

Notes on
Several Books by Chuck Klosterman
Notes by: William Gasarch

1 Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs

1.1 This is Emo 0:01

1. People take their cures on relationships from movies and TV shows.
2. Woody Allen movies made hot women date nerdy guys more of a thing.
3. *When Harry Met Sally* (and other movies) made people think they really do want to sleep with their best friend, and/or they are in love with their best friend. Other movies: [Link Here](#) In reality, they really don't.
4. These thoughts even happen to people who never saw these movies.

1.2 Billy Sim 0:12

1. When Katie (a girl he knows) plays with a Barbie, if you asked Katie why Barbie has four outfits but only 2 pairs of shoes, she will make something up. Maybe Barbie and Britney Spears only had enough money for that. But if she plays SIMS she does NOT color outside the lines.
2. In SIMS the happiness of a character is determined by how much stuff they have. If your character buys a color TV they get 6 happiness points. That's really messed up.

1.3 What Happens When People Stop Being Polite 0:26

1. Season one of MTV's *Real World* was the only authentic season since they didn't know how to act to get more screen time, or how to act at all. So they really were themselves. Later seasons had people doing things just to get more screen time.

2. RW is obsessed with race and diversity but in a bad way— they want the black characters to only talk about racism, and the gay characters to be really gay. More generally, all of the characters become stereotypes.
3. The people on RW have to pretend that they are not on a TV show. They can't say *you're only saying that so that it will get to the final cut*.

1.4 Appetite for Replication

The chapter starts talking about a Guns and Roses Tribute band, hence the title of the chapter.

1. The main point is that a tribute band succeeds if they lose their personalities and become the personalities of the band they are tributing. *The goal is not to be someone, its to be someone else.*
2. People in bars would rather see a tribute band pretending to be a band they like then a new band playing new songs.
3. Someone auditioning for a tribute band has to look and sounds like the person he is imitating.

1.5 George will vs Nick Hornsby

Soccer will never make it in America.

1. Lots of kids play Soccer. But they are only playing it because the alternatives (Softball, Basketball, Football) are worse. In Soccer the scores are low and a kid playing it can go unnoticed.
2. The kids who play Soccer are outcasts who do not do well or even like team sports.
3. Basketball players are tall, Football players are big, but Soccer players look like normal people. And they don't dominate their opposition. Americans want players not like them who dominate. (Not sure this is true since its been said that white Americans like white players.)

1.6 8 33

The 1980's Celtics-Lakers rivalry was symbolic of a lot of divisions in America.

1. The Celtics had 3 starting white players in a league that was 80% black. The Lakers never had a white player who mattered.
2. The Celtics were decentralized. Chuck says they were like republicans-no need for big government (their Coach). They also play 1950s-style basketball. The Lakers had a strong coach.

1.7 Porn

1. Many Porn sites have a category like *Sexy Housewives*
2. Amateur porn has increased A LOT. Why? Take 1986, before the web became capable of such things. Did women say: *You know, I would love to have strangers see me naked for free but there is no mechanism for that yet.*
3. The technology has enabled porn, but the reverse is also true: porn has motivated the technology.
4. People seem to want to see gorgeous women on the web (not surprising) but also amateur porn, with ordinary women, which is a bit more surprising.
5. (Chuck claims the following contrast.)
 - (a) If a man in a bar can have his choice of any women in the bar to see naked he would choose the most attractive women.
 - (b) If a man at a terminal is browsing porn and can have any choice, he will choose someone a bit LESS THAN gorgeous. Someone more normal.

Why? The web took over our lives so fast, from (1) *What is it?* to (2) *I need it to live*. Perhaps people like NORMAL people porn just to hang on to something normal in this social upheaval.

1.8 The Lady and the Tiger

1. Sylvester Graham invented Grunula (a precursor to Granola) so that people would eat it and their sex-drive (which he thought was evil) would decrease. It was served in some Sanitariums. John Kellogg was a doctor who agreed. He improved it and then his brother William Kellogg wanted to sell it to the public. John objected since (a) this is a science thing and not a profit thing, and (b) George added sugar to it which John thought would increase the sex drive. There was a lawsuit, but George won and we now have sugar-coated cardboard for breakfast.
2. In the 1950's cereals were advertised to kids by having mascots who want the cereal but can't have it (Trix Rabbit, Sonny the cuckoo-for-cocoa puffs, others). Hence kids are COOL and can have the cereal whereas as the mascots are not.
3. How to be cool? Use semioriginal, semielitist things. Obscure things but not too obscure. He suggests a T-shirt with the cast of that awful TV series AfterMASH.

1.9 Being Zack Morris

1. Chuck used to make mixed tapes for a girlfriend which they liked. Since it was audio tape they had to listen to the whole thing and he would make sure it had a theme and an order that made sense. BUT when burning CDs came out he had to switch to that and—anyone listening can play only the songs they like. So no more concept-mixed CDs.
2. Chuck was seeing two women. He burned a CD for one of them which was about their lives and romance and how he felt about her. He then realized that the same CD worked for the other girl as well. They both lied the CD they got and they never found out. (I assume he broke up with both of them later since his relationships seem to always break up- though he was married in 2009 and still is. Two kids.)

In this chapter he talks A LOT about the series *Saved by the Bell*

1. SBTB was about High School students, but later sequels were about college students.

2. It was a terrible show but he and others could relate to it.
3. It was very unrealistic.
4. It had no point to make, or if it did it was an obvious point. For example, Zack Morris (the main character, the reason for the title of this chapter) would get drunk, his friends tell him to NOT drive, he drives and gets into an accident nobody is hurt. But he's such a vapid character that his promise to not do it again, and the lesson learned, don't work.
5. Zack breaks the fourth wall and talks to the audience.
6. The actors all, after the show, tried to break out of their stereotype to avoid being typecast.
7. The Tori Paradox- some characters drop in and out of the series and when they are out they are not talked about, and when they come back in nobody says *where have you been?* Chuck realizes that this is actually REALISTIC when he thinks of his college experience.

1.10 Sulking with Lisa Loeb on the Ice Planet Hoth

The Ice Planet Hoth is from SW- its where Luke was freezing and Hans cut open and animal to put him into to warm up.

Lisa Loeb was in the movie Reality Bites, a Gen X movie.
Star Wars

1. At one time (probably 1977) Science fiction fans were not part of the mainstream so being a SW fans made you cool. Over time (probably 1990) Science Fiction, or at least SW, became part of the mainstream so being a SW fans is no longer cool.
2. SW was underrated in 1977 but overrated in 1990. Quote from the book which I think is over-the-top *Star Wars changed the social perception of what a movie was supposed to be; George Lucas, along with Steven Spielberg, managed to kill the best era of American Film making in less than five years.* This is in my mind also nostalgia. Also, having a movie that everyone is talking about is FINE. If they want to say that movies are now more like cartoons and adventure and not high drama about

the Human Condition, then this requires a study of how many movies like that (“great movies”) were produce pre-SW and post-SW.

3. Objectively SW is actually a terrible movie. *The Empire Strikes Back* is much better. Note that TESB ends on a DOWNER: Hans Solo is frozen and Luke got his hand chopped off. Chuck seems to think this is a good thing. I don’t think so. Frankly, I liked the first two movies equally. The third one was to cutsey-with the Ewoks (Chuck agrees.) TESB sets the tone for Gen X as its angst-written. I think he reads to much into that one movie.
4. Chuck admits that TESB was the first movie he ever saw so that may bias him. He also thought that ALL movies begin with a long incomprehensible (to an 8 year old) summary of the past movie.
5. Luke is the ultimate gen Xer- he wines, he learned stuff from Yoda that is not relevant for a job (meditation, fighting), how romantic aspiration is to a women who thinks of him as her brother (which he actually is!), his dad is on him to join the family business, and *Most significant, all the problems in his life can be blamed on the generation that came before him, and specifically on his Father’s view about what to believe (i.e., respect authority, dress conservatively, annihilate innocent planets, etc.)*
6. 8-year olds and SW
 - (a) Objectively, Luke was not cool, Hans Solo was Cool. But an 8-year old does not yet know that the rough bad-boy (Hans) is the cool one.
 - (b) Luke could either join the dark side and be happy and rich but WRONG, or continue the fight with the rebels. ALL 8 years old are with the rebels. They still have ideals. Older people claim they would go with the rebels, but their actions in real life make me wonder.

Gen X: Everything said about Gen Xers—both positive and negative- is completely true.

1. They reject working-class American lifestyle because

- (a) They were smart enough to realize those values were unsatisfying.
- (b) They were lazy.

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2. They liked Nirvana's *Nevermind* because
 - (a) It was a socio cultural affront to the vapidness of the Reagan-era paradigm.
 - (b) It rocked!
3. They were depressed about the future because
 - (a) They knew there was very little to look forward to.
 - (b) They were obsessed with staring into the eyes of their own self-absorbed sadness.

1.11 The Awe-Inspiring Beauty of Tom Cruise's Shattered Troll-like Face

1. Chuck was a movie critic who refused to say if you would like a movie or not and refused to summarize the plot. He only cared about ideas.
2. He liked *Vanilla Sky*, *The Matrix*, *Memento*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Waking Life*, *Fight Club*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Donnie Darko*, *eXistenZ* since they asked the question *What is Reality*. Odd that he tell us that he liked these since thats a recommendation. Also odd that he later says movies suck (perhaps mostly suck). (A later point will get into that.) I tried reading the descriptions of those movies on Wikipedia. Most don't really make sense and are to ambiguous for my tastes.
3. Movies that are both GOOD and POPULAR are rare nowadays. He has (false?) nostalgia for an older time and points to *The Godfather*, *The Godfather 2*, *Cool Hand Luke*, *The Last Picture Show*, *Nashville*, *Pulp Fiction* (the last one and rather later than the rest) as being in that category.
4. In both *Vanilla Sky* and *The Matrix* people must decide between a terrible real world or a great fantasy world, and they choose the real

world. Chuck thinks this is wrong, and I agree. But he appreciates the question. He also says that Science Fiction is *Philosophy for stupid people*.

5. WHY do movies suck now and were good earlier? Two reasons
 - (a) Hollywood went from being director-driven to producer-driven. Hence movies are almost *required* to be bad.
 - (b) A cultural shift. In the 1970's films *validated social evolution*. Jack Nicholson has said that in his movies he *plays characters that do not exist yet*, like anti-heroes. This is hard how since reality is *more transient*. I don't quite know what he means, but I think he means that there is no establishment to rebel against, culturally. Culture is too splintered to have one that you are playing against. Here is a quote *Traditional character models like "The Everyman" and "The Anti-hero" and "The wrongly accused" are no longer useful, because nobody can agree on what these designations are supposed to mean anymore. In Christopher Nolan's "Memento", all three of these could be applied to the same person.*

1.12 Toby over Moby

Country Music

1. People who say *I like every kind of music except Country* are idiots and snobs. They hate country because they hate the south and the Midwest and rural areas.
2. Country music is popular because it relates to real people. It's not pretentious. You can understand the lyrics and they make sense and don't need to be interpreted. Sometimes they are about very particular places like a Tastee-Freeze. A town where your boyfriend proposes to you outside of a Tastee-Freeze is one that is too small to have a Dairy Queen or a sit-down Ice-Cream place. (Eminem is controversial because when he raps you can actually understand his lyrics. I wonder if Novelty songs get no respect since the lyrics are so important.)
3. Chuck says that music critics (I do not know who he is referring to) under-values lyrics and instead focus on other things. They are wrong for doing so.

4. Toby in the title of the chapter is Toby Keith, a country music star.
5. Moby is a pretentious intellectual he may well be the kind of guy who says he like all music except country.
6. I remember a scene in the TV show Wiseguy, the Music arc, where a black singer tells a white singer (who idolizes him) that he listens and learns from all kinds of music *including Country*. The white singer winces at that.
7. This reminds me of *Whats the matter with Kansas?* and books of that type.

Double Standards

1. Chuck claims that more people say *Its unfair that guys who have lots of sex are studs whereas girls who have lots of sex are sluts* then actually call such guys studs or girls sluts. For the people he hangs out with (and also me) I am sure this is true. But there ARE people out there who still have the double standard.
2. Chuck thinks that the way we've gotten rid of the double standard is not good: *Sex and the City* and *Ally McBeal* have the message that we should ALL be having a lot of sex. I think there is the question of reflecting the culture already there vs creating a culture.

1.13 This is Zodiac Speaking

Chuck is interested (obsessed?) with serial kills and knows THREE people who have had contact with one.

1) *Mike Braae* This is the least interesting. A friend of Chucks named Sarah danced at a bar with a guy who was known as *Cowboy Mike*. Mike wanted to take her elsewhere, but she declined. Mike was Mike Braae. He was later convicted of one rape-and-murder charges though he is a suspect in 3 others. He also was at one time on trial for attempted murder for shooting a woman in the head, but was a mistrial since the victim couldn't testify due to her brain injury. ANYWAY, Sarah COULD HAVE been a victim, but wasn't. And she didn't know him at all. Still, was later shaken up when she found out who he was. This encounter intrigues Chuck since he was there also!

Mike Braae is not on Wikipedia but he is on Murderpedia (which I didn't know existed until I wrote this).

2) *John Wayne Gacy* Chuck met Eric Nuzman at a New Years eve party and found out that Eric knew John Wayn Gacy. Eric did not want to talk about JWG at the party but agreed to do so later, and DID follow through. Eric got to know JWG since Erik is in an anticensorship group an JWG was being barred from selling paintings he had done. Odd- JWG was the ONLY inmate in Illinois who was so barred. Eric contacted JWG. JWG is VERY PICKY on who he will be penpals with (very odd for someone in Jail). JWG demands that anyone who wants to be his penpal answer on paper 52 questions about artistic affinities, political ideologies, and personal values. Eric did all of this and made the cut! But what did they write and talk about (by phone)? HBO movies. Normal stuff. Also, Eric bought one of JWG's paintings. Eric doesn't talk or even think much about JWG's rapes and murders. He is not in denial, he feels sorry for JWG- upbringing (drunk father who abused him). Also, Eric says that JWG just isn't' that smart, isn't that methodically planning, which somehow makes him less evil. When he was executed, Eric felt bad

JWG does have a Wikipedia page. He killed 33 young men and boys. He was

3) *Jeffrey Dahmer* Chuck met John Backderf (nicknamed Derf) when they both worked a a newspaper. Derf is a comic book artist. Derf knew Jeffery Dalhmer in high school. He did a comic book called *My Friend Dahmer* which is not quite right since Dalhmer had no friends in High School. The comic book was 26 pages long and was Derf's memories of Dahmer, called simply *Jeff* in the comic book. Dahmer was picked on in HS but didn't really respond to it at all. Or you could say his later (a month after graduation) killed for the first time. Derf things that all the signs that Dahmer might do this were there, and if some adult had intervened then Dahmer might not have. Derf feels sorry for Dahmer. The comic book humanizes Dahmer but Derf draws the line at murder and does not like him. Derf is glad he knew Dahmer as it makes his (Derf's) life a bit more interesting.

Jefferey Dahmer does have a Wikipedia page. For Jeff killing was a sexual thing- he was a repressed homosexual (not sure how the eating part comes into that). He killed 17 people.

More on Serial Killers:

1. In fourth grade Chuck was told (1) don't pick up hitchhikers since they are (NOTE- not *could be* but *are*) perverted serial killers, and (2) don't hitchhike since they only people who will pick you up are perverted serial killer. This circularity got him interested in the topic.
2. Experts say that serial killers come in four categories:
 - (a) *Mission-oriented*: kill specific people to make society better. Jack the Ripper killed prostitutes, and that might have been why.
 - (b) *Visionary motive*: imagine voices in their head telling them to kill.
 - (c) *Thrill-oriented*: they find the process of murder exciting.
 - (d) *Lust killers*: they get a sexual thrill out of doing it.
 - (e) America is the most celebrity-driven culture. Being a serial killer makes you a celebrity. America has far more cereal killers (per capita) than any other country. Connection?

1.14 All I Know is What I Read in the Papers

(This is Chuck's view though I prob agree with it.)

NEWS IS NOT BIASED, ITS JUST STUPID

Americans complain that the media is biased. They point to either the fact that most journalists are liberals (true) or that most people who own newspapers are conservatives (true). And NO, they don't cancel out. The truth is that news is arbitrary.

A reporter needs a quote from some expert, so he calls 10 experts. The first one who calls him back, THATS the story. So its more arbitrary than biased.

Also, reporters are the opposite of biased: they struggle to make sure that all sides are represented. This makes it more biased, like presenting a flat-earther and a round-earther as equals in a debate.

Some people thing FOX news is better because you KNOW their bias. Not true- they will distort facts and lie to support their bias. Knowing their bias does not help that.

SPORTS REPORTING

Sports reporters begin their career because they love sports. They end up hating it since athletes don't really have anything interesting to say, so questions asked are vapid and so are answers. Plus you get to see the underbelly of sports. As its been said, never meet your heroes.

CELEBRITY NEWS

The problem with celebrity profiles is that the celeb is lying and the reporter is guessing. To much interpolation, exaggeration, trying to make a point about the celeb that might not be true or is too polished.

SHORT ATTENTION SPAN

TV news was a threat to newspapers so they began trying to be like TV-nice graphics, shorter stories, easy to digest sound bites (they should have done what TV cannot do- longer, more serious stories, like The Economist).

1.15 I, Rock Chump

The *Experience Music Project* is a conference of academics studying Rock and Roll. Also some Rock and Roll reporters, and even some groups.

1. Nobody drank. Really!
2. People were up by 8:00AM for the first talk. Chuck says: *what kind of rock and roller gets up before noon?* He then notes that these people STUDY rock and roll, so they are not really Rock and Rollers.
3. Talk were obscure and incomprehensible. So was normal conversation

1.16 How to Disappear Completely and Never be Found

This begins by being about the Left Behind series (hence the title) but is about religion in general.

1. 40% of the NFL players claim to be born again. Chuck thinks that about 40% of the NFL players *spend the entire off season snorting cocaine off of the thighs of Cuban prostitutes and murdering their ex-girlfriends.*
2. For some players, being Born Again helps their game for real (Kurt Warner is one). And for some Chuck thinks that what happens on the fields shows God IS involved, though Chuck wonders why God cares who wins a football game.

A contrast of the Left Behind movie and the actor who played the main role.

1. In the movie Buck Williams goes from being a normal person to being someone who wants to convince people that there is no future unless we prepare for the political incarnation of Satan. Note that the rapture HAS happened so this is not crazy.
2. In real life the actor who played Buck Williams, Kirk Cameron, long before the movie was made went from being a normal person (Teen actor so ...) to being a born again Christian who really believes that the idea of 100 million true Christians being taken up into heaven is realistic. And he wants to convert people to Christianity. Similar to Buck Williams, except that the rapture hasn't happened so perhaps crazy.
3. In the book children under 5 get raptured. Chuck thinks this is silly—kids aren't that good.
4. One problem with the book and movie: To become a Christian you need to take a LEAP of faith. But if it took seeing the rapture to become a Christian, that's not a leap. That's based on reason.
5. *Left Behind: The Movie* had the following strategy: The DVD was released first with a coupon for a matinee price when it came out. Also, you were supposed to TELL all of your friends to see this IMPORTANT movie. It grossed around 4,000,000 which barely covered expenses, so perhaps this did not work.

Thoughts on Being Born Again (Chuck is not)

1. Atheists who say that being a born again Christian would *make everything so simple* are snobs who are looking down on those people and presuppose they are stupid.
2. It's appealing to be a born again Christian since you have a definite direction in life. Things really matter.
3. Even more positive: *They are probably the only people openly fighting against America's insipid Oprah Culture—the pervasive belief system that insists everyone's perspective is valid and that no one can be judged.* By contrast, Born Again Christians judge and want to be judged.

4. Born Again's are good because they have a relation with God. If you are good but not because you have a relation with God then it seems weird that that does not count.
5. Motive Matters. Osama bin Laden really thought he was doing God's will. What if Chuck K lies to a girl so he can sleep with her? That is less evil than 9-11, but has worse motives.

2 A Highly Specific, Definitely Incomplete History of the 21st Century

2.1 Three Man Weave

There was an game of Basketball between *United Tribes Technical College North Dakota State University at Bottineau*. The United Tribes team only had 5 players. 2 of them fouled out. So they played the last 66 seconds of the game as 3 on 5.

They Won!

This is amazing!

But what intrigues me (Bill Gasarch) is that this was in the 1988. No Video, No audio, No Internet, No Cell phones taking pictures. If it was not for Chuck K's reporting on it, nobody would know.

2.2 My Zombie Myself

Vampires: People can like actual vampires. Vampires can have a personality, can be charming.

Zombies: People cannot like actual zombies. They have no personality. People can still like the concept, and like Zombie Movies.

Zombie movies are a metaphor for life. They are easy to kill but they just keep coming. Like your spam email.

2.3 Thats Not How it Happened

Nostalgia is a funny thing. When you hear a song or watch a TV show from the past and you like it, you might just be liking the times it was done in. It may remind you of a pleasant time. This can be confused with liking the actual song or TV show.

I (Bill) might like the book *Arm in Arm* for real or because it reminds me of liking it as a kid. Not sure which.

In the past people would have a limited number of (say) cassettes so they would listen to the few they had a lot (Clyde and his kids watched Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country over and over again.) Hence people having nostalgia because they have heard a song a lot of times as a kid may stop being a thing.

2.4 The Light who has Lighted the World

Tim Teabow was a football player who was also a strong christian. But he never said or did anything offensive, so those who didn't like his overt displays of his faith didn't have anything to really complain about. (Reminds me of Republicans who don't like transgender so they complain about the issue of HS sports and men to women people. A fair issue, but not to the extend they complain about it.)

Faith: In the 20th century only two incumbent presidents won reelection with high unemployment and a bad Economy: FDR and Ronald Reagan. Both said that there already-in-progress plan to jumpstart the economy was better than the hypothetical plan of their opponent. And people had Faith in that. (Obama did the same in 2012.)

Tough football players are often bad citizens and people seem to connect the two, which is probably not a real connection. If Teabow was an asshole he would not be polarizing.

2.5 I Need to be Alive (in Order to Watch TV)

Watching a sports event on tape is just VERY DIFFERENT then watching it live. Just KNOWING that the outcome is already known makes watching it very strange. Chuck often fast forwards to the end.

Why is it so different (and worse)?

1. When watching a sporting event thats recorded you fast forward through commercials. This is actually bad— *It's during those moments when nothing is happening that the drama of a game becomes more palpable.*
2. Watching the game on tape removes your from the experience. The Networks can do a lot for you (instant replays, interesting commentary) but they cannot make you forget that the outcome is already known.
3. You have the freedom to turn it off. Note that if you watch a bad football game LIVE then you can blame the players for making it boring. IF you watch a bad football ON TAPE then you only have yourself to blame for keeping on watching it.
4. People feel (irrationally) that they have an actual affect on the game. Their cheering, their being there, helps their team. Note that fans often

say *we won the game* as if they are part of the team. But seeing it on tape you cannot think these things.

5. Since the game already ended... it was just a game. Not an emotional experience.
6. In this day and age its impossible to not know the outcome ahead of time. Or to turn this around- if you watch a game live you can be surprised. On tape- not so much.

2.6 I Will Choose Free Will

The four best TV shows of the last 10 years (the book was written in 2017) were

The Sopranos

The Wire

Mad Men

Breaking Bad

Chuck thinks the best one is Breaking Bad.

All four deal with Morality.

Mad Men: Set in the 1960's, every action a character takes is a commentary on the era.

The Sopranos: Tony was evil, so no real debate or internal conflict.

The Wire: All of the characters are good and bad. So hard to make a moral statement.

Breaking Bad: Here Morality is a personal choice. We see Walter White CHANGING.

Note that in the other shows, characters do not really CHOOSE their morality. They do not change.

2.7 Speed Kills (Until it Doesn't)

The record for the 100 meter race:

In 1968 Jim Hines did it in 9.95 seconds. He was the first person to break 10 seconds. This record stood for 15 years. He was at a high altitude (Mexico City Olympics).

In 1983 Calvin Smith did it in 9.93 seconds. Also at a high altitude. (Zurich Switzerland)

Since then the records was broken often. (Steroids may have helped.) (Side note- Florence Joyner, the female record holder, had such a drastic improvement in her time that Steroids were suspected, but never proven.)

In 2009 Usain Bolt did it in 9.58 seconds which was WAY faster than second best Tyson Gay, 2.69. Usain is tall which is unusual for a sprinter and NOT the key to his success.

Chuck thinks this will be broken but wonders if there is an upper limit. I'll note that its 2023 and still not broken, or even come close to.

Reza Noubary is a scientist who thinks the limit is 9.44.

That there is a limit depresses Chuck but not me.

Humans are terrible sprinters compared to most other animals, though we hold our own at long distances.

2.8 The City that Time Remembered (Tulsa Oklahoma)

In 1957 the community of Tulsa OK buried a car and some gasoline and oil as part of a time capsule. The residents all guessed what the population of Tulsa would be in 2007. Of those that were still alive (it was 50 years later!) the one who came the closest would win the car.

2.9 White's Shadow

Royce White was an NBA player who said (and this is believed) that he had a mental illness and demanded some consideration from his team.

Not in the book: He later played in Canada and did well. He was leading BLM protests, but later became a MAGA Republican endorsed by Steve Bannon (Royce lost the primary).

He is black so I am surprised Steve Bannon endorsed him.

3 Eating the Dinosaur

3.1 Something Instead of Nothing

Why do people respond to interviews? Chuck says he has often given interviews that would not help his career and have the downside that if he says something stupid it will be remembered. So why do it? Why does anyone do it?

1. When asked a direct question, its human nature to respond. Okay, but why is that?
2. People feel a need to given account of themselves, not just to others, but to themselves.
3. A desire to get approval.
4. Can be like therapy or group therapy.
5. Ira Glass (NPR-all things considered) says people open up to him because he genuinely cares about what they are talking about.
6. Errol Morris (he makes documentaries, including one on Robert McNamara). People who lie and don't know they are lying are more interesting than people who tell the truth.
7. James Frey who wrote *A Million Little Pieces*: He first wrote it as fiction and nobody wanted to publish it. He then claimed it was fact and it got very popular (he was on Oprah) until people found out it was fiction. It was about his awful life- drugs, jail, etc. But it wasn't true.
8. Prince mostly declined to be interviewed. When he did he insisted no notes, no recording. This way the interviewer would get an IMPRESSION of Prince but less details.
9. Chris Health (Rolling Stone, he has done many celeb interviews) *If a question is interesting, it is very difficult to resist answering it, because you will usually find your own answer interesting to yourself. If you have any ego at all, or a desire to share your experience and thought process, then you may also imagine your answer will be of interest to other people.* He later says that this only works if the interviewer is genuinely interested in the answer (like Ira Glass said).
10. EM: There are two theories about how well we know ourselves. Either we all have a black box of secrets that we know but we don't want others to know. OR we don't even know whats in the box.

Side Note: Rick Rosner

1. He is one of the smartest people in the world by IQ tests. He has been on quiz shows and once sued *Who wants to be a Millionaire* claiming they had a bogus question. The question was

What Capitol City Is Located At the Highest Altitude Above Sea Level?

- (a) Mexico City
- (b) Quito
- (c) Bogota
- (d) Kathmandu

He answered Kathmandu which is HALF of the altitude of Quito. However Rick Rosner said that the actual highest capitol was not on the list. Here is the list from Wikipedia:

- (a) La Paz, Bolivia, 3640 meters. Seat of government.
- (b) Quito, Ecuador, 2850 meters.
- (c) Sucre, Bolivia, 2790 meters. Constitutional Capitol. (This is what's listed on Wikipedia.)
- (d) Bogota, Columbia, 2625 meters.
- (e) Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2355 meters.
- (f) Thimphu, Bhutan, 2334 meters.
- (g) Asmara, Eritrea, 2325 meters.
- (h) Sana'a, Yemen, 2250 meters.
- (i) Mexico City, Mexico, 2240 meters.

2. He doesn't seem to have done anything with his intelligence. He has been a stripper, roller-skating waiter, bouncer, nude model. He has been in documentaries and been in a dominoes pizza commercial. Wikipedia says he is a *Television writer and reality television personality*.

3.2 Oh, The Guilt

Nirvana breaks guitars on stage. They even did this when they were an unknown band who perhaps could not afford to do it. Kurt Cobain wanted to be rebellious. A few notes on this

1. In 1994 Kurt Cobain committed suicide. In 2023 one of Kurt Cobain's smashed guitars sold for \$600,000.
2. Their first album was *Bleach* (1989). Critics liked it but it did not sell well, though it sold better after their second album was a big hit. Their second album *Nevermind* (1991) was a massive hit— it sold 30 million copies world wide. See next item.
3. Kurt despised success. *Nevermind* was anti-establishment, yet it made a lot of money for both Nirvana and their record company, which could be called the Establishment. He was determined to make his next album, *In Utero*, un-listenable. He bragged about it and INCORRECTLY claimed that the suits didn't like that. See next point for Chuck's opinion.
4. *My suspicion is that the label merely wanted an album that a large number of people might like, and they did not think such a desire precluded the band from making an album that was valid. but Nirvana (or at least Cobain, and possibly bassist Krist Novoselic) did not agree. They could not reconcile the dissonance between mass success and artistic merit; interestingly, they assumed combined mass success with dissonance was the only way to salvage any merit at all. And this reality requires some very weird questions. Why did In Utero need to be conventionally "bad" in order for it to be exceptionally good? And—perhaps more importantly—why did he fraction of the badness only matter if people knew that the badness was intentional?*
5. *In Utero* ended up selling 15 million copies. And it was listenable. It came out in 1993 and Kurt C committed suicide in 1994.
6. Cobain made his wife Courtney Love return a Lexus she had bought. They really could afford it but he didn't want to be the kind of person who drives a Lexus. Again he was anti-commercialism but very rich, which drove him ... to suicide(?)

Kurt Cobain and David Koresh similarities:

1. Both had shoulder-length hair, played guitar (Cobain much better), had a bad childhood, often complained of stomach problems (this one seems less interesting), and had troubling taste in women, considered

themselves outcasts from society, and were the partial authors of their own demise (David K had help from the ATF).

2. Both had a persecution complex and were delusion. Given how David K died, it might not have been a delusion. But we have a chicken-and-egg problem: He stocked up on guns in case (say) the FBI wanted to attack his compound; however, since he had so many guns the FBI did attack his compound. OR, as Chuck points out, they didn't like that he was weird and outside of the norms of society.
3. *Koresh decided he was literally God. Cobain was told that he was figuratively God. Which should make a man crazier?*
4. Both wanted to seal themselves off from the rest of the world with a small set of true believers. *Cobain failed at his attempt to true followers from the rest of America and he destroyed himself. Koresh was destroyed by others for succeeding at the same goal.*
5. *A frustrated rock musician with a Messiah complex, armed to the teeth, and trying to fuck anything that moves. This sounds like everyone of my friends from Austin.*

Misc Kurt C stuff

1. *Insecticide* (1992) is a collection of B-sides and outtakes. The liner notes say *If any of you in any way hate homosexuals, people of a different color, or women, please do this one favor for us— leave us the fuck alone. Don't come to our shows and don't buy our records. BUT THEY ALREADY HAVE BOUGHT IT.*
2. How good were Nirvana? There is a problem with this type of question. Consider:
 - (a) Who was the best president ever? People often say GW or AL or TJ. They will NEVER almost never say anyone in the last 100 years. The two three slots are taken. They defined the role so its hard to break in. FDR sometimes does. Anyone coming along will be compared to them.
 - (b) Who was the best writer of all time. Shakespeare. Again, its hard to break in. Anyone coming along will be compared to them.

- (c) Who was the best rock band of all time? The Beatles and the Stones. Its hard to break in Anyone coming along will be compared to them.

Chuck things Nirvana SHOULD be included since they took the notin of hating your success to new levels that later bands can only imitate. Counter argument: they only produced three albums.

3. Artists (including Cobain) start out by singing about what they know which means parts of their own life. But once they are a success people assume EVERYTHING in their songs is from their own life (which is not true). Then Cobain claims NO- NONE of is my life, also not true. It can become paralyzing if you know that whatever you write people will think its about you.

Misc David K stuff

1. Yes he was crazy but the government does not kill people for being crazy.
2. Whether or not they started the fire or the FBI started it (by accident) the FBI really did kill Koresh. The legal thing- they took actions that they could foresee would cause harm.
3. *The fact that he believed he had to sire 25 kids so that they could rule the world seems lie a creative way for a psycho to meet girls.*
4. The Branch Davidians were a diverse bunch. They had in common that they thought the world was going to end soon.
5. They bought and sold guns as a business. Anyone who thinks they were going to attack the United States truly did not understand them.
6. Some of the guns were AK-47's and illegal. *But perhaps they thought the FBI would rive tanks into their homes and fire tear gas at their children while broadcasting the phrase "This is not an assault" over an intercom. Maybe they thought the government would shoot at them from a helicopter and burn them alive. They were, after all, insane.*

3.3 Tomorrow Rarely Knows

Time travel: Why do it? The title of the book *Eating the Dinosaur* comes from this chapter- that is one reason to time travel- to see what its like to eat a dinosaur. Good luck with trying.

A Time Slip is when the mechanism is not explained. Fictional Time Travel:

1. *Rip van Winkle* by Washington Irving in 1819. The title character drinks alchol out of a keg, with people who may be ghosts, falls asleep, and wakes up 20 years later. He is 20 years older, so not sure if this counts. Rip falls asleep a few years before the American Revolution and wakes up after it. Time Slip
2. *Memoirs of the 20th Century* by Sam Madden, written in 1733. A book from 1997-1998 gets transported into the past. Some say its the first real example of time travel. The book that was transported is a set of diplomatic letters back and fourth. Hence it portrays how the world will be in 1997. More interested in politics than technology— the tech is unchanged. Sam Madden destroyed most copies, though some survived and its been reprinted. Time Slip
3. *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens in 1843. One could argue that he goes to the past and the future and then back to the present. If so, this is the first such fictional piece where someone does that. Done with ghosts. Time Slip.
4. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Authors Court* by Mark Twain, written in 1889. A Yankee Engineer (prob from 1889) gets a blow on the head and wakes up in the reign of King Author. Time Slip.
5. *Golf in the year 2000* by J. McCullough, written in 1892. Gibson falls asleep in 1892 and wakes up in the year 2000. Pretty good for predictions, including televised sporting events and more rights for women. Time Slip.
6. *The Time Machine* by HG Wells in 1885 was the first story to have someone *control* where they go, and use science as such.

Problems with going backward in time (going forward seems fine).

1. Intentional Butterfly effect. Don't leave a modern technology in the past- it may destroy the world.
2. If you go back in time to stop something terrible from happening (e.g., kill baby Hitler) then you remove the reason you went back. Chuck thinks the infinite-universe theory is insane (oddly enough, in another book he thinks the Simulation Hypothesis is reasonable).
3. A Time Loop may make an object have no origin. You go back in time and give Shakespeare a copy of Hamlet that you bought in a used book shop.
4. Unintentional Butterfly effect. Don't sneeze, you could kill everyone.
5. You could meet yourself.
6. You might tell yourself it worked. What if you and former-you destroy the machine?
7. Butterfly affect- people's memories would change.
8. The past has already happened and can't be changed. This is the theme of the movie *12 Monkeys*. If you see it more than twice then you are a Calvinist.

Why time travel? *Its to important to use only for money but to dangerous to use for anything else.*

3.4 Through a Glass Blindly

Watching other people is fun (for Chuck) since you do not know what they are doing or why. Movies like *Rear Window* get this wrong: the watcher sees people (not just the killer) do things and know what they are all about- like a lonely woman who pretends she is making dinner for a date and eats it and cries- the watcher knows that she is doing this. In real life a watcher would see her do random things and NOT be able to put together a story.

Why is watching fun? If you see other lives and see that they are meaningless it makes you feel less bad about your meaningless life.

3.5 The Passion of the Garth

Sometimes a musician invents another personality (and this is not a secret). *Garth Brooks*: He released one CD with the name *Chris Gaines*. It had fictional liner notes. Gaines was allegedly emotionally conflicted. *A lot of people he knew died violent deaths. Gains almost died in a car accident that resulted in plastic surgery for his face, hand, and shoulder.* Chuck wonders- why the shoulder? The Chris Gaines Persona never really took off. The CD sold 2 million copies which Chuck says is *a relative failure in the music economy of 1999*. (In the year 2023 2 million would be one of the top 5 albums of the year.) Garth really wanted Chris Gaines to to well. He wanted to me more like Chris (A deep thinker?)

More generally, if a singer adapts a new persona that may be who they really want to be. Its an odd think to be faking it yet everyone knows you are faking it.

3.6 "Ha Ha" he said "Ha Ha"

Chuck does not like to criticize things and always tries to find *something* positive to say. Oddly enough he rattles off things that people thing are terrible to make the point of how positive he is:

1. The movie *Medellian* from 1999 (not even on Wikipedia)
2. The comic strip *Mary Worth*- he claims he read it for a decade.
3. He saw *Korn* in concert three times and enjoyed it once.
4. The movie *The Day after Tomorrow* which got a 6.5 in IDMB- not that bad.
5. Chuck bought a very expensive robot that doesn't do anything.

BUT one thing he despises and sees no redeeming value in is

LAUGH TRACKS

1. *Filmed before a live studio audience* is no better than a laugh track since the audience is primed to laugh.

2. People tend to laugh because they think they are supposed to. Like liberals watching *The Daily Show* laughing to show they are hip. Also for politeness or for filler. Sometimes because something is actually funny.
3. Germans only laugh when something is funny. Chuck was in Germany and was asked if he had exact change he didn't so he had a nervous chuckle. The LACK of the cashier also chuckling made him realize that his own laughter was just filler.
4. Laugh tracks or live-studio-audience are still used. The Big Bang theory uses a laugh track. (This surprised me)
5. Laugh tracks have been criticized since their origin.
6. If you see a show with the laugh track removed its really odd since the laughter is there during a pause.
7. Why do execs use laugh tracks: Because they thing Normal people do not have enough confidence to know what they think is funny. Chuck then says that this is sadly true, but its not our fault. He does not elaborate. Darn.
8. NOT having a laugh track is signaling to the audience that you are a better show.
9. If there is NO laugh track and a joke is told that doesn't work, the audience may wonder if it was supposed to work. The audience won't really know if it was a failed attempt at laughter. For a show like *30 Rock* they may even think it was a satire of what a joke is on a TV show. They may even be right.
10. Without a laugh track you might even enjoy a laugh-less sitcom. He gives *Sports Night* as an example.
11. As a kid Chuck thought that the laugh track was there because TV was 2-way and he was hearing the laughing of other people watching the show.
12. Exclamation points in literature is like a comedian laughing at his own jokes.

13. Chuck want to see *crying machines* so we'll know when to cry.

3.7 It Will Shock You How Much It Never Happened

Adverting is deceptive: they want you to associate, say

1. Pepsi is hope. (This was a campaign in the Obama Era and played off of that.)
2. The Kodak Carousel is nostalgia (This is from Mad Men.)
3. Rice Krispies treats are about a granddaughter and grandma sharing (I wonder about the grandmothers teeth.)
4. Beer is sold as a lifestyle.

So, what happens when everyone knows the trick? Does it still work?

It does. In fact, it works better

We are now a generation who analyzes commercials and talks about their ascetics. There are TV shows *Best Superbowl Commercials*.

Yes we still buy products with good commercials.

So to revisit the first one, Pepsi

Pepsi is not really trying to market soda pop to optimistic people. Thats impossible and nonsensical. They are hoping that when consumers recognize that Pepsi is trying to tie Soda to Optimists, some people will decide "Thats a good idea. Its ridiculous, but I see what they are doing I am willing to associate myself with this gimmick." Its the difference between a magician performing a trick to impress his audience, and a magician trying to sell that trick to other magicians. There is nobody left to fool. We are all magicians. An Example of how much we care

Tropicana Pure Premium Packaging changed *the picture on the package*. Not the content just *the picture on the package*. Consumers revolted and the original packaging was back a few weeks later.

People aren't just buying something because of the advertising. They are buying the advertising itself.

3.8 T is for True

Irony is when someone says something with an unclear level of sincerity. Most people do this. Those that don't confuse us.

Ralph Nader is never ironic and doesn't know what irony is. That may be why he has never been in a romantic relationship.

We *expect* our politicians to lie to us (on some things) and are not shocked when they do, nor is it scandal. Clearly Obama was for same-sex marriage when he ran in the primaries in 2008 but said he was not. When he changed his mind not even republicans accused him of flip-flopping.

The last chapter was about how we see advertisements as being about more than the produce. Same here- when people say X what do they really mean? It can't really be X.

Weezer is a rock group that sings very straightforward songs. The fans don't get it.

Movie directors sometimes use a shaky hand-held camera to make a fictional movie seem like it was an amateur real movie. *The Blair Witch Project* was one of those.

The TV show *Friday Night Lights* (which Chuck likes) uses camera motion to manipulate your emotions.