

*the intergalactic*

# **observer**

**"Seeing is believing!"**

**APRIL ISSUE 06**

**TEMPLE  
INTERVIEW**

**PAGE 06**

**INTRODUCING:  
DEEP PLAYA**

*An Exploration of Burning Man Art*

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# Letter From The Editor

Good morning, dear reader!

The release of this issue marks six months since The Intergalactic Observer first launched; as our magazine has grown, so has its reach. The Intergalactic Observer initially began as a way to keep the citizens of Intergalactic Sasquatch Village excited, informed, and connected their camp year-round. Given that we now have a small base of enthusiastic readers from outside our own camp, I thought it important to put the values of this magazine into writing for the benefit of anyone who may stumble across our humble publication.

The Intergalactic Observer is committed to upholding the 10 Principles of Burning Man; to this end, we are a non-commercial publication. This means that we—as individuals and as a camp—make no profits or revenues whatsoever from the publication. We might, on occasion, include information on fundraisers for Burning Man-related projects. However, we will never do this without the prior approval of Burning Man Project's (BMP) Press Office and we will never use this magazine to publicize our own fundraising efforts.

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We reach out to BMP each month to make sure that what we publish is aligned with their message. In saying this, the opinions published in this magazine are our own and do not reflect the views of Burning Man Project, nor are they explicitly endorsed by BMP.

We always welcome feedback from our readers. Whether you want to tell us that we're doing a great job or a terrible job, you can contact us any time at [observer@intergalactic.camp](mailto:observer@intergalactic.camp).

This magazine is a gift from us to you, and we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoy producing it.

Yours in dust,

Casey Sparks  
Editor-in-chief  
The Intergalactic Observer



# Three O'Clock Plaza & The Esplanade

Katie Swalm

## EVENTS ARE CANCELED. Humans, do not interact.

This, of course, means that this month's events column is canceled too.

In this time of pause, we encourage you to find other means of social interaction. Play a game together via FaceTime or the Internet; watch a movie with Netflix party; participate in one of the many Instagram challenges polluting (er, populating) my feed.

Just please, for the love of god, stay home. Stay safe. We'll (probably not) see you next month!

## It to Be 4/20 for the Duration of the Month

After another century of waiting, humanity finally gets to experience an entire month where the date will be 4/20. This date has been marked on Google Calendars tied to email addresses like [joeffarts69@gmail.com](mailto:joeffarts69@gmail.com) and [xxwelcometomynightmarexx@gmail.com](mailto:xxwelcometomynightmarexx@gmail.com), since the discovery of email.

It appears that most humans have maintained the Pavlovian conditioning of chuckling at the sight of the weed number and have chuckled at it since weed's invention. This year, God's ringing the bell.

Jokes are expected to be plentiful in social circles and may perhaps make their way into the business world a time or two via messaging platform, Slück. Goofs and gaffs may be found at your parents' house if they're particularly cool, and definitely with your white friends who buy dimebags at \$60 a pop. The possibilities are endless when you have a society willing to do anything for a meme.

While The Intergalactic Observer does not explicitly endorse the use of any drugs not beginning with the letter "K", you should maybe do a little bit of drugs to celebrate this momentous occasion—especially when it actually turns to 4/20/2020.

Wait! I just remembered that not all countries are the United States! How are they going to celebrate the actual day of April 20, 2020? The good old U.S. of A is finally not on the wrong side of history for a pressing issue. Have fun celebrating "20/04/2020" and "healthcare", you freedom-hating cunts.

We contacted future president Joe Biden for comment, who gave his wholehearted endorsement: "Where am I? What's going on? Where's my wife!?" Us too, Joe. Us too.

This is an ongoing story and we will continue to update as more news becomes available.

BRC CLASSIFIEDS

COVID-19'd by Andy "I'M FINE. EVERYTHING IS TOTALLY FINE." MacDonald

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**FOR SALE:** Two tickets to Burning Man! Because it's totally happening! We decided to take the year off and travel. For some reason flights are cheap right now! Italy is magnificent in the Summer and we LOOOOVE unlimited soup, salad, and breadsticks!

**LOST:** KAREN??? YA THERE HON??? THE ROUTER'S OUT AGAIN AND THE GOTH BOY NEXT DOOR WON'T COME OVER BECAUSE OF THIS DANG BEER FLU. BUNCHA MALARKEY IF YOU ASK ME. KAREN?? HON??? HAS ANYONE SEEN KAREN OH FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE SIRI! STOP RECOR...

**LOST:** Hello? Is anyone here at the main sale? It's... It's so cold. Bad time to lose my gloves. Seriously though, where is everyone? Skrillex? Diplo? You guys here yet? This doesn't feel very PLUR! HELLOhellohellohel...

**WANTED:** Supes woke sophomore Communications major looking for hair stylist to make corona- I mean, cornrows, for the Cultural Appreciation Poetry Slam at our BRAND NEW CAMP, White Ocean 2: Mayonnaise Peninsula. My mushroom dealer, Cody, has dreads and he said it's chill.

**WANTED:** New Burning Man reality show, Playa Shore, almost ready to shoot. All that's left is to cast the role of Mike "The Coviduation" SARSentino! Must provide own mask, as we have donated all our spares to the brave frontline soldiers working at GNC. Candidates who are immunosuppressed as a result of chronic steroid abuse need not apply.

**WANTED:** Mystery non-profit organization that is most definitely 100% not Burning Man looking for chargeback and refund specialist to just... like... fuckin' crack open an ice cold Corona and kick it with us. No other reason. We just like your vibe.

**FOR SALE:** Everything. Decommodification is OVER. All those Mad Max jokes you dumbdumbs crack? They're real now. Buckle up, bitch. Oh, you don't have a buckle? No problem. That'll be \$5,000. And I'm not saying please.

**LOST:** A neon light up Corona Beer sig- MY GOD. MUST I CARRY ON THIS CHARADE?? WHY AM I WRITING THIS SHIT??? THE WORLD IS MELTING AND I DON'T EVEN LIKE ANY OF YOU. DOES ANYONE HAVE TOILET PAPER????????????

**MISSED CONNECTION:** I stood six feet away while you obsessively checked Twitter and sobbed uncontrollably about society... Mumbling apart? I didn't understand you through the mask. I don't actually want to meet you because, you know, the crying, but... Can I have your mask? I need it for Burning Man! Because it's still happening! Gonna be lit!

**FOR SALE:** Hand sanitizer. Purell! Great brand! ...Okay, fine. Ya got me. It's just a Camelbak full of Orgy Dome lube and Black Rock French Quarter absinthe. We're all making do, okay?!

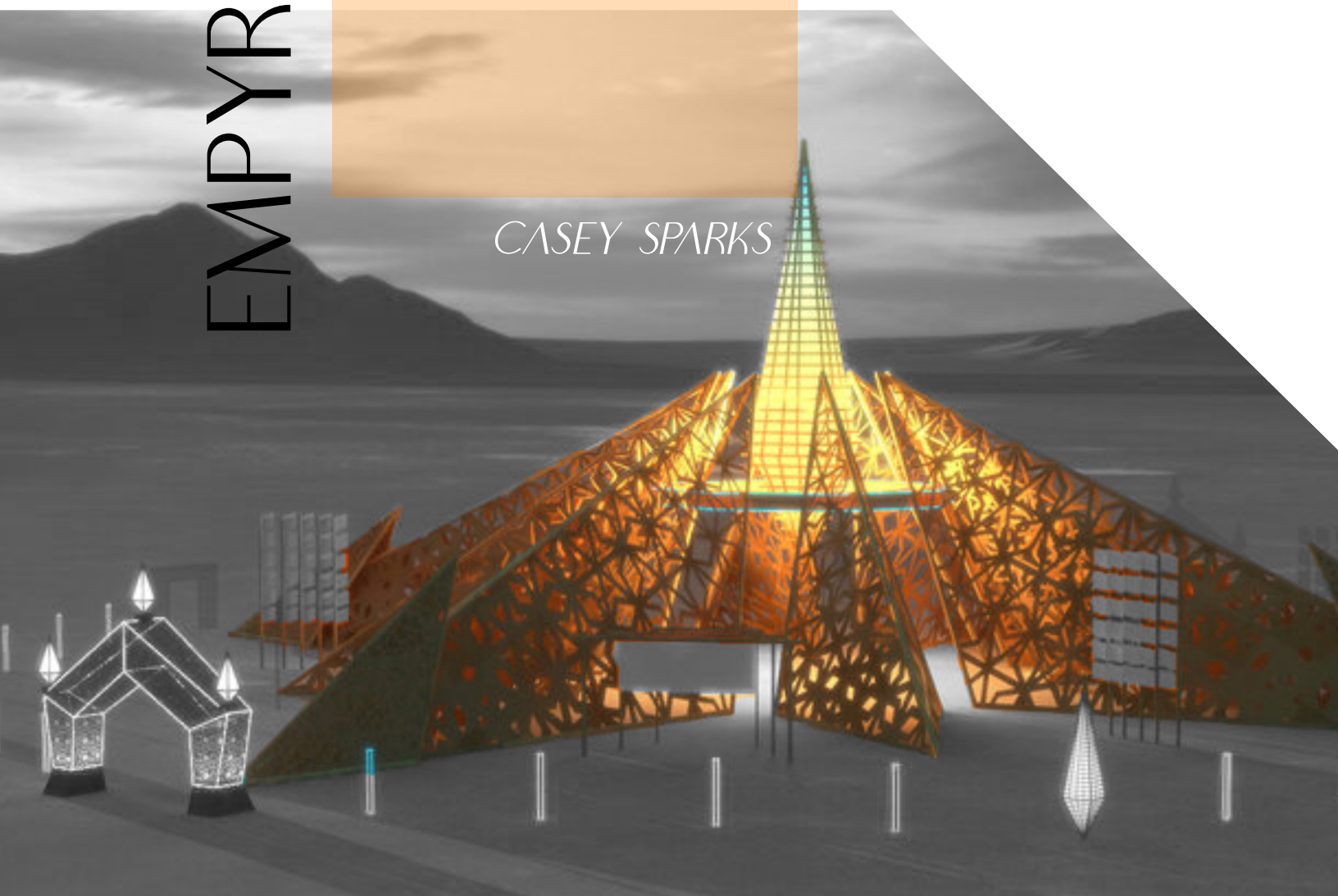
**MISSED CONNECTION:** MY SANITY.

**WANTED:** 'Sup Burner fam! Terry Godfried, leader of Burners Without Boundaries here. As I'm sure you can imagine, social distancing is taking its toll on our community. Donations of telescopes and cameras we can use to get screenshots of your Snapchats without you knowing are greatly appreciated. We'll get through this together. FOREVER.

# EMPYREAN 2020

This issue, I was lucky enough to interview Burning Man 2020's Temple leads, Sylvia Lisse and Renzo Verbeck, on Empyrean, what it means to them, and their advice for would-be artists and Temple builders. As I interview them, I get the impression that they are at opposite ends of the Burner spectrum, each providing a crucial balance to the other that covers the full range of what Temple entails. On one end, Renzo concerns himself with details and logistics, while Sylvia focuses on how Empyrean curates the experience of its participants. Despite their differences in approach, Renzo and Sylvia speak confidently of their project, and with the sort of surety that comes from hundreds of hours of planning and the knowledge that, somehow, this enormous undertaking will come to life in Black Rock City.

CASEY SPARKS



## How did you first become involved with Burning Man? Where do you camp?

*Renzo:* The first time I went was 20 years ago. I didn't go back until last year because I wanted to bring some big piece of art (or to be significantly involved with one) and I didn't know how to do that. It seemed too daunting a task to get some large, flaming, explosive, giant art piece from Colorado to Nevada. I love creating art and I just didn't want to go back empty-handed, so I just didn't go back until 2019. I went back last year because a friend of a friend did a really wonderful job of keeping me in touch with the staff of Temple of Direction. Even though I'd only met her for an hour as she passed through Boulder on her way to the build, she kept in touch and there was a need for carpenters and builders at the eleventh hour, so I got a call, went out, and had a wonderful time.

*Sylvia:* My first year was 2008, and that was the first year I camped with a theme camp (Ka Palina). I've been involved with a lot of different groups since including Fire Conclave in 2010, and the airport in 2012, where I played just about every role there is. After that, I moved on to some big art projects like the Luna Flora project in Honoraria.

## What was the Temple application process like, and what do you think set Empyrean apart from the other applications?

*Sylvia:* The process was extensive. We started in October and had a month to submit the application. It was multiple sections, so we split them in half and each wrote what needed to be done. They wanted to know what our concept was, what the inspiration was, what crew members we were going to bring with us, what our experience was with Burning Man. They wanted to know our leave-no-trace plan, our lighting budget, our timeline, and what we felt our weakest link might be. Renzo created architectural drawings and we had some digital imaging that we sent with our presentation.

I think our application was set apart because we're both Temple builders, and that our design speaks to the heart of Burning Man. When people see it, they fall in love with the concept.

*Renzo:* I think that what set us apart is that we were accomplished temple builders in the sense that we got along with other people, produced, and were a big part of Temple build last year. We also included a lot of key people that are known in the community, dedicated, and have been there year after year. I think that spoke to a strong team.

Another thing that set us apart is that we had a complete application. We'd spoken to the pragmatics, the inclusion, and the strength, mindset, and theory behind the architecture, so we had a complete package. We have a lot of people who are veterans, we have a lot of people who committed early, we produced strong architecture that presents well from a simple architectural perspective. Our application had complete scheduling documents, construction documents, budget analysis, and a complete explanation of the costs and how we were going to proceed.



**Sylvia, you've worked on several large-scale art pieces across a variety of mediums; what inspires you to create large-scale art, and what advice do you have for somebody who wants to get into it, but hasn't done it before?**

*Sylvia:* What inspires me is the opportunity to create something that seems impossible. It challenges you to think outside the box and to trust that you'll figure it out, even if you don't know how to do it at first. It brings together people with multiple skills and you learn to communicate and work together.

If you've never built anything before, I'd recommend that you find an artist you admire, contact them, and ask if you can apprentice. I had a friend who was a large-scale sculptor and architect come into town and I asked him, "Do you have any projects that you're working on? What do you need?" and he said, "I'm building a 70-foot tower and I need an 80-foot fabric cover sewn for that. Is that something you could do?" Before I had time to think about it, my mouth had already said yes. I was panicking a little bit; this tower's never existed before and there's no pattern, but my mom and I worked together on it, made our own pattern, and then created a gigantic, 80-foot fabric cover. The feeling of hand-crafting something that had never existed before was pretty fantastical.

I would definitely recommend that people believe that they can create things that are larger than themselves, and I really encourage people to take on challenges that don't seem possible because it will stretch your boundaries, give you confidence, and enable you to meet incredibly ingenious, imaginative people that change your life in incredible ways.

**What kind of preparation goes in between now and the last day of build week?**

*Sylvia:* Right now, we're solidifying our design ideas. We have multiple architects coming together and we've given them an idea of the images and patterns we want to see latticed on the Temple. They're helping us to make shop drawings that we can give to builders to make in time for Burning Man. We're also concentrating on ordering build materials. We've got our site set up and now we've got to set the experience of our core build crew so that we can accept new volunteers and have a support system in place that teaches them how to build Emyrean.

*Renzo:* We're developing teams for budgeting, fundraising, trucking, construction, logistics, engineering, I.T., scheduling, personnel. We have about 30 to 40 people right now on a lot of those teams and we're setting the stage in preparation of the push to get on playa in August.

**What's the hardest part of building such a large-scale project? What would you say is the most rewarding?**

*Renzo:* The most rewarding part is having so many people involved in a community project. It's a giant piece of art, and having so many people involved in that is exciting. Teaching a community how to build a giant sculpture and seeing this idea come to fruition is really rewarding.

The biggest challenge is the same thing: managing several hundred volunteers. I've been working on this project for several months at this point, and I'll continue to work through August, but it's hard to gauge volunteers' input. People have lives. They can participate to a certain degree, but they have to go do something else. They have to go to their jobs and attend to their other responsibilities, and it's not like you can just hire professionals—you have to engage a lot of volunteers and manage them.

*Sylvia:* I think the most rewarding thing is sitting in the Temple once it's built and watching how people utilize the space. Observing what it means to people and the depth of healing it offers the community. The Temple is like no other structure in the world. It's built by volunteers, by the community and for the community. It's non-denominational. There aren't a lot of other art projects of this scale that are built by an entire community, and that's something that's extremely exceptional. I think that the Temple offers a level of healing that you really can't find anywhere else on the planet. It's a welcoming, sacred, safe place that you can bring anything you want to. Watching it burn is pretty cathartic to people who have brought this pain that they want to leave behind, and the release and healing that they get from that is immeasurable.

*Renzo:* I'm not looking forward to watching it burn, honestly. I know the whole point is to watch it burn, but it's still going to be painful.

**What would you say is the single most important thing to have when running a project of this scale?**

*Renzo:* Experience building and seeing a project through. Knowing how to draw, knowing how to design, and having good people skills are all great assets to have, but I couldn't imagine doing this without having decades of professional experience guiding me through this process. The construction, logistics and engineering don't concern me at all; the challenge is doing it in such a short period of time with 150 volunteers.

*Sylvia:* I think you need flexibility, ingenuity, and the ability to listen and communicate. You can have a plan for Burning Man, but a dust storm will happen, a shipment won't make it, and things will get damaged, so you've got to be flexible enough to allow another solution to present itself. Listening is pretty important too. You may have a very strong vision of what your Temple is supposed to be, but there's some magic behind the Temple in which it builds itself the way that the community needs it to be. If you try to stand in the way of that—or don't listen to the community trying to tell you that something could be improved—it makes the process a lot more difficult. You really need to be able to communicate what your needs are and ask for help, because everything you need is out there if you're willing to ask for it.

**Will the Temple have seating this year?**

*Renzo:* We were just talking about that this morning. We're working on it.

*Sylvia:* The thing with seating is that it usually turns into an altar and then you can't sit on it anyway. It's tricky, but we're talking about it.

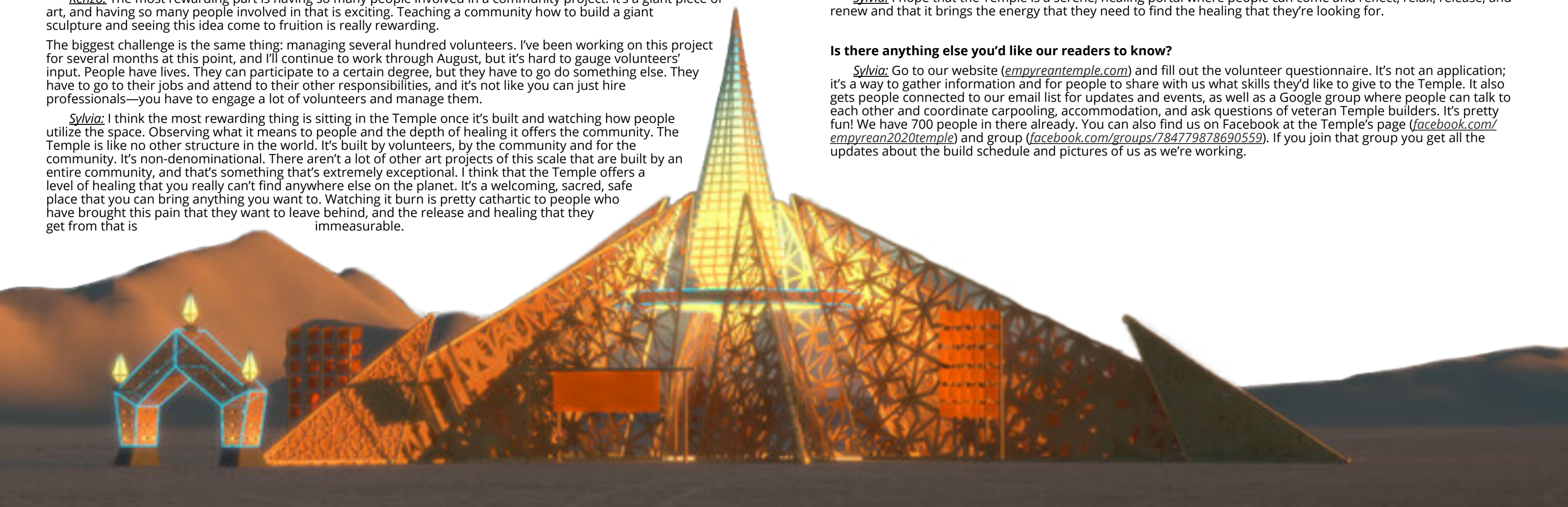
**What does the Temple mean to you? What do you hope it provides to the playa?**

*Renzo:* I hope it brings the participation of other people. There's a lot of opportunity designed into the project that allows people of all skill levels to create and participate in the project. For example, there are 20 proposed flag poles and on the poles will be prayer flags on which people can write notes and hoist them up as a small way to participate. There's also an opportunity for artists to create small, modular pieces of the Temple that come together at the build site as part of the bigger whole.

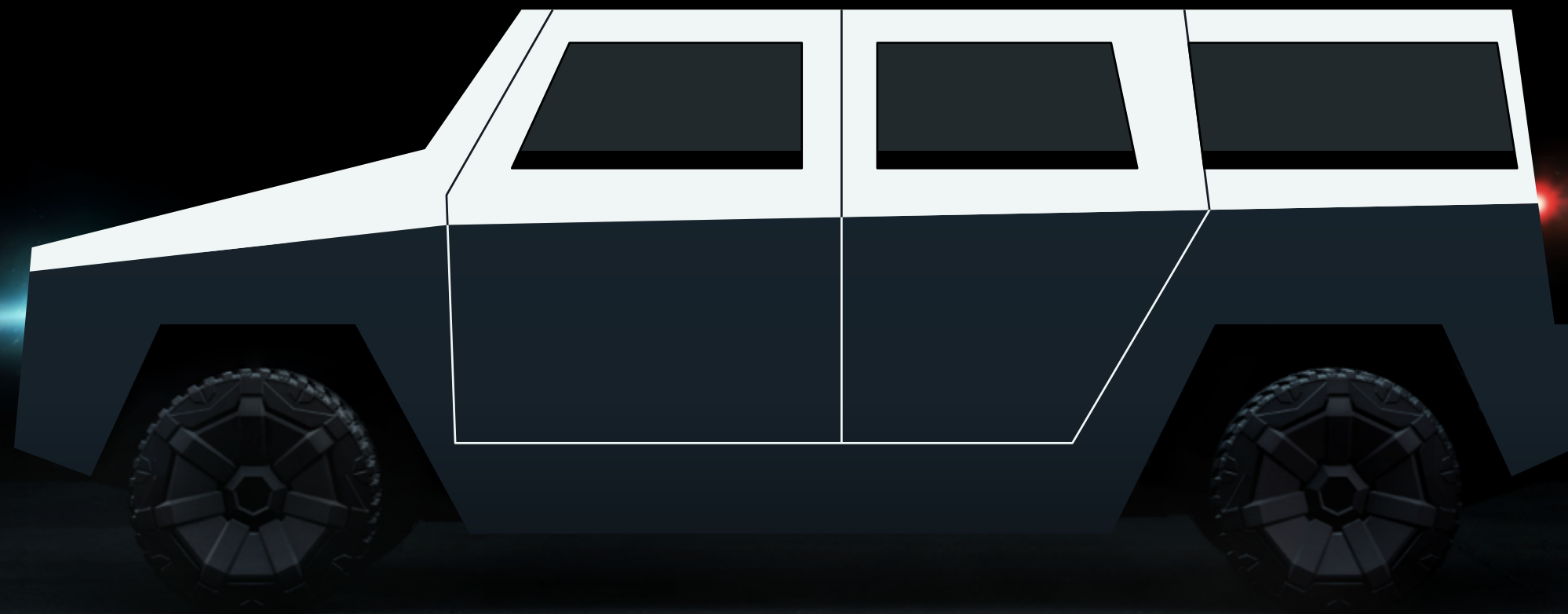
*Sylvia:* I hope that the Temple is a serene, healing portal where people can come and reflect, relax, release, and renew and that it brings the energy that they need to find the healing that they're looking for.

**Is there anything else you'd like our readers to know?**

*Sylvia:* Go to our website ([emyreantemple.com](http://emyreantemple.com)) and fill out the volunteer questionnaire. It's not an application; it's a way to gather information and for people to share with us what skills they'd like to give to the Temple. It also gets people connected to our email list for updates and events, as well as a Google group where people can talk to each other and coordinate carpooling, accommodation, and ask questions of veteran Temple builders. It's pretty fun! We have 700 people in there already. You can also find us on Facebook at the Temple's page ([facebook.com/emyrean2020temple](https://www.facebook.com/emyrean2020temple)) and group ([facebook.com/groups/784779878690559](https://www.facebook.com/groups/784779878690559)). If you join that group you get all the updates about the build schedule and pictures of us as we're working.



# CYBERHUMMER



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Image by Klaus Moeller ([instagr.com/burningmanphoto](https://www.instagram.com/burningmanphoto))

# Deep Playa with Katie Swalm: COLORDANCE

Deep Playa is The Intergalactic Observer's newest column, in which we curate and interview Burning Man creators and artists. Art is an integral part of Burning Man, so we take you behind the scenes of your favorite pieces each month.

Out in the deep playa, a stark, white projector screen stretches between the inky black sky and the dusty floor. Against the projector, colorful lights flicker and dance in all patterns, shapes, and sizes, creating a three-dimensional shadow around anyone who steps into its glow. When you approach Colordance, the brainchild of Adam DeMuri, you'll be tempted to not only dance in front of the light, but play with the lights through an interactive control panel filled with large, tempting buttons and switches. The piece invites play and interactivity, and is a wonderful surprise for any deep playa explorer.

## **Tell me a bit about yourself. Where in the default world do you live? What's your day job?**

I live in Boulder, Colorado. By day, I'm a programmer on a payments security team.

## **How did you find out about Burning Man and what made you want to participate?**

I had gone to a few music festivals and heard of Burning Man. When a friend asked if I wanted to try to get tickets, I started reading about it and it sounded like my people. I was drawn to the culture and the ridiculous engineering projects.

## **How many years have you attended, and what keeps you coming back?**

I've gone the past six years. It's fulfilling in a way that's hard to describe—I feel a sense of connectedness that's elusive in the default world. Bringing art is really satisfying—I'd highly recommend it.

## **How has Burning Man changed the way you live your day-to-day life?**

It's inspired me to create art! And I've made a lot of friends who've become default-world friends, too.

## **What was your inspiration for Colordance?**

As a kid, I was fascinated with how shadows can look three-dimensional when the lights come from different angles. I wanted to play around with that concept, so I built a mockup of my initial concept in a game engine; that let me try out different combinations of lights. I wanted to create a moment of delight by making something that was both intuitive and surprising.

## **Tell us about your creation process. What was the most difficult part of creating Colordance?**

Building Colordance presented a lot of technical challenges, but for me the hardest part was the project management aspect. Knowing what was most important for me to work on at any point, making sure that I bought or designed things in time, that sort of thing. At the moment I'm collaborating closely with some friends on Colordance 2.0, which is great. I'm working to design things so that other people who aren't as obsessive as me can pick it up and work on it without spending days learning how everything works.

The other major challenge with Colordance was that I had to build each piece without knowing exactly how the whole thing would work. I started work on the software before I knew how many or what kind of lights I would use. I started on the controls before I knew what effects there would be or how I would need to control them. I've learned from that, and am getting better at prototyping so that I can test things out early on.

## **What was the reaction to Colordance?**

One of my campmates got into a battle with some shadow puppets. I like when people are surprised by it—it's a simple principle with interesting results.

When I was play-testing Colordance, my friends thought that people would be afraid to play with the controls, but we've found the opposite; people will use the control box, but it's harder to convince people to be in front of the screen!

## **How do you see your relationships with technology and art affecting the pieces you create? In what ways did learning one field change the way you saw the other?**

I find a lot of contemporary art "good" in a technical sense, but without making me feel very strongly. When making art, my goal is to inspire an emotional reaction. I enjoy it when people play, and want to create spaces where people want to play.

## **Tell us about what you have planned for Burning Man 2020.**

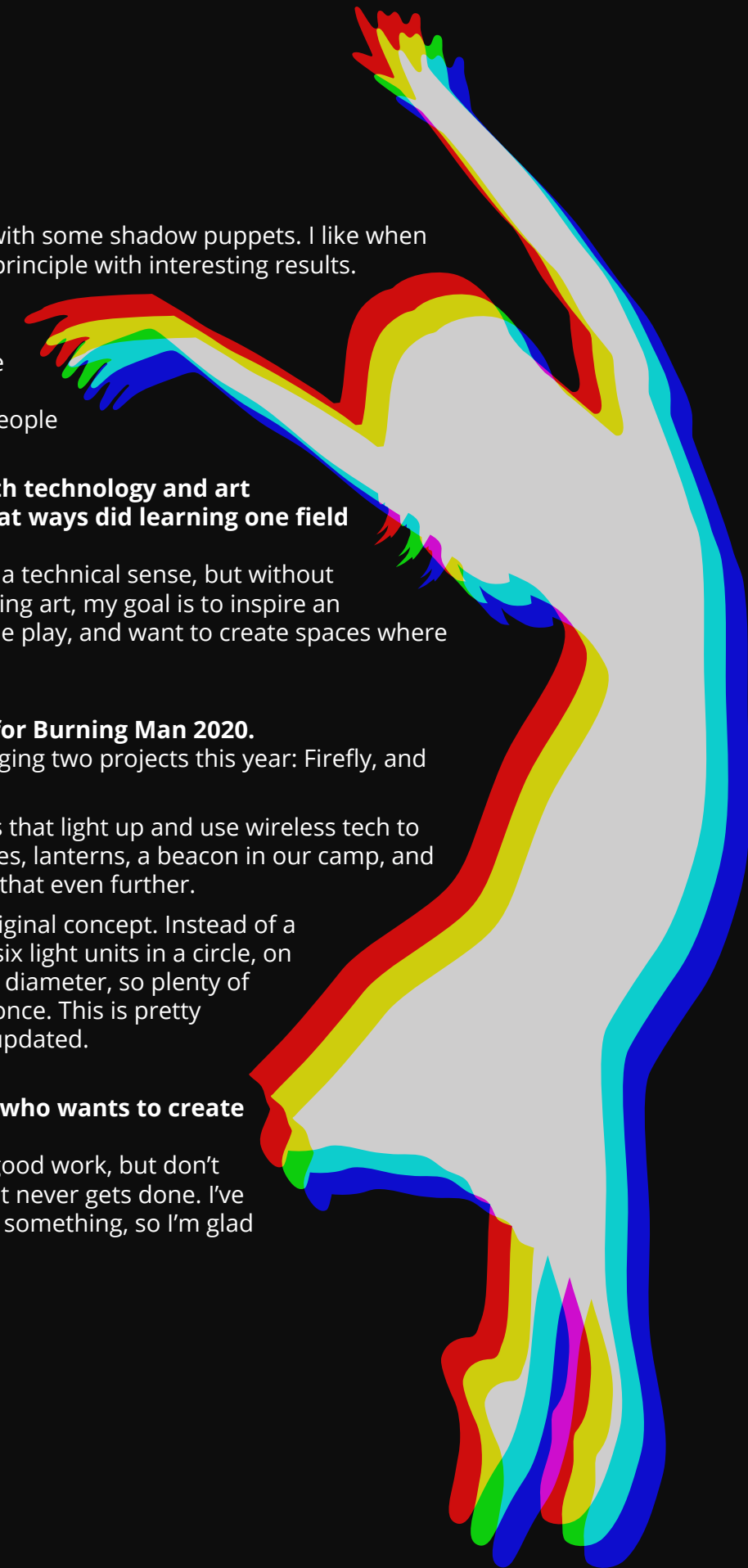
With the help of my campmates, I'm bringing two projects this year: Firefly, and Colordance 2.0.

Firefly is a bunch of wearables and props that light up and use wireless tech to sync up patterns. Last year we had scarves, lanterns, a beacon in our camp, and more. This year, we're hoping to expand that even further.

Colordance 2.0 is a reimagining of the original concept. Instead of a single light unit and a screen, there'll be six light units in a circle, on 10-foot poles. The circle will be 15 feet in diameter, so plenty of people will be able to be in the space at once. This is pretty ambitious—we're keeping our build log updated.

## **What advice would you give someone who wants to create their own playa art?**

Yes, do it! I like the B-work strategy; do good work, but don't get so hung up on getting it perfect that it never gets done. I've learned a lot every year that I've brought something, so I'm glad that I brought what I could.





## Tales From A First Timer

Michael Snyder



After four days of Burning Man, I needed a damn day off. The plan was to wake up early, get coffee and watch the sunrise alone. This all went to shit as soon as the cheap nylon of the instant cabin that my best friend Gary and I were sharing let in just enough pre-sun heat to let me know, "You overslept and probably missed something cool." I knew I didn't have much time.

After 10 months of planning, 3,000 miles of travel and five days of living on the Playa for my first Burn, I was having a tough time breaking free. I was two years into my 60-hour-a-week "dream job" and had become addicted to the constant feedback loop of stress and anxiety. The job's relentless tempo was creating distance between me and the relationships that I cared about the most, including the one with Gary. This Burning Man trip was part of my effort to break the cycle, enjoy the little things again and reconnect with the man who had once locked eyes with me while I pooped in a river.

At this point in the week, I had my morning routine down. First, I would violently sit up and open my eyes like there was an active dumpster fire taking place in our tent. Next came fumbling around in the dark for the things I thought I needed for the next 18 hours while trying not to piss myself. Finally, I would attempt to Houdini myself out of the tent without waking Gary up, lest he try to join me or talk to me

before I had coffee. Having completed everything except for the peepee dance/emergency egress, I made my way to the zipper to silently escape the steam-box death trap we called a tent.

I slowly unzipped the tent flap that Gary so graciously decorated with a cigarette-sized burn mark earlier in the week. I got it halfway open, set my dusty boot down onto the playa and silently slid out of the tent like a jorts wearing ninja. Mission complete. Now I just had to seal my best friend up in our Coleman Sarcophagus to die alone. As I shamelessly zipped the long blonde-haired man who I have been best friends with for over 20 years away to an early death, I heard three words that no one in my position ever wants to hear: "you getting coffee?" Well, shit.

The jig was up. So was the gig. It was all up. My grand plan of a morning of solitude evaporated like properly managed gray water. Four straight days of sensory overload, accompanied by a cocktail-induced full-body fog, and I had to wait a martian year for Gary to get ready. It takes ten times longer to get ready when you never know the next time you will find yourself in an impromptu, dust storm-induced, shelter-in-place situation. I finally got sleeping beauty on his bike and off we went to Center Camp to spend commodified dollars on decommodified coffee.

I love riding through the city as it wakes up. Early risers glide through empty streets as the all-nighters swerve back to their camps. Camps lie motionless, left in whatever condition the previous night's events left them in. No one is out in front of camps peddling free drinks or french fries. The machine rests for a few hours in those early morning hours before slowly spinning up again for another day of radical self whatever you want.

By the time we got to Center Camp, the sun had spilled over the mountain tops. The only hope I had to salvage my morning plan was to pay for unreasonably hot coffee and find some shade to gingerly sip it in while pretending Gary was a failed art piece that I felt bad for. We waited in line and I took respite in the breezy calm of center camp. One of my campmates was crooning on stage to a few early birds who were sitting on jigsaw puzzle furniture covered in dust-coated pillows.

When I finally reached the forever long countertop, I exchanged a few dollars and my empty cup, which still smelled like day-old beer and hot chocolate from the night before, for coffee that was just a few degrees cooler than the sun's molten core. Having finally accomplished something, we set off to find shade. I stubbornly led the way, hoping Gary would maybe get hit by a bus, or an art car or a dick shaped kite.

Our first stop on the journey to find shade was a group of swing sets suspended from clouds called Dream Swing. I sat on one of the cloud swings and let my mood continue to curdle. Lazily swinging back and forth, I nursed my shit mood while Gary bounced along to the beat of a man playing a single drum that he drug out to the swings. My cloud may as well have been raining on me as Gary got off his swing and provocatively danced with strangers. I was at the carnival and my ice cream had melted.

We set off for shadier pastures, next stopping at the giant mosaic-tiled Crocodile named "Niloticus." I sauntered about the beast's shadier hindquarters while Gary climbed it like a jungle gym. He was glorious up there, long hair shifting in the easy breeze, and I hated him for it. I found a spot to sit in the shade of Niloticus' massive jaw. Even though I had everything I wanted, mainly shade and white-hot coffee, I was deeply unsatisfied. I got up and noticed Gary was chatting with the man responsible for bringing the giant sea beast out to playa. Instead of engaging with the person who worked tirelessly for the better part of a year to gift his handmade vision to the playa, I stood idly by, staring longingly out into the cornucopia of shadier places, yearning for something.

At this point, my free-spirited companion was growing impatient, I knew he only had one stop left in him. I charted a course deeper into open playa through a light dust-up. We finally stopped at eight

shipping containers that had been stacked two-by-two like dusty Jenga blocks. The containers were part of an art piece called Containerisation, which would have seen the containers pieced together to form a giant asterisk on the playa. Instead of punctuating the dust, complications got in the way and the containers were stacked. A system of janky ladders had been added to the inside of the containers going all the way to the top, probably by participants and not the original artists.

We climbed up to the third stack of containers and sat down, letting our boots hang over the edge facing the city. The horizon was littered with art cars headed back in from a long night, art cars headed out for a long day, and hundreds of ant-sized bicycles weaving through both stationary and motorized creations. The coffee had finally cooled down to the manageable temperature of Chernobyl's graphite core and I was in acceptable shade. We sat in silence for a while, letting the dust kicked up by a nearby dance party cut the tension between us. I looked over at my best friend and said: "*I don't know what the fuck is wrong with me.*"

For a moment, he considered the ramshackle city that splayed out around the containers; the city made up of hundreds of thousands of man-hours distilled into a broken clock, and meant to house almost 80,000 participants for a week. With a clarity that he usually hid behind a wall of joy and golden blonde hair, he spoke. "*Your job has changed you, but I know the real you is still in there.*"

The honesty stung. It delivered a fatal crack to the glorious wall I had been building around myself. The raw truth he gifted me was the exact brand of honesty that I craved, a catalyst for change. The tension in my chest unwound and fell out of the container into the alkali desert. Instead of resenting the joy people were having around me, I became inspired by it. The man-baby facade I was toting around broke and I let the reality of how neglectful I had been of myself set in. At that moment, I firmly put my feet on a different path. Emotional health became cool again.

We sat in the container for hours talking, laughing, and reflecting. The conversation flowed from our friendship to highlights of our Burn. I told him about the perfectly pierced gooch I saw on a guy bench pressing at Comfort and Joy the day before. He told me about the woman who fell off an art car onto him and then nursed him back to health with liquor until finally tucking him into his sleeping bag. We eased back into the effortless brotherhood we had been cultivating for over half of our lives. The Burn is a pressure cooker for your emotions, your insecurities and baggage can't take the heat.



Feel free to chalk up the clarity I found in that shipping container to the placebo effect, first-Burn euphoria, or whatever happenstance you wish. Maybe you think it was the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy. I don't subscribe to any of that. I believe the bullshit-dissolving experience I had resulted from the environment the inhabitants of Burning Man created, coupled with the surgical honesty of someone who knows me best. TTITD (that thing in the desert) is a blank canvas that encourages people to hug strangers, gift cocktails, dance all night, seek answers, seek no answers, wear nothing, wear everything, and reconnect with whatever it is they want to reconnect with. When everyone else is bearing their true colors while trying to survive and party together, you cannot help but take a look inward.

Burning Man came easier to me after we climbed down from our special little container. My eyes opened a little more to the beauty that had unfolded out there. I sunk deeper into the Burn in those last few days and my focus turned to the beautiful relationship I have with my wife, who wanted absolutely nothing to do with a week of showerless camping in the desert heat. Engaging in combat with the one-eyed peg-legged bastard known as Emotional Neglect granted me the cold, hard realization of how I had not only been a sub-par best friend but also a distracted husband. Yeah, shit got deep, I know.

I rode the Burner Express back to Reno with the radioactive emotional fallout I am sure most burners experience (especially after their first Burn). In my first hours back in the default world, I decided I was going to wear jean shorts and shemaghs every day and trade in my iPhone for a Nokia brick. While those lofty goals faded in a matter of hours, I was left with crystal clear insight into my relationship with stress and how crippling it can be when left unchecked. The entire experience recoded my DNA with specks of dust and granted me a cool superpower I like to call "chilling the fuck out."

I am not sharing a tent with Gary next year.

# Principle of the Month Radical Self-expression

—Dave Levy

**A word on last month's principal.** Radical self expression has so many forms, it is impossible to encompass all types in writing; they definitely have to be experienced to be fully understood. While we should take pleasure in the act of self expression, it feels wonderful when people take part. The principle allows for people to be unwilling and for everyone to respect their wishes nonetheless, but how can someone truly know what they do not like until they have experienced it without any reservation that would inhibit them? I propose a tiny call to action to seek out something entirely out of our comfort zone and abandon all preconceptions. Just the act of doing so, whether we find enjoyment or not, will be liberating. You will abandon the shackles of your preferences, opening up new opportunities. At the very least you will acquire an entertaining story.

**On the topic of this month's principal.** To have any of the principals function, let alone operate on a large scale, you need participation. The principal making this possible is communal effort.

Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction. Communal effort creates an opportunity for all of the principles to be executed effectively.

Without a doubt, Burning Man would not be possible if not for the people, but none of it would happen on this scale without people working hard with each other.

Not only does it utilize the old adage "stronger together," it adds to it the concept that just attendance alone is not enough. Active support is what makes us powerful. Burning Man takes on a new light if you view everything based on the time and physical or mental effort needed to make each individual part happen. Spending too much time thinking about it becomes overwhelming. Time and physical effort are measurable to some extent, but it is easy to overlook the value of support, communication, and logistics. While just as important, it is often hard to recognize and thank people for what they contribute as individuals. All too often when everything goes well, no one person gets praise but—as soon as there is turbulence—it is all too easy to assign blame. If we move away from these pitfalls we can allow for Communal Effort to be nothing but a pleasant interaction.

What are some uncommon communal efforts you have witnessed? What would you like to see?

## Askquatch with Taskwatch



Hello my gorgeous burning princesses locked in your high castle tower. It's me, Taskwatch, here to rescue you from your quarantedium with some answers to questions I definitely didn't write myself!

As someone who has been spending my self-isolation self-feeding and self-pleasuring, I figure that this month's edition should be all about food! (I was warned a column about masturbation might be a bit self indulgent.)

So listen, my very hungry caterpillars, as I give you the tools to become very satiated butterflies.

**"What food should I bring to playa?"**  
—E, New Hampshire

*In this instance, East, I think it will be more efficient for both of us if I answer with what types of foods you probably shouldn't bring. There are two main types of foods to avoid, the first being items that are very perishable. Fresh milk, hummus, yogurt. These are things I always avoid. It's not impossible to keep them, but use common sense; either you've got to make sure you're running your generator 24 hours a day to keep a plug-in fridge cold, or you are going to be doing a LOT of runs to Arctica (Burning Man's ice depot. Ice for sale in three places on playa during peak sunlight hours. Real tight operation they're running. Eye-roll gif). Let me tell you something: runs to Arctica are rarely quick, and never what you want to be doing after a night of drinking and dancing until sunrise.*

*The other type of food to avoid bringing is food that generates a lot of its own waste. Think melons, citrus, corn. If it's going to be a large ordeal to prepare and generate a good size portion of waste, then perhaps think of an alternative for your last week of August.*

*Also don't bring six pounds of fresh seafood in a loosely sealed styrofoam cooler. That's a mistake I promised myself I wouldn't make a third time.*

**"Will I be able to buy food at Burning Man?"**  
—M, Manhattan

Dear Model,

*You may absolutely buy your meals at Burning Man if you adhere to a strict fashion-week diet, which is to say you only eat coffee and ice. Otherwise, no. Bring some food and make some friends you skinny thang.*

**"What food can I find on playa?"**  
—S, Virginia

Now this Seeker is the True Quest™. I believe almost every type of food is able to be located on playa. There are food camps gifting out things you forgot even were foods! Meatloaf, in my case specifically. If you can't find it in a food camp, then you know some creep somewhere is cooking up something good in their camp. You meet the right burners at the right sculpture at the right time, and you're in glazed-donut town. You have sex with a with a man dressed as a goat and decide to spend the night in his yurt, I guarantee you're getting pop-tarts. Every thing is findable, should you rise to the mission of finding it.

**"What food would people like to receive at Burning Man? What is a good food to bring to gift?"**  
—F, Ohio

Dear Friend,

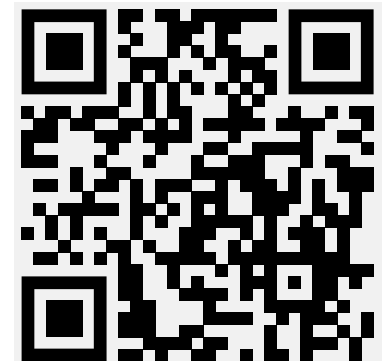
*No matter what you bring to playa, there will be somebody who will love to receive it as a gift. Try to avoid excess packaging so you're not also gifting somebody a handful of future-moop. For example, my personal favorite food to receive as a gift on playa is ketamine.*

**"Should I plan on sticking to a regular eating schedule while at Burning Man?"**

—T, Cornwall

Dear Type-A,

*As with all personal plans, I'll leave that to you to plan. Plan your plans in any which way you can plan them, but do not plan to stick to any plan. Here is some simple planning that could help to get you started: cereal before milk, peel before eat, and liquor before beer.*



Got questions?  
Ask them here.



**MOOP** our mailbox with your bad ideas.

Scan the QR code to submit content to The Intergalactic Observer or email your garbage to [observer@intergalactic.camp](mailto:observer@intergalactic.camp).

