

ALBUM REVIEW

'Black Gives Way to Blue'

Reviewed by Jim Warkulwiz
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

"In your darkest hour, you strike gold." This lyric from grunge band Alice in Chains' song "Lesson Learned" on new album *Black Gives Way to Blue* seems a fitting mantra for a band that once had one foot in the grave. However, the songwriting talents of guitarist and vocalist Jerry Cantrell could not be silenced long. Fans and critics alike believed that a talent like Layne

Staley's could never be replaced and the reunion would be a mistake. Looks like some may have to eat their words. The album blends dark hard rock with thoughtful acoustic ballads to such a degree that you would think the band had been playing together during the entire hiatus.

"Check My Brain" is a perfect example of Cantrell's vision on a rock song. Take a Metallica riff, slather it with some mud — obviously not in short supply in rainy Seattle — and you have an opening riff that sounds like the revving of a power tool rather than a mere guitar.

In the style of the band's acoustic songs, William DuVall and Cantrell play with the harmonies of the vocals in front of hand drums and acoustic chords as the undertones. DuVall, taking Staley's place, channels the loved singer's energy but brings a lighter atmosphere to the music.

This difference doesn't hurt the song but improves it. DuVall seems like he can go higher and louder than Staley could, but he holds back for the sake of the song's inflection.

While Staley was such a force behind the band, DuVall acknowledges his role as a replacement but still manages to sing in his own voice without overpowering the band.

The album would be up there with the group's signature works like *Dirt* and *Jar of Flies* if not for two problems:

First, some of the songs can seem a tad repetitive. Cantrell's deep guitar tones can sometimes blend together.

Second, its first single, "A Looking in View," tries to do too much. It is as if the band were trying to win back fans with death metal chords that are too deep and vocals from DuVall that fall more into step with a hyped-up Scott Wyland than a replacement for the more mellow Staley.

For the rest of *Black*, the band still knows what it's doing. Perhaps grunge isn't dead after all.

Grade: B+
Download: "Check My Brain"

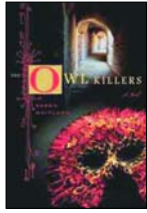
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BOOK REVIEW

'The Owl Killers'

Reviewed by Ricky Morales
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Corruption, famine and disease may plague mankind, but its deadliest enemy is ignorance, which is what drives Karen Maitland's latest book.



Though characters function mostly as plot devices in her grim medieval novel, *The Owl Killers*, their suffering at the hands of society's inadequacies is palpable. Once its horror wrenches your attention, it refuses to let go.

The novel is set in the year 1321 at a height of social unrest in a small English village. Nearby, a group of women from France have formed a beguinege — a sort of convent that operates independently from the Church — to serve God by helping those in need.

The villagers believe the women are a bad omen and are split between the church and legends of the Owlman, a demon, and his servants, the Owl Masters.

Maitland effectively builds the tension between the beguinege, church and Owl Masters, mirroring them in a web of greed and corruption that feels inescapable. She is merciless with her characters; the brutality they endure is both cringe-worthy and shocking. Her consistently somber tone insists that mankind's pain is inevitable, and no one, not even beguines with best intentions, manages to skirt confronting death or his or her own sinfulness. No real hope exists in its pages, and when it does, Maitland squashes it swiftly.

Based in historical fact, Maitland's dark tale never necessarily crosses into fantasy. Supernatural events occur, but the novel leaves it up to the reader as to whether these elements actually happened. Given Maitland's theme of faith — or lack thereof — throughout the story, this careful execution lends the novel a second layer, slightly elevating it from simple escapism.

However, while her characters' thoughts are developed well, their voices aren't. Nothing distinguishes one character's perspective from another one but the content of the narrative, and their descriptions of the unfolding action sound contrived and unrealistic.

Instead, Maitland chooses to flesh out her characters with pure plot, and once the action begins, there is no time to ponder anything. It's a downhill trek of decisions and consequences.

Though still meant to be an interesting read, Maitland's book is on the higher end of escapist adventures. Its concepts aren't necessarily new, but they're worth considering, especially with a tight plot in which doom is all but inevitable.

Grade: B+

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Black Sails In The Sunset
"Kill Caustic"
"Girls Not Grey"
"6 To 8"
"37mm"
"Endlessly, She Said"
"The Leaving Song Pt. II"
Answer That And Stay Fashionable
"The Missing Frame"
"Miss Murder"
"Paper Airplanes"
"Death of Seasons"
"This Celluloid Dream"
"Dancing Through Sunday"
Decemberunderground
"Morningstar"
Shut Your Mouth and Open Your Eyes
Very Proud of Ya
"Summer Shudder"
"The Days of the Phoenix"
"Wester"
"Smile"
"The Interview"
"Kiss and Control"
"Totalimmortal"
Sing The Sorrow
"Medicate"
"Affliction"
"Silver and Cold"
"Miseria Cantare"
"The Killing Lights"
"Love Like Winter"

AFI album egotistical, but refined

Reviewed by Kevin Sullivan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Of the 12 songs on *Crash Love*, AFI's latest record of ultra-serious rock, four include the words "I" or "mine" in the titles. After eight albums, Davey Havok still has nothing to sing about except himself and the hurt feelings he drags around like a martyr.

Despite this and a long bout of being rock's most flamboyantly glamorous goth band, AFI has revitalized itself into a more restrained and more mature unit.

AFI has always been a band that flourished on evolution, its last albums sounding nothing like the brute force of their hardcore punk beginnings. Until now, the East Bay hardcore element had always shown up on its records, even after they clearly ditched the genre for greater things. On *Crash Love*, these old tendencies for shrill screaming are completely absent, which is a good thing. Songs like *Decemberunderground*'s "Kill Caustic" always seemed like they attempted to appease old fans while simultaneously not putting in new listeners who weren't into hardcore.

Here, the band ditches half-measures and simply makes the best

music it can. After a 30-second intro of ambiance and a gothic pummel, Havok interjects with one of his trademark girly yelps, and "Torch Song" starts off the album with one of Jade Puget's best riffs to date.

Puget's guitar work is the standout aspect of the album from front to back. It is heavily layered, sometimes multi-tracking up to four guitars at once.

For the most part, Puget also shows a gift for developing one riff into another, letting the music take space and grow and evolve into the next part.

The chorus to "Beautiful Thieves," however, falls short. Its loud, triumphant blast comes out of nowhere and is certainly not the victorious crescendo the band tries to force it to be.

There are other shortcomings, too. While Puget does his part as a pop punk Johnny Marr, Havok comes across as "Weird Al" imitating Morrissey — as in his voice actually sometimes sounds like "Weird Al" Yankovic doing his best Morrissey. Havok's lyrical abilities also bog down the band from time to time. He's not one to shy away from the trite or cliché — "Oh my dear, please dry your eyes," "I feel nothing at all." He also has a tendency to write lyrics that are altogether meaningless —

"The broken radio was playing suicide," "I'd tear out my eyes for you, my dear/ to see everything you do."

Another detracting point with this album is how nearly every song, after developing pretty interesting music during the verses, always pops into a power chord-backed chorus.

There's no surprise at all in that area.

The band's rhythm section sticks too much to the same pop-punk rule-book throughout the album, creating another source of stagnation in the under-stirred pot.

When Jade Puget joined AFI after the release of *Shut Your Mouth and Open Your Eyes*, the band wasn't much more than a pretty decent hardcore band of the '90s.

His arrival sparked the band's first experiments, adding darker, almost gothic touches to its heavy punk sound.

Puget's influence as a silent leader still shows through today, in spite of how drastically different the band has become. If his ability to focus and his eclecticism were shared by each member, AFI would be a band to reckon with.

Grade: C
Download: "Medicate," "Torch Song," "Okay, I Feel Better Now"

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Wanting Moore

'Love Story' provides political wit

Reviewed by Kristen Karas
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

You can say what you want about Michael Moore, but love him or hate him, it's clear from his films that the man cares about the well-being of Americans.

Through his characteristic brand humor blended with biting commentary, Moore's latest film makes a provocative, hilarious and strong case for why greed is destroying our economic freedom.

Capitalism: A Love Story, Moore's follow-up to 2007's *Sicko* and 2004's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, is a piece that examines problems caused by corruption within America's capitalist culture.

The film explores the impact of corporate America on the average hard-working blue-collar American, highlighting the shocking claim that the top 1 percent of wealthy Americans collectively have more than the bottom 95 percent. Through heart-breaking character portraits and brutal attacks on the wealthy, the film emphasizes the absurdity of our economic system.

Moore has a fascinating ability to mix fact with satire and humor in a way that no other current documentary filmmaker can. Old film clips set in ancient Rome are juxtaposed with modern America to insinuate a link between now and the fall of Rome, while digs at the Bush administration feature famous shots of the former president dancing and playing volleyball. Below the belt? Yes. Effective? Even more so.

Nowhere does he do this better than while discussing the disparities between capitalist ideologies and Christian teaching. Moore takes clips of an old Bible film and overdubs Jesus' voice to have him say he can't

heal someone because of a "pre-existing condition."

Moore's wit, while scathing, is laugh-out-loud funny — enough so that my entire theater literally did. This is not the type of reaction you'd normally expect from a documentary about the economy.

As with all of Moore's films, however, he is at his best when sitting down with average Americans and creating portraits of their needless suffering, showing viewers facets of American life they never knew existed. One such interview reveals certain companies take out life insurance policies on their workers to collect after their deaths — the deceased workers are known as "dead peasants" — without informing their spouses. Moore's interview with one widow, whose cancer-victim husband's former employer collected more than \$1 million without her ever seeing a penny, is particularly moving.

Outside of the character portraits, Moore adds in some of the characteristic antics that made him famous. Similar to his reading of the USA Patriot Act through a mega-phone in an ice cream truck in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, he heads to Wall Street in this film to make "citizens' arrests" of bank bigwigs and wraps yellow crime scene tape around the New York Stock Exchange. The scene is both hilarious and symbolic of the mess that is our current economic status.

The movie's major flaw, is Moore's lack of an alternative. We see that he thinks capitalism does not work, but he fails to be clear on what we should do instead. He doesn't explicitly come

out in favor of socialism but does not say how to effectively change capitalism to make it better. Viewers are left wondering if there really is a form of government that is actually any better.

Despite this, the documentary is both thought-provoking and eye-opening. The local State College crowd that laughed out loud in the theater also erupted in applause by the film's end — whatever you think of him as a person, that is a testament to Moore's growing ability to connect with Americans.

Grade: A-

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