THE THERMALS’ BEST ALBUM YET
HOW THE PORTLAND PUNKS TURNED OUT POP GEMS

URBAN SURVIVAL TIPS FROM A HIPSTER IN A LOIN CLOTH

NEW NEKO CASE

GENE STOUT ON LIFE AFTER THE P-I

SEATTLE’S INTERNET KING AND THE CATS THAT MADE HIM

i can has cheezburger?

SPRING FASHION ENVY • ZEKE TALKS TATS
THERE IS MORE TO LIFE THAN MUSIC

AT LARGE

OPEN LETTER

TURN ON, TUNE IN, DROP OUT ... REWILD!

NOTORIOUS HIPSTER SURVIVALIST URBAN SCOUT OFFERS SOME TIPS ON HOW TO SURVIVE THE END OF CIVILIZATION.

Peter Bauer first began thinking about the end of civilization when he was 16 years old. At that point he was living in the suburbs of Portland, Ore., and living life like anyone else, on his way to becoming, as he now puts it, a “city-slicker born and raised to work as a wage slave in a coffee shop.”

Then something changed that life. While living in the urban core of Portland, he and a friend decided to create a short film that featured Bauer as Urban Scout, a muddily hunter-gatherer interacting with civilized people. A multidisciplinary artist, Bauer began performing as Urban Scout throughout town. Within a couple years, he had etched a spot in the culture of Portland as that guy in the loincloth who talks about the end of agrarian-based culture. But Bauer is no poseur. He has committed his life to the study of pre-agrarian life and now spends his time educating others on the inevitable downfall of civilization on his website, wherein he details the finer points of, among other things, cooking roadkill and practicing post-apocalyptic safe sex.

In these difficult times, Sound thought it wise to ask Bauer what he had to say to civilization. He responded with this open letter. Note that his opinions are his only and do not reflect those of Sound. MARK BAUMGARTEN

DEAR CIVILIZATION,

Ten years ago gas cost 98 cents a gallon. No one had heard of peak oil. No one was worried about an energy crisis. Polar bears still had ice lands to roam. No one was worried about the climate crisis. The economy looked prosperous, not preposterous. When I tried to explain to people that the systems that make civilization possible are unsustainable and would begin to collapse in the near future, they looked at me like I was totally insane.

These days I can pretty much strike up a conversation with anyone about the collapse of civilization. Ironically, the majority of people still have no idea why civilization is collapsing, nor do they understand why civilization is—without a doubt in my mind—the worst thing to ever happen to humanity and to the world at large.

You may be wondering how could I make such a claim since humans have been living on the planet for 3 million years and we only have a written record of the past 5,000. I can say that with confidence precisely because we have no record other than what is written in the land. Humans lived on the planet in a sustainable manner for 3 million years by living as hunter-gatherers; they lived their lives wild and free from any form of domestication. I can say that with confidence because if humans hadn’t lived successfully in this way, we wouldn’t be alive today.

In our agrarian fundamentalist culture, we’ve mythologized the hunter-gatherers as a poor people who spend their short lives in a constant state of hunger. Unfortunately, there is little to no factual evidence to support this myth. On the contrary, the mounting evidence we do have says the exact opposite. Hunter-gatherers lived longer, more leisurely lives while keeping their environments thriving and diverse and meeting needs of the people. The same cannot be said for the short history after the “agricultural revolution.”

We did not reach this level of destruction because humans >
are greedy, evil creatures who only yearn to screw up the environment and stab each other in the back. We are here because humans are products of a system. The civilization system does not work and, as a result, it brings out the worst in people. The myth of the “noble savage” (that native peoples are more noble than civilized) exists because civilized people saw a working system (the hunter-gatherer system) and how that system brought out the best in its members. But rather than understand their system, they thought it must be something inherent in the people themselves. Hunter-gatherers did not live some fantastical perfect existence. They just had a system that worked to meet the needs of its members and the environment.

The complexity of hunter-gatherer economics (yes, hunter-gatherers had economics) is often ignored or unnoticed by civilizationists. Because they didn’t have agricultural fields, civilized people could not recognize their management style, but instead they saw “untamed wilderness.” Through large-scale and small-scale prescribed burns, hunter-gatherers greatly manipulated the environment, encouraging growth of desired foods and stability in ecosystems. When settlers came to the Americas, they saw a vast “Garden of Eden” that they thought was untended by its inhabitants; they pondered why people would set fire to such a place. We now know that this supposed “Garden of Eden” did, in fact, have gardeners: humans, who also had a sophisticated understanding of fire mechanics.

Our system does not work, has never worked, and will never work. Agriculture is a sedentary subsistence strategy that forces us to stay in one spot for a long period of time. It is what makes cities possible. Unfortunately, it slowly depletes the nutrients in the soil, and it turns it to sand that washes away into the ocean. Once these lands lose their fertility, our civilization spins into neighboring territories, killing everyone in its path, and repeats the cycle endlessly. Ultimately, we’ve reached the end of the line. There is hardly any more land to ravage. Most of the soil has been dusted for almost 100 years. We’ve had to put down petroleum fertilizer on it to grow anything. But now petroleum is becoming more and more expensive and hard to access.

Sedentary cultures also accumulate wealth, which creates hierarchy and implies slavery. Civilization implies slavery. Although most first-world countries have supposedly abolished slavery (never mind wage-slavery), there are more slaves in the world now than ever before in history. The first-world countries never abolished slavery; they exported it to the third world. Small-scale mobile cultures cannot afford to have slaves because no one has accumulated wealth to hoard over anyone else. The end of civilization means the end of slavery.

Maybe now you’ve got some idea why I feel I can say that civilization was the worst thing to happen to humanity. Once we understand these fundamental flaws, we must ask the question, What will be true in the future? If we understand that we cannot save this sinking ship of civilization, and we know that living a wild lifestyle was good enough for 3 million years of our ancestry, then the future looks rather obvious to me: we need to rewild.

Rewilding, the process of dismantling civilization and restoring biological diversity and the soil base through hunter-gatherer land management techniques, offers us a beacon of hope and optimism.

Ecological communities bounce back; extinct animals don’t. Many species hang on the verge of extinction. Rewilding will greatly reduce the effects of civilization on the biological community. This is a no easy task, but luckily for us, there is a rewilding renaissance happening on the fringes of civilization’s edges. We call this land the rewild frontier, and it exists everywhere civilization is losing control, from the furthest stretches of wilderness to the dandelion coming up through the cracks of the sidewalk in New York City. From the perspective of rewilding, the collapse of civilization is not a societal breakdown but a breakthrough. If humans are living on the planet 100 years from now, it will be because we returned to a wild lifestyle. Why wait for a better life? Start rewilding now!

Sincerely,
Urban Scout

Read more from Urban Scout at urbanscout.org.