

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Lo-fi high-five music reviews: Dragged Into Sunlight

Liam Strong

lstrong1@uwsuper.edu

Being a Christian was a contributing factor for the worst times of my life. I grew up homophobic without knowing why, other than that it was in the old King James Bible my mother toted everywhere she went. I was elbowed into evangelizing at friends, who quickly ceased being friends after learning I wasn't as real as they thought I was. When

I discovered my identity as not only bisexual, but having grown up with gender dysphoria, I realized that searching for answers was the sickening root to my mental health. I read a lot of Sam Harris, Albert Camus, and other literature that reinforced the truth that Christianity was the cause for the majority of the world's suffering.

Suffering is apparent in the harsh noise record, "Terminal Aggressor II," by blackened sludge metal band Dragged Into Sunlight. A single 28-minute song comprised of three movements, the album shifts from slow guitar effect noise to doom metal, and descending into a death metal frenzy by its finale. After having dealt with the absolutely poor management of Prosthetic Records, Dragged Into Sunlight ritualized an album that encompasses all of their previous ventures, something Krallice floundered on their 2019 EP "Wolf."

The stigma of metal music being full of hatred isn't exactly new; in fact, I can't necessarily disagree with the notion. However, what's important to consider behind all the distortion and visceral sound is that such distortion is in protest of not only the genre's musical predecessors, but the societal enforcement of religious suffering, as well. Eminent in the spastic black metal crescendo of its ending, "Terminal Aggressor II" suggests that evil is a common domicile. Or, perhaps, that "evil," is not the Christian connotation of the word,

but rather a perversion of our actions. I am as evil as I am non-binary. I am as good as I am queer. Evil, despite the attempts of Christianity, is as inevitable, normal, and as equal to goodness as blankets are to a bed. Depending on your definition, it's just a word. Depending on your utilization of hatred, it's more than that. It's hard for me not to hear hate in "Terminal Aggressor II," but what Dragged Into Sunlight are implying could be that hatred is useless, that we have better things to do, that Christians have better things to do than hate.



Dragged Into Sunlight
"Terminal Aggressor II"
(2020)

Lo-fi high-five book reviews: How We Fight for Our Lives

Liam Strong

lstrong1@uwsuper.edu

"How We Fight for Our Lives," by New York based poet, Saeed Jones, is a memoir detailing Jones' upbringing in Lewisville, Texas, with his single mother. Beginning in his childhood, Jones recounts his early realizations of being gay. Likewise, the memoir grapples with what it means to be a gay black man in the South, referencing the murders of James Byrd Jr. and Matthew Shepard, two gay men who were murdered in the late 1990s. As Jones grows up and attends college, the memoir opens up to a vivid portrayal of Jones' mental state while flitting between sexual

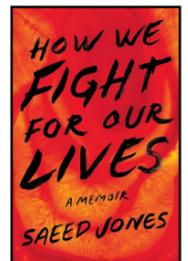
partners. As an honest discussion of burgeoning sexuality in lieu of the racist and homophobic atmosphere of his surroundings, Jones punctuates the means we strive for when developing our identities. The latter portion of the memoir acts as an elegy to Jones' mother, who passed away in 2011 to congestive heart failure. This ending, albeit a bittersweet sentiment, concludes with Jones' acknowledgement to all his mother went through to raise him, send him to college, all the while fighting her own body.

I read Jones' previous col-

lection of poetry, "Prelude to Bruise," the day after I read this memoir, which I felt gave me an extra gateway for insight with specific images of his poems. I recommend reading "How We Fight for Our Lives" first, not just for the visceral understanding of Jones' minimal and unique poetic voice, but because his memoir stands alone as a stalwart voice in the archives of queer literature. Perhaps that's Jones' greatest strength, one that some memoirists seem to outdo themselves with: "How We Fight for Our Lives" is brief (it's about 190 pages), doesn't

overstay its welcome, and although I could ask for more, Jones' memoir is special in its brevity. Much like his poetry, the scenes are more poignant and lasting for me as a reader without any extra fluff or build-up to them. His prose is succinct, yet so transparent in his power to convey in so few words the honest, brutal truth of his upbringing. I wouldn't call "How We Fight for Our Lives" a short, "quick" read, because that would seem to suggest its themes are easy to digest. Rather, Jones' memoir is a seminal note that not all creative nonfiction

books need to extend to the same page length as his peers. I would argue that such precision makes "How We Fight for Our Lives" more effective in its delivery, like a poem, where every single line matters, and every line must stand precipitously on its own.



Saeed Jones
"How We
Fight for Our
Lives" (2019)

Lo-fi high-five movie reviews: Brightburn

Liam Strong

lstrong1@uwsuper.edu

As an avid horror fan, both for mainstream larger budget horror and low-budget schlock films, I sometimes find myself flailing for enjoyment in the swarm of clichés the

horror genre has generated. Even films that take a minutely fresh approach to a well-worn wheel are a respite.

In the advent of combining elements of two genres, "Brightburn" is a superhero horror film that contracts the concept of Superman, but on the

other side of the coin. This leads me to my first initial problem with the movie, in that it functions with all of Superman's character development tropes, except if they created a villainous character as a result. It should go without saying, then, that if you make Superman "evil," then you can probably see the end of this movie coming from miles away.

The premise of "Brightburn" juxtaposes a young son who learns of the brainwashing his parents have committed to pre-

vent him from learning that he's an alien with superpowers. Over the course of awkward familial tensions, the son becomes rather disturbed, secretive, and often lashes out verbally at his parents. Not surprisingly, he kills a few people who end up getting on his nerves. After killing a waitress at a local diner, the son murders his uncle in one of the most brutal death scenes I've seen in a recent horror movie. Somewhere around here he dons the title (only known to himself) of Brightburn, which is the name of their small Kansas town (kids aren't the most original, I guess). Eventually, Brightburn's parents decide that their son is probably the cause for all the recent murders on the news happening in town. His

father tries to shoot him on a hunting trip, but he's pretty much impervious to bullets. Likewise, his mother fails to kill Brightburn with part of the spaceship hidden in their barn that he arrived in as a baby (this functions as his Kryptonite, basically). In his rage, he kills both his parents and the local police force, and the movie ends.

Despite partially developing a troubled character with staggering mental health problems, the movie left much to be desired in terms of writing a backstory and premise distant from Superman.

The cool death scenes (which were the only saving grace for me) cannot be the only thing holding a horror film up on its

legs. If there were more at stake, and a greater chance for the characters to either reason with or defeat Brightburn, then the collapse of the plot under its inevitable weight wouldn't make it so bland.

After seeing the initial trailers for "Brightburn," I was intrigued by the idea of rehashing Superman in a darker light, but in the end, nothing feels new or fresh in any way. Even the coolest line of the movie, deciphered from his home alien language, "Take the World," gets lost in the mix of a plot that had already been written decades ago. There isn't a world to take with "Brightburn," because there isn't any meaning to take away.

