

# THE HATED PRETENDERS



## THE HATED PRETENDERS

While doing research for the project that would eventually become the film *The Masked Monkeys*, we came upon a phenomenon that – although not directly related to the practices we witnessed in Indonesia – also dealt with apes and masks. We stumbled upon a group of humans who use masks to act like apes. They call themselves the *Hated Pretenders*.

It was through a former member that we were able to conjure up a picture of this particular community. His name is Charles.<sup>1</sup> He said he came upon the *Hated Pretenders* while searching for fandom groups that focused on animals. He was looking for something unusual, maybe a bit dangerous. He told us that he got into the *Hated Pretenders* because everyone was so intense. You could really sense every member's effort. To them it wasn't really a choice, but a necessity. The whole thing seemed to have real significance.

"You see", he said, "They portray themselves as possessors of hidden knowledge and as such, persecuted by enemy forces. They are always on the brink of being discovered and thwarted. That's why the group never meets in person. Everything takes place online. They share videos with each other where they display their skills. This is how they demonstrate how far advanced they are in their respective transformations. This is also what spurs competition between them."

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<sup>1</sup> Not his real name.

Sadly, Charles said he couldn't send us any of the videos. He said there weren't any. Every video he made or saw was live streamed and he kept no copies.<sup>2</sup> Those were the rules. In any case, the videos wouldn't really help us understand what it all meant, he said.<sup>3</sup> For us to even come close, he had to explain the masks.

The masks are the principal symbols of their practice. They use the masks to create their characters, yet they are not meant to be worn. Actual masks are perceived as crutches. No real costumes are involved. In fact, during a session the *Hated Pretender* must be naked.

The masks do not correspond to a particular ape or character but symbolize what could be described as an ape archetype. Each ape archetype

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, we had already seen a part of one video. It was through this video that we found Charles. A friend had sent us a link to it on a porn streaming site. Fascinated by what we saw, we tried to contact the uploader but got no reply. We asked on the site's forum if anyone knew where this video came from. Charles answered. First thing he said was that it wasn't him in the video. He said it had been leaked by an enemy of the Hated Pretenders. We asked him who the Hated Pretenders were and that's how this story began.

So what was on the video? Well, it was a young man naked in a room with blacked out windows and no furniture. First he's in the corner balled up and picking at something on his skin. Then he jumps up and erupts into animal-like growls and screams, drooling and spitting. He lunges towards the camera and throws himself on the floor, spreads his legs wide open and starts rubbing a patch of dark hairy skin right below his genitals. The clip ends abruptly after a few seconds of him rubbing that dark patch of skin.

<sup>3</sup> Charles always wavered between being willing and reticent to share detailed information with us. On the one hand, he didn't want us to misunderstand what the group was and made clear the importance of its mission. On the other hand, he was sure we would never truly comprehend what they were doing. He said this was one of the underlying reasons for the group's name. He told us that one of the main reasons they were so hated was because their enemies could not grasp the complexity or importance of their mission. We never found any of the group's supposed enemies to corroborate this sense of persecution but he continued to assert that they were out there. Leaking that video onto a porn site was an example of them trying to discredit the group, he said.

possesses characteristic behaviors or traits. These traits are what the *Hated Pretenders* enact during their sessions. The *Hated Pretender* chooses an archetype and proceeds to enact its traits. Sessions last from a few minutes to hours to sometimes days. Other than the camera used to document the session, the room where it takes place must be empty.

At an agreed upon time, each *Hated Pretender* streams their session live onto an archetype's stream. Since the enactor in the video must not speak, it is up to the other *Hated Pretenders* to interpret the traits that are being presented. Other *Hated Pretenders* that want to enact that archetype go to that archetype's stream and create their own characterization based on the traits they have observed. This is how the sessions keep evolving. Every new trait is a response to those seen in previous streams.

Charles told us that before he left the group there was a significant development in the enactments. The most esteemed *Hated Pretenders* started to act increasingly less like apes, or the traditional image we have of apelike behavior. Their enactments began to resemble what it would look like if apes tried to mimic human activities. Things like smoking a cigarette, riding a tricycle, bouncing a basketball, dancing in front of a crowd, reading a book, or answering an email.

Lately, some very committed *Hated Pretenders* have also begun to practice a form of xenotransplantation, where they graft real ape tissue to their own skin. They stitch a small patch of hairy tissue to the area of skin between the anus and genitals.<sup>4</sup> Apparently, certain qualities intrinsic

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<sup>4</sup> Charles wouldn't tell us where the tissue is being sourced or who is performing these grafts but our own research led us to sites where DIY xenotransplantation is quite popular. Some DIY guides point towards dark net providers from which animal parts and immunosuppressant drugs can be obtained. We've also come to believe that the *Hated Pretenders* took their inspiration from the work of Serge Voronoff (1866–1951), a French doctor who became famous and very wealthy in the 1920's and 30's by grafting monkey testicle tissue onto the testicles of men for the purpose of rejuvenation.

sic to apes can be transferred to the host in this manner.<sup>5</sup>

Although we asked many times, Charles refused to send us the images of the masks. He did send us their archetype names. After that he stopped answering our messages.

These are their names:

**BABA the Expositor**

**BEBE the Skin Fiend**

**BIBI the Shadow Traitor**

**BOBO the Dark Daemon**

**BUBU the Grunting Philosopher**

Since we had no other reference, we decided to create our own images to go along with the names. But after making them, we were not sure how *our* masks go together with *their* names. So we started to combine the names with our masks and to mix them up to create different characters.

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<sup>5</sup> This is the reason why Charles is no longer part of the HPs. He told us he was thrown out for not being able to commit to the xenotransplantation. The nature of the practice nurtures competition and this led the group to become increasingly radical, vis-à-vis what should and shouldn't be considered a true HP. Eventually the skin graft became a requisite for membership. He just couldn't go through with it. "Not good with blood", he said. He tried to fake it with synthetic hair, foam latex, and makeup he bought at a costume shop but was discovered when the patch of fake hair fell off while he was rubbing it. After his video went out, he received a message informing him he had been officially removed from the group. He thinks they'll let him back in if he goes through with it, so he's been trying to build up the courage by cutting himself on his inner thigh and staring into the wound. He's also been practicing grafting chicken skin onto pig skin. "It's all about visualization and speed", he said.











We like to dream up different traits and think about how we would interpret them if we were to make our own video.

Perhaps now you would like to do this, too. Perhaps for a moment in our minds, we can all be one of the *Hated Pretenders*.

Perhaps you will choose one of the masks for yourself. Perhaps you will look at it closely and try to absorb its features, try to discover its character. Perhaps you will choose a name to go along with this mask.

Perhaps you're in an empty room. Perhaps you're in front of a camera. Perhaps you're naked. Perhaps between your anus and your genitals there is a patch of foreign tissue. What color is the hair that protrudes? Perhaps you rub it with your fingers. What does it feel like?

What are your traits? Who are you really?

Now, concentrate.

Perhaps you are a picture of innate energy. Perhaps you're a black-haired monster with blazing little eyes.

Perhaps you have a diabolical appearance and one need not be a child to shudder if you should approach with features distorted by rage.

Perhaps few venture to speak aloud in your presence. Your chest is covered with muscles, developed beyond regular proportion. Your neck and your hands are double the width of those of a strong man.

Perhaps you spontaneously start whistling, mimicking an animal caretaker making the sound. The importance is that whistling is a sound from a human's but not an ape's repertoire.

Perhaps you are recognized for your insight in solving numerous pro-

blems, including stacking or manipulating boxes to reach a reward or the use of two sticks as a unit to rake food into a reachable distance.

Perhaps your gifts are so distinct that you are put on a stage to display them. You travel the world and see many different faces. Perhaps under thick lids, your dark eyes calmly but closely watch the beings that stand staring wonderingly at you.

Perhaps with much effort and pain you straighten your stance. Perhaps with time, your features appear more refined. Your muscles lose much of their size and definition.

Perhaps you struggle to define an obscure aspect of your current existence that you hold to be of great importance with regard to understanding your unique predicament.

Perhaps you sweat under fine garb. You struggle to twirl a cane, which you now mostly use to support your diminished yet still considerable weight.

Perhaps the weight of your body mirrors the weight of all those erased capacities.

Perhaps ultimately the toll of your duties becomes very hard to bear. Perhaps you begin to associate the nightly dimming of the lights on stage with the dimming of your inner force and every evening feels like a gradual retreat toward an inner lair.

Perhaps to console yourself, you rely on your ability to create complex worlds using only your imagination. Perhaps “metaphorical” is your instinctive mode. Perhaps you create a space. Perhaps you are intensely curious about this new world. Perhaps your whole life plays out again in this space. You draw a circle. The circle relates to your sense of self. You draw a square around the circle. The square is an architectural unit. The

square relates to your feelings about your house/home. Perhaps you inhabit an enclosure that protects and separates you. Perhaps within this world you sense endless possibilities. Perhaps it's just a matter of being able to remember your previous abilities. Perhaps it's just a matter of achieving proper concentration. Perhaps it's a matter of blocking out foreign stimuli.

Perhaps the stimuli persist, assailing your attention. Perhaps you can sense the eyes of an audience outside the boundaries of your enclosure. Before, you were known as a performer, yet you find it very hard to give those eyes their expected reward. You struggle once more to define your condition. Just beyond the edge of your awareness lies an image that if accurately presented would clarify for them the mystifying aspects of this entire process. But every action begs for an effort you can no longer provide.

Perhaps you realize the boundaries of your new enclosure are much closer than they once seemed, so close that they restrict all movement. Perhaps you discover that in your enclosure you are absolutely still. Perhaps you discover that in your enclosure there is no space for present possibilities. You surrender, but the act lacks the appropriate weight. You sink, you dissolve, but the enclosure in some form remains. Perhaps your enclosure might one day act as a trace from which other imaginary enclosures will be built. How might those that go about it know what to build and how?

Perhaps it's just a matter of being able to forget.

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