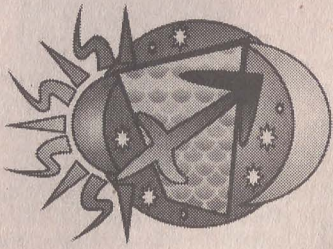


Cultural Corner

November 2008

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Garret's Smear'd Crystal Ball



Sagittarius: November 22 through

December 21: Half of your family will argue that Thanksgiving must be celebrated because it is both a national and family tradition. The other half of your family will argue against doing so because they feel it is the celebration of genocide. You will stay out of the arguments, and instead cook up some Kraft Easy Mac for dinner, followed by a long walk with the dog.

Capricorn: December 22 through

January 19: Christmas and New Years Eve will be spent with some insanely religious/fascist step parents after your actual parents drive all the way from Alpena, Mich. to Nebraska in order to ditch you, 17, and your sister, 15, at a hospital. They drive away yelling "Thank the Lord for safe haven laws!!!" If you are expecting an X-mas card from them, do not hold your breath.

Aquarius: January 20 through February

18: You will ask the beautiful woman you have been in love with for the longest time out to dinner on Valentine's

Day. She will shock your senses by claiming to be your long-lost mother, who left you at a priest's doorstep shortly after your father died of unknown causes. She will also reveal that your real name is not Jimmy, but actually "Oedipus".

Pisces: February 19 through March 20:

Since you are now 21, you can legally drink. You will spend St. Patrick's Day doing just that. You will remember nothing, and wake up in a jail cell. "Where am I?" you think to yourself. You then look to your right and think to yourself, "And why is that dangerous thug looking at me like that while rubbing the front of his pants?"

Aries: March 21 through April 19:

Your best friend claims that the demon monkeys in his head are telling him to blow your brains out with the shotgun he's holding in his hands. You will laugh and say something to the effect that it is April Fool's Day. I will not reveal what happens next, but type "scanners head explosion" into YouTube's search function to get an idea what your doom will look like.

Taurus: April 20 through May 20:

After being ten years apart, you will meet up with your buds at the Dry Dock. You will all get plowed, laugh about old times, and each get stabbed in the gut by one or two of the criminal scum that occupy that bar. You will all die at the same time, but, ironically your funerals will all be held at different churches, at different times, and you will all be buried in different cemeteries.

Gemini: May 21 through June 21:

My smear'd crystal ball—which really should be cleaned sometime—for some odd reason cannot show me your fortune. It is no big deal though. It would

have just told me of something bad happening to you and/or you getting killed in some absurd, tragic way, so you did not miss much.

Cancer: June 22 through July 22:

Keeping with the tradition of heroes such as Joe the Plumber and Tito the Builder, you too will now be held up as an idol of the Caucasian, Republican, conservative, patriotic, nationalist, imperialist, Christian, homophobic, semi-racist (depends on "who" you are talking about) middle-class (i.e. "Real America"). You are Noel the Deadbeat: you live in Alpena, barely graduated high school, have no desire to go to college, spend your free time at the bowling alley, imagining you are "The Dude" from *The Big Lebowski*, work at Wal-Mart as a greeter and janitor, and waste your weeknights watching Fox News and waiting for the next VH1 reality show to come on.

Leo: July 23 through August 22:

You and your little brother are both playing in the street when a minivan turns the corner and speeds toward you both. There is no time to escape. You grab your brother by the hips and hold him up in front of you, praying that, by utilizing him as a shield, you will be spared the worst of the damage. You were right in your assumptions! You only get a few scratches and your brother is waiting for you at the pearly gates to smack you.

Virgo: August 23 through September

22: Certain people who post on alpenanow.com infuriate you with their opinions so much that you challenge them all to a brawl. You give them your address, a description of what your vehicle looks like and a description of what

you look like. A few of them show up at your door, ready to accept your challenge. You cower underneath your bed, screaming about how you are right and they are wrong. Your car is subsequently vandalized.

Libra: September 23 through October

22: You have been sentenced to prison for taking bribes and gifts from big corporations. As the judge leaves the court room, you think about all the great stuff you receive and yell out loud for everyone to hear, "It was worth it! By George, that generic fish statue was worth the hell I'm about to experience!"

Scorpio: October 23 through November

21: You will dress up as Charlie Brown for Halloween, expecting that people will give you rocks instead of the usual treats. You will be disappointed to find that, instead of rocks, you are giving rotten apples filled with rusty, blood-covered razor blades and candy that was previously submerged in a deadly aphrodisiac called Spanish Fly.

"It serves no purpose. Well, I guess that's not strictly true. It gives astrology columnists jobs, and it allows people to shirk responsibility for their actions. 'I'm sorry I pushed that button Mr. President, sir, but Saturn was out of sync and my houses were screwed up.'—magician and skeptic Penn Jillette on astrology"

Garret's Smear'd Crystal Ball is written by Garret Schuelke. He is not a professional astrologer, but rather a lonely, cynical, and pessimistic writer and college student. The horoscopes here are figments of his imagination and are intended for entertainment purposes only.

Now, to review...

Icy Sparks: A

Linda Reames

Staff Writer

This book is about a girl named Icy Sparks who lives with her grandparents in a town in Kentucky. She goes to school until she acts up in class and gets sent to a hospital. She meets friends, and hangs out with a woman named Miss Emily who knows what is like to be an outcast. Then, later in the story Icy tries to control her behavior to find out what is wrong. Her grandfather dies after that and her grandmother starts to go to church where she finds God. In the end, Icy finds out what is wrong with her and accepts it. I like this story because you really get to know how Icy controls her behavior. Sometimes when you go through hard times you try to make it right, but in the end things come together and you have to have faith that God will take care of you. If you are going through a hard time, just remember that you can do it. Don't give up.



Capital Lights: This Is An Outrage A

Bethany Bohlen

Staff Writer

The appropriate word for Capital Lights' smashing debut, *This Is An Outrage*, is "infectious." Packed full of synthesizers, captivating guitar rhythms, nostalgia, and irrepressibly catchy melodies, this album is one that will stay in your head for good, and it's outrageously likely that you really won't mind.

"Mile Away" is highlighted by the sound of the 1980s, while "Let The Little Lady Talk" carries echoes from the progressive rock of the 1970s. The style of the majority of the tracks on *This Is An Outrage*, is a mix of the best of those decades with the pop-punk genre of today. The finest representatives are "Worth As Much As A Counterfeit Dollar" and the boisterous opening track "Outrage."

The music isn't all that'll get inside your head. The Tulsa quartet's lyrics are authentic—rich with conviction, hope, and relevance. Every song tells a story, ranging from breakup anthems, "Re-

member the Day" and "Work It Out", to the Bible-based "Return."

"We're really big proponents of writing about the experiences we deal with on a day to day basis," frontman Bryson Phillips told musicfaith.com.

"Frank Morris" is the only place to find acoustic guitar (in the final bridge of the final song), but it's well worth the wait, giving a fictional account of an escape from Alcatraz.

One might suppose that the album's stylistic consistence equals monotony. However, in a genre diagnosed with E.S.S.S.S. (Every Song Sounds the Same Syndrome), *This Is An Outrage* promises to keep its listeners entertained. From the refreshingly random album cover to the cleverly worded lyrics, Capital Lights has unleashed a project worthy of an uproar.

This Is An Outrage was released in July 2008 on Tooth and Nail Records. Some tracks are available for a listen on the internet (myspace.com/capitalights), and the full 12-track album is up for sale on iTunes for \$7.99.

Charlie Bartlett: A

Arielle Peirce

Staff

Writer

Charlie Bartlett, starring Anton Yelchin, depicts a rebellious, witty, and charming teenage boy who finds a way to get kicked out of every boarding school he attends. After moving to public school, Charlie boosts his popularity points by becoming the school's underground psychiatrist in a boy's bathroom stall. He dishes out advice and strong prescription pills prescribed by his personal psychiatrist to troubled students. Charlie immediately rises to star status among his peers. As if he hasn't created enough of a stir already, Charlie falls in love with the principal's bold daughter, Susan (Kat Dennings of *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*).

Charlie Bartlett distinctly portrays the chaos of the pill popping era. There are slight exaggerations, such as the school dance turned rave due to Charlie and chum's distribution of Ritalin. Charlie Bartlett is humorous, cunning, and portrays a decent picture of today's so-called "troubled youth". It balances its comedic tone with a serious and emotional one as well.

The cast includes infamous Robert Downey Jr. as the disenchanting, alcoholic principal and Hope Davis as Charlie's nonchalant mother. As the plot begins to unravel, it becomes conclusive that Charlie has more of his own issues to handle and that there is a whole lot more to learn. *Charlie Bartlett* is a must-see film that leaves viewers wowed and induces intriguing thoughts.

Nights in Rodanthe: B+

Katie Welch

Staff Writer

Looking for a movie that is going to make you cry? *Nights in Rodanthe* would be that movie. The movie is based on the book by Nicholas Sparks.

From the second the movie starts to when the screen blacks out, *Nights in Rodanthe* is a very predictable movie. Diane Lane and Richard Gere playing the two leading roles of Adrienne Willis and Dr. Paul Flanner keep the movie going. Even from the seats you can sense the onscreen chemistry that the actors have.

Adrienne Willis (Lane) goes through a rough divorce with her husband Jack (Christopher Meloni). To help her deal with it she volunteers to look after a friend's hotel at Rodanthe. Dr. Paul Flanner (Gere) is the only guest. Throughout Paul's stay, things between Adrienne and him heat up. When he leaves, Paul heads to Africa to help the sick orphans and Adrienne heads back home to take care of her two kids. Letters race back and forth between the two yet Paul never makes it back to see her.

If it wasn't for the predictable end it would be one heck of a movie.

Gears of War 2: A+

Gary Pikula

Staff Writer

Director of Epic Game, Cliff Bleszinski, said that *Gears of War 2* was going to be bigger, better, and more badass than the original *Gears of War*. He was absolutely right.

Marcus Fenix and his partner

Dom return to the campaign mode to battle the onslaught of the locust horde that is destroying cities on the planet Sera. The locust horde returns to the game bigger and stronger than *Gears of War*. After the opening mission in the hospital the battles are bigger and the firefights are more intense. The story is deep and captivating. After watching the opening cut scene and playing through the first mission you will not want to put the game down.

The campaign will keep you on the edge of your seat through the entire game, but the multiplayer will keep you coming back for more. Multiplayer levels are no longer dark and grey, but filled with vibrant colors. Graphics overall are stunning even on a standard definition TV.

Game play is much different than *Gears of War* but is far more balanced. No more repetitive shotgun battles against your friends. In *Gears of War 2* you need to learn to use every weapon effectively to achieve victory.

Overall, *Gears of War 2* is exactly what Cliff Bleszinski said it would be; bigger, better, and more badass than the first game. It is well worth the \$60 price tag and will likely be the king on Xbox Live for a long time.

Good Taste: A+

Robert Gandy

Staff Writer

In April, when I moved from Washington, D.C. to Alpena, it was with a heavy heart I said goodbye to all the favorite restaurants of my childhood. When my education bids me to move on again, it will be with that same bittersweet sadness I will say goodbye to Jimmy Chen's Hunan Chinese Restaurant.

The restaurant is a delight to the senses from the moment you walk in the door. The smells of cooking garlic, spices, meats and seafood, and the ceramic tomb soldier are a prelude to the artistry found within. The warm greeting of the host—frequently Mr. Chen himself—shows how you will be treated: like family.

Check out the many restaurant awards on the way to your seat. In addition to the statuesque guards, the walls and tables are decorated with a number of paintings and calligraphies, many original works of art by Mr. Chen.

The atmosphere of the restaura-

rant and charm of the staff are only outdone by the quality of the food. The ingredients are always fresh, and the dishes flavorful. The menu item I judge all Chinese restaurants by is Orange Chicken. This dish is relatively simple and can be done a thousand different ways, but certain benchmarks of quality are universal. Here you will find the chicken is fresh and juicy, with a full bodied sauce that is not overpowering. The vegetables are always fresh and perfectly cooked. The quality of ingredients and skillful preparation is a rare and beautiful harmony not often found in places that don't charge you an arm and a leg.

If you like spicy foods, start your meal with the Hot and Sour soup—delightfully made with shitake mushrooms, tofu, and a delicious hot broth with a kick. Chen's Russian soup is also a perennial favorite, loaded with fresh vegetables and pasta.

If you are unfamiliar with items on the menu, the staff is always helpful with explanations, but the best way to learn is to dive right in. The buffet offers a wide range of chicken, pork, beef and seafood dishes to let you sample the spectrum of flavors.

For the adventurous seeking a taste truly unique to Alpena, try the sushi available only on Fridays and Saturdays. Mr. Chen's sushi is always fresh, beautifully presented and of a quality once thought only found on the Atlantic or Pacific coasts.

To satisfy your sweet tooth, end your meal with the sweet buns. The light, subtle flavor compliments your meal without overpowering the pallet, and goes perfectly with the ever present hot tea. Be sure to try it with the light pink plum sauce found in a jar at each table for a heavenly taste found nowhere else.

Just as I felt a lifetime away from the foods I knew and loved, Jimmy Chen's Hunan Restaurant brings world class flavor and a feeling of home to Northern Michigan.