

CHAPTER SEVEN:

VANITY AND SPLEEN

“Someday this war’s gonna end . . .”

Robert Duvall, *Apocalypse Now*



hen I received my first hate-mail letter, I was terrified. Not just ordinary-terrified, but the kind of undignified panic that they never show in the movies: I was the guy on the sinking ship screaming like a bitch . . . kicking mothers in the teeth for their life jackets, tossing their children overboard to make leg-room for myself in the lifeboat.

It came via land mail to the *Living Here* offices. I didn't know that land mail actually made it anywhere in Russia. Especially into the Soviet tangle of buildings and annexes in which our office was hidden. Even the crusty, hunched security guards who stood inside the double-doored entrance in their worn gray Soviet suits, army stripes pinned to the breast, reeked of peeled yellow Brezhnevian incompetence: there's no fucking way on earth they'd let a piece of mail get through the door. *Living Here* was located on Gazetny Pereulok, dom 3 (just down the street from my first office, where I'd sold wine and Seagram's liquor in late 1993), a huge yellow and white turn-of-the-century building that the government leased out for free to the Gaidar Institute.

In turn, the Gaidar Institute leased out space to businesses for its own profit. The Gaidar Institute was set up as a Russian think tank to assist the government in its economic reforms. The Institute was founded by Yegor Gaidar, the first Prime Minister of Russia, the frog-faced architect of “reform” and “shock therapy” and every other curse word associated with capitalism in Russia. Gaidar is the guy responsible for shaking down the entire Russian population, and handing over their belongings to a few well-placed comrades. He will go down in Russian folklore as one of the

most terrifying villains ever to set foot on Mother Rus—his name will be invoked by parents to scare their children into going to bed and brushing their teeth.

And now, he was *Living Here*'s landlord. For the small two-room space, no more than twenty square meters in all, we paid a whopping \$1,500 a month. And to top it off, the fucker never fixed our heating or faulty telephone lines. Gaidar was learning the landlord trade quickly. A real reformed kinda guy, that Gaidar: from *Homo Sovieticus* into *Homo Mr. Roperius of Three's Company*.

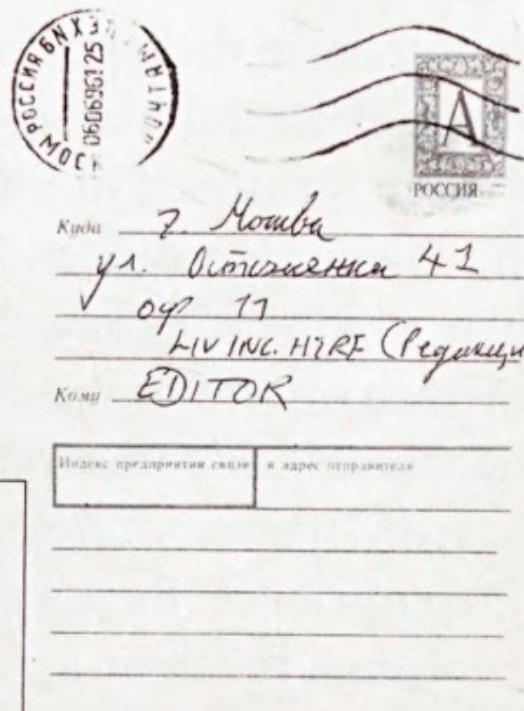
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How could a hate-mail letter actually make it from one place in Moscow to another, then into a mail slot for *Living Here*'s offices in the Gaidar Institute, all on account of me? You always heard rumors here that no one ever received anything more than a postcard. All the enveloped mail was taken to some location (in Moscow, the mail dump was reportedly somewhere near Sheremetyevo Airport), torn open by the half-starving, unpaid postal service employees, and stripped of any valuables. Then the remains were dumped in a huge, open lot, and that was that.

I stormed into the office and grabbed the letter from



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Perhaps the only letter in 1996 to have been successfully transferred from one point within the Russian Federation to another. It still burns to the touch.

Manfred's hands, noticing a strange, cringing expression on his face. I read the first paragraph, then looked up and tried to force a laugh. But it didn't come out. Just a squeak of some kind.

The dignified thing would have been to laugh it off, make a light James Bond-ish quip, then move on to some administrative matter. But instead, I panicked, and it showed.

"Who do you think sent this?!" I demanded.

Manfred shrugged. He didn't seem to want to talk about it much, although he did clearly enjoy seeing me panic.

"It was Owen, don't you think?" I said. "Or maybe Genine. Yeah, she's pissed off because I made fun of her cat in my column. You know how women are about their cats. Especially overweight, lonely American women. No wait,

this was written by a Brit, and Genine isn't a Brit, so it had to be Owen."

Manfred didn't reply. He just smiled with that feckless, Amsterdam-café-toothed expression of his. I think Andrei was in the office at the time too. Andrei was an effeminate street kid whom Manfred had "hired" to help design advertisements. He had wavy dark hair and the soft features and crooked white teeth of a prepubescent. Andrei could barely speak a word of English. He tried hard, but he couldn't. He had a learning disability of some kind. Probably Manfred's domineering way of dealing with Andrei didn't help. There

was something unpleasant about their relationship. I hated being in that office. Manfred was always more than willing to pile his own work on the poor kid so that he could go out drinking with his friends, making quirky, witty, Social Democratic wisecracks around the *stolovaya* or spouting Beigeist alterno-guy opinions on quirky underground bands. A bunch of fucking Schweiks, all of 'em.

I couldn't read the whole thing until I got home. I stuffed it into my bag and turned to leave. Manfred made me go eat a meal with him in the cockroach-infested Gaidar Institute cafeteria (the real Gaidar was dining down the road at the 5-star Metropol Hotel). I couldn't eat my cabbage soup. My heart was beating into my ears. I slung my bag over my shoulder and headed home, dry mouth, pouring sweat. It was a thirty-minute walk home, down the poplar and birch-lined promenade on



Dutchman Manfred Witteman eyes his advertising underling Andrei like a toasted Gouda sandwich.

the Bulvar Ring, past the statue of Gogol, whom I reverentially bowed to as always on my way past. I lived in a tilted studio apartment in the Kropotkinskaya district. My building even had a name, "Bolsheviks," in honor of the lower-level functionaries who were rewarded for their quiet, unflinching servitude by getting apartments in this prestigious region. It wasn't the highest quality building: although only 20 years old, the brick apartment block already had its problems. Wall plaster crumbling and peeling. Doors that didn't close. Balconies giving way. The Stalin-era buildings are the only quality ones in Russia. After that, everything went downhill.

The elevator in my apartment building was broken, so I had to march up seven flights of stairs. By the time I got into my apartment, I was a human amphibian—a terrified human amphibian... it was all too familiar, like being back in the suburbs of California: scared and sweaty. Intellectually, I had to tell myself, no, this isn't the suburbs, this isn't California. But I wasn't convincing.

I opened the letter and read.

It hurt. It hurt even worse than I feared it would. Because I knew I'd have to publish it. Manfred had seen the letter. To attempt a cover-up, after he'd seen it, would be worse than fleeing. Much worse. That wasn't even an option. Was this how Nixon felt, opening the papers every morning?... 25,000 readers. 25,000! O, the humiliation! I was sure that the backlash was about to begin, that publishing it might bring other angry, disgruntled readers out of the woodwork. As in, the entire expat community. They'd gather below my window with torches and rakes and hoes! They'd drive me out of *Living Here* and out of town!

For the first eight months of *Living Here*'s existence, I'd sort of lived the literary equivalent of a Serbian sniper overlooking Sarajevo, taking the odd potshot at old ladies shopping for a loaf of bread, blowing the top of their skulls off... then taking long breaks to pound a bottle of *sljivovice* and chew the fat with Miloslav and Bosko. I didn't worry about the consequences of what I wrote because I spent most of my first year hiding. I mean *literally hiding*. I'd sneak up on the community with a couple of articles, whack them on the head with the proverbial rubber chicken, then flee back to my apartment. It was always the same: come production day, I'd get the courage up to write the kinds of things I'd always written for my own private pleasure: pure bile, unchecked invective. Then, the day the newspaper would come out, I'd suddenly be struck with a loss of courage: Why did I just do that?! They'll kill me! So I hid.

And when no backlash came, I'd crawl out of my hole, slowly build up my courage again, fire at defenseless civilians from my totally secured nest high up in the hills, flee back to the bunker, and brag to the partisans about the kid on the bicycle and how he rode around in a circle after I blew his head off... "Like a headless circus bear! Ha-ha-ha!" "Oh Ames, you're a card!"

My first direct target in the expat community was a Canadian photographer, Heidi Hollenger. She gained a crust of fame in Moscow by photographing the far-right

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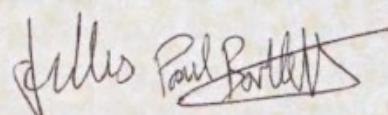
Dear Sir/Madam,

Consider the thought-provoking opinion piece from issue 14 of *Living Here*, written by People's Columnist Mark Ames. It dealt with the fascinating demi-monde of the Moscow expatriate literati, auspicious journalists from that august publication, the *Moscow Times*, and the esteemed editor-in-chief of *Living Here* himself.

On the one hand, the article railed against the inconsequential parochialism of features in the *Moscow Times*, whilst, on the other hand, emulating that very same thing.

When *Living Here* first appeared, we welcomed a refreshing alternative to the established English-language press, only to find that by its fourteenth issue it had become the antithesis of its former self. Perhaps the change in editorship is a fundamental reason for this. Mr Ames has metamorphosed into Jean MacKenzie. In a country which bombs its own citizens and in which the minimum wage cannot assure survival, he considers the reduced spending power of its expatriate community to be a "painful issue".

We wait with bated breath for issue 15. What burning questions will be on the agenda - shopping for cleaning products, tracking down Pampers, or maybe even interviewing nannies and maids?



Joanna Lillis
Paul Bartlett

opposition. She sweet-talked her way into the bedroom of Vladimir Zhirinovsky and got him to take off his pants for a photograph. She had been interviewed in the local press about her photos, and came across as a complete moron.

"I hate Americans," she was quoted as saying. "I was always a Marxist. I'd never date a Republican."

One expat invited me to her photography exhibition, at a gallery off Gogolevsky Bulvar. Why I went, I don't know—one of those masochistic thrills, I suppose. We came to the opening night party. The gallery was impressive in a kind of central European way, newly remodeled, white-painted walls, lacquered parquet floor, expensive industrial light fixtures that hung down from the ceilings. Most in

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attendance were sub-middlebrow expat barons, dressed as they thought they should for a photo exhibit: tweedy sports coats, modish skirts, lots of African silver on the necks and wrists. Free wine and cheese and crackers.

The expats crowded into the large room, talking, occasionally whispering about how bad they thought the pictures were, only to hush up if Hollenger rushed up to introduce someone to them. On the other side of the gallery, a small, shady group of fascists, the subjects of her photos, gathered, nervous and out of place. One was bearded and heavy. A few wore Soviet suits and stood uncomfortably, shifting from foot to foot, afraid to go near the wine and Brie, because the expats were gathered there. The only one who moved with ease from fascist to expat was Nazi-lite Sergei Baburin, the suave nationalist Duma deputy.

One of Heidi's friends, an American redhead grad student from Duke, bounced up and down when she saw Baburin. "Introduce me, introduce me!" I heard her cry.

She wore a tight black miniskirt with a skimpy tank top and black pumps, a halfway attempt at playing the *dyevushka*, very out of place on an angry-looking, makeup-less American grad student. Her corpse-white legs were covered in bright red mosquito bites. She didn't even try hiding them. When she met Baburin, he was cordial. He smiled blankly and held out his hand, bored and halfheartedly enjoying the attention. The expat men, for their part, were nervously discussing business and their planned vacations to Italy and Spain, keeping an eye out for Heidi, just in case they had to reiterate, in their loud, positive voices, how much fun they were having.

Heidi was dressed up in a peach dress and pearl necklace, like some sorority girl, entertaining everyone and guffawing in that loud, obnoxious way of hers. She acknowledged me once. "Who's this tall, handsome man?" she said, ironically.

It hurt bad, and triggered my worst panic attack since my stepfather's death. How was it that she—SHE—this MORON—got famous! She didn't deserve it! She'd never paid a red cent for that fame! She did nothing to *earn* it. It wasn't fair, wasn't fair at all. Fame of that sort wasted on a dumb, talentless dilettante who didn't mean a thing she said or did. Stolen from under my feet, scooped, scooped again!

I held that hatred of Hollenger as something sacred, a rallying point for my mind's troops. And issued my own internal *fatwah* to never forget her, to never let her get away with it. "The Hollenger Must Pay!" was chanted at many an angry student demonstration inside of my head, late at night.

So a year and a half after her photo exhibit, I held to my promise and wrote a column slamming her. Then hid. And nothing happened. I expected to run into her somewhere, but didn't. I expected a lawsuit, or a phone call. Instead, I even got a few compliments. As it turned out, most people who knew Hollenger even agreed.

Later, I hurled invective at the editors of the *Moscow Times*, particularly opinion page editor Michael Kazmarek, who'd banned me from ever writing for the *Moscow Times*. He told another journalist friend of mine, "Mark Ames is exactly the kind of writer whom I'd never publish in my opinion pages."

Like most cowards, I was emboldened by the lack of violent backlash. My strategy of keeping myself safe, up to that time, had been pretty foolproof. I had a small circle of acquaintances—about two or three—and my Belgian girlfriend.

Now, after getting that piece of hate mail, the honeymoon with Moscow's expat community had ended.

After receiving that letter, I hid for three days inside of my apartment, only slipping out to buy the basics, or to scurry down the block to Suzanne's apartment for some bland, boyfriend-girlfriend sex. The sex only increased the panic. I felt betrayal everywhere. I'd sulk back to my apartment and work and rework my editor's reply to the poison letter, but each one came off as serious and hurt and defensive. So I had to come up with a better response, if I wasn't going to look like an asshole. I had to mask my hurt, and go on the offensive. I couldn't fake James Bond nonchalance, but I could definitely try to fire a salvo of GRAD missiles.

In the next issue, I published the hate letter. And my reply. I was cheap and unfair. I picked apart the grammar mistakes, then, in a cheap shift to racism, accused the authors of hiding the fact that they were really just a lone, envious African student from the People's University in Southeast Moscow. *Fuck you, nigger! Learn how to write grammatical English, or shut the fuck up!* That was my response.

After printing it, I ran back and hid in my apartment, waiting for the building to be burned to the ground. I tried closing my curtains—until I remembered that in my studio, there wasn't even a curtain to close. Just some dark orange cloth hanging from a broken curtain rod. So I left the open part in the far corner, and quickly scuttled past it on my way from bathroom to bed. I waited for several days for the flames to rise, the windows smashed, smoke pouring in. . . . But the days went by, and nothing happened. Nothing at all.

My heroes were always hated figures. When I was seven years old, I discovered the old Oakland Raiders, the Jack Tatum and Kenny Stabler Raiders. Everyone in the suburbs where I lived rooted for the San Francisco 49ers. Declaring your allegiance to the 49ers wasn't just a shallow Sunday afternoon hobby. The 49ers were, in the besieged '70s, the glue that held the white suburban Bay Area together. Like having a Mexican maid and dragging yourself out for a game of tennis. Everything about the 49ers was Eisenhower-America: the red and gold uniforms, the quarterbacks with 4-H Club names like John Brodie and Steve Spurrier. . . . They were the kind of people you'd have a Sunday bar-b-que with. Even their black players were "good" blacks. They were golden retrievers with red bandanas, great for taking into the park and throwing the Frisbee to, harmless and friendly to everyone.

The Raiders, on the other hand, represented the threat to suburbia. In the early and mid-'70s, white suburbia was under siege in California from all sides. With Zebra killers and Black Panthers creeping around, whitey wasn't safe.

The Raiders played dirty, gratuitously—even stupidly so. They'd slug opponents in the head or bite their exposed flesh during a pileup. Jack Tatum put Daryl Stingley in a wheelchair for life after spearing him in the spine. They came from Oakland, home of the Black Panthers. Even the white people on the Raiders didn't look like "our" whites: unshaven, scraggly, overweight, crude, they looked more like truck drivers or Hell's Angels than grown-up homecoming kings. The Raiders didn't do charity functions or bar-b-ques. They banged speed and planted coke on unfriendly journalists. They wore black and silver. And their fans wore shower caps and Activator. They were gods to me. People from the suburbs didn't dare go to the Oakland Coliseum. My great-uncle, a selfless old ham, took me once. He was terrified, and so was I. He stopped making wisecracks the minute we stepped out of his convertible Cadillac in the parking lot, and absorbed the bloodshot stares of 50,000 Schlitz-soaked Negroes. I was eight years old, and I was sure we were both going to die. We escaped alive. It was the only Raiders game I ever went to.

The Raiders were just part of my problem. I was a curious child who always got into trouble. I started down that route at age seven. We broke into a neighbor's stash of Scotch whiskey, and drank so much that the youngest guy in our group nearly died from alcohol poisoning. A few months later, I convinced the same kid to help me try to light a neighbor's estate on fire. She was a crippled widow

who lived on a huge hill surrounded by 50-foot high pines and eucalyptus trees. The fire destroyed a shack at the bottom of the hill and about a half acre of land before the firemen put it out. I got off with a warning. A couple of months later, we took sharpened rocks and destroyed the car that belonged to the woman who had called the neighbors on us. Again, a warning, a few tears, and I was off scot-free.

At age eight, I was already a pothead and a kleptomaniac. I stole from every store I could—usually cigarettes, but also candies, posters, trinkets. I could never figure out why they never busted me. . . . The other kids always seemed to get busted. Maybe I was more slippery back then. Another time we went on a joyride in a neighbor's parents' car. The local sheriff ran us off the road. The car reeked of Panama Red. My brother and I got off with warnings; the others were put on probation.

My parents enrolled me in St. Andrews, a private Episcopalian school, in second grade. Two years later, after terrorizing the teachers and students, I was thrown out, and told that I was never allowed back on their property again.

That was when my parents divorced and we dropped a few socioeconomic rungs down the middle-class ladder. The American dream we had tried to live out had been under siege for years by hippies and intellectuals. By the mid-'70s, it was dead, for us at least. The hippies had won. Everything was turning upside down. Even my baby-sitters were fucked-up hippies. They were always wigging out on some drug or other when they came over. My parents had no idea: they were just getting used to the new world of singles bars and group therapy. Sometimes the baby-sitters' hippie boyfriends would come over and chew me and my brother out for molesting their teenage girlfriends. They were real disgusting trolls, those hippie boyfriends. One of them even smacked me. He's one smelly, hairy reason why I joined the Republican Party in the mid-'80s.

By high school, my spleen kicked into high gear. After getting stomped by jocks, I withdrew into the hills of my mind and trained. I learned how to be far meaner than the inarticulate surf-rats. How to hurt without getting hurt. It earned me the reputation of a real jerk. People talked about my problems at home. They talked a lot back then, about things I'd rather not get into. Let's just say that I took it all out on those who a) were meanest to me, and b) least likely to beat me up. That is: popular girls. I sent at least three of them packing from our high school, and helped trigger bulimia complexes in a few others.

I played football and tried to live out my heroes' lives

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from the Raiders of my childhood. I played defensive end, and I played cheap. My trademark was my “rip”: I’d swat the opposing lineman’s helmet with my padded fist, ringing his ears long enough for me to slip by.

In the last game of my my junior season, playing against Monte Vista High, a 225-pound black tight end complained to me. He told me to stop swatting him in the head. I didn’t. Then the ref told me to stop. And I didn’t. So the next play, he grabbed me by my jersey, ran me out near the sideline, lifted up the breast plate of my shoulder pads, and peppered me in the diaphragm with his fists, about thirty lightning blows, until I was blue and sucking for air. I lay on my back like a roach soaked in Raid, twitching. The ref watched the whole thing. I crawled up to the ref, and, gasping, wheezed, “He . . . hhie! . . . can’t . . . hhie! . . . do . . . hhhhhiieee! . . . that . . . hhie!” The ref shrugged. Ending my dreams of becoming Jack Tatum.

These incidents are the exciting parts, the bad-boy ones. But the other 99 percent of the time I spent playing the coward and collaborator, trying and failing to fit in with middle-class suburban California, vacillating between repeated failed attempts at trying to fit in, shame, and raw hatred.

No matter how much I tried stirring things up, I couldn’t even make a tiny ripple in the waters. The flat suburbs couldn’t be shaken. Not even the San Andreas Fault could fuck my suburb up.

My imagination, by most standards, was starting to take a major detour. The “R”-rated violent movies that they began showing in the early-’70s gave form to dormant fantasies. The earliest one I remember seeing was *Bluebeard*, a B-movie which graphically showed each mistress getting murdered in her own special way. Those murders were catalogued in my memory, and slated for permanent rerun on the local syndicate.

When *Jaws* came out, I was eight years old. I was so enthralled by the movie—particularly the scene where the half-eaten head floats out from under a boat wreck—that I bought the book and devoured it. I’ll never forget the way that Peter Benchley described that first shark mauling of the hippie girl in the surf: “crushing her organs like jelly . . .”

When I started writing, it was because I wanted to reproduce that effect on myself that Benchley had produced on me. Most of the rest of the book was oddly bland, suburb-bland: adult relationships, affairs, divorce . . . familiar stuff, filler between the shark’s mangle-feasts. My attitude was, why not make the shark maulings the main part of the book, while the other stuff, the boring humans with their little, boring problems, just glossed over?

Years later, in a creative writing course at Berkeley, our teacher, Thom Gunn, asked us all to say why we chose to be writers. All of the students gave pretentious answers that they’d probably read in *Paris Review* interviews or literary biographies. My own, which I thought was honest, was:

“I write because everything I read sucks, so I hope one day to write something readable.”

I told that to Dr. Dolan, who was at the time a Rhetoric professor of mine. “Why didn’t you just tell them the truth?” he said. “Tell them the reasons you write are vanity and spleen.”

I remember being shocked. I’d never thought about it from that angle. I admired Dolan’s cynicism, but I took it as just that: reactionary nihilism colder and cleverer than my own. I couldn’t believe that the only reason I’d write was to become famous. The spleen part—yeah, that was obvious. But vanity? If I was merely vain, then I’d write vaguely sentimental workshop fiction stuff, quiet, diminished Raymond Carver stories with ever-so-slight epiphanies. But what I was writing—it was bound to get me nowhere.

Then I graduated. And that’s when I ran into that massive, scary wall of Beigeism. It was so large and immovable that it couldn’t even be measured. A wall impossible to breach.

 met Edward Limonov nine months after moving to Moscow. Limonov had been one of the reasons I chose to move to Russia. Two of Limonov’s books in translation, *Memoirs of a Russian Punk* and *His Butler’s Story*, are, in my opinion, the best works of fiction published in the ’80s. The former book painted a portrait of provincial Soviet Russia that made me salivate: violent, cruel, and yet full of possibility for a kind of minor epic life. The latter book made me writhe in envy for being about the only honest, nonliterary account of modern America I’d read. What really drove me crazy was *His Butler’s* plot: would Limonov get published and famous, thus allowing him to get laid more easily, or not? It was so cynical and antithetical to everything that 20th-century literature had preached, and yet, it was . . . honest. For the sheer bravery of it all, he deserved my awe.

I had heard about Limonov’s lecture through his former publisher, the gay journalist and poet, Sasha Shatalov. I knew Shatalov because, a few months after moving to Moscow, I decided that I had to ingratiate myself into Limonov’s circle. I tracked Sasha down at the Writer’s Union; we met, and became friends. Shatalov is a shaven-headed, bucktoothed intellectual with a penchant for scandal. When I met him, his

former lover, the young journalist Yaroslav Mogutin, had just dumped him for an American artist, Robert Fillipini. I had the sense, in my meetings with Shatalov, that he was hoping to score me and get back at his old lover. And I led him on a little bit, never making clear my aversion to cock until I was able to get close enough to his star writer, Limonov.

It was at a library lecture that I met Limonov. The library was well lit and not too different from any neighborhood library in America, except that it was in the bottom floor of one of the zillions of block apartment buildings. The audience ranged from old literary ladies dressed to the hilt to younger, half-nerdy college-age girls. Shatalov brought me backstage, into a small square office with a couple of librarians. Limonov paced back and forth, in his black leather jacket, black jeans, and black boots. He was, of course, "smaller than I'd expected," which is to say, as tall as every star ever is. When Sasha introduced me, he told Limonov that I wasn't a "typical American." I clumsily broke into an anecdote about seeing the Grazhdanskoye Oborona riot, and told him that *Podrostok Savenko* was my favorite novel. He seemed mildly impressed. I realized that I was light-years away from his plane of fame, that we were communicating from different universes.

Limonov was cordial, if a little nervous, around me. I was completing a manuscript at the time, *Skin Plows*, about my bout with the worst episode of scabies that anyone had ever suffered in modern medical history. It's still not the kind of book that I'd like to show to anyone I know.

A nervous middle-aged woman with huge horn-rimmed glasses and red hair piled up into a bun stuck her head into the room and announced that the lecture should begin. I nearly bumped into Limonov trying to walk through the door—like one of those slapstick scenes where the big guy and little guy get squeezed in the doorframe . . . "Uh, heh-heh, you first . . ."

When we walked out into the main hall, I couldn't believe how many people had shown up: there must have been almost a hundred, seated in cheap plastic or wooden chairs arranged in rows. A hundred people, almost all women! In a library! In Russia! I took a seat near the back, and scanned the faces, noticing, to my further horror/envy, that at least one-quarter of the hall consisted of attractive student types, who had taken the time to make up their eyes and cheeks and lips, set their hair, and wear their finest respectable lace and faux-silk blouses.

Limonov stuck to political issues, although most in the crowd wanted to talk about his writing. He paced back and

forth, making little eye contact. He told the crowd that literature was, for him, too effete, that his only interest was politics and revolutionary struggle. He compared himself to George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway, recounting, in his half-bored, half-raspy voice, his battle experiences starting in Yugoslavia, where he fought on the side of the Serbs in Bosnia and Krajina, up to the last, failed battle at the White House in 1993. The day after that White House battle, there had been rumors that Limonov had been killed. Or that he'd been wounded. . . . Then came news that Limonov had gone underground. After the Duma granted an amnesty to those who had taken part in the uprising, Limonov came out of hiding. It was an epic story that I was determined to deflate.

During the question and answer part, I rocked nervously in my seat, thinking about how I could penetrate his fame-shield. "*The slow blade penetrates the shield . . .*" No, I never believed that line. Too Zen for my tastes. I knew what to ask him—Dr. Dolan and I had discussed this issue many times.

Finally, after getting the Russian words properly arranged in my head, I stood up and asked: "You said in your book *His Butler's Story* that you wanted to die in a hail of bullets, in a great battle. But you wanted to wait until you were famous enough to make your death worthwhile, so that your death would be reported on the front pages. When I read that you were in the White House during the battle in October, I admired and even envied you, until I found out that you survived. So my question is: *Why didn't you die?*"

He was stunned. A low rumble of laughter rippled in the audience. A few turned and stared at me. Limonov stumbled, then offered a weak answer, about how a comrade had died in his arms and bled on his jacket. He knew I was right: By his own aesthetic standards, he should have been killed in the White House and been made a martyr of the Dark Side. He claimed to have nearly died, but that wasn't good enough, not for an envious lit-twerp like me.

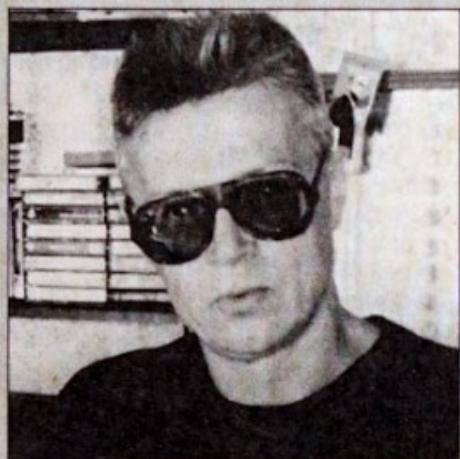
Afterward, Limonov sat at a table to sign books. People lined up a mile long to get their book signed. One girl, young and attractive, asked me for my autograph, thinking I was a writer. She approached me with large, wet brown eyes and an inviting smile. I fled. Later, much later, when I sat alone in my communal apartment room, punching my pillow and biting my knuckles, I regretted—no, not just regretted, I *denounced* that. I denounced that and denounced myself and promised both to punish the guilty (me) and replace myself with a new, quick-thinking, brighter version of me. I replayed that foolish reaction, that simpering "aw-gee-shucks" idiocy, and realized, no, I hadn't changed.

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The Limonov X-Files

In Praise of a Sick Punk Newspaper



by Edward Limonov

I have met Mark few years ago, in apartment of my publisher Alexander Schatalov, or to be precise, at Schatalov's kitchen. Most of a Russian's friendships are started in kitchens, no doubts. Mark appeared to me as American should be - a huge, big man, wearing a boots of fifties size, or at least size forty eight. Mark said that he read few of my books published in the United States, and that he liked my books. Then we lost each other for a few years.

One day somebody gave me a newspaper called if I am not mistaken *Novaya Gazeta* with an article signed by Mark. It was entitled "Limonov is not punk, but Zhirinovsky is rotten." In his article Mark wanted to say that Zhirinovsky is more punkish than me, Limonov. I was offended at that statement, as I believe that I am most punkish person on whole territory of Russian Republic and probably on all territory of ex-Soviet Union also. Maybe Shamil Basaev is comparable with me. So, for a while I was angry at Mark, for his preferring Zhirinovsky. Then we have met again when Mark came to my party "bunker" accompanied by a man called Manfred, they together wanted to publish newspaper and

they wanted me to collaborate, to write some articles for their newspaper.

I said "Yes", I will write in my broken English, boys, and you will type it, preserving my terrible Russian English style, please. Mark was surprised that I wasn't angry at him anymore for his preference of Zhirinovsky. Meanwhile, as time have passed, Mark understood by himself that Zhirinovsky is much less punk than Limonov is. To be a chairman of National Bolshevik's Party is tougher occupation than to be a chairman of Liberal Democratic Party, isn't it?

After some time Mark splitted from Manfred and started to publish *eXile*. For some time I wrote for two competing English language newspapers, then Manfred gave up, and now *eXile* is only one of its kind on the Moscow's market.

I should say that Mark's paper is probably the freest English language publication in whole world. And craziest as well. I am sure that such publication is impossible to publish and maintain in the United States or elsewhere. Only in Moscow's climate of permanent revolution of conscience is possible to publish such a sick, crazy and funny paper as *eXile* or my National Bolshevik's *Limonka*. I imagine that in ten years time some American and Russian university professors will be studying *eXile* as a cultural and political phenomenon. The changing of one political regime by another one is profitable to incredible freedom. Such freedom will not last for long. But I am happy to live now, to be an editor of a revolutionary *Limonka* and to collaborate in extravagant *eXile*. Your hand, Mister Mark! Troublemakers of the whole world, unite you!

But it will be fair to repeat, Mark, that Limonov is more punkish than Zhirinovsky is.

After the lecture, I followed Limonov out of the library and walked him to the metro stop. On the way down that long, deep escalator, designed to protect the population from nuclear-bombing raids, I asked him how he copes with being a hated, controversial writer. I wouldn't let him leave until I got some answers. He was, after all, the only writer who served as a sort of light for me.

"When you get published, people don't judge you anymore in that way. They sense you have some power," Limonov explained in that emotionless tone he adopts with strangers. "It doesn't matter if you write disgusting things. What matters is if you are published and seen as being powerful. Then everyone treats you with respect."

Afterward, he disappeared in a metro car, not too happy to have a big, hairy American fan stalk him with questions. Not after the way I'd treated him in the lecture. He disappeared into his parallel fame-plane, in that inaccessible dimension so many dimensions above my own. He was untouchable up there.

A few months later, in a glowing example of my gratitude, fulfilling the Sonic Youth ethic of "Kill Your Idols," I wrote a vicious attack on Limonov's incarnation as a fascist, accusing him of being a cynical marketing whiz looking to move more product and maintain his fame. I published it in both the English-language and Russian-language press, and it eventually made it into Limonov's hands.

I tried converting that one article into a permanent position as a humor columnist for the *Moscow Times*, particularly since their other columnists were so bland. Marc Champion, the pencil-necked Brit editor, agreed that it might be a good idea to have a more "humorous, colorful" writer like myself, so he asked me to send him some column-samples. The next week, I sent him three samples. I read the columns over and over, imagining how he might react, eagerly anticipating a new life.

That's when Champion stopped taking my calls.

Finally, I barged into the *Moscow Times* offices and demanded an explanation. He sat me down in his glass-enclosed, Ben Bradlee—editor’s office, overlooking the newsroom, and delivered his “fuck off and leave me alone” address to me in his quiet, deliberate, educated British voice: “The problem is that the Moscow community doesn’t want or need a Hunter Thompson, which is how I see your columns. Your writing is trenchant but *too violent*.” He paused, sighed, then continued with the condescending tone of a high school counselor. “If this was the sixties, a really crazy time, then you could justify that sort of wild Hunter Thompson style of writing [!]. But Moscow is a business community. There’s just no market for your style of writing. It’s not—how do I say this?—it’s not *appropriate* to Moscow.”

Oh my, what could I say? If he didn’t see it, there was no chance of opening his eyes. In fact, Moscow was a thousand times more wild and violent than the ’60s of San Francisco. I was awake at the tail end of that period: It was nothing, a family argument, a few plates tossed against the cupboard, compared to Moscow.

But I lost. I thanked him in my twerpish way, then sulked down the hallway of editor’s offices, doors half-open, heads leaning to get a peak at me. That was it. Game’s up. It was my first reencounter with the local Beigeists’ colonial representative, and I lost. I was routed, in fact, by their age-old weapon: silencers. Their twisted, hyper-edited, Orwellian view of the world even applied to Russia. Here we were, living in the vortex of one of the century’s greatest cataclysms, an economic and social apocalypse, in the capital of one of the world’s last great empires . . . but according to Champion, it’s “not the sixties,” that “really crazy time” . . .

I wanted to hang myself—if it wasn’t going to happen here, it wasn’t going to happen anywhere. I gave up writing, and took the job as the personal assistant to a rich Pakistani businessman. In a matter of a few months, I got caught up in the high world of finance. I was wearing a suit every day to work, power lunching with bankers from Credit Suisse First Boston, Morgan Stanley . . . going to conferences in London . . . helping to manage Russia’s first private placement, working with Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, Norton Rose law firm . . . a world I’d never be allowed access to in America had I stayed (and never would have wanted access to) was suddenly mine, in the same way that a baron’s lackey was allowed into the aristocracy—a physical, though not spiritual, presence. It was bizarre, that rise of mine into the world of finance—a sort of late-20th-century Moll Flanders, I guess. I made it through for almost two years. I

had to do a lot of lying, to wear a mask heavy and thick. It grew more and more uncomfortable as time went by.

Then, unexpectedly, the *Times* printed a second “opinion piece” that I’d written but which Champion had shelved for almost eight months, for fear of alienating “the community.” It was titled, “The Rise and Fall of Moscow’s Expat Royalty”; in it, I wrote about how once-condescending expats had been overthrown by a new elite of rich Russians, leading to a severe case of “fiscal envy,” and causing resentment and bitterness. Expats had fallen from the status of local aristocrats who had once scorned the natives into the role of a kind of petite bourgeoisie, complaining about the high prices and the vulgar wealth. And they couldn’t take it on the chin with dignity.

The piece was a sensation by local standards; Champion himself admitted that the *Times* had never printed anything that drew so many letters. When I went to pick up my \$125 from the *Moscow Times*, I poked my head into Champion’s office to thank him again. He looked stunned—and thinner. Giardia-thin, not healthy-thin. He’d cut his hair and dyed it a sort of dirty yellow, and changed wire-rimmed glasses frames to something a little hipper.

“I heard you guys got a lot of letters from my article,” I bragged.

He grimaced, and admitted that he’d never seen an article draw such a reader response. “You really touched a nerve,” he said, jabbing his editor’s pen into the air for emphasis. It sickened me to get that little concession out of him. He swept back behind some deputies, reverse-fog following him like some caped villain, and that was the last we ever saw of each other.

They were still publishing hate mail a month and a half after the article. But all that hate mail only scared Champion and his new über-Beigeist opinion page editor, Michael Kazmarek. Kazmarek told me that he didn’t agree with my article, and, therefore, he wouldn’t be looking for any future pieces from me. He also said that he had received a letter in support of my article from a Russian office manager. “I didn’t believe it was real, so I called her up. I thought you’d planted it,” he said.

That article led to the community’s hating me, to expats sneering at me everywhere I went. I was even stopped on the streets twice by expats who noticed me, just to tell me what an asshole I was for writing that piece. . . .

“I’m soooooo jealous of the New Russians and their wealth,” one American real estate woman sarcastically screeched into my face when we passed on Kutuzovsky

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Prospekt. I got phone calls from people asking, "Did you write that? Aren't you . . . embarrassed?"

A few weeks later, I was offered my very own column at *Living Here*, and eventually, having earned enough fame and enmity, it led to the *eXile*.

I didn't expect much from *Living Here*. I thought I might, if I was lucky, get a few compliments from some greasy student-nerds. Maybe a line of free coke, an inviting smile from some half-attractive Russian literary student, the kind with long, oily hair and a sallow complexion, whose lithe body, trapped in bland *Univermag* clothing, showed promise. What I did expect was a violent backlash; or, if not violent, then at least the kind of weaponry used on me back home: the quiet closing down of my one venue. The silence-bomb.

Neither happened. In fact, the more I hammed it up, the more popular I became.

Anyway, it wasn't as if I'd had a choice. I started writing my *Living Here* columns at the age of 30. It's a little late to change and try to write "responsible," Beigeist articles when you're 30 years old and for the previous 23 years, you've been pretty much isolated from and in opposition to the mainstream reader, working on coming up with a line as memorable as "crushed her organs like jelly . . ."

So, as Jake La Motta might have said, I wrote the only way I knew how to write. Strangely enough, the more repulsive my first-person romps through the epic flames and torn panties of Moscow, the more free drugs and willing girls came my way. Lots of them. I didn't expect it, because my heroes, mostly punks and cult writers, never told me that there were regular perks to irregular aesthetics. Dolan tried to tell me, but I didn't take him seriously. I thought it was just more envy-inspired cynicism on his part, and not kind words of advice from a mentor.

I found out the positive meaning of fame at *Living Here*'s first year anniversary party, on September 20, 1996. We held it at the Duck, knowing that a party at the Duck couldn't possibly fail. Even if *Living Here* couldn't attract more than the five or six friends and hangers-on, the Duck was guaranteed to attract its usual, motley sardine-can crowd of second-rate Russians, alcoholics, sluts, off-duty cops, drug dealers, and rednecks.

It was the first *Living Here* party that I attended. I usually avoided them because I was afraid that either they'd fail, or I'd get attacked. Not physically attacked—that I could deal with—but verbally attacked. So I got blistered drunk beforehand, and emceed the event. Afterward, something happened that I'd never experienced before: Girls made themselves easily available, not for who I was, but for what I was. Several of them, including a young married Russian girl who worked at *Elle*, some other teenager type, and Lyuda, a sort of chunky "Westernized" Russian who worked at the International Medical Clinic. I was still seeing Suzanne. She was in Belgium at the time, and I was supposed to fly out and meet her the next day.

I took full advantage. I must have rammed my tongue down three or four girls' throats, before grabbing Lyuda and leading her out on the balcony of the Duck. You reach the balcony by crawling through the windows on the side of the bar—it's actually a flat roof more than a balcony, and this night was a little too cold for people to use it. When I led her through the window, we were alone on the balcony, kissing.

Wednesday, October 4, 1995

The Rise and

By Marc Ames

My first day in Moscow was a shock. Not because of the dirty streets, the rude clerks or other banal inconveniences (which I'd expected), but rather because of the foreigners themselves. I was standing in the lounge of Park Place with a group of Americans in September 1993 when the manager introduced himself: "I'm sorry I'm late for the softball tournament, but my Russian workers are pathetic." When he heard that I'd just arrived in Moscow, he shook his head, put his hand on my shoulder and said, "You know, the difference between Russian workers and children is that at least you can teach children."

His attitude was the rule, not the exception—at least among those Westerners in the overwhelmingly expat softball tournament. At night, a group of Americans took me to all-expat bars; later, in Western conveyances, they raced back to their Western-standard apartments under fear of the night. It was like an automated 18th century, with the expats as a kind of functional aristocracy, and the Russian masses as—the masses.

In the modern mind, the aristocracy is marked by two characteristics: birthright and downfall. It is due to their birthright, to the fact that the aristocracy didn't have to earn its exalted place in society, that they eventually grew complacent, dull-witted—and were toppled by those who had to work harder, who understood reality a bit better. Right up to and beyond their downfall, the aristocrats are known to have shown a deep contempt for the masses—a contempt in which, considering the French or Russian revolutions, the last blood-stained laugh was on them.

We Westerners who showed up in Moscow in the early dawn of postcommunism were elevated to a sort of aristocracy merely because of a kind of birthright: our passports. In keeping with the script, it didn't take long for most Westerners here—particularly those who came to make a buck—to develop a condescending attitude towards the



And Fall of Moscow's Expat 'Royalty'

natives, a condescension that often slipped into sheer contempt.

Contempt, though, often leads to tragedy, and complacency leads to the final chapter of the nobility's script: the downfall. Nowhere has this been more evident than in that most blue-blooded branch of Moscow's expat aristocracy, the American Expat. We Americans were granted an exalted status the minute we landed, something we're not used to in Europe. So when the red carpet was pulled from under our feet, we fell hardest.

American expatriates can be divided into two easily recognizable categories. The first is the Ugly,

Out of the blue, one of the guests launched into an invective against the Russian mafia — not because of anything they'd done to his business but because of what they'd done to his self-esteem. "This so-called mafia is a complete joke," he sneered. "In America, we'd just call them 'gangs.'"

He was, of course, completely wrong. The real joke — as the so-called mafiosi cruise past our Nivas in their 600-series Mercedes and sit atop unimaginable piles of offshore wealth — is on us, and any ambitious American businessman who dares to acknowledge this fact inevitably suffers from a severe case of fiscal envy. For any decent

When I first arrived, real condescension and contempt dominated the typical American-expat operating system. But it was clear I'd arrived at the end of our reign: 1789, 1917, 1993.

Moscow reminded me a lot of the Arnold Schwarzenegger film *Total Recall*: In raising the *Total Recall* analogy to today's Russia, I am not referring to the outdated Marxist metaphor of capitalist exploitation, but rather to very concrete similarities: The film's depiction of the Terran monopoly over the Mutants' oxygen supply is roughly similar to today's precious Western aid that is carelessly dangled before a desperate Russian populace. Terran (Western) businessmen act out the white-collar fantasy equivalent to action-adventure heroes, leading a life among the elite 1 percent of the economic aristocracy in a way that would never have been possible on Terra (in the West).

The only part of the *Total Recall* plot that's missing is the ending: a brutal, flesh-ripping uprising against the Terrans, and the ultimate victory of the Mutants.

But wait: The uprising came after all, although the blood has only been metaphorical — an economic bloodletting, in which most Westerners got left in the gold dust. Most of my friends from 1993, including the American entrepreneur who first invited me to Russia, have returned home with little to show but chronic heart palpitations and a falsified paragraph in their resumes.

It's painful to admit how far we fell — but what really stokes my latent paranoia is what the future holds. Imagine this: American expats peering longingly into the windows of overpriced Moscow restaurants and whining bitterly about the prices while the garish all-Russian clientele, with a mixture of unease and contempt, whispers, "Hey, if these Americans are so great, why did they have to leave home in the first place?"

Marc Ames is a writer living in Moscow. He contributed this article to The Moscow Times.

or "typical," American: the culturally insensitive vulgarian — the briefcase-toting bull in World Culture's china shop. The other is the Ugly American's awry twin, the Bohemian American: pious public-television types in thrift-store uniforms who tend to define themselves in inverse proportion to the Ugly American. Russia has been inhabited mostly by Ugly Americans, the sort of creature who will endure the most savage conditions in order to buff up his or her resume. Your average Bohemian American cannot sustain a progressive world view in Russia.

Something awful has happened to Americans in the last year. We've become nastier, wounded. We've taken a fall in economic prestige.

A few months back, I was at an American time-share dacha for a little get-together with a bunch of young expats, the type for whom a special discount really is better than sex.

American, fiscal envy is the final pit stop before an open Prozac prescription.

What interested me most was the instinct that clouded the embittered American's perception. He reflected not at all the aristocrat's contempt he was trying to market to us (a contempt that we desperately wanted to buy), but rather a deep resentment. Resentment is perhaps the single ugliest human emotion, more unappealing than raw hatred or Chess King clothing. But after all, resentment and contempt are nearly biochemical twins, differentiated only by point of view. Contempt reflects a position of strength and resentment, a position of weakness. This means that we expatriate Americans are today perceiving Russia from an altogether different frame. Now we American expats are the economically vanquished, priced out of our palaces, which makes holding the title *de l'America* painfully humiliating. What happened?

"I'll do anything you want," she tells me.

Lyuda immediately undoes my pants, then drops to her knees. I saw, through the window, a group of nerds pointing at us and trying to break through their window. They

rallied their other friends, and pointed excitedly. Then I grabbed Lyuda and dragged her to the far end of the balcony, turned her around, pulled her pants down, and fucked her in the ass.

CHAPTER SEVEN

That was when I understood, in the most clear, unmediated sort of way, what it was to be famous. It was, frankly, better than any drug or sexual experience: Fame is the sum of those experiences. Later, on my flight out to Paris to meet my girlfriend, I began to rue, well in advance, the fact that I could easily lose this fame. It was so tenuous. It was, I felt, "out of my hands." That's when I first recalled that moment in *Apocalypse Now*, when the Robert Duvall character surveys the falling shells, the litting helicopters, the bursts of machine-gun fire, the screaming wounded, and the smell of napalm, then says sadly, to no one but himself, "Someday, this war's gonna end . . ."

In the months before *Living Here* collapsed and we started up the *eXile*, I was really riding on the clouds of small-time fame. The money was bad, but the perks were good. I'd split up with my girlfriend, I was meeting women with relative ease, I was getting treated to free drinks and plenty of heroin. It was the most valuable lesson in my life, and the moral was: Anyone who settles for less is an asshole.

When Matt and I first agreed to work together, I blew a huge sigh of relief. The greatest threat to having my perks pulled had been removed. I'd still have my Black Sea dacha, my ZiL and Moscow apartment—that is, I'd have my little plot of fame.

In Matt, I detected, with some unease, that underneath his jock-ish, unpretentious exterior, there lurked gargantuan Ego dying to be noticed. You could hear it every time Taibbi laughed. Anywhere you go with him—restaurants, bars, business meetings—that laugh of his turns heads. At first, people laugh in response. Then they start to complain. In the case of our former partners, they grew to despise him, and did anything to get away from that laugh—even returning to America.

But I heard that laugh, and I thought—*there's my Hitler!*

In our first meeting, I got the sense that Taibbi was sort of dicking around. He talked about "just having a good time" and "going out there and having fun," sports clichés that he'd carried with him from his days as a jock. One thing I liked about Taibbi was that he was an unabashed jock. Few intellectuals have the courage to be authentic jocks. When I arrived at Berkeley, I spent two years slimming down to that punk-poet bony affecta-

tion before realizing, Oh shit, I've fucked up! Being in strong physical shape is much better than being a thin jerk, and I threw it all away just so none of these frog-faced shits would accuse me of being a jock. Yet another bad career move, on par with moving into the European Care Home.

Taibbi clearly never suffered from those complexes. And he didn't seem to take this whole thing quite as seriously as I did. The main thing, from his point of view, was that he didn't want to go back to the *Moscow Times*. We were on the same page there.

I told him that he should write a book on his experience as a professional basketball player in Mongolia. But he soon gave that up. "I can't stand writing about myself," he said, cringing at the thought. "I get a chapter into it, and I can't go on. I make myself sick."

The good thing about that was, as I saw it, Taibbi would be one of those hustlers who works "behind the scenes," who gives it a hundred 'n ten percent, but leaves the glory part to the quarterback. Sounded fine with me.

What I didn't expect after hooking Taibbi was that he'd start to steal my thunder. Within a couple of weeks, he had TV cameras in the office interviewing him, radio stations calling him . . . while Kara was telling me that word on the

... space ...

Former *eXile* editor Mark Ames' column will not appear in its usual space this week, as he has been transferred to the sales department. We wish him every success.



I'll
give you THE best
deal in town!

There's probably nothing more sickening than the Anglo-American tradition of "laughing at yourself." But sometimes, there's no other choice. After Taibbi joined the *eXile*, word on the street was that Ames had been axed.

The Voice of a New Degeneration

the eXile

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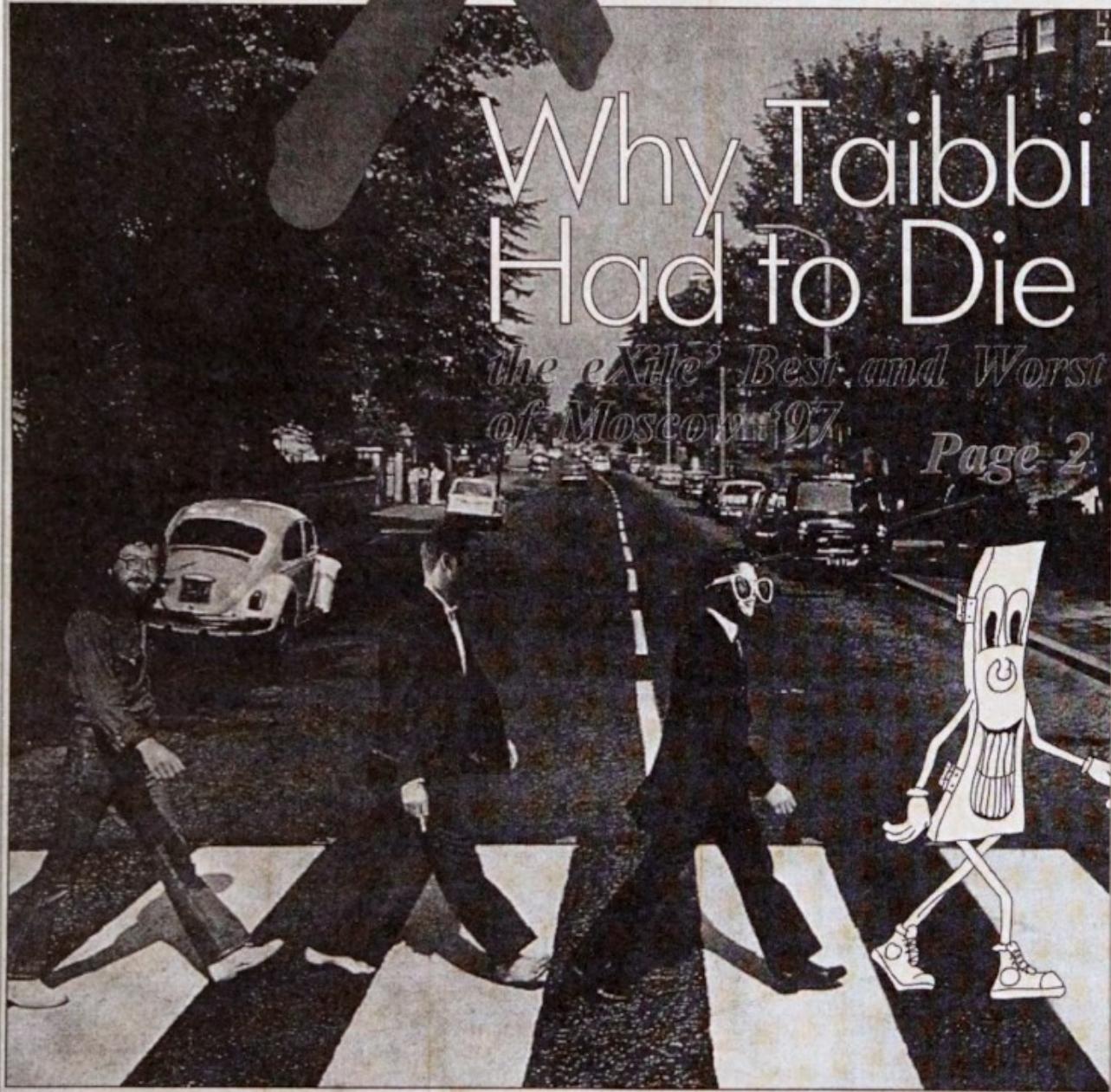
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Why Taibbi Had to Die

*the eXile's Best and Worst
of Moscow '97*

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**Clown eXposes
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**Di-ing Here: Internet
Ghoul Pools lighten
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**Ronko's Dyevushka
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their lives**

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Starting a tradition of fucking with the editor who leaves town for a sushi-filled 3-week vacation in America, we stole Taibbi's idea of doing an "Abbey Road" cover, subbing genius-designer Ilya Shengin for George Harrison. After this cover, word spread around Moscow that Taibbi had been fired, and the eXile was going downhill. It was the third of about ten periods when the eXile had "gone downhill."

street had it that I'd quit the newspaper, that Taibbi was running everything. Worse, everyone said the paper improved after Taibbi joined. I had agreed with him that we needed to add respectability and credibility to the paper, precisely so that we could hit bigger targets and make it hurt (we shared a loathing for journalists in particular). The problem was, all that respectability we acquired was chalked up to his joining.

At first, I'll admit it was tough to swallow. I hope, looking back, I didn't make too much of a jealous ass of myself. Before he joined, I knew this might happen. But my choices were limited: I could fight Taibbi and possibly lose everything, or join up with him, the way the Russian mafia joined up with the Cosa Nostra, and divide up the fame dividends between us. Also, I figured the competition and new blood would be good for me—it would discipline my own writing.

But what I didn't realize was how eager Taibbi was to take the self-promotion shtick and run with it. He'd already been on three TV programs before I'd finished tying my shoes in the

20 Years of Humor Conquest



morning. His articles were getting reprinted in the Russian press. One morning I walked into the office, and there was an entire TV crew surrounding Matt, with the lights on. I didn't exactly see him, but I heard him yell out in a cheerful voice: "Hey, Mark! Sorry about this! Do you wanna just come back in about a half hour? I'll be done by then!" I heard his trademark laugh bellow—I couldn't see him, but I could pinpoint him aurally—somewhere behind the lights and the guy with the mike and tape recorder. I rolled my sorry ass out of there, and took a long walk. . . . If my ego was Jabba the Hut, then his was the Death Star itself. I was already yesterday's news. Everyone was referring to him as "the editor of the *eXile*." We even received a few calls. "Is Ames still with the paper?" "The *eXile* sure got better since Ames left."

This couldn't go on. I started thinking of "accidents" that might happen to him on one of his crazy "Working Here" stories. . . .

(AP) MOSCOW—A Boston-born journalist was killed in Moscow yesterday during a freak accident at the Moscow City Zoo. Superintendents found the body of Matt Taibbi, 27, torn to shreds in the orangutan park. The orangutans were seen playing catch with his head, while his femur bone was being used as a weapon by another orangutan to establish dominance during this, the traditional mating season.

Taibbi's partner, deputy editor Mark Ames, was the first to arrive on the scene.

"I'm shocked and saddened by this tragic event," Ames said, clutching a photograph of the deceased editor and wearing a black armband over his brand-new suit. "But we will go on. Matt would have wanted it this way."

On the other hand, the *eXile*'s popularity really began to take off, and since I was strapped in for the ride, I had to be grateful to Taibbi for that.

Sometimes I wonder if I've betrayed my own revolution. Is this what it was all about? Is this why I paid all those years? Just for sex and drugs? Well—yeah, what the fuck! And lemme tell ya: The People in me are grateful. Grateful for The Revolution that freed them from the bonds of American banality. They're marching in formation down Red Square, having replaced "Land, Bread and Peace" with "Sex, Drugs and Fame." And "Death to the Paradigm Blob," referring of course to that monstrous universe I escaped from. When you have Sex, Drugs and Fame, when you've escaped the bondage of centrist serfdom, you don't need land, bread, or peace. Or rather, you have land, bread, and peace.

Still, Ours is a totally unfinished revolution. It will never be safe so long as that Paradigm Blob in America and its agents—those well-meaning, pious, cruel expatriates—are pushed back far enough that they cannot threaten the superior counterparadigm that Russia offers.

Actually creating a rival superpower, a competing context—that's another task. The only *real* task that the *eXile* has.

When Taibbi joined the *eXile*, we finally had the possibility to freeze The Blob, to hurt the people who would, with the best intentions, destroy everything unfamiliar in Russia. We'd agreed, in our policy discussions, that we wanted to give the newspaper more surface respectability, in order to expand our influence. Matt insisted that we adhere to a few basic journalistic tenets, such as never misquoting anyone. Facts would be double-checked. Targets carefully chosen. Matt was right: we didn't want to give people a chance to dismiss us easily, which many people could while I was editor. We'd adhere to some of the basic rules of journalism and establish ourselves as better than them even at their own game. That way, we'd really be able to fuck up the party.

Our first victims were the local petty shopkeepers—restaurant and bar owners who feared getting trashed in our club and restaurant guide. They'd bow obsequiously to us when we'd enter their restaurants, especially the desperate expat entrepreneurs. They'd pull aside the Russian wait staff, nervously warn them that if they fucked anything up, their jobs would be lost, then send them out to meet us. Then they'd feed us free food, in the hope that we'd go lighter on them. The Russian wait staff inevitably fucked every order up. That would send the expat entrepreneur into bloodshot rages: They'd shake at the table, trying desperately to act hip in order to court us, then finally burst out of their seats, give a pained smile, explain that their Russian staff was hopeless, and rush into the kitchen, where plates and pots crashed. . . .

Those experiences were usually more unpleasant than anything else. I'd never talked to these kind of people before coming to Moscow, and I certainly didn't come to Moscow and lay my literary rep on the line just to eat free meals with low-rent entrepreneurs. But it was part of the job, and free meals became one of the perks, particularly since we couldn't afford to eat out much. Moscow being as expensive as it was, and our newspaper paying as little as it did, we had to go leeching free meals. Even so, we'd still slam their restaurant or bar.

Being a savage newspaper had its commercial advantages.

everyone I meet: If you read one newspaper about Russia, read the *eXile*! No, it's true! Ask anyone!" He jabbed his finger at the air for emphasis. I sat in a chair, listening to this guy, thinking, *You've got a real job! . . . you write for Time-fucking-magazine! . . . why are you bothering to make a fool of yourself? Don't you realize that this is all just more comic material? . . .*

"I was on the phone with David—David Remnick," Andrew continued. "You know, the funniest thing you guys ever did was when you pretended that you were Remnick. I sent him that piece. I told Remnick what I tell everyone—the *eXile* is the only newspaper that tells it like it is!"

On the next couch over, Taibbi was getting serviced by Andrew's wife. She'd done some freelance work for *L.A. Times* bureau chief Carol J. Williams, the single biggest target of the *eXile* in our war against the foreign press corps. "You guys are right on—dead on!" she said.

Afterward, Matt and I were laughing at the ridiculousness of it all. Why were they trying to defect to our camp?

In time, we attracted more and more foreign press. We'd appeared in articles and news programs. We made appearances on Russian television, and attracted Russian journalists to write for our newspaper. All of this pulled us out of the margins and into the world of legitimacy.

Something had happened. The Beigeists' most powerful weapon—ignoring and silencing the opposition—was no longer effective. The two-front approach we led had earned us an officially recognized seat in the General Assembly.

They were lumbering and clumsy and slow to act. When they finally retaliated, it only worked to our advantage, the way hatred and violence increases the power of the Devil. Kathy Lally of the *Baltimore Sun* argued that the *eXile* should be banned from a popular and highly influential Internet forum for Russia-watchers, the Johnson's List. We retaliated by playing one of our most devastating practical jokes of all: We caught her agreeing to back a boycott of the *eXile*'s sponsors, and considering acting as a witness in what our phone caller claimed was a criminal investigation into our alleged "hate crimes." We printed the conversations, and she never bothered us again.

In the summer of 1998, as Russia's financial crisis spun totally out of control, a truly formidable Beigeist opened up a new front against us, arguing that we should be banned from the same Internet list because we allegedly supported violence against women. His name was Michael McFaul, and he boasted an armory of credentials—Stanford associate professor, leading Carnegie Endowment



An Emerging Meet Market

By Johnny Chen

I woke up last Friday morning with a screaming woodie. Johnny Jr. popped up bright and early that morning, and he wasn't in a good mood. "Get your clothes on, jack," he snarled. "Hey! Didja hear me? I said GET YOUR FUCKING CLOTHES ON! It's been six weeks since I've been in the Temple of Doom, Chen, and I'm through waiting. Tonight, we're gonna do things MY way, understand?"

I'd never seen it so pissed off at me before. He wasn't in a mood for compromises or negotiations. He laid an ultimatum on me that if I didn't get him laid that night, it was off to Whores R Us for some toxic, unprotected sex that was sure to land both of us in the morgue within six months.

I took his threats pretty seriously. If there's one thing I've learned, it's that Johnny Jr. doesn't fuck around.

So I took him for a walk on Independence Day, Friday, June 12th: the day that Russia freed itself from half of its own conquered territory. The weather was boiling hot, as you know: sticky, sweaty. We walked up the promenade from Gogolevsky Bulvar to Pushkinskaya Ploschad, then turned down Tverskaya towards the Manezh.

"Jesus Christ," Johnny Jr. barked, "I've never seen so many sluts in my life!"

He was right: girls either wore see-through shirts with see-through bras, or see-through shirts with no bras AT ALL. How does a man keep from going mad here? It just ain't fair. I've been suffering through a sexual famine lately. I have only myself to blame, but knowing that doesn't help me through it. Walking alone down Moscow's streets, past rows of armlocked dyev-babes, I began to ponder the life of a molester. A sexual offender. Anything but this, walking alone among all this sexual energy, this human pollen, the only idiot not getting any for six straight weeks, like the Boy in the Plastic Bubble or something.

There was only one answer for me: The Duck. I went there Friday night for the sweatiest, ugliest Ladies' Night yet. It was horrible. Every person was a human sprinkler system of slime, sweat, semen and b.o. Sweat dripped from the ceiling. Slavic pheromones burned your nose. Under such circumstances, I knew that I, Johnny Chen, had a pretty good chance of scoring. And I did. In fact, I never made it more than half-way in. Literally within four minutes of arriving, some teenager with a face like Mutley's from Laff-A-Lympics fell off the bar and onto my shoulders. I carried her almost straight out to the coat check, then hurried her down to a taxi, ran her home, up my stairs, and into my apartment. The whole time she was begging me to take her back, to be careful, she was drunk, bla-bla-bla... After we were through, I had no idea what to do with her. She was bleeding and crying. As for me, I was depressed. I'd just shot a load large enough to repopulate North Korea. So I walked her over to my balcony, and held her in my arm, leaning her over the ledge.

"Throw her over," Johnny Jr. advised me.

"What?"

"You know you want to," he said. "Just pick her up and throw her over. You'll feel better, I promise."

But I didn't have the energy. Instead, I passed out on the floor, and woke up the next morning, with Mutley beside me. It took me a long time to get rid of her, but I did. You know how that is. It always works out that you have horrible poo cramps the morning after, and all you want to do is dump a huge shit, but you've got this humiliated, skanky bitch tagging around. Girls, if I can give you one piece of advice to win a man's heart, it's to get up bright and early the morning after, and leave before he even wakes up. Because despite what the song says, There Ain't No Morning After.

This is the infamous Johnny Chen "rape" column that drove Dr. McFaul to advocate censoring the *eXile*, and started a second "boycott the *eXile*" grassroots movement in Moscow's expat community.

Boy have Americans done a great service in showing the Russian savages how much better our culture is than their old, evil, oppressive Soviet culture. During those Cold War years we were feeling mighty superior to the "Orwellian" Soviets for suppressing anything they found offensive, while we, God Bless Us, had built our culture on the very concept of tolerance and free speech.

Free speech for everyone, that is, except when it offends you.

Last week, yet another "Burn the eXile!" scandal erupted, first touched off by an anonymous letter to the Johnson's Russia List, an internet forum for thousands of Russia-oriented scholars and journalists the world-over. The anonymous letter—which, incidentally, most local Western correspondents believe was written by a certain colleague of theirs who has come under heavy criticism in these pages—claimed that the eXile should be banned from the JRL because, based on out-of-context quotes from twerp-O-matic Johnny Chen's last club review, the newspaper has gone rape-mad:

"The Exile's editorial stance, which both condones and celebrates rape, needs to be brought to the attention of the readers of the Johnson list and needs to be considered when deciding whether or not to include their submissions any longer," the anonymous poison pen claimed, using the convenient veil of anonymity. The letter was clearly written by an American, in American prose, the product of a brain not merely washed, but scrubbed, pressed, and bleached in the factory tubs of political correctness.

Russian readers might be confused by the inanity of it all, but brace yourselves for the real shocker. Professor Michael McFaul—henceforth referred to as Dr. McFaulwell—of Stanford University, basing his stance purely on the anonymous letter, raised her one by announcing his immediate vote for censoring the *exile*:

"I was appalled by the quote from Johnny Chen's article in *Exile* sent by 'anonymous' to your list. The *Exile* writers and editors occasionally have some interesting insights about Russia. I am glad that *Exile* has the right to publish its views both here and in Russia, but must such a valuable publication as the *Johnson List* dupe so low as to propagate the ideas and promote the reputations of people who celebrate rape? Why dont you suggest that *Exile* set up their own list. Those who want to support the open propagation of violence against women can then subscribe to this list, and spare the rest of us from having to tacitly condone these views by subscribing to your list."

Dr. McFaulwell then apparently leaned hard on Johnson to impose a blanket censorship ban on the eXile, even using his position as a heavy hitter in the Carnegie Foundation and a board member of another Johnson project that Carnegie is helping to fund to pressure Johnson to comply—at least, that's how we interpreted subsequent email exchanges. For our Russian readers, we want to emphasize again that **THIS IS NOT MADE UP**. Americans—First Amendment-proud Americans—were **REALLY** having this debate. A Stanford Professor tried to have us censored and banned from an internet list based on an anonymous poison letter. Of course, the fact that Dr. McFaulwell is both a former USAID consultant and a regular contributor to *The Moscow Times* might help put his ketamine-logic and eerie, Zhdanov-esque reaction into perspective, but it still doesn't say much about Americans setting a fine example when it comes to showing Russians about tolerance and free speech.

The next day, scores of postings were sent to Johnson urging him not to listen to Dr. McFaulwell, and to keep publishing the eXile. Supporters included several foreign correspondents, academics, a representative from the Kennan Institute, and two outspoken feminists, CBS News's Beth Knobel, and Masha Gessen—that's right, Masha Gessen. We have to tip our hats to you for your principled courage on that one, Masha, after all the shit you've taken from us. Perhaps your experience as both a Russian and American has made you a little more tolerant than pampered uber-geeks like Dr. McFaulwell.

DANCES

By Mark Ames

On a minor note, a nerd-infested internet list for Americans-without-lives-in-Moscow also ran the anonymous letter, which provoked half-literate community service dropouts to post their own version of a baloney-sandwich lynch mob. One woman wrote, "My husband has begged me to stop reading the *Exile*, as it only raises my bloodpressure [...] They are an embarrassment to me as an American in Russia." Fair enough. But not far enough for Ian Schier—whose name we will print because he posted to the list a private e-mail sent to him by Matt Taibbi. Schier courageously wrote, "I'm afraid that a warning of a boycott of advertisers may be in order. As it is, I had thought about placing an advertisement in the *Exile* and have decided not to do so. There is a fine line between acceptable humor and unacceptable insults, and the *Exile* crosses it far too many times." Interestingly, we remember the ad Ian wanted to place. We've still got a copy. It goes: "I am: a middlebrow tub of lard Jew with stained underwear. You are: still alive. Let's get together at my place and watch old 'Friends' reruns! Email me for a fun time at nxrprim@cityline.ru." Ian complained that he hadn't received a personal insult since elementary school. We're sorry to hear that kids avoided you in junior high and high school, but we'll make up for lost time, Ian.

So there you have it, Russians. All that malarkey we Americans told you about tolerance and free speech? We didn't REALLY mean it. What are you, fools or something? Ha-ha-ha!

This July 4th is dedicated to all those Americans who have gone public in calling for the eXile to be censored and boycotted. It's an eXile Fourth of July and what better way for an eXile to act than to act as... well, an eXhole!

As for us, we're offering to all those offended by Johnny Chen's article—and to the community at-large—a human sacrifice of sorts. See, in order to make Chen feel the pain that he inflicted on others, we arranged for him to be gang-raped by the cast of Ian Schier's favorite television sitcom, "Friends."

And as you'll see in the comix strip to your left, there's a warm, happy, Spielbergian moral to it all.

And if that's not enough, you can even win a "Death Porn" T-shirt if you send us a photograph of yourself defacing or burning the eXile in your own special way. After all, what does an American stand for, if not the pursuit of liberty, justice... and the right to burn anything he or she disagrees with?!

analyst, Hoover Institute tool (note the squeaky Clinton-like synthesis of liberal Carnegie and conservative Hoover creds), and the Clinton administration's most relentless academic propagandist in favor of its near-genocidal reformophilia. As McFaul's SimCity global-village-paradigm crumbled around him in a reality of corruption, cynicism, and destruction, he decided that taking on voices of opposition was more important to The Cause than writing truthfully about Russia. As he wrote more than once, "The facts on the ground are often not as important as the perception of those facts."

McFaul pressured David Johnson, who ran the Internet list, to ban the *eXile*, based on the now-infamous "rape" article by Johnny Chen. He argued that a publication that glorifies rape in its pages should not be allowed a forum on a "serious" academic list, even if the editor of that list, David Johnson, only reprinted relevant and serious political

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RAPE: IT'S NOT EVEN FUNNY

by Mark Ames and Roman Papsuev



One way to annoy the hell out of our under-sexed, hysterical P.C. detractors was to publish comix, placing their arguments in the "mouth" of Johnny Chen's dick. Roman, the artist, forgot to make Chen's eyes slanted—because the editors forgot to tell him that "Chen" is a Chinese name.

articles from our newspaper. McFaul argued that by posting our "serious" pieces, Johnson was "tacitly condoning rape and violence against women." Of course it was an absurd argument. Johnson had posted several articles from fascist and radical communist Russian publications.

In another time, we would have lost without a fight. McFaul expected it to end that way: His ugly confidence showed through in his postings to the list. In the world he came from, you won debates by flashing your credentials, and that was that. A show-trial display of debate might be allowed—the kind of false, cringing, shamefully polite debates that his people conduct. In his Stanford/Carnegie world, a pair of wounded tweaks like Taibbi and me would simply get zapped by 100 rectons of McFaul voodoo-rays, and that would be it. You'd never hear a peep out of us again.

I was terrified and seething mad when he first tried to silence us. Night after night, McFaul and I squared off via email. It got nastier and nastier. I'd whiff out, pound the computer, and curse in my ovenlike box-sized apartment during those long July nights. I could imagine where McFaul was, on the other end of this Information Superhigh-way: either in his quiet office on the Stanford campus, in that quaint, nauseating ranch-setting in the

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONGRESS GETS [SIC]!

Dear eXile,

I've been following your wonderful exposés via Johnson's Russia List and giving them added circulation in a bulletin I write from our foundation for U.S. policymakers in Congress and in government. You are coming up with some excellent material—the Hinshtien reprint in addition to your original investigative pieces—that are provoking much-needed discussion in Washington. I just ran a one-paragraph summary of the Hinshtien article and another of Haagland's response. It seems that Mr. Haagland provokes more questions than he answers, and I hope you keep digging.

I can tell you from my conversations with senior congressional staff of both parties that they do read your work and have followed up on some of it with inquiries to the government.

Keep it up!

Sincerely,

J. Michael Waller, Ph.D.

Vice President

American Foreign Policy Council

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Washington, DC 20036 USA

202-462-6055

mike@salnet.net

jmwaller@aol.com

Proof that the eXile "mattered." Waller's right-wing think-tank was the arch-enemy of McFaul's, and since the enemy of our enemy was our friend, we liked Waller.

McFaul's golden retriever, inevitably named Pasha or Sasha, gnaws on an expensive handmade Earth Toy underneath the mahogany wood desk. His Volvos—both of them—are safely parked in his neatly organized garage, oil trays beneath the chassis. A police patrol car slows before his home to make sure that the Guatemalan gardeners are staying clear of the doors and windows to the McFaul manor. The Guatemalans obligingly cower before the cop. Satisfied, the patrol car moves on to check up on the next two-story beyond the hedges. Mrs. McFaul, who chairs a domestic violence support foundation, returns home late.

rolling peninsula foothills, where robins and bluebirds chirp in the oak trees outside of his open window. . . . Or, if he wasn't on the Stanford campus, playing god to the sons and daughters of America's oligarchy, then he was reading some comforting Daniel Boorstin book in the study of his two-story Palo Alto home, oblivious to the low background hum of lawn mowers and weed-eaters, as a crew of illegals from Guatemala manicures his front yard. I can picture it perfectly because I was reared not far from there, in the San Jose suburbs, about 20 miles south of and 20 degrees hotter than the bay-cooled Palo Alto.

Over a skinless chicken dinner, she talks about her good fight, while Dr. McFaul, an agitated vein bulging in his forehead, recounts his battle against the *eXile*, the very incarnation of the McFaul-ian bogeyman.

Taibbi and I kept quiet at first. Johnson queried his subscribers as to whether or not McFaul's ban should be enforced. The response was overwhelming: Tens of letters representing local bureau chiefs, Russian journalists, and various academics, as well as others, came to our aid. We'd become too famous to fuck with. Banning us would mean violating another one of those sacred Beigeist tenets: Thou Shalt Not Censor. It was sweet. We piped in, renaming McFaul "McFalwell" and abusing him from every angle possible.

Eventually, he sent an email saying, "Okay, you win, I'm exhausted. I give up."

Shortly after, his colleague at Stanford, Gordon Hahn, also of the Hoover Institute, started another email war with Taibbi and tried to have us banned. Within a week, he also surrendered and even apologized.

Afterward, the whole tale was written up in both the *Scotsman* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, making us out to look like victims of an evil mainstream plot to censor one of the most important, honest sources of information from Russia. The Beigeists were in a bind: If they ignored us, we'd roll right over them. But if they attacked us openly, they risked making us more famous—and thus more firmly entrenched.

So if The People of My Mind are wondering whether or not their revolution has been corrupted by hedonism, the answer is, not at all. (After all, when The People were stuck in the baking Santa Clara Valley suburbs, they bewailed the famine of pleasure, and the famine of possibility.) We're taking the revolution out of our tiny republic and spreading it as far as we can. We're radicalizing the revolution. No more cringing in the Sarajevo hills, picking off old ladies, and fleeing, screaming, back to the safety of the bunker.

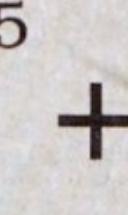
the eXile
presents:
Talking
Head Math



Famous Hoosier
Dan Quayle



Cry-baby
Phoenix Suns
head coach
Danny Ainge



A golden retriever



Stanford professor
and frequent bather
Michael McFaul

With Matt, I had a formidable ally, one who'd been on the other side, who saw and studied how they worked, came back with the intelligence reports, and struck at their very hearts. Now, we were more like those Somali warlords, whipping up dust in our machine-gun-mounting Toyota pickups, wreaking havoc against a lumbering Superpower. We dragged McFaul's and Hahn's and Lally's charred corpses through the dust-and-fly-infested streets of our newspaper for all to have a laugh. We forced them into a hasty retreat. Now, the goal is to make a landing on American soil—after all, we are Americans—and to make them surrender at least some piece of real estate in American Letters to us.

But even if my sex and drugs supplies were slashed to pre-Revolutionary levels—which, in the last few months, has happened—I wouldn't leave Russia. Those are the perks, well-deserved perks, but no longer essential perks. They aren't the reason I came.

The most important thing is protecting Russia from going the way of Prague. From becoming a domesticated, obedient member of the Global Village. This paradigm, this counteruniverse, so fragile, must be preserved, if only because my very health depends on it. Russia is my home. I have never, not once since moving here, thought about returning to America. Or anywhere else.

As this chapter is being written, the Yeltsin regime responsible for creating this horrible, bizarre, and yet epic paradigm is cracking apart. I have no idea what will come next, but my instincts tell me that I'll have to be more careful if I want to stay, and avoid getting nailed to the side of a church. Can't have the Russians thinking I'm merely here to rape and pillage. Wouldn't be prudent—or safe. "Uh, guys . . . heh-heh . . . it was a joke, get it? Yeah?" No, the next people in power won't get it much at all.

Anyway, the best thing is to aim our guns Westward and Westward only. If only to keep them off our property.

Every other Sunday, I go to Limonov's apartment to pick up his article for the *eXile*. I usually drop by at around noon or 1 P.M. Sometimes I wind up staying for hours. He makes tea, boiling water and tea leaves in a dented tin cup over the stove top, then pouring it into a tea mug and handing it to me.

He lives on the sixth floor, in apartment 66, just off the Old Arbat. There are two doors: one on the sixth floor corridor, which leads to three apartments, then one to his

apartment. When I press the buzzer to 66, Limonov is always just a few seconds from the door. I'm usually late—California time—but he rarely complains. I press the buzzer, and Limonov opens the upper bolt lock. He looks down at the ground as he approaches me, sighing ironically. He comes up to the glass-paneled door in the corridor, opens it, lets me in, and shakes my hand. He usually wears a torn black sleeveless T-shirt or a button-down black T-shirt, black fake jeans unraveling at the seams, and Keds-like shoes. And his trademark heavy, plastic Soviet glasses. His gray hair is always done up like an older, fascist James Dean.

We go back into his kitchen/reading room. More often than not, Limonov has some girl sitting quietly in a divan-chair underneath the bookshelves, while we sit at the kitchen table, talking in English. He likes to practice his English with the *eXile* boys. Every half hour or so, he'll lean over to the girl and make some quip, asking her if she understands. She usually lies and says she does.

Once, in mid-June 1998, I came over to pick up an article he'd written on the Russian intelligentsia, whom he has always loathed for their masochism.

He offered me the usual cup of tea. I told him how McFaul and others were trying to get us remarginalized.

"Well, that means you're famous now," he said, approvingly. "You should be happy."

"It's better than not being famous," I said, looking over at his new girlfriend. Her name was Nastya. She was a little punkette, dressed adoringly in a spiked dog collar, thrashed boots, army coat, and Grazhdanskoye Oborona T-shirt. Limonov claimed that she was 16—or rather, that Nastya told him she was 16.

She squinted at me with sly, Asiatic eyes and said, "He doesn't look American."

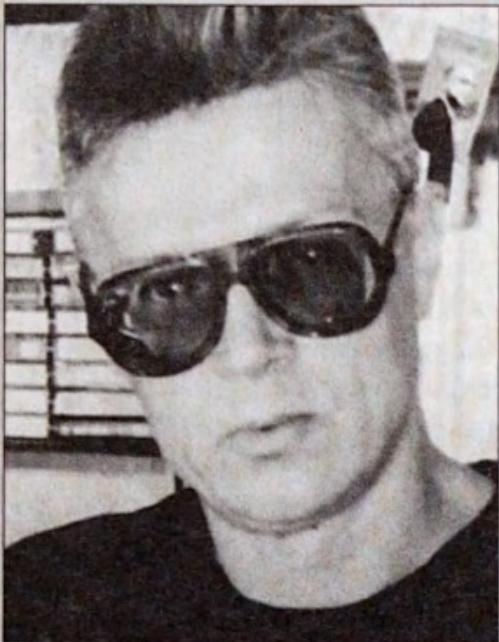
Limonov laughed. "No, he's a Chechen," he said.

When Nastya spoke, I noticed her two front teeth, slightly crooked and too large for her mouth. No fucking way she was 16. More like 14, tops. She slumped back into the divan, boots pigeon-toed, fumbling restlessly with a strand of hair. She stared at me like a little child, unabashed. Limonov pointed to a *Pulp Fiction* poster that she had defaced by erasing Uma Thurman's eyes and drawing devil's horns on her head. He was annoyed, but clearly proud.

One of Limonov's skinhead bodyguards from his National-Bolshevik Party came by at 2 P.M. Sasha had been a champion judo expert in the Soviet Army when he was stationed in East Germany. He was shorter than me,



Doctor Limonov's Advices For Traveling In A Cattle Vagon



By Dr. Limonov

urrent situation in Russia can be identified as very tense. Russians are extremely angry at its own politicians. Russians are extremely angry at its own politicians. They also very angry at Westerners whom they consider or a villains and thieves and responsible for the fall of Mother Russia. It is very probable that anti-Western pogroms would occur at big Russian cities. On another hand any government after Yeltsin's would use Westerners as scapegoats for the deeds of last decade. So, Westerners should prepare themselves to arrests, interrogations and difficult trips to Siberia in a cattle wagons. Following are advices, based on personal experience and on my father Veniam Ivanovich's experience.

My father Veniam Ivanovich was an NKVD [the KGB's predecessor under Stalin-Ed.] officer and during the 50s regularly made trips to Siberia as a chief of military convoy unit. At his charge he have had a few wagons filled up with convicted prisoners, who were sent to different Siberian camps. My father

would dispose of his human merchandise on different Siberian stations. His final destination was a rail station and port "Sovietskaya Gavan," located on Pacific Ocean coast, near Japan. On his way back to Kharkov my father collected some prisoners in order to transport them to European Russia's prisons and camps.

Once, as a kid of 13, I went to Kharkov's railway station to meet my father, who arrived from Sovietskaya Gavan. Native, at first I have looked for him among crowd of passengers. He wasn't there. Finally I found my father on outskirts of Kharkov's railway station. Semi-circle of soldiers with a rifles (bayonets facing prisoners, descending from wagon into "Black Maria's" automobile), was breaked at one place. My father was staying there, reading the names of prisoners. Holster of his was opened and naked pistol's body was shining at spring sun. So, I am descendent of professional caretaker of prisoners. I know well how to take care of them. My father taught me.

Before to get into details about how to equip oneself to trip to Siberia I should say that my father was a dangerous, good, honest, almost ascetic type of officer, not drinking, not smoking. I suppose he was a difficult bastard as well as for his subordinate soldiers, as to prisoners. No weakness, metal, harsh, disciplined man, who lived on his trips no better than his soldiers, little better than his prisoners.

At his travels, they lasted few weeks, because Russia is very big country, my father would always take his suitcase. Or, rather it wasn't suitcase. It cannot be called suitcase-it was Russian "chemodan." On its cover was glued forever a list of items that my father carried with him to Siberia. He would take aluminum mug, spoon and fork. My father carried with him a pocketknife with as many as eleven items, including scissors. He would take also few needles, black and white threads. He would take four sorts of brushes; one for his teeth, one for his boots, one for

his uniform and one for his uniform's buttons. Buttons he would at first cover with stinking liquid called "osedal," and then brush them to shining state. My father always carried with him at least ten white cotton pieces to sew it to his collar. (You don't bother yourself with it, you will be in no need for white collar) every morning. He also carried many pieces of soft cloth, "portiankas", to wrap it around his feet. Portiankas are much better than sock, they can be used much longer. Of course portiankas can be used only with a boots, no shoes can survive on a trip to Siberia anyway.

You may need also wooden spoon. It's much better in eating hot "balanda"-prisoner's soup, what usually served in mugs. With a wooden spoon you can eat faster, and it will not burn your lips. The only food to be recommended to take with you are dried up bread and "salo," salted pork fat. Tea and sugar are luxuries, so you should hide it on your body somewhere, in order that your fellows travelers will not rip-off you. Don't carry many things. Anyway, soldiers or fellow prisoners criminals of common law will take them from you. For the same reason don't wear good clothes.

If you can snatch some money in cattle wagon, then from time to time you will be able to ask soldiers to buy some food for you. Old-timers highly recommend to fold money, as many times as you can, to state of a small ball or little cube. Then you can color it on surface with a dirt and sew it on your clothes as if it is a button. Many buttons made of one and five dollar bills, and Siberia will be a little warmer for you.

I highly recommend to stop smoking now. Then in a cattle wagon you will be suffering less.

Edward Limonov is the chairman of an up and coming nationalist political party, the National-Bolshevik Party, and author of several books.

but about three times wider, with hands that swallowed mine when we shook.

They invited me to take a walk with them. They were planning to meet with a group of striking miners from Vorkuta who had just recently begun a sit-in at the White House, demanding that Yeltsin and his government resign and that their months of unpaid wages be paid. I agreed to go. Nastya found it all boring. She ran out ahead of us, and we didn't see her again.

The three of us walked down the Old Arbat, past a group of middle-aged American tourists.

"Promise me you'll let me load them all in the cattle wagons myself if you take over," I joked to Limonov. He laughed, and assured me at least a post on a commission to deal with the colonialist occupiers.

"You have the right attitude," he told me, laughing.

We crossed to the Smolenskaya metro station, just behind the McDonald's. As we stepped onto the escalator, a tall, attractive woman, with long blond hair and an intelligent face, quickly caught up to us and stared at Limonov.

"Are you . . . are you Edward Limonov?" she asked, excited.

"Yes," he said calmly.

She nodded, then, half-confused, turned and quickly made her way down the escalator.

"Wait!" he called after her. "Who are you? Where are you going?" Sasha and I laughed, but Limonov lost her.

We got on the metro, changed on the ring line, and got out at Barrikadnaya, the closest stop to the White House. On the way, two or three more people stared knowingly at Limonov. He half-ignored them, speaking to me in English, and keeping an eye out for girls.

Limonov was telling me that I might want to start worrying about the CIA. "Your newspaper is dangerous," he said. "You and Matt may have problems getting back into America. Have you ever thought of that?"

I had a hard time imagining that, but from his point of view, our problems with McFaul and Hahn were exactly that: the beginning of a war with the CIA. They are Stanford boys, Clinton people, and they work at the Hoover Institute, a known breeding ground for spook propagandists. "Ideas are very dangerous," Limonov said. "Your newspaper is showing a side of Russia that these people don't want out."

It was boiling hot that day, about 95 degrees and humid. We walked quietly down Konyushkovskaya Ulitsa. On the east side of the street, a row of makeshift monuments to those who fell in the battle at the White House in 1993. Red ribbons tied to the sickly

birch trees. Black-and-white photos of the fallen: young and old, grim Soviet-looking passport photos blown up to life-size. A few were even young women, dressed in blouses and hair neatly combed for the photographs, now dead. Dozens of people, with their names, dates of birth and death written below. Flowers are laid at the places where some fell in battle. As comical as that October uprising may have been, you really had to pause to respect the fallen.

Painted on the fences are slogans denouncing the Yeltsin regime and their attack on the White House. That the Yeltsin regime even allowed this seething display of dissent, just a couple hundred meters from the White House, showed how they'd learned from the American oligarchy that silence is the best weapon against dissent.

Police in uniform walked past us and stared menacingly. A little farther down, there was a water truck, and several dozen *militisioneri*, some with AKs slung around their shoulders.

We approached a gated area on the eastern side of the White House, next to Gorbuty Bridge, where hundreds of miners, mostly topless with their T-shirts wet and wrapped on their heads, lazily paced around, pounding bottles of *kvas*.

The police stopped us, but then, recognizing Limonov, turned their heads and let him pass. Limonov barely acknowledged their presence.

We stepped over a barrier, and for the next two hours, we were assaulted by groups of miners, all of whom wanted to speak to Limonov. Miners! Talking literature and politics with a writer! Limonov tried to convince them to radicalize, to join with his National-Bolshevik Party, because everyone else, the Communists, Zhirinovsky, whoever, they didn't give a fuck about the miners. Every other word was *blyad* and *khui*, cuss words. They came in crowds to speak to him.

After some time, we joined a group of miners who had laid out a large sheet on the lawn. We shared some more *kvas*—donated by Mayor Luzhkov—and they crowded around Limonov to talk with him.

Then they asked who I was.

Limonov proudly put his hand on my shoulder and said, "My American friend who writes for a newspaper that we consider a fraternal newspaper, the *eXile*. The only good, anti-bourgeois Western newspaper I know."

I get uneasy when Limonov calls me anti-bourgeois. A context-clash: my reactionary politics and bourgeois blood, versus his reactionary politics and lumpenprole blood.

ЛИМОНКА №77

ГАЗЕТА ПРЯМОГО ДЕЙСТВИЯ

ОКТЯБРЬ 1994

Цена - 100 рублей

ТРЕТИЙ ГОД ИЗДАНИЯ

Выходит с ноября 1994 г. каждые 2 недели

Правильный ответ, пацан!

В номере:

- КТО ИМЕННО ДАЕТ ДЕНЬГИ КПРФ
- ГОЛОВИН/УРЛА
- ДУГИН/О ЖЕНЩИНЕ
- НБП И СОРОС
- КОМУ ПОДРАЖАТЬ РУССКОЙ ДЕВОЧКЕ
- ПАВЛА И КАЗНИЛ ЗАПАД
- + ЗАМЕТКИ АМЕРИКАНСКОГО ДРУГА

России

Limonov's extremist newspaper, "Limonka," is named both after him and the slang word for hand grenade. Here is an article "from our American friend" Ames, telling his skinhead readers how painfully boring life in the West is, and why they should stay in Russia.

Mark Ames, гл. редактор
газеты *Exile*, выходящей в
Москве на английском

СКУКА ПОРОЖДАЕТ РУСОФОБИЮ

Популярная в кругах иностранцев в Москве поговорка звучит приблизительно так: "Проблема с Россией в том, что она населена русскими."

Парень, который сообщил мне эту поговорку, —

Единственное "происшествие" за мою десятидневную поездку случилось, когда я перебрался в отель в районе Бастилии, известный местным как "опасный". "Опасный" — относительное определение

вызывая французов на поединок. Два врача пониже вылезли из "Рено", расхабрившиеся, смеясь, один размахивал небольшим лезвием... Это был самый унизительный расовый инцидент, который я когда-либо наблюдал, хуже даже, чем Беркли (Калифорния) — известный тем, что там разозленные черные охотятся за тщедушной белой добычей. Араб медленно, неспеша прошел к своему авто. Никто ничего не сделал. Хиппи собрали свои манатки, пересекли улицу и занялись своими ранами, боясь даже оглянуться.

После этого я представил, что половина свидетелей происшествия будет, вероятнее всего, голосо-

"America, huh?" said one miner, a huge, mustached jerk from Vorkuta, browned from the sun. "Isn't it true that America is shit? Huh?"

I kept quiet.

"America is shit, huh? Is that why you left?"

"It's just that no one does anything there," I answered, finally forced to. "Russians live more intensely. That's how it should be."

The miner seemed somehow offended. He tried hitting me up for money. I balked, like an idiot. I thought he was just fucking with me. Limonov intervened and explained that I wasn't a rich American, that not all of us were rich. If I was smart, I would have given the money, scored points. But I'm always slow to the mark in these things. And any-

way, fuck him for asking a shitty American for money.

At one point, because of the heat, Limonov took off his shirt. The miners started to make fun of him.

"Why did you take off your shirt?" one said. "You want to show off your muscles?" A few laughed.

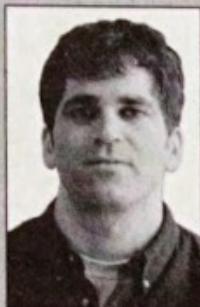
"No," Limonov replied. "It's hot."

But he's clearly proud of being the sort of Iggy Pop of the right-wing literary world.

I kept my shirt on. These Slavs—they have mostly bald chests. They were already making quips about the "kike-masonic" conspiracy to sink Russia. My North African chest and stomach and back could be sheared and made into pillows for these guys. Best to keep the shirt on and sweat puddles instead....

State Nihilism Rules Russia

by Mark Ames



Why aren't there any political assassinations in Russia today? On paper, it makes no sense. The nation has gone from a great empire to a kind of banana republic sucking loans out of organizations that were originally set up to assist the Third World, while millions of workers go unpaid for months because the structures (government/banking) that are supposed to pay them are busy siphoning their wages off to Cyprus... You couldn't ask for more perfect conditions for political instability. So why isn't anyone getting killed over it? (Indeed, the only assassinations are ones that involve mafia-style hits over valuable assets—the haves getting capped by the have-mores.) Why isn't there a Zapatista-style guerrilla movement? A single political assassination?

The argument that Russians are passive and enjoy "feeling the sting of the knout," as the last Empress put it a few years before being bayoneted, shot, rifle-butted and necro-sodomized by not-so-passive Russians, is not only racist but also false. For several decades leading up to the 1917 revolution, Russia was plagued by political terrorism. Even during Soviet times people rose against their oppressors. The Kengir uprising against Stalin's GULAGs ended with some 600 deaths, and over 1,000 Russians were gunned down in the suppression of a worker's uprising in Novocherkassk in 1964. Today, we can only count one uprising as such—the 1993 revolt, which led to somewhere between 150 and 500 deaths. It was actually the perfect uprising, from the point of view of the power structures (and comically moronic on the opposition's part). It concentrated the entire opposition movement inside of one building in the center of the capital, instead of dispersing throughout the nation. Thus it was easy not only to crush the opposition, but also to marginalize them, and therefore—and this is the key—completely discredit armed opposition as an option.

That the Russians are reacting passively—or rather, not reacting at all—to the present national calamity is obvious; what isn't obvious is *why*. The reason, I believe, is that Russians are oppressed by a kind of State Nihilism so comprehensive and effective that people have lost not only their will to fight, but even the ability to conceive that active opposition is an option. It is a nihilism that is imposed from above, a nihilism that grew organically around the activities of those in power, until it became a symbiotic force intertwined with the power structures. State Nihilism has proven to be a far more potent tool to control the populace than State Terror, which has failed as a power-strategy in late-20th century politics. State terror calls too much attention to itself and to the structures behind it—terror focuses people's attention on who they should oppose, and what they would gain by overthrowing them. But what if the populace could be inversely-terrorized? What would they be fighting for if they were convinced that nothing could be changed?

In order to rally even a vanguard to action, there has to be a kind of binding ideology. When the People's Will activists tossed bombs at Alexander II's passing car-

riage, they weren't killing a man and the innocents surrounding him—they were advancing the cause of Righteousness. The same with the Israeli settler who sprays kneeling worshippers with bullets, or the Palestinian who walks into a yellow schoolbus with a bomb attached to his chest. Who in today's Russia has that kind of fervent *belief in something*?

Almost no one. Marxism-Leninism is dead; Orthodox religion is mostly a fashion trend/ cigarette importer; Western liberalism turned out to be a cruel hoax, although some grotesque form reigns today if only by default. The one movement which could have rallied a powerful opposition—nationalism—has been effectively declawed and debased, particularly by the disastrous war in Chechnya, but also by the clowns who coopted nationalism, such as Zhirinovsky (who was probably created by the KGB precisely to cheapen and control nationalism) and Yeltsin. Chechnya in many ways posed the greatest threat to those in power, not because of the danger of the dissolution of the Russian Federation, but because it could have whipped up real nationalist sentiment among the Russian masses. Nationalism would have given people purpose, and national purpose is the enemy of those who are today ruling. Losing a drawn-out war against a tiny guerrilla movement turned out to be the perfect strategy—even if it wasn't planned that way—to discredit the possibility of Russian national glory and further the sense of hopelessness. *Paradoxically, the loss in Chechnya actually strengthened the regime.*

Every action that reinforces the national despair and nihilism also reinforces the position of those in power. Each obvious case of corruption and cronyism only reminds the public of how helpless they are, and how little they can do. The more blatant the theft, the more demoralized the public; the more demoralized the public, the more powerful the rulers; and the more powerful the rulers, the more assets they can steal. It's an amazing circular equation of State Nihilism that would cause a revolution in almost any other country where ideology, religion or nationalism still existed. In a way, the Russians are innovators in this. But Russians have been innovators in the realm of ideas for quite a while—indeed, the word "nihilism" was first coined by Turgenev in Father's and Sons to describe his character Bazarov, although that was used in an entirely different, more "positive" sense. There's no reason why State-imposed "negative" Nihilism won't become an alternative power-strategy to liberalism in the 21st Century, just as communism opposed liberalism.

If anyone denies that Russia is gripped by a state-controlled, all-encompassing nihilism, then just look to that most telling symptom of all: earlier this year, Russians were asked (via government organs), What does Russianness even mean? The answer is irrelevant; the answer lies in the need to ask the question. The question caused a stir, then frustration, then passive despair. And, not surprisingly, an answer never arrived. We barely hear it asked today. The answer was *nihil*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The leader of the striking miners from Vorkuta, as well as the head of the union for disabled miners, met with Limonov to lay out their positions. They weren't ending their sit-in until Yeltsin resigned. "Let them try to force us out with troops. If they do, if they spill blood, all fucking hell will break loose. None of us are afraid to die."

I sat on the lawn, in the shadow of that massive white government building, built like a huge concrete and granite car muffler standing up on the flat end, listening to this talk of revolution and bloodshed. Inside there, hundreds of *apparatchiki* were robbing the nation and hitting up the IMF for more loans to avert a revolution. Four and a half years earlier, I was a fresh defector, walking through the gunfire in this very district, with my head in the clouds, and absolutely no plans for the future except never to return to America. Now, I had access to the very gated lawn. And was being introduced to strike leaders by Limonov as a comrade.

After a few hours, we shook hands with the miners and left. Limonov bought himself a beer. I demanded an ice-cold Coca-Cola, to make a point. Limonov paid for it.

Then we got on the metro. At Kievskaya, he and Sasha got out to switch to another line. We said good-bye. After the doors closed, a young girl and a middle-aged man in glasses approached me, smiles on their faces, and, pointing to Limonov, asked, "Was that . . . was that him?"

The last death-threat letter sent by the Russian nerd-stalker. The letters stopped after a column that dared the stalker to "get it over with or shutup." The stalker shutup, and reappeared as an angry email letter freak named Alexei who demanded a free "Death Porn" T-shirt from the *eXile*, and threatened to beat Johnny Chen to a bloody pulp if he ever saw him. While getting a death threat is not exactly flattering, it is a sign that you're a big enough asshole to matter. And it's not as scary as it seems at first, either. As a recent study showed, all major presidential assassins were characterized by one common denominator: They didn't start off by faxing written threats to the victim.

10/12/01 05:48 FAX

02

Stop that whining, Mark. Didn't you get it from what that bright Briton told you? Ask your ma before selling us your shit, man. Cause WE ARE NOT BUYING. Wanna abuse people? Get a bit yourself. And please, take it like a man.

Suck my fucking dick. And hello from the gutter.

To be continued...

H8 RED

10/12/01 05:48 FAX

01

Congratulations, Mark, I am back. You know me.

How will you swallow this, Marky? IMF has signed away its billions. You wanna talk crisis now? Fuck you and your cocksucking investment houses of all sorts. You want an explanation why it happened? Well, because the chicks are not the only fucking problem you have to deal with back home. You biggest problem is your greedy government that wants to control everything. Would you please fucking agree with that? I know you agree, no matter what you say. With the government like that everyone who is 10% sane would agree. The problem is, you are greedy, too. For many of your fellow citizen motherfuckers the only way to get back part of what they are giving away in taxes to your cocksucking government is to play Russian Shares Roulette. The problem here is that too many of your USAID-type assholes got involved with playing it. They feel a bit more than disappointed actually LOSING their money instead of earning. What do you think they care about, the Russian people? Hoarseshit. What they care about is their greenbacks, cause that is all they got to compensate for their small, lame dicks. They need to stuff chicks with dough to keep them interested. These guys are good at lobbying things, aren't they? They simply lobbied for these billions. Do they give a shit that the most of it will go for big four-wheel-drive vehicles and huge, pompous palaces all around Moscow? No, they don't. What they care about is that THEY get a tiny part of it. Could you just fucking imagine that? Take a few jumbo jets full of money, throw it for the profit of a bunch of thieves just to ensure that your shares don't tumble too much.

Don't piss me off, Mark. Remember what I told you before? I said leave it here RIGHT NOW. You've lost your privileges, man. No laughing matter, you dickhead.

Come on, motherfucker. Face it.

Talking shito? Talk no moro. You will get enough shito from me to be real concerned, Mark. What a lovely creator of words you are, Marky. Don't turn your shit into shite, man. You will deceive no one. Listen, it's you who are so full of shite that your eyes are brown, man.

Talking some K-Y jelly stuff? You gotta be kidding, man. K-Y is shite. Every American sucker knows that. You need to get Slippery Stuff. You know exactly what part of yours you need to lube up. Cause that is exactly the part I am going to drive my Grand Cherokee into.

Let me ask you a few questions, Mark. What do you know about our culture? What do you know about Moscow? What do you know about Russians except for the fact that our Moscow got more hot chicks than your whole cocksucking land of USA?

I gonna scream it in your fucking face.