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the  
eye

# RECOVERING 9/11

HOW STUDENT REPORTERS APPROACHED  
THE UNTHINKABLE

*by Finn Vigeland*





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How student reporters approached  
the unthinkable, pg. 07

*by Finn Vigeland*  
*photos courtesy of Stephen Poellot*  
*illustrations by Cindy Pan*

## CONTENTS

### 03 EYESITES

#### EYE TO EYE

### 04 **Motel California** *Amanda Cormier*

#### FOOD

### 05 **A Side of McMacaron?** *Meredith Foster*

#### FOOD

### 06 **Dining in the Streets** *Meredith Moore*

#### MUSIC

### 11 **Turn My \$wag On** *Zoe Camp*

#### BOOKS

### 12 **Undead and Well-Read** *Anneliese Cooper*

#### IDEAS

### 14 **Getting Tanked** *Jon Edelman*

#### VIEW FROM HERE

### 15 **Anatomy of a Breakup in the Digital Age** *Carolyn Yim and Paul Hsiao*

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

During the past few weeks, like many, I've read countless stories about what the 9/11 decade meant. I've also been revisiting the post-9/11 experience through YouTube: the first episode of SNL afterward, the Today Show's coverage, and other TV clips I may have forgotten in 10 years' time.

The one sentiment that stuck with me, though, did not come from Frank Rich, or Rudy Giuliani. It was from Jon Stewart.

"I'm sorry to do this to you. It's another entertainment show beginning with an overwrought speech of a shaken host. Television is nothing if not redundant."

Stewart opened his first post-9/11 show this way. He knew that his audience had been inundated and overwhelmed, but he was going to talk about 9/11 anyway.

In planning this week's cover story by Finn Vigeland, I thought in a similar vein: I knew that New York would be saturated with 9/11 anniversary

stories that tried to construct some sort of coherence, some sort of narrative, for what happened that day and in the decade following.

At first, I was nervous about adding to the deluge, and more importantly, concerned about making conclusions about the day that we aren't in a position to make.

And so we decided to do what we know, as student journalists: tell an important story that hasn't been told before, and tell it straight. The logistics of how Spectator reporters covered 9/11 is a story in itself, one that illuminates what the mood was like on that day for one group of students.

The 10-year anniversary of 9/11 has come and gone. But like Jon Stewart did, we're going to talk about it anyway—the stories still untold demand it.

Amanda Cormier  
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# FRESHMAN YEAR CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

BY MARGARET BOYKIN AND ASHTON COOPER

Hey, freshmen! Remember how when you were a kid, *Choose Your Own Adventure* books were the best? You could run from a creepy haunted house, investigate an old well, open doors and look for secrets... The possibilities were endless. Luckily, the days of tough choices and turning pages aren't

behind you—college is like its own *Chose Your Own Adventure*, with every decision you make irrevocably marking the path of your future, turning the pages till the book ends and you're looking for a job in a thankless economy.

Just kidding! Not every decision made in your first year is life-altering, but that didn't stop us from taking a look at what it would be like if it were. Choose wisely!

EYESITES

Shopping period doesn't go your way, so....

**You go with African Dance and something called "Aesthetics."**

Your open schedule leaves Thursday nights free for...

**Exploring the new hip scene in Rockaway Park.**

You know, dubstep meets Asian Fusion? Anyway, there...

**You harass the registrar until your schedule looks like a bar graph.**

This leads you to spend a ton of time studying and becoming intimate in Butler Library. Oh, and by "intimate," of course we mean...

**Regularly baking cookies in the communal kitchen.**

Hey, the oven isn't dirty, it's just supposed to be that color. Here, you meet...

**You meet your best friend!**

He/she shares your passion for film and disgust towards flip-flops. It's a match made in heaven, and your BFF-activity-filled time together leads you to...

**You find your girlfriend/boyfriend!**

She/he's a feminist and enjoys raw kale, but can also appreciate some college ball. It's a match made in heaven, and your time together leads you to...

**Studying. You're intimate with Butler because you spend a lot of time studying.**

Gross, what did you think? Your academic fortitude leads to...

**Join a sorority/fraternity/computer club/newspaper.**

The point is, you invest some serious time in an on-campus social life, and you come away from your bake-sales and mixers with...

**Learn about love and friendship and all that stuff.**

There are playlists and roses, but also a true mutual respect, and they push you to follow your dreams of...

**The freshman fifteen.**

You're burned out and become lethargic, disorganized, and confused. The summer comes just in time and after some needed therapy and gym time, you return to campus refreshed, ready for take two.



**The feeling that you've accomplished something.**

You may not stay committed to this forever, but you tried something new and everyone knows that's what your first year is about. One year down, three more to go!



**Backpacking across Europe.**

The stress of dealing with such an institutional academic setting has fueled your desire for open air, so you hit the road and return in September cultured and sensitive, bearing a single dreadlock.



**A summer internship with a prominent investment bank.**

Finally, you find friends who understand the value of a dollar (zilch) and of a hard day's work. Social skills meet career guidance and you enter sophomore year having learned about balance. Oh, and with some spare cash.





# Motel California

L.a.'s newest indie export makes fun new again

BY AMANDA CORMIER  
PHOTO COURTESY OF SAINT MOTEL

The catchy pop played by Saint Motel, a band just out of Los Angeles and riding on the heels of their latest single, "Puzzle Pieces," evokes the good ol' days of 2005: when straight-forward indie rock skirted on the peripheries of the airwaves, but mostly resided in episodes of *The O.C.* or Apple commercials. The music back then had a strong hook and danceability factor, with enough edge and artistry to keep it far away from Top 40. The word "chillwave" didn't even exist back then, and we were all the better for it.

That's not to say that Saint Motel's music is innocent or twee or shallow pop. It's just not the kind of music—and the guys of Saint Motel aren't the kind of characters—you'd expect the NYPD to be suspicious of. They're all pretty harmless: the lead singer, A/J Jackson, greeted me with a hug.

Which is why it was a surprise when the NYPD interrupted my interview with Saint Motel in Williamsburg last month. Shortly before the band's headlining show at indie incubator Glasslands, we stepped outside to chat on a nearby stoop about their critically-acclaimed debut EP *ForPlay*, their roots as film students, the revival of the L.A. indie scene, and their mini-tour in New York: two nights later, they opened for Mute Math at Mercury Lounge.

A stocky woman emerged from the passenger side of the police van that pulled up to our stoop. "Hey, guys. What's going on?"

I quickly explained that I was a student journalist interviewing the band before their concert.

"Oh, OK. We've had a few incidents around here lately."

What kind of incidents?

"Robberies."

Once the police van left, I wondered what about the band, or me, attracted the NYPD. They certainly didn't look like typical Glasslands clientele, which is to say, apathetic and perhaps stole a bicycle in a coke-addled rage earlier. Maybe the NYPD was lured by the same thing that attracted the crowd that night at the show: on stage, the four exude an earnest energy that is magnetic, and might be easy for cynical Williamsburgers to dismiss. The place was dark, but mini-LED lights were attached to several parts of the band's instruments and hands. The effect was less Main Street Electrical Parade and more an honest message of permission: "This is fun! You can dance!"

**So you guys met in film school. Have you made any film?**

Jackson (lead vocals and guitar): On our first EP, we did a music video for every song. I directed five, my friend Carlos directed two, and Evan directed one.

**How long have you been together?**

Aaron Sharp (lead guitar): Since 2007, but we'd known each other in other ways.



Dak, Greg Erwin, A/J Jackson, Aaron Sharp

Greg Erwin (drums): I found an ad for a drummer on Craigslist.

Jackson: And then what happened?

Erwin: I came to their concert and told them I was better than their drummer. I found him in the parking lot and broke his knees. No—I auditioned.

Jackson: And Dak [bassist] was a sushi chef.

**How did Dak join the band? Did you sense at the restaurant that he had musical talent, or something?**

Sharp: We were talking at the restaurant about needing a bass player, actually.

Jackson: I met Aaron because everyone said he was the best guitarist on campus. I was like a talent scout. I found these hot dudes, and was like, let's form a boy band. We high-fived.

**I THINK THAT OUR MUSIC IS HAPPY AS A CONTRAST TO HOW DEPRESSING LIFE CAN BE. IT'S AN ENERGY THING—IT'S REALLY FUN TO PLAY LOUD MUSIC.**

**Your new song, "Puzzle Pieces," is really good!**

Jackson: Puzzle Pieces is the first song of what's going to be a vinyl soon.

**Did anything or anyone in particular influence the new album?**

Jackson: [thinks] Scatman John.

**Who's Scatman John?**

Jackson: You know, ba-bop-ba-dop-bop-ski-bop. Scat!

**Oh!**

Jackson: [thinks] And scotch, sex, Klaus Kinski, danger.

Dak: Buddhism.

**So what's in your future?**

Sharp: We see an international tour. Then an intergalactic tour after that. Then, a transcendental metaphysical party tour. An inner tour: by watching Saint Motel, have I found myself?

**How would you describe your music to someone who hasn't listened to it?**

Jackson: An adrenaline-packed thrill ride of adventure and intrigue, with hints of danger, romance, and I guess, umm...insanity.

[The NYPD briefly interrupts our interview.]

**It's been a summer of sort of sad new music, with Bon Iver and all of that. Your music is pretty happy, which is a nice contrast. Is that on purpose?**

Sharp: Absolutely. We focus on trying to play music that is high-energy. We're always looking for new sounds, new ways of writing songs. We're always trying to push ourselves.

Jackson: I think that our music is happy as a contrast to how depressing life can be. It's an energy thing—it's really fun to play loud music.

Sharp: A lot of the time, we're all in a dark room recording, so you might as well play something that cheers you up. ●



# A Side of McMacaron?

ladurée caters to the pastry's purists

BY MEREDITH FOSTER  
ILLUSTRATION BY IAN MARSHALL

Rose, blackcurrant violet, and lily of the valley sound like choices available at flower stores. But with the emergence of macaron shops around the city, these flavors have become typical fare for New York pastry chefs. Ladurée—the birthplace of the modern macaron—opened a shop on the Upper East Side on Aug. 29, and there are rumors circulating about a downtown expansion. But is Ladurée's arrival an attempt to cash in on a booming U.S. macaron market, or merely an attempt to bring the haute pastry back to its high-culture (and expensive) origins?

The modern macaron—two cookies stuck together with buttercream or jam—was invented in the early 19th century by Pierre Desfontaines of the French pâtisserie Ladurée. Since then, the macaron has become the best-selling cookie in pâtisseries across France. In Montmorillon, there is even an entire museum dedicated to the macaron and its place in French culinary history. However, unlike the long-time popularity of the croissant and the crepe, it was not until 2006, when Sofia

Coppola featured Ladurée macarons in her film *Marie Antoinette*, that America gained interest in the colorful, bite-sized dessert.

Within years it became almost impossible to walk a New York block without seeing dozens of flavors of macarons decorating the windows of cafés. Macarons have been the subject of books (*I Love Macarons* by Hisako Ogita), blogs (mad-aboutmacarons.com), and featured on television shows (they are Blair's favorite treat on *Gossip Girl*). Bon Appetit magazine went so far as to christen the french treat, "the new cupcake."

Matt Powell, a senior in CC, co-president of the Columbia Culinary Society, and author of a paper titled *What Makes a Dessert?* explains that it is easy to see why the macaron caught on so quickly in America. "It is colorful, and it is a quick bite of flavor. It is the ideal dessert," he says.

The macaron's popularity in America and America's subsequent influence on the dessert have become quite controversial. Many feel that America, by mass-producing the macaron to fit demand, have turned it from something usually labor-intensive, delicate, and, as a result, expensive (about \$2.50 per small macaron), into something almost unrecognizable to macaron

connoisseurs. While the macarons of French pastry chefs like François Payard take more than 24 hours to make and have a very short shelf life, Trader Joe's offers a box of freezable macarons for \$4.99 per dozen. Macarons have begun to appear at Starbucks, Whole Foods, and even McCafés—a coffeehouse chain owned by McDonald's.

Professor of sociology Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, author of *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*, says that, if offered in bulk, the macaron will be "dumbed down, if not totally ruined." She compared it to the bagel: in supermarkets across the country, "bread" called bagels are offered, but most New Yorkers would not recognize these plastic-wrapped orbs as authentic.

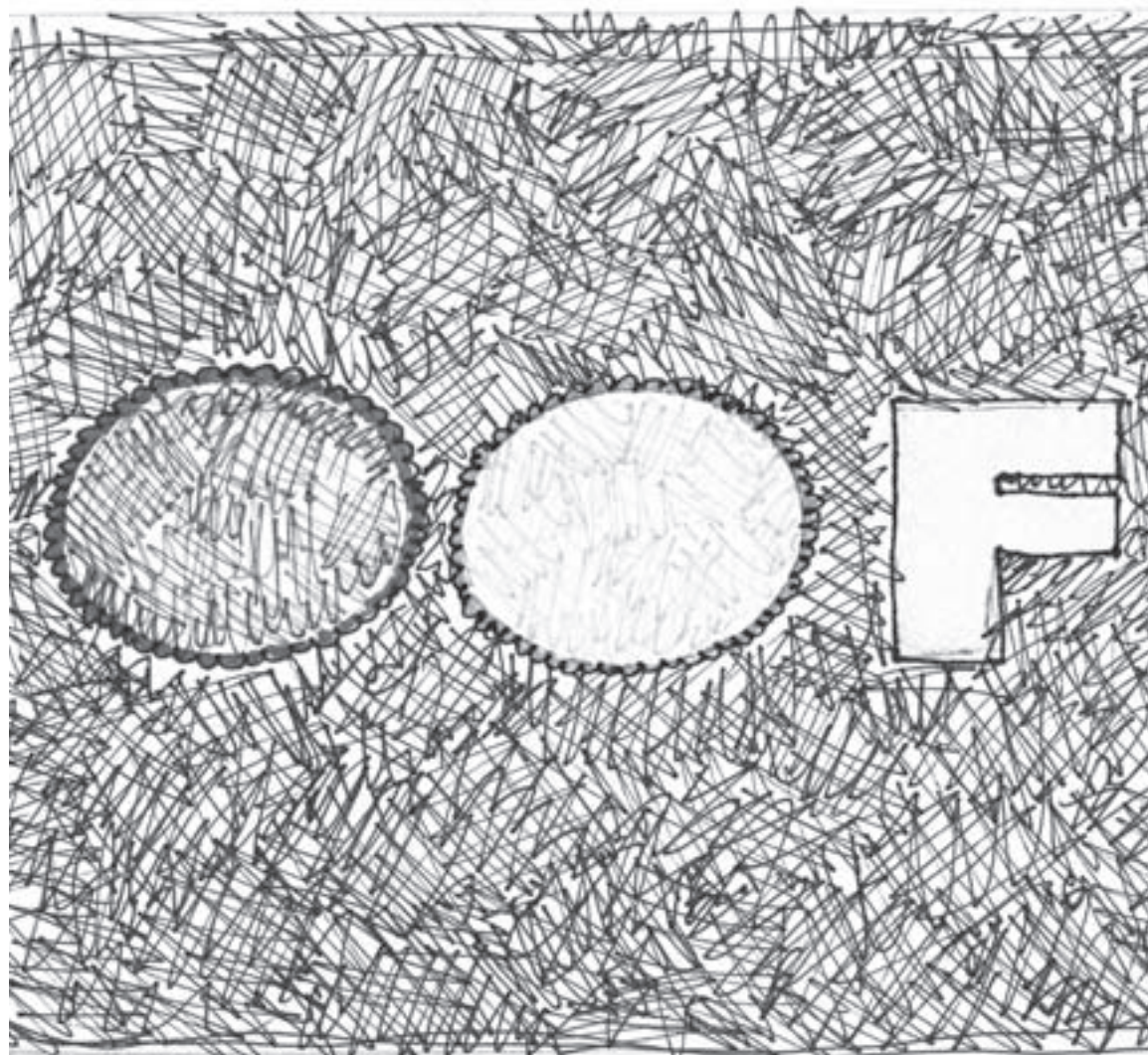
**IF OFFERED IN BULK, THE  
MACARON WILL BE, "DUMBED  
DOWN, IF NOT TOTALLY  
RUINED."**

Ferguson's predication has turned out to be largely true—reviewers who have tried McCafé's and Starbucks' macarons complain that they are too sugary and too dense. Starbucks spokeswoman Lisa Passé even admitted to the Wall Street Journal that "it's hard to do something mass-produced because they're so delicate." Yet, Trader Joe's macarons have had more success than their fast food counterparts. The website Serious Eats published a review of Trader Joe's macaron called "French Macarons from Trader Joe's Are Pretty Damn Good," saying, "For only \$4.99 a box, I'd definitely buy these again."

Due to what many perceive as the Americanization of the macaron, Ladurée's arrival in New York City has caused quite a stir among macaron devotees. The French eatery promises a return to the macaron in all its delicate, melt-in-your-mouth glory. The New York Times has already heralded the Parisian pâtisserie as a breath of fresh air in a macaron-saturated metropolis. David Holder, the president of Ladurée, is insistent that despite expanding to America, Ladurée is one hundred percent Parisian. The macarons are flown over from Paris and the store is pale green with traditional Parisian décor. Holder told Interview magazine that "you have to feel like being in Paris."

But while many are ecstatic about Ladurée's arrival in New York City and have waited in lines outside the bakery for hours, others have been less than impressed. Many on Yelp complain that they are "overly soggy" and "definitely not worth" the \$2.70, claiming that La Maison du Macaron (another high quality macaron shop) is a better option than waiting in line for hours.

Although it's still early, it seems as though Ladurée's journey overseas may not bring about the gourmet macaron revolution that many foodies hoped for. Perhaps they aren't successfully replicating the Parisian tradition, or maybe Americans aren't willing to fork out \$3 and instead opt for lower-quality, mass-produced macarons. Unfortunately for connoisseurs, it's just the way the cookie crumbles. ●





# Dining in the Streets

a more permanent brand of mobile food arrives in MoHi

BY MEREDITH MOORE  
PHOTO BY ANTHONY CLAY

Halal carts offer the perfect undergrad food—cheap, convenient, and open at all hours of the night. The popularity of these carts is determined by their permanent parking spots, late-night hours, and cheap prices, but newer, more refined MoHi food trucks may steal customers eager for downtown-style fare. Korilla BBQ, the Desi Food Truck, Wafels & Dinges, and Street Sweets have all visited campus frequently throughout the past year, but it's difficult to imagine these choices fully integrated into the Columbia gastronomic routine. These higher-grade food trucks come and go at their leisure, many times without a set schedule, but this is all about to change.

The Department of Parks & Recreation has accepted commissions for six permanent food trucks and stands, with three pending to open near Columbia University. Purple Yam, a Korean and Filipino restaurant in Brooklyn, will operate two trucks—one on Broadway and 114th, the other on Broadway and 113th. Another truck by Borough Fare, owned by a Michelin-caliber chef, will operate by the main gates at 116th. These new permanent stands reflect a food truck industry that is expanding beyond traditional fast-food carts to include both mobile food trucks, and now, semi-permanent street venues.

While food trucks are a food trend that by now even non-foodies are familiar with, they are by no means an exclusive iteration of a fast paced New York food culture. Mobile food stands date back to post-Civil War America and westward

expansion. Far-removed from gourmet fare, food on-the-go was not a preference, but a necessity for long travels. The food cart finds it's ancestors in Texan chuckwagons and the mobile canteens of WWII. Now, the newest version of the food truck, the permanent food stand, offers a discerning audience a gourmet variety of multicultural and organic menu choices at relatively low costs and an increased emphasis on quality. Typically, food stands of the past were noted for their poor quality and health value, emphasis on keeping costs down, and were often degraded as “street food”—now a term of some esteem. Though the new food stands may be slightly more expensive, the quality is restaurant-grade.

Halal cart owners insist that quality doesn't have to come in a gourmet guise. Omar Khalil of The Halal Guys Chicken & Rice stand on W. 53 St. and 6th Ave. knows his demographic and isn't worried about the competition. “We are always

**FOOD TRUCKS WITH ECLECTIC MENUS HAVE BEEN AROUND FOR YEARS, BUT NOW THEY HAVE CITY GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND PERMANENT UNITS WITH SPECIFIC PARKING SPACES.**

crowded,” he says. “Our food is always fresh, our salad, our vegetables, our rice—everything is cooked day by day and served very quickly. Our stuff is very high quality.”

Yet, Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe, who oversees the official proposals for “high quality, specialty mobile food units” seems to support the shift toward gourmet food truck offerings. He aims to grant commissions to carts with “menus that are inventive and interesting, serve a variety of options beyond hot dogs and pretzels, and that incorporate ethnically diverse and/or healthy food choices.” Food trucks with eclectic menus have been around for years, but now they have city government support and permanent units with specific parking spaces.

Though even with the support of Commissioner Benepe, there are still some difficulties with establishing permanent food stands, namely regulatory issues between the NYPD and Parks Department. Due to safety reasons and jurisdiction issues, the Lil' Purple Yam food truck has been put on hold for now. Meghan Lalor of the Parks Press Department says that, “there will be three mobile food units operating along the Broadway malls near Columbia. The opening date for Purple Yam is still pending.” Besa speculates that the Parks police cannot patrol the carts closer to Broadway Malls, and the NYPD is not responsible for patrolling the food trucks outside of the parks.

Despite legal difficulties, restaurant owners are using food trucks as extensions of their brands, even sacrificing profits that they might otherwise make at more traditional locations. Amy Besa, the co-owner and chef of Purple Yam says, “the way I look at it is that this is really more a promotion for our restaurant.” Evidently, promotional value is worth obeying the rule that park-commissioned food trucks' menu items cannot exceed a certain price limit. Putting high-end meals in the back of a truck means that Purple Yam may have to shoulder the full cost of quality ingredients and preparation. Je & Jo Organic Ice Cream and Cookie Dough owner and 2000 Columbia grad Jonathan Baker also sees the promotional value of food trucks. “I would have been psyched to have a food truck,” says Baker. “I think the newer food trucks are interesting; they really are trying to use them as a platform for opening a restaurant. Hopefully those trucks over the years will keep changing.”

Indeed, the changing nature of street fare has kept foodies—and students—interested, regardless of slightly higher prices. Nathalie Qin, a Barnard sophomore, says, “I'm not too into halal, and it would be great to have more diversity on the streets.” The new MoHi food trucks with premium menu choices may soon become staples for students not on a meal plan and looking for a good meal at the right price.

For now, mobile stands commissioned by the Parks and the current food trucks will have to share the sidewalk, each carving out their own unique niche. For chefs trying to break into the cutthroat restaurant market, the permanent food stand may be the next step—more permanent than a food truck, but with less start-up costs. It remains to be seen how these new stands will affect our expectations of food and its prices, on the street and in the restaurant. ●



# RECOVERING 9/11

how student reporters approached the unthinkable

by Finn Vigeland  
photos courtesy of Stephen Poellot  
illustrations by Cindy Pan



People always remark on the blueness of the sky, on how perfect a Tuesday morning it was. It was unfathomable. The stark contrast between the beauty of the day and the terror that was only eight miles away made it difficult to figure out how to proceed. “People were in the West End, people were playing soccer on South Field,” Mike Mirer recalls. “As the day wears on and nothing else happens, it’s just sort of hard to square those two ideas. And yet they’re both completely present.” For editors of the Spectator, the routine of the board meeting offered some relief. Mirer, CC ’02 and the editor in chief in 2001, says, “Being in the room together talking about what we were going to do felt normal.”

The planes didn’t hit Low Library on Sept. 11. The Columbia Daily Spectator is a hyperlocal paper covering Columbia’s campus, Morning-side Heights, and West Harlem, and typically avoids reporting on national news. But Columbia doesn’t exist in isolation. News that has a universal impact—and especially something as devastating as 9/11—needs to be shared.

In 10 years, the way news travels has fundamentally changed. But whether you find out via television or via text, devastating news brings people together. For the student journalists who witness and write about their peers coming together, reporting can have an overwhelmingly powerful effect.

## News Spreads

It was nine o’clock on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. Nick Schiffrin, CC ’02, was sitting in a classroom in the International Affairs Building, about to begin a Shakespeare class. Simone Sebastian, CC ’03, was just waking up and listening to the radio. And Mirer was fast asleep.

Schiffrin, Spectator’s managing editor that year, had entered class and heard the much-circulated rumor that a small plane had hit the Twin Towers. The rumor was spread the old-fashioned way—by ear. There was, of course, no Twitter, no Facebook. Schiffrin had recently purchased a “big, bulky cell phone” but relied more on his Spectator-issued pager.

The impact of what had really happened wasn’t yet understood, and Professor David Kastan proceeded with the lecture as usual. “When I went into that class,” recounts Schiffrin, “all I knew was that there was a rumor that there was a small plane crash in south Manhattan. By the time the class was over, the second tower had already fallen. It’s inconceivable, the notion we could have started that class.” He remained in the dark until an hour and a half later, when he left class and saw a crowd around a television in the IAB fourth floor lounge.

The magnetic power of the television set was



in full force that day. After Mirer woke up to a call on his dorm room ROLM phone, he quickly checked the New York Times website on his laptop (which Mirer described, like Schiffrin's phone, as "big and bulky") before seeking out live coverage. He ran down the hall to his RA, who had the TV on, and they watched in horror as the first tower fell. But it was important to be with loved ones, and Mirer quickly left to join his girlfriend—now wife—Anna Cash, CC '02, at her parents' house on Claremont Avenue, where they again turned on the TV. They took no more than 29 minutes to get there, because then they watched the second tower fall.

## "GATHERING AROUND THE TELEVISION DIDN'T JUST PROVIDE A WAY FOR US TO GET INFORMATION, IT PROVIDED A WAY FOR US TO BE TOGETHER THAT DAY."

"TV was huge for us, huge not just because of the images and the information, but because TV watching is communal," Sebastian, the former city news editor, says. "Gathering around the television didn't just provide a way for us to get information, it provided a way for us to be together that day."

At 11:14 a.m., Schiffrin emailed Spectator's managing board, moving their daily meeting up six hours to 2 p.m. "Please share any needs that anybody has; today, perhaps we can be more of a family than a staff," he wrote. When Mirer logged in after watching the North Tower fall, he says, "I checked my email and there were already people sort of taking notes back and forth to each other—what we were going to do, what our next steps were."

A university-wide email alerted students that classes had been canceled, though many professors who had heard the news before entering their classes chose to let their students go.

"Suddenly everybody knew," Mirer says. "It seemed like everybody knew, everyone who had a TV knew. People could see it happening from East Campus."

Reset the stage to a different, but related, scene: May 1, 2011, about 10 p.m., the night before the last day of spring semester classes, and thus the last night of regular production for Spectator. I was sitting in the Spectator office, surrounded by at least two dozen computers and laptops, buzzing iPhones and Blackberrys. I was all ready to pack up my bag and study for my final the next day when Jim Pagels, CC '13, and Spec's sports editor, emerged from the



sports office.

"Did you guys hear? Osama bin Laden is dead."

Nobody spoke. We looked to Jim's face—was he making some kind of sick joke?

"What? No. What?"

We each directed our browsers to the New York Times website, where a 40-word, unbylined brief confirmed the rumor. I turned to my news editors, Leah Greenbaum, CC '12, and Sarah Darville, CC '13, and asked, "Should we do something?" The answer was obvious as soon as the words came out of my mouth—of course we should do something.

I grabbed a notebook. I didn't know it then, but I had just booked my next eight hours, running around campus, calling student leaders, and ultimately taking the train to ground zero to witness an outpouring of nationalism as I had never seen it before. It took all of five minutes to go from not knowing about it to reporting on it and another 10, upon returning to the office, to determine that I would forego studying for finals and head downtown that night.

Without a doubt, 9/11 and bin Laden's death are two wholly different events. Still, even though they both impacted billions of people worldwide, the reactions of the comparatively miniscule Columbia community are stories worth telling.



### 'To Start to Form a Narrative'

On Sept. 12, 2001, Spectator ran a two-page spread written by 10 different reporters capturing individual moments throughout the day and across the campus: the story of two suitemates in East Campus who went to the roof, were asked to leave by Public Safety, and saw the North Tower collapse from their suite at 10:28 a.m.; of the somber vigils in St. Paul's Chapel and on Low Plaza; of the AEPi brother who sat on the brownstone's stoop, trying to contact his uncle who worked near the towers.

Unlike a traditional news story, there is no lede. There is no hook. Much like the way in which the news of the attacks was disseminated that day, the article provides short snippets of anxiety, uncertainty, grief. You read about the emotional confusion of a graduate student who has just learned of the news, but you then zoom in on the fear that attendees at an Ivy League conference in Lerner faced, realizing that many of their former classmates could be trapped in the buildings.

When news of this significance breaks, there's a rush to be a part of it in some form or another. That's why scores of Columbia students packed into

a car on the 1 train to ground zero and joined thousands of others that night this past May. Whether it's the urge to help in time of tragedy, to celebrate with the masses, or just to know what's going on, in this city, there is always a forum for people to convene and share.

9/11 was no exception. The rush to do something—anything—was intense. People lined Amsterdam Avenue to give blood at St. Luke's, but were very quickly turned away. "There really wasn't need for blood. There really wasn't need for much, but everybody was trying to go out there and help," Ben Casselman, CC '03, and former campus news editor, says. "A few people rushed down to ground zero—there was the wanting to do something even when there wasn't all that much people could do. In that sense, I was always very grateful that I worked for Spec. It gave me something to do—I could feel like I was contributing."

"I turned on the radio and the first words I heard were 'terrorist attack,' but they didn't really make sense at that point," Sebastian says. "So I listened for a while, and it fully started sinking in. As a student journalist at that point, I just went into journalist mode. I started thinking about how we were going to cover it."

Even the phone call that jolted Mirer from his sleep—the first he would ever hear of the events—had Spectator in mind. Mirer recalls sportswriter Ian Rapoport, CC '02, asking him, "Do we have anyone going down there?"

Although the series of vignettes was the most significant part of Wednesday's issue—occupying part of the front page and a two-page spread in the middle—the lead story was a Reuters article detailing the attacks more generally. Mirer said the managing board had opted against writing their own ac-

count of that national story because they thought it more important to document the reaction on campus.

"We told the story that we were in the best position to tell," Mirer says. "We can talk about our campus with authority and we knew what was going on. We were there all day. Nobody else was going to tell those stories. That was our contribution ... to reflect how our little community in a huge city responded to this extraordinary and terrible event."

By noon, emails expressing interest in writing submissions for the next day's issue had already reached Alice Boone, BC '03, GSAS '11, then-opinion editor and editor in chief in 2002. "That's the most striking example of how Spectator was seen as some sort of sounding board even really, really early on," she says. "Before anybody really understood what had happened, before the towers even collapsed."

At around 10:30 a.m., Schiffrin left his Shakespeare class. "The world that existed before the class had already been replaced," he says. "Outside the room there was a TV. It was usually really loud in that little area, but it was silent then. ... As I walked toward the TV screen and to the group, some people were already crying or hugging. Others were stupefied and shocked. They were staring at the TV with their hands over their mouths."

Immediately, Schiffrin took out a notebook and began talking with the people surrounding him. "We wanted to give a feeling for how a diverse community responds in diverse ways to a single event," Schiffrin says. "We were using our few resources to really try and show how we were all reacting in such extraordinary ways and such instantaneous ways to something that we already knew would change our lives forever."

"It's just sort of a totally extraordinary mo-



ment," Mirer says. "What you do [when you hear breaking news] is you just start asking questions and you just start writing because that's what you do on campus. Having something to do was a way to make sense of everything, to start putting it in perspective. To start to form a narrative."

Boone sat in the office's conference room trying to write the editorial with Ross McSweeney, CC '02, then-arts editor. "We knew that we needed to find something to say as an organization, as an institution, at Columbia, but it also seemed like an impossible task," Boone says. She began rifling through the bound volumes of old Spectators for inspiration. "I remember turning the pages of one of them, and the whole page just crumbled in my hand. It seemed funny that just the paper technology of the Spectator was crumbling because we could see it even then, from the ways that we were obsessively reloading CNN.com, things were changing."

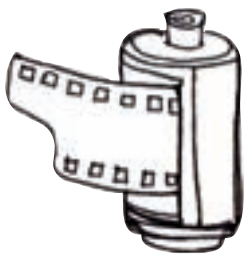
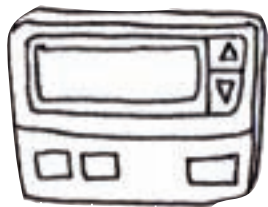
### Reporting Triggers Memories

Elsewhere on campus, a freshman named Steve Poellot had returned to his room on the fifth floor of Carman after his professor dismissed his calculus class. Every class for the remainder of the day had been canceled, so Poellot, CC '05, decided to walk downtown through Central Park with three of his floormates, Jennifer Preissel, photo editor in 2003, Bridget Geibel, and Alexandra Seggerman, all CC '05.

Remembering a day 10 years ago is not an easy task, even a day as significant as 9/11. Although everyone I spoke with had hazy recollections of various details of the day, they were all able to speak vividly of a moment they had conducting an interview or taking a photo.

Speaking from his home in Geneva, Poellot tries to recount the events of that morning with Segger-

## TOOLS OF THE DAY







man, to whom he is now married. The two bounce off of each other, reconstructing the timeline of their day.

"I grabbed my camera and we began walking down Broadway. I don't think I really spoke to anyone from Spectator before we left," he says, noting that, because it was only a week into his freshman year, he had only taken on maybe one photo assignment.

"No, the first thing we did was walk by the Spec office," interjects Seggerman. "I remember waiting downstairs while Steve went up to get the rolls of film."

Poellot agrees with his wife as the memory comes back to him. He questions whether he talked with one of Spectator's photo editors or if he simply grabbed the film. "I can't remember if I talked to one of them. They probably would have told me not to go," he laughs. "But it certainly wasn't an assignment and they didn't ask anyone to go. It was more of—we just felt like we wanted to see what was happening more closely. The fact that I had a camera and could take photographs for the Spectator was just another impetus."

As Poellot narrates his arrival downtown, however, he perfectly describes the shots he took—a news ticker declaring "There may be 10,000 people dead" in midtown, a police car covered in ash on Sixth Avenue, a couple hugging after the collapse of 7 World Trade Center, two policemen standing at the corner of Leonard Street and Hudson Street, a little four-year-old boy holding two big gallon jugs of water. "People weren't sure if New York was going to be closed for weeks, if they should plan as if it was a hurricane," he says, explaining the scramble for provisions.

Schiffrin had a hard time recounting the managing board meeting that afternoon, but clearly recalled the moments in the IAB lounge and at the West End, the two vignettes he contributed to the article the next day.

And even though bin Laden's death was just four



months ago, the events of that whirlwind evening are not easy for me to parse together. I vaguely remember approaching revelers on College Walk, Columbia students singing "Roar, Lion, Roar" on the subway, and leaving the office at 6:15 the following morning. But I can very plainly picture speaking with the Jackson Heights woman who felt closure for her good friend who was the youngest firefighter to die at the scene, and with the marine cadet who knew he had to be on his boat at six the next morning, but wasn't going to sleep, and with the two army veterans who, overcome with emotion, kept repeating, "This is a great day. This is a great day."

#### Aftermath

In the grand scheme of things, TV remained vital. "For days afterwards, probably weeks, in any floor lounge, there was a TV tuned to CNN or some 24-hour news station. And there were almost always people who were gathered in front of it," Casselman says.

For Spectator, "circulation was way, way up. The paper was grabbed everywhere it was offered," Casselman says, pointing out that nearly every newsstand sold out of every paper on Sept. 12. "As much as I'm proud of the work we did that day, I think our role really emerged as time went on. We did the best that we could on the day of to say what this meant for Columbia, but the truth was we didn't know—I don't think anyone knew."

There was no question it would dominate coverage, Schiffrin says. He recalls his favorite piece that week, a story Casselman wrote. "It was about the smell," he says. "It encapsulated this horror, because [even though] this thing was six or seven miles away, downtown, Tuesday night or Wednesday night, that smell drifted north. ... There's a lot of things that none of us will forget, but this in particular was unforgettable. It was acrid. It was burned steel and paper and bodies and heat. And it was all-encompassing."

As the true impact of 9/11 became clearer, so did the paper's responsibility to its readers. In the news pages, "We were able to play a more important role in covering how this affected Columbia, how Columbia responded as an institution, how individual groups responded," Casselman says. Schiffrin says he wrote or edited 50 obituaries of Columbia affiliates for Spectator.

In the weeks and months that followed, the paper received, "more submissions and more letters to the editor than we could possibly print," Boone says. "What was really striking to me was that the subjects of those columns were ineffable emotions—grief, anger, fear, isolation, confusion—all these



things that are really, really difficult to express. And it struck me that the thing that the most people wanted to do was write about how difficult they were to express. As an editor, my task was to help those people find some way to express it."

Opinion columns, Boone says, "tend to be about certainties: 'this is my opinion and I'm going to prove it to you.'" But 9/11 shook that framework, instilling confusion into the campus. "What we saw people writing that fall was really more of an exploration of contingency and doubt and uncertainty," she says. The opinion pages were "like a muse to find a way to figure out what things you were going to stand for—what things you were going to hold firm to—when it seemed like the entire world had changed."

#### Postscript

At the same time I was taking in the revelry at ground zero as a staff writer, Schiffrin—managing editor on 9/11—was standing in Abbottabad, Pakistan, broadcasting the world's only report that included footage from inside bin Laden's compound, in his role as ABC News' correspondent in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"I think it is probably not coincidental that a higher-than-average percentage of the managing board members that year ended up pursuing journalism careers," Casselman, a reporter for the Wall Street Journal, says. His co-news editor Sebastian is now a staff writer at the Houston Chronicle, and Mirer is studying journalism at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

I went to ground zero in May first and foremost as a reporter, but I will always remember the scene as more than just part of an assignment. Seeing Columbia students joining in the chorus of elation, and then talking to them and analyzing it all, made me feel like a part of something much larger. To be in the same situation on Sept. 11 could have only intensified that feeling of community. And when you can engage with the work that you do, when it becomes more than just work—there is no feeling more rewarding.

In 2000, a Columbia junior murdered his girlfriend and Spectator covered it with a more sensitive, local angle, vis-à-vis the sensationalized tabloid coverage that followed. It was then that Mirer began to realize the value of a "localized community paper," as he put it. 9/11 reinforced this idea. "When you are writing about a thing that affects the whole campus community, the campus community has a common reference point," he says. "News becomes the common reference point. That's always been the value of Spectator—the value of local newspapers." ●

# Turn My \$wag On

can tyler the creator bring swag to the mainstream?

BY ZOE CAMP

ILLUSTRATION BY ZHOUNAN XIE

Beside Lady Gaga's gender-bending role-play and Justin Bieber's possibly alcohol-fueled religious ramblings, there was one other scandal at this year's MTV Video Music Awards—the battle for Best New Artist. In an unexpected upset, the fan-voted award didn't go to rap superstar Wiz Khalifa—the favorite by far, anchored by a platinum-selling album and world-spanning arena tour. Also leaving empty-handed were breakout success stories Big Sean, Kreyashawn, and Foster the People.

The winner was a 20-year-old skater from California dressed in a tie-dyed cat T-shirt and a wide-toothed grin. The kid was Tyler the Creator, the ringleader of rap entourage Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All. Though his nominated song, "Yonkers," generated plenty of buzz online, nobody in the amphitheater seemed to have any idea how this goofball rap jester could cause such an upset. The victory speech was largely bleeped, except for periodic shouts of "SWAG!" The camera-man's cuts to celebrities' reactions (for the most part, shocked and amused) no doubt mirrored those of viewers. Just what is "swag," and how did it enter our musical and cultural conscience?

## THERE'S, OF COURSE, ONE LARGE QUESTION MARK HOVERING ABOVE THIS ENTIRE THING—WHY IS COCKY, SELF-PRODUCED, UNAPOLOGETIC RAP ENGULFING THE HIP-HOP SCENE AND TAKING AIM AT THE MAINSTREAM?

A term defined by urbandictionary.com as being "the way one carries oneself," "swag" has come to embody a new lifestyle comprised of equal parts class-clown goofiness, cool-kid cynicism and plenty of confidence. At first glance, it looks like shorthand for "swagger," and really, it's very similar. But more than anything else, "swag" is about coolness persevering no matter what barriers are in the way.

Indeed, Odd Future's reputation as swag forbears is likely rooted in the fact that their success came from adherence to the so-called tenets of swag philosophy: Do it yourself, don't listen to

haters, and stay true to your own style. A collective of talented rappers, singers, hype-men and beat-makers known for their frantic live shows and consistently solid (and wholly self-produced) mixtapes, Odd Future built up a dedicated fan base of skaters, misfits and hipsters in their native Los Angeles before being courted from everyone from Jay-Z to Diddy in one of the biggest rap bidding wars in recent memory. The group's outrageous demands ("If you are serious about the meeting, I want Randy's Donuts, swivel chairs, and a megaphone," Tyler famously announced to label execs) were completely anti-establishment and, thus, totally "swag." Indie mega-label XL Recordings ended up wining out, but only by acquiescing to Tyler's demands for complete freedom regarding all matters, snacks or otherwise.

Somewhere in the middle of the bidding war and the maelstrom of hype it stirred across the internet, hashtags of "#swag" started to proliferate on Twitter and Facebook. This was perhaps in part as a direct result of Justin Bieber's pickup of the phrase. Interestingly enough, as part of Diddy's efforts to woo Tyler et al, the mogul arranged for the Canadian pop-tart to meet the rap crew—a genius request on Tyler's part, as it allowed his stylistic brand of "swag" to reach the millions of Beliebers worldwide. A bevy of new artists carrying the swag flag followed: the equally prolific, DIY-inclined Lil B, electro-rap duo New Boyz, and aforementioned breakthrough female rapper Kreyashawn all generated buzz this year. Even established acts like Chris Brown and Kanye West reinterpreted the phenomenon with albums oozing with swag's characteristic cocky bravado and bold, organic beats.

There is, of course, one large question mark hovering above this entire thing: Why is cocky, self-produced, unapologetic rap engulfing the hip-hop scene and taking aim at the mainstream? In addition to the scene-starting spark produced by unique artists like Odd Future, there's something to be said about our cultural mind-set in the year 2011. While the economy flounders and petty squabbles on Capitol Hill breed a sense of apathy in American youth, the Internet and social media allow pent-up attitude to be transcribed into a Pro Tools track and

uploaded en masse to millions. Just like punk and grunge before it, "swag" connects fans by tapping into the very things that keep them sane in this crazy age: their individual senses of style, their apathy toward the "man" and the world at large, and the catharsis enabled by raw live music.

WBAR hip-hop DJ Olivia Parker, a sophomore at Barnard, explains Odd Future: "The crew is a really young group and they are mixing genres, making them different from the rest. They basically invented modern day alternative hop."

As with most musical trends, there is a chance that the entire thing will fizzle out and that swag will lie alongside "rad" and "far-out" in the graveyard of embarrassing decade slang. Perhaps Tyler's victory at the VMAs is the voting public's way of acknowledging the movement and giving it a push into the mainstream. What happens next is the real test—the test of whether or not Odd Future and company will continue to connect with audiences and blogs and put some much-needed life in the dying record industry, or if Tyler's swag ship sinks. Tyler plans to release a new LP, *Wolf*, this year, and records from other scene artists are no doubt on the horizon, giving mainstream consumers plenty of chance to have their say. Whether those chants of "SWAG" will go down as the rallying cries of a new musical movement, however, remains to be seen. ●







# Undead and Well-Read

horror's mindless masses infect literature

BY ANNELIESE COOPER  
ILLUSTRATION BY LIZ LEE  
PHOTOS BY STEVE MCGOWAN  
AND ADAM HAWTHORNE

They came in hordes: limping lopsided through Boston's poshest districts, trailing clothing strips and rubber limbs, snarling peppermint-flavored blood at unsuspecting brunchers—because, well, there are worse ways to spend a Saturday. These hundreds of brave and faux-battered souls were none other than the eager participants in Boston's seventh annual Zombie March, an occasion for any ex-makeup artist or horror enthusiast to break out some spirit gum and stroll brokenly through the streets. As startling as a mob of faux blood-drenched adults hobbling through Sephora might be, the existence of the march itself should come as no grand shock, if only because, in recent years, zombies have been lurching their way into every aspect of our pop culture with gusto—especially, and perhaps surprisingly, onto the literary scene. This fall marks the publication of two new zombie volumes—*Zone One* by acclaimed fiction writer Colson Whitehead and *Zombies! Zombies!*, an anthology edited by Otto Penzler—both of which arrive on the coattails of a year-long surge,

including Max Brooks's *The Zombie Survival Guide* and *World War Z*, among dozens of others. Though perhaps not so shocking as a man with perfectly rendered rotting flesh slapping at the side of your Duck Tour bus, the invasion of this particular horror trope onto our bookshelves is certainly worth an eyebrow raise, at least.

As Terrence Rafferty opined in his August New York Times piece, "The State of Zombie Literature," these scribed undead, "have fewer obvious attractions" for fiction writers than other mythical monsters, "because, unlike vampires, werewolves, demons, witches, goblins, and shape-shifters, zombies can't plausibly be endowed with rich, complex inner lives." Ever the brainless, gape-mouthed stooge, a zombie presents a problem on par with natural disaster—a wall of blind, dumb antagonism to be beaten back and back again—an apocalyptic plague, sure, but there's little opportunity for nuanced interplay between hero and villain, seeker and sought, the kind one might expect out of a modern creature novel. The simple visual of vacant, putrid cannibals stalking the streets is enough to provoke a chill or two, which would explain why zombie films have thrived almost unceasing for decades, but this recent surge in writing on the walking dead begs the question: why zombies? What about these particular monsters makes them

such an appealing topic, even in a medium for which they may be somewhat ill-suited?

An easy answer is that zombies, quite simply, are popular—cult icons, even—and are therefore marketable. When creating a series sprung from 2009's now infamous *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*—a reworking of the 19th-century classic as a tale of zombie warfare, co-credited to Ms. Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith—Quirk Publishers strategically paired novels in the public domain with what The Daily Beast's Liz Goodwin termed a "list of popular fanboy characters like ninjas, pirates, zombies, and monkeys." The word "fanboy" here is telling, denoting, as it tends to do, that particular demographic notorious for obsessing over their favorite media source—and, most importantly, for slaking that obsession with a mountain of themed paraphernalia. It's the age-old philosophy of marketing departments the world over: "People like it? Well, can we make a sequel? A trilogy? A TV series? An ice show?" What sells, sells, and if zombies are for fanboys, then there's no reason publishing houses—whom one might imagine suffering in this age of video games—shouldn't get in on the action by catering to those who might otherwise cash out on DVDs of *28 Days Later*.

Still, this more callous analysis fails to take into account the allure of the subject matter itself—why,

in fact, these creatures and their particular brand of havoc are so beloved. “Zombies in general just have this undeniable appeal,” agrees Maggie Hutton, a Barnard senior, who wrote her novel, *Zombies in Bonobo*, as part of her creative writing concentration. “Personally, I’m in it for the laughs and the gore.” Indeed, as Hutton points out, the almost slapstick, cartoonish stupidity of the living dead is ripe for comedic interpretation, alternating between fear and fun—and, of course, the reassurance that comes from finding fun in something fearful. For example, Hutton cites as inspiration the 2004 zombie flick *Shaun of the Dead*—a sharp parody of the genre, loaded with knowing nods to zombie tropes, stomach-ripping gore, and brain-bashing sequences set to the jangle of Queen’s “Don’t Stop Me Now.”

More than clever jokes, though, *Shaun of the Dead* offers a look at another pertinent facet of the undead phenomenon: their ability, like so many a mythical creature before them, to provide an apt and useful allegory for the zeitgeist. In fact, many of the film’s laughs come from the protagonists (and through them, the audience) mistaking the dead for the living and vice versa: a tongue-in-cheek opening sequence shows supermarket cashiers mindlessly scanning items, businessmen mechanically checking their cell phones, bus riders gazing into space, faces slack and pallid—all these ordinary citizens zombified by modern convenience long before any toxic plague hits. Just

as the werewolf might be said to capture the fears of Victorianism—the upstanding gentleman devolved to his basest impulses, Mr. Hyde tearing through the strictures of a newly mechanized, even sartorially repressive England—so might a zombie speak to the fears of the domesticated suburbanite, dulled into an inert dystopian complicity.

Other metaphors certainly fit the bill: Rafferty’s article imbues these creatures with “a general anxiety, particularly in the West, about the planet’s dwindling resources,” the “gaping maws” of the undead a not-so-subtle stand-in for Earth’s starving millions. One might also note a late-20th-century paranoia around fatal infection lurking behind the inciting plague—even the popular theme of mistrust in government, as this contagion is usually released through some bureaucratic mix-up. Apocalypse fantasies, too, run rampant nowadays, with 2012 fast approaching and a Rapture scare still snapping at our heels. Indeed, Penzler’s retrospective anthology chronicles the ever-evolving significance of the walking dead—from Poe’s *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, a medical mystery for the new age of science, to Stephen King’s *Home Delivery*, which invokes “a hole in the ozone layer” as the topical cause of its characters’ demise—each reaffirming the zombie myth’s inherent plasticity, its bare-bones structure that almost begs to be reimagined.

## WHAT SELLS, SELLS, AND IF ZOMBIES ARE FOR FANBOYS, THEN THERE’S NO REASON PUBLISHING HOUSES... SHOULDN’T GET IN ON THE ACTION.

Of course, this adaptability only serves to augment perhaps the most intriguing aspect of a zombie story: its near-insidious inclusivity—an equal opportunity infection that allows for the chilling, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*-esque possibility that anyone, at any time, can be drafted to the dark side. A zombie could be your neighbor, your president, your girlfriend whom you have to bash in the face with a shovel for the safety of your survivor group—your easiest Halloween costume: throw some blood on any outfit and tack on a “zombie-” prefix.

As these endless iterations prove, and their staggering readership solidifies, this versatile trope appears to be contagious in its ability to inspire new fiction—a welcome epidemic for fake-blood fans, and especially for up-and-coming writers like Hutton: “Rotting corpses walking around devouring human flesh?” she muses. “My God, the possibilities.” ●





# Getting Tanked

in search of salty inner peace

BY JON EDELMAN

ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY PAN

As fall term begins, it's impossible to miss the back-to-school messages: Develop good study habits! Find good professors! Make good friends! But these all leave out something that every Columbia student needs: a good coping mechanism. College life in New York City, and the whirl of papers and parties, exams and extra-curricular activities that it entails, can be enough to make anyone wish for a little nothingness. Reliable releases range from yoga to Jägermeister, but what relaxation options exist for those leery of substances and spirituality? Sam Zeiger has a solution, and it's in a pitch-black soundproof tank in his apartment.

This is less creepy than it sounds. Zeiger is the owner of Blue Light Floatation, the city's oldest floatation therapy provider. Stressed New Yorkers of all sorts visit Zeiger's apartment for floatation sessions in his saltwater-filled sensory deprivation tank. According to his website, upon floating in the water, free from external stimuli, "the body relaxes completely, the mind releases, and the consciousness is free to be in its original state, like a clear sky. ... a beautiful silence is experienced and a lightness of being that cannot be felt in any other way on Earth unfolds."

Floatation therapy has a vaguely New Age tinge—possibly in part because its pioneering scientist, John C. Lilly, liked to pair tank sessions with LSD. His early experiments were immortalized and fictionalized in the 1980 sci-fi/horror film *Altered States*, in which a floating William Hurt experiences himself devolving into a Primitive Man and a conscious amorphous blob. The film helped start a brief vogue for the practice in the '80s. More recently, isolation tank therapy was featured on an episode of *The Simpsons*, in which a drug-free Lisa hallucinates that she's a cat, a tree, Cokie Roberts, and finally, Homer.

Zeiger doesn't promise anything that dramatic, although his website touts plenty of benefits: among them, the reduction of stress, tension, and blood pressure, cleansing the body of wastes, creating harmonious brain wave patterns, and improving both skin and self-confidence. I'd take a good hallucination.

After a quick orientation session with Zeiger, I take a shower and wash my hair, to rid my body of anything that could affect the purity of the tank's water. Toweled, I duck across the hall (there's a foldable screen sectioning off the part of the apartment where Zeiger is) into the tank's antechamber. There, I discard my towel, and lie down in the water, which is heated to skin temperature and silky with a thousand pounds of Epsom salts. Immediately, I feel it gently boosting me up. Now officially floating, I hit the button that controls the light.

Blackness. Silence. The air smells like a twenty-five cent bag of popcorn. Almost immediately, I bump into the side of the tank, which makes me move my head, which drips salt water into my eyes, which sends me scrambling for the spray bottle of fresh water, which causes me to bump into the side of the tank. It takes a while to get straightened out.

Nothingness, it turns out, is kind of boring. I lie there for what feels like 40 minutes (but what is probably 20) waiting for something—transcendence, hallucination, even a sense of calm—to occur. It doesn't. My mind, which was supposed to be clear by now, has turned into an obsessive carousel: "I don't think I'm doing this right," "This was a stupid idea for an Eye piece," "I wonder what happens if you fart in here?" I begin to feel like I'm in the world's most pretentious bathtub.

Finally, I notice something—the throb of blood coursing through my body is incredibly loud. I picture it rushing through my veins, energizing me. (Is that how blood works?) Suddenly, I hear a twang, like a single plucked guitar string. I'm blinking. I can hear myself blink. Or am I just

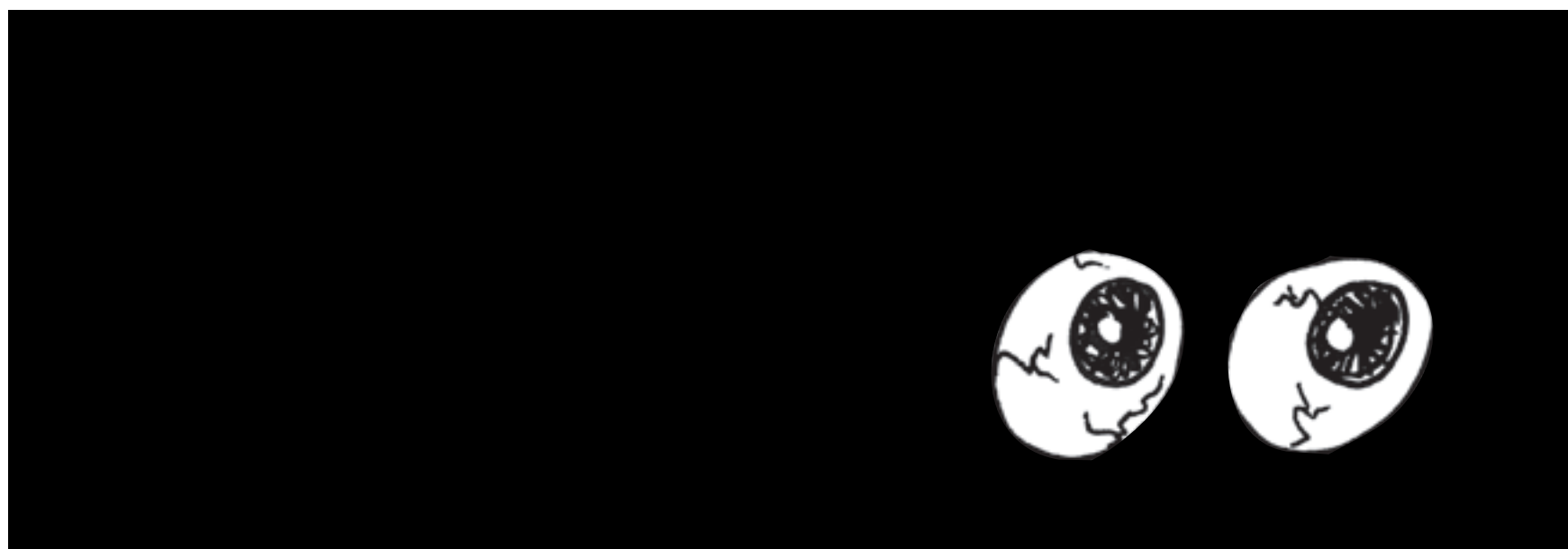
imagining it? Who cares? I start blinking madly, trying to play a song. This does not succeed.

Before this gets too old, I hear the soft music that means that my hour-long session is up. I get up, reclaim my towel, and take my second shower of the afternoon (my hair is silvery with salt). After I dry off, I have a glass of chilled herbal tea in Zeiger's living room and reflect. I definitely feel calmer and lighter, but I'm not quite sure that I'm a convert.

**FLOATATION THERAPY HAS A VAGUELY NEW AGE TINGE—POSSIBLY IN PART BECAUSE ITS PIONEERING SCIENTIST, JOHN C. LILLY, LIKED TO PAIR TANK SESSIONS WITH LSD.**

According to Zeiger, my experience was typical. For many first-timers, it can take a long part of the session simply to adjust to the environment. As tank users gain experience they become able to relax more deeply and more easily. When it existed, a national floatation therapy organization recommended that beginners commit to three sessions.

Although much of his clientele consists of executives and artists, Zeiger has also seen many students, ranging in age from elementary school to college. His website says that, in addition to stress reduction, floating can improve learning, memory, creativity and concentration. It's easy to imagine myself, besieged by obligations, wanting to slip away from it all for an hour's float. That said, a session at Blue Light costs \$80. I wonder how much salt will fit into my bathtub. ●



# Anatomy of a Breakup in the Digital Age

breaking up has never been harder to do

BY CAROLYN YIM (CC '11) AND PAUL HSIAO  
ILLUSTRATION BY MADDY KLOSS

## HER

See it coming. Know after months of sharing experiences, coffee mugs, the same side of the pillow, and far too much Facebook foreplay that it just isn't working out anymore. Think about how to break it to him. Reach for iPhone. Open WhatsApp. Decide breaking up by text is still too cruel. Will ask to meet up.

Load previous chat under his name. Inwardly sulk about how his status is last seen at 2:12 a.m. but he still couldn't be a f\*\*\*ing gentleman and care for once and message "did you get home safe last night." Cringe at suddenly resurfaced memory of what a drunken slob you were yesterday. Curse Freud and repressed memories. Sigh and ask for coffee at corner cafe.

Hover on and off of WhatsApp every two minutes as you continuously check whether or not that one green checkmark will turn to two, indicating that your message has been read. Hold your breath when his status reads online. Wait for typing ... status. Never comes. Exhale when he goes back offline without replying, even though he's clearly read it. Feel ego deflate.

Finally hear iPhone buzz. Meet up. Do the deed. Bitterly tell yourself you had seen this coming all along. Feel better, somewhat. Come home, and first thing after shoving the piles of take-out debris and crumbled fortune cookies ("When you find patience you find true love." What? Lies!) off your desk you log onto Facebook. Race to cancel relationship status. Feel better again knowing that you beat him to it. Deliberate momentarily on whether you want to announce that you're newly Single or quietly fade into the ranks of the unspecified relationship status. Decide on the latter. This isn't OkCupid, after all.

## TODAY, DWELLING ON YOUR EX MEANS STALKING THEM ONLINE, THROUGH FACEBOOK OR GOOGLE OR WHATEVER METHOD, AND ERASING YOUR BROWSER'S HISTORY AFTERWARD.

Meanwhile, stare at nothing in particular. Have conversation out loud with self, repeating the "talk" you just had with him and how you could have said it better or delivered it with more punch and snark. And more of a straight face. Instead of whimpering. Practice poker face in mirror. Oh well, next time.



Feel superior that your relationship change has received more Likes than his. Feel ego slowly starting to inflate back.

A month later, check Foursquare. Ruminates when you find out you were just ousted as the Mayor of His Room. Weep.

## HIM

When it happened, I went on the offensive. I didn't want to cause a huge fuss, but then again, it was I who wanted to make our relationship "Facebook-o-fish" in the first place. So, I should be the one who should end it officially, right? But, she didn't even give me that satisfaction. I didn't feel a lot different afterward—the sky didn't split apart nor did my phone buzz with comments on my status update. What was annoying, though, was that I noticed that a bunch of her cute friends bombed her wall with comments ("WHAT HAPPENED!?" "omg...let's Skype :(").

Get ready for that vast emptiness. Text messages, phone calls, whatever is just attention quantified. Video games are addictive because they provide instant gratification and incentivize going back to them. So do relationships. At 11:11, I used to get a text from her: "wish." Now I don't. After a test, good or bad, I used to be able to send a text

saying how it went and usually receive an appropriate emoticon. Now, after any sort of textworthy event, I half-expect my phone to ring, but it never does. I want that back.

I knew the worst thing to do after a breakup was dwell on memories of the past. Today, dwelling on your ex means stalking them online, through Facebook or Google or whatever method, and erasing your browser's history afterward. It's sort of like bingeing, isn't it? A small indulgence here or there, clicking on what events she attended or photos of her isn't as bad as endlessly scrolling through her wall desperately finding which asshole is hitting on her now. NYU? Bastard.

I hate ignoring her. I hate that she goes online. Should I be the first one to talk? That's a sign of weakness. Talk about what? I don't miss her. I miss the idea of her, right? I should take her off my contact list. What if she did that to me first? The bitch.

There are 23 photos of us together online, about a thousand emails, hundreds of texts, dozens of Facebook exchanges, 174 mutual friends, hours upon hours of Skype messages interrupted with Skype calls, and probably many more digital traces of her on my hard drive. And I still can't see where it went wrong. ●

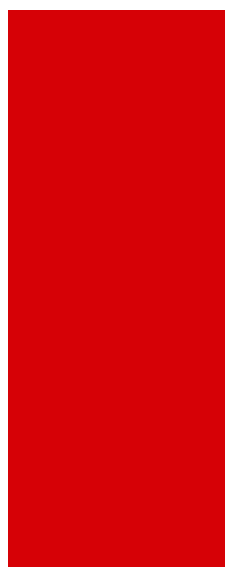




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