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Newspaper Item

China State Media Accuses Google of Political Agenda

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's state media on Sunday accused Google of pushing a political agenda by "groundlessly accusing the Chinese government" of supporting hacker attacks and by trying to export its own culture, values and ideas.

In a commentary signed by three Xinhua writers, the state news agency also sought to defend the government's Internet censorship, which Google has cited as one reason the world's largest search engine may quit China.

"Regrettably, Google's recent behaviors show that the company not just aims at expanding business in China, but is playing an active role in exporting culture, value and ideas.

"It is unfair for Google to impose its own value and yardsticks on Internet regulation to China, which has its own time-honored tradition, culture and value."

On Friday, the China Business News reported that Google may make an announcement as early as Monday on whether it will pull out of China.

Two months ago, Google said it had been the target of sophisticated hacking attacks originating from inside China, and the company said it would no longer agree to abide by Beijing's censorship rules even if that meant shutting down its Google.cn site.

Since then, the two sides have reportedly been at a standoff, although Google's chief executive, Eric Schmidt, said he hoped to have an outcome soon from talks with Chinese officials.

China requires Internet operators to block words and images the ruling Communist Party deems unacceptable, including those involving politically sensitive topics.

Beijing has also entirely blocked internationally popular websites Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

In the Xinhua commentary, the writers accused Google of violating international norms.

“In fact, no country allows unrestricted flow on the Internet of pornographic, violent, gambling or superstitious content, or content on government subversion, ethnic separatism, religious extremism, racialism, terrorism and anti-foreign feelings,” the commentary stated.

As in other disputes with foreign businesses and governments, the commentary said China’s stance in this case was a “pure internal affair.”

The writers said China’s Internet development would prosper without Google, while the company would be the “biggest loser.”

“Whether it leaves or not, the Chinese government will keep its Internet regulation principles unchanged. One company’s ambition to change China’s Internet rules and legal system will only prove to be ridiculous.

“And whether leaving or not, Google should not continue to politicize itself, as linking its withdrawal to political issues will lose Google’s credibility among Chinese netizens.”

Although it is the global leader, Google operates at a distant second place to Baidu Inc, China’s domestic search engine leader, which has benefitted from the dispute.

Baidu’s shares have surged more than 44 percent since Google’s announcement that it could pull out of China, while Google’s stock has fallen roughly 6.3 percent.

(Reporting by Ken Wills; Editing by Jeremy Laurence)

Picture: A man walks past the Google logo in front of its China headquarters building in Beijing March 19, 2010. REUTERS/Jason Lee

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Palm Can Still Win: Here Are Five Things They Need To Do

Palm kept its word this week and disappointed investors with dismal 3Q results. Investors responded by slashing another 20% from the embattled company's shares. The financial situation doesn't seem very good, and time is running out to turn things around as Palm continues to lose the big bets it has placed on the Pre and Pixi.

This is how bad things are: A couple of analysts trimmed their price targets for Palm shares to \$0. The stock is trading at a 52-week low, and at half the 50-day moving average. The total investment by Elevation Partners, some \$475 million, would be 70% of the market cap of the entire company — if they could take it out dollar for dollar.

Several analysts downgraded the company and one of them, Peter of Misek Canaccord Adams, basically sees no future for Palm. "With what appears to be roughly 12 months of cash on hand, an accelerating burn rate, a complete lack of earnings visibility, and substantial debt and preferred equity, we no longer see any value in the company's common equity," he said in a note.

The good news? The phone is becoming just an app on a smart, portable device. The disruptive contours of that smart, portable device is still in flux, and about to get buffeted again by the release of Apple's iPad in about two weeks.

This is anybody's game — heck, if even Google is worried about the next Google, why can't Palm be the next Palm?

Here are five ideas humbly suggested to get the iconic company back on track.

1) The MiFi Killer

One of the Pre's buried advantages is its ability to create a broadband hotspot for up to five devices. So does the MiFi, which is known for that — and nothing else. And guess what one of the next big consumer jihad will be about? (We hope) the inability to tether whatever device you have to whatever connected device you also have.

In the olden days I used to take people's breath away by being able to surf the Web on a Palm using my Bluetooth-enabled phone. The setup was tedious, but no company created technical impediments to prevent me from doing so. Now we live in a world where every device needs its own broadband plan as a crass way of increasing revenue. That's

revolting, and consumers will revolt. Get ahead of this. And at the same time, stick it to your nemesis by becoming ...

2) The only phone that iPad 3G users need

That's right. There are a lot of bruised feelings about the need for a separate plan for those who will be buying the 3G-enabled iPad at the end of April. We've written about the insidiously unnecessary design decision to use one type of SIM in the iPad and another in the iPhone, making the connection unswappable *and* untetherable. Tethering will be a battleground, and you have nothing to loss by siding with consumers.

Some iPhone users have told me in all seriousness that owning an iPad will make it less necessary to have an iPhone. They are thinking about going for a junk handset and basic plan and living an iPad-centric life. This means you have a wedge issue with Apple fans who maybe need just a little push so they will want a phone which, far from junk, is arguably its equal.

Apple did you a big favor by making a smartphone that convinced normal people they needed one, and you need to slip seriously into your well-deserved seat at the table.

3) The Android Killer

None of the newest cool kids really know your history. I'm no expert on the fine points of the OS game, as commenters will no doubt point out for me. But you did come up with the first bitchin' portable OS, and it still rocks. From at least the average user's perspective Android has pretty much the same utility — multitasking being high on the list — but you were there first. More than a decade ago.

This might be one of those instances where nostalgia works. "This isn't your father's WebOS — but, thank Heaven, it is ..."

4) Press The GPS Advantage

Your ads tell us too much, and not enough. How did Verizon and Google market the Droid to the press? GPS. They planted the seed of an idea that the Droid was was the killer GPS appliance, good enough for your car. Everything is going mobile now. Nothing matters if you can't solve the 'What can I do from here' problem.

Sure, some of this is an app issue. Oh, right. You used to have the most exhilarated third-party development base in the history of computing. Make your GPS integration the envy of all the others, and if you think it already is, make us believe it starting now.

5) Customer Service

Ok, this one is easy, but it also isn't. Remember when some people went nuts because they didn't get the satisfaction they felt they deserved when the Nexus One rolled out — no phone support from Google, etc?

The only differentiator anymore is the customer relationship. This is especially true in the crowded smartphone market, where (let's face it) all devices pretty much do the same thing and the hardware/software differences nibble at the edges — wired.com gave equally high marks for the Pre, Nexus One and the iPhone.

Apple provides you with a Genius, but you have to go to them, and schedule, and wait. Lots of the time customers just need their hand held, answer a dumb question — for you to sound like you understand, and not in the scripted way that we are know is phony.

So: Answer the phone on the second ring. Have a human answer. Have that person say, as if they were the local bank: "This is Palm. Fred speaking. How may I direct your call?" "Fred" may hear a lot of nonsense before he can get an idea of where to send that call. That's a skill — hire some former suicide-line volunteers. Pay these people more than they'd get doing "the same thing" somewhere else. And reconnect with customers who don't want to hate you, but are prepared to in an internet second.

We've said it before: Palm is worth saving. But Palm isn't likely to save itself by more of the same. Sometimes you don't have to burn the boats if you zag in time. We'd like to think there's still time for Palm.

See Also:

- [Shut Up and Text: Why Voice Is Just Another Phone Feature ...](#)
- [Guess What? Google Fears the Next 'Google'](#)
- [Palm Acknowledges the Pre Isn't an 'Anything' Killer. But Is It ...](#)
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- [Google Nexus One Leaves Customers Sour](#)
- [Palm Unveils Its Long-Awaited Smartphone, the Pre](#)
- [PreDevCamp Aims to Burgeon Palm WebOS Development](#)
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Scenarios: What's Next for Google's Operations in China?

SHANGHAI (Reuters) — Two months after Google shook the world with its threat to leave China on censorship and hacking concerns, there are increasing signs that an exit is imminent as the two sides refuse to back down.

Google said in January a key condition to staying on in China, the world's largest internet market by users, would be an end to rules that require it to self-censor results. Beijing has repeatedly thrown cold water on any such expectation, maintaining that all Internet firms need to abide by local laws. The China Business News is reporting that Google could make announcement on Monday.

Following are the possible paths the world's largest search company could take, and the possible reactions from Beijing:

1) GOOGLE PARTIALLY WITHDRAWS

In addition to its Chinese search site, Google.cn, Google has two research and development centers, hundreds of sales and customer service staff and engineers working on its Android mobile operating system and other initiatives in China.

Google could well decide to pull the plug on Google.cn, but leave its other China-based operations intact.

The manner in which the company executes such a pull-out would also be of importance to its employees and reputation.

If Google goes out with a bang by halting censorship of its China site before shutting it down, hundreds of local employees could be at risk for working for a company that broke local laws.

But given the very public nature of its initial threat, many believe such an underhanded withdrawal is unlikely.

By being up-front about shutting its China search site, Google — whose unofficial motto is "Don't do evil" — could generate positive publicity from sympathetic quarters in the West, including politicians, media and human rights groups.

2) GOOGLE FULLY WITHDRAWS

Google could decide that China isn't worth the trouble and completely pull out, including all its R&D and Android support operations.

Such a move would put hundreds more out of work, and could jeopardize firms like Dell and Lenovo that were banking on Android-based phones as a major part of their push into the China cellular market.

Independent software application developers who were counting on Android phones to carry their programs could also find themselves out in the cold.

China warned last week that it would be "unfriendly and irresponsible" for Google to suddenly stop filtering searches, and added the search giant would have to bear whatever consequences might follow.

Some say that such words could be a veiled warning from Beijing that Google would not be welcome in China if it leaves the local search market, giving the U.S. search giant no other choice than to pull out entirely.

3) GOOGLE STAYS IN CHINA

Google could cut a deal with Beijing and work out a plan to stay in China under a face-saving compromise.

Many consider this outcome unlikely as Google has stated that freedom from censorship is key to its staying. A condition Beijing is unlikely to bow to given its insistence on direct or indirect control of all media in the country.

In giving in to Google, Beijing would also set a dangerous precedent, possibly prompting other popular Web site operators such as Baidu and Sina to request similar exemption from self-censorship laws.

Thus the probability of regulators bending rules just for Google is highly unlikely, meaning Google would still have to self-censor at some level if it wanted to stay.

(Reporting by Melanie Lee; editing by Doug Young and Sanjeev Miglani)

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Sex.com Firesale Delayed As Creditors Bicker

The strange saga of the jinxed Sex.com domain name continued Thursday as its sale in a foreclosure auction was postponed just hours before the sale was to start due to drastic, last minute legal filing by the domain owner's creditors.

Sex.com has a tawdry but telling history. Its current owner spent \$14 million dollars on the property in 2006 — the most ever for a domain name at the time — and is now selling it off after the property failed to appreciate in value. The bidding starts at \$1 million. And to be sure, the domain name retains some value and, even as people use search engines and search-enabled browser address bars to find what they want without typing in *keyword.com*, an old habit that spawned a billion-dollar industry of crappy, content-less web pages like windshield-wipers.com.

Sex.com was originally bought by entrepreneur Gary Kremen, founder of match.com, in 1994. He did nothing with it. But a year later Stephen M. Cohen tricked Network Solutions into transferring ownership to him. After a five-year legal battle, ownership was restored to Kremen, who then sold it to Escom LLC for what is thought to be the most ever paid for a domain. Escom was backed by DOM Partners LLC, which acquired it by default and is now peddling it to the highest bidder.

On Thursday, creditors of Escom lodged an “involuntary Chapter 11 bankruptcy petition” against Escom in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California in San Fernando Valley.

“Petitioners took this action to protect their interests and to maximize value for all other creditors and equity holders,” the creditor’s lawyers said via e-mail. “The filing will stay the public auction foreclosure proceedings ... which petitioners believe would have diminished the value of Escom’s assets.”

The auction page simply says that the sale is postponed, with no further details.

The history of the domain is so twisted, complete with forged documents, shell companies and a bounty — that there is already an entire book devoted to it.

It’s not clear at this point why anyone would want to get involved, but when or if the auction comes around again, you’ll need a certified check for \$1 million to get in on this once-in-a-lifetime business opportunity.

See Also:

- Hot Property Sex.com on Auction Block
- Wired 11.08: The Prisoner of Sex.com
- The Sordid Saga of Sex.com
- Sex.com Loser Claims Poverty
- Judge Orders Sex.com Returned

Report: Google Working With Intel, Sony on TV Project

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) — Google is working with Intel and Sony to develop a new class of internet-enabled televisions and set-top boxes, according to the *New York Times*.

The effort, known as Google TV, has been under way for several months and is based on Google's Android software which is currently available in certain smartphones, the Times, citing people with knowledge of the project, reported on Wednesday.

Logitech International is also involved and is developing peripheral devices, such as a tiny keyboard.

"The partners envision technology that will make it as easy for TV users to navigate Web applications, like the Twitter social network and the Picasa photo site, as it is to change the channel," the Times reports.

Google has begun testing the set top box technology with Dish Network, the *Times* said.

Representatives from Google, Intel and Sony were not immediately available for comment. A Logitech spokeswoman said the company did not have any comment.

Efforts to converge computing and TV watching have had a uneven history, despite such major attempts to bridge the gap as Microsoft's Media Center and Apple TV, and more recently such things as TiVo's embrace of YouTube and other web-based services. There are many theories as why these two media appear seem more like reluctant fiances than soulmates; real computing of any kind requires a real keyboard, viewing a TV set or home theater system is done from a far greater distance than a laptop, TV is immersive — and so is e-mail, surfing, social networking, etc.

And yet streaming TV is now an app on smartphones, and your gaming system can connect you to Facebook and other social media. Apple's iPad, set to be released on April 3 may finally deliver disruptive punch to the promise of casual computing in the living room — not as an appendage of television, but as a synergistic component of the entertainment hub.

Google is expected to deliver a toolkit to outside programmers within the next couple of months, and products based on the software could appear as soon as this summer, the *Times* reports.

(Reporting by Alexei Oreskovic; Editing by Bernard Orr. Additional reporting by Wired.com)

See Also:

- [5 Reasons Why Apple TV Rules, 5 Reasons Why it Sucks](#)
- [The 27-Inch iMac Is the New Apple TV](#)
- [What We Want in an Apple TV](#)
- [Why Apple TV Must Evolve to Avoid Extinction](#)
- [Review: Roku Netflix Set-Top Box Is Just Shy of Totally Amazing](#)
- [Move Over Netflix — Roku to Open the Box](#)
- [Total Media Convergence, Courtesy of Microsoft](#)
- [CEDIA 2008: Microsoft's Media Center Starts Anew](#)
- [Google TV: Google, Sony, Intel Team-Up to Make Television](#)
- [Google, Dish Network Reportedly Test Android-Based Satellite TV](#)

Canon First in Line for Its Own Top-Level Domain, .canon

Canon announced Wednesday it intends to be the first company to say goodbye to .com and buy its own top-level domain, taking advantage of ICANN's decision to broadly widen the number of top-level names. If — or rather when — this starts happening, web address conventions may never be the same.

If successful, the global electronics giant, perhaps best known for its digital SLR cameras, will open the .canon global Top Level Domain, or TLD, as soon as late 2011. And then the dot-com revolution, still only 25 years old this week, gets really interesting: Surfers will be able to navigate to “http://canon” to reach its website. Canon employees could create e-mail addresses like “Jim@canon.”

“Canon hopes to globally integrate open communication policies that are intuitive and easier to remember compared with existing domain names such as ‘canon.com,’” the company said in a press release. “Canon has made the official decision to begin necessary procedures to acquire ‘.canon’ upon the introduction of the new system.”

Of course, many (but not all) web browsers already resolve the correct site when you type just a company name in the address bar — but this is the search engine working under the hood making its best guess. Typing “Intel” into the address bar of the latest version of Firefox, for example, gets you straight to <http://www.intel.com/>. Ironically, typing in “Canon” takes you to a Google search page whose top choice was that company, but apparently the page is not strongly enough associated with the word to trigger a “Feeling Lucky” choice.

ICANN hopes that opening up the name space will lead to innovation and allow for more choices for those seeking to register a domain name, given how hard it is to find a name in the dominant .com TLD. For instance, restaurants across the world called Gino's Pizza could be [ginospizza.socal](http://ginospizza.socal.com), [ginospizza.chicago](http://ginospizza.chicago.com) and [ginospizza.westvirginia](http://ginospizza.westvirginia.com).

ICANN won't finalize the rules for landing your own TLD until at least the middle of 2011. But the draft rules say new gTLDs are only open to corporations or organizations — sorry [John.Abell](#) — and the application fee is set at \$185,000. Fees can rise from there depending on whether people dispute your claim. If multiple organizations apply for the same name — say for instance .news or .religion — they are urged to work out a deal on their own, else the name could go to the highest bidder in an auction. So, good luck with that, .MiddleEast.

In an interview with Wired.com earlier this year, ICANN CEO Rod Beckstrom said he thought that nearly all of the 100 most popular websites would eventually apply for their own top-level domain.

Companies like Canon will use existing name registrar companies that knows how to handle DNS, and are unlikely to give up their .com addresses anytime soon. But the idea of shortening URLs further will likely appeal to companies like Google and Facebook that provide public profile pages for users (e.g., <http://JohnAbell.Facebook>, or <http://MileyCyrus.Google>), giving individuals who missed out on the domain land rush of the '90s another crack at intuitively named beachfront internet property.

The idea of opening new domains is hardly without critics, including some who see user confusion over the new names and who point out that e-mail validation scripts will not recognize sergey@google as a real address.

Trademark holders like CocaCola fear they will have to battle domain squatters in hundreds of new domain and argue that “fraud and abuse in the system as it currently exists ... will be amplified by the rapid addition of new gTLDs.” Coke suggests that brand name TLDs should wait until after more generic names like .restaurant are tried out, while other trademark holders see no reason for the new names at all.

Perhaps even more dangerous are fights over contentious domains like .religion or .muslim, which could land ICANN in deep political fights that it has tried to stay clear of in order to remain being seen as a neutral, standards setting body that only controls the net’s naming architecture.

Already, the proposal to establish .XXX has caught ICANN in a political battle. The proposal, which would create a top-level domain for pornographic sites without requiring all such sites to use it, was initially approved by ICANN. But after religious groups in the U.S. protested, the U.S. government threatened to keep .XXX out of the net’s root file, which would force a showdown over ICANN’s independence. (The Commerce Department approves the root file every day, though that’s usually a formality). ICANN then revoked .XXX, only to lose an arbitration proceeding in February, forcing it to reconsider its decision.

The final rules for the first round of applications have not yet been published, but they will likely be quite similar to the current draft. Those rules require a hefty deposit, a thorough vetting of the name and the sponsoring organization and a public “Expression of Interest” to let the

net community know about the proposal. Trademarks will be taken into account, and given the price, it's unlikely anyone will try to snag .IBM unless they are actually IBM.

But in some ways, the move might not be necessary, since a cool URL isn't as necessary as it used to be. Given that many users use search engines to navigate (typing Yahoo into Google.com's search box, for instance) and that many browsers now let users search on words directly from the address bar, it's increasingly irrelevant whether users remember your URL or not — so long as they remember your company's name. This could get complicated, however, if someone registers .plumber. What will browsers do in the case that someone types "plumber" into their browser's address bar?

See Also:

- [Domain Name Czar Seeks .OnlineUnity](#)
- [Web Addresses Now Can Be All Greek to You, ICANN Rules](#)
- [Former DHS Cybersecurity Head Lands at ICANN](#)
- [Bush, Pornographers Bash .XXX](#)

SXSW: YouTube Launches Partner Program for Indie Bands

AUSTIN, Texas — If you can play the guitar, you can quit your day job!

Well, maybe. But independent musicians who are accepted by YouTube's "Musicians Wanted" section will be able to do just that if their music videos and live musical performances draw enough views through a new feature of Google's YouTube Partner Program.

Another wrinkle: Artists will also make money when their YouTube videos are embedded on external websites, including music blogs. Considering the importance of blogs to the music scene, we're inclined to agree with YouTube that this could turn into a significant source of revenue for independent bands and labels that make videos people that want to see and music they want to hear.

"Whether you make hip-hop, folk, noise-rock, jazz or a genre of your own invention, we are looking for all types of original music video content," wrote YouTube music manager Michele Flannery in a note to be posted at midnight PT on YouTube's blog.

At the witching hour, any and all comers are invited to submit their videos to the new section of the Musicians Wanted site.

"Our goal in all these partner programs is to help people get to that point where they hear the most beautiful words a creative person can hear, which is 'You can quit your day job,' YouTube head of music business development Glenn Brown told *Wired.com*, "and some of our partners have already done that."

To try to get a piece of this new action, bands need only apply. So what makes this Musicians Wanted campaign any different from the existing partner program, aside from this announcement?

For starters, the YouTube employees who decide which applicants get accepted to the YouTube Partners Program will now be on the lookout for indie bands. If they're accepted, they'll get to add tour dates and "buy" links for music and merchandise and exert further control over the design of their pages. They'll also receive "a majority" of the advertising generated from pre-roll, text and overlay advertising on a monthly basis.

To make participating bands easier to find on YouTube, which ingests more than 20 hours of video every minute, the site will gather them into a browsable, searchable section dedicated to independent music.

“Not everybody who signs up will end up making a living, but it all comes down to their talent and ability to engage with the audience,” said Brown. “Whether or not they get discovered by a big media company, they’ll be able to make money on their videos from the get-go.”

YouTube has struggled at times to come to terms with the demands of major labels, which wield tremendous negotiating power because they have the ability to block vast swaths of popular music from the service. Independent artists will not likely get quite as favorable an ad-revenue split as those labels, understandably, because they lack the requisite negotiating power. However, they will receive every cent paid out by YouTube, as opposed to giving a chunk of that money to their label.

YouTube won’t accept static images paired with a song, so these will have to be real videos, and they will have to meet YouTube’s quality standards for inclusion in the program. The reason bands can’t just upload an image with an MP3 soundtrack is that if people don’t have something to watch, their eyes wander. And if their eyes wander, YouTube’s advertising rates go down, impacting both YouTube and the artists in question.

Also, this is strictly a U.S. initiative so far. “One thing to keep in mind is that right now this program only supports video content by U.S.-based artists, though there are plans to roll out the program more widely in the future,” the YouTube blog post says.

The first band to apply? Who else but OK Go, who vaulted to fame on the strength of their breakthrough treadmill video (over 50 million views) and whose “This Too Shall Pass” video continues to attract a buzz. One reason they reportedly left their major label earlier this month recently is that EMI/Capitol wouldn’t allow the latter video to be embedded on blogs (see update below). Assuming YouTube accepts the band, which of course they will, OK Go’s fate will rest in their own hands. The next time they make a video everybody wants to embed — assuming lightning strikes thrice — they should see a healthy payday.

As for other indie bands, they have a new reason to add compelling videos to their songs and upload them to YouTube’s Partner Program: a chance to live the dream of life without a day job.

It’s hard to see how this isn’t good for unsigned bands and independent labels, who need all the revenue they can get. So, who’s the loser in all this? That would be MySpace, because participating bands will have a financial incentive to direct their fans to YouTube instead, unless they’re the type that believes music should be heard and not seen.

Update: OK Go's Damian Kulash got back to us with a comment that's worth reading: "What's tremendously freeing about starting our own label is that we can now distribute our work however we want to, and we can look for new and interesting ways to make a living off of it without constantly chafing against the constraints of a big label with a rat's nest of conflicting agendas."

"The YouTube Partners Program, and specifically the Musicians Wanted division of it, is a great example. We can distribute our videos the way we want to (embeddable!), and actually make some money off it, to boot. A couple months ago our hands were tied by the embedding restrictions at our label, and the money that was generated from our streams wasn't winding up in our pocket. Now we're enabling embedding and we'll collect a check every month. It's a pretty obvious win/win."

See Also:

- [YouTube Invites Uploaders of Suddenly Popular Videos to Cash In](#)
- [SXSW: Dynamo Takes on YouTube for Indie Film Rentals](#)
- [You Tube Search-and-Delete Code Makes Money for Rights-Holders](#)
- [Sick of Grievers, YouTube Vloggers Start Members-Only Site](#)
- [YouTube Movie Rentals: Today Sundance, Tomorrow the World](#)
- [Susan Boyle YouTube Video: 100 Million Hits, So Where's the Money?](#)

Google's Traffic Is Giant, Which Is Why It Should be Your ISP

Everybody knows Google is one of the net's big kids, but how big is it exactly?

Well, as Arbor Networks measures it, if Google were an ISP, it would be the third largest in the world and the fastest growing — if you are measuring the amount of traffic passed from its network to another.

Arbor sells network-control and monitoring equipment to the net's biggest ISPs and networks, and knows as much about global network traffic as anyone.

Now much of that traffic comes from YouTube, since a three-minute video is the traffic equivalent of thousands of pages of search results — but that's still a staggering number for a single company.

Moreover, Google has a dual strategy for moving away from paying top-level internet transit providers to serve as the middleman between its servers and the world's consumer ISPs.

Now, more than half of its transit traffic is sent to those networks through direct peering relationships, according to the data ISPs provide Arbor Networks anonymously.

Moreover, Google has been deploying banks of servers *inside* those same networks, so traffic to Google's servers never has to leave an ISP, cutting down on lag time and transit costs. Arbor estimates that more than half of the ISPs in Europe and North America are home to a bank of servers known as a Google Global Cache.

So where does this all fit with Google's prominent announcement that it will test out a residential network that will bring internet connections of 1 Gbps to hundreds of thousands of people's homes?

Well, it's unlikely that Google will want to become a full-on ISP, but the changes and innovation Google is showing highlights just how important net transit is to its business.

What should frighten the world's current ISPs is that Google's plans call for working with a community to build infrastructure on which any company can sell internet services, so long as they pay a fair rate to use the infrastructure. If Google can come up with a partnering model that costs them little or uses a revolving fund, they could create a workable model for communities to get beyond reliance on companies like Verizon and Comcast. Using some of Google's cash, a lot of its know-how and

citizen dissatisfaction with the current costs of not very fast broadband, municipalities could forge a viable alternative to the current system of begging and pleading for telecoms to lay fiber in their areas.

Certainly, Google has the motivation and a pocket full of cash. It's just a question of whether its innovation in transit can extend from its current efforts to rework how its packets get to consumers to remaking how networks are owned and built. Someone needs to do something about \$30 a month 1.5-Mbps DSL lines, and if the national broadband plan isn't going to do it, it might as well be Google.

Graphs courtesy of Arbor Networks; Google Cache page from a Google presentation.

See Also:

- [Peer-to-Peer Passé, Report Finds](#)
- [YouTube's Bandwidth Bill Is Zero. Welcome to the New Net ...](#)
- [When Google Goes Down, It Falls Hard](#)
- [DDoS Packets are Two Percent of Net Traffic, Report Says](#)

PayPal Fist Bumps Square

PayPal, which made its initial splash in 1999 by letting Palm Pilot owners beam each other money — only to abruptly drop the feature — has returned to its roots. The latest upgrade to the PayPal iPhone app lets you pay (and be paid) by bumping fists.

As the internet goes mobile, so come ways of leveraging your smartphone for cashless transactions. Think about reimbursing co-workers for getting you coffee without someone getting screwed because nobody ever has the exact amount. Think about not having to come up with cash when someone at dinner says he wants to charge the whole thing for the miles.

Or think about small businesses that can't be bothered with the cost and complication of credit card fulfillment equipment and contracts. That's the exact demographic Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey is going after with Square, a startup whose small, iPhone-connected device will let small merchants take payments by swiping credit cards.

When it was launched, Wired.com called Square "Smartphone PayPal for Credit Cards." So that must make the new PayPal "Smartphone Square without Credit Cards." Besides that, the distinctions are narrowing.

Square requires that the seller have an iPhone peripheral and the buyer nothing but a credit card; PayPal requires both parties to have PayPal accounts — and the app, which, of course, can be installed on the fly. PayPal also requires physical contact, although the kind even Howie Mandell can handle.

There are more than a few apps that leverage the iPhone's accelerometer this way, including the appropriately-named "Bump," the billionth app downloaded from the iTunes store. And, hey, if first-bumping is good enough for the president and first lady ...

Also, it's good to have choices, including the choice not to even wield a credit card, whose use exposes you to the risk of ID theft. PayPal requires that you link your account to at least one credit or debit card or bank account but that information is never revealed to a seller.

So how big a deal is this? You can also text and e-mail someone money, but both of those methods depend on the buyer knowing something specific about the seller, to say nothing of the possibility of introducing error when entering information on your portable device. Square and now PayPal eliminate the need to share any information in

advance so strangers can conduct a virtual money transaction without knowing anything about each other at all.

Full disclosure: I was an early adopter of the PayPal Palm app and delighted in using it to pay an equally enamored co-worker who went on coffee runs. The original use case, as reported by Wired.com in July 1999, was the lunchmate who “forgot” his wallet. When PayPal eliminated this feature in favor of e-mail — a popular as the app was, there were only going to be so many Palm Pilots in circulation, and everyone had e-mail — I wrote an angry e-mail threatening to cancel my account. I got a sympathetic reply, but no satisfaction (and I never canceled).

The irony is that this long-abandoned feat of digital legerdemain is what put PayPal on the map. The peer-to-peer tool was infrared — no Bluetooth or Wi-Fi networks yet. PayPal co-founder Max Levchin knew he was on to something “storing” money on a Palm, but he also thought the whole infrared thing was “quaint and silly.”

“But that actually is what moved the needle, because it was so weird and so innovative,” Levchin recalled in a Facebook interview last August. “The geek crowd was like, ‘Wow. This is the future. We want to go to the future. Take us there.’”

“So we got all this attention and were able to raise funding on that story. Then we had the famous Buck’s beaming — at Buck’s restaurant in Woodside, which is sort of the home away from home for many VCs,” Levchin said. “Our first round of financing was actually transferred to us via Palm Pilot. Our VCs showed up with a \$4.5 million preloaded Palm Pilot, and they beamed it to us.”

There is cool, and there is cool. Whether fist-bumping a money token will ever replace the slick bill-palming technique that gets you the best table is doubtful.

See Also:

- [Twitter Creator Launches ‘Square’ — Like Smartphone Paypal for Credit Cards](#)
- [From Credit Card to PayPal: 3 Ways to Move Money](#)
- [Hey Buddy, PayPal Me a Quarter?](#)
- [Feds to Let Citizens Log In With Yahoo, Google, Paypal Accounts](#)
- [Amazon’s New API Competes With Paypal, Google Checkout](#)
- [How PayPal Gave Rise to a Silicon Valley ‘Mafia’](#)
- [Latest ‘Square’ Details Include Free Dongles, Craigslist, Alyssa Milano](#)

Lonely Classmates.com Users Get \$9.5M in Lawsuit

Classmates.com has agreed to refund nearly \$10 million to users who were told that long-lost school chums were looking at their profiles, only to find, once they'd ponied up a subscription fee, that no one they knew was looking for them at all.

The proposed settlement would end a lawsuit filed in November 2008 on behalf of Classmates.com user Anthony Michaels who sued after he spent \$15 to upgrade to a Gold Membership at Classmates.com, one of the net's original social networking sites. But that fee was a ripoff, he said.

"Upon logging into his Gold Membership profile in order to view the classmate contacts ... Plaintiff discovered that in fact, no former classmate of his had tried to contact him or view his profile," the complaint read. "Of those www.classmates.com users who were characterized ... as members who viewed Plaintiff's profile, none were former classmates of Plaintiff or persons familiar with or known to Plaintiff for that matter."

While Classmates.com denies it engaged in any deception, it agreed to pay up to \$9.5 million to the estimated 3.16 million people who signed up for the service after seeing ads and e-mails encouraging users to upgrade in order to see what members had been looking at their profiles. Each will be offered \$3 in cash or a \$2 certificate towards future membership.

Additionally, Classmates.com agreed, for a period of two years, to add a link to its "Guestbook" page, explaining that the entries in it are not necessarily from people that a user knows. The Guestbook registers who has looked at your profile, and only "Gold" members can see that. The defendants' lawyers get \$1.3 million plus costs for their trouble, while the named plaintiffs, including Michaels, will get up to \$2,500.

The class action lawsuit, originally filed in a California state court, was eventually moved to a federal court in Seattle. The proposed settlement now has to be approved by a judge before notification goes out to Classmates.com users.

Classmates.com, owned by United Online, says it's the most profitable social networking site, with 5 million paying users and nearly \$60 million in 2009 profits. However, in a recent attempt to keep up with Facebook, the site made significant changes to its privacy policy —

making more data available publicly by default, prompting a privacy lawsuit against the company.

See Also:

- [Classmates.com User Sues; Schoolmates Weren't Really Looking for Him](#)
- [Classmates.com's Facebook Mimicking Prompts Privacy Suit](#)
- [Classmates.com IPO: What Are These People Thinking?](#)
- [Facebook Privacy Changes Break the Law, Privacy Groups Tell FTC](#)
- [Facebook Privacy Changes Hint at a Brave New, Twitter-Like, World](#)

Newspaper Item

Shark-Bitten Crocodile Poop Fossils Found (No, Really)

Paleontologists have stumbled across a scientific first that's sure to inspire both fascination and disgust: coprolites, or fossilized fecal matter, bearing the distinct impressions of a creature's teeth.

The coprolites — one chunk of rock is fist-sized, the other is about 30 percent larger — were discovered on a beach along the western shore of Chesapeake Bay, says Stephen Godfrey, a paleontologist at the Calvert Marine Museum in Solomons, Md.

The impressions in the coprolites are as much as 6.5 millimeters (just over a quarter of an inch) deep, Godfrey and a colleague report online March 9 in *Naturwissenschaften*. A silicone rubber mold of the tooth marks indicates that the biter was most likely a close relative of today's tiger shark.

This fossilized poop doesn't include visible bits of bone, feather or fish scales like similar coprolites unearthed from 15-million-year-old rocks in the nearby cliffs. But the hunks do have a phosphate-rich composition that hints the fecal matter came from a creature that had fed on bony prey. This, along with the size of the coprolites, suggests they came from a large animal, possibly a crocodylian, Godfrey says.

Although sharks are known to taste-test possible prey, Godfrey thinks it's unlikely that the shark just took a nip of poop floating by to test its palatability. For one thing, he says, the tooth impressions are much deeper on one side of each coprolite than on the other — a scenario that's unlikely if the delicate fecal matter had been free-floating.

Instead, the researchers contend, the disparity in the depth of the impressions probably resulted because the fecal matter was still inside the shark's prey, or constrained within disemboweled intestines, when bitten.

Images: Stephen Godfrey.

Large Hadron Collider Triples Its Own Record

The Large Hadron Collider set a new record for the creation of energetic particle beams this morning. The particle accelerator, which surpassed Fermilab's Tevatron in December as the baddest atom smasher of them all, smashed its own record, charging particles to 3.48 trillion electron volts.

That's three times the energy of any beam ever created by human beings and just a shade under half the LHC's proposed maximum capabilities.

After a series of mishaps and repairs over the last year and a half, CERN's Director for Accelerators and Technology Steve Myers sounded a triumphant note.

"Getting the beams to 3.5 TeV is testimony to the soundness of the LHC's overall design, and the improvements we've made since the breakdown in September 2008," Myers said in a press release. "And it's a great credit to the patience and dedication of the LHC team."

The LHC could allow scientists to better understand the nature of mass, dark matter and the origins of the universe. But many of them hope that instead of confirming the current set of theoretical models we have all come to know — string theory, dark energy, the Higgs-Boson, etc. — something entirely unexpected will emerge from the CERN-run experiment.

Next up for the massive experiment is to collide those beams together to create a spectacular tiny explosion that could confirm or challenge decades of theoretical predictions. By sorting through the wreckage, physicists may find particular subatomic particles that will only exist under certain theoretical scenarios. For example, the detection of certain types of supersymmetric particles, aka sparticles, could be seen as what physicist Michio Kaku calls, "signals from the 11th dimension."

While the LHC's beam energies are certainly impressive, raw power is just one component of the quality of the data that a particle accelerator can produce. Understanding the incredible, almost unfathomable amounts of information that result from the collisions of beams requires iterative fine-tuning and learning by doing.

So, while the Tevatron, the last great American particle accelerator, may be chugging along at just under a trillion electron-volts, it's still got an outside shot at finding the Higgs-Boson particle before the LHC can

find or exclude it. And that could be a fitting final act before the high-energy physics torch passes wholly from Batavia, Illinois, to Geneva.

Photo: A piece of the Compact Muon Solenoid/CERN

See Also:

- [Complete Wired Science coverage of the Large Hadron Collider](#)

*WiSci 2.0: Alexis Madrigal's [Twitter](#), [Tumblr](#), and [green tech history research site](#); *Wired Science on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).**

Evolution of Fairness Driven by Culture, Not Genes

Human behaviors are often explained as hard-wired evolutionary leftovers of life on the savannah or during the Stone Age. But a study of one very modern behavior, fairness toward total strangers one will never meet again, suggests it evolved recently, and is rooted in culture rather than biology.

In a series of three behavioral tests given to 2,100 people in societies around the world, an innate sense of fairness dovetailed with participation in markets and major religions. Generally speaking, these use social norms and informal institutions to promote fairness, which allow societies to become larger and more complex.

Biologically speaking, people in the study weren't fundamentally different from their circa-200,000 B.C. ancestors, or from each other. What differed was their cultural DNA.

"You can't get the effects we're seeing from genes," said Joe Henrich, a University of British Columbia evolutionary psychologist and co-author of the study. "These are things you learn as a consequence of growing up in a particular place." The study was published March 18 in *Science*.

Kindness towards strangers is a baffling human trait, given that strangers appear to have been treated with suspicion and violence for most of human history. Some analyses of mortality in the Stone Age — those 2.5 million years of living in small groups that ended just 200,000 years ago — estimate that one in seven people died in combat.

But something changed. Small, family-based groups came together, forming hunter-gatherer tribes. With the advent of agriculture, tribes gave way to city-states. After that, came nations. Anthropologists say all this was only possible because people were willing to treat total strangers in a manner once reserved for kin.

Some researchers say that shift was rooted in a glitch in humanity's primal circuitry, one that caused people to mistakenly treat strangers as relatives. Others think it's a holdover of Stone Age-style thinking — that deep in our brains we see everyone we meet as part of our tiny family, and can't imagine encountering someone who won't ever be seen again.

That's not what Henrich's team thinks. To them, fairness between strangers at the individual level is what allows social organisms to thrive, and to out-compete more selfish societies. From that perspective, fairness-promoting social norms and informal institutions — markets

and religion — are an inevitable evolutionary step. Fortunately for us, they make life gentler.

“Once you get cultural evolution going with any strength, you get the enforcement of these norms.” Behaviors interlock in a way that rewards fairness and punishes its violation, Henrich said.

To study this dynamic, Henrich’s team had 2,100 people from 15 different societies — hunter-gatherers, marine foragers, pastoralists, horticulturalists and wage laborers — play three variations of a game designed to measure their innate sense of fairness.

In the first, a player is given a sum equivalent to a day’s earnings, and told to share as much or as little as they want with a second player. Both are anonymous, so from a purely self-interested perspective, there’s no reason to share at all.

In the second variation, the second player decides beforehand which offers they would accept and which they’d reject, but rejection means that neither player gets anything. Self-interest dictates that the second player accept any offer, even the lowest.

In the last variation, a third player receives a sum that can either be kept or spent on punishing an unfair offer from the first player to the second. Self-interest dictates that the third player keep their money, and spend nothing on punishment.

The trend in the responses was clear: When people lived in larger communities, and participated more in markets and religion, they were more willing to share, and more willing to punish selfishness.

In smaller communities, lacking the social norms and informal institutions embodied by markets and religion, people have narrow concepts of fairness, “but they’re not for dealing with people outside your sphere. There are no default norms for that. There are norms for fairness, but not the kind that let you build a large, well-running culture,” said Henrich.

“These findings call into question the standard assumption in economics that preferences are innate and stable,” wrote Karla Hoff, a World Bank economist who was not involved in the study, in an accompanying commentary in *Science*. “We cannot know for certain how fairly our ancestors in foraging bands behaved,” but the findings “bring us a closer understanding,” she wrote.

Henrichs suggests that culture evolved toward fairness for hundreds of thousands of years before the advent of agriculture, which in turn

fostered stable, ever-larger community structures that further accelerated the cultural evolution of fairness. This could have biological effects, favoring the development of linguistic and cognitive abilities, but the fundamental driver was culture.

“We can’t rule out the possibility that there was culture-gene interaction, but all the variation we see could be explained by plain cultural evolution,” Henrich said.

Images: 1) Game playing in the village of Teci, on Yasawa Island, Fiji./Robert Boyd. 2) Graph showing the average offer in the Dictator Game, arranged by the degree of test subjects’ participation in markets./Science.

See Also:

- Religion: Biological Accident, Adaptation — or Both
- Religious Experience Linked to Brain’s Social Regions
- Altruism’s Bloody Roots
- Termite Altruism Might Have Roots in War
- Chimps Follow the Golden Rule
- Immorality a Lot Like Rotten Food

Citation: “Markets, Religion, Community Size, and the Evolution of Fairness and Punishment.” By Joseph Henrich, Jean Ensminger, Richard McElreath, Abigail Barr, Clark Barrett, Alexander Bolyanatz, Juan Camilo Cardenas, Michael Gurven, Edwina Gwako, Natalie Henrich, Carolyn Lesorogol, Frank Marlowe, David Tracer, John Ziker. Science, Vol. 327 No. 5972, March 18, 2010.

“Fairness in Modern Society.” By Karla Hoff. Science, Vol. 327 No. 5972, March 18, 2010.

Brandon Keim’s Twitter stream and reportorial outtakes; Wired Science on Twitter. Brandon is currently working on a book about ecological tipping points.

Op-Ed: Why the Internet Should Win the Nobel Peace Prize

This year, a Chinese dissident and a Russian human rights advocate — recent nominees for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize — are joined by an unlikely, nonhuman contender: the internet.

A campaign to nominate the web, first put forth by the editors of *Wired* Italy, proclaims that the internet has “laid the foundations for a new kind of society,” in which massive interpersonal contact fosters consensus and understanding.

From the Fields is a periodic *Wired* Science op-ed series presenting leading scientists’ reflections on their work, society and culture.

Jamil Zaki is finishing his PhD in psychology and neuroscience at Columbia University. His research focuses on empathy and altruism, and specifically how we (and our brains) come to understand, care for, and respond to other people. He has published several scientific articles on these subjects. He also writes about culture, social behavior and the brain at his blogs on the Huffington Post and Psychology Today.

Predictably, the internet’s nomination was met with a wave of skepticism. After all, isn’t it ridiculous to give one of the world’s greatest honors to an inanimate technology? A friend of mine asked, “How about we give [the Nobel] to paper, since that’s what all peace agreements have been written on?”

The nomination seems especially ill-advised when we consider how un-Nobel-like online life tends to be. The primary use of social networking sites is “meforming,” or frequent updates about the minutia of people’s lives that one research group duly categorized as “pointless babble.” And if the internet’s most common asset is keeping us posted on what old high school classmates are having for brunch, then its risks may be more important.

Following a tragic case in which a couple allowed their baby to starve while raising a virtual child online, William Saletan warned that the internet lures us away from the real, grassy, human-populated world, toward a Terminator-esque dystopia in which digital life “gains the upper hand,” presumably leaving us all ignoring each other in favor of compulsive button pressing.

A lot of this bad press is misdirected. What it critically misses is that the internet is simply an enormous amplifier of human social behaviors, and that many of these behaviors are worth amplifying. Take the case of altruism. Countless demonstrations suggest that helping others comes

naturally to us. Toddlers aid people in need without prompting, and even 6-month old infants prefer watching prosocial, as opposed to antisocial behavior.

Altruism is likely driven by empathy — our tendency to “resonate” with the emotional and physical states of other people. For example, if you’ve ever had a friend who’s both clumsy and culinary, chances are you’ve seen that friend burn himself on a hot stove accidentally. Watching this, you likely felt a pang of discomfort, and maybe even pulled your hand back, as if you, and not your friend, had been burned. My research and that of others has demonstrated that when we watch others in pain, we activate some of the same brain regions that are also active when we experience pain ourselves, suggesting that we really do “feel their pain.” I like to call this the Bill Clinton effect.

The internet provides, by far, the most effective vehicle for us to “catch” positive social behaviors from each other.

Empathy and altruism are powerful instincts that define our species, but they can also be shut off or amplified by a number of situational factors. A newly explored way to “turn up” altruism is especially relevant to the internet. People are much more likely to be generous when they are following the example set by others. Recent research has demonstrated that people can “catch” everything from happiness to obesity from each other. Moods and behaviors propagate through our social networks like strains of the flu.

In a paper published last week, researchers demonstrated that this contagion applies to altruism as well. After seeing others acting generously towards a “public good,” individuals were more likely to follow suit, and these influences spread through several degrees of separation in a social network, forming “cascades of cooperative behavior.”

The internet can spread positive cascades further than we could have previously imagined. Recently, the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile provided a dramatic example of this effectiveness. Following both tragedies, social media played a key role in creating an outpouring of private aid. Instead of updating about their own lives, people posted requests for text message donations to the Red Cross, a message that rippled through social networks quickly and broadly.

Similar altruistic cascades followed the South Asian Tsunami in 2004. Mathematically, altruism in response to these tragedies spreads in ways similar to epidemics. And like epidemics, contagion of altruistic behavior

is most effective when it is distributed and fast-moving. The internet provides, by far, the most effective vehicle for us to “catch” positive social behaviors from each other.

When Marshall McLuhan first coined the phrase, “the medium is the message,” he was describing how radio and television changed our lives by allowing us to share experiences on a grand scale. McLuhan believed that people were largely oblivious to the impact of media on culture, and that IBM was only then discovering “that it was not in the business of making office equipment or business machines, but that it was in the business of processing information.”

Four decades later, it would be hard to accuse Google (or us) of similar ignorance. We are hyper-aware of the extent to which the internet has altered our world. But what is the result of this change? Has it rendered us a bunch of pale, empathy-drained automatons? I think this opinion is too easy and too reactionary. Internet culture can amplify and spread our best and most human characteristics: empathy, altruism and communication. If this is the case, there may be reasons to seriously consider giving this year’s Nobel medal to an unlikely, interpersonal laureate.

Image: [Dia™/flickr](#)

See Also:

- [Kindness Breeds More Kindness, Study Shows](#)
- [Loneliness May Be Contagious](#)
- [Tracking Internet Chatter Helps Spot Swine Flu Outbreak](#)
- [Could Life Evolve on the Internet?](#)
- [Op-Ed: Microbes May Be More Networked Than You Are](#)
- [Op-Ed: Tornado Scientist Risks Life for Ph.D.](#)
- [Op-Ed: Why the Elevator Floor Is So Interesting](#)

Cosmic Dust Gives Milky Way a Fiery Mane

The Planck space telescope, which is surveying the entire sky in four massive sweeps, has nearly finished its first scan.

Rotating in orbit, Planck takes data of the sky in strips, almost the reverse of a chef peeling an apple in one long, thin strip.

This image, taken from the scan, shows the structure and form of dust clouds within about 500 light-years of the sun. The bright band in this far-infrared image is the Milky Way's spiral disk. Above that, you can see the cold dust arching upwards. The color palette here is a bit unusual: Reddish tones are colder, while white tones are warmer.

The [Planck mission](#), launched in May 2009 by the European Space Agency, is creating the best-ever map of the cosmic background radiation left over from the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago.

Image: ESA and the HFI Consortium, IRAS

See Also:

- [New Look at Big Bang Radiation Refines Age of Universe](#)
- [Wired 10.12: The New Convergence](#)
- [70 Years of Telescopes Tuned to Cosmic Radio](#)

WiSci 2.0: Alexis Madrigal's [Twitter](#), [Tumblr](#), and [green tech history research site](#); Wired Science on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

Controversy Erupts Over Captive Endangered Bat Colony

A bitter controversy is brewing over a captive colony of endangered Virginia big-eared bats, founded in November as a hedge against disease driving the species to extinction in the wild.

Of 40 bats put in the colony, only 10 have survived. According to environmental activists and a consultant to the project, their demise wasn't just an unfortunate consequence of the animals' sensitivity, but a result of avoidable human negligence.

If the colony's keepers had not "ignored the advice of experts, these bats would still be alive today," said Christine Erickson, a staff attorney Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a government watchdog group.

On March 9, PEER filed a complaint (.pdf) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the project's overseers. The complaint was based on a critique of the bats' care (.pdf) at the Smithsonian National Zoo written by Missy Singleton, a bat care consultant retained by the Zoo during the colony's first few weeks.

USFWS officials decided to start the colony after white nose syndrome, a highly virulent disease that threatens many cave-dwelling eastern bat species with extinction, was found in one of the few caves where Virginia big-eared bats live.

The responsibility for keeping the bats was given to the Smithsonian National Zoo. Federal and zoo officials described the colony as an ark, a hedge against the suddenly realistic possibility of the species' demise.

According to PEER and Singleton, the zoo disregarded the advice of experts in setting up the colony. Among the allegations are improper feeding, exposure to fluctuating temperatures and careless handling, leading to the fatal infections that have killed most of the bats. In a letter to the USFWS, Singleton described "a repeated and ongoing disregard for the welfare of the bats."

"Even under the most challenging conditions, no more than a 20 percent death rate is considered acceptable for insectivorous bats," wrote Singleton.

In a public statement, the National Zoo said (.pdf) that many of Singleton's claims, "which form the bulk of the complaint, are unsubstantiated and untrue."

“The care plan was based on existing bat protocols, but they had to very quickly adapt and change some of those protocols,” said Pamela Baker Masson, a communications officer at the National Zoo. “Nobody has ever worked with this subspecies of bat.”

Baker Masson said that Singleton was only present during the first few weeks of the colony’s founding, and was not familiar with the full story. Some of her advice was followed but proved ineffective, said Baker Masson.

“She said the bats needed to be fed juicier mealworms, but we found that when the bats ate them, liquid dripped off their chins, matted their fur, and created skin ulcers that led to infections. So we had to reverse that,” said Baker Masson.

According to Barbara Douglas, a USFWS biologist who oversaw the project, the department is now reviewing the colony’s care. Some of the allegations are untrue, “and some I don’t have enough information on yet. Obviously, we take any of those allegations very seriously,” she said.

As to charges that expert advice was ignored, Douglas said that “before any bats were brought into captivity, they consulted with a number of experts.” The [full plan is available \(.pdf\)](#) from the USFWS.

The USFWS has not decided what will be done with the remaining captive bats, which PEER wants transferred to professional bat rehabilitators. According to Jeremy Douglas, the USFWS’s white nose syndrome coordinator, captive colonies remain an option for bat species threatened by the disease.

Peter Youngbaer, the White Nose Syndrome liaison for the National Speleological Society, said he only recently became aware of PEER’s allegations, but does consider them troubling. The goal of raising Virginia big eared bats in captivity, however, he considers noble.

With just a few thousand bats left, “and a fatal, highly infectious disease knocking at the door, I can’t fault the idea as illegitimate. The particulars of the project, however, are another story,” said Youngbaer.

Image: [Jeff Hajenja](#), West Virginia Department of Natural Resources/Flickr

See Also:

- [Desperate Efforts to Save Endangered Bats May Fail](#)
- [Video: Moth Blocks Bat Attack by Jamming Sonar](#)
- [Infrared Video: 500000 Bats Emerge From Cave](#)
- [Video: How Bats Land Upside Down](#)

Brandon Keim's Twitter stream and reportorial outtakes; Wired Science on Twitter. Brandon is currently working on a book about ecological tipping points.

The Oldest Trees on the Planet

<< [previous image](#) | [next image](#) >>

Trees are some of the longest-lived organisms on the planet. At least 50 trees have been around for more than a millenium, but there may be countless other ancient trees that haven't been discovered yet.

Trees can live such a long time for several reasons. One secret to their longevity is their compartmentalized vascular system, which allows parts of the tree to die while other portions thrive. Many create defensive compounds to fight off deadly bacteria or parasites.

And some of the oldest trees on earth, the great bristlecone pines, don't seem to age like we do. At 3,000-plus years, these trees continue to grow just as vigorously as their 100-year-old counterparts. Unlike animals, these pines don't rack up genetic mutations in their cells as the years go by.

Some trees defy time by sending out clones, or genetically identical shoots, so that one trunk's demise doesn't spell the end for the organism. The giant colonies can have thousands of individual trunks, but share the same network of roots.

This gallery contains images of some of the oldest, most venerable and impressive trees on earth.

Pando

While Pando isn't technically the oldest *individual* tree, this clonal colony of Quaking Aspen in Utah is truly ancient. The 105-acre colony is made of genetically identical trees, called stems, connected by a single root system. The "trembling giant" got its start at least 80,000 years ago, when all of our human ancestors were still living in Africa. But some estimate the woodland could be as old as 1 million years, which would mean Pando predates the earliest *Homo sapiens* by 800,000 years. At 6,615 tons, Pando is also the heaviest living organism on earth.

The photo above of the Pando colony was taken by Rachel Sussman, as part of [The Oldest Living Things In The World project](#).

Image: "Clonal Quaking Aspens #0906-4318 (80,000 years old, Fish Lake, UT)" / Rachel Sussman

Cool: New Exoplanet Is Near Habitable Zone

Extrasolar planet hunters are excited about a not-so-hot discovery. For the first time, they've found a relatively cool extrasolar planet that they can study in detail.

The finding is a milestone, says study co-author Hans Deeg of the Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias in Tenerife, Spain, because it is the first time astronomers have found an extrasolar planet that not only is cool enough to be similar in composition and history to the familiar solar system gas giants Jupiter and Saturn, but also passes in front of the star it orbits.

Although a number of extrasolar planets with moderate temperatures have been discovered, only a planet that passes in front of — or transits — its star can be studied in depth. The starlight that filters through the atmosphere of the planet during each passage reveals the orb's composition, while the amount of starlight that is blocked outright indicates the planet's size.

All the other transiting planets seen so far have been “weird — inflated and hot” because they orbit so close to their stars, notes study collaborator Didier Queloz of the Geneva Observatory in Sauverny, Switzerland. Deeg, Queloz and their colleagues report their findings in the March 18 *Nature*.

The planet, found with the COROT satellite and dubbed COROT-9b, lies 1,500 light-years from Earth and never gets closer to its star than Mercury's average distance from the sun. That puts the surface temperature of the planet in a relatively temperate range, somewhere between 250 kelvins and 430 kelvins (-23° to 157° Celsius). Although the gaseous planet isn't expected to be habitable, its atmosphere could contain water vapor.

If this Jupiter-like planet has a moon, that satellite's rocky surface could be habitable, says Sara Seager of MIT. But a planetary system closer to Earth would offer a better chance of searching for the tiny gravitational tug of such a moon, Seager adds.

“This discovery adds weight to the fact that we know that planets often orbit in or close to the habitable zone, so we should not be surprised when the Kepler or COROT satellites or some ground-based search makes the claim for the first habitable Earth or super-Earth,” comments Alan Boss of the Carnegie Institution for Science in Washington, D.C.

Nevertheless, finding such a planet is encouraging news, Seager says, because “where there is gold dust there might be a gold mine.”

Citation: “2010A transiting giant planet with a temperature between 250K and 430K” by Deeg, H.J. et al. Nature 464:384. doi:10.1038/nature08856

Image: ESO/L. Calçada

Seminal '70s Environmental TV Series Now Online

Every episode of what was probably the environmental movement's first television series is now available on the web.

Our Vanishing Wilderness first aired almost 40 years ago. The eight half-hour episodes were broadcast by the PBS precursor, National Educational Television beginning in October of 1970. They are now available on a website created by another NET descendant, the New York public channel Thirteen.

The production values of the show are a far cry from the ultra-slow-mo, high-definition extravaganzas epitomized by the BBC's *Planet Earth*. The series was created by nature writer Mary Louise Grossman and her husband Shelly, a nature photographer. It is low-resolution and grainy. The tone is groovy in that slow, Saganish way but tinged with deep sadness over the loss of American biodiversity.

"Forty years ago, a small crew of filmmakers set out to document some of the more pressing issues involving wildlife in America. They made eight half-hour films around the country — it ended up being the first environmental TV series in the U.S.," the Thirteen website maintains. "Shot in 1969, the issues weren't new, but hadn't been handled much yet on television — the medium had yet to embrace the environmental movement."

The eight shows are a mini-study in the issues most important to the environmentalists of the day. The Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969, which has been described as "the spark that brought the environmental issue to the nation's attention," features prominently. Also covered are the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez, Alaska. Its construction and operation brought a consortium of different environmental groups to the remote reaches of the Arctic.

And there's also some good, old-fashioned nature porn like the fight between an owl and a snake embedded below.

The shows were actually digitized last year, but have not received wide circulation. A tip from web producer Robin Edgerton, who worked on the project at Thirteen, brought the series to our attention.

The strange and discordant music that accompanies the opening sequence was arranged by Barry Kornfeld, who may be the same Barry Kornfeld who played guitar with Bob Dylan and on the Van Morrison track, "The Way Young Lovers Do."

See Also:

- [The '70s Photos That Made Us Want to Save Earth](#)
- [The Environmentalism of Wall-E](#)
- [Op-Ed: Stop Trying to Save the Planet](#)

WiSci 2.0: Alexis Madrigal's Twitter, Tumblr, and green tech history research site; Wired Science on Twitter and Facebook.

Quantum Physics Used to Control Mechanical System

By using a quantum device to control a mechanical object, researchers have linked the mind-bending laws of quantum physics to the tangible, everyday world.

Until now, quantum physical behaviors were observed at atomic and subatomic scales, or in medium-sized molecules. Now they've been found in something that bumps and grinds, visible with nothing fancier than a high school lab-issue microscope.

"At the macroscopic scale we live in, we don't see quantum effects at all," said Andrew Cleland, a University of California, Santa Barbara, physicist. "The goal of the experiment was to see if we could see quantum mechanical effects in a large, mechanical object."

The mechanical object used in the experiment, published March 17 in *Nature* and led by Cleland and fellow UCSB physicists John Martinis and Aaron O'Connell, is a 0.0002 millimeter-square wafer of quartzlike material bracketed by metal plates. The wafer is a piezoelectric resonator, expanding and contracting in response to electrical voltages at a precise, extremely high frequency. Cleland likened its expansion and contraction to the inflation and deflation of a balloon.

The quantum device is a qubit, a term that generically refers to a kind of quantum transistor being used for quantum computation, in this case made from an ultrathin aluminum-based superconductor. At extremely cold temperatures, it goes quantum: It exists in an oscillating waveform spanning an excited state, an unexcited state, or both simultaneously, all controlled by electrical currents.

With their experiment, the researchers have not only fulfilled a two decade-old dream of controlling quantum motion in micrometer-sized system, but "opened the door for quantum control of truly macroscopic mechanical devices," wrote Aspelmeyer.

To do so, Cleland's team wired a qubit to a resonator, then cooled them to a fraction of a degree above absolute zero, the point at which all atomic motion nearly stops. At this temperature, the vibrations of the atoms in the qubit and resonator are small enough to prevent them from interfering with quantum measurements.

When the researchers sent a pulse of energy into the qubit, the resulting energy quantum was transferred to the resonator, which fluctuated accordingly. With extraordinarily acute vision, "you'd see it

expanding and contracting. You'd see it vibrating. These are quantum vibrations," said Cleland.

In a study published in September in *Nature*, Cleland's team coupled two qubits in what's known as quantum entanglement, in which the oscillations of one were linked to the oscillations of the other, even when physically distant. That feat drew attention for demonstrating quantum properties in a large, visible system, but the properties themselves still belonged to electrons, in which quantum effects are routinely observed and controlled.

In a sense, it was the same old quantum physics. The latest results occur in a new world, one that quantum physicists have tried to enter for nearly two decades. In a commentary accompanying the paper, University of Vienna physicist Markus Aspelmeyer described the reaction of an audience of physicists to whom Cleland described the experiment's design. "Dead silence — and then roaring applause," he recalled.

One of the principles of quantum physics, illustrated by the Schrodinger's cat thought experiment, is that the act of measurement collapses an object's waveform into a single, observed state. To get around this conundrum, the researchers used a repetitive measurement, preparing the system and then measuring its waveform millions of times.

At a precise moment during one trial, the resonator might be both in its expanded and its contracted state; a single measurement forces it to "choose" which state to be in. The quantum nature of its behavior emerged from the accumulated readings. "If we do it enough times, we can assign a probability to the state at each point," said Cleland.

According to Aspelmeyer, the findings could inform the design of storage devices used in quantum computers. Cleland isn't sure the system will be reliable enough for that, but thinks it could be used in exploring how the subatomic rules of quantum physics are manifested at higher scales.

Schrodinger's cat experiment is likely impossible, because the cat itself is a measuring device, said Cleland. However, it might be possible with other large but inanimate objects linked to a quantum device.

"If you had a tuning fork and got it cold enough, maybe that could behave quantum mechanically," he said.

Image: Schematic of the resonator-qubit system./Nature

See Also:

- [Everywhere in a Flash: The Quantum Physics of Photosynthesis](#)
- [Quantum Computing Thrives on Chaos](#)
- [Ultra-Precise Quantum-Logic Clock Trumps Old Atomic Clock](#)
- [Quantum Entanglement Visible to the Naked Eye](#)
- [“Sudden Death” Threatens Quantum Computing](#)

Citations: “Quantum ground state and single-phonon control of a mechanical resonator.” By A. D. O’Connell, M. Hofheinz, M. Ansmann, Radoslaw C. Bialczak, M. Lenander, Erik Lucero, M. Neeley, D. Sank, H. Wang, M. Weides, J. Wenner, John M. Martinis & A. N. Cleland. Nature, March 18, 2010.

“The surf is up.” By Markus Aspelmeyer. Nature, March 18, 2010.

Brandon Keim’s [Twitter](#) stream and [reportorial outtakes](#); [Wired Science on Twitter](#). Brandon is currently working on a book about [ecological tipping points](#).

Underwire

SXSW Scenes: Hot Dogs, Hare Krishna and Rock

An enthusiastic fan cheers on the crowd at the Shit & Shine show at Encore on Friday night.

AUSTIN, Texas — With crowds spilling out of the clubs and into the streets, South by Southwest brings together characters of all sorts.

“It’s just a big, mellow event,” said Al Morris III, lead guitarist of “blacker than Black Sabbath” metal band Iron Man, out of Washington, D.C. “It’s like how Woodstock was back in ‘69.”

The overwhelming lineups of official SXSW events, as well as unofficial side parties, put a constant rock ‘n’ roll racket in the air.

For a look at some of the bands and characters roaming and rocking the streets during SXSW 2010, check out Wired.com’s photos below. (Don’t miss the guy dressed in a Santa suit.)

Recent buzz beneficiaries Cloud Nothings from Cleveland pump out gritty, catchy indie rock at Karibu.

Rex "Orange Rex" Campbell, a fire-breather from Oklahoma City, enjoys a hot dog on the Sixth Street strip.

Atlanta band The Coathangers scream and thrash at Karibu.

Video: Universal to Reveal Harry Potter Theme Park's Opening Day

After months of teasing and vague promises, Universal Orlando is gearing up to reveal the opening date of its Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park.

In this video released Thursday, we see glimpses of the making of the attraction's premier ride, Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey, which will star the cast of the blockbuster films. More importantly, it promises that we will learn the opening date of the park Thursday, March 25, at 12 p.m. Eastern time, thanks to [Universal's website](#).

See Also:

- [Underwire: The Wizarding World of Harry Potter](#)
- [Photo: Hogwarts Express Chugs Into Orlando](#)
- [Immersive Harry Potter Theme Park Brings Wizardry to Orlando](#)
- [Photo: Hogwarts Castle Towers Over Orlando](#)

Review: Hubble 3D Takes You on Beautiful, Brief Space Journey

The premise of *Imax: Hubble 3D* is simple: Make home movies in space.

And what beautiful movies they are. The stunning space vistas and intimate moments with astronauts make for a fascinating flash of interstellar eye candy.

The images were captured in 2009 when the space shuttle *Atlantis* crew left Earth to repair the Hubble Space Telescope. The astronauts — Commander Scott Atman, pilot Gregory Johnson and mission specialists John Grunsfeld, Mike Massimino, Megan McArthur, Andrew Feustel and Michael Good — brought an Imax 3-D camera on board to document the trip.

At the time, filmgoers' expectations of what 3-D movies can deliver had yet to be transformed by the dazzling look of stunners like *Coraline*, *Avatar* and *Alice in Wonderland*. But now people are pulling out their wallets and paying a little extra to don 3-D glasses and immerse themselves in wild worlds they never thought possible.

Hubble 3D's breathtaking visuals just happen to be based in reality. The 3-D technology amplifies the beauty of the already captivating images captured by the space telescope. Immersive and engaging, the movie, which opened Friday, is far more of an experience than anything else.

Writer/director Toni Myers sets up the film in three ways. First, narrator Leonardo DiCaprio provides Hubble history and his best, "Are we the only ones out there?" questioning. Second, the crew's trials and ultimate success are captured. Finally, the audience is taken on a moving journey through the cosmos with images from Hubble's data.

It's in these space-travel sequences that the film truly impresses and provides a childlike sense of wonderment. The natural phenomena captured in these moving images are billions of miles — light-years upon light-years — away from Earth. Upon pulling away from the stars, we see 3-D galaxies interwoven with one another like a web. It is a testament to Hubble's importance and contribution to how we see space.

Probably the movie's biggest failing is its scant 45-minute running time, but it's hard to criticize *Hubble 3D's* brevity, simply due to real-

world constraints. The film is shorter than you'd like it to be in large part due to Imax's desire to log as many museum screenings as possible, but also because you can only carry so much film into space. Plus, these documentarians aren't filmmakers: They're astronauts and they had a job to do.

If anything is missing from the film, it's more time with the *Atlantis* crew. We see the mission. We get what they're doing. However, we never really get to know any of them, aside from witnessing some of their quirky antics. The trip was the first space flight for some members of the crew. I wanted to know what it was like for them: I wanted to know how they felt seeing Earth from 350 miles above for the first time.

Just because *Hubble 3D* shows space in the most realistic way yet doesn't mean I've actually seen it. I wanted to know what it felt like for those who had. Despite this criticism, the film is a success in capturing and presenting beautifully rendered images from the outer reaches of the universe.

WIRED Space travel. For real.

TIRED Making docs shorter to make an extra buck.

Rating:

Read *Underwire's movie ratings guide*.

Follow us on Twitter: [@gingerscott](#) and [@theunderwire](#).

See Also:

- [Video: Making Hubble 3D for Imax](#)
- [Hubble Is Back! With New Stunning Images](#)

Artists Get Their Geek On to Celebrate Yuri's Night

<< [previous image](#) | [next image](#) >>

On April 12, 1961, Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin embarked on the first manned voyage into outer space. The geek equivalent of St. Patrick's Day takes place next month in more than 70 locations as science-minded revelers throw parties to celebrate Gagarin's historic feat.

Getting the jump on the international night of astronaut-inspired hoopla, artists in the Washington, D.C., area plan to get their intergalactic ya-yas out on April 10 with the third annual Countdown to Yuri's Night bash. The event features work by 20 artists, including Virginia painter Todd Gardner, whose "Rocket Car or I'm Sorry, Steve, I Can't Let You" mural is pictured above.

The show brings together Pop-Surrealism, Post-Pop and Lowbrow stylists who "frequently and freely embrace the imagery of science fiction and mid-century tropes," according to *Countdown* lead organizer Jared Davis. "Countdown to Yuri's Night is an excellent excuse to feature their more sci-fi inspired work.

"Whether it's Scott Brooks' nightmare vision of a future where Cupie-doll robots battle for Thorazine, Steve Strawn's photo journalism from the great robot wars or Sherill Anne Gross' green pinup girls, they all create a vision of the future of humankind in space. Whether it's an accurate prediction is beside the point — what matters is that they are having the conversation and leaving room for any one of a million possible futures."

Read on for a sampling of art works inspired by man and space.

Rocket Car or I'm Sorry, Steve, I Can't Let You

Virginia painter Todd Gardner says he has been on "an intergalactic mission to spread the gospel of the new robot overlords through allegoric paintings exploring the *"all too* human condition."

Bad Magic Comic *Mysterius* Makes Good Tech Satire

The line between magic and technology in the 21st century is blurrier than ever, especially in *Mysterius, the Unfathomable*, Jeff Parker and Tom Fowler's hilarious comic released this week as a paperback collection from DC's Wildstorm imprint.

"I would liken tech to stage magic," Parker told Wired.com. "The tech that catches on has the best barkers, entrancing and mesmerizing you."

Other comics transpose a vanishing magical tradition into our postmodern setting, like those from [Neil Gaiman](#) or [Alan Moore](#). Parker and Fowler's tome is an unrepentant laugher. Watching a deathless, [magical lout named Mysterius](#) try to negotiate the 21st century and its techno-magical rites like Burning Man and tools like the internet, is a hoot.

"Burning Man seemed the perfect place to have occult orgies," Parker said.

[Tom Fowler's cartoonish tableaux](#) only intensify *Mysterius'* goofy proceedings. But ironically enough, Parker simply can't wait for the comic's digital upgrade.

"I hope we'll soon be reading *Mysterius* on the iPad," he said. "It looks perfect for reading color comics."

True enough. But until the age of iComics arrives, we'll still have the material iteration to make us laugh and cry. If you want to do both with *Mysterius*, check out the rest of our [chat with Parker](#) below for a chance to win a free copy. Abra-ca-freebies!

Burning Man and more postmodern primitive pastimes are magically skewered in *Mysterius*, out now.

Images courtesy Wildstorm

A red-nosed hybrid of Dr. Who and a totally drunk Vincent Price, *Mysterius* is both eccentric and genius. Much of the comic makes purposeful allusions to other characters, said Parker, especially *Mysterius'* geek-generation assistant, Delfi.

"We certainly acknowledge the Dr. Who dynamic with the assistant, but if Dr. Who were a completely selfish a-hole," Parker explained. "It's really borne out of wanting to do an unlikable character, because I write so many noble ones."

Indeed, *Mysterius* is nothing like the heroic icons Parker has penned for Marvel and DC, who range from Spider-Man, Avengers and the X-Men to Wonder Woman and more. One of *Mysterius*' coolest magic tricks is replacing his bills with photos of his creditors in compromising positions.

"He's a lech," Parker said. "He rarely pays for anything, because he can cast an illusion to make a laundry ticket look like cash."

In Fowler's hands, *Mysterius*, *Delfi* and the rest of their madcap acquaintances come off as riotous caricatures. Thankfully, unlike the majority of comics from both of the major publishing houses and a great many of the indie ones, *Mysterius* never takes itself too seriously. Whether it is ripping on the postmodern primitives of *Burning Man*, the nefarious tongue-twisting incantations of Dr. Seuss, the faux spectacle of David Blaine or better.

"I think Tom is finally about to be acknowledged as a talent," Parker said. "He does an amazing pen-ink of a caveman abducting an opera diva. We're trying to get another story off the ground now — an Irish adventure."

That would place him, however spiritually, within the realm of the magic-minded comics gods from across the pond, like Moore, Gaiman and Grant Morrison. Indeed, much of the mayhem of *Mysterius* recalls Morrison's hilarious work in *Doom Patrol* and especially *52*.

"I'm enjoying Grant's *Joe the Barbarian* and I've read plenty of Gaiman," he said. "But Alan Moore is the one who has captivated me again and again. When I was a teenager and Moore's *Swamp Thing* came out, I thought the back of my head blew off."

Although it's not as thematically weighty, *Mysterius* might blow your head off as well — or at least infect it with laughter. Wired.com has three copies to give away for those looking to test out that theory. Just let us know your favorite magic-related comic or character in the comments section below.

See Also:

- [Alan Moore: Comics Won't Save You, but Dodgem Logic Might](#)
- [7 More Alan Moore Comics That Could Get Librarians Fired](#)
- [Review: Alan Moore's Seminal *Swamp Thing* Resurfaces](#)
- [After *Watchmen*, What's Unfilmable? These Legendary Texts](#)
- [Grant Morrison Talks Brainy Comics, Sexy Apocalypse](#)
- [Neil Gaiman Writes a Final Love Letter to Batman](#)

SXSW: Scenes From a Musical Madhouse

AUSTIN, Texas — With hundreds of bands playing simultaneously at any given time, South by Southwest can be a musician's wildest dream or a band's worst nightmare. A bad monitor mix can lead to an ear-splitting set; an unfortunate show time or venue can mean playing to a tiny crowd.

Even simple logistics can be crushing: Many bands play multiple sets during the festival, and band members routinely walk down crowded streets carrying heavy amps and trying to avoid tipsy revelers. It gets even worse sometimes: Harlan T. Bobo (pictured above), a Memphis musician and SXSW veteran, said he walked 6 miles, guitar in hand, from his hotel to his Thursday night gig at Barbarella after he couldn't get a cab.

Still, thousands of bands play Austin during SXSW each year, some as part of the official lineup, others gigging at side events timed to cash in on the crowds drawn by the music festival, which is now in its 24th year. It's a golden opportunity to win over new fans, make industry connections and maybe even rack up some buzz. These bands fought the good fight Thursday.

Leopold and His Fiction crank up the rock to a fever pitch on the outside stage at Beauty Bar on Thursday.

Renan McFarland cuts through the mix for Ringo Deathstarr at 501 Studios.

Ringo Deathstarr uses its loudness like a drug at 501 Studios.

Alex Gehring plays bass and sings for Ringo Deathstarr.

Young Prisms drone on heartfelt psych jams on the inside stage of Beauty Bar.

Careful listeners stand back from the stage while traffic proceeds in front of Young Prisms' performance.

San Francisco band Weekend washes an Ethiopian restaurant parking lot in distortion for a brutally hot day show.

The Happy Hollows' Sarah Negahdari mixes tap-on riffs, frantic strumming and aggressively pretty vocals at the Aquarium Drunkard day party.

Chris Chu of The Morning Benders leads a crowd at Cheer Up Charlie's in some call-and-response singing.

Dr. Dog plays its first song like it's their last at the Lustre Pearl Thursday night.

Photos: Harlan T. Bobo by Jim Merithew/Wired.com; all others: Keith Axline/Wired.com

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See Also:

- [SXSW: Amps Set on 11, Bagpipes Set on Stun](#)
- [SXSW Keeps Austin Weird, Wired and Wild](#)
- [SXSW 2010: Full Coverage From Wired](#)

Lucasfilm's *The Clone Wars*: Best Political Cartoon Ever?

Political murder, mercenary violence, military occupations and callous terrorists don't just kill as newspaper headlines. They've also made excellent thematic fodder for *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, whose dark second season returns with a seven-week stand starting Friday night.

The procedural and corporate intrigue has also solidified Lucasfilm's CGI tween fever dream as one of Earth's coolest political cartoons. But is it the best?

The conclusion of *The Clone Wars'* second season begins with Friday's episode "Senate Murders," which finds Padmé Amidala investigating the mysterious death of a politician.

"Many of Padmé's episodes center around politics, for obvious reasons, and they're sometimes a departure -- to a degree -- from the action-packed episodes," explained Catherine Taber, the voice of Padmé, in a press release. "Diplomacy -- or the lack thereof -- is essential to *The Clone Wars*, and part of the foundation for the *Star Wars* saga."

Mandalorian terrorist group Death Watch has darkened *The Clone Wars'* second season. But has it politicized it?

Image courtesy Lucasfilm.

True enough, but it's arguable that *The Clone Wars* has explored the netherworlds of parliamentary intrigue, capital crime, militarism and political arrogance much better than its cinematic parent narratives.

The movies were alternately legendary and underwhelming popcorn blockbusters. But Lucasfilm's animated series, on the back of Genndy Tartakovsky's inimitable 2003 miniseries, has been able to stretch out more seriously. And whether it's using alien children as human shields in season one or loosing bounty-hunting terrorists (pictured above) in season two, *The Clone Wars* has not just been an action-packed blast. It's been an eye-opening one.

At least, for those who might be looking. The series wields its dissection of interpersonal and interstellar politics like a Force push, rather than a buzzing lightsaber. It's not visibly slicing up its subjects, but invisibly moving them like pawns on a chessboard.

The saga's incarnation of all cosmological evil is hiding in plain sight as a career politician, yet *Star Wars* is still often ignored as a political allegory. But with two seasons and 44 episodes almost tucked into its Jedi robe, and 22 more scheduled to land in its third season this October, it's getting harder to pawn off *The Clone Wars* as mindless toon entertainment for the iGeneration. It might be time to take it seriously.

But let us know what you think. Is *The Clone Wars* one of the best political cartoons ever, if not the best? Can it hold a candle to Robert Smigel's *Saturday TV Funhouse*, which probably holds the current title? Does *Harvey Birdman* count? School us on politics and toons in the comments section below.

See Also:

- [Is Clone Wars the Most Action-Packed Series on Television?](#)
- [What's the Secret of Bit Player Boba Fett's Staying Power?](#)
- [General Grievous May Have Outlived His Clone Wars Menace](#)
- [Clone Wars Finale Draws on Good, Bad and the Ugly](#)
- [Half-Naked Female Jedis, Coming Right Up in Clone Wars](#)
- [From Pawns to People, Star Wars' Clones Evolve](#)
- [Clone Wars Reboots Star Wars' Peripheral Players](#)

The Jackson 5 Appear at SXSW ... as an iPhone App

AUSTIN, Texas — Michael Jackson is no longer with us, but the spirit of his younger self lives on in the Zoozbeat Jackson 5 Remix mobile app for iPhone, slated to be announced Friday morning at South by Southwest. The app's creator, Zooz Mobile, makes a suite of music-creation apps for the iPhone that have impressed us with their precision and versatility, but what makes this one special is that it includes fully licensed stems for five songs from the band's heyday.

To make it easier for non-musicians to remix the songs, the developers reduced the parameters of control, so that if you tap a certain part too early, the app waits until the proper beat in the song to play it.

"We're basically making GarageBand functionality available on a phone, but with professional recorded music in it," Zooz Mobile President and CEO Scott Geller told Wired.com.

The app costs \$5, which is what you'd pay for non-remixable versions of the same tracks, and that investment could pay off in more than just sheer entertainment value. Once you get the hang of it, you can enter your remix to win a slice of the prize money the company is offering for the best entries as voted by users — \$1,500 for the best one and \$250 to each of three runners-up. Each winner also gets a Jackson 5 prize pack consisting of a hoodie, a bag and a T-shirt, as do 30 honorable mentions.

For the label and publisher, selling a remixable version of these songs ("ABC," "Dancing Machine," "I Want You Back," "Mama's Pearl" and "The Love You Share") represents a new way to get paid for old music while offering fans something they can use, instead of just consume. Because this requires a new type of music licensing similar to that of using a song in a film, details need to be hammered out on a case-by-case basis before remixable songs can be released.

"This is basically the Super Bowl of licensing — we have EMI Publishing on one side, which owns [sync rights for] the Jackson 5 songs, and then Universal Music Enterprises, which includes the Motown catalog on the masters side," said Geller. "It's kind of a new thing — there is coordination between what you see on the screen and the music,

but it's not a sync license in the traditional sense of a movie or something like that."

With the music licensing out of the way, Zooz Mobile engineer Mark Godfrey turned each isolated element of the song (Michael Jackson's lead vocals, his brothers' back-up harmonies, guitar parts, bass and drums) into discreet modules for users to activate or deactivate, essentially painting them into the track with their fingertips. To prevent the user from creating something unmusical out of the samples, the app helps out with timing, so that everything stays in sync.

"You don't want to have every section of the song in there, and every possible loop, so we had to go through [and choose]," said Godfrey. "Especially when you have a three-guitar song like 'ABC,' you have to choose which one you want to use."

We're too busy at SXSW to spend an entire afternoon with this, but I have a feeling it will be just the thing for the plane ride back home.

See Also:

- [Zoozbeat Turns iPhone Into Beat Factory for 3 Bucks](#)
- [Anyone, Really, Can Make and Share Music with Zooz Mobile's iPhone](#)
- [Best Ways to Produce Music on an iPhone](#)
- [10 Weird Ways to Distribute Music](#)

SXSW: LaDiDa iPhone App Lets Anyone With a Voice Make Music in Seconds

AUSTIN, Texas — Outside of isolated cultural pockets — the Irish countryside, Appalachia and church among them — most people think of music as something other people make for them to enjoy. But as anyone who sings or plays an instrument knows, making music can be a deeply satisfying act, and it's a shame that more people don't get to do it.

The husband-and-wife team behind LaDiDa — Khush CTO Parag Chordia and CEO Prerna Gupta — have devised a “reverse karaoke” app that makes it simple for anyone with an iPhone or iPod Touch to make songs with full instrumentation using only their voice.

You don't even have to be able to sing in tune in order to use the \$3 app, which was approved last fall. In the demo video above, Chordia, who is also an assistant professor of music at the Georgia Institute of Technology, sings absolutely terribly to show that, really, anyone can do it. (It's quite difficult for a trained musician to sing that poorly, so he's been practicing.)

The app is impressive. It creates harmonic and rhythmic elements after you've recorded yourself singing anything you please, whether it's a pop song cover, “Happy Birthday” or something original. LaDiDa corrects your pitch and adds some reverb (just like the pros do), then aligns it with these elements and plays it back in a variety of styles that you can toggle through until you find the one that sounds best.

From there, the app lets you easily share your creation through Facebook or Twitter. As Gupta suggests, a great use of LaDiDa would be to sing “Happy Birthday” for someone and send it to them electronically, although that's really just the tip of the iceberg.

LaDiDa is available in the iTunes store for \$3 ([iTunes link](#)).

See Also:

- [Best Ways to Produce Music on an iPhone](#)
- [iPhone App Digitizes Sheet Music, Teaches You Piano](#)
- [Music Video Shot with iPhone, Jerry-Rigged Camera Stabilizer](#)
- [Sneak Peek: Rhapsody's Upcoming iPhone App](#)
- [SXSW: MOG's Mobile Music Apps Go Beyond the Playlist](#)

How I Survived My SXSW Keynote Interview

Daniel Ek and Eliot Van Buskirk chat in front of thousands during a SXSW Interactive keynote conversation Tuesday.

Photo: Jim Merithew/Wired.com

“You must feel like the third wife of Henry the 8th,” Hugh Forrest told me as I prepared to interview Spotify CEO Daniel Ek in front of thousands of South by Southwest Interactive attendees, many poised to review my performance in real time on Twitter.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, you know what happened to the first two,” said Forrest, SXSWi’s event director.

The volatile combination of audience dissatisfaction, Twitter’s immediacy and the bland nature of some high-profile keynote interviews at “South By,” as the hipsters used to call it, has been incendiary the past few years, causing otherwise-respected interlocutors to be pelted by virtual tomatoes and beer cans on the real-time short-messaging network.

You can’t just talk at a SXSW audience anymore, because the audience (an estimated 40 percent larger than last year’s SXSWi crowd of 10,741, according to event organizers) has more power than ever, thanks in no small part to Twitter.

Henry the 8th’s first wife in the above scenario was Sarah Lacy, the *BusinessWeek* columnist who drew the fearsome ire of the SXSW crowd with a much-derided [interview of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg](#) in 2008.

“Never, ever have I seen such a train wreck of an interview,” said Jason Pontin on Twitter in a message representative of hundreds that criticized her interviewing style as ingratiating, with too many interruptions. “Poor girl, flirtatiously awful tho’ she was,” he (sort of) commiserated.

On Monday, Henry the 8th’s second wife, Umair Haque, met a similar fate at the tweeting fingertips of SXSW attendees for his [widely panned chat](#) with Twitter CEO Evan Williams. The Twitter executive’s “@anywhere” announcement was out of the way within the first five minutes, leaving Haque plenty of time to talk about how his theories of what constitutes a 21st-century business applied to Twitter.

Just one problem: Audiences were there to hear about Williams and Twitter, not Haque. “Off with his head!” demanded the crowd in hundreds of tweets sent during and after the panel. Haque later apologized for the interview and defended his theories.

When my turn came to face the thousands-strong throng to interview Spotify’s Ek — 24 hours after Haque’s fateful interview of Williams on the same stage — I had the eerie sensation that pirates must have felt when they were about to walk the plank, even before Forrest mentioned my likely fate as Twitter decapitee No. 3. I contemplated plunking down a random piece of electronics at the start of the interview and telling everyone it was a Twitter jammer.

But for whatever reason, I was spared by the Twittercutioners, and will live to moderate another day.

I chalk this up in part to lessons learned from the fates of Henry’s first two wives:

- People come to the SXSW keynote interviews to see and hear the interviewees, not the questioners.
- Keynoters should vary their presentations as much as possible to keep them interesting.
- Interviewers should solicit questions from the crowd using Twitter and the microphones located in the hall. Since it’s inconvenient — not to mention rude — to monitor your cellphone while holding an onstage conversation, I sent out the call for questions on Twitter a few hours earlier and copied resulting questions into my notebook.

I thank you, my would-be executioners. You spared me, and I am grateful ... at least until the next time I hear those blades being sharpened.

See Also:

- [SXSW: Twitter CEO Launches @anywhere to Tepid Audience Reaction](#)
- [SXSW: Zuckerberg Keynote Descends Into Chaos as Audience Takes to Twitter](#)
- [SXSW: Sarah Lacy Laughs Off Zuckerberg Keynote Debacle](#)
- [SXSW: Recapping the Keynote Roast With Bitstrips](#)
- [SXSW: Music Panels We’d Actually Pay to See](#)
- [SXSW: 2008, the Year the Audience Keynoted](#)

Alt Text: Final Fantasy, Then and Now

I am currently hip-deep in *Final Fantasy XIII*, and I can say with confidence that it has more Roman numerals than any *Final Fantasy* game I've ever played.

My first *Final Fantasy* game was *VII*, and I've felt like it would take a really special game for me to take on that third "I." When I saw that *XIII* would finally feature something I've been begging for — a guy wielding two guns with a baby chocobo in his hair — I decided it was time to take the plunge.

At the same time, I've started playing the original *Final Fantasy* game on the Wii Virtual Console, because I don't spend enough of my day sitting down as it is.

Now, you may be thinking to yourself "Aren't they basically the same game? After all, there haven't been any real advances in videogame technology in the past 23 years." As it turns out, there are a few differences, which I outline below.

Plot

Final Fantasy XIII: There's this Purge going on, because a Pulse fal'Cie has been ... OK, hold on. There are these things called fal'Cie, and they make people into l'Cie, to protect Cocoon from ... OK, there's this place called Cocoon and this other place called Pulse. And Pulse, well the thing is the fal'Cie made Cocoon, actually there are Pulse fal'Cie and Cocoon fal'Cie, and they each make l'Cie, which are ... well, Pulse and Cocoon are at war, or they used to be at war, and there's this one Pulse fal'Cie in a Vestige. OK, well, a Vestige is ... uh ... it's all kind of confusing but at least the heroes of the story don't know what's happening either. They spend most of the time so far asking what's going on and what they should be doing and if they're making the right choices, so I guess you could say it's immersive.

Final Fantasy: The heroes must restore light to the four elemental orbs and save the world.

Big Questions

Final Fantasy XIII: What is the nature of duty? What does one do when the most moral action hurts innocents? How can we know what truly controls our destiny?

Final Fantasy: Where's the damn inn?

Battle Options

Final Fantasy XIII: Each character has multiple classes, which can be combined into various paradigms, the better to build up chain bonuses and stagger the enemy — further increasing damage bonuses and often lowering enemy defenses — while protecting your weaker members. You can use automatic actions or choose specific actions, with the ability to determine your foes' weaknesses so that your AI-controlled teammates can better focus their attacks. You can also summon an Eidolon, which takes you to a separate battlefield with different options that you choose within the limited time allotted to the summoning.

Final Fantasy: FIGHT MAGIC DRINK ITEM RUN.

Characters

Final Fantasy XIII: Snow, the idealistic rebel whose cocky demeanor hides the heavy burden of responsibility he carries. Lightning, the battle-hardened soldier who masks her doubt with a single-minded thirst for battle. Hope, a child who seeks a purpose to his life to counter the despair that eats at his soul. Sazh, a man torn from his family by the caprice of forces beyond his control or understanding. Fang, a woman without a past or future who must move ahead at all costs. Vanille, the illegitimate child of Crocodile Dundee and Smurfette.

Final Fantasy: Fighter, thief, white mage, black mage, red mage, black belt — pick any four. You can name them whatever dirty word you can fit into four letters.

Monster Design

Final Fantasy XIII: Freaky-deaky.

Final Fantasy: Sometimes freaky, rarely deaky.

Button You'll Be Pressing in Battle 90 Percent of the Time

Final Fantasy XIII: "A"

Final Fantasy: "2"

Born helpless, nude and unable to provide for himself, Lore Sjöberg eventually overcame these handicaps to become a black belt, a red mage and a blue meanie.

See Also:

- [Alt Text: A Hard-Core Proposal for Gamers](#)
- [Review: Beautiful, Boring Final Fantasy XIII Loses RPG Magic](#)
- [Alt Text Video: Top 5 Most Guilt-Inducing Videogames](#)

Review: Squishy Repo Men Sticks Shiv in Organ-Extraction Action

Repo Men's Jude Law and Forest Whitaker are perfectly capable actors but here's the brutal truth: In this organ-swiping thriller, the most compelling moments belong to liver, kidney and spleen.

Set in a near-future, Tokyo-meets-New Jersey urbanscape crowded with JumboTrons, monorails, skyscrapers and shantytowns, the R-rated *Repo Men*, which opens Friday, blasts off with a brilliant premise worthy of a Philip K. Dick short story.

Sick people buy GPS-enabled artificial organs on an installment plan from a corporation called The Union. When a customer falls behind on payments, Union employees Remy (Law) and Jake (Whitaker) track the laggard down, perform crude surgery without anesthetic, reach into the poor bastard's body and repossess the overdue "artiforg."

Based on *The Repossession Mambo* novel by script co-writer Eric Garcia, this setup drives a succession of icky thrills, dramatized with conviction by a bulked-up Law. The British actor, who was nominated for Oscars for *Cold Mountain* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, clearly took this action role seriously, getting into thickly muscled shape with help from the same people who trained the cast of *300*.

Alice Braga plays a bionic chanteuse formed almost entirely from replacement parts.

Though Law looks the part physically, his character's grisly extractions are so outlandish you'd expect a dash of gallows humor to leaven the sadism. Instead, these repo men demonstrate little in the way of dark wit.

Whitaker's company-man character seems consumed with misguided notions of loyalty. Liev Schrieber plays Remy's corporate overseer with used-car-salesman smarm but lacks the stinging one-liners that distinguish the juiciest movie villains.

The primary injections of satirical tone come not from the generally generic dialogue but from feel-good pop songs that counterpoint the on-screen butchery.

Meanwhile, Law's earnest portrait grows tiresome, as does the dreary domestic conflict between Remy and his grim wife Carol ([Carice Van Houten](#)). For the sake of their son, Carol wants Remy to find a more wholesome day job. In the thankless role, Van Houten, spectacular in the Dutch thriller *Black Book*, comes across as a one-dimensional shrew.

Enter the lovely Brazilian actress [Alice Braga](#), who plays a drug-addicted nightclub singer made up almost entirely of spare parts.

Even with Braga on board, *Repo Men* sags. But fortunately, British director [Miguel Sapochnik](#) jacks up the pace with a startling vision of big business biotech animated by the best fight scene of the year and a seriously twisted sex 'n' surgery sequence.

Jude Law, left, and Forest Whitaker play Remy and Jake in *Repo Men*.
Images courtesy Universal Pictures

Sapochnik, making his first feature on the strength of a 15-minute short film called *The Dreamer*, knits together a largely convincing alt-world with help from production designer David Sandefur (*Minority Report*), cinematographer Enrique Chediak (*28 Weeks Later*) and special makeup effects expert Andrew Clement, who designed a convincing array of replacement innards.

Overcoming a rote middle section during which Law finally gets the inevitable wake-up call to do the right thing, *Repo Men* succeeds as a stylish exercise in mayhem. Moral of the story for working stiffs neck-deep in the Depressed Economy zeitgeist? When it comes to predatory corporate practices, you ain't seen nothing yet.

Follow us on Twitter: [@hughhart](#) and [@theunderwire](#).

WIRED Provocative premise powers cheap thrills and one stunning knife fight..

TIRED Mundane relationships and fuzzy motivation mar a sluggish second act.

Rating:

Read [Underwire's movie ratings guide](#).

See Also:

- [Repo Men: Perfect Metaphor for Econocalypse?](#)
- [Repo Men Posters Tout Joys of Organ Upgrades](#)
- [Repo Men Trailer](#)

Jackson and Del Toro's Hobbit Journey Begins This July

After false starts, lawsuits, hype and drama, Peter Jackson and Guillermo del Toro's cinematic adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's mythic classic *The Hobbit* finally starts filming this July in New Zealand.

According to Sir Ian McKellen, who returns as the masterful wizard Gandalf, casting has commenced and is taking place in Los Angeles, New York and London.

"The script too proceeds," McKellen wrote on his official site. "The first draft is crammed with old and new friends, again on a quest in Middle Earth. The director Guillermo del Toro is now living in Wellington, close to the Jacksons' and the studio in Miramar."

It seems all that is left to decide is who's going to step into Bilbo Baggins' furry feet. We asked for your input last year, and you settled on actors as different as Simon Pegg, Paul Giamatti and Emile Hirsch.

So let's open up the floor once again in this new year. Drop your dreamcasting selections for Jackson and del Toro's possible Hobbit duology in the comments section below. From Bilbo to Smaug and beyond into comparatively esoteric characters, there are plenty of major and minor roles to fill. And the road goes ever on and on until 2012, when the film is tentatively scheduled to premiere.

Image courtesy New Line Cinema

See Also:

- [Dreamcasting The Hobbit: Who's Your Bilbo?](#)
- [10 Knights to Follow Patrick Stewart and Peter Jackson](#)
- [Tolkien's Spy Past Inspires Hunt for Hobbit, Rings Spooks](#)
- [Hobbit Director Guillermo del Toro on the Future of Film](#)
- [Apocalypse, and How: Viggo Mortensen's Road Winds On](#)
- [Q&A: Sir Ian McKellen Takes On The Prisoner's Number One Tormenter](#)

SXSW: Dick Jokes, '80s Action Tropes Power *MacGruber*

AUSTIN, Texas — *MacGruber* is funnier than it has any right to be.

The comedy, a sendup of '80s action flicks starring *Saturday Night Live*'s Will Forte and Kristen Wiig, had its star-studded premiere Monday at South by Southwest, with co-stars Ryan Phillippe and Val Kilmer also in attendance.

Director Jorma Taccone was there to preface the screening with a warning: The cut of *MacGruber* screened at SXSW is almost-but-not-quite done. Some of the special effects weren't final, and some of scenes might be tweaked for the version that will hit theaters May 21. But it's already clear that lovers of the sharply written crude humor of *SNL Digital Shorts* — which have gone viral online, with uncensored versions racking up millions of views — will get a kick out of this.

History suggested that would not happen. It's a *Saturday Night Live* movie — you know, those things they mercifully stopped making 10 years ago after *The Ladies' Man* and *Superstar*. Those films were at least based around original central characters: Taccone's *MacGruber* sketches are just *Mad* magazine-style parodies of the '80s television series *MacGyver*, only the hero (wait for it) *fails* to construct life-saving contraptions out of ordinary items. Ha ha!

That would not have carried a feature film. But Taccone (and co-writers Forte and John Solomon) seem to have realized this, and reframed the plot as a sendup of the buddy-cop genre.

They stick rigidly to the formula laid down by *Lethal Weapon*, *Die Hard*, etc. Special agent MacGruber (Forte) is reluctantly called out of retirement for one last mission: Track down his wife's killer, generic European terrorist Dieter Von Cunth (Kilmer). But he's paired with his total opposite, rookie special agent Dixon Piper (Phillippe), who knows how to complete missions sans the epic failure.

The movie rolls out a series of stock situations: The chief calls MacGruber a loose cannon and kicks him off the case! Then he's back on it, learning to work together with his partner! Finally, just when it seems the chips are down, the rookie learns the wisdom of the grizzled veteran's crazy contraptions!

The most ridiculous of these involves a piece of celery inserted into a personal part of Forte's anatomy. We see his ass a lot in *MacGruber*, actually; we see it in the Pentagon, we see it outside an enemy base and we see it in two extended sex scenes that are pretty much what you'd

expect from the makers of "Dick in a Box" when you give them an R rating.

Forte's face — all wild, bug-eyed expressions of childish disbelief at the action movie going on around him — is funnier than his ass. But Wiig, generally the funniest person in any movie in which she appears, is one of the big reasons *MacGruber* is consistently entertaining.

Forte and Phillippe run around screaming their heads off and shooting people the whole time, but Wiig got even bigger laughs from the SXSW crowd just whispering her lines. Her feature film interpretation of Vicki St. Elmo, MacGruber's imperiled assistant, is pretty much all her *SNL* characters rolled into one, but I'm fine with that.

The *MacGruber* TV skits aren't my favorites; they're pretty much one obvious joke hammered over and over again. But we were quoting the movie and laughing on the way out of the theater (and even days later in the airport), and doesn't that count for something? I don't think this will become a breakout classic like *Wayne's World*, but it's a proof of concept that the *SNL* sketch movie, in the hands of young talent like Taccone, isn't a bad idea per se.

Although it's probably safe to pass on the 90-minute version of "I'm on a Boat."

Photo credit: Ryan Phillippe, Will Forte and Kristen Wiig in MacGruber (Greg Peters/Rogue Pictures)

See Also:

- [SXSW: Kick-Ass Is Fast, Furious and Funny as Hell](#)
- [SXSW: First Look at Bigger, Nastier Predators](#)
- [SXSW: Motorhead Mania Cranks Up as Lemmy Blitzes Austin](#)
- [SXSW: People vs. George Lucas Packs Vitriol, Nostalgia](#)
- [SXSW 2010: Full Coverage From Wired](#)

SXSauced: Bid Austin Good Knight With a Bit of Bourbon

A trio of delights at The Good Knight: The Desert Rose, A Slice of Heaven and an Old Fashioned. *Photo: Keith Axline/Wired.com*

AUSTIN, Texas — The big browns — Scotch and bourbon — hold a place of sanctity among aficionados. They're considered perfect just how they are, and aren't mixed as often as their colorless cousins.

Whiskey is usually served neat, or maybe with a little bit of water or ice. That's about as far as most serious whiskey drinkers are willing to go.

"There's a certain pomposity to whiskey drinkers — thou shall not muck this up," says Billy Hankey, bar master of The Good Knight here in East Austin. Hankey, who helped open the tavernlike restaurant a year and a half ago (and even built the bar), knows he's going out on a ledge by basing most of his mixed drinks around God's Great Gift.

"Bourbon, rye, brown liquor in general — it's this glorious thing that's often overlooked in cocktails," he says.

Sure, brown liquors can get fancy. There's the mighty Manhattan. And let us now forget the beloved Old Fashioned. The recent return of absinthe has lifted the profile of the once-obscure Sazerac. But Hankey's whiskey cocktails — some are simple twists on old favorites and some are entirely his own — push the flavor envelope.

Consider a new selection on The Good Knight's menu: A Little Slice of Heaven, made using Buffalo Trace bourbon, Nocello walnut liqueur and Framboise. Served up , it's bold like bourbon but the nutty and sweet overtones mellow out the burn.

A little more edgy are the rye-based drinks, like Hankey's spin on the classic Sazerac — a mix of Old Overholt rye, Pernod and bitters (\$7) — which delivers a perfect amount of bitterness. The Good Knight's eponymous house cocktail — made with Old Overholt, Paula's lemon, sweet vermouth and bitters (\$8) — is both bitter and sour, but not overly so.

The Good Knight is just outside of the downtown hub, a five-minute walk from the hustle of the South by Southwest conference and festival, which continues here this week. But attendees would do well to venture into East Austin's sleepy boho grid for more upscale late-night fare — the menu changes seasonally, but you'll always find hearty soups, pot pies, delicious local vegetables and rustic flatbread pizzas on offer.

Ryes and bourbons can beat up on delicately flavored dishes, so Hankey balances the drink menu with some lighter options. The Bee's Knees is a straightforward blend of Bombay Sapphire gin, lemon and honey (\$7). The mysterious Desert Rose contains mescal, St. Germaine, Cherry Heering liqueur and grapefruit juice (\$14). Both are refreshing, fruity and pleasantly odd.

Hankey is constantly workshopping new recipes, and he keeps a section at the bottom of the menu cornered off for "New Cocktails." Start there, or start at the very top for one of his perfect house Old Fashioneds. Either way, The Good Knight shall not muck it up.

See Also:

- [SXSauced: Crafty Cocktails at East Side Show Room](#)
- [SXSauced: Sinfully Good Cocktails at P  ch  ](#)
- [SXSauced: Viatinis Flow at Wired Happy Hour](#)
- [SXSW 2010: Full Coverage From Wired](#)

SXSW: Amps Set on 11, Bagpipes Set on Stun

The Ferocious Few play the sidewalk along Red River Road in Austin on Wednesday night.

AUSTIN, Texas — Bands brought the noise during Wednesday's transition between the interactive and music portions of the South by Southwest festival here.

After days of power-tweeting and foursquare badge wrangling during SXSWi, suddenly there's music everywhere: Bands play in hotel lobbies, on street corners and anywhere else there's a little bit of spare space and maybe a power outlet.

San Francisco band The Ferocious Few drew power from their car battery to amp up a sidewalk performance.

To make things just a little more off the hook, Wednesday was St. Patrick's Day: Green wigs, binge drinking and at least one strolling bagpipe player helped turn up the volume as Austin got its Irish on. (Yeah, we know the bagpipe is traditionally associated with the Scots, but it's close enough for rock 'n' roll.)

"I noticed a lack of Celtic music on Sixth Street on St. Patty's Day last year, said Andrew King, a Salt Lake City musician attending his second SXSW. "So I brought my own bagpipe this year."

Andrew King of Salt Lake City brought his bagpipe to SXSW 2010.

Traffic is bumper-to-bumper coming up Fifth Street toward the Austin Convention Center.

Austin resident Scott O'Donnell emerges from the bathroom at the Game Streamer party held at the Shangri La on Austin's East Side Wednesday afternoon.

The Irish spirit was well represented Wednesday on Sixth Street in Austin.

If you can't think of anything to do at SXSW, just look at any surface to find myriad choices.

The Zs from Brooklyn, New York, play a house party on Austin's East Side.

There is plenty of beer, music and pizza at SXSW, but not enough bathrooms.

Photos: Jim Merithew/Wired.com

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See Also:

- [Fifth Annual SXSW BitTorrent Download Is Almost Legal](#)
- [SXSW: Geeks Defend Their Foursquare Turf](#)
- [SXSW 2010: Full Coverage From Wired](#)

FlashForward Flashes Forward Without Its Creator

FlashForward producer Marc Guggenheim and creator David S. Goyer sketched out a meticulous mythology for the time-warp series last summer, right down to a key scene planned for the season finale that would air 10 months in the future.

Then the show, which deals with the aftereffects of a catastrophic global blackout, suffered its own potentially crippling shakeup: Guggenheim left the show in October. Goyer, co-writer of *The Dark Knight*, departed in February to focus on new Batman and Superman movies.

It's as if Chris Carter quit *The X-Files* six months into production or *Lost* co-creator Damon Lindelof bailed on the Oceanic Six before the island's mysteries got sorted out, right?

Jack Davenport plays a scientist whose company might be responsible for the global blackout in *FlashForward*, a taut drama that mixes a little bit of sci-fi with a lot of head games.

Photos courtesy ABC

Not really, says *FlashForward* star Jack Davenport.

"It's not as if David left the building with the end of his series in his head," Davenport, the British actor who plays physicist-with-a-conscience Lloyd Simcoe, told *Wired.com* in a phone interview. "There's a building full of talented writers who have been working on the show as long as he has. When David went off to do other things, the bible of the show, the mythology, whatever you want to call it, did not exit the property with him."

After a three-month hiatus, *FlashForward* returns to ABC on Thursday with 12 new episodes. Trailers hint at another blackout that would produce a second worldwide "flash forward," enabling every human to see a brief slice of his or her future.

As for his character's immediate future, Davenport says: "When last seen, I was being bundled into the back of an ambulance by men who clearly were not nurses. There are a lot of people who would like the information that resides in my head. Ironically, that will push me toward Mark, which is something that neither of us is thrilled about."

Why the tension?

The wife of Joseph Fiennes' Mark Benford character seems predestined to wind up sleeping with Simcoe. Like other relationships on the show,

the not-so-lovely triangle between Mark, Lloyd and Olivia Benford (played by *Lost* alum Sonya Walger) is driven by what they've seen in their flash forwards, setting up the show's overarching theme: the struggle between free will and fate.

"This bond between Olivia, Mark and Lloyd becomes more complicated and has a fairly central role in explaining things as the show reaches its finale," Davenport says.

FlashForward's mix of soap opera friction, sci-fi machinations and conspiracy thriller elements resulted in a strong start last fall but the show lost viewers by the time it took a break in late November.

Nonetheless, Davenport sounds excited about the series' thought-provoking premise. "I'm not normally a huge fan of the big concept show," Davenport says. "My heart sinks when I read a script that starts with a group of time-traveling veterinarians or whatever.

"But the thing I love about *FlashForward* is that once the big concept happens, you're left with the aftermath. I've played roles where there are triangular relationship constructs but never under this kind of pressure where you've got this weird vision of the future, free will versus determinism, is it written in the stars or not?"

Blowback: Will You Be Flashing on *FlashForward*?

With showrunners Lisa Zwerling, Tim Lea and Goyer's wife Jessika Borsiczky now in charge, *FlashForward's* two-hour "Revelation Zero" episode airs Thursday at 8 p.m. EDT on ABC.

Which brings us to the blowback portion of the program. What's your take on *FlashForward's* fresh start? Which character should be killed off? Are you loving the tattooed villains and African catastrophes, or has *FlashForward* lost sight of its own future? Weigh in below.

Follow us on Twitter: [@hughhart](#) and [@theunderwire](#).

See Also:

- [Review: *FlashForward* DVD Offers Half-Season Flashback](#)
- [First Look: *FlashForward* Spins Global Blackout Into Time-Warp](#)
- [Review: Fast-Paced *FlashForward* Promises Epic Mind Games](#)

SXSW: Geeks Defend Their Foursquare Turf

SXSW attendee Aliza Sherman is determined to rule foursquare in her home town of Tok, Alaska.

AUSTIN, Texas — You weren't cool enough to be elected class president in high school, but now you can become mayor of your local Yogurtville.

Foursquare has given geeks a second shot at being a big shot, but as the mobile location-sharing service piles on new users, some are finding themselves defending their turf.

"I can't throw a ball and I'm a terrible athlete, but I know I can compete at this," says foursquare power player Nan Palmero, a blogger and journalist from San Antonio, Texas. "I can put one foot in front of the other, and this is something that's fun for me."

Foursquare players compete for mayordoms and badges — you become the "mayor" of a location when you use the service to "check in" at a location more often than anyone else, and you earn badges by completing special tasks, like checking in at two hotels in one night or visiting multiple BBQ joints over the course of a week.

Location-sharing services have been steadily growing in popularity since foursquare launched its iPhone app at South by Southwest Interactive in 2009. The gaming aspect of foursquare motivates bloggers, Xboxers and comic book collectors to hit the streets with their iPhones and BlackBerries to play virtual king of the hill. As more players compete, foursquare becomes a real-time measure of the popularity of a given location or event.

Nan Palmero's BlackBerry displays the SXSW badges he collected in Austin.

The competition heats up at technology-oriented conferences like South by Southwest, which continues this week in Austin, as thousands of out-of-town festivalgoers roam the streets looking for the hottest parties and shows.

To amp up the battle, foursquare built a special set of badges that SXSW attendees can earn by completing different tasks in and around Austin. There's a special badge for checking in at multiple pools and hot tubs, one for visiting more than one taco truck, and one for taking a ride in the Karaoke RV, which has been rolling around the city's streets all weekend.

Palmero doesn't mess around — he has 37 of the 40 available badges. He's been psyching himself up to dominate the show since before SXSW started.

"I knew I was far gone before I got here," he says. "I looked at the page of badges and said to myself, 'I've just got to win this.'"

Scooping up badges is all the rage in Austin, but some people, like Aliza Sherman of Tok, Alaska, get more pleasure claiming mayorships. Sherman is already the mayor of the Three Bears grocery store in Tok, but her goal is to be the mayor of every business in the 1,400-person town.

"Fast Eddy's is the best place to eat in Tok," she says. "Somebody there, I believe it's the son of the owner, is into foursquare. He knocked me off of mayordom, so I keep going back as often as I can. I have to be mayor again. I really want to have a royal flush of mayorships across all of Tok."

One prized mayorship SXSW attendees fought over this week: Ben Huh. The CEO of Cheezburger Network is listed as a place in the foursquare system.

He says either a friend or somebody who works at foursquare put him into the system as a joke. He also suspects alcohol was involved.

"There was no competition to be mayor of Ben until somebody started drinking," he says. "That's usually what happens on foursquare. One person checks in somewhere, then everyone has to go check in there. It's a mob mentality."

If you want to try to become mayor of Ben, he recommends you wear protection.

"There've been 52 people 'here' this week," he says.

CC Chapman, a marketing expert from Massachusetts, has 16 mayorships spread out around Boston and New York. He says the key for him was to get in early — he joined foursquare when it launched at SXSW in 2009 and created a lot of locations in the system, making himself mayor of each of those spots by default.

"I'm starting to lose all of them," Chapman says. "There's this guy who works at EMC who keeps checking in and taking all of my mayorships away."

Andy Volk, president and founder of Downtempo, a small investment and incubation firm in San Francisco, says he's getting more use out of foursquare than the official SXSW events listings.

“The special badges, the party check-ins — it’s all really smart,” he says. “It’s a classic example of community done right. It’s a really great way to build traction, and I wouldn’t be surprised if they got some great usage numbers out of this.”

Indeed, foursquare says it set records during SXSW Interactive: According to tweets from the official foursquare Twitter account, the service logged almost 350,000 check-ins Saturday and players had unlocked more than 10,000 badges by Sunday.

With more than 500,000 users, there’s no question foursquare, only a year old at this point, has built a passionate user base. Even people who don’t play are talking about the service at SXSW.

“We play foursquare — it’s great,” says Little John, a busker holding a banjo who was in Austin to perform (although not at any of the official SXSW venues). But people in his crowd play with an actual ball rather than smartphones — no iPhones allowed. “Punk-rock foursquare is a bunch of drunk kids who are part of the underground music scene,” he says.

Palmero — the guy who gathered a staggering 37 foursquare badges at SXSW this year — maintains about 20 mayorships in different cities. He’s well-known in the social media circles in San Antonio, so people there take great pleasure in ousting him from mayorships as often as possible.

“But then I come back and crush them,” he says. “I rule my mayorships like I rule Candyland — with an iron fist.”

See Also:

- [Gowalla Tops Foursquare at SXSW Web Awards \(But Benson Smokes 'em All\)](#)
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Austin Calling: 10 SXSW Bands You Shouldn't Miss

Austin's annual South By Southwest conference started out as a musical showcase, long before nerds with laptops and suits with films arrived. But now that SXSW has exploded into a multimedia colossus, it's harder than before to sift out the worthy sonics from the buzz and noise.

That's why we've drafted this handy to-do list for those looking for musical direction. Below you will find 10 artists fully deserving of your possibly inebriated time and attention.

But it's by no means a full one. This year, SXSW's musical palette is as packed as ever with talent, so it's mathematically impossible to catch every awesome show in a single night, much less several. So if we missed anyone, beneath the radar or otherwise, school us in the comments section.

Now, prepare to break the speed of sound.

Spoon

Who better to kick off SXSW's music leg than Austin's own piano popper Spoon (pictured above)? As one of the best bands of last decade, Britt Daniel and crew have continually crafted sly, hooky rock culminating in Spoon's latest effort *Transference*, released in January. Expect to hear much of *Transference* live on Wednesday, as well as beloved tunes from Spoon's back pages, delivered with love for the home crowd.

Stone's Throw Showcase

DJ J. Rocc spearheads Stone's Throw's all-45s dance party Wednesday night.

Image courtesy Matthew Scott

On Wednesday night at the Speakeasy Cabaret, SXSW's coolest music is provided by the wax warriors of Los Angeles' indie label Stone's Throw. But its standout turntablists won't be picking up axes or synths, but

Technics and 45s, giving Austin its most danceable party of the conference.

Why 45s? Why not?

“Vinyl is much easier to use than digital,” DJ J Rocc told Wired.com by e-mail, ahead of his Wednesday night stand with Madlib, Egon, Peanut Butter Wolf and more. “You can see where you want to put the needle, hold it in your hand, read the credits and artwork. Stuff you can’t do with a MP3.”

Labels like Stone’s Throw view the age of digital DJs with skepticism, which is usually why their live shows end up being such engaging affairs. Advancements in technology have made it easier to be a DJ, but not a great one like Rocc or the stunning Madlib, both of whom pressed up specific acetates for their all-45s show.

“Everyone can DJ now if they own a laptop,” Rocc said, “but it still takes skill to play music right.”

DJ Spooky

The smartest DJ alive, Paul Miller is busier than a vanishing honeybee during SXSW with multiple shows based around the cerebral composer’s various projects. He’s also planning to show off his new iPhone app with a DJ battle, helm a panel wondering why the music industry has not yet sued Girl Talk, perform with Danger Mouse, Diplo and much more. He’s so our kind of geek.

Miller’s latest geek-out is the full-length effort *The Secret Song*, a labyrinthine blast of hip-hop, electronica and philosophy. You might need to eat some smart food before comprehending it all, but you should be happy, given hip-hop’s increasing ability to churn out dumbed-down product. Whether you call him DJ Spooky or Paul Miller, you can’t with any good conscience call him uninspired.

SXSW: Grooms Brings Noisy Indie Rock From New York to Austin

AUSTIN, Texas — Guitarist, singer and boutique effects pedal maker Travis Johnson is planning on adding a new piece of gear to his arsenal, just for South by Southwest: a pair of cheap shades to keep the sun from washing out his tuner's display.

"I like playing outside even though it's impossible to see your tuner and what it's actually saying," said Johnson, whose band Grooms played a day party Wednesday as the music portion of the festival kicked off. "I think I'm going to get some sunglasses just to put over that."

Early morning and afternoon time slots can be awkward for bands playing the busy festival, especially on the first day, when most fans are either hungover, asleep or haven't arrived yet. Trying to draw a crowd for the day parties can be difficult, with dozens of bands playing at venues around town at any given moment during SXSW.

At Wednesday's opening-day gig, pictured above, Grooms came out swinging and rocked the Music Gym stage like the house was packed. The crowd was sparse but enthusiastic, and although the newly constructed stage bounced like a trampoline during the set, Johnson says it was the best-sounding SXSW show he's played. (The three-piece band will play its second of three SXSW 2010 shows at 8 p.m. Monday at Wave Rooftop.)

LISTEN:

"Acid King of Hell (Guitar Feelings)," by Grooms

A gear geek and tone tweaker, Johnson admits to hiding behind the compression on the overdrive channel of his Fender amp at shows, but is thinking about taking the leap into clarity.

"I'm kind of afraid of a really clean signal," he says. "For most of our stuff it would sound kind of weird. So I think I'm going to play on the clean channel and use one of our distortion pedals to give it some grit. That way when I step on the distortion pedal it will sound huge instead of just fuzzier. Our records are recorded with really clean sounds, but live I feel superweird about it for some reason."

The Brooklyn, New York-based band's sound is driven by beautiful indie-rock grooves accented by fits of noise and crescendos. Think Pavement's "AT&T" off Wowee Zowee but with more focus.

Lyricaly, Johnson says most of his songs revolve around guilt and forgiveness — a product of a very religious upbringing in Dallas. Musically, the 28-year-old's influences come from a summer when he was an impressionable teen of 15 or 16. "There was this one summer where I got into The Smiths, Sonic Youth, Pavement and New Order all at the same time," he says.

Another influential moment came when Johnson's dad sat him down and made him listen to The Beatles' *White Album*. He says it was the first time he'd heard music that could be scary.

"It's such a weird experience to get scared by music," Johnson says. "It makes you feel like you're not really there in a weird way. That's what's really tricky about technology, is that it's really easy to make 'weird' sounding stuff. What makes it a copout versus not a copout with how intentional something is, is, 'Did you take something that doesn't sound weird at all and just make it sound weird because you put some filter on it with a computer?'"

Travis Johnson stands in front of an old sugar factory across the street from his band's practice space in Williamsburg.

Moving to New York City

Johnson met Grooms' bass player and co-founder Emily Ambruso at the University of Oklahoma, where he studied history. They each transplanted to New York separately, where they hooked up with Grooms' drummer Jim Sykes.

Johnson's move from Oklahoma to New York seems almost scripted. The van that he and a friend had driven there was broken into the first night they hit the city and his guitars were stolen. A couple of weeks later, as he burned through a modest savings with no job, the van was towed and he had to use the last of his money to get it back. When he returned to his apartment from the tow yard, an e-mail was waiting for him from a temp agency with a job offer.

Years later, the setbacks take on a nostalgic glow as Grooms are three-time veterans of SXSW and are signed to Kanine Records.

Now Johnson is living what fans of Tenacious D call the "cream dream." He works in what can only be described as a musician's clubhouse in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, assembling boutique

guitar pedals in a workroom next to his band's practice space. There's a kitchen, lounge and rope canopy for when you just need to lie suspended for a minute and reflect on how sweet your job is.

Oh yeah, and there's a popular venue just down the hall where Grooms often play. It goes by the same name as the pedal company, Death By Audio. Johnson says it took him a while to see the beauty of the arrangement, but he admits that it's not too terrible.

Johnson and Ambruso do most of their songwriting collaboratively since they've been intermittent roommates over the years. The band tries to find a sweet spot between noise and melody, according to Johnson.

"I think pretty music could get noisier and still be pretty and I think noisy music could be really sad or really happy or weird," he says. "It could convey emotions without just being abrasive sounds."

In not just finding beauty in the noise, but searching for the meaning behind it, Grooms has moved beyond many bands that make pretty sounds but have nothing to say.

When pressed on what he'd like listeners to take away from the trio's music, Johnson says: "Ultimately I want it to be an emotional experience, not just a visceral experience."

Johnson's guitar pedals include Death By Audio's own Octave Clang, second from left.

The rope canopy in Grooms' studio is currently being used for storage, but was initially intended as a relaxing hangout spot.

Grooms' practice room is right next door to the Death By Audio workroom.

Death By Audio's Robot pedals wait to get their brains.

Johnson assembles his guitar effects pedals in this workroom.

Photos: Keith Axline/Wired.com

See Also:

- [Fifth Annual SXSW BitTorrent Download Is Almost Legal](#)
- [SXSW: YouTube Launches Partner Program for Indie Bands](#)
- [SXSW 2010: Full Coverage From Wired](#)



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