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# We find inspiration between pages, so should you

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Books have been the keepers of knowledge, the preservers of history, the bearers of poetry and the vessels of dreams and ideas. But above all, they possess the ability to bring words to life and to transport readers into different worlds.

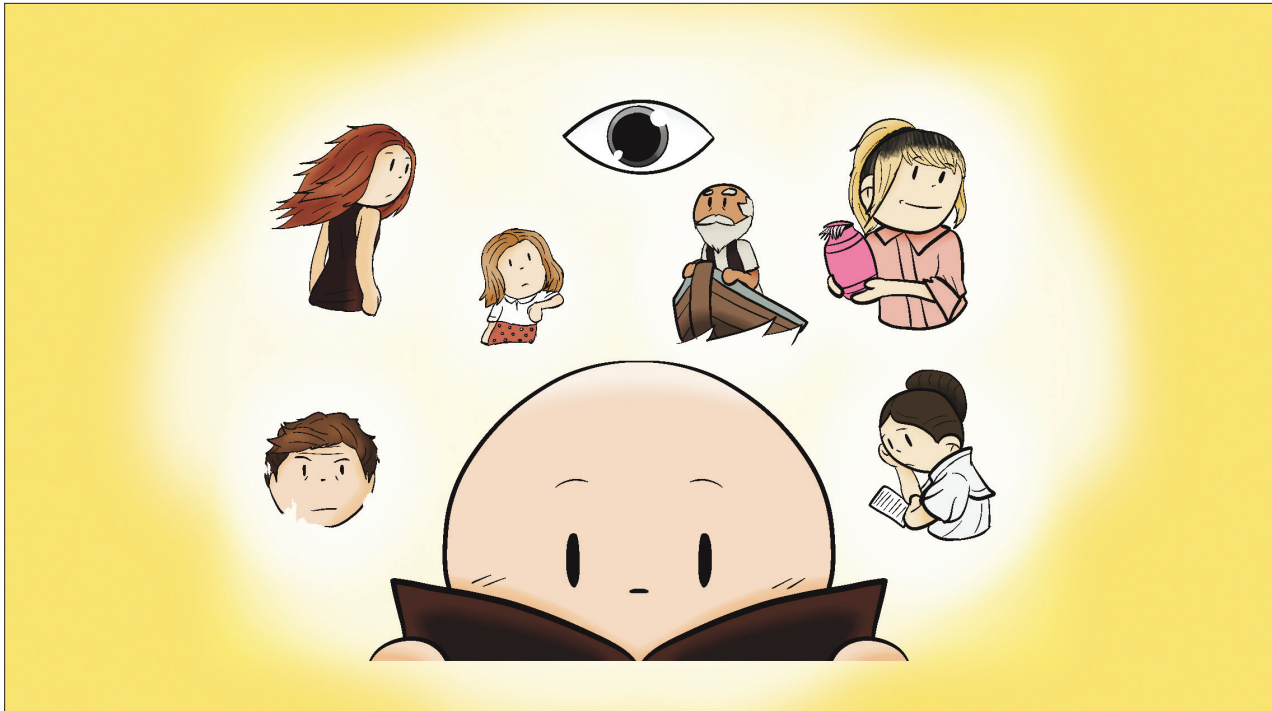
Books are often an escape for readers. Sometimes they are plucked off shelves to provide wisdom or inspiration.

Whether you enjoy fantasy fiction, classic novels or a good picture book, there is inspiration to be found in every story. If you're seeking new motivation in paper form, here are some of the Editorial Board's most beloved suggestions.

### "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE" BY JANE AUSTEN

As an English major, I recognize that this is probably not the most pretentious and intellectual pick I could've gone with, but it's one of my favorites nonetheless. "Pride and Prejudice" was among my first forays into the world of classic literature and one of the reasons I chose to be an English major in the first place. I picked it up around the time that my high school shut down due to the pandemic, and I remember it giving me a fantastic sense of escape that allowed me to step out of a world that was sick and scary and dangerous — more dangerous by the day — and into a world where the greatest evil was Mr. Wickham.

I feel that it's important to acknowledge that the world set forth in "Pride and Prejudice" is still maybe not the one I want to live in, what with the lack of rights and all, but the simplicity and peace of the Austen-verse is beautiful. It reminds me of a summer day in my backyard when I had some big choices ahead of me but all the time in the world to spend with the bold and beautiful Elizabeth Bennett.



James Ellis | Cartoonist

Emma Weidmann | Editor-in-Chief

### "A LITTLE LIFE" BY HANYA YANAGIHARA

This book is daunting. Reaching over 800 pages and an emotional front cover, it wasn't easy to crack the spine. Two hundred pages in, everything began to shift. I remember covering my mouth in awe at the tragedy of the main character, Jude St. Francis.

His life is not a series of cookie-cutter events. Orphaned at a young age and facing early abuse by a priest, Jude struggles with self-harm and relationship issues throughout his life.

This book taught me unbounding empathy and the courage to be there for your friends even when they constantly need it. Jude inspired me to remember that we don't know everyone's stories. We don't know where they came from, their family situation or the current battles they face. Through it all, his relentless kindness toward others makes this book something I will never forget.

Erika Kuehl | Opinion Editor

### "DIVERGENT" BY VERONICA ROTH

This book is for any sci-fi or dystopia lovers out there. "Divergent" focuses on a teenage girl living in a post-apocalyptic Chicago that is divided into factions. These factions are separated upon values, beliefs and lifestyles creating an extremely polarizing world — a world facing similar issues that are not far off from today. It handles themes of choosing personal values over family, discovering one's identity and navigating a lonely, troubled world.

Picking this book up for the first time had a major impact on me during my early high school years as a young adult who was trying to find a sense of belonging and identity. I found the main character, Beatrice Prior, relatable and empathized with her when she dealt with hard decisions, such as risking losing contact with her family to start a new life in a different faction and finding courage when her initiation process is going poorly.

Rory Dulock | News Editor

### "1984" BY GEORGE ORWELL

I'm not a big reader of

American literature, but Orwell's novel was actually an enjoyable read that has stuck with me. And for those of you who haven't read it for a school project or your Goodreads, do yourself a favor and join the bandwagon.

The dystopian novel, which has been unnecessarily (and stupidly) banned at some schools, tells a cautionary tale about a future run by Big Brother. Take away current political beliefs and the novel details a future eerily similar to past events and a not-too-distant future. With all of our newby technology and worries about what's to come, the approach of this novel does a great job at articulating fears about the future and how to be a human.

Foster Nicholas | Sports Editor

### "OLD MAN AND THE SEA" BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY

This is a great read if you are looking for something meaningful yet short. Hemingway shows why he is such a renowned author, guiding the readers through the old man's eyes

as he undertakes a profound journey, conquering the ocean with reverence.

This book helped me gain appreciation for the sea, as Hemingway not only finds admiration for the things he finds beautiful but also the struggles he is presented with. His reflections are calm, and fair, even in the face of hardship. As a younger reader, the old man's perseverance makes me feel inspired in my own life. Hemingway does a wonderful job of emphasizing the importance of your past experiences, but continuing to look ahead at your life with purpose.

"The Old Man and the Sea" is a must-read, and I feel connected to it because of the father-son relationship between the boy and the old man and the subtle theme of baseball in the 1950s.

Julien Hajenius | Web Editor

### "I'M GLAD MY MOM DIED" BY JENNETTE MCCURDY

Putting aside the shock of the title and the book's cover, McCurdy's 2022 memoir is one of the most emotionally impactful stories I've ever read. While I don't read

books and literature often, I decided to give McCurdy's a read after seeing posts discussing it and sharing parts from the book, and I'm glad I did.

McCurdy's book inspired me to see celebrities differently. While some people may see celebrities as spoiled rich people, McCurdy's book reminded me that many celebrities are just normal people and that many of them have hardships just like you and me. Instead of just assuming that celebrities are undeserving of fame or spoiled and wealthy, take a step back, look into how they've gotten to where they are now and see how hard they've worked and what they've gone through to be the person they are today. Celebrities aren't just there for entertainment — they're human.

James Ellis | Cartoonist

### "FROM HERE TO THE GREAT UNKNOWN" BY LISA MARIE PRESLEY, RILEY KEOUGH

Here's one for all the memoir lovers and Elvis superfans. Lisa Marie Presley tells all in this real, raw autobiography with the help of her daughter. Through a series of voice memos pieced together in printed form, Presley reveals childhood shenanigans at Graceland, loves and losses, lifelong struggles with addiction, the joys of motherhood and her perseverance to see the beauty in life through it all.

If you know everything about Elvis but nothing about his only child, you're missing out on so much. Lisa Marie's life was truly a whirlwind, but she inspired and touched the lives of many as she made her way through it.

For the full effect, I'd recommend listening to this story as an audiobook, which has snippets of Presley's unedited voice memos. This isn't a light read, but it is a good one.

Olivia Turner | Arts & Life Editor

# Faith without works: Calling students to better Waco

CALEB GARCIA  
Photographer



Baylor prides itself on being unapologetically Christian — a strong statement and one that I'm sure drew many of us to the university. It's our core principle, chasing a degree while in a strong faith based and God-fearing community. It's beautiful to see such a united student body working towards being better Christians. However, many of us seem to lack a key part of our faith.

We often forget how blessed we are. As students, we are given an opportunity that so many dream of. We get to go to one of the best private universities in the nation,

enjoy incredible traditions and a faith-based community, all on a beautiful and safe campus. I know that a lot of us appreciate these gifts and that many have dedicated our lives to pursuing a higher education and our dreams. Although many of us appreciate what we have, an even greater portion seems to ignore or refute it.

It's not difficult to miss those who aren't as privileged. They're just about everywhere you look. You will see this just past the highway, downtown or really in any part of Waco. You can see dilapidated buildings, communities desperately in need of support, and most noticeably of all? The homeless. You can hardly take a step anywhere without seeing them, walking the streets or huddled in corners. Sights like these are the most apparent problems in Waco. Just as there are problems outside the university, there is one clear and present problem within.

A certain piece of scripture comes to

mind when I think about the problem — James 2:14-7.

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' but does not give them the things needed for the body, what good is that? Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

Every day I hear students who profess their faith and claim to be righteous. I'm all for it, I suppose. I believe in praising God and spreading the word just as much as anyone. But some profess their spiritual devotion and seem to completely ignore putting it in practice. Many preach for change and a better world yet refuse to volunteer or get involved to do so. Some claim to treat everyone as people of God but treat the homeless as almost sub-human.

As an ambassador for the volunteer

organization Bear Necessities, I see the desperate need for volunteers and those who are willing to step out and make a difference. If some of us can sit in a prayer tent and go to worship concerts three nights in a row, why can't we put the same time into actually making a difference?

Just because we've been accepted into a prestigious university does not mean we have to turn a blind eye to the problems of those around us. It is our calling to make our communities better as Christians. Whether it be local or problems far away, we as Baylor students can make a huge impact, provided we truly open our eyes to the call as God would want us to. With this, I want to leave one last piece of scripture.

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For by your standard of measure, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).

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# Forrest Frank at Foster



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**GOOD DAY** Forrest Frank’s “Child of God Tour Part II” brings people together in worship and good vibes Tuesday night at the Foster Pavilion.



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**LEGACY** Forrest Frank’s “Child of God Tour Part II” tour welcomed Claire Leslie as the opening act, where she sang her popular songs like “Passenger Seat.”



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**AMAZING GRACE** Baylor alum Forrest Frank performs his hit songs during his “Child of God Tour Part II.”



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**PRAISES** Forrest Frank dedicated his concert to his love for Jesus, allowing everyone to have a safe place to worship.



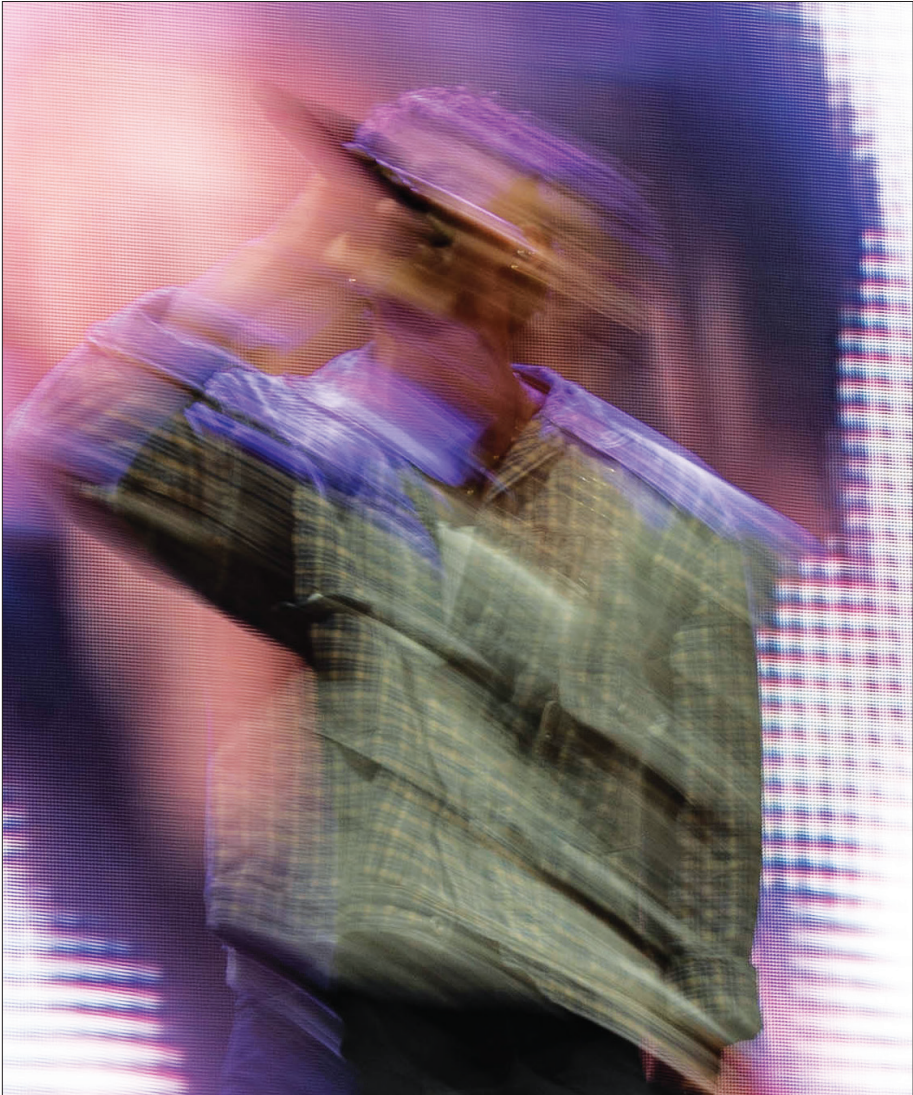
Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**UP!** Forrest Frank hypes up the crowd while playing one of his most popular songs, “UP!”



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**POINT OF VIEW** Drummer David Espinosa is locked in the rhythm while powering the beat during an electrifying set.



Kassidy Tsikitas | Photo Editor

**THIS VIEW** Forrest Frank lights up the stage and energizes the crowd Tuesday night at the Foster Pavilion.







# Waco shops blend sustainability, wellness

JANAY BOYD

Reporter

In a fast-moving world of mass production and synthetic fixes, three Waco small businesses are choosing a more mindful path. Centered on sustainability, healing and the power of community, these businesses also highlight the value of recycled and resold goods, encouraging customers to reconnect with the earth, their well-being and more intentional ways of living.

From vintage clothing to custom herbal teas, these three businesses show that sustainability isn't just a buzzword — it's a lifestyle, one rooted in resilience, creativity and care.

## PENELOPE PICKERS VINTAGE

Michelle Josline grew up as a “garage sale baby,” collecting pearls, vintage hats and other nostalgic items with her mother and grandmother. That early love of all things old has grown into Penelope Pickers Vintage, a boutique that gives clothing a second — or third — chance at life.

“I really got into vintage because I grew up going to garage sales,” Josline said. “I remember going to Tennessee one time and I saw all these huge piles of clothes ... They were being thrown away. I just thought that it was so sad.”

After a long career with AT&T, Josline followed her passion to open a store where everything is curated with care, from vintage gems to name-brand overstock. She said it's not just about aesthetics; it's about keeping clothes out of landfills.

“In our realm, I think just to give something a second life,” Josline said. “Anything that was made in the USA probably can make it another 10-20 years if it's taken care of.”

Penelope Pickers Vintage is located at 811 Wooded Acres Drive.

## COTTONTAIL JONES

Down the road, Cottontail Jones offers another twist on secondhand shopping — this time focused on kids. Jessica Lim, who relocated from California in 2018, saw a need for affordable, gently used children's clothes and boutique items.

“With how fast kids grow and how rough they can be on clothes, it's just not always practical to buy everything new,” she said.

Her shop sources through community buy-backs and consignments, with an emphasis on quality, she said.



Maggie Meegan | Photographer

**ROOTED IN RENEWAL** Cottontail Jones is a Waco small business that offers second-hand, gently-used children's clothes, encouraging their customers to turn to more sustainable shopping choices.

“Some people think pre-loved means stained or worn-out,” Lim said. “But we're super picky. Everything looks fresh, on-trend and clean.”

Cottontail Jones is located at 1025 Austin Ave.

## GRANDDADDY WILLOW

For Koby Marsh, Granddaddy Willow was born out of necessity. After surviving 19 brain and spinal surgeries and a rare stroke during college, his life path changed dramatically.

Facing ongoing pain and harmful side effects from medication, Marsh turned to natural remedies.

“I asked a doctor ... is there not something else natural?” he said. “[The doctor] looked at me and said, ‘You have no other

choice ... You're going to be in pain for the rest of your life.”

Marsh's journey led him to develop his first product, a pain-relieving body butter. Now, Granddaddy Willow is a haven for others seeking alternative healing. The shop offers other holistic products, such as roller balls, essential oils and crystals.

“I'm using ingredients that are already here, that have been extracted from nature,” Marsh said. “We're not adding to any waste ... we're using what was given to us by God.”

He said Earth Day reminds him to slow down and give back.

“I love trees,” Marsh said. “I think everything is a good reminder of looking at where we're living and making sure we're not making it worse ... giving back what we take.”

Granddaddy Willow is located at 1101 Richland Drive No. 5.

# Review: Coogler directs bloody good time in ‘Sinners’

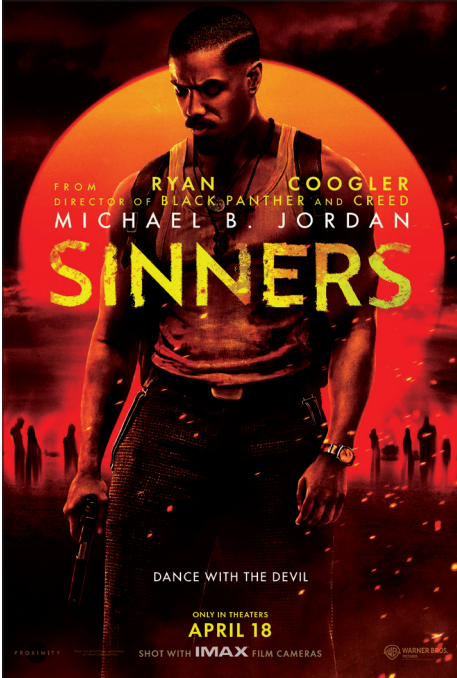


Photo courtesy of IMDB

COLE GEE

Staff Writer

Blues music and the supernatural have had a long and fruitful relationship ever since they sprung out of the outhouses and juke joints in the Deep South. Some consider it a signal for vagrants, drunks, womanizers and the devil himself, while others say it's a pure look into the grief and beauty that lies in our souls.

In “Sinners,” Coogler blends all these myths and folklore about blues to create a beautifully terrifying harmony.

*Beware! Spoilers ahead.*

Set in 1932 Mississippi, “Sinners” follows twin brothers Smoke and Stack, both played by Michael B. Jordan. The two gangsters buy an old sawmill from a rumored Klansman to set up a juke joint (basically a 1900s nightclub) in their home state. They're joined by their blues-singing cousin, Sammie (Miles Canton), who seems to have an almost supernatural talent for performing the blues. His talent unfortunately begins to attract Irish vampire, Remmick, and his motley crew who decide to turn the juke joint and its patrons into an

all-you-can-eat buffet.

Stack, Smoke and Sammie are joined by a cast of eclectic characters. Delroy Lindo plays Delta Slim, an alcoholic harmonica player. Wunmi Mosaku plays Annie, a hoodoo witch and Smoke's estranged wife. Hailee Steinfeld plays Mary. Her steamy and violent escapades with Stack certainly earned this movie its R rating. Actress Li Jun Li gives a powerful performance as Grace Chow, a desperate and protective mother.

Isolated and surrounded, the group must fight to survive until morning as Remmick and his crew pick them off one by one.

The movie is a Coogler original. It's the first film he has written and directed that isn't based on an existing intellectual property or heavily-screened historical event. Essentially, it's the lovechild of “Blade,” “From Dusk Till Dawn” and “Lovecraft Country.” “Sinners” intricately weaves together the history, culture and music of the American South, set to a brutal vampire flick.

It's incredible how Coogler manages to take an era of American history that's so full of pain, misery and strife and paint a beautiful canvas showcasing the love, history and art that was created and enjoyed during this time. Sinners show how every race during this time — whether Black, Irish, Native American or Chinese — used music and dance as a form of escapism from troubling times.

As a fantasy and Southern gothic fan, I tried not to fanboy in the theater to all the references to traditional Southern and supernatural folklore. I like “The Vampire Diaries” and “Twilight” just as much as the next guy, but I love how sinister and traditional Coogler made the vampires in “Sinners.” In this film, he enforced standard vampire rules like fear of the sun, silver and no uninvited entries.

It adds tension to the story knowing our heroes are only safe as long as they stay inside the building and don't invite them in. Despite this, they still aren't safe, as the vampires continue to hunt down their loved ones, all in the hopes of breaking their spirits.

One of the best choices the movie makes when it comes to establishing the time and place is through its main antagonist, the Irish vampire Remmick. His nationality is actually a very understated but important part of his character. It would've been easy for Coogler to

have leaned into the stereotypes of this period, making Remmick a raving racist and madman who harbors a deep resentment for Black people and wants to drain them of their blood because of it. When the movie was initially announced, a prevailing theory was that it would be Michael B. Jordan vs Klansman vampires.

However, Remmick is actually a very multilayered and well-thought-out character. He doesn't want to hurt and harm the antagonist because of their race — if anything, their race is the main reason why he wants to help them. Like many Irish immigrants during this era, Remmick understands the oppression that many Black Americans have gone through. He personally views the act of making them vampires as saving them, releasing them from the shackles of racism, prejudice and even death itself.

Each character in the movie has a vice that has caused pain and suffering throughout their lives. For Delta Slim, it's his alcoholism. Sammie's is his love of the blues, and for Smoke and Stack, it's their love of money and power. Ironically, both the twins and Remmick offer different ways of escapism from pain. Smoke and Stacks offer booze, gambling and music, while Remmick offers “salvation” through vampirism.

“In “Sinners,” Coogler blends all these myths and folklore about blues to a create a beautifully terrifying harmony.

When I first heard about Jordan playing two versions of himself, I was worried if he had a bag deep enough to give life to the two brothers. However, I must give credit where credit is due. I love the personalities he put into the devilish pair as well as the color motifs the

two symbolized — Stack being the hotheaded and cocky brother with a love for red suits while Smoke is the more calculated and business-focused twin in blue.

Despite Jordan's incredible performance, he wasn't the star of this movie. That honor goes to Miles Canton (Sammie). This is Canton's first-ever acting role after working as a backup singer for H.E.R. Despite working next to veteran legends like Lindo and Jordan, Canton not only held his own but possibly surpassed them as well.

Canton's best scene and the strongest in the movie is his performance of “I Lied” in the juke joint. The scene itself is almost completely indescribable.

The storyline explained in the beginning of the film included that certain musicians in different cultures are known as “griots.” A griot's performance can be so powerful it can pierce the veil between this life and the next, bringing forth spirits from the past, present and future, good and bad. As Sammie sings, the audience watches as an almost supernatural force overtakes the crowd, sending them into a frenzy.

Reminiscent of the Marvin Gaye album cover “I Want You,” the crowd dances the night away in the club hall. As the dancing continues, we watch as musicians from the past, present and future, join the crowd as ethereal spirits.

We watch a turntable DJ add an underlying boom-bap beat to the heavy blues-focused soundtrack, and a Jimi Hendricks-like rockstar plays a heavily amped-up electric guitar. Gangsters, Igbo priests and even traditional Chinese Xiqu performers weave in and out of the crowd like pieces of thread. Coogler spins a beautiful tapestry incorporating classic styles from throughout black history.

Across the board, “Sinners” has received critical acclaim, with the film currently holding the top seat in the box office — \$45.6 million. The movie also has a strong 98% score on Rotten Tomatoes and is one of the highest-reviewed horror films released in the last decade.

To summarize this very long winded Ryan Coogler love fest, go watch “Sinners” right now. Missing out on experiencing this movie in theaters is not far off from a Greek tragedy. Any producer with a brain would write Coogler a blank check and let him make whatever he wants.



Headed to Austin Psych Fest this weekend? Here are 7 mind-melting psychedelic artists to binge pre-show.





# ‘Pressure is a privilege’



**FROM DUCK TO BEAR** Redshirt junior outside linebacker Emar'ion Winston, a transfer from Oregon, gears up for drills during practice on Tuesday at the Fudge Football Development Center. Camie Jobe | Photographer

## Bears rebuild OLB depth through transfer portal

**JACKSON POSEY**  
Sports Writer

Baylor football head coach Dave Aranda's defense is far from conventional. The hybrid 3-3-5 defensive scheme utilizes players in unorthodox ways, most notably with the "STAR" position, a safety/linebacker hybrid spot famously manned by Jalen Pitre. Outside linebackers play the "JACK" position, where they primarily rush the passer but are also expected to drop back into coverage. The Bears' top two JACKs from a year ago — Garmon Randolph and Steve Linton

— are gone, leaving a void atop the depth chart for a jack-of-all-trades. Newly-hired outside linebacker coach Carson Hall, who joined the program in January from Western Kentucky, noted the "growth mindset" of a position group that added two transfers and two freshmen this offseason. "It's cool — the dynamic of the room — just because you have a good mix of new guys and guys that have been here," said Hall, a former Georgia defensive lineman named to the 247Sports 30 Under 30 List in 2024. "They're focused on getting better every single day, which is key."

Oregon transfer Emar'ion Winston played under Baylor defensive coordinator Matt Powledge in Eugene. Winston said Hall has a defensive philosophy similar to Dan Lanning, the Ducks' head coach, who comes from the same Kirby Smart coaching tree. "The way he teaches defense and talks football is the exact same as me, so it's perfect," Winston said. Hall highlighted Winston's high-end potential. The 6-foot-4, 255-pound redshirt junior was an opening-day starter for the Ducks in 2023 before slotting into a rotational role in the nation's No. 16-ranked

scoring defense. "I tell him every day, his ceiling is the roof," Hall said. "Emar'ion is definitely one of those guys. He's got that capability to be a guy. His work every day is a true testament to that. He comes to work every single day to get better, and when he's making plays, it's because he's doing work to get better." Hall mentioned Winston as one of many players with the possibility to "bust through" the ceiling. Multiple players could see time in the JACK rotation, including Winston, Tulane transfer Matthew Fobbs-White and returners Kyler Jordan and Corey Kelly.

"That's how every single guy in the room is, in my opinion," Hall said. "They're all guys that have an incredible potential. They can climb as high as they want to go as long as they go do it." Fobbs-White racked up 7.5 tackles for loss last season as Tulane's highest-graded pass rusher. He credited Aranda's defensive mind with helping him take another developmental step forward. "He's just a brilliant mind on the defensive side," Fobbs-White said. "He's definitely more technical with his defenses; he likes to call them up."

The Bears took a big step forward last season, capping off the regular season with a six-game win streak. The water level of expectations has risen in Waco — a challenge Hall says he's ready for. "You can definitely feel the momentum walking around the building," Hall said. "[But] you have to prove it again. And I'll go back to something I've been hearing since I was in college: 'Pressure is a privilege.' So if you are in a situation where you are under pressure to perform and excel, it is because you've done good things in the past."

## Trigg, Klopfenstein lead experienced tight end room

**JACKSON POSEY**  
Sports Writer

In a transfer portal era so often characterized by frenzied player movement, Baylor's tight end room is a beacon of consistency. The Bears replaced graduated senior Gavin Yates with three-star freshman Brody Wilhelm. The rest of the depth chart is back in business. That consistency is already paying dividends. "We've all kind of felt that this spring," redshirt sophomore Hawkins Polley said. "It's me and Matt [Klopfenstein's] first year really having the same offense going into spring ball as the previous year. So I think that's huge for us just to be able to develop in the offense and have things that are more second nature to us." Leading the room is Michael Trigg, a versatile weapon in the passing game who can play in-line or out of the slot. Trigg is a matchup nightmare for opponents — too big for most defensive backs, too quick for linebackers. The former USC and Ole Miss tight end is set to play an expanded role in Baylor's offense after a strong first season in Waco. "When you have a guy like Michael Trigg, that's a little bit unique [for] the tight end position," offensive coordinator Jake Spavital said. "You guys saw him last year and the catches he'd make and how dynamic he is." Trigg caught 30 passes for 395 yards (13.2 yards per catch) and three touchdowns, though most of his production came in inconsistent intervals. The redshirt senior caught four passes for 96 yards and a touchdown against Houston; the following week, he finished with zero catches on two targets. He could play an even larger role this season. "The room last year had such success with Trigg and Gavin [Yates] and everyone," junior Matthew Klopfenstein said. "It was definitely a point where, 'OK, this is something we can

build from." The coaching staff has held Trigg out for most of spring ball, taking "precautionary measures" after a minor injury. In his stead, Klopfenstein has taken on more of a leadership role after playing a small rotational role as a sophomore. "Matt Klopfenstein has stepped up in that role and taken another level," tight ends coach Jarrett Anderson said. Redshirt junior Kelsey Johnson unexpectedly redshirted in 2024 after being sidelined by an early-season injury. The Red Oak native played in 22 games for the Bears across his first two seasons and could see increased playing time with Yates out of eligibility. "We decided to have surgery right after the season, try to quick-fix something that had happened probably back two years ago, kind of been bugging him," Anderson said. "If he's at full strength, he has ability to help the room." Yates wore a lot of hats for the Bears: tight end, fullback, occasional short-yardage target, all-around tough guy. Now, he's out of eligibility. Someone will need to step up. "I think guys already learned from that," Anderson said. "At the same time, they've already learned. ... [I got here] last year, and then learning from Gavin, and Gavin was having to learn the offense. And from that standpoint, I think it's trickled up, so it's not been a downside from that standpoint." Anderson isn't looking for a single player to replace Yates. Instead, he's looking for several players to fill part of his role. "Well, I'm not grooming a guy to have a metal jacket on his arm," Anderson said, laughing. "I'm hoping I can keep all that body armor off 'em. And I think all the guys that we have now have the combination to do all the things, whether it's route running, whether it's in the backfield blocking, whether it's on the perimeter blocking. I think they all have the ability to do that."



**SAFETY NET** Redshirt senior tight end Michael Trigg (1) caught 30 balls for 395 yards and three touchdowns in 2024. Lariat File Photo

## Film breakdown: Bodo Bodo brings elite defensive foundation

**JACKSON POSEY**  
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Scott Drew has found his defensive anchor. Baylor men's basketball hasn't finished as a top-100 scoring defense since the 2021-22 season. The Bears have allowed an average of 70.4 points per game in the past three seasons, their worst three-season stretch since 2007-09 (72.7). With no returning players from a team that failed to make it out of the first weekend of the NCAA Tournament for the fourth consecutive season, Drew went fishing for an elite defensive anchor. Enter Juslin Bodo Bodo. The High Point transfer dominated Big South competition, winning back-to-back conference Defensive Player of the Year honors as a freshman and sophomore. He played every game, averaged 1.7 blocks per game and led the nation in offensive rebound percentage both seasons with the Panthers. "We are excited to add a player of Juslin's caliber to our roster," Drew said in a press release. "Obviously, his size leaps off the page at you, but he knows how to use it to his advantage ... He can impact the game in a variety of ways, and we are excited to add him to our roster."

Bodo Bodo is a monster defender. He led the Big South in blocks as a freshman with 1.9 per game and led the Panthers to dramatic defensive improvement. High Point allowed 68.9 points per game in the 2024-25 season, down from 77.2 per game the year before Bodo Bodo arrived. Bodo Bodo's length and timing change the shape of the defense. Opposing teams looked hesitant at times to drive into the paint; when they did, they were often met by the outstretched arms of the 7-foot, 255-pound Bodo Bodo, waiting to swallow up the shot. Sometimes, his elite timing and wingspan can belie his defensive positioning. Bodo Bodo can struggle with help-defense footwork at times, an issue that becomes apparent against high-major competition. The Panthers' NCAA Tournament opener against Purdue showed off Bodo Bodo's biggest defensive issue: playing in space. The junior's best defensive scheme is a "drop," where the guard fights over the screen while the center waits below. (Other alternatives, such as hedging, involve the center playing up to the level of the screener.) But Bodo Bodo simply isn't comfortable enough backpedaling to hedge screens at this point. He looks uncomfortable playing in space, particularly in the mid-range, where he often gives

opposing big men plenty of breathing room. This is the junior's Achilles' heel. He simply hasn't displayed enough mobility to effectively guard high pick-and-rolls consistently. Baylor leaned heavily into offensive rebounding after Josh Ojianwuna went out for the season with a knee injury. The Bears crashed the glass nearly every possession, to mixed results. Bodo Bodo changes that equation. He led the nation in offensive rebound percentage the past two seasons at 19.9% and 18.3%, respectively. Bodo Bodo is also a terrific screen-setter and roller, adding significant rim gravity to a Baylor team that hasn't had a true pick-and-roll lob threat since Yves Missi. Most of Bodo Bodo's scoring output comes through putbacks and lobs. But he's also experimented successfully with pump fakes — his rim gravity is so strong, smaller defenders often go flying. It's a solid counter move for a player who averaged just 5.3 points per game as a sophomore. Baylor needed a defensive anchor. They found one in Bodo Bodo, one of the nation's premier shot-blocking and rebounding big men. He should become Baylor's best defensive center since prime Jonathan Tchamwa Tchatchoua — and, if he can figure out how to survive high pick-and-rolls, he has a chance to overcome defensive downgrades on the perimeter to keep the defense afloat.







