THE
X
LIVES
OF
PAUL

THE X LIVES OF PAUL

is a multigenre compilation curated by

VAN JACK

and released by

GIRLY GIRL MUSIK

on November 21st, 2019

ALBUM ARTWORK BY

SEGAOCTOPUS

ASVMR

THICKLY PAINTED WALLS

HOUDINI MANSIONS

VAN JACK

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INTRODUCTION
by Gabriel George Martins, a.k.a. Van Jack

The X Lives of Paul was born without a name, but it always had a house.

The idea for the compilation came to me on September 4th, 2019. I was walking down a street towards a bus stop and thinking about some of my favorite music genres and how they were produced. Moments before, I saw a tweet by someone, though I can't remember who, talking about ambient music and I was just wondering how many times I used the Paulstretch function to help me create drones—drones were an essential part of my production, and they continue to be. It's still amazingly helpful from time to time.

If I use it the right way—"right" being anything I feel it's good or fit, without much reasoning beyond what I can hear and feel—, I get some blissful, spacy, often dark sounds to be part of a more layered track, or to use just like they were: drones. It is as magical as the download page make it seem to be: "It can transform any sound/music to a texture".

So, I began wondering how many people used Paulstretch's Audacity plugin or standalone software in their music—how many people owe Paulstretch at least a tiny portion of their output. I couldn't say for sure back when I pondered this, but I had the impression that a lot of us, producers from the underground, had a comforting, cozy story involving the tool.

Considering that, I felt like the algorithm deserved some praise—which is something odd to say in a world seemingly dominated by algorithms. The fact is, Paulstretch isn't just essential for experimental music, chiefly drone and ambient, but it's also a catalyst of human sensations of all kinds, either for listeners diving in a sea of lengthy perceptions or artists patiently spending hours in front of a computer, trying to achieve something they, more often than not, don't even know what it is.

That praise, of course, didn't struck me at once as a dedicated compilation, but I'm not gonna say the jump from a forgettable tweet to a massive conception wasn't very fast either. In fact, it was so fast that the forgettable tweet didn't even came to see the light of the day (or the shadow of night, as it was past 10 PM in Brazil) and remained in my drafts. I nurtured the new idea for a bit, and the tweet that came instead was this one:

what if I curated a comp?

I had an idea for one literally like 5 min ago. I already have the concept (an homage to Paulstretch), a vague notion of the title (Paul's Songs, or Songs for Paul, or Songs about Paul, idk) and a label (it has to be @GirlyGirlMusik)

should I?

As can be seen, it all happened quickly, in a stream of thoughts. Most of what took place afterwards followed the same pattern: once I received the blessings and excitements of several supporters, I started to make the arrangements. A deadline (November 1st) was established, and I asked people to send tracks within a 10 minutes limit. Another thing I made sure was that the compilation would be multigenre; as much as the algorithm was some sort of soulmate for ambient and drone, I tried to see how far we could go using it, exploring the tool and experimenting. "Experimentation" should always be an attractive word for anyone involved in arts, and as such, it was more than desirable to invest and encourage it.

In order to do that, I tried to enforce the multigenre characteristic on tweets and open calls in a variety of subreddits. The result is a very open-minded, inviting reunion of several styles. There's the obvious and obligatory amount of drone and ambient, but we also have a fair share of vaporwave and vaporwave-adjacent producers, incursions in dreampop and synthpop, and a great portion of noise and industrial sounds, with at least one aggressive harsh noise contribution—a quite powerful one. In short, and praying to not repeat myself, it can be said the music side was conceived as a showcase for different styles, combining and talking to each other by their similarities and united by the usage of Paulstretch in some fashion.

The visual side of the record was thought in an analogous vein. The initiative intended to reflect the community-built aspect found in the tracklist and its often-contemplative tone, looking to life and death with the same admiration. A commission composed by nice and talented people was created to handle the artwork for the compilation. Each of these people contributed with an aspect of the final cover art, and their original ideas, detached from the final product, can be found with a download of the album.

Yet another piece of collective contribution for the compilation was the name it received. Since the title for the project had to be defined—my original tweet talked about

options like *Songs about Paul* and *Songs for Paul*—, this was left to popular choice via a poorly drafted poll on Twitter. "Poorly", because I forgot to set a longer time for voting, resulting in only 24 hours and a day too busy for me to promote the poll every hour. But, in retrospect, I'm glad for this "mistake", as it concluded with the best title possible. "The X Lives of Paul" was an option very different from the sameness of the "songs" alternatives and, at first, I thought it wouldn't be embraced by people, having this *Life of Pi* nature. To my surprise, it was. Maybe people saw something conceptual I came to realize later, a possibility of not only humanizing even more this anonymous, personified Paul, but also turning him into many, many iterations, interactions and interpolations of Paul. If the "X" originally stood for the number of tracks the compilation would have, it eventually became just that, an X, designating an unknown number of lives a certain Paul could have in musical format, visual shape, textual existence and beyond.

Which brings us to this, a much later thought of part of this already huge project: the booklet you're reading now. It came to solve a problem—the credits for the enormous list of artists participating were too big for a Bandcamp description—but it was mainly conceived as a vehicle for the display of individual writings. I remember, back in my high school years, that our students' guild promoted open calls for people's manuscripts without restriction of genre; the texts received were later shown on a table at the court so everyone could read, touch, comment. This memory purposed, along with this "natural" humanization of Paul, a call for texts in a diversity of genres: fictional prose, poem, review, chronicle, biography… It was up to the writer to choose how they should write. The only requirement—since even the one paragraph guideline could be bent if the resulting creation were short enough—was to revolve the writing around a Paul, any Paul. Fake, real and somewhere between the two at the same time. As a result, Paul is now a ghost figure, a musician and a simple, seemingly meaningless word. Paul is Paulstretch itself and Paul is the subject of "the Lives Of Paul thingy". Paul is an astronaut. Paul is an alien—one I discuss in my longer review of the 2011 eponymous film, presented apart of the writing's section to *stretch* possibilities of readings—, but even an alien can be *human*. In conclusion, Paul is too much: music, drawing, digital art, text.

As such, Paul is also an undeniable part of Girly Girl Musik. As the first sentence of this introduction stated, the project was born without a title, without many of its features, without the artists who contributed to it and without any sense of its final success. In the beginning, there was only Paul… and Girly Girl. From the start, this was

the label in which the compilation should come out. *The X Lives of Paul* exists because Girly Girl exists, being such an avenue for new and experienced producers, for different genres and tastes—for difference itself. Because this congregation of various scenes, environments, backgrounds, levels of knowledge in music production, genres, writing styles, visions, stories and histories are no less than an indicative of the power of difference, and how it is important to keep it, support it, promote it. Girly Girl Musik represents difference, and so does Paul, and so should we. Difference is existence.

THE ARTWORK

The cover art for *The X Lives of Paul* was made by a commission of designers. A public call was made on Twitter asking for volunteers interested in proposing ideas for the visual aspect of the compilation. The final artwork would be an assembling of those ideas in a single, collective creation, reflecting the communal ideal of the music album.

The "smoking hipster" figure was designed by segaoctopus. It envisions an anonymous Paul, living his anonymous life wanting to get something more out of it. He looks to the distance, posing to our eyes as if he was in a film by Philippe Garrel, pure aesthetic. Is he looking to his anonymous future—anonymous even for himself? What does he expect from life? What do we expect from his life to be?

ASVMR came up with a superstreched figure of Paul McCartney. The app Photo Warp was used to produce this concept, further brightened by thickly painted walls, who also produced a series of digital variations using the original designs provided by the others—stretching them, if we can say so. These variations employ simple repetitions of images, sometimes to the point of being impossible to identify the source without some exercise of imagination.

The "two men and a gun" portion is a contribution by Houdini Mansions, who saw the curious quality of the big stretched weapon. However, according to him, "The fellows with the gun isn't streched in any way. That was the joke. I'm the class clown here, I suppose". HM's joke, nonetheless, played an important role in the grander scheme of the final cover, opposing the hipster's gaze by pointing both men's sight and the barrel of the gun to nowhere in the other direction, while tpw's remix of ASVMR's warped Paul looks more or less to the front.

A montage of individual creations was first suggested by Gareth A. Hopkins, a designer who didn't end up contributing with a sketch or a visual in the commission; despite that, our next steps proved Gareth's plan would be adopted as the most viable and good-looking.

A primary rough attempt of blending the designs created so far was made by Van Jack, who rendered a quick monochromatic overlay of segaoctopus' and HM's images onto an ASVMR's/tpw's warped Paul background. Fed by this initiative, HM assembled

all these concepts together in another single image, essentially making the skeleton of the cover art. He dubbed it "Pauls World".

About making the assemblage, he noted:

> While choosing a monochromatic color scheme has its advantages, blending will not be one of them. The reason is that at that point you are dealing with value alone and the gradations of value are hard to balance. […] It's always a challenge not to get too cluttered.

In response to that, ASVMR came up with two cluttered proposals for a cover, serving more as experiments with the theme of bringing together the many different projects made by the artists. The color palette present in them influenced the choice for pink and orange in the main and alternative final covers, respectively.

Returning to HM's design, one of tpw's variations were added to the upper left corner, making room for the project title, displayed in the Aharoni font which would be used in this booklet as well. A duotone filter—previously tested on the original concepts—was applied to the image, along with adjustments on edges and posterization. The final main and alternative covers resulted from that.

A PREFACE TO THE WRITINGS

A second pinned tweet was fixed in Twitter on October 18th, asking for text submissions for a written segment of the compilation. No fixed deadline was given (the date of November 15th was later given as a limit), and the theme was simple: the name Paul.

People were asked to write whatever they wanted, in the genre they wanted, only having to feature the name "Paul" in some fashion. The requirement, thus, established the existence of many Pauls, always differing from each other in a way. We're now celebrating these differences and, in contrast, looking for unlikely similarities between them.

Some people took the orientation for "keeping the text within one paragraph" quite literally, providing short, concise creations to rival the longform nature of most time-stretched tracks in the music album. Other authors chose to defy the norm and bend the guidelines for their own sake, which was expected and desired. This resulted in weird forms, like the one presented by V ▲ P Y D: a real-life direct message interaction becomes a self-referential piece in a dialogue between artist and curator, proving art is sometimes a case of agreement between parts. There's also Yzin Blaze in his account of an equally strange dream: are we reading verses or paragraphs? Are we in front of a nocturnal poem or a feverishly organized prose?

Influenced by (neo)concretism and futurism, Leftist Legume came up with an extraordinary example of vaporpoetry, full of the slowdowns and pitch shifts found in the music genre, dabbling in the relatively unexplored field of vaporwave literature. But he's not the only member of that community to appear here with an oddball display of experimentalism: Lugia909 seemingly employs steampunk imagery to conceive a psychedelic new world, ready to confuse and amaze the reader.

After the steam, cyberpunk material appears in a singular mixing of references, from *Blade Runner* to *Terminator*, in Steve Mueske's paragraph; the public may also feel a similarity with Michael Bay's *The Island* in this one. On the other hand, s h e e p, brings us to a space setting, recycling the idea of stretching in a work akin to 1960's sci-fi productions.

Like her, KN also uses the concept of stretching as the driving force of their manuscript, subtly diving into horror territory, with a fair share of irony infused. SEODAH does the same, although in a much smaller production, almost an oral anecdote, but in written form; Filipe Chamy shares this condensed quality, in a witty short tale of dark atmosphere and maybe some humor buried in it.

MASHŪ XCVI and Gabriel George Martins opt to use everyday storytelling devices to talk about the adventures and misadventures of two Pauls, with the former recurring to the founding landscape of Judeo-Christian religions, while the latter ponders on the extinction of a culture.

Glenn Sogge writes something that feels like a memorandum, a brief note on the joy of creation: the length of his piece reflects the attitude with which his Paul exists in the world, living quietly, inspired. vylter, in a way, also deals with inspiration, returning to her memories of an idol of her youth in a piece of sincere non-fiction, contemplating again an era way before streaming, essential for her formation as a musician.

Music experiences move the observations by Alan Morse Davies, who employs a similar flashback to tell us about his first contacts with Paulstretch; with him, we go from one time to another, in an even broader trip. But he's not the only one to take the opportunity to talk about Paulstretch itself in this part of the project, as Eis-T seizes it to write a letter both melancholic and sardonic—clearly ironic, almost a joke, but having a serious earnest attitude sometimes, showing it's possible to be several things at the same time.

THE WRITINGS

Last transmission
by **s h e e p**

I didn't ever think this experiment would succeed but here we are, we made a wormhole. We're going through it and I don't know what's going to happen to me. My name is Paul Joyner. I'm a guinea pig in a tin can in outer space – and I'm scared. We're about to make the hop and I don't know what's on the other side. Oh god – here it comes! Are you reading these stats?

Conners? Conners!

I'm…stretching…

Is this the … convergence point…?

Once a week

by **Yzin Blaze (Nickolas Cornwall)**

It seems I have this dream every week,

Why?

A mysterious figure dressed in black.

The figure wears a black cloak with a hood that covers their face,

The only distinguishable feature from this figure I can remember is that they have one of those stupid

"Hi, my name is" stickers with the name

P A U L wrote in the blank part.

The figure doesn't seem to be evil but carries a mysterious aura.

The figure has been trying to communicate with me.

Their voice comes out distorted and warped

Often stretched.

Why

It seems I have this dream every week,

Why?

Once a week

by **Yzin Blaze (Nickolas Cornwall)**

Dear Paul
by **Eis-T**

Dear Paul,

I vividly remember when we first met. It was at your place, Hypermammut's I believe, and I was with Magix Music Maker generation 6 at the time. Your grey outfit, mysterious interface and technical jargon initially impressed me and yes, I regret nothing of what we did. Between us, your stretching was far superior to what Magix ever offered. Our experiments weren't all fantastic, but they all were at least interesting. Yet we didn't stay together for long, did we? There's something I haven't told you, but I think you should hear, and maybe you have realized it yourself by now. I've come to the realization that you're haunted. Don't get me wrong Paul, you're more often than not hauntingly beautiful and brighten the world with your algorithmic wonders, but sometimes you scare me and the people around you. We both know you can go on and on for hours if I don't formulate properly, we both know that there's something dark boiling beneath your hyperstretched surface. I've heard that voice trapped inside of you and I think it wants to get out. And after all these years since we first met you haven't changed a bit. Still wearing that same worn-out suit since your XP glory days and I've heard friends say you've grown incompatible with them. I know you're proud of your wide array of options but you gotta see that years of processing under extreme settings with uncleaned samples is going to have a price on your mental health. I'm saying this as a friend, but I think you'll need to consider getting professional help to cope with your pain and trauma. You tend to process things really well, so I'm confident that, with the right help, things will turn out better and brighter for you.

With love,

Eis-T

This dude
by **MASHŪ XCVI**

So, this dude, Paul, used to be called Saul. He had a hard-on for killing God-fearing folks, which prompted the God that was feared to get his attention in a pretty drastic way. He sent his Son (again, because Saul was being such a douche) to blind him, learn him to depend on and love the God-fearing folks, change the first letter of his name, and then write scriptures that became a part of the backbone of the religion of the folks he was killing. Crazy stuff.

This dude
by **MASHŪ XCVI**

Snapshot

by **Glenn Sogge**

What Paul wrote wasn't important. Nor was what he thought. But snagging an idea or three from the air, mulling them over, and adding to them to mull again was useful. It gave him the clay with which to sculpt the words, sand them into submission, burnish them with the tip of a ball-point pen. And let them back into the world for somebody else to trip over and snag. That he did was the thing.

Snapshot

by **Glenn Sogge**

Sounds like John, but it's Paul
by **vylter**

      My first trip to Washington state was held together largely by a Paul Westerberg in-store at Easy Street Records in the Queen Anne district. Having been a fan since the *Singles* soundtrack was released, I was very eager to see what he was like after a six-year hiatus from playing and recording. The releases of *Mono* and *Stereo* occurred in a wave of strong storytelling-oriented music in April 2002, and while I was not financially solvent enough to purchase the album at the in-store (much to Paul's chagrin), I did long for a copy after he performed most of the songs from those two albums. Once he was positioned to sign albums and take pictures, I brought with me the J-cards from my cassette copies of *14 Songs* and *Sorry Ma, Forgot To Take Out The Trash* (by his first band, The Replacements) and he did sign them, though he scoffed at the *14 Songs* j-card and then offered this unforgettable tidbit: "Those motherfuckers owe me money!". Warner Brothers never treat their artists well, a sadly known quantity in the advent of Prince's mysterious death in 2016. That Easy Street location has since closed, and a bank stands in its stead. Paul has gone on to release many albums and even featured as the focus of a documentary that I am also featured in, as I submitted digital photos to the fan group online that pushed for the film to get made. I am now back in Washington state, living my dream as well.

Blurb

by **Alan Morse Davies**

I've loved slowing things down for a long time. As a kid, I stole two reel-to-reel tape recorders from a German class in 1980 (they were heavy; I later got expelled). That got me down through bouncing to 1/16th of the original speed.

It was originally to hear birds talking and sort of translate into human terms.

I wondered what it would sound like if I was able to preserve pitch, so in the early 90s I bought a pitch shifting box, but it sounded awful.

Fast-forward: my cSound routines weren't cutting it. Then I stumbled across Paulstretch.

Stop the clocks! Part the clouds!

First thing was *The Last Summer*, in 2008, three 78 records just slowed.

There is infinite beauty in detail.

Thank you, Paul!

A Paul is harmed

by **Filipe Chamy**

      Paul was not sure he was feeling quite so bad at all, as much he would probably claim not to be, although the impression of being uneasy did not leave his spirits up until late at night, when he could very reassuringly realize he was not really Paul.

Paul was unhappy
by **SEODAH**

Paul was unhappy. On Monday he put glue in his neighbour's lock, on Tuesday he kicked a cyclist off his bike, on Wednesday he poisoned a dog, on Thursday he stabbed his brother and on Friday he hung himself. Paul wasn't unhappy anymore.

Paul was unhappy
by **SEODAH**

The haste land from B. S. Elloit
by **Lugia909**

Paul awoke to find himself in the dinosaur-infested jungles of darkest Kansas. All about him, the sounds of the lurking lizardcows could be heard in the underbrush, lurking, because that's what lizardcows do in Kansas because there's not much else TO do in Kansas.

Slowly, he became aware of the strange rhythms, clearly emitted by the world's slowest locomotive, that began to permeate the dank (ha! I said "dank!") foliage. Paul made his way toward the mechanistic noise, making his way up an embankment to the tracks… only to find that the hellish machine was being driven by the ghost of disgraced former Secretary of Agriculture Wilbur Mills!

"What would famous TV pitchman Billy Mays do in this situation?", Paul wondered… but by the time he'd conducted a seance to summon Billy Mays' soul to answer the question, the locomotive was far down the line, its metal sounds clattering distantly from the stygian darkness of the humid Kansas night, punctuated by the cries of the parrots and air-fryers…

Hello, Paul   **26**

by **Steve Mueske**

Paul specializes in hunting down escaped clones. Everything in his life is neat, orderly: his uniform, crisp and pressed; his hair; the formal syntax of his language. Whether or not clones are actually human is not his business. He has a job to do. Under the language of the law, clones are property. They can be bought, sold, used as sexual slaves, rented, or fitted with neural sensors and sent into battle as surrogates for those rich enough to afford the VR network. It's always the same. When one escapes, he is sent to track it down. He is very good at his job. Efficient. Emotionless. Methodic. A man at the edge of humanity himself, DNA resequenced to remove all trace of empathy.

Stretching Paul
by **KN**

Paul is this pseudo-sensationalist journalist on the Dutch television. After he did his nonsensical bit on camera, he walked off, brushed off his shirt, wiggled his blond woozy hair to be greeted by what he thought was a fan. This fan was me, who wasn't a fan at all. But Paul was unaware that I needed him for my Paul Stretch project… To break the ice, I asked Paul if he could sign his autograph in my notebook and acted real friendly. I joked a bit about his name, about how many Pauls I knew in my life and flattered him by saying how special he was. Somehow Paul bought my skit, signed my little black book (of death) and then I dropped the ball: I asked him – Paul, would you be interested in coming afterwards to my house? My family are all such big fans of yours, it would mean so much to my husband, and all my beloved children would be over the moon if you would turn up in our house. I'll make you vegan dinner and pay you *in natura* for any inconvenience! Paul must have been flattered, or perhaps his journalistic curiosity must have blinded his sensible thinking process, as unbelievably he said "Yes". I gave him my address and told him to be there at seven. At seven Paul arrived; he rang the doorbell once and when he arrived in the dimly hallway, I already greeted him with a fancy drink. He must have been thirsty or flattered as he gulped it down and asked enthusiastically if my husband and children had been informed about his arrival. I quietly closed and locked the door behind him and told him with a smirk that I had no husband and neither any kids. Paul looked a bit worried as he fell down to the floor. When he opened up his eyes, Paul found himself tied to a medieval stretching device. I could hear him making muffled screams as I turned the wheels to make him stretch each time an inch out of his already lengthy body proportions. I told him not to worry, as I heard his bones crack, making sure to fill up his mouth with homemade vegan food.

A vaporpoem named Paul

by **Leftist Legume**

P -

aul aul aul aul aul aul au

P - aul   P - aul   P - awl   P - awl

awl

awl

awl

awl

awl

awl

awl

awl

awl

awl

awlawlawlawlawl awl awl

awl

P -

awl

Paul

aul. aul. aul. aul. aul. aUl. aUl.

P - ptpt. ptpt. ptpt

P - tuh. ptpt. ptpt.

P - tuh ptptptptptpt

P - tuh ptptptptptptaulaulaul Aul Aul Aul aUl aUl Aul Aul

Au - P - ptpt

A vaporpoem named Paul

by **Leftist Legume**

ptptpt

aul. aul. aul. aul.

aulaulaulaulaUlaUlaULaULaULAULAULAUL

Paul

Paul: the last dude
by **Gabriel George Martins**

I once heard Paul saying he wanted to be the last dude doing what he does. And he didn't say that lightly, just to exaggerate how much he liked to do that. He meant it. I could feel. His flesh wouldn't perish until he was the last; his soul wouldn't leave his body until he was old enough for an entire era to die with him. It was difficult for me to see him as the last bastion of a lifestyle, but how does one know who or what is supposed to be the last anyway? No, he *meant* it. And by the sheer power of his speech, I soon started to believe him wholeheartedly.

I remember feeling and I still feel this way. Paul is very much alive today, but I like to imagine him in the future, being this last dude. Everyone, by force of years, has moved on, either due to life or because of death. And then there's him, getting interviewed by morning shows, appearing as the fancy old man of his community, doing what he does best until the day he dies too. And then a culture dies with him. When Paul is no longer here, the world will finally be another.

The Paul that could have been
by **V ▲ P Y D**

hey sorry, I tried writing something for the Lives Of Paul thingy, but I just couldn't find any angle on that

      that means it's time to steal this very message you sent and repurpose it

          after all, it's a text and it's all about Paul…

😂 You have my consent

REVIEW OF *PAUL* (2011)
directed by Greg Mottola
United Kingdom

by Gabriel George Martins

If my memory and capacity of perceiving trends is correct, there was a widespread embracement of geek culture around late 2000's and early 2010's. Here in Brazil at least, a modest but important number of blogs and websites created in the mid-2000's (like Judão, Jovem Nerd and Omelete) experienced their peak in popularity, with their lexicon being wholeheartedly adopted by its audience, myself included. As they worshipped established geek bastions, such as—obviously—*Star Wars* (the whole series; United States, 1977-), they also talked about contemporary pop culture in an uncommitted manner, informing, laughing and having fun with each new game or *awesome* flick popping up in theaters. That was the era of movies like *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, United States, 2008), *Iron Man* (Jon Favreau, United States, 2008) and *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* (Edgar Wright, United States, 2010), all of them helping to build this growing imaginary. The world saw the rise in popularity of YouTube as well, and content creators frequently disseminated the idea that being nerd was not only okay, but *cool*. In fact, to call oneself a "nerd" was just starting to become sort of a new normal, and sure there were products like Chuck Lorre's *The Big Bang Theory* (United States, 2007-2019) to capitalize on and feedback the standardization of the title.

Paul seems to stem from this sentiment too. Simon Pegg and Nick Frost, the leading pair and writers of the movie, were already known and lauded for their partnership in two other pictures by Edgar Wright, *Shaun of the Dead* (United Kingdom, 2004) and *Hot Fuzz* (United Kingdom, 2007), making the three sort of demigods for the new geek culture and their names a recurrent presence in nerd discussions in, say, Judão. One could imagine, then, that there was some talking and a mild anticipation for a film adopting two self-declared nerds/geeks as protagonists and constantly making use of geek/nerd references and imagery.

These references, though, often constitute some of the silliest moments of the film, with many of them being gratuitous or just a nod of approval for this public. *Fan services*, we might say, although fan services for a number of franchises and names; for instance, the mere presence of Sigourney Weaver in an significant role, revealed at the end, emphasizes her importance for the geek culture, having starred in the *Alien* series (1979-) and the *Ghostbusters* series (1984-). Steven Spielberg also represents a driving force for the picture, either by mention, voice cameo or homage. Aided by names like this, it's hard not to see an entire cultural background backing and validating the film—endorsing its geekiness.

The events of the plot reaffirm this endorsement and promote the fun of being part of this culture. Those two dorks, Graeme and Clive, growing up as aficionados for all sorts of geek stuff and UFOs in particular, were the perfect individuals to go through this adventure with an alien. Being a geek means being ready for experiences like this, either by actually living them or pretending to, reading a science fiction novel—such as the one Clive and Graeme create at the end, titled *Paul*—or cosplaying in a Comic-Con—like Ruth does afterwards, abandoning the lifeless nature of her Christian growing and immersing herself in the culture as a result of her troubled journey.

Self-discovery with a pinch of misdeeds is not something strange for Mottola: *Superbad* (United States, 2007) has McLovin entering a spiral of transgression, stealing the show from protagonists Seth and Even at times; he peaks his coming-of-age by breaking rules and infringing laws (much because of law agents' agreement with it), setting a police car on fire and shooting it with a gun at the end. In *Paul*, Ruth, Graeme and Clive all must break the law several times in order to save Paul, although it's Ruth who experiences the largest transformation throughout the story, and the one who does the craziest things in relation to her initial status—she starts as a close-minded fundamentalist and ends up as a sexually curious nerd. There's a process of acceptance and embracement occurring in her path at the same time she violates the law: minor traits viewed by her (and by many people, even today) as morally wrong are shown to be harmless, commonplace. The trip and the misdemeanors brought with it tend to symbolize her personal late growth, just like McLovin's "crimes" are a fundamental part of his development. In both cases, the joy of literal transgressions also brings the fun of (individual) moral transgression with it. In *Paul*, they prove her there's nothing wrong in wanting to kiss, or to have sex, or to curse. Or to be a nerd.

Nonetheless, there's still a few instances of nerds being mocked or threatened for whom they are in the film. Those merely seem like one of a series of conflicts in display, with a normativity trying to impose itself over a group, sometimes by force: "normal" people vs. nerds, straight people vs. homosexuals (everyone, including Paul, believes Graeme and Clive are a gay couple and often react with malice), Americans vs. British people (in America, Graeme and Clive are seen as *peculiar*, prompting the absurd interrogation of the police officer, who is incredulous that in UK people don't usually have guns, to the point of asking how cops *shoot* people there), Christians vs. non-Christians (Ruth's dad is a rude man, eager to retrieve his daughter from the devil he believes Paul is, and Ruth's shirt have Jesus *shooting* Charles Darwin, which could also be a commentary on American values) and, of course, humans vs. aliens (explicit in the chase for Paul but also underlined by the recurring, very lazy and poor fainting gag).

The aftermath of these conflicts is the promotion of these "outcast" groups to a state of glory and acceptance. The movie achieves that by the victory of Paul and his friends, by the active mocking of cultural standards and agents of normality (America might be "great", but their tea is awful; two thugs are brought to tears after Paul threatening to shove a probe in their asses), by Graeme and Clive's newfound success and by changes in character that undermine previous taboos (Ruth feels tempted to accept an invitation for lesbian sex, a sharp contrast to her past Christian self and the—veiled or not—homophobia of society).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE X LIVES OF PAUL

is not the end...

Girly Girl