



Metal Church

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We worship power chords. On Sunday morning we fill the pews of Metal Church, sing hymns to the Metal gods, throw our goats in the air and shake them, as if to say that we no longer care, and listen to the Hessians in the guitar choir with their axes tuned to drop-D thrashing in their ragged leather robes until way past brunch. And, if we don't have to be home with our wives or have gotten all of our chores done on Saturday, we will stay and listen well into the afternoon.

Those of us who still have long hair throw it around as we used to; some of us (myself included, I would like you to note) cut our hair to hide among the non-Metallic as if to say that we have forgotten our roots, forsaken our black Metal god; that we now cringe at the sound of a distorted barre E on the twelfth fret, when in fact the sound makes us shiver as the chord rings out and breaks up into a long feedback whine. We pretend and deny that tweaked out Locrian scales fill our heads during the workday when we should be reading e-mails or paying attention to conference calls. They believe that our black clothes are merely a fashion statement and that we have packed up or sold our black B.C. Rich "Bitch" electric guitars. I will tell you this—we still have them, and they are tuned.

You thought it was something nice in my headphones at work, didn't you? A little R.E.M., perhaps, or maybe some Phish? We hate that shit.

Each Friday as I scrambled to bullshit my way through another timesheet, you leaned against the fabric wall of my cube and smiled. I eyed you suspiciously at first, thinking that you pretty much had me figured out—that you knew I sat in my cube and did a total of

thirty minutes of actual work most days and spent the rest surfing the net for free pornography or MP3s by bands like Iron Maiden or Confessor.

Man, I love Confessor.

Anyway, you stood there and waited patiently for me to fill out my form and e-mail it off to you each week an hour or two late, and you smiled and thanked me. Even though I figured you would have me fired for being such a waste of company money, you were hot so I didn't mind; I knew that the longer it took to make up things I did that week, the longer you would stand there.

Did you notice how I mimicked heavy, double drumming with my typing? You wouldn't.

Once, you asked me what I did in a way that sounded like you might be suggesting I didn't do anything at all. I told you I programmed things. This and that. You know, "Special Projects."

You nodded and asked me if I wanted to go get coffee.

Now? During work?

Yes, during work. Come on, we'll be fine. Don't be such a pussy.

I almost invited you to Metal Church right then.

I'm no pussy, I said. Have you seen my guitar? I wanted to ask. If you had seen it, you would know; I am no pussy. It's shaped like lightning.

Then come on, let's go, you said.

Outside on a workday, the sunlight seemed brighter and the air had a strange heat to it as people bustled about on the street. During the weekends, when I roamed around these deserted neighborhoods, I tried to imagine what it was like on the 'outside' during the week because it was my own strict policy not to leave the office during work for fear that it would needlessly draw attention to my lack of productivity. With you, the outside seemed like a new, beautiful and urgent world and I could not imagine having to ever go back inside, away from all of it. Things were happening out here, and I was missing it.

We made it a ritual, you and me. You'd show up and playfully scold me for bullshitting on my timesheets, and then we'd go get coffee. Once, we didn't make it back to the office and went back to your place and screwed on the floor. Okay, you are right. I am making that up. It was after work, not during (we were afraid we would get caught) and we didn't screw the first time, only kissed and pet each other in a heavy way.

Again, I considered asking you to Metal Church, but didn't. Even though I am no pussy, I did not want to ruin a good thing by telling you about Metal Church.

At work, you wrote a computer program that took all of my accumulated bullshit and generated new, random bullshit and put it on timesheets, so instead of you standing there over me while I tried to recycle my own new bullshit, it was taken care of by the computer. I had no idea that you even knew how to do that. I don't even think I knew how to do it, and programming was supposed to be my job.

Now that we had more time to get coffee, we tried doing it in the supply closet, to which you had a key, but the shelves of paper got in the way and we ended up frustrated and just went for coffee like we had planned in the first place.

Soon, you figured out a way to submit our timesheets automatically using a feature of the system that had always been there, but that nobody seemed to know about. It was no longer necessary for you to come by my cube anymore, or for me to e-mail you anything, which at first made me sad, but you told me we could just meet at one of our apartments and go in late instead of going for coffee. That's when we started to screw in earnest, on the floor. Okay, you are right, it was in bed. The floor would be uncomfortable, you said.

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These things were merely relics, not my metal identity, not my metal future, only symbols of my glorious metal youth.

But we most certainly did it, and when we did, I heard Bon Scott singing down from Metal Heaven. We were that good.

Before you came to my apartment, I hid my Metal, which was easy, because it was all on cassette tapes in milk crates. I put them down in the basement in the storage unit and all you saw were fifteen compact discs that had been given to me as gifts. They were not cool, that is for sure, but they were normal stuff that people thought I would like. Jazz, for example—there was some of that, and if I had to, I would put it on. In preparation, I took these discs out of their wrappers and arranged them alphabetically.

My Metal clothes were not so easy. My concert t-shirts I could tell you were some sort of ironic joke on the 80s, but there were so many of them that you would probably not believe it. You were pretty sharp. So, I put them in trash bags and hung them in the back of my closet behind my Eddie Bauer khakis and polo shirts that I wore to work. And the framed Eddie poster from Iron Maiden's Seventh Son tour—a prized possession—I donated to the Metal Church for the rummage sale.

The black candles, leather jackets, incense holders, bongos, black lights, and high tops went, too. These things were merely relics, not my Metal identity, not my Metal future, only symbols of my glorious Metal youth. I told myself that you were worth it, and that these things could be thrown away because I loved you and it was the right thing to do.

I told myself that these actions did not forsake the Metal church. But they did.

Soon, you figured out that since everybody's timesheets were being collected automatically now, and that since your job was to collect timesheets, and my "Special Projects" existed only in the timesheet system, which seemed good enough for management, we

no longer needed to show up for work at all. You circulated a memo that said we had been sent on Special Assignment at our company's office in North Carolina, so even if somebody noticed that we were gone and bothered to look into things, our asses would be covered.

Again, I thought of telling you about Metal Church, but I waited.

Now, without jobs, at least in the sense that we no longer had to go to a place and appear to be working to collect a paycheck, we were 24-7. I had missed a lot of Metal Church and knew that they would wonder where I'd been, so I snuck out and visited the Metal Priest late on Sunday afternoon while you slept.

After services had ended, in the Metal Church office among Metal relics like a set of mint-in-the-box K.I.S.S. dolls and a framed Sabbath set-list from '75, I explained the situation to the Priest and promised that I would tell you soon, and that we'd have a new convert. He warned me not to be so sure, that new converts were rare these days and even then they were rarely pure. If you didn't know of my Metal worship already, once informed, you might form a different opinion of me, one that I would not like.

Why not court one of our Metal women?

From Church? One of the Metalheads from church?

Yes, some are very beautiful, and they all love Heavy Metal. They do not forsake it. They would not shun a Hessian, no matter how long his hair or dirty his high tops.

You are wise, Father, and while I agree that they are beautiful, their hair is very large.

Wouldn't a large-haired Metal girl complement the long hair and chain wallet that you wish you could have? Instead, you let the desire for these things fester inside you like some Metal disease. It's unhealthy.

You have a point, father, but I feel that I must pursue my current woman.

It will be your undoing.

While she may not love Metal, she's rigged the work computers so we don't have to go in anymore.

While that is indeed sweet, remember your roots, and remember who loves you.

He formed his fingers into a goat and touched my head with his index finger and pinky. I heard the choir practicing in the background and understood the Heaviness of the situation and thanked the Priest for his guidance.

So, while standing in the middle of the Banana Republic looking at pants, I told you that I was a Metalhead. At first you didn't believe me and continued to look, but I unbuttoned my shirt and revealed my Megadeth shirt.

Megadeth, you said.

Yes, I said.

That's serious, you said.

Very.

You cried into the cardigan you were about to buy. I probably should have waited.

From my head, where long golden locks once did flow, to the tip of my feet, once protected by steel-toed work boots in the pit, or white high top sneakers for more formal occasions, I am a Metalhead. Where now are Dockers, once were torn, acid-washed jeans adorned with bandanas, and where now I wear a fitted baseball cap when out on the golf course to protect my bald spot from sunburn, once was a terry cloth sweatband. I am a Metalhead. I have a selection of guitar picks in my pocket.

After I told you these things, you said you were confused. The Banana Republic shoppers looked confused too, but I felt that I had made my position clear. You did not understand Metal, or the Church that I attended every Sunday.

Couldn't I just listen to the music once in a while? Couldn't I wear the sweatband when exercising? Couldn't a bandana be replaced with a stylish handkerchief?

It would not be the same.

Back at my apartment, I showed you the shirts, my Bitch, my high top Ponies. Down in the storage unit, I showed you the crates of cassettes and my bong. I told you about the Maiden poster. You told me that you could not deal.

When my timesheets stopped appearing in the system, my boss must have gone over to my cube and when nobody in North Carolina knew who I was, he told his boss, the head of our department, and he had no idea what I had been working on, either. He must have asked my supervisor exactly what "Special Projects" meant, and when he didn't know, I was fired. They made you a manager.

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Things have been heating up at Metal Church. The solos on Sunday have smoked and attendance has been huge. People can't sit down while the Metal Priest wails the Metal Sermon, so we mosh while Metal Gods possess us.

You could have been there.

I'm a Metal Deacon at Church now, and counsel young Metal couples about to be married in the Metal Church. Even though it hurts, I tell them our story and warn them never to hide their Heavy Metal worship. I give them mix tapes of the classics so these young Metalheads understand their roots. I believe that with my help, these couples have stronger marriages.

I took the Priest's advice and started to date a pretty girl from Metal Church. We're not as passionate, and her hair is much larger than yours, but I can be myself around her. She likes headbands and bandanas, and we trade cassettes. I got a new job too, and have

so, while
standing
in the
middle of
the Banana
republic
Looking
at pants,
I told you
that I was a
Metalhead.
At first
you didn't
believe
me and
continued
to look,
but I
unbuttoned
my shirt
and
revealed my
Megadeth
shirt. 15

grown my hair out around my bald spot and no longer care about wearing torn jeans to the office.

One thing I can't stand, though—at this job, my supervisor reads the timesheets and yells at me when its pretty obvious I've only been working a half hour a day, so I've been picking it up a bit. As long as they don't make me put my hair in a ponytail or tell me to turn my music down, things will be okay.

