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## JUST A JUGGALO

**T**

he beginning of the book *The Gathering Of The Juggalos* tells the poignant story of 'Knox' (real name Cody), a 24-year-old 'Juggalo' who walked 2,000 miles across the US to reach an annual five-day music festival known as

The Gathering. To put that into perspective, that's like walking (and presumably swimming a bit) to the Download metal festival in Derbyshire all the way from Ankara in Turkey. It's a bit of a trek...

"Knox described the journey as his own pilgrimage," says the book's photographer, Daniel Cronin. "He'd been dumped by his girlfriend and needed that time walking alone to sort things out. To me, Knox epitomises what the perfect Juggalo is. He's had his hard times and been shunned by certain sections of society, but he persevered and found calm with an alternative group of like-minded outsiders."

A Juggalo (or 'Juggalette') is the name given to a fan of Detroit's 'horrorcore' rap duo Insane Clown Posse (ICP) and their affiliated hip-hop acts. Like all Juggalos, Knox is proud of his membership. So proud, in fact, that he's been stabbed for his troubles – but that hasn't stopped him from wearing his allegiance like a badge of honour. Nor has it deterred him

from traipsing 2,000-miles to prove his unquestionable loyalty to the ICP cause.

Most outsider groups get thrown a bit of shit here and there, but few have been splattered as much as the Juggalos. Being a Juggalo takes balls. They're ridiculed for apparently possessing abysmally bad music taste, and are generally perceived by mainstream society to be drunk, poor, uneducated, badly dressed and thuggish. Some law enforcement agencies have gone so far as to classify the Juggalos as a criminal street gang, and there's an ongoing campaign at [JuggalosFightBack.com](http://JuggalosFightBack.com) to get that status wiped.

But adversity only serves to bring the Juggalos closer. Every year since 2000, in the vast outback of Midwest America, thousands of Juggalos congregate at their annual festival, which takes





## “SHIT ON BY THE MEDIA AND BY THEIR FRIENDS, FAMILIES...”

place at the Hogrock Campgrounds in Illinois – literally the middle of nowhere. And, according to the people who go there, the one thing that grabs you (besides the face paint, the ‘running hatchetman’ tattoos – an ICP symbol – and unconventional dress sense) is the overwhelming sense of togetherness and acceptance. There’s a warming, us-against-them mentality here. If you’ve seen the Clive Barker film *Nightbreed* (or read the source novel *Cabal*) where all of the world’s monsters hide underground in a place called Midian, it’s a little like that. Only with a whole lotta Glastonbury or Woodstock mixed in so they can all get their jollies while they’re at it.

“The Gathering of the Juggalos is the four or five days of the year that these people get to be themselves and feel totally comfortable with who they are, whether that’s from painting their faces or walking around butt-naked,” says Cronin.

“Juggalos really look forward to this festival. They get shit on by the media and by their friends, families, fellow students and colleagues who can’t understand why they’re into this – but for those five days, everyone accepts them. It’s a place that they can let their freak flags fly high.”

### CLOWNING AROUND

The Gathering is put on by the Insane Clown Posse and their label Psychopathic Records, and has no corporate sponsorship or branding whatsoever. In many respects, the Insane Clown Posse themselves are the ultimate *Bizarre* band – even if you detest their music. They’re a cultural enigma; a pantomime horror hip-hop duo with flamboyant dress sense, who have formed their own wrestling organisation, the appropriately-called Juggalo Championship Wrestling (JCW), are involved in various

charity campaigns, and divide opinion quicker than a shipment of Marmite. Their music is not so much critically panned as utterly reviled, yet they have also sold millions of records. More significantly, they’ve single-handedly created their own outsider subculture – thus why we have The Gathering festival. No other musical act in the world can stake that claim.

You only need to watch ICP’s video for their 2009 song ‘Miracles’ to understand what makes these boys tick. Unlike the angsty-clown-orchestrated violence of earlier tracks, this song celebrates how beautiful our world is. It’s blessed with a heart the size of the sun, yet also contains lyrics so laughably ludicrous (“fuckin’ magnets, how do they work?”) that you can’t help but snigger and question its sincerity. But that video has had more than 12m YouTube hits. →



After befriending some Juggalos at a local show in his hometown of Portland, Oregon, the now 29-year-old Daniel Cronin saw this unapologetic fanbase as a great subject to document in photography. He was encouraged to visit The Gathering festival in 2010 and ended up returning for two further years, shooting what became his book *The Gathering Of The Juggalos*.

The festival itself features a giant ensemble of musical performers, and some of the names are actually very appealing, with past acts that include the likes of Ice Cube, Ice T, Funkadelic and Andrew WK. It also hosts various other

joyful activities including wrestling, after-hours comedy, strange sideshows, and band seminars where fans quiz the acts in a giant tent. But Cronin specifically wanted to capture the Juggalos themselves, portraying these revellers away from all the carnivalesque commotion and devilry.

"A lot of people write off ICP because they say their music is childish, and certainly a lot of the earlier stuff is very violent and silly lyrics-wise," says Cronin, who confesses to not being a fan of ICP's music. "But once I started talking to the Juggalos and photographing them, I realised that there is something special beyond the music which I find very admirable,

and that is camaraderie. Most of the photos I'd seen of the Juggalos in the media focused on them partying and getting stoned, and had made The Gathering seem like a wild festival, which it is. But their reportage made the people look reckless and nothing else. I wanted to capture the softer, quieter, more intimate moments. A lot of The Gathering is all about hanging out, talking and barbequing."

**PROUD TO BE DIFFERENT**

The book's introduction mentions that the Juggalos welcome you with open arms on one condition: that you aren't there to judge or poke fun.

**"I WANTED TO CAPTURE THE MORE INTIMATE MOMENTS"**





The irony isn't lost on Cronin that there is a clearly voyeuristic element to his gripping portrait shots. Some of the pictures, it could be argued, support some of the mainstream preconceptions and stereotypes of the Juggalos. But behind every painted face is a story, and that's what Cronin hoped to capture; he wanted to show that these are real people coming together and striving for a great time.

"I realise there are people who will gawk at this work and it's tough for me," he says. "I took those photos from a caring perspective, and I find myself getting defensive over Juggalos and their culture. Once you read the book's foreword or research them more, you'll realise these are everyday people who happen to enjoy

painting their faces. Someone might laugh at one guy's appearance, but that one guy may have offered me a bottle of water because I was carrying a giant camera around all day in 95-degree heat and was really thirsty. These are real people with real stories behind them. Of course, there's a dichotomy in taking these photos but also trying to get people to appreciate The Gathering a little more. In the US especially, people like to look at photos of Juggalos and sit back and laugh. But the Juggalos see The Gathering as a safe haven to not be judged and to do what they want."

Cronin observes that the average age group for the Juggalos is 18-30, with a demographic predominately based around Midwest America,

close to ICP's hometown of Detroit, Michigan, but there are also Juggalos into their 40s and 50s, and a tiny few who jet over from Europe for the festivities (that figure is steadily growing). Again, Cronin makes the point that the outside world's perception of them is skewed. "Contrary to the average American view of Juggalos being drug addicts and uneducated kids from the Midwest, you'll also find Juggalos who are successful college students or people holding down successful jobs," he says. "I consider the Juggalo subculture to be very similar to punk rock. These people feel like outcasts, but instead of being handed a Sex Pistols CD, someone's handed them an Insane Clown Posse record and they've identified with that. They've also →



become a tight-knit group who watch out for each other, which is something I don't think you always find in other music subcultures."

If it's a cheap preconception to dismiss Juggalos as "white trash", it's probably a major misconception to fear them all as menacing outlaws, creating havoc in the wilderness and likely to nab the hubcaps on your Honda Civic.

Since the first Gathering in 2000, the festival has earned a reputation as one of the most controversial festivals in the world. True, it has had its share of dramas; in 2001 the main stage collapsed after too many fans rushed it, and in 2003 the police tried to stop Juggalettes from showing their breasts, which resulted in a riot – at least according to Wikipedia. But their current residence at Hogrock Campgrounds is on private soil, meaning that the police aren't allowed entry unless invited or specifically called for help. And it seems their services haven't been needed. Instead, Psychopathic Records provide their own security. And if you can overlook reports of Playboy model Tila Tequila trying to get the festival shut down after she was "bottled" in 2010, there hasn't been much trouble reported.

Cronin refers back again to that warming sense of camaraderie, the overriding message in his photographic project. Everyone here loves each other. That's the point of being a Juggalo...

"During the three years I was there, I never saw any fights," says the photographer. "If there was ever some kind of tension simmering, then everyone just started chanting 'FAM-ER-LEE, FAM-ER-LEE, FAM-ER-LEE...', and all the people involved calmed down and went back to having a great time. The Juggalos call themselves 'The Family'. And that's exactly what it is." **B**

For more arresting portrait shots of the always-put-down-but-never-defeated Juggalos, *The Gathering Of The Juggalos* by Daniel Cronin, with a foreword by Camille Dodero, is available now, published by Prestel Publishing. Go get a copy, folks!

## THE PEOPLE VS THE JUGGALOS

Here are definitions of what a Juggalo is from the website [UrbanDictionary.com](http://UrbanDictionary.com)

- "For the most part, an uneducated, pathetic excuse for a human being who listens to the group ICP who are bold enough to actually consider themselves musicians. They should not be allowed to reproduce, because that is too cruel to future generations."

- "A fat teenager with a kool aid moustache and no friends who listens to songs about clowns in his stepmother's double wide mobile home when he isn't at the mall food court."

- "Confused individuals that are a product of the breakdown of the white middle class / lower class family, hero worship, and the emasculatory expectations of society. Usually characterised as indolent, witless, self-glorifying, and speak a lot of shit about anyone but are never concerned about backing it up because they won't. All these traits are an attempt for a cohesive group structure that will tolerate their unfounded angst / effeminate actions."

