

This Slam Dunk Kills Fascists

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FEATURING THESE 16 ½ THINGS:

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Darryl Dawkins' Dunks

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Thanks for Reading

MY FLORIDA CHILDHOOD

O, how I fondly remember my childhood in Florida.

I would wake early in the morning as the sky erupted in shades of pink and blue to herald a new day in the Sunshine State. Ma would be in the kitchen making scrambled pelican eggs, while Pa would be sipping on a glass of fresh-squeezed rattlesnake milk. I'd eat up my peli-eggs and then kiss my pet alligator, Teeth, goodbye. Teeth was a good pet, but he was a cat murderer, and my town had little mercy for such behavior. O, how I miss Teeth so!

I'd then meet up with my friends at the ol' meeting spot—the parking lot of a TGI Fridays—and we'd hop in our golf carts and go for a ride about the town. O, how I remember the businesses of my youth: there was Mr. Jensen's shop, where you could buy seashells with googly eyes glued on, or the good Miss Lester's store, where you could get dead horseshoe crabs, 3 for a dollar! We'd save up the money that we earned scrubbing blood off the shuffleboard courts at the yacht club and buy a whole mess of dead horseshoe crabs, and we'd suck on their dry carapaces while we watched tourists harpoon the dolphins. Even to this day, I'll still jolt awake in the middle of the night with a craving for dead horseshoe crabs.

Sometimes my friends and I would go fishing for manatees. We'd bait our hooks with heads of lettuce and just sit on the dock, waiting for a bite. One time, Lopy Jarter caught an 800-pounder. We feasted like kings that day!

In the winter, the snowbirds would come down from the north, and you could make some extra money doing little chores here and there, like mowing their lawn or pretending to be their grandson.

Winter also meant Christmas, and Christmas meant a visit from Santa Claus. Since we didn't have a chimney, we'd leave our garage door halfway up so Santa could get inside. Christmas morning would come, and we'd run into the living room to see what Jimmy Buffett CD Santa had left for us under the palm tree.

I remember going to school. We'd begin each day by putting our hands over our hearts and reciting the lyrics to "Margaritaville." Then we'd get to work on the day's lessons. In history, we'd learn how the conquistadors braved the Florida wilderness to courageously spread smallpox to the natives. In science, we'd discover the different stages of the water cycle: evaporation, precipitation, Gatorade. And then it was off to recess, where'd we pass the time pummeling each other with citrus until someone said the magic words: "No more, please! You have blinded me!"

O, my childhood in Florida. How I miss it so!

DARRYL DAWKINS' DUNKS

Beloved NBA legend Darryl Dawkins, known for his powerful dunks and the colorful names he gave them, passed away in November 2015. In accordance with his last will and testament, these were the dunks he donated to the Darryl Dawkins Slam Dunk Collection at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Earth Shaker	Cheeseburger in Dunk-adise
Board Breaker	Slamdunk Millionaire
Bad Teacher	There Will Be Dunk
Jack Reacher	No Country for Old Dunks
This Slam Dunk Kills Fascists	McDunkald's
A Dunk Named Sue	The Hunt for Red Dunktober
Cat on a Hot Tin Hoop	Dunk Me Like You Mean It
Dunk You	Hello Newman
Fuck You	No Woman, No Dunk
My Cousin Dunky	I Know What You Dunked Last Summer
Little Deuce Hoop (You Don't Know What I Dunk)	Nixon's Disgrace
Dunk & Wagnalls	The Dunk Also Rises
Rim Wrecker	The Old Man and the Dunk
Rim Tickler	For Whom the Dunk Slams
Simon & Gardunkel	America Runs on Dunkin'
Simon & Gardunkel: The Concert in Central Park	Dunk-ey (said in "Shrek voice")
Dunkin' Sheik	My Dunk! (said in "Borat voice")
Three Men and a Dunk	Do I Make You Dunky, Baby? (said in "Shrek voice")
I Think, Therefore I Slam	Lay-Up
Tomahawk	In Soviet Russia, Basketball Dunks You
Takhomasak	Slam Malone
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dunker	Kirstie-Alley-Oop
Honey I Dunk the Kids	Carter/Mondale '80
20th Century Masters - The Best of Night Ranger	[untitled]
I Did a Dunk	Driving Miss Dunk-y
"Dunk," An Exploration of 20th Century Isolation	Dunky Cold Medina
"History is Dunk" - Henry Ford	Netflix

FOR SALE, BABY SHOES, NEVER WORN

For sale, baby shoes, never worn.

Good morning! So I posted a classified in this newspaper earlier this week about some never-worn baby shoes I was trying to sell. It didn't occur to me how macabre it came off until my wife and I were bombarded with sympathy cards and condolence phone calls over the past few days. I can assure you that we're only selling these shoes because they don't fit the baby, and we know that they don't fit the baby because just a few weeks ago, my great-aunt purchased some shoes that were the same size and those were too tight for the baby (which is why these baby shoes we're selling, which were a gift from a family friend, have never been worn). So, yeah, I just wanted to return to the source of the initial confusion to clear the air, to remind everyone that the shoes are still for sale, and to also say 'thank you' for the outpouring of sympathy, no matter how misinformed it was, that we've seen this week. And the flowers, too! So many wonderful flowers were sent to our home. My wife and I enjoyed them.

Of course, my baby hasn't been able to enjoy them. Not where he's at.

Hi. So I posted a clarification earlier this week about some never-worn baby shoes for sale (they have not been sold yet, by the way), and in explaining the confusion over my original statement, I appear to have just further muddled things up by ending my note with the phrase 'Of course, my baby hasn't been able to enjoy them. Not where he's at.' As the police officer who came to my door told me, there was a great hubbub by this newspaper's readers over what I can assure you was nothing more than a poor choice of words. Our sweet baby has been visiting his grandmother just up the road in Greenville this week. So what I was in fact saying was, 'Of course, my baby hasn't been able to enjoy the flowers. Not where he's at, which is my

mother-in-law's house in Greenville, which is 15 miles northwest of our town and hence too far for any person, especially a baby, to be able to see or smell the flowers.'

Let me make this clear, though. The baby will never see or smell the flowers.

Still trying to sell these shoes.

—

Me again. The flowers are already starting to wilt, and the baby won't be back home until next week. By that point, my wife and I will have thrown away the flowers. Therefore, our baby will never see or smell the flowers, unless he ends up at the city dump.

And there's a damn good chance he will end up at that dump.

—

Ok, I WORK at the city dump, just as my father did and his father before that. I can easily foresee a future where my baby, once he grows up, takes employment at the city dump. Someone please buy these goddamn baby shoes, never worn.

—

Baby shoes have been sold. Please stop calling, sending anonymous letters, and standing on our front lawn holding signs. The baby is fine. The baby is incredibly healthy and happy. Please believe me.

—

For sale, baby hat, slightly worn.

FIRST IS THE WORST

First is the worst,

Second is the best,

Third is the one with the hairy chest.

Fourth is also fine,

Fifth is just rad,

Sixth is the one who's a failure in the eyes of Dad.

Seventh is awful,

Eighth, why even bother showing up?

Ninth will have an inferiority complex as they continue growing up.

Tenth is respectable,

Eleventh is a thrill,

Twelfth is the one who is cut out of every family member's will.

Thirteenth is unlucky,

Fourteenth is one to moan,

Fifteenth will die penniless and alone.

Sixteenth is sweet,

Seventeenth loves to boast,

Eighteenth will haunt all who wronged him as a ghost.

LOOKING FOR ROCKSTAR MARKETING REP!

We are looking for a dynamic personality who is willing to think outside the box in order to overcome challenges at our River North-based marketing agency!

Ideal candidates will have:

- 1-3 years experience in marketing
- An ability to think outside the box to help with creative solutions
- An ability to think inside the box if that is what the box commands you to do
- No fear of the box, especially when it starts to glow and releases hell-birds from its innards
- Amazing character and integrity, even as the box engulfs co-workers in a torrent of blood and bones
- Strong time management skills

Position duties include:

- Representing our brand at various customer and B2B events
- Managing inventory of marketing materials and “swag”
- Observing the box on a regular basis
- Discovering the box’s weaknesses
- Creating a plan of attack to bring down the box during a rare moment of box vulnerability
- Coordinating with IT and engineering to assemble weaponry and defenses for said attack
- Convincing sales to be sacrificial lambs during the attack, for, lo, the box will be angered by our attempts to destroy it, and we must distract it with offerings of human flesh while we get the catapult into place
- Identifying team members to fire crossbows at the hell-birds as the box releases them upon us
- Reaching out to priests, shamans, or other religious authorities and asking them to call on the mercy of whatever God is listening in order to make sure that each smoldering bit of the destroyed box doesn’t evolve into a new giant box itself
- Working with building security to ensure that no other boxes, prisms, spheres, or pyramids appear in our breakroom, no matter how sweet the siren song emanating from it may be
- Using CRM for e-marketing

To apply, please email us a resume or just show up to our office armed to the teeth. We are looking to fill this position ASAP as we just lost half of Human Resources to the box.

No phone calls, please.

EPILOGUE FROM A COMING-OF-AGE MOVIE SET IN THE EARLY 1960s

After that summer in 1961, we all went our separate ways.

Horace was drafted into the Army and fought in Vietnam. He was awarded the Medal of Honor after stopping an enemy attack using nothing more than—you guessed it—a slingshot.

Goper finally caught that fish. And then he married it. They live happily in upstate New York with their three fish-children. All are well received among their peers.

Chet and Chucky Nike became multimillionaires after they started their own athletic footwear business. Maybe you've heard of it: Reebok.

Barney was voted "King of Pies" at the county fair four years in a row. When he finally lost, he turned into an orb of light and ascended to a spiritual dimension adjacent to ours.

Clara Peller woke up one morning to find that she had aged 50 years overnight. She became a national sensation in 1984 as the "Where's the Beef?" lady, but, to me, she'll always be my first kiss.

Vance turned into a real asshole. Fuck that guy.

Mosquito Dick asked us to please stop calling him 'Mosquito Dick'. But we refused. He ran away crying and we never saw him again. Good ol' Mosquito Dick.

John Goodman became an actor.

Ribs the Dog attended Harvard for undergraduate and then earned his law degree from Oxford. He is now a human rights lawyer. Who's a good boy? Ribs is a good boy.

And me? Well, I've long since left our small town, but every now and then, when I look up at the stars from the desert island I'm marooned on, I remember that ONE MAGICAL SUMMERTM.

NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM

Nora looked at the clock on the wall across from her cubicle. It was 10:46 a.m. She sighed and rubbed her temples. Here she was—another day, sitting at her stupid desk on the NASA space station *Armstrong II*.

God, why did I say 'yes' to this job? She thought. *I didn't even want to be a NASA mission commander. I wanted to be an entrepreneur.*

She had thought up so many great ideas for inventions.

Valets-for-hire at coffee shops who would watch your belongings while you went to the bathroom.

Press-on fingernails that could be cut into the shape of your house key so you could open your front door with your finger.

A “joke-a-day” desk calendar for people stuck in dead-end office jobs. Every page had a mirror on it.

She looked at the clock on the wall. It now read 10:17 a.m. *Oh, great.* Time was moving backwards again. The *Armstrong II* must have drifted into another “chrono-rift” out here at the edge of the Milky Way. This day would never end.

She saw Jeff in Medical walking over to her. *What does this asshole want?* She tried to look busy. She shuffled some papers and pretend to type at her computer.

“Hey, Commander! TGIF!” he said.

“Oh, hi, Jeff,” she replied. “I didn’t see you there. What’s up?”

“Well, me and some of the crew were thinking of heading over to the Chinese orbiter after work today for some drinks. You wanna join?”

Nora fumbled for an excuse but had nothing. “I, uh, I can’t. I have plans,” she finally said.

“Aw, ok,” Jeff said. “Well, we’ll be taking Transport Pod A at 5:15 if you change your mind!”

“Thanks, I’ll think about it,” she said. It was the second lie she had said that day; the first was when she told herself she was happy.

Jeff walked away whistling. Nora leaned back in her chair and looked out the window. The expanse of outer space lay just on the other side of the glass, a swirl of constellations and celestial bodies. It had been beautiful the first 489 days of the mission, but now she was just sick of it.

Bing! She had received an e-mail. Maybe it was NASA telling her she could take the rest of the day off? She opened it.

Hey everyone - there's free bagels in the breakroom if anyone wants some!

She got excited for a second and then realized that this e-mail had been sent to the “Houston office” list serv. *Why was she still on this thing? She hadn't worked in the Houston office for over a year.*

Bing! Bing! Bing!

Great, here were the “reply alls” from the chuckleheads.

Free bagels? Heck, I would've paid the 'hole' price. Bravo, Anna.

Wow, super nice of NASA to buy everyone a 'round! Fuckin' Tom.

Can someone bring a key in case the bagels are covered in 'lox? Ok, that one was pretty good, Jeremy.

She fired off a quick email that read “Unsubscribe” and then muted the conversation.

Maybe I can just quit? No, she needed to see this thing through. She had 14 more months on her contract. That wasn’t great, but it wasn’t terrible.

What about a vacation? I have some days to spare. Maybe I can take a trip over to the Neptune colony and hang out with the Russians? She began to look at her Google calendar to pick out a good time to go but then gave up. *Oh, why bother? When you hate your job, vacation is just a short-term solution to a long-term problem.*

She looked at the clock. It now read 4:51 p.m. 4:51 p.m.? Hey, it had jumped ahead! Chrono-rifts could be your best friend or your worst enemy.

Maybe I’ll sneak out early today, she thought. *Nine minutes isn’t a big deal. I can grab a drink at the space station bar and be back at my habitation chamber before rush hour.*

She began to close out the open windows on her computer—the live data transfer from the *Sailor* probe, the charts detailing atmospheric conditions on Saturn, Facebook—and thought about how, all things considered, her life wasn’t that bad. It could be a hell of a lot worse. She could be unemployed, or, worse, still stuck at that Subway she had worked at in college. Even today she couldn’t look at shredded lettuce without a chill going down her spine.

She filed away some papers and began to get up from her desk when her phone began ringing—*Zurrr. Zurrrrrrrrrr.*

Don’t pick it up, she thought. *Just let them leave a voicemail.*

She stared at the phone as it kept ringing. *Shit, what if it’s the President again? I can’t miss another call from the White House. NASA will kill me.* Nah, no way this was the President. If it was, she would’ve received a Google Calendar invite for it. She began to walk away but then stopped.

Oh, God, what if it’s an emergency? She sighed. *Ok, just answer it.*

She picked it up. “Hello, this is Commander Grant.”

“Commander Grant, it’s Dave and Melissa at the Cape Canaveral office. Got a second?”

“Well, actually, I was just on my way out.”

“On your way out? It’s only 4:52.”

“Yeah, but it’s Friday. I thought maybe I could...”

“Commander? Melissa here. Yeah, sorry to spring this on you, but we wanted to send over some edits to next week’s mission plan and go through them with you.”

“Um, can we just discuss this on Monday?”

She heard laughter on the other line. “No, I don’t think so, Commander,” Melissa said. “We just shared an Excel file. Can you open it?”

Nora sighed and sat down. She re-opened her e-mail. “I don’t see it,” she said.

“It’ll be there soon,” Dave said. “Say, how are things going over there?”

Nora didn’t respond. She looked up at the clock. It had shifted back to 1:20 p.m.

THIS STORY SYNCS UP PERFECTLY WITH THE 1998 HIT “THE WAY” BY FASTBALL

This is pretty cool: if you play the 1998 hit "The Way" by Fastball, and then start reading this story, you'll find that several parts sync up perfectly. Intentional? Coincidence? Either way, it's eerie! Give it a try!

[15 seconds of radio static]

They made up their minds
 And they started packing
 They left before the sun came up that day
 An exit to eternal summer slacking
 But where were they going without ever knowing the way?

They drank up the wine
 And they got to talking
 They now had more important things to say
 And when the car broke down they started walking
 Where were they going without ever knowing the way?

[Chorus:]

Anyone can see the road that they walk on is paved in gold
 And it's always summer they'll never get cold
 They'll never get hungry, they'll never get old and grey
 You can see their shadows wandering off somewhere
 They won't make it home but they really don't care
 They wanted the highway, they're happier there today, today

[15-second guitar solo]

Their children woke up
 And they couldn't find them
 They left before the sun came up that day
 They just drove off and left it all behind 'em
 But where were they going without ever knowing the way?

[Chorus]

FAREWELL, BABE

Babe Ruth laid back in his hospital bed, weak and barely able to speak.

“How are you feeling, Babe?” the nurse asked.

The Babe smiled his famous smile. “Like I could knock one out of Yankee Stadium right now.”

The doctors and nurses laughed. “You received a telegram from President Truman, Babe,” said one of the doctors. “It reads, DEAR BABE. STOP. WISHING YOU A FULL RECOVERY. STOP. WE’RE ALL ROOTING FOR YOU. STOP. SIGNED, PRESIDENT AND MRS. TRUMAN.”

“Aw, shucks,” Ruth said. “Awfully nice of them to think of me.”

He let out a great sigh and looked around the room at the flowers, cards, and gifts sent by his fans from around the world. “I’m a pretty lucky fella!” he said. He then took a deep breath and looked out at the window overlooking the Manhattan skyline.

“Well, I guess it’s time for the Babe to head to that big baseball diamond in the sky.”

He closed his eyes.

Babe Ruth opened his eyes. A great blinding light was before him. He moved towards it. He felt weightless - no pain in his body, no aches in his joints.

He saw the silhouette of a figure just ahead of him. He was drawn to it. He inched closer and closer, until the figure came into focus—a man standing at a podium, in front of towering gates of gold.

The Babe approached the man. “Where am I?” he asked.

The man smiled the warmest smile the Babe had ever known. “Why, my dear boy,” the man said. “You’re at the gates of Heaven.”

“Heaven?” the Babe looked around him. “So that means I’m dead?”

“Yes, dear child,” the man said.

“And that means you’re...” the Babe couldn’t even bring himself to say it.

The man chuckled. “Yes,” he said. “I’m St. Peter. And now, George Herman Ruth, it is time to judge your life.”

Babe Ruth chuckled. “Well, Pete, I’ll tell ya, I went to the plate 8,399 times in my lifetime. I faced Carl Hubbell’s notorious screwball, George Uhle’s cunning slider, and Walter Johnson’s scorching fastball. But I ain’t never been more nervous than I am right now!”

St. Peter smiled. “Sweet Babe, you were one of the most beloved men to ever walk the face of the earth. You brought joy to millions. You inspired a nation. O Babe, you have so little to fear right now.”

The Babe grinned. “Aw, shucks, St. Peter, you’re swell!”

St. Peter opened the mighty tome sitting on the podium before him. He thumbed through its pages. “Ripley...Rucker...ah! Here we go! Ruth! George Herman Ruth. Born 1895 in Baltimore.”

“Baltimore! What a town!”

“...Schooled at St. Mary’s Industrial School for Boys.”

"It's where I met some of my best friends and first learned the game of baseball from the dear Brother Matthias Boutlier!"

"...Rose to great acclaim in the 1910s as a member of the Boston Red Sox."

"Fenway Park. Truly an American cathedral, uh, that is if you, uh, don't mind the expression, Your Honor!"

St. Peter chuckled. He returned to the pages of the book of judgement. His brow furrowed.

"Hmmm."

"What is it, St. Peter?"

"Welllllllll." St. Peter cleared his throat. "Yikes."

"Something wrong, Pete?"

"Yes, Babe. Quite a bit of mischief on these next few pages."

The Babe bashfully looked down at his feet. "I guess I did get into a little trouble now and then, but it was all in good fun, Your Honor!"

"You regularly overindulged on food and drink."

"I'm a big boy! I got a big hunger!"

"You once consumed 12 hot dogs between the games of a doubleheader."

"A fella's gotta eat!"

"And drink, too, it seems. You drank alcohol well into the early hours of the morning almost every day of your adult life."

"It helped me sleep!"

"Doesn't look like you were doing much sleeping, Babe. You frequented brothels on a regular basis."

"So I like dames! That ain't no crime!"

"You polluted your body with temptations of the flesh."

"So I got syphilis once or twice. Ya gotta live, chief!"

St. Peter shook his head in disapproval. "Looks you were guilty of hubris, as well."

"Hubris? But I ain't never been to Sweden!"

"Hubris, Babe. Excessive pride or overconfidence. You once pointed to the outfield bleachers and called out the spot where you were going to hit a homerun. That's hubris."

"Big whoop! It ain't hubris if you can do it!"

"Babe," St. Peter said with a raise of his hand. "I am sorry. You are going to Hell."

"Hell?! You can't send me to Hell!" the Babe screamed.

But it was too late. The ground under him gave out and he plummeted for what felt like forever before landing in a cave surrounded by walls of flames.

"Oh, God, no!" the Babe screamed. "I can't believe they sent the Sultan of Swat to Hell!"

He heard loud screeches. Out of the fiery shadows of this ungodly landscape crawled demons with claws like pitchforks and teeth like the gears of a machine.

“Stay away!” Babe Ruth yelled. But it was no use. The demons lunged at him and began tearing into him. Their talons ripped into the Great Bambino’s skin. They bit off his limbs and then tore them into shreds as if they were made of nothing more than cheap wrapping paper. They spit venom into the Babe’s wounds until the open sores began to boil like bloody volcanic craters. They crunched on his bones and vomited the marrow back into the Colossus of Clout’s face. They tore off his penis and then his testicles and used them as equipment for a cruel makeshift game of baseball. The Babe screamed and screamed for mercy but his cries were heard only by Satan, who sat laughing atop his throne of angel skulls.

“This is the price you pay for leading a life of sin!” Satan roared. “And you will pay this price for all eternity!”

“Farewell, Babe” originally appeared in “Catholic Boys’ Life Weekly” magazine, July 8, 1949, issue.

S.O.S.

We have been sitting at this table for 25 minutes. She smiles and takes a sip of her wine. This is one of the better first dates I've had in awhile because she hasn't mentioned *it* yet.

"So, 'Mike,'" she says, making air quotes as rolling her eyes playfully. "Tell me all about 'life insurance.'" She doesn't do air quotes that time, but it's implied. *Uh-oh.*

"Well, I really like it," I say as I nervously pick at what remains of our crab cake appetizer. "It can be a little mundane and redundant at times, but ultimately it's rewarding work and it's important work."

"I see, I see," she says. She chuckles to herself. "Any...interesting clients?"

"Oh, well, they're all interesting," I reply. "I couldn't really single one out, and even if I could, I think that'd be a breach of the insurer-insuree relationship to discuss it."

"Oh really?" she says. "You haven't worked with anyone...interesting?"

"Like I said, they're all interesting." *What is she getting at here?*

She smiles and shakes her head and then takes a deep breath. "Okay, let's cut the crap," she says. "I know who you are."

Damn it, here we go. "What?" I say. "What do you mean? My name is Mike. I work in insurance."

"No, you're not," she says. "You're character actor David Morse."

Fourth time in five weeks. "Um, no, I get that alot, but I'm not," I say as I stick the last piece of aioli-drizzled crab cake into my mouth. "My name is Mike and I'm an insurance a—."

"Bullshit," she interrupts, rudely. *Is there a polite way to interrupt?* "You're David Morse. You were on *St. Elsewhere* in the '80s and since then you've had supporting roles in movies like *The Rock* and *The Green Mile*."

"Emily, I really am not him."

"Oh, come on, David," she says. "Isn't it obvious? You're looking for love, but you don't want a woman to date you for your modest fame and fortune. So you came up with a fake name and identity for your profile. But your picture doesn't lie. You're David Morse."

I pull out my wallet and show her my driver's license. "Look," I say. "Michael Stephens. And I'm 6'2". David Morse is 6'4"."

She looks at the license, and then at me, and then back at the license, and then back at me. She sits back in her chair. She sighs. "You're right," she says. "David Morse is 6'4"."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," I say, returning my wallet to the back pocket of my tasteful pleated khakis.

"Oh, it's okay, it's okay," she says in a way that tells me it's not. She smiles a close-lipped smile and shakes her head. "I'll be honest. I was wondering what David Morse was doing in Tampa, Florida."

“You didn’t know,” I say. “He could’ve been on a break from filming the WGN America show *Outsiders*.”

“Yeah,” she chuckles. “I’m, uh, I’m gonna get out of here. Is that okay?”

“Sure, sure, I understand,” I say. We shake hands. “Nice to meet you, Michael Stephens.”

“Nice to meet you, too, Emily.”

She gives a half-wave and heads out.

It’s always interesting to see how far I get into a date before the truth comes out.

Last time, with Katherine, it was right after we got our drinks. “Okay, let’s drop the ‘Michael Stephens’ facade,” she had said. “What was it like working with Jodie Foster in *Contact*?”

The time before that, with Aimee, it was as we sat down in the booth. “I am such a big fan,” she had said. “I loved you in *12 Monkeys*. And you were so good in *The Hurt Locker*. And 2000 must have been one heck of a year for you: *Bait* and *Dancer in the Dark* and *Proof of Life*!”

And before Aimee in the booth, it was Heather in the parking lot: “I know people think of you as a film actor, but to me you’ll always be George Washington in the HBO miniseries *John Adams*. You should’ve won the Emmy for that.” Hell, she even remembered ‘me’ from my short-lived CBS series, *Hack*.

But it wasn’t ‘me.’ I am not David Morse.

Maybe I should start telling them ahead of time, I think. Save everyone the trouble. But, no—to even plant that idea in their head is to draw suspicion. And I made a promise to myself to never think of myself that way. I am not a David Morse look-alike. I am Michael Stephens. *David Morse* looks like *me*.

“Care to order an entree?” It’s the waiter.

“Um, no,” I say. “I think I’m ready for the check, actually.”

“Oh, okay,” he says. “I’ll be right back.”

Of all the character actors, you could do worse than David Morse. He’s a good-looking man. He has a quiet power to him. He works steadily. And, sure, he’s been happily married since 1982, but people don’t know that. Somehow, it makes sense that’d be on a dating site in Tampa—he’s down here filming a movie and he wants companionship, or he has a home in the area because he likes to get away from the Hollywood lifestyle.

“Here you go,” the waiter says as he sets the check on the table. “Crab cakes are on us, Mr. Morse. By the way, I loved you in *Disturbia* and *World War Z*.”

I start to correct him, but I stop myself. *Who am I to turn down free crab cakes?* I pay for the drinks and I leave a generous tip and walk out the door. A woman takes a picture of me with her iPhone as I make my way across the parking lot. Another night of disaster for Michael Stephens is in the books.

I activate the keyless entry to my Hyundai Sonata—*damn, I love this car*—and start to climb inside when I hear a voice from the group of twentysomethings strolling up to the restaurant: “Yo! William Fichtner!”

I turn around and smile. “Yeah, kid. I’m William Fichtner.”

THE SALAD GUY

“The Salad Guy” is my advice column that’s syndicated in more than 70 daily newspapers throughout the United States and Canada. Here’s a few selections.

Dear The Salad Guy,

I recently moved in with my fiance—let’s call him “Evan.” Evan is the man of my dreams, and we’re compatible in nearly every single way...except one: I love salads, and he hates them. I’ve tried to win him over by serving him all sorts of salad greens: spinach, arugula, butterhead lettuce, mache. But nothing works. In fact, each subsequent salad just makes him hate salads even more. I love Evan, but I also love my salads. What do I do? — *Loves Evan but Afraid of Future*

Dear LEAF,

Belgian endive is a great gateway green. Try that out and if he still doesn’t like salad, it might be time to rethink your relationship. Good luck.

Dear The Salad Guy,

I was recently on a first date and I ordered Thousand Island for my salad. Too forward? — *Doubting Recent Events Surrounding Salads In Newnan, Georgia*

Dear DRESSING,

I’m old-fashioned, so, yes, I think a first date is far too soon to be ordering Thousand Island. Maybe it’s just how I was raised, but I’m of the belief that Thousand Island is a “relationship” dressing and not a “dating” dressing. That said, I also know that times change, and courtships move much quicker nowadays than they used to. How did your date react? Did they seem to welcome the Thousand Island? If so, I wouldn’t worry about it. Just don’t go ordering honey mustard before marriage. 😊

Dear The Salad Guy,

Is macaroni salad a salad? I say no, my buddy says yes. Please help us settle this debate once and for all! — *Novice On Organizing Dishes’ Labels, Etc.*

Dear NOODLE,

I would end this friendship with this so-called “buddy” immediately. Salad requires a bare minimum of a base of greens; macaroni salad is a pasta dish. I firmly believe this, and I have serious concerns about the mental capacity of anyone who thinks otherwise.

DEATH OF A CONTENT CREATOR

Christopher Bouillard, whose memes, tweets, and gifs made him one of the most acclaimed content creators of the 21st century, has died. He was 89.

Bouillard was instrumental in pushing Internet content into American galleries and museums, said Diane Redding, curator of the Content Institute of Chicago. “He was a pioneer of what we now know as the ‘Contentist’ movement,” she said. “From the Will Ferrell parody accounts he ran on Twitter to the many Vines he recorded of himself wearing wigs and screaming while jumping into his swimming pool, his impact was undeniable.”

Bouillard first rose to prominence in 2012 with his meme “Stoner Dog.” The meme, featuring a picture that Bouillard did not take of a dog that Bouillard did not own, became an online sensation due to its text overlays capturing what it would be like if a dog was a stoner, or perhaps if a stoner was a dog. “Stoner Dog, No. 14”, with its caption “With a knick-knack paddywhack / Give the dog a bong,” was the most popular entry in the series and served as the basis for the Tony-winning musical “Stoner Dog” starring Matthew Broderick as the dog and Bernadette Peters as a bag of weed.

While many of his peers limited themselves to one particular medium, Bouillard continually strove to explore new avenues of expression. During the 2016 presidential election, his Twitter account @TrumpzTinyHandz brilliantly captured the zeitgeist of a divided nation and was #2 on BuzzFeed’s “Best Parody Accounts of 2016,” behind @KyloRenKanye.

During the 2020s, he shifted his focus to .gifs, using videos and images he did not own to produce such iconic works as baby_spaghetti_whoopsie.gif, poet_shorter_than_microphone.gif, and gross_sunset.gif. For this work in the field of lo-res, looping animations, Bouillard was awarded a “genius grant” by the MacArthur Foundation. He used the prize’s \$625,000 stipend to create what is arguably his masterwork, the YouTube video “*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* Re-Edited to Look Like a Movie About Basketball”.

Bouillard’s career was not without controversy, however. He was accused of “selling out” in some circles after signing on to be ‘Creative Director’ for Blp, the social networking site which limited posts to three characters, and his 2047 exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Content, “Looking for Good Thai,” was slammed by critics as being nothing more than a collection of various Facebook statuses he wrote asking his friends for restaurant recommendations.

But any serious critiques of Brouillard's work did little to damage his popularity. The 2063 Museum of Modern Content retrospective "Please Share" showcased more than 150 of Brouillard's memes, gifs, tweets, Vines, and Internet videos, including his rare webseries "Bad Roommates," which chronicled the comic misadventures of bad roommates. "Please Share" was a huge success, drawing an estimated 2.5 million visitors to MOMC and winning a Grammy for some reason.

In his later years, Brouillard became an elder statesman in the world of content generation, mentoring such famed content creators as Lyndzee Pritchard, the Fabulous Jeffrey Twins, P!casso, @pizza69_69, and Stephanie the Viking. His memoirs, *Content to Make Content*, was one of the best-selling pills of 2071, with more than 3 million ingestions in its first run.

In Brouillard's final days, he spoke with gratitude of the critical and commercial acclaim he has received over the years. "Sometimes young people will come up to me on the streets and tell me what my work meant to them," he told the *New York Times* earlier this year. "I call those 'verbal favs.' And when someone tells someone else about my work, I call that 'verbal retweeting.'"

Brouillard is survived by no one.

CHEAT CODES FOR 1991 SUPER NINTENDO GAME "HOME IMPROVEMENT: POWER TOOL PURSUIT"

Code: A B X Y ↑↑↓↓ A

Which level to use it: "Tool Time"

What it does: Shuts down all the power tools in the studio so you don't do something stupid with them, ya dolt!

Code: ↓↓↑↑↓↓ A A

Which level to use it: "Backyard"

What it does: Knocks down the fence to reveal Wilson's deformed face. Wilson will then give you 25 Advices that you can trade in at Harry's Hardware for bonus hammers.

Code: A B A B ↓↓

Which level to use it: "Construction Site"

What it does: Creates the ultimate "Al's Mom" joke to shame Al and defeat him. Once Al is defeated, you can shave his beard off to further humiliate him in front of Heidi.

Code: ↓↓ X A

Which level to use it: "Kitchen Table"

What it does: Removes all obstacles in your path and allows you to earn your psychology degree. [Only works if you've chosen to play as 'Jill']

Code: A X A X →→←←

Which level to use it: "Garage"

What it does: Tells Brad to get his shit together. Randy is into books and Mark is weak — you need Brad to 'man up', for one day, when the injuries suffered in the name of syndicated television are too much for you to overcome, it will be he whom assumes the title of the one true "Tool Man."

2016 INDUCTEES INTO THE "MUSICIANS WITH A LAST NAME THAT'S ALSO A FAIRLY COMMON FIRST NAME" HALL OF FAME

Billy Joel

Paul Simon

Elton John

PJ Harvey

Missy Elliott

Gene Clark

Bob Dylan

Debbie Harry

Buddy Guy

Janis Ian

Diana Ross

James Taylor

Loretta Lynn

John Mellencamp (*currently under review*)

THE COMEBACK KID

I've been sitting in this Brooklyn bar for almost an hour now, waiting for my interview subject to arrive. I have received multiple text messages from his publicist. *Sorry, he will be 5 late.* Then, *OK he should be there in about 10.* And finally, *He got lost, he will be there in about 15.*

And then 30 minutes after that last one, in he finally walks — the personification of Sunday morning dishevelment — raggedy blue jeans, untied Converse sneakers, one of those faux-vintage “Rolling Stones ‘72 Tour” shirts, and a Yankees baseball cap pulled down over his eyes.

I stand up to greet him. “Hello, Mr. Kissinger,” I say.

“Please,” he says with a smile. “Call me Hank.”

The waitress stops by. I ask for a refill of coffee. Hank glances over to the bar. “Whatever IPA you have on draft works for me,” he finally says. He smiles at her. She smiles back, although it does not seem that she recognizes him.

“Sorry I’m late,” he says. “Freddy Dent was in town last night and we got a little crazy.” He chuckles and shakes his head.

“Frederick Dent? The former Secretary of Commerce?”

He laughs and nods.

“So you keep in touch with other members of Nixon’s cabinet?”

“I don’t know if we ‘keep in touch,’ *per se*,” he says. “But when the boys are in town, we get together and have some drinks and talk about the good ol’ days.”

The waitress returns with my coffee and his beer. He takes a sip of his brew and sighs. “Nothing like it,” he smiles. He sees my tape recorder sitting on the table and seems to suddenly remember that this is an interview. “Who is this for again? The Atlantic? Politico?”

“Maxim,” I say.

“Ah, yes!” He wiggles his considerable eyebrows. “The Hot 100.”

Henry Kissinger is 93 years old. He is a former Secretary of State. He is a Nobel Peace Prize winner. He is one of the most polarizing figures in modern American history. And he is gearing up for a comeback.

“Give this a listen,” Kissinger says. We are sitting in his Williamsburg loft—“my escape from the madness,” he calls it—where he has spent the last three months writing and recording music. He hits ‘play’ on some fancy piece of recording equipment and a slinky reggae beat starts playing over the speakers.

“This is a fucking great groove,” he says. He lights a cigarette and sits back in his beanbag chair. “And that’s Flea on bass. You like the Chili Peppers?”

I tell him I’m not a huge fan, which serves as the launching pad for Kissinger to unleash an almost non-stop 20-minute diatribe of his views on a number of things: yes, the recent Red Hot Chili Peppers albums have been hit-and-miss, but they deserve a lifetime pass on the strength of “Under the Bridge” alone;

Sleater-Kinney is overrated; Jeremy Renner seems like “a total badass”; Taco Bell is so good when you’re high; the U.S. should seek an alliance with Vladimir Putin and Russia to form a mega-super-power; *Batman V Superman* was bad but not as bad as everyone says it is; and “Tosh.0” is the best show on television right now.

The walls of Kissinger’s loft are lined with photographs of the friends he’s made over the years: there he is with Harmony Korine and Chloe Sevigny at the opening of a Soho art gallery in 2000; in conversation with Richard Nixon in the Oval Office in 1973; backstage at the 1994 VMAs with two of the Beastie Boys.

“You’ve led quite a life,” I say.

“You’re wrong: I’m *leading* quite a life,” he says with a smile. “Check out this track.” He skips ahead a few songs. “Co-wrote this with Mark Ronson. We got Santigold to do vocals.”

A bright synth line opens the song before some electronic percussion joins in. Then Santigold comes in, sounding like sunshine on a summer day. I suddenly find myself nodding along.

“You like it, huh?” Kissinger says. He claps his hands together. “Listen to this guitar part. That’s all me.”

It turns out Henry Kissinger is a hell of a guitar player. There is a controlled sloppiness to his chops. The guitar skitters, soars, and roars, weaving itself in and out of Santigold’s vocals.

“This is a real change of pace for you,” I say.

Kissinger considers this for a moment. “Well, I’ve always made music,” he finally says. “So I don’t see this as being a ‘change of pace’ as much as it’s just me doing what I’ve always done, except now people will hear it.”

He starts telling me about his plans to tour behind the album—“small clubs, theaters, that sort of thing; I want it to be so fucking intimate”—and says he’s been approached to write a song for the soundtrack of *The Croods 2*.

“Do you think people will respond well to your music?” I ask.

“Well, I can’t control how people respond,” he says. “Do I want them to like it? Well, yeah, of course. But I can’t live my life trying to make music that I think people will like. I can only make the music that I like.”

“No, I mean, considering your divisive career in politics and diplomacy, do you think people will respond well to the fact that you’re making music at all?”

He sits back with a confused look. “I’m not sure I know what you’re talking about.”

“Well, Mr. Kissinger, you have a very controversial record. Some people even consider you a war criminal. The bombings in Cambodia, the overthrow of the democratic government in Chile, the Indonesian invasion of East Timor...”

Kissinger springs up from his seat and paces around for a bit with his back turned to me. He seems angry. Agitated. Annoyed. Finally he whirls around to face me.

“Look, man, are you here to talk about my politics or my music?”

I consider my answer carefully. “Well, Mr. Kissinger, I’m here to talk about *you*.”

“Well, I am my music now. All that other shit—that’s old news, man.”

There is silence for what feels like an eternity but is really only a few seconds. Finally he says, “Let’s get out of here and grab a drink.”

“You wanna do some shots?”

Kissinger has his arm around me. We are standing at a hole-in-the-wall bar somewhere in Greenpoint. I oblige, and a few seconds later, we are throwing back what tastes like watered-down suntan lotion.

“That was Malort, baby!” he says with a laugh. “Only place in the borough you can find it!”

The bar is packed with an assortment of twentysomethings, all of whom Kissinger seems to know. In the course of a three-minute span, he’ll introduce me to Winnie, a painter he met at a New Year’s Eve party last year in Bushwick; Everett, a comedian who Kissinger met at an open mic during a brief foray into stand-up; Greta & Trent, a recently married couple who own a coffee shop that Kissinger frequents; political activist and 1997 Nobel Peace Prize winner Jody Williams, whom Kissinger met at a banquet in Washington D.C. in 1999; and Dirk the Dick, a performance artist who does “x-rated puppetry” at a theater down the street from Kissinger’s loft.

“God, the energy in this room is incredible!” Kissinger says as he goes to the jukebox. “But let’s really kick it up a notch.” He inserts some coins and selects D-17: “All My Friends” by LCD Soundsystem. The pulsating piano intro begins and the bar cheers.

“Great pick, Hank!” yells someone in the middle of a pool game.

Kissinger gives a thumbs up and turns back to me. We ‘cheers’ our bottles of beer and he puts his arm around me again. “You’re a good dude,” he says. “You’re gonna make me look good in this thing, right?” I laugh it off and turn my attention to the pool game. I can feel him staring at me. He leans in closer.

“Hey, man, I’m sorry I snapped at you earlier,” he says. “You’re just doing your job, I get it. But I can’t dwell on that past shit. If you live in the past, then you miss out on the future. My music is what I’m focusing on right now.”

Kissinger chugs the rest of his beer and tosses it in the garbage can next to us.

“Okay!” he yells to no one in particular as he walks through the crowd. “Who feels like getting their ass kicked in darts?”

EXCERPTS FROM STORIES THAT DIDN'T MAKE IT IN

“Chip or swipe?” the barista asked.

“Neither!” the magician said, disappearing in a poof of smoke.

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The snow was piled high like mashed potatoes and the dead crows were strewn about like black pepper and the bits of grass were like chives and the fog was like gravy and the rusty plows were like spoons.

--

“Are you suggesting we...team up?” Tom Joad asked Batman.

--

She flicked the lit cigarette at the trail of gasoline leading up to the shark tank. “Anastasia says ‘hello,’” she whispered.

--

“Nothing in the rulebook that says a dog can’t perform open heart surgery!” the hospital referee said.

--

I took a sexy sip of my coffee. “Mmmmm,” I loudly moaned so everyone in the Denny’s could hear. “Good beans.”

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“You heard me, damnit!” Orville Redenbacher sneered. “I said, ‘When I die, pop me and eat me!’”

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The sun and the moon were making out behind the clouds, and, O, how the perverted stars did watch!

THANKS FOR READING

Thanks for reading. If you liked this, please share it. Thank you again.