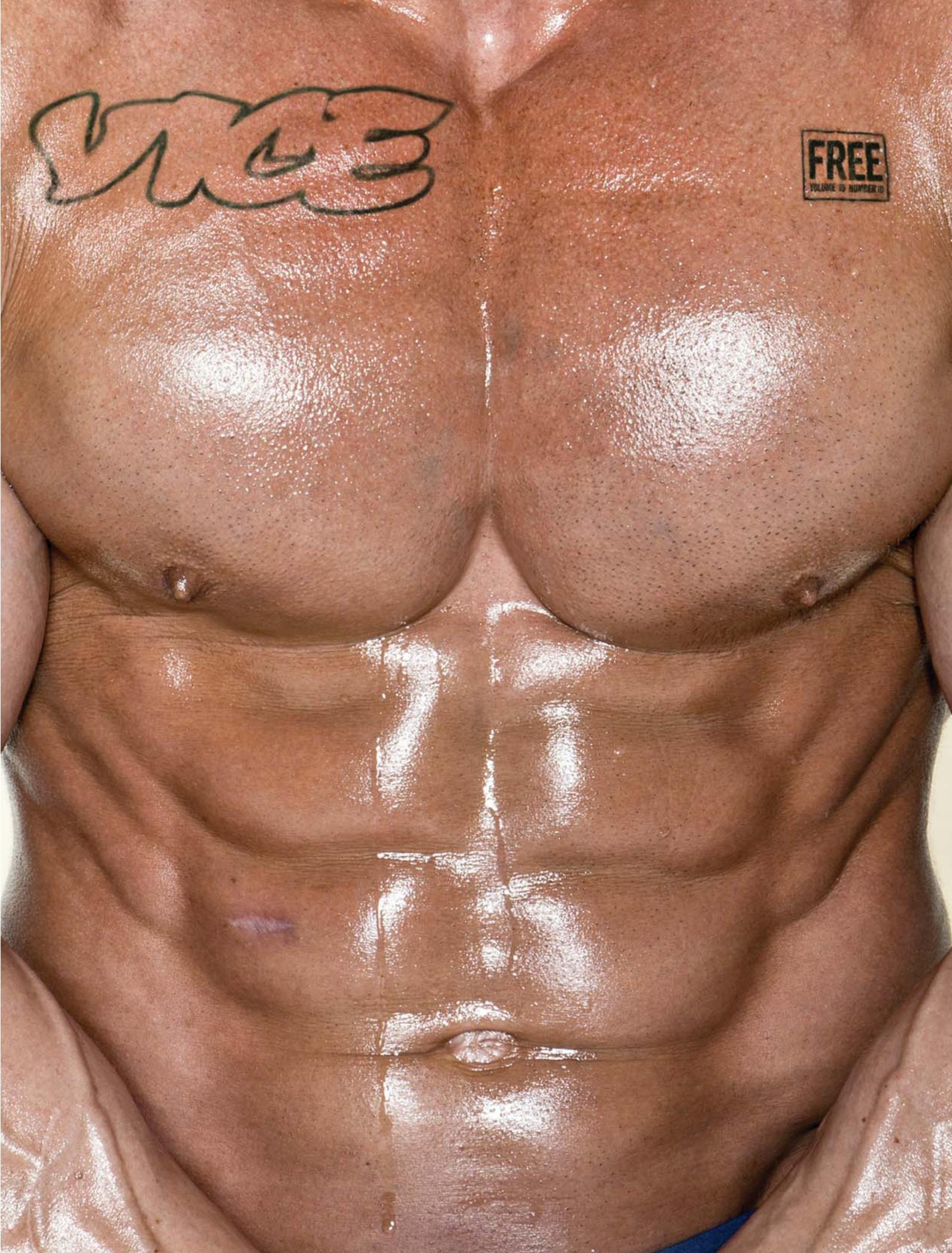


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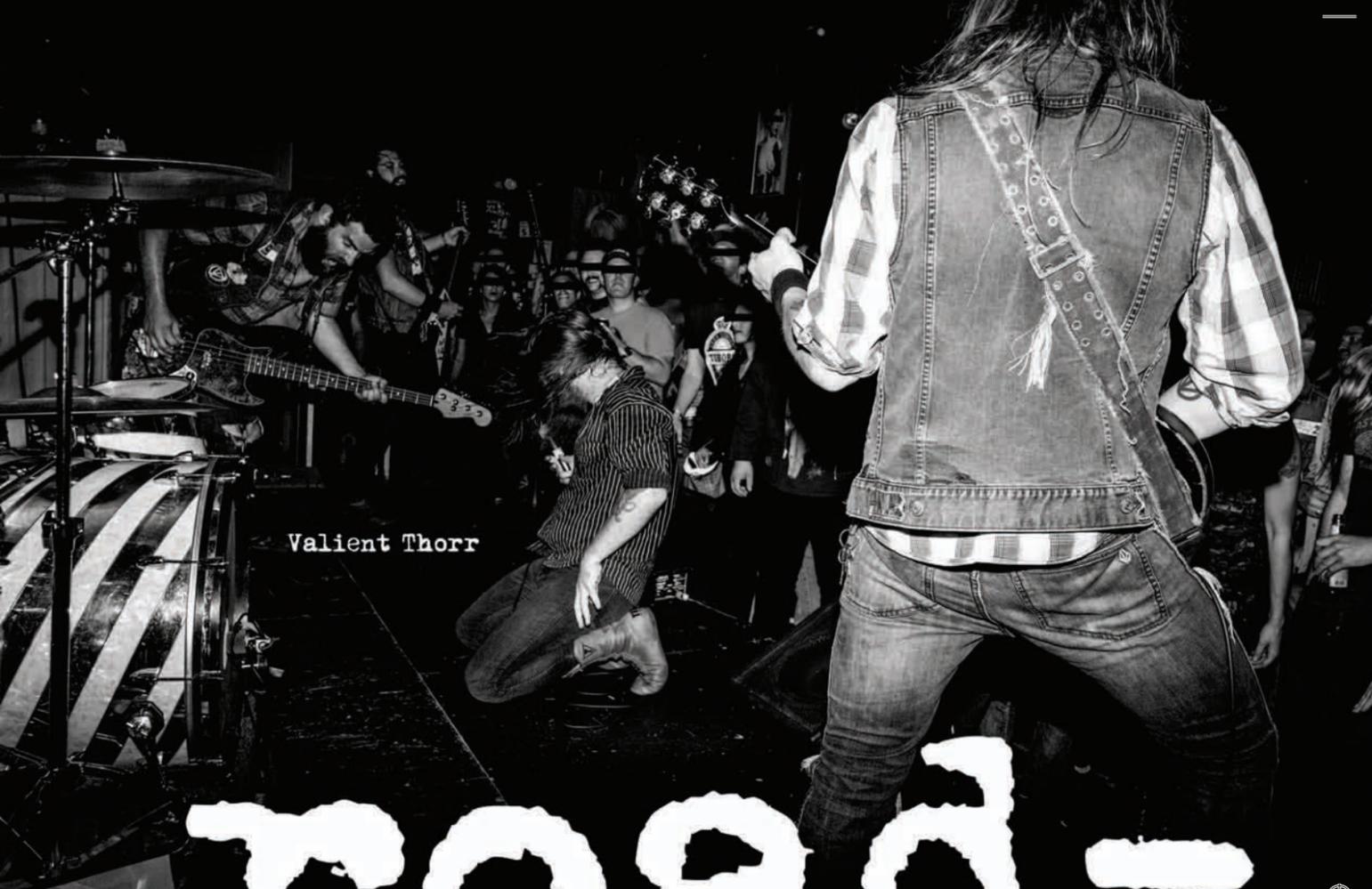
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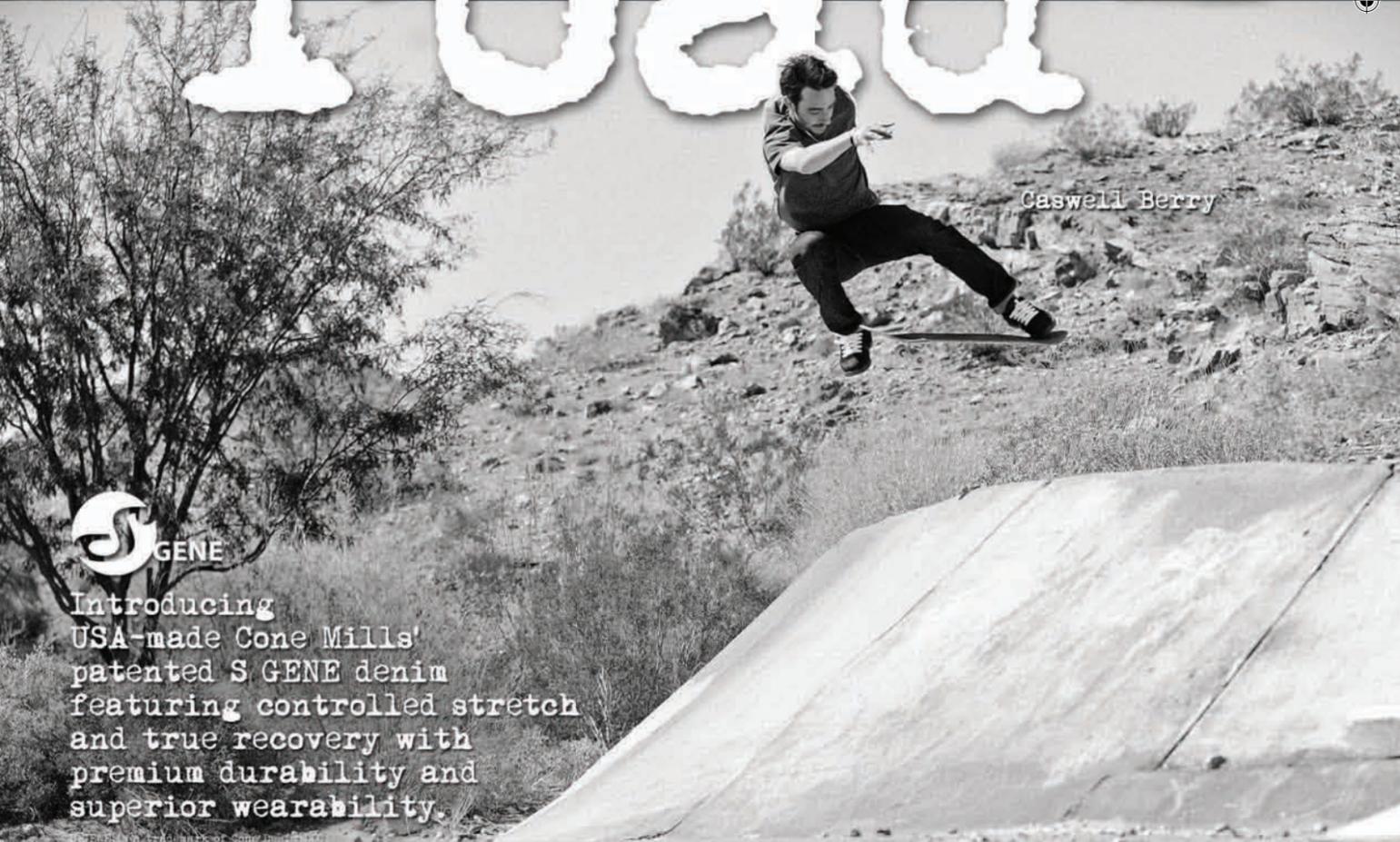


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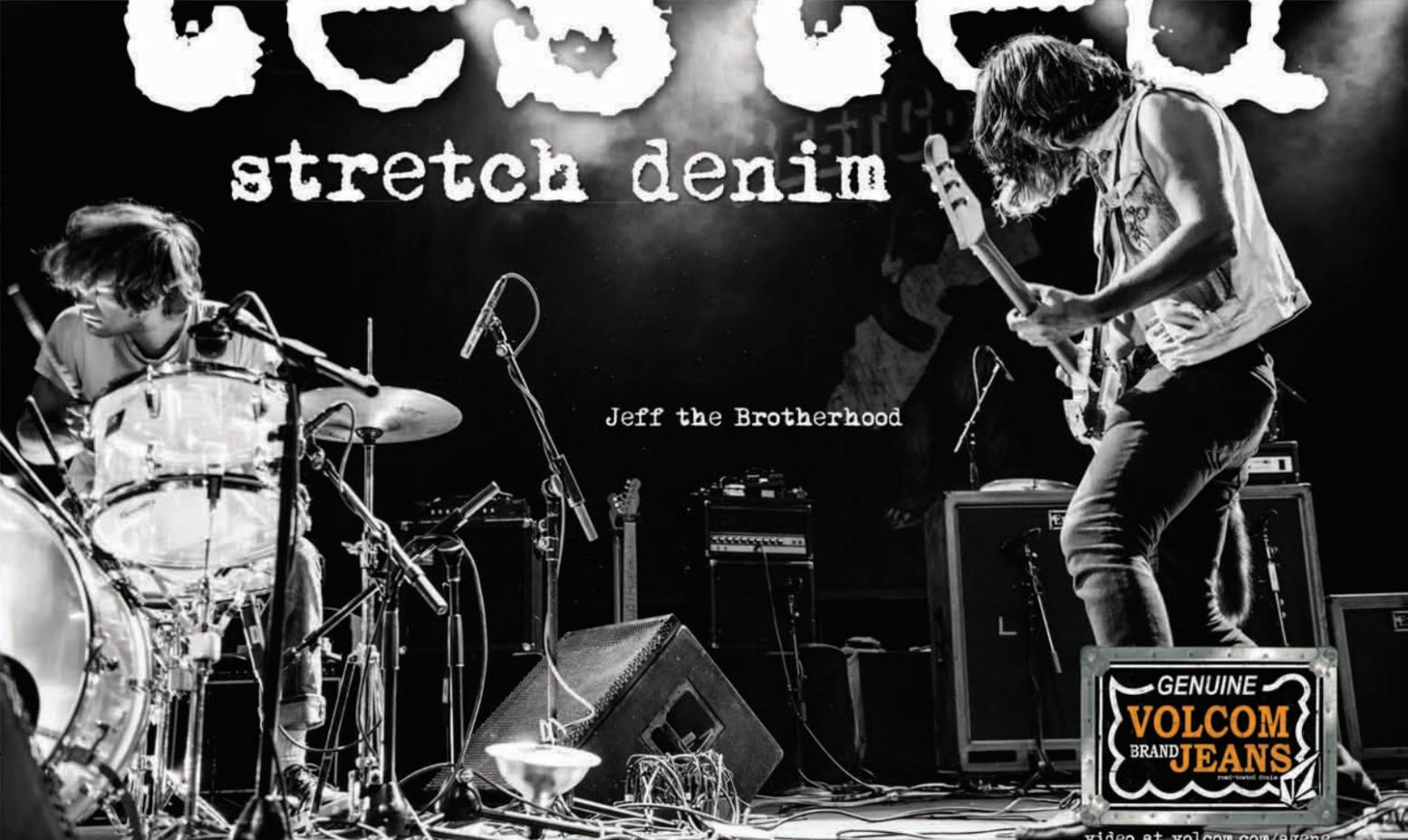
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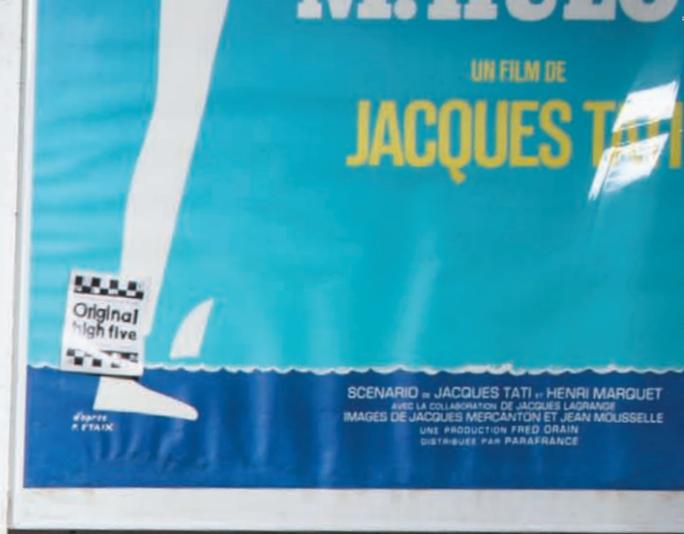
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These photos are from a new body of work by Ben Pier. His book, Teenage Teeth, is available now and makes us feel like we're 14 and smoking cigarettes in the parking lot behind Arby's again. Check out his website at benpier.com.

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Cover by Ben Ritter

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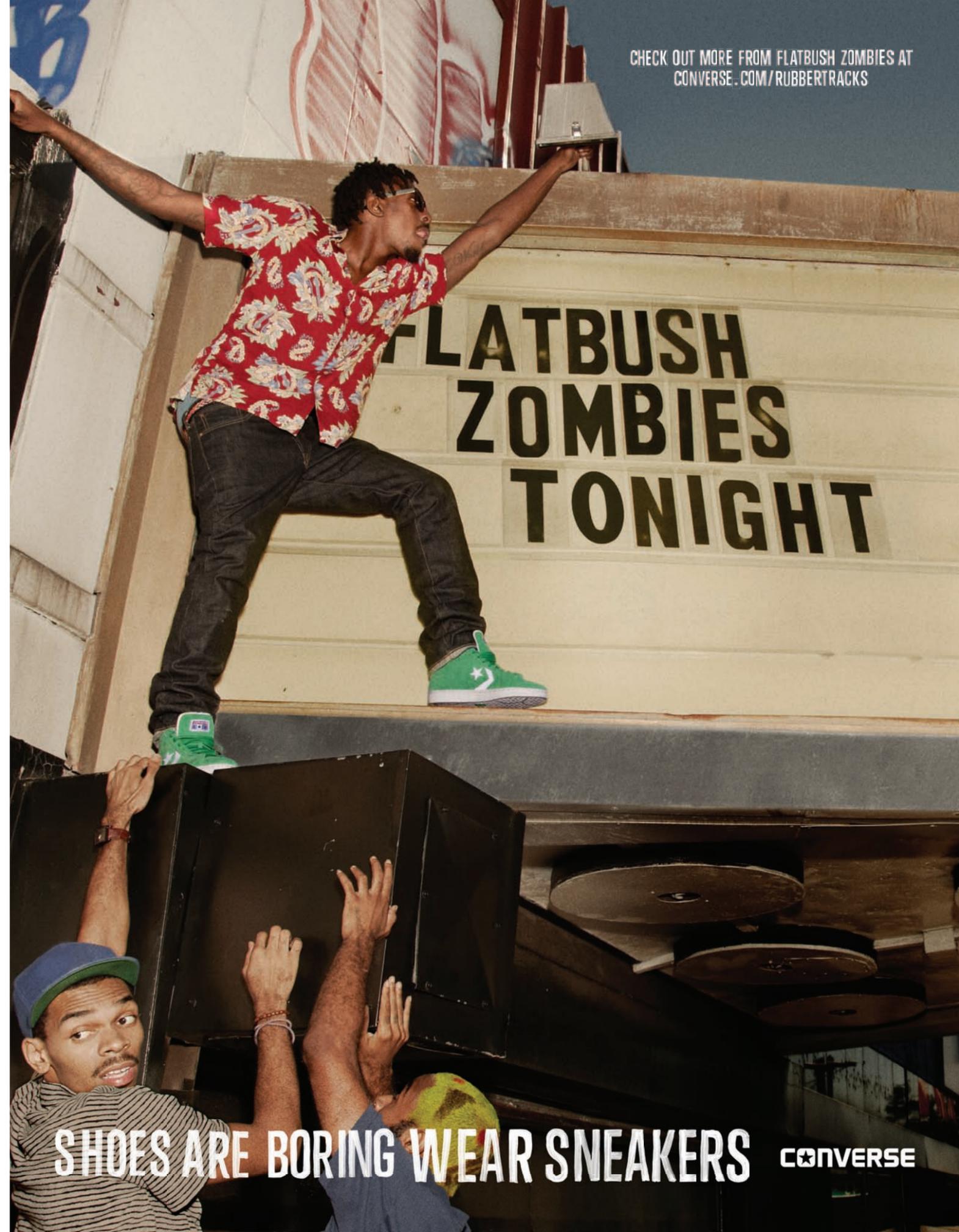


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EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



AMIE BARRODALE AND CLANCY MARTIN

The Vajrayana approach to passion and desire is—allow me to get it wrong—to use them to destroy themselves. Passion to cure passion, etc. When Clancy and Amie get together, two crazy alcoholics become movie watchers, popcorn eaters. We were supposed to write this bio as though we're one person, but I am tired, and Clancy is lazy. My mom just called me to suggest that—since my house in Iowa is haunted, and I have to move—she drive her silver PT Cruiser from a Buddhist retreat in Whistler, Canada, to Iowa. She will make the drive and move me out alone, so Clancy and I can attend the Buddhist Red Tara retreat. God forbid we miss the Red Tara retreat. Well, we'll keep you posted. (Clancy added that last part.)

See SHIVA'S WEDDING, page 120



JOE STRAMOWSKI

Before being forcibly abducted by VICE and intimidated into joining its staff as a video producer, Joe Stramowski labored as a freelancer who made mediocre television that everybody watched and wrote screenplays that never got read. Now we're like, "Hey, Joe, you need to go to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where a bunch of people are shooting one another, and produce a video piece on Joseph Kony's army. Oh, also, can you write something about it for the magazine and take photos?" And he's all, "Sure," because, like most people worth a shit, he is a hard worker who enjoys what he does. This also goes a long way to ensure that everything he makes turns out great. Thanks, Joe, and keep 'em comin'.

See BUSH-LEAGUE REBELS, page 104



ANGELINA FANOUS

Assistant Editor Angelina, who has often been mistakenly (but awesomely) referred to as "Ms. Famous," once went to Europe for two weeks just to devour good food. She is really excited about being an Employee of the Month, mostly because she gets to share a picture of herself next to her alter ego, Cookie Monster. They both love the same things: eating, cookies, and more eating. She likes butter and bagels, but not together (jalapeño-cheddar cream cheese, please). She also hates stuff, like the smell of McDonald's hand soap (which, according to her, stinks like an old folks' home), the phrase "Just do you," and answering the question "Where are you from?" (originally Egypt, but it's complicated).

See KEEPING THE EDITORS FROM KILLING THEMSELVES AND EACH OTHER



SUSAN MILLER

Hey, did you know it's VICE's birthday this month? It's OK if you forgot, really—most people don't know that our first-ever issue came out in October 1994 (we were known then as *The Voice of Montreal*, but that's a story for another time). Since no one bothered to get us a present, we decided to gift ourselves with one and hired astrologer extraordinaire Susan Miller to give us a natal-chart reading. Her website AstrologyZone receives 6 million visitors a month, and she writes for too many magazines to name. She consulted the stars and the planets and concluded that we're 1) good with money, 2) creative, and 3) doing just fine. Turns out astrology isn't bullshit, huh?

See VICE'S BIRTHDAY, page 50



WILLIAM T. VOLLMANN

When we were putting together the Employees of the Month section for this issue, we realized that we had never featured William T. Vollmann, which is a terrible oversight. We're huge fans of the National Book Award-winning author and have had the honor of publishing his fiction, nonfiction, and illustrations on a few occasions. His past work for us has included meditations on cross-dressing and dominatrix shows, as well as absinthe-fueled prose poetry. For this issue he gave us a peek at his forthcoming collection, *Last Stories and Other Stories*. He is also the nicest person we've spoken to on the phone, ever. And considering the plethora of idiots and assholes we're forced to talk to on a daily basis, that really is saying something.

See THE FORGETFUL GHOST, page 100

TALIB KWELI, MUSICIAN
NEWERACAP.COM/FLAGBEARERS





ADVERTISERS ARE LIVING IN YOUR BRAIN

Brain-computer interface devices are essentially helmets that allow users to control computers with their thoughts. Last August, a group of researchers at the USENIX Security Symposium used this technology to extract security PINs from people's minds using off-the-shelf BCI technology and published their findings. But Daniele Perito of the University of California, Berkeley, one of the paper's authors, told us not to worry about our identities being mindfucked out of our heads before being transferred to a memory card and sold on the black market. Instead, this technology will mostly be used for profiling and advertising. Thanks, Daniele, we feel a lot better now.



BY HANNAH MURPHY
Illustration by Bilyana Ilievska

VICE: Should we be scared that you can hack people's brains?
Daniele Perito: We can't make somebody do something they don't want to do. The only thing we did was to get people to wear this helmet and hook them up to a machine, and then show them images and see if they are familiar with them by measuring their signals of recognition. From that you can infer certain information.

Ummmmmm, like people's PINs?
We asked our participants to choose a PIN, and then we said: "We're going to show you some numbers. At the end of the experiment, you will be asked to enter the first number of your PIN." This basically forces them to think about the first number of their PIN, so when they saw these flashing digits, they had a higher recollection when they saw the first digit of their PIN.

Can this technology also extract information from someone's mind?
We've had partial success, but our experiments were very controlled. Participants sat in front of a screen and watched flashing images, but nobody is going to do that [in real life]. Now we're thinking of ways in which this could be made subtler, so that you could be probed for hours without realizing it.

That sounds really creepy. How does it work?
Once you see and recognize a stimulus, we can measure it. We're trying to bring the display time low enough so that it's barely noticeable at all, to see if the reaction is still there. This is not going to be dressed up as an attack as much as user profiling. When you're browsing the internet, many parties are going to have questions about you—your status, your age, your gender, your mood, what you're interested in—and we can track that.

It sounds like a very intrusive but effective advertising tool.
It's going to be a while, but I think it is going to be much easier to get certain information like someone's political preference or sexual orientation.

Keep Your Reputation Tight with Reconstructive Hymen Surgery (or, if You're Poor, Chinese Hymens)

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATION BY KARA CRABB

You know how, growing up, your mom was always like, "Don't have sex until you get married or else your husband will throw you in the garbage and you'll die a dirty, trash-covered slut"? But then the hormones came and you got too horny and started boning dudes like it was your day job? In hindsight, you probably wish you could go back in time so that you could lose your virginity all over again, right? Well, whores, do I have some good news for you: Reverting your vagina to its pre-popped state is possible. (Not in the medical sense, of course, but in the by-the-standards-of-the-poorly-educated-and-ultrareligious sense.) In fact, many women around the world are doing it at this very moment!

Reconstructive hymen surgery is one of the most popular cosmetic procedures in China today, costing ambitious young girls up to \$700 per sew-up. Apparently bleeding all over your bedsheets on your wedding night is symbolic of a loving, eternal relationship.

Don't have the funds? Don't worry! If pussy-regression surgery is too pricey for you, you can opt for the next best thing: an artificial hymen, also known as a "Chinese hymen" because, again, Chinese ladies (or their traditional-minded fellas) love virgin vag. This fabulous invention, a veritable miracle of modern science, is a fake fleshy membrane that tightens up your baby hole and actually "bleeds" slightly when penetrated. It doesn't produce too much of the red stuff, though—just enough for you to brag about getting deflowered all over again. And we're not talking cheap Halloween blood made out of food coloring or whatever. The flow that drips out of this thing will ensure an everlasting memory of a painfully awkward consummation as if it were real.

In any case, you should pick one up. Why wouldn't a gal want an extra hymen just lying around at her disposal? You could use them for all sorts of fun and put them anywhere! Your dog's ass, your father's dickhole, your master's thesis. Or do what I did and buy a pack of ten for \$150 at hymenshop.com. That way you can relive losing your virginity over and over and over again, because let's face it, there's nothing sexier than forcefully tearing through a solid wall of flesh. Just ask your Nana. She'll tell you.

Read about Kara getting her fake pussy popped this month on [VICE.com](#).



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2012 IS BULLSHIT; 2020 IS WHEN WE'LL REALLY BE IN TROUBLE

Peter Turchin is a Russian-American scientist who specializes in population biology and devises theories, backed by cumulative scientific evidence, that, in their essence, predict the future by tracking “temporally varying processes and the search for causal mechanisms” throughout history. He calls his field of study “cliodynamics,” after Clio, the Greek Muse of history, and it’s been getting a lot of attention lately following an article about his research in the science journal Nature.



BY JAMIE CLIFTON
Illustration by Daniel David Freeman



Peter’s work suggests that peaks of violence in the US work on a 50-year cycle, with the next state of upheaval set to hit humanity in 2020. It’s sort of like that 2012 Mayan-apocalypse nonsense, except Peter’s theory is the result of the hard work of a modern, living, and well-respected scientist rather than a bunch of dead Central American dudes whom hippies like to talk about while taking heavy psychedelic drugs. We spoke to Peter to find out what’s supposedly going to make the US descend into a horrifying, dystopian pit of violence in eight years’ time.

VICE: Can you humor me and explain your cliodynamic theory of violence in layman’s terms?
Peter Turchin: Sure. Historical studies show that society goes through long-term cycles of violence: There’s a build-up for roughly a century, then a period of violence, or upheaval, for ten or 15 years. Then people get tired of it and the next generation goes back to being peaceful. It’s then the grandchildren of *that* generation—who never experienced the severity of upheaval firsthand—who are likely to start causing problems again. My theory suggests that it will be 2020 when the US hits a new peak of violence.

What does the term “violence” include in regard to your theory?
There are three distinct kinds of violence that I’ve included in my research. Firstly there is “groups on groups,” which, in the case of modern-day America, would be riots. Then there is “groups against individuals,” which would be lynchings and that kind of thing. Lastly, there is “individuals against groups,” which are what we call rampage killings. We’ve seen a very

fast rise recently in that last one. It’s where one person mows down a group of people by himself, which is essentially terrorism, but it’s not referred to as that here because it’s American-on-American violence.

Like the *Dark Knight* shooting, for example?
Yes, exactly. Things like Columbine, Virginia Tech, and the Timothy McVeigh bombing might be better examples, because rampage attacks are usually directed toward large institutions, like the educational system or government. Those kinds of incidents have grown over the last generation by a factor of 20 or so.

In your view, what causes these upheavals?
Historically, the trouble has always come from people with power, and the number of those people who want the most power. There are too many political entrepreneurs who are all trying to get power, and they get frustrated, which is how revolutions start: when members of the elite try to overturn the political order to better suit themselves.

Seals Are Assholes



BY TOBY FEHILY
Photo courtesy of iStockphoto/dawnn

Australian fur seals may sound like stuffed animals with a pulse, but in reality they’re greedy blobs of fat who will eat all of Tasmania’s salmon if the current situation is left unchecked. For these fatties, salmon is “like a cross between a Big Mac and heroin,” according to a paper written earlier this year by Jon Bryan of the Tasmanian Conservation Trust. To get their fix, these flipped seafood junkies have been breaking into salmon farms for years, sometimes snatching up to 2,000 fish a week from a single farm.

Seeing as a seal-clubbing spree can put a strain on the ol’ shoulder muscles (and tends to upset animal rights types), Tasmania has taken to using nonlethal weapons as a solution. Superstrong pepper spray, beanbag guns, and darts have all been approved for use on these gluttonous furry bastards by the government. But there are many other ways to dissuade seals from being such greedy fat fucks. Salmon farmers the world over have toyed, Wile E.

Coyote-style, with every nonlethal method available—short of tear gas and microwave-powered heat rays—to protect their precious fish meat from the appetites of fur seals. Here are a few of our favorites.

NOISE
Salmon farmers in British Columbia, Canada, used amplified sounds underwater—the volume was equivalent to a jet engine taking off—to frighten seals away. At least they did until 2001, when scientists claimed that the sonic blasts caused killer whales to flee the area which actually attracted more seals. Whoopsie.

EXPLOSIVES
Seal crackers—small explosive shells that give off a frightening bang and flash—have been employed in Tasmania since 1986. Studies have found that, after time, seals become accustomed to the harmless bombs and start to avoid the crackers or ignore them entirely.

MAKING SEALS PUKE
Some salmon farmers in Australia and California have fed local seal populations dead fish that have been injected with lithium chloride in hopes of ruining the blubber balls’ appetites and making them vomit before taking a hike. In a way, it worked: The seals would eventually start puking, but not before grabbing a few more mouthfuls of salmon on their way out.

THROWING A SEAL PARTY
The most brilliant repellent methods come from the US Department of Commerce’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which in 2008 compiled a list of ways to chase off harbor seals and sea lions in California. Seal-scaring tactics included banging on pots, decorating at-risk locations with brightly colored balloons, and using strobe lights, sprinklers, fireworks, music, and paintball guns to frighten seals away. Regardless of the effectiveness, it sure sounds like a great way to spend a weekend.



LOUIE VITO wears his signature PLATOON GOGGLE



ATHEISM—SEXISM=ATHEISM+

Being an atheist is a hassle, but being a lady atheist can be the pits. Not only do you have to deal with Christians saying you're going to hell all the time, your beliefs will undoubtedly put you in close proximity with "enlightened" male unbelievers who will unabashedly hit on you and maybe even make rape jokes because, well, there's no God to punish them. Atheist blogger Jennifer McCreight became well versed in goddess misogyny when in 2010 she devised a stunt called "Boobquake" via her blog that called on women to dress immodestly for a designated day (April 26) in response to Iranian cleric Hojatolislam Kazem Seddighi's claim that things like female cleavage and bare legs cause earthquakes. Of course, Boobquake went viral. The unfortunate by-product was that Jennifer's instant internet fame resulted in a deluge of hateful, misogynistic emails from fellow nonbelievers.



BY HARRY CHEADLE

Photo courtesy of Jennifer McCreight



Once again she took to her blog to respond, authoring a post that called for a "new wave" of atheism that concerned itself with feminism and social justice. And again Jennifer's ideas exploded all over the insular, male-dominated world of atheism blogs. This led to her setting up an online forum that concerns what has come to be known as "Atheism+." She plans to continue what she's doing without compromise, despite objections from the same sort who said nasty things about her boobs. I called her up to see how the fight was going.

VICE: When did you begin getting hassled by sexist atheists?

Jennifer McCreight: When I first started going to atheist conferences, I was warned to avoid certain speakers because they were known for going after younger women. I was often approached after I gave talks, and people would make really lewd, sexual comments to me or basically be talking to my chest.

Then you wrote the post that begot Atheism+. I basically said that we have to fight back against this. We need to make our own space where we don't tolerate that kind of discussion or people trying to silence each other with really hateful things. I was actually surprised to see that people were excited about it.

It's been pretty divisive—I've read some blogs that really don't like the idea of Atheism+, or the message board you've created around it. The people who have been really hateful in the past are obviously pretty cranky about it. They see it as being exclusionary toward white people or men, but that's really not the point. We have a lot of white men who are happily participating. It's a space where we can talk about feminism, race, or social-justice issues, and not have people come in with slurs or threats. I think some people feel threatened by that.

Is it fair to say that, on the whole, atheists aren't that crazy about feminism?

I think, for some people, atheism is the one minority identity they have. They're not gay, they're not black, they live in the United States, and a lot of them are middle-class or higher. Being an "atheist" is the one thing that they take on as their cause, and they think it's the most important because it's the only one that affects them. It puts their priorities out of order a little bit. Once you've figured out God doesn't exist, that's great! But there are other irrational things you might believe in, like sexism.



The Lessons of Drone School

BY BRIAN A. ANDERSON
Photo illustration by Alex Cook

Over the past few years, the use of flying robots to spy on and kill people has gone from science fiction to a secret government program to something so commonplace it won't be surprising if newscasts start running a confirmed-kills-by-drones ticker at the bottom of the screen. And with the FAA planning to permit drones to fly freely over US skies by 2015, and police departments using them to catch criminals, drone pilots will be a hot commodity very soon. But where are future operators going to learn to fly these things? That's where Jerry LeMieux comes in.

Earlier this year, Jerry, who holds a PhD in electrical engineering and has spent decades flying fighters for the Air Force and passenger jets, founded the Unmanned Vehicle University. The Arizona-based school is the first of its kind, and Jerry hopes it will attract 1,000 potential death-robot pilots in its inaugural year, 10,000 in the second, and 30,000 in the third (50 people are currently enrolled). We called him up to see what the dean of UVU has in store for his students.

VICE: What sort of person enrolls in a drone-piloting university?

Jerry LeMieux: A lot of people don't get it. But the people who do get it don't care what it takes. They want to learn about these systems. They want to be experts because when the time comes and the [FAA] passes the rule [allowing drones to freely share airspace with airplanes], where do you want to be? Starting to learn, or positioned so that you can have a job or start a business? That's what the school is about.

I've heard estimates that by 2022, there will be 30,000 drones in the US alone. Is this accurate?

There are hundreds of applications for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV)—farming, pipeline inspection, police, fire. There are about 18,000 law-enforcement agencies in America. Add in sheriff departments, and that number jumps up to 100,000. If every one of those agencies bought two, that's 200,000 vehicles right there. I think this 30,000 number is an extremely low guess.

What about those who worry that drones infringe on civil rights?

The typical battery life on a quadcopter is 20 minutes. Do you really think with 20 minutes there's time to hang out over somebody's backyard and look in his or her window? The field of view on the sensor in a UAV is extremely narrow, like looking through a soda straw. You can't see anything. You'd have to be looking at the exact spot where you'd want to see something in order to get the job done. This privacy thing is totally overblown. It's good that we have the debate, but I think that in the end we'll have some restrictions that say, "Look, if you're the police and want to collect evidence with one of these things, you can't use it unless you have a search warrant."

GERARD BUTLER

CHASING MAVERICKS

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A buckboard chuckwagon racer and his team of horses haul ass down a straightaway.

ON THE WAGON

Riding Along at the Chuckwagon Championships, Perhaps the Most American Event of All Time

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JEFF WINKLER

Brain seepage, I think to myself as I watch paramedics tend to a rider who's been ripped from his saddle. He's not getting up. It's the first hour of the first day of the National Championship Chuckwagon Races in Clinton, Arkansas, and I'm just realizing how dangerous this sport can be. Yesterday, on my way to the ranch, I talked to a retired neurosurgeon about the injuries caused by the annual event. Brain seepage had stood out on the list.

By the end of Labor Day weekend, at least five riders will be knocked, thrown, or dragged off their mounts. It's dangerous for the animals, too: I saw one horse get stitched up after receiving a deep gash from bumping against a wooden wagon trucking along at more than 30 miles per hour. On the surface, no one appears worried about getting hurt, but many of the participants wear helmets disguised as cowboy hats. One paramedic who has worked at the races for 14 years said he's seen one death and countless head and spinal injuries. "I don't have the testicular fortitude to ride in that," he told me,

gesturing toward one of the rickety wagons that look like they're in the wrong century.

After the on-site paramedics give the all clear, the races resume. No one seems too worried about brain seepage. Down on the sidelines, a small woman in her early 60s is screaming her lungs out ("CowMOWN! CowMOWN!") as the wagons fly by. If anyone's got the lowdown, I figure, it'd be her.

"You ain't gotta be good to ride, you just gotta have cojones," she says. Her name is Judy Harris, and she and the rest of the Harris gang are among the hundreds of wagons, riders, horses, and trailers that descend on the sprawling range of Dan Eoff—who started the tradition by inviting a few dozen friends over for a wagon race in 1985—every year. The MCs claim it's the largest equine event in America. I'll take their word for it since nearly two miles of field are packed with teams from all over the US (mostly the South) along with one Australian group and various others from the Republic of Texas.

Like many chuckers, the Harris family have been coming for years: They've attended at least 24 of the 27 Chuckwagon Championships, an event that now includes eight full days of camping, ranch-related clinics, rodeo events, and a mini state fair. There's also enough booze here to drown a cavalry division.

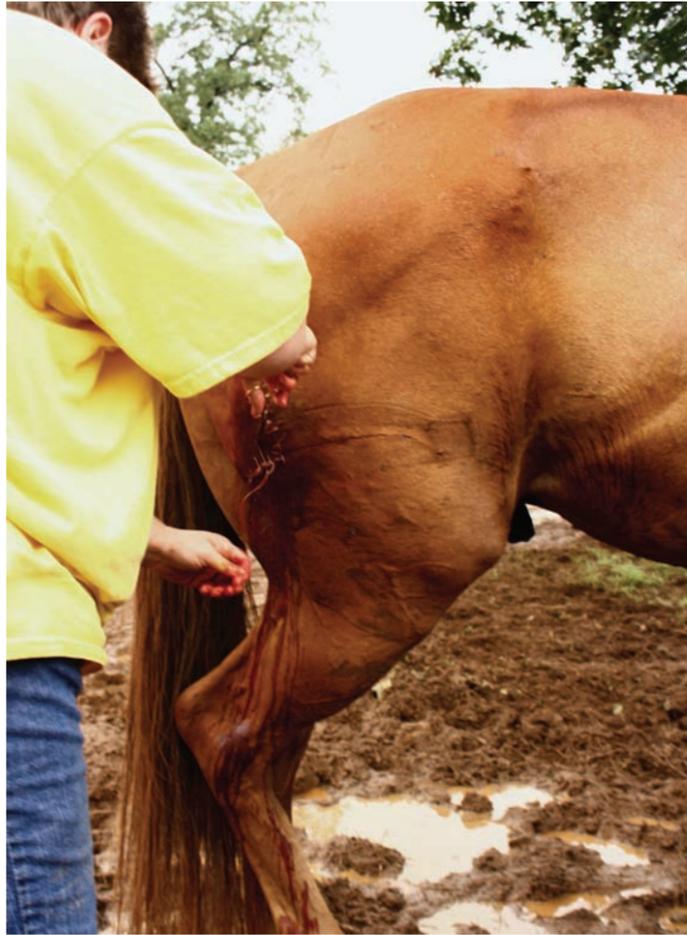
Of course, it's the last three days that really matter. That's when spectators line the cliffs above the racing field



coal

Taylor in the Rye.

facebook.com/coalheadwear / Mark Welsh photo



Dr. Laura Martin Mobley stitches up a horse, at the on-site veterinarian clinic, that grazed against the side of a chuckwagon.

to the east, and folks on horseback gather along the north and south sides of the infield. That's when the wagon races happen.

Ms. Judy, as everyone calls her, tells me that among the several chuckwagon categories—which include soapbox-derby-size carts and slightly larger wooden buckboard wagons—the “classic” series is the main event. The rules that govern the racing of these ten-foot-long, 1000-pound, dual-horse-powered rockets are ridiculously simple:

- 1) There are three members to a team: a driver, a “cook,” and an outrider. Before the race starts, they sit around a fake campsite, which includes a tent and a bundle of rope (the “stove”).
- 2) At the starting gun, the cook throws a tent into the wagon and hops in behind the driver. The outrider picks up the stove and throws it in the back of the cart, which is pulling a quick U-turn around some barrels, then jumps onto his own horse and rides after the wagon in an attempt to pass it.
- 3) The course consists of a 400-yard straightaway, two broad curves within a stretch of 100 yards, a 200-yard straightaway, a sharp curve, then a 250-yard home stretch.
- 4) The outrider must pass the finish line by himself before the wagon, and all the wagon's “luggage” and inhabitants must be intact.

The whole thing takes about 75 seconds. Tops.

There's no big money in chuckwagon racing. The carts are marked by quirky team names or the logos of family-owned

ranches, and the prizes for winners, according to one participant, “ain't nothin'.”

Ms. Judy's family has won it two years running, in 2007 and 2008, with their wagon, dubbed “Rock-n-Rollin.” “Once you do it, you keep coming back,” she says. “It gets in your blood.” I ask her whether I could ride along in the race with the Harris clan, and she doesn't miss a beat. “My nephew Corky'll probably let you ride with'm.”

Corky, I'd learn, won the buckboard championship in 2004. He also nearly breaks my hand when I meet him at Base Camp Harris. I don't think he means to. It's probably because he has five kielbasa sausages for fingers, attached to an arm with several kneaded-layers of pure muscle. He's also got a bushy, foot-long Fu Manchu mustache that covers his lips so completely it's difficult to tell when he's talking. Not that it matters much—Corky doesn't do much jibber-jabbering. He simply nods, smiles, and says, “Sure, you can ride.” And just like that, I'm in.

When Ryan, the cook, gets wind of my involvement, his only question is rhetorical: “So now I gotta hold on to both y'all sons o' bitches?” If anything, the rest of the Harris crew—Pee-wee, Glenda, Ms. Jen, Ryan, Brian, Dustin, and Porkchop—are even friendlier. They tease me about being nervous, and yeah, I might be a bit nervous about the whole brain-seepage thing but I try not to show it.

“Once you're in with us, you're family,” says Ms. Judy, who's quickly become my surrogate mother. “You know the Rascal Flatts song ‘Me and My Gang?’” I do not. “Well, it's like that.”

The next day, Saturday, is the big race. At 11 AM, two hours before the starting gun, Ryan and a bunch of others are pregaming. By the time we saddle up, he'll have downed at least five beers. Not that I don't trust him. Quite the opposite. I have entrusted him and Corky with my life, literally.

While Ryan drinks, Corky tends to the horses with methodical care, his Fu Manchu tucked back around his ears like the strings of a surgeon's mask. Chuckers spend a lot of time caring for their horses which explains why they aren't fans of the rabid animal rights crowd, who call the sport cruel and its participants barbarians.

Before the races begin, the MCs spout an invocation that is exactly as patriotic as you'd expect, given that we're in rural Arkansas. We bow our heads for God, country, and the troops. Then we watch an empty chuckwagon roll mournfully around the infield, pulled by two unreined horses. This ghost wagon is meant to honor chuckers who've died in the past year. It's unnerving.

As we ride up to the starting line, my brain senses I'm about to be involved in something very risky and foolish, and most of my thinking facilities give out. I have trouble placing where we are in relation to the crowds and the cliff, and in the process forget how to operate my camera's most basic functions.

“You need to be on your knees, in case we get thrown off,” Ryan says when I attempt to sit Indian-style in the 1000-pound wooden wagon. Ryan's legs are pressed against my back while Corky, seated directly in front of me, steers our two large quarter horses to the starting line. I take his advice. I figure being on my knees is more convenient in case I reflexively start praying.

I don't remember the starter gun or that U-turn around the barrels, but suddenly we're on the first straightaway, the wagon shaking violently like a car with blown-out shocks rumbling down a gravel road. The only thing louder than the grind of wood and metal is the yelling above my head.



YONE
JIMMY FONTAINE
VINCENT SKOGLUND
KEVIN ZACHER
ANDY WRIGHT

BRANDON LONG
ALESSANDRO SIMONETTI
ANGELA BOATWRIGHT
KASSIA MEADOR
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HOLDEN



The White River Cattle Company, from Rosie, Arkansas, competes in the sixth heat of the race.

Here's what I didn't realize before being in the cart: In chuck-wagon races, the drivers can only see straight ahead. So the cooks have to act as spotters and let their drivers know when a wagon is coming up from behind. The cooks also hold down their drivers, often with a bear hug, to keep them from flying out. Everyone in the wagon must lean into the curves.

Halfway down the first stretch, Ryan yells, "Coming up, coming up!" as a wagon emblazoned with TEAM USA appears a few feet away on our left. For half a second, we're side by side, and a female cook with wild, dark hair is standing nearly straight up, whooping and hollering and gnashing her teeth at us. It's like we're being ambushed by Old West Indians. Then Team USA cuts inside, taking the lead.

The first curve hurts. Bad. My ribs slam repeatedly against the wagon's sideboard edge. Mud flies into our faces. Then another mental blackout—I have no idea what's happening until we round the final sharp curve, where our wagon hits the ruts. It'd rained plenty on the Thursday and Friday preceding the race, which makes for "safer" driving for everyone except the big, top-heavy wagons like ours. Its massive iron wheels can easily get stuck in the ruts, increasing the chance of us going horizontal.

This last turn proves to be the most dangerous spot for everyone: I later see wagons fly up and balance momentarily on a single wheel, which explains why I'm completely airborne for a fraction of a second—a long fraction of a second. Ms. Judy later informs me that this was when our outrider passed us.

Midway through the final straightaway, there's more yelling from behind. Ryan sounds jubilant. I start shouting nonsense, caught up in the moment, then stop, thinking I could confuse Corky with my gibberish. I don't know what he's thinking; I haven't heard a sound from him since long before the start of the race.

Then we cross the finish line. In first. We won, and I have no idea how.

"I can't believe we did it with three goddamn bodies in here," I hear from the direction of Ryan's crotch. Corky doesn't break his streak of silence; he just pulls to a stop while his daughter Jess hands him her son to ride with granddad back to Base Camp Harris.

When I step out of the wagon, the entire clan is all smiles. "How was it?" they keep asking, but I can only mutter some variation of "Holy *crap* that was fun" while walking around in shock for the next 20 minutes, trying to determine whether the grit in my mouth is mud or tooth.

But I get it. I now know why the participants race despite the possibility of permanently looking like some mangled prairie dweller from the 1800s. It sure as hell isn't for the money, because there's none to be had. Nor is it for the approval of outsiders, who call them dumb rednecks or say they're cruel to their animals.

The races are a vacation for these folks, a chance to hang out with friends and fellow competitors and cut loose by traveling at unsafe speeds on unstable wagons along courses designed with maximum danger in mind. It's not everyone's idea of fun, but like Ms. Judy says, "It gets in your blood." 



ERIK ELLINGTON / LIZARD KING / TERRY KENNEDY / TOM PENNY / WINDSOR JAMES
SPENCER HAMILTON / BOO JOHNSON / KEVIN ROMAR / DANE VAUGHN

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Sunday prayer at the church is when attendees try to wash away their sins through atonement, music, and dance.

TRANSMUTATIONS IN TIJUANA

Meet the Christian Pastor Who's Praying Away the Gay in the Mexican Border Town's Slums

BY
JUAN CARLOS REYNA

PHOTOS BY
ALEJANDRO COSSÍO

The pastor finishes her sermon and closes her eyes, waiting for her parishioners to come to her at the altar while the house band provides a down-tempo accompaniment to the congregation's reading of the Psalms. The only fan inside the cramped, overheated church is pointed at the drummer.

"Open your heart so that Christ may cleanse and heal you," she commands the dozen men walking toward her. One of them is sweating profusely (or crying, it's hard to tell) while lifting his arms toward the pastor. He has a girlish face, dyed hair, and plucked eyebrows. The pastor takes him by the shirtsleeve. "Just like Jesus rose from the dead, so shall you," she assures him.

The other 150 or so worshippers begin to shake violently—some yell and gasp, others jump and spin in circles. The music speeds up. It's the climax of the ceremony, which has been going on for almost three hours in the sultry heat.

"In the name of Jesus, I'm saved! In the name of Jesus, I'm saved!" yells the man as the pastor grabs him by the

hair and brings his forehead to hers. The man's sweat wets her face, they both take a deep breath, and then he collapses onto his knees and begins to pray in silence.

The man's name is Eduardo Herrera Gómez. He's 30 years old, and he is one of 25 "redeemed" homosexuals who have knelt before Alma Leticia Rosas, a Pentecostal pastor who claims to have the power to exorcise diabolical spirits that, according to her, cause homosexuality "and other evil deviations." Every Sunday at the Templo y Centro de Rehabilitación La Esperanza (Temple and Rehabilitation Center of Hope) in Tijuana, the group gathers to celebrate having turned their backs on what Sister Lety—as she's known to her followers—calls "the evil way." The Temple is one of four affiliated rehab centers in the neighborhood, but it's the only one that, in addition to treating addictions to hard drugs, also strives to train gay men to love women.

The surrounding area is typical of the borough of Sánchez Taboada, one of the most violent in Tijuana: a labyrinth of muddy roads cluttered with homes made of cardboard and tin. You can buy drugs from hole-in-the-wall stores called *narcotienditas*, and some of the neighborhood's flimsy houses serve as holding cells for kidnapping victims. At night, luxury SUVs with tinted windows drive through the streets at high speeds.

Sánchez Taboada is also home to many transsexuals whose presence has helped turn the city into a

BACKPACKS

MESSENGER BAGS



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[TECHNICAL]

APPAREL

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LEFT: Rafael has been a transsexual for many years. He is hopeful that in the future he will be able to afford reconstructive surgery of his genitals and live as a man once again.

RIGHT: Pastor Alma Leticia Rosas, aka Sister Lety, is the leader of a church in Tijuana where she attempts to convert gay men into heterosexuals through the power of God.

destination for American sex tourists. For years, homosexuals and transsexuals have arrived anonymously in hedonistic Tijuana, fleeing the conservative towns where they were raised.

“Ever since I was conscious of who I was, I began leaning toward things that were not meant for a boy, like dolls, dresses, and makeup,” Eduardo, who says he’s now a “former homosexual,” tells me. He ran away from his home in Guadalajara at 15 so that he would no longer have to hide his identity; he didn’t want his mom to see him dressed as a woman or his brothers to be ashamed of whom he dated.

One night, Eduardo went out partying with his lover, a man ten years his senior, and never looked back. They moved to Manzanillo, Colima, a nearby town with a reputation for having a good LGBTQ scene, and his life took a turn. “That’s when I started living *la vida loca*,” he says. “I started using drugs and prostituting myself for money.” He also said he began taking female hormones and saving money to pump his breasts, butt, hips, and calves with silicone, doing “everything to enlarge my butt and my tits.”

Lack of work forced the couple to move to Tijuana in 2002, when the violence caused by the drug trade was at a low ebb and the tourist-solicitation business was brisk despite post-9/11 security protocols that made crossing the border more of a hassle. He rented himself a room downtown and started turning tricks for money in the Coahuila Alley, part of the red-light district.

It didn’t take long for Eduardo to acquire a smorgasbord of addictions. “Ever since I got here it was like I had been possessed by the devil,” he says. “I was falling: using drugs,

whoring, doing everything to myself.” I got the feeling he had a morbid sense of accomplishment about his past, or perhaps it was that he was proud of having repented after a seven-year period of living in such deep sin. “My job as a whore gave me a life of comfort and luxury, but it also pushed me toward drugs, and because of that I lost my apartment, my friends, and my family,” Eduardo continues. “I ended up eating from a trash can.”

One day, when he was still lost in his “evil way of living,” someone told Eduardo that Jesus Christ could fill the void that had developed in his heart. He ended up at Sister Lety’s temple, where he came to denounce his former life so totally that he now says he would like to get married to a woman and start a family. “I’d share my life struggle with my kids,” he says, “take care of them and protect them so that they don’t become homosexuals.”

Eduardo’s inspiration, Sister Lety, has devoted almost half of her 46 years to healing the “victims of the evil spirits,” the term she uses to refer to gay men and transsexuals. When I interviewed her at the rehab center, she asked me to let the homosexuals of the world know that “if they believe this is how they were born, that this is how they should live, they’re wrong—your homosexuality is the devil trying to deceive you. Your insane desires are the result of evil spirits.”

Sister Lety’s convictions may sound extremely homophobic, but she cares for her charges in her own way. A couple of years ago, when she was preaching at a state penitentiary in Baja



HUFWORLDWIDE.COM



Men who have renounced their homosexuality and drug-use praise God during a service at Sister Lety's church.

California, she came across an effeminate homosexual whom all the other inmates wouldn't allow to pray. She managed to earn his trust and proposed a cure to his woes: the teachings of the Bible. A few years later, after the troubled man had done his time, the pastor took him in to live at her house. "Then came another one and another one, but I couldn't take them all into my house," she said. "That's when this place we're in, which belongs to my brother in flesh, was lent to me."

For Sister Lety, homosexuality isn't a disease or psychiatric disorder—it's a form of spiritual possession. She's never turned to a psychologist in an attempt to "treat" someone's sexual orientation and pays no mind to the current scientific consensus that one's sexual orientation or gender cannot be "fixed." Her belief is that drug addiction and homosexuality occur as a result of sexual abuse during childhood: All the pain and hatred that result from such an experience attract spirits into the victim's soul, she says, and homosexuals and addicts are always in the company of these spirits.

"The solution is teaching them the Word. I have them listen to the Word of God three times a day and pray. And celebrate the Lord on Sundays," Sister Lety says. She stresses, though, that this process is entirely voluntary: "The lost one grants us the authority to help the Holy Spirit possess him or her, so that he can be guided, cleansed, and cured."

No one can claim that Sister Lety is a stranger to abuse. She grew up in a Catholic family in Tijuana, where she was molested by her uncle when she was five. She didn't confess this to her mother until years later, instead choosing to enter a

convent, where she lived until she was 14. She then ran away with a man who got her pregnant and promptly abandoned her. At 23, she decided to move to Los Angeles with her daughter. Once there, she befriended a former heroin addict who reintroduced her to the Christian faith. "He showed me that, no matter who is at fault, we're all sinners. In the eyes of Christ, the person who abused me isn't the only one who has sinned. I have sinned, too."

Homophobia is common in Tijuana and other places throughout Mexico. Víctor Clark Alfaro, the director of the Binational Center for Humans Rights in Tijuana, says this climate of hatred has forced some LGBTQ people to flee to the US. In 2006, a group of about 30 transsexuals immigrated illegally to California and took the unusual step of applying for political asylum because of how they were treated by the Tijuana Municipal Police. In addition to verbal and physical abuse, Víctor tells me his organization has documented reported cases of transsexuals being raped by cops.

From a scientific and logical point of view, religious institutions often make matters worse when it comes to anything involving sex—especially when it comes to anyone who isn't heterosexual. The former archbishop of Guadalajara, Juan Sandoval Íñiguez, for instance, is an unabashed homophobe, and in an interview with *Gatopardo* magazine published last February he claimed that homosexuality was a "strategic weapon from the developed world" to "reduce the population no matter what... so that Earth's resources are not depleted." It's no wonder some gay men in Tijuana wish they were straight.

In the Temple's treeless concrete backyard, I spoke with Gustavo Silva, another of the 25 men currently being treated by Sister Lety. His story was similar to those of many of the other men. "Since I was 15 I started walking down the path to perdition," he says. "I liked drinking, I liked using drugs, and I also liked dressing as a woman. But what I yearned for the most was to look feminine and voluptuous. Then I had surgery. The bigger my tits, the larger I wanted them to be. My breasts were there to satisfy my desire for men but also to whore around and pay rent, as well as buy nice dresses."

A few years later, the working life had worn Gustavo down to a point where he was so dangerously skinny he was almost certain he had contracted AIDS. Then, on his 23rd birthday, as he walked down the street after buying some meth, he began to feel "sick of so much filth around me" and turned his face toward the sky to yell: "God, give me the strength to get out of the street, for I can't take it anymore!" Then I remembered how these sick gays had once told me about La Esperanza. I said to myself, 'Oh, the rehab house... I think that's what I need.' And that's how I ended up here." That was a year ago. He still has his breast implants but is saving up to pay for their removal.

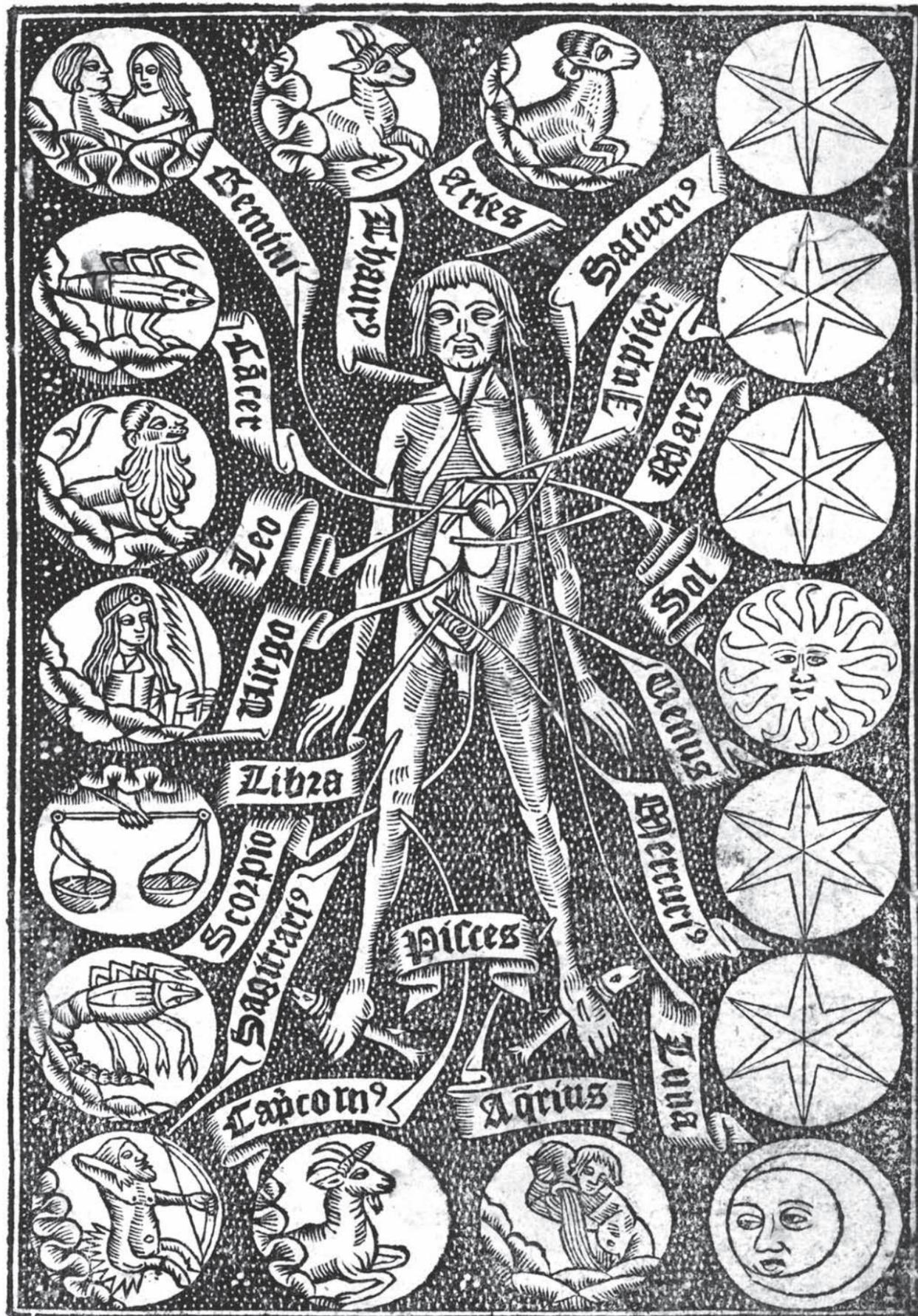
After I'd spent some time with her, Sister Lety came off as a caring woman who lives by her convictions, and the men under her care are undeniably devoted to her. She, in turn, is devoted to them—or at least, in her mind, the people they have the potential to become. "I tell everyone who has this problem that they can do it, that there is a Christ who can change their minds and turn them into new beings," she says. "I believe deep down that all homosexuals don't want to be homosexuals. That is why there is hope."

I detect no malice in her statements—she genuinely views homosexuality as a terrible curse and wishes to rid the world of her definition of evil. But when I shook her hand to say goodbye (against my better judgment, I nearly hugged her), I couldn't stop thinking about the old saying: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." *CCB*

YOUR ROAD TO HAPPINESS
MAY HAVE A FEW POTHOLES.
MAKE SURE YOU'RE
COMFORTABLY EQUIPPED.



THEY'RE NOT SHOES
(THEY'RE SANDALS)



VICE'S BIRTHDAY

And What Its Natal Chart Says About the Company

WORDS AND NATAL CHART BY SUSAN MILLER

Companies and nations have birthdays and natal charts, just like people do. The date VICE was launched—"born"—was a very positive day in the heavens. I am anxious to relay to you the details of VICE's chart, but first, a few preliminary points are in order.

VICE was founded on Tuesday, October 11, 1994, making the company a Libra. I've defaulted to sunrise as the time of birth, as this is the correct fallback method to use when the precise hour and minute are in question or unknown. The algorithm I used is the equal house system, Tropical, with zero degrees all the way around the horoscope wheel. I cannot calculate a rising time for the company without an exact time of birth, but I can nevertheless discern a great deal of information about the company and its future.

As you will soon see, there are two main themes that will clearly emerge in the examination of this company's chart: 1) enormous financial savvy, and 2) an enduring and endearing celebration of art and culture. Few charts are this loud and clear, but VICE's is so, and is helpful, for following too many paths will not distract the organization—this is the chart of a company with a mission.

TRUSTWORTHY AND PRUDENT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Let's first look at the powerful emphasis on financial expertise and proficiency inherent in the management as reflected in the VICE natal chart. The company's natal moon is in the wise and financially conservative Capricorn. This shows fiscal prudence and forbearance in appropriating and managing large sums of money. (Capricorn is associated with the trustworthy management of global companies of behemoth stature, the stock market, and large capital investments.) According to its chart, VICE's management is able to remain practical and realistic.

Neptune and Uranus are conjunct (standing shoulder to shoulder) within two degrees, and these are two planets involved with creativity. Both are found in Capricorn, and aside from Capricorn's natural talent for being entrusted with monetary functions, this sign

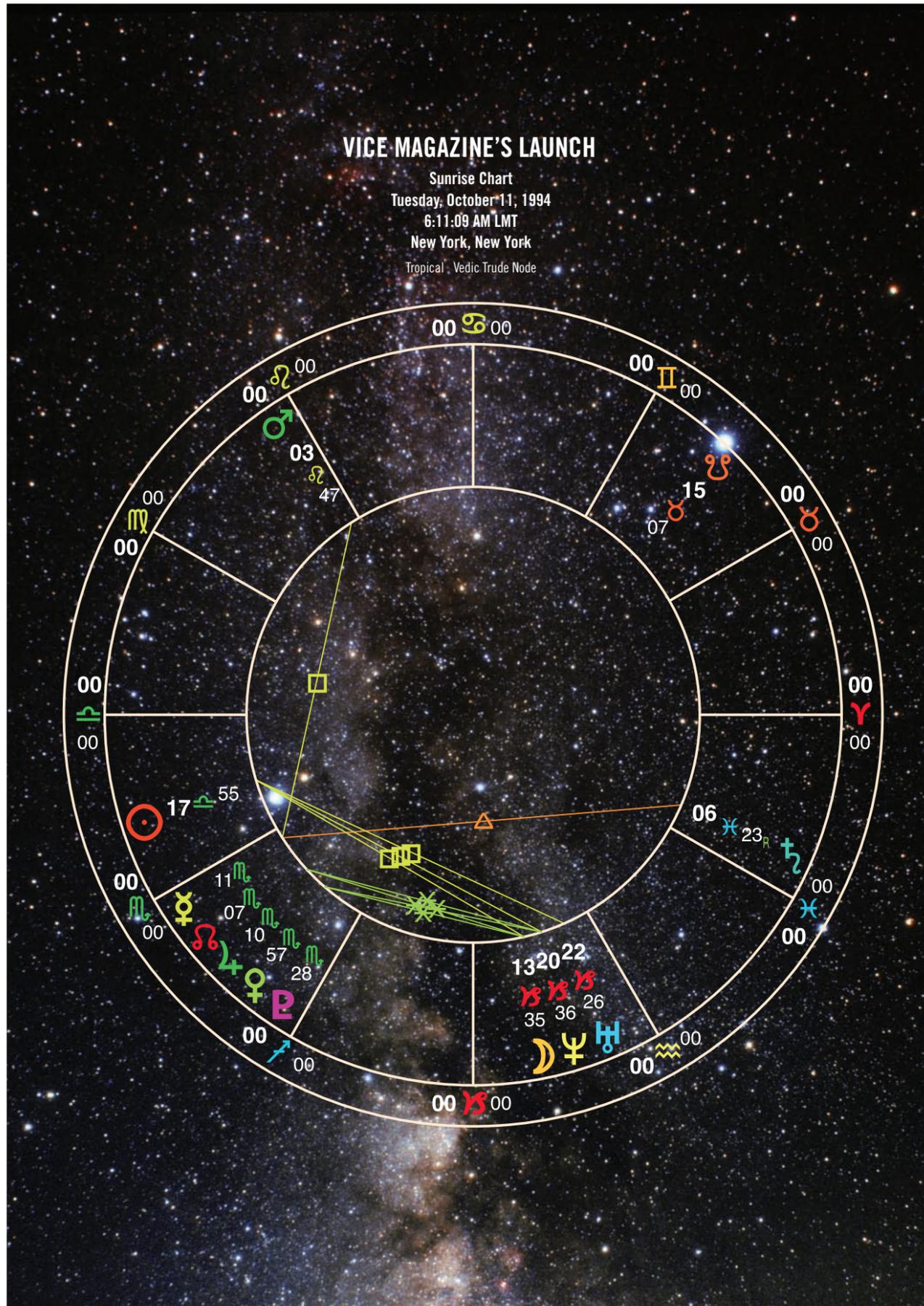
is also associated with tradition and history. This is a wonderful place for Uranus and Neptune (as well as its natal moon) to be, for it reveals a company interested in all art that is new, innovative, and even quirky but also shows that editors will examine art in such a way to put the work in a cultural and historical context. It also suggests that the editors may eventually decide to go one step further by writing pieces that will entice readers who are interested in art as investment.

More financial smarts come from the four (count 'em—four!) natal planets of VICE in street-smart, intuitive, and financially savvy Scorpio. Remarkably, Jupiter (good fortune, abundance) is found precisely conjunct with Venus (which represents beauty, art, and culture)—both were at exactly 17 degrees Scorpio at the time VICE was conceived. In astrology, Venus and Jupiter are planets associated with abundance and profit and are found in the other big-money sign: Scorpio, a sign that is best known to multiply profits while they sleep, through investment. This all portends extremely well for the future profits of the company.

Every sign has a ruling planet, and it's important to note it and to examine how it is aspected in the natal chart. As I mentioned above, VICE is a Libra, and Venus is the ruling planet of Libra. To have Venus, the ruler of Libra, so ideally placed and holding hands tightly with good-fortune Jupiter is simply remarkable. But wait—there is more! I have saved the best and luckiest aspect for last.

In the fall of 1994, when VICE was formed, Jupiter was orbiting in deep space very close to Pluto, both of which were in Scorpio. Whenever Jupiter is close to Pluto, an exceedingly rare event, it is considered a signature of success in the chart of any person or firm. Jupiter is at 17 degrees of Scorpio, and Pluto is at 26 degrees of Scorpio—a span of only nine degrees. This is considered to be close enough to be a mathematically significant conjunction, and as with all cases, a conjunction is considered the strongest possible aspect that can manifest in a chart.

To give another example of how rare and special it is to have Jupiter in such close proximity to Pluto, it's helpful to know that this occurs only every 13



years, and this orbital anomaly ends within a matter of weeks. This explains why so few natal charts contain this aspect. A baby—or in this case a company—has to be born within a tiny, very specific sliver of time, and VICE was established in precisely this 13-year window.

I have not studied enough corporate charts to list any that share this distinction with VICE, but I do know certain extraordinary individuals—both living today and from throughout history—who were born under this conjunction, and all are or were big thinkers of their generations; examples include Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, Mick Jagger, Robert DeNiro, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln. Obviously, VICE is in good company, astrologically speaking.

As I briefly touched on earlier, the placement of Venus and Jupiter at the time of VICE's birth is extremely exact to a specific degree, another remarkable gift given at the birth of this company. All three financial planets—Venus, Jupiter, and Pluto—are found together in Scorpio, practically on the head of a pin, forming what is called a stellium or crown of stars in the VICE natal chart, bringing prominence and extraordinary success. The Pluto and Jupiter closeness tells me the company's management thinks big and, in turn, will have the potential to influence many on a massive scale.

A HUGE EMPHASIS ON ART, BEAUTY, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE

Libra, the sun sign of this company, is known to be the zodiac's arbiter of taste. It is an air sign (which are all highly communicative) that supports the analysis and disbursement of information. Many fashion designers, editors, artists, and museum curators are born under Libra, or are born under its rising, for Libra is ruled by Venus, the planet of grace and beauty. Libra is also the sign of the scales, giving individuals (and companies) born under it a yearning for heavenly proportion and harmony among all things; it's an ideal sign for a magazine dealing in artistic and humanistic expressions in culture, society, and current events.

VICE's natal Mars in Leo further emphasizes the theme of art, with Leo having a long-standing association with sophisticated design, rich color, and a blending of many elements and materials to produce striking, unique work. Leo is also the sign of royalty, and astrology texts have long extolled its association with expensive luxury goods and services.

Finally, in VICE's natal chart, Saturn is in Pisces, the sign most closely associated with the endless well of creativity, stemming from deep within the subconscious. Saturn, being the taskmaster planet, would impart disciplined creativity to the staff's efforts. I can think of no better place for Saturn to be for this company.

THE COMING THREE YEARS FOR VICE

Something we all know about life is that many things will not transpire easily. As a Libra, VICE recently hosted Saturn on their sun, a once-in-29-years event that began October 29, 2009, and will end October 4, 2012. For most Libras, when Saturn comes knocking he almost always requires a stern and practical reassessment of current conditions, and a reconfiguration of the old to create a new way is always required to forge stronger and more competitive structures for the future. It is a process that requires patience. Although Saturn lingered for three years, last year, 2011, was showtime—the period when VICE experienced the most pressure to change, and change it did, in what its staff tells me were all the right ways.

That period is over, but a new process will begin this fall, because VICE will have four planets in Scorpio. Saturn will travel over all of them from October 4, 2012, to September 17, 2015. Once this period is over, there will be no more tests for many decades.

Saturn has developed a bad name among those who have only a limited knowledge of astrology. In truth, Saturn demands that we stretch beyond our self-imposed limits to maximize our potential and meet what at first seem like impossible standards. Saturn shows us we are stronger than we know, and are in a constant process of evolving into something better. These periods are often major turning points, although we rarely know just how important they truly are until later on, when we see what we've built.

When I had Saturn on my sun (my sun is in my house of career achievement), nearly 17 years ago, I created and launched my website Astrology Zone, which has provided me with bountiful rewards ever since. When Saturn comes to the sun of an individual or a company, it's time to learn, work hard, and meet new challenges head-on as they arrive—especially because, eventually, we all experience a Saturn transit over our sun.

If we choose to work with Saturn in earnest, we can grasp the golden ring and achieve our greatest dreams, and I have no doubt that VICE will devise new ways to become even more relevant to its readers. In all, the company was initiated under wonderful aspects, and it's all the more remarkable because the founders chose this day of their own volition, without an astrologer. This suggests to me that true dedication and passion was in the hearts of VICE's founders, as well as a clear vision of what they wanted to do with their creation.

Happy birthday, dear VICE. Here's to the coming years of ever-bigger achievements and victories. At age 18 now, you have reached your first stage of maturity, and we, as readers, have so much to look forward to from you in the future!

Head over to Susan Miller's AstrologyZone.com to get the absolute best life advice the stars can give.



DOs

Special Guest Writer: The Internet's Megan Amram



Here we have a representative from the Boy Scouts of America. As you can see, he is a very accomplished Boy Scout. He has gotten badges in Black Power, Black Power East Coast, and Fist (Black Power). That's basically Eagle Scout! Next badges on his list: Helping the Elderly and Black Power!



Know how to spot a man who is about to practice a long bout of autoerotic asphyxiation? Scarf or beltlike structure? Check. Kermit, Pikachu, or Jessica Rabbit sweatshirt? Check. Red hair? At any given time, 100% of gingers are hanging themselves to dingle their Lunchables.



Instead of tattoo removal, her other option is to tattoo a squiggly red Microsoft Word typo line under "Chær." Does that happen? That would be so cool.



We can all appreciate the dedication to extreme weight loss. Ladies—lose 30 pounds in two minutes by cutting off your leg!



What a beautiful mix of God's most exotic menagerie of pelts. Cheetah. Leopard. Sailor Moon's ecstasy dealer.



Photo: Vincent Saglund



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DON'Ts

Special Guest Writer: The Internet's Megan Amram



This was the original idea for the *Abbey Road* cover. John two fists deep up his tooter. Paul about to fall down because he drank too many Skinny Margaritas at Tortilla Flats and now he's going to drunk-text his ex and tell him he's pregnant. Bigger than Jesus!!



I've always thought tribal-tattoo sleeves should count as a handicap. I'm so glad the Americans with Disabilities Act is coming around. I love this country!



Total butterfaces.



This woman is an underwear mule. She had to smuggle her underwear across the border by stuffing it up her ass. She is smuggling her underwear shoved a foot up her ass. It's like drugs but it's her underwear. It's going across the border.



We get it. You're a douche riding a motorcycle to compensate for your tiny dick.



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DOs

Special Guest Writer: *The Internet's* Megan Amram



Technically, a group of three or more slutty, half-pregnant pirates is called a "pod."



Dance like no one is watching. Dress like you're a used Taco Time napkin. Brush your teeth with an ant farm. Self-medicate.



True Christians burn trees, because they might turn into *Huckleberry Finn* someday.



Kudos for the long skirt, which expertly hides the fact that her carpet exactly matches the drapes. Insider info: The carpet reaches until JUST before the skirt hem!



Good to know the curtains match the neon dildos. I'm not sure the metaphor holds up.



12th Planet

MOCA

Revolve

The Thompson Hotel

Life Curated

Apple



DON'Ts

Special Guest Writer: The Internet's Megan Amram



I mean, yeah, their early stuff was great, but now they've pretty much sold out. I saw one of their songs on a Dodge commercial. And Pitchfork still gave their most recent album a 9.1. It's fucked.



Get your head out of your smartphone. People are so obsessed these days. If you spend all your time looking at a screen, you're going to miss out on life's large yellow papier-mâché sperms.



On the bright side, now that Mark David Chapman is up for parole, there's a chance he'll shoot this guy, too.



There is no excuse for this, unless he's Benjamin Buttoning. If so, kudos to you, old man, you've earned it! Twenty years ago, you were a 50-year-old power bottom with a penchant for big-game hunting and the Wallflowers. That doesn't just go away when you turn seven.



Women really have no idea how to drive.

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SWOLE

PHOTOS BY BEN RITTER

STYLIST: ANNETTE LAMOTHE-RAMOS

*Photo Assistant: Jason MacDonald
Stylist's Assistant: Miyako Bellizzi
Hair and makeup: Ren Chang
Manicurist: Holly Falcone
Models: Julian and Josh at Silver Models,
Stephanie at Philly Faces, James, Renee, Roxanne
Shot at Fast Ashleys Studios
Casting by IMPOSSIBLE
(impossiblenyc.com)*



American Apparel bikini top and shorts, Nike sneakers, H&M earrings



Speedo swim shorts



Diesel swim briefs, American Apparel socks, Reebok sneakers



American Apparel swimsuit, H&M earrings



American Apparel swimsuit and bikini top, vintage necklace, watch, and bracelets



Nike shorts, Cartier earrings



American Apparel swimsuit and bikini top, vintage necklace, watch, bracelets, and earrings

ONE IN THE OVEN

Artist and 'Girls' Star Jemima Kirke Bares Her Belly and Chats with Us About Being a Grown-Up

BY ANNETTE LAMOTHE-RAMOS
PHOTOS BY RICHARD KERN

Photo Assistant: Max Dworkin

Growing up in New York City, I knew about Jemima Kirke long before we ever met. We both went to art-centric private schools in Manhattan, and Jemima was a myth you heard about during Monday-morning homeroom. Her dad was a rock drummer, and her mom owned a vintage boutique that supplied dresses to *Sex and the City*, so it was ridiculously unfair that Jemima was also stunningly gorgeous. Normally, this breed of legendary cool chick meets some tragic fate after graduation, or moves away and is never heard from again until she appears in a Japanese perfume ad under a different name.

Somehow, Jemima has avoided both fates, and she's being talked about now more than ever, mostly because of her role as a fun-loving party gal on HBO's *Girls*, which revolves around the stories of four young women who keep trying and failing at relationships, work, and life (it also makes dorks on the internet very angry for some reason). In real life, Jemima is a wife, the mother of a young daughter (with another baby on the way, obviously), and a visual artist, so when Richard Kern and I drove out to her family home in East Hampton to photograph her (at eight months pregnant), I was curious as to whether she had been wholly domesticated by this point. I also wanted to see if she's still pretty. She is, and she's got her shit together so much that it's somewhat upsetting.

VICE: I ran into you when you were 18 and back home for the holidays from the Rhode Island School of Design. It was at an afterparty for our friend's band Dopo Yume. From the moment I met you I've always seen you as this beautiful, glamorous—
Jemima Kirke: Wait, what happened at the afterparty? Now I want to know. Do you remember?

Well, I can tell you and it can be off the record if you want...
No, it's fine.

We were at Black and White, the bar, and obviously neither of us was old enough to be there. We were introduced by a mutual friend, hit it off, and then you asked me to go into the bathroom with you.

Oh yeah! I do remember that, and that you seemed somewhat impressionable at the time. So I thought, "I could probably get this girl to do drugs with me." But I don't think there was anyone else at the bar...

You offered me bumps off your keys while you were peeing on the toilet. And I recall thinking, *Who the hell is this girl?* Then when I saw the show and watched you doing the same thing, minus the drugs, it brought it all back.

The character I play is not so far from me. I mean, fundamentally she is, and some of her behavior might have been taken from things I've done, but—

But now you're 27 years old and about to be the mother of two. How did this happen? Most people our age who grew up in the city are still kind of fucking around—living at home and not pursuing any of their passions, if they even had any to begin with.

I think that way of life stopped working for me really quickly. Some people know how to balance things, at least enough to be able to continue messing around, but



I didn't. I was very all-or-nothing about it, and you burn out really quickly if you keep going that way. It really fucked me.

How did you get into acting?

My friend Lena [Dunham] asked me to be in a movie that she was making with her parents' money called *Tiny Furniture*. She didn't have enough to pay anyone, and I guess it was slim pickings, so she asked me to be part of it and it was a success. Afterward she was offered the TV show and invited me to work on it. I never thought it'd go as far as it has.

How has this sudden fame changed your life?

One of the best parts is that I can sufficiently support my kids. At my age that's pretty hard to do without struggling or taking money from my parents, and I don't have to do either. But it has taken a lot of time and energy away from my work as an artist.

“If I have a boy, I'll probably tell him to be nice to women. Being humble and sweet is the hardest thing you can do.”

Would a career in art be preferable to what you're doing now?

Acting is secondary—I don't feel like it's going to stick around because it's not something I want to do forever. My art has always been my top priority and I have far more experience in that field than I do in film. It's hard to explain without sounding like a dick. I'm not that person. I'm really grateful for such enjoyable work, I just don't feel as though I have any clout as an actor. I haven't earned it, and I don't intend to.

How did you and your husband, Mike, meet?

Really short story, actually: We met in a doctor's office. I had bronchitis, and I don't remember what he was there for, but I liked him and gave him my number. We've been together for four years and married for three of them.

What kind of dating advice will you give your children when they grow up?

If I have a boy, I'll probably just tell him to be nice to women. Being humble and sweet is the hardest thing you can do. Stay confident and don't act desperate, because I guarantee whomever you're into actually sucks way more than you think they do. There is always something they're not telling you that will bring them down a notch in your eyes.

What about for your daughter? Lock her up and not let her out?

I would love for her to date guys. I guess I'd just let her do her own thing and hopefully she'd feel comfortable enough to talk to me so I can offer advice.

What's your take on the theory that girls secretly love to date assholes?

I think it's a phase and something you grow out of. That kind of game gets really old, hopefully sooner rather than later. I loved that when I was younger, but my husband is the perfect example of what I think is hot now. He's the kindest, most humble man in the world but still has that bad-boy glint in his eyes. He could be an asshole if he wanted to, but he isn't—he knows how to treat the woman he loves.

How would you feel if you had a son and he turned out like Adam, Hannah's boyfriend on the show? Or if your daughter began dating a guy like him? He doesn't seem that bad once you get to know him, but he's a fucking mess.

If my son turned out like that I'd actually be proud! He's a smart and intuitive guy once you get to know him, but he's really dark and that can be incredibly seductive and potent. I'd be worried if my daughter ended up with someone like that and would hope she was in a good place prior to getting involved, because that type of darkness can destroy a person.

Sounds like you're going to be a really understanding mom.

I'll probably be freaking out on the inside, but I'd like my kids to feel like capable and independent human beings. I'm here for guidance or if they need me; I'm not going to tell them who they should be.

Are you planning on raising both of your kids in the city?

For now, yes, definitely, I think New York is a great place to grow up.

Do you feel that living in such an abrasive place has shaped you in any way?

People tend to say that living here you grow up too quickly, but I don't necessarily agree. It just depends on the person. If someone is going to gravitate toward bad things in the city they're also just as likely to do the same in the suburbs to a certain degree.

It definitely seems to have worked out for you.

Yes! I promise I still would have been a disaster in the suburbs, too. In the city I had access to bars, parties, and drugs, but even if I lived on the outskirts I probably would've been cutting up pills in my bedroom.

It was just your path.

Yeah, that was just me. I don't think location would have mattered. I wasn't pissed at my parents, and I wasn't a brat, so I don't feel the city really changed me in that way. [pause] Oh, Lindsay [Lohan] strikes again! I'm reading the *Post* and she fucking hit a pedestrian again with her SUV.

Are you serious?

It was at 2:30 AM, too. That's not a good look.

She hasn't grown up yet.

No, she definitely hasn't, and I don't think she ever will. 











CELEBRITIES AS FOOD

BY JAIMIE WARREN
CUSTOM MASKS, MAKEUP, AND HAIR
BY LEE HEINEMANN

*These images are recreations of photoshop collages
found on the internet.*

PRETZEL ROD STEWART



FRED CABBAGE



LASAGNA DEL REY



OREOPRAH



MADONUT



ZAK LOVES MANDY

*And They'll Keep Making Art and Porn
Until One of Them Dies*

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY KIMBERLY KANE

first met Zak Smith and Mandy Morbid back in 2007 while shooting a porno in the Mojave Desert. Zak “Sabbath”—his stage name—performed the role of a transient squatter, and I played a trailer-park housewife who dreamed of making it big in Hollywood. Mandy accompanied Zak on set, and we quickly became friends, darting around the property in a beat-up golf cart and taking photos of whatever caught our eye.

In the years since, Zak, Mandy, and I have worked together on a lot of strange projects. They’ve always inspired me artistically and sexually, and I’ve really come to admire their dedication to each other. Last year, Mandy was diagnosed with Ehlers–Danlos syndrome, a genetic disorder that causes loose joints, damage to blood vessels, and skin that stretches and bruises easily. Her diagnosis was a relief in some ways. For years, doctors had no idea what was causing her debilitating pain, and her health deteriorated until she was often unable to get out of bed, let alone work. Some days are better than others, but if Mandy leaves the house she must do so in a wheelchair or with a cane.

Through all of Mandy’s hardships, Zak has never left her side. And she is always there, inspiring his art. Their love is honest, real, and somehow exists gracefully in their world of disease, art, and pornography. You don’t normally bombard people you see almost every day with deeply personal questions, but Zak and Mandy have always made me curious. So when I asked whether I could document their relationship and they agreed, I knew it was also my opportunity to ask them everything I’ve ever wanted to know and then some.

VICE: You two grew up in very different environments. How did you first meet?

Zak Smith: I’m from DC. I went to art school at Cooper Union, held a bunch of shitty jobs, and worked at an abortion clinic before I got a big loan and went to graduate school at Yale. I earned my MFA and started showing my paintings. Then Benny Profane, an adult-film director, got in touch with me and said it would mean a lot to him if he could use the [unofficial and unauthorized] illustrations I made for Thomas Pynchon’s book *Gravity’s Rainbow* in his autobiographical porno movie. I was like, “It would mean a lot to me if I could fuck all the girls in your movie.” So he asked me to send him pictures of myself, and that’s how I started performing in porno movies. Then I made a series of paintings of girls in the sex industry, and Mandy at that time was a nude model. She contacted me and said I should paint her.



Is that accurate, Mandy?

Mandy Morbid: That's kind of how it happened. I grew up in Montreal and later moved to Ottawa. I was very sick growing up so I didn't have a bunch of shitty jobs. I was always looking for a porn site where I could express myself because Ottawa is unbelievably boring, and I didn't like most of the websites I found. I discovered Suicide Girls and started modeling for them. Zak would sell his paintings of the other girls on the same site. I contacted him and told him I liked his art. He said he wanted to paint me, so he came to Canada for a weekend. An hour after he got off the plane we were fucking in his hotel room. A month later I was living with him in New York.

How romantic.

Mandy: Or insane.

But you haven't been with many men, right?

Mandy: No, I'm extremely picky. I've only been with five men my whole life, and I'm 28. I was 21 when I met Zak, and I haven't been with another man since.

Zak, what did you think when you first met Mandy?

Zak: She's hot.

Yeah, but you've obviously had sex with a lot of "hot" women. What made her so different?

Zak: I thought she was literally the most attractive woman in history. I needed to make sure she was always in arm's reach or someone else would take her.

Speaking of your arm, what are all of these tattoos you have? Is that the logo for the band Eyehategod?

Zak: Yeah, and I have Mandy's preexisting medical conditions tattooed on my right forearm. I think there are around 12 of them. They're for when we have to talk to EMTs or if we have to fill out medical paperwork. You would have them, too. They're hard to keep track of, and I've got a lot on my mind.

You told me a story once about the first day she was in New York, the day you realized she wasn't like all the other girls.

Zak: Right. I went to pick her up from the station, and as soon as I saw her, the shuttle bus was pulling away. I told her we needed to run to catch it, and she said she couldn't run. I thought, *Wow... You can't run. OK, what are other things you probably can't do?* 1) Hop trains. 2) Run from cops. 3) Skateboard... *There are several lifestyle issues that could come up.*

Mandy: That first weekend he came to Canada I told him I had health issues, and we talked about it. When I finally went to New York he realized the seriousness of my afflictions.

Did you two discuss Zak being in Benny Profane's porn movie?

Mandy: That was right before we met. I knew he had been in that porn.

How did you feel about that?

Mandy: I was like, "This is perfect. This is exactly what I need." It was a selling point.

When did you guys make the big move out to LA?

Mandy: In the summer of 2007.

And that's when you guys started doing more adult films? How many movies have you done?

Mandy: Only four or five actual movies, but I've also done sex scenes with girls for my website.

What's the process that you two go through when someone books Zak for a porn scene with another girl?

Mandy: First: Is she hot? If she's hot, it's OK. If I'm not attracted to her then I don't get anything out of it.

So would you consider yourselves polyamorous?

Mandy: Yes.

What are the rules of your poly relationship?

Zak: Fuck if I know.

Mandy: Bringing another girl into the equation in real life depends on how healthy I feel and how much effort it's going to be. And we have to both be attracted to the person, because that's not always the case.

You two had a live-in girlfriend before, right?

Mandy: We dated somebody for a while and it was nice while it lasted. Ideally it would be me, Zak, and another girl.

Why would that be ideal?

Mandy: I like girls. Back when I was less handicapped, taking care of our sexual needs wasn't that big of an issue. Now it would be nice to have another girl around so on nights that I can't give him a blowjob because my jaw is in too much pain, she could do it and I could watch and get turned on and then get fucked, or the other way around. And I'm greedy!

So you want a hot dude and a hot girl?

Mandy: Yeah! Also, emotionally and socially there is a different kind of intimacy that you share with another woman, and I like both.

Zak, what are your thoughts about having two ladies in the house?

Zak: Who's going to complain about that?

There will be a lot of complaining, I'm sure...

Zak: [laughing] The number of problems you could have during a threesome approaches infinity, but the rewards... Let's say one girl accidentally chopped off one of my legs and the other one knocked all my teeth out—in the end I still have a two-girl blowjob, which is more good than anything could ever be bad.

Can you handle two women emotionally?

Zak: I don't think handling things is an issue; I can handle everything or nothing.

Two women at once would be intimidating to some men.

Zak: Well, every Saturday I am simultaneously paying attention to six women while I DM a Dungeons & Dragons game. I could handle that on a daily basis if there were blowjobs involved... Sure.

Why do you guys enjoy playing D&D so much? Is it an escape from the world you live in?

Mandy: Well, I read a lot as a kid, and still do. D&D is like an extension of that, as are video games, but I wouldn't call it an escape. There are interesting things for me to think about—there are puzzles and problem-solving. My brain wants to do stuff; it's very active. So I do like playing, but it definitely is a distraction from the pain.

Would you call yourselves homebodies?

Mandy: We used to go out a lot more, but Zak works in the house and I've always been an indoor person just because of my physical limitations, although as a kid I didn't think about it like that. I just like to read, draw, play video games, and hang out with my family. Socially I was more comfortable at home, so that's kind of my default mode of operation. I don't know if I'm antisocial. I may have a touch of high-functioning autism.

Zak seems to literally work all day, every day. Is he a workaholic?

Mandy: I think he has a lot of stuff in his head that needs to be manifested in a physical format.

Would you consider your work and painting style to be obsessive?

Zak: I'm like anybody else who might like the art I make—it has to be detailed and intricate or it's not fun for me to look at, so I have to put in the hours.

A lot of artists I know love to paint but hate sitting down all day. You've had other jobs—how's this gig?

Zak: It's a good gig if you can get it. It's my second-favorite thing.

What's your favorite thing?

Mandy: [laughing] Sex!

Mandy, you were recently diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. Can we talk about that?

Mandy: I've had it my whole life, but when we moved to LA I did some porn, modeled, traveled... I was able to do it all. Since the condition is progressive, nowadays all of that is way harder. Now it's like, how do we adapt to this constant sickness? I need leg braces, arm braces, and a wheelchair. How can you still maintain your life when your body doesn't want you to have this lifestyle?

“Back when I was less handicapped, taking care of our sexual needs wasn't that big of an issue.”

How do you?

Mandy: I talk about it a lot so people know where I'm at. That's really important—to let people know I'm in pain. “I'm tired, this is what's wrong with me, this is why I'm coughing, this is why I'm in a wheelchair.” If I talk about it, people get it, and that makes everything so much easier, but we're still adapting.

Does Zak work hard to help you?

Mandy: He has from the very beginning. One of the things that happens to sick people is that they start to worry about when it's going to be too much for the people around them. I've learned to trust that it's not going to be too much for Zak. He helps me out a lot with little things: If I'm too sick to take my dog out then he'll do it. He'll pick up my medication, make me cups of tea, push my wheelchair, or load the heavy motorized one into cabs or friends' cars. He takes time out from what he's doing to help me with these things. He's very dedicated. When I went to Canada to try to get diagnosed, he spent months with me in a city he didn't want to be in.

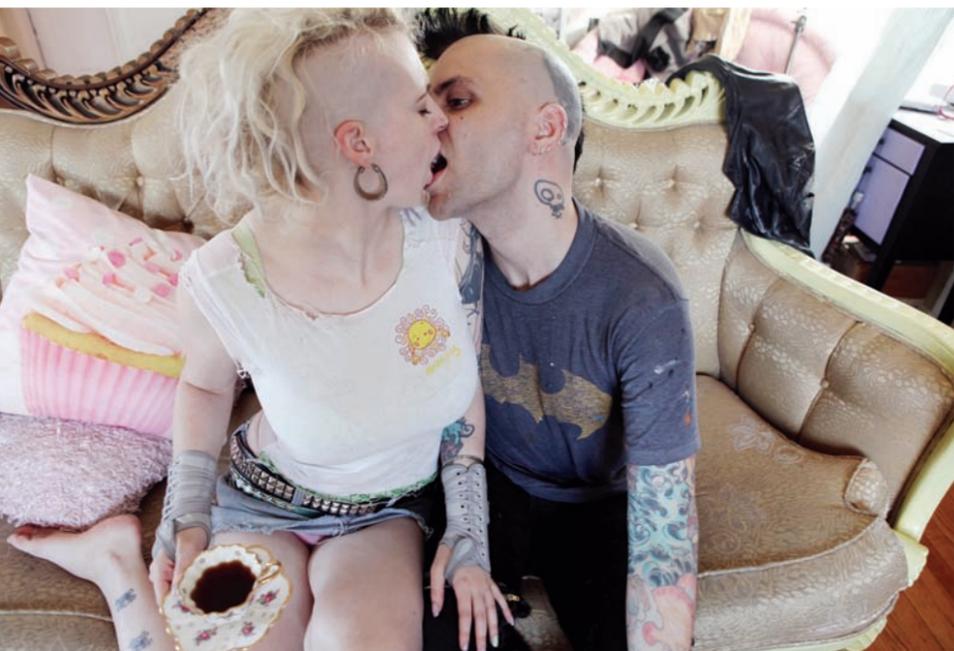
What do you guys want in life?

Zak: I'm a guy. I don't want to be anything, I want things.
Mandy: I learned at a very young age that I wanted as much mental, emotional, and physical stimulation as I could possibly get before I died. By the beginning of my adolescence, I had already survived near-death experiences due to my health, and I realized that the only real thing is death. There is nothing after that.

So what does the future hold for Zak and Mandy?

Mandy: Well, it could go one of two ways...

Zak: She dies or I die. 





SOMETHING FISHY

The Strange Rewards and Follies of Bristol Bay's Great Salmon Run

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY
COREY ARNOLD

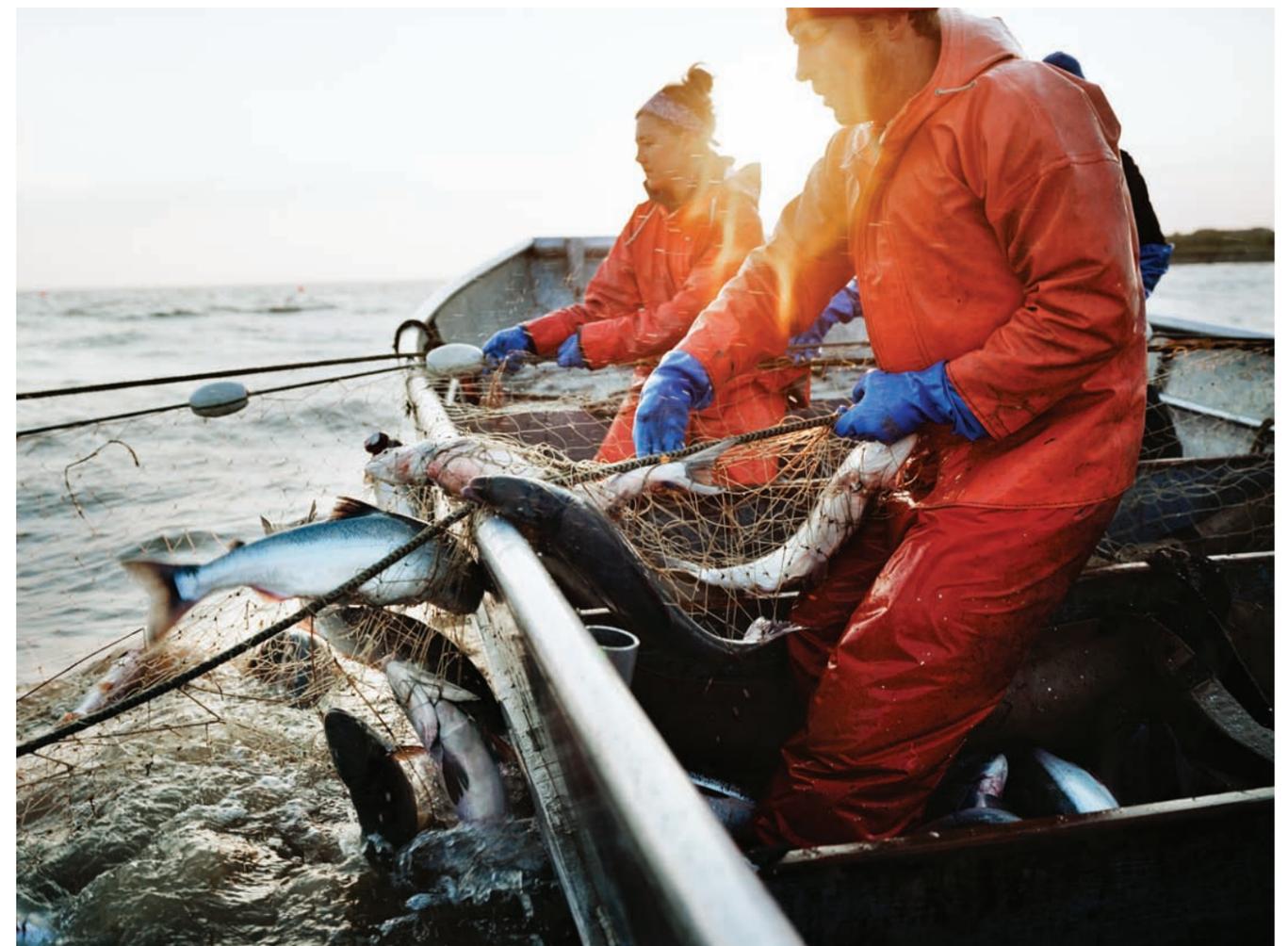
Deep in Southwest Alaska, surrounded by mosquito- and grizzly-infested tundra, lies an abandoned salmon cannery known locally as Graveyard Point. The cannery sits at the mouth of the Kvichak River, one of the many bodies of water that empty into Bristol Bay, home to North America's last great sockeye-salmon run.

Every June and July, about 130 commercial fishermen from around the US converge on the area and take up residence in broken-down dormitories and dilapidated shacks that have otherwise sat empty for decades. The fishermen are Christians, Mormons, atheists, and neo-Luddites. They are ex-convicts, construction workers, dog mushers, trappers, suburbanites, city slickers, and Native Americans. Most days there is a quiet camaraderie among the disparate squatter groups, but intense periods of round-the-clock fishing and the ensuing sleep-deprivation-driven mania occasionally stir up gunfire and conflict between rival fishing families.

The community at Graveyard Point teeters on the edge of a sandy bluff overlooking a vast delta of extremes. Coffins fall into the sea, and the bones of unnamed fishermen collect at the tide's edge. Dogs roam the beach, chasing bears and four-wheelers. The fishing work happens at a furious pace as tens of millions of sockeye arrive at what seems like precisely the same moment every year. Nets are rapidly sunk by the masses of fish, while extreme tides tear through canyons of undersea mud. Men and women work 20-hour days in small open boats regardless of the weather. Great fortunes can be earned or lost, depending on a fisherman's skill, luck, and avoidance of injury.

I've been a fisherman in this community for the past four years, taking these photos along the way. **VICE**

If you like these photographs and live somewhere near Oregon, be sure to catch Corey's exhibition of his Graveyard Point series, which will be on display at Charles A. Hartman Fine Art in Portland from October 3 to 27.







Untitled, 2012, charcoal and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 in. Private collection, Switzerland. Image courtesy Haunch of Venison, New York. © Ahmed Al-Soudani

THE FORGETFUL GHOST

BY WILLIAM T. VOLLMANN
PAINTINGS BY AHMED ALSOUDANI

If you claim to like books and reading and don't know who William T. Vollmann is by now, there is even less hope for this thing we call humanity than what can be gleaned from his prose. The National Book Award winner's copious fiction and nonfiction works (both of which VICE has been fortunate to publish in the past) explore the oftentimes filthy but enlightening undercarriage of history, empathize with individuals and actions others might consider to be scourges of society, and consider the justifications (or lack thereof) for violence and war. Appropriately, Bill is also interested in ghosts and supernatural occurrences, exemplified by the fact that he sent us the story below about an amnesiac spirit which is perfect for Halloween-time and will be included in his forthcoming collection of spooky tales, Last Stories and Other Stories, due out in 2014 on Viking. We've coupled the story with new paintings by Iraqi artist Ahmed Al-Soudani, whose work, like Bill's, explores brutality and its aftermath in multitudinous ways. An exhibition of Ahmed's artwork is currently on display at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut.

1

After my father died, I began to wonder whether my turn might come sooner rather than later. What a pity! Later would have been so much more convenient! And what if my time might be even sooner than soon? Before I knew it, I would recognize death by its cold shining as of brass. Hence in those days, I do confess, I felt sometimes angry that the treasures of sunlight escaped my hands no matter how tightly I clenched them. I loved life so perfectly, at least in my own estimation, that it seemed I deserved to live forever, or at least until later rather than sooner. But just in case death disregarded my all-important judgments, I decided to seek out a ghost, in order to gain expert advice about being dead. The living learn to weigh the merits of preparation against those of spontaneity, which is why they hire investment counselors and other fortune-tellers. And since I had been born an American, I naturally believed myself entitled to any destiny I could pay for. Why shouldn't my postmortem years stretch on like a lovely procession of stone lamps?

If you believe, as H.P. Lovecraft asserted, that all cemeteries are subterraneously connected, then it scarcely matters which one you visit; so I put one foot before the other, and within a half-hour found myself allured by the bright green moss on the pointed tops of those ancient stone columns of the third Shogun's loyally suicided retainers. Next I found, glowing brighter than the daylight, more green moss upon the stone railings and torii enclosing these square plots whose tombstones strained upward like trees, each stone engraved with its undertenant's postmortem Buddhist name.

The smell of moss consists of new and old together. Dead matter having decayed into clean dirt, the dirt now freshens into green. It is this becoming-alive that one smells. I remember how when my parents got old, they used to like to walk with me in a certain quiet marsh. The mud there

smelled clean and chocolate-bitter. I now stood breathing this same mossy odor, and fallen cryptomeria-needles darkened their shades of green and orange while a cloud slid over the sun. Have you ever seen a lizard's eyelid close over his yellow orb? If so, then you have entered ghostly regions, which is where I found myself upon the sun's darkening. All the same, I had not gone perilously far: On the other side of the wall, tiny cars buzzed sweetly, bearing living skeletons to any number of pre-mortem destinations. Reassured by the shallowness of my commitment, I approached the nearest grave.

The instant I touched the wet moss on the railing, I fell into communication with the stern occupant, upon whose wet dark hearthstone lay so many dead cryptomeria-tips. To say he declined to come out would be less than an understatement. It was enough to make a fellow spurn the afterlife! I experienced his anger as an electric shock. To him I was nothing, a rootless alien who lacked a lord to die for. Why should he teach me?

Humiliated, I turned away, and let myself into the lower courtyard behind the temple. Here grew the more diminutive ovoid and phallic tombs of priests. Some were incised with lotus wave-patterns. One resembled a mirror or hairbrush stood on end. I considered inviting myself in, but then I thought: If that lord up there was so cross, wouldn't a priest have even less use for me?

So I pulled myself up to the temple's narrow porch and sat there with my feet dangling over, watching cherry blossoms raining down on the tombs. The gnarled arms of that tree pointed toward every grave, and afternoon fell almost into dusk.

A single white blossom sped down like a spider parachuting down his newest thread. Then my ears began to ring—death's call.

So I ran away. I sat down in my room and hid. Looking out my window, I spied death up boards and pouring vinegar on nails. Death killed a dog. What if I were next?

Not daring to lose time, I decided to seek a humbler grave. And right down the superhighway, past the darkly muddy rectangles of rice fields scratched with light, I discovered a wet, gray necropolis upon a ridge crowded around with shabby houses. At first I wondered what it would be like to live in that neighborhood, with death right above everybody. And then I remembered that all of us do live there.

The sky had cleared well before twilight. I killed time, so to speak, in a narrow little eel restaurant. Within the lacquered box which the old man served to me, wormlike nut-brown segments lay side by side on their bed of snow-white rice. They were delicious. I felt as if I were getting advance revenge on the night crawlers which would eat me someday. And I cried out to the old man: Aren't you glad we're still alive?

Sometimes, he replied, I forget about everything but paying my taxes.

By now the moon had risen. Ascending the steep path, I arrived at the thicket of gravestones and found a meager one with just a few lichen-specks on it. The name on it was nearly effaced, and three neighboring steles shaded it so effectively that I had reason to hope that this soul might not be proud. Thank goodness!

I bowed twice from the bottom of my heart, clapped my hands, and knocked upon the tomb. Right away the ghost swam out. He had a wide, pallidly smiling face, and was serenely rigid, glowing like a spray of cherry blossoms in the sun. His eyes were mirrors in which I did not see myself.

Yes? he said. Who are you? Have we met before?

I don't think so, I replied.

Well, said he, in that case I'm at a loss. I wasn't sure if I remembered you.

At first I thought him sprightly as well as spritely; his movements were as crisp as the golden characters of the Lotus Sutra marching down blue-blackness, each column ruled off with gold, each letter even both horizontally and vertically with all the others.

I asked his name, and he said: Well, I used to be—actually, what does that matter? By the way, this moonlight is almost too bright. Doesn't it hurt you?

Not really.

Oh. I wish I could be as strong as you.

He liked to interrupt me as eagerly as raindrops leap up from stones. In his words and flights he made flashy starts, but soon began to amble uncertainly. He was an entirely friendly ghost; I can't say I disliked him.

I inquired how to avoid suffering after my death, and he flittered about like an immense carp, smiling so widely that for an instant I took alarm and wondered if he meant to eat me. I asked if I were tiring him; I offered to run away, but he said it wouldn't do any good.

What's your aspiration? I wondered, and he told me it was to lick the sweat from a young girl's leg just one more time—he had grown too uncertain of himself to aspire higher than that.

I tried to learn whether life without consciousness might be preferable to consciousness without life; but to calculate the answers he needed to count several secret variables simultaneously upon his misty fingers, and soon lost track of where he had started. Of course he could not inscribe the sand with anyone's memorial stick, nor borrow pen and paper from me, being utterly permeable in relation to objects.

Well, then, you wouldn't be able to lick anyone's leg, I reminded him. My satisfaction, in which I could not help but bask, consisted of the fact that this ghost was dead and I alive. I was safer, more superior, less likely ever to be dead!

His eyes kept goggling. I asked if I would die soon.—Prune? the ghost echoed in bewilderment.

We continued to discuss the matter of suffering, and he suddenly cried out: But just now I can't quite remember what "suffering" means. So sorry! How do you spell it?

S, u...

Beg your pardon? F?

S.

Are you quite sure?

He had forgotten just enough to make a conversation exasperating, but not enough for him to give up hope of communicating his thoughts, such as they were, and of listening to me, in an effort to remind himself of what life was, and perhaps even to escape, however momentarily, into some pretense of life of his own. And how I longed to escape from him! I would have done nearly anything to avoid becoming his younger brother. Unfortunately, it wasn't up to me. As for him, was it his fault that he wasn't alive? Many times I have seen old men go through the motions of picking up the young girls who would joyfully have let themselves be carried away in ancient days; it's as if one needs to learn over and over the lesson of loss, and even then one hopes that since the rules altered before, they might change back again. But they never do, at least not for the better; and although I sought to be as patient as I could, I increasingly resembled the ignorant, bustling child who grows annoyed when its grandfather fails to accompany its lunges to and fro.

He wanted to know the current prices of everything—How many golden ryō? he asked. How many silver kwan? He imagined himself to be au courant, since he had not yet forgotten those two bygone coins.

Well, I finally said, I was thinking—

Are you always thinking? interrupted the ghost with extreme interest.

Yes.

Sometimes I don't think about anything, the ghost confided.

And is that relaxing? Would you rather not think than think?

Is relaxing a pattern or a sound?

A pattern.

And what was it you were trying to ask me?

Never mind.

Oh, you forgot? That makes me feel better. I sometimes forget things also. Do you know why?



Untitled, 2012, charcoal and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 108 in. Image courtesy Haunch of Venison, New York. © Ahmed Alsoudani

No.

I was hoping you could tell me why.

I'd wanted to learn to die, but instead was condemned to try unavailingly to teach a ghost to live. Did it follow that perhaps I could help him forget that he was dead if he in turn taught me to forget that I lived? No matter; I found myself ever less ambitious to ride to death in a palanquin shrine. I'd rather keep hold of my flesh, at least until rain falls in Tokyo and people run away with newspapers over their heads.

The ghost would not stop asking me questions. I finally said: Ask the grass. Ask why it lives.

What an intelligent idea! he said. He bent shyly down over a tuft, and I sneaked away. Perhaps I'd return to the cemetery where the third Shogun's lieutenants dwelled. I'd dwell again in the shade of the tall cryptomerias. From the spreading cherry tree, there'd come a pale pink rain. Didn't I possess places to go? Wasn't I a fellow who once might have been slightly in the know?

But without the ghost I quickly remembered my helplessness in this alien environment and repented of my cruelty. I had lost myself among the crowds of tombstones. Bumping accidentally against them, I discovered myself hounded by marching ghosts in laced red corset-armor, their legs wound up in white like mummy-worms, their

faces phosphorescent blotches of horror. They could not really strangle me, but their touches chilled me; my bones ached with cold. Ahead of me loomed an immense black whirling wheel—my death, no doubt. Well, well; it was going to be sooner! Somehow I reached the edge of the cemetery and leaped into the darkness. I fell and fell. When I came to earth, there was scarcely any pain, which made me wonder whether I had died.

Overhead hovered a familiar pallid, plump-cheeked shrine figure. The ghost had fluttered off to wait for me. He was very good at that.

What was I supposed to ask the grass? he inquired.

Ask which one of us is dead.

Dead? Is that spelled with an x or a z?

A z.

Just a moment. I'll go find out. Actually, I was wondering the same thing.

He flew slowly away, but when he returned his flight was as long and straight as one of the bolts on a sanctuary door. He reported: The grass said, just forget you're dead and then you can go on. Let's both do it.

Well...

But last time didn't you say that it's spelled with an x?

I demanded to know what he meant. The ghost sighed: Don't you remember how often you've been here?

BUSH-LEAGUE REBELS

A Perplexing Survey of the Congo's Myriad Resistance Groups

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY
JOE STRAMOWSKI



The dreaded National Police pose for our cameras in Dungu.

On my first day embedded with the UN stabilization force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), I visited a camp in the city of Goma set up to house rebel combatants who had recently surrendered. The facility was split along ethnic and administrative lines, with only a chain-link fence separating Hutu and Tutsi fighters who, out in the bush, have been spilling each other's blood by the bucket for decades.

Alongside the scarred and lean young fighters at the camp were dozens of women—"bush wives," we were told—and their children, all born in the jungle. Most of these women had been taken as sex slaves, who pull double duty as domestic servants forced to cook, mend, and serve as porters for their captors. Already warned by my UN minders that they were concerned about the extent of my coverage, I asked the camp's public information officer, Sam, how close I could get when snapping photos. "Get your pictures," he replied. "Just, please, avoid the children."

Goma is the capital city of the North Kivu province of the DRC and is situated in one of the world's worst geopolitical neighborhoods. To the southeast, there's the Rwandan border, which largely consists of mountain jungles through which scores of Hutu militants passed in the wake of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, fleeing punishment for their role in the massacre of Tutsis there. Over the course of the next decade, this armed migration directly contributed to the escalation of ethnic and factional tensions in the First and Second Congo Wars, in which an estimated 5 million people were murdered. Meanwhile, to the northeast of Goma, the West Nile region of Uganda has served as a transportation corridor for heavily armed Acholi-speaking fanatics like Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)—who were made infamous by Invisible Children's viral *KONY 2012* documentary—to cross the border and drive deep into the DRC, where they've engaged in all sorts of ruthless behavior, like herding villagers into churches before burning them down to the ground.

While *KONY 2012* got a lot of flack for focusing on a rebel faction that had largely dissipated by the time of its release, ethnic conflicts are still erupting throughout the DRC, albeit of different varieties. These ethnic tensions are in turn exacerbating an already raging fight between local groups to control the illicit mining of cassiterite, wolframite, coltan, and other minerals essential to the manufacturing of everything from smartphones to air bags to jet engines. As a result of these tensions, a slew of foreign and native Hutu and Tutsi militias have renewed hostilities against each other.

Besides the dilapidated LRA, the DRC is also home to militant groups such as the Mai Mai, the Raia Mutomboki, and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)—names that are all as confusing as that tingle Justin Bieber's voice makes you feel. But the greatest threat to regional stability could be M23 (short for the March 23 movement), a group that mostly consists of Congolese Tutsis who defected from the army last April in response to what they described as the country's "high [levels] of corruption" and "improper governance." Since then, almost a quarter million people have been displaced by M23's violence, which includes at least 15 murders and 46 rapes (some of which

were perpetrated against girls as young as eight years old, according to Human Rights Watch). Once a refuge for people fleeing Rwanda and its ethnic tensions, the DRC has become yet another African country from which many residents wish to escape.

The camp at Goma is indicative of the DRC's confusing geopolitical turmoil. Combatants staying at the camp must first surrender and hand over their weapons to UN or government troops, after which they are processed and held for 72 hours. A portion of the residents are from Rwanda, from which they fled to the DRC, joined a militia, became hired guns, and now want to return home. Other campers are Congolese who fought with local Hutu or Tutsi militias before surrendering. There is also a contingent of Rwandan farmers who pose as ex-rebels to hitch a free ride with the UN back across the border. UN workers provide them with clothing and brightly colored plastic sandals. To determine their status and surmise their identities and countries of origin, they're quizzed on local facts and subjected to fingerprinting and retinal scans. The camp is an element of a UN program designed to transform rebels back into civilians, reintegrating them back into society—or what's left of it.

"Many of these people came to the DRC in search of opportunities after the conflict in Rwanda," Sam said. "But now that the situation here is changing they want to go home."

Various NGOs and government agencies operate in the DRC, all of which walk a fine line between doing harm and doing good. The most important of them is MONUSCO—the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. MONUSCO was formed two years ago, when the UN Security Council decided that a military solution was needed to stabilize the country in the wake of the Second Congo War. According to the UN resolution, the force comprises "a maximum of 19,815 military personnel, 760 military observers, 391 police personnel, and 1,050 members of formed police units."

In addition to handling its homegrown dissenters, MONUSCO has also had to deal with all the foreign groups that have set up camp in the country's remote rural areas. The Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement (DDR for short) division of MONUSCO aims to "voluntarily repatriate all illegal foreign armed groups and their dependents from the DR Congo to their respective countries of origin." That's no small task for a force half the size of the NYPD patrolling an area the size of Western Europe, a place without any infrastructure where anyone can buy a loaded AK-47 for about the cost of a chicken.

Working with tribal chiefs, elders, and community leaders, DDR also conducts psyops campaigns designed to encourage soldiers to defect from their respective militias. These messages are delivered through FM-radio broadcasts and flyers, which are air-dropped into combat zones and depict a cartoonish action sequence instructing combatants on how to escape the jungle and rejoin civilization.

Meanwhile, the battle between M23 and government troops has raged so wildly that MONUSCO has had to divert troops and resources sorely needed elsewhere in the country in order to give the government a fighting chance. This, in turn, has created a security vacuum, which many of the armed groups in the area have rushed to fill while



TOP: FDLR ex-combatants, bush wives, and their children are processed for intake at a UN transit camp in Goma, North Kivu.

BOTTOM: Witnesses and survivors of the atrocities perpetrated by the LRA in Dungu.

reigniting the cycle of old tribal conflicts that were never stamped out in the first place. For instance, the largely Hutu FDLR is staging attacks in concert with another armed group called the Nyatura against villages perceived as sympathetic to the Tutsis. Raia Mutomboki, a militia largely composed of Congolese Tutsis, claims they are protecting the local population from Hutu attacks, which according to their definition consists of massacring ethnic Hutus. Complicating matters further, it is widely believed that M23 is receiving aid from the Rwandan government.

As Sam gave me the walking tour of the M23 side of the Goma transit camp, it became apparent that no one from MONUSCO wanted to talk about the confusing three-way battle raging between the Tutsi M23 mutineers, MONUSCO, and the FRDC (the official name for the government's troops). They were, however, more than happy to discuss other armed groups that are now less active, such as Joseph Kony and his LRA fighters—just not the rebels standing right next to me.

Neighbors guided us to a spot where LRA militants had butchered villagers in shoulder-high grass.

Ian, my MONUSCO contact, has the build, diction, and swagger of a cop or a soldier, or at least someone who had always wanted to be in a position of authority that also allows him to hold a gun.

“My understanding was that your story was about DDR’s efforts to reach active combatants,” Ian told us on the balcony of my hotel’s lakeside restaurant. But when I asked about M23, he bristled. “Here in Goma, we are largely dealing with M23 and the FDLR. But I have to make this clear: The UN will not discuss the M23 situation in Goma. Understood?”

The secrecy, I later learned, was due to the fear of an impending M23 attack. UN officials later told me that M23, which is led by Bosco Ntaganda (affectionately known by his troops as “the Terminator”), was situated approximately 25 miles outside Goma. But rumors among locals, NGO workers, soldiers, and private contractors put the rebels “in the bush,” less than six miles from the city. One afternoon, while I rode atop an armored personnel carrier on patrol with a detachment of Uruguayan soldiers, it became obvious that rather than prepping to go out into the jungle, as I’d expected, we were actually policing the streets of Goma’s poorest neighborhoods, as well as power plants, airstrips, and crossroads—the kind of places a rebel army would likely attack. The MONUSCO troops, it seemed, were preparing not for a jungle assault but for a potential M23 attack on Goma.

Even if the M23 has eclipsed the LRA in terms of its notoriety in the DRC, Joseph Kony’s legacy still haunts the country—and his soldiers, to some degree, are still active. After my visit to the camp in Goma, I traveled by plane to the rural outpost of Dungu, where in 2008 the LRA launched a brutal campaign of slaughter in which they set down their usual AK-47s and RPGs

in favor of machetes and clubs. I met a boy who had witnessed the results of their handiwork—his two older sisters had been among the dead.

Later, I took a helicopter to Bangadi, an even more remote town near the South Sudanese border. I almost immediately found evidence of LRA activity in the area. First, I interviewed a teenage boy who, after being abducted and forced to spend three years in the bush, had escaped in the middle of the night and made his way home. Other neighbors guided us to a spot where LRA militants had butchered villagers in shoulder-high grass. I was then led to the center of the village road, which was piled with bones and burned clothing marking the spot where the residents of Bangadi had exacted their own brand of vigilante justice against captured LRA combatants.

When we asked the locals why the LRA dead had not been buried, the village chief dismissed the question with a wave of his hand and sauntered away. My fixer leaned close, so as not to offend my hosts, and said, “They believe if they bury the bones in the ground then they will haunt this place.”

The next morning, we awoke before sunrise in order to catch a ride with a joint military convoy headed to an area still harassed by the LRA. Under the command of a Belgian named Leo, the convoy included elements of the FRDC, foreign African troops, and a US Special Forces unit on loan from the United States Africa Command. As we entered the operational zone, we watched as the American soldiers removed their Velcro-affixed flag patches and insignias from their uniforms. Their commanding officer—a brash, blond South Dakotan—spotted my camera and made sure to inform me that Africa Command had a strict “no media” policy.

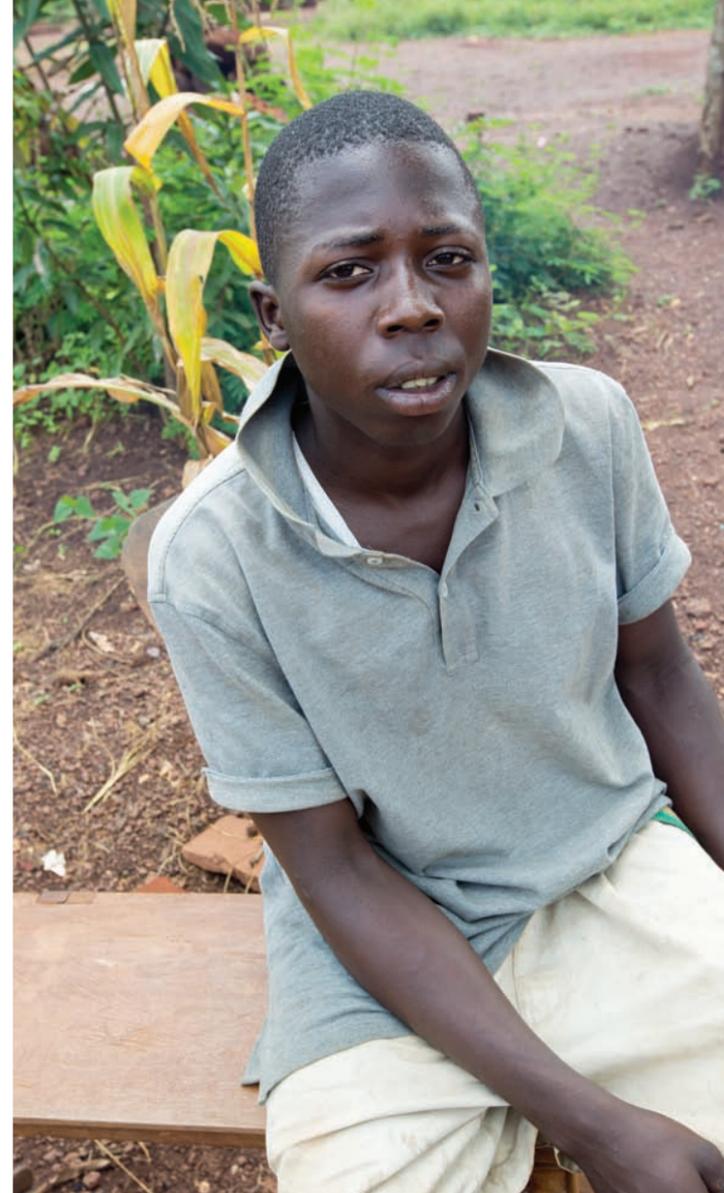
Later that night, at a toga party hosted at the Doctors Without Borders compound in Dungu, the South Dakotan told me he thought most of the people in the area were blowing the situation out of proportion.

“You have to take it all with a grain of salt,” he said over his single beer of the evening. “They’ll all tell you, ‘Before the LRA I had a herd of 400 goats.’ Bro! No, you didn’t! You’re hungry because you’re lazy and you don’t farm enough.”

During the patrol we had persuaded the convoy to drop us off in Duru, a village hard hit by the LRA’s 2008 Dungu offensive. It’s also where, according to local rumors, a small band of fighters had recently been raiding local farms. Once there, we met several witnesses to atrocities in the area, including a man named Martin who had been abducted by the LRA and escaped only a few days before my arrival.

Martin, a local hunter, told me that he was accompanying his teenage son into the bush near the village when they encountered two men dressed in FRDC uniforms. Assuming they were government troops stationed in the area, he did not hesitate when they waved him and his boy over to see what they were up to out in the jungle.

It wasn’t until he noticed their mismatched uniforms that he realized something was amiss. Masquerading as government soldiers, his LRA captors forced Martin and his son to carry their extra equipment and then foolishly proceeded to march them through the bush in a series of concentric circles to conceal their route. Being a local hunter, Martin knew every tree and gully, which meant he also knew that they had not even left the immediate area. It was then that he formulated an escape plan.



As the day wore on and turned to evening, the LRA bandits grew tired from their jungle trudge and started griping about their limited food supplies. Martin suggested that perhaps his captors could allow him to find them some game like an antelope, or at the very least some “bush meat” (monkey). The bandits handed Martin back the weapon they had seized from him earlier, a locally made, large-caliber rifle known as a “Double Zero,” and agreed on the condition that Martin’s son remain with them. Knowing that his captors, Acholi speakers from Uganda, had a limited or nonexistent understanding of the languages spoken in the region, Martin, in his own tongue, whispered to his son, “I will fire once to trick them. When you hear the second shot, then you should run.”

Martin circled their encampment at a safe distance and waited for the moon to rise. After his first shot rang out across the night sky, the LRA men, lulled into a false sense of comfort, laid down their weapons and promptly went to sleep. After the second shot, Martin’s son fled and the pair made their way back to their village.

Over the next hour, as we plied Duru residents with cheap Congolese cigarettes so that they would agree to being interviewed, they gave us an idea of how the recent rise of militia fighting in the country has affected the LRA. As other armed

groups have risen to prominence, Kony’s troops have been squeezed, left to fight both villagers and other militias for access to scarce resources in the country. Working in groups of three to five, thinly spread across an area about twice the size of France, they have no communications equipment and limited ammunition and are mainly attacking villages in search of food. The first questions they ask their victims usually concern the local availability of corn, goats, or chickens.

We asked Martin whether, while he was in LRA custody, he had seen any of the psyops flyers DDR had air-dropped over the jungle, or heard any of the radio broadcasts urging defection. His eyes lit up. “Yes. They had many flyers. They were using them for the fire.”

“Did they discuss the flyers?” a UN officer who had accompanied us on our trip asked, curious about the bandits’ response to the propaganda designed to dwindle their forces.

“Yes,” Martin told us. “They said, ‘Tell them we will never come out of the bush.’”

Remembering the pile of torched clothing and bones littering the road in Bangadi, I could see why. 

For more on what’s really going on out in the Congo, watch *Bush-League Rebels* on VICE’s YouTube channel ([YouTube.com/VICE](https://www.youtube.com/VICE)) in November.

LEFT: A former child soldier in Bangadi who was kidnapped at age 14 and spent three years in the custody of the LRA.

RIGHT: “Jean-Baptiste” (not his real name) witnessed both of his sisters murdered at the hands of the LRA in Dungu.

DEATH OF THE AMERICAN HOBO

*The National Hobo Convention
Reaches the End of the Line*

BY AARON LAKE SMITH
PHOTOS BY JACKSON FAGER

Balty and Firecracker Wendy, two of the handful of young transients who showed up to this year's National Hobo Convention in Britt, Iowa.



When walking through a city, or a suburb, or a section of forest, I feel an enormous sense of relief when I come upon a set of railroad tracks. It is as if the fears and doubts and anxieties of daily life abruptly vanish. The vise grip that civilization and *this world* have on my head loosens, and for a moment I can breathe freely. The train tracks persist in the shadows of our stark, digitized 2001: *A Space Odyssey* future, relics of the time when iron behemoths and Pullman passenger cars cut through the inky-black primeval wilderness on their diesel-stained voyage through the night.

In this endless matrix of streets, cars, cell-phone towers, businesses, houses, jobs, and families, the train tracks are a trapdoor exit, a gap, an exception where silence and lawlessness still reign.

If highways and roads are America's veins, the hundreds of thousands of miles of tracks are like those chakra diagrams in acupuncturists' offices, the hidden flows of energy that affect the body as a whole. It's as if the vapor of several hundred years of America's daring and rugged spirit is contained within the wafting, intoxicating smell of hot railroad tar. It is the last truly American place, untainted by the regrets of modern progress.

Most people know that in the mid-1800s, Henry David Thoreau moved to a cabin off the banks of a little pond outside his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, to live there for two years while writing a book called *Walden*. What is less widely known is that his cabin was no more than 300 feet from a set

of railroad tracks leading into Concord, and that it was only a 30-minute walk down the line to get to his mother's house.

On a recent visit to Walden Pond, while I was awed by the pristine site Henry David had chosen for his experiment, I saw that without the tracks—that lifeline, that trail of bread crumbs that could be followed back to civilization—his long hermitage could have been an unending hell. Thoreau had found the best of both worlds, the thing we all want—nature and civilization together in one tidy package.

I can only imagine that on some lonely, cold nights in his little cabin, when he was missing his friends in Boston, wondering why he had moved back to his birthplace to grow string beans, the sound of the train whistle echoing through the woods in the dead of night steeled his will to the task at hand and reminded him that while he was alone, he was still a part of humanity.

I grew up in the suburbs of central North Carolina, a gentle and compassionate eastern wood, where the freight train was a vital part of the texture of the landscape. In high school, on late autumn nights as multicolored leaves fell in my neighborhood, I listened for the din of the high school marching band in the distance and the whistle of the train as it chugged through dense deciduous forests and my spirit surged with excitement for the future and all that was left to be done.

I spent my formative years on the tracks. There was something magical about the way you could part the foliage or walk down a clay gully behind the CVS parking lot and suddenly enter a hidden world.

Just after I turned 18, on a crisp fall afternoon, I hopped my first freight train out from downtown Raleigh with my friend Doug MacPherson. Those pleasurable hours spent lying around on tarry pieces of lumber, trying to figure out the mysterious shuffling of cars and locomotives in the yard, are seared into the marrow of my bones—like a puzzle you don't understand that begins to make sense the longer you look at it. My friend Cricket, a veteran train-hopper, gave us a little hand-drawn map to help us navigate our way once we got into the Linwood yard in western North Carolina. His advice was the stern warning given to most first-time riders: "Stay down and don't let anyone see you."

As our train creaked out of Raleigh, we promptly ignored Cricket's advice and sat up on our grainer porch, visible to all the cars stopped at the railroad crossings. There was something incredible about waving to all the drivers as we passed—when they saw us, their faces lit up and they pointed, mouthing, "Look, hobos!" It was almost as if by riding on the porch of the train we had made them believe in mystery again, the contemplation of the unknown.

The scenery along the tracks is completely different from that seen through the window of a speeding car—there are no gas stations, billboard advertisements, bars, sidewalks, or pedestrians. It is a world of disused lots and shadows cast from backyard floodlights, stray dogs howling, underpass bums drinking, concrete monoliths, and telephone poles engulfed by kudzu. Once you get out there into the open country and away from the roads, you see pristine nature, untouched by the withering hand of civilization.

With our ragged map, heading on to a strange place, Doug and I felt as if we were a pair of early Americans—pioneers far from home on a great adventure. And so began my contorted, largely unfulfilled love of riding freight trains.

Be wary of any enterprise that requires new clothes," Thoreau warned. The great New England radical and nonconformist could be described as the proto-hobo, with his emphasis on self-sufficiency, living outdoors, and aimlessly wandering the still-virginal American landscape. Historians agree that the modern American hobo emerged after the Civil War. The nation's young men had returned to devastation at home. Some, already accustomed to sleeping outside and foraging for food, became transients, setting off across the country in search of work. In the mid- to late 1800s, the growth of the hobo followed the westward sprawl of track.

In the early days, hobos were migrant workers who jumped train cars rather than paying to ride in passenger class. One estimate put about 1 million hobos on the rails between 1890 and 1930. Ben Reitman, a peripatetic anarchist of the 1920s, famous for being the lover of Emma Goldman, subdivided the transient taxonomy as such: "*Hobos* [were] the unattached men and women traveling around looking for work; *tramps* the unattached penniless ones tramping around for excitement and adventure like myself, and *bums*, who make up the third and smallest but the most troublesome type of vagrant, the type addicted to drugs and to drink and who have lost all sense of respectability [*italics mine*]."

The turn of the century was a perilous time to be a hobo. Between 1898 and 1908, the Interstate Commerce Commission recorded an estimated 48,000 tramps killed on freight trains and an equal number maimed. It was common for migrants to

"ride the rods," lying across the skeletal steel bars under the train, extended like Superman. They also rode the "blinds," crouching on the platforms of fast-moving passenger trains. Boxcars and lumber cars would often be so packed with riders that it was hard to find room inside. Life was cheap on the rails—some hobos fell off or under trains, others were murdered, while the least fortunate froze to death in refrigerator cars or suffocated in long tunnels unequipped with modern ventilation. Railroad expert Lee Wheelbarger told me a story that well illustrated these perils—the steam trains at the time sprayed boiling oil and hot effluent onto a little platform behind the second locomotive, called the "monkey porch." On cold nights, hobos who didn't know any better would move up the cars toward the warmth radiating from the locomotive's furnace; when the crew found them, they were scalded so badly that they looked like burned monkeys.

Once you get out there in the open country and away from the roads, you see pristine nature, untouched by civilization.

Today, if caught trespassing in a train yard by a railroad bull (rail police), you are given a polite warning, cited, or at worst thrown in jail for a couple of days. At the turn of the century, however, a low-grade guerrilla war raged between the rail companies and the hobos. Bulls would wantonly kill hobos, and the hobos would avenge the fallen by shooting bulls. This saga is best dramatized in the movie *Emperor of the North Pole*, in which a ruthless, hobo-murdering bull named "Shack" is challenged by the heroic hobo "A Number One." A Number One is determined to jump Shack's unridable train. The Shack character was probably loosely based on Jeff Carr, a turn-of-the-century bull with a terrifying reputation among itinerants.

In his 1926 underworld autobiography *You Can't Win*, outlaw author Jack Black wrote, "[Jeff Carr is] 'bum simple'—simple-minded on the subject of killing bums. If you run, he'll shoot you; if you stand, he'll get you six months [in prison]. And he'd rather have you run." Jack London also wrote about Carr in *The Road*, his 1907 book about train-hopping: "Fortunately, I never encountered Jeff Carr. I passed through Cheyenne in a blizzard. There were 84 hoboos [*sic*] with me at the time. The strength of numbers made us pretty nonchalant on most things, but not on Jeff Carr. The connotation of Jeff Carr stunned our imagination, numbed our virility and the whole gang was mortally scared of meeting him."

In addition to murder, extortion was rampant. Railroad workers would barge into boxcars and shake down riders for the small amounts of cash they had, threatening to kick them off or have them arrested if they didn't pay up. In the late 1800s, a group of hobos formed a union of unemployed and itinerant workers called Tourist Union #63 to protect themselves against the railroad workers and bulls. Some of these hobos went on to found the American Civil Liberties Union. More than 50 years later, in 1972, they won their long fight to repeal outdated and repressive vagrancy laws.

Around the turn of the century, Tourist Union #63 held their annual Hobo Convention in Chicago, then the nexus of

The author fast asleep on a grainer porch, somewhere in Utah or Wyoming.





American hobo life. Chicago had the biggest freight yards in the country and was a natural way station for the nation's outlaws, criminals, radicals, and itinerants. After riots and police violence marred a couple of the conventions, the organizers put out word that they were looking to relocate. The founders of a small, newly incorporated farming community in Iowa called Britt got in touch to offer their humble lot as host.

Unlike so many towns with draconian vagrancy laws, Britt actually wanted the hobos around—they needed temporary farmworkers. They shrewdly saw that inviting hobos to their town was a way to distinguish themselves from other developing communities. So the founders bought the hobos first-class Pullman tickets from Chicago to check the place out. The hobos liked Britt—there was plenty of space in the little town to hold their large gatherings. A deal was made, and the National Hobo Convention has been held there for the past 112 years.

Today, the hobos still descend on the quiet little town for one weekend a year in August to reconnect with their kin, honor their dead, eat mulligan stew, and elect a Hobo King and Queen. Britt has a Hobo Museum, a Hobo Graveyard, a Hobo Jungle, and even a shrine to the Unknown Hobo.

I'd always wanted to attend the convention, so a scheme was hatched to ride trains from Oakland to Britt with three people I barely knew in just under five days. One should really have an open schedule when riding trains, allowing plenty of time for detours of fate and luck. Due to other obligations, more time was not possible, but we set off on the race anyway. As Tennessee Williams said, "Make voyages! Attempt them! There's nothing else."

Our train trip began inauspiciously. The four of us rendezvoused at Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon, a century-old dive bar and Jack London's old haunt, which sits on the Oakland waterfront: There was Jackson, the photographer; Ben, his friend who had a couple of weeks off work and wanted an adventure; and Chris, an itinerant train rider whom I had corresponded with but had never met in person. Chris had ridden extensively, I had ridden a decent amount, and it was Jackson and Ben's first trip. We camped out on a culvert in the Oakland train yard, downwind from a noxious, throat-burning wastewater-treatment plant. The next morning we were kicked out of the yard by a bull, who threatened to throw us in jail, "and you do not want to go to jail in Oakland."

Heeding the bull's warning, we went to the Amtrak station with our tails between our legs and bought tickets to Roseville, the next stop down the line on the Union Pacific Overland Route. Once there, we jumped a slow-moving junk train and got about five miles out of town before it screeched to a halt. We were pulled off by three friendly cops who told us a conductor had seen us hop on. That night, after spending hours wandering around the suburban edges of Roseville so I could replace my ripped backpack, we slept on some high school bleachers just outside the train yard. In the morning, Chris took off on his own, and Ben, Jackson, and I walked across town to catch the \$15 casino bus to Reno, Nevada.

The Union Pacific yard in Reno is in the shadow of the towering Nugget Casino. As soon as we arrived, we ventured into the casino. After we'd lived outside for two days, the low-pile carpet and mirrored walls offered a hallucinatory experience, like being inside a fun house.

We walked out of the casino past the sprinklers and neon-green Astroturf and ducked into the first gap in the ornamental bushes. Just behind the hedge was a scrubby hobo jungle (an encampment or catch-out spot by the tracks) beside a chain-link fence, littered with beer cans and trash.

For most of the 20th century, train riders learned the rail system through trial and error and by swapping information with other riders. In the 20s, the jungles were full of people doing laundry and cooking up big meals. You could stumble into one and ask the old-timers when the next hotshot was leaving. The old-timers knew the schedules, yard layouts, and catch-out spots by heart through years of repetition and experience.

In 1997, an anonymous train enthusiast catalogued this folk knowledge in a single codex, a guide of how to hop out of every city, town, and suburb in North America. The thick

On board, a train is like a living creature, a primordial dragon.

photocopied pamphlet is updated every year with information submitted by contributors from around the nation. This modern-day sextant for the explorer out on the iron sea is then discreetly passed from hand to hand among freight riders. All 50 states and the Canadian territories are covered, rendered in nine-point Times New Roman font, with an elaborate system of acronyms. An excerpt from the section about Reno:

Reno (UP): YD is 3ME of Reno CH in Sparks... For WBS, you will need to be down at the McCarren overpass at E end, or maybe further E of there. This is fenced off now, but there are access points... Best at night, there is a bull who sporadically scans pig and GM trains, most often daytime.

An eastbound double-stack train headed to Chicago pulled up around midday. We hoisted ourselves over the chain-link fence and ran along the side, looking for a rideable car. Not finding any, we settled for the rear unit—an unmanned locomotive at the back of the train—pulling open the metal door and scurrying inside.

The inside of a locomotive cab resembles a pilot's cockpit—it's temperature-controlled, filled with buttons, knobs, and captains' chairs. There's bottled water in a minifridge and a bathroom. Jackson and Ben looked around hesitantly. They'd expected to be riding outside, in an open boxcar or in the convertible of a rideable freight car, a 48-foot well—a five-foot-deep cubbyhole beside the double stacks of shipping containers.

On board, a train is like a living creature, a primordial dragon. It creaks and groans and releases air and beeps—it even farts. With each strange noise, Ben and Jackson jumped, thinking something had gone wrong. After I explained that the sounds were completely normal, they relaxed. Once our train lumbered out of Reno, we came out from hiding and sat up on the pneumatic captains' chairs. The tracks veered away from the highway, and soon enough we were in the open country, scrubby bushes and white desert as far as the eye could see. We opened the windows and smoked and sat out on the platform, just to feel the hot desert wind whipping against our faces. We

OPPOSITE PAGE: A cross-section of National Hobo Convention attendees.

traveled farther and farther from civilization, away from roads, water, and other people, where cell phones don't work and you have to rely on context clues or rail maps to decipher your location. As the locomotive cabin grew dark across Nevada, we unrolled our sleeping bags and went to sleep.

When I awoke, it was the middle of the night, and we were in the Elko, Nevada, train yard. Headlights shone outside on either side of our locomotive. I peeked out the window and saw a refueling truck on one side and a golf cart on the other. I shook Ben and Jackson awake and told them we needed to go. Rear locomotives are typically inspected every 24 hours. When you're riding alone, you can just hide in the bathroom and keep quiet, but with three of us we had nowhere to run. Sensing that a worker was about to burst in on us, I went up



Backwoods Jack plays an original song to a crowd in the Hobo Jungle.

to the big steel door and put my weight against it, holding the handle. I heard footsteps on the other side and someone pushed down the handle from the outside. He tried three or four more times, but I held the door until he gave up and walked away.

As soon as he left, we bolted out through the open desert into some scrub bushes near the yard office. As we huddled there in the prickly desert sage with our heavy backpacks, train-hopping felt like some DIY version of boot camp.

The menacing headlights of worker trucks circled around us, boxing us in. We watched as our train pulled away. Just as we were about to give up and walk to the highway, a long grain train pulled into the yard, headed east.

All of a sudden, the trucks disappeared and left us a clear path. We jogged alongside the train as it picked up speed, then pulled ourselves up on a perfect grainer car, wide enough for us all to lie down. The train accelerated and entered a desert canyon, bathed in the soft light of the full moon. The freight train, dark taskmaster that it was, had made us suffer before we earned its grand rewards. The grainer car swayed and creaked across the endless desert; the cool night air was invigorating. I crawled into my sleeping bag and slept more soundly than I have in years.

When I awoke, the horizon was pink, and we were crossing a jetty stretching over the Great Salt Lake. Red tabletop mountains were reflected in the stagnant, mirrorlike water. The smell of sulfur wafted off the water, and gulls flitted about overhead. In the distance a single anchored boat looked like an ancient Phoenician ship. Ben, Jackson, and I gasped, feeling blessed to be among the few given an opportunity to see such splendor. It was almost like time traveling. We passed pure white salt beaches, ruinous old power lines, and beached tugboats entirely eaten by rust.

Though we were running out of water, we decided to stay on through Ogden, Utah, to Green River, Wyoming. In Green River, once the train stopped, we moseyed over a bridge into town like cowboys in a spaghetti western.

Green River is a major freight stopover in the West. Union Pacific logos are plastered on all the overpasses, and the substantial freight yard occupies the spot where downtown should be. A gorgeous Greek Revival building that looks like it should be City Hall is in fact the local train-company headquarters. Rail workers constantly circulate in white trucks.

Transients seemed to be an accepted part of daily life in Green River. Residents smiled at us on the street and asked us whether we were hopping out. Cops crept slowly by, eyeing us with their windows rolled down. A cop we met estimated that the town received 1,000 transients a year. Half starved and dangerously dehydrated, we gorged ourselves at a wood-paneled restaurant called the Crazy Moose, then stocked up on cigarettes, water, and beer and tromped back to the catch-out spot by the river.

We waited under the bridge like trolls, passing the empty hours drinking beer and throwing rocks, trying to break 40-ounce bottles suspended in a brine of mud. Waiting for freight trains has a rhythm similar to warfare or big-game hunting—long stretches of monotony are punctuated by moments of high-adrenaline action.

The tracks were strangely quiet, so we decided to call it a night and try to get a cheap hotel. This proved difficult. Three in a row turned us away, claiming they had no vacancies. Seeing the empty parking lots, we realized we had been denied because we were transients. After hiding our backpacks in some bushes and cleaning up a bit, we had no problem checking in at the Super 8. The next morning, feeling like our catch-out spot might be a dud, we ventured into the main train yard. A worker promptly called the cops, and we spent an hour hiding behind train wheels, trying to not be seen by a prowling cop car. We managed to jump over a couple strings of cars and get out of the yard and were wandering past suburban houses when two cop cars rolled out of nowhere. A bald, angry-looking officer swaggered over to us. "Cat-and-mouse game, huh? Looks like we win," he scoffed. The other, a soft-spoken "good cop," asked us a lot of questions about ourselves, and we managed to build up a friendly rapport. The bald one narrowed his eyes and glared at Jackson: "You've got a wedding ring on and a nice-ass camera around your neck. So what are you doing out here?"

They let us go with a warning that they would throw us in jail if they caught us again. Tempting fate, we went right back to the river and waited under the rail bridge. In no time, an eastbound junk train came along, and we jumped into the rear unit. It stopped in the middle of the Green River yard, and we spent a nerve-racking hour hiding, imagining the inside of the Green River jail. Our train finally departed, but it was running so slow we decided to get off in Rawlins, Wyoming.

By the tracks in Rawlins we met a 17-year-old rapper named Whytesmoke, who freestyled for us, surrounded by his entourage of BMX bikers. We ate some very good Thai food, and the owners of Rawlins' only coffee shop let us fill our water bottles. A young father walking with his family stopped us on the street and told us that he had ridden trains in the 80s. "I remember it being a physically grueling experience," he recalled wistfully. It was a strange moment, realizing that riding trains inevitably becomes just another exciting story of something you did when you were young.

At sunset, we walked down the tracks and crawled up into an old jungle in the jagged cliffs. It looked like a medieval grotto—we started a fire in a rusty barrel. After a while, an eastbound train made up of refrigerated cars came along in the darkness, and we hopped into the rear unit.

Each train is a roll of the die, a unique and unpredictable experience. Perhaps that's why we do it—to gamble, to relinquish control completely and give ourselves over to fate and luck. The train out of Rawlins gave all the appearances that it would blaze across Wyoming. But instead it pattered along miserably, stopping for higher-priority trains every hour. Frustrated, we jumped off in Laramie, Wyoming.

We were now in a race against time. We had 12 hours to make it to the National Hobo Convention, and were already late. We rented the cheapest one-way vehicle we could find—a U-Haul truck—and got on the road, resolving to pick up every hitchhiker we saw along the way.

Just outside Laramie, we spotted a lone figure on the side of the highway. He had a bushy gray Walt Whitman beard and was pushing a heavy, tanklike bicycle up a Sisyphean hill. We made a U-turn and pulled over, startling the man. He was sitting in the dirt, smoking a rolled cigarette and staring into the trees. His face was deeply lined and his clothes were filthy. He had starkly expressive blue eyes and looked like Tom Hanks in *Cast Away*. He introduced himself as Joe. With his missing teeth and calloused skin he looked ancient; he told us he was only 55.

After five minutes of chatting, I could tell that he was one of the last of a dying breed. Joe said he had been camping out in Oregon for a couple of years and was now biking to Arkansas, where he planned to set up camp for "three or four years" and pan for gold. He had ridden to Montana but had been forced to make a 1,000-mile detour on account of wildfires. After Arkansas, Joe planned to get a couple of horses and ride west across the American backcountry. "I've seen the country by car and will have seen it by bike and foot; I figured I wanted to see it by horse, the way the old-timers saw it."

In his long hermitage, Joe befriended the fauna. "You wouldn't believe the kind of animals I've seen up close." He said he talked to badgers. Joe's bike was more of a two-wheeled shopping cart than a form of transportation. It was about 200 pounds, weighted down with pickaxes, shovels, tents, tarps, and cookware. We helped Joe and his belongings into the back of the U-Haul and told him we could take him as far as Des Moines. He was exceedingly grateful and said that we were probably saving him "one or two months" of biking.

Down the road we stopped for another hitchhiker, a young, handsome guy with frizzy long hair, sunglasses, and a dog. He introduced himself as Alex and said he was a travel writer.

His dog was a red-nosed pit bull named Batman. Alex explained that, in 2010, he had left his job at Google and set off on the road hitchhiking, using couchsurfing.org to arrange for places to stay. In his entire two years of peripatetic travel he had only been forced to sleep outdoors for two or three nights.

After a couple of hours, we stopped for gas and opened up the U-Haul to find our human cargo crumpled in the back, squinty-eyed and soaked with sweat. With a length of rope, we rigged open the cargo door to give them a breeze while we drove onward.

Two hours later, in Nebraska, blue lights flashed and we were pulled over. An officer sidled up to the window, explaining that someone had called us in: "They said it looked like you were trafficking Mexicans." He checked on Alex and Joe in the back and then let us go with the warning that I-80 was a major vein for human trafficking and that we would likely get called in again.

Each train is a roll of the die, a unique and unpredictable experience.

Our next stop was Omaha, where we soaked up the enlivening Friday-night vibe of the city—everyone was dressed up in their best, the midwestern girls startlingly gorgeous (reaffirming Jack Kerouac's 50-year-old observation that "the prettiest girls in the world live in Des Moines"). Alex stayed sober and drove us through the night. We stopped to catch a few hours of sleep in the parking lot of an Embassy Suites, waking up at dawn to drive the remaining two hours through the Iowa cornfields into Britt, just in time to watch the high school marching band parade down a placid residential street. Senior citizens and middle-aged women threw candy and magnets from convertibles and floats. A chunky preteen boy on a colossal John Deere tractor struck poses and waved.

Britt was overrun with tourists but there was a conspicuous absence of people who looked like real hobos who had spent any considerable amount of time on the tracks. Rural families ambled down the main street past dunking booths and food stalls and tents blasting top-40 hits. Pubescent girls bought pink HOBO girly tees from the Hobo Museum and then went to eat breakfast across the street at Mary Jo's Hobo House.

We walked over to Britt's makeshift Hobo Jungle, a well-mowed stretch of grass by the railroad tracks. There, clustered around a disused boxcar, were about 20 people milling about, mostly gray-haired and wearing leather vests or coonskin caps. Ten or 15 tents dotted the green, along with a little village of RVs and vans. There couldn't have been more than 60 people in all camped out. It had more of the ambience of a hippie craft fair than a Depression-era Hooverville. To put things into perspective, 1,800 hobos had attended the 1949 convention in Britt.

Across town in City Park, Britt residents served up vats of mulligan stew, the traditional improvised gumbo of the hobos, to a mixed crowd of transients and tourists. The ceremony to elect this year's Hobo King and Queen began with an older woman singing all three refrains of "The Star-Spangled Banner." As the anthem droned on, attendees looked off into the distance glaze-eyed. They didn't know the words.

The candidates for Hobo King, a collection of scruffy elderly gentlemen with names like Adman and Minnesota Jim, took to the stage to give their stump speeches. There's been a Hobo King crowned every year since 1900, and to keep interlopers out, the Hobo King has to have lived considerable portions of his life on freight trains. Adman and Minnesota Jim's two-minute speeches were moving. Both men talked about their health problems, and Adman announced his retirement from riding the rails. Old-timers who had "caught the westbound" (the hobo term for dying) were canonized and lauded.

The crowd went wild when a friendly-looking older hobo with one leg rolled his wheelchair up to the microphone. "Hi, I'm Frog," he said in a croaking, high-pitched voice. He announced that he had taken a bad spill off one of the floats that morning, but that he was fine. While Adman's speech had been laden with morose self-pity, Frog seemed full of gratitude to his hobo family.

The nominees for Hobo Queen were all senior citizens—Angel, Minnesota Jewel, and a woman named Empress Vagabond Lump, the only black hobo at the event. The winners were decided by applause. In the end, Minnesota Jim, who looked like a cadaverous Woody Guthrie, won, alongside Angel, a woman from Britt. They were crowned with tin Folgers-can hats.

After the proceedings wrapped up, I found Frog sitting off by himself, smoking. Frog lived alone out in Helena, Montana. He had gotten his name in a California immigration jail, "because my traveling partner told them I hopped the trains like a frog." I assumed he had lost his leg on the freights, but he said that

a gang of teenagers had jumped him in the early 2000s. "Just some kids coming home from a ballgame. It happens a lot these days," he said, upbeat and smiling. He had ridden trains for 31 years before his accident. "My wanderlust spirit started at eight years old, and it's still there. Though I'm not riding trains anymore, I still want to ride. I have one final ride, and that's my westbound journey."

I asked Frog why there were so few young riders at the Convention. "The young anarchist brothers and sisters are out there, still riding trains, just not calling themselves hobos. I honestly feel like, give it another 25 years and the Hobo Convention will be a thing of the past."

He explained that, over the previous two decades, Britt had clamped down hard on the convention. It had become county-fair mainstream, completely sanitized—little kids milled around the Hobo Jungle collecting autographs and gawking, as if it were a circus. The city started enforcing leash laws and instituted a hard line on fights, drug use, and drunkenness. A final insult was the installation of a railroad bull on the tracks during the convention, preventing hobos from hopping into or out of Britt. As I took a stroll on the tracks in the late afternoon, the clean-cut, sharklike bull stopped me and demanded my driver's-license number with a smile.

In Jack Black's *You Can't Win* he described a turn-of-the-century iteration of the National Hobo Convention: "There was a grand jungle by a small, clean river where they boiled up their vermined clothes, or 'rags' as they are always called, cooked their mulligans, or if enough bums got together, held

their 'conventions.' These conventions, like many others, were an excuse for a big drunk. Sometimes they would end in a killing or some drunken bum would fall in the fire and get burned to death, after which they would silently steal away."

In 1998, a sect of hobo attendees got fed up with the convention's increasingly restrictive rules and regulations and started their own roving event called Trampfest, meant to run closer to the original outlaw spirit of Britt's Hobo Convention. "They decided, if they're going to bring in all these cops and railroad dicks and the media, they didn't need that," Frog explained. The stories I've heard about Trampfest give the impression it is the younger, drunker, stabbiest version of Britt's convention.

Darkness fell, the campfire was lit, and Styrofoam plates of beans and hot dogs were served; the whole thing took on the ambience of a Ren fair or a Wes Anderson movie. A terrifying Amish-looking guy with a neckbeard danced around and performed a flute version of "Call Me Maybe." One of the crusty punk kids who had shown up, who looked half-human, half-pig, breathed fire while standing inside the boxcar. There was a lot of Kiwanis-style talk of patriotism, and the evening was moderated by a 66-year-old MC named Medicine Man, who was not even a hobo, but rather a kind of hobo enthusiast who traveled the country with his wife in an RV.

These "hobos at heart" (a euphemism faux hobos invoke to describe themselves) seemed to have commandeered the convention—the authentic hobos, ailing and tired, tried to sit back and appreciate the time with their family. Empress Vagabond Lump told me, "When I first came here in '81, it was different. It wasn't policed then like it is now. Now it's like a history thing, people learning the history of the hobo. This is just like weekend stuff."

Hanging around the Hobo Jungle as the sun went down, I met the enfant terrible of the National Hobo Convention, camped under the wheels of a parked boxcar with a scrap of ragged blanket, nursing a 12-pack of Beast Ice. He wore a filthy tie-dyed T-shirt, and his skin was the color of boiled hot dog. He moonwalked out from his hole, shouting, "I'm the Tan Man, baby!" and singing Lady Gaga—"Lemme take a ride on your disco stick!"

In his early 40s, filthy, and deranged, Tan Man came off like a caricature of a crackpot bum. He explained that he had spent his life living on the streets, and that he was proud to be "king of the thumb bums." He said he felt safer in a gutter than in a warm bed. He raged against what the Hobo Convention had become. "A lot of these people here are credit-card hobos, hobo millionaires," he seethed. Tan Man showed up, even though it had become a parody of itself, out of respect for the elderly hobos. "One thing the old-timers taught me: Always respect, always offer a cigarette, always offer something to eat and a beer if you've got it. That's old hobo rules. You've got to give respect to get respect."

Tan Man said that after the convention he was heading to Clinton, Iowa, to get sober and become a youth pastor in an evangelical program for homeless youth. "Instead of running butt-naked down the beach with the police coming after me asking, 'Who's that guy?' 'I don't know, they call him the Tan Man,' I'd like to just do one thing good. If I could just help one person, one punk kid, it's worth my whole journey, my whole life."

After I left Tan Man, Medicine Man, the "hobo at heart," came over to me with a worried look on his face. "I saw you were over there talking to Tan Man. We've had a lot of

problems with him over the years, so I don't know what he told you. But I just want you to know that if you print any of the things he said, you all won't be welcomed back here." After going back and forth with him a bit and a couple more open-mic acts, it was time to call it a night.

The next day, I learned that Tan Man had been arrested for pissing on a fence. The most basic primal human need, barely an affront to lawful society, singled out in a town that was once the hobo's sanctuary. I'd had enough. Disgusted by the petty paternalism of Britt and with the convention, it was time to leave. We flew back to New York.

When I got back home, I called Frog to continue a conversation we had been having in Britt. He had told me that he had been one of the founding members of an infamous transient gang called the FTRA, which is the freight-train equivalent of

A terrifying Amish-looking guy with a neckbeard danced around and performed a flute version of 'Call Me Maybe.'

the Crips. Frog laughed off the reputation of the much-feared cabal. "It stands for Fuck the Reagan Administration—we started it when Reagan cut our food stamps—but somehow it became Freight Train Riders of America. To this day, sometimes people ask me to rag-and-tag 'em." He laughed.

A warm and generous man, Frog had told me that plenty of train riders and hobos stopped through to visit him in Helena. I had imagined him living in a rickety, paint-peeling cabin with a woodstove, surrounded by sunflowers and a collection of rusted railroad spikes stacked on the porch. In my mind, he was living out his sunset years in a cheerful sanctuary, with tramps, bums, and outlaws with names like Minneapolis Minnie, Pasco Slim, and Salt Chunk Mary constantly passing through, cooking up big meals together, getting drunk, and disappearing back out into the night. So I was caught off guard when during the course of our conversation he mentioned that he lived in a senior center. My fantasy idea of his life crumbled, replaced by gray reality—fiberboard walls, fresh-cut grass, welcome centers, and parking lots.

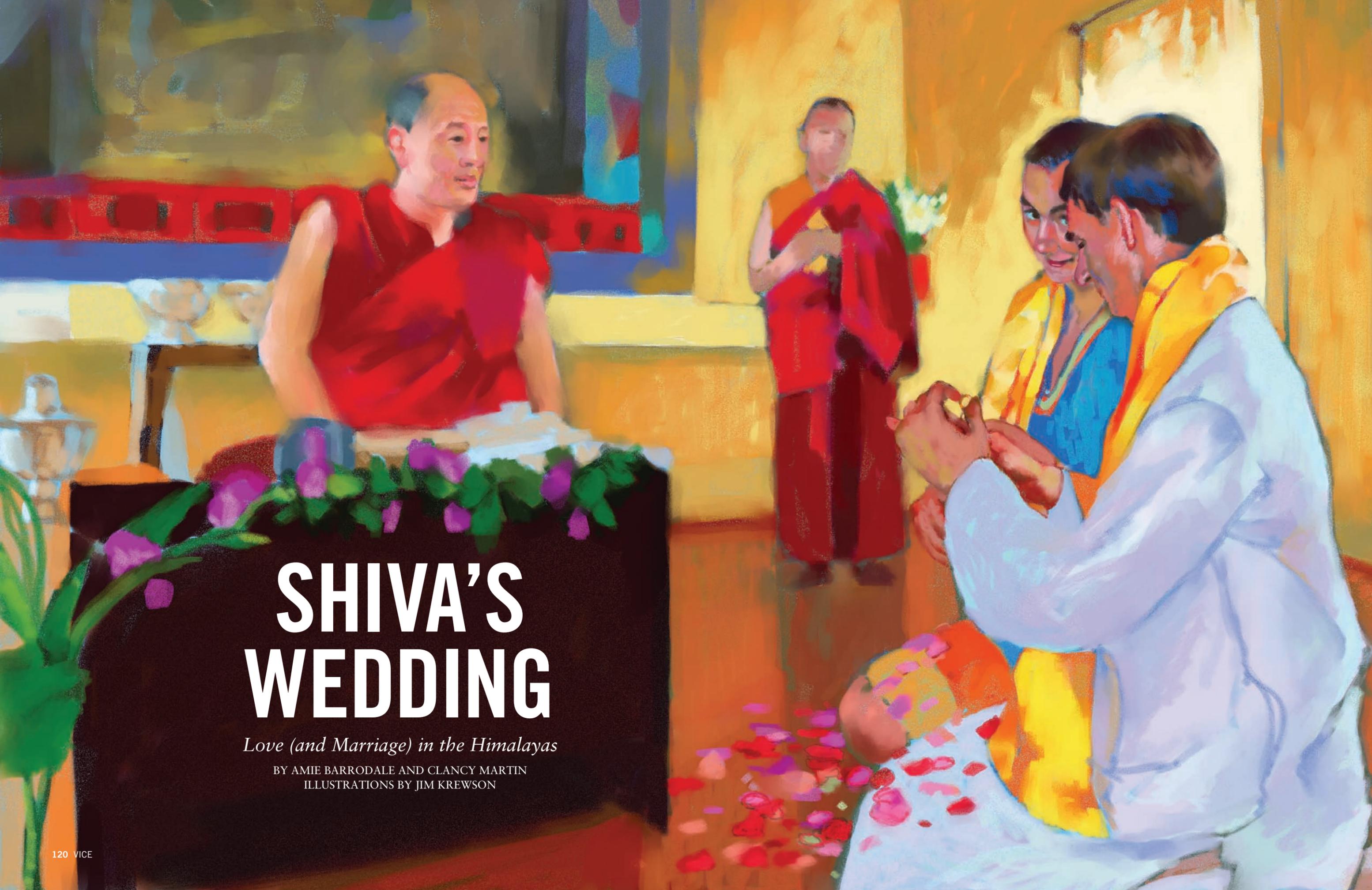
The thought of Frog in his wheelchair, all alone in a Montana senior center, was too much. Sensing my malaise, he began describing his surroundings. "I'm overlooking the Sleeping Giant Mountains. I watch the trains go by my house, and they zoom right by my window," he said wistfully. "There's two sets of tracks—one going west and the other going east. And directly behind the tracks is an airport, so I can sit and watch the planes going in and out of here." I imagined the rumble of the trains, the lonesome horn waking him in the middle of the night from persistent dreams of riding once again. I promised to write him a letter and come visit sometime before saying goodbye.

Sitting at my desk after hanging up with Frog, I found myself crying for all the gone people and gone ways of life, and the great American hobo, disappearing down the westbound track, never to return again. 

To see dawn over the Great Salt Lake and the hidden world of the train tracks, check out our new documentary *Death of the American Hobo* this month on VICE.com.

The author and Ben wait in a Wyoming hobo jungle for the night train.





SHIVA'S WEDDING

Love (and Marriage) in the Himalayas

BY AMIE BARRODALE AND CLANCY MARTIN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JIM KREWSON

Part I Amie's Fantasy

I am a Buddhist. I have mentioned this before in VICE, last December. The story was about how I went to Bali to make offerings to Shiva, to ask for a man, after hearing my guru make this suggestion to a Chinese woman at an informal gathering in California.

A piece of advice my guru gave directly to me around the same time was to “write crap.” He said, “Even Wong Kar-wai makes commercials. Then he has the money to make things like *In the Mood for Love*.”

I took his advice and proposed a column for VICE.com. In it I would interview people in the form of tarot-card readings. I didn't think this was total crap—I had often thought that this would be a fun column—but I proposed and wrote it (often with great embarrassment because I am not psychic at all, and I can be a truly terrible interviewer with strangers or people who I sense don't like me). Also, the format was just strange, and finally, sensibly, VICE killed the column.

But one way or another, after the column ended, I stayed in touch by email with one person I had interviewed: Clancy Martin. I'd interviewed him because I thought he

But Clancy's reading made sense. It said he was worn out with his relationship and wanted to pursue something higher. That something-higher card was a spiritual card, but I was reluctant to say that to him, so I downplayed that and up-played work. The cards also said he was having trouble letting go of the relationship because he loved the woman and because the sex was tremendously good. I didn't feel comfortable saying that so I put it more modestly. In short, the cards told him not to be in a relationship, and they told him again and again to work, work, work.

We emailed a bit after the interview came out. Once he wrote to tell me that the reading, so far, was accurate; he and his girlfriend had broken up. I told him I'd broken up mine too, but it was much different. I wrote him when *Harper's* killed an essay I had traveled around the world to report and worked two years to write. We switched to texting in the way things go. Sometimes he would write me in the morning, “Whatcha doing?” and I'd say, “Mantras.” My mom and I practiced two or three hours each morning at that time, along with our friend Patience. He asked me what my mantra was, and I said maybe it's better not to say. He told me his and said it meant “God is at the center of your being.” He also said he didn't really think it meant that; he thought it meant something you couldn't quite explain.

To make a long story short, he flew me to Kansas City about five months after we had the interview. By that time we were already in love. When my week in KC ended, he flew to Seattle and stayed in a hotel for five days. Then my mom was offered a free meditation retreat in Whistler, Canada, and so he came and stayed with me a few days. We flew back to Kansas City together for maybe ten days, and then he flew back to Seattle, and for five nights he stayed in a two-room apartment with my mother and me.

I have to explain something before I go on. At one point, earlier, Clancy had asked me to come stay with him; he was at the Carlyle in New York for four nights. I got the mistaken impression he was wealthy.

He was asking me what I wanted for my birthday, the very first time he came to town. We had known each other in person for ten days. There was something I wanted a lot—a bracelet by Pamela Love that I had seen at Barneys—and after a lot of nonsense (“Tell me, what letter does it start with?”), he got me to tell him what it was. We went to Barneys and, sweat rolling down his forehead, he bought it. I never take it off.

We were upstairs in the CO-OP section. Clancy was thinking of writing a piece about up-and-coming women jewelry designers, and he asked if I would come downstairs with him and look in the high-end cases. We did. He actually has a lot more interest in jewelry than I do, so I was wandering away from the Monique Pean counter when he said, “Amie.”

I don't know why, but I kept walking toward Kiehl's. I like to spray my face with their acai astringent. He said, “Amie.” And then, “Amie Barrodale.”

At this time, I already knew I was going to marry him, and so did he, but we hadn't talked about it, and we both sort of imagined it would come in a year or two.

“Can you try on this ring for me?”

It was petrified boar tusk, surrounded by very small diamonds. To me it had looked plain, earlier, when I had been at the display, but on my hand—Clancy has a very good eye—I saw that it was magic.

No, of course he could not buy the ring right there, but when I gave it back to the salesman something had changed. Clancy proposed on the sidewalk outside the store, and I accepted. Later in Kansas City he proposed again, with a ring. It is a temporary ring, a beautiful one that was my great-grandmother's. He could've bought the Monique Pean—he had intended to—but as his brother is in the jewelry business, I asked him to be practical and knock it off. By some coincidence, I happened to have a very crazy cousin who recently died, and among the things he left in storage—a gun he had bought to kill himself, a ten-place-setting box of sterling-silver flatware by Gorham—was a piece of ivory tusk. A smiley face was carved into it.

This story may be going long, so I'll just say Clancy mistakenly thought I had invited him to join me for a monthlong *abisheka* on the Tibetan border. (I can't explain what an *abisheka* is. If you want to find out, go to one.) This was before we had met in person, and he had immediately accepted. So now, it seemed like, “OK, I'll ask Rinpoche to marry us.”

As a part of how we funded our trip, Clancy sold an article to *Men's Journal* about the other side of his father. He had written about the conventional view; he sold an article on the unconventional—the possibility his father was a spiritual man. The article would explore the possibility that his father's spiritual experiences were authentic.

Originally, for the article, Clancy had wanted to fulfill his father's dying request by throwing his ashes into the Ganges. But he had lost the ashes. Before our trip, I talked to some lamas and they said it was OK; he could use any personal item of his father's. What he chose was very precious, but that story is his to say or not say.

We went to Benares for the ceremony and arranged for Drubgyud Tenzin Rinpoche to perform the rites. Afterward, when Rinpoche had gone to class (he is learning Pali), our guide said that the Ganges is sacred to Shiva. He told us the story: It would have flooded the world, but someone asked Shiva to stop it, and so Shiva dammed it with his head, or tied his hair in a knot. I could not entirely understand, but a small part of me—thinking of Bali—thought, “Hmm.”

Our guide said next we'd go to the most important Shiva shrine. He called it “the number one” and said, “You do have your passports, don't you?”

We'd left them at our hotel.

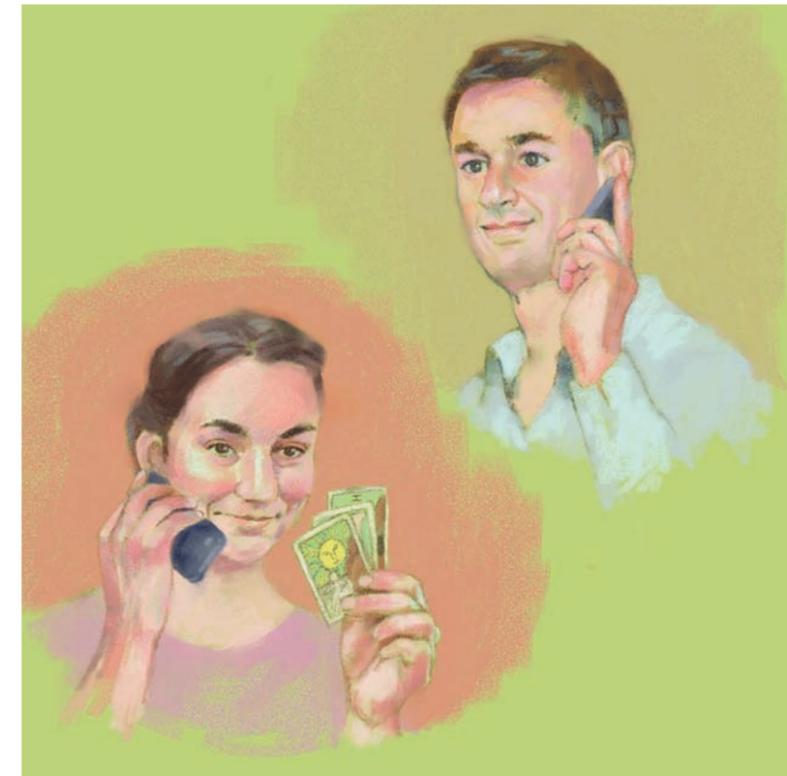
“Well, that's OK,” he said. “We can go to the number two.”

I said I wanted to go back and get our passports. Both Clancy and the guide resisted me. I can be a bit stubborn. I put my foot down. We changed our program and went to Sarnath, where the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths. We skipped the silk shop. We went back to the hotel for four hours, and then our guide came and got us.

“I'm sorry to ask,” he said, “you do have your passports?”

I think the appropriate way to make offerings at a temple is to bring one flower, to simply lay it down. However, I grew up in Texas. My mother and I were not rich and we were not poor, but my grandfather had new oil money, and he liked to spend it, to flash it, to walk into the most expensive store in Texas and shout at the ten women in his party, “If you see something you like, BUY it. We're here to do some shopping!”

It humiliated me then, but 20 years later I have the very same Donald Trump mentality when I enter a shrine. It embar-



rasses people. I can't help it. I'm like a Chinese-restaurant owner in that way, so as we approached the temple, I said to Clancy in a low voice, “Can you do something for me?”

“Anything.”

“Can you please let me get a lot of offerings, even when it makes them mad or embarrasses you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you promise?”

He nodded. “But just flowers, OK? No fruit and incense and lights and all that.”

I agreed to the terms.

At this temple—the number one—you need a *paṇḍit* to take you through, not a guide, because “it is not open to

tourists.” Also, our guide told us, we would have to lie. When asked, “Do you believe in the Hindu faith?” we would have to say yes.

Actually, we did not have to do that, but just as predicted, we did irritate our paṇḍit, who had bought us each a modest offering basket. He shouted at us and at the flower-garland vendor, as Clancy spent \$20 on garlands and lotus flowers.

Inside the temple was Shiva’s lingam. It was behind a gate, and a paṇḍit there said prayers over it as lines of devotees offered whitish water (below the lingam was a pool of this



offered water, more than several bathtubs, I would guesstimate) and flowers. There were so many people, but the line moved quickly. Clancy and I slid the flowers from the basket into the water together.

One person was happy: the paṇḍit. He smiled and stopped us, putting a garland around each of our necks. For Clancy two, for me one.

Each night at sunset on the Ganges ghat, Hindus gather and seven Brahmins say prayers. We stayed for a lot of that. It was beautiful but temperatures were high (maybe 104 degrees Fahrenheit), and it had been a long day. We took our garlands down and put them into the Ganges. As we came back up the steps, our guide pointed to a small room.

“That’s a very important Shiva temple, too,” he said. “The lingam inside is 1,000 years old.”

Clancy had no small bills for offerings. It is impossible to get change, and I knew I couldn’t get away with Donald Trump spirituality twice. But I wanted to go. Our guide read the situation and went and bought us each a ten-rupee offering. We went inside.

I think going to India to get married by a guru after you have known someone a month is about the craziest thing you can do. But how about I do you one better. Clancy and I made our offerings. I went in first, but a paṇḍit caught Clancy at the door, washed his hands, brought him to the lingam, told him to touch it, and then sat him down and gave him a long blessing. He wrapped a red and saffron bracelet elegantly around Clancy’s right wrist. Two or three other devotees were in the temple, and they asked me about myself and made an expression of sympathy because I had not received this holy man’s attention. I could see from their devotion and from his appearance that he was authentic. I also felt he was special. When Clancy joined me he saw my face and made me a bracelet too, more cursorily, so I would not feel left out.

I sat beside Clancy and said, “Should we have him marry us?” Clancy said yes. He got down before the man and asked, “Will you marry us?”

“Why not?” We both kneeled before him, he said a simple prayer in English, and baffled we came out—15 minutes had passed, the prayers were over—and walked the mile to our car in the throngs, dazed.

Clancy said, “I feel like I have taken a drug.” “I know,” I said. “What happened?”

Here I had come all the way to India to be married by my guru and... Well, I still could, I reasoned. I put it out of my mind.

The next day, Clancy and I stayed at the hotel. We went for a dip. We ordered Diet Cokes and Clancy asked the server the meaning of his name.

The server’s English wasn’t good, but he explained it was the name of the man who had prayed to Shiva to stem the Ganges’s flow. Clancy asked the server about the tattoo on his forehead, and he told him what that was. Seeing our interest was unfeigned, the server said, “You can say the Shiva mantra: *Om Namō Shivaya*.”

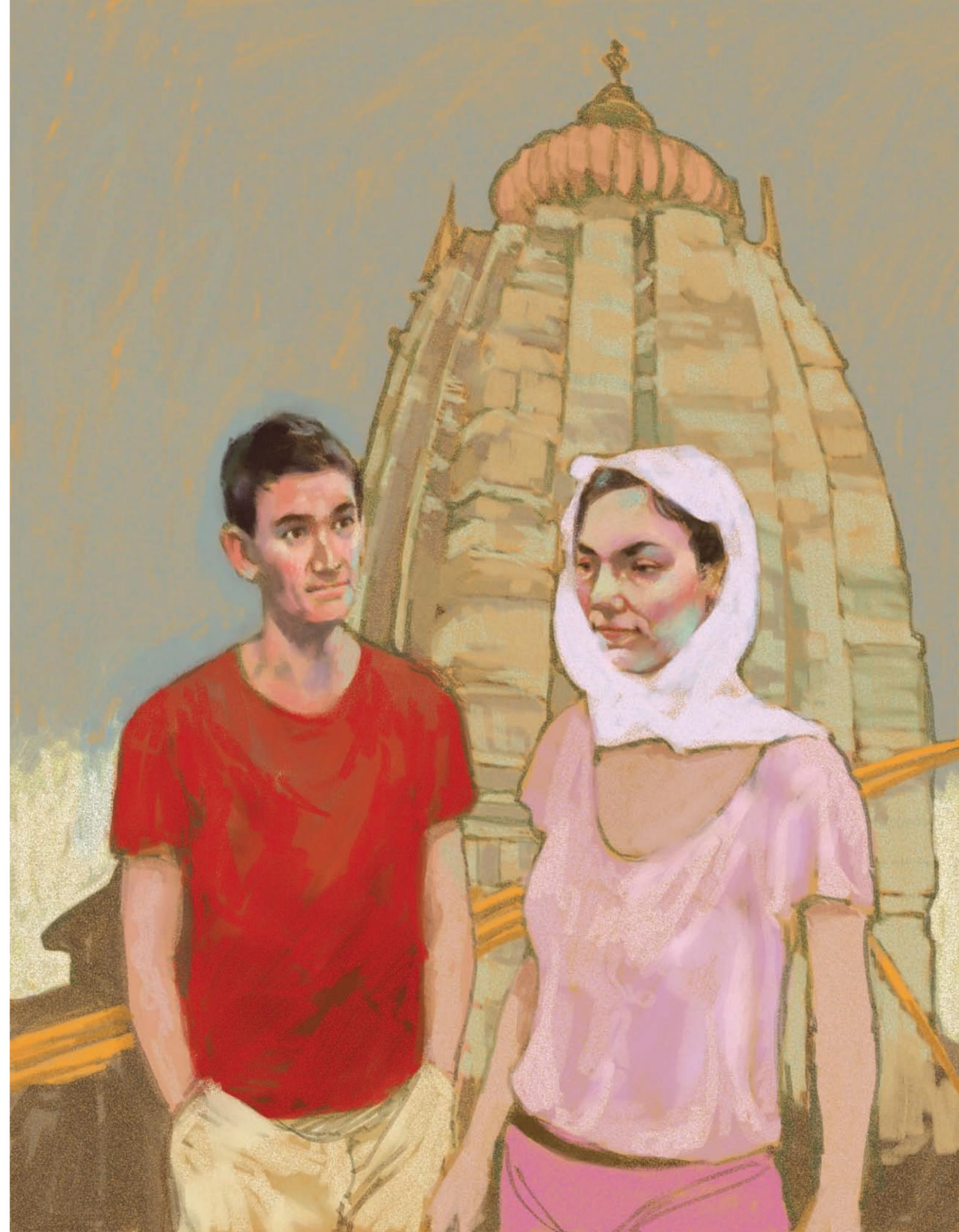
Clancy turned to me: “That’s my mantra. I’ve said it a hundred thousand times if I’ve said it once.”

“How come you never told me?” “I did—remember, the professor asked me to translate it.”

“But you said it means, ‘May God make everything go right.’”

“What does it mean?” “Well, I don’t know. But for us, *Namō* means ‘I take refuge in.’ *I take refuge in Shiva*.”

Clancy—who has many times suffered my theory on his father, whom I never met, of course—said, “Maybe you better not write about this.”



Part II Clancy's Facts

We argued about the wedding rings in the back of a truck on a narrow cliffside road from Kalpa to Kaza. The Spiti River was far below us. We passed an enormous dam-construction project.

"See that?" I said. "All of this will be covered by the river one day. Even this road."

"How do you know that?"

"The rock. Look at the way the rock is scored. See all those holes?"

I didn't know, and later I learned I was wrong: We were on the new road. The old road would one day be underneath the river, but this road was dynamited out above the expected waterline. Our driver didn't speak any English so I didn't have to worry about being corrected.

Amie couldn't stop looking at our hands. She held my hand with hers and then took her hand away. Then she held her hand next to my hand. Then she extended her ring finger and watched my ring finger. Then she held her fingers tightly together.

"I love your rings," she said. "Do you like my ring?"

"Do you wish you had a silver ring too?"

We'd made two trips to the jeweler in Kalpa. In the first round, he'd made us two gold rings, which Amie had wanted to like but didn't. So the next day we called the jeweler to our little hotel,

A problem we had in common is that we did everything at once. We are both impatient, hot-tempered people.

and in the dining room the owner of the hotel explained what we wanted. By the expression on the jeweler's face and the way he nodded his head I could see his profits shrinking. But I didn't feel bad about it because I knew he had overcharged us. They were simple half-round gold bands rolled out and soldered at the ends. Any jeweler could make them in an hour.

When we went to his house to get the second set of bands—this time I'd asked him to make me a band from silver, too, so that I'd have a band to represent my daughters and Amie's mother, to wear next to my wedding ring—we sat on the floor of his one-room home and haggled. According to the plan Amie had devised before we came in, she pretended to be unhappy with the rings. We couldn't speak, so he entered numbers into a little calculator and showed them to me, and then I punched away at the calculator and showed it to him. We settled on a price. It was a much better price than what we had paid the day before.

Outside I asked Amie whether she liked the new, fully round rings. They were much heavier than the first set and looked handmade. The color was also richer. (This set cost twice as much as the first, but the jeweler's profit was much less.) The rings she hadn't liked had been the kind of band you might see in any jewelry store in the States.

"I love them," she said. Her sincerity was obvious. She was excited and kept admiring the ring on her hand.

"Let's wear them," she said. "Let's keep them on."

"You want to?"

She nodded. She understood she was making me happy. All through the trip there was an understanding between us that I wanted to get married more than she did. It was one of those

couples' unspoken understandings. We had decided we weren't going to wear the rings until her guru married us, even though we had already married in an impromptu ceremony in a Shiva temple on the banks of the Ganges in Benares.

Now, in the car, the next morning, she liked my rings but not her own.

We'd both taken Valium for the drive—it's an excellent antinausea drug, and I take it daily for my alcoholism—but our stomachs were still queasy. We were in the Himalayas, above the tree line, in the rocks and the dust, and the driver switched back and forth, up and down, on the bumpy road.

We'd been traveling through India on a Buddhist pilgrimage for about two weeks and were on the way to the monastery, where, if things went according to plan, her guru would marry us a second time.

Like me, Amie has a great love of expensive things. I had first proposed to Amie because of the ring we'd seen in Barney's—it looked so natural on her hand, and we both understood something about our future together when we saw it on her finger—and now again it was the rings, and we were married but we weren't married, just as we'd been engaged but not engaged, because I couldn't afford to buy her the ring I'd first proposed with, just outside the luxury department store.

The second time I proposed was at a Mexican food place in Seattle, on the patio, where I was watching the bar to see whether I could sneak a drink. I tried to talk her into having margaritas.

The third time I was on both knees on Broadway Boulevard in Kansas City, outside the jeweler's where we had her great-grandmother's ring sized to fit on her ring finger. Amie was embarrassed and told me to get up. She said yes all three times, so I'm not sure why I kept proposing. I suppose it was because I still had not purchased a proper engagement ring for her.

Amie fell asleep on the road with her head in my lap. We had stopped for lunch at a roadside campsite where the bathroom was at the back of a tent furnished with a bed and a bedside table and a lamp—a very nice tent, we later understood. She had insisted that we find an ancient monastery at Nako that was famous for its 1,000-year-old Buddhist religious paintings, called *thangkas*. The driver and I understood—silently, between us—that if we stopped at the temple we would never make it to Kaza before night. It was not the sort of road either of us wanted to drive after dark. So he did not look over his shoulder to wonder whether he should look for the temple, and I did not tap him on the shoulder to remind him that we were supposed to find the temple.

The driver honked his horn. In the mountains you honk your horn before every turn. As we made the curve he swerved to avoid a truck. Amie sat up. She blinked and took a sip of water.

"You slept through a pretty part of the drive," I said. "It's beautiful up here."

There were waterfalls, icecaps, and strange towering rock formations that looked like the standing crypts of giants.

"I was tired."

We were both exhausted, even after our rest in Shimla and Kalpa. We'd been driving and driving. We were also both writing, and we hadn't stopped moving since we'd come to India. And we were newly engaged, and we'd quit drinking a couple of weeks before. A problem we had in common is that we did everything at once. We are both impatient, hot-tempered people.

"I really like your rings," she said.

So, I thought, she doesn't like the second set of rings.

"It's not that I don't love my ring, I do. It's just that I really love yours. Do you honestly think it looks nice on my hand?"

She extended her hand again.

"It's so elegant, Amie. It looks beautiful on your finger. Because of your long, narrow fingers. Look at it."

"You're right. Oh. I don't know."

She thought I was trying to sell her.

This is not about the rings, I thought. For her it was, but also it was not. It wasn't that it was confused in her head; the ring and the marriage were tied up together. In the 12th century many intellectuals and mystics saw the world as wholly allegorical. God's text. Amie can be that way.

At last we arrived in Kaza. I had suggested that we stay a couple of extra days in Kalpa, where our Swiss-chalet-style hotel room had floor-to-ceiling windows and tremendous views of the mountains. So we were two days late, and our hotel room at the Parasol in Kaza had been given away. The Parasol struck me as a friendly place. We needed that. Kaza was dusty and frightening. Dogs barked in the streets, and the town was desolate. On the face of a mountain someone had written *Om mani padme hūng* like graffiti in 100-foot-tall letters. It was a lonely place made of concrete, and I felt like if I got sick, they would put me onto a cot and carry me to a different hotel. The one we were taken to was bare and grubby. I lost my temper. It was Amie who had brought me to India. This was all her idea. Even the marriage she'd reluctantly agreed to that hadn't happened yet.

In bed I said, "Listen. If you'll forgive me for missing the *thangkas*, I'll forgive you for not liking your ring."

"What? I never said anything about not liking my ring."

"What?"

"You heard me."

There was a knock on the door. A boy came in with the four teas I had ordered. I asked him if they had fresh lime soda.

"With salt, sir?"

We continued the fight until our sodas arrived.

"You are always saying I don't want to marry you. I do want to marry you. I'm wearing the ring, aren't I?"

"You're wearing it, but you don't like it."

"I never said I didn't like it. You said I didn't like it. I do like it. I'm getting used to it."

"Oh, that's good. I'm glad you're getting used to it. Obviously you love it."

The fresh lime sodas smelled like bad eggs.

"They have sulfur in the salt here," Amie said.

"I know," I said, though I hadn't known. I drank my sodas quickly. "What do you want to do?"

"I want to check my email," she said. We hadn't checked our email in more than a week.

It was night. "The email place will be closed," I said.

"You say that like you know it, but you don't know. I'm going to sleep. I'm taking a shower and then going to sleep."

"Fine. Good for you. Have a nice shower, Amie."

In the middle of the night we rolled onto each other, and in the morning we made up.

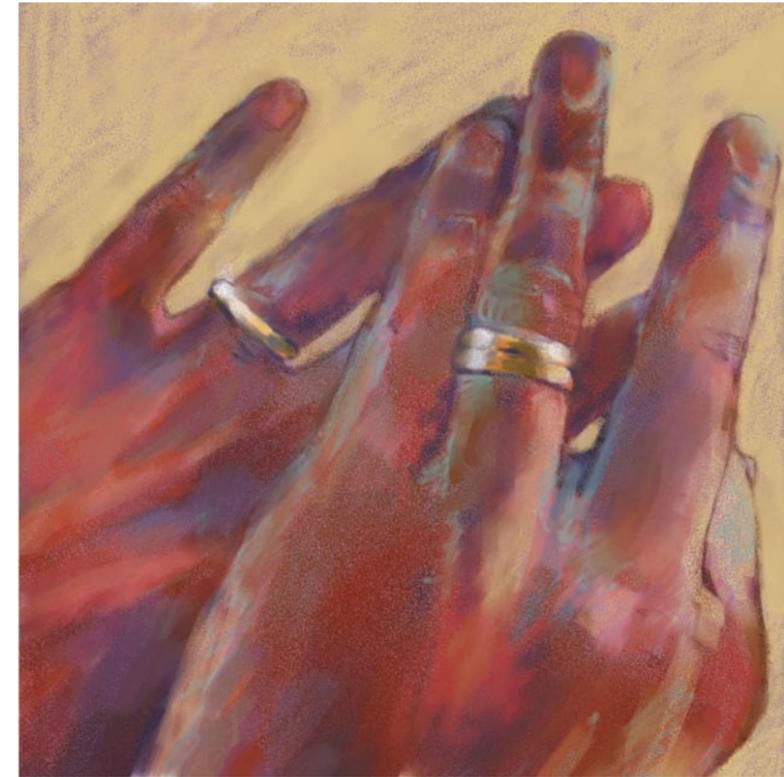
The next day we made it to the campsite below the monastery. We rode in a jeep alongside a deeply suntanned woman wearing a kind of robe, her hair in long braids, with cloth bags and dozens of crystals hanging from her neck. She waved at every Tibetan we passed on the mountain road, smiling with an aura of hysteria. She could have been from any country in the world—if she'd been a

dog, she would have been the perfect mutt—but Amie guessed she was French. She was wearing a lot of makeup.

"Classic woo-woo," I whispered to Amie. The crystal lady rolled down her window and shouted out greetings in Tibetan. "Blissed out," I continued. "That's what my dad always called people like that. God save us. Tell me they won't all be like that."

Amie shrugged. If she doesn't have anything nice to say, she tends not to say anything at all, unless it's to your face. Then she says whatever she damn well pleases, most of the time. I've seen her throw a chair at a woman who angered her.

When we arrived at the camp, things went from bad to worse. Our deluxe tent leaned to one side and was full of dust. The Himalayas stood all around us—bare rock and sand and ice. The campsite was desperate, out of place, and barely hanging on. We



pushed the beds in our tent together and piled our luggage in a corner. Amie was in a hurry to get to the *gompa* (temple). We asked Bishan, the short, handsome, muscular Tibetan mountain guide who ran the camp, how to get there. The other Westerners had already arrived and were up at the temple.

"You could wait until tomorrow," he explained. "I could make you something to eat."

"No," we said.

"You should eat something," he said. Then he pointed, showing us how to take the high path to the monastery. "Or you could take the road. There's a shortcut when you get below the monastery. But it's steep."

"We'd like a walk," I said. Amie had bought hiking shoes at REI and I had boots we'd found on sale at APC. I fell four times and was told by several people: "You should have hiking boots like Amie's." I'd agree.

After half an hour we arrived at the monastery. We climbed a wall and saw hundreds of Tibetans sitting on the ground in the hot sun. A voice was broadcasting from loudspeakers, reading quickly in Tibetan or Dzongkha.

“That’s Rinpoche’s voice,” Amie said. (It’s an honorific, pronounced, “Rin-poh-shay.”) Rinpoche was the man we had come to see. There was no reason for us to be here other than Rinpoche. We would not have come to India if Rinpoche had not been teaching for three weeks at the gumpa.

“Do we just go in, or?” The temple door was closed.

“No. I’m not sure,” Amie said. “Why don’t we just stay here?”

We sat in the sun. A tall, middle-aged Australian wearing aviators with leather flaps around the lenses approached us and said, “Eh, you know the sun can be murder here. Up in the mountains.”

I was annoyed. We moved, and I made a point of leaning my face back into the sun. I needed sun on my face.

Then the reading stopped, and Amie said, “Let’s see if we can go in,” and we stood on the steps as the doors opened. I stood beside her and pressed my palms together, as she did, and bowed my head. I noticed her looking up over her hands. There was a man about my own height, bald, about 50, unusually handsome, with eyes that seemed to see whatever he looked at—in this case, me—as opposed to the usual eyes that look while thinking, *Here I am, looking at this and Later I will eat a dumpling and I wanna rock your gypsy soul! Just like way back in the days of old.* He was wrapped in a scarlet robe, passing us on the steps. He looked at Amie curiously and then looked at me and then looked back at Amie and scowled.

We both knew the wedding in Benares had been a pretend wedding.

“That was Rinpoche,” she said, after he was gone. “What do you make of that?” She was smiling, because it was the first time she had seen her guru in a year—this was a man she’d loved since she was 11 years old, a kind of father to her—but underneath her smile was disappointment, suspicion, or relief. I didn’t know which. Maybe it was all three. She was off the hook. But whatever he was telling her about me, it wasn’t good.

A few nights after we arrived I had a dream. I asked a monk whether I could talk to Rinpoche. He told me he was sorry, but Rinpoche was very busy. I asked again, and he said no, again. Then I asked a third time and said I just needed two minutes. Rinpoche came over.

“You want to know why I won’t marry you and Amie.” I nodded, and he continued, “It’s hard to explain.”

I said, “OK,” and started to walk away, but he told me to wait. He turned to his attendant and asked whether he could see his necklace. I understood it was the necklace I’d seen on the strange, blissed-out woman from before.

The attendant said, “I can go and get it.”

“No need,” Rinpoche said, and he noticed the bracelet I had given to Amie for her birthday a few months before. It has 14 quartz crystals protruding from it like teeth.

Rinpoche said people were sort of like the bracelet. He pointed at it and said, “My Amie is like this.” All the crystals lit up but two. “You just have these lit up,” he said, and he looked at me very gently and kindly. Only a few crystals illuminated. He said, “I’m trying to figure out whether it will be too hard for her.”

When I told Amie the next morning she cried, and then she said it was all just a dream.

Several days passed. It was lunchtime, and we were sitting outside the temple in a courtyard with our legs dangling off a high stone wall, eating curried vegetables out of borrowed ceramic teacups. The crystal-necklace lady from the first day, who had rolled her window down to wave to Tibetans, sat next to us. We hadn’t seen her since day one. Amie told her she’d been in my dream. She asked to hear what the dream was. When I told her, she said, “I’ll give you both a crystal,” and began untying two.

We wanted to give her something in return. After she had walked away, Amie said, “I should give her my *gao*.” Her *gao* was a silver locket, about the size of a small pocket watch, that she’d worn ever since we’d met. It was filled with relics. I said, “Your *GAO*? You can’t give her your *gao*.” But oddly, I wanted her to. She hesitated, then insisted. She took it from her neck. I ran and gave it to the woman.

The next day, our new friend Jimmy, a gentle Taiwanese biochemist in expensive blue jeans, asked us to lunch. He was staying at the camp and had introduced himself to us the first night.

“I can’t stand to watch you eat out of teacups anymore,” he said. We liked him because he was funny, kind, intelligent, and ordinary, and so we told him we had asked Rinpoche to marry us. He asked if he could give us a gift. “I’ve been carrying this around in my pocket for a couple of years now,” he said. It was a golden *gao*, ringed with diamonds, holding emerald, ruby, and sapphire cabochons. I used to be a jeweler so I knew its approximate value, something around \$10,000. I put it on Amie’s neck.

Later, we fought in the tent.

“Look, it wasn’t me who asked Lama Jowo and Lama Godi if we should get married,” Amie said. “It was you and my mom.”

We fought in the tiny town outside the monastery, in the only place that served food.

“I thought you were certain. If we’re both uncertain, why are we doing this?”

We fought on the mountainside.

“I can’t believe my destiny is being controlled by a man I’ve never even met.”

We fought in the gumpa, on paper notes we passed back and forth.

“Did you or did you not ask Powo”—one of Rinpoche’s attendants—“to ask Rinpoche to marry us again?”

Amie had emailed Rinpoche asking him to marry us and also approached him from two other channels. But I had not seen what she had written, and I did not know what sort of reservations she might have expressed. The fact that she wasn’t insisting in the way that I wanted us to insist was further evidence of her lack of commitment to the whole project, as far as I could tell. We both knew the wedding in Benares had been a pretend wedding.

We’d now been in India for almost a month, and to me it looked like the wedding was not going to happen. More important, it was becoming obvious to me that only one of us wanted it to happen. The last two times I’d been married my brides had been enthusiastic—they were insistent, even. Both bride and groom are supposed to be enthusiastic and insistent. That was the idea. Now I was getting married for a third time to a woman who didn’t want to marry me by a Tibetan Buddhist lama who was ignoring me. Or rather, I wasn’t.

Praying in the temple, I made a deal with Rinpoche. He sat at the front of the gumpa, in a high seat on a dais, on red cushions, reading from a 14th-century Bhutanese Buddhist text, with an enormous golden statue of the Buddha behind him.

“Rinpoche,” I prayed—I was praying to Rinpoche for hours at a time because there was nothing else to do and we were there from six in the morning until five or six at night—“if you will marry us, I will tell Amie the truth about everything.”

I had in mind one particularly ugly lie I had told her: “You know you have a reputation. For being easy.” I told her this vicious lie while drunk. I had fallen off the wagon just before we first met, when we were still texting and phoning, and I didn’t remember telling the lie. She had mentioned it to me many times since, but I had never corrected it. I had tried to soften my lie in the cowardly way I have of backing away from things I do or say in a blackout. But I had never found the balls to tell her the truth.

That day, sitting in the temple, I continually asked Rinpoche: “What do I have to do to marry her?” And I continually heard what I already knew: “Don’t lie. Don’t cheat. Don’t drink.”

I understood what I had to tell her. But I didn’t want to. That evening on the hike back to camp from the temple, there on the mountainside where we had admired the wildflowers and fought and picked our way across mud and mountain streams like frightened, clumsy children, with me falling down and sliding toward a harrowing drop on my ass and my hands, I heard a voice in my head the way you sometimes do. I tried to negotiate with the voice, because Amie and I were already arguing again.

“Now is the worst time you could tell her,” I told myself. “Wait until she loves you again. She’s already angry. Don’t add insult to injury.”

“You better tell her. Otherwise, don’t expect anything.”

I stopped her and told her that I had lied. I also told her why I had told her. She forgave me. We stood on the side of the mountain and held each other. I was still surprised that I had told her. The sun was going down, and when we made it back to camp it was time to go to bed. I don’t think we ate anything, and I don’t remember whether we made love.

Those first nights and mornings in Pin Valley we made love so often—really trying our best to be quiet—that a friend in a neighboring tent complained. But the longer we were there, with the bad food and the bathing in buckets and the strange bugs and the constant dust and the hours and hours and hours in the monastery, the less energy we had for anything except writing and fighting.

Then we got sick. First Amie had a sore throat, then a high fever. She could barely move. The other Buddhists in the camp offered their hippie remedies: Chinese herbs, cinnamon from an Australian homeopath, rosemary oil. The camp leader, Bishan, sold me a jar of Himalayan berry distillation for \$20: a huge sum by Indian standards.

Amie just got sicker. She couldn’t leave the tent and had to pee in a bucket. She couldn’t eat and lived on bottled water, weak Indian painkillers, and the local apple juice. Then I caught it. One night she said, “Your skin burns to touch,” and I said, “Take me and put me in the river. I have to cool off.” This went on for days. We wobbled around the campsite while the others were gone, asking Bishan’s boys for garlic soup (available), chicken broth (unavailable), and plain rice (abundant).

At last Amie had had enough. We sent a note with Jimmy to Rinpoche. Amie wrote it. It said: “Rinpoche. Clancy and I are sick. Should we stay here or go to Bir? —Amie.” (Bir, in the Himalayan foothills, is where Rinpoche keeps a home and would be meeting the foreigners to give a few days of teaching in English after the Tibetan training at the monastery was complete.)

The next morning, Jimmy called from outside the tent. He unzipped the door.

“How you guys doing?”

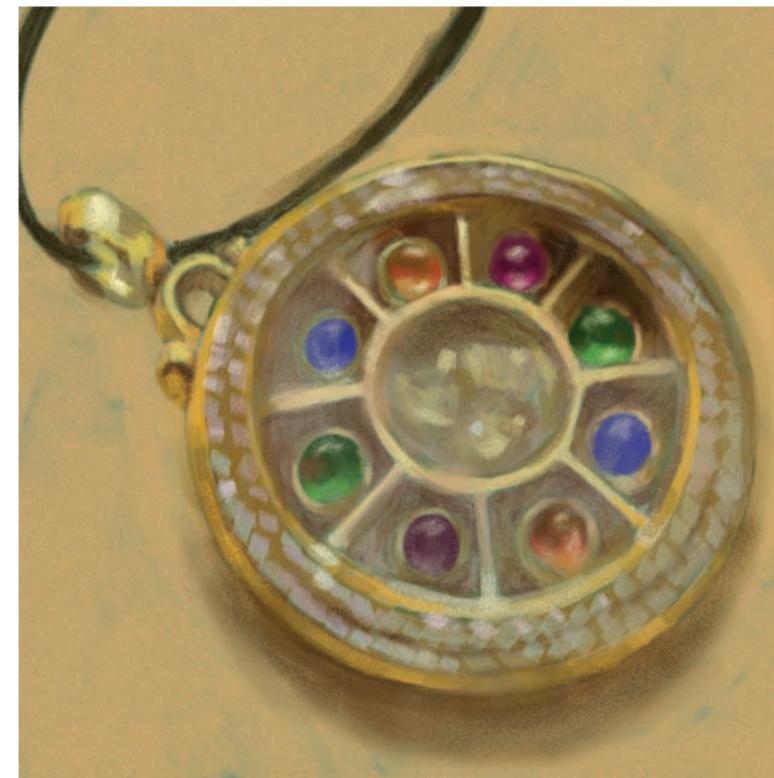
“Oh, you know, Jimmy. About the same.” By this time everyone believed we had the plague. The Australian homeopath had concluded it was malaria.

“I got an answer for you back from Rinpoche. I think it’s good news? He said you should go to Bir.”

Jimmy looked at us fearfully. I saw he expected us to be devastated. Amie was disappointed, but I was enormously relieved. In Bir they had hotels. They had restaurants. They had the internet, convenience stores, and coffee. They had a doctor. It was a town of a few hundred people, but it was civilization.

Then Jimmy added, “Oh, and Rinpoche said when he gets there, then he will marry you.”

Amie burst into tears.



On the day he married us in Bir, Rinpoche talked about Shiva (I am transcribing from notes Amie took on her phone):

“When Avalokiteśvara was a baby bodhisattva he said, ‘May my name alone inspire people. May it liberate them.’ And it is like that. In China, in the middle of some Taoist shrine, you will see a statue of Avalokiteśvara. Some people may disagree with me, but one of his manifestations is Shiva.

“I guess, Shiva sat at Buddha’s feet, and he said, ‘Teach me something new, teach me something that you never taught anybody else.’ He sat and said, ‘When I stand up I want to be enlightened.’

“Buddha said, ‘OK,’ and he brought Uma”—the goddess who would become Shiva’s lover—“and he said, ‘First you have to fall in love.’ Because when you are in love, everything is pink, and then you are a perfect vehicle for the Tantra.

“So Shiva stood up, pinned the moon into his hair, wrapped a cobra like a scarf, and went out to find his market—how to sell himself. And his market is desire.”

TELL US ABOUT YOUR TATS!



EVERY TATTOO tells a story and has a story—that's two stories per tat! So every month we stop someone on the street and ask them to "tell us 'bout them tats!" We even say it just like that, with a southern accent. It gets people to open up. This month we stopped Gordon Penniweather in Park Slope, and he filled us in on the story behind a few of his many tats.

Thanks, Gordon—for the great stories and the cool tats!

THE SUSSMAN BACK TAT

"Basically, I was drunk and made a bet on a baseball game with some guy in a bar. Can't remember his first name, but his last name was Sussman. Funny story—we almost got into a fight because he was talking shit about my beloved White Sox, and in the course of stepping outside to hammer each other, we started laughing because I realized he was talking shit about the Red Sox, who I also hate. There and then we decided to bro down by getting tats and spent the whole night in an all-night tattoo parlor with me getting his face on my back. We were supposed to meet up again the next night to get my face on his back, but... never happened."

THE "TONIGHT" ARM

"This is my masterpiece-in-progress. Every time I have a dream I get an image from it added to this arm. First I get drunk. Then I go to the tattoo shop and see what I can afford, and what I can remember from the dream I had. The "Tonight" tat is from a dream where I was trying to remember to do something that night. The homeward ship is from a nightmare where I was seasick and couldn't get home. The torn-and-threaded heart is from a dream where I had to do surgery on myself and didn't do a good job at it. The spiderweb/fan is a design I saw in a tattoo parlor in a dream, and then I went to a parlor in real life and there it was! The shark and the crazy turtle are from a dream about a shark and turtle who were friends, and the turtle was kind of crazy. That was a funny dream—I was drunk when I had it and I woke up to find I'd lost a bet to see who could stay awake the longest."

THE "START TODAY" ARM

"These three tats are actually connected. First, the bird happened. I was drunk and won a bet—this was at a poker game held in a tattoo shop. Anyway, some asswipe didn't have the cash to cover his raise so he used his credit card to reimburse me for my win and let me pick any tattoo I wanted from a certain section. I wanted the Dude from *Lebowski*, but that cost too much. My girlfriend at the time was kind of cuckoo, so she chose the bird. Below that is the girlfriend—I can't remember her name. It might have been Birdy or... Bethany? Something. She HAD a name, I know that much. I got it so I'd always remember who had picked out the bird tattoo. The "Start Today" thing on my wrist is a reminder to start saving to have tattoo-removal surgery done on most of my body. Pretty funny, if you think about it. I try not to think about it."

BY BOB ODENKIRK, PHOTOS BY DAN MEYER

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L'I'L THINKS: ME VS. "ME"

BY KATE CARRAWAY, ILLUSTRATION BY PENELOPE GAZIN



Kate Carraway writes the weekly Girl News column for VICE.com.

I've never had an abortion, but I've been to a few. They are or are not a big deal depending on a few things, like, how much religious or sexual dogma was absorbed before the age of majority, or whenever a girl double-middle-fingered her origin story and peeled the fuck out of there. It also probably depends on how bloodily nightmarish said dogma was, and on whether you believe that abortion is murder but an OK kind of murder or an almost nothing or *whatever*. But I don't actually know anything about abortions, and I don't want to, because it's probably not much different from but probably worse than touching my eyeball, and I hate that.

It doesn't matter, but it does necessarily exclude me from a subset of my feminist sistren [*splits*] who are very into their I HAD AN ABORTION T-shirts, and the ways in which their collectivized experience gives other people the squiggles, which is all fine—totally fine—and I do all of that all the time about having been raped: all code words behind whisper fingers with other girls who *know*. When you have an essential interest

because you chose it or were born into it, or because something happened to you that was like a rushing wave of surgical knives, you will want to be somehow among your similars, getting empathically inebriated. (Twitter is a good place to see this play out without self-consciousness.)

Minitribes like those within feminism are just how feminism has always been (Fun Fact: Did you know that when black men became legal "people" in the US some feminists were like, "I'm fucking out"?) and continues to be (I'm curious: Are there still racist-cunt feminists?), and having it out with the other minitribes is how a tribe-tribe—or a big tribe, aka an interest group of any variety—checks itself (which feminism *sooooooort* of does when it comes to racism and classism), rebalances itself, and maybe moves forward. Slowly, like a hungover baby turtle, but forward all the same. That's the whole idea of ideology and democracy.

It's not just theoretically right, it's in the strategic self-interest of interest groups to be out for themselves as

a whole and get both mad at and cozy with different and similar versions of itself, to get and do stuff. That's politics, parties, PACs, Super PACs, and any of the more realistic, slow-moving agents of baby-turtle progress—they're all for something. I'm not a Democrat or a Republican (being Canadian exempts me from having to align myself with either party and their particular wrongnesses and rightnesses), but I'm very glitter-starry-eyed about any founding principle that uses capital of any variety for good. It is righteous and balls-out to say that shit, to build on it. It's still me-ness, but the "me" is everybody. (Is that a new majestic plural? The royal me?)

Where all of this changes, though, is when the tribe, mini or regular type, is sort of collectively abandoned during an election. As maybe half-conscious but absolutely full members of social, cultural, economic, etc., etc., etc. tribes, it follows that people might vote accordingly, but that's without taking into account the voodoo of the voting booth. What happens in there? Instead of the maintaining of tribal ties, what seems to inform and compel voters, especially the votes that swing on some single, private, and unknowable thing of candy beans, is a strange alchemy of the often-conflicting forces of aspirationalism and relatability.

That's cool—do what you feel, right?—but it does, objectively, transgress the otherwise so-solid boundaries of the minitribes and tribes. Call it disassociative identity politics. That's when anyone—not just poor people, not just not-white people, not just women—decides to cast a Hail Mary vote, maybe on the basis of likability or on some imagined basis of a very different Future Me or something, thus avoiding the participatory requirement of their minitribe in the most essential moment of being among one.

Unless... maybe voting is the most essential moment of being alone, being the most "me," wanting or seeing something that is outside what the tribe sees, having a different essential interest that is not about rape or abortion or money or whatever. Maybe the essential interest that ultimately guides his decision isn't knowable, even to us, or to either kind of "me," and remains American exceptionalism—but of a subtler kind, where not participating how you're supposed to, or because you're supposed to, is the highest value.

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COMBOVER: DIRTY LAUNDRY

BY BRETT GELMAN, PHOTOS BY JANICZA BRAVO

Featuring Seth Morris



Another diversion. Tired of these. Got a call from Seth Morris asking for my service. This one's difficult. Used to be my best friend. My mentor, really. Taught me everything I know about the business. Helped me get my first assistant's job with Billy Wilder. Then the white dragon set him on fire. And before I knew it, I was his own personal ATM. I like to help him out. I feel too guilty if I don't. But I'm growing tired of it.

The white dragon's still lighting him ablaze. Along with several other dragons. It's like a dragon Seder in his body and mind. I have no illusions of where my money goes. I meet him at the laundromat by his apartment. He looks like my nightmares of what I could become. And he sounds even worse. Maybe I shouldn't give him the money this time. Maybe I'm helping to make a bad situation worse.

I get to the laundromat. Kind of place that looks like it'll make your clothes dirtier. Seth smiles. We hug. He smells like sissy. He dances into his con like he's Gene Kelly.

"I was doing real good, Combover. Honest I was. I wasn't even takin' Nyquil when I got a cold. I was doing *that* good. But you know how my brother died two years ago, right? Hit by a train and all that... Well, I got to thinking about it and my nose started to tickle something awful, and my lungs started aching, and my arms started screaming for something.

"You know how it is, Combover. This business is rough. I know I haven't really been on the front lines lately, but I feel it. I feel it hard. I've been having a tough time. The other day some old weirdo paid me 20 bucks to let his dog lick Cheez Whiz out of my ass while he jerked off on the dog. Then I had to shampoo the dog, brush its teeth, and everything. Even worse, the dog's a biter. Don't like hands near its mouth and bit me on the thigh somethin' awful.

"That turned into a huge infection and I got real sick. Went to this back-alley doctor and he told me he had to operate. He put me under, and when I wake up I don't know for sure but I think he fisted me. Either that or he was some kind of alien looking to probe junkies. Not that I believe in aliens, nor do I consider myself a junky. I'm not a junky. Unless of course you take the *j* and replace it with an *f*.

"I been sleeping in the dryers here. Legal, of course. Owner lets me do it if I fuck his wife so he can go out and do God knows what without her noticing. I showed up pretending to be a Bible salesman, 'cause apparently she's all crazy religious. Every time we fuck... the whole time she's screaming, 'We're going to hell! We're going straight to burning hell!' I can't tell you what I gotta think about to keep my wang hard inside her.

"I think I got problems with my spine. You know, from sleeping in the dryer. One night I overslept and some kids came in the morning and turned it on. You don't need to be in there long to get thoroughly knocked around. Plus, my back is already bad on account of what happened last November when those frat boys told me that part of their hazing was that they had to fuck a homeless guy. Told me they'd give me 50 bucks to let 'em take rounds on my ass. We went under the bridge, and then they remembered that they got the hazing wrong. It wasn't 'fucking' a homeless guy; it was actually 'breaking' a homeless guy. I got chained and whipped within an inch of my life. And after they left, one of them came back and fucked me anyway. I figure, hey, at least some pleasure was involved. But not for me...

"But listen, Combover, I'm clean now. I'm fine. I just need a couple Frankies to pay my rent and eat a little something. Plus I got a big project brewing that's gonna put me back on top. It's called *Crocodile Monkey*, all about a croc who gets injected with some monkey genes and gets a lot smaller and more human-like... well, really more monkeylike, but whatever. So you got a croc looking at the world the way an ape would look at it."

"JUST TAKE THE MONEY, SETH! JUST TAKE THE MONEY AND SHUT UP!"

I'm tired of these diversions.

This is the seventh chapter of Combover, Brett Gelman's new novel about Hollywood, the beauty of the Jewish tradition, baldness, and murder. We will be serializing it throughout the rest of the year. Read the previous installments at VICE.com.



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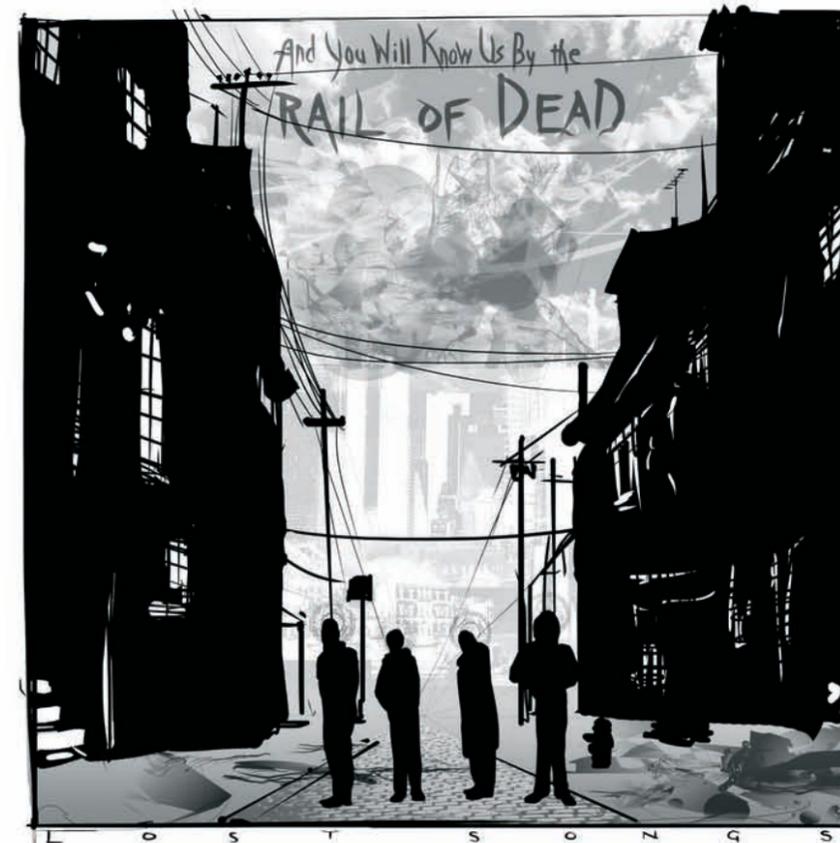
THE CUTE SHOW PAGE!

BY ELLIS JONES, PHOTO BY WILL LEW

Wiener Dog Races!

To see more costumed dachshunds compete, check out the newest episode of The Cute Show!, now playing on VICE.com.

Dachshunds were originally bred in Germany to hunt badgers, but now that we have grocery stores and vermin-control services, most people who aren't of royal blood or complete bumpkins frown on running down and killing innocent animals with packs of other animals. Luckily, we found a better purpose for these sausage-shaped dogs: dressing them up like monkeys, lizards, and French people. And we can thank Montreal for this important innovation in adorability. In August, the city held its fifth annual wiener-dog race day, which included costumes, snacks, and lively competitions like "Seriously Stupid Pet Tricks." Prizes were awarded for the fastest runner, best costume, and bobbing for wieners—that's like bobbing for apples but with dogs and cocktail wieners, and it's as amazing as it sounds. Watching all those wiener dogs stuff wieners in their little wiener mouths was 100 times better than all the movies released in the past year put together, and I'd have no problem doing this every day for the rest of my life.



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ANAL LESSONS

Dir: Mike Adriano
Rating: 10

MikeAdriano.com/
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Are there scouts in the porn business like in baseball who travel the minor-league circuit looking for the next big star? If so, I think that's what I'd like to do when I grow up. I feel that I have an eye for who is and isn't slutty, and this goes far beyond my default fantasy of "Well, she's got a mouth, she's got to be slutty." Like a batter, there are a lot of telltale signs. Instead of hip movement or bat swing, first check the eyes. Are they slowly scanning the room, seeking something? If so, most likely you have a good case of daddy issues on your hands and she's probably a nice prospect.

As I've said in the past, tattoos are the quickest indication that a gal likes anal. Is she covered in ink? Chances are she loves it in the ass and prefers it there first. Freud tied the whole yearning-for-pain thing back to the loss of virginity in his book about porn; I forget what it was called.

The young lady above is named Christy Mack, and I wish I were the scout who found her in Indianapolis. Aside from the necessary three holes, she's got all the attributes needed to play in the big leagues: attitude, a unique look, and big tits. I don't know who the (not dead) George Steinbrenner of porn is, but I can imagine calling him from my cell phone in the parking lot of the Brass Flamingo or whatever club I found Ms. Mack patronizing, and saying, "I just found your next Derek Jeter (of butt sex)."

I always wanted to own my own Brass Flamingo. From the moment I walked into my first strip club—smelling the coconut lotion and pressing my head to a stripper's vagina in the champagne room and hearing the

ocean—I knew it was the tropical locale where I wanted to live out my days in retirement. At the time we were at war with someone in the Middle East, and I remember thinking that the Gaza Strip would be a great name for a strip club, but as I traveled more I realized it was important to come up with the basest name possible to attract the sort of clientele who frequent such places: Tit World, Ass Palace, and Place to Look at Pussy (PtLaP) were quickly added to the list of possible names.

Then I moved to Cincinnati for nine long months and ballooned from 135 to 215 pounds. While living there I went to Sudsy Malone's, a local rock venue/laundromat, and that's when it hit me: Open a titty bar in a college town where you can pay the girls to do your laundry and give you a lap dance. I'd call it the Muff 'n' Fold. Every year I'd get a new crop of girls who honestly and truly were just trying to put themselves through college. If they were unsure of what occupation to pursue, and if they had the right stuff, perhaps I could suggest to them a fun and exciting life in the not-at-all seedy world of pornography. I envisioned it as a wholesale family business with my sons recruiting the prospects for training camp, me scouting for the bigs, and my wife making sure the girls knew how to do laundry because I have no idea how that works. I tried once and flooded the entire basement with suds. Then again, they love those foam parties in Ibiza. Maybe that wouldn't be such a bad idea.

More stupid can be found at ChrisNieratko.com and twitter.com/Nieratko. Also, check out the Skinema show now on VICE.com.



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KING DUDE IS THE KING OF DUDES

Because He Makes Fun Satanic T-Shirts and Music

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATION BY NICK GAZIN

TJ. Cowgill, the guy who runs the clothing label Actual Pain, also performs music under the name King Dude. He's the most optimistic, friendly Luciferian we know, a declaration made all the more powerful by his new record, *Burning Daylight*, which is out this month. It's filled with upbeat, folksy songs with horrifyingly grim lyrics, and a few dirgelike tracks sprinkled in for good measure. I wanted to talk to him about his new album, so I called him up because I'm a "journalist." Pretty neat how I can just do that, huh?

VICE: Why's the new record called *Burning Daylight*? Is it about being aware of the limited time you have left to breathe, or is it more that it's a pretty bit of imagery?

T.J. Cowgill: It's both. The record is about having time against you, so all the stories and characters have a serious desperate vibe to them. I like to think of the subject as times when shit is so bad you don't even notice how beautiful the daylight is, or how obsessions drive people to do something so fiercely that they don't see the good things around them.

There is a lot of the sound of whooshing wind on this record, especially on the first song.

The first track is the sound of a massive house fire I sampled from some home video I found on the internet. I do a lot of field recordings as well, and those always end up on my records. Like on this newest one there are recordings of church bells from Stuttgart, a train in Italy, a broken bathroom fan at this Vietnamese restaurant called Ballet by our office, and more, I'm sure. That's just what I remember off the top of my head.

You cut your hair since the last time I interviewed you. Why'd you do that?

As I'm sure you remember, it was really long. It got stuck in a car door once, and that was it for me. I donated it to Locks of Love, and they sent me a certificate of appreciation, which was really nice. I like to think of the little kid with cancer who has my hair stapled to her head. If she only knew where that hair has been. Besides, it's fun to drastically change your look from time to time. It makes it easier to index your past and avoid annoying people in public.

Somehow you were conned into designing a T-shirt for VICE. What's it going to look like?

I don't know. I try not to think about my designs too much before I sit down to make them. I suppose it would have to be kind of funny since VICE is a comedy magazine. Maybe you could help me design it? I could hire you to do it, and then it'd be like you paying me to pay you to draw your own shirt. That's pretty funny already.

I guess. What's your process usually like when you're designing a shirt?

I usually start with an intention or a feeling, more than an idea of an image that I am going to put on a shirt. Normally I will find something that inspires me to make a series of designs, most often an old book. Then I work on an entire season at once, designing about 13 to 20 images. Our seasons have general themes or intentions, which guide me along in the process. I find that very helpful in deciding what makes the final cut. It's the same process I use when writing music. *VICE*



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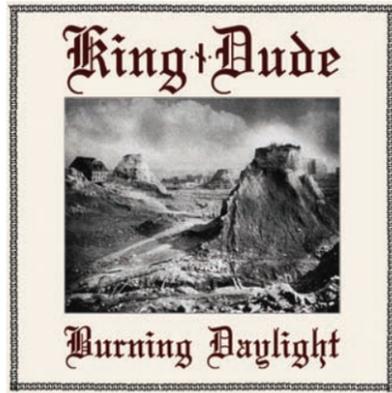
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A
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DONNIS
Break Hundreds & Hearts
Fool's Gold

Oh, so this is what we're doing now? Rappers rapping over crazy-ass dance beats and shit? Yeah, OK, I can fuck with this. Donnis had previously been about as interesting as hair gel, but holy fuck is he onto something now. It seems like he finally gave up on trying to be the next David Banner and now just wants to be the southern Danny Brown. We ain't mad at that shit. We happy at that shit. Pop somethin', roll somethin', and get twisted, my dude.
RAY ANASTASIO



KIRKO BANGZ
Procrastination Kills 4
Warner Brothers

I think about Kirko Bangz a lot, mostly about how his lips look like they'd feel nice wrapped around a vagina. He mostly raps about nonsense, like jewelry and beverages, which is on that silly-urban kick a lot of rappers are throwing out there these days. But that's not what I'm thinking about while listening to this mix tape—I'm thinking about making the sex, furiously and many times in a row. Let's be honest with each other. Let's just be real here. I bet this guy's dick looks like a tube of cookie dough.
HOT GYNO



MAIN ATTRAKIONZ
Bossalinis & Fooliyones
Young One

The title of this album irks me because it looks like it might be some garbaggio Bloodhound Gang, quasi-mafia bullshit, and the music is so far from that. One of the biggest pluses with these dudes is that

**BEST ALBUM OF THE MONTH:
KING DUDE**

they pick beats like cheap broads looking for wholesale designer wear at Century 21. There's some sort of strange science behind it, and yet it was disappointing as hell to see that Clams Casino didn't produce a single track on this one. (Are they internet beefing or something?) They did find some good replacements like Joe Wax on "Cloud Life" and La Musica de Harry Fraud on "Do It for the Bay" and "24th Hour." You better run like hell from this project if you're looking for some backpacketty lyrical exercising, because there's a shit-ton of "bounce and smoke an ounce to this" all over this. Whoever said hip-hop had to be so goddamn serious anyway?
KATHY IANDOLI



BLACK MARBLE
A Different Arrangement
Hardly Art

Certain bands were made for fall and winter, and this is one of them. Carry this around and put it on and stare out the window, letting your eyes go numb and dead in a pile of damp, fallen leaves. Really sink down, put a blanket over your head, and pretend like you can smell snow, even when there isn't any. Get real *Harold and Maude* about it.
KELLY KELLY



COLD SHOWERS
Love and Regret
Dais

I listen to this and all I can think about are starry night skies and motorcycles in the desert and razor blades and smooching hot babes in the bathtub between cigarette puffs and, like, really cool boots and Kiefer Sutherland in *The Last Boys* and, honestly, I give this an A-fucking-plus. I want it all around me, wrapped around my neck like a thick, gothy anaconda strangling the life out of me. I want the anaconda to have Kiefer's head and I want it to breathe hot pink vapor all over my

body. Take me, Cold Showers, take me to your postpunk heaven draped in dark gossamer. I'm yours.
OJ SIMPSON



BOYS NOIZE
Out of the Black
Self-released

There's no way to draw a cute little face for this level of barfiness, which is reserved for that feeling when you're lounging around in boxer shorts, with no undies on underneath, just having an easy-breezy day, and then your vagina throws up all over the chair you're sitting on, and you're like, "FUCK!!!! Do I have bacterial vaginosis AGAIN???"
HEY SALLY



DIAMOND RINGS
Free Dimensional
Astralwerks

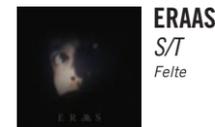
This guy looks like a homosexual teen trying his hand at David Bowie dress-up time in his mom's silk scarves and pajama pants. No, wait, he's like a baby seal covered in glitter, voguing. Saying we hate this would be like wiping our asses with a rainbow flag. Gotta pick your battles, ya know.
SOPHIE SAINT THOMAS



ELLIE GOULDING
Halcyon
Interscope

I first learned that Ellie Goulding could walk on water back in 2009 when I heard her cover of Sam Sparro's "Black and Gold." No fucks were given for the original (sorry), but Ellie's take on electronic music and in-betweeny folktronica is nothing short of brilliant. By the time her debut album, *Lights*, hit the States, everyone was swirling over the bastardization of "EDM," and the album's title track was enveloped in an accidental pop hug. Ellie could have turned her art into saccharin BS with her follow-up, *Halcyon*, but she

didn't. Instead she opted to perfect her sound on the title track, "Figure 8," "Dead in the Water," "Hanging On" (sans Tinie Tempah, please), and everywhere else. You can dance to her, you can eat your feelings to her, and then you can eat your feelings while dancing to her.
KATHY IANDOLI



ERAAS
S/T
Felte

If you play this record alone in your apartment at night and hiss "eraas" three times like a snake, Anthony Hopkins will appear dressed as an Orthodox priest and perform an exorcism on your tortured soul.
STONE Y SPICE



PAWS
Cokefloat!
FatCat

When you are in the middle of an itchy cock of a day, are an ass hair away from freaking out, and are making things a whole lot worse for yourself by stewing on shit, just calm your mind for a second and think about all the girls across the whole wide world who have to pretend to like their significant other's TERRIBLE FUCKING BANDS. It must be so exhausting.
BUTTHOLE SUNRISE



KING DUDE
Burning Daylight
Dais

Next time you're on a first date, at that point when you've run out of bullshit to talk about and the only reason to stick around is to get drunk enough to start violating each other's bodies, lean over to the person you're with and, real creepy-like, whisper this

**WORST ALBUM OF THE MONTH:
BRIGHT LITTLE FIELD**

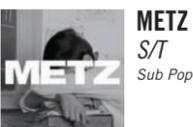


question into his or her ear: "If you were to ever tie someone up and kill them, what song would you put on while you did it?" Chances are your date won't have a chance to ask you the same in return, because the wuss will have already sprinted down the street, simultaneously tweeting about how much of a creep you are while filing a restraining order. If he or she does stick around to ask, you should probably get married. And your answer should definitely be "King Dude."
WOLFIE VIBES



PONTOONS
Slow
Self-released

I can't fully endorse this album because for the most part it's just random "college-sounding" music or sounds like some sort of introductory smart rock that you'd get into while sitting in your parents' basement, in between listening to the old albums and honing your own tastes. But I will give them this: They've got those little Lemonheads-esque vocal drops down. Maybe you don't know what I'm talking about, but if you do, then you do.
EMILY GILMORE



METZ
S/T
Sub Pop

Have you guys read that book *The Bad Guys Won!?* It's about the 1986 Mets championship team, and it's pretty incredible. Those dudes were the biggest bunch of rowdy, drug-addled creeps and goons, and all they did was drink, fuck, snort, and party... and, yeah, baseball. I guess I kind of let my understanding of the '86 Mets influence my expectations of Metz's *Metz*. Unfortunately, this record has nothing to do with partying. When I listen to this, I don't want to do anything fun. It's almost as if the band cracked some kind of surefire formula for getting anything remotely enjoyable out of their songs. These guys probably don't even like sports, and if you bring up sports in conversation, they probably complain about

how athletes are overpaid and steroids and the state of America and blah blah blah. Come on, Metz. Shut the fuck up already. Get your geeses loose. Get Metsmerized and come by to rip a few gankers with me.
LMFAO



NO DOUBT
Push and Shove
Interscope

Fuck no would we actually be reviewing a No Doubt album, and this came out last month anyway, but I just had to let everyone know that I had a dream that VICE columnist Kate Carraway tweeted that she deleted someone from her Facebook because they were shit-talking No Doubt. (Only it wasn't a dream; this actually happened in real life.)
KELLY MCCLURE



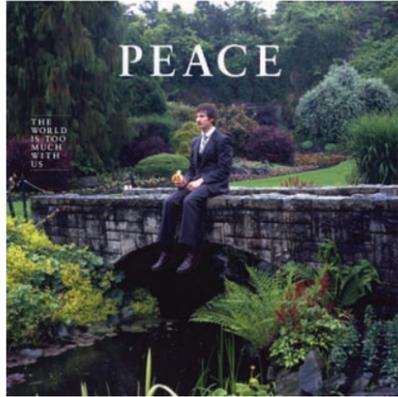
PEACE
The World Is Too Much with Us
Suicide Squeeze

About a month ago I stuck my arm in one of those blood-pressure machines, and it said I was fat and going to die soon. This album provides a similar sensation of constriction, making me feel slightly trapped and uncomfortable, but in a satisfying way. It's kind of like when you have to poop real bad but purposefully hold it in because you know the pooping will be that much more satisfying on account of the wait.
OJ SIMPSON



PAUL BANKS
Banks
Matador

Paul Banks is all over the place. First he's in Interpol, then he's Julian Plenti, and now he's like, "OK, fine, I'm just Paul Banks." Whatever the hell he wants to call himself, he knows how to write and play all the right notes. His music sounds like falling in love. Whatever. It's in print now. It's out there. Some



other doofus who writes for us tried to give this a bad review and we killed his body. Seriously. We murdered his life. He's done. Chum for the sharks, at the bottom of the Atlantic.
RANDOM SUPAMUDEL



CHELSEA WOLFE
Unknown Rooms
Sargent House

I've never gone out of my way to listen to anything labeled a "collection of acoustic songs" because I don't sell repurposed hair clippings on my Etsy shop, nor do I have any fucking idea what flax actually is, but I can get behind this in a big way. With every gravelly, misanthropic strum of phosphor bronze, Chelsea annihilates another coffee-shop open mic, another Starbucks playlist, another Barnes & Noble CD rack. Hey, baby. Let's hate the world together.
GIRL REPORTER



TALK NORMAL
Sunshine
Joyful Noise

A lot of these noisy girl bands really, really, really don't care what you think (for real, guys). Talk Normal is no different. They totally do not give a stinking shit if you "don't get it." They didn't want you as a fan anyway, bitch. Which is all good over here because you'd have to pay me in gold-plated orgasms to sit through this burning-pile-of-trash-on-the-side-of-a-road-in-Somalia in its entirety.
ALEX HOLMES



TY SEGALL
Twins
Drag City

In college, I shared a dorm room with Jim the Drug Dealer. Nitrous tank next to my bed, sheets of acid on the nightstand, 'shrooms in the freezer—that kind of stuff. Fucked up at all times, we

BEST COVER OF THE MONTH: PEACE

lived on Rice-a-Roni and Swedish Fish, listened to the Stooges, and aligned our chakras with magnets. San Francisco treat Ty Segall was there. He played swampy fuzz-garage rock for us, spat out some bratty Beatles-y "Tomorrow Never Knows" kinda vocals, and then sucked down a balloon. "That'll be \$2, please." Then his face melted onto his guitar like molten lava. Namaste, motherfuckers.
JENNIFER DARLING



MATT AND KIM
Lightning
Fader

Bands like this can't help but make me think of those late-night infomercials for *HOT JAMZ* CD collections—specifically, that one with the old dudes from Air Supply talking about the "mellow sounds of the 70s and 80s." How much you want to bet that 30 years from now we'll be falling asleep to the same shit, only this time it'll be hosted by the Shins, who will be sporting bald-guy ponytails and raving about all the mediocre, pussyfied songs of the 00s included on the *Faux Pos Puss Rock Queefz Volume 8* compilation, defined by its insincere optimism and spunk.
GORDON LIGHTDONG



MAC DEMARCO
2
Captured Tracks

Full disclosure: I've heard a lot about Mac Demarco, and even answered emails from, and about him, but I guess I've never actually listened to his music before now, because this doesn't sound anything like what I thought he'd sound like. This is all dreamy vocals and surfy, tin-toned guitars. I've heard stories about Mac getting drunk at shows and shoving drum sticks up his ass, so having that backstory in mind while listening to this makes it even better. Listening to sweet

singing is great when you can be pretty sure that the person singing it was thinking about something disgusting at the time.
KAYLE MAQLUE



MOUNTAIN GOATS
Transcendental Youth
Merge

I wonder if John Darnielle is talking in the mirror when he pushes out "Let people call you crazy for the choices that you make." I mean, have you seen his Twitter feed at all this year? He might be losing it a little bit. Also, he turned down an interview with us because he has "issues with our content." Why don't you air your foreskin out in the breeze and calm down there, buddy? Nobody likes dick cheese.
BECA GRIMM



TILLY AND THE WALL
Heavy Mood
Team Love

Fuck Tilly, fuck the wall, fuck "being whimsical," fuck Gregory Hines, fuck tap dancing, fuck this album, and fuck the Zoëy Deschanel movie that one of these songs will inevitably end up in.
HAN DOLO



ANDREW BIRD
Hands of Glory
Mom + Pop

There are so many funny stories to be told about Andrew Bird. If you've ever lived in Chicago, for any amount of time, you've probably seen him on the train or in Trader Joe's looking wistfully at the produce. One day my friend was like, "OMG, I just saw Andrew Bird holding a can of peas!" Remember when he played that concert and dropped his violin and everyone thought it was such a tragedy? I don't know what the big deal is with this birdy, or birds in general. Those sons of bitches are everywhere, just look up. I saw one

WORST COVER OF THE MONTH: PAWS



they fellated the young half-black boy who was being used as their BJ guinea pig. I'm sorry, Cody Chestnut, but all you'll ever be to me, and probably a lot of other people now, is that guy who almost soundtracked a pre-teen, tag-team blowjob, but then didn't. Off the top of my head though, this sounds like something nice someone's parents would really be able to stand behind.
HEY SALLY



MARTHA WAINWRIGHT
Come Home to Mama
Cooperative Music

Oh. It seems that someone lent Sheryl Crow a tUnE-yArDs CD. That was a nice gesture, I guess.
GIRL REPORTER



BAT FOR LASHES
The Haunted Man
EMI

I like this band, and I like this album, but I'm not exactly sure why. In general, you can listen to this and ponder pleasant things, but it won't make you really think about or feel anything, unless you're 17 (aka blissfully dumb). So it's good and safe. Play this after you break up with someone and everything else makes you want to put your head in fire.
HEY SALLY



BRIGHT LITTLE FIELD
Treatment Bound
Bar/None

This career-spanning uke-tribute to the Replacements would serve well in an attempt to get that alt-girl from youth group down with some over-the-Misfits-T-shirt action post-hayride or whatever. But this is weird, unnecessary, and leaves me

ioning for the originals to wash clean the sucky-scum residue left behind. It's possible the Bright Little Field covers could lasso in a few never-otherwise-would-be Westerbergheads, which is a redeemable concept in theory. I recommend you just listen to the actual Replacements instead.
BECA GRIMM



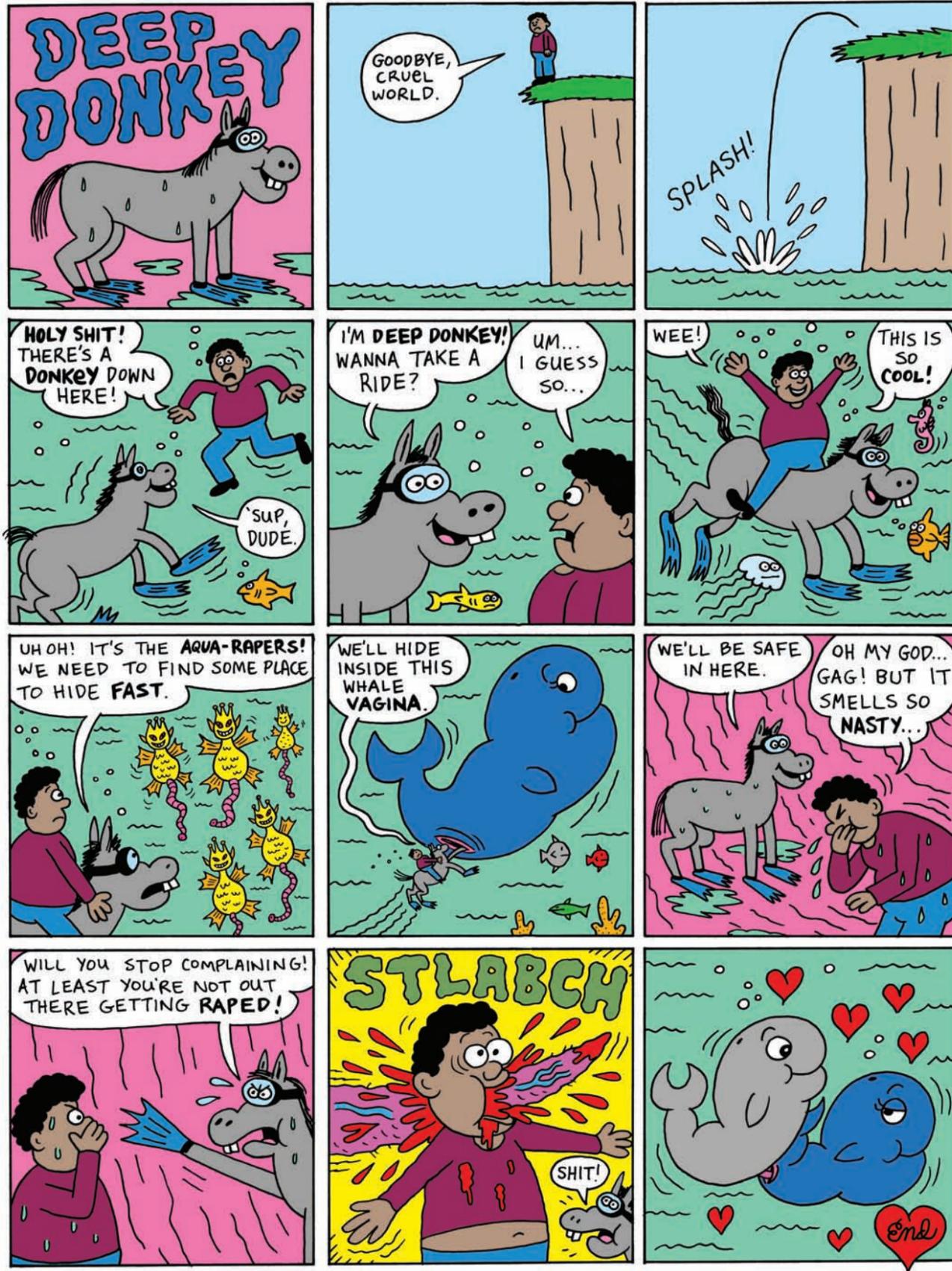
MIKA VAINIO
Fe304—Magnetite
Touch

Pan Sonic was part of that let's-see-if-we-can-make-the-audience-shit-themselves-with-this-freaky-sine-wave school of noise musicians who, granted, weren't ever much to look at but pursued a far nobler goal than their Whitehouse-biting counterparts, who were just doing it to yell a lot and get laid. Mika went a little off the rails when they split and started doing minimal glitch covers of Kate Bush under the name Ø, but this seems like he's prodigal-sonned his way back into the grumbling, swooshy drone game. Which is good because I've been eating a lot of cheese this week and am stopped up like a fairground port-a-john.
FÅIRGRØUND PØRTAJØHN



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Fifty Shades of Grey—The Classical Album
EMI

Do you ever find yourself in a situation where you're so eager to shit all over something that you're not even sure where to start? This is an album of classical songs personally selected by E.L. James, who wrote that ode to crusty-cunted housewives everywhere. But actually it's good that this is a thing, because if you're ever nosing around someone's iPod and spot it in there, you'll know that if you hang out for long enough you'll be handcuffed to something with a pair of plastic fuzzy handcuffs purchased in the children's-costume aisle of Target. Here's an idea, E.L. James: Why don't you take a few copies of this and flog yourself to death with them?
CHRISTIAN GAY



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