

Giant Robot



• ISSUE

41

SUPER NATURAL

GEORGE TAKEI
THE AUTOMATOR
HAMBURGER EYES
MAD WORLD
DENGUE FEVER
IRON MAN

JEANA S



ウルトラマン
ULTRAMANTM

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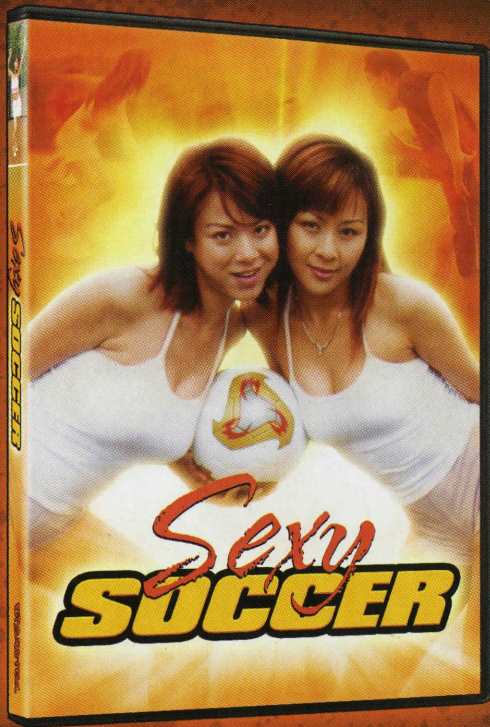
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The story continues at GetIntoFusion.com

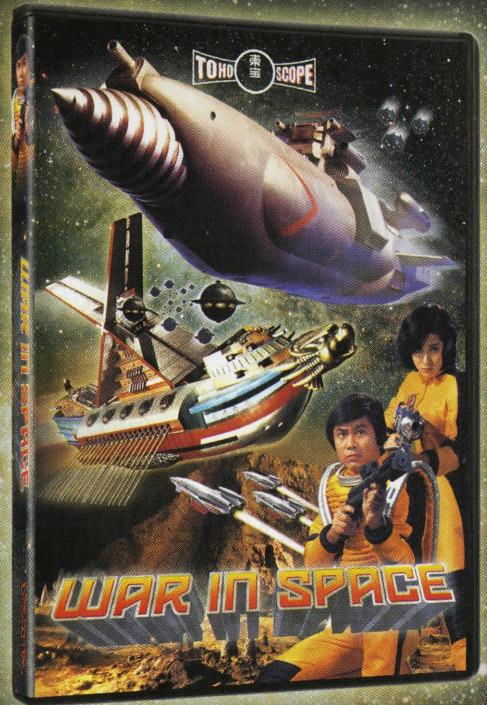
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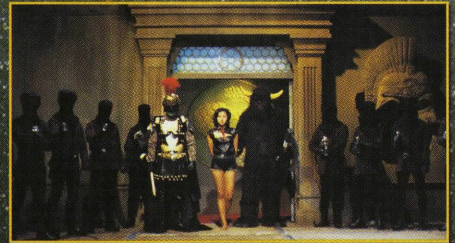
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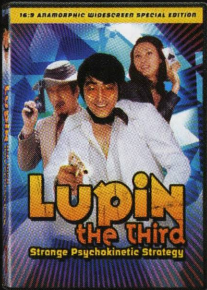


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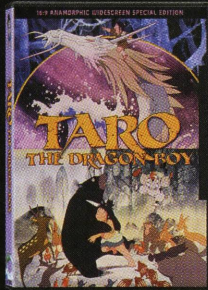


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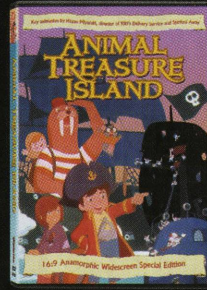
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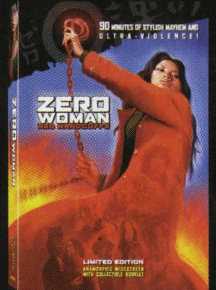
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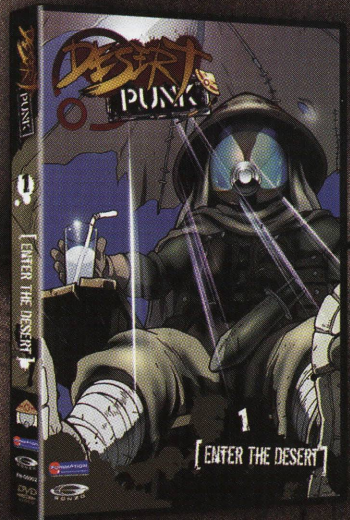
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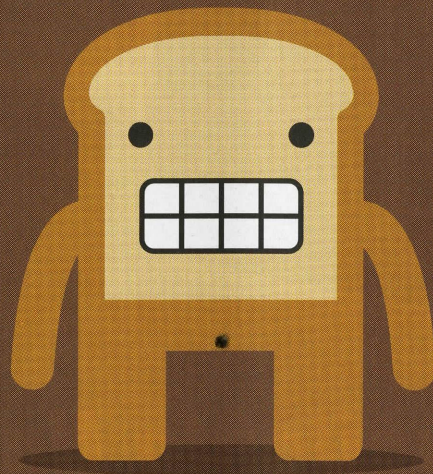
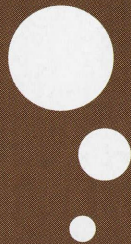


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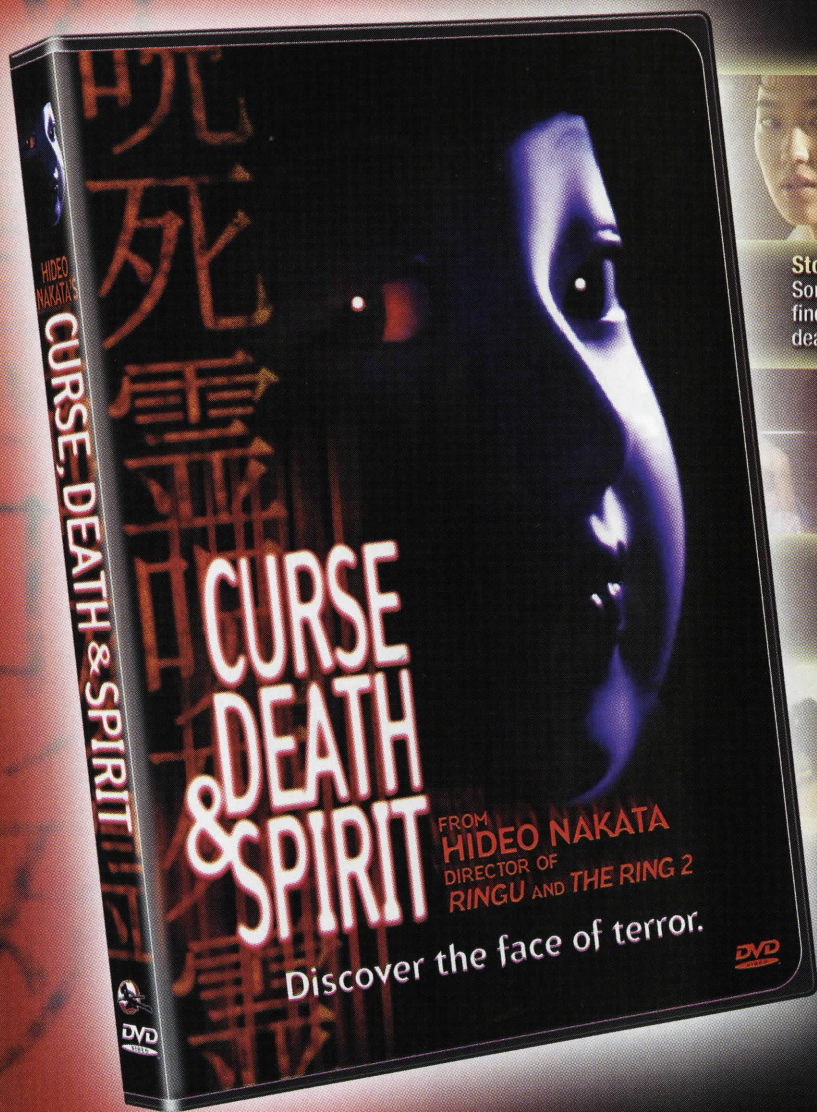
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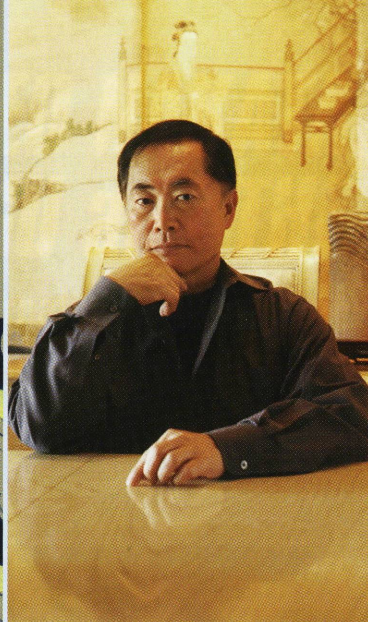
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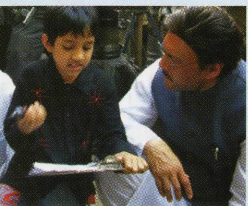
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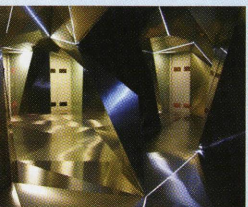
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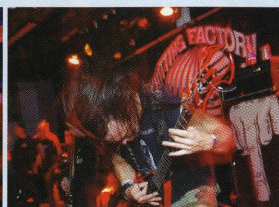
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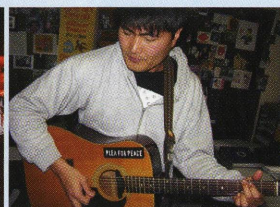
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On the Cover

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Hide and Seek, 2005
Acrylic on paper, 7" x 11"

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Jeana Sohn
Feeding the Sharks, 2006
Acrylic on paper, 8" x 10"

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Throw, Michelle Loc for the Frida font (even though we
didn't use it this issue)

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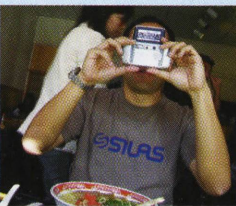
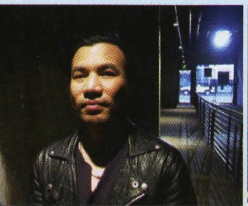
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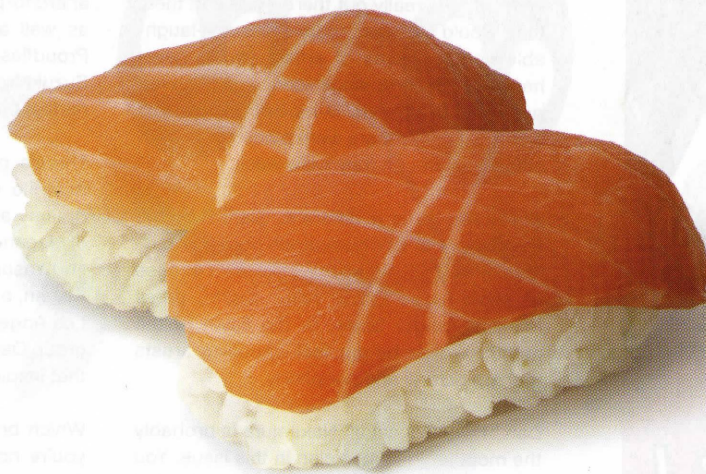
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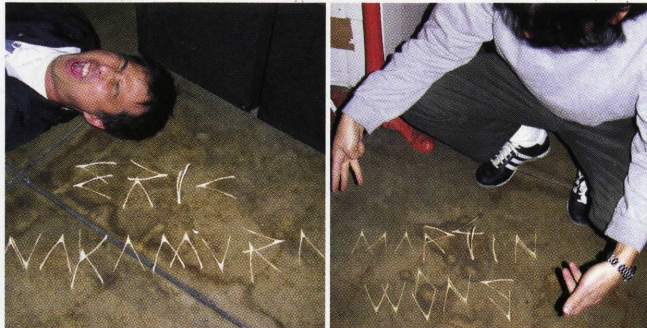
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LAUNCH



Lucky Break wishbones are vegan and Ray Fong-approved.

Once upon a time there were magazines that tried in vain to define what it means to be Asian American, rather than simply experience what is really out there. Now and then, they would release “music” issues—laughable compendiums of artists you’ve never heard of. Generic singer-songwriters, over-produced boy bands, B-movie poseurs, and token band members were placed on a pedestal even though they were wack.

Our music issue is different. Giant Robot is an offshoot of DIY punk zines from the early '90s, and we don't spotlight music because of super-Asian lyrics, sales charts, press releases, pretty faces, or the flavor of the month. We go by gut feel—choosing artists that are natural and not phony.

Dan “The Automator” Nakamura is probably the most famous musician in this issue. You hardly ever see his face because he's behind the scenes, but he's shaping sounds and tastes on his own terms. Mike Park is an indie artist who realized that Asian-American

musicians will never get a fat record deal so he started his own label. Other individuals include Sothira Pheng from the influential anarcho-punk group from the '80s, Crucifix, as well as his hard-rocking current band Proudflash; underground metal hero Dave Suzuki from Vital Remains; and humble Canadian trip-hopper Koushik Ghosh.

There's plenty of other topics: The larger-than-life experiences of George Takei, the dreamy art of Jeana Sohn, the dark cinema of Japanese filmmakers Shinya Tsukamoto, and Yasuo Inoue, Bollywood protégé Master Kishan, a trip to Madrid's ARCO festival, and Los Angeles-based Cambodian psychedelic group Dengue Fever's journey to the country that inspired its sound.

Which brings us back to the music. Even if you're not interested in the artists or open to their genres, give the articles a chance. We won't pretend to provide the soundtrack to your life, but do we think the artists' outlook, energy, and stories are worth your while.

as of March 9, 2006

Giant Robot Foundation

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Julia Huang
Eugene Alex Hwang
Bleu Loo
John Arai Mitchell
Megan Mullally
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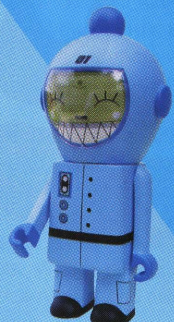
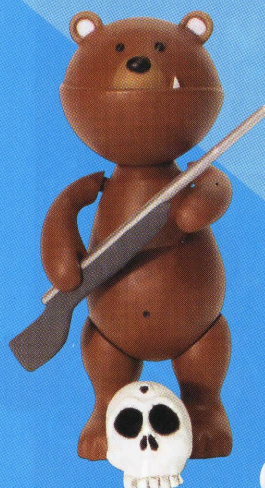
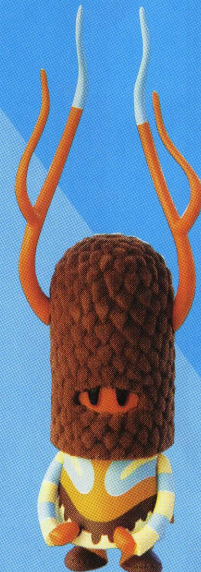
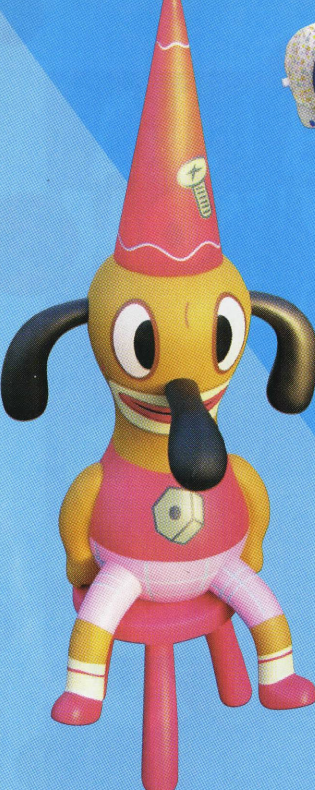
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GIANT ROBOT TRASH

ERIC'S TEN

1. February (The Month). Got a huge award from JANM as a visionary in the arts and met George Takei, went to Madrid and hung out with great folks (thanks Pedro and Peter), did Ray Fong weekend in L.A., then went to S.F. to see Dehara's show, then NYC to seize another location to make a GR2-type spot, and returned for deadlines.

- 2. gr/eats Turns One in April.** Come by and say hello!
- 3. New gianrobot.com page will be up soon.** We'll start blogging and podcasting, and it might be up by the time you read this.
- 4. Olympic Curling.** <cusack> It's the sport of the future. </cusack>
- 5. PSP.** When I get time, I'll play with it more often. What a great item.
- 6. Finding My Old Seiko 5 Watch.** Lost it for a year, and now it's back like an old friend.
- 7. UCI Talk.** We picked off some great talent—most of whom weren't even enrolled in the class! Next: Harvard GSD.
- 8. Genius Bar at the Apple Store.** Pretentious name, but great concept, and helpful, too.
- 9. The New GR2 in NYC.** It'll be next to the other GR, and feature art shows with Caroline Hwang, Saelee Oh, Souther Salazar, and kozyn-dan, in that order!
- 10. Isamu Noguchi Show at JANM.** Check it out if you're in SoCal.



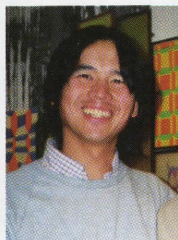
KIYOSHI'S FIVE

1. Razorcake Fanzine. Rocking its fifth year of heavy thinking and heavy drinking. Happy anniversary!

2. Mark "The Hammer" Coleman versus Mauricio "Shogun" Rua. Holy crap! The Pride Superfight went out of control and turned into a royal rumble. Pro wrestling wishes it were this crazy.

- 3. Seventy More Artists To Be Announced.** Are the "other" Masters of American Comics at New Image Art?
- 4. Lucha Vavoom.** Rudos, technicos, masked-midget wrestling, metro sexuals, and a bevy of burlesque ladies get thrown together with inappropriate amounts of alcohol at the Mayan Theater.
- 5. Kendo Kashin Undercover.** I met Puro Resu superstar Kendo Kashin at the Lucha Vavoom show, while he was unmasked and enjoying the burlesque girls and Mexican wrestlers.

MARTIN'S TEN



1. Here Comes Sickness. I hardly ever get ill, but the flu wiped me out for two weeks in February. Damn.

- 2. One-Inch Ceramic Tiles from eBay.** Mr. Lau's bathroom-redecorating effort has been awesome. I also have a pedestal sink and unbreakable toilet!
- 3. Ray Fong at GR2 and Yukinori Dehara shows at GRSF.** Also, sucking at surfing with the Fongs three days in a row!
- 4. GR Softball.** We finished last season by winning six in a row to earn a second-place trophy in honor of our injured third baseman. Now it's time to seize first place and win the summer tournament.
- 5. Cool Shows:** Lifetime, Grand Buffet, Brujeria, Cattle Decapitation, Gregory Isaacs, Alton Ellis, Horace Andy, Vital Remains, Unfear, The Impaled, DMBQ, Arctic Monkeys, Eastern Youth.
- 6. Talay Thai.** Order three dishes, and you get one free. Plus, they deliver to the GR office.
- 7. Destructo Trucks.** I'm still a lousy skater, but I'm styling on my Shepard Fairey-painted axles. Next: Maharishi and Dalek.
- 8. Midweek Snowboarding at Mammoth.**
- 9. Music DVDs:** *The Director's Bureau: AV Club; The Director's Bureau: Shynola; The Mae Shi: Lock the Skull, Load the Gun; Nardwuar the Human Serviette; Concluding Unmusical Postscript.*
- 10. JANM Banquet.** The GR crew got dressed up, George Takei was awesome, and Eric's mom had the best time out of anyone in the room. Then we hit a Friends With You art show and DJ Jester gig!

GATE'S FIVE



- 1. Hines Ward's Super Bowl XL MVP.**
- 2. Mora Mi-Ok Stephen Receiving the Spirit Award for Conventioneers.**
- 3. Ang Lee's Brokeback Mountain sweep.** Kudos to Michael Costigan.
- 4. Robert Altman's Honorary Oscar.**
- 5. Eric's JANM honor acceptance speech.**

JUDI OYAMA, OLD SCHOOL SKATEBOARDER

Favorite Skateboard Artists

1. Jim Phillips
2. Jimbo Phillip
3. Sean Cliver
4. Johnny "Mojo" Munneryn
5. Thomas Campbell



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Flatland BMX Paradises

1. Shinjuku Chou Park (Tokyo, Japan)
2. Zuma Beach Parking Lot (Zuma Beach, USA)
3. BBG (Saitama, Japan)
4. Park and Ride (Studio City, USA)
5. Ibiripuera Park (São Paulo, Brazil)



MEENA KIM, FELT MOI

Why I Handstitch Plush Toys

1. Plush friends are the best friends.
2. Bunnies are soft, cute and delicious.
3. Poor people *make* things.
4. Creative control! Mwah-ha-ha-ha!
5. Actually, I only had to make two and then put them in a romantic setting. Wink, wink.



KIWON YOON, SCIENTIST

Best Things About The South Pole

1. Seeing my footprints in the snow for days afterward.
2. Snot instantly freezing and crackling.
3. Playing the best ping pong of my life.
4. NY strip and Guinness for breakfast—at midnight.
5. Leaving.



UNA KIM, KEEP SHOES

Why We Started a Women's Shoe Co.

1. Size 5 boys' kicks are never in stock.
2. With \$100K in student loans, there's nothing to lose.
3. No leather, no lame labor.
4. Pink deserves more respect.
5. To live the dream and work with our friends.



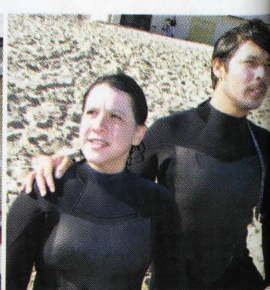
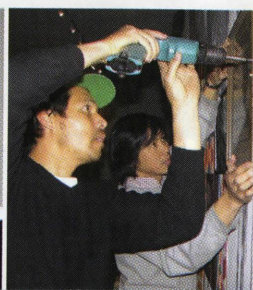
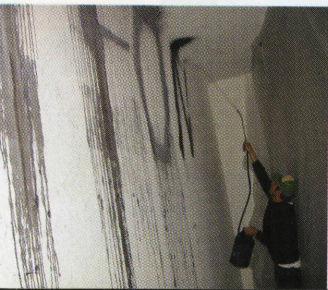
TOM TAVEE, PHOTOGRAPHER/ KISS MY SNAKE FILMMAKER

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1. Sekonic L-558 Light Meter
2. Quantum Q-Flashes
3. Leica M6 TTL .85 Rangefinder
4. Canon EOS-1DS Mark II Digital Camera
5. Domke Canvas Camera Bags

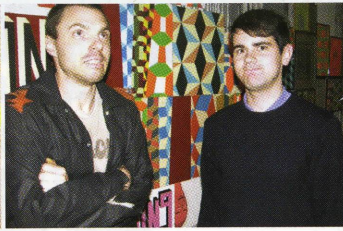


Who Is Ray Fong?

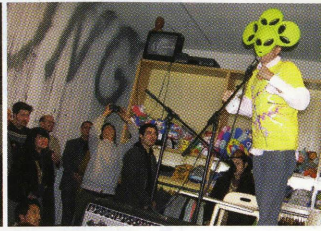




Ray Fong hairnets and Barry McGee artifacts.



Artist-drummers Brian Chippendale and Jack Long.



Andrew Jeffrey Wright is the unknown comic.



Lydia Fong gets the best (only) seat in the house.



Lydia, Asha, and Ray Fong soak in the awesomeness that is Paper Rad.

podcast at giantrobot.com

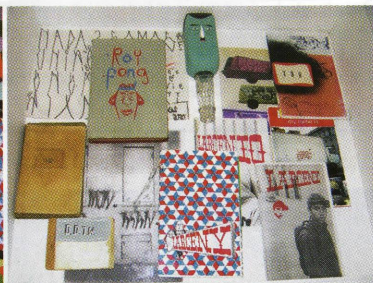
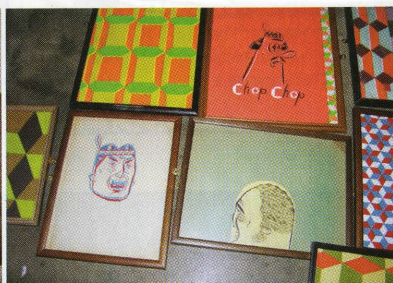
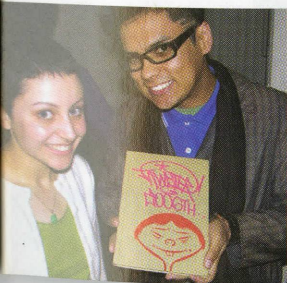
Ray Fong could be any Chinese man in any Chinatown. But the Ray Fong who arrived at GR2 was Barry McGee. Showing art at Giant Robot's Los Angeles gallery is atypical of an artist who paints in museums and huge galleries around the world. But because we're in Southern California where the surf is decent, this show was made possible. Some people can be bribed with money or food. For Barry, it takes waves.

The question of the week was, "Why 'Ray Fong'?" Answer: Because using a pseudonym is mysterious and fun, and lowers the pressure. As the truth about his identity started to be known, freaks and fans began calling, stalking, and hustling for the chance to buy art from a modern master. We maintained only that "Ray Fong would be showing."

Barry's approach was unique from the get-go. He peeked behind the front door and asked, "Is it okay to start from the first corner and go to the far corner?" Of course! The first night was brief. Barry placed squares with geometric patterns on the wall while we prepared extra boards by painting them white. The next night was much longer. We gave Barry permission to "get up" with a pesticide sprayer. That excited him more than anything else, but first we had to make a tent since the spray would bounce off the wall and splatter the rest of the room. The paint dripped like crazy, but ruined only Barry's clear complexion and a few books. The remainder of the wood pieces went up easily, the Ray Fong metal box sign worked like a charm, and drawers were filled with "artifacts." We left at 6:30 a.m.

Before the Friday-night opening, a crowd lined up in the rain as we set up a DVD that showed off Barry's animation skills and did some last-minute Gocco printing for special Ray Fong hairnet packaging. At 7 p.m. the doors opened, and an excited herd filled the room. Not long after, Andrew Jeffrey Wright did a short stand-up routine and then introduced a musical performance by Lydia Fong aka Peggy Honeywell aka Clare Rojas. She sang and played acoustic instruments atop a cleared-off merchandise table. Tasteful drums were provided by Ron Regé, Jr. Afterward, kids lined up to get their sketchpads tagged by Barry, and it was like a book signing.

On Sunday night, Barry presented a slide show about graffiti in San Francisco, New York, and Brazil. You wouldn't believe how funny he was. Clare whispered that this was unlike his other slide shows; he seemed really comfortable. Maybe the casual space gave Barry a level of freedom that doesn't happen in galleries or classrooms? The slide show was amazing—better than any concert, book, or movie.



BOOK COLLECTOR

Air Show



Misaki Kawaii's weird felt art and drawings are making in-roads in the world of high art. In this collection, she makes planes that are cute, raw, and filled with energy. Some are piloted by little animals, while others feature The Beatles! The book is truly odd, and for some reason it's perforated so you can make little cards. Keep an eye out for Misaki.

Gaylord Phoenix 4



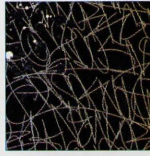
This is a bizarre and far-out adventure about a confused, lost spirit named Gaylord Phoenix. He receives assistance that doesn't work, and in the end he has to help himself. The story's imagery is striking and awesome. The nice, hand-screened cover is great, but doesn't even do justice to the interior work. That's better than the other way around, though. Find this book.

Pulling Teeth



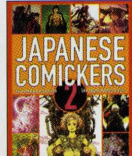
Co-founded by Andrew Jeffrey Wright, Philadelphia's 1026 art space is home to a nationally known collective that spits out amazing work and puts on great shows. This hard-to-find hardcover publication shows off the work and energy that go on there. Vanity books like this are the best. Anything goes, and it's even better if you happen to know some of them.

Also Known As



Light on attitude but heavy on design, *Also Known As* might be the most exciting graffiti book ever. No joke! It's packaged with mini posters, cards, stickers, different paper stocks, and other doodads that will thrill print and graphic design freaks. This will make you want to tag, bomb, throw up, and just get up in any way possible. The photography and layout makes everything look museum-worthy.

Japanese Comickers 2



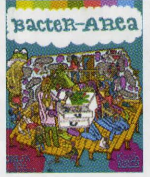
Japanese Comickers 2 continues the first volume's efforts to transform fans from otaku to creators. It features the secrets of many animators, from Tatsuyuki Tanaka (who did *Akira* and the "Chamber of Fear" commercial with LaBron James) to Noa (who is much smaller in the industry). The subjects divulge their materials and tools, as well as provide step-by-step procedures.

Que Suerte



The silk-screened cover of *Que Suerte* is by one Madrid's coolest cartoonists. Simply named Olaf, he is also famous for playing homemade instruments, and I hope to see more of his work in the future. This publication boasts a mixture of artists, and it's great to see that a scene of indie kids in Spain can band together and create something like this.

Bacter-Area



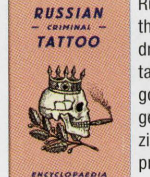
Keith Jones is an up-and-coming artist, illustrator, and comics guy who has been sending us little zines and images for ages. Yet only recently have art people been recognizing his work. Maybe it's the new watercolors or composition that people dig so much? The only bad part of this book is it's too small, and doesn't show off his painterly aspects. Watch out for Keith's work in the GR gallery spots.

KoreAm Vol. 17 No 1



Look who's on the cover? It's our favorite son of a beeyotch, David Choe, looking cross-eyed at the camera. Inside, there's a lengthy article about the troublemaker, his history, and what makes him tick. (We're quoted in the article, too.) You also get a diary from Mike Park's Plea for Peace tour, which entailed cycling from Seattle to San Diego. The guy didn't even ride the whole way!

Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia



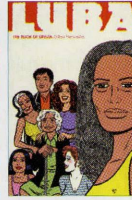
Russia must be a mess, because this collection of tattoo photos and drawings is freaky. I don't have a tattoo, and skimming this book is a good way to prevent me from ever getting one. The images are by Danzig Baldaev, who has been shooting prison ink for over 50 years. The tattoo drawings are equally gross. They include sex scenes, swastikas, and ugly people. This book actually has essays, too.

Battlestack Galacti-Crap Foods



This Brian Chippendale comic will be hard to come by since it was made for a U.K. art show. The story about selling cubcakes is chaotic and so is the imagery. What's going on? Is that important? No matter, the insides are every bit as exciting as the cover, and the whole package will make you smile. If I could draw this rough yet make everything look so good, I'd be happy.

Luba: The Book of Ofelia



Gilbert Hernandez steps up once more with this thick graphic novel—his second follow-up to the epic *Palomar*. The main thing about *Luba* is boobs. They're freakishly porno-star sized, and you see a lot of them in these comics. The stories work like a soap opera with tons of characters. Just know that it's NC-17 for sexual content, it's funny, and it doesn't hold back.

Shintaro Katsu Illustrated



In Japanese cinema, Shintaro Katsu played *Zatoichi*, a blind swordsman who would roam the countryside and get in and out of trouble. This amazing book chronicles his life. The photos are beautiful, and the reproduced movie posters, film images, and album covers (!) are great, too. Even better, this book is both in English and Japanese. If *Zatoichi* were real, he's definitely read it.

Crickets



Sammy Harkham always amazes, and this two-color comic is so artfully done that you'll forget about the limited palette. This story, an adventure about a thrashed dude and a golem, mixes reality with spirituality. I think that's the basis and strength of much of Sammy's work. The *Kramer's Ergot* artist and editor is a big part of the indie comics scene, and this is among his best works.

Megawords



So far I've seen two issues of this full-color, jumbo-sized, photo zine, which immortalizes life on the streets. Photographers include Elissa Bogos, Todd Fisher, Drew Goldschmidt, and others, but editors Dan Murphy and Anthony Smyrski put in their own works as well. This newsprint publication is a lot of fun, and worth picking up.

Silken News



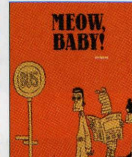
The only way to get this is to stay in one of the Silken hotels in Europe. It's not the greatest publication, but it does have nice photos of the Puerta America hotel, where I stayed in Madrid. Many pages are dedicated to the deluxe rooms, their famous architects, and the hotel's opening gala. The text is in Spanish. On the cover is the hallway that led to my room!

Discover of Cover



This book collects children's album and picture-disc art from Japan, and it will amaze even the most jaded record collectors. It's already fun enough to look at the youthful art, but there's also music, stories, and history. If you're a graphic designer or a T-shirt maker, this has a wealth of material for you to rip off! Almost every page is cute, and this is a resource that you'll keep picking up.

Meow, Baby!

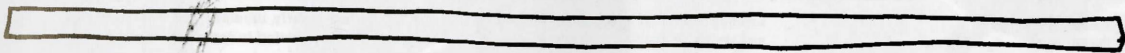
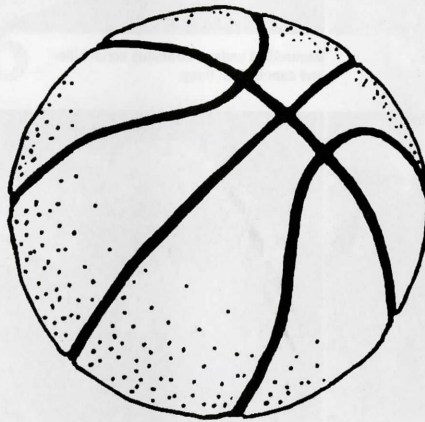


There's no possibility of Jason transforming into an emo superstar since he doesn't write a lot of whiny dialogue. He tells compelling stories using imagery alone, and this one utilizes his usual cast of characters: dog, duck, cat, skeleton, and mummy. They do funny things, run into problems, and even do some nasty stuff! That's always a nice surprise.

Una Casa Para Siempre



With a fancy silk-screened cover and black-and-white insides, this homemade publication from Barcelona is cuter than *Que Suerte*. It mixes in familiar names like Souther Salazar, John Porcellino, and Jeffrey Brown, but the Spanish contributors to this publication can flat-out draw, too. If they were in America, they'd be having little art shows and becoming famous.



'GLIDE' REISSUE

pfflyers.com



Wax figure demonstrating elephantitis of the testicles.



Mummified body of infamous serial killer and cannibal, Si Quey.



Tot with skin condition and visitors' offerings, including toys, candy, and pop star paraphernalia.



Not a paperweight in the gift shop, but an exhibit in the museum.



Bed bug display featuring super-sized ticks and stuffed animals.



Miffy, Ultraman, and other toys bring comfort to departed children.

To Siriraj with Love

By Yong Kim

Waking up in Bangkok with an aftertaste of scorched street-stall meats, whiskey, and rusted metal could only mean one thing: food poisoning. My plan was to take Cipro and catch up on Thai soap operas, but that was ruined when friends volunteered to take me to the Siriraj Hospital. I assumed I would be treated for my condition. Instead, I was faced with the mummified corpse of a serial killer, gruesome displays of baby bodies, and other unsavory exhibits at the Siriraj Medical Museums.

The Siriraj Hospital was founded by King Rama V and named after Prince Srirajgaguthapan, who was killed by cholera. It was Thailand's first Western-style hospital and medical school. The medical school included museums that were geared toward its students. These days, it also attracts giddy Japanese goth girls and macabre-loving Western tourists.

For about one U.S. dollar, you can purchase a ticket that will give you access to six separate museums: The Songkran Niyomsane Forensic Medicine Museum, the Ellis Pathological Museum, Parasitology Museum, Congdon Anatomical Museum, Sood Sangvichien Prehistoric Museum and Laboratory, and the Quay Ketusingh Museum

of the History of Thai Medicine. Some museums are older than others. The halls built in the 1920s come across like a chamber of horrors or circus freak show. Multiple Siamese twins are suspended and displayed in fluid. The newer exhibits—for example, steps for extracting a tapeworm—are more academic in tone. But regardless of age or arrangement, every corner of the museum is permeated by a stench of formaldehyde and vinegar.

My visit to the Siriraj Hospital did not solve my digestive ailment. However, it did put it in perspective. As I sat on the ride back, I was glad not to be balancing on a bowling-ball-sized testicle.

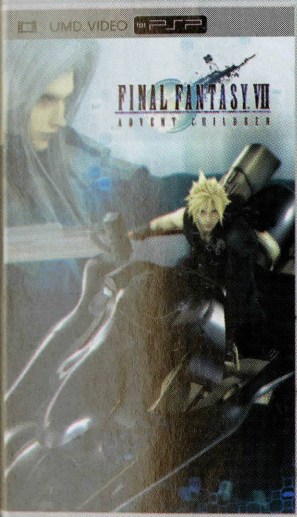
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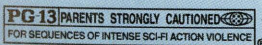
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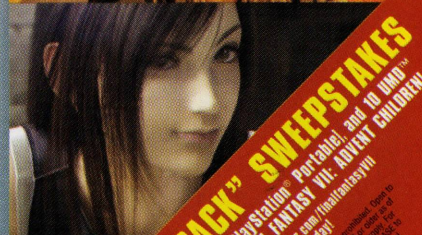


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Fight Back!

By Kiyoshi Nakazawa

Perhaps someone is following you on the street or maybe you're in a situation where you feel vulnerable to sexual assault. In every dangerous scenario, the best way to avoid getting hurt is to run away. If you're wearing high heels, get rid of them. Unless the ground is covered in broken glass or rusted nails, you will keep better balance and run faster barefoot.

What if your nemesis runs faster than you? Buy time and distance to keep your safety. Use Mace or a rape whistle. If nothing works and he or she runs too fast, you can resort to one of these techniques:

Antenna. If there are parked cars nearby, yank off a radio antenna and use it like a slashing weapon. Aim for the eyes. If it helps, use two antennas at once. Practice makes perfect. All the while, you should be yelling at the top of your freaking lungs for help. Meanwhile, make your way to a safe spot such as a store, restaurant, or any populated location.

Belt. Belts keep your pants on and they can also be fashion accessories, but they are also great for self defense. Do you wear a giant steel belt-buckle with a picture of a bucking bronco or words like "Miller Lite" on them? Even better. Whip that thing off, wrap the soft end around your fist, and start swinging the buckle at your attacker's head. I don't recommend side-to-side unless you enjoy self-flagellation. I prefer top-to-bottom, like pitching a baseball but not letting go. Again, yell for help and look for a safe place.

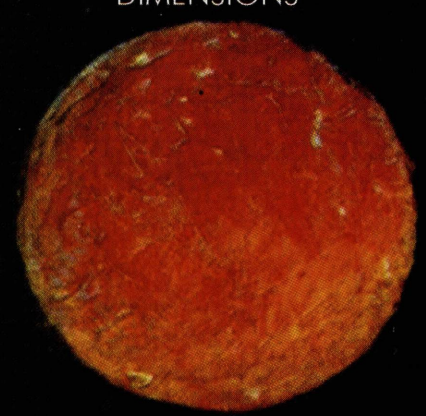
Teeth. Criminals do not fight fair, and neither should you. If you find yourself under an attacker, bite whatever part of your attacker's body is near your face. If there's a man sitting on your chest or anywhere near your face, bite his balls off! Keep biting until he gets off you and goes looking for an ambulance. The police may charge you with cannibalism, but at least you will be alive.

Remember, these are all serious self-defense tips that can result in bodily harm—perhaps your own. These are not fun-time moves to do with your drinking buddies. If your boyfriend playfully wrestles you to the ground, please do not bite off his balls.

GR TRASH

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Scratch Fever

By Martin Wong

The Upsetter, the Super Ape, Dr. Dick—Lee “Scratch” Perry has as many nicknames as James “The Funky President” Brown, and is just as influential a figure in music. On the eve of the Ragga Muffins Festival in Long Beach, I placed a phone call to the reggae pioneer, who was scheduled to perform. Perry wanted to make two things clear. First, he wanted his fans to know that he is no ragamuffin. He is not a tough guy from the ghetto, and he has nothing to do with ragamuffin music. Second, he wanted his fans to know that he was having visa problems. If he didn’t show up at the concert, it wouldn’t be because he didn’t want to play. It turns out that he didn’t play, and no one knew why—except for us. Catch him if he returns to the U.S. during the summer; he’s a real genius and a real character.

GR: How old are you? Do you ever get tired of making music?

LP: I’m 70. The music I make is blessings. I can’t get tired of receiving blessings, and I can’t be tired of giving blessings. Some music makes you dance. Some music makes you mad or makes you a devil. My music tells you right from wrong and God from man.

GR: You started with ska, right?

LP: People wanted ska, and most Jamaican artists started with ska. But I was not fond of ska, even though I was a part of it. I did not want to do what ska producers do. And with rocksteady, I was not really proud of it because I did not want to do what rocksteady producers do. So I created a whole new vibration that ended up being called reggae. It was totally different from ska music, which was Coxsone’s, and totally different from Duke Reid’s music, which we called rocksteady. My music is spiritual music.

GR: You also created dub music?

LP: Dub music is not dedication. Dub music is lubrication for healing and education. That’s why I named myself Dr. Dick—Dr. Dick Tracy, because I trace the disease, cast out the disease, heal the temple, and make you right and righteous. I listen to the God of Mercy and the God of Grace. I am involved with the

world party of 4,000 saints. I am involved with the righteous, I am involved with the godly, I am involved with the holy, and I am involved with the saints. I don’t want to be bored, so I call to the saints for help.

GR: How do the saints communicate with you?

LP: I believe in spiritual telepathy. I say to my guardian angel, “I don’t want to be bored, and I don’t want to bore my enemies.” I don’t want to make my enemies feel bored, just like I don’t want to make my friends bored! I don’t hate my enemies anymore. If I call anybody an enemy of God, I will cause them to die. If I hate somebody, I will cause them to die. That’s a sin.

GR: So no more upsetting people?

LP: I must upset the pope, I must upset the archbishop, and I must upset the false government and bring the righteous government to the people.

GR: Is that why punks like your music so much?

LP: The music that I write has a lot to do with punk. I said, “Having a party / Hope you’re hearty / Please don’t be naughty / It’s a punky reggae party.” I read that to Bob Marley, and he didn’t understand. He thought it was a dread reggae party. I’m not against dread—I love dread—but my God is not Dread.

GR: What do you believe in?

LP: The crows say that Rastafari is God, and I believe in birds more than human beings. I believe in the birds’ laws, and I believe in the animals and the jungle law. I believe in the fish, and I am a Pisces. I believe in King Neptune, and King Neptune is a fish. Without water, everybody’s dead. We use water to cook our food and quench our thirst. If we don’t have water we’d stink! So let’s give water a hand.

GR: Living in Switzerland must be very different than living on an island like Jamaica.

LP: Switzerland is super clean. I am not living in a polluted village. I am in the mountains. I love myself more. I rid myself of pollution and cigarettes and alcohol. I’m not drinking any more Red Stripe beer. No white wine, no red rum, no cigarettes, and no ganja.

GR: No ganja?

LP: My God is not Dread. When I gave “Punky Reggae Party” to Bob to sing, he took it over and sang about the King of Kings and whatnot.

GR: You’ve created so many records. Do you remember all the songs you’ve written, recorded and mixed?

LP: No. Sometimes people have to remind me. If I remember them all, I would become greedy and say “Where’s my money?” Then I’d lose my power.

GR: When you write music, do melodies come in your head or do you have to fool around with instruments?

LP: When the spirit speaks, I memorize what the spirit says, get a pen, and write it down.

GR: You hear the spirit all the time?

LP: I am a fish, so I get telepathic communication straight from the Seven Seas, straight from the rain drops, and straight from the toilet in my bathroom. You can get communication from your bathroom. Believe in your piss. Believe in your shit. If you did not get water to drink, you could not piss. And if you had no food to eat, you could not shit. So respect the shit and the piss. Your piss comes from the Seven Seas, and your shit comes from the bottomless pit of stink. The piss will tell you what you need to know, and the shit will tell you what you need to hear with telepathic communication. You have to be open.

GR: Did you have a good working relationship with the Chinese people in Jamaica’s music industry?

LP: They liked the music that I made, and they believed in it. But they were very closed up. I believe in feng shui, which brings hope, warmth, happiness, and healing. But the Chinese in Jamaica are only interested in money. I do things different than other people. Some people believe in money, believe in cash, and believe in vanity. I don’t believe in vanity, even though I live with vanity. I believe in the earth, I believe in trees. I believe in the breeze, I believe in water, I believe in iron, I believe in air, and I believe in fire.

GR: Your music is elemental?

LP: Definitely. My music is my teacher. If I was learning from my music, I would be like ordinary people. That would be too bad. I would get bored to be an ordinary person.

GR: Do you think your audiences and listeners recognize the qualities and intent of your music?

LP: If they don’t understand, they will understand. I am more than proud of my special music. I create music to heal the brain, heal the mind, heal the heart, heal the soul, and heal the body. My music blesses people. My music teaches people. My music is God.

GR: How do you choose what songs to perform at a concert?

LP: I choose the types of songs that I know can help the people who want to hear what is happening—make sounds like a different type of teacher—the King of teacher who knows the future. If you want to know what goes on, go to the forest, kiss a tree, and say “Dear tree, bless me and tell me what to do because you are a shepherd of the earth.”

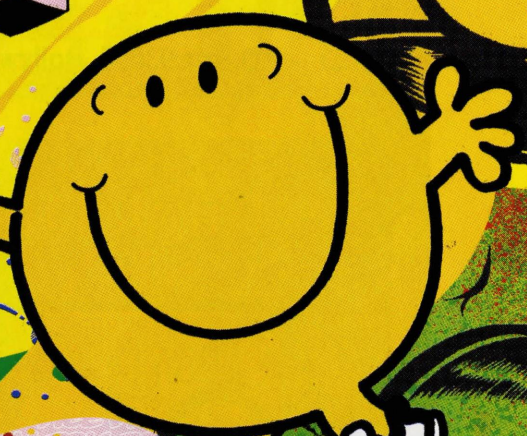
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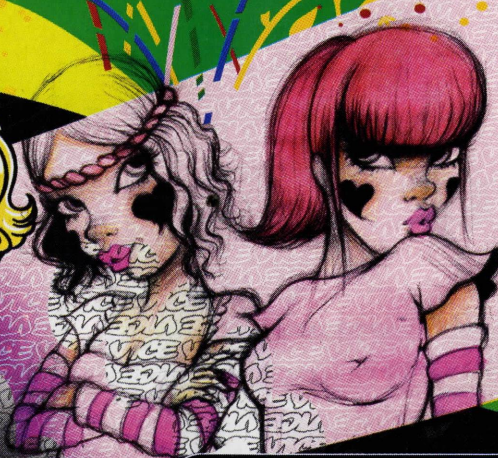
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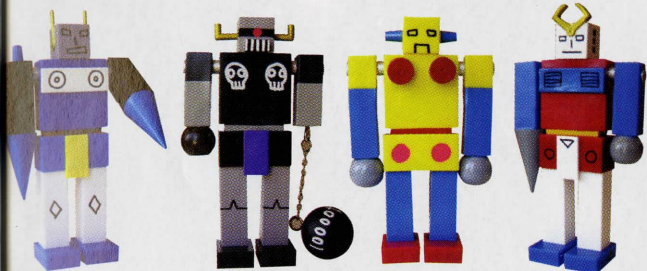
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T-Shirts Prints Art

Favorite Things

Polska Cyclops

Limited and rad, this is a hard-to-find Egg Qee that glows in the dark. Tim Biskup collectors are fending for it.



Taroshooten

We brought some of these die-cast-inspired robots made out of wood blocks to America a while ago. Now they're being made vinyl dolls by Medicom! This project has really taken off, and there are more models coming down the pike.

Killer Tomato and Killer Cabbage

If you liked the limited-edition Giant Robot X Dehara figure, you'll love these larger-quantity dolls and their little buddies. They're are about two years too late, but they're still cool and capture Yukinori Dehara's handmade spirit.



New Murakami Goods

Need a keychain that costs more than \$400? Takashi Murakami has the item for you. This heavy silver unit comes packaged in a special bag that you can use later use for diamonds, gold coins, or earwax.

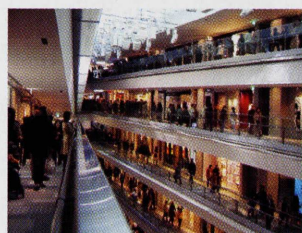


For soft-goods fans, there's also a multi-color flower cushion. About 12" in diameter, this product should appeal to Rainbow Warriors, leprechauns, and Pantone freaks. These cushions should never meet ass; they're more like pillows.



Dotesando Hills

No thanks to Beverly Hills, the word "hills" is getting too way much play in Japan. Located at one of the busiest intersections of Tokyo, this new mall is already a landmark. If you hit the right shop, you can pick up exclusive Ai Yamaguchi candies packaged in a custom tin ornament. There are also Yoshimoto Nara containers that come in five colors and are filled with gummies!



GR TRASH

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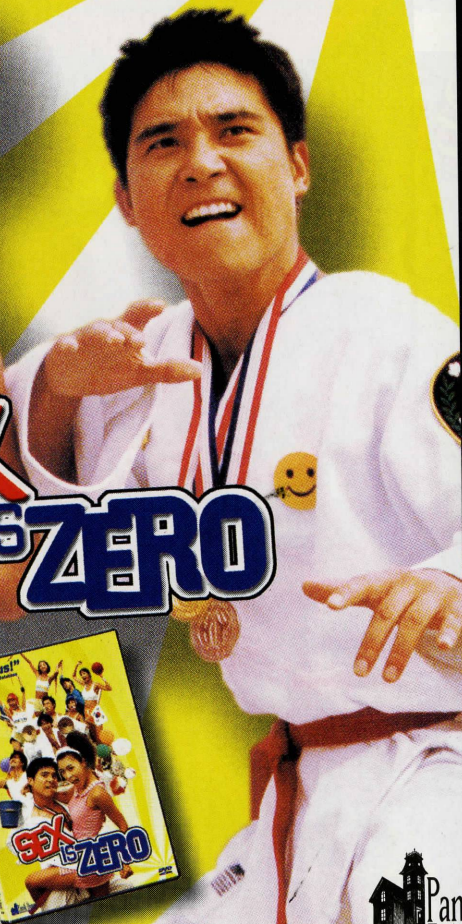
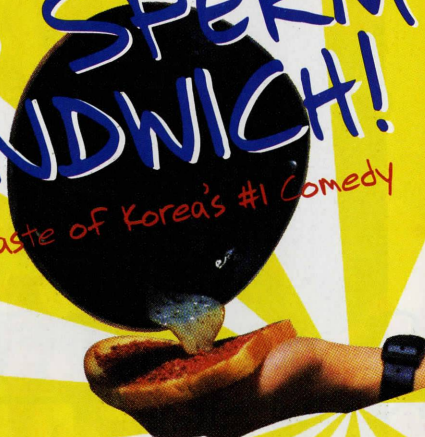
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March 28th

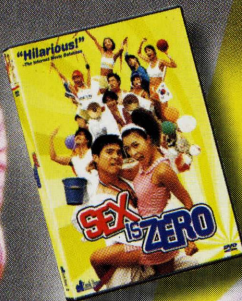
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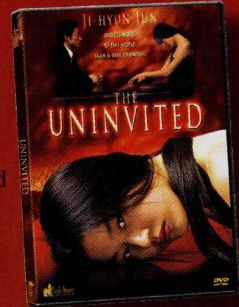
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THE
UNINVITED

SHIN-YANG PARK
(MEMORIES OF MURDER)

THE RING AND
THE GRUDGE WERE
JUST A WARM UP.

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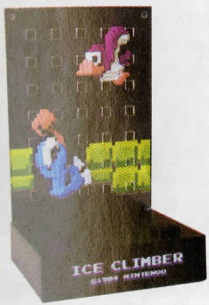
Favorite Things



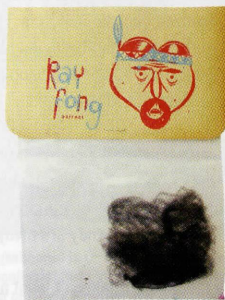
Super Malfi
In polka dots and with a big smile, Friends with You's Super Malfi has never looked better. He's one of seven new plushes, which are smaller and lighter than the original series.



Felt Moi
Just when you thought plushes were over, Meena Kim handknits these one-of-a-kind characters and spares no detail. This one is a pirate!



Nintendo Dot Graphics
It isn't that much fun playing with these randomly packaged desktop toys, but their sound effects are the best. Will you get the Ice Climber, Mario, or someone else?



Ray Fong Hairnet
Packaging is everything; here's proof. Silk-screened with two colors, this simple-but-rare hygiene product has approval from the Junky Chinese Restaurant Association of America.



Inu No Kurashi / Neko No Kurashi
It's Year of the Dog, and anything goes for canine-related products. The neutered postal-delivery dog is strange, but at least you don't have to worry about it peeing on your mailbox! If you're a cat person, there is also a feline set. What could be cuter than a happy kitty chatting on its cell phone in pure delight?



Red Tooth Wedgehead X Operation Smile
The question of February was, "When are you going to sell the Red Tooth Wedgehead?" The answer? We gave them away to raffle-winners in Los Angeles, New York, and online, and at the same time, raised a chunk of change to help children born with facial deformities. Creators David Horvath and Sun-min Kim were there to stir up support and sign the coveted, limited-edition Uglydolls for the happy recipients!

GR TRASH



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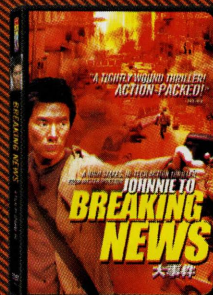
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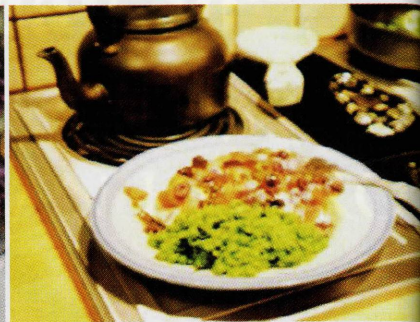
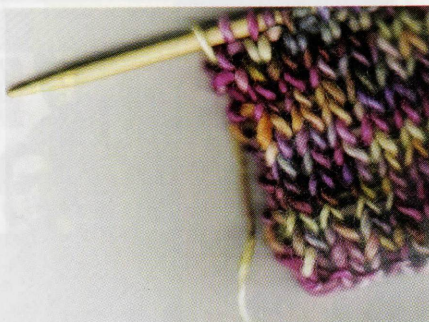
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a wormy apple
and a basket of worms!



My Perfect Day

By Alexis Ching

When I was younger, my family lived in a suburb of Vancouver. Our next door neighbors had an older daughter that rode horses, and one day she took me and her younger sister with her. We rode bareback and jumped a few fences and I ended up falling off. But when we moved back to California, I persisted—and not just trail rides, either. I wanted to jump horses. When I was 7, I started riding competitively, and by the time I was 12, I was representing the U.S. at Spruce Meadows in Canada. I started representing the Philippines after moving there in 1992, and competed in New Zealand, Australia, Southeast Asia, Japan, and Mexico.

Twenty years and many horses and ponies later, I am back in the middle of Nowhere, California on my old training ranch, where they breed cattle, sheep and horse. I spent my summers here from when I was 12 to when I went to college in 1998. Yet somehow, I find myself back once more, battling the urge to move back to New York and managing their ranch and riding young horses while they are away at horse shows.

On a perfect day, I don't have to leave the ranch. It takes at least a 10-minute drive to get anywhere. I even have to drive to the g.d. post office. I've been out here almost six months now, and I'm used to cooking all my meals. I wake up without the alarm clock and have some tea on the back porch with the cats.

I taught myself how to knit out here using a few books and Internet resources so that's what I do instead of watching TV. I've got some random leftover yarn that I'm knitting into squares to make a throw.

I read a lot out here, too. Currently I'm slogging through *The Act of Creation* by Arthur Koestler. Since it's a perfect day, it's Sunday and I also get the *New York Times*. I flip to the back of the magazine and figure out the crossword without any help. All the news is good, and the headlines read something like "Worldwide Abolition of One-Ply Toilet Paper." I sit outside until the sun goes down, listening to the cows bellowing.

Finally, I make some dinner. Tonight it's salmon livornese (calamata olives, capers, tomatoes, red onions, lemon juice) and mint peas. I eat this while watching a Pedro Almodovar marathon and sipping on some local wine, which I didn't get carded for. And not once do I think about going back to New York, even though the next day, being Monday, that should be my first thought.

On a perfect day I wake early enough to catch the sunrise. And it's a clear sunrise too, not one of those foggy werewolf ones.



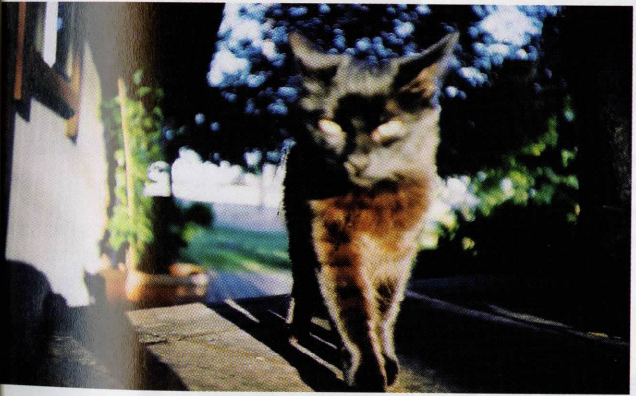
GR TRASH



Everything is pretty spread out around here. About 30 minutes northeast is Angel's Camp, which has a small grocery store that stocks a really good local wine selection, imported cheeses, and also a good selection of beer, which has been difficult for me to find. So I grab a couple of stouts and some buttermilk blue cheese. Beer and cheese! 15 minutes west of Burson is Lockeford, home of Lockeford Sausages. On the one side of the cow it says "European Style Sausages" and "BRATWURST." On the other side it says "JERKY." During the holidays they have cranberry, apple cinnamon, and blueberry sausages. Pick up a couple of homemade brats.



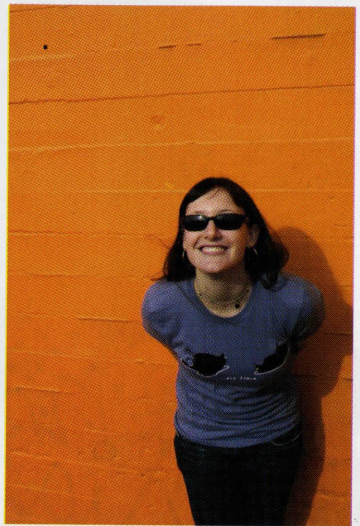
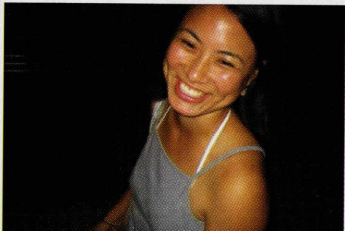
I haven't liked to drive much since I injured my coccyx (tailbone) in October. I fell off a horse and landed right on my ass. The X-rays looked like I had scoliosis. But since this is a perfect day it doesn't hurt. One of my favorite things to do is slap a few playlists together and drive. The country roads are usually quiet and wind through farms and mountains. It's good to do whether it's rainy or sunny. On one drive I discovered some old buildings from the gold rush. They were just standing there, gutted and roofless with no signs or markers to distinguish them. Other attractions up here include old gold mines and caverns where you can go spelunking.



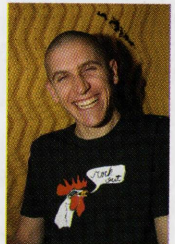
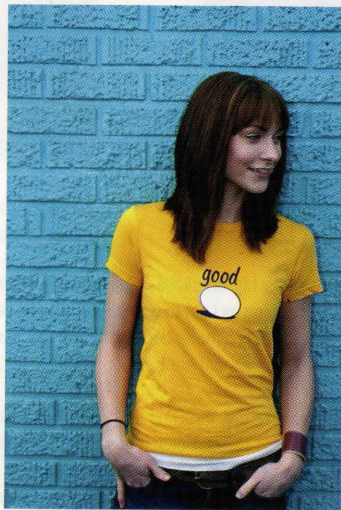
Back at home, I chill with the cats on the back deck. Normally I'm not a cat person, but these cats are great. They follow me into the pastures in the mornings when I check on everything. They try to play with the horses. They like to come into the house and check everything out. They come when you call them. They like their tummies rubbed. They're like dogs without all the dependence and attention-whoring.



So I'm outside chilling with the cats. There are sausages on the grill and I'm tossing back a couple of beers and stuffing my face with cheese. It took me a while the first year I did this to get used to all the quiet and solitude but I think this year I've got the hang of it. The best thing about being out here is being outdoors and getting to work off everything I eat. Oh, and the animals are neat, too.



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HEART RD



My Perfect Day

By Kaori Shoji

For me, the perfect day constitutes a big fat cliché: a day at the beach. It doesn't matter much where the beach is, as long as I get to walk around on the sand, take in the water, and just be there. The beach is a metaphor, but it's also the most genuine sensory pleasure I know—so palpable it almost hurts.

30

Going to the beach means getting up early, throwing stuff in a basket, and heading out. From my home city of Tokyo, the nearest beach lies south by southwest—the Shonan area, which is about an hour's train ride away. I've always loved the Shonan beaches despite the grey-brown waters, almost-blackened sand, and incredible congestion during the summer peak weeks, simply because it was such a big part of my growing up. That's how it is for a lot of Tokyo people; we go to Shonan on weekends to surf on the baby waves, dance at the local clubs, and make it home on the last train. If we miss it (most likely), we'll get a room in one of the kitsch, cheap inns that line the freeway and stay overnight. In the process, we're able to forget the stress of big city life and nonstop work, by getting... stung!

Shonan's own, homegrown ferocious jellyfish are part of the waterscape, and there's no escaping those slithering thingies. Really, there's nothing like getting one's bare skin covered with red, angry jellyfish welts to make life's other woes disappear. In the event of welts, here's what you do: Apply chamomile (or any mild skin lotion), rub in a little baby oil, and call your friends over. Now you've got a perfectly legit excuse to whine and be spoon-fed coconut ice cream.

GR TRASH

The best of the Shonan beaches is probably Hayama, where the Imperial Family has a summer place. Contrary to expectations, this summer house is a modest, two-story affair that looks out on the public beach and is merely surrounded by a wall and a clump of trees. Very low security/royalty/celeb factor. Hayama itself is beautiful, laid back, and has a lot of local color—namely in the cafés and shower houses that appear only in the months of July and August and are dismembered during the rest of the year. These are run by local chefs, surfers, DJs, artists, and their friends. Assembled and scattered in various strategic spots on the sand, the beach houses (and their contents) make up a very distinct, unique beach culture not easily seen anywhere else in Asia.

A day in Hayama means a day spent relaxing in the Oasis Café, strolling down to the water for a swim, coming back to Oasis for iced coffee and avocado salad, strolling down to the water... Repeat ad nauseam.

Whether I'm in Hayama, Ko Samui, or Muir Beach outside San Francisco, I make a point to take feet photos. (Groooooan!) I know, I know, it's dumb and fetishistic. Scarlett Johansson in *Lost in Translation* despaired over the fact that she, too, took feet photos. But let's face it: Pointing the camera at one's feet (preferably artistically pedicured, but if not, what the hell) is one of life's great pleasures. Don't ask why.



Pinoy Places

By Myleen Hollero

can't even begin to describe the wonderful and strange goodness that transpired during my trip to the Philippines. Every day was spent visiting and reconnecting with loved ones, taking in the sights, and eating yummy foods. Highlights included New Year's Eve in Manila, joining mama for her very first tequila shot, being stared at by locals while riding the jeepneys and tricycles, and learning that "G.F.R.O." is slang for prostitutes (meaning "Girl For Rent Overnight). And then there were the local chains and their charming names.



Mr. Quickie

Don't let the name fool you. Mr. Quickie is all about quality shoe and bag repair and key reproduction. More than 180 franchises nationwide are spreading the good name of the Quickie Family.



Mr. Poon

House of Steamed Fish since 1974. I've always wondered where Mr. Poon went. Now I know that he's in the Philippines serving dim sum, congee, and Cantonese cuisine. You can find these in Mandaluyog and Quezon City.



Tang City

The #1 Chinese food restaurant in the Metro Manila area. Filipinos flock to Tang City for the crab dishes and chicken feet. Unfortunately, this establishment serves no trace of that yummy orange powdered drink.



Chinky's

This Pinoy food chain is exclusive to Bacolod City within the province of the island of Negros Occidental. The menu has a plethora of Filipino favorites, but its specialty is "batchoy," a soup dish with pork tenderloin, pig's heart, kidney, liver and spleen.



Walter Mart

A super duper supermarket/mish mash store. In Metro Manila. Meh.



Buns n' Buns: Fresh & Yummy

A food-cart franchise mostly seen in malls. They serve warm "pandesal," the dinner roll of the Philippines.



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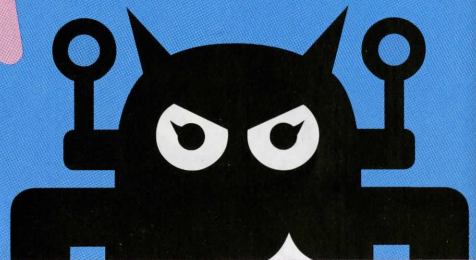
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LETTERS

SHARI LIVES

I grabbed this month's issue and flipped to the page where I would think a page dedicated to her would be, and lo and behold it was there. Thank you so very much for doing this... The part where you mention her husky voice made me chuckle out loud.

Alex Lai

I was deeply moved by your story about the passing of a GR intern. I was so sad to read about her death, because she seemed on the brink of a happy adventure-filled life.

I am moved by the fact that your GR mag dedicated time and effort at making a "behind the scenes" person into flesh and blood. You helped us mourn for a person most of us didn't even know existed.

Thank you for your humanity. I'm signing up for the longest subscription I can find. I'm also going to show the story to my students.

Sincerely,
Stephanie S. Suntwanuparp

PERFECT DAY

Wow. Ming and I have nearly the same perfect day. Right down to the location: Copper Mountain, Colorado. Except that maybe I would choose a big bowl of Pho with extra noodles to end the day.

First off. Thank you Ming, for being an Asian Sensation spot located an Asian Hot Spot (otherwise known as a city with a Giant Robot retail storefront). It's good to know you can rock hard enough to grace the pages of GR in Middle America. And, a little bit of lingo so you don't look like a newbie on the slopes... Green runs are the easiest designated by a circle; blue is more advanced designated by a square; and the diamonds are reserved for black runs, which are more difficult; and double black (double d's) are "rider use caution."

Ming, if you ever want to leave Union Creek and hit freshies in the back bowls of Copper with the Megasoreass Snow Riders Club, we would be honored to show you how to rip. (Plus, we have cool T-shirts and other apparel, which even GR knows is a must, but alas, no storefront... yet.)

Here is wishing Ming many more perfect days in Colorado.
Tabitha Manresa

POD PEOPLE

I just listened to your Podcast and felt compelled to send praise on an such an entertaining show. Being the collector geek I am, is it possible to save these? It would be great to have an archive of them on disc. Keep it up, and look forward to future GR Podcasts!

Landon Wong

More Podcasts are coming at giantrobot.com. - ed.

NOT A COLLECTOR

I met you briefly at the opening of my dear friend, Andrew Scholtz. That was actually the first time I visited GR2. I have in some ways been turned off by the toy or the commerce-oriented art industry. At Andrew's opening, I got a chance to see the space, and I even purchased my first issue of GR. I read through the entire issue and I think I might be having a change of heart.

Growing up, I loved action figures, picture books, Sanrio, superheroes, comics, cartoons, stuffed toys, video games,

etc. But as I grew older, I blamed much of the demise of my Philippines-rooted family to capitalism. I tried to simplify my life, pare down my existence, and fight my urge for material things. I guess as I am getting older, I realize that I still live in a capitalist culture, and I can't help but be attracted to the shiny playful things of my youth.

Although I will try to stay clear of being a collector, you've shown me a side of myself that needs to be freed, and a side of myself that should release the blame and move on.

Alvin G.

STILL SKATING

I picked up a copy of your mag. Great design and art. The art and toys caught my eye, but the skate article was what made me buy the issue. It's very cool to see a magazine that is about the Asian culture. I thought it was cool to see an Asian skateboarder and thought it was a one-time issue about Asians. I think it's awesome that there is a magazine dedicated to the culture.

I was born and raised in Santa Cruz and have never been to Japan or any Asian countries. My uncle helped fund the movie *Beyond Barbed Wire* about the war and interment camps. I majored in illustration and have done graphic design for over 20 years. Mainly surf, skate, and snow.

I was told a long time ago that I'd never make it specializing in action sports. I've been doing it for two decades. I'm the art director at Giro helmets. I love what I do and I still skate.

Keep up the good work.

Judi Oyama

SAD READER

Sometimes when I read your magazine, I get sad. For I am Asian, and sometimes reading about successful Asians makes me feel bad about myself. Not bad like, I hate myself, but bad like, why aren't I doing that?

A few months ago I thought about how there are not a whole lot of Filipino artists featured in your magazine, but then you featured one. Are there any more? How bout Thai artists? Do they exist? I ask, because I am these things. Help me help myself.

JDS

REVIEW REVIEW

How many (expletive deleted) crack rocks did you smoke before you watched that DVD to review it? No, wait. Did you actually watch it or just read the promo pack that came with it? I am still in shock that Criterion released it. It is easily and by almost immeasurable lengths, the worst pile of steaming crap ever committed to film. "The storytelling is understated and patient..."? (another expletive deleted) No! It's vapid and intolerable! I'm a huge David Bowie fan, and I like me some weird-as-(yes, expletive deleted) movies, but *The Man Who Fell To Earth* is an insulting debacle.

Soundtrack: garbage. Cinematography: embarrassing. Directing: sloppy. Editing: laughable.

Yes, sometimes Blue Angels do crash. This time they crashed right into your eyeballs and distracted you from the endless orgy of boring that is *The Rockstar Who's Only Good In Basquiat*, I mean *Fell to Earth*, or something. Gah! That made me cranky.

Matthew Thompson

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words and pics | Eric Nakamura

Mad World

ARCO Arena

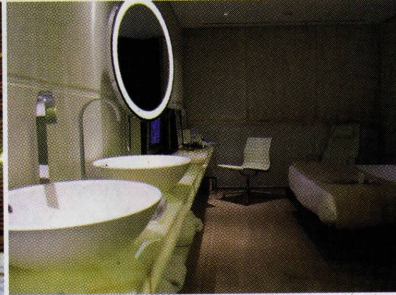


Stepping out of the elevator to the fourth floor (designed by Plasma Studio), you feel like you're in an episode of *The Twilight Zone* or hanging with Jor-El on Krypton.

Top: The lobby by John Pawson has furniture you want to steal. Bottom: The coolest hotel bar ever, designed by Mark Newson.



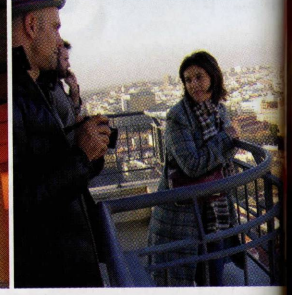
The back side has light saber implants.



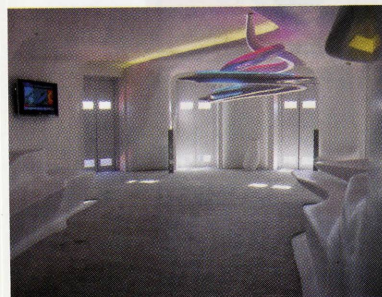
The water splashed out of my sink. Figuring out how to turn off the lights was also a problem.



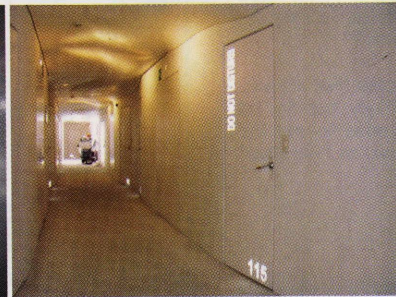
The parking garage by Teresa Sapey has fun graphics and nutty lighting.



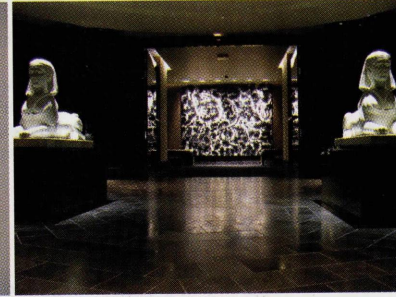
This amazing view of Madrid is not from the hotel, which has no accessible balconies.



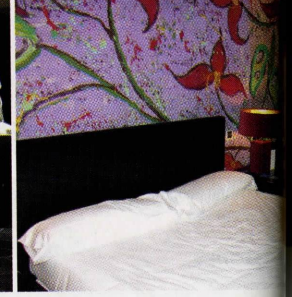
Zaha Hadid's icy-looking first floor is in high demand.



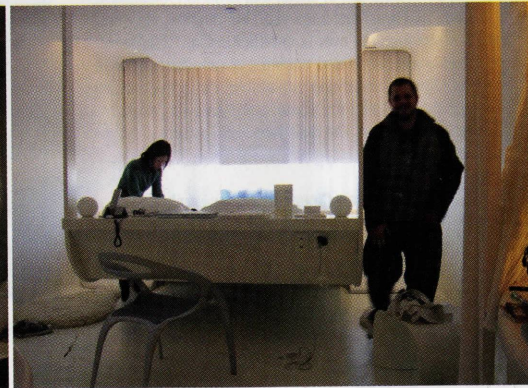
"Do Not Disturb" lights up on the door. You can't miss it!



Run away from the fifth floor, by Victorio & Lucchino. Sphinxes and bad '80s decor blow like a bad bed and breakfast.



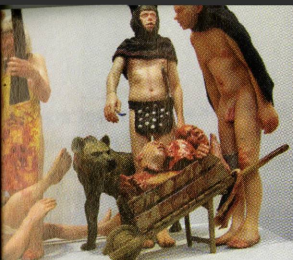
The ninth floor, by Richard Gluckman, is stylish but the bathroom has no lighting or furniture.



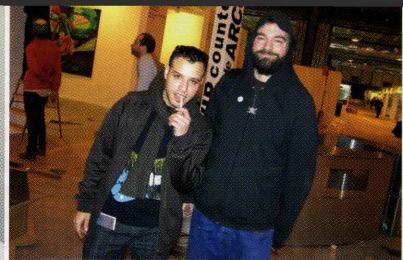
kozyndan had a rad room. The eighth floor, by Kathryn Findlay, is space age with a retractable flat-screen TV at the foot of the bed.



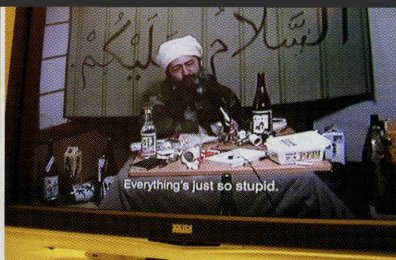
Security guards were always roaming around to keep the peace.



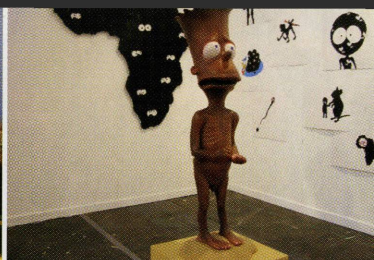
These twisted, bloody sculptures would make the greatest toys ever.



Dzine and Cody Hudson stay positive even though their art showed up super late and fucked up.



Makoto Aida as Bin Laden hiding out in Japan.



Someone give Bart a Butterfinger!



These characters could use some iPods.



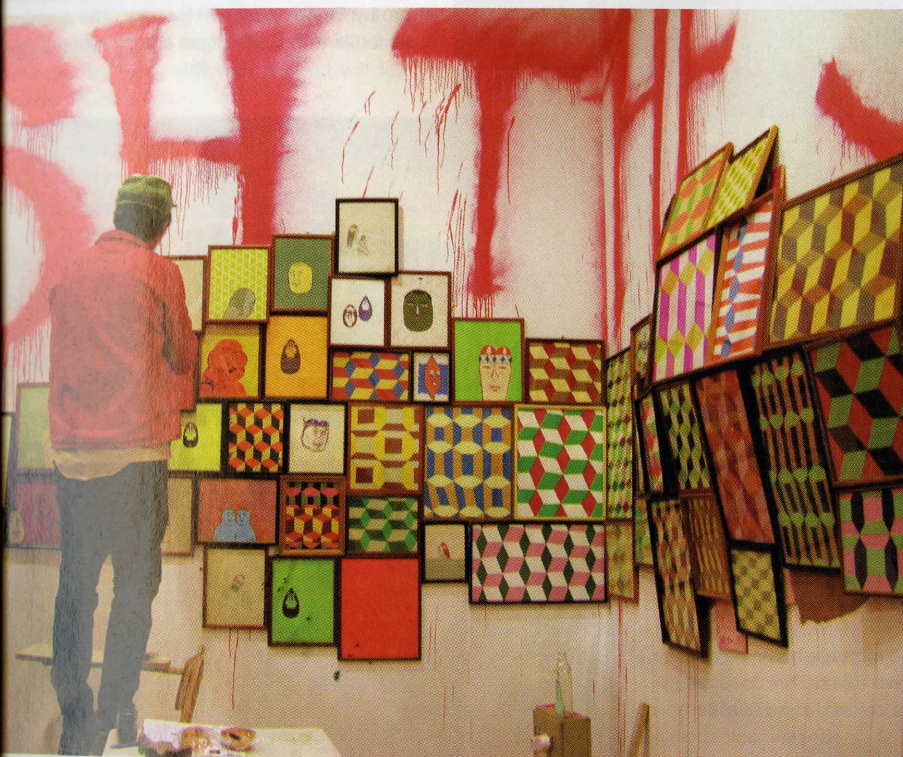
Nano is a Madrid graffiti guy who was part of ARCO.



These freaky cherubs were freaking expensive.



If people were like this, how would we put on T-shirts?



The "street art" of Barry McGee. The wall says "Smash the State." That's a wall pimple on the right.



Top: Ed and Jeanna Templeton put up a ton of photos. Bottom: Makoto Aida unpacks a delicate bonsai-like piece.

This is the "Street Art" section, the first ever at ARCO, and maybe the most exciting hundred feet in the miles of exhibits.

Flying into Madrid, you see nothing. It's hazy all around the old city, and the brown buildings look like camo patterns. As you descend, you realize that you're landing in a desert, like Southern California. Barajas Airport is simple, and getting through customs and baggage is just walking through a turnstile. It doesn't matter if you're packing blunts or Play-Doh; the security guard has taken a break, and the crowds walk on through. Strange, for a city that was recently bombed by al-Qaida. For this trip, I've been invited to speak on a panel about "marketing street art" at ARCO, the city's big annual art fair/convention. A driver dressed in black holds a sign bearing my name, greets me, and dives us away in a Mercedes.

The first place I'm taken to is the architectural landmark Hotel Puerta America. Sitting outside of the city proper, the area around it is boring. There's a lot to say about this new *Wallpaper** magazine gush recipient; a different world-famous architect designed each floor, and it's supposed to be one of the premier hotels on the planet. However, the reality is that it's still in beta mode. Things are broken, dirty, and being figured out on



Clockwise from top: The massive plastic-bag baby juked and waved, but no one cared; Ryan McGinness is dwarfed by a massive urn by Keith Haring; A cardboard hot rod!



Music time—beardy, folksy, campfire-circle style. Left to right: Aaron Rose, Clare Rojas, and Ed Templeton doing their thing.

the fly. The concept is still awe-inspiring. It's probably the only hotel in the world where you're compelled to visit and talk about every floor.

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours first," would be the hot greeting by the last night of my stay. Walking around late in the hallways, you're bound to run into someone lurking about, taking photos, and hoping to see your room. My second-floor pad was cool. Designed by Brit Norman Foster—whose works include the Beijing Airport, Chek Lap Kok Airport, and the Great Court of the British Museum—it is said to be the most functional floor. There's a lit marble counter, retractable window shades, and leather walls that still have the toxic "new car" smell. The shower is weird since there is no door, and the floors are nice wood. Farting in my room seemed like a no-no, but who could resist? It feels like a DWR sample room.

Getting a cab back to the hotel is fairly easy, no matter where you are. I speak maybe 10 words of Spanish, but "Nuevo roja hotel" does the trick a couple of times. The hotel is new and is colored shades of red and purple.

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ARCO hasn't opened yet, so I take a cab to infiltrate. Guards give me the hand at every entrance since I don't have a pass, but I see an Asian guy kneeling next to a garbage can and smoking. I think, "Obi-Wan, you're my only hope." Asians have to help each other, right? Especially in foreign countries. It's a universal truth. It turns out to be a Japanese artist we interviewed, Makoto Aida. With a few nods, I make it to the floor where artists and gallerists get their spaces ready. Ed and Deanna Templeton are putting up loads of photos for the Roberts & Tilton Gallery, Barry McGee and Clare Rojas are doing their thing for London's Modern Art gallery, and Dzine and Cody Hudson sit patiently waiting for his art to show up. Is this America? This is the "Street Art" section, the first ever at ARCO, and maybe the most exciting hundred feet in the miles of exhibits.

Seeing friends from home makes the days even better. On day one, we eat cheeseless pizza and walk around the convention area. On day two, it is time for the panel discussions. The Spanish audience wears headsets and listens to translations. Jokes don't ever work, and

the classroom-size full house listens to us talk about street art and how it's commodified, exhibited, and handled. Are they entertained? Is it worth the bucks they spent to get in? Mark Gainor from *Mad Magazine*, *Beautiful Losers* curator Aaron Rose, Chicago artist Dzine, and I are on the panel. The panel that follows ours almost straddles the same topics, and features my L.A. travel-mates kozyndan, New Yorker Ryan McGinness, and a dude from the Faile art stencil. Nothing is controversial, everything goes as planned, and attendees get free copy of GR.

The convention itself is huge. Rows and rows of high-end art from Picasso, Calder, Warhol, Basquiat, Haring, and other million-dollar works are there to see—and touch, if you are sneaky. But the majority of work is by artists I will never hear from again. Some are funny, like the black Bart Simpson that reminds me of Andrew Jeffrey Wright art, a full-sized cardboard car, bloody figural sculptures, and a huge plastic helium-filled baby. Hope the artists' careers make them happy and fulfilled.

People are amped about the next day, since the king of Spain is doing a walk-through as an opening blessing. Will he dress like Burger King or King Diamond? Will he hold a scepter and wear a crown, while he gushes at a nasty photo by Ed Templeton? Hope so. The evening features a hippy-like music circle with Clare Rojas and guests playing



Old storefronts in Madrid are beat up and cool, with signs over signs.



Left: Street art almost like Banksy on the Panta Rhei bookstore's roll-down gate. Right: Demolished Puma store. Even the logo was tagged! Goooooaaaaa!



Left: We're all guilty of graffiti in Madrid. Right: Chinese folks don't own 7-Elevens, so they vend on street corners late at night.

acoustic guitars. The menu was suggested by the Templetons, and my dish was a bong-nit meal of rice, beans, and potatoes. It's a course that made the local guests mad. Eventually I'll figure out what the locals like to eat, but I don't think vegan food is part of the equation.

The most popular nightclub is the traditionally gay Chueca area, right off of Gran Via Boulevard. Everywhere you look, there are a bunch of tags on the walls. It's something like old Soho or Melrose, with sneaker shops and clothing stores, and I don't even notice the gay parts. The Panta Rhei bookstore might be the coolest shop in the area, and nearby is the urban youth-culture store, Subaquatica, which is supposedly the only local store of its kind, as well as the Lladro shop. What's Lladro? You might have seen porcelain figures that depict a girl milking a cow, a naked cherub, or an Asian Buddha series. They're like high-end figures that you might find at a garage sale, and they're sort of a national treasure in Spain, although any kid will tell you it's tourist crap.

Lunch takes place around 2 p.m. during the citywide siesta when stores close for three hours to get ready for the evening stretch. We eat tapas like cured pork cold cuts, potatoes, and calamari. The bread is always dry and crusty. Meals end with a shot of cherry-cough-syrup-like liquor to put you down for a couple of hours before the stores reopen.

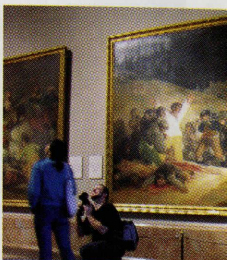
At night, the area can rock. After eating veggie food at an art dinner, we walk the streets, passing by smoky bars and eateries that smell up your clothes. Barry McGee finds the heavily tagged area to be exciting, and markers and "Hello, my name is" stickers come out quickly. "Look at this place. It's like New York," he says. Lagging behind the crowd, he looks for any clear spot to leave a mark. Soon, he meets a Bulgarian kid named "West." Not knowing that he is tagging with a legend, the young Bulgarian seems fearless, although he is somehow able to spot a cop car from blocks away. West yells, "Mira, mira" (Look, look), while pointing at a huge, virginal white wall. You can easily tag in front of people without any fear of retribution, and Barry and West quickly disappear down a tiny street. It's a joy to see someone get so excited over tagging.

Restaurants, cafés, and bars stay open late. Dinner begins at 9 or 10, and it's more of the same cold cuts and shrimp dishes. Okay, if you go to a good place, the local food is actually tasty. Vegetarians are out of luck, though. There's only so much gazpacho and paella you can take.

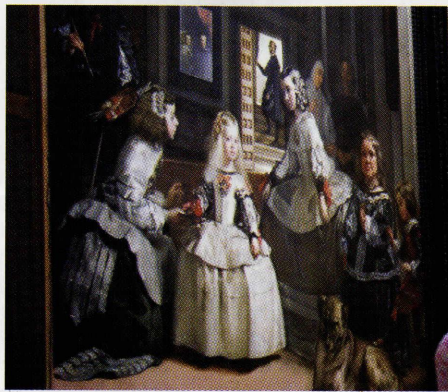
While we sit in a late-night café, a Chinese woman walks in selling flowers. Aside from one Korean storeowner, this is where I see the Asians in Madrid. Not during the day but



Left to right: Madrid has the best logo ever—a bear leaning on a fruit tree; The Subaquatica store is Madrid's GR, sort of; Weird bullfighter-street performance art that I don't get; Tapas look the same everywhere, but taste different.



Left to right: If you're a Mark Ryden fan, these stores are for you; More Ryden-esque goods; kozyndan at the Prado museum in front of the famous painting by Goya, *The Shootings of May Third 1808*.



Velasquez's *The Maids of Honour* draws a crowd.



Spanish plazas are amazing, but the food is strictly for tourists.

at night, they come out like urchins and hustle the streets. Using a box as a container and then as a display unit, they sell candy, beer, water, soft drinks, and bocadillos, which look like baguette sandwiches. Every couple of blocks, you'll see one on the corner. It could be a youngster, a woman, or an old man, and they'll pack up and run when the police drive by, only to come back seconds later. Barry buys 10 bottles of water from a Chinese street vendor. In a simple conversation, we find out that he's been in Madrid for five years. Why does he sell stuff on the streets? I suppose you could say that our Asian brothers and sisters have the entrepreneurial spirit no matter where they are.

On the last day, I frolic with kozyndan, whose Spanish friend's sister shows us around the Puerto del Sol area of Old Madrid. We walk through old neighborhoods and see restaurants that say "Hemingway ate here" or "Hemingway didn't eat here," then go to the Museo del Prado, which houses super-old to medium-old art. *Garden of Earthly Delights* by Flemish painter Hieronymus Bosch is a stunner, Goya's 1814 work, *The Shootings of May 3rd*, is cool, and Velasquez's *The Maids of Honour*, from 1656 or 1657, is catching a lot of attention. There are thousands of works in

the Prado, and kozyndan's art-school explanations of what the heck I'm looking at helps put things in context.

Is this trip to Madrid for work or pleasure? For me, the differences are actually thin, and everything blurs into one. I do my work, spend time with friends, and then explore. That's what I do on any trip, especially when I know that I can come back to see more. Madrid won't be going anywhere, and it won't be changing much, either.



George Takei

Sulu Speaks

Going where no (Asian-American) man has gone before, George Takei played Hikaru Sulu in *Star Trek*, perhaps the most influential science fiction show of all time. But 40 years after the first episode aired, the sound of his voice is more engaging than ever. He can make any word sound amazing, and his tone and enunciation of words is as distinct as James Earl Jones'.

Takei's acting career spans many decades, and he can somehow juggle it with community work and politics. Recently, he has come out as a gay man to speak out for same-sex marriage, lended his voice to Howard Stern's new radio show after years of being the butt of the shock jock's every joke, and served on the board of the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. In fact, it was after he presented an award to Giant Robot at a JANM banquet that we asked him for an interview! As gracious as he is eloquent, he was generous with opinions and verbiage.

GR: When did you know that *Star Trek* was going to make your career?

GT: At the time we were working on it, that was the farthest thing from our imaginations. Our ratings were rock bottom all three seasons. In the third season, NBC put us on at 10 o'clock on a Friday night, which is traditionally known as the morgue hour. So our ratings plummeted even further, and they had the numbers to justify cancellation. So I thought, "Well, we did good work. We're proud of what we did, now we're going to move on in our careers."

When *Star Trek* went into syndication, that's when our audience found us and the ratings soared. But by that time, it was too late: the show was canceled and the cast and crew had scattered to the four winds. We were glad the show was enjoying some popularity after the fact and that our good work was being validated. Then 10 years later, we came back for one film that was based on the popularity of the syndicated reruns. That exploded at the box office, and then the sequel exploded at the box office. Then we did the second sequel, and it became a movie series.

This year is the 40th anniversary, so there are slews of *Star Trek* conventions, the biggest of which in the U.S. is in Las Vegas. The other big one is in Frankfurt, Germany.

GR: Are those easy to be part of?

GT: We've been doing them for 40 years! I try to bring something more than *Star Trek* trivia to those conventions. As a matter of fact, at a couple *Star Trek* conventions in the 1970s, I advocated the impeachment of Richard Nixon. I put it in the *Star Trek* context: I said that the United States of America is like a starship. It's got to have a good

captain, and when the captain is corrupt, the entire starship is endangered. I got cheers.

You know, *Star Trek* fans are pretty well-known for being quite overweight, if not pushing obesity. So I talk about the importance of fitness and nutrition. I put it in the context of *Star Trek* or space travel. I ask "How many of you want to go out into space?" Ninety-nine percent of the people raise their hands. I say, "Well, that's a very expensive investment we're going to make, for exploration or even for tourism. The weight on the ship and how fit you are is going to make a difference. Tomorrow morning, I'm going out for a jog in the park right by the hotel, so I want to see as many of you join me as possible. And those of you who aren't runners, come half an hour later, and we'll do a walk through the park."

I try to use these conventions and the fans' enthusiasm for the show to make a unique contribution. Every situation is an opportunity.

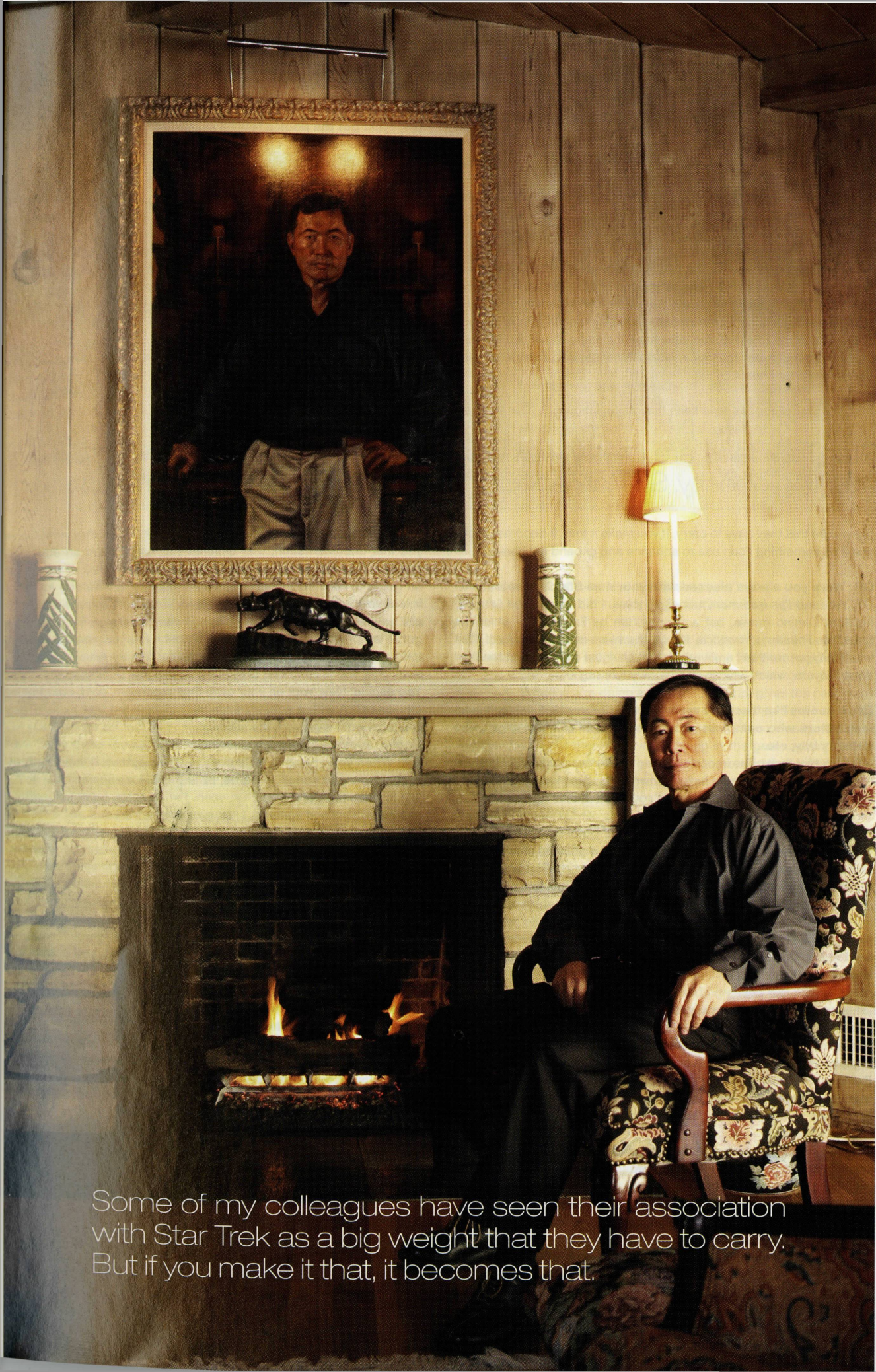
GR: It sounds like you embrace the role and make it work for you and you're able to help people through it. That's not how it is for some of the other cast members.

GT: They have complained. When you're that closely identified with a show, a character, and a genre, there are some unimaginative producers who can't see you as an actor. You might lose a part. Jimmy Doohan complained that they all wanted him to do a Scottish accent. But there are also the positives. My first love is the stage. I've been able to do theater all over Britain. I've done plays in Edinburgh, Redditch, London, and Brighton. I'm certainly mindful that there are fine British-Asian actors in London. Why do they fly me from Los Angeles? My name has box-office currency via *Star Trek*. I am reminded of that every time I come out of a stage door after a performance, because the theater is lined up with *Star Trek* books, rings, and action figures.

GR: This is a collegiate type of question: Why didn't your character ever have a relationship on *Star Trek*?

GT: Believe me, I lobbied for it. The thing is that on that show we had seven regulars. Everybody was pushing for their time in the sun. I was peppering the writing staff, the directors, and Gene Roddenberry with ideas and suggestions. What about Sulu's family? His parents, wife, his brothers, his sisters, and children? Everyone else is doing that. And then you had two competing stars who were trying to get as much for themselves. It was a very intensely competitive situation.

However, we eventually found out that Sulu had a daughter in the library of *Star Trek* novels. There's one titled *The Captain's Daughter* which goes into the whole back history of how Sulu's daughter came about. But the main thing I was campaigning for was captaincy. Sulu, as were the other non-captains on the show. I was the only one who succeeded in getting that.



Some of my colleagues have seen their association with Star Trek as a big weight that they have to carry. But if you make it that, it becomes that.

GR: You are the only member to wear all three colors of the Federation uniform.

GT: That's right. In the parallel universe, I wore red. You are a trivia expert.

GR: Was there ever a time that you wanted to shed your association with Sulu?

GT: I certainly made an effort because I'm an actor. I want to play roles beyond and other than Sulu. Theater opportunities are that. I've also done an Australian film, which I'm very proud of, *Prisoners of the Sun*. They cast all the other actors out of Tokyo, but for the upper-most, highest-class Japanese in the cast, a baron, they cast a Japanese American. Between shots, I was sitting and chatting with the producer and asked, "Why didn't you cast the whole thing out of Tokyo?" He said, "Well, there's no one in Japan who could speak English as you could, which the role required, and have the name to sell tickets, certainly in Australia but also Asia, North America, and Europe." That's because of *Star Trek*.

Some of my colleagues have seen their association with *Star Trek* as a

Star Trek fans are pretty well-known for being quite overweight, if not pushing obesity. So I talk about the importance of fitness and nutrition

big weight that they have to carry. If you make it that, it becomes that. I see it as something I can use to enhance and expand my career.

GR: Were you always pleased with your non-*Star Trek* roles?

GT: Yes, and I've had many non-Sulu roles. I did *Year of the Dragon*—not that Cimino movie, but a play written by Frank Chin—which we taped for *Theater in America*. It was shown on public television. That was TV exposure that I enjoyed very much. I just did *Equus* at the East West Players, which was an enormously fulfilling experience.

GR: It seems like there are many young, disgruntled Asian-American actors who complain about the kinds of roles they get, like delivery boy, etc.

GT: Good for them. The important thing is they need to speak up at the interviews. Also, they need to turn down roles. Someone else will do it eventually, but at least you've made your statement.

GR: Have you ever had to do that?

GT: Early in my career, I was plucked out of a student production at UCLA and cast in *Ice Palace*, a feature film starring Richard Burton. My father said, "Well, that gave you an entry into movies, but it's not a good image for you to perpetuate." Shortly after that, I went to New York to audition for a Broadway show. They wanted me to read a side onstage. Then I saw that it was for the role of a comic buffoon servant. My father's advice came to mind, and I handed the side back and walked out.

When you're a struggling young actor, you make money in any way you can. My roommate in the Bronx had an aunt who catered these posh parties. So on the same day that I walked out on the role as a servant, I had on my white jacket and bow tie and was passing out canapes. But that was all right, because it wasn't my real thing. My real thing was acting, and I turned down an acting role as a servant! The irony of that still amuses me.

GR: Your acting goes back to high school, right?

GT: All the way back to grammar school.

GR: How did you decide to act? Wasn't your father a farmer?

GT: No, my grandfather was a farmer. My father was in real estate.

GR: It seems like acting was not a good job for an Asian American at the time.

GT: It was not. I see you have not read my autobiography, *To T Stars*.

GR: I just got the book a few days ago.

GT: Well, do read that. I talk about my acting training. As I said, I did my first plays in grammar school, and all the way through junior high school and high school. I began my college career as an architecture student in Berkeley. My father wanted me to design some of the buildings that he was going to develop. But after two years, I thought, "Down the road 10 years from now, I'll be working as an architect. I really going to be happy doing that?" So I came back to Los Angeles that summer and said, "I want to go to New York and study acting at the Actor's Studio." That's the place that was producing people like Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, and James Dean—all my heroes at the time.

I girded my loins for a real knock-down, drag-out discussion with my father. He threw me off guard. He said, "I knew this conversation would eventually come up, and I have a deal to offer you. You want to go to New York and study at the Actor's Studio. That's a fine art

respected acting school. But after you finish there, they won't give you that documentation, that diploma that says you're an educated person. Your mother and I would like you to have that. If you insist on going to New York, then you ought to be mindful of the fact that it is a very intensely competitive place, it's a very expensive place, and you're a Southern California kid. Those winters are fierce! You've got to be prepared to battle with the costs, the congestion, and the cold all on your own. But UCLA has a fine Theater Arts department and when you finish there, they will give you that piece of parchment. You decide: New York on your own—that expensive, cold, competitive city—or UCLA with a subsidy from us. I discovered that I was a very practical kid. I went with the subsidy.

GR: When you speak there's powerful projection. It's so distinctive. Is that how you speak at home, or is there a mellower George?

GT: Is there a different me? Oh yeah. I'm an actor. I can talk softly, I can be excited and agitated. I just give different colors.

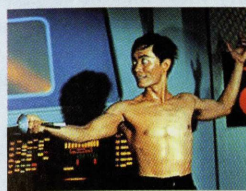
GR: You're paid to use your voice quite a lot. Is your voice something you've worked on? Is it your natural voice?

GT: Well, I have my natural tools, but as a theater student, you take projection classes and elocution classes. My graduation present from my parents was a summer session at the Shakespeare Institute, Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace, where I audited classes with the Royal Shakespeare Company. My voice is a combination of the tools that my parents gave me plus all of the training and experience.

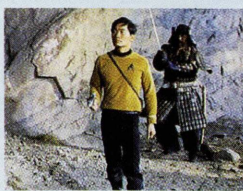
GR: How have you adapted to the changes in directorial style about how acting is supposed to be done?

GT: Change is the most constant thing. When you look at the history of acting, there have been many different styles. When I was young it was the Stanislavsky system, also called method, where you dredge up memory of some experience that you've had. Now it's up to the actor to pick and choose from the various acting-techniques that have been handed down to us. For example, when I did Dysart in *Equus*, he's a British Asian. I had to decide on what kind of English accent I would use. It takes place in Hampshire, on the south coast of England, but I was educated at Oxford, so he would have that upper-class, educated accent. The author, Peter Schaeffer, comes from Lancashire, so I gave him a Lancashire background. You do that kind of research. You use some of the Stanislavsky method, but you also have to take the elements, incorporate that, and personalize it.

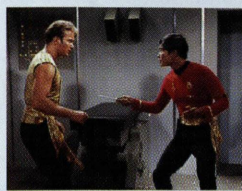
RENTER'S DELIGHT



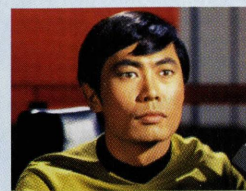
"The Naked Time"
(Season 1, Episode 4)



"Shore Leave"
(Season 1, Episode 15)



"Mirror Mirror"
(Season 2, Episode 33)



"The Savage Curtain"
(Season 3, Episode 77)

Airing Date	September 29, 1966	December 29, 1966	October 6, 1967	March 7, 1969
Sulu Spotlight	Sulu is infected by a space virus that reveals his desire to be a swashbuckler.	Beamed down onto an Earth-like planet for rest and recreation, Sulu encounters a samurai warrior.	The Enterprise crew encounters barbaric versions of themselves from another dimension, including an anti-Sulu.	While Kirk and Spock come to the aid of an outer-space Abe Lincoln, Sulu commands the bridge.
Star Trek Trivia	Spock uses the Vulcan nerve pinch for the first time. Sulu is the recipient.	This episode was penned by sci-fi great Theodore Sturgeon.	The Mirror Universe would return in the "Crossover" episode of <i>Deep Space Nine</i> .	This is the final appearance of Uhura, who does not appear in the final two episodes.

GR: Are you still learning?

GT: What do you mean still? Being alive is a learning process. I think you stop existing when you stop learning. I know people in their 80s who went back to school. That's a wonderful thing. They don't consider themselves old, and they don't want to vegetate. I know an 80-year-old guy who does 10K runs, and that's the way I think life has to be lived.

GR: Can we go back a bit? I remember you having a feud with William Shatner on Howard Stern. I thought it was humorous, seeing an Asian-American guy taking on an institution.

GT: Is Bill an institution?

GR: He's the face of that show.

GT: He is the star of that show!

GR: Was there a feud? Did it get resolved? What happened?

GT: When I wrote my autobiography, I really wanted to talk about my internment background. I'm still amazed that so many people in this country don't know about it.

But I used *Star Trek* as a hook, and I described the working conditions on the set. I said I feel blessed that professional colleagues have become very dear friends—save for Bill. To be very frank, Bill is full of himself. He's very self-important. There have been occasions when the camera was on me for a close-up, and we'd set it up in rehearsal. And Bill usually didn't participate in rehearsals when he didn't have any lines. He'd be back in his dressing room and would come out only when we were ready to film. He'd see that we'd rehearsed with the camera focused on me because I had some critical lines in the scene, and he'd go and whisper to the director. They'd have an intense whispered conversation, and the director would change the camera angle. You knew clearly what had happened, but in television you haven't got time to get into debate, and he was the star of the show.

I described many things like that in the book, and when it was published, the publishers didn't make a big thing of it. But the reviewers and shows like *Entertainment Tonight* picked it out and played that up. Then when I did Conan O'Brien's show, it reached a whole new group of people because I said Bill's full of himself.

GR: I heard about it on Howard Stern.

GT: The book came out 10 years ago, but Howard perpetuated it.

GR: It seems like you were the butt of Stern's jokes for so long, and now you're the voice of the show. How did that happen?

GT: The first time I did the Howard Stern Show, I was doing a play in New York. When you're doing a play, the publicist gives the cast members assignments to promote the show. This one particular morning, I had a list of radio shows to do, and one of them was on Madison Avenue. So I went there and was waiting in the green room, flipping through magazines with the other people there, and they had this radio show on. It was the crudest, most vulgar conversation. I said to the guy sitting next to me, "Why don't they put some nice music on? This is really disgusting." He said, "That's the show we're going to be on." I thought, "Oh my lord." Then they came to get me, I was introduced, and this wild-haired guy tells me, "I didn't know you had such a deep voice. Anyone with a voice that deep has to have a big dong." I said, "Are we on the air?" That was my introduction to him. I had no idea he had such a huge and passionate following on the radio.

He took some of the things I said and played with it. But then a few years later, my book was coming out. This was 1994, and I was in New York doing some promotional work for it. The publicist gave me a list of things to do, I saw Howard Stern, and I crossed him out. This very well-spoken, professional-looking woman in an elegantly tailored suit literally got on her knees and said, "George, please, please, please do the show. It means a lot to us." I said, "I don't think his listenership buys books. I doubt if they can even read." She said, "We're going to sell tens of thousands of copies if you go on that show." Finally, I said, "Get up. I don't want to see you kneeling down," and I did the show. Then he took more sound bites from me.

I had done the audiocassette version of my autobiography and they had a field day with that because they had four or five hours of me talking. That "I love black wang" phrase—I played a character named Wang in that Richard Burton movie—so he got the "wang" from that. And I was in a civil rights musical early in my career called *Fly Blackbird*, so I must have said "black" in that portrait. They take pieces of what they catch you saying, and they had me saying things that I never even imagined, much less actually said.

One morning I picked up the phone and it was Ricardo Montalban. I've worked with him a couple times. So we chitchat for a while, and after four or five minutes the accent starts changing, and I say, "I don't think you're Ricardo." The guy guffaws, and I think, "It's a prankster," so I hang up. The next morning, that conversation is on the Howard Stern show. He sent an imitator to call me, and he put it on the air. I've had a lot of involuntary exposure.

GR: Was that an honor in a way?

GT: It was not an honor; just a lot of nonsense.

Yes, Howard's language is crude and vulgar, and he's obsessed with body functions. That's not my cup of tea, but his right to speak as people speak normally—we hear those words around us all the time, "fucking this" and "fucking that"—that's part of the reality of life. Beyond that, his personal sense of what is really, was truly obscene, like these pork-barrel expenditures of hundreds of millions of dollars to build bridges to nowhere when our soldiers are dying in Iraq because they're not equipped with body armor. Those are the true obscenities of our society. I defend his right to truly speak out on the issues of our time.

The other thing I admire about him is that he boldly goes where people haven't gone before, just like on *Star Trek*. His moving from the very safe and secure yet nevertheless constraining arena of terrestrial radio to the high-risk, high-wire act of satellite radio—he did it. He's been enormously successful, and he's been well-rewarded for that bold move. That's what makes American society move forward. He's a risk-taker, and I support that.

On the second day of this year, when my phone rang and this guy introduced himself as Gary Dell'Abate, the producer of the Howard Stern Show, I just burst out laughing. I thought it was another prank. He said, "No, no, no. This isn't a prank, and our conversation isn't being recorded." I said, "Why are you calling me?" He said, "I'd like to know if you'd be interested in being our announcer." I laughed again because I thought it was another prank, and he said, "We really are serious. We'd like to make the offer to you." I said, "Well, why don't you talk to my agent?" He said, "We intend to do that, but we want to get some indication to see if it's worthwhile to call your agent." I said, "It sounds intriguing, but you may not be able to afford me." I gave him my agent's number, he called, they discussed it. I didn't want to move to New York, so I said, "Let's do a week." I flew there for a week, and it was a bizarre but interesting experience. Then I recorded a lot of liners, and that's what they're running right now. People think I'm still on the show, but no.

GR: You came out last year, although people probably already knew anyway.

GT: All my friends and family knew.

GR: Was that a risk in any way?

GT: It was a very conscious decision. I'm involved in civic work and political arenas, so I've never publicly talked to the press about my homosexuality. But I've been together with Brad for the last 19 years now. We've been out in that sense. Last year was the first time I talked to the press about it, and the reason for that was that I was offended and aghast when Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed the same-sex marriage bill.

I thought the bill being passed by the California legislature was a historic event. Massachusetts had legalized same-sex marriage, and I thought California and Massachusetts were going to bookend the United States. I thought we were going to make history because when Arnold ran for governor in that recall election, he made those very moderate statements: he works in the motion picture industry, he knows a lot of gays and lesbians, he's friends with many, and he's very comfortable. I thought, surely, having campaigned on that moderate stance, Arnold would sign the bill. That's all that was needed for it to

become the law of the state. Instead, he played to the narrowest, most reactionary Republican segment of his base and vetoed it.

I was outraged. It was just like Southern politicians who make moderate statements to curry votes with the African-American community and when it comes time to vote, they vote for segregation.

GR: So coming out wasn't just a personal thing?

GT: No, it was to make a political statement. In order to make that statement, my voice had to be authentic, so I discussed my homosexuality.

GR: Were you comfortable doing that? Was that something you wanted to do anyway at some time?

GT: Well, we were comfortable living the way we were. As you know, the press is an ungovernable creature. It's not as comfortable after you talk to the press because everybody wants you to talk to them. Right after I made my first commentary, there was that initial tidal wave of requests. Then when it started to peter, then Howard called and wanted me to talk about it. I was very candid with him, and apparently, that went over very big with his listenership, and that's what prompted Gary Dell'Abate's call.

GR: I thought it was heroic. It was great for you and a lot of people—even straight people who understand.

GT: The first day that I was on Howard, Arnold Schwarzenegger called in. Howard said, "George, do you want to talk to him?" I engaged in a conversation on the veto issue. When Arnold doesn't want to talk about an issue, he'll crack a joke and try to laugh it off and move on to something else. I said to him, "Mr. Governor, you are elected to an office that has serious responsibilities. What you do, what you say, and how you behave publicly as well as in your political decisions make a profound impact on many Californians' lives. I would expect you to at least address this issue seriously." He engaged me in conversation and as abbreviated as it was, he said, "All right. The next time the bill passed, I commit to you that I will sign it." I turned to Howard and said, "Howard, you may be called the King of Media, but you have enormous clout beyond the media. You have just made history in California and perhaps in the United States."

It turns out "Arnold" was an imitator. He was very good, he was very believable, and his political soft-shoe dance trying to avoid issues was very, very Arnold. It wasn't just the accent. He really had Arnold's persona. So I challenged Howard. I said, "You have a lot of clout. I challenge you to deliver the real governor of California."

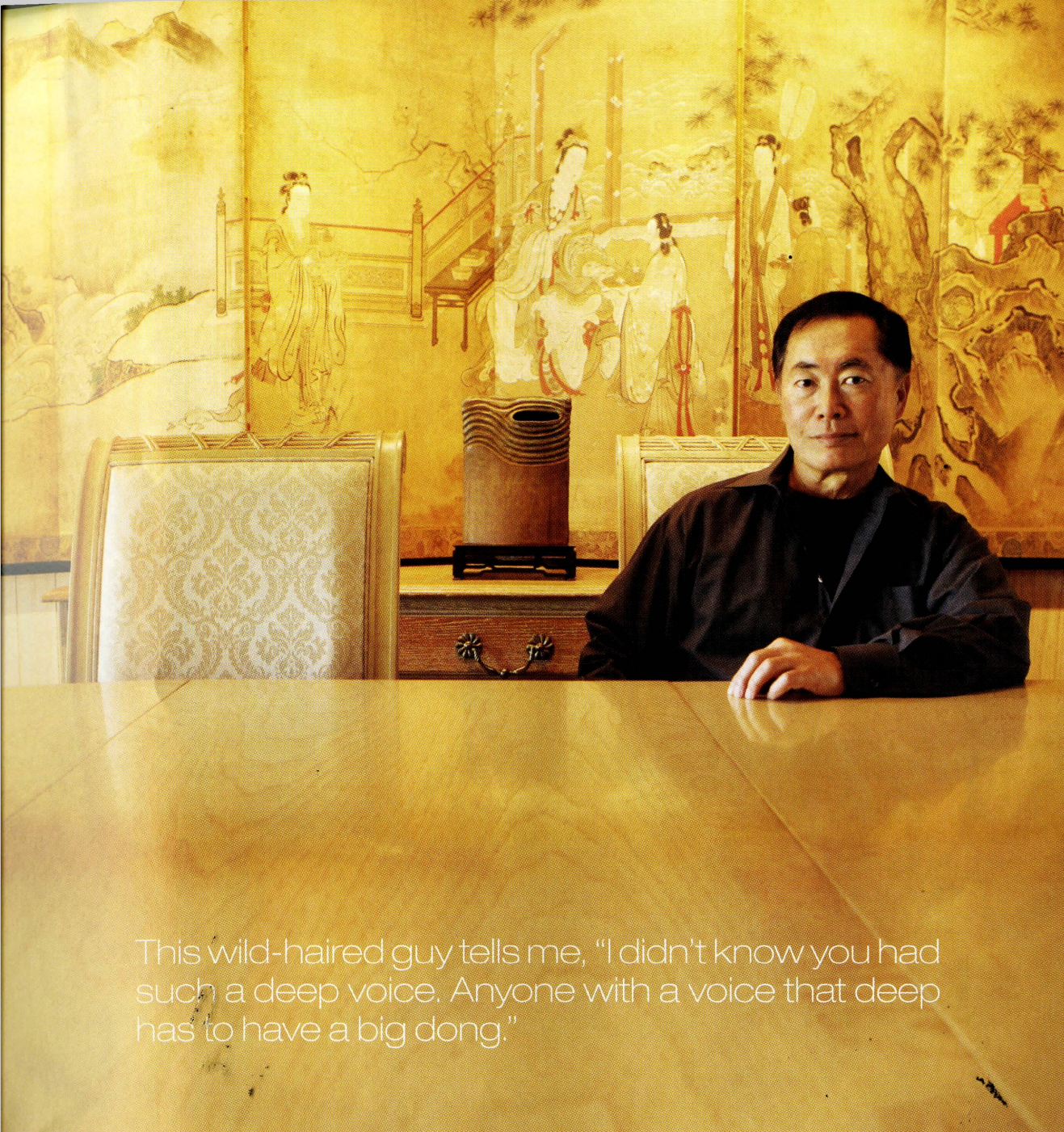
A few days later, Arnold called in and I had the same conversation that resulted in the same promise. Afterward, Howard said it was the same imitator! But my computer exploded with emails. As a matter of fact, the visitations of my Web site went up not double, not triple, but 10,000 percent. Amongst them, I got hundreds of people who identified themselves as white, male, suburban, conservative, and straight who said that they would support same-sex marriage because of the conversations I had with the fake Arnold on the Howard Stern Show. These were people writing from places like Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Nebraska. So there were a lot of positives that came out of that. I told Howard, you did make a contribution.

GR: You got him back in a way.

GT: He didn't know I would use it that way.

GR: You once ran for councilman. What compelled you to get involved in politics?

GT: My political involvement goes way back. It's the influence of my father. As you know, our family, like all Japanese-American families, went through internment. Despite the fact that my father went through that dark chapter of American history, he felt that the American system was the best in the world. He said that both the strength and weakness of American democracy was in the fact that it's a true people's



This wild-haired guy tells me, "I didn't know you had such a deep voice. Anyone with a voice that deep has to have a big dong."

democracy; it could be as great as the people could be, but it could be as fallible as the people. He felt that it was very important for the good people to be active participants in the process. Even before I was a registered voter, my father volunteered me to work for the Adlai Stevenson campaign. I was an active campaign headquarters worker during all of his unsuccessful campaigns.

So I've had that kind of interest inculcated in me by my father. But, also, my theatrical instincts jibe well with it. An election campaign has all the elements of theater. There's excitement, suspense, and tension. Are we going to win or lose? And then there are vari-

ous debates that candidates engage in, and there's drama there. There's either glorious triumph or black defeat, and the world goes down into the pits.

I also was involved in the George Brown senatorial campaign and Tom Bradley's city council campaign. My father had a fundraiser for Tom Bradley in our living room. I was a delegate to the Democratic Convention in 1972, which was a fantastic experience. Then I was involved in Tom Bradley's mayoral campaign after he became our city councilman in the 10th district. When he was elected mayor the second time around, there was a vacancy. I had a lot of political friends

by that time who said, "This is going to be a one-shot election. There's not going to be a primary and a general because it's to fill the unexpired term of the councilman who became mayor." They urged me to run. They said, "You have name I.D. from your acting career, so you have a great leg up. At the last minute, I was persuaded. But after I threw my hat into the ring, I went to Tom Bradley to get his endorsement. He said, "George, if I had known you were going to do it, I would have endorsed you, but I've committed to Dave Cunningham." But we had a good race, it was good fun, and I enjoyed the excitement of the electoral process on that level. I lost by a heartbreaking 3 percent. ❧

words and pic | Eric Nakamura
art | Courtesy of Jeana Sohn

Jeana Sohn

Crows from Korea



The Blue Tree, 2006
Acrylic on paper, 8" x 10"

Green Night, 2006
Acrylic on paper, 8"

Trained as a graphic designer and animator but driven to be an artist, Jeana Sohn has quickly attracted a rapt audience with her youthful but sophisticated work. The Los Angeles painter's dark yet dreamy depictions of boys, girls, trees, flowers, stillness, swimming, and sharks are unnaturally realized. Combining the straightforwardness of children's book illustration and subdued color palette of folk signage, no verbiage is needed for the Korean-born artist to imply mysterious plots, awkward stories, or a quiet sense of discovery.

GR: What did you do before making art?

JS: I got a BFA in graphic design in Korea, but I didn't like it because I don't like sitting in front of the computer. I studied graphic design in San Francisco for six months, and then I stopped





I'm trying to make new environments in my works. They're from my imagination—not from something I saw.



Drunken Dad, 2006
Acrylic on vintage book cover, 11.5" x 10"

because I was just doing the same thing. So I moved to L.A., got into CalArts, and studied animation. I thought, "Maybe I could draw a lot if I changed my major to animation." I was wrong. I didn't like animating, but I was interested in making characters and doing some concept design. I still do storyboard jobs sometimes.

GR: When did you start painting?

JS: About two years ago—right before I graduated CalArts.

GR: You started late!

JS: Yeah, but I've been drawing all the time since I was a little girl. I read a lot of comic books—not really funnies but serious love stories.

GR: Manwha?!

JS: Exactly. Isn't that funny? I think I made 10 comic books by myself when I was in elementary school. They were going around school, and everyone was reading them.

GR: Romance in elementary school?

JS: I was just making up stories! I wasn't a rich kid. My parents were so poor, we couldn't afford toys, computers or anything. So my brother and I were always doing things that were free. Our town was surrounded by mountains and hills. We went to the mountains and chased animals like squirrels and little birds. My paintings show a lot of my childhood experience. All of the characters are my brothers and my friends.

GR: Who's the female with the moustache?

JS: That's me! The older guy with the moustache is my dad. I think I was 8 when he bought a gun and started hunting animals. It was a big shock to my brother and me, and one day he killed a huge black crow. For some reason, he brought it in and locked it in the bathroom. The next day, our house was covered with black crows—thousands of them! It was all black. We were so scared because they wouldn't leave. After a week, I told my dad that we had to do something about the bird, but he wanted to use it as bait for fishing.

The bird my dad killed must have been the leader or king. That's why I usually put a crown on a bird's head. When we buried the bird in the mountains, they left. They knew that the bird wasn't in our house anymore. It didn't feel real, but it happened. I experienced it like a dream. I had weird dreams about huge birds and animals attacking me, and I think that's still a big thing for me. I grew up thinking about that, and it shows in my paintings.

GR: Did he hunt anything else?

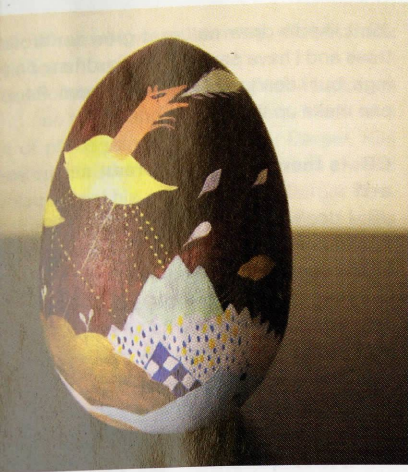
JS: I also saw my dad kill a deer. He carried it over his shoulder. I was crying.

GR: Does your father know all this?

JS: Recently, I asked him, "Do you remember the birds?" And he said, "What birds?" I explained, and he sort of remembers. My dad was into tough-guy things. He was sort of crazy, so the government took away his guns. He's still a moustached guy, and sometimes he has arrows and stuff.

GR: You put a lot of trees in your work.

Eggs, 2005
Acrylic on egg-shaped wood, 2.5" high



Children, 2005
Acrylic on wood panel, 12" x 12"



JS: I like to draw nature. I grew up around trees and I have personal stories in my paintings, but I don't necessarily tell them. People can make up their own stories.

GR: Is there anything Korean about your art?

JS: I don't think so. I'm trying to make environments in my works. They're from imagination—not from something I saw.

GR: What are the sharks all about?

JS: The sharks are from my dad. He told me that on the way to the Vietnam War, he was on a huge ship. One of the guys tried to swim and a shark came and ate him. My dad didn't want it happen, and it was bloody. I don't know why, but I thought about it and I have a lot of sharks in my paintings. I thought maybe I could paint nice sharks. I think my works are from a child's view and not from an adult's since they're all from my childhood.

GR: Your characters don't look very happy. Are they?

JS: I tell mysterious stories. I don't tell if they're funny or comical. I don't know why.

GR: You must look back at your childhood that way.

JS: Maybe I didn't have a happy childhood. We were so poor. We lived in a two-bedroom apartment, but we shared one room with another family. We slept together in one room and we didn't have a living room. It was two rooms with a kitchen, a bathroom, and a small hallway.

GR: What does your brother do now?

JS: He's a sushi man!

GR: How did you start painting?

JS: The basic technique is from my education. I always took art classes. Then my brother and band took me to an art show at Giant Robot. It was a group show with Saelee Oh, Chae Rojas, and others. After I saw the show, I started painting. I liked the style and tried to make it work.

GR: How is your style developing?

JS: I'm trying to do bigger projects. I don't know if I can do it, but I want to do something huge. I want to experiment with different styles.

GR: I notice you moving from color palette to color palette.

JS: It's like I'm still studying. I move to different colors. I have green-cream yellow and indigo blue. When you see it you think I have a lot of colors, but I only have a few colors.

Deer Hunting, 2006
Acrylic on wood panel, 12" x 12"

Swimming, 2006
Acrylic on paper, 8" x 10"

GR: When you were learning, did you look at a lot of books?

JS: I collect *National Geographic* magazines and use them when I need them. I look at a lot of photography. I like Henry Darger, Kiki Smith, and Edward Gorey. Gorey has a weird feeling about his work. I saw the Darger documentary and I really liked it. I wish I were weird like that.

GR: What's up with the owls that you paint?

JS: I make owls, deer, and unicorns because I like the way they look and can make nice graphics with them. People tell me that they are not trendy.

GR: Do your characters talk?

JS: Not talking is cooler.

GR: You're a first-generation Korean in America who moved here at 25. How were you able to make art and not worry about making money?

JS: My parents call me all the time and ask, "Are you making money?" Luckily, I have a husband. He doesn't make a lot of money, but he's really supportive.

GR: Your husband is in a punk band. Does punk rock influence your work?

JS: He does punk rock for fun, but he wants to work in pop music. When I have a show, he makes tons of songs for me.

GR: Has it been easy for you to get your work out?

JS: Not really. I'm bad at self-promoting. I'm antisocial and shy, so I don't talk to people. It's hard for me.

GR: Have your parents had a chance to see your art?

JS: I took them to a group show once. They said, "What the hell? That's it?" They thought I was making something huge, but the pieces were so tiny and the characters were so weird! They're conservative and traditional, and they don't really understand.

GR: So is art working out for you?

JS: Right now it's too stressful. If I think about whether people are going to like it, I can't make art. But I don't have any money coming from other places, so I have to sell paintings.

GR: How often do you paint?

JS: If I have a big show coming, I paint every day. If I don't, then I work maybe two or three days a week. I'm lazy! I'm not that hard of a worker!

Kite, 2006
Acrylic on wood panel, 16" x 20"

Red Rabbit Coat, 2006
Acrylic on paper, 8" x 10"



Mr. Automatic

Production Junction



Dan Nakamura is Eric's cousin.

I miss being able to create audio collages. It's just not financially feasible.

Dan "The Automator" Nakamura has carefully planned our meal. "I got the perfect spot, but we gotta leave early." After a hike to his San Francisco recording-studio house overlooking the waters of the bay, we luxuriously roll out and start driving south toward San Mateo, where one can find the best ramen in America. I've heard Dan boast about how one of his *Iron Chef* buddies devoured two bowls in a sitting. Chefs usually eat little and drink a lot, but two bowls of ramen? This small shop got the seal of approval. Parked at the end of an unassuming block, a small shop has signs telling you that once their soup runs out they close and their stewed pork already has run out. We wait for a bit, then take our seats. The word is out, and other people wait with us.

Once the tonkotsu (white pork broth from Hakata) ramen is brought out, it doesn't take us long to down it all and then talk about what is next. It's easy to engage Dan into conversation if you know what's seemingly most important to him, and that's gastronomy. Dan has an encyclope-

dic knowledge of good eats in almost every city. If he's stuck, he'll open up the Sidekick. Stuck at an airport? He might know where the best place is to get a quick meal. Is the food in England shitty as a whole? He'll tell you that it's getting better. Once at his New York home, he pulled out a thick collection of menus from places that deliver in the rain and we ordered from two of them. Hanging out with chefs, Dan hears and tries what's best and probably knows about the signless secret restaurants in your city. Where one person's quest to eat ends, like at the ramen shop, we're just getting started. Just down the block is a small spot called Happy Camper where the two orders of soup dumplings turned out to be the perfect match for the ramen. We have just eaten two meals, but that's the perfect way to start a workday.

You might think Dan is all about food, but his day job is equally impressive. One of his earliest acclaimed projects is Dr. Octagon's *Dr. Octagon*, which became an instant hip-hop classic. More recent jobs include the production of the Gorillaz' first album, *Deltron 3030* featuring Del tha Funky Homosapien, *Cornershop* and *Handsome Boy Modeling School* with Prince Paul. His client list is long, his waistline stands trim, and he has remained humble over the years.

GR: When is your album going to come out? I heard it a while ago.

DN: I'm one of those guys who has the fortune and misfortune of doing major label records. There's just such a lack of stability between the downloading and things. I'm sort of outside the world of MCA, which is a very well-stocked label. So my contract fell from the Universal system and got put into the Geffen system with somebody who didn't understand what I do. It took me a year and a half to get off the label. But to make a long story short, I'm going to put out the album probably next May after I redo some of it.

GR: Are you having a hard time finding a record label that shares your vision?

DN: The problem is that I put out a record last year and had the absolutely worst timing with the label. It was just bad timing. They were about to go public with stock offerings and things fell through the cracks. Lack

stability, different people here and there, and other stuff makes the decision to hand over your stuff a bit more complicated.

GR: What's the difference between indie and major labels?

DN: I like to look at it this way: If you are on an indie label or you are putting out your own records, you probably have 3 or 4 people working 100 percent on your record. Or, you could be on a major label where you have like 20 people working at 20 percent. A lot more can fall through the cracks, but there can be a lot more opportunities.

GR: Musically, what is the difference?

DN: There's no difference, except that you won't be able to have a hit record on an indie label unless you are really lucky. If it's a great record but it doesn't have that single all over it, maybe a major isn't the best place to be. And vice versa: if you have that cunning single but the album isn't very captivating, then maybe it's better on a major.

GR: From the instant you finish working on a song, do you know if it's a Top 10 single or a Top 50 single?

DN: I can't say that it is a Top 10 single, but I can say that it has potential. Right now I have a single with Jamie Cullum. It's pretty big—more of an adult single than a kid single. An album-oriented rocker or whatever you call it. Alternative college radio plays it, but it's the kind of thing that could use a push, you know?

GR: Your title is mostly producer, but it seems like you can do everything.

DN: I'm a producer by trade, but I can play instruments and I like to do a lot of different things. I don't consider myself a great artist or Elton John.

GR: You haven't worked with Madonna or anyone like that yet.

DN: No, but I've done stuff with people who are considered commercially viable in formats like alternative and rap. I've worked with Busta Rhymes, you know? I've done stuff with Primal Scream. You couldn't give away their record in America, but it's all over the radio in Europe.

Let me put it this way, if I could make Britney Spears records, I'd be making them. I'm not morally opposed to it. It's just not what comes out of me. I don't make country records. I don't make modern R&B records. I don't make modern jazz records so much. There's someone out there who's feeling it, who's going to be doing Christina Aguilera and Madonna records better than me. And more power to them, you know? I'll probably see them drive by in their Rolls-Royces.

Way back, like a year before I started making records people noticed, I kinda knew that I was making my own thing and that I wasn't equipped to copy what was going on right then.

GR: Was this around Octagon?

DN: Right before that. I realized either I'd be okay, or no one would ever hear me, but at least I'd be true to what I do.

GR: What can you bring to a punk rock band that has no hip-hop element at all?

DN: It's less about hip-hop in rock records; it's more about hip-hop in youth culture. Hip-hop has become the No. 1 influence on culture. Even if you are a rock kid, you might have grown up listening to NWA records. A lot of the rock kids I work with don't have any motivation to rhyme, but they grew up listening to rap.

My roots in music are underground hip-hop, but I'm not really an underground hip-hop sort of guy. That just happened to be a way for me to express myself at the time. I'm actually a really big fan of music, whether it's hip-hop or rock or pop or whatever.

I've probably made more rock or alternative records than hip-hop ones. This wasn't by accident, you know? After I made my first successful venture with Dr. Octagon, the very next successful record I



made was Cornershop. That made me open my ears to the sound of Indian music. I got to tour with Radiohead. I got to do all these things that rap guys don't do. It was like seasoning.

GR: When Octagon came out, did the color of your skin make any difference?

DN: I'm not a ghetto guy, and I didn't sell drugs or anything, but our parents were locked up by the government. If you are a minority, you are on this side of the fence rather than the other side of the fence. You have nothing to prove. But I don't want to make this a racial issue. I don't want to be the best Japanese guy. I want to be the best, period!

GR: I watched that Metallica documentary, and it was pretty cool. They did this weird rap thing where they gave a song to some guy and I think Busta Rhymes rapped on it. Is a project like that interesting to you?

DN: Kinda. Metallica makes great records. I see them at Safeway once in a while and we'll chill. I'm interested in self-expression.

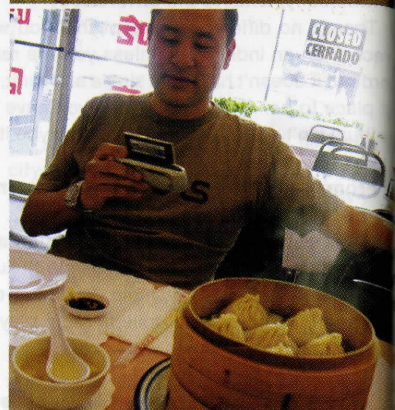
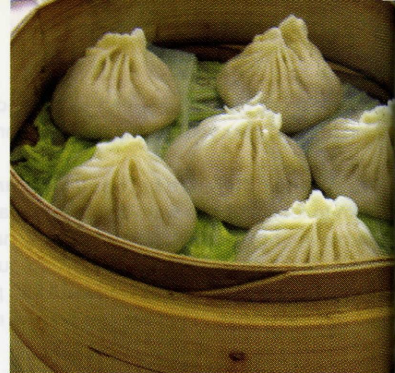
GR: I think I read in an interview that you might take sounds from previous records but tweak them so much that it's impossible to know where they came from. Are people able to figure them out nowadays?

DN: I actually don't sample stuff much anymore because it's so expensive. It isn't worth the clearance. It's almost like, why don't you just get them played or whatever? I'll still have two or three or four samples on a record, but I won't have a lot because it's too expensive.

I miss sampling. I miss being able to create audio collages. It's just not financially feasible. I think it's an art, and the public will never be able to hear all the great stuff that guys like Shadow could've done. It's a shame, because I think it's a very important part of 20th century music. It's a big part of modern electronic music and modern music, but we are at a point where people just can't afford to make records like that. I'm telling you, Josh (DJ Shadow) can do amazing things with it, but he just can't afford to. I'm sorry that I'll never get to hear that stuff taken to its fullest.

GR: What does a sample consist of these days? I know Vanilla Ice was popular because he stole the Queen riff, but something like that is a little too obvious.

DN: Well, if you pay for it, you pay for it. It's not a question of how much you take or what you take. And it's not uncreative to do that. The



I would love to be that guy who makes all the Justin Timberlake records, makes all this money, and lives in a hovercraft. But that's not really who I am.

Beastie Boys take other people's three notes and make their own thing out of it. The thing is that you get to a point where you can't do anything because it gets too expensive. It takes away the fun. Like I said, I actually miss it because I am actually a big fan of the whole thing. The Bomb Squad is one of my favorite hip-hop production teams ever.

GR: Hank Shocklee and Public Enemy, right? Those guys were insane. I even bought *Son of Bazerk* just because I heard that they produced it. It would have been cool to hear an instrumental version.

DN: I love the vocal version, too. See, I'll never hear records like that again, and I miss it.

GR: Do those guys still work?

DN: Yeah, I saw Hank a couple weeks ago.

GR: Is there like a producers community?

DN: Somewhat. I'm not saying like we get together every day.

GR: But Pharrell knows who you are?

DN: Yeah, we are friends. We chat occasionally.

GR: But he's like a billionaire nowadays. As a producer, is he just doing more commercially viable work?

DN: More than me! [laughs] I mean, he's good. He does Justin Timberlake records. He did all the hits on the Justin Timberlake record except for one of them. He's incredible, and he knows his shit.

GR: It seems like he became a real mainstream artist all of a sudden. He was on one of those 60 Minutes-type shows on television. Now he's appealing to 60-year-old white men.

DN: He's really an interesting character—not your typical pop-beat poppy dude. I actually find him to be really influential. I'm a fan of what he's done recently.

GR: I bring him up because he was a hip-hop producer once. Now he's doing white music for white people. As white as can be! It's some kind of a weird crossover-type of thing, you know?

DN: He's really good at it. Take, for example, Dr. Dre. That man has made more money than God. He's made hit record, after hit record, after hit record. I love all of his records, but they are mostly all rap records. The amazing thing about Pharrell is that he can do that in different genres. I'm like him in the sense that I'm also interested in different genres. I'm sure Dre is interested in different genres, but it just happens to put out rap music.

GR: He probably doesn't even have time to mess with them.

DN: The thing about Dre is that he doesn't put out as many records as, say, Pharrell, but everything he makes is a hit. I've been following him forever. He's definitely my favorite rap producer on the L.A. side. He's taken chances and failed, plus he's taken chances and succeeded.

GR: What did he fail on?

DN: That's the thing. You don't know the failures because the records don't sell.

GR: How about you?

DN: I would love to be that guy who makes all the Justin Timberlake records, makes all this money, and lives in a hovercraft. But that's not really who I am. At the same time, I'm not like "Oh, let me speak to my indie roots because it's cool." I find people I like, and I do stuff with them. I know some records are only going to sell a few copies.

but it doesn't really matter, does it? I mean, it's kind of about the musical output and ultimately getting to make something that you think is relatively cool.

GR: How often do you hear something that is super fresh, like a fresh new sound or a fresh new thing? How often does that happen these days?

DN: I think the most fruitful period for me was around when *OK Computer* came out. I think Björk had *Homogenic*, and then Portishead had a record. That was just a fruitful period. It's not like that right now, as far as I can tell.

GR: When was the last time you have been really excited about an album?

DN: Oh, man. Well, someone thought the Postal Service record was pretty hot. Chan, you know, Cat Power. Her new album, *The Greatest*, is really, really good. I also think that Young Jeezy is pretty amazing.

I get caught in these moods where I'm working on new projects and I listen to old records that I really like to get into. Last year, I spent some serious time with The Clash, Big Audio Dynamite, and New Order. I used to listen to a lot of that stuff because I think Big Audio Dynamite and New Order have the creative energy that encapsulates what should be going on today.

GR: So are you out buying as many new records from new artists?

DN: I slowed it down a lot, specifically because there are so many things that I want to buy. You get to a point in your life where you're not looking for anything, but there's always music. I would always be able to go out and buy records. After a while, you realize that you are buying less and less. You still have the same desire to buy it, but there's just less records out there.

A number of years ago, I started buying a lot of DVDs. But I realized that you might see a DVD of your favorite movie like 20 or 30 times, whereas you might listen to your favorite record 10,000 times. So I buy music because it can be listened to so many times.

It's a lot easier to buy on iTunes, but then you don't get the pictures and it's less interesting. It makes the hobby not fun.

GR: Does downloading hurt you? Is it noticeable from one year to the next?

DN: Of course. Record sales in general are sliding. I don't blame people for downloading. Either you spend \$12 on a crappy record or get the song free. I don't think it's a music thing, though. I think it's an intellectual property issue.

I think that the government has to really crack down on downloading music and movies. How far away are we from downloading medical formulas? I'm serious; these guys



Prince Paul, Dan Nakamura, and white people.

spend half a million dollars on drug research. Don't you think that in about five years we'll have a chemistry set and be able to do that kind of thing?

Or how are you going to stop somebody from downloading a PDF and then silk screening it onto a shirt? Protecting intellectual property is something that needs to be addressed on a much more stern level than it is right now. It's hurting the music industry, but that's just a small fish in the bigger picture.

GR: Is there one album that you always go back to?

DN: Not one that I always go back to consistently, but I listen to Serge Gainsbourg's *Histoire de Melody Nelson* a lot. Can's *Ege Bamyasi*, The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, Radiohead's *OK Computer*, Björk's *Homogenic*, the Postal Service, BDP's *Criminal Minded*, Mobb Deep's *The Infamous*, the second Mantronix album.

GR: When was the last time you put out a record of your own? Was it Handsome Boy last year?

DN: This year, I have a new Deltron record and a new record with Josh Haden.

GR: You produce music that fast? It seems like you do three or four projects a year, which seems like a lot.

DN: Yeah. Now I'm working on a record with an English guitar blues-rock band.

GR: What do you think of the mash-ups? It seems like a DJ thing right now.

DN: We used to do things just like that 15

years ago. I like juxtaposition, but I like my mixes to be musically viable. Sometimes it's bad, sometimes it's pretty good. I've had remix records out, you know? Sometimes that stuff can be extremely crazy.

GR: But it seems like that term came out last year or so?

DN: When I was a kid, you'd see guys mixing "Under the Boardwalk" with "Planet Rock." Maybe it actually helped me musically, because I didn't know anything about putting genres together.

GR: Is there ever an issue of work being work and home life being home life?

DN: A little bit. People think they know me through my music. For example, I don't do drugs. But after Octagon and all that stuff, I was perceived differently. You know what I mean? So when I do shows, even 10 years later, people give me drugs. To this day, I'll be DJing and people sweep things onto the mixer. You know, 99 percent of the people don't do that, but the 1 percent that does, I'd just rather leave them out of my midst. When we were doing the Octagon record, we had people showing up at our P.O. box. Maybe I'm a little paranoid about things, but I don't want to be part of that. It's just not worth it. There's no upside to it.

GR: So we're never going to see an MTV *Cribs* at your house?

DN: Never [laughs]. No, I'm not super private, but if I don't see a real upside to a situation, I don't want to get into it. It's like swinging the pendulum too far that way, you know what I mean?

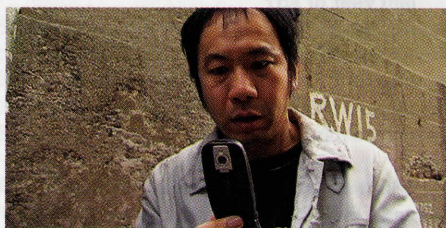
53

Iron Man

Planet Tokyo



Kiki makes a breathtaking debut in *Vital* (2007)



I'm a happy person with a positive outlook, so I'm attracted to extreme darkness.

Long before Japan provided the mother lode of modern horror cinema, *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* was freaking out arthouse audiences around the world. Shinya Tsukamoto's 1988 movie detailed the breakdown and transformation of a couple that drives into a frenzied metal fetishist. Oddly turned on by his body (played by Tsukamoto, who jams metal rods into a self-inflicted thigh wound with gusto), the two proceed to make out in front of his dying eyes before burying him. The low-budget, black-and-white depiction of the salaryman boyfriend becoming a metal monster and the girlfriend, who reacts with a combination of fear and lust, triggered comparisons to the films of David Lynch, David Cronenberg, and Sam Raimi.

Tsukamoto became an international cult filmmaker, paving the way for other Japanese filmmakers like Beat Takeshi and Takashi Miike. Since then, he has taken a few industry jobs (*Hiruko the Goblin* and *Gemini*) but has mostly continued to create challenging, violent, and smart films. Highlights include the metal mutant skinhead extravaganza, *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer*; a brutal boxing and relationship movie, *Tokyo Fist*; a sadistic-stalker-with-a-heart flick, *A Snake in June*; and *Vital*, in which an amnesiac medical school student regains his memory by dissecting his dead girlfriend.

Tsukamoto's filmmaking style has clearly become less flashy and more subtle, but his subject matter remains challenging, and the look is as grainy and odd as ever.

GR: Your themes are pretty crazy. Do you consider yourself a regular guy?

ST: I consider myself a regular guy. My film style is no different than anyone else's. Even when it comes to movies, I want to create something very different. My movies usually involve a normal person that is jumped into a different situation.

GR: The situations can become very strange. Do you worry about people not understanding your movies?

ST: During my early projects, I really didn't care if they appealed to a general audience. Being different was fine. My view has changed a bit since then. I want a bigger audience that understands what I'm saying. Even if the themes remain the same.

GR: What is the theme? Being repressed?

ST: In general, the theme is people surviving.

in the urban setting and creating their own existences.

GR: How did growing up on kaiju movies affect your attitude toward filmmaking?

ST: I watched a lot of kaiju movies when I was a kid, particularly *Godzilla*, *Gamera*, and *Ultra Q*. My first movie, *Tetsuo*, was highly influenced by that.

GR: The special effects in *Tetsuo* were pretty raw, with people stabbing themselves with metal and everything. Did anyone get hurt?

ST: The effects appeared raw, but in reality we were very careful. Nobody was hurt.

GR: Did you create the special effects yourself?

ST: We were pretty low budget, so we did it ourselves. But for *Tetsuo II*, we had some budget and asked young people to help out.

GR: Did you expect the first movie to be a success, and was there a Plan B in case it didn't work out?

ST: When I was creating *Tetsuo*, I never thought about being a director in the future. All I thought about was making the movie. My devotion was 100 percent to creating it.

GR: *Tetsuo* was shot in black and white, and you've chosen not to use color a few times since then. Is that a budget issue or for aesthetics?

ST: Cost-wise, black and white prints are more expensive. It was more for aesthetics. For example, *Ultra Q* was black and white. Also, when one dreams, it's in black and white. Because *Tetsuo* was about a man becoming steel, it looked good in black and white, too.

GR: What about the length of your movies? It doesn't take two hours for you to make your point.

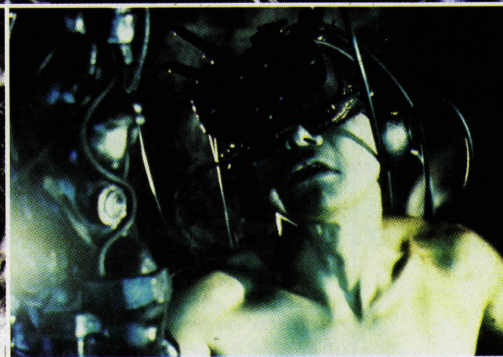
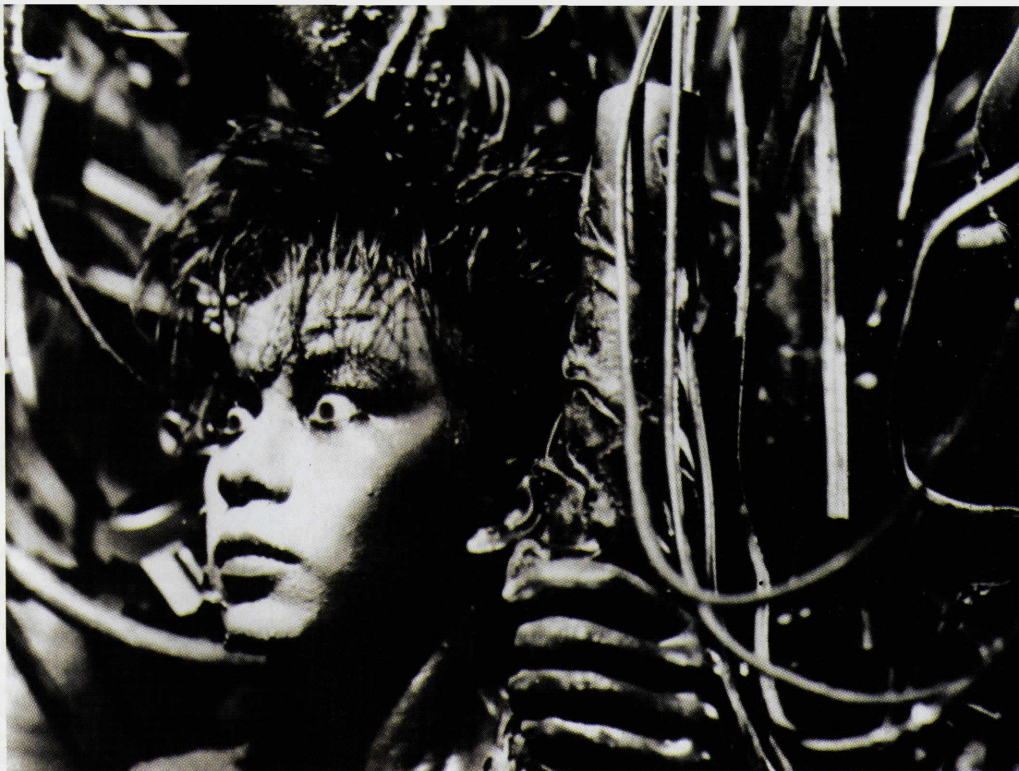
ST: It's for tempo. Instead of having lengthy explanations of what happens, I want to make my movies simple and not wordy. A lot of times my points are complicated and difficult to explain anyway.

GR: The *Tetsuo* movies are linked closely to Tokyo. What will the purported American *Tetsuo* movie be like?

ST: I've been thinking about that for almost 13 years. Now I'm not sure it will be set in America. The theme will be cyberpunk, so maybe Tokyo is a more appropriate setting.

GR: When you began, you edited your films manually. Now you use computers. Has the change in process affected the way you edit?

ST: In the past, a lot of times film got misplaced and it was time-consuming trying to locate it. But I don't feel like my editing style has changed.



Clockwise from top: A bad hair day for *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1988); Upside-down goggles make a comeback in *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer* (1992); Funnel vision in *Vital* (2004); Stubby kisses from *Tetsuo*.

GR: Your films are full of darkness and violence, but they aren't unhappy.

ST: I'm a happy person with a positive outlook, so I'm attracted to extreme darkness.

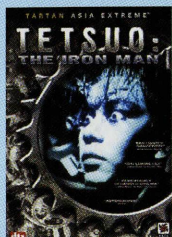
GR: Do your actors understand what's going on? Do you have to explain scenes that are disturbing yet arousing, for example?

ST: I don't really explain the parts in detail to actors. I describe the theme but nothing in depth.

GR: When you act in a movie like *Marebito*, is it hard for you to let go of things, like cinematography or directing, and just play your part?

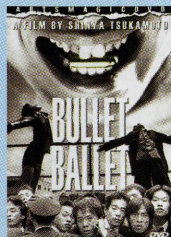
ST: I started acting in school plays and enjoy it very much. I still act in my own movies. When I act in movies by my favorite directors, I listen to their direction and work their vision.

RENTER'S DELIGHT



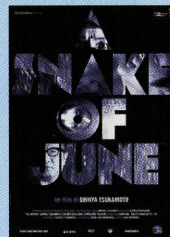
Tetsuo: The Iron Man (1988)

This grainy, 16mm labor of love foreshadowed many elements that would mark Tsukamoto's later work. For example, the stylish use of black and white, the strange relationship between men and women, and the transformation of everyday people into extraordinary freaks. In *Tetsuo*, Tsukamoto plays a fetishist who gets off by jamming rusty pieces of metal into self-inflicted wounds. After he is run over by a car, the driver and his girlfriend become strangely aroused, disrobe, and fornicate right in front of his warm corpse. Somehow, the driver goes on to become an iron man himself, growing metal stubble and then a drill penis. And that's only the beginning! The results are dreamy and nightmarish at once.



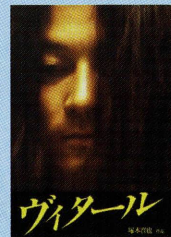
Bullet Ballet (1998)

Of Tsukamoto's personal works, this has the most straightforward narrative. After his longtime girlfriend commits suicide by shooting herself, a salaryman becomes obsessed with acquiring a Chief's Special gun. His quest for a firearm takes him to dark corners of Tokyo's underworld, where he is ripped off, beat up, and generally humbled. The salaryman, played by Tsukamoto, even resorts to fashioning a junky homemade gun! When he finally acquires a gun, predictably, it does not solve his problems. How it unfolds is riveting, baffling, and quite open to interpretation. There are plenty of great shots as well, including an exhausting foot chase that rivals SABU's *Dangan Runner* and *Postman Blues*.



A Snake of June (2002)

Asuka Kurosawa plays Rinko, a psychological hotline operator who is stalked by a caller who decides to repay her assistance with blackmail. The stranger sends spy photos of her masturbating and says he will give prints to her husband unless she meets his demands. Observing Rinko's repressed life and nonintimate relationship with her cleanliness-obsessed spouse, the stranger asks her to walk around town in an ultra miniskirt with no panties. Then he has her buy a vibrator, "wear" it in public, and give him the controls. The stalker, who is played by Tsukamoto, somehow sees himself as her liberator, and although the black-and-white drama plays out with incredible cruelty, the effect is intellectually shocking and not smutty.



Vital (2004)

Short, sweet, and sick. *Vital* stars Japan's coolest actor Tadanobu Asano as an amnesiac med school student who regains his memory as he dissects the body of his deceased longtime girlfriend. At first, he thinks it's a cruel joke, but then he begins to savor his dreamy flashbacks, which include the car crash that took his memory and ended the life of his companion, as well as their shared moments of erotic asphyxiation. Asano sketches each layer of flesh and bone as if he were Leonardo da Vinci uncovering the mysteries of anatomy and humanity. Mixed into this understated but gory love story is a stalker played by model and first-time actress Kiki, who comes to realize that she can never compete with a memory.

In general, the theme is people surviving in the urban setting and creating their own existences.

GR: Is that like a vacation from directing?

ST: It's a vacation from being a director, but it's not relaxing. It's more involved than being on a holiday.

GR: What do your parents think about your body of work?

ST: They always attend the premieres and are very opinionated about them. They give me very detailed feedback.

GR: They never worry about the dark themes?

ST: No, not true at all.

GR: Vital was very different than your other movies. It seemed like there was less overt violence and more intellectual struggle.

ST: That movie was about how Tokyo's city life affects human flesh. It explored the natural human body. In the future, I'd like to tackle more natural subjects as well.

GR: The movie was also about love, although it involved a dead person. Your other movies, which involve metal fetishes and being beaten into a pulp are also about love. Are you a romantic?

ST: I think so. I'm a happy guy and romantic as well. I believe in true love and make movies about it—even if people can't tell. 🐸

Tadanobu Asano and Shinya Tsukamoto discuss hair care on the set of *Vital* (2004).



A Snake of June (2002)



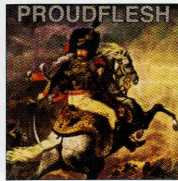
TOP PICKS

The Black Heart Procession

**The Spell**

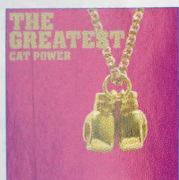
Along with Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds and Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Black Heart Procession has perfected the art of turning sadness and darkness into lush, beautiful music. The San Diego group's newest release mixes twinkling keyboards, complex percussion, and mournful lyrics into sad movements that will sweep you out of your funk and make you savor your despair. Morrissey would be jealous. This time around, the Tropicalia elements have vanished and the electric guitar has re-emerged. Songs like "The Replacement" and "GPS" barely reach for the cusp of rocking out. (Perhaps a nod to the return of Three Mile Pilot, the group that Black Heart and Pinback came from?) Still, the songs remain as restrained as ever, the group realizing that releasing the pain would ruin everything. [Touch & Go] mw

Proudflesh

**Self-Titled**

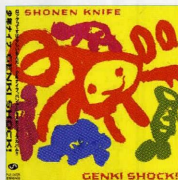
This black-clad squad features Sothira and Jimmy from Crucifix, but the sound isn't anarcho-punk at all—at least not in sound. Once a shouter of Crass-like slogans, Sothira practically sings now, and his bass playing isn't bad, either. Meanwhile, Jimmy uses the slower tempo to show off guitar licks that just weren't possible in the pair's earlier, crustier musical collaboration. Despite the softening of the music style, which charges the gray area between punk and metal in a Motörhead-like fashion, it's as if the lyric-writing process has been frozen in time. When Sothira kicks off the CD by belting out, "I'm antiwar, I'm antiwar" it's ridiculously simple, but it blows away a hundred "support our troops" country-rock songs in purity and power. [Wired Gnome] mw

Cat Power

**The Greatest**

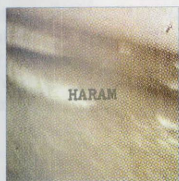
I actually bought this one, and it didn't disappoint me. Chan Marshall usually plays acoustically, but *The Greatest* is a band effort. Diehard fans might talk you down, saying that her older work is better, but this album is a powerful effort. The title sounds like a greatest-hits compilation, but it might be her greatest album, period. The title track does it all; it's a piano ballad with strings, sounds, and light drums that are orchestrated just right. It's an instant classic, nearly worth the price of the album on its own. (I'm partial to all of the songs with piano.) The album's moods go up and down, but it's a strong album throughout, with just a few loose songs mostly at the end. I dig the juxtaposed bling necklace and pink cover, too. [Matador] en

Shonen Knife

**Genki Shock!**

Is it okay to fall in love with a band again and again? Shonen Knife is that type of band, and I hope they never stop playing. The music is just a little more sophisticated than day one, but *Genki Shock!* is just as exciting as their early, raw, bubblegum-punk classics were. Their songs aren't about complex subjects, and should appeal to anyone. "Jeans Blue" has lyrics about going out and seeing people wearing them! "Anime Phenomenon" should be the anthem for otaku in America. Luna's Dean Wareham sings on "Under My Pillow"! How did that happen? Will the younger generation be cool enough to pick up on the the Yamano sisters' brand of cute and primal rock? I doubt it, but Shonen Knife will kick Puffy AmiYumi's thongs inside out. [Tomato Head] en

Haram

**Self-Titled**

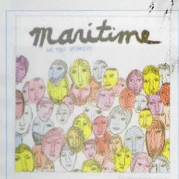
Haram plays choppy guitar-based rock with harsh vocals and pain-inspired lyrics. The group boasts members of hardcore bands like Out_Circuit, Pg. 99, and Majority Rule, and its heavy tendencies are clearly demonstrated in epic struggles like "Plastic Hearts," "Scar Chest," and "Fade Away," which balance crushing bass lines with massive guitars licks. But the group is definitely not taking the Mars Volta route to drum circles and space jamming. The songs always have structure, and the bulk of the album is shorter blasts like "Mountain of Youth" and "Out of Tune." I appreciate how the group shows its chops but will let songs end with a tweaked note as if a string just broke. A great, dark mix of music and noise. [Lovitt] mw

Mia Doi Todd

**La Ninja: Amor and Other Dreams of Manzanita**

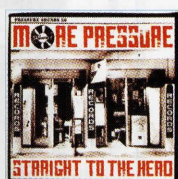
La Ninja is a surprisingly quick follow-up to Mia Doi Todd's onslaught of recent releases, and it is probably the most varied and exciting of them all. I didn't expect a remix album from this mellow singer-songwriter. Instead of acoustic guitar, it's got electronic noises, trip-hop beats, majestic sounds, and crazy psychedelia courtesy of guest knob-turners. Of course, Dntel of the Postal Service is the forerunner of radness, but I'm partial to Nobody's sitar-flavored remix of "What If We Do?" Other contributions come from Adventure Time and Chessie. Not to be outdone, Mia Doi Todd adds some new songs, and her cover of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood" might be better than the original. John Lennon would have dug it. [Plug Research] en

Maritime

**We, the Vehicles**

With the singer Davey von Bohlen and drummer Dan Didier from the Promise Ring and bass player Eric Axelson from the Dismemberment Plan, you know what to expect, right? Maybe not. Not as mellow as the Promise Ring's final album or as funky as anything the Dismemberment Plan released, the sound is pure melodic pop, with twisting and turning yet rhyming lyrics and subtle tones and buzzes added in unexpected places. It's kind of like *Head on the Door*-era Cure dressed in white linen instead of black polyester. Actually, "German Engineering" resembles George Michael's "Faith" as much as it does "Close to Me." Since the LP was completed, Axelson quit the group, but the band plays on with Decibully's Dustin Klug. [Flameshovel] mw

Various Artists

**Straight to the Head**

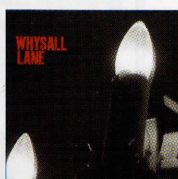
Specializing in re-issuing hard-to-find Jamaican music, Pressure Sounds does no wrong. The British label scrounges up vintage and rare dub, rocksteady, reggae, and dancehall cuts, and collects them into beefy, affordable collections with exquisite taste and deluxe packaging. To celebrate its fiftieth release, the label has gone back to its roots—roots reggae, that is. This compiles eight killer 7" singles, complete with dub versions. It's hard to pick highlights, but "Over Come" by The Key is downright hypnotic with its buzzing guitar, spare piano, and right-on lyrics. Just when you get sucked in, Bongo Gene's mind-bending version spits you out, preparing you for yet another version featuring crazy spoken word that must have inspired the Stones' "Emotional Rescue." [Pressure Sounds] mw

Mudhoney

**Under a Billion Suns**

The shit, shower, and shave-less era of grunge came and left, but Mudhoney is still at it with their 10th album in 18 years. The Seattle band may have added some horns in homage to Rocket From the Crypt, but the band's sound remains supremely dirty. Almost all of the original members (except Matt Lukin, who left in 1999) are still rocking out, and they remain unafraid to play a song based on 12-bar blues. Mark Arm's voice is as howling as ever, but the key continues to be the psychedelic, Hendrix-like licks of Steve Turner. They're as thick as were on day one. The songs are still at a medium-grunge pace, with just enough burners to start a pit of stinky, flannel-wearing slam dancers. Will grunge come back in a early '90s flashback? If it does, think Mudhoney, not posers like Pearl Jam. [Sub Pop] en

Whysall Lane

**Self-Titled**

Thanks to Richard Baluyut's crisp and distinctive vocals, this got a free ride to the top of my stack of CDs to review. His old band, Versus, is one of my all-time favorites. Mikel Delgado from Wussom Pow! provides perfect backup vocals, and the songs they sing together are the album's best. Rounding out the trio is ex-Jawbreaker drummer, Adam Pfahler. You can't ever question the quality of his drumming. So what does Whysall Lane sound like? Honestly, it's like *2 Cents Plus Taxera Versus*. The songs that rock, like "Time Machine" are epic. The mellow ones, like "Pillows," are introspective—practically romantic ballads—and have the power to make a bunch of dudes in a room feel uneasy. This is nearly an indie rock hall-of-fame release. [Blackball Records] en

IRRASHAIMASE! DOZO, OHAIRI KUDASAI!

AMOEBA MUSIC

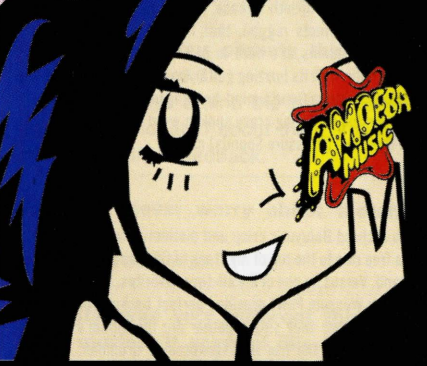
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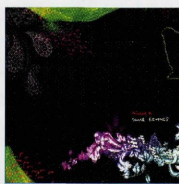
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MUSIC REVIEWS

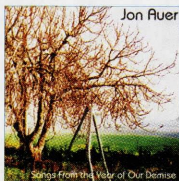
Aloha



Some Echoes

This underrated quartet plays mellow, happy, experimental pop that's not wimpy. At times, they have a slight indie/psychedelic sound that's similar to Apples in Stereo. But it's not fair to lump Aloha with other bands, since the sound is rich and unique. Maybe it's the vibraphones? The marimba plays a role, too. For a group with members that don't even live in the same city, they have sculpted an impressive pop sound with varied instrumentation. How can they still be relatively unknown after four albums? [Polyvinyl] en

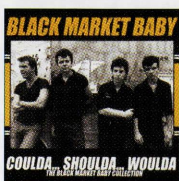
Jon Auer



Songs from the Year of Our Demise

In the shadows of the Grunge Era, the Posies didn't write top hits, but they did release solid, melodic pop songs that some people will say they were as important as Galaxie 500's. Jon Auer was a Posie, and *Songs from the Year of Our Demise* is his first solo effort. On the album, he plays mellow pop that borders on indie emo and should appeal to fans of Death Cab for Cutie and Elliot Smith. It's very much in that singer-songwriter genre. When he's not doing solo stuff or playing with the Posies, he's with Alex Chilton in the reformed Big Star! [Pattern 25] en

Black Market Baby



Coulda... Shoulda... Woulda...

Two years before Dischord's scene-documenting *Flex Your Head* compilation came out, Black Market Baby was driving slam pits in Washington, D.C. The story goes that young locals like Ian MacKaye, Henry Rollins, and John Stabb were fans, but the rest of the world missed out because the hard-drinking, fight-loving group never toured. The music is mid-tempo and rock-flavored, not too far from working-class punks from Europe like Chelsea or 999. From the buzz-saw attack of "World at War" to the moody and layered sounds of "Parasite," the songwriting and anger hold up well. [Dr. Strange] mw

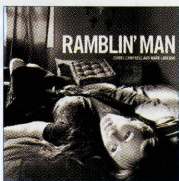
blackPus



2

From the depths of Olneyville (near Providence, RI), comes this mysterious band. Who are they? One member is Lightning Bolt's Brian Chippendale, who handed me this impossible-to-find CD, and the sound is as fuzzy and noisy as you might expect. In fact, Chippendale's tribal drums and instrumental feedback create an experience that's even more epileptic than Lightning Bolt! Is that possible? Yes, blackPus is too powerful for words, and this CD is handmade, hand-burned, and silkscreened. [Diareahrama Records] en

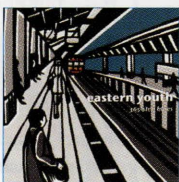
Isobel Campbell / Mark Lanegan



Ramblin' Man

What happens when Belle (of Belle & Sebastian) joins forces with the deep-voiced front man of Screaming Trees? Isobel Campbell's parts are lightly sung while Mark Lanegan's side are the opposite, almost like Johnny Cash. Lanegan's deep, muddy vocals are a perfect fit for the Western and blues-flavored songs. Most of the cuts are mellow, and have a distinct duet or call-and-response feel. Then again, some songs have no vocals at all! Campbell and Lanegan gel well, and there are more than a few gems in this old release. [V2] en

Eastern Youth



365-Step Blues

Eastern Youth is considered the Fugazi of Japan, and if you speak Japanese get ready to cry. The band's emo lyrics about life in Tokyo resonate with throngs of young fans who flock to shows and don't hold back the tears. The musicianship is powerful, and each song is epic. On the best tracks, the pace changes throughout and Hisashi Yoshino's vocals go from overdrive to a soft whisper and back again. Eastern Youth makes me want to start a Yoshino fan club. Entry fee: a workmanlike look, shaved head, and Clark Kent glasses. [FiveOnelnc] en

Geoff Farina



Already Told You

Unlike the ex-Karate singer's jazzy rock efforts in which he sounds like Donald Fagan, this material is as real as it gets. No more Steely Dan jokes. With *Already Told You*, it's just him and a guitar, and the jazzy elements make the songs sound more like acoustic lounge music than beardy folk. I imagine the songs you get are an honest piece of Geoff Farina's soul. When he's not making music, Farina co-handles an artist's studio in Rhode Island called Narragansett Grange Hall. Ron Rege Jr. once did a residency there! [Southern] en

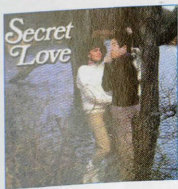
Future Pigeon



The Echodelic Sounds

This eight-piece band from Los Angeles plays serious dub reggae with live horns, deep beats, and help from the likes of Mikey Dread and Ranking Joe. Dub cuts resonate with skill, authority, and heaviness, but there are plenty of killer songs with lyrics, too. Topics include the evils of money and yuppies, but I like "Mummy," which renders "Walk Like an Egyptian" obsolete with lines like "roll a little spliff with the papyrus" and "I hear coughin' in the coffin." True, it seems like the subject always turns to pot, but these songs are no joke. [Record Collection] mw

DJ Jester



Secret Love

The nicest guy in hip-hop has released yet another CD filled with the illegal samples, song clips, etc. and mixes them to fun perfection. He sets the tempo of the album with the theme song to *St. Elmo's Fire*, and breaks into Boston from there. This isn't scratch-happy, mix-master, dick-out stuff; he lets the music do its job, picking the greatest and cheesiest songs from the '80s without needing to feed his ego and make a new song out of it. Get this CD, and it will send you into the recesses of your past. If you see Jester live, make sure you pick up one of his Whoopee Cushions, too. [Exponential] en

Just a Fire



Spanish Time

This band has distant vocals, slathered riffs, and loose drums that suggest sloppiness but are actually right-on with every beat. So it makes sense when the Chicago trio slips in some minor chords or goes into jazzy freakouts like a rougher version of The Police. But mostly, the group just rocks. "Sidebet" kicks things off with a staccato assault of drums and guitar, overpowering sampled voices that could have been taken from a boardroom meeting from any corporate office. When the howling vocals start, addressing war, history, and religion, you know they bring the full package. [Sick Room] mw

Gregg Kowalsky



Through the Cardial Window

Gregg Kowalsky once played and recorded as Osso Bucco. The Oaktown composer's sound is thick with textures, an array of sound that may seem monotonous at first glance, but is actually rich in tone and harmonics. There are seven songs on this album, and each is over 5 minutes long. Each song conveys a feel that's different from the others, and even "samples" the metal band Isis. But where is it? Void of drums or anything that sounds like an instrument, perhaps the easiest way to explain the sound is a wave of tone. [Kranky] en

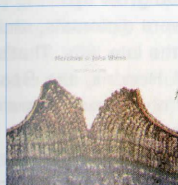
Hugh Masekela



Presents the Chisa Years 1965-1976

Compiling rare tracks by Afrobeat, jazz, and funk pioneer Hugh Masekela, this CD starts off with a bang. "Afro Beat Blues," by Ojah is a masterpiece of funkiness with lyrics full of African pride, a percolating bass line, and heavy influence from Masekela's friend, Fela Kuti. Letta Mbulu's vocals in "U Se Mcani" are as pure as they are soulful. And Miatta Fahnbulleh's treatment of "Witch Doctor" is absolutely arresting. If some of the tracks seem a little *Graceland*, cut him some slack. Although Masekela actually played on Paul Simon's World Beat breakthrough, he is the real deal. [BBE] mw

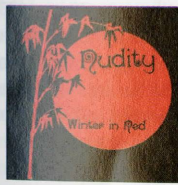
Merzbow and John Wiese



Multiplication

To most people, Merzbow sounds like 10 radios tuned to different frequencies at once. But to a tiny percentage of you, this is music at it's finest. I saw Merzbow in concert, and its live show is comprised of an insane amount of pedals and a bukkake of sound that will stun any audience. I recall Merzbow to be as powerful as this album, but with less transitions. Noise guy John Wiese must have added those. The sound is in no way easy to understand, and it's not gentle or apologetic in any way to anyone's ears. [Mis-anthropica] en

Nudity



Winter In Red

This would be a top pick if it were more than three songs. Even so, each song is an epic piece of psychedelic rock with the hypnotic vibe of Stereolab and crazy guitar layers of Hawkwind. The sound is absolutely huge, as you might expect from such an all-star jam band. Members come from the Tight Bros from Way Back and Dub Narcotic Sound System (not to mention C.O.C.O. and Spider and the Webs). Conversely, the packaging and distribution is about as lo-fi as you can get. To get either of the group's mind-blowing CDs, you'll have to get in touch with the band. [getnudity@lycos.com] mw

Rahim



Ideal Lives

Rahim plays rock music with the precise smoothness of Squeeze and the arty mood of XTC. On cuts like "It's Not What You Said" and "Something From An Amputee," the New York trio proves to be masterful at creating deceptively sparse songs with complex arrangements. "Forever Love" is as sweet and straightforward of a pop song as you'll ever hear before it breaks down into a fuzzy math-rock deconstruction. Moods shift from sunny falsettos to sci-fi gloom—sometimes in one song—and it seems like the group is capable of almost anything, except for boring, formulaic music. [French Kiss] mw

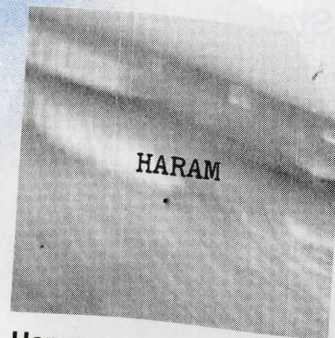
Smoking Popes



At The Metro

Another reunion show caught on CD, but I swear this one's really good. Throughout the '90s, the Chicago-based Smoking Popes overcame a goofy name and earned a pretty big following. With its Skippy Creamy vocals and Super Chunky guitar-based rock, the group came off like a mutant version of The Smiths. This live set from 2005 surveys tracks from the band's career and captures the contrast of the crooning vocals and perky music with authority. Concerts I go to are never, ever mixed so well! You also get a DVD and a reproduction of the concert poster by Jay Ryan. [Victory] mw

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Proudflesh Punk

Stations of the Crucifix



Crucifix's "Annihilation" has been covered by Sepultura, A Perfect Circle, and Orbital.

While American skate punks with shaved heads were making the transition to slam pits and hardcore in the early '80s, their spiky British counterparts were squatting in burned-out high-rises, starting communes, and singing about war and anarchy. Crass and Discharge were two of the biggest groups from Europe, and adding to the peace-punk mix was San Francisco's Crucifix. With Mohawks, spikes, and leather, the group had the same anti-war messages and song titles like "Annihilation," "Religion Kills," and "No Limbs." Cambodian emigrant Sothira Pheng was the singer, and he is still writing and playing music today with the hard-rocking, heavily political group Proudflesh.

GR: When did you come to the U.S.?

SP: Halloween, 1975. We were in the first wave, I suppose. There were thousands of refugees, mostly Vietnamese. We went to temporary location camps in Pennsylvania, where they gave you shots and stuff.

GR: What was the refugee camp like?

SP: It was easy. When we got there, we had our paperwork done, got our shots, and were out of there. We had sponsors and relatives. Some people had nobody. They were waiting for Catholic relief funds and church groups to help them out. And they didn't know anything. To be honest, I've never felt like an underdog or anything. We were so well-prepared coming here. Everyone in my family spoke English. My parents were French educated. Back in the '50s, they went into the cha-cha-cha and all this stuff.

GR: Where did you grow up?

SP: My parents were diplomats, and I grew up in England in the late '60s. That's where I first heard Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, course, and rock 'n' roll and it ingrained itself with the rebellious kind of thing.

GR: So were you in Cambodia for any of the bad times?

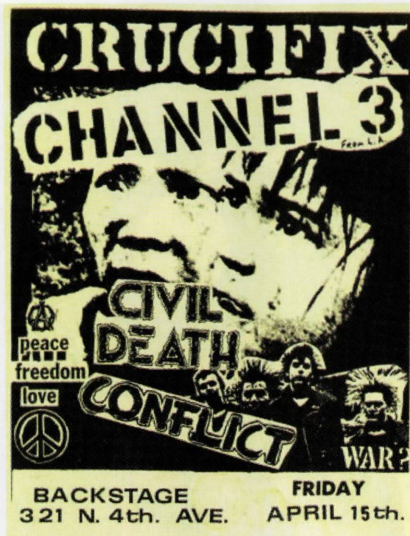
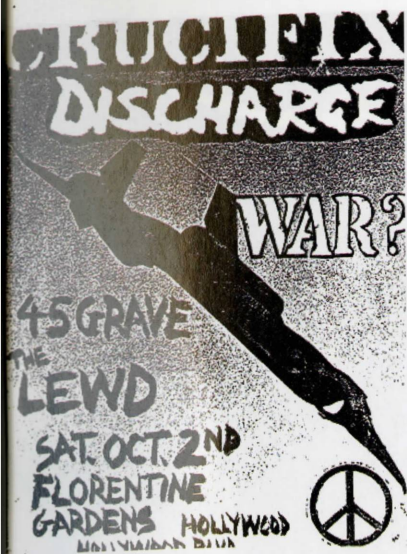
SP: We went back there in '72 and '73, which was the middle of the war. People had bad feelings with the war going on. If you were fortunate enough to be able to get out, you got out. We got relocated to Taiwan and went to an American private school.

GR: So there probably wasn't much of a culture shock when you arrived in the U.S.

SP: No, but there was culture shock the other way around. People couldn't figure out who we were. They would say, "You speak English really well." In 2006, that's a dumb thing to say, but in 1975 through the late '70s, Vietnamese and Cambodians were brand new people.

GR: How did you get into punk?

SP: Coming over here, I was freed from the chains of my parents. We had always gone to private schools and everything was really forced on us. When we came here, my parents were looking for work. We had to go to public school, and all of us boys were free



The song was about hunger and children, but if you think about it, we were kids singing about kids!

roam around. I was pretty curious and adventurous as a kid.

When the Sex Pistols came to town in January 1978, it was a big deal. When you're a kid and you see a band that is touted like that, looks like it is from Mars, and is hated, you naturally gravitate to it. I stayed up until 2 in the morning listening to college radio stations. Also, V. Vale was a really great person to know. He was one of the first people I met, and he was doing *Search & Destroy*. What a great magazine, and it enlightened me to music as well as Bauhaus, Cubism, Dadaism, Picasso, writers like JG Ballard, and all this stuff.

GR: How did Crucifix come about?

SP: There was this store called Luther Blue that was on Columbus Street. It sold Boy of London, bondage clothes, and everything you'd imagine the Sex Pistols would wear. I'd cut class and go there and hang out even though I couldn't afford a single thing. One day Matt walked in and said, "I'm looking for a bass player." I went up to him and said, "Hey, I play bass." Of course, I was lying. We connected, and we went from there. The core was always Matt, Chris, and me.

GR: Did you find your musical style pretty easily?

SP: Back in '79 or '80, music was really transitional. It was the dawn of a new era, with Killing Joke, Joy Division, Motörhead, and Adam and the Ants. There was a surge of totally different ideas from all these bands. Meanwhile, there was a big skate and thrash explosion in California that spoke to us: Black Flag, Circle Jerks, and the Adolescents.

Crass came out with *Stations of the Cross*. I thought, "Whoa. This really speaks to me." They were very intellectual. I was writing them. I'd write, "Dear Crass, How do I pick up my scene?" or something stupid like that. We kept corresponding, and I still keep in touch with some of them.

In '81, Discharge's *Why* came out. That blew the doors off everything. They played music we liked, and only a few people knew about them, so there was a solidarity thing. Matt, Chris, and I grew toward the leather jackets and studs.

Everyone hated us. We were accused of so many things—English clones, Sid clones, Exploited clones, Discharge clones. But we didn't think of it that way. We were an American band playing punk rock and wearing punk gear in solidarity. That's how we felt.

GR: How did you spike your hair?

SP: Bar soap. You get it really goeey, and then it hardens.

GR: You have always written the lyrics?

SP: Yeah, 99 percent of them. The peace punk comes from me coming over from Cambodia in '75. Back then, there was nobody like us—nobody like me. Nuclear destruction was really real to me. I remember having nightmares.

GR: Today, the apocalyptic themes and heavy guitars have more in common with underground metal bands than modern punk bands.

SP: Jimmy was already an accomplished rock guitar player when he joined the band.

fuzzyballsapparel.com

words | Senon Williams
concert pics | Kevin Bolton
travel pics | Jeff Palmer

Return to Dragon House

Dengue Fever

Since appearing on Cambodian Television Network, we have been recognized by every moto driver, waitress, kid, and expat.

After we formed Dengue Fever, a Los Angeles band that plays originals and psychedelic Cambodian music from the '60s, we never dreamed that we would ever go to the country that inspired our sounds. Then, when a performance for Internet TV was halted by a blackout, the idea of going to Cambodia to make a documentary came up. We called our filmmaker friend John Pirozzi, told him our idea, and he said, "Let's do it."

It took three million more phone calls to raise the funds, but two months later, we were traveling halfway around the world to the homeland of our singer Chhom Nimol. She had not been there since boarding a plane for the States five years ago. In Cambodia, we played live on TV, outdoors in Phnom Penh, at the town of Kep, in an Angkor-period temple of Phnom Chisor, and at a couple of expat bars, in addition to recording with Cambodian master musicians. It was almost too much to take during 10 days of shooting and three weeks of travel.

Here are some entries from my journal:

NOVEMBER 23

Zac hooked us up with a real nice hotel on the river, and we all have our own rooms for the first week in Phnom Penh. I got a real nice one overlooking the river. Plush! Tonight we are all going to a bar to hang out and try to stay awake for a bit longer.



I still have not seen Nimol. It seems she has her own schedule and is in high demand. We are going to have to hijack her and not let her out of our sights.

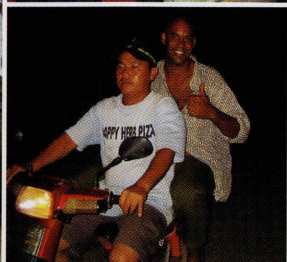
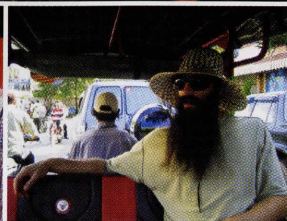
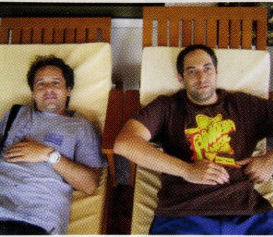
Things are coming together. We have a radio show booked at Love FM, and our first gig comes up at Snowy's, a funky old house converted into a bar that is slipping into the Tonle Sap River.

NOVEMBER 27

Today was nonstop. We recorded with a blind musician named Kong Nai at 8 a.m. He is like a Cambodian Ray Charles. He was super sweet and masterful, and we made a real connection.

In the afternoon, kids from Cambodia Living Arts, a program to conserve culture through the arts, gave us a private song-and-dance show. It was touching and beautiful. Then we rehearsed songs with them, which we will perform later in the Tonle Basaac district, the ghetto.





At 6 p.m., we played on a shantytown stage. We were way out of our element with raw wires, crazy lights, generators, trash, naked kids, and crazy security dudes. The PA system was an assortment of about 50 speakers, and it sounded like we were playing through a giant telephone. It was great but odd.

Afterward, I went for a massage at a place where all the masseuses are blind.

NOVEMBER 30

We recorded all day with Tep Mary, a master of the roneat, which is like a boat-shaped marimba. It was great! The music was mellow and psychedelic. We tried playing some faster songs with her, but the tempo fluctuated too much for us. Unfortunately, John was filming interviews with the kids from the Tonle Basaac District and Kong Nai, so he missed the session.

Last night was a bit crazy. We went to play a gig at the Peace Pub where Nimol and her sister Charvin were going to meet us. It was supposed to be a free gig, but when we showed up, we discovered that the club owner was charging \$5 at the door, thus keeping out all Cambodians. Also, he built a rickety 8-square-foot stage, six feet off the ground with barely any support. I would not stand on it by myself, let alone with the entire band and Nimol's sister. The owner had promised three amps and a drum set-up, but there was only half a drum kit. Where are the amps? He pointed to a shitty PA and said if we needed more, we could use the house sound system (a home stereo).

The little joint was packed, and the dude was still selling tickets to people who could not even get in. We called Nimol, told her to rest her voice (when not with us, Nimol had been singing at lunches, dinners, parties, TV shows, and weddings), and then got the fuck out.

I had never walked out on a gig before. It was kind of funny because we did not have to say much to each other before deciding to split.

DECEMBER 1

Since appearing on Cambodian Television Network, we have been recognized by every moto driver, waitress, kid, and expat, even in the little town of Kampot. Earlier, we drew a crowd in a funky outdoor market, and Zac and Nimol did an a cappella performance.

Today, we had a great day on the road. In Kep, we played in a run-down mansion from the '60s, and a bunch of kids hung out with us. Later on, I found out Nimol bribed the kids before we started playing.

We played again in Phnom Chisor, which are ancient ruins from the Angkor period. People of every age and background, including monks were in the audience. Ralicke ended the day with a sax solo, playing some deep shit as the sun set. The place was magical, without a tourist in sight. Located high atop a peak, Chisor is accessible only by a dirt road. We climbed 412 huge steps to see the view.

Back in Phnom Penh, we went to the "Spark" stadium club, complete with hip-hop dance shows, live music, DJs screaming "1-2-3" in Khmer every three seconds, bottles of Johnny Walker at the table with our own bartender, a VIP area, and security escorts to the bathroom.

DECEMBER 2

All the shooting is done and I am a tourist now. Last night we played a gig at "Talkin' to a Stranger" in an outdoor garden. It was our big comeback show after walking out on the Peace Pub. I guess there's nothing like bad press because it was twice as packed, with a mix of freaky expats, journalists, and locals.



We were way out of our element with raw wires, crazy lights, generators, trash, naked kids, and crazy security dudes.

After the gig, we went to a sick club called "Elsewhere" (this town really knows how to name its bars). I didn't know there were that many white chicks in Cambodia. You see the dudes around town during the day, but this was like a party in the lavish tropical garden of a Beverly Hills mansion. Foreigners sat with their feet in the pool, shaking senselessly to techno, or reclined on wicker furniture.

Meanwhile, Cambodians packed around the club's entrance trying to get our attention as we walked in or out to sell us a pack of smokes, ganja, Yaba (or Yama—nasty, toxic Thai speed), or a girl. This was the only time that we said we were going to go for "one beer" and actually did.

DECEMBER 4

Here in Sihanoukville, I am staying at Coaster's on Serendipity Beach. I got a small bungalow and a scooter and it's relaxing—almost too much so. Today I'll probably take a little drive, get a "seeing-hand" massage, swim in the Bay of Thailand, and stone-cold chill.

Tomorrow we are going to get a boat and go to an island.

DECEMBER 8

I am getting used to relaxing. A couple days ago, I spent the day on two islands and got scorched by the sun. I am a maroon lobster. Today I went on a long boat ride in Ream National Park, where I saw freshwater dolphins. They were super cute, only about 3 feet long.

Last night our moto drivers took us to the most insane red light district I had ever seen. Nearby the only deep-water freighter port in all of Cambodia, there were whore shacks along the dirt road for 2 kilometers. Then in the midst of it all was a nightclub called Biba with crazy Christmas lights and decor. The place was packed with men, ladies, and tranny hookers, but mostly it was locals partying.

Every table had two bar girls who refilled your beer after every sip. I

have no idea how much I drank. Before Zac did karaoke, he got a huge intro from the MC, and everyone there gave him flowers as he sang. When he was done with the song, you could not even see his face. Later, he did a duet in Khmer with one of the local singers, and the whole place went crazy.

My moto driver was named Yoht, and for part of the night his 3-year-old kid Sok was riding with us. The evening was a blast—some serious Indiana Jones shit.

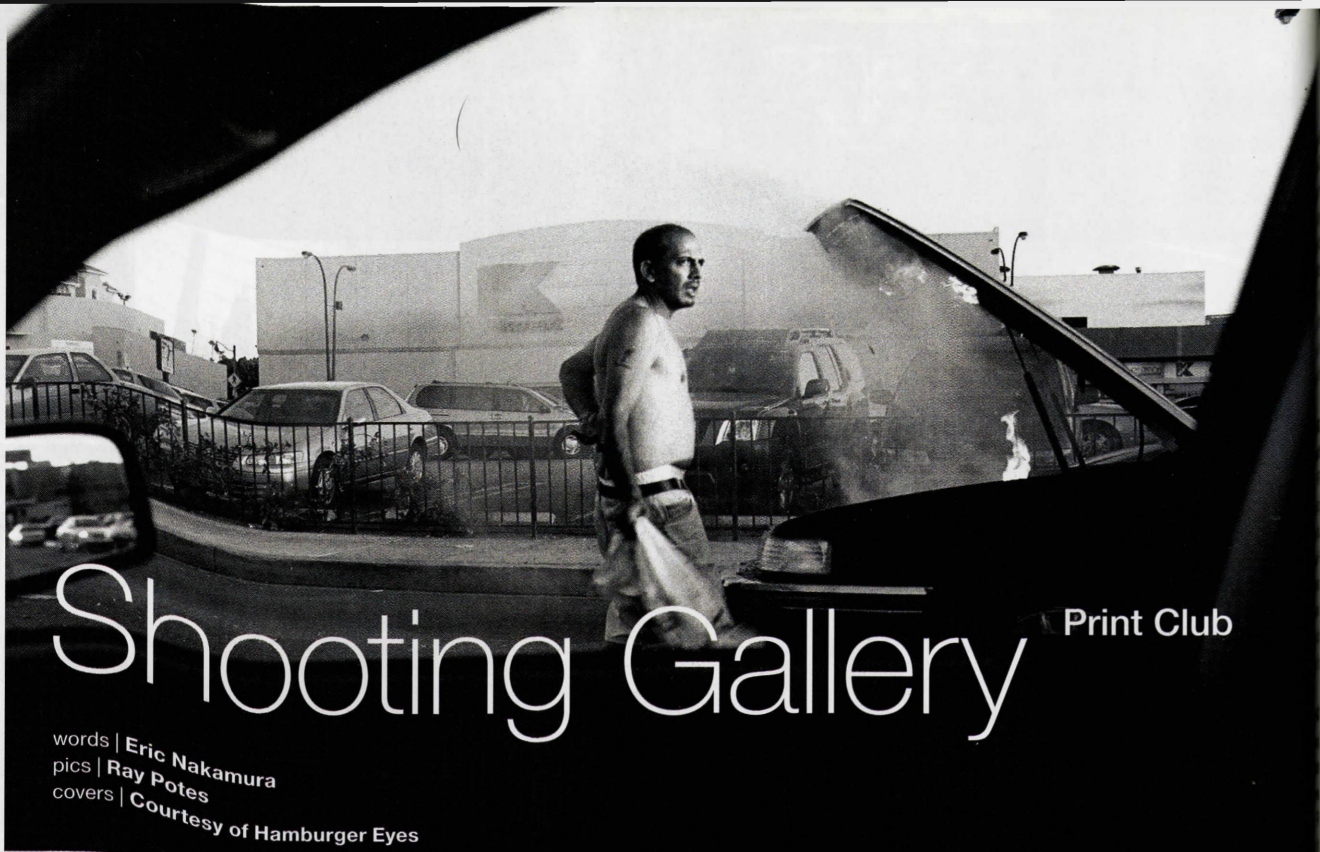
DECEMBER 11

I have been hanging in Phnom Penh for two days now, doing a little shopping, taking long walks, and going out for drinks with my old friend and his wife, who came to visit me from Hong Kong. Later, I'll go to the Cambodian National Museum: It's about time I do something touristy.

This is my last night here, and the Jungle Bar is throwing us a going-away/CD-release/T-shirt-release party! A local shop has bootlegged a bunch of our CDs and will be selling them at the party for a buck-and-a-half each (that's the way of the land), as well as special shirts they have designed. We might get free drinks out of the deal. We just decided to go with it. Otherwise, no one would hear our records here.

A couple of days ago, a few of us rented dirt bikes in Kampot and drove 42 kilometers up a perilous mountain in Bokor National Park. Off the rutted dirt road, in the jungle, live cobras, tigers, black panthers, and bears. At the top, a haunted French cathedral sat next to a haunted French casino at the edge of a cliff. Two hours up, two hours down. I only drove off the road once, but the trip left every muscle in my body in deep, deep pain, and my left wrist and right knee have minor injuries.

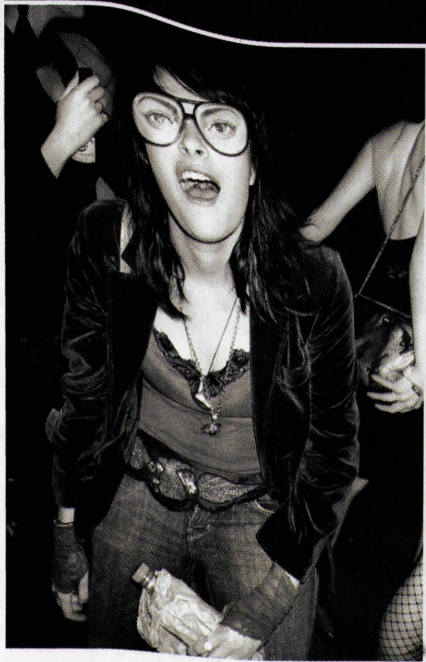
The flight home goes much smoother, but I'm actually not sure because Xanax and Ambien put me in a deep, dreamless slumber for 90 percent of the trip. Actually, I am not sure I have awoken from it. ☹️



Shooting Gallery

Print Club

words | Eric Nakamura
pics | Ray Potes
covers | Courtesy of Hamburger Eyes



66

Taking photos since he was 16, Ray Potes has applied years of photography and zine-making skills to publish *Hamburger Eyes*. Magazines featuring camera work traditionally focus on high art, famous photographers, or the never-ending technical aspects of the craft. *Hamburger Eyes* turns that world upside down and celebrates the portfolios of rookie, indie, and up-and-coming camera addicts, many of whom can't get a break anywhere else. You may see the gore of a bloody street fight, grime on the set of a porno shoot, or simple, sparkling nature. The idea isn't f/stop, focus, or shutter speed; it's heart, guts, and vision.

Somehow, Ray Potes gets past his thick glasses, long hair, and trucker cap to shoot nice pictures.



Stepping into the San Francisco Mission District apartment/office of Ray and roommate/fellow *Burger* editor Stefan Simikich, you'll see photos and work-related paraphernalia everywhere. Their living space is aptly named "Brotannical Gardens" that lies in "Outer Gnarlem." In a tight run of a few thousand copies, this black-and-white publication serves as a strong backbone for the future of unpretentious photography.

GR: How did you choose photography as the main focus of the zine?

RP: I just got tired of writing and I was psyched on shooting photos. I was thinking about this the other day. When I moved to Hawaii, I started shooting a lot of photos to send to my friends back on the Mainland. It was a great way to communicate what I was doing in Hawaii, and they'd send me photos of what they were doing in California.

GR: I feel like there's this whole photo-journalist-type of scene going on. Your stuff is pretty street. Do you feel like you are a part of that?

RP: I do see that happening a lot, and I think it's awesome. But I think it's just because of so much mainstream media perfect-ness showing you colors and things. I think that all this new stuff coming out is like backlash.

GR: A publication like yours stresses the indie side of photography.

RP: I think it's part of that aesthetic. A lot of people who have photos in our magazine love photography and just don't know where to put their photos. They have good stuff that I think should be out there, so I help them.

GR: Was getting work out there a problem for you?

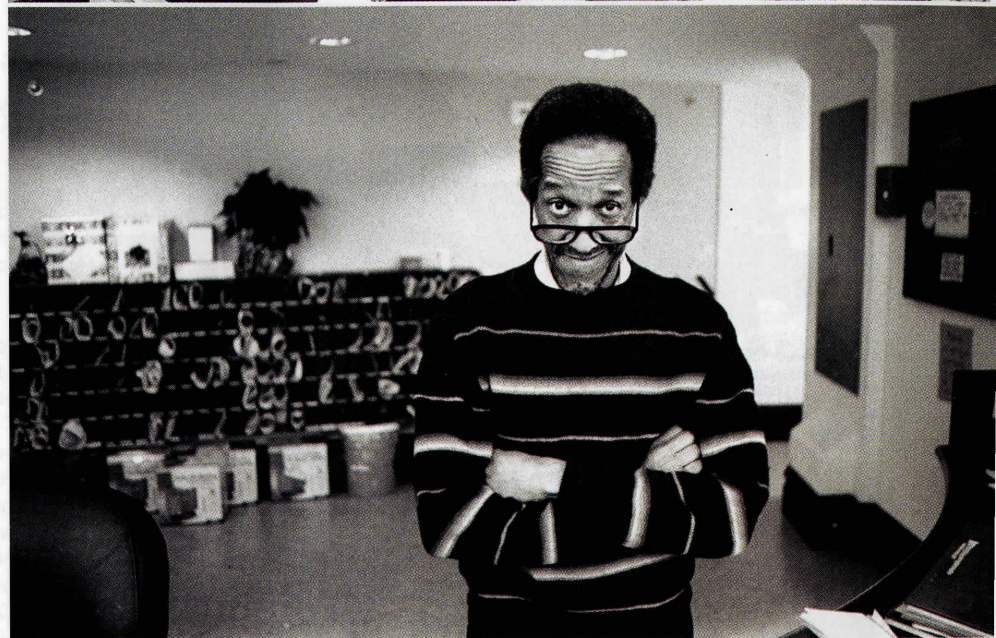
RP: Definitely. When I was living in Hawaii a couple years ago, I was really pushing to be a photographer. I had cool business cards. I had a cool portfolio. I was going to different magazines and newspapers, sending a lot of my stuff out and trying to get work, but nobody was doing anything with it. At the same time, I was making *Hamburger Eyes* and people were feeling that. That was completely different from what I was trying to get paid to do. I feel pretty fortunate that I can keep that going.

GR: Was your style too rough or raw?

RP: I think it was just too random. I had a lot of photos of my friends and my block—a lot of photos of stuff I just find or see around. I didn't know if there was a place for that in regular magazines or publications. But obviously there is because I put the photos out myself. All these people have similar styles and tastes, so we have been able to keep the magazine going.

GR: What do you look for in submitted photos?

RP: This question keeps getting asked, and I



I don't really think, "This is a shocking photo, so I'm going to put it in here."

don't know how to answer it. If we are doing a feature story or a portfolio or something, we'll do those first. But as far as mixing photos, I usually just start with a cover and keep going until I reach the end. I have a big pool of photos, and whatever jumps out I'll use as the next photo.

GR: Some people who buy *Hamburger Eyes* are real straightlaced. They're like, "I want to show my friends this zine because they're photographers. They can't get their work anywhere, but this is also how you can do it."

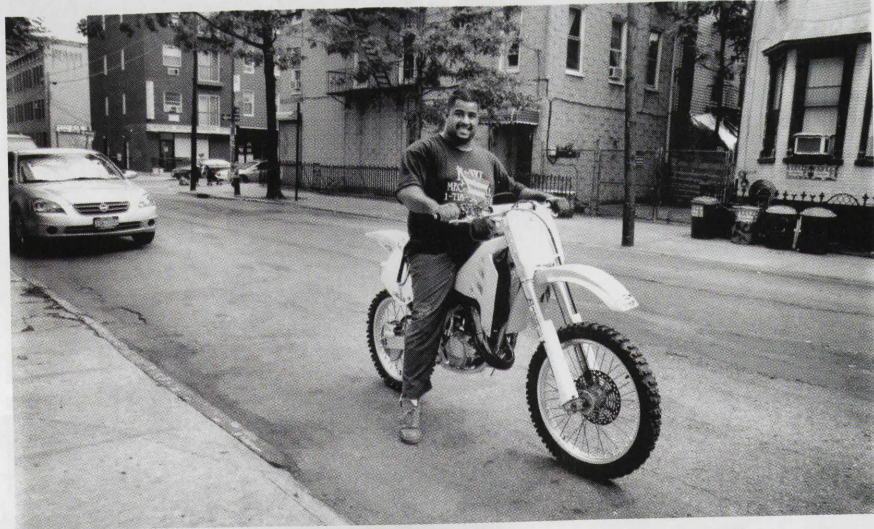
RP: Even if the photos suck, people appreciate our effort. Zines are so personal, and I think that is what makes them powerful.

GR: What do you say to people who say, "I could've taken that picture, made a print, and done it myself." They don't say that about other art, but with photos they do.

RP: That's just something somebody's always going to say. It doesn't even bug me. It just means that they don't understand what we are trying to do. I don't have to explain myself to them. They just have to start taking photos to find out for themselves. If I had the chance to say something, I would say, "Okay, be better than me." You know what I mean?

GR: When you shoot something, is it like a blog or diary entry?

RP: It's all personal, but when I'm shooting I don't really think about what I'm going to do



with the photos. I think it messes up a lot of people when they are shooting to do something with it. When it comes time to look at, edit, and sequence photos, whatever pops out, pops out. At this age or at this stage of the game, you should just shoot like crazy. Maybe when I'm 60 or 70, I'll start thinking about the importance of stuff, but for now I'm just going to keep shooting.

GR: If you go out to a bar or anywhere, you bring your camera, right?

RP: I always have a camera on me. Sometimes I shoot three rolls. Sometimes I don't shoot at all. It goes in spurts. I might not shoot anything for a week or two, but I might get a lot the week after that.

GR: Are you a manual camera guy?

RP: I have a semi-automatic camera. I use my Nikon 8008. It's got some minimal automatic stuff on it, but I still use it.

GR: What else do you use?

RP: I have a Yashica T4 for whatever. That's always on me if I don't have my other camera on me. I like the Nikon F5.

GR: What's that for?

RP: I used to use it for skateboarding pictures. Then I started getting all those weird jobs, like headshots and soccer and little league team photos. I used to work for *Transworld Skateboarding Magazine* for like four years, too. I didn't shoot that much then because I was a bit intimidated by everyone I was working with. I worked at the darkroom there, processing all their black-and-white stuff. I was basically their personal one-hour photo lab. That's how I learned how to print really well and really fast, along with different styles of printing, like super contrast and stuff. I got to learn and experiment a lot, which was awesome.

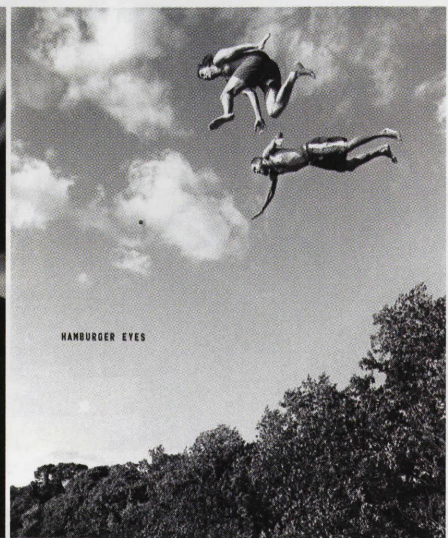
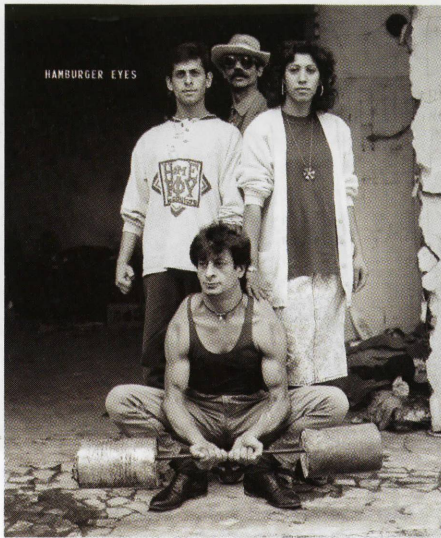
GR: Is technique really important to you, or would you rather see a 12-year-old troublemaker just shoot away?

RP: Half the guys spend a lot of time in the darkroom, a lot of money on their gear and film, and a lot of energy on processing. Some of these other guys are just handing me stuff they didn't spend a lot of time on, but they lead these crazy lives and get inside crazy situations. I think it's a little bit of both, and I appreciate both sides. For my stuff, I like to be in the darkroom and print all nice. But there are guys who email me their photos. I think that's fine, too.

GR: Do you worry about a photo being good specifically because of shock value versus it being well composed? It seems like your magazine straddles that.

RP: I feel like we're teetering sometimes. When it goes one way, I try to balance it out the other way. Like, I'm trying to make the next issue kind of calm because the last few issues have been kind of nuts. But really, it's





Nobody said anything about those epic photos. They only remembered the crazy porno and dead body photos.

just whatever we get, you know? I'm pretty into not censoring or judging our photographers. It's all about appreciating what they do. Someone might randomly send me a photo of a run-over dog, versus the photographer who only shoots photos of run-over dogs. He's way into it, and that's what he does. I appreciate that.

GR: So you are more concerned with a body of work than a lucky shot.

RP: Yeah, definitely. A few issues ago, we'd just run whatever. Now that we're developing our nice little crew of photographers, it has become important to me.

GR: How much of the shock-value work do you really love and value?

RP: I really want to see it, but in the end, as an editor, I have to have a different viewpoint. I don't really think, "This is a shocking photo, so I'm going to put it in here." My friend went to Guatemala and saw some crazy stuff. I gave him eight pages for whatever he wanted, which happened to include two dead bodies and a girl with stitches in her face. That's just the life people are living down there. Boogie, too. He's from Serbia but lives in Brooklyn now. He gets into these crazy situations and loves shooting photos. I'm like, "Okay, Boogie. I'll give you eight pages." Turns out, he wants to do something on the projects with guns, tons of drugs, etc. I'm like, "My mom isn't going to be happy when she sees this," but that's what he wants to show, and I'm going to let him show it. It's not like, "Oh, I'm going to run this photo because Uzis are crazy!"

GR: Do you think it's harder then to take a photo that doesn't have a gun, dead people, stitches, or blood? Isn't it hard to compete against that crazy shit?

RP: Not really. It's about personal taste, too. I don't shoot that crazy stuff. My stuff's pretty mellow. It comes off in a certain way because I have a certain aesthetic or style. There's one guy who just shoots *National Geographic* landscape views—I would love to be him one day, you know? If your stuff is good, then it's good.

GR: Are there limitations to stuff that you shoot? Do you have self-ethical guidelines?

RP: Kind of. I have a hard time with other people's blood and stuff. I saw this old man lying at the bottom of the stairs at the BART station. His head was all bloody, and I couldn't take a photo. Other guys would jump right into that. And we show fight photos in our magazine. I don't really get photos of that stuff. I'll be there watching, running, or getting out of the way, but not shooting.

GR: Are you worried that shock takes away from the photography itself? Like, the actual craft?

RP: Sometimes, I think of it as distracting. That one issue, we had Guatemala and crazy behind-the-scenes photos of a porno set. Those were smaller features. The big feature was underwater photos. This dude took his underwater camera to in Hawaii. We had photos of a shark and a giant manta ray, but nobody said anything about those epic photos. They only remembered the crazy porno and dead body photos.

GR: Are you interested in educating people about photography?

RP: It's interesting to me how some photos weigh more than others. I'm not trying to take responsibility for that, though. If that's what they want to remember from a particular issue, then they can have it. I guess I'm not trying to educate anybody. I'm just putting out what I'm into.

GR: So what's the craziest photo you've ever seen?

RP: I don't know. I see them all the time. The craziest photo I've seen today is this image of two kids. One has a terrible 50 Cent G-Unit tattoo. Another crazy photo was by Vic, who's in Guatemala again. He got prison photos there. The inmates have prison tattoos all over their bodies and heads.

GR: What about the prettiest photo?

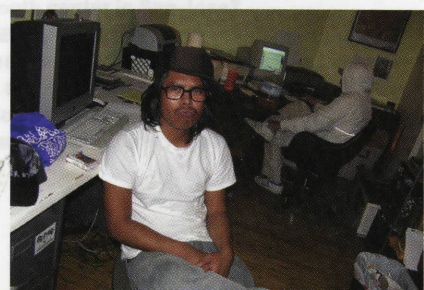
RP: I've got these cool winter photos. Actually, one of the coolest photos I got today was a nighttime shot of a full moon out of an airplane window. It was pretty epic. It was sharp and came out awesome.

GR: Nastiest pictures?

RP: Behind the scenes at the porno shoot was pretty bad. There were nastier ones that we didn't run.

GR: What happened in those?

RP: [laughs] Let's just say they are bad.



Asian Man

Spirit of San Jose



In addition to playing heartfelt music and running a successful record label Mike is an accomplished ping-pong player and trampoline jumper.

Mike Park is sort of like the Charlie Brown of indie record labels. He has gone on a painful and unprofitable bicycle tour of the West Coast to raise money for an ill-fated youth punk rock center in San Jose. He has also had ventures flop in Japan and Korea. It seems like he's always fighting an uphill battle, and some of his projects fail in the most unfortunate ways, creating laughable storeis that make you say, "Awww."

Yet Asian Man Records is now 10 years old and going strong. When we pull up to his mother's Monte Serrano home, Mike Park stands in the garage, which serves as the entry to his mail-order empire. The entire bottom floor is dedicated to his record label. Room after room, there's inventory, order fulfillment stations, office space, and room for "band" practice. It's littered with CDs, T-shirts, stickers, and glossies. It's Sunday, so there aren't any interns around.

The ex-leader of third-generation ska band Skankin' Pickle, current member of the Chinkees and Bruce Lee Band, and emerging solo artist shows us around, laughs, and says, "We're a bad record label." He doesn't spend anything on advertising, does practically no promotion, and can't guarantee that being on his label is a good thing. However, the bands and releases keep coming. "Music, it's all right," he goes on to say. "Basketball is number one."

GR: You started Asian Man Records 10 years ago?

MP: Skankin' Pickle had put out records on Dill Records, a collective amongst the band members, but in my mind I did all the work. So when we started doing well and started releasing other bands, we had a significant amount of money in our bank account. It was hard to have a six-way partnership. Everyone wanted his say and had different ideas, and I realized it wasn't going to work.

GR: Was Skankin' Pickle making a lot of money at the time?

MP: Yeah. The ska boom was crazy, and we were getting courted by major labels. We built up like a quarter-million dollars in our bank account. We'd start fighting over what to do with the money. It became a nightmare.

At that time, the band was falling apart. Drugs were involved. Myself, I was the guy selling merchandise while the other band members partied. It was unfortunate. It happens with every style of music, even classical musicians, and especially jazz.

GR: That's very *Behind the Music*.

MP: We separated, and I thought, "Okay, this is a good chance to be Asian Man Records." Within a few months, it was up and running. Much better companies don't get that lucky, but I had momentum from being in a popular band on the underground level, and the releases that I put out did well right from the start.

GR: What were the first records?

MP: Just touring, I met these bands—Slapstick, Less than Jake, and Link 80. Getting their records out, we thought, "Wow, we can try to be the Dischord of ska."

GR: Of all the music out there, how did you get into ska?

MP: The defining moment was seeing the movie *Dance Craze* in 1986. It was on a double bill with *Stop Making Sense* at an art theater in downtown San Jose. I went with a group of high school kids, and it was my first and only experience of just everyone danc-



No one's going to sign an Asian face as a lead singer. It hasn't happened, and it's not going to happen.

ing in a theater. There were a lot of mods and skinheads, and I was like, "Whoa, this is cool!"

GR: Did you play sax in the school band back then?

MP: Yeah, we started our own mod ska band, and I actually played with some punk bands, too. But ska was the most fun for me—especially after seeing Fishbone. I couldn't sleep that night. I was just lying awake all night because I couldn't believe what I'd just seen.

GR: Was it tough getting into it and being Asian back then?

MP: At that age, I wasn't thinking, "Okay, I'm the Asian American in the band." I was just the young kid trying to have fun. It's only when I got older and started learning about the music business that I learned, "You're not going to get signed. You're not going to get famous." No one's going to sign an Asian face as a lead singer. It hasn't happened, and it's not going to happen, especially if you're overtly Asian-looking. I understood the politics, and that's what led me to start a DIY label.

GR: Why do you think ska got so hot in the mid '90s?

MP: I think everything circles.

GR: It got shockingly big.

MP: Especially in Southern California and Northern California. You had bands like No Doubt who were, according to the media, ska. When a band like that sells a million records, every high school kid who plays trumpet will try to start a ska band. It became a ridiculous oversaturation of bad bands, and it was over. Ska took a big dive and hit rock bottom in 2000. It's going up again.

GR: Ska's coming back? Why's that?

MP: I have no idea. We just look at the ska mail orders. Maybe kids are tired of being angry?

GR: Yet you're playing acoustic stuff now. Why is that?

MP: It's strange. The first few tours, I was playing with like five ska bands. It's not fun for me, to be honest. When I'm playing acoustic, I think, "This is not what the kids want to hear." They don't want to hear me mope with an acoustic guitar, so I try to keep it as lighthearted as possible, keep the songs short, and tell a few jokes.

GR: How does your acoustic stuff get categorized?

MP: I go to record stores to see if they have my record, and it's always in the ska section. I go, "Wow, this is not really ska, but at least it's in the store." I just sold like 4,000 copies of the new record, which I don't think is that bad, but it's a lot less than Skankin' Pickle.

GR: It must be kind of exciting to write and play a totally different type of music than before.

MP: Yeah, and playing acoustic allows me to tour again. Being in a band is very time consuming. Playing solo, I can work during the week, fly out on the weekend, play two shows, come back, and get back to work. I like to travel, so it's more that than anything.

GR: It seems like Asian America has really paid attention to your solo album.

MP: I hope so. I feel like there are issues that are interesting, especially from the Korean-American standpoint. A lot of it was educating myself about my family's history and the Korean War. You're kind of oblivious to it growing up in the States. The Korean War was something I never discussed with my parents, but when my dad was dying of cancer, I sat down with him every day and said, "You've got to tell me about your history." Then my mom started diving into it. She was just a little lost kid in the war. She didn't know where her family was for a year.

GR: The ska kids don't want to hear this stuff?

MP: I don't think so. They want to hear me sing "I'm in Love with a Girl Named Spike."

GR: You're not as into the lighthearted stuff?

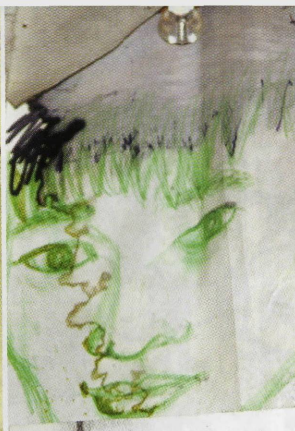
MP: I still love it with all my heart. It's just that this record had a few songs that were heavy hitting, and I thought it would be silly to have those and suddenly play a song about *Degrassi Junior High*. I get letters from kids asking why I'm writing such serious stuff. I'm like, "I'm a big fan of comedy in music, but this is where I am right now." What else can I say?

GR: People change and so do their tastes.

MP: Definitely, but I went to Japan and did the ska thing in 2005. It was physically hard trying to skank as hard as I could. We did a warm-up show at the Knitting Factory in Hollywood. Midway through the first song, I was like, "Oh, no. Big trouble." I woke up the next morning and my body hurt.

GR: Did you always intend to gear your label toward social causes like Ska Against Racism, Plea for Peace, and doing the bike tour to raise money for a youth center in San Jose?

MP: The social consciousness was always there. Looking back, ska music was a lot more politically influenced. The whole 2-Tone movement was about black and white equality. In the late '90s, ska was becoming this circus music. It was a total 180-degree turn from what it was supposed to be. That's when I started Ska Against Racism.



Unfortunately, the golden age of fan art is over.

Plea for Peace was with a group of friends who said, "Look at what happened at Woodstock." In the Bay Area, we grew up with the Dead Kennedys and Rock Against Racism shows, and then we saw the insanity of testosterone-filled music like Limp Bizkit. We decided to bring back music with a message. At first, we started benefit tours for certain causes like suicide prevention. But the more people I worked with, the more disillusioned I got. It was like, "Let's get as big as we can and get corporate sponsorship." I didn't want to do that, so I dropped out.

Now we're doing stuff locally, like this youth center that's modeled after Gilman Street in the South Bay. Trying to get someone to let you open a music venue for youths and punks is impossible.

GR: You'd think with the commercialization of punk rock, it would be easier these days.

MP: But in Northern California, real estate is so expensive. If you're a nice restaurant, you don't want kids loitering two doors down. I'm trying to find a place that's away from that but not in an area that's crime ridden. We've sent 200 grant proposals, and we have a stack of letters that say, "Thanks, but not right now."

GR: Who have you hit up for support?

MP: Any company that accepts grant proposals, especially bigger companies in the San Jose area, like Adobe. We've spent a lot of time and money on postage, and we've got nothing.

The bike tour was equally frustrating. We hit up every bike and energy bar company, but all we got was five bags of tea. It was so much work, and we raised so little—like 10,000 bucks.

GR: What was it like riding down the West Coast and playing acoustic shows?

MP: In retrospect, it was fun and amazing, but it was hell. We went from Seattle to San Diego. There were anywhere from 11 to 20 of us. We didn't know what the hell we were doing. The first idea was to play shows in real venues. As we got closer, we realized, "How are we going to ride to these venues?"

To ride on the bike trail, then go into the city and back, you'd lose so much time. Then we thought, "Okay, we'll use public campgrounds."

In my mind, I thought the story was so amazing, national media like CNN would pick up on it, and people would be throwing money at us. But nothing! It was insane. I felt like I was babysitting everybody, trying to get everyone to wake up and go. We weren't even leaving until 10 a.m. I remember Jenny Choi was so frustrated she would leave on her own at 7 a.m. to get a three-hour start. It was very frustrating.

GR: Was the bike tour a success?

MP: I call it a success on a smaller level because people heard about it, and we did raise some money. But it was very time consuming and physically and mentally draining.

I've got to find better ways to raise money. Nickel and diming sucks. We've raised \$40,000 going to shows here and there and selling a sticker and a button for 50 cents. We have kids all over the U.S. who table shows and send checks with letters saying, "We've raised 150 bucks in the last six months." Great, but do you know how much work goes into sending them all the materials to do that?

GR: You have this commitment to San Jose. Why?

MP: I have no idea. I want to leave so bad! But I feel like I have to give back and do something for the kids here. Once I get that done and make sure there's a good network of young teens, I'm out of here.

GR: Do you want to accomplish this in five years?

MP: I'm hoping by the end of this year. The clock is ticking so fast.

GR: How is the record label going?

MP: The music industry is shifting so much toward digital downloads that I don't have to do anything. Most of my work is actually letter writing. The first thing I do is shut everything down for two hours and just write to people. I write back to every single letter I get.

GR: Are there benefits from writing back to everyone?

MP: I wonder that, too. Every so often, I'll meet people who say, "When I was a teenager, I went to see you and you were nice to us," or "You wrote us back and that was cool." I affect them and they remember, so I guess it's helping.

GR: Is it easy to operate as Asian Man Records? I don't know that many companies are so overtly Asian.

MP: Slant-Eyed Records? I don't think there has been or will be any problem with it. But I don't think there have been any benefits, either. The reason I used the name was to show people that it is run by an Asian American. I'm Asian, I'm in the music business, and that is very rare. I wanted people to know that there are Asian Americans involved in punk rock. I realize that most of my fan base is Caucasian, but it's pretty neat for the few Asians that are out there to know that I'm Korean American.

GR: Were your parents cool with the business taking over the entire downstairs of their house?

MP: Yeah. I think the defining moment was when the Korean press picked up the story. Two different newspapers came and did stories. You could tell they had no punk roots and couldn't figure out why I was doing it like this. They said, "One day, you'll move up," and I remember my dad translating for me, "He doesn't want to move. This is it."

Four years ago, I got a letter from Korea that said, "We want you to play the International Rock Festival in Pusan." I had no idea how big it would be but I thought, "They're going to pay for our flights, put us up for two nights in a hotel, and give us free dinner at Outback Steakhouse both nights." We went and it was unreal—the biggest show we'd ever played. I only practiced for five hours with MU330, but we happened to play really well that night. From that show, I got a record deal in Korea. I was really excited: There was no ska in Korea, the market was clear, and we had it! I went back and did all the press, TV shows, and radio shows, and the album just bombed. We sold less than a thousand, and the company went out of business.

GR: Do you plan to have Asian Man running for another 10 years?

MP: There's definitely no plan to stop. It's such an easy business. It runs itself, and has such a strong back catalog.

GR: What do you look for in a new band these days?

MP: We get anywhere from 6 to 20 CD-Rs a day. I've stopped listening to them. Actually, Skylar (Asian Man helper) enjoys listening to demos. There's one from Norway that he likes, and we're putting out the record.

ROCKER'S DELIGHT

				
	Skankin' Pickle	The Bruce Lee Band	The Chinkees	Mike Park
Members	Mike Park, Lynette Knackstedt, Ian Miller, Mike Mattingly, Lars Nylander, Gary Lundquist, Chuck Phelps	Mike Park and members of Less Than Jake	Mike Park, Greg Alesandro, Miya Zane Osaki, Jason Think, Steve Choi	Mike Park
Musical Style	Hyper ska punk	Ska with horns	Organ-driven ska	Acoustic indie rock
Albums	<i>Skafunkrastapunk</i> (1991), <i>Sing Along with Skankin' Pickle</i> (1992), <i>Live</i> (1995), <i>The Green Album</i> (1996), <i>Skankin' Pickle Fever</i> (1997)	<i>The Bruce Lee Band</i> (1997), <i>Beautiful World EP</i> (2005)	<i>The Chinkees Are Coming!</i> (1998), <i>Peace Through Music</i> (1999), <i>Present Day Memories</i> (2001), <i>Searching for a Brighter Future</i> (2003)	<i>For the Love of Music</i> (2003), <i>North Hangoock Falling</i> (2005)
Crucial Song	"I'm In Love With a Girl Named Spike" - I don't write love songs / In fact they make me very sick / But Spike the girl from DeGrassi High / She's truly one cool chick	"Don't Sit Next To Be Just Because I'm Asian" - So this guy he sits next to me / But he doesn't know I know what he's thinking / So I fill out my Scantron and then I erase / And the poor guy fails his final chance to graduate	"You Don't Know" - What I'm trying to say is: / "People can be jerks no matter what they look like / And people can be great in exactly the same way!"	"Blue Marble" - I'm just a stranger in a strange, strange land / And I've got something to say / To me, to you, to everyone / The world is a big blue marble / That I'd like to give to you
Trivia	Recorded the TV theme song from an alternate universe, "It's Margaret Cho"	Was renamed The B. Lee Band due to legal pressures.	Has maintained an all-Asian-American lineup through all albums.	Mike is the number-one fan of ex-Golden State warrior Larry Smith

I want to leave so bad! But I feel like I have to give back and do something for the kids here.

GR: You would put out a record by a pure nobody with no track record?

MP: Actually, I try to release only bands that are on their first release and then build them up. I look for something that sounds good, and from there I ask around if anyone has heard anything about them or if there's any buzz about them. Then I'll try to meet them and see what type of people they are. I try to work with nice guys. I've definitely put out a lot of records by bands where I'm not so much into their music as I am into them as people.

GR: Is there a mathematical formula behind how many albums you press?

MP: The business strategy is, "Can I break even?" The back catalog is the profit and the new albums just have to break even. We've really cut back in terms of what we do for promotion. We put out the records and that's it. We're really clear with the bands, and say, "This is what we're going to do. Do you still want to do it?" Surprisingly, all of them do.

GR: Are you involved in production or anything?

MP: No. We've definitely gotten some releases where we're like, "This is horrible! Oh well."

GR: What about packaging?

MP: We've had discussions about it, but I've never vetoed anything.

GR: That's different than most labels, isn't it?

MP: I've talked to Mike at Fat Wreck Chords, and he's definitely turned down bands after he's paid a lot of money for their recording. For me, if that's what they really want, it's their decision. If it doesn't sell, it's not my fault. I try to give them 100 percent creative control. It's obviously their passion, and who am I to say it's good or not good?

GR: Your label's look and sound are all over the place.

MP: Yeah, and that's probably not to my advantage. If I had stuck strictly to ska and punk, I'd have a lot more money, but you can't worry about that. I kind of like having that diversity.

There's also an effort to release more Asian bands. I've purposely tried to put out more music from Japan because very few American labels will release a Japanese band. If I get a demo from Japan, I'll listen to it right away. Japanese punk really appeals to me. Even the worst of the worst sounds kind of good to my ears. The worse the English is, the better. I think it's charming.

GR: Where are the Korean bands?

MP: I desperately want to release a Korean punk band, but they're horrible! I want it to happen so bad, but they're just not doing it for me. I can't think of any Korean artists in the alternative music realm that have done anything! It's all K-Pop. 🤖

Vital Solution

Rock for Darkness

There are times when I just want to curl up and die, but I find happiness when I create or play music.



Dave Suzuki feels kinship with Immersed in Blood's half-Japanese, half-Swedish bassist.

You'll never hear a Vital Remains song on commercial radio, much less a television ad or video game soundtrack. With perfectly brutalizing guitars, monstrous vocals, and sacrilegious lyrics, there's just no way. But while the group's audience is relatively small, it is hardcore and insanely knowledgeable about the genre. A band can't reach the upper echelon of death metal through street teams, teen focus groups, or anti-marketing. It has to truly rip, and that's why Vital Remains was chosen to headline the final night of Murderfest 2.0 at the Knitting Factory in Hollywood.

Although Tony Lazaro founded the group in 1989 and singer Glen Benton hails from the genre-defining band Deicide, it is lead guitarist Dave Suzuki who attracts the biggest mob of long-haired, black-attired, horn-throwing fans in front of the pit. On the Providence, Rhode Island-based group's latest album, *Dechristianize*, Suzuki also played bass, drummed, sang backup, and wrote the lyrics. Backstage, before the band's set, I suggest to him that he could easily become a one-man death-metal machine, like Prince but clad in black instead of purple. He humbly smiles, then turns the topic back to serving his band, its fans, and the worldwide death metal underground.

GR: Have you been into death metal since you were a kid?

DS: I started out with classic rock like Rush, AC/DC, Led Zeppelin, and Van Halen. I went to the hard stuff when I heard the Entombed's *Left Hand Path*. I crossed the path. I became so consumed with learning the guitar, I didn't give a fuck if I did anything with it. I just enjoyed learning the instrument.

GR: Did you take lessons or anything?

DS: No, I was self-taught even though my mom's a classical pianist and my dad has a jazz background. So I appreciate music a lot, but I've never really studied it.

GR: Does your parents' background in music give them extra appreciation or make them more critical of your work?

DS: Good question. My mom loves the music to a point. She understands some of the melodies. Lyric-wise, she doesn't like it because she thinks I'm going to be killed by some religious fanatic. Since my father is into free-form jazz, anything goes. He really appreciates the music. Being how old he is, it's cool that he can listen to the music and understand what we're trying to do.

GR: Your dad is from Japan?

DS: He was born in Tokyo and was voted one of the best jazz trombonists in Japan in the late '60s and early '70s. He and my mom moved to Las Vegas and had me. As I grew up, I would see my dad play with Frank Sinatra, Tom Jones, and the other Vegas staples. I've heard stories about Buddy Rich. He'd go off if a musician was just a little bit off.

GR: Did growing up in Vegas affect your sense of showmanship or aesthetics?

DS: It's totally different. That's one of the reasons why I wanted to get out. There was nothing I could relate to. When Vital Remains asked me to try out, I did it in an instant.

GR: Did you already know the band?

DS: They played in Vegas in '93. I gave them

a demo tape a friend and I had recorded. This guy Mitch Harris, who plays in Napalm Death, produced it. I got a phone call two years later asking if I was interested in playing drums. I went there and knew all the songs.

GR: What was it like moving to Providence?

DS: That was a culture shock—totally old school. But the different scenery and different vibe were refreshing after living in Vegas for 24 years. Everything is more blue-collar and working class.

GR: Is there a big death metal scene or do you guys rock out by yourselves in the woods?

DS: Back in the day there was a big death metal scene, but it has transformed into some kind of artistic chaos music, like Lightning Bolt. Craziness seems to be more accepted in Rhode Island now.

GR: You wrote all of the guitar leads and lyrics for Vital Remains' last album. Where did you find inspiration?

DS: I was on the computer writing lyrics to "Entwined by Vengeance" on 9-11 when the towers were falling. The lyrics were subconscious, but I didn't want to write in the traditional "I hate that" style. I was trying to be as cruel and offensive as possible. I bring up religion and what it can do to you if you're totally blinded by it. That's fear.

At the same time, it wasn't a satanic thing. I wouldn't call myself a Satanist at all. I just speak for myself. I rely on myself to get things done. Some of the lyrics go toward that, and I twist some blasphemous stuff into it.

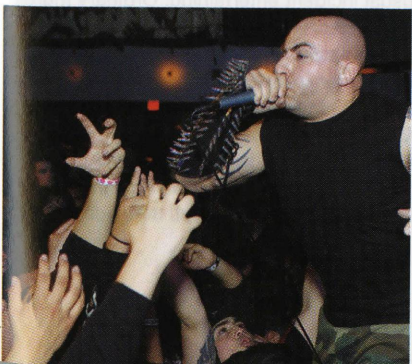
GR: When it comes to the dark side of your music, do audiences often confuse the theatrical aspects for the intellectual basis? Do they expect you to sacrifice animals and stuff?

DS: Well, I'm an animal lover. Once they meet us, they realize we are normal guys who love to create powerful, brutal music.

GR: You play guitar, bass, and drums. How do you find time to practice all those instruments?

DS: Playing guitar is a natural thing. I've been doing it for so long, I just have to practice for a couple days to get back into it. Drumming is a whole different monster. I've got to practice for at least a month.

Glen Benton also sings for Deicide.



Dave Suzuki gets the goat from a fan.

GR: It's got to be expensive to collect all the gear.

DS: I've been lucky enough to find deals.

GR: Your music and lyrics can be incredibly violent, yet you seem like a happy, positive guy.

DS: I try to be. There are times when I just want to curl up and die, but I find happiness when I create or play music.

GR: Because of the emphasis on guitars and rough style of singing, you actually have to sit down and read the lyrics to make out the words.

DS: Yes, and I'm shocked that people like the lyrics because I don't consider myself an intelligent person. I hated school. I don't read. Music is my education.

GR: Do people pray for you and stuff like that?

DS: A handful of people tell us we're going to hell or this and that. We just look at it as affecting somebody. The fucked-up thing is that my personality is so passive. When people meet me, they don't know what to think. With Glen in the band, they know his past and how he is.

GR: As the singer for Deicide, Glen Benton is famous for branding his face and throwing animal parts at audiences. Did your previous singers wear full body armor in concert?

DS: That was something new. Our guitarist, Tony, got in touch with a company that makes armor, and they made some for our last tour. But Glen had his own ideas for the facemask and everything. For me, it's about the music and how you perform.

GR: What's the biggest show you've played?

DS: I don't pay attention, but I would prefer a small club to a big club. We feed off the crowd's response. The further away they are, we seem to lose them. Being in their face and thrashing along—there's nothing like that. I think Poland was one of our best runs as far as shows in a row, where people came out and were really supportive. In November, we're going to play in Japan for the first time. I told my dad, and he's going to fly to Japan with us. His whole family is still in Japan, and they haven't seen me in years and years. We just booked a show in Germany called Fuck the Commerce, and I hear that's a pretty decent festival.

GR: Most fans probably think of you as living in a demolished church with no running water and toads hopping around.

DS: Tony might live like that, but I live in a house with my girlfriend. We have a cat, a dog, and a bird.

GR: Do you see yourself playing the same type of music in 10 years or so?

DS: You see people like Paul Speckman from Master. He's still going strong. Venom is still going, and Celtic Frost is back. If you love the music, it shouldn't matter.

GR: Then it's time to start wearing the armored helmet or King Diamond makeup.

DS: To hide the wrinkles? I smoke a lot, but I try to eat well and exercise. It really depends on how the day's going.

75

Neighborhood Threat

Planet Tokyo



The Neighbor No. 13, played by Shidō Nakamura, is a bully killer.



The Director No. 13.

Who hasn't thought about having a powerful second self to release his or her inner rage? Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, *The Incredible Hulk*, and *Teen Wolf* are only a few of the literary and cinematic alter egos that have entered the common vocabulary. Manga artist Santa Inoue added to the pop culture pantheon with *The Neighbor No. 13*. In the comic, a young man is relentlessly bullied as a youngster only to get a construction job under his childhood nemesis. When the fragile youngster can't handle the abuse any longer, an alter ego named No. 13 emerges.

Adapted by first-time feature director Yasuo Inoue, the film version unfolds slowly and artfully. As the powerful and mysterious figure goes out of control and kills an innocent neighbor (portrayed by director Takashi Miike) and threatens his boss's child and wife (played by Yumi Yoshimura, one half of the Puffy AmiYumi pop music duo), the revenge fantasy is no longer fun but horrific. Everyone's childhood fantasy is turned upside down in Inoue's directorial debut.

GR: How did you wind up making *The Neighbor No. 13*?

YI: I was a big fan of the comic. I went to see Santa Inoue to get permission to make a film based

on it but started writing the script, making a storyboard, and casting before receiving his official approval.

GR: What is the manga's appeal to you?

YI: It's difficult to explain *The Neighbor No. 13* in a word, but I think the most interesting point is that the comic makes a very usual incident entertaining. Ordinary murder cases happen every day in Japan. Also, you can feel sympathy with the protagonist even though his expression looks very crazy.

GR: Did you and scriptwriter Hajime Kado talk with Santa Inoue about the changes you made to the manga?

YI: Yes, we talked about that a lot. Fortu-



Clockwise from top: Shun Oguri plays the bullied young man; Shidô Nakamura is his ultraviolent alter ego; The Japanese Scraper; "The God of Death" meets his maker.

You can feel sympathy with the protagonist even though his expression looks very crazy.

nately, Santa Inoue kindly gave us approval to make this film as we wanted. It was challenging for us to make changes because Inoue said he would ignore the film if we made it boring!

GR: What sort of guy is Inoue?

YI: He was very helpful. Once the project started, he gave us a lot of advice as an objective observer. He is very knowledgeable and kind of a pop idol maniac.

GR: How did you prepare for directing your first full-length movie? Was the experience enjoyable or stressful?

YI: I had directed commercials and music videos before, but directing a film was totally different. I did not know how to start, so at the beginning I started to make a storyboard as usual. It took two months to complete 200 pages of storyboards! The assistant director was shocked and pointed out the story was too long. I rewrote it and made it half as long. That was the hardest part. As for the shooting, it wasn't

harder than I expected. I was very comfortable working with the same staff I use for commercials and music videos. The new staffers also made a big effort to help my first film shoot.

GR: As a first-time director, were you given a lot of freedom, or did the producers check in on you often?

YI: I appreciated their letting me make this film very freely.

GR: Was it different to direct guest stars like Yumi Yoshimura from Puffy AmiYumi and director Takashi Miike compared to the other actors?

YI: No, there were no differences.

GR: Were you ever tempted to ask Miike for tips?

YI: For the scene of No. 13 killing Mr. Miike, he taught us how to drive a knife into him. I remember he was moaning with pleasure when our staff was painting blood on him.

With Koushik

Shoetronica

Every time I sit down and try to do a straightforward pop song, it comes out a bit demented.



At the University of Vermont, Koushik Ghosh earned masters degrees in epidemiology and biostatistics. Most people have no idea what that exactly entails, but anyone can appreciate Ghosh's musical forays. Although complex in their own way, his compositions go down smoothly, like a cocktail of hazy shoegaze pop and sample-driven electronica. Since signing to Stones Throw Records in 2002, Ghosh has released three EPs (compiled in the *Be With* CD) and remixed tracks for the likes of Four Tet and Madvillain. The soft-spoken and even softer-singing Canadian took time to talk about remixing, collaborating, and making his first full-length album.

GR: What have you been up to recently?

KG: Mainly recording and trying to finish my proper album. I'm also doing some stuff with Percee P, who is one of my favorite MCs.

GR: What do you look for when collaborating with someone like Percee P or Four Tet, another guy you've worked with?

KG: I'd rather work with an acquaintance or a friend than somebody random. That said, those are both people whom I really respect and am a fan of. I talk to Percee occasionally. As for the Four Tet collaboration, we did the remixes separately. They asked me if I had some time for a Madvillain remix, and it was a no-brainer. I love the album. So they sent me a cappella versions of the songs, and in the first night I did four remixes. I called up Four Tet the next day, and he was all, "I just did four also!"

GR: When you do remixes, do you try to keep true to the artist's sound or do you work your own compositions into the mix?

KG: It depends. There's a Four Tet track called "Hilarious Movies of the '90s," which had a guitar line I really liked. The only problem was that I didn't like the drums. I had this melody in my head that went on top of it, so it was mixed just for fun, and he liked it, too. I try to keep a balance. Mostly, though, it's me trying to put my own twist on a track.

GR: You've toured with Four Tet, right?

KG: Yeah, we did this tour all across America that was really, really good. We're probably going to get a load of instruments and do an actual collaboration.

GR: What is your live show like?

KG: I actually haven't done any live shows yet. I've only DJed, mainly because I haven't been allowed in Canada for most of 2005, so I haven't been able to practice and stuff. I wasn't allowed to leave the States for a bit. I don't want to do laptop shows—no disrespect to people who do them. When I put together a proper band, I'm going to play with people

from my hometown in Canada. Another reason is that I want to finish an album before thinking about how to play it live.

GR: You have a full-length coming out?

KG: Yeah, probably late spring or summer. It's called *Out My Window*.

GR: Most of your vocals are indecipherable. What do you sing about?

KG: I was considering putting a lyric sheet in the album because I do spend a lot of time figuring out the lyrics, and nobody can understand them. I don't know. They are love songs and spiritual things. It's kind of personal.

GR: Does your style of singing come naturally, or did you have to practice to get it that way?

KG: Both. It was kind of natural, but recently I've been having a nightmare of a time doing vocals. I've had a kind of chest condition.

GR: Do you practice a lot?

KG: I never used to, though I'm kind of forcing myself to now.

GR: Is there anything Indian about your music?

KG: Yes, because it's made by an Indian person! That's a tough question. I don't sit around and think, "Does this represent my heritage?" I grew up singing a lot of Indian folk and classical songs, so I'm sure a lot of the melodies had an influence on me.

Traditional Indian music isn't thought of as experimental, but it has a balance between being freeform and structured. I guess that's why my stuff isn't completely insane. Every time I sit down and try to do a straightforward pop song, it comes out a bit demented.

I guess another way it influences me is that Indian people tend to be open-minded. Modern Indian music can be a crazy mish-mash of music at times. In a lot of Bollywood soundtracks, the composer will throw in everything: Moog, sitars, and monstrous drums.

GR: What music have you been listening to lately?

KG: Lots of African stuff. J Dilla beats. He's like my guru—I could listen to his beats all day. Some '60s sunshine pop and loads of reggae.

GR: A lot of people have likened you to My Bloody Valentine and Slowdive.

KG: That's shit that I've grown up with and loved. I've never really thought about it, but it's quite obvious that it's there. The first Slowdive album, *Just For a Day*—I heard this song on it, "Brighter," for the first time in about 10 years, and it still sounds amazing. *Loveless* still kills me. My Bloody Valentine is one of my all-time favorite groups. The Verve

as well. For the first couple years, they were pretty magical. There's not much new rock music I like, though.

GR: People have included you, Four Tet, and Manitoba in this "folktronica" movement. Is that an actual scene?

KG: Not that I know of! If there is, nobody has invited me to the parties or anything. Four Tet always jokes about being the king of the "folktronica" movement.

GR: How long had you been recording music before you were signed to Stones Throw?

KG: About 10 to 15 years. I've always made music; I just never played it for anyone. I made it all in my basement and sent it to Kiran (Four Tet) just as a friend. After he listened to it, he asked me to put it out on a 45. Then Stones Throw asked me to do a 12 inch for them, and it kind of evolved from there.

GR: Did getting signed change the way you make music?

KG: I'd like to say it didn't, but probably. Stones Throw is my favorite label, and it has been since the *Lootpack* album came out. It is the only current label in the last eight years where I would buy everything it puts out. The Quasimoto album is one of my favorites; I'd put it up there with *Loveless*. It was just kind of surreal because at one point all the music I listened to and people that I liked were on the label. You know—Doom, Dilla, Madlib. It feels pretty good, and they are all really amazing people. I think because Wolf has been around the block as a recording artist and he's signed with Disney and stuff, he knows what it's like dealing with record label people. So he doesn't act like one. He's more like a friend.

GR: Have you always thought of music as something you wanted to do as a job?

KG: Never. Like I mentioned, it's something I've done since I was an early teen. There was a point when I was young and didn't want to rely on making music for money because it would take the magic away. I don't ever want to be in a position where I have to do something that I don't want to do.

GR: It hasn't come to that, though.

KG: Not at all, but I was afraid of that. Luckily, I'm in a position where I can do what I want.

GR: How seriously do you take your career as a musician? Do you consider yourself a professional?

KG: I guess I might consider myself a professional, but honestly I've never really thought of it like that. First and foremost I'm a music fan.

GR: Outside of making music, how do you spend your time?

KG: Going on hikes, nature kind of shit. Where I live is really gorgeous, really nice.

KOUSHIK'S CRATE

These aren't necessarily my all-time Top 5, but just a few of many amazing Asian records that I listen to. There are loads I'm forgetting or didn't include but love, such as Gamelan, Classical Indian, different types of Asian percussion, and Japanese folk music. I'm not too knowledgeable about Korean psych like San Un Lim, but I've heard a bunch of insane stuff. Apparently, they used to have to package the records as Christmas music so they wouldn't get discovered as rock.

Kakoli Ghosh, *Songs of Rabindranath Tagore*

One of the albums done by my mom. Been listening to her sing since I was a baby, so she has to be number one.

Hemantha Mukherjee, *Songs of the '50s*

Beautiful, modern Bengali songs my parents are always playing.

People, *Ceremony-Buddha Meet Rock*

One of the craziest records I've ever heard. Took a walk last winter on frozen Lake Champlain and watched the sunset from the middle with this Japanese classic on my Walkman and got taken to another level. Starts with a sample from David Axelrod's "Holy Thursday" (these guys beat Black Sheep by more than 30 years) and goes through everything from chanting and meditational drum breaks to percussion dances, fuzzy fuzz and hypnotic guitars plus a psychotic psych/woman screaming track. I usually skip this one; it's like the Japanese equivalent of "Infinity" by Aphrodite's Child or Serge Gainsbourg's "Melody Nelson." Then more Axelrod to close things off—plus some bird sounds, which all good albums should end with. This album hypnotizes you and messes with your head.

Ananda Shankar, *And His Music*

Of course, everybody loves the two funky songs, "Streets of Calcutta" and "Dancing Drums," but the whole album, along with almost everything thing he did, is great. "Back Home" almost sounds like Sun Ra goes to India.

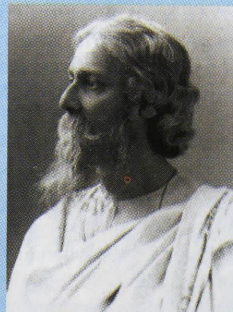
Various Artists, *Molan Groove*

This is a Thai compilation recently put out by Sublime Frequencies. The music and production techniques make western music sound so boring. Also check out *Cambodian Cassette Archives*.

Nobukazu Takemura, *Child's View / Milano / Song Book*

An absolute genius when it comes to childlike melodies.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was a writer, poet, choreographer, and Indian nationalist. He won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913.



words | James Lee
pics | Courtesy of Master Kishan

Boy Wonder

After-School Special



"Give me the damn camera."

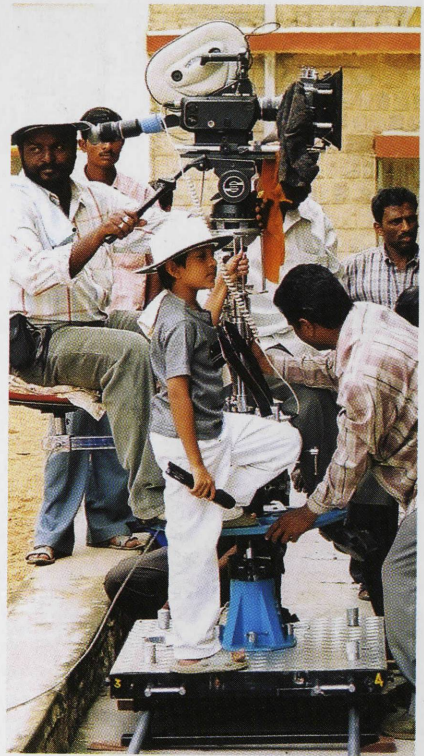
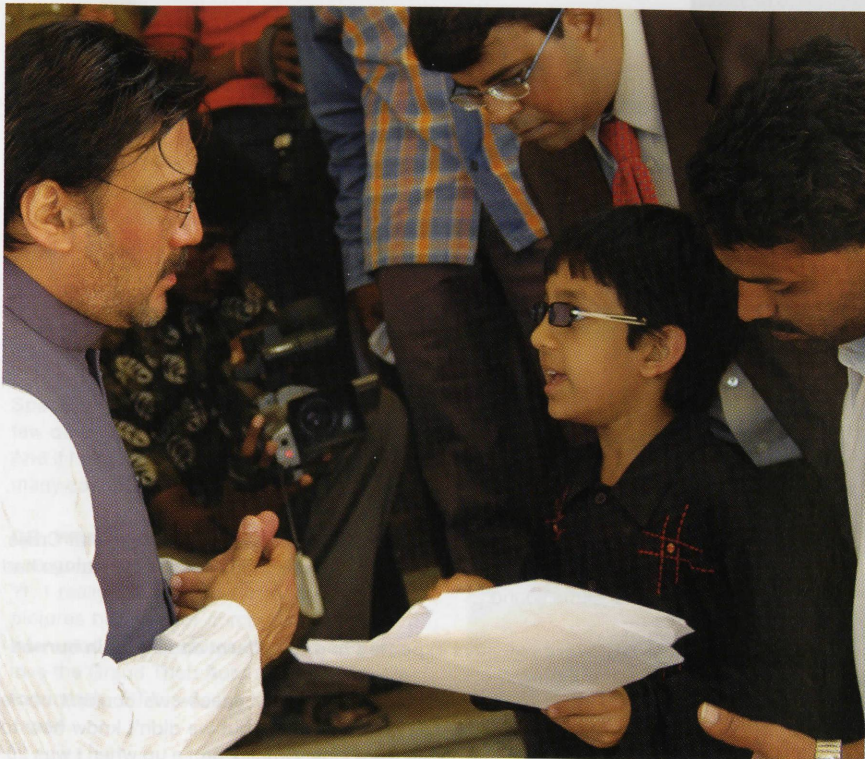
At the age of 4, an age when most of us had just stopped eating glue, Master Kishan began an impressive résumé in Bollywood. He starred in 24 feature films, finished 1,000 episodes of a popular soap opera, and wrote a hit song four years ago. Now he's making his directorial debut with *Care of Footpaths*, setting the world record as the youngest person to ever direct a major film. It's slated to be released later this year and will be dubbed into Bengali, Tamil, Oriya, Malayalam, and Hindi.

Things are hectic on the set as Kishan struggles to finish up the last few days of shooting so he can rush in his latest homework assignment—getting his film submitted into the Cannes Film Festival. Impressing everyone in Bollywood (Kishan persuaded leading man Jackie Shroff, among others, to star in his motion picture), the 10-year-old has more things to worry about than just hitting that stage in life when he'll find hair growing in funny places and start thinking about girls. We catch up with the busy youngster on the Bangalore set—he's been shooting since 5 in the morning—before his mommy cuts us off and tells us that he's too busy.

GR: You have an incredible work history in film. What made you want to become a director?

MK: There are children that sell newspapers in the street in Bangalore. Sorry, not in the street, at traffic signals. I asked my dad why they do not go to school. I wanted to make something very big for these slum children, so I directed this movie. It was a depiction from my short story. The story and direction are mine.

GR: Do you find it ironic that your film is about orphans not going to school, and you're missing school to direct this?



I wanted to make something very big for these slum children, so I directed this movie.

MK: Yeah, [laughs] October 2005 is when we started shooting. I've been going to school now and then, and someone's taking notes.

GR: So you're still going to school?

MK: Can you hold on?

GR: Uh, sure.

MK: [Kishan barks orders to people on the set] Sorry, I'm in the middle of shooting right now.

GR: How close are you to finishing?

MK: We still have post production. After the shooting is done, we'll do the dubbing, do the video recording, and do the graphics. Then I'll edit the film with my editor.

GR: This is your first time behind the camera. It seems like a tough transition. How'd you go about learning how to direct?

MK: I've been acting for a while. I'll always ask questions of the director, "What is this? What is that?" So that I know. I also read many books about directing. They are *The Practical Director*, written by Mike Crisp, *Making Movies*, and many others.

GR: How do you keep your stars in line?

MK: The day before shooting, I make a program, and after programming the scenes—thinking about how I want to video this up—I explain how I want the shot.

GR: Who are your cinematic influences? Favorite movies and directors?

MK: My favorite director is Steven Spielberg and my favorite movie is *Jaws*. Oh, and *Jurassic Park*.

GR: Why do you like *Jaws*?

MK: The music is great. The shark is a great icon.

GR: Who would you say has helped you the most during the filming process?

MK: My dad and mom.

GR: What do you hope the audience will get out of watching your film?

MK: The message is that if they make up their mind to do this kind of work or that kind of work, nobody can stop them.

GR: What would be your dream project to direct?

MK: Science fiction or graphic fiction.

GR: Which science fiction or graphic fiction movie have you enjoyed recently?

MK: I enjoyed *War of the Worlds*.

GR: Wait, isn't that rated PG-13? What are your parents' thoughts on movies that are rated PG-13 or R? Are there restrictions that your parents put on you when you watch films?

MK: No, not for violent films.

GR: Would your parents let you watch *Munich*? It's pretty violent.

MK: I don't know *Munich*.

GR: Lots of directors can't watch their own movies. Will you be able to watch your own film?

MK: Oh, yes.

GR: What was the tensest moment on the set?

MK: I have forgotten.

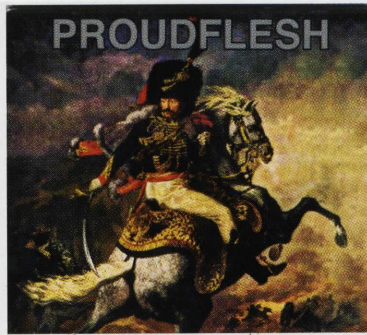
GR: What sort of disadvantages and advantages are there for being such a young director?

MK: I don't know. Disadvantages are that it is not the age to direct a movie and lots of stress. No food at the right time and lots of work. I want to become a graphics engineer.

GR: So you don't want to continue being a director?

MK: No, I want to become a director as well as a graphics engineer.





Wearing black meant we realized the harm we cause as human beings in America.

continued from page 61

Jimmy wrote all the guitar parts, and brought his rock 'n' roll stuff. He grew up listening to the Scorpions and UFO, and gave us a little more melody. Maybe that's what metal kids pick up on.

You know that picture of all three of us wearing painted jackets in *California Hardcore*? That was when hand-painted jackets were in style. But after we saw the picture, it looked like we were advertisements. After that, everything turned black. The philosophy was no band shirts, no exploitation. Wearing black meant we realized the harm we cause as human beings in America. You know, it sounds cheesy, but it still holds true today.

GR: How did Crucifix wind up on Crass records?

SP: John Loder flew to Boston where we were playing with Flipper, the Dead Kennedys, and the Proletariat. We agreed on a verbal contract, and it was such a coup. It was like the Good Punk-keeping seal of approval for us because we were getting so much shit Stateside. The biggest political band in the world signed us!

GR: Crucifix lyrics are shockingly quite legible.

SP: At the time it came out, it was pretty undecipherable. But I really like distinct vocals. What's the point of singing if you're not communicating? We had an honest viewpoint: War is bad. No matter how naïve it was, we meant it. When my friend Maati Lyon proofread the lyrics for the song "Death Toll," she cried. The song was about hunger and children, but if you think about it, we were kids singing about kids!

Thirty-year-olds might have already heard it from John Lennon, but we have credibility to this day. Bands tell us that we influenced them, and how incredible is that? Twenty years later, there's a whole tribute album to us out of Germany.

GR: Did you tour a lot?

SP: We spent two months on the first tour and five months on the second tour. We played in the U.S., Canada, and Europe. England was great. We played two shows in Iceland. We were the second punk band to play there! Crass was first. This was before Björk or the Sugarcubes.

GR: Did you guys book your own shows?

SP: I didn't, but Matt did. He was a 30-year-old guy in a 17-year-old body. He did 90 percent of the business, so I had the luxury of just writing lyrics, showing up to gigs, and jumping up and down.

GR: Was there a good network of places to play and floors to sleep on?

SP: There would be a scene in places like New York, Los Angeles, or Atlanta. In Albuquerque, someone would open a barn door and there would be no P.A. It's so easy now, but there were no rules then. Still, Matt contacted Crass and set up an English tour. We toured with

Antisect, Dirt, and all these bands that were associated with Crass. Those guys were our peers, and Penny from Crass knew that we had the same sound.

GR: Were you guys expected to grow a farm and squat in burned-out buildings?

SP: We had our own pseudo collective because we couldn't come up with rent money. The idea was there, but we didn't know how to implement it because we were kids. Crucifix broke up when I was 20. We were all under 21.

We knew that it wouldn't last forever. Die young and have a good-looking corpse, like the Sex Pistols. And it was proven: Most bands suck after their second albums. We didn't want to be like that. It literally came to one day in 1984 when Matt said, "I don't want to do it anymore." That same year, Crass broke up and everybody broke up. We felt like it was time.

GR: Did you feel lost after it ended?

SP: Absolutely. We were kind of like those Hollywood kids who are forced to deal with the real world. I had to get a job, which was very traumatic. Growing up and meeting people who didn't like you at all, the ass kicking began.

GR: How did Proud flesh, your second group with Jimmy, get started?

SP: We formed in '87 and broke up in '92. I was turning 30, and it wasn't going anywhere. It's hard when you're doing it and feeling like you're banging your head against the wall.

GR: There's a new Proud flesh album. Is now a better time?

SP: Are you kidding me? We're going to be in Giant Robot! Also, there's more interest and we're not competing with anybody. We're on a different plane. It's not like I'm not nice to anybody and I like a lot of bands, but we're in a different league than everybody else. With Crucifix, we were like Crass! I still feel the same way. I can't believe I'm getting a second chance.

GR: Has your approach or technique changed since the first or second time around?

SP: I still have similar feelings, but the idealism isn't the same. I'm an older man. It's hard to define the music because there are so many genres: Grindcore, crustcore, post-hardcore—what the hell is that? It's just loud and fast.

GR: You're still considered anarcho-punk. Do they expect you to wear vegan shoes and drive in a bio-diesel van?

SP: We've been doing it for so long that no one can accuse us of anything. We've been doing it for 20 years. Everything else we've done, we've done head-first with complete commitment. 🐌

GR: Do you think your movie will please Puffy fans?

YI: Puffy are too famous as pop idols in Japan, and I think their fans want to see another side of them. But I am afraid that some American fans would be shocked to see Yumi Yoshimura in this film.

GR: Did you ever have experiences with bullies as a child?

YI: I have no experience of bullying myself, but there were many kids being bullied. Speaking of bullying, my friend quit his job a few days ago because his boss was a bully. And if I can say so, I think America is bullying many countries.

GR: What sort of look and aesthetic were you going for?

YI: I really like realism—not only for moving pictures but also for computer games. I am interested in the pictures at ogrish.com and I love the Grand Theft Auto video games. Unfortunately, GTA is designated as harmful in Japan.

GR: Movies show a lot of violence these days. Were you ever tempted to show more of it in your film?

YI: It depends on the film, but I will show a lot of violence if it is necessary. I like to shoot violence. But for me, it is more important to describe the scene after a murder. It's too shocking to see someone being killed.

GR: Your movie also depicts a lot of mental conflicts. Can you compare depicting inner turmoil and exterior conflict?

YI: I show inner feelings by depicting outer actions. I don't like to explain characters' mentalities because I think it makes everything look fake. In reality, you cannot see anyone's inner face.

GR: Have you always wanted to make movies?

YI: Studying fine art at the university and creating CG animation just as a hobby, I did not imagine becoming a film director. After graduating, I started shooting for the production department of MTV Japan. My foundation for shooting was established there, and I've always loved directing people. It was like on-the-job training.

GR: What was the most rewarding aspect of making *The Neighbor No. 13*?

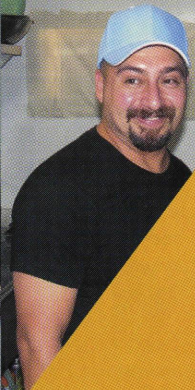
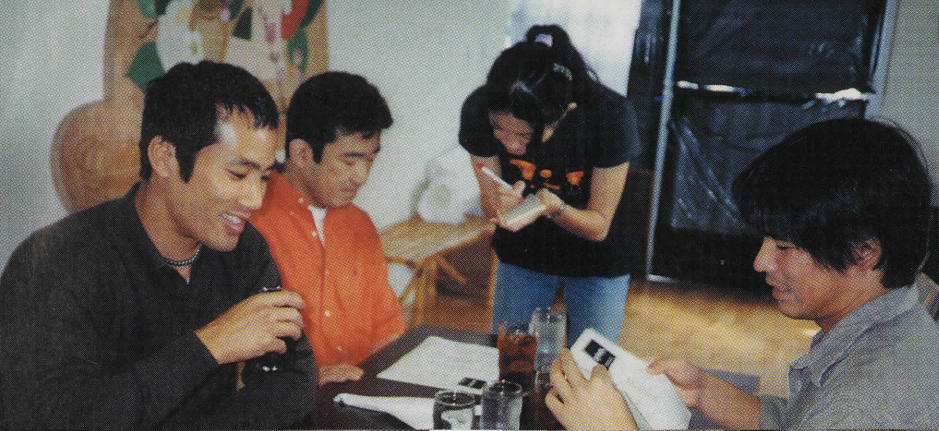
YI: I got a lot of attention from women for a while. But no longer.

GR: What are you working on now?

YI: A zombie movie is in development. Also, my commercial business is very healthy. I'm directing ads for a mobile company, beer company, video game company, and fast food company. I shot Maria Sharapova for a camera company. 🐱



No-holds-barred, three-way cage fight: Takashi "The Actor" Miike vs. Yasuo "The Director" Inoue; Homocidal Maniac vs. Pop Idol; Bullied Young Man vs. Bully's Young Boy.



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Clockwise from top: *Breaking News*, *Shadow: Dead Riot*, *Kill Devil*, *Address Unknown*. (Not Shown: *Lupin The Third: Strange Psychokinetic Strategy*.)

TV Party

by GR Staff

Address Unknown (South Korea, 2001) Kim Ki-duk gives a complex take on the American military presence in Korea by following three young protagonists: Chang-guk, the half-breed son of an African-American soldier; Ji-heum, the heartbroken son of a crippled father; and the crush-worthy and vision-impaired Eun-ook. There's plenty of angst to go around, but the relationship between Chang-guk's mom and her deadbeat husband, as well as a doomed love story between an American soldier and Eun-ook, make the Yankee presence look problematic at best. The mood of this hybrid art-exploitation movie is bleak and the violence is nonsensical, but you might find sick humor in the dog-related plot elements that range from strangely kinky to awfully brutal. [Tartan Video] mw

Breaking News (Hong Kong, 2004) A million gangster movies have been filmed—many by Johnnie To himself—but this is the only one I know about gangsters being filmed. Starting off with an intense eight-minute gunfight on one Steadicam shot, the film leads into a hostage situation and a battle of wills between media savvy cops and Mainland robbers. Both sides try to use the press to their advantage. When a police director played by Hong Kong starlet Kelly Chen tries to gain public support for the hard-working cops and media by ordering them take-out, the head crook, played by Chinese pop star Richie Jen, cooks dinner for their hostages and sends footage to the public! This film, which screened at Cannes, is no typical crime thriller. It won Best Director for To and Best Editor for David Richardson at the Golden Horse Awards. [Palm Pictures] mw

Kill Devil (Japan, 2004) *Battle Royale II* was disappointing since it veered away from the premise of high school kids trapped on an island and forced to fight each other to the death. War just isn't that much fun. Perhaps this rip-off is a truer sequel to the original. In this scenario, the government isolates youngsters possessing DNA that allows them to be killers, erases their memories, and sets them against each other in the name of science. The relocated juveniles eventually form packs and fight

the system, but can they overcome their adult captors? Yuichi Onuma's movie isn't nearly as clever, violent, gory, funny, or compelling as *Battle Royale*, but it does have its moments, including strange modern dance scenes—apparent swipes from Beat Takeshi's *Zatoichi*. [Urban Vision] mw

Lupin The Third: Strange Psychokinetic Strategy (Japan, 1974) This live-action feature based on Monkey Punch's popular manga and anime must have been made to warp the minds of young adolescent cartoon fans in Japan. Much like the original *Pink Panther* movies, we follow Lupin pulling off the caper of the century while simultaneously being chased by cops, avoiding assassins, and trying to get laid. While this movie lacks the charm of the original comic and cartoon, it makes up for it with sheer absurdity. You will never stop and ask if the story makes any sense because you will be overwhelmed by the amazing wardrobe and soundtrack that time forgot. Lupin wears a white outfit that John Travolta later stole for *Saturday Night Fever*. There is also an Oscar award-winning musical scene with a leather girl gang disguised as nuns that basically satisfies at least two fetishes at once. This is the movie Woody Allen wished he made with *What's Up Tiger Lily?* [Discotek] dm

Shadow: Dead Riot (USA, 2005) Smitten by the best of Hong Kong cinema, the Wachowski brothers took gravity-defying wirework, insane camera angles, and established martial-arts themes and made the high-concept *Matrix* movies. Inspired by *The Story of Ricky*, the creators of *Shadow: Dead Riot* came up with an amazing piece of hybrid trash combining the gratuitous T&A of the women-in-prison genre and violent gore of zombie flicks. With contributions from Hong Kong director Derek Wan (*Fist of Legend*), action choreographer Tony Leung Siu-Hung (*Enter the Dragon* and *Legend of the Drunken Master*), and the best that the B-movie couch has to offer, this movie is loaded with blood, boobies, and butt-kicking. Limbs are lost, heads roll, and blood spills at an almost nonstop rate in this *Candyman* spinoff. It's not art but it's pure entertainment with no pretension or artifice. [Media Blasters] mw



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ANIME ADDICT

Burst Angel - Vol. 6



The first volume of *Burst Angel* (reviewed a couple issues back) wasn't great on any level, but it wasn't nearly as mediocre as this disc, which collects the final four episodes of the series. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly what contributes to the overall poor nature of the visuals; it almost looks hurried and crudely drawn. To make matters worse, the story elements don't fare much better. I don't mean to give anything away to those of you dying to see the ultimate volume of *Burst Angel*, but this must be the hundredth title I've seen to shockingly reveal a main character as being a "perfect soldier" genetically engineered by fascist government overlords—and it's not one of the better ones. Not even close. About all it has going for it is a DDR-appropriate opening theme song, and even that gets pretty tired after the first few listens. [Funimation]

Desert Punk - Vol. 1



Maybe it was just the burrito I ate beforehand, but watching *Desert Punk* made me a bit nauseated. The setting is Japan in the distant future. The skyscrapers are made of rocks and sand, and the whole place is a toxic desert. Sunabouzu, a stumpy, constantly masked bounty hunter, makes his living using magic to chase down bandits and ogling the occasional big-breasted woman. There's also a pudding-obsessed villain, a buxom mercenary... In short, it's ugly people doing ugly things, trying to be funny, and for the most part failing—although I did get a kick out of a randomly singing village chief. It's sort of a cross between *Mad Max* and *Lupin III*, which, believe it or not, makes for a rather unpleasant viewing experience. Should you choose to watch it, do yourself a favor and delay eating anything heavy until afterward. [Funimation]

The Fuccons: Meet the Fuccons



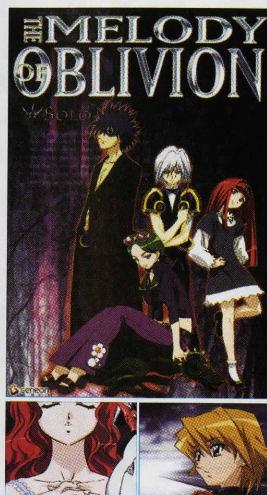
Mannequins have always been disturbing (see *Mannequin* and *Mannequin 2: On the Move*), but when used to act out short scenes involving an all-American mom, dad, and son adjusting to their new lives in Japan, the creepiness quotient really skyrockets. That's why you really don't know weird until you've seen *Meet The Fuccons* (pronounced foo-kawns). Fortunately, in addition to being completely random and bizarre, the eight three-minute live-action vignettes are also pretty damn funny. They play out much like *The Super Milk Chan Show*, to which ADV recently gave a similar treatment on DVD: grating at first, but very quickly endearing. Also, as with *The Super Milk Chan Show*, *The Fuccons* seems like a natural fit for Adult Swim. But whether aired Stateside or not, the original Japanese version is definitely worth seeing. [ADV]

Ghost Stories



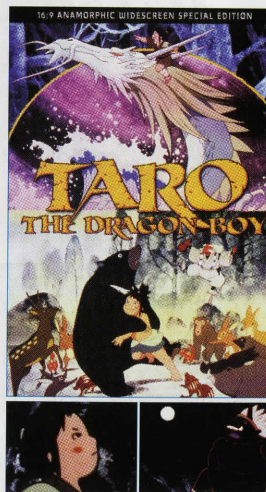
Credit is due to *Ghost Stories* for inspiring such nostalgia, but not for anything in particular. It feels exactly like the kind of cartoon you'd watch right after getting home from school or bright and early on Saturday morning. Although it doesn't really cover any new territory and certainly isn't unpredictable, perhaps those are the very reasons it's so watchable—just easy, mindless viewing. The plot involves a group of unmemorable elementary school students being constantly terrorized by assorted ghosts; but unlike the ones in, say, *A Pup Named Scooby Doo*, these ghosts are perfectly willing to kill, maim, and cut the feet off the children they're harassing. So maybe *Ghost Stories* is not exactly like the shows we watched as third graders, but it's a fine substitute. It's also a relief to see that the cat from *Sailor Moon* is still getting work. [ADV]

Melody of Oblivion



They really must have envisioned *Melody of Oblivion* as a video game first because in terms of an RPG, the idea works perfectly: legendary warriors wandering around a huge labyrinth, fighting evil monsters, and searching for the trapped young girl whose song can save humankind. As a cartoon show, this concept is significantly less exciting—especially since the makers executed it in the form of the most irritating type of anime, that which intersperses androgynous youngsters' longing gazes with bland action sequences and cheesy orchestral fills. Of course, it does offer choice lines, such as "I can't forgive the one who ate you!" and "Is someone from the future watching our fight?" But those are much too far and few between to make MoO (as I deridingly refer to it) deserve anyone's valuable time, attention, or shelf space. [Geneon]

Taro the Dragon Boy



Taro the Dragon Boy dates itself immediately with its washed-out look and watercolor backgrounds, somewhat resembling *Watership Down* or some Ralph Bakshi project. But regardless of its 1979 release date, *Taro* is as good as any family cartoon I've seen in some time. Very little of today's animated output can hold a candle to this gentle morality tale. The story is simple: Taro is a lazy, selfish boy who spends all day sleeping and sumo wrestling with his woodland animal friends. But when an old magician gives him the strength of a hundred men—only to be used for helping others—Taro changes his ways and begins a quest to find his mother, who was tragically transformed into a dragon just before his birth. Nothing unexpected happens, but it never feels trite. Maybe I wouldn't call *Taro* a classic, but it's certainly required viewing. [Discotek]

MY PANTS ARE VIBRATING!

OH, RIGHT! HA! I FORGOT ABOUT THE CELL PHONE IN MY POCKET.

CASPER,

SO YOU'RE SAYING I SHOULD CALL REGGIE AND ASK IF HIS REFRIGERATOR IS RUNNING? YEA, IT'S A CLASSIC PRANK.

AND UPON HEARING THIS SEEMINGLY INNOCUOUS QUESTION HE'LL ANSWER "YES" TO WHICH I'LL RESPOND...

STOP OVERANALYZING IT! TRUST ME, IT'S HILARIOUS AND HE FALLS FOR IT EVERY SINGLE TIME.

IF SOMEONE IS CALLING ME I'M SURE IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT!

HELLO! YOU'VE REACHED THE CELLULAR TELEPHONE OF REGGIE-12!

AS FAR AS I KNOW, IT IS RUNNING.

HE HUNG UP ON ME BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO COMPLETE THE SECOND PART OF THE JOKE.

THE SECOND PART IS THE JOKE, THE FIRST PART IS JUST THE SET UP. BY ITSELF IT'S JUST A STUPID QUESTION.

IT'S A VERY GOOD QUESTION. I SHOULD RETURN HOME TO CONFIRM AS MUCH.

OH MY GOD! DO YOU THINK HE KNOWS IT WAS ME?

CHILL OUT, MAN I UNPLUGGED THE FRIDGE. IT'LL SEEM LIKE A LEGITIMATE QUESTION.

REFRIGERATION! IT'S JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS I TAKE FOR GRANTED!

WHY CAN'T I GET A DATE? IT DOESN'T ADD UP!

WHY DON'T YOU EAT THE BAKING SODA WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, YOU VULTURES!

SIT NEXT TO JEERO.



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