Below are a few sample pitches that I've had approved over the years. Not all of them were published (one ended up being killed, and I sold one to another writer) but they all passed through the editorial gauntlet known as the "pitch meeting". I might make another document of failed pitches and maybe someone who is very very smart can find out the secret formula of success and explain to me why some stories make it while others fall flat.

Realize that a pitch is a very different animal than a story. Not all of the facts are confirmed and not all of the anecdotes have happened yet. What you're selling here is the idea of the story which could come into existence if a publisher decides to fund the research and editing.

If you have any questions drop me a line. As long as I have free time I'm happy to help. Also, please sign up for my e-mail newsletter for ongoing journalism updates and occasionally publishing tips.

-Scott Carney
Investigative Journalist
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What Doesn't Kill Us Book pitch to media.

I'm an investigative journalist (for Wired, Playboy and Mother Jones) based in Denver, CO.

Earlier this year I released a new book called *What Doesn't Kill Us: How Freezing Water, Extreme Altitude and Environmental Conditioning Will Renew Our Lost Evolutionary Strength* which ended up on the NYT Bestseller list for Feb and March.

If the wall of text below here is too long, take a look at this book trailer or a feature excerpt in *Men's Journal*.

A few years ago I heard about a Dutch fitness guru named Wim Hof who claimed to be able to give people what sounded like superpowers--consciously controlling their body temperature, their immune systems and oxygen consumption. I had just written a book and given a Tedx talk about another guru making similarly outlandish claims in the deserts of Arizona. That story ended in tragedy, with a man dying on his search for enlightenment. I thought Wim Hof was just another charlatan, so I got a commission from Playboy to set out to prove he was a fake.

Obviously, I was more than a little bit skeptical when I met Hof at his training center in Poland. However, within a few days, he completely changed my mind. I ended up meditating on the banks of a snowy river, melting the snow around me with my body heat. I learned to hold my breath for three minutes at a stretch and stand in the snow for hours at a time. At the end of the week I climbed a mountain in Poland wearing only a bathing suit while the temperature plummeted to 4 degrees.

The piece in Playboy turned out to be a hit and I spent the next four years studying the method more closely and examining scientific explanations for why it worked. I interviewed top athletes using cold exposure and high-intensity training to maximize their workouts, and military scientists who are trying to make the perfect soldier. I delved into the anthropological literature on human evolution that suggested that our ancestors survived frigid winters by cultivating a vestigial tissue known as brown fat, which uses ordinary white fat to heat the body. Then I learned how to cultivate brown fat myself.

I know that a lot of this sounds crazy. I thought so too. But as I learned more, I began to see results for myself. I learned to control my body temperature to such an extent that last January, I climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro without a shirt--at a pace that was three times faster than almost anyone ever attempts--making it to the rim of the volcano in just 28 hours.

There's a lot more to say, of course, and a ton of peer-reviewed science that I've barely touched on here. You can download a pdf here.

I look forward to hearing from you.

The Iceman's Inner Fire

Sold to Details, Killed. Resold to Playboy
Published March 2014 under the title "The Iceman Cometh"
http://www.scottcarney.com/article/the-iceman-commeth/

The arctic is cold. So cold that the mere thought of arctic ice makes most people want to curl up next to a fire with a mug of cocoa. But for Wim Hof arctic ice makes him want to strip down to his skivvies and go for a jog. For the last 35 years Hof, who is also known as "the Iceman", has practiced an idiosyncratic form of meditation that allows him to modulate his body temperature almost at will. The technique has resulted in some near impossible feats: including running a half-marathon in the depth of a Finnish winter wearing only shorts and no shoes, to summiting some of the world's most formidable mountains without acclimatization. In 2007 he attempted to summit Everest in the same attire, but had to back out after a foot injury. Still, his showmanship has attracted a fair amount of scientific attention, and several US and Dutch scientists have begun to study Hof to reveal his secrets.

He chalks up his own success to uncanny control over his Hypothalamus--which through biological voodoo somehow raises the temperature in his core. Two experiments seems to prove the point. In a controlled setting scientists dunked two people into ice water for 15 minutes, while the control subjects body temperature dropped to a scare 81 degrees, Hoff's barely budged. In another experiment doctors at an Amsterdam hospital injected Hof with a flu-like virus that should have certainly made him sick. Hof shrugged off the bugs and didn't so much as sniffle.

Now, at the age of 53, Hof thinks that he can teach students his secrets. In February he's running a four day training camp in Poland with ten university student volunteers. At the end of their time the research subjects will return to Amsterdam where doctors will inject them with endotoxin and see if they can repeat Hof's immunological response. "It is incredible what people can do with the right conviction. If there is a fire in your home then you run like hell. You are so fast that you don't even think. That is where I will bring people to," says Hof. And, in another trip, Hof will bring 15 people up Mt. Kilimanjaro in just 4 days without acclimatization. Their uniform: just biking shorts.

I'd like to write a feature article about Hof. Over the years Outside has run several stories on Icemen--from the 2009 article "Professor Popsicle" whose own experiments ended in occasional frostbite, to the 2003 piece on Lewis Gordon Pugh whose breathing techniques made him the fastest cold water swimmer. On the face of it, though, Hof's feats could be even more miraculous. And if he's right that they're teachable, and not the result of some genetic anomaly, perhaps he's the beginning of a new way to look at the body's unlock-able potential. On the other hand, if it IS all about genetics, then all of his followers might be in for an unexpected surprise when they find themselves on the side of Kilimanjaro in the throes of altitude sickness.

I think the best way to do this piece is to meet Hof in Amsterdam or Poland to cover the ten kids who he is teaching his techniques to. Barring that, I believe he will be in California in March on an iceless rock climbing expedition.

Related Links:
Wiki: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wim_Hof
Wim Hof's personal website: http://www.icemanwimhof.com/en-home

The Weakness of Diamond Minds
Death and Madness on the Path to Enlightenment
Published by Playboy March 2013 as "Death and Madness on Diamond Mountain"
http://www.scottcarney.com/2013/06/death-and-madness-on-diamond-mountain/
Is the basis on my book "The Enlightenment Trap")

Ian Thorson was dying of of dehydration on an Arizona Mountaintop on April 22nd and his wife, "Lama" Christie McNally didn't think he was going to make it. She dialed 911 on a pre-paid cell phone and within hours a search and rescue helicopter thumped its way to Tara mountain to evacuate the stranded couple.When they arrived Thorson was already dead. McNally would require hospitalization. Until that week, McNally and Thorson were rising stars in the tight community of meditators in the Tucson area, had co-authored several books on tibetan meditation. Along with Michael Roche, who was the first American to receive a geshe degree, they were founding members of the nearby Diamond Mountain University which attracts an enormous following of spiritual seekers. In 2008 the New York Times (http://nyti.ms/JYIuWD) lauded their teachings.

In 2010 Christie and Thorson began an intensive 3-year long silent meditation retreat on Diamond Mountain's campus in Bowie, AZ along with about a dozen other people. The course was so rigorous that if they completed it they would be heralded as new authorities of spiritual awakening. The duo updated the world on their progress through a blog, but, according to the strict rules of the retreat, were only seen in public wearing veils. But after two years of seclusion their practice turned to madness. McNally stabbed Thorson with a ritual knife during what she later described as meditative ecstasy. In the technique McNally envisioned that she was a wrathful Tibetan protector deity who was using the knife to "cut through ignorance". She stabbed Thorson so deeply that the dagger "penetrated organs" and he needed immediate medical help. That week the board of directors at Diamond Mountain asked Thorson and McNally to leave the retreat, giving them several thousand dollars and a prepaid cellphone, but did not seek out professional help. In a decision that would have fatal consequences, Thorson and McNally climbed the nearby Tara Mountain to continue meditating on their own.

Thorson's death has set off a firestorm of debate among the meditation community in Arizona and across the world. Former friends of theirs have posted strings of blog posts demanding that the Diamond Mountain University psychologically evaluate the other retreatants who are still in seclusion and have asked Michael Roach to step down immediately. A full account of the debate can be found here: http://bit.ly/Iw8cN2 It's worth a read.

However, the story goes much deeper than an obscure religious cult going off the rails, Their deaths are just the most recent, and extreme, out of a series of incidents that point to a nexus between meditation and madness. The last 40 years of scientific inquiry into meditation has largely focused on the benefits of meditation--showing substantial improvements to cardiovascular function, as a tool to manage depression, improve memory, and even significantly altering the composition of the brain's gray matter. However there has been far fewer studies into possible negative side effects. Willoughby Britton, a neuroscientist at Brown University, is one of the few to

tackle the issue with a NIH-funded study on "The Dark Side of the Contemplative Path". In the ongoing study she has found numerous cases of acute psychosis that seemed to be triggered from intensive meditation, whether on retreats, or on their own. In 1984 Leon Otis, a psychologist at stanford, showed that 70% of meditators have symptoms of mental illness after transcendental meditation. The DSM-IV even has an entry on "Chi-Gong Psychotic Affective Disorder" which notes that people who do meditation frequently descend into delusions. A 2008 paper on "Meditation Induced Psychosis" out of Denmark noted several similar cases.

I am currently working on a book about this dark side of the spiritual path which explores about a dozen similar incidents to Thorson's death, starting with the suicide of a former student of mine at a retreat center in Bodh Gaya, India. There are at least hundreds of accepted meditation techniques of varying levels of intensity. They are all currently on the upswing in the United States. Dr. Oz sits on the board of Delek Hospital in Dharmsala, Oprah recently endorsed Transcendental Meditation and just about every yoga studio in the country has a relationship with a meditation center. However by and large, Americans aren't following in the linage of long-standing religious traditions out of Asia, but are borrowing different techniques piecemeal and founding what essentially amounts to a new, and untested, religious tradition. Paul Hackett, a religious scholar at Columbia university recently told me “People are mixing and matching religious systems like legos. And the next thing you know is that you have some fairly powerful psychological and physical practices into whatever idiosyncratic attitude you’ve come to. It is no surprise that people go insane,” he says."

I'd like to carve a feature article out of my book which uses the death of Thorson to investigate the larger, and unspoken, social phenomenon of what happens when the spiritual path turns sour. Perhaps there are things that we still don't understand about the practice of meditation that neuroscience might be able to shed light on.

Scott Carney (scottcarney.com) is a senior fellow at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism and author of “The Red Market: On the Trail of the World’s Organ Brokers, Bone Thieves, Blood Farmers and Child Traffickers". He speaks Hindi and has spent six years in India.

The Suicide Sutra
It is easy to think that India is magical. It can also be deadly.

Approved by Details
Published as "Death on the Path to Enlightenment"
http://www.details.com/culture-trends/critical-eye/201210/india-syndrome-death-enlightenment?printable=true#ixzz27aaVnvvO

In 2006 while I was the director of an abroad program for American colleges students in India, one of my wards committed suicide after a meditation retreat. Some of the last words in her journal declared "I am a bodhisattva", and that all she had to do to attain enlightenment was leave her body. After she died I spent the next three days moving her corpse from a bandit-infested backwater to New Orleans, along the way building a make-shift coffin out of plywood, blocks of ice and an air conditioner. Emily's death led me to investigate other foreigners who have died or gone missing in India, and I've come across a pattern of spiritual misunderstandings that can have dangerous consequences.
If the stories were true then the Himalayas would be dotted with nearly naked levitating monks whose meditation-induced body heat melts the snow around them. Yogis could open their third eye and see your accumulated karmic burden and gurus could turn ash into golden trinkets. For Americans India is a land of outrageous poverty, a hub for IT outsourcing, but also, mostly, a global center for mystical spiritualism. Every year tens of thousands of Americans take pilgrimages to meditations centers, yoga ashrams and holy places on the Indian subcontinent seeking some form of enlightenment. Not everyone comes back sane. Or alive.

These spiritual seekers are especially susceptible to a little known psychological disorder colloquially known as "India Syndrome", a condition most frequently experienced delusions of enlightenment and magical powers. A normal physical response to sitting in one place for an extended period is to see walls breathe and move, during meditation many novices take this as a sign of great power. At Privat Hospital in Delhi a doctor once described an American brought to the clinic screaming "Don't you dare touch me! Don't come near or I'll open my third eye and kill you!" before the hospital sedated her. The hospital reports that is sees 100 similar cases a year. Multiply that by every major metropolis in the country and there are signs of a spirituality induced epidemic.

Last month a 28-year old Irish journalist for the IHT named Jonathan Spollen went missing in the holy town of Rishikesh after a meditation retreat. In 2005 Ryan Chambers (an Australian) left all of his possessions on his pillow at a hostel and disappeared, also in Rishikesh. Gary Stevenson, also known as "Gary the Sadhu," a fixture of the Varanasi tourist

scene, was often seen gnawing on dead human bodies with a group of ash-covered ascetics known as the aghoris while on a quest towards enlightenment (he is interned at a mental hospital in Texas now). Until the mid-1990s the German embassy in New Delhi had so many complaints of lost travelers that it ran a special program in Delhi to try to locate them. In all cases travelers came to India expecting to find solace, but went astray on their journeys.

I would like to write a feature about India's lost travelers in an attempt to identify how preconceptions and spiritual quests in India can trigger delusions of grandeur that lead travelers down treacherous paths.

The story of my student, Emily, is the entry point for my research. By exploring how these other travelers lived, died, or disappeared while traveling the sub-continent, I hope to also explain how romantic notions of Eastern religions that formed over hundreds of years of orientalism make it easier to believe that there are magic powers in exotic places far from home.

Scott Carney (scottcarney.com) is a senior fellow at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, author of "The Red Market: On the Trail of the World's Organ Brokers, Bone Thieves, Blood Farmers and Child Traffickers. He speaks Hindi and has spent six years in India. He plans to be in India this summer.

Art of the Steal
Approved by Bloomberg-Businessweek
Story Killed.

In a dark warehouse on the outskirts of Los Angeles Kristine Eubanks practiced a signature on a yellow legal pad. Chagall's had been giving her trouble and she had 700 to sign before her friday broadcast. What she didn't know was that the police would find the legal pad full of her practice forgeries as well as thousands of fake Picassos, Chagalls and Dalis during a raid of her office in 2006.

From 2002 to 2006 Eubanks was the mastermind behind one of the largest consumer-level art frauds in the history of the United States. At the height of her operation she was selling more than a million dollars worth of fake art every month for a total of more than $20 million from ten thousand victims. The court proceedings have only just become available, and as of April 2010 she was sentenced to 7 years in jail.

Her plan was as simple as it was brazen: Teaming up with DishNetwork and DirectTV , Eubanks broadcast a four hour live auction every week of forged fine art prints, over-appraised "certified" jewelry and original paintings. She claimed to have access to estate sales around the world where she found thousands of serialized fine art prints signed and authorized by the original artists. Piccassos supposedly valued at $50,000 sold for $700, Degas for $1100 in fast paced live TV auctions. When the price didn't rise fast enough she submitted fake bids to keep up the action.

The host for Fine Art Treasures TV show was T.J. Myers, a C-list celebrity known for scantily clad roles on late night cinemax dramas, as well as a 2004 film called "Poop" and, later, as the host of a program detailing the world's most notorious art crimes. (see a clip here: http://is.gd/g8sCg). In a corresponding scam, Eubanks also sold prints to the captive audience on Princess cruise lines.

Eubanks story taps into the investment frenzy of the sub-prime mortgage boom where everything in America was seemingly going for nothing. Poorly equipped consumers were duped into art investments that were simply too good to be true. While the FBI seized $3.4 million from Eubank's accounts, most people who bought from her own artwork that isn't worth the price of the frame. At least two people lost their life savings.

Both the FBI and the LAPD's Art Crime Detail—the only detail of its kind in the country—investigated the Eubanks case. I've been corresponding with Eubanks by letter since September and have an open invite to speak with her at the Federal Correctional

Facility in Victorville. It would be the first interview she's ever given to the media on her past. I am also close to the detectives who headed up the case who have said that they will open up all of the records to me. It should also be easy to track down victims and the show's former staff. The story will explore the murky world of art valuation and the ease with which the scam continued to operate in the open for four years in the public eye.

The Transponder that Cried Wolf
Approved by Outside
Published as "Panic Button"
http://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/outdoor-skills/survival/Panic-Button.html?page=all

In February the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group received their ninth distress call in three months from the same unregistered emergency transponder. Every time the signal would stay strong for three hours at a time and then mysteriously disappear. Either someone was in trouble and only able to send out a signal intermittently, or they were playing a hoax. Nevertheless, Paul Woodward mounted eight separate searches in some of the most treacherous terrain in the American West to locate this lost soul.

But this time was different. The transponder didn't flip off. And the rescue team—clad in orange vests and wilderness gear—zeroed in on the distress beacon: a diner in downtown Boulder. Bursting into the office they located a highly embarrassed alpine skier who says that he hadn't read the box that his personal locator beacon (or PLB) came in. He thought the satellite unit was supposed to warn him about potential avalanches. He hadn't realized that every time he went out to ski that he had sent search and rescue out after him.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association there were 4434 false alarms in 2009. In most of those cases search teams, helicopters and law enforcement went out looking for the non-existent distress-ees. In that same time period NOAA assisted in rescuing 195 people in real life-threatening danger. That signal to noise ratio wastes tens of millions of dollars every year. "This sort of thing is a huge waste of money, but it also risks the lives of rescuers who take more chances, go over more difficult terrain and fly in dangerous conditions thinking that someone's life is on the line," says Steve Rorark a project officer at SARSAT and former search and rescue pilot. In 2004 four British helicopter pilots died in a crash while responding to a false alarm.

The rise in false alarms speaks to a deep issue in modern outdoor security. As hikers and outdoorsmen gear up for their excursions into the woods the PLB is becoming a tantalizing necessity for emergency convenience. Scrambling a helicopter is as easy as pushing a button. In many cases, the convenience of pressing a button and getting rescued makes many non-life-threatening situations—like a friend of mine who "ran out of water" on a hike in the desert, pressed the emergency button, found a stream of cool water a mile away and met search and rescue eight hours later—far too common.

I'd like to write a feature about the rise of false alarms are pushing emergency rescue teams

to the breaking point. I will juxtapose stories of seemingly mundane excursions that baffled rescue attempts with the danger and excitement of rescue missions. In many cases the end result is a waste of resources and a hearty dose of embarrassment. But the alarms can also result in huge fines (often hundreds of thousands of dollars), or send the rescuee to court to face jail time.

Prior coverage: False alarms are usually the stuff of local newspaper coverage. And there are probably hundreds of articles a year about searches that are called off. I am not aware of any major features that try to link them all together.

Scott Carney (scottcarney.com) is a contributing editor at Wired magazine. His first book "The Red Market: On the Trail of the World's organ brokers, skeleton thieves, blood farmers and child traffickers" comes out with Harper Collins in June 2011.

The Price of White Eggs

How Eastern European Prostitutes are supplanting the market for Ivy League gametes

Approved by Fast Company

Published as "Human Egg Sales Raise Bioethical Issues"

http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/148/eggs-for-sale.html

There are a lot of factors that go into determining the value of a human egg. From a medical perspective grade-A ocytes are the ones most likely to be carried to term in another woman's womb. But on the free market the price of humanity is determined by the education and race of the donor. In the United States the most valuable eggs come from white 20 year old women in Ivy league institutions who can get paid as much as $100,000 for a single cycle. African Americans can expect about $8000. Whiteness is the single most expensive factor in in egg markets, and, though most fertility clinics won't advertise it, egg markets are racial politics writ large. But this is the age of globalization. In the same way that Berkeley women can contract surrogate pregnancies in India for a fraction of the cost of the American system, she can buy white human eggs from Eastern Europe to get just the right phenotype.

Markets in human eggs are legal in only a handful of countries (among them the United States). In most of Europe laws exist that extend harsh penalties to egg selling that approximate the punishments on human trafficking . The exceptions are Spain and Cyprus who have capitalized on their legal free zone and turned egg selling to big business. The permissiveness has sparked a brisk trade in fertility tourism. Here people from the UK and US can fly in for a week, pick up a packet of eggs and get them implanted at clinics back home who don't ask any questions about where they got them. But rather than harvest eggs from the local population, both spain and cyprus have found Eastern European migrants--refugees from former East Bloc--will give up their eggs for cheap. For a cycle of hormone treatments and harvesting they are paid between $300 and $1000, about 1/100th of their US counterparts.

The clinics claim that they are simply well positioned in the market and advertise the nordic-ness of their egg supply (see http://www.nordica.org/). Yet critics maintain that the eastern european egg markets are capitalizing on human suffering and taking advantage of people least able to protect themselves from a global traffic in body brokers. In the last three weeks I've been in touch with top anti-trafficking experts in Cyprus through the US embassy and learned that many of the egg donors are prostitutes who have been trafficked into the country for sex work. For these women, their first stop is at a hospital where doctors test them for STDs and offer them other ways to sell their bodies than just sex.

But this isn't just a story about egg selling. It's also about the potential risks of egg donation. Approximately 3% of women who undergo egg harvesting have serious side effects that can include stroke and even death. The clinics in Spain and Cyprus are known to give much higher hormone doses than in the United States that while increase the number of harvestable eggs, but also potentially lead to increased chances of serious side effects.

This story, which will be included in a book I am writing about human organ trafficking and published by Harper Collins in 2011, will be a major feature article about the current dangers of globalized egg markets. I have solid contacts in Cyprus and believe I can accomplish the reporting for this with a week on the ground.

I am an investigative journalist based in Brooklyn, NY and contributing editor at WIRED and writer for Mother Jones and NPR. More information about me on my website at http://www.scottcarneyonline.com

Red Markets:
In the US, it's illegal to sell your blood, kidneys, corneas, or any other body part. Instead, you can donate them.
Approved by Wired
http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/01/ff_redmarkets/all/1

By social consensus, the supply of human flesh must be driven by altruism rather than lucre. A clinical trial can be stopped before it begins if an ethics committee finds that payments to human guinea pigs are high enough to cause "undue incentive." A would-be surrogate mother has to pass a psychological assessment to determine that she's motivated more by giving the gift of motherhood than taking the paycheck. But while you can't sell your own body, you can certainly buy someone else's. A certified prime US surrogate womb can run $100,000. A new kidney goes for at least $50,000. There's a price tag attached to every pint of blood used during surgery.

This disconnect between supply and demand creates tremendous economic pressure, and that pressure finds a variety of outlets. Million-dollar businesses are based on an unreliable system of donations with no readily available source of spare parts. Shady operators are only too willing to fill the supply-chain vacuum. Advances in refrigeration, transportation, banking, drugs, and surgical techniques lubricate the flow of goods, while globalization brings together buyers and sellers: If you can't buy the parts you need at home, you can go abroad and get them at a deep discount. Welcome to the red market.
Law and economics recognize three types of markets: white, gray, and black. The red market operates outside this system, product of the contradictions that arise when social taboos surrounding the human body collide with the individual urge to live a long, healthy life. We insist that a human flesh can't be valued, and assume that it's in short supply. In fact, the prices are well established by the medical community, and the supply is endless, thanks to burgeoning populations in impoverished parts of the world. In Egypt, India, Pakistan and the Philippines, entire villages sell organs, rent wombs, and sign away rights to their bodies after death— not under duress, but in mutually agreeable transactions. Middlemen who have the legal authority to deal in human parts—often hospitals and government institutions— buy for the lowest possible price while assuring buyers that the parts come from an ethical source. And while procurement is frequently illegal and sometimes abhorrent, the final sale is not only legal but sanctioned by the implicit moral dimension of a human life saved.

Consider the market for blood in Gorakhpur, India, a city that boasts a dozen hospitals. Encouraged by steady demand, suppliers kidnapped 20 people and milked them three times a week for two years, delivering a product indistinguishable from that of the local Red

Cross. The blood thieves were busted in due course, but even a year after the arrests, authorities note that legitimate banks account for only 50 percent of the blood used in surgery. No one can say where the rest comes from.

I've covered some of aspects this trade in articles about skeletons, surrogate motherhood, and adopted children. But I've come to see common elements in these markets and others, including organs, gametes, and connective tissues. HarperCollins has commissioned a book on red markets, and I'd like to introduce the concept in Wired. I envision 3000 words sketching out the major features of red markets and showing how these features bear out in various markets, supplemented by quarter-page Dewars Profiles on each of the markets discussed. I will show how a shortage of blood created the illicit market in Gorakhpur, how the market for surrogate mothers in India boomed in the wake of US regulations, and how criminal organ-trading networks make the US transplant list irrelevant. I will also show how respected insurance companies, well-meaning medical authorities, and international institutions come together to make red markets the norm, rather than the exception.

Sugar Pills
Writer: Scott Carney
(Wired bought this pitch and then assigned it to another writer)
http://www.wired.com/medtech/drugs/magazine/17-09/ff_placebo_effect?currentPage=all

The idea behind modern medicine is simple: put a chemical into someone's body and it will have a predictable effect. Sure, there are a few reasons why this might not happen--variable sensitivity to the compound,interference from other medications. By and large, though, we tend to accept that medicines work as they're designed to work. But there's one complication that's giving the medical industry fits: the placebo effect. Although the phenomenon has been recognized since the days of the ancient Greeks who named it, the placebo effect remains little understood. In the past few years, research has established that it definitely exists, and it's neither bias ("all in your mind") nor a natural fluctuation of symptoms. Placebos work through specific brain pathways and can have a profound impact on autonomic functions like endocrine activity and the immune system as well as cognitive functions like mood and memory. The first over-the-counter placebo, Obecalp, for nonspecific childhood ailments, went on sale this summer.

If an inert substance like sugar or saline relieves pain in 20 percent of people and an analgesic helps 21 percent of recipients suffering from the same illness, did the medicine have much to do with it? Drug companies try to answer this question in two ways. First, they routinely start their trials with a placebo-only study and throw out all the candidates who showed a strong response, retaining the rest for testing. Second, they match their drug tests with control groups who received only placebo. To gain FDA approval, the drug must outperform the placebo, if only marginally. There are problems with this system. For one, by rejecting people who respond to placebos, researchers make the placebo look less effective than it really is, skewing their results in favor of their drug. It also opens a loophole that pharma companies use to fudge results — say, by switching participants from the drug group to the placebo group so lingering side effects can be attributed to the placebo. Moreover, when a drug beats the placebo, it's likely that some percentage of recipients improved due not to the medication but to the placebo effect. Was it a small portion or the lion's share? There's no way to know. Sometimes the placebo outperforms the medicine it's pitted against. Ted Kaptchuk at Harvard found that placebo treatment tested better than any existing med in 270 patients with irritable bowel syndrome. Most mysterious, beneficial placebo effects are often accompanied by a negative "nocebo" effect that parallels harmful drug side effects.

These issues have become the elephant in the clinic, especially when it comes to the efficacy

of the class of drugs known as SSRIs. Treatments like Prozac and Zoloft are the most frequently prescribed meds for depression - and the most profitable class of drugs on the market, accounting for $10 billion annually in profit. Doctors report that they have undeniable positive, even life-saving effects in some patients. Yet in clinical trials, they rarely outperform placebos, and when they do, it's only slightly. Drug companies are desperate to demonstrate that SSRIs are effective. "The placebo effect is overwhelming the ability to make a distinction between the pharmacology of a drug and an inert imitation," Kaptchuk observes. All of which makes it a top scientific priority to understand the placebo effect. The NIH made a special call for proposals eight years ago, and research has exploded since then. Thanks to sophisticated brain imaging techniques and cleverly designed studies, researchers are closing in on the mechanisms that underlie the phenomenon and devising test procedures that can distinguish it from drug-induced effects. Jon-Kar Zubieta at University of Michigan is studying whether responsiveness to placebos is related to estrogen and testosterone levels. To minimize placebo effects in clinical trials, C. Benedetti at the University of Turin suggest supplementing overt drug tests, which presumably activate some degree of placebo effect, with a group of subjects on an IV drip so they can't tell whether or when they're getting dosed. A comparison would reveal the drug's own placebo nature.

I've made contact with a few pharma insiders about the havoc the placebo effect is bringing to their industry, and with researchers about what it means and how we might cope. Medicine will be changed by the current ferment. Let's capture the transitional moment and offer a glimpse into the future.

Prior coverage: Mother Jones covered the ineffectiveness of SSIRs in relation to placebo in 2003 (and it remains an ongoing story). Although that was after the NIH started pushing placebo research, it was before much of the new understanding of placebos began to emerge. The New York Times has reported regularly on manipulations of drug trials. Discussion focusing on the placebo effect has been confined mostly to medical journals, particularly PLoS Medicine.

No Country for Young Children
Approved by Mother Jones
Published as "Meet the Parents"
http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2009/03/meet-parents-dark-side-overseas-adoption

Sivagama only turned her back for a second, but that's all it took for her son, Subash, to be whisked away into an auto-rickshaw by kidnappers. Later that day he was sold to an orphanage in Chennai, India and ultimately adopted by a family in the United States. Now, ten years later, they might have a chance for a reunion.

The last two decades have been bad for Indian adoption agencies with protests from adoptees about poor record keeping and accusations of child trafficking. Though orphanages here are dismal and overcrowded, poor government oversight, and byzantine regulations have made legal adoptions complex and often impossible. However a few agencies have thrived by circumventing the law entirely by hiring gangs of kidnappers to steal children from the streets and funnel them into a world of non-profit organizations, churches and well-intentioned parents who desperately want to care for disadvantaged children. Along the way, foreigners pay top dollar—as much as $20,000 in donations and fees—to arrange the child's transfer. That money has been incentive enough to attract the worst kind of attention.

Between 1999 and 2001 the orphanage Malaysian Social Services (MSS) arranged 121 international adoptions—sending children mostly to the United States, Australia and the Netherlands. In 2005, two men, and two women were arrested in Chennai on kidnapping charges after police overheard them arguing loudly in a crowded slum bar at how low their fees for child stealing were. During their interrogation they admitted that they had been selling children to MSS for several years. One child brought them 10,000 rupees ($280); They got 20,000 for two. The money was even better for the orphanage, according to court records, MSS earned more than $250,000 in adoption fees from abroad.

The police have spent the last three years investigating the case and are about to file formal charges some time in September or October. They have tracked 21 children to the United States, and followed one paper trail to the doorstep of a Christian family in Wisconsin where Sivagama's son has ended up. For the last ten years an upstanding Christian family who is active in their community has raised him. An inside source close to the police gave me his adoptive family's contact information.

I have the blessing of the family in Chennai to speak with the adoptive family and give them a message of reconciliation. In a way, I would be leaving the traditional role of journalist

here as I deliver a message between the two families. There is the chance that my contact with them will be the first they have heard of a possible abduction. However, the family here has little faith in the police to resolve the matter as they have already dragged on their investigation for more than ten years, despite knowing the child's location for the last three years. The family here hopes that I will get there before INTERPOL re-abducts the child, and sends him back to India forcibly, as they realize that after ten years, the child may be more American than he is Indian. They suggested that I get DNA evidence to make the case transparent and raise awareness in the weakness in the adoption system.

What happens next will raise complex ethical and legal issues and send a jolt through the world of regulated international adoption. Should a child who has been raised for ten years in America be forced to return to an Indian slum? Have high adoption fees created opportunity for child trafficking? Has Western altruism been turned on its head?

This story is not only confined to the experiences of two families, but potentially thousands of adopted families across the world and dozens of orphanages across India. Among these leads are Deserie Smolin and her husband David who adopted two kidnapped children who remembered their birth brother, and over the course of several years, led them back to their biological parents in India. There are also at least 300 pending cases here in Chennai. I have solid leads (meaning names and addresses) of two similar cases in the United States, two in the Netherlands and one in Australia that shed light on the true scope of the issue.

I took these photos of the families in Chennai this week:
http://scottcarneyonline.com/photos/USA%20Kidnapping/
http://scottcarneyonline.com/photos/zabeen-kidnapping/

I am an American investigative journalist who has lived in India off and on for the last ten years. I am a frequent contributor to WIRED and National Public Radio. My work has also appeared in Discover, Fodors, GQ, FHM and several major European news sources. A documentary that I helped produce for the National Geographic Channel on the international organ trade has been nominated in this year's Emmy award. A story I wrote for WIRED titled "The Bone Factory" is being made into a movie, and was selected as a finalist for both the Livingston Award and the Daniel Pearl Award.

(Read it here: http://www.wired.com/medtech/health/magazine/15-12/ff_bones). I speak Hindi and Urdu. Find out more about me on my website at http://www.scottcarneyonline.com

Pirate Gambit
Everyone knows that you don't negotiate with terrorists . . . but pirates? That's a different story.
Approved by Wired
Published as "Cutthroat Capitalism"
http://www.wired.com/politics/security/magazine/17-07/ff_somali_pirates

Case in point: Last September, the Ukrainian freighter Faina, carrying scores of Russian tanks and grenade launchers plus a crew of 21, was overrun by 50 gunmen. Even as gunships from the US, UK, and Russia surrounded them, the attackers demanded $20 million to give up the boat and its contents. Last week, a helicopter dropped $3 million onto the deck. The brigands released the crew unharmed (though one had died of a heart attack during the ordeal), dumped some guns overboard (presumably to pick up later), and slipped away to plan their next attack.

The Faina incident is by no means unique. Somali pirates who infest the waters off the Horn of Africa attacked 111 commercial ships in 2008 alone. Armed with rocket-propelled grenades, automatic weapons, and speedboats, they captured 14 vessels and took 300 crew members hostage. In every case, the shipowner struck a deal, paying for the release of the return of the ship, and letting the pirates go free.

This state of affairs amounts to a revolution in the piracy business. For centuries, pirates have operated in a familiar way: Board the target, take everything of value, and flee. That's the way Indonesian and Caribbean marauders work to this day. Somali pirates, on the other hand, demand a ransom. The Faina's $3 million settlement may seem small, but it's the largest ever in such a caper — and, in any case, it's a fortune compared to northeastern Somalia's average per-capita income of $180 a year.

The new Gulf of Aden business model is a delicate dance among four parties: Somalis need a way to survive amid total economic collapse, shipping companies need protection, insurers require security, and private security firms need work. It's a cozy relationship in which everyone benefits. The pirates can make a living without demanding more than the market will bear. Shippers absorb the ransom as a minor cost of doing business; with typical cargo loads worth tens of millions of dollars — and ships upward of $125 million — a few million is small change. The insurance companies charge ever higher premiums, up from $900 to $9000 per trip within last few years multiplied by 20,000 ships passing

through the Gulf annually. And the security companies earn a handsome fee for resolving a crisis.

In a way, the Gulf's pirate infestation is an unintended consequence of efforts to make the notoriously unstable region safe for international trade. Everyone is willing to pay to minimize risk. The pirates start with outrageous demands, but they'll settle for a modest purse. They know that harming crew members would bring their operations to an abrupt and bloody end, so they treat hostages well. Ship captains, like convenience-store clerks, are trained to surrender. They're allowed to defend themselves with high-pressure water hoses, sound cannons, and evasive maneuvers. "Beyond that, we are not to resist," says Jayant Kohli, who regularly sails the Gulf. And negotiators start out knowing they'll settle on an agreeable sum sooner or later. "Paying ransom to criminals isn't criminal in itself," says Leslie Edwards, a former British Special forces commando who now works with Clayton Consultants, a security company. "We're not there to solve the issue of piracy on the high-seas."

I'd like to tell the story of the symbiosis between piracy and globalization. I'm in touch with top security experts and former hostages. The reporting presents obvious challenges: Security companies sign confidentiality contracts and several journalists have been kidnapped at the port of Ely, where pirates are based. However, it looks likely that I'll be able to travel through the Gulf of Aden on an escort boat. With attacks surpassing 100 a year, I could well see some action. I have placed enquires with the British, US, and Indian navies and I'm working the back channels at several security companies.

The fate of the Faina and Somali piracy in general have been covered extensively in the daily press. However, most cover only breaking news. I have seen nothing the traces the business priorities that make this new style of piracy so potent.

Mobgalore
Approved by Wired
published as "The Godfather of Bangalore"
http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/16-11/mf_mobgalore?currentPage=all

Eight years have passed since *Wired* published Brad Wezeir's article "Boomgalore." In that time, the city has continued its metamorphosis from a sleepy administrative outpost to globalization's premier showcase. New IT campuses continue to sprout, teeming with call center operators and Ivy League-educated programmers. Real estate prices have skyrocketed, from $25 per square foot in 2001 to over $1000 today in the center of town. There's just one wrinkle: Bangalore's very success has turned the city into a hotbed of organized crime.

The mob has its fingers in prostitution, video piracy, and pharmaceutical smuggling, but it operates most flagrantly in real estate. Developers looking to build new corporate campuses face the challenge of obtaining a deed. Land ownership in the region is absurdly convoluted, and two or three people can claim ownership of any given plot. Settling deeds in court can take between decades—too slow for modern business. (I've read about land disputes going on for 140 years.) Mobsters have learned that the IT industry's unquenchable thirst for land means big profits for anyone who can bribe, threaten, and murder their way into possession of a legitimate title. Some 40 percent of land deals happen on the black market, often with the collusion of the police and government officials.

In this lawless environment, Muttappa Rai provides a valuable service. Hired by a would-be buyer, he checks out the parcel and decides who has the strongest legal case for ownership. He offers that person 50 percent of the land's current value in cash. To those who have a weaker case, he offers to divide 25 percent — still a fortune to most Indians. Then he sells the land to his client for the full price and pockets the remaining 25 percent. What if the original claimants don't like his terms? Rai arranges for them to be persuaded — frequently leaving them terrified, injured, or dead.

In 2001, Rai's minions gunned down a prominent real estate developer named Subburaj. During the escape, the two gunmen dropped a cell phone that implicated Rai, who fled to South Africa and eventually made his way to Dubai. There he joined forces with an international crime syndicate run by Dawood Ibrahim, who orchestrated the 1993 Mumbai bombings. Within months, Interpol brought him back to Bangalore to face 20 charges of extortion, murder, and organized crime. However, before the trial, some witnesses had fatal accidents (including Subburaj's wife). Others recanted their testimony. The arresting officers have gone into early retirement and today Rai is a free man. He has founded a

“social organization” that facilitates land deals and acts as a local labor union. Living in a fortress replete with AK-47-wielding guards and 12-foot walls topped with barbed wire, Rai is busy cleaning up his image for a political run.

US companies hoping to share in Bangalore’s success are inevitably dragged into the morass. I haven’t yet uncovered the full extent of American complicity with the land mafia. However, a prominent land developer showed me an IT park, Golf Links Private, Ltd., that was brokered by Rai's gang. IBM, AOL, and Cognizant are listed on the lease. I’ve identified several properties owned or rented by US companies; it’s hard to imagine they could have taken possession without help from the mob. More examples are sure to surface when I return to Bangalore.

Wired is in a unique position to uncover the relationship between the rise of Bangalore’s IT industry — based on billions of dollars in foreign investment — and the careers of crime bosses like Rai. Over the last two years I have made dozens of contacts — the assassinated Subburaj’s family, arresting officers, lawyers, developers, builders, even Muttappa Rai himself. There are some important caveats. Many people are afraid to speak up about Rai, and the police case against him has faltered. That said, I don't think it will be difficult to show that he's a bad man.

When Going Green Means Drawing Blood
Approved by Foreign Policy
published as "Fire in the Hole"
co-authored with Jason Miklian
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/16/fire_in_the_hole
Note that there is a huge difference here between the pitch and published story. This is a classic example of what you might find on the ground isn't necessarily what you expect. AKA: Never confuse the project with the proposal

In an age when gas-guzzlers have pushed us to the brink of climatic catastrophe, hybrid vehicles are a shot of medicine for the green technology movement. In addition to cutting fuel emissions, they show our neighbors how committed we are to tackling climate change. Even President Obama drives one. And his administration is giving billions with the goal of putting 10 million more hybrids on the road in the next decade.

But the cost of the green technology is paid in more than dollars. Instead of the currency of petroleum products hybrids use batteries and drive motors manufactured out of exotic compounds and rare earth elements which are only found in a few select places in the world. America has only a tiny fraction of what it needs within its borders, and international supplies are dwindling. The green industry has come to rely on Chinese mines, but both green activists and manufacturers are wary of keeping it that way forever. They're looking for friendlier sources.

This quest has led to central India. The geologically fertile ground holds all the raw materials needed for not only the neodymium and dysprosium needed for hybrid batteries, but also the steel for the cars themselves. Both Toyota and Honda are ramping up their operations in India, with over $1 billion in 2009 investments alone. The rare earth search has kicked off a new gold rush in some of the most contested territory in all of South Asia, and the potential for profit has led international companies to turn a blind eye to the fact that they're searching for riches in the heart of a war zone.

It is a war between four parties: the Communist Party of India-Maoist (also known as Maoists or Naxalites) who began their ideological struggle against India's central government in the 1960s; government military forces that always seem to be one step behind the Maoists; mining companies who don't care who controls the area's ideology as long as the companies can control the resources, and finally millions of innocent civilians who are caught in the middle of the firefight. The stakes are enormous. Since 2006 alone more than 100,000 people have been killed, injured or displaced.

The war spans the length of the mining belt states of Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh. Legal and illegal mines number in the thousands, and are often located in remote areas where government is weak. It's an opportunity for the Maoists, who have learned to exploit the mines, to add cash their war chest. First they attack the mine's equipment and supply lines, then blackmail the mine owners into mafia-style 'protection' services. Those mine owners

who refuse are kidnapped or even killed, dragged through the jungles to secret rebel headquarters where the police fear to tread.

Government officials who play along with the Maoists use the conflict to their advantage. Former Jharkhand Chief Minister Madhu Koda went from being a day laborer to a multimillionaire in under a decade through mining-related payoffs alone. Local police also use mining kickbacks to hire goons that squash the political competition. Some corrupt politicians even lock up political opponents and human rights campaigners under Orwellian anti-terrorism laws.

This leaves local farmers and indigenous communities caught in the middle of a war with nobody to protect them. Their families had tilled the soil here for centuries, mostly ignored by the conflicts that had swept the continent. Now with their land suddenly valuable, many villagers are forced to choose between one of three horrific options:

If they try to stay, they are told to leave at gunpoint by security forces because the area is ‘infested’ with rebels. If they still refuse, mining companies sometimes hire the Maoists to cut off the hands of random farmers until they all flee. With the land vacant, laws guaranteeing its right to stay in tribal hands no longer apply. In this way, mining companies have acquired more protected lands in the last five years than in the previous fifty.

If they give up farming, local people’s only real option for employment is to work in the mines. Employees get paid about $9 a week in exchange for 15-hour workdays in dangerous environments that virtually guarantee the early onset of chronic lung and skin diseases. Illegal mines are even more dangerous. In the unregulated sector, employees receive no protection from the mining companies or the Maoists, leaving them easy targets for exploitation.

Their third option is to join the fight. Where the Maoists used to need years to indoctrinate the disadvantaged to take up arms for their revolution, they now simply use their newfound wealth to buy troops and weapons in regions where jobs are scarce. The mining money is an irresistible incentive for farmers to join the Maoists, and being pushed off of their land provides all the justification they need to take out their rage on the state.

The Indian government is trying to quell the bloodshed, but officials privately admit that they’re fighting a losing battle against the tight-knit consortium of Maoists, miners, and politicians. And new large-scale military offensives like the newly tagged Operation Green Hunt confusingly operate not in the districts where Maoist activity is highest but in the areas most coveted by mining companies. There’s just too much money to be made for any side to be concerned about how the war affects the innocent.

The heated climate change debate in Copenhagen this week assumes that the only costs to increasing our green technology investments are on the financial side. Blindly pushing ahead can sometimes lead to unexpected consequences, like villagers in India losing everything for the sake of slightly greener technologies.

In the meantime, that hybrid in your driveway just lost a little bit of its moral sheen.

Jason Miklian is a researcher with the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). He is the author of several articles on conflict and insurgencies in South Asia.