

CLAIMS DEPARTMENT



ISSUE 7: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE LADIES

CLaims Department

Issue 7

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Last time, I talked about a great trip to a small hotel and there wasn't much going on. The Steam-punk theme was all the art, but this time, I've decided that it's important to talk about the ladies.

You see, I love the ladies, they're my thing. There have been long periods of time where I haven't had a romantic interest in my life, and long periods where I have. Im just beyond the break-even, I imagine. When I came across the work of GoblinQueen. Her work features a lot of lovely ladies in a very stylized and cartoony fashion. That got me thinking about one of the better periods of my life.

You see, for every terrible period, I've had a period where I could walk down the aisle and pick my girl. The period where this issue takes place is one of those, and it's a fun story that takes place

right before Gen and I had started dating. I had had a fairly bad run of lady luck over the previous couple of years. I had a little luck in Sonoma when I met and had a delightful afternoon and evening with a lass from out of town (which I detail in Claims Department Issue 2) I was getting tired of things the way they were, so I figured I'd step out a bit. I had met a number of fun lasses at Cinequest and around town, so I figured I'd start hanging around with them some more and seeing if anything developed.

Of course, nothing ever did.

I was really annoyed with the state of things, so as I decided to take a break and head out to a place called Las Vegas.

Some may know of Vegas as the home of Arnie and Joyce Katz, or maybe from the 1970s TV series. Believe it or not, Vegas is a popular destination, despite being in the middle of the desert. I love to play cards (who doesn't?) and I had a little extra cash. I hopped in the

car and headed down, hoping to prove that unlucky in love must mean that I'd be lucky in cards. I started down after a drive-by CD grab from my old place.

The Music

I once had a giant collec-

tion of CDs. Sadly, between moving across the country a few times and having been broke enough to need to sell them, I'd lost about 90% of them over the years. I knew I had a bunch of them left on my dresser at the old home, so I gathered a few of them and hopped in the car after I stole a small cooler, a few Cokes, a can of Pringles and a bottle of Johnny Walker Black I had left at Mom's before I moved. I also grabbed a pillow and a blanket, since I didn't know if I had a hotel room, or would even have enough money to

let one once I was down there. All that was done before 5 am.

I found a pair of CDs that I had forgotten had been given to me for Christmas 1995. They were the only CDs I had gotten that year and I hadn't listened to them since. I had bought Miles Davis' Kind of Blue just before Thanksgiving and it had yet to come out of my CD player by the time Christmas had rolled around. I hadn't even listened to them in the

eight years since. The CDs were Devo's Greatest Hits and Devo's Greatest Misses.

If there was a seminal Science Fiction band, it would be a race between Kraftwerk and Devo to see who got the title. Their gimmick is simple: They devolved from a long-line



of brain-eating apes. That's the simple version. In reality, they were a bunch of college friends from Ohio who met and found that they all had similar interests in SF and music tinkering. That's the basic story of the group. They started making SF-tinged music in the mid-1970s and they were the second band I ever saw live. My first show, which my Pops brought me to when I was far too young, was The Avengers, Devo and Blondie. The Out-of-Town acts were on first and The Avengers closed the show. I can still remember parts of it, though it's kinda a blur. I've read about it in more books since than which is the only reason I know the order of the bands!

I put in The Greatest Hits album first, knowing that I liked Devo, though it had been years since I listened to them, I figured getting the great stuff out of the way early would be a way to pass the time.

The Devo songs that I've always known are on this one. Jerkin' Back and Forth is one of the classics, and Big Mess is one of the songs that I think of when I hear a piece of modern electronica.



Devo Over the Years

Lots of wild Moog work in that one. The album includes Beautiful World (some car commercial used it in 1997 or so) and Satisfaction and Whip It, all the songs that people know when they first come to Devo. But it also includes two songs, put back to back on the CD, that define Devo to me.

Smart Patrol is the story of Jocko Homo, a guy who has been with the World, or so they say. There's a group that monitors reality on this place, and they're not happy. The song is slower, but a steady, rockin' rythm.

And then it goes nutty.

The second half of the Song is about a pair who come from the past to save humanity by sacrificing Devo. They are Mr. Kamikaze and Mr. DNA. This song speeds up and trails along the punk rock sensibility that Devo was founded on while mixing in all the electronic elements they added. The song rockets away from the slower portion and really imparts a sense of panic...or maybe I'm just reading too much into it.

The other great song feautres the most perfect song opening of modern times. Gut



Feeling is a song where the lyrics are only there to play around the tune they've constructed. 'Something 'bout the way you taste makes me wanna clear my throat./ There's a madness to you movement, it really gets my goat' are not the type of lyrics you drop if you want folks to listen to them. The opening is a power piece of simple guitar and piano-synth with rocketing drums. It's hard to resist the urge to move, and the car-based equivilent is speeding, when the opening is on. Later, they would use the opening for a training scene in Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic*. It's just about the perfect way.

This was the Devo I knew and loved, and as I made it to Barstow, I was in full rocking mode. I stopped at a little bar/restaurant that advertised a steak sandwich for 5.99. I love me a good steak sandwich, so I pulled in and grabbed a seat.

The place was well-lit for what I had hoped would be a dive bar. There were the regular barfly types, all with the same amount of beer that seemed to stay in the glass the entire time I was there. Every few minutes, someone would buy a lotto ticket and stare at the screen until the numbers came up.

But even with all those dead-

eyed humans staring into the screen, I would come back every day because that sammich was damn good. It was a huge and thoroughly cooked steak. They didn't even ask how I wanted it, because there's only one way they make it; halfway to jerky, but however it is that they marinade it, I must find out. It was tangy and smooth and the meat melted in my mouth even though it was tough to break from its parent matter. It was amazing how well it worked. I washed it down with Johnny Walker Red on the Rocks.

And then I saw her. On a bad day, she might have resembled Lauren Bacall in *The Big Sleep*, and I'd have no idea what she might look like on a good day, since the two times I saw her she was leveled in a depression that made the lights go a little darker around



where she sat. I got up from my bar seat and headed over to the restroom. Someone had grabbed my old seat, but I wanted another drink and the only seat available was next to the Queen of Sorrows.

"You mind if I sit here?" I asked.

"Not at all," She said, she twisted around so that her elbows were on the bar, thrusting forward a considerable chest. "my name's Melinda."

We started a conversation about television for some reason. She was a big fan of a TV show that had been off the air for a while called Lucky. I was also a GIANT fan of the show. Basically, it was the story of a remorseful pro-gambler who falls off the wagon hard and the two friends who help him in his adventures.

It was during that conversation, which lasted four Lotto draws, according to the screen over the bar, that I noticed she had placed her hand on my arm and while she hadn't changed her face much, still carrying the signs of unhappy times prior to her drinking, she was smiling...sort of. It was hard to judge what she was thinking, but after about an hour, and with the hour of One approaching, I thought I had to leave and through the rest of the desert.

"Sorry, but I gotta head out."

"Shame." She said, now certainly smiling. She grabbed a pen and wrote something down. "If you find yourself here again, gimme a call."

And she handed

me her number.

In fact, up to that point, I had never gotten a number from a lady in a bar. Other strange locations yes, but never a bar. I left feeling pretty good about myself, not realising what lay ahead.

The Desert.

More Music

I started driving through what was really desert land. I took out The Greatest Hits and put in the greatest misses of Devo CD, not sure what to expect. What I should have thought was the CD would be an interesting look into a band that did otherwise smart and interesting music, but what I found was that their failures were almost as good as their successes.

These tend to be a little more DIY sounding and rougher, but at the same time show more experimentation than the other disc. It features another version of Satisfaction that is far more Kraftwerk-y than the Greatest Hits version and at times more punk rock.

The first song where I thought I was listening to something really special was Pink Pussycat. Every





New Wave band had at least one song that could be read multiple ways and this was Devo's. I'm betting you can figure out what they're talking about half the time in this song. Devo Corporate Anthem sounds like you'd im-

agine an anthem would sound if it were written by The Allen Parsons Project. It's unhuman, sterile and totally corporate. It's a wonderful piece.

The two most interesting pieces on the CD had to be the ones that moved me most were Mongoloid and Speed Racer, but for completely different reasons. Mongoloid is almost totally a punk rock song. There's an electronic element to it, but in construction and performance, it's as punk as you'll find. The lyrics are good too.

'MONGOLOID HE WAS A MONGOLOID
AND IT DETERMINED WHAT HE COULD SEE
AND HE WORE A HAT
AND HE HAD A JOB
AND HE BROUGHT HOME THE BACON
SO THAT NO ONE KNEW
MONGOLOID HE WAS A MONGOLOID'

That's good song writing. Speed Racer is an electronica song that points out many of the troubles of electronica songs. The few snippets are comical bits, but they don't mean anything, they're simply filler in the gaps left by the machine. And the lines they deliver are all simply about their places in the world. It's a tough electronica song if you go through it and look at the signs and signifiers.

I was up to my neck in desert at this point. I-15 is not the type of road that rewards attention to the passing scenery. I must say that it's pretty country, but that wears off before the first 50 miles. I was listening to my music, sitting in the front seat, boldly remembering Melinda and thinking of what I could possibly do to set up some sort of arrangement to see her again. I pulled off the road for a while at an overpass road that didn't lead anywhere. It was nearly 100, but I wanted to catch a quick nap. I parked in a bit of



