

The Asphalt Jungle

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Noon approaches on the fateful Saturday as the temperature on the pavement slowly creeps over one hundred degree. This is the relentless heat that will warp the minds of the afflicted purple mass. The door of a truck slams as groups of students and alumni unhitch the black smokers that lurked like great billowing beasts from the back of their trucks. A fraternity president backs his smoker into one of the countless stenciled rows and begins to set up the purple pop up tent, one more roof in the growing shantytown. But what lies behind this dedication to collegiate tailgate culture?

“We come out here around noon with the smoker and claim our spot. They are all ridiculously priced; it’s around eight thousand bucks for a single parking space. Once the smoker is in place and the tents are set up we kick back and wait for the chaos to unfold.”

The smoke wafts away into the Texas summer sky, smelling deliciously of cedar, mesquite, apple wood and the distinct tinge of hickory; this nasal medley is ignored by those who are greeted with it, more important things are at hand. TCU football is back, and after months starving without college football fans are flocking to the spectacle.

The purple sea of students swells as the sweltering heat reaches it peak. Enthused groups of five, ten, even twenty students cross the burning plain to find their oasis among the pickup trucks, tents and flags. The noise grows slowly; a crescendo of high-pitched chatter, genuine laughs and countless country songs greet the ear with a kind reception. Welcome home friend, it whispers, welcome back to the paradise of collegiate sports.

This is College Football’s return. This is TCU tailgating.

Standing proudly in wranglers, a purple fishing shirt, mirrored sunglasses and a cowboy hat, a fraternity president scans the crowd. Raising his beer to the relentless Texas sun he exalts,

“T! C! U!” and is answered with the benediction from the mob,

“GO FROGS GO!”

The beer trough big spanning ten by four feet, eighty cubic feet of sunken malted treasure, the constant ebb and flow of the population of silver and blue cans continues for hours as if subject to rogue tides. The ice melts slowly, filling the metal with gallons of arctic water to cool the haggard brow of the early risers. Five

hundred, three hundred, one hundred beers left, the endless refreshment of a frosty beer in the heat drives the mass to proactively exterminate the population of the ice filled behemoth. The group around the trough continues to swell, usurping three more spots and the entire road. A mass of dripping musky bodies echoing the overly-loud lyrics,

“Sweet Caroline BUM BUM BAH! Good times never felt so good,

SO GOOD! SO GOOD! SO GOOD!”

To the right of the beer trough lays a face that reads like the pages of a paperback bestseller, dripping rivers of sweat, delusion and jubilation; celebrating the advent of the game day, a starting player in the southern sport of tailgate. This is the face from which you can't look away, the determined drunken grin masked in sunglasses and sweat, beer ever-present in his hand and on his breath, voice overly-loud just asking for confrontation. To his right sits a blonde on the tailgate of a pickup. Her golden hair perfectly curled as her face melts off in the Texas sun. The heat takes something out of these faces, it takes away a mask and lets the drunken truth shine through. The face of a pledge desperately trying to talk to her catches the eye, his bug eyes and high forehead draped in sweat, desperation and fear is cruelly entertaining. No wonder this pretentious mix of booze, blondes and upper-middle class Caucasians catches the laws attention.

An officer wades through the crowd to confront the depraved face of the jubilantly throbbing mass in the face of jeers from all around,

“I hope someone get's raped because you're wasting your time on us.” Is screamed, over the chorus of laughter immediately erupting.

The officer had had enough though,

“This is unacceptable. I'm not TCU PD, I can't just turn a blind eye to this shit. I seriously need to speak to someone who is...”

This member of Fort Worth's finest is immediately distracted by an explosion of angry oaths and landed punches behind him. A dispute over a parking space escalating to blows taking priority over the threat of a horde of fanatical students imbibing cheap beer to the best of their ability.

Another depraved dripping face shrugs his shoulders,

“When you're having a hell of a time and everyone is jealous you're going to attract a lot of attention, I'm just glad that brawl over that old guys parking spot distracted the cops from our shit show.”

With a swift flick of the speaker dial Corey Morrow drowns out the moderated scuffle. The purple sea closes in on itself and returns to the task at hand, feasting. Creations steam with the sweat and tears of almost a full day of preparation, and are demolished by the famished hands of friends. The cedar board lies silently in wait adjacent to the smoker. It's abuse knows no bounds, the constant knife strokes and puller scratches have no effect on the hardy wood steaming in the heat of the day, smelling of vinegar and molasses, the toils of the masters coming to fruition. The tender meats melt slowly on the palate; served on a tortilla with lime the pulled pork taco fuels the fire that is TCU tailgating. This wooden altar had been the offering place of hundreds of generous offerings to quench the hunger of the churning mob.

The population of the purple shanty-town begins to thin as students and alumni alike start the trek towards the looming yellow brick of Amon G. Carter stadium, yet this is not the main event, only the capstone of the experience. The coliseum begins to fill slowly with purple as the long awaited awakening comes to fruition. The heat is not for the meek, those who still stand are the victors. The exodus to the stadium continues as the temperature creeps well over 102 degrees. To the left and to the right the scene is reminiscent of a battlefield, as the thump of steaming bodies with melted faces crumbling to the ground reaches fans ears. One-by-one sultry socialites continue to be plucked from their concrete beds and delivered in unconsciousness to the asylum of air conditioning and hydration.

"Freshman, they will learn," the melted blonde scoffs as she wipes the fog out of her golden aviators.

Yes they will, but are baptized by fire in this beautiful place.

The sanctuary is full of the afflicted, football has returned, but the true beginning of the season kicked off hours before hand. The ones who remain standing are but the survivors of the asphalt jungle, the TCU tailgate experience. Kickoff is on its way, but Ryan's victory is already complete, the game is a time for the tailgate purist to breathe deeply—and have another beer.