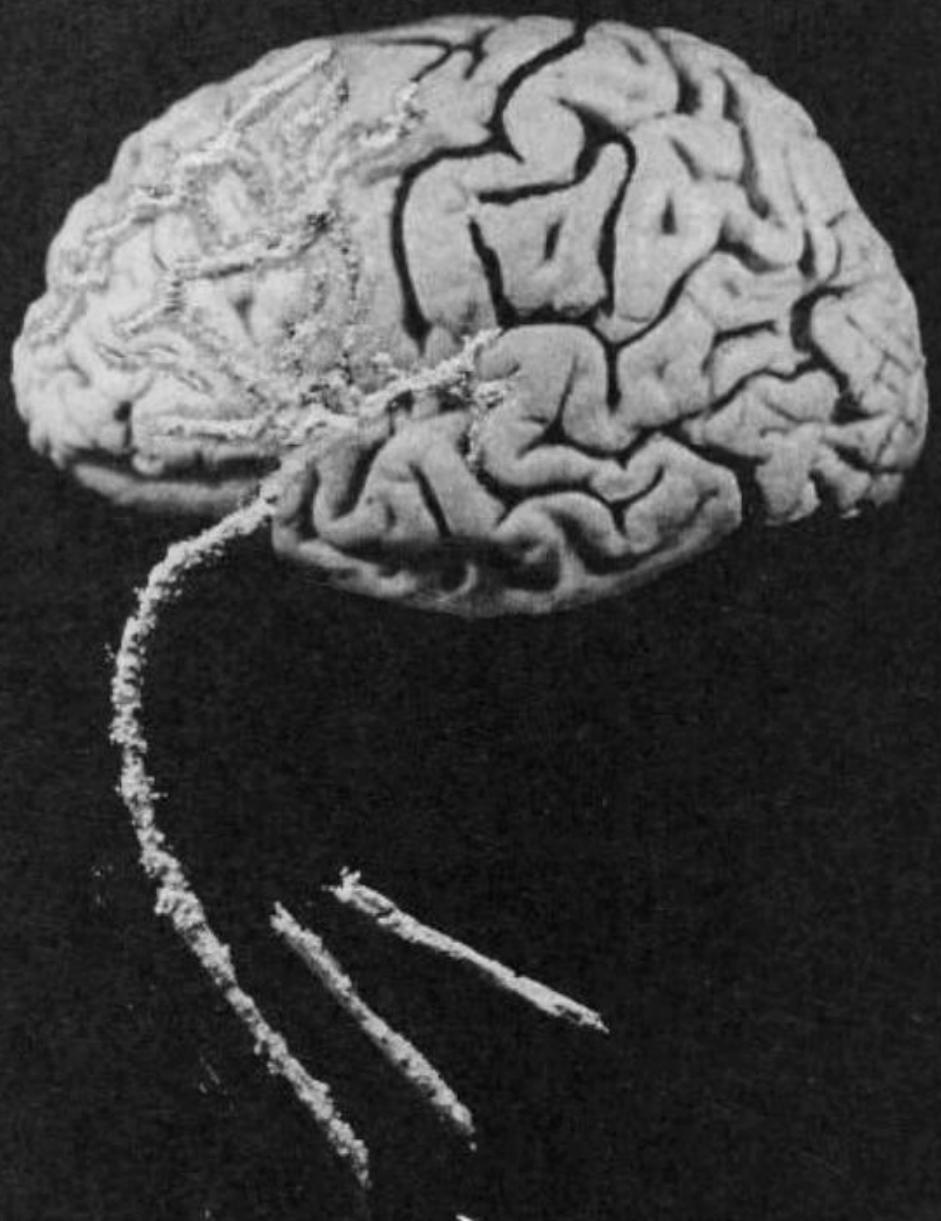


+ дорожка



- извилина

the eXile

CHAPTER FIVE: OUR GOD IS SPEED

"Our God is Speed"
Vladimir Mayakovsky



e took a vote. Should we skip an issue in August, when business is slow and half of Moscow is on vacation? How to take advantage of the expected advertising boom coinciding with the garish, \$150 million celebration of Moscow's 850th birthday in early September? . . . I voted to skip a week in August and readjust our publishing schedule so that we'd have an issue coming out the week of the "party of the century," as Mayor Luzhkov's people were calling it. Kara wanted to stick to the normal schedule. Matt had an even better idea: Why not *really* cash in by putting out three issues in a row, week after week, back-to-back, without the usual one-week interval? That way we'd have one issue coming out the week *before* the birthday bash, one the week *of*, and one the week *after*. Kara liked the idea: they heard cash registers ringing . . .

I was staunchly against it. It was mosquito-muggy that day. The mere mention of extra work made me break out in one of my famous Sephardic sweats. I argued against it as best I could. My economics ratio is fame:work. How can you squeeze as much fame out of as little work as possible? But Kara and Matt outvoted me. Two to one. And then, to my horror, they both split for vacation during that same three-week period. Taibbi chased his girlfriend back to Yale, while Kara and her husband were secretly plotting to sink the company. Like all embittered partners, she wanted to see the paper die in her absence. She was all for me running the newspaper alone. As I later learned, the gist of their plan was to run up arrears with our printing press and our film developer, while not collecting on any of our bills, leaving us choked of funds and without any favors to call from the people who we had to pay to keep the paper

going. She had counted on the fact that our operation was so feckless—and Kara was so on top of everything—that we wouldn't figure out the scheme until it was too late. It almost worked.

But before then, when phase one of the sink-the-*eXile* plan first kicked in, I didn't see the storm clouds coming. Actually, I waited until the roof of my cozy little house was blown off and I stood in four feet of water before I realized, Fuck! I'm going to have to do this ALL BY MY FUCKING SELF! The selfish American shitheads had abandoned me for their vacations RIGHT WHEN I NEEDED THEM MOST!

There was only one other person who could possibly help me through.

I called up Krazy Kevin to beg him for some editorial assistance. I'd pay him anything.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Oh no, man," he said in his lazy, slacker way. "I'm going to Ukraine and the Baltics. Didn't Matt tell you?"

So I was alone.

Before leaving, Taibbi joked that my hair would turn white before he returned . . . like Leland Palmer's from *Twin Peaks*. I didn't laugh—the possibility was too real. I'm getting up there in age. My brother, who is only two years older than I, has whitened temples.

But I was lucky. I got ahold of one secret aide, my little Santa's helper: an old snowman who's been bailing me out of trouble ever since college finals first pinned me up against the wall.

If it wasn't for the speed I'd scored in Estonia while renewing my visa that summer, I don't know how I'd have made it through. It wasn't very good speed—in fact, it's about the worst speed I've ever snorted in my life. Way too ex-lax white for my tastes: white means baby powder and laxative. The really good speed is yellowish or crystal-brown. My friend Lee always has a rock of pure crystal when I visit him in Hollywood. He takes a razor and scrapes a few rails off the crystal for me every time I see him. He calls his speed "glass"—he gets it before they even wash it down with whatever chemicals they use to dilute it.

The Estonian shit—you can tell you're the very last sucker in the drug chain pyramid—you're the last scavenger to the corpse. What's left is fur and bone, the odd ligament. But you don't have a choice. When it comes to drugs, you takes what you can gets.

When I was working on the second solo issue, I got a call from Jeffrey Tayler. He'd been commissioned by *Spin* magazine to write an article on drug abuse in Russia. In the fall of 1997, it had become the new fashion among foreign correspondents to write harrowing, chilling accounts of young drug addicts in the former Soviet Union. The *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, *Newsday* . . . they'd all run harrowing-Russian-drug-abuse stories that fall.

Tayler called me for help because he figured, reading our newspaper, that we knew everything there needed to be known about drugs. I was flattered, as I easily am. We agreed to meet. I had a preconception of what a *Spin* writer should

look like: earring, stringy hair, leather jacket . . . a kind of deceptively lazy-voiced ex-college radio DJ type.

On the day of the appointment with Tayler, some absolute nerd arrived in his place: tweed jacket with elbow patches, pressed slacks, loafers, perfectly coiffed hair, cartoon square jaw, and soft voice. Was he looking for an art gallery party? *Here?*

"Hi, I'm Jeffrey Tayler," he said, introducing himself.

I hid my shock, the way you try not to show your revulsion when you meet someone with a birth defect—a glass eye, a bionic hand, a jaw destroyed by flesh-eating bacteria . . .

In the hope that the *eXile* would get some publicity, I spent a few weeks helping Tayler. He admitted to me almost straight off the bat that he'd never tried drugs in his life. He told me that he'd previously written for *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Magazine*. "I don't even understand the drug language, so I hope you can help me," he modestly pleaded. "I usually write about culture and that sort of thing." Tayler tried ingratiating himself to *eXile*-y decadence by telling me about the time he spent in Morocco.

Tayler needed training wheels. He didn't know that you "snort" coke, or what "banging" heroin meant. It was embarrassing. I myself felt like some washed-up hipster with an earring, using that kind of language. He was looking for the real dark, harrowing angle as well.

"*Spin* wants me to write about some other kinds of drugs," he said. "I'm not sure what they're called, but not the regular stuff, you know. I need to find drug addicts shooting up dirty needles, that kind of thing. They want a real gritty, dark story, with a Russian angle."

I wasn't going to let his annoying idiocy get in the way of my own literary ambitions, so I introduced him to a drug addict friend of mine, under the pretext that he'd be protected. I told Tayler clubs to visit, places to go, things to watch out for. In return, he was going to blow the *eXile* in *Spin*.

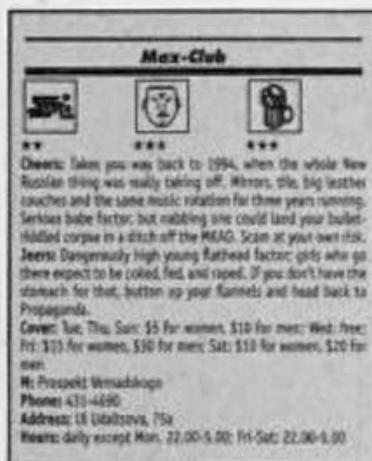
One night, I got a call from an astonished Tayler. He asked me, in a whispered, nervous voice: "Is it . . . is it true that you can *snort* heroin?" he asked.

I laughed. "Uh, yeah, of course. Everyone does. Why?"

"Wow, I didn't know. I was at Marika, and these girls were snorting something in the bathroom. I asked them what it was, and they said 'heroin.' I thought they were just teasing me."

Another time he told me about going to Titanik and seeing a group of young techno types in sunglasses passed out on couches with blank expressions. "What do you think that is?" he asked.

"I don't know. Coming down from E, or else heroin."



"Yeah, I think it was ecstasy," he said. "That's what my friend said. I have an escort showing me around. I'm going to a kislotechny (acid) club tonight. You wanna come with me?"

"I'll meet you there."

"What time?"

"Don't wait," I'd say.

I'm still not sure what the guy's deal is. How could someone in their mid-30s never have tried drugs? It was bizarre. He spoke a flawless, almost accentless Russian. Only CIA spooks and Mormon evangelists have stats like that. He just didn't make sense.

I finally saw the article a few months later. I was shocked. I thought I'd trained this bitch up, but he'd let me down. It was nothing but a collection of every harrowing-tales-of-drug-addicts-doom-apocalypse cliché you could ever imagine. And worst of all—the fucker didn't mention me once! Me, his OB-1 Kanobe, without whom . . . ah, fuck it.

Journalists aren't just professional liars, propagandists, and pickpockets—they're also the lowest, most shameless careerists and ingrates on Planet Earth.

The accumulation of drugs=despair articles in the fall of 1997 spoke more of a conspiracy among careerist hacks than anything remotely resembling the truth. What people forget in every article ever written about drugs is one simple, basic fact: **PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS BECAUSE THEY'RE FUN**. That's it. It's the most basic premise of all. There's no mystery to the drug thing. People drink water to quench their thirst; they have sex because it feels good; and they do drugs because they're fun. Is it really that difficult a concept to run by the reader? Is this obvious fact really so dangerous and censored that we can never utter it in the printed public?

Even Hunter S. and William Burroughs couldn't state it that plainly: they elevated drugs to the mythical level, keeping mum on the single most obvious, dangerous fact. So I'll repeat: **PEOPLE DO DRUGS BECAUSE THEY'RE FUN**. It's no different from alcohol or roller coasters, except that drugs are A LOT BETTER.

If everyone would admit that people do drugs because they're fun, then suddenly, the whole 30-year war on drugs thing would seem savage and bizarre: the war on fun. Which is exactly what it is.

Drugs are also incredibly practical. They can help you get through rough times. They can numb you to horrible circumstances. They can improve your social skills. Or they can increase your work efficiency. Sometimes coffee just isn't enough, just like sometimes beer isn't enough.

When I was stuck doing three issues back-to-back, all

alone, it was the speed that stepped in as deputy editor, copy editor, ideas-man, and gofer. I went days without sleeping, just railing out one *strelka*, or arrow, after another. True, each issue was worse than the previous one. The last Taibibless issue was almost a complete editorial disaster. Readers were beginning to complain about the decline in quality. It could have been worse, though. There could have been no newspaper at all, with me hanging from the ceiling, a scrawled note pinned to my body: "I didn't have what it takes. Go on without me. M"

Muscovites rarely take speed. It's one of the few truly baffling things about this place: an enigma wrapped in a zipper lock wrapped in a nosebleed. It's not like Russians don't love their drugs as much as the next guy. They vacuum up overpriced, heavily cut cocaine, they bang heroin and Special K, they drink shoe polish and paint thinner, they sniff glue and gasoline, they drop countless tabs of cheap Polish acid, they pop Latvian ecstasy like it's chewing gum, they score rank opiate substitutes and poppy straw from babushki at Lubyanka and bang it in basements, they chow mushrooms, they spark up Kazakh shake that takes 20 hits to get a buzz from, they smoke Afghani hashish, drop trans . . . they even take drugs I'd never even heard of before I arrived. Like vint, an amphetamine developed by the Germans for the Luftwaffe. I'd like to try it, but I'm sure it's a filthy high, full of awful speed-hallucinations. I don't want to have one of those Prince Myshkin wiggly bacon seizures in the middle of someone's floor, spike-in-arm.

Ketamine is another drug I didn't know about until I came to Moscow. The Russians say that Ketamine was developed as an anaesthetic for abortions. It works differently on men and women. Women experience a kind of sweet, euphoric high, lolling on the puffy clouds, passing through heaven's petting zoos. For men it's a bit different. There are no petting zoos and puffy clouds. It's more like an H. P. Lovecraft world of terror, fish that are all bear-trap jaws. . . . Your body becomes a pilotless slab of concrete in low-gravitational flight, paralyzed but awake, recklessly careening above the stratosphere, in the darkness, without any brakes or headlights . . . just burning out of control into a physical place called Terror. A poet friend of mine, Andrei Turkin, shot Ketamine a few times and told me all about it. At the time, I was desperately searching for drugs, coming up empty. With Turkin, I thought I might have finally found a "Drug Crowd," that secret underground clique that lurks in every city, town, class, etc. . . . Since Turkin was a poet—a

Russia Turns Trendsetter

by Mark Ames



Almost two years ago, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of Russia's victory over the Nazis, I experienced the quintessential evening of Moscow Decadence. It began at around midnight in the parking lot of the Young Pioneer's stadium. My friends, a mixture of Europeans and techno-Russians, spread the goods atop a mirror: an 8-ball of whiff cut into rails as long as asparagus stalks, 6 caps of X, and some diazepam to smooth the ride.

Inside the club, you could tell us apart from the others: we had the largest eyes and the weirdest smiles... and we pounded the most water.

As the evening wore on, the doses were boosted. People drifted in and out of our circle. Then a group of us split off to go to a friend's apartment, where, I was assured, I would witness "group sex." The idea of "group sex" didn't appeal to me—in fact, it embarrassed me—but I went along for the ride. I didn't want to miss out—a sin in suburban mentality: the fear of "missing out."

At Stas' apartment, some of the guys based over the stove-top, little gray-white rushes of smoke shooting up from the tin foil. Then another round of caps were offered, although I threw in the towel. It was five thirty in the morning, and I had a meeting with my boss in two and a half hours. Also—I don't know how else to say it—I was reaching a stage where I didn't feel involved anymore. I was starting to make mental notes of the whole thing, trying to find relevance, preparing the column in advance. That's always a bad sign.

Then the "group sex" began. Yulia, Tanya, and Sveta, feeling the boost kick in, launched into an annoying techno-dyevushka dance [early morning TV aerobics step with a vacant expression] right there in the living room. The guys sat around, staring with jaws open, while Stas reassured me that the "group sex" leg of the program was just around the corner. With a lecherous grin, Stas crossed the room, dancing in rhythm, moving up close, rubbing Tanya's ass, kissing her... they fell to the floor, real Wild Orchids-like... On the other side of the room, Yulia jiggled harder, then took Sveta onto the floor and started dry humping her. The European next to me got excited; he crawled next to the sapphites and started rubbing Yulia's back as she humped Sveta. If only I had a camera, I thought, this would make some seriously good comedy... real Don Knotts/Jack Ritter meets Pia Zadora... I don't know what it was—it just all seemed so fucking healthy. There was a strange, practiced, zombie-like quality to it all that, while interesting, certainly wasn't erotic. Still, I stayed on, afraid that if I cut out, I'd offend someone. Finally, at around 7:30 in the morning, I slipped out, just in time to meet my boss for the Victory Day parade. At the time I was living on Kutuzovsky Prospekt, which served as the runway for the military parade: all kinds of APCs, tanks, howitzers, jeeps and so on were rolling under my window as the spell of the previous evening wore off, and I was forced to confront a few questions: a) Did 20 million

Russians die so that their progeny could become wiggled-out techno heads engaging in some kind of flat "group sex"; b) why didn't I get excited; and c) are these questions mere serotonin-soaked attempts to "get to the bottom of it" or to "see a pattern" where one doesn't exist? The only answer I could come up with was that yes, indeed, 20 million Russians did lay their lives down exactly so that a few thousand kids, on the 50th anniversary of that tragic victory, could inhale imported drugs and engage in "group sex." What the hell did they expect anyway? I got mean and nasty and as the serotonin washed away, and the rumble of tanks below my window kept me from much-needed sleep, and if my boss hadn't come barging on my door at 8, I would have spent all morning brooding about the meaninglessness of war and life.

Okay, now here's the twist. See, that was two long years ago. The winds only blew from west to east then. But I've been back to California, and I've seen something... so awful... could it be? "Chemical Brothers and Orb Headline the Henry J. Kaiser Auditorium!" "Techno Music Takes Youth By Storm!" "From 'Ambient' To 'Jungle': The San Jose Mercury Guide to Techno..." In the listings, you can choose your night out based on what kind of music you're into: garage has about 10 listings in San Francisco; Progressive, House and Hardcore have a few, and so on. So it's finally happened to America, only FIVE YEARS AFTER IT HIT RUSSIA: America has gone technichal. What scares me the most is that I'm beginning to detect a trend of America following the lead of Russia in a lot of things. For example, in the film *Fargo*, the kidnappers offer the cop fifty dollars to forget about a registration violation. True, the cop refused, and wound up getting his head blown off... but still, it means Russification has reached the far north of Minnesota, not to mention popular culture, and it could only lead me to ask, what in God's name is next? Group Sex? No—one thing I realized about Americans is that they stopped having sex—heterosexual sex, at least. You can see it in all the surveys they publish. Americans are fascinated with lesbians right now—they've gone bonkers over dykes, who are all over the TVs, movies, magazines—even my mother's talking about them—it's the closest thing we get to Group Sex, only it's far cleaner, clean enough for the whole family. But conspicuous consumption—that one trait expats have sneered at most—is definitely in. Not only has the Next Generation gone techno and bribery, but they're also into expensive cigars, golf and quirky cars that cost a lot. It may not be the Golden Palace, but it's a step in that direction, and it makes me sort of glad that I'm heading back to the land where trends are set: Russia—the trendsetting nation of the late 90s. I can see the doubly ironic leads now: "The Times They are a Cha-a-a-ning" or "If Reagan was dead, he'd be turning in his grave knowing that America's youth takes its cue from Russia's." Kind of makes you wonder who really won the Cold War after all, doesn't it?

Not really.

well-known Moscow poet—it seemed natural that he'd have access. It's understood that one of the few perks in the art world is access to drugs. I was trying to get him to hit up his avant-garde friends for some good drugs, but Ketamine was all he could offer me. I considered it. I was so desperate for a vacation in the mind that I even considered banging Special K with him until he told me what to expect. It sounded like PCP, and that's got to be about the scariest substance on earth. I would rather die—I mean literally DIE—than endure a night on PCP—or Ketamine, for that matter, although the Ketamine "high," if you can call an awake nightmare a "high," mercifully only lasts an hour. Once Andrei told me that he saw God while on Special K, and it was horrible. He didn't get into details. But he did continue popping the shit, right until he moved to Austria, when the government gave him a grant to write a novel. I asked Turkin why he took it, and he'd just laugh, twist his finger to his forehead, meaning to say, "I am crazy Russian poet, hee-hee!"

Turkin and his ex-jock girlfriend were a pair of obscene alcoholics drinking themselves to death every night. As a protégé and member of Dmitri Prigov's postmodern poets' circle, I thought Andrei would have access to something better than liquid panic. He made a few promises to find me speed—he kept calling it "phendrene"—but they never came

through. The drug world seems to follow the same script in any culture. Ten empty promises for every bad score, and five rip-offs for every decent score. Not very good odds.

Who else could I turn to for speed? Vova, my banker friend, only wanted to drink vodka and smoke that shitty Kazakh shake. He introduced me to a locally famous, but painfully bad, punk band, DumBo, whose lead singer, the Armenian Jew "PoZr," couldn't come up with anything better than weed either. I smoked a few joints with him before the DumBo concerts at the old Sexton and Bunkr clubs, where metalheads, punks, and bikers hung. I didn't even catch a buzz—just got tired and scared.

Once, I almost got stomped at a DumBo show by some bikers, the Night Wolves, who are the local Hell's Angels. I was drunk and I slapped one of their girls' asses. It was idiotic—I deserved a good knifing for it, but she mercifully pulled them away from me. So I was humiliated, and straight. Jesus! If even a popular punk band can't score anything better than fucking weed, I'm doomed.

In late '93 and '94, I had to rely on the *apteky*, or pharmacies, for my scores. The real coup was the Stary Arbat pharmacy, a newly remodeled pharmacy, dom 25. The walls were painted fresh white. The display cases looked like they'd been imported from Austria, all clean and glass, with painted strips of metal. I cruised inside once when Dr. Dolan was visiting me in Moscow. In one of the sparkling glass display cases,

The War On Pleasure

by Mark Ames



A truly terrifying incident happened last week to a close acquaintance of mine.

He'd scored two grams of smack from a young African woman—she sold it to him in her podyezd while holding her five month old baby in her free arm—and made a straight B-line to a friend's house nearby. For the next six hours or so, the group of smacking-buddies binged themselves into a numb, groggy stupor. Three snorted, two jammed. They watched movies, talked (or rather drawled in half-sentences), nodded off in chairs... it was harmless fun by any standard.

By five in the morning, two of them—both expats—decided to leave for home. They stood out on Leninsky Prospekt trying to flag a car down to get back to the center. No one stopped, perhaps because, as my friend put it, "I'm like you, Ames—they take me for a blackass."

Finally, one enterprising driver took a chance: he made an illegal U-turn to pick them up. They agreed on a price, then got in. As they headed towards the center, a militsia car pulled up beside them, on the passenger's side. The cops stared menacingly at my friend, then blew their horn and motioned for them to pull over. Right then, my friend realized that he was holding one and a half grams of china white—one ball in his inside coat pocket, and the other in the front pocket of his pants.

"I thought about pulling the shit out and dumping it on the floor of the car," he told me, "but I realized that they were probably watching my movements. I had to gauge which would be riskier. I just had to hope that they wouldn't haul me in and frisk me."

The driver got out and showed his documents. There was still hope they'd quickly get away. Then one cop came up to the side of the car and banged roughly on the backseat passenger's door. The guy in the backseat didn't have any smack on him, but he'd forgotten to bring his passport. He nervously got out of the car. That's when my friend's paranoia reached a peak: he thought, "Why did they pull everyone out of the car but me? Is this some kind of Soviet mental torture?"

To give the impression that he was a confident Westerner, he got out of the

car himself and approached the cop, offering his passport. The cop asked him what he did in Moscow, and mocked his answers. He mocked his job, his citizenship, his bad Russian (my friend affected the bad Russian, hoping that naivete would put the cop off). Then the cop noticed a minor fault in his visa, and said, "Davai v militsiu." That was it: they were taking both of them into the station. Where, for sure, they'd be frisked. And where, for sure, the smack would be found.

"My legs started shaking uncontrollably," my friend told me. "I kept this stupid American smile on my face, but my knees were like Shaggy's from Scooby Doo. I've never shaken that hard before."

If he'd been busted, it would mean nine months in Butyrka waiting for a trial, and another two to three years time in a foreign labor camp in Mordova. The chances of getting tuberculosis in that time are about as high as the chances of getting raped in Folsom. Official statistics claim that ten percent of Russia's prison population has TB, but the real figure is far higher. No man, and particularly no milked Westerner, can possibly survive such an ordeal without serious and permanent damage to his health and mind. And all for what? For a completely victimless crime; for trying to momentarily relieve the pain and boredom of "reality" via a natural substance that happens to be less filthy, and more appealing to the senses, than alcohol and cigarettes. Alcohol: how many murders, rapes, assaults, auto accidents and the rest happen each year in Russia, or any country, because of alcohol? One estimate I heard is that up to a third of Russia's crimes are alcohol-related. Ah, but it's all so fun and whacky, all that alcoholism, isn't it?

I have since asked around what the sentence might be for someone carrying one and a half grams of heroin for personal use. The court in the Novocheryomushki region told the exile that such a person would "sit for three years." Sergei Zabarin, a lawyer who is fighting for clarity and sanity in Russia's drug laws, told me that Russia's drug laws are unconstitutional, and yet he has several clients sitting in holding cells for carrying amounts even less than half a gram of heroin.

"It is uncivilized and inhumane," he told me. "But I don't have the money to fight it in the World Court."

The Russian criminal code separates drug offenses into three categories:

small amounts for personal use, large amounts, and very large amounts obviously intended for sale. However, there has never been an official list published which spells out what a "small amount" is, although the Ministry of Health, which is in charge of naming that amount, has privately listed a "small amount" of heroin as .005 grams—in other words, about one microscopic granule, which could implicate frankly anyone who's ever bumped into a druggie. The obvious intention is that this gives wide leverage to the cops to bust who they want—and to extract massive bribes at whim.

"The Russian constitution forbids prosecuting a citizen for a crime that has not been properly disseminated through the media," Zabarin told me. "Since no one knows what a 'small amount' of heroin is, by our own constitution, they should not be prosecuted. However, I have one client who has sat in Matrosskaya Tishina for eight months after they found 4 grams of heroin on him. He's still waiting to hear his sentence."

Expats are not at all immune. I remember hearing about a black American who last year was caught with a gram of coke and sentenced to two years, but this has never been confirmed. The Chereyomushki court told the exile that an American woman was busted in August at Sheremetyevo, having stuffed seven kilos of smack into her daughter's barbie dolls en route from Lima, via Moscow, to Ljubljana. It's hard to feel sorry for her, though: her bust has more to do with social Darwinism, weeding out the mongoloids, than anything else.

What happened to my friend? As they were about to put him into the back of the militsia car, he feigned surprise while masking his terror, and said, "Wait, why jail? Can't we just pay a fine?"

The militiaman's expression suddenly changed. He motioned my friend to follow him to the side of the street, then turned around and whispered, in English, "One thousand fifty."

My friend sighed in relief, but again feigned surprise and shock. "One hundred fifty? You mean, uh, sto pyatdesyat' tysich rubley?"

"Dot" the militiaman sneered.

My friend shook his head, then pulled out the bills. It was business, that's all.

Never again will my friend leave his house with drugs in his pockets.

Not will I.

CHAPTER FIVE

we spotted a bottle of German codeine cough syrup. I couldn't believe my eyes, but it was true. Regulations were lax when I first arrived. The cough syrup was a real find: I'd buy about four jars of the stuff for twenty dollars a bottle. I'd come home, strip naked, light a candle, then gulp down a half a bottle at a time.

The high you get from codeine cough syrup is fairly close to a heroin high, if you drink enough: that same numb, low hum in the ears. I'd lie in my bed in the communal apartment I lived in, play my Breeders cassette, and pass out. . . . My neighbors, a pasty alcoholic and his obese architect wife, quietly avoided the American junkie in the apartment. I selfishly blasted my music and ignored them. But after fifteen or so bottles, the codeine effect wore off. After a few months of sucking that shit down, I was starting to look like a bleached, thin poet. That really scared me. And then, just like that, they pulled the codeine cough syrup off the counters. The revolutionary chaos from '91 to '93 was quickly fading, a rippling effect that began with the tanks shelling the White House, sound waves that rippled into the pharmacies, onto the streets, until it spread across Moscow: random order was replacing chaos.

So I was back to square one. By mid-'94, I was ready to give up on Russia as a source of vascular decadence. I was despondent, and my inflated opinion of Russians began to wane. Here's a nation of proud maximalists, living on the footsteps of nature's very own opium poppy preserve (Central Asia), and of all things, they choose to stick to vodka—dirty, filthy, piss-in-your-underwear vodka. It seemed to me that the idiots only wanted to drink, that they couldn't imagine drugs that took you to far more interesting places than Ketamine, pot, or alcohol. I tried defending Russians in my mind for their bad taste: such as, life here was already so intense that the kind of drugs I was looking for would only send them over the edge. Of course you need speed, E, or heroin in suburban America—NOTHING HAPPENS IN SUBURBAN AMERICA. But that excuse didn't wash—it's all a matter of taste, and in this area, the Russians, I was sure, had bad fucking taste.

There was another, possible source. It was the expat world. From what intelligence I had gathered, they were a very unlikely source of drugs. Moscow's American expats in particular were a grotesque caricature of Middle America: part Tim Allen, part Jerry Lundgaard. They'd have had bar-b-ques on their lawns if Moscow had lawns—they did, in fact, practically every weekend. They had proverbial bar-b-ques on their proverbial lawns every weekend.

On my first day in Moscow in 1993, I was dragged to an

expat softball game just outside of town, where they tried bar-b-queing uncooked McDonald's hamburger patties. This is the truth: on my first day, about a hundred expats took two U.S. Embassy buses out to a field in a village outside of Moscow for a foreigners-only softball tournament. And among the sponsors was McDonald's, which delivered hundreds of uncooked hamburger patties and a couple of hibachis. I was dragged there by Al Parker's local American manager, Ted Krashenko. Since Al had lined up my visa, and Ted had picked me up from the airport when I arrived, I complied. And was shocked. The expats there—almost all Americans—told me with wild-eyed joy that this was the best day of the summer.

"You're really lucky," several of them said. "It barely feels like Russia here. It's great, isn't it!"

I'd come to escape the American paradigm—and here it was, transplanted in its entirety! I thought I'd made a huge mistake in coming here, and I briefly considered fleeing to somewhere more remote—Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Tomsk-7 . . .

As expat communities go, Moscow's has to boast the shoddiest bunch of losers of all. Hands-down. It's as though, no matter how young they were, they couldn't wait to be middle-aged—that is, the type of middle-aged people who, trying to show their youthful spark, dress in college sweats and baseball caps. And just in case you didn't get it the first time around, the Americans created an intramural ultimate Frisbee league, and a softball league, and a tag football league. They took over the fields and parks of Moscow for their sports, and chased locals away when they bothered them.

Later in the evening they happily drank beer at expat parties, or expat bars. *Beer!* And they did a lot of worrying about their careers. *Careers!* And they were and are an incredibly ugly community, physically speaking. *And I mean U-G-L-Y!* Especially compared to the Russians—well, the female Russians—who are the most physically attractive gazelles on earth.

For expats, in 1993, Moscow barely even existed, and to this day barely exists—Moscow might at times be conceded as a cinematic backdrop to their career-climbing, hotel-lobby-lurking, insulated lives. And yet, Moscow didn't even provide a cinematic backdrop—it couldn't, in fact: because the expats here were the least cinematic people alive. They were the triumph of genetic blandness, beige-blooded. It took me a while to understand. The whole setup was too bizarre; it's never been described before in literature or film, this incongruous blandness upholstered over the chaos of a collapsed empire. At first, I couldn't quite verbalize it; I

thought somehow it was I who was misreading things; it was I whose romantic expectations of Moscow were not only wrong, but perversely distorted. I had expected savagery, nihilism, and romance when I arrived. And I knew those things were going on, in every nook and cranny of Russia that hadn't been sterilized by the presence of an expat. They tried to recreate familiar episodes—moving, in seatbuckled transport, from Rosie O'Grady's Irish bar to the Western-furnished apartment to the Western supermarket to the Western restaurant... it just made no sense.

What were they doing here?! These types don't just pack up from America and head to Moscow. Damaged people like me go to Moscow—we flee, we take refuge in the anti-America, or so I'd thought. Instead, they came here and took refuge in an insular simulation of the familiar.

So what about the "unconventional" expat? Where did he go? As far as I know, the ever-so-slightly, temporarily unconventional types go to Prague. They spend a year there. They write a little poetry. They dabble in a few things they never had the guts to try in college: ecstasy, bisexual sex, whacky hairdos and body piercing.... Then they go back home. But Moscow as magnet for boring careerists? There was something truly bizarre about this expat community desperately trying to force a bar-b-que morality on the most violent, corrupt, anarchic city in the world. Like Ned Flanders packing up for Goa to sell processed cheese, avoiding the giant raves and hippies, cowering in his Goa-Sheraton hotel room, glued to a Tony

Alina, Will You Marry Me?

by Mark Ames



Last week, I sent the following letter home to my family:

Dear Everyone,
I have some good news and some bad news.

The good news is that I'm finally getting married.
The bad news is that my wife-to-be is sitting in jail.

Don't worry: I'm not marrying for love. This is purely humanitarian.

They were shocked. I'd never done anything humanitarian in my life—they remember me cheering when the French bashed a cap in a Greenpeace activist during one of their Nouveau-Beaujolais-mushroom-cloud festivals in the South Pacific. My joke at the time: "Q: What do you call a dead Greenpeace activist? A: A dead Greenpeace activist." It really bowled them over in Peoria... had 'em rolling in the aisles in Kalamazoo. But that was back.

Out here you're faced with enough road kill, cap beatings and gonorrhea—that is, the stuff black humor is made of—to rattle your average cynic. Once in awhile, you even have to shed your cynicism, to do something to fight against the horribleness of it all, or else you feel you'll lose your right to comment on anything. Sometimes those black jokes seem as defiant as singing Christmas carols on Christmas Eve.

The trial of Alina Vitukhnovskaya is one such injustice that has inspired me to utterly futile action, and not mere quips. She is the victim of vicious persecution from renegade FSB agents, a rigged legal system, and hypocrisy on the part of American writers and human rights activists, who once beat their breasts in support of Soviet dissidents, but now keep obediently quiet.

I went to her trial way out in northwest Moscow. You sit in this worn beige and yellow room on the fifth floor of a severe granite building... an empty cage awaits the defendant on one side, and three dilapidated Alice in Wonderland high-backed chairs on the far end, where the judges sit. You realize, just by looking at this perversion of a grammar school detention hall, that there's no way the accused will be judged innocent. You could sit Mother Theresa in that cage, and she'd look like guilty.

Talibbi and I came to watch Vitukhnovskaya's trial, which has reminded many here of the repression against writers and dissidents during the Brezhnev era. The State went after Vitukhnovskaya in 1994 in a highly-publicized trial in which she was accused of selling seven dollars of acid to a pair of rent-a-junkies who, everyone admits, had been brutally beaten by a team of eight FSB goons to force a "confession." After an outcry by famous Russian writers and leading human rights activists, she was freed in 1995, but not after spending over a year in Butyrka prison, one of the most savage dungeons in the northern hemisphere.

This year, her case was reopened. The judge signed a secret order in August to re-incarcerate her based on a rarely-invoked Russian statute, article 96, which allows re-incarcerating someone based on the "dangerousness of the crime." He called Vitukhnovskaya in for a hearing on October 23rd, and unexpectedly, without warning, had the five foot two poet seized, arrested, and thrown in Women's Prison number 6 for the duration of her trial. To imagine what her days were like there, remember that each prisoner is allotted an average of .7 meters of space. Often they have to sleep in shifts. The harsh, cramped cells are hostile to humans to the same degree that they are luxury suites for parasites. Prisoners become little more than a human salad bars for lice, fungi, bacteria, gum disease, tuberculosis, and worse.

The judge presiding over her case is a 30-year-old ex-cap from outside of Moscow; his two "consultants" are a pair of barely-breathing white-haired Soviets, one of whom spent most of the trial asleep.

After the first trial, I left for home feeling utterly defeated. You can write an article about it, make some phone calls, but you know you'll have no effect. Something else had to be done. Something to draw attention to her desperate plight. Something... stupid.

That's when I realized that if I married her in jail, thus making her an American citizen, then perhaps the American press would decide that she "counts." We all know that if the American press cries, the Russian government listens. It even worked during Soviet times!

Even though every Russian and West European human rights group has condemned her trial as a farce, the Americans won't touch it because of drug allegations. The local head of the PEN writer's association, Alexander Tkachenko, admitted his frustration.

"Even the American PEN backed away when they heard that there was a drug accusation," he told me. "I showed them evidence that the accusation was unjust, but they didn't care—the accusation was enough to scare them off."

My stepsister, who is an intern at the New York branch of Human Rights Watch, agreed. "The Russians are tricky," she wrote me. "They must know that people here are afraid of looking like they support drug use."

Just last Thursday, the judge made an unbelievable decision: he transferred Vitukhnovskaya to the Serbsky Psychological Institute to decide whether or not she is insane. This is exactly the same judgement handed down to countless Soviet dissidents, and this is the very same psychiatric ward where the same Soviet dissidents were held. Only now, it's worse today, Serbsky holds the worst, sickest maniacs and serial killers in Russia. This is where the "Red Ripper" Chikatilo underwent his examination. And now this innocent young poet is stuck in there with them. Her sentencing is set for January 26th, unless the psychiatric expert assigned to her case decides he needs more time. Incredibly, but it's happening. Now there's no other choice but marriage.

So here goes. I'm on my knees, Alina. Sure, I've got a few blemishes on my record. I was denied a few weeks back by a disfigured provincial girl. I hate children, and I will strangle you with a pair of cheap stockings if you if you dare threaten me with kids. All in all, I'd make a shitty husband. But I have a few pluses. I'm tall, for one thing. I can score free exile drinks. And most importantly, I have American citizenship.

Lately, I've tried imagining what our married life would be like. You'd fry up some meat and potatoes, toss up a little tomato and cucumber salad with mayonnaise... I'd be watching some cheap porno in the other room. We'd talk about our day at work—how the exile is going downhill, or how you're becoming more famous and more respected than me—as Mr. Nasty groans in the background... when we make love, you insist on wearing the famed exile propeller cap. We're a team. And the most important thing is that you're free. You're out of that madhouse that they're holding you in. And they won't hurt you any more, because Carol J. Williams and Michael Specter have decided that your oppression counts. They've written you up, so the same people who intervened to free Richard Bissell have intervened to free you.

Even the thought of your freedom is enough to cheer me up. And that's all that matters.

CHAPTER FIVE

Robbins special. . . . The chasm between expat world and Moscow reality was so great that it created something psychotic. The expat community reacted as any individual might react to such a disparity between one's inner, familiar world and the outer, inexplicable world: they got a big-time disease. The expats became grotesquely demented and didn't even know it. They suffered from a mass psychotic episode of Folie à Deux, although instead of imagining themselves as emperors and tank commanders, they adopted the blandest delusion possible—that of commuting careerists living back in suburban Atlanta, occasionally passing a depressed industrial district over the freeway bridge . . . a delusion that could only be punctured by bad weather and occasionally malfunctioning telephone lines.

Moscow was not real for the American expats. It was ignored, the way these people have learned, through solid American upbringing, to ignore a lot of unpleasant things they don't want to know. They even have a propaganda organ, the *Moscow Times*, to reinforce that delusion, successfully superimposing white Atlanta microbrewery culture over savage Moscow, and making everyone feel all the more comfortable for it.

I was willing to engage in psychotic episodes and mass

delusion, so long as it was artificially induced. But these rock-climbing types didn't need or want drugs. They just wanted more beer.

They were no help to me.

I wanted drugs, even if Moscow was providing its fair share of natural excitement. The shelling of the White House was great, I have to admit. I spent the whole day wandering around the gun battle. Once, when I passed a barricaded police precinct station, two cops pointed their AKs at me and threatened to make human confetti out of me if I didn't take a long, circuitous route around them. That day-long adrenaline rush was the closest to speed I'd had in Moscow. The killings, the corpses that litter the streets, the odd bomb that went off in the night. They were good for a rush. But I wanted drugs because I need that vacation in the mind every so often. After my first year, I thought I'd come to the wrongest place on earth for drugs. The Russians only wanted to drink, and I don't care for alcohol; and the expats were duller than Belgians, Homo Sovieticus perfected, Brezhnev's wet dream.

Then I met James.

James is the guy who dropped something called Marilyn. I still don't know what the fuck Marilyn is, and I haven't

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It's difficult to say which expat community was more nauseating: the alterno-expats (few though they were), or the Eurotrashers.

heard of it since. It looked horrible, but James insists to this day that Marilyn was the best drug he'd ever tried, and you could only get it in Moscow. I'd try it just to try it, but I wouldn't go into the ride with an eager smile and my hands up in the air—I'd clutch to the safety bar and scream like a bitch.

All I remember is that James did a lot of twitching when he was on Marilyn. We were in Ptyutch, the infamous (and over-rated) underground rave club that survived until mid-'96. I saw James there, sitting alone on a couch. Twitching and trembling. The left side of his face looked like it was melting off the bone.

A filthy-rich 25-year-old Russian cigarette distributor named Igor, decked out in Day-Glo techno uniform and metallic platforms, had scored James the tab. He couldn't explain to me what Marilyn was because he couldn't verbalize a complete thought that night. He kept slouching in his chair, with a blind smile on his face.

"Mark," James repeated, trying to throw his arm around me. "I really... I really... what? Did... did you say?" His eyeballs vibrated back and forth like figures on a slot machine, and his hands shook so violently that he couldn't pull a cigarette out of the pack.

"Are you okay, James?" I asked.

"Yeah," he drawled. "It's really great. This guy... he gave me Marilyn. He gave me..." James fell asleep in the middle of his words, then suddenly jolted awake, turned and smiled, then tried throwing his arm around me again. He couldn't lift them high enough to get them around my shoulders.

I worried about James that night. But I was pretty high myself, which made me selfish in a numb, distant sort of way. I'd done my first lines of Russian heroin, and they weren't that bad. A creepy young junkie, Misha, invited me to go with him and his girlfriend into their car, parked around the corner from Ptyutch. He poured some china white on a face mirror, quickly cut it into rails, and passed the mirror to me. Within



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This flyer announces perhaps the last ever Moscow July 4th bash, which generally means a "Whites Only" bland-o-rama held at some historical Russian landmark. On the center-right, note that "All Ex-Pats, families, and friends" are welcome, and "Passport or other identification required when purchasing a ticket." That is, if you're Russian, fuck you, get off your historical landmark! Sasha, our last production manager, furiously glued a swastika on this flyer and hung it on our wall.

CHAPTER FIVE

twenty minutes, I was happily buzzed. Things were looking up in Russia.

James never could figure out what Marilyn consisted of, and I've never heard of it since. I would guess that it was some kind of cocktail of ecstasy and heroin. I'd heard about a Russian girl who OD'd on such a cocktail. She popped one E/heroin cocktail, but didn't feel anything. So she popped another. She waited, but got impatient, and wanted to show off her Russian nonchalance. So she popped another cocktail. And then another. She finally felt a rush, but being drunk and Russian and predisposed to taking things to the limit, she thought she'd pop another one for good measure. And one more. About an hour later, her heart stopped. They rushed her to the hospital. She survived, but she lost that chirpy glow of hers forever.

James had been overindulging in ecstasy over the previous year, and he had a few physiological glitches resulting from a meningitis attack as a child. Maybe his nervous system couldn't handle the sensation overload of an E and heroin cocktail—if that's what the Marilyn was. Perhaps Marilyn was just some bizarre KGB psychotic, who knows. But it fucked James up. Ecstasy was doing enough damage to his nerves. The last time I saw him on E, his eyes dripped down to his lips, and his lips were pouring off of his face. It didn't look fun or funny; just horrifying.

I thought about James as I lay in my bed that night, floating weakly from the last residue of heroin in my blood. It was the first time I'd scored heroin in Moscow, and it lived up to its promise. The danger to James seemed abstract to me at the time, and my sincere worries were equally as distant. The next afternoon, James met for a Sunday brunch with some local executives. He told me he felt great, and although he still couldn't describe Marilyn's effects, it was worth the ride.

"I was really worried about you, James," I told him. "I was seriously considering calling an ambulance."

"No, I was fine," he laughed. "I really enjoyed it. But if you were so fucking worried, Ames, why did you abandon me? Great friend you are."

"Sorry."

James comes from a freakishly wealthy, yacht-owning English family. It was through James and his Eurotrash friends that I finally found the Drug Crowd in Moscow. When all else fails, always go with the rich. Careerist middle-class Americans are guaranteed bummer-bots. They won't even do drugs in private. They've been so successfully co-opted by the Reagan propaganda machine that they actually believe drugs are immoral; and what's worse, they're con-

vinced that they came to this sick, perverse conclusion *all on their own*.

Russians at least don't judge you morally, particularly not when it comes to self-abuse. It's one of the main reasons I feel so much more free here than back home. They don't judge you, and they aren't hypocrites.

Before James I'd never hung out with Eurotrash types. In fact, I'd barely even believed that they were real. One thing I noticed right away was that his crowd liked to be around beautiful Russian women—unlike either my poet friends or American expat acquaintances. Or rather, beautiful Russian girls liked to be around James's crowd. In any event, it was a sign that unlike the mainstream bar-b-que expats, these guys were looking for maximum sensual pleasure.

There were some drawbacks to the Eurotrashers, however. They listened to techno music, talked lovingly about Ibiza and modeling shows, and dropped a few coded hints that, at the very least, cocaine was part of their weekend. . . . Okay, I could tolerate the coke part. To coin a proverb, where there is coke, there is the catalogue.

One night, when James felt safe enough, he invited me to a party his Eurotrash friends were throwing in an huge apartment on the Novy Arbat. It was the night I was first introduced into Moscow's drug world. I can't remember exactly how it went, but I think James said something jokish and disparaging about people who drop ecstasy, but the disparaging was so obviously ironical to my ears that I decided to up the coded ante by mentioning drugs in a morally neutral sentence, which he then seconded in his own way, which I then peeled open by admitting that I'd "tried" a few drugs, which led to a few jokes about pot and hash, then a mention of ecstasy . . . a few minutes later, I followed him into a closed bedroom, where his friend Ben sold me a hit of E for \$35.

There were probably 40 people at the party, including a few Russian DJs in leather coats and Caesar hairdos. Every single one of us was flying. Sometime later, the cops broke it up and even threatened to haul us in. They were responding to complaints about the music, and looking for a little bonus. They made us line up against a wall. A couple bottles of vodka solved the problem.

After that, I went on a wild coke-and-ecstasy spree with James and the Eurotrash gang. At the time I was working as a personal secretary to the hyper-ambitious Pakistani investor. He drove me like a scabbed mule. I worked more hours than anyone I knew, and made less than anyone I knew. I'd go days without sleeping, just to keep the Pak from screaming. I'd work through the weekends. Those weekend nights I got off, I was so desperate to escape even the residue

of the business world that I'd gorge myself on James's coke and E.

The Eurotrash circle was fairly international: British, French, German, two Americans, and a lot of Russians, particularly female Russians. They were all lifestyle, and they were doing it right. They distinguished themselves from the conventional American expats in almost every way, from being physically beautiful to being Russian-speaking, not overly concerned with their careers outside of office hours, and by their healthy attitude toward corporeal pleasure. It was understood that none of us would reveal to "the community" what we were doing on weekend nights; we all pretended that we were beer-swilling, bar-b-queing expats. But when we got together, it was all pills, powder, techno music, and model girls. We were living almost like rock stars—well, they were, actually. I was only getting the scraps when it came to sex. I got the leftovers, but that was fine. They tolerated me, although they thought I had a screw loose—or else I was somewhat nerdy in their eyes, out-of-code, awkward.

I was willing to sell out, sell out everything. Fuck the punks and artists, who couldn't score me anything better than banana peels! Call me Mr. Techno, so long as they can get me high! I listened to and—get this—even DANCED to their techno music, clumsily of course. After watching the Eurotrashers a few times, I started getting the steps right (hooking thumbs in belt loop and thrusting pelvis; cocking arms and holding index finger out like revolvers, pointing everywhere while shaking head with a cheesy techno smile, and other assorted embarrassments). I hated the music more and more after having initially decided to ignore it; I snorted coke with greed, dropping my hard-earned money on gram after gram in the hope that I'd be invited into the heroin penthouse; I popped caps of E well after they stopped making me feel good. It was still better than the alternative: beer and bar-b-ques on the lawns of Moscow.

It got to the point where we were dropping E and snorting coke almost every weekend. That and 80-hour work-weeks for a manic, ambitious young Pak were wiping me out. But I pushed on. I'd read about these *ubermenschen* business types who never slept at all, and I figured I could do it too. I had to somehow nullify those 80 hours of pain and waste with a few good hours of bliss, even if it meant I paid more later.

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Red Army's victory over the Nazis, I slipped out of my boss's apartment at eleven in the evening on a Saturday—we were putting together a kind of employees' manual to define our alleged corporate culture—and met up with James at the Titanik

club, which has reigned as the king of flatheads-on-ecstasy disco since it opened.

Titanik is massive, two-floored, like something from a Hollywood movie. Buzz-cut security in *Die Hard* costumes and ear mikes keep order and occasionally rough up a drunken flathead. It's all smoke, eardrum-mangling techno booms, and sweating nouveaux riches. In the parking lot, James, his girlfriend Ira, her sister, and I snorted several lines of coke in his Saab. Then we each popped an E tab and headed into the club.

It had been a few weeks since I'd taken anything. Work was beginning to drive me insane. My Pak boss dragged me up and down his stairwell of ambitions and complexes day in and day out.

But on this night, for some reason, the E and the coke didn't work their magic. There's a law of diminishing returns with drugs. I was exhausted. Exhausted from work, from drugs, and from faking it, faking that I belonged to this Eurotrash crowd.

That's how you start a-feelin' when it's five in the morning, dawn breaks, and that mental decathlon takes its toll, one too many wipe-outs. You want to retire in peace. You start thinking about sitting by a fire, in your bathrobe, with a John Grisham book, dog on the carpet....

A couple of months later, James took me to a party at Bogdan's apartment. Bogdan was a Russian techno pop star. He was always on TV, prancing around in sunglasses and gaudy techno Elton John outfits. And he was the darling of the rave underworld, mostly because of the infamous parties he threw in his apartment.

I was grateful, if a little perplexed as to why I'd been invited to what was supposed to be the coolest of the cool in the techno Eurotrash world—a party at Bogdan's private flat. But I didn't ask questions. The apartment was huge and cleared of most furniture: there was a massive sound system, a huge projector TV projecting onto the side wall, and a side cubby-hole area for DJs. Behind the TV projector were two couches and a long, low table. In the center of the table, a kind of traditional Russian party bouquet of Soviet champagne, wine, cognac, grapes, and mandarins.... On the edges of the table, rows of pills—ecstasy. There must have been about forty people who showed, half of whom were teenage girls.

I was in awe—I kept my mouth shut. Everyone dropped a tab—except for James and me. It was a Sunday night, and I couldn't physically or mentally take the strain any longer. I figured I wouldn't get laid anyway. I'd only end up paying at work the next day.

James withheld too, which surprised me. I regretted it

CHAPTER FIVE

then as I regret it now, but I can't argue with my general frame of mind, which was that I couldn't fake it any longer. Even though this neo-'70s disco drug scene was better than no drug scene, I wasn't really enjoying myself. It was beginning to feel like work, as though I had to come to meet them not halfway but all the way. Selling out wasn't all it was cracked up to be. A constant effort, a constant pushing and masking.

Secretly, I was hoping for something better, ideologically up my alley. Time, as it turned out, was on my side.

By 1996, the drug scene had exploded and democratized. The government claims that drug use exploded by 300 percent between 1992 and 1997, and that there are now 2 million addicts. Another statistic claimed that heroin imports increased by five hundred percent in 1998 alone—continuing one very wonderful vertical X-Y graph slant that began when Yeltsin took power. If anything, they're probably underreporting it a thousand percent.

Which was good for me. I no longer had to sell myself just to get high. After *Living Here* established itself, I stopped hanging out with the Eurotrash crowd completely, and spent time with journalists and quasi-arty expats.

Later, as a manner of bragging, we listed Bogdan's apartment in the *eXile* as the top "Ho-ing" place to visit. We bragged about the wild ecstasy parties and tripped out tee-

nies and Euro-decadence. But we didn't give away the address. We must have received hundreds of phone calls and letters from desperate readers, begging us to let them know where Bogdan's was. They were looking for fun.

Kolya couldn't tell me where to get speed. He was an ex-junkie from northern Kazakhstan who used to bang boiled opium extract from the age of 13 to 15, out of sheer boredom from living in the steppes. His geologist father moved his family there as a child. He told me that the boredom was unbearable: just a flat, moonlike, dusty steppe, and a city plunked in the middle of nowhere. Block Brezhnevian apartment buildings, grim schoolyards. . . . You either fought the rival punks, or banged poppy straw.

The word "speed" in Russian means AIDS. So you don't go asking junkies, with an eager smile, where you can score some AIDS. Most junkies here share their needles. They don't want to hear about AIDS. Hepatitis B and C are bad enough. When AIDS comes to Moscow—and it's just about here—"speed" will be the evil incantation. . . .

The closest equivalent word for speed is "phenamine," although some also talked of "ephedrine," a ma huang Chinese herb which, like ginseng, is pure fiction.

I met Kolya at the only pirate music kiosk in Moscow that



Heroin first started trickling in around late '94, started to become popular with the cool crowd in '95, and sent a generation of super-cheesy/hip techno kids into a vomit-drenched slumber of coolness in 1996. As always, the *eXile* jumped on the heroin-Xploitation bandwagon way too late, and when we did, we faked it, got it all wrong, and sold it back to the reader as cutting-edge journalism. The truth, however, is that our senior staff wisely abstained from whiffin' Burma's finest, and we wouldn't be caught dead doing cheesy drug rituals like getting high and snapping self-timed photos of ourselves.

sold punk and alternative tapes. He couldn't believe that an American would be interested in avant-garde music. The few Americans he'd met were all of the Ned Flanders lawn-set. The bar-b-que crowd had really fucked up things for the rest of us.

Kolya invited me to sit with him in his kiosk, drink beer, abuse the customers, and steal tapes and money. Actually, he stole the money, while I just stole a few tapes here and there. We had fun, although in the summer it was a fucking pressure cooker inside that kiosk. You could barely move one way or the other without worrying about tipping over a stack of pirate cassettes, and you sweated like a 300-pound noseguard during training camp.

Kolya pocketed every third sale. He needed the money for his wife and child. They rented an apartment so far out of town that, by train, bus, and metro, it took him over an hour to get into the center. I started spending some time at Kolya's kiosk after I heard that he was an ex-junkie. This was in 1994. As it turned out, he was even less connected than I was.

By the summer of '96, I didn't need Kolya. Through *Living Here*, I'd come into a second, somewhat more interesting and intelligent group of dopeheads, including journalists, investment bankers, and regular hangers-on. They were neophytes for the most part, but the drugs were real enough. They'd even cracked the speed enigma: one had scored speed in Estonia and brought several plastic gram packets to Moscow. It was pretty weak, heavily cut with baby powder or something, but if you took enough you could make a chattering fool of yourself.

It was heroin I was after most by now. After Misha's little gift at Ptyutch, I went seven long, dry months without it. I finally found the wormhole to Luang Prabang at the Water Club, which in the summer of '96 was considered the hippest "underground" techno club. It was built into a Soviet river-port building, but done up sort of like an MTV video: earth-gray curtains and sheets hanging, the requisite Day-Glo wall murals... rooms cut out of nothing... and an outdoor chill out in a colonnaded space, perhaps an old waiting area for riverboat travelers. Water Club was the successor to Ptyutch, the now-mythical underground bomb shelter where I'd seen James twitching on Marilyn.

Not that Ptyutch was all that interesting: just another dark disco, only every single kid was guaranteed fucked up. The authorities closed Ptyutch, probably because at any given time about half of Moscow's MDMA was bursting and popping in the brain canals of Ptyutch's patrons. Water Club, although more impressive in design, never took off. In mid-'96, the drugs were beginning to take their toll on the

first wave of chemical gluttons. People like Kirill and Stas had been devouring drugs for a solid year now. Not in a measured, American way, but like raging alcoholics in charge of a vodka warehouse. They had the money and the connections, as the children of the old Soviet elite—and thus, the New Russian elite. So they did lots of drugs every single night, and slept it off in the day. They lived like vampires.

But their supply of serotonin and dopamine had depleted. By the time Water Club got off the ground, the usual faces were starting to drop off. A couple had gone to dry out. One lost her husband to jail for a minor possession infraction. Someone—a young blond ex-model—got raped and killed while out on a score. There were overdoses. We heard about another person dying. Others tried to stay away from the Water Club just to save themselves. They'd become heroin junkies. They'd been blindsided. It just happened.

A word about the Russian attitude toward drugs. In 1994, drugs began to appear in Moscow like never before, and by '95, the distribution networks were falling into place. The youth—particularly the sons and daughters of the new elite, who generally had a lot of money, good instincts for what was cool, and a love of techno culture—consumed everything without prejudice. Because they came so late in the game, Russians don't carry the baggage of old, false preconceptions. All are equal before the Russians' eyes!

In America, the hippies somehow got control of the drug-ranking levers, and little has changed since. So we have these dated moral values attached to each drug, such as:

Marijuana: benign, the Corona Beer of the drug world

Mushrooms: relatively benign because they are "natural" or "organic," next logical step up from pot

Cocaine: can be a bad scene, but good for conversation

Ecstasy: fun, positive, mostly benign, just don't take too much

Acid: a requirement for mind expansion, just don't abuse

And a separate category:

Speed: dirty, bad. As Allen Ginsberg wrote in a manifesto in 1967, "Speed is antisocial, paranoid-making. It's a drag—bad for your body, bad for your mind, in the long run uncreative and a plague in the whole dope industry."

And a third category:

Heroin: E-V-I-L

My own pyramid would be the complete inverse. I've

never been more terrified than on mushrooms and marijuana, whereas heroin has taken me into its down pillow den many times, and never once hurt me.

Speed is everything the hippies said it wasn't: it is social, confidence-making, creative, and a bright spot on the whole dope industry. Marijuana, on the other hand, is absolutely paranoia-inducing, bad for your mind, antisocial, and not just uncreative, but responsible for some of the dumbest music, lyrics, and album-cover art in the history of man.

All drugs hit the market in Moscow at roughly the same time. So the Russians judged each as it made them feel, discounting hippie lore. No doubt ecstasy is still by far the most popular drug in Moscow, along with coke, but heroin is not far behind. More often than not, the complaint about heroin is that it's unsociable. But there is no social/moral stigma attached to a person who takes that plunge "down" into heroin, which in America puts you into a kind of prison uniform.

This made Russians far more enlightened than Americans in their attitude toward drugs, but also created a lot of unwitting junkies very fast. If you have a weakness for heroin, or an addictive personality, you may as well buy heroin a diamond wedding ring.

Russians as a race are prone to excess, I mean extreme excess. They consume 80 percent of the world's vodka. You can see them wobbling drunk on the streets on any evening, helping each other into metro cars and at crossings. It's considered a right here. Even centuries ago, foreign travelers reported seeing not just drunken peasants, but smashed aristocrats and clergy, stumbling down the morning streets naked, in the

You Were On Ecstasy, You Stupid Dickhead!

The Ecstasy Club
by Douglas Rushkoff
Scribner Press, London 1997.
315 pp., UK retail price 10 quid

by Mark Ames
the eXile

I wrote. I didn't right off. I didn't finish this book. I couldn't. I mean I literally, physically couldn't. It sucked so bad that it didn't even warrant a mere laugh. I mean, look at the fifth-grade science textbook cover: would you call it "hippy," man," or just plain stupid? Trust me, Masha Gessen was like Hunter Thompson compared to this; at least she had a subject to work with. Her book was grotesquely affected and fake, but at least, on the basic physical level, you could turn the page without screaming out loud from raw pain. In fact, a lot of really bad books can be valuable for their unintentional humor: take Rick Moranis and Jennifer Gould as examples. The office offices sounded like they'd been taken over by a pack of pot-smoking hyenas the night we read Gould excepts out loud to each other: her book was Kirsch non-fiction, a sort of Toxic Avenger of the journalism world. The tiniest, shocking thing about Gould was that she actually found a subculture and an audience who not only didn't laugh, but took it very seriously, at face value—including her airbrushed pinup photo.

This book, despite the blurb by William Gibson, was a literary root canal: like being chained to a dentist's chair, eyes squeezed open like the guy from Clockwork Orange, forced to watch a ninety-foot Bill Clinton on a movie screen growling with sobs in his seat for eight hours straight. Telling you, "All is bles."

That line constitutes a pivotal, deep, intense moment in the novel, by the way. I didn't just make it up. Douglas Rushkoff did.

So why are we even bothering to review *The Ecstasy Club* way out here in Moscow? First, it is considered by many to be the hippest book of the year, and the first and only authentic piece of fiction on rave culture. The young rave chick who loaned me the book struck me as intelligent and cynical, so in spite of my natural revulsion for things-techno, I really didn't expect the book to suck this bad. I expected to swallow the bitter taste of literary envy. Instead, I got a whiff of pure, liquid shit—that's right, "shit" and "shit."

As the first "voice of a new generation" book since Douglas Coupland's boring, middle-brow novel *Generation X*, *The Ecstasy Club* simply had to get a review in our newspaper, since we ourselves claim to be the voice of a new generation. Well folks, one thing I can say pretty confidently is that our voice and his voice ain't got nuttin' in common, and he daddy am I glad.

Now I'm assuming that *The Ecstasy Club* authentically represents the zeitgeist of the rave/techno generation. And lemme tell ya, folks, they're as stupid as I'd always feared. Which is why, I suppose, the book—or what I mean by it—was the most jarringly reading experience since, well, Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*, another novel, by the way, that I couldn't finish.

This massive, crass-sized flaw in Rushkoff's first novel is that he... didn't follow basic drug codes. There is an understanding among experienced hands in the drug world that, excepting speed, drugs make you dumb. You may have a lot of fun and you may experience sensations more intense than anything you've known... but those sensations do not translate back into the world of the sober as anything but embarrassing cultists you'd rather forget. Probably for that reason, almost none of the huge body of 80s hippie



literature survives.

No drug makes a person more stupid and switish than ecstasy, with cocaine running a close second. Remember what Dennis Leary said about coke? Even Jews would sneak into the bathroom with Hitler if he had an eight ball to share... and, after writing out the Jews, in their cocked-out enthusiasm, would say, "You know Adol, I think you had a lot of really neat ideas." But hey, at least they'd feel pretty damn embarrassed the next day. That's no reason not to sniff coke. Just remember all that empty chitter-chatter was purchased with your own serotonin and dopamine.

Rushkoff is no different from the Jews of Leary's joke, sneaking into the powdered bathroom with a bunch of morons and popping ecstasy, then writing down such insane reflections as, "Their tension dissolved into the smooth lines around them. People began swaying in the waves of energy..." That was a scene when an outdoor rave was almost broken up by a bunch of mean black kids who, in typical white suburban nicely language, only needed to understand and be understood, and of course, get down into the rave party. What calmed the blacks down? The alleged genius/leader of the rave pack, who softly whispered, "All is bles. All is bles." That was at it took to soothe the generations of racial tension, discrimination and hardship. Some very like cracker whispering, "All is bles. All is bles." A few pages later, there's even a deep, pitiful homeless man whom the ravers adopt. We're supposed to be impressed that the ravers take him in and understand him. Of course, nothing is mentioned about the burns, fits, crabs, urine-and-shit-soaked underwear, or tuberculosis. I had to imagine it myself—imagine the characters writhing every time their little homeless cloud of lurches and benders sat down to chat.

Thirty years ago, Charles Manson thought he heard something profound in even the dumbest Beatles songs. As Sam Kinison screeched, "YOU WERE ON ACID, MANSON! You would have heard messages in the Monkees songs, and they weren't even a real band, you lush!"

That's exactly how I felt reading *The Ecstasy Club*: "YOU WERE ON ACID, YOU FUCK!" I took that shit too, but I always felt embarrassed the next morning. I just hoped no one would remember how stupid and affectionate I was the night before—I didn't go writing my impressions down like they mattered!

It hit me a couple of days ago that maybe I was missing the whole point of *The Ecstasy Club*. A novel couldn't possibly have lines as stupid as, "He had that whole working-class-British thing about him. Those

are the people who were Doc Martens in the first place—before the punks and then the ravers decided they were so cool." Leaving out the fact that these skinheads who first popularized Docs, I began to get the queasy feeling that maybe this novel was working on a meta-level, as in meta-satire, or meta-parody. A parody of rave culture and ecstasy thoughts. A post-modern cyber-novel that both exploits and laughs at its subject at the same time.

So I rushed to the internet to find out if my hunch was valid. Nope. Not a chance. The book was meant to be taken at face value. The only satire, according to the author himself, was to show that the raver characters, in their attempt to free themselves from the chains of conventional life, wind up creating oppressive institutions of their own. I swear to god, it really works on that grammar school level of cheap morality.

Apparently Rushkoff has touched off a lot of controversy lately. Not because he wrote a bad book so painful that it could paralyze a man. But rather, because he was accused by "leftists" in America of having "sold out"; i.e., he charges selling lies. This is like being back in high school and arguing over whether or not REM "sold out" after Murmur, or after *Fables of the Reconstruction*. The only positive impression I kept after abandoning the novel (by pages into it was relief—relief that I live 6,000 miles away from the Bay Area, where the novel takes place... 6,000 miles away from that incredibly vicious, pointless paradigm of utter stupidity).

The book confirmed most of my suspicions about the techno culture. Such as how desperate they are to prove that they are cool (or underground), and how they stole all the idiotic mystique and cheap dogeza of the hippies without adapting what made the hippies truly interesting: active confrontation. What these characters have learned is that you can steal all the dogeza about fighting authority or doom or death that the hippies and punks paid so dearly for, and merely repeat them in code; that for them, style is the end-all of rebellion: a nose-ring is substituted for mohawk cocktails. End of discussion.

There is nothing fun, funny or kitch about the stupidity in *The Ecstasy Club*. I don't doubt that this book really does authentically capture the esprit of the new generation (even though rave culture is hardly new). After getting attacked last week by a Russian nationalist who kept calling America "stupid," I've been thinking: the longer I stay away from my motherland, the more right he seems to be. This book has me convinced that the stupid genes are being successfully passed down into the young generation. If America really is stupid, however, then stupidity is a pretty damn successful national strategy. America may well be the stupidest country in the first world—no other nation is as religious or god-fearing. However, that kind of stupidity, that kind of willful self-delusion on the individual level may in fact be the necessary ingredient that makes a nation strong. America completely lacks the self-doubt and self-loathing that crippled not only the late Soviet elite, but grop all of Europe. The stupidity of this novel proves, if anything, that America will stay strong and rule the world for at least another generation.

I've spent some time over the past three years in Russia with the local rave scene. My reason is simple: They live in the body, as opposed to the life in the bitter mind I had explored to death before arriving here. I could handle hanging out in the rave world not because the music was good or the aesthetic was profound. I always blocked out the stupid parts, the pseudo-mysticism and the freakshow. "Is a tree lost in a forest and no one was around to hear it, would it still make a sound?" level of philosophizing. No, I hung out with them because they popped pills and had sex. And now, frankly, I feel really stuck myself.

In spite of the eXile's policy of trashing anything that smacked of techno culture, a techno diva named Apollonia dropped by our offices and gave us this book to read, thinking we'd be blown away. Well, we were blown away—we nearly died from a bile overdose. After printing this review of über-moron Douglas Rushkoff's book, we sent a copy of it to him via email. He actually responded with the usual hurt tone. So we fired off another salvo of nasty emails, to which he finally replied with deafening "bounces off of me and sticks to you" silence. Douglas, your name's on our list.

middle of winter, holding their hands in front of their genitalia and picking fights with phantoms.

During Gorbachev's failed temperance campaign, Russians found clever ways to get hammered. For example, they learned that fuel products used in MiGs, when distilled, yielded something akin to a low-quality vodka. So the MiGs—which became known as “flying restaurants”—were tapped for their break fluids and gear fluids. While Vanya and Sasha got tanked in the airfield tool shed, Sergei Petrovich, flying five miles up in the air over the empty steppes, suddenly realizes that his wing flaps aren't responding. . . . The flying restaurant suddenly starts heading in a downward tilt, and there's nothing Sergei Petrovich can do. . . . No foreigner can drink—truly drink—with a Russian. Even a teenage girl will put you under the table. But at least with alcohol, it takes a bit longer for the drug to turn to poison.

That's why a drug like heroin successfully pruned some of the weaker-willed young Russians back in 1996. The penchant for excess and addiction meant that a dabble in heroin meant jail, destruction, or death for every tenth Golden Youth-er. In a culture where people help each other and even allow people to fuck up massively, having an addictive, excessive personality is not only tolerated, but encouraged. They'll get deeper and deeper into the addiction, assuming that somehow fate—or someone—will pull them out. And even if no one successfully pulls himself out of the shit, at least all the fussing and crying makes for good social drama, which Russians can't live without.

So the Water Club got emptier and emptier, and Golbuev, the owner, got more and more desperate. Ilya looked nothing like the raver kids. He was a curly-haired, bearded, potbellied Jew who looked twenty years older from the coke abuse. Here was another thing I'd never known until now: how coke fiends get fat. I can think of about six or seven heavy coke fiends I've known in Russia, all of whom were slob-fat Belushi types. Golbuev was one of them. And as the owner of the coolest new club, he had a new worry: patrons dropping off like flies. The cutting-edge techno scene that he was instrumental in creating at Ptyutch was cannibalizing itself.

We spent a lot of time together that one summer at the Water Club. He turned me on to some shit jones one night. He took me and a few friends into his back office with a mad look in his black-ringed eyes. He pulled out a wad of cocaine and poured it onto a mirror. He pulled out two credit cards and started to chop and divide like a Benihana chef, cutting some of the hugest rails I'd ever seen. We whiffed out on those high-speed rails, Golbuev taking three for our one.

Then he pulled out another packet: heroin, as per my very own request.

“This is gray. Persian gray,” he chirped.

A nasal speedball. It was nice, if a bit weak.

I bought two grams of coke and a gram of Persian from Ilya. A day later, he called me up and asked if he could come over. He was over in comic lightning speed. [Ames hangs up phone, suddenly, doorbell rings, Golbuev's at the door . . .] He rushed for my stash, poured it out on my desk, and cut rails that were even larger than the ones a few nights earlier. They were six-lane freeways, those coke rails. Three of them lined up next to each other. He had good drug manners. He paid for it—he bought it all back from me, then hurried off in a taxi to someone else's house. On his way out, he shook my hand, paranoia burning in his charcoal-ringed eyes.

I didn't see Kirill any more. There was a rumor that he'd gone to a rehab clinic in England or Miami. Stas also cleaned up. As did all of James's friends. James was developing some strange disfigurement in his facial muscles, a kind of wind-tunnel polio droop that got worse every time he dropped E. So he finally gave it a break. But by now I didn't care about the Eurotrash crowd. I'd moved on to a new group of serotonin parasites who had better taste in music—Pixies and Lou Reed albums in between the techno.

Near the end of summer, word got out that the Water Club was in big trouble, that it was dying. Golbuev was having problems. I could easily imagine: with those manic coke fiend eyes of his. . . . A regular of the club was raped and murdered. A Water Club manager OD'd. The patrons were thinning out. They were dropping off like flies, this first generation of Moscow's druggies. They'd reached a limit.

And then we heard the news: Golbuev had been assassinated. He apparently had coke debts in the hundreds of thousands. It's hard to imagine someone doing that much blow, but he did.

Later the story got changed. He absconded, or simply fled and spread the rumor himself that he'd been assassinated. He snapplepussed to Argentina with his girlfriend, then eventually made his way back to New York.

I later learned a shocking fact about him. He was only 27 years old. He looked like he was 40.

Later, in early 1998, Liza Berezovsky, who was close to Golbuev, was hauled in by the St. Petersburg cops for possession of cocaine. She'd been busted at a local rave. I feel sorry for the cop who busted her. Boris Berezovsky isn't known for his warm, forgiving personality. You don't rise from controlling the mafia-run automobile distribution network to über-oligarch and survivor of car bombs that

CHAPTER FIVE

Top: we printed Rushkoff's emailed reply to our review of his book. Below: Yet another eXile reader desperately trying to find out where Bogdan's apartment is, and how he can get invited.

A BAD ECTS [SIC]SY TRIP

The following is an email from Ecstasy Club author Douglas Rushkoff, in response to last

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issue's review of his book, which was emailed to his web site.

Ecstasy Club is a satire. I guess you're too serious to get that.

Oo, that's smarts! More ruthless satire from the vicious, acidic pen of Douglas Rushkoff.

BOGDAN'S ADDRESS REVEALED!

Alright Guys,

How's it going ??? Hopefully you can help. I am a frequent visitor to Moscow, the first thing I try and do is pick up a copy of the eXile, just to find out where all the shit is going down. There is one particular club that me and my mates want to check out, "BOGDANS". Every fucker I speak to in Moscow has heard of it (or have they ?), but no-one knows where it is.

I've gotta get to the "Sixth Dimension", & don't care if I ever leave, but none of the Gypsy Cabs know where it is.

You gotta help !!!!!

Dear !!!!!,

Okay, okay. Everyone's been bassing us about this, so we'll tell you exactly where Bogdan's located. The address is 12, 1st floor, 5, Good luck, and if you need that, we'll send you!

decapitate your drivers by holding charity raffles. And now, his little Liza was in jail, and word had leaked out to the national press.

Liza, of course, got off. The loophole was found. A little-known section in Russia's draconian, Malaysian-style drug laws allows you to get off scot-free if you turned the drugs in yourself. And now, according to the arresting cop, whose memory had probably undergone a little reediting by Berezovsky's thugs, Liza had in fact turned that coke in all by her goodie-two-shoes self. The bust was reported in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, two papers not too friendly to the dark prince of privatization.

Other drug offenders haven't gotten off so lightly.

In Tallinn, the most Western of any FSU cities, speed is the drug of choice, perhaps sharing top billing with ecstasy. It makes practical sense: speed gives you a far better value, ten times the juice of coke for less than half the price.

The Estonians are Western-minded and more practical, so it makes sense that the Estonian youth, in their accelerated drug-selection Darwinism, would go for the best value.

What you get in Tallinn is not the best speed or the best ecstasy, but it does the job for a price. For forty dollars, you get a gram of baby-powder white speed. I try telling my friends that real speed looks like brown sugar with small crystal glass shavings: it has a harsh, industrial look. One tiny blast will keep you going for hours. But I'm just a speed pedant in that way, and it must get old hearing me whine, the way expats always whine about sub-Western quality.

A few friends of mine—expats only—muled their own personal stashes in from Estonia by train. The chances of the

Bogdan's



*** *not nec.
Cheers: You are guaranteed to blow your mind: more lasers than Star Wars, gut-bending sound system, and a liberal pharmaceuticals policy that gives new meaning to the name "Easy-E."

Jeans: *ville alert! Word has it that Bogdan's was thrown out of his last den of sin, and is now homeless. However, he's back in town, so expect Moscow's technos Nero to open up again at a location that you'll probably never learn of. If you party at Bogdan's for too long, you'll develop these weird spores that take years to get rid of.

Cover: Your serotonin.

Address: The Sixth Dimension

Hours: No one ever leaves Bogdan's

Dolls



* *** ***
Cheers: It's already 4am and you're feeling unsexy. You regularly fast-taste about narcissistic interludes with drugged-out aerobics. Tasteful leopard-print upholstery.

Jeans: There's no going for the bad acts. Nearly impossible to take home the girls (\$1000 is the reported price).

Cover: Free for Americans with passports, \$50 for all other male nations.

Address: 1905 goda

Phone: 252-5761

Address: Krasnaya Presnya UL, 23 B, Str. 1

Hours: 13:00 - 06:00

customs officials checking foreigners are very slim, slim enough to warrant the risk.

But still no Russian speed. The nice thing about speed is that it can be manufactured in any part of the world—but here, you've got to import it. I've tried to understand why Russians eschew the most rigorous drug of all. My first answer would have to do with social stigma—or rather, the complete lack of a social stigma. Speed signifies nothing. It's a working-man's drug: for artists, truck drivers, late-shift operators, physicists.

But living in a country where people aren't used to working too hard kills the incentive to do speed. On the other hand, coke is exotic, expensive, and cinematic. Speed is proletarian or intelligentsia—so it's almost like snorting a concentrated Soviet Union. Drugs are supposed to be an escape, a vacation, not a return to the familiar.

People who take speed usually do so because they lack the energy and confidence to meet the daily grind. Russians have to be the most energetic race in Europe. They are a northern anomaly in that way. You can't shut a Russian up. They can talk for hours, days on end, about nothing, and make it sound urgent. People with high metabolism rates tend not to like speed that much. As for confidence, while Russian men may lack the kind of anchorman confidence of the average Western businessman, he more than makes up for it in genuine, unaffected fearlessness.

A small nation like Estonia, on the other hand, would like to feel big and vital a few times a month. As would a lot of very small American individuals who felt they were promised so much more, and rather than accept that it was all a lie, rail out on speed to feel that bigness, that vitality that is lost to nearly every American by the age of 20.

Heroin really hit big in '96, but has declined lately in popularity. The techno kids who missed out on the first Ptyutch wave started hitting clubs like Galaktika and Plasma and Les, content with dropping ecstasy, mushrooms, and acid. Those clubs have since closed, and new ones opened in their place: Chaos, Territoriya, interchangeable techno joints decked out in Day-Glo. I say they're all a bunch of fucking lunatics. Go into a techno club and watch these zombie recruits. When not slumped brain dead in a chill out, they're crowded into the dance floor, all staring ahead in the same direction like soldiers waiting for orders. The orders come from the DJs, who vary the music to try to correspond to the dominant drug of the evening and the crap stage dancer. The Return of Disco, Part 10.

The Russian drug scene is becoming more Western in that factions are starting to form. Before, heroin was on a moral par with coke and ecstasy; it's now earning a reputation as something a bit more dangerous and devilish than the others. In a culture where restraint is a totally foreign concept, heroin is indeed more dangerous than other drugs. It's just that it's capable of ruining lives faster than the others. Vodka takes about twenty or thirty years to turn your insides into ulcers and confetti. That is, if you haven't been run over by a car or killed in a fight during one of your 3-bottle binges.

Russians will develop drug rankings and morals based more on consequence, not on ideology. Russian youth are, to their credit, the most ideology-free human beings on earth. They are the only people who can look skeptically upon everything we're pushing on them—from drugs and goods to market economics and post-Christian morality. Americans must be the most ideologically rigged people on earth, after the North Koreans, precisely because they don't even see their morals as having an origin in time and history. As the victor of the 20th century, America feels its values to be natural, the base standard.

The first time I saw Kolya shoot up was in my apartment in the Kropotkinakaya region of central Moscow. This was in the great summer of '96. He'd scored one dose, or so he said, and he wanted to bang in front of me. To his credit, he did offer me a share, but I wasn't in the mood.

"Can you get me a tie or a belt or something?"

I brought him an old tie from my slave days with the Pak businessman. Kolya wiped his nose, tied the knot, proudly jacking the works, as they say. I had to turn and look away, especially when the blood was drawn up the neck. It's a little phobia of mine, needles and blood. After pulling the needle out, he rolled his eyes up and stared at my ceiling. "Wow!" he cried. Then he moaned listlessly. I was impressed by how little time it really took. "Ohhh, wow."

Six months later, in my friend Andy's apartment, we tore open the fresh needles that we'd bought from a kiosk and dipped them into spoons full of freshly cooked smack. I tightened the belt around my biceps, while Kolya slapped a vein on the inside of my elbow. He'd bought cotton and a small round bandage just for me. He leaned over and shot me up. As the heroin spread throughout my body, then slowly fanned out to the extremities, I remember thinking, Kolya was right. They've all been right, all who have walked this path. Lou wasn't lying either. You really can't lie about smack. It's like lying about love.

GUILTY: The War on Fun

By Peter Garrett

The Moscow City Duma last week passed an incredible measure. A majority of city deputies agreed to sign the following bill into law under a new administrative statute. Nightclubs and discos can be fined and even closed if erring police decide their parties appear to be under the influence of drugs.

"It's not a joke it's true," said Tatjana Taranova, spokeswoman for the Duma. "The law grants only the appearance of having taken drugs, not nonprescription ones."

According to the new law, clubs which continue dancing-looking after the law can be fined 200 times the maximum wage the first time, 1,000 times the second time, and 10,000 times the third time.

Fined for bad-looking shows? Thanks to the Moscow Duma, free control has yet entered a new, dangerous phase: this isn't about trying to be cool anymore; it's about keeping your business from being shut down. Maybe in Russia it really does come to that—where you can be punished just for looking at a copy of the wrong song.

Should the bill pass into law, it will only cost more because a second reading after corrections are introduced—it will mean just one more way that the introduction of new "administrative procedures" has been used to make everyday life more expensive, less free, and less fun in recent years. While the economy has been liberalizing, everyday life is in danger of returning to the gray, dull days of communism. And the administrative code has been at the heart of it all. If you're American and you remember the money tax for black water, you know that there's nothing that scares a bureaucrat more than an "administrative procedure." Only a few of them are funny enough to bring the whole depressing phrasemonger into focus. The new drug law, an inspired piece of law-and-order legislation, is one of them.

Each owner could have spent this morning, in the last part of a whole slew of clubs, suffered severe problems due to administrative crackdowns. The gay club that was raided earlier in the year and closed—impossibly, now clubs like Gafunkel and Alkemy have all also had temporary shutdowns, while Lava, Melody Disk, Amsterdam, Water Club, and other "underground" clubs have closed for good. Jack Rabbit Slim's and Maxxus have both seen their nights become close due to rules about commercial activity in residential buildings—a rule that made the infamous French club, and eventual that Kristin Zvezda keeps a cap on the nightclubs that factor in a country where every single high-profile meeting that has been commented in the past seven years has gone suspended, someone for some reason has decided that nightclubs, and the dope, need practically involuntary managers which prosecute them, are a threat the Russian public needs to be protected from. Not at all.

Now we're going to get a law where Section 49, bacterial caps, from preventable foods like Vassaroff and, from the Pidnichnyevo, are going to have to walk over places like Zorki, look at the slow-eyed shopkeepers in London, and give grinding over to economists such as me, and make the expert determination, on right, as to their safety.

Owners of pretty-faced clubs where bass hit off by building code violation from administrative zoning violations, and married women know exactly what the deal is with a law like this. This is the beginning of the end for the club scene, the first round of cultural legislation—the moment where “leg. Impressing Moscow” gets rolled back, leaving nothing but certain tiny clubs, and a bunch of barely-above-freezing polyesters as recreational choices for the masses.

This is serious. This means the police can come in and shut down

any club at any time, for no reason at all,” said Andrei Aleksandrov, director of Kafe-Bar, a club in central Moscow. “It’s just one more in a string of stupid and strange laws.”

America, club manager, who asked not to be identified, said that the new law is not intended to reduce cultural possibilities, but to help police and partners in protection efforts. “This law gives police the excuse to shut down the operation of any club which goes a big enough line,” he said. “It has nothing to do with improving any cultural standards of order. If they wanted that, they’d shut down the drug dealers at Lekyashka. This is all about money.”

May of our readers who are not fifteen-year-old girls with dimpled looks on their faces might very well ask themselves: who cares? What does it matter if hangs out for years and happens to frequent out-of-control? As long as my old dad still goes through, why should I care?

The answer is that the new drug law is very representative of an ugly new habit the Russian government has adopted lately of circumventing the law through an emphasis on “administrative” discipline. If you were one of those people who believed our propaganda when we said we wanted freedom in Russia before perestroika, this—and a few other “administrative” tables will be getting to us a minute—should be the kind of thing that would distract you. Or, alternatively, if you’re a bureaucrat who believes that the voice of his Russian church will ultimately depend on the international perception of Russia as a democracy, you may want to pay a little more attention to administrative law. That’s because as a result of it, the Moscow authorities already have the practical experience to control movement, behavior, public speech, and even consumer choices—all the things democracy was supposed to leave up to the individual. When the world finds out your government has its own, you may be in trouble.

While most Muscovites, including the folks at the club, were classically cushioned as on the frontier surrounding Moscow’s 850th anniversary, the Helsinki Watch for Human Rights released a report on Moscow that contained what would have been eye-opening statistics. If anyone had been paying attention, among the most shocking things in its report was the fact that in the first five months of 1997, Moscow police issued spurious to make registration document checks 2.1 million times. That means that one out of one out of every five people in Moscow has been subject to random administrative checks—most of which have resulted in fines, loss or deportation (Helsinki Watch found that 63.4% of the checks uncovered violations).

Like the new drug law, the mass registration checks are based on the use of police to enforce administrative procedures, blurring the lines between criminal and administrative violations. In fact, under Moscow’s amended law, police do not have the right to enter apartments to make registration checks. Article 10 of the Law on the Administration grants police the right to withdraw entry into private homes in order to pursue a suspect in a crime, in case of accidents, and to “protect the safety of citizens and public security in times of natural disaster, catastrophe, and...man-made disasters.” In short, for any reason you might need a policeman for—not for administrative purposes. There is a Ministry of Internal Affairs decree which allows police to issue licenses and permits on possible grounds that a crime or administrative violation has occurred, but that doesn’t allow police to enter private homes.

Aleks Tegunov, a lawyer who has campaigned for fair drug laws, believes that the new drug law and other police behavior are creating

an environment where people have come to expect and tolerate even the most ridiculous obvious types of invasion of privacy from the government.

That new drug law is a mockery of the whole concept of law,” he said. “You can’t have people fined just for looking a certain way. This would be an obviously illegal procedure.”

So far, there hasn’t been too much public outcry about the random apartment checks or the drug law. Why? Because the majority of the people living their apartments raised are dark-skinned migrants, and the majority of Muscovites aren’t all that sympathetic to “bad” non-Russians.

Russians, of course, have a traditional history of tolerating just about anything as long as the majority is left alone. After all, only about a million people were deported in 1937, a tiny minority. So it makes perfect sense that no one would get too upset about a few passport checks or a minor law or two.

Everyone knows that police in this city have power, but how often have you heard that it’s getting worse? Here are a few statistics: in 1996, 5,000 people were deported out of Russia from the

territory of Moscow—1.7 times more than in 1995. Most of these deportations came as the result of

some period of 1996, reaching 1.4 million in addition to the aforementioned apartment checks.

When the Russian police do anything at all a million times in a year, thoughtful people should probably worry. But you don’t hear much of anything in the newspapers—even in the Western “democratic” press.

With the notable exception of Standard professor and unabashed Yeltsinophile Michael McFaul, who last week made the extraordinary assertion that Russia was not an undemocratic state because the post-Soviet era demonstrated that public officials are still somewhat accountable for their behavior, even the most conservative Western commentators have backed off the assertion that Russia is a democracy. In fact, in separate materials in recent weeks, the conservative Economic and the Financial Times both published lengthy apologies for the post-Soviet Russian regime, speaking in detail about the progress the country has made since the end of communism. Yet although both spoke about new respect for the “sanctity of private property” and the promise of the “new market economy,” neither mentioned the word “democracy” at all, except as a future goal.

A weird sort of boosterism has taken over in our view of Russia. When the club scene booms, everybody has Good Morning America on *Newsweek* raves to publicize it. But when democracy strides to the point where clubs can be shut down just because the people who hang out in there look funny, you don’t hear a peep about it in the news.

It’s beginning to look a lot like we were kidding when we pretended all that rock over Radio Free Europe in the early 80s. We talked about the free press, and when the press went in the tank for Yeltsin in 1996, nobody protested too much. Now the press is almost completely bought off, and the U.S. government still issues editorials through Radio Free Europe, saying that Russia is on the “right path.” We talked about human rights in the 1980s, but by this point we have millions of illegal house entries every year and a criminal conviction rate of 99%. The system of representative democracy has degenerated to the point where there is only one election—the Presidential election—that matters, and even the 1996 version of that was allegedly held at home.

Now, with this drug law, we’ve got this great example of the same

continued on p. 4



This ugly person could close down your favorite club!

For the next three weeks we lived in those needles. I was getting careless, spending all that time in Andy’s apartment. Andy was kind enough to loan me his swank pad while he was on vacation, and I was messing it up with blood and syringes and needles. There were bloodied needles on his floor, on the glass table, in the sink. . . . Kolya was worse than me: shooting bloodied water from his infected needle across Andy’s floor. He’d leave his used, bloodied needles in Andy’s sink. I wouldn’t go near Kolya’s needles. I know what he’s done, who he’s been with. I know how safe Russians are, how worried about consequences, how practical-minded they are. I don’t think even an AIDS explosion—when it comes—will change those habits. You have to be viscerally afraid of death to change your habits, the way Westerners are. Russians aren’t as terrified. That’s why they make such good infantry.

One downside to mainlining with a poor junkie was that if he helped buy you smack, he felt that it was half his. That was what I’d call the “Kolya Tax.” He’d phone at any time of the day and, after a few forced pleasantries, say, “So, is there a little bit left, man?”

I learned to just lie after awhile. But Kolya was the type who responded to sharp slaps on the muzzle like a dog begging for food at the dinner table. He didn’t have a right to take a quarter or a third, let alone a half or more as he usually did, of other people’s shit. He’d push to see how far he could go, how much he could take.

The best shit we bought was through a girlfriend of mine, the great Sofiya, she who has made *kasha* out of my heart, she who almost turned me into the O. J. Simpson of Moscow. Sofiya is Nexus-6, beauty incarnate: six feet tall, long blond hair, pale blue eyes, antelope legs. And not mean, not in the least. She’s always up for a laugh. She slept overnight, in bed with me, on January 1, 1997. I made a move—just one. And quickly retreated back to my border posts, crouching, terrified the entire night.

The following morning, Sofiya berated me, in front of Kolya, for being “*smirny*,” or meek. Later, my internal newspapers recalled that incident as, and I quote, “An evening that will live in infamy.” The details remain hazy.

We got on the subject of drugs, and Sofiya told us of her old childhood neighbor, Pasha, who sold heroin. Pasha was a lieutenant in the Russian Army and a cadet at an

elite school. He was also on his way to becoming a major junkie. Sofiya called him up and made the arrangements. Then we crossed town to Prospekt Mira, and hung out at Sofiya's while we waited for our man. Her apartment was cozy and cluttered with reds and golds and embroidered carpets on the walls in the old Soviet fashion. Her father is a colonel who usually serves in overseas units.

Kolya slipped on his suede wool winter coat, and we followed him out the door, leaving Sofiya behind. Sofiya doesn't like heroin. She prefers coke or E. "Heroin just makes me go plttt!" she says, splaying herself on the divan like a whacked-out zombie, then jumping up and laughing. Sofiya. . . . I can't even think about her without wanting to burst into a post office. . . .

The three of us—me, Kolya, and Pasha—catch a taxi out to Petrovsko-Razumovskaya, one of those anonymous regions of Moscow that you might never hear of in ten years. Moscow has more people than the entire Czech Republic, more than all of Hungary. It spreads in every direction. Every year it swallows up another ten villages, a few municipalities. It's like the deep sea. I've never met a single person in Moscow who knows his city well.

We agreed to meet our dealer in the central platform of the metro at an exact time, thirty minutes from now. It was snowing that day, a nice cold white snow. Somehow the gray buildings and the white snow made for a truly cinematic scene. The gray had never been more solid and stoic than right after a powdering.

We waited on the platform for about fifteen minutes. The dealers were late, just like in the song. . . . Then two well-dressed bandit-teenagers approached us, each in their *dublyonki*, or thigh-length sheepskin coats. We introduced ourselves, shook hands, then followed them up the stairs and out of the metro station. Parked beside the station was a Zhiguli 6-series, based on a boxy 1960s Fiat model, with pitch-black smoked windows. Pasha and Kolya agreed to go into the car to make the score.

I passed the money to them, hoping to get two grams for myself. One of the bandit kids opened the back

door. Kolya and Pasha got in, eyes greedily fixed on the dealer. The bandit slid into the back with them, while the other young bandit waited outside with me, checking for cops, making sure I wasn't a snitch. I did my best to act cool and nonsnitchy.

I got a good look at his eyes—they were dead. I remember that he had small pimples on his chin.

"Aren't you cold?" I asked, noting his open coat.

He laughed and turned away. "Naw," he drawled.

That was the giveaway. "So how're you feeling?" I asked.

He smiled vacantly and growled, "Fuckin-A."

The score took about ten minutes. This mobile scab unit wasn't exactly the most discreet method I'd come across. I was shocked and nervous. But I figured that they had to have the local *militsia* paid off to operate this openly. Either that, or they were just taking the "*davaï*" attitude. Hard to tell, even in hindsight. For those ten long minutes, I started coming up with ways to save my ass. If they bust me, I'll do like Ash in *Army of Darkness*: "Hey . . . I've never even *met* these assholes!"

Kolya came out with a shocked look on his face. "Oh Mark, it's very good, man," he said, then laughed in disbelief, shaking his head. I knew he wasn't lying. We gave two .1 gram *tchetki* to Pasha as a kind of agent's fee, then we



The Water Club, the last of the first generation raver clubs in Moscow, was already half empty a few months after opening in mid-'96. But you'd never know anything was wrong by the mirthful expressions on these dorkadent customers' faces.

Clampdown!

By Mark Ames



Last week, the Russian Duma passed what is easily the scariest law since the body was first formed in December 1993.

Now, a cop can stop anyone on the street and haul him into a police station if the cop even SUSPECTS that this person is under the influence of drugs. They can search not only you, but also your place of residence, just based on your facial expressions. It gets worse: if the police don't find any drugs, they have the authority to force the suspect to submit to a drug test—meaning they can jam their filthy needles into your arm and determine via questionable means if you are under the influence. Under the new law, merely testing positive for illegal substances constitutes possession, and possession in this country usually carries a minimum of three years' prison.

Russia is said to have 2 million drug addicts. Given the general ratios of addicts to casual users, perhaps 10-20 million Russians on any given day might test positive and would thus be considered felons "in possession" of drugs. The state doesn't intend to lock everyone up—it can't; rather, it wants to assert its authority over the masses through fear and arbitrary power, with the "drug war" providing an acceptable cover.

Now, it all depends on whether or not you look like a suspect. Which I apparently do.

Early last week I was walking with Krazy Kevin near Ploschad Ilyicha when a rickety *militia* jeep swerved up on the sidewalk, and two cops jumped out, clutching their AK-45s. They forced us into the back, hoping to scare us. After some arguing, they tossed Kevin out, leaving me sandwiched in, AK barrel lazily pointed at my ribs.

"We're gonna go for a ride," laughed the fat-faced cop next to me.

The driver was slightly nervous, but the other two cops were whooping it up, taunting me about the hell that awaited me at the *militia* station. I knew they didn't really want to take me down; they just wanted some cash. I played dumb, entertaining a sick curiosity to see how far they'd take it, but I gave in after a 10-minute drive that took us to an empty storage lot.

"How much?" I asked.

"Put down what you want, and we'll see," said the fat-faced one.

I only had one 100,000 ruble note, and I couldn't very well ask for change. I laid it down on the seat. The fat cop hastily grabbed it and stuffed it into his pocket, nervously looking out the window. Like... like in a drug deal. Then nothing happened. For a moment, I thought they were going to haul me in anyway. But these guys weren't interested in paperwork.

"Where would you like to be dropped off?" the driver asked politely. He seemed almost embarrassed.

"Where you picked me up," I said.

On the way, they stopped at a kiosk to make a few purchases. It was Cosmonaut's Day. Then they dropped me off, wishing me a cheery ironic, "Privyet Amerika!"

Another slapstick skit, I thought, but four days later, the Duma passed their War on Drugs law, farce turned to fear, and now I'm not even sure if this article is legal.

After hearing from friends about the law and noticing that last week's *Moscow Times* account omitted the most menacing provisions, I called Sergei Zabarin, a lawyer who works closely with parliamentarian Yuri Shokochkin, a Yabtsovo representative on the Duma Security Committee, where bills regarding drug laws are produced. Zabarin, who has been fighting for some kind of sanity in Russia's drug laws for a couple of years now, was nearly out of his mind when I spoke to him last week.

"It's incredible!" he said. "This is total madness! It's completely uncivilized, and a violation of the Russian constitution." Zabarin confirmed that the new law is vague enough that local police officials and courts have broad leeway to interpret it as they see fit, which, he said, means that suspects can be detained, searched and forced to submit to blood tests if they simply look wrong. Most Moscow cops are from the provinces, and couldn't tell the difference between the munchies and the jones... now, they're going to decide who looks high and who doesn't. You can guess what subtle criteria they're going to use."

The law has been passed, and it's already being applied. A close friend of Ne Splat' edi-

tor Dima Shalya was detained outside his home Monday night because the cops thought he looked "pale." They accused him of being a junkie and hauled him into the station. This guy isn't a raver degenerate, but rather a typical young Russian, age 25, who works in a travel agency and has never touched drugs in his life. The cops locked him up, searched him for drugs and checked his arms for signs of track marks. They threatened to take him to a local facility for a blood test, but eventually, he was released.

Knee-jerk social liberals like the *Moscow Times* may print editorials about the need for increased education and needle exchange programs to solve the drug problem, but the fact is that drug use will never wane for the same reason that alcohol use won't: DRUGS ARE FUN. Even though this has been common knowledge since roughly the beginning of time, it's still highly censored. So let me repeat: DRUGS ARE FUN. Drugs are more fun than real life—real life means a lousy job, a bad marriage, leaky bathtubs, cars that don't start in the morning... But not everyone has the nerve to take drugs, so the rest, the ever-vengeful herd, insists that they be locked in jail.

When I saw Alina Vitukhovskaya sitting in that courtroom cage six months ago, I took a selfish interest in her case because I suspected that I could be next. Now I'm more convinced than ever. Even Boris Kagarlitsky of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* expressed his surprise recently about how many people read the *eXile*. They're not all fans, either. They include the same FSB people who locked up Vitukhovskaya not long after she published her articles on drug culture in *Novaya Vremya*.

In Russia's darkest periods, the State treated its citizens as potential suspects. I believe that is the reason why a criminal culture is so strong today. It is impossible to create a democracy when such a relationship between state and citizen exists. The West, which claims to have fought the Cold War in the name of democratic values, doesn't seem to mind, because the stated aim of the law is to combat drugs; just as no one cares about the virtual genocide of the Russian population this past decade, a "necessary" by-product of the shock therapy reforms.

White folk can pretty well avoid looking like suspects by ditching the leather coats and dayglo stripes for respectable L.L. Bean catalogue clothes and thick horn-rimmed glasses—the thicker, the better. Glasses, even fake ones, can obfuscate your dilated, pinholed, or bloodshot eyes, while the L.L. Bean clothes will rightfully scare most cops away like garlic to vampires. It's an unpleasant option, but a lot better than wearing a prison uniform.

If you're a blackass or an African, then my suggestion would be to flush your shit down the toilet now, and start learning to enjoy alcohol. Cops and lawmakers drink it all the time, and look how well it has worked for them.



were off again to the *apteka* for needles, then Andy's plush apartment for movies and smack.

Then *Living Here* collapsed, and I had to go cold turkey. It was a terrifying week. Quitting smack is sheer pain: splinters in your knees and feet, nausea, and intense paranoia. You're completely aware that this world is nothing but a giant charnel house, a concentration camp, and there's no hope. All your friends are plotting against you. Even your body is rejecting you.

I was lucky to score some Valiums at the *apteka* to get over that withdrawal. Then the *eXile* had me consumed. Kolya and I saw less and less of each other. I kicked the heroin, but Kolya never left. It got worse and worse. He was jamming a half a gram a day, then more. . . . He developed nasty tracks on his inner elbow.

"Mark, I think I'm starting to have a problem, man. I think I may need help," he told me over the phone one day. He was high at the time. His voice was groggy, vaguely desperate.

I have this natural mechanism that goes off inside of me when weak people need my help: I feel a kind of contempt, and they suddenly vanish from my screen, <delete>, almost maliciously so. I have a few exceptions to that very suburban California reaction, but Kolya wasn't on that list. He'd call me, groggy-voiced, pleading through the fog of heroin. I told him I'd help him. Then he'd disappear.

He and his English girlfriend, Jennifer Biggs, couldn't decide if their junkie lives were cinematic or merely horrible. *Trainspotting* had just come out on video, so the instinct was to choose cinematic. People who try drugs late in life, like Kolya's girlfriend, get stupid ideas in their heads.

Pasha, the army lieutenant, had become such a serious

junkie that the great Sofiya told me she wouldn't even see him anymore, even though they were old friends going back to childhood. I immediately hated Pasha, on her behalf.

Pasha's military father busted him; they locked him in the house for six months, and he was cured. Compared to Kolya, he was lucky.

Kolya's brother-in-law, a longtime junkie from the suburbs of Moscow, was recently busted by the police for possession. The last person I jammed with, a strange foreign-currency trader from a top local bank with horn-rimmed glasses and a heavy-metal hairdo, somehow got hooked on speedballs, overdosed, and died a couple of months after we banged together. After that, I gave up the needle.

Just today, finishing this chapter, Taibbi and I saw a pair of junkies lying almost dead in my apartment entrance. They couldn't have been older than fifteen. For some reason their shirts were pulled up—they'd probably fallen out of my elevator. One's face was turning yellow-white—his lips had lost their color. We ran and found some cops, but the junkies had somehow reanimated and escaped. I was sure they'd died.

These are the usual heroin endings, although I have to say my own is a happy one. I haven't become a junkie. Nor have several friends of mine who dabble with it. I think this is a highly censored truth about heroin: that an overwhelming majority of those who try it don't become junkies. You have to have some inner drive to junkiness for that to happen: I'm not sure if the psychological foundation is that inseparable from the physical one. A junkie will become a junkie of something at some time: alcohol, co-dependence, bad relationships.... Anyway, I'm not, nor are my friends, several of whom have done it.

Kolya is. He cried for help several times, but wouldn't let me help him. He enjoyed the attention, the work it took to try to cure him, but not the actual cure. Like so many Russian men, he wants to be the center of a melodrama, to be worried over. Jennifer, his aging disco-hip English girlfriend, provided that better than anyone. Hell, she went straight down the junkie chute with him, because, as she'd tell me, "I worry about him, Mark, you know? And I don't want him to do this alone. I want to do it with 'im so he's not alone, you know what I mean? So that he has an anchor."

Finally, though, even they couldn't conjure up a cinematic version of their realities. Kolya needed to be saved. I got the name of a rehab center from Medicins Sans

Frontiers. It was supposed to be the closest thing to a humane rehab center east of Poland. In fact, the place was like a jail, with grim nurses and doctors marching down the guarded hallways, and the odd patient being hauled from one wing to another. I escorted Kolya myself to the doctor, a stern, jaded central Asian with a clipped silver mustache, who started off by telling Kolya he had almost no hope. Kolya weakly protested. The doctor persisted.

"How much are you taking a day?" the doctor demanded.

"A gram," Kolya moaned.

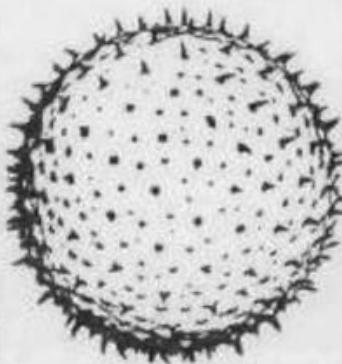
"One gram," the doctor repeated. He shook his head. "Let me see your arms."

Kolya sniffled, then pulled the sleeves up on his arms. I almost gagged: pustules and scabs lined all the way up the underside of his forearm, and up the backside as well, going along the ulna. His arms were rotten Swiss cheese, no doubt about it. The doctor gave him very little chance, but he agreed to do it for free.

Kolya checked in Monday afternoon. The warders closed the door behind him and locked it. The first thing Kolya did was sneak into the bathroom, slip a stash of smack from under his shoe, and a needle that he'd hidden in his sleeve... and jammed it into an empty spot. The other inmates demanded their cut, so Kolya passed them his needle and what was left of the smack. They fought over it like animals, but by then he didn't care. The entire drug rehab clinic was banging Kolya's heroin! Hurrah!

Later that night, they started their rehab regime: it consisted of pumping him full of tranquilizers and keeping him under tight surveillance. Jennifer came to visit him. You weren't allowed to go in and see him in the first week. She caught a glimpse of him through the sealed glass door—she said he looked like a zombie. He yelled as well as

Plasma wasn't just another techno club. Its owner, Timur Mamedov, was constantly raided and harassed by the cops for promoting fringe rave culture among Russia's Golden Youth.



Washed Up in Kishenov

By Mark Ames



ber-messages from outer space to begin preparations. The galaxy's future depends on it.

1998 has started out more depraved and dangerous than any year. Beginning two Fridays ago and ending a week later in Moldova, my memory is a blur of aimless desire, discharge and shame. The only thing I'm sure of is that I unwittingly took a snowball from one of my own best friends, who blew in my new girlfriend's mouth before I ever kissed her. In fact, he may have been the fourth or fifth guy to blow in her mouth that night, not counting the gypsy cab driver or the doorman at the Karusel Club.

I remember being in major regret-mode the Saturday morning after our skinhead party. I'd woken up dizzy and pasty-moshted beside an ex-convict who'd hoovered half the male population of Moscow. I ran to the bathroom and brushed my teeth, but it was too late. By the afternoon, after hitting the bottle again, I was adding to my list of regrets, turning it into a dissertation on delayed-fuse teenage irresponsibility. Then on Sunday night, someone stuck a pin into my eyes and drained my pupils. That was a sweet night, floating, but unfortunately Sunday night turns into Monday morning, which turns into Monday afternoon, and it's hard to get pumped for work when your corpse is floating somewhere over the poppy-studded hills beyond Luang Prabong. I was in no shape to tie my boots, let alone write and edit for our new exile launch. That's when I called in the chemists to construct a high speed monorail line from ganglion to retina, down to palms that had turned into a pair of abalone feet, and straight into the Big Pump. But the monorail didn't work right. The train ran wild, derailing here and there... it didn't stop to pick up a single passenger, leaving me stranded in random thought patterns. I was like Cornholio, giggling wildly to myself and blurted out disjointed bits of info while the others did their best to avoid me.

This wasn't a question of being "on da edge." When it comes to sex and drugs, those yardsticks of choice for Olympiad edge-judging, then I consider myself to be pretty standard—a kind of Ford Escort of the decadence world.

So what's my excuse? I don't know. It all began with a few cans of Miller Magnum in the skinhead basement. That's the last clear memory I have. Two weeks later, I'm not the same person. Now, all I can do is try to recover the little black box in my head, and continue popping as many antibiotics as the local apothecary will dispense. My lawyer has advised me to go on a strict two-week diet of Amoxicillin, Erythromycin and Ciprofloxacin, a super-antibiotic generally reserved for what Phillip K. Dick would call *The Stoos*; politicians, movie stars, CEOs and the like—*humans that matter*. Thanks to all these antibiotics, I'm single-handedly responsible for mutating about two or three easily-curable microbes into scaly, spiny, indestructible bloodmines.

I'm not complaining though. Things could be worse. Taibbi has been on my case about gross under-reporting on my part, an affected slant towards the negative. He's right, but I can't help it—I just have a hard time imagining that I've suddenly taken a lead part in anything, even a *shite* indie film that'll never make it to video. In my last column, I mentioned a horny underage girl who had allegedly had a miscarriage at the Duck on Ladies' Night. Well, I didn't tell all the truth. I got to know her well—too well. Natasha. The good news is that she didn't actually have a miscarriage—that little polliwog in her alcohol-and-nicotine-soaked womb is still mutating into a cute little Flapper baby, right on schedule. But as things stand right now, neither Natasha nor Flapper have a daddy. Or a home. I didn't mind spending a night with a pregnant, bleeding teenager a few weeks back. But then she started calling me. And coming over. And ringing my doorbell for a half hour straight at four in the morning. I finally ripped the cheap box out of the wall and smashed it, and I don't intend to fix it soon. The last time she called me, she asked me if she could come over and see me.

"Look, Natasha, you're pregnant," I laughed.

"Nu i chto?" she snapped.

I don't know, man—maybe I should get a caged pitbull and put it in my podyezd with a video camera... when someone rings, and I don't like what I see, I press a button releasing Scraps, whom I haven't fed in six days and who has spent his puppyhood getting regularly beaten by hired neighborhood dyevushki. "Go for the womb, Scraps! Atta boy!"

It's a good sign that I'm thinking these pitbull thoughts. Taibbi's right. Just a couple of years ago, I'd have put a cute golden retriever in that cage. Things have definitely improved.

Now I have someone living in my apartment with me. She'd just been released from a three year stint in prison the day we met, and she needed a place to sleep. A lot of this was her fault. I spun completely out of the orbit of responsibility and adulthood, leaving everyone else to do the work of putting the newspaper together. I fucked everything up, down to the last word. When I boarded the Air Moldova flight to Kishenov, Taibbi and Krazy

Kevin hadn't even begun to experience their literary Stalingrad. Me—I just pressed the seat release, kicked back, and tried to think of reasons why this rattling Tu-134 wouldn't explode in mid-air. Then I realized, I didn't fucking care—after five days of mental gymnastics, I was ready to surrender to any fate, including a See Page 3 story with the caption: "No survivors were found."

At least the exile staff got its celestial revenge on me. Kishenov is the exact topographical representation of what a heavy methamphetamine come-down feels like. This is the real gray, the end of the line. Hope was sucked from its very soil. Even the city's beggars and taxi drivers seem more dead than alive, like those weary phantoms in a Platonov novel. Coming down from a six-day serotonin-sucking binge in the Kishenov Cosmos Hotel is just plain redundant.

The White God factor was disturbingly high in Moldova, but the swarthy, empty faces were not the stuff of even my most troubled fantasies. I understood what it felt to be a mid-ranking, pith-helmeted British official in the Raj—as the natives groveled at my feet, I wanted to swat them away with a sharpened rod, and quickly get to my hotel room.

The nicest Moldovans worked in pharmacies. For some reason they all had it in their heads that I was from the George Soros Foundation. Not bad: Soros, after all, bankrolled the California referendum that allowed marijuana houses to open. "Yeah, I'm from the Soros Foundation," I agreed, as they filled my Christmas stocking with diazepams and rohypnols and phenobarbital/codene cocktails. "It's a lot of hard work, being a philanthropist. No sleep at all." I showed up to interviews with bankers and ministers—a bloodshot wreck, nodding off in mid-answer. I assume they thought it was some kind of eccentric, Soros-like behavior on my part, and not the symptoms of a washed-up expat crying for help. Which is where I'm headed if I don't get a handle on this hirocco called Moscow.

he could for her to rescue him. Then they dragged him away.

By Saturday, Jennifer and I were officially allowed to visit Kolya. The oddest thing happened, though. He wasn't dressed in a smock. He was chipper and excited, kissing the orderlies good-bye.

"All right," he said, hugging us both. "I'm out of this fucking place."

"Wait, what do you mean?" I asked. "You're supposed to do three weeks or six weeks, aren't you?"

"No fahking way, man," Kolya said. "They threw me out and told me never to return. They fahking hate me. I made their lives fahking miserable until they can't stand me anymore. They're telling me, 'Fakh you, we take care of you for free and you act like this.' And I tell them, 'Just let me the fahk out, I don't want your fahking help.'" He laughed proudly and hugged Jennifer.

"But Kolya—" Jennifer weakly protested, but it was clear by the way she snuggled up to him that she was happy to resume their little film.

On the car ride home, she boasted about her own painful withdrawals, and all the weight she'd lost from her junkie spree. Kolya called her "Babbles," and told me that everything was all right, he was cured.

The next week he and Jennifer were both back on, worse than ever before. I clicked and dragged Kolya's icon into the delete bin, certain that he was going to be dead within a month. He called, but I didn't return his messages. We ran into each other again at a nightclub, and he was high as usual.

"I need your help, man," he moaned. "Really, I need your help."

But by then, he didn't exist in my hard drive. He was communicating through a pathos-filter, meaning that as

far as I was concerned, he was little more than babbling furniture.

He finally left his girlfriend and took off first for St. Petersburg, then to northern Kazakhstan, to his home village, for another three weeks. He told his parents everything, and they helped nurse him back to health. Can you imagine that in suburban California? Being welcomed by your parents with open arms when you tell them that you're a junkie, that you need their help? No way! They'd throw you on the streets and tell you "it's for your own good." That line—"it's for your own good"—has done more harm than any land mine. That middle-class selfishness cloaked in morality. What people really mean is, "leave me the fuck alone!"

Kolya returned to Moscow a month later, tanned, fit, and with his old voice back. He was completely clean. Jennifer had done the same, having moved to England for two weeks.

And then.... Within a month, they were back on. At first they dabbled, like regular casual users. Then, like some subatomic physics equation, they leaped up to the next orbit, the junkie orbit. It happened so quickly. They sank into a kind of slow paranoia—a very indoors, drawn-blinds and scattered-cassettes paranoia, a bourgeois Sid and Nancy. But she couldn't take it anymore. She was dying. In the summer of '98, she abandoned Moscow.

Kolya called me in a panic after she left. "I can't believe the bitch! She just left! Now where am I going to get the money? I'm fakhed, Mark. Can you help me?"

I brought two grams of speed with me from Tallinn into Moscow to help me when Kara and Matt left. I was in the train wagon with another mini-mule, Owen Matthews. When we crossed the border, we stuffed our grams into a crumpled-up cigarette box in our first-class train car. I was nervous at the border crossing—Jesus, what was I thinking? Seven years, hard labor in the foreigner prison in Mordova just for a lousy two grams of shit Estonian speed?! It was too late. The passport control checked our documents, then left.

Suddenly, two blue-uniformed customs agents burst into our cabin, one with a flashlight, the other, the hefty mustached one, moving slowly. The one with the flashlight steps onto the bed and shines his light into the cubby hole up top, where our bags are kept. He asks me to lift up the bed, to check the storage space underneath. I comply, trying my best to keep from shaking. And then suddenly, they're out. Just like that.

That speed helped me get through a rough period with the newspaper. The rest went into writing this chapter.

Later, a techno skinhead friend of ours scored us some local "phen," yellowish amphetamine imported from Latvia. Taibbi and I must have vacuumed fifteen grams of the shit from February through May 1998, when we tried and failed to convert the *eXile* from a biweekly to a weekly. Looking back, those months barely register on the memory. Just quick scenes of frantic scrambling to meet deadlines, the cut-up method put into practice. I can still hear the evolution of Taibbi's snorting habits: at first, he'd line up tiny little yellow *strelki*, snort, and screech. Within a couple of minutes, paranoia would hit him. "What? What are you looking at, Ames?"

"Nothing, dude. Don't worry."

Then he'd start to pour sweat, worse than me.

After a couple of months, Taibbi's *strelki* got fatter and fatter, while his snorting got louder and louder. You could hear him from the other side of our offices. It was like an elephant with a nasty case of the sniffles. And he'd always finish off his snorts with a loud, half-pained, half-satisfied, "Ahhhhh!"

We were lucky, again: if not for the speed, we'd have collapsed after three issues. As it was, with the speed, we crashed after about fifteen issues, but the crash was proportionately brutal.

We snorted our way through four months straight of weekly *eXiles*. And in the process, we lost track of our new, embittered sales director, Nicole Mollo, who had replaced Kara. Under Nicole, the business end began to fall into disarray. Before our incarnation as Moscow tweaks, we kept a close eye on her. She hated our newspaper and everything Matt and I stood for, and desperately wanted to be accepted by those baloney-sandwich geeks whom she imagined were the elite of the expat community.

Her background was anything but normal. Nicole told Matt and others that she had been pushed into a foster

Club Lux		

Cheers: For the serious, discreet gamblers. No hooligans, no unshaven mafiosi, no seedy chelovki; this place is actually respectable, the clientele consisting mostly of businesspeople. Dress: Don't come here looking for sex; security dressed like Giuliano cops means you have to check in your fun—and your gun—at the door. Cover: Free No: No裸体 (nudity) Phone: 430-4393 Address: Michurinsky Prospekt 4/1 Hours: daily 13:00 - 00:00		
Golden Palace		

Cheers: Split floors, running steam with fish (no golden fish) swimming past the card tables, awesome New Russian interior. Eat/drink of the Vietnamese restaurant, so it's shed a lot of the Deer Hunter feel. Nice, great selection of 1500 a day phones (though they can be talked down). Dress: Nervous Russian security with their shotguns pointing at your face. Have to pay the barmen for the phones. Scary Vietnamese clients haven't abandoned the casino, in spite of the closing of the restaurant. Cover: 8.00 - 20.00; 60,000 rubles. 20.00 - 00.00: 250,000. Free for ladies. No: No裸体 (nudity) Phone: 212-3995/41 Address: 3rd Yamskogo Polya 15 Hours: 24 hours		

CHAPTER FIVE

home in rural Wisconsin as a child. How she wound up in Russia is unclear. She was 17 when she arrived. One version is that she came here with her mother and ran away. The other version is that her mother brought her here and abandoned her. For Christmas, she received a box of gifts at the *eXile* from her mother: Inside were scores of kiddie world toys meant for the "Ages 3-8" segment. Nicole showed them to me and told me that this was one big reason why she wasn't going back to America. It made us feel sorry for her and, in the midst of our brain-sucking speed binge, we forgot to keep our eye on her.

Just as the phen was running out, and we made the decision to go back to our biweekly regime, I arranged to have a meeting with Nicole to go over all the cash receipts and expenses since Taibbi and I first dipped into the crank four months earlier. She skipped the first meeting. I called, and she didn't return my calls. I left messages on her pager, but got nothing. Then came the weekend, near the end of April 1998. And still she was nowhere to be found. The following Monday morning, just recovering from a weeklong dry spell, I arrived early in the office. My energy was best in the morning. My brain could only produce enough serotonin fuel to last until lunch. That's when I saw Nicole's note on her desk, next to her pager. She'd absconded.

There wasn't a lot we could do, at least not right away. She took the financial records of all the cash-in and cash-out transactions. She promised to hand them to our publisher, but never did. We've never seen them since.

We tracked her down through a friend of hers at the American Embassy. But what could we do? Only our boss could have her iced—which he wouldn't dare. Icing an American girl wasn't worth that kind of money to him. We couldn't have her arrested. Bringing this to the attention of the *militia*, a force so corrupt that they make the Mexican police look like Andy Griffith, would only cause more problems. No, we'd have to postpone our revenge on Nicole.

Worse, we'd run out of speed. We were plunked back into reality—stripped of money, honor, and amphetamines. You couldn't find phen anywhere in all of Moscow! The Latvian labs had been raided.

The punks went back into hiding. We got desperate. So desperate that we agreed to hire the techno skinhead who'd scored us our speed on a permanent basis, if he could line up another batch.

Eventually, he did. We bought 20 grams. And got a special customer discount, which we then kicked back in the form of a bonus to our skinhead. Now we've got enough phen to last us to the end of the year. It was a win-win situation for everyone.

That was my last issue.
I feel that I'm enjoying you
guy as much as you're
enjoying me!
I will fax all needed
financial paperwork by
the end of the week
and monies owed.
You can reach me through
956-4228. (Had a landline problem)

Our last female American sales director skipped town on the day we were supposed to discuss the cash situation. She left this note, along with her pager, on her desk, and cleared everything out—including our cash-in/cash-out records. Despite leaving a telephone number, we were never able to reach her. However, we know where she fled to, and we plan to drop by some day.

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Avoiding the Death-Thing

By Mark Ames



I barely leave my apartment these days. Mandarin peels and coffee grinds till my kitchen sink. For the last two weeks, I've lived mostly on a diet of mandarins and coffee. Since we went weekly, I've dropped almost ten pounds. Don't sleep much anymore either. All those bodily functions... They're such a waste of time. I could pump out two free-lance articles in the time it takes to shit out a Mama Zoya's dinner—and they'd look roughly the same, too. But there's no way around it, you've got to tend to the body's basic needs. Unless you want to wind up like Karen Carpenter: a shriveled skeleton, blackened at the edges. Which is where I'm headed if this weekly thing doesn't give.

Sometimes you have to wonder if you're taking things too far. I consider myself to be pretty modest in that area, especially compared to some people I know. Like my friend Layton, who has whiffed so much glass over the last three years that his teeth are falling out, his dick has shriveled into a walnut, and he can't take a shit without consuming three bars of Ex-Lax chocolate. I don't think he's left his Hollywood apartment since I last saw him over a year ago. Another close friend here in Moscow contracted hepatitis from carelessly mainlining. There's been a fresh hepatitis epidemic among junkies this year. Half of Moscow's kroto youth has yellow faces and yellow eyes. I recently got my hep-A and hep-B vaccines because you never know who's popping with dirty needles and who isn't. You'd be surprised how many young Russians I've met jam drugs like it's nothing: Special-K and poppy straw... even LSD juice. It seems that almost everyone I meet has popped at least once in the last month. Not just grungy hair-dye types with nose rings, but seemingly normal people. Your girlfriend/boyfriend or receptionist or research analyst might be one of them. Unlike in the West, here, mainlining drugs doesn't set you apart from the pack and place you in a special, dangerous category. It's just seen for what it is: a better, faster means to a high.

You can buy needles at just about any apteka in town. The quality varies: you can get anything from Danish needles to Turkish or Indian ones. Those can be painful, leaving big greenish bruises for days. But Russian needles are the worst: thick, dull... Popping one of those into your veins is like trying to cut a tractor tire with a butter knife.

Just last Saturday night I was at an underground club, talking to some grungy teenage girl, out of school and out of work. She told me that she regularly jams Special-K and LSD, but she avoids heroin because too many of her friends have become junkies. You'd never know by looking at her that she hangs, which is why I'm just going to assume, in the future, that anyone I meet is a regular dirty-needle junkie. Which is as good a reason as any to get your hep vaccinations and—gasp!—wear condoms. You just know that Russians, with their blasé attitude towards the Dying-Thing, aren't dipping their friends' needles into Cloex bleach solutions before sticking them into their arms. There's only one thing on their mind when their yellow-hued, scabbed-faced friend passes the needle, dripping with infected blood: *Davai!*

Another mutual acquaintance OD'd on a monster speedball a few months earlier. He was a FOREX trader for a top local Russian bank who couldn't get enough stimulation. You've got to wonder that feels like, ODing on a speedball: is there a thirty-second flash of Pure Bliss before the aorta explodes? Like one of those blinding white lights that makes your jaw drop, and say, "Oh... my God! It's... beautiful..." before slumping over in a pool of vomit. Or does a little voice in your head screech, "Eanger, Will Robinson! Dan—" as the battery pack in your back falls to the floor and you keel over dead.

About a month back, I was heading into my podvezd with Taibbi, when we nearly tripped on a pair of teenage corpses that had fallen out of my elevator. One was lying on his back, his shirt and sweater drawn up almost to his shoulders. His face was whitish-blue, and his lips had lost color, while his friend was curled into a ball. It was clear that they'd OD'd on some bad junk (the purity of heroin has gone from less than 50% to over 90% in the last few months, according my old housemate Lena). Right then, some babushka from my building comes storming in, yelling at the two corpses, kicking the blue-faced kid's legs and making a scene. Then she turned and asked Taibbi and me to help her drag the dead kids out into the snow. Jesus, and I thought I was a nihilist: but this old bitch made me look like Sally Struthers...

Since I've been spending a lot of sleepless nights lately in my apartment, I've been thinking more and more about the Death-Thing. The way I look at it, it's important to avoid the Death-Thing. Seems straightforward enough. Russians, as I said, are far less paranoid about death than your average Californian—that's why they make far better infantry than surfers. Their attitude has always impressed me. But... still... not wanting to die is a pretty good strategy. And for my money, the best way of avoiding death is by staying locked up in my apartment. I fixed my doorknob recently, but I don't answer it when it rings. And I stopped answering the phone after I got a bitter, tear-drenched call from an ex-girlfriend whose abortion story I wrote up last time. "Don't you know that people I know read your newspaper?" She's



The eXile's first year anniversary party was held in a basement squat for skinheads, orphans, and techno freaks. One of them, pictured above, helped organize our party, stole our beer and transqs, and nearly died from consumption. The party was a smashing success.

probably boiling a rabbit right now in her kitchen, a rabbit named Mark. Before her, I was getting regular calls from some OMON thug who was having an affair with Lena when she lived with me. Who knows to what lengths he'll go to find her. And speaking of Lena... she disappeared three weeks ago, her bag is still in my apartment, and I haven't got so much as a message. I wonder if she's even alive.

I try to limit my outer-world excursions to the eXile offices. But I'm beginning to think that this is where it will all end. There's a kind of eerie, foreboding vibe going around the eXile offices these days, as if something BAD is going to happen. The weekly schedule has put an unsustainable stress on us all. Also, the unannounced-wear-assed-visitor-Index has soared to an all-time high at our offices. Crypto-Nazis hanging out in the corridors; skinheads popping in and out; and just the other day, some strange middle-aged Russian man who claimed to work for a state information agency innocently dropped in, refused to look at Taibbi or me, and proceeded to quietly gather up as many copies of the eXile as he could fit into his briefcase. Then he disappeared... We even had a former Burger Queen burger-flipper drop off a manuscript two weeks back, and pester us with twice-daily calls. His piece was a fairly interesting account of what it meant to be a Russian "eXile" living in squats in Moscow, and the difference between these suffering, harassed Russian eXiles and the pampered, hedonistic eXpat heroes of our newspaper... when we told him that we were interested in running his piece if he rewrote it, he played the hurt, misunderstood artist, grabbed his manuscript, and split.

That got me thinking: one of these days, someone's gonna Mark David Chapman us all. The question is when, and by who.

The Kathy Lally letter to the Johnson List [see page 13] is proof positive that our days in this world are numbered. Now we've got a correspondent from the *Baltimore Sun* who not only wants us censored and banned, but who's willing to play the NKVD informant and help lock us up in a Russian prison because she doesn't like the way we write. That's not just a lapse of journalistic ethics—that's a sign that the lynch mob is reaching critical mass...

My solution to the Death-Thing is to try to stay at home as much as possible. I'm beginning to like my apartment, in spite of the awful smells that waft in from the bums who sleep and crap in the corridors. I've got my "South Park" tapes and a porno film starring a Great Dane, a water buffalo, a pony, and some Pacific Islanders to keep me company. After this issue's done, I'm going to settle down for a quiet laugh watching eight year old cartoon kid Kenny get impaled on a flag pole, and his slow, blood-greased slide down to the ground. Even if it's not funny the tenth time watching it, at least it's soothing, under the age-old theory of "Better him than me."