

Sue Ie

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English 1A

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Self-Taught Guitarist

He roams restlessly from place to place. He is always speaking but never saying much. He makes his daily stops, walking his shuffling, barefoot march from door-to-door, room-to-room, acquaintance-to-acquaintance. In the hall lounge, the fluorescent light creates a round oval that glares on the television that is surrounded by a throng of college students. Unaware of anything but the miniature sorcerer gliding across the screen casting spells and in search of a mission, they toss him a half-hearted, distracted greeting. Accustomed to this, he takes a seat within the group of boys, shifts into a comfortable position, and conversationally inquires as to progress of the video game and their quest. Becoming quiet and introspective, he begins to fade like the white ghost that he so resembles.

After what seems like an eternity later, he shakes himself lightly as if he is awakening from a recurring dream that stalks him from day-to-day. Combing his hands through his fair, translucent, corn silk hair and rubbing his pale, occasionally pink-splotched cheeks, he arises from himself and gives a cheery farewell. Not bothering to straighten his trademark rumpled khaki shorts and hooded UCR sweatshirt, he leaves with a ready joke and a promise to return to those pleasure-seeking, boredom-hating college students that linger in the area. As he slowly shuffles back to the cluttered mess that is his dorm room, his pace begins to quicken with the beginning of a growing anticipation.

Stopping on the balls of his feet, he pauses at his door and takes a hesitant look inside.

Seeing nothing but a box of empty Squeeze-It plastic bottles, half-eaten fruit snack bags, and stacks of books and paper piled haphazardly on the blue-patterned carpet, he steps inside and firmly closes the door. His first action is to pick up his beloved guitar, the only thing that doesn't have anything defiling its surface. Firmly holding his guitar, he takes a seat and once again shifts, posture erect, cornflower blue eyes alert, and skilled hands ready. Adjusting the acoustic guitar in his lap, his fingers automatically position themselves over the taut, slender strands. Expertly shifting the position of his fingers, he warms-up by gently caressing the strings. Initially, he strums the strings hesitantly but gains confidence as he continues. Moving smoothly from chord to chord, he is rewarded by the rich clarity of the silver notes of Eric Clapton's *Tears in Heaven*. His face is hidden in shadow as he bends slightly over the guitar. Hyperaware of the possibility of making a mistake, he stares intently at the position of his hands on the strings. Gaining a vibrancy he previously lacked, he continues to play with an intense air about him. When he plays the guitar, he says "It's like everything ceases to exist but my guitar and the music that comes from it." After he finishes the song, he goes online to search for challenging acoustic guitar tabs from a website that reads "Welcome to Rawktabs.com! On this site you can download guitar tabs of the latest songs and classics."

His name is Rob Peterson, a UCR Freshman and struggling student. Formerly a pianist and a trumpeter, he is now a self-taught guitarist. When he selects a song, he searches for something that suits his tastes (e.g. alternative acoustics and orchestral music) and provides him with a challenge. His song selection is based on his mood; he explains that "Depending if I'm happy, then I'll just play some sweet thing, if I'm angry, it'll be some loud, heavy thing that breaks some of the strings off," and joking adds "so I try not to get angry too often—it gets expensive." Finally deciding on a song, he stares at the guitar tab with intense concentration,