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The Portland Spectator accepts letters to the editor and commentaries from students, faculty and staff at Portland State University. Please limit your letters to 400 words.

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To whom it may concern,

As many of you have no doubt noticed, this month’s issue has been our least timely so far this year. We ran into some post-production troubles and did our best to get it out as quickly as possible, but I do apologize for the delay. Delays aside, along with ushering in the new year the staff here at The Spectator have been working diligently to usher in some exciting new projects for the magazine! For one, our website (which is currently under construction) is scheduled to be up and operational by the beginning of February. Once we are live with an internet presence we can start posting real-time updates on stories that appear in our monthly print editions. Our website will also feature a digital copy of the magazine in order to provide a greater reach to those of you who may not be able to get to campus to grab a physical copy of the magazine. In addition to the scheduled launch of our website, starting with this issue we will now have a dedicated opinions section located in the back of the magazine. This section will be a way for our writers to express their feelings toward relevant topics in a coherent manner. It is my hope that this section will also help generate feedback from you, our audience. We will be accepting and printing some of the responses to opinion articles that are sent to us via email, mail, etc. In essence: If you write us, we might print it. In all seriousness the staff and I feel that it is very important to generate a dialogue here on campus when it comes to topics that are relevant to the student body. While it is beneficial to have our writers put their thoughts and ideas into writing, it’s even more helpful to hear student responses to their opinions. Through your feedback it is my hope that we will be able to improve our relevancy to the student body and create a place where more people feel like they have a voice. Aside from the changes on the horizon of our ever evolving magazine, we have some great articles for you right here in this issue! From the best of upcoming shows and new artists to tackling issues with campus safety, we have all put a lot of effort into putting out some top notch articles this month.

As per usual, we thank you again for staying loyal to our publication. Please feel free to contact us through Facebook, Email, telephone, etc. We welcome all questions, comments, and concerns. Thanks for reading the Portland Spectator,

Maxwell N. Bordman
Editor-in-Chief
With A Name Like Ron J. Rambo Jr. ...

PSU GRADUATE MAKES HIS FICTION DEBUT IN THE WORLD OF SELF-PUBLISHING

Written by: Jacob Stein

Have you ever found yourself in the library and been completely overwhelmed? Not only due to the amount of works, but the sheer amount of authors. Think about how all those writers started on their paths to being published, how they strove to write and sell their pieces; how they flexed their wordsmith muscles at a Word Processor for hundreds of hours, or how they probably spent countless sleepless early mornings editing and debating word choice. For an aspiring writer like me, it can seem a bit daunting.

That’s why seeing a man like Ron J. Rambo Jr. take action in the field immediately after college is so admirable.

“My goals are to see how people like it, see what I can learn from it, and – perhaps most of all – see if it’s something I can have success doing,” says Ron James Rambo Jr. about his recently published collection of short stories. The book, titled Twisted Love Anthology, is a series of surreal tales of love and relationships, spiced-up by an added element of horror mixed in.

Rambo is a recent PSU graduate (June 2012) and Twisted Love Anthology is his first endeavor into the field of self-publishing. Working at the Spectator while he attended PSU, I remember the first day I met Rambo clearly. The writers were having a meeting to pitch article ideas for the next issue, and the brainstorming was running a bit dry. We were having an especially difficult time finding newsworthy material that month. Then Rambo strutted through the office door and began rattling off ideas like a brainstorming machine gun. Suffice it to say, we had plenty of stories whenever Rambo was writing for the magazine.

His talent for generating a plethora of intense and detailed ideas has translated well into the field of short stories. Concerning the writing process for the Twisted Love Anthology, Rambo reported, “After I get home from work, I relax for a couple of hours, go to the gym, and then get started writing around 8:00 or 9:00, usually with a glass of wine or two.” Rambo is a strong believer that “working late with a little alcohol helps the creative process, and barriers often evaporate when given the proper ‘lubrication’.”

And who doesn’t love a little lubrication from time to time?

Given his switch from journalistic writing at the Spectator to writing short story anthologies, it’s interesting to consider what persuaded him to change gears. Listing Ray Bradbury, HP Lovecraft, Richard Matheson and Harlan Ellison as his biggest influences, Rambo explained, “I love short stories because they get right to the point; there’s little introduction and often no true conclusion, but they say what they need to say as long as they’re written well.”
The question of what specifically prompted Rambo to write this anthology of “twisted love” came up, to which he responded, “There is so much that can be said about love, I could have easily written twenty or thirty more stories with that in mind. I think each of the stories covers a basic emotion or idea behind the theme of love itself.” However, he confides that “the surreal aspect is my favorite part. Usually, I take a basic idea that I find weird or surreal or scary, and warp it until it becomes its own animal and does what it needs to without me having to explain it.” Rambo also revealed that music is a large part of his process, explaining, “Each of these stories has a song (or several) that gave me fuel in the form of a tone for my writing.” According to Rambo, music did a lot to help him explain the emotions of the stories to the reader.

Though this inclusion of musical preferences may not be a staple in most writers’ handbooks, perhaps it’s a soundproof element to Rambo’s own process. And whoever liked a writer that was normal, anyway?

As for Rambo’s favorite story from this anthology, he apparently has a difficult time deciding. “They all have their own merits,” he said, “and that’s what’s great about short stories. ‘There are more of them now’ is a really simple, basic horror story that would probably hit home with a lot of outdoorsy types.” He went on to say, “It’s always scary to go out in the woods and not know what’s out there. Even though you’re certain nothing weird will happen, there’s always this little tinge on your neck, telling you if you turn around you’ll see something you didn’t think was possible.” Among others, Rambo lists Don Juan Tenorio and The Whisper for their psychological horror aspects, as well as Alien Love Song, a sturdy, simple story that starts the anthology off with a strong glance into the world of gender roles... and what that might have to do with a phantom invasion and alien abductions? Other favorites of Rambo’s are Burn and Icarus Dream Suite, the latter of which seems to be a fan-favorite according to the reviews on Amazon so far.

Where will Ron J. Rambo Jr. go from here?

“I’m about one third through my next book,” Rambo states. “It’s another concept book, this time about nuclear weapons and their atrocities.” Rambo claims Carl Sagan’s “A Path Where No Man Thought” as a source of inspiration for his upcoming project. “I’ve been borderline obsessed with the idea of how much the world would change with just one simple nuclear event,” Rambo admits, “and that’s what my next book is about.” He is looking to release it in early spring of this year.

You can grab Twisted Love Anthology off Amazon for only 3.99, why wait until spring? After all, they’re only short stories and like Rambo says: “If a [short] story is bad, you didn’t waste a lot of time on it – the same can’t be said about novels. Likewise, if a story is good, it should leave the reader wanting more, and if that’s what people get out of my stuff, I’ll know I did a good job.”
**Artist Profile:**
The Little Canoe: The Whimsical Art of Brooke Weeber

*Written by: Alice Perez, Photos from artists website; www.brookeweber.com*

“My work is a combination of whimsy, charm, and playfulness often with a darker underlying sentiment. I combine pattern with landscape and people with animals to create imaginary worlds with an iconic and recognizable color palette and intricate line detail. Because of my versatility and relatability as an artist, my work appeals to people across the board,”

What do men with conjoined beards, pickled vegetable jars, houses blooming out of flowers, a superhero-like beluga whale, and pair of coffee-loving mermaids have in common? They are all the whimsical artwork of Portland-based illustrator Brooke Weeber, the creator of The Little Canoe.

Weeber’s eye-catching illustrations combine playful and humorous scenes of odd pairings that somehow seem to work together. In one piece a bearded robot dances with a woman with flowing hair that turns into the ocean, not surprisingly titled “Robot Love.” The pair is interesting to say the least, but Weeber’s artistic presence makes the two feel like they belong there together.

She began drawing at an early age, but it wasn’t until high school and later in college when she pursued her passion for drawing and received her BFA in painting at the University of Oregon. She traded her Northwest roots for the Big Apple where she pursued her other passion - professional baking. After some time, she began to miss her Douglas fir trees and wished for more elbow room to draw. She packed her bags and headed for Portland in 2009.
"I started by drawing band posters and album covers for my musician friends...Eventually I started to research making my own prints and greeting cards. Once I took the plunge and bought my Epson Photo printer, Little Canoe really started to take off," Weeber continued, "as my little business grew I saved as much money as possible until I was able to quit my day job and do art full time."

Weeber’s love for the sea and aquatic life was the inspiration for the name of her company Little Canoe; a number of her drawings are of mermaids, whales, and ships. "The name Little Canoe came from my own love of oceans and rivers and all things nautical. I also felt that ‘canoe’ was a good metaphor for me and my journey in life, rowing swiftly from one phase to the next, never knowing what kinds of rough waters I might encounter along the way, always knowing that there will be smooth sailing ahead and the views will make it all worth it," Weeber elaborated.

For the past year and a half Weeber has happily been a self-employed artist and found her niche in the Southeast Industrial part of Portland, working out of a studio space which she shares with another artist. "It’s a big open space with large windows that let in a lot of natural light. I have enough room to store all my product stock with room to grow. It’s a very inspiring building with other talented artists and makers that help to motivate and encourage me," Weeber explained.

Weeber finds inspiration everywhere she looks in addition to her own life experiences. "I find inspiration in the world I surround myself with. This could refer to the mountains and trees that populate the beautiful Pacific Northwest; it could be from the art community that I've found myself in, or in my travels. It also comes greatly from life experience. I allow myself to respond to what I'm feeling through my artwork, so there's often a little bit of myself in each piece," she said.

Weeber has come up with a grocery list of perks she has experienced as a self-employed artist. "There are so many things that I love about what I do. The freedom to make my own schedule, the ability to be totally self-sustaining, my complete independence. I love being creative, coming up with ideas and following through with them until completion. I love the limitless possibilities that I have with my artwork and I love the wonderful response I get from my customers/clients and the general public. It's so rewarding to do what you love. I love how it feels like it," said Weeber.

Expect to see more of Brooke and the Little Canoe this coming year. You can find cards and prints locally at Tender Loving Empire and Mag-Big. In reflection Weeber iterated, "I expect people to start seeing Little Canoe more and more in their favorite shops and online. I’ll be doing lots of big projects this year as well as growing my inventory and product line. And if I’m really lucky, a children’s book will be finished up this year."
DATE NIGHT
IT’S HARD TO HAVE A GOOD TIME ON A STUDENT BUDGET. LUCKILY, THE SPECTATOR FINDS EVENTS FOR STUDENTS WHO WANT TO EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY WITHOUT GOING BROKE.
Written by: Jesse Hansen, Photo by: Lia Mahoney

Animal Eyes, Kithkin, and Rare Monk @ Rotture
Where: 315 SE 3rd
When: January 31st @ 9:30pm
Cost: $5 (21+)

Rotture, ever a staple of the East-side hip scene, is no venue to ignore. The sexy industrial shabby-chic aesthetic is hot, and the music’s great. Nestled deep in the waterfront industrial district, if you don’t know where to look you probably won’t find it (so if you’re date’s never been here, you’re probably going to look pretty cool). With a bangin’ lineup of Northwest bands hitting the stage later this month, there’s no better time to check it out. Headlining the event is Animal Eyes, a local band praised by the Willamette Weekly for their “experimental optimism,” tears upith jangly instrumentals and soulful howling vocals. They also have an album, so go buy it. And seriously, don’t miss this show.

John "Babbacombe" Lee: The Man They Could Not Hang
Where: 1847 E Burnside (NE 18th & E Burnside)
When: January 25th & 28th @ 8pm
Cost: $15 advance, $20 day of show

History, Mystery, murder and...steampunk? It’s a one-man show! Wipe the Cheetos dust off your hoody and come take in some culture! Lawrence Howard brings his talent to the stage once again in this Portland Monthly editor’s pick, described as “CSI meets Downton Abbey.” With free snacks included, cheap beer, wine, and soft drinks, there’s really no reason for you not to attend.

Hungover Brunch @ Swift Lounge
Where: 1932 Northeast Broadway Street
When: 9am - 3pm Every Saturday
Cost: Check the menu... (21+)

It’s Saturday morning! Now grope blindly for the aspirin bottle on your nightstand, because you probably drank too much last night. Don’t fret though: there’s a place just for you (and it’s not the Cheerful Tortoise). Every weekend, Swift Bar and Lounge hosts the Hungover Brunch. Teeing off at 9:00am, you don’t even have to drag yourself out of bed until you’re done vomiting...yay! If you’re not hungover, it’s not a prerequisite; the food probably tastes just as good. With buckets of mimosas (I mean that literally) and Bloody Maries to die for, Swift Bar’s Hungover Brunch makes another night of drinking a whole lot more tolerable.

Skyhigh Sports - The Trampoline Place
Where: 11131 SW Greenburg Rd, Tigard, OR
When: Every Friday @ 9pm - Midnight
Cost: $20

I really don’t even know where to start here. The Trampoline Place, just a few miles outside the Portland city limits, boasts “trampoline floors and trampoline walls” - and there’s really no better way to say it. The whole place is one...giant...trampoline. (If your inner child isn’t begging you to do this, then you’re a doomed cynic.) The deal gets better though: every Friday night, from 9:00pm to midnight, Skyhigh sports hosts free play Fridays. While the name may be deceptive (it’s very not free), it’s still a hell of a bargain. For twenty dollars a person, you get three hours of jumping time, which includes trampoline dodgeball and a foam-pit to flip into, as well as free access to all the arcade games. To sweeten the deal, they even kick you two free slices of pizza and a large fountain drink with admission, ‘cause pizza and trampolines go together like PB&J.
BAR
FACE
OFF
Bar Face off: 
Battle of the "College Bars"

Written by: Charles Hackney

A great alternative to the Cheerful Tortoise, Gnarly grey is an awesome little sports bar on the corner of 13th and Jefferson. This bar often has several sports games showing on an array of televisions throughout the bar for the common sports fiend, and hosts free pool every day for any pool sharks out there. Due to their support for Portland State University, the founders, Corey and Johnny, donate a percent of their proceeds to the school. Finally, students can feel like they are contributing to a good cause while drinking their favorite alcoholic beverage!

Gnarley Grey

Service: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Let me begin by saying that I have nothing to complain about in regard to Gnarly Grey’s service. It seemed as if Johnny was eager to cater to every customer’s wants and needs while carrying out his duties swiftly, and contentedly. Although the bar was not busy when I was there, I have no doubt that the service would be the same regardless. One thing that I especially care for in a pub is feeling able to ask questions. Johnny was more than willing to answer any questions that I had about the establishment, food, beer, and full bar. Taking into consideration the owner’s friendliness, and hospitality, I am giving Gnarly Grey’s service a five out of five.

Happy Hour: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Happy hour is from 3-7 p.m. every day, and the food prices range from 3-$5. The menu includes mac and cheese, pulled pork sliders, a burger, side salad, nachos, and a house salad with chicken. I personally decided to go with the pulled pork sliders, which came with a side of chips. In terms of beverages, drink specials include 2-$5 draft beers, and $3 well drinks from 3 o’clock until midnight. Although there are a limited amount of choices on the happy hour menu, there are several different choices at excellent prices including a steak and a pork chop at $6. Hell of a bargain! When you’re feeling the need to get your protein fix and enjoy a beer or cocktail, Gnarly Grey is definitely the place to go, happy hour or not. With a decent happy hour menu, and other affordable options, I grant a four out of five stars in regard to happy hour.

Quality: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

You know the type of food you receive on a warm plate at a family get together? It’s almost as if the Gnarly Grey has tried to encapsulate this comfort food style. Upon being served my three pulled pork sliders, I felt as if they were put together with quality and satisfaction in mind. The tid bits of pork were tender and juicy, and the barbeque sauce that it was smothered in was phenomenal. The side of chips went together very well with the sandwiches; they topped off my stomach and I was left feeling content at a reasonable price of $3. Being a fan of red ale, I decided to go with the Bear Republic red. This beer was amazing, and I was content with the $5 pricing. With dank beer, and good food, Gnarly Grey deserves a Quality rating of five out of five.

Total: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
The Cheerful Tortoise

If you don’t know about the Cheerful Tortoise, pull your head out of your ass. Cheerful is the sports bar on the corner of 6th and College right on campus - the bar that everyone knows about at PSU. With a bustling atmosphere, the Cheerful acts as a great get-away for a pint between classes, or a party spot in the evening any day of the week. Similar to the Gnarly Grey, the Cheerful has an array of televisions playing different sports games at all times. Although lacking a pool table, I feel as if the atmosphere makes up for it.

Service: ★★★☆☆

I was pleased with the waitresses that served me at the Cheerful Tortoise. The timing, on the other hand, was infrequent and inopportune. Nevertheless, I was happy to be served by pleasant, and might I say cute waitresses who were happy with their job. The bar was not very busy, so I cannot help but question the timeliness of the service. I would imagine that the service is almost non-existent if you are sitting away from the bar during their busy hours. Although the service is not the best in my opinion, the cheerful attitudes hold up to the company’s name. The waitresses comforting attitudes made up for the inefficient service, leading me to grant the Cheerful a three out of five in service.

Happy Hour: ★★★★★

Cheerful has a happy hour that is accommodating and affordable. They have many choices that range from 1.95-$4.95, with a happy hour running from 3 to 6 p.m. and midnight to 2 a.m. These times make for a generous window to indulge at a cheap price. Cheerful tortoise is a great place to dip in between classes to grab a cheap bite to eat and a cool frothy beer, or a nightcap if you live on campus. If you are unable to make it to happy hour, their prices are still reasonable, and they have great food. One of the specials outside of happy hour that Cheerful is known for is their thirsty Thursday special, which includes $1 Blue Moon and Coors Light on tap! Although the crowd can be a real shitshow during thirsty Thursday, it’s totally worth the wait for the cheap brew. Their happy hour, along with their thirsty Thursday special have become staples on the PSU campus—deserving of a five out of five rating.

Quality: ★★★★☆

I decided to go with Cheerful Tortoise’s breakfast special, a plate with two eggs, hash browns, and toast for $2! I also decided to order a mimosa, considering I was there earlier in the day. The breakfast was great, but the hash browns could have been a little bit crispier. However, it was definitely one of the better breakfasts I’ve had for only $2. The mimosa was good, the simple mixture of orange juice and champagne made for a great start to the day. Furthermore, Cheerful was not shy when it came to their champagne to orange juice ratio; I left feeling pretty buzzed. Taking the somewhat soggy hash browns into account, I’ll give the Cheerful Tortoise a four out of five for Quality.

Total: ★★★★★
★★☆☆☆
FOOD CART FACE-OFF

Written and Photos by: Jacob Stein

PORTLAND IS KNOWN FOR ITS AMAZING FOOD, AND MOST OF THAT AMAZINGNESS COMES FROM ITS FOOD CARTS. LOCATED ALL OVER TOWN, THESE CARTS DELIVER ASTOUNDING MEALS ON-THE-GO AT REASONABLE PRICES. FOR PSU STUDENTS, THE SPECTATOR WILL CHALLENGE TWO FOOD CARTS IN A HEAD-TO-HEAD COMPETITION FOR THE BEST FOOD AROUND. OUR GOAL IS TO KEEP YOU IN THE LOOP ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT'S DELICIOUS ON WHEELS NEAR CAMPUS, SO YOU KNOW WHERE TO GO WHEN YOUR TUMMY STARTS RUMBLING.

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BURGERS, WINGS, SAUSAGES,
New Year’s Special!

It’s the new year, and resolutions are running rampant. Of all the habits we’re telling ourselves we’ll form with the start of this new year, making healthy choices is often an overriding theme of the equation – and among these new health-conscious commitments, making good, healthy decisions about the food we stuff in our faces is usually number one on the list. That is, eating more organic foods, maybe even starting a vegetarian or (gasp!) vegan diet.

Vegan and vegetarian food usually gets a bad-rap. People complain that these healthy options don’t taste quite right, or that the portions are smaller than meat-eater food.

Well, let’s put an end to the debate. For the first Foodcart Face-off of the new year, I’ve decided to test a vegan burger versus a normal beef patty. It’s time to see if the healthy resolution-makers among us are actually doing themselves a favor.

DC Vegetarian:

DC Vegetarian is a prime spot to try out your new resolution. Located on 3rd and Washington/Stark, this cart has both vegan and vegetarian options, for relatively reasonable prices, and great service. I chose the burger with a vegan patty made from wheat gluten, oats, and TVP (textured vegetable protein).

Price: $4.75

Quality: ★★★★★

Let’s be honest: the most important thing about a burger is how it tastes. Size matters, but the quality of the ingredients reigns supreme in the end. Well, as for this burger, my taste buds could not have been more pleased. I must admit, I was expecting something perhaps a bit grainy, a weak attempt to copy the taste of a real beef burger in the flavor department. I was pleasantly surprised. Instead of trying to copy the taste of anything else, this vegan patty invents a new taste all of its own. It is juicy and savory, and when combined with the organic “vegenaise,” my first bite had me completely blown away. Tomatoes, onions, pickles, mustard and ketchup top off this burger, but the patty is the real culprit of this powerful flavorful punch. And all sandwiched between two slices of toasted organic wheat bread – who could argue with that for a healthy new years resolution?

Quantity: ★★★☆☆

The size of this burger is medium – it could not be better stated. I was not underwhelmed by it; in fact, I was quite full after eating it. But I was certainly not overwhelmed by the amount of food. There was nothing left for me to save for dinner later. And maybe that’s the point: you can’t stuff yourself to the brim if you’re trying to do the best for your body. For the price, this burger was a good, decent size, but nothing to boast about.

Healthiness: ★★★☆☆

I know what you’re thinking: “Only 4 stars? Wow, did he really just rate a vegan burger higher in the taste department than for its healthiness?” Why, yes, I did. You read that right. I’m not giving this burger a complete 5 stars in the area of healthiness because, quite frankly, it doesn’t deserve it. That’s not to say it isn’t healthy – compared to most of the meals you could find at foodcarts, my bet is that DC Vegetarian is among the healthiest. But the vegenaise and the bun were the only aspects of the sandwich that were organic. What about the veggies, like the tomatoes and onions? What about the patty itself? It said nowhere on the menu that any of these were organic. This is probably because they want to keep the price low, which is certainly reasonable. But if you’re looking for an all-organic vegan burger, don’t look here. If you are, however, looking for a very well-priced and healthy alternative to a beef patty (a meatless alternative, remember) then you’ve just found your favorite new spot for lunch.

Total Score for DC Vegetarian: ★★★★★
The Sausage Shack:
For a taste of a real meat patty, I knew I couldn't go anywhere except a cart with a style completely opposite of DC Vegetarian. So my search led me to The Sausage Shack. At the corner of SW 3rd and Stark, this shack-o-meat has won awards for its bacon and sirloin beef. To compare against the vegan patty, I ordered a sirloin burger.

Price: $5

Quality: ★★★☆☆

That 1/3 lb. of sirloin beef definitely tastes good... but I have to say, not entirely great. It's a hearty burger, to be sure, complete with onions, lettuce, tomato, and all the customary toppings.... but its weakness is that it's basic. Sure, I only ordered a standard burger, not one of the crazy combinations like the Paul BrOnion Burger on the menu (which features sirloin AND bratwurst), but I wanted the competition to be fair with DC Vegetarian. A battle of the basic burgers. And the Sausage Shack's standard burger, while hearty, was not exploding with mysterious flavors or toasted goodness. Infact, the beef patty was the only part of the sandwich that was grilled; the buns weren't even toasted. This burger was good, but did nothing to completely impress.

Quantity: ★★★☆☆

It was a good-sized burger; again, like the DC vegan choice, it did not overwhelm me nor underwhelm. In fact, it was roughly the same size. And it did not come with fries or a drink or anything like that, such as you might expect if you're used to fast food meals. Albeit, it tasted much better than anything you might get from Burger King or McDonald's... but in terms of quantity, for the pricey total of $5, you might as well save a quarter and take the vegan option instead.

Healthiness: ★☆☆☆☆

As I touched on earlier, when you eat a burger, you're probably not trying to be healthy. By the time that sirloin patty is broaching your lips, you've come a far way from being concerned with healthiness. And if you can put the level of healthiness of this burger (or rather, lack thereof) out of your mind, that's probably for the better - this burger makes no attempt to help you be respectful of your body. The burger is an enormous intake of a pure sirloin patty, and a good helping of standard white buns. The only reason I'm giving this burger a health-rating of 2 stars instead of 1 is because it did manage to include the basic burger veggies - the tomatoes, the lettuce, and the onions. If you're looking for the Ron Swanson burger, the slab of cow between two dry buns, you'll have to keep looking. But if you want a good standard burger which makes a point to be certainly NOT meatless, this is your place.

Total Score for The Sausage Shack: ★★★★★
Not So Selfish?
PSU RESEARCH SHOWS LIFE MUST INEVITABLY COOPERATE TO SURVIVE.
Written by: Jacob Stein

In the beginning, there was a primordial soup of RNA molecules—so goes the prevailing theory about the early origins of life. Portland State University Chemistry Professor Dr. Niles Lehman and his team at PSU are contributing to this theory of how things may have worked billions of years ago. If he is right, cooperation beat out selfishness even then.

The theory about an "RNA world" centers on the dual capacities of RNA. It can store genetic information, as DNA does, but it can also catalyze chemical reactions, as proteins do. So before DNA and proteins came along, RNA alone may have sufficed to carry out information-flow and metabolic processes.

But RNA was caught in a dilemma. If it stayed as it was, it wouldn't drive chemical evolution further in the direction of self-organization, building complexity to eventually become what we today know as life. If it became an ever larger and growing molecule, in order to hold more information and thus complexity, it would become less stable and more prone to "copying errors" as it replicated itself.

The solution to this problem?

According to Lehman, these first replicators may have split their information among multiple cooperating molecules.

Dr. Lehman has his Ph.D from University of California, Los Angeles, and was a postdoctoral fellow at both The Scripps Research Institute and University of Oregon before settling as Professor of Chemistry at Portland State University. His research is focused on the biochemical and genetic issues surrounding the origin of life on Earth—one of the few subjects of research that is both microscopic and entirely epic all at once.

Earlier studies had shown that pairs of molecules could indeed cooperate. Now the PSU team has examined a network of three molecules and found similar cooperation, as reported by Lehman and colleagues in the October online issue of Nature. "If you can go from two to three," Lehman told a reporter from New Scientist magazine, "you can go from three to infinity."

For his most recent study, Lehman created three RNA molecules and put them to a sort of test-tube test known as evolution in vitro. Molecule A helped molecule B to copy itself, molecule B did the same for C, and so on back to A. The team executed the study again with 48 different fragments of an RNA molecule—and sure enough, the fragments re-made themselves into a network of molecules that included all 48. By assisting one another to assemble the chemical building blocks of RNA, multiple RNA molecules could grow faster than any single RNA molecule.

As the team put it in the Nature report, "Our experiments highlight the advantages of cooperative behavior even at the molecule stages of nascent life."

This groundbreaking study by the PSU team indicates that teamwork in the RNA world was the driving factor behind survival and increased cellular complexity. It indicates that, quite literally, cooperation is in the biochemical heritage of our blood and bones. As human beings, we are extremely complicated multicellular organisms—huge networks of eukaryotic cells and molecules, and all these molecules work together in order for us to operate and survive. Well, we already knew that the cells in our body had to cooperate in order to maintain our organs, our life, but Lehman's research points toward teamwork that has taken place for eons, on a much, much smaller level.

What does this mean for us? It means there's a good chance that helping others is an instinctual capability in all life. It means that we were meant to coexist; that perhaps sympathy and compassion are not superfluous, but rather the most important qualities we could possess. The ability to work together with others, to help those in need, to build a society with and not against other forms of life, may be our best chance at survival in the long run—especially in a world that is quickly becoming filled with disasters, both natural and man-made. On a much more basic level, nature has dictated that cooperation beats out selfishness. Lehman may be focusing on a molecular level, but his findings nonetheless enlighten us about the bigger picture of life.
"Put a gun on it!" – CPSO’s Absurd Appeal For Arms

HOW PSU’S CAMPUS PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICE IS TRYING TO SPEND YOUR TUITION MONEY ON GUNS

Written by: Romain Bonilla, Photos by: Lia Mahoney

With all the recent news surrounding school shootings and the legal status of firearms in the United States, writing an opinion piece about gun policy has become a much more serious endeavor. In the past few weeks, virtually every major publication in the country has featured op-eds and articles making the case for their author’s take on second amendment issues. Rest assured, this is not one of those articles.

The question at hand relates to the efficacy of Portland State’s Campus Public Safety Office (CPSO) and whether or not public safety officers ought to be armed. In other words: do we want campus officers to carry firearms as a part of their peacekeeping duties? A policy proposal presented by CPSO aims to make that happen, and while the university hasn’t taken an official stance as of press time, the PSU administration seems quite infatuated with the idea.

If the proposal is put into effect, Portland State would see the emergence of a campus police force to enforce university policies. CPSO officers would be trained at a police academy and granted the same prerogatives as regular police officers, including the use of deadly weapons.

What could possibly go wrong?

Last October – while the folks at CPSO were probably polishing their proposal – an 18-year-old freshman at the University of South Alabama was shot to death by a public safety officer. His crime: running around in his birthday suit outside the campus police station. In his defense, the officer claimed he felt “threatened” by the cheeky teenager (who was 5’7” and weighed 135 lbs, mind you); but the student could not possibly have been carrying a weapon, seeing as he was fully nude. It’s unclear what the officer was thinking when he drew his weapon, but that’s beside the point: had that gun not been given to him in the first place, that tragedy would have been avoided.

The changes proposed by CPSO also involve a significant cost – $2 million – which essentially doubles the yearly cost of
Portland State's public safety department. Gee, I wonder why CPSO is so eager to make this happen! Naturally, students would be the ones paying for most of that bill. Speaking to a group of ASPSU senators, CPSO chief Philip Zerzan made the case for the policy change by citing the current inadequacy of the public safety office, which functions with no more than 14 officers. With close to 30,000 students enrolled at PSU, this translates to an officer-student ratio of less than 1-to-2000. As a comparison, the University of Oregon has about 20,000 students and 35 public safety officers, translating to about one officer per 570 students.

The need for more public safety officers at Portland State is not news. In November 2011, a woman was raped by two men on SW 10th and Market Street. Sgt. Pete Simpson, speaking on behalf of the Portland Police Bureau, said the incident was "a crime of opportunity." Sadly, this is no isolated incident. In the early hours of November 26, a PSU student walking to her dorm was knocked unconscious and sexually assaulted. These preventable misadventures would happen less often if the university hired more public safety officers. The greater the number of officers, the more likely they are to be at the right place, at the right time.

Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for Portland State's campus safety officers to waste their resources in the wrong places, at the wrong times. For instance, on Halloween night – a date notorious for its alcohol-fueled parties – no less than six CPSO officers were lingering in the Broadway Building lobby, waiting for residents to come home and handing out drug and alcohol violations like candy. While these officers were hard at work determining which eyes were red and which eyes weren't, the rest of campus was deprived of almost half of its public safety. Whether or not they have a gun matters little in the few instances of criminality that happen on-campus. Aside from the sexual assault incidents mentioned above, Portland State University has a remarkably low rate of violent crime. In September, CPSO released its latest Clery Act and Fire Safety Report, which gathers crime information from local police, public safety, and university official data. According to the document, there have been zero instances of murder, attempted murder, or aggravated assault in 2011. The last time a firearm has been used on PSU premises dates back to 1998, and the weapon's only victim was a dormitory door.

Arming PSU's campus safety officers is a $2 million solution to an imaginary problem. To meet the community's needs in regards to public safety, we need more officers, not more heavily armed ones. With the Portland Police Bureau located six blocks away, CPSO's proposal for a campus police force embodies nothing short of grotesque redundancy. Not a single shot has been fired at Portland State University in 14 years. Let's keep it that way.
The Oscars have been announced, and I must admit I am sorely disappointed at how single minded and dull the Academy really is. Unable to separate quality from popularity and conventionality, they have yet again set up an awards ceremony celebrating how un-progressive Hollywood is. The Oscars take a close second to the Super Bowl in my book, which makes every year that much harder when I read the nominees. With Lincoln, Life of Pi, Zero Dark Thirty and Silver Linings Playbook (a romantic comedy for craps sake) cleaning up in nominations it will be difficult to watch the Elitism of Hollywood grow even larger. To help digest this jagged and repetitive pill I swallow every year, I have compiled a list of a couple of movies from 2012 that may (or may not) be regarded as Oscar worthy.

1. For my favorite movie of the year I have a tie between Holy Motors and Django Unchained. Quentin Tarantino is currently the most entertaining director to watch in film, but has recently let me down with Death Proof and Inglorious Bastards. Inglorious definitely has signature Tarantino moments - like the carving of the swastika into Christoph Waltz’ forehead and the brutal massacre of an entire movie house, including Hitler - but his usual comedic wit with every horrible situation lacked throughout (I personally blame Eli Roth). This was fortunately not the case for Django. Jamie Foxx and Christoph Waltz become the perfect duo of bounty hunters who track down and kill wanted fugitives. Their journey leads them to a plantation where Foxx has to rescue his wife and classic Tarantino shenanigans are had--Tarantino returns to form with each of his characters. Waltz and Foxx are on par with Jackson and Travolta in Pulp Fiction, with each character becoming memorable throughout each scene no matter how small the role. Django is Tarantino’s best since Pulp Fiction. Tarantino wants to make movies that people love and he succeeds with Django because we can tell how much he loved writing and directing this movie: each of his characters are the proof.

2. Holy Motors is a French foreign movie written and directed by Leos Carax. There was a lot of hype about this movie, but but due to us living in America, only the biggest cities will show it and only for a week maximum. Leos Carax was someone who I had never heard of before Holy Motors, so after watching another one of his movies, The Lovers on the Bridge, I decided to give Motors a shot. It is rare that I will walk into a movie and know nothing about it, but it is an experience I look forward to. After watching any trailer or constantly hearing about a movie for weeks or months it can ruin the experience. Thus, I was excited and nervous about the blind date—and it was definitely an experience I don’t regret. Throughout the movie we follow a man in a limo as he switches from costume to costume and acts out a different part in everyday normal life. From an old woman to a dying old man we follow him as he becomes a different person who is recognized as a father, husband, friend, enemy, lover, killer, etc. We do not understand why he is doing this but we become transfixed and understand that each role needs to be filled for one reason or another. Reality is blurred when he murders a character whom he has previously played, and even more when he is unable to die after multiple gun shot wounds. Holy Motors has no beginning, middle or end, yet needs none to effectively portray how important and common each of these characters and events are. Holy Motors was an unexpected and greatly needed break from an increasingly unoriginal Hollywood.
3. The only reason that I didn’t put The Master alongside Holy Motors and Django was because I have only seen it once and need to see it again to make a clear judgment. With each movie P.T. Anderson has slowly been unraveling his cinematic genius before eager audiences. Anderson may have lost some people with Magnolia and Punch-Drunk Love, but has truly shown what he is capable of with There Will Be Blood, and now, The Master. Many auteur directors like David Fincher are beginning to turn to alternative musicians outside of the Hollywood circle. Fincher signed on Trent Reznor, who won an Oscar for best original score in The Social Network, and now Anderson has turned to Johnny Greenwood (Radiohead) again for The Master. Greenwood plays a major role in exposing and complimenting Anderson’s lost and hopeless main characters; Daniel Day-Lewis and now Joaquin Phoenix. Joaquin plays Freddie Quell, a man who has just been released from the military after WWII. Very quickly we understand that Quell is a short tempered man who feels he has no place in commercialized America. After wandering upon a boat for shelter he becomes friends with Lancaster Dodd (Philip Seymour Hoffman) and becomes Dodd’s project. Dodd is the leader of a cult and becomes connected with Quell right away. Quell finally feels important and useful under Dodd’s guidance and becomes Dodd’s right-hand man, much to the disliking of his wife (Amy Adams). In one scene we see just how deep the connection between Quell and Dodd has become, when Quell dreams (or maybe he doesn’t) that he has received a phone call from Dodd asking him to come half-way across the world for a visit. The Master is a visually breath-taking movie of just how far a bond between two deviants can bend.

4. My two favorite “L.O.L.” comedies of the past year were Goon and Tim and Eric’s Billion Dollar Movie. When it comes to sports movies the only two worth watching, in my opinion, are boxing and hockey movies. Granted, Any Given Sunday kills it with its over-the-top debauchery fest of drugs and retired Hall of Fame football legends (thank you Oliver Stone) it is an exception to countless unexciting sports movies. Goon involves Doug Glatt (Sean William Scott) a bouncer turned hockey player who helps a struggling minor league team become relevant by fighting, earning himself the name “Doug the Thug”. Scott has portrayed a regular frat boy in most of his movies, so it was refreshing to see him play a meat-head who is actually a considerate human being—with the I.Q. of a 12 year old. The story is a build-up to his last fight with Ross Rhea (Live Schreiber), the ultimate Goon. Blood is shed, ankles broken, and teeth lost, all while laughing and enjoying it. Scott awkwardly wins the affection of the team and comes out triumphant against Schreiber, who plays a character more intimidating than Sabertooth.

5. Tim and Eric’s Billion Dollar Movie, on the other hand, is a whole different beast. Many people are familiar with the show, Tim and Eric Awesome Show Great Job and Tom Goes to the Mayor, which is pretty much what you get with their movie. They are definitely an acquired taste, but with help from Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly (a regular on TAEASGJ) the movie becomes too ridiculous to pass up. Tim and Eric have fallen into a billion dollars worth of debt and the only way to pay it off is to run Ferrell’s mall with the help his boy, Reilly, who is chronically ill and “not meant to live long.” Tim and Eric’s gross late-night infomercial humor does not disappoint. At one point Eric takes a cleansing shrimp bath filled by children who are fed only the softest meats, and Tim seduces a noticeably older woman in an adult toy store where they proceed to test out each device in awkwardly graphic fashion. All the uncomfortable stares and bodily noises that we have come to expect and enjoy from Tim and Eric are present throughout the movie.
6. Two horror movies, well one may be a horror/comedy, that I was surprised with were Cabin in the Woods and Excision. When I first saw previews for Cabin in the Woods I had low expectations, and was near passing it up completely. The movie unfolds just as all the other genre horror films do, but it progresses with self-deprecating humor and creative ways of introducing different creatures throughout. Like most slasher movies, a group of college kids head to a cabin in the woods during their college break. Regular dark omens are noticed and then shrugged off as they head into the woods, but the omens are contrasted with a sense of humor that mocks each rule of survival in any slasher film. Once the kids find themselves in a basement full of ornate objects, we realize that they are part of something much bigger. They decide how they will die with which object they choose. All of the rules of survival are broken throughout but the humor is just as prevalent as each kid dies a bloody death. As the stoner and virgin find a way out we find out that they are a part of more than just a sadistic game; they are an offering or sacrifice to help ensure the survival of the human race...overly clichéd and outrageous, which only helps the movie. A huge bonus is witnessing hundreds of creatures in slasher action instead of just the one in most other horror films. My favorites were the unicorn, or perhaps the merman, who sprays all that remains of his victim through his blow hole after feasting. Cabin in the Woods finally finds the medium that works between a spoof movie and a horror movie. It reminds us that we can have our gruesome murders and laughs all in one entertaining movie.

7. Excision was another movie that came out of nowhere and shocked me, which is fairly difficult. Horror movies are the laughing stock of all film genres, but Excision helped instill fear back into the field. Excision is about Pauline, a teenager girl who is fascinated with surgery and blood and obviously doesn’t fit in because of it. She is the daughter of Phyllis, a mother who favors Pauline’s younger sister over her, to the point where Phyllis can do nothing but tear Pauline down by purposely giving all her attention to the younger sister. We are able to see inside Pauline’s self-indulgent dreams/fantasies and realize how desperately she wants to make them a reality. Pauline goes so far as to surgically operate on a dead bird before taking the next logical step of operating on a human. Pauline loves her sister, who has a failing organ, and cannot watch her suffer anymore; thus, naturally, she decides to drug her and perform a transplant. Excision is a psychological horror in which we are able to witness just how delusional and horrific Pauline’s dreams and reality truly are. We witness everything from only her point of view, and understand just how blurred events are to her. In the end, of course, her mother finally realizes how devastating her constant neglect has become.

8. 2012 was also a year that released one of the most pure action films in a long time. The Raid was a small budget Indonesian film that packed a lot of punch. The movie follows a small set of S.W.A.T. officers as they infiltrate a drug lord’s apartment building with orders to detain the criminal as soon as possible, but find themselves trapped at the mercy of the drug lord’s militia. Usually in an action movie this is the part where other subplots seep into the story and we find ourselves floundering in lackluster questions of love and morals, but fortunately for us, in The Raid only a couple of small subplots deter the fast-paced action. Each scene accomplishes nothing but raw fight scenes that have no other ulterior motive than to take no prisoners. The Raid is a sober action movie that strips itself of all the Hollywood baggage which tries to please each demographic of movie watcher. The Raid takes the simplicity of Die Hard and the martial arts of Jackie Chan to make an action movie that leaves you bruised and battered.