

# Endless Sandstorm

Meg Elison

A sandstorm is nothing but grit in your teeth. It costs you the horizon and the whole sky. It steals your vision and your perspective. It's something you can't see coming until it consumes you.

But most of all, it's a shitty techno song.

The town that I lived in as a teen existed at the intersection of many avenues of suck: it was the desert, it was inland, it was poor. It lacked easy freeway access and suffered from the attendant joblessness one might expect. Chief exports: oranges, meth, anyone with a B+ average or better.

These conditions meant that every party I went to was in some way deeply flawed; I have hung out in a lot of empty pools with people who had nothing to say until crossfaded and then had far too much. We stood around on concrete patios under bug-covered lights. We drank the cheapest thing that would fuck us up and smoked the same cigarettes that our mothers had quit ten years before. The year that I should have graduated high school, this nation of hyperconnected disaffected souls received its anthem.

The song was "Sandstorm" by Darude.

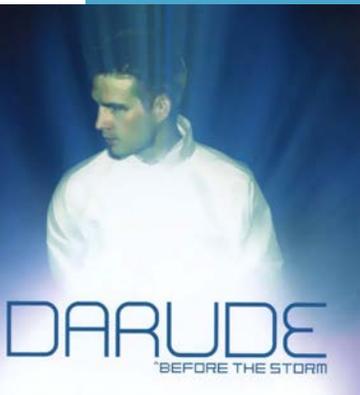
"Sandstorm" came out the year I dropped out of high school, but like many earworm hits it just wouldn't go away. It was the best song on Dance Dance Revolution at the arcade, it was on an episode of *Queer as Folk*. I remember it playing at clubs and on portable dance floors at graduation parties until 2005, easy. Around that time is when it became a meme.

The memification of Sandstorm seems like a foregone conclusion, looking back. It was easily the most well-known piece of happy hardcore in my part of the world; Eurotrash we were not. For a long time, it was funny to say that any song someone couldn't identify on the internet was "Sandstorm," by Darude. It became emblematic of some other world where cool parties were happening, where there were laser lights and people who spoke something other than English twitching all night on drugs we couldn't get.

I thought it would die with the early-aughts, gone with the Affliction shirts and tribal tattoos that always flash before my eyes when I remember my nightclub glory days, when my fake ID looked good and so did I. But "Sandstorm" keeps coming back.

This year, I got not one but FOUR Snapchats on New Year's Eve from people I know who still live in those ghost towns with "Sandstorm" playing in the background (or the foreground) of a short video of illegal fireworks going off in wide streets. Fascinated, I re-watched them all, trying to figure out HOW in the year of our Lord of Misrule two thousand and sevenfuckingteen the kids are still listening to "Sandstorm." These kids were raised on Skrillex and weaned on Deadmau5, they learned FL Studio like I learned to play the recorder. Why the fuck won't "Sandstorm" die?

Obsessed, I sought out cover versions of the iconic composition of Meister Darude. Two dudes on acoustic guitar. A meta-techno cover played on eight hard drives. A strangely appealing accordion groove. These cover videos were made in 2014, 2015. Why? I clicked one after the other; none of the musicians said anything. They just played the song. Nothing would satisfy, so I found myself pulling up the original on YouTube at 9am as I



Darude

"Sandstorm"

*Before the Storm*

09/2000

BMG

walked the streets of San Francisco, trying to figure out why this piece of music, out of all the embarrassing garbage I listened to in my late adolescence, was the thing that would not be ignored.

Popping impotently in my ears, the phrasing and melodic structure of the song itself seemed to encompass everything I remember about that life.

The medium is the message.

"Sandstorm" won't die because those kids are still living it.

"Sandstorm" sounds like a series of days that are indistinguishable from one another, like shifts in a big box retail store.

"Sandstorm" sounds like numberless semesters in an indifferent for-profit college that spits you out after a few years with nothing but debt.

"Sandstorm" sounds like your friends telling the same stories over and over, because their lives were only interesting that one time.

"Sandstorm" sounds like getting nervously fingered by a guy who has no idea what he's doing and knowing you're never going to come.

The song has no rising action. It has no climax. It chases its tail for a while, sometimes reversing direction for kicks, but achieving just as much as the dog that employs this tactic. Like a life made up mostly of quiet desperation.

Somewhere under a bleached-out desert sky, the same kids are having the same party they've always had. They're lighting their illegal fireworks, they're pooling their tips to buy an eighth. They're working my old job and singing my old song. They're lost in the sandstorm, and most of them won't make it out.