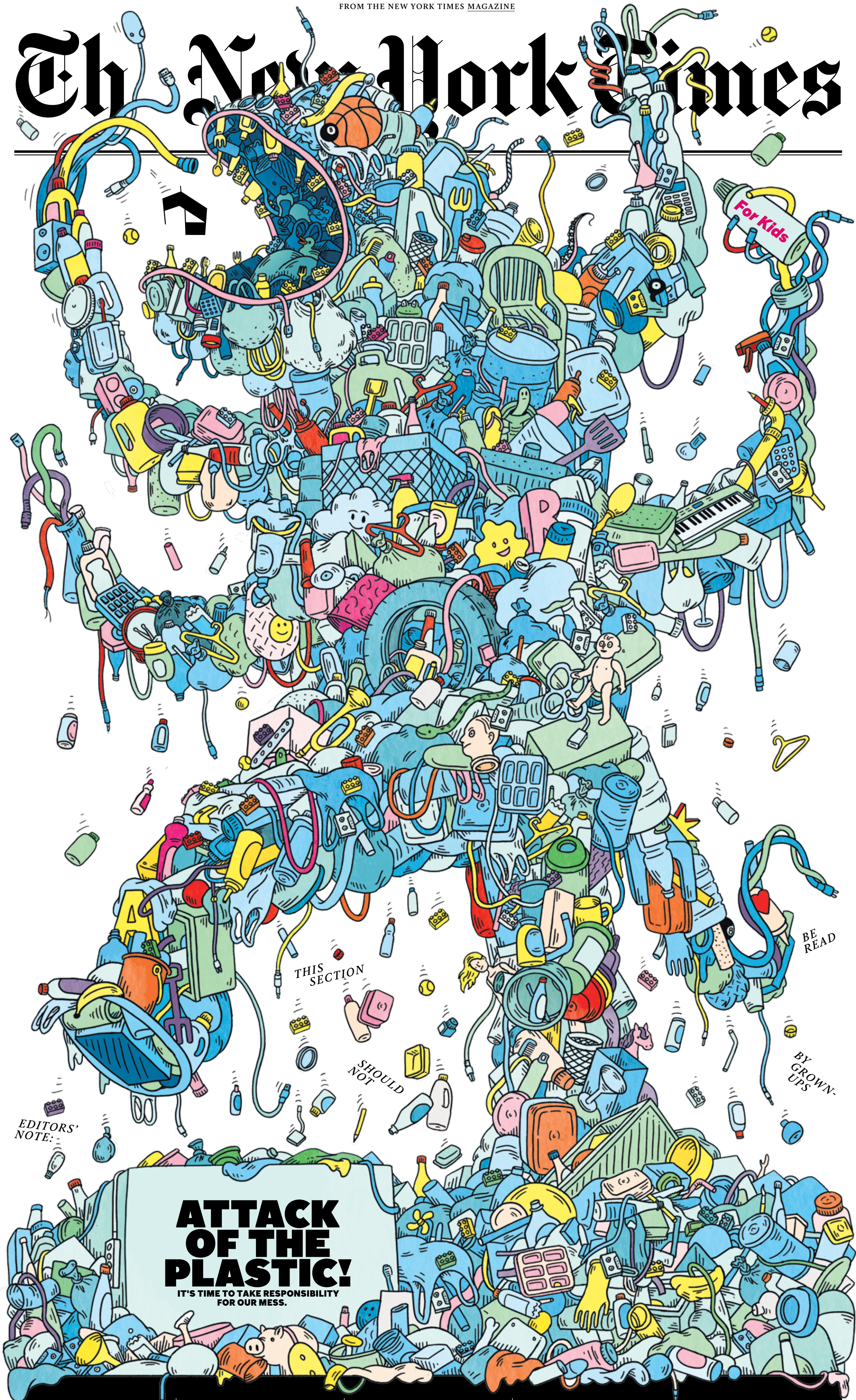


The New York Times



THIS SECTION

SHOULD NOT

EDITORS' NOTE:

BE READ

BY GROWN-UPS

ATTACK OF THE PLASTIC!
IT'S TIME TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR MESS.

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THE CAVE RESCUE

HOW A THAI BOYS' SOCCER TEAM CAPTURED THE WORLD'S ATTENTION

Rain was forecast for June 23, the day the Wild Boars headed to Tham Luang Cave after soccer practice. Some of the 12 boys and their coach had ventured into the cave system before.

They left their bikes and soccer cleats and set off with flashlights.

A sign outside tells people not to enter from July onward. But a heavy rain started falling, and the cave complex quickly began to fill with water, forcing them deeper into the maze to avoid drowning.

By the end of the first night, their parents were frantic.

A contingent of Thai Navy SEAL divers arrived 24 hours later, and began pushing their way into the flooded caves.

But the Thai frogmen were accustomed to tropical open water, not the murky, cold currents racing through the caves.

On June 25, the first volunteer cave divers showed up at the scene. Dozens would follow, from places including Finland, Britain, China, Australia and the United States.

The divers painstakingly made their way into the cave, securing rope guidelines needed to ensure their safety.

They found footprints that hinted at the soccer team's trail.

But as monsoon rains inundated the area, the porous limestone cave absorbed water like a sponge. Once-accessible caverns flooded entirely.

The world was following the case of the lost boys, but as time ticked by and they were not found, everyone feared the worst.

On the 10th day, July 2, with little hope of discovering anything but bodies, a pair of British divers working to extend a network of guide ropes popped up near a narrow ledge.

Suddenly, they saw 13 emaciated people perched in the dark. The Wild Boars, stranded on a rocky perch more than a mile underground, had survived by sipping the condensation from the cave walls.

Elation at their discovery quickly turned to anxiety that the boys and their coach might have to stay in the cave for four months until the rainy season subsided.

The risks of moving them out were obvious: Four days after the boys were found, a volunteer died as he was placing air tanks to supply divers along the underwater route.

Efforts to drain the cave, using pumps and a makeshift dam, began producing results, however. The most waterlogged passage, which took five hours to navigate in the early going, could now be traversed in two hours.

In letters home carried by divers, the trapped boys and their coach sought to reassure their families that they were in good hands and in good spirits. (Letter by Ekkarat Wongsookchan, 14.)

Don't worry about me. I've been away for two weeks. I'll help Mom every day. I'll be back soon.

The rescuers were eager to act. Rain was back in the forecast.

The oxygen level where the boys were stuck had dipped to 15 percent. At 12 percent, the air might turn deadly.

The American team recommended that each child be confined in a flexible plastic cocoon called a Sked, which is a rescue stretcher.

Ultimately, the rescue officials concocted a plan for individual divers to bring out the boys and their coach one by one.

On the first two days of the rescue, 18 divers took part, bringing out four boys on each day.

On the final day, July 10, at least 12 divers took part, rescuing four more boys and the coach.

The boys wore full-face oxygen masks so they could breathe underwater.

Extracting them required long stretches underwater, in bone-chilling temperatures, submerged for around 40 minutes at a time. The boys were even given anti-anxiety medication to avert panic attacks.

Maj. Gen. Chalongchai Chaiyakham, who helped the operation, said:

The most important piece of the rescue was good luck. So many things could have gone wrong, but somehow we managed to get the boys out.

I still can't believe it worked!

After emerging from the cave, the Wild Boars were taken to the hospital for observation.

Weeks later, most of the boys entered a Buddhist monastery to be ordained novice monks, to honor their rescuers and show their appreciation for the diver who died during the mission.

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FOOD FIGHT!

BY CHELSEA LEU

YOU MAY HAVE participated in what you considered an epic food fight in the school cafeteria, but it was nothing compared with the world's biggest food fight.

La Tomatina occurs every year on the last Wednesday of August (this year, Aug. 29), when tens of thousands of revelers converge on Buñol, a small town in Spain, to hurl more than 200,000 pounds of squishy, pulpy tomatoes at one another. The tradition began more than 70 years ago, although no one's sure exactly how — some say a group of kids disrupted a parade by flinging food; others say that disgruntled Buñol residents threw fruit at local officials during a celebration. Nowadays, the festivities officially begin when someone is able to fetch a *jamón*, or a leg of Spanish ham, from atop a greased wooden pole. When that happens (or at 11 o'clock, if no one can reach the ham before then), a cannon fires to signal that the tomato-throwing may commence. La Tomatina is a messy free-for-all, but there are a few rules — most important, that people have to squish the tomatoes before hurling them. Getting hit point-blank with a ripe tomato can hurt! Some people also wear goggles to protect their eyes from tomato juice, which is acidic and can sting. After an hour of chucking, dodging and general mayhem, a second cannon sounds to signal the fight's end. By then, the ground, walls and participants are covered in a thick layer of red goop; fire trucks hose off the streets, and everyone trudges off to clean up, exhausted but exhilarated. ♦

TINY STORY

97,000

Pieces of mail sent from the post office at the top of Mount Fuji in Japan last summer.

1

The number of crawler tractors (bulldozers without the front blade) that journey to the top to collect the crates of postcards and letters and bring them back down.

