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Seven Nights of Sin

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You've been there. The day's work is done or at least forgotten. It's time to kick back. Relax. Go out. Maybe toss back a few. Then a few more. Question is, where to go? The same place we always go? The place we go when we're tired of the same place we always go? Scratch that. Let's shake it up. Check out something new. But where, oh where? Don't worry, *Ethos* hears things. We're hooked up with the down low. We sent some of our finest out on the town to be your eyes and ears and liver. Each writer went to a specific bar on a specific day because it might, just might, be the place to be that night (or morning). Some of these haunts were hits and some were duds. Some were out of the way and some were bar-going staples. Some were picked because of drink specials, some because of, ahem, ambience. Put it all together, and it's seven nights of sin.
boonie's sunday at... Thumbs

Thumbs is not the conventional establishment. "If you're looking to pick up chicks, you're in the wrong place, ... but we're trying to change that," says Thumbs bartender John Anderson.

You don't have to be a player seven days a week. Even God rested on the seventh day. Sunday at Thumbs is all-day Happy Hour. A time to let your guard down, drop your defenses. So with the remainder of what you've spent of your paycheck the two previous nights, you head here with no intention but to keep one of Ames' best Bloody Marys in hand at all times.

Chances are unless you've walked in with a friend, you won't know those bellied up to the bar. Jim Benson, one of only six on staff, notes: "It's mostly regulars. We know who you are, or actually, we know who you're not. If you don't know me, you're not here."

On this particular evening, I walk into Thumbs post-Super Bowl XXXVI after bowling league. In the front window was what appeared to have once been a nicely laid-out spread of hot dogs, hamburgers and veggies. By 11:30, it looks as if a battalion of drunk grunts had made their way through the chow line. But it wasn't the scraps of food that got my attention. Upon walking in, I saw someone I actually knew. "What are you doing here?" I asked. She replied, "Well my friends said, 'Let's go to Thumbs.' And I was like, 'Where's that?'" This is nothing new to Benson though. "Nobody knows where the fuck we are."

Thumbs is the small neighborhood dive your mother warned you about but would probably approve of upon further inspection. Sure, there are peanut shells strewn around the room and the overhead fan is wobbling in its loosened fixture on the ceiling, but that's part of the charm. You're more likely to find intelligent conversation here than on Welch Avenue, with the sohos in tube tops and black stretch pants dreaming about spring break.

Spending Sundays here allows you to think over the coming week. Maybe it's an upcoming project, or that certain boy or girl you've been pining over. Perchance it's the philosophy term paper assigned eight weeks ago that you haven't given a second thought.

While leaving one thing becomes obvious — Thumbs isn't just for Sundays anymore.

aaron's monday at... Tip Top Lounge

I'm sitting here in the Tip Top Lounge with a rum and Coke in hand, watching a school bus go to pick up children. It's 7:15 a.m., and I'm checking out whether the Tip Top is as top notch as they say it is at 7 on a freaking Monday morning.

From what I've heard, this is the place to be if you feel like a few drinks with the blue-collars who have just finished working the graveyard shift. Aside from the odd feeling of drinking before classes, there's nothing overly exciting here. Just me, the bartender and the Budweiser delivery guy.

However, I have to admit the place is comfortable. It has the small town bar feel, complete with old jukebox and pictures of regulars lining the walls all the way to the bathrooms. It seems like a place to just hang out and relax.

A little before 8 BT (bar time), guys start coming in. It's a group of five. They order their drinks and joke with the bartender. Shortly thereafter, a couple of older guys come in for coffee. Bartender Joane Doyle, 64, says the mornings to be here are on game days. "They're lining up at the door at 6, when we open on game days."

The Tip Top is legendary for its pre-Cyclone football chili. Seating is scarce, the wait is long and beer has a strange flavor after just brushing your teeth. Doors open at 6 a.m., but showing up after 5:30 a.m. will draw chants of "Late! Late! Late!"

I guess this isn't the time to be here, unless you work all night or feel the need for a few drinks before your 8 o'clock class.

So if you need a crib sheet, here's the breakdown:

Rum & Coke? $2.
Bottle o' Bud Light? $1.75.
Smirnoff Ice? No
Coffee? $1
Cigarettes? Yes.
Lottery tickets? Yes.
Fruity drinks? No, go somewhere else.
Welch Ave

All disclosure: I love Welch Ave. Station. 'Tis my bar of choice. However, being at Welch on Tuesday is a lot like being at Welch on Thursday, which is a lot like being at Welch on Monday. Welch is like an old friend who never changes, like going back to your old high school, like singing the same song every weekend at the karaoke bar. It's comforting. It's familiar. It's home. Welch is a place where you can go for your 21st birthday and get trashed or go for a couple of lackadasical daiquiris and hang loose. If you drink fruity crap, I don't.

But I couldn't send Ethos to seven bars in seven nights and skip good 'ol Welch. So Tuesday it is. Not that there's anything wrong with a Tuesday at Welch. It's easy on the pocket ($3 domestic pitchers, $1.50 Tangueray and tonic and free pool) and easy on the ears (Dave Gugliotta).

You probably do not know Gugliotta, or Guges as I like to call him and have never stopped to think whether he likes to be called that or not, but he rocks. He DJs at Welch three nights a week. Only classic rock on Tuesdays. Don't even try to convince him that early Radiohead is classic. It's not.

"Now that we're into the next decade, I will play early '90s grunge," Guges says. "Ten years out, and they're dead. Or if they've released a box set."

There is little decadent about Wednesday afternoon. Weekend drinking is still at least one day removed, while the responsibilities of the week still loom.

So to draw students in, Paddy's serves up reasonably priced grilled steer and drink.

"Buck Burgers" is the formal title of Paddy's Wednesday afternoon special. It actually stretches into the evening, starting at 4 and ending at 8. What you'll find here is a subdued environment where people are concerned, in their weekday worlds, with the events of society. Indeed, some people watch Peter Jennings rather than the pool table.

You can smell the grilled hamburger long before you pay the $1 for it. After you do, you make your way through the bar, smoke filling every crevice and jack- et can find and maybe after ordering a $4 pitcher, you find a place to sit — Buck Burgers is busy — and listen to hair metal.

Hair metal seems appropriate. It is the music of yesteryear — weakened by repeated play on Keg Night — and here at Buck Burgers it finds its home.

Something like Poison is going through something like its 12th riff and Peter Jennings is talking about Afghanistan and pool cues are meeting pool balls and beer mugs are meeting lips and people are everywhere and smoke is everywhere and then ... your order is called through a microphone.

My God, there is nothing like a grilled burger, is there? There's also nothing like paying $3 and change for two of them and fries.

White, wheat or onion are the choice of buns. I went with wheat. It wouldn't have mattered.

Do you taste that? That's mustard, ketchup, lettuce, tomatoes, onions above a grilled slab of meat with a center tinged with pink.

The beer came all night. Good beer, too. Pick a brand and Paddy's will pour you a pitcher's worth. They sure did for us.

At 8 p.m., our empty trays long since picked up and cleaned, we head out, halfway home to having a really good time. We head to Mickey's across the street for that. To hell with these workday responsibilities. Hello, weekend.

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday
Bethany's Thursday at...

Coconut Joe's

Aimee's Friday at...

Big Shots

When I turned 21, my friends warned me. They told me every rumor about the former Dean's List to keep me away, like how there are diseases out on the dance floor that we don't even know exist.

However, I thought something called "Fishbowl Friday" sounded like an ideal time to try out the redecorated, renamed bar, now known as Big Shots.

Big Shots doesn't look too much different from the former Dean's List. They've slapped on a new coat of black paint and installed some bubbly lights next to the dance floor. From my limited experience being in the Dean's List, it seemed pretty much the same.

My Dean's List angst disappeared when I got my fishbowl, filled with 128 ounces of Blue Maui goodness. The $2 cover along with the $10 bowl (plus $5 deposit) may seem steep at first, but I learned firsthand that one fishbowl is enough to get two mighty drunk.

About halfway through the fishbowl, the dance floor beckoned. Leaving the fishbowl behind, I tried to dance to the bar's wide array of Nelly and Jay-Z hits, which was amusing in a where-is-my-skirt kind of way. There were very few women wearing standard issue pull-and-peel skank tops. Mostly it was dudes wearing tacked-in, plaid, button-up shirts. There were only a few women wearing standard issue pull-and-peel skank tops.

I didn't know anyone but the people I came with. Shocker.

My dancing ended when I saw two of the people I came with making out next to me on the nearly empty dance floor. I whimpered and ran back to my fishbowl.

Although Big Shots isn't the first place I'd choose to go, fishbowls are fun, and for those who don't want to go grind or watch their friends get it on, the fishbowl is the perfect excuse to stay behind and talk with friends.

Bethany's Thursday at...

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justin's saturday at . . .

The Fox

A week prior to this trip, my crew couldn't get into the Fox for karaoke. Come on, we can get in any bar in Campustown, but there's a line at the Fox? Unreal. Anyway, week two we were, uh, lucky enough to actually enter the premises.

There should be a Surgeon General's warning label on the front door because entering the Fox is like getting in Snoop Dogg's tour bus. Every person in the place is blazing a cig so expect to inhale 10 years worth of second-hand smoke in one night.

Seating in the Fox isn't plentiful. If you're not in the door by 9 p.m., don't plan on sitting until an hour later. Also, a word of caution, don't piss off the cowboy waiter by standing in the aisle. If he can't deliver beer, you're just adding to his angst. He barked at my foursome, but that's cool. We're not messing with anyone wearing a cowboy hat and NASCAR sweatshirt, which is 90 percent of the clientele.

My friend Ben and I sign up for karaoke immediately. It's an hour wait and does it ever feel like one. My other amigo Chad is the first to complain. "Shoot me in the face, I want to die," he says. To pacify my three compadres' bitching, I buy the first two pitchers of Coors Light. The beer will help once we take the stage.

When it's finally time to kick out the janes, my buzz nourishes my courage. Right when Slash's guitar begins to wail on Guns N' Roses' "Sweet Child O' Mine," I'm ready to channel Axl Rose. We put on a full-scale show complete with cliched rock mannerisms: swaying with the mic stand, grimacing as we belt out each lyric and ripping off clothing. We thoroughly rock everyone in the joint.

At midnight the winners are announced. The announcer breezes through the third- and second-place winners. That's fine. We know we've clinched the grand prize of a $15 bar tab and a one song recording deal. It's a formality to even announce the winners. But we underestimate the contest's political nature. First place goes to some woman who sang some twangy country tune. Whatever.

Not standing for this slight, we leave in a fashion worthy of the aforementioned Rose. As our ruckus informs the Fox patrons of this travesty of justice, a woman stops us and agrees with our plight. Vindication.

Overall the Fox is a fun dive to rock karaoke in, but it's definitely not a final destination. A couple of hours will do you just fine, and the smoky smell will eventually come out of your clothes. Oh, and just remember that the karaoke judges don't know real talent. They probably even snubbed Prince, who supposedly was a regular in his pre-"Red Corvette" days.