

the intergalactic

observer

"....." *JANUARY ISSUE 03*

PRINCIPLE OF THE MONTH:
DECOMMODIFICATION

**SUPER
SLOW
NEWS
WEEK!**

FUCK, I'M BORED!

**STILL BETTER
THAN THE BRC WEEKLY**

**CRYSTAL
GRID**

with David "Boots" Baker

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings, Sasquatches! It's the dawn of a new decade and you made it all the way here. We're happy to have you with us. More importantly, it's the dawn of a new month, and that means another issue of *The Intergalactic Observer*, so I'd like to take the moment to talk a little about what Burning Man means to me.

I first met (The Legendary) John Henry and our dutiful Mayor, Chris Kodiak, in late 2015. For the next two years, I heard stories about their yearly adventures in the dust and grew to love that last week of August (as it was the one week a year when I didn't have to hear about Burning Man).

In 2017, I went for the first time and realized, as I'm sure many of you did at your first Burn, that I'd always been a burner. You can preach to me about the importance of Self-expression, Immediacy, or any of the other Principles, but what struck me as the most important element was the sheer absurdity of it all. For the many of you that don't know me, humor has always been my biggest vice. I've never really cared much if it was an appropriate time for a joke and I've certainly never known how to quit while I'm ahead. Suddenly, there I was in the most absurd place I'd ever been. A place where the rules were (mostly) made up, and the points absolutely didn't matter.

I vividly remember my first interaction with a non-Squatch. I'd struck up a conversation with a passerby and he asked me, "How's your Burn going?"

No sooner had I spoken a word of reply did he quickly decide, "Actually, I don't give a fuck," and walked away.

"Holy shit," I remember thinking. "You can say that?" Anywhere else in the world, I would've felt a little put out by the interaction, but in the dust it was refreshing, even funny. I laughed all the way back to camp.

Snark and antics aside, Burning Man has quickly grown to become the highlight of each year for me and—as the personal significance of the event has grown—so has my desire to create, contribute, and share the experience with as many people as I can. More and more over the years, I've endeavored to ask not what my camp can do for me, but what I can do for my camp. I hope you see this magazine as a fitting reflection of that, and I hope it inspires you to ask yourself the same question. Remember, you are not a spectator.

I'd like to wrap up my thoughts with a word of thanks to all the campers and burners that have put the in work to create this monthly magazine. Each one of you has made an initially daunting task both fun and achievable, and I am incredibly grateful to everyone that has contributed their time, effort, images, and thoughts to the publication. The reward of seeing your ideas come to life is my favorite part of each month.

Finally, I want to make an appeal to anyone that would like to write for *The Intergalactic Observer*, and finish with one of my favorite lines from *The Talmud*:

"Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."

It's the dawn of a new decade here at *The Observer*, and we'd love to have you.

Yours in the dust,

Casey Sparks.

Three O'Clock Plaza & The Esplanade

Katie Swalm

Happy new decade, 'Squatches! Here are ways you can stay involved and informed, starting off the new year right. Remember, you can find local news at here at Three O'Clock Plaza and Burning Man-wide news and events at The Esplanade.

For a full calendar of regional events, visit: <https://regionals.burningman.org/events/2020-01/>

Burner Mondays

What: A time to connect with other Vegas burners.

When: December 2, 19, 16, 23, and 20: 6.00 p.m.

Where: Phoenix Bar & Lounge: 4213 W Sahara Ave, Las Vegas, NV 89102.

[More Information](#)

Hyperborea—Central Canadian Burning Man Regional Event

What: Hyperborea is a camping, arts and cultural event in the Canadian Shield.

When: Theme camp registration opens January 1, 2020; ticket registration begins February 8.

Where: Ontario, Canada (Exact location TBD)

[More Information](#)

Late Night at No Spectators: The Art of Burning Man

What: See Burning Man art in a gallery and enjoy a snack.

When: January 9, 2020: 6:00—10:00 p.m.

Where: Oakland Museum of California, 1000 Oak St, Oakland, CA 94607

[More Information](#)

Decommodifying the State: Burning Man Organization sues BLM to recover millions of dollars in permit fees

Originally reported by the Associated Press, [Burning Man organizers sue over millions in US permit fees](#)

On December 13, Black Rock City, LLC—the nonprofit that produces Burning Man—sued the U.S. Bureau of Land Management for millions of dollars in fees charged the over the past seven years, for which BLM has failed to provide justification, according to Black Rock City, LLC.

Black Rock City is required to reimburse the BLM for its services of law enforcement and oversight; through the years, the fees have continued to rise, without a specified cause. Though event attendance increased around 29 percent in the past few years, permits and fees have risen 291 percent, BRC attorneys said.

Black Rock City hired the Washington-based lobbying firm Holland and Knight to help take on the legal battle. It has already filed six appeals in the past four years, fighting against what it calls “excessive and unjustified costs,” according to the lawsuit.

“This case is our attempt to break this cycle,” Burning Man spokeswoman Megan Miller said in an email to the newspaper.



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The new iRobot® Tactical Assault Roomba® 9000 Series Vacuum Cleaning Home Defense Robot, powered by our advanced military-grade weapons system, replaces conventional vacuum brushes with guns to give you better performance. So you spend less time cleaning, and more time fleeing.

THE CRYSTAL GRID

WITH DAVID "BOOTS" BAKER



The Intergalactic Observer is on Spotify!

If you are brave and curious enough to try out Boots' metal playlist, you can do so by scanning the Spotify code to the right, or by clicking the link below. Please work through the tracks in order as you read *A Headbanger Lost on the Playa: Thoughts of a Metal Head at Burning Man*.

spoti.fi/2tYGMU5



A Headbanger Lost on the Playa: Thoughts of a Metal Head at Burning Man

Hello, my name is Boots and I'm a metal head.

Cue the Alcoholics Anonymous chorus response of "Hello Boots."

It is true, I hail from another tribe, recognized by our patched denim and black leather, not bright rainbow colors. I live for the scream of chorus guitars and my heart yearns for the double bass drums to kick, rather than the beat drop. Scandinavian forests are far more home for me than dry lake beds. Raising the horns is as great a greeting as any hug, and one has not truly lived until they have survived a Wall of Death. So, what the fuck is a blood-sworn Defender of the metal faith doing in the electronic music world of Burning Man?

The answer, surprisingly, is having the time of my life.

I hope that doesn't shock anyone reading this, for there is more in common between burners and bangers than you are most likely realizing.

Let's dig beneath the surface just a little. Neither of our cultures can be defined merely by our love of certain musical genres. Our tribes are not as different as one might think.

Both tribes push individuality while simultaneously strengthening the bonds of brother and sisterhood (or Radical Self-reliance and Radical Inclusion.)

Both tribes favor the fruits of hard work, determination, and perseverance. While success is rewarded with glory, it comes from participation and communal effort.

Both tribes have been known to enjoy altered states of conscience, although we don't really use ketamine. Have fun with that.

Both tribes, to sneak a rock reference in here, turn it up to 11, and I do not only mean volume. I mostly mean Radical Self-expression, though volume helps.

Both tribes are a misunderstood enigma before the uninitiated or those who do not know our truth.

A few weeks ago, a DPW friend posted a comment on facebook. "The harder the techno the nicer the people. Fact." I'd argue that this applies to metal as well. Now, we may have the superior music in the realm of metal, but if you dumb both metal and EDM down to their fundamentals, they both function the same. Each is a primal beat that awakens something within us, ebbing and flowing, with raising intensity and velocity. Our music is catharsis, my brothers and sisters, the emotional

release of tension and repression; most importantly, it is the wellspring from which we all flow.

Burners are some of the most open and amazing people I have met, other than metal heads, of course. But while you are open, we exist more in the shadows. We fly under the radar whenever possible. Burners, on the other hand, I have found to be much more public. You have rules that are abided, the Ten Principles, that we do not have, rather just a loosely agreed-upon moral compass, sometimes set askew by those fucked up Norwegian dudes that burn churches. I must also add that coming from the anarchistic Viking raiding party, I really appreciate this about the Burn.

When I first arrived on playa, I was understandably lost. Some of you know the story of how I got 36-hours notice prior to leaving Las Vegas for the playa my first time, so lost means many things here. But the most loss I felt was from my tribe. Ryan Steimer got a brief introduction to the ways of metal in the line at gate road, but that was the only metal I consumed that week, with only my denim patched vest left to remind me of my tribe, I felt lost and a world away.

But as the saying goes, your vibe attracts your tribe. I very quickly ceased to be the lost banger in a neon hell, but a burner, joined to others by the Ten Principles and the anticipation of what we could accomplish with our powers combined. Captain Planet, motherfuckers.

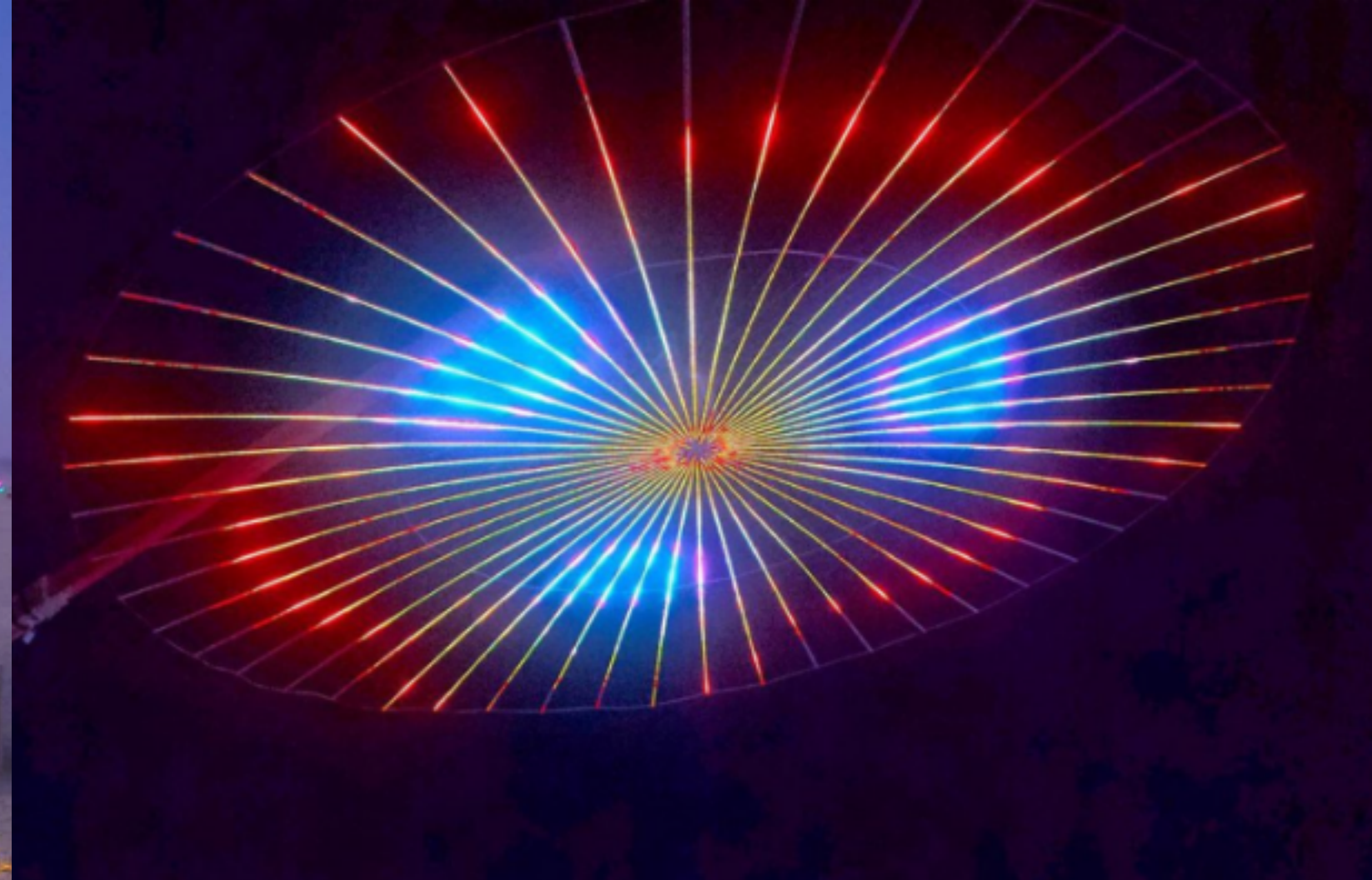
So, at the next Burn, if you by chance come upon a lost soul, dressed as what one ISV member described as looking "like a Russian warrior," befriend them. Your tribes may not be the same at first, but you can accomplish greatness and enhance each others Burns in ways you did not initially expect to be possible, but ultimately find gratifying.

Until next Burn,

GLORY MAJESTY UNITY

Boots,

Banger, Burner, Intergalactic Sasquatch Villager.



Images courtesy of Kate Fehlhaber
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Everyone Moops



Eight Tips to Preserve The Black Rock Ecology

Casey Sparks

Burning Man 2019 has long since ended for the majority of its attendees, but the work is far from over for Burning Man Organization (BMOrg). Their teams stay behind long after the citizens of the city pack up and go home to the default world, deconstructing and cleaning the site in an effort to leave no trace that the city ever existed. In terms of ecological sustainability, 2019 was the city's most successful year to date, and reported the lowest levels of residual moop ever recorded.

In the spirit of preservation, The Intergalactic Observer provides you with these eight easy tricks that you can take to the playa and use to sustain the delicate biosphere that is our home.

- 1. Feed the Instagram models.** Won't someone please think of the Instagram models? These fine, young, beautiful men and women spend their whole year on restrictive diets and intense workout regimes, all so they can go to Burning Man and take photos that they can use later to sell products. Is that really so wrong? Why all the hate? If your local Instagram model happens to pass you by on the street, give them a smile and offer them a candy bar; they deserve it.
- 2. Do not feed the wooks.** Do not get the wooks wet, do not expose the wooks to sunlight, and for God's sake, please, please, please don't feed the wooks (ketamine) before Wednesday.
- 3. Go smudge yourself.** "Oh shit dude, is that Palo Santo? Don't sage me, bro!" Burning sage is all well and good, but remember that not everyone appreciates it. While your smudgery is no doubt well-intended, bear in mind that some people don't care for the smell, would like to maintain their personal space, or maybe just prefer a combination of Himalayan salt lamps and heavy drinking as their method of choice for clearing out negative energy.
- 4. Check your vibe.** Don't forget to take care of Burning Man's most important native wildlife: yourself! If you're not quite feeling up to tackling the day, take a quick minute to ask yourself if you're dehydrated, hungry, or perhaps just sober. There are a thousand reasons why you might not be feeling so great out in the desert, and food, water, alcohol, and other intoxicants can solve approximately 700 of them.
- 5. Eat the rich.** Go on, eat the rich! They're tasty and they'd eat you in a second if they had the chance. It's what Bernie Sanders would want. (NB: Vegans can mulch the rich instead.)
- 6. Recycle your spit.** Here's a hot tip: keep your spit in a bottle (or your cheek pockets) for later. Out in deep playa with a bad case of cottonmouth? Not anymore! Perhaps you'll pass a thirst-stricken stranger out in the dust; now you can present them with an exciting new fluid-exchange opportunity! The possibilities are endless.
- 7. Don't go.** Fuck it, just don't go this year.
- 8. Ride a bike.** Gasoline-powered vehicles are noisy, dangerous, and create pollutants that can harm the environment. Have you considered taking a bicycle to Burning Man?

2019 Annual Human Resources Assessment - Intergalactic Sasquatch Village

Reporting HR Agent: Lacy Knaffla

The below report is broken up into three parts and followed by a conclusion. Observations and notes were made throughout the dates of August 24, 2019—September 2, 2019. My assessment and perception of events is completely neutral, and I definitely wasn't under the influence of any substances whatsoever.

Employment Law

Upon first inspection of the camp, it was clear that the working environment was littered with hazards; unpredictable weather and toxic dust aside, electronic bass music was blasting at full volume day and night, likely wrecking havoc on workers' eardrums. By the end of the week, I could not wait to return to the comforting arms of Maroon 5, Taylor Swift, and Ed Sheeran. In this environment, work was done with little protective wear (or little clothing of any sort), at all hours of the day.

In favor of management, it seemed no one had any trouble taking their legally required breaks (perhaps a bit too frequently). However, these breaks were often spent drinking—or in self-induced comas—rather than sleeping, which I could not imagine lead to the safest or most productive working environment. Any attempt to have any coherent conversation with anyone was met with failure.

Although there was a great deal of work being done, focusing on bar shifts alone, I found that the bartenders and barkers drank in excess with patrons, climbed, danced on bar tops, and allowed a strange man to set up an unpermitted soft serve machine on premises, all of which I refused to be associated with.

All other issues of safety aside, it appeared there were no complaints of sexual harassment, which I found astounding considering the amount of nudity and frequency with which the workers were all sleeping with one another.

Management Practices

Many of the above observations lead to a number of questions regarding the camp's hiring practices. Substance abuse being but one issue, it appeared there was little training for employees placed in management positions. After one meeting and a small binder of instructions, workers were released to manage their shifts however they deemed fit, often going into fits of mania following a 12-hour shift awake through the night.

In many cases, workers would arrive at shifts late or

not attend at all. Management was often left working extended shifts but, considering that employees were unpaid, and had actually had to pay themselves, they seemed to have no concerns that Burning Man would otherwise not run if people didn't pick up the work (yes, if you fit this description, I am shaming you).

This obviously affected employee morale, encouraging employees to further self-medicate, or just wander into unknown parts of the desert for hours on end. How most found their way back is a mystery to me. In many instances, team-building activities—or attempts at such—transformed into exactly this, with employees intentionally dispersing, getting lost in a trance, or returning to camp in duos and trios to do as referred to in the previous section.

Records Keeping

The management of workers' information was rather pristine consider the enormous amount of drinking (amongst other substances) utilized by management. However, when it came to recording employee performance, there seemed to be no interest. Issues that I would find to be rather alarming and concerning to employers (see above), went either completely unnoticed or uncared for. Rather than escalating conflict with other workers to management, employees seemed to prefer discussing it, quite aggressively, amongst themselves, stunting any ability to formally address the problem, should management have even been interested in doing so.

In addition to this, important memos were often posted simply using paper and marker notes duct-taped to the toilets. Rather odd, not particularly sanitary, and maybe not quite effective enough for the workers trapped on mushroom trips in the stalls.

In conclusion, it is abundantly clear that the overall Human Resource Management of this team is, for all intents and purposes, non-existent. It is a complete disgrace to all that is HR, and a disaster waiting to happen.

With that, my final Burning Man HR assessment concludes that the score due is:

B+

For questions, concerns or inquiries, please contact Lacy Knaffla, SHRM-CP.

Principle of the Month Decommodification

—Dave Levy

A Reflection on the Last Issue

“Worst gift” is relative. Some would say a glow stick with a word of encouragement stenciled on is a terrible idea. At the end of any event, how many stickers and rings do you actually need? It can be considered bad form to decline a gift, but I don’t believe gifting is intended to make you feel obligated to accept anything presented to you. “It is the thought that counts” is easier said than to adhere to.

An important byproduct of gifting is that it acts as a social lubricant. Imagine being in the default world with someone handing you a folding fan then starting a conversation about a place that whispers positive affirmation into PB&Js. For some, it is hard to initiate and maintain an interaction with a stranger while, for others it is challenging to be receptive to the experience. The culture of Burning Man and acts of Gifting allow for people who might have difficulty with either of these traits to find the initiation easier, providing an environment which fosters contact. In the default world, gifts from strangers can be met with distrust; there is a perceived ulterior motive. On playa, that barrier is dropped, providing an ideal environment for the enjoyment of people. A mechanism to keep gifting as selfless as possible is decommodification.

This Issue: Decommodification

In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.

Burning Man makes money. It is obvious that a huge percentage of its planning and effort takes place in the default world, which operates through the utilization of money. In an effort to defend Decommodification, they state:

Under the Terms and Conditions of entry into the event, Burning Man shares the copyright to

photos and videos obtained at the event with the photographers and videographers. This joint copyright is what enables Burning Man to protect participants’ rights if a third party obtains and uses event imagery commercially or in another unauthorized manner.

The Burning Man symbol (logo), “Burning Man,” “Burning Man Project,” “Black Rock City,” “Decompression,” “Precompression,” “Burnal Equinox” and “Flambé Lounge” are protected trademarks. The design of the Burning Man (aka “the Man”) and Man base, the map and layout of Black Rock City, the design of the City’s lampposts and the Ten Principles are protected copyrights.

These trademarks and copyrights may not be used for any commercial or promotional purpose whatsoever without prior written permission from Burning Man. In order to preserve the “Man” for use in gifting and as an affinity symbol for our culture, we do not license this symbol, or any likeness, for commercial or outside purposes.

Burning Man has a unique set of media and image-use policies guided primarily by [the] principle of Decommodification. While self-expression is highly encouraged, Burning Man does have an important set of policies surrounding media use. Burning Man images, video, and audio cannot be used in a commercial manner or to promote any products, brands, or services.

This is what Burning Man is doing to ensure Decommodification during the Burn and after. What do we do?

I believe that in fully committing to the Gifting principal, we do so passively. I don’t believe many burners actively enforce Decommodification. If we witness something distasteful or exploitive, which may instigate a feeling of displeasure, the farthest we would go is posting something online. The method is super effective and garners endless amounts of attention.

Gifting aside, how do we practice Decommodification? What have you witnessed that goes against it?





Snark needed. Enquire within.

**Scan the QR code to write for The Intergalactic Observer.
Irish need not apply.**

