



MOSCOW'S NIGHT WOLVES MC A LIVING LEGEND

Something about the good old US of A and that hell-bent spirit of freedom and independence has a way of reaching some of the most geographically remote and politically isolated corners of the globe. It's truly an eye-opening experience to be tooling around or hiking—or whatever—deep in the Peruvian Amazon, then suddenly come upon a primitive Indian wearing a *ROCKY III* T-shirt. Or better yet, trucking across the Sahara and passing a camel jockey wearing a Madonna button—now there's a fit.

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One rumor of American influence that was seldom seen but often heard shortly after midnight, was a fierce pack of bikers with black leathers and long hair roaring across Russian soil in defiance of their oppressive government. They call themselves the Night Wolves MC.

Up until recently, no one believed that they actually existed, mainly because acknowledging them as a real life group instead of some kind of modern folk myth or legend would be a direct slap in the face of the old Soviet

government. 'Course, these days, the Russian bros dedicated to their own independent lifestyle are easier to spot, even when the sun shines. In fact, they can usually be seen blasting down the back alleys of Moscow, then along Gorky Street where they pull into an old joint called Margaritas. This restaurant is one of the Night Wolves favorite hangouts, and up until a short time ago, it had been banned and shut down by the Soviet government—to the tune of 30 long, dry years.

The Night Wolves MC was

formed in sworn secrecy in 1982. Back in those days of iron-fisted Soviet rule, long hair, earrings, beards, tats, and, especially, Harley-Davidson motorcycles were considered by the government to be a revolutionary symbol of Western decadence. The government had very specific ways of dealing with anyone who flaunted such symbols. The Night Wolves had good reason to do most of their riding in the blackness of Moscow nights.

Sasha, the Night Wolves president, who rides a '42 Harley-Davidson

flathead, explains that the group was originally formed from a common love of riding and a mutual defiance of the system that suppressed their freedom.

As far as the way they looked next to other Muscovites, any deviation from the proletariat norm was not easily condoned. Russians waited in long lines at the state-owned stores where clothes, like everything else, were scarce. Levi's, for example, were available only on the blackmarket, and if they were available at all they could set you back a good four or →



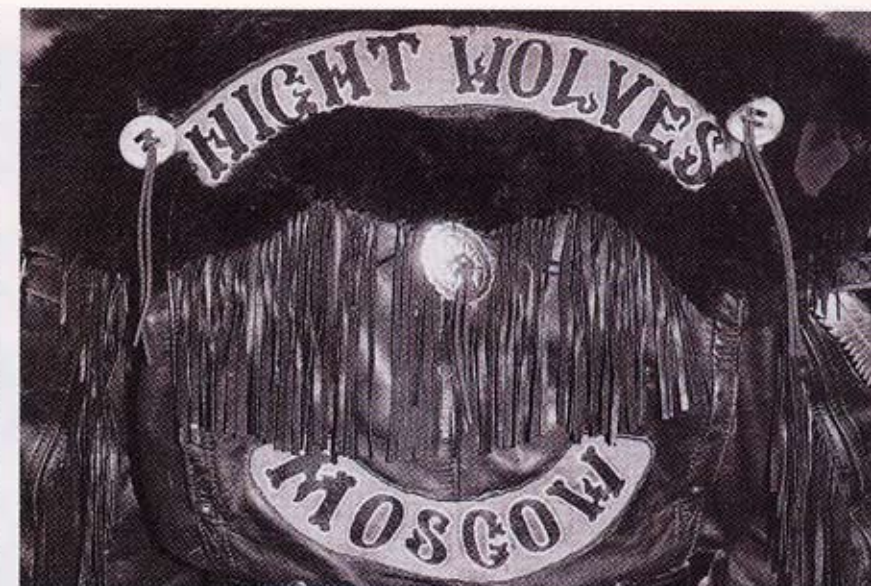
five weeks wages. It's not hard to imagine how near-impossible it was to piece together their rides. And trusting no one but themselves was one of the primary tools used to get the job done.

Early on, long hair and black leather prompted suspicion from the police, and many a Wolf endured his share of nights in jail, as well as confiscation of his scooter. But the one thing they always maintained through it all was secrecy about their group identity—which on more than one occasion required a stiff price.

Many painters, poets, musicians, and writers turned to the Night Wolves for help, relying on them for safe haven at their hideouts

Back in the hard-line days of communism, when the secret biker group was formed, career advancement for Soviet citizens was often linked to how many people you ratted on, and more important, how close they were to you. Turning in a relative or close friend was worth more than ratting on a recent acquaintance. Those who opposed the system or openly protested it were hounded by the KGB and sent to Siberia if they did not publicly renounce their ideologies and embrace the party line.

As a result, many painters, poets,



musicians, and writers turned to the Night Wolves for help, relying on them for safe haven at their hideouts and for security at their respective concerts and openings.

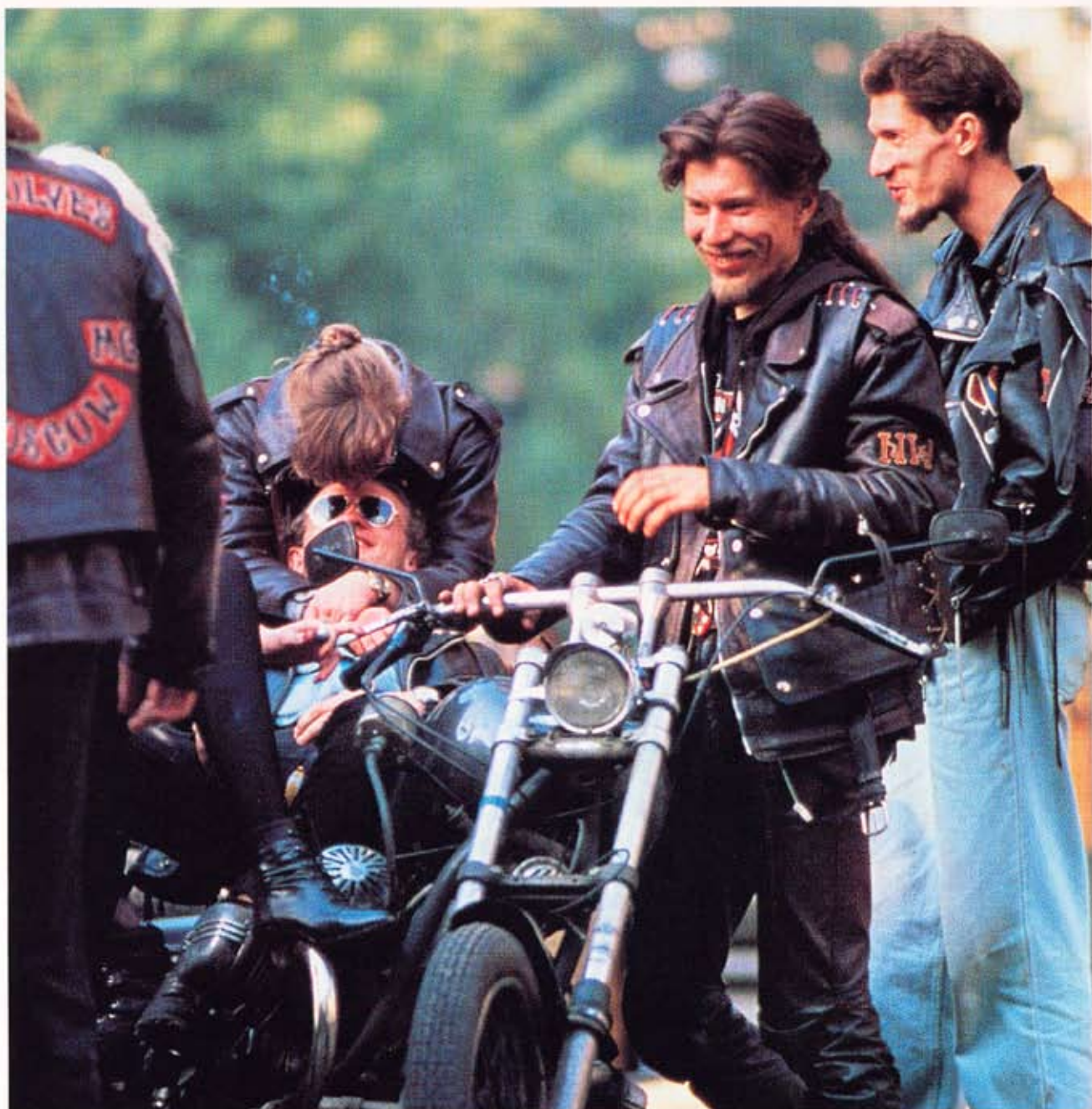
For years, Night Wolves remained invisible, their true identities revealed only unto themselves and a very select trusted few. Colors would have made them easy prey and were not worn until three years ago. Today, however, the Night Wolves wear their colors with pride, and even in a much freer society they still have to do what it takes to back those colors up.

Just recently, they were partying with some London rockers at Moscow's velodrome when the feared Chen Chen mafia made the mistake of threatening the Night Wolves' leader, Sasha (aka *Hirouka*, which means "the surgeon"), who was just sitting there, minding his own business.

Not more than a half-second later, the Chen Chen tough guy was flying backwards across the room, having fallen victim to an unexpectedly powerful headbutt. The stunned Chen Chen lunged once more toward the fearless

Wolf, who met him with a bone-crunching left to the stomach and a blinding right to the face. The bloody-faced mafioso collapsed to the floor, where he shouted for backup. Thirty Chen Chens with sticks and knives surrounded the biker warrior, who was backed only by a handful of his brothers. With the bikers outnumbered a good three to one, the rumble lasted 15 minutes.

When the police broke it up, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that the Night Wolves had kicked some serious Chen Chen ass. →



Photos: Robert Curran

Even the police showed their gratitude to the bikers for standing up to the formidable mafia. The Wolves were released after only half a night in jail.

Although democracy is making decent progress in Russia these days, the Night Wolves will continue to remain apart, trusting no one but themselves as they continue to make a mark for individual freedom and lay their fiercely defiant tread across a new chapter of Russian history.

—Clay Dog and Robert Curran

