

Daily

Opinion

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ADVENTURE IS OUT THERE.

JUST ASK THE PENGUIN.

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What do you call a seemingly suicidal penguin? An internet meme. It seems like a bad joke, and yet, this true story is causing penguins to really have a moment in the spotlight right now. If you haven't seen the viral video, the premise is simple. Shot in one of Werner Herzog's acclaimed documentaries, a singular “deranged penguin” makes the bizarre and unexplained choice to depart from the rest of its colony at their nesting grounds. The penguin instead boldly journeys to a land where almost assuredly none of his kin have ever set foot: the distant Antarctic Mountains some 5,000 kilometers away. As Herzog claims, the penguin is heading towards “certain death.”

We don't know if the avian explorer ever reached his mountains. Still, that hasn't stopped the bird from rapidly taking over the internet, with edits of the creature flooding the mainstream. It has been placed inside the NFL and alongside such vaunted historical figures like Chris McCandless, Joan of Arc and even Alexander the Great. Perhaps because of its widespread use across social media, the star of this trend has been met with a mix of reactions and interpretations. To some, he has been referred to as proof of a pseudo-Nietz-

chian worldview: a nihilist figure enduring a world without meaning, facing down the “call of the void.” To others, he has been framed as a rebuke of secular modernity, seeking some greater “masculine” purpose away from a supposedly meaningless society. Many have accepted the explanation that the penguin simply lost its mind and waddled away only towards its own demise. Yet across the internet, an increasing number have dubbed the bird a hero-errant, bravely marching across a frozen wasteland in search of adventure and the unknown. The bird functions as a sort of cultural Rorschach Test and is open to any number of meanings.

However, it is the latter-most interpretation that I believe we can take the most away from. An important lesson can be learned from the interpretation of it as an explorer: that being our own ability to, like the penguin, choose the unknown. In a world where we face constant stagnation in the face of an end-goal-oriented life, many seem to believe we have lost the ability to adventure outwards. Indeed, as we hurtle through a sedentary reality centered around screens, zoom calls and the seemingly endless slog towards the next big payday, it's easy to see why we may have fallen victim to such a state of alienation from our surround-

ing natural world.

It is not hard to see how these feelings of weariness and isolation from the world around us may have led to a lone penguin seizing our hearts and minds. We, as human beings, crave both adventure and the profound. This urge to explore is, by many accounts, what led us to covering the world we occupy today. It is the calling that led the Polynesians across the Pacific Ocean, Leif Erikson to North America and Zheng He down the coast of Africa. To some degree, we each desire a return to these experiences — it's why we can find such meaning in a penguin solivagant: he represents the freedom and purpose we all want to hold away from our desks and computers.

For many of us, that adventure comes with its barriers. The sad truth is many of us lack the economic and political privilege to freely travel at our leisure. What's more, few of us sufficiently lack the attachments needed to turn our backs on so-

ciety, Alexander Supertramping our way to some far-off wilderness. Nor do many of us possess the monetary ability to hop on a plane and jaunt on over to the Andes or Alps for a two-week expedition. Yet despite this, adventure is still at our fingertips. Our ancestors did not conquer the world in mere days — instead, they pushed to see what was over the next hill. What was around the next bend of the river. What was to be found on the opposite shore.

We can still experience that, despite living in a smaller, more modern world. Too often, we fail to find adventure not because it is inaccessible, but because it is so close to us that we dismiss it. It is the small adventures that can mean the most; after all, the penguin's first step was not towards the mountains, but rather away from its nesting grounds. Even here at Storrs, the first

step towards the unknown exists for us within walking distance. The UConn Forest — which many students pass each day without second thought — stretches over 2,000 acres, covering meadows, rivers, streams, woods and precipices. Meanwhile, campus organizations, such as our Rec Center and Outing Club help to dissolve the logistical boundaries, keeping us still. With these resources, we too can commit towards the first steps of adventure.

The mountains ahead of us may be smaller, closer and less dramatic than the Deranged Penguin's — yet they remain no less real. By boldly walking across the horizon to them, we affirm our affinity for adventure has not yet been abandoned, and indeed, can still be reached. The solution to stagnation, as the penguin teaches us, begins with the choice to pursue the unknown.

