



CRAZY 'N' ROLL

FLIP SHOCKS SHANGHAI

BY MICHAEL BURNETT



David introduces China to the rock 'n' roll spirit, and the frontside noseblunt slide

GAWK 'N' ROLL



It's impossible to look tough while drinking from a straw

FOR THE INFANTS and toddlers of China, wearing diapers is the exception rather than the rule. While their drooling counterparts in the so-called First World bide their time messing themselves and waiting around to get cleaned up, the Chinese babies are dressed in pants and singlets that, though perfectly normal looking from the front, have no backsides to them whatsoever. You see these babies everywhere—running free, butts in the wind.

There's no wipes or powders or debates over cloth versus disposable. When nature calls, the Chinese parents just aim their rug rats' business ends over the closest gutter, flower bed, or out an open bus window and let 'em rip. I bring this up not as part of my continued fascination with bathroom habits around the world, but because I find it odd that a society who spends the first years of its life wearing, what basically amounts to ass-less chaps, could be shocked by much of anything—especially not a group of overgrown teenagers playing on a wooden board with wheels.

“AIM THEIR RUG RATS’ BUSINESS ENDS AND LET ‘EM RIP”



GAWK 'N' ROLL



MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about skateboarding's ability to draw a crowd on the streets of China. And while it's sort of satisfying to imagine a culture so unsullied by the advances of the West that its people would stop and stare in amazement at the pure magic of skateboard riding, this isn't really the whole picture. From what I could tell, stopping and staring is something of a national pastime. Be it a scooter accident, the cops rousting a street vendor, or an old man scolding a group of foreign assholes for scraping their four-wheeled toys against the

nice marble benches, people of China love any opportunity to crowd in close, let their jaws fall slack, and indulge in a good ol' fashion gawk.

True to rumor, it was almost impossible to not attract an audience while street skating with the Flip team in Shanghai. Upon seeing us, pedestrians would abandon their missions and post up. Taxis stopped in the middle of traffic. People would pull over and get out of their cars, and scooters and bicyclists would jam up the sidewalks to get a good, long look. When cops did come to kick us out, it was often because of the traffic jams, not because we were sliding ledges. The crowds formed almost instantly. Many times I'd be kneeling over my camera bag for a couple of seconds and then glance up to find five grown men gazing down at me in a circle. Standards of personal space are very different in China, so you don't just get stared at—you get stared at by nine people, all of whom are suddenly close enough to hug.

As any high school student outside of California can probably tell you, China has the world's largest population at 1.3 billion. That figure's hard to wrap your head around, but one that quickly comes alive the first time you get elbowed on the street by an elderly woman or have your face coughed directly into. That whole personal space thing, I'm not exaggerating that. During rush hour they have men in the subway stations whose sole responsibility is to physically jam as many people onto the train as possible. Apparently they come running straight at you like linebackers. Several times I stopped at a door to let a woman come through first and had five or six people snake around me and cut her off. It's not an issue of politeness, I don't think. Chinese people seem extremely humble and friendly. It's just that, when you're competing with 1.3 billion other assholes, one person's elbow room isn't as important as getting yours.

“THEY COME RUNNING STRAIGHT AT YOU LIKE LINEBACKERS”



The toilets cost one Yuan, but Arto's 180 was on the house

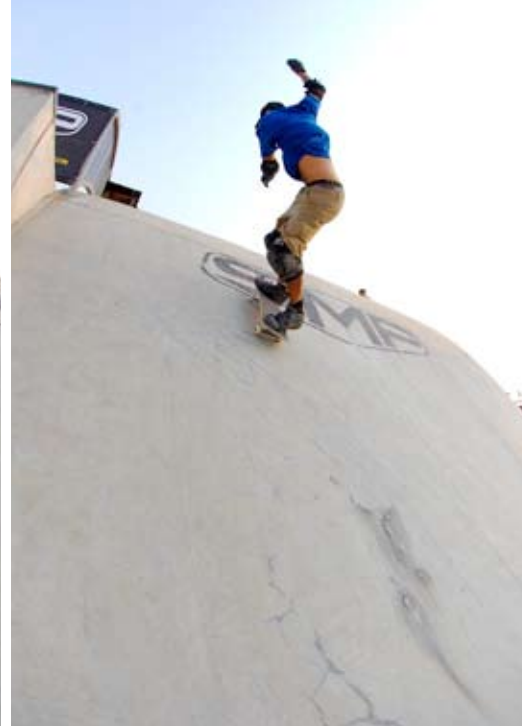


Bob was going crazy all over the park, and it was hard to slow him down long enough to pin down a photo. This alley-oop frontside blunt into the drink was part of a more diabolical

“ALMOST NO ONE SKATES



THE WORLD’S LARGEST SKATEPARK”



THE WORLD’S LARGEST ASHTRAY

SURPRISINGLY, the place where we were almost completely free from looky-loos was at the only spot actually designated for skateboarding in Shanghai, the massive SMP skatepark. I spent the first week there with Bob and Rune, as well as special guests Jake Brown, Jen O’Brien, Neal Hendrix, and PLG, who were all in town for the Asian X-Games. On the 45-minute ride from our hotel in downtown Shanghai, the landscape slowly opened up from monstrous, sparkling glass-and-steel high-rises to dingy Communist block apartments and factories to brand new

Orange County-style malls stretching wide across freshly paved streets. The last few miles to the park were via a meticulously landscaped road that cut through recently abandoned farms with thousands of tulips and rows of billboards attempting to block out the heaps of trash and rubble in the fields beyond. This type of signage is everywhere in China, advertising—with attractive (often Caucasian) models—the promise of a better future that will come with whatever new shopping center, apartment building, or office park is planned to rise up behind it. If you

looked between the signs, however, you could often see children picking through the piles of trash or men fishing in shallow, mucky canals.

The skatepark is part of a largely unused sports complex which sits across a manicured lake from a gigantic arts center, which also appeared to be empty. Catty-corner from that is a brand new yet-to-open university that stands in front of an army of large apartment buildings in various states of construction. It’s all eerily vacant, with only the yard workers and occasional security guard poking around, but has the makings of a mid-sized suburban town. Just add people.





While Rune is acceptable,
Madonna is banned in China

RIDICULOUS DOESN'T EVEN BEGIN to describe the Shanghai skatepark. Absurd? Nuts-O? The thing is gigantic for starters: almost 150,000 square feet. Which, for you nerds, is equivalent to 3.75 Dyrdek Skate Plazas, 27 Huntington Beach skateparks, or 377 Carlsbad gaps. There are so many mysteries attached to the park that it's best to not even think about them. Questions like "Who paid for this thing?" or "Why'd they build the world's largest skatepark in a city with practically no skaters?" drift off into the ether with your first plunge down the chute into the terrifying 22-foot tall capsule. On top of that lies the Mondo Bowl, where you can roll over the peak of the pipe to hit the 15-foot tall quarterpipe of death, which, like the rest of the park, is capped with custom-made black granite coping blocks that must have cost a small fortune. The Mondo also includes a smaller side-pipe that plugs into the capsule as well as a cradle, a setback bank extension, and plenty of flat wall, the smallest section of which is around nine-feet deep. Other advanced bowl terrain includes a set of clovers with a near-vert spine and cradle, another clover with three cradles, a small capsule with a three-quarterpipe, a whippy mini-ramp-style thing with extensions, and a peanut-shaped wee bowl.

**"EQUIVALENT TO 3.75 DYRDEK SKATE PLAZAS,
27 HUNTINGTON BEACH SKATEPARKS, OR 377 CARLSBAD GAPS"**

There is also a colossal vert ramp (well over 100-feet wide) with a seamless steel surface and concrete flat. According to the locals, these sections (the bulk of the park) sit relatively undisturbed when the pros aren't there, and by the amount of cigarette butts littering the bottom of the capsule, I tend to believe them. Although the street course and the bizarre, X-Games-style arena behind it are a tad more accessible for the non-vertically inclined, in fact, almost no one skates the world's largest skatepark. Regular kids can't afford taxis to get out there, and it's too far off the bus and subway lines to make it any other way. Again, these are points best not dwelled upon.

After a week of the vert guys battering the park and themselves, the street-style reinforcements arrived. Geoff, Arto, Mark, David, Rodrigo, Ewan and I cruised Shanghai, navigating crowds to skate an assortment of interesting marble and granite obstacles. Our trip happened to coincide with a national spring holiday, so the parks and plazas were extra-packed with extra-curious people, many of whom were out-of-towners like us. We didn't so much get kicked out of spots as had to dance around with the cops and security guards to get an extra 20 minutes here and there. A few times it seemed like the guards were furious at us, shouting and waving their arms. Then Matt would explain, "He asks if we will please come back after 6 pm." Other times our efforts got stymied by everyday heroes, just like the concerned citizens back home, who would sit on the ledges, cross their arms and scowl.

This was a pretty no-nonsense trip, and we kept a pretty tight schedule of skating all day and eating at a chain of California-style healthy restaurants called Element Fresh. Although we went to Japanese food one night, I don't think we ate actual Chinese food the entire trip. I'm sure it's delicious.



Rodrigo backside flips
while the Duckhead gawks

With Brazilian rap-rock ringing in his ears, Bob torques a backside 180 out of the bowl and deep into the capsule



GAWK 'N' ROLL



Ripped Off the Wall

MY NAME IS NOT “DVD”

FORGET THE GREAT WALL or Tiananmen Square. For skaters visiting China, the first thing they want to see is the infamous Black Market, that mysterious place where all their counterfeit Rolex and bootleg DVD dreams can come true. It seems our reputation precedes us, 'cause no sooner did we stick our lily-white faces out of the taxi than we were bombarded by several new friends, all of

whom greeted us with a hardy chorus of “DVD! DVD! DVD!” They shoved laminated pieces of paper in our faces, detailing all the other luxurious goods they had to offer, and then followed us from store to store, grabbing at our elbows and delivering their pitch over and over.

“Gucci watch! Polo t-shirt! DVD! DVD! DVD!”

It felt weird, because even with as much American guilt as I carry around (enough to fill several bootleg Gucci fanny packs) it got really annoying to be treated like a human ATM.

“DVD! DVD! You buy! DVD!”

After several attempts to convince a gentleman that no amount of Burberry raincoats or *Shrek 3* DVDs would convince me to follow him to his store, he looked up from his catalog exasperated. Then, as if struck by a Eureka moment, he pulled out his ace.

“Underpants?” he asked, with an arch of his brow.

“FOR THE EQUIVALENT OF \$6 US YOU COULD BE LOOKING HELLA TIGHT IN A GENUINE ARDDIDDAS TRACKSUIT”

The Black Market didn't seem especially sinister or, seeing as how there were cops everywhere, particularly underground either. Mostly it was just the same crap you could get at a swap meet in the States. There were, however, a few funny exceptions. The first could be described as Franken-shoes, sneakers made from spare parts of competing brands. For instance, you could get a shoe with a DC top and an I-Path sole, or a Duff's sole and a Lakai tongue. They even had some really shabby knock-offs that read like a 14-year-old girl's Christmas nightmare come true.

“They didn't have those Airwalks you wanted, honey. So we got you some Allwalks.”

In addition to fake Vans, they also offered I-Vans, Vivans, and Vivians. Instead of Lakais, they had Lakas, and for the equivalent of \$6 US you could be looking hella tight in a genuine Arddiddas tracksuit.

The other funny items were the highly coveted DVDs, more so for the surprise when you tried to play them. Of the hundreds of discs the dudes picked up (available every 20 feet or so for \$1 each), almost 60 percent were either in Chinese, different from what was on the package, or filmed off a movie screen and in Chinese. Still, *Spiderman 3* in Chinese with people walking in front of the screen is better than no *Spiderman 3*. Right?





HONK IF YOU'RE DRIVING

“CHINESE PEOPLE DON'T DRIVE WORSE than Americans,” our friend Matt explained, “they just drive more defensively.” While this may be true, they also are not afraid to slow to 20 miles per hour on the freeway for no reason, barge through crosswalks crowded with children, make left turns in front of oncoming traffic and use their horns like rollerbladers use wax. The honking is seriously ridiculous. Three seconds into a green, the blasts begin and don't seem to stop until the keys come out of the ignition. It's also common to honk when passing another car, even if you're in a different lane. It's almost as if to say, “Hey! I'm over here! Hey!” Although our driver, Mr Long, was highly professional, he was also more than happy to race up one-way streets, bump over sidewalks, and regularly scare the shit out of us with his aggressive Shanghai style. Needless to say, those who embrace negative stereotypes about Asian drivers would not be disappointed.





Arto grinds a long backside 5-0 at Sheckler's secret spot. Yes, the Sheckler has spots in China

NOT A GIRL, NOT YET MY EIGHTH GRADE LAB PARTNER

WE HAD ALL HEARD tales about the elaborate spa treatments common in China, where haircuts include full-body rubdowns and how it's hard to go to the dentist without receiving a "happy ending." Enthusiastic about an hour-long massage for \$10, but not wanting to shame our families in the process, Mark, Arto, Geoff, and I had Matt find us a place where we could be taken care of—but not in the Biblical sense.

"Still, tell them we want to be massaged by girls," Geoff told him.

This request seemed to be very open to interpretation, as our "girls" ended up being a woman with one eyeball for Geoff, a blind man for Arto, and what appeared to be a 14-year-old boy for me. Actually, I may have just assumed my masseuse was a boy based on his striking resemblance to my eighth grade lab partner—right down to the dandruff and Coke bottle-thick glasses. Thinking back on it now, he could have just as easily been a 38-year-old woman. Mark's masseuse, however, was the real pro of the bunch. We knew this because after they all gathered around, pointed at and talked excitedly about Mark's massive, fucked-up, talon-like feet, it was she who bit the bullet and

took them in hand. My lab partner seemed glad to get a pass, and giggled happily as he dunked my dogs in a hot bucket of tea.

David and Ewan made a trip to a sauna place around the corner from the hotel, which aside from seeing a bunch of naked Chinese businessmen sitting around, was memorable only in that the administrators initially mistook David for a woman, stopping him just short of entering the ladies dressing room (an error he would have gladly made).

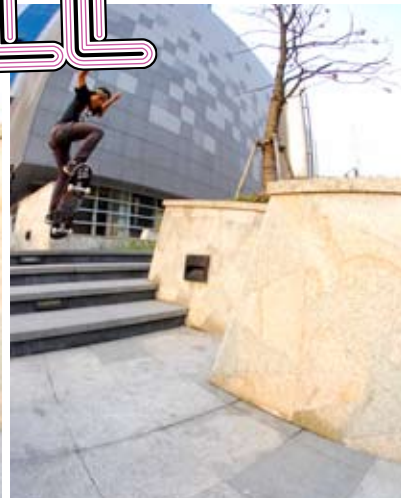
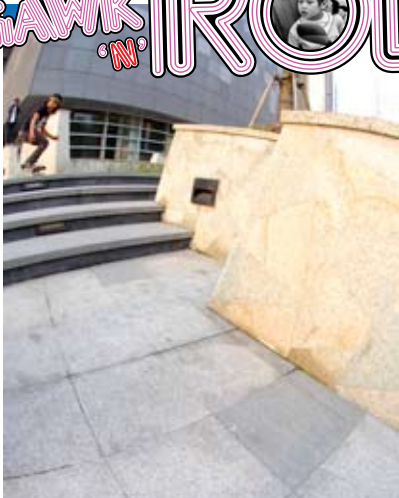
Arto commented a while ago that David's balls had dropped, and this hyperbole was all too obvious on the China trip. He's not only getting taller (and looking tougher with a new large forearm tattoo), but he was stepping up to every spot we encountered. His English has also improved to the point of being able to argue with and insult Ewan in better and more creative ways.

"Ewan, always talking about you balls," he'd say. "No one care about you balls."

He also adopted a new habit of giving me the finger every time I pointed the camera at him. Yes, our little boy is really growing up.

"NO ONE CARE ABOUT YOU BALLS"





Hefty gap to a waist-high, six-inch wide ledge?
David was the only one who messed with this thing



“A FAN CLUB OF TEENAGED GIRLS AT THEIR COMMAND”



EX-PATRIOTS

EVERYWHERE WE WENT in Shanghai we saw whiteys living high on the exchange-rate hog; taking advantage of the business opportunities, luxurious trappings, and female companionship their bulging wallets afford them. Like in the rest of the developing world, it's not uncommon to see a beautiful woman on the arm of a Jabba the Hutt, and if I was a lonely 400 pounder from Des Moines I'd probably be booking a ticket over there, too. Of the bros we met in Shanghai, most of them were from outside of China. The locals at the park (all ex-pats) not only had the entire thing to themselves, they had what appeared to be a fan club of teenaged girls at their command.



I can't believe these chicks think we're cool!



Rune rakes a backside Smith up six feet of vert, but the line to get to this point was the real trick



Riding high among giants,
Rodrigo backside 50-50s in People's Park

GAWK 'N' SNACK



MEAT BAGS

It's a testament to the McNuggetization of American meat that the ready-to-eat bagged animal parts of China seemed so shocking. Not unlike the beloved jerky and pork rinds of the American convenience store, Chinese Quickie Marts offered chicken legs, wings, and even feet in non-refrigerated, pressure-sealed plastic packages. They were on the shelf right next to the candy...and the dried cuttlefish and dried octopus and every other kind of dried dead sea creature. I didn't try any of these.



VEGETABLE ICE CREAM

One thing you'll notice when eating sweets in China is that they're just not that sweet. It seems high-fructose corn syrup hasn't become the nutritional staple it is in the States, and even candy and cookies are only slightly sugary. So when I spotted ice cream bars with different vegetables on the package I had to give them a try. The first was soybean flavored, which tasted a lot like frozen dirt. The next was some sort of lentil thing, which was a little better as it had a creamy outer layer with the lentils in some kind of syrup in the center, but I still couldn't polish off. The last ice cream flavor was corn, which, no big surprise, tasted exactly like corn—like the corniest goddamn corn I had ever eaten. Like some sort of corn liqueur or a popsicle of creamed corn that had been boiled down to its corny essence and then refrozen. I had to gargle with Coke just to get the taste out of my mouth, and it still makes me feel funny thinking about it.



TEA EGGS

Every convenience store counter had a simmering crock-pot of what looked like 300-year-old eggs floating in motor oil. Cracked and dark brown in color, these are actually just normal eggs that have been boiled in tea. Though I enjoy a good egg salad sandwich from time to time, I couldn't get myself to attempt any of these black beauties.

MEAT CHUNKS

Next to the eggs sat a gridwork of boiling compartments, each holding a different kind of meat wad on a toothpick. It's not really any sketchier than the hot dogs at 7-Eleven when you think about it. What? Are rotating metal rods any more sterile than hot water? I wish P-Stone could have been with us to tell me what each of them was. I think one of them might have been squid.



FISH HEADS

Behind the Black Market was a row of food stands I guess could be called the Black Food Court. You could select almost any kind of water animal and then have it slaughtered and stir fried in a large wok while you waited. There were wriggling bags of frogs and tanks of lizards, turtles, snakes, eels, shellfish, and fish of every size. There was also a large selection of fish heads, of which we were told the cheeks and eyeballs are especially delicious. I can't tell you if that's true or not, but I did pet one of the frogs.

“NOT REALLY ANY SKETCHIER THAN THE HOT DOGS AT 7-ELEVEN”



COLLON

I got this a couple of times because I thought it was funny that it was called Collon and looked like little chocolate tubes. Also because it tasted like cake mix. Mmmm. Cake mix.

CORN IN A BAG

They had it in those pressure-sealed bags, as well as raw dog from tons of vendors on the streets. Ever since having braces I'm a bit leery of corn on the cob, but I saw Mark get it twice. And although every tourist guide advises you to avoid street foods, he didn't get sick or nothin'.

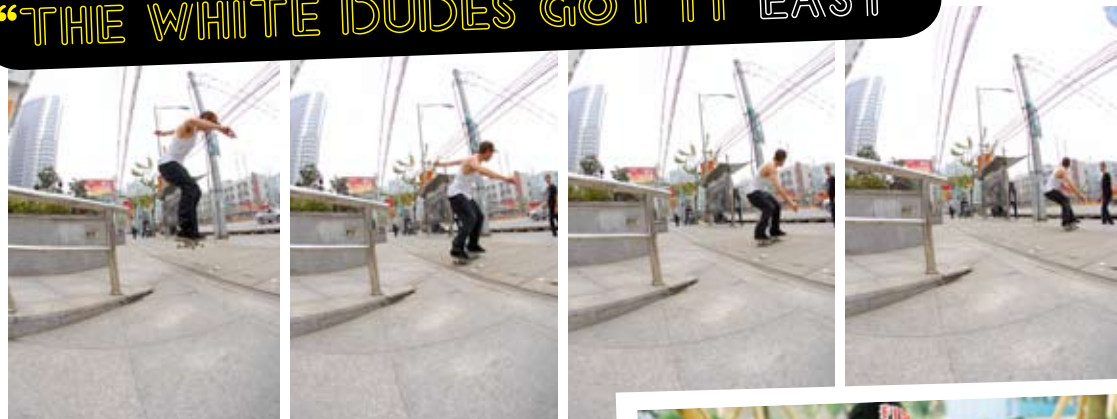


MEAT STICKS

Kabob spots were everywhere, including directly across from our hotel. We also saw a bunch of dudes who had rigged up their bicycles with small Hibachi-style grills welded in directly behind the seats. They'd simply peddle up, hit the kickstand and start grilling. David treated himself to some meat sticks several times, and when I asked what they were, he replied, “You know. That animal that sounds like BAAAAAHHH!”

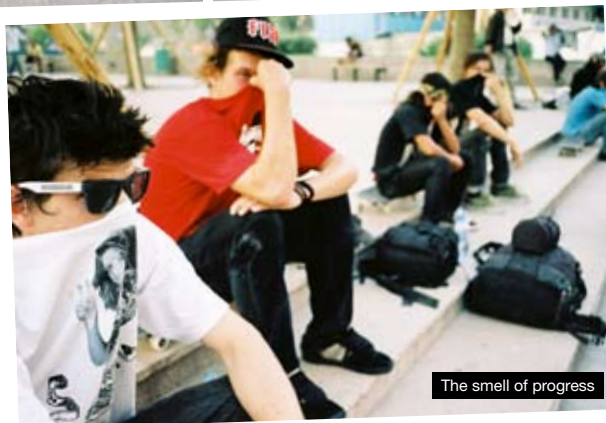
“A sheep?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he answered. “BAAAAHHH!”



"I've seen guys who can't speak a single word of Chinese hook up with the hottest chicks," Danny, a Chinese-American skater from San Diego told us. "The white dudes got it easy."

Matt, our friend who set everything up for us, is a Canadian who'd first come to China to teach English, as is Johnny Tang, a skater from Toronto who now gets paid as a pro over there. We also hung out with Leejay, a super-cool Chinese skater who learned English from watching American rap videos. He's in the process of setting up some kind of skate business, too. It's kind of the Wild West over there right now, and it will be interesting to see if any of these dudes strike it rich if the Chinese skate industry really develops. Either that or they can always move back home and get tickets for skating a curb.





As the cops were posting brand new "No Skateboarding" signs, Mark couldn't help but get one last kickflip over the grass



Flying out of a nine-foot pool to a curved rail that blocks an 18-foot deep drop, Bob looks death in the face and grinds it



“THE NUMBER OF SKATE SPOTS

THAT WILL BE BUILT IS UNIMAGINABLE”



THE NEW EMB?

TREND SPOTTING IS POPULAR in the skate media, and it would be easy to declare China the Next Barcelona, or whatever the hype-sters are telling the team managers these days. So is it? Maybe. It's got a lot going for it. For one thing, China is experiencing one of the largest construction booms of the last century. Over the last 10 years, millions of people have been displaced for the biggest hydroelectric dam

project in the world with brand new towns springing up overnight to accommodate them. Meanwhile, the countryside is emptying as people move to the cities for jobs, and farmland is subsequently turned into more city. The number of skate spots that will be built as a by-product of this economic revolution is unimaginable. The second thing China has going for it as a professional skate destination is the lack of locals.



GAWK 'N' ROLL



This sounds lame, but as long as we're talking business here, it's simply much easier to skate in a town with fewer skaters. In the spirit of brotherly stoke I hope that kids all over China start rolling, but that really has nothing to do with the ability for us westerners to go over there and pillage their spots. It's kind of a weird thing—this imperialistic approach to skating that's developed—but hopefully the end product

will be high fives and new friends the world over. It's nice to think that would happen, anyway. In 10 years time, perhaps a skater on the streets of Shanghai will garner no more attention than a toddler in ass-less chaps or a man cooking kabobs on the back of his bicycle. ♠



“IN THE SPIRIT OF BROTHERLY STROKE
I HOPE THAT KIDS ALL OVER CHINA START ROLLING”



Brothers from different mothers

Double bars and crooked grinds go together
like bicycles and shish kebabs.
David Gonzales likes 'em both

Xtras: GAWK 'N' IROLL



GAWK 'N' IROLL