

TRIPLE CROWN TOPS LIST IN SAN MARCOS

MOIRA MULDOON

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SAN MARCOS — “So where do you stand on ‘therefore’?” my colleague and office mate Jon Marc Smith asked me. Jon Marc, a native Austinite and passionate resident of San Marcos, has often encouraged me to investigate and write about the Triple Crown bar down the road from Texas State University. And he also wanted to know if I truly thought “therefore” functioned as an adverb.

Disjunction is aesthetically sexy. I like thinking about adverbs; I like drinking beer. I especially like drinking beer and talking about adverbs. Especially when the bar is a local dive with a serious music scene — the kind of place that’s like Hole in the Wall was five or 10 years ago. At least, that was how Jon Marc described the Triple Crown, and I’m inclined to trust his description, given his attention to nuance in language and the fact that his wife was a waitress at Hole in the Wall.

And I see why he’d compare them. The Triple Crown’s a solid local dive with a blue collar and a pack of cigarettes tucked away in its breast pocket. It’s got some edges: The building used to be a massage parlor and the “Tokyo Tan” sign still hangs on the back wall. The bar opens at 7 a.m. Monday through Saturday and at noon Sunday, and sells 27 varieties of beer (six on tap; 21 in bottles and cans). Domestic pints are only \$2 all day, every day and only \$1.25 during happy hour.

The Triple Crown presents music 365 nights a year and owns a soundboard that looks like it cost more than all the bar’s furniture and décor put together. Not that the décor is wildly expensive — the tables come with metal folding chairs, the fridge is covered in magnets and stickers, and the red and black checked tile floor couldn’t have cost one-tenth the amount fancier bars spend on bathroom faucets.

The Triple Crown isn’t a big bar — 1,300 or 1,400 square feet — and gives off a local feel. Jon Marc insists that the Triple Crown is a “local bar,” and I call it a dive. We argue semantics and definitions for a while. But the point is it’s small and largely working class and filled with characters and bartenders who’ll happily pass the time of day with you, nevermind that you occasionally obsess about various parts of speech.

The intimacy of the bar also means every seat is a good seat when the music starts. Or, perhaps, every standing spot is good — rumor has it the joint gets packed when good music is in the offing. I caught a singer-songwriter playing one happy hour; the intimate stage looked surprisingly big with just one person, though the sound was solid and full. As the performer came onstage, the dim lights were dimmed further, so much that I was temporarily blinded when I walked back outside.

That blindness had a symmetry to it. When I’d first walked in that day, after a disgruntling afternoon of teaching, I pulled open the side door (the front door has a sign saying “EXIT ONLY”), and could see very little of the dark bar. But the sunlight coming

in illuminated a pair of old cowboys, in hats and boots, sitting in a raised booth behind the pool table, as if they were waiting for a shoe shine. Each was eating a tamal, purchased from a woman in the bar. The image was so astonishing, so crisp and profoundly unexpected that I was momentarily dislocated. I stood in the doorway, not going in, not coming out, and wondered if this was how photographers saw the world.

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Triple Crown. 206 N. Edward Gary St., San Marcos. (512) 396-2236.