



RUNNING WITH MCAFEE

A Journal of Manufactured Reality, Unsettling Occurrences, and Sideways Truths

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The specter of John McAfee entered my life on the evening of November 24 when I received an email from someone named François Garcia. He said that McAfee—a man best known for creating antivirus software and, more recently, being named a person of interest in a murder in Belize—wanted to speak with me. I wrote back to say I was interested. François replied exactly one minute later, asking me to call him at a number with a Montreal area code.

I called. I asked why me, why VICE. He said that he hadn't known McAfee for long, but that he had offered the services of his Montreal-based marketing agency—URecommend Media—to handle the former tech mogul's public relations free of charge. This arrangement was made following the slaying of McAfee's neighbor and fellow American Gregory Faull on November 11, one day after McAfee's dogs were poisoned on his Ambergris Caye compound. He immediately went "underground" because, he said, if the Belizeans managed to bring him in for questioning, they would torture and kill him.

François wrote again following our brief call, passing along McAfee's personal email address. I emailed him my number immediately, asking when he could chat.

The following afternoon, my phone vibrated with a call from what appeared to be a 501 area code. Little Rock, Arkansas, my phone read. But I knew who it was—501 is also the country code for Belize, and with a population of just over 300,000 its telephone-numbering system only requires 10 digits. I answered.

"Mr. Castoro?" a deep voice said.

"Yes."

"This is John McAfee. I have a proposition for you, sir..."

He asked whether I would be willing to accompany him as he fled Belize across the border into Mexico. He said he was leaving Belize because his life was in immediate danger. Before I could answer "Yes" or "No," McAfee told me he couldn't talk much longer, that the threat of his cell being triangulated was imminent, and said that if I wanted to meet him, I'd have to be OK with some less than luxurious living conditions. He said I would have to make my decision soon.

Given his paranoia and urgency, it sounded like McAfee could have been on heavy drugs, like some rich burnout uncle you only see every eight years and who, out of boredom, has gotten into boutique experimental psychedelics and home-brewed espionage. The narrative in the mainstream media—eccentric tech mogul who lost his money finally loses his mind, starts taking bath salts and having wild orgies, pisses off the police, kills his neighbor, and starts bouncing off the walls—certainly lent itself toward this interpretation, and from our initial conversations, McAfee seemed to be squarely lining up with these claims.

At some point, I hinted at his proclaimed 30 years of sobriety. He circled around the topic and moved on. Then I asked whether he was currently armed or had armed guards with him, and if I decided to come down to Belize, whether he or anyone in his camp would have guns. "No, sir, I am unarmed," he answered.

When I asked McAfee about the danger we could face as journalists in the company of a potential murder suspect who claims the authorities want him dead, he said, "I guarantee your safety." I knew that, under no circumstances, could he guarantee my safety at any time. I was sure it was quite the opposite—danger had enveloped the man, even if it was self-perpetuated.

I told McAfee I could potentially make it down to Belize City within 72 hours, reiterating my requirements that my cameraman and I would be able to ask questions, roll video, and take photos at any time he was in our presence. McAfee agreed once again.

Then he asked whether I owned a scarf or an ascot. "Of course I have a scarf," I said. "I live in New York."

"Bring it and drape it off your shoulders when you get to the airport," he instructed me. "Don't tie it, just let it hang around your neck." He told me to ignore the dozens of cab drivers looking

for tourists who would inevitably greet me at the airport. He then gave me a pass phrase that his driver would use and the correct response we would have to give to be invited inside the vehicle.

DAY 1: ESCAPE FROM BELIZE

Photographer and videographer Robert King and I arrived at Belize City Municipal Airport a little after 10 AM on December 1. We stood out on the arrivals-pickup curb and waited for McAfee's driver. We were there for ten minutes before my phone rang.

"Hello. Where are you, sir?" McAfee said.

"Standing outside arrivals, wearing the scarf."

"OK, stand there. What color is your hair?"

"Dark brown, and I'm wearing a blue button-down shirt."

"OK. We are pulling up in three minutes."

The "we" threw me off. Was McAfee himself coming to meet me at the airport?

A rickety green mid-90s Chevy van emerged in the distance and drove toward us. McAfee was sitting in the back. He wore dark sunglasses and a black hat with a freshly dyed black goatee. He was on a cell phone, as was a woman in the passenger seat wearing aviators and what appeared to be a blond wig. Robert and I stepped into the van and surveyed the situation.

A young woman was resting her head on a furry brown pillow in McAfee's lap. I figured it could only be 20-year-old girlfriend Samantha Vanegas and quickly confirmed this. The woman in the passenger seat was McAfee's friend and former girlfriend Amy Emshwiller (who once tried to shoot the antivirus mogul in his sleep but missed, damaging his hearing). The girls appeared to be sick, alternately laying down and complaining about stomachaches. I wondered whether it was motion sickness, or whether the stories were true—that perhaps the young ladies were strung out on some experimental sex drug McAfee had concocted, maybe a precursor to the female equivalent of Viagra that many reporters had hypothesized he had been working on for years. The driver, a Belizean associate of McAfee's, asked not to be named.

After we exchanged awkward greetings, McAfee informed us that we had one other person to pick up. The driver pulled around to the side of the airport and stopped in front of a stocky man in his late 20s with black hair, a goatee, and wraparound sunglasses. This was Keith Cameau, an American who works as a musician in Belize and who, I later learned, McAfee set Amy up with after their relationship became too much for one man to handle. I wasn't sure what his role was in all of this, but it seemed that McAfee thought the more people he had with him during his escape, the less chance he had of getting caught.

McAfee asked me to take shotgun so Amy and Keith could sit together. Great, I thought, the cops will shoot me first.

I asked McAfee, who was now obscuring his face by holding a bouquet of flowers between his head and the window, where we were headed.

“We’re leaving at this moment, sir,” he replied.

“Right now?” I asked.

“Right now, as we speak.”

“So we’re not going back to any location?”

“No sir.”

As we sped down Belize’s sprawling two-lane Southern Highway, McAfee explained that the goldish-brown Ford F250 we were following was a shill, a decoy car that would be riding as far as two miles ahead, alerting us to any potential dangers at the three mandatory checkpoints that separated him from freedom. Amy said the flashy pickup was one of McAfee’s many vehicles. He confirmed, saying that it was registered in his name and that if the cops pulled it over, they would be distracted while our driver rolled on through.

“If that car encounters a checkpoint,” McAfee explained, “they’ll tell us what the general tone is: Are they taking people out and strip-searching them, doing anal probes with gloves, or are they just by the side of the road, drinking beer and waving everybody through?” Its driver, McAfee continued, had acquired information from sources within the police department that Belizean prime minister Dean Barrow had placed an under-the-table \$150,000 bounty on the defiant American millionaire’s head. (It is important to note that the only mention of this supposed bounty came from McAfee’s mouth; I have not been able to corroborate it in any way.)

“We’re not anticipating problems. [Our driver] knows exactly what to do. I’ve seen him go through checkpoints without a driver’s license, plates, or insurance, and all it cost him was a Coca-Cola. He got out of the car, talked to the officers, went next door, bought them two Coca-Colas, and they waved us through.”

“Where are we going?” I asked. “Mexico is the other direction.”

“You will be given this information when it is necessary to do so,” McAfee replied.

About 45 minutes later, we pulled into a gas station for a bathroom break and to buy refreshments. About a quarter mile away from the first checkpoint, McAfee was visibly nervous but tried to play it cool. Paranoia seemed to permeate every word he said, washing over everyone and everything in his path. At times, it was difficult if not impossible to distinguish untainted reality from the refractions cast by the nebulous prism that is McAfee’s mind.

McAfee said that his decision to flee his beloved Belize—a place he had made his home in 2008 and had previously claimed he would never leave—was made a few days prior when three (now former) friends of Sam’s had tried to set her up. They said that they wanted to hang out and catch up, in an attempt, she told me, to lure her away from McAfee, after which she would be used as bait to draw him out of hiding.

It seemed it had lately been the women in his life who prompted his current predicament. At one point, he had been living with at least seven young ladies, ranging in age from 17 to 24, on his property in San Pedro or on other lots he owned. Many were former or current prostitutes, some of whom had worked at the cathouse in Orange Walk that McAfee had renovated into a much more respectable establishment (which nonetheless continued to serve alcohol because, he told me, the town’s women shouldn’t be beaten by angry husbands whose only bar had been taken away). In fact, McAfee said, it was one of his girlfriends who had first alerted him to the potential outcomes of his predicament.

“Amy was the first to tell me,” McAfee said, pointing to the seat in front of him, “because she has lots of friends in high places. They were hoping I would go into Mexico because both the Zetas and the Mexican authorities—and I don’t think there’s

OPENING

SPREAD:

John McAfee, a software mogul and, more recently, person of interest in a Belizean murder case, and his girlfriend, Samantha Vanegas, make out as they flee from Punta Gorda, Belize, on a boat headed to Livingston, Guatemala.

BELOW:

Sam naps in McAfee’s lap as they make their getaway out of Belize down the Southern Highway. McAfee’s ex-girlfriend Amy Emshwiller, who reportedly once tried to kill McAfee in his sleep, and her boyfriend, Keith Cameau, came along for the ride.

PRO





any difference between them now—would've picked me up and either killed me there, which would've washed the Belizeans' hands of any responsibility, or at the very least simply brought me back across the border."

I asked Amy why she liked McAfee so much, why she had looked after him in his time of need.

"I like everything about John, except when he's mad," she said. What makes him mad?

"Lies. It makes everybody mad. But it's the only thing that makes him mad."

Minutes later we approached the first checkpoint. Dark Caribbean clouds, which had been threatening overhead throughout our drive, opened up into a sudden downpour. The timing could not have been more perfect; the officers stationed at the checkpoint waved us through.

Seemingly relieved, McAfee disclosed our final destination: Guatemala. He said that he had chosen the country, which has one of the highest violent crime rates in Latin America, for two reasons: 1) Due to a dispute over a small stretch of uninhabitable rainforest near the border, Guatemala has been deadlocked in an "unofficial war" with Belize for more than 150 years; and 2) Sam had "highly placed" relatives in Guatemala, and "once we get to them I think we will be... hopefully we will be OK." He solidified this sentiment by quoting *Shakespeare in Love*, claiming a fondness for the film: "[Geoffrey Rush's character] says, 'It will work out,' and the other guy goes, 'How?' And he says, 'I don't know. It just always does.' This is sort of where I am right now. I know it will work out. I just don't know how."

McAfee said we would be entering Guatemala through Livingston, a diverse port town that in recent years had become a tourist destination. I asked him, as I had asked him before, whether he was planning on crossing the border illegally. He claimed that we would be free and clear after paying \$20 to a customs agent who lived atop a hill. There was no official customs office, he continued, just a grumpy old man with a stamp who wouldn't have a problem with the target of a national manhunt in a neighboring country waltzing through his jurisdiction.

There was one thing I had to ask, though: Why hadn't McAfee tried to return to the United States? Hadn't they reached out to him in some way? Was he wanted there for reasons he had not disclosed? He said that the US Embassy had contacted him numerous times, offering assistance. They told McAfee they could provide safe harbor. "Meaning a safe place to be interviewed by the police," he said. "I didn't want to end up a second Julian Assange."

McAfee let his master plan sink into everyone's brains and seemed to himself be pondering what could happen once we entered Guatemala. Then he pulled out a cell phone, one of a few he had with him, and dialed. He instructed the person who answered to post a misleading entry on his blog at whoismcafee.com, a personal website he had set up to expose the corruption of the Belizean government and tell his story. McAfee surreally explained to the person on the other end—someone who helped run the site—that he had just been apprehended in Mexico, just over the Belizean border.

"An unconfirmed, unnamed source has contacted the blog with the information that Mr. McAfee has been arrested just across the border of Belize in the country of Mexico," McAfee dictated. "Write that down... It has to happen by one o'clock. My life depends on this, my friend."

About 30 minutes later, McAfee asked Keith to place a similar call anonymously, claiming that he had witnessed McAfee's arrest and narrowly escaped the same fate. McAfee anxiously smoked in the backseat as he scanned Google News on his laptop's

cellular internet connection. Eventually he spoke up to tell us that AFP and the AP were reporting that Mexican authorities had apprehended him after he attempted to enter the country illegally from Belize. He read aloud: "After weeks on the run... we have received unconfirmed reports that John McAfee has been captured at the border of Belize and Mexico."

McAfee clapped his hands, turning the laptop around so everybody could see the proof. Later he said that he had also sent a body double—an old friend who, he said, looked just like him (and who had years ago legally changed his name to John McAfee) to Mexico to turn himself in with a Korean passport.

"I do regret this," he continued, preemptively contradicting himself. "I know it's a waste of finances and resources, but quite frankly the traditional press is not my favorite collective, so I won't lose sleep over this tonight."

I asked whether he thought it was strange that the media were basing their reports on his blog posts. Wasn't it counterintuitive, especially if he was asking reporters to look beyond his grandiose persona and focus on the matter at hand?

"My blog allows me to tell my side of the story and tweak the heartstrings of the general internet public," he answered, and then went on to brag about how his readers supposedly crashed the Belizean government's official website, following a request from McAfee to flood them with requests applicable to his cause. (The only source that corroborates this claim is a post on whoismcafee.com.)

Anyone who's read into even the second stratum of the crap

Seemingly relieved, McAfee disclosed our final destination: Guatemala.

reported about McAfee knows that he has been a skillful if somewhat scummy manipulator of the media and the public at large for decades. It's telling that he made a significant portion of his fortune (which, at one time, was reported to be more than \$100 million; McAfee claims to have lost most of it in the 2008 stock-market crash) in 1992 following the looming threat of the Michelangelo virus, a boot-sector virus that was reportedly lying dormant on infected computers until March 6—the birthday of the master Renaissance artist the virus was named after.

McAfee made many media appearances during this time, claiming that Michelangelo could potentially infect tens of thousands if not millions of PCs when it became active. (In the May 1992 issue of *American Journalism Review*, he said that his claims had been misreported by the media: "I told reporters all along that estimates ranged from 50,000 to 5 million," he said. "I said, '50,000 to 5 million, take your pick,' and they did.") In the aftermath, 10,000 to 20,000 confirmed cases were reported. I asked whether the Belizeans had tried to freeze any of his accounts, and he said that for the past ten days he had been unable to transfer any funds whatsoever and that none of the banks would give him much in the way of an explanation. In a later interview, I pressed him about his net worth, asking whether he had exaggerated his losses. He said that he had, and that the double who took on his name was really the one who had lost it all.

I had witnessed McAfee working the media the night before my arrival in Belize, during a layover in Miami. I received a flurry of texts from colleagues alerting me to teasers on CNN advertising an "exclusive" on-camera interview with McAfee in hiding. Some joked that we had been scooped. I found the

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: McAfee in "disguise" as an elderly stroke victim after checking in at Belcampo Belize, a luxury hotel on the edge of the rainforest in Punta Gorda.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: McAfee, who claimed he spent very little time sleeping while on the run, unwinds in his room at Belcampo Belize.

nearest TV and discovered that the interviewer was Martin Savidge. He had apparently met McAfee at an undisclosed location in Belize, one of the many he had supposedly been bouncing around in while eluding the authorities—namely, Belize’s Gang Suppression Unit (GSU), who, he told me, answer solely to the prime minister and whose leader, Marco Vidal, was the primary source of McAfee’s self-alleged persecution.

I asked McAfee whether he had played up his desperation and supposed insanity during the interview because he looked like a different person now, a day later, sitting in a grimy van with me, chain-smoking and bleary eyed and “exhausted from being on the run” but seemingly lucid. He belly-laughed and said that he had picked Martin specifically.

“I looked at the camera, which I know is the wrong thing to do,” McAfee said, smiling. “And [Martin] goes, ‘No, you need to look at me, I’m doing the interview.’ I said, ‘No, I’m sorry. I don’t work that way. The cameraman has to ask the questions.’ He goes, ‘Well, that’s not what we’re doing.’ And I said, ‘Well, then, I’m not going to talk to you guys. I always relate to the cameraman. He’s the guy with the camera; he’s the guy who’s actually shooting. I should be talking to the audience.’ And he goes, ‘Oh, that looks really strange when you do that.’ Then he has the fucking nerve to say, ‘You claim to be a practical joker and yet everyone believes that you’re not.’ And I’m thinking, What the fuck is wrong with you? Because I did nothing but joke those dudes.”

I asked whether he thought his elaborate deception of the

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think you’d go, ‘Oh my God, that’s a lie,
I can’t say it?’”**

media was hypocritical, especially because one of his main complaints was that they had missed “the real story”—not a murder investigation, but a corrupt Belizean government extorting an innocent but wealthy and bullheaded American who refused to make under-the-table donations to the United Democratic Party (UDP), the more conservative and business-oriented of the country’s two main parties, which is currently under the leadership of Prime Minister Barrow.

“What would you do in my case, sir?” he answered by asking rhetorically. “Do think you’d go, ‘Oh my God, that’s a lie, I can’t say it?’ And do you think it would be justifiable to call you a liar?”

I told him I didn’t know, because I didn’t know how important the truth was: How was I supposed to go about reporting the truth when my main subject is a self-admitted exploiter of the media? And how was he going to fuck with VICE?

“I read your stuff,” McAfee said, contradicting his claims from just a few hours ago that he had never heard of VICE or myself, that he had selected me solely on the recommendation of his “advisers.” “I realize who I’m talking with here. I promised you that I will not fuck you over, and I will not.”

Never a man to shy away from the spotlight, McAfee told me that the vast majority of reporters were humorless and hopelessly gullible, singling out Josh Davis’s supposed willingness to believe Belizean officials at their word when writing a series of articles for *Wired* last year, and a July 2012 interview with Denver alt-weekly *Westword* during which McAfee espoused

the values of “observational yoga,” an innovative form of the spiritual discipline that consisted of paying “\$200 a month to sit in an easy chair and watch people do yoga up on a stage. There is a scientific basis for this, that through osmosis, as you watch others be active, the observation of something impacts yourself.”

Every reporter who had covered his story thus far, McAfee said, had gotten it wrong, and he condemned the media in its entirety: “I think the way the mainstream media works, it is impossible to report accurately on any complex story. News is not news these days. It used to be the continuing unfolding of human history. Now it’s, ‘Let’s grab something, some event that randomly happens, and run with that for as long as we can run.’ That’s not news. That’s looking at some poor, twisted shadow of truth.”

It was a bold statement from a man who, hours after we first met, had disguised himself as a geriatric stroke victim. Riding along Belize’s winding Southern Highway, I watched in befuddlement as he stuffed flower petals into his mouth to make his face look locked up and sluggish, wore a pair of taped-together old-man glasses, held his right hand and arm bent rigidly against his chest, slurred his words, and said he was smoking more cigarettes than normal to help induce a hacking bark that was persistent throughout my time with him.

He was still dressed this way as we neared Punta Gorda, the last town and seaport before the landscape turned into dense, sparsely inhabited forest. It was then that McAfee reneged on his claim that we would be crossing into Guatemala that evening, saying that instead we’d be staying the night at Belcampo Belize, a semi-remote 12-room luxury lodge constructed on a 15,000-acre rainforest preserve between the Maya Mountains and the Caribbean. Apparently we would be headed out to Guatemala the next morning on a “fishing trip.”

With the support of a rosewood cane carved into the shape of a cobra, McAfee feigned limping out of the car and shuffled around the side of the complex, sending his driver to check in for him under the pseudonym “Paul Riff.” I kept an eye on the staff, who appeared to be confused and perhaps suspicious of their new ragtag group of guests. The driver worked his persuasive magic, asking whether he could sign into the hotel for “Paul,” whom he said was weak and feeble because of a recent illness. Eventually, they relented after the driver agreed to sign in under his name. Our driver, however, would not be staying. He and the man who was driving the decoy car had a busy night ahead of them—McAfee had tasked them with finding a boat that would provide us with safe passage to Guatemala. Amy and Keith had also booked a room for the night. Whether they would be accompanying us to Guatemala was unclear.

McAfee and Sam laid low in their room the entire night, where they had their dinner brought to them by the hotel staff. At first the manager declined, stating a strict policy of not serving food in the rooms because it would attract mosquitos and other insects. But as usual, McAfee got his way—all it took was Sam getting in the manager’s face and telling her that her “husband’s health” would be jeopardized if food was not brought to him promptly.

After dinner on the upstairs patio, the rest of us retired to our rooms and went to sleep.

DAY 2: GUATEMALA OR BUST

The next morning I leafed through a copy of *Destination Belize*, a free glossy magazine left in hotel rooms and various resorts throughout the country for convenient toilet reading. It is published annually by the Tourism Industry Association, the PR wing of the number-one industry in the beautiful Central American nation.

The cover of the 2012 edition features two women seated on a grassy knoll in front of a temple in Cayo District's Xunantunich archaeology site. One is an old soothsayer burning incense in some unclear and halfhearted ritual, the other, young and gorgeous, the tourist. According to the caption inside, the pair are discussing the significance of the Mayan calendar. In other words, December 21, 2012—a day on which many thought the world would end or, at the very least, there would be a glacial shift in global consciousness the likes of we have never seen. The cover line below reads: WHERE WILL YOU BE WHEN THE WORLD BEGINS ANEW? I found it an odd pitch to mainstream vacationers, but then again, so far my trip to Belize had been far from a margarita-soaked holiday jaunt. At this point, who was I to judge?

Wishing I were with my girlfriend rather than McAfee and his crew, I tried to wake up under the stream of the dual showerheads in the massive stall that included a built-in bench and glass wall that looked out on the rainforest below. I worried that it might be the last memory I had before having to sit in a Guatemalan detention center.

Outside I was surprised to spot McAfee and Sam eating their breakfast in plain sight up on the balcony. He was smoking, holding a cigarette in his “crippled” right hand while trying his best to look like a stroke victim. As ridiculous as it seemed, his disguise was working. The seemingly uptight American manager, the one who had initially refused his room-service request, asked how he was feeling today (“better”) and his name (“Paul”), and became visibly uncomfortable after reflexively reaching out with her right hand to shake his, awkwardly transitioning to her left. With that, she disappeared.

The scout driver from the night pulled up and met us at the table, telling McAfee that he had secured a boat and captain who would take us into Guatemala, no questions asked. McAfee sent him away to finalize the plans and continued smoking, becoming

more emboldened with each interaction with the hotel staff.

He showed me a magic trick, asking me to place a toothpick in a cloth napkin, which he then folded up before presenting to me what appeared to be the shape of the toothpick, which he asked me to break. I used my forefingers and thumbs to snap it into multiple pieces—or at least my ears told me so.

“Now you believe it’s broken, don’t you?” he said.

He unraveled the napkin, and the toothpick was still stuck through the center, completely intact.

“This is the problem with life. What you see is not actually happening,” he said.

With that, the waiter approached, and McAfee dropped the napkin so as not to blow the cover of his stroke-victim routine. I asked him about his plans for the day.

“We will fish south, headed toward Guatemala,” he said with authority. “And at a certain point we will cruise into a port called Livingston, which is at the mouth of one of the grandest rivers on the planet. It’s called the Río Dulce—the Sweet River—and it winds between sheer cliffs that go up 500 feet, where vines are growing down and monkeys... it’s incredible. It’s like a magical kingdom. So you’re going to enjoy today, assuming that I am not nabbed before I get on the boat.” McAfee also added that, despite its beauty, Livingston was “the asshole of Guatemala.”

Fifteen minutes later McAfee, Sam, Robert, and I were speeding down a dirt road, which abruptly ended at a dock where a 20-odd-foot motorboat with a center console was waiting for us. Keith had to get back to San Pedro for work, so he stayed at the hotel and made arrangements for a ride home. We left Amy behind; McAfee said he didn’t plan on doing so, that she was supposed to come with him and Sam, but that his driver had only made the deal for four people. Any changes, he said, would be suspicious.

We stormed out of the van and hopped aboard the boat. Once we were in open water, McAfee grinned ear to ear and

An immigration officer in Livingston whom McAfee unsuccessfully attempted to bribe after entering the country illegally.



tongue-kissed Sam repeatedly. Sam, too, was in the best spirits I had witnessed since our arrival, and she finally seemed to be opening up a bit.

The captain kicked the engine into full throttle, only slowing when he spotted some dolphins in the distance. As we approached, we noticed that the pod was massive, the largest any of us—including the captain—had ever seen. There were at least 20 total, and they put on an acrobatic show for us once the boat had idled.

It seemed like the best of omens, but if there's one man on this planet capable of negating the power of a joyful pod of dolphins, it is John McAfee.

As we pulled into Livingston about an hour later, we were greeted by a dark-skinned man named Eddie who insisted that we drop by immigration to get our passports stamped. I was expecting to meet the curmudgeonly old customs agent McAfee had described the day before, some sun-scorched Yoda hermit who used rum as mouthwash and wore the keys to Livingston

As the agent meticulously scanned each page of our passports, looking for exit stamps, I began to grow alarmed.

around his neck, so I was surprised when we were led into an official-looking customs office. For the first time since I had entered his presence, McAfee seemed to be entirely at ease, believing he was finally home free. "You'll see the real me now," he said. "Now the practical jokes will begin." *They hadn't already begun?* I thought, worried for what might lie ahead.

The customs official, on the other hand, offered a counterpoint to McAfee's glowing optimism. As the agent meticulously scanned each page of our passports, looking for exit stamps, I began to grow alarmed. When he didn't find any, he scanned them into his machine, and I knew we had a rough day ahead of us. McAfee tried to bribe him with a handful of cash, and the agent waved it away and became agitated, calling for his boss. Sam told us to wait out front while she attended to the situation in Spanish.

We didn't get our entry stamps, but somehow Sam got our passports back—I believe by telling them we would return to Belize to get exit stamps, but I am still unsure—and we slinked off down the street as the head agent grilled us from outside the office.

Eddie—whom I had mistakenly thought McAfee hired before our arrival but was actually just some random "guide"—led us to a nearby restaurant. We ordered hamburgers as Sam went to buy a few prepaid Guatemalan cell phones. Things were not going according to plan, or if they were, McAfee was making things dangerously dramatic on purpose. My gut told me that we wouldn't be getting our passports stamped anytime soon. Eddie proposed two solutions: returning to Belize with our passports to get them stamped and then coming back to Guatemala, or finding a facilitator in Livingston who would be able to successfully bribe the immigration officials. McAfee dismissed both, instead deciding to hire a private boat to take us down the Río Dulce and to the Guatemalan town of Fronteras. He asked the owner of the restaurant whether he knew of a captain with a vessel we could hire. He did and said he'd update us in 30 minutes.

While we waited, I spoke with McAfee about the unauthorized publication of a portion of a story he wrote titled "Darkness Falls." Originally posted on a private message board

last September and subsequently leaked to Gizmodo by Joel Johnson, part one of the story is a synopsis of what McAfee believed to be his predicament in Belize: taking a stand against what he says is a thoroughly corrupt government and "universally brutal" police force; publicly declaring the prime minister a liar via the national media; hiring gangsters as bodyguards and then consorting with their ex-girlfriends (namely Amy, referred to as "Amber" in the story); the six other young women he had lived with besides Amy/Amber and the resulting chaos; being extorted by drug traffickers; "community lying" as a sociological trait; his "refusal to assist the prime minister's son, the rapper best known as Shyne, gain an early release from an American prison in 2009" following charges of attempted murder; and refusing to donate to the prime minister's United Democratic Party when it had allegedly demanded he do so. (Joel didn't respond to multiple requests for comment on the matter.)

What this first part of "Darkness Falls" doesn't include, according to McAfee, is that part of the reason he was in his current predicament was his curiosity about Belize's insular Amish community. He told me that he had become obsessed with photographing Belizean Amish men who secretly drank and solicited prostitutes at a local whorehouse called Lover's Bar near his property in Orange Walk, where, a few years ago, he was funding quorum-sensing research conducted in a lab on the property by a young chemist named Allison Adonizio. His quest to take photographs of the Amish men at Lover's Bar required weeks of buying rounds for everyone and feeling comfortable being the only gringo—one who drank only sodas because he was sober. Finally, they let him shoot photos without hassle. But what began as a lighthearted quest to document some weird Amish dudes getting their jollies begat McAfee's infatuation with a young prostitute, which begat what the media and McAfee himself portrayed as an attempt to basically single-handedly rehab some of the most impoverished and crime-stricken areas in the country.

I asked McAfee why he thought Joel leaked the story from one of the most exclusive and secretive message boards on the internet (one, that like *Fight Club*, none of its members will even mention by name on the record). "He said it was basically his moral imperative," McAfee told me, explaining that Joel was swiftly booted from the board after being berated by its members for betraying their self-imposed rules. "There were about 2,000 replies to that... They know your soft spots. Within a day they've got every fucking button that you didn't even know you had. They were pressing all of those."

It sort of sounded like a dorky sewing circle, albeit one where McAfee was disclosing some of his most closely guarded secrets. It made me wonder: Were my trip to Belize and McAfee's "adventure" (he had used this word several times to describe his planned escape route) just one giant social-engineering experiment? A game? Or, as McAfee states himself in his story, it is "a tale of intrigue and deception, involving great risks and dangers. Or, perhaps, it is a tale of paranoia in which innocuous events are misinterpreted by an unstable mind. My mind."

The owner of the restaurant interrupted our discussion, saying we were to meet him at a juice bar across the street in 15 or 20 minutes and from there he would take us to the captain who would be ferrying us to Fronteras.

We killed time wandering the dusty streets of Livingston, while Sam seemed to be tiring of Eddie's inaction and wondered why we had even followed him in the first place. I was wondering the same thing.

"I asked him where he was from," Sam said. "He said Belize. Belize City. What is he doing all the way out here?"

No one had a good answer, and no one wanted to think too deeply about what I hoped was a strange coincidence. The customs official was still glaring at us from afar, so we double-timed it onto the boat, hopped in, and began our voyage down the Río Dulce.

I cannot overemphasize that there are dramatically easier, cheaper, and better ways to enter Guatemala illegally and even legally; I never doubted for a second that at many moments McAfee was putting on a show for us, and for the video camera especially. He is, at heart, a performer. Others might call him a con artist. I think he's just an old man with a lot of money and a genuinely offensive lifestyle for which he is unapologetic. And someone or something in Belize had pissed him off something fierce. Was it because of his own shady dealings? We may never know for sure. Adding to his convoluted worldview is the fact that he is honest about his deception, or at least as honest as he deems appropriate at any given time.

The Río Dulce, as McAfee had promised, was pristine and stunning. Emerald-green water became one with the vegetation hanging from the sheer white cliffs that bordered the zigzagging river, the banks bleeding into riverside communities that seemed largely unmolested by the modern world.

Out on the open water once again, McAfee was able to forget about his troubles for a few moments. Tossing uninvited sexual innuendo my way as he had throughout the trip (at various points he had claimed that Amy thought I was cute, warned against having sex with her because it would ruin me for life, and jokingly begged me not to sneak off in the bushes with Sam), McAfee said that he was offended that I hadn't answered my door at 3 AM that morning when, on his hands and knees, he had crawled up to my room at Belcampo Belize.

Sam played along. "Your dick was out, what were you doing?" she asked McAfee, pretending to be disgusted.

"It did not go all the way in; he was kissing it. I swear to God. It did not go inside once—not even the head." He laughed.

"What are you trying to say, that he's better than me?"

"No, he's not better. It's the worst head I have ever fucking had."

Forty-five minutes later, we arrived at the port of Fronteras, a town that, McAfee said, was "populated primarily by foreigners... people who want to get away from the world, who want to just completely vanish, start a new life—tired of culture, tired of their friends, tired of taxes, tired of whatever. It's a fun town. It means 'frontier' in English, and it's pretty much like the Western frontier in the 1850s. Not that it's a lawless place, but it's certainly a wild and fun place."

Unfortunately, our time in Fronteras was the opposite of fun. We killed a few hours at an oceanfront café, where McAfee pored over our passports in an attempt to come up with some desperate exit-stamp scheme that I didn't understand. He also learned, by speaking with Americans and other Westerners holed up there, that there was a man—back in Livingston, of course—who would, for a fee, facilitate our getting stamped into Guatemala. McAfee reached this man on the phone, who instructed him to call back in 30 minutes.

When the time came, McAfee called, but our potential savior had bad news: The officials in Livingston had flagged our passports. This meant he could not help us.

As dusk settled on Fronteras, we decided it was probably best to find a hotel for the night. We got into a cab and asked the driver to take us to the safest lodgings in the area. Ten minutes later, we arrived at the gates of Nanajuana, a "yacht club" that more accurately could be described as a strange tiki-themed hotel with a dock.

Before checking in, McAfee convinced Sam to call her uncle—former attorney general of Guatemala and high-powered criminal lawyer Telésforo Guerra—who, McAfee hoped, would provide us with transport for the dangerous four-hour-plus journey from Fronteras to Guatemala City. Telésforo seemed willing to help but was struggling to grasp the scope of the situation at hand.

Sam and McAfee float down the Río Dulce, a majestic emerald river in Guatemala that delivered them from Livingston to Fronteras.





His 20-year-old niece was calling him in a panic, asking him to assist her and a strange man more than three times her age who was wanted for questioning in a Belizean murder case.

Eventually, McAfee asked to speak with Telésforo himself: “My name is John McAfee, and I’m with your niece Samantha. You speak English, sir? I’m trying to hire a limousine in Fronteras to take us to the city. Can you recommend a company or somewhere? I am not comfortable getting on a bus. It’s not a matter of money, we have money. We have not slept in a while. I’d like to get some rest and see if we can do this tomorrow. Maybe I can hire someone in Guatemala City with some security to come and pick us up. Money is not an issue. If you can recommend it, I can arrange it, sir.”

DAY 3: ONWARD, INTO THE DARKNESS

I awoke early the next morning. McAfee and Sam were already up and eating breakfast at the open-air waterfront restaurant, and they told me that Sam’s uncle was sending one of his most trusted bodyguards to pick us up and drive us to Guatemala City.

After breakfast, I checked McAfee’s website and noticed he had posted an entry announcing that he had not been captured in Mexico as had been previously reported, but had instead made it out of Belize and was with two reporters from VICE without giving our names. The day before, he had mentioned something to me about posting that VICE was documenting his escape from Belize, but in a state of exhaustion I hadn’t remembered until the post was up. I felt strongly that McAfee should not make mention of our presence, but I also did not want to influence his decision making in any way, so I bit my lip and sucked it up.

Almost immediately, my inbox was flooded with emails from reporters from around the world, asking who from VICE was with McAfee, whether I was with him, where he was, etc.

Whether we liked it or not, it looked as though Robert and I would be revealed as the reporters with McAfee in the very near future. VICE’s communications department had also been inundated with queries, and after speaking to them, we came to the mutual decision that it would be best to get in front of the onslaught. McAfee was excited by the prospect; I was not but wrote up a press release and asked Robert to take a photo of John and me with my iPhone to prove we were with him.

I was aware that this photo contained geodata. I had left it on while taking photos throughout the trip—a trip with an unknown destination with someone who many thought could be a murder suspect and a frequent user of experimental and extremely potent psychoactive drugs—to leave breadcrumbs in case someone needed to find me (or, even worse, my body). Like the other photos I had sent to my colleagues in New York, I included the geodata so that they would know where exactly I was. But this time I also sent very specific instructions to scrub the data from the photo (specifically by way of multiple emails that said things like, “TAKE A SCREENSHOT OF THE PIC INSTEAD OF POSTIN. IT [sic] DIRECTLY TO ENSURE THAT IT IS NOT GEOTARGETED”).

Over the next hour or so, as we waited for our ride, McAfee and I sat down for another long interview, chatting at length about his adamant and frequent claims of widespread corruption in Belize.

No one can say that McAfee has constructed a fable regarding Belize’s shady governmental and business dealings. As he is wont to point out, the National Heritage Foundation ranks Belize as the 77th economically “freest” nation in the world as of 2012 (placing it in the “moderately free” category). While not a one-to-one correlation with corruption, the list’s rankings

are a rough indicator of a nation’s governmental instability and enforcement. The least corrupt, at number 1, is Hong Kong. Uganda falls just after Belize at 78, the United States at 10, Venezuela at 174, the United Arab Emirates at 35, Guatemala at 82, and Mexico clocks in at 54.

Regardless of whether, how, and when McAfee became entangled with corruption in Belize, he had been focusing on his government adversaries to hedge and draw attention away from the fact that he was wanted for questioning in a murder case. But if corruption was as rampant as McAfee had claimed, it’s within the realm of reason that the death of his neighbor was, in some way, a result of it. How close he was to the fire, and whether he was pouring gasoline on it, are questions that are still—and may always be—unclear.

Rick Stepp, an associate professor of anthropology and Latin American studies at the University of Florida, has spent more than a decade conducting research in Belize and Guatemala and said that Belize’s small size and its lack of a strong media presence invite shady business—both political and otherwise.

“If we’re talking about Belize as a democratic country, we’re only looking at a little more than 30 years [of history],” he said. “So I don’t see much difference between the two ruling parties in government. They both have their faults, and you see a lot of issues that exist independent of who’s in charge at the time. Belize was considered to be underpopulated, both during British rule and after 1981, when they came into their own as an independent country. You could go there in the late 80s and basically get the deed and titles for large parcels of land from the government in exchange for improving them. So that’s how a lot of these land holdings ended up taking place. There’s always been that kind of extractive colonial mentality, and I think that lends itself to some of the issues you see going on right now.”

Like drug trafficking? I asked.

“At one point, people were landing planes on the Southern Highway and just abandoning the planes. And then the govern-

Whether we liked it or not, it looked as though Robert and I would be revealed as the reporters with McAfee in the very near future.

ment was turning around and auctioning the planes off. You can read about it. I don’t know a lot of people who can afford a plane in Belize, even under government auction. So I wouldn’t be surprised if these planes were sort of cycling through the system again.”

I spoke with another American, who asked to go by the name Seymour for the purposes of this article and who had lived in Belize for more than a decade while running a tourist resort. At one point, he had met McAfee, whose friend, Seymour said, was potentially interested in investing in his resort. He went on to say that McAfee is “a pathological liar. The guy can’t get around it. He fit right in in Belize because the average Belizean is also a pathological liar. I lived in Belize for ten years, and fuck, everybody’s trying to scam you.”

Seymour relayed more sordid tales of living as an American business owner in Belize, claiming that things got tougher for him when the United Democratic Party took over in 2008, paving the way for his exit from the country. Under the People’s United Party (PUP), he said, just about everything was fair game. Early on during his time in Belize, Seymour got in tight with a senior PUP member who took him under his wing.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP:

McAfee watches his step, attempting to avoid the trash strewn in the streets of Fronteras.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM:

McAfee and Sam stroll toward the waterfront at the Nanajua Marina & Yacht Club in Fronteras.

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"Everything went so smoothly with the PUP," Seymour said. "Everything I needed, I could get. Permit? Didn't even need a permit. But if I did need one, I could get it instantly. If you broke the law and you wanted to get it backdated, you just tell them, 'Give me this permit set from the year before.' They would backdate the permit and hand it to you. That's how nice things were."

When the UDP won, Seymour continued, it was "like a revenge thing... It wasn't anything like the connections I had before. They came down on us with environmental problems, 'You guys are breaking environmental laws.' It was all bullshit. Before, with the PUP, you could break whatever law you wanted. It was because we were with the PUP, or because I was associated with the PUP. Immediately I saw that the writing on the wall was that it was going to be a tough career. I pretty much pulled out of the operation."

Seymour also had a theory regarding who might've killed McAfee's neighbor Gregory Faull. He said that it could've been similar to an experience he had with two day laborers that Seymour had hired to work at his resort.

"One of the guys who was working for me killed somebody and thought I was going to give him a reward afterward," he said. "Serious shit! Crazy shit. He chopped him up and burned the body into ashes and then showed me the fucking ashes. I'm like, 'Dude! I didn't want to know about this! Even if you did it, I don't fucking want to know.' Freaked me the fuck out."

Still recovering from his time on the run in Belize, McAfee was talked out and our driver would be arriving soon, so we wrapped up the interview to pack. He returned to his room, and I headed to reception to check my email on the only available Wi-Fi at the hotel.

When I got online, to my horror, I received an email linking to a tweet that said geodata was included in the photo we took earlier in the afternoon and listed our exact coordinates. I ran to find Robert, who had asked that he be credited for the photo on the website. We quickly discussed our options, which we determined to be nonexistent: No matter what, we'd have to wait it out for our ride.

I had to find McAfee and tell him. Surprisingly, he stayed calm, advised us not to tell Sam because "she will rip off your balls," and reached for his laptop to assess the damage online.

Within half an hour, dozens of journalists and other people had called the front desk, asking for McAfee or myself. McAfee wrote and published (and later deleted) a post on his blog, which claimed that he had purposefully manipulated the EXIF geodata in the photo and apologized to his readers—and Robert and me—for doing so. I had let him read the email about the photo containing geodata after I sent it; he had deemed it a stern enough warning and said that he did not, in any way, hold us personally accountable. And at that moment it didn't matter; we were all in potentially very deep shit.

"You guys are fucked, too. You realize that, if we're caught, right?" McAfee said. "You're fighting for your life here. If you get arrested with me, there is a chance that you will suffer some ill treatment." I asked what he meant by "ill treatment" and he said that he had ten fingers but could soon be missing some if the "unfriendly folks" who were after him caught up with him in Guatemala.

It was around this time that Robert posted an update on Facebook, corroborating McAfee's blog post about his alleged manipulation of the photo's geodata.

Robert King is a freelance photographer and videographer who has documented most major wars and conflicts since Bosnia.

A few days before our time with McAfee, he had been in Syria shooting video of innumerable atrocities committed under the Assad regime (including the targeting of children and hospitals). Robert told me that when he is in Aleppo or Al-Qusayr, he sometimes updates his Facebook status saying he's in Memphis, his hometown, to purposefully mislead anyone who might be looking for him and to "protect [his] own ass." If Facebook is now public record when it comes to journalists, I know for a fact that a lot of people in the media should be having some serious heart-to-hearts with their significant others.

Sam had asked the front desk to call a cab for us—the plan being that we would hang out at a restaurant until our driver arrived—but she left the desk in a panic, telling McAfee that she was certain she had called and the operator said that no one from the hotel had called them recently. The staff was watching our every move. Sam called our ride, her uncle's bodyguard, and he said he was about 50 minutes away from the hotel. It was time to leave and wait it out at another location.

We walked swiftly to the gates of the compound and met the cab that Sam had called minutes earlier. We hopped in, and McAfee and Sam gave him intentionally confusing directions, first requesting to go to the nearest hotel, then to a restaurant, then to another hotel, and after that another restaurant.

The driver told us that he would take us to a Mexican place farther down the road, one about 35 minutes away. McAfee told

Whether we liked it or not, it looked as though Robert and I would be revealed as the reporters with McAfee.

Sam to offer the driver money for his BlackBerry, just in case he was in cahoots with the hotel and had been instructed to call them with our whereabouts after dropping us off. He accepted \$200 cash for the phone, retrieving his SIM card before handing it over to Sam.

We arrived at the restaurant and took a table in the back. If we could just make it safely to Guatemala City, everything would be all right.

We ordered food, and shortly after it was served, our escort called Sam to tell her that he had passed the restaurant by about ten minutes, and he was turning around now. McAfee said that everything was fine, that he knew—because I had showed him the emails—that it had been a mistake, and that we would be on our way to Guatemala City in no time.

"The leak absolutely did not alter my plans," McAfee later told me. "And it did not screw up anything."

Then again, after reaffirming this dozens of times, a few days after I left Guatemala McAfee "terminated" his relationship with VICE on his blog, claiming that the geodata leak did result in his arrest, and that it was a setup by VICE. The next week he told me that he had written this post out of anger, partially because I had not yet published information related to the murder investigation that could potentially compromise any mounting case against him. At no point did he refuse to answer my numerous follow-up questions. Eventually, if you're dealing with McAfee, you just accept things like this and move on.

The bodyguard picked us up and, after swerving in and out of potential head-on collisions all night (that's how they drive in Guatemala), we arrived around 11 PM at the five-star Vista Real in Guatemala City. We retreated to our respective rooms

exhausted and shell-shocked. McAfee had made plans early the next morning to meet Sam's uncle, after which he would retain his services.

DAY 4: GUATEMALA CITY

The next morning Robert and I met McAfee at the breakfast buffet, where there was an impressive array of crepe fillings, fresh fruit juices, cold cuts, and other foodstuffs.

Robert and I sat down with McAfee and Sam, who were awaiting Sam's uncle, Telésforo Guerra, to come save the day (and, with any luck, help get our passports stamped). Telésforo called Sam to say he was almost there, and she and McAfee went outside to greet him.

Back inside, at the restaurant, McAfee professed his love for Sam to Telésforo and said that, after the dust had settled, he intended on marrying her, joking that Telésforo might have to deal with having a potential criminal in the family. Then they got down to business.

McAfee briefly summarized his situation, and Telésforo nodded his head in sympathy when his client mentioned the

“You guys are fucked too. You realize that, if we’re caught, right?” McAfee said. “You’re fighting for your life here.”

persecution he was suffering at the hands of the Belizean government. I asked Telésforo whether there would be any problem getting our passports stamped, and he assured me, “No, no, this is a human rights issue. And you are journalists.” Then he said he had to run to a meeting, but not before collecting our passports and a retainer fee paid in cash by McAfee. He also mentioned that it would be a good idea for McAfee to host a press conference as soon as possible.

Later that afternoon, McAfee went shopping for a new suit, and afterward we reconvened with Telésforo and some of his associates at a Mexican restaurant.

“The best way that we can get political asylum [is by claiming] political persecution by the government of Belize,” Telésforo said. “So that’s why we are having this press conference, so the public opinion knows what is happening... And the government of Guatemala can impose political asylum. That is protection according to international laws—that every human has the right to ask for it.”

At one point during the chaos, McAfee pulled me into the foyer of an adjacent Asian restaurant, being careful to turn away from the two French cameramen outside who, he hypothesized, could read lips. His face relaxed, and he took on a serious demeanor that I had previously not witnessed.

“Rocco, dude,” he said. “I’m John McAfee; I invented antivirus software. I can get into anyone’s computer. This story isn’t about me, or drug trafficking, or the GSU being corrupt... I’m 67. I don’t like fucking women that much, that’s not why I was living with so many of them. I use them to get information, and I have information that proves that al-Qaeda operatives are being smuggled into Belize and, from there, into the US. It has international implications at the highest levels...”

He didn’t say much more, and just as abruptly as he had pulled me aside, he said that the press conference was soon and he needed to get his suit, the tailoring of which Telésforo had expedited.

Later that afternoon, on the drive over to the press meeting in front of city hall, I asked McAfee whether he felt confident that he could prove his innocence.

“I think there is nothing to prove,” McAfee said. “I was not there; I was with Sam the entire night. I have more than half a dozen witnesses to the fact. I had no motive. I had no access to a 9-mm... Whatever it is they want to talk to me about I think has very little to do with the murder of Mr. Faull and very much to do with their collecting me. On any charge whatsoever.” Sam corroborated McAfee’s alibi, and during a later interview, reiterated that she was with McAfee at the time of the murder. They were “sleeping” she said, and then later half-covered her mouth with her hand and whispered—“fucking.”

At the press conference, which from what I could tell was attended exclusively by local media, McAfee gave his spiel about how he had faced extreme persecution by the Belizean government, and why he was forced to leave the country he called home. I zoned out, exhausted.

The rest of the evening was, thankfully, uneventful.

DAY 5: THE BUST

Before parting ways the night before, McAfee told me that he needed a break from being constantly challenged and probed by Robert and me, saying that he didn’t want to see our “fucking faces” until well past noon the following day. I confirmed with Robert that the feeling was mutual, and we spent part of the day reviewing footage and photos.

Later that afternoon, I called McAfee’s room, and he invited me over. When I arrived, he was lounging about in a purple polo shirt and khaki slacks, and remained relaxed and candid during our conversation, which mostly revolved around his three friends and associates in Belize—Eddie Ancona, Cassian Chavarria, and William Mulligan—who were being held in custody on what McAfee claimed were “trumped-up charges” related to the government’s allegations of his possession of improperly licensed firearms. He had been trying to rally support from the readers of his blog, encouraging them to email a laundry list of Belizean officials and dignitaries to demand their release. Eventually, all three of them were set free.

I had returned to my room and stayed for about a half hour when the phone rang. It was McAfee. He said Telésforo had requested that he come to his office immediately to go over some paperwork, and McAfee wanted Robert and me to tag along. On the way there, McAfee told us that after the lawyer’s office we would be headed to the city of Antigua, about an hour away, to prepare for his press conference the following afternoon.

The paperwork, as it turned out, was McAfee’s application for political asylum, which he promptly signed. But the good lawyer had other intentions for asking his client to stop by (or McAfee was lying when he told me he had no idea why Telésforo wanted to speak with him so urgently): ABC News correspondent Matt Gutman and his crew had been invited by Telésforo to interview McAfee and were waiting at his office when we arrived.

McAfee seemed genuinely surprised, even telling Matt that he didn’t particularly care for his reporting but, since they had made the effort, he would agree to a brief interview. During what turned out to be a 45-minute discussion, McAfee revealed—as he had earlier told me—that he had been on the run in Belize for not four but six weeks before his arrival in Guatemala, two weeks before the murder of Gregory Faull. McAfee also said he felt vindicated by the Guatemalan media, who, instead of thinking he was a lunatic like their American counterparts, had welcomed him with open arms and replied with phrases like “of

course” when he had mentioned the corruption of the Belizean government and the persecution he faced.

Matt asked McAfee how much money he had left in his coffers following the string of lawsuits against him in the US before he left for Belize and the 2008 stock market and real estate crash that had virtually wiped him out, at least according to what he told the *New York Times* in August 2009.

“See, here’s another problem. You are a polite man, with your friends. And no one has ever said you are rude. But I’m telling you, that is a rude statement. This is what’s wrong with the press. What it does is it reduces the politeness of human behavior, which has evolved over centuries to allow us to commune, rather than just talk.”

Perhaps Matt just broached the topic crudely, because later when I asked McAfee about his wealth, he told me that his losses were vastly overstated and he was more than comfortable. Ever since then, McAfee said, all of his real estate holdings, finances, and other large-ticket items were technically owned by this eponymous body double—the same look-alike who posed as him in Mexico during his escape from Belize.

It was getting late, and on our return to the hotel McAfee decided against driving the 45 minutes to Antigua. Instead, he said, he and Sam would have dinner and relax for the night. Robert and I retired to our rooms to have a short rest. A couple hours later, we met up at reception. Both of us had noticed the unusually large presence (even for Guatemala) of law enforcement outside the hotel. But earlier we had watched an envoy of Canadian dignitaries arrive, complete with a Guatemalan military convoy, so we assumed that the show of force was a diplomatic formality; however, the fact that Telésforo still had our passports gave us reason to be paranoid about the presence of a special police task force and a lone agent with INTERPOL emblazoned across the back of his vest. The conversation ended when we spotted McAfee outside, pacing back and forth. We

went to greet him. He appeared distraught and said that he was looking for Sam.

Moments later, Sam, who had been clothing shopping for the upcoming press conference, arrived in a vehicle driven by Telésforo’s bodyguard. She exited and immediately embraced McAfee, who said he was getting worried.

Almost as if on cue, a group of special police task force officers surrounded McAfee and asked to see some identification. Sam was allowed to go up to their room to retrieve his driver’s license, but this wasn’t good enough for the officials—they wanted to see his passport. McAfee called Telésforo, telling him to come to the hotel immediately. In the interim, McAfee seemed largely unperturbed, playing a flute borrowed from a local vendor, banging on drums for sale by the same vendor, chain-smoking, and telling Robert to be sure to get shots of the officers (who were trying to intimidate us by taking photos of us).

“They are trying to arrest me for coming into the country illegally,” McAfee said. “We know that this is merely a move to keep me from doing my press conference... Dude, if I had not left the hotel, you know what would have happened tonight? They would’ve come and gotten me, with no one watching, at two o’clock in the morning for... something. Trust me.”

Telésforo arrived but, for whatever reason, was unable to produce McAfee’s passport, and shortly thereafter, the officers escorted McAfee and his lawyer to their truck. Robert, still rolling, asked McAfee where they were taking them as the driver stepped on the gas.

“To jail,” McAfee said definitively.

DAYS 6: WEIRDNESS ABOUNDS

I awoke before dawn the next morning, paranoia washing over me like a soiled mop being plunged into even filthier water. Had I been infected by the McAfee virus? Had this entire experience been an elaborate social experiment? Was I going to be arrested

McAfee explains his legal situation to former attorney general of Guatemala and high-powered criminal defense lawyer Telésforo Guerra over coffee at the Vista Real hotel in Guatemala City while Telésforo examines McAfee’s passport.



by machine-gun-toting Guatemalans today?

I took a shower in an attempt to get my head straight and then went downstairs for breakfast. On the way to the buffet, I doubled back and crept up to the corner of the last window facing the street. Somewhere around 20 Guatemalan cops were standing guard outside. Their numbers hadn't dwindled, but the Canadian diplomatic envoy hadn't left the hotel, so I hoped I was just jumping to bad conclusions. Still, it was hard not to notice the dozen or so shifty-looking men dressed in black suits identical to those worn by what I had assumed were security guards stationed at the front door. I just told myself I was being irrational.

Robert met me for breakfast, where we tried to avoid the topic. I mentioned that I thought spooks were all over the place, and he agreed. This led to talk about how the phones lines in our rooms were filled with static, the internet in our rooms lagged to the point of being unusable (especially when trying to send email), and when we called the local US Embassy to ask how to acquire a temporary passport, their only advice was "stay in your hotel rooms no matter what." This seemed like the best course of action—to not cross the property line of the hotel—but when we called reception to request additional nights (we had two left), they told us they were all booked up.

Dozens of telephone calls to numbers I had for Telésforo and his office were left unreturned. Finally, I got hold of Sam, who

I called McAfee. He said that it was all a mix-up. That he wasn't sure whether Sam had managed to retrieve the items he had asked her to secure (multiple laptops, phones, clothes, and other important possessions), and figured that Sam may have left them in my room because I had been interviewing her following his arrest. This was not what I considered to be a plausible scenario, but I wasn't up for an argument. I just wanted my stuff back.

"What about my shirt and socks?" I asked.

"What color is the shirt?"

"Sky blue."

"Shit, man. I'm wearing it. We must be the same size because it fits perfectly. I just figured Juan Pablo was a nice guy; it was in a bag from the hotel. I thought he had bought me new clothes."

"They were in bags because I had just had them laundered."

Soon after, I finally got hold of Telésforo, demanding that he return our passports, with or without exit stamps. He agreed to meet me at the hotel within the hour.

Robert and I now had our passports, but they still were not stamped; however, within 30 minutes most of the police surrounding the hotel had cleared out, and we felt comfortable traveling to a local hospital, where McAfee had just been admitted for a supposed heart attack. Earlier that morning, Belizean officials had issued a press release stating that McAfee would be extradited to Belize. Of course, after having spent the past few days with him, we were skeptical about his sudden cardiovascular woes.

On arriving at the hospital, we were told by Telésforo that McAfee was already gone and had been transferred back to Inmigración: Albergue Transeúntes, where he was being housed. I called McAfee, who said that if we went to the detention center he would try to get the guards to return my possessions to me and would also try to get us inside once Telésforo arrived. We did as he asked, but three hours later neither of these things had happened. We returned to the hotel.

That evening, the security staff provided me with a manifest listing the items taken from my room, and Robert and I were allowed to review CCTV camera footage that clearly documented Juan Pablo entering my room with the hotel's security manager and his underling and exiting with a bag full of my belongings. I was pissed.

DAY 7: EXIT PROCEDURES

The next morning, Robert and I awoke early, hired a cab to drive us to the detention center, and waited outside for Telésforo, who, McAfee said, would try his best to get us inside. Once again, this didn't happen. The lawyer didn't even show up; however, after repeatedly pressing McAfee about my belongings, he bribed a customs official to bring them down to me. She opened the door and handed over my laptop, iPad, and chargers. McAfee kept my shirt and socks because, he said, he had no clean clothes. He also admitted to me that he had faked the heart attack, claiming that the Belizeans could have easily deported him that morning during a four-hour window following the rejection of his request for political asylum and the filing of multiple injunctions by his lawyer that made it impossible for him to be removed from the country anytime in the near future. The story, it seemed, was over, and I wished McAfee the best of luck. Robert and I both thought he wouldn't be released anytime soon, maybe for years.

A few hours later, we booked a flight from Guatemala City to New York. Convinced that without stamps we wouldn't make it past the customs official at La Aurora International Airport, all we could focus on was trying to suppress a Hiroshima-level freak-out. The customs agents, however, didn't even bother to

"Rocco, dude," he said. "I'm John McAfee; I invented antivirus software. I can get into anyone's computer."

gave me his direct cell. Still, no answer.

Around 11 AM, I returned to my room and immediately noticed that my laptop was missing from the desk where I had left it. My iPad, the factory charger and cord for my iPhone, the bottom half of the Mophie charger for my iPhone, two pairs of socks, and my favorite button-down shirt were also missing. Whoever took it had targeted the items, I was sure, because the \$800 or so in cash I had in my bag was still there.

I checked under both beds, convinced I was in the throes of paranoia and had stashed my valuables there. I checked the safe. I searched my bags, hoping that I had no memory of putting my gear inside. Nothing. I called Robert.

"Are you sure you didn't leave them somewhere?" he asked, skeptical.

"Yes, I'm sure. Somebody took them."

I rode the elevator down to the lobby to report my missing items. The hotel's security manager explained that Juan Pablo Gutiérrez, an associate of Telésforo's law firm, Corporasa, had come to him with a legal letter approved by McAfee that said they could remove certain items from my room that pertained to his immigration case.

I returned to Robert's room and immediately began to repeatedly dial Sam and Telésforo, determined to get one of them to pick up the phone. Eventually, Sam answered.

"Rocco... John has your stuff in his cell," Sam said. "It was all a big mistake. He will explain."

"What?" I asked. Surely I was misunderstanding her.

"Just call him. Here is his number—"

"John has a phone in detention?"

"Yes."

carefully peruse our passports. Instead, they quickly flipped to blank pages and stamped our exit without question. It was beyond surreal, even after everything we had just experienced.

Robert and I looked at each other, shrugging our shoulders, and walked to our terminal to get some beers. Twelve hours later, after a layover in Mexico City, we were back in New York.

THE AFTERMATH

During and following my time with McAfee, I received information from multiple sources in Belize—much of which was unsolicited—regarding the murder of Gregory Faull.

A person who lived near McAfee and Gregory on Ambergris Caye and who spoke to me under the condition that he would remain anonymous claimed, “It wasn’t simply McAfee’s dogs that were poisoned. One of his other neighbors’ dogs was poisoned as well.” This person also said that Gregory Faull admitted he was planning on poisoning McAfee’s dogs and did so with food containing the pesticide Furadan (aka carbofuran) the night before his murder. Additionally, the source claimed that McAfee had murdered Gregory at his house or hired someone to do it, and that he had heard McAfee firing shots into the air the night his dogs died, screaming, “I’m going to find out who did this and have them killed.” McAfee denied these accusations and said he was certain he knew who my anonymous source was, claiming that this person had a vendetta against him.

I also spoke with San Pedro mayor Daniel Guerrero, whose jurisdiction covers the murder scene. “Who shot them?” he asked rhetorically, in reference to McAfee taking responsibility for shooting his dogs following their poisoning. “We don’t know,” Guerrero continued. “People are saying John killed them. But did he kill them? I don’t know. [The police] have not sent an official report as to what they have found and what is going on... The only thing I know is that the police probably found the shell that was used.” I asked Guerrero whether he

could comment on claims made by my anonymous source that Furadan was found on Greg’s property following his murder. “[The police] are still doing the investigation,” Guerrero said, “and I know quite a few things have been looked at, but whether they found something like that I cannot comment on at this time... The crime scene was contaminated so fast with so many neighbors going back and forth.”

Jeff Wise is one of the only journalists who wrote articles that, before McAfee became a person of interest in the murder of Gregory Faull, painted McAfee in a negative light. His pieces contained insinuations that McAfee had moved to Belize to dodge potentially costly lawsuits and corroboration to back them up. On November 12, Jeff wrote a piece for Gizmodo titled “Exclusive: John McAfee Wanted for Murder” a few hours ahead of the official police statement issued by the Belizeans later that day.

When I asked McAfee about his experiences with Jeff, he told me that he “was not a friend.” McAfee went on to allege that, due to a May 2010 piece for *Fast Company* in which Jeff wrote extensively about the myriad costly lawsuits that McAfee was potentially facing in the States, he believed Jeff was working with one of the law firms seeking to prosecute him. When I asked Jeff about these allegations, he said, “I think McAfee is a psychopath. And I don’t mean that in a mean way, I mean it in a clinical way.”

In Jeff’s December 9 *New York Times* piece about the media circus surrounding McAfee’s escape from Belize, he writes that he “received a curt email from a police official in Belize on Nov. 11, [which said] ‘It may interest you to know that there was a murder yesterday in San Pedro Town, Ambergris Caye and McAfee is the prime suspect.’”

The “police official” in question was Marco Vidal, head of the national police force’s Gang Suppression Unit, the government entity McAfee had claimed was behind his ongoing harassment

McAfee has lunch at a Guatemala City restaurant after a meeting with his lawyer and interviews with local reporters.





and persecution in Belize. Jeff confirmed, as he had alluded to in his piece for Gizmodo, that it was Marco who had leaked this information to him almost a full day before the official press release. I found it curious that such a high-level official would purposefully disclose such sensitive information, especially one who was not officially involved with the investigation of such a high-profile case. In the States, such actions would have severely impeded any semblance of a fair investigation or subsequent trial.

As so many other journalists had before me, I called Raphael Martinez, spokesman for Belize's Ministry of National Security. He confirmed that while the GSU has its own investigative unit, the San Pedro Police Department was in charge of the investigation of the murder of Gregory Faull. He said that "it should have been the San Pedro Police" who initially released information concerning McAfee as a person of interest in this case.

"I saw the blog that Jeff Wise wrote implicating Marco Vidal," Raphael said. "The investigating officer [is] not Marco Vidal, and the investigating officer as such [who came] out of it in terms of speaking with the media should not have been Vidal."

I asked Raphael whether this leak could potentially compromise the investigation in any way.

"I'm not sure what effect it will have," he said, "but I know that it was not the right way to go."

A few days after my return to New York, McAfee was released by the Guatemalans and flown to Miami without incident. His story (or nonstory, depending on your point of view) had stalled, perhaps because the media feeding frenzy stripped it to the bone.

Then on December 14, 20 elementary school students and six of their teachers and caretakers were brutally murdered during a mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. McAfee's response was to write a blog post for whoismcafee.com that listed the names of the victims and said he was taking some time away from the public eye in the wake of the horrifying incident.

About two weeks later, I got hold of McAfee on the phone. He said that he would not tell me his current location but that he was traveling "overland" across the US. Judging from his voice, he was as tense as he had been on the run in Belize and Guatemala. Sam and Amy were in Honduras, he said, and for the umpteenth time he declared his love for Sam, adding that both ladies would be back by his side soon.

I also asked, one last time, a question to which McAfee had not provided a clear answer (even for him): Why had he made it so hard on himself? Surely, an easier path to freedom was possible given his finances and supposed connections.

"They never gave me my fucking apology!" he shouted into the phone, referring to his initial arrest by the GSU for suspicion of methamphetamine production and unlicensed firearms in April 2012. "That's what civilized people do. I went to war. I go, 'Well, you just fucked with the wrong person here.'"

He then resumed the conversation that we had begun in Guatemala, when he pulled me into the foyer of the Asian restaurant and said that Belizean officials were funneling al-Qaeda into North America. He said he was ready to reveal the "larger story" to me, but that the Middle Eastern extremists being smuggled into Central America weren't al-Qaeda. They were Hezbollah, and the Belizeans were providing them with passports.

"I'm John McAfee," he said, as if it had been rehearsed. "I invented antivirus software. I can get into anyone's computer, but there's an easier way to do it [than hacking]. It's called social engineering, dude. The day after I got arrested, I started collecting women, started handing out computers; I have man friends who are great with secretaries, and inside of a month I had every fucking computer in the government wired—everyone

I was interested in."

He said that in early January he would release recordings and other data on his websites that would prove his most absurd and mind-boggling claim yet: that high-level officials in Belize were facilitating the smuggling of Hezbollah members into Central America, providing them with government-sanctioned passports registered to deceased members of the Belizean Amish. (McAfee also alluded to the fact that this discovery was connected to his fascination with the Amish drunks he was so determined to photograph at Lover's Bar in Orange Walk; however, the chronology doesn't quite line up, and he would not comment further on the matter besides saying, "We'll see.")

I told McAfee I was dubious. He told me he could provide proof and emailed me a ten-minute recording of a private conversation he had with a Belizean diplomat who helps to oversee international security matters that detail the supposed passport scam. (A few days later, on January 3, McAfee posted a modulated version of the recording that disguises the official's voice; he sent me the raw, unaltered audio file on the condition that I not divulge the source. I have independently confirmed that the voice on the recording sounds like that of the official in question. I was unable to discern whether his claims regarding the passport scam were given under duress or taken out of context.)

In the recording, the official reveals the names of the major players involved in the scheme in the late 90s and early 2000s

That evening the security staff provided me with a manifest listing the items taken from my room.

when a group of wealthy Lebanese businessmen operating in Belize lobbied the government for what came to be known as the Economic Citizenship Investment Program (a legal process by which businessmen who have made significant investments in the national economy can be fast-tracked for citizenship). Whether or not the persons in the recording were involved in the conspiracy and what their level of involvement was remains to be seen; however, the passport scam and ensuing trials were well documented by Belizean media until, eventually, all charges were dropped against its main players.

It has also been reported that several individuals connected to Hezbollah have been issued Belizean passports, or at the very least acquired counterfeit facsimiles. Last September, two Belizean-Lebanese men and a Belizean American were arrested in Merida City, Mexico, by the National Institute of Migration. According to reports by local and Belizean media, Mexican officials were working in tandem with US Homeland Security and the FBI to apprehend a "part of a cell of Hezbollah-linked Arab terrorists who were operating in Mexico and Central America." Two of the men arrested in the operation—Justin Yasser Safa and George Abdallah Elders—were carrying verifiable Belizean passports and were later released by Mexican authorities. The third alleged principal, Belizean-American Rafic Mohammad Labboun Allaboun, was deported to the US after it was discovered that his Belizean passport had been issued under the name Wilhelm Dick, an Amish Belizean who died in 1976 a few weeks after birth. There have also been several unconfirmed reports in the media that Rafic Mohammad had a role of some sort in the attack on the Twin Towers on

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Sam and McAfee couldn't keep their hands off each other, even while he shopped for a suit to wear to his press conference in Guatemala City.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: Telésforo and McAfee hold a press conference for local media outside city hall a day after his arrival in Guatemala City.

9/11. Some bad business was definitely going on somewhere.

The passport scam was the tip of a catastrophic iceberg, McAfee said, that the United States would inevitably careen into unless the scope of the operation was exposed. He said that late 2012 reports from Israeli media that Iran had helped to establish an Iranian-funded Hezbollah training camp in Nicaragua were true. Several international intelligence organizations had caught wind of the situation, he told me, but each was missing a piece of the puzzle—one he had now managed to stitch together. He said he knew the exact location of the camp (an abandoned Sandinista compound) and that it housed approximately 80 trainees who had entered Central America through Belize, where they procured passports before making their way to Nicaragua via Honduras. On completion of their training, he said, they would be shuttled through Mexico and, eventually, into the States. He also said that the camp's residents were cultivating castor beans, from which they were extracting large quantities of ricin that, he said, would be used to poison municipal water supplies in the States.

McAfee told me, and later stated on his blog, that he had unraveled this scheme in the months following his April arrest after donating dozens of computers that had been outfitted with keystroke loggers to the Belizean government, providing him with gigabytes of proof of government corruption and shady dealings. He said that if he wanted dirt on an official who did not receive one of his bugged machines, he would send in one of his girlfriends (or, in a few cases, attractive men under his employ) to seduce his targets and install keystroke loggers on their computers and other devices at the first opportunity. This digital information funnel, he said, had also aided him in evading the government during his weeks on the run.

But this revelation about Hezbollah in Belize and Nicaragua, McAfee said, was truly his end game, and he would be going “underground” once again while continuing to analyze and leak

information acquired from this data.

“I am departing civilization and heading into the wilderness,” he said. “At least for a little while.” Knowing McAfee and his penchant for attention, I can’t believe he will stick to this declaration. But then again, I never thought he would make it out of the detention center in Guatemala City.

All of this presents an unusual but appropriately titillating conclusion to McAfee’s story, or at least its current chapter: If he offers conclusive proof that Belize and Central America are in bed with Hezbollah, history will remember him as a bafflingly eccentric Julian Assange-type figure who brought the world some very hard truths at all costs and with a truly bizarre sense of panache.

If McAfee’s latest claims are a deceitful attempt to once again enter the news cycle, it will be game over. The public and, by extension, the mass media will not tolerate lies about terrorism or international security, and his misguided ruse will definitively discredit anything and everything he has said in the past or will say in the future. He will be shunned, confirmed to be the total lunatic so many believe him to be, and no one will care anymore outside of Alex Jones and the tinfoil-hat crowd.

Regardless of how things turn out for McAfee, I must admit that during one of our last phone conversations, a few days before the New Year, he left me with some infallible words of wisdom: “You don’t fuck with old people. We want to drift silently and comfortably into oblivion. Those who mess with us are in for a hard fucking time. And they fucked with the wrong dude. I will bring down [Belizean prime minister] Barrow and his government.”

After we hung up, I could only wonder: How many will be dragged into the abyss along the way? *WCS*

McAfee on the balcony of his hotel in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, four days after being returned to the States following his release from an immigration detention center in Guatemala City.



