At the end of an 11-mile trail, deep in the heart of old Hawaii, lies a hidden valley where society’s burnouts and dropouts found solace and reinvention in a community of self-proclaimed Outlaws living off the bounty of the land, practicing free love, and answering to nothing but their bliss. Then along came a drifter with a criminal past whose pursuit of earthly pleasures invited ruin into this real-world Eden. By Kelley McMillan
Jersey, summarizes the tribal code. For the most part, the self-policing 39-year-old professional musician and Outlaw from Hopatcong, New steal. Be respectful. Don’t bring violence to the valley” is how Red, a “frightening.” Pierce Brosnan celebrated his 50th birthday with the Mitty, lies on public land. Shortly before he signed up for house close by, and Mark Zuckerberg was recently hunting for a home end of the trail, the rewards are immediate. “It’s like going back through with “Bless your way, goddess.” To reach this slice of paradise, you follow the 11-mile Kalalau trail, pass five canyons that drop into the sea and terraced hillside brimming with mango and guava trees, scramble up a red-dirt hill, and then behold it: a lush valley, like in a Frederic Church painting, that recedes into scalloped mountainsides laced with waterfalls and draped in fragrant plumeria flowers and passion-fruit trees. After a hike down to the beach, a quick survey reveals the bounty: tomatoes and wild basil line the trail, and a pristine freshwater stream flows, teeming with prawns and watercress. In a very real sense, it is the land of plenty. Philosophers, artists, and writers have long mused about man’s search for an earthly paradise. Sir Thomas More’s Utopia described a fictional island society and gave us a colorful new word, while James Hilton’s 1933 novel Lost Horizons introduced Shangri-La, a mystical valley where the inhabitants enjoyed serious longevity. As for the modern-day model, well, if Leonardo DiCaprio were looking for a real-world version where the inhabitants enjoyed serious longevity. As for the modern-day model, well, if Leonardo DiCaprio were looking for a real-world version of The Beach, he’d find it in Kalalau. Here, the Outlaws—spiritual seekers, burned-out professionals, social outcasts—live a back-to-nature lifestyle, drinking wine made from passion fruit, sucking on fresh mangoes, roasting wild boar and goat (the testicles are a Thanksgiving treat), while operating a barter economy for those necessities the valley doesn’t provide (tobacco is highly prized). Topless women roam the riverbanks offering massages in exchange for fruit, sucking on fresh mangoes, roasting wild boar and goat (the testicles are a Thanksgiving treat), while operating a barter economy for those necessities the valley doesn’t provide (tobacco is highly prized). Topless women roam the riverbanks offering massages in exchange for weed, psychedelic mushrooms, and LSD. When I arrived last summer to live among the Outlaws for 10 days, one such woman greeted me with “Bless your way, goddess.” For travelers and professionals from around the globe who hike to the end of the trail, the rewards are immediate. “It’s like going back through time,” says Heath Haacke, a 36-year-old attorney from Park City, Utah, who is packing up after a four-day stay to recharge. Will Smith owned a house close by, and Mark Zuckerberg was recently hunting for a home near the valley, which, as part of the Na Pali Coast State Wilderness Park, lies on public land. Shortly before he signed up for The Secret Life of Walter Mitty, about an office-bound daydreamer yearning for an adventurous life, Ben Stiller hiked the Kalalau trail, describing it as “beautiful” and “frightening.” Pierce Brosnan celebrated his 50th birthday with the Outlaws, enjoying their signature pizza under a lunar eclipse. For years, the Outlaws were able to keep their existence a relative secret, living peacefully and abiding by basic commandments. “Don’t steal, be respectful. Don’t bring violence to the valley” is how Red, a 39-year-old professional musician and Outlaw from Hopatcong, New Jersey, summarizes the tribal code. For the most part, the self-policing worked and the Outlaws lived under the radar, albeit illegally, as squatters in a national park. But that changed one evening in December 2012, when a recent arrival named Justin Klein, a handsome 37-year-old drifter from Eugene, Oregon, hiked with a couple of Japanese tourists to the valley’s heiau, a holy structure on a steep promontory built 1,000 years ago by Polynesians, who performed rituals at these sacred spots, including human sacrifice. On this night, Klein allegedly threw one of the Japanese women, who had recently become his lover, off the cliff—setting in motion a chain of events that would push the Outlaws’ seemingly idyllic society to the brink of collapse. Shortly after dawn on Halloween 2012, Justin Klein woke to the sound of a goat braying. Klein, six feet one, lean, and sporting an impeccably groomed mohawk and goatee, was camping by the beach, about 50 yards from A Camp, the social hub of Kalalau’s loose-knit community and the home of its de facto chief, Alekai Kinimaka, a 53-year-old hard-drinking, pot-smoking former pro surfer with a penchant for playing the ukulele. The goat was caught in another man’s snare, and although stealing is a serious transgression among Outlaws, Klein decapitated the animal with a machete and claimed it as his own. Klein had arrived in Kalalau a few weeks earlier and was often found hanging around A Camp, a tarp-roofed compound overlooking the beach with two open-fire grills, several hammocks, folding chairs, and coolers stocked with Gatorade, eggs, bacon, and cold beer. Newcomers would often perform chores for Kinimaka in return for access to his supply of food, booze, and weed. He collected water, kept the camp tidy, and cooked meals for Kinimaka and his guests. Klein was born in Oregon and spent much of his adult life there. After dropping out of high school in his junior year, Klein opened a successful landscaping business in Eugene, where he lived in a house on 12 acres with a small farm—he was an avid outdoorsman and hunter. At 19, he got married, and he and his wife went on to have two daughters. Around 2008, his marriage, and then his business, began to implode. He spent the next several years flailing around town before deciding, in May 2012, to seek a fresh start in Hawaii. But Klein couldn’t settle, and after four months of exploring the islands, he landed in Kalalau. He didn’t arrive with much gear or many material possessions to barter with, so he survived by getting things—food, shelter, tools—from others. “He was intelligent, was a good-looking guy, and he was helpful,” says Larry, 49, a former Coast Guard helicopter mechanic who has lived in Kalalau on and off since 1996. Sometimes, however, Klein exploited others to get what he needed, according to Richard Pecjak, a 50-year-old photographer from San Diego.
who was friendly with Klein during a three-week stay. “He was a master manipulator, and he didn’t really have anything to contribute except his Charles Mansonesque personality,” Pecjak says.

Klein was said to have a God complex and was prone to launch into bizarre rants. “He had this whole rap about how he’s Zeus and Prometheus and Satan and Gandhi,” Pecjak says. Klein also believed in the Mayan doomsday, that the end of the world would arrive on 12/21/12. But he didn’t strike anyone as being particularly out there, according to Larry, because it takes a lot to be considered weird in Kalalau. What Klein did strike them as was charismatic. “Whenever he rolled into someone’s campsite, he stole the center of attention,” Pecjak says. Klein quickly emerged as one of Kalalau’s alpha males.

Shortly after his arrival, Klein started spending time with Tara (not her real name), a lithe 28-year-old midwestern graduate of a Big Ten school, with long brown hair and pert breasts that were on display as she floated around the valley perpetually naked.

Tara remembers meeting Klein at A Camp. “He seemed friendly, like a sturdy person, confident but relaxed,” she says. They became close, making pizzas, collecting firewood, and sleeping on the beach together. Gradually, their friendship turned romantic, though they were never exclusive—“I saw him really be a beautiful person,” she says before adding that “he was in his own world.” She says Klein told her he liked the psychedelic drug DMT, and she’d heard that he believed the heiau was a portal to another dimension. He often drifted into apocalyptic reveries, talking to her about the end of the world, nuclear explosions, and mass genocide.

And now he had slaughtered someone else’s goat. According to an Outlaw who was camping with him at the time, Klein needed a smaller knife to butcher the beast, so he went down to A Camp, where he met Brooks, who was checking on some of the 50-plus snares he had set up. According to Brooks, Klein asked to borrow his knife. “I asked him, ‘What do you need a knife for?’” Klein replied that he had snared a goat. “You went and raided my fucking snares, took my animal, and now you’re asking me for a knife to butcher my animal?” Brooks recalls telling Klein. “I said, ‘Fuck this guy. I’m out of here.’”

Soon after, Klein suffered an infection in his foot from a wound he’d gotten by stepping on a thorn while picking oranges. He was too sick to prep the goat, so he lugged it up the valley to a camp called Three Mangoes, which has a community kitchen, and left the animal on a rock before hobbling off. Three Outlaws prepared and cooked the goat for that evening’s Halloween festivities. Brooks and 40 others—one wearing a goat-skin loincloth, another smeared in purple java-plum juice, and another wearing fern leaves and red ginger flowers—gathered to drink papaya wine, feast on goat stew, and dance around bonfires to drums, flutes, and ukuleles. Klein chose to brood alone in the dark, trying to shake off the pain and feverish shivers as he listened to the bacchanalia rage on till late into the night.

Looking back on his first meeting with Klein, Brooks says, “I got a bad vibe, and I thought, ‘This guy isn’t going to last long.’” At his camp near Three Mangoes, a dug-out dirt hut with a smooth stone floor, rock walls, and camouflaged tarp for a roof, Brooks wonders whether he and the others should have seen signs in Klein’s behavior of the troubles ahead. “There’s a Zen-like tolerance for all kinds of people, from all walks of life, no matter what their package is, no matter what their
mental problem is," Brooks says. "That's why individuals like Justin Klein end up finding a niche here, because they're tolerated. We're all hoping they'll exercise the better half of themselves, though we don't know what's going to happen in the end."

ON THE AFTERNOON OF DECEMBER 8, AZUSA INO, 31, AND MARIE Koga, 29, visitors from Japan, arrived in Kalalau as part of an around-the-world adventure. They planned on staying a few nights, hoping to make it to Chichen Itza, Mexico, for the Mayan doomsday. They crossed the river bisecting the valley and passed the heiau before encountering Pecjak. The girls were "quiet, modest, and attractive," recalls Pecjak, who had endured a traumatic day in paradise: It had gotten off to a fine start when he snared two papio and an o‘io, but when he went for a swim around noon, he nearly drowned in a huge surf. He survived, he says, because of lifesaving tips dispensed by Klein a few days earlier.

When Pecjak returned to his tent with Ino and Koga, Klein was there. After they decided to have a big fish fry that night with Pecjak’s catch, Klein coozied up to the Japanese women as they helped prepare the fish. A group of Outlaws gathered for dinner, some of them ogling Ino, who Pecjak says wore a loose blouse and flashed her bare breasts every time she bent over. As the sun went down, they feasted on grilled fish, sashimi, and pizza. After dinner, they gathered around a bonfire on the beach, where Tara played the ukulele and sang Hawaiian songs naked. Klein eyed Ino from across the fire and said, according to Pecjak, “I’m going to tear that girl apart.” According to Tara, Klein said, “I really want that girl to come sleep with us.” It wasn’t long before Klein and Ino walked off in the direction of Klein’s camp. When they returned, Klein told Pecjak that they’d hooked up. Later that night, says Tara, she joined Ino and Klein in a threesome on the beach, and over the next few days a casual romance between Ino and Klein developed. By that point, Ino had swapped her designer duds for sarongs and a bed-sheet toga. “They were Hello Kitty’d–out when they arrived,” Pecjak says, “but within a few days they’d gone native.”

Klein soon persuaded the Japanese women to extend their stay indefinitely. But in the following days, his musings continued to lurch from lucid to manic. “He was saying demented shit—that he was God, that he hated tourists and was going to shoot at the cruise ship off the cliffside trail,” says Emmett Milbank, a 27-year-old marketing executive from Boston who spent nearly six weeks in Kalalau. During this time, Tara began to distance herself from Klein—she’d grown weary of the ménage à trois.

Late in the afternoon of December 16, Tara was hanging out with friends at Goddess Camp when an Outlaw named Elyse approached them. “There’s been an incident with one of the Japanese girls and maybe Justin,” Elyse said. “Somebody needs to come be with her.”

Tara followed Elyse down the trail toward the heiau. They saw Ino splayed out on the rocks below—her face was badly bloodied, and although she was conscious, she was unable to move. Tara knelt beside her and applied pressure to a wound above her eye that was gushing blood. “She was in complete shock,” Tara says. Ino’s friend Koga had witnessed the incident but spoke little English, so she tried to show the others what had happened. Through a violent pantomime, Tara says, Koga indicated that Klein, who was nowhere to be seen, had grabbed Ino and thrown her off the cliff beside the heiau, 15 feet onto the rocks below. Using a two-way radio, one Outlaw called a helicopter, and Ino and Koga were airlifted to Wilcox Memorial Hospital on the other side of Kauai in Lihue.

That night, as word of the incident made its way through the valley, Outlaws emerged from their camps and gathered in groups on the beach in a heavy downpour, which only added to the ominous vibe. Another group retreated to a beachside cave, where there was only one way in and one way out—easier to defend. Some slept with machetes. Klein had always cut an imposing figure among the Outlaws—but an out-of-control alpha male lurking in the shadows of the dense valley? “We were scared that he was hiding in the woods—it was creepy, eerie,” Milbank says. “I was fucking terrified,” says Tara. “I didn’t know what state of mind he was in.”

“WHO’S IN YOUR FUCKING TENT?!” THAT WAS THE RUDE AWAKENING Emmett Milbank got early on the morning after Klein’s disappearance. A joint SWAT team from Kauai PD and the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) had surrounded Milbank’s camp, automatic rifles drawn, as he drank coffee. “Do you know this guy? Where is he?” an officer shouted, shoving a picture of Klein in his face. They poked their guns into Milbank’s buddy’s tent and demanded to see camping permits and IDs. Outlaws could be heard running every which way, yelling, “It’s a raid!” But this was more than a raid; it was a full-on manhunt.

Kalalau has a history of harboring fugitives. In 1893, a Hawaiian leper named Ko’olau hid in the valley to evade an army patrol sent to capture him and take him to the leper colony on Molokai. Today’s Outlaws trace their roots to Taylor Camp, a hippie commune founded at the beginning of the Kalalau trail in the 1960s by the actress Elizabeth Taylor’s brother Howard. In 1974, Kalalau was folded into Na Pali Coast State Wilderness Park and a permit system made long-term camping illegal. After the government shuttered Taylor Camp in 1977, the hippies scattered, and some hiked 11 miles down the trail, deeper into the bush, where they were less accessible to the authorities. The government has been trying to roust the community from Kalalau ever since. DLNR officers conduct periodic sweeps, which the Outlaws evade by hiding in the jungle. Archaeologists claim the illegal residents damage his heiau, but officers conduct periodic sweeps, which the Outlaws evade by hiding in the jungle. Archaeologists claim the illegal residents damage his heiau, and many island residents fear the lawlessness of Kalalau. “You’re crazy to go out there without a shotgun,” says Randy Wichman, 55, a former president of the Kauai Historical Society who has lived in Haena, a small town at the start of the Kalalau trail, his entire life. “It’s a place for lost souls.”

For three days, the SWAT team and other authorities combed the campsites, the beach, and the valley in the hunt for Klein as helicopters hovered. The authorities were shocked by how established the community was and ejected 60 people from Kalalau, but they failed to find the one they came for: Klein. The police shut down the main highways that bisect the island and set up checkpoints.

With Klein on the loose, even the Outlaws who weren’t kicked out...
wrestled with whether to leave their paradise. “It was like they had dark clouds around them. They were full of fear,” Tara says. Four days after Klein fled the heiau, about 10 Outlaws, including Tara and Larry, the former Coast Guard mechanic, chose to hike out of the valley.

For three weeks, the Kalalau trail was closed as the search continued. While many Outlaws relocated to another state park on the island, Brooks hid out in the woods and, like Klein, evaded the authorities, though they did find and destroy Brooks’ camp, he says, stealing $16,000 worth of tools—the DLNR claims this was part of the effort to clean up trash left over by the “squatters.” After four months on the run, Klein turned himself in on April 6, 2013, at Lydgate Beach Park, more than 30 miles from the beginning of the Kalalau trail. Before surrendering, he posted a rambling, garbled Facebook message: “I’ve never been innocent nor should I. Ever be convicted of crimes I creat life as we go as the world continues so dose all your suffering of cyclic existence you all really want another 1000 yrs of suffering just try me I am not guilty at all.” He also called his sister Jody Pearson in Georgia, and she says he told her he’d taken five hits of acid and had been dancing with Ino on the heiau—the fall had been an accident. According to Pearson, Klein said he and Ino were “in bliss. . . . I wasn’t trying to hurt her.” He said he’d been in the valley while the police were looking for him and had survived on wild goats and vegetables.

Pearson painted a desperate picture of Klein’s life in Eugene—he was institutionalized in a state mental hospital for several months in 2011 and has a rap sheet that includes reckless endangerment, burglary, and arson, after setting fire to a church. His life began to unravel when he started smoking crystal meth six years ago, Pearson says. Her brother headed to Kauai because “he thought Kauai was paradise.”

At his arraignment, Klein pleaded not guilty to a charge of second-degree attempted murder. In June, he was determined to be mentally fit to stand trial. He is being held on $1 million bail while he awaits his trial, scheduled for this February. If he’s convicted, Klein could face life in prison. “We believe the victim could have been killed—it was a very serious fall,” says Justin Kollar, a County of Kauai prosecuting attorney.

A week after Klein turned himself in, I had a brief telephone conversation with him. He sounded intelligent and coherent until he asked me how long my article would be, because telling his story would be like writing the “living story of Christ.” Soon after that, our time ran out. Klein did not respond to subsequent letters, and the Kauai Community Correctional Facility’s public-information officer declined requests to set up another interview with him. His lawyer, Stephanie Sato, has said she cannot comment on the case.

Ino sustained severe injuries to her head and face and spent 11 days in critical condition before returning to Japan. She has declined all requests to be interviewed—it also turns out she is married.

After the park reopened in January 2013, some Outlaws began to trickle back. They returned to find that their camps, gardens, traps, and kayaks had been destroyed, along with the illusion that they were out of civilization’s reach. Post-Klein, life in the valley is a different proposition. Ranger raids are frequent, and wardens now stand watch at the start of the trail, checking camping permits. Tension between islanders and the Outlaws is at an all-time high, because locals believe the Outlaws helped shelter Klein while he was on the run. “Justin fucked it for everybody,” says Pecjak.

Tara returned to Kalalau last October and lamented the changes. “Is this place truly different, or is it just the same as anywhere else?” she says. But Larry, who returned a month after the park reopened, sees Kalalau as a home, no more or less. And in the wake of the tragic fall that shook the valley, he can scarcely conceal his contempt for those who worship this idyll—who see it as a panacea or a paradise. “Where is that place?” he asks as he sits on a bluff overlooking the impossibly blue-hued Pacific. “The peace is within. It’s not somewhere else.”

The Outlaws continue to honor the heiau, a sacred stone structure built more than a thousand years ago by Polynesians, who performed rituals there, possibly including human sacrifice. On December 16, 2012, Justin Klein, who had recently joined up with the Outlaws in Kalalau, allegedly threw his lover, a Japanese tourist, from the heiau onto the rocks below, before disappearing into the lush Kalalau Valley, sparking a manhunt—and threatening the community’s way of life.