

WE COULD
BE HEROES
JUST FOR
ONE DAY

a zine about pop
culture pilgrimages

Content warning: rape, childhood sexual abuse including that of an infant

In 2004, there was a song that a bunch of people liked which I thought was ok. The song was by a band that I thought was ok. I also thought the band was Christian (coz their name had the word 'prophet' in) which made them ok. I saw them headline a festival and it was ok. Ok. Ok. Ok.

Eight years on, their lead singer, Ian Watkins was charged in court with conspiracy "to rape a one-year-old girl, of two incidents of conspiring to engage in sexual touching with two young children; possessing, making and distributing indecent images; and possessing "extreme" animal pornography." [1] He pleaded guilty to "conspiring to rape a child, three counts of sexual assault involving children, seven involving taking, making or possessing indecent images of children and one of possessing an extreme pornographic image involving a sex act on an animal." [2] Two female fans of his band, the Lostprophets, stood on trial alongside their idol, such was their devotion to Watkins they had "sexually abused their children at [his] behest and were prepared to make the children available to him for sex." [3]

Described as a "committed, organised paedophile" and "potentially the most dangerous sex offender" ever seen by the Senior Investigating Officer of the case, the judge lamented the fact that the case had "plunged into new depths of depravity". [4] Watkins is incarcerated in HM Prison Long Lartin, a Category A men's prison in an English village, serving 29 years. He discussed his crimes over a recorded phone call in prison, to a female fan, describing them as "mega lolz". The expression "mega lolz" had previously been sold on Lostprophets T-shirts. His band had even performed against a backdrop of the phrase when playing on the main stage of Reading festival in 2010. In a report on this incident the Guardian described Watkins as a "paedophile rock star". [5]

All future tour dates were cancelled and the group disbanded. Two years on it was reported a new single had been released on Spotify but it was revealed to be a hoax, simply the original recording of Taylor Swift's 'I Knew You Were Trouble'.

But let's go back to that single. Before I rebranded my apathy of a Download headliner (there were fireworks at the end! I was bored!) into a self-righteous psychic act. The 'I've always known' attitude to the celebrity rapist a worse and weirder incarnation of the 'I liked them before they were cool' outlook. Taken from the album 'Start Something', which has a record cover of comically Gothic script, a heavily edited black and white photograph of a young person in a studded belt and black hoodie stands in the middle of an empty road, sky scrapers stretching out behind

them, their eye scribbled out in that corny Sex Pistols styles. A parody of 2004. With Good Charlotte and Hoobastank on a back-up.

Reviewing the album, the BBC described it as "tactically worded to the point of genius", remarking that regardless of quality the Lost Prophets work is "ludicrously bankable music, after all. A painstaking chemical compound of technical hardcore guitar and emo-ish vocal pleading." In short, they concluded "Resistance is pretty much futile". [6] Johnn Loftus develops this in his single review of Last Train Home, writing that:

"Last Train Home" was an absolute masterpiece of pop single mixing board surgery, flawlessly, brazenly binding the properties of three of California's most marketable acts into one monster of a post-grunge anthem, sung by a bunch of immaculately T-shirted dudes from Pontypridd. Beginning with an instrumental run through its unstoppable chorus, the song drifted into faraway echoes of piano as vocalist Ian Watkins emoted vaguely meaningful lyrics like "Love was once apart/But now it's disappeared". But pretty soon it was time for that chorus again. Lusty shouts of "We sing!" matched hard-cranking distortion, gave out for a brief interlude, and exploded once again in an absolute flurry of Linkubustankian triumph. The kids loved it, and by May 2004, "Last Train Home" had peaked at #1 on the Billboard's Modern Rock singles chart. [7]

Last Train Home was reflective of a particular brand of 00's desperation where the endless circle of a chorus, a whirlpool of a shout, that presented a ride home to your suburban bedroom as an exit ticket to somewhere greater. Was every teenager in 2004 so desperate for escape that they took a rapist for their ticket out of here? And why in retrospect did I think it was okay that all my other girl friends in school were dating leather trench coat clad creeps in their twenties?

But there's still tomorrow
Forget the sorrow
And I can be on the last train home
Watch it pass the day
As it fades away
No more time to care
No more time, today
-Last Train Home, Lostprophets, 2004

The singles that sang most powerful were those that professed escape in one's return, that presented the journey home, vomit stained and alone as a hand to hold us and a finger to guide us. All as Alex Turner sails backwards down a highway, his eyes on the club as the car heads home. The meters rising and the memories merging. He didn't want to leave.

And so why are we in a taxi?
'Cause I didn't want to leave
I said "It's High Green Mate, via Hillsborough please!
Artic Monkeys, 'Red Light Indicates Doors Are Secured, 2006

And another last train home rushes by for Jamie T, one of the leaders in the spoken word world of white, drunk (vaguely) working class young men, lost forever in the public transport system of the 00's:

Drunk and being sick, I feel like shit
I gotta quit I hope I haven't missed the last train
Gonna be stuck in Hampton Wick,
With the boys across the platform
Shouting lightweight prick
I'm a featherweight champion, cheap to get pissed
Jamie T, Sticks n Stones, 2009

It's easy to sing and hard to leave. The area I'm from is called Downend, isn't that the best combination of words? Down-end! Dead end! From my childhood window I can watch the glowing lattices of the bus windows jumble down the highway. There is not so much to say about a suburb on the outskirts of Bristol, with its post-war builds and largely white and working to middle class population, but it's my area of expertise as I've never managed to actually get out of it. Getting out is a myth, of the working class kid, of the first generation kid, I am a failure of both. Succeeding only in the accomplishment of being a free school meal kid with an Oxford education that rendered me back home with my family. You never left the suburbs but at least you didn't end up back in Syria. Syria! A civil war that is not civil in any sense of the word.

Getting out is also a recovery myth. Escaping trauma. Healing, recovery, therapy, all subjects I fail fantastically at. And it is my 25th year in this place and the 10th Anniversary of 'Skins', a distinctly Downend drama of Bristol 00's youth, lead character and eager extras alike, acting as an alumni of my comprehensive school education. House parties spent trying not to stare at E4 superstar celebrities. It was even prestigious to be an extra in Skins. I auditioned for a casting with a school friend. It was a weekend. We got the bus. I couldn't act and we didn't get it but we were there and that was enough. 'Has every Bristol teen come out for this?', rolls the eyes of a London television executive. But she didn't understand. It felt like we were a part of something.

The people of Downend are eager to escape. Each year a new reality television contestant from my road, a new person to vote for on ITV or Channel Four, a new campaign poster in the fish and chip shop. Each year they come back. We never win and they go back to their childhood bedrooms and I go back to watching strangers, not neighbours, on the television.

Who can save us? And from what? I'm not entirely sure what we're escaping from but I know it's urgent. This country is frightening and though I am meant to 'go back to where I came from' the only place that will ever be is suburban Bristol. It really does feel like the end of the world.

"In the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains

of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes, or something like that, something I have already seen elsewhere, under a Christmas tree, for instance, dolls I believe. The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things."

-Julia Kristeva, *Approaching Abjection*

2016 was universally understood as the Worst Year Ever for its unique blend of far-right triumphs and music legends passings. What cannot save me from death, but was promised to save me from death: pop music, glam rock stars, youth culture, movie stars, good manners, celebrity endorsements, a vague liberal sensibility that positions cultural consumption as a radical act, an 'edgy' sense of humour, revealed to be wholly unironic in its adoption by the far right, a cute sense of style. All proven meaningless in one year. All proven meaningless as the 45th President sang along to 3 Doors Down.

The conversation around Bannon's clothes reminds me a little bit of the meme about two photos of Drake, one in which he's dressed to the nines, one where he's in sweats, captioned, "Get you a man who can do both." Maybe the American public is just confused because we've never encountered such an effective "man who can do both," where both is "look ridiculous" and "push through hateful policy." Shouldn't the former prevent him from doing the latter? If someone's maybe a Nazi, isn't he supposed to at least dress well? Like all things Trump, this is unprecedented, and Americans are struggling for the appropriate reaction.[8]

- [Heather Schwedel](#), Should We Care What Steve Bannon Wears in the Oval Office?

Steve Bannon is not dressed for a Rolling Stone shoot, he's dressed for the apocalypse.[9] And though we 'need the psychos when the apocalypse hits', as those around me have enthusiastically assured me when I question my worth as a disabled woman in a hostile world, I do worry about my place in all of this. I've never been branded amongst the well-mannered mentally ill but I do not think the political violence of the far-left is an option for someone already so traumatised as me. Clips of Bane, the Batman supervillain, have been shared in comparison with the 45th and there is one line I think of especially, 'I was raised in the darkness, you merely adopted it'. So mall goth, so Lostprophets! But as a survivor who did not really survive, who could unironically say she was raised in the darkness, whose hyper vigilance has nearly broken the nose of my beloved, I do not see a punch as a great way to go for me. Though there is something striking about a Neo-Nazi's description of his relationship with an internet forum's cartoon frog interrupted by a smack on the nose (that contrast between the imaginary safe space of ideology and the reality of its opposition) it's not a path I would personally go for. All violence is poisoned for me because I am poisoned, with the violence of a political movement distinct

from the violence of the abused. In short, I'm too feral to go anti-fa. Too crazy to be anyone's comrade.

This is the violence of traumatised embodiment which means the only space I can destroy is my own. I've tried to cut myself out of this and consume my way out of this. And through my cut-up body I cultivate a loneliness that makes me corny. That makes me sit on the plastic green grass of a windowless museum and watch screenings of Woodstock like it means I was there. That makes me seek the morbid fandom of Paris, with its celebrity grave stones and a love for a place so heavy that it has the power to destroy it entirely:

When locks first began to appear more than five years ago, some "could be seen as rather pleasant, but as years passed they took on such proportions that they were no longer acceptable for the cultural heritage" of Paris, Mr. Julliard said.

Most of the locks look rather flimsy, bought for 5 or 10 euros (\$5.50 to \$11) along the quays on either side of the Seine, but with hundreds of thousands hanging on the bridge, they were too heavy for its elegant ironwork. There was a constant risk that batches of the locks or even a whole panel could have come crashing down on the boats passing beneath. For some time, the city has periodically replaced whole sections of the bridge, only to see them fill again with locks. [\[10\]](#)

I see it too, in the work Juno Calypso a feminist photographer who took herself on a one-woman honeymoon, photographing herself in the love spaces of the coupled, heart shaped tubs and mirrored ceiling, made up and alone. Her photographs speak of "the area in between desire and disappointment" where images are both "sad and sexy". [\[11\]](#) The sad lap dance. The way Donald Trump has warped the words 'so beautiful' beyond meaning. (Coincidentally it seems that the children of Syria are in fact beautiful, if still utterly unwanted, but only when they are dead.)

Desire is a death space and fandom is a failure, but there is hope even in heaven. In Charlie Brooker's 'Black Mirror' lies the party town of San Junipero. A gay girl afterlife of neon beaches and makeover montages. Heaven is a place on earth, if only in our head. Because pop fandom is a queer kind of dysphoria, all the day dreams, celebrity ships, the unrealised crushes, unreciprocated love, parties no one came to, weekends spent alone, bodies we could have been, living forever in paradise, finally finding their potential, finding their form. The impossible redemption is realised. There are pink signs and white sands and blue light and everyone is young and everything is fun. I want to live there, or maybe I always have or already do.

But until I can be a full time San Junipero resident I stay in the suburbs playing video games in the dark. 'Night in the Woods' is my favourite, an indie side scroller that follows a college drop out cartoon cat named Mae

aimlessly wander through her suburban home town of Possum Falls. She shoplifts from Hot Topic, plays bad bass and disappoints her parents. There aren't so many jobs, or mobile phone reception, and her mental health is getting bad again. There's monsters in the woods, and they're swallowing up the unwanted and the unproductive. And there's this one song her band plays that I keep thinking about, that keeps playing in my head:

"I just want to diiiiie anywhere else-If
Only I could diiiiie anywhere else-So
Come with me, let's diiiiie anywhere else
An-y-where... just not here"
-Die Anywhere Else, Night in the Woods

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- [1] John Hall, 'Lostprophets singer Ian Watkins remanded in custody after appearing in court accused of conspiring to rape one-year-old girl', *The Independent*, Wednesday 19 December 2012
- [2] Ed. 'Lostprophets' Ian Watkins sentenced to 35 years over child sex offences', *BBC*, 18th December 2013
- [3] Steven Morris, 'Lostprophets' Ian Watkins admits sex offences including attempted rape of baby', *The Guardian*, Tuesday 26th November 2013
- [4] Ed, 'Ian Watkins could be 'most dangerous sex offender I have ever seen' - officer', *The Guardian*, Wednesday 18th December 2013
- Ed. 'Lostprophets' Ian Watkins sentenced to 35 years over child sex offences', *BBC*, 18th December 2013
- [5] Ed., Convicted paedophile Ian Watkins told fan: 'It was mega lolz', *The Guardian*, Wednesday 18th December 2013
- [6] Jack Smith, 'Lostprophets Start Something Review', *BBC*, 2004
- [7] Johnny Loftus, Last Train Home: Song Review, All Music
- [8] Heather Schwedel, 'Should We Care What Steve Bannon Wears in the Oval Office?', *Slate*, January 30th 2017
- [9] "He's not dressing for workplace success, to climb the ladder, to score points with the boss—he's dressing for the apocalypse."
-Heather Schwedel, 'Should We Care What Steve Bannon Wears in the Oval Office?', *Slate*, January 30th 2017
- [10] Alissa J. Rubin, 'Paris Bridge's Love Locks Are Taken Down', *New York Times*, June 1st 2015
- [11] Quoted from Juno Calypso's Arnolfini Talk 'Performing for the Camera', January 2017