

Oct. 19/20

Hey Mom,

How are things? I hope Dad is doing better, tell him I told you, to tell him, that if he doesn't listen to Dr. Bertrand's advice, I will fly home and give him a stern talking to. He always listens to me right? Anyway, things are good here. As you know, since I got fired from The Outlook for writing that scandalous exposé about the Mayor, its been a little tough, but I feel something big coming on, call it journalistic instinct. Tanya and I are taking a little hiatus, I know you always liked her so just thought I'd let you know where things were at. I wouldn't be expecting that Grandkid just yet!

Funny how loss of employment can change things. I still have some money saved up so no worries there but, I am getting antsy to write again. Been keeping my ear to the ground but nothing yet, hopefully soon, like I said, I feel something big on the horizon. Well, not much more to report for now, stay tuned and I will write again sometime in the next couple weeks. Give the Old Man a big hug for me and my best to you, I miss you guys.

Love, as always,
Barren

October 24th/20

To Whom It May Concern:

I am formerly requesting the services of a novelist, journalist, or otherwise professional scribe. The duty to be performed is as follows: Transcribe the details of my dreams and vision quests. A warning thus: There will be constant use of hallucinogenics on my part, translator must not partake, strictly notate my words and actions.

If interested, do not reply but come at once. This position is to be filled on a first come first save basis. Payment of One Thousand and Fifty Two Dollars per week will be allocated. Lodging and adequate food also provided. Length of service indefinite.

Thank you for your consideration,

Signed,
The Clairvoyant
1643 Freecantor Avenue
Madison, WI

Oct. 31/20

Hi Mom,

Great news! I was rumbling around online looking for a gig and came across something pretty obscure but sounded interesting nonetheless. Some nut job out in Wisconsin was looking for a writer to cover his drug induced rants. He offered to pay well enough and also kicked in room and board. I flew out to Madison the next morning and landed the job! I figure the whole stint can't last more than a couple months. I have been here for a week and so far nothing to note of great interest. He wakes up at odd times, if he ever really sleeps, haven't figured that one out yet. Spits and spews a few random "visions", mostly about spirit animals and dimensional gateways, then falls back into hippieville. Dad would love him, he dresses like a bohemian and once in a while clangs out a cacophony on his tambourine, then stands in a corner of the house staring up at the ceiling. It's damn funny! Tonight should be a real zinger, it's Halloween, and all the kids are buzzing on their way back from school, some of them already wearing masks and costumes. I wouldn't trust any candy coming from this house though, it could accidentally be laced with a bit of acid! Anyway Mom, gotta run, I think I hear Claire, he hasn't told me his real name so I had to call him something. In turn, he strictly refers to me as "The Scribe", has a regal touch to it don't you think? Oddly, it sounds like an Apache War Cry or something coming from the kitchen, God knows what he's "visioned" now. Give Dad a big hug for me and I will talk to you guys soon.

Love, as always,
Barren

THE RESPONSE

(Via Radio Transmission)

"My dear citizens, this is your Exalted Leader! The Grand Supreme Ruler of North Korea! We have learned that the foul and pestilent cowards of the godless United States have waged war against our perfect country!

But do not fear! We have retaliated and the gluttonous fiends from the West will soon perish! Our defences are impregnable! You are all safe from their provocations!

We will easily deliver a death blow to their oncoming missiles! Our technology is vastly superior! They will not breach our beautiful country! This is the moment we have been waiting for! Our justice will be swift and merciless! Hail your All Powerful Leader! Soon we will celebrate victory!"

Dear Journal

Claire and I are now back in what is left of North America. We have stopped counting the years and even the days but, assuredly it has been at least a decade. I often think back to the day I wrote my last letter to my parents telling them of Claire's rant from the kitchen. He had envisioned a world on fire, melted metal, and clouds of smoke. I did as I was hired to do and simply entered it in into my transcripts. At one time I thought him purely mad, but now I know, his connection to the outer plains of most peoples consciousness is real. It has saved us from certain death many times over.

I was shocked when he had a plan for evacuation from the nuclear fallout. Having once been a helicopter pilot for the United States Air Force, through many years of saving his earnings, he was able to purchase an airborne ready vehicle to be used in just a state of emergency. He had plotted out places to refuel and even take on supplies. At one point they were four of us, Claire, two of his retired friends from the service, and myself. We had weapons and ammunition, but when they ran out, and scavenging became more difficult, the weapons became nothing more than a hinderance.

It was only a year and a half in when the other two members of our travelling party fell ill and died. It has been Claire and I ever since, two desperate men against a world of desperate people. When we eventually landed in the South Pacific, there were already thousands of men, women, and children trying to make sense of how to survive. The herd was quickly culled though and Claire and I made it only by the graces of a local tribe who had quickly recognized Claire's unique ability.

We spent the better part of five years there, learning to live off the land and source clean river water. The time

came though when we were eventually run out by a horde too large to overcome. Claire and I ventured to the far eastern side of the coastline and spent weeks constructing a makeshift raft in which to make our escape. The water was filled with debris and because of the contamination, no sea life was edible. Near starvation, we found land and seemed to be the only inhabitants. We called it a miracle and thought nothing more of it. Until, one night into our stay, we realized why it was so desolate.

In a mode one can only call "collective survival", we witnessed a strange phenomenon. The animals, predatory by nature or not, were starting to hunt in packs. First, the flies and mosquitos would circle together in droves. Next, the snakes and ants would swarm around us, hissing and crawling but keeping a certain distance. Then the spiders and rats, dared to inch closer, until the real beasts made their presence known. It was by sheer will that we were able to return to our makeshift raft and set out to sea once again. What was to come next astounded us both.

While adrift, we passed a handful of fellow survivors, some from Europe, some from India, even some Americans, no matter where they were from though, we all now called home. In different languages and variations of the story, they told us of a number of different tribes who had splintered off into factions. Some, it seemed out of likemindedness, others purely to make due. Oddly, each of them had relocated back to The Americas, running the swathe of land up from Argentina to The Pacific Northwest, some even as far up as Canada.

Locating these tribes became our soul pursuit, and I dare say, even gave us something to live for. And so it has been. Migrating North, using what little common sense we had left, and a strange dream map that would unknowingly come to Claire in his deep states of unconsciousness. We are now back on what should be familiar ground. Although, as I look around, it makes my heart sink even more than having been in any other place.

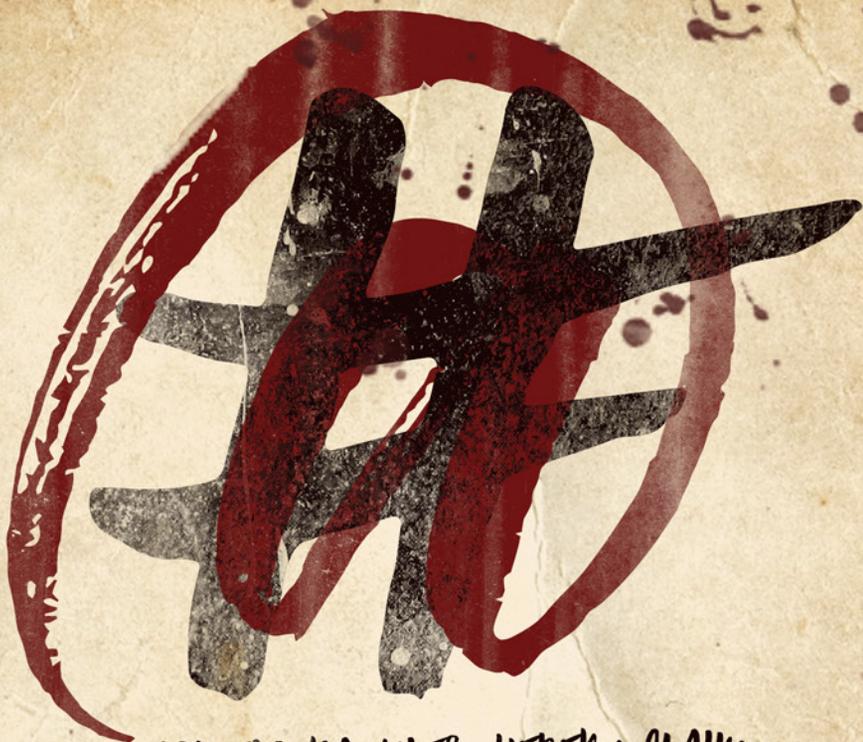
As the hands of Winter start to melt, the dire state of the world around us is becoming more apparent. Claire and I have spent the last few months in the refuge of an old movie theater, safe from the elements and relatively free of any predators, either human or animal. Three days ago we began our trek once again, to find the Northernmost tribe and make contact. Our hope is to find a new home to spend our remaining days, which, under the current circumstances, are surely numbered.

Although his visions are becoming more accurate in terms of coordinates, Claire is slowly becoming weaker in physicality. I have started to notice the gleam in his eyes dimming with each passing day. Perhaps it is the noticeable decline in hope of finding the Northern Tribe.

Today we stopped at a creek. Its noticeable lack of a sulphuric scent urged us to imbibe in its liquid stream, and, when I looked up from the gurgling waters, I saw, to my dismay, a recognizable symbol in the form of a hashtag. It had been covered over with an @ symbol drawn in blood. Initially, it made me wonder what it meant, until I recalled the tribes of Southern and Central America, whom, after conquering a rivaling faction, would mark their new territory with a larger, more profound declaration of their existence. Could this be the Northern tribe we were seeking? And, if so, how defensive and territorial had they become?

My question was quickly answered when Claire and I found the prior camp of The Hashtag Bandits. A pile of dead bodies had been amassed, each of them with their tongues cut out, and each one marked over their chests with an @ sign. My heart shuddered. To think, after all our years of travel, adventure, and survival, to bear witness to something so savage. We had seen the worst of human nature, from cannibalism and sacrifice, to the most unthinkable of desecrations, but, the raw show of victory, to have made pyres of peoples remains, was unlike anything we had yet to observe.

It didn't take long for Claire and I to pass through the small commune that once stood where had been standing, when, I came upon a declaration, written on the back of an old western "wanted poster" nailed to the entry gate. It read as follows:



#WE, THE HASHTAG BANDITS, HEREBY CLAIM
THIS LAND AS OUR OWN

#NO ONE OUTSIDE OF OUR ORIGINAL 312 SHALL BE
ADMITTED INTO OUR FOLD

#THIS IS THE ONE AND ONLY WARNING YOU SHALL RECEIVE

#TURN BACK NOW OR FACE THE MOST DIRE OF
CONSEQUENCES

#OUR WILL TO SURVIVE WILL RIVAL AND OUTLAST ANY
WHO DARE TO OPPOSE US

#WE HAVE GATHERED THE MOST RUTHLESS, MOST
DIABOLICAL, AND MOST UNRELENTING MURDERERS,
KILLERS, AND THIEVES THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN

#TAKE ONE STEP FURTHER AND FACE WHATEVER
CELESTIAL MAKER YOU DEEM WORTHY

Claire now hasn't spoken in years. Some of the last words he did utter, I will never forget. They were simply, "Scribe, I need you now, write this down and do not misconstrue it!" Those unfortunate notes were a shadowy glimpse into the oncoming apocalypse. His detailed description of millions of lost lives, melting and warping facades, churning waters and charcoal skies, turned out to be the sentences that would silence him forever. We have learned to communicate through gestures and subtle flits of the eye. There was a brief period, after the malay, that I enjoyed the silence, it proved as a place of solace, a window of opportunity to try and make sense of it all. But now, I long for nothing more than to hear his voice, even if it was filled with gibberish and calamity.

We have decided to keep moving. Our unshakable need to face whatever fate awaits us has gained momentum ten fold. Recently the animals, and all things that go bump in the night, have led to sleepless nights in the wilderness. We have both been edgy and restless. The images of our most recent encounter with civilization have stung my dreams and swelled my waking thoughts. Claire has been pointing towards trail heads and pathways, with a driving sense of urgency. They don't seem to make immediate sense yet always give us access to a forward direction.

Some weeks after passing through the burial ground of The Hashrag Bandits, our trail led us to an abandoned church. Perched atop a hill, its wooden frame was dilapidated and modest. Once we swung open the doors the unmistakable stench of death overtook us. As did the flies, rats, and worms. They scurried towards Claire and I looking for a fresh feast. We stomped and swatted all that attacked us until we drove them out. After securing ourselves inside, we did our best investigative work. There was not much to be sleuthed, although, a recognizable pattern had seemingly begun to form.

The corpse of a man who couldn't have been more than 30, had been strung up overtop a preachers pulpit. His tongue bound to his chest by a set of rosary beads. All around us the bodies of at least two hundred people were strewn throughout the pews and aisles, each one again, loosed of their tongues. In the lifeless hands of an elderly woman there was a long parchment scroll. Its original context had been covered over with an elegant calligraphic reinterpretation.

Although hard to read through the bloodstained (a) icon that blotted over the page, I was able to read the following:



What has happened? Why has it happened now? All the answers we seek are in the hands of God. Our commune welcomes all those based in the many religions of the world. As God would want, we have opened our doors to all who believe, regardless of background, creed, or gender. All are free to study and share here. We now know, that searching for God, through all the ancient scriptures, will be our only way to true salvation, and answering the ultimate question:

WHO ARE WE?

The warped and half melted Hollywood sign hung from the side of the hill like a fly caught in a spiders web. I remember my days as a youth growing in the sunshine of California. The endless days and moonlit nights, the pier in Santa Monica, the muscle heads on Venice Beach. It all seems like a distant memory, maybe even more like a fanciful dream.

Claire seems to be extraordinarily jubilant since we crossed into the Golden State. A few days ago we met a small group traveling East. We spent a night with them and one of the travelers had an old tambourine. Claire motioned for it, and must have then clanged on that damn thing for the better part of an hour. I could see the gleam return to his eyes.

The days were hot but the nights were pleasant enough and we started to work our way towards the beach. It seems like an odd yet deserving vacation. We stumbled upon a old shoe store and were surprised to find it virtually untouched. Massive raids for supplies had meant that provisions were far and few between. Claire and I felt like kids in a candy store. Each of us trying on shoes and modeling them for the other until we both agreed on a pair that we found to our liking. It was light moment in an otherwise dark world.

A pack of wild dogs approached us when, a broken down half churning bus roared by us on the street, its crackly horn blast scaring the mutts away. We waved in appreciation and the bus came to screeching halt. When we approached the door, the driver, a rather plump man in his late fifties, offered us a ride. We asked his destination and tentatively accepted. He told us that he was seeking out a camp that had been claimed by a group who called themselves "The Rebels".

Apparently they were a tribe of fun lovers who figured the world had already ended once. Why not party the rest of life away and turn to hedonism and drugs? The driver didn't

quite know the exact location having originally heard about it some months ago while navigating his way from Colorado to the West Coast. He had simply been told to look for signs decorated with an exclamation mark. I feared the worst. If indeed history repeated itself, I anticipated to find the party goers celebrating nothing but death.

The drive took some time, as the streets were packed with burnt out and half melted cars. L.A. traffic in its current form. I had a thought to warn the old man of what he might expect to see but didn't feel the need to dash his dreams. Everyone who survived the fallout needed hope.

When we approached the pier in Santa Monica we could see the shoreline dotted with boats, old signs, and the picked over skeletons of at least a dozen whales, sharks, and seals. Some of the signs were even in foreign languages. Surely carried in by the massive waves from thousands of miles away. And then, as if lit up like the classic neon lights of the pier, a series of old concert posters jumped out at us. Each one boasting a colorful! symbol, yet, once again, they had been smeared over in the bloody @ icon. I knew what was to come next.

Claire pulled on the drivers arm, silently urging him to stop his fruitless pursuit of "fun in the sun". The old man just smiled and patted Claire on the arm as if to say, "It's ok." I knew there was no stopping the old man now, he was too close to the destination that had given him purpose and direction. Ultimately it might prove to be the best thing for him to see, at least he would now know the true danger that surrounds him.

As we walked over the creaky wooden planks towards the amusement park portion of the pier, a very large Grateful Dead poster was hung from the entrance. It bared the slogan of The Rebels, and it read as follows:



HEAR YE HEAR YE!
STEP RIGHT UP!
THE SHOW HAS JUST BEGUN!
IT'S FILLED WITH WONDER!
INSTILLED WITH MAGIC!
AND HAPPENS UNDER
THE SUN!

The moment we turned the corner, the old man put his hands on his knees, and became violently ill. Strung from the ferris wheel were dozens of bodies. Mostly teenagers, donning brightly hued tie dyed shirts, and cut off denim shorts. All of them crusted in dry sun baked blood. Vendors at the refreshment stands were slumped over their carts, lifeless and withered. In the middle of the park hundreds of popcorn buckets were brimming with the cut out tongues of the deceased. One poor soul had apparently tried to stop the bleeding, and from his mouth hung a bright blue t-shirt, the only letters I could make out were, "neyland" and the corner of what appeared to be a cartoon mouse ear.

We parted ways with the old man. I'm not sure he will ever recover. I'm not sure I will either. Claire and I decided to make our leave of California as well, and tomorrow morning we will start out for the Oregon Coast. The closer we get to finding the @ tribe, the more my heart races. I don't know if it's anticipation or fear, probably a mix of both. But now, Claire and I are more determined than ever to unravel the mystery behind the Northern tribe. Why such a brazen show of savagery? Why do they incorporate such crude methods? The reasons, I hope, don't kill us, too.

Entering into Oregon, my main fear was also disguised as our means to survival. The wildlife has proven to be more deadly than any tribe, band, or horde of people we had faced. But, the fact there was an animal presence also meant food. We foraged for berries and sourced clean drinking water by watching the animals. This has not been an easy task by any stretch of the imagination. In many instances it actually means that either Claire or myself have to act as a distraction to draw the beasts from their grazing and watering. It always feels more like being bait than anything else.

What animals we are able to find roaming alone and trap means a few days of meat. This is always a welcome surprise and we do our best not to over indulge when we are presented with the luxury. The further North we push the better our traveling conditions have become. There seems to be more nature preserved here than anywhere else we have been, and it's very refreshing. Even the air quality is noticeably better. I attribute it to the thick and dense forest that surrounds us. The trees and foliage have survived very well.

By my estimation, and the dream maps that keep appearing to Claire, we are only a few days journey from the Washington border. Later this afternoon we will make our way inland towards Portland in hopes of finding some more supplies. I dream of finding a craft brewery that has a stockade of cold IPA but I know it's a dream I must wake up from.

Claire has been having restless nights. He's been constantly points up at the stars, drawing circles in the air and pointing at himself, as if to say he is part of the celestial makeup. I suppose we all are in some way. He is incessantly growing more profound in his actions. I can only hope that he makes it all the way to our final destination.

We arrived in Portland around an hour or so ago and it is a ghost town. We found an outdoor shop and salvaged what we could, a fishing rod and some lures, a knife and a large tarp was our total haul. They will surely come in handy. There was also a wine shop with the window already broken but still boasting a few errant bottles. Claire and I will drink it later this evening with the leftover venison we smoked a few days ago. I sure am looking forward to the protein for a change.

As we left Oregon summer was a fading memory. Yesterday, entering into Seattle, the leaves were starting to change color. It is magnificent to see. I remember having visited here when I was a teenager. My parents had brought us out to watch a Mariners game as my Dad loved baseball. We took the elevator to the top of The Spaceneedle, and I will never forget the view. It looks so much different now. The downtown core a war zone. It's not like we haven't seen destruction before, but this has a strange and ominous feel to it.

Claire spent the morning asleep, but yet his eyes were wide open. I haven't seen that yet and it has me worried. We have holed up in an abandon hotel. There are four survivors here with us. They are very friendly and seem to have a good handle on where to source provisions. I don't necessarily like the idea of attempting the last leg of our journey during the upcoming Winter months, but at this point Claire and I both need a rest and this seems as good a set up as any.

We have spent a few comfortable months here and I feel our strength has returned. Claire looks well but still sleeps with his eyes wide open. He has taken to scribbling down random notes on his bedroom wall. The words and number combinations make no sense to me but it seems to be important to him.

I have asked our roommates if they have heard of the Northern tribe we are looking for, and if they have noticed any @ symbols any where in the city. One of them hadn't

designated it to a tribe but mentioned she remembered seeing a large @ icon overtop a % symbol at a bank on the far side of the city. We will set out in a few hours and even though I know what horrors we will encounter upon our arrival at the bank, I must continue gathering as much information as I can so as to be ready for when we encounter the mysterious Northern tribe.

After thanking our hosts, me with words of adoration, and Claire with a firm set of handshakes and a genuine smile, we departed from the hotel that had given us safety and shelter over the course of the Fall. As Claire and I stepped outside, the crisp bite in the air made it apparent Winter had arrived. After a brisk 36 block walk, we arrived at the bank. The rain had washed away most of the crimson liquid @ symbol that was marked overtop a faded percentage sign which was tacked on the front doors. Claire and I both knew that inside those same doors, fresh images of death awaited. The original message, drafted on graph paper, read as follows:



WE HAVE CALCULATED THAT
SURVIVAL ABIDES BY THE
LAW OF AVERAGES

Once inside the bank, Claire and I fought off the usual barrage of insects and rodents. In what was surely once a beautiful place to conduct one's daily financial affairs, there now lay forty or so bodies, all of them face down on their desks or overtop the cashiers counter. Save for two, who were positioned in the vault, their stiffened bodies like broken puppets. In the cash registers, the tongues of the employees and patrons. The pattern had repeated itself.

I noticed a pile of papers seemingly untouched and was drawn to read the contents. They were full of calculations and formulas. These people hadn't just been bankers, they were a commune of statisticians and mathematicians. I wondered if they were trying to work out a theory on how best to bring back the population or simply calculating their odds of survival? Whatever their hypothesis was, they were clearly wrong.

As Claire and I left the bank, we looked at each other and cried, the rain carried away our tears. Having been in such safety and comfort these past few months we had forgotten how bad things really were. We quickly came back to our senses though and started walking towards the half burned sign that said 'U.S./CANADA Border - 99 Miles'.

The haunting and eerie feeling of crossing a border with no agents to check identification was overwhelming. In the three days since Claire and I made our way into Canada, we are in the most relaxed state we have been since leaving our domicile at the hotel in Seattle. Oddly, the rain, which hasn't stopped since we arrived, has been rather warm. It suits us well and is definitely better than freezing to death.

We have made camp in Vancouver, and all things considered it is quite tranquil. Across from us is a large octagonal sphere, its once reflective facade now tarnished and cracked. It seems an oxymoronic mirror image of a city that was surely, in its past, beautiful and vivid. There are a dozen or so others camping near and around us, each of them has warned of pursuing our quest to find the Northern @ tribe. Stories and folkloric smatterings of a certain death that awaits. We are not daunted, in fact, more than ever, we can feel our destiny is close at hand.

Although none of the campers has ever actually seen any of the tribespeople, they all echo the same sentiment and agree on the tribes location. The island to the west, in a place called Tofino, is where they seem make their home. Apparently they are a nomadic people for most of the year, which would explain the pattern of eradication Claire and I have witnessed.

Our main challenge now is navigating transport across what I believe is called the Georgia Strait. As Claire and I are now as worthy a seamen as any I don't anticipate this being too difficult a task. We have been told though, that the once great Orca whales that had previously made frequent use of the narrow passage, have become aggressive and very territorial.

Since money has become virtually useless, people have returned to the ancient traditions of trade and barter to exchange goods. Claire and I have gathered what we believe are items of use and will seek out a vendor who might be able to supply us with a seaworthy vessel to attempt our crossing. Considering the Island seems to be forsaken ground, I believe finding and negotiating use of a boat shouldn't be too problematic.

I was right. After spending the afternoon going camp site to camp site, we stumbled upon a man who used to operate a ferry between the mainland and the island. He wouldn't offer to take us over but, did provide us with a chart and a compass. The boat itself, was in good enough shape to maneuver but, had certainly seen better days. But what did it matter? I feared we were about to depart on a one way trip regardless.

At last, dry land! Claire's dream mapping didn't seem to be nearly as effective at sea as on ground. We lost the chart in a gust of strong wind, and we were forced to rely on the compass to guide us West. A pod of Orca whales did make their presence known, but thankfully paid us little mind. Our outing should have been a full day less than it took. We have finally set foot on land and walked a while before taking a break to rest.

As I write this my heart is calm, but my mind is racing. Where do we go from here? And more importantly, what do we do when we get there? Wherever there is...

I can only surmise that we follow the trail which has gotten us this far. Looking for symbols and indicators in hopes of them leading to the tribe in which we seek. I'm reminded of the old quote, "Be careful what you wish for, it might come true."

We had been hiking through a heavily wooded area for some days without an @ symbol to be seen. Claire has been making good use of the knife we procured while in Oregon. Marking the trees every 50 steps or so in order to provide us with a way back. Should we be fortunate enough to need one.

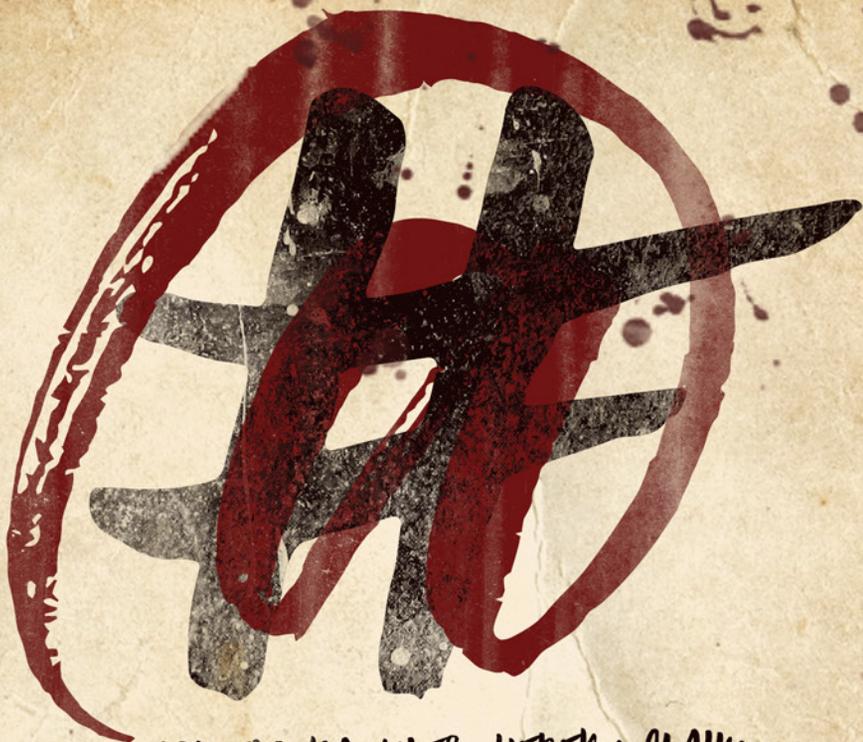
As we approached a bend we saw our first beacon of the Northern Tribes existence. Burned deeply into the bark of a cedar tree, we saw the @ icon that had come to haunt our dreams. In a sudden fit Claire began to go into a state of revelry and extreme excitement. It was like a child who had finally gotten what they asked for at Christmas.

The trail of @ symbols was clearly marked, and at that point Claire put the knife away and stopped carving the path to our exit. I suppose he had a point, our collective fates were now sealed, we had come too far to turn back.

Once we set upon the trail of @ symbols, it didn't take long for us to be intercepted. A member of the Northern Tribe approached us on horseback. This image alone was enough to shock both Claire and myself. We hadn't seen a steed in years yet alone someone being able ride one. The hind-quarters of the chestnut colored animal had been painted with the tribes @ icon. The tribesman's garb was also a sight we had yet to behold. In all our years we had never seen such use of salvaged industrial items blended with traditional garments.

The man on horseback, whose posture made us assume he was extremely influential, was adorned in a chest plate decorated with empty shotgun casings, owls feathers, and a small skull. Perhaps from a fox or a mink. Atop his head, also branded with the @, was a bright orange bucket, its faded and scratched out logo still recognizable. On the side 3 point stags horns jutted up towards the sky, giving the appearance and air of regality. And for footwear, a pair of hi-top sneakers, the entire ensemble was so unbalanced it scared me deeply.

As I write this now from inside the tribes camp, I believe what happened next is why we are still alive. From his perch atop the powerful steed, the tribesman spoke, "Why have you come?" Claire, who hasn't spoken in years, stayed to his ritualistic pattern of silence. As for myself, I was too afraid to even breath out loud, let alone utter a single word. He asked again, this time with more volume and assertiveness. "WHY HAVE YOU COME?" I looked over at Claire, and he back at me, our longstanding mode of communication reinforced, and neither of us said a thing. At that the tribesman slowly reached into his saddlebag and produced a lone piece of tanned hide. I knew instantly that I would never speak again. The consequences; irreversible. For on the hide, branded in the same manner as the @ icons that led us to this point, was the inscription:



#WE, THE HASHTAG BANDITS, HEREBY CLAIM
THIS LAND AS OUR OWN

#NO ONE OUTSIDE OF OUR ORIGINAL 312 SHALL BE
ADMITTED INTO OUR FOLD

#THIS IS THE ONE AND ONLY WARNING YOU SHALL RECEIVE

#TURN BACK NOW OR FACE THE MOST DIRE OF
CONSEQUENCES

#OUR WILL TO SURVIVE WILL RIVAL AND OUTLAST ANY
WHO DARE TO OPPOSE US

#WE HAVE GATHERED THE MOST RUTHLESS, MOST
DIABOLICAL, AND MOST UNRELENTING MURDERERS,
KILLERS, AND THIEVES THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN

#TAKE ONE STEP FURTHER AND FACE WHATEVER
CELESTIAL MAKER YOU DEEM WORTHY

The mix of different cultures here is astounding. Those who passed the test of silence upon arriving at the (a) Tribes camp were granted entrance. Those who spoke declarations of what they sought were now in a place reserved for the dead. It has been some months since we were brought into the fold and I have been privy to the history of the Tribes founding. A pictorial heritage has shown me that in its inception, a band of survivors quickly agreed that the arrogance and narrow-mindedness of the world's past leaders led us to destruction. They vowed that words shan't be spoken, and that by negating conversation of any kind it would lead to unity, purity and, true understanding.

As the nomadic nature of the Tribe took form, they encountered a number of faculties whose boisterous and braggadocios means of living deemed them unworthy of continuing to live. Hence the demise of The Hashtag Bandits, The Truth Seekers, The Rebels, and The Calculi. There were certainly dozens more like them that had met the ultimate fate. At first I thought it savage and the acts full of rancor, but in reflection, I now see the way the (a) Tribe lives is full of conviction and unilateral agreement. Not once have I seen an inhabitant of the camp treated disrespectfully. This goes too for the land surrounding them. A mix of industrial remnants and natural elements has allowed them to live, and to live well.

Claire has made a pact with the Tribes soothsayer and they seem inseparable. They gather once a day to forage for

vision quest aiding hallucinogens and are constantly in what I have come to simply call, 'The Tent'. A structure made of animal hides yet at its base, a triangular support system wrought of salvaged steel beams and p.v.c. tubing. It is part sweat lodge, part apothecary laboratory. With Winter coming to a close within the month, the pair of them is preparing for a sizable ritual to welcome in the bounty that Spring will soon provide.

I have for the most part been left to my own devices. I fill my days by walking in silence with a young woman, whom I have named Flora, due to the fact that she once tended to the flower gardens that dot the perimeter of the village. We have become the self nominated scouting party, looking out for any incoming travelers. It would seem the rumors of the Tribes savagery have kept most people at bay. Although words are forbidden, the language of love needs no voice, and I believe we are speaking the same dialect. Children are all around the camp. The Tribe intrinsically knows that in order to survive there must be a next generation. In fact, the natural process of pro creation is encouraged.

I have named the tribesman mounted on horseback, Chief Bucket, and his wife, the maternal figure to the Tribe, Mother Hammer. We will soon approach them for their blessing to be wed.

Tonight is the grand ceremony that will usher in the coming of Spring, and also the night Flora and I are to be married. In 'The Tent', Claire and the resident soothsayer are at work preparing what I can only imagine is a heavy dose of vision quest inducing drugs. The entire Village is in action at some task or another. The young girls are gathering flowers, and Flora is helping them weave a ceremonial headdress for tonight's processions. The teenage boys are stamping posts into the ground and lining the tops with camouflage tarpaulins, creating an impromptu canvas should the elements work against our favor. The elderly woman and men, both alike, are preparing the feast to come. The scene is quite beautiful. I have enjoyed capturing all this on the camera I received as a wedding gift from Chief Bucket and Mother Hammer.

Night has begun to fall, and the Tribe is gathering to witness the festivities. First, my marriage to Flora. My heart is pounding with excitement! I can not wait for the moment. Secondly, an all night ritualistic vision quest by Claire and the soothsayer. The ceremony of the wedding is to take place underneath the rising of the Moon, and the vision quest ritual directly afterwards. In fact, dear journal, I must leave you now, my big day awaits.

This morning brings the happiest and yet saddest day of my life. After what was a flawless and perfectly orchestrated marriage ceremony, Flora and I consummated our vows and quickly got ready to join the rest of the village to watch the vision quest ritual. As the balance of the Moon hung in the sky and the stars around it seemed to dance, the ritual began. Flora and I smiled at each other like two newlyweds, for indeed we were. And now, I would watch my closet and dearest friend of over a decade, journey into the only place I knew he found true meaning.

The ritual began. Claire and the soothsayer drank from the same hand carved wooden bowl, and the entire village began to hum a low and tranquil note. Instantly, both men looked towards the sky and clasped hands, as if to suggest the journey would be one of duality. For a brief instant, the soothsayer shook violently, his eyes rolling back in his skull. Claire however, appeared calm, stoic almost. And then, the unthinkable. Claire started to convulse in a manner that I can only describe as otherworldly. It lasted for such a brief moment that the shock of it all wouldn't allow me process what I was actually seeing. Before I knew it, and I barely have recollection of moving at all, I was by his side. Clutching his hand and holding him. It was too late. As his eyes slowly closed he looked at me with a smile I will never forget, and said, "Thank You Scribe." And that was it. He was gone. I wanted to yell out, to beg him to find his way back, but I stayed as silent as a stone. The thoughts of my new wife and our life together kept my tongue at bay, and in my head.

Nine long months have passed since I have written. I couldn't bear to bring myself to face the harsh reality of my past. However, today is a new day. A day for celebration! Flora has carried through a trying time of her own, but this morning she is due to have our first child! The elderly women and Mother Hammer, have indicated they believe it will be a girl! I am overwhelmed. The thought of holding a baby of our own is the truest gift I could ever imagine. I wait now, outside 'The Tent' for the soothsayer to come and collect me.

Dear Journal (final entry)

A miracle! A true and honest miracle! The most beautiful child I have ever laid eyes on has been brought into the world! Flora is doing very well and her excitement and joy is tantamount only to my own. I stand now only a few feet away from my beautiful Daughter! Although I know I will never be able to speak her name aloud, we have decided to name her Claire. My dear friend would undoubtedly have been honored. As every Father does, he vows to protect and provide for his child. I also have another dream for little Claire. While giving her the best of what our current world can offer, I will raise her to become strong, vigilant and determined. In hopes, that one day, she may become the one to break the long silence.