

THE BEST WRITING ANYWHERE, EVERYWHERE



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THE TRIP PLANNERS

The unusual couple behind an online encyclopedia of psychoactive substances.

By Emily Witt

Erowid seeks to be a reference for everyone from the village stoner to the drug czar.

You can't tell a great deal about the Web site Erowid from its home page. A tagline reads, "Documenting the Complex Relationship Between Humans & Psychoactives." This text is surrounded by photographs: a cactus, a cannabis bud, a bottle of ketamine, tabs of LSD. The design looks old, Web 1.0 old, with a simple typeface and a black background. The Tolkienesque name, the F.A.Q. page reveals, was coined with assistance from a dictionary of Indo-European roots. It means, roughly, "earth wisdom."

People who are interested in psychoactive cacti, ketamine, and LSD are generally unfazed by strangeness. Any such person will likely know of Erowid, as will most toxicologists and many E.R. doctors. When the site launched, in 1995, it served as a repository of drug-culture esoterica, drawing just a few hits a day. Today, Erowid contains highly detailed profiles of more than three hundred and fifty psychoactive substances, from caffeine to methamphetamine. Last year, the site had at least seventeen million unique visitors.

In October, on the twentieth anniversary of Erowid's launch, I travelled to the home of its founders, in the Gold Country of northeast California, where the Central Valley gives way to the Sierra Nevada and road signs along I-80 start marking the altitude. The hills are dotted with Gold Rush museums and monuments, along with evidence of

a thriving cannabis-growing scene. Local television weathermen refer to the region as the Mother Lode.

The founders of Erowid are a couple in their mid-forties—a man and a woman who call themselves Earth and Fire, respectively. Their names date from 1994, when, as recent college graduates living in the San Francisco Bay Area, they went to a Menlo Park storefront to sign up for a dial-up account and for their first e-mail addresses: earth@best.com and fire@best.com. They live and work in a one-bedroom post-and-beam cabin, built in 1985 and surrounded by ten acres of forested land, on a high slope facing a ravine. The property's original owner was a collector of obsolete industrial machinery, and the house is a collage of California artifacts, including oak floorboards salvaged from nineteenth-century Southern Pacific Railroad boxcars. During my visit, Earth, who is tall and lumbering and wears his hair in a ponytail, identified strains of a Grateful Dead track wafting from the home of a distant neighbor. Fire, who is more assertive and fast-spoken than Earth, has dark hair and fine features that often earn her comparisons to Björk.

On Erowid, which is run by Earth and Fire with the help of two off-site staffers and many volunteers, you can read about drum circles in the “Mind & Spirit” section, and about Jerry Garcia in “Culture & Art.” You can also find the digitized research archives of Albert Hofmann, who first synthesized LSD. But the centerpiece of the site is “Plants & Drugs.” Each substance has a “vault,” which includes pages on such topics as dosage, effects, legal status, and history. Some of that information is derived from “experience reports,” which are descriptive accounts of drug trips that anyone can submit.

Since 2000, Erowid has received more than a hundred thousand reports and has published about a quarter of them. Some are positive: “The Inner Eternity,” “Spiritually Orgasmic.” Others are not: “Existential Horror,” “Unimaginable Depths of Terror,” “Convulsions, Seizures, Vomiting.” Reports are reviewed by a few dozen specially trained volunteers, who range from college students to computer scientists. Each submission is read twice, and the best ones are passed on to a handful of senior reviewers for final selection.

At one time, the samizdat on drugs was so rare that those who found it seemed like sages at parties and in college dorms. Earth and Fire call such enthusiasts, and anyone extremely knowledgeable on the subject, drug geeks. Earth said that he “considers it an honor” to be among them. In the eighties, President Ronald Reagan’s war on drugs sent the geeks into hiding. An ad sponsored by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America featured a father delivering a tearful graveside monologue, and showings of some Hollywood films included public-service announcements from the likes of Clint Eastwood and Pee-wee Herman, who held up vials of crack before the phrase “The thrill can kill” appeared on the screen. People who wanted both to try drugs and to know the risks had difficulty finding any credible guidance.

But by the mid-nineties a fragmentary drug-geek community had started sharing information on e-mail lists such as Leri, Web sites such as Deoxyribonucleic Hyperdimension, and Usenet groups such as alt.drugs.psychedelics. The geeks and the government continued to ignore one another. In 2002, during a talk at the consciousness-studies conference Mind States, in Jamaica, Fire said, “From the establishment viewpoint, it’s surprising if new data come out of the drug-using community. In the drug-using community, it’s surprising if information that’s useful comes out of the establishment.” Earth and Fire’s idea was to close the rift: to maintain a comprehensive data set that could serve as a primary reference for everyone from the village stoner to the national drug czar.

Edward W. Boyer, the chief of medical toxicology in the department of emergency medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, in Worcester, first became aware of the drug-geek sites in 1997. A pair of high-school students had ended up in his emergency room after going online and learning how to synthesize the sedative GHB at home. “My first thought was, It’s really bad—people are potentially learning online about new drugs to abuse,” he said.

In 2001, Boyer wrote a research letter to the *New England Journal of Medicine* alleging that Erowid and other “partisan” Web sites were outperforming federal antidrug sites in the search results for ecstasy, GHB, and certain other drugs. But during the aughts Boyer paid attention to assessments of new drugs as they went up on Erowid, and found that his emergency department did not receive an influx of poisonings. Instead,

Erowid taught Boyer the street names of unfamiliar drugs, along with the basic chemicals that they contained. “We emergency physicians pride ourselves on being pretty close to the street,” Boyer told me. “Erowid just blew the doors off what we do.”

According to the 2014 National Survey of Drug Use and Health, nearly half of Americans over twelve have tried an illicit drug. They may borrow Adderall from a friend to work harder, or Xanax to reduce anxiety; they may use cocaine to have more fun at a party or ayahuasca to contemplate the great questions of life. Today’s experimenters can also partake of many new psychoactive substances. In recent years, suppliers have expanded into a wide range of synthetic chemicals that, until they attract government attention, go untargeted by molecular bans in the United States and abroad. Once they have been prohibited, these “research chemicals,” as Earth and Fire call them, can be modified in labs and sold anew; they are often cheap and can be bought through online marketplaces.

Erowid is an educational nonprofit, whose mission is to “provide and facilitate access to objective, accurate, and non-judgmental information” about psychoactive substances. Users can assess benefits and risks by reading experience reports, and many vaults have a summary “Health” page. Erowid has also formulated a set of standard warnings, or “Erowid Notes,” which are used to flag risky activities in experience reports (“Driving while intoxicated, tripping, or extremely sleep deprived is dangerous and irresponsible because it endangers other people. Don’t do it!”).

The average age of Erowid’s thirty thousand Twitter followers is twenty-six. The most frequently looked-at profiles are those of LSD, MDMA, and mushrooms. For years, Erowid’s traffic has declined during school breaks—a gauge of its popularity among eighteen-to-twenty-five-year-olds, the demographic most given to experimenting with drugs. Earth and Fire have spoken before the American Academy of Clinical Toxicology and the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and in 2011 the reform-minded Drug Policy Alliance gave them the Dr. Andrew Weil Award for Achievement in the Field of Drug Education. They have also co-authored several papers in peer-reviewed journals (for example, “Use Patterns and Self-Reported Effects of *Salvia Divinorum*,” in *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*) and have collaborated on projects related to such drugs

as hallucinogens and opiates with researchers at various institutions, including N.Y.U. and Johns Hopkins.

As a condition of talking to me, Earth and Fire insisted that their “driver’s-license names” not be published, even though their given names can be easily found. Earth explained, “Everyone calls us Earth and Fire, approximately, except for the robots.” Like the volunteer medics who used to patrol parking lots at Grateful Dead concerts, they want to be seen as the straights among the weirdos and the weirdos among the straights. They want readers to focus on the usefulness of Erowid’s information, not on the authority of the people publishing it.

Earth and Fire spend most days in their living room, which is also their office. Fire is the site’s main editor and fund-raiser, and Earth attends to the technical side. They work at a shared desk with a landline and six computer monitors on top, and towers of hard drives underneath. A stack of books on the coffee table includes a copy of “Sapo in My Soul,” about an Amazonian frog whose skin secretes a psychoactive compound. During my visit, Earth and Fire would wake up at noon and work until 4 A.M., with a pause for dinner around 8 P.M.—a time that their cats, Eos and Nyx, marked by staring expectantly until they were fed.

Earth does most of the cooking; Fire is the sous chef and the dicer of garlic. Each uses a “personal bowl.” Fire explained, “This is my bowl. I eat every meal out of my bowl. I don’t have to wash my bowl before I eat out of it if I don’t want to. He never has to wash my bowl.”

I received my own bowl for the three nights I ate with Earth and Fire. They are vegetarians, and, for the past twenty years, they have subsisted on healthy snacks and one meal, at night. Dinner consists of what their friends call “Erowid chow”: vegetables served over a mixture of brown and wild rice. They don’t eat sweets. One night, they offered me a Carr’s whole-wheat cracker for dessert, which I declined.

As for psychoactive substances, we ingested only Rex-Goliath Pinot Grigio and Chateau Ste. Michelle Sauvignon Blanc. Drug geeks are not necessarily heavy drug

users: Earth and Fire say that they have tried LSD, MDMA, and psilocybin mushrooms, but not cocaine, heroin, or meth; of prescription painkillers, Earth said, “I prefer an ibuprofen and a beer.”

For small doses of caffeine, Earth and Fire drink Diet Coke. Earth told me that it tastes “like the future.”

“Like a robot!” Fire said.

When Earth and Fire say “I,” they usually mean “we.” They describe themselves as life partners, and each wears a stainless-steel earring. They don’t have kids, and call themselves “online socializers.” They speak in tandem, like twins in a children’s novel. When one of them left the room, I felt uneasy.

Earth said, “We used to use the term ‘soul mate.’ ”

“But it annoys people,” Fire said.

Earth and Fire grew up in the northern suburbs of St. Paul, where they attended the same schools. Earth’s mother was a therapist and his father a designer of supercomputers, who founded the Supercomputer Systems Engineering and Services Company. Fire’s parents owned a consulting business. At forty, Earth’s mother separated from his father, later becoming a minister in the United Church of Christ. Fire’s parents, after they retired, moved to Africa and did educational work through the Lutheran Church.

In 1987, Earth left for New College, in Sarasota, Florida, and Fire for Miami University, in Ohio. They started dating after their freshman year. In their sophomore year, Fire joined Earth at New College, which had been established, in the nineteen-sixties, as an experimental learning community. Earth and Fire refer to the ideas that they spread through Erowid as “memes.” One meme is that nobody should take a drug without first being able to consult a reliable source of information about it. On arriving at New College, Earth had been offered LSD, psilocybin mushrooms, and MDMA.

He declined every overture, and, by the end of the couple's time there, neither had tried anything other than pot and alcohol.

Fire earned a general humanities degree, and Earth designed his own course, Language and Culture. They read books on philosophy, anthropology, Buddhism, and meditation. As Earth remembers it, a turning point came when one of their close friends argued that without having tried a psychedelic “you could not be taken seriously as an engaged intellectual who was interested in topics of spirituality and metaphysics.” Other friends agreed.

“We turned out to be the kind of people who like to research something first,” Fire said. “And it turned out to be impossible.” Earth had to drive all the way to the University of South Florida, in Tampa, to photocopy some scientific papers about MDMA. He and Fire started collecting the few books on psychedelics that they could find locally, and they observed their friends experimenting. Sometimes, Earth and Fire showed other people their research materials. “We had more computers than anybody else,” Earth said. “We made a database of all the movies we'd ever seen and rated them and wrote little descriptions.”

They graduated in 1992 and returned to Minnesota. Earth designed databases at his father's company, and Fire wrote manuals. Within a year, they felt that they had learned enough about LSD to try it. They took a quarter of a blotter each—within the range of a “light” dose, according to Erowid.

While tripping, Earth and Fire experienced a sense of wonder in looking at everyday things. Earth told me, “It made us very much more aware of how different states of consciousness are constantly flowing by, and that one can—”

“—have some control over that,” Fire said.

On Halloween, 1994, Earth and Fire, dreading another Minnesota winter, packed their belongings into a U-Haul and drove to Northern California. I asked them if they were hippies.

“We were hippie-ish,” Fire said.

“It was tech,” Earth said.

“Hippie liberals.”

“Tech hippie liberals.”

They crashed in the laundry room of Earth’s brother, in the bucolic Bay Area suburb of Woodside. Earth was working remotely for his father’s company, and Fire, who was looking for freelance jobs, decided to teach herself Web design. They bought a VW camper van.

On Labor Day weekend in 1995, they picked up some friends for a camping trip at Lake Tahoe. One of their friends had a flyer announcing a festival called Burning Man. They drove past Tahoe to the Black Rock Desert, where the festival was taking place, and veered around a man in a straw hat who was trying to charge admission. They parked next to a group of Nevada locals, who were cooking heroin by a campfire. In subsequent years, Earth and Fire would set up a geodesic dome and bring a whiteboard on which visitors mapped out molecular-synthesis paths.

Also in 1995, Fire began work on a Web site that would use the couple’s collected materials on drug subculture as a data set. On drives up to San Francisco to see friends, Earth and Fire debated what to call the site; they knew that it was important to make the name unique. In September, they rented a house on a mountain peak in Sky Londa, with a view of the Pacific, on the site of a former tuberculosis sanitarium. In October, they launched Erowid.

Earth and Fire stayed in Sky Londa for seven years. They posted the site’s first warnings in 1996, after watching a friend get sick after accidentally taking a large dose of GHB at Burning Man. Fire said that the early site “felt to us like an act of civil disobedience.” They worried that the authorities might shut them down, and to this day they operate their own server, burn all envelopes sent to them with return

addresses, and use search software that will not generate data for Google. (They say that they have never had any legal problems.)

During those years, Earth and Fire became friends with the Bay Area chemist Alexander Shulgin, who discovered more than two hundred psychoactive compounds, and his wife, Ann. Together, the Shulgins wrote the books “Pihkal” (Phenethylamines I Have Known and Loved) and “Tihkal” (the same acronym, but for tryptamines); their Friday-night dinners, or F.N.D.s, served as regular gatherings for local drug geeks, among others. Taking drugs at the meal was not allowed, but Earth and Fire got to know Bob Wallace, a software pioneer and former Microsoft employee, who became Erowid’s first donor and major supporter. Wallace encouraged the couple to work on the site full time, and, starting in 1999, Fire did so; Earth joined her the following year.

By then, Internet users were no longer a small group of tech-savvy familiars. Teenagers were trying to figure out how big a dose of LSD they could safely take, and at the end of 2001 the site was getting more than two hundred thousand hits a day. In 2002, Earth and Fire were priced out of the Bay Area; they moved to the Gold Country. That same year, Bob Wallace died. The period that followed was financially trying, since Earth and Fire had decided early on against posting advertisements. By 2008, however, Erowid had become a nonprofit; its current operating budget is three hundred thousand dollars. In February, Reddit users deemed it the fourth-most-worthy nonprofit out of more than eight thousand candidates, granting the site a donation of exactly 74,610.97€. Erowid came in ahead of NPR.

One day, I sat on a paisley couch as Fire compiled a new vault, for the chemical methoxphenidine. Like ketamine, to which it is often compared, MXP produces a dissociative out-of-body experience. The drug was patented by Searle in 1989, as a possible treatment for neural injury, but its recreational use wasn’t documented until 2013, on user-moderated discussion forums like Bluelight. Erowid deliberately lags behind such sites, in order to let a more representative sample emerge.

In April of this year, an Erowid user from Virginia anonymously submitted a sample of MXP to a licensed lab in Sacramento that the site works with, as part of an initiative that Erowid calls EcstasyData. Since then, Earth and Fire had been waiting for

experience reports to arrive, and now Fire pored over the dozens that had been winnowed down by the triage team, along with other online accounts. One report read, “The space between me and my phone is enormous. Is my arm really long now?”

Fire also looked up the chemical’s molecular structure and scrolled through toxicology reports on PubMed, a search engine for biomedical literature. Using estimates mentioned in the reports, and after chatting with users on drug forums, Fire settled on a tentative dosage table, sending it out to a group of Erowid volunteers for comment. In the MXP vault, the dosage page will retain the “very tentative” label for perhaps a year, which is typically long enough for about a hundred reliable reports to emerge.

Six days later, Fire tweeted that the vault had opened. The landing page displayed a biohazard symbol, which Erowid uses to designate drugs that “should be considered experimental chemicals.” A warning reads, “There have been several deaths associated with its use.” I clicked “Law,” and learned that the chemical is not prohibited in the U.S. but is “not approved for human consumption.” It had just been banned in China. On the “Effects” page, I read, “Increase in heart rate and blood pressure,” “Nasal discomfort upon insufflation,” and “Sense of calm and serenity.”

Erowid adopts “the perspective of a user rather than that of a health-care professional,” according to Andrew Monte, an emergency physician at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, in Aurora, and a medical toxicologist at the Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center, in Denver. He contrasted Erowid with the National Poison Data System, a standard resource in E.R. work, which he described as “a series of check boxes that are geared toward collecting medical data.” Erowid, he said, instead creates “a rich tapestry of what users are wanting to experience, what they do experience, and what the potential downsides are.”

“Why don’t we call that nameless dread of yours Bruce, and see if that helps.”

The experience reports can also be helpful to researchers. Erin Artigiani, the deputy director for policy at the Center for Substance Abuse Research, at the University of Maryland, College Park, said that she relies on the reports in her work as the coördinator of the National Drug Early Warning System. (The system, which is supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, tracks drug trends by monitoring

poison-control reports, social media, and other sources.) She called Erowid “a useful tool for our initial phases, where we’re detecting and looking for what’s emerging.”

Roy Gerona, a clinical chemist at the University of California, San Francisco, told me that he has used Erowid as a source to identify research chemicals in toxicology cases. “Designer drugs have a really fast turnaround,” he said. “The primary literature cannot keep up.” For Gerona, Erowid occupies a useful middle ground between unedited drug forums and scientific journals.

Is Erowid accurate? Artigiani told me that the site “makes a concerted effort to be accurate with what it’s sharing.” Gerona described Erowid’s information as “a good starting point.” Still, Earth and Fire readily admit that they cannot correct all errors, and that experience reports are not peer-reviewed studies. The reports are meant to be read en masse, creating a broad spectrum of impressions for regular users, just as they do for medical professionals. According to Fire, any individual document must be taken “with a grain of salt.”

One reason that Earth and Fire haven’t tried opiates themselves, Fire told me, is that “Erowid’s legacy would take a nosedive” if one of them were to die of an overdose. But the site does not unequivocally advise against taking opioids or any other drug, no matter how dangerous or addictive. Earth told me that the goal of the site is not to “shape behavior,” and that, even if it were, proscription would be the wrong approach: “If you say no to one drug, you’re essentially saying yes to all the others.” They told me that the facts indicate only which drugs are more dangerous than others, not which ones are “good” or “bad.”

Oxycodone, the tenth-most-popular drug on the site, is described as being “widely available by prescription” and as “notoriously addictive, leading many users to have problems controlling their own use.” Some drug experts don’t see what’s wrong with urging people to avoid such a substance. “The Web site should say, ‘Don’t do it,’” Robert DuPont, the first director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, who served as the drug czar under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, told me. “We don’t say, ‘Most people who don’t wear seat belts never suffer any injury,’ though that’s true.

That would be irresponsible in public health. Instead we say, ‘Wear your seat belt every time you drive.’”

Corey Waller, an addiction specialist at the Center for Integrative Medicine, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, said the site was “without checks and balances.” He works with drug users who land in emergency rooms ten times or more a year. Addicts, he told me, would not read Erowid with the skepticism that the site presumes. “Part of the disease is that they’re not able to make logical decisions.”

Fire said that those who treat addicts “understandably see the whole world as—”

“—as a giant heroin overdose waiting to happen,” Earth said.

“Our audience is not the most likely to become heroin addicts,” Fire went on. “Our message might be, ‘If you start finding yourself needing to increase your dosage, you’re building tolerance. That means you’re using too frequently.’”

Of course, no matter what the user’s knowledge base, some drugs are more addictive than others. According to Edward Boyer, the recent opioid epidemic has proved that “exposure does matter.” The greater the number of people who try certain habit-forming drugs, the more addicts America will have.

To the extent that Erowid does caution users, it is with infrequent warnings, such as the injunction against driving while high. Andrew Monte, of the University of Colorado School of Medicine, said that these standard cautions are disingenuous. “I would say that they’re largely throwaway kinds of statements,” he told me. “They’re really put there almost as a protection, it seems to me, just for the operators of the site.”

Earth said that warnings are good, but only insofar as they “help people put the risks and benefits into proper balance.” As for the question of quantity, Fire said, “We don’t over-add warnings, because then it’s just all warnings.” It’s possible that the warnings they do include, some of which are echoed by drug users across the Internet, are taken

more seriously as the result of being on Erowid, given its reputation for avoiding hyperbole. “We are developing a library, not a personal-use guide,” Earth said.

Such statements put Erowid in a particular corner of the drug subculture. Recently, there has been a general uptick in the use of “harm reduction,” some of it opportunistic. Bluelight, the drug-user forum, claims to be “reducing harm by educating the individual.” Ross Ulbricht, the imprisoned founder of Silk Road, an online black market that sold drugs and other illicit goods and services, used the term in his legal defense. Fire told me that harm reduction is a goal for Erowid, but not a primary one.

Erowid’s object is to help establish a conversation about drugs in which “actual accurate information is published and agreed upon.” Fire said, “When we publish about a drug, some people will choose to do that drug who otherwise might not have. But we can’t just stay back where we are.” Earth added, in an e-mail, “There will always be deaths, regardless of information or policy.”

Sometimes, late at night, when Earth and Fire get tired, they turn on a football game. They happen to enjoy what Earth calls America’s “head-trauma fest,” but they also like to keep an eye on what common psychoactive substances (alcohol, sex drugs, caffeine, antipsychotics) are being advertised to television audiences.

Today, long after the “Reefer Madness” era, there is less consensus about which drugs are “good” and which are “bad,” and the latter are less likely to be treated as such—the federal government includes marijuana in “the most dangerous class of drugs,” yet twenty-three states have legalized its medical use and four permit its retail production and sale. In 2010, Congress changed sentencing rules for crack-cocaine possession, establishing higher-quantity thresholds for mandatory jail time. The Affordable Care Act requires insurance companies to cover substance-use disorders. As Mark A.R. Kleiman, a drug-policy expert at N.Y.U.’s Marron Institute of Urban Management, put it, “Drug policy is moving in a less hysterical direction.”

Nevertheless, Kleiman said, “it’s not as if the National Institute on Drug Abuse were conducting serious research on the intended effects of drugs on ordinary users.” In a statement, Mario Moreno Zepeda, a spokesman for the White House’s Office of

National Drug Control Policy, used watchwords such as “evidence-based initiatives,” but in the context of the Obama Administration’s focus on “prevention, treatment, and recovery.” According to Kleiman, “If some kid wants to know what drugs to use and what their risks are, he’s not in a better position,” particularly given the proliferation of new psychoactive substances. Earth seemed to agree: “Where we are in 2015 is substantially evolved from 1995, but things are still in a relative stone age for teaching people how to make good decisions about psychoactives.”

Now Erowid’s task will be to teach people not only about specific substances but also about what to do with a mysterious white powder. This meme is called “Know your substance,” and, among those who understand that the “Molly” they bought on the street might not be MDMA, it has gained a following. They might try to determine what a substance is with a liquid reagent test, which can be conducted inexpensively at home, or they could send it to a lab through Erowid’s EcstasyData program.

These hurdles are high, but, in Earth and Fire’s view, they are necessary. Earth told me, “I don’t feel that humans have ever been in this position before, where we have the ability to deliver to every single person in a rich society a variety of mind-altering chemicals.” He added, “We’re not that far away from having the ability to have the coffee-maker print our drugs for us.”

“I don’t think most seventeen-year-olds are ready for that,” Fire said.

When Earth and Fire took me on a tour of their property, they showed me a three-story barn, filled with antique saws, a car-size diesel generator, and a gantry installed on railroad tracks. Their plan is to turn the top two stories into a library that would be open to researchers. “There should be generations of knowledge,” Earth said. One current initiative is the Wisdom Cycle Project, which collects reflections from older generations about their drug use.

One afternoon, I asked Earth and Fire how they saw themselves in relation to psychedelic proselytizers like Timothy Leary and Terence McKenna, the drug philosopher. We were sitting on the couple’s deck, overlooking the ravine. Deer picked their way through the leaves on the slope below.

“We’re not showmen,” Fire said.

“We’re just not that fun,” Earth said.

“We’re not so into the ‘woo’ side of psychedelic stuff,” Fire said. “But we try to keep it open and flowing, because we talk to a lot of people who are more into the ‘woo-er’ side.”

“Well, but we also are ‘woo,’ ” Earth said, pointing out that they had done their share of “sweat lodges and that sort of thing” in the nineties. “We’re so ‘woo’ we’re ‘post-woo.’ ” They laughed.

The light had faded, and a gloom settled over the dry forest. Nyx the cat jumped onto the railing.

Earth said, “We just want to—”

“—be accurate,” Fire said.

“Be accurate, but we also want to allow for all—”

“—to create room for other people to have their experiences.” ♦

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