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GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY

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up!**

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ME!**

**Twilight's  
Kristen  
Stewart  
is ready  
to draw  
blood**

By Jonathan Heaf

**Phone  
hacking:  
Rupert  
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secret  
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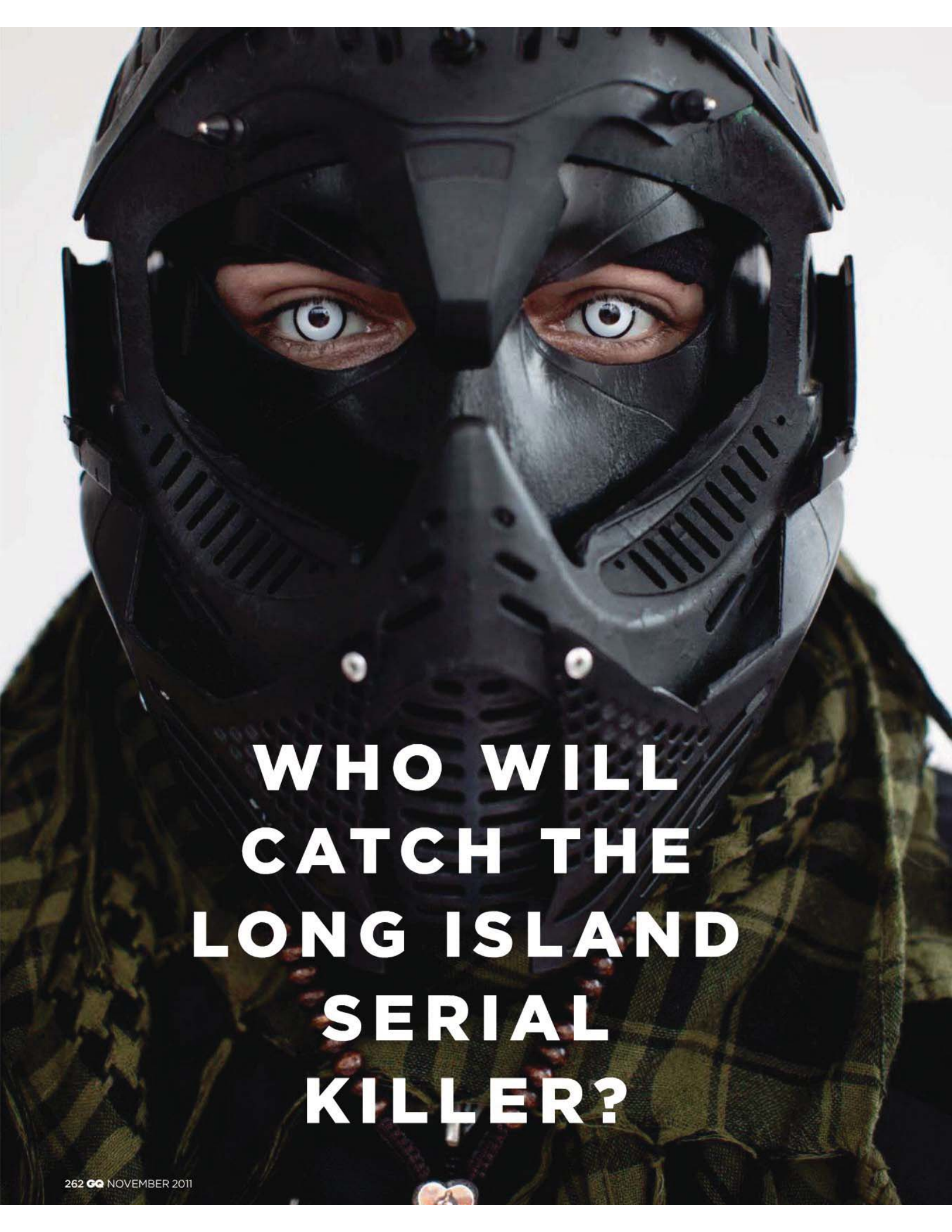
By Michael Wolff

NOVEMBER 2011 £3.99



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**WHO WILL  
CATCH THE  
LONG ISLAND  
SERIAL  
KILLER?**

Watching the detectives: Suffolk County police step up their search for clues, triggered by the discovery of more remains, April 2011; while vigilantes such as 'Samaritan Prime' (opposite) are also on the case



Amber Lynn Costello

Megan Waterman

Maureen Brainard-Barnes

Melissa Barthelemy

Shannan Gilbert

America's eyes are trained on a quiet coastal corner of the country where a murderer has claimed ten victims and remains at large, despite the efforts of investigators. Now, as **Alex Hannaford** reports for GQ, a growing band of self-styled 'superheroes' is joining in the hunt and attracting as much attention as its quarry

Photographs by **Matthew Rainwaters**

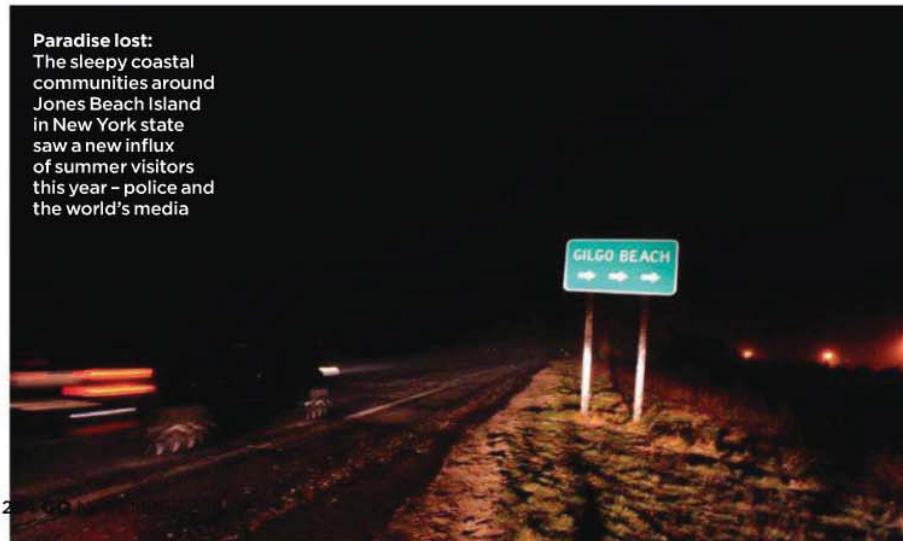
There are still a couple of hours left until the sun sets on Oak Beach. Two huge seagulls peck at a line of driftwood, empty crab shells and the few cigarette butts that scar the sand; a man in a baseball cap, standing halfway along the pier, attempts to land a bluefish or striped bass in the dying rays of the day.

Right now it's rush hour on Jones Beach Island, this long finger of sand, pine and brush scrub wedged between the Atlantic Ocean and Long Island's Great South Bay. In a little while, the constant hum of traffic behind me – cars heading home from New York City – will have disappeared. The only sound then will be the waves breaking on Oak Beach.

**That was probably all that Shannan Gilbert heard the night of 1 May last year, too, as she headed along the tide line.**



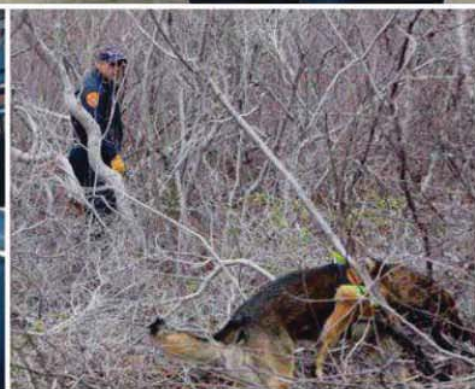
**Paradise lost:**  
The sleepy coastal communities around Jones Beach Island in New York state saw a new influx of summer visitors this year – police and the world's media



**GILBERT WAS** a 23-year-old prostitute from upstate New York. She had moved to New Jersey a few years earlier to try to make it as a singer, but had drifted into escort work to make ends meet. Since she'd begun posting ads on Craigslist, Gilbert had started to make good money, but occasionally, perhaps unsurprisingly, there was a price to pay. Once, she was beaten up by a boyfriend and a surgeon had to insert a titanium plate in her jaw. Her taste for recreational drugs, too, meant she wasn't left with much at the end of the day, but despite this, she had started taking a college course and moved into her own place for the first time.

On the night of 1 May 2010, a client called Joseph Brewer contacted her via Craigslist, and her driver – a man called Michael Pak, whom

**Shots in the dark:** Media interest heightens as reports emerge of a ninth and tenth set of human remains, expanding the grim signs of crime scenes (opposite) further throughout Jones Beach Island



Tackling searching questions (from left): Nassau County's Detective Lieutenant Kevin Smith; Gustav Coletti, who last saw Shannan Gilbert alive in May 2010; an officer and cadaver dog on the hunt

## Fear turned to panic turned to anger, and a growing sense something had to be done to stop girls going missing

Gilbert had worked with before – drove her to Brewer's gated community by Oak Beach.

Pak waited outside in his car while Gilbert, wearing a blonde wig, leather jacket and jeans, went inside. At around five o'clock in the morning, Brewer came out asking Pak for help. Pak found Gilbert distressed, speaking to police on her phone. She was saying she feared for her life, and in those twilight hours she kept the 911 dispatcher on the line for 23 minutes. But she didn't say why, didn't give an address and refused to leave with Pak, her trusted driver. Instead, Gilbert ran out of the house, screaming for help, banging on the door of one of Brewer's neighbours, 75-year-old Gustav Coletti, who offered to call the police. Gilbert, sobbing, begged him not to

and instead disappeared into the night. The only trace, a set of footprints in the sand.

By the time Pak pulled up outside Coletti's house, Gilbert was gone. Suffolk County police, tasked to the case, searched Brewer's house and questioned both him and Pak but publicly said neither was a suspect. Coletti was cleared as well. Sometime in early summer, police stopped searching for clues among the brush scrub and marshes along Ocean Parkway. As summer 2010 turned to autumn, you could feel a chill in the breeze on Long Island. But as the fallen leaves blew along this remote stretch of road, with them, it seemed, went any leads.

**ON 11 DECEMBER** last year, just a few miles up the road from where Gilbert disappeared,

a Suffolk County police officer, out training his cadaver dog on the grassy bank that lines the road, noticed his animal had picked up a scent on the wind. He walked over to the brush scrub and thorns, and peered in. A few feet in, he saw human remains.

Detectives closed off Ocean Parkway in both directions and combed the area for more clues. A few days later, the grisly body count had risen to four as they came across the badly decomposed bodies of two more young women and the skeletal remains of another, each wrapped carefully in coarse, brown burlap sacks – jute bags usually used for grain or, around here, more likely as sandbags. Each body lay spaced about 500 yards apart, and it was clear that the number of victims and (➤)

➤ the way in which they'd been arranged along this desolate, windswept stretch of road, bore all the hallmarks of a serial killer.

One thing the TV crime shows get right is that the first 24 to 48 hours of a police investigation are crucial. Detectives look into the relationships of the deceased, their business acquaintances and neighbours. They want to catch the culprit when it first happens; they don't want to give him time to formulate an alibi or, worse, disappear. But 48 hours after the fourth body was discovered, the cops had no leads. What's more, none of the victims had a titanium plate in their jaw: none of the four bodies found belonged to Shannan Gilbert.

It wasn't long before the four women were identified as prostitutes: Melissa Barthelemy, 24, of the Bronx; Maureen Brainard-Barnes, 25, of Connecticut; Megan Waterman, 22, of Maine; and Amber Lynn Costello, 27, of North Babylon, New York, a town just across Oyster Bay. And all had offered their services on Craigslist, just like Gilbert.

Then came more chilling news: the teenage sister of victim Melissa Barthelemy told police she may have been contacted by the killer back in August 2009. Shortly after her sister went missing, a man phoned Amanda Barthelemy several times from her older sister's mobile phone. In the final call he said: "Do you think you'll ever see her again? You won't. I killed her," before hanging up.

It was now obvious to everyone – including frightened residents of this quiet coastal community – that a serial killer was still on the loose. And Shannan Gilbert was still missing.

**WINTER STORMS** swept in from the Plains in late December 2010, burying Jones Beach Island under two-and-a-half feet of snow and making the already difficult task of looking for more bodies among thick bramble impossible. Detective Lieutenant Kevin Smith, a commanding officer with the Nassau County police department, was watching what was happening in neighbouring Suffolk County particularly closely – after all, his department shares the jurisdiction of Jones Beach Island.

Smith adjusts the cuffs of his crisp, white, long-sleeved polo shirt and sits back in his chair, revealing a .38-calibre revolver on his belt. It's the end of May 2011 and I've come to Nassau County police headquarters to meet him. He has the chiselled looks of a matinee movie star; in fact, there's an uncanny resemblance to Michael Douglas. He has lived on Long Island most of his life, been on the force for 28 years and is a trained hostage negotiator. He speaks with a broad Yankee accent and I get the impression he is not the sort of man whose feathers ruffle

easily, but then he's never had to deal with a serial killer operating in his backyard.

After the snows had thawed in spring, Nassau police got involved in the search. Behind the "no parking" and "emergency stopping only" signs that line Ocean Beach Parkway, the impenetrable brush and dense undergrowth make access to the beach via anything other than designated paths or deer trails impossible. It wasn't long before the thorns and poison ivy had taken their toll. "My guys got shredded, torn apart," Smith explains.

There was only a small window of time before the dunes once again became strangled with spring vegetation. On 29 March, however,



**A history of violence:** Nassau County state troopers have previous when it comes to tracking America's most wanted, having caught Joel Rifkin (above) who murdered nine women in New York while living just ten miles from Jones Beach Island

police in Nassau County found another body, half a mile east of where the first four were uncovered. A few days later, searchers hovering over tick-infested foliage on ladders attached to fire trucks, discovered three more sets of human remains, bringing the total to eight. But there was still no trace of Shannan Gilbert.

Nassau County detectives, with park police, officers from New York state and cadaver dogs, worked their way west from the Suffolk-Nassau line. Some time around noon they came across a black bag 30 feet from the roadway; inside were what appeared to be human bones. Three hours later, a few yards from the entrance to the John F Kennedy Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary, detectives found a human skull – later identified as belonging to another former prostitute, Jessica Taylor – in the undergrowth.

The days following these finds saw high activity in the area: roads were closed, cordons set up, helicopters swooped overhead looking for potential "dump sites". One hundred and fifty officers combed the roadside along the barrier island, but they found nothing further – just some debris, a makeshift shelter that Smith says could have been there for years and a lot of animal bones.

There were now ten bodies – the four bodies initially found last December and six more – although Suffolk County police made it clear they were sure they weren't all victims of the same killer. It was obvious the first four were connected, but then there was Taylor's skull, a bag of bones, and the body of a small child and an Asian man in his twenties.

Like the Suffolk detectives, Smith didn't link the bodies to the same killer. Until the forensic evidence came back, he wouldn't even say they were all murder victims. "People do strange things," he tells me. "Some people go off into the woods to die. Sometimes family members are embarrassed by a suicide and they may move the body. Who knows – it could have been a medical student with a cadaver throwing it in there."

But it was the four initial bodies, those of the missing prostitutes, that really shook the local populace, and nothing was going to allay the fears of the people who lived on the island: a place that had now, whether they liked to admit it or not, become an open-air charnel house. Fear turned to panic turned to anger, and there was a growing sense that something, by someone, had to be done to stop any more girls like Shannan Gilbert going missing.

**JUNE 2011** marked just over a year since Shannan Gilbert's disappearance. What's more, the killer, or killers, hadn't been caught. Lorraine Ela, the mother of one of the murdered girls, Megan Waterman, was in college near her home in Maine when she got the call from police to say they'd discovered four bodies last December. She's frustrated that almost a year on, they seem no closer to finding her daughter's killer.

"Are they putting 100 per cent into this? I don't think so. I'm always calling the police but they never call me," she tells me. "Everything I learn, I hear on the news. It's the biggest case they've ever investigated but I feel like they're putting it to the side. And I know her murderer won't stop killing until someone who knows what happened comes forward."

The Long Island murders were perplexing. Come August this year, with still no hope of an arrest, everyone was talking about them. Detective Lieutenant Smith even saw a couple of retired cops down by the side of Ocean Parkway sniffing around; he thinks ➤

Heroic effort (from left): Founder of the real-life vigilante collective the New York Initiative 'Zero', with partner 'Shade'



**'The fact people can say, "It's OK, they're just prostitutes so it doesn't matter," makes me sick. Nobody deserves that.'**

ZERO VIGILANTE

➤ they missed the life a little bit. “How often does this happen?” he says.

The answer to that is not very often at all. Serial murder represents less than one per cent of all homicides committed in any given year. Long Island had never had a serial killer operate on its soil before – not that police knew about anyway. Joel Rifkin, a Long Islander who lived in East Meadow, just ten miles north of Jones Beach, was convicted of killing nine women – mostly prostitutes – in the late Eighties and early Nineties, but his hunting ground was New York City. It was Nassau County state troopers, though, who pulled Rifkin’s truck over in June 1993 for not having licence plates and discovered the body of his final victim in the back.

In summer the population of this sleepy beach community multiplies overnight, and this year the message from the authorities was clear: this summer, like every other, the beaches were open. It echoed the scene from *Jaws* in which Mayor Vaughn, fearing reports of a shark attack will ruin the summer tourist season, overrules a plan to close the beaches.

But it didn’t change the fact that there was, if not real fear, then a paranoia among the locals who had been told of the likelihood that a serial killer was among them. Such warranted fear is as ripe as it was back in December – and building. Frustrated by the lack of progress made by the local police, uncovering the killer’s identity has for some people become an obsession; while for others, turning vigilante and helping the murderer meet his demise is a dark compulsion.

**LONG ISLANDER** Brendan Murphy, 34, was on holiday in the Virgin Islands with his girlfriend last December when he heard police had discovered a slew of bodies; the newsreader said it had turned into the biggest investigation Long Island had ever seen. Murphy’s father had been a homicide prosecutor for the Suffolk County district attorney’s office and now worked as a criminal defence lawyer for one of the biggest law firms on the island.

When he returned home, Murphy decided to visit the locations where the bodies had been found. He trawled the internet for more information and stumbled upon Websleuths – an online community devoted to true crime. Websleuths was born 15 years ago, following the JonBenét Ramsey murder – the disturbing and still-unsolved case of the six-year-old pageant star found dead in the basement of her parents’ Colorado home. Websleuths’ owner Tricia Griffith describes the site as a “big spitballing session” and says police, retired detectives, lawyers and private investigators pitch in to the discussions as well.

I meet Murphy in nearby Gilgo Beach late one afternoon in May and we stand looking out over the bay. He tells me he was a “lurker” on the site initially; he’d never contributed to an online forum before but he was surprised at the level of intelligent discussion about the investigation into the murders. “They seemed really on top of it; people were making valid points,” he says. Unlike many of the contributors, though, Murphy actually lived on Long Island and knew the area where the bodies had been dumped. His grandfather had built more than 80 homes there and Murphy had spent his youth building docks for him. He knows the geography and ecology of the area intimately.

Someone on the Websleuths forum wanted to know who patrolled the barrier island aside



**Coast is not clear (from top):** Amateur detective and resident Brendan Murphy at Gilgo Beach; police divers take the search to sea along Jones Beach Island’s long Atlantic shoreline

from the police. The state’s Department of Environmental Conservation, Murphy told them; they drive round in white trucks and fine residents if they build anything too close to the water. Then there were the parks police, state police and county police.

Another contributor wanted to know what burlap was used for; maybe the murderer worked with the sacking he’d used to wrap four of his victims. On Websleuths, people speculated it could have been a clammer or fisherman, but Murphy corrected them: around here it was used more to make sandbags for erosion control projects. This also followed on from his theory that the Long Island serial killer was a local. In fact, he even had his eye on a potential suspect – someone who police, apparently, had ruled out.

Perhaps it was because his father was a lawyer, but Murphy, who has a background in programming and now works in IT for a financial firm, was tenacious in his research – and he wasn’t content with joining the other amateur sleuths online throwing around conjecture. He knew that if he simply googled the name of the suspect, it would just throw up pages referring to his recent questioning by police, but if he altered the date parameters, he could find out if this person had form.

“I discovered he’d been in trouble with the law before,” Murphy says. “He had a record for gross negligence and he’d been in alcohol rehab. I found the index numbers of the court cases and punched them into the Nassau County court website to get the details.”

He knew having previous form didn’t mean this person was guilty of the Long Island murders, but Murphy was keen to at least add something of substance to the discussions online. He posted the court transcripts on the forum and recalls everyone saying, “Great find; how did you get this?” “The TV news networks weren’t digging through the public records like I was,” Murphy says. “And I was just some guy sitting on the internet.”

In addition, Murphy had been using a tool to assist in his sleuthing that he was keeping quiet from the virtual community. A few years before, he had been looking for a car for his girlfriend when he came across an ad for a decommissioned Drug Enforcement Administration surveillance van on Craigslist. The DEA van was a 1989 Ford Econoline with only 30,000 miles on the clock. It was bullet-proof, naturally, had two fuel tanks, a separate propane tank that fuelled a heater and an air conditioner that ran on dry ice pellets. But the clincher, as far as Murphy was concerned, was an on-board periscope.

From the outside it looks like a normal van but Murphy says if you tap on the side you can tell it’s far from normal. “It’s amazing,” he says. “It has a well of six car batteries that runs everything so you can power it up without the ignition. You could sit there for hours being fired on by the bad guys and you’d be OK.” The periscope, cranked by hand, pokes out the top of the air vent on the van’s roof so as to be inconspicuous. Murphy and his girlfriend call their vehicle the Land Sub.

**BRENDAN MURPHY** isn’t the only Long Islander who has turned amateur detective. I discover another New Yorker who has taken an obsessive interest in the story – someone calling himself “William Wallace” online, who posts on longislandserialkiller.com, a website that publishes news of the



police investigation together with e-mails from readers offering their observations. Wallace hopes such speculation may help lure the killer out, although one may well question whether such hobbyists are making light of disturbing and tragic events. "Even if he wants to fight me alone somewhere. We can meet up," Wallace tells me with bravado. "I'm nobody special. I'm just disgusted by guys like the killer. I'd rather him target me than hear about him killing someone else's daughter or mother."

Wallace isn't the only one tempted to take on the job of law enforcement. Twenty-five miles away in New York City, some are concerned that the murderer has gone underground and could resurface at any moment in their own neighbourhood. "Son of Sam" killer David Berkowitz may have carried out his killing spree in the city 40 years ago, but the institutional memory of his summer of destruction still lingers.

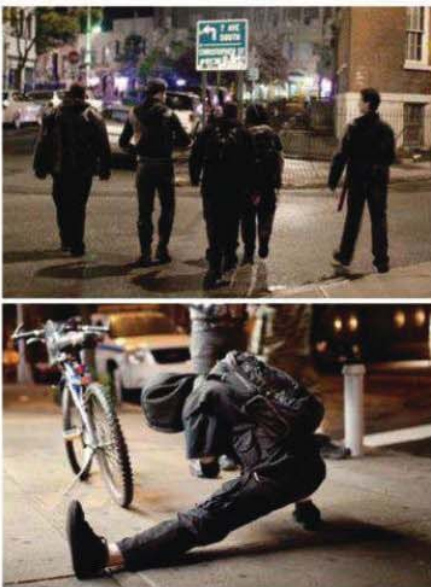
Somewhere in downtown Manhattan, a powerfully built man in his early thirties, decked from head to toe in army fatigues and wearing piercing blue contact lenses that turn his eyes wolf-like, is doing laps round a three-block radius on his mountain bike. Every so often he stops to wait at a street corner, one foot on the kerb, removes a harmonica from his top jacket pocket and plays a few notes. The man calls himself "Samaritan Prime", or "Sam" for short. Welcome to the world of the real-life Watchmen – super-geeks, turned do-gooders gone wild. Capes included.

Inside this "patrol area", eight of Sam's colleagues are walking the dark streets in pairs and they've invited me to join them for the night. There are prostitutes on corners, small groups of questionable-looking people hanging out in doorways, but the New York Initiative – or NYI as the group is known – don't flinch. A pimp approaches: "Who are you? A cop? You'd better have a badge, man. That's all I'm saying..." the man says. "Shade", a relatively new member of the NYI, ignores him and continues up the hill to the next block.

The NYI belongs to the Real Life Superheroes movement, an international group who perform community service, help the homeless and occasionally combat crime through community patrols. Last April, the NYI posted an open letter on Craigslist to prostitutes working in the Long Island area: "Hello, pretty lady!" it began, somewhat misogynistically and without a smidgeon of irony. "The Long Island Killer is out there. He's a scary bastard, and it's starting to seem like he is focusing on you... the law doesn't respect your personal choices and that means cops are slower to follow through when it comes to you." It then lets them know how they can contact the group.

"Zero" is the NYI's founder and leader – a tall twenty-something who wears arm guards reinforced with Kevlar, has a wisp of hair on top of his shaved head and looks like an extra from *Mad Max*. He tells me he started the group out of a desire to make the world a better place. At the time, he claims he was suicidal, "but instead of taking myself out I decided to go out on the streets and try to do something right and get taken out that way instead". With all the costumes and the chat, you wonder at times whether the NYI are genius opportunistic marketeers, woefully naive or genuinely out to try help the wider communities.

Zero says a lot of his group are misfits: "kids that have been told we can't do anything by those in power, by our jobs, even by some of our families. And we say screw



**Street fighting men (from top):** Real-life 'superheroes' from the New York Initiative take to the streets of Manhattan; hooded vigilante 'Short Cut' stretches before pounding the pavement on patrol

that, we can. Watch." In addition to trying to prevent muggings, the NYI also employs a tactic it refers to as "bait patrol", in which their only female member, "Tsaf", walks down the street "dressed up to the nines" and the rest of the squad stays some way behind to nab the offender if she is attacked.

"The fact that, in the case of the Long Island serial killer, people can sit there and say, 'It's OK, they're just prostitutes so it doesn't matter,' makes me want to throw up. Nobody deserves that," says Zero.

"Our mission is to help people regardless of their status in life," Sam adds. He started patrolling the streets of New York as a vigilante after 9/11. "I felt my home had been invaded. We felt so wounded by the attack, but it galvanised people into doing something."

Zero says the NYI is offering martial arts and defence training to call girls and that he has already been approached by a sex worker outreach organisation to put them in touch. He points to a scar on the neck of a team member known as "Nitro". He says Sam did that while demonstrating how to use his harmonica as a weapon. "He can slit somebody's throat with that thing, plus he can teach that trick real fast. When you're dealing with animals, you have to become one."

**ANOTHER MAN** with his own theories about the killer is three hours' drive up the coast from New York. Dr Jack Levin sits in his cluttered office, preparing for a lecture he's giving tomorrow to his criminology students. He's worked at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, for decades and is something of a celebrity here. Back in 1985, Levin wrote *Mass Murder: America's Growing Menace*, one of the first books on serial and mass murders, and he's been watching the developments on Long Island closely. He says he sees a reluctance, particularly on the part of police, to accept one person could be responsible for so much destruction. Yet, he says, it's no coincidence all the bodies were found in approximately the same desolate area. "It's highly unlikely the same dump site would be used by two different killers."

Another possibility, Levin believes, is that the Long Island slayings could be the work of a team. He says 25 to 30 per cent of all serial murders are committed by cousins, brothers, friends or lovers. "Maybe they're taking turns," he says. In addition, serial killers don't usually travel, Levin tells me. They have a comfort zone. The chances are that this killer lives fairly close to the dump sites.

As Jones Beach Island heaves a sigh after the summer onslaught of tourists, Levin is convinced the murderer is currently on hiatus; waiting until things cool down. But, he says, when he feels it's safe, he'll probably start killing again.

Right now, at Oak Beach, where all of this began with the disappearance of Shannan Gilbert, there are ominous clouds looming on the horizon – probably a hangover from the storm that soaked the eastern seaboard a few days before. The fisherman on the pier is still there as the sun sits low in the sky, joined now by a father and his young son eager to land a bluefish before evening sets in.

A woman gets out of her car, removes a deckchair from the boot, and heads down to the beach. She covers her knees with a blanket, stares out at the ocean and then closes her eyes. Seconds later she opens them again, and looks over her shoulder at the few cars in the car park. Locals here have got used to looking behind them lately. They never know who may be watching. 