

## CHAPTER FOUR: MICHAEL BASS



y first contact with *eXile* archenemy Michael Bass wasn't even contact. It was a missed meeting.

It was the spring of 1996. I was working on the news desk at the *Moscow Times*. Mine was an important strategic seat in the newsroom. I sat directly behind and to the left of then news editor Robin Lodge, facing reporter/revolutionary orator-descendant-and-namesake Patrick Henry, and to

the left of politics reporter and chain-smoking hypochondriacal conspiracy theorist Jonas Bernstein, who was 40 years old—30 if you didn't count the ten years in the sixties and seventies that he'd missed while he was doing acid and listening to Led Zeppelin and Cream albums in his basement.

Bernstein's desk was always covered with a huge pile of newspapers and notebook sheets covered in indecipherable pencil scratches. He'd sink lower and lower in his chair as the workday progressed, and his face would turn blood red from stress. While other reporters focused their energy horizontally, in a direct beam between their head and their computer screen, Bernstein was operating in both longitude and latitude on a perilous mental sea—trying desperately to keep his pile of highlighted newspapers, audio tapes, and notes in line long enough to coax something intelligible on to his screen before it all spun out of control.

Bernstein's daily struggle was the only thing that made my workday at the *Moscow Times* bearable. Every day I would watch him closely out of the corner of my right eye, keeping close track of his rising stress level. After a long day of reading magazines and playing video games, I would at about 4 P.M. make a few phone calls, then ostentatiously write my vapid article with a minimum of effort and worry in what would seem like a matter of minutes. Then I'd push a button on my keyboard to send it to the editor, turn slightly in Bernstein's direction, and wait.

Somewhere between 7:00 and 8:00 P.M. every day, Bernstein would reach critical mass. His papers would begin spilling off of his desk in a panic: deadline would come and go and he would always be hopelessly late, well past the point when the article could conceivably be finished in time to get into the next day's issue; shame and despair would begin to creep across his face, and, worse still, you could see that a faint trace of a snappy sentence would occur to him as he was hurrying to finish up, only he wouldn't get it right away—he'd freeze, struggling to

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The *Moscow Times* newsroom, circa 1996. Beleaguered hack Jonas Bernstein (center, in glasses) sinks his in chair, struggling to write his lead. Taibbi seated at far right.

wrest it out of the drug-addled corners of his mind as the clock ticked away, and . . . not get it.

And at exactly that moment, when the reality of failure and missed opportunity and age met him face to face, I'd lean over with a friendly smile on my face and say:

"Hey Jonas! How're you doing, pal?"

"Fuck you!" he'd scream. "You always do this! Fuck you!"

On the day Michael Bass called I was perched in my seat, article finished, staring at Bernstein and waiting. It

was already dark out and Bernstein looked about 40 minutes and a couple of bags of potato chips shy of his Old Faithful act.

Then, behind me, the phone rang. The seats behind me were occupied almost exclusively by female reporters. That side of the newsroom was where phone calls that were from people in search of a sympathetic ear went to. No one was around, so I hesitatingly crossed into that territory and picked up the phone.

### FACE OF THE YEAR



INTERNATIONAL MODELING COMPETITION  
BENEFITTING BEAUTIFUL HEARTS FOUNDATION

#### Michael Bass producer

511 Stonewood Drive  
Beverly Hills, California  
90201,  
310-855-0777

2, Avenue Montaigne  
Paris 75008,  
33-1-49520042

8-5 Tverskaya #103  
Moscow 103009  
7-095-229-0518,  
974-0111 #17436

"Hello, this is Michael Bass," the voice said. "Who's this?"

I frowned. Michael Bass was an American and a strange nightlife figure who had some kind of job in a couple of casinos in town and had been hassling every reporter on the staff to help publicize some charity program he was apparently involved with. I knew through notorious MT features reporter and degenerate friend Owen Matthews that the completely bald, white, and round, Bass also had some kind of connection with prostitutes; he'd taken Owen out on a docked cruise ship once and offered him a selection of whores, and nothing had happened because Owen was broke . . . it was one of those stories you never quite remember the details of, but of which the essential slimy memory sticks.

Bass pitched his charity story to me. It was a "women's shelter" which he said was being unfairly shut down by the city. He wanted to rally the foreign community behind him with the help of the *Moscow Times*.

I listened closely to Bass's plaintive, even voice. If this story was bogus—and from what I'd heard, the "women's shelter" was actually a brothel—his sanctimonious good-guy act was really impressive. For sheer balls alone, he deserved some credit. I shrugged and agreed to meet him the next day.

The next day I ordered a driver and headed over to the building just off Tverskaya Street in the center of town that housed Bass's shelter. But when I got there I realized that I'd left the exact address back at the office. I paused for a moment, then in a sudden burst of contempt and irresponsibility decided to leave Bass hanging.

"Fuck it," I thought.

A half hour later my driver and I returned to work, shrugging as we walked through the hall.

"Bass didn't show up," I told my editor.

"Asshole," he said.

Bass called almost immediately. He screamed and yelled, but I took the strong position that I had actually been there and he hadn't showed up.

"Never in my life have I missed a meeting," he said in a wounded voice. "I'm shocked."

But I insisted, convincingly, that I'd been there. Then I somehow managed to pawn him off on another reporter and snuck back to my own comfortable work routine. I was safe. Bass was known as a pain in the ass. No one would believe his story over mine. And no one would care enough to listen to him anyway.

**A** year later, I was fleeing the city on account of Bass. As editor of the *eXile*, I'd published a brutal exposé on him, and afterward he'd called up and threatened to kill me, a threat that caused me to consult with the FBI and split town. And that was just the beginning.

The story of the 1997 war between the *eXile* staff and Michael Bass is a sordid, absurd, and tragic tale of what happens to foreigners when they are allowed to operate outside their culture's usual moral and ethical standards for any significant length of time. Michael Bass was a bona fide criminal who came to Russia to become respectable, while we were American kids from the suburbs with an unhealthy curiosity about the sleazy underworld people like Bass came from. We shared a flair for self-promotion that caused us all to become public figures in the foreign community in Moscow—and when we clashed, it got a lot more serious and a lot uglier than either side would have expected.

Bass was a convicted felon; he'd done time in California for mail fraud in the 1980s. How and why he had arrived in Moscow was a mystery to a lot of people, but by the time I went to work for the *eXile*, I'd heard what just about everyone else who'd been in town seemed to know already, which was that he'd been working as a peculiarly Muscovite form of "modeling agent" for many years. Eventually I would even be shown a stack of "résumés" for his modeling agency "Karin." The holder of that stack was a friend of mine who'd been passed them by a Bass associate on the understanding that any of the girls in the pictures were available for a price. In any case, Bass formally made his living as a consultant to clubs and casinos, which he kept packed full of his teenybopper models, and privately he appeared to be making money off those stacks of résumés and various special "excursions," about which more will come later.

Well... so what? The world is full of sleazebags. Only a few of them, though, have the gall to try and become respectable public figures, which is what Bass did by engineering a column for himself in the *Moscow Tribune*. "Bassworld" was, at the time of its creation, the only society column for the expat community. The column read like a newsletter for a Beverly Hills rehab clinic, which may in fact have been where Bass's style originated from; the protagonist playing the role of the group therapist in every weekly installment was Bass himself, whose eerie bright white head, puffy body, and purplish lips appeared smiling alongside the patient-subjects of his society notes.

Despite his syrupy prose and saccharine good-guy therapist voice, Bass apparently had a temper. He was the type of guy who went around town demanding free drinks, hassling women, and abusing doormen and security guards, and along the way he made a lot of enemies. Within just a few months after joining the *eXile* I was inundated with requests from what few readers we had at the time to do something on Bass. Mark and I weren't against the idea. After all, Bass wrote for a competitor, and he brought in a lot of business for the *Trib*. Nauseating as it was, his column was the only thing in the paper worth reading. And after all, it was offensive that a guy who made his living packing nightclubs full of destitute Russian girls would host dinners for ambassadors and worm his way into photo opportunities with people like Bill Clinton, Benjamin Netanyahu, and King Juan Carlos of Spain.

So when one of our clients gave us the idea to reprint a chapter of a book called *You'll Never Make Love in This Town Again* that showed Bass in a very

## Sculpted At Birth?



*Cowed and bloodied Casanova restaurant manager Michael Bass...*



*...and an ugly discarded statue behind the Dom Khudozhnika?*

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unflattering light, we had no objections. Although that client, who unfortunately has to remain nameless, offered to publish the thing as a paid advertisement, we stupidly said we'd just enter it in as straight unpaid editorial, since we thought it was a legitimate story.

The book, which had been a *New York Times* best-seller, had been written by rock groupies who described their sexual experiences with people like Don Henley and George Harrison. It contained a chapter about Bass that was written by "Liza," one of the four authors of the book. Liza had met Bass back in the days when he was still living in Beverly Hills and was working as a modeling agent; the chapter told a story of how he'd offered her a job as a runway model in Paris. The Paris job turned out to be as a sex slave for an Arab prince, and when the girl refused the work, Bass locked her in a hotel and kept her doped up on Quaaludes. . . . The story wrapped up in semicomical fashion when the model tied sheets together and lowered herself in her bra and panties out of a second-story window onto the Paris street, where she was indifferently rescued by a local bartender who let her use his phone.

In short, it was good stuff—the kind of thing we all felt had to be shared with the *Tribune's* readers.

Mark was on vacation when the Bass piece came out on Thursday, May 8. Almost immediately, on Friday, I got a frantic call from Jane Butchman, a friend of ours who worked as the food and beverage manager at the Beverly Hills Club. Liz was a young American divorcée with cropped hair who loudly advertised her s&m leanings. Her defining character trait was an inability to keep phone calls short. Mark and I both got along well with her, but for fear of hearing all about her latest bad date, we almost never answered our phones.

Liz, however, was our main link to Bass. Bass did promotional work for the Beverly Hills Club, and the two saw each other all the time. Liz and Bass didn't get along, probably because Bass suspected that Liz was trying to get the club owners to get rid of him. Also, I think, the two of them frequently fought over the right to use the club limousine.

"Matt," Liz said, "I spent hours last night talking to Michael Bass. He's thinking about having you killed."

"What?" I said.

"I think I have him calmed down. . . . But he was saying that his roof wants you dead, and he's not sure what to do. But I think I've convinced him that it would be a bad idea."

"What roof?" I shrieked. "What's he talking about?"

"His roof. . . . He says that when they saw the article,

they wanted to kill you right away. Bass was really crazy last night. He'd be nice to me half the time, then all of a sudden he'd start screaming. He kept talking about how everyone says I was always sucking cock in the kitchen when I worked at Azteca—can you believe that?"

I cut her off. "What did he say about me again?"

"He said he's not sure what to do. His people apparently want you dead. I just couldn't believe that thing he said about me sucking cock. What an asshole!"

After I got off the phone with Liz, I called Bass right away. I told him that, while I wouldn't print a retraction, I was willing to publish his side of the Paris story. He hedged, diving straight into his creepy rehab-therapist voice:

"I don't know, Matt," he said. "I just don't know what to do. I mean, I'm really hurt about this. I cried. And you know, the worst thing is that my charity programs are going to suffer. That's the thing that hurts the most."

Was all this really happening to me? Was he serious? "So what are you planning to do?" I asked.

"I don't know. . . . My roof wanted to kill you right away, but I really don't know what to do. I mean, what are my options? I can have you killed, or I can pay someone a couple of hundred bucks to have your legs broken, or I can just let it go. And I don't like any of those options."

"Michael, I can't believe you're threatening me like this. What is this, the Solntsevo gang? You're talking about having me killed."

"I'm not threatening you," he insisted.

"You're sitting here, saying you don't know what you want to do, and talking about having me killed as one of your options! That's a threat from where I sit."

"I'm not threatening you."

"Michael, if I understand it as a threat, then that's the only thing that matters. I'm the subject of the threat. Can't you see that distinction?"

"No, I'm not threatening you. But listen." He laughed. "You have to understand, Matt, I travel in the kind of crowd where. . . . Well, it's dangerous for me if you do this and I let you get away with it. You realize that, right?"

I said nothing.

"I mean," he continued, "did you ever think about what might happen to you if you do something like this in this town? People get hurt for things like this."

Bass eventually refused my offer and hung up. In a panic I called the U.S. Legal Attaché office at the embassy—the FBI. I knew that they had no arresting power in the city, but I thought that if I could arrange a

sit-down between them, the Moscow police, and Bass, then I would be covered. That way, if something happened to me, Bass would know he'd be picked up right away.

Agent Dennis Cosgrove agreed to meet me in a half hour at the north gate of the embassy. I raced over there and found him waiting. He was a tallish man with slightly thinning wavy hair, a mustache, and a stiff, proud, sheriffly walk. Back straight, hands swinging confidently at his side, he led me into the embassy and into a cafeteria next to the swimming pool. As a courtesy, he bought me a diet soda. We sat with our two cans of Diet Coke, two decent Americans, talking against the white concrete cafeteria wall.

Cosgrove listened to my story carefully. They'd had complaints about Bass before. He began asking me if I'd ever heard that Bass was dealing in pornography. I said I didn't know anything concrete. He frowned and leaned back.

"So, you're with the *eXile*," he said.

"Yes," I said. "I'm the editor."

"You go out to all those clubs?"

"Sure," I said.

"You know what's amazing?" he said. "There are so many beautiful women in this city. I mean, I walk around town, or sometimes I'm on the subway, and it's like, I just can't believe it. Where do they come from?"

"I don't know," I said, shrugging. "The provinces?"

"And the other amazing thing is that they all turn into such monsters when they get older. You see those older women? They're huge!"

"Yeah, I know," I said.

"Amazing," he said, shaking his head and then sipping his soda.

"So," I said, clapping my hands, "what should I do about Bass?"

"Well, I would say, at this point, just take normal safety precautions," he said, looking away.

"Okay," I said. "But . . . wouldn't I just get shot in the back of the head in my doorway, if something was going to happen? I wouldn't have any warning."

"Well, yes, I guess that's true. But I don't think you have anything to worry about . . ."

After I left the embassy I decided to leave town for a while. Not wanting to be alone, I packed my things and went straight to Bernstein's apartment. Now retired and happily freelancing in the comfort of his own home, his stress level had dropped significantly. When I showed up

at his place, he was lazily playing his guitar and smoking a cigarette.

"You look tense. Want some tea?" he said.

He made tea. I sat in his living room staring out the window. Soon he poked his head in from the kitchen.

"Sugar?" he said.

"Sure," I answered.

He laughed. He knew the whole story. "Sure, have some sugar," he said. "You know—*live a little!*"

**T**hat weekend I did all of the things easily rattled people do after getting a threat from a would-be serious source. I worked out elaborate plans for leaving the country and suffered bad hypochondriacal episodes. Why was I sweating at night? Was I sick? And what was that pain in my abdomen? It made some eerie kind of sense that I would get a lymphoma by chance just exactly at the moment I had imperiled my life by design.

I missed my family. One thing about being home: You never feel farther than a phone call away from having all

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## TOP TEN WAYS TO AVOID APPEARING IN BASSWORLD

1. Mention you know his parole officer
2. Ask him to sign a copy of "You'll Never Make Love in this Town Again"
3. Wear garlic around your neck
4. Tell him that Sean Penn is in the other room, and Sean doesn't like flashbulbs
5. Ask him to put an apple on his head and to stand 100 meters away
6. Cancel your subscription to "Pre-Teens in White Panties"
7. Follow him around and pat his head
8. Hire Beverly Hills Club security staff to follow you to restaurant opening parties
9. Have hair
10. Carry a copy of the *eXile* with you at all times

\* If you are female and under the age of 15, sorry, there's nothing we can do to help you - seek professional help immediately!

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your worries taken care of. I considered performing some awful mea culpa before Bass in Moscow, then hurrying back to my parents' homes in New York and Boston. Apologize, cry on my mother's shoulder, and start over, with a smarter, safer life plan.

But I just couldn't imagine it. The idea of going home, to the awful "real world," made me want to cry. I felt trapped. So after a few days I went back to Moscow on a night train.

**A**t the time I was living with that old *Moscow Times* friend of mine, Owen Matthews. I was pulling a Kato Kaelin in his luxurious apartment just south of the police headquarters on Petrovka Street. Owen and I went way back, but our relationship had changed lately. Two years before, we'd been the staff fuck-ups on the *Moscow Times*. He was a prematurely middle-aged Oxonian with slicked-back thinning hair and tight stretch slacks, while I was a dopey American who wore sneakers to work and didn't know who the Prime Minister was, and together we spent a whole summer loudly not getting laid. We had all kinds of ideas, some as dumb as just walking up and down the fabled Arbat street at night, politely leering at passersby, and hoping for a random act of God. But nothing worked, no matter how much Owen in his nervous lilt talked about "parking porky in the pigpen" in the MT stairwell where we all hung out smoking cigarettes.

Back then, Owen had been constantly broke and we'd both often borrowed money from each other when we had nothing left to buy food (or, in Owen's case, pay for cab fare—Oxonians don't take the subway). Now, however, Owen's operating nut was much bigger. His schmoozing skills had soared in those two years and he was inundated with pricey freelance assignments from splashy European magazines. And during the Bass affair, he was just about to be given a job on the bureau of *Newsweek*—the coveted reporter job in the city. He had a big stuccoed two-bedroom apartment with tasteful paintings he'd bought at auctions, delicate sugar bowls and other kitchen accoutrements, and a hardworking maid who came three times a week; Owen hadn't done a dish in over a year. He'd also honed his technique in two years and now had a fairly steady flow of not entirely ugly women who entered his apartment wary and doe-legged on weekend nights and sometimes gave in under heavy rhetorical pressure. Meanwhile my cash flow was next to nil and I was sacking out in his second bedroom for free,

smoking his dope and burdening his maid with my filthy underthings. And my social life was limited to a couple of disastrous low-sex entanglements with hysterical Russian teenagers, whose sloppy denouements reflected the excessive amount of time I'd been spending worrying about my newspaper.

"You shouldn't have done that to Bass," said Owen, when I came home. "He's really upset."

I stared at him. Was it possible that my roommate had been talking, socially, to someone who had just threatened to kill me? Dressed in a green silk robe, Owen leaned back in his chair and took a drag on a Gitanes. I knew him well and knew he had a weird Moriarty-esque flair for moral ambiguity—an admiration for poisoners, plotters, and turncoats, for stylish and desperate scoundrels. It was some sort of literary pose he had picked up at Oxford, and it freaked me out. I knew he liked to hedge his bets and play both sides of the fence, but I wouldn't have guessed he would have done that here. I was caught totally by surprise.

He kept laughing at me, trying to explain to me that Bass wasn't going to kill me, but the reasons he was giving were very conspicuously *reasons*—like that Bass was too much of a coward—not arguments that the whole thing was ridiculous, or even meaningless reassuring phrases like, "You have nothing to worry about," which I guess was what I wanted to hear. Then he'd get farther down on his cigarette and try to convince me to apologize to Bass, or print a retraction.

After that, I no longer felt safe at home.

Days passed, nothing happened, and finally Mark came back. A true friend, he jumped immediately into my corner, answering the phone when Bass called and telling him that he had okayed the piece, that it had been a joint decision. Now both of us were responsible.

By now the next issue was looming. Mark, Bass, and I entered into negotiations, which were annoyingly arbitered by the conspicuously unwelcome Owen, who kept calling the office late at night to press Bass's case. Bass wanted a retraction at most and a chance to tell his side of the story at the least. I insisted that, in light of the death threat, I would no longer publish his side of the story, unless I could publish a piece detailing the threats he'd made against me.

Bass hedged, then finally agreed. And here's where the story became really comic. The would-be assassin suddenly, on the phone, transformed into a meek freelancer.

"Does it need to be typed?" he asked.

"That would be nice," I said.

"Because I like to write by hand," he said.

"Well, whatever," I said. "We can type it in."

"What about spelling and grammar?" he asked. "My spelling isn't too good."

I paused. "Well," I said. "Try your best."

"Okay," he said brightly. "I'll get this right to you. It'll be there in a jiffy. I'll enjoy this!"

Three hours later a handwritten letter spilled over our fax machine. Mark and I read greedily. Filled with atrocious spelling and grammar mistakes, it was manna from heaven. The text was the work of a stone-cold obvious sex criminal. No one who read it could doubt that Bass belonged on a warning poster in every battered women's shelter in the world. My favorite part is his reference to the "alleged [sic] 1983 trip to Paris with a girl who in the book pretends to have never met me in Kansas but only [sic] in her imaginary trip of 83. [Eds. Note: If the trip was imaginary, that was strange, since Bass had contended to me that one

of the holes in "Liza's" story was that she was on the 15th floor of the Paris Hilton, not the second.] She was tripping that's [sic] for sure."

In any case, here is the whole text:

"Who Says I'll Never Make Love in This Town Again?"  
by Michael Bass

"On Monday my legal team of Joseph J. Perrini and Raymond Markovich filed a \$70,000,000 libel suit in N.Y. Supreme Court against Dove Books, its distributor, lawyers and private investigative firm which are all supposed to vet the book for at least obvious slander. And of course let's not forget Liza Greer Journalist/Hooker and of course my X lover who's intro reads under goals 'to finish high school and become a counselor to help other prostitutes and drug addicts.' Well maybe she was Claudia Schiffer in appearance and Jethro Boden in brains but she was appealing to me in the late 1970s when I was in my early twenties Looking back she was like a boomerang which kept returning to my door step. Finally in late 1982 I refused to see her. Enter the tale of 1983 recreated 15 years later with the exact recall or flash back of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz and full of imaginary people taking an imaginary trip. Lots of characters in this book Rod Stewart, Olivia Newton John, Vanna White, James Caan, Timothy Hutton, Jack Nicholson, Warren Beatty, Don Henley, Dennis Hopper, Sylvester Stallone, Stephano Caserachi, George Harrison and Hugh Hefner to name drop a few.

"For those of you who have a life and are unfamiliar with Dove Books they are devoted to publishing smut written by X wives of personalities etc. Although I am about the least known figure in the book I am unfortunately the only one living in Moscow. Most of what is written is not contested by celebrities who prefer to ignore such books as this one in order not to further promote the lies contained inside. However since the book couldn't get any more publicity than the *eXile* already provided I will respond. Let's face it these girls did Oprah and every other talk show. Most of what was written about the others was behind closed doors and very difficult to contest. However I hope to lead the way by filing the first suit and calling everyone to join as a plaintiff or witness. My case is supported by solid facts the chapter devoted to me makes reference to an alleged 1983 trip to Paris with a girl who in the book pretends to have never met me in Kansas, but only in her imaginary trip of '83. She was tripping that's for sure

So right now realize how easy it is to get  
bureau this talk about trials is considering  
fiction. I my own mother language YES  
man I could have found a better way to  
entertain the boys. I hope to receive  
a quick settlement and apology letter  
from the publisher and my X who  
probably would see it just that way  
I of course apologize to everyone  
who come in contact with me these  
last two weeks. I was upset about  
being singled out without you the  
reader getting the benefit  
of laughing through this juvenile  
set of Whore or stores by  
7 in 7 UN HAPPY Hooker  
who wasn't even 300 at night  
flight lying down and turning  
to lying the most pure form  
of prostitution. Most humiliating  
for me was coming from  
the girl who came close to stalk  
me for over four years calls me  
1) an ugly arse & with 2) no person  
and 3) claims we never had sex  
I hope most will agree she's  
probably at least 3 wrong.

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"1) I was in America all of 1983

"2) I stopped seeing Liza in late 1982

"3) I never had the pleasure meeting the King of Saudi Arabia, King Fahd

"4) I never stayed in the Paris Hilton, I prefer the Ritz

"5) I never had Armed Arabic security guards dressed in traditional attire wondering the champs ellysee with me—defiantly bizarre and Anti-Arab in nature!

"6) The whole chapter was written for illiterate housewives from Nebraska who think Naked Gun is a movie based on facts, Oliver North was telling the truth and corn should never be eaten off the Cobb.

"7)a) I am wondering why no one checked Liz's passport, hotel registration, plane ticket, immigration record, or I.Q. before print.

"b) How could she have yelled from the room and no one spoke English in Paris.

"c) Or maybe Inspector Cues should have questioned her tying two bed sheets together and then crawling from the third floor window like cattleman

"d) Eating lumpy oatmeal in a cheap hotel near the Champs Elise

"Maybe when your goal is cash accuracy and truth don't count.

"For those of you who have been in the spotlight, you realize how easy it is to get burned, and this tale about tails should be considered fiction. For my own mother I answer yes Mom I could have found a better way to entertain the king. I hope to receive a quick settlement and apology letter from the publisher and my x who probably would sign it just that way I of course apologize to everyone who came into contact with me these last two weeks. I was upset about being singled out without you the reader getting the benefit of laughing through this juvenile set of whore ER stores by this most UN HAPPY Hooker who couldn't earn 300 at Night Flight lying down and turned to lying the most pure form of prostitution. Most humiliating for me was coming from the girl who came close to stalking me for over four years calls me 1) an ugly nerd with 2) no personality and 3) claims we never had sex. I hope most will agree she's probably at least 2/3 wrong.

"If I ever wind up in a sex scandal again I hope I can be present and at least enjoy mycelia when I get screwed. As for Stallone, Nickolson Beatty and company. You'll never make love in this town and probably have to give up your careers. For me since I never made love in the book I hope next time I at least get the girl and more respect than Rodney Dangerfield."

**W**e got his piece at 1 A.M. on production night. I was thrilled and had no intention of altering it. Bass's own text was my best defense. But then he called me, like any other freelancer would, and asked how I liked the article.

"So, what do you think?" he said. "Was it good?"

"It . . . had something," I said.

"Was it funny?" he asked hopefully. He was like a schoolkid.

"Yes," I said honestly. "It was."

"Listen," he said. "Can you clean up the grammar and the spelling for me? I know there are a few mistakes."

"I . . . what? No way!" I said. "Michael, you're a professional writer. You also threatened to kill me not long ago. Did you forget that? There's no way I'm going to edit your piece. You're a grown man and you can handle it."

"But I'll look illiterate," he said, dejected. He sounded shocked that I would betray him like this.

"Well," I said. "There's not a whole lot I can do about that."

"Look," he said. "I'll get someone to clean it up for me, and then I'll send it back to you, okay? Just give me a minute."

"It's pretty late," I said.

"Just hold on."

Two hours later a conspicuously cleaner, but no less demented, version of Bass's letter spilled over our fax. I looked at my watch, consulted with Mark, and together we decided to fuck him. The first version was funnier. And we wanted whoever had helped him—and we were pretty sure it was Owen—to have wasted those after midnight hours. We ran the first letter, then didn't speak to him for months.

But Bass wasn't done. Later that year, toward the end of the summer, he somehow managed to get himself hired by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy as an imagemaker. Shunned by almost everyone in the foreign community after years of shenanigans and public scandals—including the *eXile* affair—Bass suddenly arose from the dead and started zooming around town in a Russian ZiL limousine (including a friendly stop at an *eXile* riverbank party), organizing press conferences and getting Zhirinovskiy in the news. The whole thing was surreal; Bass spoke almost no Russian at all and was, very conspicuously, an American Jew, a strange partner for an ultranationalist anti-Semite like Zhirinovskiy. It was the kind of thing that only made sense if you'd been living in Moscow for years.



Meanwhile, life had been moving steadily along at the *eXile*. We'd kept after Bass since the death-threat incident, feeling that he was game as long as he was still employed by the *Trib*. His sickly-sweet column had become more lovey-dovey than ever, and even featured pictures of Bass siding up to terrifying LogoVaz chief Boris Berezovsky—one of the most feared men in Russia—and describing him as being “in fine form” at a function at the Radisson-Slavyanskaya hotel. We responded with our own version of “Bassworld”: The paper, in that time, had been growing; the Bass issue had caused us to be an eagerly anticipated scandal sheet, and as the summer progressed our revenues steadily rose as Kara stormed around town on her giant haunches extorting ad revenue out of restaurants and clubs. Owen and I reconciled after I matched his treachery by coming home drunk one night and hurling his visiting elderly father, a pretentious and irritating former British spy, across the room into the wall. The father-beating incident left us even and on good terms.

Bass's hiring as a Zhirinovskiy aide made it inevitable that we would cross paths with him again. When the popular daily *Moskovsky Komsomolets* ran a feature of Bass with a shocking photograph of him, we found ourselves scrambling to find any story that would support putting that photograph on an *eXile* cover. We set to work digging up old and new Bass material, and in the meantime an angel visited—and arranged a guest spot for me on a new talk show.

The show was called *Akuli Pera*, or Sharks of the Quill, and was intended to be a forum for young political activists and journalists to ask questions of leading Russian political figures. When I was invited, through a contributor to our sister publication, *Ne Spa*, I was told the guest was going to be Gorbachev. But when I arrived at the set on a Saturday morning, word filtered around that the guest was going to be Zhirinovskiy.

Sick and twisted as he was, I liked Zhirinovskiy. I knew that, for the greater good, he should probably be shot, but he's at least funny—really funny, funnier than anyone in American public life. Once, years before, after he'd announced an intention to reclaim Alaska, I'd approached him at a press conference and asked him if he really planned to take Alaska back.

“Where are you from?” he quipped.

“Boston,” I said.

“We'll take Boston too,” he said.

Now, here I was, dressed in a new suit early in the morning, waiting to face Zhirinovskiy at a talk show—and for once, in my whole career of press conferences, I had a *real*

question to ask. About midway through the show, after the other young panelists had fired away a few questions about politics and started the great bullshitter rolling, I reached for the mike.

“About your new imagemaker Michael Bass . . .” I said.

“Michael, right, I've got one of those,” he said.

“Did you know he'd done time in America for fraud?”

“Of course,” Zhirinovskiy said. “So what?”

“But that doesn't bother you, right?” I said, knowing the answer. A few years back, the Interior Ministry had released a report showing that Zhirinovskiy's party, the LDPR, had over a dozen convicted felons in it. His party was the Oakland Raiders of politics—the place you go when you've fucked up one too many times. Its Duma headquarters had a great reputation for parties.

“No way,” Zhirinovskiy said, smiling. “Michael has fulfilled his societal obligations. . . . And in general, there's no such thing as a clean family. Dig deeply enough into any family, and you'll always find someone who's done time. It's normal.”

The crowd applauded. I smiled. The exchange was shown on national television a few months later.

After that exchange Mark and I scrambled to get 2,000 words' worth of material on Bass ready and handed Ilya, our mad-scientist designer, a special picture of Bass, which had been taken at the Beverly Hills Club/casino a few weeks before.

This was a serious photograph. It had been taken after Bass had tried to force himself and Zhirinovskiy into a banquet for ambassadors at the club. When security had denied them entrance—mainly because Zhirinovskiy archenemy Boris Nemtsov was expected to dine at the event—Zhirinovskiy called every news network in Moscow to cause a scandal. Once they were inside the club, Bass got into an argument with Ivan X—I can't and won't use his real name here—a fearsome local heavy in the Moscow gaming world. X, a giant hippopotamus-sized monster of a man who wore a size-56 suit, eventually lost his patience with Bass and smashed a whiskey glass on the American's bald head, crunching the splinters into his skull. The victim ran shrieking out of the restaurant, where he was met by a patiently waiting *Moskovsky Komsomolets* photographer who took the fateful photo.

There was an ugly undercurrent to this story. After the incident, Zhirinovskiy and co. pushed Bass to press charges against Ivan X for assault. The problem there was that X was said to be a very heavily connected member of the Izmailovo mafia gang—some of the scariest people in the

**Bassworld Retrospective: Berlin, 1937**

Like many people in the expat community, we were startled last week to read the entry in the Moscow Tribune society column "Bassworld," where favorite exile suspect Michael Bass hinted at a friendship—and a set of mutual personal problems—with scary LogoVaz chief Boris Berezovsky.

"Boris Berezovsky," he wrote, using his trademark hold key, "was in great form as he entered the Sad-Sam Summer Solstice party.

"While enjoying the BBQ, he fielded questions regarding everything from Anatoly Chubais to his slander suite [sic] against Forbes Magazine. We agreed to meet soon as it was difficult to hear over the West African band Melonge..."

Bass's flattering name-drops of figures like Berezovsky and others struck us as strange until we received word that he's done this for years. Many years, in fact. Professor Sam Weissov at Moscow State University sent us a note and a copy of a rare newspaper clipping: the society column from the 1937 Berlin expatriate newspaper the *Berlin Tribune*, at the time the third-leading English-language paper in Berlin. It seems Bass, who at the time was still a mere 47 years old, learned his journalism skills in a very fertile environment,



By Moenkle Basse

**IMAGE REICH**

SS Colonel Karl Koch finally held his posh ribbon-cutting at the sparkling new Buchenwald camp. S.D. chief Reinhard Heydrich organized everything, from the largest ice carving of its kind to a limbo contest with camp guards. S.S. chief Heinrich Himmler did not disappoint us, coming in his trademark black shirt, and even entertaining us by grabbing a watermelon and doing a very funny impersonation of Jesse Owens after the ceremony. Franz von Papen, fresh from declaring a state of emergency in former Prussia, was in fine form as he tested the nozzles in Buchenwald's swank new "shower" room.



**Herr Goebbels and Herr Goering relaxing**

While enjoying the buffet, he fielded questions regarding everything from the planned annexation of Austria to the Reich's grievance suit against the League of Nations, though it was difficult to hear over the 178-piece band commissioned by stylish state architect Albert Speer, who

added very high pillars of light. We had hitched a ride with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, who was in town for talks with Reich Foreign



**Basseworld**



**Admiral Doenitz at the helm**

Secretary Herman Ribbentrop. "Vyach" tasted sauerkraut and kartofelpuffer and confided in us that he and Herman were planning to study Polish together, which made us feel bad that we had never studied in school. The 4th annual Berlin Book Burning was hosted at the Herrenhof by one of our favorite government members,



**Keitel looking sharp**

Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels. We warmed our hands by a fire which consumed the books of Thomas Mann,

Erich Maria Remarque, Jack London, H.G. Wells and many Jewish writers. The gathering was a good opportunity for the Minister to

educate us about the goals of the Reich. He said the flames not only illuminated the end of an old era, but they also lit up the new. We wish him every success. Julius Streicher, editor of *Der Sturmer*, dropped by the ceremony in his new Mercedes. In 1923 in Munich we were invited to drink at the beer halls by The Fuhrer almost every evening. In those evenings Julius was always very aloof. Only in Berlin did I realise it wasn't attitude, but a combination of shyness and thoughts of more important things, such as religion, family, and literature.



**Brau at the Herrenhof**

We should have realised Julius was not a Bertoldt Brecht type. Julius has been helping the effort to protect Christian children from having their blood used to make matzoh in Passover ceremonies. His effort in distributing *Der Sturmer* to Palestine has saved thousands of Christian children there. As Julius told us, "It just got in my gut. I felt I had to

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The *eXile's* party  
of "Bassworld."

do something." Julius, we're glad you came out of your shell. We received a lovely invitation from S.D. researcher Adolf Eichmann to a trial for 17 attractive young "race defilers." Sad to say but in this country many young women go astray. Of course they were all found guilty and that's what they deserve. Finally we were treated to a very special visit to the Eagle's nest with the Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler, his lovely young companion Eva Braun, Magda and Josef Goebbels, Herr Himmler (again!), and Lutwaffe head Hermann Goering. We had an excellent Crepe Suzette which many said we would all be eating more of very soon. After dinner the Fuhrer invited us to watch a new screening of Lefi Reifensahl's excellent film *The Triumph of the Will*. The Fuhrer, as always an excellent critic, said the well-shot film was very good but maybe showed him in too flattering a light. But we all quickly reassured him that there could never be too flattering a light for the deliverer of our nation from sensational Yellow journalism.



The Fuhrer, Himmler and Mr. Basse hangin'

city. Pressing charges against him was like asking to be assassinated. And if any American in Moscow was going to be killed, it was Bass. Already his friends Paul Tatum, a partner in the Radisson hotel project, and Joseph Glotser, the director of the strip club "Dolls," had been killed in the previous twelve months for various reasons, and those two people both had had many more friends than Bass.

Bass was playing a dangerous game. He was probably banking that Zhirinovskiy and the LDPR would protect him, a near-delusional assumption given Zhirinovskiy's crew's attitude toward American Jews. And it was at the peak moment of his stress that we blindsided him with our cover story—25,000 copies of his bloodied head, seen in the beginning of this chapter, plastered in every hotel and restaurant, every place that Bass did business in town.

The text was unsensational, although we outed his criminal record and added a few other choice anecdotes, such as the story of his brief tenure as the manager of boxer Julio Cesar Chavez—Bass in the eighties had tried unsuccessfully to swipe Chavez away from Don King (accusing the multigazillionaire King of cheating Chavez out of a whopping \$4,700) and been quickly moved out of the boxing world. In any case, after it came out, we sat in our new office—since the death-threat story, we'd moved to a bigger, cleaner, more modern facility on the other side of town—and waited by the phone.

Finally, a few days after the story came out, Bass called. He sounded tired and dejected on the phone—in fact, he was too down even to threaten me. All he did was take issue with a few lines in the piece.

"You write here that 'even otherwise-intelligent basketball star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar allowed himself to be photographed' with me," he sighed. "Why say that? Am I so disgusting that you have to use language like that?"

"The piece was written . . . from a certain point of view," I said.

He sighed again. He was sighing two or three times between every sentence. Next he complained that I had published a picture of his handwritten letter.

"It really hurts me that you pick on my writing," he said. "I don't see why that's relevant."

"It wouldn't be, except that you do it for a living," I said. "You write for a competitor. You use your column to gain access to ambassadors and all sorts of people."

"But, you know, I'm a dyslexic," he said. "How could you pick on me like that? I can't help it that my grammar is bad."

"Michael," I said. "I'm sorry you're a dyslexic. But you don't see any midgets playing for the Knicks, do you? Being a midget doesn't make someone a bad person. But it certainly rules out his playing pro basketball."

"That letter I wrote to you, I wrote under duress," he protested. "I didn't have time to edit it. That's why it came out like that."

"Michael . . ." I said.

I hesitated, beginning to feel sorry for him. He had that effect because he was so obviously weak and vulnerable. But then I remembered everything I knew about this guy. He would promise sixteen-year-old girls trips to Europe, if only they'd blow him in his limousine. He went to clubs and rang up thousand-dollar bills and walked out. He was violent and vicious with women. And he had, of course, threatened to kill me in the spring, and was probably thinking of doing it again now. Worst of all, he wrote for the *Moscow Tribune*. I shook my head and pressed ahead.

"When I have to write fast, I don't make mistakes," I said. "That's because I'm a professional writer. You're clearly not."

## A REAL BASSHOLE!



**THIS ZIPPERHEAD'S A WINNER!** When we first spotted this Michael Bass costume at the giant GosOrgHalloween party at the planetarium two weeks ago, we thought it was Bass, it was so convincing. Turns out it was just a great costume—and the first reason we've had to give away one of our prized propeller hats. Brian, if you see this, and we're sure you will, give us a call at 267-41-59 and arrange to pick up a hat you could probably use. And by the way, we were too drunk to get you a t-shirt that night...



"But I'm funny, aren't I?" he said, hopefully. "I've got style, don't I?"

"You've got personality," I said. "But you can't say you're a good writer, because you're not. And I'm in a position to judge. I'm sorry."

He was quiet for a while. Then, finally, he spoke up.

"You know I'm pressing charges against Ivan X," he said.

"I know," I said. "I'm sure you know what you're doing. I wish you luck."

"It would make a pretty good story if I got killed, wouldn't it?" he said. "Wouldn't it?"

I paused. "Well, no one wants to see you get killed," I said. "Why don't you just leave the country?"

"Because I believe in sticking up for what's right," he said.

"Really?" I said.

"Well . . ." he said, sighing one more time. I thought he might cry. "I don't know. Anyway, I was very upset by your piece. It ruined my charity efforts."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Good-bye," he said, and hung up.

A few weeks later it was Halloween. Mark had again left the country, heading off to France to gorge himself on rich food and visit with his weird Californian family; when he came back, Kara and Marcus announced that they were leaving the company. A period of intense stress followed, with the result that we hired a beautiful, daffy American blonde, Nicole Mollo, to replace the scheming husband-wife duo. Sales dipped, then Mark's old rhetoric professor, John Dolan, dropped in from New Zealand for a visit; we all snorted a lot of drugs in semidarkness, in front of a flickering television, for about a week, then the two of them left me alone to emcee a giant Halloween party that Mark had weaseled us into.

Prior to the party, I'd written a bit in our gambling page about Bass, daring our readers to come to the party dressed as our archenemy. The costume, I said, was simple—shave your head, stick a bunch of zippers on it, and enter the party trailed by hired assassins.

Raving drunk, I ascended the stage at the party in a toga and gave away a bunch of T-shirts, bobbing and weaving to avoid flying tomatoes (I'd distributed a bunch to the audience).

"Fucking queer," someone in the band said, behind me.

"Have a T-shirt," I said, tossing him one.

There had to have been 500 people at the party, which was called GosOrgHalloween—the wildest thing I'd ever

seen in Moscow. It was a shock for me; I don't get out much. And I'd come to Russia in the first place precisely because it was grim. In any case, I didn't have too much time to think; the crowd screamed for the band, and it was time to get down.

When I got down, I saw a bald head leaning over the bar. Michael Bass! Or was it? I walked over and looked at the figure. It wasn't Bass, but a guy named Brian whom I knew because he'd moved into my apartment when I'd left for Mongolia the year before. He'd shaved his head and stuck zippers on it, and drawn bloodstains all over himself.

"Nice costume," I said.

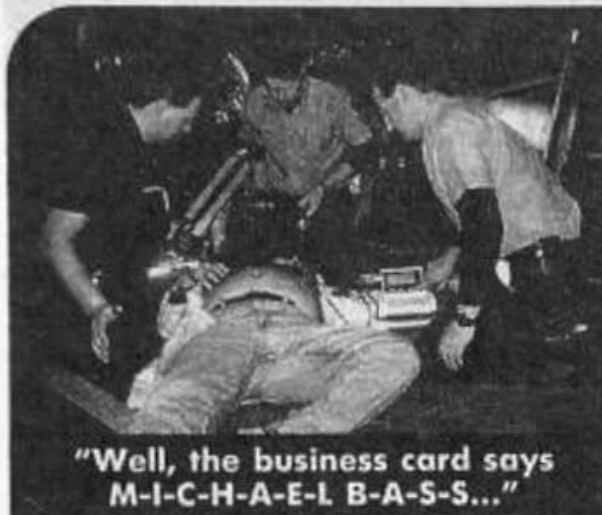
"Thanks," he said.

Nouveau pop-icon Bass himself was nowhere to be found. He'd been keeping a pretty low profile lately. He was still alive, but the Ivan X thing had him really rattled. Club owners reported not seeing him at any of the major hangouts. And Zhirinovskiy quickly dropped him. But he didn't go home: there were all sorts of rumors about why he wouldn't, or couldn't, go back to the United States, and he had apparently decided to stick it out in Moscow.

Just before Christmas, Mark and I met with a guy named Andrei Alexandrov, the director of *Kak Bui*, a new club near our office. *Kak Bui* had previously been a gay club called "Exit," and previous to that been a gay club called "Banana." It had been shut down in both incarnations for various reasons, and in the latter stages of its

the *eXile*

## Death Porn



"Well, the business card says M-I-C-H-A-E-L B-A-S-S..."

### Boy, Was He Pissed!

The *eXile* award for most twsited crime of the year so far goes to 46 year-old Alexander Petrov of the Tombov oblast, who left six people charred and burnt in the hospital after a freakish botched murder-suicide. A veteran mechanic at a sovkhos in the tiny village of Verkhnyaya Yaroslavka, Petrov, like just about everyone else in the provinces these days, was pissed over not having received his salary for months. Unlike most others, however, he decided to do something about it. On the after-

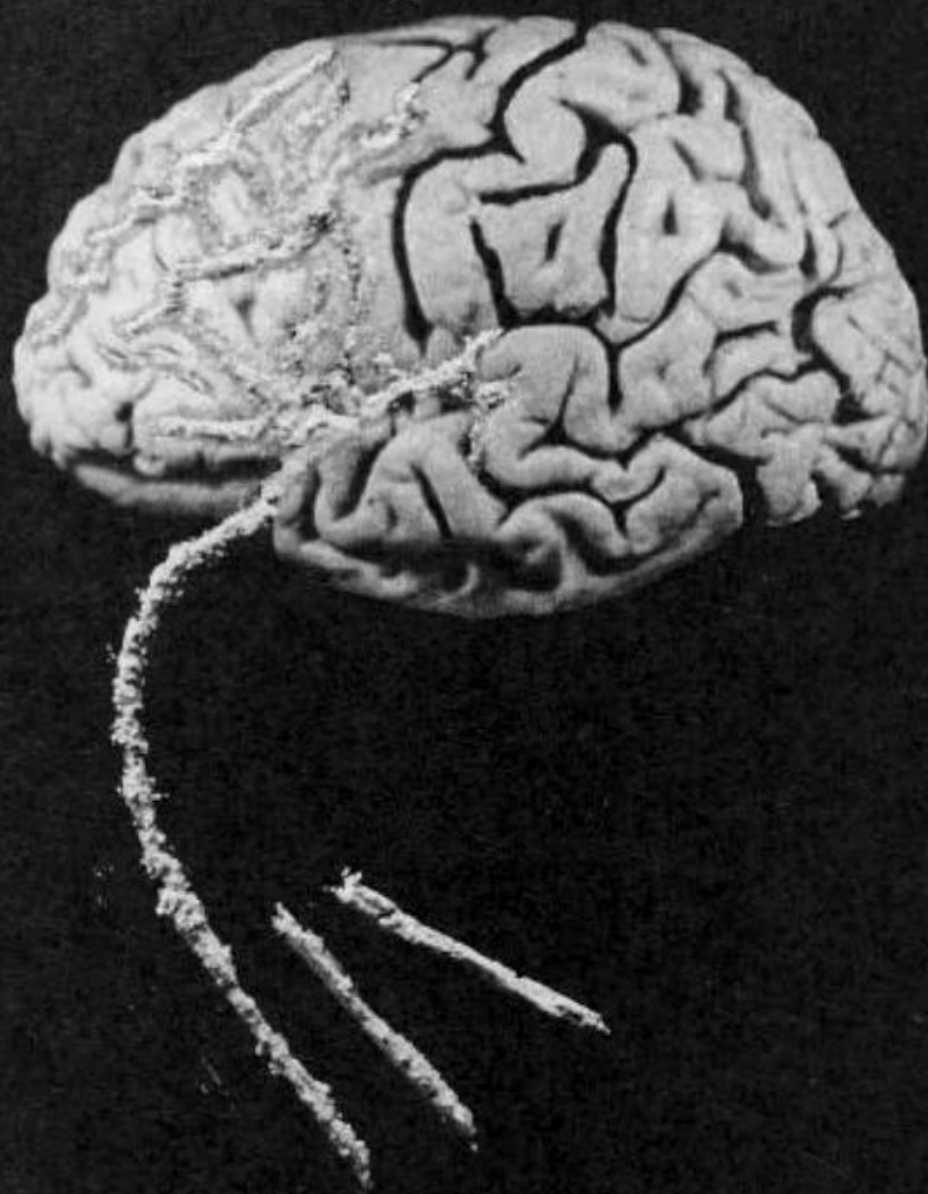
noon of May 16 he entered the office of the sovkhos administration, poured gasoline all over the floor and over himself, and dropped a match to the ground. Within minutes the entire first floor of the small building was in flames, and the five workers who were at their desks on the second floor came barreling down the stairs to head for the exit. The only problem was that Petrov, by now himself engulfed in flames, was blocking the one door to the building. When a woman attempted to move past him, he stabbed her with a plastic-handled knife. Eventually, however, the remaining four managed to overpower him and burst out the door. Farm firefighters arrived quickly enough to put out the fire and the flaming Petrov, who by then had passed out in shock on the first floor. All six people were taken to a hospital in Tambov and remain in serious condition. Petrov, if he lives, will be charged with attempted murder and arson.

existence as "Exit" had been the emptiest, saddest club in Moscow. It had since been redone in loud spray paint and had a new straight, "funk" image it was hoping to project. Alexandrov was a nice guy, but the club seemed doomed, and as a business it had the desperate, expectant feel of a kids' lemonade stand.

"I had a visit from a guy named Michael Bass," Alexandrov told us, laughing in the quiet of his empty club. "He told me that he could come in, be my general manager, and take fifteen percent of my profits. I said to him, 'No Thank you.' What a weirdo!

"Anyway," he said, "I think things will pick up around here. Once I have a sign made for the outside, anyway."

+ дорожка



- извилина

