

**EVENTS**

•Puppets: shows 3p.m. Sat.-Sun. Columbia Marionette Theatre  
 •Photos: "Lord, I Wish I Had a Prayin' Church Tonight," McKissick Museum, through Sept. 12.

# ETC.

**SITE OF THE WEEK**

Hate the new movie? So does Mr. Cranky.

<http://www.mrcranky.com/>

## Live the action flick

By **Tate Austin**  
*Web Guy*

If you own a fast computer, you might be interested in what online gaming has to offer. Personally, I think these games — action shooter style of entertainment — are better than peanut butter and jelly; I've enjoyed them for more than four years. You might have heard the names "Quake" and "Doom," but these mean little until you've experienced them. You've got a gun, cunning and your overpowering instinct to survive.

The appeal of these games isn't simply that you get to destroy anything and everything that stands against you (nice as that is); it's a technical marvel. In most any other game, a player is up against a computer-operated opponent, which gets very boring, as patterns and situations are simply repeated. In a miniature realm with other humans, every engagement is unique. Most humans don't obey algorithms; it's instinct that powers a player through a firefight.

All you need is a fairly new computer and a 56k Internet connection. Purchase the software, install it, connect to the Internet and find a server. (Try <http://www.gamespy.com>.) After you connect and load all the needed environmental properties, you can run around and do some van-damage!

Some of the newer games require some pretty high-powered hardware to operate properly. The hardware components that make all the difference are the processor and the video card, which decide what kind of appearance a game will take on. For those readers with slower systems, try games like "Quake" and "Doom."

Online play operates in a virtual environment such as a building. Players can move freely about this space, picking up weaponry and engaging in fast-paced gunfights. Imagine a world in which everybody moves like a Hong Kong action flick and has superhuman endurance; this is the way a shooter feels.

As a longtime fan of these games, I highly recommend them. At first, this is something you might dismiss as mindless violence, but it will grow to be a highly enjoyable experience. Try <http://www.quake3arena.com>. This is an experience I wish more people could have.

# New Flaming Lips CD sizzles



By **Kevin Langston**  
*Gamecock Reviewer ★★★★★*

It's been a while since anyone has heard from The Flaming Lips. After their fluke hit in the early '90s, "She Don't Use Jelly," the band seemingly disappeared from the realm of pop music. If this album is considered a comeback album, the door is wide open for the Lips.

"The Soft Bulletin" has been built up as the album of the year, and it was released in late June. This album is strong enough to fight off upcoming releases, but its "album of the year"

status remains to be seen. It's definitely worth buying.

You'll be disappointed with this album if you're expecting the goofball antics of "She Don't Use Jelly." You will, however, still hear the pop mess that the Lips are so accomplished at producing. But this album plays more like a symphony than a circus.

While most concept albums seem to focus more on the record as a whole, "The Soft Bulletin" expresses emphasis from song to song. Each song is a wonderful display of orchestral arrangements and playful lyrics. In addition, the album is ear candy for the fans of great drumming and bass. You wouldn't think it was The Flaming Lips of old if you didn't hear the unmistakable sound of Wayne Coyne's vocals.

In "Race for the Prize," the band immediately launches itself into an uncharted world of pop. The crashing symbols and lovely orchestral arrangements build up to a wonderful plateau that carries itself throughout the album.

The lyrics tell a story seemingly fit for science fiction. The world is in dire

"What is the Light?" or "Feeling Yourself Disintegrate."



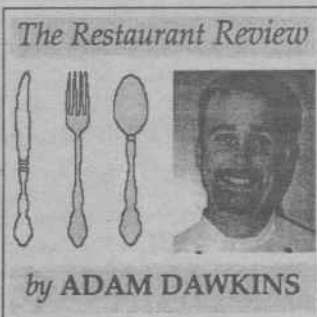
Courtesy: [www.burned.demon.co.uk](http://www.burned.demon.co.uk)

need of a cure, and love proves to be the savior. The message isn't new, but the method The Lips use is refreshing and perfect. No pop fan will be able to deny the power of "Buggin'," nor will fans skip past

There are moments when you think The Lips are losing themselves in a fuzzy dimension of soft melodies and chords, but they pull themselves and the listener back with a more tangible and powerful display of pop and beauty. "A Spoonful Weighs a Ton" and "The Spark That Bled" are perfect examples.

"The Soft Bulletin" is perhaps the best album released this year. It's definitely the strongest of the summer. Some critics have even compared this album to The Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." I don't know whether these albums could even be compared, but that statement says a lot about how incredible this album truly is.

# Get friendly with Mr. Friendly's wines



**Villa Tronco**  
 Out of four stars  
 ★★

1213 Blanding St.  
 Downtown  
 \$\$

Villa Tronco, one of the oldest existing restaurants in Columbia, consistently serves up good Italian-American cuisine in a very traditional atmosphere.

They offer a nice variety of pasta dishes in a simple manner that's quite refreshing at times. I always enjoy dining at Villa Tronco because it's a home-like atmosphere with little fuss involved. They might not serve the most creative Italian food in the world, and it's definitely Italian food by American definition. But they're very good at what they do and how they do it. Evidently,

this is the case because Villa Tronco has been in Columbia for decades.

I have to rave about the variety of cheesecakes; it's wonderful. They have some of the nicest desserts around for the money, and, again, all with no fuss. If you often grow weary of the culinary frou-frou of today, then head to Villa Tronco. It's a nice change from the eccentric.

They have very nice home-style pizzas, as well as a nice variety of meat dishes. I'm especially fond of the veal choices. For the vegetarian, many acceptable menu selections are available.

I think Villa Tronco is one of the most comfortable and charming restaurants in town. It offers American-style Italian cuisine in a charming atmosphere, and food also is available for take-out.

**Mr. Friendly's New Southern Cafe**  
 Out of four stars  
 ★★★

2001 Greene St.  
 Five Points  
 254-7828  
 \$\$

Mr. Friendly's is an excellent restaurant in Five Points that serves Southern cuisine with a modern flare. It's very easy to understand how the name of the restaurant has affected the staff,

they have some of the friendliest servers in town.

At Mr. Friendly's, I started off with fried grits, topped with herbed goat

cheese and served with a roasted head of garlic, a very Southern appetizer and certainly one of the most popular ones on the menu. It was very tasty, and the goat cheese went well with the flavor of the fried stone grits, which were made into cakes. For my entree, I enjoyed the grilled pork steaks with blackberry ketchup, served with seasonal vegetables and roasted garlic mashed potatoes. The portions were quite large, and the meal was very nice.

One of the very best kept secrets is the wine list. It's rather extensive and very well priced. Some wines on the list were priced two or three times less than I have seen the very same wines in restaurants in Chicago, Atlanta or even in this area. I was pleasantly surprised, and I highly recom-

mend that wine enthusiasts in the area take advantage of Mr. Friendly's prices. While no rare wines are on the list, there are still some very nice selections.



Ashton June Photo Editor

The service is superb and very attentive. In fact, I wouldn't hesitate to rate the service I received there as some of the very best I have come across in Columbia.

Whether you enjoy southern fare or upscale dining, head toward Mr. Friendly's, a nice place to take a date or the family.

Key to pricing guides:  
 \$ = \$1-\$10 per person  
 \$\$ = \$11-\$20  
 \$\$\$ = \$21 - \$30  
 \$\$\$\$ = over \$31

Adam Dawkins is a hotel, restaurant and tourism administration senior, and a member of both the National Restaurant Association and American Culinary Federation. He has published restaurant reviews in publications throughout the Southeast.