

and tribulations a burden, everyone felt it / Everyone heard it, multiple shots, corners cryin' out / You was deserted, where was your antennas again? / Where was your presence, where was your support that you pretend?"

As much as the sad-sounding songs on the album inspire feelings of sympathy, the upbeat and inspiring tracks on the album exhibit why Kendrick referred to himself as "the closest to a preacher that these kids got," referring to his fans. "Alright" is an amazing feel-good song, "King Kunta" is as lyrical as

Kendrick gets, and the music video shot at a Compton swap meet was vintage West Coast hip-hop. "Mortal Man" is legendary, and (spoiler alert) the Tupac interview sample at the end blew my mind. "How Much a Dollar Cost" is humbling, and "Complexion (A Zulu Love)" is important. One of my favorite parts of the album was the replacement of the studio version of "i" with a live recording, featuring Kendrick's rant on the word "negus," and the origin of blackness as he sees it.

"To Pimp a Butterfly" brings listeners

along so well; it leads them through stories and emotions and helps to put music to a movement, Kendrick's personal doctrine aside. The album is original, catchy, and strengthens my personal belief that K.Dot could end up being a New Age, West Coast version of Andre 3000. It's the album hip-hop needed, a masterful celebration of blackness that re-establishes Kendrick, as he claimed on the now-infamous "Control" verse, as the king of rap. ♦

Am I teenager-ing enough?

Lessons from a Brooklyn Indie Music Journey gone awry

ESSAY

by **Sam Herron**

Sitting in Sharples at lunch, I mentioned that I had read a Vice Media article in which a reporter had snooped around the Playboy Mansion and taken pictures.

As someone who is only vaguely familiar with the Playboy mansion as a cultural object, I regarded it with a silent, mass-media-informed awe. The Playboy mansion, I assumed, was filled with Barbie-beautiful, perpetually scantily clad women giggling and sucking on their fingers or, like, petting Hugh Hefner in some Bacchanalian cuddle pile on a bed shaped like a heart. The mansion, in my mind, had a glittery, sweaty, mystical allure.

The Vice article, however, showed otherwise. The mansion, beyond its manicured facade, looked...very normal. Worse than normal, almost. The pictures looked like photo attachments for a Yelp review of a shitty theme-motel. It was just some house! Maybe there were heart-shaped beds somewhere, but after scrolling through the piece, I can only guess that the Bunnies ended their night by eating cereal or watching a rerun of *The Voice* or calling their mom. If there is orgiastic revelry to be had in the Playboy mansion, it is presumably not the beautiful, never-ending sex jamboree I had expected.

Realizing this, though, I didn't feel

disappointed. I was robbed of a mildly attractive cultural myth, but in its place came the recognition that the world spins just as fast for everyone everywhere. Instead of feeling bummed that the mansion isn't a lingerie-and-down-feather-laden dreamscape, I felt relieved that people are just people and houses are just houses.

When I mentioned this article at lunch, though, I didn't detail this emotional journey. I just used the article as evidence of Vice Media being fucking weird. The Playboy mansion photo safari is hardly the tip of the Vice iceberg (Viceberg?) when it comes to the weird, clickbait-y journalistic madness the news outlet puts out. Vice News seems like it's powered entirely by shitty beer and pseudo-self-aware youth rebellion.

My friend Nora responded to my Vice news analysis by saying she had a celebrity crush on a Vice writer named River Donaghey. We googled him. His articles are silly—most are amusing write-ups of his ingestion of dangerous things like diarrhea-inducing gummy bears, powdered alcohol, the grossest food he could find in New York City, etc. His human guinea pig accounts are fit with overexposed pictures of the author in American Apparel hoodies and denim jackets that would be at home on any Tumblr blog. He's very cute, in the hip, boyish, smart way.

Further Googling informed us that he was in a band—Pocket Hercules—and that said band was playing in Brooklyn

on Saturday. I joked that we could go and meet River Donaghey. We laughed, but quickly realized that it would be easy. I had plans to be in New York that day anyway for a conference. Leo and Nora both live in New York. It would only cost us a Boltbus ticket and a Saturday evening. We decided to go.

Once committed to our Brooklyn Indie Music Journey, we were hyped up. Given our collective histories of weekly attendance at crippling unsatisfying frat parties, our decision to leave campus in pursuit of River Donaghey, alt-rock dreamboat, to go to Brooklyn, no less (Brooklyn's cool, right?), seemed unshakably radical. I could feel a teen lit plot coursing through me.

I daydreamed about how awesome I would inevitably look on the subway and envisioned being infinitely out-awesomed by fellow concert goers. The night, I assumed, would include some very remarkable conversation with River Donaghey that ended with us making out (sorry, Nora!) or at the very least exchanging snapchat usernames. I was fuzzy on the details, but I fully expected our Hip New York Adventure Fantasy to be nothing short of weird and exhilarating. Barring potential public embarrassment or an unforeseen natural disaster, nothing could go wrong.

Nora looked at us and said, "The only thing stopping us is our fear."

When we arrived in New York, we ate dinner at Leo's house and then tried

to leave for the venue. A Google Maps search informed us that our destination entailed a longer subway ride than we had anticipated. After a brief discussion about how many Cool Points we'd lose by having Leo's dad drive us, we asked Leo's dad to drive us—Cool Points be damned.

We parked on the side of Myrtle Avenue, under the L line, a few blocks away from our target. The street was sparsely populated and dotted with delis and a Dunkin' Donuts. A woman with an eye-patch, leather jacket, and shih tzu on a leash stood outside of a nearby laundromat. I was psyched. We were obviously in a place where crazy shit went down. After walking to the the address, we followed a group of White People Who Looked Like Us into a nondescript apartment complex, up a tight staircase, and past a group of floppy-haired, mustachioed boys shrouded in smoke.

We arrived at the venue: a loft apartment turned concert space mysteriously named David Blaine's The Steakhouse. We each paid the \$5 entrance fee to some bearded guys sitting in a kitchen with a cash box. After one of them assured us, "David Blaine will bless you in the after-life," we ventured further into a dimly lit open area filled with beer-sipping 20-somethings in skinny jeans. At David Blaine's, hipsterism still exists in its purest form. Denim, flannel, cigarettes, and scruffy facial hair abounded. I actually heard someone say the words "fixed-gear bike." In general, everyone looked roughly like Conor Oberst circa 2007.

The loft was remarkably well-disguised as a music venue. But, given that the locale is an apartment where people actually live, the space was fit with the furnishings appropriate to the fairy-tale counterculture boys I assumed inhabited it: worn-in leather couches, half-empty bottles of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle shampoo and bags of cat litter in the bathroom, a barrage of thrift-shop-sourced tchotchkes. We had arrived in indie wonderland.

The venue looked exactly as I had imagined it would but I felt no different there than I felt elsewhere. I was mid-Teen Adventure Fantasy and completely unprepared for my own indifference. I think I expected Ezra Koenig to pop out, hand me a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon and congratulate me for being cool. He didn't. I kept saying, "This is the craziest thing ever!" but it wasn't. I felt at ease! Is it really an adventure if I feel so comfortable? I kept my enthusiasm up with the

knowledge that I would soon meet River Donaghey. And it was going to be memorable, god dammit.

We walked downstairs to where the bands would play. There he was. River Donaghey, man of the hour. Having dedicated the prior 36 hours of emotional and mental energy to this random Vice writer, seeing him in the flesh felt akin to seeing a celebrity. The fate of My Life as John Green Book Plot rested on his cute, indie rocker shoulders.

We stood in the crowd, mere feet away from River. At the time, I hadn't listened to any of Pocket Hercules's music. Back in Sharples, listening over the din

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of lunch rush to the Pocket Hercules BandCamp, phone speakers pressed to his ear, Leo had said that he thought they "sounded like shitty Weezer."

But then they started playing. They weren't shitty or Weezer-like. I was dumbfounded. Pocket Hercules's sound is bright and catchy. The songs were short, highly singable, and energetic. I alternated between bouncing up and down on my toes and doing a casual nodding thing that seemed to be en vogue. River looked cool. He had a lovely voice and a confident stage presence. He said funny things in between songs. At one point, I made what I thought was very excellent and highly extended eye contact with him, but it is undoubtedly more likely that he was just abstractly staring in my direction—Nora thought his gaze was for her as well. But, for the sake of my girlish, determined, and adventure-seeking heart, I felt absolutely sure that River Donaghey and I had had a Very Special

Moment.

Even before we had left for New York, I couldn't wait to tell people that I had made a pilgrimage to a strange apartment in search of the Vice writer frontman of a very bad garage band (How quirky of me! How daring! How ironic and funny!) but the problem was that Pocket Hercules was great. I felt my attempt at cool irony fade into genuine fangirling. I was almost disappointed.

When the band finished, the crowd cheered briefly, and the band members began to pack up their equipment. Nora, Leo, and I turned to each other to make a game plan. I was elected spokesperson. We decided it would be best to explain everything from the beginning. In our collective understanding of the situation, there were only two very polar possible endings to this story: either River would think we were super amazing and hilarious, or River would think we were weird and scary. We did not consider the possibility that anything besides those two situations could occur.

Nora and Leo thought we should go get drinks before we made contact with River, but I was ready to bite the bullet. I had been waiting for this adventure climax all night and I needed to do it. He was standing three feet away from us, drinking a beer. It was our chance.

I dragged Nora over and tapped River on the shoulder. He turned. I said "River Donaghey." He raised his eyebrows and said, "Yes." I explained Nora's crush situation and the Googling and the decision-making and the revelation that Pocket Hercules was pretty fucking good. He laughed. He told us we were boosting his ego or something. Leo took a very unattractive picture of Nora and me with River. River told us to stick around, enjoy the rest of the show.

That was it. We hadn't anticipated him being this very appropriate amount of flattered. It wasn't terrible or great or life-altering in any respect. It was good. It was fine. I felt dizzy.

I was stunned by the climax of anti-climax. My Saturday night had all of the ingredients for an adolescent dream escapade, but nothing exceptional happened. I left David Blaine's feeling the same as I had when I walked in: like a normal, well-adjusted college student. I remembered the Playboy mansion that is just a house and the Bunnies who are just people.

It is so easy to feel, as a White American 19 year old, that I'm not teenag-



The members of Pocket Hercules (River Donaghey, pictured in bathtub).

er-ing enough. The mythology of youth affords its members a unique freedom, a stupidity, a sexiness, an invincibility. I'm 19—my life should be a music video, a romance novel, a house party. I should be skinny and thrilling and drunk. My days should look like filtered Instagram photos of underground music venues or be draped in red velvet comforters made special for heart-shaped beds.

It is both heartbreaking and remarkably relieving to watch these myths crumble. In the few short of days of knowing that River Donaghey existed, I had managed to Manic-Pixie-Dream-Boy-ify him into a representative of some glamorous youth narrative I thought I was missing out on. I forgot that David Blaine's *The Steakhouse* and the Playboy mansion and Bonnaroo and The Ohio State University and the city of Los Angeles and Twitter and One Direction are all filled with nothing but people who are

just people. People who need sleep and eat Cheetos and binge-watch *House of Cards*. People who are bound by the laws of gravity and capitalism and the rules of social etiquette and their own mortality. I instantly felt silly for having mentally held River responsible for imbuing my life with ersatz teenage meaning.

At the end of the concert, Leo, Nora, and I ascended a ladder to the roof. If I am to believe what every movie, TV show, or social media upload featuring a rooftop tells me (which, given the evening's events, I do not), rooftops are supposed to have some abstract symbolic significance. This would be the point in the night where we have a heartfelt conversation or look up at the stars and say something of deep philosophical importance. Maybe it would end in a group hug or dramatic confession.

None of that happened. We just sat there in a friendly but meaningless

silence. Leo peed in a corner. Nora checked her snapchats. I scrolled through a BuzzFeed list of cute dog gifs. When we got too cold, we clumsily climbed back down the ladder and left the building for the subway.

The impossible vision of a neon-lit young adulthood is hard to shake. My alternate daydream life timeline still looks like a sparkly montage of pretty, endlessly fascinating people making out in basements and going on roadtrips in vintage-cool station wagons. But back in reality, where America is packed dense with infinite me's and infinite River Donagheys and infinite Playboy Bunnies, I'm comforted that no one's existence is suited to 24-hour MTV coverage. My adventure was, by necessity, paved with people who are just people.

At least, that's what I tell myself when River won't answer my follow-up e-mail.

