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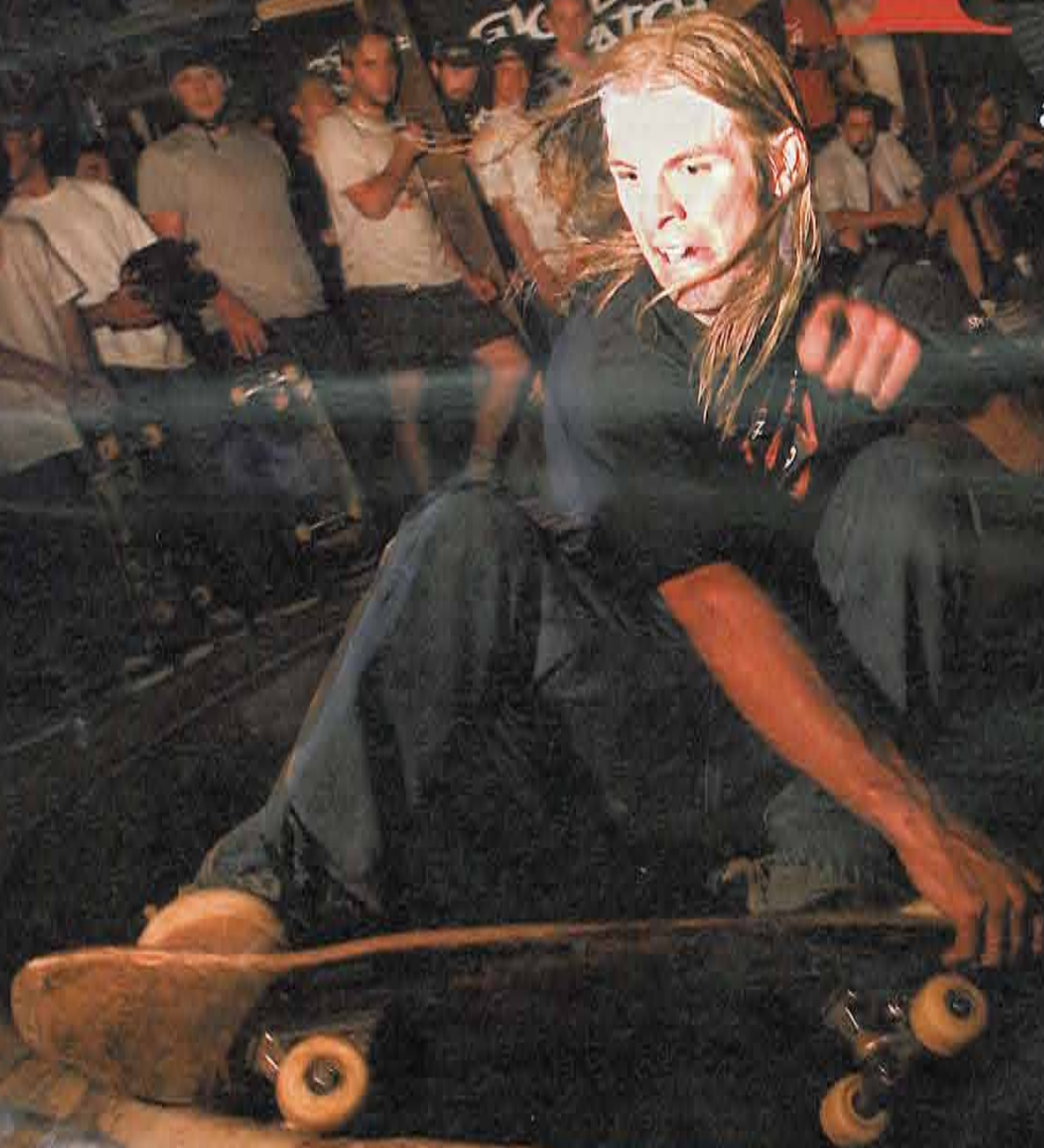
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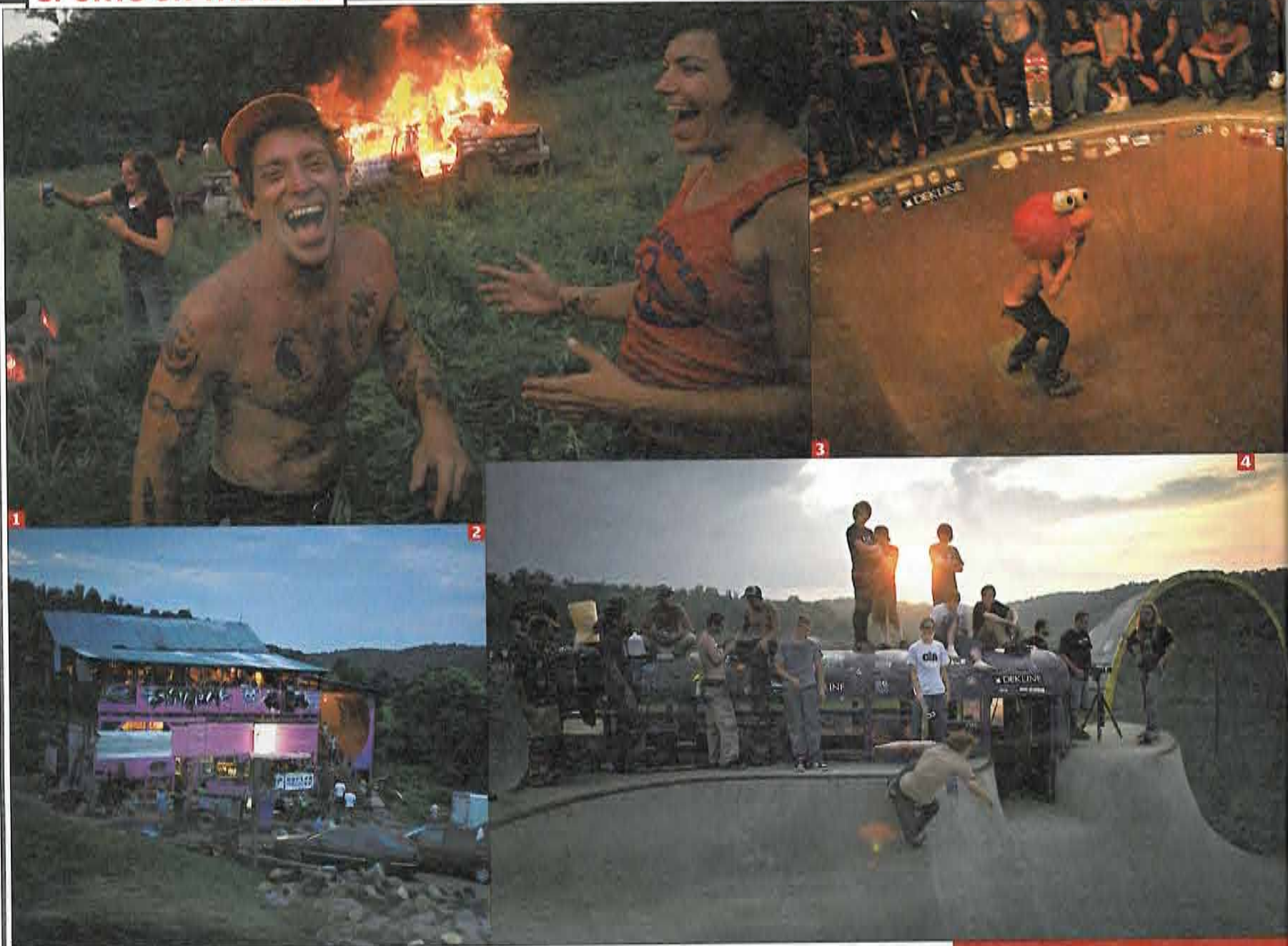
welcome to skatopia

Eighty-eight
acres of
anarchy in
the USA

By Mark Binelli
Photographs by
Travis Dove



Evan Hendershot, of Marietta, Ohio, lipslides at Skatopia's barn bowl. "He's a fucking ripper," says Brewce Martin, who founded the anything-goes skater haven. "He comes, rips and leaves."



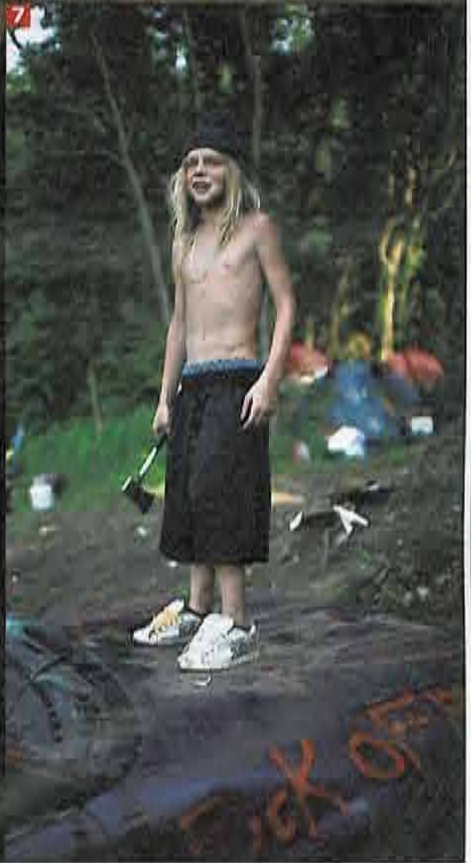
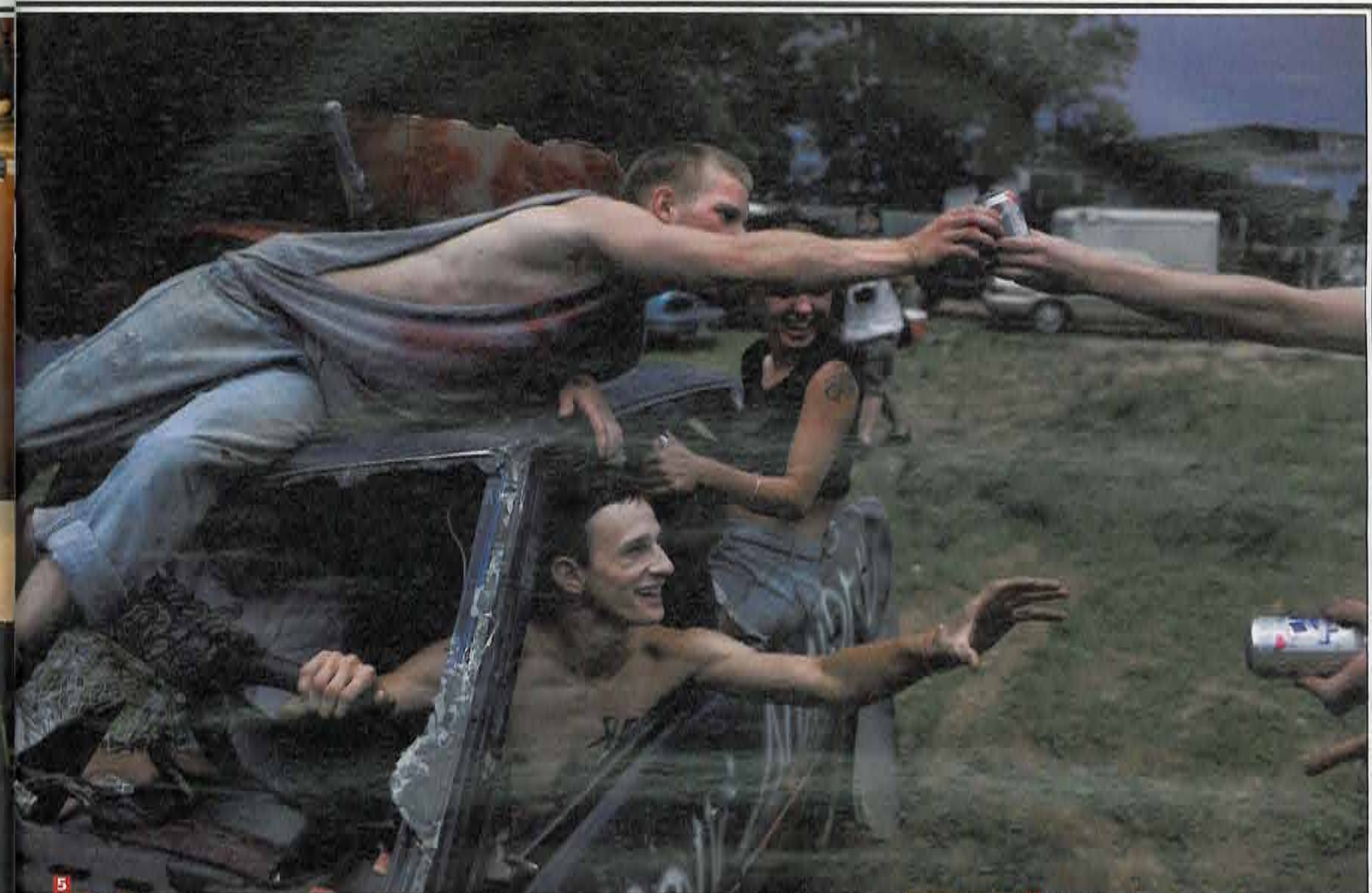
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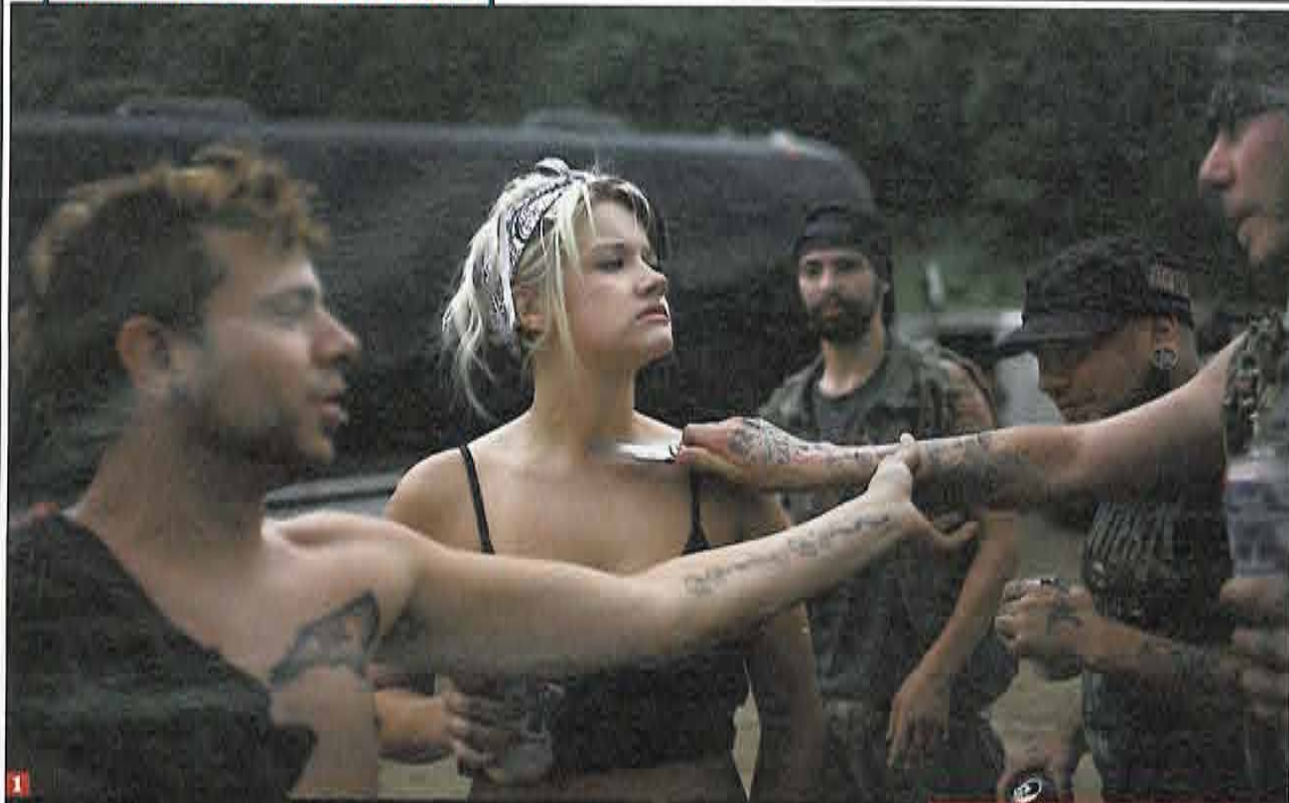
HE ROAD TO SKATOPIA IS BARELY TWO LANES AND OFTEN UNMARKED. IT WINDS PAST a field of sheep, a white clapboard church (Page Free Will Baptist), a yellow highway-crossing sign showing an Amish buggy instead of a deer. A handmade warning at the top of a steep dirt drive — "Skatopia Enter at Own Risk!!!" — lets pilgrims know they have arrived. They come at all hours, most any time of year, from as far away as Argentina, Japan, Finland. The gates are always open. ✚ On this particular afternoon, Brewce Martin, the voluble founder and cheerily autocratic ruler of Skatopia, is conducting a guided tour. Skatopia sits on 88 acres of hilly, forested land in Rutland, Ohio, an Appalachian town with a population of approximately 420, about 20 minutes from the West Virginia state line. Martin has been a skateboarding fanatic since he was a kid. That was in the Seventies; he is 42 now. Growing up nearby, Martin always dreamed of creating the perfect skate park. In part, his vision was simply architectural.

He loved the design challenge of building ever-more-elaborate ramps and bowls, and spent years doing construction work at skate parks around the country. But as with all other major American utopianist movements, there were deep philosophical underpinnings, as well. "There was a park called Skatopia in the Seventies," Martin recalls. "You had to pay to get in. You had to wear full pads. You couldn't drink. It was a good park. But there was no 'opia' to it." ✚ Martin's version of Skatopia is meant to amend all that. There is no admission fee. (Skaters are generally asked to perform an hour's worth of work.) There are no safety regulations, and in fact, a certain amount of behavior that might be considered "unsafe," like setting things on fire, is encouraged. (Though, as Martin's 22-year-old son, Brandon, points out, "When we burn stuff, it's stuff we have permission to burn. We're not just gonna burn your car. I mean, that *has* happened here. But we didn't do it.") Drinking? Oh, yes. "Drinking and driving is allowed up here," Martin tells me as he cracks open a Pabst and climbs behind the wheel of one of the many seemingly inoperable vehicles strewn across his property. This vehicle is, or was, a Jeep Grand Wagoneer, but it looks like something that was parked too close to a building destroyed by aerial bombing: All of the windows have been smashed, one rear door is crumpled shut, the interior and exterior are entirely caked in mud, and the front grill is gone, leaving the radiator completely exposed.

Skate-Punk Deliverance

Brewce Martin began building Skatopia in 1996. (1) Martin and his girlfriend, Amber Cavender, revel in the chaos of this year's Bowl Bash. The main barn (2) houses a massive bowl (3), skated here by 18-year-old Josiah Renn. (Last year, Renn lived in a room under the bowl.) Also popular: the Lula Bowl (4). Andrew Frye (5), on the car's hood, has been coming to Skatopia for five years: "This is my favorite place, 'cause you can just do whatever," he says. "You ain't got to follow any skate-park rules." Some visitors pass out (6): 13-year-old Nathan Priest (7) was kicked out after trashing a girl's car: "You shouldn't leave your car sitting somewhere with the back windshield out," he says. "It's called Skatopia. It's anarchy here."





Skate or Die

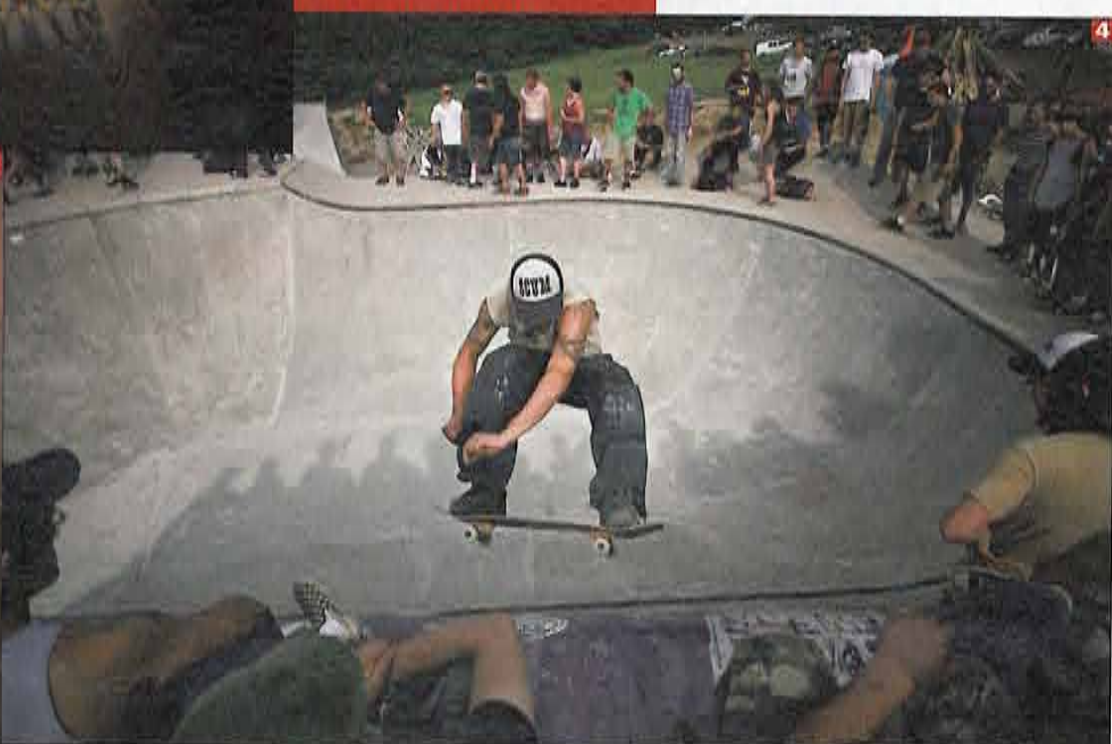
Pete Ager, the 26-year-old singer of North Carolina punk-metal band the Dirty South Revolutionaries, jokingly menaces his drummer's girlfriend with a knife (1). "That's something I do to get a rouse out of people," says Ager. "We were more than a little tipsy." If the mosh pit (2) gets dull, Skatopians add fireworks (3). Catching air at the Lula Bowl (4).

The Jeep does run, though, and soon Martin is gunning it up a dirt road. We fly past the Lula Bowl, named for Martin's deceased dog, who is buried beneath the concrete, and then we cut into the woods, where there is no road, and Martin, leaning over the wheel, dodges trees like he's playing a video game and not actually risking our lives, even though he hates video games, except perhaps Tony Hawk's Underground 2, which features an entire level set at Skatopia.

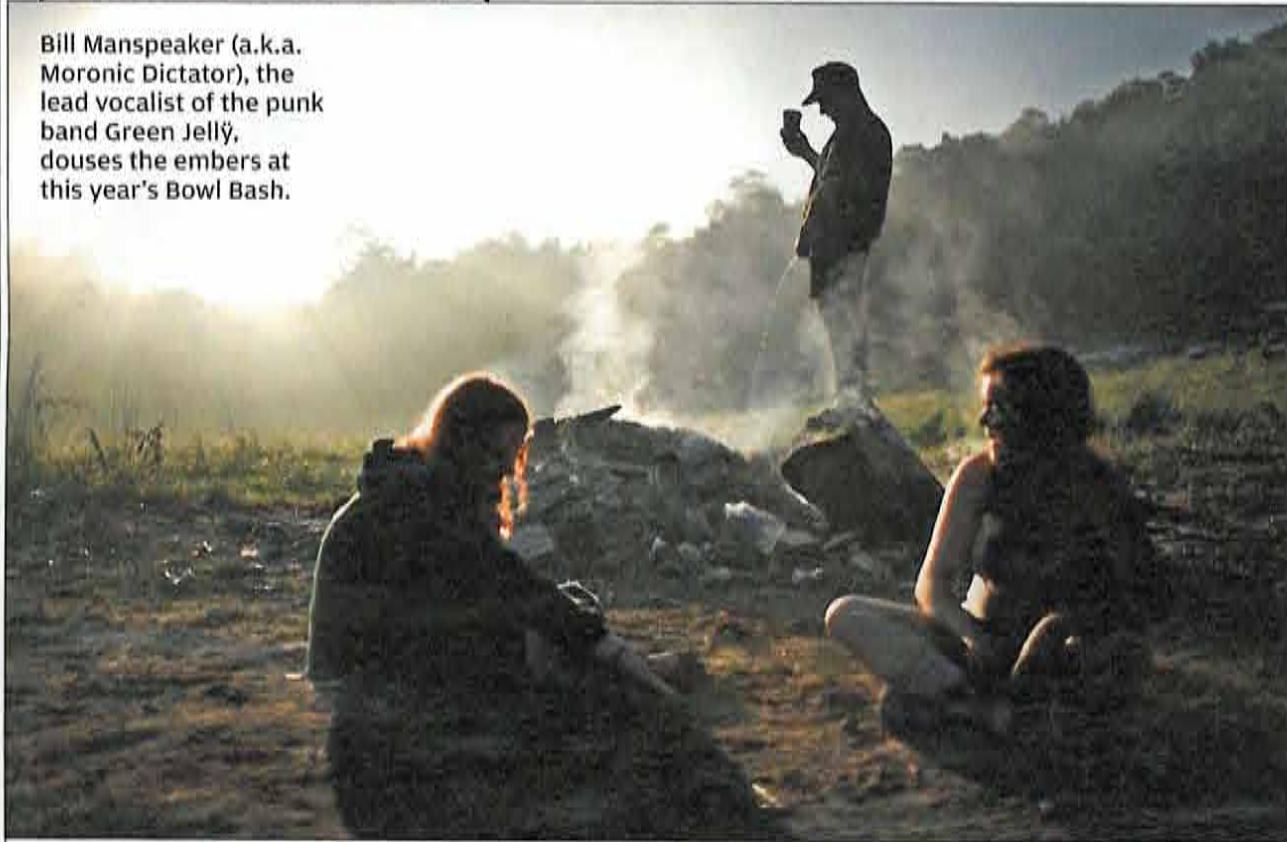
Eventually we turn onto a muddy path. Martin steers around a piece of metal. "There's that tailpipe I was looking for," he deadpans. We near the top of another rise, with a lovely view of the rolling foothills of the Appalachians. Martin nods at a mossy rock. "This is my spot, if I ever want to get laid," he says. "With the view up here, the girls feel like Genghis Khan is taking their village."

Martin has a compact, muscular frame. His family origins are Scottish, and he has reddish hair, cut short and messy. Today he's wearing a dirty Volcom shirt over a white T-shirt, gray work pants, muddy boots and a shark's-tooth necklace. He's missing a tooth of his own and has sideburns that end abruptly at the level of his mustache.

He bought the land in 1995, after he was evicted from an earlier Skatopia site in West Virginia. He and Brandon live on the property, in a farmhouse that doubles as the Museum of Skateboard History. Four of the rooms are largely bare, except for the walls, which have been paneled with hanging skateboards. The boards are arranged in chronological order, beginning with crude wooden models from the early Sixties, on through the changing styles that mark subsequent historical skateboarding eras like



Bill Manspeaker (a.k.a. Moronic Dictator), the lead vocalist of the punk band Green Jelly, douses the embers at this year's Bowl Bash.



rings of a tree. Farther up the hill, there's a big pink barn housing two enormous bowls and a three-quarter pipe. Another bowl is tucked inside an old metal shed. The place feels like a cross between an elaborate folk-art installation and the set of one of those Seventies exploitation movies where marauding cannibal hillbillies set upon foolish interlopers who are looking for gas. Wandering around the property, we pass a gutted school bus and a row of wooden cabins with names like "Captain Creepy's" and the "Fatty Shack." A handful of guys with red eyes and some manner of facial hair sit on cinder blocks around a fire, drinking beers. Nearby, a couple of mangy dogs, one half-blind, root around some carpets piled in the weeds. The half-blind dog glares at me with its good eye.

SKATOPTIA HAS BECOME THE stuff of legend in the skateboarding underground. *Thrasher* magazine described the Barn Bowl as "a 13-foot bottomless pit" and pointed out that "the biggest menace of the bowl is Brewce himself . . . he literally mows down whomever happens to be in his path of radical." When Bam Margera and Tony Hawk filmed an episode of *Viva la Bam* here, one of the hosts warned that Margera and Hawk "have no idea what they're getting into. They're used to nice, glossy, safe ramps, X Games-style stuff. They're walking into the gates of hell." All of this promised gnarliness, of

Contributing editor MARK BINELLI wrote "Greenland Melting" in RS 1056/57.

"Everyone always refers to *Field of Dreams* when they talk about Skatopia," says founder Brewce Martin. "We like to show young kids that there's some hope for them."

course, remains incredibly attractive to skaters looking for an old-school sense of danger that's been largely subsumed as the sport has been co-opted and corporatized. "It holds a mythical allure," Hawk says. "There was no mass destruction during my visit, but the bowl was much tighter and deeper than I imagined. It was not easy to skate."

"My goal is to build a monument to skateboarding," Martin tells me, "so that a thousand years after we've done fucked everything up, some straggler will come upon *this*." Martin speaks in a raspy Southern drawl. He likes to compare himself to cult leaders and other outsized historical figures. Over the course of my visit, he mentions Charles Manson, Robin Hood, Socrates, Robert Mugabe, Pete Rose, Nietzsche and Stephen Hawking. (He says Hawking is a more appropriate comparison than Einstein only " 'cause he's in a wheelchair, and that's where I'll be one day.")

But in fact, Martin does possess a weird charisma. When I visit Skatopia, at least a half-dozen others are crashing on the property. Several seem perpetually drunk. They all perform various chores for Martin, mostly involving new construction projects. Martin calls

them his "minions." One of the minions, Clay, is tall and gangly, wears a Lynyrd Skynyrd cap and speaks in a Beavis-like monotone; the others call him "Clay Drunkenstein." Roger, another minion, has a long goatee and sleeps on a pallet in a creepy room under the barn. Roger knows Martin from West Virginia. He showed up at Skatopia drunk on Wild Turkey, after spending 17 days in jail, and said he wanted to skate, even though he'd never skated before. Martin padded him up and dropped him into a bowl. He immediately took a nasty spill and broke his femur. Before they drove him to the hospital, while he was still lying in a heap at the bottom of the bowl, he pulled a bag of cocaine out of his pocket and demanded someone cut him a line.

Martin says, "My dad's an engineer, and I have a huge math brain. I can take even the dumbest of minions and get them to turn out something. *Par exemple* . . ." He gestures at a garishly painted mobile home parked in front of the barn. A more recent project, back at the house, involved constructing a shower grotto entirely out of Jägermeister bottles.

"It didn't turn out the way I wanted," Martin says, "but now I know the possibilities of the medium."

THE MOST CONCENTRATED PERIODS of mayhem occur during the annual summer Bowl Bash, when hundreds of kids descend on Rutland for Skatopia's answer to Woodstock. The first Bowl Bash was June 1st, 1996; the first band to play was an all-gay punk band called Stupid America. The bands play in the loft of the barn. The kids, meanwhile, camp out on the property, skate, drink, shoot bottle rockets at one another, drive recklessly on dirt tracks and otherwise celebrate the fact that freedom's just another word for plenty left to burn. Occasionally events get out of hand. At this year's Bash, a drunk girl accidentally backed into a parked car, which prompted some kids to smash the windows of her car with rocks and their skateboards. By the time Martin arrived on the scene, the girl had beaten one of the boys with a two-by-four. She ended up abandoning the car. When the police came a few weeks later, someone had hidden the vehicle in the woods.

There's little tension between Martin and his neighbors. As in many relatively isolated communities, the right to do whatever the hell you want on your own property is sacrosanct in Meigs County, where Skatopia is located. Meigs is coal-mining country and has long been one of Ohio's poorest corners. But it's also attractive to hippies and dropouts looking to fly under the radar. Jefferson Airplane guitarist Jorma Kaukonen lives nearby, on his 119-acre Fur Peace Ranch. (Martin says he heard that Kaukonen forbade his daughter from coming to Skatopia.)

Martin and his younger brother began skateboarding in the early Seventies. His parents split up when he was five, and he grew up with his mother, an accountant, in Vienna, West Virginia, a suburban town just over the Ohio state line. In the basement of his childhood home, Martin built his very first skateboard ramp — "probably the first ramp in West Virginia," he says — by nailing some closet doors to a workbench and using linoleum to smooth the angles. Throughout his 20s and early 30s, Martin skated, took classes and worked odd jobs in places like Orlando. He also raised (and home-schooled) Brandon as a single dad. Brandon could not be less like his father: tall, skinny and bearded, he looks vaguely Amish, and unless directly engaged, he rarely speaks. "Brandon's an anchorite," Martin says. "He's my proudest accomplishment to date."

Back at the barn, Martin and Brandon climb up to the loft to demonstrate their skills. One level below, there's a stage and a stripper pole, operational during Bowl Bashes. "There been a lot of sluts on that pole," mutters another minion, a bearded mechanic named Nick who gets Martin's cars running, looks like Waylon Jennings and reeks [Cont. on 51]

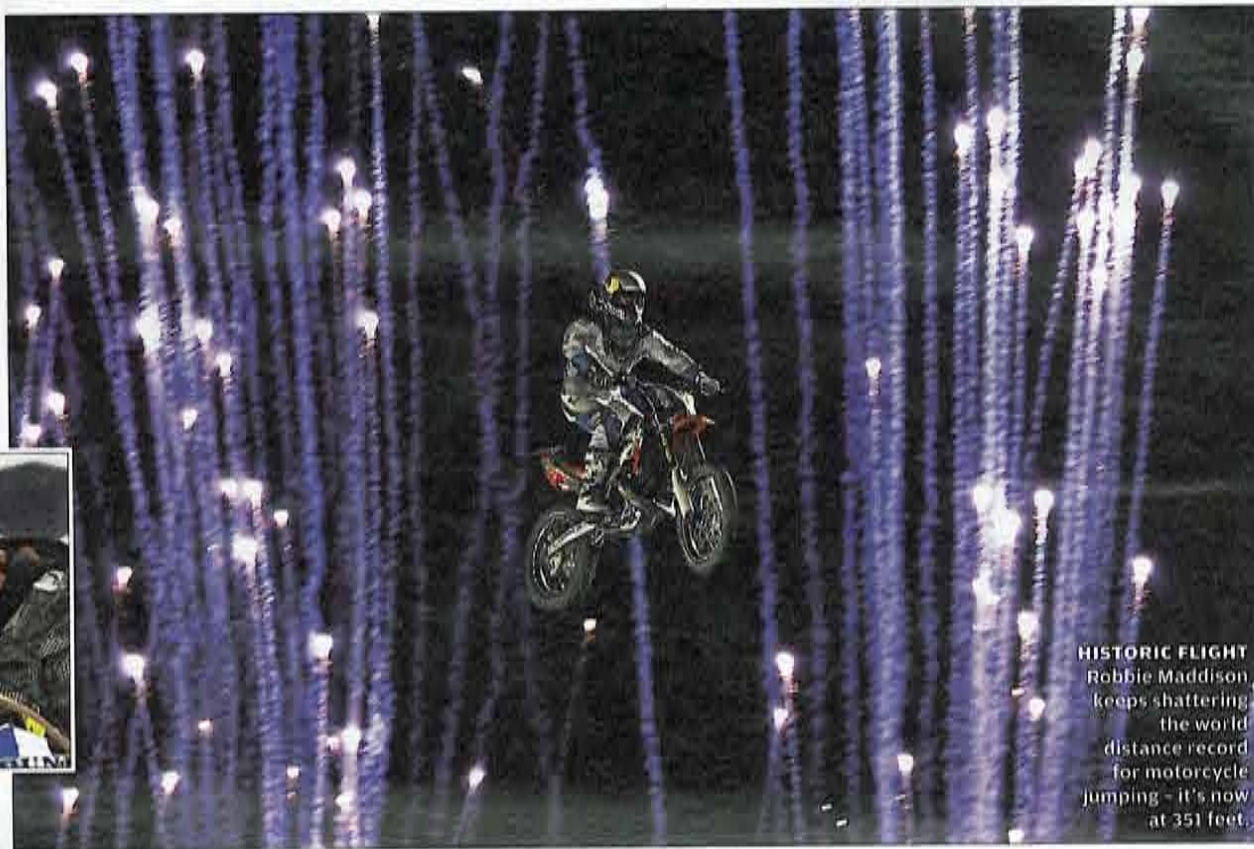
The New Daredevil

Meet the most reckless man to ride a motorcycle since Evel Knievel

By Josh Dean

ROBIE MADDISON THOUGHT he was going to die. Which shouldn't have been surprising, since death is an occupational hazard for a man who makes a living flying over football fields on a motorcycle. Maddison — known to everyone as “Maddo” — had just launched himself off a ramp on his bike in an attempt to break his own world record for motorcycle distance jumping. He needed to soar 340 feet, but the instant he left the ramp, he knew something was wrong. “I realized I wasn't gonna make it,” he says. “I thought, ‘I can't believe I'm gonna die in front of 40,000 people.’ Luckily, I missed death by two feet. But that's a pretty life-changing moment.” Then, of course, he did the jump again a half-hour later.

As of last December, no one had ever jumped farther than 277.6 feet on a motorcycle, but Maddo — a rising star in the X Games sport of freestyle motocross (FMX) — just had a feeling it was something he could do. So on New Year's Eve in Las Vegas, he broke the world record live on ESPN, flying 322 feet in front of millions of viewers.



HISTORIC FLIGHT
Robbie Maddison keeps shattering the world distance record for motorcycle jumping — it's now at 351 feet.

“There are a lot of guys who do FMX, and a few who are serious about distance jumping,” says Bryan Stealey, managing editor of *Road Racer X* magazine. “But he's in a class of his own.”

Maddo, a 27-year-old Aussie, was a champion motocross rider in his youth, but by the time he made it to America, FMX was already a growing

sports phenomenon with established homegrown stars, and he felt the need to make his mark. His solution was to smash distance records. “Maddo is insane,” says Travis Pastrana, the seven-time FMX X Games gold medalist. “He has a set of brass balls that allow that guy to fly a motorcycle farther than anyone ever dreamed.”

“It's actually so intense it's sickening,” says Maddo, who is preparing to debut some never-before-seen tricks at this summer's X Games. “The feeling in the air is terrifying. Every time I get on the bike, I'm saying goodbye to everyone in my life, because I don't know if I'm riding away from it. I know on the next jump I could die — but I just want it.”

SKATOPIA

[Cont. from 48] of alcohol. He is sipping out of a plastic SpongeBob SquarePants cup bearing the message THIS IS THE BEST DAY EVER. A tattered American flag hangs over a severe-looking 13-foot-deep bowl. Graffiti covers the barn's exposed wooden beams: “Eatin' Ain't Cheatin',” “Hobbits Are Gay.”

Martin bombs straight into the bowl, crouching and reckless, occasionally losing his board when attempting a wilder trick. Amber, his pretty 27-year-old girlfriend, who is studying to be an anesthesiologist, looks on affectionately. Brandon, meanwhile, though also a powerful skater, has the opposite style: He barely bends his knees as he hurtles down sheer angles, looking calm and moving with the elegance of a skier.

Money is tight. Martin settled a civil case last November stemming from a 2004 bar fight. “Dude's girlfriend was dating me, I ran into him at the bar, and he was like, ‘Come meet me in the parking lot,’” Martin says. “Well, the exact words were ‘You wrinkled old man, come get what you deserve.’ And I was dumb enough to go get what I deserved, which ended up being a \$100,000 debit to my lifestyle.” One of the guys in the fight had a bat, but Martin relieved him of that and ended up putting two men in the hospital. He spent 45 days in jail.

Martin scrapes by, though: selling merchandise (and scrap metal) and cadg-

ing donations from ex-skaters. “There's a huge loyalty in skating,” he says. “The guilt is worse than Catholic if you leave.” There's also a Skatopia documentary in the works. “That'll end up being a great résumé piece for the filmmaker,” Martin says. “Meanwhile, I'll be here picking through the embers. Scavenging copper wire out of old houses like some hobo.” Up on the hill, some teenagers are skating the Lula Bowl. The only thing visible from down here is the bowl's cement ridge. Occasionally, a black-clad figure pops to the surface of the bowl. You can't see their skateboards. The boys seem to be floating. They look like kites.

There's an odd purity to Martin's vision. As he likes to say, he's figured out a way to replace money with work and to give visitors whose only knowledge of anarchy comes from punk-rock songs a

taste of the absolute freedom they think they want. “We just like to show young kids once in a while that there's some hope for them,” he says. “That people can live a dream, and you don't have to be rich. It's hard as hell to make a living out here. But as far as freedom goes?” Martin tosses a baseball to one of the dogs. “It's retarded,” he continues. “Everyone always refers to *Field of Dreams* when they talk about Skatopia. But I've always lived this way. Former girlfriends would tell me, ‘You're just gonna be a lonely old man with all this stuff. No one's ever gonna use it.’ And I'd say, ‘Bet not.’”

Amber comes by and says she has to head home to West Virginia. Martin asks if she'd like to go up to the woods first, to admire the view. She says sure; they excuse themselves and begin to make their way up the hill. **Q**

For more exclusive photos of Skatopia and a preview of the upcoming Skatopia movie, visit rollingstone.com/issue1058