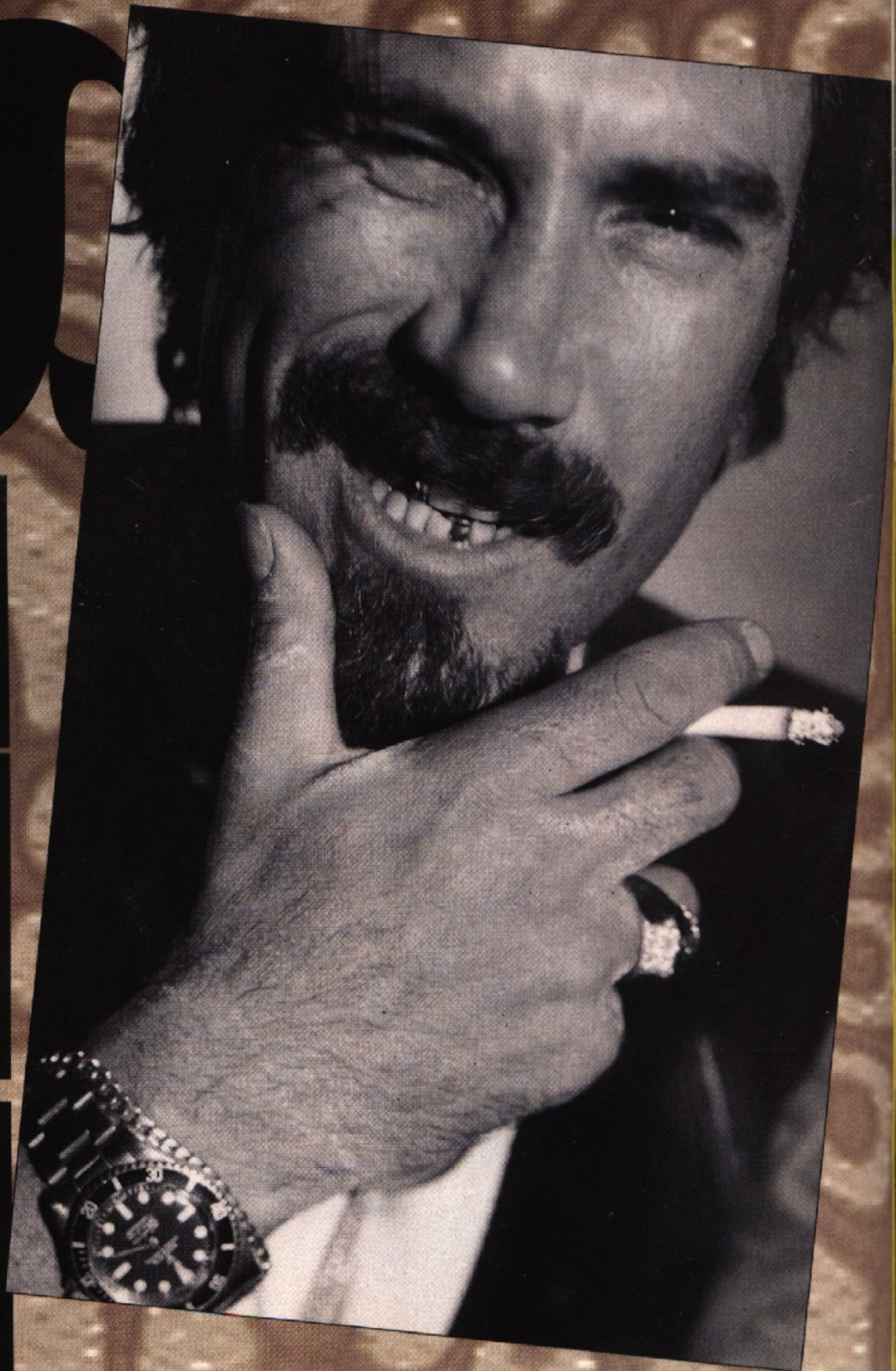


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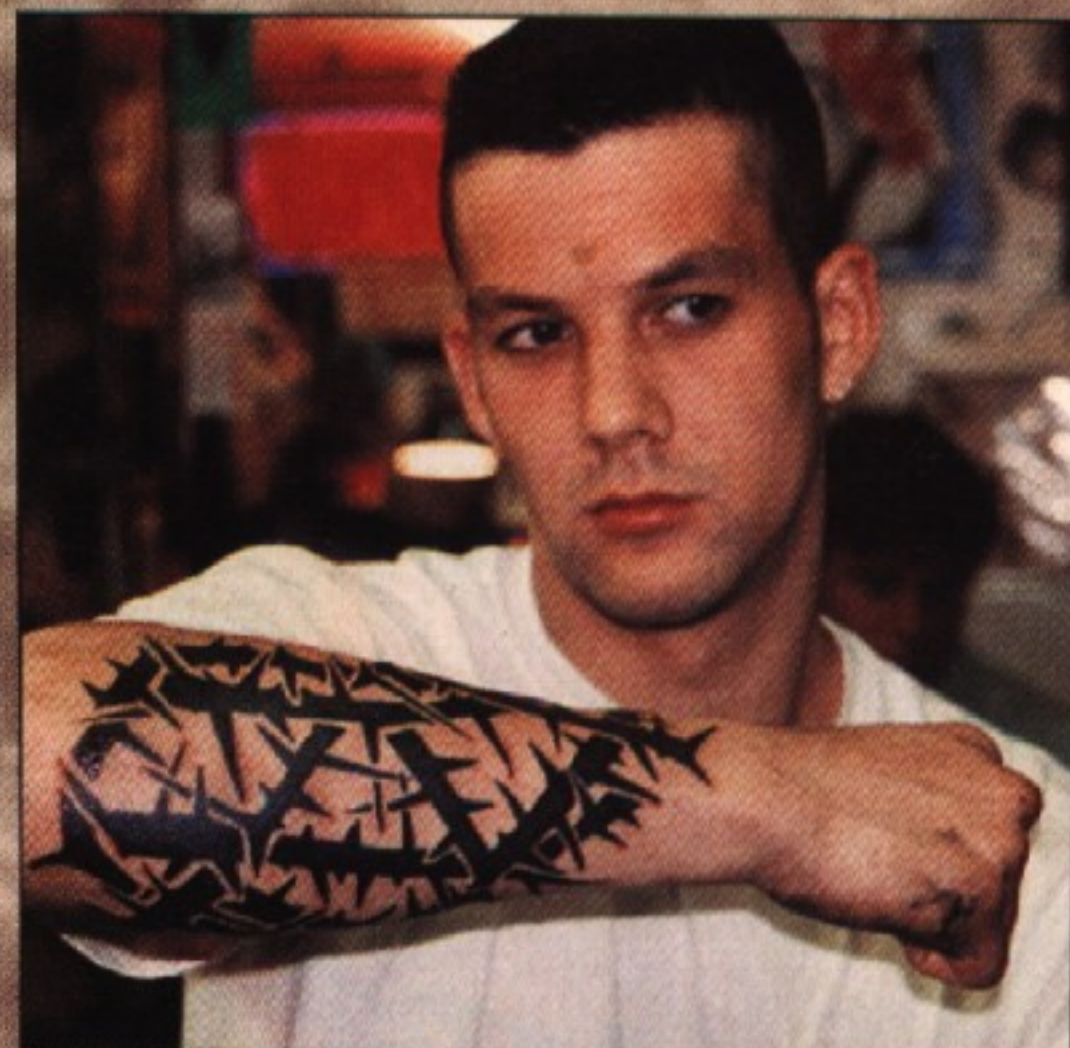
**Skin Art By
Jonathan Shaw**

By Michelle Delio Photos provided by Jonathan Shaw



Jonathan Shaw is *not* the king of tribal tattooing. In fact, he doesn't even do tribal work. Surprised? Yeah, me too.

But, on second thought, it makes sense. Look carefully at the work. It is not based on the traditional iconography of any pre-industrial era tribe. And, as Jonathan himself is quick to tell you, "Tribal was not the term that I chose to describe my work. Actually, I steered clear of doing real tribal images simply because I'm not a member of a tribe. My original intent was to put my own spin on wild style graffiti art—and what I ended up with somehow got dubbed tribal."



Seems that the perfect tag for Jonathan's work was recently dreamed up by his good buddy David Lee Roth (yes, *that* David Lee Roth), who dubbed it, "High Anxiety Urban Neo-Primitive Tattooing". That works, especially if you know Jonathan.

By the way, Mr. Roth will soon be apprenticing with Jonathan, and he plans to be tattooing in a few years. I pity him. Sure, Jonathan will give him an incredible tattoo education, but he'll also torture him. Ready to scrub those toilets, Dave? (heh, heh).

Jonathan has had an interesting life. He left home when he was 15, shipped out, and traveled all over the world. His first exposure to tattoos was in South America, and they were of the hand-picked variety. As he explains, "they looked like they were done with huge clusters of needles fastened to a toothbrush or something. It was thick, thick line work. That gave me the idea that tattooing had inherent limitations. The fact that you could incorporate details and





all this other high tech stuff into a tattoo never crossed my mind until much later.”

After some time spent scratching, Jonathan caught on pretty quickly that he was going nowhere fast. “It’s hard to look at your work honestly, without being blinded by your own arrogance. But you can’t teach yourself what you don’t know. I realized that instead of letting my ego take charge of my future, I’d have to humbly set out in search of someone who’d be willing to teach me.”

And find someone he did. Tattoo legend Bob Shaw took Jonathan under his wing. “It was just me and him in this little shop. I was like a sponge trying to soak up every little bit of his wisdom that I could. It was more than just tattoo techniques, Bob had a great bedside manner, a really profound philosophy of tattooing and good cheer for the business of life. I learned more in my first year with him than I have in the last nineteen years on my own.”

Admitting that he sort of involuntarily pioneered the current direction of tribal work, “which, believe me, was never my intention,” Jonathan agreed, after intensive coaxing, to describe what he thinks constitutes a good piece of tribal work. “You’ve got to watch the spatial balance, that’s eighty percent of it right there. None of this free-floating lines haphazardly placed in space garbage. Plus, be aware of negative spacing—leave some open flesh, and leave some room for the image to breathe. And you better work on your precision—if you mess up a tribal piece, it’ll look like a fuckin’ gaping wound forever. If you have a little mishap while you’re doing a detailed color piece, you can bury it in the jumble. But this tribal stuff is very precise. If it’s one millimeter off, it looks like an abortion.”

But, maybe because he’s got the fine art of High Anxiety Urban Neo-Primitive Tattooing down to a science, Jonathan has recently developed a love for traditional American style tattoos. The style he loves is “the same kind that I did way back when, which I used to think was shit; those silly ships, corny eagles, and dumb-ass pin-up girls. I got stuck doing that stuff when I was itching to blaze new trails with new wave punk rock tattoos. So I hated it.”

“But I’ve been through lot of changes in my twenty years of tattooing and I’ve come full circle. I feel like I’ve come back home and fallen in love with the Sailor Jerry Pin-Up girl next door. The simplicity of the old designs, the economy of the imagery, the humor, it’s the coolest and most everlasting tattoo art of all.”

Jonathan is creating his enduring art at Fun City Studios, which is located right



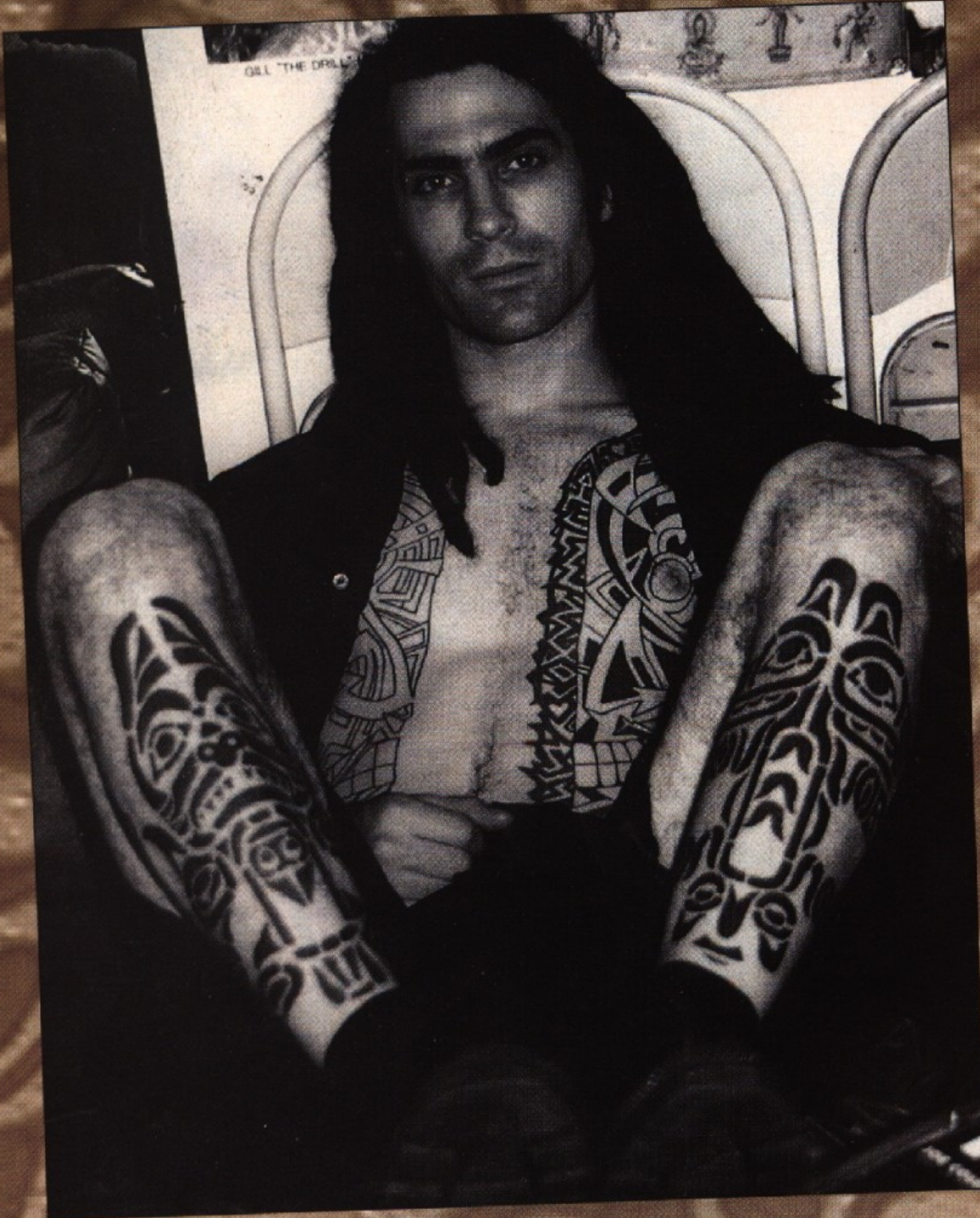
“...this tribal stuff is very precise. If it’s one millimeter off, it looks like an abortion.”



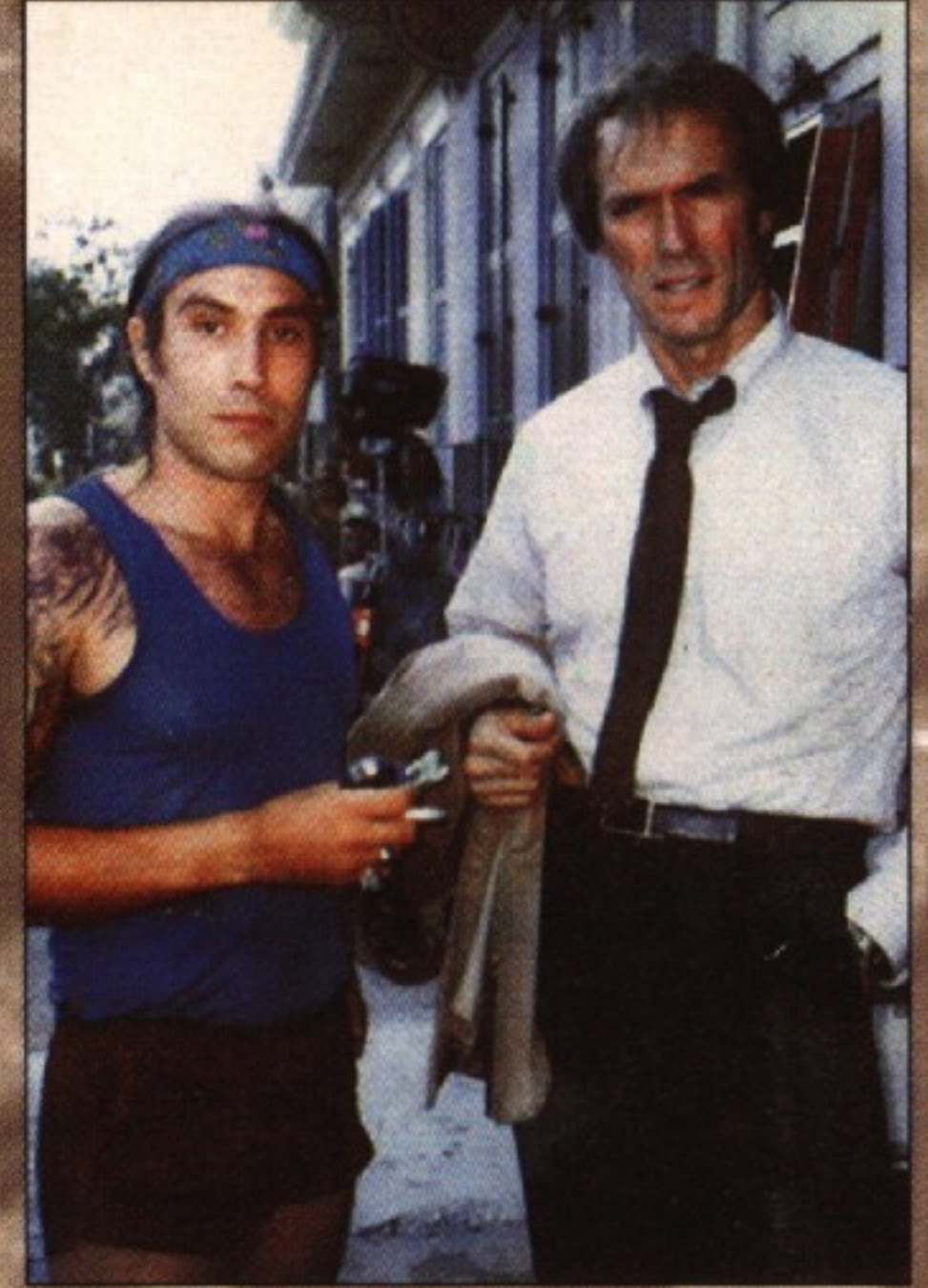
“...everyone gets good tattoos here at Fun City—even people who don’t deserve them.”

in the core of the big apple. He and his crew of world class artists are well versed in all the common garden variety of tattoo styles, along with stuff that’s distinctly over the edge. If you can’t find what you’re looking for here—you don’t need it.

Jonathan enjoys working with people who are willing to delve deep into their



Luke



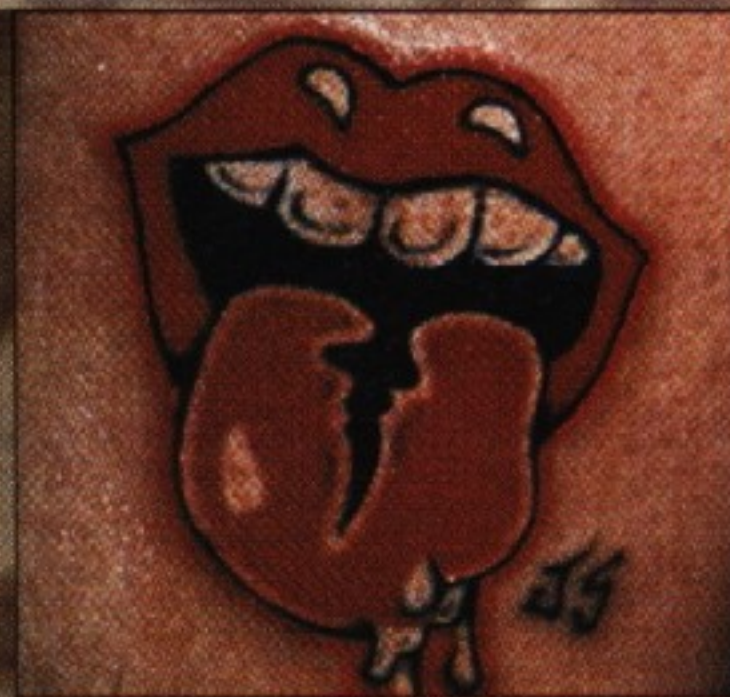
Jonathan Shaw & Clint Eastwood, 1983, during filming of "Tightrope"



Jonathan Shaw & Johnny Depp

Fun City Tattoo

is located on St. Marks Place between First and Second Avenues In New York City. Call 212-353-8282 for more information or to book an appointment. You can also contact Jonathan at P.O. Box 20088, New York, NY 10009.



Vanilla Ice tattooed by Jonathan Shaw

psyche and are courageous enough to challenge themselves to come up with a personal tattoo design. “I love customers who come in with high expectations, open minds and good attitudes. These kinds of folks leave with a tattoo that just radiates love, art, self-respect and goodness. And if they have a bad attitude—well, everyone gets good tattoos here at Fun City, even people who don’t deserve them.”