

# The Postman

MULTI-FACETED SALEM ARTIST WITH CONNECTIONS TO EUGENE SENDS CONCERTS TO YOUR MAILBOX

By Will Kennedy

The daily mail delivery has become a comfort — thanks to the depths of the pandemic and working from home, and despite the U.S. Postal Service becoming highly politicized in the 2020 presidential election.

Austin Rich, a Salem-based visual artist, writer, internet-radio host and musician with deep ties to the Eugene area, has turned the humble act of sending and receiving mail into political protest and a commentary on isolation.

As he put it to me the other day, simply sign up for Rich's mailing list and he'll deliver "concerts to your mailbox," in the form of a monthly postcard with original art and a QR code that unlocks digital music.

"We're living in this climate where suddenly the mail is this very politicized thing," Rich tells me over the phone. "I can use this thing that I already use to have concerts in your mailbox, free of charge."

In broad strokes, Rich's music falls into two categories: experimental sound collage and traditional rock 'n' roll-based songwriting mixed with the Dadaist-tendencies of The Residents and Negativland.

Rich went to high school in Cottage Grove and after graduation lived in Eugene for a time in the mid-'90s.

He's still involved in several music projects in the Eugene area, namely DEATH MUTATIONS, which is a found sound collage and sampling project with Eugene-based artist I Died, from local Ghost House DJ nights. Some music fans may also remember Rich from the Eugene punk band Cathead, active in the '90s.

Last spring, Rich was slated to support Negativland in Eugene at Old Nick's, but the concert was canceled on account of COVID. In the past, he's toured with Mark Hosler from the group, and next month, Rich will release a rock-based album under a project he calls ShotReverseShot.

His experimental, sound collage work isn't explicitly topical, but recent work features chopped-up Mike Pence speeches; another reconfigures an old recording of Bing Crosby reading *The Emperor's New Clothes* to say "the swindler's new clothes."

"I've always been attracted to things that are very political," he says. Other interests include experimental performance art. "Often when you get involved in protests or activism, the music ends up being performative and abstract," Rich explains. Instead, his work is more in



AUSTIN RICH

tune with the moment rather than strictly how the song goes, Rich says.

Rich says Dylan Houser and Scott Bazer, friends as well as fellow musicians and artists from outside Oregon, inspired his postcard project.

"All my friends stuck at home waiting for the mail to come: can't play shows, can't go out," he says. The postcards could be a way to get music to people without playing a show or leaving the house, he thought.

"I was blown away because it was so simple," Rich continues. So simple, in fact, "We can't be the only ones who landed on it." But to the best of his knowledge, Rich might be among the few artists trying it, he says.

Sending physical media in the mail that plays music has been tried before, in the form of flexi-postcards with actual record grooves cut into them. Those postcards, however, proved expensive to make and not very durable. In the 1970s, the government of Bhutan also issued miniature postage stamp-sized 33 1/3 records that could be

played on a turntable and used as postage. The Bhutan stamp records are now highly sought after by collectors.

Marc Time, a Eugene radio DJ, record collector and host of *The Sunday Morning Hangover* on KWVA, the University of Oregon's campus radio station, is on Rich's mailing list.

"Austin has been a fixture in the noise and experimental scene here for years," Time says. The postcard project "is the perfect combination of old technology and new technology," he continues. ■

*Austin Rich's postcards are free, though he does accept donations. To get on the mailing list and to keep up-to-date on all of Rich's many projects, go to [AustinRich.org](http://AustinRich.org).*

## books

# Escaping the Future

EUGENE SCI-FI AUTHOR TOUCHES ON CLIMATE CHANGE, CORRUPT GOVERNMENTS AND THE COMING APOCALYPSE IN THE SECOND BOOK IN HIS FOUR-PART SERIES

By Will Kennedy

The *Foreseeable Future*, the second book in the SEEDER series from Eugene-based sci-fi author Howard Libes, is a gripping and well-paced expansion of the universe and characters created in *When All Else Fails*, the first book in his intergenerational saga.

With highly relevant themes of government corruption and environmental collapse, the story picks up where the first book leaves off: The planet Koda has been decimated by an environmental catastrophe, and the majority of the population lives in dome cities.

There was another option for the people of Koda to escape their dying planet besides the faulty dome project, but it was all covered up by an autocratic global regime.

As the story begins, Yorlik "Yor" Vanderlord, the heir apparent of the world famous Vanderlord family, has escaped Koda alongside the mysterious tech entrepreneur Mado Prevor in a newly restored spaceship called *When All Else Fails*. It's all part of an elaborate plan to save the planet, and the bold move sends Koda into chaos, inciting a populist uprising.

Nevertheless, the media spins fake news, reporting Yor has died as riots break out in the streets. Meanwhile, Yor's mother, Mar, is pushed into a position of power she never could have anticipated.

Libes sat down with *Eugene Weekly* to talk about his decision to center Mar in the storyline, current events, and what it might take to solve our environmental crisis before it's too late.

**EW: I read the book in the midst of social unrest in American streets, wildfires worsened by human-caused global warming, a pandemic and an American autocratic government. Were current events on your mind while writing *The Foreseeable Future*?**

HOWARD LIBES: Not really. I definitely have a clear idea where the story is headed, but I'm never sure exactly what'll happen until I sit down and write.

I started writing this series in 2015, so back then there weren't headlines even close to today. Obviously, I had no idea how things would pan out, but since then climate change has accelerated, and this country has devolved into crisis.

In *Foreseeable Future* there are moments that clearly reflect the events of 2020, but the book was fully formed last year. Maybe I'm projecting how I see things going in a worst-case scenario, and here we are.

**Can you talk a bit about the decision to center Yor's mother, Mar, in the story?**

The story in *Foreseeable Future* tells Mar's journey as a reluctant hero. *Foreseeable Future* shows the transformation of an individual who is resistant to involve herself in tackling societal issues into a person who is energized to make a difference. That story intrigued me.

**With tech billionaires like Elon Musk building rocket ships to escape the planet while Earth's governments bicker and flounder, there are additional parallels in the book to Mado Prevor and the spacecraft, *When All Else Fails*. Do our hopes lie with private billionaires, or will the people of Earth be able to solve our climate emergency through representative government?**

*Foreseeable Future* spotlights the darker side of Kodan society and what motivates the people who are working to suppress the population, whether it's greed, power, loyalty to an idea or all of the above. I think it's important to understand these people in the saga — and in real life.

I'm cautiously optimistic that nations around the world and our country will pull ourselves together and deal with the climate change reality that we face.

Unfortunately, I think in many parts of the environment the damage is done and there is no turning back. Long story short, I think we need to fight for our planet. ■

*The Foreseeable Future and When All Else Fails are available in paperback and eBook through Amazon.com. Read the first chapter and buy the new book in paperback at [HowardLibes.com](http://HowardLibes.com).*