

DEAD BABY SQUIRREL



a travelog by VERNON HOWL

The [dead baby squirrel](#) was my favorite musical artist of all-time.

His record *Fad Babylon* was basically on a loop between 2001-2019 in the Howl house. I'm not sure why he chose the pseudonym Greg Bisby since he was a squirrel and a baby and also not alive. It didn't seem like a good name for a squirrel nor a baby, and certainly not an aura who made the most wonderful music come alive from somewhere beyond the unknown.

I would have called the project, Dead Baby Squirrel. Why beat around the bush?

It's been over 7 years since his last release — *Gold Arrows* — which admittedly ranks among his worst. Even something like the

much-maligned *Bisby on Bisby* (2008), which was also ill-received, is a better record (and the second half of that album is basically 1 long track of demented, unintelligible whispers set over a collage of wind and traffic).

Some posit that the spirit responsible for his work was absorbed back into the ether.

Some say he was just an industry plant all along. And the team behind the creations got bored.

Late last year, I set out to get some answers.

I was not prepared for where the journey would take me.

This book is a chronicle of that saga.

I decided to make the trip to Nome, Alaska to visit Bisby's record label headquarters. Nome Records was founded by a man named Shep Brimhold in 1972. There's not much information about him or his business.

It would be a long journey by car but I felt that my 2012 Ford Mustang was up to the task after I had it outfitted to run strictly on pig's blood.

It was going to take about 100 hours of driving to get to Manley Hot Springs, Alaska, where my uncle Manley Howl ran a bathhouse for wounded animals in the 60s.

From there, no roads make it all the way to Nome. I'd have to backtrack to Fairbanks

International Airport and take a charter flight the rest of the way.

I was looking forward to my journey as it would give me plenty of time to revisit the entire Greg Bisby discography.

I planned the trip strategically, with just 7 stopovers between my new home in North Augusta, South Carolina and Manley Hot Springs.

This would correspond nicely with the “7 bursts” of dead baby squirrel recordings made between 1973 and 2015, when he mysteriously stopped. Up until that point he had released 7 full-length albums on the 1st of January, every 7 years, on the dot. 49 records. Was he really done?

The following is my travelog...

- Turn right onto Alaska Hwy/YT&Z N/Yukon 1 W (signs for Alaska Highway N)
 - Continue to follow Alaska Hwy/Yukon 1 W

 94.4 mi
- Turn right to stay on Alaska Hwy/Yukon 1 W (signs for Anchorage/Fairbanks/Alaska Highway)
 - ▲ Entering the United States of America (Alaska)

 201 mi
- ↑ Continue onto AK-2 N

 291 mi
- ↑ Continue straight onto AK-2 W

 79.2 mi
- ← Turn left onto AK-2 N/Manley Hot Springs
 - Continue to follow AK-2 N

 76.9 mi

14 hr 25 min (743 mi)

Manley Hot Springs
Alaska 99756



DAY ONE

07-01-22

Destination: Sugar Creek, Illinois

Distance: 679 miles

Bisby Records: 1973

Album No. 1 *Swirling Termites*

Well the car is gassed up and ready to go. I am worried about being able to secure enough pig's blood on the journey, especially when I hit some of the more remote stretches in the Pacific Northwest. I have to trust my pig-tracking skills, I guess. My knives are sharpened.

The 70s Bisby is a weird batch, you'd probably call it proto-punk? I'm looking forward to getting back into it. The longest record is only 37 minutes long, so there's going to be some filler by the end of this 10+ hour trek. That's OK. I've got plenty of other music to listen to as well, like vinyl from You Essay, Super Rare Bug, Tom Petty, Nokia Ocean, Estrogen³ and more. I should also mention that I'm going strictly old school on this trip. I've outfitted the Mustang with a record player and mega

soundsystem. It's going to be a little tricky changing sides while I'm driving but I'm a good multitasker.

Swirling Termites is such a cool LP. Fast and brash: the kind of music that makes you want to chug a Slurpie and do some shoplifting.

Album No. 2 ***Belittled Busboys Club***

I keep thinking about why Greg stopped. I woke up on New Year's Day expecting the email linking to his new batch of music. Every 7 years it's like Christmas for DBS-Heads. And then... nothing.

I've read all the think-pieces about why he might have hung it up. All the conspiracy theories too. It's been radio silence from Nome and Mr. Brimhold, of course. Somebody from Pitchfork attempted to find him but he said that the label's mailing address led to a pizza place and nobody there had even heard of the mysterious and legendary dead baby squirrel.

This record doesn't build much from the debut. I finished it just as I stopped for some lunch at an Arby's. I gave a homeless man outside \$20 and ordered 4 crispy fish sandwiches for the road. I got a little tartar sauce on the record player as I put on the 3rd Greg Bisby record.

Album No. 3

UNI

This album is notable for having the discog's most controversial artwork, perhaps. It's 1 of Frida Kahlo's famous self-portraits, only her famous unibrow has been altered. It's made to look as if the browline was shaved so that the letters "UNI" are visible in between. I actually like it alot. It's quite striking! (One of the few good album covers.) The music on this disc is less inspired, however.

Album No. 4

-13 Wind Chill

I've just passed through Atlanta as I head towards Nashville. I probably won't need to stop for fuel until my brief cut through the southwestern corner of Kentucky. And that's good news. Plenty of feral hogs out that way.

-13 Wind Chill might be my personal favorite of this era. It's the most raw and immediate record of the batch. The sound edges closer to a lo-fi territory that wouldn't be culturally popular for another 20+ years. Really ahead of its time.

Album No. 5

The Mask

This was an appropriate soundtrack for my 1st pig hunt of the journey. I pulled off Route 24 near Lamasco, Kentucky and parked the Mustang at an abandoned gas station. I have all the music on an old Coby brand MP3 player from the early 00s, as well. *The Mask* is an eerie record, with mostly indecipherable lyrics/vocals. I caught wind of a target pretty quickly (I've trained my nose to expert levels in the months leading up to this trip). The hog I caught was pretty old, a female. I don't like slaughtering the lady swine, necessarily, but beggars can't be choosers in a situation like this. The kill was fast and painless (I've perfected this part of the process, too). I purchased a pack of 30 pigs a few months ago and still have a dozen or so left on my property back in NoAug (North Augusta). I've tasked my neighbor Jim with tending to the flock in my absence. In my trunk I've got upwards of 15 gallons of blood for emergencies only. I developed a machine to siphon the fuel into the car's special tank. It ain't pretty. Essentially it's a metal stand with a strainer and a solar-powered crushing mechanism which squashes the animal, collecting the blood in a series of 6 tubes. It's big enough to host a pig of about 50 lbs so I have to be mindful of what I kill lest I want/have to do some extra butchering.

Album No. 6

Six Pictures

I was spotted by a civilian dumping the pig corpse behind the station. I'm not sure why anyone was walking on this stretch of road but I've got to be more careful.

Six Pictures is a really interesting record, maybe the biggest outlier of the '73 releases, in so much as it's only 6 tracks long. Each song is 6 minutes and change, as well, and seem to tell a story. My favorite is "The Basketball Game" which is a perfect example of Bisby's strange, narrative lyricism: "I was late to the basketball game / and being late was my own kind of fame," he sings in the chorus. It's inviting yet peculiar: you never quite know exactly what he's getting at even when he gives you a lot.

Album No. 7

Why Am I Always Wrong?

I finished the 7th and final album with almost 200 miles left to go before my destination, just as I figured. I thought about relistening to some of the music during my final push towards Sugar Creek, but I opted not. Instead, I put all the windows down

and let the sounds of the cool night air bring the day to a close.

Sugar Creek is due west of St. Louis by about 35 miles. I'd made reservations at a resort called July's which I felt corresponded nicely with the month of my trip. I like seeing things like this work out in the world: small, not quite magical things. It makes me feel like living is less like putting a puzzle together and more like admiring 1 that's already done.

Much to my chagrin, I realized that the place was actually a "pet resort" and July herself was confused when I spoke to her over the phone. I'd laughed at her question about what breed of dog would be staying. I assumed she was being oddly flirtatious for some reason.

When I arrived, she was surprised and embarrassed. Well, that made 2 of us! She offered up a room in her house which was connected to the glorified kennel, as her son had been recently killed when he was distracted by watching *Avengers: Age of Ultron* on the screen inside his hacked Tesla as he drove. But I insisted on staying in 1 of the doggie pens on the concrete floor as punishment for my ineptitude.

I even made her fill a bowl with water and I kindly lapped from it during the night when I got thirsty.

DAY TWO

07-02-22

Destination: Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Distance: 650 miles

Bisby Records: 1980

Album No. 8 ***Atropa Belladonna***

After a rotten night of sleep on the cold kennel floor, I decided to start out early the next day. July said goodbye and offered me a sack of dog treats but I assumed she was joking. I'm writing this in the Mustang and she's still staring at me. She seems like a troubled and sad lady. I wish her well.

The 2nd Bisby stanza is a gigantic step forward. He must have been listening to a lot of krautrock and other experimental music. *Atropa Belladonna* is a deadly nightshade, occasionally used as a recreational hallucinogen in small doses, and early humans made poisonous arrows from the plant. In the mind of the dead baby squirrel, however, it takes on the form of a female protagonist, a princess seeking revenge.

It can be considered the very 1st concept album in his impressive oeuvre.

Album No. 9

All is Well

The 1st and most basic thing people notice about the 1980 records is that every title begins with the letter A. I don't quite know what to make of this.

Maybe he saw this as a place to start over?

Whereas the 1st 7 LPs feel like the product of a manic burst, this music feels far more considered, as if he used the entirety of the 7-year block to tinker and hone his new sound.

This is the perfect soundtrack for what's quickly becoming a much more sparse and remote landscape as I make my way across the country. I will cut through Kansas City, Omaha and Sioux City today, but the metropolises are getting smaller and further apart.

Album No. 10

Affix

I decided to stop in Kansas City for an early lunch and this BBQ place is empty. I'm the only customer and the food tastes like mayonnaise or sawdust but not both. Part of me wonders if I should start to harvest the blood-drained pigs for future meals. Otherwise, it feels like building that refrigerator

system in the trunk of the Mustang was a gigantic waste of time and resources. How much fuel is that thing using anyway? I certainly don't like the idea of eating blood-drained pigs. Something about their bloodless meat feels rotten even if I know that couldn't be farther from the truth.

As I was leaving the restaurant, I could've sworn I passed the man who saw me dumping the empty swine back in Kentucky. It couldn't have been, though, could it? Am I being followed?

Album No. 11 ***And Then It Happened***

And Then It Happened, probably the most manic and paranoid record of this grouping, is not a very good accompaniment right now. Bisby sounds like he's on trucker speed on this LP: the songs lack focus and drive ahead in staccato bursts without ever landing on any pleasing resolution. My mind is rattled after seeing that man.

The next stretch of the trip runs due north on Route 29, swaddling the borders of Nebraska to the left and Iowa to the right, on the lowan side of the Missouri River. It's pretty country but my aura is off. My mind is not right.

Album No. 12

Aces

I'll need to stop for food and fuel soon. My initial goal was to only eat 1 large meal a day, but my stomach is growling after that mostly inedible BBQ back in KC. I know what needs to be done.

I'll look for hogs just north of Omaha. There's a forest near Little Sioux, Iowa which feels like the place. I fire up the Coby with Aces and embark.

This is a lovely and remote land, overlooking the river. I can smell the swine. The forest is ripe with swine.

I grab my portable roasting spit and an apple for the pig's mouth. I know there's a risk to having an impromptu pig roast for 1 in a public space, but what else can I do? If I'm able to kill 2 at once (not impossible) then I'll cook the tastier-looking hog, eat and haul the rest of the meat plus the fuel pig back to the Mustang.

But things don't go as planned. I can't find any pigs. My sniffer is off. You just can't smell feral hogs with a worried mind. Aces plays itself out and I'm left empty-handed.

Album No. 13

American Maze

Well, that didn't go as planned. I got all the way through *American Maze* (a really solid album and probably the best of 1980 on a technical level) before finally getting hold of a scent. I came upon a triplet of pigs, identical by the looks of them. They were spotted like dairy cows. Though they were all only about 25 lbs soaking wet and likely juveniles, I felt as though I had no choice. I'd never completed a triple kill but the glorified piglets stood nary a chance against my blade. The apple was almost too big for the mouth of the 1 I cooked.

Still, I felt lucky. I was able to enjoy the meat without it having been fully mangled by my machine. I'm a lousy butcher, though. I loaded the leftovers into plastic bags: it couldn't have looked less appealing.

Album No. 14

Alarming Data for the Drab

My stomach finally full, I sped the final 200 miles in just a shade over 90 minutes. I should drive more carefully. What would a cop say if he saw my

vinyl-loaded Mustang and refrigerator trunk full of wild hog meat?

I'm writing this at the Econo Lodge on Cliff Ave. in Sioux City. I've never been to South Dakota before. Despite my pig-hunting detour on the banks of the Missouri, I've made great time. I decided to hold off on the last LP of this period for some relaxation time at the motel jacuzzi. It was a lovely experience. The indoor pool room at this Econo Lodge is wood-paneled and incredibly small. It has a cozy, den-like feel. I pressed play on *Alarming Data for the Drab* as the warm bubbles tickled my body and soothed my feet, which were aching from the hunt. I felt like I could really listen to the lyrics of the dead baby squirrel in a way that isn't possible on the road. As monotonous as long drives can get, there's still a sensory depletion with one's focus driving. For the first time, perhaps ever, I truly considered the language of Bisby as the spirit of a small, deceased woodland creature. And why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't WE? It's easy to not believe in the magic of it, to think "of course this music wasn't made by a dead baby squirrel's ghost." It's hard to actually process the fact that... maybe it is? That it wasn't just some fantastical and absurdist backstory invented by a human or humans, Shep Brimhold or whomever. Certainly he or someone close to him was the conduit but maybe, just maybe, the legend was real.

DAY THREE

07-03-22

Destination: Butte, Montana

Distance: 883 miles

Bisby Records: 1987

Album No. 15

Sequential Jacket/Jackrabbit Slacks

I've got a LONG way to go today. The longest travel date on my itinerary in terms of mileage. It's big, open roads, too. A part of the country I've never seen before. I put on the first Greg Bisby double album and I play it loud.

Strangely, a good many of the '87 discs seem to be about clothing and/or food, and that's fairly fitting since both are on my mind right now. I'm dreading having to cook the pig meat in my fridge-trunk and I'm also contemplating a disguise since I might be being followed. And sure, the latter is essentially a moot point because of the flashy car I'm driving. But still, it would feel good and appropriate if I was wearing a trenchcoat or something.

These are also the 1st albums of his to get a CD release, though I am still sticking with the reissued vinyl. This double disc set, the two-part *Sequential*

Jacket/Jackrabbit Slacks, is really more like a quadruple LP (which is how many records are collected in the reissue on wax). Like many artists of the era, Bisby filled up the extra runtime this new medium allotted. Each half of the conceptual saga clocks in at over 70 minutes. And this is good news, considering the length of my ride today.

Album No. 16 ***Radicchio Bonnet***

I am going clean across the entirety of the state of South Dakota. Almost 5 total hours of this vastness before a brief cut through of the northwest most quadrant of Wyoming where there's a little hamlet called Aladdin I plan on stopping at before Montana, which is even bigger and longer than this. There's nothing to this road. I guess it's beautiful.

I was more than halfway to Rapid City, SD, when I realized I was being followed. A blue minivan, maybe 100 yards behind me. I would slow down to a crawl, no more than 35 MPH and it kept its distance just the same. Being followed is unnerving. I tried to concentrate on the dead baby squirrel's music. This block of discs, soundwise, is jovial, jaunty and pure fun. I wish my mood was equal to the tuneage.

Album No. 17

Volvo Kitten Casserole

If *Radicchio Bonnet*, strictly from its title, wasn't signal enough for this new aloof, weirdo era of Bisby, then *Volvo Kitten Casserole* certainly does the trick. There was always an air of casual coolness to his work but it never bordered this close to the plainly bonkers. But I can't really enjoy it with the van on my tail.

I made the executive decision to pull off in Rapid City just as *Volvo Kitten Casserole's* nuttiest song — the 13-minute "Proud to Be Me" — was hitting its peak. What happened next is going to alter the events of this trip completely.

Parking the Mustang at a bookstore called Books-A-Million, the blue minivan did the same. It's the man from Kentucky. I went right up to him and asked him, point blank, why he was following me.

"Let's go inside this shop," he said. I don't know why, but I agreed. I felt as though I was in some kind of trance, perhaps the open road will do that to a man, or perhaps the very nature of my strange journey dictated that I must simply submit to anything and everything put in my path.

The man was tall, maybe 6'7". The store was a chain, acronymized and stylized as "BAM!" I had never heard of it before. The man said he had been following me well before I spotted him observing my pig corpse disposal. He said he was a ghost, and an aspiring musician, just like the dead baby squirrel. He thanked me for believing in the origin story of Greg Bisby. He gave me 2 choices: 1) to abandon my quest and return home, or 2) complete a ritual in Aladdin, Wyoming that would allow him to leave the spirit world and enter the world of the living.

The ritual was convoluted and disgusting. He said I had to purchase a pack of Oreos from the Aladdin General Store, scrape off the filling onto a slab of raw hog meat and feed it to him.

I hadn't planned too many stops when I was game-planning this trip, but Aladdin — a town of just 16 people — and specifically its only place of business, were 1 of the destinations. I looked at this as fate and took him up on the offer.

"The world is changing," he told me. "Or I should say the *worlds* are changing. You've set in motion something bigger than you could ever possibly comprehend. Open up any book in this store and you'll see."

I grabbed a copy of *Freedom* by Jonathan Franzen and started reading a random page:

Vernon Howl, weary of this traveler,
nevertheless agrees to his demands.

I shut the book in horror. Moving to a different aisle, I sought out *Moby Dick* and turned to the very last page:

He leaves BAM! and gets back in the
Mustang.

I slam it shut, my body flushed with nervous sweat. I reopen it to the same place:

Vernon changes the vinyl to *More Fodder for Future Use*, the 4th record of '87, unsure if he's even finished listening to the previous one.

I closed the book and gently put it back on the shelf. Silently nodding to the stranger, I got back in my car and he did the same.

Album No. 18
More Fodder for Future Use

It isn't long before Aladdin. When I arrive, I try to write down exactly what happened in Rapid City, I try to recall the exact words of Melville and Franzen, though I know those weren't their words.

It's blazing hot out, almost 100 degrees. I can't tell where my flop sweat ends and my natural perspiration begins. The stranger stays in the car as I go into the store.

I get the Oreos and walk back out to open the trunk. It doesn't feel right to do this strange act out in public but there's nobody around. The clerk inside was an elderly lady. She didn't seem suspicious at all.

I find the smallest slab of hog and discard the rest. I got a feeling I won't be wanting any more of that pork after this. I use my hunting knife to spread the Oreo filling on the raw meat. The stranger gets out of his van and walks over. He eats it.

Through orgasmic and manic, yet somehow controlled swallows, he ingests it. When he gets it all down, he smiles and says to me, "You will see me 1 more time, if you do good. You will see me... 2 more times, if you do bad," before rushing back to

his car and speeding away in the opposite direction. I can't place it, but that line is so familiar.

Somewhat ironically, this is the only album of 1987 that doesn't reference food at all.

Album No. 19 ***The Last Supper***

The Last Supper is a fairly straightforward conceptual effort. It is a retelling of the famous Bible story, only Jesus is a plumber named Gary and the apostles are all plumbing apprentices who want to break up the local union because they are staunch free market capitalists. They serve Gary some McDonald's cheeseburgers as his final meal before killing him. It's a long and melodic LP, incorporating advanced harmony in a way Bisby never has before. But it really isn't clear whether or not he has any true grasp on the original story beyond the simple fact that, yes, Jesus dined with some dudes before he died.

I'm really trying not to think about what happened in Aladdin. I don't know what the tall stranger meant or what his motivations might be. I've dug into my emergency pig blood supply as I just can't be bothered with conducting a hunt today. My plan is to drive straight on through to Butte where I'm

meeting my former 3rd grade teacher, Mrs. Beasley. She's still kicking it in her 6th decade as an educator. She's agreed to meet me outside of Butte Elementary where she said I can spend the night in her classroom. I can't wait to see a friendly face.

Album No. 20

I Wear the Coat Made Out of Cold Cuts

Like *Radichio Bonnet*, this record also references fashion made out of food. It's the darkest record of the batch, both sonically and lyrically. The night sky is still strikingly warm but I put the Mustang's windows down because I need the fresh air.

Mrs. Beasley was barely 20 when she taught me back in 1977, that 3rd grade year in Louisiana. We've somehow managed to keep touch all this long while. 1st by snail mail and now with our weekly messages over the computer. She relocated to Montana, where her husband was from, when he retired. Sadly, he got cancer not long after. I actually flew out for the funeral back in 2006, the last time I saw her face-to-face.

Album No. 21

Fashion Hat

I started to feel hungry again during the final stretch of this neverending day, but I didn't want to keep Mrs. Beasley waiting too long.

Fashion Hat is an interesting record in that it keeps with the mostly jovial tone of the majority of the '87 LPs but has incredibly sad lyrics. There is a real sense of longing on it and this would prove prescient as well.

Mrs. Beasley was putting me up in her classroom because her home had recently come under attack by a rare form of flying termites. "They're somewhat venomous, it turns out as well," she'd told me in an email. The claim seemed suspicious but I didn't question it.

I figured she had been staying with a friend, but when I got to her classroom I saw that she was living there as well. I didn't want to impose and told her I'd go to a hotel. But she insisted I stay.

Well, 1 thing led to another and let's just say I got to know Mrs. Beasley better than I ever had before that night. She was incredibly inquisitive about my trip, as we lay there together, naked on the air mattress. I tried to be as coy and brief as possible,

but she kept on digging. Much to my surprise, none of it came as a shock to her. In fact, she wanted to come along the rest of the way. I was naturally hesitant, but how could I not see this as another turn of fate?

“It would be nice to have someone there to help me change the vinyl,” I told her.

DAY FOUR

07-04-22

Destination: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Distance: 732 miles

Bisby Records: 1994

Album No. 22 ***Spasm Psalms***

Summer school had let out before the holiday, Mrs. B told me. Today marks the 4th of July. Fitting that we'd be leaving the country by the end of it. I've lost all sense of time. The road today has been rough and it's only going to get rougher when we get into the Yukon. 12-15 hours of driving each day from here on out.

The '94 records are what you might call Bisby's "grunge phase" though whether or not they're proto- or post- is anyone's best guess. Did he make these in a flourish of inspiration? Or did he hunker down for the long haul and take his time over the 7-year stretch? The mathematics of it all and, more to the point, how it seems to have so neatly corresponded with my travels, is making me dizzy. I thought it was a cosmic force for good when I started out (serendipity?) but it now feels as though it's driving me slightly insane.

Album No. 23
Criminal Sympathy

There's nothing much to hate about this block of music, but to my ear it feels largely uninspired. The worst of it sounds like a boring Nirvana knockoff and *Criminal Sympathy* is perhaps the bottom of the barrel in that regard.

We're heading towards Vancouver where I plan to meet up with my friend Jack and crash at his place. I haven't figured out how to explain the presence of my 3rd grade teacher who's now my much older, impromptu girlfriend, I guess.

To that end, Mrs. B has taken to the role naturally. She's insisted that I call her Shelly, which feels odd, but I suppose is more appropriate given the change in circumstances.

Album No. 24
In Accordance with the Rules

We stopped for an early lunch outside Spokane. I wanted to grab something and go but Shelly insisted that we sit down and eat. I figured this was as good a time as any to explain the Mustang's fuel situation.

Shelly is a strict vegan and animal rights' advocate so I was shocked that she took the news about the pig blood in stride. I told her I'd mapped out a spot ripe with feral hogs near Snoqualmie Pass, Washington. She even offered to help.

I'm constantly struck by the strangeness of this whole ordeal but I need to keep my emotions in check. Even if there's truly evil things afoot, I believe it's all happening for a reason.

Album No. 25 ***Leftover Moments Dissolve***

For a long time — mostly because of my obsession with *Fad Babylon* (2001) — I've tried to decipher code in the dead baby squirrel's recordings. Most of it doesn't register beyond a tinfoil hat fascination, but, of the 1994 releases, at least, *Leftover Moments Dissolve* seems to be saying something more than what's on the surface.

In what's easily the most exciting, sonically speaking, of this stanza, *LMD* also feels like a warning about the Y2K bug crisis/snafu looming around the corner. Bisby has never been shy to lump in current events, historical matters and

cultural references (however vague they might be) into his recordings, but occasionally (a la *Fad Babylon* and 9/11) he also acts as sage and prognosticator.

I don't know **WHY** a bug as big as this /
Has run amok on my computer sys /
It speaks in not zero or one, but **TWO** /
But it's **OKAY**, this bug ain't rude /

From the lyrics of "Big Bug" go (emphasis mine). Take it with a grain of salt, I guess. But it seems clear to me. Later, in "Big Bug, Part 2," he directly references the coming, new millennium:

I couldn't squash, couldn't bring myself to /
In the year 2000, it will be reborn anew

I don't know what he *means* to say about any of it. But the reference is unmissable.

We should be able to get through at least half of the next record before we have to stop for the crucial pig hunt.

Album No. 26
Brand Names for the Orphaned Boys

It has been nice having Mrs. B, I mean *Shelly*, manning the record player. Even if she has to ride in the backseat (I set up the soundsystem on the front passenger side and it was too tricky to move). I've exhausted my *Driving Miss Daisy* jokes and then some by the time we reach Snoqualmie.

Best known as the shooting location for the fictional Great Northern Hotel in the television program *Twin Peaks*, Snoqualmie is also home to 1 of the country's most fertile feral hog populations. These famous "mountain pigs" were always going to be difficult to hunt, but I was not prepared for what happened next.

Shelly became deranged. She ascended the mountainside like a spider monkey and immediately picked up on the scent of some wild hogs. I will never be able to unsee what happened next.

She started manically ripping to shreds a family of pigs with her bare hands. She even tore apart a baby that was far too small to harvest any usable amount of blood. When the slaughter was done, over a dozen dead bodies remained and Shelly just laughed. We wouldn't be able to fit even a 3rd of them into the trunk fridge.

Album No. 27

Jaramy

We sat mostly in silence the rest of the way to Vancouver. The chorus of *Jaramy's* lead title track seems to echo the 1991 hit by Pearl Jam, right down to the phonetically similar chorus: "Jaramy woke in / a massive daze."

The rest of the record features the most dour and slow music of this group, a fitting soundtrack for the muted strain that had come on like a lightning bolt when Shelly lost her mind with the pigs.

We wouldn't have to worry about fuel till we hit the Yukon at least.

Album No. 28

Head Iron Vida

I'm not sure I can continue on with Shelly the Killer. I'm writing this on the couch in Jack's living room. It's well past midnight and I can't sleep. She was cordial enough to Jack. I wanted to pull him aside to talk about what happened but I couldn't find the moment or the courage. I'm shell shocked. No pun intended.

I tried to broach the subject during the last stretch after we crossed the border. No issues there, by the way. I was *very* worried about the corpses in the back of the Mustang but the customs officers never looked.

I think *Head Iron Vida* might be an anagram for “hodierna vida” which is Latin for “modern life.” On the closing track (“Ages Ago”), the DBS muses, “my oh my, this modern life.” And that’s got me thinking about my own existence in the here and now. What the fuck am I doing?

I can hear Shelly snoring in the guestroom. Do I just get up and leave? I’m not sure I can get back in the car with that maniac. Thinking back to that moment on the hillside, she seemed so inhuman. Like *literally* inhuman. A woman of her age shouldn’t be able to move like that. She took down the mama pig, the guardian, with ease, snapping its neck like she’d done it before.

I hate the idea of leaving Jack here alone with her, but I don’t think I have a choice. I write him a note, trying against all hope to explain this impossibly odd situation, and fold it inside his favorite coffee mug so Shelly, hopefully, won’t see it.

And I go.

DAY FIVE

07-05-22

Destination: Smithers, British Columbia, Canada

Distance: 713 miles

Bisby Records: 2001

Album No. 29

S is for 5 is for Salmon Drenched in Safety Orange: A Series of Prayers

I stopped for coffee on my way out of Vancouver. It's going to be a very, very long night. I can't believe yesterday was the 4th of July. I'll never forget that holiday, that's for sure. I'm heading towards Smithers, BC, but I plan on stopping for a catnap once daybreak hits. I'm cursing the fact that I gave Shelly a copy of the itinerary.

At least I have Greg Bisby's best run of LPs to look forward to on this leg. And not just because it features what I (and most people) believe to be his very best record (The 9/11-predicting masterpiece, *Fad Babylon*). All 7 discs are jammed packed. No filler.

S is for 5... is the most difficult listen by far (as 1 might expect from its long and clunky title). It's 5 tracks, each clocking in at around 15 minutes,

mostly spoken word and ambience. They're all named after the animals that comprise the "Big 5 Game Animals" in African hunting lore: lion, leopard, rhino, elephant and buffalo. The minimalist liner notes simply read: "For as long as I can remember I've been obsessed with the charismatic megafauna. As a dead baby squirrel, I see something in them that I could never possibly see in myself. And so this is for them." That's followed by over 50 pages of crude drawings that (I think?) are supposed to be renderings of said animals in various odd environments (a rhino at a laundromat, a leopard in spandex stretching, an elephant trying on shoes at the mall, etc.). The booklet barely fit in the CD jewel case.

Bisby has never sounded more evil, his voice is a gnarled growl here. Every "S" sound is emphasized so that his voice has an eerie snake-like quality. Salmon or the color orange are never mentioned.

Every single 1 of the 2001 albums defies categorization: they're each their own unique thing. And this is 1 hell of a way to start. I should mention, if you're not familiar, that each block of releases was always accompanied by a simple press release which read: "These are the 7 Greg Bisby records for [insert year]. The dead baby squirrel suggests you listen to them in order."

And who am I to disagree?

Album No. 30
Water Music 101

I was looking forward to these albums more than any other. Sure, I knew every second of *Fad Babylon* by heart, but it had been awhile since I'd sunk my teeth into the rest of them.

But I'm finding it difficult to really enjoy them, as unsettled and fatigued and, frankly, scared as I am.

Water Music 101 begins with the strange couplet:

There's salmon in the heart of the sea /
No water's fresh without a blessing by me

This ain't night-riding music. At a whopping 44 brief tracks, it's the polar opposite of *S is for 5...* in every way. The LP is jaunty and loose, as poppy as the DBS has ever sounded. It's quite the juxtaposition.

Album No. 31
Assembly

After a twin hit of discs chalk full of animal and nature references, we get the steely *Assembly*: a brooding, post-punk, quasi-industrial record.

Now this is more appropriate.

This stretch of road is so long and desolate, that I've decided to spin each album twice. Both to fill up the minutes and to really try and get my head around them, as difficult as that's been. I keep reminding myself that that was, in fact, the point of this journey to begin with.

And that's something I keep coming back to: why the hell am I out here in the middle of nowhere? What is it all *really* about? I suppose the point of the journey was to figure that out, but I'm only feeling further away from the answer.

Album No. 32 ***Airtight/Fairfight***

I've stopped to rest at 100 Mile House, a quaint municipality off the Cariboo Highway. I'm not sure I'll be able to catch any zzz's but I've got to try.

Airtight/Fairfight is the only double album in this group and I flip back to Side A of the first vinyl as I recline my seat and close my eyes.

It didn't feel like I slept but 3 hours passed. It's daylight now and I get back on the road.

Album No. 33
The Ark of Desire

I'm gonna try to make the best of things, I've decided. Sure, I'm in the wilds of Canada in a Mustang that runs on pig's blood and a deranged almost-septuagenarian might be on my tail as I seek out the origins of a genius musician who may or may not be the ghost of a deceased woodland creature, but when life hands you lemons...

After the dreary, mechanical 1-2 punch of *Assembly* and *Airtight/Fairfight*, *The Ark of Desire* is a return to the natural world (lyrically, at least): a luscious, string-laden affair featuring an array of auto-tune and other studio tricks that wouldn't become popular in the mainstream for a good many years.

It's probably my second favorite album. The perfect lead-up to *Fad Babylon*. And I'm making great time cooking along the Cariboo before a hard left turn around Prince George, BC.

I've canceled my reservations at the Capri Motor Inn in case you-know-who isn't far behind, booking a room at the Driftwood Lodge, just outside of town instead.

Album No. 34

Fad Babylon

I don't think I'll need to stop for fuel today, which is fine because tomorrow's winding path into the Yukon is overflowing with swine, untethered to anything but their own wild existence. Having driven through the night means I'll arrive early today, which is also fine because I'm as exhausted as I've ever been. Part of me feels like I should keep going, to stay ahead of the dread, but the pictures of the Driftwood Lodge look so lovely and tranquil, with excellent views of the Bulkley mountain range (I even splurged for a room with a view). I could use the respite, I feel.

Because this is *Fad Babylon*, after all, I've decided to listen to each of the 20 songs 2 or 3 times in a row. The album is broken into 2 parts, eerily titled "Nine" and "Eleven," featuring that number of tracks in each.

I've listened to the nearly 80-minute long record 100s of times, previously collecting my opinions and thoughts on its relationship to that fateful day in my self-published book, *Fadwa* (a pun I regret).

It's a fearless and enigmatic double album. Brooding yet strangely vibrant. It still excites me so many years later. All of the haters like to say that

just because he titled the 2 sections “Nine” and “Eleven” and has 1 song called “Twin Towers” doesn’t mean it’s anything but a strange and creepy coincidence. But they aren’t really listening— no, not really FEELING the music.

The second track “Oh Danny Boy” comprised the longest chapter in *Fadwa* so I’ve covered it to death. What you need to know is that, while this non-cover of the famous Irish folk tune interpolates some of the same chord structure, it’s essentially a riff between G and D7 with a sharp metallic blast in the middle. Musicologists around the globe haven’t been able to discern what this sound is. I called it the “O” tone, as, per my theory, this mostly wordless song is about “GOD” Himself. And that 7nt is important for, if Frank Black taught us anything, “God is 7.” I was worried that hearing this for the umpteenth time would be unpleasant but it’s done the opposite. I feel rejuvenated, connected to this journey in a way that I haven’t since before Kentucky.

When I literally wrote the book on this record, I was obsessed with finding throughlines that explicitly predicted the tragic events of 9/11, like how in part one’s “I’m Not Going to Use a Gun,” a song which everyone assumes is about suicide, is really about the falling man (the DBS sings “body like straight lines before it hit the earth” — note he doesn’t specify whose body, and the use of plural “lines”),

but today I found myself consumed by the why/how. There's no doubt in my mind that Greg Bisby, or whatever/whomever that entity truly is, saw the future 9 months in advance. Not to say that *Fad Babylon* is a warning, necessarily. It's also not quite akin to, say, how the 1970s work of artist Joseph Beuys has been seen as a prediction for social media. For the first time, I can't rule out the fact that the dead baby squirrel willed these events to happen. If we're going to believe in the magic of it, the magic of anything, then who's to say it couldn't/wouldn't be a dark magic? There's a sick glee in this music. "Eleven" especially is full of freakishly upbeat passages with disturbing lyrical content. Beuys once said, "Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline."

Well, perhaps it could also do the opposite?

Album No. 35 ***The Story of It All***

Well, this BnB-style lodge was not all it was cracked up to be and be. My hosts, Mark and Yelenka, are not who they say they are. And the

Driftwood Lodge might be some kind of house of horrors for all I know.

I'm writing this on my phone from what can only be described as a dungeon. I didn't get a chance to listen to *The Story of It All*, and I won't tomorrow either, at least not on vinyl. As everything was burnt to a crisp when they torched my Mustang.

Thankfully, my bag which held my MP3 player and my notebook was salvaged.

When I arrived a little after 3PM, I was greeted by a woman in the lobby. I had to do a double take because she looked exactly like Mrs. B. Then a man entered the room from a door behind the counter. The man from Kentucky. The man from the Oreo experiment in Aladdin. They were wearing matching "Driftwood Lodge" polos and their name tags said "Mark" and "Yelenka," respectively, who I had read from numerous Trip Advisor reviews were the friendly owner-operators of the place. These 2 weren't them.

Spooked, I sprinted back outside. Only to find a strange, snickering older fellow in a bad toupee dousing my car with gasoline. Because it runs on pig's blood, the Mustang burned slowly. There was no cinematic explosion. The 2 imposter hosts made their way outside and "Mark" said, "Come on in. Let's have a little chat." With no options and even less hope, I did what I was told.

“You shouldn’t have left Shelly back in Vancouver, Vern,” he informed me. “She was to be your guide the rest of the way. That was a poor decision.”

I frantically asked who they really were and what they wanted. Searching for some sense in this madness. But the man just kept reiterating that my diverging from the path was a grave mistake. “You’ll need to be shepherded the rest of the way now,” he said.

Mrs. Beasley didn’t say a word during all of this. If this really was Mrs. B. She simply sat there coldly with dead eyes.

I was told I had to spend the night in isolation (“to think about what I’d done”) and in the morning, the man outside would drive me the rest of the way in his car (“he’s going there anyway, it’s all been arranged”). I asked who he was.

Then the man from Kentucky grinned for the first time.

“The 1 and only Shep Brimhold, of course.” Then he punched me in the face, knocking me out cold.

DAY SIX

07-06-22

Destination: Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada

Distance: 778 miles

Bisby Records: 2008

Album No. 36

This Garbage

“I’m sorry about Sterling,” Shep told me as I got in the passenger side of his Honda Accord. “He’s been very prickly since the change. You don’t remember him do you?”

I’d gotten very little, if any sleep in the dingy basement of the Driftwood Lodge. My mind was beyond the brink now. I simply tried to breathe and process everything as best I could. “You’re the real Shep Brimhold?” I asked. “Of Nome Records?”

“Yup, that’s me,” he said, his toupee wiggling.

“And who’s this Sterling guy?”

I won’t even try to reconcile most of the endless barrage I was subjected to over the course of 2 days in the car with Shep, an older man of at least 70 who looked every bit of it. I couldn’t even if I

wanted to. I've never heard a man talk so much in my entire life. It's actually the end of August now as I write this. My trip across the Western Hemisphere and back is over — thank god — and I won't be leaving the house again anytime soon. The experience was harrowing, strange and transformative. I wasn't afforded the luxury of being able to take notes traveling with Shep, so what follows is my best recollection of the events after a month-long decompression.

Most of this is going to be difficult to believe: I get it. But it's the truth and nothing but the truth. In short, there were 3 individuals who held the key to the secrets of the dead baby squirrel, and all their initials were "S.B." just like Shepherd Johann Brimhold III, my elderly travel companion. You see, Shep — since the early 70s — had been the engine behind the entity that was Greg Bisby. This widely believed theory ended up being true. For the most part. Shep, as a Native Nomer, had found the baby squirrel, still alive, when he was just a little kid. Now, there are only 2 ground squirrels indigenous to Alaska: the common arctic squirrel (which looks sort of like a tiny woodchuck) and the much more rare red squirrel (which has funny tufts of hair above its ears — it looks vaguely like a Muppet). But the squirrel he found that day near the icy water was an eastern gray squirrel. How it got there, but by the grace of some god, is a mystery.

Shep's father Barry Brimhold tried to nurse the little critter back to health but it passed away in their front yard on New Years Eve, 1972, 1 day shy of young Shep's 4th birthday (the cover of this book features the only existing photograph of the DBS, which Shep graciously gave me permission to use).

"Most people assume the '73 records came out that year, but I was still basically a baby!" Shep told me. "In fact, it wasn't until the mid-80s, after both my parents died, that I got around to releasing both of the 2 initial batches, in very limited cassette-only runs, mind you, on Nome Records, which is technically run out of an acquaintance's pizza parlor downtown, but I just needed an address for it to be legit, you know?"

No, I did not know. All of this sounded insane, naturally. But then again, what 'correct' answers had I been expecting?

Getting to the bottom of the actual creation of the music was another story altogether and the loquacious Shep was suspiciously cagey about it.

"All I can say is there's this box, a wooden box," he said. "My dad wanted to bury him in it — he was real attached to the little guy — but my mom was dead set against it. They wound up just throwing him into a campfire and saying a little prayer or whatever. Well, for some reason — there's not

much going on in Nome — this story became a legend of my childhood. How I wandered off and found the baby, how they tried to nurse him with my baby bottles, et cetera, et cetera. 1 day, I must have been at least 11, I'm helping clean out the basement and my dad points out the box. He tells me that was going to be the squirrel's casket but mom — who we'd just lost... the cancer, horrible — said absolutely not. Apparently it was an Iñupiat artifact handed down the generations by my great grandfather the fur-trapper, an Englishman who settled out there for some preposterous reason. And—”

It was around this time when I stopped him to see if we could fire up some Greg Bisby tunes while we talked. I told him about how my semi-strict listening schedule was paralleling the journey and asked him if there was a way we could connect my MP3 player. He looked at me like I had 2 heads.

“You know all that shit's been on Spotify for years, right?” I did know this. But it always felt wrong to stream what felt like holy music to me. Beggars can't be choosers, though, and so he connected to the app via iPhone on the Accord's CarPlay interface. And we listened to *This Garbage*, a loud, surprisingly obnoxious record which has Bisby sounding like a bad Johnny Rotten impersonator.

“You know it wasn’t until this block of albums where all this crap really took flight. Sure, sure, everyone points to *Fad Babylon* and the 2001 era, but the internet wasn’t really in full-bloom then. These are still the most streamed, if you can believe it. Which kind of sucks because they’re also among the worst.” I had to agree with him there, on both points. My fascination certainly piqued at that time, as I can vividly remember the rollout: Brimhold had put together a countdown clock on a brand new website leading up to the occasion. I even organized a physical re-release of 1 of the albums on my own vanity record label later that year (more on this later).

But the music is *bad*. It’s almost consciously bad, although still bad in an *interesting* way. The only through-line seems to be that all of the LPs reference some historical point in the 19th and 20th centuries, either tangentially or directly (save for *Brisby on Brisby*, which I briefly mentioned in the introduction to this book). *This Garbage*, firmly in the latter camp, seems to be about the 1968 Memphis sanitation strike. Although only 1 track (“Larry Payne” about a 16-year old African American teenager who was killed following a march in support of the labor action) specifically references those events.

“I never get into the weeds about meaning,” Shep said. “I leave that to everybody else.”

Album No. 37

The Bolza Problem

We continued out of northern BC into the wilds of the Yukon. Desolate and eerie land, seemingly vacillating between peaceful and unsettling every 10th of a mile. It was difficult to focus on the music whilst also digesting Shep's stories, but I tried my best to do both. *The Bolza Problem* is even worse than *This Garbage*: seemingly a concept record about German mathematician Oskar Bolza but... it's just fucking free jazz, is the best description I can come up with. And the type of free jazz that someone who's spent a lifetime making anything but would concoct. The song titles are just a list of the "numerical computations of the first 10 positive eigenvalues of the Bolza surface" (a complex algebraic curve which provides a relatively simple model for quantum chaos). And I only know that because of the liner notes. The songs have such catchy titles like: "3.838887...." and "18.6588..."

There are no lyrics. It's just noise.

"Do we really have to listen to this?" Shep asked me at least 5 times.

Album No. 38

Bisby on Bisby

There were certain cosmic convergences that were undeniable. If *Fad Babylon* had been Greg's way of saying, "look at me, I can use my mystical powers to obliquely predict (?), assess (?), warn (???) the listener about future history" then the '08 records were his way of saying, "history is meaningless regardless of when, where or how significant (or insignificant) we assume the events that transpired actually were, both forthwith and in retrospect." And *Bisby on Bisby* might be his way of saying "everything is meaningless."

Before the 2nd half's experiment-for-the-sake-of-experiments, there are 6 story-based songs which seem to tell the tale of, well, a man named Greg Bisby. A human man. In fact, all the 2008 albums feature a guy on the cover purporting to be this person (I guess). No one, to the best of my knowledge, has been able to figure out who this guy is in real life, and when I asked Shep, he simply shrugged and said "good luck" with a sneer.

In this false reality, Bisby is just a man, a simple man: graying but trim, in a turtleneck and suit jacket. The stories give no great insight and offer no larger thematic resonance either (song titles

include “Bisby Makes an Omelet” and “Bisby Loves Trains”).

Only 1 track, Side A’s closing number “Bisby in Autumn” does the DBS seem to get more personal:

She said it was her favorite season /
But I can’t be believing in /
Absolutes like that /
She wasn’t keen on deceiving /
So I accepted the reason /
And she fell asleep at last

I’ve often wondered who this 3rd person is. There seems to be a good deal of feminine energy throughout the catalog. Could *she* be the squirrel?

Album No. 39 ***The Making of Bread***

Shep was driving like a maniac and said that we wouldn’t be stopping to sleep. It didn’t take much convincing to get him to agree to stopping at Manley Hot Springs to see my uncle whom I’d never actually met. In fact, he said, rather cryptically, that it was an integral part of the journey.

At the rate we were going (he was hovering around 90MPH) and with his special solar-powered panels on the roof of the Honda, we would make it to the Springs on the early morning of July 7th with minimal stops.

I was curious as hell about how exactly Mrs. B and Sterling fit into this equation, or if I would even see them again, but the talkative Shep pretty much wanted to talk about anything else. “You’ll see,” he kept saying.

At least he was into the music and we had some really good conversations about this batch of records specifically. His take on *The Making of Bread*, a concept record ostensibly about the Making of Bread Act 1757 (an Act of the Parliament of Great Britain, which aimed to protect the making of bread and punish those that adulterated it after a report accused bakers of using alum, chalk and powdered bones to keep bread white) was especially resonate.

“It’s a racist record,” he told me. “I don’t think Greg was a racist but I’ve always thought he was a little too sympathetic towards the bread adulterers.”

Now here was something even I had never considered.

Album No. 40
Winona, Arizona

Probably my personal favorite of the '08 batch. The small town referenced in the 1946 song "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66," popularized by the King Cole Trio, *Winona, Arizona* is subtly about how country singer Wynonna Judd adopted her stage after the lyrics. It's such a weirdly insular detail to expand into a 45-minute album. And the music itself is tender and small, loose and meandering to match.

Album No. 41
R.U. Ready 2 Rock?

In many ways this is actually the most personal record for me. Because I helped co-release the vinyl edition on the vanity label I run with my former friend and business partner Justin Jefferson, Pizza Puppies Inc. He was dead set against it and, in truth, it was 1 of the biggest creative arguments we ever had. (I will spare you the details of our other, mostly uncreative squabbles... another book perhaps.)

Long story short, while he recognized the enigmatic title track as the banger that it is, he didn't not think the rest of the album warranted our financial interest. A history of the State University of New Jersey (Rutgers, Justin's alma mater, for what it's worth), *R.U. Ready 2 Rock?* is indeed a difficult listen after the rollicking and melodic 5-minute opener.

I asked Shep if it was him whom I had been corresponding with in planning the release, and he said something along the lines of "naturally, you idiot." But how was I to know for sure? Everything was set up via a nameless email account.

"It's just me. It's always only been *just me*."

Album No. 42 ***Flatwoods***

Thankfully, the Yukon was in the full summer bloom of 23 hours of light. So we were never in danger of running out of "fuel" over the dangerous and desolate stretch. It made listening to perhaps the creepiest DBS LP a little more palatable.

Flatwoods tells the story, in the most Bisbyian way possible, of a humanoid, extraterrestrial monster allegedly witnessed in the tiny West Virginia town of same during the fall of 1952. It is a spooky-sounding record, with more bleeps and eerie FX than the entirety of the rest of his output combined. But even in the uneasy, nearing midnight brightness of wild Canada, lead track “Pungent Mist” remains unnerving.

In fact, as much as I always wanted to trick myself into believing in the magic of the dead baby squirrel, I probably always knew deep down, despite all of the strange occurrences on my journey, that the whole enterprise was more than likely a ruse. But something in the unnatural sounds of *Flatwoods* that day was like an awakening. This did not sound like it could have been made by a natural being.

I didn’t necessarily feel scared right then and there (or more afraid than I’d already been), but I felt different. Like somehow the music had changed me.

And little did I know how true that would turn out to be.

DAY SEVEN (SORT OF)

07-07-22

Destination: Manley Hot Springs, Alaska

Distance: 740 miles

Bisby Records: 2015

Album No. 43 ***Jon & Kate Plus 8***

The delirious CHOICE that was making *this* record: the longest by a good stretch in the entire catalog, a fucking concept album about the original run of TLC reality show *Jon & Kate Plus 8* which aired between 2007 and 2009. This is 115 tracks long (one for each episode) spanning exactly 15 hours (each song is, on average, close to 8 minutes long). It is INSANE. I am a sucker for extreme runtimes (for example: Lil B's 100-track, over 5-hour mixtape *05 Fuck Em* is the greatest rap album of all-time, in my opinion) but this is unwieldy even for me.

But even more inaccessible than its length is the actual sound of the music. Like Captain Beefheart filtered through Jandek (at his worst), each song is a perilous journey in and of itself, full of moaning and discord.

I did not know how I was going to handle listening to the vaunted 43rd LP given that its length alone would encompass more than an entire day's worth of driving. But, luckily, Shep Brimhold solved this problem for me.

"We're not listening to that shit," he said coldly. And there was no room nor desire for debate.

Album No. 44
Mispronouncing Foreign Names

While Shep quieted down some at this point of the trek, he did have quite a bit to say about this album. It's certainly a counterpoint to *Jon & Kate Plus 8*: 15 punk songs in exactly 15 minutes, Bisby's shortest record by a good amount. (There's something about that number, right?)

We listened to it 3 times in a row as we crossed the border into eastern Alaska.

Album No. 45
In 'vaIærnment

Even though this stretch of the USA was just as desolate as the Canadian highways we left behind, it felt a little comforting to be back on native soil. At the, frankly, wreckless pace Shep was speeding we were due to hit Manley Hot Springs by around 9AM tomorrow morning. I was a little worried fatigue would be hitting home soon for my chauffeur, but he assured me that he was used to staying up for days at a time (I didn't ask any questions).

I decided to use the dulcet tones of the only fully and strictly ambient record in the discog, the flowing, 80-minute-long single track that is *in 'vaIærnment* to catch a nap. I was surprised how quickly the peaceful music put me to sleep.

Album No. 46
The Capital Gains Yeast in the Field of Formidable Fruit

I woke up to the crackle of an AM radio. It was just after midnight on the 7th. "Good morning," Shep said. "Today is the day that's gonna change your life forever."

I didn't push him on the cryptic message because I was immune to the insanity of things by that point. But he was 100% correct, of course.

"You were out for quite a long time," he told me. "Feel rested?"

"What the hell are you listening to?" I said. The speakers broadcast mostly fuzz in between blurbs of what could have been a religious station.

"Static. Best thing for sleeping in cars. Forget that ambient nonsense." I asked him if we could get back to listening to Bisby and he obliged, shuffling to *The Capital Gains Yeast in the Field of Formidable Fruit*, probably the most accessible and pop-focused LP of this era (despite its bad title).

Album No. 47 ***Stool Pigeon Religion***

"Just 3 more records left to go," Shep said. "Maybe the most maligned of his career, huh?"

I couldn't argue with that. I didn't know a single person impressed by records #47, 48 and 49. It wasn't that they were overtly weird or non-musical like other recent entries: they were just bland. So

impossibly bland. I guess they could all be classified as “rock” but the kind of songs I associates with the genre when referring to it as a dead artform. I had actually been looking forward to listening to this block, to see if maybe, aided by the solitude of the road, I had been missing something. All of the records clock in at under 40 minutes so we would have time to spin them multiple times if we so chose. But by the time the 12-track *Stool Pigeon Religion* came to a close, I didn’t even broach the subject. It was just as boring as I’d remembered.

Album No. 48
Reflections in a Timeless Mirror

“When’s the last time you saw your uncle, Vern?”
Shep asked me.

We were halfway through with *Reflections in a Timeless Mirror*, which — to be honest — wasn’t nearly as bad as I thought. It’s a simple, mostly acoustic record. Sure, the lyrics are insipid and stale, but there’s a tenderness to the vocals and melodies that I appreciated.

“Well,” I told him. “I know when it was, but I don’t recall it at all. I was just a baby. Must have been ‘72

or '73 I guess. He used to run a bathhouse for wounded animals in the 60s but that was at least a few years after it closed down. It was the only trip we ever took to Alaska.”

“A bathhouse for wounded animals, did you say?”

“Yeah. I know. It sounds funny. Uncle Manley was a bit of an eccentric... according to my dad. I guess it was just a rehab place but he insisted on calling it a bathhouse because he believed the hot springs could heal the animals. Or something. I’m not really sure. I’ll be honest, I don’t even know if he’s still alive. I always thought it was incredibly funny that he was named after the town he was born in. Like if I’d been called ‘New Orleans Howl’ haha. I figured if I was going all the way up to Alaska, I should at least try to look him up.”

Shep glanced over at me and smiled. It was the first time I’d seen him take his eyes off the road in forever.

“Oh, he’s alive,” he said. “Well, maybe not in the way you’re thinking... but he’s very much alive.”

Album No. 49

Gold Arrows

We still had about 5 hours left to go after *Gold Arrows* played itself out. It was early morning and we were coming out of the scant darkness. I could never imagine living up here, especially in the odd patterns of light during the summer.

It was then and there when Shep told me I was ready to hear the rest of the story: the Iñupiat box, the “S.B.” triangle, and the absolute insane connection to my uncle. If all of these dots seem impossible to bring together, trust me, you’re not alone. I’m still trying to make sense of everything. I’ll do the best I can.

I’ll start with the trinity.

Shelly Beasley, Sterling Berthelsen, and Shepherd Brimhold were all born on the same day, January the 15th: Shep in 1950, with Shelly entering this world in 1957 and Sterling 7 years after that. “Now,” Shep told me. “Our places of birth are very important. I wasn’t actually born in Nome but due north in the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, a mostly uninhabited place in Shishmaref, Alaska. My parents were doing the whole ‘off-the-grid’ thing but soon returned to civilization after I came about. If you can call Nome ‘civilization’.

“Now on that very same day, 1000s of miles away, Sterling Berthelsen — the large man who punched your lights out — was born in Greenland in the small settlement of Itilleq. A direct shot along the 66th parallel from Shishmaref. Now what major event was happening on this day in America?”

I had no idea.

“The first ever Super Bowl! We’ve tried to pinpoint what event was happening during the game at the very moment our lives on earth began, and we’re relatively sure it was right around the moment when the Packers’ Willie Wood secured the game-altering interception of Len Dawson in the 3rd quarter. Arguably the most important play of the game, you know?”

I did not know.

“Anyway, for years we thought that Willie held the key to unpacking all this. That it all couldn’t be a coincidence. We tried to talk to him but his brain was scrambled from CTE by the time we figured it out. He passed away just recently actually.”

“And Mrs. B?” I asked.

“Ah yes, our spiritual mother. She was born in Belle Fourche, South Dakota, the geographic center of these United States!”

I, obviously, wasn't following.

"If you link those dots on a map, what do you get?
But a perfect equilateral triangle! Right down to the
10th of a mile.

THE KILLING SPREE¹

In the words of Shepherd Brimhold...

I'm a killer. Listen close.

My real name is Dickson Abel.

My 1st victim was a man named Samuel G. Bisby. I killed him in the early 80s in the suburbs outside of Chicago. This is the photo I used for the 2008 album cycle: I decided to use his middle name Greg so as not to alert suspicion, and not to offend the relatives of the deceased, though – as Greg was a recluse painter – I wasn't too worried about the second part. By the 6th series, enough time I had passed where I thought I could manipulate the man's image. It was the greatest clue and nobody thought anything of it. But it all makes sense. S.B.? It's all connected. Even

¹ I am presenting these next 2 chapters as recollections of what Shep Brimhold (real name Dickson Abel) told me when we arrived at the Tanana River dock landing in Manley Hot Springs, Alaska.

I can see that, and I'm not a smart man, Vern.

There were others on my way to Alaska, but they aren't important. I was born a psychopath and would have died a psychopath, that is if I had never met your 'Uncle Manley'.

Manley, or "Manly" (there's no "E") is just a nickname, you know? Or did you not know that? You probably also didn't know that he's actually your dad and not your uncle. Sorry for the bombshell. Boom! Haha.

The character I previously told you about, my dad Barry, is in fact, your true father². But they had to change the family name from Brimhold to Howl on account of how Barry helped fix the first Super Bowl³. That's right. The

² For the life of me, I do not know why Dickerson lied about this element to begin with. Why did he frame the story as being his own? This is still a mystery.

³ This checks out inasmuch as I was always aware my extended family had deep connections to both gambling addiction and bookmaking.

Kansas City Chiefs should have won that game but your pops Barry rigged the contest! This is the connection to football, although it's mostly a coincidence. We didn't need to confuse poor Willie Wood, after all. Your real name is actually Shepherd Brimhold. You're the last S.B., Vern. You weren't born in New Orleans but in remote Alaska. You were also born in '64 not '69, so you're 5 years older than you think and that's why your earliest memories are so blurry. He wanted me to tell you this specifically⁴.

Fast-forward to 1984, I make my way up to the north country from Illinois. I first meet your Uncle Barry "Manly" Howl, formerly Brimhold. He still has the Iñupiat box. We get to talking and he shows me the box. Says he hasn't opened it in years. That he's too frightened to. Well, lo and behold, I

⁴ It's true that my earliest memories as well as my immediate family's retelling of this era is foggy at best, but naturally this reveal came as a shock. When you're already north of the division line that is middle age, 5 years is a *very* long time.

get him to crack that thing open. And what's inside? The dead baby squirrel, in pristine, totally fresh condition.

Right then and there, before my very eyes, your daddy's⁵ soul left his body and entered that little rodent's. His physical form melted into the ether and all that was left was the – VERY MUCH ALIVE – creature. He started to talk. I nearly fainted. And the rest is history, although I guess there's a fair amount of explaining left to do, haha.

He – the *living* baby squirrel – told me that there would be a life of riches and notoriety for me. I just had to be patient. He knew that I was a killer, though I'm not sure how. When you see the soul of a man enter the body of a dead baby squirrel and start yapping orders, you don't question things, I guess. He said I

⁵ The hardest part of this to swallow was that the man who I had believed to have been my father all these years (God rest his soul) was actually my uncle. This was a punch to the stomach I'm still feeling.

had to do 1 more thing before we could get started. He said there would be a gathering of 7 people at the Tanana River boat landing later that day. I was to kill them all and dump their bodies in the water. But 1st I had to meet up with a drifter named Mika Chaselli who had just entered the village a few weeks earlier. This was gonna be our patsy.

He explained exactly how it was supposed to go down, right down to the final shoot-out with the helicopter cops. I was able to escape and the police pinned the whole thing on Chaselli. They assumed I was 1 of the victims and so the DBS and I snuck away to Nome and started the record label. I'm not sure why the first 2 batches were to be backdated to 1973 and 1980, respectively. There are a few things that remain a mystery to even me.

In Nome, I got us a little apartment and made a homemade recording studio based entirely on the specs that the

little squirrel described. Over time, when the money started to finally come in, the equipment and gear improved. This little guy played all the instruments, did all the vocals and barked orders at me, the de facto engineer. He wrote the liner notes (he made sure to refer to himself as "dead" even though he was, and *IS*, very much alive) too. The only thing I was fully in charge of was the marketing efforts: the graphic layout and cover art⁶, and the name of the outfit. Truthfully, I landed on "Greg Bisby" on a whim, more or less.

⁶ This also makes sense, as the album artwork (not to mention the strange moniker attributed to the project) always felt detached, more than slightly off... not good by comparison.

THE TRINITY

Shep Dickerson continues...

But back to that day in '84: Of the 8 people I killed (I also took out the helicopter pilot, although that wasn't part of the plan), they only recovered 5 of the bodies. 3 remained, the Trudeau family. A father, mother and a little 2-year-old boy. I fought with the DBS over the slaying of the youngster but he said it was essential.

I never thought much about how they couldn't recover their bodies. It was a miracle they found any of them as the Tanana River is a beast: a mile wide and 100 feet deep, and as the water remains near freezing temperatures, the glacier-fed river is heavily silted, and bodies were always likely to remain below the surface.

Over the years, the DBS, or as I just called him "Squirrel," never mentioned

it either. We only talked about business, in fact. He really did spend a painstaking amount of time on the records, even the ones that sound flippant and/or bad. Everything was intentional and by design. Even predicting 9/11. I'm still a killer at heart but even I thought *maybe I should tell someone about this big-ass terrorist attack?* Squirrel wouldn't have none of it. And I knew better by that point, as that's always when the notoriety (and cash flow) started to really amp up.

Other things he predicted that nobody picked up on: Columbine, the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, President Trump, the 2017 McDonald's Shamrock Shake variants (Shamrock Chocolate Shake, the Shamrock Chocolate Chip Frappé, the Shamrock Mocha, and the Shamrock Hot Chocolate⁷), just to name a few.

⁷ For the life of me, I can not figure out which record or song references the 2017 McDonald's Shamrock Shake variants, for what it's worth.

By the time of the 2015 releases, technology had improved to the point where the little fella could man the digital recording stations by himself. I wasn't needed in the studio. I was in full-time digital promotion mode and, with streaming? Let me tell ya. We started making bank! And since all Squirrel really needed was some nuts and the latest version of Pro Tools, I was allowed to pocket all the income.

Cut to December of last year and I check-in with him to see if the next batch is ready for release. I know he's been recording. I sleep across the hall. But he tells me that there is no next batch. There might be 1 final album, he says. If I follow his instructions. Well, the last time he told me to follow his instructions I had to go on a killing spree and shoot a child, so I was not looking forward to what he had to say. Thankfully, nobody needed to die this time around. Not yet anyhow.

He told me all about the triangle and about Shelly Beasley and Sterling Berthelsen and you, the 7-year gaps, etcetera. That the spirits of the Trudeau family had been revived in your bodies and were ready to be 'awakened' (his words). I was to set in motion a plan by contacting those 2 and chanting a Iñupiat spell at them. It took me months to find those guys. I asked him about you and he explained that you were the final piece of the puzzle, the key to it all. That you would find me eventually. He described most everything in detail. Even the Oreo incident in Aladdin. That was gross, huh? Wish I could have seen that freak eat that shit, ha! Well, it wasn't all so simple, as you know. But here we are. My final assignment is to say these Iñupiat words to you, right here, in the very spot I killed little Joey Trudeau nearly 4 decades earlier. His spirit is ready to come alive inside of you.

Are you ready?

DAYS EIGHT-TEN

07-08-22 — 07-10-22

Destination: Fairbanks, Alaska

Distance: 143 miles (on foot)

“Wait,” I told him. “I want to see my uncle... um, Squirrel?”

“He’s not here,” Shep—I mean Dickerson Abel—answered.

“Where is he?”

“He’s back in Nome. He never left.”

“What’s supposed to happen when you chant those words?” I asked.

“I have no idea,” Dickerson said. “It turned Shelly into a mad woman, although briefly. And it made Sterling into this hulking, brooding figure. He seemed to grow maybe 3 or 4 inches too? He was actually a lovely, talkative, man of average height beforehand.”

Obviously my brain was abuzz from this reveal, the whole impossible story. Dickerson’s solar-powered Honda was parked up the hill and I thought about

making a beeline but I didn't know if he had left the keys.

"Wait," I told him again. I didn't know what to do.

"If you're thinking about running to the car, I did leave the keys in the cupholder. And you're probably much faster than me as I'm 72 years old and a lifelong smoker. But the Iñupiat chant is only 4 words long and I only have to say it within 100 yards of you for the spell to work. Even if you cover your ears and make a lot of noise, it will still work. This is all per Squirrel's instructions, but he's not somebody I would want to bet against at this point."

"What's in it for you?" I asked. "I mean, why are you still doing what this... *thing* says?"

"That's a good question." Dickerson paused a long time before continuing, "I read your book. *Fadwa*. It's a good book. You didn't get everything right, but you got more than anyone else did. The thing that I most remember from it, though, is how it seemed like you really did believe in the magic of it. And your hypothesis that it was probably dark magic, especially. It *is* dark magic. I've gone down a very dark path. I was already on it, in fact. Your uncle knew better than to open that box. Sometimes I think that my role in all this has been inconsequential. I can do what a squirrel cannot. Send cassette tapes through the snail mail.

Purchase microphones on Amazon. Etcetera. But there's nothing special about that. It's just that I was simply in the right place at the right time. Or the wrong place at the wrong place. Depends on how you look at it. And how this story ends. I don't know how the story ends. I'm no different than most people, good or bad. I just want to see how the story ends. So I'm gonna say the words now, Vern."

And that's what he did.

"Piqqiq taġniq, piqqiq timaqsiiq."

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The next thing I recall I was running through the woods, the great vast wilderness of Alaska. Something had changed within me, but it was not a big change. I felt like me. Was the 2-year-old boy's spirit inside me? Little Joey Trudeau?

If I had not changed, the world certainly had. This was not the 'real' Alaska. When I first became aware of my hunger, I had traveled 20, maybe 30 miles through hard, rugged landscape. This was

bear country. Wolf country. The country of things that were built to kill you. But I was completely alone. Safe. I stopped to catch my breath, recognized the pangs of malnourishment and fatigue, and what was directly in my path but a fully functional grocery store.

The grocery store was nameless save for the storefront sign which looked as though it was written in an ancient language. It read:



Upon return, I deciphered that this was likely Old Norse (a Viking era language used in Greenland, Scandinavia and other territories circa 800-1000 AD) and loosely translated as “pig” or “piglet.” But in my mind, I called the store “six.” Inside, the shop was staffed by giant, bipedal, vaguely humanoid squirrels dressed in people clothing, the attire of 1950s Americana, perhaps. They all wore aprons with the “ | X” logo.

The store only sold deli meat ham. They had a variety of products but it was all just deli meat ham dressed up in different ways: the baby carrots were bags of small, pink baby carrot shaped deli meat ham missiles; the Pringles were tubes full of deli meat ham crisps, in a wide array of flavors (including “pizza” and “cajun” and “buffalo”); the bottled water was pinkish, oddly chunky (deli meat ham in the liquid form); the seafood section was stocked with deli meat ham of the sea; and so on, even the pet food was all deli meat ham.

“Who are you guys?” I asked 1 of the squirrels.

“We are disciples of the goddess Hel.” They spoke slowly, in an almost robotic voice. “We are here, not by choice, however, to serve you on your journey. We have deli meat ham in many different styles and options. We are having a sale, in fact, on deli meat ham. You are our 10-billionth customer. Congratulations!” they said.

The squirrel handed me a wet pile of deli meat ham, not in a package, potentially rotting. The meat was soft, I did not need to chew: it melted in my mouth and slid down my throat. I left the store and started sprinting through the woods again. I turned back to look and the store was gone.

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The rest of the jaunt through the woods went by in a similar fashion: I feel famished, I see and enter a $\int | X$, I eat deli ham meat and am replenished. It took me less than three days of straight jogging to get to the Fairbanks International Airport. I felt like I was no longer part of the natural world, although I felt closer to nature than ever before. There, waiting for me on the airport runway, were none other than Sterling and Shelly. The latter was clearly with child. She looked ready to pop. I became deeply confused, all over again.

Shelly explained, and through her explanation, the story changed yet again. We have access to all realms, all the time, she told me (“like the multiverse, like that movie you might have seen”). There is a trinity, though Sterling is not a part of it. He’s the muscle, our protector (“things are going to get messy... and soon,” she said ominously). The big galoot was wearing an Ergobaby infant carrier with a plastic doll in it strapped tightly to his chest. He has scrawled “Vern” on the baby doll’s head. He says it’s because he is sad to be outside of the holy union. Shelly tells him that it’s more like a square, a solid foundation (“Big Brother,” she calls him affectionately). The magic baby she’s about to give

birth to, our child, is the final piece of the puzzle, and we're all to board the purple helicopter purring on the roadway (which has made her exposition dump difficult to hear, so I might have missed some things) to fly to Nome and meet the Squirrel. We sneered at the idea of this ugly fivesome, or what soon will be. The ugliness of the number 5 is crystal clear but it was lost on Sterling, who appears to be devolving, getting exponentially stupider by the second (in any and all realms, in theory of course). I got very nervous that the increasingly strange Sterling had been tasked to be the pilot of our flight, though Shelly reassured me: "The Aladdin pig meat Oreo was actually a flight spell — he's a crack pilot, one of the best that ever lived, or will live."

Everything was coming into place, it seemed. The baby was born. It wasn't not a bloody or painful birth. He simply fell out of Shelly's body like a leaf in autumn. He was a toddler. How has he grown into a toddler in a matter of seconds? My son. "I don't think he will get any bigger," Shelly tells me. "Should we give him a name?" I ask. My son answered.

"I shall remain nameless."

He spoke in a perfect Transatlantic accent. He sounded like peak-era Cary Grant. And what an athlete! He — I'll call him The Boy for the sake of

this document — moved like a spider monkey. “He does have squirrel blood in him,” I remarked.

The Boy was not without vanity so we went inside the Fairbanks International Airport gift shop to shoplift some toddler-sized athletic shorts. They were mesh white, very sharp looking, adorned with the FIA logo, which is actually ordered “FAI” after the International Air Transport Association code...



The Boy looked great standing next to the purple chopper. I felt bad about stealing the airport athletic shorts but Shelly reassures me that we had entered a realm where either A) money did not exist, or B) people (and, therefore, money) did not exist.

We got in the helicopter and took off for Nome.

“Do you know what the IATA code for the Fukuoka Airport is?” Shelly asked me.

“No,” I said, unsure of where she was going with this. “Japan?”

“Yup, Japan.” She paused, her eyes lit up with a schoolgirl’s sneaky charm. “It’s FUK. F-U-K, fuck.”

We all laughed. It’s good to have a laugh in the face of such serious endeavors.

SEVEN DAYS IN NOME

07-11-22 — 07-17-22

Day 1

We got to Nome quickly. Too quickly, I wondered. “Shelly,” I asked. “Are we processing time in the abstract as well? Like how we are maneuvering freely through space?” No, she told me. We were simply in a realm that had a much smaller Alaska. “We could have stopped for lunch in Juneau,” she said. “Me hungry,” the now caveman-esque Sterling blurted out.

“We can stop for food as soon as we land, Big Brother,” Shelly told him.

“Ling,” Sterling replied.

“Excuse me?”

“Me Ling now. No Sterling. No Big Brother. Call me Ling.” Ling was a broad term for various fishes of the cod family (such as a hake or burbot), I recalled as I looked out the chopper window. We were flying over the ocean. I had fish on the brain.

“Wait,” I said, shocked. “Why are we flying over the ocean?”

“Because in this Alaska every inhabitable place is an island. Think of it as Alaskipelago,” Shelly told me. She said she knew so much about the rules of the multiverse because she’d been living with the Iñupiat spell the longest. “It’s like a dream,” she said. “Although sometimes the dream gets to be too much and I... react.”

Sterling, I mean Ling, gracefully landed the helicopter in the middle of the Nome Skateboard Park. From there it was just a short walk to the Squirrel’s place of residence on Tobuk Alley, which was just around the corner from the famous pizza place that secretly doubled as Nome Records HQ (this joint is actually called Airport Pizza, interestingly enough).

On our stroll to finally, at long last, meet the — apparently very *alive* — baby Squirrel, Shelly told me that we needed to talk about the Trudeau family. I had assumed that Shep was wrong about little baby Joey, that he was, in fact, not present inside me, but rather in our nameless son, who looked to be about the same age as the child when he died. “No,” Shelly told me. “Shep was wrong about all of it. We need to move faster. I’ve got a bad feeling about things.”

We reached the Tobuk Alley apartment and knocked on the door. Just as we did, a black fog seeped from the cracks in the entranceway. The billows turned into a jet black smoke that formed into a creature, a demon. Ling (who now appeared to be well over 7-feet tall) instinctively pounced on the ethereal figure. They struggled mightily as he instructed us to RUN! And so we did.

Day 2

At an establishment called The Noxapaga, we booked a room (the Sockeye Suite) to regroup. Night had fallen and Shelly unleashed her theory about what was happening...

“I think the 7 people that Squirrel instructed Dickson to kill on that river were all sacrifices. I believe that they were to be made for the Iñupiat goddess, Sedna, ruler of the sea. In exchange for what, I’m not sure. But 3 of the bodies, the Trudeaus, were never properly buried. Their restless spirits have morphed into a dark force that has wreaked havoc on the world. To compensate for this miscue, the Squirrel has been attempting to warn us — humanity — about all sorts of atrocities — 9/11, Shamrock Shakes, you name it — through his songs. We were not reborn as the family, but as

hunters of the family. Ghost hunters. Me with my speed and cunning, Ling with his size and brute force, and you with... I don't know yet. This must be the final piece. Do you have any idea?"

"If I may interject," said The Boy. "I think our pal Vern is nothing but a thoroughbred stud. And I'm the horse you want to bet on, little lady."

I didn't take this as an insult. In fact, it kind of let me off the hook in a way.

A NOME ASIDE (NOT SPONSORED BY THE NOME, AK TOURISM INDUSTRY):

The Sockeye Suite at The Noxapaga was wonderful, as is the charming, surprisingly bustling town of Nome on the whole. I imagine this is the case in any sector of the multiverse because — as Shelly explained it to me: we were experiencing everything everywhere, and all at once too — that was literally what was happening. My knowhow when it comes to the comparison and contrasting of realms is amateur at best, but apparently this is not the case with most places. Part of the reason for Nome's inherent bliss is this synergy between its various 'verses, however. ("Take any Springfield," Shelly told me. "A bustling metropolis in one, a total ghosttown in

another, with every stripe of city, good and bad, in between. It makes visiting such a place hell on the gifted like us.”)

We obviously weren't your traditional tourists, so I didn't get to explore the area as I normally would have, but I will offer a few recommendations herein.

First of all, we had time to kill. While Sterling/Ling was doing battle with the Trudeau entity (this was a brutal fight to the death and was occurring in all of the infinite realms at once — they would appear only in fractions of a nanosecond in individual spaces at any given time, their duel translating to a mere flicker of the lights⁸ — and would last for nearly 24 hours, resulting, sadly, in the death of the brute Ling, but rendering the T.E. vastly weakened), Shelly, The Boy and I were free to explore Nome.

Our first stop was the Arctic Native Brotherhood Club. What a hoot! The ANB has a full bar, pull-tabs, pool tables, and dart boards. I had never experienced 'pull-tabs' before, although Shelly told me they're a staple in Montanian pub life. They're

⁸ So take pause whenever this occurs on a relatively weatherless day: interdimensional foes could be feuding.

essentially scratch-off tickets and we played them for a solid 3 hours before shifting to the dart boards for target practice. We played Break-Opens, Nevada Tickets, Cherry Bells, Lucky 7s, Pickle Cards, Pickle Tickets, Instant Bingo, Bowl Games, and Popp-Opens, and nobody but The Boy had any luck. He won \$15 but traded them in for more tabs instead of cash and lost them all. “Maybe I’m lucky in another realm,” he mused.



Then we stopped for lunch at the Pingo Bakery & Seafood House. I recommend the halibut-stuffed waffles (hopefully available in your dimension). Delicious!

We spent the rest of the day on the waterfront. The three of us basked in the glorious views of the Norton Sound of the

Bering Sea and, for a second, it felt like we were a real family. Unfortunately, The Boy — while still never eclipsing 3-feet in height — seemed to be aging rapidly. He developed a bad cough and I felt the love I imagine a father has for a child when they fall ill. We didn't know where this, any of this, was heading and I felt helpless. To his credit, The Boy remained hopeful, reticent to whatever his fate might be. "Perhaps this ocean air will do me a bit of good," he wondered. "Perhaps," I echoed. Little did I know he would turn to dust in less than a day.

Big Randy, the proprietor of Big Randy's Beach Club, cheered us up some. He served up some homebrew sour beer (the 'Norton Sour' he dubbed it) and the alcohol took the edge off. What a character! He briefly questioned if The Boy was of drinking age before getting a better look at the deteriorating creature and shrugging it off with a slightly horrified bemusement. He pointed us in the direction of the famous Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race's iconic burlled arch finish line, perhaps the most famous landmark in Nome.

We all remarked that we could feel the soul of every canine who crossed under this

structure. Its wood felt alive with their spirits. I could see them running in my mind. Sadly — in my home universe, at least — they would collapse less than 2 years later. Wood rot, the mayor said...

Iditarod finish line's iconic Burled Arch collapses in Nome



We went back to The Noxapaga for more seafood and a good night's sleep. Tomorrow would be a very big day.

Day 3

T.E., the jet black ghost, had been greatly diminished by the brave Ling (RIP), but it still posed a grave threat. “If the spirit gets inside of you,” Shelly pondered, “you’re done for.” We had to get inside the apartment in Tobuk Alley to find the Squirrel, my father. Shelly believed that his home recording studio was a sanctuary which the T.E. could not penetrate.

When we got to the building’s entrance, the dark fog demon was indeed waiting. It was still just as sprawling as before but it appeared fractured, glitching like bad TV reception. I had put The Boy, who was not long for this world, in a backpack I purchased at Maruskiya's of Nome, the premier gift shop of the lesser-known resort town jewel. We had to think fast.

Shelly, utilizing her cunning and speed, decided to cause a diversion. She sprinted at the beast like she had done with the family of pigs the week prior (it felt like months ago). In the midst of her assault, she quickly locked eyes with me and mouthed the word “go” — though it was a strikingly brief moment, I knew it would be the last time I would ever see her. But there was no space for tears or grief. I bolted through the door and bounded up the stairs, The Boy, in my backpack, painfully groaning.

*

As I reflect on this now, I can only scoff at my own words, my own memories. But when I saw that little eastern gray squirrel, I immediately knew I was looking at my father. And when it spoke, I knew I was hearing my father's voice. I wept at the sound, the miracle of everything.

"Hello, son," he said.

"Papa," I replied between weeps. I never called the man who I thought was my real dad (my uncle), "papa," but it just felt right. Unfortunately, there was no time for reminiscing, small talk or anything in between. The fused union of a deceased family unit was literally breathing down our necks: with static, furious gasps, plumes of black fog/spirit entity spilled in through the cracks in the Squirrel's studio door. It was up to us — three generations of newly minted heritage: the father (the DBS), the son (me) and the grandson (The Boy) — to defeat it and, perhaps, save the world.

"Let's have a look at The Boy," Papa ordered, shaking his little rodent head. "Just as I thought. Not a second to spare. Quick, place his body in that ukulele case.... and say your goodbyes."

I did as instructed and looked into the sad eyes of the child who had only just been born. But as soon

as I laid him on the soft velvet, his expression changed. He had withered to almost nothing, but he was able to sound off one more time. “I pretended to be somebody I wanted to be until finally I became that person,” he said with a smile. “Or... he became me. Close the lid, good chap. Close the lid.”

“Goodbye... son,” I said through another blast of tears. I closed the ukulele case and turned to Papa. “Now what?”

“Wait a minute. Take a breath. Take several. Then open the case.” We sat in silence for what I remember to be exactly 10 breaths. I’m not sure how I landed on that number. I opened the case.

Inside was a lovely, handcrafted uke — through the soundhole, I saw a label proclaiming it be the 46th made by a master Hawaiin ukulele craftsman named Ala Kamala — where the soon-to-be-corpse of my magical child once laid. The person he had wanted to become was a... uke?

“Good,” Papa uttered. “Now it is time.”

The Squirrel then unpacked the plan. It was at once on par with all of the insane shit that had transpired, but also leveled up the fantastical derangement to a whole new stratosphere (literally). As concisely as possible:

1. We had to construct the 50th and final Greg Bisby/DBS album *together*.
2. Papa was to play the synth and I would be on the new uke which held the spirit of my offspring. (“I can’t play a lick of guitar,” I told him. “It doesn’t matter,” he replied. “Play with your heart and, in the end, a chorus of angels will flow through you.”).
3. The album was to be called *One More Day*.
4. It would feature 6 songs, each named after 1 of the dwarf planets (Pluto, Charon, Eris, Haumea, Ceres and Papa’s personal favorite, Makemake⁹).
5. We would have only 3 days to record the 6 tracks: 2 in the A.M. and 2 in the P.M. each day.
6. We had to finish by midnight at the end of day 6, my 7th day in Nome.
7. When the record is complete, the giant asteroid-sized dwarf planets would be summoned down to Earth, crashing into the

⁹ As an amateur astronomer, I bristled with the inclusion of both Pluto and Pluto’s moon Charon on this list. But Papa assured me it was essential, that neither would exist without the other. I said, what about Makemake’s one known moon, nicknamed MK2, discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope in 2015? He simply smirked and told me that MK2 was a good name for a band and I should consider it when I got back to the east coast and started on my next record for the Pizza Puppies, Inc. recording label. It warmed my heart that he had been following me and was a fan all these years.

surface (on the exact opposite — or, more accurately: antipodal — part of the earth, in this case: the South Atlantic Ocean off Antarctica), killing the Trudeau entity but also over 95% of all life on the planet. It was imperative we finished by then for 2 reasons:

- a. This was Papa's "expiration date" as he described it — the moment when the Iñupiat spell either wear off, or he would self-combust entirely. "I'm several decades past the previous record-holder for oldest eastern gray squirrel that's ever lived," he said proudly.
- b. This was also the time when Nome would be furthest away from the crashing dwarf planets in the Earth's rotation, hopefully assuring (at least) my survival. "Alas," that part is a mystery," Papa told me. "Lord knows, history has taught us, a single, 'normal' asteroid hasn't been too kind to this planet, let alone 6 super-sized bad boys summoned by a kind of magical magnetism." The ethics of this whole endeavor were murky to say the least:

Was it worth killing that many people? Papa described the 2 likely scenarios:

1. We do nothing and the T.E. slowly engulfs all of Earth's realms, sucking in every person, every soul, into what can only be described as hell on, well, Earth.
2. We try to make the music that will kill the beast, saving 5% of the population being better than saving 0%. To which I replied:

ME

What's killing the demon? The music or the falling planets?

PAPA

The music.
The dwarf planet thing is just an unfortunate effect.

I didn't totally love my Papa's explanation about the dwarf planets wiping out almost all life on Earth (how did he know this?). But it seemed like a risk we had to take.

He had me spend the remainder of the day trying to tune the ukulele, something I had no idea how to do. Work on the *One More Day* record would commence promptly at midnight whether or not it was in tune ("It doesn't really matter," he told me. "So long as you try."). We wouldn't be able to sleep for the ensuing 72 hours once the clock struck 12, he instructed.

It would be intense, soul-shattering work. The 6 tracks of the album would all be instrumental improv compositions, and we would use only the final take.

Somewhere in Nome, in some nook of the multiverse, there's a freaking box set worth of outtakes, let me tell you.

Days 4-6

We recorded the album.

Day 7

I can only recall a flash of golden light.

After Papa printed out a CD copy of *One More Day* and popped into his very retro boombox, we sat there and listened to the 45-minute disc as the T.E. screamed in agony behind the door, slowly fading away into the ether, receding into the nothingness of air molecules behind the door.

During playback, Papa started to fade away as well, not unlike Marty McFly's siblings in that famous photograph in the 1985 film, *Back to the Future*. When the closing song "Makemake" (the highlight of the record, in my opinion) came on, we could feel the rumble of the fastly approaching dwarf planets. Or I assume that Papa could. By that point, he was reduced to but a pair of disconnected squirrel feet.

As the final notes of the track floated away, so did both the demon and my dad along with it. Midnight struck. Papa's calculations were clearly wrong: nothing stood a chance against the might of Pluto, Charon, Eris, Haumea, Ceres and Makemake.

...mico aureo, vita recessit, vita renovatur...

EPILOGUE

I woke up on the morning of July 1st, 2022, in my bed back in NoAug, SC. It had all been a dream.

Or had it?

My business partner, Justin Jefferson, stormed in (how did he have a key to my apartment? why was he in South Carolina??).

“Check this out!” he exclaimed, tossing a vinyl record onto my bedspread. “*Guess who’s back? Back again?*” (He was doing the Slim Shady song/voice thing.) “It’s Bisby! Freaking Greg Bisby!”

I glanced down at the record and couldn’t believe my eyes. I could only smile coyly (a little like you-know-who)...



(Out now on Pizza Puppies, Inc.)