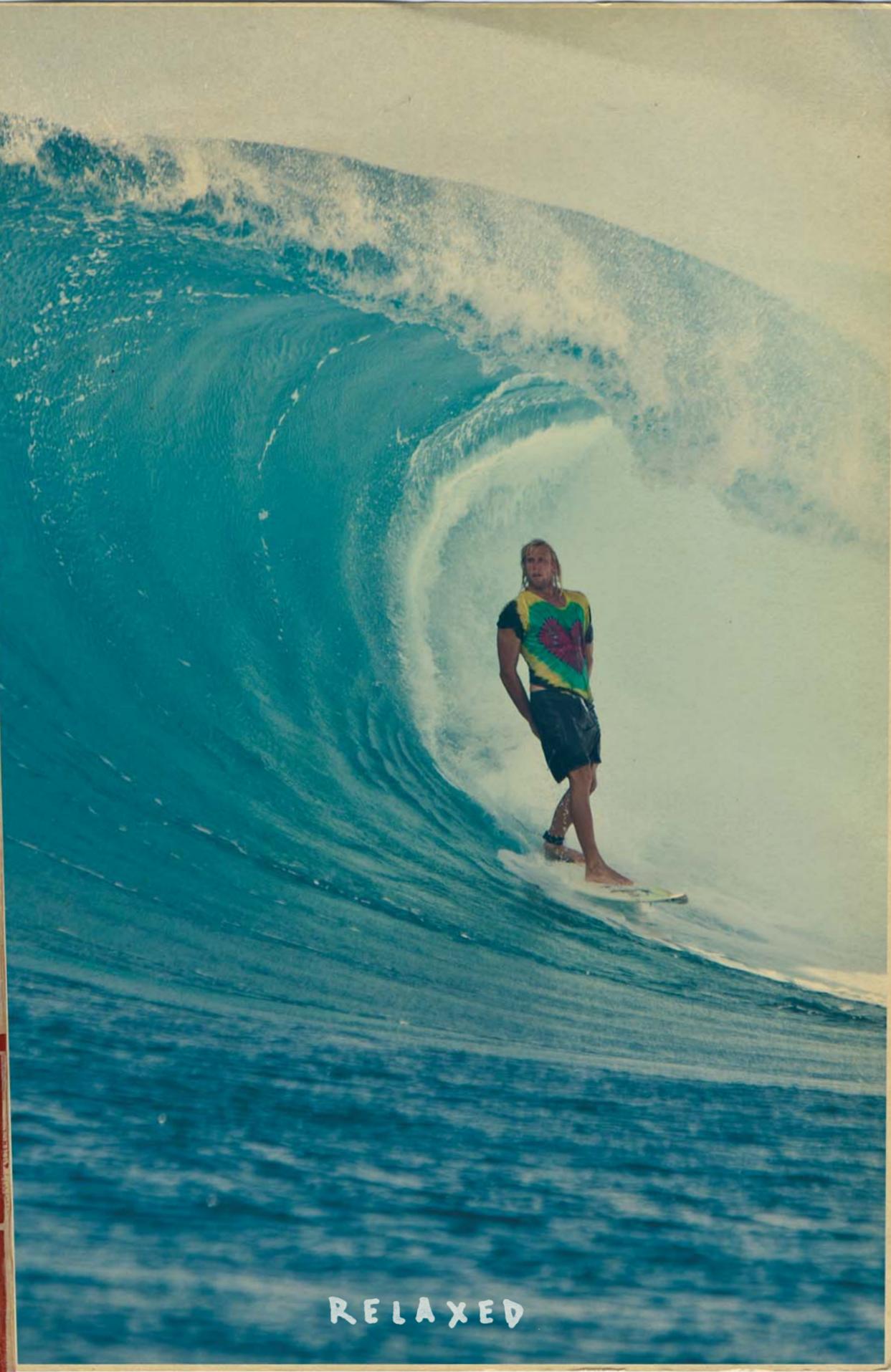


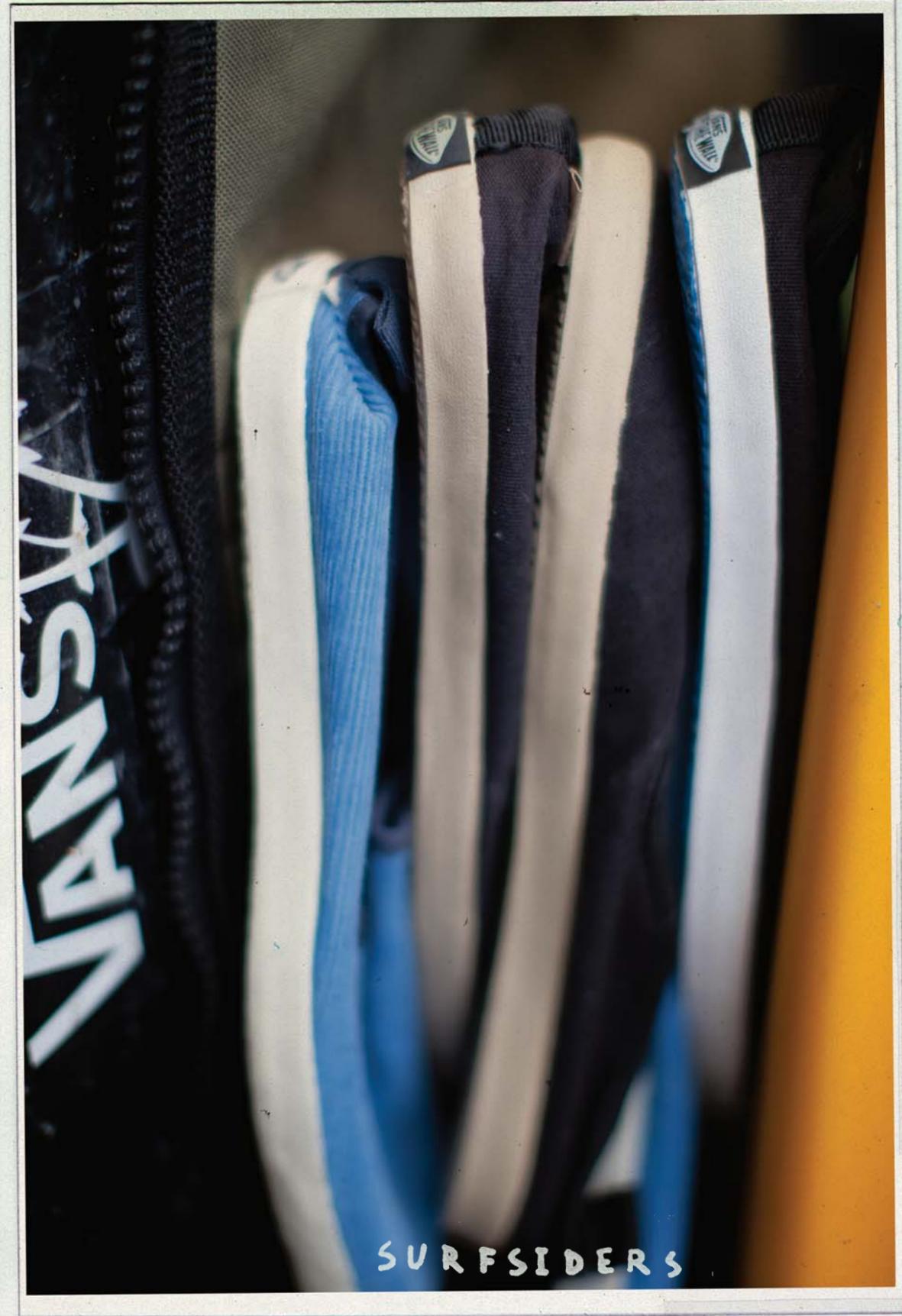
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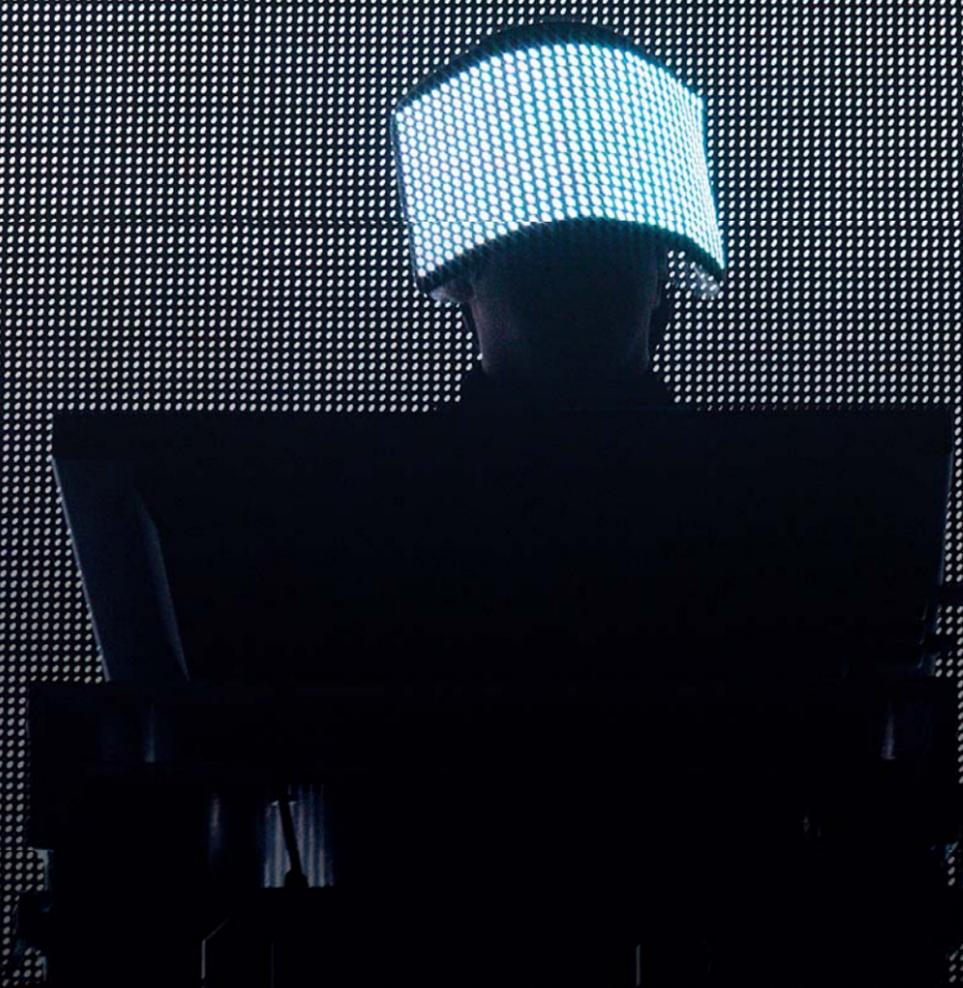
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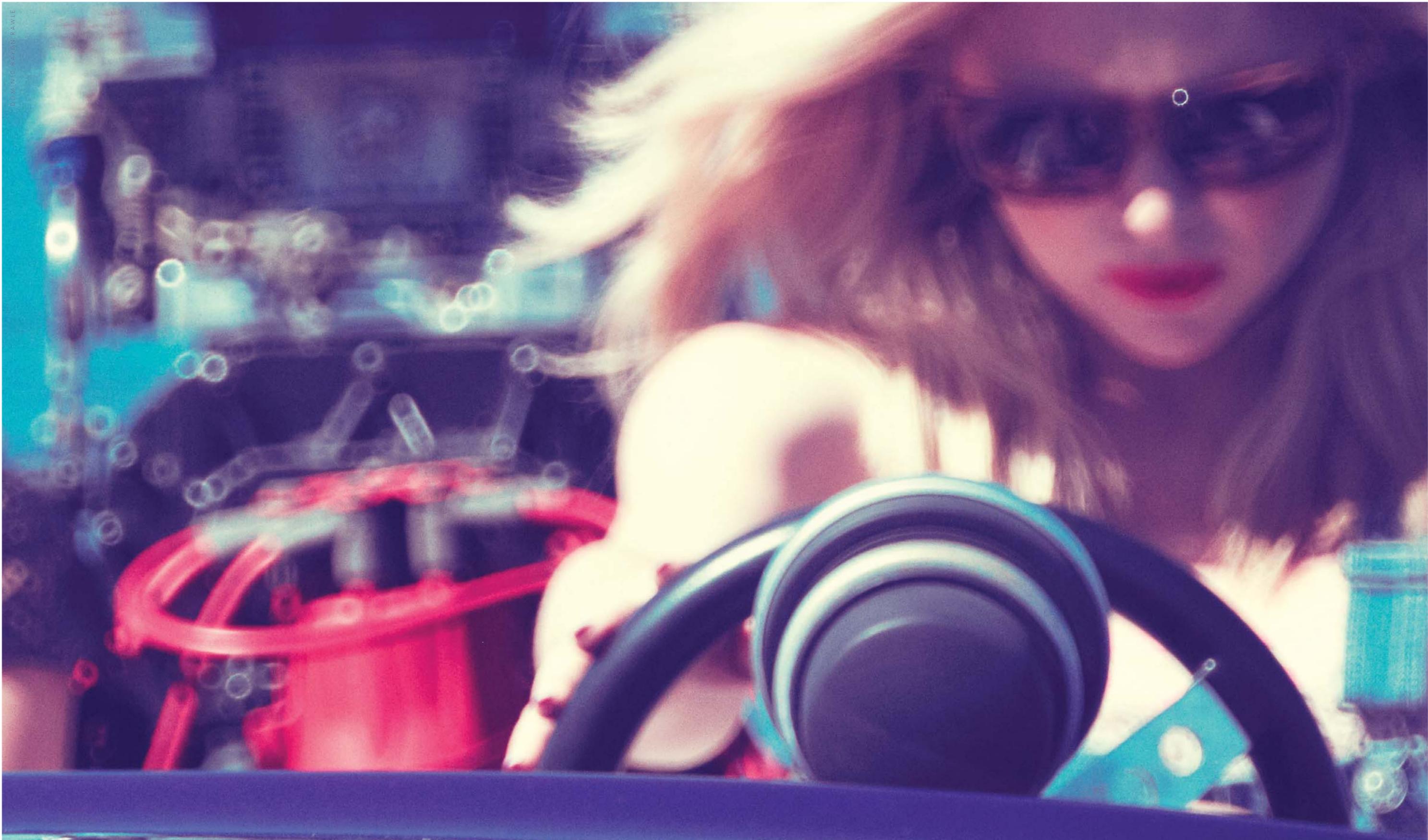
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## SEAN REVERON: CVLT NATION

Sean has been a key figure in celebrating and nurturing subcultural scenes globally, with bands like A Gun Called Tension and labels like Rockers NYC. Now based in LA, he runs CVLT Nation clothing and webzine with his wife Meghan. Covering every element of the dark arts, from metal, doom, and disbeat, to art, photos, illustration, and video, CVLT Nation is redefining how streetwear and media come together to form a complete culture.

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A house on Ganghwa Island, just west of Seoul. This and the following photo are part of Juliane Eirich's Korea Diary, a project where she shot one photo per day for 18 months while in South Korea.

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Cover by Maggie Lee and Sandy Kim

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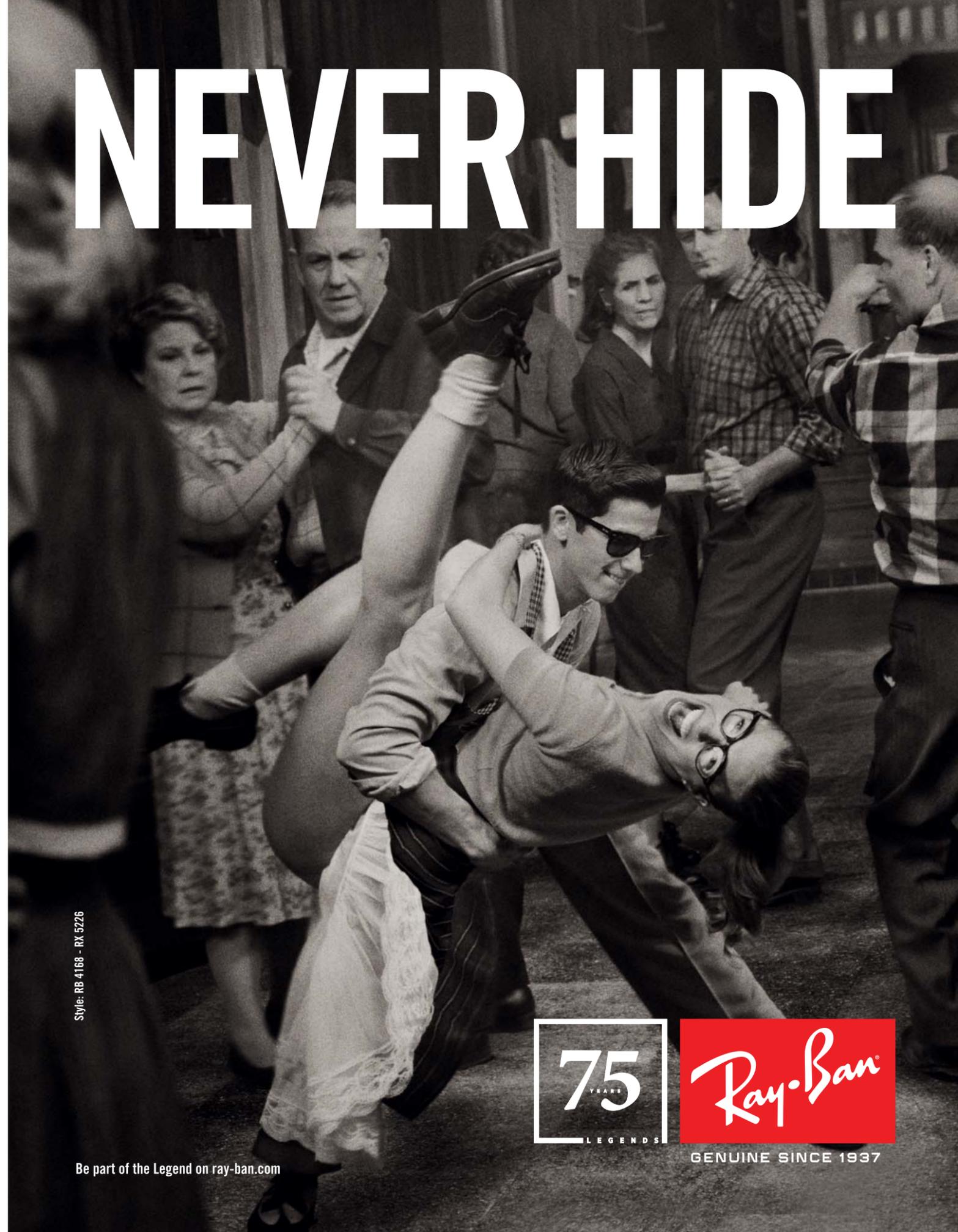
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Clothing racks outside the commissary in the US Army base in Seoul. Photo by Juliane Eirich.

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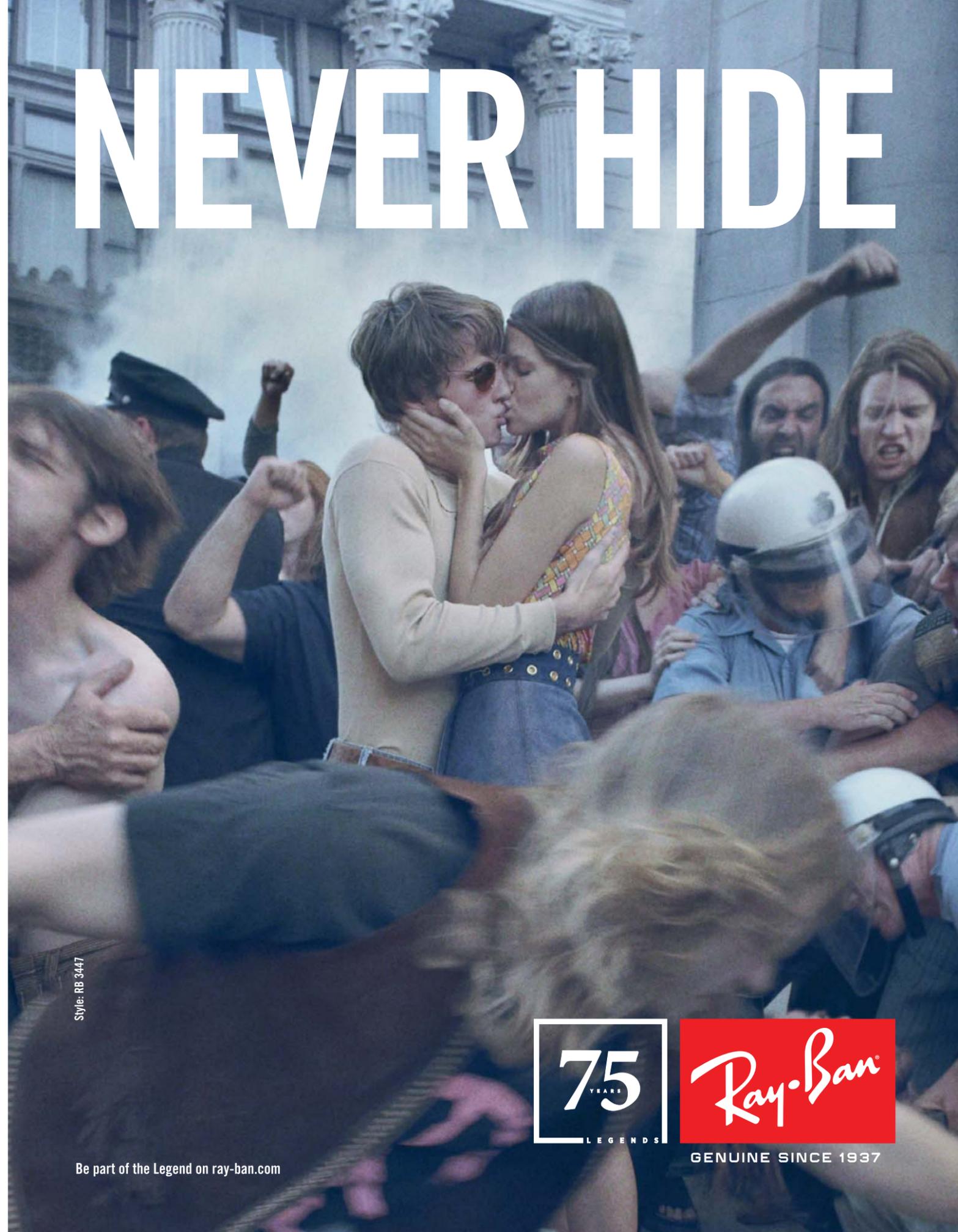
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## EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



### LINDA FORSELL

Linda Forsell is a freelance photographer and journalist based in New York and Stockholm, though she's been hopping from place to place so much recently it's hard to say she's "based" anywhere. From October 2010 to January 2012 she traveled to ten different countries, documenting violence against women in Brazil, Pakistan, Sweden, the US, Congo, and many other places. The photos of hers that we're featuring this issue come from her previous project, *Life's a Blast*, the result of two years' worth of trips to Israel and Palestine to document the conflict there in startlingly original and subtle ways. The book version is still unavailable outside Sweden, which is why we're extra-thrilled to bring these images to you.

See ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE, page 86



### RYAN KNIGHTON

Ryan Knighton is the author of the memoirs *Cockeyed* and *C'mon Papa*, and his scribbles have appeared in *Esquire*, the *New York Times*, the *Believer*, and many other publications. Recently, Disney animated his mind's eye for a live stage version of *This American Life*—or they told him they animated it, anyway; since he's blind he'll never be sure. Ryan writes movies as well, and even more weirdly for a screenwriter, he lives in Vancouver, not LA. He has never seen his tattoos or his daughter's face and frequently travels to hazardous locales all by his lonesome, but for his story in this issue he asked his archaeologist brother to come along with him to the largest rattlesnake roundup in the world.

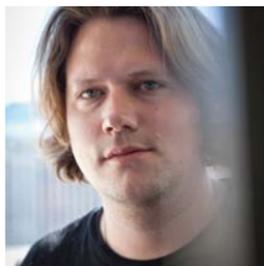
See THE TWITCH, page 110



### WINSTON SMITH

Punk surrealist Winston Smith has been hand-crafting provocative collage art since the 1970s, when he started appropriating insipid icons in magazine ads from the 40s and 50s to create absurd, sometimes politically charged images. His album covers, inserts, and flyers for the Dead Kennedys in the early 80s inspired a lot of people who hated authority and the government to make art, and his "DK" logo has been carved on school desks, spray-painted on bathroom walls, and tattooed on bodies all over the world. In the years since, he's continued to glue shit to other shit to make awesome shit, and his art adorns covers of albums for George Carlin, Burning Brides, Ben Harper, Green Day (pre-makeup), and a bunch of other folks.

See THE TWITCH, page 110



### CHRISTOPH WÖHRLE

When we asked Christoph what inspired him to write a story about a German mental hospital's monthly disco night, he told us, "Crazy people are always fascinating," which is like saying farts are stinky. Christoph's worked as a freelance journalist for the past dozen years, traveling the world and writing for places like *Stern*, *Der Spiegel*, *Playboy*, and *GQ*, but attending the Looney Disco was a weird story, even for him. "The most shocking experience was when the lady tried to bite my genitals. Thank God I was wearing pants. I am happy that I was there, but I will never go back again." We don't really know what he's talking about, because his piece makes it seem a lot more fun than any club we've ever been to.

See INSIDE THE LOONEY DISCO, page 104



### ANGIE SULLIVAN

Hailing from Oklahoma, one of Angie's first jobs was recording books on tape for the blind under the supervision of a boss who exclusively wore those button-down shirts with Tabasco bottles all over them. A short while later, she packed up her meager belongings in a bundle and high-tailed it out of the Dust Bowl to pursue a career in art and graphic design in New York City. Not long after that she started interning at VICE, then became a designer, then a senior designer, and for her latest feat she nailed the fuck out of the ridiculously intricate photo-illustration work for this issue's cover and corresponding fashion spread by Maggie Lee and Sandy Kim. It was inspired by those *purikura*-sticker booths so beloved by Japanese tweens.

See THE COVER and PRETTY KOOL-A, page 60

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## DEAF COMEDY JAM

Deaf comedy hasn't had a lot going for it ever since black people ran it into the ground in the 90s. There's that episode of Seinfeld where Rob Schneider pretends to be deaf, but that's kind of it, and I'm not sure deaf people think that counts. Andrew Fisher is trying to end the deaf-comedic world's long silence by telling jokes in American Sign Language and then having an interpreter say them out loud, which produces a weird, slightly staggered laughter between the hearing and nonhearing members of the audience that's arguably as funny as the jokes themselves (which are already pretty fucking funny). Here's him.



BY ALLISON VAN SICLEN  
Photo by Diane Cohen

**VICE:** Do you think the audience reacts differently to your jokes because you're deaf?  
**Andrew Fisher:** Being deaf puts you at an advantage in stand-up comedy because you have their attention. They've never seen a deaf comedian before. But being deaf gets old very, very fast. It could easily become a gimmick. You have to address it as quickly as you can—make a couple jokes about it when you get onstage before you can move on to things that are universal and timeless. So for me, the compromise is to find the universal in being deaf, something that everybody can relate to.

**Like what?**

I tell stories about the humiliation of sexual adolescence. That's universal, but also very experience-specific. Everybody masturbates, but I also talk about what it was like to realize that masturbation makes a sound. Or how my language acquisition was a bit different from others—when I was a kid, I didn't know there was a difference between spoken and written English. I thought everybody said the names of punctuation marks out loud. If I saw a couple arguing in the street, I thought one might be saying to the other, "Get lost. Exclamation mark."

**Is any of your material based on being mistreated because you're deaf?**

I have this joke that actually happened. I was in a waiting room when this comedian came up to me and he was like, "Um, I notice some of your friends are in the audience here. If I want to address them, which term do you think they would prefer? 'Handicapped' or 'disabled'?" And I said, "I'm sorry, but between those two terms, I'd prefer 'retarded.'"

**Is there such a thing as a "deaf joke"? Like, one that only deaf people would get?**

There are jokes in ASL that are based on the symbolic significance of hand formations. For example, the sign for "marry" looks similar to clapping your hands together once. So there's a deaf joke about King Kong asking a blonde bombshell whom he's holding in the palm of his hand to "marry" him. Of course when King Kong makes the sign for "marry," he accidentally squishes his fiancée.

## Lap That Shit Up



BY TOBY FEHILY  
Illustration by Ben Montero

Earlier this year, US intelligence agencies published a report concerning the growing likelihood that nations will soon wage war over the world's dwindling supply of fresh water. One possible solution to circumvent this looming crisis is to literally drink our pee and poo. Even if you think your shit doesn't stink, consider that at one point or another your thirst has probably been quenched by water from a septic tank.

Since the 1950s, sewage has been recycled and purified into drinking water in many places throughout the world. The results have ranged from mass outbreaks of dysentery to crystal-clear, refreshing liquid that you'd never guess came out of someone's anus.

Perth, Australia, is the latest municipality to test these questionable waters with what they've termed the Groundwater Replenishment Trial. Since November 2010, over 1,500 megaliters of the formerly brown stuff has been pumped underground to a containment system located far away from local drinking-water reservoirs. The plan is to let it sit here until the end of the year, and then Perthians will have to decide whether they're thirsty enough to take a sip.

Nick Turner, manager of water-source planning for Water Corporation, told us sucking down a glass of shit is no big deal. "There's no new water in the world; it's all been going around for millions of years now," he said. "There could be a molecule of Leonardo da Vinci's wee in the water I'm drinking today."

Changing the subject, we asked Nick to give us a step-by-step breakdown of how excrement stew is transformed into potable, life-giving H<sub>2</sub>O.



**PRELIMINARY TREATMENT:** Raw sewage is collected and passed through a series of screen traps to remove all of the random gunk that sticks to poop ("the rags and the rubbers," as Nick put it).

**PRIMARY TREATMENT:** The sifted shit is then pumped into a container where it stays until gravity separates any remaining grit and deemed safe for the purification machinery.

**SECONDARY TREATMENT:** After all solids have been removed, the liquid is transferred to an aerated tank filled with microorganisms whose favorite foods are feces, drugs, and hormones.

**ADVANCED WATER TREATMENT:** At this point you've got something that you definitely wouldn't drink but might swim in if you were on MDMA. The next step is to squeeze the mess through a series of membrane filters that remove anything wider than 1/300th of a human hair, and the water is then zapped with ultraviolet rays, which according to Nick is "just an insurance policy."

**INJECTION:** What was once a murky mess of smells is now transparent and technically safe to drink (it's even a bit less salty than tap water), but we're not quite done yet. The end result is injected 656 feet underground into the Leederville Aquifer, where it's diluted in 120,000 gigaliters of groundwater.

**MONITORING:** Finally, the resulting water is continually examined by people who have very boring but important jobs. Over 40,000 water samples have been taken throughout the trial, and everyone says it's good to go. Drink up!



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## A HAIRY SITUATION

*Most of the world views Sweden as a bastion of liberal-socialist tolerance and forward-thinking feminist ideology, but it turns out the country's open-mindedness extends only so far as its armpits. And if them shits are hairy, all of the talk of acceptance and the perils of prejudice gets tossed down a drain clogged with short-and-curlies.*

*This hubbub about hair began in March, during the finals of the Melodifestivalen national song contest, when school librarian Lina Ehrin's unshaven underarm was caught on camera for a split second and beamed directly into the fragile eyes of millions of viewers.*



BY CAISA EDERYD  
Photo by Richard Kern



A screengrab was uploaded to Facebook shortly afterward, racking up thousands of abusive comments about how disgusting Lina was for neglecting to shave her pits. A Facebook event page called Ta Håret Tillbaka! (Take the Hair Back!) was quickly created to defend Lina's right not to shave and urging women to post pictures of their own furry enclaves.

The page quickly garnered 15,000 likes and hundreds of pit pics, the group began organizing real-life protests, and the discussion exploded from the social-media sphere and spilled into the mainstream tabloids. Befuddled by all of this tufted outrage, we spoke with Deidre

Palacios, one of the founders of Ta Håret Tillbaka!, and asked her why her fellow citizens care so much about hair.

**VICE: What do you mean by saying you want to "take the hair back"? Did it ever go anywhere?**

**Deidre Palacios:** It's not meant to be taken literally; it's more about women reclaiming the notion of hair. I thought only my friends would care—I never imagined it would spread like it has. I think the debate makes people think in new ways. A girl contacted me today and told me her boyfriend wouldn't accept her having hairy armpits. She was really shocked, and it shed new light on him.

There's a picture of your own hairy underarm on your group's Facebook page. Are you personally offended by the negative comments you've received?

No. However, I do care when women who've uploaded pictures of their pits get death threats. When that happens, I contact the police.

**Why do you think Swedes have been so provoked by a little female body hair that's completely natural?**

That's something I really don't understand. I work as a sex-education teacher and talk to teenagers a lot. I've noticed body hair is more or less a taboo. I let the students know everybody is different—some are hairier than others, and that it's completely normal.

**Are you going to organize any public events similar to the protest in Malmö where girls gathered to publicly display their fuzzy pits?**

I think I'm going to take it further in one way or another. A lot of the members are active hair campaigners, so I really think that something will come out of this. I recently saw a YouTube video of girls singing a song about hair.

## Sorry Your Dog Got Decapitated



WORDS AND ILLUSTRATION BY KARA CRABB



If there's a golden rule for people who run a dog-sitting business, it is this: Don't let the dogs you're watching get mauled by other dogs you're watching. Montreal Dogs, a Canadian dog-daycare center, has recently received a barrage of bad press because a couple pets under their care got slaughtered over the past few months. And then they lied about it.

In February, a cutie-patootie cocker spaniel named Chestnut was mutilated beyond recovery while her owner was on vacation. Then, later that same month, Stanley the shih tzu was reportedly decapitated and partially eaten by larger dogs. Instead of owning up to their massive fuck-ups, the sitters fed the owners some serious dog shit.

Montreal Dogs operators Mina and Cesare Carbone tried to pull the

old "We dunno, your dog just ran away" excuse, but weeks later the truth came out after an animal-rescue service investigated the matter (at the request of Stanley's family). The dog owners then called on the Montreal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to help draw attention to the deaths of their canines through protests.

At this point it appears that Chestnut and Stanley went to heaven (where all dogs go) due to plain old negligence rather than cruelty. Susan Briggs, founder of Crystal Canine, a consulting and resource business for the pet-care industry, said, "People who have multiple dogs at home think that this is a fun, easy job, but they don't understand that it's different managing a large group of dogs that don't know each other." During the chaos of everyday small-business management, accidents will happen. Susan continued: "I own a pet-daycare center, and we do make mistakes. Dogs play with their mouths, so even when there is supervision

there could be injuries. In cases like this it's hard to be honest, but you have to step away and accept that you've made a mistake, talk to the owner, and do whatever you have to do to make it better. It's not always negligence—dogs are unpredictable; they're animals. And it's expensive to be safe. You get what you pay for—not always—but if you get a good bargain at a pet-daycare center you should really question why."

What have we learned from this? First of all, your business's reputation matters more than a couple of mutilated pooches. Second, it's a given that dead dogs, like spilled milk, are going to happen. So why don't open a sister company catering to the needs of pet owners with "missing" animals? Offer a printing service, private-detective work, cremations, urns, caskets, tombstones—that's vertical integration, baby! I think we can all agree that Montreal Dogs really missed out on some great business opportunities.



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## VIBRATORS THROUGH THE AGES

Against all odds, San Francisco did not have a museum devoted to antique vibrators until last month. This absurd oversight was corrected by Carol Queen, resident sexologist at the Good Vibrations sex-shop chain and author of both scholarly journal articles regarding sexuality and straight-up (but not necessarily straight) erotica. She's also the star of Bend over Boyfriend, an instructional video series about "pegging," the elaborate art of females strapping fake dicks to their crotches and reaming said dildo into a willing male's BH. As you can see, Carol does not fuck around when it comes to fucking—especially when it involves apparatuses that you stick inside yourself or someone else. So it's no surprise she has opened a physical space that celebrates one of the most important technological breakthroughs of the past millennium: the vibrator.



BY DARREN WEE  
Illustration by Penelope Gazin



**VICE:** How did you get the idea to open a museum dedicated to vibrators?  
**Carol Queen:** Good Vibrations founder Joani Blank collected old vibrators and displayed them in the store from the beginning. They were a popular feature, and people began to give more vibrators to us, and we acquired some from eBay as well. Eventually, we'd been given so many that we decided to devote a space to them and make it official!

The first vibrators date back to the 1800s. What sorts of materials were people sticking up into themselves back then? Logs? Actually, vibrators were not used then for putting up anywhere. Vibrators are really made for the clitoris, which has specialized nerve endings to feel just that sensation. While some certainly do like them vaginally and there are people of all genders who love anal vibration, the old vibrators are all intended for clitoral stimulation. In those days, they thought vibration could cure practically everything, and of course it *does* enhance blood flow. There were also dildos back then that were used for insertion. I have read descriptions of leather, rubber, and wooden ones that date from the 19th century and earlier, but these were not, to our knowledge, used by doctors.

**Hold on a minute. Since when did doctors use vibrators on patients outside of a fetish porno?** In the mid- to late 19th century, they were used by medical doctors to treat hysteria, a condition that responded well to "hysterical paroxysms of relief"—what I call an orgasm! Even before that time, there were hydro-powered and hand-cranked vibrators. By the turn of the 20th century, as more homes got electricity, these devices became available to individuals. They turned up in a frankly sexual context in the porn movies of the 20s. This was the beginning of the end for their use by doctors and of the very notion of hysteria, which was taken out of the med books in 1952.

**What's the most impressive piece in the museum's collection?**  
My most amazing find was a pneumatic vibrator that runs on compressed gas. You hooked it up to the kind of tank you see powering a pneumatic drill during street construction. Obviously, this is a device that didn't really catch on.



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## The Black Tar Tits of Afghanistan

 BY WILBERT L. COOPER

If you're even a teensy bit cynical, you could say that Afghanistan is a giant heroin lab that also happens to be a sovereign nation. The country produces 90 percent of the world's opium; the drug is grown on family-cultivated poppy fields in rural areas like the Farah Province and shot by skag fiends in broad daylight on the streets of Kabul. With at least 200,000 users among a population of 30 million, the only place with more junkies per capita is Iran.

One related statistic that seems to be ignored is that the greatest victims of Afghanistan's drug epidemic are women, many of who suffer silently under a haze of opium smoke. In 2007, there were an estimated 100,000 female addicts in the country, largely a byproduct of the 1 million widows and recently returned refugees. Considering the conservative Islamic traditions that keep many women confined to their homes and stigmatize drug abusers, 100,000 is most likely a drastic understatement. Worse still, only 10 percent of Afghan women even have access to the scant drug treatment that is available.

Drug dealers seek out women here the same as anywhere else. Nazif M. Shahrani, a professor of Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University, said, "There are people who would peddle it, and they will go and encourage the women to indulge. They may even give it to them for free. And eventually it hooks them. It's not long before those women have to go and find money, or even steal to support the habit."

Of course, addiction isn't just wrecking the lives of women. Increasing drug-abuse rates will have a profound impact on the next generation who are being raised by dope-fiend moms. A 2010 study conducted by the US State Department found that in 31 out of 42 homes where adult addicts lived, there were signs of children being exposed to drugs.

Videos from the rural northeast Wakhan region depict families huddled together in shanties, passing around the dream stick. When their children cry of hunger pains or cold, the mothers blow smoke in the kids' faces or rub opium powder on their lips to settle them down—practices once isolated to small ethnic groups like the Wakhi that are now widespread because of limited access to doctors in the wake of recent wars. And suckling from a junkie tit can be lethal, which is pretty much the most hopeless image imaginable.



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VINCENT SKOGLUND  
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Ali got excited and stabbed himself in the forehead at the very beginning of the ceremony.

## TAKE A STAB

*Iraqi Dervishes Celebrate God by Knifing Themselves*

WORDS AND  
PHOTOS BY  
KARLOS ZURUTUZA

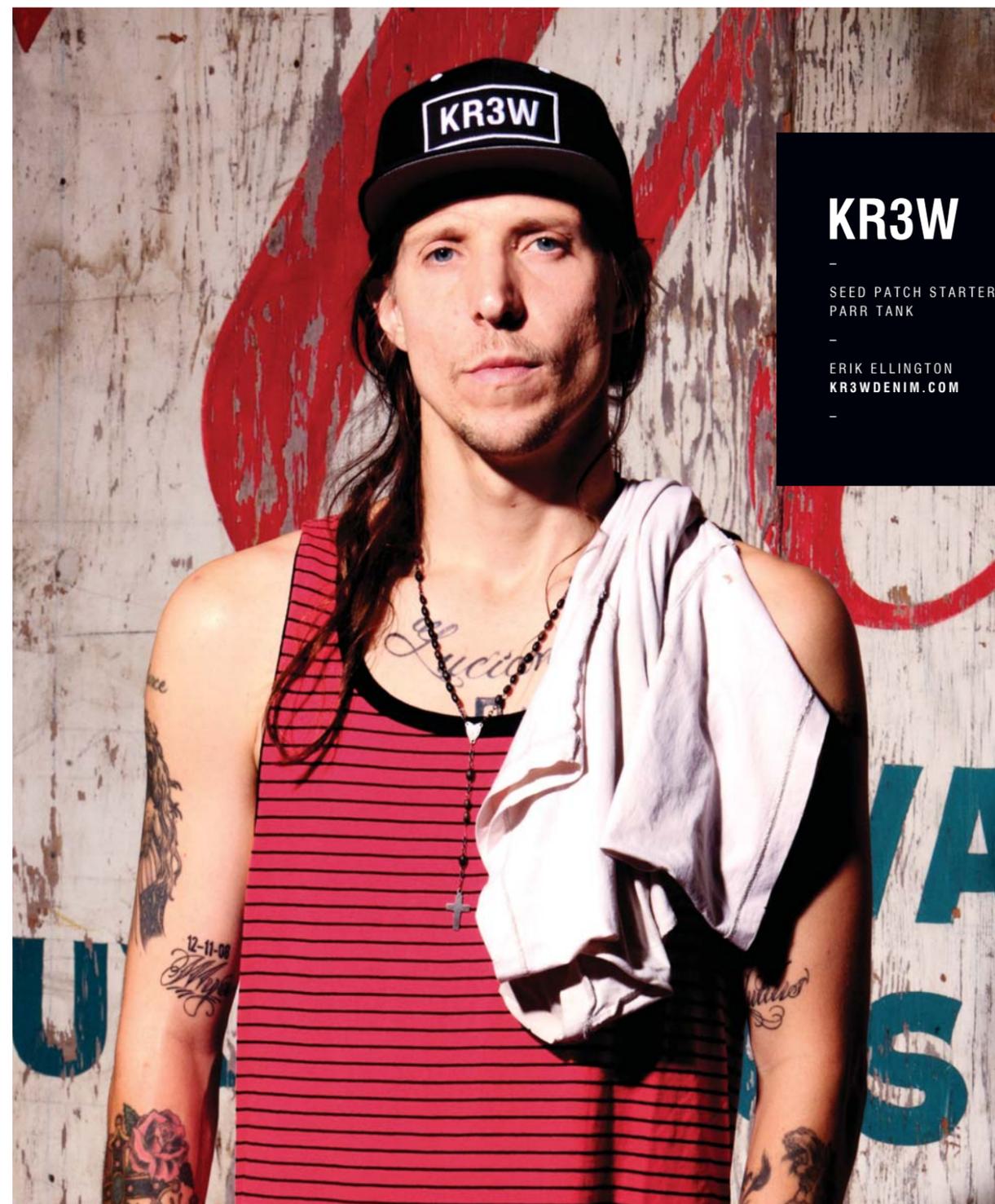
The mystical twirling Sufi dervishes of southern Iraq are a peaceful and generally well-educated Muslim minority who live in poverty in hopes that it will teach them humility. Like most Islamic sects, they're not appreciated by their religious brethren (especially extremist groups like Al Qaeda) and are regularly shunned, harassed, or even killed. And the continuing onslaught of extreme prejudice has worked; many dervishes have fled their homeland in recent years.

The few who remain continue to practice their rather intense brand of Islam, which occasionally includes a special form of *zikr* (a religious ceremony that involves the "remembrance of Allah" and repetition) during which men continually stab themselves in the head and abdomen with knives and spears. The ritual dates back to the early days of Sufism and is performed as both a display of practitioners' spiritual superiority and a means of recruiting new members by proving God's existence

through a demonstration of his miraculous healing powers. Not too long ago, during a visit to Basrah, Iraq's southern oil hub, I was lucky enough to be invited to one of these prickly ceremonies.

The rite took place in a *takia* (dervish temple) in Al Zubeir, one of Basrah's most deprived areas, a run-down neighborhood with dirt roads and spartan flat houses. As I entered, I was received with a warm welcome and a frugal but delicious meal of lentil soup, local bread, and oranges. Afterward, five young boys started playing timpani, singing, "There is no god but Allah," while a circle of assembled men rhythmically swayed their heads up and down with their eyes closed. I would soon learn that this was their way of preparing for some serious body perforation.

About 30 men of various ages were gathered, six of whom volunteered to be stabbed. The youngest looked no older than 16, but his calmness and confidence made it apparent that this wasn't his first time under the knife. The *khalifa* (leader of the ceremony) unwrapped the brown leather clutch packed with spears and knives of various sizes, and Ali, a young oil engineer, grabbed a hammer and smashed himself in the head before plunging a knife into his forehead. He walked up to me and



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*This spear most likely pierced Hassan's kidneys, but he said he's used to it because they've already suffered a lot.*

asked that I take his picture. (I was allowed to take photos, but they no longer permit anyone to film the ceremony, since a previous guest uploaded a video to YouTube with a description that, Ali said, was something like, "How the fanatics of Al Qaeda prepare for jihad.") He then asked me to pull the knife from his skull. Out of politeness, I gave it my best shot, but it seemed to be stuck. The khalifa came to the rescue, effortlessly removing the blade. Shortly after this, a man named Aqil, who had just had two knives shoved into his head, said, "The miracle is in the healing process. Mine are not serious injuries; you will see other people perforate vital organs without consequences to their health."

Sure enough, minutes later, a man called Hassan had a spear thrust through his lower left abdomen. With a painful grimace, Hassan told me, "Today it did hurt a little because the tip of the spear hit my hipbone before coming out through my back." I asked whether he thought the spear had passed through his kidney. "It's possible," he replied, and said it wouldn't be the first time it had been pierced. "Once, after a perforation like this one, a friend had a problem and was taken to the emergency room. After the operation, the doctor told him he had never seen anything like it—he had over 15 holes in his kidney."

The ceremony lasted for three hours, with only about half an hour devoted to the congregation's cutting, slicing, and

stabbing themselves all over. There was even a cool-down session, when everyone got on their knees and prayed. The only one who seemed to be bleeding was Aqil, who had a cloth wrapped around his head to absorb the blood. No doctors or medical personnel of any type were present, and no one seemed alarmed. When the ceremony concluded, everyone shook my hand, thanked me, and (as was inevitable) invited me to join the religion. Careful not to seem rude, I assured them I was most grateful for their generous offer and said I needed to consider it first.

The dervishes also told me that last year a Japanese journalist had accepted their invitation. I smiled at the thought of the poor girl whose customary cultural politeness wouldn't allow her to decline such an offer. Who knows, maybe she now practices knife ceremonies by herself in some dark Tokyo apartment. Soon I began to feel guilty about how these men had potentially seriously injured themselves, at least partially on my behalf. Hassan, who had just thrust a spear through his side, assured me I had no reason to worry and suggested that we meet the following day so that I could see God's healing miracle with my own eyes.

The next day, a hale and hearty Hassan peddled up to me on his mountain bike, right on time. He stopped in front of me, unbuttoned his shirt, and proudly displayed a pitifully small scar on his stomach. *UCB*



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# CRACKING CRYPTOCACTI

*The Prickly Problem of the Cactus of the Four Winds*

BY HAMILTON MORRIS,  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARTHA ISERMAN



Four-ribbed  
*Trichocereus*  
*pachanoi*

There are many cacti that have risen to the status of legend: from Sahagún's contentious white peyote and the fabled specimens of purple *pachanoi* to a sacred stand of San Pedro in Huancabamba that is said to inflict a measles-like plague that causes small bumps all over the body on anyone who dares harvest it. Some of these cacti can be readily found, like *Ariocarpus retusus*, a species the Tarahumara claim will induce madness and death when ingested by those with "impure heart." Others have eluded the discerning eye of the modern taxonomist, going unseen for years and sometimes centuries. These are cryptocacti, confined to the margins of ethnobotanical literature, where they are discussed and debated but never observed. Of these cacti there is one that towers above them all in both its power and its elusiveness: the Cactus of the Four Winds, an ancient columnar cactus characterized by four longitudinal ribs that is rumored to possess supernatural curative powers. On a recent trip to Lima, Peru, for a completely unrelated story, I took advantage of some downtime to search for wild specimens of these cryptocacti, hoping for a chance encounter with the Cactus of the Four Winds.

In order to successfully hunt *Trichocereus* (the reputed genus of the Cactus of the Four Winds), one must master the techniques used to detect taxonomic differences between species. Superficially similar green columnar cacti are distinguished on the basis of maximal height; width; rib count; spine length, girth, number, and angle; where its flesh falls on the (vast) spectrum of green; the presence of a glaucous bloom of epicuticular wax and whether this bloom, if present, can be rubbed away; the sheen of the cuticle; the presence of small, V-shaped depressions above the areoles; the flexural responsiveness of the column when jiggled; and the mucilaginosity of the tissue following blender-assisted homogenization. I am, of course, neglecting the painstaking attention required to differentiate the fruit, seeds, and flowers—but still, no one could mistake the Cactus of the Four Winds.

In Richard Evans Schultes's book *Plants of the Gods*, the Cactus of the Four Winds warrants its own chapter, its species identified as *Trichocereus pachanoi*, or San Pedro. The anthropologist Douglas Sharon wrote in his book *Wizard of the Four Winds*, "Four-ribbed cacti, like four-leafed clovers, are considered to be very rare and very lucky, they are believed to have special curative properties because they correspond to the 'four winds' and the 'four roads,' supernatural powers associated with the cardinal points invoked during curing rituals." Italian historian Mario Polia said, "The San Pedro of Four Winds is very rare in nature and is a symbol of choice: It is believed that whoever finds it is a great shaman or destined to become one." Wade Davis, one of the many ethnobotanists who have traveled to South America in search of the sacred cactus, wrote, "Here perhaps was the key to understanding... the source of the religious impulse that had swept the mountains 4,000 years before. The Cactus of the Four

Winds, a plant so powerful that it could annihilate consciousness, transform body into spirit, crack open the sky."

For all the lore the Cactus of the Four Winds has inspired, fully grown specimens are exceedingly rare, if they actually exist. It is not unusual for a commercial cactus cultivator to encounter the occasional immature four-ribbed *Trichocereus bridgesii*, and though even less common, the same can be said for immature San Pedro. Contemporary reports exist of four-ribbed *Trichocereus scopulicola* exceeding four feet in height, but none have been substantiated with photographs. I have observed a five-ribbed *Trichocereus bridgesii* that acquired the sacred four-rib configuration because of a drought that caused the diameter of its stem to shrink; however, I have never seen a fully mature four-ribbed *Trichocereus* of any species, and neither had the four commercial cactus growers I surveyed.

With only one week in Lima to find the cactus, I decided to visit Karel Knize, a Czech-born succulent dealer with the largest cactus farm in South America and what is likely the largest *Trichocereus* collection in the world. For decades, Knize (rhymes with *sneez-ay*) has been the primary psychoactive-cactus exporter to North America, and many ethnobotanical vendors base their business on cloning and reselling specimens that originated from the Knize collection. Among his international clientele, Knize has developed an unsavory reputation for shipping unlabeled, hybridized, or completely misidentified cacti in such large numbers that many specialists now feel taxonomic designations such as "Peruvian Torch" are nigh meaningless.

On entering Knize's cactus farm I feel weak with astonishment and steady myself with awe-palsied hands on a *Cereus repandus*. Countless cacti stretch into the distance—golden barrels the size of weather balloons—and long rows of stoic San Pedro prickly pears precariously balance their cladodes like Calder mobiles alongside grow rooms bursting with terrifying feats of *Lophophora* xenotransplantation. The cacti number in the tens of thousands, with millions of cumulative spines.

I am greeted by Knize's assistant, who leads me around to select specimens while taking notes on a Donald Duck clipboard. We scour the farm, counting ribs until we have located a number of four-ribbed *Trichocereus bridgesii*, four to be exact. The specimens are larger than any I have ever seen but are still immature. They are also for sale, so I pack the cacti to ship back to the US for chemical analysis and then am led into Knize's private chamber to discuss payment.

Immense stands of cacti eclipse the windows, casting Knize's home in perpetual darkness. A third-generation cactus dealer, he tells me his family has been collecting cacti since the death of Napoleon. After giving me a cup of coffee, which he repeatedly offers to spike with whiskey (holding the bottle in a hand that is missing the terminal segment of its middle finger, which I can only imagine is the result of a cactus experiment gone terribly awry),



Purple  
*Trichocereus*  
*pachanoi*



White Lophophora williamsii

we agree on a price for the four cacti, which may or may not qualify as bona fide specimens of the Cactus of the Four Winds.

If the Cactus of the Four Winds does exist, there is every reason to believe it would be significantly *less* potent than its more heavily ribbed brethren. Ribs confer a number of advantages; they facilitate convective heat loss, allow expansion and contraction in accordance with seasonal variations in rainfall, and extend photosynthetic surface area. The latter is especially significant because it is the green photosynthetic tissue where the greatest concentration of mescaline<sup>1</sup> is found. Assuming the reports by Davis, Polia, Sharon, et al. are correct, let us examine four possible explanations for this cactaceous paradox:

1. Anthropogenic extinction: Silphium, an ancient medicinal plant, was said by Pliny the Elder to be “one of the most precious gifts of nature to man,” but it is thought that humans drove it into extinction by the end of the first century, when the last documented stalk was presented to the Roman emperor Nero as a curiosity. Similarly, the human hand may be responsible for the disappearance of the Cactus of the Four Winds due to overharvesting for its psychedelic properties. Contrary to the symbiotic survival theory of psychedelic plants and fungi posited by Terence McKenna, our ancestors may have killed off some of the most valuable medicinal plants thousands of years ago. It’s certainly possible, especially when one considers the critically endangered populations of peyote in the American Southwest.
2. Predatory goats: When I asked the esteemed cactologist K. Trout what he thought became of the Cactus of the Four Winds, he replied, “It seems to have been wiped out from the wild. Maybe by goats.” In the 16th century, Spanish colonists sailed to Mexico carrying a most precious cargo—the goat. With urine-soaked beard and cloven hoof, these alien ruminants gnawed their way across the Americas, flourishing in domestication and establishing feral populations in the wild. Like the mongoose and the snake, the cactus and the goat are sworn mortal enemies. Goats are voracious cactophagists, responsible for decimating wild populations of *Browningia candelaris*, *Trichocereus pachanoi ssp. riomizquiensis*, and the awe-inspiring *Opuntia echios* of the Galapagos. Should an isolated population of four-ribbed cacti have found itself in close proximity to a pack of feral goats, there is no telling what carnage could have ensued.
3. Recessive trait(s): One four-leaf clover occurs in approximately 10,000 trifoliate clover. It is thought that the trait is expressed only in clover that are homozygous recessive at multiple genetic loci; even then it seems certain environmental conditions are required for phenotypic expression

<sup>1</sup> Doses of cacti are traditionally measured by length, a questionably useful metric. Potency can be estimated with greater accuracy by calculating surface area. Assuming a consistent core radius, additional ribs result in a linear increase in surface area, which can be modeled by this equation:

$$\text{cactus surface area} = \left( \left( r_2 - \left( r_2 \times \cos\left(\frac{\pi}{n}\right) \right) \right)^2 + \left( \sin\left(\frac{\pi}{n}\right) \times r_1 \right)^2 \right)^{1/2} \times 2n \times \ell$$

Where  $r_2$  = distal-rib radius,  $r_1$  = proximal-rib radius, and  $\ell$  = cactus length.



**BEWARE** HALF THE LIES THEY TELL ABOUT ME AREN'T TRUE

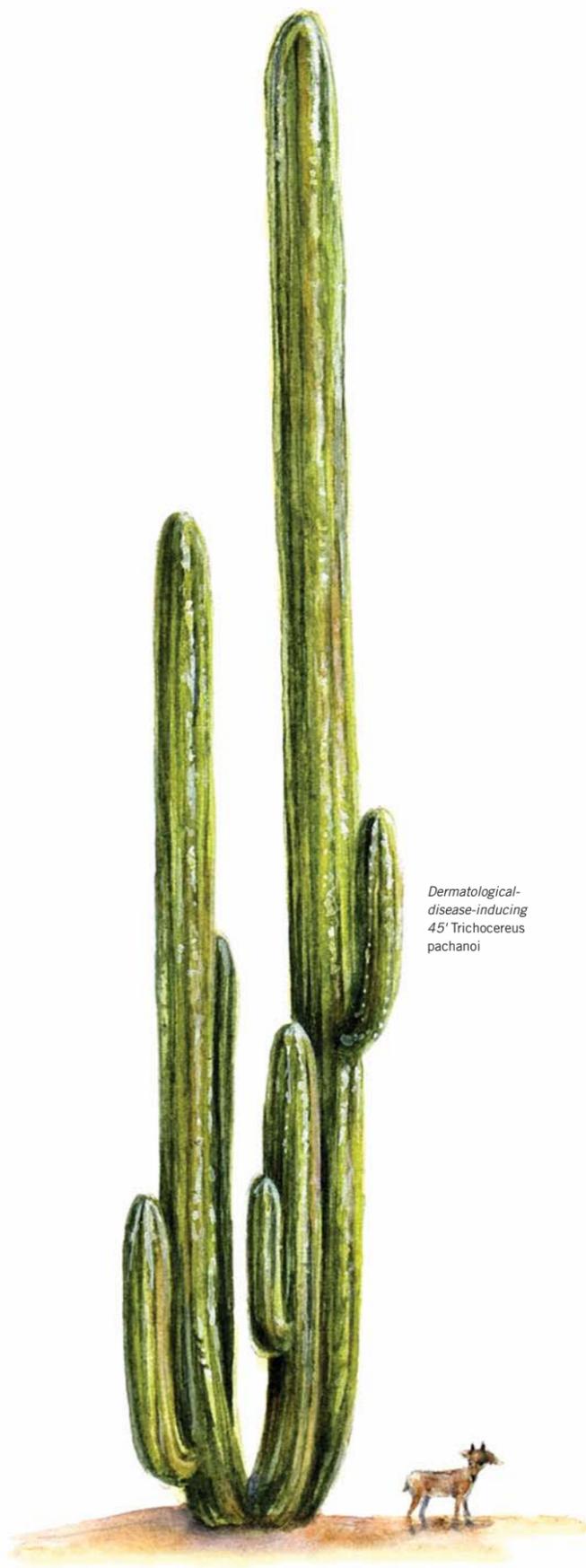
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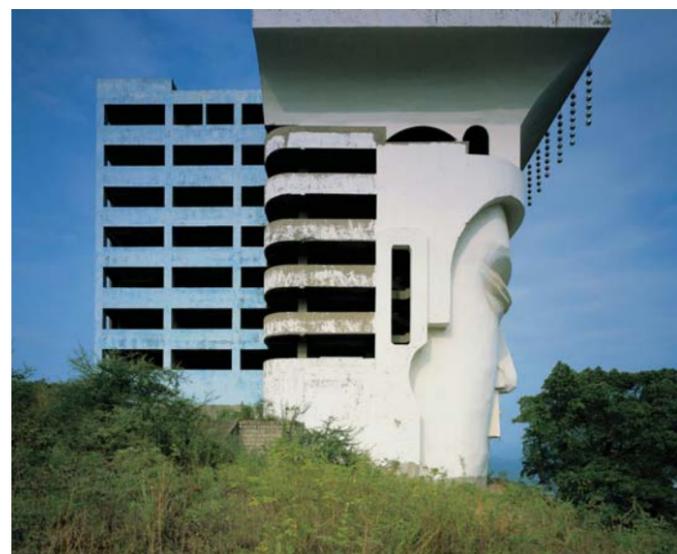
of the four-leaves. Similarly, the four-rib cactus configuration may be mediated by a combination of recessive genes and particular environmental requirements, giving it a slim chance of phenotypic expression. Unlike clover, which experience annual genetic recombination, many *Trichocereus spp.* are propagated clonally by man and in nature, hindering the development of morphologically diverse populations.

- Value is symbolic, not chemical: Among Peruvian *curandero*, seven-ribbed cacti are vastly preferred over six-ribbed cacti, which are considered to be evil. This is assuming a four-ribbed cactus is not available, which seems to be a constant. Long-spined cacti are said to be strong and male, while short-spined cacti are gentle and female. Does the trait dictate the effect or does the effect dictate the trait? Even among placebos, the color of the capsule impacts the nature of the experience. It is possible that these external traits are *linked to the* chemical composition of the cactus, but it could also be that their power is purely symbolic. The Cactus of the Four Winds could be rooted in pre-Columbian symbols: the four roads, the four cardinal points, the four seasons, or Christian symbols such as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse or a passage from Revelation in which four angels stand at the four corners of the earth and hold the four winds to prevent them from blowing. Among the Huichol Indians, the most precious specimens of peyote are those that possess five ribs. A mature peyote cactus often has eight or more ribs, so five-ribbed peyotes are almost invariably young. One would think more value would be assigned to larger, more heavily ribbed “grandfather peyotes,” which contain higher concentrations of psychedelic alkaloids, yet that is not always the case. Likewise, the only four-ribbed cacti to be found with any degree of regularity are young *Trichocereus* specimens. Perhaps the Cactus of the Four Winds is simply immature ipso facto.

There is very little primary-source information identifying the exact significance of mature four-ribbed cacti. Two ceramic bottles, respectively crafted by the pre-Columbian Chavín and Chimú people of modern-day Peru, as well as a Chavín temple engraving of a mythical beast clutching a section of columnar cactus, are frequently cited as evidence of the existence of this type of cacti and its traditional use as a psychedelic. Ultimately, the rib count in the engravings is ambiguous,<sup>2</sup> and in either case we can't be certain of the role these plants have played. Such is the case for the other cryptocacti, each of which could warrant an article of its own detailing possible explanations for its elusive nature.

When I returned from Lima, I patiently waited for my four four-ribbed cacti to arrive in the mail, but they never came. Later I discovered that I had sent payment during the height of a Peruvian postal strike, and so both my cash and my four-ribbed cacti were “lost.” Perhaps, somewhere, a Peruvian mailman has my package and is learning the source of the religious impulse. *VICE*

<sup>2</sup> Depending on which of many ways one can interpret five parallel lines in a two-dimensional engraving, the Chavín beast could be holding a two-, three-, four-, five-, six-, eight-, or ten-ribbed cactus.



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# KARACHI KILLS VICE

A Scene Report from the Most Insane City in Pakistan

BY SUROOSH ALVI, PHOTOS BY JASON MOJICA



Photo by Zia Mazhar/Associated Press.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: One of Pakistan's famous decorative buses gets hit by one of Karachi's infamous outbursts of violence; By some estimates, there are as many as 4 million heroin addicts in Pakistan, and in Karachi high-grade horse can be bought on the street for 80 cents a gram. Heroin and opium flow freely from Afghanistan: 160 tons went across the border in 2009, the same year a UN report put the value of Pakistan's opiate market—including trafficking and private consumption—at \$1.2 billion; On the outskirts of Karachi, children search for scraps in one of the largest garbage dumps in the world, which is next door to what is rumored to be one of the mafia's favorite hiding spots for its kidnap victims, Surjani Town.

Interviewing a “target killer” in Karachi was probably the scariest thing I’ve done in my 17 years at VICE. His gun sat between my feet in the backseat of our car as we drove in circles around his neighborhood. After our chat about killing people for a living, I felt like vomiting for three hours. I’ve been around my share of guns and violence, but sitting next to someone who has murdered 35 people (for between \$550 and \$1,100 per head) made me feel not so good.

So who hires these people? According to the hit man I interviewed, politicians contract about 80 percent of the assassinations in the region and the other 20 percent are related to organized crime. Twenty years ago, he said, there were a total of six guys in his profession. Today, there are more than 600 active target killers operating in Karachi. Indeed, many locals speculate that the famous Raymond Davis case—in which a CIA agent took out two armed men in Lahore last year and subsequently strained US-Pakistan diplomacy—was a failed target killing, not some random kids on motorcycles trying to rob him.

I have visited Pakistan many times and know my way around the rest of the country, but this was my first time working in Karachi. This place is different. A sprawling, ultraviolent metropolis of 18 million people, it’s one of the fastest-growing cities in the world and is probably most famous in the West as the place where *Wall Street Journal* journalist Daniel Pearl was kidnapped and beheaded.

Karachi has a rich history of violence, dating back to 1947, when Pakistan rose from the ashes of the British Empire. The massive influx of Muslim refugees into the new country brought turf wars, ethnic diversity (as well as ethnic tensions and rivalries), political warfare, gang violence, sectarian killings, and, in more recent years, suicide bombings.

When the Western media report on Pakistan, they generally focus on the “war on terror” and how awesome it’s going for America and NATO. We’ve all heard the stories of successful US drone attacks on Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants in tribal areas—and others of drones missing their targets and leveling entire villages of innocent women, children, and old people—but it seems the overall sentiment is that it’s cool because they’re faceless mountain people and we’re winning.

After 9/11, Taliban militants scrambled over the Afghan border and into the hilly tribal areas of Pakistan. When the Americans followed, blowing them to smithereens with remote-controlled airplanes, they fled to the cities. First they infiltrated Peshawar, which they promptly destabilized with regular suicide bombings. Then they hit Karachi.

Getting rid of militant extremists is like trying to kill cockroaches—you stamp down on them but then they appear to the left and the right, and before you know it they’re everywhere. They have been forced to duck for cover in urban centers—in Karachi’s case, this means there’s a new gang in town, and they’re called the Taliban. Compounded with the baseline level of craziness, violence, gang wars, and poverty, this makes the city even more terrifying, especially after you meet the cops tasked with taking them on.

The police force is completely overwhelmed and consists of a rag-tag group of underpaid and undertrained guys who are basically a third-world version of the Keystone Kops. We went on an “operation” with them, alongside every TV station from Karachi, and even though we were supposedly hunting Taliban in one of Karachi’s sketchiest enclaves, it felt like a film set or a scene from a low-budget version of Pakistani *COPS*. In fact,



the situation was so absurd that our crew ended up on local media with accusations that we were CIA.

All signs point to a country that is ready to explode, and considering the reporting I’ve conducted here over the past seven years, it appears that Karachi may be the detonator. It’s the economic engine of the country, home to pockets of Westernized culture, a burgeoning fashion industry, tech start-ups, lots of rich people, and millions more who are suffering and destitute beyond belief. But it also contains one of the world’s largest slums and the biggest garbage dump on the planet, which young children comb for food and anything of value. The stench is unbearable, with smoldering garbage for as far as the eye can see. Heroin goes for about 80 cents a gram, hash is everywhere, corruption is endemic at all levels of society, and the availability of clean water and electricity is a major issue for pretty much everybody. More people die violent deaths in cosmopolitan Karachi than in the tribal areas, where there’s a “war” going on.

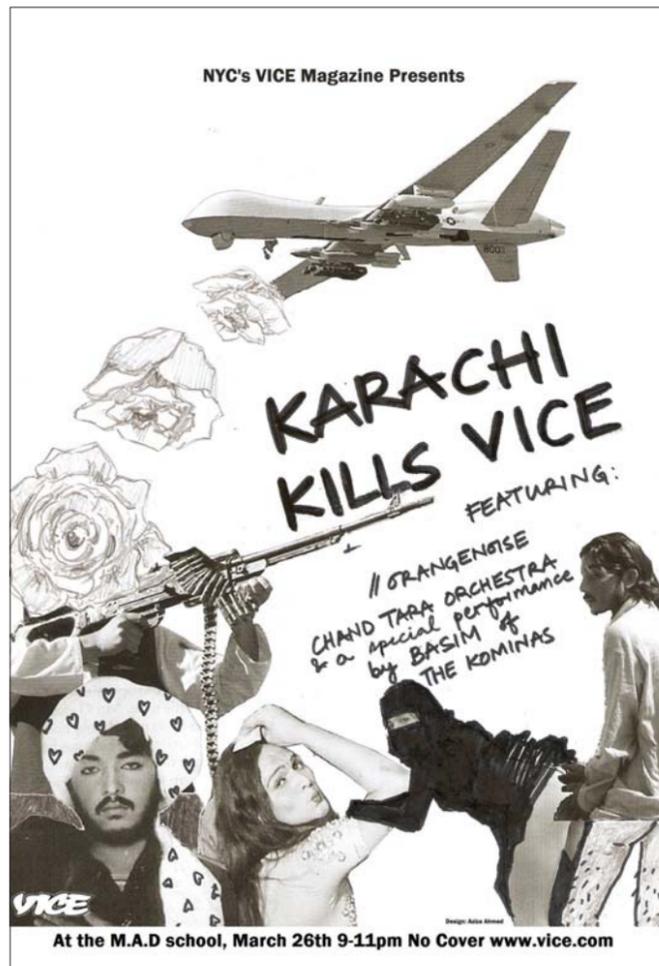
After spending five days surrounded by total lunacy and heavy vibes, my crew and I tried to seek out some normalcy. We just wanted to see some kids having fun—some small sign of hope. So we organized a little event with some Karachi kids active in the local art and music scene. We were going to call it VICE Kills Karachi, in the tradition of our epic “VICE Kills” events. But they suggested the inverse, Karachi Kills VICE, because “Karachi kills everything.”

We said yes.

Watch Suroosh navigate one of the craziest cities on the planet in *The Vice Guide to Karachi* this month on VICE.com.

TOP: Suroosh gets some face-to-face (or face-to-helmet) time with a “target killer,” who tells him the tricks of the trade.

BOTTOM: A security post overlooking the Pashtun stronghold of Kati Pahari, where rival political parties trade shots on an almost daily basis.



## The Flyer

BY AZIZA AHMAD

What's more punk than a flyer featuring a collage of Pakistani subculture put together using MS Paint while skipping class? How about if your flyer is laughed at (and promptly handed back) by the guy at the copy shop, frowned at by your acquaintances, and banned from the venue it's supposedly promoting?

The poster I made for the Karachi Kills VICE show received just such a response for depicting a posterior not much different from one you'd see on Cartoon Network. And it's not like sex is totally taboo in Karachi. Walk down any street and you're bound to run into a sassy *hijra* (tranny) who might or might not visit a dark alley with you, a ten-year-old flipping the deuces and hustling roses (who might or might not have been in a dark alley before-hand), or a burka-clad prostitute who probably isn't down with the alley (you better bring a car). Even so, this city reacted in an insane way to a poorly drawn sex act—a black squiggle away from being banned from the walls of the local cinema—but was totally OK with the Taliban fighter ringed in hearts and the flower-shooting drone inches away from him.

In the end, I wound up turning the flyer into something my mother could be proud of by covering the naughty bits with a grinning terrorist's head. Because in Karachi, that's more tolerable than VICE.

## Headbanging Is Not a Crime

BY BABAR N. SHEIKH

It's a little after 10 PM in Karachi, and the few metalheads living in this mammoth metropolis meet up after work for some Chinese food, over which they discuss the new Fenriz interview and the fact that DRI has decided to tour Asia. Conversations are spiced with loads of metal trivia and the usual bitching about some guy who ripped someone off in a record trade. These guys might not pray to Allah, but they worship the second Tormentor demo and all of Sarcófago's records.

Metal in Pakistan was stillborn. There was a brief embryonic phase in the mid- to late 90s when bands like Dusk—which I am a member of—put Pakistan on the map of international metal, and there is still a small scene of loyal metal fans. Those were the days when interviews could only be read in zines, when you would kill someone if he bent your records on the bus ride back home, when Bolt Thrower's Jo Bench was queen. But in Karachi, even though it's 2012, some of us still live in that time.

**FROM TOP:** After we sent this flyer out, people wrote to us asking whether we had a death wish. We replied, "Dude, that should be clear from the title of the event". The cover art for Dusk's 2003 release, *Jahilia*.

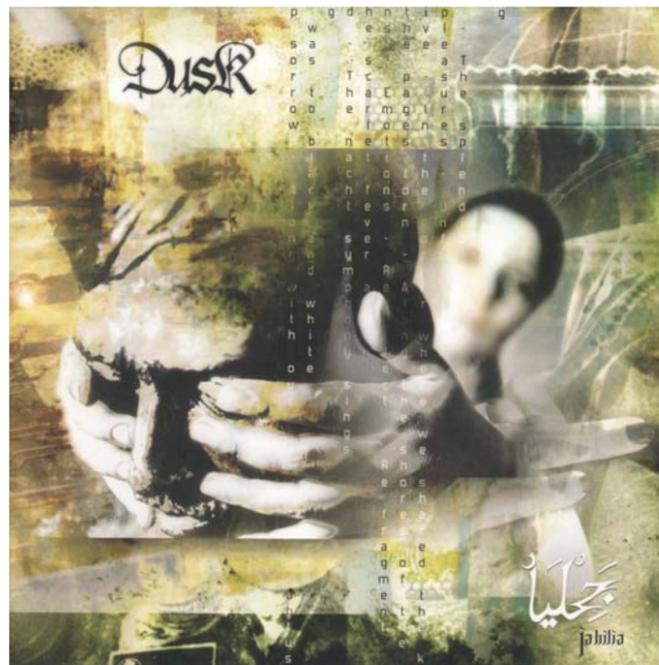
# HOCHSTADTER'S SLOW *and* LOW

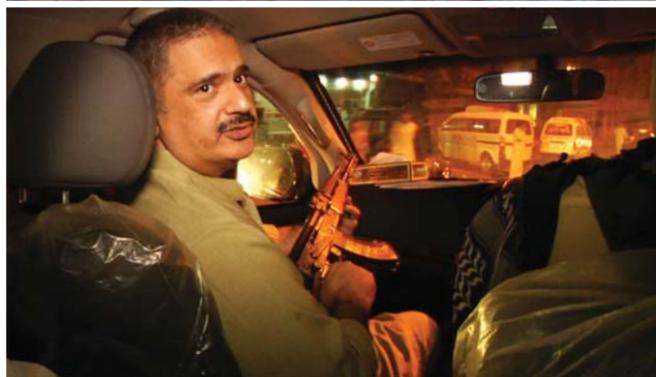
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## Dinner and a Movie with a Couple of Karachi Wise Guys

BY BASIM USMANI

During my first dinner in Karachi, I almost sat on a Kalashnikov. Turns out Uzair and Zafar Baloch, senior members of the banned Peoples' Aman Committee and the city's most notorious gangsters, are pretty great hosts. They are dons, after all. Their living room is equipped with an empty indoor swimming pool and a gigantic flat-screen TV; the garden features an exotic fish pool and a garish fountain. It's like if Scarface's villa were transplanted to Pakistan.

While we dined with the Balochs and their crew, automatic weapons were always within arm's reach. Zafar spent much of the dinner on the phone, discussing how they got called out as gangsters on local news, while Uzair and I ate *Lyari qorma* off a tin plate.

The conversation turned to New York. "Lyari is basically like the Bronx," their clean-cut spokesperson, Habib Jan, said. "I've visited the Bronx many times, and the people I know in New York are always saying, 'No, no, don't go to the Bronx.' It's been maligned." As has Karachi, though probably for more explicable reasons. I've been told by Karachiites that we probably shouldn't go rolling through Lyari at night unless we wanted to become one of many "missing persons" kidnapped by either the Taliban or one of the local gangs.

VICE needed Uzair and Zafar's protection, but in Pakistan journalists are hardly objective observers, and they wanted to know who we *really* were. So we showed them *The VICE Guide to the Congo* and *The VICE Guide to Gaza* on their oversize TV. These guys, the Baloch brothers quickly determined, will be protected. As they waged war on the local police, they would also ensure that we wouldn't be kidnapped and murdered. Thanks, kind gangsters!

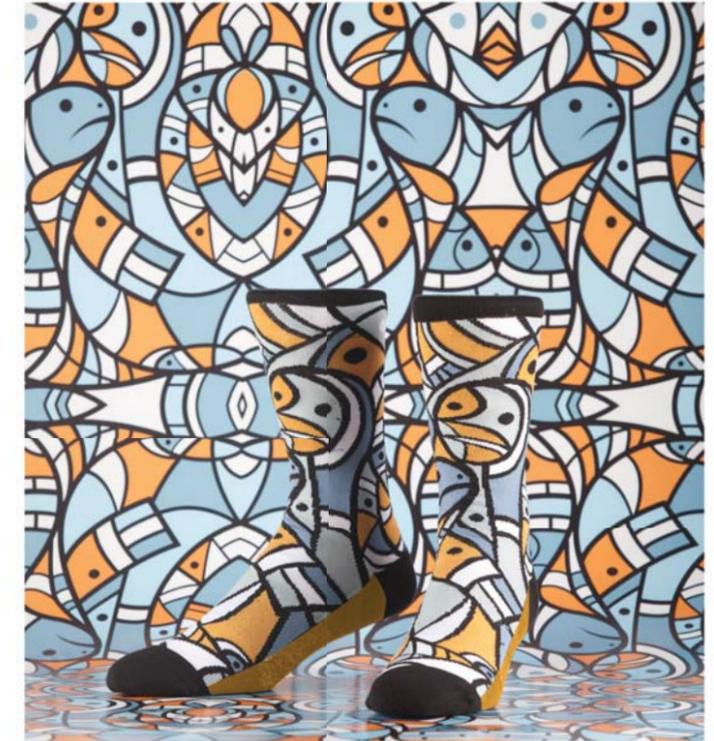
## Karachi Kills Itself

BY OSAMA MOTIWALA

Early in the morning on Tuesday, March 27, just hours after VICE left Karachi, two members of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a liberal political party, were shot dead by gunmen who invaded their homes. Everyone knew that the city was about to get fucked... *hard*. The suspect was connected with the Peoples' Aman Committee, a bitter political rival of the MQM. So it looked like yet another case of "You fuck with us, we kill you!"

As expected, the MQM subsequently took control of the city, ritually setting fire to vehicles in the process. By sundown, dozens of cars and buses were ablaze, nine people were dead, and others had been injured, mostly in the areas where VICE had been reporting. Shops, schools, public transportation, and gas stations were shut down.

Clashes between political and ethnic groups have turned Karachi into a shithole. Around 1,700 people lost their lives last year due to the violence in the city. However, the people of Karachi possess a certain "We don't give a fuck!" mind-set. They watch the news and then whine about how bad everything is. And that's about it. 



FROM TOP: Zafar Baloch watches one of Pakistan's many 24-hour news networks to keep tabs on the government's plan to wipe them out; Uzair Baloch proved to be a very gracious host even while waiting for the cops to storm his palatial home; Nabil Gabol, of the Pakistan People's Party, travels with a massive private army but still always carries his own Kalashnikov; In Orangi Town, the suspected new hideout for the Taliban, police conduct a raid for the benefit of the media and manage to nab one bearded guy with a 9-mm.



Yovani extracting fluids from a body.

## LIVING OFF DEATH

*Yovani Solís Embalms Ex-Presidents, Midget Wrestlers, and Victims of the Narco Wars*

BY ELIZABETH DUARTE, PHOTOS BY MAURICIO PALOS

Every day I ride a tram back and forth between my house and office. I've taken it for years now. The route goes through some of Mexico City's nicest neighborhoods, like Colonia Roma, but it also passes one of its roughest: the Doctores, where each street is named for a famous physician. Last year, on an April morning, I was gazing out the window of the tram when I spotted two oversize trailers backed up to the door of what looked like a nondescript residential house. A large group of photographers were snapping pictures around the trailers as soldiers stood around the perimeter, blocking off the street. It was an unusual sight, but it didn't provoke any Roswellian suspicions.

Later that day, as I was watching the news, I learned that the house I saw on the tram is something like a stopover to the afterlife—like a mom-and-pop-shop mortuary.

The scene kept replaying in my mind until curiosity finally got the best of me and I decided to return to the house and see who was inside. I knocked on the door, expecting some creepy, vampire-looking old guy to answer. Instead, I was welcomed inside by a sweet and soft-spoken young man named Yovani González Solís, who is the sole employee of La Embalsamadora la Piedad (Mercy Embalming).

The first thing I asked Yovani about was the trailers I'd seen while riding the tram, one of which was currently docked to the house from the sidewalk. He told me that the trucks were full of bodies, and that they were being delivered to him. Autopsies in Mexico are handled by the Forensic Medical Service (SEMEFO), a government agency tasked with identifying bodies and investigating violent deaths. But people like Yovani are relied on for the cleaning and embalming. It's mortuary outsourcing, basically.

When I asked Yovani where the stiffs on the trucks came from, he said they were transferred from Tamaulipas's infamous narco mass graves—victims of a series of brutal drug-cartel executions that happened last year. I was shocked and thought it best for me to leave to reflect on what was going on at Yovani's house, but I asked him whether it was OK to come back some other time to talk more about his work. He said yes.

Soon I was spending long afternoons with Yovani, talking about decomposing bodies, the mysteries of death, and his life. While many kids in Mexico City celebrate their 15th birthdays with huge parties that are on par with bar mitzvahs, at 15 Yovani was forced to start working as an embalmer out of necessity. Even though he's only 27, Yovani has such a good reputation in the embalming industry that he has gained the loyalty of big-time clients like SEMEFO and the Heróico Colegio Militar (an academy that trains Mexico's military officers).



Yovani posing inside the embalming chamber after a hard day of work.

Yovani spends almost every hour of every day inside his bunker of death, and much of the Doctores neighborhood is in the body business: two public hospitals can be found on a single block, countless funeral homes and coffin shops are scattered about, and the SEMEFO headquarters is nearby as well. It's a goth teen's paradise.

It's tough to have a social life when you live inside an embalming facility, as Yovani does. He can't even take time off because the work is endless and he's been unable to find a full-time assistant who'll put up with the incredibly demanding and olfactory-challenging work. He runs the place entirely on his own. It's ironic that in a country where young kids readily sign up with the cartels to become *sicarios* and kill people for less than 50 bucks a head, no one is willing to take a job cleaning up the mess.

As Yovani points out repeatedly, every body arrives in a different condition, and some require much more work than others. Murder victims are first sent to SEMEFO before they can be readied for a coffin and, if they're lucky, a funeral. After the authorities perform a necropsy to determine the exact cause of death, the bodies must be embalmed in a specific way called *legal*. The corpse is injected with at least two liters of formaldehyde—first through the jugular vein, then the carotid arteries in the neck and the subclavian vein in the chest, and finally the femoral arteries in the legs. When the body arrives at the embalming house, the innards (heart, liver, intestines, kidneys, etc.) are put inside a plastic bag. This helps delay decomposition.



*Yovani unwraps a body before placing it on the surgical table.*

If a person dies in a particularly nasty way, Yovani will cover the wounds with a formaldehyde powder that turns the blood gelatinous, which ensures that the previously injected liquids won't squirt out during the funeral. All other bodily fluids need to be extracted as well. To suck the water out of the abdominal cavity, Yovani measures three fingers up from the navel and pierces the body with his trocar, a vacuum-powered spike that is the embalmer's signature tool. When I asked him what the hardest part of the body to pierce is, he said, "The heart." Figures. "When the bodies leave here they look as if they've just come out of the shower. We wash them, we dye them, and occasionally we apply makeup to them, too."

His workshop contains all the tools you'd expect—scalpels, forceps, medical thread, a couple of slabs to lay the bodies on—along with a few personal additions. "I can't work without superglue, because when I have to close the holes in the neck I suck the fluids out of, I don't like using stitches. It's not pleasant for the relatives to look at in the funerals; if you just glue the skin, it looks much cleaner." He also keeps lipstick and powder on hand for similar reasons.

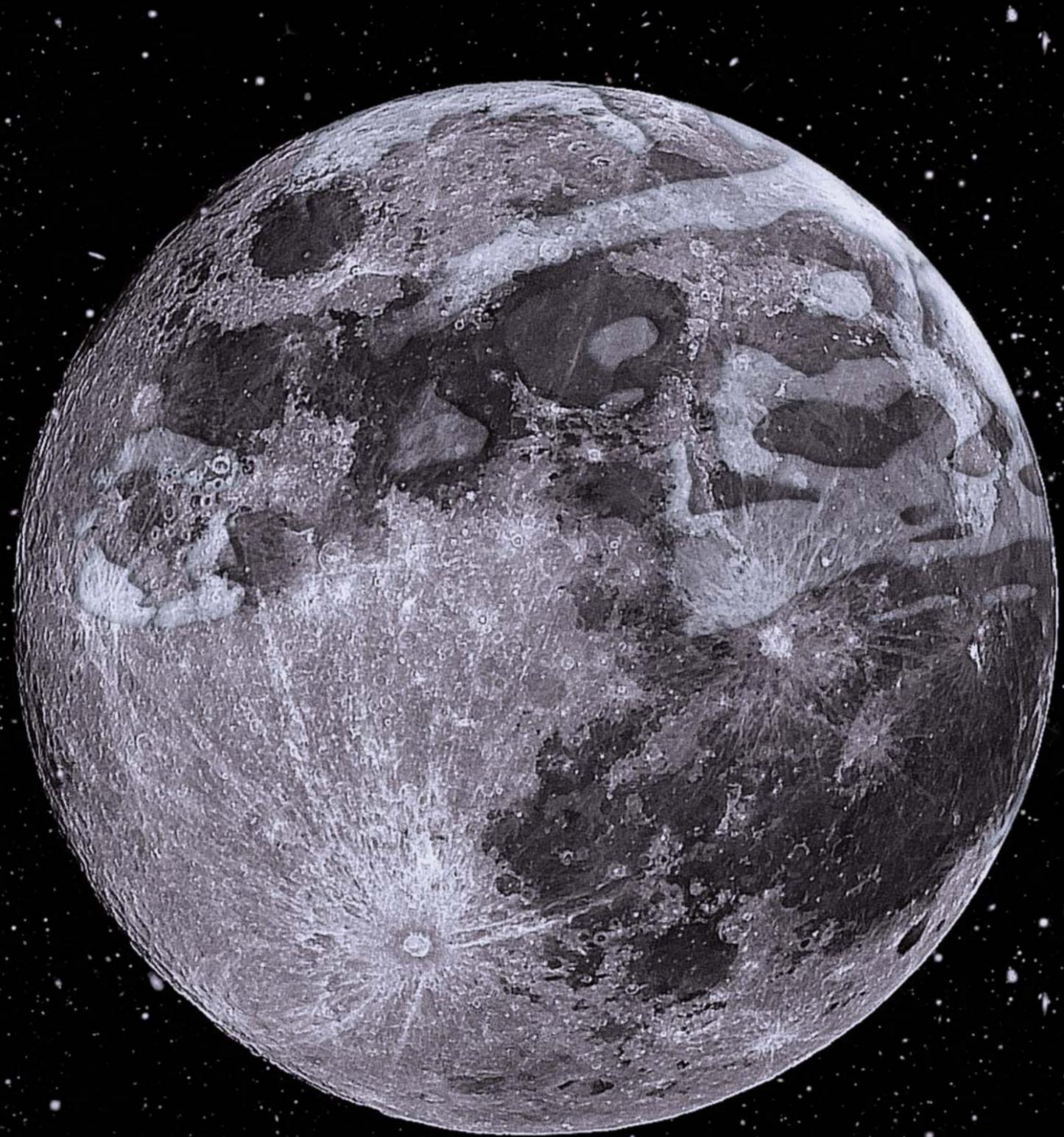
Sometimes, though, families request things that are beyond even Yovani's talents: "When people bring bodies of very old women, they are very picky. They always give me photos of dead women when they were young and had hair, but there's only so much I can do. I'm not a magician."

As I watched Yovani suck liters and liters of blood, piss, water, and less-identifiable matter out of corpses, I wondered what he did with all that stuff, as well as the bloodstained

sheets and other assorted detritus. He told me that all the fluids get flushed into the sewage system, but not until he drops in a chemical that breaks down the gross mixture into "water." Really, water? That sounded like alchemy. "Well, not exactly drinking water, but it gets rid of the odor and the color of the fluids. And once it's done its work, I turn the lever, and the liquids go down the drain." As for the solid waste, that gets picked up by a garbage truck that primarily collects trash from hotels. Of course, he gives them a generous tip for their help.

Trying to take in the scope of his operation, I learned that Yovani has prepared hundreds—if not thousands—of bodies in his time. But the most famous body he has embalmed by far was former Mexican president José López Portillo. He also worked on Espectrito Jr., a midget wrestler who, in an incident tailor-made for the tabloids, was found dead in a hotel room along with his brother and fellow midget wrestler La Parkita; allegedly, they were drugged by two prostitutes who robbed them.

The most legendary—and gory—work Yovani has ever done involves the bodies inside the trailers I saw from the window of the tram. The corpses were found in a town called San Fernando, in the northern state of Tamaulipas, an area known as a crossing point for illegal migrants from Central America on their way to the US. Reportedly, the Zetas cartel were kidnapping busloads of people, holding them for ransom or trying to force them to work for them. It has been rumored that some were even forced to fight one another to the death, and many of the abductees went missing until the mass graves were discovered. When word got out about the situation, all



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Before delivering a body to its final destination, Yovani makes a final inspection to make sure it looks nice and clean.

the embalming houses in the Doctores sent the bodies they were working on to other neighborhoods and came together to form a kind of impromptu corpse-treatment squad to handle the sudden influx of the dead.

“First there was a batch of around 80, but the next day we received maybe 75 more,” Yovani said. “Most of them arrived in a very bad state of decomposition; they were mostly unrecognizable. In some cases, all we could do was to put the bones and chunks of skin in formaldehyde. We formed a team of ten embalmers, and we split in pairs.” I asked about the stench. “I can’t tell. About two years into this job, I lost my sense of smell.”

After weeks of conflicting information about the final body count in San Fernando, the government released an official statement reporting that 193 bodies were found in 47 clandestine mass graves. The regional embalming shops in the north of Mexico were simply not able to handle the volume, so the cadavers were shipped to Mexico City in refrigerated trucks. Once embalmed, the dead were sent back to SEMEFO. According to the PGR (Mexico’s equivalent to the Department of Justice), only 34 have been identified.

This was not the first time Yovani had to work on such a large quantity of corpses. In September 2010, his shop received 56 bodies, the lion’s share of 72 victims executed by the Zetas in San Fernando. That massacre is one of the most infamous events in recent history, since most, if not all, of the victims were innocent migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Brazil, and even one from India, who were simply seeking a better life as so many others had before them.

According to SEMEFO, by the time the second massacre occurred in 2011, 14 of the 72 migrants had yet to be identified, and thanks to the discovery of fresh bodies, the unidentified corpses from the first batch had to be moved to the nearby city of Toluca. One of those bodies was later reclaimed by relatives, but in June of last year, the remaining 13 had to be buried, ironically enough, in another mass grave, this one a legally sanctioned site in Mexico City.

Clandestine gravesites in Mexico are nothing new, but *narcofosas* (narco mass graves) have become something of an epidemic since 2006, the same year that the government of Felipe Calderón took power and declared war on the cartels. Between 2006 and 2011, 174 mass graves containing 1,029 bodies have been found scattered across 19 states (with higher concentrations in Guerrero, Tamaulipas, Durango, and Chihuahua). Estimates of the total number of drug-related murders over the past five years vary widely, and who knows how many bodies have yet to be uncovered. Official numbers released by the PGR in January put the death toll at 47,515, but *Semanario Zeta*, a weekly political journal based in Tijuana, reported that the number is more than 60,000, and the organization Mexico United Against Crime claims it’s actually 80,000.

There is a silver lining of sorts: As long as the bodies keep piling up as a result of this war between the government and the cartels, businesses like Yovani’s will thrive. I feel fortunate to have found a trustworthy friend like Yovani, whom I can talk with for hours about life, death, and the new season of one of our favorite shows, *The Walking Dead*. *CCB*



[www.IFLADIES.com](http://www.IFLADIES.com)



Fredrik Söderberg, Pen II, 2012. Watercolor, palladium, and gold leaf on paper, 74 x 54 cm. Photo by Daniel Andersson. Courtesy Galleri Riis

# ALLIGATOR STORY

BY BARRY GIFFORD  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY FREDRIK SÖDERBERG

*The New York Times Book Review once said that Barry Gifford has been “chronicling the decline of Western civilization”; another way to look at it is that Barry has been one of the few figures preventing Western civilization from going completely to shit. He’s written more than 40 books, including novels and collections of poetry and essays, and VICE has had the pleasure of publishing a few of his short stories over the past few years.*

*So when he sent us his previously unpublished “Alligator Story,” we of course jumped at the chance to share it with the world. We’ve paired Barry’s text with new works by Swedish artist Fredrik Söderberg, whose occult-inspired imagery gives us the same sorts of chills that Gifford’s stories do.*

A kid wearing a Tampa Tarpons t-shirt came running up the street shouting, “Some cracker just shot a gator!”

Roy and his uncle Buck were in the driveway of the house on Oakview Terrace, rinsing down the boat. They had just come in from fishing out of Oldsmar and had been gone since five o’clock that morning; it was now 6:30 in the evening. They hadn’t had much luck, having boated several kingfish and a few mackerel, but they’d run on sharks everywhere and had to cut lines to get rid of them. The weather had been spotty, the water in the Gulf was cloudy and there were periodic brief showers. It was just the two of them, so they’d had a lot of time to talk. Roy was 12 and a half years old and he loved to listen to Buck, who was 45. Buck was full of information on almost any subject. He was well-traveled and well-read and today he had been teaching Roy about navigation, explaining a rhumb line, which is a course that makes the same angle with each meridian which it crosses; it is constant in direction throughout and always appears as a straight line on charts.

“But the curve of shortest distance between any two points on the earth is always an arc of a great circle,” Roy’s uncle told him, “the sort of circle which would be marked out if we were to slice the earth into two halves, passing the cut through the ends of the course and the center of the earth. The shortest path will always be a great-circle course.”

Buck had been a lieutenant commander in the navy during the war, and he was a civil and mechanical engineer; sometimes his explanations were too esoteric or complicated for Roy to absorb, but his uncle was always careful to show Roy what he was talking about.

“It’s the wind you have to pay the closest attention to,” said Uncle Buck. “The winds will control the course more than mathematical considerations.”

As the kid in the Tarpons t-shirt ran by, Buck asked him, “Where’s he got it?”

“On the little pier at the end of Palmetto,” the kid shouted.

Buck cut off the hose and went into the utility shed and came back out with a sheathed knife and a hatchet. He handed the hatchet to Roy and said, “Come on, nephew, let’s go down there.”

Roy and his uncle walked along River Grove under massive hanging moss and cut across the narrow skiff launch to Palmetto Street, which they followed down to the little

pier. When they got there they saw a skinny man about 40 years old wearing only a pair of gray trousers with the butt of a pistol sticking out of the waistband and a dark brown Remington Ammo cap slicing up the belly side of a six-and-a-half-foot-long alligator. The man’s pants, chest, and arms were spattered with blood.

Buck and Roy watched him work for a minute, then Buck said, “What are you going to do with the hide?”

The man was working fast and he did not look up.

“Throw it away. There’s a \$500 fine you get caught with it. All I need’s the meat.”

Roy and his uncle and two boys who were about eight or nine years old and had been swimming in the Hillsborough River watched the man hack and tear feverishly at the carcass. It was still very hot although the sun had begun to go down. Roy knew that it was against the law to shoot a gator without a permit; he guessed that the man didn’t have permission to kill alligators, so he wanted to take what was edible and get going.

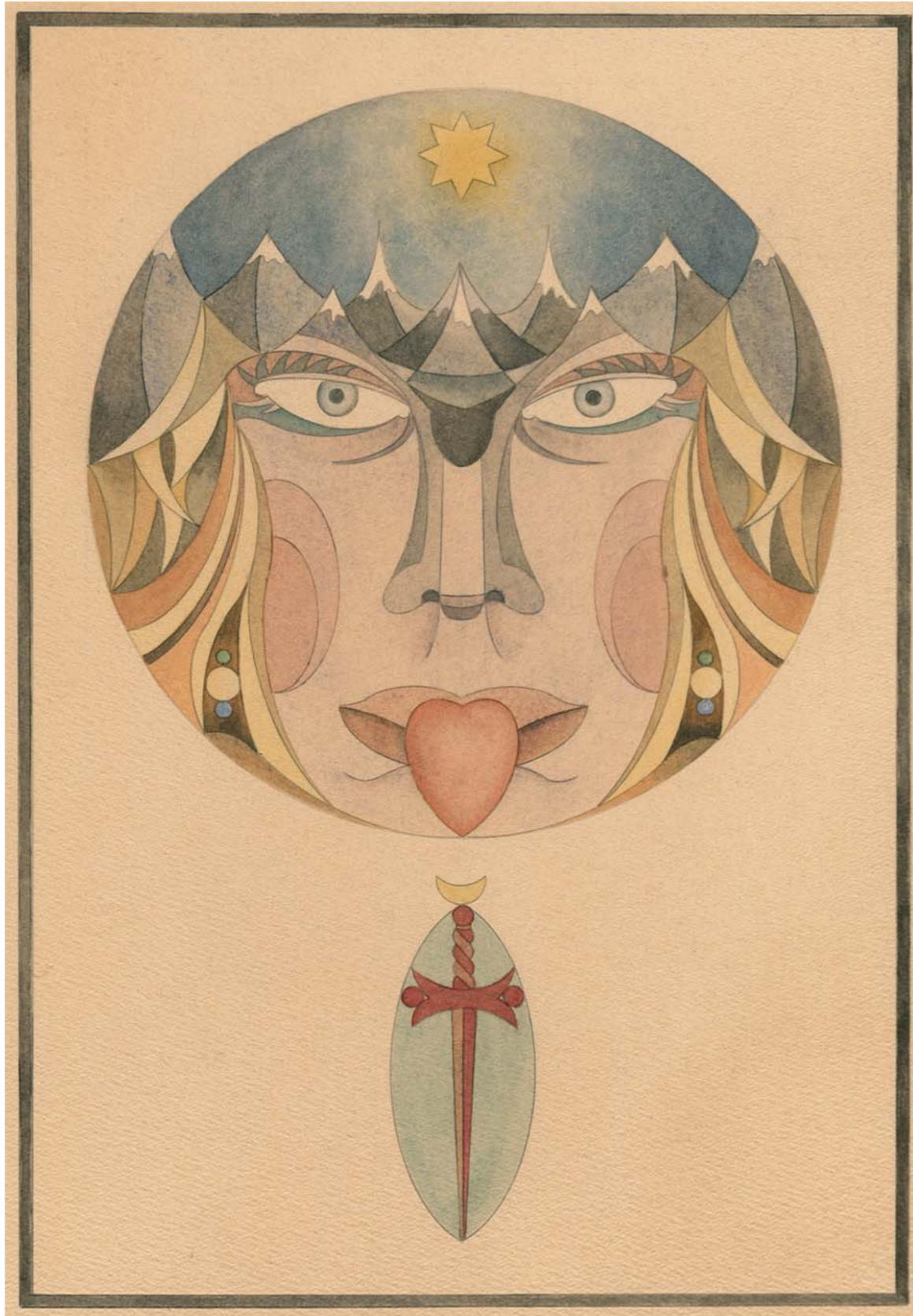
When the man had finished carving up the belly, he crammed the meat into a canvas sack, stood up, wiped his knife on his right trouser leg, and said to Buck, “I’ll leave the rest to you, then.”

The man walked off with the sack over his left shoulder. Roy noticed that he was barefoot and his right leg was considerably shorter than his left. The bag full of gator meat seemed to help keep him balanced as he made his way up the pebbly incline from the dock and disappeared behind the hanging moss.

Buck unsheathed his knife, flipped what remained of the alligator onto its stomach and told Roy to chop off the head.

Roy hesitated and his uncle said, “Come on, nephew, we don’t want Fish and Game to find us. Run your fingers along the top of the spine and find the soft spot.”

The ridges along the gator’s back were hard as stones and sharp-edged but not abrasive like a shark’s skin. Roy’s fingers found what felt like a seam two inches behind the head and with both hands wrapped tightly around the handle of the hatchet raised it just above his right shoulder and brought it down into where he judged the seam to be. The blade cut a half-inch into the hide before meeting resistance from muscle and tendon. Roy dropped down from his squatting position and straddled the snout with a knee on either side of the gator’s head resting on the planks. The two boys watched



Frederik Stöderberg, Yet Time to Turn, 2011. Watercolor and gold leaf on paper, 29 x 22 cm. Photo by Daniel Andersson. Courtesy Galleri Riis

**ALLIGATOR STORY** by Barry Gifford

intently as Roy hacked away until the head began to separate from the rest of the body. It took about 15 or 20 minutes to sever the head entirely. When Roy stood up his legs and arms were trembling and his hands hurt.

"Pull the head away," said his uncle, "and stand back."

Buck knelt on the gator's back from the opposite end and began cutting at the hide. Roy stood with the two boys and observed as Buck swiftly but carefully skinned the ancient-looking reptile. Sweat streamed down Roy's uncle's face as he worked, cutting evenly as he progressed from neck to tail, taking particular care not to mutilate the feet. The sun had been down for three hours before Buck completed the job. Roy and the two boys, who were cousins named Rupe and Rhett, were seated cross-legged on the pier.

"That was tough, huh?" Rupe said.

"Alligators have survived for tens of thousands of years," said Buck. "They don't live in houses, like people do, so they have to be protected from the elements."

"God made 'em tough," said Rhett.

"What you gonna do with the head?" asked Rupe.

"You can take it, if you like," Buck said.

Rupe and Rhett stood up and together they lifted the head.

"Whoa, it's heavy," said Rupe, and they dropped it. "We can't carry it all the way to my house."

"Your mama wouldn't let you keep it anyhow," said Rhett.

"Shove it into the river," said Buck.

The cousins slid the head to the end of the pier and pushed it over. There was a small splash when the head hit the water. It floated on the surface for a few seconds, then tilted backward so that the mouth half opened and grinned at them before the head sank out of sight.

"Them were some terrible lookin' teeth," said Rhett.

Buck kicked what was left of the gator's guts, bones, and intestines into the river, then lifted the hide under the front legs.

"Grab the tail with two hands," he told Roy. "Put your arms underneath. So long, boys."

Rupe and Rhett watched Roy and his uncle carry off the hide.

Back at the house, Buck brought out from the garage a board about six feet long and three feet wide. He and Roy centered the hide on top of it, then Buck tacked it down so that it was stable. He went into the house and came back out with a box of salt and sprinkled the salt liberally all over the hide.

"Pick up the other end," Buck said, and he and Roy carried the board with the gator skin tacked to it around to the backyard and set it down on the ground. Buck took two cinder blocks and placed them down five and a half feet apart, then he and Roy picked up the board and set it down end to end on the blocks.

"It'll be all right here for now," said Buck. "The sun will hit it first thing in the morning, then we'll hoist it up onto the garage roof in the afternoon to dry out."

Buck looped his right arm around Roy's shoulders.

"You did a great job, nephew. I know that head didn't come off easily."

"You did the real work, Unk. You skinned the gator like a Seminole would."

Both Roy and his uncle were covered with blood and gristle.

"How is it you were able to keep your concentration the way you did while you were skinning him?" asked Roy. "I mean, you hardly said a word for two hours."

Buck pulled his blood-stained shirt off over his head and threw it down.

"I started thinking about your grandmother's second husband, the one who raised your mother. He hated me and I hated him, and so I imagined that I was skinning him instead of the alligator."

"Why did he hate you?"

"For no good reason, really. I'm almost 14 years older than your mother. He disliked the fact that my mother had been married before, so he resented my existence. Some men are like that; some women, too."

"Did he hate my mother?"

"No, she was a young girl, and he sent her away to school when she was old enough. I was almost a man, it was easier for him to hate me."

"My mother never talks about him; all I know is that he died."

"He had a heart attack after he and your grandmother were married for ten years; then she remarried my father."

"You must have really hated the guy to imagine that you were skinning him."

"I pretended that he was still alive but barely conscious and that he knew what I was doing but was too weak to do anything about it. I imagined that he didn't die until after I skinned him entirely."

"Did he do anything terrible to you?"

"He banished me from his house, even though my mother and sister lived there. To see me, your grandmother had to meet me somewhere else, in a park or at a restaurant. Whenever she gave me money she made me promise that he would never know that she had."

"That's crazy, Unk. How could she allow that to happen?"

"I don't know, Roy. People do all sorts of crazy things."

Buck unfastened his belt and let his pants drop to the ground. His skinning knife was in its sheath, which was still strung on the belt.

"I'm glad I never had to meet him," said Roy.

"He wouldn't have hated you, nephew. What's terrible is that I still harbor such awful feelings for a man who's been dead for 25 years. It's no good to keep that kind of poison in you because after a while the poison starts to work on you. I hope you never have to hate anyone like that."

"I hope I won't, either."

"All right, let's wash up and get some dinner."

"Why didn't we save the head?"

"The only way to preserve it would be to soak it in formaldehyde. Too much trouble. The catfish are feasting on it."

"I bet those cousins are telling their folks about the alligator now."

"Come on, Roy, get your clothes off."

The head was scary, Roy thought, but it was beautiful, too. It was too bad that Rupe or Rhett hadn't kept it.



# Pretty Koof-A

By Maggie Lee & Sandy Kim

Sandro top, Lublu skirt, A.J. Morgan sunglasses, Charlotte Ronson sweater, Sandro shorts, vintage sunglasses

Starring: Maggie Lee and Sandy Kim  
Stylist: Miyako Bellizzi  
Producers: Serena Pezzato and Ellis Jones  
Photo illustration: Angie Sullivan  
Photo assistant: Davide Bernardis  
Hair: Darine Sengseevong  
Makeup: Ruico Oshika  
Hair assistant: Aut Sivongxay  
Shot at Fast Ashleys Studios



American Apparel top, Miyako Bellizzi necklace, vintage barrette, American Apparel top, Swatch watch



Johnny Was dress, Johnny Was top, vintage necklace



Jack Greer for Opening Ceremony denim vest, Comptoir des Colonniers top, Kelly Wearstler skirt, vintage barrettes; Jack Greer for Opening Ceremony denim vest, Reborn flannel shirt, vintage barrettes



Willfox Couture top, Richard Nicoll by Fred Perry top, Undeclared hat



Garni sweater, Charlotte Ronson jumpsuit, Jac Langenheim bow;  
Suno dress, Comptoir des Cotonniers headscarf



Jimmy Tavermiti overalls, Vince shirt, Deschain bowtie; American  
Apparel overalls, Comme des Garçons t-shirt, Deschain headband

PUTTA  
SMILE ON IT



daddy daddy daddy

Degen top, WeSc top, Stussy hat, vintage necklace



I WANT TO DO NOTHING

Amy Winehouse for Fred Perry top, Mango skirt, vintage hat, Swatch watch; Santoro blazer, Vince top, Amy Winehouse for Fred Perry skirt, Miyako Bellizzi necklace, vintage sunglasses



Let's be honest. All a woman under 30 has to do to make any man throw away his wife, his job, his AA promises, and access to his kids is open her mouth.



How come janitors in every other country on earth look like trolley drivers at a Bond villain's compound while we're still stuck with Joe Dirt plus fat, times diabetes, minus funny?



Hip-hop fashion's made some pretty brutal missteps in the last two decades, especially with the Asian accessories, but I feel like it's leveled out in recent years and hit a more subdued sort of—holy shit, look at this fucking girl.



It fucking blows watching your friend run off with some girl and throw all his money and years of his life up their arms (provided they don't die). That said, if it's just every once in a while and both you and she can handle your shit, where's the shame in that? Everyone's such a Puritan these days.



I maintain that there's no greater emblem of pure, unconditional love than a super-skinny guy with a big fat girl, but Latin America's got this reverse situation going on all over the place that's pretty sweet, even when he's holding on to her like a suitcase full of coke.



DON'Ts



Everybody's got a picture of their dad holding them as a baby with a lit cigarette inches away from their baby face and a pair of tallboys in his other hand that your mom always pulls out to show to friends and joke about how "that explains it, right?" This picture, however, really is going to explain it.



Did you know the Netherlands has its own version of Juggalos? They're called Gabbers, they've been around since the 90s, and they go to parties wearing Jason and Pinhead masks and headbang (yes, headbang) to techno so mentally devoid it makes ICP sound like freaking Gang Starr. Google "hakken dance" right now if you don't believe me.



Fuck, dude. I hate when people spill across the armrest too (especially when they've already taken your window seat and are pretending to be asleep to avoid confrontation), but this reaction is a tad extreme, and documenting it after the fact makes you look like a serial killer.



Hey man, why don't you unplug yourself and actually take time out to say hello to the people around you? I mean, just imagine the kind of awesome shit a guy whose t-shirt was designed by a committee of smartphone-application designers would have to say!

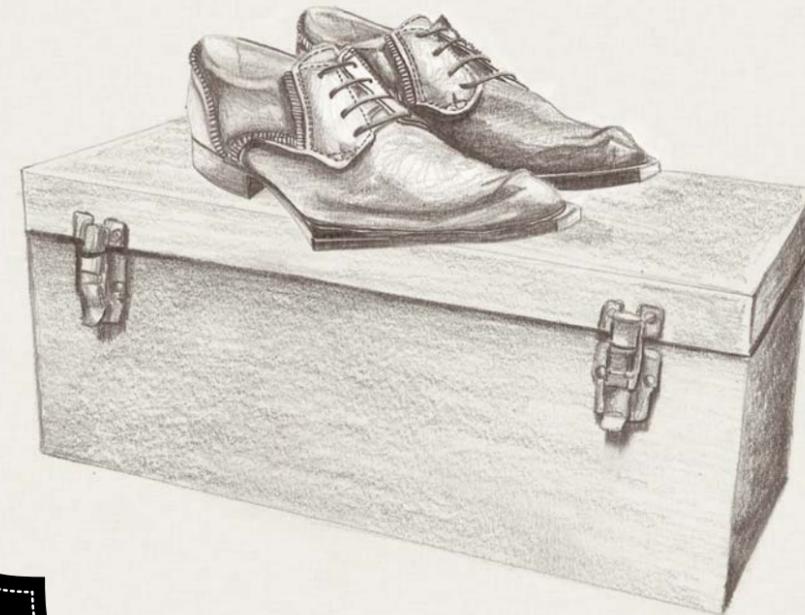


You know what else rules? VHS tapes. And fax machines. And is it just me, or do pinhole cameras actually take much better pictures than those \$5,000 digital crapbuckets? BTW, you should go see my dentist, he's totally analog.



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DOs



It's been kind of weird having Satan around the house, but aside from the hair all over the couch and the smell (I guess that's brimstone?), I'm feeling pretty comfortable with the decision. She actually gives really good advice.

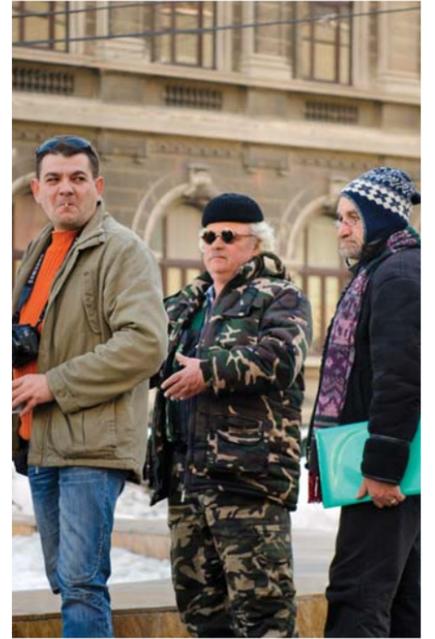


Hey. Hey now. What's going on here, little buddy? The weather's nice, the bitches are out in full force, and you've got nowhere to be in the morning. Come on, me and Pete are going to go get some pitchers at Mabel's with our new roommate. I think you'll like her.

DON'Ts



After years of being told to stop playing video games and go outside and get some fresh air, this kid has finally beat the system and won yet another battle for American ingenuity. He is officially the Steve Jobs of getting his mother to shut the fuck up.



"The Room does not give you what you ask for, what you think you wish for, but what you truly, most deeply desire. OK, which one of you keeps farting?"



No, this isn't some lazy Borat joke from Romania, you simp. This is a walking love letter to American masculinity delivered in maybe-not-so-perfect English, but with the kind of heart and sincerity that make our throats knot up tighter than YouTubeing the Jim Henson funeral at the end of a three-day bender.



Er, maybe a little light on the "masculinity" with this particular love letter, but I guess you've got to play the hand your genes deal you.



The only way he could look more like the phrase "sultan's butt plug" is if he was just a pair of squirming flip-flops poking out of a rich Arab guy's ass.



Ever wonder what it would be like to fuck the female version of yourself? This guy knows. He totally has "I just fucked girl-me" face.



Mashing up Sammy Hagar with Joan Osborne is bad enough when you're a DJ and it's just a couple of their songs, but doing it to the two actual people takes playing God to some severe Book of Job shit.



Where to start with this woman? No, I'm serious, where do I start saying anything about this woman? It's like her entire outfit has been designed to confuse me out of any attempt at rational criticism. Her pants are from four different decades.

# AVE- DONE

PHOTOS BY ALIYA NAUMOFF  
STYLIST: ANNETTE LAMOTHE-RAMOS



Alexandre Herchovitch jacket, American Apparel top, Jac Langheim skirt, Aldo belt, Candace Ang bracelets



Photo assistant: Rafael Rios  
Stylist assistant: Miyako Bellizzi  
Hair: Bethany Brill  
Makeup: Lisa Aharon at Kate Ryan  
Models: Garima and Mia at IMG,  
Jana at Women Direct  
Shot at George Brown Studio



*The Blond dress, Dagmar jacket, American Apparel socks, Jeffrey Campbell shoes, vintage ring*





Betsy Johnson dress, American Apparel slip and tights, custom Converse sneakers by East Village Shoe Repair, Chris Habana necklace



*Imitation tank top, American Apparel shorts and skirt, Jeffrey Campbell shoes, vintage sunglasses;  
Stussy jacket, Sally LaPointe dress, Terese Bennett headpiece*





*Jac Langheim bustier, Sally LaPointe pants, Aldo belt, Mango earrings*



# ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE

*A Selection of  
Photos from  
'Life's a Blast'*

PHOTOS BY  
LINDA FORSELL

*By this point, so many photojournalists have made the trek to the West Bank and Gaza Strip that the Plight of the Palestinians has become a predictable subgenre, complete with its own lame clichés: young men throwing rocks, protesters waving flags and screaming, children walking through rubble, checkpoints, rocket explosions, Israeli Defense Forces storm troopers busting down doors, and, of course, the wall. It's one of those instances of something being so well documented that one has to question whether we have become desensitized to the severity of the situation due to oversaturation.*

*Linda Forsell's new book, Life's a Blast, avoids these well-worn tropes. The 101 impeccably composed, square-format photos contained within were taken on a series of trips between 2008 and 2010, and somehow Linda found a different, more human way of telling this familiar story. Palestinians and Israelis aren't reduced to anonymous victims of history or heavily armed occupiers. Instead, the stunningly ordinary activities of daily life are used as a prism to reflect the crushing weight of what appears to be a conflict that will never end. Depictions of violence are subtle, which makes them all the more terrifying—a store mannequin with its jaw blown off; a little boy using a crayon to draw a house, stick figures, and a tank.*

*The photos are interspersed with vignettes by Linda that draw on years of conversations with Palestinians and Israelis and underscore the poisonous atmosphere created by decades of armed conflict. Linda writes about a street in Hebron where settlers are notorious for standing on the roofs and peeing on Palestinians passing underneath. "When I go to my school, I sit between two settlers," a Palestinian man tells her in another account. "Both of them carry machine guns. We always offer each other tea if we have it, but none of us accept."*

*You could say that Life's a Blast is definitive—a good argument for why photographers who cover the conflict need to put down the camera for a little while and reflect on how they could be telling this story in more impactful ways. For now, we'll just let them take a cue from Linda with this small selection of what you can find inside.*

Some Palestinian boys admire their handiwork after flipping a broken car upside down during a demonstration in East Jerusalem, 2010.





**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Israeli soldiers smile after firing tear gas at demonstrators in the West Bank, 2010; A Palestinian boy plays in what once was his home in the Gaza Strip, 2009; Palestinian military officers in Hebron share a laugh, 2008; Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox Jews protest against allowing Sephardic ultra-Orthodox Jews into their schools in Jerusalem, 2010.



A Palestinian teenager grins as he lobs rocks at Israeli soldiers using his slingshot in Ni'lin, 2008.



*A Palestinian man and companion on a beach in the Gaza Strip, 2010.*



*A young man looks out over Beit El, an Israeli settlement on the West Bank, 2008.*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A Palestinian boy in a homemade gas mask near a violent demonstration in Nabi Saleh in the West Bank, 2010; A young Palestinian at a demonstration in the West Bank, 2010; A Palestinian boy in a Bethlehem refugee camp, 2008; A Palestinian fidgets with his permit while waiting in line at an Israeli checkpoint at Kalandia, 2009.

A Palestinian and an Israeli wait at the same bus stop in Jerusalem, 2009.



*A Jewish boy gets his first haircut at the age of three, as mandated by the Torah, 2009.*



*A Palestinian woman in Gaza makes sure her veil is looking good, 2009.*



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Rubble in a house in the Gaza Strip bombed during the war in January 2009; Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem watch a demonstration, 2010; A selection of newspaper clippings collected by a Palestinian teenage boy in Bethlehem, 2008; A young man stands at the Israeli side of the wall surrounding Gaza, 2010.



The grieving mother of a 17-year-old Palestinian boy who was shot in the back after stabbing an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint, 2008.

# MEMORY IS SELECTIVE

*The Forgotten Indiscretions of Sweden's 'Lollipop' Zine*

INTRODUCTION BY RICHARD KERN  
PHOTOS BY CARL ABRAHAMSSON



A collective group of artists and musicians located in Gothenburg, Sweden, called Radium invited me to show films a few times at their warehouse-like space in 1986 or '87.

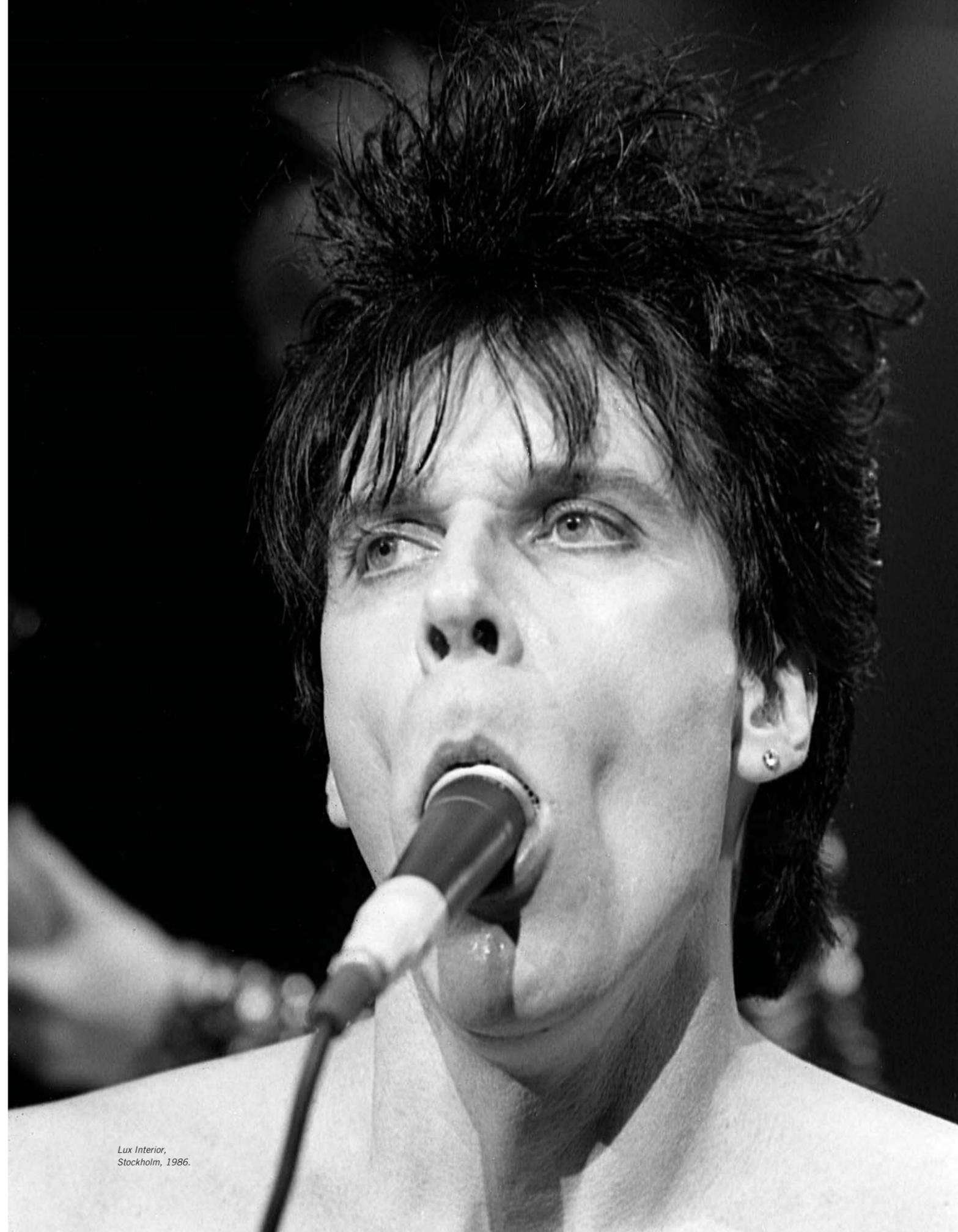
I was a drug addict at this time, so going to places like this was always a psychedelic experience. I'd get on a plane, begin kicking dope immediately, then be forced to start looking for something to dull the pain as soon as I landed. In Sweden, the favored drugs seemed to be speed, alcohol, and cigarettes. No one slept. I was amazed that the Swedish government gave organizations like Radium free money to promote the kind of stuff that degenerates like me were doing.

On one of these trips, I met Carl Abrahamsson. He was producing a fanzine called *Lollipop* and offered to organize a film screening for me in Stockholm.

Memory is selective, unreliable, and questionable. There is no "I'll remember this forever" tool in our brain. So I was very happy to receive this book of Carl's photographs from that time period in Sweden. The book puts names to some of the hazy images that drift around in my head. It's nice to see myself with thick dark hair and black stubble, Genesis as a man, Lydia as a shapely sexpot, Freddie Wadling exactly as I remember him, and multiple photos of one of my favorite bands, Union Carbide Productions.

All I remember about Carl and the trip he organized for me was that I was supposed to sleep on a beat-up leather couch in his one-room apartment while he and his girlfriend "slept" in a bed a few feet away. Drug-sick, I couldn't pass out, and the grunting and squeaking noises from the bed didn't help. I know lots of people slept on that couch while visiting Stockholm, and I've always wondered if having sex while an extra person or persons were in the room was and still is a vital part of Carl's sex life. *VEB*

*The following photos are from FanzinEra, Carl's new book of photos he took in Sweden during the half-remembered years of 1985-88. It will be out in the US in mid-May. More of Carl's work can be seen at [www.carlabrahamsson.com](http://www.carlabrahamsson.com).*



*Lux Interior,  
Stockholm, 1986.*



**THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** *Screamin' Jay Hawkins and friend, Hultsfred, 1987; Aron Aronsson, Stockholm, 1986; Steve Shelley, Stockholm, 1987.*

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** *Lydia Lunch, Stockholm, 1988.*





**THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:**  
*Genesis P-Orridge, Cheltenham, 1988;*  
*Patricia Morrison, Stockholm, 1985;*  
*Nick Zedd, Gothenburg, 1988.*  
**OPPOSITE PAGE:**  
*Tim Warren of Crypt Records, Stockholm, 1986.*



# INSIDE THE LOONEY DISCO

*Dancing the Night Away at  
a German Mental Hospital*

BY CHRISTOPH WÖHRLE  
PHOTOS BY TANJA KERNWEISS

**O**n the second Wednesday of every month, Klinikum Wahrendorff, a psychiatric hospital in Köthenwald, Germany, becomes the most improbable disco in the world. The common room is cleared out and transformed into something resembling a typical discotheque: People dress up, dance, drink, flirt, argue, and generally get out of hand. The main difference here is that while it's hard to get *in* to a regular club, it's even more difficult to get *out* of Wahrendorff.

I arrive before the festivities begin to find two light machines beaming blue, red, yellow, and green lights in various patterns on the dark hardwood floor and the long red curtains that cover the windows. It could be a scene straight out of a B movie from the 80s, except I don't think the concept of time is held in high regard here.

I scan the deserted room and try to picture how it will appear in 30 minutes, when 200 patients invade the space and coagulate into one dancing, pulsing entity. The bass kicks in over the speakers. I half-recognize the song. It's something by Lady Gaga, a fitting choice for a soundcheck in a mental hospital. Behind the dance floor there are tables laden with plastic plates full of chips, pretzels, and other snacks. The setup resembles a cross between a small-town disco and a teenager's birthday party.

## I realize that someone is approaching me from behind, and a very big lady with a clubfoot lands a kiss on my cheek and nibbles on me very gently.

I soon discover that psychiatric patients take to the dance floor just like their supposedly sane counterparts: first slowly, then in a rush, all at once, when the right track mobilizes the larger group. It's not long before the party is in full swing, the music attracting excited inmates like sharks to a bloody meal. The DJ is Sabine Wenzel, the director of the residential portion of the facility, and she defies all the Nurse Ratched, mental-hospital-overseer stereotypes by completely absorbing herself in the music and grooving energetically behind her mixing console. The attendees succumb to the sounds too, including Johnny, a 60-year-old schizophrenic with thinning hair and dirty glasses who alternately sings along and grinds his teeth in pleasure.

Johnny takes a break from the dance floor and wanders over to talk to me. It freaks me out a little. I wonder what goes on inside his head. "Nobody is taking care of me, nobody wants me," he says, before telling me that someone was mixing poison in his food, which, he continues, is the reason for his sickness. He tells me he's been in and out of mental hospitals since he was young and admits that he can't live by himself. "I don't want to get out; it's terrible on the outside," he says. "It's a bit like Woodstock in here."

I'm not sure exactly what he means, but I keep thinking about the inmates in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* who prefer the safety and sterility of the hospital to the world outside. I doubt Randle McMurphy would be able to heal Johnny, though. As we talk, he suddenly puckers his face as if he'd just bitten into a lemon and tells me about his various delusions in great detail. For instance, he claims he once infiltrated a ring of pedophiles, which resulted in breaking down the door of a guy's apartment and catching him jerking off to photos of kids. Johnny spits as he speaks, and my face gets wetter by the syllable. Then, out of nowhere, he loses all interest in me. He hollers, "Music, please," and wobbles back to the dance floor.

The party is boiling at this point, the room packed with sweaty bodies. Apart from a revolving handful of patients

with acute problems who only stay for a short while, there are about 1,000 long-term residents at Wahrendorff, all of them 18 or older. Many are here by court order and won't be going anywhere anytime soon.

Before the party, Sabine gave me a guided tour through the hospital while continuously smoking an e-cigarette with a glowing tip. When we got to the maximum-security ward, I felt like I had wandered into a house of horrors. Sedated, foggy-eyed figures shuffled around the halls—all bleak faces and bad posture. Colorful artwork painted by the patients decorated the walls, illuminated by fluorescent lights suspended from the ceilings. The days of straitjackets and solitary confinement have long passed, and the communal living room looked pretty cozy, but I got spooked nevertheless. They're in the process of furnishing a room that is completely padded from floor to ceiling. Everything will be soft. "Being crazy is fun here," Sabine said.

As the director of the residential home, Sabine has nearly absolute authority over the patients, but not so much as a DJ. As she cycles through some German hits for the umpteenth time, someone yells out, "Fuck the DJ!" Everyone's a critic, even in a psych ward. The party has reached critical mass, and despite the heckling, everyone is dancing, even Tanja, my photographer. She's not afraid of the patients at all.

I would love to be so relaxed, but I just can't do it. I'm standing at the edge of the dance floor, embarrassed and feeling like the most awkward voyeur in the world. I wish I were a cigar smoker, who could hide his awkwardness behind a cloud of tobacco. I feel a bit ill after seeing all these sick people. Suddenly, I realize that someone is approaching me from behind, and a very big lady with a clubfoot lands a kiss on my cheek and nibbles on me very gently, like a cat biting her young. I'm really feeling the fear now, and I move away to dry my face with my hoody.

While some of the guests—like my not-so-secret admirer—are obviously not inhabiting the same world I live in, others seem completely normal. For instance, there's Nadja, a young woman with borderline personality disorder, a condition that's characterized by intense mood swings and impulsive behavior that can wreck personal relationships—not that you'd guess that from meeting her.

Nadja smiles frequently as we chat. She really likes being interviewed, giggling as she tells me she doesn't like the music that's being played right now. She's more into techno and hip-hop and is so charming, eloquent, and nice and has such a cute little face that I catch myself wondering, "Is that girl really sick?" Then she tells me the story of how she was sexually abused as a child and how her illness stems from that. She had been thinking about suicide for a long time, but she's over that now. She also cut her arms with a razor blade. "But really superficial, I never had to have stitches," she explains, as if it were the most normal activity in the world. Nadja used to live in the maximum-security ward, but she was transferred to minimum security in February. She wasn't able to go to school for a long time but now wants to complete her GED. "I would really love to work with sick kids, take them for a walk, read to them, stuff like that." She adds that she'd really like to have a family, provided that her husband isn't constantly trying to touch her or have sex with her.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Regardless of which psychological disorder they're afflicted with, all patients are equal on the dance floor.

Markus has HIV and drug-induced psychosis, but that doesn't keep him from partying and having a good time.

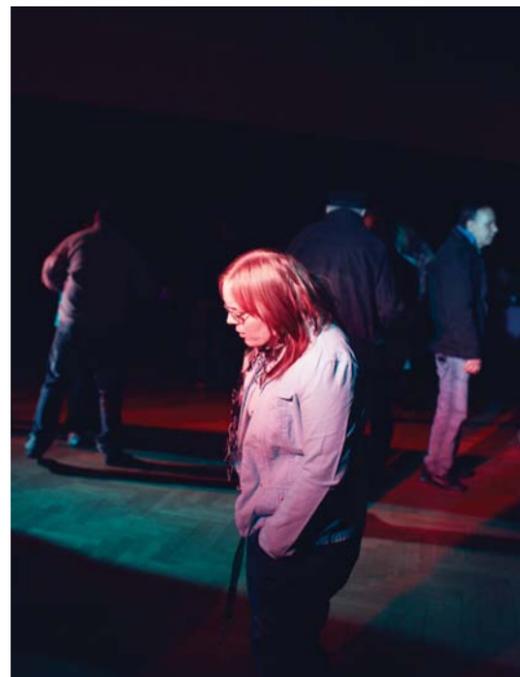
Nicole, 22, suffers from Münchausen syndrome.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** At the height of the celebration, the crowd becomes one dancing, pulsing entity.

Just like “normal” bars and clubs, some patients prefer to scope out the scene from the sidelines.

Maybe not surprisingly, a lot of the patients dance alone to their own private rhythms.



At the DJ stand, Sabine has moved onto the really cheap techno. She created this looney disco six years ago, shortly after she started working in Wahrendorff. By now, the event is a monthly highlight on the patients’ sparse social calendars. There’s also a movie night once a month, but that’s less of a draw. It’s easy to see why dance night is so popular: It’s one of the few things that resembles something you’d see in the outside world. A bouncer stands at the door and stamps the guests’ hands (blue for people from minimum security, red for those from maximum who aren’t allowed to leave the disco). Young, hormone-driven guys nurse nonalcoholic beers at the edges of the packed, sweaty dance floor. Occasionally, fights break out, just as at every club, and there’s the odd person who tries to sneak (nonprescribed) drugs.

The guests flirt with one another, of course, and it can actually lead to something serious—Wahrendorff allows lovers to move in together inside the hospital walls and provides contraceptives and information about STDs. “Our patients do have a right to love and sexuality,” says Sabine.

I look around the floor and see 21-year-old Sandra Brandt, a nurse-in-training who’s dancing with Markus, a 44-year-old patient who cuts a striking figure in red stretch pants and a plaid shirt. His mouth is open in a laugh that bares all of his teeth as he struts like Travolta and spins the young nurse around. Markus suffers from drug-induced psychosis, which is just what it sounds like. Sometimes the psychosis goes away after a period of treatment, sometimes it doesn’t.

Markus instantly agrees to speak to me, and we raise a toast together. It’s clear we like each other, but I quickly realize it’s going to be tough to speak with him—his speech is severely impaired, to the point where he sounds like a toddler with a mouth full of marshmallows who’s trying to say something very important very loudly. Sandra understands, though, and acts as my translator. She explains that Markus used to live in Mallorca, Spain, where he owned a bar. He loved to dance back then, too. “He was constantly out in the clubs and took lots of LSD,” Sandra says. Markus is gay and caught HIV in 1993. His psychosis and the HIV infection are eating away at his brain, but he remains agile, alert, hungry, thirsty, and as ready to devour life as he was in the old days. “Come on, let’s keep on dancing,” he says in his unique language. Sandra nods, and they’re back on the floor.

I begin to relax. Markus is an example of how positive one can be, even with a severe illness. He’s looking forward to every day as if it were a new journey. And it’s not as if the people here are contagious or kept in quarantine. Wahrendorff is not just one of the biggest employers in the area, it is also remarkably well integrated with the surrounding community; every September, there are jazz festivals where patients and people from the surrounding towns mingle, the insane and the supposedly sane interacting amiably.

As the party reaches its finale, I notice an eerie parallel: It’s Wahrendorff’s equivalent of the moment when, in a regular club, you’d be glancing around for your last, desperate options for getting laid. Sure enough, something soft and romantic is playing. Some patients sway on their chairs, others sing along. Nobody slow-dances. A man stamps his right foot down, then his left, like a drowsy baby elephant. The snacks are almost completely ravaged when I walk up to the bar and meet Nicole, a short 22-year-old with blue eyes; she’s

wearing makeup and sweet, bitter perfume. She’d make it past the ropes at practically any club in the world, but she is here because she suffers from Münchhausen syndrome, meaning she pretends to have illnesses and imitates symptoms without actually being sick, often just to get attention.

She won’t tell me exactly what disease she pretended to have the last time she was taken to the hospital, but she openly admits that she just made it up. She looks at me and grins, the sanest smile in the whole world. I ask her how she copes with the other patients, whose problems are more obvious. “It was weird in the beginning, but I’m happy to be here now.” She got used to seeing people who look a bit odd. As harmless as Nicole seems, she is still in maximum security; she had to be forcibly restrained while pretending to have seizures, and not long after she was admitted to Wahrendorff, she pushed one of the nurses and tried to run away. Nicole believes her illness originates in her childhood. Her parents argued a lot, often leaving her to take care of the home, and she became so overwhelmed she stopped going to school. She thinks she’ll stay in the hospital at least until 2013, and her dream is to become a nurse for the elderly after she receives her GED. She doesn’t want any contact with her parents right now. Nicole asks whether I’m married, pointing at my ring before she goes back to dancing. Am I the last desperate option now?

## Something soft and romantic is playing. Some patients sway on their chairs, others sing along. Nobody slow-dances.

Before I leave, I ask one of the clinic’s male nurses, who’s serving as a bouncer tonight, whether any trouble happened during the dance. He tells me that apart from some escape attempts, there was nothing doing. “You can’t have 100 percent control,” he says, adding that someone might have smuggled some real beer inside, which happens somewhat regularly. It doesn’t faze him. “I’m happy when I see the patients here. It’s such a different setting. They’re really happy here.”

I’m on my way back to the common room when the real night-ender happens. The large lady with the clubfoot reappears and bows down toward my crotch, preparing to use her teeth again. I can barely prevent the attack and try to flee a possibly painful incident. My face is burning. The woman watches my retreat with wild eyes, shaking her boobs and making them wobble like Jell-O. She won: I’m really afraid. Then the thing happens that happens at every good party: It ends. The lights are turned on, and it’s closing time—the patients board small buses, and everyone leaves. Sabine cues up the same song she always does at the end of these parties, “Born to Live,” by the family-friendly German band Unheilig. She says the lyrics mean a lot to many of the patients:

“We were born to live/ for all eternity/ We were born to live/ for just that one moment/ when everyone realized/ how precious life is.” *—UNHEILIG*

# THE TWITCH

Sensory Overload at the Biggest  
Rattlesnake Roundup in the World

BY RYAN KNIGHTON  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY WINSTON SMITH

"Rattler Round-Up" © Winston Smith, 2012



I'm one of those assholes at the airport who slaloms past you on a beeping golf cart. The limo of the elderly, lazy, and infirm. Even I can feel the seething looks. Sorry, but it's for your own good. Airports are punishing enough without my people slowing the herd. Or so we tell ourselves as we relax in our cushy seats and run you over.

Since I've nothing to look at, and all I can hear is beeping, I'm left with one entertainment between gates. I smell the terminal. This is about as interesting as it sounds. Having said that, the salty, carbon-rich fog of deep-fryer grease we rolled through in the Dallas airport was pretty stunning. A nasal lubricant. Texas doesn't just look big; it smells big, like a hungry, oily place.

I was racing to make my connection to Abilene, another hour's flight west of Dallas in the heart of what's considered central West Texas. You know something's large when its west has a center. I tried this bit on my golf-cart driver. He just honked his little horn at the pocket of body odors clogging our passage.

At the gate, I listened for a familiar voice. Nobody called my name. I stared into the blur and hoped to be recognized. Still nothing. My brother, Mykol, was to meet me. His plane from Toronto had landed an hour earlier. The plan was for the two of us to fly from here to Abilene together. That seemed unlikely at this point.

They announced preboarding. I paced and called Mykol's name, even flagging my white cane overhead. Bupkus. Final boarding call was given. I tried his cell phone. No answer. Should I just go and hope he'd catch another flight? I wasn't prepared to bumble about Texas on my own. They've got trucks. Lots of them. I fit under trucks.

"Y'all are sure he was on the plane, sweet pea?" the gate agent asked and punched some keys on her computer.

"No idea" I replied.

"Don't worry, hon. Bet he stopped for a snack. Some fries. Or a burger or—" I got the notion she was consulting the horizon of menus over my shoulder.

She was probably right, and I wouldn't have worried, but things happen to Mykol. What kinds of things? Just look at the way he spells his name. There's also the fact that lizards are his preferred roommates. I can't say I know anybody else who collects sand or has imbibed a glass of bleach, twice. Once he even beat up our sister's boyfriend because the man was on fire. Not only did Mykol extinguish the flames blow by blow, he fulfilled our sibling fantasy. Did he start the fire? Who knows. Is it wise to fix the wiring of an industrial dishwasher with your switchblade? Mykol has provided me with the answers to such questions.

All of this is to say he's terrific fun, as long as he shows up in one piece, and there's no denying his capacity for adventure, which I assumed would be invaluable on this trip. Besides, nobody else would come.

"Are y'all staying in Abilene?" the gate agent asked. "I could make a note here for where he can find you."

"No, we're supposed to drive to Sweetwater tonight. This isn't good."

"Sweetwater?" She said the name like an affliction. "What on God's green earth y'all are going to Sweetwater for?"

I leaned on her counter, feigning cool and casual.

"We're here for the rattlesnakes."

"Rattlesnakes?"

A nervous grin cracked my face.

She spent a few beats sizing up the idiocy of the blind man in front of her. Then, finally, my brother arrived. He had encountered problems at customs.

"Really, the agent was nice enough," he began as we boarded the plane, "but her badge said her last name was Powers. I

don't know, it just got me nervous and things got a bit sticky after that."

"Sticky?"

"I started to lie."

"Lie? About what? Why? Jesus, Mykol."

"What? It's a reflex. Her name was Powers."

"But it's not like you have anything to hide."

You never know with my brother. He's an archaeologist who spends much of the year living in the bush. That does things to a person. One morning, when Mykol was supposed to be surveying sites about six hours from our childhood home, my mom walked into the kitchen to find him boiling a bear skull in a CorningWare pot. He likes bones. My point is this: It isn't hard to imagine him at airport security emptying his pockets—a heap of coins, bus transfers, and a half-dozen humanoid teeth—and then a security guard sternly offering him a seat in the interrogation room.

"What did you lie about?" I asked.

"Nothing bad. I said you were driving us to Sweetwater," Mykol began, slumping into his seat, "But I guess I'd already said you're blind. It was an honest mistake."

To be fair, Mykol has let me do the driving before. Not that a customs agent needs to know that.

"Remember that time on the road to Douglas Lake?" he asked.

"You could have let me steer a few more miles."

"Agent Powers didn't think it was all that funny. Then I started to stammer because, you know, uniforms, and then the whole blind-man-and-rattlesnake thing was a hard sell."

Among other stipulations, Agent Powers had required Mykol to explain how a blind man can write books and stories he can't read.

Nevertheless, and despite it all, he made it, and now we were off, to die.

"Let me ask you something," he said as our plane taxied. "A cheese smoker or a crossbow: Which would you get? I can't decide."

The highway between Abilene and Sweetwater is dotted with billboards advertising all-you-can-eat beef joints with names like Buck's and Skeet's. This pleased Mykol and me to no end. We love everything cowboy. The older, the sadder, the leatherier, the better.

Driving this stretch of road, one can't help but appreciate the endless miles of wind farms this part of Texas is known for. Incredible gusts bucked us about. Some were natural, some were from the convoys of semis and diesel pickups that threw around our rental car like a cat does a ball of yarn. Mykol, a chatty driver, often returned to the subject of his two goals for our trip: to find himself a "sweet-ass bolo tie" and to keep me from getting snake-bit.

We'd traveled all this way, from our respective homes on the opposite sides of Canada, to participate in Sweetwater's Rattlesnake Roundup, which is held annually on the second weekend of March. Reputedly, it's the largest of its kind in the world, although there's no way to verify the claim. Only a handful of these events formally exist anywhere in the world, mostly hosted in small towns throughout Texas.

Four days of country-fair fun awaited us, all of it somehow dedicated to, or stemming from, the catching, skinning, cooking, and studying of western diamondbacks. Folks comb Sweetwater's surrounding cattle ranches and desert to gather as many rattlesnakes—or, as they say, "critters"—as possible. Then they dance, have a parade, host a cook-off, and God knows what else.

Statistics from the past 50 years suggest that, on average, the weekend haul of rattlesnakes is about a ton and a half. How many critters is that? At four or five feet long, the typical western diamondback clocks in at ten pounds or so. You can do the white-knuckle math. Even with the annual harvest, they say, the population is barely kept at bay. They are, literally, everywhere.

"According to the website, we have to buy a special hook and a hand mirror," I said to Mykol. "I sort of get the hook idea, at least in principle. But why a mirror?"

"Dibs on the snake hook. I'm bringing it home."

"I can't use a mirror. I can't even imagine what it's for, let alone how it's going to disadvantage me."

"It's so we can look under stuff without getting too close," Mykol said. "So we can look into the dens."

"Don't say that."

"Don't say what?"

"Don't say 'den.'"

"Why?"

"Just don't."

"Fine, then."

"I said don't say 'den.'"

My feet were sweating. It wasn't the idea of getting bit that freaked me out. Not entirely. Truth is, I'm mortally afraid of snakes, of everything snaky. The way they move, the way they sound, their shape. I won't even begin to deconstruct the threat of a tongue that behaves so erratically. Never in my life have I touched one—not even the tiny garter snakes on our lawn when I was a kid, and that was way before blindness. They'd send me screaming.

I know what you're thinking. Why put myself through something that runs contrary to every cue from my nervous system? It's a legitimate question, and one I asked myself at the airport, on the plane, and in the car. The only answer I can offer, and I say it with conviction, is this: The best experiences don't invite you.

I don't remember how I first heard about the roundup, but I do recall what captured my interest. All of the snakes spend some time at the local rodeo coliseum in a transfer pen that's called the Snake Pit. From there they are weighed for research, milked for their venom, skinned for the leather trade, and cooked for dinner. At any moment, hundreds and hundreds of snakes are waiting, piled and writhing on top of one another. When I let my disgust and horror ebb, I realized something was ringing in my ears: If I was to go, I could take in the sound of that holding pen. It was one of those things that didn't happen anywhere else on the planet.

The more I tried to conjure the sound in my mind, the more I couldn't. I wanted to hear what it had to say. Why not? If by

evolutionary design an animal's primary defense is a singular, infamous noise, such an animal must be able to teach us something about listening, right? And all of this comes from a rattle and a spasm. Hundreds of snake tails banging out a primordial choral arrangement inspired by one unmistakable sentiment: "Fuck off." I wanted to hear it. And then I would try to catch one, and maybe, just maybe, I would touch it.

"Don't worry, big brother. I've got a plan," Mykol said, turning us off the highway. "The way to hunt is this. First, you find a snake. Biggest one in the den—"



"Shut up about the dens already."

"Then you get close. Distract it with your cane or something. La-la-la. It'll get cocky. Then, listen to this, when surprise is on our side, wham, it's *Hello, Mykol* time."

"*Hello, Mykol* time?"

"I punch it in the face."

The closer we came, the more overwhelmingly real this bad idea grew.

"And don't you worry." He patted me on the arm. "I won't miss."

It was dark when we pulled into our hotel parking lot. From the sound of things, you could spit on the highway from the rooms. I opened the passenger door, eager to stretch, but paused, my foot half out of the car. Warm air rose from the pavement and crept up my pant leg. I listened. Snakes could be anywhere out here. I recalled how they like to draw the evening heat from the asphalt. Slowly I dipped my toe and jiggled it like bait. Nothing bit.

We checked in, both of us starving and beat. Our hotel smelled like an airport.

"Snake Bite" © Winston Smith, 2012



"Rattlesnake Ranch" © Winston Smith, 2012

"Hey," Mykol chirped as we walked the hallway to our room. "There's a huge stuffed snake stretched on the wall here." He stopped to admire it. I hurried past. "You want to touch it?" he said. "Nope," I said, racing down the hall. "C'mon, it's not alive. Just put your hand up and—" "Nope." "Still right beside you. You can just reach up and—" The snake was on a wall, dead and stuffed, yet I couldn't outrun it.

According to the sleepy fellow at the front desk, we were lucky to get a room at all. Given that we were the only car in the parking lot, this seemed to be based on his own sunny optimism. Still, he insisted that the town would fill up tomorrow for the opening-day parade and barn dance, and the grand opening of the coliseum where the snake-hunt registration would take place. When we asked where to eat, he said we had plenty to choose from. Buck's or Skeer's.

The next morning, Mykol and I stepped out of the hotel in our requisite knee-high boots. The sharp light of a blue sky bit into my retinas.

"Ah, Sweetwater," Mykol crooned. "Where the water is yellow and a bit buttery."

We cruised about town, and Mykol described what he saw. It didn't take long. Sweetwater, it turns out, is only a few minutes wide.

"Here we have another church, next to that a pawn shop and another bail bondsman, and, ah, if you need money for the bail bondsman, thoughtful, here we have a Money Mart..."

Every other house seemed to be boarded up or for sale. A lot of cars rotted on a lot of lawns. Gas was expensive, but litters of puppies and kittens were free. We kept the exploration short. I got the picture. Recessions always look the same. Then again, according to a quotation from the local chamber of commerce, "If you're bored in Sweetwater, it's your own fault."

"Cowboys!" Mykol squealed. "Oh my God! They're everywhere. And on horses. And some of them are old!"

In a town this small, I imagined a few dozen of us comparing hooks and hand mirrors. But the farther into the fairgrounds we drove, the bigger the scale bloomed. Seas of campers and RVs. Truck after truck hauling industrial-size smokers and barbecues. A makeshift amusement park stretched to our right while a shantytown of kiosks and curios occupied the desert to our left. Stitching their way throughout were men and women on horseback, and overhead, like a tent of sound, speakers blasted syrupy country-pop into the sky. I rolled my window down to the smell of horses. My head filled. It was my grandparents' farm when I was eight.

We parked at the side of the road, where I did my foot jiggle over the grass before I climbed out. My brother took my elbow and steered. The grasses were crispy blotches, the ground mostly dust. Nothing rattled.

"About a hundred yards this way," he said, "there's an evangelical Jumbotron. I can see the coliseum just past."

The gates were open, so we bought our tickets. Before we entered, though, Mykol wanted to take a picture of a sign that prohibited the use of firearms inside.

"Shouldn't that go without saying?"

He hitched my hand to his elbow. "We haven't seen what's inside yet."

Our boot heels echoed ahead into the coliseum as we stepped through a long concrete corridor and emerged on the mezzanine level. I couldn't hear anything worrisome, just the chattering of folks, a distant fountain, and announcements echoing from the stadium PA. Mykol stopped abruptly, as if we were about to plow into somebody.

"I think registration is downstairs by the back wall," I said. I went to move, but my brother was frozen.

"What? What are you—"

"Just gimme a minute."

"What for? Let's go and—"

He snapped. "I just, I just need a minute, alright? It's a bit... much."

Descriptions like this don't help. My mind's eye only sees what it is told.

"What's out there?" I asked.

At my own question, my body pressed to my brother's. His paralysis drew the horizon of the unknown, its proximity, closer and closer.

"C'mon, Mykol, What do you see?"

"It's just..." He whispered, searching for words. "I don't want you to think I'm exaggerating, but it's just, it's all, all of it, snake."

## Immediately I knew that the picture in my mind's eye was correct. A critter somewhere had just eaten a microphone.

His whisper made everything worse, like he didn't want to alarm something. My mind's eye went to town. To say a stadium is all snake is just cruel.

"What the hell do you mean it's all snake?"

"I don't even know where to start."

"Start with what's next to me!"

"OK, well, about ten feet in front of us there's an old man, and he's shaking a rattlesnake, shaking it like a toy, at a baby."

"No."

"Yes, and his other snake, that one is not being shaken."

Before I could even zero in on their rattles and separate them from the din of the stadium, hissing and spitting noises boomed from the PA, followed by the distinct sound of a snake strike. Then a terrible thud. Immediately I knew that the picture in my mind's eye was correct. A critter somewhere had just eaten a microphone. I practically hugged my brother, ready to piss myself at the thought of moving through this room.

"Whoa, Nelly!" exclaimed a voice over the PA. "That'll turn your engine."

Somewhere in the building, this man's voice was attached to a body that stood in a pen with a dozen rattlesnakes. The fellow, part biologist, part circus performer, was in the middle of broadcasting his demonstration. He chatted on and on about the predatory habits of pit vipers, casual as pie, bland as a chemistry teacher, while snakes chewed his boots. His presence, along with other educational booths and pens, evidenced the recent shift in the roundup's public-relations strategy. Science and information were being foregrounded to mitigate accusations of cruelty. I can't say whether their efforts were working, or even sincere. I was too busy hoping somebody from PETA might save me.

We descended the stairs to the floor level, its packed dirt pocked by years of hooves and tractor wheels. The sounds of the snake exhibition followed us, punctuating the air with hisses, rattles, and textbook paragraphs about the animals that have haunted my ears ever since.

Winding through a maze of stalls, we came upon purveyors of everything from snake skins to snake meat, from first-aid kits to rattle keychains to jars of preserved bits, and wall after wall of fancy critter-proof chaps. Mykol spied every conceivable mount and trophy, including a rattlesnake head and tail glued to the shell of an evicted turtle. You could fondle belts and boots adorned with fanged, glassy-eyed heads, or buy antitoxin for your cattle, or a hand mirror. Every ten feet or so a rattle went off next to me, sometimes low enough to imply it could be on the loose, or perhaps in a cage or bucket. I didn't know where to move.

"You have to keep talking to me," I said. "Am I OK here?"

"You're gray," Mykol whispered, keeping to his tactic. "And your hand is soaking through my shirt."

Another rattle went off, this one beside my ear. I ducked. Then it passed by, as if somebody were taking it on an aerial tour.

"I can't do this," I said. "We have to go. I can't cope with this."

## The sound had a startling physics. It had mass. A tangible weight and effect on the air.

"It's OK, it's OK. Let's just register for the hunt, and then I'll take you outside."

By the time we found the registration table, I'd overheard far too many phrases that should, in principle, be prohibited at a snake roundup. These include: "Shit!" and "Hold this" and "Back up, back up!" and, worst of all, "See? That's how fast it can happen."

The registration table was empty except for one man. Jeb, by Mykol's account, was tall with a silvery ZZ Top beard. He wore sunglasses, despite working indoors, and a Stetson in the style LBJ made popular. Jeb was a JC, one of the organizers behind the event. Considering Sweetwater's evangelical climate, I assumed that being a JC meant you were a member of the Jesus Christ gang, but the acronym actually stands for junior commissioner. These were small-business and civic leaders, not woo-woo snake handlers.

"Pretty day, boys," he greeted us. "Pretty day."

I wanted to hug him.

"Hi. He's blind," Mykol began, "and we came from Canada to go on the snake hunt."

Jeb's reaction was administrative and cool, as if he'd processed a busload of me this morning. All we had to do was purchase our licenses and pony up the fee. It was settled. Our team would head for the desert early tomorrow. That was fine. I'd had enough for one day. Jeb told us we'd meet at a grocery-store parking lot bright and early, and convoy from there.

"Can you tell me, has anybody been bit?" I asked.

"When?" he said.

That, of course, was the wrong answer.

"Has anybody been bit recently?" I tried.

"Son, y'all will be just fine now," he said. "OK?"

I felt better. He sounded like he knew what he was talking about.

"But don't forget to have your bite kits with you tomorrow."

A woman elbowed in front of us, burning to ask Jeb how many snakes she had to catch in order to make a set of pumps.

"Oh, I hear tell they need about four for ladies' shoes," said Jeb.

"How about three? Is that enough if I want a really open, strappy style?"

"Couldn't say, ma'am."

"But I really don't want to pay unless I know I can catch enough by noon."

She seemed to think she was negotiating the number of tickets necessary to win the big stuffed panda. We finally bolted for the nearest exit, heading past the coliseum's fountain. Its gushing water, almost like a sizzle, was loud enough that it touched every corner of the room, though it failed to cool us to any degree. Then, about ten yards away, my ear distinguished the first edges of its rattling.

"Is that—?" was all I could muster.

It was. A plywood pen, chest-high, teeming with diamond-backs. The Snake Pit. Mykol had come closer for a look, not knowing I'd misheard it as a fountain. We pushed toward its wall of noise.

The sound had a startling physics. It had mass. A tangible weight and effect on the air. I was immediately reminded that, at its essence, noise is vibration. To listen is actually to receive our most subtle form of touch. How easily we forget that.

What radiated from the Snake Pit was extraordinary in another way. It didn't feel remote or abstract. For me, sounds are often little more than a caption for a picture I can't see. A lesser substitute for sight. Functional, but incomplete.

Consider my perspective. A noise illuminates a specific thing in a specific place. The dishwasher door slams and, in slamming, defines what's out there and where it is. The effect is like a glance. Or let's say a kid rings a bicycle bell. Now I know there's a bike, and the fading ring traces its path, giving a hint of depth and dynamic to my two-dimensional blur. Other sounds are more environmental, less precise. The irrelevant buzz of electronics in an office. The panoramic thrum of distant vehicles. These don't conjure images in the mind, not so much, and they certainly don't locate things in the world very well. But their noise is out there, as generic and unfocused as "cars" or "traffic." Call it color.

With the exception of music, sounds share one chronically frustrating quality. For me, they just refer. That's their cognitive nature in my body. They point, name, and gesture to the unseen. They are as substantial, or unsubstantial, as a word.

But these rattles had more. They were something unto themselves. Their occupation of the pen rose, swelling, solid and defined, like the feeling of heat from a road. A thing. The sound physically pushed us back while it asked us to come closer. We put ourselves inside its vibrations. I could feel the rattling with my face. A quickening in the air as more joined in and intensified their spasms, then a thinning, a deflating lung, as some gave up and calmed down. A sour smell, just a moisture, would faintly whip about when the activity increased, faster, louder, angrier, the snakes sensing whether the numbers of looky-loos had grown.

Rattlesnakes can detect a shift in temperature of 0.01 degrees Fahrenheit. The slightest change can alarm their tails, which are actually a matrix of cartilage, not bone. So as the warmth of our bodies came and went, drawn and repelled, we played the snakes like a prehistoric Theremin.



"Serpent Serenade" © Winston Smith, 2012

Though I was transfixed, it was too much. The pit was too flip and unnatural. Too shamefully spectacular. Mykol continued to watch, but I swung my cane, trying to carve a way back through the crowd. Nobody moved. A few quick raps on the plywood drew some eyes. Folks stepped aside, some gawking at my curious and somewhat frightening image. Back and forth I whacked my cane, tapping an exit, as hundreds of tails, likewise, waved.

Because a few stragglers on our hunting team were late, Mykol and I sat in our car in the grocery-store parking lot and ate the sandwiches we'd bought for lunch. It was eight in the morning. Neither of us wanted to smoke any more cigarettes. We'd both quit eight years ago. That was before we learned every store in town was sold out of snakebite kits.

"Your hand hurt?" I asked Mykol. I could barely hold my sandwich.

"Got a blister the size of a quarter."

After we'd registered at the coliseum, Mykol and I had driven to Abilene for some decompression. There he'd experimented with the phrase "Hi, my brother's blind, and we came from Canada. Can we—?" You can insert any number of bad ideas here. Who can say no to the disabled? My unchecked power was Mykol's new toy.

So he had tried this phrase in Abilene on a couple of fellows at an indoor gun range. Within minutes they'd loaded a .44

Magnum and set me loose. Of course, Mykol aimed me, but interestingly enough, nobody questioned my right to be there. In fact, the only thing said was a reminder to wear ear protection. Wouldn't want to lose that, too. The gunmen were indeed courteous and considerate, despite a penchant for blowing the shit out of objects.

"We're just waiting on two more. We'll give 'em five more minutes, folks," called Jeb to the parking lot. "Then we're outta here."

I heard one of our team add, "Damn straight."

"Were you surprised how well you did?" Mykol asked me.

He'd carefully folded my gun-range target so I could bring it home, show it to my students (I teach at Capilano University), and possibly lose my job.

"All this violence, or threat of violence," I said, "is sort of making me toxic. Or maybe it's this sandwich."

I'd never shot anything before. I never plan to again. The explosions were frightening, even though I caused them and could anticipate their arrival. The kickback from Dirty Harry's .44 is not a pleasant sensation, either. It's like trying to catch the hoof of a pissed-off donkey. Besides, it's dull when you can't see. Bang. What'd I hit? Bang. What'd I hit? Golf is essentially the same sport.

A truck sped into the parking lot and pulled up beside our little crowd. I knew it was a truck because it's always a truck in Texas.



"Sorry we're late, Jeb," a man's voice called through the window.

"S'OK, Bill," said Jeb. "How'd you do yesterday?"

"Not so bad, not so bad. Brought about 20 in from the south pasture. Got a pretty corn snake, too, but it got loose in the back here somewheres and damned if I can find it."

"I hear that," said Jeb.

Mykol would later tell me that Bill's wife, or friend, or captive, smiled and waved shyly at the crowd from the passenger seat, sort of like the Queen, as Bill admitted a snake could be nesting behind her ankles.

Jeb and his two sons led the way, and Bill's truck brought up the rear. About half an hour out of town, we turned down a dirt road deeply corduroyed by cattle and tire tracks. Our destination was a 9,000-acre ranch, where we would fan out. To Jeb and his sons, and Bill and the ranch owners, this wasn't sport or fun or curiosity. This was work. A service to the town and to the farms. Culling the diamondback herds would remain an annual chore for the community's health and the cattle's. If hapless tourists wanted to pay to help, step right up, folks.

Jeb's words to live by, his only instructions, were given at the side of the road. The ten of us listened like a platoon, each of us armed with a plastic bin, a very, very securely fitted lid, a pocket mirror, and a hook, though "hook" is really not the word for it. Mykol and I each held a retrofitted golf club. The head had been sawed off, and in its place a small piece of metal had been welded, something not unlike an Allen wrench. I'd been puzzling over mine for hours. Jeb, mercifully, was about to disclose how the hell you pick up ten pounds of angry snake with an IKEA assembly tool.

"Listen up, and we'll keep her brief," Jeb said. "You and your partner will keep your eyes down at all times. Y'all want to look for piles of rocks, fallen trees and logs, old lumber, tall grass. Shady spots, that's what we're wanting. But, and I can't say it enough, you keep your eyes down at all times."

A couple behind us popped two cans of Coors, getting their morning shine on.

"Now, if you find a snake," Jeb continued, "first thing is you want to come to it with your boot up."

I heard him tap the sole of his boot with his augmented IKEA wrench.

"Then, with your hook, you want to wave a little and, here's the trick, you want to provoke it."

"See?" Mykol whispered. "I told you."

His joke in the car, about taunting a rattlesnake with my cane, is the actual method. According to Jeb, we really wanted the snakes to throw themselves at us. Uncoiled, they'd be vulnerable. Vulnerable enough, the theory went, that you can just plunk an Allen wrench down over their necks, pinning them in place. Then you just pick them up, put them in a bucket, and snap on the lid, and, presto, you're a survivor and an undisputed loon.

But Jeb went from "provoke it" to "put it in your bucket" as if nothing much happened in between. It seemed, at least to me, we should have spent a lot more time in breaking down the interim skills. For example, how, exactly, do you pick it up? And how do you let go of it in a bin, and while we're on the subject, how do you grab the lid before the diamondback gets its rightful revenge on your neck? Oh, and how do you repeat the steps when it gets loose in a tiny rental car?

One of our Coors enthusiasts wanted other clarification.

"I read," she said, "that you gotta tuck your pants into your boots on account of the fact that if they bite, they'll leap at your

ankle or calf mostly, and if you got your boots on, well, then what's done is done, but if you got your pant leg hanging out, then the fangs get caught and then you got a snake hanging off your damned pants. Am I right?"

Jeb gave it a bit of thought, but not much.

"I'd say that'd be about so."

Pants were tucked like you'll never see at the Gap.

"All right now. Happy hunting, folks," Jeb said. "Holler if you got need. And keep them eyes down, you hear?"

Mykol and I stepped off the road to wander the desert scrub. Our steps were slow and deliberate, the way our teenage bodies used to sneak home drunk.

"I'm going to get you the biggest snake ever," he said, returning to a whisper. "Wait here."

Poking around, his hook worked inside little holes, which I still refused to call dens.

"Tension" is not an adequate word for what filled us. Step, listen, step, listen. Occasionally, Mykol prodded crispy stands of grass. I'd flinch, recoil, or even leap at its audible likeness to a rattle.

"Jesus, Mykol, tell me when you're going to do that," I whispered.

"We're so awesome. We're looking for a deadly snake."

We found a large pile of rocks and old wood.

"I can feel it," he whispered. "Get ready."

I prepared myself to run away.

## He lifted a large rock, then jumped to safety and stifled a giggle. We listened. Something moved in the pile.

He lifted a large rock, then jumped to safety and stifled a giggle. We listened. Something moved in the pile.

"I'm so scared," he whispered.

He reached for another rock.

"No hands, boys!" Jeb shouted across the scrubby field. "Keep your damned hands away!"

Mykol shoved another rock aside, this time using his hook. Then another. I did the same. We'd invented a new sport through a combination of Russian roulette and landscaping.

Again, something moved. We could hear rustling in a crevice. Then, out it came, sufficiently provoked.

"Damn. It's a mouse. Or a rat," Mykol said.

"Can I ask you something?"

The voice came from behind me. It offered a Coors. I declined politely as Mykol hurried to a nearby stand of stumps.

"Are you, you know, blind? Like really... blind?" Mr. Coors asked.

"Yep."

Several yards away, Mykol shrieked and leaped back, then realized it was just the wind in the grass.

"Like, really blind?" Mr. Coors pressed.

"Yep. Really blind."

"Well, then I'll be goddamned!" he hooted, and slapped his thigh. "You the bravest son-bitch I ever met! Hey, Connie! Come here, baby! This here man is the bravest man ever!"

He shook my hand, praised Canada for making me the kind of "son-ah-bitch" I am, and wandered off to find a snake just for me. I said it was OK, I'm fine, but he insisted that he

and Connie would help and that they wouldn't take no for an answer. How friendly, assisting in my self-destruction.

Mykol gasped at some logs as he pulled them apart with his hook. Then he cursed at them.

"Idiot jerk wind!" he said. "C'mon, let's try the grass over there. I can feel it..."

Several hours in the sun yielded nothing but Mr. Coors singing my praises to whoever would listen. Jeb decided we should pack up and try another spot down the road a mile or two.

"You know what, Mykol," I said as our car humped along through a cloud of dust. "Let's just turn around and call it a day. I mean, I've heard them. That's enough for me."

"OK. I just want to see what's down here," he said. "Then we'll go. Just a few minutes."

"Really, I'm done."

"OK. Just a quick look."

I knew that tone. An even, autopilot voice. He was ready to get stupid, determined to catch something, come what may. Was it for me? Was it for him? At this point I would have gladly just fingered the skin on the hotel wall and gone home.

"Awesome," he shouted, quickly parking us. "There's an old house and lumber and car bodies. Go, go."

## It was the skinning pen, and it was full of women who were competing for the title of something called Miss Snake Charmer.

We leaped out and he dragged me, rushing to beat our platoon to the riches that could only dwell in such a decaying outpost and its shadows. Others clearly had the same hope, because they ran after us or rocketed ahead. We caught up with Mr. Coors and Connie. Like us, they had eyes on the house. It was an abandoned one-room shack about 20 yards in from the road.

Connie's voice was pointed, almost nagging, as we rounded the grasses at the corner of the old porch, where she stopped.

"Hank," she said, "get it."

"I ain't getting' it, you get it," he replied.

I stepped past Connie and, unknowingly, toward the tail of a critter that lit up, bright as fireworks. It was about three feet away. I froze, clueless which way to retreat.

"You got the damned hook, Hank!" she argued.

"Then you take it, then!"

The snake's tail seemed to double its speed.

Jeb's boys hollered, "Daddy, it's real big!"

Where there's one, there's likely others. I didn't care. I hop-skipped backward into the safety of the unknown, or the camouflage of whatever.

"Hank! Get it, quick!"

"Like how?"

"I look like I know?!" she shouted.

The rattling stopped and, for a microsecond, my world and its pictures were snuffed into silence as the snake shot, from what I'm told, up and in the general direction of Connie's face.

"Holy Jesus!" Jeb hollered as he came running.

The snake had missed and was quickly recoiling beside us.

Mykol yanked me back, exclaiming, "It's for real! It's for real!"

Before Jeb could plant his IKEA tool, the snake, at least five feet long and thick as a fire hose, booked it in reverse, jetting

under the house, its tail drumming against the floorboards and mapping its escape. The sound was like a stick dragged across a picket fence.

Everybody stood around, though way back, from the mouth of the hole while Jeb's boys fetched tools to force the snake out. Hoses were inserted. Clamps, flashlights.

"I am not going near that with a fucking hand mirror," I said to Mykol.

"That was awesome," he whispered. "It tried to eat Connie."

Though Jeb and Bill did their best, the snake knew better than to show itself again. It kept quiet deep in the dark, millions of years of evolutionary stasis proving the perfection of its strategy. Lie low, tuck in, and stay away from predators. We, on the other hand, were something else. Something ugly and graceless. Out here, in packs with trucks and Allen wrenches and boots and bins, we can't clear room enough to feel safe under the biggest sky.

Mykol and I searched about but, again, found nothing. It was late afternoon, and we were both hungry, dirty, tired, and dispirited. I was, to be honest, sort of relieved, too. I was more than content to leave the diamondbacks of Sweetwater and have them leave me. I'd listened. To be left alone was all they asked. The paradox of their tails became clear: Remain quiet, you might get crushed; alert the world to your presence, you might make yourself a target. I get it. I'm a disabled guy.

Every few hundred yards, driving us back to town, Mykol pulled over and announced that he'd be right back. Then he darted into the desert to some distant pile of rocks or knobby patch of grass, imploring the universe to give us our moment. That's Mykol. I listened to him happily scratch at rotted logs, chasing a scare, and marveled at the fact we are, somehow, the same.

As Mykol threw his hook into the back seat, admitting our final defeat, I warmed with a big love. I eyed the blur of his snake hook. He'll do anything for me. I don't have to wonder at such questions.

Though we didn't catch a snake that day, Mykol continued to work the fairground for any other sensation he could wrangle me.

"Hi, my brother's blind and he came from Canada. Can he judge the rattlesnake cook-off?"

We sampled 20 plates. Yes, it tastes like chicken, only bonier and fishier. Everything was hampered, or aided, by the beers we'd been asked to cleanse our palettes with between plates of snake.

"C'mon," Mykol slurred. "I got one more idea."

Back into the coliseum we went. He dragged me past the curios and the idling Snake Pit, until we reached another plywood pen.

"Hi. Blind. Canadian. Can he try that?"

It was the skinning pen, and it was full of women whom I would soon learn were competing for the title of something called Miss Snake Charmer. Apparently a revealing swimsuit and a desire for world peace aren't enough. You must also have enough skill with a knife to remove the epidermis of a serpent. After each snake had been successfully unwrapped, smiles and big hair walked past us. Each contestant went to press her bloody palm to a nearby white wall, autographing it with a bloody finger. Someone named Keri even doodled a heart over the "i." The world is, officially, indisputably, that fucked up.



"Miss Snake Bite" © Winston Smith, 2012

The gate opened, and a big man guided me in to take my turn, to literally touch my greatest fear.

"You ready, son?" he said. "Here's the knife. You're safe. The head's already gone. Worst is over. Now you just got to carry on, all right?"

What has stayed with me is neither the cold nor the sliminess of flesh and skin. The coiling and uncoiling spasms of the headless body required all my strength to keep it taut. I'll spare you the details, because what really impressed itself on me was something small.

After I finished, my guide, a JC named Mark, opened my hand and dropped something into my palm. The snake's heart. It felt like a tangerine. Then it beat. And it beat again. I hate to admit it, but the sensation was beautiful—the primitive rhythm that keeps us alive. And there it was, a surprise every time. Beat. When will it stop? Beat. I waited, but it kept going. To think, life comes of something so unremarkable. Just a twitch. That's it.

When our plane left the runway, I gazed out the window at a Texas smear and could sense, albeit abstractly, the landscape shrinking below. It cheered me to think of all the thousands and

millions of snakes in my visual field, dwelling way down there. The ones who got away.

Though he had worked at it, Mykol couldn't engineer a way to cram the snake hooks into his suitcase. Bringing snake hooks as our carry-on luggage also didn't seem reasonable. The gunpowder residue on our hands could prove trouble enough, especially for the blind guy. We'd had no choice, so the hooks were abandoned in the trunk of our rental car as we raced to catch our flight.

"Do you realize what we did back there?" Mykol giggled.

I turned away from my window. "Shed blood with beauty contestants?"

"I mean, just back there," he said. "We left the snake hooks in the trunk."

"So?"

"So, the next person who opens that trunk is going to find a garbage can with the lid on, and two snake hooks resting on top."

The picture filled my mind's eye. What a postcard. What a thing to be confronted with.

"Would you open it?" he asked. 

To see more of Winston Smith's artwork check out a new episode of VICE Meets... this month on VICE.com.

# RIO DE VAGINA

## The Brazilian Drag Queen Guide to Tucking

BY BRUNO B. SORAGGI

PHOTOS BY  
BOBBY DOHERTY

Every boy has given himself a mangina at least once. In the locker room, at summer camp, in front of the full-length mirror in your parents' bedroom when you thought they'd already left for the store—whatever the setting, the urge to hide your junk between your legs, leaving only a soft tuft of pubes in view, is universal and ineluctable. It's a healthy practice that yields great pictures, but for some men, the thrill of not having a dick never ends. And for transsexuals and drag queens, whose job it is to not have a dick, tucking is less a boyhood larf than an essential trick of the trade.

Since luscious, heterosexuality-challenging trannies are Brazil's third-largest export (after Havaianas and Seu Jorge), we felt the burden was on us to explore the technical minutiae of this beloved national institution. So with help from our favorite queen, Lohren Beauty, we present a step-by-step guide on how to hide your hose.

**PENIS PREPARATION:** A hairless *mangine* is many things—aesthetically pleasing, hygienic, and easy to maneuver. So wax or shave as much as possible, from your belly button to the start of your spine, being sure to hit the dick, balls, asshole, and gooch. A word of warning, though: Avoid using adhesive tape if you're freshly shaven because it's easy to end up with a crotch rash that could be mistaken for the clap.

The next step is to hide your balls. This is essential for all methods of dick tucking, so it's important to get your technique nailed down. Stretch your wang forward as far as you can and gingerly push your testicles up one at a time, back into that cavity where they were hiding before puberty. This usually isn't painful, so if you feel like you're about to barf while fainting, you're doing something wrong. A tip: This is easiest to do while lying on your back, delicately finessing your testes like a pair of Chinese meditation balls until they sloonk right up in. Getting into a bathtub full of cold water immediately beforehand can also help. Now you're ready for the most important step: hiding your tube steak. Depending on your size and preference, there are three ways to do this, which have been passed down from tranny fathers to ladyboy sons for generations. We've summarized them below.



### METHOD 1: BASIC TUCK

*Necessary material: a thong two sizes too small*  
*Recommended dick size: longer than six inches*

This is the half-Windsor knot of penis tucking, i.e., the one novices should master before moving on to other methods. First, stretch your schlong forward and then down, join it with your balls, and pull both of them back between your legs, toward your butt. Tug it as hard as

you can; the tighter it gets, the more even and beautiful your fake pussy will appear. Next, put on some panties. They're the secret to keeping your dick in the right position (and also to being a classy woman). We recommend Lycra underwear, which isn't super-pretty but combines comfort and flexibility. If you *must* use lace panties, we recommend wearing a pair of skin-colored Lycra tights underneath. One drawback to consider: If you get an erection, your "pussy" will expand, and it may look like you're wearing a soaked maxi pad. Gross.

### METHOD 2: TAPING

*Necessary material: adhesive tape*  
*Recommended dick size: nonspecific, you just need to have one*

First off—do NOT use Scotch tape. It'll slide off your junk the minute you start sweating. Stay away from duct tape, too—unless you want to rip your dick off. Parcel tape seems to work well, the wider the better. Once you've got the tape ready, pull your dong out and wrap it from base to tip. Without cutting the tape, pull it down and back so that it runs between your nuts and through your ass crack. Tape your package around the right side of your hips. Make one more pass around your left hip, then run it over your unit again, and finally cut the tape so it sticks right at the tip of your coccyx. If you're sweating, pat it dry. Then put on some panties and do a little dance.

Variation 1: Wrap your shaft with tape but leave the tip uncovered. Your fake pussy will be a little bit bigger, but you can now pee sitting down—a major plus for drunken queens!



Variation 2: Skip the step where you wrap the tape around your hips (because there will be nothing there to cover it) and instead double it up across your tailbone. This is a

trick used by transvestites who dance the samba and drag queens who prefer to perform in a cache-sexe. It'll keep them guessing all night.

### METHOD 3: THE JAPANESE

*Necessary material: adhesive tape and superglue*  
*Recommended dick size: Japanese and uncut*

Even among the most enlightened circles of queens and pre-oppers, this technique is still spoken of in hushed whispers. No one we know has ever met someone who's done it, only a guy who knows some people who met a man who heard about it once.

This method only works with smaller salamis. It's actually one of the rare cases where having a big cock is a bummer, because, if you do, the final result will be an asshole that shits *and* pees. First—before you've undropped your balls—tie your foreskin closed with some sort of tape or string. Try to cover as much of the tip as possible, so that it resembles a dehydrated jasmine flower. (Note: Don't tie it so tight that liquid won't be able to pass through.) When it's done, hide your nuts as usual, pull your dick down and back as described in the previous methods, and then discreetly tape it starting from the tip, as tight as possible, all the way to your butt crack.

Here's where the famed Japanese ingenuity comes into play: With your dick tight between your legs and just a bit of foreskin hanging out, grab loose bits of scrotum on either side of the penis using your fingers as



pincers. The objective here is to wrap the whole shaft with that skin, which, if you do it right, will look like the outer labia of a vagina. Glue the whole mess together with superglue (we're serious) and, to make extra-double-sure it's not going to open up and ruin your fun, put tape on top of the whole enchilada. Once you've got the front ready, use a larger piece of tape to cover

your entire taint. In Japan they have specific adhesive tape made for this very purpose (obviously), but if it's unavailable in your town you can stick with clear packing tape. Finally, pinch a hole on the part of the tape that goes over the foreskin, leaving the left-overs outside the package so you can pee freely. Congratulations, man. You now have the prettiest pussy of all! 



## Thomas Kinkadee JANUARY 19, 1958–APRIL 6, 2012

Hello, VICE readers. This month, I, Bob Odenkirk, hand my page over to my dear brother, Bill, to acknowledge the loss we all feel after Thomas Kinkadee's tragic demise—as it is too great for my poor talents and also because I didn't write nothin' yet, so... Take it away, bro.

# LIGHTS OUT

*Painter of light, extinguished now.  
Brushes silent. Take a bow.  
Shatter the bulb in the lighthouse yon.  
Quench the candle. Dim the dawn.*

*Through eyes turned toward a magical past,  
Thy art bestowed gifts of coziness vast.  
Comforting notions and cheerful fictions,  
We thank you now for your benedictions.*

*In addition to the lighthouse mentioned before,  
There were bridges, churches, and cottages galore.  
Each vibrantly alive with ethereal light,  
To welcome a stranger and banish the night.*

*To your critics who in darkness dwell,  
Sending bitter dispatches from the mouth of hell:  
Hear now, you reptiles of limited vision,  
May blood clog the throats that once spat derision!*

*Each canvas sang its own simple story.  
Your aim, though modest, achieved great glory.  
You sifted the consciousness of all mankind  
To render the wet dreams of a grandmother's mind.*

by Bill Odenkirk,  
illustration from iStockphoto.com,  
photo by AP/Gene Blythe

Photo: Vincent Siqueland



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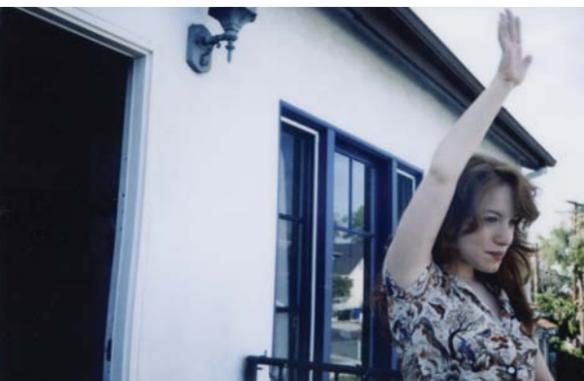
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## COMBOVER: SMART AS A RABBI

BY BRETT GELMAN, PHOTOS BY JANICZA BRAVO

Featuring: Maria Thayer



Someone shot an angel. Some piece of dreck found their way up to heaven, got past the gates, somehow got a gun in without anyone noticing, saw an angel sitting on a cloud, and opened fire. Now an angel is dead. Maria is dead.

The memories rush my mind. Liz Taylor gorgeousity. Brandoesque talent. And smart as a rabbi. I start thinking about being on the set of *Not Remembering Sasha Mathis*, watching her on the monitors, making me laugh my hairy ass off. Damn, she was good in that. She was good in everything. Great in everything. No words to describe. Except “great,” obviously.

I should have married her. She would have made a great fifth wife. Only thing that stopped me was that she wasn’t in the tribe. That and I’m married to this town, Hollywood, baby! But that didn’t stop me from loving her more than a sheet of matzo with some chopped liver. Boy, she’d get my belly heaving. And she knew it too. Whenever we got together I’d turn bright red with hypertension. “Your blood pressure, Combover. Your blood pressure!” Always so caring. I’d have 40 heart attacks for her, 75 diabetic comas, 125 strokes. I would have died for her. Well, maybe not died, but definitely a hip operation or two.

I remember when she auditioned for *Birdbrain*. You might remember *Birdbrain*. It was only one of the top-grossing action movies of all time. She came in to audition. I didn’t want her to. Yeah, I knew she was good, but to me she was always sugar. Like Audrey Hepburn, but Hepburn never played a cop.

I said, “Mar, don’t waste your time. You got the world lovin’ you. This part is too hard-edged.” She told me if I didn’t see her for the role she’d never talk to me again. Now if another actress said this to me, I’d give them a swift backhand, make a couple calls, and bury their careers. But never Maria. She had a hold on me tighter than my grandmother’s grip on a packet of Sweet’N Low. So I agreed. She came in, and what did she bring with her? Her own gun! A gun to an audition!

She pressed the barrel to my head. “How sweet am I now, you big, fat Jewish pile of shit?! You give me this part or I’m gonna give you a fucking lead yarmulke!” I knew she was good, but I didn’t know that good. Needless to say,

she blew my tallith off. I gave her the part, and we went straight to Malibu. I fed her fresh herring all weekend. She fed me a little redhead lovin’.

I feel dizzy. I don’t like any of this one bit. Oy vey, what’s that on my face? Tears? I’m crying.

I’ve seen dead bodies before, but this is going to be rough. This one is going to sting right where my foreskin used to be. I walk up the stairs to her place. The door’s open. I hear the cop’s voice, the guy I was on the phone with.

“Come in, Combover.”

Strange for a crime scene. No yellow tape. No photographers. No cops. And where’s her body? It’s on the couch... sitting up!

“Hey, Combover.”

“Maria, you’re alive. Who called me?”

“I did,” she says in a deep Brooklyn-accented man’s voice. Uncanny. Never in a million years would I have guessed it was her. Damn, she’s good. I can’t help but feel the nachas tsunami over me.

I embrace her. We make love on her rug like a couple of wild rams. I blow my shofar in her like I’ve never blown it before. We lie in postcoital perfection. I make a couple mandatory business calls while she smokes and plays the guitar. A horrible afternoon just got a hell of a lot sunnier.

“But why, Mar? Why did you fake like you were dead? What are you, meshuga?”

“No, I’m not, Combover. But I’ll tell you who is. Pickering. He’s nuts. Said if I didn’t marry him in two weeks he’s going to kill me. I can’t have that. I’m a star, not a corpse.”

“I couldn’t agree more, Red.”

We get her dressed and ready for her flight. She’s in some real sweet travel digs. Looks classy enough to board the *Titanic*.

“When will you be back? I got this great role waiting for you. You’ll get an Oscar for sure.”

“Soon. In the meantime, can you straighten things out with Robbie?”

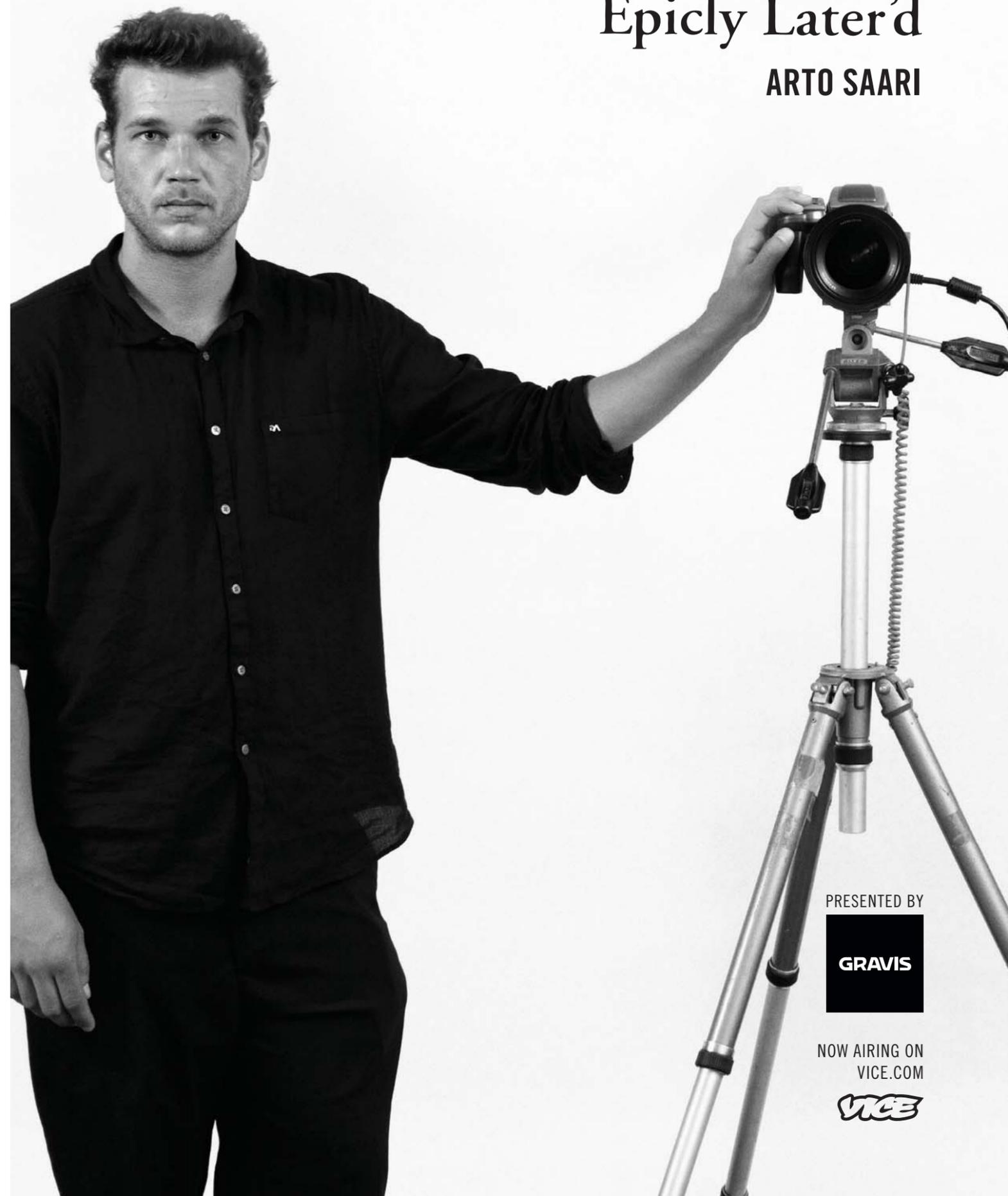
Oh, I’ll straighten things out all right. I’ll straighten things out nice and good.

Time to get Mossad on a fucking goy.

*This is the second 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 installment at VICE.com.*

# Epicly Later’d

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## THE CUTE SHOW PAGE!

BY ELLIS JONES, PHOTO BY ADRIANNA GLAVIANO

### Lovely Owls

*Watch a brand-new episode of The Cute Show! featuring Molla and friends later this month on VICE.com.*

I've hated birds most of my life, but owls are different. They're not morons like sparrows or disgusting roadkill eaters like crows. Owls are wise old souls who get to spend their days chilling on branches, rotating their necks 360 degrees, and staring at things with wide-eyed curiosity. Hoping that some of their majesty would rub off on us, we visited I Falconieri delle Orobie, a family-run falconry center in Villa d'Adda, Italy. The center's specimens include an African horned owl named Wendy, Fumetta the red-legged brown owl, and two barn owls named Snoopy and Heidi. While visiting, we met a 12-year-old girl named Martina who told us—while cuddling a tiny owl named Molla—that in order to train an owl you must first feed it by hand to form a bond. I think if everyone got his or her own owl to raise we would have world peace in no time.



LAUNCH LA TRADESHOW // JULY 25-26 2012 // BARKER HANGAR, SANTA MONICA



# SKINEMA

BY CHRIS NIERATKO



## GIRLS LOVE GIRLS #4

Dir: Jonni Darkko  
Rating: 8

JonniDarkkoxxx.com/  
Evilangel.com

Let's face it, the lesbian scene in a porno film has been perfected. Much like the classic boy-and-his-dog or the free-the-whale-from-the-ice/aquarium film, it's hard to improve on two women in the throes of passion. And yet director Jonni Darkko found a way. How? Marijuana. In my 40-plus years of watching pornography, I thought I'd seen every manner of female same-sex debauchery: dongs the size of horse cocks, horse cocks the size of whale cocks, coke cans, coke bottles, coke dealers, bowling pins, bowling balls, baskets of golf balls, and every other manner of round or oblong or misshapen object invented by man. But never in all my days have I heard anyone request to have smoke blown up his or her ass or seen the act executed.

The scene stars Heather Starlet and Madison Ivy (who has a Snooki-like quality about her. I know, "Snooki" and "quality" should never be used in the same sentence). It begins with them on a couch sharing a blunt (people still smoke blunts?) and quickly escalates to shot-gunning and nudity. Before long, Heather is blowing smoke up Madison's ass (when played in reverse, it looks like Madison shits out smoke. And tells you to kill your parents). It culminates with the two in a shower spraying each other with weed smoke instead of water.

I very much wanted to love the scene for its groundbreaking incorporation of weed, but the problem is, I hate weed. And stoners. I don't care what anyone tells

you, there's no such thing as a "functioning stoner." They're all retards. Ever read *Retard Times*? Fuck, it's brutally painful. That's what the world needs: some baked dipshit with political views. "The government is, like, not cool, man." Fuck off and get a job. Go occupy the back of a garbage truck; there's no shame in that. It's a respectable occupation with benefits.

In my early 20s, I was the first of my friends to realize pot made me an idiot. Sadly, I have many friends inching up on 40 who still haven't figured it out. I know guys who live at home with their parents, milk unemployment, borrow money from their mom for "the chronic" (you'd think if you didn't have a job you'd at least smoke a more affordable caliber of marijuana, for your mom's sake), burn one down at Wall Street, and then cry about how they can't find work. I tell them, "It's impossible to find something that you refuse to look for."

I will tip my hat to Heather and Madison, who have found a way to stay gainfully employed and pay for their own pot. I'd go so far as to say that if weed smoking were reserved exclusively for naked chicks in porn, I probably wouldn't hate it as much. But much like my stoner friends ever getting a job, I don't think that's ever going to happen.

More stupid can be found at [Chrisnieratko.com](http://Chrisnieratko.com) and [twitter.com/Nieratko](https://twitter.com/Nieratko). Also, the Skinema show is finally airing on [VICE.com](http://VICE.com). Check it out.

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## SHEPPARD'S VIDEO-GAME PIE

BY STEPHEN LEA SHEPPARD



### THE PLAYSTATION VITA

I've been a moderate fan of the PSP for years, which is to say I've liked the idea of the PSP and have liked a few PSP games quite a lot (wooo, and *Dissidia! Priny!* *Persona 3 Portable!*) but on the whole haven't played it much, so it was with some trepidation that I grabbed a PlayStation Vita on launch day. As a Game Reviewer I sort of had to, which, by the way, is a great excuse for buying all the gadgets I want but wouldn't be able to justify getting if I couldn't tell myself they're job necessities.

Lots of people *don't* have to get a Vita. Should they?

For media play, it does the usual array of omnigadget stuff (camera, movies and music, social-media apps, Netflix), which I will not spend a lot of time talking about because you can see the feature list in any description of any current smartphone (minus the phone, which the Vita isn't). As a gaming device, it's got a touchscreen on the front, a touchpad on the back, and the full array of current-gen-console controller buttons and analog sticks, save two fewer shoulder buttons, and the sticks aren't clickable. It does backward compatibility with most PSP games in the PlayStation store, which is downloadable titles only, meaning if you own a game on UMD you'll need to buy it again. It does *not* play downloadable PSOne or PS2 games, and Sony says it won't ever support PS2, although watching Sony for years I've seen them repeatedly insist on one thing right up until the day they announce the opposite, so take that how you will.

Sony was very kind to send me a promotional package with copies of *Hot Shots Golf: World Invitational*, *Little Deviants*, *ModNation Racers: Road*

*Trip*, *Uncharted: Golden Abyss*, and *WipEout 2048*, as well as download codes for *Super Stardust Delta*, *Hustle Kings*, and *Escape Plan*. I haven't tried *Hot Shots Golf* or *Hustle Kings* yet because I don't care about golf or pool and wouldn't be able to judge their quality anyway.

Of the games I have played, in no particular order:

*Little Deviants* is a collection of minigames that are more like tech demos for the various things you can do with tilt and dual touchpads than anything coherent or fun. Stay away.

*ModNation Racers* is a satisfying little kart-racing game with customizable levels and characters; worth it if you like kart racers and personalized content.

*Escape Plan* is a side-scrolling puzzle-adventure game with a neat black-and-white aesthetic.

*Uncharted: Golden Abyss* is mediocre for a third-person adventure/shooter and quite bad for an *Uncharted* game; with a different creative team from the mainline *Uncharted*, the story isn't captivating, the environments feel constrained and more like video-game arenas than actual places (the way *Uncharted* levels usually feel), the climbing gameplay is full of touch/tilt bullshit that tries to show off the Vita's alternate control features but mostly feels tacked on, and the shooty is, if anything, looser and less satisfying than usual for *Uncharted*.

*WipEout 2048* is *WipEout*; I've been playing variations on *WipEout* since 1995 (wow, 17 years; I feel old), and it's basically always great but also never really surprising.

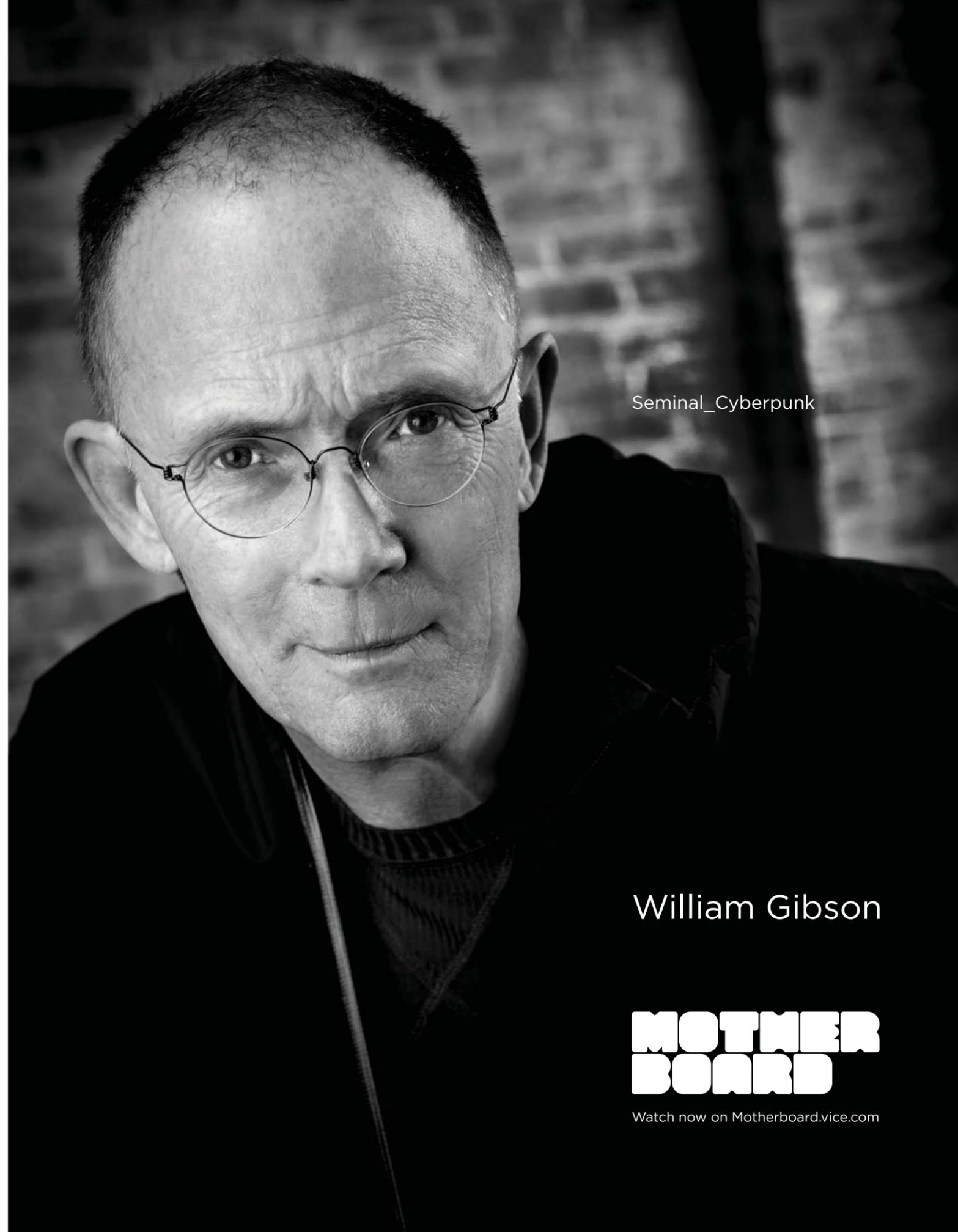
*Super Stardust Delta* is essentially the same twin-stick shooter it was on PS3.

The game I've played most is *Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus*, which I bought myself and which is the Vita port of the PS3 port of the expanded rerelease of the 2004 Xbox game. *Ninja Gaiden* was great seven years ago and is still good today, but it's eight years old.

For all Vita's media-player functions, its mission statement is that it's less a portable console and more a home console that's portable—dual analog sticks and graphics shiny enough to fake the appearance of a PS3 if you squint. It does not yet have games that live up to that promise: *Ninja Gaiden* is a port of a port of a rerelease, and *Uncharted* is bad. I'm looking forward to *Persona 4: The Golden* whenever the hell it gets announced for a North American release, but I've already played *Persona 4*, and anyway it's a port of a PS2 game. That leaves *Gravity Rush*, due out in June, as the one game for the system's first half year that might live up to its apparent point. There are, undoubtedly, other games, but since I've never found a place that rents out portable games and not everything in the online store has a demo, the barrier for trying a new Vita game is very high—for example, I've heard good things about *Army Corps of Hell*, but whenever I see it in the PlayStation Store, my thoughts run, "I'm in Canada, so that costs \$40, and there's no demo, and my shelves are overflowing with games I own and haven't played enough of yet; also I have books to read and movies and TV shows to watch. Maybe next month." In reality, I know I'll either never buy it or buy it when it hits ten bucks in the store years from now.

The purchase of any new console is an investment, with hope for a library that will improve with time. What I hope is that in two or three years, the Vita will have a thriving landscape of midbudget titles from Japan, the stuff that used to show up on the PS2 during the last two years of its life cycle because the companies couldn't afford to develop PS3-quality art assets. Right now, though, I recommend the Vita to people like myself who like new gadgets and have poor impulse control; for the rest of you, I'll be reviewing new Vita games along with everything else I review, so watch this space and I'll let you know whether the Vita library ever lives up to the console's promise.

This review is based on a PlayStation Vita I bought myself, as well as some games either purchased personally or provided by Sony as described above.



Seminal\_Cyberpunk

William Gibson

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# EARL IS FREE

*Stalking My Favorite Rapper*

BY FRASER JONES

ILLUSTRATION BY  
SCOTT VALLINE

Like most teenagers, I decided to get out of town for spring break. LA seemed like the best option for me—it was the polar opposite of Salt Lake City—and one fateful mid-March morning I awoke in an unfamiliar UCLA dorm room with Earl Sweatshirt rhymes blasting in my head, a lyrical hangover from the night before.

I ate a banana, laced up my Converse high tops, and threw on my favorite Atlanta Braves sweatshirt (which, I hoped, was the sort of thing a member of Odd Future might compliment), and headed out the door. My quest had begun.

There was no direct road map or GPS tracker to guide me on this journey. I had no idea where I was going. All I had were Earl's tweets from the day before, which I had already memorized but also saved on my phone just in case I blanked on any important details. He had posed a tantalizing offer to his followers, and I was determined to take him up on it. He had tweeted, "Hai. If you're in la come to the 7-11 on Olympic and barrington and buy this jersey and meet me. I need lunch money. We'll be there for 15." My heart skipped a beat. My favorite living rapper, one who had been missing in action for more

than a year, was now back and willing to reveal himself to anyone who would buy an article of his clothing so that he could get a bite to eat.

Minutes after landing in LA, I was once again feverishly checking Earl's Twitter. "Back to School," he wrote. "Damn. I'll still sell this. Tomorrow same time at stoner doe. Maybe." No one wanted Earl's jersey, which was sad but worked in my favor. I had another chance. His somewhat cryptic tweet prompted me to google "LA stoner," which, in addition to numerous references to an herbivorous counterculture, led me to a skate park near Santa Monica, just three miles from my friend's dorm at UCLA. It was worth a shot.

I left the dorm and started walking, which turned into a speed walk, which turned into a bus ride. Within minutes, I arrived at Stoner Skate Park and sat down on the bench, trying to hide the fact that I didn't have a skateboard. I was just waiting around, checking Earl's Twitter, when a new one popped up: "We in da car in west la lookin to sell this jersey. Might hit the fatburger in Westwood ayyee." Westwood? What the hell, Earl? That's where I had just come from! But I figured there was no point in leaving Stoner just yet; maybe he would come by after his burger. A minute passed with my pulse racing before he sent out yet another tweet: "Fatburger fasho. Breeze thru cop a jersey and the new sticker doe."

I was off, running as fast as I could down the sidewalk, and jumped into the first cab I could find. Ten minutes later, we skidded to a stop at Fatburger, and I immediately spotted Earl in front of a red truck with the jersey in hand. I shouted, "Ear! Hold that jersey." Then I noticed the money in his hand. I was too late. Two other fans had beat me to it. I realized I recognized them—they were the same dudes I'd seen waiting in a truck at Stoner. I lowered my head and, still out of breath, admitted defeat.

I walked up to Earl and told him that I had literally sprinted over here to come see him, hence the heavy breathing. As a consolation prize, he handed me a few stickers and I asked for a quick picture, realizing that this was my only chance to convince any of my friends back home that I'd actually met him. He agreed and after a quick high-five, he was headed back in to finish his burger alongside his friends.

Just as I was about to walk away, I turned to Earl and asked, "Can I eat with you?" That wasn't like me at all. I'm never that bold, especially around someone I practically worship. He responded with a wave of his arm toward the door. After a deep breath, I followed. I greeted his four friends, other high school seniors still on their lunch break, and ordered my food, plunking down across from Earl, who was already digging into his fries.

The conversation was typical for a group of high school seniors: girls, college, classwork, hip-hop, and food. I asked the others where they were planning to go to college next year and let them know I'd be studying film as a freshman at NYU. I was hoping Earl's ears

would prick up and perhaps ask whether I would shoot a music video for him, but I guess you can't ask for all of your dreams to come true at once.

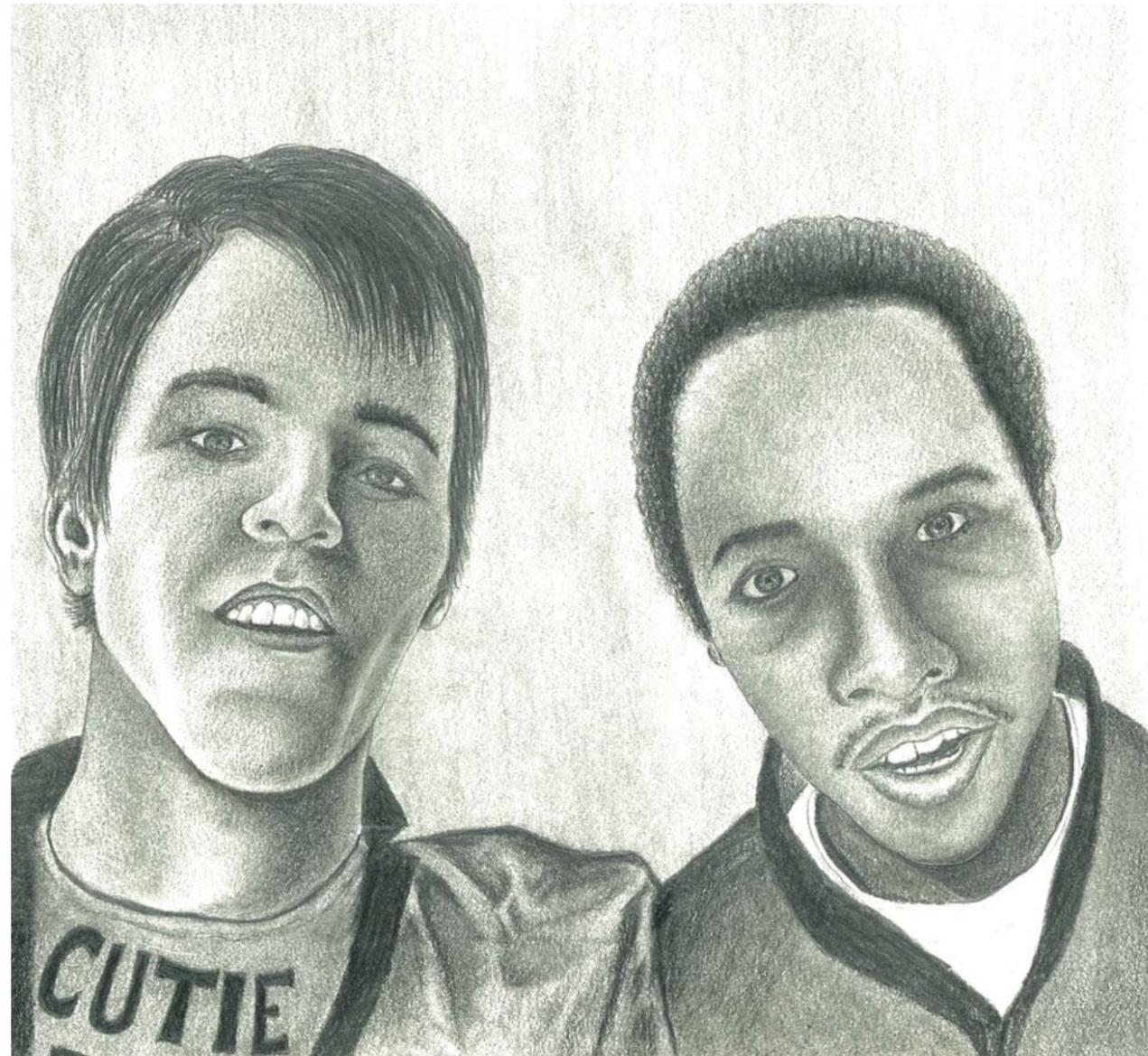
I asked Earl where he was going next year, to which he responded, "The school of fucking hard knocks." I burst out in laughter, and the jokes didn't stop there. A group of elderly men with canes walked in, and Earl turned his head to the door and shouted, "Here come my real fans." The same joke was recycled as a group of toddlers stumbled in, their mothers behind them.

**A group of elderly men with canes walked in, and Earl turned his head to the door and shouted, "Here come my real fans."**

Lunch continued. My heart rate eventually returned to normal, and before I knew it my burger was gone. I offered to buy the crew milkshakes, which Earl quickly turned down, claiming that he knew I was "harder than that." It was as if he didn't want to take full advantage of his stardom, or maybe he just didn't know how much people liked him. Before getting up, Earl told me to tweet the picture of him, goofily calling me "cutie." I happily obliged. As he was getting ready to go, I snapped a few more pictures of him and asked him to autograph my sticker. He signed it "Jesus." I thanked him and exchanged another high-five, mentioning that I hoped to see him at the Atlanta Odd Future concert. He said he wouldn't be able to make it and quickly waved goodbye with a smile. And just like that he was gone—disappeared yet again.

It took me a few hours for it to all sink in. I had met Earl Sweatshirt—the teenage rap superstar who had vanished at the peak of his popularity. I'd found him. Unable to do much of anything but smile, I slowly began strolling through Westwood, waving to people, holding doors open for others outside random stores, and enjoying the dazed high from my encounter with the missing hip-hop prodigy. As I checked my phone to see what time it was, up popped a Twitter notification: @earlsweat had retweeted my picture. Followers started flooding in, totaling 70 by the end of the night. Countless Earl fans I had never met were asking about my experience. They tweeted how lucky I was, how I looked like Tyler Craven, how my twitter name, @thefrajo, was so dumb.

Of course, all things considered, my life remains unchanged. I was not inducted into Odd Future. I was not asked to make a video for Earl. I am just another white, adolescent fan who thinks that their music resonates deeply with my generation and its culture. Amen. 



# REVIEWS



## BEST ALBUM OF THE MONTH: KILLER MIKE



**SANTIGOLD**  
*Master of My Make-Believe*  
Atlantic

☺ If you've swallowed the hype and are expecting the soundtrack to "Let's tear this fucker down!" on Santigold's second album, you will be disappointed. At times she tries to shelter herself from the shitstorm that follows all sophomore albums with a lyrical shield made of scrap metal from hip-hop and reggae clichés. The truest moments are in the space between the lyrics, like the "Hey, hey, hey" on the stirring "This Isn't Our Parade." The single "Big Mouth" supposedly mocks Lady Gaga and Katy Perry, which just reminds me that Katy Perry exists. Cool it with the music-snob bullshit and give the thing a goddamn smiley already. SOPRAH



**DAWN GOLDEN AND ROSY CROSS**  
*Blow Remixed*  
Mad Decent

☹ This EP is just a bunch of producers redoing the same songs over and over. It's like that thing that happens where you're at a shitty club and after your fifth drink you turn to your friends and ask, "Have they just been playing the same song here for 99 hours?" And your friends scream back, "YOU'RE RACIST!" HEY SALLY



**DEL THE FUNKY HOMOSAPIEN AND PARALLEL THOUGHT**  
*Attractive Sin*  
Parallel Thought Ltd.

☺ Not sure if backpacker rap is the same thing as stoner rap, but I feel like Del gets pigeonholed for making at least one of those (maybe both). This record gets a little Native Tongues-y with the jazz and chill-out samples, but dude deserves credit for making hip-hop that doesn't

make me feel like I need 200 milligrams of MDMA and about 8 million shots just to keep it down. He also deserves credit for sticking with that honker of a name nearly two decades past the point it wasn't corny. I mean it. THE M.A.N.



**COLE WILLIAMS**  
*Out of the Basement, Out of the Box*  
Self-released

☹ 1) This is the kind of music they would use during a movie montage showing the strong female lead "getting shit done." 2) I wouldn't be surprised to hear this playing at a fancy pool party thrown by adults who have savings accounts and get those neat color filters for their pool lights. GINGER BEEF



**KILLER MIKE**  
*R.A.P. MUSIC*  
Williams Street

☺ Killer Mike is so smooth and fluid, yet hard at the same time. He's like a nanostructured amorphous solid, or Slimer with a boner. If he were to pull up in his car in front of my place of business right now, I'd take a knee at his wheel like they do at football games when a player's been injured. It would be the only way I'd know how to fully express the sentiment "You killed it, black man." RYAN GOSLING



**CFCF**  
*Exercises*  
Paper Bag

☺ Whoa, this is new. I remember downloading a lot of CFCF stuff from Palms Out Sounds and thinking it was just old, rad Italo disco. The kind of music that made

you feel like you're playing an arcade racing game, and pixelated palm trees are flying by super-fast. This is more like Cornelius's second record or Aphex Twin's more subdued stuff, lots of quietness, droning buzzes, and piano. CRUCIFIED BY THE CFCF



**DANA BUOY**  
*Summer Bodies*  
Lefse

☹ A cloying shot at Panda Bear by the Akron/Family drummer. The press release says this record is "what Buoy refers to as 'Tropicore.'" Tropicore just sounds like an empty glass of orange juice. PLASTERED BOYS



**HECUBA**  
*Modern*  
Germ

☹ I've invented the perfect venue for this album: an extremely air-conditioned bar called Onyx. It's populated by 40-something LA "industry" types with wizened skin and stupid hair, and the decor is minimalist brushed steel and leather meets poor-ergonomic-value furniture. Everything is really low to the ground so the patrons are perpetually uncomfortable, which forces them to try really hard to appear otherwise. BLONDE CAMARO



**GOSSIP**  
*A Joyful Noise*  
Columbia

☹ A Joyful Noise still has the same basic sound the Gossip had before they dropped the "the," but there's a little less grit. Electric crunch swapped for gentle synths, less howling, and more falsetto. There's also a noticeable absence of head-shaking anger and an increase in finger-wagging diva 'tude. Maybe Beth Ditto is getting old. Or maybe she's just trying to sound like Madonna. ROBIN BACIOR



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PRIMAVERA SOUND 2012  
30/31 MAY - 1/2/3 JUNE  
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OPTIMUS  
PRIMAVERA SOUND 2012  
7/8/9/10 JUNE  
PORTO

A STORM OF LIGHT BCN - A\$AP ROCKY BCN - AEROPLANE BCN - THE AFGHAN WHIGS BCN/POR - AFROCUBISM BCN - ANÍMIC BCN - ARAABMUZIK BCN  
ARCHERS OF LOAF BCN - ATLAS SOUND BCN/POR - ATLETA BCN - BAXTER DURY BCN/POR - BEACH BEACH BCN - BEACH FOSSILS BCN - BEACH HOUSE BCN/POR - BEIRUT BCN  
BENGA (LIVE) BCN - BERNHARD FLEISCHMANN BCN - BIG STAR'S THIRD BCN - BIGOTT BCN/POR - BJÖRK BCN/POR - BLACK LIPS BCN/POR - BLEACHED BCN - BOMBINO BCN  
BOXEUR THE COEUR BCN - BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE BCN - CHAIRLIFT BCN/POR - THE CHAMELEONS BCN - CHAVEZ BCN - CHRISTINA ROSENVINGE BCN - CHROMATICS BCN  
CODEINE BCN/POR - CUCHILLO BCN - THE CURE BCN - DANNY BROWN BCN - DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE BCN/POR - DEATH GRIPS BCN/POR - DEATH IN VEGAS BCN  
DEMDIKE STARE BCN/POR - DIRTY BEACHES BCN - DIRTY THREE BCN/POR - DOBLE PLETINA BCN - DOMINANT LEGS BCN - DOMINIQUE A BCN - THE DRUMS BCN/POR  
DUTCH UNCLES BCN - ED WOOD BCN - ELEPHANT BCN - EROL ALKAN BCN/POR - ESPERIT! POR - EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY POR - FASENUOVA BCN - FATHER JOHN MISTY BCN  
THE FIELD BCN - FIELD MUSIC BCN - THE FLAMING LIPS POR - FOREST SWORDS BCN/POR - FRANZ FERDINAND BCN - FRIENDS BCN - GALA DROP POR - GIRLS BCN  
GIRLS NAMES BCN - THE GO! TEAM DJ'S BCN - GODFLESH BCN - GRIMES BCN - GRUPO DE EXPERTOS SOLYNIEVE BCN - HANNI EL KHATIB BCN - HARVEY MILK BCN  
HOORAY FOR EARTH BCN - HYPE WILLIAMS BCN - I BREAK HORSES BCN/POR - ICEAGE BCN - INBORN! BCN - JAMES FERRARO BCN/POR - JAMIE XX BCN - JAPANROIDS BCN  
JEFF MANGUM (NEUTRAL MILK HOTEL) BCN/POR - JEREMY JAY BCN - JOE CREPÚSCULO BCN - JOHN TALABOT (LIVE) BCN/POR - JOSH T. PEARSON BCN - JUSTICE LIVE BCN  
KINDNESS BCN - KING OF THE OPERA BCN - KINGS OF CONVENIENCE BCN - KLEENEX GIRL WONDER BCN - KRISTEN BCN - LA ESTRELLA DE DAVID BCN - LAURA MARLING BCN  
LEE RANALDO BCN/POR - LFO BCN - LINDA MARTINI BCN/POR - LISABÖ BCN - LITURGY BCN - LORENA ÁLVAREZ Y SU BANDA MUNICIPAL BCN - LOWER DENS BCN - M83 BCN/POR  
MAIN BCN - MARIANNE FAITHFULL BCN - MATÍAS AGUAYO BCN - MAYHEM BCN - MAZZY STAR BCN - MELVINS BCN - THE MEN BCN - MICHAEL GIRA BCN - MILAGRES BCN  
MILK MUSIC BCN - MUDHONEY BCN - MUJERES BCN/POR - MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY BCN - NACHO VEGAS BCN - NAPALM DEATH BCN - NAPSZYKLAT BCN - NEON INDIAN BCN/POR  
NICK GARRIE PLAYS THE NIGHTMARE OF J.B. STANISLAS BCN - NO MORE LIES BCN - NUMBERS SHOWCASE: JACKMASTER, ONEMAN, DEADBOY,  
SPENCER, REDINHO BCN/POR - OBITS BCN - OFF! BCN - THE OLIVIA TREMOR CONTROL BCN/POR - ORTHODOX BCN - OTHER LIVES BCN/POR - PEGASVS BCN - PETER WOLF CRIER BCN  
PICORE BCN - PIONAL (LIVE) BCN - THE POP GROUP BCN - PURITY RING BCN - RAFAEL TORA POR - THE RAPTURE BCN/POR - RATS ON RAFTS BCN - REAL ESTATE BCN  
REBECCA GATES BCN - REBOLLEDO BCN - REFREE BCN - REFUSED BCN - RICHARD HAWLEY BCN - THE RIGHT ONS BCN/POR - RUFUS WAINWRIGHT BCN/POR - RUSTIE BCN  
SAINT ETIENNE BCN/POR - SANDRO PERRI BCN - SBTRKT BCN - SCUBA BCN - SENIOR I EL COR BRUTAL BCN - SHARON VAN ETTEN BCN - SHELLAC BCN/POR - SISKIYOU BCN/POR  
SLEEP BCN - SLEEPY SUN BCN/POR - SLEIGH BELLS BCN - SPIRITUALIZED BCN/POR - SR. CHINARRO BCN - STOPESTRA! POR - SUEDE POR - TALL FIRS BCN/POR - TENNIS POR  
THEE OH SEES BCN/POR - TRASH TALK BCN - ULTRAMAGNETIC MC'S BCN/POR - UNICORNIBOT BCN - VERONICA FALLS BCN/POR - THE WALKMEN POR - THE WAR ON DRUGS BCN/POR  
WASHED OUT BCN/POR - WAVVES BCN/POR - WE TRUST POR - THE WEDDING PRESENT PLAYS SEAMONSTERS BCN - THE WEEKND BCN/POR - WHITE DENIM BCN  
WILCO BCN/POR - WILD BEASTS BCN - WOLVES IN THE THRONE ROOM BCN/POR - THE XX BCN/POR - YANN TIERSEN BCN/POR - YO LA TENGO BCN/POR ...

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## REVIEWS



### WORST ALBUM OF THE MONTH: HOPE FOR AGOLDENSUMMER

around in a velvet cape purchased from some store with a name similar to The Werewolf Cave. The air smelled like fog machine and stale incense, and I knew it wouldn't be long before I went down on my first gothic vagina. Those times were beautiful, and this album takes me right back to them.

HOT GYNO

#### VIDEO LOVE Mon Ange Lentonia

Oh, great, a new French electro album. Like I didn't have enough musical options to get herpes to.

INDIAN BUMMER

#### PHÈDRE S/T Daps

Is there a Guitar Center kit that comes with "Ariel Pink" presets and a publicist?

YAWN MOOSE



#### ROOMRUNNER Super Vague Fan Death

I wish the 90s had been as good as the stuff coming out of the 90s revival. I was there, and the 90s were a cultural shitshow. You had four years of Nirvana and then a million years of the bands they influenced, which meant Nickelback. You know who has a Kurt Cobain tattoo? Fred Durst. That's what Nirvana wrought in the 90s. Why did it take so long for their influence to produce good music?

FAN DEATH FAN

#### 2:54 S/T Fat Possum

There was a time during high school when I, as a young goth, would go to the weekly downtown Wednesday-night street fair in my town and walk

#### THE SPITS Kill the Kool In the Red

The Spits are a Ramones-core synth-punk band from Kalamazoo, Michigan, who are too ugly to ever make it moderately big even though they make some of the poppest songs about hating everyone ever. This is a sold-out tour LP they made for their last tour and it collects most of their recent singles. I'd say go find it on eBay, but I just checked and it's not up there, so if you want this record your best bet is to go fuck yourself.

SPIDER PRINCESSES

#### SATAN'S SATYRS Wild Beyond Belief Trash King Productions

Satan's Satyrs sing about nudity, the Dark Lord, motorcycles, and skinheads lighting other skinheads on fire. Their latest LP sounds like if Venom went live to tape for Estrus, and the recording reminds me of the first Warzone seven-inch played through a boom box on a Sunday.

SAM REISS

#### BEST COAST The Only Place Mexican Summer

I've been avoiding this band, and now I know why. How many ways can one remind us they love boys and California? Keep in mind I am a New Yorker who mourns winter when it becomes too hot to

wear leather pants without developing Jim Morrison-style stink crotch. If you're looking for something "new" in the same vein as those *O.C.* soundtracks you adore, this is all you, buddy.

SIRIUS BLACK

#### EVANS THE DEATH S/T Slumberland

I always thought the Cranberries were for smoking cigarettes and drinking Diet Coke in a Land Rover, but the other week when "Dreams" came on at a warehouse rave everyone flipped out and sang along. This band's extremely well positioned for the gold rush.

BUZZ CHAMP

#### TEEN DAZE All of Us, Together Lefse

I don't know. I don't have enough room on my iPod for more of this kind of stuff. And Teen Daze sure have a lot of stuff. I guess it's pretty good if you're watching a visualizer or maybe tripping while staring at an aquarium.

ALEX HOLMES

#### GRASS WIDOW Internal Logic HLR

Man, imagine being a lady. Just walking around everywhere with your hips and breasts and asses and midlength curly hair all gently bouncing in step; wearing a dress or some shit. Imagine having a sweet, high-pitched lady-voice and getting together with a couple of other women and some guitars and making your slightly different voices all sync up as tautly as your periods, then snuggling all up together in a big gorilla's nest of blankets and pillows while

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## REVIEWS



### BEST COVER OF THE MONTH: BEST COAST

something noninformative is playing on the TV. What a life. I guess there's the whole "rape thing" to deal with, too, but let's not split hairs here: Girls got it pretty fucking made.

MAIL GAYS



### BURZUM *Umskiptar*

Byelobog Productions

Let me start off this review by saying that I'm a big Burzum fan. I listen to a Burzum record like once a week at least. I even enjoyed the last few postprison albums. This latest one, however, is kind of disappointing. Varg seems to be drifting in a folksier direction, which is cool, but he spends most of the time here talking in Norwegian over the music. I felt like I was listening to Rosetta Stone language tapes. And all this talking makes him sound like he's way too tired to even get up the energy to sing. I guess murdering people really wears a fella out.

NICC GAYZEN



### BROKEN WATER *Tempest*

Hardly Art

Instead of spending 80-some-odd words dancing around the fact that this sounds more or less exactly like Sonic Youth, why don't we both be adults about this and I'll just say go ahead and say buy this shit if you like Sonic Youth. Or Magik Markers.

DOINK



### BRIAN JONESTOWN MASSACRE

*Aufheben*

A

I like how everybody's problem with this band is they saw the lead singer kick someone in a movie. Nobody can deal with assholes anymore. As late as the 80s and 90s you still had human ogres like

Norman Mailer and El Duce roaming the earth, commanding if not respect from most people, at least a healthy curiosity about whose clock would get cleaned next. Now everybody's so averse to confrontation they'll tweet a 1,000-word jeremiad against the guy who cut in front of them at the bank before saying, "Excuse me, sir." It's actually made it kind of an amazing time to be an asshole. Last night, this girl at the next table over kept yammering on about some holistic pyramid-scheme crap that's supposed to heal cuts, burns, and cancer with the power of the ocean, and in lieu of making fun of her loudly, barking "SHUT UP," or simply not caring, I went straight to flipping pennies at her chest, safe in the knowledge that her living shrug of a boyfriend would do absolutely nothing about it. Which he did. Hail the New Asshole Dawn.

LEROY GUMPTION



### GEOFF BARROW AND BEN SALISBURY

*Drokk*  
Invada

Geoff Barrow runs this label and four other bands, including fucking Portishead. He put out the *Drive* soundtrack vinyl. Now here's a one-off buddy jam he made with the guy who soundtracked *The Life of Mammals*, and it's a cold-synths fantasy homage to the Judge Dredd comics that's as dark and minimal as a red dot on your forehead.

WALTER THE WOBBIT



### CODEINE

*When I See the Sun*  
Numero Group

Codeine stand as a simultaneous testament to just how much smack people were doing in the 90s and just how thoroughly emasculated and depressive you had to make yourself look in order to get laid

back then (provided you didn't have any smack). I still can't fully process how they were able to make lyrics that read like they were cribbed from a 14-year-old girl's poetry journal sound completely not-hilarious, or how any of these sad men could keep time to a single snare hit every ten seconds without some severe chemical assistance. A little bummed the label didn't include the Peel Session of "Broken-hearted Wine" in this otherwise comprehensive box set, but I guess I can find other reasons to kill myself next time I'm even slightly a bit hungover.

BARRY ADAMSON



### RUFUS WAINWRIGHT

*Out of the Game*  
Decca/Polydor

I want Rufus Wainwright to spit in my mouth. I want to bathe him. While I'm drying him off, we don't even have to speak if he doesn't want to.

This is how unhinged of a fan I am. His last album, *Songs for Lulu*, I reviewed as "Album of the Decade." I was ready for this album to be great. It's not. It's terrible. And my heart is broken. The only theory I can offer is that his new sober life as a father, and a soon-to-be husband, has sent his muses running for the hills. Rufus, get back to being heartbroken, get back to watching the sun rise with an overflowing ashtray between you and a new naked body each morning. Here is my number: 917-539-3963. I will be that body/ashtray.

GIANCARLO DITRAPANO



### THE SPRING STANDARDS

*Yellow/Gold*  
Parachute Shooter

I would love the shit out of this if I were a middle-aged woman coming home after "a long day at work" before drinking "some wine" and watching *Mad Men* and thinking about Don Draper plowing me like "a harvest." It's not a bad album—I just think at least one member of the band needs to



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## REVIEWS



develop some sort of semicrippling addiction by the next one or at the very least buy a distortion pedal, because if this album sounded any more like a hug it would have arms.

NED HEPBURN



**SOSO**  
*That Time I Dug So Deep I Ended Up in China*  
Girlie Action

Looking for the right background music to add some pizzazz to your Windows Movie Maker videos about your love of “haute couture”? This album has just what you’re yapping on about.

BLONDE CAMARO



**VIOLENS**  
*True*  
Slumberland

These guys have probably heard the Smiths a time or two, and yet somehow this makes me want to cruise down the highway in a convertible that I don’t have now and probably never will. But I can dreeeeeeeam!

ROBIN BACIOR



**HOPE FOR AGOLDENSUMMER**  
*Life Inside the Body*  
Mazarine

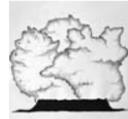
Every time I eat soy or tofu mushed into the shape of a burger or chicken wing, I always think about how I wouldn’t mind eating soy or tofu if it tasted a little more like a burger or chicken wing. Similarly, I wouldn’t MIND listening to muff-diver music if only it didn’t always sound SO MUCH like muff-diver music. Backstory on this group is that they deliver babies in people’s homes when they’re not plucking their lesbian banjos. Neither of which I mean sexually.

HOT GYNO

## WORST COVER OF THE MONTH: HECUBA



**JON PORRAS**  
*Black Mesa*  
Thrill Jockey



**MOUNT EERIE**  
*Clear Moon*  
P.W. Elverum & Sun

If they made a *Friday Night Lights*-type show entirely about doing heroin, this would be the

soundtrack. A+++++  
NED HEPBURN

Whenever a long-term personality-cult rocker puts out a new record it seems like the only reason to say you don’t like it is to troll the fans. In this case, all the Elverum fans I know are growing a redwood or are great artists, so I’ll leave them be. (Sound of gentle chimes.)  
CX ZOLA

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
*Best of Perception & Today Records*  
BBE

Enough with the fucking funk and soul comps already. What is this, my dad’s second wedding?  
TOPHER BANKS

**LOS MITICOS DEL RITMO**  
*S/T*  
Soundway

There are a bunch of kids in Monterrey who make this slowed-down, super-stoney *cumbia* music that’s basically the Mexican version of chopped ’n’ screwed and which sounds terminally *fuuuuucked*. This ain’t that, though. This is your standard Mexican-restaurant-sounding

shit from Colombia that Señor Coconut fans can pick up to mark their severely retarded passage into adulthood. Bonus cringe points for the cover of “Another One Bites the Dust,” dudez.

AMBROSE PIERCE



**PUMICE**  
*PUNY*  
Soft Abuse

Record nerds love freaky New Zealand things because they’re obscure, but also “good” in pretty normal terms. Case in point, the new Pumice, an album of “laboriously crafted” songs bowled right down the center of its country’s underground style guide. This guy’s been doing basically exactly this by himself since 1991, but this time there’re more than 100 copies of the record.

LITTLE LOCKY



**KATY PERRY**  
*Teenage Dream: The Complete Confection*  
Capitol

Katy Perry’s pretty, but she’s not really a singer or a dancer. Madonna’s not a great singer, but she can dance, and she had the right mixture of talent and mediocrity that she was both special and relatable to yearning but boring suburban girls. Lady Gaga is the starlet of now and beyond because she’s actually in control of what she’s doing, plus she’s talented. Katy Perry makes me sad because she is a step backward and her music is really shitty, even for pop. If pop is great, it doesn’t need explanation. You just say, “Candy tastes good.” But this candy doesn’t taste good. It tastes sad and stiff. It tastes like she’s struggling to stay in tempo while the producer angrily claps his hands in time on the 30th take of “California Girls.” The sexuality feels forced and fake like she’s some Operation Monarch CIA sex puppet. With Lady Gaga or Rihanna I get the sense that they’re genuine pervs who like getting porked. Katy Perry seems like a very wholesome, normal woman, and I don’t feel like her fun party persona is working.

JIGGAHEAD CREEK



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## VICE FASHION STOCKISTS

Photo by Aliya Naumoff, see page 76

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ajmorganeyewear.com

ALDO  
aldoshoes.com

ALEXANDRE HERCHCOVITCH  
herchcovitch.uol.com.br

AMERICAN APPAREL  
americanapparel.net

BETSEY JOHNSON  
betseyjohnson.com

CANDACE ANG  
candaceang.com

CHARLOTTE RONSON  
charlotteronson.com

CHRIS HABANA  
chrishabana.com

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CONVERSE  
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DEGEN  
degen-nyc.com

DESCHAIN  
ledeschain.com

FRED PERRY  
fredperry.com

GANNI  
gannistore.com

HOUSE OF DAGMAR  
houseofdagmar.se

IMITATION  
imitationny.com

JAC LANGHEIM  
jaclangheim.com

JACK GREER FOR OPENING CEREMONY  
openingceremony.us

JEFFREY CAMPBELL  
jeffreycampbellshoes.com

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JIMMY TAVERNITI  
jimmytaverniti.com

JOHNNY WAS  
johnnywas.com

KELLY WEARSTLER  
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kiraplastinina.com

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X JEFFREY CAMPBELL  
jeffreycampbellshoes.com

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stussy.com

SUNO  
sunony.com

SWATCH  
swatch.com

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jewelrybyterese.com

THE BLONDS  
theblondsnewyork.com

UNDEFEATED  
undefeated.com

VINCE  
vince.com

WESC  
wesc.com

WILDFOX COUTURE  
wildfoxcouture.com

Manish Arora vest, Alexandre Herchcovitch bodysuit, American Apparel skirt and socks, Stolen Girlfriends Club x Jeffrey Campbell shoes, Miansai bracelet



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