

RETURN TO FORTRESS EUROPE

The Big Shiny Prison (*Volume III*)

c/o Ryan Bartek

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1// FORTRESS EUROPE: *a military propaganda term from WWII, referring to areas of Continental Europe occupied by Nazi Germany. In British phraseology, Fortress Europe was a Battle Honor accredited to Royal Air Force & Allied Squadrons for operations made against AXIS targets from the British Isles.*

2// FORTRESS EUROPE: *modern slang used to describe the state of immigration into the European Union (EU). This can be in reference to antagonistic attitudes toward immigration, or to the system of border patrols/detention centers used to make illegal immigration difficult. Since would-be immigrants are often of non-European ethnicity, the phrase “Fortress Europe” is frequently used in a derogative context to reference the extreme nationalism within European politics.*

– INTRODUCTION – THE ENDLESS ESCAPE

by Benedict Badoglio (Former Ambassador of The ALUS Republic)

The Big Shiny Prison, and it's sequel Fortress Europe, were initial stirrings of a larger quest in literature & of the self. These books appear at a deceptive glance to feature the author's travels of The USA & Europe, interviewing hundreds of bands, artists, freaks & madmen. However, the realities of his propulsion were otherwise.

It started with heartbreak; a turgid, desolate dead end. When the author of these eventual books “Gave Up The Ghost” one fateful night in 2006, he slipped away on a Greyhound bus at midnight. He ran far & hard from his old life in Detroit that had ground to such a depressing halt.

He felt trapped, with no choice but to flee – and like a man turning to Magick he found unlimited imaginative strength in The Written Word. At age 25, it was do or die – admit economic defeat & sign up to Trade School? Or enable one's sole truth & fanatically submit to the most wild of artistic inclinations.

Does one drop the dream of being a writer taken seriously? A political writer, travel book author, music journalist & artist defying genre conventions? Or does the next Joe Blow shmuck “give in” as always, abandoning youth to install ventilation systems or plumbing?

In defiance, this young man denied society & willingly threw it all away to be a homeless traveler living out a backpack, letting his curiosity of the unexplored “take the wheel.” This was his only tangible “Holy Grail.”

Thus he embarked on a “living book” called “*The Big Shiny Prison*,” largely inspired by Henry Miller's “*Air Conditioned Nightmare*” – where all dialogue is rendered as if characters in a fictional novel. Also, it would assimilate the trance-inducing, free-form writing of Kerouac's “*On The Road*” & the abstract political surrealism of Hunter S. Thompson's most electric works.

He was going to the primitive roots of books such as these – the literature-smashing format Henry Miller created in daring to publish first-person reality fronting as if a fictionalized novel – which eventually did to world literature what “*Citizen Kane*” did for film.

“*The Big Shiny Prison*” was a “Trojan Horse” – a book masquerading as “music journalism” but in actuality something quite different. The focus was presenting the most honest way people actually talk in America – especially in the underground. Through many a subtle framing a reader discovers a common psychological unity.

As is why anyone looking to these books for “deep journalism” in terms of “talking music” will be deeply disappointed. Yes, music & the underground experience are the consistent thread – but no one in *real life* talks like they are being interviewed by journalists all the time. It's phony bologna.

There is something deeply unnatural in being put “on the spot” – especially when people feel the need to impress their knowledge of obscure subjects. Being interviewed is nervous as a job interview, or sitting down with a lawyer or the police for questioning. So hit hard & fast – get the “music stuff” out of the way & onto the real subjects, which were often random questions designed to pull aspects of truth out an individual.

Despite critics who may only interpret a messy, unconnected narrative awaiting further editing – every line indeed compliments a further sentence or notion in the manuscript. Just as the philosophy of the Hermeticists – *As Above, So Below*; there is a correspondence for everything. And the world of “*The Big Shiny Prison*” is its own inclusive, living sphere. All dots connect.

Unlike the reader, the author has perspective of his work as a whole. As has been the venom for critics – thoroughly annoyed because they didn't quite understand that the very things annoying them were absolutely deliberate.

Negative reviews or assertions usually revolved around things that were ostensibly projected in a misleading sense to act as a mirror to the reader's own psychology. Critics were poisonous in “picking things up” they were meant to.

Literature is like music – you can do anything you want with it. And likewise, you stir reaction in the reader. Music is often ambiguous – it does not tell you what it means. “*The Big Shiny Prison*” “tells” you what it means, while it's writer chuckles at the “meaning” you just acquired and waits to mutate it in due, lurking like some shadowy, cackling figure behind a paragraph deeper in the text. The constantly author ambushes you.

That much said, the key to understanding R. Bartek's work is his hyper-complex, masked embedments – the “Holden Caulfield Approach” of “*Catcher In The Rye*” where it's not so important what the character is telling you but the reality behind his warped & deluded understanding of events. Even when fronting “first person,” he is still a narrator far distanced from the “self” on his paper. As is all writing – anyone who tells you otherwise is lying.

What may seem like a loose, insignificant line or minor unrelated experience often has some kind of extreme psychological correspondence later. “*The Big Shiny Prison*” demands you let go & stop struggling – it drags you with it's flow while lulling you into a sense that no undertow exists...

“*Return To Fortress Europe (The Big Shiny Prison Volume III)*” is the third & final volume of the trilogy – completed roughly 12 years after the author left Detroit to embark on this strange quest.

The subcultures that molded him also determined his fanatical attitude. Punk Rock meant something – “never surrender.” Heavy Metal was its own loose-knit tribal civilization in defiance of the static world. These concepts weren't simply “music scenes” or “kid stuff,” nor were they “entertainment.” This was Revolution – a down & dirty propaganda war against The Herd.

And he was hardly alone. As the generations continued, the counterculture spark kept evolving, splintering into innumerable directions, only to slowly come increasingly full circle as the years progressed.

By the time it reached minds such as the teenage Ryan Bartek of the mid 1990's – they'd all been indoctrinated to so many subcultures they all bled

together. Formerly segregated scenes & movements became a vague, gray mass. There was larger recognition of unity in building a different world at any cost.

And so as an adult he took the most meaningful stab at it he knew how – journalism, music promotion, internet propaganda, press relations, media manipulation, books, bands – you name it, he was on it. He was a workhorse until his breaking point, where it was freedom of travel or cabin fever eternal...

Despite its quality, “*The Big Shiny Prison*” did not find a major publisher. While a number of agents were interested, all offered raw deals. He didn't believe they knew how to market it either.

While he thought it quite possible, none of the competent record labels in extreme metal were inclined to release it. They thought it was solid, but had no idea what to do with it. Some had released straight-forward metal or punk books, but these were never huge sellers or label priorities. Like all independent publishers, they could only get so far. They encouraged him to self-publish.

Eventually Bartek released “*The Big Shiny Prison*” as a Free PDF days before Thanksgiving 2009, then watched to his amazement as dozens of major news services ran the press release – the download count soared & he was being interviewed for magazines, newspapers & webzines worldwide. When he'd given up hope & just “threw it out there” the payoff finally came.

2 years afterward he flew to London to backpack Europe for 3 months – an experience that was to become “*Fortress Europe (The Big Shiny Prison Vol II)*.” Released again as a Free Download March 2012, it had immediate impact – the underground embraced it, and he again scored a tsunami of press. As time went on, the download counts never stopped.

He returned to Europe in Summer 2012 & 2013 – backpacking for months gathering all the experiences & stories what would eventually become this manuscript – “*Return To Fortress Europe*.”

Just as the other two volumes were “Trojan Horses,” this book again defies conventions. He no longer plays the “mystery man” or adopts the glitzy

showmanship of a PT Barnum or Kayfabe hustlin' Vince McMahon. He no longer plays into the sleazy punk rock logic of The Dwarves or the silly Church of SubGenius. He no longer is that idealist 30 year old “Super-Tramping” his way across the open Schengen Zone, idolizing the counterculture hope of the 1960's.

In “Return To Fortress Europe,” the author has finally become what he always loosely considered himself – a literal refugee; a homeless, hard-line political radical urban camping his way through Europe like a grizzled mercenary of a mission he himself enacted. He still interviews the occasional metal or punk band, but his focus is reporting on the global wave started by The Arab Spring, Take The Square & Occupy which changed the political fabric everywhere.

Included herein are tales of a wide variety, through terrain as foreign as România, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Croatia & Serbia. This book, despite all it's subject-jumping & intentional inconsistency, is strangely coherent. It is sharper then the previous volumes in many ways, yet more wildly disjointed then ever. However, no Bartekian collection is complete without this rousing finale to his nervous-breakdown inducing, titanic road saga.

As for the author? The legends speak of many ends, yet only one is of a certified, factual basis – *still he rides out there, still the wheels turn.*

Once long ago they dubbed him “GhostNomad” – a vaporous, airy traveler walking voids they could not grasp. It was always his tag – scribbled on bathrooms & venue walls. 'Twas his “Kilroy Was Here,” spray-painted on the imaginary Memorial Wall of nobodies who came from nothing, never had nothin', then that nothing turning nothingness & they ran like a slave to glorious freedom when that nothingness gestated a vacuum of worse.

And just as “GhostNomad” stands in small tribute to the escape mechanism of a discontinued existence, “Return To Fortress Europe” is likewise a neon tombstone that colorfully rests upon an otherwise grim grave of a thankfully forgotten, go nowhere life.

(Former Ambassador of The ALUS Republic)

RETURN TO FORTRESS EUROPE

Subteren Voivode România (*Part One: România 2013*)

It was in the Hungarian torture basement, where the Nazis & Reds had imprisoned 70,000+ enemies of The State, that I decided to flee to Transylvania. This evil place – *this haunted subterranean pit echoing the necrotic energy of 10k murder/tortures* – it ruined Budapest for me.

From thereon, all I could see was communism every where I looked. The great mass of sprawling architecture spoke this grim history in rambling prose, and the building which so drained me was a kingpin among world class bureaucratic horrors.

I'd slipped into the "House of Terror" around 11am, a museum exposing the heinous crimes of the Fascists and Soviets. As the administrative center of both parties' secret police, somehow the building stood untouched.

Perhaps it was only because the length of Andrassy Ave. would've burned down had the Hungarian's torched it. Maybe they wanted to keep their Boardwalk equivalent. Or maybe, just like the Romanians, the denizens of Budapest held a similar fear the Commies could never be stamped out – that somehow they'd return like a Soviet zombie army. If they found their monstrous nest in scorched shambles there would be hell to pay.

After being led through red & black hallways & endless corridors of propaganda, the looming round skull of Rákosi greeted me. The third floor was dedicated to the repression of the clergy, and a carpenter artist had ripped up the glossily varnished floor & placed at its center a glowing white crucifix that illuminated the room as if a cavernous monastery.

I accidentally stepped on it, shorting out all power on the upper floor of the museum. Oops! Angry Hungarian security guards flung their heads in my direction as if enraged hawks – they scowled & spoke on Walkie Talkies.

Alongside German tourists, we were herded into a tiny box of an elevator with glass walls so you could see the industrial-guts of the hidden section.

The elevator descended slowly & all lights died as we plunged in slow subterranean motion. On came a black & white TV screen – a survivor recounting 14 years of confinement & torture in Hungarian dialect. 11 minutes later, we reached the most evil basement on earth. The elevator halted with the conclusion of his tale, and in I was pushed into Nazi Hades by angry security guards still incensed I'd nearly broken the art display.

This basement of savage inhumanity reeked of black mold & desperation; It contained the most atrocious rubber room & scariest crawl space in Europe, and the most tense interrogation room imaginable. It was a nexus of blackened fear – like a matrix of ghosts haunting ghosts.

The only part of it that felt inviting at all was the execution room, and the hangman's post still stood as testament and as a warning to future generations should they loose control to bloodthirsty madmen.

When I made the street, I knew I had to get out. The vastly intense architecture seemed as if it would come alive, changing shape and form as to restructure itself like a robot of concrete & iron. Budapest was non-tropical Athens with plastic surgery...

Yet Budapest was just not happening for me. The bare essentials of every European's summary appeared true: it was the only “*cool cool*” city in Hungary, no one really speaks English, there's a nationalist xenophobic undercurrent, street crazies are abundant, it's crawling with the most shadowy element of Roma & you can essentially “see it all” in 2 days (*in the cliché “tourist sense”*).

But these were not problems for me. I prefer not to hear English and to be alien. I don't even look at a map before heading into a city – just dump me on some weird planet, cut me off from anything I know, and go live as

one of their homeless poor. I dig for the absolute truth. I am a fan of street crazies, and Eastern European street crazy with it's own mentality.

The physical size of Budapest is negligible, because each man is his own universe. All you have to do is find that right fellow that will key you into everything, and you can fall into a labyrinthine adventure lasting for decades within the same 50 kilometer stretch.

Budapest certainly was that place. It could devour you whole for several lifetimes, if you stumbled upon the right nerve. The tourist hordes were consistently frantic, kind of a mirror effect of what Amsterdam does to them yet lacking it's claustrophobic, mega-stoned pressure cooker.

I am curious of the Romani people, and I gladly take the time to listen to their Baltic street music. I don't call them “*gypsy*,” because that equates to “Ni**er.” They are not gypsies. They are Roma, or Romani.

The Europeans know they are essentially calling them “ni**ers” – it's ageless. Refer to the children's faerie tales of the Dark Ages for the popular mentality involving these roaming tribes who reject the notion of a homeland or “roots,” as you know them.

They don't even know their own history. Supposedly they were mountain men between India & Pakistan (*who famously hate each other*) and a shunned half-breed of both warring cultures. When Genghis Kahn ripped through Europe, he'd captured tons of Roma as slaves.

Once the savage warlordship of Genghis Kahn climaxed (*by his 14 year old wife punching him in the face during BDSM kink, thus breaking his nose, thus bleeding to death from a smashed artery, thus literally & ironically “climaxing” with his empire*), he'd left giant swathes of them spread across Europe.

Budapest was symbolic because it was the last of the great European capitols I was dead-set on visiting. Combined, I had now traveled 8 months total throughout Europe between 2011-2013. Every summer I went for 3 month stretches, and this third and final run I still had 36 days left.

I'd reached the end of the road – almost. It was now August 2013, and it had been a brutally hot Summer. It rained nonstop from May to July, and the European gloom ended the day I'd arrived.

While it was true that there were areas of Spain and Greece that I was deeply interested in, there was only one final territory left that I considered urgent as a matter of life or death – I wanted România. I wanted to devour it whole, to crawl through every inch of mystery.

I wanted to understand the truth of the Romani, to walk among the Carpathians, to stare out from the stone windows of Castle Dracula. I wanted to see the Detroit-like rot of post Communism.

The problem which plagued me before is the same which plagues Românians now – there is no easy or inexpensive way there from the wider whole of Europe. Trains? No way. Eurolines buses? No how. Rideshare or carpooling? No one is ever going further east then Hungary. Hitchhiking? You have to go through Hungary too, and they look funny at strangers.

Hitchhiking through Ukraine is a suicide mission, they say. There are some EasyJet, WhizzAir & RyanAir flights – but at a Milano airport in “The Styx” & costs €15 from Central to reach – or from Charleroi, the industrial corn-hole of Belgium.

Furthermore, I'd yet to meet a single person who had traveled România in any real capacity. A guy here or there might have crossed through it hitchhiking, but I could get little info other then “don't drink the water” and beware the packs of stray dogs that have multiplied uncontrollably.

România was also a milestone in my existence as a traveling journalist. Throughout 2007, I journeyed America while being road reporter for 2 of the largest heavy metal magazines in The USA.

City to city I went, dropping myself in the thick of alien environments as if dropped into an RPG game. I ran wild with it, and the overall mission ended 2009. My book on this experience, *The Big Shiny Prison*, was released to coincide. The second book, naturally, detailed my exploits throughout Europe in Summer 2011. I headed again to Europe for 3 months in 2012. That year, it was Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain & my favorite northern haunts.

2013 though – I never really thought I'd make it back. I made the money by the skin of my teeth & just went for it. I had my health & the opportunity to do so, so I dove right in. Why not? Live Free Or Die, right? I'd tackle Europe 1 last time, but only venture where I'd never gone. The final frontier was East – the Post-Tito/Post-Soviet world...

I exited The Basement of Nazi Doom and crouched outside the House of Terror. The stench of Budapest crept up – the way too shallow sewers that were roasting under the thumping sun and that particular stench accompanying the aftermath of a parking lot carnival in Missouri. Bees were everywhere, as if soda pop glazed picnic tables were lumped into pyramids.

The Roma were heavy in presence, carting wheelbarrows full of old TV's, bed sets, dressers, electronic doodads, clothing and convenience accessories into huge disorderly mounds on the sidewalks and peddled them as if it were a garage sale. They don't need city permits to occupy the flea market. You could arrest them a million times, and they will still go back.

The gypsies as a race are the unflinching, unbreakable angry antisocial kid in the back of the high school classroom that will never, ever do what authority tries to force. Whatever that authority is, they will forever mock & defy it. But that doesn't mean they want to sling their arm around

your shoulder and be buddy buddy with you just cause you think they are wacky and subversive and you detest the system too. In more graceful words then mine: *“You ain't one of them.”*

Although, to be fair, it was Greece that I'd originally intended to go. I'd flown into Belgium on July 16th, 2013 and spent the first 2 weeks of this journey hitching between Koninkrijk België and Nederland before a bus to Czech.

The 3 stage, 5 day, 100 band Brutal Assault extreme metal festival then followed, and afterwards I dragged my drunken, ear-ringing carcass onto a convoy of Serbian metalheads, drifting 10 hours south to Belgrade, Serbia where I spent 2 days ingesting their culture & dirt cheap economics – so cheap you felt ashamed by it, even though you unconvincingly reassured the Serbian people that their quality of life was vastly superior to that of America. How is that possible, they ask, when they're selling bananas in the street?

It would be a long bus to Greece (Thessaloníki via Belgrade), because I'd have to head through Skopje (Macedonia) and stay a night before continuing onward. There was no way to find out the connecting bus times for the next 7 hour to Thessaloníki. Could be 3 days.

One last Internet check before I headed to the station, and a distress cable from a Portlander popped in my feed. West Nile virus was ransacking Greece – her boyfriend had just been quarantined by the government! The Americans wouldn't let him leave quarantine for 3 months either – to be readmitted only after a battery of tests!

The African super flu spread by mosquitoes had erupted, killing 142 confirmed people. The boyfriend was nearly to coma. The authorities had no drugs to treat it, and there was a massive shortage of blood donations.

Legitimate scientists were claiming that at least half the mosquitoes in Greece were infected, and to stay away. The Greek government, of course, was too busy stealing money to arrange for planes to spray the mosquitoes.

Greece was now a tropical paradise of standing water, and people were growing ill at an extraordinary rate that couldn't be measured because most doctors don't realize this virus for what it is.

40% of those infected don't realize it, the other 40% is hardcore super flu, and the other 20% – their brains swell up and they die. It's brutal. It was discovered in Uganda in 1937, but somehow it broke out in Algeria in 1994, then to an epidemic in România in '96.

The first USA case was New York, 1999. Now, it's global. But as I learned while pecking away at my iPod in the Belgrade square, all of Central & Balkan Europe were having ballooning statistics.

West Nile virus was everywhere, and if I went to Greece, I would be forced to execute my plan of sleeping outside every night. I was a man with a tent, not a credit card for hotels. The heat wave was incredible as well, up to 40+ Celsius (aka *104+ Fahrenheit*)...

The most intelligent decision was to wait out the sickness. Crete had begun spraying for mosquitoes in a panic, and it was presumed the Athenian parliament would follow suit. Greece was a waiting game.

In the meantime, I'd head West. If the Greek coasts were not to be enjoyed, I would commence upon the beach bum alternative of Croatia, the Jurassic Park of the Mediterranean.

I was stoked. Back when Serbia, Macedonia, Slovenia and others were united under Tito, this former Yugoslavian tropical play land was their paradise beneath intense forest canopies & gorgeous mountain sides. It was where the whole of Yugoslavia would head on a summer weekend to soak up the sun and float in pristine waters.

Following war in the 90's, it was severed. Croatia became it's own nation, and just recently joined the EU against the wishes of its majority. The

clock was ticking down to Schengen law, and only the politicians getting IMF & Rothschild handouts were thrilled.

I took a bus from Belgrade to bypass Bosnia, and was dumped onto the streets of Zagreb, the capitol, on a drizzling night. I spent the evening trying to find the metal bar which had moved locations, then attended an outdoor film fest devoid of English language before sleeping in a mysterious looking park with giant trees & sloped hills.

Wrapped in my plastic tarp like a burrito, I'd slid halfway down the hill by the time I awoke at chilly 5am. I strolled through the cobble stoned Old World district alone for hours, but by early afternoon the greater city was closed down due to a national holiday.

I followed the map on foot 2 kilometers to what appeared a vehicle roundabout just before the freeway on-ramp. Once I reached it – sweating like mad and parched from the sun – it was a bicycle thoroughfare. The only hitch spot possible was a McDonald's parking lot, and I flew a sign that read “NEXT PETROL STATION” an hour.

No one understood what I was getting at, although I thought they were just lying & didn't like strangers. It was at least a 5km walk on the side of the freeway to reach the next big gas station – the key to clean escape.

A Bosnian guy pulled up with his Croatian girlfriend: “*Hey man, I'll take you – but don't be mad that no one stopped. No one says Petrol down here – it's Benzine. No one knew what you were talking about.*” I slid in & we were heading the same direction – Rijeka, the beach town that was the former border between Croatia & Fascist Italy.

The couple zoomed us away & we soon were ranting about LAIBACH, hitch-hiking in Southeast Asia, every genre of extreme metal. I'd found my people, and not only did they escort me to the most pristine beach of Rijeka, they gave me swimming trunks, a towel, and plenty of free beer.

I hung with them for hours before they had to move on, and I lost myself in the Amsterdam-like corridors of downtown. I got an offer to work as volunteer staff at a mega Psytrance rave in the forest about 100km east called “Momento Demento (aka Modem Fest).” The promoter would provide a free €100 ticket – but I had to get there soon and work 5 solid 6 hour shifts.

To those heavy metal fanatics reading this now grumbling that this tale is not yet metal enough for you, understand that this was not any kind of cheesy loop-based club music we know so well in the States. This was not tacky disco stuff with mall shoppers in tight skirts.

This wasn't the *Matrix* soundtrack or a cheesy Daft Punk single. This was like Skinny Puppy at the bottom of the rabbit hole – a collection of freakishly dark & evil sounding electronic music layered with horror movie instrumental dissonance. This was the pounding rebirth of industrial music for a new generation, spliced with gabba, breakcore & hardcore techno of the UltraViolence variety.

This was as extreme metal-minded as electronic music gets, and the bass system was to be a tower of power echoing for miles in every direction. This was the height of Forest Darkpsy, a specific subculture that has not quite invaded America and probably never will. This is something unique & specifically European with origins to the Goa beaches of India where it does not rain precipitation but rather LSD.

It was a solid 10 days on a mountain, and I was debating it. I'd come here to hitch to Pula, another sunny beach town filled with alternative lifestyles and an anarchist squat in an old army barracks. I figured if I was to stay out of the Euro Zone and keep my visa legal, that place was key. But so were the 3,000 friendly acidhead stoners I'd be camping with over a week.

That night I slept hidden behind a public bus stop that I had to clear of broken glass & sprinkle dirt around to kill off its pissy smell. Endless scores

of drunk Croatians had no doubt habitually used it as a beer-drunk pee corner before hopping on that bus to wherever.

I woke up the next morning, got some grub, then ducked into an alley to make a hitch sign for PULA. As I was blackening the big U a younger blond kid with a bloodshot red eye from a bar fight snuck up talking my ear off, trying to get me to throw down on some weed.

He wanted to practice his English, and invited me out to an all expenses paid lunch. One thing led to another, and by nightfall we were headed to KRK, the paradise island just off the Rijeka coast.

Within a few more hours, we were hanging with his deceased fathers' Balkans' war buddies. One guy had a giant scar on his chest from a liver transplant, and the other guy a peg-leg.

The guy with the chest scar used to run a bar but drank himself nearly to death. He explained through the gulps of whiskey he was using to wash down his heart & liver pills that he'd sold his business for the new liver. When we asked how he could take his meds like that considering his health problems he said: *"Fuck it, I'll buy another liver – you only live once!"*

I made it back to Rijeka the following day, and while waiting on the bus to get within proximity of the Psytrance rave, I met the personal chef for all the superstar DJ's.

I told him that I too am a professional chef, and he made a quick phone call. I too was locked into my gig of cooking backstage, if I so wanted. But getting there would be a long hassle – the bus took us to Karlovic, an hour drive north of our destination.

The bus arrived 5 minutes late, and we sat in the beating sun another 6 hours to catch the linking vehicle. The chef & I went back to hitchhiking, but after an hour of no one stopping, we accepted the age old principle – *"money talks and bullshit walks."*

We wrote a huge Euro sign on the cardboard and waved around a 100 Kroner note. In 20 minutes we got picked up by 3 guys driving aimlessly, and decided they might as well take us for the free beer.

One of the volunteer coordinators picked us up in a small town called Slujn (*spoken: "Sloon"*). We were shuttled to a house where most promoters were cooking a gigantic feast for the starving crew, and arrived at the exact moment 12 humongous joints were lit – everyone was so stoned that despite the mad belly grumbling no one could eat more than a plate of spaghetti!

The chef & I jumped into the shuttle, and off we went deep into mountainous back roads where we almost nailed 2 roaming cows at 50km that were shuffling across the gravel. The driver swerved, and continued heading forward.

We were all quiet for a moment, and then he turned to us. *"Was it just me, or did it look like those cows were coming home drunk from the bar?"* We all burst into crazed laughter, because we all thought the same thing. The look in that big white quadruped's eyes was the same as every trashed drunkard you have to push out the door when a tavern closes at 2am.

We pulled into the location, and by dawn the light revealed the paradise we'd been escorted to. It could only be described as a sort of Ewok Village deep within the heart of a sprawling Croatian forest, a rag-tag group of acidheads had banded together to throw the ultimate Psytrance party in a gorgeous, exotic locale that was somewhere between the Cascadian Mountain Range and Amazon terrain.

They'd occupied the forest in April, and had lived within it for 3 months. They cut down entire tree clearings, made a Tibetan staircase up a mountain hammered with large logs spiked like railroad tracks.

Stages and structures were everywhere, and a two man German and Russian team spent 3 days rendering the main stage into a flood of black lights that was unparalleled in terms of Middle School black lit poster world.

When the LSD experience is at it's most insane, that first time, when little Johnny drops that first hit after school and climbs his way back home and loses himself to the images of his walls.

We were living on the other side of the poster, in the peak imagination of the universal 14 year old, the bottom of the bottom of the rabbit hole these drooling children look off into when hypnotized by that flashy mess of wonderland splashed upon the void of black felt. This was germination. This was art.

This was the final festival of the summer for the subculture based around taking psychedelics as far as possible, and after a solid 3 months of such festivals all over Europe, the group flooding into our camp were those who had gone so deep into the rabbit hole that they were morphing into Pharaohs & elf creatures & warped caricatures of themselves rooted in primal subconscious.

As in physically mutating in shape by the suggestive power of DMT, the drug your brain releases when you die, in a manner that the film *Altered States* suggests, even if not fully caveman.

All of these people have gone from raver kids to Gods of chemical DMT or the natural Chonga (chon-guh), which is the sort of thing pharaohs had around heir neck in vials. To communicate with the gods. To go somewhere else for 30 million years dafter hitting one hit of this mysterious thing (**something I refuse to do, by the way, because I want to leave that blast fro death. I don't want to one day get to the end of it, realize I'm on a drug, and be forever trapped in a bad trip that lasts for eternity because it's the last thought before my brain flickers out. I just want to go out thinking the space aliens I'm seeing are real. All of it, whatever it is, let it be unraveled then. Fuck looking the gift horse of the universe in the mouth. Its just rude*).

Thus, the carnival of savage pagan psychedelic excess began. I gave up on it all, and we did the dirty hippie dance. 3,000 max capacity and the

ultimate jaw-dropping underground lineup for 6 slamming days of full-on Forest-Darkpsy-Experimental-Goa.

Everyone mutated into an elf creature goblin fairy human with medieval *Jetsons/Tron* apparel get-ups. The stage was a mighty beating heart, an electronic octagon of interlocking blocks. Projected onto it was constant movement in surrealist whirl. It was the beating heart of UNICRON – this was our boss, and if there was an issue, someone had to take it up with him.

No one would fuck with us here – not with a Cybertron decimating demigod at our behest. This was not a rave party – this was the palm of Chernabog, and we were the devils dancing in his grip.

The lineup was insane – Kindzadza, Malice In Wonderland, Module Virus, Fidel, Grouch, Nomad 25, Isochronic, Nargun, Disintegrated Circuits, Ellis Thomas, Arjuna, Asimilon, Ataro, Chris Rich, Loose Connection, Paralocks, Dataura, Dirty Saffi, EVP, Hypogeo, Holon, Dust, Flipknot, Modern Errors, Iketa, Eurithmy, Angular Momentum, Parasense, Quanta, R2, Whiptongue, Zoolog, Harmonic Rebel, Ianuaria, Kabayun, In Lak Ech, Sprocket, Soutwild, Xpiral, Wolfeye & WagaWaga...

After 6 days it was every man for himself. Thousands had run out of food and money, and the rain had poured so hard most the cars were stuck in the downhill parking lot turned mud canyon.

The port-a-potty toilets were overflowing, and someone had been tripping so hard they actually shit on one's ceiling. It looked like the aftermath of a war – bodies were strewn about everywhere zonked out and laying in the mud. Those on foot were altered forever & 3rd eyes' burned like hot coals.

As bulldozers clanked through the mud like tanks dropping hay over mudslide, I tried desperately to find my way out. I had to return to KRK island – I wanted to swim with the dolphins.

Within an hour I caught a lucky ride exactly there! With an American guy & 2 Austrian girls, we made KRK by nightfall – spending 2 days

recuperating at a hotel room! The American guy had grown deadly sick – whatever bacteria that had been dragged through disastrously dirty hippie freak-outs over these past few months had solidified in one nasty flu.

I feared we all would get it, and had to make my way to Greece before it was too late. Unless... It was West Nile & Mosquitoes ambushing the massive party... No point in panic. After all, you'd have to be bit by a mosquito with West Nile, and it hits very quickly, within 24 hours.

I ended up getting dropped back in Rijeka, having never made Pula. At this point, the clock was ticking down. Would I attempt Greece again? Would I follow the Modem Festival hordes to an even deeper rabbit hole in Ancona, Italy? Could I really handle another 6 days of trance music at Black Sun Fest? Or was the east route of Hungary/România my hearts desire?

It was the last week of August, and it would soon be growing cold in the Carpathians. Greece would remain warm enough until early October at least, but it would consume all my money.

And it was in a civil war of sorts, not only with the politicians but also the fascist Golden Dawn staging black-shirt rallies and black bloc Anarchists waging ongoing street battles with them. It had reached a violent tipping point, and Molotov cocktails were being thrown.

Since Greece had bet the house on a “permanent tourism” economy – a main cause of their irreparable ruin – the airlines are lifeblood. They are desperate and won't back down from their scalpers' pan-monopoly.

A round trip flight almost anywhere in Europe is €400, if you're lucky & buy in advance. Most the time, it's €1000 or more – depends where you are. But you can still find that magic €200 one way ticket to Athens on a Tuesday in Copenhagen or Frankfurt Am Main, because those are major financial business centers.

All international trains to Greece had been suspended years ago. No Eurolines bus exists because Western Europe is their racket. You can get as far as Budapest, but only a few times a week. The closer you get to a country in person, the more you get the cheap buses in person. Online jacks up \$\$.

Thus, the way into Greece is busing it from Budapest on South, country by country. You either have to go through Albania, Bulgaria, or Macedonia. Albania is a black hole, filled with gangsters & farmers, and you need to pay a visa fee to get in, like a cover charge. The cops also stop you and demand money like Mexico or Ukraine. Bulgaria is run by ex-Soviet mobsters and people get their kidneys stolen at petrol station rest rooms.

Or you have Macedonia, which is very Serbian-like but is also home to Shutka, the “Capitol of The Gypsies,” which is an area outside Skopje. I wanted to spend the night in Shutka before heading to Thessaloniki.

The people of Greece had figured out how to exploit carpooling(.com) – there were endless posts of underground cabs flooding the board (*we call them “gypsy cabs” in Americanese*). They seemed to use it more than even the Germans with mitfahrlegelhet(.com).

But that was a hassle, and probably €100 if I rode them all down. The only way to bypass the transportation trap in Greece was a one-way Easyjet flight from Milan to either Crete or Athens – €80. Easyjet was like the Greyhound of air carriers. But like Whizzair, or Ryanair, they would charge extra for bags & dump you off at weird, random airports, far from a big city.

Crete I lusted for – it was an explorers paradise that never rained, and you could sleep outside anywhere. It was *Clash of the Titans* incarnate, and one easily could hitch out the airport parking lot. I'd also found a €30 ferry to Athens online. After a week in dirt cheap Athens, I could explore Greece on €200 worth of transportation if the hitching scene was dead as they say.

Worst case? Buses – and those I profoundly prefer. Once you arrived in Greece, there was no cheap one-way flight out, by order of the Tourism

Rape Dept. I'd go to Skopje afterwards, unless some miracle took me to Sofia, Bulgaria. Greece could be mine, oh yes, it could... *but what of the mosquito?*

I took a cheap bus to Trieste (Italy) & hung tight for a night. The bus to România was €120, and left once every 3 days. Best I had was a €40 night train to Milan just to gain access to their dirt cheap airport. There was an EasyJet flight straight to Crete Island for €80...

I had to think it over. A night in seaside Italy couldn't hurt. I wandered down the waterfront, past large boats roped into docks. Glistening & bright, this was a post card photo defined. Italians were scattered about in teal & turquoise colors with white pants, eating ice cream.

I dipped my feet in the water, and began to notice the slight burning in my throat. That odd, unmistakable feel of the full body flu creeping up. I was going to get sick. Between the American guy sleeping 14 hours a day from sweat-hysterical illness on KRK island, and the lingering threat of West Nile, I feared this might be a wallop.

I walked past the town square into a corridor filled with shops. Not a word of English, and I was feeling alien. Not because lack of communication, but because the horde of deranged acid freaks behind me had vanished. Days ago, I was the multi-talented handyman of an otherworldly civilization. Now I just felt dirty & confused. There was no magical aura pulling me into Italy.

Crazy British guy with circular John Lennon shades spots me out the crowd, winking a nutty eye. He's on me quick, this benevolent hustler – a street crazy of the UK breed, which is its own stripe. Cocktail Charlie, with his rocker ponytail and denim coat.

One of these wine-drunk Ferris Bueller magic men that roll out their knowledge of the territory and keep you a little company while they keep knocking 'em back on your dime. I know his breed. He knows I know his

breed. There's no pretense. He knows I'm gonna get him drunk anyway, because street urchin is as street urchin does.

Charlie & I go off on a bar hopping cruise rambling conspiracies. As the night grows, so does the fever and it's weirdly dizzying effect – it's fluctuating beneath me, like seasick rumbling.

Charlie had been on the streets in Trieste for 10 years, just avoiding Britain. Tells me he locked him up in a psyche ward because he cried in public at his son's own funeral. He says the English are so dead they really arrest you for showing unscripted emotion.

Said he had all sorts of State Intelligence secrets, like all street crazies do. And being a street crazy myself, I like to sincerely ponder any nutty shit that these weird people tell me. Charlie says that Obama is an MI-6 Manchurian Candidate. He says all you have to do is look into the guys college records, something about his professor & stint in England.

I'd like to think Obama is just an alien shapeshifter, and they just zapped the real Obama with a ray gun, right after he was sworn into office. Like when he walked out of public view into the White House, the aliens just pounced on him, froze him in carbonite or something.

At least it would have the guys' career make sense. At least there would be a blatant source to the vileness which has somehow come from this fallen idol of HOPE and CHANGE. It's hard to make Nixon look good, but once you scrape off Barack's smiling corporate motivational speaker veneer, he is one of the most hated men in my country. But at least I can say that he doesn't make George W. Bush look good. No – that is impossible.

Anyway, Charlie and I go out on the town, meet a cigar chomping Sicilian bar owner, then get trailed by a gypsy midget in a brown trench coat and a Moe Howard bowl cut. Just a few teeth, nasty gums – she looked like a Jawa. She was definitely a midget though. Many Roma – their parents hack

off their legs beneath the knee, so they can get more money hustling the street, make them look young forever. It's a freakish world ever-beneath.

Charlie and I stayed near the seaside, in a small public park by a liquor stand. Charlie knew the lady and we got some freebies. We laid out to sleep and I went under fast.

I awoke to blue sea, blue skies, perfect temp. Charlie soon began cursing, because the gypsy had stolen his prized oval sunglasses. *“Damn it, damn it! I can't wear n'e'thing more then 10 grams on me nose! They were special, they were! N'e'thing else just hurts – I'd me nose broken 15 times!”*

Then I noticed it – the big red mosquito bite on my forearm – right where a junkie would plunge a needle. I remembered Trieste had 30 confirmed cases of West Nile. Whatever the sickness I felt yesterday, it was begin to rise like a time-controlled vice.

Within a few hours, I could be spiked by this click-down iron maiden. I broke off with Charlie after morning coffee & had two options – A) chance the flu & camp at the Black Sun Psytrance Fest for 5 days (*the promoters email-confirmed I could volunteer*) or...

B) Fly to Greece & make my way through brutal desert terrain in a post-apocalyptic economy in a cold civil war stalemate or...

C) Go to Slovenia & chill in Ljubljana, lay low, get healthy, and go for Hungary & România. Kill off the worst summer heat in the notoriously cold Carpathian mountains – then if money & time permit head to Greece...

Slovenia it was. Within the first 15 minutes on the bus, I'd developed the shakes. I was ice cold, sweating heavy. We made Ljubljana and I head to the Durum Doner stand – too sick to eat more then 3 bites even though starving. I found a pharmacy, but they did not sell aspirin in mini packs. You have to buy a 20 pack, and it's \$25 USD.

I made it to the park, and I collapsed. I went under for 3 hours. By the time Ivan from the grind/death band Dickless Tracy found me, I was in ragged shape. He let me crash, and I slept a full 12 hours.

My shirt was soaked with sweat when I awoke. I masked the flu as Ivan led me around like a tourist guide before throwing me on the national radio for an interview on Radio Free Slovenia.

That night we attended a gig near the mountains, and next day I was alone on a Saturday, dropped off at Metelkova – an ex-Yugoslav army barracks turned squat art colony. It was a dead scene; a holiday and everyone was out of town. The connected hostel was a quiet scene, but pricey.

I went outside to nap in the sun, but I awoke with fever blazing. I'd only bought one hostel spot so far, a month ago in Rotterdam when it was 100 degree humidity soup. It was a room packed with sweaty, naked Germans. Here, it was literally a former prison cell with bars still intact.

I was not in the mood for this novelty when in came my roommate – a Jewish guy from Israel fiercely advocating a Western led attack on Syria while around the globe an international coordinated march against any USA involvement was taking place. We were not getting along.

The 2nd day, I wanted out, but I had the most pounding, viscous headache I'd ever experienced. I drifted off sluggishly seeking nourishment & found reasonably priced Chinese grub. On the lawn, I pecked away at what I could. My head was pounding like a billion war drums. If this wasn't West Nile, I would be impressed.

I imagined some bereft virus drag itself through all the Psytrance fests of the summer – a cellular amalgam organically created by one million LSD addicts surrendering themselves to months of the most savage drug frenzy I'd ever laid my eyes upon. Carpenter's *The Thing* was eating me from inside.

I reluctantly dished out another €20 and made my brittle-boned way to the top floor with 9 beds. I opened the door and felt out of place among the

teenagers & college students, and they looked unnerved by the bearded, dark man hacking, coughing and shambling his way to the bed.

13 hours later. The glass roof panes were coated in thin layers of water as a heavy storm rained down. The sickness had broke away enough to hitch out, but the cold outside yet remained. It would be an extremely unpleasant hitch & rolling the dice on my health.

I had the address of a squat in Maribor, an hour away, but no direct contact. What I really wanted was to make it to Budapest in one shot. It was 4 hours away, but uncharted territory to me...

The storm broke. As I was leaving to stock up on supplies, I ran into a Belgian survivor of Modem Fest in Croatia. He'd been riding a motorcycle this whole time, and came to Metelkova because someone else from a Psytrance fest recommended it.

I finally had someone to talk to. This can make all the difference if one feels it's right to move onward while traveling. Within a few hours a French kid wandered into Metelkova – he too had survived Modem Festival, and had spent the entire summer consumed by the fest circuit. We were all still recuperating, just floating out there.

The French kid had been in România earlier this summer – the first person I could ever find that properly explored it! He'd spent 11 days in Cluj Napoca – “*it was soooo amazing*,” he said. He spent another 2 weeks just floating it, shocked by it's inexpensive quality. Brasov, Bran, Sibiu, Bucharest – he was thrilled to describe these uncharted delights.

Well then – I would head to România. But it had now grown too dark to hitch, and if I stayed any longer I'd never leave. I walked a few km and camped near the hitch spot, in an overgrown field & draped in a tarp.

It was frigid at 5am, and due to the elevation of Ljubljana we were coated in a thick gray fog which made everything extremely wet, almost as if the vapor from a squeezed dish sponge.

It took 4 hours to hitch out; the man who finally stopped his car for me was a music professor at Maribor College. Took me to the hitch spot leading to Murska Sabota, near the train where to Budapest it was €120.

I went back to the hitch spot & a preppy guy pulled over in his nice, shiny car. Showed me the spot I really wanted to go on his smart-phone. As he left, another guy down the street was flashing an M. Sabota cardboard sign as well – a French kid, a backpacker as lost as me, trying to get to Hungary.

We spent 2 hours on foot to make the hitch spot which was a really shit location with nowhere good to legally stop. He took off to try a bus, and I stayed nearby... Another night in Slovenia – 6 days now!

Remember – why did you travel in the first place? Well, to hitchhike & sleep outside in a tent like a homeless free person. Well, isn't that what I'm doing now? In the Land of Laibach, under a red majestic sky & stars so bright they compare to Texas, cause I'm halfway elevated to Swiss Alps? I got a jug of water & a bag of pretzels – I am totally in Heaven.

There was no denying the skies that night were the most dynamic reflection of light I'd seen; the clouds were Asgardian above the mountain range. I walked a quarter mile from the highway, popped my tent in a field of construction equipment, and the sweat came on again...

Early morning I caught a ride with a huge LAIBACH fan & was soon dropped at a fuel station with dozens of semi trucks parked in long rows. This is what I'd been scraping by to reach – the launch pad for endless cars

The heat slowly came to a boil, and a honk caught my attention. A tiny car was about to jump on the freeway, and the driver was waving me. Behind him a semi-truck was impatient, looking like it wanted to crush him.

I hopped in, and we were again swooshing by scenery. The man spoke zero English. 25 minutes east, he dropped me at the spot the French kid and I were trying to reach yesterday – a tiny on ramp to the freeway between 2 tiny Slovenian towns with a gas station.

I was all but 15 minutes from the Hungarian border – and as per usual, this is where everything went wrong. The super-flu crept up in the devastating sun. I waved a cardboard sign 3 hours dripping sweat. I was offering money for the ride, but not a soul would stop. The next town south was Murska Sobota, and I felt that a cheap train or bus had to be possible. I was too close to believe otherwise.

I lifted my thumb and a Slovenian man picked me up. Again, zero English. He took me halfway to M. Sobota and parked at his home, pointing in the direction of the road I needed to walk.

I began my difficult, sickly walk. Nothing but farmland and cornfields, decorated by religious displays with burning candles and images of the Virgin Mary.

The first English speaking person told me it was 15 km to town centre, and then next bus didn't come for 3 hours. I kept walking, hoping for a ride. With every step it grew more painful, and the hollow eyes of scarecrows seemed to mock me. I knew I had gotten in way over my head; I was hallucinating & felt trapped.

7 days now, this quagmire in Slovenia. Stuck in the middle of nowhere, and for friends nothing but crows circling me like a piece of meat soon to drop dead for rabid flesh pecking.

A lucky ride took me back to the same gas station, but after another 3 hours of attempt, a bicycle cop rode up & demanded my ID – a Slovenian Andy of Mayberry. A moderate hard-ass, he took down all my passport information. Told me I couldn't stand there anymore, that there was a hotel

nearby & semi-threateningly that I should pay €50 euro, and in the morning there was a bus to M. Sobota, then from there a €30 train to Budapest.

If I were to take his advice, Slovenia would nearly have cleared me out of travel funds. I was pushing \$600 for a month & a half, if I was to return to the USA with anything at all. I already knew I'd be on the street again when I returned, but without a dime to my name, the prospect was grim.

I walked to the nearest town for food & water, again chased by that bicycle cop. There was no field or area I could pop a tent. Like Holland, every meter of Slovenia was zoned & populated. It wasn't in the culture to have a strange man camping outdoors. They had solved homelessness, and a backpacking/hitchhiking American was an anomaly.

I took care of the basics, then went back to the hitch spot. I again was stopped by another cop, this time in a squad car. He took my info, then radio dispatched his people. They let me proceed.

By the time I reached the spot, the sun was setting. No one would give me a ride,. People looked scared or distrusting of me. 3 more cop cars passed giving me grim faces. I was being harassed for my willful tourism.

The sun set; I found a football field for a high school, and surrounding it was a canal like a moat. Something about the canal had caused thick moss to grow from its trenches, so that a normal grass field had become a swamp with moss 4 inches thick. It was like horrendous astro-turf that felt like a sponge of mold. I popped my tent on it, and it acted like a full body cushion.

The phone alarm rang at 5am, and I made the bus by the skin of my teeth. Again we drove through cornfields of sickened doom & their monstrous scarecrows toward Murska Sobota. Close to the bus was the train, and I had found that magic ride – €22 euro for a return ticket, and 6 hours. I could return if need be, but wanted Slovenia solidly in the past.

So it was after another long 6 hours that I finally was able to ride that fateful choo-choo. 2 hours in, the sickness returned and I was out cold in a sleeper car, shivering under my coat in the summer sun.

When we arrived at the old communist railway station of Budapest, I was starving. Unlike any other city I'd been to, there were no bank machines. Everything was closed. I had to walk an hour just to find money, and by the time I ate a stale sandwich from a mini-shop I was desperate for sleep.

I wandered into the *“too dark Roma park”* & found a darkened area with a large bush that I was able to sleep beneath. It was another drunken urine forest, and broken slabs of concrete and smashed pottery were poking me in the back. I was so tired the concrete slab was a wonderful pillow, and I went deep under cloaked in my tarp like the camouflaged tamale.

I awoke freezing cold at 5am, and went right off into the city centre. Historic capitols, thousands of tourists, sunny bright. Everything was remarkably cheap. Budapest looked like Athens in many respects.

It was a tourist haven, and I felt out of place. I was dirty, ragged, at the end of my rope. I decided upon a cheap hostel room to sweat off the last of the probably West Nile super-flu. I fell asleep by 8pm, and slept 12 hours.

I was free; I had survived. Best way to celebrate? Nazi torture basement... Not that I in any way thought fascism was cool, but because the energy of the place might enliven me. There were things to fight against in this world, and I needed a jump start.

I needed the energy of a thousands lost souls reaching out for a chance at the life and freedom I currently possessed, and I thought it would be the ultimate booster to recognize my powers. Instead, I left haunted. I needed out, immediately...

Nepliget is the cheap bus station on the Budapest outskirts that does not exist on tourist maps. No one will tell you it exists at the railway stations, because they are trying to milk every fool.

And what a weird setup it is – the “modern” train station is a strange wedge in a calm part of town, and the tracks dump you off at something resembling an open-air airport terminal linked to a subterranean mall that feels equally Greek as it does Serbian, like an uneven mudslide of architecture.

The train station to the East was built severed from the Western European railway system. It was the Commie Superhighway, the back door straight to Moscow. The building is massive, almost like a Milan church with rusted tentacles of steel spiraling like corrosive roots.

Inside, it's like an American DMV – take a number & wait in painful plastic chairs, then walk up to the bulletproof windows & speak through an intercom with an old lady that mangles barely discernible, choppy English. It's a mad house.

But train prices are a fraction of what they are Pan-Europe. You can actually get a huge distance by train in any direction for dirt cheap. Still, I could do better.

I grilled an old man, and he pointed out Nepliget the bus station way off the margins of my tourist map. I walked 3 kilometers through increasingly destitute sections of the city.

It was looking like Detroit, down on Jefferson, with busted old communist warehouses and crumbling brick walls, Red apartment projects that looked like grid tombs. Public parks with trash on the lawn, abandoned clothing, rusting monkey-bars, pee forests & grizzled gypsies eyeballing me under the burning sun.

I was running out of food and water. I said to myself that if a bus were magically heading to Cluj Napoca in the next 15 minutes, and that if it was like €20, I would just hop right on. It seemed a fantasy, but it happened –

I was right on time, give or take 15 minutes. They rushed me up to the driver who was taking cash and I talked him down to €20!

And this was the last bus to the heart of Transylvania for a week, and they were only stopping in Cluj Napoca because of two other riders that had booked in advance for a special exception. Thus, I climbed aboard the rickety bus – just me, 60 Româniâns, 12 hours, and not a lick of English aboard.

It was about 3 hours into the trip when I began blubbering like an infant. People stared curiously at the odd American dripping tears silently, the total fool called out by absurdity.

Like a hardened crest shattering to tectonic plates, an ancient wall of confusion had been undone. In my long quest of journalist drifter existence, I'd reached the end of the road. This was the last chapter I would live out for my book series. What began in Detroit would end in Transylvania.

Here I was, an amorphous man that had figured out the secret key of escape. Someone who simply walked off one day. A guy that just uprooted from all he'd ever known and floated away like a ghost with a crazy mission.

And the phantasm realized all you needed to crack into any major city was a tape recorder and a little imagination, or just a Sharpie and piece of cardboard. The man that realized all past was negligible, and that any day of the present was utterly malleable, and no one would ever know who you were if you told them otherwise.

That you could get whatever you want if you just smile and tell them whatever they want to hear. I was a traveling journalist, simply because I declared it. I was on tour, just because I said so.

And city by city I thrust myself in as a stranger, and within a week my experiment birthed a new life that I could have stayed in if I'd wanted but chose over and over to simply walk away from.

From homeless man to well-connected organizer bopping across town within 1 week or less. A job, a place to stay, a possible romance & band. All

the sorrowful circumstances of my life in Detroit that drove me to desperate loneliness – once I left, over & over, I was given a happy ending I would've killed for if I were to imagine the years of frozen winter & depression that preceded it as if an eternally cursed man.

However, the more you do this, the more you deconstruct yourself. And once you've done it hundreds of times, the ones you used to hang around become alienated to you. You become separate, by law of evolution. It is negligible not to confront the inner pain one receives from being unable to love another person who would once have been an ultimate relationship. Now they are just fleeting sign posts in a travel blur. They are faces forever melting away & drifting out of frame.

I went from Detroit to San Diego to LA, Albuquerque, Denver, San Fran, Huntsville, New York, Portland, Seattle. So many humans entangled my whirlwind. For endless motion I was a fiend & it was never enough – the relentless tours I did began incorporating cities by the day until I had consumed most of America.

It went on through Raleigh, Clearwater, back into the Northwest, and then Finally to London, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Prague, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Milan, Venice, Ljubljana, Bologna, the whole of Belgium. But it still wasn't enough – Frankfurt Am Main, Athens, Rome, Barcelona, Lisbon, on & on & on & on...

România was the final destination; I pulled out my iPod & typed: *“In the name of punk rock, heavy metal, and the gonzo-Kerouac-Miller revolution – I have traveled alone to the heart of Transylvania to plant the trilateral flag of Occupied Cascadia, the East Side Crew, and The Cleveland Street Posse upon the very peak of the Carpathian mountains!!”*

***The border cue is what I expected from Russia – militant guards in uniform with with triangular servicemen hats. The sort of dudes in a bad

horror film that would inspect a cargo truck filled with experimental chemicals soon to undoubtedly spill & rise the dead from their graves.

We poured from the bus and began racing towards the toilet shack. The little old bathroom lady wanted money and would not take Hungarian. I sidestepped the mob and headed for the other group which were lined across a fence with their dicks in hand.

It was nasty – a mudslide piss waterfall that had certainly been there since the borders' creation. It was probably a small ditch 40 years ago and it had turned into a miniature cliff from the sheer weight of perpetual urine blasts. The muddy, pissy, shit caked mudslide cliff rolled out into a bioseptic ravine overgrown with funky reeds.

I caught some English behind me – a tall Brazilian kid and his Polish girlfriend were traveling the “*awkward countries*.” They were the reason we were stopping in Cluj Napoca. Like me, they'd only heard rumors of the place. We decided to team up once we got to City Centre...

Passports stamped, we cruised into mythical România. It was dark night, and the sparse fields beside the highway seemed infinite and vague. The pot holed street was lit only by bus headlights as we cruised past gas stations and motels, trucker stops with gaudy neon lights.

It was a scene out of southern Missouri in 1988. We passed churches, crucifixes – little white homes all cemented together in one story blocks with tight metal cages around their property.

We reached the outskirts of the Carpathian Mountains soon after, and began our upward ascent as if it were a roller coaster ride. It was like roaring through Eastern Oregon or Northern California, and I was geeked. We soon parked at a diner that was our last chance of a meal or bathroom for hours. Fancy, upscale – and they were selling all of their meals by the gram!

By 1am, we were let off the bus in Cluj. The mountain air was crisp, and everything had frosted. When I left Budapest it was 37 Celsius, and here

it was 6, at best. We were far from city centre and surrounded by gray projects and black mountains.

It was like Denver in February. All we had was a gas station beside an empty road large enough for a highway. The woman at the counter spoke no English. We also had to adapt to a new monetary system – the Romanian leu (*4 leu = €1*).

We proceeded onward, seeking a tent-friendly hidden area or a park to sleep in. The streets became more narrow, and the architecture more bizarre. It began to look like a vampire movie set, where all the buildings were a slop of Old World Hapsburg and Soviet design.

Steel shutters & twisted iron bars protected already cracked windows. Roofs looked like they were molding and collapsing inwards, paint just falling off in clumps to the ground. The iron bars of most windows resembled Bane's mask in *Dark Knight Rises*, this tarantula tomb of iron enclosure.

I felt like I had bit off way more than I could chew. I was in a weird, frozen world where I anxiously awaited the xenophobia of bankrupt locals, shadowy gypsies, and the packs of stray dogs living like coyotes in the streets. Had these two lovebirds not crossed my path, I'd really be gobbled up.

We emerged into the main square with an unexpected turn and proceeded towards well lit college buildings, a well-lit Gothic church with a sprawling cobblestone square, and a thriving strip of restaurants and bars. We grabbed a Romanian-styled gyro then found Hostel Transylvania which was €10 a night. But if we were to we'd be paying €10 only until noon, then we would have to repay for the next night.

When I told the Hostel keeper that I would just go sleep in the park and come back tomorrow, he thought I'd gone mad. He scribbled down directions on my tourist map anyway, and off I went at 3am to a tiny public triangle surrounded by black iron bars.

Wrapped myself up like a burrito in my tarp & I slept fantastically. 5:30am came much longer then it felt, and the air was brisk and unpolluted. I'd never felt such a stringent chill. It brought an arctic focus, like the initial sip of a coffee cup filled with lightning. I wanted to set an easel on a mountain top & paint.

I made my way to a bar that looked like a haphazard jazz club in a subterranean cave. In România bars serve booze 24-7 & this was a town that liked to drink, and all the TV's played 80s hard rock videos. After Dire Straits, a Hare Krishna chant with an animated rainbow landscape went on for a half hour of “*Har-reeeeeeeee-Har-reeeee-krish-naaaaaaaaaaah.*”

I spoke to a Romanian semi-truck driver that had spent years in America hauling cargo. He shook his head at America. Like everyone from Transylvania, he thought the streets were paved with gold. Now he just works there for 6 months at a time, then retreats back home where its sane.

We kept getting interrupted by a hammered Tunisian guy. He was obnoxious and sexually propositioning women bar-wide, almost getting into fights with their Romanian guy friends who had too much dignity then to pound on this skinny drunk guy.

He kept coming up to me, “*I'm from Tunisia, I don't care, fuck these bitches. I have a wife back home, she is beautiful. But I no care – when I go out, I fuck bitches, all these bitches, I fuck them. Hey hey, buddy – come on, come on.*” Tries to drag me off to his Ukrainian coke dealer and then gets offended I don't want to snort any blow. It was getting weird for a second, almost like I'd be coaxed into a fist fight – or be stuck with this guy for hours.

I snuck out the back door and started towards the hostel. I began hearing thick chanting, and I immediately assumed it was a loudspeaker recording. Once I got a solid view, hundreds of older men with fedoras, old ladies with rag bonnets and traditional skirts were chanting outside the medieval church. Like monks, they were united in one deep moan.

Back at the Hostel, I sign in. *“Ah yes, the writer – The American. Someone will be here to pick you up at 2pm for the protest – they will take you to someone quite knowledgeable whom you can interview. We also have a staff member with a metal band, and he knows of your project and wants to meet for an interview if up for it.”*

I was shocked to find them managing me, but I was thrilled & grateful at the same time. I'd made some quick remarks to the night staff about my project, and word traveled fast. I was a broke ass vagrant, but at last I felt like a superstar!

Then the word *“protest”* dawned on me. The city would soon be thrown into an uproar – a national Occupy-style revolt was underway with a vast coalition of marches and pledged civil disobedience.

A Canadian company was trying to come in and dump cyanide over the top of multiple mountains to make gigantic open pits so they could strip mine all the gold and minerals. The cyanide would just be going directly into the water supply; it was an lunatic plan enacted by purchased politicians.

I took a nap and went to the main square. The activity was beginning to swell. Crowds of impassioned people were gathering, and soon it was as if the entire University was there.

This was a massive showing – the spirit I remembered so grandly during the peak of Occupy. We could not speak the same language, but we all understood the hand signals. We all had a grasp of the organization issues with the nod of a head.

As I sat on the park bench looking at the gathering throng, from the sky buzzed down a police drone. It looked like the Empire's spy droid from the Planet Hoth. It just hovered there watching me, videotaping me, taking pictures. What a head-trip! The Orwellian future buzzing about like a multi-eyed insect on the backdrop of Old World cathedrals and Hapsburg buildings!

As the speakers worked the crowd into a frenzy, the two travelers from last night caught up with me. We began a long walk seeking traditional food, getting ourselves lost in intricately painted Gothic churches. There were more worship spots than businesses, and the religious were out in droves.

Soon we were met with a throng of angry protesters – everywhere, huge columns chanting & waving flags as the cops luckily marched alongside them. This was a peaceful march, and the people were winning. Later that night, the government called off the deal...

The next day, a smoky restaurant – this time with Andu Anches, the bassist and vocalist of Krepuskul. They are an experimental metal band weaving their sound from a host of different styles.

Any time Romanian metal gets brought up, I hear this name. What better a way to kick off the next portion of this mad telling? Andu strokes his goatee like a super-villain conjuring a maniacal plan, lights up a cigarette and then unfurls the legacy of Krepuskul...

“OK so we formed our band in 2005. Our first show was in January of 2007. we changed like 15 members in the first 2 years. We started playing live a lot we tried to maintain an average of 30-40 gigs a year. We released two albums one in 2007, then in 2010 we release the '*Game Over Album*' and to promote it we did a big tour. I think it is the biggest tour in România made by a Romanian band. It went for almost 30 concerts. We also started touring outside România seriously. Right now we came back from a tour in Russia, Belarus, and Moldavia also. Really nice places. We went on the bloodstock festival in UK last year. We opened for many big bands, international bands like Sepultura. Rotting Christ, Crematory, Pain. In 2011, 2012 we took every festival we could. Right now we are working on a third album we hope to release in 2014.”

“Your site had it listed as experimental...”

“It's more a death metal thrash with black influences with some metalcore, old-school hardcore and all this mixed with non metal like reggae, swing, funk, haha. That is our style. We didn't want to do it like that at the beginning but in the end we enjoyed it.”

“So touring Ukraine & Belarus, I hear its kind of a closed society.”

“Don't talk about politics and don't talk with the police, or something like that, from what we saw its a really nice country, really good looking, the people there are nice. We had only one night in Belarus, but from what we saw they are really great people.”

“Is it like Ukraine where cops stop you and want money?”

“In Ukraine it was like that in fact. We passed the border but only once they wanted money. We didn't want to pay and they kept us there the whole fucking day. We had a little not good thing in our papers & they made us turn back in the Ukraine which took us the whole day. Then at night it was a huge que at the border. We got to Russia 10am. We still got to the concert, but... we had 4 gigs in Russia.

“What was the Russia experience like?”

“Really nice. The border, the police – they were really professional. We didn't have to wait more then a half hour. And the concert, the crowd is really great. Everywhere the crowd was really cool, in Moldova, Ukraine they like to move a lot, they like to mosh pit allot. You don't see it everyday in western Europe. The people are a bit more static. But if you go to this part – Slovakian, Hungary, going east – the crowd is more crazy & responsive.”

“Tell me about the Romanian metal scene...”

“Well its kind of growing up – more and more foreign bands are coming now. This has its advantages and disadvantages. We get to see many bands, but the crowd becomes divided. Some go this, to that, so on. The scene is growing. We played in Brasov – its quite a big city. But it was really cool. It was the fact for 3 or 4 years they didn't have places to play, now they are

having one or two pubs which do metal concerts. We played there one and it was amazing,. In Sibiu we played 5 or 6 times, felt good every time. In Sinai I don't think they have real metal scene. Its kind of small town and more of a town for people that want to go in the mountain. Another city we like is Petrosani. I think we had more then 150 concerts in România. We played pretty much everywhere we could.”

“You have a nightmare tour story for me?”

“We were touring in Bulgaria. And we were playing the seaside and the day we were coming back directly home and in the middle of nowhere our tour bus stopped. The engine stopped and didn't want to go anymore. We found ourselves with no water no food no cigarettes no nothing. It was also on a Sunday. It was also really cold and heavy raining and saw a sign that the next village was 5 kilometers. So we walked over a giant hill that was 5 km long trying to find an open shop but there was nobody it was all deserted. In the end we finally managed for food and water. But then a platform came and we got our bus on and this is how we got back into our country – on a tow truck. We crossed the border like this, even though it was totally illegal. We took the train back from Bucharest to Cluj but on the way the train engine broke too. So we got stuck another 6 hours. It was a mess. But now as we look at it it seems like a funny experience but then it was pretty hardcore.”

“About the church...”

“Unfortunately the church here is interfering with the politics, the community businesses in places they shouldn't be. Also I think they are just getting money from the people and instead of doing – building shelters for the poor, helping the communities, they just build huge churches and this is pretty much everything. For now, they are kind of a big pain in the ass...”

“We are roughly the same age. I'm curious what it was like living through the fall of communism and what that was like.”

“Well we kind of got rid of the communist regime in December 1989. but the people who were leading the country in that era kind of stayed after. I think it happen3ed everywhere in all the ex c9ommhyunist countries so this transition was very hard for the first 10 years. As an economy – the life changed but it changed a bit slow. After 2000 things managed to be a little bit more light, but we still have mass corruption. We still have people who first think about the money then the population. Since we entered the European union things got a bit better because we had some anti corruption laws imposed by the EU. Also I think the generations are changing so more young people are getting into politics and high positions. I hope that in 5 or 10 years things will be totally different, its ind of a hard transition. The communists were here for 60 years. So you cannot repair the damages in 20 years,. Usually it takes longer then it took to fuck it up. We still have to change the old generations way of thinking, but I think we are going in the right direction,. I hope. You know, in ro0mania, metal started in the 90s. Before that there were only 3 or 4 heavy thrash bands, because in the communist days in order to be a band or musician you had to do a test at the ministry of culture so they only let play those that were convenient to them.”

“Was joining the EU a public vote?”

“I think everyone wanted to join the EU. We were supposed to from 1996, but it took us almost 10 years. Also because the corruption the fucked up politics, they just postponed. They didn't want us since the beginning,. It was kind of understandable. They are still holding us away from the Schengen open border area.”

“You got a ghost story for me?”

“Its no ghost, but it happened to me. I was going with a friend to a city and in 45 kilometers we changed a tire 4 times. The thing was it was the same tire, the same wheel, every time. But the same wheel, same fucking wheel – it happened only after we passed a church or a cross. It was also

rented. So we said that car was really satanic & didn't want us to pass churches. It was also on a winter night, -20, and we both got so sick we stayed in bed the entire week after. We did like 100km in 8 or 9 hours. We kept calling friends saying will you please bring us a tire, we need to get to Cluj. It was a kind of a crazy story.”

A few hours later, and I'm finishing up a cafe table interview with Divided By Perception, one of the better metalcore/deathcore acts in town. We cover all the familiar basics and they reassure me and all who will listen of the same basic challenges all of us face as musicians.

Wherever you go it seems, the clique is in the place. Wherever you go, shady promoters want pay to play gigs. With the lack of activism and punk rock styled occupations, you are left with no house venues, no proper squats, and random bars more often playing 80s covers and traditional music.

Metalcore is still the rumbling of the day for the younger pack about România. Apart from Diamonds Are Forever, Divided By Perception are easily one of the most noteworthy exports of the genre from Transylvania.

But more than anything, they want to know whats on the outside. They want to know about America, about touring in the EU. Tommi, the lead vocalist, explains how difficult it is to tour abroad because just like the Serbians, all Româniens need to get a tourist visa just to enter the EU – despite being an EU country. The European Union treats all of România like a dog on a leash.

I wave goodbye to the young metalheads & make my way towards old-school pasture. I am to meet with the guitarist from Decease – a death/thrash styled band – at the subterranean jazz club.

But first, I need to have a long discussion with “Alex,” one of the protesters I met yesterday who was totally fluent. The guy had a good vibe to

him, and he seemed the right candidate to put into the words the emotive uproar which I remotely witnessed last night...

“What is your PhD about?”

“Oh my god don't ask, its something very fucked up in the brain – yeah its philosophy so some thing about paradox and hiding your thinking, some crappy thing...”

“You want a tailor made cigarette?”

“No, I like to be the tailor [starts rolling his own cig]... and they're fucking expensive. If I smoked real cigarettes I couldn't afford smoking.”

“Have you lived in Cluj your whole life?”

“No, no. just 8 years, since coming to the university. I came from a small town in the south of Moldavia, the Românian Moldavia, not the republic of Moldavia.”

“People told me basically there were no squats in România...”

“Nope. We've been wanting to do one here for 6 months, but it is very hard to find a state owned building – that's worth taking. Haha. Because 80% of the town centre is owned by the church and not the state, and that is a big problem. Because if you take it from the church no one is going to be sympathetic to you reclaiming the space. If it could be the state, OK, its the state, its for everybody, nobody is using it for social usage. So the church – the state has very few buildings worth going in. and that sucks. Also there is a good community here but I don't know if its enough to squat a place and keep it. You could squat it but after one week, two weeks, the police will kick you out.; unless you have a big mobilization of people. I don't really see that happening right now, but its changing gradually. I see a lot of people...”

“Why two months ago? “

“The law was the moment, the law for Roşia Montană. I didn't really expect nothing like this”.

“So a Canadian company wants to come in, dump cyanide over one of the Carpathian mountains to melt it down so they can plunder the gold and minerals, and then all this goes in the water supply, and...”

“Four mountains – four mountain tops. Its a junior corporation they had no projects until now. And they are trying to create the biggest open pit, open mine in Europe. It would be the biggest. Near Mannheim is the biggest pit in Europe, and its horrible. And the mine projected for Roșia Montană would be 200 hectares more. It would be a 180 meters down with a huge lake of cyanide. They are trying to tell us “no, it wont go into the ground, we're going to put some something on it and it will stay there for only hundreds of years. What they are doing in Canada though, in neutralizing the affects of cyanide, because there was mining like this – is to freeze the ground, they are actually making huge holes in the ground and freezing the lower strata to neutralize the cyanide and arsenic. Canada is spending 1.5 billion a year fixing this shit. And our profit would be 5 billion. So in 5 years all profit would be gone.”

“It doesn't make any sense”

“Yeah it makes no sense”

“Is it a paid off parliament trying to push it through?”

“The parliament, they have no balls to do it from the government, so they said '*let the people vote on it*' – the people being those in parliament, the representatives. I don't know if you saw this but today parliament made declarations that they are going to vote in the parliament to ban it. Yeah, because they are afraid. Which is good. And the company, they are going to try and sue the Romanian government for banning them. Which I don't give a shit. Good, sue the motherfuckers. They signed it, so they should pay.”

“And they've been trying to do this shit for awhile now?”

“15 years. And we've managed to stop them for 15 years.”

“Is Monsanto banned here?”

“No, fuck no. we had two ministers of agriculture were employees of Monsanto and they were pushing for GMO's. Now, the quantity of GMO fields here is diminished. But The government gave us one of the most retarded laws in the history of law making – to allow GMO crops in protected natural sites. No, fuck no – That's why they are called protected!”

“Could you tell me more about the political landscape here?”

“Well România is obviously a post socialist country, hahaha... zero when it comes to civil activism or any kind of activism up until now. Now we have to go after banning cyanide, because they have another project near Deva. But civil activism – what communism did was destroy the social texture of people so that there was no solidarity, no nothing. We had in the 90s the hugest occupy-like movement. Tens of thousands of people occupied the university and the square in Bucharest. And they were beaten horribly by the miners. So after that a lot of people emigrated, the progressive people because they couldn't really live here. And we had like jack shit, so this is starting to change for 2 years now, more being aware of the problems.”

“What I was basically explained that the overthrows of Ceausescu was a coup by his own people to save their neck, and they killed him fast as possible so he couldn't talk.

“Yeah, it was a coup.”

“And it took about 10 years to weed those people out.”

“No – they're still in power now. That's why people say that were still living in com,communism, but that's such a big piece of shit. We didn't have communism when it was communism. How can you call this wild capitalism that we have no com,communism? The next day after the revolution – ‘ah, flea market. This is what we always wanted.’ so yeah, they are still in [power. That's why its very hard to structure an anti-capitalist discourse in România because they think what does that mean? Communism, like we had? No thank you. and its really hard to say no, that wasn't communism, one, and second,

no, not that – dictatorship, what the fuck? In 89 there was this slogan in university square better off dead than a communist, better something than an activist. So an activist meant something really bad. In the 90s if you were an activist you were a communist. But now this has changed. It means something good, you are doing something, you are involved. But it took like 20 something years. And gradually people are starting to wake up to this. There are a lot of youngsters coming along who have almost nothing – they fail their exam to get into university. Like 50% fail rate. So these people have shit jobs, they will continue to have shit jobs anyway but without the degree they will have even shittier jobs,. And they have nothing to look forward to. We want to privatize health, we privatized the railroad cargo system, electric, oil, everything. So we have nothing basic ally.”

“Is health care the only thing left that the state provides?”

“Yeah, and education.”

“Is the health care shitty?”

“Oh yeah it's shit-shit. Its horrible.”

“Is it worse then the USA?”

“...I don't know.”

“Hahahaha”

“It's debatable.”

“If an ambulance picks you up and takes you to the hospital, how much does he charge you? In the US they make you pay \$900-\$1500 dollars.”

“Nothing. But in the new system, it will only be free to stabilize you, and then after the money starts rolling... In activism, things start moving in Cluj in 2012.”

“What sparked it?”

“Privatization of health. And those in power were very very smart. While over Europe you have movements that build up very gradually, now

they are 1000, tomorrow 5000, 5 weeks a million. But in Bucharest, by day 3, violence broke out. The people that started the violence, nobody knew them. They had hoodies on, they were infiltrators and afterwards people saw them going to police and shaking their hands and leaving. So it was a big plan on the part of the police to discredit the protesters. To say '*look here's these football hooligans that come to the streets to smash everything.*' Which wasn't true, but, I get, you know, people were genuinely angry. And I have no problem with being genuinely angry. I mean fuck banks. In România they wanted to put a bill out to like when you identify an abusive clause in a contract and you take it to court and win, the law should change for all clauses. It should be annulled for every contract. Well the banks opposed it, saying this would be a €600 million loss for the banks., so this is why they did not. So what they are saying is abuse is good, because otherwise the banks would lose money. What the fuck is this? Really. It's a fucking nightmare, you know, so this happened last year and people started meeting everywhere, organizing, going all over the country. It's a big part of that mobilization that is now making this happen here."

"Do people talk about the Bilderbergers here?"

"Yeah but they talk about it in a very conspirative, the masons, the Jews, the various anti-Semitic..."

"So you can't pull apart this stigma that it's not a hoax and should be taken serious..."

"Yeah. I mean they are rich people, that's the problem. They have all the power and it doesn't matter what nationalist they are. They could be Romanians, that doesn't mean anything. They control 80% of the world. That's the real problem, not that their Jews or masons or whatever the fuck."

"Because the Freemasons these days are mainly a charity group. I mean, it was just a secret handshake you'd learn from a master stone architect in the old days..."

“Well that's changed over time...”

“Oh yeah, no doubt.”

“Yeah, like the union of the free Romanian little countries that went on to form the larger România after the first world war, during the Versailles Treaty. We got the union because all the heads of state were masons, as were the heads of state for all the civilized winner states. There are masons involved in politics yeah, but that's just some conspiracy piece of shit that takes attention from the real problems.”

“When I saw the Occupy wave happen, I saw Bucharest...”

“I went there. It was a total fiasco – it didn't even actually start I went there and the idea *'let's not put up tents because the police will destroy them, let's just sleep in the street.'* I slept there one night,. We sang some things, maybe 40 people. And only 15 remained the whole night. Some people went to a bar & returned later kind of drunk which wasn't very good. And then people walk by and think *'those are the occupiers? fuck no we don't want that.'* so I left the 2nd day. Actually, last night, 8 tents remained in Timisoara. They occupied Central Square & nobody is telling them anything...”

“Alex” bails to further the good work of civil disobedience, and in comes Radu Vulpe the guitarist/vocalist of Decease. Influenced by the late '80s/early '90s thrash scene, Decease combine a pummeling drum style with dynamic riffs, battering bass & grunt heavy, raspy scream.

In 2012 their debut “Exhort to Obliterate” was spawned, and by August of 2012 Decease put out their first official video. By December, Decease had signed a deal with Hatework Records//Asociatia Culturala Manifest. February 2013, their work was unleashed...

“Well, tell me your background in music...”

“Well I played live in bands since 2005, with NECROVILE. Pretty much brutal death metal with programmable drumming. Since then we are still

playing, we did 5 or 6 European tours. We did obscene extreme festival. Between this band, I've played 6 or 7 over the past years but not all metal. One was very pink Floyd, another was metalcore but in a time before it was fashionable now everybody plays metalcore, its the shit for Cluj.”

“I went to obscene extreme in 2011 and 2012...”

“I think since 2010 OE started getting more death metal then grindcore. I played there in 2009, back when everything was like dead infection or early Napalm Death. Now, I've read about Curby – he put out an edition in Asia and USA”

“Yeah, he did 4. I actually sent a guy to Mexico to cover that one. I heard Australian went OK, but Indonesia didn't have much turn out... did you go to Brutal Assault this year?”

“Yeah, for me it was the festival of my life. This year was brutal – everything, everything, it was the perfect combination of everything. Gotalax, Decrepit Birth, Dying Fetus – Anthrax & Entombed. It was perfect.”

“So you did a tour with NILE recently?”

“Yeah we just returned from a tour with /Nile,. It was a short tour for us, for Decease, 6 concerts. We had very bad luck and when we arrived to Vienna – the stage was 4 meters square. We had huge equipment. It wasn't even possible to put everyone there and play the show. We said let's put everyone on the stage, and then we play where they are standing,. Haha. I think its best. The pre-sale was only 90 people. It was pretty much impossible to do that show, but the rest of the tour was amazing. It was our first European tour. It was a big achievement to play with Nile. In Poland, the first two shows it was at the anniversary tour of Vader. They just gained 30 years of metal so they are on tour and now playing in the states. We also played with Hate. And to see Vader in their homeland – its definitely a different case. Int heir home town, their home country – its a totally different approach.”

“What is the general message of the band?”

“We usually talk about politics and war – everything that's anti right. Everything is denied since you are born, when you grow up, when you die, everything is being taken from you. First we started with religion. In România it's the dumbest thing. You are actually being obligated to be a Christian. It is the ideology of the communist period – old fashion. Whether orthodox or catholic.”

“Is this a particular religious spot then eastern Europe?”

“I can call this the epicenter of Christian fucks. I don't think the Baltics, the Hungarian, the Bulgarians are more Christian than us. Here everyone is Christian, everyone believes and is afraid of god. Except the hipsters. Here you have to be a metalhead or hipster or modern guy not to believe in this shit. So, rewinding... since the day you are born you are obligated to be Christian. Fuck this shit. You don't have a choice here. It's not like they pressure you after that. When you are 18 you do what you want like everywhere else. But when you're a kid with fucked up parents with fucked up minds, brainwashed minds, you are obligated to go to church. I think I was luckiest – my parents were divorced since I was 3 years old. The part from my father was more question, he is a pastor. He's a preacher, you know. Of the dark side of Christianity – like the worst kind.”

“You've toured a bit – what is a good nightmare tour story...”

“I had a really weird experience. After a festival, we were 70 or 80 kilometers from România. Me and my girlfriend, we got ditched by our friends and were left there alone. We said to ourselves let's go and hitchhike at 4 in the morning. We'd met some really crazy people on the road while we were hitchhiking. There were three guys, one was a bald guy that didn't speak English. He repeatedly said “*this is not a safe place to be – walk walk walk.*” he kept repeating “*walk walk walk, the police are coming, walk.*” The other guy was 12 year old kid – just standing there doing nothing at 3am. The third guy was an old guy – you know the Buddhists with the robes and those long

hats? It was an old guy on a bicycle with one of those hats, and he was riding his bicycle in a circle towards us and kept ringing his small bell. It was like the twilight zone, you know. So I said to myself fuck this. So my girlfriend and I went to a public place. Your in a foreign country and something like this happens to you and you are alone,. So we went to a park, sat on a bench. And until 6am we heard that annoying bicycle bell. The old guy was looking for us. Fucking creepy. No one believes me. The town was Kavarna Bulgaria, with the metal mayor, with the Ronnie James Dio statue...”

***Brisk was the air that next morning, rising from that notorious 04:00 Transylvanian chill to a steady 13 Celsius by 7am. It was a 15 minute walk from the touristy comfort zone of central Cluj to the Autogara (aka “*auto garage*” or “*bus depot*” in Americanese). I made it on foot, quickly realizing the major contrast between the cleanly facade of the University area and the real Transylvania before me.

I felt that I instantly traveled into some grainy 80's BBC documentary on the Iron Curtain. Big dark blocks of buildings, freaky churches, cobbled stone & brick streets, oblong building structures and steel shutters.

Like vampire mythology, it's as if they entomb themselves at 4am into these giant blocks. When you walk those empty streets at that moment, with the Bane mask windows and chipped paint dust in clumps like neglected basement cellar rooms, Transylvania feels the way your flesh zangs when you lay down on cold marble. The way the Earth just pulls you out of your body, when there is no cardboard or blanket between you and the ground.

As you walk, the Carpathians just pull it out of you. Not like a leech or a parasite, but in a mighty solidarity with the Earth. It invigorates and propels. Yet it is a lonesome pulse at once; it bears sadness and grief, but with a faint vagueness way.

Your body receives it like a hushed whisper you can't clarify, though you know whatever it speaks is a typhoon. It trembles your core, like Odin descending to the Earth and screaming at your sternum like an enraged gorilla ready for the battle of primate primacy.

But then, as always, no matter how freaked out or confused you are by it, you simply walk up to one of the people where this is all they have really known, and they are legitimately some of the nicest people on earth. Transylvania is filled with those that listen; they are a people who do not speak just to hear themselves think aloud...

The Autogara was a fraction of the price of Nepliget in Budapest. Since the trains were old & railways had to go around the mountains, the only way between cities were large mini vans, some with trailers hitched to their bumpers that were open air and covered by fastened tarps.

Packed like Haribo bears in a crinkly wrapper, we drove off towards the south. I selected GoaGil on my iPod and drifted back into the Memento Demento mindset. I was once again with my ghost army of maniac acid-freaks doing way too much goddamn DMT.

It rained in the early portion, giving the black outlines of the mountains a freaky character. The sky turned gray, and we began traveling through some of the larger outlying towns, until we started passing small villages connected to sprawling farmland and valleys. Everything was old world about these tiny ranch style homes, enclosed like sardines and oddly resembling minor Mexican towns.

As we went deeper into the mountainous region, the Carpathians were surprisingly spread out. When we did get close to more wooded areas, there were scores of gypsies selling potatoes by the side of the road. There were probably thousands of Roma encampments under the over of the trees.

They were everywhere, just fishing in the lakes. Tons of wild dogs, wandering in packs, looking depressed. They were not savage, but acting like

all of România was a domesticated pooches living room. It was as if they detected an invisible dome stretching along the country borders. They knew instinctively that they were home.

We arrived in Sibiu after a wave of trepidation. I felt extremely out of place, unsure where to go or what to do. I was to meet with a guy named Flaviu from a metal band called Heavy Duty, but he wouldn't be off work until 17:00. I had 6 hours to kill.

After the sub-Amarillo like emptiness I saw passing through most of these cities, I thought Sibiu might be akin to Belgrade – broke hustlers on money-loaded American like horse-flies on a mound of feces. After what looked like a field of broken oil wells, we approached the city.

On the horizon, it was much larger then I'd expected. After a quick turn it was an extreme mix of Old World and Iron Curtain again, and both of their social fabric emerging into this digital era.

I exited the bus and went for a stroll, getting lost in a section that looked like a mini industrial rail-yard without tracks and somehow haphazardly built all over a normal city section.

I made my way to city centre, and was immediately in the most Old World looking city I have ever been to in my life. The town centre was vampire world incarnate, all buildings medieval and crooked with slanted roofs covered in moss. Huge churches, iron statues, cobblestone streets. It was a UNESCO World Heritage site, and it earned the title. After all, the first official record of Sibiu dates from 1191.

I decided to celebrate, and went back to pretending I was on vacation. I sprung for pizza – a fully round oven baked beast at a fancy-pants restaurant with coffee and a payment equal to some french fries smothered in mayo at a Brussels food cart. The best pizza I had in Europe thus far, Italia be damned!

After a few hours in the more posh town square, it was starting to drag just watching the children feed pigeons. Flaviu Volosciuc from the band

Heavy Duty came right up to me with an outstretched hand. This man was a pro – straight to the point, no bullshit attitude. He seemed unsure if I was some con man, but was down to give this journalism experiment a shot.

He thought I was absolutely crazy. Not because of my passion for writing, or the passion for metal, or even backpacking. It's the whole thing of just showing up to a city without even looking at a map. He couldn't fathom why I wouldn't research a destination, or even bother to Google it's most basic attractions and atmosphere.

I explained quite simply as I always do – that's all part of the adventure. I let the universe take me where it may, even if it isn't doing anything at all, and just go along with the magic notion and try to navigate it as such. Let the fortune cookies do the management...

After a cautious introductory rambling, Flaviu warmed up; he had family randomly living in my hometown of East Dearborn. We dug into a beefy stew while I dispelled the fixed idea people seem to have of me as a potentially way-too-politically-correct blowhard.

We took a stroll to the store and picked up the mixtures needed so we could complete his homemade wine mixture. Flaviu had been fermenting his own supply and gotten quite adept to the process.

Flaviu explained how the Gypsy King of România had died the week before I arrived, and that his “castle” was in Sibiu, which was a large mansion that looked like a messy squat house from afar. When the “Gypsy King” croaked, the Romani pushed ox carts into the streets and shut down the city Occupy style, with a sudden and glorious parade for their dead king.

There are, of course, people who call themselves “Gypsy Kings” all over the world but this was The Big Man of România apparently, and his son had just taken over whatever duties such a subterranean monarch performs.

I wanted to show up to his castle mansion with it's iron gates and request an interview. That would be epic! Flaviu just laughed at me, and said

not to waste my time. There was no chance they would talk to me. And even if they brought me into that ramshackle palace, I'd probably be leaving a wallet lighter & travel-pack picked clean...

“So the band is called Heavy Duty, we started it as a simple hobby. I mean I had always this dream from high school that I should try to play in a band. I had some experience in playing guitar, but I never had the financial power to start the band, and after I had my second job I believed it was time. So we started in a garage down the street,. This was 2008 and we did this for 3 or 4 months and the other guy quit. So I moved on. I s thought the perfect combination would be with two guitarist – the classic thrash band so to speak and I found him in a bus. He actually played a show one year ago – it was a Metallica tribute. So these were the beginnings. I remember I didn't have a head for the guitar, a power amp, anything. I was just playing through a power amp with old overdrive. The sound was like white stripes or something like this, ah ha. And he came with a hi watt combo. And wow – it was only 30 watts. But wow, it was amazing. We found this place by the train station and we rented the place with a lot of money and we had to sign a contract for one year. We said OK let's risk it. So we started playing covers – Hammerfall, Sentenced, Rammstein, Black Sabbath. All this combination that makes no sense OK I have nothing against it, we play all sorts of metal style. In the end we found our style. At the end of 2008 we had the first concert here in Sibiu. And of course it was almost a disaster. Imagine he was the only one that had a combo. The equipment was shitty, the drummer was shitty. He could only play the 2x4 tough punk style. 'I will not play it, because I don't hear you.' we went on doing the same shit, and then we create out own songs. After awhile... the drummer was gone, because he went to the university. There is always this problem with drummers – you can find drummers, but not that play metal. Everyone plays rock or alternative. Then you say 'play

metal but you won't make any money' no one wants to come. So we found this guy near Sibiu. We had to buy the cheapest drums we could get. In 2009 we started playing in the north of Romania, which is known for the Hungarian population, but I felt there was a problem with the vocalist. He didn't have much time – I wanted to go much for a growling sound. I took the place. From there we told ourselves we'd not stop rocking until we are getting old. So I'm the vocalist & rhythm....”

“Why do you feel passionate about this music?”

“This music represents us. From its harsh sound to its growling attitude, everything is a part of us. I don't imagine ourselves playing something else, this type of music is what defines us.”

“Tell me about the Romanian scene & being a metal band here...”

“The Romanian music scene is the product of mediocrity – a cheap copy of the American mainstream scene. The only difference is the language used in the lyrics and the Balkan attitude. Visually the scene is represented by fancy cars, tuned girls and bad boys but somehow kitschy. A metal band has no place in this scene. First of all because metal as a whole cultural thing is not accepted or understood by most of the Romanians. Second, why would somebody listen to screams along aggressive or depressive music when he is bombarded daily with fake sounds of an imaginary good life?”

“What Romanian metal bands should readers check out?”

“Loudrage, Target, Dirty Shirt, Taine, Cap de Craniu, Negura Bunget, Altar, Krepuskul...”

“What are some stereotypes or ideas people have about Romania that are either true or untrue?”

“Romanians = gypsies is untrue. Is Romania a garbage disposal pit for the European industry? Partly True. Are Romanians beggars? Untrue. Romania is a corrupted state? True. The scum of Europe? Partly true – ha ha.”

“What is the message of the band?”

“We don't have a general message and we tried not to sing about social problems. Each song has its own theme from fantasy or occult ideas to WWII depicted images or personal profound experiences.”

“What is something strange that happened to you and when you tell people they think you are making it up?”

“I have experienced a Succubus appearance. In other words I felt the touch of a ghostly female entity while I was half awoken. I am convinced that the whole experience was the result of my mind, a very strong dream in its own. So I decided to recreate it in a song called 'Hunting Ghosts.'”

“What was it like living through the transition from communism?”

“We are still living in a transition. I believe it's a continuous transition to nowhere. I feel that the nowadays trend in the whole World is the transition. It's like a perception change so that the people would lose their confidence in order to be easy manipulated. There is no order, just a daily chaos in which you strive to survive.”

“What are the major differences between areas in your country. Like the mentality in Bucharest vs Transylvania vs Moldavia, etc?”

“Bucharest is the capital of România, a city full of egocentric people. Bucharest is their homeland, and not the entire country. The Moldavian mentality is rooted in an ancestral past where their leader is still Ștefan cel Mare also known as Stephen III of Moldavia. Churches are their source of vitality and they still have a Russian accent due to the communistic Russian occupation after the WWII. On the good side they have great food and easy women. Transylvania is a mixture of German Saxons, Hungarians, Moldavians, and Oltenians all gathered here for a better living. This part of the country was very influenced by the Austrian/Hungarian Empire, from the economic to the cultural point of view. While the rest of the country was forced into internal warfare, this part flourished with the help of foreign

support. Today Transylvania stands out as a reformatory territory, an example of Romanian good life...”

***I arrived in Brasov the next afternoon at a very communist looking bus station. Black mountains ranged the distance, and the buildings were those gray Soviet blocks that towered like tombstones around the shambling city. I was far from the tourist centre, if there even was one. I immediately headed to the public bus and was dropped 2km from another bus station. Here, all the tours departed to Castle Dracula.

I climbed aboard a rickety bus with air fresheners stapled all over the ceiling. As we drove, they dangled like a Christmas Tree that's ornaments affected by vicious earthquake.

I spent the day at Bran castle, which may or may not have had Vlad Tepes as a prisoner in the basement at one point in history. It was all marketing, assuredly, but it was still epic in it's own right. Far smaller and less haunting then I'd imagined it to be, but it was clear that when Bram Stoker came here once upon a time he harnessed its vibe and imagery as the basis for his legendary Dracula novel. I was thrilled to stomp its domain.

I returned to Brasov and made The Black Church. Dating back to the 13th century, this is the apex of that Old World cathedral that a guy like Van Helsing would fight satanic creatures on the roof of.

This is where the villagers would huddle in the medieval Dark Ages, harnessing the energy of countless ceremonies. So much history, so much human reality – it just seeped through it. But the building was inherently cold & basement-like. It must have been a tomb in the dead of winter on those sermons of the Unenlightened Ages.

I realized it was now 9/11, and what a strange juxtaposition to find myself here 12 years later! I really don't know how many Americans think in

this manner, but for me there is only the world before and the WTC. No use going on a conspiracy rant, because I feel the proof is in the pudding.

And no matter how deep you are willing to go down the rabbit hole or how fringe your possibilities of what really happened might reach, we all know it's not so much “*fishy*” as it is reeking like a decomposing whale.

It took a cab ride to reach Rockstadt Club, the premiere metal/rock bar of Brasov. The cab driver kept saying “*Yeah Barack Obama Number 1, America Number 1!!*” and I kept saying “*no, no – România number 1 – Barack Obama criminal, he is criminal.*”

But I do not think the word “*criminal*” translated. He just smiled and replied: “*oh, oh... George Bush number 1, George Bush number 1!!!*” This guy knew what it meant to be a taxi driver – anything for a solid tip.

I reached Rockstadt and soon Alinescu from the diverse, multi-genre metal band Deliver the God met me. He was in a cheerful mood because at midnight it was his birthday: “Please excuse my English, haha. The music has a long history – I've been playing since 1992, but in 2009 we started this band Deliver The God. It's just hobby; its our passion. We cannot and do not make money out of it. Why? First of all, it's România. Music is complicated for people everywhere, but I think especially for Romanians. Second, we are not very young. I will be 36 tomorrow, the other guys are 35, 34. I look at the kids today and they had all the good gear, and we couldn't have that then. We started a little late. We get around and said can we do this for hobby. Can we accept that we do this for our pleasure, and expect nothing more? Because if our expectations are low then our karma will be OK, our harmony. We just want to create the music we like, and that's it. Our success comes from the heart. If someone thinks that we deserve some money or something, it's rather OK, but its passion and that's why we continue. And the feedback from the people, from friends and strangers that come to our shows, it's excellent. And that's great. That's what gives us the power to continue. So we played from

2009, I think around 60 or 70 shows around România and never had negative feedback. Hell breaks loose at our concerts – stage diving, circle pits, wall of death. I mean I can play technical shit, complicated stuff, but that's not the point – the audience is the point. I think we found the recipe that moves the audience and that's everything we need.

“What is the message of Deliver The God?”

“Our vocalist should be here, haha. Its about life experiences, about religion, but not in the satanic way or something – but in a rather hidden message, its not a very direct message. Something like fuck church or something. Its rather philosophical, arising more questions then answers. So it's about life, feelings, fears. Its not political, not social. More personal stuff because our vocalist makes the lyrics, its his parts. Its not something you figure out at first.”

“Tell me about music scene in România.”

“It's rather complicated – what I can say is the metal scene has grown a lot. Its growing my maturity, all the bands invest a lot in gear. There are a lot of bands that are coming into the light. A lot of young bands and that's great. They evolve with their technical skills, their musical conceptions, of course you cannot reinvent the wheel but every band has a unique DNA. I'm against this band is better than that band because you cannot compare because each is unique.”

“When traveling, România has been a mystery...”

“There are some issues here – Dracula, vampires, that stuff. I think its marketing. If someone says come to România see this Dracula stuff, its worth once in a lifetime to see. But its mostly marketing. Its OK, because everything is business. But after that its the stuff with the gypsies, that thing.”

“I've heard a lot of stuff, problem people don't want to sound racist, but I know stereotypes do exist and this is usually...”

“I think this is the biggest problem because they media is talking about the issues with the gypsy and that somehow puts a label on all of us, on our nation,. And its not like that because every nation has it's gypsy people. There are a lot of good people here as well as every country in the world and there are some bad segment of the population that wouldst make our nation proud. But its not like that. I had a friend that came from sewed where everybody is white and blond, and he was here at this table, and we started talking, having a beer. And he said oh you know I was very afraid coming here cause the gypsy the media talking about how dangerous your country is, violence, whatever, and I came here and I found beautiful people, beautiful country. Its distorted. A distorted image, I think these are the two issues. Also people would be surprised because we a re a farm country – horses, cows, all this. Its like 50 years behind or something, and this way of living of ours is very surprising for many people. I know many tourists come here exactly for that they want to feel those 50 years back,. That clear water. Now if we take different regions – i think every region has something to show. Transylvania has a lot of history, castles,. Fortresses. Another interesting area is the Danube delta. Then the shore of the black sea, as well. The northern part, where all the traditions are like they were hundreds of years ago. Christmas or new years eve, you see the traditions taking place in the street in the villages, I think this is very interesting for people to see.”

“I'm curious about the Moldavia country.”

“Well it looks like România but – BUT like architecture, communistic architecture big blocks of flats. Not much history, historical. It's rather more modern. The thing is that they are poorer then us. There is no middle class. Its high class and the poor. And that's all. This is one of the most astonishing image when you get there, apart form the border where they check you for visa, everything. Politically speaking, they want to pace with România. Yes we are Moldavian but we speak Romanian , so its a big political fight to

extend our territory with them. Its communist there, still. There is some kind of democracy, but still communism. It's like Russia or something.”

“You lived through the change of communism...”

“Well I was very young at the time, 13 during the revolution in 1989. its a long story a lot to speak here. After the revolution there was some opportunities. Politically speaking nothing changes because the people continued to rule somehow and took he opportunities – financial stuff, all the smart guys took advantage of the chaos and build their business, stole things, you know? They increased the gap between the high class and the poor class. And that was some years... now I think it changes. Because it started to show a middle class somehow. I guess they settled somehow. We say we are poor but I wanted say exactly that,. Of course there are many poor, people who worked 20 or 30 years and got nothing for their pension. But besides that now its some kind of balance. There are problems with the politicians like every country. With this protest here, I think its a kind of manipulation, its too easy that those were in the streets 20,000 people with riot there had some kind victory, because our prime minister said that the project its stopped with the gold and cyanide. But I think he will for sure run for presidency and if he makes this move now, to say to the people you asked for your tights, well I stopped the project, so when I run for president you should elect me. I am sure that every politician will think for himself, his group of interests. So don't tell me that this move is for the people because it isn't so. After all this, it was a bad time after revolution. It was chaos. But now it's rather stabilized and we are somewhat progressing.”

“Is it extremely hard for people to get into politics?”

“No, not really. Judging by my friend – everybody is getting in a party, into politics. People younger then me are getting into the senate. What the fuck? I know a singer from a band that is now running for senate. You

pull strings, you know some people, and in a few years, you get to the bone. Its not about the money, it's who you know.”

“Bucharest?”

“Personally I don't like Bucharest. Because its very crowded... Starting Brasov to west, we have some kind of thing against them. We see them as the capitol,. We see them – we are from Bucharest. And you are from the country. You know? Its still this kind of thinking and we don't enjoy that. And there were some kind of wars between the country and Bucharest. I was living in Bucharest two years, and I couldn't accommodate with the living. I took the bus from where I was staying to work and I was spending 3 hours of the day of my life just on the bus. What is that? It does have its beautiful things, some great historical buildings – its the capitol. But I wont live there. But you should go to see it, its like 3 million people or something.”

“What's a totally bizarre story you tell people that happened to you and everyone thinks you're lying when you try and explain it...”

“There is one, a small one. I was studying in Cluj for two years – geography, whatever, tourist industry – and at that time I was a big fan of martial arts. I studied a lot – I also had a small school of martial arts. I was studying the art of ninja. And in this art of ninja there are some meditation things, there are stuff you do with your fingers and you meditate and you feel your body is going somewhere, you feel crazy stuff, they say.. Its called tantra yoga, stuff like that. In one I was in the bathroom, in the bathtub, and I open the tap with warm water. I went in lying in my back and I waited for the tap to fill,. And I started to do this tantra stuff and I was freeing my mind, I wasn't thinking of anything – it's a process, you get through, to get that state of mind, I remember that it seemed to me that is passed 5 or 6 seconds but when I open my eyes the water was to my neck. And I was scared of that. This, I think was the weirdest thing to me. But it happened. It was very strange, the strangest of my life. Missing time or something”

“Do you have a question for me about the USA?”

“Yeah, is it really happening – that stuff like going on vacation with some friends in a van, taking a left turn & reaching the remote village with the small gas station with an old man picking his nose and what happens is 'Texas Chainsaw Massacre?' Is that shit really happening there? Haha.”

“That's what we think about România, hahaha...”

“Hahaha, yeah like '*Hostel*.' That kind of stuff, I think is real. But like Moldova, Ukraine. Like the movie where they go to Brazil but are hunted for liver, for kidneys, whatever...

I parted ways with the smiling Alinesku and made my way to the hostel he'd arranged for my broke ass. In the night, the dim corridors of Brasov seemed menacing, but any shadowy figure that passed flashed a smile. There were no lurking strangers here, it seemed.

I crawled atop the bunk bed and lay awake staring at the white ceiling still bright in the heavy darkness. It would be many months, if not years, before I fully understood the impact of this Romanian trip. It was a strange land to confront, and one of beautiful terrain.

Nearly everything I assumed or heard was at least partially true, but no traveler I met accurately entailed the character of the Romanian people. Even the “gypsies” that populate it's fringe are obscured. Western and Northern Europe broadcasts this stereotype that România is a land ripe with missing teeth, violent poverty, flesh starved wild dogs, pick-pockets, Russian gangsters & such nonsense. It is a shame this majestic land of intensity is dismissed so frequently.

It is a level of insipid fear broadcast from the west such as American media does to Cuba, Mexico, Latin America at large. Life is not “cheap” in România – it flourishes. It may be economically strangled and treated like the unwanted child of the EU, but it is a people versed to community, even if that sense of community is enveloped by rural Old World platitudes.

Even if behind in technology, fashion, bureaucratic organization – there still beats a great heart that thunders if you are apt enough to catch it's pulse. To some, this pulse is silent; for others, it roars like a tiger. All one must do is put a careful ear to the ground and reappraise what it means to be a simple human stripped of the flashing TV set & instead imbue the rich soil of the earth...

***Days later, a park bench in Budapest. I ended up in Targu Mures, where I caught a lucky bus to Budapest for €20. The ride thundered & rained all night, 12 hours through lands that reminded me of the Pennsylvania countryside. Maybe it was just the best of George Thorogood comp on my headphones. I felt like we were all truckers zooming through Nevada on that slick black road.

I was back in Hungary, and I'd have to make Belgium soon. It was one leviathan of a distance to hitchhike. Perhaps it was OK to just pay for a bus back to Brussels. Be a lazy tourist. Get wine drunk in the sun. Just read a book in the shade, and not kill myself attempting to write one.

Today the sky is clear, and the calm weather a pleasant 20. Kids play soccer, and 2 teen girls smoke a joint behind a tree trying to look inconspicuous. They nervously look around for cops, hoofing lung intakes of crappy Eastern European weed on par with stiff Mexican bricks. They snuff out the jibber, hide it next to a tree stump & dart off.

I wait a minute, then head over & pick it from the ground like a branch-dropped fruit. Even if it's a bile vomit color of pea-green, the dirt weed is still stickier than the floor of a jack shack. I roll it's remains into a spliff then wander the park. Like a long lost slobbering dog, my stoned mind-frame finds me.

I walk the busy streets of tourists, mostly Germans today. Everyone here is on vacation before the weather turns sour. I'm am at the epicenter of Summer's finale, and I still have 3½ weeks before my plane leaves. I am rapidly running out of cash, but I'll make it – or pop a tent on the floor of the airport like a caveman.

As the tourists pass, I reach an odd fulfillment. I have lived out the final chapter of my European journalism mission. As it stands, I have spent nearly 9

months over a 3 year span wandering Europe. I could go anywhere, but I'd already traveled to every territory I set out to. I now know their sprawling continent better than half the population living it.

True, I got screwed out of Greece and a little more Spain action would've been nice – maybe a weird week in Belarus or Latvia – but Budapest was the last big fish to catch. I was left again with the hyperactive tourists snapping photos, having their naughty sex capitol drunken night or their drunken getaway.

It was all said & done, and I felt like I'd reached the final level of a video game where you defeat the ultimate villain but once he drops dead nothing happens – you are just stuck piloting around a character with a joystick and no credits or animation comes on screen.

I really had no idea what to do with myself. In conquering my journey across The Atlantic, I defeated my main reason to live, to work, to struggle for that mysterious payoff. Europe was played out. It was time to play music again.

I headed back to the bench and there was a younger guy with bright blue eyes sitting in my previous spot. He had a weird energy about him, a sort of mega-fulfillment going on that I could sense.

I asked to bum a smoke, but he said he quit years ago – in an American accent. I kicked up a conversation with him that he seemed to want out of, only because he was waiting for something.

He was from a nowhere town in Minnesota & traveled far & wide. Spent a lot of time trying to get out, same as me. Said he'd never, ever have to go back – that he was waiting on someone to meet him. They were going to leave Budapest that night & live in Sweden – “Happily Ever After” type stuff.

I reached into my pocket for a flier of my book, but before I could even tell him who I was or what I did, he said “*sorry, sorry – I have to take this.*”

He veers his eyes to the left, gets up with a once in a lifetime smile, and starts walking towards someone. I turn my head, and there she is. Beautiful Swedish girl, bright blue eyes – his eyes looking back from another body. He

walks past me in a delighted haze, leaving both myself and his American past completely behind.

As he gets closer & closer to this mysterious Swede, her eyes well up. He glides right into her, and they share a passionate kiss that somewhere, in some locked room in the fabric of space and time is photo developed by Cupid & placed among the 1000 greatest kisses in human history.

Whoever he was, American guy gets his European dream girl & Captain Minnesota gets his green card. They embrace for an intense 30 seconds, pull apart, walk off hand in hand into the sunset.

I plop back down onto the bench with my twisted, aching, dis ruptured spine & all my flimsy gray little Xerox copy fliers made to push a book that the majority of people in Europe can't even read.

Me & my crazy little mission, a phone that never rings with a lonely voice, barely a dime of life savings & no one coming to this quiet Hungarian park to take me hand in hand to the promised land.

And then I laughed – *I laughed, I laughed, I laughed*. I arose from my seat, and drifted back into the tourist herds leaving a little moat of discarded gray fliers around the bench. I no longer felt the need to promote anything.

Budapest was waiting with it's cheap beer & €3 dinner plates & thermal baths & raging nightclubs & gypsies selling piles of broken appliances & stained clothing in lumps on the streets. And somewhere in that sprawling mix of ant people, I knew somewhere out there were blue eyes for me too.

It's great to be infamous among the antisocial, socially awkward, misanthropic teenager demographic. But you know what? They won't hand you a cup of coffee in the morning or wash your socks when your not home... And if that's all a pipe dream my friends... well, then... there's always South America...

xXx

Dr. Ryan Bartek // 2.23.14

RETURN TO FORTRESS EUROPE

“Lisboa e a Luz de Lúcifer” (Part Two: Portugal 2012)

If Barcelona taught me anything, it's that Spanish Siesta is no joke. The heat wallops the flesh like an electric eggbeater gone horribly wrong, and the humidity is gulping steam. It had been days of bullet sweat in the tiny anarchist commune, and my mission to report on the groundswell of protest in Europe had come to a stumbling halt.

Not that there was any lack of activity, but the response of authorities in nearly every country was so harsh and riddled with informants, snitches & provocateurs that no one in their right mind would trust some shadowy American poking for info.

They were right to be suspicious because it is an extreme rarity to find people such as myself doing what I do, let alone the absurd lengths of discipline necessary to fund these zany journalism adventures. I seemed too good, too articulate to be real. I still had all my teeth & a wild sounding back story – they thought I was a coy government agent with a hip scheme & I might just doom them all.

They were right to be paranoid. Spanish activists had been pushing it hard since the broadly international Take The Square campaign in 2010, which was precursor to both Arab Spring & Occupy.

With civil disobedience & mass protests rocking Spain, the government in Madrid clamped down hard. Barcelona was always the secession-minded trouble spot for the central government, and 2012 was again boiling with secessionist calls. Occupy amped it up, and Madrid sent in the riot police like an army.

Barcelona had always been touted as the party city of Southern Europe – that you could experience a freedom perpetually Old Quarter New

Orleans. And as a romance city, it's beaches were pristine as was it's grand architecture. This was a top-shelf tourist delight & still is – but only if you are one of the cash-tossers sticking to tourist traps & fancy restaurants, isolated to your cozy hotel room after.

July 2012 and the disparity between travel brochures & street reality had never been more profound. Trucks full of soldiers rode at night enforcing a sort of silent curfew through intimidation. It was no longer legal to eat food on the street or sit down for any length of time. You could no longer drink beer openly. The parks and squares were guarded by constant police patrols and surveillance to make sure no activists dug in for encampment.

An upwards of 60,000 protesters were now forced to meet out of the public view entirely, in their homes & behind the locked doors of invite-only community center. There were now huge demonstrations involving a half million people or more, and all were quelled through rubber bullets, tear gas canisters & water cannons.

After days spent trying to make a break-through, it was a total wall. Mainly because the fear of political persecution, but also because English was not the top language, and Catalan was not the Spanish we know in The States.

I had gotten lucky because I knew a grindcore musician from Denmark that had been squat hopping down here. He put me in the right hands, and in 24 hours I knew a dozen crusty punk metal guys that let me crash at one of their communes.

But that's where it came to a halt, since the trust issue was lost in a hot bed of political dissidence with severe consequences if the state should arrest someone during an action – they loved to indict conspiracy charges.

I'd left the USA on May 6th with Occupy fever and a serious vocation to hitchhike. It was barely a month later & I'd already made it through Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin, Frankfurt Am Main, Athens, Milano, Lecce &

Rome (*from where I flew into Spain*). The road had been pure havoc of the most charming kind.

But it was clear that in lieu of the heavy push-back from authorities, Occupy was dying. Not that the people themselves had given up or stopped believing, but it was no longer safe to use its name.

Occupy at its core was a social network that emerged as a zeitgeist based on frustration & outrage towards exploitation. The unrelenting critics of it didn't want to face the fact that these Occupy camps were microcosms of the serious problems in each society materialized into a hive on the front steps of every city hall. The situation had grown so severe in its economic desperation that it could no longer be subdued.

And there were the critics who did nothing to offer any kind of solution, and also those who just wanted it to go away & looked the other direction as police relentlessly beat the crap out of activists, framed them for false charges, kidnapped protesters for secret grand jury tribunals & facilitated the crafting of “domestic terrorist” lists through Interpol & Homeland Security (*in The States*).

People were afraid to continue Occupy activities – families were having children taken from them by The State for holding up peace signs on cardboard. Police were infiltrating marches and dressing as Black Brigade anarchists – cops were slipping on ski-masks & throwing Molotov cocktails, smashing cars, attacking people to justify mass arrests and smear the name of a positive change system.

And if you don't believe it was happening, if you think this is paranoid conspiracy talk of a baseless nature, you really don't understand the reality of Western society & its inherent martial law. So there I was, drunk on the nude beach, with things having devolved into a mini-vacation for a guy who just can't sit still.

When in such a situation, you can't help but consider your luck. With so many Americans fantasizing about being *exactly where you were* in their own daydreams midst 9 to 5 work routines, it's almost as if you have to live it just for them. Because they can't, you are the ultimate lottery winner, and you'd feel downright ashamed if you complained to them in person about being drunk on a nude beach in Barcelona with hot women everywhere and not having tear gas shot at you by Riot Cops instead.

It's the same notion a burned out rock star has to find comfort in – it might be “old news” to be on a world tour shredding guitar every night for tens of thousands of screaming fans, been there/done that a thousand times over & now it's just a headache & Deja Vu repeat – but it's someone else's dream out there in the crowd & your function is to live that very dream for them 'cause they cannot.

That inclination can trip up even the most hardened travel-packing veteran into a hypnosis of hunkering down. The waves scream bottled Corona and the white sands demand relaxation.

Still, it is the impasse of velocity that I despise. I'm a workaholic of my art! Give a man like me paradise & they don't know what to do with it, especially when all they see through the mobs of smiling tourists are heavily armed guards keeping the tourists shuffling along as if it were a carnival fun house of drunkenness...

It was time to split. And if, unfortunately, my attempts at cracking the near impenetrable shell of Occupy Europe were stunted due to justifiable paranoia beyond my control, I'd get back to business – the “original business,” that is, of delving into the eccentric depths of the extreme metal underground.

I'd two immediate options – hang with Dave Rotten from Avulsed who'd invited me to Madrid, or fly to Lisbon to meet the shadowy black metal legend Nocturnus Horrendous whose band Corpus Christi are regarded as

one of the top-tier BM acts in Portugal. The guy was serious about his Satan & wanted to spit some Luciferian venom.

Both individuals were reputed as “class acts” in the extreme metal community, good dudes who worked hard & been active many years. Both contacted me during my travels after hearing stories of my journalism exploits & I felt honored by their support...

My internal compass screamed “go with Portugal.” Something about getting to understand the mind of writer Fernando Pessoa more intimately by inhabiting his old haunts appealed to me.

I also liked the idea of hanging out with people who'd enthusiastically grin when hearing such sentiment. You know, name-dropping F. Pessoa at a bar in the USA never picked up an American chick – but I'd definitely get raised fists in solidarity in Lisbon. It's the same thrill of going to Slovenia and talking LAIBACH & NSK.

If time permitted, I could always double-back to Madrid. There were no shortage of cheap flights & the bus lines from there are dirt cheap to a number of capitols where hitchhiking gets easy once again.

I broke the news to my anarchist friends who had so graciously allowed me to stay in their collective space for nearly a week without complaint or demand. It had been an effortless adventure – I showed up knowing 1 guy & within 24 hours quickly became involved with a crew of 60 smiling squatters.

I'd never gone from rags to riches so quick. I was floored by that feeling as we mobbed like a swarming mass of *Reservoir Dogs* one night to the remnants of a former castle for a punk gig. Its crumbled remains lay about an overgrown hill and the show took place inside a dugout cement corridor.

We saw a Thai grind band that night, and even though a multitude of languages were spoken, we were united.

To celebrate my brief existence & departure, several of us played basketball at a nearby park long after midnight. It was all very American & recognizable, even if most the guys were polish. The moon was bright & nearly full, with the Torre Agbar poking into it's flawless circle like the silhouette of a giant emerald dildo. And they wonder why Barcelona gets pegged as a wild sex city...

****Tucked away in the Southwestern tip of Europe, Portugal is one of those vague countries that never draws a clear picture. Semi-tropical beaches & vast deserts pronounce its territory, and the most striking aspect is that every single building is near identical – white concrete & bright orange roof tops. The streets are all cobblestones & everything seems as if in perfect order.**

This architectural scheme is a remainder from the days of Dictator Salazar, who was very conservative & authoritarian. Salazar had imposed guidelines that everyone was required to follow, such as the boring home designs which create a sort of Old World version of the American suburban grid. He was a plain, minimalist man, and felt everyone should be as well. Thus the identical, characterless homes springing forth for kilometers.

Not that it mattered, because the Lisbon of 2012 was exactly as the Europe of 2012 – modern people of the growing hive mind resulting from Facebook & YouTube, living life as usual on the countless centuries of humanity erected long before them. Lisbon, in other words, was a big open air museum of architecture.

Nocturnus Horrendus, the guy behind Corpus Christi (and Nightmare Productions, a metal label/distro) had picked me up from the airport. Like some freak mafia Don with his squad of shadowy black metal guys, he had us

chauffeured to Lisbon City Centre. They drove me around the city pointing out various sites as we jammed some nasty, barbaric sounding black metal.

We soon parked & were drinking tiny bottled beers (*so they never go flat before you finish*) at a cafe table atop the cobblestone of an Old World public square. Members from the doom band Process Of Guilt were present, as well as a journalist from one of the largest mags in the country.

So there I was, among fellow brethren in blasphemic t-shirts with leather coats & long hair. Nocturnus stood 6 foot 3, with long black hair and a squinty eye partly sizing everyone up.

Like most the freaky occult-minded dudes, he had his smoke screen of distance. He was also definitely the organizer of their little clan. He was very punctual, no BS, and straight to the point – and we'd have our mano-e-mano mega-interview the next day.

Tonight was a discussion with Hugo Santos of Process Of Guilt, a bottom-heavy progressive doom band from the outskirts of Lisbon. Despite the bands grumbling vocals and thunderous tribal drone communicating waves of desperation, sadness, suicide & isolation, he was in fine spirits.

They all were, in fact, with the kind of wise calm you'd get from the old men playing chess on the street in New York. Process Of Guilt had recently put out a stark new offering called FAEMIN, and Mr. Santos was glad to give me an earful...

“Talk about Lisbon in general and the music scene here..”

“I have a band called Process Of Guilt but we are not from here, we are from a place 100 miles from here, so I play here sometimes, we are going to play in a week. There are a bunch of gigs here, perhaps too much at Timwa. There is a big festival called Rock In Rio, but I guess Lisbon is like other places in main cities in Europe. Some big concerts, some small...”

“What is the overall message?”

“That's too deep to talk about, ha ha. The overall thing is that we are trying to express ourselves in the best way possible. We like heavy music, meaningful music and sincere music – that's our main purpose of playing music. All our influence and lyrics are mostly based on our everyday experiences. I guess our daily experience has a lot of potential to write from. Our latest album, our new label is a Swiss label called Division Records. The new record was mixed in New York with Andrew Snider. He worked with some bands, like Converge, so he's a good one to work with. Everything went to Chicago, and New York...”

“Have you toured a good deal?”

“We've played in some other countries other than Portugal and are going to do a small tour later this year. It's really hard to tour here, but if you aim for the central European countries there's more venues, more listeners, but its far from here. Our geography, as it is – we're a small country in a small corner of Europe and we are apart from the main scene. Concerning Process Of Guilt it was almost 10 years before we could perform a small tour in Portugal with 5 or 6 dates, because there are not too many people into underground music. I guess perhaps that's the meaning of doing underground music. Of course we reach our audience, but being in an underground band... Like Metallica – as it is, it is a big trend. People seem to look up to them like a football or basketball team. So people cannot relate themselves to underground music, but it's always been like that, I guess.”

“I know it's difficult to get to Central Europe from here, there is such a distance to go through Spain, and little to play along the way. How long does it take to drive from here to Barcelona?”

“About 12 hours. We played in Madrid two times, so I guess they have a tiny scene with good bands, but mainly the doomier side of things, some sludge, but its small. You have to go through Spain, it's a distance.”

“Stuff like Metallica brings people, but say Moonspell, the well known local – do they draw a large audience?”

“I don't know, but they can drag 2 or 3000 people to a gig in Lisbon. You can draw a parallel between Metallica all over the world and Moonspell in Portugal. They deserve the credit that they have but they are not an example of what our music is in Portugal or the scene here. I play in an underground metal band in an underground county. That's how I see Portugal right now. It's not a good place to live right now because we are in the middle of this crisis, this global crisis, financial, basically a living crisis. I'm happy but I don't have any other chance right now. We are in Portugal & trying to make it possible.”

“What are some stereotypes of Lisbon you'd like to dispel?”

“I don't know, ha ha – perhaps the guys with the big mustaches? It's not true. We all have mustaches, but, ha ha. I guess we were stuck in this dictatorship for almost 40 years and we still have some traces that come from that period of time. Friends in other European countries think Portugal is still almost a third world country, but it's not like that. Sometimes we are the last frontier between organized Europe where everything is so polite and clean and we are, still, I don't know – more savage? Rugged, yeah. I don't know if guys in other countries relate us to more of that rough quality. I guess we can translate that we are more at peace with ourselves, we have more liberties with our actions. We still are free and with all the good stuff and the bad stuff. We have corruption, like everywhere else, but here perhaps it's more... we have our own lives. I guess that's a misconception...”

***It has become standard procedure as a traveling journalist to constantly wake up in strange places. For a few short moments you have no idea what country you're in or how you quite got there. Add in the barrage of hashish &

general drinking that can come with this occupation and it adds to the general confusion.

Portugal has been one of those places, and my current whereabouts again reiterate this theme of me ending up somewhere with goat skulls hammered to the wall & weird art sculptures of bone mended with barb wire & lots of pentagrams painted on hardwood & burning candles in Gothic blacksmith frames, so on and so forth.

It was the goat skull speckled with dried blood staring out from the void with haunting empty sockets that I woke up to. And there were of course ritualistic looking goblets of steel, magickal items strewn about like a secret workshop of Crowley.

I remembered thinking that nothing was out of place, that this was all quite normal. I was firmly at another one of the many Satan shacks that exist in the black metal musician world – everyone seems to have one. Some black-walled freaky cement dungeon where people record, live, or simply hoard all their eccentric belongings.

This one belonged to Nocturnus Horrendous. Like a lot of these super-satanic black metal guys, they've heard of me or “like the idea” of me but aren't quite sure if I'm going to be some over-the-top politically correct leftist guy in person. I'm always this question mark, and a lot of interviews are very poker-faced with this crowd.

Well, until they actually just talk to me. The truth is that I've always rubbed the anarcho-crowd the wrong way more so than anyone. Case in point: Ron Paul, who even though I don't think is/was “The Answer” should nonetheless have been pushed by everyone just to wreak havoc on the Republican Party. It was the only solution to throw a very real & effective monkey wrench into mainstream American politics – especially international relations & The Bilderbergers.

It wasn't a question of ideology but of legal intervention in the nastiest affairs of the CIA, NSA, FBI, etc. Ron Paul would actually have done something, especially to “untouchable” white collar criminals. Give the hell-raiser in the baggy suit executive power & let the crazy old man go apeshit in the name of Thomas Jefferson. Why not? We were all fucked anyway.

Getting Paul the GOP Presidential nomination was the #1 thing that could rationally be done to screw the Bankster mafia. Pushing Ron into power, no matter the overall ideology, was above all comedy. Let the libertarians hijack it from the Halliburton Cartel, and let “The Moral Majority” defecate their lily-white panties.

Obama was a horrible joke, an absolute danger – and so was Romney. But they would never let Paul win. His campaign organizers & street team members were being placed on “Domestic Terrorist” lists nationwide!

At this moment in time, in 2012, Ron Paul is still campaigning for President, refusing to give up, having had the vote stolen from him multiple times by the Republican Party. It was not even voter fraud – just refusing to tally the final counts to prevent him from winning!

He took multiple states yet the choreographed news reports were simply claiming Romney! And the libertarians knew it as well as the Tea Party, and the GOP knew it, and there was this internal GOP bureaucracy war just raging.

So this is why I was surprised to find Nocturnus, the shadowy occult black metal legend, was interested in Ron Paul's campaign. He'd been watching the American election from overseas & like all Europeans was absolutely dumbfounded by the general lunacy of my fellow countrymen.

Having lived his life in Portugal, he had what most Americans would likely call quasi-Libertarian views that were specific to Portugal. He very much understood the essential problems of the larger global picture and had a wise cynicism about everything.

So it was after a long multi-day rant about conspiracies, social collapse & mankind's infinite idiocy, exploitation & enslavement that we finally got around to talking music & message. Corpus Christii was created to spread the message of “...*satanism, misanthropy, agony, death & depression. With the main aims of spreading the Word of Satan and to raise torment over this earth, Corpus Christii has been releasing works of audio terror since 1998. Corpus Christii have reached out to a vastly spread audience on all continents through their releases but also through numerous live-gigs over Europe. The back catalogue consists of 12 releases in various formats (tape, CD, vinyl) of which 5 are full-length albums. The band has passed through different Eras in the creations, the first one being the more primitive side with Saeculum Domini. Thereafter going into a more technical state with The Fire God, and [*post-scripto] the conceptual Torment trilogy where dynamics and built-in symbolism reflect themselves throughout the lyrics as well as the music...*”

So here we are folks, the self-described “sleazy anarchist long hair” known as Nocturnus Horrendous – and the only European I've met who doesn't give a flying f**k about soccer. I hit record midst a discussion on Ron Paul, analyzing his possible election as president...

“...and even if he won legitimately, he'd end up like JFK...”

“When JFK died people weren't so aware of things. Now they are so I think it would create quite a stir because people wouldn't believe some random crazy guy killed him – they would say Islamic extremist or something.”

“Is that an American thing? The term Islamo-Fascist?”

“I've never heard it until today.”

“Yeah, that's being used frequently...”

“Well, if you have your convictions and you try to impose it you're a fascist, so what if you're a communist and you impose your convictions are you still a fascist. What America does the best is if they don't agree with you they call you a terrorist or a fascist, and you're done. Nowadays you're best friends with China now?”

“Ha ha. So, anyway, we've been talking about Lisbon...”

“Well right now Lisbon is becoming a really strong scene alongside Porto. It's becoming – a lot of good metal bands, indie bands, all sorts. Maybe it's the crisis – people have to stir things up for some reason. Finally they move their ass to do it because Portuguese musicians are pretty lazy – bands, especially metal – they complain nothing happens because they don't make it happen. In Corpus Christi I always do it myself and people say '*oh, you're an ass-licker*' – no you have to bust your ass to make things happen. Not wait for something to pop up. This is a good example – I talked to bands for you to interview, and no one wants to move their ass. The thing in Lisbon – we are always some years behind the rest of Europe, maybe, lets say. So when the metal scene was staring to grow up and having places to play – especially the black and death metal or even grindcore – all of a sudden all these genres popped up again, these 80s clone bands, this indie rock. For some reason it's cool to like new startup genres and I agree with it but because you listen to Interpol doesn't mean you have to stop listening to Cannibal Corpse. As a kid I was listening to iron maiden and Depeche Mode at the same time. Now its hard to get venues to play metal – its too noisy, too extreme, the aesthetics – so you have all thee foreign bands that are basically playing black metal but have the cool hipster look so they can play everywhere. But if you close your eyes it's still all these extreme genres we have been battling to spread around but cannot because the aesthetics?”

“Was Rock N' Roll banned under Salazar?”

“In a way yes, but mostly the intervention bands. Why? Because most were communist. So they were banned. Its a logic tactic. But there were very good rock bands in the 70's and 80's when we were a little behind. It took a while to get away from the regime. But our rock, it was never exported. Because in the 80's the bands in Portugal were singing in Portuguese. So you cannot really export the scene because what – you're going to sell to the ex-colonies? Where they still hate you? And they don't even like rock or pop? And in the 90's you had all these bands, better produced – cover songs but in Portuguese. So yeah it was the crappiest period ever, the 90's, when it comes to radio music. But already then the metal scene was very strong. I started going to gigs in 1990 and there were a shit-load of people at the gigs. The gigs were quite violent, quite extreme. I saw quite a lot of interesting things at 10, 11 and 12. and things kind of stopped and I don't know why. I mean if you're in a band and you're trying to battle to get a record deal and you cant get anything or you get a record deal in your country and they rip you off of course you get unmotivated but in my case – if you are doing the thing you like, even if you don't make a penny – at least do it for the sake of yourself, to get some sanity out of your insanity. It's a way to fight your inner demons and reaching the light – in my case The Light of Lucifer”

“Was it more thrash and death stuff early on?”

“In the days of Kreator & Sodom you had all these good thrash bands then all these death bands – black metal didn't really exist except a few. In the beginning of Moonspell it was also black metal and it was hard for them. Music goes always by cycles. Even in the 90's the black metal scene was quite known, then died pretty fast. Now it's heavy metal and all this hipster extreme metal bands. It always works in cycles, although shorter then before. At least in Portugal.”

“And what about Spain?”

“I think they thought there was no scene here. Even when we started touring all over Europe and playing festivals and so on, people were surprised. When you go to Spain it's a bit more old school heavy metal, a lot of Iron Maiden shirts and so forth. And its cool to see. Me, I can listen to Darkthrone, then Iron Maiden, then Helloween, Depeche Mode, Joy Division then Morbid Angel. What I like I listen to. I never get stuck to one thing. I don't limit because if you get stuck it's kind of one-dimensional”

“What of the doom project Tree of Signs?”

“We are finishing the mix for the new mini CD and will start playing as much as we can – we gladly got an agency. They deal with some cool bands in varied styles. I don't know what to expect – one night of inspiration, one track, just a demo version, and all of a sudden we have gig offers and label offers. Just a sample of one track,. It's odd and frustrating because with Corpus Christi – a guy working hard to get the music out there. With the new band it's easier to get our with the aesthetics. It's more a 70's progressive band, it's easier to listen to, but it's not commercial. The lyrics are dark, so it's actually easier for once.”

“Any newer bands in Portugal today that you respect?”

“Well one band I've followed since their first album and finally they are breaking out – Bizarra Locomotiva. They have an industrial metal thing and sing in Portuguese, they pre-date Rammstein. If you can listen to Rammstein and not understand it then you might as well do the same for a Portuguese band. There are other bands I respect but – let me say this. There's so many bands now, so many... I don't want to say names because... I have to refer to this – I'm dead serious about this. Many times I'm here with friends and so on and I put on my own music. A lot of people they say 'you are egotistical' or something, but its true from the bottom of my heart. The music I do is the music I want to listen to. I don't even look at it as my own music.

That's why I crave to make it. I hate when musicians do an album and then 6 months later 'I don't listen to it, I'm fed up with it.'"

"What was the most blasphemous BM gig you ever played?"

"That's tricky – there have been quite a few and a lot of them I don't remember all details or cannot say it, haha... Well, I would say some of my own. Sometimes I go in a trance state of mind onstage and things start to go away because of my ritual. You start seeing things different, everything seems sick. It goes to your guts and to your soul but with some other bands of mine. I like ritualistic, with people's eyes closed and feeling the music. For me that is more extreme then slamming around, because you know you are hitting a spot. But you know, getting arrested and causing chaos, going to the hospital for an O.D. Or a whorehouse in Poland with all these weird skinheads. There's all sorts of crazy shit. Going on the road – its unavoidable for strange things to happen, and the less you program the more strange things happen and those are the best moments ever. You just go for the ride, but just because it's the ride doesn't mean its not symbolic."

"What's your general view on occultism & satanism?"

"My practice is for me only but what I try to do with my art is enlighten people. There is a lot of reference to every day world strangeness. Even the new album 'Luciferian Frequencies' – it comes to a world point of view in the... the maelstrom happening in the world. It has a connection in my point of view to other perspectives of occultism, or relevant social struggle. In Corpus Christi what I do the most is about people instead of being in darkness – the black metal bands going 'Satan, Satan, Satan' and forgetting that to be a satanist is to know and to learn as much as you can. And to reach the light. To be one with Lucifer and to learn and question everything. But often in the occult, people don't see that frequency. Things have a core to it and it isn't as plain as some people think. It's an illusion, right?"

“About die-hard black metal guys in particular – who really mean what they say and are actually seriously deep into the occult? Who are some real deals that you've met?”

“Well, I don't really know... As you know, I know a shit-load of people in black metal. People are true to what they believe in. A ritual itself – I think it should come from the music and not a real live ritual. You see the difference there? But people that are true to themselves, and I will not disagree with them, because that's the beauty of Satan you can interpret it as you want, but in the end – even if you are on his side, you are still a puppet. And you aren't sure if what you are working for – the right things... I have to disagree with the black metal that... You had the period where you'd scream 'Hail Satan' and it was enough. In the end most of those people gave up and didn't really mean it. The thing is some of us know we are being played with and we reply to that. And then you get an answer. And it's on that term that you've reached the climax of the situation. What I see more and more when you think you've reached it there's nothing more after. Its like alchemy – tuns metal into gold. It's not that though – turning men into gods, reaching a higher state of consciousness. That's my whole purpose in life – to be an astral alchemist and reach The Light [*of Satan, of course].”

“Trying to summon things – Ouija boards, exorcisms, etc – what are some of the weirdest things you've heard of? Got any good ghost stories?”

“I didn't discover the occult through metal, it was the other way around. When I was a kid I had quite some experiences because I knew it wasn't my imagination because people in my family were experiencing them. Poltergeist, parallel worlds – it doesn't mean there is a ghost, it could mean our own life being created in another dimension. There's so many ways of seeing things; the world is not straight – what you see is not always... One that got to me. There were several with people walking and so on. I lived in an old house with wood floors. You know the difference between the wood

cracking and a foot step. We had this pendulum clock and it had been dead for years – all the strings were broken. If you tried to make it move it was broken. You just couldn't get it moving. My mother and I were fixing things and the pendulum started moving steadily and we started hearing foot steps all around and some kind of low volume voices,. We looked to each other and we both heard the same thing. I cannot explain it. Also a record started playing in my room, stuff like this. When you are a kid it's freaky as hell. Now, it just happens. Don't be so spooked about it.”

“What's the worst country to play metal in in Europe?”

“Spain? Haha. No, really... I'd say Italy, even beside France. The promoters don't really take care of you and there's a language barrier. I'm not saying it's bad for other bands, but in my case we played there 7 times and never came out pleased. One time it was a motorbike gang thing - it was a mess. I'm glad we came out alive from there.”

“What's the weirdest tour story for you ever?”

“It's hard because for some reason you take it for granted when it happens, then you get home and 'fuck, that actually happened?' In each 3 dates at least one night will be surreal. Like when we come from tour, even years after we hang out drinking some beer and remember when ... fuck that, fuck that all... I have a good stage story. Something... we were playing – I wont say the country. The place was packed. Then we started playing a slow track – more doomy – and a group of guys start making fun during the track. So at the end I told them stop. And I asked the guy to come on stage. When he was coming I just threw my leg, my foot on his face. He just crawled out of the place and everyone was cheering. And that's really cool because if you don't want to be there, don't be there. And the funny thing – after I was resting and the guy comes to me with his two friends: 'Why did you do that?!' Why the fuck do you think? My girl shows up, she's like: 'You know what – he invited me to bed!' So I stood up and put my fist right into his skull – it was

awesome, haha. I needed 4 guys to take me off him. I was smashing his brain out. And his friends just bailed. If anything I didn't get hurt. Then my girl jumps on me & I twist my ankle. So I'm in this hospital waiting hours for an ankle wrap. Haha.”

“What are some stereotypes about Portugal?”

“In France they say everyone here has a mustache. But in France I see lots of women with mustaches. Also they think we are a really Catholic country, but I disagree with that. We don't really have... especially in Lisbon we don't have any pressure whatsoever with religion. Even the small villages up North, there's like 3 churches. But we never had pressure like that, nothing in this country...”

It was now 4, maybe 5 days later, and I'd again be headed to Northern Europe. When you can head in any direction with complete freedom of mobility, there are infinite variables. Only had one on my mind though – Christiania of Copenhagen. Why not?

It was strange that this trip & its discussions on Ron Paul ended with his withdrawal of candidacy in the face of rigged election. Following the orgy of Martial Law that was Occupy NATO in Chicago, the Occupy coalition just could not summon the forces to make a significant protest at the Democratic National Convention. There was just too much heat from Homeland Security.

America had become as Barcelona, paranoia driving everyone into the shadows to change tactics, slogans & coalition names. A few hundred were all that showed up to brave the Democratic National Convention, and only 50 made it to the Republican National Convention in Florida where police were driving around in tanks looking for “Anonymous.”

Literally, the Tampa newspaper headline was “POLICE ON MANHUNT FOR ANONYMOUS.” Really? You're driving around in a tank looking for someone who doesn't exist?

Anon is a literal joke – there is no organization. It's the same as writing a dirty joke on a bathroom wall & leaving a fake alias. “Anonymous” is a loopy-goopy term for any cyber prankster that wants to prove a point, like a modernized “Kilroy Was Here.”

The code is simple – expose criminal evidence & stick it to The Man by any non-violent means necessary. They want the real criminals exposed & arrested, even if their missions are cloaked in black humor & bad taste. It isn't much more complicated than that. Yet this hive-mind of angry teenagers & 20 somethings has been branded by state television (aka Fox News) as “terrorists.” Surprise, surprise.

Funny enough, Occupy had 10 times the number of protesters waving its flag outside the Bilderberg Conference in Virginia then they did the national conventions of both major political parties in America.

So we see now the shifting paradigm of people recognizing the real problem. But even at RNC, when the literal hurricane came, the GOP ran away while our boys stayed put! I resolved to hunt them down just to shake their hands in person...

I left the Satan ranch, relaxed on a lawn chair & kicked my feet up on a crumbling cement wall. From the hill of black metal mayhem one could see a wide-spanning panorama of Lisbon in the distance, with its tropic lushness & bright green vegetation.

Everything was at peace except the loud Salsa music blaring from the nearby neighbors. There were at least 30 drunken Portuguese guys having a BBQ in an enclosed backyard with a tall wooden fence, all shouting and laughing. Party balloons were floating on strings & confetti streamers glistened. One man was moving odd, shouting what must have been curse words at someone or something.

A massive bull came charging at him from behind the ramshackle house – he dove out the way, then ran from the mammoth mammal. With all the drunken locals laughing, the bull kept chasing the drunkard around the backyard – nudging him, throwing the guy around with his horns.

And this was their idea of a party – not fighting the bull or killing it – just getting hammered on whiskey & letting the thing trample & knock them around the dirt for the hell of it!!

If there was any parting memory I was left with from this adventure, it was that scene. It spoke loudly of the Portuguese character, as opposed to The Spaniards: *“screw domination & murder – we’re just gonna toy with the bull naked to its rage. It’s all one big brute shit-show anyway, so let’s just wrestle the mad joke itself – with fizzy mini-beers & lunatic grins. Duck, swing, duck, DIVE...”*

RETURN TO FORTRESS EUROPE

ψυχής ιατρείον (*Part III: Greece 2012*)

Dodging the army of Deutsch cops, riot squads & army special forces was easier then expected. Lugging a travel pack like a tortoise human when trying to sneak by them may have been a red flag, but I was still a 31 year old Aryan-passing honky with all my teeth. Camouflaged in a business suit, I looked an inconspicuous German rushing off to some corporate meeting...

The green suited paramilitary troopers at the train station were arresting or ticketing any protesters that were part of the attempted blockade at the World Bank. I could easily plead “ignorant tourist.”

It was a long, beaded sweat walk past grim police, army guys and cop dogs before I nonchalantly slipped on the train headed for the airport, I was finally free of Frankfurt Am Main & forced deportation. Again I was that Detroit runaway, seeing just how far I could take it.

I boarded the aircraft & launched, aerially soaring towards Athens like some Homeric legend. Greece had always been a target in my European travels. I’d been obsessed with it’s mythology as a child, and always felt akin to it’s people whenever I met them. There was something deeply centered in their attitude that coalesced with mine.

My interest in Greece had nothing to do with beaches or islands; it was the vibe these people gave out. The problem was I never found any cheap method of getting there. Europe had this glorious yet utterly annoying issue where each country looked at itself as it's own reality, and what may only be an hour drive to the next country is for locals an exotic land. I never understood how a Dutch adult could never have stepped foot in Belgium, or an Eastern German never once crossed into Poland. Even the most well-traveled European looked at România, Ukraine & Croatia as distant as Tibet.

Thus, Greece was the most notorious in it's separation. Practically speaking, it had no business even being in the EU. The only reason it got in was because it's strategic importance & trade routes.

Northern countries wanted to suck 'em dry like a mosquito & the corrupt politicians of Greece reeled them in by “cooking the books.” The Greek Gov. intentionally lied about their finances as to bludgeon their way in. They were economically blobbed together now.

It was an obscure land that no one anywhere had ever seemed to been to, and even if they had it was some island for a week. It was cut off by the Balkans which were difficult & dicey to hitch-hike.

Flights were expensive unless booked far in advance from Milan or Copenhagen. Eurolines buses of tourist-heavy Western Europe halted at Budapest. All international train service had been cut to it, and most of Greece was a desert such as Portugal or Spain.

I'd spammed every travel forum & rideshare site trying to hustle a cheap ride, but one never came. The only cheap way was to get to Budapest then hitchhike through the dauntingly unnerving Serbia, through unfriendly Kosovo & finally freaky Macedonia. Not exactly fun, and likely to dish out the same amount of cash along the way in areas unfriendly to hitchhikers – especially Americans. Airfare it was.

These days 2012, Greece was a consistent topic in any discussion on the future of the EU. The country was bankrupt beyond salvage – internally rotted from thieving politicians, vulture corporations & horrifically bad management. It was the millstone around the neck of The EU.

All the nationalized industries were sold off or privatized to the highest bidder, and Greece was stripped of self-sustainment. It then foolishly became a “Permanent Tourism Economy” – a realm of fancy beach resorts, pay-to-see ancient ruins & high-end restaurants overlooking the Acropolis. This was economic self-murder, of course, but no one realized the tangled

web of doom that had been built around the Greek people by the classically sleazy forces of old.

So when the economic collapse of 2008 came, the wobbly structure crashed. No one in the more developed Euro countries – let alone Canadians or Americas – had money to throw around drunk on the beach. “Party Land” dried up, and so did the funds.

And then came the million man riots. The Greeks were now in a state of constant revolt, a sort of Cold Civil War. In media worldwide, images of burning cop cars and tear gas fogs coursed through the consciousness of the press. The only game left to be played was “Kick The Can.”

The IMF, World Bank & EU hierarchy knew the situation was damned, and all they had to offer was brutal austerity measures and criminal loans at soaring interest the Greeks had no possible way of clawing their way out of. The only question is how long that game could endure, and how nasty the implosion would be...

And so there I was, May of 2012, willingly flying into this hazardous inferno to live in the alleyways among the beggars and the most dejected. I sought the pulse of Occupy & had little interest in the touristy sections except as a fall-back safe zone of anonymity.

I was wary of the squats, who unlike the more politically correct & organized Northern European variety were more ramshackle and desperate. I was supportive, no question. But I did not want to be deported for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Currently they were engaged in running street battles with The Golden Dawn, the ultra-nationalist Neo-Fascist party now prominent in the Greek political & social debate. The fascists were on the rise, marching in jackboots, carrying torches & waving creepy occult-laced banners spreading the message of xenophobia.

They were becoming an ominous force of intimidation, attacking migrant workers and illegal aliens under the cover of night. Things had gotten so bad people were starting to take them seriously. I knew I could very well be targeted with my style of urban camping.

Even though the flight was under 2 hours, my belly was full. Nothing could represent more starkly the contrast between American and EU life than airplane luxury. Even as bottom-barrel 3rd class I'd been served lunch & dinner for free – with red wine & citrus sodas.

Grimacing from my cushy notion of vacation, the airspace cleared the fluffy clouds giving way to a descent that was miraculous. Like a Pegasus above an enchanting realm of dreams (*and there is no phrase more precise, no matter how cliché it may ring in the ears*), my vision hovered above waters shimmering like turquoise.

The sands were whiter than cocaine on the shore, slowly blending into the outer rims of rugged, rocky terrain that over length grew a dark brown such as dried compacted mud. Every rock seemed a diminutive, majestic mountain. When the buildings began to coagulate it seemed the kind of housing slop stretching across Mexico City. Yet oddly, they seemed utterly appropriate, as if part of a natural formation.

From the height I soared they looked like grains of dry oatmeal that tumbled from a rip in a mammoth packet of Quacker Oats belonging to a careless, half-wakened giant stumbling around a behemoth kitchen shoddily attempting to prepare them before the rush hour drive to work.

As the plane descended, the reality of what I was doing hit me hard. What in Sam Hell was I really doing here? Once again I'd be thrust into the stream of an exotic, dicey country where I spoke not a word of its native language. I didn't know anyone here on a personal level, and I didn't even bother to look at a map.

Well, why should I? It only spoils the adventure because it's vastly more entertaining to be a wayward pirate navigating some perilous situation. But perhaps – just perhaps – this time I really bit off more than I could chew. This wasn't Holland, after all. Shit, it wasn't even Detroit. By nightfall, rubber bullets could be a-flyin'.

Best case I'd be talking like John McClane, cursing myself for not quitting smoking when trying to outrun tear-gassing, flash banging, stick-bashing Darth Vader cops. Athens could be the death of me, for real this time... and then the plane hit the runway, and ground to a halt.

As I gazed about for the reputed signs of decay, the airport's central building seemed functional enough with high ceilings and a carpet fit for a Marriot hotel. I ran into some leather jacket clad metal guys – most likely a famous band not willing to exactly say who they were, both with the shifty eyes of elitist black metal.

I unloaded some flyers on them for my Fortress Europe book with a smile, and when reading the laundry list of KVLTL names printed on them they looked even more puzzled.

The very non-metal looking guy in the blue suit coat, tie & fedora is running around Europe hanging out with extreme metal bands? Just who in the bloody hell is this fast-talking, weirdly animated lunatic? I did a snap of the fingers & pointed at 'em with a crazy grin: “*Hey... Smile.*”

I caught the cheapest public bus I could find and headed straight for Syntagma Square, down a highway flanked by barren desert and jagged mountains such as cracked pottery.

It looked like a spaghetti western, if not for the purple lotus-like flowers alongside the highway & the giant cinder block rectangle of a Best Buy store. This American franchise seemed an odd placement, like a bizarre flag planted on a deep space moon & NASA never to return. US capitalism knows no boundaries, let alone the ancient world!

Soon we were on a freeway, flanked by modern automobiles. We rolled into the outskirts of Athens around 5pm, as the sun was beginning to set like a peculiarly hued auburn fireball.

The buildings were freakish – everything was for sale or lease. Tacky used car lots were dried up and empty as the desert; those frilly sparkly tangles dangled in the wind alluring ghost customers to empty concrete.

Even the banks were abandoned and up for lease. The buildings grew more deranged – every 3 was burned out from a Molotov fireball.

Suddenly, the bullet-sweating bus halted for a traffic jam. I looked about & no passenger was phased. Traditional Greek music started roaring from carried speakers in the distance, like patriotic anthems. I could hear the thumping of war drums, loud as the foot steps of a lumbering colossus.

A huge column of protesters emerged, having shut down all traffic. I expected the likes of a black bloc, perhaps rowdy anarchists or even the fearsome Golden Dawn. What emerged instead were legions of average people, and many elderly.

Just people. Everyone was smiling and peaceful, singing and clapping hands. They looked hungry and tired, but they were fueled by the never-say-die Greek spirit.

The crowd dispersed and we rolled onward, deeper into the coming labyrinth. If a building were not scarred by fire then it was up for sale or lease. Some looked vacated during a barbarian onslaught, left in haste to maniacs launching fireballs through primitive cannons.

A high speeding motorcyclist with a reflective lens zoomed in front of the bus, and in the driver's eyes came the urge to chase him. The driver sped up, as if playing a silent reverse game of chicken in a war rig. The speedster shot out of view, and the driver pulled into the roundabout at Syntagma Square in cheerful mute victory.

I hopped out with the buzz of the city cascading about me. I was an astronaut of a world that could not be compared to American soil by any means, let alone the whole of Northern Europe, Italia or even Spain. I took a deep breath of this Mediterranean air polluted by bus exhaust & darted up the concrete stairs ahead.

Atop I was greeted by an elderly Greek man, clothed in a 3 piece suit. He'd a large silver crucifix dangling off a gold chain, selling trinkets & incense. To his sides, humans rushed along the sidewalk headed towards the tourist trap. The other direction led downtown.

The old man was like a weather vane, a surreal compass point for me where my understanding of Greece, as a center, was firmly planted. East/West/North/South, for the hole of the country, was determined right there forever. To his left the trail of modern financial district ruin, to his right the heart of the Old World (Monastiraki Square). To his south the beaches of legend, to his north endless desert.

With gray hair like strings haphazardly combed over his shining baldness, the skinny old man with the big nose smiled down to me. Assuredly I expected he wanted money, but he stopped me to say I reminded him of his son. Because the way I walk, way I carry myself, the curiousness I let off gazing around computing my surroundings.

Asked if it is my first time in Greece, said he just liked to greet incomers, because he liked to meet new people. Talked about Detroit, talked about Chicago. He explained the direction to Monastiraki, the ancient vital center where upon The Acropolis looks down from the horizon. He pointed the way, wished me well, and never asked for a dime. The desperation for it did not even well up in his eye. He actually just wanted to talk to me.

Even if he was too bashful to ask for money as a matter of pride this restrain was something so removed from American interaction I was convinced I'd discovered a race of heroes I could barely fathom. I waved

goodbye to my initial contact, feeling like an adventurer crossing paths with the native of a remote tribe.

Within a few blocks I walked into Monastiraki – the ancient public square that was eternally the main pulse of Athens’ “Street World.” With it’s immediate edges revamped into neon storefronts, the bizarrely rock-tiled ground led to stone alleyways cramped through a zig zag cluster of Old World buildings, all of which beset a mad labyrinth that mirrored the ancient bazaars of Turkey & Egypt.

The very power of this place was indescribable; it felt like a chamber of souls locked into time, just hovering eternal in a gleeful vacuum, where the tramps & drifters & street urchins of history had found the center of their world and upon dying refused “the white light” to remain earthbound ghosts, pleasantly locked in infinitude at this eternal city square which shall remain forever so long as Greece stays unmolested by an invading external war. If the Athenians had a god of The Hobo, the rock benches currently crowded by screw-loose & starving would no doubt have been his altar.

Atop the roofs of building clusters on the horizon lay a craggly mountain of sharp rocks like a frozen tsunami. At it’s top the ruins of The Acropolis. The atmosphere was so dense with power, mystery, brutality, ecstasy, that in a few slight heartbeats the world I knew was undone. What record I could offer beyond stunned paralysis was the feeling of opening a book that’s words were of magmic calligraphy.

I stared into Greece, infinite Greece, unsure where I, as a mere observer, now placed in its majestic tapestry. I’d never been to a place so thoroughly intense that I had no other course of action but to immediately go to sleep. Even emerging into New York City that first time, rising from the subway of downtown Manhattan and being thrust into 20 kilometers of skyscrapers did not compare. Without being able to grasp its content, or even

able to interpret the feeling, at Monastiraki I absorbed the beginning and the end of time. My eyes were lanterns, my existence dwarfed. I was bewildered.

I felt the smartest thing to do was set up a few interviews with my contacts – Nikos from Convixion (thrashy classic heavy metal), Sakis Fragos (editor of Rock Hard Magazine and former executive producer of MTV Headbanger's Ball Greece) & Paminos from After Dusk (a melodic thrashy power metal band).

I went for the telephone booth but it was this strange orange bubble, like a set piece from a 1960's British TV show. It did not take money, just some weird card. The man at the nearby newspaper stand explained that SIM cards do not exist in Greece – they all had to buy mini pre-paid cards. Cell phones were still new & generally foreign!

I had 5 days in Athens before Milan. I would then spend a week and a half in Italy, then to Barcelona, then to Lisbon to meet the black metal band Corpus Christii. But here I was, 5 days in this unknown powerhouse which was equally terrifying as it was exhilarating.

A huge part of me had wished I'd just cut the chord and wandered off into the larger country. It was certainly cheaper than most of Europe, rained very little, and was ripe to sleep outside wherever I could get away with it. Brimming with rocky white coast line, it was a tourist dreamland for those who had the money to throw around.

Outside of it, who knows? Certainly I wanted to. It was the sort of country where even if you do wind up alone in a hostile environment and refuse to pay the \$\$\$ for a hostel the sheer intensity of that country keeps you up all night and you have no choice but to keep going on like a hypnotized marionette through it's nocturnal consumption.

The Greek night is the mother's milk of bipolar manic. Here the adventurer is a surrender, gleefully waving the white flag such as a madman.

Utterly intoxicating, it had devoured the daylight; the pulse of the city was throbbing like one big central nerve.

Fighting the urge to sleep was useless; the swarma sandwich had filled my belly, the tourists were swarming, and I needed to hibernate. I knew that only by wrapping myself up in a tarp cocoon & going under would let the visuals & emotions compartmentalize.

Without an adequate reset, I was crippled. I crawled through the shop frenzy maze and into a seemingly dirty section of New York, kind of like a Brooklyn with graffiti on 1950's apartment buildings. Into a dark alleyway I glided, unfurling my bum-o-flauge to safely become the plastic burrito person I was accustomed. I went out like a light.

***The recollection of dreams never have a clear starting point – one is just thrust into a subconscious situation. While my body may have been in a Greek alley, whatever else of me was 23 again, clocking off work from my old miserable porter gig.

Those days were exhausting, running around the length of a football field at a Ford Dealership, hopping into burning enclosed metal boxes of automobiles that'd been parked for days under the summer sun. I'd jet to the front with a vehicle, give the keys to it's owner, then run out again to fry my skin on the next leather griddle.

In the dream I clocked off work, then went home. My ex-girlfriend was nowhere to be found, and I vaguely realized I was dreaming, because in actuality we'd broken up long before I ever took that job. Still, I went out driving looking for a metal show at a dive bar that did not exist except in my dream, with bands I could not name because they too were a figment.

It was night, so late that I was sleepy even in sleep wondering how I would be able to do the automotive shuffle with 3 hours of rest. I thought:

“Who cares? I’m a young man. I will never remember being tired, only the actions of the day itself.”

It was the line I always repeated to myself when battling fatigue in order to catch some death metal gig going until 2am even though I had to be at work 7am the next morning.

I entered the bar with it’s freaky neon marquis fit with clown faces – perhaps a mutated slumber rendition of Portland’s Avalon Theater. The bartender was cleaning out empty glasses with a rag; he told me all the bands had canceled.

The tavern was empty except for one lone figure hunched over the bar top, drinking on a stool and gazing emptily at a TV above a row of hard liquor bottles.

I approached him but first looked to the screen – the Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney was on the television, dressed as a surgeon with a purple surgical mask, operating on a mans slit open stomach, as if an awful gastrointestinal cable show.

The sad man at the bar turned around and looked at me – it was Barack Obama, his tie loosened and cuffs rolled up, getting hammered in disarray. His eyes looked exhausted and empty, as if abandoned. He gave me this intense look meant to say so much but it was lost on even me. Too exhausted to even shrug or sigh, he turned his beaten spirit back to the Romney incision broadcast.

The dampness of my own face awoke me, more so than the mosquito swarm. I removed the tarp like a crinkly bed sheet and looked to the roofs of the alley. The moon was bright over the zig-zagged structures, the sky inching towards dawn and amassing the unseen purple of the night hue like a vacuum cleaner sucking it all up into a cumulative density.

The thin telephone wires slinging between crooked alley tops were cluttered with hung shoes; pairs left dangling by grateful travelers. I headed into the street at pre-dawn.

The first sight that greeted me were Moroccan scrap hoarders pushing half-broken shopping carts full of any metal they could salvage or pull from any of the molotov cocktail torched buildings. Just pushing that cart around ceaselessly, night after night, such as an American homeless with an overstuffed junk buggy of raw scrap.

They were even hoarding beer bottle caps. Anything, everything. I turned a corner for a random direction, emerging into a more industrial feeling wharf market.

As I walked, the earth felt asleep just as it did in Venice. The roads were wide, as were the cement blocks making up the sidewalk. They seemed abnormally large, fit for giants. The only comparable environment I'd seen was Stockholm, where the old Viking lore seemed present in their architecture. It felt that if even subconsciously they were paving the roads to be fit for some mythological king's return.

Every half block or so was planted a tree with purple flower, such as a lotus. They were like an absinthe reverie, raining down their night-mirroring hue to the concrete. A clump of these flowers led my vision to a bloody ditch.

From the prettiness of the vegetation my vision swung upwards towards a crimson stream leading from an open garage warehouse where skinned lambs hung on hooks, Greek butchers ripping out the entrails of fish while wearing galoshes.

The most disturbing piles of intestinal gore lay on the ground of the shop, a river of blood seeping out carrying with it the occasional fish eye or brain matter. It flowed through the cracks of the giant-fitted walkway slabs, over the ledge into the street and into the sewer dug-outs enclosed by welded iron bars.

Looking deeper into the long street, half the businesses were wholesale butcher shops such as the one I just glimpsed. Every few businesses, streams of blood & gore dribbled grotesquely in the street.

With the city now slowly waking and businesses flicking on their lights, dawn came suddenly. There was a light purple to the sky with a slight pink, such as the early AM of New Mexico.

I returned to Monastiraki; two street crazies were wandering it's contours as if a rubber room. In the USA, we would call them tweakers; here, crystal meth was foreign. Either they were insane long before, both of them cawing like roosters and nervously talking to thin air, or the starvation and exhaustion of the Athenian street had taken it's toll. I looked to The Acropolis on the horizon, wondering just how many poor chaps those ruins had cast their mighty shadow upon.

After a brief coffee, I sought out the adventure I aimed to take all along – even if the sheer immensity of what I saw over a bus ride, a roundabout, a public square, a few city blocks & an alley was enough to keep me decoding this marvel for life.

I was almost fearful, as if heading deeper into this labyrinth would cause me to lose my mind. I felt I'd surpass a tipping point where everything prior to this adventure would become utterly meaningless, and I would have no recourse but to plant roots in that filthy alley and make a life of it. I was already debating hijacking a shopping cart to initiate a career of scrap metal.

I hit the main street which opened up a view comparable to a quaint road in Brooklyn. On the corner was an old man selling hoagie sandwiches out of a cart for €1, stuffed with turkey, cream cheese & tomatoes. It was easily the finest tasting sandwich I'd had in all of my Euro travels thus far. I bought a second, then proceeded.

It was instantly clear that Athens, and most likely Greece at large, was a mans world. There seemed only to be four businesses outside of food – all

of which repeated themselves over & over on my stroll. First was a navy/army surplus store, next a shop for suit & ties, next a tourist trinket parlor, and then finally a hardware store where the items were threadbare. Various hammers and saws hung from the walls off nails, and sawdust covered the floor.

I passed the shops and the pattern kept repeating – it was like everything you needed to be a man, over and over, and every one of these men running the businesses loved to haggle over a price. They all made a sport of it & I fell into the trap, arguing over the price of things I didn't need to own or carry, but felt obliged to purchase just to play along their tug-of-war. I ended up buying some half-needed items for the travel pack, and a solid raincoat for €2.

I followed the road towards the more financial-based public sector, where Athens becomes as Manhattan-like as it does. Just like NYC, there are newspaper dealers and flea market stands pawning off all matter of watches, sunglasses, and cheap Turkish made electronics for €1 or €2.

I took a seat on a marble bench & watched the Athenians stumble to work in their suits & dresses, all of them grim faced by economic peril. Work, work, work & not a dime for themselves. Yet it felt arcane, like a Manhattan of the 50's with fedora hats abounding.

I walked & walked as the sun beat down. Even in late May it was feeling the depths of August. No matter where I went that day, on every corner stood a riot cop in full Darth Vader battle gear gripping a gigantic Plexiglas riot shield. They were stationary as a London Palace Guard – never smiling, never moving – like bizarre statues of flesh as sentient guardians.

The tourists could overlook them because they chose not to see them; an eyesore of implied brutality. Also buzzing through the crowds were riot cops on crotch-rocket motorcycles, riding on the sidewalks themselves, faces shielded by fascistic helmets like Judge Dredd. On some of the motorcycles

hung younger rookies, gripping steel billy clubs. They were a reinforced warning not to step out of line.

The tourists largely ignored them, preferring to stay in their head-trip of trinkets. Yet I could see hatred gleam from the eyes of the native shopkeepers & businessmen. It was the kind of police state tactic exemplified by Iran's authoritarian elements – zoom-by crotch-rocket beat downs.

Every young man on the street when wearing plain clothes either look the stereotypical LA/NYC top fashion or they have cargo & SWAT pants, pockets everywhere, all sorts of compartments hooked on belts. They are adventures through & through.

And every young man into rock n roll seemed to own an Iron Maiden t-shirt. At every turn – Iced Earth, Judas Priest, Iron Maiden. The Greek metal flame has, as a popular culture, seem to recognize MANOWAR as far mightier than Metallica.

What a country. It was so thoroughly metal in every regard it seems bizarre that Sweden gets such recognition as the Euro Metal Mecca. Music-wise, sure. But in, Sweden it's usually so damn cold there's nothing to do but fuel cabin fever.

In Greece, it's always August – and they drag one and another into the street like children over a loose fire hydrant gushing water everywhere. The Greeks are dancing in the metal as if it showers upon them like incandescent maniacs; Nordics stand cross-armed and “no nonsense.” Each man his own deity & the commandment is “shred.”

As the sun set, I found myself again in Monastiraki. I had surrendered to the passion of the swarma sandwich and was a trash compactor of gnawed lamb. The street people flooded the square, zipping flashing purple pens into the air which drifted down like those distinct lotus leaves. Fitted with a plastic

propeller, they were flicked into the heavens by a rubber band giving spoiled tourist children who *want, want, want* their battery operated hypnosis...

It was time to meet my first interview of the trip – Nikos P., guitarist from the band Convixion. He had told me to trek up to Exarhion Square, which was the more rock n’ roll oriented square full of restaurants and clubs for alternative culture.

Even if it was a little slow this night, there were still a motley bunch encamped in the square like a ramshackle Occupy. They did not have any sophisticated structures or tents, most likely 'cause the cops had all torn them down & they couldn’t afford them anyway.

Instead, at the heart of the swarm was a ripped up bed sheet strung between two poles and secured into the soil. There was the universal anarchist A, but other slogans in Greek spray painted on. They were like the Fat Albert kids of the Occupy junkyard.

I sat outside a club named Dr. Feelgood’s that had hair metal posters on the walls and jammed 80’s rock on the speakers. Nikos buzzed up on a motorcycle, pulled off his helmet, and shook my hand. The guy was full of life, embodying the Greek notion which is an absence of any resistance to the ebb and flow of life.

Like all Greeks he seemed so thoroughly in the quick of life he'd an almost elemental vibe – that same vibe one gets from a bunch of kids hanging out on the porch steps of an apartment building in Harlem, or a mob of crusty kids pan-handling some West Coast USA metropolis. The Greeks are permanently “in the street” – a mode of being I inherently grasp, and one which American society dismantles for air-conditioned convenience.

Nikos P., with his smiling exterior, was the kind of guy you could envision wandering until dawn with a pack of friends, happy to be alive, sharing a bottle of wine under the full throttle moon...

“Ok, so... how can I start? Here – this is the eye of the tornado. It’s the Exarhion Square, as it’s called. It’s been a place where all the rock guys hang out since the 80s, and even earlier. In the 80s it was a very infamous place – backstabbing stuff, drugs. The good thing is in the last 5 years all the people that live here took matter in their own hands. I was here when people took sticks and stuff and they literally kicked the ass of the drug dealers. They also put some tables in the basketball area so children could hang out. The last 3 years, the place is way better then it used to be...”

“So, about metal...”

“I did for my school project a documentary about the metal scene here. If i can say something – during the 80s, you know, people here – how can I say... more ‘rebel.’ They used heavy metal and rock music as a way to express their ideas. It used to be great but the Hellenic metal scene – not so many bands, problems with production values of the albums not so good... During the 90s – ok, I am 28 years old, and I feel as a part of the scene, the last 12 years – especially from November ‘99, Athens was a great place for heavy metal. We used to have many record shops, many live stages. You know, you could easily make a gig. We used to have a heavy metal club, like 500 people always inside. So also thrash metal, this club over here. Sleaze or hard rock, you go here. Traditional, here. Heavy Metal became very popular again, especially the younger ages, especially 16-20 with all that 80s outfit, you know? I don’t want to sound like an elite guy, but I knew it as just-a trendy stuff. A bubble about to pop, you know? Of course there were many new heavy metal band and most of them did a demo, some just one album, then they quit. I can say the last 2 years Hellenic metal rises up again!”

“I’m curious about the economic situation, the new elections. I’ve read that a new bailout would cause a chain reaction that would make both

Spain and Portugal default on their national credit, since everyone is linked now by the EU currency..."

"So... it's all about the money, everything – the fucking money. As i have it in my mind, my thoughts – the heavy metal scene is a society inside our society. Let me tell you how I think things work here. In heavy metal, from the moment I grab a guitar in my hand, every time someone buys a Convixion album, there is a big chain between me and the guy who buys the record. Bands, band members aren't always so friends with each other. They aren't really friends, people who share the same feelings. Everywhere has its problems. I feel music is a way to express it, get the feeling out. Me and the other 3 guys from Convixion – we go to the rehearsal room, close the door and leave our problems outside. We do not face problems inside that room. A lot of bands quit because they aren't bound with each other. In Greece, all those years the studios and productions were very very expensive. Not only expensive – people didn't know how to record metal in the 1980s. In the last ten years, the production levels are way higher. But still even in the 90s people didn't know how to mix it or place the microphone. Ok, so i put the money, we record the demo. we try to find a record label... and i was very lucky in my other band – we found Greg from Eat Metal records. They begun this record label as pure as they could. They said we're going to find some new bands, help them with their recording, and all together as a fist we will make rise the Hellenic metal scene. They helped us pay for the album, we went to Netherlands and Germany for shows – they made something happen... Back to studio stuff – in 2004 they could ask 4000 euros, for example. Let's say i gave you the 4000 – the production level wasn't that good. So bands used to go to Germany or Sweden. for many years the Hellenic metal scene was not appreciated by the metal press. Ok, so if that guy from Metal Hammer [magazine] says it, it must be true... There's this TV show called 'TV War' – it's more like 'Headbangers Ball' in the early years.

But the only heavy metal show on the planet with 13 years in a row. Our latest release was a 7 inch single and we had a video clip. So the producers saw that, we got exposure... I think that here in Greece, inside our society the heavy metal scene is a smaller society. It's the same people. Something is that we're supposed to listen to heavy metal because it's our way of life. We are supposed to be thinking that – but the way I see it, the local organizers, many of them, they try to take as much money as they can from you. No! OK... we're going to do a concert with heavy metal band, if we put €10 interest we'll have 100 people because they are dying, they would come no matter what. but if we do the €5 ticket – will we have 200? I have organized live shows myself and the way i see it is a lower price for many people. More people is not only more fun – we can all unite. It's a way to make the scene stronger. Organizers look for profit – this is how things work in whole society. This is the problem with Greece – the same people, the same people that voted all those people in all those years...”

“About the new elections – you had a very left wing party make many gains...”

“The people are in a very bad situation, especially my generation under 30. It's because our parents – they tried to do the best for their children and they cared only about their families, not the others. It's funny – it's the dream of every parent for their children to work for the municipality, the government, some good job, because they will always get paid. They will have bigger salaries then the rest of us. It was always our dream. If I work for the government, I will be safe for my life, so I don't care about the others. And I have someone on the inside that will help me get to the top. I think they write about us – we complain now, the last years – we used to give tons of money for lying people on an island in western Greece. It came that 90% weren't even blind, they just took the handicap money. It's all about the signature. It's ok – just send the paper. No one controls it or sees what is

going on. It was so easy to steal the government. The funny thing is if you ask every single person here – everyone knows someone stealing from the government. Even today, a friend of mine told me a very sick story. He's a guy that's 24 years old – he took a good job and its to control the people that make roads. His other co workers said 'Ok, we'll say €5 million for that road but we'll just use €2 million. How do we explain the missing €3 million?' He spoke to his superiors about the thieves. He tried to be honest and he was fired! Just like that! A brother of a friend of mine got fired because he wanted to do the right thing! You're fired – end of story! Stories like that – that's why all these people are so pissed off. You see all those riots and stuff – during 2011 there many riots and protests, 1 million protesting!"

"Did you have 1 million in the streets?"

"Of course the media will say 500,000, but you could see from the pictures – all the parliament house was surrounded! Even then, nothing happened. The funny thing... now everyone is basic salary, everything corrupted to the bottom. People changed their minds and voted for little parties, something else. I believe this is something good, of course a left wing party took a very big percent. The strange thing is 8% totally right wing – Golden Dawn, in English. They are right wing extremists – Fascists, you know? People voted for them as a way to express their anger. But they are like cannon balls. Since day one they were bullies. But, you know, exit polls, opinion polls – they are down to 3%, But even that is enough to get them into parliament, so i am really curious what will happen in the next elections. The really funny thing is there's this website where we can bet on which party will win. it was exactly as the betting side foretold. Ok, this will happen – those people know. Just follow the money."

"In terms of austerity, what got cut?"

"For 12 months you used to get paid for 14 months. Every Christmas you'd get a whole salary and every Easter half and every summer the other

half of your salary. The first year they cut two of the salaries. The last year the basic salary was €700 – the least you could get paid. The most simple thing. Now this went to €500. We're talking about a huge cut. They also cut insurance and stuff... another thing – the problem with immigrants. All the right wing parties say that the biggest problem are the immigrants. Personally I disagree. I know that there is a problem but if i compare it to the money the politicians take it is way lower. And many people believe it's all the immigrants fault, why they voted for the right wing extremists. The first thing they said if we get in parliament we kick out all the immigrants..."

“Do you think Greece will go back to Drachma?”

“I think this won't happen. The rest of the European Union won't let it happen because it will make them weak. And comparing to the situation in the USA – you know I see that people don't have work, the rents are still very high. Ok... myself, for example. I like the small things. This place we're at now, has a-very cheap beer, very good music. I know I don't want to be all day on Facebook on a computer, I want to go outside. One thing that makes me sad – Greece was one of the most beautiful places in the world. We have the island, the place for free. We have the sun. The climate here is so good that even in the heart of winter, where we're at would be packed. Greek people have passion – we like to go outside, go for a walk, hang outside and drink beers and stuff... The sad thing is I see people about my age that don't want to make family. They say 'I live with my parents, I have my girlfriend, my salary is €500, so is my girlfriends... we're going to rent a place, €400, and were going to give €150 for the phone, internet and electricity. OK we have 350-400 to spend. the super market the food is so expensive that at the end of the month...' I see it with myself, my friends – we don't even have the money for a beer. We can go out one time a week. I am romantic about music, I like the big club with the 400 people that now doesn't exist because people done have money. I cant even think spending €40 every Saturday. I

like to go out every day, I'm working tomorrow morning but I will sleep 4 hours and still feel good because I'm young. But most people are just in their homes, downloading music, downloading movies. And they are losing their spirit. OK I have the girl I love, we'll stay together, but with €1000 as I told you, you cannot have babies. The way I think is that – you can't afford their protecting. A friend of mine, his wife gave birth – it costed like €6000 with the hospital! €6000! You can't even have a baby, you know! And the sad thing is I see most of my friends – they are very sad, just in their homes depressed in front of the PC. They can't live their lives, and this is a very sad thing. There's people thinking 'OK I will go to another country for a better future.' I wouldn't choose that, I chose my country – I love the place...

***Again stumbling my way from slumber, this time peeling off the plastic tarp to find several Moroccan scrap cart pushers eyeballing me hungrily. The alleyway had been compromised, and if I chose to crash there again I'd no doubt be mugged.

Even if I could hold my own against one of these attrited paupers, I would no doubt be overwhelmed by a large pack of them. They were leering like wolves...

There seemed no recourse but to seek a low-key urban camp location, which I'd been scouting for all along. I had to just take the financial hit & rent a room. I was never a fan of hostels or the wealthy child tourists who inhabited them, and to assume a struggling metropolitan hotel would hook it up on the cheap seemed a fantasy.

But I was dirty and tired, sticky from body sweat. I needed rest, real rest. For now, the day was about motion. Realizing this was my once in a lifetime shot to see fragments of the ancient world, I took a bus to the outskirts of the city where a larger terminal existed. I was told one could buy passage to any of the ruin attractions within a few hundred miles of Athens.

Henry Miller had written about Epidaurus, the ancient amphitheater, as a place of holy quiet. And he'd not only written but ranted for many, many pages on the topic – screaming at his readers from the beyond to reach it by any cost as to be born anew.

It seemed a natural place to clear my head. The fancy architecture of downtown drifted away, peeling back to unveil the real Athens with endless one story brick buildings that looked like industrial areas faring slightly better than Detroit.

Graffiti is universal, and caked everywhere that broken windows can be found. I started getting nervous, thinking once again I'd be let off alone in some cursed section of hungry eyes staring down the unknown contents of my travel pack.

Yet we soon docked into the depot and I was among hundreds of tourists. Inside the bus station, there were dozens of counters. Every ancient ruin in the country had it's own claimed stake from some minor travel company, nestled in one of many tiny offices.

Wherever you wanted to go, it seemed possible. All it took was money – the kind of cash the Japanese or French have to toss around. Well, the round trip bus to Epidaurus was about \$40 USA, and another \$35 cover charge to get in, and it was deep in a mountainous desert area with no local town to walk to except 10 miles away.

I darted around the bus depot seeking out cheaper attractions, but it was the same tune everywhere. I felt cheated by extreme capitalism, but I could easily forgive the Greeks. Even their dumpsters were dived clean of food. So back to the city I went.

I returned to Exarhion Square with it's semi-Occupy camp & palm trees & outdoor cafes & hookah bars. It was sunny & packed, young people everywhere. I sat down on a bench and thought to myself how badly I wanted to smoke a joint.

Even in this tropical paradise gone economically wrong, I could not suppress the urge to want much else then to get baked & wander. Marijuana was anything but legal, and one just did not want to get caught by the police. The word was they could be easily bribed off, but I didn't feel compelled to press my luck.

Unsure what to do, I opted for Frank Sinatra. I clicked on "My Kind Of Town;" as the orchestral opening rolled in the wind picked up a slight breeze. And then, as if a miracle – as if the floating feather from the intro of Forest Gump – it carried across the cement a gigantic hand cannon of a *rolled blunt* to the very edge of my shoe!

I thought it was an unkind mirage. I took a whiff – *pure skunk!* It looked as if it had been lit the night before and after one puff tossed away before a cop walked up on it's previous owner (*who likely lost track of its location afterwards*). But it was mine! *All mine!*

And so, with Sinatra crooning into my ear lobes, I went for a nonchalant stroll off the beaten path. I puffed that hooper down like Tommy Chong 10 minutes after released from a years-long prison stint.

I was quickly red-eyed and smiling, losing myself in areas far off the tourist map. How quickly the character of Athens changed. The sun beating down unmercifully, and the blacktop pavement heat punishing, I had a revelation of Athens. I thought of all the times I'd dined at Parthenon Restaurants in Midwest USA, how every time there would be some mural painting of Greece on the wall. I had hopped into one of them! Genetically crossed with the most outstandingly dirty Manhattan imagery I could mentally summon!

It was so gloriously Third World I fell in love with the city all over. One of the strangest sights was a billboard advertisement, faded from the sun. It was of a Greek family smiling around their son, who was typing away at an

old block of a computer that must have been one of those green-screen Apple's from the 1980's.

It was an ad for a computer college that might've well been from a Tim & Eric Awesome Show sketch; something you'd expect to see alongside a highway in a snapshot from Hussein's Iraq, or perhaps Yemen.

I turned the corner and found black trash bags filled with hardcover books in the Greek language, many of them on World War II. I dug through them in splendor before realizing how pointless it was, since I had no room to carry them, let alone the ability to maintain more weight, let alone read the indecipherable print.

I made it through more streets, all with that same business suit/army surplus/hardware store invariance – this time shaken up with betting parlors and ice cream shops. Everywhere you went, Greeks eating ice cream! They were people of my heart and temperament. Eventually I chose one at random and waited in line.

As I was about to order some Rocky Road, the smiling chubby shopkeeper was diverted from my sale by a breaking news announcement on the TV's hung above. The shop filled with resting men looked to the screens.

A very low-tech new broadcast looking like it was from 1989 appeared, with equally low-tech supers. The anchorman made a speech and cut to hand held footage of a highway at night. In the shaky video, a cop was stationary on his motorcycle. Suddenly, 8 men blitzkrieg & began beating the living shit out of him with wooden lumber 4x4's & tire irons.

They dragged the cop off his chopper and started kicking him on the ground. One of the attackers, inhumanly energized, sprinted like a cartoon and catapulted his groin onto the motorcycle as if a super hero. He kick started it and sped off, stealing the bike while the men continued their beat down, one guy giving the finger and muttering some kind of Grecian 'Fuck You' to the imperiled office.

Then it cut back to the anchor. The entire ice cream shop reacted ecstatic – they jolted up, laughing & clapping with standing ovations, laughing like hyenas, high 5-ing each other!

Even the cheery faced fat man behind the counter, with his white ice cream man's hat and apron like an illustrated stereotype from a children's book, was laughing with a mighty boom!

It took him awhile to regain composure, turning to me with a great smile. He handed me a mountain of sugary cold on a pointed cone, and I sat among the legions of elated giggly pig haters in welcomed air conditioning.

Language barriers permitting, some things are just universal. Everyone gave me a friendly nod as if to say: "*the crazy American is one of us!*" As I re-entered the street the fuzzy peak of the weed had tapered off, and now I was in that slow vacuum that characterizes the end of a proper stoning.

I never quite wanted to be vanquished from the Athenian sun bearing down. It pierces the epidermis and pours out the toxins. Only here, on this stretch of land, was this singular hue of light gracefully arriving like the unintended slivers of a bereft spotlight. It was as if the soil attracted it itself, the landscape nursing the sun in reverse like a confused photosynthesis...

Greece & "The Singularity" were homies. One can only get lost in a metropolitan labyrinth so much before feeling abandoned by your past incarnation, who only several hours prior led you off on a wild goose chase of structural eye candy. If there is no quest sharply influencing one's eternal compass, all you eventually become to your self is a foggy notion, as if a forgotten impulse gone wayward midst foreign buildings.

Thus, I found an internet cafe and arranged the interview with Mr. Fragos in an hour near the historical museum. It was a needed jolt to return to my overall mission as to keep the mind clearly pointed.

Well, there I was, on my way to meet Sakis and now descending an escalator on the fringe of Monastiraki, gliding to a subterranean train system.

Admittedly, the entrance to this Metro Station was freaky & grimy. The iron gate was three-quarters open, looking as if the latch was broken and the transportation authorities had no money to fix it.

White tiling surrounded it's edges, nasty with oily finger smudges. A Romani trio were panhandling on a filthy blanket – the veiled woman begging and praying, one man passed out and another gazing off emptily with that hard-boiled “gypsy stare.”

Reaching the lower floors, pale brown floor tiles were massive squares, flanked by tan walkway tiles. The decor – most likely created in the 1970's – was tacky and deteriorating.

It looked as if the Greeks had modeled their subway line in the polyester leisure suit era, with mock pillars and sculptured molding like a fun house of mythological flashiness. They summoned many of the visuals I'd yet to interconnect – this renovation was all over Athens.

They had built their city to reflect their permanent tourism economy. But now even these fake ruins were becoming actual ruins – a living museum caked on top of the ancient one, at every turn symbolizing the excesses of modern Capitalism which have unfortunately chosen Greece as the lowest rung of the burden, where the swine avarice of Modern World has reached and – if we're lucky – becomes another myth once our current order collapses & regenerates.

One day the humanity of the future will tell their children about the International Monetary Fund vultures the way we now speak of the Griffin. The current world is doomed to be a myth. Greece was an important cradle of civilization, and it is again now too. The ironical end of our inevitable, penultimate World Stock Market Crash now volleys into Grecian borders like a spastic shell of aluminum landing from a mad game of Kick The Can.

And so, in a story fit for the Old Gods, for Homer, for Seferiadies, for Plato, for the rest – the fate of the wider world may very well originate here.

If humanity is to rise again, I do believe it resides here, within Grecian boundaries. America is no longer the melting pot – it is the silent struggle of Greece’s soul, it’s raised fist attitude harnessing the quick of life that will set the example for mankind to come – if he so wishes to surrender the ignorance of his indifference.

So anyways, blah blah deedle-dum, I hopped onto the red line Metro and was sped 3 stops away, where the tacky forced architecture adopted artifacts housed into it’s walls behind enclosed glass. It was something of a free museum corridor, just to wet your whistle. It opened up to a high ceiling, blocky area of that tan & brown look, but composed also of polished marble blocks.

I joined the human traffic stomping up the broken escalator in this obvious Athenian “rush hour” – men in suits, carrying leather briefcases & women in skirts looking like subdued, sleepy eyed secretaries shuffling home to take a nap.

We reached the opening, and again the burning daylight was before me. It was then, unexpected as a daylight mugging, that I stumbled onto the most gruesome sight I’d ever witnessed.

Above & beyond its horrific nature, the intertwining atmosphere in which it bore presence unfurled a symbolism which was blazing. This fragmented glimpse of life, unfortunately bestowed upon my memory, was iconic. Had the wider world access to my haunted recollection, a Pulitzer would be awarded, instantly, both applauded & acclaimed by the stupefied academic community.

With the human traffic flooding by, heads down in quietly in silent ignoring, lay a burnt mound of human flesh somehow still living.

His face only showing a quarter resemblance as to his human origin, the rest of this obviously once handsome 20something man was shriveled and distorted such as a raisin. With one arm a nub cut short of the elbow, and his

other a tiny nub, they reached out to me, hauntingly, desperately, begging for money, for food.

When I looked into his horrid blue eye, I saw the real request of his mannerism dynamics – from his own personal hell he reached out to me, begging for death. “*Kill me, kill me*” was his silent mantra, unspeakable, his jaw partially removed and tongue most likely gone. Before him was a filthy hat one might find discarded in a dumpster, frayed and torn, with maybe .37 odd cents tossed to him.

Flanked by the artistically fake ruins built upon real ruins, the horror was too much to bare. I looked away (and I am a man who never looks away). I feel that mankind must never ignore the abyss, never look away in willful ignorance at the worst elements of human suffering – as to better deescalate future calamity from the lessons it teaches. Prevent the catastrophe, and aid the most starving & wounded of earth.

But there was nothing I could do for him. The charms of American Street World had no relevance to such titanic suffering. What use was a Free Therapy sign, Sharpie scrawled on cardboard?

There was no program in which to direct him, no knowledge I could affront. I walked away quickly, just to recoup, promising myself I would return shortly.

I wanted to do something, anything. I removed my blue suit coat from the travel pack – something that was luxury weight and took up to match backpack real estate anyway. At least I could make him feel “fly”, and get him a cheap swarma.

I smoked a cigarette, wondering how he’d been afflicted with this cursed fate. Was he a protester caught in the wrong place at the wrong time? Did wayward petrol smash through his apartment window? Was he battling riot police and consumed by the “friendly fire” of some desperate, lunatic anarchist? Some deranged Lone Wolf that acts out of hatred and retribution?

I went back to find the heartbreakingly deformed man. With my blue suit coat in hand and a smile on my face I turned the corner and found empty cement. He had vanished as quickly as it was ghostly. I felt awful. I wanted to help, and was impotent...

Thus, I proceeded to the nearby cafe, where a very business-like Sakis Fragos was seated outside and having a drink. He was a large-framed man that looked as if his family belonged to hard weathered fisherman throughout Greek history. He had a shaved head & eye-glasses, and was obviously quite intelligent by his demeanor. I slunk into the chair across from the mid-30s man and ordered a coffee...

“...most bands in Greece live in Athens, come from Athens... The late 80s early 90s we had a good scene in extreme metal that continues today. I think the most prominent band is Rotting Christ, since the late 80s, and they have never stopped. Their career is going up and up, but they’ve slightly changed their style. Then we have Septic Flesh, which is another very old band. We have a band called NightFall which used to be more well known in the past – the first Greek band to sign to a foreign label in the 90s. These are the triptykon that make Greece’s metal name well known. FIREWIND is coming now, they are playing power metal different from the extreme metal bands. The guitarist from Ozzy Osbourne is in this band. The other band that's really well known these days is Suicidal Angels, touring with world known thrash bands like Kreator. Good reviews all over the world. We also have a very strong epic power metal scene; this kind of music is not big in other countries in the world, except Germany and Italy. We have many thrash bands and we even create a scene now with more modern bands. I think in Greece we have a problem of supporting our bands. I mean most people play and think if the other band gets good reviews, has bigger live shows its somehow bad for them. It’s good for them, helps them! Boycotting bands, not supporting,

saying bad things to one another – this is not what should happen. Because we have some good bands that do not get the exposure they should have, not from the press but from the people. People don't give local bands the credit they really deserve sometimes. The bands, if they release a demo or some stuff on the internet – its as if they create a band to get some free beers and get some women... but that's not the main purpose, or goal. So these are things that hold the Greek scene from being better and greater. Greek people do not trust the bands & the bands don't always have trust in each other.”

“Do most people just fly in for the concerts? I know it is tough to drive through the Balkans, and the smaller states aren't such a huge payout for even the bigger touring bands, so they stick to more familiar lucrative territory...”

“Almost all shows are at the center of Athens. 70% come by airplane, but 30% come with tour bus. But air tickets are not so cheap to come into Athens. We have very expensive tickets even if you fly from Sweden. It's really added in the cost of a live show. The venues are sometimes very expensive to be rented – €3000 is lots of money. We have very strict laws; the taxes are very high for a live show, especially with a foreign band. We have laws that are 100 years old. We pay everything – the rights of musicians taxes to the state its like 13%.”

“Does this come from antiquated laws?”

“It's a very strange law that you have to pay in the city of Athens – you have to pay a tax because you are holding a concert. It's called something like... even if it s a theatrical play you have to pay the state 6 or 7% of a ticket. This means the state is your partner – almost 20% of each ticket. So you also have to pay the band, the owner, the rent, the back line. This is why shows are expensive here and most of them are over €25. People cannot afford €30 for one club show, but it cannot be done another way. Too many taxes, too expensive venues, too expensive flights, bands want more &more.

They cannot earn money from the sales and they get it from the merchandise. They cannot understand the situation we are in and they will not agree to take less money. We have many people doing concerts and the price gets higher and higher and they bid on it.”

“Does Thessaloniki have the same laws?”

“Yes it’s the same thing, but the expectancy and fees are lower. But they have the same problem – and not too many people to attend because of the crisis.”

“You’ve met tons of musicians in your career...”

“It’s always interesting when you meet your idols. It’s always... interesting. However it’s also interesting to see people are not the way you have imagined. So I do not want to say names, but I’ve met some people and I didn’t want to listen to their music anymore.”

“Who were you not disappointed by?”

"I think that Ronnie James Dio was a person that was so humble and kind, and treated people as special human beings. I think he was very gifted.”

“What were some of the best interviews you ever did?”

“The best? I could tell you some of the worst. #1 is the late Chuck Schuldiner of Death. I’m a big fan of his music. The only thing I could say... This interview was surely done many years ago, the late 90s. This guy had an obsession that people... he had a persecution mania. He had an obsession that people were after him and wanted him to fail. And whenever you asked question about his former members, he didn’t like that. The magazine i used to work back then called Metal Invader – another guy was asking him about his former members. And Chuck hung up the phone. This guy that did the interview was the one who had arranged for him to come to Athens for the one and only time. He was the one who literally arranged the show of Death and he got told that if Chuck saw him, from the stage – because he knew him, personally – then he would go off the stage and cancel the show. So when I

did the interview after, he was preoccupied against me and the media I was working for. He was expecting questions about his behavior but I didn't ask him, because I knew that. So the last question was about the former members – he and his tour manager stop the tape recorder and said 'I won't be answering these kind of silly questions, that's what you do,' and he was selling somethings. And I told him – 'That's what I wanted to see – I wanted to see myself what a big asshole you are.' And unfortunately I was right. And he stood and thought for a second and told me: 'Okay you're right, you're right – let's answer this question.' And now I didn't want an answer, I just wanted to see your attitude. And again, I'm telling you I love his music... Another one was Zack Wylde. This was 6 or 7 years ago. He's so 'American Guy.' He was burping, he was saying fuck every three words. Look it's his opinion, but its always something – I love his music, but let's not talk about history and America and all this stuff. We wont be pro American or pro Greek, or what have you... Another person, Dave Mustaine – he's a fantastic person to do an interview because you don't know how he's going to react to anything. I've done face to face and phone interviews, and i never know if he's going to hang up because of the questions. I was kind of afraid the first time when I was younger, but the next i was laughing and saying It's OK, he's a kind of person – you cannot expect anything from him. He could be laughing – he has this enigmatic face. You get this ironic face that you cannot judge if he's laughing, angry, if he's going to hit you in the face. And i really like these kind of persons. Anytime you interview Mustaine it's a challenge."

"Well, about the crisis..."

"Right now... the European union has imposed some very strict measures on the Greek people that they simply cannot afford to live with. What can you do when you lose 40% of your salary? You have created a life where you must do everything with a small mound of money every month. When you are a civil servant you cannot lose your job. So when you have a

40% reduction on your state, even on your pension – how can an aged man or woman live with €300 a month? How could it be? I am 38 years old and most my friends live with €700 a month. You simply cannot live with this money. The unemployment percentage is 25%. 1 out of 4 does not have a job, and the other 3/4 might work part time. This affects everything. Our fellows in Europe have not understood that. It's not the people from Greece that have taken this money – it's politicians and the politicians will not get this money from the rich people because they support them. They take it from middle class. Now there is only rich and poor, and it is a plan to destroy Greece. And what have we done so wrong? In Germany there is a wave of people saying: 'fuck Greece, they are stealing money, they are liars.' Well, you know, these people, Germany, some decades ago, destroyed Greece completely, and we got nothing from them. And we didn't ask for them, for this money, and we tried to rebuild Greece from what they had done to us with our own money. Why are these German people so fierce? that's the sense of the European union to help each other, not sink the country. just try to help. and now we have some politicians that do whatever some strong people say to them to do, they get elected and they do the opposite thing they promised the people. you simply cannot imagine what kind of extra taxes we are paying the last couple of years. we pay for the house we live, the house we rent, the electricity bill. you pay tax for everything you have and extra taxes for your job, because you have a company, because you drink beer. whatever you earn you just give to the state in form of extra taxes."

"Sounds like Michigan... is health care gone too? can you get a second job?"

"You get €500 for a full time job. You could get a part time job, but if you are a civil servant, you are not allowed to do that. You get €700. Because if you work for the state the law is that you work for the state you will not lose your job therefore you do not need to work somewhere else. This time

they have said they will fire some people, some civil servants, reduced their salaries 30-40% and say you cannot have a second job. The thing is you cannot find a second job. We have so many fired people, so many shops closed, you simply cannot understand if you do not live here. Some legendary market streets in Athens have shops that are up for rent. A few years ago you could never imagine the possibility of closing a shop in this place. It can't even be rented! No one wants it. If they start a business they will lose it all."

"Are people moving to other countries in large numbers?"

"Yeah, yeah. Today my wife's brother left to the United States with his family forever. Both our lawyers – a very good job – and they lost 4/5th of their income. People could not afford to pay them. There are so many law cases that are being solved in up to 5 years times. Every day you always have strikes – the lawyers, every month. In Germany the immigrants are unwanted. In many cases I hear they go to Germany to find a job like in the late 60s or 70s. And then they get back with some money they had. They went to Germany and they could not even find a house to rent because they wouldn't rent it to them because they are from Greece. That's racist."

"What was the last big protest?"

"The riots are not only from people that are protesting – they are people from the state, the government, the police creating riots to disorientate the media and public opinion."

"Provocateurs?"

"Every time! When someone tried to step towards parliament they throw chemicals and tear gas, all this stuff, and they create riots, even in the metro stations they throw tear gas. People cannot breathe."

"When was the first big protest?"

"December 2009. A policeman killed a young guy that was protesting and I hadn't seen such riots in my whole life. I mean, you see the city center of Athens, and almost half the shops had broken glasses. The post office was

burned. All the banks were burned, all the banks. I can see thousands of cars were burned. I even stepped out the house to see what was happening and parked my car in a basement lot – I wasn't allowed to do that but I needed to save it. Everything was burning... it was something you had to see. Most people had left to their houses to go to hotels to sleep because the tear gases went into their homes. If you walked outside it wouldn't be possible without protection. From this time on we've been having 3 or 4 very strong riots, but nothing was compared to that – nothing. Last summer my wife was pregnant and over here, working, and there were some riots in city centre. I immediately came to take her home and was seeing policeman with wooden sticks hitting tourists, as if they were protesters. This place! This is The Acropolis museum! For gods sake this is the tourist place of Athens, and there were policeman on motorcycles hitting with wooden sticks even tourists. They didn't care! They even hit people outside the Athens museum. They are even hitting people that earn the same money as them, have the same problem as them and they act as if they are the enemies... Now we have no politicians who can walk alone. We were having many attacks, people hitting them with eggs and yogurts. If they go to a restaurant for example, and get seen. Like the former minister of economics. He stated a lot in his interviews that he cannot have a cup of coffee with his wife. Of course! Because you're an asshole! You've sunk the country! I mean, why can you have – I cannot have a cup of coffee because I cannot afford it. Why should you have a cup of coffee with your wife? You don't deserve it..."

***Back to Syntagma and then Monastiraki I went, again filling my belly with cheap swarma until the stomach poked the spine out of place. It felt so good to hurt as such.

I recalled my alleyway sleeping quarters had been compromised earlier, and thought this would be a good occasion to seek out the cheapest hotel room I could find. I wanted to, if only for the experience.

The Hotel Exarhion across from the main square and it's motley assemblage of rebels was perfectly accommodating. The room was €30. The Old Man at the front desk refused my payment – he whipped out a gigantic book where you sign yourself in old school style like an official log.

Yes, he could take my money, as it was explained, but that's the way they do it there – you pay in the morning. It's an honor system approach. Your hand is shaken like a man and as a man with respect to the other man you get your man room to unfurl your tools, suits & army surplus gear like an ever-upgrading prepper midst this permanent financial doomsday.

The room felt very Turkish; everything was orange and white. The doors felt thin and the rug was a very 70's brown. I had a balcony with which to watch the square from above. After a shower & a nap, I turned on the TV. Random Greek-language music stations & low-tech public access stuff.

Every TV channel of course had its own Greek oriented broadcast. I finally stumbled onto Men In Black with subtitles, oddly watching the film from the aliens perspectives and not the protagonists. The sunset after it's ripe red glow off the dresser and I head to Exarhion at night. It had the vibe of a Friday night party on the dark side of a bridge, getting rowdy and avoiding patrolling cops.

Tons of people were out, the clubs roaring. One street dweller approached me, trying to do that “cool guy helping out the tourist” shtick to get a few beers out of me. I knew his game and did not care – I just liked the fellows style. He had a light blue silk shirt & straw fedora. We talked about other areas of the city as he split a finely rolled joint – provided I buy him another beer.

Homeboy bounced, and after silently watching the action for an hour, I slipped back into my hotel room. I was lonely, certainly, but I was grizzled from travel. I felt amnesic yet electrified, exhausted and in no shape to hold a conversation with some spontaneous bar date below. Greece was busy speaking to me, and I couldn't mute it's tirade.

None of these tourist people would continue speaking with me if I told them I flew in to sleep in alleys with Moroccan scarp dealers? I got's game, ya know, but what works among my own twisted brood is inclined to shock them, most often intentionally.

From the balcony the stars were a powerhouse, and the roofs of the other high rise buildings cut across the horizon like a CGI rendered silhouette. Every iota of this image within my recollection is graced. I felt, for once, that I was exactly where I was supposed to be – even if a 3rd World hotel...

I woke up naked with little ants crawling all over me. At first I thought they were bedbugs and panicked. When I realized they were normal, I gave up and drifted back to sleep, letting my friends explore my epidermis terrain.

I soon took a shower, blasted all my socks with the bathroom sink, and dried them on the sunny balcony before my departure. Life was bustling down in Exarhion Square.

I walked down the long marble staircase and signed out in the big book, gladly paying the old hotel proprietor. After yet another swarma lunch, I struck up a conversation with a young painter named Alex. Getting filled in on the enigmatic blanks I had on Greek politics was quite a lesson. He'd lived in Barcelona a year & just returned, renting a studio overlooking Exarhion.

He took me to his creative work space and spared no venom toward the vultures that dismantled his country. We smoked some fine hashish-laced herb with me as he explained that all Greek politicians had to have bodyguard at all times and could not enter public or they would be attacked.

And no Greeks even wanted to accept their business as a matter of national dignity. Their entire bureaucratic class were protected by bodyguard Mercenaries, ex-Iranian Republican Guards and the like. No Greek would protect them!

I thought the country had swung to the left following the international nervousness throughout the EU when members of The Golden Dawn were swept into office in a streak of unsuspected victories. Greeks were voting in Neo-Fascists marching with torches? *Then handing it to the left wing Socialists in the next elections??*

NO – the reality of it was like a terrible in-joke, the primordial belly-laughing madness at the foot of the derangement colossus. Earlier Nikos mentioned it briefly – what was really going on was politicians had cut the “red tape” so people could now *bet on political elections!*

The Greeks were using social media to conspiratorially rig the election as a nationwide effort to favor the highest point spread pay-out on the betting board! The Nazis had a +12 handicap being the underdogs, so the payout was 12 fold!!

Everyone banked – and they weren’t too worried about the fascists anyway cause they’d just vote them out of power in the next nationally-rigged sweep! It had now gone on like this for years – the country literally betting away their future on whatever fringe party popped up! *It was absurd!*

Another day before I left for Milan, again to sleep on the streets. The day passed dreamily; I went for a long walk, drifting bereft businesses. Everything was dirt cheap, everywhere. I’d gotten a little lost & popped my head into a book store for directions. The lone man behind the counter – with his shiny bald block of a head, set down what he was reading.

With a booming, epic voice he gave directions. Whoever this guy was, he spoke with such power as I have never experienced elsewhere. The

ground shook. Staring back at me, I froze like an animal in headlights. I thanked him after moments of staring blankly, and he slowly picked back up his book.

Soon I met the guitarist from After Dusk – a classic power metal vs melodic death act – for an exclusive interview for MetalRules.com (**Google it if you wish to read it!*). We had a good discussion regarding the Athens metal scene & After Dusk's latest record “The Devil Got His Soul.”

Afterwards, I just kept walking. By nightfall, I was determined to wander The Acropolis before heading off into the seedier bars. I was off the “metal work time clock” and no longer needed to write about it some day in the future. This would be a night just for me.

But first I wanted to find “The Burned Man.” I set out to the metro station he haunted yesterday, but was nowhere. I looked all over – he’d vanished. Whoever he was, he’d stalk my memory for life. I saw in his figure the lowest rungs of suffering the homeless can endure, and it made my empathy grow boundlessly to the plight of the displaced.

I tried giving my suit coat to another homeless man with 1 arm, but he wasn't interested. Eventually I took a trip to the €1 store to gather items. The metro it was located at was a sparse one, with plenty of land to sprawl out like a public park. At it’s most comfortable looking edge lay a purple lotus tree.

I spread the suit coat beneath me like a blanket & stretched out beneath the sky which soon turned a dark purple into a solid night. The stars were brighter from this iota of earth than in the whole of Texas. Nowhere else on Earth did I feel the constellations were as dignified.

I'd soon make my way to the ruins of The Acropolis, just to get my own nocturnal tour apart from any tourist chatter, and then off to who knows where. But that, my friends, is all for the deep well of personal experience. εμπρός , προς τα εμπρός , και ποτέ δεν υποχωρώ...

RETURN TO FORTRESS EUROPE

All Roads To Rome (Part IV: Italy 2012)

Ocean, sprawling forever into limitless horizon, blue like the eyes I yearn to see gazing at me forever. “She” is not at the other end though – just the rocky coast of Albania where, I am told, only on rare days such as this can one view it with hawk-eye clarity.

I'm at a rock formation atop a rocky cliff on the seaside. I think it's Torre Sant-Andrea. not far from Torre Dell' Orso beach in Melendungo, where I am currently a Super-Tramp Beach Bum. I'm not too far from Lecce, in the southern tip of Italy.

Here there is a small formation – a large rock-cave randomly apart from the others, standing upright like a cracked seed; a sky-opening above hollowed by nature & dug-out chair semi-carved inside. A naturally worn hole in its “floor” is lit up from the light above; it shines downwards into blue tropic-like waters below, with schools of fishies visible to the naked eye.

This place has been the scene of wedding proposals & hot romance since the dawn of man. Everyone in Italy knows this place.

And it is here – in this travel memory – where I like to stay. No, I'm not here with a romance prospect – just my geeked Italian buddy, a local, boisterously enthused to be showing 'round The American. He's been a lifelong resident of this terrain; he knows it all – every last nook & cranny. And he is adamant on delivering me to the natural beauty of his home world: “*Vedrai La Bellezza!!*”

A few days ago, I'd flown out of Greece & into Milan – a great starting point to soak up the fact that I was now in Italia. It's important to “ring out” the previous country you visited like a sopping wet sponge before

you are apt enough to exit the plane, bus, etc. You touch ground, and all sorts of new juices spill. You've no choice but to absorb.

Sometimes you gotta hang on the fringes, “people watch,” make a quiet day of observing your habitat, figuring out bus & train routes while eating sandwiches in parks. Milan was one of those.

I'd been here during the original *Fortress Europe* travel, in July 2011. I woke up in Helsinki, flew to Milan, and got interviewed for Vice Magazine at The Duomo, a Catholic religious landmark with cardinal clergymen mummified in glass cases.

Here I return, June 2012, almost a year later – and what do my circumstantial odds favor? The same journalist from Vice meets up with me in the exact same area as before!

We hang, get drinks, and again I sleep on the street hobo-style in the exact same spot as the year before. I've slept outside many times, but of all the places I ever have, this was quite a cozy corner. I recommend everyone should pass out drunk there, at least once in a lifetime.

Anyway, I woke & took a long walk – reacquainted myself with the vibe of the city. Prepared, I then go to Occupy Milan – or whatever was left of it. Just a few tents outside a government building & 30 protesters – mostly 20-somethings, college kids & working poor. And a bunch of cops still standing around, looking bored, just wanting it to be over & go home...

Last week Occupy Milan had been pushed out of their encampment by the Italian Army – *who'd surrounded them with tanks!* They'd taken over a skyscraper in the heart of the city, squatted it & held it for weeks! Only extreme legal & para-military SWAT threats & blockaded attrition got them to vacate.

I met with an Occupy Milan protester who gave an articulate interview, explaining there was no longer minimum wage in Italy – the gov made it so employers could just pay anything they wanted! €2 an hour or less!

The protester said 1 out of every 4, perhaps 1 out of 3 Italians were now unemployed . Everyone was moving to India – not other parts of Europe – to go make big \$\$\$ and for a number of reasons. India was a big boom for Italians since many phone company techs & sex hot-lines routed calls there.

India is a hub for call center networks and it's lucriveness is in it's dirt-cheap negotiated deals with the industry. And to have an Italian & English & [Insert Language Here] call center tech person is an easy 15 euros an hour & an easy 50 euro monthly apartment.

He said Berlusconi being driven from power as Prime Minister didn't change much, just created more opportunist politicians to take his place. Berlusconi infuriated everyone – he was a ridiculous clown they could not suppress or make go away. It took an absurd amount of years to get him out.

Somehow, he charmed the country into allowing him an entrenchment in power. It's like they let him get away with a soft-belly Dictatorship, knowing he wasn't a military madman just a ship cruise singer & TV CEO.

Berlusconi was the Italian Equivalent of a Donald Trump – a glitzy rich guy sleazing his way into the limelight. Trying to play “cool rich guy” on TV, making himself a part of sporting events, cultural events & so forth.

Dear Americans, just imagine if somehow Donald Trump actually became our President 1 day – then just changed all the laws of term limits & stayed in power 20+ years! While still body-slammng Vince McMahon at every *Wrestlemania*! Yeah right, as if Americans could ever be stupid enough to let that happen. There's no way they'd ever sink that low.

Berlusconi is finally gone now, drummed out of power by ethics scandals. And just like Mussolini whom he quietly emulated, he drove away from Parliament after being fired in disgrace, without fanfare. Like Benito on that German Truck, he drove away from his career, a crowd of activists laughing & mocking him, and no politicians waving goodbye.

Goodbye *Perdente*. And just as the *politico scherzo* fades into history, soon the last lights of Occupy Milan shall die too. They wouldn't last much longer. The "Occupy Wave" reached fever-pitch worldwide by forcefully bringing the mentality of anarchist squat culture into the public square in a dramatic way that was collectively staged & hyped by social media.

It was anarchist-styled consciousness haphazardly erupting & fortifying itself on the front doorstep of every Mayoral Mansion & suburban soccer mom homestead & law enforcement professionals' lawn in America. They didn't know how to respond.

These regular blue-blood Americans weren't aware that any of this stuff was even going on out there. If you tried to tell them about European Squats, they'd think it a wild fantasy. Maybe some weird shit like that was out there in some strange post-Communist country, but not here in America. No way could the USA be quietly brimming with "these types," so readily available to create civilizations from scratch & surprisingly adept at doing so.

And once they "caught wind" of "Anonymous" – which is essentially a prank and not any kind of organization – they couldn't be dissuaded that there was no actual menace to pin some kind of blame, and these scary online vandals were brewing some crazy *Fight Club* thing that made no sense...

So I hopped on a train & went 12 hours south to a random beach 'cause I was told it was the most beautiful beach in all of Italy – *and Europe* – by some Italians I met at a squat in London. And on the Train I met this dude Allesandro, who became intent on giving me the ultimate vacation.

And it is at this beach where I still am pretending to be – Torre Dell'Orso, the beachiest beach in the whole wide world. I'd be leaving it soon for Rome as to finish my journalism mission, but here I wished to stay with it's white sand & uncompromising sun...

In Rome I had to pull it together – would I return to The States? Or would I join 50+ foreign language dating websites trying to get a European woman to adopt me. Someone, somewhere wanted a green card...

When I shoved off from beach town, I had to take 10 hour night train to Rome. At 3am, we switched trains in the middle in farmland countryside. My alarm went off & I stumbled out to the platform; the train wooshed away...

I took one look down the dirty, 3rd World train station – packs of Roma everywhere, sleeping in huddles with shivs, knives, hatchets, axes laid out in blankets next to them. This was not a xenophobic perception – they seemed ready to butcher wolves if need be, or fight brown bears & lynx in savage hand-to-hand combat!

One by one they wake – all noticing me, motioning to each other. I tried to ignore them, but more kept waking. They began picking up weapons & lurching towards me! As the dirty, crazed mob enclosed upon me – like misshapen freak villagers from some Jodorowsky film – the train pulled up & I hopped on, zooming off to Rome in the nick of time! *Bloody Hell Man!*

I rolled in jamming DeadMau5 & got off at Cavour B Metro Stop. All roads had led me to Rome – I was finally on the streets of the ancient capitol, zig-zagging cobbled streets.

Soon I made it to Welt Yama Tattoo – the rock n' roll blasting shop where metal guys get their ink done. I talked to the main guy and, in a nutshell, he told me the metal scene in Rome was good again, starting over from 10 years of silence.

Since the end of the 90s electronic music got huge, and everything went downhill the next 10 years without many concerts. The new generation was back to rock n roll & old-school metal, thanks to social media. Doom was getting big, the most non-commercial metal there is.

I darted over to the Roman Empire's infamous Coliseum, where hundreds of thousands hacked each other to pieces for the entertainment of bloodthirsty folks wanting their “bread & circus.”

Standing outside you feel insulted. All that power & the world at their feet – yet they just feed the poor to lions. Woo ha – so classy.

Went for a wander, slept at the park. Soon as I was up, Gabbo Giaccari from Orange Man Theory arrived. All the gratitude in the world to this guy, because he hooked up everything pleasant over the next few days.

That night we went to the most well-known of the underground music studios. Most guys from the band Inferno were there (Sci-Fi Grind N' Roll) and Gabbo himself. We all sat down for an interview (**and apologies for leaving the Inferno musician unnamed – could not find the info anywhere!*)

Gabbo: “Well you are speaking with people with 10 or 15 years in music here. I think everybody will start with this studio – it was 'the must' for every underground band in Rome. My first band here, he was the producer [*points to the guy from Inferno, to be known as “*”*].

**: a band growing up in Italy is like growing up in the third world – Italy for metal is like the underground of the underground...*

Gabbo: “The last 10 years I played Europe, USA & South America. Today I think Italy & Rome is not that bad because when a guy playing in Rome think about playing in USA – always thinking about paradise where everyone is going to the show, a lot of money & stuff. But going there – now you know how it works. We played in New York to maybe 3 people, in a show with 10 bands that each band play and then go away without listening to the other, and everybody with these drum [*mocks carrying equipment*]...”

**: At least in Italy you will have a crowd of band.*

Gabbo: “Yeah, at least in Italy you will play for bands. So yeah, is not that bad here. There is not too much fight between promoters and bands. Most people are friends with bands, promoters, studios.

“Is power metal still big in Italy?”

Gabbo: “Maybe some years ago, but not now...”

**: “Also now it's a total different scene. In the area of 2000 all the sort of hardcore stuff was stronger, but – what I'm feeling right now is a lot of people just remained linked to this scene from the best of it. They don't want to listen to new bands cause the late 90s, early 2000s were the best of it, so people think there will be no more good music. Also in Rome there is like 6 million people. In evidence, we have something like 3 or 4 venues.”*

“Do you have to pay to rent the venues, like in Greece?”

Gabbo: “If you wanna play you don't have to pay – but if you just go to a venue and ask, is not that easy. If there is someone who produce they leave it to management – they do the booking & work.

**: “And we know all 3 or 4 of these guys. And all the owners want to be totally safe when setting up a gig... Also, I wanted to come back to something – he was talking about the scene in the late 90's – or the early 2000 and I'm not sure this lack of a scene – maybe people in Rome are used to thinking about the bands as belonging to a particular scene. So as of now there are very good different bands but not belonging to a particular scene. Its really hard for the common DIY or underground music fan to categorize them. In Rome we are more concentrated... When we started touring with Inferno – the band start in 2002. And we started playing in Europe in 2004. What we felt about touring Italy – especially in the north – there was a lot of clones of what was happening in that 6 months in the US. All the bands play metalcore, then emo, then the next big style in next 6 months. Support bands were always different but it was always the same music – they were cloning themselves and something better from the USA.”*

“So Gabbo, you toured South America – how was that?”

“This was the band Mantra, from Costa Rica. They came touring Italy and needed help to organize a show. So I help them then they ask me to play guitar the whole tour. The 2nd guitarist never came on tour! So I start to play with them & they brought me to Mexico to tour 1 month. Then Costa Rica, Guatemala. And it ended playing with Helloween in Costa Rica! It was a strange experience for me – I was 21 years old. Then I know other guys in Mexico that tour with Mantra – now each year I go back for one tour with this Mexican band and then tour with Mantra. I visit Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay all these countries it was good, very strange. Sometimes I have to cross the border with really bad van, or to cross the border between Argentina and Paraguay – I have to cross with a boat, in a river, illegally, because the Mexican people had no visa. So we call the promoter – 'no worry, I will pay the police. You will come by me with boat.' Haha! So OK, lets do this. Haha. So we had a show that night. Which was incredible, because nobody go to play there. So when you tour these places people go crazy because they never see a metal band live, or not so often, and never from another country. The day after – when we have to get back, they have to pay like 5 different police in each police stop! One year we have to cross Mexico to Guatemala and we played El Salvador where its like a civil war, more or less – so every shop, every house was like a cell. You could not enter inside. You could just choose the thing you want to buy and they'd give you. And the supermarket was police with shotguns. It was incredible. The show was like 2000 people headbanging, and everything. Now when I think of these shows, I'm a little scared about it. That I made it out? But it was really good. Colombia is an amazing scene – hardcore and metal. We played in Columbia, with Orange Man Theory, opening for Sick Of It All in Bogota. It was very cool. But when you have to cross Columbia – 'pay attention when you cross, maybe the guerrilla come...'

I woke on a couch in a quietly peaceful apartment, with 1970's carpeting & random framed paintings on the walls. We were at Gabbo's; we drank coffee, swung by his storage space & then drove to his mother's apartment for lunch.

On the TV buildings were shown cracked & ruinous – a heavy earthquake had struck central Italy. It was one of the strongest in some time, and they'd been waiting as a culture many years for “The Big One.” Unlike the rest of Europe, Italy had that California paranoia – the ground could swallow you any moment.

Gabbo's mom was hooking up a 5 course Italian meal, bopping around the kitchen & having him translate various sentences to me. Soon, the low-key American guy hanging at the studio last night arrived with his lady partner in crime. Edgar & Gazelle – the doomy sludge band JUCIFER!

They were in the middle of a tour. Being a couple, and playing as a two-piece, they figured out how to tour Europe as some \$0 budget band – you buy an RV overseas and just live in it. You build a *mobile squat* on wheels.

And when you come back from tour, you just leave it there at a friendly spot for your return or sell it off. And you get really good ones for \$300 in România or Serbia. Pure road warrior, stockaded like a camping trip. None of this silly extra wheeled hitch for instruments connected to the bumper of some mega gas-guzzlin' American styled tough guy GI Joe van. You tour “Roma style.”

They were playing the next night & I'd be at that gig. It wasn't the moment to throw a sound recorder in their face, but it was the right moment to chow down. We stuffed our faces & talked every subject Americans of our breed want to chat after being submersed in Europe for months. It's like getting lost on acid at a music festival for hours but finally finding your friends after you forgot how you even got there in the first place...

Dropped off at the Metro Train (*or its equivalent*), I head straight for the EUR. Italians pronounce it “*eee-you-ray*” – it's not a place they like to hang out, and give tourists odd looks when they ask about it.

Rarely does a guy of my temperament find any interest, because it was something of a cursed, shunned land to all Italians and especially Romans. And a blonde haired, blue eyed white guy in a heavy metal t-shirt? They assume you're a fascist creep, not a history student.

As everyone knows, Italy got dragged into WWII during the Fascist Era. That bizarre reality was at it's zenith – but it was also at a tipping point where Mussolini was now following Hitler's “lead.” I say this in terms of “spectacle” or “propaganda showmanship.” Mussolini increasingly had to mimic Hitler's “next big thing.”

So just as the Germans were rebuilding downtown Berlin to be a new city centre for their “3000 year empire”, so too did Mussolini begin developing a section of Rome as the new centralized Fascist Government District, and in due, the new city centre of Rome for the Fascist Future.

It was to be a monument to the glory of Neo-Rome, created totally in postmodern futuristic style, as if a cross between Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and some 1970's sci-fi post-apocalypse film. And the EUR was littered with all manner of freakish, surreal art sculptures that the Fascists of 1936 thought Fascists in 2300 AD would appreciate.

But also it was an attempt to visualize the “Corporate State” – which, in the end, was discovered to be a totally bogus cardboard cut-out; a make-believe economy created by the illusion of propaganda. Mussolini set up the framework for a socialism that rendered Italy a hyper-aggressive business corporation, but no one actually ran any of the departments, nor was there contact between them.

“The Corporate State” was all “on paper” and never fully implemented. It was “smoke & mirrors” fed to Italians at newsreels before movies – and all

decisions went to his desk alone. He was a pure dictator pretending a new kind of economy.

Now Mussolini, being the dumbbell that he was, hitched Italy's caboose to the Nazi war machine. He waited to the very last minute when it seemed Hitler had won the war, and in greedy stupidity he ordered his troops into combat.

Famously, he commented he needed a few Italians dead in battle to get his share at the peace table. Rather not-so-famously, Benito's wife claims he was directly threatened by Hitler to join the war or be invaded & occupied. He seemed to very much understand things were not going to turn out well, but he'd created a beast that he no longer had control of.

Regardless of the fact that he never wanted another World War to happen, he still literally created it all – Mussolini is the pivotal villain of WWII because his negligence was so profound that it germinated the nightmare leading to 50 million dead.

The “ham” he was, the performance he played – it created the ghastly scenario where somehow all the desperate conditions were met where one of his Austrian psycho-stalker groupie fan boys took it upon himself to emulate Mussolini to the very point of fanatically taking over an entire civilized nation.

Without Mussolini there would never have been Hitler. Because of this hard fact, he can never be forgiven or rehabilitated. Mussolini can never be let “off the hook” (**pun intended*). Hitler's only defense was that he was mentally insane – yet admission of insanity does not excuse acts of inhumanity.

Mussolini on the other hand was totally rational, totally sane; he knew what he was doing and was always consciously an actor playing a part. He just never dreamed that his arrogance & belligerency & the glitzy nationalist carnival he was creating could ever somehow lead to a Hitler. But again, how could anyone? It is still no excuse.

No one man can be held more personally responsible for any history-shaping event as he, the Failed Duce, who at the end of the war tried to sneak away from his country like a rat. They caught him almost to Switzerland – in a Nazi military truck of retreating soldiers, pathetically disguised as the lowest class soldier in the Nazi Army.

Once long ago he tried to make all Italians speak the Northern Dialect and failed miserably. As is why the random Italian soldier who identified him on the truck intentionally said in Southern to his Captain: “*Hey Boss – we got Big Head!*”

Such an epic rise & fall of unspeakable karmic irony & nadir humiliation, and all of it so clearly going right back to him. As Above, So Below – the correspondences & structures & dynamics all emanate like a shock-wave from his existence.

So yes, back to the subject: “Theme Park Mussolini.” In Finland, these guys I met said the slang for tourists who visit WWII sites like Auschwitz or etc – Europeans jokingly call it “Theme Park Hitler.” I thought that was absolutely hilarious. In Italy though, no one knows what you mean by “Theme Park Mussolini.” *Don't even try it!*

The year prior I'd traveled to the square in Milan where Mussolini was hung up on hooks and his corpse beat with shoes. I just wanted to be there, soak up some of it's ghost.

This year, I wanted to go somewhere special – the EUR. As I was saying, it's this weird section of the city that was meant to be a new Fascist City Centre and site of the Worlds Fair 1942 – but they never completed the project. They were maybe 60% done when the country soon collapsed into a Nazi Occupation & Civil War.

After 1945, The EUR was left to sit unoccupied like an eerie abandoned carnival. No one wanted to live there, work there, even go there. Homeless people didn't even want to squat in it's buildings. Years went by,

and eventually Vincent Price's *Last Man On Earth* was shot there, because it's cryptic darkness.

Eventually it was turned into a business district for corporations outside of Italy! No one wanted to touch it, so they'd stick all foreign corporations in it's pocket who would never care the history. The rest became various government buildings, Italian post office mail processing centers, city vehicle parking lots enclosed by barb wire.

The only major landmark people seemed to visit was the Civiltà Romana History Museum, which was still open and intended to be the Fascist equivalent of the Smithsonian. Naturally I had to go – but it was closed.

Yeah, I was there in person, and the EUR was creepy as they say. Many buildings were like blocks, extended to feel imposing & towering – like skinny rectangles but their roofs were supported by fake ancient Roman style marble columns rising dramatically upward.

It was like looking at Downtown Houston, or the business district in Troy Michigan, at Exit 69, on Big Beaver Road. And so wonkily Italian and strange. Houses were also built slanted in some spots – steel structures of grinning jesters, like some awful theme park for children in Victorian England.

It was a dead zone. You walk & walk & walk, and everything has been built over. It was literally corporations slapping paint over the corporate state, and neon business logos & famous brands placed over statues of eagles & carved lion's heads.

And then you climb up a flight of stairs, and you're in the back of a McDonalds parking lot just a block from the Metro Train, with food wrappers fluttering around the wind, and Italians are again everywhere, teenagers with iPod's & ear-buds eating Fries in the baking hot sun, the stench of blacktop & car exhaust, and the teens dressed like American teenagers, all giving you that look like: *“he who just wandered from the cursed land we dare not enter.”*

It's like staring down the long dirt trail to Bohemian Grove hidden behind the gas station in Monte Rio. Except this secret portal leads to the dead realm of the fallen Fascist Empire. And now it's just a bunch of Fed EX logo's & parked mail trucks...

Next day, I again wake up in another weird place, unsure how I got there, until it all gets clear. I'm in a cool, early morning room at what used to be some old fortification turned farm castle turned anarchist squat.

This place is called the Via Fattiboni – South of Rome, across from a giant open field of tall grass. There is hay on the ground, and chicken run around outside. Some punk rock looking anarchist crusties work on projects, sawing lumber & sewing clothes.

The huge anarchist squat in Rome is literally a castle, but this is one of the more low-key squats. They do tons of shows here as well, and record every band that comes through. Yes, they do music – but this is a true squat where they get serious work accomplished.

One of the guys who books may shows here and is highly involved is Cedro, also from a band called POST FATA RESURGO – who jam a dark, crusty doom with old school death metal.

Cedro was a great, no-bullshit sort of character. We spoke over lunch, and he led me on a tour of the Via Fattiboni – it was encouraging just how well organized a rag-tag group can be when they just pooled their efforts. Northern Euro squats might think it was ramshackle, but if the USA underground knew even partially how to adapt these methods, the American counterculture – and especially metal & punk – would be so better off...

Cedro: *“There are squats in Europe – the big difference – in Spain, in Greece, and in Italy, also in France sometimes, there are squats that are totally legal and different from the squats you may meet in Northern Europe.*

Many are house projects; they are old squats & after a lot of years, the government say 'you will pay rent, you will buy all the building and then make whatever you want.' Here is totally legal in Italy. No permission – no nothing. The DIY scene in Rome – OK, so in Rome, the anarchist squats are 5, maybe 6. We support the DIY scene, we organize concert & political stuff at the same moment. The DIY scene here in Rome – the band that come to play here is-a famous band but only to the DIY scene. If you want more money to play you go to the club – here, there is no cover. Always admission is free. Here, you leave whatever you want. Some friends give 3 euro, 5 euro, 10 euro. For this reason we cannot support another scene. Lot of bands come from the DIY scene and now say 'no we need 50 euro to come, 200 euro to come' – especially metal scene we have this kind of problem. The bands grew up, got famous, and start to think about a lot of bullshit. This bullshit don't belong to us. For sure, I wanna die without playing metal crowds fucking it all up. In Europe, in the metal scene... we pay attention to the lyrics. If they say bullshit – for example 'porn gore' band full of sexism, full of that shit, we dislike totally. Cause if they come here, play their bullshit – we say they no play for their 'insurance.' Cause people here no like this bullshit. So every time a band comes here we check everything – is boring but we have to do it. Cause here in Italy, especially – the Fascist scene try to steal our culture. The big Fascist collective in Rome – they come from the hardcore scene, the skin and hardcore scene. For this, and all the sexism, the fascism – we have to control it. Where you come from, which other bands you play with – it's-a boring stuff, but the situation here is not to make music and shit – we are fighting and its war time, you know, and no time for this bullshit – we have to be strict with the stuff, cause it's shit. Especially a lot of these metal bands. They play there, then they play there and there and there, then they ask here. This shit about the sadness of the forest in Northern Europe. You can sing your songs in a lot of places because you don't speak about nothing. You can

play nothing in front of everybody. No – here is not possible. So if you have played another place that 'is a shit-a' in way of money – and you want to come here? Fuck off. Is-a strange cause especially metal happened this. A new wave of the DIY scene – OK, we love black metal but black metal is one of the most Nazi stuff in our music. So all the bands that are black metal we check more cause we love-a black metal and study how to listen to it without getting in that shitty situation... Black metal is a difficult argument. There is a website that for sure checks everything. You know, some Nazi black metal they speak just about religion, shit like that, and is not always obvious. I love a lot of black metal – but you have to pay attention. Fascist is fascist in every word. We fight them as well – sometimes they come here making bullshit. Rome is full of fascists – they killed one guy years ago. He was at a party in the seaside, just a bar on the beach. They don't care about nothing. They support this shit. These bastards – they fight the 'same enemy,' and that are the gypsies, the dirty people, the poor. No, Fascists are not 'the poor people' cause not many poor people anywhere feel 'defended' by this fascist stuff. I think human stupidity have a lot of expressions..."

Finally, I head to The Vatican. I was raised Irish Catholic (*though I'm clearly not anymore*) and I had to view it myself, at least once. It is from here which The Cult I escaped sprang forth. It was special.

I wanted to approach clergy directly, and ask if I could have a formal letter saying I was excommunicated. The guys from Inferno told me it didn't work like that – but it still was easy. All you have to do is send a special letter by post office to The Vatican to be unbaptized but no one does it anymore 'cause why waste more time with this shit?

So I decided to go straight to the Vatican and demand to be unbaptized, in person. I was really expecting something much bigger – not

just a building/complex taking up a city block. It was like visiting a museum, not a “Holy City.”

They told if I was to see a Priest, I'd have to first pay \$20 to enter! *They make you pay to leave your faith!* And outside all the homeless encamped around it – not one clergymen bringing them aid.

Not one “donation cup” near the wraparound line awaiting entry. Just \$20 to get in, look around real quick, here's the gift shop, and another \$25 to go through that curtain over there & take your picture with The Pope, just like Santa Clause as a shopping mall!

The certified “way out” of Catholicism is having to write an official letter – its a sort of stamp, but more expensive, that specifies this document is legal. You have to spend €10 or €12 to make this document official. Then another €20 to stamp it! *Only then are you canceled from the Catholic lists!*

I awoke in a nervous panic, hours later, in a park as the sun set. It was dawning on me that I likely would have to return to America. I had to put the “pedal to the metal.” I had tried everywhere for a green card scheme, any sort of extended visa or loophole not to leave a Schengen Zone country.

I would've married into something blindly, had the opportunity come. No – I was still the homeless, Super-Tramp American – and had to start being tighter with money if I'd last another month & a half.

I head off to the Jucifer gig at a small bar with a tiny stage – it looked like a lot of places you'd end up playing in New York City. Jucifer totally slayed it – huge bombastic sludgy doom, just bludgeoning everyone's senses. It was like a little reunion of folks I'd met the past few days – and we had a jolly, drunken rock out time.

This time I wake up, open my eyes & a pyramid is before me. Gabbo was talking about it – how all over Rome, there are monuments that no one knows

where they came from. The Empire just stole it & carted it back from wherever.

I slept on a grassy meridian between traffic under a tree. I awoke with cars whizzing by in early morning work rush. The meridian across from me, in it's little patch of grass, was a literal pyramid.

Again – some holy pagan artifact stolen from who knows where. I was sure it had some crazy history that would mind-boggle me – but it was now some dead paperweight on a grassy knoll, left to occupy a rotunda.

I walked over & touched it, because it was so mysterious. Just as I had done at The Vatican, when I touched the Holy Statue of Mithras slaying the bull. One day, I'd learn what Mithras actually was & how epic that discovery was – an occult artifact of shadowy Pagan Sorcerers.

Yes, the Vatican was once center of a much different cult before Jesus Christ – and the leader of this Old Religion was The Pope but instead called The Pater Patum (The “Father's Father”)! It was The Pope of this ancient cult that changed his allegiance to Christianity & all that was Mithras now fused together with Jesus to create Roman Catholicism at the very moment Caesar outlawed paganism.

Well, I finally made it to the Civiltà Romana Museum. Again a great irony – once built by the Fascists to triumph their own history, it now detailed all Italian history *except their own*. They were erased!

Outside the building, my “tourist inclinations” died off. I again was that travelling, grizzled, crustie anarchist guy. Cedro's attitude put me back in focus – I was a man on a mission. But then pulling up my shorts my iPod fell out & cracked on the ground – finally dead!

Like Snake Plissken dropping into New York with his little wrist watch communications gadget, mine finally bit the dust. This hobo James Bond no longer had his fancy-pants tech! Back to coffee shop internet, and a sharper mind memorizing notes & maps...

For a homeless man adept at urban camping, Rome was like a beautiful woman. But it had not gone quite mad yet – and no matter how poor Italy was, even their poorest felt like the upper middle class in Greece.

Italians felt like sailors; Greeks felt like hardened pirates. I missed them all, and wished to return to Thessaloniki perhaps. I did however have to make my way to Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Brussels. If I was to stay out of America, there were people I needed to see. Someone in those countries could situate me. The crazy American would not be going “home” without a fang-bared final fight.

I had 2 last journalistic missions to complete – Spain & Portugal. They were a final “throw of the dice” as an expatriate refugee – maybe I'd get lucky and find a way to legally stay.

And I walked away, just like Vincent Price, again through the secret portal behind the dirty McDonalds that's parking lot stunk with summer heat & sun-baked mayonnaise on “Royale With Cheese” wrappers. Away & to the airport, onto a \$50 Barcelona jet next to one smelly passenger making me gag throughout the hour long flight...

**But we're not done yet, cause like I said – I'm still on the beach. Yeah, the magical Mafia Beach at the Southern Tip of Italy, in this tiny little region called Puglia. It's almost like the “Florida of Italy,” and in the summer the beaches rage into a party town, like a secret Ibiza.

Why here? Cause I heard it was the most beautiful place in all of Italy. Not one to contact & just “showing up.” This time, I felt like the universe would help me. Cause I'm stupid like that.

Anyway, I board the train & this 23 year old kid sits next to me. He wants to talk – he can read English, just can't speak it. But he's all about

America, learning everything he can. Watches all the Hollywood movies, digs all the music, everything. He's that sort of sponge.

So he asks why I'm going to Lecce. I explain & his calm reply is: *"You mean to tell me you never even looked at a map, you know no one, not much money, no nothing – and you're just coming here 'cause you randomly heard its the most beautiful spot in all of Italy?"*

I confirm & he explodes with joy. Tells me he is the local lifeguard of the famous beach, and he has been away from his *famiglia* so long that it's driven him crazy, he is homesick beyond description. He must go to Milan & work 8 months & send funds back home to help pay his families living cost. He's that sorta dude!

Allesandro wants to show me everything his homeland has to offer. I whip out a copy of the interview Vice Magazine did with me in Italian – he reads it lightning fast. Can't believe it! Thinks I am super famous American writer, which, technically, I guess I am now. That paper says it, even if I can't read it. He just can't wait to introduce me to all his friends, his family.

We talk the whole train down – gets me to his house in a taxi – takes me to the garage & he's got a BMW! With huge thumping rap speakers in the back we jam loud Italian rap music as he drives me beach to beach, showing me all the formations.

Takes me to the barbershop where I get my head buzzed to the skin & a straight-razor shave from a dancing barber jamming Sinatra-like crooner songs. We head the local baker to eat "the best bread" in Italy – like cheesy bread baked with rock-hard olive kernels inside.

Allesandro drops me off at the most magnificent beach one could imagine – *but its not in season!* I'm a month early! It's lightly populated, and soon it will drizzle with gray skies the next few days.

But for now, I have it perfect. Had I never met Allesandro, I'd been ruined – no public bus to any of these places! Only during peak season! I take

the long-needed vacation float & enjoy my long day, getting drunk & sleeping on a towel.

He comes back later with friends & a giant sack of ganja. We all go cruising into the countryside, in olive fields of wineries that have ancient little stone huts plotted throughout them. We go to one and get super-stoned, then head back into town.

Now we're at the public square, with all his friends, and it's obvious he's like the Ferris Bueller of his city, with that Captain Do-No-Wrong vibe of a High School Football “Star Quarterback.”

We drive the outskirts as he swings through alleys & roads like a madman, going way too fast, driving so dangerously. He points out all the Mafia homes that were empty. Gangsters come down on vacation and bring puppies & their wives just leave them, throw 'em away like old shoes – as is why stray ghetto dogs are everywhere in packs.

At the main square with all the kids he shows them my interview. They all think I'm a superstar. Stray dogs come up, and I feed them my bologna. They were hungry like wolves – but now they lick my leg! I am the The Super-Trampin' Lord of Dogs!

After several blunts & red wine passed, they take me to the countryside, to ancient Roman ruins, where young Italian kids are partying outdoors like a college kegger. Everyone has their collars raised & guys surround booty-shakin girls & pelvic freak dance them like the “*What Is Love / Baby Don't Hurt Me*” guys on *SNL*.

Allesandro grabs me by the shirt & tugs me to this dug out pit. “*And here, they throw the Christians*” he said, drunk & smiling. It was an ex lion pit for military entertainment – a mini-coliseum. All his friends laugh, and we smoke another blunt, mocking Jesus Christ.

They dump me off again at Torre Dell'Orso at night – just me, in the woods, in a sleeping bag alone, listening to that primal, gigantic ocean crash

on the shore with all it's kinetic power. I fall asleep to it like a train-yard clanking away in perpetual motion – and my hand-held shovel ever-ready next to me, just in case stray dogs attack...

Allesandro comes back with a friend – *we are stoned once again!* He was supposed to work but called it off to show me more good times! They take me to City Centre with a few hours to kill before I leave for Rome. The giddy troublemakers drag me all over the town square, feeding me pizza rolls & so, so much ice cream.

Back at the train station, they never want me to leave. Allesandro wants to run away to America, and I tell him he can sleep on my couch if he really wanted. Portland was the best – that's what everyone says. Well, me too. Not a bad place to live.

Soon I'd be in Rome, swinging from squat to squat, interviewing bands & anarchists alike. But so seldom does such an unbelievable off-the-cuff adventure happen. So few times does one get such a warm reception from a community of foreigners.

As I waited outside the train, all the Italians were looking at me, walking by & glancing. All the kids I met – the teen boys & girls, the early 20 somethings – they all told each other about me on Facebook; the crazy American writer who just kind of showed up. And they all walk by me with glitzy eyes – *their parents even!*

And then I see a bunch of men in suits, all looking like straight up mobsters, all eating ice cream – and all of 'em smiling, giving a luminous gleam in the eye, spying on the famous American writer guy, the broke ass nobody, the madman refugee. N' all of 'em quietly wishin' they could just be a free-wheeling, Super-Trampin' hobo author rather than some Cosa Nostra mook. *Grazie Italia, Per Sempre!*

een liefdesbrief aan amsterdam

(a love letter to amsterdam :: 10.12.13)

Beating a dead horse that's pummeling you in return, a victorious desideratum amid the sordid meat scream. From the shadow-cast ghost-steps of iron rain symphony it is to you, Dearest Amsterdam, whom I offer this useless, profound commentary. My best friends are cities, and I consort with music. And you, staunchest of comrades, are my finest ally. The meat grinder Ponzi scheme of your Pinocchio Donkey Island is precious, profane, preposterous. Like Merle Dixon, you are cold brotherly love. You and all your dirty Dutch tricks. No slotstuk of touristic rampage, no rest save for the pee woods of the freest park in Europe. In my country I am a loser, but in your realm I am the Omega VondleParkTroll. Amsterdam – one stop shopping, everything you need right at your fingertips. Your flawless cardboard sign HEMA sharpies, cannabis amnesia & finest socks on earth. I never understood LSD until I understood you, my darling. You make me fall in love every time – you & your eternal garden-legion of dread-headed Aryan goddesses & pasty white snow queens. Your 2 hour hitch-hiking max wait time & assurance that the FBI will never find me here. Amsterdam it is never your fault, solely mine. If a nacht grows soft, it is simply of volition to my ever increasing sense of alienation. Amsterdam, a lesser man you would break. But is the concept of €1 cinema too radical a notion? Can we just ditch the little old bathroom ladies? I'm so glad you're not French, because it's fucked up to eat snails. Spared of Fukushima and not a FEMA Camp

on the horizon, your cops politely ignite my joints. A resin caked ground-score every five meters, and not a gunshot echoes through your night. I highly appreciate the €50 AIDS-cleansed hookers, but just because I'm a psychopath doesn't mean I'm not a feminist. Amsterdam, your cultural tolerance is so profound it borders on self destruction. You inspire me to collect scrap metal like a Moroccan cart pusher. I really don't miss the sector of my brain we mutually fried, even if I can't recall these sentences halfway through typing them. Amsterdam, ich bin der kaiser von shiese inglese & a harvest of spirits thunderstruck by fog clarity. Hand in hand & lies conjoined we will pretend your cultural nexus tapestry invented Speculoospasta, though you created something far greater in your industrial outskirts – a place which I am proud to call home, even if I cannot pronounce its name, where the definition of church sanctuary reigns unrestrained. Amsterdam, stop looking at me funny. You & your squat colonies pregnant with amphetamines & infinite neuron disfigurement. Nederland, you really should look into that deal the Dutch Royals cut with Hitler before taking the first boat out of Dodge. Marijuana is not your national treasure, but rather The Hague. How do I break it to your volk that in America soccer is a sport for women and little girls? Even your mightiest athlete is dubbed a “foot fairy.” Don't shoot the messenger Holland. And please remain cordial to the Belgians, even if they never cut the grass. Dear Amsterdam, deaf and blind parades are choking the arbitrary fallacy. I'm drained of ink. You & me & Mr. Sugar Cube buddy. Let's do the dirty hippy dance.

WELCOME TO MONTE RIO

A Bay Area Occu-Venture

(The “Lost” Prologue of RTFE // April 2012)

The yellow brick road doesn't end in glory, but rather the fatal remains of rust belt sacrifice... I've traversed Gary (Indiana), Cuba (Missouri), the rottenest urban decay of 3 dozen postmodern metropolises – as a taxi driver, I scoured every inch of war-zone Detroit...

But despite these disjointed manifestations of grimness, it takes a final puzzle piece to recognize the hydra in full. That loosened jigsaw, vague to it's brother pieces, comes in the shape of a hamlet in mountainous Redwoods...

Monte Rio, California is the creepiest city I've ever been to. Even the obscure Deep South fails to compare, because at least there is a familiarity of poverty & expected disappointment. That invisible lasso of economic distress holding these realms in place is the byproduct of many a “smoke-filled room” behind the curtain of Oz, so to speak.

When you overhear that leathery 55 year old woman working the gas station counter rapping her rampant medical bills to the trucker buying \$2 pipe tobacco 'cause it's all he can afford – just close your eyes & drift away to a scene where politi-scum converge round' a round table. All of 'em look like Dick Cheney or Newt Gingrich – fat, balding, white-haired & conniving...

Imagine that these clandestine puppet-masters are all scheming & presiding over a vast system of control which has since ancient Rome kept a deliberate social hierarchy in place. Where the poverty they've created & intentionally sustained is the largest criminal conspiracy ever devised, where their operatives flood the streets with coke/crack/meth and simultaneously

assist an internal police state based on for-profit prison systems now backed by military power...

But it's not a smoke-filled room where this theoretical hidden hand is meeting, nor is it some “one size fits all” Illuminati-like fraternity. The closest thing we get to the “secret puppet-masters of the universe” is this thing is The Bilderberg Group.

The second closest is the “private party” in Monte Rio held at a summer campground for the power elite at Bohemian Grove, and it's not an easy thing to grasp.

No one is quite sure what to make of Bohemian Grove, but everyone agrees that the top 1% (of the 1%) just dropping off the face of the planet for 2 weeks to attend a clandestine all-male campground where they are giving secret political & business speeches is bad news.

That they perform an extremely creepy ceremony called “The Cremation of Care” while carrying lit torches & wearing KKK-like outfits before burning an effigy (symbolizing their “cares of the outside world”) inside a human coffin underneath a 40 foot stone owl statue that looks like a Lovecraftian Elder God is also extremely bad news.

What do you do with that, once you accept it's real and actually happening? No matter how it started, where it came from, the antiquated rituals held onto from when it was an artist camp retreat – that this freakish entertainment is what the highest class right-wing Republican politicians are quietly “into?”

And that at this all-male campground – surprise, surprise – male prostitution & rampant cocaine use is a well known fact? What does a legitimate political journalist do – let alone any citizen of the US – once you realize this is the weird hobby of our congressman in Washington DC? This is what they do with their spare time? *When the House Majority is literally a Grove Majority??*

Well, if you're like me, you come straight to the source. And that's what I'm doing here, about 75 miles north of San Francisco, up in the mountains – hanging out in a tiny stage prop of a town, which only exists when all the Big Whigs fly in mid-summer. It's a propaganda front, like the demarcation zone between North & South Korea.

Monte Rio is *literally* a stage prop to mask the sprawling 2700 acre Bohemian Grove occupied/owned Redwood Forest in the very back – and the only road to it a quaint & humble dirt drive.

No place other than Hollywood gave me the impression of a propagandic stage prop, like a theme park attraction where they mask it by making it free admission.

Well, this was the dead Hollywood – like a zombie town, with blowing newspapers warning of the walking dead, years long after the presses stopped printing from undead cannibal apocalypse...

“Bohemian Grove” is a 2,700-acre campground located in Monte Rio (CA) belonging to a private/secretive organization known as “The Bohemian Club.” They are an all male organization whose members have included every Republican President since 1888 as well as Fox News CEO Rupert Murdoch, Warren Buffet, Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Henry Kissinger, Alan Greenspan, John Lehman, Karl Rove & the Rockefeller Family.

Other connected names include high-ranking members of ALEC, NATO, NAFTA, Stratfor, Haliburton, The UN, Bilderberg Group, CIA, FBI, Secret Service, Federal Reserve & the 9/11 Commission report committee. The list continues to spiral with a laundry list of major players in world politics, big business, the banking industry & military industrial complex.

What is Bohemian Grove? The short answer is that BG is a super-exclusive 2 week encampment/party for many of the most notorious figures in

government & business today. Those involved are members of The Bohemian Club (nicknamed “Bohos” or “Grovers”).

Formed in 1880 as an artists retreat, this 2700 acre campground (dubbed “Bohemian Grove”) exists 75 miles North of San Francisco. Originally an artists retreat – like a “live action participatory theater” camp that was slowly discovered by wealthy California business men who slowly bought it out for themselves. By the 1900's it became an annual, clandestine party for the mega-rich of Right Wing persuasion.

From the late 1800's until this very day, every year from mid-July to the beginning of August, these men hold secretive “Lakeside Talks.” This is the cause of concern – secret seminars involving unbelievable concentrations of wealth and power.

Disclaimer: The Bohemian Club soon grows *exceedingly bizarre* once you investigate it, and this is where most people opt out of the conversation. Indeed, there are some fantastical claims out there. DO NOT believe the occult conspiracy talk claiming The Bohemian Club's mascot (a huge owl statue) is some Pagan Demigod.

This owl statue IS NOT MOLOCH! This IS NOT a “satanic” or “witchcraft” cult! David Icke & Alex Jones are full of bologna! This is why most never look deeper into this subject – “conspiracy personalities” who cannot be taken seriously. Furthermore, lunatic websites often pop up with searches, and it's difficult to get a straight answer, therefore it's blown off as a weird hoax.

So, anyway, The Club's mascot is a massive 40 foot stone owl (The “Owl of Bohemia”) and every year on the big first night they have an opening ceremony called “The Cremation of Care.”

Taken out of context it looks terrifying & satanic. Even in its proper context it's still extremely weird & politically damaging – in fact, this is the worst PR nightmare “The 1%” could ever have.

Contrary to mythology, Bohemian Grove is more of a pseudo-mystical frat-boy thing, on par with Fred Flintstone & the Loyal Order of Water Buffaloes. So yes, while it is true that burning an effigy under a creepy statue while wearing Druid-like hoods has connotations to ancient sacrifice religions, in reality this is a tongue-in-cheek reference to that sort of thing.

It's a theatrical show held-over from the early days of the club, when it was solely an artist's camp before the mega-rich found it, bought it & stole it for their own amusement.

The reality is that this Cremation of Care ceremony originates from the artists collective that created The Grove in the late 1800's. It was basically a thespian group that had a weeks long, live action, spontaneous role-playing theater camp.

“The Cremation of Care” was the hokey, cheesy ceremony that kicked off the larger plays & events. These artists actually went into the woods and made their own reality with a tent city that was cheesy & circus-like & resembled an antiquated Burning Man Festival notion!

It was basically an artist's “Occupy Monte Rio” of the late 1800's – but then the 1% found it & the Rockefeller/Bush patriarchs bought it out! Soon all that was left was the creepy Owl Ceremony & a 2 week full throttle party inside this freakish Republican Disneyland.

The “Cremation Of Care” ritual has been infiltrated and filmed multiple times. To kick-start the 2 week party, Bohemian Club members gather around a man made lake in the middle of The Grove.

At the shoreline of this lake is a 40 foot stone owl, which is the mascot. Dubbed “Moloch” by ultra-conspiracy types (but in reality called

“The Owl of Bohemia”) this owl statue is terrifying looking – huge & half covered in moss like some black magic demigod.

While the rest of the club watches from wooden bleachers, about 2 dozen Grovers march out in cloaks holding lit torches – red KKK-like outfits & are carrying a funeral coffin dubbed “care.”

Inside this coffin is a skeleton which represents The Bohemian Club's pent up “cares.” Their cares are then placed under this gigantic owl statue & the show begins. The owl speaks from recording equipment rigged inside the hollow statue & the hooded actors recite a creepy sermon/play. They then set this coffin on fire with their torches to incarcerate the outside woes of The Clubs public lives.

The Camps: The Grove itself has 118 encampments where the power structure is divvied up by territory. For instance, only USA Presidents & Military Brass are allowed to stay at the “Owls Nest” encampment. Concentrate on that name for a second...

Also there is Lost Angels Camp (Banking/Defense Contractors/Media), Cave Man Camp (Think-Tanks/Oil Companies/Universities/Media), Hill Billies Camp (Big Business/Banking/Politics), Stowaway Camp (Rockefeller Family/Oil Companies), Isle of Aves Camp (Military/Defense Contractors); Silverado Squatters Camp (Big Business/Defense Contractors)...

I should also point out The Bohemian Grove is reputed to be a major epicenter for homosexual prostitution. One can imagine the possibilities if the USA at large realizes this – and what the full extent of “outing” homophobic conservative politicians entails for them. One Google search & the case laid above will be found credible.

Members may invite guests although those guests are subject to a screening procedure. After 40 years of membership the men earn "Old Guard" status, giving them reserved seating at talks, as well as other

perquisites. The Club motto is "Weaving Spiders Come Not Here," which implies that outside business deals are to be left outside (*ha ha).

The tradition of a summer encampment was established 6 years after The Club was formed in 1872. The Owl Shrine was designed by sculptor & two-time club president Haig Patigian in the 1920s. Since 1929, the Owl Shrine has served as the backdrop of the yearly Cremation of Care Ceremony.

The ceremony was first conducted in 1881. It was originally set up within the plot of the "High Jinks" dramatic performance on the first weekend, after which the spirit of "Care", slain by the hero, was solemnly cremated. The ceremony served as catharsis and *"to present symbolically the salvation of the trees by the club..."*

The Cremation of Care was separated from the Grove Play in 1913 and moved to the first night to become "an exorcising of the Demon to ensure the success of the ensuing 2 weeks." The Grove Play was eventually moved to the last weekend of the encampment.

The ceremony takes place in front of the Owl Shrine, a 40-foot hollow owl statue made of concrete over steel supports. The moss covered statue simulates a natural rock formation, yet holds electrical & audio equipment inside.

For many years, a recording of club member Walter Cronkite was used as the voice of The Owl. Music & pyrotechnics accompany for dramatic effect. The play is a large-scale musical theatrical production, written and composed by club members, involving some 300 people, including chorus, cast, stage crew and orchestra.

An artificial lake in the middle of the grove, used for the noon-time concerts and also the venue of the Cremation of Care, is also the location of the 12:30 p.m. daily "Lakeside Talks." These "informal talks" (*many on public policy issues*) have been given over the years by entertainers,

professors, astronauts, business leaders, cabinet officers, CIA directors, government officials, USA presidents...

So there I was, in the fake town cardboard cut-out “city” of Monte Rio – a blatant facade which hid the Republican *Twilight Zone* lurking in the forest depths behind. You view for yourself the empty movie cinema, the out of service gas station, the front of an empty drug store – the “town square” is a dust bowl; a dirt patch the size of a small parking. It's the end of the Federal Government's carefully built sound stage, like the finale of *Truman Show*.

Monte Rio does the same for politics, for the media, for the military industrial complex – makes them all cardboard cut-outs of a stage play. There is a hand painted 1950's sign as you pull into town square: “Welcome to Monte Rio: Vacation Wonderland.”

But then you walk past this shell of a ghost town & find the small trail that leads to the tiny crossroads of Railroad & Bohemian Avenue. Everywhere “DO NOT TRESSPASS/PRIVATE PROPERTY” signs & surveillance cams hidden in trees as you progress – you feel like you're staring into *Blair With Project* as you gaze down this corridor to Boho Grove itself. Better yet, the intro of *Tales From The Darksides* with that cheesy negative filmstrip image toaster effect...

We were out the car 5 minutes when 2 undercover cop cars circled past us. A car with punk rock bumper stickers pulled up with some curious kids checking it out, giving us a fearful look before zooming away. Chances were they thought I was a government agent, since I was wearing a suit & tie!

My cohorts and I hopped back in our vehicle & drove off – only soon to be followed by the Sheriff of Monte Rio! The squad car trailed us all the way back to the “town square” – and he also had company! Alongside him a

man in black on a motorcycle cruised behind us – all black leather & reflective, faceless helmet! *FBI?? Secret Service?!?*

Earlier that day I'd met with The Bohemian Grove Action Network & members of Occupy Santa Rosa (the closest major city to The Grove). The understanding I have of this Occupy Bohemian Grove protest now looming on the horizon is one of a probable circus.

Ever since the call went out for a peaceful presence & cool-headed picket line, the highly detailed FAQ has circulated like wildfire. Take The Square – the original start of Occupy & one of it's largest globally trafficked websites – released a giant article about Bohemian Grove written by some guy named Haig Patigian. The document quickly reached 20,000 views & the PDF went viral, getting passed around the underground circuit.

Strange things were happening – more social media-based amateur journalists & reporters were forcing Bohemian Grove into their debates & stories. People were ambushing politicians demanding answers, and every time they skirted it things looked stranger. Videos from Anonymous on The Grove were growing in frequency.

The zeitgeist was rolling & it seemed everyone in Occupy was waking up to this bizarre reality the same way we all sort of fell into ALEC, Monsanto, Stratfor, HAARP & Bilderberg.

One by one, serious discussion topics were communicated to different Occupy groups in different countries and cities via internet & email. Occupy crowds had gathered with Wall Street greed as their central issue and it quickly ballooned to mean anything related.

And then BOOM – Bohemian Grove was everywhere. Tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, were confronting the completely awful reality that yes, indeed, this weird 40 foot owl statue Republican Party camp in the woods was a real, tangible, actual thing.

So now this coming July 13th-30th 2012, no one knows what will happen. While Occupy as a visible force has waned (the last of the major USA camps had been evicted 6 months prior) the people are still active and doing mass group projects.

We're in the "crushed rebellion" phase – or so the media wants the script to read – and the one's left are all the die-hards not going away anytime soon. How many will show?

Thankfully the ground organizers are working on public camps to store people, port-a-pottys, community outreach to de-escalate tension. Unlike other major occupations without any real physical planning, this one has legitimate support to sustain itself. Still, Occupiers know how to handle & sustain themselves. In the end, all they needed was water, lunch and a slogan on a piece of cardboard.

It was Saturday night, and the next stop was almighty Occupy Oakland. I'd been watching their exploits like a mythological phalanx.

Occupy Oakland was action packed – eyes across the world were glued to the computer screen watching live footage of protests, many which went wrong and ended in chaos & violence usually set in motion by the illegal, heavy-handed moves of the Oakland PD.

Occupy Oakland gained international attention early on, when Iraq vet Scott Olson was "sucker-punched" in the forehead by a tear gas canister shotgun. The Riot Officer was filmed blatantly taking a step back & aiming methodically before firing, shooting Olson in the forehead with a canister, then slipping off behind other Riot Cops.

No police would rat out who it was, since his face was masked. They blew off the inquiry – it was hideous. Olson survived but had serious head trauma. He was a marine with Veterans For Peace.

Saturday nights, I soon found, had essentially degenerated into a weekly “Fuck The Police” march. Like an army marching through occupied territory, waving their flags.

Amazed (*but not surprised*) at this terrible propagandic courting of public opinion, it was clear that the situation had deteriorated as to where any meaningful honeymoon with the wider Bay Area public opinion had long ceased to be a concern.

They made their stand and had been exiled for their extreme, reactionary, group-mind behavior. Now it was a kind of *Lord Of The Flies* of mad patchwork, but sunny as opposed to grim tribal.

They still were interested in solving the real problems, not attacking each other. They were what remained after the democrats & college kids & clean cut's & etc jumped ship.

Like all the major Occupations, they were relentlessly infiltrated & attacked by cops, FEDS, whomever. And when the going got tough, the jellyfish bailed – leaving the few dozen hardcore occupiers who refused to go home & soon became a daily target to vengeful predators with badges.

Oakland was a dead scene when I arrived though – no one was returning my texts & I couldn't locate the F.T.P. March anywhere. Since sleeping on the street in Oakland = waking up without your travel pack/wallet, I headed to Berkeley for safe seclusion beneath the awning of an oriental massage parlor...

I came back Sunday 4/16 to the Occupy Oakland park, as to listen in and observe their G.A. (General Assembly). At the GA's, anyone participating could stand up & voice their concerns – about what directions the group can take, projects, logistics, outreach...

It was like a street-level form of a Town Hall meeting led by a democratically-picked facilitator (*or someone who just naturally took the role*

because they were inherently good at it, and no one seemed to mind) as well as an old school Roman Senate – completely democratic & outdoors.

Here in the General Assembly would a public project be molded & voted upon for action. It was a public architecture of thought & structure continuously being built & recorded. GA's were a major feature at Zucotti Park in New York where Occupy began. Portland (OR) was a major beacon of example – but Oakland as well.

The O.O. park was down the street from the Obama re-election HQ which was a bigger ghost town then Monte Rio. It was pitch black inside – pathetic. Cardboard cut-outs of the smiling Obama family gazed back at you from the windows, but just far enough back from the window to look like they're hiding some crime, or they are scared of you and just want you to go away & hope you'll keep on moving.

It looked like a Blockbuster Video that went out of business 5 years ago & no one had touched since...

GA was interesting – sunny, bright & planted with informants that people were eyeballing as outsiders. The kid that started Occupy Phoenix had just run away from Arizona; I was the first person he talked to having just wandered into Oakland.

Said he made a Facebook page and in 3 days thousands of people just showed up. By the end of it – last week, in fact – it had devolved to just him & 2 other kids. He said there was no cohesion between the radicals & the Obama-bots & the situation was unsustainable. Said he came to Oakland for: *“The Real Shit.”*

The spirit was strong – their GA felt like one of Occupy Portland's at Shemanski Park. The most heartbreaking topic was one woman whose husband wanted custody of their son, so he told the judge she brought her child to Occupy Oakland's GA.

This was enough legal precedence to kidnap her son. Courts around the country were now using this as a scare tactic to end the dreaded Occupy Rebellion – threatening to steal kids away & put them in foster homes for Occupy related protest actions. Neo-McCarthyism via child hostages...

The most surreal moment came at Occupy Oakland's stronghold – an info-shop called The Holdout. There were 50 people sitting in fold out chairs listening to a panel of 5 speakers; the presenters were passing around a clipboard with 100+ FBI/DHS documents declaring Occupiers internal terrorists and just how to deal with it. The entire Orwellian game plan was now clearly laid before them.

It was a mind blowing moment watching first hand all these 27-33 year old white professionals from upper middle class families & educated backgrounds realize they're in an absolute police state and their heads were indeed on the chopping block.

And these people were bringing this horrible fact to their GA as if this was an issue that could be resolved by talking it out with the larger group the same way we'd ask the group donation's bank for \$20 to get toilet paper for the sanitation committee or the engineering tent needs more generators or what have you... There was no solution, only shaky voices & frightened eyes. We were now “terrorists.”

I decided on downtown San Francisco. Here I was – the most “progressive” city in the USA & certainly one of the most political, but at 1am that Sunday night/Monday morning, I watched what was symbolically the final death-blow after months of struggle.

In the end, despite all the big talk, Occupy SF withered down to myself, a Buddhist from West Virginia, a 19 year old 103lbs cancer patient & one brilliant maniac named “Gypsy” that can only be described as if casting Heath Ledger for 12 Monkey's Jeffrey Goines. He intentionally took the

pseudonym 'cause it was the most anonymous street kid name you hear anywhere – he stole it with a wink of the eye.

Occupy SF had done the impossible – solved homeless harassment by police for all of San Francisco. Except, of course, for the one tiny patch of land in front of The Federal Reserve they've occupied since September.

This is the only place the cops say they will enforce the no camping ban – only because it's Occupy SF. Their “menacing” fold out table is stacked with fliers & a bunch of sleeping bags are crammed into a pile within this sacred 10x10 space.

The police told us quite directly (*and for the first time*) that the entire city of San Francisco was open to sleep on the streets – and they would write a note they said so, if any cop harassed any of us at any time. Just show them you surrendered Occupy, and we leave you alone – and if so, here's your fake slip! We could go anywhere – just not here!! And if we dared to sleep here we'd be arrested on the spot!!

I was given a free pass to sleep anywhere free of their harassment – the magic Golden Ticket for a homeless man in San Francisco – *but I refused to take it!!* I had to sleep here, because they were telling me I couldn't!

I read 'loud my 2012 State of the Counterculture Union Address over a bullhorn in front of The Fed with the audience of Occupy SF & 2 cops parked nearby in a squad car, listening in. After I finished, Gypsy began yelling at the cops, hollering at them, daring them to come arrest him. Hellfire in his eyes – he'd reached that point beyond all points.

The cops finally were angered enough that when Gypsy tried to sleep on the ground just to annoy them, they actually called in the paddy-wagon to arrest us all! They legally ejected us from the scene threatening bitter consequences if we continued on.

The 15 other Occupiers hanging around – all of them scattered & ran away in the face of The Man – leaving us the last 4 left! All that remained of

the once Great Occupy SF Army was 3 Misfits & Me! We hauled our belongings down the street under a tavern awning...

The cops said only 1 person could stay in that spot, that they couldn't have a blanket or any items, and they had to stand there from 1am-5am before we could reenter our previously held Occu-Territory.

The cops watched as the skinny 19 year old female 103 lbs cancer patient refused to move, shaking from the cold in a thin hoodie, while her boyfriend sobbed across the street.

In all of San Francisco, we were somehow “The Last Defense” – one dying of cancer, one living out a shopping cart, yours untruly & 'o course the Heath Ledger Jeffery Goines. He was a little cracked, no doubt, but I loved that guy to death – I saw more humanity out of him in a few short days than most people through years. Dude ruled.

The next morning, Gypsy told me after the Occupy Oakland mass arrest January 28th that 600 were arrested, yet 193 disappeared.

“Most of these people are people that were just there for the march. Oakland police arrested 600 people and later that day [they] listed 40 some odd people in jail. A couple days later the number had grown to over a hundred. By the time it was said & done, 407 were said to be held on warrants or released.”

“However for anyone that was watching– the prison buses used hold 50 prisoners a piece & they used 12 buses and all were filled to capacity. My question is what happened to the 193 other people?”

“I've had people pop up – 'what happened to homeboy, cousin, brother, dad'? These people went to the January 28th march & never returned. My fear is these people haven't fallen to NDAA, which allows them to indefinitely detain protesters in FEMA camps...”

– Dr. Ryan Bartek (4.27.12) –

SWAMPDRAINER

Somehow it all led to a gelatinous orange mass gyrating with hate;

a face prune-like & withered by ego, furrowed caterpillar brows mercilessly
arched in coked out, power hungry rage.

Somehow, it all led to him. Somehow, he was their hope:

President Chump

. . .

And now we are all Great Again.

Now *Everything* is Great Again.

. . .

So how does it feel, America?

I ask you, how does it really feel?

Are we not Tremendous?

NEULAND (II) // Raw Notes

Every now & again, I'll meet someone else with my habit
of taking notes in key phrases that mean nothing to
anyone else but me. A few strange words unlock paragraphs
(if not pages) of a story.

What follows are the raw handwritten notes of my 2012
travel odyssey through Europe - about 13 pages of free-
form "chicken-scrawl madness" which has a certain poetic
beauty in it's own right.

Few authors ever publish these sort of odd notes, but I
thought for the sake of posterity, why not? I am the
author/publisher, after all, and I enjoy an artist's
commentary on their own work - and all the odd little
methods they cultivate along the way.

So here you go. Not 'cause I wrote it, but because it's a
rarely witnessed intensity of ebb & flow, gushing
straight from the source of creation.

- R. Bartek -

5.18.18

NEULAND (II)

Back @ 420, 5/9/2012 – so stoned I can't remember what road I hitched in on. Blueberry Kush. No Jane, but John. Flew in leaving Orlando, FL. 2:30 pm Sunday. 5/6 – layover in Atlanta straight to Bruxelles 5:30 pm. 8 7 hour flight. Bus \$3.40 Shabeedee Park Sleep 1pm-6pm, metal promoter Cath meets me, drink. Square – apt pizza onion mush Belgian TV show, Pat Chouli – wake 7am naked Terrorizer Pat Chouli 1pm leave remy to squat village, smoke, head of GE like director in Belgium. Buy phone Walmarty guy says I've got cajones. Downtown Antwerp 220 to gas station semis, sleep bridge Ariel Luke dream with HAARP mushroom clouds, like a marine, within 5 minutes, petrol half way to Rotterdam, guy has throat issues -boom. Harassed. 3 hours, crane area, cargo hulls, park, metro train, Dan Haag, to 11 euro train to Amsterdam. Kebab blueberry. Yum – Mash apt. same story, shell mess old vs new – hitch a! Dutch guy silverfox, lady w cat hair, road crew, German yuppie guy w/ nuclear blast CD, guy w/ tiny car and red eyes, near Ostabruck hunters house in field. Hot sex. Staring into the drizzle Dutch field early morn. Fucked kneecap. 4 hours, Hannover, guy going all the way. Tons of hitchers at gas station. One guy offers to Poland, vanishes. Other polish guys barely English or German, drive us pat Berlin loop so all traffic going other way cause east headed gas station. Hot hobo sex in public. Ride in early morn, freezing, dropped near Kopi 137. durum doner, internet, M12 Occu-March, led by Rammstein NIN, KMFDm, anon masks, LGBT 4 Obama t-shirts, 4 parades to Alexander Platz, green fatigue police, soviet flag, park, apartment, weed, bed cuddle triad, Greek/Italy route studies in the morning + Deutsch poltik lesson. 1euro swarma, Occu-Bloccupy, paranoia, try for Kopi 137, walk past old Berlin wall line, last minute train instead, kicked off in Leipzig. Sleep in park, cold, onward next train to Frankfurt. Big plans, Austrian alps, leiderhosen, frosty beer. Sneak into Frankfurt, cops everywhere. Camp at Central Bank like Occupy Portland at its peak. Sleep in the kitchen under table, scene with girl and the creeper guy, eventually have to stand up. he gets nervous, next day there is General Assembly – anarchist girl says she'll marry me for a green-card, German speech, go to squat, research flights all are cheap – Athens, Barcelona, Milan. after GA we know Schengen lifted, Occupy leaders sent letters band in Germany 1000 fine, etc. cops to arrest everyone in morning. Sebastian meets us, small apt near college. Smokes us out. Etc... wake up they were raided 5am, 150

arrested, camps dismantled. I wear suit “how my disguise?” “you look like a German man.” To GNB Haus, Maalox + apple cider vinegar, stopped & searched at train station after rally out front getting enclosed, moron tactics, cops find all stuff but don't know what it is, let us go, “go stand next to your boyfriend.” 2 stations down, wont listen, I go anyway, stopped leaving train, all grilled, they take my name and passport, threaten to arrest, “make new friends.” to park. On comes the GA at the town square. Hang back. Meet Occupy Cleveland people. Tell me about feds and the bombers, I go to Waterfront Park on fake Rheine. The Paddywagon and cop army arrives. Kids throw fire in trash cans. Giant scene. Mob moves on. I'm lost. Wandering the bank get expensive hot dog. To Bockenheimer University. Sleep in tent, surrounded, cops everywhere, people nervous. cant cross onto university but cannot leave, bust out 6am in my disguise. Get coffee, Hear sirens. Slip in alleyway. 35 green paddy-wagons zip by. Sirens, helicopters. Sounds like prolonged war. Chill in the alley park, try to nap. Go to bakery then try to go downtown. All stops cut off. City split in half. Long walk, lost. Falcon park, bigger park, industrial park, eventually take street car end back up at waterfront. Danielle tells me about skyscraper in Milan via email at Kenyan run market internet cafe thing. Scoot through town and army guys everywhere. No idea where anyone is. Everyone arrested? At town square, waiting forever. calls, all back at university. 850 were arrested trying to leap the barricades. Belgians there. Veron appears. StarChild too, like ww2 Luftwaffe bombing. Fall asleep to Godzilla's shadow painted on the wall. Next day back to Sebastian's I go before the girls. He just appears randomly on the street when I go towards his general area. He drops me off and bolts. Stoned, pizza, cheap euro beer, research – 40 fed agencies in Chicago for Occupy NATO. 4 people arrested for “conspiracy to commit terror” for having bomb making equipment. The anarchist girl says I'll never get out of Athens alive. But I go in morning by myself anyway. Tons of cops still around trying to get the remaining occupy troublemakers. I slip through... GREECE, fly in looks like oatmeal spilled over white sands, magic, blue ocean blue sky plane straight in like a harbinger of Zeus. Airport metal guys, avoiding telling me who they are but I give CDs anyways. In suit and tie. X95, purple flowers, crisp mountains, deserts, third world as I get closer, long line of shops all burned out. Bus stopped in traffic. Nationalist music, flags, beating drums, protesters – big mob, a full column walks by, old ladies and men. Just people. Head to Syntagma Square. Men on motorcycles driving on sidewalks, cops on scooters hanging off, tons of tourists, dark characters eyeballing me, ancient square, acropolis on the close horizon,

old guy with the cross, in suit, doesn't ask for anything. Not a scammer. No phone takes money, weird card. Scramble through the alley shops lost in ancient civilization trying to make a third world phone work. Call Sakis he says Tuesday. Fanis tells me tomorrow. Other bands later in week. Get swarma old guy. Little square with the ancient mini castle thing. Drink at square a bit, flying purple pens. so intense I must sleep. Moroccan scrap mettalers, huge walkways. Find an alleyway put on bum-o-flauge. Sleep. Dream of getting off work at porter gig going to old apt no leah and then end up at some Avalon theatre-like bar in some PDX boonies. Obama at bar drunk. Romney ad on TV with a surgeon mask. Wake up in alley 4am gotta pee, looks like Tripoli Libya. wake up 5am and walk. Magic. Purple lotus trees, third world city built for the gods, unexplainable, huge butcher shops, everything slowly opening. To Syntagma Square. Methed out guys at coffee shop. Semblances of the west. Watch dawn over the acropolis. Go for a walk. The shops lining the street – man shops for tool, suits, army surplus. Spend early morning in Syntagma Square watching pigeons. Haggle for rain gear, go to another square, pushed out by cops, busy day, walk everywhere, stick in Syntagma area, go meet Nikos at Exarhion square first glimpse, tons of people, white bed sheets phrases “desperate ones,” meet with Nikos at Dr. Feelgood's, go sleep in alley, next day spot compromised by Moroccan guy. Wake up go for Epidaurus. Take third world bus to outskirts of town to bus transit station for all ancient ruin destinations. 24 euros to Epidaurus too much, go back to town. Head to Exarhion Square. Want to smoke weed so bad. Listen to Sinatra “my kind of town” & I feel a wind a giant roach rolls up to my shoe like the feather from Forrest Gump. Magic. Get blazed, go for a walk. Lost in the land of the giants. Billboard ads like Tim & Eric sketch, very Turkish/Iraqi. Garbage bags of books in Italian on the street, I get the Mussolini one. Walk walk walk. End up at ice cream shop. Big Greek ice cream guy with black apron. Everyone lounging out front. Breaking news, bunch of guys beating the shit out of a cop on a motorcycle on a freeway, one guy steals the motorcycle. Everyone laughs and claps, including the ice cream man. Head to meet Sakis at a cafe I go through the bus station which is like Logan's Run “Acropolis style” outside is the guy all burned up begging for change, the look in his eyes as all walk by into the bus underground, one arm a tiny nub and the other arm a nub, burnt crispy. Can't remember if he had legs. Interview Sakis go off. Try to find that burned up guy but gone, give my coat to the homeless no one wants. Back to Syntagma Square. At night tons of tourists. Purple pens floating in the air. Cheap gyros. Decide to get a room at hotel Exarhion. MIB on tv, subtitled in

Greek. Tiny room. No make me pay until morning in old school book. Go outside hang in square. Local gets me to buy beer, but I go with it. Hang and smoke. Go for a walk to find strip club find nothing head back. Wake up, orange room. ants in bed. 30 euro. Meet Alex in morning, takes me to art Studio, smokes me out. Says all politicians have immunity from prosecution for anything done in office. No Fanis. No Kostas. Walk walk walk. Go to bus terminal area small park nap & watch stars under a tree. Go for stroll in the dark area. Check out brothel for a kick, go to strip club where its 15 to sit so I give up and not pay and go sleep in a dug out lot. Morning, etc, back to airport for Milano. Feel like Indiana Jones. Ice cream on plane, yum. Dumped off in Milan around 5pm. Expensive ass train. Get downtown, Danial tomorrow. Get lost. See Occupy Milan at the Duomo. Go to Colone square (on Del Torino?). Loud, weed, Joe, spring grad, wander off when cops clear everyone out. Sleep in same spot as last year. Next day, super hot. Repeat last years stroll, same coffee shop. Get tix – Rome to Barcelona to Lisbon to Copenhagen for 236 bucks. Meet with D and his girlfriend. Interview. Hang at park. Take train to Lecce, Salento, just for kicks. Vacation mission. Thus enters Allesandro, who sits next to me on train. Local lifeguard of best beach hooks me up, coming home from 8 months in Milano. Reads the vice article. I'm gold. After travel we go to Melendungo and he gets his car, takes me to get straight razor shave. Get all the stuff needed, dumps me off at the beach. Torre Del' Orso. Wonderful, perfect, even if no one there. Within a few hours, it gets gray and rainy and stays that way pretty much for days. Friend picks me up smoke ganja, go to Stonehenge-looking olive fields – “it is a structure for young men to smoke” cruise past mafia homes empty stray dogs. Driving // gruscotto (secret hiding space) // “deformed asphalt.” // “french bitch” friends show up Vice Italia. Good! Drive like madman through city, calzone, to flower garden square, policia very dangerous, mafia kids, alkaline trio, Nike shirt, YouTube girl, how you say, invert/invert - “fuck Christ?” “yeah fuck-a-Christ!!” red wine, 6 joints, Lecce, lion pit for Christians, roman remains, big party, goomba kids, metro-sexuals with collars up, “give me your pussy” Italian rap music, flying through the roads, dumps me off at night, I shit in woods, car rolls up, I hide, them looking for me, let them go, freaky, quiet. Waves. Will the stray dogs get me? Sleep with shovel next to me. Wake up raining slightly make it to gray beach I get cappuccino. Going to Rome to meet Gabbo Kater. Napoli no train only in morning. Golden rule/cut losses, legend in Salento, deep meaning for Allesandro, picks up @ beach, we smoke, zeitgeist federal reserve, ice cream, bye guys. Train 6 hour wait, get another calzone. Slow... en route to Rome

the train stops in a random nowhere station with sleeping gypsies everywhere. Just me and them. They start to wake, then I hop the train and make it to Rome early jamming DeadMaus. train station metro b to cavour. 5 stops north of Cavour. Get cappuccino. Meet Welt Yama Tattoo, gorgeous tat girl, listens to AKA MABUS, welt, wander, sleep in park, meet Gabbo takes off, I meet later across town at piazza, then I go to the inferno recording studio with Jucifer, Edgar. Smoke out. Next day 5 course Italian meal at Gabbo's moms earthquakes all over Italia, I go to EUR, Civilita Romana museum closed. Squat on outskirts via Fattiboni, old school, chickens, medieval, we eat pasta & pizza, like Ultimo Atto end, Cedro interview, I take off and museum still closed, go to Vatican, other contacts flake, back to park, nap, wake up in nervous semi panic is it really all over? What if I really have to go back to the USA? Off to Jucifer gig. Meet mike from Terminvvs, see stoner Moog band, sleep down street. Wake up near the random pyramid get coffee, dream was zombie apocalypse. Museum finally open nice walk through roman history completely avoids Mussolini. Ipod finally dies when I'm changing my pants. Another dark drunk. I want out. Rome like a thrift store Athens and way to expensive. Off to airport almost lose my green notebook find it in ashtray, off to meet Ulver in Barcelona. Stinky Asian woman on flight. Get dumped off half awake cranky and hurting in the most beautiful airport on earth. It was like another world completely. Quick bus to the square and Alex from Copenhagen/Obscene Extreme walks up and I had no idea it was him I was meeting. (Place Catalunya), beer @ Gothic Quarter, like Amsterdam, guys selling beers illegally on street dodging cops, walk towards beech sleep outside in lot, met Alex in morn hang at his friends apt then go to the UK squat guys. To Revoltosa – Cliff, Laura, Joao, Kuba, yeeeeah John-nee, Jesper, big show. Walking squat to squat end up at park with 40 people. Go to show with Thai guy at punk fortress dugout hill venue, hop subway with cliff, sleep 5am. Next day beach lazy day. Naked beach, sleep 5 hours, back late, Israeli guy from Hafa named Ishi, day 3 alien talk free concert, eat the greatest croissant ever, Ulver thinks no aliens says pyramids blah blah give ancient people more credit, day 4 beach, nap, basketball ping/pong off to Lisbon in morning. Alexandre gets me from airport everything white with orange roof tops, loud! Mag interviews, meet process of guilt, Corpus Christi guys, Pedro the hash stoner, Nocturnus house like Pez' shack. Pedro & doom intie, day 2 pork sandwich, cop, hash, aliens movie at bar, long drive, get some cola. Ron Paul discussion, day 3 slow, no license, wine, Pedro, jam, a Tree of Signs, Ron Paul loses Texas with 12% of vote. Loses California 11%... next day, his dad takes me to

airport. Finally gets license back. Get to k-town. Everything dark and cold, kinda rainy. Total reverse of last trip. No Kor. Go into k-town like a gypsy village, get some bubblegum weed. Try to sleep on bridge for a few hours too cold. Early morning blunt patrol no sleep back at Christiania. Internet finally no see until tomorrow. There is the show with dead instrument. Mary insane, feeling down. Hippie Santa. Go to gig. Awkward. Sleep outside in the woodland patch. Next day go back to Christiania. Down down down. Get really baked, unrelentingly. Ron Paul concedes delegates. Romney now the nominee. Cold and dark and free Sunday concert at Christiania but all bands are like bad Depeche Mode. All this time here and I haven't talked to anyone, just hung around like a ghost feeling depression suck me dry. Barcelona was only like a week or so ago? Internet, hippie santa, grim bus tickets and trains, tough to hitch out, raining for days, cold forecast. Find train for 66 euro to Bremmen, going to hitch from there back to Amsterdam. So dejected, just want out. Sleep at lake hidden in bush. Go to train. K shows up an hour before departure. Tells me maybe she travel with me in due. Get to Bremmen and there is a 40 euro train but I fuck up and not buy it stupidly cause I sleep and then price jumps up extra 36. booo! Paris Hilton American lookalike whining on the train. Call her to her face "Americano Swinehund." guy gives me free Bali shag. I get to Amsterdam to cafe 420 John Sinclair on vacation elsewhere. Get baked, visit girl briefly, short fling just weeks ago.. Shes cold. out the door American tourist once again. all sorts of plans and flaked. homeless in Amsterdam once again. Epiphany – realize that cities are my best friends "this is what my friend provides for me today, and Amsterdam always hooks it up." Wander around baked, sleep in Vondelpark at the one spot you can – the pee woods. Next day drop by 420 get food, etc, go to Spring Solstice at RUIGOORD. Race back tot he race of elves and everything gets better. First I find is Journey. Bunch of the characters – Philly Andy, ADM johnny, Erik K, Roland, P. Hook, Marijn, Levo, Remco, CJ, Suzannah glimpse then disappear, roll face go to Cukoo's next with Journey and Erik and his vaporizer hut. Johnny puts bunny ears @ fire, call everyone rolling face, sleep 3 hours, wake ragged have to pee, a black lady that looks like Grace Jones walks up and grabs my face mooshes it between her hands in an acid trance then wanders off, recoop, Sloterdijk, go back and dance sober, Suzannah reappears, first time MDMA, kisses me at campfire, e-bond, dance in church until 9am, big red glowing Ruigoord face, go outside, beautiful sky, dutch clouds for painting (said Joeroen) blanket for cape + pyrate sword, dutch cuddle cocoon, wakes me with a kiss, takes off, slow cleanup, front 242, sleep under big top, back to

Amdam, Suzannah meets me, beautiful one day date, Manowar fan, all day bliss, in park making out, so very french like, drop her off at the golden train station, she's gone, I am left with Amdam again on a hectic tourist night. "the cities provide" – perfect end to Amdam, sleep at Vondelpark again same spot avoid old syringes, sands of time, like Shoshana in *Inglourious Basterds*, 20 years old, go to 420 cafe get hitch directions leave gloriously, hitch ride with Billy Joe from North Carolina American on football team in Nuremberg, get girl at nuke plant, he keeps telling me nuke energy safest, grand central station in Antwerp, find squat monastery, Rocko Melencheck & 2 Kristofs, Yanis, Czech guys living Kerouac trip, sleep in guest room, haunted feeling, Anna in kitchen, breakfast clothes wash, computer room, guy wants me to go tomorrow, hang, take walk, Veronique and Botestraat, get drunk and play chess with Czech guys, in the morning Rasheed catches me, long walk, long rant, tells me 9/11 plane story, his girl died his mom said don't go so he listened, he is general secretary at the squat bunch of Italians in for cannabis lecture, market with Muslim women crab, mussels, etc, gives me 10 euro on way out, go to hitch spot takes hour get ride outside gent, hitch with guy who travelled Central America for 2 years, sleep in park, make it to Botestraat the Chateau Badeau on like 2 euros combined, big party, show, girls from UK busking/travelling, tells me when they captured Nazis they handed them soap and said take a shower, guy trying to kick them out the restructure plan on table, leon directors cut, surf bands seasick 6 AMD Les Prof Des Skids, dance party in basement, ULTRAVIOLENCE "Paranoid" cover, "Misrelou," Judas Priest. Day 2 – Tokyo Gore Police, Caro pils, TOOHO & doom, "we want to smash the state" the guy who blew up his own house, they think I'm crazy with Boho Grove tale, everyone sleep early, I watch Guns Of Navarone and Pulp Fiction, sleep in David's art studio, Syria shoots down Turkish jet, Reactor 4 might have collapsed, Saudis now openly funding/arming the resistance in Syria, tomorrow election results for Egypt and Muslim Brotherhood wins, what happens if I cant stay? PDX? SF? Riverside? Write everyone feverishly, jam with David, walk to cemetery, watch I am legend and raging bull, flashback in mind with the ticking clock back to Carl's trailer, begin to write about Florida for acropolis now, go to show with idiot convention Woermen whatever squat, FNB buffet, take off late, sleep in wooded area, make way up river in morning, hitch to Brussels, cheap train 7 euro to Hasselt, meet Veronique shes out her head on speed, takes me to Diepenbeek college town, meet her friend the farm boy, she find 2 4 leaf clovers in field, we go to tiny psytrance rave at club so tired shes out her head on pills, end up 6am at brothers apartment they

are still going strong I'm so dead tired they wont let me sleep, back to Veron's I sleep forever, when I'm awake shes out for 10 hours, frank the Belgian drug dealer with scorpion tat out his head on 2cb on freeway drinking everyone wasted, castle farm with Goa Gil 25 hour set, red pill that says dance, blown away by Gil, meet Mo & Emily, going to Berlin, Freqs Of Nature Festival, hitch a ride next day. Emily like Mary Poppins, volunteer, Unko, Mario, Benjamin, flyer bomb grove – epic 5 day psytrance event. Try to hitch to Prague for obscene extreme not happens, take 5 euro train to Berlin, get 44 euro bus to Prague, go to kopi, its dead, eastern European travel guy old uk dude, meet Nina and Natalia and they take me to Grimm, the runaway from Portland. Oldschool punk, rant conspiracies all night, stay with Natalia the Spanish girl, she makes me breakfast and kisses my cheek on way out. Nina and Grimm to hitch to OE the next day, Grimm friends with some Poison Idea guys, get to Prague, hang with the Slovenians, lots of grinder mobs everywhere on streets speaking many languages, sleep in park, get to Trutnov on 10 euros. 4 drunk days of bliss, after concert rideshare flakes need bus back to Brussels. 40 from student agency. Make it to Brussels way early, sleep in same park at start of trick, wake up. I don't want to go. Get stuff. Hang at airport all night. No last minute call to tell me don't go. Wake up. Call bank. 1700 left. Like peter at end of dawn of the dead I refuse to get on plane and take train to gent blubbering. I just ended an entire time loop. Man the digital cannons during Belgian week long Mardi Gras in gent, Batman shooting that weekend, 86k hits in one week, 4 prime-time stories on RT, the Belgians believe me now, but big mess at grove, Carrie is only one that shows up, people protest me. I give up, wander into Mardi Gras on drunken Belgians in castle world. Surreal. Next day try to get to Den Haag to get stamped again, not working, EU zone all different, I have to go to London or Ukraine or Norway or the Balkans. Man... find rideshare to London for 30 euros. Best bet. Turk guy with 2 french black ladies. Take boat, dumped off in London, get pain pills, way expensive train get to Keith, they feed me, can stay a few days, Scottish room mate Simone lays down the Scot/Ireland plan, day 2 dark knight rises, go to internet cafe, marge says raided by FBI 5 minutes of shit pants until she retracts, go back to Keefs, sleep, next day no Kiara, wander Camden, Scottish girl from Freqs there tells of party the tall Felicia shes going to Croatia after... stupidly I don't go to the party despite barrages of texts so tired I sleep outside. Next day go to Kiara, meet Antisect Joe go to Australian guy Bozz' party in suburb. Midget drunk, beer can canes with duct tape. Very American. Woman that thinks all guns should be outlawed, Santiago crazy guy total idiot, day 5 wake

up clean go to Birdsnest in Deptford, free show with cavity search. Sleep outside Birdsnest after meeting a girl that says I can work rebellion fest. Wake up next day go back to Victoria find 50 pounds hanging out ATM machine! Wait forever. At park meet french rapper Scarface he smokes hash with me, tells me french best language to convey full spectrum of emotion. Girl flakes on rebellion fest. Decide to just go Landjuweel and accept my USA fate. later get “devils” by Dostoevsky for 2 pounds, bill from south England older guy gives me free beers and I just tell him stories for an hour, free cigs by another guy, meet polish dude with Metallica shirt “my friend my friend you must come to Warsaw!”, take him to sleep spot, next morn find free coffee untouched, get passport EU stamped again by the french (dammit), ponder an eastern European run. Should I just overstay? Back onto the long ferry, but cheap Mega Bus for 15 pounds back to Amsterdam. Ruigoord here I come! No Sinclair, still gone. Nice chat with Jane though. Get baked. Haggle with a Paki over Vaseline, big Amdam night, find the joint in the pile of shit as a joke smoke anyway, sleep in same spot day dreaming of Suz, huge party 6 day bliss at RUIGOORD. The short fling who left me hanging earlier in Amsterdam shows back up, trying to get me to go to Switzerland with her for an anarchist conference, to just keep travelling Europe but I kinda blow her off the way she blew me off. Suz, it's all ok – she could 'never have existed.' Pain you do not know is still pain in deed – the emptiness of abyss where pain should be, but nothing is felt. Suzannah, oh Suzannah, what a wonderful eve it was... Matt the American is there, the other parking lot guard from Freqs of Nature, who I lured to come here with bizarre tales of Ruigoord. I explain that this is for me what the cannibal island is for Captain Kurtz – upstream, gone half-mad, surrounded by chaos of strangeness. and then I meet HarLeeLoo. Green hair psytrance goddess, into metal, into everything cool. her hair is green cause shes obsessed with Harley Quinn. Giant blood red Anarchist A on her shirt. She's eating my soul, dances with me. so perfect, so beautiful, so entrancing. She drags me outside to the big top tent. I know we are going to dance for days – we're gonna keep on travelling forever. Just keep twistin' again, like we did last summer, twist again like we did last year. I may never leave Holland. I am free. GREECE, here we come...

WYRD HIGHWAYS

(Edited Cuts from The Big Shiny Prison & Beyond)

LOST TRAVELS

(An Introduction to "Wyrd Highways")

In completing this final book of "*The BSP Trilogy*," conventions again do not apply. These books were a living organism dictated by reality as it occurred & what could be channeled or manifested from it's stated existence.

"Raising The Flag" declaring one is actively writing/living a book - this is genesis. Put a tape recorder in front of anyone, anywhere , and Magick happens. If you know how to spark the fire, the book will write itself.

And just as these quests took me everywhere, I could only sculpt their direction so much. Real life is never neatly tidied; everything is cliffhanger. To obsess over tangible closure is to drive oneself mad; real closure lay in the epiphany of never needing it. Its all a circle.

Like a film on pause, this trilogy ends. If there was an acute finale, it'd be detrimental to it's own logic & stated purpose.

However, we still have another thin book of it's own specific merit - all the disembodied prose intended for "*Return To Fortress Europe*" that were severed due to its fluid nature.

Instead of forcing anything together disjointedly, it was important to keep "R.T.F.E." thoroughly linked within it's own literary sphere of existence.

Think of the following tales as "deleted scenes" of a Directors Cut. Included are extended versions of writings from "*The Big Shiny Prison*" & beyond - plus various illuminations on the artistic process...

SQUARE ONE: THE BIG SHINY PRISON

– ORIGINAL PRESS RELEASE // Dec 2006 –

After waging a savage and unrelenting war for nearly 12 straight years, I have done that which I have previously thought impossible – I have quit A.K.A. MABUS and will be leaving Detroit forever. By the time many of your receive this I will be en route to a sunny retreat on The West Coast.

There are a multitude of factors which have culminated in this final decision. Let it be said that I have accomplished every single goal I had ever set out to achieve in this town, albeit through a rather turbulent course that no mere press statement could ever afford.

In the end, I have realized that personal happiness will never occur here, and the time has come to move on while I'm at the top of my game – rather than burn out or fade away.

For the past year the A.K.A. MABUS collective has worked long and hard on our debut album "Lord Of The Black Sheep." It is a fine piece of work and will still be coming out this spring, as they will be continuing on without me. There will be no farewell show.

For those who witnessed the madness first-hand, they will remember this period as something special and unique. To those who missed it, you can look forward to a 15 track titan of high-voltage insanity soon enough.

As for other matters, I would like to thank all of those that kept it real throughout this bizarre journey. Your support has been generous and solid. I will continue my activities in music and writing as always for I know no other course of action.

Throughout 2007 I will be attempting something that has yet to be pinned down in such a matter. Beginning on January 1st, until the end of the year, I will be commencing a full scale road novel and exploration of the American underground.

From Jan-April I will be bouncing between Hollywood, San Diego, Temecula, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle. Afterwards, I will be rolling through Denver, Albuquerque, Los Vegas, Chicago, and finally New York until I return to an undisclosed location in California to complete the manuscript.

Every possible genre will be represented, every social movement, every fanatical and revolutionary outcry. I seek all possible help I can receive on this one. The first chapter of this saga tentatively entitled "The Big Shiny Prison" will be running in the next three consecutive issues of The Record Magazine, available at numerous fine local Metro Detroit businesses.

The remaining cast of characters known as A.K.A. MABUS are now holding auditions for a new lead guitarist. They can be contacted through myspace.com/akamabus, and sample tracks from the upcoming album can also be previewed.

That much said, I wish the best of luck to you all, and know that the triumphs of this Detroit period will always remain close in my thoughts as I fulfill this final act of my personal tragi-comedy. THE OCCUPIED STATES OF MABUSVANIA has been unsheathed and firmly placed into motion. History is a sequence of external returns; the phases in the lives of inertias are measured in terms of years, sometimes of decades.

- Ryan Patrick Bartek; 5am, 12.13.06

...FROM THE ANOMIE PR WIRE...

UNDERGROUND JOURNALIST/MUSICIAN
 RYAN BARTEK ANNOUNCES "THE BIG SHINY PRISON"
 ROAD NOVEL/SOLO TOUR THROUGHOUT 2007

In the long standing tradition of the classic road novel, underground journalist Ryan Bartek will be traveling from his hometown of Detroit to produce an unprecedented look at the American Underground throughout 2007. Commencing in California, from January to April he will be making rounds in the areas of Los Angeles, Hollywood, San Diego, Temecula, San Francisco, and towards the end Portland and Seattle.

Afterwards, the campaign will continue through Denver, Albuquerque, Dallas, Chicago, and finally New York City. As a follow up to his critically acclaimed debut anti-novel the Silent Burning, this new book tentatively entitled "THE BIG SHINY PRISON" is a full expose stopping short of nothing to cover the extreme metal, punk, indie, experimental, rock, and industrial scenes as well as every fringe movement or bizarre story that exists to be unearthed.

The following is a statement from Bartek: *"Having been thoroughly slumbered by conventional music journalism, and having reached a swan song finale in my own hometown, it is time to move on to the next level. I have decided to do something that, to my knowledge at least, has yet to been attempted in such a manner. What this entails is a full hands-on account of The American Underground through numerous one-on-one interviews and personal contact to explore the varied realities gaining inertia today. Therefore I seek not the rich or famous, nor the rock star minded, but the freakish and struggling who have long fought in the trenches of all music scenes combined. The most outrageous elements, the most eccentric and radical views, the weirdest of the weird, the intense of the intense. All forms of heavy metal, punk rock, experimental, industrial, rock and roll...*

It's time gonzo journalism and the Kerouac fanaticism merged with underground journalism. I hope to do what Henry Miller did with The Air Conditioned Nightmare, where every chapter is in essence a character study and odyssey within itself. I am out to propagandize the oddest stories possible from fringe political parties to unconventional religions and social movements. Poets to revolutionaries. Private eyes to repo-men. Extraterrestrial seekers to hobos to felons to pagans to journalists, record labels, zine proprietors, promoters, porn professionals, film makers, et cetera ad infinitum.

Any and all are invited to join in the adventure. I seek all the help I can get on this one, as it will be the most important and riskiest move of my career. There is no major financial backing save for the small amount of money I have worked hard to accumulate in the past four months. I am leaving Detroit armed with nothing but a pen, a note book, a tape recorder, a duffel bag, a backpack, and a weird dream which I will stop at nothing to fulfill. Let's us give the stagnant media a swift kick in the pants."

Bartek has parted ways with the group A.K.A. MABUS and they will be continuing on without him. Their debut album "Lord Of The Black Sheep" is still set for an independent release in spring 2007. To preview upcoming tracks or contact the band for interview, please visit [[website](#)]...

- X -

*Thanks In Advance,
June Mansfield // Anomie PR*

***This is how "Big Shiny Prison" originally began - another gag showcasing the "Inside Joke" of constant, ever-perpetual career suicide. Always annihilating the audience by being "Garbage Pail Kid" style offensive. So here we have this daring author declare this bold book - and what's his first step? Alienate every critic, agent, publisher & reader by snorting the cremated ashes of his dead friend...*

AUNT TOMMY'S LAST ROKEE DOKE

My preference for snorting weird substances has always been of a rather eloquent manner. Preferably it involves a mirror, either gold plated or rimmed with diamonds. The razor is of an utmost importance, the coasting fluidity in which it graces the surface both majestic & divine. *One proper crushing, a perfect symmetrical line...*

In this instance there are no illegal narcotics, no Columbian smuggled fruits of the high lord. Illegal in the foreseeable future perhaps, but a law passed only upon discovery of these ghoulish antics. Certainly it's *creeeeeepy* – but freakishness does not equal illegality.

3 long years ago, Aunt Tommy – one of Onyx' prostitute buddies – had finally succumbed to AIDS, leaving behind nothing but a leather-skinned wax-like corpse. He'd struggled with the plague for some time, but in that final pained week had he deflated like a balloon, abandoning his human shell at Onyx' trailer park.

He left no will or testament – only a pile of naked Barbie dolls & a stack of biographies on prominent women. Notoriously fickle about paying his debts, he'd only left one debt behind – he owed me \$2.65 for a 2 gallon jug of milk. Now was the time to claim loan-shark revenge – although, ironically, there'd be no more a man in-tune to the general humor of this episode than the deceased Aunt Tommy himself...

So there I was, about to toss more irretrievable cash into the Tommy pit, but Onyx realized that this powder could be used as a money making scheme on the punk rock kids who follow my ludicrous whims into sparkling new fads. Actually we could start selling Tommy on our lawn, like little kids with lemonade stands.

Fuck it, no use to daydream now – it’s time to nightmare. So I paid the \$5 admission fee and prepared for the ride. Staring at that grainy lump of gray powder on the tabletop, not a single soul had a razor for usage. “*Great, another Farmer Jack savings card opportunity. Is there any higher class an angle?*”

Tommy, sweet Aunt Tommy, our *cremated* old-school den mother with a penis. *Smash, smash, smash*. No matter how rough you crack it those bone chips just won’t shatter... I snatched the rolled up \$1 bill from Mr. Skinner’s hand, wailed a monster pull from the Sailor Jerry’s bottle & Aunt Tommy went flying up my nostril. Dr. Bartek, the human vacuum cleaner. *Hot damn that drip is vicious...*

Laughter explodes throughout The Villa Winona; even if we weren’t all shit-faced this would be on par with *Duck Soup*. Skinner assumes the position & goes in for the kill – his burning eyes light up in distress. Brandon, who hammers down another crunchy line of sunshine & starts babbling: “*That’s it, that’s it – I’ve gone completely insane*”...

Within 10 minutes we’ve hit rock bottom harder than anyone we’d ever known, dancing around & cackling like Hyenas. I set the Aunt Tommy World Record with 3½ monster lines, and as I lean back into the chair the clock reads dead-on midnight. 2007 years ago, baby Jesus popped his fascist head up on this accursed earth. And 1 year from now, I can already feel the rustle of 3 dozen interviewee lawsuits being filed...

***The first chapter of "BSP" dealt with Hollywood. It was something of a misfire because I could give very little "heads up" to interviewees and LA is one busy town. I had to cut the first chapter down to flow with the rest - and at that point, the manuscript had to fly. So here is one night showcasing my ever-charming self talking about metal with a Valley Girl type, which is a pretty relatable conversation, haha. Then off to Johnny Depp's Viper Club to interview a band called Suicide Holiday.*

THE NERVE HAS BEEN PUNCTURED

"I really like your band whenever that guy's not screaming."

"Excellent."

"You don't find that offensive?"

"Oh no, our music is intentionally repulsive."

"Why would you want that? Don't you want people to like it?"

"Not really. But if they do 'get it,' they also 'get the joke.' And if you yourself liked it, there'd be something seriously wrong with it."

"What's that supposed to mean?" she says, hurt & insulted.

"No, it's fine - you don't get the joke. Not everyone does; it's a special breed. It requires a deep-seated love of Garbage Pail Kids. One day you might understand... Pardon me, my shoes are on fire."

I leave the confused girl at the table & step outside smoke a Marlboro. The back porch looks exactly like one that many years ago we'd stare into the heavens to discern the cosmic ramifications of our collective future. ..

The first day of 2007, the technical origin of this history, and I am at the home of the editor who filmed the behind-the-scenes documentary for Dave Grohl's PROBOT release. He is full of enthusiasm, well connected, charmed

by my tenacity. He knows his film, trains to one day fight in the UFC, and is a NYC refugee from Queens...

The wind blows gently – that California wind that carries no chill, yet thick with a coming storm; a destructive, heralded return of Il Nino which is months off the coast of LA. You can feel in the pores of your skin the approach of the elemental leviathan. My mind is ocean, my flesh granite – my heavy heart burning volcanic ice. This is the last day of vacation – now begins the assault... *The storm remains vague, thousands of miles away, creeping slowly in our direction...*

Johnny Depp co-owns a Hollywood night club called “The Viper Room.” It is the apex of the greed that courses through the veins of the music scene in LA – the entrance point for mediocre sycophant bands to partake in their struggle for a major contract. Record Industry Illuminati prowl silently, and every act hopes to impress the greenback-eyed fisherman...

The industry people hang out in tiny booths furnished with red cloth, where liquor specials are a 5th of Captain Morgan for \$350 or Citron \$500. You can’t even get Royal Canadian less than \$150. I’ve avoided the high price for whiskey though – I went to the store on the corner, which all sane patrons do, and slammed me a 40oz of King Cobra in the parking lot...

To add insult to injury, it costs bands \$250 to take photos of themselves playing live, and \$350 to video-record their performance, since The Viper Doom is so “prestigious” and press packet worthy. Does this strengthen Depp’s reputation as a pyrate? Only Captain Jack Sparrow would devise such a cunning, luminous plan...

While the industry people take up booths, I arrogantly plop down in one as if rightfully the heir to this reserved throne. No one has the guts to say

anything for fear of my possible connections being ruptured, and I wink at the hapless bands to cajole their greed...

I'm here to see a band called Suicide Holiday, who unlike the sell-out bands are just here doing their thing, playing in LA wherever they can. They are on the cusp of an African tour, then onto Europe. One of their members was a touring player for Trent Reznor, although I was never given the nature of his role (*Malt Liquor folks, all apologies*). The band are a darker modern rock thing, like later-day Marilyn Manson, Wednesday 13, or Powerman 5000. Niki, the female bassist, takes the recording privilege...

“How do you feel about Napoleon?”

Niki: “What – you think I’m short? You think I have some kind of complex? Hahaha...”

“I have a complex...”

“...my fishnets are riding up my ass right now...”

“If for some reason you’re in the middle of a zoo, and all the cages open simultaneously, and there’s all these fuckin’ wild animals running around – could you take a lion with your bare hands?”

“Of course – and I would dance with that lion. I would fuckin’ have it on its knees by the end.”

Are you like a big-game hunter? I heard you guys were gonna play Africa.”

“Oh yeah, we're hunting some huge game...”

“Are you gonna have huge elephant tusks on your tour van?”

“Yup – we’re gonna put tusks on the front. We’re thinkin' about having a little tail on the back too, after we slaughter 'em...”

“Do you think Elvis is still alive?”

“Definitely – he gives us all inspiration & our pelvic moves...”

Niki backs up and the singer Ralf hustles his way in. He is a lanky German in his late 20's with blonde dreadlocks and a heavy accent...

“So you’re from Germany right? Ever met Bethlehem?”

Ralf: “Nope, heard the name though. I grew up on German bands like The Scorpions...”

“Is there a burgeoning industrial metal scene in Germany or is that just a stereotype?”

“Yeah, but it’s pretty fake. It’s ok, but you know, keep it real – keep it balls to the wall. Just because you’re German doesn’t mean you’re industrial. It’s cool but it’s not rock n’ roll. Rock n’ roll is about danger. In industrial you want to be dangerous? Don’t just put some makeup on your face & have smoke machine. It’s funny, you have girls naked dancing. Again, be dangerous – that is my mission. You’re sad about your girlfriend? Go fuckin’ kill yourself. My lyrics are not about girls, not about being sad. It’s me & you, we go out and have a good time. Maybe everything is shitty but it’s you & me together. Together alone – that’s what it’s about...”

What’s the one thing you want to tell anyone reading this?”

“The sooner you die, the longer your dead...”

* * *

***Here is a cut moment from the Albuquerque chapter of “BSP” – 2 of the guys from the industrial yet cartoony Vertigo Venus talking about their side projects at a noise show of sorts where people are playing an electrified fold out metal chair. Ken Cornell is the first speaking, who is behind industrial band Alchemical Burn. Also is a tale from a solo-industrial/EDM creator Brian Botkiller...*

THE FOLD-OUT CHAIR IS AMPLIFIED

"I lived in Waco – I was there when it all burned down. I got on the roof of my house so I could see it burn... Two years before I got into my band Unit 7 Drain, the first tour that they went on, they stopped 40 miles south of Albuquerque to get gas and beer."

"Two of the guys were in the van. One of them was asleep, the other was on acid, and the third one's pumping gas – then he caught a beer bottle across the head from rednecks in the parking lot 'cause they had like blue hair & eyeliner & shit – these guys just didn't like the look of them."

"The guy that was asleep ran out & also got hit with some bottles in the head. They grab one of the guys that are attacking them & just pummel his face in – finally the guys took off. They went inside trying to pay for gas, covered in blood. The next 2 weeks they're on tour with bloodied clothes..."

The above quoted bolts from the Tiki Lounge and there are now but a handful left for Ken Cornell's performance as Alchemical Burn. Brian Botkiller is the other half of this duo for an industrialized noise tag-team. They leap their beats creating a pulsating eeriness from an arsenal of modulators, theremins, samplers, electronic toms...

There is an atmosphere of silent observation, sonic emissions leaving the sparse audience in odd reverie. Ken pulls out an electrified, fold out steel chair and microphones it to pick up the waves of distorted static as he solos the noise climax by wrenching it's rusted, crunchy legs against the tiling of the floor...

Later on, Brian Botkiller explains his first solo concert: *"Someone tried to kill me. My car broke down 15 miles outside Albuquerque one night, like 3am. I used a phone at a hotel off the highway, and my friend and I decided to walk to town to get cigarettes."*

“This guy pulls up in this huge truck – it’s like 8 feet off the ground. He’s yelling at us, just yelling at us. ‘Hey white boy!’ And this is a white guy. He’s like, ‘Where you from?’ and we say, ‘We’re not from around here.’”

“I guess he didn’t like that, so he revs his engine, spins his truck around, and comes right at us. We jump over the side-railing and he slams into it, missing us by inches.”

“He’s driving alongside us as we’re running – there’s no moon that night, it’s dark as shit, I lose my friend, and just fall 10 feet down a ditch. I smash my head against the side of the ditch & land on my knee – I passed out like 10 seconds. I heard his truck go by & realized my left knee was broken...”

“So this guy is pulling into this field coming back to find us. We ran a half mile back towards the hotel and I’m running on my broken knee and this guy is trying to run us down.”

“We get back and we’re banging on the door, we wake up the keeper and he lets us in. Truck pulls into the parking lot and the dude’s just sitting there, just waiting for us. We call the cops. They don’t show for who knows how long, and this guys’ just sitting out there.”

“The cop shows up and immediately looks at me. My leg was all destroyed, bleeding all over the place in a real bad way. He laughs at me. I’m like, ‘what’s so funny?’ He’s like, ‘Nothing, nothing.’”

“I tell him the story and he tells me, ‘I’ve gone out there and I’ve talked to him. He said that you guys were trying to mess with his ATV.’ He didn’t even file a report, he didn’t do anything! So that was awesome. Then I asked him for a ride to my car and he says he can’t do it. My first solo gig and a broken knee...”

***Anyone who's ever been in a band or tried to be a semi-serious artist in the underground while forced to be a blue collar shmuck will understand this next one I dubbed "Universal Employment Woes." While this exemplifies so much sentiment already in the back of people's minds, it appeared in the "Mercury Retrograde" chapter while hanging around San Diego - another point where the script just needed to keep zooming forward.*

THE UNIVERSAL EMPLOYMENT WOES OF THE UNDERGROUND, EXEMPLIFIED

I find employment at this dinky, high-volume pizza shop that services the SDSU college kids. It's also next to the best liquor store in the city, and our parking lot is full of drunks, coke-heads & tweakers all night.

The job is a madhouse. I'm making shit minimum wage, but not complaining. Everyone at this place smokes a hellified amount of pot, as we break every hour to have a 6 man Philly blunt pow-wow.

There are a few pretty girl co-workers I wouldn't mind getting to know better, but like all jobs, I have to keep my big, subversive mouth shut & play up some bumbling Clark Kent routine. At work I'm Ryan the quiet guy, never Bartek the foul-mouthed Pyrate Lord...

I attempt to remain unnoticed 'cause I need a quiet workplace where I'm totally under the radar and no one will bother to care or realize how weird I really am. The last thing I need is for any of them to type my name in the internet. I can't let them know who I am, what I do, or what I'm into – *ever*.

If they find out they either don't believe a word of what I say, are terrified of me, or pushily harass me to hook up their band or friends' bands with press then get angry when I don't. The second they realize you know celebrities they lurch towards you like zombies and end up despising you 'cause you won't introduce them.

“Well if you’re this famous *Big Shot*, what are you doing working here?” No one “buys” that you’re purposely laying low while writing some ludicrously epic book, and intentionally working at a crap pizza joint because you don’t want any responsibility. You try to use the “*Kevin Spacey at the hamburger joint in American Beauty*” comparison, but no avail...

They will never believe you don’t want any scenesters to know you’re in town because you have to worry about spurning press-hopeful bands when you don’t do something for them. And they never, ever believe you sometimes have kids break into cold-sweats when they shake your hand.

They don’t believe that the last 5 girls you’ve dated have all been models, or that you don’t want everyone to read your books – and they certainly don’t believe you don’t want anyone to know what you look like, because *everyone* wants to be famous...

To make music because it’s what’s inside of you and not to pick up chicks or be famous is laughable to them. To try and discuss music is pointless, because everything I listen to is ultra-obscure & generally imported from Europe: “*You listen to European metal? You’re a closet Nazi no matter what you say ‘cause you like weird music from Germany and wear army boots and have blonde hair.*” And the usual, “*Rock stars are rich, you don’t have money, therefore you’re just a hater ‘cause your band ain’t on on MTV or corporate radio.*”

It all goes around in one big, never-ending circle jerk. The conception of art & social revolution remains miles above their heads. They never have a grip on what the underground is really like, and you can’t explain the fanaticism that resides in punk rock or heavy metal.

They can’t mentally register that in the underground if you even remotely talk about supporting gender classification, materialism, authority, religious fundamentalism, or big-money hustlin’ you’ll be blackballed, beaten by a mob of crusties or laughed out of Dodge...

In any instance, I'm driven out of the job by unsolicited pressure, weird looks, or axed for extremist views. The only saving grace is their usual gross ignorance. They pigeonhole all weirdo's into one vague, gray area classification that appears harmless & unappealing, like your some un-hip "chess team" honky nerd. Let's just hope pizza gig lasts enough to fund my secondary expedition...

* * *

***What use is any story if lacking a pulse of romance? While never intended for the book, this was written at some point during it. This piece showcases the tongue-in-cheek romantic-ness of the author and is psychologically revealing (if not charming). This wasn't addressed to anyone in particular, but rather just a vague statement to many individuals who'd never read it, tucked away in a forgotten notebook.*

Dear [insert different name then usual]

I see the world which now envelops you, that split from idealism into adult career. The gears lain against you are beginning to churn. Despite the great power against me, know that I will continue to fight for your soul. No matter how many steps ahead you get, myself & all the maniacs I've created are eternally beyond your farthest advance.

When you sit down at that table for your big job interview, know that it will fall apart because we already physically removed the screws. When you go to cash your paycheck no liquor store will do so, because we convinced the cashier to quit his job mid-shift an hour before you came inside. The bank will be of no help, because all of their customers will have pulled their money out. Western Union will be a vacant building for rent.

The harder you pursue this line of action, the less your money will be worth, because we shall annihilate all principles of supply & demand. Even though I cannot win this struggle in full, know that I shall die with my hands clean of their poison.

You know this to be the path of truth. I set these grand booby traps because of my great love for you. I personally witnessed your utopian peak and I saw first hand the goddess you were & the selfless feats of charity of which you are fully capable. Like a mischievous gremlin I clip your wings not from stubbornness, but because of compassion, for I am eternally he who feeds The Apple to The Snake.

* * *

***How can one discuss the 1990's and not bring up Marilyn Manson? Especially if it's a chapter set in Seattle ruminating about the "Grunge" era & "dark era" soon after. The rise & fall of Marilyn Manson was quite an astonishing thing. The guy made pop culture play into his hands, and through mass media exposure became the poster boy for all kinds of wild subjects. it was this same proverbial volcano which basically drown him in it's lava. While I liked this bit, it certainly felt misplaced & unnecessary 300+ pages into the book...*

THE FALL OF MANSON

It's another hour before I get to Capitol Hill; alone again, just strolling. Seattle – the land of 1000 coffee shops. Everything I've ingested has led me to believe it's still 1997...

Growing up in a place like Detroit which is territoriality in the middle of everything – the whole Midwest is always 10 years behind. Back in the 90's, the internet wasn't a major player & there was no 800 channel HDTV with On Demand music stations.

You had radio feeding you what the corporations handpicked, and basic cable where if you stayed up all night hoping to see metal videos on MTV at 4am.

No one had any clue about European metal or imported punk because there was no Napster or likewise service – you had to dig through used record store shelves listening to everything at the headphone station to find all the really cool shit, and usually even then it wasn't all that deep underground.

You had to wait in line for concert tickets on a “*first come first serve*” basis, gruel it out in a sleeping bag overnight. These days you just hit ENTER on the keyboard.

In '92 when grunge hit, the “powers that be” set this fad as the generic prototype to push. Everybody had flannels & long hair, shaved-side bowl cuts. It's just the way things were, because a board room in New York decided so. Even though the really weird kids had our own innovations, that “Seattle look” was still at the core...

When Cobain shot himself, the marketing world wasn't ready for it – they greedily planned to ride the Kurt caboose until no more coal was accessible. You had a massive crop of youth who were heart-broken & twisted, because the maker of the music & dreamer of their dreams was dead as a doornail in a tragic, anticlimactic, fugly finale. It wrecked the minds of all those teeny girls sending love letters to his fan club. Shit got dark, fast, and then immediately Nine Inch Nails dropped *The Downward Spiral*, which sort of took the place Nirvana held...

I wasn't among the Nirvana kids – I was still sporting Judas Priest shirts in '94. Actually it wasn't until about 2000 that I retrospectively went back to *In Utero* & *Bleach* and realized how amazing Nirvana really were.

I was a die-hard of this “new campaign” because Nine Inch Nails was my favorite band since 6th grade, 3 years before *Downward Spiral* came out, and I regularly got my ass kicked for defending them to redneck children.

I was overjoyed Reznor was selected as The New Cobain, because it meant pure psychological warfare. His shit was deep & freakish, with petrifying lyrics that got under your skin, incubating contempt for society, religion, and human arrogance...

They gave Trent Reznor free reign to run amuck with his hands in everything. To the outside world, his hit single “*Closer*” was the industrial equivalent of “*Pour Some Sugar On Me*.” They never read between the lines, and no one spotted his agenda to warp the youth.

He came at us with a blitz of bands via Interscope Records – side-projects, mind-blowing video collections, movie soundtracks, NIN remix albums. 1994 was a bizarre CandyLand of demented children age 11-20 growing increasingly depraved...

And then came Marilyn Manson, Trent's ultimate ace. As this deranged, drugged out Willy Wonka, Manson gripped everyone with the undisputed awesomeness of *Portrait of an American Family*, which I will defend to my dying breath as one of the most underrated rock albums of all time (*thank you, Scott Putesky*).

You have to understand this is before Manson became the ego bloated, watered-down hack he is today. At that point there was no Antichrist, no glam guy, no lame dadaist nu-metal thing or cut-rate stripper anthem pop songs – he was just a dirty freak somewhere between Iggy Pop & Alice Cooper. His lyrics were powerful & confrontational, and he had the most underrated, brilliantly original guitarist ever – Daisy Berkowitz...

2 years later – right place, right time – *Antichrist Superstar* came out. To a vast sea of post-Cobain warped Reznor protégés – and a certain 15 year old underdog who was a die-hard Anton LaVey worshipper – it was a grand declaration of war. Manson “told it like it was” while marketing himself as the ultimate anti-hero in the most oxymoronic, repulsive shell imaginable...

In that brief campaign from October ‘96-September 1998, he did more damage then any “major media rock persona” of my generation. GG Allin was a hushed secret, and this was the first true exposure of king-hell shock rock 90’s style.

Manson's interviews were razor sharp, and his live shows beyond belief. It was a theatrical cross between the demagogue Pink’s final transformation in *The Wall* & a mosh-pitting Church of Satan rally...

Unlike so many other bands of his time, what he was all about was front & center in everyone’s face. If you wore a Manson t-shirt you’d instantly be targeted by police harassment, despised by parents, confronted by Christians trying to save your soul, face the endless threat of fist-fighting mobs of jocks or honky g-thugs.

The hostility was just as vicious from the rebellious kids, who were in large measure taking it to the extremes. Anything could come out of it and that permeating darkness got under everyone’s skin.

You had those who just enjoyed music & the spirit of Halloween, kids just out to piss off their parents – then you had a growing army of maniacs who literally wanted The Antichrist Superstar to be *real*. It bred a cauldron of self-destruction, religious deprecation – rampages, protests, social deviancy...

People will always downplay & ignore what went on there, but it was a vicious ground-war explosion that was fought tooth & nail. In that period a subculture of freaks came together under a propagandic figurehead. Just be thankful no one ever heard of Burzum at the time...

While Manson was running around the country playing sold-out shows surrounded by caravans of missionaries & armies of police in riot gear, the entertainment industry decided this was all too radical an experiment to make a buck off and slowly backed out.

They used their radio tendrils to kill off the old bands of Seattle-era “Grunge” and then Clear Channel replaced everything with over-produced fluff like Creed, Limp Bizkit, Disturbed, Nickelback, Staind, Filter, Sugar Ray, Godsmack, the laziest Korn they could muster.

All the old bands of “The Dark Era” – NIN, Pantera, Type O Negative, Ministry, Tori Amos, Smashing Pumpkins, etc – they’d all disappeared from radio or stopped recording for way too long. The few that released albums were mediocre with little promotion...

Manson was the last standing and in the position to unleash hell it had raised such fever pitch. But then brilliantly, the great ace up his sleeve was to completely alienate his entire audience with that ridiculous Hollywood-rocker glam campaign that was so heavy on the homosexuality it wilted away the entire metal/hard rock base.

In hindsight, *Mechanical Animals* is quality – the sarcasm, message & production are excellent – but it was the worst case scenario of wrong place, wrong time. In 1 week all of those die-hard supporters burned their t-shirts, ripped up his posters, dumpstered him...

His stadium tour bombed & stagehands were sabotaging his set – he eventually switched to smaller venues to recoup the massive financial loss.

But then like a lightning bolt from another planet, the Columbine school shooting happened, which was the stake in the heart of The Old World. He was scapegoated, attacked by every media source, and received thousands of death threats.

He canceled his tour 2 months early and went underground, refusing to leave his house for 3 months in a nervous breakdown – painting watercolors, drinking absinthe & blowing down endless rails of Special K...

When he finally resurrected himself with that lame, watered-down *Hollywood* album late 2000, it was the equivalent of Napoleon showing back up in modern day France expecting his empire to still be in tact 300 years later, in complete denial of Waterloo...

* * *

***In the New York segment, I stayed with an Iraq Vet – a Marine I knew back in high school as a skinny punk rock kid. We were reunited after many years, not having seen each other since 1995 when he was moved out of state.*

He popped back up mid-way through the book – he was relocating to NYC. So we drove to New Jersey from Michigan with his furniture & belongings in a U-Haul.

Along the way, he mentioned he'd kept some old fiction writing I did. And it made it's way into the scraps taped inside his notebook that he went to war with. While securing Baghdad block by block as a sniper directly after Saddam Hussein's downfall, he kept re-reading this thing I did below & writing poetry.

It became this weird thing in the back of his head, merging with the warzone he was living. When he mentioned it I remembered – and it too entered my head like a tarot card image symbolizing my NYC adventure.

*Now, the story itself – who are the NecroLords? F**ked if I know. I'd say ask 15 year old me, but I doubt he even knew. Just some half-baked, unfinished gory tale that was a slick set-up for something much better & more gruesome that just never came.*

Don't blame me - blame the stoned kid who wrote this! But he probably only wrote it because he was stoned. So, don't blame pot either - cherish it!

Either way, this is some Grade A super cheesy post-apocalypse horror movie sci-fi action. Perhaps I'll finish it someday!

But I don't think anything this burned out, cranky old fart could make is anything remotely as cool as what some 1990's "Dark Era" teenager watching horror movies non-stop might conjure.

Schechter's Fave (The NecroLords)

The stink is rising – you know, the way the corpses rot in the heat. Last nights' onslaught had been a slaughter, leaving countless numbers of humans to thrive in the streets. Blood flowed & the silence had brought fear into the remainders.

Only a child and some men had escaped the raid. Hiding in the seclusion of the sewers, they lay silent staring into the darkness as they heard the roar of souls being torn from bodies of the unfortunate at the hands of the NecroLords – fierce armies of the damned.

Armageddon had come, in the true sense of the word. If only mankind had listened to the cries of madmen, for only the insane could know what was coming, as they felt things more deeply than the others. This insight had made all of their nature “delusional,” for they'd peered deep into their souls & had seen what was coming.

Torture, death, destruction, and pain beyond mortal understanding were all common thoughts toward their understanding of reality. These type of men the NecroLords had stolen for their own, using them to foretell their own future – and in consuming this power they've been rendered nearly unstoppable.

As the few remaining humans gathered their senses, they picked their weapons up from the sewer's murk and began moving towards the grating. The youngest was sent to the grating to peer out for a safe escape route.

Nervously, he crept to the holes where the sun was peeking through and looked back at the others who were completely silent with not even an exhale. Regaining his courage, the young man lifted himself up on rungs of the ladder shaft and almost lost his grip because the slime. While this did not stop him, what did was the sight of what awaited...

He mismanaged his grip & plummeted into the murky septic-shock brewing waters, nearly breaking his leg. He tried to get back up but only partially did so, vomiting as he collapsed once again into the raw sewage. The rest of the group dare not say a word, for the look in his eyes was enough to show them what awaited above...

* * *

***This next nervous meltdown of anxiety came 8 months into "The Big Shiny Prison" - living at the squatty house The Villa Winona, totally consumed by manic August intensity. It was one of those summer nights in San Diego - humid & soupy, sweating bullets, typing away at a computer at 330 am in a cockroach infested flop. Here it is, unabridged...*

8 MONTH ANNIVERSARY (7.20.07) // Original Version

I remember back in 1998 Marvel Comics initiated a campaign to reestablish the roots & origins of all its prominent characters – to revitalize, to clean the slate, to take seemingly ancient archetypes & reintroduce them to the new generation at hand...

For some reason this platform has always stayed with me, this pointed paragraph of an interview from J. Quesada 9 years ago. It had a resonance

that coincided with my own scattershot – hitting 17, the messy trail of the prior 4 years being refurbished, spaded under. Back to my roots, reexamining core characters & their relationships, influence, plots – the interwoven complexity of our pathways...

This was a process that took hold deeply as a necessary confrontation of age. In lieu of the chaos which later emerged & speed at which everything progressed, this loose-screw cocoon morphed into an obsession of deconstruction. I had become a whirlwind of flux...

This book is my attempt to strip it further bare than I've ever succeeded – to throw away your life, to sacrifice yourself to journalism, to art; knowing that with every breath & action you are a character within a novel that you are in fact living & writing simultaneously.

You write yourself as yourself writes you, and you become the sacrificial lamb conduit of an unsteady ball of inertia that comes speeding from obscurity that you must cling onto whenever the opportunity emerges and go blindly onward to the next adventure. There is no time to think or breath; even sleep is sleeplessness...

So what is this effect upon a man? I do not believe I am qualified to give an answer that the general public could understand. I'm somewhere far away; I have been from birth. I felt ancient & elderly at 5 years old, and I am no more than the backlash of your control and vulgarity.

The world I live in bares little resemblance to the world you know. I cannot connect with it – I can only watch it twitch nervously like a patient on a psychiatric couch acutely under my lens, my soul itself the amplified magnifying glass...

I analyze your animal mechanisms and watch your guilt & empathy give your every action & impulse away. I know too much, I've

seen too much. The gray cement walls, the crystalline sky, the loose change on the desk, the garbage can rolling in heavy wind, the shattered glass lining the oil-stained desolate alleyway – to me these things are the only things that are real and humanity is the clutter...

You are the animate inanimate objects. You are the robots & gears of the machine. No culture, no ideals; no romance, imagination, charisma, talent, process, structure, community, rebellion, reliability.

You are a culture of spiritual invalids. You are the ghosts haunting my world running on poltergeist motor function. *Naivety, ingratitude, persecutors, liars & shams...*

The Quesada method has lost all gravity. I now take the furthest approach – to withdraw & scrutinize the primordial sense of myself. No television, no movies, no video games, no books, no comics, no moderately gourmet food – no money, no woman, no car, no possession save what a backpack and dufflebag can maintain.

I stand at a periphery in which I am frozen in time mere moments before falling to the depths of the canyon below. I could go through brutalization at Auschwitz and dust the snowing ashes from my shoulder.

I have nothing to prove to any of you, and I've nothing left to give you. The hard fact is my personal record entails such a history that to fully experience it would drive any normal individual to madness.

This is my real problem with women – once they see my truth, they get lost in it and never return. Bad things happen when people listen to me talk. It's my most charming, boyish quality...

So I boil it down to what I'm really made of. And all I'm left with is the permanent impression of the violence that has dominated my life. Violence has been the one consistent variable in everything. My art, music, self-therapy, sex, emotion, language.

Everything has been colored by hatred, revenge, destruction – themes I've never eclipsed. I am a victim of my environment and a mere reflection of its bruised & scab-picked surface.

All the people I once fought for are now living ghosts far from me – literally dead, in prison, something else, somewhere else. I had turned into poor Willy Lomax, lost in a world of ghosts; one could say I reveled in it masochistically. Perhaps there was a truth in my suffering that I needed to discover but could never grasp.

But now all of that has been wiped clean – I am this character of GhostNomad, and there are no more phantasms or flashbacks. The memories are fading if not permanently gone, and I no longer struggle to hold onto them. When I try I find only thread bare strands misty & opaque. I am something else now, something of pure energy. To even call me human seems absurd, as absurd as that statement is within itself.

It all goes back to violence. I tried to hope, I tried to be politically conscious. I tried to believe that we as humanity could rise above the level of gears & sheep.

But it's no longer my struggle. I choose to accept the absurd notion and place myself as a peripheral visitor. I'm a tourist. I'm bored, I want to go home, but home there is not. Death seems the only return, but that is never to be romanticized...

I don't know what to believe because to summarize a view of life you would need definition of the self yet this is a lapse because there is nothing to compare myself to in order to mold a solid cohesion. It is my firm decision at this moment in time that there is no other course of truth – I am a nihilist, albeit with an acute & poetic humor.

Every strategy to decode the cosmos or summarize the human existence ultimately showcases a frailty which unravels it. But it does not

stifle the absolute humor of the grand punch-line – it's the joke itself that remains a mind-clawing enigma.

No morality truly exists – nothing governs us save the flimsy laws of science and survival. Beyond that is a gap filled by religion, propaganda, television, marketing, merchandising, immediate hedonism, collective human population & its nucleus of herd mentality...

We are not a race nor a nation – we are simply lumps of putty molded by our immediate environments and by the models we assume from systematically observing human interaction.

Clumps of tribes assuming an interconnected identity by technology far advanced then we are compatible for, in a world moving at lightning speed towards homogenization & endless confusion. This is the core of all understanding, and it looks & feels like Manhattan as Armageddon...

For the past few years I've turned to an analogy favored by the Marquis de Sade. After being persecuted & imprisoned illegally by his stepmother for 13 years – freed during the French Revolution – fate had it that he was to become a supreme judge of the guillotine.

Yet he never condemned to death anyone unless his own head was on the chopping block. He could not persecute or damn, for it would undo all he stood for: '*Judge not lest ye be judged.*'

Into this situation, the Marquis' stepmother was brought before his mercy. With one stroke of the gavel, he could have had his revenge. One snap of his fingers & she'd been beheaded. Yet with all his fire he shouted, '*This is how I avenge myself!*' & set her free.

They butchered the prime of his life – degraded him, broke him, stole his land & inheritance. And with the bat of an eye, he could've had

his ultimate revenge. Yet he did not. It was one of the strongest moments of ideological firmness recorded in mankind...

I tried to let such mythological strength guide me. That analogy I would turn to for comfort & guidance. But I no longer hold that strength. When it comes to the core of what I am, who I am, the cold-blooded fire that burns inside me – all that truly has existed in the past 5 years internally is a constant struggle between the noble belief of anti-persecution and the damning revenge of reaction.

Truth is, I'm sick of hearing them talk – I am exhausted by their uselessness, clamor & noise. You ask me what effect I hope this book will have? *Money? Career? Celebrity?*

A giant sun-like beam radiating the truth I unearth to guide those who “explode like roman candles” under its majestic twilight?

Nein. I hope to damage your America so profusely it will take centuries to heal. I hope your children smash every TV set, disown all their belongings & savagely destroy all which persecutes them.

I hope to inspire thousands onto the road, prepared or not, results be damned. I hope your foundations rot to their core & your plastic culture is reduced to ash. I hope your ugliness suffocates & breaks you...

But don't look at me as if I'm the ringleader. I am not a John The Baptist of any New Order. I'm not an anti-hero, nor a revolutionary – I'm not even a drummer boy. I am simply a tourist. I don't like it here & I want to go home. There are no plans, there is no organization, there is no conspiracy. This is the United States of America and you have the right to hate whoever & whatever you want. And that's why we are Free...

LOST UPDATE

October 14th, 2008 – the perfect date to type this long-negated update; the 1 year anniversary of the death of the road & genesis of this year-long, vaporous limbo. From that moment until last night, only two things have taken actual precedence – finishing the book/getting it published & the quest for true romance... I'm a man who listens to fortune cookies & heeds astrology columns. It's not that I believe in superstition; it's that I turn to symbolism for my sense of father. He never praises, only punishes – for his directions are ambiguous & ceaselessly lay claim to disaster...

So where am I today, knowing & having known fully well that the year following my road campaign would be a period of Precambrian genesis, morphing & altering? That all learned lessons would be applied in a new man, a new body, a new creation?

For one year straight you wake up in a different state of the union, in a new reality – mind-frames & environments alien from all you'd ever known, this kaleidoscope range of experiences & sensations, then you shoot right back down the tunnel & plop out at the beginning – all over again with everyone from the initiation of the voyage staring you right in the face, eagerly waiting to consume whatever wisdom you are liable to relate, like kiddies at a campfire listenin' to Old Grandpa...

But they don't like what they hear, they don't "get you" – in fact they want only to immediately sever this new, wise, Zarathustrian you – and their confusion/misunderstanding quickly turns from desperation to distrust to anger to jealousy then a brutal coup-de-tat climax...

In one day you're handed everything – you're wife, you're kids, you're future, happiness, escape, sunny bliss – you see it all, after chasing a ghost for 2 years, it's just handed to you on a platter. *And the moment it's within a hairline fracture of a grasp, Armageddon...*

Prior to that, during the crust clan pyrate hustle in San Diego, I'd saved \$900, was living on a couch for \$100 a month, raking in a \$1000 from the job per month, and by April 1st would have had everything allocated in Los Angeles with the stealth snap of the fingers – full guitar rig, big house with practice space, full SASQUATCH AGNOSTIC lineup ready to tour and pressed LP, better job, completed BIG SHINY PRISON manuscript, new guitar, allocated van, Hollywood rumblings, a carefully laid systematic state of Pan-Tribal

cells in a every major American city & a deranged Detroit expatriate cult living happily-ever-after like the Adams Family in a sunny faraway land with naive rich people for thousands of miles... So close, soooooo close to actualization – SOOOOOOOO close...

Instead, an unmitigated volcanic explosion. No reason, no rhyme – just the way things happen with me, always. January 29th 2008, again climbing onto a Greyhound escape pod – that was the corpse of everything I once was. Everyone who was close to me, everyone that mattered – it's like they all died at the same time, the biggest funeral ever held.

It is said that one person could only take 3 of his/her closest dying at once without going completely mad. Well, I took 20 on the spot. Just erased, wiped off the planet – my wife, my children, my home; my brothers, sisters, psychologist, bodyguard, astrologist, commando unit & refugium...

That was the death of everything Ryan Bartek was – just the ice-soul zombie of GhostNomad, this wreck of flesh being carted off to who knows where, to do who knows what, no real plan except that I had a couch to stay on in Seattle once the rough draft of the book was done in Michigan – if there was any money to get there.

So sick on that bus home, collapsing from near pneumonia in Las Vegas with a 104 temp – then getting stuck in the Rocky Mountains at the height of the fever and 14 inches of snow with a dead heating system, shaking under blankets with screaming babies everywhere, wanting to die rather than face the prospect of having to work the winter in Royal Oak, if I even had a place to stay or would be thrown to the street...

By the time I got to Michigan I had \$200 & no one was hip to having me lounge on their couch for long. Although I got some pity allocation, I ended exactly where I dreaded – that same trailer park where I & the whole lot of San Diego folks came from. Right back to the vein...

So I cut off the world & went deep into the trailer cocoon – my ex-roommate dipping out to Colorado for 2 weeks – just myself, 40 pots of coffee, 300 pages to type, silence, darkness & Buju the kitty cat...

I finished the rough draft on March 2nd, the day before I was to shove off to Washington once & for all. 3 months in to 2008, and nothing but darkness, pain & a screaming ulcer formulating ever so rapidly...

On it went upon my NW return – living on a couch on the outskirts of West Seattle with a couple long-haired metal dudes – no money to go anywhere, working full time, typing like mad, living up a romance farce going nowhere, this pathetic attempt of “setting up shop” yet falling apart internally 'cause I felt utterly useless & unable to change anything...

With every day the Old World died, and with every passing day the New World was sluggishly moving forward. I was a stranger in a strange land; this inverse of main street America gone supra-eco progressively liberal. I found most of Seattle's inhabitants to live in undisturbed bubbles purebred by Washington with no knowledge of the Nazi terror which imbues Outside America. To them Detroit was just a word, a vague image. They'd never witnessed a horror like Houston or Gary, Indiana...

Everyone so PC – so progressively snooty liberal, if even just a fad for show.

Finally, the freaks become the majority – and they go right to living like straight, normal people with even more rules & regulations & control? What's the point of being weird if there is no Gamorrah on the horizon? Is this not what we should be working towards – Sodom??? To be hated & feared & represent chaos is *soooooo important*, even if we are all silly children at heart...

Police Officers with septum rings & knuckle tats...

Every dime I scrapped, living like a prison cell reading every book & watching every movie I'd missed in the past 10 years – I had to throw every buck into a 3 month temp lease in a smelly ant-infested house, leaving no money to promote the book, buy equipment, start a life, do much of anything...

3 months of desperation only to begin another 3 of the same, and after 5 full months of huffing & puffing, I finally let “the girl” go. No rough edges, no detestation – she just couldn't fathom where I was. I was like a Nam vet coming back to his high school sweetheart after 5 years of jungle recon, trying to explain the severe baptism of fire...

Well, that was that. In my absence she soon bolted back from whence she came, leaving me in expatriate isolation. A tragic defeat of what could have been but never really was... Therefore I moved into the stinky ant house & sat in a basement like Saddam Hussein in that spider hole – hiding, typing, trying so hard to get the book out, sending it everywhere, totally agoraphobic, not talking to anyone outside my already established contacts, refusing to speak to any girl lest it be a certain Roman Goddess / Uber-Sidekick who might as well been a talking A.I. MySpace block...

That was mid-June, and now its mid-October. Between these periods, I've done some serious research. In a colliding roller-coaster of intense experiences I've come to enormous revelations of great historical importance.

Take your creative license on these please...

- 1) Skynet and the vegan-anti-transfat axis;
their coexistence and codependency.
- 2) The Labyrinth and its surrealistic architectural poise a literally and carefully planned organic painting, pulsing with main civilization points similar in proportion to the Redeker Plan.
- 3) The absolute necessity of OPERATION: GAMORRAH.
- 4) The identical necessity of mass MKULTRA.
- 5) The Ragnarok cycle of *Saved By The Bell* episode morality.

So here is the plan, step by step, since I finally made the money mark necessary to put everything in action. Seattle is now rigged for happily-ever-after punk rock retirement, I completed the first SASQUATCH AGNOSTIC album as an EP, final drafts of all 3 books, finished a movie screenplay & got all my contacts in order for future touring.

Above all, I'm personally content on an individual level after facing all my demons & burning the past to cinders. I no longer find myself intolerable – in fact, I rule, and I'm so happy just being awesome, just getting drunk by my lonesome & heading downtown & bouncing around like a crazed pinball & flowing with random buses like a mad dog sticking his head out the window digging the breeze & adventure. Still, *plans plans plans...*

#1 SASQUATCH AGNOSTIC: Instead of going through all the hoopla to put together a band from scratch, I'm just gonna make a new studio album then hook up with a quality band & have them learn a 20 minute grindpunk set. Then I book us a 6 week tour with myself on vocals so I can hobble out at end of their band set, grab the microphone, and we just turn into S.A. & slay the crowd dead. In the meantime, I work their merch as to make it a seamless operation. BADDABOOM. And this one band won't be the only SASQUATCH AGNOSTIC – I will allocate a "Sasquatch Cell" in Detroit, New York, San Fran, Seattle & LA, just bouncing around the country like a maniac renegade, doing journalism & spoken word gigs as I feel. All bands write our own material – quicky thrashy grindpunk songs. Then we slap all bands together on a "Retrospective Anthology."

#2 ART: Since everyone everywhere is generally full of shit, I'm just gonna live for ME for once & the rest of y'all ingrates can piss off. I will be doing what I should've all along – PAINTING.

#3 PHYSICAL THERAPY: Again, crocodile spine of horrendous pain & a dilapidated body. Need chiropractic, gym, acupuncture – and all of this will be A LOT of money which I don't have. Can't stands this no mo...

#4 OPERATION: GAMORRAH, ARKHAM ETERNAL & THE SIEGE OF NEO-GOTHAM: Take your creative license with these please...

#5 MR. BARTEK, FAMOUS HEAVY METAL JOURNALIST GUY: Well, I've made it to the point where I'm known internationally as this thing, but having been at it for 7 years & accomplishing all of my goals in the field, I'm really only doing this now spottily, for fun. For the time being, it's my turn to do the band & have people write about me for a change. I'll just be hooking up "nobody bands" I dig because I have that power until my big journalism book comes out, which leads us to...

#6 THE BIG SHINY PRISON: It's done, it's a marvel, it will redefine metal journalism & the modern "classic road novel." Problem is, as always, its extreme nature & indefinable niche – yet all I need to do is brainwash the right people to put it in plain view at Borders Books, Barnes & Noble, Hot Topic because it "sells itself." At the moment, I've been sending promos all over the place. The big issue is cost of D.I.Y. Printing & shipping rates – it's running me \$17 per kit to send out & lots of 3 hour trips across town. I've sent about 25 of the beasts to record labels & literary agents & going through pro protocol. Still, that this economy is tanking does not help reassure the small-time publisher of taking major risks. However, quality & longevity are on my side. It will come out even if I have to live on the street & work 5 jobs to raise the cash...

* * *

Well, I'm at the library and out of time. More later, ya tragic whores...

Excruciatingly,
-KlownFuehrer, GhostNomad, Benedict Badoglio & Herr Bartek

***And here is a glimpse into an artist's exhaustion.*

it's finally reached that point

I've been quite considerate of my own mortality as of late. Actually, I've always been fairly obsessed. Not morbidly, or in some emo way, but that I've always taken into consideration that you could never live to see tomorrow...

So I based my life on that principle & from an early age set out to accomplish certain goals. For the most part, I have accomplished these goals. I had a plan I enacted that would last until, say, around the age of 30, expecting to never really live as long as I have.

This explains the problem – I surpassed the point, and I'm not really sure what to do with myself. Like so many of the adults whom I listened to the regrets of, I'm starting to become one of them.

Not because I didn't accomplish the majors – but that I'm left with a sense of dismay 'cause I never found myself able to live & breathe & be human. I always had to be someone else, always had to push the extreme.

I became such a workaholic that I missed out on many of the simple pleasures. Most were smart enough to just be kids, to have relationships & their own worlds & be strong enough to realize that's all they were – just humans floating on a rock in space. They didn't feel compelled to try & create themselves as urban legends to live up to some impossible archetype.

A lot of the reasons why I do what I do is out of guilt. There was once someone very close to me that committed suicide about a decade ago. I know that I am not responsible for this, but in a way I am, because sometime before it happened she confided in me as a protector.

But I went off the hinge, she became someone else & I turned into a self-destructive, drugged out wreck that didn't give a shit about anything but watching the rottenness of the world burn to the ground. And then one day I got the phone call...

That's about the time I turned into a workaholic, typing my way into a trance. The vast majority of my actions – the writing, the music – all of this became a way for me to reach out to people like her, to provide the possibility of another world, that we could all be legends & superheroes. I would give to those like her reading my work some kind of anonymous strength. To just prove, maybe, that they were not alone.

And now sometimes I get emails from people around the world telling me that they read my books – that sometimes they were close to putting a bullet in their head – and I inspired them to do something more with their life. Is it vindication? I don't know. But at least I tried.

Which brings me back to my quasi-emo point – I've surpassed my plan and am not sure what to do with myself. Once the book is complete, that's the swan-song – everything after seems a lame fuck-around...

Physically, I'm a wreck & cannot push it like I once did. The cartilage in my kneecaps are grinding, and I really don't know how much longer before I'm a hobbling cripple. Which means this being a cook for employment business – my livelihood these days – has an apparently short life-span as well. In a different America I'd find a new line of work. But that option doesn't exist anymore – this country is over & I've qualities but no marketable “degree-based” skills...

One of the things I loved most in life has been the freedom of the street – to just invade a city at random, live there a few months, see the reality of life in a pure way those suit & tie yuppies never will as they rush to work in mute panic obsessing about their condos, credit bills & IKEA collections. But I'm in no shape to keep floating from scratch...

I keep watching that monologue from JCVD where Van Damme breaks down on camera. He was another of the many adults I kind of looked up to as a kid – the superhuman tough guys.

If I had it to do all over again, I'd ditch the sickliness of drugs, tobacco & alcohol and just be some karate man. I'd buy a guitar early on and learned to be a shredder. I would've just dropped the bullshit & found a beautiful woman to just be real with & close off the world...

True, there have been many women in my life. Some really major ones that never truly went all the way. Ever since I left Detroit, there was always a new one popping up in every town that I ended up in. And time & time again, I could never just stop – I was addicted to movement. I wanted so much that I was never strong enough to stop.

When I look back I can say that I was in love quite a number of times, even though many were misplaced affection they could not reciprocate 'cause I was always in a place they could never understand. You love someone because you are a million miles above them & understand them perfectly, but they can't grasp where you are.

So there are all of these situations I can count off, but there were only 3 majors. The first, we were just fucked up kids. The second was not long ago – someone I didn't meet until the last second of Michigan whom I should've known for years but never came across, despite her knowing nearly every person I hung out with to the point where no one brought us up to each other because they just assumed we hung out all the time.

It was a sick head-trip & I was consumed by her nearly 2 years, to the point where every woman I met or talked to only reminded me of her. And anytime I saw her in person, I was unable to speak because I was so awe-struck & intimidated.

I am convinced she was my “soul-mate” – if such a thing exists. If you were to ask her though she'd never agree. She'll probably just describe me as some loon who wrote her too many big, desperate, over-the-top letters & made a fool of himself from 3000 miles away. She had absolutely no idea

who I was and as a result, I changed completely & grew a new soul in response; I became someone else entirely...

The third came after I stopped struggling. She found me naked by the side of the road, beaten to a pulp. I no longer struggled & just went with it. As a result she taught me more about just being human than I can describe.

But age difference, the gulf of experience & two loons thrown together in the most stressful & apocalyptic of situations... Somewhere along the way I had to go my own route. And now I'm here, writing this, but at least I know who I am....

* * *

So I find myself at a crossroads. And like Van Damme in his great rant, I too wish to proclaim "OSS," find my way back home & get my health back. I keep struggling with quitting smoking; I keep struggling with my own body, which aches & pains to no end. But that's the bitch with getting old – you fall apart, piece by piece...

But I saw the world, I conquered my objectives. I've known so many beautiful people & discovered true love many a time, even if tragically short. I've lived all over the USA & come to a deeper understanding of life & the human condition than most will in my short time upon this floating rock. My triumph outweighs my regret, but regrets remain still...

I guess the only thing you really can do is fight like a champ to outweigh that ratio.. One must become Grand Voivod of the sub-subterranean horde. I am 13/18 flying rampage with trample, at the cost of 20 black mana & 666 colorless...

OCCUPIED CASCADIA

Tonight was the big premier of OCCUPIED CASCADIA, a documentary which is a triumph of propaganda relating to our growing tribe here in the Northwest. I do not say propaganda in a demeaning sense, because propaganda is a form of language, a kind of psychological mathematics, if you will. This film was slam dunk & hats off to the architects...

This movie struck a specific chord of spiritual self-analysis. In all my years adopting pseudonyms, assuming the temperaments/dispositions of a host of fictional characters, writers or historical figures that have inspired me (*or who've provided a symbolic morality fable*), I think I've finally pinpointed the one that I identify with most, at least at this stage – Necron 99 from the Ralph Bakshi animated classic *Wizards*, circa 1977.

I see myself in this forlorn caricature because he is something of an Imperial StormTrooper borne from mutant wastelands. He is quite innocently a henchman of a blackened fascist wizard, sent off to be a pawn soldier in a mad mutant war.

Early in the film he is reprogrammed by the elven heroes, renamed “Peace,” and thus fights alongside the rebellion. The problem with Peace/Necron 99 is that anything he touches is infected by the evil that birthed him like a lingering black magic spell of possession. This eventually leads to his tragic downfall...

When I came to the Northwest, without knowing the mythological history, I instinctively felt the pull of what the Native Americans called “The Land of Wounded Healers.” It has been a place that people like me

have flocked to unknowingly & sought refuge. The powerful atmosphere of Cascadia is like a womb that breathes inherent resuscitation...

Instead of a black wizards sway, that evil influence within me is Detroit itself – the land of death, the ghost that forever haunts. Detroit, it is said: *“Does to the white man in months what a 100+ years of slavery couldn't do to the Negro.”* My father is Bill O Reilly & my Mother is Ann Coulter; my religion was spiritual Opus Dei, my brainwashing sadist.

Most my friends are dead or in prison, otherwise drowning in debt with children or they've become something else, somewhere else. The few that continued the path of spiritual honesty & integrity are of the last flickering stars in that dread universe. All is not lost among the bright ones, but the game is rigged. And none that have lived their entire existence in Metro Detroit have any clue as to how green the grass is at the other end...

It is the scar of Detroit & it's blue collar, self defeating, violent, homophobic, racially prejudiced Archie Bunker mentality that I still stave off every day. In my head, it screams that this line of thought is still correct – this crude, flag waving, center-right spiritual leech.

Because of brutal conditioning, my mainframe agrees through & through. My soul though still fights like a champ, cutting through this psychological gibberish with the rampant strikes of light-sabers...

When I close my eyes, I see smokestack canopies coughing yellow toxic smoke. I see abandoned buildings with broken windows like hollow skulls. I see black ice covering roads that are of Siberian tundra. I see empty streets because even the homeless are used as automatic weapon target practice for the hostile gangs lurking inside. I see despair and hopelessness, and a culture of the enslavement & probation & tethers & arbitrary jail sentences & -30 degree winters with 28 inches of snow...

I wrote a book about it called *The Silent Burning*. It's what “broke me” in the underground & made me something of a legend in certain circles. It thrust me into a spotlight, at least in terms of “Planet Metal.” I don't promote this notorious manuscript anymore, because it is no longer “me.” If you wish to know the dead soul which I attempt to segregate myself from, it is your best evidence...

I remember exploring every inch of that mausoleum. I was a taxi cab driver in Detroit. I worked for the bus company. I was a parts driver for Ford Motor Company. I grew up on the West Detroit border, where crossing one side of the street led to apocalyptic roads filled with pot holes & boarded up houses, and the other the largest Arab community outside the middle east in terms of population density.

The river which ran through my hometown and gave it its lifeblood was so poisonous from Ford's chemical dumping that all the way until the early 90's even sipping a gulp would kill you within hours. In some spots, the grass was pink from the toxicity...

I remember the glass lining freeways where you do not stop or get out. I remember the cut wire pay phones, the mold eating away the buildings like stacks of wet discarded newspapers. I remember being 5 years old & living in the ghetto with bars on the windows like a cage.

I remember, oh yes I do – and I'm still there right now, mentally fighting those ghosts every day of my life. I should be dead or in prison, yet somehow I am here – and it's all one strange dream...

So like Necron 99, I too have escaped the blackened pull, but instead of elves I've given myself to Occupy & the notion of a gloriously self-sufficient Cascadia. Yet no matter how centered one becomes at Mt Hood, I'm still a robotic soldier of a dead empire...

This is the uniqueness of my tale, one that I do not generally express to others who've bravely stood up for what is right in our struggle. Perhaps it doesn't matter, because we are all Anonymous now.

Yet it is that very background I come from which has impeded my ability to truly fit into the NW. You go from nothingness to the Big League hipster city with it's free zone max & \$200 a month food stamps & everyone has funny colored hair yet no one is dodging carloads of jocks who jump them for being strange.

Weird is “normal” here – and somehow the “weird ones” are the same people who in Detroit World would once beat the shit out of me in mobs for wearing an Iron Maiden t-shirt. They've only had the advantage of smarter parents, and an emotionally open, artistic environment.

I am the remnant of an extinct world fighting death in the world which now gives me life. So when you see me bottled into myself, head down & earphones cranking extreme metal, know that it is not an insult, that I am not antisocial out of rudeness.

I've once again become that loner kid who rode my bike 10 miles a day fist-fighting the other children daily, who sat like a reject in Boys & Girls Clubs of America playing pool with black kids from the inner city, forced to go fishing with my uncle because the psychiatrist recommended it to my estranged mother lest I be sent to a boot camp instead.

I am again that kid who found no other restitution from the pain which engulfed him & made him desire suicide save for a fanatic commitment of revenge against all the things which created him. Know that it is I, this ghost from another world, trying so humbly to move on but most likely to damaged to proceed in any real distance...

Onward Cascadia! // – R. Bartek :: 2012

Ryan Bartek is a writer & musician from Detroit (MI) now living in Portland (OR). He is author of 6 books: “*Anticlimax Leviathan*,” “*The Big Shiny Prison (Volume One)*,” “*Fortress Europe (The Big Shiny Prison Vol. II)*,” “*Return To Fortress Europe (BSP Vol. III)*,” “*The Silent Burning*” and “*To Live & Die On Zug Island*”

Bartek is guitarist/vocalist of SKULLMASTER, an Extreme Metal band from Portland, Oregon. He also performs acoustic/anti-folk as “The Real Man In Black” & spoken word performances. LURKING STRANGERS, his freakish new punk rock band, will be debuting 2019.

Known for his journalism in the metal/punk undergrounds due to his counterculture travel books and long-term output for mass-market magazines, high-traffic webzines & respected print fanzines, R. Bartek is also the shadowy figure behind the press relations firm Anomie PR, servicing thousands of media outlets globally.

:: Books ::

“*Anticlimax Leviathan*”
 “*The Big Shiny Prison (Volume One)*”
 “*Fortress Europe (BSP Vol. II)*”
 “*Return To Fortress Europe (BSP Vol III)*”
 “*To Live & Die On Zug Island*” (*Unreleased)
 “*The Silent Burning*” (2005; Out of Print)

:: Records ::

Vulture Locust “*Command Presence*”
 A.K.A. MABUS “*Lord of The Black Sheep*”
 Sasquatch Agnostic “*Complete Mammalogy*”
 The REAL Man In Black “*GhostNomad Lives*”

All albums & books have been released under Anomie INC /
 Anomie Press, as FREE digital downloads.

* * *

R. Bartek’s book collection & music discography 100% FREE

www.BigShinyPrison.com

In 2007 it began - Detroit spawned journalist Ryan Bartek traveled the USA to create a unique exploration of American Counterculture. This non-fiction road book "*The Big Shiny Prison*" would not only detail his observations of America, but equally cover the heavy metal / punk rock underground of its fringes.

1 year, 35 States & 600+ hours on Greyhounds later, "*The Big Shiny Prison*" was released November 2009 to instant acclaim; a wild, highly original manuscript featuring 100's of face-to-face interviews with legends in the metal/punk/industrial/alt-rock undergrounds.

By March 2012, "*Fortress Europe (The Big Shiny Prison Vol. II)*" was released - this time following the author backpacking Europe. This genre-defying work continued it's exploration of fringe culture, and once again featured 100's of face-to-face interviews with legends in extreme metal, punk, industrial, rock & electronic.

"*Return To Fortress Europe*" is the 3rd volume of his acclaimed series, documenting an eye-opening, high-octane journey through the stranger regions of Europe: Greece, Romania, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Serbia, Croatia, Belgium, Germany & Netherlands - while also featuring interviews with some of the most prominent metal & punk bands in their respective countries.

This work is also a chronicle of the worldwide protests launched by Take The Square & Occupy Wall Street, their impact and realities unfolding at the time of the author's adventures.

Less a music book and more a tribute to the Beat Generation, "*Return To Fortress Europe*" combines the classic autobiographical road novel with current European Counterculture.

This edition also includes extended & cut material from "*The Big Shiny Prison*" and other unpublished writings.

- Download Ryan Bartek's book collection/music discography FREE @ -

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