

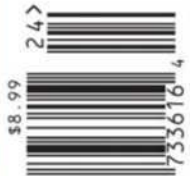
World Cup Kick Bait / Alt-Right Flight

Newsweek

06.15.2018

HE'S BEEN
LINKED TO
TRUMP, THE MOB
AND THE CIA.
BUT WHO IS THE REAL
**FELIX
SATER?**

The Informant



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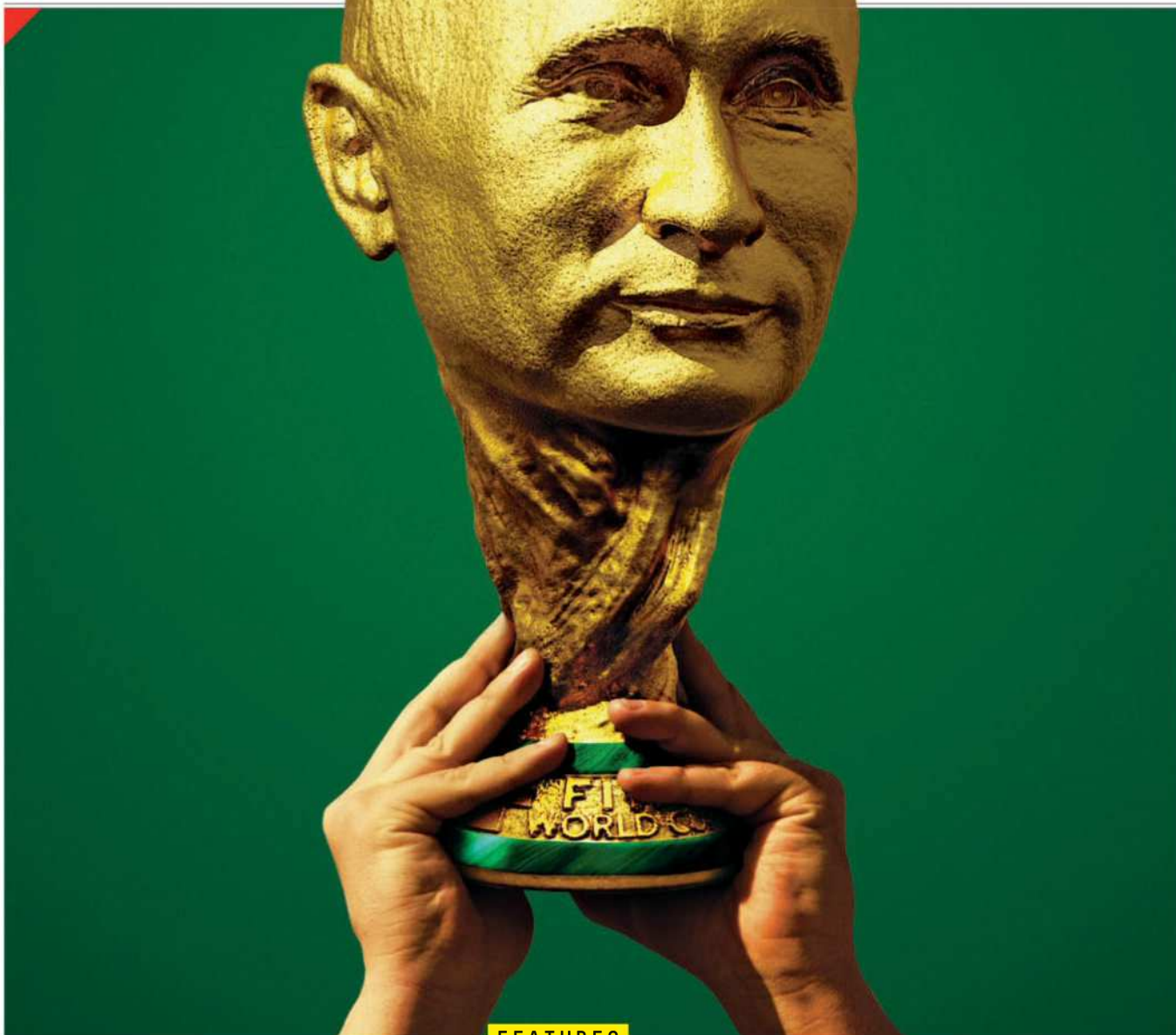
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FEATURES

SETTLING SCORES

The Russian government has spent an estimated \$19 billion on the upcoming World Cup, and that massive spending isn't because President Vladimir Putin is a soccer fan.

COVER CREDIT

Photograph by **Stephen Voss** for *Newsweek*



For more headlines, go to **NEWSWEEK.COM**

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Cloak & Swagger

He's been called many things: business associate of Donald Trump, career criminal and highly valued informant. Will the real Felix Sater please stand up?

BY BILL POWELL

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Kick Bait

Russia hopes the World Cup will help improve its international image. The Kremlin's enemies may have other plans.

BY MARC BENNETTS



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YOUNG GUNS

Militias in the Central African Republic are bolstering their ranks with more and more child soldiers.



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HELP SAVE THE 'WOW'

These giants of the animal kingdom need help. Despite their strength and cunning they're no match for a poacher's rifle. For 50 years WWF has been securing protected areas worldwide, but these aren't enough to stop the killing. To disrupt the sophisticated criminal gangs supplying animal parts to lucrative illegal markets, we are working with governments to toughen law enforcement. We're also working with consumers to reduce the demand for unlawful wildlife products. Help us look after the world where you live at panda.org/50



In Focus

— THE NEWS IN PICTURES





ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

White Hats

Cadets celebrate their graduation at the U.S. Naval Academy on May 25. President Donald Trump delivered the commencement speech, quoting Admiral David Farragut's famous Civil War battle cry, but with a different ending: "Damn the torpedoes—full speed ahead!" he said. "Boom."

→ JIM WATSON

JIM WATSON/AFP/GETTY



OCONGATA, PERU

Magic Mountain

People from across the Andes celebrate Qoyllur Rit'i at the Ausangate Mountain glacier on May 29. The centuries-old festival—a mix of Catholicism and indigenous religious beliefs—celebrates the relationship between human beings and nature. Melted ice from the glacier is believed to hold healing powers. But these days, due to global warming, there's a lot less ice to go around.

→ DAN KITWOOD



JALALABAD, AFGHANISTAN

The Block Is Hot

A man takes a much-needed dip on May 30. The temperature in the city reached 108 degrees Fahrenheit, which is normal for this time of year.

→ NOORULLAH SHIRZADA



ARCADIA, CALIFORNIA

Fast and the Furriest

Corgis scurry across a track on May 27. The event, the SoCal Corgi Nationals, featured 17 races between these pint-size herding dogs, many of which were dominated by a speedy pooch named Roi.

→ MARK RALSTON



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DAN KITWOOD/GETTY; NOORULLAH SHIRZADA/AFP/GETTY; MARK RALSTON/AFP/GETTY



BOY INTERRUPTED
In Kananga in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a former child soldier attends a math class at a school that helps reintegrate such children into society.

"One of the biggest propaganda coups since the death of Hitler." »P.12



WORLD

Midnight's Children

As civil war rages again in the Central African Republic, the number of child soldiers is increasing rapidly—despite international intervention

➤ FIVE YEARS AGO, WHEN HASSAN WAS 11, militiamen killed his father not far from his home in Kaga Bandoro, a small, cattle-trading town in the Central African Republic, he says. Full of sadness and anger, the boy, a member of the country's disenfranchised Muslim minority, didn't believe the courts would deliver justice. The only thing he trusted, he says, was a Kalashnikov.

So, not long after his father's death, Hassan (identified with a pseudonym for security concerns) joined the Séléka alliance of rebels, a coalition of local and foreign fighters in the civil war, he says. The largely Muslim group seized large swaths of the country in 2013, triggering reprisals from mostly Christian militias called the anti-balaka.

His first job: working as a bodyguard for a commander whose armed group was terrorizing towns across this Texas-sized country, sandwiched between Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Three months later, Hassan says, he was promoted to lieutenant and put in charge of about 50 people, including 10 other

children. "At the beginning, I was scared," he says. "But later, I lost this fear. I got used to holding a gun."

The rebels also tasked him with recruiting more children, offering him sporadic and meager rewards. "I liked my work," he says. "On special holidays, I would be given cigarettes and money."

But as the war raged on, supplies dwindled, and the death toll mounted on both sides. Most nights, he and his platoon slept in the bush. While on guard duty, he says, he shot civilians if they didn't listen to his commands and stop. "I saw a lot of blood," he says. "I would be happy after attacking a town. But this feeling went away, and I became scared when I realized that my enemy would come back."

Today, that bloodshed continues. After a tentative lull in early 2016, the civil war began raging again later that year. The rebel alliance has fragmented

into rival factions that fight over mineral resources and trade routes across the Central African Republic. Militias are bolstering their ranks with more kids, as a United Nations-led task force struggles to help thousands of former

BY

JACK LOSH

[@jacklosh](#)

child soldiers reintegrate into society. In March, the U.N. deputy chief of humanitarian affairs, Ursula Mueller, said that “the recruitment and use of children by armed groups increased by 50 percent between 2016 and 2017,” and the conflict continues to escalate. Several thousand boys and girls are now being used as combatants, cooks, messengers and porters, according to the U.N. Children’s Emergency Fund. They are often abused by older militants, ordered to commit atrocities and used as human shields. Most have experienced deep trauma. “Children,” says Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF’s regional director, “are paying the highest price for this new surge of violence.”

Since 2004, Western nations and international institutions like the European Commission, the U.N. and the World Bank have funded several

disarmament programs in the Central African Republic in a bid to quell a string of rebellions, encourage armed groups to disband and help militants return to civilian society. These programs usually offer incentives—such as educational support, vocational training and paid work—to fighters, including child soldiers, to give up their weapons.

Yet out of the approximately 12,500 children released from armed groups since 2014, U.N. figures show more than a third of them—about 4,500—

are still waiting for assistance. Key reasons include a lack of money—UNICEF’s operations in this area, for example, are almost 90 percent underfunded—and an inability for aid workers to operate in some areas controlled by armed groups. “If we don’t do the job properly, children go back,” says a senior aid worker who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. Mediators try to convince commanders that releasing child soldiers will benefit their militias, freeing up crucial resources such as food and water for other fighters. “Afterwards,” the aid worker says, “both parties sign an agreement. We will look after them, and you don’t recruit them again.”

Disarmament programs have become a key component of the U.N.’s peace-building efforts, but these initiatives are problematic. Aid workers tell *Newsweek* that, during negotiations, militia commanders attempt to wrest handouts for themselves from international nonprofits and list fake children or relatives as combatants in exchange for benefits.

Louisa Lombard, a Central African Republic expert and Yale University assistant professor of anthropology, has described some disarmament initiatives as “pits of corruption,” in which officials have sold slots on programs and failed to track aid. For some critics, even successful disarmament campaigns end up, inadvertently, promoting the use of violence. According to Lombard, many in the country “consider rebellion to be more fruitful than ever,” as the resulting programs may appear to militants as “their best avenue to a salary and other entitlements.”

“At the beginning, I was scared. But later, I lost this fear. I got used to holding a gun.”



BABES WITH ARMS “Children are paying the highest price for this new surge of violence,” a UNICEF director says, speaking of a civil war now raging again.



SCHOOL OF LIFE A class at a temporary learning space run by UNICEF in Kaga Bandoro, a rebel-held town in the Central African Republic.

Some officials have also seen militants turn in homemade guns used for hunting bushmeat, keeping more sophisticated weapons at home. When 7,500 combatants participated in one of the country's biggest disarmament programs, between 2004 and 2007, researchers found that the fighters handed in only 417 guns, which proved impossible to store and trace properly due to shoddy databases. This program also defined the term *weapon* so loosely that officials tasked with disarming militants accepted innocuous pieces of uniforms—such as military caps—in the place of guns.


In an interview with *Newsweek*, Kenneth Gluck, the deputy head of the country's U.N. peacekeeping mission, acknowledged there had been "a lot of problematic practices in the past" and insisted that future disarmament deals would not repeat these failures.

Either way, reintegrating child soldiers isn't any easier than

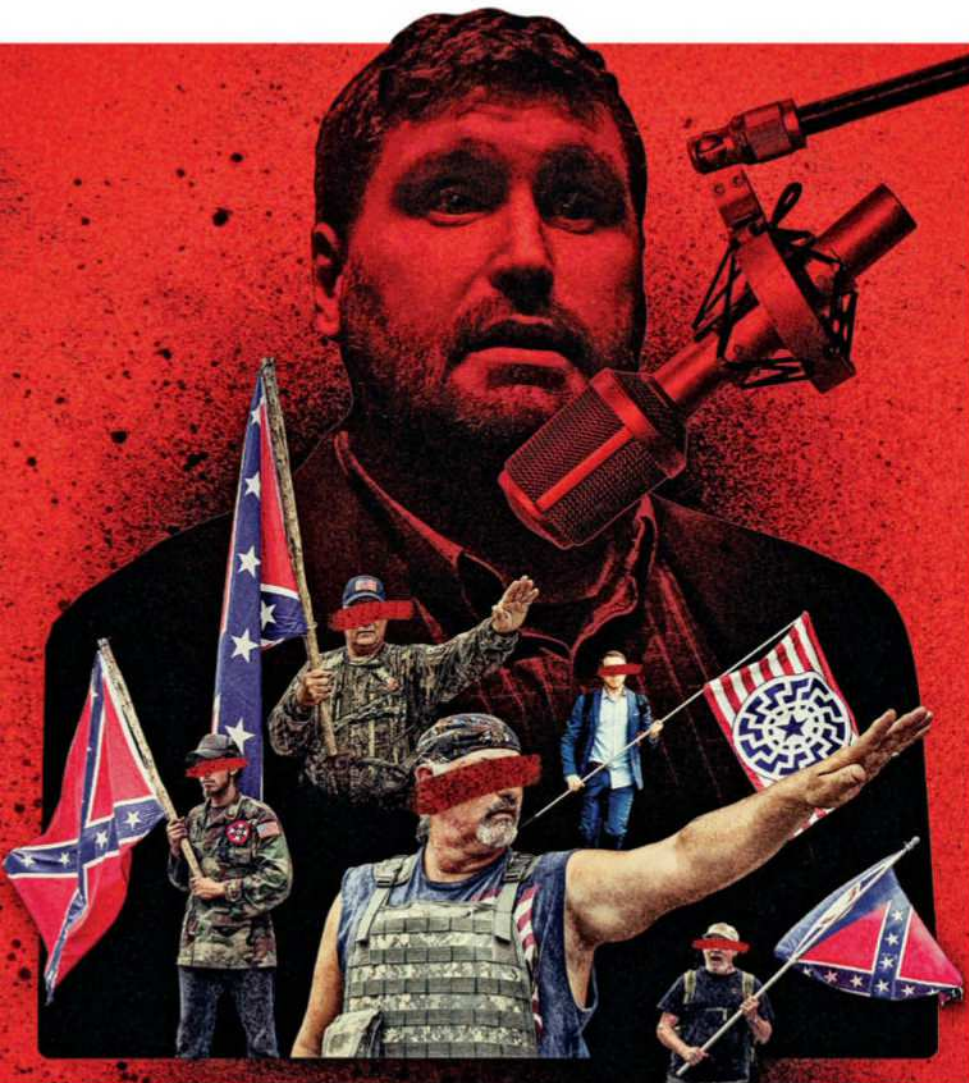
disarming them. All are traumatized, and many resist the offer of a fresh start. Substance abuse is common and can compound the problem. "When I meet with children in armed groups, they don't want to look at me," says Marciel Mongbu, a child-protection worker in Kaga Bandoro, which lies in the country's northern, rebel-held regions. "They see a lot in the bush; their behavior becomes brutal and aggressive. But by working with these children, they see that what's happened to them is wrong."

The next hurdle: returning home. When armed groups release child soldiers, local leaders and aid workers try to ease their transition to civilian life, both for them and their communities. "The message is: Take them back," says Mongbu. But the stigma attached to their violent past means the community may reject them.

As for Hassan, his future is uncertain. He was among 74 child soldiers

released from armed factions last September. Five months later, on a dusty afternoon, dozens of them gathered on the outskirts of Kaga Bandoro to speak with a UNICEF worker about coping with the trauma each had experienced during the war. The children removed their shoes and sat cross-legged on blankets in the shade of a mango tree. Hassan was near the front, wearing a black tracksuit, his face impassive. He is broke and living off UNICEF ration kits—mostly cassava and tinned sardines. He's also far from his remaining family members, some of whom live in refugee camps. Yet he is determined to rise above the conflict. He hopes to learn new skills, to become a tailor or a mechanic. As he puts it, "I am ready to start a new life." 

Reporting for this story was supported by a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.



POLITICS

White Noise

Purged from social media, white nationalists are finding a last refuge in podcasting. And Mike Peinovich has the hottest mic

IT WAS AUGUST 2017, AND WHITE nationalist shock jock Mike Peinovich was firing up his audience on *The Daily Shoah*, the signature podcast of an “alt-right” network that attracts tens of thousands of listeners a week. Many of them were preparing for the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Counterprotesters, however, were promising to disrupt the event in

Emancipation Park, where city officials planned to remove a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Peinovich told his audience to come prepared for a fight. “Bring whatever you need, that you feel you need for your self-defense,” he intoned. “We don’t want them to have the impression that we are going to be showing up there unarmed.... That is not the case.”

Some of his listeners apparently got the message. Soon after, members of the Ku Klux Klan and droves of younger, more internet-savvy white nationalists arrived with guns, clubs and Plexiglas shields. Fights broke out, and men and women were attacked with blunt objects. A 20-year-old man who had marched with a neo-Nazi group drove his car into a crowd of counterprotesters, injuring 19 people and killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer. (The driver is charged with first-degree murder.) The story became international news.

Before Charlottesville, few outside the dark corners of the internet had ever heard of Peinovich or his blog *The Right Stuff*, commonly referred to as TRS. But, as tech companies like Twitter, PayPal and GoDaddy slowly attempt to purge their platforms of alt-right voices in the aftermath of the rally, Peinovich’s podcasting network has developed into arguably the loudest and most influential gathering place for white nationalists on the web. His website, *TheRightStuff.biz*, now hosts more than two dozen podcasts and draws close to 1.5 million views per month. Until recently, a separate fan forum had nearly 10,000

registered users and, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, appears to be spawning new hate groups. One organization, True Cascadia, operates

BY

MICHAEL EDISON
HAYDEN

[@MichaelEHayden](https://twitter.com/MichaelEHayden)

The TRS forum became the place to settle arguments within the alt-right movement, attracting a who's who of white nationalist leaders.

throughout the Pacific Northwest and has recently drawn headlines for pasting neo-Nazi flyers in local towns. Researchers who study the far-right say it's become difficult to keep up with Peinovich's massive output of white nationalist propaganda.

Some alt-right leaders see his network as a kind of last refuge for a political movement on the run. While his peers at the neo-Nazi website Daily Stormer have been reduced to arranging secretive cash transactions or asking fans for cryptocurrency donations, Peinovich is still able to raise money using the payment processing company Stripe.

Critics, however, argue that the podcaster is using his website and his voice to hawk a violent ideology: A coalition of students, clergy and Charlottesville residents are suing Peinovich and a handful of other white nationalists—including regular TRS guests Richard Spencer and Andrew Anglin of Daily Stormer—for allegedly using their platforms for “planning, promoting and carrying out” the attacks in Charlottesville last year. If successful, the lawsuit could potentially unmask anonymous Peinovich fans, expose secret funding sources and silence the alt-right's largest microphone.

For his part, Peinovich has repeatedly denied that he intended to provoke violence in Charlottesville—he blames counterprotesters for the clashes that weekend—and expressed regret to *Newsweek* that it happened. But he and the other defendants have dismissed the legal challenge as “lawfare” designed to dismantle the alt-right. Their speech, they argue, is protected under the First Amendment.

“The facts alleged by plaintiffs in this lawsuit, even if totally true, are not sufficient to establish the elements of a conspiracy,” Peinovich tells *Newsweek*. “All they are really describing are political activists attending a rally.”

Peinovich's rise was relatively quick. Broadcasting under the name Mike Enoch (a reference to a far-right British politician who staunchly opposed

immigration), the former tech worker posted the first episode of his flagship show, *The Daily Shoah*, in 2014. The name is a pun mocking the genocide of Jews during World War II. Other shows were quickly added—all of them focusing on building a separate country for white, non-Jewish people and reveling in irony and inside jokes. They have names like *The Poz Button*, a term mocking people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, and *This Week in White Genocide*, which refers to the belief that white people are being slowly eradicated through race-mixing. Another show, *Third Rail*, which is hosted by anonymous performers who call themselves Spectre and Lauritz von Guildhausen, urged their listeners to call the police on black people and file baseless claims that they had stolen something or possessed weapons.

The biggest draw, however, was Peinovich himself, a thick and burly carnival barker adept at channeling

WHITE LIES Riot police form a line in front of a statue of Lee on August 12 in Charlottesville, Virginia. Opposite: Peinovich at the mic.



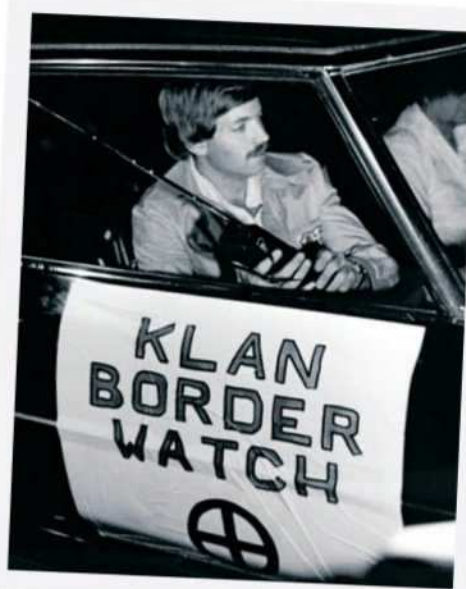
his extremist point of view through comedy. His humor is frequently racist and personal. (He has referred to Heyer, the fallen Charlottesville activist, as “the fat chick that died.”) He also creates new slurs and lists grievances that get repeated in alt-right circles for months after he speaks. He claims to have invented the omnipresent “echoes” meme, in which Jewish people’s names are written with three sets of parentheses around them to single them out for derision by anti-Semites.

Like many other white nationalist podcasts, TRS shows are typically recorded out of a home. But their superior sound quality—enhanced by indie metal band guitarist Jesse Craig Dunstan—distinguished them from the pack. Some say this nod toward professionalism helped turn a home-brew network into an alt-right sensation, simply because it changed the perception of how white supremacists broadcast their messages. “Most of these other white nationalist podcasts sound like they were recorded in a tin can,” says Keegan Hanks, an intelligence analyst at the Southern Poverty Law Center. (Dunstan, who did not respond to requests for comment, also contributes song parodies to TRS shows. One example: “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town,” replaced with the lyrics “Donald Trump Is Sending You Back.”)

Most importantly, Peinovich and his collaborators gave his fans a venue where they could gather—first in the comment threads of the TRS website and later on its forum—encouraging them to participate in political discussions on a daily basis. While topics on the

forum could range from anti-Semitic conspiracies to relationship advice (typically with a gleefully misogynistic tone), it also became the place to settle arguments within the alt-right movement, attracting a who’s who of white nationalist leaders. One thread from early March debating the subject of how nationalists should present themselves at rallies lasted for 107 pages and read more like a dramatic stage play

On the eve of Charlottesville’s “Unite the Right” rally, Peinovich urged his listeners, “Bring whatever you need, that you feel you need for your self-defense.”



NOT A KLU Duke, who was Ku Klux Klan grand wizard and is a fan of Peinovich, patrolling the California-Mexico border for undocumented immigrants.

than a political debate by the time it was finished. (Supporters of the alt-right have developed a reputation for throwing personal insults at one another when things don’t go according to plan.)

Peinovich fans also got together in real life at “pool parties.” Researchers of the far right say these private meet-ups of TRS listeners represented the next step in the evolution of the alt-right movement, as it stepped out of obscure chat rooms and into spaces like Charlottesville.

Anonymous activists tried to stop all of this last year by unearthing and leaking the podcaster’s real name and personal information, including his marriage to a Jewish woman. As a result, he lost his job as a computer programmer, and some of his fans turned on him. But thousands more stuck around, and Spencer, Anglin and former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke vouched for Peinovich, helping him rehabilitate his image among the white nationalists who often shun people with personal ties to Jews. Hanks believes Peinovich survived largely because of his enormous clout. As Anglin put it in a post on Daily Stormer: “Tens of thousands—maybe even hundreds of thousands—of men have been brought into the [alt-right] movement through TRS and Mike’s work.” He went on to describe Peinovich’s echoes meme as “one of the biggest propaganda coups since the death of Adolf Hitler.”

Without a shield of anonymity, Peinovich’s commitment to the white nationalist cause seemed only to sharpen, and he began making public appearances with more extreme figures, like the neo-Nazis of National Socialist Movement and the now-defunct Traditionalist Worker Party. He also ramped up TRS’s content and invested more time in its growth.



THE FIGHT STUFF
Clockwise from top: A vigil for Heyer, who was killed when a man drove a car into demonstrators in Charlottesville; Spencer, the white nationalist; Kaplan, the lawyer.



Those efforts are now jeopardized by the Charlottesville coalition's lawsuit, which could potentially force Peinovich to reveal the identities of his anonymous fans. Roberta Kaplan, the attorney leading the suit, tells *Newsweek* that he should be expected to produce only information about his fans that is relevant to the case at hand, concerning whether they conspired to commit acts of violence in Charlottesville last summer.

But even the mere prospect of being exposed has created a panic: Many fans fear losing their jobs and being isolated from their communities. Peinovich, who is representing

himself in the case, has argued that he has a right to protect the privacy of unnamed individuals that contribute to his site. In court documents, he said that "his 'reputation and ability to earn a living' will be 'irreparably damage[d]' if those visitors 'no longer feel they can browse' the website's 'politically controversial' content without fear that their 'personally identifiable information' will be disclosed in litigation." The judge shot these attempts down in April.

"Dude, get a lawyer," a TRS forum user named @j-r-ewing wrote in a thread about a recent *Newsweek* story on Peinovich. "The fact that you

are [defending yourself] is the most concerning fact in the article. It means that you don't have competent representation."


"You don't know what you're talking about," Peinovich responded.

He further alarmed fans in May, when, during a court proceeding, he accidentally called his Charlottesville security detail his "conspiracy" team, according to people who were present in the courtroom. ("Say the words *security* and *conspiracy* five times in a row without making a mistake," he tells *Newsweek* about the flub. "Now, do it in front of a federal judge. Go.")

As the legal battle continued, the TRS forum and its thousands of posts abruptly disappeared from the internet. Peinovich denied to *Newsweek* that he was responsible for apparently deleting its history, and he blamed collaborators instead.

Meanwhile, on air, the podcaster has verbally attacked Kaplan, lapsing into insults when the subject of the lawsuit arises. "Alright, Roberta Kaplan, you poor, swine, sweaty dyke-y, little f***ing Jewish lesbian!" he said on an episode of *The Daily Shoah*. "F*** you! You don't even know how the internet works."

Kaplan, whose arguments during the 2013 Supreme Court case of *United States v. Windsor* paved the way for the legalization of gay marriage, says Peinovich has struck a more deferential tone with her and others in the presence of the judge, perhaps indicating that he understands the threat the lawsuit represents to his podcast business.

She provided *Newsweek* with a transcript of a court hearing as an example. At one point, Peinovich reminded the judge that he was representing himself, without much legal muscle. "I'm kind of up against a lot of stuff here," he said. 

Cloak

A man in a dark suit and purple tie stands against a dark blue background. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The word "Cloak" is written in large white letters to his left, with a red horizontal bar underneath it.

» BY Bill Powell » PHOTOGRAPH BY Stephen Voss

& Swagger

HE'S BEEN CALLED AN **Associate** OF DONALD TRUMP AND A CAREER **Criminal**
CONNECTED TO THE MOB. BUT U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES
CALL HIM SOMETHING ELSE: A **Highly-Valuable** ASSET.
WILL THE REAL **Felix Sater** PLEASE STAND UP?

A

ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO, NOT LONG AFTER DONALD Trump announced his improbable bid for the White House, Felix Sater sensed a big opportunity. He and his childhood friend, Michael Cohen—then a lawyer and dealmaker for the Trump Organization—had been working for more than a decade, on and off, to build a Trump Tower in Moscow. The New York real estate mogul had long wanted to see his name on a glitzy building in the Russian capital, but the project had never materialized.

Now, with Trump running for office, the timing seemed right to Sater, who felt he had the proper connections for the project. A Moscow native whose family had fled to Brooklyn in the 1970s, he had returned to Russia in the 1990s, where he had done business with a number of high-ranking former Soviet intelligence officers. He eventually came back to New York but had stayed in touch with some of them—potentially a major asset in signing a lucrative deal. He even boasted to Cohen that Trump Tower Moscow could somehow help the candidate win the election. “Our boy can become president of the USA and we can engineer it,” Sater wrote in a November 2015 email. “I will get all of [Russian President Vladimir] Putin’s team to buy in on this.”

It didn’t turn out as planned. The Moscow deal never came through and eventually led to tension between Sater and Cohen—tension that hasn’t gone away. But to the shock of almost everyone, at least part of Sater’s boastful email turned into reality: Trump’s victory. Yet almost immediately, allegations of collusion with Moscow dogged his presidency. Russia had interfered in the election, with an intricate campaign of hacking, “fake news” and other forms of information warfare. And as U.S. investigators try to piece together what happened—and determine whether the Trump campaign coordinated its efforts with the Kremlin—Sater’s boastful emails have piqued their curiosity.

Cohen, now the subject of a federal investigation, has been summoned to talk to special counsel

Robert Mueller, as well as the House and Senate intelligence committees. They were interested in Sater too. Suddenly, reporters began hounding him, showing up at his house on Long Island, calling him at all hours. The negative publicity hurt his career in real estate, and his wife of more than two decades, with whom he has three children, has left him. As for the president of the United States, he claims he wouldn’t recognize Sater—a man he had a business relationship with for years—if they sat in a room together.

In the two years since the Trump-Russia scandal exploded into the headlines, few have been the subject of more curiosity and speculation than Sater. There were endless press reports about his background: He was an ex-con, purportedly with links to the Mafia, who had worked with Trump on failed real estate deals in Florida and Manhattan. Rumors surfaced that his former real estate company, Bayrock, was a money laundering vehicle for corrupt business and political figures in Russia and Ukraine (something he denies). He also picked

MUELLER TIME

The special counsel, below, is said to be interested in the Trump Tower Moscow project, which Sater worked on with Cohen, opposite page top.



FROM TOP: HECTOR RETAMAL/AFP/GETTY; JOSHUA ROBERTS/BLOOMBERG/GETTY; SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY



INFORMANT

over three meetings and more than eight hours of conversation, Sater offered new details about his life—from rumors about his Mafia connections to his encounter with Russian hackers in St. Petersburg.

And his story—the way he tells it, at least—is stranger than I had ever imagined.

An American Tale

“I’M TIRED OF READING THIS SHIT,” SATER SAYS.

It’s early May, and we’re sitting at a coffee shop inside the Mandarin Oriental, a tony hotel in Washington, D.C. Sater had traveled there to testify before the House Intelligence Committee. The 52-year-old, wearing a blue blazer with an American flag pin affixed to the lapel, explains how much of what’s been written about him is false. It’s why he’s been spending a lot of time with journalists. His campaign for “personal redemption,” as he calls it, began earlier this year with a lengthy article on BuzzFeed, followed by a couple of TV interviews and now our coffee talk. And he wants his reputation back.

The most interesting thing about Sater is what that reputation consists of. In 1972, his family emigrated from Moscow. They were among the first wave of Jews allowed to leave the Soviet Union

during the Cold War. For a year, they lived in Israel before moving to Coney Island, a neighborhood in Brooklyn where many Russian immigrants wound up. Sater was 6 years old when he arrived in the states.

Sater grew up as a normal Brooklyn kid. His father

worked as a cab driver, and young Felix attended public schools. He also performed odd jobs and hawked *The Jewish Daily Forward*, a newspaper, in Brighton Beach.

After high school, he enrolled at Pace University, but his college days didn’t last long. He got a part-time job on Wall Street at a boutique investment bank and loved everything about it. “I breathed it in like it was air,” he says, becoming a full-time broker by the age of 19—a symbol of success in his old neighborhood. Within a few years, Sater was making serious money. He married his wife, and the two moved into a fashionable Upper East Side apartment building, developed by Fred Wilpon, the owner of

“**No one** THOUGHT TRUMP WOULD WIN.
AND THAT **includes** DONALD.”

a peculiar moment—the middle of Trump’s presidential campaign—to try to revive the Moscow deal, bragging about his clout with Putin, one of Washington’s most potent adversaries. And the only public defense—hinted at in court documents over the years—seemed to be an improbable story about how he’d wound up helping America track down Osama bin Laden, among other adventures in espionage.

So who is Felix Sater? Is he connected to the mob? Is he a spy? Trump’s man in Moscow? Or is he a key figure in Mueller’s investigation, the man who will ultimately bring down the president and finally answer the questions swirling around Russiagate? Pundits have speculated about all of the above. But

the New York Mets. One of their neighbors was the team's star first baseman Keith Hernandez. "I was living a fairy tale life," he says.

But one night in 1991, he went out drinking with some of his colleagues, and a combination of "alcohol and testosterone" resulted in a bar fight. The way he tells it, a currency trader came at him with a beer bottle, so he grabbed a margarita glass, broke it and stabbed the guy with its stem. It took 115 stitches to sew up the man. Sater landed behind bars in New York's infamous jail Rikers Island.

Released after a couple of months—a judge allowed him out on bond while he was appealing his conviction—he was unable to get a legitimate job on Wall Street; the case had sullied his reputation. So Sater joined a firm that was running an old-fashioned pump-and-dump operation straight out of *The Wolf of Wall Street*: It bought thinly traded stocks and then talked them up to hapless customers, scamming them out of tens of millions of dollars. A few months later, Sater's appeal failed, and he ended up back at Rikers, where he served more than a year behind bars for the assault in the bar.

It was the worst period of his life. "[I] had a wife and a young daughter to take care of," he says. "I didn't know what I was going to do when I got out. It was bleak."

A Spy Among Friends

ONCE OUT OF JAIL, SATER WENT BACK TO HIS JOB at the pump-and-dump operation; because of his rap sheet, he still couldn't find work in legitimate finance. But after about six more months, he says, he quit. "I was disgusted with myself," he says. "I needed to leave the dark side."

His next stop: Russia. By the time Sater arrived in the mid-'90s, the Soviet Union had collapsed, Boris Yeltsin was in power, and Moscow had embraced a lawless version of capitalism. The city was anarchic, ruthless, but full of opportunity. Through connections on Wall Street, Sater started a telecommunications company in Russia selling transatlantic cable for voice and data transmission from the newly democratic countries of the former Soviet Union



"MY FATHER wouldn't know SEMION MOGILEVICH IF HE FELL ON him."





FROM TOP: JULIE JACOBSON/AP PHOTO; ULRICH BAUMGARTEN VIA GETTY; SOVFOTO/JUG/GETTY; SHEPARD S. HERRELL/CORBIS/GETTY

MONEY BALL

By the time Sater arrived in Russia in the mid-'90s, the Soviet Union had collapsed and Moscow had embraced a lawless version of capitalism. Clockwise from opposite page top: the Rikers Island jail, the New York Stock Exchange, the Kremlin in Moscow and Yeltsin.

to AT&T. During that era, the once-powerful Soviet military and intelligence services were in disarray. Large swaths of both were being privatized. A bevy of former military officers and intelligence operatives went to work for businessmen—some legitimate, some with ties to organized crime, all looking for a piece of the new Russian economy. One man, a senior Soviet military intelligence official in Afghanistan during the Red Army's occupation, took an interest in Sater and his telecom company.

Sater won't divulge the man's real name—he just refers to him as "E"—but he was an acquaintance who changed the American's life in unimaginable ways. The two soon became close, and Sater routinely went to *banyas* (saunas) with E and his friends to drink and relax. Almost all of E's

friends were also former high-ranking military or intelligence officials.

One night, the group went out to dinner, and Sater met an American named Milton Blane, who introduced himself as a consultant. A few days later, Blane invited him to a popular British pub in central Moscow. He told Sater he was connected to "some serious people," guys who had extraordinary access to senior levels of the Russian armed forces. OK, Sater said, so what?

Blane was an officer of the Defense Intelligence Agency, operating out of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Sater, with his ties to "E" and his friends, could be very helpful. To Sater's astonishment, Blane was recruiting him to become an intelligence asset. The U.S. was working on anti-missile defense systems, and the DIA wanted to find out how Moscow's worked. (Former FBI and CIA officials support Sater's account. Like many government officials interviewed for this story, they asked for anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak about the matter.)

Sater says it took him "about three seconds" to decide. "I'm in," he told Blane, a decision he now says was driven by both "patriotism" and a "romantic notion" of espionage.

He had no idea what he was getting himself into.

Mobsters, Feds and Jihadis

BECAUSE OF E'S TIME IN AFGHANISTAN, HE WAS familiar with the country. One of his closest contacts was a senior intelligence officer for the Northern Alliance, a group at war with the Taliban for control of the country in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal. Moscow was the Alliance's chief source of arms, and this contact—I'll call him "Hamid"—frequently traveled back and forth to Russia.

During the Soviet occupation, the U.S. had supplied stinger missiles to rebel groups fighting the Red Army. Once the USSR pulled out, however, American policy eventually changed; it became clear that jihadi groups, including Al-Qaeda, might use the missiles for terrorism. In 1995, President Bill Clinton signed an executive order to round up as many of the stingers as possible in Afghanistan.

Both Hamid and E knew what Sater was doing, who he was working for. And for the right price, they offered to help the Americans reacquire some of the missiles. Sater relayed this message to Blane, who asked for proof. The Afghan sent photos of the serial

numbers of the stingers, paired with the same day's newspaper. Impressed, Blane turned the matter over to the CIA—which was tasked with collection—and the agency began negotiating to buy back the missiles. Sater then began dealing with Langley. (He believes his information helped the agency recover at least some of the missiles, but he can't say for sure.)

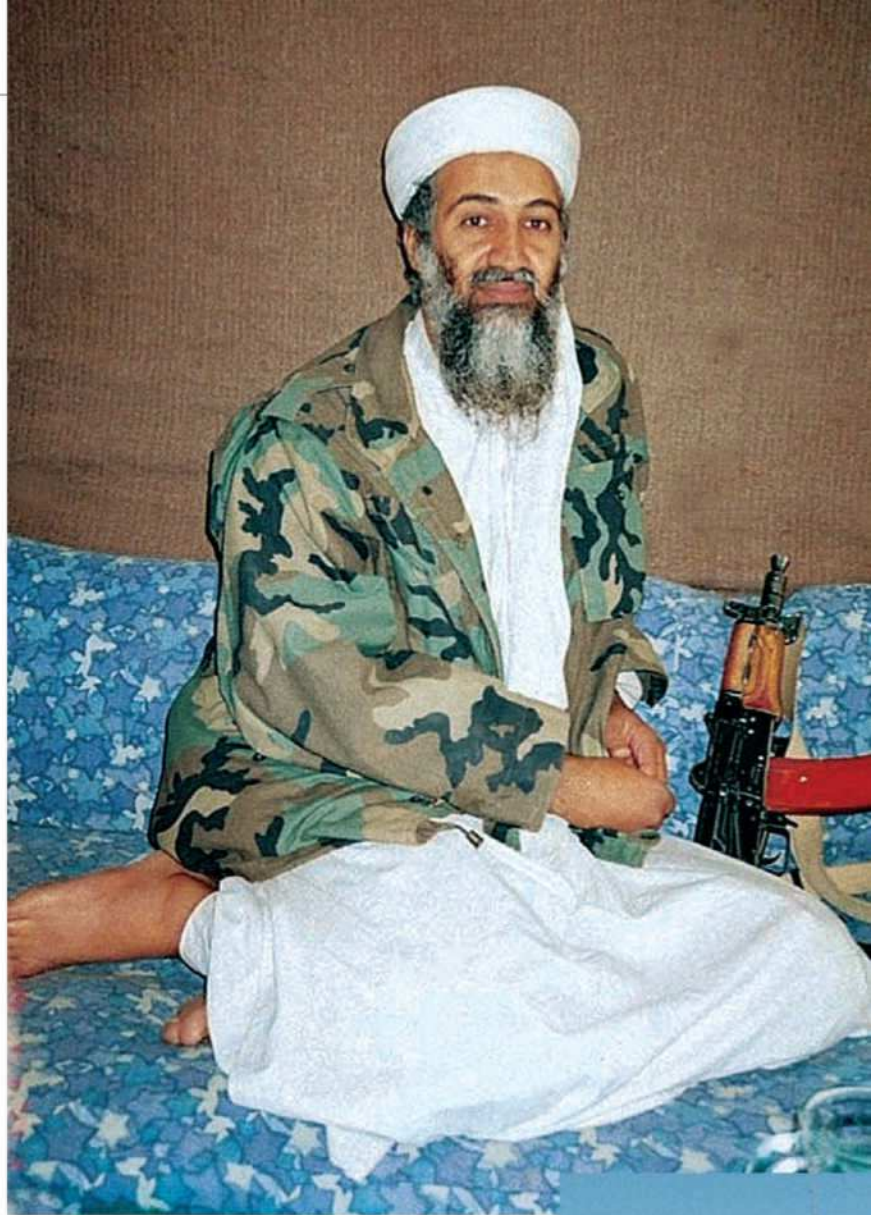
Late in 1998, Sater got a call from an FBI agent in New York named Leo Taddeo, who told him about an investigation into the pump-and-dump operation on Wall Street that Sater had left behind—part of a broader probe into the Italian Mafia's expanding presence on Wall Street. The FBI had some dirt on Sater, who had gotten involved with two Brooklyn mob members—"guys whose job it was to keep other mobsters away"—before he went to Moscow, and Taddeo told him he was likely to be charged with fraud. If he came back and cooperated, a judge would take that into account at sentencing. (A former FBI official in New York says Sater's story is accurate.)

Sater agreed to return to the states. He then called E and told him what was going on, and the former intelligence official asked him to delay the trip, not saying why. Two days later, E provided Sater with a packet of information from his Afghan contact, Hamid. It included numbers for the satellite phones used by a man then living near the Afghan border with Pakistan: Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda, the jihadi group that had just bombed the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. (A former CIA officer familiar with Sater's story says the agency came to believe the numbers were authentic.)

When Sater arrived back in the U.S. in late 1998, he met with Jonathan Sack, the assistant U.S. attorney in New York's Eastern District, who was handling the stock fraud case. Sater told him what he had been doing in Moscow, and the CIA and DIA backed up his claims. Both agencies wanted their asset sent back to Moscow, but Sack was unmoved. And Sater was mystified. "So I'm giving the CIA bin Laden's sat phone numbers," he tells me, "and this guy [Sack] is more concerned with going after 'Vinny Boom Botz.'"

Sater pleaded guilty to fraud and agreed to help the feds with the stock case. "I did 10 or 15 debriefings," he says. "They ended up satisfied." Sack agreed to delay his sentencing.

Clinton that summer had ordered an airstrike on



Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, based in part, former CIA sources say, on information Hamid had passed on. "[The CIA] really wanted me to go back [to Moscow] at this point," Sater says. But Sack and the FBI still wouldn't allow it.

In late 2000, as Sater helped the feds take on the mob, he also tried to make some money. He joined a real estate business—Bayrock—and the company managed to get a few deals, he says.

His work as a government informant was equally fruitful. Two FBI sources say Sater's cooperation would eventually help turn Frank Coppa, a captain in the Bonanno crime family, into a cooperating witness against the mob organization—"a real turning point in the war on the Mafia," a source says. Eventually, his cooperation on the stock scams helped the feds get 19 guilty pleas, according to Sater and law enforcement officials.



HUNTING OSAMA

Sater says he not only helped the U.S. track down stinger missiles in Afghanistan, bottom right, he provided the CIA with satellite phones used by bin Laden's Al-Qaeda, the jihadi group that bombed the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, below.

That figure seemed significant at the time, and Sater says he “hopes” it helped atone for his crimes. But the Mafia cases would turn into an afterthought compared with his next role—one that was even more improbable.

Greed Is Good

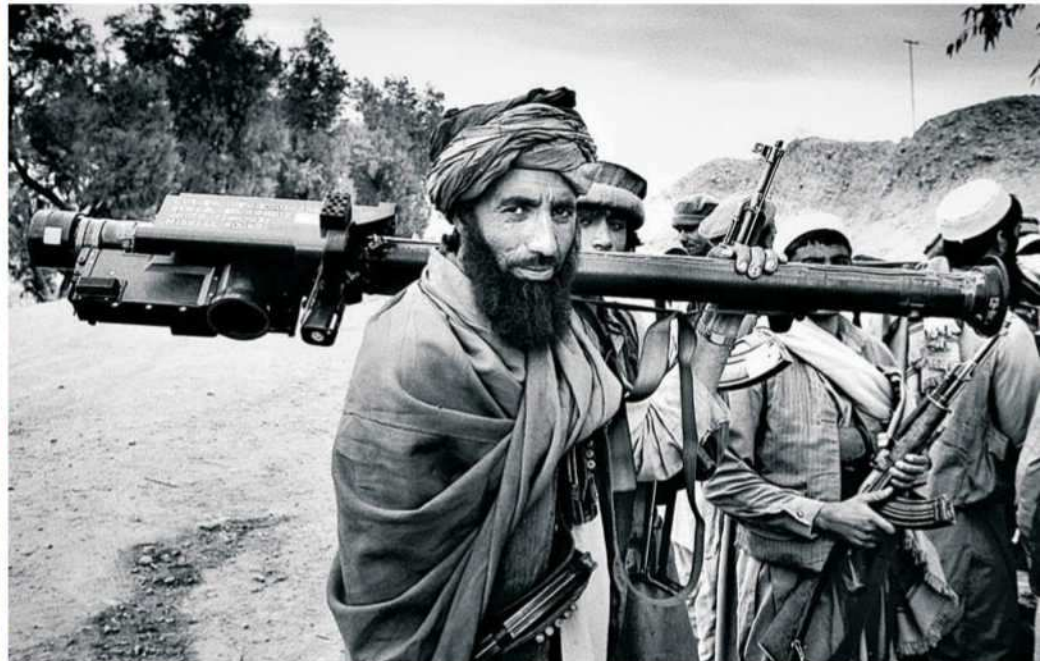
ON THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, SATER was still working at Bayrock and making his normal morning commute into Manhattan. But when he neared the Midtown Tunnel, he saw it: The twin towers of the World Trade Center had been hit by planes, one after the other.

Sater doesn't remember exactly when he realized bin Laden was responsible for the carnage. But once he did, he says, his mind raced back to his time in Moscow, when he was funneling information to the U.S. government. One bizarre episode stood out, he claims: In the spring of 1998, he, E and about 15 or 20 ex-Soviet special forces

fighters went to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, a former Soviet republic that borders Afghanistan. They had information from Hamid's sources in the Northern Alliance about bin Laden's location—a camp in the mountain range called Tora Bora. Hamid had proved his bona fides, so “we had no reason to doubt what he was telling us,” Sater claims. And E and his men were going to try to take out bin Laden—for a price. They drove from Dushanbe across the border to Mazar-i-Sharif, where they rendezvoused with Northern Alliance fighters.

Sater claims he called Langley, saying he had real intelligence about bin Laden's whereabouts and soldiers who were willing to move on the camp. What he needed to know was how much the agency would pay. “Greed was always my go-to weapon,” Sater says. Getting E into potentially lucrative telecom deals, as well as Sater's background as a Russian-speaking former Wall Street guy, had cemented his relationship with the former military intelligence officer.

“I'M GIVING THE CIA **bin Laden's** SAT PHONE NUMBERS, AND THIS GUY IS MORE CONCERNED WITH **going after** ‘VINNY BOOM BOTZ.’”



The CIA, Sater says, told him the bounty on bin Laden was \$5 million. He claims he told the agency that wasn't going to cut it: "These guys were walking into a potential bloodbath. There were about 50 of [them] total. They needed at least a million dollars each." The CIA balked, Sater claims, and the group retreated to Dushanbe, then back to Moscow. (Three former CIA officials declined to either confirm or deny this account. Hamid couldn't be reached for comment.)

As bin Laden's face became a permanent fixture in the papers and on the news, Sater couldn't shake the thought out of his mind: "Could we have had him? Was that a possibility? I'll never know."

Not long after the 9/11 attacks, the FBI again reached out to Sater. Only this time the bureau wanted him to get in touch with Hamid—and help with counterterrorism—not the mob. The American informant did what the bureau asked, and he knew what to expect from the Afghan. "What's in it for me?" Hamid asked. He "didn't give a damn about Americans," Sater says. But Al-Qaeda had recently assassinated Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance, so the Afghan said he would help if the money was right.

Sater had already given this some thought. He claims he told Hamid—accurately, as it turned out, but not because he knew anything—that the Americans would soon invade the country. The Afghan needed more than that. So Sater claims he assured him the U.S. would depose the Taliban and set up a central bank in Kabul. The Afghan, he says, could help run it. This was a complete lie, but Sater says he sold it by putting together a packet of official-looking legal documents, allegedly from the U.S. government, authorizing the creation of the bank. He shipped them and a satellite phone to Hamid, who believed the story, according to Sater.

Soon, the American asset says, before the first CIA paramilitary operators entered Afghanistan, the information started to flow. It was detailed and specific, and even included locations of Al-Qaeda fighters, weapons caches and information about how the 9/11 attackers had financed their operation. The way Sater recalls it, a relative of his Afghan informant was married to Taliban leader Mullah Omar's personal secretary, and they traveled everywhere together, including to the caves of Tora Bora, where he and bin Laden retreated after the United States invaded.

For Sater, the work was surreal and often gratifying. "FBI agents would come to my house each night and stay there until 2 or 3 in the morning," he says, "drinking my wife's coffee, poring over this stuff." (An FBI official who knew Sater at the time said the general outline of this story is accurate but declined to go into specifics.) Sater says he has never been paid by any U.S. government agency for his assistance, and current and former FBI officials confirm that. "As all this was going on," Sater says, "I just remember thinking how crazy it all was. 'How in the fuck did I get involved in all this?'"

Hackers, Liars and Journalists

IN THE EARLY 2000S, NOT LONG AFTER THE WAR in Afghanistan began, Sater says he met Trump, thanks to his work for Bayrock, the real estate company. (Neither the White House nor Cohen would comment for this story.) Sater raised money for Bayrock from, among others, a wealthy businessman from the former Soviet republic of

FIRE AND FURY

Not long after the September 11, 2001, attacks, Sater, opposite page top right, entered the real estate business, which is how he met Trump. He also continued his work as an intelligence asset.

FROM TOP: MARK VON HOLDEN/WIREIMAGE /GETTY; ZUMA PRESS/LAMY; SPENCER PLATT/GETTY





HE **grabbed** A MARGARITA
GLASS, BROKE IT AND **stabbed**
the guy WITH ITS STEM.

Kazakhstan, and he persuaded people in Trump's orbit—including Cohen, his old friend—to bring his deals before the boss.

Two of the ideas worked out. Sater and the New York real estate mogul eventually worked on the Trump SoHo in Manhattan and a hotel and condo project in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, which failed after the 2008 economic crisis. He and Trump, Sater claims, were friendly but not particularly close. As Abe Wallach, a former Trump Organization executive, once told the journalist Tim O'Brien, "It's not very hard to get connected to Donald if you make it known that you have a lot of money and you want to do deals and you want to put his name on it."

But Trump eventually distanced himself from Sater, after *The New York Times* published an article detailing the latter's criminal conviction for assault, as well as his role in the stock scam case. "If he were sitting in the room right now, I really wouldn't know what he looked like," Trump said of Sater in a 2013 video deposition taken in connection with a civil lawsuit. Two years later, as Trump was running for president, a reporter asked the *Apprentice* star about his former business partner, and he replied: "I'm not that familiar with him." For Sater, these comments were hurtful, but he didn't stop trying to work with Trump; there was still money to be made.

Nor did he cease working with the FBI. Law enforcement officials say that beginning in 2005—and continuing for several years afterward—Sater helped break up a Russian ring in St. Petersburg that was hacking into the U.S. financial system. Taddeo, the FBI agent who had summoned Sater back to the U.S. in the pump-and-dump case, worked with him on the case. The two men traveled to Limassol, Cyprus, a popular post-Soviet vacation spot for Russians. Under the FBI's watch, Sater had infiltrated the hackers, helping them launder money, and even met with the group's ringleader in Cyprus.

The irony of this operation is not lost on Sater. According to an indictment brought by Mueller, it was allegedly a St. Petersburg outfit, the Internet Research Agency, that spread "fake news" in the U.S. before the 2016 elec-

tion. I asked Sater whether the FBI has indicated that the cases he worked on were linked to the same group, or to the alleged Democratic National Committee hackers. "It could be part of the same group," Sater claims. "They've told my lawyer that some of the information we gathered is still 'actionable.'" (The Department of Justice declined to comment on the matter.)

Either way, in court proceedings and in testimony before Congress, various law enforcement officials have consistently vouched for Sater—including former Attorney General Loretta Lynch, who told the Senate Intelligence Committee that he had provided "valuable and sensitive" information

to the government when she was running the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn. Which is why when Sater was finally sentenced for the stock scam case in 2010—a case brought against him 12 years earlier—he got just a \$25,000 fine.

For a once-convicted felon who had taken part in a multimillion-dollar scam, that was nothing.

'A Bit of a Blowhard'

HACKERS. TERRORISTS. SPIES. MAFIOSO. THE FUTURE president of the United States. Unbelievably, for a kid from Brooklyn, all of these people have been in Sater's orbit. And now he's splitting his time between New York and L.A. and trying to become a Hollywood producer. He's like Zelig, I tell him as we finish our breakfast during our final meeting, at the Mandarin Oriental in D.C. He chuckles at the reference, the main character from a 1983 Woody Allen movie who becomes a bit player in the lives of historical figures, from Adolf Hitler to Al Capone.

But as the Russiagate probe continues, Sater's Zelig-like role in the affair remains murky. It's hard to know what to make of his story, hard to pin down where Sater the dealmaker begins and Sater the asset ends. Mueller's investigators—some of whom Sater has worked with during his years as an informant—are said to be interested in the Trump Tower Moscow project. (E, the ex-Soviet intelligence officer, was reportedly part of it as well.) They're apparently interested in a Ukrainian peace deal Sater and Cohen tried to broker—one that would have involved lifting U.S. sanctions on Russia—a result the Kremlin has long desired. And the special counsel is also interested in money laundered from Russia and Ukraine, which could bring into focus how an obscure—and now defunct—investment bank in Iceland, the FL Group, was able to invest \$50 million in the Trump SoHo project. Some suspect the company was laundering money out of Russia. Jody Kriss, a former colleague of Sater's, made this accusation as part of a civil lawsuit against Bayrock alleging racketeering and claimed Sater used to brag about how



“Our boy CAN BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE USA AND we can ENGINEER IT.”

close the bank was to Putin. Sater denies that, and the two settled the suit earlier this year. The Moscow-born dealmaker claims he answered all of Mueller's questions to the special counsel's “satisfaction,” adding that investigators told him he is not a target in the probe. (The special counsel's office declined to comment.)

Today, Sater seems weary of the Russiagate queries—and the questions it has raised about his background. Some have alleged he has ties to Russian organized crime, which Sater calls “bullshit.” There are rumors that his father was a capo in a gang run by alleged über boss Semion Mogilevich; Sater denies that as well. His father,

FROM TOP: MARK WILSON/GETTY; ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY; STEPHEN VOSS FOR NEWSWEEK

INSIDE MAN
Sater's role in Russiagate remains murky. But former officials such as Lynch, opposite page top, say the longtime informant was a valuable intelligence asset in other cases.

he acknowledges, ended up in the “dispute settlement” business in Brooklyn after he could no longer drive a taxi because of a back injury. He pleaded guilty in 2000 to extorting restaurants and other small businesses in Brooklyn and got three years’ probation. But he was not working for the so-called “brainy don,” as Mogilevich is known. “My father wouldn’t know Semion Mogilevich if he fell on him,” Sater says. Besides, he adds, “I helped the Justice Department prepare a stock fraud case against [Mogilevich]” in 2011. (Two FBI sources back up Sater’s claims. Mogilevich did not respond to questions for comment through his lawyer in time for publication.)


Over the past year, some press reports have speculated that Sater was a source for the Steele dossier, the explosive memos written by a former British spy alleging that the Kremlin coordinated parts of its interference campaign with members of the Trump team. “Not true,” Sater says. “I swear on the heads of my children.”

Others have also suggested he might turn on Cohen; as BuzzFeed first reported, the two the two occasionally bickered over control of the Trump Tower Moscow project, among other things. After receiving a referral by Mueller, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York is now investigating Cohen for possible bank fraud. Would Sater serve as a witness against him? “Against him?” Sater says. “I doubt it,” adding that he has no information about the case.

It may look strange—suspicious even—that he and Cohen were pursuing a major real estate deal in Moscow. In the middle of a presidential campaign. On behalf of the Trump organization. With a foreign power, an adversary that was—at the exact same time—interfering in the U.S. election. But on November 8, 2016, Sater claims that he, like many others, watched in “disbelief” as Trump was elected president. “No one thought he would win. And that includes Donald.”

Even though he supported him, Sater allows that “Donald is a bit of a blowhard.” And perhaps, he suggests, he too has dabbled in puffery, which is how he explains his statements about Trump Tower Moscow—that he could push the deal through, that a real estate venture could somehow determine the outcome of an American election. Years ago, Sater apparently had enough clout to get Ivanka Trump into Putin’s then-empty Kremlin office, where she twirled around in his seat. But now he suggests that he and E are not so connected that they could easily get Putin’s personal approval on a high-profile real estate deal with Trump’s name on it.

As we stand in the lobby at the Mandarin Oriental, I have one last question for Sater: Does Mueller really have anything on the president? The enigmatic informant-cum-dealmaker offers what seems to be a sincere response. “I think,” he says, “Donald is going to be re-elected.”

He smiles broadly and adds something he’s told other reporters before: “And after his second term, then we’ll do Trump Tower Moscow.” 





RUSSIA hopes the World Cup will help improve its international image.
The Kremlin's **ENEMIES** may have other plans



BALL

by
**MARC
BENNETTS**

ON THE BALL

In hosting the World Cup, Putin is hoping to replicate the success of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia. Here, the Russian president plays soccer with Infantino. Opposite page, Germany's players celebrate after winning the 2014 World Cup.

FROM LEFT: FRANÇOIS XAVIER MARTI/AFP/GETTY; ALEXEI DRUZHININ/TASS/GETTY



LADIMIR PUTIN KEPT A WATCHFUL EYE ON A black-and-white soccer ball as it soared toward him through a spacious Kremlin office, before he deftly bumped it back with his head. On the other side of the room, Gianni Infantino, the president of FIFA, soccer's international governing body, waited for the return pass. When it came, he flicked the ball up, juggling it from foot to foot before kicking it back to the Russian president. The two men, both dressed in suits and ties, were taking part in a promotional video for this summer's World Cup, which Russia will host for the first time.

In May, just weeks after the filming of the video, Putin and Infantino met again, this time in Sochi, on Russia's Black Sea coastline, where they inspected the Fisht Olympic Stadium. The 48,000-seat arena is one of a dozen that Russia has either built or revamped for the tournament, which runs June 14 to July 15 and takes place in 11 cities. The government has spent an estimated \$19 billion on the tournament, making it one of the most expensive World Cups ever.

This massive spending isn't because Putin is a huge soccer fan; he isn't particularly interested in it. Instead, some say, he hopes to use the World Cup to improve Russia's international image. That's a difficult task, especially after the Kremlin has been accused of war crimes in Syria and Ukraine, spy poisonings in Britain and election meddling in the United States and other Western countries. But Putin couldn't have chosen a better platform to spread his message: The tournament is the world's most-watched sporting event.

"Putin wants to present Russia as a strong country—not just in the military sense—that is able to organize events well on an international level," says Andrei Kolesnikov, a political analyst at the Carnegie Moscow Center, a Russian-based think tank. "The World Cup will also be an attempt to soften his iron man reputation."

The Kremlin has a long history of using international sporting events for propaganda purposes. For decades, the Soviet Union promoted its athletes' success at the Olympic Games as proof of the socialist system's supposed superiorities. Some of these efforts were benign, others more sinister. Just before the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, for instance, Soviet authorities rounded up dissidents, handicapped people and others they judged to be "undesirables," forcing them out of the city for the duration of the games.

Decades later, Putin put a modern-day spin on Communist-era propaganda when Russia hosted the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014. The Kremlin pumped billions of dollars (no one knows quite how much) into the games—widely reported to be one of the most expensive Olympics of all time. Opposition politicians slammed what they said was massive Kremlin corruption. But Putin hailed Sochi as a showcase for the "new" Russia that had emerged after the collapse of the USSR.

It worked. Russia's athletes topped the medals table, the world's media praised the Olympics' opening and closing ceremonies, and despite some negative coverage in the lead-up to the event,

Russia basked in the glow of positive press. The country's Federal Security Service, or FSB, also celebrated what it said was a joint operation with the United States and other Western countries to avert planned attacks by Islamist militants. Even subsequent allegations of massive, Kremlin-sponsored doping failed to diminish the results, at least as far as most Russians were concerned.

Now, as the world's top soccer players and an estimated 600,000 foreign tourists head to Russia for the 2018 World Cup, Putin is hoping for a similar success. "This was the dream of many generations, and this moment is about to happen," Arkady Dvorkovich, head of the Local Organizing Committee for Russia's World Cup, said on May 30. "The Olympics in Sochi demonstrated how we can welcome guests, but this situation is much larger on the global scale."

Yet with that scale comes greater risks and more potential problems, from Islamist militant attacks to human rights abuses. And the Kremlin is doing everything it can to ensure nothing goes awry.



FROM TOP: CHRIS JACKSON/WPA POOL/GETTY; VYACHESLAV PROKOFEV/TASS/GETTY; SERGEI KAPUKHIN/REUTERS



PITCHED BATTLE
Some Kremlin critics have called for a boycott of the tournament, but so far that hasn't materialized. Clockwise from left: Prince William speaks to players on the British national team; Zakharova, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman; and the interior of a railway station in Nizhny Novgorod.

'Your Blood Will Fill the Stadium'

THE JIHADI FIGHTER THRUSTS AN AUTOMATIC WEAPON INTO THE air as a bomb explodes nearby, shrouding a World Cup stadium in plumes of white smoke. In the background, the Russian president stands at a podium, in the crosshairs of a sniper's rifle. "Putin: You disbeliever, you will pay the price for killing Muslims," reads the message on this online poster, which was produced in April by supporters of the Islamic State group (ISIS). In other gruesome images circulated online, jihadis are depicted beheading some of the world's top soccer stars, including Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. A caption reads, "Your blood will fill the stadium."

Over the past year or so, ISIS has suffered crippling military defeats in Iraq and Syria. But the jihadi group has been using social media and encrypted messaging services to encourage followers to target spectators at the World Cup. Analysts say that security at the stadiums will be tight but that crowded fan zones around the arenas will be far harder to lock down and could be vulnerable to ISIS-inspired "lone wolf" attacks. Such assaults, which require minimal planning, have taken place in London and Manchester in England, Barcelona in Spain and in Russia, killing dozens of people.

Just because ISIS says it will wreak havoc at the World Cup doesn't mean it will, but security analysts worry the event may be too attractive a target for ISIS militants to resist—especially given the group's loss of territory. "A successful attack [in Russia] would provide a tremendous propaganda boost for the Islamic State and its fighters and supporters," says Matthew Henman, head of Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center at the London-based IHS Markit analysis company, in a recent report.

One of the main risks: battle-hardened Russian jihadis with experience creating improvised explosive devices who have returned home from Syria and Iraq. According to Russian security officials, around 4,000 Russian citizens, mainly from the country's North Caucasus region, which includes Chechnya, have fought alongside ISIS in the Middle East.

Although Islamist attacks in Russia have their roots in the volatile North Caucasus, fighters loyal to ISIS have the ability to strike far beyond the area. One World Cup host city at risk is Nizhny Novgorod, just 250 miles from Moscow. On May 4, an ISIS militant wounded three police officers during a shoot-out there. The jihadi fighter was killed by security services after barricading himself in an apartment just 9 miles from the stadium where nations such as Argentina, England and Sweden are due to play. In February and last November, Russian security forces also shot dead ISIS militants plotting attacks in the city.

World Cup host cities in Russia's south are also at risk, says Grigory Shvedov, chief editor of the Caucasian Knot online news agency, which monitors Islamist militant activity in Russia. Shvedov says recent ISIS attacks on Russian Orthodox Churches in the North Caucasus indicate that the jihadi group is gearing up to attack



"If fans go to Moscow's OUTSKIRTS looking for adventure, they could get their asses KICKED."



sensitive targets. Volgograd, which borders the North Caucasus region, is a particular security concern. Last November, two police officers were hospitalized with stab wounds after an ISIS-inspired assault in the southern Russian region, which will host matches involving Russia and Spain, as well as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Four years earlier, in December 2013, twin suicide bombings by Islamist militants killed 34 people in Volgograd. Those attacks were carried out by the Caucasus Emirate, a now-defunct jihadi group whose former members have since sworn allegiance to ISIS.

Because of these potential threats, the Kremlin is stepping up its counterterrorism operations. State security services “liquidated” 12 militant cells and arrested 189 suspects between January and April of this year, says Alexander Bortnikov, head of the FSB. The FSB has also ordered chemical plants and other high-risk factories to be shut down during the monthlong event.

Russian security officials insist, however, that the tournament will proceed safely, pointing to their success in preventing attacks on the 2014

Winter Olympics. But there are some crucial major differences between Sochi and the World Cup. “The Sochi Olympics took place at a time when Islamic State was not active in Russia,” Shvedov says. “Today, unfortunately, it is extremely active, especially in the North Caucasus region.”

ISIS did not claim its first attack in Russia until 2015, when it targeted a tourist site in the country’s south, killing one person. Since then, the group has taken responsibility for a series of bombings and shootings, including 20 in the North Caucasus, according to Caucasian Knot.

The World Cup also presents jihadis with a larger number of potential targets than the Sochi Olympics, says Mark Galeotti, an expert on the Russian security services at the Institute of International Relations in Prague. “Sochi was essentially a single securable point,” he says. “But at the World Cup there will be too many people, at too many sites. If anyone wants to make a terrorist attack, you don’t need to hit a stadium, you just need to hit, say, a bus depot near a stadium. And suddenly that becomes an attack on the World Cup.”

‘Stalinist-Era Show Trials’

JIHADIS AREN’T THE ONLY ONES HOPING TO USE THE WORLD CUP to advance their cause. As the tournament approaches, Putin’s

FIELD OF NIGHTMARES

Because of a potential threat from jihadis, the Kremlin is stepping up its counterterrorism operations. Above: A view of the Mordovia Arena in Saransk; opposite page from top, Russian Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko and masked men near Sevastopol in Crimea.

FROM TOP: MAXIM SHEMETOV/REUTERS; PFABRICE COFFRINI/AFP/GETTY; VIKTOR DRACHEV/AFP/GETTY

critics are hoping to put a global spotlight on what they call widespread human rights abuses, including state-sponsored violence against political opponents.

The Kremlin appears to be spooked by such plans. In an apparent bid to prevent demonstrations in front of the international press, Russian authorities have banned protests in host cities through July 25. And analysts say the government is doing its best to make sure there is no public dissent even before that law kicks

in: Alexei Navalny, the opposition leader, was jailed for a month on May 15 on protest-related charges. Sergei Boyko and Ruslan Shaveddinov, two members of Navalny's anti-corruption organization, were locked up later that month for the same amount of time; Navalny's press secretary, Kira Yarmysh, was handed a 25-day sentence. Their crime? Tweeting about protests.

"The World Cup will be a celebration of Putin's eternal empire of the security services," says Maria Alyokhina, a member of Pussy Riot,

the anti-Putin punk band and art collective. "People who come should realize that they are coming to a country where people are beaten at protests, tortured in jail and in police stations, and where there are very many political prisoners."

Among those alleged political prisoners: Oleg Sentsov, a Ukrainian film director. A Russian military court imprisoned him for 20 years in 2015 on terrorism charges, though he says it was just revenge for his opposition to the Kremlin's annexation of Crimea.

Sentsov had brought food to Ukrainian soldiers whom Russian troops had blockaded inside their bases during the invasion. Prosecutors said that he and Alexander Kolchenko, his co-defendant, set small fires at the Crimean office of Putin's ruling United Russia party and in the entryway to a Communist Party office. They also accused them of plotting to blow up a statue of Vladimir Lenin in Sevastopol, the Crimean capital. Both men denied the charges.

Critics say the evidence against them was flimsy. The prosecution's main witness withdrew his testimony, saying he had been tor-

tured by investigators into making incriminating statements. The court also dismissed Sentsov's allegations that he had been beaten by security forces, ruling instead that his bruises and scratches were the result of a supposed fondness for sadomasochistic sex. Amnesty International likened the court hearing to "Stalinist-era show trials," while a host of international film directors, including Ken Loach, Mike Leigh and Wim Wenders, signed an open letter to Putin calling for Sentsov's release. Human rights groups say almost 70 Ukrainians are being held in Russia or occupied Crimea on politically motivated charges. The Kremlin insists there are none.

On May 14, a month before the World Cup opening ceremony in Moscow, Sentsov launched an indefinite hunger strike, demanding "the release of all Ukrainian political prisoners held on Russian territory." Other activists are attempting to highlight their causes as well. In May, 14 human rights groups signed an open letter to FIFA, urging it to put pressure on Russia to secure the release of Oyub Titiev, the head of the Memorial human rights organization in Chechnya. Although no matches are taking place in the region, FIFA has approved its capital city, Grozny, as a training base for the Egyptian national team.

Chechen police detained the 60-year-old Titiev in January for allegedly possessing 6 ounces of cannabis. He could now face up to 10 years in prison. His supporters say the charges were trumped

"The WORLD CUP will also be an attempt to soften Putin's IRON MAN reputation."



up on the orders of officials loyal to Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen leader. Aпти Alaudinov, the Chechen deputy interior minister, has previously encouraged police officers to frame Kadyrov's "enemies" using similar tactics. "Plant something in their pocket," he said, in comments that were broadcast by Chechen television. Shortly before Titiev's arrest, masked men torched Memorial's office in Ingushetia, a southern Russian republic that neighbors Chechnya. A spokesperson for Kadyrov was unavailable for comment.

Founded in 1989 by Soviet dissidents, Memorial has gained international acclaim for exposing both Soviet-era repression and modern-day abuses. But the human rights group says the catalyst for the current clampdown was probably Kadyrov's loss of his Instagram account this past December. "The closure of his account is a matter of Kadyrov's image," says Oleg Orlov, a Memorial founder. "When he feels offended, nothing else is important to him—whoever gets in his way must be destroyed."

The U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned Kadyrov in December over alleged human rights abuses, including involvement in extrajudicial killings. Facebook, which owns Instagram, said the decision meant it was legally obliged to close down his social media accounts, which included threats against Kremlin critics; he had over 3 million followers just on Instagram. "We were held responsible for this by Kadyrov and his inner circle because we are one of the very few sources of information about rights abuses in Chechnya," Orlov says.

FIFA, which only adopted a human rights policy in 2017, says it is concerned about Titiev's arrest but has rejected appeals for it to move its training base from the Chechen capital.

Memorial members hope that international attention on Titiev's case will embarrass Putin into ordering Chechen authorities to release him. Analysts say the former KGB officer is the only person in Russia able to exert any influence on Kadyrov, who often waxes lyrical about his love for the Kremlin leader. "The World Cup is very important for the Kremlin," says Katya Sokirianskaia, who once ran the Memorial office in Chechnya. "If international organizations, especially FIFA, raise the case of Titiev at high levels, then we hope that Putin will intervene and set our colleague free."

Among the Thugs

WHILE SOME KREMLIN CRITICS HOPE TO USE THE WORLD CUP TO highlight their grievances, others want to ruin Putin's tournament altogether by calling for an international boycott of the event. Yet with this month's kickoff, not a single one of the countries due to take part has withdrawn its national team. Even London, which has accused Putin of ordering a hit on Sergei Skripal, a former Russian military intelligence officer who spied for MI6, has balked at missing out on world soccer's biggest competition. (The Kremlin denies the accusations.) Instead of an outright boycott, the British government has refused to send an official delegation to the World Cup. The British royal family is also snubbing the tournament.

When Kadyrov
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DESTROYED.



RED CARD?

Putin's critics are hoping to put a global spotlight on what they call widespread human rights abuses in Russia. From top: A man rescuing a child in Syria; opposition protesters inveigh against Putin; men carry an injured person on a stretcher after the 2017 attack on the St. Petersburg Metro.





FROM TOP: MUHAMMAD AL-NAJJAR/SOPA IMAGES/LIGHTROCKET/GETTY, OLGA MALITSEVA/AFP/GETTY; ALEXANDER TARASEN-

So far, only Iceland has joined England in refusing to send a government delegation to Moscow for the World Cup's opening ceremony. And Putin probably isn't concerned. "He is accustomed to bad relations with the West," says Kolesnikov, the Carnegie Moscow Center analyst. "He can get by without delegations. What's important is that the soccer players come."

What's also important is that fans—particularly Russian fans—behave in the stands. In recent years, far-right supporters have unfurled swastikas at stadiums, and in 2010, thousands of soccer hooligans and ultra-nationalists rioted near Red Square after the murder of a fan by a resident of Russia's mainly Muslim North Caucasus region. Russian soccer officials have taken some steps to tackle racism. In 2017, they appointed Alexei Smertin, a former national team captain, as their envoy against discrimination.

But problems remain. In March, Russian fans directed racist chants


at France's Ousmane Dembélé, N'Golo Kanté and Paul Pogba during a friendly match against Russia in St. Petersburg. FIFA fined the country \$30,000. "Incidents in recent months show how racism is still deeply part of the fan culture in Russia," says Pavel Klymenko, who helps monitor instances of fan discrimination for the Football Against Racism in Europe network.

Likewise, soccer hooligans have gained a terrifying reputation in Russia since going on a rampage during the Euro 2016 tournament in France. But most experts believe security forces will not allow a repeat of such violent scenes; the World Cup is far too important for Putin. Sources within the soccer hooligan scene say the police have been warning known troublemakers they could face long stretches in prison if they do anything to harm the country's international image. (The sources asked for anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.) "I think they'll prevent trouble at the World Cup," says Vladimir Kozlov, the author of *Football Fans: The Past and Present of Russian Hooliganism*. "If fans go to Moscow's outskirts looking for adventure, they could get their asses kicked, but that'll have nothing to do with soccer hooliganism."

Home Field Advantage

WITH ALL THE TALK AROUND THE TOURNAMENT OF JIHADIS AND geopolitics, it's sometimes easy to forget that this is a sporting event. Russians are excited that the world's top soccer stars will perform in their country, but there is almost zero chance their national team will win. Russia is one of the lowest-ranked squads taking part in the World Cup, and it has not progressed past the event's initial group stages since the collapse of the Soviet Union. "Who are you going to support when Russia gets knocked out?" is a popular joke among soccer fans in Moscow.

The Kremlin can't influence events on the field, but with a little help from FIFA, it is leaving nothing to chance elsewhere. Even the minor details are being taken care of. One example? That promotional video of Putin and Infantino, the FIFA president, kicking a ball around. While Infantino's soccer skills were impressive, some suggested that clever video editing had greatly exaggerated Putin's abilities. (FIFA did not respond to a request for comment about the video.)

"This is all about proving to the world that Russia can stage successfully an event of this magnitude," says Viktor Shenderovich, a well-known Russian writer and soccer fan. "The soccer is of secondary importance. For Putin, the propaganda comes first." 



HEALTH

Fast Times

Is fasting a long-ignored health savior for diabetics or a possible cause?




WEIGHT GAIN MAY BE DRIVEN BY NOT ONLY WHAT WE EAT but also our tendency to eat all day long. That's the thinking behind the weight-loss trend of intermittent fasting, which has grown in popularity in the past few years. An increasing number of health professionals are also prescribing fasting to people with type 2 diabetes, which currently afflicts more than 29 million people in the United States. Yet a recent study warns that going for long stretches without eating could cause the very damage it's supposed to prevent.

Type 2 diabetes is triggered in part by unhealthy eating, which renders the body resistant to insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas. Without insulin, sugar from food can't enter our cells, leaving the blood with an excess amount of sugar. At first, the pancreas compensates by making more insulin, but eventually the demand wears it out. Diabetics then become dependent on insulin injections to control their blood sugar.

Dr. Jason Fung is convinced that fasting undoes that cycle: Not eating, after all, reduces blood sugar. And, as he points out, it's something we naturally do already, when we sleep. "It's supposed to be part of everyday life," says Fung, a kidney specialist who co-founded the Toronto-based Intensive Dietary Management Program and wrote *The Obesity Code* and *The Complete Guide to Fasting*. Fasting can also send the body into ketosis, in which it burns fat rather than sugar. That helps with losing weight, which also aids in slowing diabetes.

Several recent studies support this thinking. Research published June 5 in the scientific journal *Cell Metabolism* found that eating only between 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.—instead of the more common 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.—helped people with early signs of diabetes respond better to their body's natural insulin. The schedule also reduced blood pressure and appetite, two factors that worsen diabetes.

But some researchers are calling for caution, including Ana Bonassa, from the University of São Paulo, in Brazil. She and her colleagues presented a study in which rats subjected to intermittent fasting showed an increase in fat tissue, with damage to insulin-releasing cells in the pancreas. Those effects, Bonassa says, "could lead to diabetes and serious health issues."

Fung disputes the result. As with all animal-based clinical research, it isn't necessarily applicable to men and women. Furthermore, humans have gone for long periods without eating for most of our history. "If fasting gives us diabetes," he says, "then cavemen should have had a lot of it." 

BY

JESSICA WAPNER

 @jessicawapner



**Intermittent fasting is something we naturally do already,
when we sleep, argues one doctor.
“It’s supposed to be part of everyday life.”**

FROM LEFT: DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE/ALAMY; TOOGA/GETTY



MEDICINE

The Path of a Pathogen

More than 200 million people are infected with malaria every year, and a new discovery has illuminated the evolution of *Plasmodium falciparum*—the deadliest of the parasites carrying the disease. Researchers in the U.K., France and Gabon teamed up to create an ancestral tree for the family of malaria parasites that includes *P. falciparum*, the only member that infects humans. By sequencing and analyzing the genomes of these single-celled organisms, the team pinpointed exactly when *P. falciparum* jumped beyond chimpanzees and gorillas. Reporting in *Nature Microbiology*, the researchers believe the parasite emerged 50,000 years ago, developing its human-specific form only 3,000 or 4,000 years ago. They also identified the single cluster of genes that enabled *P. falciparum* to make that leap—a critical discovery that could help end the scourge of malaria.



FITNESS

Gaming the (Circulatory) System

How much exercise will keep hearts young? That was the question posed by researchers at the Institute for Exercise and Environmental Medicine in Texas for a newly published study in *The Journal of Physiology*. The subjects—102 people over 60—were asked to be accurate and honest about their exercise history; their arteries, which move blood out of the heart, were also examined for stiffness. By matching up the amount of exercise with the flexibility of these life-sustaining vessels, the researchers found that exercising two or three times a week could preserve the midsize arteries, which bring blood to the head and neck. But the larger vessels, which go to the chest and abdomen, require four or five sessions. The researchers hope the findings will lead to programs specifically designed for heart health, with one important caveat: Exercise in the study was defined as 30 minutes or more per session.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Rice and Fall

Evidence is mounting that the world's food supply is at risk. The latest research concerns rice, a food providing at least half of the dietary energy and protein consumed by 600 million people worldwide. At sites in China and Japan, researchers grew 18 genetically distinct types of rice, each selected for its richness in protein, iron, zinc and several vitamins. Contained in a plot elevated 1 foot above the surrounding rice fields, the plants grew in their own mini ecosystem with escalated carbon dioxide levels, mimicking the environment that scientists predict we'll be living in later this century. According to the study, published in *Science Advances* on May 23, the futuristic ecosystem depleted the levels of vitamins and minerals in the plants. This change in the nutritional quality of rice "would likely exacerbate the overall burden of disease," the researchers write, "and could affect early childhood development."



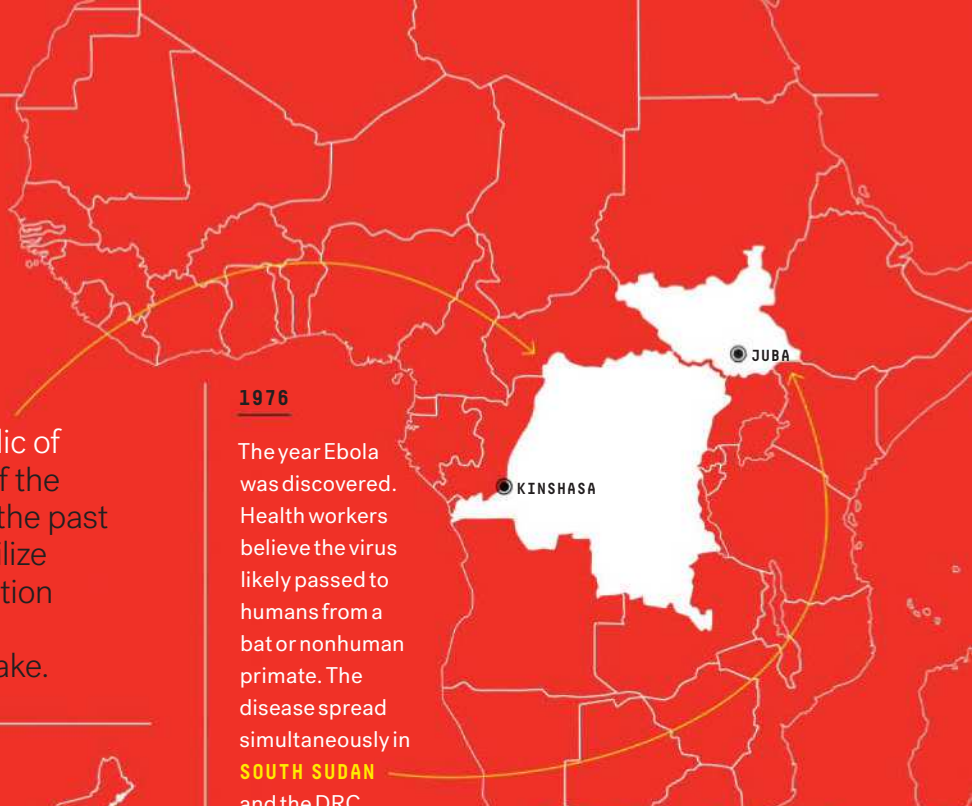
"We need three things to end malaria for good: **new tools that can stop parasite transmission and cure everyone who is infected;** better strategies to deploy these tools where they're needed; and the will to get the job done.... It's a choice between a world where close to half a million children die each year from a completely preventable disease or a future where no child has to suffer and die from malaria again." —BILL GATES



BY THE NUMBERS

Ebola

On May 8, the Democratic Republic of Congo declared a new outbreak of the Ebola virus, the country's ninth in the past 42 years. As health agencies mobilize to contain the spread, the devastation from prior outbreaks serves as a haunting reminder of what is at stake.

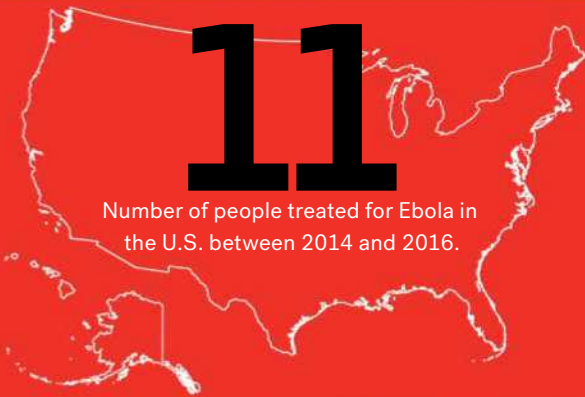


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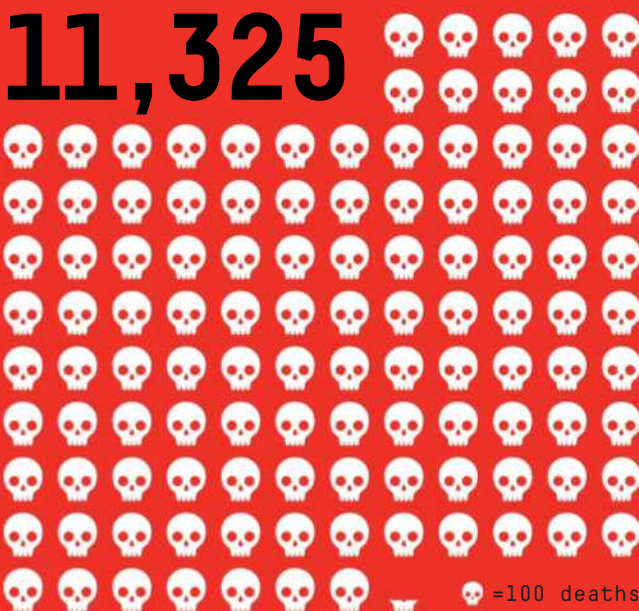
The year Ebola was discovered. Health workers believe the virus likely passed to humans from a bat or nonhuman primate. The disease spread simultaneously in **SOUTH SUDAN** and the DRC. Named after the Ebola River, near the village where the DRC outbreak occurred that year, the virus infected about 600 people, 430 of whom died from it.



Number of Ebola outbreaks in the DRC from 1976 until May of this year, when 39 people were infected, 19 of whom have died.



Estimated number of deaths from the 2014-2016 epidemic:



28,700

Estimated number of Ebola virus cases during the 2014-2016 epidemic.

507 → Number of health workers—out of 8,000—who died after becoming infected during that outbreak.



Average mortality rate tied to Ebola. Of every 100 people infected, 25 to 90 die from the disease, usually within a month.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: POP JOP/GETTY; UGURHAN/GETTY; JAKE OLIMB/GETTY; POP JOP/GETTY

SCULPTURE

Art as Ammo

Robert Longo's *Death Star* is a 40,000-bullet argument against gun violence



GUN SHY

Longo's 2-ton ball will debut on June 14 in the Unlimited exhibition at Art Basel in Switzerland.

LEFT: COURTESY OF THE ROBERT LONGO. METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK, AND GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC, LONDON. PARIS, SALZBURG TOP RIGHT: PHOTO: AF ARCHIVE/ALAMY; TV: IMAGE SOURCE/GETTY

FICTION PREDICTION

The 20th anniversary of *The Truman Show*. » P.40



▶ IN 1970, ROBERT LONGO WAS A SENIOR AT Plainview High School on New York's Long Island—a football star with long hair who smoked pot. “I wasn’t good in school, and I was worried about getting drafted and going to Vietnam,” he says. “I’d seen guys older than me come back totally scrambled.”

On May 4 of that year, the Ohio National Guard shot and killed four students during an anti-war demonstration at Kent State University. One of them, Jeffrey Miller, had graduated from Plainview a few years earlier. In John Filo’s now iconic Pulitzer Prize-winning photo, Miller is the 20-year-old man lying face down on the pavement as a young woman crouches over him—the two forever a symbol of the country’s social unrest.

Longo would go on to become one of America’s most important contemporary artists, a member of the groundbreaking Pictures Generation (1974 to 1984); along with Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince and Barbara Kruger (among others), Longo rejected minimalism and conceptualism, often using appropriated images inspired by newspapers, advertisements, film and television. But Filo’s photo of Miller, a catalyst for Longo’s social activism, “is one of those images I could never make art out of,” he says. “It still haunts me.”

The work that got him noticed, *Men in the City*, is a series of 35 photo-realist charcoal and graphite portraits (1977 to 1984), of businessmen and women in suspended animation, flailing and falling. Though not overtly political, each anonymous portrait is a potent skewering of ’80s excess and alienation. “I came up as an artist under Ronald Reagan—the pre-Trump Trump,” says Longo. “He was the guy who said ‘Make America Great’ first. I remember him talking about returning the country to traditional values, and I thought, What does he mean—owning slaves?”

In the years since, controversy and tragedy—war, immigration, police brutality and government corruption—has continued to preoccupy him. His latest work, *Death Star*, tackles one of the most contentious issues in America: gun violence. It’s far more complicated, the artist notes, than the crises of his youth. “In 1968, it was obvious that

the Vietnam War and racism were wrong,” he says. “Today, the magnitude of our problems is far more complex. Stricter gun laws, for example, will certainly help, but that’s not going to solve the problem entirely. It’s not clear exactly how to proceed.”

The piece, debuting at Art Basel in Switzerland on June 14, is a massive ball composed of 40,000 bullets, a number that approximates the overwhelming number of U.S. citizens killed by guns in a year (not including suicides). The work is an update, of sorts, of a project—also called *Death Star*—that he completed in 1993—a piece composed of 18,000 .38-caliber bullets. The look of it was inspired by, “dare I say it, *Star Wars* and a disco ball,” says Longo, though there was nothing whimsical about the incident that sparked the idea.

In 1993, his son, 14 at the time, came home to say that one of the kids at the local basketball court in

New York City had pulled a gun. “My kid was really excited about it,” says the artist, who has raised three sons with his wife, the German actress Barbara Sukowa. The “excitement” was a reaction to a change in the power dynamic.

“You didn’t have to be the strongest or the

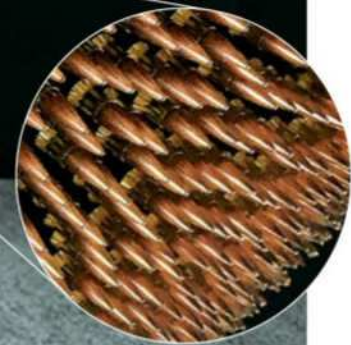
toughest kid anymore, you just needed to have a gun. It made me realize that I should pay more attention to guns,” says Longo, who began to do research with the FBI, which led to the first *Death Star*.

The gun problem, you may have noticed, has exploded since then. “All my rage and helplessness has really amplified my work in the last three or four years,” Longo says. “All these mass shootings!” It is not his choice, he adds, to make political art: “Making art in itself is a political act—the freedom of expression. I don’t want to instruct or preach,” he adds, “I want to present something that has a visual impact, that lets the viewer make a decision.”

The biggest difference between the new *Death Star* and the original (now at the Burchfield Penney Art Center in Buffalo, New York) is the types of bullets used, a reflection of the nation’s shift in preference, from handguns to AK-47s and Bushmasters. “What really killed me,” the artist says, “is how much gunpowder these bullets contain—over twice as much as a .38-caliber. It’s overwhelming.”

BY

MARY KAY
SCHILLING



Not that there's any gunpowder in the bullets. In 1993, Longo could purchase blanks in the mail, but that's now illegal in New York state. "So I had to buy the casings and tips separately, as well as a loader to put them together," he says. Yet after ordering tens of thousands of casings, "no one knocked on my door. Nothing. Sure, they don't have gunpowder in them, but it's not like that's hard to make!" The only question came after he had ordered an extra 4,000 bullets and the woman on the phone asked if he'd like to round off the amount of the purchase with a donation to the National Rifle Association. Longo laughs. "Are you fucking crazy?"

To compose the random sequencing of bullets—each attached by hand—the artist worked with a NASA engineer at Neoset Designs in Brooklyn, New York. Longo didn't want any recognizable patterns—because gun violence doesn't have one. The 2-ton result, which took over a year to complete, will be presented by Metro Pictures and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac at Unlimited, a curated platform for projects that transcend the classical art fair booths. (More of Longo's work will be in the Metro Pictures booth.)

The ball will be hung at eye level, from a chain secured to I-beams. "I'm a big fan of the musician Nick Cave," he says, "and there's a line in one of his songs, 'Jubilee Street,' about a 10-ton catastrophe on a 60-pound chain. It reminds me of this piece."

Death Star will sit in darkness, with a high-intensity spotlight attached to the I-beam. As you walk toward it, the horizon of the edge starts to glow. "It's very trippy," Longo says, "because when you first see it you're not quite sure what it is. Once you get right up to it and you realize it's made of bullets, it becomes rather shocking. The amount of bullets is pretty insane."

It does seem, I suggest, that *Death Star* is intended as an anti-gun statement. Longo sighs deeply, then answers with an anecdote. "I was in college, taking acid and walking down the street with a friend," he says. "And I saw Jimi Hendrix's head in the tree ahead of me. I said to my friend, 'Do you see Jimi's head in the tree?' Of course he didn't see it, but later on I realized it was kind of like what making art is: You're trying to get people to see what you see."

A month or so before we spoke, on April 22, a white man, armed with a semi-automatic rifle, had killed four people at a Waffle House in Nashville, Tennessee. The incident reinforced the deep divisions and sad ironies that come with living in a highly racially diverse democracy: The man who saved the survivors, James Shaw Jr., was a young black man. "In

"The irony is that every time there's a mass shooting, the sales of guns go up because people are afraid of regulation."



a country where cops are afraid of black men with guns—and under different circumstances, might have arrested this guy—he was the one who grabbed a hot barrel with his hand and threw it away," says Longo.

Maybe, he suggests, the country is hardwired for violence. "America is *insanely* competitive," he says. "I'm *insanely* competitive." He points to his passion for football, a game that encourages and rewards brutality—something he was indoctrinated in at an early age. "I know football's bad and I wouldn't let my kids play it," he says, "but I still love it."

The 2006 book *Dangerous Nation*, by the neoconservative Robert Kagan, got Longo thinking about America as a sports team. "It's a frightening concept, because what's the goal of a sports team? To win," he says. "To slaughter the opposing team, to humiliate them. So when 9/11 happened, there was no attempt to understand why it happened. They scored a goal, now we have to go and kill 100,000 of them."

That mentality—winning at all costs—whether you agree with it or not, is supported by millions of Americans. Longo believes that gun ownership is "ridiculous, and the NRA is horrendous. But there are people living in the woods who have to contend with grizzly bears. I have a friend in Montana who has tons of guns; I don't think he's going to kill anybody."

On top of that, he adds, is the undeniable economic incentive of manufacturers. "All the things I've bought lately are made in Pakistan or China," he says. "But most of the guns sold in the United States are made here. It's a huge industry. And the irony is that every time there's a mass shooting, the sales of guns go up because people are afraid of gun regulation."

It's odd to think that 40,000 bullets



FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF MARTIN KUNZE, METRO PICTURES; COURTESY OF ROBERT LONGO, METRO PICTURES

might be intended as a form of gentle persuasion, but for Longo it sort of is, particularly with both sides of the U.S. gun debate seemingly incapable of compromise or conversation. “The excessive sense of individuality that Americans have, which is exacerbated by the media, reinforces biases so that nobody trusts each other anymore,” says Longo. The resulting and extreme tribalism, he notes, adds up to many different kinds of Americans. What art can do is “give you the chance to possibly fuck with biases, to say, Why don’t you look at it this way or think about it a little differently?”

But isn’t it likely that those attending Art Basel—arguably the world’s most important art fair, attended by the richest collectors and dealers—will think much as he does? The European Union is definitely on Longo’s side; its government has

established stringent new gun controls. “You *are* preaching to the choir,” he says, “but the thing about the choir is that they have to do something.” For example, 20 percent of the sales of *Death Star* will go to Everytown for Gun Safety, a nonprofit organization founded and largely financed by former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2014, as a way to match the National Rifle Association in political influence. “I’m not running out to protest or march,” Longo says, “but there is a way that I can do something, and money is power.”

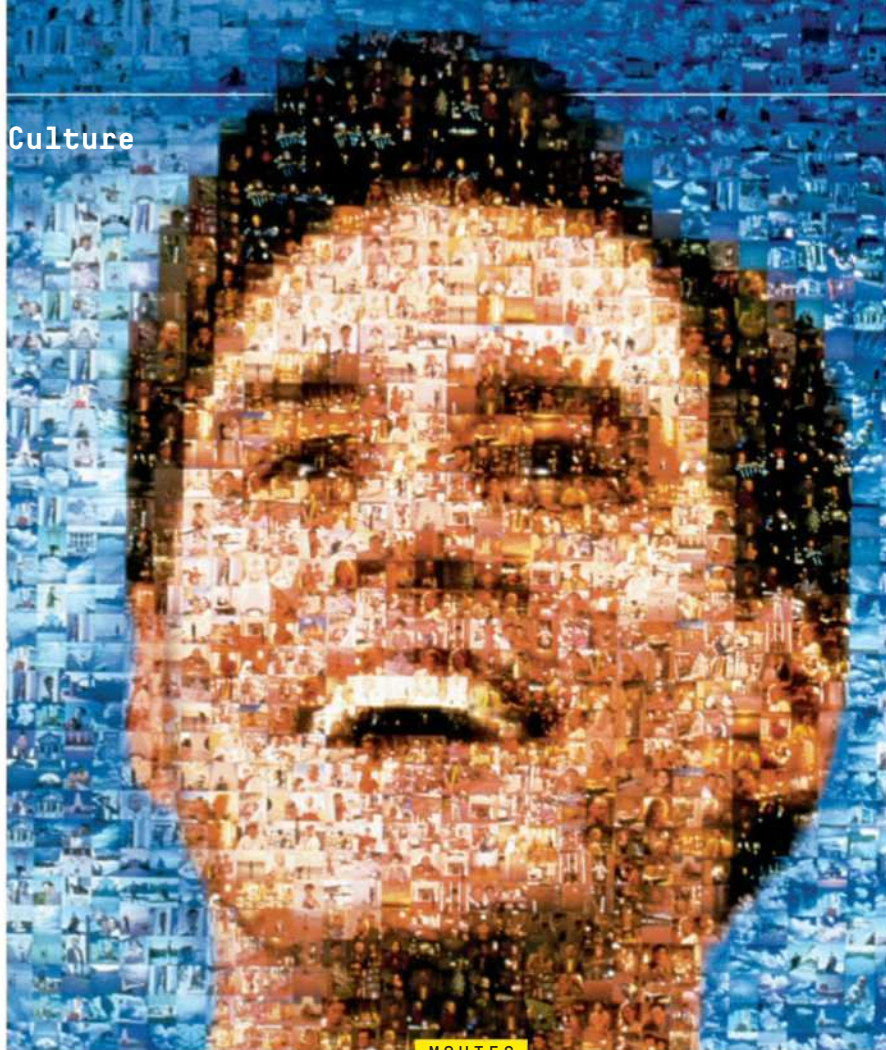
Making beauty out of disaster can seem a contradictory pursuit, but Longo is following in a long tradition. He considers Théodore Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa* to be “one of the greatest pieces of political art ever made. So is Picasso’s *Guernica*,” he adds. “And I watched something

A WORLD ADRIFT Longo’s monumental charcoal triptych, *Untitled (Raft at Sea)*—from his 2017 show “The Destroyer Cycle”—is based, in part, on a photograph of migrants in the Mediterranean. A percentage of the sale went to refugee organizations.

recently that was some of the best art I’ve seen—a music video by Childish Gambino [the alias of Donald Glover] called “This Is America.”

He talks about a moment in the video, when Gambino, after shooting a fellow black man, hands off the gun to someone who wraps it, almost tenderly, in a soft red cloth before spiriting it away. Meanwhile, the body is roughly dragged off screen, suggesting that the instrument that ends a life is more valuable than the life it ends.

“It’s fucking brilliant and moving,” Longo says. “Kanye West must be dying when he sees it.” **N**



MOVIES

You Lookin' at Me?

Director Peter Weir reflects on the 20th anniversary of *The Truman Show*, a film so disturbingly ahead of its time it has spawned its own delusion

PPETER WEIR KEEPS HIS WEBCAM covered with tape. He doesn't want anybody watching him.

Can you blame him? Weir, after all, directed *The Truman Show*, an incisive satire-drama from 1998 that seems startlingly prescient today. Back then, the movie drew acclaim for its imaginative storyline and barbed commentary. Two decades later, it resembles a veiled warning, both as an astute predictor of reality television's enormous rise and as a cultural forerunner to the age of digital surveillance.

The film stars Jim Carrey as the

happy-go-lucky insurance salesman Truman Burbank, a man whose every moment, unbeknownst to him, has been broadcast on TV, turning his life into a 24-hour reality show. Millions have watched him grow up, go to school, fall in love, get married, eat, sleep, brush his teeth. Things get interesting when he begins to suspect he is the involuntary star of America's favorite series.

Twenty years ago, Truman's life of constant surveillance seemed like a flight of

BY

ZACH SCHONFELD

[@zzzzaaaacccchhh](https://twitter.com/zzzzaaaacccchhh)

REALITY BITES Carrey played the titular and involuntary star of the most popular TV show in America.

paranoia. After reading the original screenplay by Andrew Niccol, Weir thought "it was just wonderful speculative fiction. My main concern was credibility; there wasn't enough precedent." Friends told him the plot stretched the limits of believability: "No one would watch it," they said. "Who wants to watch reality?"

Answer: a lot of people. Reality TV wasn't entirely new in 1998. The first such show, *Candid Camera*, came on in 1948, and MTV's *Real World* began in 1992. But it wasn't until the American *Survivor* debuted in 2000 that the genre became an obsession (the season finale drew more than 50 million viewers). For the next decade, reality TV would dominate prime-time television, giving one star, Donald Trump, a springboard to the White House.

Weir's film, which was a critical and financial success, contains a fascinating duality between utopian and dystopian elements. On the one hand, Truman's home of Seahaven Island—actually a set constructed within a massive dome—is an idyllic, postcard-perfect place to live. (Ed Harris's Christof, the show's God-like creator, eventually tells Truman: "In my world, you have nothing to fear.") But this paradise is also outfitted with 5,000 hidden cameras and funded by product placement. We learn, as the plot unfolds, that Truman is the first human being to have been "legally adopted by a corporation." As Sylvia (Natascha McElhone), a protester of the show, observes, "He's not a performer; he's a prisoner."

Niccol's original draft—which predated *Real World* by a year—dialed up the nightmarish elements. "The Truman character was sadder and kind of strange," recalls

Weir. The Australian director (whose previous hits included *Dead Poets Society*) signed on to direct a year after producer Scott Rudin purchased the script in 1993, on the condition that he could rework the script with Niccol. They eventually settled on a sunny, resort-like setting, where the unsuspecting star would be “a kind of back-slapping friend to everyone.”

Weir wanted Carrey, with his rubber-faced comedic zeal, and he was willing to wait a year for the actor, who was then busy with *The Cable Guy* and *Liar Liar*. “I thought of Tom Hanks, but he had already done *Forrest Gump*, and it was too close,” he says. Ultimately, “there was no one else I thought could pull it off. And there was no question that this had to hit the target dead center.” Otherwise, the film “would collapse.”

Carrey had recently become a huge star, and he identified with Truman’s sense of being constantly watched. “I can draw off the feelings I have—I’m a prisoner,” Carrey reportedly told Weir. It would become the actor’s first foray into drama, setting him up for *Man on the Moon* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

The actor and director initially clashed. “After a take, Jim would come out and say, ‘Let me have a look at that,’” Weir recalls. “I was stunned. I said, ‘You don’t need to look. I’ll tell you if it’s working or not—that’s directing.’ He said, ‘No, no, I need to evaluate my performance.’” Weir began allowing Carrey to view the takes he printed, then realized it was interfering with the character’s unwitting innocence: “I said, ‘Jim, it’s harming your performance. Truman doesn’t know he’s on television. So you shouldn’t be looking at yourself.’ He trusted me.”

Truman, a glorified lab rat, is manipulated by producers who stage dramatic plot twists, like the feigned

death of his father. Family and friends and co-workers, he comes to discover, are all actors taking direction. “Was nothing real?” he asks Christof during the film’s emotional climax. “You were real,” Christof says. “That’s what made you so good to watch.” Christof grasped the business model that would drive the success of YouTube and social media: base voyeurism.

The Truman Show’s emphasis on product placement (his friends and family incessantly shill brand-name items) seems particularly relevant in 2018. Instagram celebs make substantial cash from sponsored content, and the intrusion of corporate brands into our private lives has become a commonplace phenomenon. Even those of us who aren’t making money off social media willingly hand over the digital detritus of our private lives to technology companies as powerful as the one that adopted Truman.

“There’s nothing more chilling,” Weir says, “than the little thing that happens quite regularly: You’re on the internet and something [appears that] you looked at the day before. You’re thinking of a holiday somewhere in Eastern Europe, say, and up comes information about towns in Eastern Europe.”

The most curious legacy of the film has been observed not by critics but by psychiatrists. While working at Bellevue Hospital Center in New York, Dr. Joel Gold noticed the phenomenon of delusional individuals believing their lives are being staged for others’ entertainment. Later, he and his brother, Ian Gold, a neurophilosopher, dubbed

this form of psychosis the *Truman Show* delusion, describing its characteristics in a 2012 paper and a 2014 book, *Suspicious Minds: How Culture Shapes Madness*.

The sense that one’s own reality is simulated or staged certainly predates the film. Weir says that during the casting process in 1996, “I came across at least three people who said when they were young, they had a feeling their life was a show.” But the more extreme version of paranoia is a common symptom of psychosis, and Gold found that *The Truman Show* resonated particularly with some of those patients. Several of his early patients said, “That’s my life.”

“I don’t think the movie created the condition,” says Niccol in an email. “It probably just feeds into a paranoia that’s already there.”

By the time *The Truman Show* turned 15, in 2013, the rise of both social media and government surveillance had made its central anxiety seem reasonable. “Putting this illness aside, the notion that we’re all watching one another has come to fruition,” says Gold, who is still contacted every month (if not week) by new patients describing the delusion.

According to one oft-repeated story, Weir wanted to play with such anxieties via a video camera installed in every theater that would allow the projectionist to switch from the movie to a shot of the viewers. Was this really under consideration? “It was probably a joke,” Weir says now. “I think what’s been lost is the ‘Hahaha’ that followed that thought. That would show that I was turning into Christof.”

Both he and Niccol marvel over their creation’s cultural endurance. “I guess I’m most surprised,” says Niccol, “that while Truman was running from cameras, most of society is running towards them.” ■

“I can draw off feelings that I have,” said the newly famous Carrey.
“I’m a prisoner.”

TELEVISION

Killer Instincts

Bill Hader delivered the most revelatory TV performance of the year, playing a hit man in HBO's *Barry*. Now he's ready to be terrorized by a clown

➔ MY 84-YEAR-OLD MOTHER HAS A crush on Bill Hader. This is surprising; she's more of a Tom Hardy girl. But when she watched HBO's *Barry*, the half-hour show Hader co-created with Alec Berg, she became a little obsessed. She hadn't watched the comedian during his eight seasons on *Saturday Night Live* or seen the films *Trainwreck* or *Superbad*. She did not, in other words, decide to watch *Barry* because of Hader; she watched because it was about a contract killer. (She's also a crime and murder girl.)

At the end of the pilot, as Hader and Berg broke down the episode for viewers, my mother finally heard the high-pitched voice and giggle familiar to his fans. She burst into laughter, delighted by the disparity between the buff (for Hader), deep-voiced former Marine he plays and the outright nerd he is in real life. "How does he do that?" she asked. "You mean sound like Kermit the frog?" asks Hader when I bring up her response. "I'm attractive to people of that age," he adds. "Tell your mother I'm single again."

No other TV performance this year has produced a double take like Hader's in *Barry*. He's done drama before, in the critically praised 2014 film *The Skeleton Twins*, co-starring Kristen Wiig. And even his most frivolous *SNL* characters had an edgy tension, between the native Oklahoman's extreme, unassuming likability and a watchful anxiety (blame the smirk, the furtive eyes, the

gymnastic brows with their eternally skeptical arch). But *Barry* is something different—as funny as a truly dark show can be. Credited with expanding the possibilities of the half-hour comedy, the show manages, as one critic put it, "to encompass the nausea of thrillers and the mortal tension of thoughtful suspense."

Hader plays Barry Berwick, a veteran of Afghanistan with post-traumatic stress disorder. His condition is exploited by a family friend, Fuches (Stephen Root), who employs the former Marine to murder small-time crooks. When a hit takes Barry to L.A., he stumbles into an acting class filled with sweetly desperate wannabes.

"Once we got into this idea of a hit man taking an acting class, we noticed some weird parallels, of working in the shadows but wanting to live in the spotlight," says Hader. "You have to be emotionally available as an actor, and as a killer you have to be completely closed off emotionally." At the same time, he adds, Barry couldn't be "a glassy-eyed cypher. You see something roiling beneath the surface."

From the start, Hader and Berg were intent on sidestepping glib: Killing, says Hader, is not funny. "What Barry does is really fucked up. He's a sad person." The two creators were more interested in the challenge of capturing two opposite tones and playing both as real. A big influence for Barry was William

Munny, played by Clint Eastwood in his 1992 Western, *Unforgiven*. "The idea of violence and how it destroys you and eats up your soul," says Hader. "The first conversation I had with Alec was, What if Munny's therapy for learning how to be a human being was joining the acting group in *Waiting for Guffman*?"

Too bad death follows Barry wherever he goes. In Season 1, that comes via a motley crew of Chechen mobsters. The show's superb ensemble (particularly Henry Winkler, Sarah Goldberg and Paula Newsome) includes the scene-stealing Anthony Carrigan as Noho Hank, an inexplicably sunny, juice box-loving sidekick to the Chechen boss. Hank is modeled on the sort of unflappably helpful guy who works at a genius bar in an Apple store. "It's why he always wears a polo shirt," says Hader. Carrigan got the part because of "the look on his face when he was listening during the audition. He was so earnest—it made us laugh really hard."

Hader and Berg are currently writing Season 2, which they promise will be even darker—a prospect that seems impossible given the Season 1 finale, which set up the possibility that, as well intentioned and normal as Barry would like to believe he is, he might simply be a psychopath.

Hader says he isn't in any hurry to spell out his character's past, which is something of a mystery. "I always get restless in TV shows or books where you take a pause in the narrative to find out about somebody, and it's usually explaining why is this person the way they are," he says. "I look at it from the viewpoint of meeting somebody. People don't immediately provide total context—you know, 'Here's my wound.'" Hader giggles. "You learn that after a couple of years, if ever. That's what makes people interesting."

Emmy award nominations will

BY

MARY KAY
SCHILLING

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JOHN P. JOHNSON/HBO; DANA EDELSON/NBCU PHOTO BANK/GETTY; COREY NICKOLS/CONTOUR FOR PIZZA HUT/GETTY



CRIMINAL MINDS Clockwise from top: Barry's Hader, Root, Glenn Fleshler and Carrigan; an SNL sketch with Fred Armisen and Elton John; and Hader, whom a trainer helped bulk up for Barry. "I play a Marine," he says, "but I'm most definitely not a Marine."




“What if *Unforgiven*’s William Munny learned how to be a human being by joining the acting group in *Waiting for Guffman*?”

likely rain down on *Barry*. Hader, who should be a lock for an acting nod (he got three for *SNL*), will almost certainly get one for writing as well. (He won in that category for *South Park* after consulting for one season.)

When the Emmy nominations are announced on July 12, the actor will be on the set of the sequel to the 2017 blockbuster *It*, an adaptation of Stephen King’s 1986 horror classic in which the eponymous clown terrorizes seven children. They’re grown up in the sequel, and Finn Wolfhard (*Stranger Things*) suggested to director Andy Muschietti that Hader play his character, Richie Tozier. “Andy calls me and says, ‘Finn would love it if you would play Richie,’” says Hader. “I said, ‘I don’t know, Finn, but I would hate to bum him out.’”

The longtime King fan couldn’t be happier about the role. “When I was a kid, my grandfather took me to a bookstore to buy *Red Badge of Courage* for school,” says Hader. “After I found it, he said, ‘Why don’t you get a book for yourself?’ I started walking towards the young adult section, and he said, ‘No, look for something in adult fiction.’” He chose *Salem’s Lot*, which he devoured in a week. “I still have the copy, with little mustard stains on it,” he says. *The Shining* was next, then *It*, which, at 1,138 pages, “took a whole summer.”

It was King’s novels that inspired the adolescent Hader “to pull my parents’ old Selectric out of the closet and start writing horror stories. It was like other kids hearing the Beatles for the first time and picking up a guitar.”

He’s become email friends with Owen King, one of the author’s two sons, both of whom are “phenomenal writers,” says Hader. “I told Owen I was doing *It*. He wrote back, ‘Watch out for the clown.’” 

PARTING SHOT

John Waters

▶ THE TRANSGRESSIVE 1974 FILM *FEMALE TROUBLE* IS OFFICIALLY A CLASSIC. In certain circles, it always was, but a new 4K digital restoration from Criterion classics, with bonus footage, puts a garish cherry on top. John Waters was 25 when he wrote, produced and shot the film, for \$25,000, on the streets of his beloved Baltimore. It was the second in his Trash Trilogy (between 1972's *Pink Flamingos* and 1977's *Desperate Living*) and starred the Dreamlanders, his regular troupe of eccentrics, led by Waters's childhood friend and muse, Harris Glenn Milstead, aka Divine (who died too soon, in 1988). *Trouble* begins with Divine's Dawn Davenport shoving her mother into a Christmas tree when she doesn't get black cha-cha heels. All manner of crime and hilarious grotesquerie ensues, ending with Dawn executed in the electric chair. Waters, who would go on to direct nine more films, including *Hairspray* (1988), spoke to *Newsweek* about how time has treated his demented baby. "It's funny. *Female Trouble* wasn't a hit when it came out," he says. "It was thought of as *Pink Flamingos*'s poor stepsister."

When you watch *Female Trouble* now, what is your impression?

Kind of what my father used to say: "What were you thinking?" [Laughs.]

The film is a treasure trove of quotable lines. Do you have a favorite?

When Dawn says to her daughter Taffy, "A team of doctors examined you, and I don't like it any better than you do, but you are most definitely retarded." It's the most politically incorrect line in the whole movie, and it still makes me laugh, I'm embarrassed to admit. But then I am politically incorrect, and Dawn was intended as a parody of a bad mother. *Naturally* she would use the r-word.

Doesn't she also beat Taffy with a car aerial?

Yes. The reason I put that in was because my sister was a social worker, and she told me that child abusers used them because they don't leave marks.

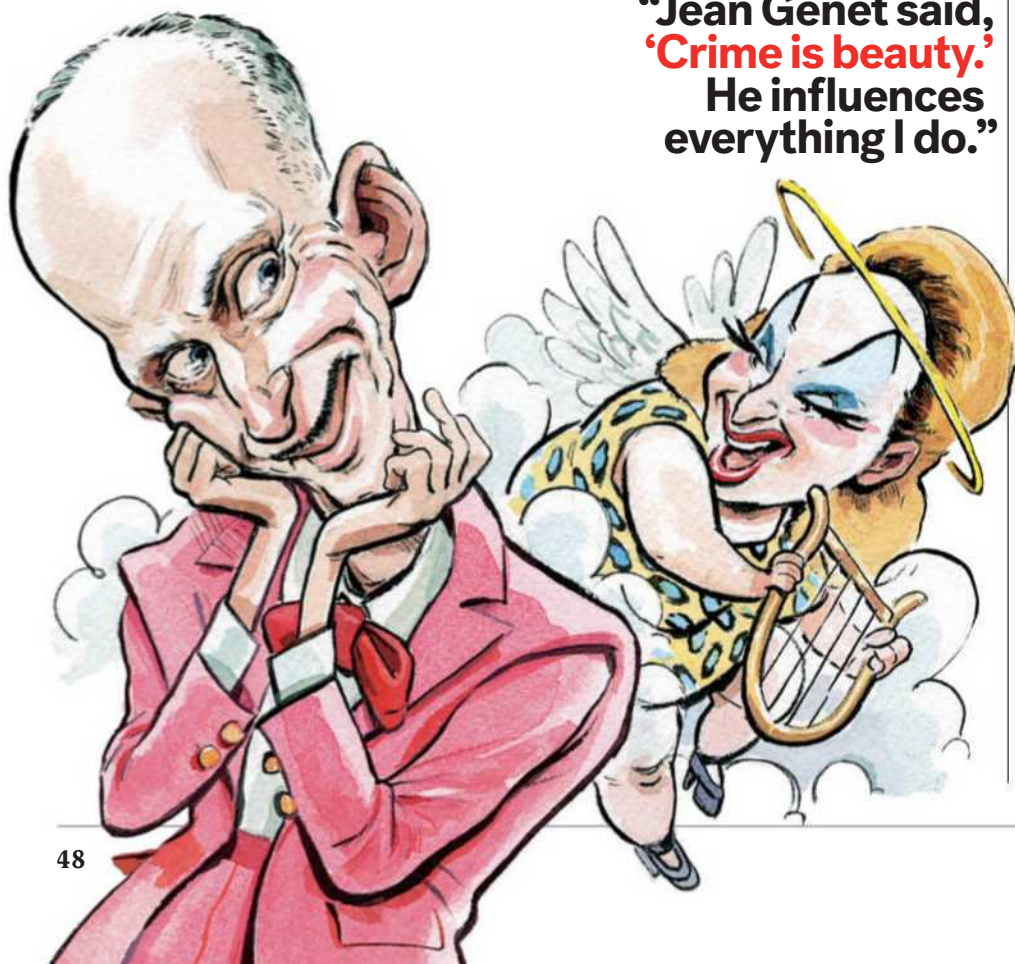
Did your hero, the French author Jean Genet, influence Dawn?

Of course he did. He said, "Crime is beauty." He influences everything I do. When I got dressed this morning, I was influenced by him.

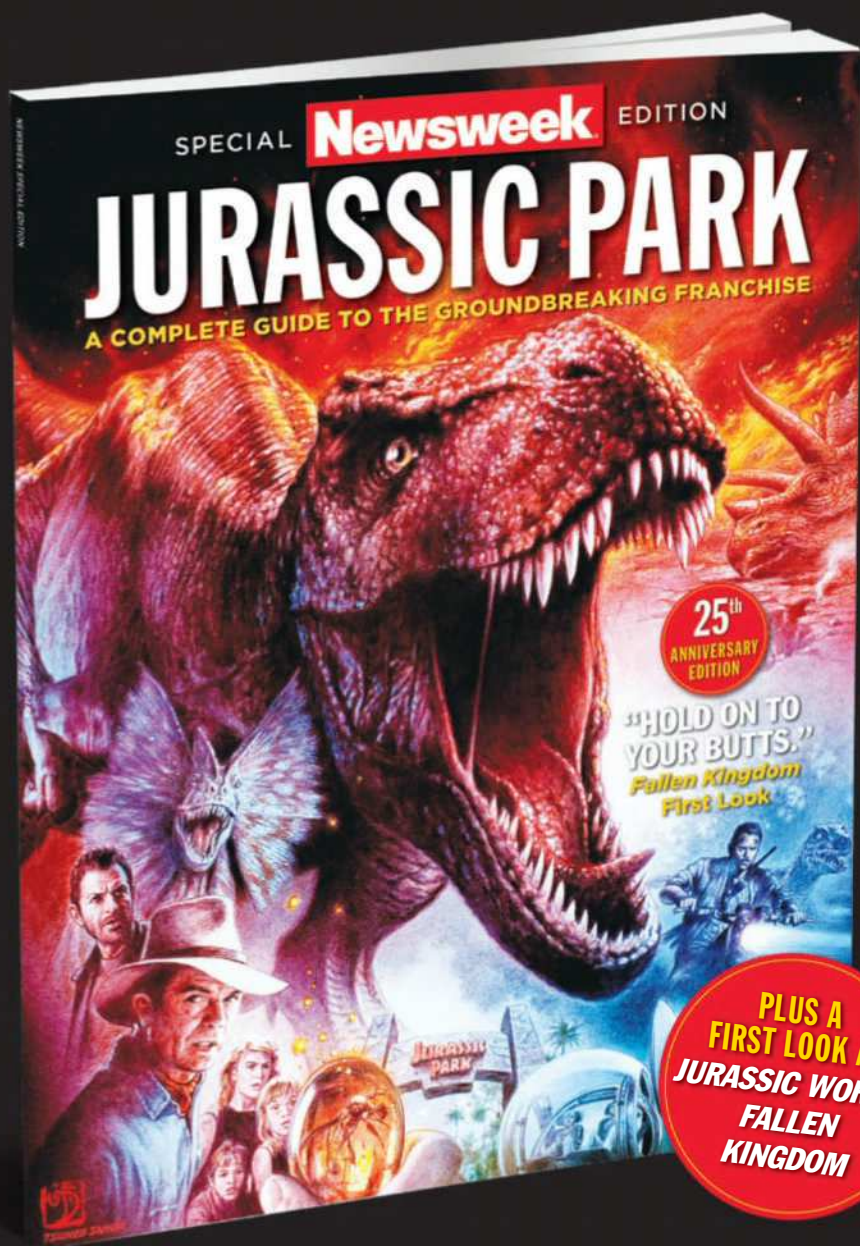
Someone wrote that Dawn foreshadowed the life of Anna Nicole Smith. Would you agree?

Not really. I have nothing against Smith, but I think Dawn was more intellectual. —MKS

**"Jean Genet said,
'Crime is beauty.'
He influences
everything I do."**



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