Pinche Hopper

by Julio Domínguez

Disclaimer

This is adult content for 13+ audiences. I am not a writer. This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, business, events and incidents are the products of imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is coincidental.

Dedication

This zine is a one-off dedicated to my friend and brother, Walter Tschinkel. Walter believed in me enough to take me out to heaven to study ants with him. He taught me the most important lesson I ever learned out in the woods. That the people you love and admire are complex and full of contradictions. That they can hold them all together and still be beautiful, precious, and worth the effort it takes to love them.

1 Upland Rill

Florida's all water. From under your feet up to the sky, everything's moisture, wicked away through phases and capillary action. I felt the heavy drip once and never forgot. I waded into the swamps by the creeks. I picked through fossils. I discovered transcendental flows. Always covered in sweat, the glory of god, a being of water, through the world.

The large extent upland and lowland regions of Apalachicola are tremendously wet. The water table is never too far from your toes, often peeking out through a pit in the terrain, or an occasional sinkhole.

Water moves, vertically, in both directions, but rain is the most beautiful thing. You often see it in the distance as a slow approaching fog that can turn from drips to sheets in seconds. Then, in this strange world's beautiful harmony, the sunlight returns to pull it back to heaven.

But, the real story is the water filtering beneath the murmur of your heart. It's the vast Florida aquifer, one of the greatest treasures in North America. My friend Stephen, a bright geologist, used to complain that Florida has amazing geology, you just can't see it cause it's underground. Stephen would know, he dragged countless graduate students into the heat to trace the water networks and discover the secrets of their complexity.

Out in the karst regions of Florida, the precious drink below the ground is in limestone carved by acidic hydrogen eating at the carbonate on recharge. Like swiss cheese, the bedrock is filled with massive caverns and galleries. Sometimes these great structures give way, causing the ground above to collapse into a sinkhole.

The sandhill regions are ancient dunes of white sand that sit 10-20feet above the water table. Upon them, in the piny flatwoods, the occasional holly swamp is visible in the landscape. Like a circus tent, the hollies grow thick around the wet basin, reaching tall and dark against the slash pine stands. During the rainy season, potholes fill with water and attract hundreds of Papilio butterflies to drink precious salt from the puddles.

Loblollies can be found in the lowland regions where the roads dip in and out of shallow swamps and where large pools fill the grade and simmer in the sun. The grasses here are wet, rich, and green, growing tall into the soaked scrub. This's dragonfly country, where winged insects dominate the low air space, and where the heat and humidity is especially lethal.

I have quenched dreams about the rain drops that peppered my skin. Once the sky clears, I'll get my chance to surf the soft saturated sediment and push hard slides into controllable drifts. I live for the wet of this life that runs rills on the red roads out in Apalachicola.

2 Chagrin

When you spend as much time in the woods as I do, you begin to hear the silence in your own heart. In the time it took me to listen and understand myself, I made many mistakes out in the woods. My greatest chagrin stems from the murders and high crimes that I'll never be tried for.

You see, even though my parents forbade it, I used my air rifle to clandestinely kill small woodland animals, and never told them. Now, I owe the truth to my family, and more importantly, I'm saddled with an unpayable debt to Life and the woods. If you strung their bodies on my necklace, my shame would be a heavy rotting fetter of fur, feather, and scale.

I think the animals and their kin might forgive me if they understood why I made such mistakes. But that's wishful thinking... Even today, every precious life I took weighs on my heart. In turn, I've sworn off the wanton *taking* of animals, and eventually insects too. I felt love and understanding for all of them, but it was a rough path to get there, and the cost was immense. And then, just when I thought I could feel what was right, I made the following mistake.

My friend Walter once derisively complained that citizens with shotguns and AR rifles were mostly using them to cut down trees in the national forest. I also remember being on his study site in Apalachicola and seeing shot in the occasional destroyed pine. It was a kind of careless destruction that made me feel sad for them. They would be all torn up and fallen over.

Many years later, I purchased an AR-556 rifle to shoot in the woods. I would mostly shoot paper targets at the range, but I was also doing more "dynamic" practice shooting with cheap .22 rounds, and I shot at some pine trees for convenience. Shooting is normally fun, but this didn't feel good. I went and touched the holes, I wondered if sap would drip out. Later, in bed, I stared at the ceiling and thought about the trees filled with lead. What would happen to them? Would they get sick and die? Would they at least be harvested?

Some time later, after a day of shooting .22, I needed to clear the dirty rifle barrel with a single powerful round. So I swapped the bolt, loaded a rifle round, and took aim at a slash pine sapling. Before I pulled the trigger, I thought back to Walter, the trees I love, the books my mom read to me, the ceiling, everything. But it wasn't enough. With sufficient gun powder to achieve mach 3, I fired that single 556 round at the helpless baby. I watched as the base exploded into brilliant cream

splinters along with my heart. You see, I'm being honest. I pulled the trigger, I felt the rifle kick, I saw what I did. And in that moment, I felt such great pain and guilt that I swore off shooting trees.

...Never again, I just can't...

I recognize that I must harm and push aside some degree of plants to explore the world. But I don't have to conjure terrible violence against my quiet friends. I'm sure this is all cope. But I'm also sure that the experience got through to me, and I'm grateful for that correction.

3 Pinché-Hopper

As spring passes to summer, the temperature begins to kick up, and with it come the pinché-hoppers, ready to bomb trail riders in the face with reckless abandon. You

see, when you're gas on the trails in Apalachicola, riding at speed, you have to weave, bob, and dodge all variety of insects and animals. But the pinché-hoppers are the worst. They're large and plentiful grasshoppers that reside in the tall grass between the tread marks left by big forest trucks. You find them most abundant through the deeper and less traveled dirt roads and trails. They seem to time me perfectly as they jump up randomly, and then, too often, fly directly at my head. Sometimes it hurts to get pelted, but they tend to bounce off, and it always makes me smile.

The silver Argiope spiders come in a close second, but are only a brief nuisance. Large orb weavers that bear a striking resemblance to the famous Banana spider. These assholes build their tremendous webs across the trails ready to coat you in invisible floss with a large wriggly spider. As long as you're careful, you can typically spot em and avoid a web-strike. I'll use a stick to gently move the webs off the trail. Luckily, these spiders are kind and industrious, they'll take the hint and find a new home.

4 Moto Sin Casco

Lo siento, Mami.

The open road is a beautiful thing, even at low speed. I love to ride, and when I am happiest, I'm sin casco, which means "no helmet". It's probably bad for my ears, and dangerous in the long term. But, my shorty short shorts and sandals aren't gonna do much anyway. I do lay the bike down sometimes, but it's rare and usually due to poor road conditions. I've not lost my ankle yet, but if you're not risking your life, you're not living.

5 Odometer 8484mi

The Gray Ghost was an old trashcar my dad had earlier on in his rough days as a single father. It was a hunk of gray shit that poured oil into the engine block and gassed any poor sucker downwind. The car's manual transmission was fucked, the damn thing couldn't even reverse. Circumstances forced my father to find inclined parking spots that would roll the car backward with gravity. I used to watch him push it out the drive, and down the hill, to "pop the clutch" when the battery failed or the starter wouldn't turn over. I have a vivid memory of a time when the engine was overheating and my father pulled the radiator cap in the driveway. Green steaming fluid exploded from the port and shot 20ft into the air, my father laughing and dodging the scald.

So when I got my brand new Honda Ruckus, and it came in gray, I quickly named it the Gray Ghost in honor of that car that got Papi through hard times. My dads had two new cars since, and each served him and the family well. The old Gray Ghost is long gone, but now I ride a reliable pony that I depend on for my life in the heat. She's gray-black and built like a bulldozer with big knobby wheels and a 4.3 horsepower Get engine. She only cranks up to 38 mph, downhill and with the wind at your back, but she sips gas, and goes and goes, taking me with her. I couldn't be happier, I couldn't be more free, a stylish dream, the open road, some personal transportation.

6 Riding The Lines

Head south on Springhill road until you hit the gas station, it's the last stop, so get gas now if you need it. In a few hundred feet, you can hang a right onto Dog Lake Tower road and begin your journey into the forest.

But if it's late in the day, I'm not going deep into the woods. No, I'm headed out to ride the lines. To lose myself through the great metal arches that carry power across the earth. Suspended at potential, the transmission lines form catenaries that bridge each utility tower to the next in a great necklace. The scenery is a well pruned tract, through the forest, from the solar power station back into town. The hills are of white sand and gravel, with little vegetation through the field.

I'm not sure if it's legal, but I ride the lines often, every time I get a chance, pushing and pulling my way across the good earth. The sun always low, the path always too short.

7 No Nostrums

Sure, I have secrets, but not secret recipes. I'll tell you what I can, the best I can, if you need me to. I'll point out my limits and mix in clarity and frank speaking. Ask away, I won't charge, I love to talk and share. I think you'll find my kindness unusual and my enthusiasm inspiring. I'm Julio, I'm ferociously intelligent and a master of machines. I've deeply reflected on this life. I've interrogated my beliefs and found **You** at the center of everything worth living for. I'm the real deal, not a cypher or a cheat, and I've got a world of people who love me to show for it.

There are no nostrums, most people see the world I see and feel it too. But I say beware, trust only human beings, and of course, your own heart.

8 Smilax Thorns

The brush is an abatis that fortifies the landscape. It abrades my skin and changes my body. It fights against me and turns to swamp as it pulls me deeper.

I don't need any savior.

I'm the wind, the birds, and the flowers, out in Apalachicola.

XOXO -Julio

Plastikk Press - @Lord_struma

Gainesville, FL - Septiembre 2023

GNU-Linux & LaTeX