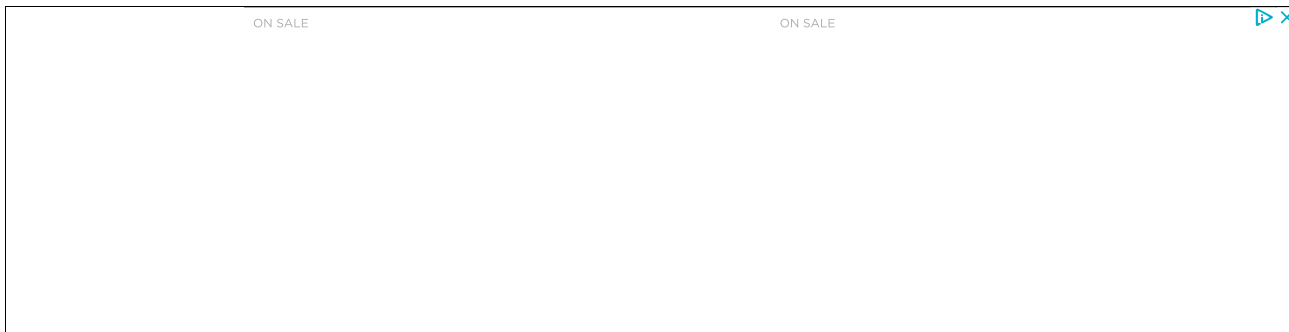


We may earn a commission from links on this page.



I Contemplated the End Times at a Life-Size Noah's Ark and You Can Too

By Johanna Gohmann Published December 22, 2016 | Comments (114)



Illustration by Angelica Alzona

It's the day after Thanksgiving, and my husband, our four year-old son, and I are coasting through the hills of rural Kentucky. Two days before, we'd driven from Brooklyn to Indiana to visit my family. Now we are en route to the [Ark Encounter](#): a life-size recreation of Noah's Ark, which happens to be nearby.

Watch

RHONY's Ubah Hassan on Her Fight With Erin in Anguilla

TS Madison Tells Jezebel How She Learned Beyoncé Sampled Her

September 15, 2023

Stars of 'Once Upon a One More Time' Test Their Britney Spears Knowledge

August 28, 2023

Two lapsed Catholics, we are going as much out of curiosity as anything else. Though as Donald Trump has been President-Elect for a full two weeks at this point, jokes about the End Times aren't quite the kneeslappers they once were. Now, when listening to the news, it often feels as though the four horsemen are charging toward us, personally, at Kentucky Derby-like speeds. So what could it hurt to do a bit of shopping around for end-of-world survival techniques? It certainly beats the standard Black Friday fare of bashing through the doors of a Walmart.

Related Content

RHONY's Ubah Hassan on Her Fight With Erin in Anguilla



- > [The SAG-AFTRA Strike Is Officially Over!](#)
- > [Time, According to the New 'Mean Girls' Trailer](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

As we glide through the beige countryside, I marvel at the view: the vast expanses of wide, open field. The misty-hills dotted with picturesque barns. An enormous Confederate flag snapping in the breeze beside a roadside home. Upon spotting the stars and bars, my husband ever so gently increases pressure on the gas pedal. As someone who grew up in 1980s Northern Ireland, he is well versed in accelerating through areas that don't appear particularly welcoming.

ADVERTISEMENT

I spot a Hillary billboard in the distance, and feel a twinge of surprise. But as we draw closer, I see that she has a long, pointed Pinocchio nose. "Trust Her?" It asks, in cryptic, Freddy Krueger-style font.

ADVERTISEMENT

Eight years ago, on one of our travels through the Midwest, my husband and I visited the Creation Museum, a center devoted to the idea that Earth is a mere 10,000 years old. So the Ark crowd feels familiar: lots of Amish bonnets and families of at least five, including children who look like they could star in milk commercials, such are their wholesome features and gleaming teeth.



I vividly remember the Creation Museum's Ark exhibit. There, Noah was explained via a theatrical film experience that included an animatronic teenager and a bunch of misting flood simulators that ruined my blowout. So I have a vague idea of what we might encounter on our Ark Encounter. This time I have worn a jacket with a hood for blowout protection purposes.

ADVERTISEMENT

Ken Ham, the guy behind the Creation Museum, is the same mastermind who made the Ark Encounter a reality. Ham is the founder of Answers in Genesis (AiG), a fundamentalist organization that advocates for a literal interpretation of the Bible, and they eschew much of science, specifically: geology, cosmology, evolutionary biology, and archaeology. (They basically aren't fond of any of the -ologies.) Naturally, the museum and Ark have, shall we say, raised the hackles of science-minded folks. As has the Ark's \$18 million in state tax incentives, which some feel dances a wee bit close to the line separating Church and State.

But it was Ham's dream to rebuild the Ark using the exact dimensions as laid out in Genesis: 85 feet wide, 51 feet high, and 510 feet long. And he did it. Though creating the largest timber-framed structure in the world wasn't cheap: it ultimately cost around \$100 million. Nor is it cheap to enter the Ark. Tickets for adults are \$40, and \$28 for kids. Not to mention \$10 for parking. I can only imagine the wallet-decimating cost for these huge families.

ADVERTISEMENT



All photos by Johanna Gohmann.

As we ride the shuttle bus down a winding road, I flip through my brochure and see what \$100 million buys you. Along with the Ark, there's also a small zoo, dining at Emzara's Kitchen, and the Screaming Eagle Zipline and Aerial Adventure. I don't recall there being a zipline element to Noah's story, but it has been a while since I've revisited the tale. I do remember the gist of the thing though: God gave us a perfect world. Man fell from grace, so God decided to wipe everyone out, except the only decent dude around (Noah). God told him to build the ark, and to bring his family, and a set of each kind of living creature. Commence non-stop rain for 40 days and 40 nights.

ADVERTISEMENT

“And don’t forget the rock giants,” my husband reminds me. He insists he witnessed humans mating with fallen angels to make a species of rock giants in the Russell Crowe film. I have zero recollection of fallen-angel-sex from Catholic school, though we were busy trying to get our heads around the transubstantiation of Christ. So maybe the nuns were like, “Eh. Cut the rock giants.”

“There’s the ship!” My son shouts. We disembark from the bus, and there it is indeed—floating not upon the roiling sea, but a stretch of muddy farmland. As we approach the gargantuan structure, it’s hard not to feel a pinch of excitement, and for that, I must tip my hat to the Ark engineers. The last time my pulse was quickened by the mere sight of a sea vessel was probably a viewing of *Jaws*.

ADVERTISEMENT

When we enter, I’m surprised at how shadowy and dark it is inside. Though I don’t know what I was expecting; it wasn’t like Noah had access to fluorescents. We shuffle through, and see the first deck is filled with stacks upon stacks of wooden animal crates. You can’t see the animals inside, but you can hear them. Various squawks and growls and monkey calls emanate from hidden speakers. What I find most notable about the cages is their uniformly small size. As if Noah decided at the last minute to bring only thousands of gerbils.

I can see looks of wonder on the people milling about me, and while I am also impressed by the sheer enormity of the structure, I must admit, I’m not that dazzled by the space, which looks like a giant, modernized barn. It would not shock me if Mumford and Sons strung up some bistro lights and recorded their next video here.

ADVERTISEMENT

I spy three women gazing around with beaming smiles. Being black, they stand out a bit in the predominantly white crowd. They are Ashley 29, Darshea 30, and Paulette, who is “in her 60s.” They are co-workers and friends, and drove 14 hours from New Orleans to see the ark. They seem almost giddy with excitement.

“We’re all religious,” says Paulette. “And to see the replica of Noah’s ark...it’s a once in a lifetime thing.” She smiles at me.

ADVERTISEMENT

For Darshea, seeing the ark has her choked up. She can’t get over how much work has gone into its authenticity.

“It’s very emotional. We’re only on deck one, but the further we go into what was needed to run the ark...and what God prescribed to Noah in order to run the ark...it’s going to become more emotional, more spiritual, more metaphysical as we continue through it.”

ADVERTISEMENT

I ask if they think we’ll ever need another ark, or another vessel to save us from end times?

“We pray not,” says Paulette. “But we as Christians know that we have a better place to go to.”

ADVERTISEMENT

“Last time I checked the Bible, he said next time I’m not coming with water, I’m coming with fire.” Ashley says.

“Well, I mean. Donald Trump’s hair is red.” Darshea quips, and we all laugh loudly together, seemingly in agreement that the end of the world is indeed hilarious.

ADVERTISEMENT

Darshea and her buddies aren’t the only ones who have traveled great distances to see the Ark. True, many people were already traveling for Thanksgiving, but the Ark still seems to be a major aspect of their trip. I speak to a mom from Tulsa, a teenaged boy from Texas who’s come with his grandparents, and a 24-year-old woman from Minnesota: all of whom are seriously psyched to be there. I realize that much more than the ark, I am in awe of the bold, intense faith of its visitors, and the happiness this place seems to bring them.

Heading up the ramp to the second floor there’s a small crowd waiting to get into the Pre-Flood exhibit. People are clearly eager to check out man’s fall from grace, as the line stretches all the way around and back. I tell my husband I’ll hold his spot while he takes our kid to the bathroom. We all shuffle in place, and a man behind me chuckles. “Well, now we know how the animals must have felt.”

ADVERTISEMENT

A woman in front of me is scrolling through Amazon on her phone. “Yeah, most of the really good deals are already gone,” she sighs. She is clearly trying to sneak in some Black Friday shopping before viewing the fall of man.

I, too, am delighted to learn the Ark has wifi. I pop open Facebook and ponder what sort of status Noah might have posted: *I'm so glad I wasn't chosen by God to board that huge boat and be one of the last humans in existence – Said no one ever.* ☺ Or: *That moment when you realize you brought only one unicorn.* ☹ Or maybe just a simple: *OMG rain! WTF?*

ADVERTISEMENT

After ten minutes, I accept that there's no way my four year-old is going to wait in a line this long unless it ends in a ball pit. But merely for a glimpse of the pits of hell? Forget it. I google some pics of the exhibit to see what I'm missing. Looks like lots of illustrations explaining how God gave us the perfect world and then we trashed it like teenagers on spring break. There's even a full-scale diorama depicting sinners partying it up, including a gyrating woman with a mane of brown hair, who I can't help but think bears a striking resemblance to Bristol Palin during her *Dancing with the Stars* stint.



Unless it ends in a ball pit, my four-year-old is not going to wait in a long line.

ADVERTISEMENT

I tuck my phone away and scan above and below deck, trying to spot my husband and son. The movement gives me mild ark vertigo, and I almost walk backwards into a crate containing a small replica of a dinosaur. I narrowly miss it due to the swift movements of an Amish woman who nudges my arm.

I finally spy my husband and son at the bottom of the ramp. They're beside a small snack stand, where one can pause from contemplating man's descent into darkness and refuel with a bag of Doritos. I purchase some cookies for my son and a \$3 Pepsi for myself.

ADVERTISEMENT

Cookies eaten, I can see my son is growing restless. I spy a section called the Fairytale Ark with wide-eyed cartoon animals perched atop in greeting. We head toward it, and I'm hopeful for a Lego table.

We enter, and are instantly greeted by a large placard that reads: "And everyone died except the 8 people in the ark." Well. The Disney Store this is not.

ADVERTISEMENT

The centerpiece of the room is even more startling, as it's a large bookcase filled with colorful, brightly lit Noah's Ark toys and books behind glass. There's also some creepy, piped in music box music playing overhead which my husband later claimed I imagined.

My son has his nose pressed against the glass, and directly above him is a book that reads “Destructive for all Ages.” It goes on to explain the dangers of fairytale-like representations of the ark, as it “attacks the truthfulness of Scripture.”

ADVERTISEMENT

I let my kid stare longingly at the miniature plastic sheep and cows for a few minutes, before ushering him over to The Door exhibit. The massive set of wooden doors is meant to represent Jesus being our one door to Salvation. There’s a small crowd gathered around it, as people take turns posing playfully for photos. It’s like they are doing the standard tourist shtick of pretending to prop up the leaning tower of Pisa. Except here they give exaggerate grimaces, like they are really throwing their back into prying open the door to salvation.

I notice a man lingering by the exhibit, specifically by the placards explaining why God sometimes has to punish man. Daniel is 59, and has come down from Brazil, Indiana. He thinks the Ark is well done, and appreciates the emphasis on scripture, and the way it presents tough questions like, “Why is God cruel?”

ADVERTISEMENT

His one complaint: the Ark is too crowded.

I nod, thinking how if that’s the case, Daniel might not have fared well on its maiden voyage. I thank him for the chat and wish him well on the rest of his travels. After the Ark, he’s headed to Santa Claus, Indiana.

ADVERTISEMENT

Up on the third, final deck, we get to see what the Ark's living quarters were like. They are far more stylish than I'd expected. There's a hint of Anthropologie about the place—lots of draped fabrics and tasseled throw pillows. Animatronic men and women lounge about reading or performing basic household chores. My son is fascinated by the animatronic woman chopping vegetables.

"Does she have a toaster oven?" He inquires. Unlikely, my boy.

We amble through exhibits about how the Great Flood changed the topography of the earth, and see a small bit on how we are all descendants of Noah. By the time we make it to the gift shop, I'm exhausted.

ADVERTISEMENT









So life-like.

The gift shop is filled with standard gift shop fare: t-shirts and ball caps and stuffed animals arranged on the shelf two by two. I spy a 50-ish woman sifting through scented candles. She's wearing a bright pink sweatshirt with a big Tinkberbell on the front. "Tink" it reads. She picks up an Ark-inspired candle and gives it a sniff.

ADVERTISEMENT

"Are we done yet? I'm hungry." My husband implores me while our son bats him in the face with a stuffed serpent. I tell him we are, and we head for the exit. On the way out, I notice a bright-eyed teenager manning one of the cash registers. She looks like she'd be at home handing out Oreo blizzards at the Dairy Queen. Instead, she's selling neon t-shirts that say "Faith Like Noah". I hold up my phone and ask if I can ask her some questions.

"Sure," she smiles.

"I'm just curious...Is it weird to come to work at Noah's Ark every day?"

"No." She frowns. Then laughs. "Ha! I never thought about it like that!"

A woman who looks like her manager is suddenly heading toward me, wagging her finger at my phone.

ADVERTISEMENT

“Uh, you’re not supposed to do that.” She says.

I shrug and shut off my phone, making my way to the door. Though I want to ask her what exactly I’m not supposed to do? Ask questions?

ADVERTISEMENT

Outside, we head to the line of shuttle buses and pass a snack booth called Creative Kernels. “Want some pork rinds or kettle corn?” I call up to my husband, but he is already boarding a shuttle.

Back in the parking lot, my husband heads off to locate our car, and I stand with my son. We can see the Ark looming in the distance, the zipline structure at its side like a stairway to nowhere.

ADVERTISEMENT

Will someone or something come to save us all in the end? Or can we save ourselves? I’d like to think we can. I’d like to think that the kind of country that has people who come together to celebrate their faith while also riding a zipline and eating pork rinds – Surely this is part of what makes this country great. Just as the protesters who once lined the highway here—the angry atheists and people who opposed all of that state tax money—make it great. I’d like to believe we are a nation not just of inflamed passions and prejudices, but one that has, at its very heart, kindness and understanding. The sort of place where when you accidentally back into a caged dinosaur display, a stranger in an Amish bonnet eating a bag of Mrs. Vicks pauses from her snacking, and reaches a BBQ-flavored hand to steady you.

Some elderly people shuffle by me on walkers, and I see them heading to a car with a Trump bumper sticker. I think how Noah and his family clung to the idea of

something to save us all, even if the very thing they were clinging to defied all logic and reason, and held impossible promises of salvation. True, it worked out for them in the end, but it came at the price of millions of innocents. Which all sounds vaguely, creepily familiar.

ADVERTISEMENT

One thing is for certain: if we're going to somehow save everyone who believes *they* are the right ones, *they* are the good ones, and *they* are the ones who truly have the answers. Well. We're gonna need a bigger boat.

MORE FROM JEZEBEL

- **Here's Our Winner! 'Redbook' Shatters Our 'Faith' In Well, Not Publishing, But Maybe God**
- **Have You Ever Beat Up A Boyfriend? Cause, Uh, We Have**
- **The SAG-AFTRA Strike Is Officially Over!**
- **If Nikki Haley Was Really 'Honest With the American People,' She'd Say Abortion Wins**

[Johanna Gohmann](#) is a writer living in Brooklyn.

Show all 114 comments

Siera Geometric Area Rug in Teal Blue

\$111.99 - WAYFAIR | Sponsored

SAFAVIEH Handmade Himalaya Breann Border Wool Rug

\$329.99 - Bed Bath & Beyond | Sponsored

SAFAVIEH Handmade Bella Alverta Dotted Border Wool Rug

\$30.99 - Bed Bath & Beyond | Sponsored

Runner Solid Handmade Hand Knotted Gabbeh Dark Blue Area Rug

\$126.99 - WAYFAIR | Sponsored

Rumley Kids Rug

\$64.99 - WAYFAIR | Sponsored

SAFAVIEH Handmade Himalaya Janessa Modern Wool Rug

\$431.99 - Bed Bath & Beyond | Sponsored

SAFAVIEH Handmade Himalaya Blue Wool Gabbeh Runner Rug

\$47.99 - Bed Bath & Beyond | Sponsored

SAFAVIEH Handmade Himalaya Wool Gabbeh Rug

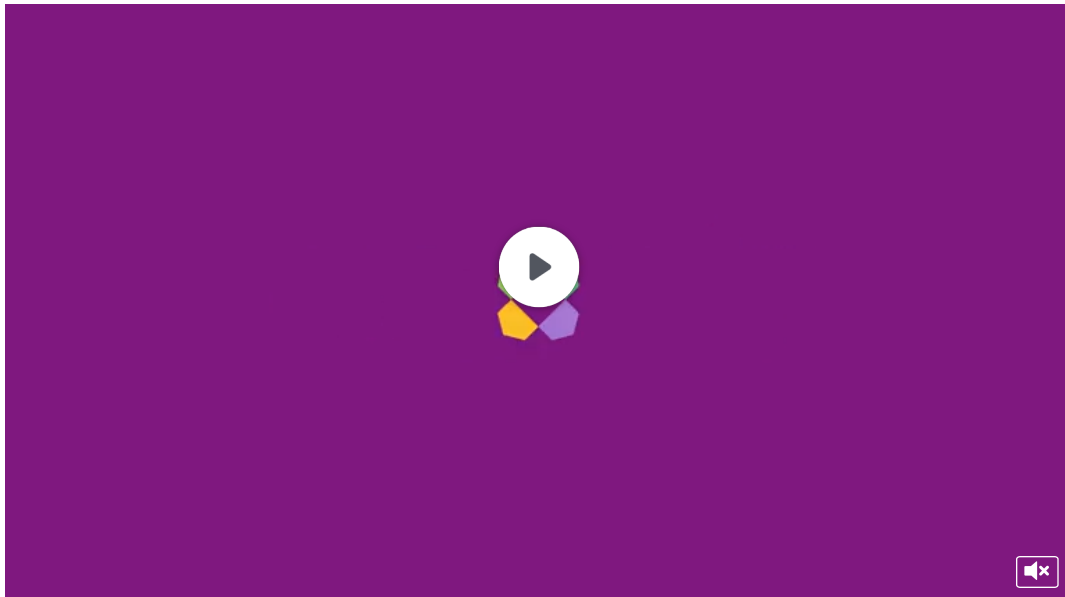
\$57.99 - Bed Bath & Beyond | Sponsored

Courtyard 6812 Area Rug In Beige / Navy

\$42.99 - WAYFAIR | Sponsored

Caitlyn Jenner And Her Partner Who You'll Easily Recognize

True Edition | Sponsored



Sponsored

Zandra Abstract Handmade Tufted Blue Area Rug

\$185.40 - WAYFAIR | Sponsored

If You Can Name 10 Of These Actors, You're Old

Dad Patrol | Sponsored

These May Be the Coziest Slippers In Existence

Need a pair of swoon-worthy slippers this year? Bombas has them all, from ultra-pillowy pairs to something a little lighter you can wear year-round. Best of all, every purchase gives essential clothing to someone who needs it.

Bombas | Sponsored

New York: No More Free Returns? Amazon Releases New Fees

Online Shopping Tools | Sponsored

Amazon Hates When You Do This, But They Can't Stop You (It's Genius)

Online Shopping Tools | Sponsored

Nature's 'Liquid Adderall' Is Now Shipped In The Mail

For Brain Fog And Low Energy

Health Headlines | Sponsored

Angus T. Jones said this about Two and a Half Men:

The reason why when he grew up, Angus T. Jones completely abandoned the character of Jake Harper, while the show was still airing its last seasons.

SportzBonzanza | Sponsored

Actor Posed With A Fan & Didn't Realize Who She Is

Modern Family' Star Posed With A Fan But Didn't Notice She Was A Bigger Star

TheDancingCucumber | Sponsored

Blake Lively's Cheerleading Photos

These Stars Had Pom-Pom Beginnings

FollowSports | Sponsored

Everybody Wanted To Date Her In The 80's & This Is Her Recently

One Daily | Sponsored

Photos that Americans have never seen before

Incredibly rare historical photos to show you the other side of the past

TravelerDreams | Sponsored

Mcrae Navy Blue Striped Indoor/Outdoor Area Rug

\$85.99 - WAYFAIR | Sponsored

Liam Stripe Indoor/Outdoor Area Rug - 2' x 7' Runner

\$40.98 - Bed Bath & Beyond | Sponsored

Linda Kozlowski Shows Off Her Perfect Figure In A New Photo

Spicy Trends | Sponsored

Look For Any High School Yearbook, It's Free

Rewind the good times. Every yearbook is a window into the past

[Classmates](#) | Sponsored

Burnt out? Take These 3 Steps

As part of Wharton's Nano Tools for Leaders, Professor Adam Grant provides three actionable, research-backed approaches to combat workplace burnout.

[Wharton Executive Education](#) | Sponsored

"I never want to wear any other shoes" - M.A

Top brand hands-free shoes with patented slip-on tech for ideal fit & unmatched mobility!

[OrthoFeet](#) | Sponsored

How Much Does It Cost To Replace Old Windows With New, Energy Efficient Ones?

See why so many Americans installed these next-gen Fibrex® composite windows in 2023.

[rbafibrexwindows.com](#) | Sponsored

The alternative to insurance

Free yourself from hidden fees and rising costs of health insurance. Enroll in CHM today.

[CHM Healthcare Solution](#) | Sponsored

Hidden Details Of Nicole Curtis and "Fixer Upper"

Who really is Nicole Curtis? This HGTV's 'Fixer Upper' star kept a lot more hidden than we thought... Here they are

[HotPopToday](#) | Sponsored

Fisherman Caught Weird Creature - Bursts Into Tears When He Discovers What It Is

[GlobeTip](#) | Sponsored

Quality Rugs in Every Style

[Mark & Day®](#) | Sponsored

'Is the UVA Rape Story a Gigantic Hoax?' Asks Idiot

By **Anna Merlan** Published December 1, 2014 | Comments (755)



Updates to this story:

[Rolling Stone Partially Retracts UVA Story Over 'Discrepancies'](#)

[The UVA Mess is Now a Full-Fledged Shitstorm](#)

[Alleged UVA Rape Vic's Friends: Rolling Stone Didn't Even Talk To Us](#)

[Emails: How UVA Stonewalled Rolling Stone on Rape Story](#)

[Rush After 'A Rape on Campus:' A UVA Alumna Goes Back to Rugby Road](#)

[Charlottesville Police: "No Evidence" To Support UVA Rape Allegations](#)

[Review Shows Everything That Went Wrong in UVA's Rolling Stone Story](#)

Original Post:

Ever since journalist Sabrina Rubin Erdely published [her searing Rolling Stone story](#) about "Jackie," a woman who was allegedly the victim of a gang rape at a frat party at the University of Virginia, the rape accusation and much more has dominated

See more →

ADVERTISEMENT

ENTERTAINMENT » **MOVIES**

ENTERTAINMENT » **MOVIES**

Time, According to the New 'Mean Girls' Trailer

I'd like a word with whoever decided to include, "This isn't your mother's Mean Girls," at the beginning of the...

By Kady Ruth Ashcraft Published November 8, 2023 | Comments (22)

ADVERTISEMENT

ENTERTAINMENT » **BOOKS**

ENTERTAINMENT » BOOKS

Megan Fox Exorcizes...a Lot of Demons in New Poetry Book

The actress takes aim at abusive men in *Pretty Boys Are Poisonous*. The delivery is a bit melodramatic, but that...

By **Audra Heinrichs** Published November 8, 2023 | Comments (8)

ADVERTISEMENT

CELEBRITIES » DIRT BAG

CELEBRITIES » **DIRT BAG**

Timbaland Apologizes for Saying Britney Spears Should Have Been Muzzled

"I'm sorry to all the Britney fans...even to her," the producer said on TikTok Live. Even to Britney? Wow, such...

By Rich Juzwiak Published November 8, 2023 | Comments (23)

ADVERTISEMENT

POLITICS » **CONGRESS**

POLITICS » **CONGRESS**

22 House Democrats Join GOP to Censure Rashida Tlaib Over Israel Criticism

“No government is beyond criticism. The idea that criticizing the government of Israel is antisemitic [is] very...

By Caitlin Cruz Published November 8, 2023 | Comments (128)

ADVERTISEMENT

LATEST

LATEST

Black Women Sue Kansas Police Department Alleging Rape & 'Government-Sanctioned Terrorism'

"Report me to who, the police? I am the police," a now-retired detective is accused of telling one of the women.

By **Kylie Cheung** Published November 8, 2023 | Comments (7)

ADVERTISEMENT

POLITICS

POLITICS

Justices Alito and Thomas Unsurprisingly Argue That Domestic Abusers Have the Right to Own Guns

It seems like the Supreme Court will rule against the violent plaintiff in *United States v. Rahimi*, but we'll likely...

By Susan Rinkunas Published November 7, 2023 | Comments (71)

ADVERTISEMENT

POLITICS

POLITICS

Trump Was as Courteous, Professional, and Respectful as We All Expected at His Fraud Trial

During his \$250 million fraud trial on Monday, Trump repeatedly insulted the judge, called the trial “a political...

By Kylie Cheung Published November 7, 2023 | Comments (134)

ADVERTISEMENT

IN DEPTH » **FEATURES**

IN DEPTH » FEATURES

11 Real-Life Scary Stories That Will Make You Sleep With the Lights On

From unidentified appearances to terrifying houses to creepy children, the 2023 finalists of our annual scary story...

By **Nora Biette-Timmons** Published October 30, 2023 | Comments (29)

ADVERTISEMENT
