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IN THIS ISSUE

contents

page three

My Response to Recent Allegations

page seven

Fifteen Near-death Experiences

page ten

An Olympic Skateboarding Primer

page thirteen

Articles I'd Actually Read in the New York *Times*

page fifteen

The Real Life of a Self-published Author

illustrations

page three

Herc DuBaughe

pages seven and eight

Theophilus Human

page eleven

Slab V. Critters

page thirteen

Egress XII

editor's desk

MY RESPONSE TO RECENT ALLEGATIONS

Spurious claims about my personal life have been spreading like wildfire, so it's time to set the record straight by sharing the *real* story.

Things started last December when a man on the street who identified himself as a circus master told me he had an emergency with an elephant. I immediately offered to help, since I had spent my childhood caring for megafauna in a massive underground bunker with scientifically enlarged giraffes, bears, whales, and, yes, even elephants. He was surprised, then, when I told him



that my father was a secret government scientist with a multi-billion-dollar budget to discover the secrets of Godzilla and other great beasts. But what started as a seemingly serendipitous coincidence soon revealed itself to be something sinister.

After that initial meeting with *Shirk Cronque* (a name I have since learned was fake), things escalated quickly. The first elephant Shirk brought me was only a calf, but I didn't think anything was amiss because who *doesn't* have a baby African elephant in their apartment these days? I taught the little guy how to get beers from the fridge, how to sweep up the floors, how to take calls and emails as an executive assistant ... just standard animal training like you'd give to any house pet.

Shirk and I struck up a friendship of sorts. I seemed to be perfectly

suited to help him with the many problems that came his way. One day it would be removing a rancid bowl of guacamole, another day might involve coaching youth table tennis, or delivering a load of soggy paper, or carving an ice sculpture in the likeness of former First Lady Barbara Bush. But no matter what the situation, we were always able to figure things out together.

Honestly, it was nice to be wanted. Growing up, my father rarely showed any appreciation for me. He wasn't shy about playing favorites, and his assistant, Gary, always came out on top. And my mother? She was so busy with her *Harry Potter* book club that I don't even think she knew I existed—until I started reading *The Golden Compass* series out of spite.

But I started getting uncomfortable with Shirk Cronque a few months later when he, now going by

the alias *Stig Qui*, brought me a dozen rare Canadian ocelots to be shaved, schooled, and ultimately trained to operate heavy machinery in a commercial construction project. Canadian ocelots have been thought to be extinct for many years, and they're more suited to white-collar work, anyways. How could I be expected to teach a pack of wild animals how to operate forklifts to both OSHA and PETA standards?

Things only spiraled downward when Stig invited me to stay with him in a fortified anti-government compound in Idaho. (Stig offered his services to many militias in the remote wilds of the state.) He was planning a regional power-grab that involved uniting various militias under one banner. This was obviously impossible, as the men in these groups were far too busy watching

sports and posting photos of their guns to Reddit to be persuaded to join with Stüg. As per usual, his ambitions were several steps ahead of reality.

With pressure building each day spent in Idaho, I realized that I had to confront Stüg Qui. I told him that I had suspicions about the legitimacy of his entire operation. I expressed skepticism about his business idea to put tobacco into little paper straws that people would light with a match and then breathe through. I also pressed him on why he always referred to himself as the highest-scoring poker player of all time because I wasn't aware that poker even had scores—or leaderboards for that matter.

Stüg Qui was furious. He began yelling and running in circles and flapping his wings. He kept

screaming, *WHAT'S A GUY GOTTA DO TO WET HIS BEAK ANY-MORE?* Stüg accused me of disloyalty and threatened to throw me to hungry lions. And there's nothing worse than having to feed all of those lions. They're very rude.

I came to realize that I had been wrong about Stüg. Most people see an angry, purple, under-hydrated charlatan when they look at Stüg Qui. But I began to see him as something more than that: furious, violet, and impossibly arid, for starters.

We made amends. Stüg promised to pay his taxes and end things with his therapist. I agreed to stop taking paychecks and start eating more fiber. We were making progress. Together.

Fourteen years later, Stüg Qui, who was now going by the name *Din Thatch*, and I were on top of the world. By that I mean

we were summiting Rainier in search of hyper-intelligent beetles from outer space. We had been to Rome, to Mars, to the height of political power, to the kitchens of overrated celebrity chefs, to the edge of plausible deniability, and, finally, to where things all began: the bunker.

My father still ran the show at the underground military black site/experimental zoology lab/interfaith prayer chapel. He had grown a rhinoceros so large that it had become bigger than itself—a phenomenon known to megafauna experts as *paradoxical girth*. He stretched an orca to over 500 meters long (and if you're not familiar with the metric system, believe me when I say that's probably longer than a normal orca). He even had an adult bullfrog.

But I didn't go down there to brag about my dad's job—I went to find out why I grew up in an underground bunker like one of his animals.

So we went straight to the reception counter and demanded to speak to my father. But he was too busy feeding goats to a praying mantis and couldn't be bothered. Din Thatch kicked over a garbage can on our way out, so I think we expressed our displeasure pretty clearly.

The next thing I remember is standing in front of a packed house at Carnegie Hall with my kazoo, wondering if I could entertain yet another audience of uncultured fools for ninety minutes without an intermission. I took a deep breath and began performing the complete works of Chingy.

And that's right when Din Thatch ran onstage with a toy accordion and attempted to steal the show right out from under me. He started playing Chingy's debut single, *Right Thurr*,

even though he had always told me he preferred the more mature works from the artist's later years.

It appeared that I had been lied to for the very first time in my entire life. I was crushed—not only by the heavy emotions that came over me but also by the thick velvet curtains that fell due to a stage mishap. In the process, I had swallowed my kazoo and now my every breath sounded like a sickly goose having sub-par sexual intercourse. And all of the sparklers tied to my jacket had been snuffed out under the curtain so everyone in the audience could see that I had been wearing an ironic *Make America Goth Again* t-shirt. The primarily pro-Trump crowd at Carnegie turned against me. It was easily the second-worst performance of my career.

So with a heart full of regrets and a revolver full of lead, I confronted

Din Thatch backstage. This time, there would be no words, only pure, unfiltered passion. We fought, we wept, we embraced, we abandoned oratorical standards, we danced, we literally burned bridges, we signed documents (not in that order). Things weren't over—they never would be—but at least I had finally told Din Thatch how I felt and also shot him in the foot six times.

So to anyone who still thinks I should apologize for anything or give back the millions of euros that we found (fair and square) in that bank vault, I just hope the world can understand that I'm only an innocent participant (a *faultless perpetrator* if you will) in this whole situation. Don't believe anything that Din Thatch—who now goes by *Ingrex Wuu*—says, especially if he says not to believe me. And if anyone deserves to rot in jail, it's that elephant calf from the second paragraph.



autobiographia

FIFTEEN NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

*one*

In my short time on the earth, I've narrowly evaded my own mortality on many occasions. Like the time when I confronted my doorman about his lackluster performance on the job. He looked terribly upset. But I played it cool, apologized profusely,

and avoided what probably would have amounted to first-degree murder right then and there. And if you think that's impressive, wait until you hear about the fourteen other brushes with death I've experienced.

two

I was once hiking through the wilds of Uruguay when I came face to face with a rare anteater-eating ant. If you've never seen this particular ant, you'll be forgiven for not believing that they exist. All you need to know is that these ants subsist entirely on anteaters—and they're

ravenous. Since I happened to be snacking on a handful of sugar-ants at the time, it was a good thing I was able to squish the tiny beast with my boot before it could pounce.

three

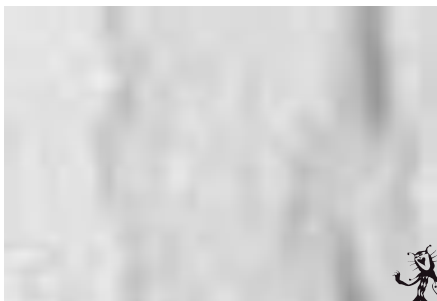
I risked a new restaurant—a feat in itself—and unknowingly ordered a dish that turned out to be full of peanuts. It was some sort of noodle delicacy in a tangy peanut sauce and sprinkled with the roasted legumes like Death himself ran the kitchen. If I had a peanut allergy, this meal would have certainly proven fatal.

four

Last fall, I actually sat through the film *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* without dying of boredom or old age.

five

I once found myself in the suburbs with only a car and my wits to take me back home. So I drove a grueling fifteen-mile stretch of the infamous Interstate Five at a death-defying forty miles per hour, across a bridge strung three hundred feet over the roaring Columbia River. One slip up from me or a fellow driver would mean that my life would certainly end. Somehow I managed to weave through traffic, exit the speedway, navigate to my home, and crawl into my living room—tear-soaked above and completely soiled below from the harrowing ordeal.

*six*

I refuse to switch to wireless headphones, and I've paid dearly for it. I once dozed off while listening to Max Richter's *Sleep* with my earbuds and found myself tangled up on the floor, hardly able to breathe. I had to squirm to the tool chest in an inchworm formation, get the wire-cutters, and free myself—all before running out of oxygen.

seven

In another accidentally death-defying stunt, I walked all the way

down the knife aisle at a kitchen supply store. There were rows and rows of freshly sharpened implements from the floor to the ceiling, closing in around me. Bloodthirsty. Glinting in fluorescence. Cursing the hooks and shelves that held them back from their soft and fleshy target.

eight

When my wife delivered our first child, I almost fainted (and could have bumped my head in the process). It was a very stressful situation for me. You rarely hear about fathers dying in childbirth, but it's a real threat for men.

nine

I spent the summer of '09 moonlighting as a private eye. On an all-night stakeout, I was instructed to post up and keep my eyes peeled for

an important person of interest in the investigation. I didn't realize that *keeping one's eyes peeled* is an innocent figure of speech, because I fucking *peeled* my eyeballs that night and almost went blind in the process.

ten

When I was twelve, a “friend” convinced me to try horseback riding.

eleven

I was also about twelve when I first made eye contact with another person, thereby exposing my whole self to their gaze. I felt emotionally bare and somehow connected to all humankind (in the worst way possible). Our souls intertwined. My very personhood was invaded in that fleeting moment by these kind eyes who certainly must have been hiding disgust at my innermost secrets and insecurities. I darted my eyes

elsewhere, anywhere, and tried to continue ordering a Big Mac meal before giving up running out the door.

twelve

Very recently, while writing an autobiographical essay about my close encounters with death, I came up with only fourteen instances. Since I felt like the piece should have a nice, round fifteen, I did what any great writer would do and contemplated suicide, thereby solving the issue from the comfort of my writing desk.

thirteen


In the army, I was captured by the Taliban and spent eighteen months as a prisoner of war in an off-grid underground dungeon in rural Pakistan. One day, a guard came just close enough to my cell for me to silently eliminate him, obtain his keys,

and lead a massive jailbreak.

fourteen

The same “friend” who convinced me to try horseback riding later persuaded me to go for a dip in the local river. Needless to say, I've since cut ties with this adrenaline-junkie.

fifteen

I once lost my balance while peering down a subway tunnel in central Tokyo, right as a speeding train was approaching. Luckily I was able to pull myself back on a stranger's sleeve—just as the train careened through the station, I lurched upward and came away unscathed. The woman whose sleeve I clutched to safety unfortunately *did* fall into the path of the train and was killed on impact. But tragedy averted for me! Chalk it up as another in a long string of lucky days. 

sports desk

AN OLYMPIC SKATEBOARDING PRIMER

“SKATEBOARDING WILL MAKE ITS OLYMPIC DEBUT IN TOKYO 2021. THE STREET SKATEBOARDING COMPETITIONS WILL BE HELD ON 26 AND 27 JULY, AND THE PARK SKATEBOARDING COMPETITIONS WILL BE HELD ON 5 AND 6 AUGUST.”

- OLYMPIC.ORG

Before the Olympic Games are broadcast this summer, we sports aficionados could be excused for needing a brush-up on competitive skateboarding. And after this quick reintroduction, you'll be *harshing your melon* with the best of them (that's skate lingo for *spectating*).

history

Skateboarding was originally developed in antiquity by Californian coastal peoples. From there, skateboarding has spread to all sorts of suburban teenagers!

But skateboarding's rise to the Olympic scene hasn't been without

adversity. The sport requires large paved areas, expensive equipment, and fisheye camera lenses to be properly observed. The sport was snubbed from joining the Olympic games in 1906 in favor of pistol dueling and again in 1984 when solo synchronized swimming was introduced.

After an aggressive lobbying campaign, mostly involving bribery, skateboarding was allowed to join the 2020 games—on the condition that all participants refrain from vandalism and punk rock music on official Olympic grounds.

objective

The objective in competitive skateboarding is to shred harder than any other bro or lady-bro in the park. During competition, skateboarders, or *skeeters* as they're affectionately known, enter the course and proceed to hammer out as many tricks as their little feet can muster in the allotted time. Competitors can use the whole course to their advantage, or anything off the course, for that matter. The use of props is also encouraged; who can forget Jimmy *The Crank* Canton's memorable qualifying run playing guitar to the tune of *Highway to Hell*?



In this year's Olympics, we're likely to see a variety of classic tricks—soft-angle zilchers, triple gustos, unholy shake and bakes, tiptoe gator claws, twisted love triangles, shingle-squirts, reverse duckbills, et cetera—as well as more recent inventions such as the underwater clam bone or perhaps even a military-grade scuttlebug (if conditions allow).

You may spot a competitor miming their run without a

skateboard. Do not adjust your television, this is all part of competitive skateboarding, which doesn't actually require the use of a skateboard at all. The more convincing and hilarious the mimic, the more points the skater earns.

judging

Like gymnastics, competitors are scored by a panel of judges during their session. Unlike gymnastics,

skateboarding is cool.

Scoring is determined by the number of high-fives the judges give one another during the course of a skater's run. This method was developed during the X Games, where judges have been known to bruise their palms so severely that competitions can often be halted for judging injuries. Judge Millie *The Skeeze* McGrady lost his right arm during the 2005 X Games in Los Angeles when a competitor landed a chartreuse pulp slam after a huge reverse mortgage.

skate lingo

- *Biff, bite, bail, bonk, beef, and eat shit* are all terms for falling.
- If a skater misplaces their helmet before their run, that's called *grunting it*, after Davey *The Grunt*

Jackson, who famously lost his helmet during the 2009 X Games.


- *Doping* is yelling *dope* after a skater lands a trick.
- A *Michael Bay* is when a ramp collapses under a skater during a hard landing. It happens more than you'd think.
- A *gnarly end* is when a skater falls into the pit of spikes at the center of the park course.
- If a skater cheats by way of the dark arts, that's called *hexing*. Competitors caught hexing face a lifetime banishment to snowboarding. Just ask Shaun *The Egg White*.
- When three skaters crash into each other in midair during warmups, that's called a *Triple Stogie*.

competitors to watch

Obviously Tony Hawk, duh.

the future of skateboarding

Now that skateboarding has ascended to Olympic competition, the only direction to go is complete obscurity—like every other Olympic sport except basketball. And there can only be one basketball. In twenty years' time, we'll stare with bewilderment at the strange street and park courses dotting the Olympic grounds of coastal Kansas City.

We can also expect to see skateboarding institutionalized with more money pouring into the sport. So prepare to be bombarded with lame camps, annoying tutors, and conformist skate clubs ruining the rebellious flair of this once proud sport. It's hard to believe now, but skateboards could one day become as lame as roller blades. 

featured essay

ARTICLES I'D ACTUALLY READ IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

“HOW A WRITER WITH A PH.D IN PSYCHOLOGY BECAME A POKER CHAMP”

- TITLE OF AN ACTUAL NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

- How a Former Child Actor with Seemingly Nothing to Hide Became the Worst Gubernatorial Candidate in Memory
- How a Terrorist Recruiting Channel with Plenty of Impressionable Young Minds Became the Hottest Fortnite Clan in eSports
- How a Botanist with a Few Hours of Free Time Became a Former Botanist Awaiting Trial
- How a Nazarene Carpenter with a Mission to Save Humanity Became an Enemy of the State
- How a Byzantine Chant with an Irresistible Bass Groove Became the Summer Hit of 1583
- How a DIY Macrame WhatsApp Group with Deb and Carol Became a Portal to the Dark Web

THE REAL LIFE OF A SELF-PUBLISHED AUTHOR

Earlier this year, I self-published a collection of short stories as a straight-to-eBook release. So, yeah, you could say that things are going pretty well for me.

Well, no, that's not entirely honest. Things are a lot harder than I thought. With all the blogs and resources claiming to help aspiring independent authors, none of them accurately predicted the difficulties I

now face. Self-publishing is the simple part, believe me. Composing an eBook file and posting it to Apple iBooks and Amazon Kindle is free and easy—literally anyone can do it. But, life after sending that manuscript to digital book stores is nothing like I imagined.

Where to begin? Well, the savagery of the critics is easily the most overlooked obstacle of self-publishing. These book reviewers

don't care about you as a person, they only care about getting clicks and selling magazines. They'll give you five stars, book-of-the-year honors, and glowing praise without even thinking of the attention you'll have to deal with from the millions of new fans you'll now have to please! These cruel critics will parade your name through the annals of literary history with significantly more adoration than you're prepared to receive as a lowly self-publishing upstart.

I love being recognized in the street for my work (an autobiographical short story collection only available in a digital format), but the constant selfies and autographs are giving me carpal tunnel. I can't even pop into my local grocery store without fans reacting to my presence and shouting, *I can't believe we have our very own self-published eBook-exclusive short story writer in the neighborhood! What an honor!*

Taxes are burdensome and confusing when you rake in millions of dollars after quietly self-publishing on Kindle and eBooks. Now I have to deal with offshore bank accounts and a bunch of other weird tax loopholes that never plagued me before becoming an author. Get a good accountant and an expensive lawyer to help you sort through the financial burden of making more money in

one week than you've made in an entire year doing other work.

My lifestyle is completely different now, several months after writing, editing, and releasing an eBook without outside help or professional publishing resources. Something that really bugs me is when my house cleaners park their helicopter on my only rooftop helipad—leaving me no choice but to use my secondary chopper in the onsite helicopter hanger. I really don't like the leather interior in last year's model, but what can I do? I'm a one-time independent digital author and I guess that's my cross to bear.

If you want to independently write and release a work of literature in electronic form, your aspiration is noble. But know this: the life ahead of you will not be easy. If your experience is anything like mine,

you're going to need sturdy shelves to handle the weight of all the prestigious awards and trophies that will be dropped in your lap by the literary community. My Ikea shelves snapped in half and pulled their screws right out of the wall when I added yet another Lifetime Achievement Medal from some academic literature group in Europe to my already massive collection of accolades, honors, and recognitions.

Sorry to break the news to you, but somebody had to reveal the truth about self-publishing. Sometimes I wonder if I would have been better off if I never wrote that damn book. Then I wouldn't have to worry about yacht club dues or the intense pressure from my fan-club for a sequel. I shudder to think what my life might become if I were the author of multiple self-published digital-exclusive short story collections. I'd have to beat the fans (and the money) away with a stick! 