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THE RED

BUCKETIN

BEYOND THE ORDINARY



FREE AND CLEAR

So much has changed for Ryan Sheckler. He's married (and a dad), sober, healthy, found faith, is as happy as he's been in years—and skating like he has nothing to lose

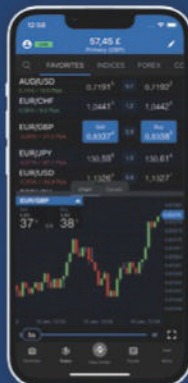


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EDITOR'S NOTE

EVERYTHING IS PERSONAL

The cliché is that practice makes perfect. And, of course, this is true: It takes hard work to perfect one's craft. Top athletes and artists know this—but also know that it's hard to reach your full potential if you're not your authentic self. Ryan Sheckler knows this now. The pro skater has recently made big changes in his life—he's married, sober and found faith. He's a father. These things have brought Sheckler a level of peace he's never experienced—and along the way, he's found that these changes allow him to skate with more clarity and drive.



Photographer Atiba Jefferson, who has known Ryan Sheckler for years, captures the skater's new family life with his wife, Abigail, and their newborn daughter, Olive.

The Aces have made a similar journey. The band suffered a huge blow when the pandemic quashed plans to tour and support a 2020 album, and several members faced tough decisions about their sexuality and faith. Luckily, grappling with questions about their identity and their struggles has unlocked new creative freedom. Their new album offers stirring evidence that being true to yourself will bring you peace—and set you up to be your best.

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE



PIPER FERGUSON

"Working with the Aces was such a dream gig," says the Los Angeles-based photographer, who shot the band in an atmospheric L.A. lounge. "The electric energy was flowing from the first setup and the band are so grounded, sweet and lovely to be around." Ferguson has photographed many top musicians and has clients like Capitol Records, iTunes, Levi's and Interscope. [Page 38](#)



ATIBA JEFFERSON

The L.A.-based photographer has known Ryan Sheckler for more than 15 years. He was present when the skater made a historic kickflip at the so-called Costco Gap in 2008, capturing an image that became an iconic cover for *The Skateboard Mag*. Jefferson has long been documenting skating, basketball and music culture and has shot for magazines and brands such as *Slam*, *Thrasher*, *ESPN*, *Supreme* and *Netflix*. [Page 24](#)

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GIG WORK

Since they were tweens living in Utah, the Aces have crafted catchy pop, but their latest effort totally rocks.





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THE DEPARTURE

Nyck de Vries on the track in Saudi Arabia, realizing an F1 dream that's been in the making for 20 years.



DRIVING FORCE

After a long journey to reach Formula 1, Nyck de Vries has arrived.

Words PETER FLAX

GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

For a guy who has spent most of his life piloting a race car along the outermost edge of the laws of physics, Nyck de Vries has had to take his time to reach the highest level of his sport. But now, sitting behind the wheel of a Formula 1 car, the Scuderia AlphaTauri driver is not about to let the opportunity pass him by.

Racing cars is his life's work. De Vries grew up in a small rural town in the north of the Netherlands. His family owned a few Renault dealerships and was into cars, so not surprisingly the kid had an early interest in racing. "My dad bought me a go-kart for my 5th birthday," the 28-year-old racer recalls. "That's how it all started."

Before long, that passion morphed into an obsession, and his talent translated into results. As a teenager, de Vries thrived in international karting competition, winning a world championship in 2011. Many

of the young racers who back then were his toughest competitors would go on to successful careers, too. "I would say that 75 percent of the current Formula 1 grid is from my generation," he says, noting that he and Max Verstappen did tons of hard laps together as kids. "I grew up with all of those guys and raced against them at some point during my career."

De Vries says his physical development was actually on the slower side, so his path to the pinnacle of the sport was more methodical than many of his talented contemporaries. The Dutchman had to spend a decade clawing his way up the open-wheel hierarchy, winning a Formula 2 and Formula E championship along the way. "Staying alive on that journey was not always easy," de Vries admits. "But I never gave up on my dream. And then Monza was the weekend that everything changed."

De Vries is referring to the 2022 Italian Grand Prix. After a series of unexpected circumstances, he was given a last-minute invitation to substitute for Alex Albon, after the Williams driver fell ill with appendicitis. De Vries had only 90 minutes to prepare for the biggest moment in his professional life. And he took full advantage of the opportunity, finishing the race in ninth place and scoring points in his F1 debut. "The whole weekend was almost like a surrealistic dream," de Vries says. "I just got thrown into the deep end. At that point it wasn't about preparation; it was more about applying all the work I'd done from the age of 5."

Since then, he's been able to keep his foot on the gas. This year, de Vries earned a spot on the AlphaTauri squad after Pierre Gasly departed for the Alpine team. And he showed poise and resourcefulness in his first two F1 races, finishing 14th in both. "I definitely try to be the best I can be," he says humbly. "There is no linear path to success. But I feel like I am making steps all the time, and I feel that I'm growing and learning and making progress within my environment."

De Vries is similarly modest and analytical in conversation but gets more animated when asked to explain how a Formula 1 car differs from all the other vehicles he has piloted in the preceding 20-plus years of racing. "In terms of speeds and performance and G-forces, Formula 1 is on another planet," he says. "The ability and the downforce those cars have to brake extremely late and carry a lot



De Vries pilots his Scuderia AlphaTauri car during practice ahead of the F1 Grand Prix of Bahrain in March. The Dutch driver would go on to finish 14th on race day.



"I'VE HAD A
LONG JOURNEY
TOWARD MY
DREAM AND
GOAL."

De Vries at an AlphaTauri
fashion photo shoot
in New York City.

of speed through corners—honestly, it almost goes beyond your imagination.”

Another unexpected light moment comes when de Vries is asked to itemize his hobbies and he has the candor to admit he doesn't have any. “My whole life is centralized around racing,” he laughs. “I will admit that my life is quite isolated at the moment and it's

really just racing. It's been like that a very long time.”

But de Vries has zero regrets. Why should he? He's been racing cars since he was 5 and now, after an arduous upward climb, he's at last lining up in an extraterrestrial race machine in the most prestigious series on the planet. “I think that my age helps me, because I've had a

long journey toward my dream and goal,” he says. “I guess I'm a little bit more appreciative because I know how long it took me and how many bumps I had to overcome.”

De Vries pauses as the interview comes to a close. “So of course I am enjoying the moment,” he says. “But I'm not here to participate—I'm here to perform.”

Naomi Schiff

STAYING ON THE RIGHT TRACK

The racing driver turned F1 analyst on inspiring a new generation of motorsports fans, being backed by Lewis Hamilton and almost killing Daniel Craig.

Naomi Schiff first tried go-karting at a family friend's birthday party at the age of 11 and was instantly hooked. Initially, though, Schiff had been wary of racing; born to a Belgian father and a Rwandan mother, she's mixed-race and didn't see anyone else at the track who looked like her.

"There weren't many girls or people of color," says Schiff, now 28. "I didn't feel like I fit in, and the idea of being compared with my counterparts was frightening." But after some tough love from her dad—himself a racing driver before she was born—Schiff went for it. "By the time I climbed out of the go-kart at the end of [my first] race, I was smiling from ear to ear," she says.

By 14, Schiff was representing South Africa—the country where she grew up—in the Karting World Championship. She went on to race in tournaments including the Clio Cup China Series, which she won in 2014, and the all-female W Series. She also worked as a stunt driver on the movies *No Time to Die* (2021) and *Jurassic World: Dominion* (2022). But despite her successes, Schiff says it's been no easy ride as a Black woman with limited funds in what's still a very expensive, white, male-dominated industry.

She has now turned her attention to broadcasting, as an F1 analyst for Sky Sports

and co-host of its YouTube show *Any Driven Monday*. It's a move she hopes will encourage more women and girls to take up motorsports. "If little girls turn on the TV, they'll see my face," she says. "If I was wearing a helmet, they probably wouldn't."

THE RED BULLETIN: What's the big appeal of motorsports for you?

NAOMI SCHIFF: When I was 11, me and my dad built our own little racing team, and I spent hours on the track on weekends. The art of driving fascinates me. It's exciting to see F1 teams, engineers, mechanics and drivers go head-to-head, thinking about every minute detail, giving it everything they've got to be the best on the track.

What are the barriers to making it in motorsports?

It's incredibly expensive. Often in racing there's the attitude that if you're quick enough it won't matter. But to be quick you need time in a car, and that takes money. You can't just jump in a car and drive the wheels off it. That's like saying to Usain Bolt, "Don't run all year, just rock up to the Olympics." For women, being taken less seriously than the men is a barrier, too. I spent a year knocking on doors with my business card. Had I been a man who looks like a typical racing driver, I probably would have had more calls.

What changes are needed?

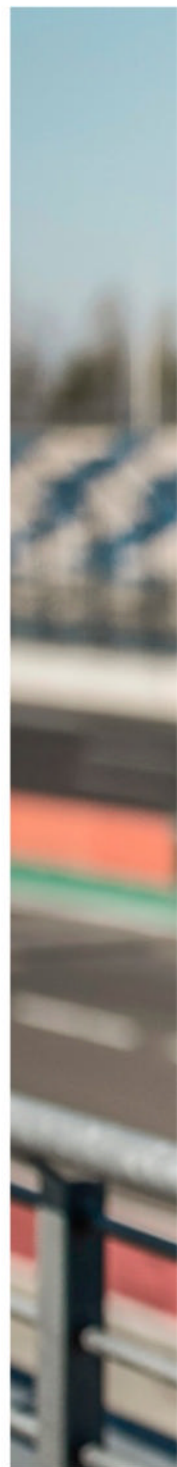
F1 is more popular than ever. Your average motorsports fan was typically a middle-aged white man, but that's changing. There are young women and people from diverse backgrounds watching, and they need to be catered to. Space also needs to be made for women. There's an institutional issue: A woman hasn't raced in F1 since 1976. We need young women and their parents to see female role models in the sport. We're not trying to make it easier for the women; we're trying to make it equally hard.

You experienced trolling last year after joining Sky as an F1 pundit. How did you deal with that?

It was scary. Suddenly, all this attention was on me. People were discussing whether I deserved to be in that environment. One person tweeted, "Can you guess why Naomi Schiff got her job?" There were 250 comments from people suggesting why I got the job, whether it was the color of my skin or that I'd fucked my way to the top. It was either misogyny or racism. I responded in the calmest way I could, with three yawn emojis. I went to sleep and woke the next day to a notification that Lewis Hamilton had retweeted it and stood up for me. I was incredibly grateful. The one thing that'll make you feel better in a moment like that is having the support of your peers.

How does stunt driving in movies compare to racing?

On my first day on [*No Time to Die*], Daniel Craig walks



"WE NEED
TO SEE FEMALE
ROLE MODELS
IN FORMULA 1."



into the room and says, "Hi, I'm Daniel." I thought, "Oh my god, I'm very aware of who you are!" The stunt I did was with Daniel—he likes to do a lot of them himself. He had to cross the road and I had to slam on the brakes and stop just in front of him. I thought I was going to take him out! I was concerned there'd be a headline saying: "Racing driver kills Daniel

Craig." There's a massive buzz to stunt driving, but I prefer racing—it's much more in your hands.

Any advice for those wanting to break into motorsports but worried they might not belong?

If you walk into a room and there's no one who looks like you, whether that's in motorsports or sport or

business, it has no bearing on your own capabilities. It might be harder, and people might not understand your struggle, but that doesn't mean you can't do it. Don't stand in your own way—other people will do that. Go for anything you want to do.

Naomi Schiff is a Formula 1 host and commentator for Sky Sports; Instagram: @naomischiff

Miami, Florida

CROWD PLEASER

Red Bull F1 driver Max Verstappen takes a victory lap, passing his team on the pit wall after winning the Miami Grand Prix last May. At the start of the race, Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc was the pole sitter, with Verstappen third on the grid, but by lap nine, the Dutchman took the lead—and maintained it for another 48 laps. In a very American twist, Verstappen took the podium in an NFL helmet, followed by an extravagant spray of champagne. “It was an incredible Grand Prix,” he told reporters afterward. “Very physical as well, but I think we kept it exciting until the end.” Indeed, the Miami heat had everyone sweating, but temperatures quickly cooled after popping a few magnums.





GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL - NORA O'DONNELL



**Tallahassee,
Florida**

PARKLIFE

As part of the Red Bull Drop In Tour, skateboarders of all stripes joined pros like Zion Wright (pictured) at the new Skateable Art Park in Southside Tallahassee this past February. The world-class facility pays homage to nearby Florida A&M University with a 225-foot-long snake run. Naturally, the end of the run features a giant orange-and-green rattler—a fittingly fierce nod to the HBCU's mascot.



THE DEPARTURE





ROBERT SNOW/REDBULL CONTENT POOL > DAVYDD CHONG

**Gatlinburg,
Tennessee**

TRIAL BY FIRE

BMX riders and fireflies have a few similarities: Both creatures do their best work lighting things up in outdoor spaces and are constantly on the move. But you rarely see the two together. That is until photographer Robert Snow set out to shoot Terry Adams, a flatland BMX pro (no ramps, no rails, no jumps), producing a little twilight magic near Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The result shows unquestionable flashes of brilliance.

redbullcontentpool.com

Luke Shepardson

RIDING THE WAVE

How the 27-year-old unsponsored lifeguard claimed victory in a major surfing event—on his lunch break.

It had been seven years since conditions were right for the Eddie Aikau Big Wave Invitational to take place, but on January 22, 2023, word came through: The waves were good. The Eddie was a go.

The Eddie—a surfing event held only when the waves at Waimea Bay exceed 20 feet in height—brought thousands of people to the North Shore of Oahu, where Luke Shepardson works as a lifeguard. The 27-year-old North Shore native had long dreamt of competing in the Eddie, and had been invited to sign up after organizers saw him surf the break back in 2016. So this year, despite being on duty that day, Shepardson had permission from his boss to take part during his lunch break. When the time came, the Eddie novice donned his competition jersey, ran into the waves he first rode at age 13—and won. Shepardson scored an incredible 89.1 out of 90, beating some of the world's best surfers and winning the \$10,000 prize—and the respect of the surfing community.

THE RED BULLETIN: When did you start surfing?

LUKE SHEPARDSON: I grew up surfing with friends and family. It's what I love to do. It keeps me in the present and is always there for me. It helps me get away from stuff if I'm having a hard day. Every time you get out of the water, you go back to whatever you were doing feeling better.

Did you have dreams of making it as a pro as a kid?

I did, but it wasn't for me. I was sponsored by a local surf shop,

North Shore, but they didn't have a ton of money. I'd feel so anxious whenever I paddled out in a competition jersey. Total butterflies. I'd make mistakes that I otherwise wouldn't have. I [won a few competitions], but generally I was putting too much pressure on myself. It took the fun out of surfing.

Why did you become a lifeguard?

It had always been a dream of mine. I tried out at 18 and then again at 20, but they wouldn't let me in, because I was taking all this time off for surf competitions. I had my son when I was 23, and I decided I needed something solid, so I quit competing and got accepted as a lifeguard. That last competition, I made it to the semifinals. Because I knew it was my last, I didn't put any pressure on myself.

What has been your gnarliest moment as a lifeguard?

Two of my friends got injured a couple of years apart, both at [local break] Pipeline. I saw my friend nosedive from the top of a wave and go down pretty hard. He didn't come up, and a few surfers brought him to shore. He was nonresponsive. I performed first aid and eventually he responded. But it was a long road until he was back to full health. The same kind of thing happened with another friend a few months ago.

Given the danger, what's the appeal of the Eddie?

It had always been a dream to compete. Eddie [Aikau, a local legend, who died in a canoeing

accident in 1978] was the first lifeguard on the North Shore with a perfect record of rescues. It's a testament to how good of a waterman and lifeguard he was. He performed so many selfless acts, ultimately sacrificing his own life to get help when the canoe he was in capsized at sea. It's about honoring his legacy.

Did that help you overcome the pressure of competing?

Yeah, it had been a lifelong ambition because of him. And it was right there on the beach where I worked. I was overwhelmed when I took part—I cried when I put the jersey on. It's a huge deal to everyone in the sport.

What was it like to take part?

I was preoccupied with work during the day, but when I grabbed my jersey for my heat I started tearing up. I was so stoked to achieve this lifelong goal—I was blown away that it was coming true. To be surfing among legends I've looked up to my whole life, and to be part of that energy, was unbelievable. I surfed as best I could, then went back to work.

Did you ever think you had a chance of winning?

I knew I had a couple of good waves in my second heat, so I did have a thought I could win, but of course you never know. When they announced it, it was ... I don't even know how to explain it. The emotion that filled my body was just ... I was in shock. It was one of the best moments of my life.

Has winning changed things?

I'm only really starting to process it, but it's all pretty surreal. I don't want to give up being a lifeguard, but I would like some sponsors to help me go surf dream breaks in Tahiti and Africa—although the cold water there kind of scares me. I'm done with competitions, but I'll never stop surfing. Ever.
Instagram: @casualluke



**"I SURFED AS BEST
I COULD, THEN WENT
BACK TO WORK."**

Playlist

HIGHER CALLING

British singer-songwriter Ellie Goulding revisits four songs that have played a crucial role in her musical education.

A pop career wasn't always assured for Ellie Goulding. Raised by her mom in public housing in England, with three siblings—her funeral-director dad left when she was 5—Goulding went on to fail music in secondary school. But she'd been writing songs since the age of 15 and possessed ambition to match her talents. Now 36, she has three platinum albums to her name, along with two BRIT Awards and a Grammy nomination for her 2015 hit "Love Me Like You Do." To mark the release of her fifth studio album, *Higher Than Heaven*, the mother of one waxes lyrical on four songs that have inspired her.

elliegoulding.com



Scan the QR code to hear our Playlist podcast with Ellie Goulding on Spotify



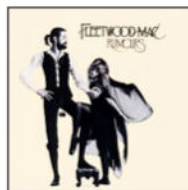
BLUR
"PARKLIFE" (1994)

"This track shaped me as a lover of music, because it was the first song I ever bought and it kickstarted my love of indie and rock. It was just the most visceral kind of reaction to music back then, and I think we need that right now. It's harder and harder to just sit there and listen to ballads about how depressing everything is."



LAURYN HILL
"THE MISEDUCATION OF LAURYN HILL" (1998)

"This opened up a whole other world. It changed things, because it made me want to sing. I loved how personal it was; I loved the tone of her voice; I loved the inflections in her voice; I loved how powerful and direct it was; I loved the energy. It was really groundbreaking."



FLEETWOOD MAC
"DREAMS" (1977)

"'Dreams' is a classic. I just didn't know that something could sound so good! [Laughs.] I'm jealous of anyone listening to this song for the first time, and, of course, people are hearing it on TikTok now. I first discovered it while listening to a friend's radio. I was just like, 'Wow, this is such a beautiful song.' It was like a revelation for me."



ACTIVE CHILD
"HANGING ON" (2011)

"This song is a bit more modern—I actually did a cover of it [on her 2012 album, *Halcyon*]. It's a combination of this choral voice, very high, and music that's hip-hop influenced but like a choir, ethereal. It's impossible not to love—it's so beautiful. And it's like nothing I've ever heard before. It's just amazing. Check it out!"



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FREE AND CLEAR

Ryan Sheckler has found something amazing: Himself.

Words PETER FLAX Photography ATIBA JEFFERSON

"Life is hard for a reason—we're supposed to learn," says Sheckler, who was photographed at his home in San Juan Capistrano, California, on March 22.



Sheckler has been skating with high-powered bungee cords for his upcoming part, flying up features that he flew down in the past.





t's tricky to decide where to begin the story of Ryan Sheckler's hard-fought journey to find peace.

Maybe it starts with him writhing and screaming at the bottom of a hulking concrete staircase in Pomona, California, as he reels from yet another bone-and-tendon-snapping impact. No doubt, the skater's narrative often has been propelled by how he has willed himself back to his feet after getting pummeled.

Or perhaps it opens with his second trip to rehab. Sheckler had been sober for a few years and thought maybe he could drink with moderation. He was wrong about that. But this time he felt something click inside—a deep yearning to alter the trajectory of his life—and now a very public figure who spent a solid chunk of two decades feeling pretty lost has found a better foothold.

Or maybe the story begins as Sheckler opens the front door to his home with a 19-day-old infant cradled in his right arm. His eyes look a little heavy—after all, the skater and his wife are trapped in a sleep-deprivation experiment—but there's an ease to his gaze. Like he's about to launch a huge gap and he just knows he's going to land it. Somehow, he's in his element. The guy that friends and fans sometimes called Sheck Daddy has undeniably manifested that title.

But while the structure of this story's prologue remains up in the air, the

broader contours of his journey and even his destination are in sharp focus. Ryan Sheckler is in a good place. "Until recently, my identity—my whole life—has been tied to skateboarding," he says later, as his daughter, Olive, snoozes in a rocker nearby. "I never addressed who Ryan was as a person. And by doing that, all of these doors have opened and all these situations that used to baffle me and take me for a complete loop have become completely manageable."

Sheckler, who long ago gained fame for skating the gnarliest shit and acting like a rock star, has turned his gaze inward, finding things he didn't realize he needed. Sobriety. Faith. Marriage. Fatherhood. Balance. And perhaps above all, peace. You can see it as he holds his baby and whispers in her ear.

And, fans will be stoked to hear, you can see it when he skates. Though it long has been true that Sheckler has nothing to prove, he's liberated to express himself in ways that feel new. The physical and metaphysical housecleaning has reinvigorated him as a skater. The 33-year-old veteran—who has been performing at the highest level for two decades and helped orthopedic surgeons put their kids through college and juggled as much love and hate from skate culture as any pro ever—is seeing a new clarity and drive in his skating life.



"I don't have to dress like anyone," says Sheckler. "I don't have to skate like anyone. I skate like Ryan. That's how I skate."

“Skating gives me the freedom of expression,” Sheckler says.

“Inner peace builds confidence,” says fellow skate pro David Reyes, one of Sheckler’s closest friends. “Inner peace allows you to be present in the moment. He’s always been a Nitro Circus baby, someone born to jump off things and take risks, but now Ryan is skating with more confidence than I’ve ever seen.”

As this issue goes to press, the finishing touches are being applied to an ambitious skate part and a documentary unpacking Sheckler’s tumultuous journey, aptly called *Rolling Away*. Both projects, which are expected to drop in July, have been three years in the making, delayed and informed by the pandemic, an injury that could have been career ending, rehab and the roller-coaster known as life. True to his obsessively perfectionist nature, he’s trying to nail a couple final tricks, including one that would instantly join his greatest hits, before setting that content free. Rest assured that domestic and existential bliss have not quieted Ryan Sheckler’s hunger to explore the boundaries of physics and courage. It’s more like he’s free to go for it.

“Every once in a while, it takes a good slam to wake you up.”

—RYAN SHECKLER

This is the spot in a typical cover profile where the writer lays out all the biographical backstory that helps readers contextualize where the subject has been in life. But few athletes or artists have had their early life unfold in the public eye like Sheckler. “He’s been vulnerable his entire life and everyone has been able to watch,” says Reyes. In some ways, despite his legitimate world-class talents, he is like a progenitor of the modern reality star—like a Kardashian, famous for being famous. For better or worse, key moments in his adolescence played out



on MTV. (If you are too young to replay this reference in your brain, feel free to google *Life of Ryan*. Or better yet, don’t.)

For those seeking context, here’s a 170-word summary: He ripped a kickflip at 6. A year later, he had legit sponsors. He won the first of seven X Games medals when he was 13. Then came reality shows and TV commercials, A-list fame and millions of dollars. He was skating hard, winning contests and releasing sick clips, flying private jets and collecting supercars and partying hard and polarizing skate culture. He was a teen superstar on a wild adventure with no mentors or a road map, living large with a major IDGAF attitude. (In a 2011 interview with *ESPN The Magazine* he leaned into the friction with core skate fans: “I want to give them more reasons not to like me.”) But through it

all, even when folks were dissing him like he was the Justin Bieber of skating, even the biggest haters couldn’t deny that his clips were off the charts. People still talk about his 2008 kickflip at the so-called Costco Gap in Laguna Niguel, clearing a fence and a monstrous 16-foot drop with shocking nonchalance.

Along the way, there were so many huge tricks and huge impacts. “He’s got a crazy work ethic,” says Ira Ingram, his longtime filmer. “He’ll brutalize himself to make something happen. He’ll skate something until he has baby-deer legs.”

Sheckler grimaces when asked to explain his relationship with pavement. “That relationship is super rad when you’re rolling away,” he says, referring to the euphoric moment when a trick is finally nailed. “But everything else is just a brutal divorce, you know? It’s gnarly.

“Until recently, my identity—my whole life—has been tied to skateboarding.”

I was counting the other day—it’s over 12 broken bones, more torn ligaments than I can remember and six major surgeries, concussions. It’s all pain.”

Sheckler has been through the cycle of injury, surgery and recovery enough times to know how much it can impact his mental health. “I’ve probably spent five years in total of my life recovering,” he admits. “That’s where my mind starts going a little bit crazy and the questions start coming up. ‘Am I made for this? Do I even want this? What am I doing?’ And those questions are super gnarly, especially when you’re already down and you can’t do anything.”

In *Rolling Away*, a few legendary pros try to describe the abusive relationship committed skaters have with pavement. “Skateboarding is terrible for your body,” says British skate pioneer Geoff Rowley, no stranger to brutal slams. “And it chips away like a hammer and chisel.”

Meanwhile, fellow American icon Tony Hawk (who was a surprise guest at

Sheckler’s 6th birthday party) reflects on the commitment that the hammer and chisel demand. “When you first start to skate, there’s sort of a moment of recognition and the threshold, where the first time you get hurt seriously,” says Hawk, who like Sheckler has seen a surgeon or two. “That’s the moment where it’s like, do you really love this enough to keep doing it?”

As *Rolling Away* documents, Sheckler faced two serious injuries in the past five years that challenged his resolve. The first came in 2018 in Pomona, where an attempt to grind the cement railing of an 18-step staircase ended with him crumpled on the ground. He pulverized the bones and tendons in his left ankle and also broke the L1 vertebra in his lower back. “I don’t really talk about this slam because it was so traumatic,” says Sheckler, who soon would be back in a surgical suite. “But that fall was the catalyst for me to take a deep dive into myself.” In his mind, the journey that

would lead him to sobriety, the Bible, his wife, a baby and to skating with new clarity and joy began right there in Pomona, as he recoiled in agony.

Sheckler knew what would come next. Pain. Grinding physical therapy. Creeping self-doubts. He knew that all he could do is obsessively recover and train to be ready when the next opportunity came.

That opportunity came sooner than he or anyone would have guessed. Later in 2018, Sheckler was invited to join fellow Red Bull pros Zion Wright and Jamie Foy on a trip to Taiwan. Even though he wasn’t 100 percent healed, he found himself in a great headspace and wound up nailing all sorts of clips. The highlight of that trip came when he pulled off a high-consequence taildrop off a Taipei bridge into a quarterpipe that was flanked on both sides by highway traffic. “That taildrop was as scary as anything he’s ever done,” says Ingram, who filmed the trick. “My hands were literally shaking so I needed to lean against something as I shot it.”

Even top pros were blown away. “One word comes to mind seeing that taildrop: ‘psycho,’” says pro Paul Rodriguez, aka P Rod, Sheckler’s longtime former teammate with Plan B. “Like that was insane.”



Sheckler and his wife, Abigail, step outside for a family portrait with their newborn daughter, Olive.



"I'm excited to see what Olive will teach me," says Sheckler, here holding his 19-day-old daughter.

Sheckler was back. And over time, he realized that he was mentally and physically ready to film a major part. In March 2020, he visited Red Bull HQ in Santa Monica to finalize the plan for this project and the adjacent short film. He was fired up and ready to go.

But it turned out that it was the day before that office—and basically the world—shut down, as the pandemic changed life as we knew it. Nothing went to plan after that.

"One thing that comes with inner peace is that you simply stop caring what anyone thinks of you."

—DAVID REYES

The central space in Sheckler's home has an open floor plan, and visual cues of how his life has radically changed are all around. His wife, Abigail, sits in the living room, with their daughter, Olive, sleeping nearby. There is an open Bible on the dining room table and a more

ceremonial Bible on display in the living room below a framed rendering of Jesus Christ. (There is also a large framed black-and-white photograph of Sheckler skating on a crowded freeway that has a considerably more secular vibe.)

Abigail gave birth at home on March 3, exactly one year to the day after she and Ryan got married. "It was a little scary when Olive came out," Sheckler says. "She wasn't breathing right away, but neither was I when I was born, so she's

"When people talk about me, I want them to see me as a guy who helped others succeed," says Sheckler.



“For a long time, I led a life that was very fast, and now I’ve learned to slow down.”

taken after her daddy right out of the gate. The actual process of her being born was super gnarly in the best way—it’s the craziest thing I’ve ever seen.” He shares a quick smile with his wife and adds that he hopes to have “a few more.”

When he’s talking about his baby and his devotion to his faith and his recent experiences with sobriety, there’s an ease to the way he discusses these potentially thorny topics. Sheckler isn’t afraid to be honest and vulnerable about his struggles and revelations, but he also has no interest to preach or overdramatize them. “I’m trying to live by attraction rather than promotion,” he says. “I don’t want to tell people they need to go to church. I’m not trying to force things down people’s throat—I just want to be a man of my word, be a man of action.”

The flatscreen in the living room is set to a channel playing Christian rock. He feels like there’s no contradiction between listening to Christian ballads and skating like a punk rocker, no inconsistency in studying the New Testament and then bungeeing himself across a concrete abyss in the afternoon. Who’s to say he’s wrong about that?

Certainly not his buddy David Reyes, who says that skate culture is more open to pros like Sheckler being their true selves. “I’ve told this to Ryan and other OG pros,” he says. “Fans just want to see you be you. With Ryan they want to see the kickflip and the kickflip indy, and beyond that, there’s less judgment now.”

Sheckler feels no awkwardness or shame discussing his struggle with alcohol abuse. There has always been a hard-partying side to skate culture and a sense that there’s something uncool about talking openly about sobriety. Sheckler presently gives zero shits about those things; he just wants to be open about his own experience without telling anyone else what to do.

“When I first started filming with Ryan, it was before all this, and he had a party lifestyle that ran parallel to his skating life,” says Ingram, noting that it

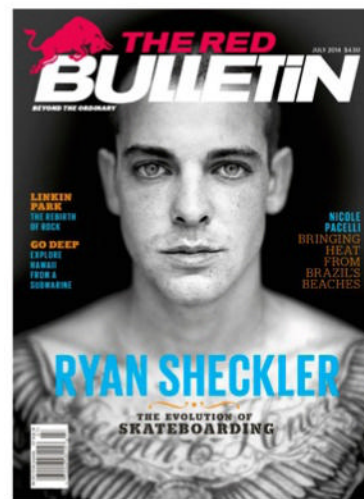
was (and is) far from uncommon for folks to start cracking beers long before the end of a skate session. “All I’d really say about this now is that he’s the happiest I’ve ever seen him.”

If you spend time with Sheckler, you can see that it’s true. “For a long time, I led a life that was very fast, and now I’ve learned to slow down,” he says. “For a long time, I was gripped by partying. And injuries led me to feeling down about myself and I thought that the solution for feeling down was alcohol, but alcohol is a depressant and so it only drove me deeper into a hole. And I was making people that I love worried about me, and it wasn’t fair to them or to me. And I was ready to make a change. I was ready to admit that I wasn’t in control of my life or my drinking.”

Sheckler was on the cover of this magazine in July 2014, and he holds an old copy of that issue and studies his former self. There’s a faraway look in his eyes (heightened by some dramatic eyeshadow). “I look like I’m trying to be someone that I think people want me to be,” he says. “It’s like I am trying to be tough or I didn’t know what I wanted to be. I felt like a puppet at this point. Just going where I was told to go. And I think that’s where a lot of my drinking problem came into place—I was just trying to escape and find something that would quiet the noise in my head.”

He’s a different person now. He’s rooted in family and faith. He’s eating smarter and working out with purpose and sleeping better—basically doing whatever it takes to put himself in position to skate at his best. “Who he is today is 100 percent different from who he was five years ago,” says Reyes. “He’s so accomplished and that’s going to last forever. He doesn’t have to prove anything but he knows that he has to do this because he loves it.”

In that same vein, Sheckler is more committed to being a mentor, to offering younger skaters the kind of guidance that no one was in a position to offer



“I was probably hung over there,” says Sheckler of this 2014 cover photo.

him. He runs a brand now, Sandlot Times, which gives him more formal interaction with young talent and a clearer role to be a mentor to the next generation. In fact, when Sheckler is asked to assess his legacy, he’s emphatic that he doesn’t want to talk about his own skating. “Honestly, I don’t care about legacy anymore,” he says. “There’s something selfish about that. When people talk about me, I want them to see me as a guy who helped others succeed and helped others reach their potential. That’s how I want to be remembered.”

Sheckler is insistent that the best part of his own self-improvement is in the meaning and peace he’s gained in his personal life. But he knows it has impacted his skating, too. He’s healthier and more fulfilled and living in the moment and more clearheaded about what skating means to him. And the people who watch him skate on a daily basis say the impact is strikingly obvious.

“Ryan has always walked his own path, and his skating speaks for itself,” says Ingram, who has witnessed more of Sheckler’s part than anyone. “But the level he’s at now—honestly it’s insane.”



“Skateboarding doesn’t make you a skateboarder; not being able to stop skating makes you a skateboarder.”

—LANCE MOUNTAIN

As the upcoming skate part and the film *Rolling Away* will demonstrate, Sheckler still has something to prove—not to fans or posterity but to himself. It’s been more than three years since these projects were born, and seeing them through has required more perseverance than he could have imagined.

The earliest weeks of filming, which coincided with the start of the pandemic, required significant improvisation, as

Sheckler and Ingram sought out some truly isolated spots to nail down clips. Nonetheless, these were intensely productive months, yielding one quality clip after another.

But that early momentum came to a painful and screeching halt three months later in National City, California. Sheckler had his eye on a high-risk ender, a dramatic clip that would appear near the end of his part to showcase his best work, but he suffered a hard landing before he could even give it a shot. Warming up with an easier trick, he launched over a staircase with metal railings on both sides and landed

awkwardly on a sloped concrete embankment, with the brunt of the impact loaded on his left knee. True to form, Sheckler, who says it felt like a “super gnarly deadleg,” kept skating that session, even nailing a couple more tricks. He can admit now that he was in a state of denial; he didn’t get an MRI of that joint for a month and a half after skating those six weeks in a knee brace.

That’s when Sheckler learned he had completely severed his ACL. So it was back to the surgeon and the couch and the PT and the creeping self-doubt. “Ryan isn’t old by any means,” says Ingram. “But still, a torn ACL in your 30s



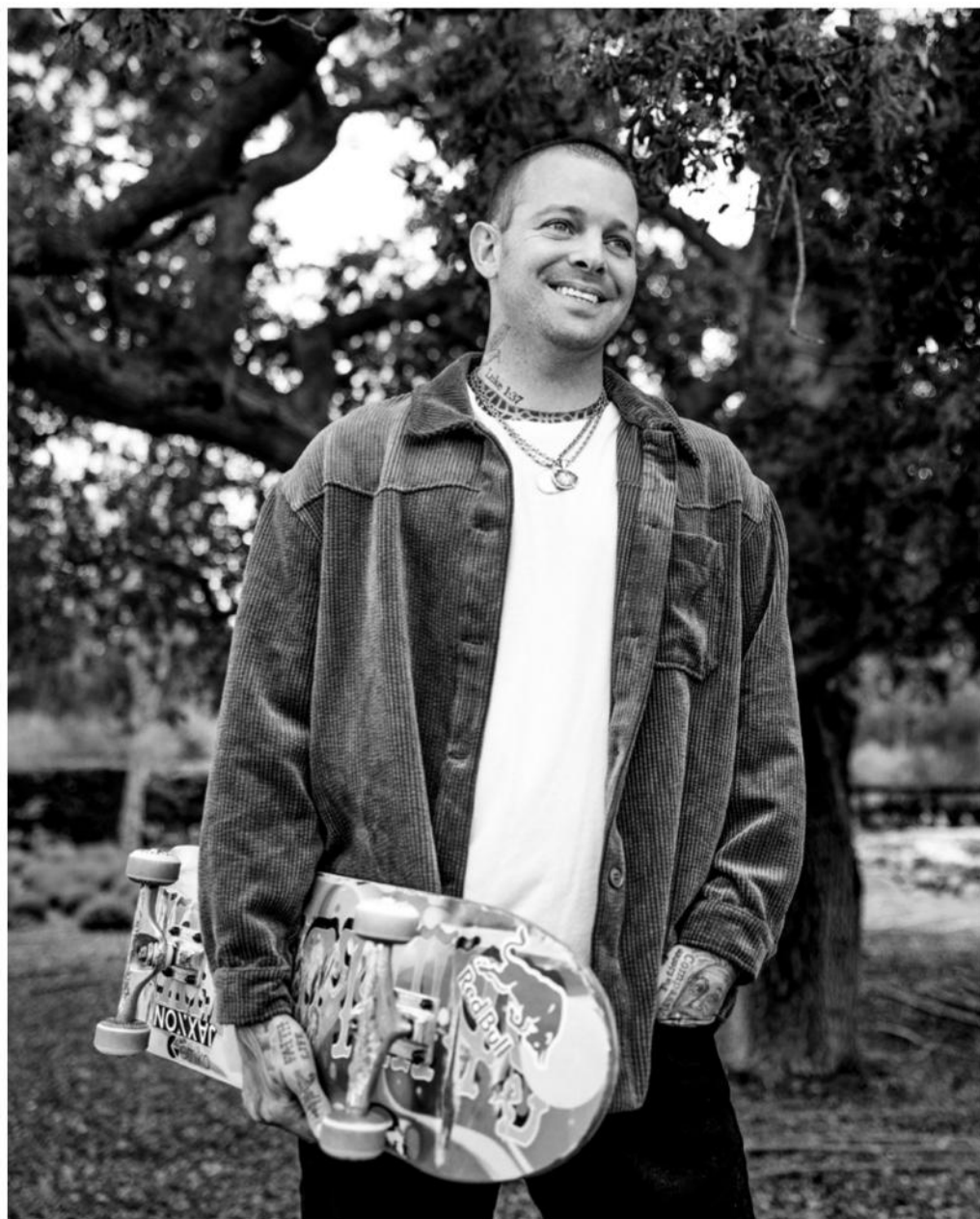
“The level he’s at now—honestly it’s insane,” says Ira Ingram, Sheckler’s longtime filmer.

can be a career ender for a pro skater.” Sheckler attacked his rehabilitation to get well as fast as possible. He amped up his weight training to add muscle mass as body armor. He did everything he could to stay busy because it took 14 long months before he could really start doing heavy tricks again. That whole period was tough. He lost his grandmother during that grinding recovery. “She was my best friend,” Sheckler says. He had plenty of reasons to start drinking again. But he didn’t.

By the time he got back at it, so much about his life was reoriented in a different and better way. He was sober

and engaged and going to church and doing a lot of little things more mindfully. And he went out with an intense eye to execute tricks that pushed his own envelope. Ingram says Sheckler has been playing with bungees that enable him to launch up features that in the past he would have launched himself down. “We’re using a bungee that’s off the market now because it’s so dangerous,” Ingram says. “It can get Ryan up to 25 or 30 miles per hour. We are talking about intense physics—it’s like he’s getting fired out of a cannon.”

The part and the film are almost done—but not done. In particular,







“I think I’m just curious still, and I’m also addicted to that adrenaline rush of healthy fear,” says Sheckler.

Sheckler is intensely focused on one trick—it’s a massive gap in northern San Diego County. Maybe he’ll have nailed it by the time you read this. Maybe not. “I hope to get this last trick and I believe I will,” he says. “I’m scared of it, you know? But it’s a healthy fear. I cannot let this thing go. And I think that’s what’s made me a skateboarder and that’s why I’m still a skateboarder today.”

Reyes has seen the spot, and he also knows the kind of obsessiveness that can be wrapped around rolling away from a trick that a skater feels certain should end his next part. “The caliber of the spot has this aura,” he says. “With an ender, it has to be the craziest shit you’ve ever done. It has to be monumental, something that will live in the skate books forever. I know where Ryan is at now—it’s like being in a nightmare until you get the trick.”

Sheckler freely admits this quest presses many of the same buttons as any other addiction—not just with the narcotic rush of rolling away from an impossibly hard trick, but all the heartache and tense moments that precede it. “I think I’m just curious still, and I’m also addicted to that adrenaline rush of healthy fear,” he says. “I’m addicted to the whole process. It’s the drive. It’s what music I’m going to listen to on the way down. Sometimes I don’t listen to music; sometimes it’s one song on repeat. It’s all very different and it’s very hard to calculate what the right day is to do it, so everything’s a guess. It’s kind of like the lottery, you know?”

A long day with Sheckler is drawing to a close. His wife is cradling his baby. His mother, who helps run his various business enterprises, sits at the head of the dining room table firing off emails. He is rubbing his eyes. Ryan Sheckler is tired because he spent part of the night half asleep on the floor of the nursery. But he’s feeling alive and well because so many things have fallen into place for him. He’s grateful for that horrible slam in Pomona and how it nudged his trajectory in a better direction. The products of reawakening are all around him.

“It feels like I could’ve missed all of this,” Sheckler says, waving his arms at the family around him and at things that can be felt and not seen. “It feels like I could’ve missed it all. But by changing one thing, which meant I had to change everything, I have a full life again.”

He pauses, then corrects himself.

“Actually, for the first time, I have a full life.”



TIME TO ROCK

When the pandemic botched their 2020 tour plans, the Aces faced the music and went back into the studio. The result is an indie-rock gem that's their most personal album to date.

Words NORA O'DONNELL Photography PIPER FERGUSON



The Aces were photographed for *The Red Bulletin* at Break Room 86 in Los Angeles on March 26.



ucked behind a loading dock and beyond a hidden door in Los Angeles, there's a time warp in progress. Four women, all in their mid-20s, are mugging for a camera phone while a friend records a TikTok video. It's an occurrence that could not have been technologically possible before 2016, but the result on the screen looks deceptively analog. The women are dressed in the same oversized blazers, a look reminiscent of the 1990s. (Or is it the 1960s, when the Beatles wore matching suits and played on *The Ed Sullivan Show*?) The location doesn't line up either. This fabulous foursome is palling around in Koreatown inside a dark bar, illuminated by the glow of old box TVs playing vintage MTV videos and snippets of Max Headroom, the supposed computer-generated TV presenter who became a pop-culture sensation during the 1980s.

But these women are not only travelers across time and space—they are also channeling their younger selves. And yet, despite all these divergent timelines, they are perfectly in sync in a way like never before.

The year is 2023, and these chrononauts are in a band called the Aces. Since they were tweens living in suburban Utah, they've been making

infectious pop-rock about the trials and tribulations of young romance, a winning formula that got them signed to Red Bull Records in 2016 when they were recently out of high school. Together, sisters Cristal (lead vocals/guitar) and Alisa Ramirez (drums), Katie Henderson (lead guitar/vocals) and McKenna Petty (bass/vocals) have released two full-length albums and amassed more than 260 million streams over the course of their career.

That number should be even higher, but the pandemic botched plans to take their second album, *Under My Influence*, on tour in 2020. But hindsight is 2020—the year that derailed and took many lives, but also produced a period of personal reflection for many people. For the members of the Aces, their inability to perform publicly led them back into the studio, where they started writing music to reflect on the grief, panic and trauma they felt in those moments of uncertainty. Ultimately, the material from those sessions became the basis for their third full-length album, *I've Loved You for So Long*, which drops on June 2. It's their most mature effort yet, with a raw honesty that permeates every track and a sound that evokes the playful experimentation and hard-hitting riffs they composed back

when they were kids jamming in a basement in Utah.

"I don't think that the Aces would be where they are today, and I don't think this album could exist if it wasn't for that forced time alone and that forced time not working," says Alisa. "The pandemic afforded us the time and space to write this record because there was so much processing and reflecting and inner-child work happening."

Growing up Mormon in Utah, each woman has faced the decision to leave their religion behind at different times, but as a group, they've leaned on each other to unpack the reasons why. Three members—Cristal, Alisa and Katie—identify as queer, which is condemned by the Mormon Church, and though McKenna is married and identifies as straight, she struggled with a doctrine that excluded her closest friends. "For the first time in our lives and in our career, we're all on the same page about religious trauma," says Cristal.

The songs on *I've Loved You for So Long* can be divided into two parts: the struggles of the past and the struggles of the now, but the two are intertwined. "It's like you're time traveling back and forth to the younger self and the present self," Alisa says.



A most excellent adventure: On their new album, the Aces dig deep into their personal history, time traveling between the past and the present.



From left to right:
Cristal Ramirez,
McKenna Petty,
Alisa Ramirez and
Katie Henderson.



The year is 2013. Cristal Ramirez is closing in on adulthood, about to turn 18, and she's sitting in her car as she waits to pick up her younger sister, Alisa, from school. Cristal is starting to sweat, steeling herself to tell her closest confidante two words: "I'm gay."

Cristal's had crushes on girls since kindergarten, but for years she's kept those feelings secret because her religion told her those feelings were unacceptable. She tried bargaining with God, asking him to lessen her attraction to girls. She tried dating guys in high school, but she can't live in denial any longer. As she starts to accept her queerness, she knows she must tell someone.

And so, Cristal picks up Alisa from school, they go on a drive and then park the car. "I need to tell you something," Cristal says with tears in her eyes. "I haven't told anyone this, but I'm gay."

"Oh, same," Alisa replies. "I thought that we knew that."

A sense of relief washes over Cristal, but also a slight annoyance: "Give me my moment, here, Alisa. This took me so much to tell you."

Alisa casually replies, "Dude, anyway, what are we having for dinner?"

Back in the present day, Cristal and Alisa effortlessly seesaw in conversation. By their own description, they are yin and yang. Cristal is more emotive, Alisa more pragmatic. They balance each other.

"I loved her surety in our sisterhood," Cristal says now of that pivotal moment. "She's a lot more assured and I'm the more anxious one who overthinks. I needed that reaction to help fuel me through the rest of my coming-out

process: That's just who we are; that's who we've always been."

But the years leading up to that confession were torturous for Cristal. "I was deeply depressed about being queer as a teenager," she says. In her head, she thought maybe she'd grow out of this phase.

Those struggles are laid bare in "Suburban Blues," one of the songs on *I've Loved You for So Long* that dissects the past. Backed by hard-hitting guitars,

"IT'S LIKE YOU'RE TIME TRAVELING BACK AND FORTH TO THE YOUNGER SELF AND THE PRESENT SELF."



the chorus wails: *Nobody knows that I'm dying inside/Nobody knows that I'm hating my life.*

But it's the second verse that exposes the truth of the torment Cristal was feeling when she was a closeted teenager:

*Everything I love
I'm told I shouldn't touch
Cause good girls love Jesus
Not that girl from Phoenix*

*If I told you all this, would you listen?
I'm stuck in my own mental prison*

When Cristal accepted that being gay wasn't just a phase, she turned to the internet. "The biggest turning point for me in my queerness was discovering Tegan and Sara."

Here were two sisters, identical twins, who were both openly queer and successful musicians. Cristal began to see a path where she could be queer and

have a life outside of the confines of her current reality.

"They're so smart, so eloquent, so talented," says Cristal of the Canadian indie-pop duo. "There wasn't queer representation like that in Utah. They became a shining light for me and that's when I started getting comfortable."

Before Cristal and Alisa came out to each other, they both had a sixth sense that they were different. "We're like freaky twins that way," says Alisa. "I just knew that she was gay. And I knew I was gay. But I was having less anxiety about it. I was more dissociating away from it."

In preschool, Alisa remembers having a crush on her friend. When she

told some of her older peers that she had a crush on a girl, they recoiled in disgust. "I didn't know what being gay was—I was 5," she says. "I felt so shamed by them. That was the first time I realized, *Oh, I don't think this is allowed. I think I'm doing something wrong.*"

Alisa kept her queerness to herself for years. It would be dealt with someday, just not right now. She put on a disguise and declared her love for Justin Bieber.

Once the sisters were out, their safe space was the band. "This felt like the first version of a chosen family," Alisa says. "Whenever we came together, we were our truest selves."

Three members of the Aces identify as queer—Katie, Cristal and Alisa—but along with McKenna, they've found a chosen sisterhood that's stood the test of time.





**"THIS FELT LIKE THE FIRST
VERSION OF A CHOSEN FAMILY.
WHENEVER WE CAME TOGETHER WE
WERE OUR TRUEST SELVES."**



Clockwise from top left: Petty (bass/vocals), Cristal Ramirez (lead vocals/guitar), Henderson (lead guitar/vocals) and Alisa Ramirez (drums).

Plenty of prominent bands in rock history formed when the members were teenagers—the Beatles, U2, Radiohead and Green Day come to mind—but tweens? When Cristal and Alisa began playing together, they were 10 and 8, respectively. Within a couple of years, they recruited McKenna and Katie, and the Aces began playing together in middle school.

By their early teens, they were headlining venues in Provo, Utah, and after winning a local competition, they had the money to record their first single in a studio. They continued to scrape money together, doing everything they could to propel the band forward. As high school graduation loomed, they decided as a group to pursue the band full-time. “We wrote down our goals,” Cristal says. “We’d, like, hold hands and manifest.”

Eventually, they gathered enough funds to release an EP, and at the release party, the studio owner suggested they reach out to a lawyer he knew in New York who was well connected in the music industry. That lawyer ultimately connected them to their first manager, who began introducing the band to record labels. In 2016, they signed with Red Bull Records, and two years later they released their first full-length album, *When My Heart Felt Volcanic*.

On that album, there’s a curious lack of pronouns in the lyrics. Although Cristal and Alisa were out to their friends and family, it wasn’t something they discussed with reporters, nor was religion on the table. At the time, Katie and McKenna were still affiliated with the Mormon Church, and only the band knew Katie was gay, too.

“I was really scared of the religion we grew up in, and that was all I knew,” Katie says. Her family was religious, and she wasn’t ready to uproot her life and go down a different path—not yet anyway. “Everybody just needs time.”

It’s March 2020. The Aces have just released the first single off their forthcoming album, *Under My Influence*. It’s a sunshine-filled bop called “Daydream.” After spending time in the desert recording a music video for the song, the band takes a meeting with their manager in Los Angeles. Then phones start lighting up. Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz has tested positive for COVID and they’ve evacuated the arena. The World Health Organization declares a global pandemic. Later that night,



President Trump announces a ban on travel from Europe to the United States. The next day, Katie and McKenna fly home to Utah, while Cristal and Alisa stay in L.A. Their tour isn’t scheduled until July, so the band figures they’ll ride out this lockdown for two months and then get back on the road.

Of course, that’s not what happened. The band didn’t get to tour the album, and each member dealt with various stages of grief—denial, anger, depression—from that loss.

“We’d put so much work into this album,” Alisa says. “There was a lot of pressure for it to do well, and it felt like



everything was ripped straight out of our hands. We sat there with nothing to do, feeling so beat down.”

“For me, it was pure apathy,” Cristal says. “I didn’t want to do anything. In my deepest scared place in my head, I thought: *What if I don’t like doing this anymore? What if I don’t want to be here?* I was deeply depressed.”

Nearly every night, the two sisters spent hours awake. Around 3 a.m., Cristal, in the middle of a panic attack, would knock on Alisa’s door. Alisa would try to calm her down, make her oatmeal and sleep in her bed if necessary.

After a few months, Cristal and Alisa reached a stage of acceptance: The tour wouldn’t happen. All they could do was

make more music, so they called up their rep and asked if the two of them could get back into the studio.

“It gave me a reason to put clothes on,” Cristal says. “There was no real expectation.”

Eventually, Cristal and Alisa reached out to Keith Varon, who produced “Daydream,” their biggest hit to date, and asked him to join a session. Varon got them out of their funk. “Keith has this really positive, motivated mentality,” Alisa says. “He put wind in my sails again as an artist.”

Back in Utah, Katie and McKenna were wrestling with their own situation. As the band did their best to promote their second album through Zoom

interviews and virtual concerts, Katie had to face the reality of being gay. On *Under My Influence*, the lyrics include pronouns—she, her—and Cristal and Alisa were now openly talking to reporters about being queer.

“I hated this weird deceit I was living,” Katie says. “We’re going to have interviews where we get asked, ‘Why did you decide to use pronouns?’ I remember thinking: *Am I not going to talk about myself being gay? How could I sit in an interview with questions about being queer and act like I’m not?*”

By June 2020, Katie was out publicly and had separated from the church. “It was time for me to come into my own,” she says.

“THIS BEAUTIFUL SYNCHRONICITY HAPPENED BETWEEN US WHERE WE WERE ALL ON THE SAME PAGE.”

For McKenna, who always supported her band members, it was a personal reckoning. A year before the pandemic, she got married in the LDS temple, and she was still in the process of finishing up her degree at Brigham Young University, which is sponsored by the Mormon Church. If she didn't follow certain rules, she was at risk of not getting her diploma.

“I was living the blueprint because I fit into it, being straight,” McKenna says. “But I was struggling. I was using touring and traveling in a way to escape all these feelings by not having to deal with [the question of] what I believed.”

The pandemic forced McKenna to start asking that question. She began going to therapy, and she started realizing that all her trauma was connected to her religion. “I was never having the spiritual experiences that I was supposed to have in the church as a Mormon,” she says. “But I always felt it with the band.”

McKenna says the past few years have seen some dark periods with her family. After getting her degree in 2021, she left the church, and it transformed her relationship with her parents. “It was really hard,” she says, though now that she's on the other side of it, things are getting better.

By 2021, when travel felt safer, Katie and McKenna started coming to L.A. to write music with Cristal and Alisa. Up to that point, their songs had been fueled by real-life experience—love, sex, heartbreak—but with their lives on hold, they all faced the question: What do they want to talk about as artists?

“It felt cheap to talk about the pandemic,” Cristal says. But every band member was going through something in that moment, so they encouraged Cristal to start writing about her panic attacks, even though she resisted at first. “As an artist, I pride myself on being very vulnerable, but when they were like, ‘We should talk about your anxiety,’ I was like, ‘No, that's going to be corny. What authority do I have to speak on that?’” And I realized there's all this shame around it for me.”

Cristal continues, “If you're an artist, you have to talk about the shame. That's your job, to talk about the things that

people don't want to talk about. So I was like, ‘If I can't fucking talk about my panic attacks, then I don't deserve the fucking mic.’”

On the upcoming album, songs like “Always Get This Way” and “Stop Feeling” probe at Cristal's panic attacks and depression, but they're delivered in a package so catchy it makes listeners want to dance. “That's very on-brand for us,” Alisa says. “We love to write songs that make you feel good, but they're about something really hard. It's like this good catharsis, where it's like, ‘I feel like I'm going to get through it.’”

“We started writing in different ways than we had ever before,” McKenna says. The band just started playing together, making music like they did when they were kids. And once they kicked open the door to talk about anxiety, they started asking themselves, what is the root of that anxiety?

The answer was their religion. Now that every band member had left the church, they could finally talk openly about their experience for the very first time.

Cristal explains, “This beautiful synchronicity happened between us where, for the first time in our lives and our career, we were all on the same page about religious trauma, about our past. Katie was out; Kenna had just left the faith. We were all out living our truth, and we were in this space where we were making music from the same place.”

This June, the band will get to share that truth with the world, when their latest LP drops. They'll finally get to go on tour again, see their fans and reach more people than ever before. “We're in the business of making real music that our fans can feel,” Cristal says.

But in the end, this album is for these four women who've had each other's backs since they were young girls jamming together in a Utah basement. The album's title track, “I've Loved You for So Long,” is ultimately a love letter to the band. Through this life-altering journey, Cristal, Alisa, Katie and McKenna have always had their chosen family to help them find their way home. It's now 2023, and the Aces are exactly where they're supposed to be. theacesofficial.com/tour

After their new album, *I've Loved You for So Long*, drops on June 2, the Aces are excited to get back on the road and see their fans.



"It was the wave that I've been visualizing and praying for ever since I started surfing out at Jaws," says Izzi Gomez of this colossal tow-in ride at Pe'ahi on Maui.

JOYRIDE

At Red Bull Magnitude, the world's best female big-wave surfers chase glory—and that magical, elusive feeling that only riding giant waves offers.

Words JEN SEE

O

ne Saturday morning in early January of this year, Katie McConnell pedaled her green-painted beach cruiser down to Waimea Bay, the legendary big-wave break on Oahu's North Shore. On her bike's surfboard rack, she carried her 10'0" gun, shaped by Gary Linden. When she paddled out that day, McConnell joined women from all over the world who had traveled to Waimea for the first Red Bull Magnitude session of the 2022-2023 winter.

Now in its third year, Red Bull Magnitude shines a spotlight on the fearless women who charge big waves. Unlike a traditional surf contest that's held on a single day, women competing in Magnitude can submit video clips of their waves anytime during the three-month event window. Magnitude invites


surfers to demonstrate their big-wave skills at three of Hawaii's most beautiful and ferocious waves: Waimea Bay and the Outer Reefs on Oahu's North Shore, and Pe'ahi (also known as Jaws) on Maui.

This past winter, 25 women submitted 66 video clips for consideration. "I'm really stoked that Magnitude is growing and it's awesome to see more women participating," says McConnell, who won Magnitude's Rookie of the Year award in 2022. "It has definitely opened more doors for me."

Magnitude's competitors come from many different backgrounds, and while a few can surf full-time, most work assorted jobs to fund their big-wave dreams. What they share is a love for the feeling that only riding the world's biggest waves gives them.



ZAK NOYLE/RED BULL CONTENT POOL, CHRISTA FUNK/RED BULL CONTENT POOL



Katie McConnell,
shown here at the
top of a wild ride at
Waimea Bay on
January 11, was the
rookie of the year
at Magnitude
in 2022.

**Magnitude invites women to show their
big-wave skills at three iconic waves.**



“The feeling that I get riding big waves, I can’t get doing anything else,” says veteran Paige Alms, who won the overall award at Magnitude this year.

The conditions for big-wave surfing may only align a few times each year, and this winter, the season started slowly. When Pe‘ahi came to life in mid-December, it offered the first big-wave sessions of the season. “We ended up getting some really fun days of glassy waves,” says Skylar Lickle. “The past couple of winters were a bit unruly, so it was a breath of fresh air to get some clean conditions.” Growing up on Maui, Lickle towed into her first wave at the age of 14. Now 23, she won the overall award at Magnitude in 2022 and is part of a new generation in big-wave surfing.

A wave Lickle rode during a solid swell on December 17 showed why she is one of the best women in big-wave surfing. Sitting deep at Pe‘ahi, Lickle paddled her board into a towering 40-foot peak. Her board chattered over the bumps on the wave’s face, but she held her line and drew a smooth, arcing turn. The wave’s thick lip crashed behind her in an explosion of white water. Standing low on her board, Lickle kept her cool and sped to the channel to kick out with ease. “This wave was everything that I could have ever imagined—it’s a wave that will stay with me forever,” she says. “It was so thick and heavy, and just truly a huge and scary wave.” The monster wave brought Lickle not only a lifetime memory but also Magnitude’s Best Ride award for 2023.

The December swells also offered a new beginning for Izzi Gomez, a five-time stand-up paddleboard world champion turned accomplished big-wave surfer. A lengthy recovery from hip surgery meant that she missed the 2021-2022 season in Hawaii. Approaching her first winter back in the water, she struggled to find the joy she had previously found in big-wave surfing. “I was at my lowest of lows,” she says. She fell on her first wave, which didn’t add to her confidence.

But big-wave surfing is nothing if not getting knocked down and getting straight back up. On December 17, Gomez paddled into a clean wave at Pe‘ahi and rode it out as though she’d never missed a day. “I felt like I needed that wave to really break the ice being back out at Jaws,” she says. She credited Paige Alms for encouraging her to go for it, and it was clear how much the wave meant to Gomez. “I’m an emotional person, and you can see how stoked I was after completing the ride.”

One of the world’s best big-wave surfers, Alms is a regular at Pe‘ahi and knows the tricky lineup as well as anyone. She’s spent many hours studying the break, where the waves shift and bend around the reef in unexpected ways. The wave’s perfect shape mesmerizes her. “It’s the perfect A-frame wave that you draw in your notebook as a kid,” she says. A two-time big-wave world champion, Alms made paddling into 30-to-40-foot faces look easy in the clean conditions. Her consistent, tuned-in surfing at Pe‘ahi in December won Alms the overall award at Magnitude this year.

“The feeling that I get riding big waves, I can’t get doing anything else,” says Alms. “When you get your feet in the wax on your board at the top of a 40-foot wave, the high of being on a wave that size is absolutely mind-expanding.”

In January, the North Pacific sent a series of swells to Hawaii and brought huge waves to Waimea Bay. On January 11, Red Bull hosted the first Magnitude session at the famous break. “There were a bunch of friends in the lineup and some funky conditions to play around in,” says McConnell, making paddling out during massive conditions at Waimea sound like a casual meet-up at the coffee shop. While women can film and submit clips anytime, Red Bull provides safety crews and filmers for these official Magnitude sessions.

The faces in the lineup that day showed the varied backgrounds of Magnitude’s competitors. McConnell has studied underwater kelp forests and tropical reefs as a scientific diver. Makani Adric rode her first wave at Waimea Bay at age 16 on a board she borrowed from her dad and has a third-degree brown belt in jiu-jitsu. Keala Kennelly is a women’s big-wave surfing pioneer. Kelta O’Rourke earned her Wilderness First Responder certification last winter and has a degree in kinesiology from University of Hawaii-Manoa. Felicity Palmateer has competed on *Australian Survivor*. A love for surfing connects them all.

Ten days later, a massive storm formed in the North Pacific and pushed monumental waves toward Hawaii. On January 22, the Eddie Aikau Big Wave

Makani Adric grew up surfing the North Shore and is in the water whenever a swell lights up Waimea Bay.



Michaela Fregonese, Maddie Anzivino and contest judge Rochelle Ballard seem awfully chill heading out to surf Jaws on January 25.





Participation in Magnitude is really growing. To wit, 25 women submitted 66 video clips for consideration this past winter.



Magnitude participants (from left) Sarah Neukomm, Skylar Lickle, Momo Sakuma and Katie McConnell share a blissful moment at the opening ceremony—before going out and showing how they can slay some of the biggest waves in the world.

Invitational, the most prestigious event in big-wave surfing, took place at Waimea Bay. Adric, Alms and Kennelly were among the first women ever to surf in the event. “When I was younger, I would tell myself that would be so cool if girls got to surf in the Eddie,” says Adric, who grew up on the North Shore and won the People’s Choice award at Magnitude in 2021. She never imagined it would actually happen. “We’ve done something that no other girls have done.”

The following day, a crew of women descended on Waimea for the second Magnitude session of the winter. Inspired by her co-worker Luke Shepardson’s victory at the Eddie, North Shore lifeguard Maddie Anzivino caught her best wave of the winter. “Just watching somebody so low-key, this underdog, who is a lifeguard on duty, take home the Eddie was so inspiring,” she says. “My head was in a good place.” (For more on Shepardson’s unlikely win, see page 20.)

Over on Maui, meanwhile, a wild, windy session unfolded at Pe’ahi. Gomez paddled out early in the morning, only to find that the wind was already on it. “It was really sketchy,” she says. A few hours later, she decided to try towing.

Gomez had no expectations. “I was having kind of a shocker of a season,” she says. “I was just so in my head.” She had still only ridden one wave at Pe’ahi back in December. Then Shawn Lopez whipped her into the west bowl, Pe’ahi’s steepest section. Perfectly controlled, Gomez slowed her headlong descent down the wave’s face and turned to take a high line.

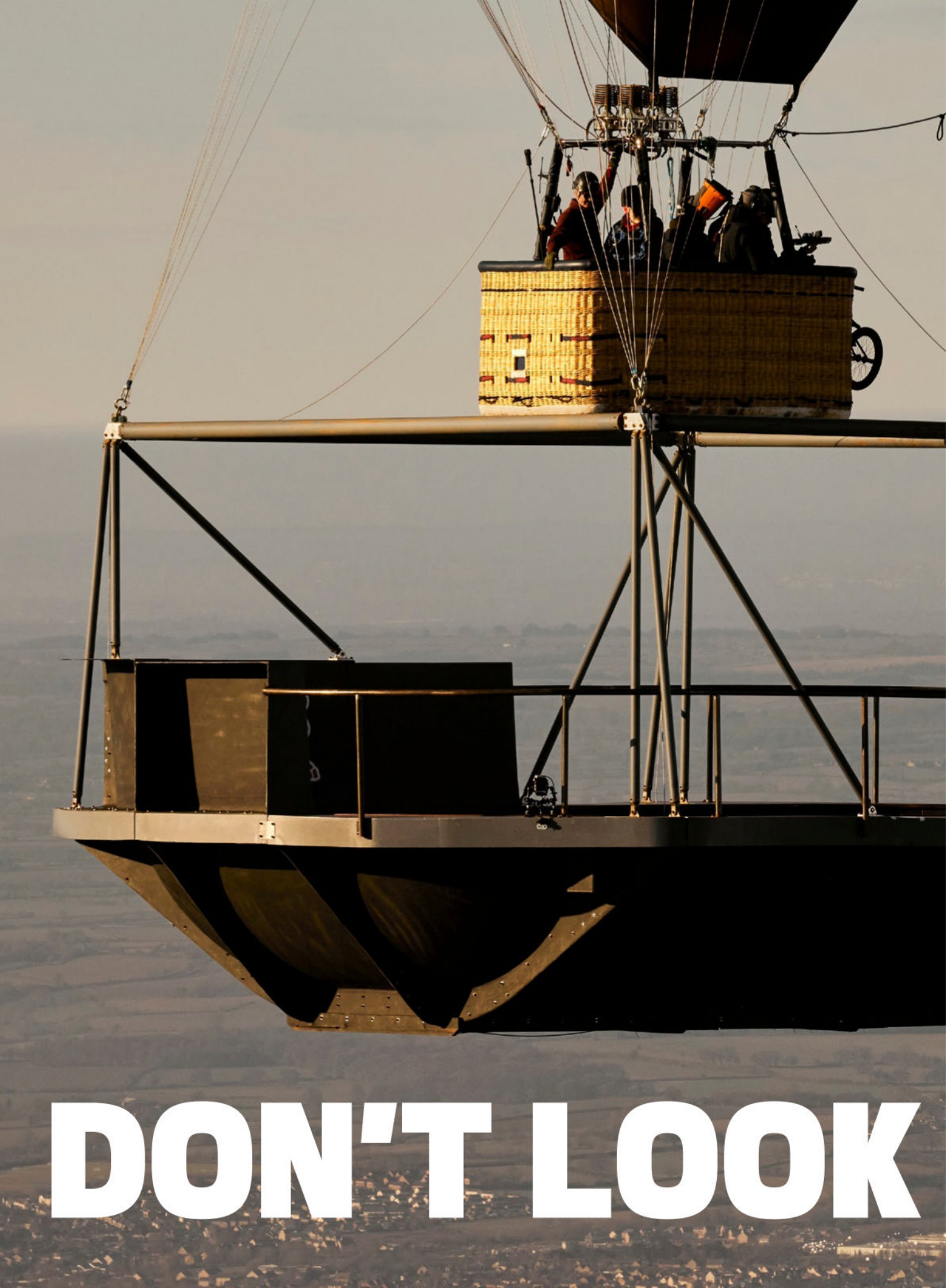
As she stalled, the wave’s thick lip began to fold over her. Then she disappeared, deep in the ocean’s embrace. “It just felt like time stopped,” she says. “I felt like I was just in the barrel looking around like,

“There is no way this is happening.” Flying out, Gomez couldn’t contain her emotions and threw her hands in the air. The ride won Gomez the Best Tow award for Magnitude 2023. “It was the wave that I’ve been visualizing and praying for ever since I started surfing out at Jaws,” she says. “I will remember this forever.”

Every woman in big-wave surfing has a story. Growing up the daughter of divorced parents in Torrance, California, Anzivino found community and connection in surfing. In 2018, Anzivino started chasing bigger swells after her mother, Shelly, died unexpectedly. “I was just so broken and lost, and I wanted to be in the water, not on land,” she says. She still remembers the first wave she caught at Waimea on a day with 20-foot faces. She’d paddled out with a friend, and they rode the wave together. “I was smiling really big, and he was on it too, just cheering me on.”

Like most of the women competing in Magnitude, Anzivino would chase big waves whether or not the contest existed. “Just the feeling of being on a big wave, there’s no other feeling,” she says. “I didn’t start doing it to be in Red Bull Magnitude or to be famous; I just did it for that feeling.” Because Magnitude brings so many women big-wave surfers to Hawaii for the winter season, it has built strong ties among them. Through Magnitude, Anzivino has met women from all over the world who share her passion.

“Big-wave surfing has brought me to such a good place in life, and I’ve met so many friends ever since Magnitude began,” Anzivino says. “Every girl who surfs big waves is in it for the same reason—they just love that feeling.”



DON'T LOOK

No, seriously: Don't look down. Ever the daredevil, Kyle can't resist a pulse-racing peek at the ground 2,100 feet below.

It's one thing to dream about riding a bike in the sky. It's quite another to pull it off. Enter Kriss Kyle, a Scottish BMX pro whose imagination is as wild as his skills in the saddle.

DOWN



Kriss Kyle's hands have been sweating all morning despite the December chill, and he's hardly slept. The 30-year-old BMXer is checking over his bike in a small aircraft hangar on a country estate in Wiltshire in South West England, trying to keep warm and stay calm. It's frosty enough outside that the grass crunches underfoot, but as the sun rises, it burns off the mist and fills the field with golden light. Today is the day Kyle has been waiting for.

Eleven months of waiting, to be precise, for the right weather to attempt his most extreme stunt yet. All told, it's been almost three years since a lockdown pedal through the hills near his home in Scotland inspired the unlikely idea of a BMX ramp suspended in the air. The pro rider has worked on some outlandish projects in his time, but this was next-level even for him. When Red Bull asked if he was serious about turning this daydream into a reality, Kyle's answer was instant. "I was like, fucking 100 percent," he says. "I said I would do it in a heartbeat."

In reality it took a lot longer than that. What followed was a Herculean effort full of setbacks and grit as a team was assembled to problem-solve their way to making airborne BMX riding a reality. By that cold December morning in 2022, a carbon-fiber skate bowl—like those you find in skateparks, roughly the size and shape of a small, empty swimming pool—had been constructed, which could then be attached to the U.K.'s biggest hot-air balloon and flown almost 2,100 feet above the ground. It was the product of

a collaboration between engineers at Red Bull Advanced Technology, who usually work on F1 racing cars; U.K.-based company Cameron Balloons; and a group of Kyle's old BMX friends from Scotland and the north of England, who had been building ramps together since they were kids and now do so professionally.

This disparate crew has gathered before dawn on land owned by the Earl of Suffolk to assemble this strange hybrid structure: nylon attached to wicker attached to carbon fiber. And the time



Flight plan: (top) preflight prep at the hangar in Wiltshire; (left) the path of the hot-air balloon is mapped out; (opposite) Kyle, helmeted up and raring to go on the big day.



**"I don't think
there'll ever be
anything harder
than this."**



Big air: Kyle nails tricks at a height of 2,100 feet. "Mate," the drone pilot said to him over a two-way radio, "how the hell are you riding that?"

Whole new bowl game

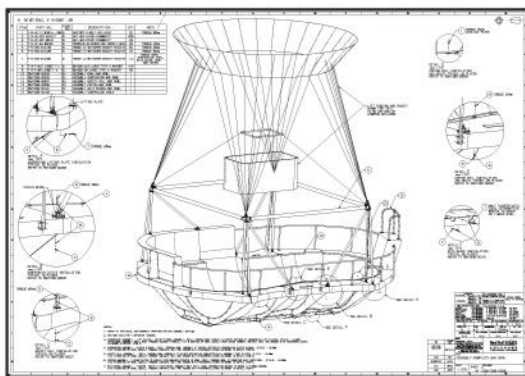
Creating a bowl fit for a sky ride is far from straightforward. As well as being the right size and shape for Kyle to use, it had to be light enough to be lifted by a hot-air balloon and able to be disassembled into pieces no heavier than 330 lbs and no wider than 10 feet, so they could be carried through gates before and after the flight. And this “jigsaw” had to be strong enough to withstand Kyle’s bike moves. Finally, it needed railings that could take the impact of Kyle landing on them, and skids on the underside for landing.

The design of the bowl began with a conversation between Kyle and ramp builder George Eccleston. Kyle outlined his requirements and Eccleston designed and built a prototype bowl from wood, weighing 6 tons. Following tests and tweaks, the blueprints were sent to Red Bull Advanced Technology (RBAT), the high-performance-vehicle engineering division of Red Bull Racing.

The RBAT team decided to build the bowl from the same carbon fiber as an F1 car. This involved building a mold and layering on glass fiber sheets, painted with resin. Once enough layers were added, the structure was cured at high temperature and pressure in an autoclave. When Kyle tried riding his BMX bike on the finished product, the interior was too slippery for optimal performance, so a rougher finish had to be added.



“I felt like I was holding my breath the entire time,” Kyle says later.



No margin for error: (top) Kyle gets a feel for the relative safety of the basket, preflight; (above) detailed blueprints show how the custom-made bowl is attached to the balloon; (opposite) flying high over the Wiltshire countryside.

has finally come to see if Kyle can fulfill his dream of riding in the sky. The bowl is being blasted with flamethrowers to dry out any moisture that could turn into an ice patch when the temperature drops to around 10°F. Meanwhile, choppers are waiting to carry the photographers, filmmakers and drone pilots who are documenting the flight. When asked how he’s feeling, Kyle acts nonchalant, but a briefing on protocol the night before, in which worst-case scenarios were discussed, had been a reality check for him. This thing is actually happening.

As well as wearing thermals, a helmet and sportswear, Kyle has a parachute strapped to his back—but he hasn’t tried using it. A height of 2,100 feet is unadvisedly low for a skydive: There’s not much time to open the canopy and get your bearings before you hit the ground. If he has to deploy the ‘chute, Kyle has been told, it’s “to save his life, not his legs.” He’ll have no control over where he lands or what he might hit on the way down.


At the same time, the weight of the parachute on his back disrupts his balance, and his handlebars could snag the ripcord loop on his chest when he twists them for a “tabletop” move. He’s had visions of deploying the parachute by accident and getting sucked out of the bowl. Add this to any vertigo he might suffer at this height and it’s not the ideal scenario for pulling off complicated runs.

Then there’s the real battle: the fact that the bowl will swing significantly in response to Kyle’s movements. When he first tried it out with the bowl hung beneath a crane in Glasgow in late 2021, he nearly gave up on the whole project. The swinging gave him motion sickness and turned even basic moves into a “nightmare” that he compares to riding drunk. And Kyle isn’t only planning to do basic moves; he has a list of nine runs to film, and there are some he’s never managed to complete in the bowl during the few hours he managed to grab while it was suspended from the crane. “It’s the hardest thing I ever could have imagined,” he says. “I don’t think there will ever be anything harder than this.”

The most difficult trick on Kyle’s list is a fakie front flip: riding backward, launching off the back wheel and rotating 360° into the air to land traveling forward. Most world-class riders would struggle to land this in such a tight space, even if the bowl was on solid ground. In the air, Kyle compares it to a gymnast trying to land somersaults on a moving



"Before I knew it, we were at 2,100 feet and I heard, 'Here we go!'"



Motorists pull over to film the strange sight on their phones.

beam. Then there's the "ice pick," a move that will involve Kyle launching himself out of the bowl and landing with one peg balanced on the top of the safety railing that separates him from a drop that's higher than the One World Trade Center. Overshoot it and he'll be given a chance to test that parachute.

What kind of person would put themselves through something like this? Kyle got married a few months ago. He loves his home, his dogs; he talks with wonder about the life of travel and adventure that his BMX bike allows him to live. In YouTube videos and press appearances, he's chipper, polite and professional; among friends, more exuberant and dryly funny. But beneath it all, there's a desire to do extraordinary things, and the steely determination to make it happen—he broke his ribs jumping from a rooftop to a tree for his last video, for example, then got up and did the jump three more times.

Even as a kid, Kyle sacrificed everything for his riding. At 14, he was so obsessed with BMX that he'd sleep on friends' couches, skipping school to avoid the six-hour round trip from his home in rural Scotland to Unit 23 skatepark near Glasgow. Before long, the park's owner, Chick Mailey, offered Kyle a two-seater sofa to sleep on and he moved in permanently, ignoring the school officials chasing him about his attendance until they finally went away. "Nights [at the skatepark] were brutal," he says. "It was so scary; there were rats running over me. I didn't have any clean clothes, and I lived off sweets. But when my friends were there and I was riding, it was the best time ever." Kyle lived in the skatepark for years, eventually joined by a gaggle of mates eager for the same kind of freedom.

"It was fucking insane," recalls Dave Summerson, who moved into Unit 23 when he was 20, "but it was the best thing I ever did." Unlike Kyle, who says

he wasn't running away from anything at home but boredom, Summerson says that he and others who stayed there "had a pretty rough upbringing." Part of the appeal of the setup, he reflects, was "probably, deep down, that thing of wanting a connection with someone else." Now, the riders who lived there are "a family, like a band of brothers."

In the years that followed, Kyle developed from teen BMX prodigy to world-traveling competitive rider, before quitting the contest circuit to focus on making creative, extreme videos. Along the way, he's involved as many of the old Unit 23 crew as possible in his projects. Today in Wiltshire, three of those "brothers" are here as part of the build team: Summerson, Jake Walters and George Eccleston, who runs ramp-building company Monolith and designed the bowl to Kyle's specifications. It was these friends who helped Kyle get through the darkest moments of his journey to this point, taking him to the pub or joining him for a low-key private BMX session when the pressure was mounting and he couldn't see a way forward.

Now the day of the flight has finally arrived, and as Kyle climbs into the basket of the hot-air balloon, trying to hide his nerves, Summerson is alongside him. The burners are turned up and the basket lifts off the ground. Finally the bowl itself, suspended about 20 feet below, rises into the air. There's a mad scramble as the whole thing then starts to rapidly move sideways, threatening to smash into equipment and cars. Then it's up and away, distracting motorists on rural Wiltshire roads, who pull over to film the strange sight on their phones.

"It got real all of a sudden," Kyle says afterward. "Before I knew it, we were at 2,100 feet and I was hearing, 'Here we go!'" He climbs down from the basket into the bowl and looks over the side, buzzing with adrenaline. "The choppers hadn't arrived yet, so there was no noise, nothing," he says later. "You're just floating. It was surreal. I remember thinking back to that 10-year-old kid who'd just started [BMX]. All these amazing projects I get to work on, all through riding that little bike."

Then the helicopters are here, and it's showtime. Kyle gets on his bike, drops in and begins riding with his characteristic mix of precision and style. "I felt like I was holding my breath the entire time," he

Jumping ahead:
Next, Kyle has his sights on some mountain-bike madness.



later reveals. “Usually, there’s a moment to relax between tricks, but this bowl was so packed with features—wallride, channel, hip, tombstone—I couldn’t get a breath in.” When it was first unveiled, in a hangar outside of London, fellow Red Bull riders Kieran Reilly and Bas Keep were invited to try riding the ramp on solid ground. “We all struggled,” Keep said at the time. “You have to change directions so quickly. But it’s perfect for Kriss; he’s like a housefly.”

The sun is dazzling in one direction and casting stark shadows in the other. Up in the air, the bowl is swinging so much that drone pilot Andrew Lawrence is having a hard time following Kyle’s moves. “Mate,” he says, though Kyle can’t hear him, “how the hell are you riding that?”

When it’s time for the “ice pick” on the railing, Summerson refuses to watch. He listens instead for the sound of the bike peg hitting metal, but it’s drowned out by the roar that rings out from everyone crammed into the balloon and choppers. “I was like, ‘Holy fucking shit!’” Kyle says of the moment he landed the trick, almost going too fast and overshooting it. “Fuck that. I’m never doing that again!” But the video’s

“BMX is an escape. It’s the best feeling ever.”

director, Matty Lambert, was telling him they needed another take, for a different angle. “I was like, ‘Nah, nah, nah.’” And then, “Ah shit, here I go.”

Landing the balloon is another terrifying moment, with the bowl bouncing along the ground of a rugby pitch and almost flipping over as those in the basket brace themselves on hands and knees. Summerson kisses the ground once they are finally out, describing the experience as “horrific.” Other team members rush over to congratulate Kyle, who receives the praise cheerfully but repeats the same response more than once: “I didn’t get the fakie front flip. I want to go back up.”

The whole team has waited almost a year for the right weather conditions for this first flight, but after Kyle persuades

them to let him try again, he gets lucky. In February 2023, there’s another bright, cold, still day, and they get the go-ahead for a second attempt. This time, when Kyle ascends in the balloon with his mates and collaborators—minus Summerson, who is happy to stay at ground level—his back is aching from repetitively drilling front flips on his bike all week, and crashing multiple times.

Once in the bowl, there’s no time for a warm-up. Kyle goes straight into filming a slightly easier run and then gets into position for the front flip. As he rides backward and launches off his back wheel, his eyes are squeezed shut. Then he feels his tires hit the transition and hears an explosion of cheers. “I couldn’t believe it,” he says afterward. “It worked first try. Thank god we put it to bed. It was so good to finally fucking get it done.”

There are riders who focus on pushing certain BMX tricks to the limit, like the triple flair that Reilly landed in 2021, but what Kyle has achieved with this project, named *Don’t Look Down*, is different. “He thinks outside the box,” says Reilly. “He thinks outside BMX.” The image of someone riding 2,100 feet in the sky, held up by nothing more than warm air, is about more than a showcase of technical proficiency. It touches on something deeper: the desire, perhaps, to escape not just gravity but other constraints, too. When Kyle was asked to come up with a name for his signature bike for the brand BSD, he chose “Freedom.” “There are no rules in BMX,” he says. “You can just express yourself. It’s an escape. It’s the best feeling ever. It has shaped who I am as a person, and it’s all I’ve ever cared about.”

This level of passion comes with restless energy. Kyle is already planning his next project, this time on a mountain bike, and says he would have gone back up in the balloon to get more clips if he could. But at the *Don’t Look Down* premiere he’ll have a chance to pause and celebrate the ridiculous achievement he and his mates pulled off: turning a surreal lockdown daydream into a death-defying display of guts and grace. “I can’t believe it was possible, to be honest,” he says. “I’m unbelievably stoked. After this, I feel like I can do anything.”
To watch *Don’t Look Down*, as well as behind-the-scenes footage, go to [redbull.com/dont-look-down](https://www.redbull.com/dont-look-down)



Red Bull



An alternative view of Kyle dropping into the bowl. You can almost feel it swinging from side to side as he rides his BMX bike 2,100 feet in the air.

At the last stop on the 2022 tour in Sydney, Australian Rhiannan Iffland, 31, clinched her sixth Red Bull Cliff Diving title in a triumphant homecoming. "I wanted to put on a really good show in front of our home crowd," said Iffland—shown here backflipping into the harbor—after the competition.



Perfect Flight

With the 2023 Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series looming in Boston, kick back with this celebration of the extraordinary action last year.

Words NORA O'DONNELL





In 2009, American David Colturi was the national champion in 10 meters, but for the past decade he's taken the plunge from far greater heights—like this leap from the 28-meter platform at the first stop of the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series in Boston last June.

The drama of these death-defying leaps is on full display as American Eleanor Smart dives off a cliffside platform in Polignano a Mare, Italy. At the end of the series, she secured the third step on the overall season podium.



With the most iconic structure in the Paris skyline looming in the background, Jessica Macaulay leaps into the Seine River. After a solid 2022 season, the Canadian diver will be returning this year.





One of four wildcard entrants (who join 10 permanent divers at each event), Swiss diver Matthias Appenzeller prepares to plummet toward the faraway surface of Lake Lucerne in Sisikon, Switzerland.





Nikita Fedotov steadies himself before jumping off the 28-meter platform at the Copenhagen Opera House in Denmark. The diver—who formerly represented Russia and now competes as an independent—would later celebrate his first top-three finish as a permanent diver.

Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has a long history of cliff diving, and this location at Stari Most (translation: Old Bridge) is among the most stunning stops in the World Series. Here, Spanish diver Carlos Gimeno somersaults into the water on the final day of the competition.







French powerhouse Gary Hunt goes for a training dive at the final stop in Sydney, Australia. Hunt finished a thrilling season by securing his 10th Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series title.

ROMINA AMATO/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Ukrainian Antonina Vyshyvnova calmly free-falls from the 21-meter platform in Boston. The Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series returns to the city on June 3. For more information, visit redbull.com/cliffdiving.



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Get it. Do it. See it.

guide

Last year, Red Bull Cliff Diving returned to Boston after an almost 10-year absence. Here, Canadian diver Jessica Macaulay takes the plunge near the Institute of Contemporary Art. The event returns on June 3.



BOSTON BLOWOUT

This summer, dive right into these locally approved staples.

Words CARLY FISHER

DEAN TREML/REDBULL CONTENT POOL

Do it



At the historic Fort Point Channel, grab some seafood at the Barking Crab.

If all your friends jumped off a cliff, would you do it, too? Believe it or not, some people actually do this for a living, and many of these adrenaline junkies will publicly show off their bravery and determination when the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series returns to Boston this summer.

With athletes free-falling from heights up to 90 feet and reaching heart-pumping speeds of 50 mph, cliff diving is among the most dangerous extreme sports in the world. Boston might not be the first city that comes to mind when you think about cliff diving, but this June 3, the world's top performers will head to the Seaport District to test the laws of physics—and do it in style.

Spectators will get quite the rush simply watching divers take the leap, so why not take the weekend to come down from that high? Get started with your feet firmly on the ground by taking in the city's best places to eat, drink and play.

SEE FOOD (AND EAT IT, TOO)

Spending all day staring at Boston's Seaport might put you in the mood for a fresh catch. Fortunately, you're in the right place to find some of the country's best seafood.

Nearby at the historic Fort Point Channel is the Barking Crab, a classic casual New England clam shack where you can rip into fresh crab, lobster and day-boat fish. Arguably, some of Boston's

best lobster rolls are at James Hook & Co., a family-owned waterfront shanty dating back to 1925 that serves up live lobsters and shellfish.

ReelHouse Oyster Bar's third location joins the Fan Pier Marina, situated adjacent to the Red Bull Cliff Diving event, where you'll find nautical-inspired cocktails, modern raw bar dishes and an outdoor patio to take it all in.

New York, Chicago and L.A. eat up all the attention for their pies, but Boston is home to a severely underrated pizza scene. Set up your own crawl through celebrated pizza parlors, starting with legendary Sicilian-style slices at Galleria Umberto, classic brick-oven pizzas at Regina Pizzeria in the North End and no-frills New York-style slices at Santarpio's in East Boston. Then, dive into Boston's contemporary scene with wood-fired pies at Area Four in Cambridge, Coppa in the South End or Lincoln Tavern in South Boston.

HIT THE BAR

As the second-smallest major U.S. city, what Boston lacks in size, it makes up in its number of bars. Start at America's oldest tavern, the Bell in Hand Tavern, a landmark watering hole where the first pour dates all the way back to 1795. Drink like a local at JM Curley, Bogie's Place and the Wig Shop—a trifecta of acclaimed bar concepts under one roof, regarded as the premier destination for industry insiders. If you're doing it for the 'gram, saddle up at the bar at Empire Boston, a trendy Asian-inspired multiconcept where you can feed your camera (and yourself) over-the-top cocktails.

Craft beer is an undeniably huge part of Boston's scene. But if you want to score points with the local nerds, ditch the national giants at Sam Adams

Brewery and Harpoon Brewery to check out indie brewers. While you're at the Red Bull Cliff Diving event, get a taste of Nantucket's Cisco Brewers by popping into their Boston Seaport seasonal pub before checking out Night Shift Brewing's colorful taproom along Lovejoy Wharf, where you can sip on light and hoppy brews overlooking the harbor. Visit Trillium Brewing's three-story brewery near the Fort Point waterfront for free-flowing taps and modern New England farmhouse-inspired foods on the patio or rooftop terrace.

Rub shoulders with Southies at the new Castle Island Brewing tasting room and bar, featuring 20 rotating tap handles of beers and hard seltzers, plus more pizza at Bardo's (in case you didn't already get your fill). Worker-owned craft brewery and pub Democracy Brewing frequently hosts comedy, music and other community-centric events alongside its roster of beers. And if you still have time, take a detour to Dorchester for sweeping views of the Boston skyline from Dorchester Brewing's Hopservatory, where you can sip beers in their year-round rooftop greenhouse, chow down on barbecue and play skee-ball or pinball in their game room.

DANCE YOUR STYLE

From the Dropkick Murphys and Pixies to Mission of Burma and the Modern Lovers, Boston has launched some of the country's best music. Discover up-and-coming and established acts like CupcaKKe, Panda Bear and Screaming Females at down 'n' dirty venues Paradise Rock Club or Brighton Music Hall. Skip across the river to Cambridge for the underground dance scene at Middlesex, drawing



Get down at the Grand, which boasts a 12,000-foot dance floor.

world-class DJs like Justin Strauss, Black Loops, Eli Escobar and Matthew Dear.

It's a musical mixed bag at Royale, a sprawling concert venue hosting internationally touring acts like Rico Nasty, Caroline Rose, Le Tigre and the New Pornographers, as well as renowned DJs in its nightclub. You can catch

headliners like Steve Aoki, Rauw Alejandro and DJ Snake at Big Night Live, as well as themed dance nights including R&B, indie and even the random Shrek night—because why not?

If your second home is at the club, get down on the 12,000 square feet of dance floor at the Grand, featuring

international DJs like Sigala, Costa, Coco & Breezy and Le Youth, backed by a 70-foot LED wall. Ready to throw down on bottle service? Make your way to newcomer Han, as well as stalwarts like Mariel Underground, Bijou, HAVA, Venu, Icon and Mémoire.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

Just because you aren't jumping off a cliff doesn't mean you can't drop your wallet on fly threads. Newbury Street, Boston's marquee shopping district in the Back Bay neighborhood, is home to the new three-story Concepts flagship store, featuring exclusive releases from the global streetwear brand and coveted luxury labels, plus a café with made-to-order bites.

Community-driven streetwear boutique Bodega started as the side project of three struggling artists who quit their soulless day jobs to open their dream multi-

hyphenate concept shop fusing art, fashion, design and counterculture with exclusive collabs/drops from Hoka, Beams, New Balance and other brands. Check out custom skateboard decks from local artists at One Gig, where you can stock up on trucks and skate tools and browse vintage threads at Boston's only Black-owned full-service skate shop.

Quirky food-centric streetwear brand Johnny Cupcakes is housed in the world's first T-shirt "bakery"—i.e., a '50s-themed, frosting-scented retail shop featuring a 13-foot-tall "retro oven" as the entrance, with lots of old-school baking racks and vintage ovens inside, but instead of cupcakes it's T-shirts packed up in pastry boxes for take-home. And if it's new shoes you're after, pop into AWOL or Sneaker Junkies to fight the sneakerheads over the latest footwear releases.

TEST THE WATERS

Chances are you'll want to leave the cliff diving to the pros, but that doesn't mean you can't get your feet wet while you're in Beantown. Hit the deck at the Tall Ship, a sumptuous floating oyster bar aboard a 245-foot vessel docked along Pier One in East Boston that will be hosting this year's welcome event for Red Bull Cliff Diving.

For unique views of the historic city, hop on a Boston Duck Tour; the replica amphibious WWII vehicles take in the sights on both land and water. You can also zoom out on a Codzilla speedboat, go whale watching along Boston Harbor or kayak down the Charles River. And if you really need to beat the heat, you can always slip into the New England Aquarium to enjoy some spectacular aquatic flora and fauna—from a safe distance.



Three acclaimed bars in one stop: JM Curley, Bogie's Place and the Wig Shop.

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Do it



"I've defined 'winning' in a very different way now," says Smart.

TRAIN LIKE A PRO

"WINNING MEANS BEING THE BEST DIVER I CAN BE"

How Ellie Smart trains for the dizzying heights of the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series.

Words JEN SEE

For Ellie Smart, it was love at first leap. In 2016, a friend invited her to go cliff jumping at McCloud Falls in Northern California. Smart had just finished a fashion internship in Barcelona and hiking to a waterfall wasn't appealing. "I was in girly-girl mode and I was like, this is so stupid," she laughs.

Thankfully, she changed her mind. An accomplished 10-meter platform diver, Smart began competing at age 12 and dreamed of the Olympics. But after two years diving at UC Berkeley, she felt like she was done. "When I jumped off my first cliff, I felt like this was what I was supposed to be doing my entire life," she says.

Now 27, Smart made her Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series debut in 2017. In 2019 she joined the series full-time and finished second at Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And 2022 was her best year yet, as she nabbed third place overall in the series. Away from the podium she founded the International High Diving Institute, which partnered with Utah's Olympic Park to build North America's first-ever high-dive platform in 2021.

No doubt, that first leap changed her life. "As a younger athlete I wanted to go to the Olympics and be the best," Smart says. "But I didn't get joy from beating other people. I've defined 'winning' in a very different way now."

MENTAL TRAINING

"I really focus on visualization"

"The hour before practice, I try to just zone out—to get my body and mind as calm as possible before I start out.

I'll listen to classical music.

I try to meditate before each practice for five minutes; I'll lie there and get my body calmed down, so I can have the most productive practice possible.

Before I do a dive, I think about it in my head. Understanding how I'm going to do a dive is important. I focus on the specific things that I need to do to do a great dive. High diving needs power, but it also needs control."

CORE CONTROL

"I don't do a lot of stretching"

"I'm known for being the queen of just showing up and diving. I find that if I stretch too much before diving, I get injured more. So, I don't do a lot of stretching. My dives are focused around twisting rather than flipping, so I need to have core control and keep a body line throughout my whole dive. I try to warm up the main muscle groups and do a lot of hollow body holds, side planks and planks. In addition to training in the pool, I train on the trampoline and use a foam pit. I really focus on quality over quantity. I'm not doing a million reps of each dive. I'm doing a couple reps really well."



TECHNICAL PREP

"I train my dives in two parts"

"Olympic 10-meter platform divers do their competition dives once or twice a week in the off-season. Many cliff divers never do a high dive during the off-season.

With women's high diving, we dive from heights between 20 and 23 meters, but all the main pools around the world only have 10-meter platforms. So I have to train my dives in two parts. I'll do a back two-and-a-half twist into a 10-meter height—then go right back up and do a second dive, called a Barani. When I show up at a competition to dive from 20 meters, I have to put those two pieces together."

STRENGTH TRAINING

"I train lighter and quicker"

"Because I'm a twister, I focus on glutes and core. I don't train heavy; I train lighter and quicker. The kind of power I need is more directional and dynamic. I do a lot of front and back squats with lighter weights. I do glute holds where I'll put a 45-pound plate on my core and for five minutes hold the position. Because I do an armstand dive, I need lots of upper-body strength. So I do traditional lifting with dumbbells, or put a 45-pound weight above my head and do shoulder shrugs. And I do handstands and handstand push-ups against the wall."

"I DO A LOT OF CARDIO FOR ENDURANCE"

"Four or five days a week I do cardio and often use a stair-stepper. When people think of diving, they think of fast, explosive, quick movements. But we go to these crazy cliffside locations and have to hike to the top. Often that's the most exhausting part. The divers who don't prepare endurance-wise really end up struggling. Sometimes, we're in harnesses, literally climbing cliffs. So I do the stair-stepper. Work the booty!"

See it

2



June 2

JACKALOPE FEST

For the first time ever, this Canadian action sports festival comes to the U.S., making its debut in Virginia Beach. For three days, top skateboarders, boulderers, breakers and BASE jumpers will descend on Neptune's Park to compete for spectators. On June 3, legendary skateboard pioneer Tony Hawk (pictured here at the Canadian location in 2019) will lead a demonstration, while many others, including 10-year-old wunderkind Reese Nelson, will be showing off their skills throughout the weekend. The best part? There's no charge to attend the events. *Thru June 4; visitvirginiabeach.com/jackalope-fest*



Available now

THE MAKING OF RED BULL SYMPHONIC: RICK ROSS

If you missed the action in Atlanta last year, now you can go behind the scenes of this unprecedented collaboration between Rick Ross, the "rap boss of the South," and the 50-piece, all-Black Orchestra Noir in this new documentary short. See how Maestro Jason Rodgers creates a show grounded in the robust rhythms of Southern rap by blending both classical and modern sounds in front of a sold-out audience inside the Atlanta Symphony Hall. Watch the ground-breaking magic happen only on Red Bull TV. *redbull.com*

May 20
BREAKING BEYOND

In this six-part series that spans different cities around the world, follow some of the best B-Boys and B-Girls as they play host in their home countries, explore the local breaking culture and each share their fascinating origin stories. Every episode highlights just how expansive breaking and hip-hop culture has become across the globe while celebrating some unique differences that put a spotlight on the diversity of the art form. Catch it on Red Bull TV. *redbull.com*

June 3
RED BULL CLIFF DIVING BOSTON

Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series returns once again to Boston's waterfront, an iconic backdrop to the first stop in 2023. Last year, Boston served up a crazy season opener when Aidan Heslop and Molly Carlson set the tone for one of the most exciting seasons in cliff-diving history. (See page 68 for some of last season's highlights.) Watch the action unfold live on Red Bull TV, or consider planning a trip to Boston to witness it in person. See our travel guide on page 81. *redbull.com*

7

June TRIBECA FESTIVAL

Although this film festival in New York was one of the first to offer outdoor screenings during the pandemic, it wasn't until last year that the fest truly returned to form, and to celebrate, the stars showed up en masse to support the in-theater experience, including Jennifer Lopez, Sigourney Weaver and festival co-founder Robert De Niro. As of press time, the 2023 lineup wasn't set, but expect the festival to continue to expand its offerings, with TV, games and more. *Thru June 18; tribecafilm.com*

15

June BONNAROO

After two years of cancellations, this beloved music and arts festival in Manchester, Tennessee, had a triumphant return in 2022, with the Aces (see story on page 38) making their Bonnaroo debut and Stevie Nicks closing the festival as the first female headliner in the history of the fest (wait, *what?!*). Although this year's main headliners are female-free once again, there's still representation on the bill, including pop star Rina Sawayama, who made her kickass acting debut in *John Wick 4*. *Thru June 18; bonnaroo.com*



July 20 COMIC-CON

Comic book and cosplay lovers, assemble! The iconic convention in San Diego is back. Here's your chance to meet the creative brains behind the universes that dominate your screens both big and small. You can count on some big announcements, trailer drops and panels with the stars. Last year included discussions with the cast of *House of the Dragon*, *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves*, *Severance* and a surprise trailer drop from John Wick himself, Keanu Reeves. *Thru July 23; comic-con.org*



June 17 RED BULL FOAM WRECKERS

This anti-surf surf contest has one simple requirement: You must ride a soft-top (foamie) surfboard. The rest is up to you. Catch as many waves as you want, and ride them however you like. Your goal is to have more fun than everybody else. Better yet? All the soft boards will be provided, so the only thing you need to bring is yourself. With the second stop in Rockaway Beach, New York, on June 17, there will be five more locations scattered across the country—from New Jersey and Florida to California and Hawaii—with the format varying based on the spot as well as conditions on the day of the competition. To sign up, visit [redbull.com/events](https://www.redbull.com/events).

WANDERLUSTY

Upgrade your next trip with these super-cool new travel accessories.

Words PETER FLAX



FAUNA SPIRO TRANSPARENT BROWN

Space is often tight when you travel, so having accessories that can do double duty are handy. That's the appeal of these sunglasses—which offer Euro style and a surprisingly rich audio experience. So you can lay out on the sand or walk the city streets while listening to music or a podcast or even weigh in on a work call. They have Carl Zeiss sun lenses (you can also swap in prescription lenses), Bluetooth functionality, two microphones and touch sensors on both temples. The sweat- and water-resistant glasses can play tunes for four hours on one charge. \$215; wearfauna.com



FOCAL BATHYS

Until very recently, it simply wasn't possible to get true high-fidelity headphones that were wireless and had active noise-canceling capabilities. These headphones change the game. With a battery life of 30 hours, you can fly halfway around the world—listening to beautifully reproduced music or movies, or just quieting ambient noise—on one charge. The handsome aluminum-and-magnesium cans leverage design cues and driver designs from higher-end Focus headphones beloved by audio nerds worldwide. Supple leather earpads and a striking gray hardcase highlight the obvious high-end style. \$800; headphones.com

At last you can get wireless high-fidelity headphones with active noise cancellation.

These handsome, TSA-compliant capsules will change how you travel with toiletries.



CADENCE CAPSULE SET

If you're a product person, packing and flying with a bunch of toiletries, supplements and beauty products can be a messy, minor ordeal. That's why having a set of these handsome hexagonal containers—which are magnetic, leakproof and available in a range of cool colors—is a stylish and functional way to organize your products (and reduce waste). Each TSA-compliant capsule is about 1.8 inches tall and 1.5 inches wide—big enough to hold enough lotion or contact solution for your trip, but compact enough where up to 15 will fit in a quart-sized bag. They're also dishwasher safe. \$143 for a customizable set of 12; keepyourcadence.com

TROVA GO

Nearly every traveler has moments in which they'd like to secure small valuables like cash, cards, pills, smoking supplies or other unmentionables. And now, whether you're leaving such stuff behind in an empty hotel room or in a bag by the pool, you can make sure it's secured in this small (and odor proof) biometric safe. Pairing your phone's Face ID or other biometric security with Trova's app means that only you can open the compact safe. If you want to safeguard a wad of cash or chunky watch, consider the larger Go Plus for \$50 more. If needed, you can track its whereabouts, too. \$199; trovaofficial.com



LARQ BOTTLE PUREVIS

Serious global travelers and hiking fanatics know that drinking out of a random tap or a pristine mountain lake isn't exactly a risk-free venture. And buying tons of single-use plastic bottles isn't the simplest or most sustainable option. That's why this innovative bottle is so interesting. It uses proprietary UV technology to eliminate more than 99 percent of bio-contaminants like E. coli in seconds. That tech allows the insulated bottle, which keeps cold drinks cool for 24 hours and hot drinks piping for 12, to clean itself so you don't need to scrub it to avoid weird-tasting water. \$99 (17 oz.) and \$118 (25 oz.); livelarq.com



**VSSL INSULATED FLASK WITH
BLUETOOTH SPEAKER**

Whether you're chilling with friends around a campfire or watching a sunset light up a remote beach, it's hard to think of a better combination than a stiff drink and your favorite playlist. This new flask gives you both: An 8-ounce double-walled container that will keep drinks cold for 10 hours and a weatherproof wireless speaker (made by Speaqua) that can rock out for five hours per charge. And if you have two flasks, you can have a legit open bar with stereophonic sound. \$150; vsslgear.com



**You can pour a stiff drink
and crank out tunes with
this innovative flask.**

MANTA SLEEP MASK SOUND

Radically upgrade your next long flight with this mask, which gives you full control over what you see and hear. Optimized for side sleepers, the design offers a complete blackout seal with no eye pressure and has integrated, razor-thin Bluetooth speakers that nestle within the comfy, ventilated strap. The mask has a 20-hour battery life and will never interrupt your sleep with an audible battery notification. It's obviously optimal for a long transatlantic flight, but don't be surprised if you start wearing it at home. \$159; mantasleep.com



Radically upgrade any flight with this comfy mask, which gives you full control of what you see and hear.



PARAVEL AVIATOR CARRY-ON PLUS

This stylish bag is the world's first carbon-neutral carry-on, constructed from vegan leather, aluminum and polycarbonate that's all recycled. Plus, Paravel offsets the carbon that is emitted in the construction and shipping of the bag—as well as the carbon cost of your first flight. The scuff-resistant hard shell has modern sensibility and throwback glamour—and it's big enough for four or five days of clothes while still fitting in most overhead compartments. Nice touches include frictionless wheels with carbon-steel bearings, thoughtful internal organization and a matching, removable laundry bag. \$425; tourparavel.com



GLOBAL TEAM

THE RED BULLETIN WORLDWIDE



 *The Red Bulletin* is published in six countries. This month's U.K. edition features British international cricketer Ben Stokes, who is captain of the England Test team.

For more stories beyond the ordinary, go to redbulletin.com.

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Action highlight



Extra! Extra!

At this year's Red Bull Slide-In Tour, snowboarder Zeb Powell (in flight above) assembled a talented crew to join him on the road for a three-stop cross-country trip: (clockwise from left) Maggie Leon, Grace Warner, Jesse Augustinus, Luke Winkelmann, Kenny Stills and Alex Caccamo. The goal? To have a blast and encourage locals to join them on the mountain. Here, at the Boreal Mountain stop in Soda Springs, California, the revelers take a moment to read all about Powell's cover story in *The Red Bulletin*.

Instagram: @zebpowell; redbulletin.com

The next
issue of
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is out on
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**DON'T SKIRT A
CHALLENGE WHEN YOU
CAN FACE IT HEAD-ON.**

Not to parrot the stock advice delivered by many dads over the years, but tackling obstacles isn't just good for you, it's good for the world. We'll explain. When you are 4x4 driving clearly, you aren't doing it because it's the quickest — or easiest — way to get from point A to point B. But when you're on the trail, sticking to it is paramount, because widening it is bad news for the Earth. Basically, turning onto the trail is a contract with nature that says "I promise to stay in my lane, even if there's a boulder in it".



To that end, the force a tire exerts on the terrain should be all-encompassing, powerful, and momentary. Take the track above for example. Pretty daunting proposition to roll tons of steel through miles of soft soil. But we design our off-road line, like the BFGoodrich Mud-Terrain T/A® KM3 to overcome anything through a Linear Flex Zone that envelops obstacles and soft soil for a brief moment so you can move through the trail with minimal impact so it doesn't get wider. We engineer incessantly to ensure we uphold that contract for every driver in every situation. Because it's the right thing to do. But at the same time, isn't it more fun that way? Maybe our dads were right.



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