Brothers that slays. That Girl has 30 episodes from the 1967-68 season, many with commentary from Marlo Thomas. To paraphrase Marlo, it was the sexual revolution on the streets but on the show you couldn't be seen in a slip. A generation later when she appeared as the Mom on Friends, Marlo says that then they were talking about not sleeping on the wet spot on the mattress.

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society

In the ultimate cross-promotion with the current Casino Royale MGM Home Entertainment releases all 20 James Bond films (produced by Eon Productions, so that's counting the late-6os Casino Royale and the Warner Brothers Never Say Never Again) in re-mastered editions. The Ultimate James Bond contains 4 volumes each with 5 films. Each movie has 2 DVDs, one with the movie and commentary, the other loaded with new (and old) extras that range from location docus to press conferences. Roger Moore completely newly recorded commentaries for this edition, and his rap includes plenty of stories about all the films he's made, not just his 7 Bonds.

Most intriguing are the 60s-era featurettes that deal with James Bond marketing. The Gilbert Company, popular for making 007 toy figures, went bankrupt when their James Bond Race Track, sold through Sear in Christmas of 1965, had so many returns due to faulty track connectors. (I tracked one on eBay, in original box, that sold for over $300.) Another TV segment compares Sean Connery's Bond to the Scarlet Pimpernel (a spy during the days of the French Revolution). Haven't heard from the old SP lately.

Interesting how a successful franchise has to keep re-inventing itself, as 007 has very well accomplished with Daniel Craig's borderline sadistic turn as Bond. How much longer will our culture escape in the adventures of espionage? After all, films about sheriffs of the 1900s and bounty hunters, a staple in the 50s and 60s, have all but vanished. Domino was hardly Wanted Dead or Alive. Every decade of filmmaking since the 1920s has revived Tarzan, who most recently appeared as a Disney cartoon and as a stage play. That's a DVD volume that would fill a shelf.


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Music

THEY SIT AROUND THE TABLE TALKING SENTENCES SO INCOMPLETE

by Kwame M. Anderson (ruining the craft since 1990 something)

It's almost over now folks, one more month and we can put 2006 behind us; who's excited? Christmas time is upon us and now the employees at Wal Mart, and perhaps other places, can say, "Merry Christmas," as opposed to "Happy Holidays," which they were forced to use after the small uproar about taking the Christ out of the mass, but this year after protests, the Christians have returned the savior to his rightful place as a catchphrase in line with sales and customer service. And why not, when those people were camped outside of the stores after Thanksgiving, and when those 7 dollar an hour wage workers at Circuit City or Mall of America looked at their schedule and saw they had to work from midnight to 7 AM, or 5AM until 4:30, they were thinking about Christ our savior. The store managers, the sale trolling mothers, the nerds trying to get a deal on the PS3, the dude trying to get that 800 dollar flat screen for his girlfriend, the lady trying to get her man that thing that lights up and plays DVDs; they were all thinking of Christ, Jesus, birth, and what that means to the world. Oh yes, when I'm hanging those lights outside to illuminate the streets I am waiting for the return of the King (wouldn't want him to walk down a dark street). Yes, Christ has returned to the mass, now we can shop and spend with a goal in mind…celebrating Christ! I love it.

So in line with this new inspiration, I will tell you of other things to do other than spend in the name of the Lord, you can…spend money on CDs and shows (in the name of the Lord ofcourse). It is what they call the fourth quarter in marketing speak, which means it's the last time (this year) to get you to part with your precious currency, don't be greedy, give and give graciously. The college students are returning, the teachers are close to vacation, the sound of those same five Christmas songs, sung by 50 different people, will ring in our heads for 'tis the season. I thought about listing my favorite songs of the season, but then I thought why mislead an already misled flock. So let's get down to it, shall we? I need to finish my NBA Live' 07 season, the X Box won't play itself. So in the words of Michael Richardson, "I am not a racist, look a nigger."

MUSIC IN PERSON

12/10/06
THE BLACK KEYS
Numbers

The Black Keys play that raucous down home rock n' roll based in vintage guitars amplified through vintage amps which derives a feeling of the "real" music of yesteryear. Still, the band does a fine job executing this feat live. When you go to a show, are you there to rock, or are you there to intellectualize? Well I'm fuckin' there to rock dude. This is a good band to see for that reason. Tasty licks, no bass to get in the way, it's simple, it's primal, it fills a void that is left by all that hip hop and synchronized dancing Numbers is a good live venue to see a band, and being as it is also a dance club, the lighting can be mildly exciting as you drink cheap beer and ponder the Gibson versus the Stratocaster, while Hendrix played through a Strat, I tend to enjoy the thicker Humbucker sound of a Gibson, though I guess you could just change the pickups, and then you could use a different gauged set of strings, or maybe adjust the amp…etc., etc.

12/12/06
BILL CALLAHAN, JOANA NEWSOM
The Orange Show

Bill Callahan, sometimes referred to as (Smog), released an album called A River Isn't Too Much To Love (Drag City) which was a fantastic collection of tunes that ranged in topic from family to love to actual rivers (which may have been a metaphor), but he never came to town in promotion of that wonderful album, until now. Weather permitting, nothing would assist these songs better than a cool breeze accenting the strums of a guitar and the harmonies of these lovelorn ditties. Imagine standing or sitting on a slightly dirty chair drinking keg beer, and looking at indie rock fan boys, free spirited women, and liberal arts majors. What could make this moment any more perfect? Joana Newsom, whose latest

Christ has returned to the mass, now we can



One Man Machine
12/9 @ Super Happy Fun Land



The Black Keys
12/9 @ Numbers



Napalm Death
12/13 @ Meridian



Penny Royal
12/15 @ Warehouse Live



Jabarvy
12/16 @ Last Concert



Patrice Pike
12/9 @ Engine Room

album YS, has frothed the mouths of music critics across the land. An expansive work that while orchestrated and beautifully recorded, will be reconstructed, but without the orchestra but with some of the string arrangements. While the last time she performed solo with harp, this time she'll have a band, which I'm sure will enhance the mysticism of the songs. As Newsom's voice is a special effect in itself, this will be an event to remember, unless you smoke too much pot, which means you will remember parts of the day, but the meal afterward will be exquisite.

MUSIC TO PLAY ON DEVICES

THE CLIPSE

Hell Hath No Fury

(Jive)

So this is going to be the album of the year. Five years ago, The Clipse released Lord Willin', an album full on crack slinging odes which had one of the hardest rap beats and songs of the last ten years (Grindin') which boasted the line, "I push cane like a cripple." This is years before the crack rap explosion that currently dominates the rap scene. In fact, many rap critics faulted the rappers dependency of cooked coke and baking soda. Still, it was a fine album that took drug rap to Langston Hughes proportions, it was visual and aural, it made each line exciting, each moment more vivid, it was poetry. It also managed something that few rap albums have, it managed to get better with time, I still bump it as if it came out last month.

shop and spend with a goal in mind

Well, after disputes with their label, their producers, and a lack of appreciation from their peers, fresh off their We Got It For Cheap mixtape opuses, they finally (5 years later) release the follow to their smashing debut, Hell Hath No Fury, and boy are they pissed. The duo recently commented that the beats the Neptunes are known for these days, have no place on their album, so while entirely produced by Chad and Pharrel, this is some of the darkest music the duo have ever concocted. Malice and Pusha T have returned full of vile and disgust, the crack hasn't disappeared, but while they were flossy and arrogant, this time their mad as hell, and you get song after song of menace and venom. Beautiful it is, unlike the party and bullshit, fake thug, Robert Goulet shit they're passing off as rap these days, this is the realio dealio. It's wicked, it's hardcore, it head nod-ish, but in no way meant for clubs or metrosexuals. Get ready people, put this in your pipe and smoke it.

WALTERS
ON
WASHINGTON

SATURDAY 2ND

MR. PLOW

FRIDAY 8TH

ANOTHER RUN
EARL GREYHOUND

SATURDAY 9TH

THROUGH THE EYES
OF THE DEAD
FROM A SECOND
STORY WINDOW
THE ACACIA STRAIN
LIGHT THIS CITY

THURSDAY 14TH

PALEHORSE
TEN CROWNS
RECON
GRAVE ROBBERS

FRIDAY 18TH
EARL GREYHOUND
W/ ANOTHER RUN

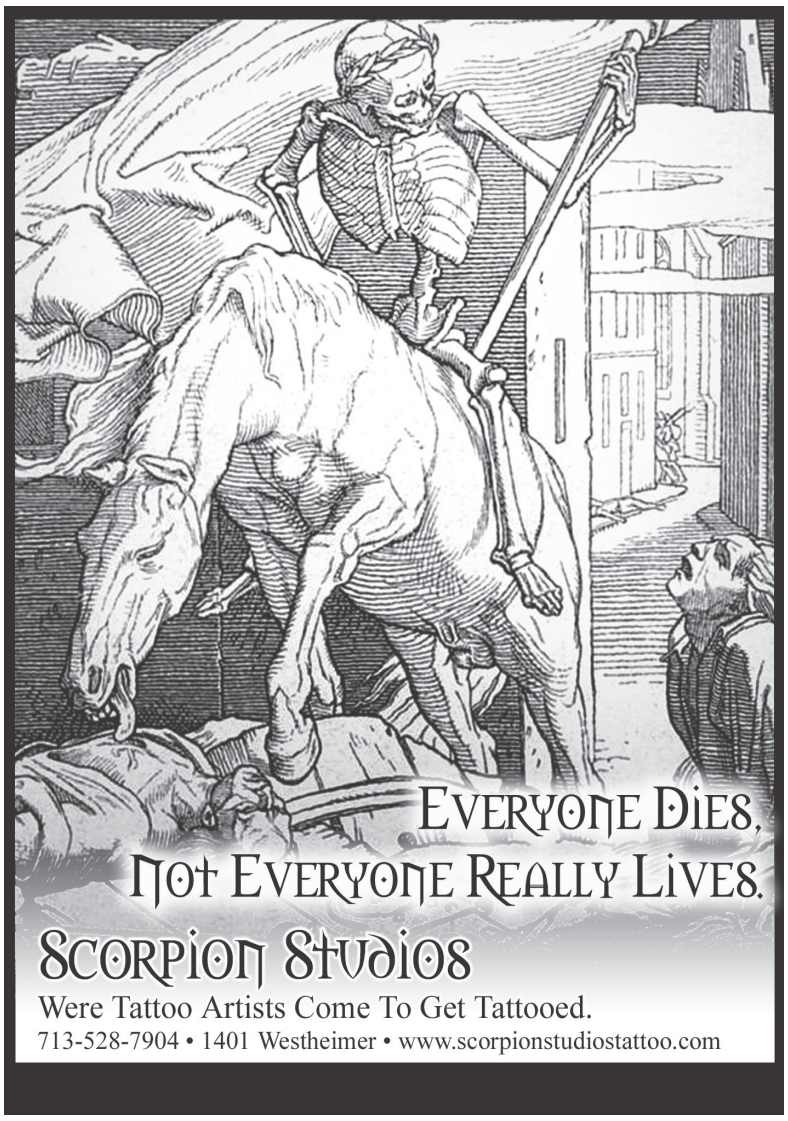
WEDNESDAY 20TH

MAYLENE AND THE
SONS OF DISASTER
INHALE EXHALE
TWELVE GAUGE VAL-
ENTINE
THE LAST
STARFIGHTER

FRIDAY 29TH

THE JONBENET
INSECT WARFARE
WARWOLF

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Free Press Houston
Issue 74 | 12/06

Scattered Pages

"This is Where the Story Ends" & "Lazy are the Skeletons"

by Evan Dunivan

This past year, Scattered Pages have been spending their time wisely, managing to remain in the laboratory long enough to bring about two noteworthy achievements.

Their seven song EP "This is where the story ends" was released earlier this year, followed closely by their full-length LP "Lazy are the skeletons".

"…Story Ends" boasts all of the qualities of a genuinely well-written record, encompassing meaningful lyrics, smoothly structured songs, and minimal but effective production. The title track opens the record with a dusty trail feel that invokes images of lonely wagon rides across deserted plains, accompanied only by the rustling of tumbleweed and one's own footsteps. Although I would say that this track is the strongest of the seven, it by no means overshadows the remaining songs.

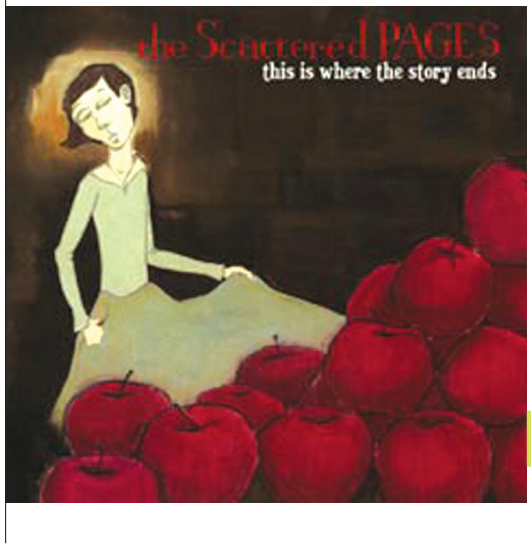
Something certainly worth mentioning is the contribution that each member of the group makes to the completed work. Although there is a definite difference in the songs written by vocalist/guitarist Brandon Hancock and bassist/vocalist Kurt Coburn, the finished pieces possess a sense of unity and cooperation. Both albums are produced by the band and engineered by drummer Andy McWilliams, who is one of my favorite fellow percussionists around town. The EP closes on one of the more upbeat numbers, delivered to us courtesy of bassist Kurt Coburn. "Stately Man" is a catchy little tune that captures a hint of humor without losing the depth brought forth by the lyrical content.

Shortly after the release of the EP came the full-length "Lazy are the skeletons", carrying another handful of choice tracks and slick recordings. Once again, singer/guitarist Brandon Hancock captures our ears and imaginations with the eccentric and memorable "Alice to Wonderland". Though I have a few favorites on both records, I found no filler material whatsoever. It is clear that The Scattered Pages have it together on all levels. On a personal note, of all the musicians I have met over the years, Brandon, Andy, and Kurt are some of the most talented and sincere.



The title track opens the record with a dusty trail feel that invokes images of lonely wagon rides across deserted plains, accompanied only by the rustling of tumbleweed and one's own footsteps.

The Scattered Pages recently returned from a successful three-week jaunt up the west coast, playing shows throughout California and up to Washington. Do not hesitate to catch them at their regular Thursday night shows at Brasil, or other spots around town. Over the years they have gained a dedicated group of fans that can always be seen singing along at the shows. So make it out and be sure to pick up both of the recent releases; they are worth it, no doubt.



WAREHOUSE LIVE

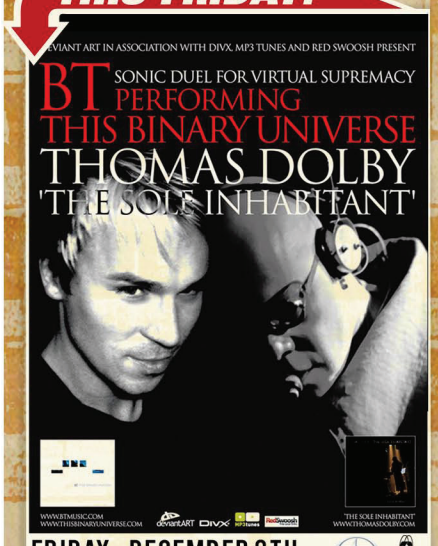
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DECEMBER 13TH *LIMITED TICKETS AVAILABLE

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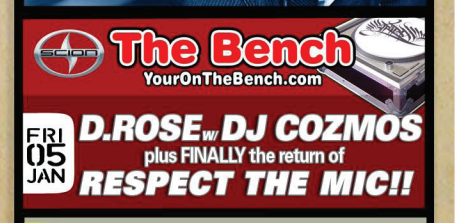
FRIDAY • DECEMBER 15TH

ON SALE THIS SATURDAY 10AM









30 JAN **DARK FUNERAL** with ENSLAVED • ABIGAIL WILLIAMS

05 FEB **METAL CHURCH**

25 FEB **UNLEASHED** with KRISIUN, BELPHEGOR & HATESPHERE
LISTEN TO THEM ON "FROM THE DEPTHS" 91.7 • KTRU SUNDAYS 10PM



SAT 03 MAR **ASYLUM STREET SPANKERS**

CLUBMONKEY, THE ROD RYAN SHOW & 94.5 THE BUZZ BRING YOU

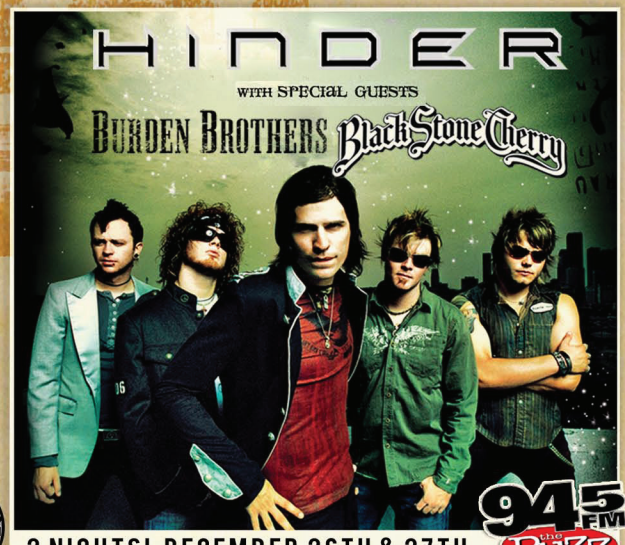
BLT III

BLACK TIE + LINGERIE + TOGA x3

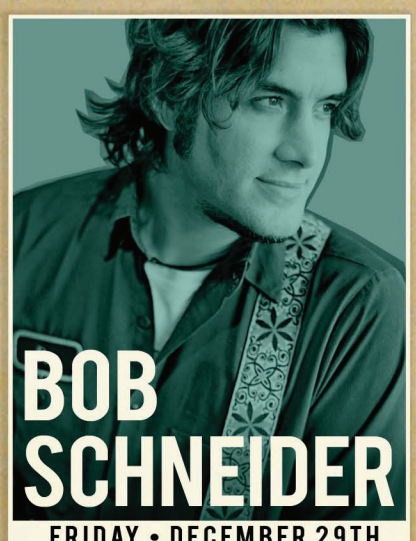
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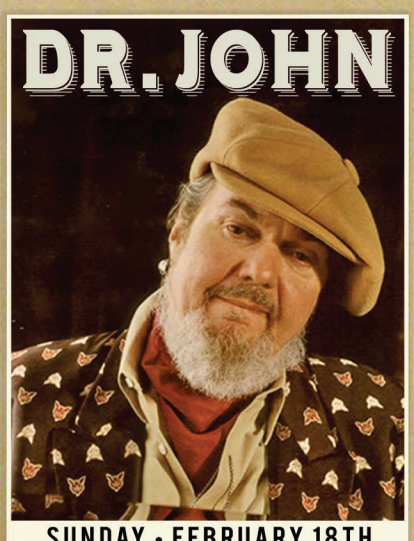
NEW YEARS EVE!
SUNDAY • DECEMBER 31ST



2 NIGHTS! DECEMBER 26TH & 27TH



FRIDAY • DECEMBER 29TH



SUNDAY • FEBRUARY 18TH



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Free Press Houston
Issue 74 | 12/06

+Tech-knowledge

Holiday gift guide for gamers by Tyler Barber

First off, I've got a Wii, and The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess. However, given that Zelda takes about 70 hours to finish, you'll have to wait until the next issue for a review. Instead, I'm giving you a gamer's gift guide that features unique gaming merchandise found in the hippest corners of the internet. Forget those cheesy, played out Hot-Topic video-game shirts; I've compiled a list of items that won't embarrass that special gamer in your life. Quality doesn't come cheap though, so dig deep, go online, and show a gamer how much you care. *All featured sites ship to the US.*



b. front b. back

Official "hip" Nintendo Clothing site
the-king-of-games.com/english

The King of Games website hosts some of the best video-game t-shirt designs on the net sporting Nintendo's officially licensed merchandise. The 20th Anniversary Zelda shirt design is so slick, you could easily picture this shirt on any of Brazil's hippster-inclined patrons. I want one of these shirts more than I want to live a long, healthy life. The King of Games English site launched December 4th, so hurry before the world buys all their goods.

a. **20th Anniversary Zelda T-shirt:** $42
b. **Fantastic Adventure (the original Mario Bros. in Japan):** $48
c. **Hoodie:** $80
Shipping: (approx.) $12

Old School Scarves
b2d4.com (bits to die for)

These scarves sport the pixelated landscapes that populated our Atari 2600 games. Though they are based in Germany, they ship to the US for a flat $9 rate, so gather friends, order together and save on shipping.

d. **scarf:** $51
shipping: $9 (flat rate)

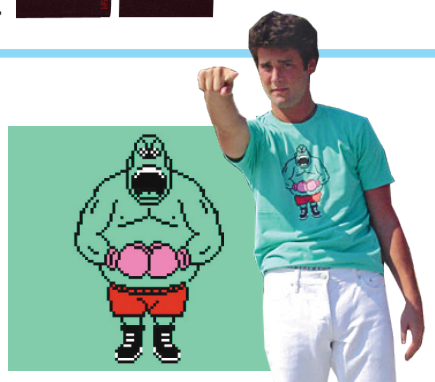


d.

King Hippo Tee
durkl.com

Not even the most elite hipster site can deny the power of videogames with their t-shirt-rendition of gaming fav King Hippo. I wonder if you punch that guy, (right) in the stomach his pants will drop?

e. **Shirt:** $18.99



e.

Mini Review: Wii Sports +B
Wii
1-4 players



Packed-in with the Nintendo Wii is Wii Sports—showcasing the simple and intuitive controls of Nintendo's new console. On the surface, its easy to write off Wii Sports as a watered-down sports compilation, but when you dig deep, you'll uncover a surprising amount of complexity.

Wii Sports includes Tennis, Baseball, Bowling, Golf and Boxing. Of the five games Bowling, and Golf are my favorite. Grab a few beers and some buds and hit the virtual lanes. The wand-like Wiimote detects your bowling swing, as well as any spin you put on the ball. Bowling is the most solid game in Wii sports, as the ball will behave just how you think it will when you release it.

The nine holes included in Golf offer plenty of variation for your swings. Wind and the power of your swing are the important factors in getting close to the green. Once you do, you'll notice the inconsistencies that trickle down into each subsequent sports game. For example, the putting game suffers from detection issues, as sometimes your character will swing when you are rearing back for your stroke.

Tennis is the simplest sports game of the pack, as you don't control where you player runs on the field, rather you simply swing your arm forehand and backhand to return volleys.

Both Boxing and Baseball come off gimmicky. In Boxing you can jab, hook and upper-cut, but getting the game to recognize the moves is a bit of luck. You'll find yourself thrusting

continued on page 18


Free Press
holiday Bash
+Staff infection
Million Year Dance. Bo Jones. Generic Tribe.
The Riff Tiffs. DJ Wes Wallace.
Come sit on Santa's lap! Free Giveaways! Dollar Drafts! Mistletoe! Free Bathrooms!
Wednesday December 20th @ Numbers (300 Westheimer)

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For the Art-nerds

iam8bit.net

I am 8-bit is a L.A. based annual art show dedicated to re-envisioning the 8-bit era into modern art forms. Visit the site's store to purchase their coffee-table book **I am 8-bit**, an assortment of limited print buttons, as well as prints from the art show.

f. **Book:** $30
g. **Button set:** $20
h. **Prints:** $20-$150

f. 



g.



iPod GelaSkins

urbanretro.co.uk

This Mario & Luigi skin will keep your nerd-jams in style. The GelaSkins are made of a thin vinyl material that not only decorates, but protects your iPod. You can get any design on the site for the iPod Video, Nano, and Mini.

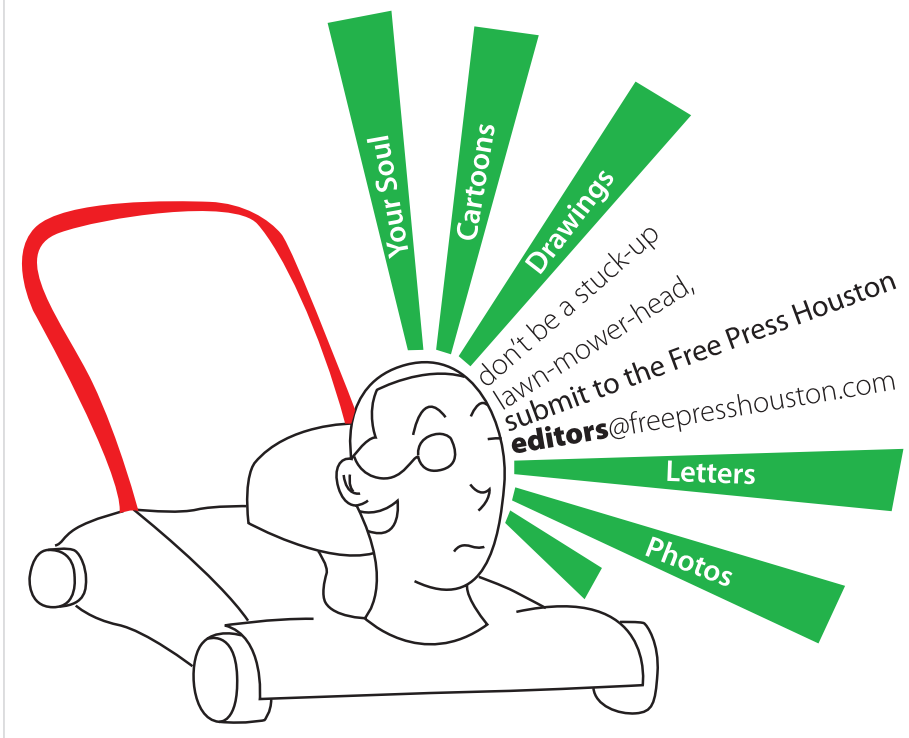
i. **iPod GelaSkin:** $20



i.

your arms back-and-forth trying to get some jabs in. In Baseball, you can bat, and pitch, and as in Tennis, how early, or late you hit the ball will determine where it goes. Once its air born, the game will automatically play the outfield, sometimes resulting in cheap outs.

While its not perfect, the fact that this game a) comes free with the system, b) is a game you can get your girlfriend, mom, grandpa, and maybe your cat to play, and c) is the only game thus far that uses your custom Mii characters, (little characters you can create to resemble you, your friends, and even Jesus and Gandhi on the Wii) makes it worth your time. Play Wii Sports with a bunch of friends and the inconsistencies will be minor gripes.





super happy
fun land

Dec. 5th:
PD WILDER (etheral drone from 1/3 of hotel,hotel)
WINCE
Ether Research Therapy

Dec. 6th:
Fancie
1977
The Bluebirds

Dec. 7th:
Warsaw Taxi
Paul Sprawl
Matt Keating

Dec. 8th:
Mad Happy
GStyles
Plid

Dec. 9th:
Searching For Signal
Doo Doo Butter
In Denmark
Shades of Blue
One Man Machine
Disaster Squad 1967

Dec. 10th:
Ek$on
Artistry of Warfare
Devon Blair Band

Dec. 14th:
Improv Rock Show with
Orents Stirner
The Soarce

Dec. 15th:
Angy Becker art opening

Dec. 16th:
Last Soul Descendents
Ne Plus Ultra
Canartic

Dec. 19th:
Austin Lucas
Ether Research Therapy

Dec 21st:
Boogdish
Chris Hamlett

Dec. 22nd:
Paula Maya
DJ Taffee
El Gato Negrito
The Bluebirds

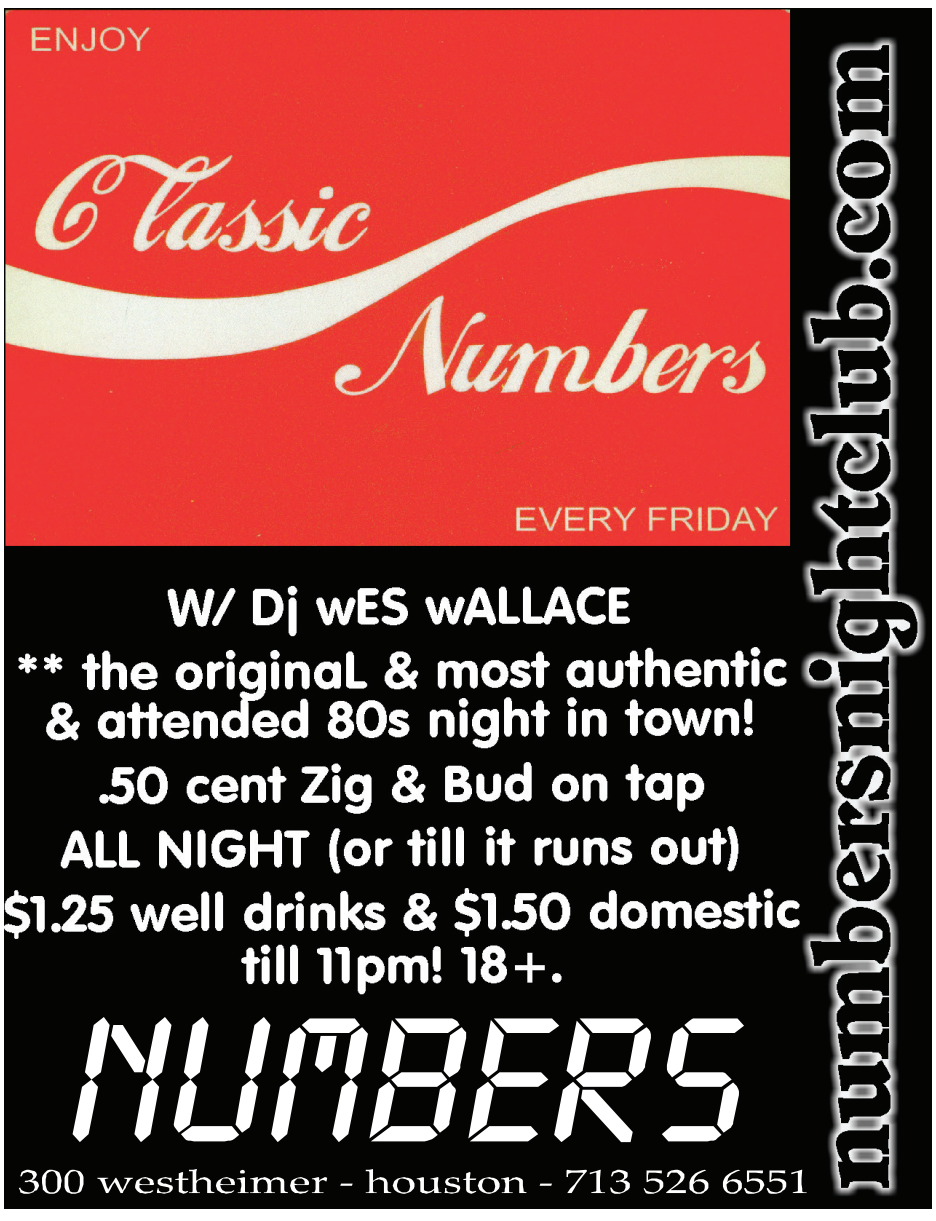
Dec 31st:
New Years Noise
Bully Pulpit

Jan 4th:
The Early Tapes
Lock Arms Block Cemeteries

Jan 6th:
Avery
Savory Special

2610 Ashland St. @ W.27th in the Heights
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www.superhappyfunland.com



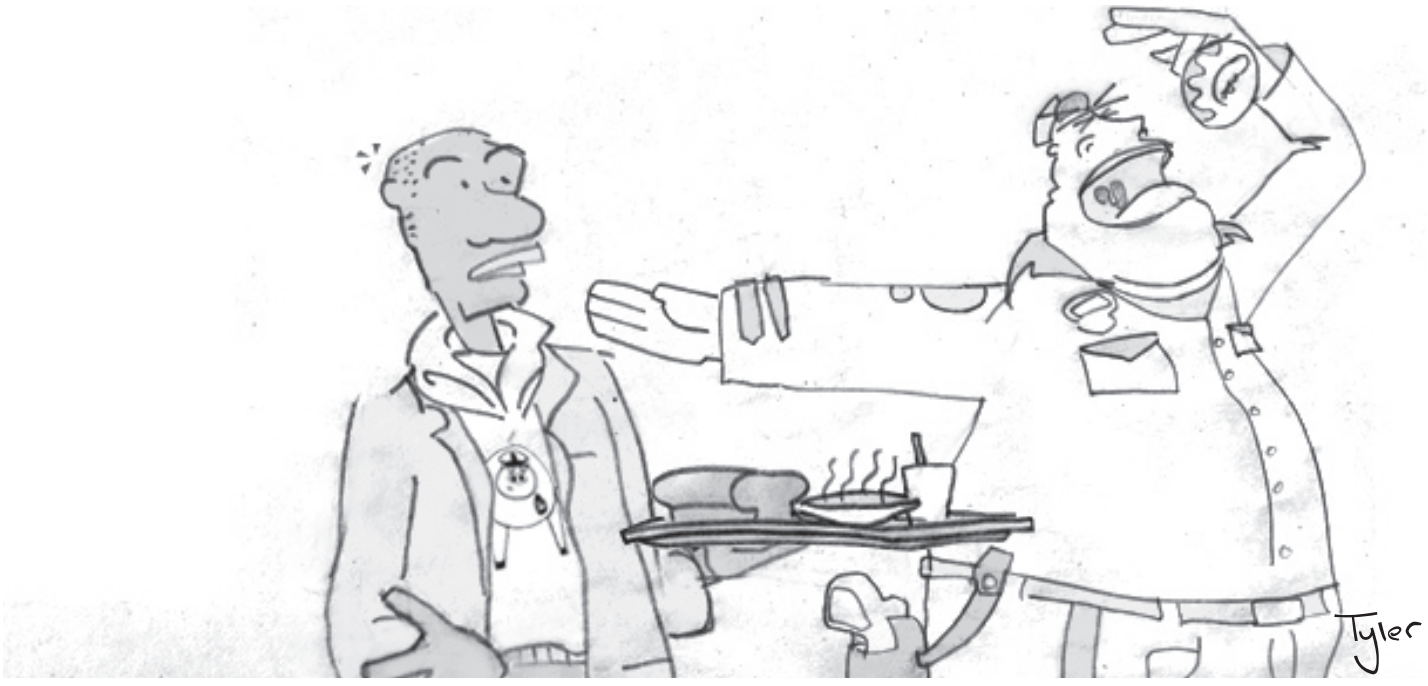


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World

Houston Food Not Bombs: Getting Moved Across the Street Often

by Nick Cooper (nickcooper.com)



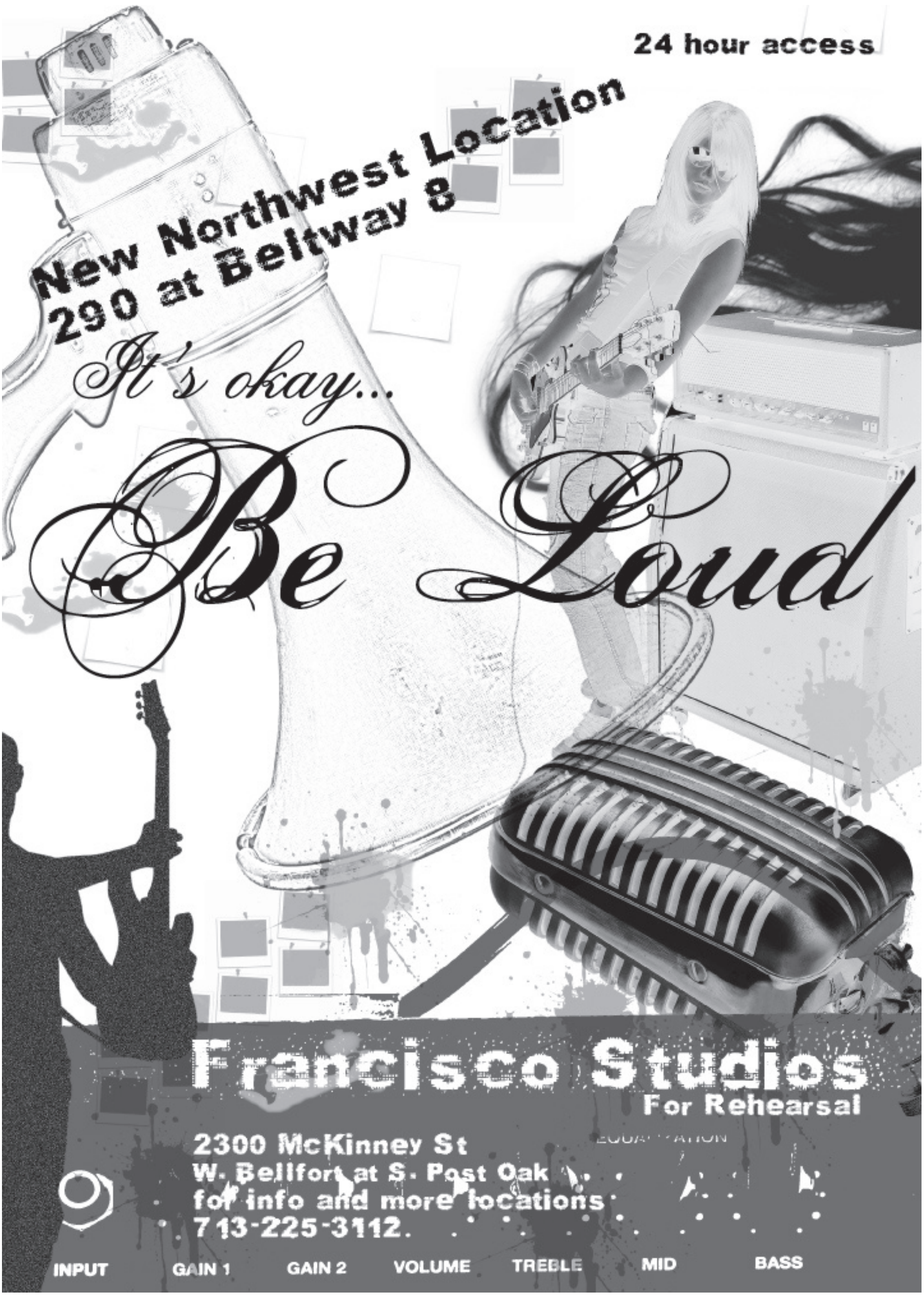
Houston Food Not Bombs had been serving food to the hungry in Houston for 13 years. We've been in front of City Hall for many months. But now for the fourth time in three years, we have responded to police pressure by agreeing to move, this time across the street. The city wastes of resources on harassing homeless and (to a far lesser extent) Food Not Bombs. This policy decision necessarily takes away resources from other agendas, such as actually helping people.

Food Not Bombs is an international organization that asserts "If we were to spend the amount of money we spend on weaponry on feeding the homeless, we could eliminate the homeless problem the world over. Poverty is a form of violence. We often assume that poverty is inevitable for some people, but with the surplus of food in this country alone, no one should have to go hungry. Poverty is, instead, a way of maintaining the status quo in a society. If everyone had equal access to the necessities of life, as well as equal opportunity to education, work, etc., some very powerful people would suddenly find themselves with a little bit less due to the fact that they no longer control such a large piece of the economic pie. As an organization, Food Not Bombs simply tries to redistribute a tiny portion of the wealth (in this case, food) that so many seem to not want to give up. The name "Food Not Bombs" means just that. With so many people at home and abroad going hungry, and so much of our wealth controlled by so few, and going towards such terrible things as weaponry, it's insane to assume that we can't redistribute some of that wealth to those who need it."

The day to day reality of the group in Houston is that people help each other by doing whatever they can, whether it be to donate food, prepare food, wash dishes, drive stuff around, etc. It is a simple thing, it would seem, to share food with hungry people, but authorities like to intervene occasionally. It is fascinating to hear the logic of the cops who believe that their intervention is going to make things better or simpler when nothing could be simpler than the way it already is. What the true motivation is, who knows? The reader might hope that the intention is to protect or better serve the homeless, but given what I have seen, that is just naive. To me, it seems to boil down to telling homeless to become less visible. The city's policies against the homeless are oppressive. The civility ordinance is ridiculous. You can't sit, lie, or even put belongings down on the sidewalk between the hours of 7am and 11pm? Come on, how could an ordinance like that possibly be enforced equally for all potential violators? It seems to be based on the idea that you can solve homeless problems by banishing them. Groups like the Midtown Management District (houstonmidtown.com) have gone to City Hall to ask City Council to enact the civility ordinance to protect the interestsof some of their residents. Ostensibly the wealthier residents.

So we move often. Around Christmas of 2004 the cops started telling everyone they were going to be kicked out of Main and Pierce where FNB had shared food for five years. The location was a central hub wherepeople could bring aid to the downtown homeless. At first, the cops told the homeless that they would be evicted by force, so FNB members invited the press. That day was crazy, mostly because one of the members of the press, a KTRK ABC Channel 13 camera man named Marshall decided to make his own news. Apparently worried that there would not be enough of a story to shoot, he called HPD with a charge of public urination against a homeless man. Two police officers at the site confirmed the ABC reporter was in fact the complainant. During and after the arrest, activists taunted and chased the cameraman away.

continued on page 22


24 hour access
New Northwest Location
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It's okay...
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INPUT
GAIN 1
GAIN 2
VOLUME
TREBLE
MID
BASS

Free Press Houston
Issue 74 | 12/06

But aside from that, with all the cameras there, the day ended without use of force. The cops backed off and tried a different technique. They worked out a plan with member groups of Houston's Coalition for the Homeless. I assume members of the Coalition do much good work, but in this case I was alarmed by their complicity in enacting an eviction on behalf of the city. They cleared the homeless out with the carrot instead of the stick. The city and private donors had raised money for 170 or so homeless to enter 30 days of various programs and hotels if they would leave immediately. If they didn't, there was still the threat of forceful eviction looming. So off they went, some into useful programs, others to hotels in the middle of no-

Our first day after leaving the City Hall park, the Mayor attended an event there to celebrate Gandhi and call for peace

where with no food or bus fare. And within minutes of the homeless leaving, the city fenced it off for permanent Metro vehicle parking.

FNB needed a new location and moved to the library in April 2005. Immediately a security guard started telling us we couldn't share food there. The cops came and somehow we negotiated to serve on the sidewalk near the library. Then with the library renovations, they fenced off the whole library, so we moved across the street to the park in front of City Hall. It was beginning to seem that anywhere we served food soon became fenced off.

In the last week of September, 2006, park rangers came to tell us that we would get in some kinda trouble for breaking some unspecified law if we didn't leave the park in front of City Hall. As of the beginning of October, Food Not Bombs moved back across the street to our new permanent location: the corner of Smith and McKinney on the sidewalk in front of the library. Our first day after leaving the City Hall park, the Mayor attended an event there to celebrate Gandhi and call for peace. If the Mayor is pro-peace, then he should know, there are many types of wars. Wars against the people of other countries, a war against our own homeless, a war against immigrants. Peace is more than holding a candle.

Come share: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 8pm, Sunday 7pm, on the ledge on the corner of the sidewalk in front of the Library at Smith and McKinney.

"BEST NEW CLUB 2004" -HOUSTON PRESS

MERIDIAN

1503 CHARTRES

SAT. - DEC. 9 -
DAREWARE'S
SINFUL X-MAS PARTY

SUN. - DEC. 10 - BLIND
GUARDIAN W/LEAVES EYES

WED. - DEC. 13 -
NAPALM DEATH W/
NECROFAITH
AS EDEN BURNS
SEVER THE SILENCE
BRUTALLY MUTILATED
PREDOMINANT MORTIFICATION
DEAD TO FALL
ANIMOSITY
A LIFE ONCE LOST
ARSIS
PINHED

THUR. - DEC. 14 -
SEPULTURA
SUICIDE SILENCE
SWORN ENEMY
DIECAST
CRYPTIC

FRI. - DEC. 15 -
HOOBASTANK
HALIFX
AGENT SPARKS

SAT. - DEC. 16 - 'RENT' 41

WED. - DEC. 20 - SHINEDOWN

THUR. - DEC. 21 -
THE 2ND ANNUAL THE HOLI-
DAY BABES CHRISTMAS
PARTY

FRI. - DEC. 22 & SAT. - DEC.
23 - DOOMSDAY WRESTLING

SAT. - DEC. 30 - GALACTIC
PAPA MALI

SUN. - DEC. 31 - NEW YEAR'S
EVE - 77002.COM NEW
YEAR'S EVE BALL

FRI. - JAN. 26 -
ALL THAT REMAINS
MISERY SIGNALS

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Saturday, December 9th

Draven Shoes & Decibel Magazine Present:

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE DEAD -
Prosthetic Records

FROM A SECOND STORY WINDOW -
Black Market Activities

THE ACACIA STRAIN -
Prosthetic Records

LIGHT THIS CITY -
Prosthetic Records

Walter's 4215 Washington

Wednesday, December 13th

NAPALM DEATH -
Century Media

A LIFE ONCE LOST -
Ferret Records

DEAD TO FALL -
Victory Records

ANIMOSITY -
Blackmarket Activities

ARSIS - Willowtip Records

NECROFAITH -
ALL SEVERED
SEVER THE SILENCE - BRUTALLY MUTILATED
PINHED -
PREDOMINANT MORTIFICATION

The Meridian 1503 Chartres

Thursday, December 14th

PALEHORSE -
Bridge 9 Records

TEN CROWNS

RECON -
Closed Casket Activities

GRAVE ROBBERS -
GNP Records

Walter's 4215 Washington

Wednesday, December 20th

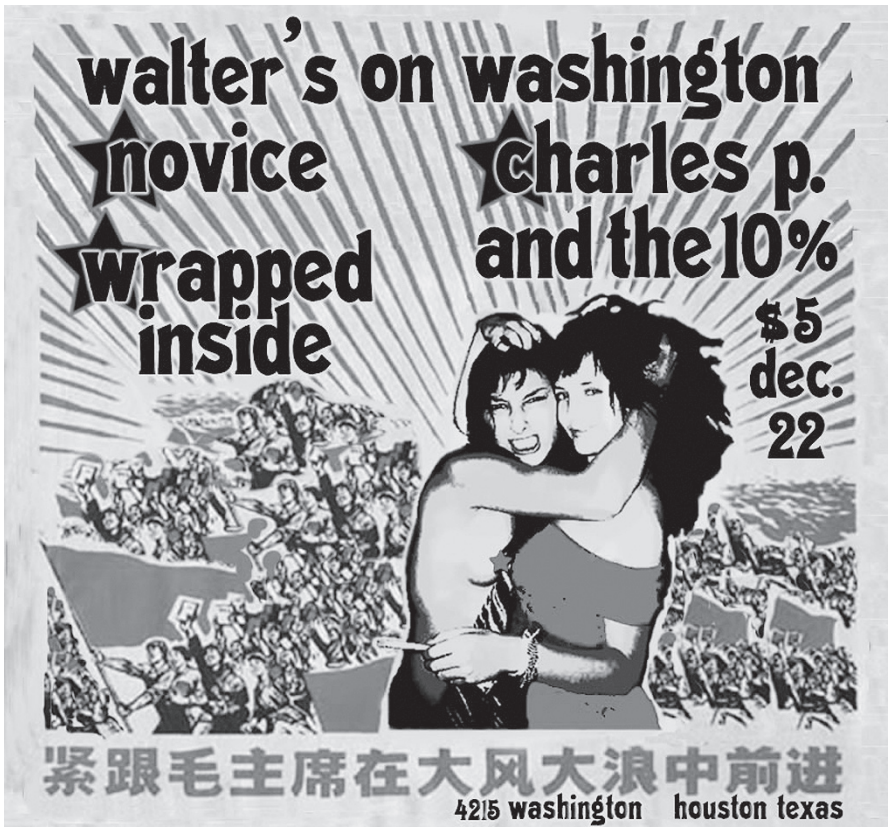
MAYLENE AND THE SONS OF DISASTER - Ferret Music

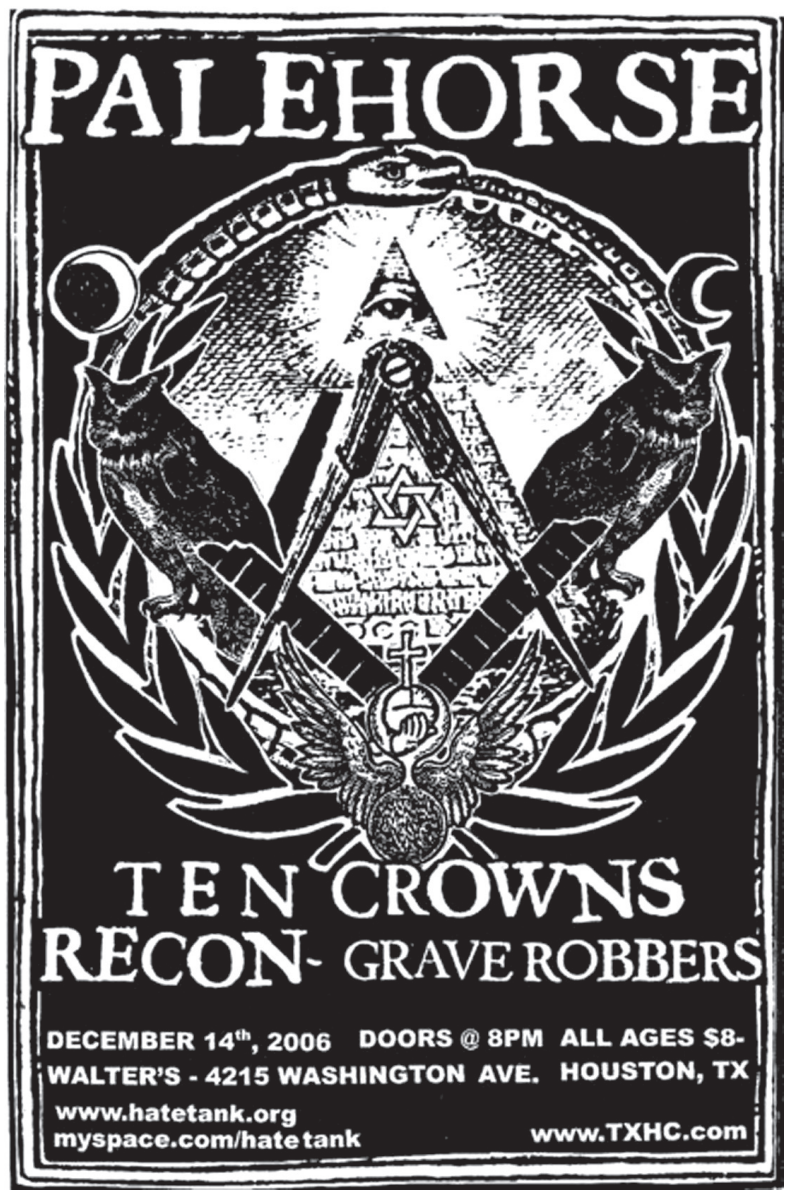
INHALE EXHALE -
Solid State Records

TWELVE GAUGE VALENTINE
Solid State Records

THE LAST STARFIGHTER

Walter's 4215 Washington





Free Press Houston
Issue 74 | 12/06

How Multinational Corporations Avoid... Paying Their Taxes

by Peter Rost

Drug companies and other multinational companies based in the U.S. systematically avoid paying tax in the U.S. on their profits. The companies elect to realize profits in low-tax countries and because of this the rest of us have to pay billions of unnecessary taxes to make up for the shortfall.

The biggest tax scam on earth has a very innocent sounding name. It is called "transfer prices." That almost sounds boring. It is, however, anything but boring. Abuse of transfer prices is a key tool multinational corporations use to fool the U.S. and other jurisdictions to think that they have virtually no profit; hence, they shouldn't pay any taxes.

Corporations involved in this scam are "model corporate citizens," or so they would like us to believe. The truth is that they rob us all blind. The money we lose can be estimated in the tens of billions, or possibly hundreds of billions of dollars every year. We all end up paying higher taxes because rich corporations make sure they don't.

But don't take my word for this.

A few weeks ago U.K.-based GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, together with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) announced that GSK will pay $3.4 billion to the IRS to settle a transfer pricing dispute dating back 17 years. The IRS alleges that GSK improperly shifted profits from their U.S. to the U.K. entity.

And U.K. pharmaceutical companies are not alone with these kinds of problems. Merck, one of the largest U.S. drug companies, also this month disclosed that they face four separate tax disputes in the U.S. and Canada with potential liabilities of $5.6 billion. Out of that amount, Merck disclosed that the Canada Revenue Agency issued the company a notice for $1.8 billion in back taxes and interest "related to certain inter-company pricing matters." And according to the IRS, one of the schemes Merck used to cheat American tax payers was by setting up a subsidiary in tax-friendly Bermuda. Merck then quietly transferred patents for several blockbuster drugs to the new subsidiary and then paid the subsidiary for use of the patents. The arrangement in effect allowed some of the profits to disappear into Merck's own "Bermuda triangle."

I have described many more ways the global drug industry cheats and defrauds our government in my recent book, "The Whistleblower, Confessions of a Healthcare Hitman." In this article, however, I'm going to focus on how they, and other rich multinationals, use the tax system to defraud us.

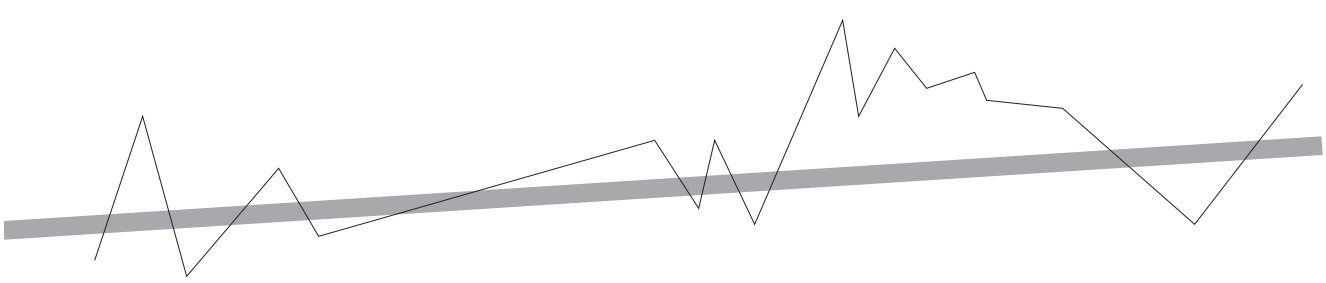
So what's going on here, how have multinational drug companies been able to gouge us for years selling expensive drugs and then avoid paying tax on their astronomical profits?

For companies in certain businesses, such as pharmaceuticals, it is very easy to simply "invent" the price a company charges their U.S. business for buying the company's product which they manufacture in another country. And if they charge enough, poof; all the profit vanishes from the US, or Canada, or any other regular jurisdiction and end up in a corporate tax-haven. And that means American and Canadian tax payers don't get their fair share.

Many multinational corporations essentially have two sets of bookkeeping. One set, with artificially inflated transfer prices is what they use to prepare local tax returns, and show auditors in high-tax jurisdictions, and another set of books, in which management can see the true profit and lost statement, based on real cost of goods, are used for the executives to determine the actual performance of their various operations.

Of course, not every multinational industry can do this as easily as the drug industry. But the drug industry, where real cost of goods to manufacture drugs is usually around 5% of selling price, has a lot of room to artificially increase that cost of goods to 50% or 75% of selling price. This money is then accumulated in corporate tax-havens where the drugs are manufactured, such as Puerto Rico and Ireland. Puerto Rico has for many years attracted lots of pharmaceutical plants and Ireland is the new destination for such facilities, not because of the skilled labor or the beautiful scenery or the great beer—but because of the low taxes. Ireland has, in fact, one of the world's lowest corporate tax rates with a maximum rate of 12.5 percent.

In Puerto Rico, over a quarter of the country's gross domestic product already comes from pharmaceutical manufacturing. That shouldn't be surprising. According to the U.S. Federal Tax Reform Act of 1976, manufacturers are permitted to repatriate profits from Puerto Rico to the U.S. free of U.S.



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"Jericho's Echo seeks to document and share with people around the world this reminder: that within people there is always hope, why else would they sing?" -Ian MacKaye

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The Last Dispatch...

"One more martyr in a dirty war–One more time to cry and hurt." *bradwithcameraEarly Dawn, OCT16*

Brad Will was killed on October 27, 2006, in Oaxaca, Mexico, while working as a journalist for the global Indymedia network. He was shot in the chest by government-backed right-wing paramilitaries as they attacked one of the blockades (plantones) set up in the streets by striking teachers and civilians, who are demanding that the corrupt governor, Ulises Ruiz, resign.



yesterday i went for a walk with the good people of oaxaca – was walking all day really – in the afternoon they showed me where the bullets hit the wall – they numbered the ones they could reach – it reminded me of the doorway of amadou diallos home – but here the grafitti was there before the shooting began – one bullet they didnt number was still in his head – he was 41 years old – alejandro garcia hernandez – at the neighborhood barricade every night – that night he came out to join his wife and sons to let an ambulance through – then a pickup tried to follow – he took their bullet when he told them they could not pass – they never did – these military men in civilian dress shot their way out of there

a young man who wanted to only be called marco was with them when the shooting happened – a bullet passed through his shoulder – he was clearly in shock when we met – 19 years old – said he hadnt told his parents yet – said he had been at the barricade every night – said he was going back as soon as the wound closed – absolutely just days before there was a delegation of senators visiting to determine the ungovernability of the state – they got a taste – the call went out to shut down the rest of the government – dozens went walking out of the zocalo city center with big sticks and a box full of spray paint – they took control of 3 city buses and went around the city all morning visiting local government buildings and informing them that that they were closed – and we appreciate your voluntary cooperation – and they filed out preturbed but still getting paid – shut – as they pulled away from the last stop 3 gunmen came out and started shooting – 2 buses had already pulled away – mayhem – 10 minute battle with stones and slingshots and screaming – one headwound – another through the leg – made their way to the hospital while the fighting continued – shout out on the radio and people came from all parts – the gunmen were around the side of the building – they got away – they were inside – no one sure – watchful – undercover police were reported lurking around the hospital and folks went running to stand watch over the wounded

what can you say about this movement – this revolutionary moment – you know it is building, growing, shaping – you can feel it – trying desperately for a direct democracy – in november appo will have a state wide conference for the formation of a state wide assemblea estatal del pueblo de oaxaca (aepo) – now there are 11 of 33 states in mexico that have declared formation of assemblea populares like appo – and on la otra lado in the usa a few – the marines have returned to sea even though the federal police who ravaged atenco remain close by – the new encampment in mexico has begun a hunger strike – the senate can expel URO – whats next nobodies sure – it is a point of light pressed through glass – ready to burn or show the way – it is clear that this is more than a strike, more than expulsion of a governor,

one more time to know power and its ugly head – one more bullet cracks the night – one more night at the barricades – some keep the fires – others curl up and

continued on page 28



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Dear Bankers Pen:
I've heard a lot of banks offering "free checking." But then, they all have different ideas of what "free" means. For example, WaMu offers free checks for life, but other banks don't. What do you think a bank really means when they say "free"?

- Dumbfounded in Dallas

Dear Dumbfounded:
It means they want to go out of business. Actually, I have no idea. Are you sure it was a bank? Maybe you only thought it was a bank, but it was really your next-door neighbor's garage sale. I can't imagine any God-fearing bank manager offering services for no cost and actually meaning it. Hogwash!

Dear Bankers Pen:
I'm in a real pickle here! I'm a bona fide cat lover, but my husband has severe cat allergies. He starts to sneeze and his throat closes up if he's within 200 yards of a cat, bless his heart, so I've learned to live without felines in the house. But my sister, who lives across town, just adopted the most adorable pair of kittens ever. After antiquing on weekends, I'll follow her to her house and play with her kitties. Then, as soon as I walk through the door at home, my husband goes into a sneezing fit and accuses me of bringing cat hair into the house. I don't want to hurt him, but I can't help my love for these adorable little creatures. Is there any help for me?

- Hopeless in Houston

Dear Hopeless:
Shut up. Just shut up.

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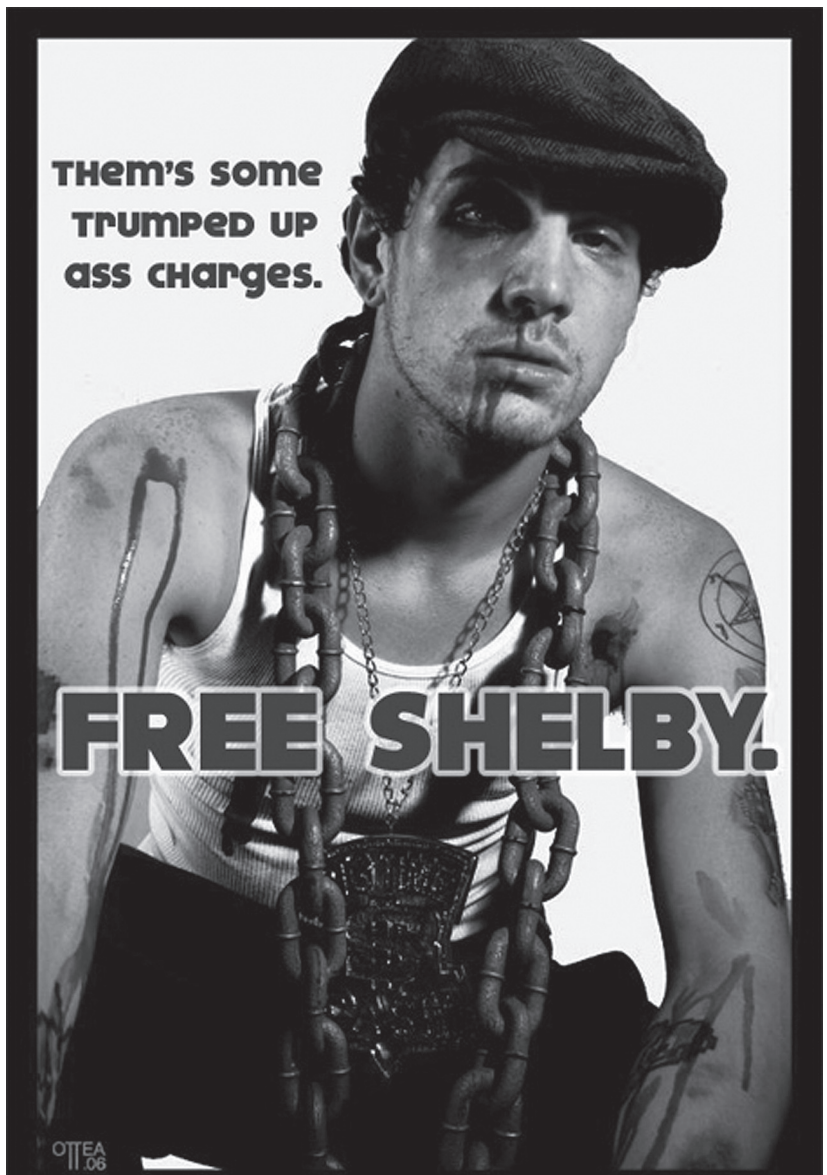
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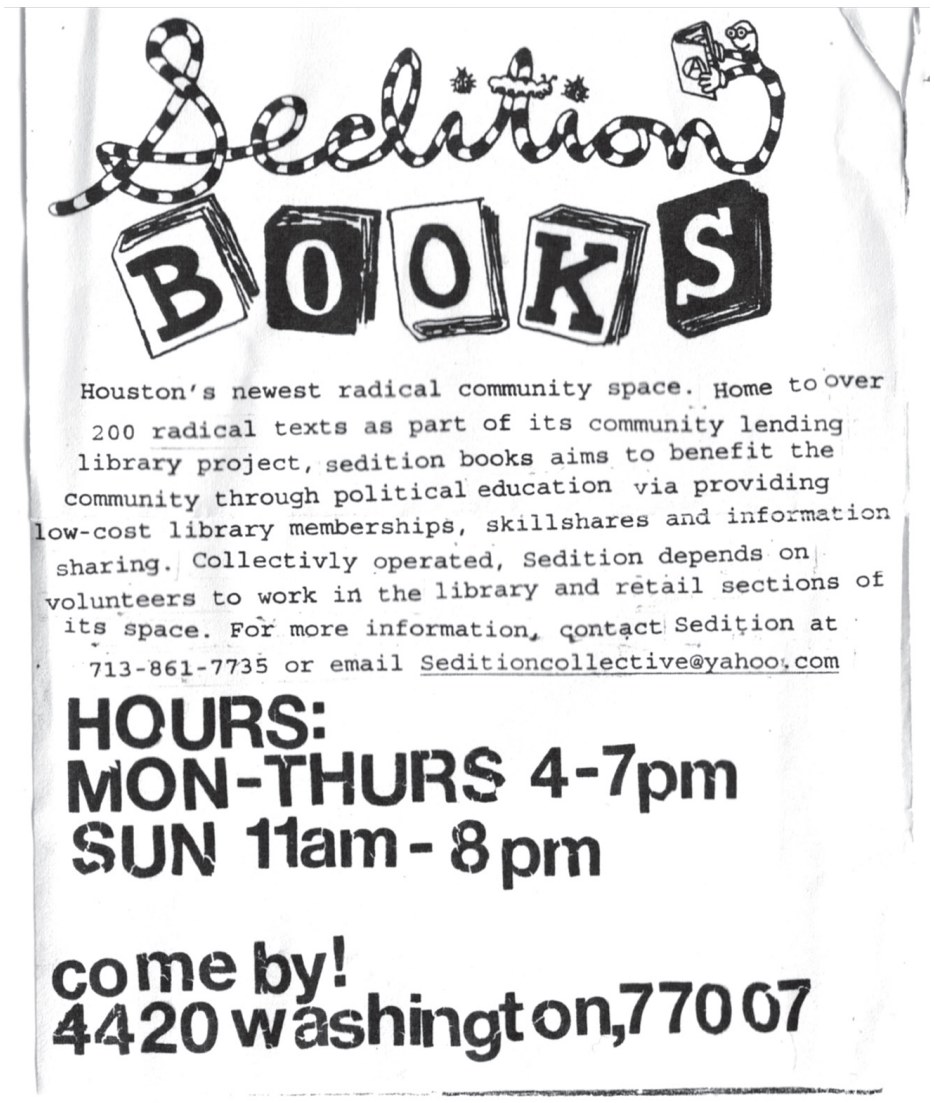
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sleep – but all of them are with him as he rests one last night at his watch.

more than a blockade, more than a coalition of fragments – it is a genuine peoples revolt – and after decades of pri rule by bribe, fraud, and bullet the people are tired – they call him the tyrant – they talk of destroying this authoritarianism – you cannot mistake the whisper of the lancandon jungle in the streets – in every street corner deciding together to hold – you see it their faces – indigenous, women, children – so brave – watchful at night – proud and resolute plantones – hes waiting for an impasse, a change, an exit, a way forward, a way out, a solution – waiting for the earth to shift and went walking back from alejandros barricade with a group of supporters who came from an outlying district a half hour away – went walking day of the dead and share food and drink and a song – waiting for the with angry folk on their way to the morgue – went inside and saw him – havent seen too many bodies in my life – eats you up – a stack of nameless corpses in the corner – about the number who had died – no refrigeration – the smell – they had to open his skull to pull the bullet out – walked back with him and his people and now alejandro waits in the zocalo – like the others at their open – waiting for november when he can sit with his loved ones on the plaza to turn itself over to him and burst – he will only wait until morning but tonight he is waiting for the governor and his lot to never come back – one more death – one more martyr in a dirty war – one more time to cry and hurt – one more time to know power and its ugly head – one more bullet cracks the night – one more night at the barricades – some keep the fires – others curl up and sleep – but all of them are with him as he rests one last night at his watch.




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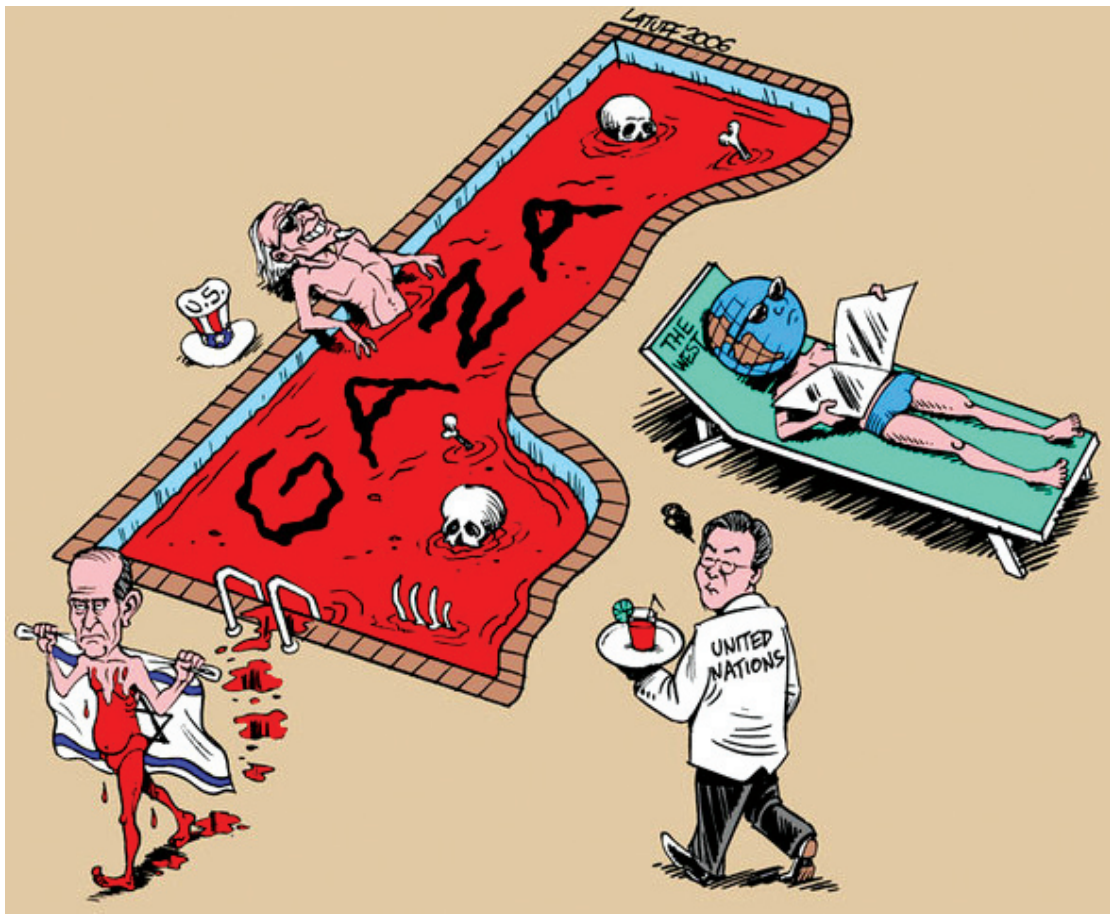

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Alice in Erez

The Gaza Crossing

By Jennifer Loewenstien



A clear and warm November evening; sun sets in a violence of color to the west over the sea and a full luminescent moon on the rise over Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. As if on cue, the buzz of the pilot-less drones overhead begins as their nightly circling ritual gets underway. The taxi driver's hands grip the wheel of the car more intently as we speed along the winding road to Erez past the village huddled in the shadows a few hundred meters away to our right. At the Palestinian side, the driver gets out of the taxi, my passport in hand, and takes it into the shack of an office where a handful of scruffy, uniformed security figures are sitting. Darkness is creeping in from the East.

There is a problem, the driver explains to me in broken English. *They won't let you through*. On the other side of Erez where the gatekeepers sit in their park-rangers' office with the neon lights and the coffee-machine, my number isn't blinking approval on the computer. Or something like that. A furious volley of phone calls on my behalf commences between the driver, friends in Gaza, PA security and the masters in Israel. *Sorry, not coordinated. Sorry, it will take a while; sorry, you can't leave. Sorry, no*. An American citizen in the Gaza Strip will stay with the prisoners for now because the keepers are not ready to let her out of the cage. Revenge for your audacity, I think. *Live with the others since you like it so well; eat their dust and shower in their sewers. You wanted to go to Gaza, no?*

Darkness covers half the sky and the drones sound hungry. The driver shouts into the phone to my friend, *Khamsa Daqa'iq! Khamsa Daqa'iq!* (Five minutes! Five minutes!) He'll wait only 5 more minutes, he says, before returning me to Gaza City but I know better. He'll wait until his life is in danger trying to help me get out. And sure enough, it is 45 minutes later when he looks at me beseechingly and says we must return. The wardens are not cooperating. My number is not approved. Now it is night.

Drones can't tell a taxi from a car full of 'militants.' In the darkness on the road they won't know who we are-or at least it will make matters easier when the explanations for two dead civilians come in the next day, one of them an 'international'. It was dark, you see, and they were 'suspicious.' The suitcase might have been full of explosives. Therefore no investigation will be necessary. Therefore it was OK. Therefore it was our fault for being out. Therefore you should not go to Gaza. Is the message clear?

The trip back is a roller coaster ride with the wrong kind of thrills. Friends meet us on the curbside outside their home and we all tip the driver better than he'll ever get again in his lifetime. He is breathing again; an old man with white hair, looking apologetically into my eyes.

In the tall apartment building teeming with prisoner families of Gaza, friends call back and forth to Israel for me in their Hebrew and English. The ghosts of Kafka and Lewis Carroll are hovering about us bemused and mocking: prisoners of the Gaza Strip trying to arrange the release of an American citizen. They all have to give the Israeli authorities their names. I finally take the phone to speak to the boss and, for the first time in the history of my excursions to this god-forsaken land, an Israeli apologizes.

Sorry. Forgot to give your number to Security at Erez. You can leave in the morning.

What a blessing: Six-thirty in the morning I am ready again, suitcases in tow, just in time for the explosion down the street; just in time to view the melted mess of a once-automobile and four once-human beings smoldering in the middle of Gaza City, boys picking at the wreckage and ambulance sirens closing in. State-of-the-art incineration tactics: a gleaming helicopter gunship straight off the defense industry's spankingly efficient assembly line and loaded with glimmering precision-guided missiles. Tourist attractions are never-ending. If they'd only let more people in who would need Hollywood?

This time on the Gaza side of Erez I am free to go, pulling my wheeled suitcase behind, concrete walls on either side of a cavernous tunnel covered by a canvas roof. My steps echo, there is nothing in sight but the tunnel and the first row of steel bars that segment the crossing into sections. Security cameras hide in the corners and a Voice from nowhere directs:

Please push open the gate.

I'm past the first jail doors and clacking on toward the second set. Here, a steel-barred revolving door interrupts the even, steel-barred gates. The Voice sounds again.

Go through the turnstile.

Monotone, passionless Voice.

Put your bags on the belt.

Don't even think about disobeying.

Step into the glass x-ray machine with your arms outstretched and your legs apart.

The glass doors spin closed, high-tech sound like the elevators in the Mall of America. I am x-rayed along with my bags as they inch through the baggage tunnel.

Please step back.

Please step in again.

Please step forward.

Please take your bags.

Please walk forward.

What a polite Voice. It says "please".

Don't touch the glass.

The Voice sees everything I'm doing. It sees through my clothing and my leather back-pack.

You dropped something, the Voice tells me. Hint of humanoid at the other end. I pick it up.

Go on.

The next set of steel bars appears. The final tunnel chamber is divided into three corrals: one for the sub-humans from Gaza currently not allowed out at all; one for the pain-in-the-ass-visitors they haven't figured out how to dispense with altogether like me; one wider than the other two- for the VIPs with diplomatic

status who still have to be treated like guests. Anyone who has passed through Erez will find no hint of exaggeration in this description. Anyone who has ever raised a question about this sprawling, grotesque steel and concrete military-industrial guards' complex will have been told it is for their security that this must exist. Anyone who has set foot in the Gaza Strip will know at once what a revolting load of crap that is.

This monstrosity is not for your security. This neo-fascist, Stalinist, gulag Guantanamo is there to keep you out, to keep you from even trying, from even wanting, to go in. It is there so you will not see the torn up streets, and ruined land; the bombed-out buildings and poisoned soil; the bull-dozed houses and bullet-holed refugee camps; the back-up generators chugging away; the destroyed central power transformer, the wrecked factories and shops; the caved-in mosques and unfinished clinics; the pressure-less water pumps; the lots full of rubble and trash; the wretched horse and donkey-carts and beggar-children; the worn out mothers, the humiliated fathers, the unemployed young men; the young girls holding whole families together; the exhausted teachers, the pay-less civil servants, the street vendo rs with last week's produce; the heaps of rust and stench of rot, the overcrowded book-and-desk-deprived schools full of troubled youth, bed-wetters, ptsd children; the travesties-of-hospitals; the wards of the sick and wounded; the morgues full of the dead; the merciful, silver-trayed freezers in the morgues where rest finally takes you unaware.

The prison compound of Gaza was built to push half a nation to the brink of death, to suck out its resistance, to squeeze out its breath. *They want us to suffer, not to die*. The words of the mayor of Rafah sound like a broken record in my head. *And they are succeeding*, he said without emotion.

Why? Because this blockade on human traffic into Gaza, this travesty of an experiment in collective human torture, is sanctioned, supported, condoned and blessed by the United States, the European Union, the United Nations, the Arab League, the G-8, the corporate masters, the "international community"; by heads of states, presidents, prime ministers, chancellors, kings; by foreign ministers and their trusty delegations; by politicians and diplomats, executives and organizations, academies and institutes, think tanks and centers for the study ofs; by departments of foreign affairs, interior, education and finance; by media lords, newspapers, radios, television stations, journalists, analysts, commentators and publics who don't dare open their mouths, write out their shock, register their objections, express their disgust, squeak out their "no's" lest they suggest that Israel's apparatus of inhumanity is an abomination on the face of the earth.

Servility to power, obsequiousness, righteous barbarism, elitist racism, cowardice, complicity and denial fuel the engine of this dreadful machine, and those with the power to stop it at once refuse to utter a sound.

So outside at the end of the tunnel the soldiers greet me. Standard procedure. All in day's work. Normalcy. *Take your bags over there*. Yet another series of x-ray machines and tables. Every item from toothpaste tubes and contact lens cases to dirty socks and tee-shirts, from blue jeans and turtlenecks to embroidered shawls and purses, is dumped onto the table and sifted through with meticulous care as the backpack and suitcase, the handbag and plastic sacks are sent through x-ray machines again. Three and a half hours after my journey began, I am dismissed to the Erez rangers' terminal where my passport is examined for the 5th time. I have two hours to get to the Allenby Bridge before it closes at ! noon. Good thing I didn't leave Gaza at 8.

The beauty of the Jordan valley is stunning. The desert hills are white and yellow and amber, swept by winds, patterned and dancing, palm trees at the bottom near the Jordan River. The warm autumn sun bakes out sorrow. Finally, the last security check of the day my presence delays a van-load of VIPs hoping to return to Jordan on the early side. Here we go again. *I guess it's because I was at Erez*, I say to the Israeli attendant looking at me quizzically when they take my passport away.

Where? She asks.

Erez.

A blank stare.

EREZ. The entrance of Gaza, I say.

She doesn't know what I'm talking about.





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