



TAKE YOURSELF LESS SERIOUSLY

by Scott Yorko | illustration by Ryan Stolp

IT WAS ALMOST 8 A.M. when two friends and I topped out on 14,279-foot Castle Peak in Colorado's Elk Range last May. At the very end of a long season, we'd woken at 4:30 and power-hiked through the darkness to beat the sun's snow-melting rays and get first tracks on the east face.

As we crested the climb's last few feet, a head poked over the summit lip: a lone figure wearing an old skateboard helmet and vintage Boeri goggles with Scotch tape over a crack in the amber lens. Masking tape across both clunky, four-buckle boots bore Samuel Alexander's full name. His jacket looked like an old thrift store score; his mittens gripped the kind of bamboo Nordic poles you find nailed above a rustic restaurant fireplace; and his pants, I kid you not, were tearaway warmups with snaps down the side—straight out of the '90s NBA. The permagrain plastered across Samuel's face and his awkward, hyper-inquisitive dialog said it all: This superdork was stoked and ready to shred.

My partners and I skied down quickly, scratching across an icy entrance, boosting powder turns in the top of the couloir and struggling through heavy, isothermal mank the rest of the way out. The summit encounter sizzled in our minds. We were shell-shocked to meet a full-on gaper at the top of such a committing line. We also respected everything about him, almost humbled by his kookiness.

As I rallied my Tacoma out of the trailhead and down the 4x4 road, past a low-clearance Honda Civic with a hanging front bumper, I pondered: What made us think we were cooler than him with our light-weight skimo setups, technical outerwear, alpine start and first tracks? In the end, we were all just there to slide down snow—basically sledging standing up, a ridiculous endeavor to devote so much time and so little sleep, yet one for which we all had a deep passion.

Later that week, reluctant to let my season end, I came across a Warren Miller film from the '80s. Its five-minute blooper reel started at a tubing

hill, cut to skiers falling on the steps at the lodge and finished with a montage of pros in neon clown outfits wiping out. There's no way any of them believed this bizarre recreational pursuit was earning them cool points. Even the pros smirked on camera, aware of how absurd it was to get so much attention and airtime for repeatedly hotdogging down a snowy hill. Good skiers made fun of themselves as much as they clowned on anyone else.

Fast forward to current day and it can be hard to not gag a bit when skiers and film narrators sound as if they're endeavoring to change the world and bring meaning to the lives of every human by going skiing. Don't get me wrong—I'm not nostalgic about the '80s. Skiing is way better now. Our gear is superior, we have access to more interesting terrain, and the mind-blowing things we're doing on skis and boards inspire so many new ways to have fun. But, in the words of sledding enthusiasts Calvin and Hobbes, "When you're *serious* about having fun, it's not much fun at all!"

Finding meaning in the frivolous activity of skiing is real; that's the nature of building an identity around something. But to believe that being "good" at skiing elevates you to some level of cool that demands recognition—be it in the form of fame, money or respect from people who don't share your core identity—is taking it a bit too far.

So whenever we find ourselves worshiping the pro demigods or star-struck in the tram line, let's remind ourselves that someone with duct-taped gear and no sponsors probably already snaked their line that morning. While you're out posting your FKT up a skintrack, remember that the soul shredders you've never heard of may be lurking nearby, having sent something far more rad. Consider that they don't take themselves too seriously and how much fun they're likely having, without trying to make it look like anything other than pure, goofy, pointless enjoyment that somehow still means everything.