



# GLAZED & CONFUSED

BY BEN RICKER

**F**ood journalists at respected culinary magazines venture that doughnuts are “having a moment” right now. Frenchified boutique pastries made with cage- and hormone-free ingredients at places like Blue Star — first in Portland then L.A. and Tokyo — masquerade as doughnuts and telegraph the coming of a revolution similar to the obnoxious cupcake uprising of yesteryear.

Feeling doughnuts slip away from the ordinary and into the purview of wealthy cosmopolitan foodies irks me because I know they are not meant for the *haut monde*. Dirt cheap and made from the worst stuff on earth, the glazed annulus fits neatly into my schlubby fist — the powerless fist of a futureless bum. Doughnuts are loser food. Knots of sugar and grease form perfect ballast for the all-night diner set, the “Nighthawks” Edward Hopper painted, folks with no place else to go.

Initially, the plan was to hit every doughnut counter and rank the city’s doughnut scene top to bottom using a quasi-scientific method. In recent weeks I’ve spoken with hardened doughnut shop clerks and self-proclaimed doughnut experts as I threw myself into a sickening city-wide junk food bender. In all, the most authentic wisdom came to me from a dour 3-year-old with whom I shared a Bismarck from Bob’s Donuts.

“I just like doughnuts,” the boy said. “I just like to eat them. That’s it.” He then asked me to bug off.

However impolite, the kid was onto something: Don’t overthink it. Doughnuts are not special; they say nothing about the broader world in which they exist. And most everywhere, doughnuts are all the same.

I realized Eugene’s doughnut shops aren’t really about doughnuts anyway.

Take Dizzy Dean’s Donuts, located in a windswept strip mall on West 11th. The doughnuts aren’t very good, but it’s easier there than anyplace else to gaze into the middle distance and think about nothing. Time stands perfectly still at Dean’s. Modern articles, like smartphones and cans of energy soda, adopt a futuristic and untrustworthy sheen the longer you stare into the glazed hole of a neon orange cake doughnut.

The only item scribbled in my notebook that day reads: “This pink frosted cruller looks too much like a bleached anus.”

At Bob’s Donuts, hunkered in a small lunar strip mall on Chambers, you meet *the* Bob. When asked how he’s doing, Bob’s says, “Wishin’ I was fishin’.” Wild tangles of rods and tackle piled by the counter corroborate.

As far as doughnuts go, Bob’s deserve recognition. But what I dig most about Bob’s is Bob — a warm, if weary, doughnut man who seems at times a hostage in his own shop. With a glazed buttermilk bar and mug of coffee in your hands, the air becomes easy to breathe. The world outside, run entirely for profit by billionaire swine at your expense, retreats almost entirely away.

It’s also a great place to buy a razor-sharp hunting knife. Ask Bob about the pile of glistening steel blades that shine from inside the glass case at the register.

Daynight Donuts is Eugene’s fried-dough Shangri La on Hwy. 99. When I die, provided I’m good enough, I hope to go to someplace like Daynight. Some on-the-spot math revealed they offer more than 90 different varieties. That’s nearly double what I counted at downtown Eugene’s own Portland-born tourist trap Voodoo Doughnut, whose schtick is flamboyant selection.

I’m told Daynight’s most popular item is its chocolate apple fritter, which is so potent it deadens the tongue’s every taste bud for a short while.

I studied the blank expression on *EW* staff writer Rick Levin’s face as he chewed a chocolate coconut doughnut after nibbling the corner of Daynight’s notorious fritter.

“I’d call this cardboard excelsior,” he said, powerless to sense anything but fading fritter aftershocks.

Levin looked out the window across 99 at the godforsaken commercial landscape and said, “If you were trying to kill the human spirit, you couldn’t do a better job.”

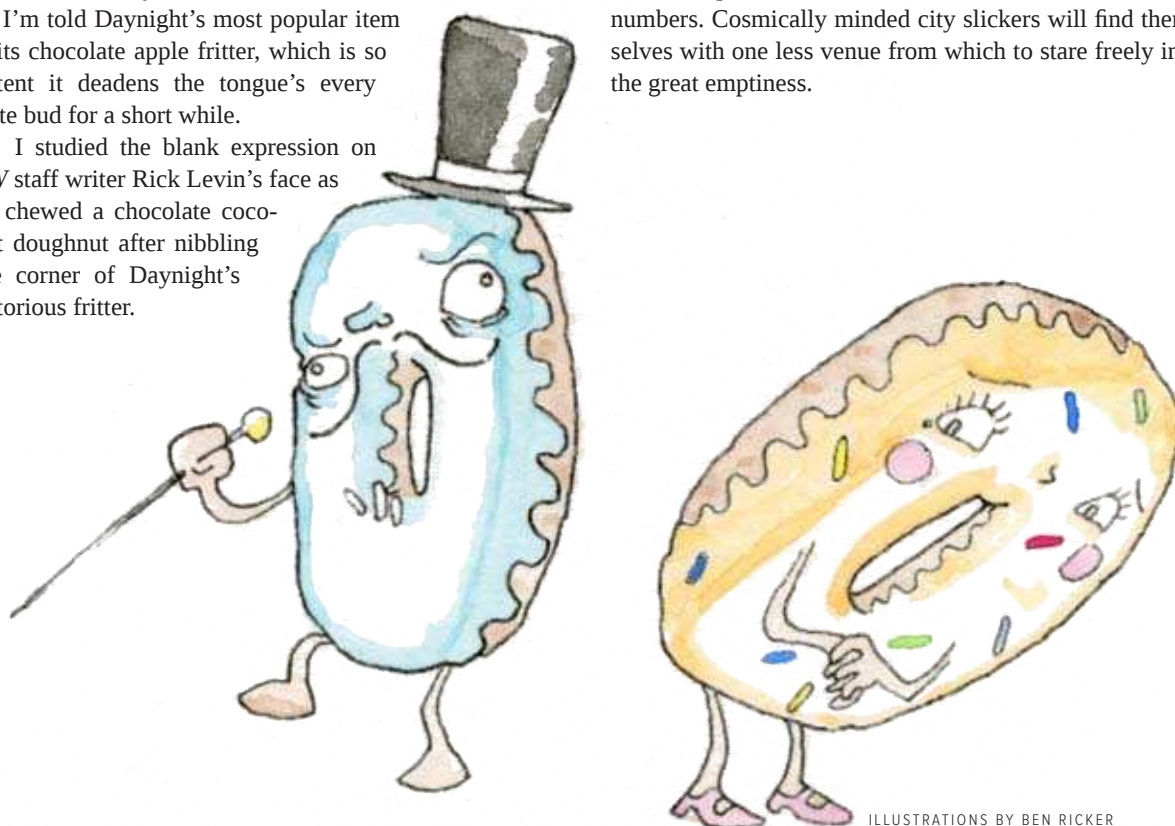
I realized at that moment the view from Bob’s is the same. So are the vistas at Lee’s Donut and Master Donut in Springfield. Industro-commercial real estate and empty parking lots surround Dizzy Dean’s as well.

Peer long enough into the abyss and the abyss peers back into you, Nietzsche said.

The haunting words of a long-dead syphilitic kraut became suddenly crystal clear to me by way of a small town doughnut odyssey.

With nothing handy to grab hold of, the mind unwinds. Too much psychological spinout might lead to irreversible madness, but a little feels good. And may even be good for you.

If doughnut boutiques win and places like Blue Star wrest the doughnut from its rightful place in America’s dismal strip malls, more will be lost than can be counted in numbers. Cosmically minded city slickers will find themselves with one less venue from which to stare freely into the great emptiness.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BEN RICKER