

White Shark Tales: Vanarchy in the U.S.A.

...in which a boy and his van set out to liberate each other...

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The strength of capitalism lies in its ability to make us be still. Where there is stillness, there is the danger of being chained down. It slips upon you like a thief in the night, tip-toeing past your defenses. It first appears in many guises — careers, expectations, degrees, promises ... parents, neighbors, children, employees, students, rent, mortgages, plans that we never had a say in and futures that aren't ours to possess. Yes, the capitalist thief moves quietly in the night, and the thief is efficient. The thief takes everything, and leaves you nothing but a shell, a cheap imitation of the life you really want. However — can the thief rob your house if you don't have one?

Yet. how can you have no house, no possessions, nothing to your name but the clothes on your back? Simple. You must always be on the move.

There are many paths that leave this world of poor-paying jobs and unfulfilling lives. To each her own path — it would be arrogant to attempt to tell you what your path is out of the mundane humiliations of everyday life. In sheer physical terms, there are many ways to be on the move. You can just walk to the side of the road and stick out your thumb, and a stranger will pick you up and take you on the road. For those of you who enjoy the usage of your legs, you can always just walk through the woods, relying on wild berries and the kindness of a stranger farmer for a bowl of porridge in the morning. Some may enjoy hopping on the underground railroad, modern-day hobos criss-crossing the country on the forgotten industrial skeleton of our most digital of societies. For me, it was a White Shark that stole my heart. Nothing much, just a normal white van, of cheap make and dodgy American build. I'm not sure how it all came to pass, how the Shark was released upon the country to wreak innumerable acts of utter piracy, revolt, and complete lack of regard for all capitalist values (except excessive gasoline consumption). I remember only that there was nothing left for me where I was. There had been too many horrors, too much failure — glorious failure, but failure nonetheless — and I felt like a ghost in my own hometown. It occurred to me that maybe I needed a change of surroundings, so I grasped my best brother-in-arms Ishmael by the shoulder one lonely night and told him we should do it, just leave it all behind. We met with an elite group of coconspirators gathered in the wreckage of the former anarchist compound amongst the slowly creeping kudzu. We decided to leave right then and there the ruins of our youth, and we gave little heed to the future. All we had was a few ideas, a few dates and events, a few scraps of a plan, and an atlas. Being a generous soul, I volunteered my old van, purchased from one of my neighbors whose mother had recently died, for transport. After all, we had to make it to these events on time, and train-hopping and hitch-hiking are notoriously unreliable. Little did I know we were releasing a monster, a monstrous shark the like of which I have yet to see again.

None of these stories are fictional, despite their ludicrous nature. Indeed, all have happened to me. However, names have been changed to protect the innocent (or, to be precise, the not-so-innocent), and the chronological order of events has been changed to throw off the fucking feds! Also — these adventures haven't been written down to glorify the last year of my life, but to bear witness to the possibilities all of us have

before us. Indeed, there are many adventures of grander scope than mine in this world, but I still hope these tales warm some lonely soul... and cause her to quit her job, jump in her van, and never look back.



Only a Manner of Time Before Banks.

Somehow, the White Shark had swallowed Isabella from Brazil, although exactly how was somewhat of a mystery. Perhaps it was because she had just been arrested at some demonstration in Philadelphia (and I'm sure the paranoid Philadelphia cops were shocked by her passport — the international conspiracy of anarchists manifesting itself!). Perhaps it was because the white van had carried the CrimethInc. troupe to a presentation in Worcester where we complemented her video with a band made purely out of dumpstered metal scraps we had found around town the day before. To be honest, I have no idea. The White Shark is a magnet for discontents and malcontents with absolutely no respect for borders, and its siren-song is hard for anyone to resist.

One problem about the White Shark is you have to feed her to keep her happy, and she takes no other food other than gasoline, occasionally garnished by oil and transmission fluid. We had made our way to Maine after ending the North American Insurrection Tour in New York City (due to unfortunate circumstances, but mostly just having been around each other for so long we just hated each other!). Now, with every single member of our merry crew utterly and completely broke, how we were going to escape the ever-pleasant woods of Maine was going to be a problem. The obvious thing to do was to just steal the gas, which we had done a few times before. However, in the words of Ishmael, "Sometimes you gotta keep the small laws to break the big ones," and given that the White Shark currently carried one recently arrested international

and at least one felon, getting caught brazenly stealing gas would be amateur. Also, one key to stealing gas is having multiple escape routes, and Maine has really only one highway. There had to be an easier way to get money. After considerable deliberation at our secret log cabin deep in the woods of Maine, we took out maps and decided we were going to do a raid at a Wal-mart shopping center in the port of Augusta. Ishmael had protested its construction years earlier, so at least one of the company was familiar with the territory. We decided the most cunning path would be for us to enter the shopping center and steal everything we could get our grubby hands on, getting money to feed the monstrous hunger of the white van from various cryptic return scams and shady pawn shops.

Filling the van with dumpstered chips (Maine seems to specialize in Frito-Lay dumpsters!), we left with enough rations to make it to the next port of call, and came up with a scheme on the way. We would walk into a very expensive and over-priced yuppie store that was known to be exceptionally vulnerable to return scams. Given that it was a small store, an advance squad would distract the few employees with various requests, while one guerrilla warrior-thief would walk in — cool as ice — and fill a backpack full of loot, then run out, to be intercepted by the Shark who would be waiting obediently outside. We should have known the best laid schemes of sharks and men can go awry.

As a member of the advance squad and perpetrator of innumerable thieveries, even I was shocked by how easily the two employees were hoodwinked into leaving their positions unguarded. We went in, dressed the best we could as yuppie shoe-shoppers, and demanded new shoes. Both employees simultaneously left the cash register and disappeared into the mysterious netherworld of shoes that must have been somewhere out of sight in some closet in the store. The guerrilla came in, grabbed a backpack, and with a smile on his face began throwing all manner of loot into his bag. It all appeared to be going well when, to our dismay, another customer walked in! This ordinary bourgeois customer immediately noticed that something was not right with this shop, and yelled for the employees. The guerrilla, ever quick, fled the store full backpack in hand before the employees bumbled from their closets of shoes. Not sure what to do, we decided to delay the employees, questioning both of them as regards the whereabouts of our demanded shoes, denying the existence of the shoplifter that the other customer saw race through the door. After several minutes of complete confusion by the employees, they decided that something weird definitely was going on and called the police. We kept up a whirlwind of utter lies and ridiculous demands upon the employees till the bitter end, but when they picked up the phone to call the police, we felt we might be suspected of collusion with the more obvious criminal elements of our enterprise. We politely made our farewells and fled the scene of the crime ourselves. Quickly I made it back to the helm of the White Shark, where a wanted political criminal who had wisely avoided participation in the crimes of the day reminded me we had to get him away from the scene of the crime, and whispered that he had grabbed the loot the criminal had wisely dropped near the Shark on the

way out of the store. The White Shark bucked, and we ran behind the store complex, hoping to outrun the police and find our erstwhile guerrilla friend. Unfortunately, he wasn't there, and, seeing the police car roll into the shopping center, we quickly sped away through another exit.

Making very quick decisions, I decided it would be best to get all possible criminals (except myself.), felons, and recently stolen goods out of the van. However, we couldn't leave our friend in the claws of the police. Quickly, I grabbed Isabella and told her that she should exit the van and begin a search for the guerrilla thief, and if he was seen to tell him to hide away as far in the woods as possible. She was to meet us in front of the shopping center and inform us of his general location, as soon as she communicated this to our companion. Not feeling entirely right for dropping off a South American revolutionary in the middle of a desolate shopping center that was currently being occupied by the police, the van sped off. I wondered what a parallel situation would be in like Brazil — what if a group of Brazilian anarchists left me as a scout in the middle of Sao Paulo? After getting a few miles away from the site of the crime, the more criminally wanted of our crew jumped out the van with the loot, and fled far into the woods after a few minutes conversation about the various bird-calls and honks I should use to announce the return of the Shark. Quickly, the White Shark sped back around and headed back into the mouth of the enemy. Indeed, the police car was right outside the recently robbed yuppie-store, and Isabella was walking about the complex looking nonplussed about the entire situation. I rode up and she jumped into the van, informing me that the police were still in the store questioning the employees, but she had not seen our missing guerrilla. In complete panic, the Shark prowled around the parking lot looking for its missing servant — and out of the corner of our eyes we spotted a shirtless vagrant in the woods on top of a hill! It was our guerrilla, shirt torn off, looking like some strange escaped Cro-Magnon man gazing upon the concrete landscape of an encroaching alien civilization.

Now, the mind of a thief works in strange ways, and whenever I see a young man with his shirt off in the woods I know he is trying to escape the cops. Obviously, the first thing someone is going to tell a cop about a criminal is his clothing description. So, the bright criminal is either going to change clothing, or, lacking a spare change of clothing, just take the shirt off! Myself, I wasn't sure exactly what the cop would do if he saw a young and shirtless man in the woods. I recognized the dire situation, and the van pulled up as near as it could, as our young guerrilla charged headlong into the open maw of the shark. Fellow pirate safe and no cops in pursuit, we rolled back to the mysterious spot in the woods where we had dropped off the rest of the crew. Unfortunately, in the heat of moment I had completely forgotten where exactly I had dropped them off. As night approached, it was beginning to look like we would never find them again. I started honking the horn wildly, driving like a madman up and down the street. Out of the corner of my mind I thought I recognized the spot where I had dropped off my compatriots. Jumping out of the car, I heard what could only be the sound of semi-automatic weapons! After fiddling with the birdcalls for a

few minutes, I just began yelling for them. Within minutes, the criminal underclass reappeared from the woods, scared out of their wits. “They’re shooting fucking guns, I don’t know who they are but these fucking woods are being pumped full of metal!” Recognizing the perilous nature of being stuck in the woods with gun-toting Mainards, we jumped back into the safety of the van and sped off into the distance.

I looked into Isabella’s eyes, trying to give some semblance of an explanation to our behavior in the last few hours. I didn’t know what other types of activists or revolutionaries she had been hanging out with beforehand. How did this compare to what anarchists did in Philadelphia...or Brazil? I imagine most of the circles in Brazil put our petty crime to shame. I fumbled for words, trying to explain what we were doing. “Were not exactly activists you know...we re anarchists...were sort of cousins to outlaws, but we have a mission in life, you know?”-I could see the gleam in her eye. She knew. Welcome to the States!

Revolution in the Heartland

The van drove and drove and drove. To all of us in its depths, it soon became obvious that this was not just an ordinary van, but a van with the heart of an animal. Very quickly, small parts of its machinery of lesser quality soon fell apart. First it was a tire, then a strange part of radiator, then yet another unnamable piece of metal. Like some ungodly monster, sometimes it appeared as if the van was reducing itself to the very minimum needed for the trip. Four of us in a van, keeping each other in good spirits with stories and memories, dehydrating in the summer heat. Sneaking in and out of campsites without paying, attempting to find backroads into the Badlands, running out of gas in the middle of the Badlands, a kind indigenous family providing us gas from their own personal store. Clearly we were slowly going mad in the van — I was even struck down with blindness due to poison ivy in my eyes! Yet the White Shark kept chugging along, ruthlessly plowing across the country all night. Ishmael drank cup of coffee after cup of coffee, and the black liquid of darkness fueled our madness. Many a lonely gas station was left short of food and gas, and many an anarchy symbol scribbled on a bathroom wall.

Small towns appeared before us, and in every one we found a little cell of anarchists plotting the destruction of civilization as we know it. No town was safe from the rapacity of the White Shark. We would pull into the parking lots of shopping centers, walk in without a cent, and walk out our pockets full of fruit and vegetarian sushi — and if we were feeling lucky, one of us would run out with a full shopping cart of wine and soy cream! In one small town, the girlfriend of our host called to tell her boyfriend that some strange vagrants had walked into the store, clearly stole large sums of food, and walked out — and every employee knew, but no one could be bothered to stop them because it was so humorous. Laughing, our host told his girlfriend to come over and meet the culprits. We created anarchy anywhere and everywhere, yelling

revolutionary manifestos in coffee-shops in Des Moines, organizing discussions with Christian straight edge kids about abortion rights, rioting — and throwing donuts! — against cops on the streets of America's largest suburbs, cheering our hip hop comrades the Insurrectionists as they spun poetry that mixed equal parts relativity theory and John Brown practice for crust-punks in warehouses and hip art crowds in New York City. We even played basketball with kids outside church, and then snuck in to steal their food! Everywhere, not just anarchists, but anarchy itself.

It was soon obvious that we were in no mere van, but some strange animal hell-bent on destruction. We imagined — or did we? — a large fin rising from its white roof; and did not the grill of our vehicle appear to be a gaping maw? The white van clearly had been hiding a secret identity from us the entire time. Like some bizarre automobile superhero — our van was actually a White Shark! Despite innumerable tires blown, arrests for mob action, being late for our own shows, and alternating between loving and hating each other, the van — by now clearly becoming more and more animal — finally made it to the Earth First! Round River Rendezvous in Wyoming. H. Rap Brown (who, I might add, our government has framed for murder and thrown in jail!) was only partially right. Anarchy is as American as apple-pie.

The first night at the rendezvous, rumor broke out a local bar was offering, I kid you not, one hour of free beer. Immediately, dozens of smelly anarchists piled into the belly of the white shark, arms and legs sticking out at all possible angles from every possible orifice — window, that is. Barely able to move, I somehow drove the mad creature down to the local bar. When we entered it, we were quickly surrounded by cowboys: huge men with giant muscles, tight jeans, and mighty mustaches that would make Emiliano Zapata proud. As everyone sat down and drank beer after beer, it quickly became apparent that the anarchists had wandered into the wrong bar. The largest cowboy with the most terrifying visage of all of them began to systematically harass the smallest woman who had come with us. The largest anarchist amongst us, a mighty redneck himself from the wild woods of Maine, inserted himself into what appeared was going to be a brawl between the local working class and the anarcho-eco-warriors. The night could not be going in a worst direction, and the cowboys were much more well-muscled than ourselves.

Luckily, at that moment a local folk singer, himself sporting a mighty beard, rose to the stage. The anarcho-redneck, realizing the fate of the Movement itself lay in the balance, called out for some Folsom Prison Blues:

*I bear the train a coming, its rolling round the bend, and I ain't seen the
sunshine since I don't know when, I'm stuck in Folsom Prison, and time
keeps dragging on, but that train keeps on rolling, down to San Antoin...
I shot a man in Reno, just to watch him die...when I hear that whistle
blowing, I hang my head and cry*

As if by divine intervention, the crowd all began singing: cowboys, anarchists, rough-necks, eco-warriors, rednecks, eco-warriors, and hippies, all dancing like the devil him-



The cast of Eugenia and Wobbleo prepare to give the performance of their lives

self possessed them. Every single one escaping their own personal Folsom prison, grasping shoulders and swaying to a man who could only be Johnny Cash reincarnated. Nothing could stop the crowd, and the man sang for hours. In fact, in the heat of the moment a train-hopper with a banjo jumped on stage and began playing with our cowboy singer. As soon as the cowboy singer stepped off the stage, the entire Dumpster Country Ramblers — a wild anarchist old-time music band if there ever was one! — jumped onto stage themselves, and began playing their hit single: “*With a Banjo and an AK-47 by my side.*” The cowboys kept going wild, and soon everyone was intermixing, talking about how much they hated politicians, kissing their sweethearts, and sharing stories about the mountains and woods. America, there is hope.

After a series of entertaining workshops, the highlight being How To Kill With A Mag-light, we decided it was time for CrimethInc. to manifest itself in a way it never had before, in a way that would be utterly entertaining, yet as relevant as it could be to the mangy hundred-odd anarchists and earth warriors congregating: we were going to throw a musical.

There have always been raging debates amongst the more intellectual of our brethren about what exactly things will “look like” after the revolution, despite these conversations doing little to nothing to bring anything even slightly resembling a revolution about. Of these debates, one of the most vicious and irrelevant has always been the “green vs. red” anarchism debate...and we let our imaginations go with the flow. What if there was a Revolution and folks really divided upon those lines? What if Ted Kaczynski was freed from jail to lead the dread-locked green anarchists to victory against syndicates of red anarchists who controlled the manufacturing plants of Carhartts and Mag-lites? What if the daughter of Ted Kaczynski, Eugenia, fell in love with the young magnate of the One Big Union, Wobbleo? Yes, we had a plot for a play, and were going to call it Wobbleo and Eugenia.

Soon, we had gathered a horde of anarchists from every corner of the United States, with the dreadlocked greens putting twigs through their noses and reds bedecking themselves in fulllength bright red pajamas. While the cleverness of the drama can never be conveyed to those who were not there, at one point the greens and the red anarchists, involved in a gang fight over the various interpretations of May-day (as either a pagan festival or celebration of workers rights) began singing to the tune of a fairly well-known boy-band song, My Way:

I want to have a class war, I want to see industrial collapse, I never want to hear you say... I want the revolution my way!

Soon, the green anarchists, engaged in acts of excessive pot-smoking, were infiltrated by the young Wobbleo, who wooed the beautiful Eugenia with his ode of how “he works everyday, and there’s nothing that I own...” She let down her dreads and the burly Wobbleo, red cape and all, climbed into her tree-sit for a night of hanky-panky. And as soon as Ted Kaczynski found out about her love-making with the enemy he quickly

scolded her: “Don’t you know that the Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been nothing but a disaster for the human race!” Soon, war broke out between the feuding anarchists, and as Wobbleo and Eugenia desperately hopped trains to have their child in a safe haven, the greens and reds began hacking each other to bits to the tune of Michael Jackson’s “Beat It.”

“You dumpster-dive to live, that ain’t primitive, so beat it!” “We wear bones through our nose and we’ll cut down your cellphone poles!” ...until one green anarchist reveals a dirty secret: *“I got a trust fund and I got an SUF, it’s parked over there right next to a tree”*. A hushed silence fell upon the collected forces of Earth First! For a second, we thought maybe our satire had hit a bit too close to home for some of those in attendance... but then the crowd burst out laughing. Surrounded by the dead bodies of their overly-ideological anarchist opponents, Eugenia gave birth to their green and red love-child — Plaid! Soon, the entire crowd began singing:

Why, why did the all anarchists die, was the theory too heavy and the logic to dry? If we dump the ideology and bake a new pie, maybe this won’t be the day that we die, maybe this won’t be the day we die...”

The Shark versus The International Monetary bund

Of course, the Shark soon began looking for larger targets than yuppie shopping centers and greater dreams to host than traveling anarchist circuses...the Shark was straining at the leash. The Shark decided that only the largest of international financial institutions would sate its eternal hunger for blood. Before even I knew it, I was driving with a small crew of anarchists to the hotel where the International Monetary Fund was meeting in a few short months. The hotel resembled nothing more than a nightmare of modern architecture, a veritable Death Star of comfort and luxury for the rulers of the world in the new millennium. Huge towering glass doors, giant towers and escapades. Yet, with all their might and power, how were we going to get in? There is always something to be said for walking through the front door.

Four smart but still black-clad anarchists walked right into the hotel where the International Monetary Fund was going to meet, without any of the staff even giving us a small blink. Quickly, we looked around — and it appeared that we were about to crash a party, a party named for some strange corporation with one of those oh-so-fashionable names to inspire investor confidence, like DigiCorp or NeoTech. Quickly realizing we were strangers in a strange land, we ran up the nearest stairs we could find, desperate to camouflage ourselves with any thin veneer of legitimacy. It appeared as if by magic: four mostly empty wine glasses left idly by. We grabbed them, and soon had metamorphosed from anarchist secret agents to slightly drunk and bewildered employees at a company party. Indeed, we heard loud pumping music below, and, never

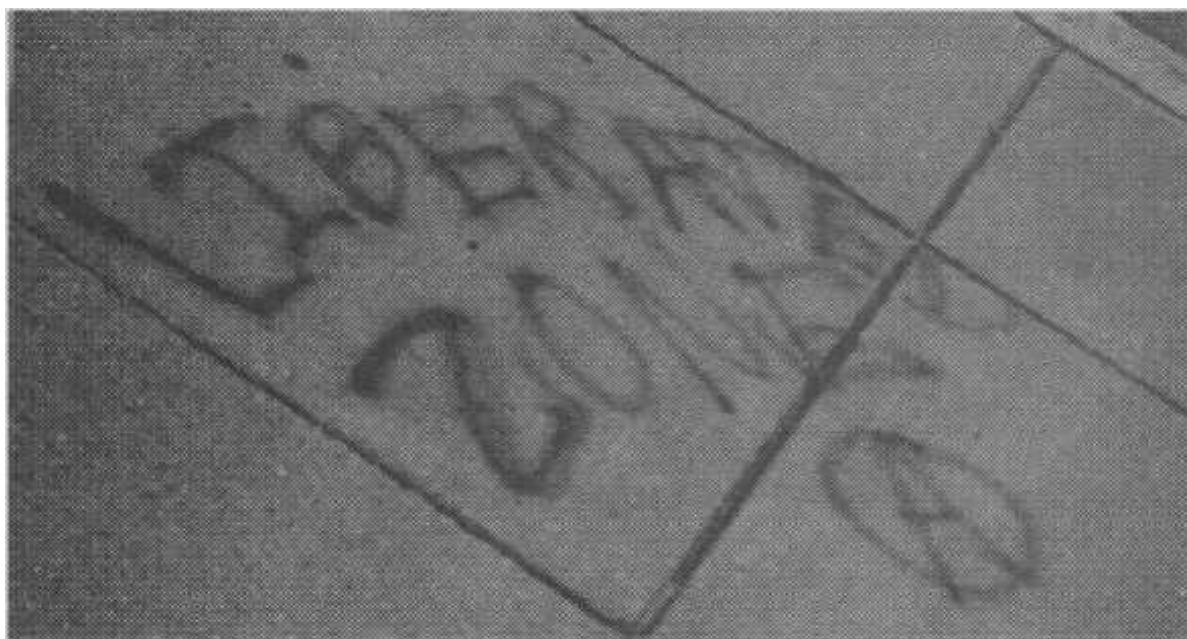
ones to forgo a dance party, we made it down the stairs and into one of the largest halls I have ever seen. A huge screen towered above hundreds of drunk employees in neat white shirts, with an image of a woman with perfectly manicured hair across an a sky so blue that it could only be digital. She spoke, and it was if God or Big Brother himself was speaking: "Welcome to the future..."

Aghast, we looked up, only to see a giant green dinosaur being slowly deflated by dozens of angry computer programmers and bureaucrats smashing it with giant rubber hammers. The future was apparently going to be very strange indeed. Although I was sorely tempted by what appeared to be free food near the sagging dinosaur, we thought actual employees, even if slightly drunk, might ask us which division we worked and so give us away to the authorities. Hand in hand, we fled upstairs.

Wandering throughout the halls of the future meeting place of the IMF, capitalist waste manifested itself as it always does at the most opportune of times. The halls of the hotel were lined with leftover room-service food that the chubby programmers and fat bureaucrats couldn't even finish. I immediately began a one-man mission to eat every last morsel I could. Half-finished martini in one hand, decadent half-eaten ice-cream in the other, I was unstoppable. We wandered floor after floor, and went up ten whole stories of sleeping chambers and wasted food. Whenever a hotel employee would appear and ask us what were doing, we would leer drunkenly at him using our best acting skills and ask where some random room number was. "Oh, I'm so sorry...I thought I was on the fourth floor!" The security system completely compromised by four anarchists armed with empty wine-glasses.

We became bolder and bolder as night ticked on. Soon, even the drunkest of the employees of the computer company were going to bed, and the hotel became virtually empty...and all ours! We found strange staircases that went down into the depths of the hotel, walked down endless corridors and found doors to empty rooms and storage chambers. We conjectured that if we had been a bit more prepared and had brought a few months supply of food, we could hide in one of those rooms and come out in the middle of one of the meetings of the International Monetary Fund with our guns blazing. Using napkins found on silver platters found outside hotel rooms, we scrawled maps of the entire complex. Eventually, as we got deeper and deeper underground into service corridors with 'Employees Only' written on them, we would occasionally hear what sounded like an employee coming around the corner. Panicking, we would run around corners hold our breath, jumping into elevators and hitting any button we could to escape. Occasionally, we would have to confront some bored night employee late night. They would always be very perplexed by the appearance of four anarchists holding wine-glasses in a corridor which no one in their right mind could possibly have wandered into by accident. Yet we would hold to our story: "Oh, we must have walked down the stairs instead of up them to our rooms! What were we thinking?" Human beings, if given implausible situations, tend to accept even the most irrational of explanations as long as it lets them reconcile whatever is before their eyes with their internal conception of reality.

As dawn starting creeping up on us, we had actually scouted one of the largest hotels in the world completely out, and we decided to leave. On the way out, as all scouts are supposed to do, we checked door knobs to see if they were unlocked. Right next to the exit from the hotel we found a unlocked door that led straight to what appeared to be some ludicrously fancy, and completely closed, hotel restaurant. In every hotel restaurant there is a bar. And in every bar there is beer.



Where's the next liberated zone? Can we break into the oval office and nap there next?

Our logical chain complete, we jumped over the bar in the restaurant and started trying to open all the locked cupboards. While the last employee at the restaurant had been bright enough to lock the wine-cupboard, they had left a giant case of iced beer and liquor completely open. Inside, it was like a treasure trove of beers with strange German names and liqueurs the like of which people of my social class aren't even supposed to know! We quickly stuffed our pockets with cans of the finest beer and peppermint schnapps, only to realize that there was no way we could carry it all out. After peering out the door, all four of us scampered out of the hotel and to the van, unloading our liquor on the way. Personally, I began feeling a bit paranoid, and thought that maybe this act was taking it just a little too far, that now we were dealing in pure hubris. However, the first beer run had only whetted our appetites. Grabbing our backpacks, we meandered right back into the hotel, walking through the front door, straight into the bar, and began filling our rucksacks with alcohol. In we went, and out we went, and in again, and out again...until every last beer was gone! In an act that can only be considered complete chutzpah, we had stolen the IMF's beer!

As we loaded up the white shark and our one other vehicle with the beer, we came to the realization that we had no idea what to do with the excessive amount of alcohol we had just stolen. The White Shark, drunk off its latest victory, seemed to be smiling upon us. Suddenly, a member of our jolly crew had a brilliant idea: We should give out the beer free at Food Not Bombs! Although it would surely be breaking one of the bylaws of the International Network of Food Not Bombs©, anyone who had to spend their nights hungry in DC at least deserved a beer to keep them warm. We drove it back to our secret anarchist hideout in the depths of the Capital itself, and, as we opened the back door, one of our compatriots came stumbling out of bed, red dreadlocks flying. When he heard the idea, he grinned. It was going to be one hell of a Food Not Bombs. Some may call it stealing, but as every modern-day Robin Hood knows: it's not theft, it's redistribution of wealth.

Intermezzo

The relationship between the driver and her car is hard to understand. Relationship is a dry word, a word used by dating guides in cheap newspapers and half-hearted people who are afraid to commit themselves to anything greater than a life of romance novels bought at supermarkets. The love between a car and her driver is hard to understand. The lines between us and our methods of transportation become fuzzy, and we melt into our own machinery. No words can express my affection for the White Shark: it feels more like home to me than any house I've ever lived in, and my sleeping bag has more fond memories associated with it than any floor the world over. Words cannot describe the many nights I've spent living in her metal shell, never able to stretch fully out — so leading to my habit of curling up like a wolf even when I sleep in a bed¹. The White Shark transformed with me, from a respectable minivan in which a mother might drive her child to a soccer match, to a torn up, smelly, vengeful, dark vagabond of the night. The paint started chipping, the white began to be encrusted with dirt that no amount of washing could fix, strange liquids continually leaked from its shadowy crevices. The tape player, often the only thing holding my sanity together in the darkest hours of those nights, even that turned cannibal, eating the tapes we put into it. Yet despite all her flaws, and perhaps because of them, I loved the White Shark. You can have your fancy red Mercedes, yuppie scum — I'd rather spend the night with my old dirty van any day of the week. Rich and arrogant bourgeoisie of the world, behold the White Shark! Behold your future executioner!

The effect the White Shark had upon its inhabitants was positively insidious. Nothing could describe the effect of watching ordinary people, disillusioned with crappy jobs or boring lives, jump into the van and, before my very own eyes, be transformed into anarchist warriors at the beck and call of any good cause within driving distance.

¹ *Editor's note: Only in punk rock circles can you find people who approach sleeping as an extreme sport!*

At first it started out as petty theft, money for gas, a few bites of food. As the distances and the glorious heights of the plans increased, everyone in the belly of the Shark slowly got more grizzled, their bodies more gaunt, and the mad look of a pirate entered in their eyes. Defending tree-sits in Ohio, offering ecodefense workshops in poor neighborhoods in Baltimore, defending indigenous lands in the highlands of New York state, fighting for squats in Manhattan...the White Shark made me believe in knights errant again. When you needed us, you just needed to get in touch with one of the associates of the White Shark and the fucking cavalry would be there the next morning.

Cars, like friendships, need maintenance. And so I descended into the inner depths of my vehicle, exploring its nooks and crannies. I knew her limits and she knew mine. I also befriended an anarcho-mechanic, the father of one of the members of the Company of the White Shark, who helped me maintain her. He repaired the cars of all the local street kids and neighbors in his own garage, and for far less than any auto-shop. He knew all the shadiest auto-parts dealers in town, and all the honest ones as well, and his word was as good as gold. As I returned again and again, after strange adventure after even stranger adventure, we bonded over the White Shark. He would tell me tales of his adventures in New Orleans and Mexico, and I would tell him of stealing food from hotels in French Canada and fighting cops in Philly. He taught me what a gasket was, what weird part of some strange metal piece connected to some other piece. In between inspecting one weird problem of the White Shark after another, he would mutter things like "That Ariel Sharon's a bloody butcher..." Indeed, both the shaggy-haired anarchist and the auto-mechanic with a family in the outskirts of the city agreed that Western civilization was headed straight towards its doom, and the President George W. Bush was a madman at the helm of sinking ship. Because of these things, our anarcho-mechanic continued to repair the White Shark, and I continued to drive the distance with the wild beast. We hypothesized that the beast would keep on going until there was nothing left but a whirling engine, a dying transmission, and a rusty metal frame, and then I would drive her into the ocean, lighting her on fire and giving her a proper Viking funeral.

In the Hands of Our Enemies

The White Shark is a wild beast, and while I may recount some of its nefarious adventures here, I can only recount those I know of. For the White Shark has been on many adventures that even I, its monomaniacal Captain, don't know of.

The White Shark does not just aid and abet thieves: the White Shark plans full frontal assaults on the foundations of capitalism itself, with a vengeance that would put most people to shame. The White Shark makes plans, and it sticks to them. As just related, the White Shark has a personal vendetta against the global financial system, especially the International Monetary Fund. Not too long after the beer had been stolen

from the IMF, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon happened, and took even us aback. All the same, the White Shark was first and foremost a van of action, and while most of its activities after September 11th are too dark too recount in the light of day, it did successfully ferry us away from danger. However, its hunger for blood is insatiable, and before we knew it, it was driving us right back to the meeting of the International Monetary Fund, which, despite the attack, had gone on. The White Shark dropped us off back at our secret anarchist hideout in the Capital, and we began preparing for what seemed to be one of the most frightening protests of our lives. It was clear this protest was no ordinary protest — and it wasn't going to be the North American version of Genoa we were all hoping for. No, this was testing the waters after a major terrorism attack and subsequent reactionary scare. The results of this test could be fatal as well, for now it was clear our government felt threatened and was looking for someone to lash out against. The bombing had just started on Afghanistan, and it was clear that one of the next things on their 'To-Do' list was to rid the world of those pesky anti-globalization protesters, especially the troublesome anarchists.



*The banner that nearl cost the White Shark its life!

However, when the going gets tough, the tough rise to the occasion. As the White Shark landed in DC, tons of CrimethInc. propaganda (produced for free at our local Kinko's) in the wings, it became clear that the work was to be done. A huge banner was being constructed in a haphazard fashion by a contingent of artists in the convergence center, but me and one of my most perceptive partners in crime noticed that such a huge banner was going to be completely impossible to carry. After all, it was larger than most anarchists, who by nature tend to be a short lot, and offered about as much tactical defense as a wet blanket. The wily White Shark, ever to the rescue, took us to the nearest home repair store where we began a brutal campaign of return scams to get a large amount of PVC pipe. With much PVC jutting out of the back of the White Shark, we drove back to the Anti-Capitalist Convergence Center and spent the entire night transforming the large banner into a formidable defense barrier by reinforcing its corners with plastic pipes. Our task done, we slept barely a wink before having to mobilize ourselves for the protest. As we wandered back into the Convergence Center, one of the organizers ran up to us and told us that there was a serious problem: there was no way to transport the banners, including the marvelous pipe banner, to the actual site of the protest. Would the White Shark come to the rescue? But of course!

This was clearly going to be one of those sketchy situations. The black bloc had assembled, several hundred strong, in one of the small central parks in DC. They were just waiting for the banners. The White Shark parked behind some decrepit gas-station and released its scouts to check the situation out. When they returned noting the huge number of pigs but the clear passage-way for vehicles, the White Shark realized the time to act was now or never. The White Shark drove up maniacally right in front of the Black Bloc and released its doors. Out from its bowels came banner after banner, pipe after pipe, flag after flag. As the Captain, I kept an eye on the cops, and they had definitely noticed this bit of maneuvering by a mysterious white van, as they started marching towards us. Panicking as the last banner was dropped off, I put the pedal to the metal and the White Shark sped away, down one road after another. Finally, we parked off what appeared to be a road in a residential area, carefully backing our van into the parking spot to have the license plate to the wall, and jumped out. I took all of the money I had to my name out of my pockets, a good crisp two hundred dollars in the form of two hundred dollar bills, and afraid they would get nicked by the police in the protest, I hid them in the ash-tray. Also, as I was living in the van at the time, all my possessions from my record collection to my two or three pairs of marginally clean underwear were in two huge black containers in the car. Throwing my bandana around my neck, I exited the White Shark and made a sprint to join the Black Bloc.

By the time I got there the banners were fully erect and ready to roll. In fact, the main black banner was simply too large — it towered over the heads of everyone in the Bloc except extremely tall people like myself. Small eye-slits were cut into the banner so people could see out of it, and then it began advancing. The police, not entirely sure what to do with the giant black thing reinforced with pipe advancing towards the street, just let it go. Soon the Bloc had occupied the street and began a relentless

march towards the Building of the International Monetary Fund. The march made it to the monetary fund almost without incident, but as soon as it got there the police tried to hem us in and everyone feared a mass-arrest. The giant banner, having served its purpose as a giant police-repelling shield, was dismantled and, much to my surprise and joy, the various pieces of PVC piping were re-commissioned as cop-beating clubs. Escaping the grasp of the cops through a charge, I met up with my former lover who I had noticed earlier carrying the banner. I was overjoyed to see her; we split up from the main group of the protest and leisurely strolled over to the Food Not Bombs that was serving in Malcolm X park. Spending hours reminiscing with her, I completely lost track of time. As sun down approached, I ran to get my van from its parking spot...and it was gone!

I was horrified. Never being known as someone with an excellent memory for where I parked my car, I suspected that I had merely misplaced the old Shark. I patrolled the neighborhood, but nonetheless it became abundantly clear that the van was indeed missing. Seeing as I was currently living in the van, and that all my money was in the van, I was as stranded as any castaway. Not knowing what to and fuming with rage and confusion, I ran to the secret anarchist hideout, and, using the same phone that had been used as the legal support number the day before, called the police to report a missing car. They told me they would need to talk to me personally to file a report. Now, I had not changed out of traditional Black Bloc gear since the protest the day before. I had my steel-toe black combat boots on, a black hoodie, a black bandana, black fingerless gloves and black fatigues on. No ‘anarchy’ patches, but definitely not a normal citizen. Even worse, since I had been on the road for a few months, my hair had grown extremely wild and shaggy, and a scruffy beard had developed, along with a body odor that in most circles of society would identify me as homeless. Lastly, the anarchist painters’ bloc that had painted the banner I had reinforced and held yesterday had used non-drying red paint on banner, leaving my hands a various parts of my body covered in a strange red substance. I wasn’t sure how the cops would react to me. What if they recognized me from the Black Bloc the day before? And I sure didn’t want them driving up to the not-so-entirely-secret anarchist hideout and ringing the doorbell. Panicking, I gave them the address of a building down the road and told them I would meet them outside.

In a few minutes, surreally enough, I was for the first time in my life being driven about in the front of a cop-car, not under arrest. In fact, the police officer was completely ignoring my appearance and smell and was instead cheerfully chatting to me about “those kids who steal your car, drive it around for a day, and park it right back...” After about an hour of driving about in cop car (mentally taking notes, having never been in the front seat of a DC cop car!), we finally surrendered and the cop wrote the car down as “stolen.” In the pits of deepest despair, I went back to our anarchist secret hideout and began maniacally trying to figure out what I should do. What if the cops had stolen the car? After all, it was the banner-mobile, and maybe this meant the cops were looking for me? The behavior of the cop I had just met had been friendly

enough; however, the many heads of the capitalist hydra sometimes doesn't talk to each other, so maybe I had just been lucky. In a fit of complete paranoia, I called a friend from a desolate northern state and told him that my situation. In a spirit of complete generosity, he offered to buy me a plane ticket to his snow-bound home. Since September 11th, plane tickets had noticeably fallen in price, so a ticket to his place was actually about as expensive as the gas to get back to my small Southern stable. Not thinking through the possible advantages-of hitch-hiking or train-hopping, or the obvious disadvantages one would face security-wise at the airport at this point, just wanting to go somewhere where I would be fed and housed indefinitely and off the map, I agreed to go.

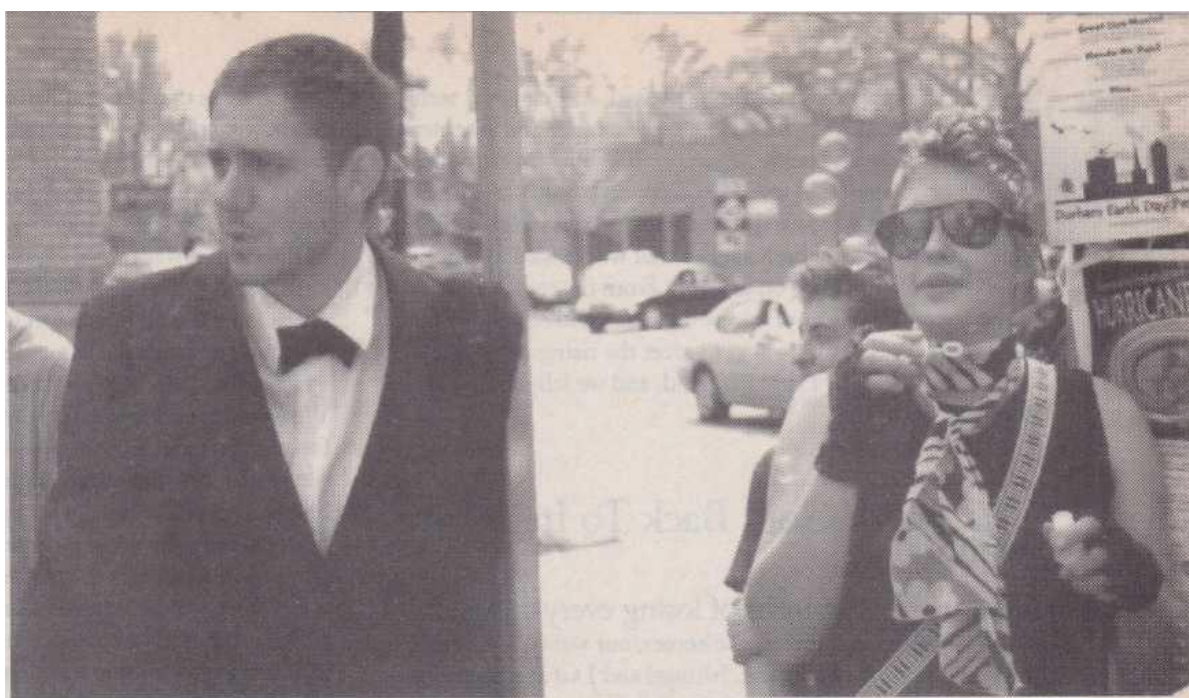


If we must raise a flag over our town, let it be black.

As my friend dropped me off at Dulles airport, I immediately recognized this was a mistake. First, I was still in complete Black Bloc gear without anything except an ID and a

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secret anarchist hideout were now completely sure I was mad; stumbling back into their house, which was currently engaged in a raging party featuring one of the locals rocking out the Smashing Pumpkins on acoustic guitar, I announced that the White Shark had returned! Determined to leave DC as soon as possible before the White Shark was either kidnapped or ran off yet again, I offered any of the plethora of traveling kids currently staying there a ride South if they so desired it. One dreadlocked hippie agreed, and as she jumped into the van, I suddenly realized that when I got back to my small Southern town, I had no place to stay...and hoped she might have an idea.



All dressed up and nowhere to go...

Whatever foul force had seized my car had cleaned out almost all of my personal possessions, but had in sloppy fashion left my 'Aesop Rock' tape in the cassette player. As we drove manically through the night, only the incessant mad poetry of hip-hop kept me vaguely sane. We rolled into my small Southern town, and I announced to the anarcho-hippie that not only did I have little funds, but that at four in the morning I could think of nowhere to spend the night...except the ruins of the old anarchist collective house mentioned at the beginning of these tales. She agreed that it would be better to sleep outside in fresh air than in the van, so I drove down the dirty road to a

house I hadn't seen in months. It looked like a wreck: the windows were smashed out, the ever-creeping kudzu had slowly taken over the much of the broken TVs and bikes and other strange junk that littered the front-yard, and the crazed house appeared to be barely standing, laying somewhere on the strange edge between reality and madness, between enchantment and accursedness. I parked, and walked up to its spray-painted walls: stabbed into the front door was a knife, with a strange note beneath it. The note said, in a scrawled hand-writing that seemed familiar: Here is the ruin of our house, a place where we tried to live the Revolution that we all want. We have all left, so please come in and make your home. The hippie was absolutely shocked, having never seen an abode, even of anarchists, so utterly magical and yet utterly ruined. "It's like an magical anarchist hill-billy shack in the middle of nowhere..." I smiled and nodded. However, the inside of the house was so littered with broken fridge doors, yellowing books, and broken glass that we decided to climb upon the roof and sleep on top of it. From the roof, I looked down upon the valleys of kudzu that stretched out before me, and as the birds began to sing to greet the rising dawn, I felt implacably at home. I held her hand, and we fell into it, like a fever, like a dream.



Reclaim the Streets breaks it down!

The Shark Goes Back To Its Native Waters

Within a few months of losing everything, all our possessions, our lovers, our homes, our sanity, and nearly the rest of our lives to prison, Ishmael and I sat at a corporate bookstore drinking the finest of coffee and eating ridiculously decadent chocolate cakes. An atmosphere of doom prevailed. We always knew we had hit rock-bottom when we were at the corporate bookstore. Other people may drink forties on street corners, lay in their beds all night and cry, but we would always fall back upon the easiest of scams: stay up all day in the bookstore drinking bourgeois coffee, plotting the next step in our revolutionary schemes. Still, it was depressing. Yet, maybe it was the carrot cake, maybe it was the autobiography of Bill Ayers we were flipping through, maybe it was the double shot of espresso in my white chocolate mocha, but the conversation between Ishmael and I became exceedingly animated. So animated, in fact, that the strange, rotund black man with an elegant mustache who was sitting next to us turned around and said, “These people, these people,” flipping his wrist at the yuppies and students sipping their lattes all around us, “these people do not interest me. But you, you interest me.” Within minutes we were engaged in a conversation with someone who spoke not in mere sentences, but in well-crafted paragraphs with clear theses and dialectical development. The conversation soon turned from the depression of myself and Ishmael, to the grand heights of Kierkegaard and Aristotle, and then returned to ground itself in an analysis of the political economy of global capital. The man, named Sherlock, was originally from Jamaica, but had been educated among the ivory towers at Oxford, and for some ungodly reason had moved to the second circle of hell we called home to teach high school. It was amazingly reassuring, for it would have been almost impossible to imagine backgrounds more removed, yet this man clearly echoed our sentiments — capitalism, civilization itself, is sick and we’re all headed straight towards apocalypse, it is the responsibility of ordinary people with the barest thread of decency to fight back with all their might, we must never, never surrender. There is hope, even in the lounges of soulless corporate bookstores, and there are allies in the most unlikely of places.

Inspired, the entire process began again. We picked out the largest, cheapest, most fucked up house we could find in town, and, through an act of sheer willpower, transformed it into an anarchist collective. While at first we were worried that we wouldn’t be able to find enough anarchists to fill the house, soon there were more people living there than humanly possible — over twenty rocking people in every little nook and corner, three of us (including myself) in the attic! The White Shark went mad, and my former home soon became the most rapacious and ruthless of thieves. Every night the White Shark would ride into the dark night, stomach empty, and return with all sorts of plunder. Anything that was not nailed to the ground was taken. Chairs, trashcans, cement, woods, nails, soil. We walked into the philosophy department at one of the local universities late at night, and, while no one was looking, grabbed a chalkboard right off the wall, fleeing down a fire escape into the ever-waiting maw of the White

Shark. We would spend entire days prowling about the city, looking for strange items that our house needed, thinking of places to run scams, and then entire nights rolling about in the White Shark. The White Shark was a pirate ship, constantly moving from port to port, raiding the soft underbellies of suburbs for all they were worth. Within a few weeks, our collective house was well-stocked. We spent some time engaging in other adventures, starting bands, drinking and carousing, engaging in acts of personal drama and infighting. It soon became clear what this town and house needed more than anything else was not just survival against the capitalist machine — we needed to go on the offensive.

There we were, sitting in the living room of our collective, plotting the night away. There were, even in our most small and isolated of Southern towns, other anarchists, some quite formidable ones at that. The local kids had thought of the idea a number of years ago. We were going to have a Reclaim the Streets on the main shopping street of town, on the street where I myself had wasted my youth in drinking, begging for just another few dimes so I could bribe some local to get me a forty. The street that everyone hung out on, and cursed afterwards for offering “nothing to do.” The street where everyone from the local businessmen to the cops knew us by name. It was a completely mad plan, but we have never denied being madmen and madwomen.

The White Shark began its nightly prowls yet again, searching the night for items that could be useful for a Reclaim the Streets. Paint, both for banners and faces, was stolen. Surgical strikes were conducted on party-favor stores, with noisemakers and costumes taken by force. Our friends working as employees at a warehouse of scrap cloth winked as we walked out without paying, helping us select the choicest scraps. Thousands of stickers and posters were printed by the good graces of the local university’s lack of regard for printing quotas. Giant banners were constructed to redirect traffic, and huge poles of bamboo were cemented into plastic buckets to physically force the traffic. Other anarchists began spreading the news first by word of mouth, and then by wheat-pasting every square foot of the entire city with flyers proclaiming the upcoming “Street Party.” Whispers, plots, schemes, allies were gathered, and before I knew it the anarchist collective house had stopped drinking and started buzzing with activity.

*Everybody throw your lighters up,
Tell me y’all gonnafight or what?
Everybody get your shit started...
It’s y’all’s motherfucking party!*

In an act of musical intervention, the Coup came to rock out the night before the Reclaim the Streets. Anarchists converged from the mountains, from the ruined industrial cities further up north, from the swamps to the east and from the soulless suburbs and tiny rural towns. The forces were surrounded, with the crowd yelling “Shame!” and “Let him go!” The cops, terrified with their backs against the wall, began

reacting with brutality against the festive party-goers, swinging clubs and releasing pepper spray. The crowd stormed up to the cops, and chaos ensued. Before anyone knew what was happening, the local Indymedia reporter was thrown against a police car, screaming. It was completely mad. Local hoodlums who had spent years dodging the cops while trying to hustle a bit of green were now throwing down with the pigs, grabbed and kicking. Acts of both extreme heroism and cowardice were taking place — women kicked cops twice their size as they charged at them, young men kicked themselves free of cops' clutches, crowds yelled and terrified the police, police reacted by pepper-spraying innocent young children. In the chaos, a friend of mine ran up and grabbed the Indymedia video camera that was still running. As the madness engulfed the street, our little quiet town was filled with the closest thing it had seen to a riot in years. As the cops fled the scene with our sisters and brothers in the backs of their paddywagons, one member of the crowd took initiative and, black flag of anarchy held high, began marching the entire party straight to the prison. The cops, by attempting to stop the Reclaim the Streets, had caused the crowd to do exactly what they had most feared — the march to the prison had shut down downtown.



As the crowd rallied outside, the cops inside the prison panicked, and one by one our compatriots were released. Fifteen arrests, one felony. The Reclaim the Streets had been both far greater than our expectations and far worst than our nightmares. We had never wanted our brothers and sisters to go to prison, and the White Shark began

to creep away, to retrieve from a downtown that the poles, the banner, the stereo, all the evidence. All the evidence must be destroyed. Yet for one moment, the impossible, the marvelous had broken loose. In the most unlikely of desolate Southern towns, for absolutely no better reason than “we could,” we, with no spokesperson, no message, and no leaders, had brought to life the biggest party ever seen. The media was utterly baffled. We had brought down the house, and with it the Police Chief and the feelings of despair that had choked these streets for our entire lives. It was a breath of fresh air — and it hurt.

The Trancontinental Spree

The problem with having sprawling adventures is that, when they are complete, you are left with no option but to surpass yourself, to make even wilder plans involving even more impossibilities, even more undiscovered continents in which to plant the black flag. As we sat in our musty . attic, we laid down an atlas.

Earlier, a mysterious old woman had approached me as I was repairing computers in the local infoshop, and offered a simple proposition: the Zapatistas needed computers, and all I had to do was to gather them and get them Chiapas. A simple plan, and as Ishmael and I sat discussing it, it became abundantly clear we had many other things to do as well — protest global financial institutions, eco-defense on the West Coast, meet friends at yet another Earth First! Rendezvous...so like the professional composers of adventures we were, we strung together harmonies of actions, triads of locations, rhythms of travels. Trainhopping across the northernmost wastes of Canada, hitchhiking up and down the West Coast...driving the White Shark up and down the East Coast, and then to the fucking Lacondon Jungle! Yes, we were going to criss-cross the entire fucking continent of North America, from Alaska to Chiapas and everywhere in between, with no stops, no holds barred, no gods and no masters. Such a journey could only deserve one name: The Transcontinental Killing Spree.

We offered seats to anyone who wanted to come along, although the ability to speak Spanish was preferred. Only one mysterious e-mail from a professional adventurer named Hibb on the West Coast answered us in the affirmative. The White Shark was getting weary. We had put on tens of thousands of miles on its already straining hold. Everything was breaking down, bit by bit. Radiators in Texas, fuel pumps, everything except the core of engine and transmission. Deep in my heart, I still felt that the White Shark was going to make it this time...though the White Shark’s transmission was making a high-pitched whistle that could be its death-knell, we still had our own mission, and the White Shark had not a mere mortal engine of gears and oil, but an engine of pure destruction. I took it by the anarcho-mechanic for one last check-up. Oil changed, tires rotated, filters placed in, new gaskets. The White Shark was readied for its final and most glorious ride.

Our merry band had to drive across the entire country, dumpster-dive some computers, and then take the White Shark and drive the electronics to Chiapas. Nothing could be easier. There were problems, the first being not having any computers. Never to let something as dreary as reason curb our enthusiasm, we began to pray to the ever-shifty patron spirits of thieves and hobos to deliver unto us computers. As soon as we began to seek the computers, they incarnated themselves in answer to our prayers. A group of semi-professional activists were willing to donate some old computers they had been given by a non-profit group that trained home-free² folks to build computers. Of course, by the time we sorted this out, we were in eastern Canada and they were on the West Coast. Without fear, a brave fellowship of companions rose to the occasion to get there and bring them to Mexico. With little in the way of possessions, no money (as usual), and absolutely no grasp on the fundamentals of rational planning, we hopped trains across the coldest reaches of Canada, reaching the West Coast by surviving purely on one large pack of oats. Arriving on the West Coast, we promptly gave away our oversized bag of oats to an indigenous family that was hitch-hiking to Seattle to see the world. Not just traveling kids, but a traveling family.

We picked up the computers from the non-profit, and then realized to our dismay that we, without a car, had no way to transport them down the street, much less to Chiapas. Again, our lack of planning seemed to doom us! We couldn't carry them by hand to Chiapas, and the White Shark we were hoping to drive there was taking a brief respite in the woods of Maine, on the other side of the United States. Luckily, a group of anarcho-primitivists were passing across the West Coast on a tour to promote the destruction of civilization, and, although we reasoned that computers were surely included under the category of civilization, we asked for help anyways. After all, the computers were for guerrillas! Despite the irony of the situation, the anarcho-primitivist gang was more than willing to help the Zapatistas, and strapped the computers to the top of their van that was driving to Texas, taking them with them one step closer to Chiapas. In search of our long-lost White Shark, we got a ride across the country in yet another heroic automobile known only as the Duster, funded purely by an orgy of gas-thievery and, by last estimate, over a thousand dollars in scams, until our ragged crew — fueled by a bizarre combination of stale pizza dough and organic energy bars — returned to the fair woods of Maine. After nearly a month vacation, and against all odds, the White Shark revved up again, loaded with even more computers from a shady inside job at a major Washington, D.C. corporation, and began its slow journey to Texas, getting in two major breakdowns and one near wreck, almost flipping due to the amount of computers loading it. One of the computers was even bartered to a car mechanic in rural Georgia for a used axle!

The problem of the border presented itself as nearly insurmountable. After all, you're not supposed to truck a vanload of computer parts into a foreign country and

² For those who don't know, "home-free" is the politically correct term for those the capitalists call "homeless."

not expect to have questions asked by the border guards. But within a few weeks, the primitivists dropped off the computers, a group of Quakers funneled them to a friendly church, who then, in collaboration with an autonomist sweatshop workers' union, maneuvered them across the border without a problem. Computers in tow, we drove to Chiapas triumphant. The truly remarkable feat was that we, who had no resources besides our unemployment and mania, had, with the aid of the legend of the Zapatistas, helped create through mutual aid a network of friends that crossed an entire continent, a network of as diverse backgrounds and ideas as imaginable, a network ranging from young balaclava-clad anarcho-primitivists to middle-aged Mexican sweatshop wage slaves and elderly Christian pacifists: a network of friends capable of doing the impossible for an armed indigenous rebellion.

The drive to Mexico City was, even by the high standards of the White Shark, a new record in non-stop driving. Our new friend from the West Coast created a magical talisman for the tiburnon bianco. Ishmael took it upon himself to merge his body and soul with the machinery of the White Shark. Coffee in one hand and wheel in the other, he drove without rest through deserts, through the megapolis of Mexico City, right through all possible physics of time and distance. It became hard to tell who was really driving, the White Shark or Ishmael, or if there was any difference between the two. Our anarcho-mechanic had regaled us with tales from his youth of being stopped on the Mexico byroads and having all his money stolen by bandits, and even our shoplifted *Let's Go Mexico* warned us of two guerrilla armies (the ERP and ERPI, although most likely defunct in my opinion) operating in southern Mexico. Not surprisingly, the only real bandits we encountered on our journey were the cops. Cops in Mexico are even more blatantly corrupt than those in the States: they will just pull you over, vaguely complain about the hassle they would have to face in writing a whole ticket out for whatever your fictional offense was, and suggest you just give them the dineros right there so they can "forget" about the matter. Bribes in hand, funded by medical experiments to which we had sold ourselves, we passed without incident through both shady encounters with the police (although once we used furniture to blockade ourselves in the union base where we were sleeping, due to fear of police reprisal!) and even military checkpoints. Dressed in our finest possible tourist clothes, we were always "going to see the ruins, " which just happened to be in the middle of Chiapas. To be honest, the fiercest threat the White Shark faced was the danger of the infamous Mexican speed-bump, the topez. While speed-bumps in the States seem to be mainly aimed at slowing a vehicle down, in Mexico the topez is designed to stop the vehicle by whatever means necessary. The White Shark vibrated as its undersides were torn and grimaced as its speed was suddenly stolen from it, but, resolve unshaken, plowed ever onwards towards whatever fate awaited us in the jungle.

Once in Chiapas, the White Shark broke all the rules of safe driving. It was finally among equals, for the Mexicans in the mountains had just as much a deathwish as the Shark did. Flying up and down mountains, through rain and mist, through darkest night and with barely any gas, the White Shark never rested. Zapatista children would

peer from around corners at the strange internationals and their white steed, and would draw strange pictures in the dust that caked on the White Shark's windows. We found ourselves driving down roads with no names, to deliver strange aids to Zapatista villages which, in acts of cartographic imperialism, the government refused to put on the map, due to their refusing to acknowledge the *mal gobierno*. Once, while standing outside at the gates of a Zapatista village to track the movements of military, I tried to explain to one of the Zapatistas (who was busily scrawling down military truck numbers on his hand as I wrote my notes down on a pad of paper) where we were from and how the *tiburón blanco* had transported us in. My shaky knowledge of Mexican geography, combined with his lack of knowledge of the geography of United States, led to me scrawling in the dirt a giant map of the Western Hemisphere and mapping out the adventures of the White Shark. As we swapped stories in a strange pigeon mixture of Tzotzil, Spanish, and English of fighting cops and neoliberal globalization from the farm fields of Chiapas to the streets of the Capital, he smiled and told me that if the military stopped threatening his land and the *mal gobierno* was destroyed, he and his children would jump in the belly of the Shark and visit us in the States.

Words cannot express my awe of what the Zapatistas have done. While Marcos and the *balacabras* are definitely sexy, the real strength of the Zapatistas lies in their autonomous and self-organized communities. Everything we anarchists in the States only talk about, the Zapatistas have actually been doing — shared land for community farming, free schools teaching revolutionary history in which the pupils help design the curriculum, hospitals based on natural remedies, preventive medicine, and everyday health, amazing food, coffee, and art co-operatives. And not a single fucking cop. Hell, the police and the tax collectors weren't even allowed in the village — yet I felt safer in Zapatista villages than I do on the streets of any city in the States. The warmth and kindness of the Zapatistas, despite their poverty and the continual threat of attack by the military, radiates and fills their villages with an atmosphere that can only be described as enchanted. Although I barely could speak their language, I felt strangely at home behind the giant black and red gates of the Zapatista villages. So different, yet so similar to what we are trying to do in the States. Giant murals of *balacabras* mixed with the huge mustache of Zapata, the circle A' mixed with Mexican flags and indecipherable Mayan symbols, everywhere children, chickens, and scruffy dogs. It even smelled like some of the wilder collective houses we had back home, but on a scale that we could never have possibly imagined in our wildest dreams. If people ever tell me that anarchy can't work, I'll just tell them to get in a car and drive four days south, and see revolution with their own eyes.

As if emerging from a dream, it came to us that we had to leave Chiapas and return to our home in States. After all, despite the temptation to live the revolution with these mountain folks, we had to continue our own struggle amidst our own people. Besides, Ishmael had a court case coming up. The White Shark began its final ride home, and we looked on a map and saw what appeared to be large highway straight to Minatchitlan from Tuxtla, the capital of Chiapas. So off the White Shark went,

bidding fond farewell to the free air of the Zapatistas, and down the highway. We should have expected trouble as we entered the highway, as a large toll or military blockade (somewhat hard to tell the difference in Mexico) had been set up, but we drove right through it without pause, leaving only the guard with only a confused stare. We drove miles and miles, completely alone on the road, upon what appeared to be the finest road in Mexico. As the sun set behind the mountains, we found the situation to be strangely eerie...yet the road continued ever onwards. Or so we thought.

Out of nowhere, a giant lake appeared on the horizon, and the road went right into the lake! Throwing on the brakes, we realized that the Mexican government had been optimistic in placing this particular highway on the map. Not knowing what else to do, we turned around and drove back to Tuxtla, sorrowfully noting that we had wasted a whole day driving on a road to nowhere. As darkness set in, the poor White Shark starting having the automobile equivalent to the tremors before a heart attack. The overheating of the engine is a dread phenomena in all cars, in which, rumor has it, the engine can be utterly destroyed, so we pulled off to the side of the road and let the White Shark simmer down. The White Shark simmered a bit, but when we starting driving again, the air conditioner mysteriously stopped functioning. Then, after a few more minutes, the engine started over-heating again and, to our increasing horror, the lights went off. We pulled off to the side of the road, and let the White Shark rest again. When we started the White Shark once more, it made it a few yards to a nearby gas station, and suddenly, in a truly surreal moment, the gauges all started moving backwards. The speed, the heat of the engine, everything starting going to zero before our very eyes. The engine refused to inject fuel, and, paralyzed with shock, we coasted into a gas station that was full of cops wielding giant machine guns. We quickly backed into a strange parking spot, and then opened the hood to see if we could deduce what was going on. The heat coming from the White Shark's insides was scalding. We opened the oil tank — it was fucking empty! We ran into the station and began desperately pouring oil into the White Shark, trying to revive her. It worked — we restarted the engine, and the White Shark's lights came miraculously back on. Yet, we drove it only a few yards from the gas station, and in utter exhaustion, the White Shark collapsed again, dead. Quaking in terror and avoiding looking the cops in the eye, we walked into the gas station and pleaded with them to let us stay the night. Confused, the clerks merely shrugged and smiled. We got the White Shark back into the gas station parking lot. Ishmael looked me in the eye, and said "You know, I normally try to stay hopeful with these things, but I bet fifty to one the White Shark is dead." I nodded in somber agreement. How were we going to get rid of the corpse? I didn't even have legal registration! Our options were limited, we were thousands of miles away from home (no, wait, we had no homes), and the only way to dispose of the White Shark was to drive it off a fucking cliff. In bleak despair, I told Ishmael that a captain always has to go down with the ship, as I fell asleep in the driver's seat.

In the morning, we woke up and had one final idea. We were going to call the hometown anarcho-mechanic. We went to the nearest payphone and called him, and

described the symptoms. He mulled over it, and within seconds came up with a diagnosis for the White Shark. Over the length of a thousand miles, his wise words told me to open the hood and see if our engine belt was still there. Putting down the phone, I walked over, followed his advice, and — behold, the anarcho-mechanic was right! It was just missing, it must have fallen off somewhere on the highway! Apparently, once the belt fell off, the engine couldn't work the alternator, so one by one everything inside the White Shark died as the battery drained. Leaping in joy, I heaped a million blessings upon our dearest anarcho-mechanic, and walked down the highway until we found, surrounded by vicious barking dogs, a tiny little automechanic shop. A man who resembled nothing more than a Mexican leprechaun emerged, and as we explained the problem to him as best we could, he smiled and drove us back to the beached White Shark in his truck. He jumped inside the metallic bowels of the White Shark, and after some messing around, attached what appeared to be giant rubber band correctly to the engine. We restarted the engine, drove it around for a test drive, and received a final wink as we handed him twenty dollars worth of pesos. The White Shark was back on the road — its crooked grill, positioned over a crooked bumper, smiling a wicked shark smile.

Back on the road, we did a maniacal drive straight back to the States, matching in furious intensity our earlier trip. Our funds slowly dissolved, and eventually I was left with barely enough blood money to make it back to my hometown; Ishmael had only a single dollar to his name. After recrossing the border without incident, I dropped Ishmael, Hibb, and our brave and intrepid translator (who had jumped into the White Shark at a moment's notice on the West Coast, and whose services had proved invaluable) at the Greyhound bus-station. We all hugged, and, looking each other straight in the eye, Ishmael and I promised each other that we would meet again for even further adventures. I felt like I was losing my family, and as we bid each other farewell, I felt strangely alone.

As I drove the now-empty White Shark on the final leg of its trip, the anniversary of September 11th rolled around. The radio waves were jammed with our so-called President's hate-filled and patriotic speeches cursing our enemies and proclaiming our "freedom," songs about attacking innocent countries, and flag-waving. The radio stations, ever ignorant, began playing "Born of the Fourth of July." These war-hungry madmen filled the airwaves with their calls for vengeance from their comfortable chairs in the White House, pasty bureaucrats whose children would never die in a war, plump God-fearing politicians who feel no guilt for raining hellfire onto families in the name of security and a quick buck. Their hypocrisy stank to the high heavens. At least the murderous Al-Qaeda had the courage to fly the plane into the World Trade Center themselves instead of pushing buttons from behind a screen. I struck back the only way I could, with an act of kindness towards a stranger. A grizzled hobo stood beside the highway in Alabama, thumb proudly stuck up in the air. So, tired and sick from caffeine, I picked up the man, who jumped in White Shark's belly. He gave me a cracked smile, and before long we were chatting up storms, telling story after story. It

was like a Thousand and One American Nights, each one of us telling stories like our very lives depended on it — which they did, since these stories were the only thing keeping me awake as we headed inevitably north. The strange hobo, twice my age at least, started telling stories of fishing, of growing up in the wilds of rural Louisiana, of his stint in the military. Slowly, it came out that we both hated the government with the intense passion that most people reserve for their lovers and family, and we loved our lovers and family with a love that most people reserve for God. The hobo had a child in Virginia he wanted to visit, and I had my own tribe in my small, Southern hometown that I missed as well. Finally, too exhausted to drive any more, I pulled off to a deserted rest station in Mississippi, and, as the crickets chirped away, the hobo took a bottle of whiskey out of his tattered rucksack, the White Shark's lights dimming as I turned the engine off. I took a sip to calm my tattered nerves. I began thinking of new adventures, new horizons, new chances to fight for everything I held precious in this world. Yes, the White Shark had to retire with the anarcho-mechanic, if only for a time. But she would ride again. As the traveler and myself sipped whiskey in the warm Southern night, we promised each other that we would hold onto our stories. We would never forget.

And Nocturnes

In the end, the power of capitalism does not lie in its ability to make us be still. Stillness, a certain measure of quiet and solitude, is needed. Some things can only be done in one place. Some communities are too big to fit in the back of van. Hell, sometimes all your band equipment won't even fit in your van! A van has limits. It is merely an enclosed square of steel, fueled by a vicious combination of modern technology and ancient fossils that will surely have no fate other than causing the utter destruction of life on this planet. Yes, automobiles are evil. But how can we look ourselves straight in the eye and call ourselves "revolutionary" unless there is no evil that we cannot subvert, no means we cannot turn towards our ultimate ends? How can we call ourselves free if we cannot carry the stillness we need inside of ourselves, if we cannot find it wherever we lay our heads and plant our feet? The answers to our woes are not movement or technology. It's not that freedom happens to you. No, freedom is something that happens because of you: Freedom is something you live, you act, you do. It's both as possible and impossible as getting that real fucking crazy plan — the one that no one would ever believe you capable of — in your head and doing it. In a twisted way, it is moving that even in America, a land of unending horizons paved with highways of gold and fueled by the blood of the world, a teetering architecture built to collapse beneath our wheels, a van can be a vessel of freedom. If even a lowly automobile can become the leaky raft of a castaway band of escaped wage-slaves, we must ask: where are other underground railroads, other avenues of escape, other possibilities of freedom, other vessels of adventures? Our civilization is

an anachronism, or, as one of our favorite bands sings: a speeding car, and nobody's driving! Unless we seize the wheel...

...Which may be impossible. There is a good possibility that's true. Maybe nothing we can do could ever save this world, and we're all fucking doomed. But must we only accept our imminent demise? Let us love our doom. With all faith in the future lost, anything becomes possible now. We can make love in the back of dingy car-vans, eat rotten vegetables from filthy hands, make mockery of their laws, steal beer from international bankers and give it to the homeless to offer them the warm nights our so-called civilization won't, throw tear gas back at cops — and when the canisters run out, throw donuts! — lie, cheat, steal, fuck, and do it all over again, but this time when they aren't expecting it! Hold each other's hands as we sweat from our darkest fears, kiss tenderly beneath the dying birch trees, cry flash-floods of tears that we've been holding back all these years, and drive until motherfucking dawn. When the sun rises, and the first rays fall upon the endless horizon, our futures are painted in colors that we never even dreamed of in the night, and the fate of the White Shark becomes apparent. The van is not to be confused with us, our smiles, our memories, our skins, our flesh, our bone, our sweat and our lives. The vessel is only the backdrop, a thread to hang stories together with. We are alive, and we're not going down with the ship. Not tonight.

The Ted K Archive

Secret Agent Captain Ahab
White Shark Tales: Vanarchy in the U.S.A.
...in which a boy and his van set out to liberate each other...
2003

Inside Front: International Journal of Hardcore Punk and Anarchist Action, Issue #14, pp.56–70: <cdn.crimethinc.com/assets/journals/inside-front-14/inside-front-14_screen_single_page_view.pdf>

Page 31 is duplicated on page 64 of the source PDF file, and the original page 64 appears to be missing as the sentence doesn't flow naturally between pages 63 & 65. So, it's just marked as missing here.

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