

# PLAYBOY



Playmate of the Year Eugena Washington

INTRODUCING

# The Blackhearts

*Four irresistible Playmates brought together to embody the Blackheart spirit.*

## BOLD

Confident and daring, **Tiffany Toth** is a risk-taker who isn't afraid to say what's on her mind. Suitors heed warning: this brazen blonde never backs away from a challenge, and you definitely don't want to bring out her bad-girl side. Or maybe you do.

## BAWDY

**Shelby Chesnes** tends to invite a bit of chaos, but this troublemaker will tell you there's no fun without a little danger. Her loud, boisterous personality turns every head and her risqué demeanor captivates every man who crosses her path.

## CUNNING

**Kimberly Phillips** will have you wrapped around her seemingly sweet finger in no time. This charming Playmate always holds her ground. But be careful, she knows exactly what she wants, and knows just how to convince you it's what you want too.

## SEDUCTIVE

Just one look will have you hooked on **Raquel Gibson**. She'll coax her way directly into your heart if you're lucky enough to catch her eye, and a single sexy smile will keep you wanting more.





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*Blackheart Premium Spiced Rum is a bold, 93 proof rum named after the sultry siren of the high seas who has forever been known as the unattainable. Now, for the first time, we're bringing Blackheart to life through four extraordinary Playmates that perfectly represent who she is – Bold, Bawdy, Cunning, and Seductive.*



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Blackheart Premium Spiced Rum and Playboy are sending one lucky winner and a friend to the annual Midsummer Night's Dream Party at the Playboy Mansion. Enter now for a chance to meet The Blackhearts and be a part of this epic night.

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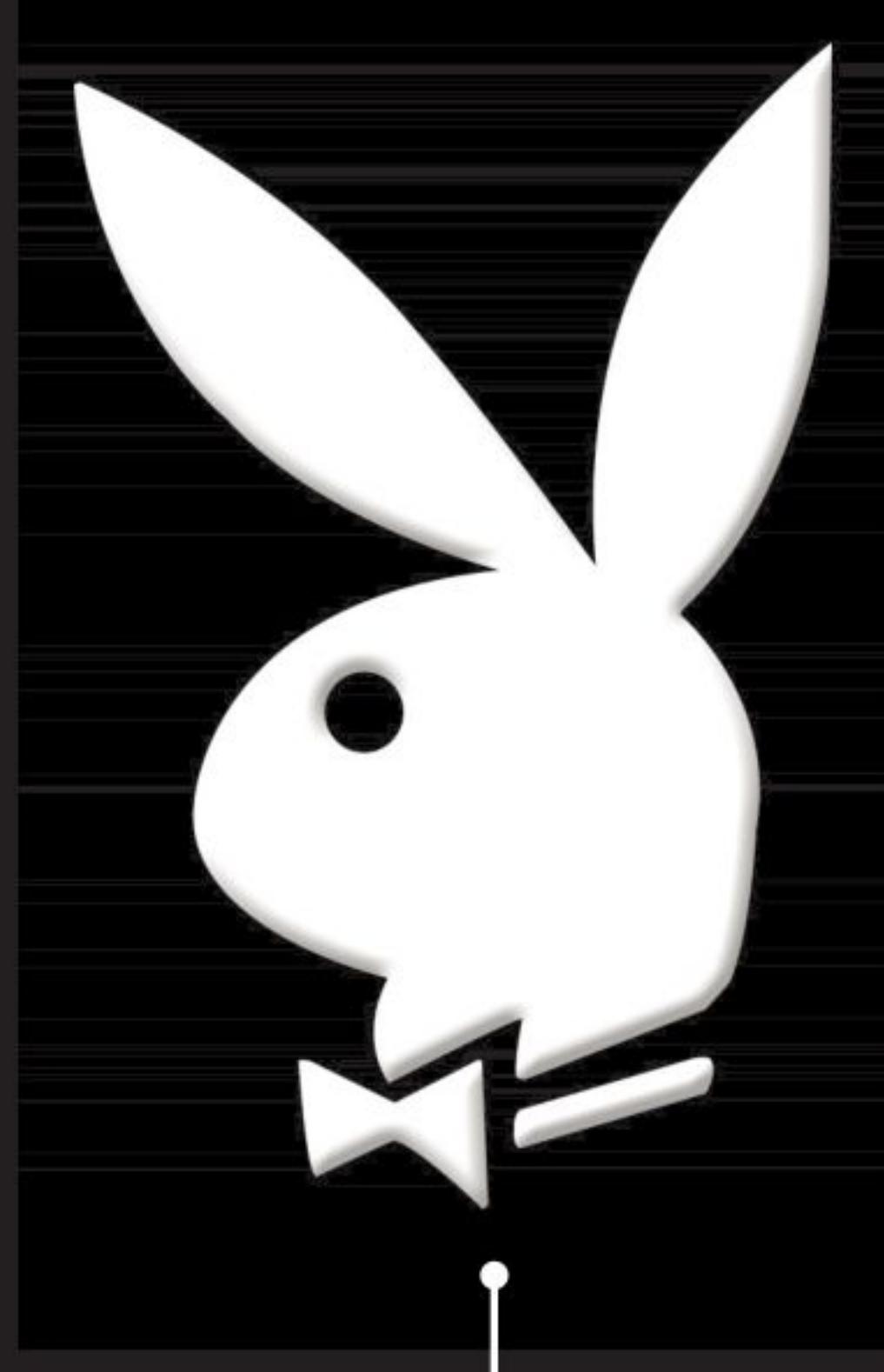
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## PLAYBILL

**Henrik Purienne**

Purienne, who last shot the cover for our May issue, reports an especially pleasant shoot with Miss June Josie Canseco. "Josie was stoked to follow in her mom's footsteps," he says, referring to Jessica Canseco's 2005 pictorial. "She was totally natural and funny, old-school."


**Mitch Moxley**

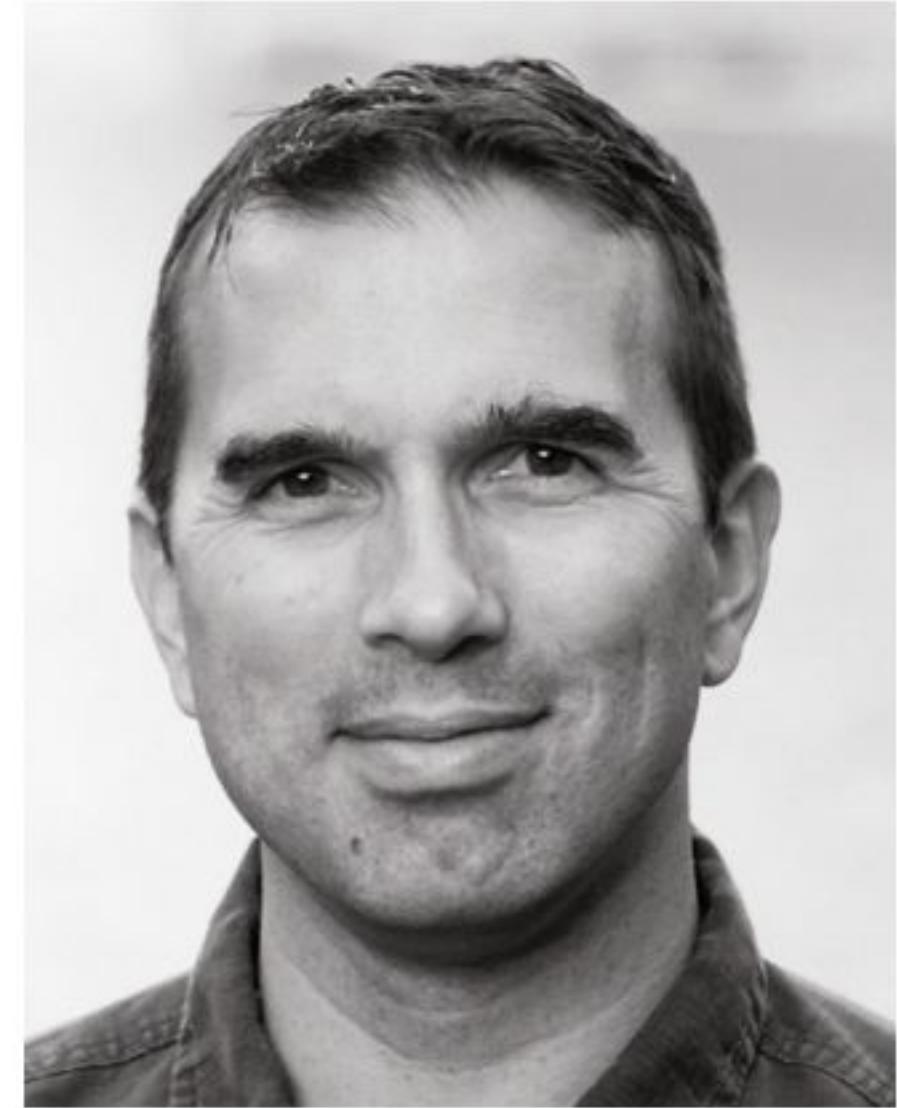
We asked one American to return to China to get inside the head of another. Moxley, who spent six years writing about the country for Western publications, profiles expat sex-toy tycoon Brian Sloan, inventor of the Autoblow, in *The Man Who Wants to Change the Way Men Get Off*.


**Chris Berdik**

In a world that worships the certainty of science, what if DNA testing, a backbone of modern criminal justice, were shown to be as unreliable as witness testimony? Veteran science journalist Berdik uncovers how misinterpreted data can become a life sentence in *The Unraveling of DNA Forensics*.


**Dani Mathers**

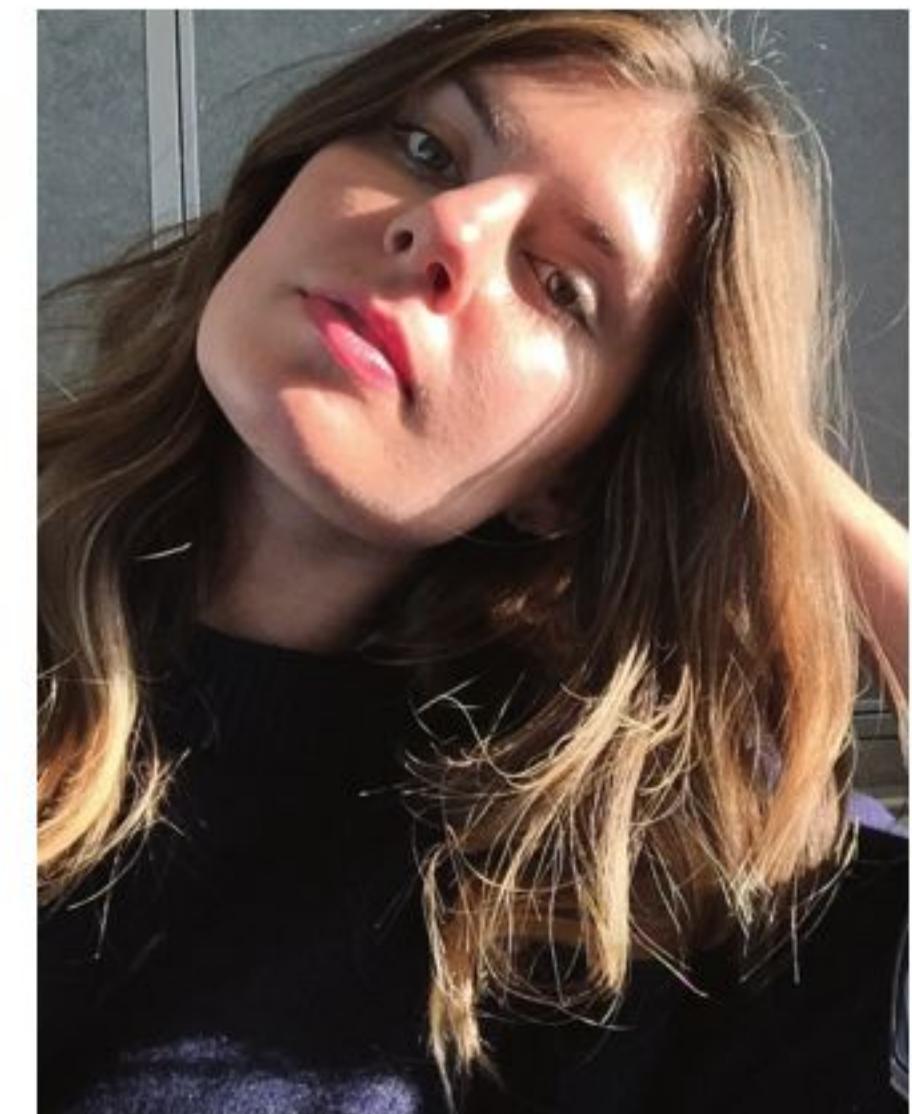
Who better to introduce you to our latest queen than the woman handing her the crown? Playmate of the Year 2015 Dani Mathers dropped by Playboy HQ for a chat with Eugena Washington about all things PMOY. You'll find their interview alongside Eugena's triumphant pictorial.


**Alex Scordelis**

"Rose Byrne may seem an accidental comedian—she was known as a dramatic actor before *Bridesmaids*—but she's a closet comedy nerd," says Scordelis, who interviewed Byrne for 20Q in advance of her *X-Men: Apocalypse* and *Neighbors 2* roles. His proof? She's a die-hard *Fawlty Towers* fan.

**Stacey Rozich**

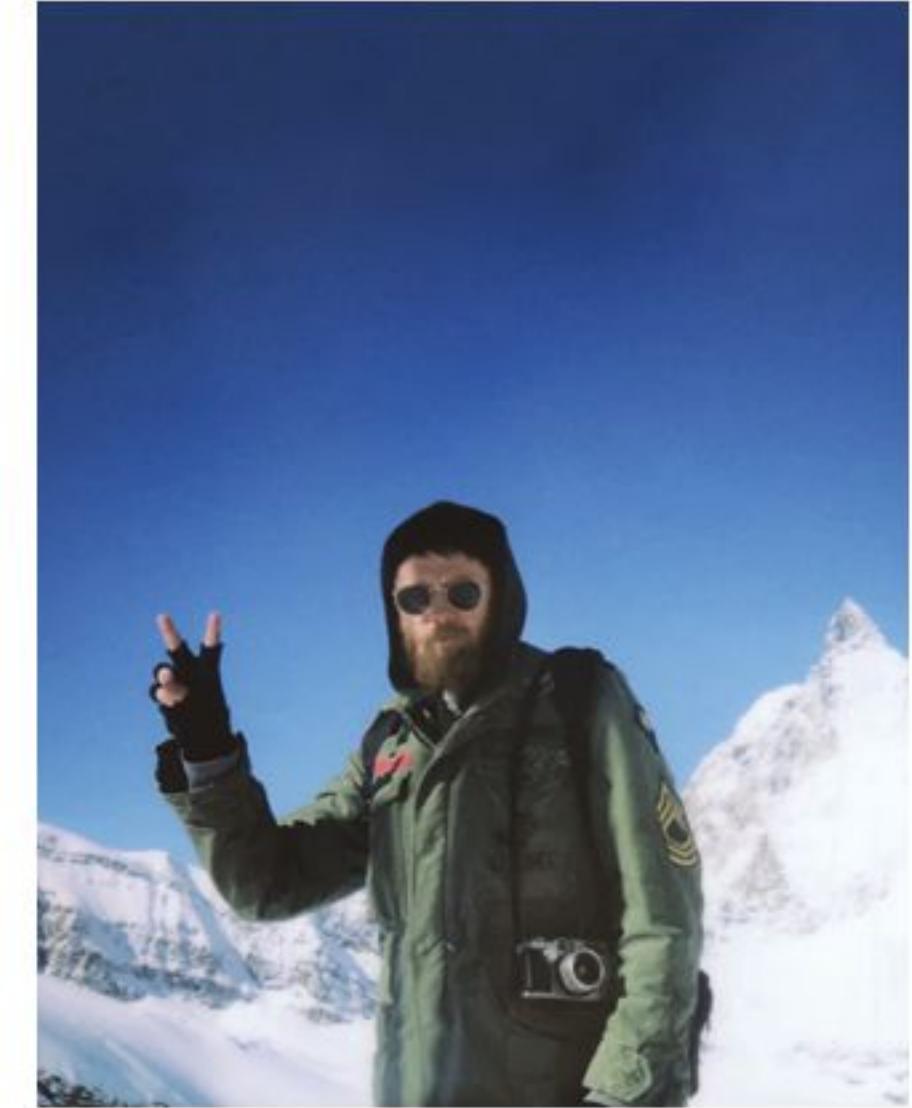
Rozich's vibrant watercolors draw on folklore and myth to tell rich stories. Maybe that's why Father John Misty chose her to paint his latest album cover; it's certainly why we chose her to bring this month's fiction, *Good-bye to Rootine*, to life in illustration.


**Jason Lee Parry**

Our Playmate of the Year is a genuine California girl—a modern beauty with a vintage soul—who needed a master of the West Coast aesthetic to reintroduce her to the world. Parry, a fashion photographer and true storyteller with the lens, was just the man for the job.


**Julia Bainbridge**

The latest wave in inebriation? Less is more: less liquor in our cocktails and less THC in our edibles, in pursuit of a smoother, longer ride. Bainbridge, who last contributed a sensual guide to Valentine's chocolate, tackles the state of getting sloshed in our *Food and Drink* pages.



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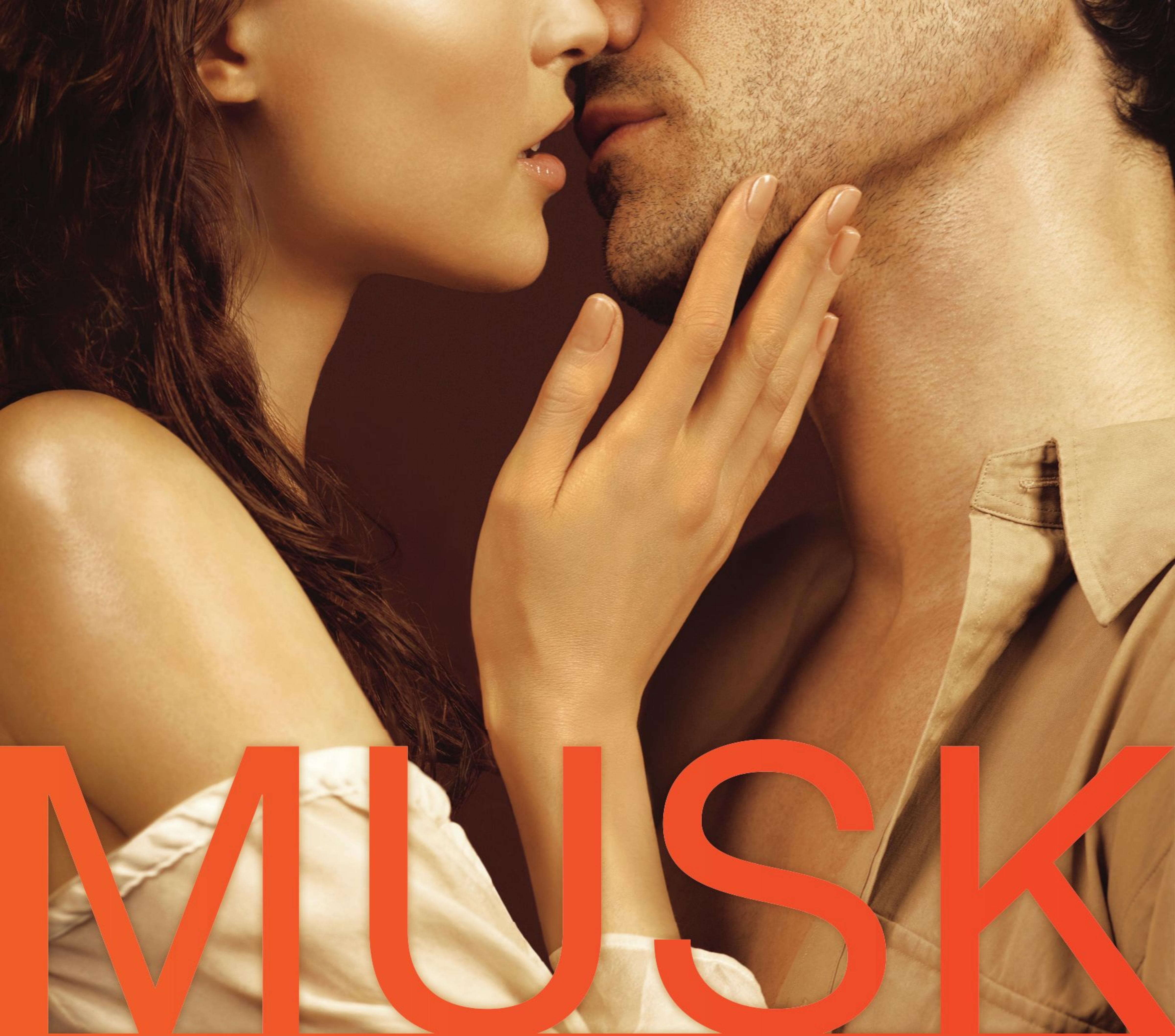
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# MUSK

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*It's what attracts*



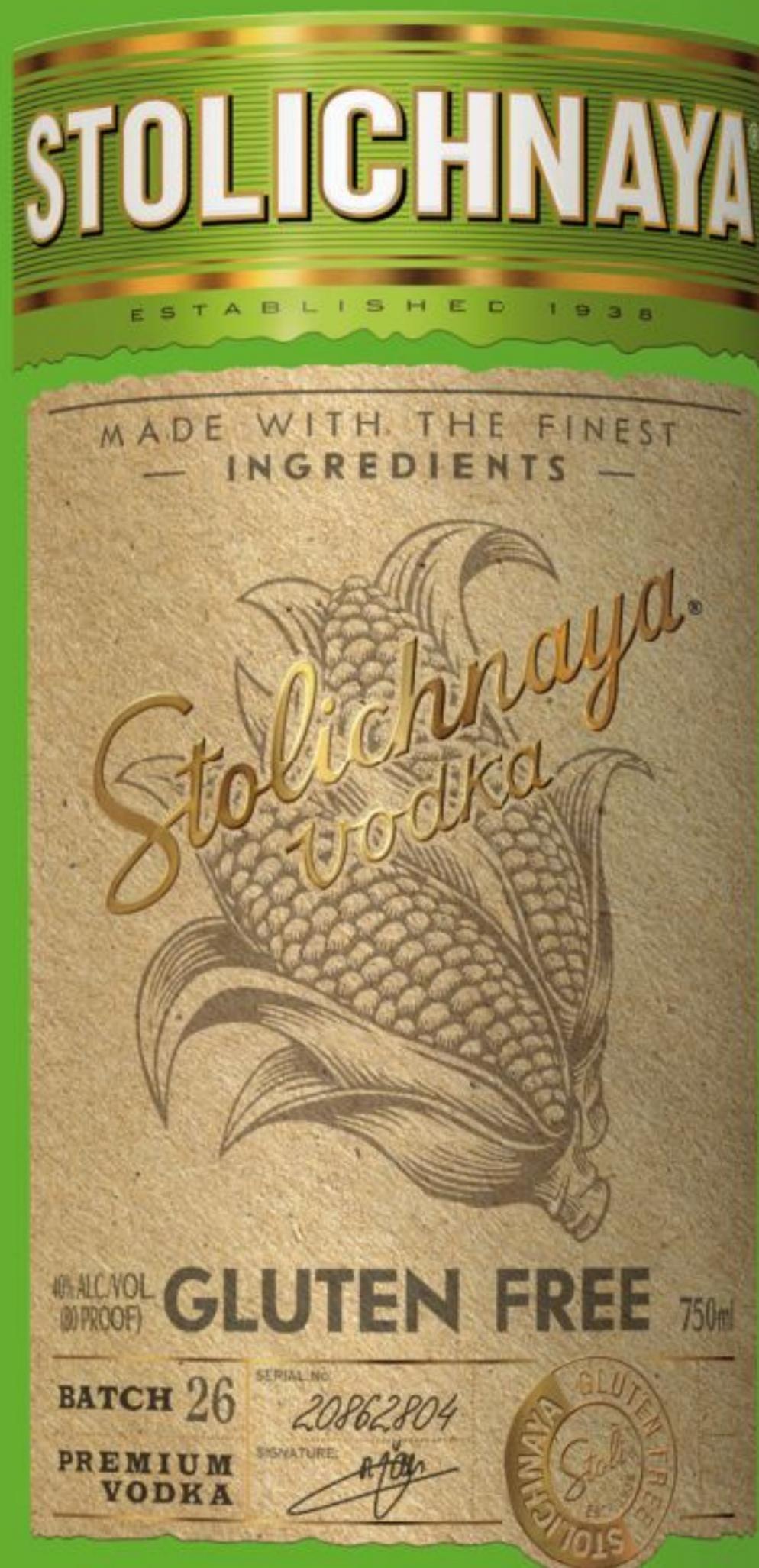
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NO FILTER

**“The Only  
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SEX defines  
is the role  
you play in  
making  
babies.”**

“Women who skateboard do it for the same reason men do it: because we love it. Skateboarding holds a universal truth. It always starts with you and your friends riding at your favorite spots. It’s about hanging out and having fun. For some reason, and for too long, there has been a perception that the only type of athlete worth sponsoring in this sport is a man. I hope to be a part of changing that. We all have physical and mental characteristics that can turn into strengths or weaknesses. How they define you is up to you.”

*Skateboarder and three-time X Games gold medalist **Leticia Bufoni** will compete this month at the 2016 X Games in Austin.*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN MONICK



VALENTINO  
MADE IN ITALY

Ballet in the air...  
When butterflies  
Untie, twice within  
They meet in may morn

# Dress for the Fest

Stand out in the Instagram fray at this summer's music festivals with a killer jacket and accessories that are both practical and timelessly tasteful

## SUMMER STYLE SET LIST



A classic silhouette upgraded with a matte-black frame and rainbow gradient lenses makes for old-school-meets-contemporary style. *Retrosuperfuture Terrazzo M3 sunglasses, \$339*



These woven-leather sandals provide just the right amount of ventilation, plus enough sturdiness to withstand any knocks the day throws at you. *TOMS men's huaraches, \$89*



Made of clay, rice powder and essential oils, this hair powder acts like a dry shampoo. Less bathing means more beats. *Alder New York natural hair powder, \$30*



Protect your neck with this fresh golf hat adorned with weeds, gators, skunks and other bane of the groundskeeper's existence. *Nike Enemies of the Course bucket hat, \$38*

If you're going to peacock, do it right, with the jacket of the summer. Lightweight satin bomber jackets are perfect festival flair. *Valentino printed-satin bomber jacket, \$2,350 at MrPorter.com*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT CORNETT



# In Praise of Mindful Drinking

As the mindfulness movement has entered the mainstream, so too has mindful drinking. "I want a martini, but could you put a little less booze in it?" is becoming a more common customer request, says Tristan Willey, a bartender at the Long Island Bar in Brooklyn, New York. "Also, my sherry stock depletes quickly these days." Sherry and other fortified wines are relatively low in alcohol by volume, clocking in at 15 to 20 percent, compared with gin, which runs around 40 percent. The bamboo (equal parts dry vermouth and sherry) has been popping up all over New York City as low-ABV cocktails gain popularity. Nitecap in downtown Manhattan even has one on tap.

While the low-alcohol thing is about fewer calories and, frankly, fewer hangovers, it can also be about drinking more. "I have the tolerance of a small gerbil, and I like to try a lot of different things," says Matt Tocco, beverage director of Strategic Hospitality in Nashville. "That's why low-alcohol drinks such as an americano, made with Campari, sweet vermouth and club soda, work for me." Smaller doses work just as well. Willey serves snack-size negronis at the Long Island Bar, and in Tokyo, Gen Yamamoto offers *omakase* flights of four to six two-ounce cocktails. Think of it as drinking less to drink more. Bonus: You can stay out longer.—Julia Bainbridge

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT CORNETT

DRINKS

## HOW TO DRINK MORE (by drinking less)

### OLD-WORLD WINES

A big California cabernet may go with that rich porterhouse, but with 15 percent alcohol in a 14-ounce goblet, you can't have more than one without getting soused. Go with old-world European wines, which are typically around 13 percent alcohol.

### SHIFT DRINKS

Working bartenders occasionally do a shot, a.k.a. a shift drink, to take the edge off. A lower-proof amaro (as low as 20 percent ABV) or other liqueur could be just the right strength.

### BITTERS AND SODA

Good bars stock good bitters. A few dashes in club soda over ice is a seriously low-ABV cocktail.



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# Cannabis Goes Gourmet

*Precise dosing and artisanal craftsmanship are revolutionizing the business of edible THC*

“You know, I really want to make high-end edibles.” So said recent Berkeley grad Vanessa Lavorato back in 2010 in a moment of inspiration while riding the BART.

At the time, the only edibles Lavorato could find at marijuana dispensaries in San Francisco were Saran-wrapped snickerdoodles and Rice Krispies treats. Those options didn’t cut it for Lavorato, who ran with the best of the Bay Area’s slow-food crowd and learned to temper chocolate from a pastry chef at Chez Panisse, the famed Berkeley restaurant of Alice Waters, godmother of farm-to-table cuisine. Since her rapid-transit revelation, Lavorato has perfected her recipes for THC-infused fleur de sel caramels and raspberry-rose ganache in Los Angeles, where she now lives. Her artisanal cannabis confections are available online and at Cornerstone Collective in Eagle Rock under the label Marigold Sweets. “We’re trying to get away from the stereotypes of Cheech and Chong,” she says of the name choice.

California is, of course, not Colorado or Washington, two of only a handful of states that have legalized recreational marijuana use. Many signs indicate that the Golden State will legalize recreational use this year, but until then pot and related products remain legal for card-carrying medical patients only. For now the foodie must speak and behave strictly pharmaceutically: “I work with a licensed dispensary. I’m a patient of that dispensary, and for my fellow patients I provide the chocolates,” says Lavorato.

Since Lavorato started crafting edibles in 2010, research and experimentation have vastly improved the product. Six years ago people were working with shake—basically the crumbs from a big bag of weed. “That’s

why edibles from that time had this green, plantlike flavor,” says Lavorato. “You’re trying to get a very small amount of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, from the shake, so the result tastes bitter, like over-steeped tea.” Dosage was also a problem with the shake method. (That time you ate pot brownies in college, got all paranoid and wobbly and ruined the one chance you had with your long-time crush? Those brownies were made with shake, resulting in an uncontrolled amount of THC.) Today carbon dioxide extraction is one process that is favored for its purity and precision. The resulting concentrates have enabled Lavorato to achieve an end result that’s as high as 90 percent THC. “I can put that directly into my chocolate and ensure that the potency is consistent,” she says.

Bigger operations go even further with quality control, and on a much larger scale. In northern California, Altai Brands has a 40,000-square-foot production facility capable of making 30,000 pieces of THC candy in a single day. “It’s difficult enough to be able to make a good sea salt caramel bonbon, but to produce 30,000 with consistent levels of THC in them—that takes another level of skill,” says Altai CEO Rob Weakley, whose vice president of operations, Mark Ainsworth, produced food lines for Costco and Whole Foods before joining Altai. As THC edibles move toward the moneyed mainstream, Weakley hopes to capitalize on that demographic’s good taste and desire for just the right amount of buzz. “We set out to make a product that had the same predictably low-key effect as a glass of wine,” says Weakley. “At 10 or 25 milligrams, it’s about being coherent and social. You don’t get couch-locked like back in your college days.”—Julia Bainbridge

## THC FOR YOU AND ME

### ALTAI BRANDS

Started by Ainsworth, Weakley (also co-creator of Pebble Beach Food & Wine) and Gavin Kogan, a marijuana-business attorney, Altai manufactures bars, bonbons, lozenges and more at its facility in Salinas, California.

### MARIGOLD SWEETS

Lavorato’s chocolates contain just 25 milligrams of THC each (her toffees have 16), so there’s little risk of overdosing. (She also makes non-medical chocolates.)

### DÉFONCÉ

Défoncé (it means “stoned” in French) is the new kid on the block. Like Lavorato, the chocolatiers at Défoncé use sustainably made cannabis concentrate.

### OPUS

Opus makes both THC and cannabidiol (CBD) chocolates; CBD addresses patients’ pain issues without producing a psychoactive high.

### KIVA CONFECTIONS

One of the only bean-to-bar producers in the industry, Kiva has more than a dozen edible offerings.



### HAIBIKE XDURO URBAN RC

This aggressively styled city bike features integrated lights and a beefy Bosch drive system. (\$4,600)

# Can the E-Bike Save the World?

*At the very least, it'll make hauling to the beach a little easier*

Bike commuting is at an all-time high in the U.S., which is kind of a no-brainer. Pedaling to work saves money, eliminates parking hassles and reduces treadmill time at the gym. The catch:

**BY CORINNE IOZZIO** It also makes you a smelly, sweaty mess.

E-bikes (electric bikes) do all the same things, but without the same physical effort—and promise to get us riding faster, longer and more often.

Think of an e-bike as a standard two-wheeler with superpowers. You pedal as normal, but when you hit a hill or start to tire, an onboard computer notices the extra torque on the pedals and signals the motor to help out. You keep pedaling, and you don't slow down; instead, it's suddenly no sweat (literally). It also means that maintaining a near-carlike cruising speed is within reach of even the modestly fit. Bikes top out at either 20 or 28 miles an hour in e-assist mode and have batteries that last at least 25 miles on a charge.

As transportation, e-bikes are already a huge business overseas, and over the past few years major bicycle makers have started to bank on converting Americans. "We're out of shape. We want to be outdoors. We want to be active," says Ed Benjamin, founder and chairman of the Light Electric Vehicle Association. "We've got transportation challenges. We've got economic challenges. Electric bicycles fit into all of these." Right now, e-bikes are a small fraction of total U.S. bike sales, but some reports show their numbers almost doubling year over year.

It's a perfect half measure for people who want a low-emission transportation alternative. As far as the feds are concerned, e-bikes are the same as people-powered ones from a consumer-product-safety perspective. And currently 22 states' DMVs agree, so there are no insurance, licensing or registration hassles to deal with. Advocacy organization People for Bikes is working to clean up legislative confusion to ensure that if an e-bike crosses from, say, California to Arizona it doesn't—boom!—become a motorcycle.

The good news is that both dedicated e-bike companies such as ProdecoTech and stalwarts such as Specialized and Accell Group (which owns Raleigh, Haibike, iZIP and Diamondback, among other brands) are constantly improving the technology to make it more undercover. Batteries tuck into seat posts and downtubes, and motors, hidden behind pedal cranks and wheel hubs, are nearly silent. "I haven't ridden an electric bike that was louder than even the quietest engine-powered vehicle," notes Court Rye, head of e-bike hub ElectricBikeReview.com.

The only hiccups are heft (the average e-bike is around 50 pounds, double the weight of a conventional pedaler) and price. Rye says you should expect to spend at least \$1,500 for a decent e-ride from a reputable manufacturer. But prices are dropping, and with proper maintenance the bike will last 15 years—which, coincidentally, is the best you can expect from a car too. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTTIE CAMERON

## PLUG AND PEDAL

*Sleek e-bikes at every price*



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### STROMER ST2S

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# MEET THE MODERN-DAY VOLKSWAGEN DUNE BUGGY

*The Baja Bug is back and more refined than ever*

While the VW Bug is hardly the first car a guy aspires to drive on his everyday commute, Volkswagen is up to something strangely appealing with its limited-edition Dune. For the first time in a long while, the brand has given us a Beetle that stands out and actually harkens back to the romanticism of the model's golden years: the mid-1960s, when tricked-out Bugs rally-raced down Mexico's Baja peninsula.

There's no denying the Beetle has grown into a cultural icon since its 1949 U.S. introduction. In the past 67 years, Volkswagen has sold 5.6 million of the cars in the United States, including more than 128,000 of the current third-generation model. But is the Beetle a manly steed? Not so much.

Of course, it was never intended to compete against more serious performers like the Ford Mustang or the BMW 3 Series. Even with the Beetle's 1997 reintroduction in the States after an 18-year hiatus, it's really the car's nostalgic appeal that has driven its fan base.

The 2016 Dune is designed to build on that appeal, with a bolder spin on the Beetle legacy that's intended to give the car more street cred. It's the latest in a line of specialty models, spruced up with features including special "Dune" graphics, polished aluminum sills and a huge rear spoiler.

The new decked-out Bug also features a slightly increased ride height and a half-inch-wider body, giving the car a more rugged

stance that evokes the true spirit of the Beetles that raced across the desert in the historic inaugural Mexican 1000 race back in 1967. And we have to admit, this modern Beetle looks decidedly masculine.

Although the Dune doesn't offer a boosted engine or an improved suspension system—two features that made those 1960s Baja Bugs so iconic—it does have style. Truth be told, the new 170-horsepower high-tech Dune will probably exceed the expectations of most drivers who have never been behind the wheel of a modern-day Beetle. And with a starting price of roughly \$24,000, the Dune is a steal for those looking for a two-door coupe or convertible with a flash of personality.—*Marcus Amick*

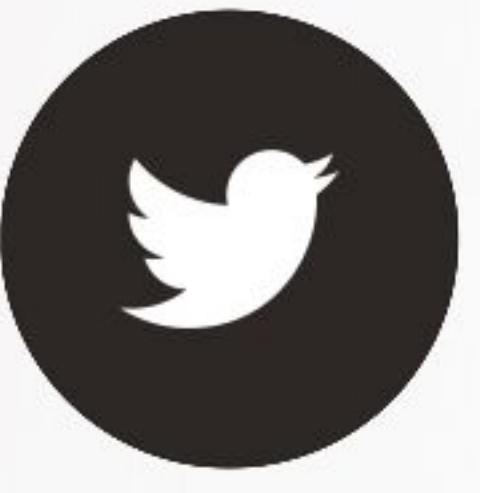
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHANTAL ANDERSON



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MY WAY

# Alexis Wilkinson

*The first black woman to lead Harvard's humor magazine is now *Veep*'s youngest staff writer. How she snagged those lofty presidential appointments against the odds*

AS TOLD TO **SHANE MICHAEL SINGH**

A year ago I was a confused, unemployed college kid applying to graduate schools in a panic and watching *Obvious Child* on repeat, crying. I've been thinking a lot about the passage of time recently and how school conveniently chops your life into four-year chunks with little landmarks of accomplishment. Puberty. Driver's license. Graduating. Drinking. Graduating again.

When I was a junior at Harvard, I was elected president of *The Harvard Lampoon*, the school's 140-year-old humor magazine whose staff has included Conan O'Brien, B.J. Novak and Colin Jost. Let's just say it was a big deal, and not because I was an economics major but because I was the first black woman to hold the position. The *Lampoon* was notorious for being a white boys' club. After the announcement, everyone wanted at me. *New York* magazine, *Forbes* and the *Chicago Tribune* clamored for my story, which goes like this: I grew up in a small town outside Milwaukee—the type of place that causes people to say, "Oh, my grandmother's best friend grew up there." My father died when I was a toddler. In his absence, my mom single-handedly raised two hardworking ladies. I went to Harvard. My sister went to Yale.

I applied to write for the *Lampoon* my freshman year. I was rejected. I tried again the following spring and nabbed a spot on the mast-

head. Two years later they voted me president. Like I said: *big fucking deal*—to me, and to a bunch of people I never imagined would care.

I've always been interested in the political process as another form of entertainment. As an undergrad I worked for Harvard's Institute of Politics and helped Mark Halperin and John Heilemann do research for their book *Double Down*. I had to track down Condoleezza Rice's phone number and stalk the Instagram accounts of politicians' daughters to see what the insides of their homes look like. It felt very Olivia Pope meets Anonymous.

Getting a call from *Veep*'s executive producer Dave Mandel before graduation was a serious WTF moment. As much as I questioned whether I could handle being a staff writer, I realized it was a rare opportunity where people would actually care about what I have to say. As a woman—especially as a young woman of color—I thought, This might be it. This is my time. I accepted the job and became the youngest writer on staff.

I showed up way too early on my first day. I didn't know how to dress for a writers' room, so I wore a blazer and a blouse. Trying to be as humble and unassuming as possible, I didn't sit at the writers' table. I didn't want to piss off anyone by sitting where I shouldn't. When Dave came in and started the meeting, he turned to me and

said, "Alexis, what are you doing? Please join us at the table and be a normal person."

One thing I love about *Veep* is that Selina Meyer, Julia Louis-Dreyfus's character, is a sexual being, but it's not her whole story. Her story never focuses on her love interests, whether it be her ex-husband or, in this season, John Slattery. It's a B-plot, and it's rare to see a woman in charge as sexual without it being her weakness or flaw. That's really powerful and closer to the truth. My life never revolves around the dick I'm chasing.

As a 23-year-old woman who has been in charge of a very male organization, I know what it's like to walk the fine line between being feminine and being the boss and having people respect you. So I identify with Selina. I know how hard it is.

I will always strive to be surprising in my work. I remember the first time I wrote a dark joke for *Veep* anonymously. When it was revealed the joke was mine, the other writers were shocked. They didn't think I had it in me. Those are the best moments, especially as a black woman. You think you know what you're going to get from me, but you have no idea. The only thing you'll know is that whatever I do is going to be good, and it's going to be funny.

That's the epitaph I hope to walk away with at the end of all this: "Alexis Wilkinson: Here she lies, a funny-ass bitch till the end." ■

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAGDALENA WOSINSKA





ADVISOR

# Can Straight People Have Chemsex Too?

**Q:** *Have you heard about “chemsex”? It’s apparently a trend among gay men: weekend-long parties, fueled by research chemicals, that move from club to loft orgy back to club. I’m a straight man, and I seriously hope there’s a straight-world equivalent. I’ve done party drugs, and I’d like to meet women who also enjoy them—especially ones who are curious about the potential of sex and drugs.*

**A:** Chemsex has a mix of critics and proponents both within and outside the gay community; media have branded it as everything from a “niche sexual phenomenon” to a “modern sexual health crisis.” But as with any trend, activity or idea worth talking about, an accurate definition of chemsex (and to what degree it is or isn’t dangerous) ultimately depends on the individual participating in it. Regardless of how you weigh in on the chemsex debate, one truth we do know is that things only get hotter when they’re forbidden.

Consider the Dionysian mysteries of ancient Greece. These celebrations used music and intoxicants to lull partygoers into a sexual trance. Social inhibitions were shed as bodies twisted with abandon. At today’s Dionysian warehouse parties and boho gatherings, sexual assault is a danger—drugs can be used to lower inhibitions or induce blackouts. Yet there are positive facets of drugs and sex that don’t see the media light: Many of us view drug use as an invaluable part of our self-exploration, sexual and otherwise. We consensually engage in drugged-up sex and find it transformative, romantic, ethereal.

So as I lay in bed, drying out from the previous night’s Bushwick rave, I posed your question to a few of New York’s finest party

girls. We decided on a few rules of thumb for a straight man looking to explore drugs and sex with a mind toward enthusiastically consenting and transcending.

(1) A gentleman has drugs to offer: Always keep a few options on hand, with enough to share. As an engineering undergrad at Harvard, Stefanie kept a vial of LSD in her bag at all times. “It was a great pickup line,” she says. “I’d go to parties and offer to dose back at my place. Men, women—it was sexier than asking them back for a drink.”

(2) Know your drugs—and your partner. Before dosing on a date, it’s best to know the drug and how you react to it. (Ideally you’ve already tried the batch.) Note the many types of drug sex: the psychic playfulness of LSD, the deep joy and fated connections of molly, the Lynchian fever dream of ketamine, the lucid fluidity of opiates. Also know what your date likes sexually. Leila, a software engineer who throws research-chemical parties at her New York estate, asks that guests familiarize themselves with the concept of “set and setting”: Scope your surroundings and your mental state, and assess your comfort level before dosing. Leila has one rule: “Don’t offer a drug to a woman if she isn’t already familiar with it. If you mention a drug and she replies with an anecdote about that time she did it in high school and it was awesome, then you can offer.”

(3) Let her lead. “Drugs are communal, but they also pull you deeper into yourself,” says Monica, a poet. “It’s about losing yourself in your own interior and in each other.” And since you want her to be present, ask that she direct the hookup. Let her be the boss.

Questions? E-mail [advisor@playboy.com](mailto:advisor@playboy.com).

ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE PERRY

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# ON SUPERHEROES

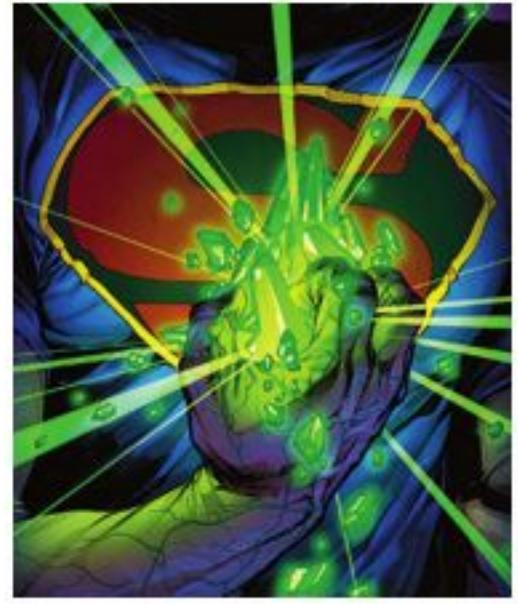
BY BEN SCHOTT

## HOLY BOX OFFICE!

The 10 top-grossing superhero films (since 1978) have taken in more than \$4 billion in U.S. theaters alone, according to Box Office Mojo:

\$623 m . . . . .	<i>The Avengers</i> . . . . .	2012
\$535 m . . . . .	<i>The Dark Knight</i> . . . . .	2008
\$459 m . . . . .	<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i> . . . . .	2015
\$448 m . . . . .	<i>The Dark Knight Rises</i> . . . . .	2012
\$409 m . . . . .	<i>Iron Man 3</i> . . . . .	2013
\$404 m . . . . .	<i>Spider-Man</i> . . . . .	2002
\$374 m . . . . .	<i>Spider-Man 2</i> . . . . .	2004
\$352 m . . . . .	<i>Deadpool</i> . . . . .	2016
\$337 m . . . . .	<i>Spider-Man 3</i> . . . . .	2007
\$333 m . . . . .	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i> . . . . .	2014

## HOLY KRYPTONITE!



Kryptonite is more than just a green rock that debilitates Superman. For example: WHITE KRYPTONITE damages plant life; SILVER KRYPTONITE causes hallucinations; PINK KRYPTONITE turns

*Kryptonians gay*; RED-GOLD KRYPTONITE causes temporary amnesia; and GOLD KRYPTONITE removes superpowers permanently.

## HOLY CENSORSHIP!

In 1954 the comic book industry adopted a comprehensive ethical code that mandated, for example: “In every instance good shall triumph over evil.” | “Walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism and werewolfism are prohibited.” | “Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.” | “Wherever possible, good grammar shall be employed.” Over the years, the code was relaxed until it was finally abandoned in 2011.

“Holy here we go again!”—ROBIN

## HOLY MISCELLANY!



Twelve-year-old Billy Batson turns into Captain Marvel with the conjuration *shazam*, an acronym for: SOLOMON (*wisdom*), HERCULES (*strength*), ATLAS (*stamina*), ZEUS (*power*), ACHILLES (*courage*) and MERCURY (*speed*). According to Peter Coogan of the Institute for Comics Studies, supervillains come in five types and four subtypes:

MONSTER . . . . . *e.g.*, the Lizard  
ENEMY COMMANDER . . . Dr. Doom; Red Skull  
MAD SCIENTIST . . . . . Lex Luthor  
CRIMINAL MASTERMIND . . . . . the Kingpin  
INVERTED SUPERHERO . . . . . the Joker  
~ ALIEN . . . . . the Super-Skrull  
~ EVIL GOD . . . . . Thanos  
~ FEMME FATALE . . . . . Black Widow  
~ SUPER-HENCHMAN . . . . the Absorbing Man

Although the word *superhero* predates comics by some 40 years, it rapidly became a prized commercial asset. In 1981, after decades of wrangling, Marvel and DC Comics obtained a joint trademark (#1179067) for the term. KRYPTONITE is trademarked by DC Comics (toys and clothing) and Schlage Lock Company (bicycle locks). Below are some pioneers of superhero cultural diversity:

Asian . . . . . the Green Turtle (1944)  
Black . . . . . the Black Panther (1966)  
Gay . . . . . Jean-Paul Beaubier (1992)  
Lesbian . . . . . Batwoman (2006)  
Muslim . . . . . Simon Baz (2012)

## HOLY EPOCHS!

The history of comic books—and superheroes—is divided into a number of epochs:

### GOLDEN AGE · 1938–1955

*Superman* · *Batman* · *Captain America* · *Wonder Woman* · *Captain Marvel*

### SILVER AGE · 1956–1969

*The Flash* · *Batwoman* · *Spider-Man* · *Thor* · *the Black Panther* · *Iron Man* · *the Incredible Hulk*

### BRONZE AGE · 1970–1985

*Green Lantern/Green Arrow* · *Tiger-Man* · *Wolverine* · *Spider-Woman*

### MODERN AGE · 1986–PRESENT

*Hellboy* · *Elektra* · *Watchmen* · *Spawn* · *Deadpool* · *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*

## HOLY SUPERPOWERS!

Outpacing speeding bullets and leaping tall buildings are passé. To make a real mark, you need truly outlandish superpowers, such as:



MULTIPLE MAN clones himself at will. MARROW grows extra bones to deploy as weapons. ANIMAL MAN assumes the characteristics of any beast. MATTER-EATER LAD consumes anything without ill effects. JOHNNY BLAZE (pictured) forces his victims to suffer every moment of pain they've ever inflicted via his *penance stare*. CYPHER speaks all languages and decrypts all codes. STRAW MAN is immune to all damage (except, problematically, fire). TAR BABY oozes a permanently adhesive mucilage. BIG BERTHA expands her physique from svelte to morbidly obese. SQUIRREL GIRL has an empathic bond with squirrels.



# ROSE BYRNE

*The Australian actress reveals her secret X-Men mutation, talks women in comedy and steals our bacon*

**Q1:** *X-Men: Apocalypse* is your second turn playing CIA agent Moira MacTaggert. How much of the surrounding geekdom do you participate in?

**BYRNE:** When we did *First Class*, an X-Men expert came to the set to talk to each of us about our characters. It was phenomenal. He was the ultimate X-Men geek. He had massive folders about every character. He came into my trailer and talked me through Moira's backstory and the evolution of her character. He was brilliant. It was like he'd been harvesting all this X-Men information.

**Q2:** Does having an encyclopedia of Moira's backstory help or hinder your performance?

**BYRNE:** It's a bit of both. As an actor it's always great to get as much information as you can. My character went to another planet for a while and came back and had a son who was half human and half mutant. Then she died and came back to life. There's a lot of context. Obviously they take only small strands of these stories for the film.

**Q3:** *X-Men: First Class* took place in the early 1960s. The new one, *Apocalypse*, is set in the 1980s. Is it just us, or did Moira not age at all?

**BYRNE:** Twenty years have passed, and yeah, she looks pretty good. Everyone joked about it on set. Does time not apply to these characters? The mutants can probably get away with not aging, but I'm a mortal. Moira might have a good plastic surgeon.

**Q4:** So you're not one of the X-Men, but in real life, is there a quality about you that you'd describe as a mutation?

**BYRNE:** I have remarkably small ears. It's almost a mutation how small they are. They look slightly weird, but I can hear very well.

**Q5:** You already had geek cred from *Star Wars*. With the ubiquity of *The Force Awakens*, did you have any flashbacks to your role in *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones*?

**BYRNE:** I'm leaving. This interview is over. [laughs] You know what brought

me back to that world? Working with James Earl Jones on Broadway in *You Can't Take It With You*. There were people waiting for him by the stage door every night because of Darth Vader. That was a trip down memory lane: seeing the *Star Wars* obsession nightly. It was extraordinary being a part of that. I mean, talk about the fans! I have *one line* in that movie. It's a stretch to say I have a character at all. But to this day 90 percent of the fan mail I get is from *Star Wars*—90 percent—to sign pictures of me in a purple snood.

**Q6:** You and Bobby Cannavale became parents for the first time earlier this year. It's a cliché that once you become a parent you start noticing the ways you're similar to your own parents. Has that happened to you?

**BYRNE:** Oh, I noticed that long before. As I started getting older, I began noticing. Luckily, I like my parents, so it's cool. But it's funny how it manifests itself.

BY **ALEX SCORDELIS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GUY AROCH**



My parents are very no-nonsense Australians: They don't like fanfare or fussiness. They're incredibly self-sufficient and curious. I hope I'm like them in those ways. Australians are real wanderers; we're well traveled because we're so isolated. That's something I'm proud of in being an Australian.

**Q7:** Neither of your parents has a show business background. Were they supportive of your decision to pursue acting at a young age?

**BYRNE:** They were very encouraging. They wanted me to go to college. I went to university in Sydney and got my degree. It was lucky that I was getting work from the start. I started taking acting classes when I was eight, so it was always part of my personality as a child, being a part of drama and acting. It wasn't out of the blue that I started working once I was of age.

**Q8:** How hard is it for an Australian to relocate to Hollywood?

**BYRNE:** I went to Los Angeles when I was 18 or 19 and spent time out there. I went back and forth for about three years before I got a job in America. I definitely wasn't an overnight success. And I didn't take to it at first. In my own naive way I felt prepared for L.A., but nothing can ever really prepare you for L.A. It's such a strange place. Even geographically it's got such an odd layout. I enjoy it now, but when I was in my 20s it was overwhelming. I stayed out in Venice. These days I like the Eastside, Los Feliz. Really wherever they put me up. Whichever somebody pays the check.

**Q9:** You studied acting at the Atlantic Theater Company in New York. Does that formal training help when you're improvising in a Judd Apatow comedy?

**BYRNE:** I've gotten more confident with improvising. I definitely don't fall into the category of Melissa McCarthy and Kristen Wiig and Maya Rudolph and Seth Meyers. My God, Seth is the funniest improviser. As with anything, the more I do it, the more confident I

get. But I always prepare for scenes. I never wing it.... Is it nasty and rude if I steal your bacon?

**Q10:** Not at all. With the first *Neighbors* movie, critics noted that your character, Kelly, was just as bonkers as those played by Seth Rogen and Zac Efron, and how uncommon that is for a comedic female lead. It seemed shocking that it was a rare occurrence. Is that what drew you to the part?

**BYRNE:** Absolutely. From day one, when I came onboard, the director, Nick Stoller, and I wanted to change that archetype. In these comedies the woman is traditionally the killjoy. We really wanted to turn that stereotype on its head. As irresponsible as Seth's character is, we wanted my character to be equally irresponsible. They're a team. And another thing—and this isn't a radical thing, but it is in the context of these films—is that they have a great marriage. They're on the same page. They enjoy each other, and sex, and they're best friends.

**Q11:** From *Get Him to the Greek* to *Neighbors 2*, you've become a go-to comedic actor. What comedies did you gravitate toward as a kid in Australia?

**BYRNE:** My family sat around and watched *Fawlty Towers* together. I mean, Basil Fawlty, what a character! The precision of the physical comedy, John Cleese's performance, the dialogue...it's beautifully orchestrated. It's mad, but it has the comedy down to a science. That was definitely a huge influence. And *Seinfeld*. It was huge in Australia, much bigger than *Friends*. I love *Seinfeld*. When I came to America, I got hooked on watching *Saturday Night Live*. I was fascinated by Kristen Wiig anytime she came onscreen.

**Q12:** You worked with Wiig on *Bridesmaids*. Looking back, that movie was a significant cultural moment. Did it feel like that at the time?

**BYRNE:** In the middle of it you're just living day to day, but when I look back, it does seem like something really special. And you hope it paves the way for



more movies like that. People like Paul Feig and Judd Apatow have championed female storytellers, whether it's in *Girls* or *Bridesmaids*. They're bucking convention, and we need more people like that. But promoting *Bridesmaids* was an eye-opening experience for me.

**Q13:** What was eye-opening about it?

**BYRNE:** With *Bridesmaids*, all the press focused on was "Wow, they're all women, and they're funny!" You would never say that about a comedy with all guys. No one would say, "They're men, and they're funny!" We were really treated like

## MOST OF MY FAN MAIL IS FROM STAR WARS—TO SIGN PICTURES OF ME IN A PURPLE SNOOD.



aliens in the press. I was so naive I didn't even think about it during the press tour. I didn't realize that was all anyone would want to talk about—that we were women. Maybe Kristen, Melissa and Maya were prepared for those questions because they're more seasoned comedic performers, but I wasn't. It's something I wish we didn't have to talk about.

**Q14:** Your *X-Men* co-star Jennifer Lawrence addressed Hollywood's wage gap in an essay for *Lenny Letter*, writing that she's paid much less than "lucky people with dicks." You've spoken out about the wage gap as well. Are steps being taken to correct this?

**BYRNE:** I think the steps are beginning to be taken. The EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] has its investigation, which is extraordinary, that this is finally being taken seriously as legitimate discrimination. It's necessary. Jen is such a powerful presence, putting herself on the line and talking about her experiences as a woman and

the differences in pay. Just starting the conversation is helping to shift perspectives. It's the same with the racial issue at the Oscars this year. My friends who recently went through pilot season are saying that the entire focus is on diversity in casting, which seems to be a direct response to the conversation about the Oscars. My hope is the more we talk about it now, the less we'll have to talk about it over time.

**Q15:** As an Australian, what are your thoughts on the American presidential election?

**BYRNE:** I'm fascinated, just riveted. My parents were here for a month, and we watched every debate, followed every poll. My dad's a punter, you know, a betting man. All the bettors online had Marco Rubio as the favorite, so it was crazy to see how it's turned out. But coming from Australia, the political world here is so much larger than life. This whole Donald Trump thing is such an unusual phenomenon. Aus-

tralian politics are like a sedative compared to this spectacle.

**Q16:** It's interesting that you mention your dad watching the odds. Remember last fall when statistician Nate Silver gave Trump a five percent chance of winning the nomination?

**BYRNE:** It's unprecedented. The difference in tone between the two parties in the debates is so striking. When you see the desperation in the candidates who are losing and how they fight to stay alive in the race, it's an interesting character study. As a performer, it's fascinating to watch.

**Q17:** Do you view the election with concern?

**BYRNE:** If there's a certain outcome. Citizens of the world are concerned about this, not just Americans. It is a terrifying prospect, sure. But I love America. The opportunities I've had here are extraordinary. The people I've met here have changed my life in so many ways.

**Q18:** You've worked with Bobby Cannavale on three films: *Spy*, *Adult Beginners* and *Annie*. Is it challenging to act with the person you love?

**BYRNE:** Not particularly. I imagine it would be more of a challenge if one of us were directing the other. As with any creative endeavor, you want the best for them. So if it's a failure, or if it's not going well, it can be heartbreaking. When we're working on something together, the stakes can feel pretty high.

**Q19:** You've been in comedies. You did five seasons of *Damages* with Glenn Close. You've done period films, sci-fi, horror. Is there a new genre out there you'd like to tackle?

**BYRNE:** I've been doing more comedies lately, and I would like to do more dramas. I've done dramas in the past, like *Damages*, but I'd like to take what I've learned doing comedic work and apply it to dramas. And I'd been dying to do more theater and was thrilled to do *You Can't Take It With You*. I'm doing David Mamet's *Speed-the-Plow* in Australia at the end of the year. I'm such a big theatergoer, and obviously Bobby is, you know, Bobby Broadway. We're a couple of theater geeks.

**Q20:** So what show should we see on Broadway right now?

**BYRNE:** Uh, *Hamilton*? I mean, come on. The soundtrack is on in our house all the time. I went with Glenn Close. I'm just going to go ahead and drop her name. She's the only reason I got a ticket. You can score hard-to-get tickets to great shows when you know Glenn Close. ■



Elle Fanning and  
Nicolas Winding Refn.

# The Most Disturbing Movie You'll See This Year

Drive director **Nicolas Winding Refn** finds his feminine side with *The Neon Demon*

Squirming your way through his latest film, you start to wonder: Is Nicolas Winding Refn messing with us for his own perverse pleasure? Worshipped by some and mocked by others for making gleefully violent, macho, stylized and self-referential movies that have lent both gravitas and street cred to Tom Hardy (*Bronson*) and Ryan Gosling (*Drive*, *Only God Forgives*), the Copenhagen-born provocateur is about to make heads explode with his new one—a harrowing about-face called *The Neon Demon*.

The film, in which a young beauty hits Hollywood and gets devoured by fame (in more ways than one), is the most violent Refn outing yet, and the most personal. Strange, considering the female-forward cast. “I believe every man has a 16-year-old girl inside him, and I wanted to make a movie about her,” Refn explains. “In this movie, I step out in the physical body of a 16-year-old girl, played by Elle Fanning, as I’d done before in the male bodies

of Tom Hardy and Ryan Gosling. For me, it’s a whole new canvas of possibilities.”

Unhinged, gut-wrenching, perched on a knife-edge of elevated horror and high camp, *The Neon Demon* stars the gorgeous Fanning as an aspiring model overpowered by the envious bloodlust she unleashes in youth- and beauty-obsessed dolls played by Jena Malone, Bella Heathcote and Abbey Lee. “I’m very much dominated by women,” says Refn, who instructed Fanning to prepare for the role by watching *Valley of the Dolls* and reading filmmaker Kenneth Anger’s notoriously sordid *Hollywood Babylon* books. “Having only ever had one girlfriend, I only know one woman. You could say I came straight out of my mother and into my wife. Having a very beautiful wife and two daughters, I had become very interested in the *insanity* of beauty—insanity because as the power of beauty in society continues to rise, the longevity of how we define beauty continues to shrink. What happens when the

obsession with, power of and need for beauty keep growing as our perception of the length of beauty recedes?” Cannibalism, necrophilia, predatory lust, obsessive-compulsive cosmetic surgeries and disembowelment, that’s what—in the deranged art-house-meets-grind-house world of *The Neon Demon*.

So why the detour, especially in the wake of rumors that Gosling was gearing up for a big-budget Refn-directed *Logan’s Run* remake? Turns out it was that inner 16-year-old girl screaming to be freed. “The kind of fetishizing of masculinity and the male body that I did in *Bronson*, *Valhalla Rising* and *Drive* had peaked beyond homoeroticism,” Refn says. “I’ve wanted to make a horror movie with a female cast for years. After *Drive*, I wanted to decompose everything, like when Lou Reed made one of the greatest rock albums, *Transformer*, and then had to make the distortion of *Metal Machine Music*. That’s what was next in his creative evolution. This is what’s next in mine.”—Stephen Rebello

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# Does Hockey Need a Bigger Net?

*With towering goalies and shrinking scores, the NHL confronts a crisis*

Last November, Chicago Blackhawks backup goaltender Scott Darling, a bearlike 27-year-old who stands six feet, six inches tall, offered a simple yet thorny truth to the *Chicago Sun-Times*: “Fans want to see goals.”

With the average goalie height exceeding six-foot-two, up almost three inches from the 1994–1995 season, and the cage remaining at its standard 48 by 72 inches, the National Hockey League is staring down a progressive scoring drought.

The average number of goals per game during the 1992–1993 season was 7.256; through January 4, the 2015–2016 season had an average of 5.401. As professional hockey scrambles to compete for eyes and ears with the other major sports in most markets, changes are all but inevitable.

A controversial fix took center ice last November when, during a press conference, Toronto Maple Leafs head coach Mike Babcock ran the numbers.

“It’s impossible to score,” he said. “All you’ve got to do is a math equation. You go to 1980, when the puck went in the net. You get the average size of the goalies in the NHL and the average size of the net. You keep growing the net bigger, and that would make the game the same. We change the game every year because we *don’t* want to change the game.”

Former NHL center and current NBC sports analyst Jeremy Roenick agrees that big

goalies pose a big scoring problem, but unlike Babcock, he doesn’t want the solution to come off the cage. “I’m a traditionalist,” he says. “I love the history of the game, and I don’t believe that changing the nets or making the ice surface bigger is going to do much more to enhance scoring.”

Roenick may take comfort in knowing the nets won’t be getting any wider—not yet, anyway. “To have that for next season would be a stretch,” says Kay Whitmore, NHL director of hockey operations and goaltender equipment. “It’s something that gets played up after a certain team has trouble scoring. To deflect criticism from his team, the coach says the nets should be bigger, and then it kind of takes on a life of its own.”

There is one thing that the NHL can shrink. Whitmore, a former goalie, announced in March that goalie padding will change next season “to fit the goalies’ body size a little better based on

how big they really are.” It wouldn’t be the first time: The league made players’ leg pads shorter for the 2013–2014 season.

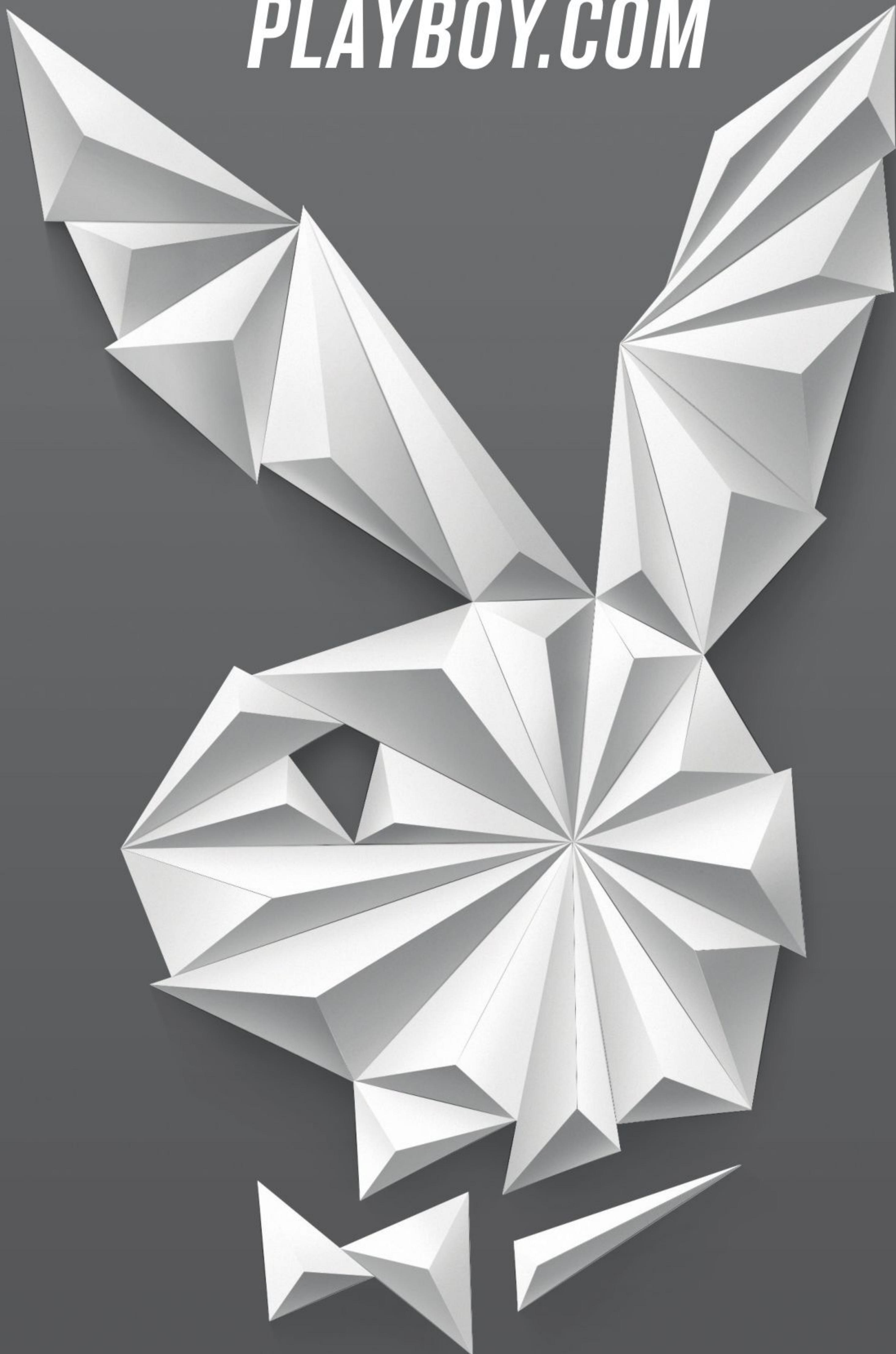
Among fans, the general consensus aligns with Roenick’s traditionalism. So what happens if another reduction in pad size fails to boost scores? Wider nets may make hockey more appealing to potential fans, but in the process it would produce a completely different game. Its hard-hitting tightness, especially in the playoff season, would quickly become a thing of the past. Instead of carefully setting up quality scoring chances, players would be free to shoot from all over the ice as soon as they touch the puck. The venerable Stanley Cup would be won merely by the team that shoots the most.

The result? Well, let’s put it in more familiar terms: Would football fans still turn out en masse if the NFL brought the end zone in 20 yards?—*Scott King*



You shall not pass: Jacob Markstrom, the six-foot-six goaltender of the Vancouver Canucks.

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# ROADIES ON THE FA



Cameron Crowe's *Roadies* is the latest in a wave of TV shows that depict the music industry's dying gasps—and hint at its salvation



*Roadies*, the new Showtime series created by Cameron Crowe, follows the managers, guitar techs, bouncers, bus drivers and miscellaneous crew of a touring arena-rock band, and while the music-industry milieu owes much to Crowe's classic films *Singles* and *Almost Famous*, its hard-R treatment is much closer to his great early screenplays *The Wild Life* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. There are expletives. There is nudity. There is a groupie having sex with a microphone.

But the series is notable for another reason: It is the latest in a recent proliferation of TV shows that focus on the music industry, following network hits *Nashville* and *Empire*, as well as FX's *Sex&Drugs&Rock&Roll* and HBO's *Vinyl*. This August, Netflix premieres Baz Luhrmann's *The Get Down*, about the birth of New York City hip-hop.

It's no coincidence these shows have arisen during one of the most turbulent times in the history of the music industry. As Lucious Lyon pronounces in the pilot episode of *Empire*, "Times have changed. The internet has destroyed the musician's ability to make money." That was in January 2015, and since then things have only gotten bleaker.

According to the Recording Industry Association of America, physical CD sales fell 17 percent in 2015, while album and single downloads dropped five percent and 13 percent, respectively—numbers that would have been far worse had Adele not released her album *25* in late November. (In six weeks it sold 8 million copies, accounting for three percent of total album sales in the U.S. in 2015.) Meanwhile, streaming continues to cannibalize the industry. Subscriptions to sites such as Spotify, Apple Music and TIDAL were up a combined 52 percent last year, and when streams go up, artist payments go down. In 2015, the per-stream rate dropped 24 percent, to \$0.00506. And that's what the *label* makes.

For decades, musicians bashed the greedy executives, soulless bean counters and corrupt radio programmers who ran the record

industry, from Pink Floyd's "Have a Cigar" to A Tribe Called Quest's "Check the Rhime." The internet was supposed to serve as the great democratizer, rendering extinct the parasitic middlemen in their towering corner offices. And so it has. Who needs A&R when you can get discovered on YouTube and SoundCloud? What's the point of a promotions department in the age of the surprise release? Why bother with payola when no one listens to the radio?

But the truth is the middlemen didn't go away; they're just different middlemen now. They wear hoodies instead of suits, and they moved from corner offices to airy loft spaces or eco-friendly corporate campuses. And they got even greedier. The website Information Is Beautiful has calculated that a signed artist needs 1,117,021 monthly streams on Spotify just to make the U.S. minimum wage, a target that only two percent of artists on the service can hit. And let's not forget that the website Genius (formerly Rap Genius) raised more than \$50 million for posting annotated song lyrics. It took five years and the threat of a lawsuit by the National Music Publishers Association for the site to finally sign a licensing agreement.

In comparison, there's something quaint about the old ways of the industry—which in part explains all these new TV shows. (It also explains why the one nonstreaming sector that increased in 2015 was vinyl sales: up 32 percent, better than any year since 1988.) Watching Lucious Lyon conspire to steal artists away from a rival label or

BY **SEAN  
MANNING**

*Vinyl*'s Richie Finestra ply a DJ with cocaine in exchange for more airplay of a Donny Osmond record is sexier than today's actual music industry, where shady moves are more likely to involve algorithms and the drug of choice is Red Bull. The premise of *Roadies* is itself a commentary on the industry today: With less money to be made from record sales, artists have been forced to tour more.

But these shows aren't simply eulogizing a dying industry. They're also throwing it a lifeline by doing what was once the job of radio and MTV: introducing audiences to new artists. *Vinyl*'s opening theme is by emerging alt-country star Sturgill Simpson, and the show has featured young artists including Jess Glynne, Alex Newell and the British rock duo Royal Blood. Actors Jussie Smollett and Bryshere Y. Gray (a.k.a. Yazz the Greatest) both signed record deals with Columbia after their breakthroughs on *Empire*—whose soundtrack debuted at number one on the *Billboard* 200 chart. *Nashville* used award-winning songwriter and producer T Bone Burnett to craft the show's early music. *Roadies* will feature cameos by real-life acts, and Crowe told the Television Critics Association earlier this year that he sees the series

largely as "a great radio station."

One of those acts is the Head and the Heart. The Seattle-based indie-folk artists, who appear in the show's pilot, have also done a stint on the CW's *Hart of Dixie*. "The importance of TV introducing people to new music has a far greater reach than people my age want to give it credit for," says singer-guitarist Jon Russell.

Although he enjoyed watching the *Roadies* pilot—"It made me laugh out loud and sometimes cringe at how cliché some things really are in our world"—Russell admits he isn't usually a fan of TV series based on the music industry.

"I have not seen any of those shows you mentioned," he says. "I get enough of it firsthand. Too much sometimes." ■

# Meet the Future of EDM

Three acts prove DJ David Guetta's proclamation that the genre "had to die so it could come back strong"

Light a glow-stick pyre for the corporate-coined, neon-tinged initialism "EDM." With industry behemoth SFX filing for bankruptcy, bottle-poppers Swedish House Mafia announcing early retirement and Las Vegas club owners second-guessing celebrity-DJ culture, it's no wonder Guetta released the tongue-in-cheek track "The Death of EDM." But electronic music still dominates American festivals and raves, informing virtually every genre in its sphere. All summer long, new noise from savvy artists like the three featured here will drive the ever-diversifying evolution of electronic sound.—Jeff Weiss



## NOSAJ THING

Back in the late 1990s, when other southern California adolescents still abided by strict subcultural boundaries, a 12-year-old Korean American kid from Cerritos named Jason Chung picked up the turntables, turned on the computer and instinctively fused G-funk hip-hop, jungle, art rock and British IDM (intelligent dance music). Nosaj (Jason spelled backward) emerged as a breakout producer from L.A.'s beat-scene hub, Low End Theory; he has worked with Chance the Rapper, Kendrick Lamar and Kid Cudi, among many others. His latest Innovative Leisure EP, *No Reality*, created partly on an iPad, blurs boundaries between genre, technological format and even sensory perception. "Everyone is unsure what's going to happen with virtual reality, Oculus Rift and all these new platforms that change how you see the world," Chung says. "To me, *No Reality* is doing our own thing with no rules."

## CLASSIXX

Despite the vintage connotations of their name, few define contemporary eclecticism quite like Classixx. What says postmodernity more than a millennial duo, raised in the *Brady Bunch* suburbs of Los Angeles and influenced by soulful Chicago house and 1970s disco, whose latest album, *Faraway Reach*, was recorded in South Africa and other spots around the world and features T-Pain, How to Dress Well and Passion Pit? "Our first record [2013's *Hanging Gardens*] was just us and our immediate friends," says Michael David (at left above), who spent his early years in apartheid-era Johannesburg before moving to southern California, where he met future bandmate Tyler Blake. "For this one, we wanted to collaborate with artists of different styles and expand on what we'd done in the past." That simple statement speaks for much of the best dance music happening right now. You can't kill what you can't pin down.

## ALUNAGEORGE

Envision Janet Jackson as an art school dropout raised on reggae and Radiohead and you'll start to understand AlunaGeorge. Aluna Francis, the band's half-Indian, half-Jamaican lead singer, is one of the most vital voices in dance music. (The group's other member, producer George Reid, opts for a low profile.) That's her vocal on "White Noise" by fellow U.K. sensation Disclosure, and the duo has collaborated with Skrillex, Diplo, Flume and DJ Snake—whose remix of AlunaGeorge's "You Know You Like It" hit number 13 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 last year. Some predict that with its just-released sophomore album, *I Remember*, the band's effervescent take on house, Jamaican ragga and noirish glitchy beats will change the face of pop. Francis aims for something more personal. "We use music when we need to feel something," she says. "I want these songs to be the rhythm to those critical life moments."



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# FRANCOFILE

Author **Tom Bissell** on religion, drugs, video games and the wild legacy of the historically bad cult film *The Room*

**JAMES FRANCO:** You spent nine years working and traveling, including to Jerusalem and Rome, for your new nonfiction book, *Apostle*. What were you looking for?

**TOM BISSELL:** The framework of the book is me visiting the supposed tombs of the 12 apostles, but it's really about early Christianity and how early Christian storytelling worked. The foundation these storytellers set down reverberates across thousands of years and still affects the way we think today. Every American city is filled with churches named after these 12 guys who lived 2,000 years ago. Trying to figure out how their stories had such sticking power became my focus; that's what the book is about. And I'm not religious. That's the other thing I always hasten to point out. It's not a book by a believer; it's a book by a nonbeliever.

**FRANCO:** You stopped working on *Apostle* to write *Extra Lives*, a book about video games. Why the shift?

**BISSELL:** I got really depressed about *Apostle*, because at first I didn't know what the fuck I was writing about. I was amassing pages and reading and writing thousands of pages of notes. I would sink into despondency about the project. But then *BioShock* came out. I would think, Oh, I'll just play for a couple of hours and go back to writing. Then it would be 10 P.M. and I'd be like, Oh my God, what have I done? Then I discovered cocaine, which is great for writing frantically for an hour, playing *Call of Duty* online for four hours and then going back to write for an hour. I was alone a lot in Estonia, which is where much of this went down. My cocaine hookup was a, shall we say, disreputable young lady with a mobster boyfriend. She helped me realize I needed to leave Estonia and stop doing drugs. We were fucked-up on drugs, lying in bed, and she said, "My boyfriend, if he knew about us, would kill you." I remember lying there with her thinking, He would kill me. He would actually kill me. That's when I



BY  
**JAMES FRANCO**

thought, I have to get the fuck out of here; this is really bad. I'm not writing. I'm fucked-up all the time and spending 15 hours a day playing video games. I've got to go. So the great tonic for me with video games was actually becoming a video-game-industry professional. Now I play them a fraction as much as I used to.

**FRANCO:** In *Extra Lives* you say the book isn't meant to be a comparison between video games and other art forms. Do you feel the same way about video games now that you've actually worked in creating them?

**BISSELL:** I used to think the promise of video games was the narrative possibilities. But I don't think that's true anymore. The story is one tiny piece of the artfulness of games. This will sound stupid, but I'm going to say it anyway: Setting up combat encounters in an action game is a real art form—where enemies come from, how you place the geometry in the level, where you get firing lines. That is a super interesting art form.

**FRANCO:** You also discuss the idea of "ludonarrative dissonance."

**BISSELL:** That's when the game tells you the character you're controlling is a wonderful person who cares deeply about doing the right thing, but the gameplay involves shooting people in the face. It's a core problem of gaming. The ludonarrative is the narrative that arises out of that.

**FRANCO:** You co-wrote the book *The Disaster Artist* with Greg Sestero, who starred in *The Room*, a really bad movie that's now a cult classic—I'm even making a movie about it. What drew you to *The Room*?

**BISSELL:** It's the only work of art that I know of—and I say this with fondness and affection—in which every single creative decision that was made was the wrong one. It's like a symphony in which every note is slightly wrong.

**FRANCO:** Plenty of bad movies exist. What makes this one special?

**BISSELL:** It's this exuberant imagination that has no idea what it's doing, working in a system that's structurally designed to prevent people like the movie's director, Tommy Wiseau, from actually making movies. It's different in literature, because self-published books appear all the time. The Tommy Wiseau of literature is a dime a dozen. The Tommy Wiseau of film doesn't exist, because the Tommy Wiseau of film would have to convince literally a hundred other people to follow him.

**FRANCO:** Yet there are a lot of outlets for bad movies. Just look on YouTube.

**BISSELL:** But they're boring. *The Room* isn't boring. Every single moment is amazing. *The Room* is so watchable and entertaining. I've seen it a hundred fucking times, at least, and I would watch it again tonight. If you said, "Hey, let's watch *The Room*," I'd say, "Fuck, yeah. Let's do it," and I'd probably notice something different. I think Tommy is a legitimate artist, and I say that with some reservation about the viability, or the respectability, of the term *artist*. ■



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# Learning to Love Trump Supporters Through Craigslist

It's hard to get a handle on the Donald Trump constituency. Since his campaign started, its daily contortions have dominated our news and social feeds with an ever-tightening focus on the rage-fueled pageantry of his rallies. The individuals are lost in the mob.

But there's one area where we can glimpse the raw vulnerability of the people who make up the Trump camp: Craigslist Missed Connections.

It turns out that Trump followers all over the country take advantage of the service, though some of the postings you'll find are obvious jokes or romantic fictions: "Slightly Overweight Redhead at Domino's That Gave Me a Footjob - m4w"; "Trump supporter who fell down stairs, dented car door with head - w4m"; "Compact woman with a subtle limp in Walmart Sunday night - m4w." Then again, is anything really implausible in this waking fever dream of an election year?

Here are some highlights—all presented sic, some accompanied by reminders of the violence that broke out at the same events where romantic sparks flew. Should any of these touch off an IRL flame, they'll offer a disturbing reply to some future child's question, "Mom, how did you and Dad meet?" The answer, from beneath the cold shadow of an impossible wall, might well be this: "While we were making America great again."—Joe Veix

## No guns allowed in the arcade – w4m (Sunrise Mall, Corpus Christi, Texas)

We talked about guns, knives and trump in your arcade. I wanted to ask you out on a date, but I was too shy. xo

## I-66 E Rest Stop – m4m (northern Virginia)

You drove a red pick-up truck with a Trump sticker.

I wanted to give you a hand.



## Blonde in Blue Dress and heels at Trump Rally – m4w (Fayetteville, North Carolina)

We were kind of walking beside each other, you had 2 girls with you, and you were in heels, Your heel actually got caught in a hole.

You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. I hope you remember who I was, We parked across the road from the Charlie Rose expo center, and had to cross Mountain drive to get to our cars.

I can't get you off my mind.

[At this event, a 78-year-old man in a cowboy hat named John McGraw punched a protester in the face. He later told an interviewer, "Next time we see him, we might have to kill him."]

## trump rally deanna – m4w (Louisville, Kentucky)

So we met at the trump rally. I believe your name was Deanna. Thought we had a connection. You were very nice to my son i held onto your signs thru the rally. Im sure this is a long shot but never know. I believe your from

mooresville. should have got your number lucking myself. send me a pic ill know if its you.

[At this event, a young girl was violently shoved, reportedly by a known white supremacist.]

## Trump Event – m4m (Fountain Hills, Arizona)

You sat behind me and I could not help but notice the huge buldge in your shorts. Not sure if you noticed me taking a few looks at it. Like to see it in private if your willing. You are tall, slim, tell me what you were wearing, age and who u were with, and tell me something about me.

[At this event, a protester in an American-flag shirt was severely beaten by the crowd while sprawled defenseless on the ground. Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski also allegedly grabbed the collar of another protester. On March 29, Lewandowski was charged with battery for assaulting a reporter.]



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# ***The Modern-Day Delirium of “Just Say No”***

*As our nation barrels toward widespread marijuana decriminalization, what is D.A.R.E. going to do?*

The antidrug program D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) began in 1983, at the height of Ronald Reagan's escalation of the war on drugs, with a wholesome-sounding mission: to teach students “good decision-making skills to help them lead safe and healthy lives.” Since then, millions of adolescents have been taught the line-in-the-sand “just say no” approach to narcotics. But the intervening 33 years have seen a sea change in American moral attitudes, especially regarding drugs. Today the United States is headed toward a marijuana boom, with 23 states and Washington, D.C. decriminalizing the substance and four (plus D.C.) making recreational use legal. Americans are smoking—not to mention eating, drinking, vaping and dabbing—in public, in greater numbers and with far greater acceptance than ever before.

That has made “just say no” and other hangovers of abstinence-based methods seem beyond outdated. Even D.A.R.E. has come around, in a way. With public opinion leaning toward tolerance and with local, state and federal drug laws murkier than ever, the organization is facing an identity crisis: How do you teach children about marijuana, especially in communities that basically respond to it with a shrug?

The answer so far has been, more or less, to drop weed from the lineup altogether. “When we create a curriculum, we have to create one

that fits all geographic areas,” says Scott Gilham, a D.A.R.E. regional director who oversees pot-friendly states including Alaska and California and who has been with the organization since its inception. “With all the controversy and changes within the marijuana arena, we had to leave marijuana out—we couldn't teach the same thing in Colorado that's being taught in some small community in Utah.”

D.A.R.E.'s decision to drop marijuana came in 2012, on the cusp of a national shift in pot laws that occurred when Colorado and Washington became the first two states to permit recreational use. The change was the culmination of an evolution that began in 2000, after

research from the Department of Education and the Surgeon

General revealed D.A.R.E. was ineffective. Another study found little difference in drug use, attitudes and self-esteem between students who had gone through the program and those who had gone through a “standard drug education curriculum.” D.A.R.E. switched from lectures to a discussion-group model, and in 2009 it established a new curriculum for adolescents called “keepin' it REAL” that hinges on open dialogue between teachers and students instead of scare tactics detailing the horrors of drugs.

These days D.A.R.E. is markedly different from the program of yesteryear, its directors

contend. “It's not the sage on the stage, like in the old days,” says regional director Mike Lien. “It's more the instructor teaching kids about the adverse impacts of drug use and giving them better life skills to make good decisions.”

While D.A.R.E. seems content with its new model—everyone I spoke with from the organization made sure to tout their “science-based” approach, perhaps because the group's funding used to be directly tied to whether its methods were scientifically sound—not everyone buys the idea that the program has kept up with how young people and drugs intersect today.

Pushing a science-based system is D.A.R.E.'s “party line,” says Marsha Rosenbaum, director emerita of the San Francisco office of the Drug Policy Alliance, an anti-drug-war nonprofit dedicated to “promoting drug policies that are grounded in science, compassion, health and human rights,” as DPA's website states. (In a talking-points statement, the DPA describes itself as “firmly committed to reducing drug abuse among youth.”)

Rosenbaum is known for creating the DPA's “Safety First” booklet, a guide for parents and educators first published in 1999 that served as an alternative to hard-line abstinence-only programs. The DPA says it has distributed more than 350,000 copies of “Safety First” (now in its



sixth edition), in at least seven languages. And though Rosenbaum was initially impressed by D.A.R.E.'s move to drop pot back in 2012, she soon had a change of heart.

"When that came out, at first I was excited. I thought, Oh my God, this is a real game changer. D.A.R.E. has decided that marijuana is not the dangerous drug they'd said it was, and they've taken it out of the curriculum," Rosenbaum says. "I called them right away for clarification, and the more I talked to the guy, the more I realized, Wait a minute. I looked at what they tell kids if they ask about marijuana, and it's pretty much the same old, same old."

What happens when kids ask about marijuana in a D.A.R.E. classroom today? Officers are instructed not to bring up the subject on their own, but when students do ask, the organization's pol-

icy is to "keep the information very basic and at an age-appropriate level" and to tell children that marijuana is a drug that can affect their mind; cause them to forget; make it hard to concentrate, learn and sleep; make them irritable and anxious; and affect their schoolwork.

Gilliam tells me one goal of this policy is to avoid putting officers in a position where they're forced to talk about ever-shifting marijuana laws. But Rosenbaum scoffs at this, saying the plan does nothing to distinguish between use and abuse and is no different from what D.A.R.E. was doing years ago.

"I think it's a wolf in sheep's clothing," she says. "It's rhetoric. 'Keeping it real'? What's real? I think the emphasis on decision making, which most of the drug education programs do now, is good. With D.A.R.E. there's only one

right decision, and that's to say no—but kids are going to make their own decisions."

If Rosenbaum is correct, where does this leave kids? D.A.R.E. is still used in approximately 70 percent of schools across the nation, and the organization thinks it has successfully kept up with the times. Rosenbaum and the Drug Policy Alliance disagree. Meanwhile, a recent study in *The Lancet Psychiatry* found that legalizing marijuana did not lead to an increase in adolescent drug use. The finding is counter to D.A.R.E.'s rhetoric—"Simply put, legalization would drastically increase marijuana use and use disorder rates"—but doesn't necessarily negate its curriculum. Until there is concrete evidence on the efficacy of D.A.R.E.'s current model, including its marijuana policy, the issue will be stuck in a thick, decriminalized haze. ■

# THE DEBATE OVER DEBATES

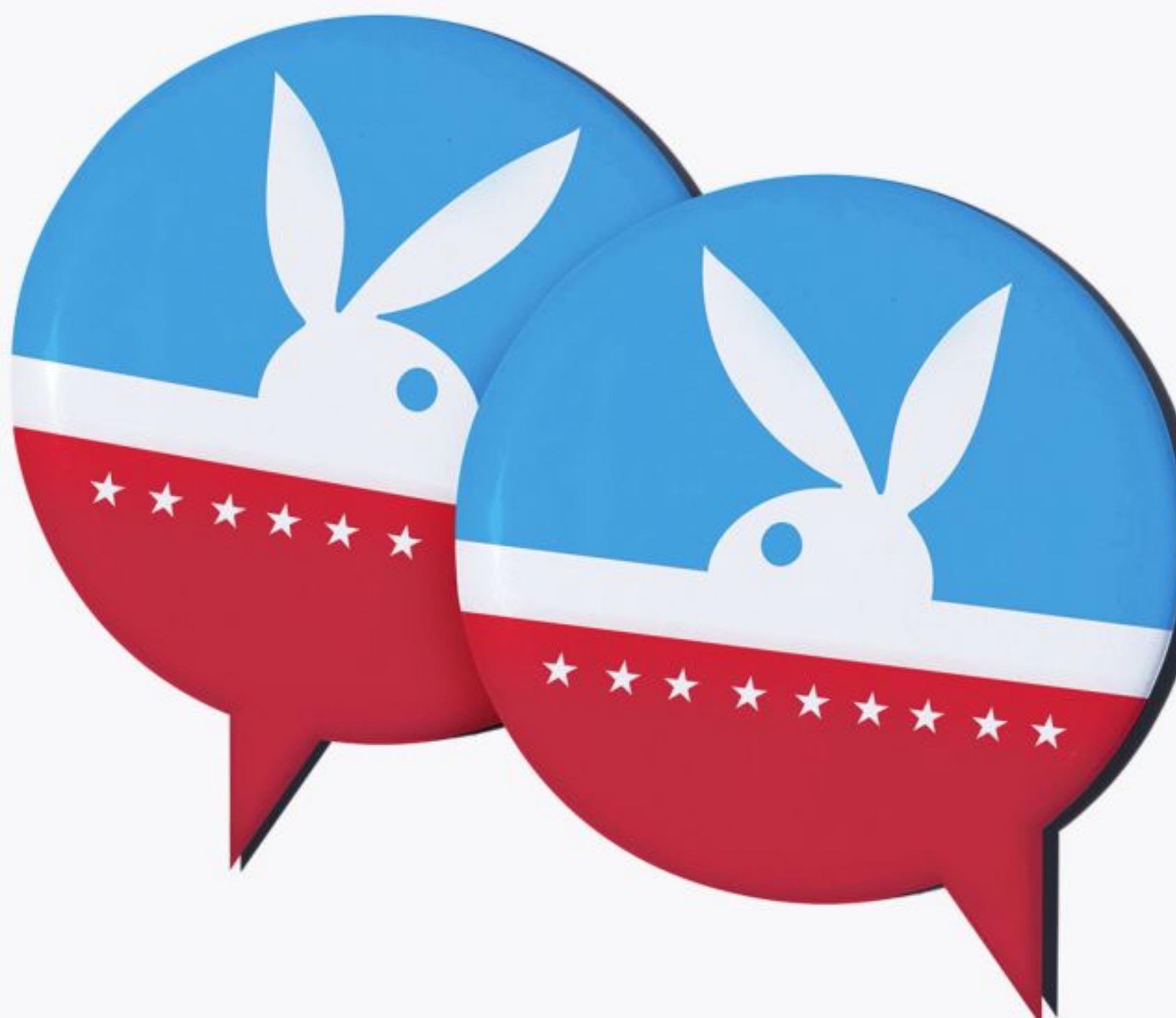
*Big corporations control the presidential debates. Can the unlikely duo of Trump and Sanders end that?*

The past year has upended the D.C. establishment, and some among the surviving ruling class fear they may be next. Folks at the Commission on Presidential Debates are especially worried. For almost 30 years, the CPD has orchestrated the most-watched political events in America—TV debates between the Democratic and Republican nominees. Controlled by the two parties and funded in previous years by corporations including Philip Morris and Anheuser-Busch, the organization symbolizes everything outsiders such as Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump have campaigned against.

The idea behind the debate commission was always slightly nefarious: to create an airtight showcase for the two big parties and their policies and to exclude insurgent candidates from challenging them. The CPD permits the nominees to decide everything from moderators to topics. It also persuades universities and colleges to host debates, though few students are admitted since most tickets go to high-dollar donors—“one nice way you can recognize people who’ve helped you,” CPD executive director Janet Brown once explained.

When legendary CBS newsman Walter Cronkite saw how this game was played, he called it an “unconscionable fraud.”

It wasn’t always like this. In 1960, newsman Don Hewitt (who went on to create *60 Minutes*) persuaded Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard M. Nixon to debate. They met four times in TV studios without audiences, and journalists could ask anything. The next debates were hosted in 1976 by the nonpartisan League of Women Voters, which convinced President Gerald R. Ford to face Georgia governor Jimmy Carter three times. The League debate became a national tradition. In 1980, it included a popular third-party candidate, Representative John Anderson of Illinois, who appeared with California governor Ronald Reagan. (Then president



BY JOHN MERONEY

Carter refused to appear, believing Anderson might draw votes from him.)

Later, stubborn politicians and growing expenses created uncertainty. “Sometimes we didn’t know if we’d be able to pull off a debate at all,” says former League president Nancy Neuman. Washington elites wanted to steal control from the League and established the Commission on Presidential Debates as a private corporation with a name designed to sound like part of the government.

The end of the League’s debate dominance came when it fought to prevent Vice President George H.W. Bush and Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis from calling the shots in 1988. “The campaigns got together and gave us a list—pages and pages of rules,” says Neuman. “They included reviewing the moderator’s script, and they wanted to run phone lines from the candidates’ dressing rooms into the producer’s control room. That’s when I said, ‘We’re not going to be an accessory to the hoodwinking of the American public.’”

The CPD seized on the League’s crisis and took over. It scored huge donations from the likes of Atlantic Richfield (now oil giant ARCO) and agricultural behemoth Archer Daniels Midland. Negotiators for Bush and Dukakis signed a 16-page “memorandum of understanding,” agreeing not to participate in any other debate hosted by any other sponsor with any other candidate. The contract also prohibited the candidates from questioning each other, banned producers from cutting away to candidate reaction shots and even dictated the height of lecterns (48 inches). In every election since, the nominees have abided by those terms—and added more demands.

While the CPD claims to welcome third-party candidates, facts show otherwise. When billionaire Ross Perot ran as an independent in 1992, then president Bush believed Perot would pull votes from the Democratic challenger, Arkansas governor Bill Clinton, so Bush insisted Perot participate, over the CPD’s objections. Bush got his way but lost the election. (Later, he admitted that Perot cost him support.) When Perot ran again in 1996, the big parties struck a secret deal excluding him from the debate. The CPD later kept third-party candidates Patrick Buchanan and Ralph Nader out and even threatened to have Nader arrested if he attended as a spectator. Meanwhile, guests enjoyed “an Anheuser-Busch refreshment tent, where there is beer flowing, snacks, Budweiser girls in red sweaters,” reported *The Washington Post*.

Maybe this will be the year the bell tolls for the CPD. Even if Sanders and Trump falter, the anti-business-as-usual movement they’ve galvanized doesn’t bode well for the major parties’ continued control over debates. Even now, the debate commission seems to be girding for the inevitable battle to preserve its fiefdom. “We’re sued all the time, every cycle,” says Brown. ■

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# TREVOR NOAH

*Has there ever been a more auspicious moment to chase after clown cars on the road to the White House? Since bravely taking over for Jon Stewart as host of *The Daily Show* last September, South African comedian Trevor Noah has watched American politics bubble into a molten mess of a reality series that even Comedy Central would find too ludicrous to green-light. Then again, Noah did not campaign for the role of satirist in chief; it found him. In March of last year, he was in a taxi heading to an event in Dubai when his manager called to ask if he wanted the planet's most coveted fake newsanchoring job. This, after appearing a mere three times as a *Daily Show* correspondent.*

As Noah said around the time to his friend and early champion Jerry Seinfeld, “I get out of the car, and my legs—I didn’t have legs.”

Thick skin is what he really needed. The instant the gig was announced, social media cried out with a collective “Who the *fuck*?” followed by a judge-y indictment over a handful of old Twitter barbs that painted the little-known comic as a menace to Jews, Ebola victims and “fat chicks.” It didn’t help that TV critics held Noah to crazy-high standards: not to Jon Stewart’s early days but to Stewart at the glorious end of a 16-year run. But the sharp-suited newcomer, now 32, settled in with polish and intelligence (and without issuing any apologies) and continues to build a following with a young, plugged-in crowd that no longer treats him like Job.

Trevor Noah was born in Johannesburg on February 20, 1984 and survived a lot worse than web controversy. He grew up in the final decade of apartheid with a white Swiss German father and a black Xhosa mother who never married because mixed-race marriage was illegal in that era. Noah spent his early years in

a “whites only” neighborhood where his mom had to pretend she was the maid. (His dad would walk across the street from them “like a creepy pedophile,” Noah joked in one of his routines.) After the relationship dissolved, Noah and his mother moved in with family members in the black municipality of Soweto. Experiencing such contrasting worlds made him fluent in a range of cultures and languages, including six South African dialects, English and German.

Noah’s dimpled charm and uncanny talent for mimicry led him to acting and a role on a South African soap opera in his late teens. A few years later, drunken friends pushed him to take the mike at a Johannesburg comedy club, and the dare set the stage for a stand-up career. Professional comedy barely existed under apartheid, but Noah blazed new trails, skewering elite whites, government wonks and township blacks alike. Sold-out performances at home led to tours around Africa, the Middle East, Europe and Asia.

In 2009 Noah’s mother was shot by an ex-husband. Noah confronted the man, who threat-

ened to kill him, prompting Noah to move to Los Angeles. He did not immediately find a foothold there, but in 2012 he became the first South African stand-up to appear on *The Tonight Show*. A year later he was the first on *Late Show With David Letterman*. By the time he debuted as a correspondent on *The Daily Show* in December 2014, insiders knew Noah as a funnyman *sans frontières*. “Be grateful for what you have” is what South African mothers say to their kids, he told Stewart’s enchanted audience, “because there are fat children starving in Mississippi.”

Contributing Editor **David Hochman**, who recently interviewed Rachel Maddow and Ray Kurzweil for *PLAYBOY*, met Noah after a *Daily Show* taping in midtown Manhattan, and they talked late into the night. “The first thing you notice about Trevor is that he’s definitely not Jon Stewart,” Hochman says. “He’s quieter, more serious, more reflective. Then you think, *Hmm*, maybe that’s what we need right now.”

**PLAYBOY:** When you took over *The Daily Show* you vowed to continue the “war on

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN LOWRY**



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bullshit" that Jon Stewart began. How's that going in this crazy election year?

**NOAH:** Waging the war isn't difficult. Getting people to join you on that crusade is what's harder than you'd expect, and not for the reason you'd expect. It's because a lot of people simply don't want the whole truth. They want only a mirror of their version of the truth. That's true not just with Republicans and conservatives. I find that a lot of Democrats and liberals are not ready to hear the truth from their side. It's human nature to look for people to validate your opinion, and I think people came to *The Daily Show* for that for a long time. But just because you have a love for a candidate doesn't mean you shouldn't question them. What is the point of having your candidate pushed to a certain level only to crumble under scrutiny because you didn't give them enough scrutiny early on? Bernie Sanders didn't have solid policy proposals, so I pointed that out. "Screw you, Trevor Noah!" Or I made the case that Hillary Clinton panders to whatever audience is listening to her. People are like, "Who the hell do you think you are?" Come on, guys.

**PLAYBOY:** Any predictions on where the contest is heading?

**NOAH:** I have no clue. I don't think anybody has a clue. So many truly bizarre things have happened already, particularly on the Republican side. We might see a last-minute candidate step in. The Republicans could go to a contested convention, which could rip the party apart at the seams. Donald Trump, presuming he continues, is so divisive and so explosive that he can go all the way or else blow himself up. The enthusiasm against him is as powerful as the enthusiasm in his favor. Assuming Hillary is the nominee, people are almost resigning themselves to the fact that she's the one. With Trump and Hillary, it's a really strange combination of terror on one hand and ambivalence on the other. And yet, wherever we are in the general election by November, people are going to have to say, "Well, you have to choose *somebody*." Fortunately, I can't vote in this country, which helps a lot.

**PLAYBOY:** You grew up under apartheid. You've witnessed hatred, racism, fear and a country divided by disagreement and hostility. It must be so refreshing to live in America in 2016.

**NOAH:** Ha. We did this thing on the show

where we said Trump is basically an African dictator. We showed clips of him alongside clips of Idi Amin. They were essentially the same guy. But it's one thing for everyone to lambaste Trump. Every candidate has a right to be crazy. Why don't we spend more time looking at the people who voted for him? It's his followers who are truly scary. Everyone makes the comparison between Trump and Hitler. The question nobody seems to want to ask is, Does that make America Nazi Germany? The madmen in history don't do it alone. What's important about Trump's run is that it exposes the layer of hate, xenophobia and anxiety below the surface in America. That can't be ignored.

has picked them all off like a short-fingered assassin. People tried to meet anger with anger, and it failed every time. But then, if you don't go after him directly, you look weak or out of touch. John Kasich never went after Trump. Ben Carson never went after Trump. Look where they are now. This is a popularity contest. This is a reality show. If you've watched any reality shows, you know the quiet people get knocked out very early in the race. The loud people are the ones who make it to the end. Donald Trump reminds me of Richard Hatch from the first season of *Survivor*. He came on, caused chaos, got naked, formed a few key alliances and walked away with the prize.

**PLAYBOY:** If Trump is Richard Hatch, who does that make Hillary?

**NOAH:** Honestly, I think a lot of people are hoping Hillary will be Barack Obama. She has said herself that her presidency will be an extension of Obama's legacy. What's interesting about Hillary is that she's really versatile. She knows when to be a little tougher. She knows when she needs to be more human. She also responds to the forces around her. She saw that with Bernie Sanders, certainly. Bernie has done something beautiful in that he has inspired young people to believe again. Hillary recognized that, and she adapted. New York City mayor Bill de Blasio said the reason he waited so long to endorse Hillary was because he wanted Bernie to push her until she was addressing income and equality, and eventually she did. She has adopted a lot of Bernie's ideas

and rhetoric, and I think that has rounded her out as a candidate. She could take it all the way.

**PLAYBOY:** What would it mean to have Bill Clinton back in the White House?

**NOAH:** That would be interesting for everyone, because we've never seen anything like it. He'll be the first gentleman. Maybe he'll be giving tours of the White House and showing people around. Maybe he'll be advising on policy. There are so many maybes, it's impossible to know. What we do know is that he's very smart, he's very involved, he's very informed and he loves talking to people. With Hillary in the Oval Office and Bill overseeing the Easter egg hunt in the Rose Garden or whatever, they could be quite the power couple.

**PLAYBOY:** Nobody really talks about this, but

## ***The biggest thing I had to learn with The Daily Show was that I couldn't be the anger for people.***

Trump's campaign is fascinating because it threw out all the rules we've known about politics. Everyone had the playbook, and he went and changed the game completely. It used to be that you would release attack ads, you would point out the fallacies and people would come around to your message. Trump somehow stayed immune to that longer than almost anyone else. Whatever was thrown at him, it didn't seem to matter. You show that he can't be trusted, but people still trust him. You show him stirring violence, but it just makes the crowds cheer louder. He branded himself early on as the candidate who represents angry people, and that has given him a huge foothold.

Those who tried to play Trump at his own game—Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio—mostly lost. He

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since this is PLAYBOY, we can ask. Do you ever imagine what their sex life is like?

**NOAH:** No! I don't imagine it. Never. It never crosses my mind. But if I had to guess, I'd say there's probably not much happening. Studies have shown that the sex life dramatically drops off for everyone, especially high-income, high-net-worth individuals who work hard. With these two, I don't think it's like, Saturday night, 11 o'clock, "Hey, Hillary, wanna watch Netflix and chill?" [laughs] We live in strange times.

**PLAYBOY:** How does the United States look to the rest of the world right now?

**NOAH:** Insane, pretty much. But the whole world is changing. Certainly on a political level, we're in uncharted territory everywhere you look. I mean, you see these fringe parties coming up in Germany, France and South Africa; that's because you're dealing with parliamentary systems for the most part. In those systems fringe parties don't get anywhere. The difference is, because of the American system, there is no alternative. You have two parties, and the winner takes all. It's been designed to make the strong stronger, but nobody ever anticipated that the strongest person would come from the outside. Trump could win his little ball of support and that could be it.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of angry people in America. There's anger, there's hunger and there's fear, and there will always be somebody who taps into those anxieties to further a narrative about who to hate and who to blame. Trump has been truly masterful at that. The Chinese are taking our jobs. Mexicans are rapists. Muslims are out to kill everyone. If you're feeling overwhelmed or broke or disenfranchised and someone says, "It's because of that brown guy over there," you go, "Hey, let's go get the brown guy."

**PLAYBOY:** Eight years with a black man in the White House does not appear to have eased tensions around race.

**NOAH:** This is hard to explain to white people, but the thing about race is that you can't turn it off. If you're black, you are constantly black and that blackness is always affecting you in some way or another. That's a tough conversation to have, because it can be subtle. It's often very small things, but they pile up. Cab-

drivers don't pick you up. It happens to me. Or you go into a corner store and get followed, or people say things about you. It's often not blatant, but it's entrenched in the system. Over time, it might change, but if you're black in the United States, even after two terms of President Obama, you still feel black.

I think the benefit of a movement like Black Lives Matter is that people have seen the influence they can have by actively getting out and doing something about ending the silencing of a voice. It has been a fantastic proponent for new

time Hollywood jobs come through networks or through friends who have worked together, so it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you're not in that circle, you can't get in that circle.

**PLAYBOY:** Should African Americans be as scared of the police as people say they should be?

**NOAH:** I think black people haven't been scared of the police as much as people make them out to be, so much as they are...what's the word I'm looking for? They're enraged. They're disenfranchised because the police have been shown to not protect and serve all

parts of the population equally. It's scary: Imagine if you lived in a world where every time you told someone something happened to you, it was met with disbelief and doubt, with people taking everything you say with a pinch of salt.

Then you go through a period when every video that comes out contradicts the report the police have made, which then makes you question how many of the reports we can believe. So it's a very tough conversation to have going both ways, because many police feel unfairly judged. Ironically, the way black people have been judged for so many years, with huge sections of the black population being lumped in as criminals—now the same thing is happening to police. Police are going, "There's just a few of us. Why are you saying it's all of us?"

**PLAYBOY:** As you look at what's happening in the country right now, are you dumbstruck, or do you just feel like it's comedy gold?

**NOAH:** I don't see it as comedy gold, because it's gotten to the point where there's too much comedy, and now it's so ridiculous that it's not

funny all the time. When presidential candidates are making dick jokes, what are comedians supposed to do? Maybe I'm not as shocked by it because I come from a country where that happened. It got to the point in South Africa where the politicians were making the jokes.

**PLAYBOY:** Speaking of South Africa, what are your memories of growing up in Soweto?

**NOAH:** It was weird. We lived how we were living and it felt normal. So many people were born into apartheid that nobody ever dreamed of a time when things wouldn't be that way. Black people fought for freedom and independence, but I don't think many of them



conversations about race, which is amazing.

**PLAYBOY:** You and Larry Wilmore notwithstanding, late-night TV is a pretty white place as far as hosts are concerned. That extends to the writing staffs on most shows. Even now, Hollywood remains an old boys' network.

**NOAH:** I am very conscious of that. We put out a call for new people to be on the show not long ago. Around 95 percent of the people who responded were white and male. We wanted diversity. But when we went out and asked some comedians why they didn't audition—black comedians, women—they said they hadn't heard about the job. Word hadn't reached them. A lot of the



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could say that they saw a real future where they would be running the country. They couldn't imagine gaining access to the wealth and opportunities of the country.

When you're poor, it's sometimes impossible to picture living any other reality. In Soweto, you live in a one-room house, maybe two rooms if you're lucky. All the adults sleep together in one room; all the kids sleep together in another room. I'm not talking about another bedroom; you have a wall dividing two rooms. There's no indoor plumbing. There would be an outhouse, and that outhouse was shared by four or five different families. If you were lucky, you'd have running water. We had running water but not inside the house. It was shared among many houses.

**PLAYBOY:** You have a book out this fall about coming of age under apartheid. Was it comedy that got you through the hardest times?

**NOAH:** You would never think you could laugh about life in a place like Soweto, but there are always funny moments in every situation, and those moments do help you survive. In the book I write about growing up in an abusive household, in a house where myself and my mom were held hostage by an alcoholic stepfather. My mom was shot in the head. That's not exactly the stuff of comedy gold. But even in the darkest, darkest moments, we found things to laugh about. To have your mom come out of surgery with a hole in her face and the first thing she says

when she wakes up is "Stop crying. Look on the bright side. At least now you're officially the best-looking person in the family." I mean, who says that? But that's the family I grew up in. We always found some silly way to get rid of the pain.

**PLAYBOY:** Your mother converted to Judaism when you were young. Did you have a bar mitzvah?

**NOAH:** I did, yes. My mom had always been a religious scholar and had studied the Bible. She has taken multiple Bible courses and is very religious. And one day she converted to Judaism. I had a bar mitzvah when I turned 13, but no one came because everyone in my family and my world is black. Nobody knew what the hell a bar mitzvah even was, so it was just me and my mom going, "Okay, now you're a man."

**PLAYBOY:** You are the first major comedian to emerge from South Africa. Are people just not funny there?

**NOAH:** We are an industry that's only as old as our democracy. There's comedy everywhere, but there was no free speech. I'm lucky in that I'm a product of my time. A few comedians laid the groundwork for me. I'm the second generation that got to take it to the next level and make it work on a world stage.

**PLAYBOY:** You've said before that Americans think of Africa as a place where people wear cheetah skins and sit around waiting for UNICEF. Will that perception ever die?

**NOAH:** I don't think I'll live to see it die, and

my mind. I had never seen anything like it. Seventeen different types of milk. Twenty-two kinds of laundry soap. It is a land of unimaginable abundance, though it wasn't a complete surprise. You get a sense of the abundance when you watch American television. Just the fact that everyone in sitcoms has a house with an upstairs area is astonishing. A house with a second floor? As an African kid, you're like, Hey, who lives this way?

**PLAYBOY:** As you developed your comedy, who was your biggest influence?

**NOAH:** I watched a lot of Bill Cosby. I love Dave Chappelle. But I specifically remember seeing Eddie Murphy's *Raw* on VHS and thinking,

Holy shit! The guy from *The Nutty Professor* does stand-up? It was a complete awakening for me because I was starting to do stand-up myself. Eddie is incredible. The honesty, the precision, the talent, the skill. Everything he executed was perfect. His impersonations. The way he walked across the stage. His command of the audience. Eddie watched my stand-up once, which was enough for me to go, I can die now. That's all I need in life.

**PLAYBOY:** What about up-and-coming comedians? Who's the future of comedy?

**NOAH:** Michelle Wolf is hilarious and outrageous. She always makes me laugh. A lot of people don't know her yet, but they will. You can see her on *Late Night With Seth Meyers*.

If you look on YouTube or Vine or Instagram, there's a guy named King Bach. He's huge online, but people don't know him in the streets. He does short-form sketches. He's a very funny actor who, because of social media, really made something for himself, carved a path, which I admire.

One of the things I love about America is there's so much comedy. There's the alt scene with people like Kumail Nanjiani. There are the hipsters, who have a very different style of comedy. There are the mainstreamers. There are black comedians who cross over and do well with white audiences. There are a few white comedians, like Gary Owen, who do particularly well in the black scene. Just look on YouTube. They're all there.

**PLAYBOY:** It seems technology is changing

# ***With Trump and Hillary, it's a strange combination of terror on one hand and ambivalence on the other.***

that's because even if you look at America itself, perceptions die hard. I'm very lucky in that I've traveled to all 50 states, doing stand-up. I remember I was heading to Tennessee and people told me, "That's the home of the Klan. Watch out." But then I got to Nashville and had the best time of my life with the most wonderful people. If people don't see the nuance of their own country—and this happens everywhere—I can't expect them to appreciate the nuance of Africa.

**PLAYBOY:** What was your first impression of the United States?

**NOAH:** I was like, I've never seen so much choice in my life.

**PLAYBOY:** What do you remember?

**NOAH:** Walmart. That place absolutely blew

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everything about comedy. You no longer need to join the Groundlings or book a set at the Comedy Store to find an audience.

**NOAH:** Technology is great for the industry. Comedy is a form that works wherever people are funny. There are people who do comedy shows in the back of a van, in a bus, in a venue, in a small room, a giant room, theater, hall, church, restaurant, phone booth, and all you need is a tiny handheld device to record yourself doing it. When you go to a place like the Edinburgh Comedy Festival, you see all those things happening all over the city, and you realize that comedy is one of the most versatile art forms we have.

YouTube has opened that up completely, and you have Snapchat and Instagram and other vehicles as well. But I think these formats will come and go. The important thing is that young people get to express themselves to an audience directly rather than looking to the gatekeepers to let them in. At the same time, the audience is expanding in ways that were unimaginable only a few years ago. Think about the fact that you used to have to be 18 or 21 to get into a comedy club. Now there are 10- and 12-year-olds who know Mitch Hedberg and Louis C.K. and many more obscure comedians because, again, it's all just part of the deluge of information available on your device.

**PLAYBOY:** How did your social media habits change after old tweets of yours surfaced that some called racist, anti-Semitic and sexist?

**NOAH:** The irony is that people had to go back five years to make a judgment about who I am today. We live in a world where you need to form your opinion about someone instantly. Ever watch the Grammys and read Twitter at the same time? Before the first presenter even appears, someone is already going, "Worst Grammys ever." It's not a 24-hour news cycle anymore. We live in a 24-second news cycle. I guess the lesson is: Some people will always want to take you down. If you say something silly, it can blow up. But also, it passes.

**PLAYBOY:** How much do you and your writing team focus on creating material that will go viral online?

**NOAH:** I don't believe in working toward a moment just to have a viral moment. I believe in doing what you love and if a moment reso-

nates, it resonates. *The Daily Show* is different in that it is not all about sound bites and tiny moments. That is a fact of the show that I have to accept. But I won't lie: It's nice when you get a moment that goes a little viral. I'm always surprised at which moments take off, to be honest. I create each moment equally, and when one element hits, it's often foreign to me. Lindsey Graham came on the program and was one of the most engaging guests we've had. We played this game of pool where if you missed a shot, you had to give Donald Trump a

was running around doing comedy clubs. She was funny, but she was nowhere close to where she is now, and I loved what she was doing. Then you see her hit her stride, and it's beautiful. There's nothing more fun than seeing a comedian come into their own, especially if you've watched them on the rise. So for me, it's Amy Schumer, it's Jerrod Carmichael, it's Hannibal Buress, it's Michael Che. It's people where I go, Man, we are the class of now.

In late night, I think every host will tell you the same thing, which is that we don't have time to focus on what other people are doing. We're too busy making our own shows. Obviously I see occasional clips of what Stephen Colbert and James Corden and Jimmy Fallon and the rest are doing. But the only person I have time to watch regularly is John Oliver, because he's on Sunday evening and I'm free to watch. I loved what he did with Donald Drumpf, for example. That was amazing. John for me is an inspiration because he shows me the possibilities. Before him I didn't believe a foreigner could do a TV show like this in America, and I love him for that. Had he not taken over for Jon for a few months and then gone on to host his own show, I don't know if the network would have said, "Okay, let's give Trevor Noah a shot." It seems less crazy to have some random African guy host the show after some random British guy has hosted his show successfully.

**PLAYBOY:** Many people think Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show* played a role in getting Obama elected in 2008 and 2012. How much influence do you feel you have in this presidential race?

**NOAH:** Oh, I haven't earned any influence yet. That's something you work toward. Jon had that effect on Obama's rise because of how long and how hard he had worked and what he had been a part of. What people forget is that the first few years of Jon's show were barely a blip on the radar. I'm still in the blip stage.

**PLAYBOY:** Do you ever call Jon and say, "Dude, remind me again how you do this?"

**NOAH:** No. Never. I mean, I talk to him sporadically, but it's about random things. The last conversation we had was about stand-up. I wanted to know if he was working on a new hour. How's the set going? Any fun jokes? That



compliment. That got a lot of attention. Trump tweeted insults at us. I would have never wished for Michael Hayden, ex-director of the CIA and the NSA, to come on the show, but honestly, I had some of the best moments with him.

**PLAYBOY:** How much rivalry do you feel with your late-night competitors?

**NOAH:** Because I come from the world of stand-up, I realize that success is a cycle. People rise and disappear, they succeed, they miss, they return. As competitive as it is, you learn to celebrate the success of your peers because you know how hard that cycle is. I remember when I first came to America, Amy Schumer



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## INTERVIEW

was literally the conversation we had. That's not to say I haven't had moments of anxiety about *The Daily Show* or needed guidance. I was terrified in the beginning, and I still have some sleepless nights. Are you kidding me? There are nights here and there when I go, Shit, what do I need to do? What am I doing? Where am I going? Because I love what I do and I believe in giving it my all. But I don't let that consume me.

**PLAYBOY:** Who has given you the best advice?  
**NOAH:** Jon said, "Don't listen to anyone. Just make the show you believe needs to be made." Jerry Seinfeld was supportive long before I got the show. That helps in general with confidence. Louis C.K. said to me, "Regardless of what happens, don't forget to enjoy every single moment, because you can never get it back." He said, "One day you'll go, Man, remember that time when no one believed in me? Remember that time when no one thought what I was doing was good? I didn't take the time to enjoy and savor that moment." Amy Schumer just looks at me and goes, "Fuck it, have a good time."

**PLAYBOY:** What do you do for fun, by the way?

**NOAH:** I love boxing. I ride bicycles. I love roller coasters. My dream is to go on a tour and bounce around to every great roller coaster in America. But I'll settle for another ride on T3 at Six Flags. I love the feeling that you're going to die even though you know there's no chance of being harmed.

**PLAYBOY:** What are you listening to these days?

**NOAH:** I'm listening to the new Kendrick Lamar, *untitled unmastered*. I'm listening to the new Rihanna. I listen to Otis Redding almost every day. He just makes me happy. I like the most recent Justin Bieber. You may not like him; you may not like how popular he is, but don't deny his talent. The guy learned to play musical instruments, worked on his singing, worked on his dancing, worked on his social media. That's why he is where he is.

**PLAYBOY:** How about TV? Do you binge much?  
**NOAH:** I do. I watch *House of Cards*, *Game of Thrones*, *Broad City*, *Nathan for You*, *Billions*. I just finished watching *The Bachelor*.

**PLAYBOY:** Any fanboy crushes?

**NOAH:** Charlize Theron. Not just because she's South African. I think she is aging

majestically. She's so beautiful. Jennifer Lopez as well. Does she even have an age?

**PLAYBOY:** No doubt your dating life has improved since getting the show.

**NOAH:** Things are good there. I have a girlfriend. But yes, you definitely get more attention all over the place. You suddenly become a little more good-looking, a little funnier to everyone. Remember, though, that I had some level of notoriety for a very long time. It just moves from place to place. I mean, don't get me wrong, getting the show was huge because I understood it was going to change my life forever, and it has. American fame takes everything up a level. Seeing your face all over New York City—

go to a comedy club and comedians are ordering kale salads and telling you about how they're going to the gym in the morning, which is really interesting to see, because comedians were the first ones who switched over. All comedians used to be drunks and drug addicts. You'd hear about a suicide in the community every single week, and that has slowed down dramatically, which is fantastic.

**PLAYBOY:** It is often said that pain is the source of all comedy. There's the need to have people laugh at your jokes, the need for validation. Is that part of who you are?

**NOAH:** It's part of most comedians. It's our dark bond. We all carry the heavy burden of depression in a different way. We all deal with it in different ways. For most of us, our therapy is on stage. I meditate. I exercise. I always try to aim toward the light in life. I surround myself with positive people. I move toward positivity. I try to find the things that help me quell that voice in my head. It's one of the reasons I love Kevin Hart, who was the first guest on my show. Comedy was associated with skepticism and a general pessimism for so long, but Kevin came in with positivity, and he still does. Look at his Twitter. He's eating right, working out, adding value to people's lives. I'm glad for his success because he shows there's another way to do it.

**PLAYBOY:** Does earning more money make you happier?

**NOAH:** Ironically, I'm not necessarily making more money as host of *The Daily Show* than I was before. I was doing very well for myself as an artist, as a businessman, as a performer. So it's not a lifestyle change for me. Mine is not a Cinderella story.

You know, it's good to have enough money. I like to splurge on friends and family and people and charity. I like watches. I guess growing up with a Swiss father will do that. I don't buy expensive watches, but I like unusual ones. I have a Hamilton Jazzmaster Face 2 Face, and there are only 888 of them in the world. I love the fact that it's a watch whose face flips over to another face, which makes it two different watches in one.

The biggest thing I have learned in America is that it is expensive to be famous here. You have to pay for things. You have to pay for bodyguards. You have to pay for a driver. You have to pay for a publicist. You have to pay for

# ***I had a bar mitzvah, but no one came. Nobody knew what the hell a bar mitzvah even was.***

no one can deny that's an insane experience. It's New York fucking City. It's the Sinatra song. It's Jay Z. It's Beyoncé. You can't deny what it is and how weird it is, even though many people still don't know who I am. But put it this way: I'm very lucky in that if this had been my first experience of fame, I probably would have caved. I would have crumbled. I would have gone mad. You can't go from zero to *The Daily Show*.

**PLAYBOY:** So many comedians get caught up in drugs and alcohol. Have you struggled with that?

**NOAH:** No. Never have. I've never smoked pot. I've never smoked, period. I was never drawn to it. I'll have a few drinks occasionally. Sometimes I regret the fact that I missed that era, because that's what comedy was all about at one point. Comedians were rock and roll. Now you

## INTERVIEW

a stylist. I never used to understand the stress around those things. I never experienced that, and I still try to not experience it. I tell people, "I have a stylist at the show, but if I go to events, a lot of the time I dress myself." I'd rather give the money to starving children. So if you see me dressed really trashy somewhere, know that some kid somewhere got a meal.

Honestly, having possessions gets boring. At some point, you have all you can have. I completely understand why Bill Gates is working to eradicate malaria. Yeah, he can own 10 Bugattis, but so what? He can drive fast in a straight line. It's much more exciting to fix problems, education, help children. Maybe it's my African perspective on the world.

**PLAYBOY:** You have a keen ear for language. What are your favorite Americanisms?

**NOAH:** Rah, rah, rah.

**PLAYBOY:** Come again?

**NOAH:** When Americans try to show you that they're keeping up with what you're saying in a conversation they say, "rah, rah, rah" as in "right, right, right." Which is the weirdest sound to me. You go, "Make a right turn at that corner" and they'll interrupt with "rah, rah, rah" to speed you along. When I first heard it, I was like, What's going on? Then there's the suggestive nature of a request. "So do you want to go ahead and pass me that water?" That's such a strange way to say it, instead of "Please pass me the water." "Do you want to go ahead and turn the lights on?" What do you mean? Is that a request or a command? What if I don't want to do it? You could have just asked me to do it. It's strange quirks that I pick up

on. I've also had to monitor myself with some South African words and phrases. People here don't really understand the word *ag*. It's an exclamation. "Ag! What a nightmare!" Also, *esh*, as in 'Where's my phone? *Esh!* I left it at home.'

**PLAYBOY:** So do you want to go ahead and walk us through the process of putting together *The Daily Show*?

**NOAH:** Wake up at seven. Spend a good 10, 15 minutes meditating, just taking time to prepare myself for the day. Then I'll read the news, as much of it as I can. It's usually *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*. It's BuzzFeed News. It's The Skimm, which is a daily newslet-

ter that pulls together the most interesting reads of the day. I'm a big fan of Vox and everything Ezra Klein is doing. I really love German Lopez. I love Rachel Maddow. I'll do a bit of a workout just to get the body moving, and I'm at work by 9:15.

We've got a big team. Making TV every day is a very tough job, so there are about 100 people helping in various ways. Around 20 of us will gather in the morning to figure out what the show is going to be. We talk out all the possibilities, and then I make my decisions based on a few things. Number one, is it interesting?



Number two, is it funny? Number three, do I have something to say about it? That's what I look for. You know, Lindsey Graham saying the choice between Donald Trump and Ted Cruz is like being shot or poisoned, you're going to run with something like that. I always go, What would I share with my friends? Because that's the way I see the audience.

**PLAYBOY:** What adjustments have you made along the way?

**NOAH:** I had to learn that I couldn't manufacture anger. I couldn't manufacture outrage. I understood that a lot of people looked to *The Daily Show* for their catharsis, but I think a

lot of people maybe also got lazy in that they stopped fighting for change. Jon was very good at articulating a feeling for many people, but I think we also evolved into an age of couch-place activism, where people just sit on their couch and hashtag. Whereas where I come from the idea is that you go out and you do something about it. The biggest thing I had to learn very early on with *The Daily Show* was that I couldn't be the anger for people. I had to find an audience in the same place that I was in. I had to find the things that interested me and the things I found

funny and had to believe and still have to believe that there are enough people like me who will experience the world the way I experience it.

**PLAYBOY:** You spend less time actually sitting at the desk than Jon Stewart did. Is that intentional?

**NOAH:** It's funny. In my head I go, I didn't work all these years to get a desk job. I sat because I was told that it was the format, because that's what everyone did. Then one day I stood because I was like, This is who I am. This is what I do. Standing up is how I got here.

**PLAYBOY:** You continue to do comedy on the road even with your busy schedule.

**NOAH:** I have to. Stand-up is where I live. Stand-up helps me articulate my point of view. Stand-up helps me exist in my purest form, and that is talking to people, sharing and discussing ideas. I try to go out every second weekend. Honestly, that's where I feel alive. I get to relax. I get to explore myself, and I get to see America, which is very important to me. I find it weird to live in a place and comment on a place but have a level of ignorance.

More than that, it's easy to get caught in this world between you and the camera and random reviewers. You have to remember what human beings are. If you live in an echo chamber, you run the risk of believing you know everything when in fact you know nothing.

**PLAYBOY:** If the show ended tomorrow, what would you do?

**NOAH:** I would pick up my U.K. tour where I left off. I would go back and carry on touring Australia. I would go and do my shows in Germany. I would do more shows in South Africa, maybe start some TV shows somewhere else. As long as I'm doing comedy, I'm alive. ■





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PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID BELLEMERE MODEL ANTHEA PAGE









# The Unraveling of

DNA

*Under fire from the FBI and leading scientists, the*

**Forensics**

*Anita Frazier hurried across the manicured lawn of the stately old courthouse in Moultrie, Georgia and up the marble front steps. It was four P.M. on February 26, 2002. Frazier had spent that and the previous day in court, watching the man she loved being tried for participating in the gang rape of another woman. ¶ Kerry Robinson, 26, had sworn to Frazier, his girlfriend of three years and the mother of his baby daughter, that he was innocent. She believed him, but his fate was now in the jury's hands.*

They had begun deliberating that afternoon, and Frazier had returned to her job at a local furniture factory, expecting them to take until at least the next day.

After scarcely an hour, however, Frazier got word that a verdict had been reached. She slipped back into the courtroom just in time to hear the judge ask the jury foreman, "Do you wish to read the verdict?"

"I'll be glad to," replied the foreman. "On the State of Georgia versus Kerry Robinson, on the charge of rape: We the jury find the defendant guilty of this charge."

"I almost passed out," Frazier recalls. "I don't know if I screamed."

Just two pieces of evidence connected Robinson to the rape. One was the testimony of Tyrone White, a convicted felon who'd pleaded guilty. White had cut a deal, reversing his original not-guilty plea and testifying against his alleged accomplices in exchange for a lighter sentence. White also happened to have an old beef with Robinson.

The other evidence against Robinson was a partial match between his DNA and the DNA from the hospital rape kit. This genetic evidence was critical to the prosecution's case. Without it, White's self-serving testimony meant nothing. But with it, the jury barely hesitated to pronounce Robinson guilty.

Most people, conditioned by countless *CSI* episodes and hundreds of real-life exonerations, view DNA evidence as a direct line to guilt or innocence: The suspect either matches or doesn't. But in reality, interpreting DNA evidence is often a murky business that boils down to judgment calls—and those judgment calls can be utterly wrong.

That's primarily because the genetic evidence is often not from just one person. Suppose you handed your friend a beer at a party and later that night some drunk smashed that

BY CHRIS BERDIK

now-empty bottle and stabbed somebody to death with it. When police investigators swab that weapon, they may find cells from your skin, your friend's saliva, the murderer's skin and the victim's blood, all mixed together on the broken bottle neck. All those cells contain DNA, but the investigators' tests don't show which bits came from blood versus saliva or skin cells, nor from whom. It's up to forensic analysts to untangle the DNA they've detected and then use statistics and probability to determine whose it is.

Evidence like that is known as a DNA mixture—a jumble of genetic code from multiple people. It's the most common type of DNA in criminal investigations, and evidence is mounting that it gets misinterpreted with disturbing frequency. At least two men have been exonerated after being convicted based on misinterpreted DNA mixtures. The mishandling of mixture cases recently shut down one major metropolitan crime lab and sent others scurrying to reexamine the evidence in thousands of cases they thought had been settled.

There's good reason to believe Robinson may have been wrongly convicted thanks to such misinterpretation. In recent years, no fewer than 12 separate forensic analysts have concluded that he should have been excluded as a suspect because his DNA does not match that found in the crime-scene evidence.

"It took me all of five minutes to look at the data and say, 'Wow, this is an exclusion. This isn't even close,'" says Eric Carita, an independent forensic geneticist who analyzed Robinson's case. "I showed the DNA evidence to three or four other experts at the time just to make sure, and they all looked at me like I had three heads. 'What are you confused about? This is an easy exclusion.'"

Robinson is now hoping that the Georgia Supreme Court, where he has filed an appeal, will agree.

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Moultrie is a hardscrabble town in southwestern Georgia, built on big farms and big timber, but today some 40 percent of its inhabitants live below the poverty line. In one of Moultrie's poor, predominantly black neighborhoods stands a dilapidated mustard-brown ranch house covered in a blanket of dry, rust-colored pine needles. On February 15, 1993, Sherri Lynsey (not her real name), 42, was in this house, cooking herself supper. By eight P.M. the temperature had dipped into the upper 50s and Lynsey had wrapped a pink housecoat around her floral nightgown. She heard a knock outside.

She looked out a front window and saw three young black men standing outside her screened-in porch. Two had on gray hoodies, and another wore a brown flannel jacket. Lynsey couldn't see their faces in the dark, and she didn't recognize them. She opened the door a crack and peeked out.

"Yes?" she asked.

One of the young men said they were trying to find the house of Emma Jean Harris. Lynsey told them she didn't know the woman, shut the door and watched through the window as the men lingered for a minute before moving along. She took her meal into the den and ate while watching TV. Then she dozed off. About half an hour later, she awoke to the sound of splintering wood.

The men had cut a hole in her porch screen, unlatched that door and then kicked in the front door. One of them, with his hoodie now cinched around his face, ran in with a black semiautomatic Luger pistol. Lynsey bolted for the back door, but the man pointed the gun at her.

"Don't touch that door," he said. The other



A Georgia jury was told that the odds were one in 15 that the DNA of Kerry Robinson (right) would match crime-scene DNA evidence, when in reality one in five randomly chosen people would match the same DNA profile. Robinson is currently serving 20 years in prison, raising questions about the use and validity of DNA forensics.

two ran in behind him, one with his hoodie also cinched tight and the other now wearing a ski mask.

"Have you got any money?" one demanded. Lynsey led them to her bedroom, where she took out her pocketbook and handed over about \$180, her rent money.

"You've got my money," Lynsey said. "Please just leave." That's when the guy with the gun told her to take her clothes off and get on the bed. He raped Lynsey while the other two ransacked the house. When he was done, his hood fell back from his face for a moment, just long enough for Lynsey to sneak a look.

All three men raped Lynsey, and at least one of them forced her into oral sex. Before the three of them left through the back door, the one with the gun said, "We know who you are, and we know where you live. If you tell anybody, we're going to come back and get you."

Shaking, Lynsey put on her clothes and reached under the mattress for the gun she kept there. She went to the back door and pointed the gun at the door. Then she picked up the phone. She stood there, with the gun in one hand and the phone in the other, her mind blank with fear. Eventually her parents' number popped into her head, and she called them and told

them what had happened. She finally put down the gun when the detectives showed up.

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DNA is what makes each of us who we are. It's a molecule shaped like a long twisted ladder—a double helix—that contains the genetic recipe for everything from hair color to height. Almost every cell in your body, whether bone, skin, blood or organ tissue, carries a complete set of your DNA. And 99.9 percent of everyone's DNA is exactly the same; the tiny fraction that's different is what makes us unique. It's this tiny fraction that is the focus for crime-lab analysts.

Most forensic tests rely on 13 well-studied locations on the DNA chain where the genetic variation from person to person is greater. Each of these 13 locations contains about two or three dozen possible genetic variations called alleles. Every person has two alleles at each location, one from each parent. DNA forensic analysts identify the alleles, or genetic markers, at the 13 locations, codify the results with numbers and string all that data together to create a "DNA fingerprint."

While it's not uncommon for any two people to have the same markers at one or two locations, the chances of two people having the exact same alleles at all 13 locations are

infinitesimal—on the order of one in 2 quadrillion (unless they're identical twins). In other words, if your full DNA fingerprint matches the DNA at a crime scene, it's yours. No argument.

While DNA matching is nearly incontrovertible under ideal circumstances, there are several ways it can mislead investigators. For one thing, today's DNA tests are far more sensitive than they used to be, and that improvement is a double-edged sword. Investigators can now detect nanograms of "touch DNA" on everything from computer keyboards to coffee mugs. But that also means microscopic bits of other people's DNA can get picked up as well. Skin cells can travel through the air suspended in common house dust; DNA in saliva can spray out when a person speaks or exhales. This isn't just a theoretical concern. For years German police were flummoxed by a supercriminal they called the Phantom of Heilbronn, a woman whose DNA they found on guns, cigarettes, half-eaten biscuits and other evidence at the scene of crimes ranging from burglary to murder. In 2009, after 16 years on the case, authorities finally discovered that the mystery woman worked for the company that manufactured the cotton swabs used to collect DNA. Microscopic bits of her DNA had found their way onto the swabs.

With police gathering more and more DNA evidence, crime labs are often swamped with samples awaiting analysis, increasing the risk of lab mix-ups. In 2002, Las Vegas crime-lab technicians accidentally swapped the samples of two suspects in a robbery case, sending an innocent man to prison for nearly four years. Police realized their mistake only when the released man was caught for another crime in California.

Another weakness is that crime-scene DNA is rarely in perfect shape. Heat and light break down DNA molecules. Over time, some markers can simply disappear—called "drop-out"—especially when there is very little DNA to begin with. Moreover, to make analysis possible, labs use chemical processes to "amplify" DNA, which can sometimes conjure phantom markers, called "drop-in."

Finally, there is the serious challenge of DNA mixtures. For an idea of how quickly DNA mixtures get messy, pretend our genetic markers are Scrabble letter tiles. If you put all the tiles for, say, Barack Obama's name in a hat (i.e., AORMABBCAKA), it would be easy to take out the letters, compare them to a name and determine if you have a match. Barack Obama? Yes. Ronald Reagan? No.

But toss in the letters for Grover Cleveland, George Washington and Dwight Eisenhower, and now you have AHGLEHREDVLGMAGOWAIN-ONBVRAECEINWERDEROIOGTCEWERGAHKNOATSSB.



# EVIDENCE IS MOUNTING THAT DNA MIXTURE IS MISINTERPRETED WITH DISTURBING FREQUENCY.

The number of possible names skyrockets. In addition to the original four names, you can also spell Ronald Reagan, Woodrow Wilson, Abraham Lincoln, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Theodore Roosevelt and Warren Harding. Then consider that a few Scrabble letters might have gone missing from the hat, thanks to the possibility of drop-in and drop-out.

At a certain point, the evidence gets so complex that “it’s basically a Ouija board of data,” says Greg Hampikian, a professor of biology and criminal justice at Boise State University. “You can see whatever you want to see.”

Hampikian believes that’s what happened in Robinson’s case. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation found that Robinson’s DNA mirrored the mix of degraded DNA from the crime scene at just two of the 13 locations on the DNA chain. No national standards exist for how labs should interpret the strength of these partial matches—when they should include or exclude a suspect from a crime scene, or when the evidence is simply too messy to conclude anything. It’s up to individual crime labs to make these calls.

There have been at least two known false convictions due to misinterpretations of DNA mixtures. In 2003 Josiah Sutton was released from a Texas prison after four years, having been falsely convicted of participating in the gang rape of a woman. William C. Thompson, a criminologist at the University of California, Irvine, analyzed the DNA from the rape kit and semen stains on the victim’s clothes and car, to which Sutton’s DNA was a partial match. He found that the lab analyst had wildly exaggerated the strength of that DNA link by calculating the rarity of Sutton’s DNA in the general population, rather than the likelihood that a random person’s DNA could “match” the crime-scene evidence to the same extent. Rewriting the numbers dropped the chances of a random match from about one in 700,000 to

one in 15. These revelations led to new, more modern tests of the evidence by an independent lab that proved the DNA from the crime scene was not Sutton’s.

In another case, an Oklahoma crime lab misinterpreted a DNA mixture in a child rape case as having come from just one man. The faux DNA fingerprint appeared to match a man named Timothy Durham. That was enough for him to be convicted, despite 11 witnesses placing him at a skeet-shooting competition in Dallas at the time the rape occurred in Tulsa. Durham also had credit-card receipts from Dallas that day. The mistake came to light only when Durham’s family had the evidence retested by an independent lab.

More recently, investigations have exposed systemic flaws with mixture analysis. The most widespread problems involve the statistics that crime labs attach to their findings—probabilities meant to help juries weigh the strength of DNA evidence.

These crucial statistics have come under fire. The FBI keeps tabs on the rarity of every known allele for each location in the DNA fingerprint, broken down by race. For instance, 24 percent of African Americans might have the most common genetic variation at position D21, while fewer than one percent of the African American population has a much rarer marker. These “pop stats” are the Rosetta stone of DNA analysis.

In May 2015 the FBI notified labs nationwide that it had discovered clerical errors in their pop stats. That prompted reviews, which uncovered an even bigger problem: Many labs were incorrectly applying combined probability of inclusion (CPI), the most commonly used statistical formula for evaluating DNA mixtures. This calculation is supposed to yield the likelihood that a random person would be included as a contributor to a DNA mixture. But CPI is accurate only when you have a full DNA profile,

including genetic-marker information at every location in your evidence sample. Instead, labs were using CPI to analyze degraded profiles, calculating probabilities at locations where they had good information and ignoring locations where they had drop-out. Those bad analyses led some prosecutors to hugely exaggerate the probability that a suspect’s DNA tied him to the crime scene. In some cases juries were told that the odds of a random person’s DNA matching the crime-scene DNA as closely as the defendant’s did were a million to one—when the real likelihood was more like 10 to one.

Last spring, Washington, D.C.’s crime lab was found to have misused the CPI so badly that it was barred for 10 months from handling any more DNA cases, pending reforms. And last fall, the Texas Forensic Science Commission ordered state crime labs to review tens of thousands of cases involving DNA mixtures stretching back to 1999. This vast undertaking will take many years and could open thousands of cases for potential retrial.

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Miranda Taylor’s bracelets jangle as she leafs through a pile of neatly penned letters from her younger brother, Kerry Robinson. She’s at the front desk of the salon-spa she owns in Moultrie, making photocopies of some of Robinson’s letters for me. A pretty woman in her late 40s with dark, curly hair, she carefully picks each letter from the stack with fingertips perfectly lacquered in a light taupe.

When Taylor and Robinson were kids, their family moved around, but much of their childhood was spent in the public housing projects a few miles north of here. There were five kids, from four different dads. Mostly the kids were raised by their mother, Alvera Robinson, who died in 2010. When Robinson went to prison for rape, his mom led the charge to exonerate him, hiring an appeals lawyer. When her mom passed, Taylor picked up the torch to clear her brother’s name.

Robinson was the baby of the family. By the time he was 12, he'd started playing what he calls "the drug game." It was the crack era of the 1980s and everybody was doing it, he explains via telephone. "The money was so easy," Robinson says. "It was a rush for how fast the money came and how bad people wanted it."

"My brother was a hustler. He sold drugs," acknowledges Taylor. "That's nothing to be proud of. But to be labeled a rapist? The things that were done to that woman, it breaks your heart into pieces."

The year Sherri Lynsey was raped, 1993, was a tumultuous one for the Robinson family. Their mother was dating a man named Nick. One day in early February, Nick's elderly father, a man known around the neighborhood as Mr. Charlie, was shot and robbed. Word reached Robinson that Tyrone White was the shooter.

Robinson told his mom, who told Nick, who told the cops, who arrested White. Taylor and the rest of Robinson's defenders are convinced White learned about Robinson snitching and was eager for revenge.

Soon after, Robinson, then a high school junior, severely beat and robbed a guy who supposedly stole some of his drugs. He was arrested, pleaded guilty and drew a five-year sentence.

Robinson claims he and White passed each other around April 1993 in the county jail where they were both incarcerated—Robinson for the beating, White for the shooting. Robinson says White called out to him, "Yeah, motherfucker, I heard what you said. I'm going to get you for that. You going down too."

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By that time, Moultrie police had put together enough of a case to question White about Sherri Lynsey's rape. A neighbor had seen the young men roaming the neighborhood and recognized one of them as White. Lynsey had also picked his photo out of a lineup.

Finding White was easy—he was already locked up for shooting Mr. Charlie. He acknowledged he was there at Lynsey's rape but insisted he was only a lookout and denied robbing or raping her. In fact, he claimed he tried to stop the other guys.

"I'm being honest. I did not rape that woman," he said, according to the interview transcript.

"Well, who did?" a detective asked.

"It was Sedrick Moore and Kerry Lewis," White said and then quickly corrected himself. "No, Kerry Robinson and another dude, and I seen them."

Asked again later who raped Lynsey, White answered, "Sedrick. No. I'm gonna say it's Kerry Robinson. It sure was."

At this point, however, the case stalled. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation lab told the Moultrie police that they couldn't analyze the DNA evidence until they had blood samples from all the suspects, and Sedrick Moore could not be found.

Robinson was released in 1999. He got a job at a local furniture factory, where he met Anita Frazier. She liked his boyish looks and lean, five-foot-seven frame, and she especially liked how he helped raise her eight-year-old daughter from a previous marriage. Within a year, the couple had a baby girl. They named her Kerria, after her doting father.

Then police finally found Moore, in Philadelphia. They arrested him, and the case was back on track. Shortly after Kerria's birth, sheriff's deputies came to the furniture factory, demanding Robinson's blood to check his DNA. That's when Frazier learned that the father of her infant daughter, a man who had never even raised his voice to her, was suspected of having raped a woman at gunpoint.

The police sent the rape kit, Lynsey's nightgown and three purple-capped vials of blood from the three suspects to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation forensic analysts in

Atlanta. According to the GBI report, both Sedrick Moore and Kerry Robinson matched the evidence at only two locations. The GBI analyst decided that Moore and Robinson "could not be excluded" as contributors to the crime-scene evidence, meaning it was possible their DNA was in the evidence mix, but the match wasn't strong enough to conclude that with certainty.

Tyrone White's DNA markers, on the other hand, matched the crime-scene evidence in 11 of the 13 locations. The police had also found the Luger in White's mother's house. In short, White's "not guilty" plea was looking thin.

Facing a possible life sentence, on top of the 10 years remaining on his earlier sentence, White cut a deal. He agreed to change his plea to guilty and testify against Moore and Robinson in return for certain charges being dropped and his sentence being slashed. (White was released in 2014.)

Both Moore and Robinson pleaded not guilty. Robinson didn't have an alibi—he had been a teenage drug dealer at the time and didn't exactly keep a detailed calendar. (Moore was convicted in the same trial; he also maintains his innocence.) During the trial, Robinson's court-appointed lawyer went after White for the glaring inconsistencies in his testimony. But when it came to the critical DNA evidence, both defense lawyers were out of their depth. Neither called an expert witness to counter the testimony of the GBI forensic analyst.

"You've got to realize you're talking to somebody here that's totally a novice when it comes to DNA stuff," Moore's lawyer told the GBI expert during his cross examination. "I fell asleep in biology."

In a deposition given later, Robinson's trial attorney admitted he hadn't discussed the challenges of DNA mixtures with anyone before the trial.

## DNA EVIDENCE "IS BASICALLY A OUIJA BOARD OF DATA. YOU CAN SEE WHATEVER YOU WANT TO SEE."



"Are you aware of what a mixture analysis is?" he was asked.

"No, not right at this minute," the attorney answered.

Both lawyers mainly asked the GBI analyst to explain the difference between the certainty of Tyrone White's match and the "cannot be excluded" conclusion for both Moore and Robinson. What was the likelihood of a random person's DNA matching the crime-scene evidence in 11 locations, as White's DNA did? On the order of one in 10 billion, said the GBI analyst. What about matching DNA in just two locations? Maybe one in 15, the GBI witness said.

"It's a rough estimate," the analyst said. "I haven't done the math." This admission didn't faze the defense lawyers, but it shocked forensic geneticist Greg Hampikian. While the physical evidence from the rape has long since been destroyed, Hampikian reviewed the testimony and the lab report in 2008 at the behest of Rodney Zell, a lawyer Robinson's family hired to file an appeal.

"This was an ad hoc play with numbers that was misleading at best," Hampikian said of the GBI analyst's testimony.

In fact, the odds of a random match were much higher. Studies of the millions of DNA fingerprints now stored in databases indicate that nearly one in five randomly chosen pairs of unrelated people will match at two of the 13 locations. An investigative reporter at an Atlanta TV news station who did a story on Robinson's case in 2009 randomly picked four people in his newsroom for DNA analysis. All four matched the crime-scene evidence at least as strongly as Robinson did.

Hampikian believes the DNA evidence not only fails to prove Robinson's guilt, it strongly suggests his innocence. There are two big reasons why Hampikian thinks Robinson should have been excluded as a suspect.

First, Robinson's DNA markers don't match those of the crime-scene mix at the most tell-tale parts of any DNA fingerprint: the D3 location. What makes D3 special? Out of all the locations, the DNA at D3 is the most likely to be detected in the lab. Basically, if even the smallest trace of your DNA can be found, it should be found at D3.

Robinson's DNA also doesn't match that found at location D21. At this location, Robinson is the only suspect who inherited the same genetic variation from both his parents. He should be contributing twice the signal here, and he's nowhere to be found.

In 2012, Hampikian asked 17 DNA analysts at an accredited crime lab to independently analyze the GBI data. Only one of the analysts

agreed with the original GBI report that Robinson "could not be excluded." Four said the evidence was inconclusive. Twelve concluded that Robinson should be excluded from the crime-scene evidence. In other words, these experts said Robinson's DNA was not part of the genetic mix detected in the rape kit. Without that, there was no physical evidence linking Robinson to the crime.

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At Robinson's sentencing, the judge allowed him to say good-bye to his family. As Robinson hugged Anita Frazier, he whispered to her, "Go. Get out of Moultrie."

"He didn't want us to have to go through all the rumors and the finger-pointing," she says when we speak by phone. Frazier followed Robinson's advice and moved back to the Chicago area where she'd grown up.

Their daughter, Kerria, is now a high school sophomore. She and Robinson send each other letters and talk on the phone most weeks. Frazier is going back to school part-time to earn a certificate in DNA forensics.

"When I left Moultrie I took a lot of the paperwork on the case. I read over all the transcripts," she says. "I remember sitting through that trial and hearing about how Kerry has a certain amount of alleles and thinking, Nobody here knows what the hell alleles are! The whole thing to me was botched."

DNA remains a powerful forensic tool. Across the country, criminal justice professionals are trying to find ways to restore its solid-gold reputation. There are calls for crime labs to be made independent of police and



Greg Hampikian (left), a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Boise State University and director of the Idaho Innocence Project, works to overturn convictions based on faulty DNA evidence.

prosecutors, which would remove the potential for a conflict of interest. Many also put their faith in the computational power of new software to solve DNA mixtures, free of the biases and mental fatigue of human analysts. But technological fixes are controversial, because proprietary software isn't open to scrutiny, and the assumptions built into its algorithms can't be questioned in court the way an analyst's methodology can.

Others are pushing for regulations that would mandate best practices in labs, such as a firm threshold level of DNA signal below which no analysis can be made. In addition, labs are increasingly using a more cautious calculation for DNA mixtures, called a likelihood ratio, which compares the probability of a suspect's DNA versus that of a random person's having contributed to the jumble of a crime-scene mixture. So far, however, crime labs have been slow to embrace likelihood ratios, because it's a trickier calculation and not easy to explain to a jury.

Meanwhile, Robinson says he spends his time in prison working out, reading and "trying to stay out of the way, trying to turn something bad into something good."

If the Georgia Supreme Court rejects Robinson's latest appeal, his only recourse would be to file another habeas petition, this time at the federal level. If that fails, he'll likely stay in prison until 2023.

"The main thing I think about, every single day, is when will I be heard?" he says. "When will somebody believe the truth of the whole situation?" ■



PHOTOGRAPHY BY HENRIK PURIENNE

**Josie Canseco** doesn't want to hear it. "I'm so over people asking, 'Are you related to the baseball player?' My family name has a lot of talk behind it," says Miss June on the set of a photo shoot in Malibu. "I believe one of my biggest achievements to date is maintaining my career and image through all the chaos." Indeed, like many children of famous parents, the 19-year-old model was unwittingly propelled into the spotlight early on. Preserving a sense of normalcy and centeredness has thus been Josie's ambition. "The family name automatically brings me into a light I haven't necessarily been ready for," she says, "but I think I've done a pretty good job of keeping a positive reputation." Her forward-thinking attitude was exemplified this spring when she appeared on a family-therapy reality show called *The Mother/Daughter Experiment*. Reality shows often bring out the worst in their subjects, but Josie was barely affected by the experience. "I didn't learn anything surprising about myself, because I don't want to be a reality star," she says. "I'm actually a weird, goofy and friendly person. Giving in to drama simply isn't me." At her age, such levelheadedness is impressive, and it makes sense that she aspires to work with other families one day. "I would love to own a dance studio for all ages where I can teach kids," she says. "After all, seeing my own family happy and healthy is one thing that will always make me happy in return."



















MISS JUNE 2016

## JOSIE CANSECO



**AGE:** 19 **BIRTHPLACE:** Broward County, Florida **CURRENT CITY:** Los Angeles, California

### SOME LIFE-CHANGING WORDS

I once read a quote that went something like "The true mark of maturity is when somebody hurts you and you try to understand their situation instead of trying to hurt them back." Since reading that, my perspective on people's motives and actions has changed. Now I try to see where they're coming from instead of acting defensively.

### MY TYPICAL FRIDAY NIGHT

After a week of going to castings, running errands and doing hour-long sessions at the gym, I like to come home, throw on my sweats and turn on *Friends* or *Family Guy*. In fact, if I had to pick one nonessential item to have in

my earthquake emergency kit, a pair of my favorite sweatpants would definitely be it.

### LOOK ME IN THE EYES

I think my eyes are the first thing people notice about me. I've always been told they are one of my most powerful features.

### EARWORM OF THE MOMENT

I'm still listening to "Dangerous Woman" by Ariana Grande. Her voice is just insane. I don't think anyone can deny her talent.

### LIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The best thing about being a woman in 2016 is our power and independence. At the same time, I think apps are giving away too

much information about people's every move. I fear technology is invading the idea of romance. Sometimes I wish I were dating in an era when people couldn't text and Snapchat.

### IF I COULD MEET ANYONE

Jim Carrey has been my favorite actor ever since I can remember. He is such an inspiration, from his sense of humor to his worldly perspective. Without a doubt, *The Truman Show* is the most underrated movie of all time.

### A PIECE OF ADVICE

Always remember that being a kind, warmhearted person will get you further than being cold and cruel. Don't fight fire with fire.







# The Man who Wants to Change the Way Men Get Off

*Beijing businessman Brian Sloan reinvented the male sex toy to the tune of \$10 million. Is he the perfect entrepreneur for the digital-sex era?*

Meet Ruby Temptations. That's her, spread-eagle and nude from the waist down on a king-size bed in the sun-drenched penthouse of the Berlin Sheraton, surrounded by a roomful of vibrators and dildos. Ruby, a 20-year-old adult-film actress from the United Kingdom with strawberry-blonde hair and porcelain skin, is a girl-next-door type—if the girl next door had double-D breasts and had filmed 40-odd scenes in just three months in the porn industry. Ultimately Ruby wants to move her career across the pond to Los Angeles. The scene is “slightly more seedy in the U.K.,” she says.

But first, a mold of Ruby's vulva will be created for a line of adult toys, which she hopes will jump-start her American ambitions. For that to happen, her crotch must be 3-D scanned, and that's why she finds herself in Berlin. A few weeks ago, Ruby entered an online vulva beauty contest organized by sex-toy entrepreneur Brian Sloan,

the brains behind a wildly successful crowd-funded blow-job machine called the Autoblow 2. In all, 182 women submitted close-up photos of their vulvas, and more than 2.7 million votes were cast. Sloan flew the winners and a handful of runners-up, including Ruby, to Germany for the scanning. Likenesses of their privates will be available as removable synthetic sleeves for Sloan's signature Autoblow product sometime this summer, as well as for 3Fap, a new multi-orifice masturbation toy. But first, Sloan is scanning the women himself.

Thirty-five years old with an athletic build, a shaved head, a disarming smile and protruding ears, Sloan was raised in the Chicago suburbs but has lived for the past nine years in China, where he has built a small but rapidly growing sex-toy empire. This year his company, Very Intelligent Ecommerce Inc., is projected to hit \$10 million in sales, up from just \$1.5 million

in 2013—a 567 percent increase. He managed this feat with only one full-time employee, a handful of service providers and subcontractors and no office space. The success has all come on the back of the Autoblow 2, which upon its summer 2014 launch went viral, being featured around the world, from Bosnia to Ivory Coast—Sloan was interviewed by dozens of publications, radio hosts and television presenters. In May 2015 the Autoblow 2 made a cameo on the HBO series *Silicon Valley* in an episode titled “Adult Content.” In the scene, a speaker at an adult-industry convention points to a table of tech-age sex toys, including the Autoblow 2, and says, “Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the future.”

For Sloan, the future includes a plan to dominate the male-sex-toy niche. Part of his strategy includes focusing on clever—some might say gimmicky—internet marketing campaigns, such as the vulva beauty contest, to promote his growing line of toys. He's

BY **MITCH  
MOXLEY**



planning an anus contest, a mouth contest and a penis contest, and has a balls contest already in the can. (The 3-D-scanned balls are being turned into decorative objects for the home.)

First, however, he has to scan some vulvas. Other than Ruby, none of the participants in Berlin works in the adult-film industry; most entered the contest on a lark, and none of them is quite sure what to make of it all. There's 27-year-old Britney from Liverpool, whose boyfriend, Max, urged her to submit a picture. (Names of contestants, except Ruby, have been changed.) Max snapped the photo himself. "We had some drinks first," Britney says. There's Carmen, a pretty 23-year-

he tells Ruby, "we need to scan you doggy style."

•••

Americans spend somewhere between \$1 billion and \$2 billion annually on sex toys, experts say, and the market is growing. The success of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* books and film sparked a 7.5 percent increase in sales of sex-themed products, including adult toys, which are becoming more varied and sophisticated.

Companies are increasingly exploring how to incorporate tech and robotics into sex toys. OhMiBod, a New Hampshire-based company, offers vibrators that sync with musical beats and others that a partner can manipulate via Bluetooth on a smartphone from across the

upgraded it from two rows of beads to three.) "The idea, in short, was rooted in the fact that robotics are becoming cheaper and more common," Sloan says. "I just brainstormed on how to apply robotics to masturbating."

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A few months before the 3-D scanning in Berlin, I visit Sloan in Beijing to learn the Auto-blow origin story. I find him working on his laptop at a Starbucks on the kind of hot, smoggy Beijing day that stings your eyes and weighs down your lungs.

Sloan is in the heat of the vulva beauty contest, the prospects of which excite him greatly. "The appearance of a vulva that I like and one

that you like might be different," he tells me between sips of a double espresso on ice. "Since I'm going to make vagina sleeves—vulva sleeves—I want to make sure I'm including the vaginal appearances that most men prefer." Sloan even hired an actual data scientist to produce what he's dubbed "The Vulva Paper," which examines, with an absurdly academic degree of detail, voters' vulvar preferences. (The contest wasn't without controversy; one critic called it "a veritable manwich of misogynist manure.")

Sloan's path to becoming a sex-toy mogul in China was a winding one. Born in Skokie, Illinois, he studied philosophy and political science at the University of Missouri before entering law school at Penn State. He had a summer internship with the Cook County Homicide Task Force and was a summer associate at a downtown Chicago law firm, but he dreaded the work. "The first thing I would do when I would go into the office," he says, "was put a sticky note covering the time on the computer, so I wouldn't have to see what fucking time it was all day."

While in law school Sloan began to drive to estate sales and antiques auctions in rural Pennsylvania, buying whatever he thought had hidden value. On one of his early trips he purchased a vintage Monopoly board game for \$30, which he sold on eBay for \$100. The sale "set me off on a whirlwind of going to local auctions," he recalls. Once, Sloan found a restaurant that was going out of business and borrowed \$8,000 from his father to buy the antique signs decorating the walls; he later sold them for \$30,000.

By the time he graduated Sloan had lost interest in the law entirely, but his parents urged him to take the bar exam anyway. Relieved when he failed by two points, he dove headfirst into his eBay business.

## "ROBOTICS ARE BECOMING CHEAPER AND MORE COMMON. I JUST BRAINSTORMED ON HOW TO APPLY ROBOTICS TO MASTURBATING."

old from Bavaria who will soon graduate from law school. She saw the contest on 9GAG.com. "There were already 15 or so pictures, and I thought, Meh. So I sent my own," she says. Carmen finished second behind Nancy, a slightly manic 27-year-old multimedia designer who lives in Scotland. Nancy plans to buy a used motorcycle with her \$5,500 winnings (\$5,000 for the first-place winner's vaginal scans plus a \$500 bonus for optional mouth and anus scans).

In the penthouse suite, Sloan is accompanied by a jovial German I'll call Dirk, who owns one of the few 3-D-scanning companies in the country. He's here to help out in case Sloan botches the scans.

Ruby waits patiently on the bed, taking a few selfies for her Twitter followers. The room has the air of an awkward visit to the gynecologist. As Sloan slowly guides the scanner—a \$20,000-plus instrument that looks like a clothing iron—a few inches from Ruby's exposed groin, an image assembles on a nearby laptop. The room is silent except for the beeping of the machine, the hum of the laptop and Dirk repeatedly telling Sloan he's doing it all wrong.

Finally Sloan has the image he needs. "Now,"

globe. It also offers an app that allows users to track orgasms. "My first intimate moment with a chick was in a movie theater, with my hand on her thigh," says Brian Dunham, who founded OhMiBod with his wife, Suki, in 2007. "When I look at the generation growing up now, those intimate moments are happening digitally."

Matt McMullen, creator of the ultra-high-end sex toy RealDoll, is working on a kind of artificial-intelligence technology that will allow a doll to develop a personality curated by the user, not unlike the operating system in the Spike Jonze film *Her*. An app will connect wirelessly to an animatronic head that features life-like expressions and movements. That product is still a couple of years away, and McMullen says a fully functioning sex robot that looks and feels like the real thing—a "machine that blows your mind"—isn't on the horizon yet.

The problem is cost. Based on today's technology, such a product would retail for tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of dollars. So the mass-market sex-toy robotics revolution may just start with Sloan's blow-job machine, which currently retails online for a relatively affordable \$160 under the name Auto-blow 2+. (The plus sign was added when Sloan



SIM CHI YIN

Brian Sloan left Chicago (and a law degree) behind for Beijing. Now his sex-toy company is projected to hit \$10 million in sales this year, a 567 percent increase from 2013.



Sloan stored his bounty in his parents' garage in Skokie, focusing on rare and unusual items—horn-rimmed glasses, vintage police handcuffs, cricket-fighting cages—many of which were sourced from China, where he began to make frequent trips. He made a profit of \$80,000 in his first full year as an internet vendor.

One of the strangest items Sloan sold landed him in the media spotlight—for all the wrong reasons. One morning in 2007 he received a frantic phone call from his landlord. Why, the landlord wanted to know, were police and news crews swarming Sloan's apartment? It turned out the cops were, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, investigating a tip from a well-known “local artist and part-time drag queen” called Jojo Baby, who had dropped by Sloan's apartment to buy vintage mannequins and instead saw a human skull boiling on the stove top.

The skull had come from a supplier in China, and Sloan was cleaning it to sell on eBay. (While admittedly bizarre, the sale of human remains online isn't unheard of.) Jojo Baby phoned a friend—an anthropologist—who advised calling the police. Within a day, the story blew up. News crews from NBC, ABC, Fox and Telemundo camped outside Sloan's apartment; the *Tribune* headline read

4 SKULLS PLUS 1 POT ADD UP TO HOT WATER. The police initially believed Sloan had murdered people and cooked their corpses; even after he explained the situation they threatened to charge him with dismemberment. In the end the cops couldn't find any broken laws, and Sloan was let off with a warning. “Not my proudest moment,” he says.

By then Sloan was tiring of his eBay business, believing it to have limited growth potential. Not long after the skull episode, he decamped for the greener (though smoggier) pastures of Beijing, where he would seek his fortune in a decidedly different industry.

In 2007, Beijing was one of the world's biggest boomtowns, with a soaring economy, an ascending middle class and the summer Olympics not far off. It was also drawing foreigners from across the globe who were looking for easy opportunities. Beijing became home to a thriving entrepreneurial culture in which Sloan was soon immersed.

In China he focused on selling a single product: latex fetish wear. (Sloan had not actually sold his products in China until recently.) He'd already become one of the internet's main suppliers of blow-up rubber suits, which he sold to inflation fetishists, a term he uses to describe people who become aroused

1. Sloan often works from cafés; his one full-time employee, a 24-year-old Romanian, handles the technology side. 2. The type of small motor used in Sloan's signature product is the same kind used to dispense cash at ATMs. 3. Sloan crowdfunded the Autoblow 2 with a modest goal of \$45,000; within two months he had raised \$275,000.

from being inflated or deflated, including those who can achieve orgasm by reenacting the famous Violet Beauregarde blueberry scene in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Operating under the brand name Kinky King Latex, Sloan sourced from a factory in China's Hunan province and sold the products online for a fraction of the price of those offered by bigger brands.

But Sloan wondered how many millions of dollars' worth of latex he could sell. The latex-suit market was small, and he had bigger ambitions. With his newly developed expertise in the adult industry, he decided to expand. He noticed that sex-toy companies enjoyed unusually high profit margins but displayed poor knowledge of e-commerce. And Sloan was in the right place: China produces 70 percent of the world's sex toys, generating some \$2 billion in sales globally. He realized that if he bought from

factories in China, rebranded the products and sold directly to consumers on sites like Amazon, he could eliminate two sets of middlemen—distributors and retailers—and drastically cut the sale price while still making a handsome profit. He believed competitors were too focused on brick-and-mortar sales. “The companies were operating in the world of the 1980s and 1990s,” Sloan says.

In other words, the sex-toy industry was ripe for disruption.

...

Sloan’s new venture initially sold garden-variety sex toys—vibrators and dildos. But he saw an opportunity in the male-customer niche. The enormously successful Fleshlight, an artificial vagina, had already become a game changer, but with it and other masturbation toys the user still had to do all the work—it wasn’t something being performed on you.

Mechanical masturbation devices called “strokers” already existed, but they were mostly battery-powered and ineffectual. In 2008 Sloan found a factory in China that was making an oddly branded stroker called the World Master 2000. He had an epiphany. “I saw it and thought, That’s a blow-job machine!”

And so the first incarnation of the Autoblow was born. The machine looked like a large coffee mug with a rubber orifice shaped like a mouth on one end. Inside was a small battery-powered motor that moved two circular rows of beads up and down beneath a rubber sleeve. Sloan ordered shipments of the Chinese stroker and built a website focused solely on selling it. (He also launched Mangasm.com, which sells other items for men, such as fake vaginas, anal toys and cock rings.)

Sloan made a video demonstrating the Autoblow that starred...Brian Sloan. In his apartment in Beijing he hung a bedsheet for a backdrop and positioned the camera so his head was out of frame. He used the product until he reached orgasm, sent the video to India to be edited and added a techno music soundtrack. “I don’t know how many people came to the website—friends, family or whatever—and said, ‘Please tell us that’s not you!’”

The first version of the Autoblow sold relatively well. The problem was, it wasn’t very good. It broke down regularly; the weak motor couldn’t power through bigger or curved penises. Sloan envisioned something much better. “If we just fixed everything that was wrong with it and made a totally new product,” he says, “it would rock the male-toys niche.”

The Autoblow 2 took three years to develop.

Sloan was worried about the machine being copied if he manufactured it in China, so he worked with a factory in Taiwan that made air conditioner controller units. The factory created a prototype, and it was a disaster; it broke down as soon as it was powered on. Sloan hired a boutique U.S. design firm to help with the concept, which he then took to a factory in Dongguan, an industrial city in southern China. The redesigned Autoblow used a small industrial-strength motor—the kind used to dispense cash in ATM machines—and featured removable, easy-to-clean sleeves, offered in three different sizes.

Once the prototype was finished, Sloan needed cash. He didn’t want to accept outside investments and give up a stake in his company, and adult businesses can rarely get bank loans. Instead he launched a crowdfunding campaign on the website Indiegogo. He filmed a video that again featured himself as the pitchman. The stated goal was \$45,000; within two months he’d raised \$275,000.

The Autoblow 2 was something the industry hadn’t yet seen, and it soon became an internet phenomenon. “There’s a huge difference between masturbating and having somebody else get you off,” says RealDoll’s McMullen, who has made a lifelike mouth sleeve for the Autoblow 2+, which has just been released (pictured on page 85). “And that device that he’s got is accomplishing that simulation. I think it’s really cool.”

Even as the Autoblow 2 blew up, the company remained minuscule. Sloan has one em-

Brian first started his business, it took me two or three years to tell my friends,” says his mother, Cindy. These days, however, it makes for great stories at parties.

Influenced by brand pitchmen he watched on TV as a kid—including Ron Popeil, inventor of the Ronco Showtime Rotisserie (“Set it and forget it!”) and Billy Mays of OxiClean fame—Sloan has become a shameless self-promoter by design. By posting videos online of himself shilling the Autoblow or by inviting women to participate in a vulva beauty contest, he’s able to directly reach his target consumer. “Everybody has websites, but in terms of direct marketing on the internet like Brian does, I’m not really seeing it,” says Sara Ramirez, associate publisher for retailing at XBIZ, an adult-entertainment trade magazine.

In Beijing, Sloan invites me to his apartment, a penthouse in a luxury development with 20-foot-tall windows that offer an incredible view of the smog-shrouded skyline. But Sloan isn’t ostentatious—he’s more of a T-shirt and jeans kind of guy. He flies first or business class and stays in five-star hotels when he travels, but those perks don’t cost him anything because he runs his entire business on credit cards to collect points. His biggest indulgence is travel, which he does extensively—including two jaunts to North Korea and an epic road trip from Zambia to Uganda a few years ago. Later this year, he plans to relocate to Berlin with his girlfriend, a 27-year-old Chinese woman he met on OkCupid. He’s also looking to buy property in Montenegro.

## “LOOK AT THE GENERATION GROWING UP NOW—THOSE INTIMATE MOMENTS ARE HAPPENING DIGITALLY.”

ployee, a 24-year-old in Romania who focuses on the technology side and whom Sloan considers a business partner, but otherwise he relies on a small team of mostly part-timers scattered around the globe. Mail from his various brands is still delivered to his parents’ address in Skokie. “We’re very supportive,” says his father, Ben Sloan, with a laugh. Once, his parents helped Sloan film a promotional video that featured him walking around a mall wearing a full-body latex suit. “When

Sloan’s apartment is decorated with sex toys and the full jaw of a woolly mammoth that once lived in northern China. Just inside the front door stands a two-foot-tall rubber penis, complete with veins and an astonishingly realistic-looking scrotum, which he bought for \$100 from a sex-toy shop in China. “This is my prize possession,” he says.

On a table is a prototype of the Autoblow 2+. (Sloan’s pitch: “It strokes 33 percent more of your dick!”) “You can try this one later,” he

says, handing it to me. (Back home in New York, I do try it. Lacking the, let's say, improvisation of the real thing, using the Autoblow 2+ feels exactly like what the name suggests: robotic head.)

Stacked around the living room are boxes of sex toys—large dildos, small vibrators, Autoblow sleeves and a 17-pound fake vagina and ass—sold through Sloan's many websites.

"Check this out," he says, reaching into a cardboard box and pulling out a pair of silicone breasts with a vagina conveniently placed between them. "It's tits with a pussy built in! How's that? I mean, that's not a bad idea for nature to take note."

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A few days later Sloan and I fly to Dongguan, in Guangdong province, where the Autoblow is manufactured. Dongguan, sometimes called the "world's factory," was once notorious for its sex industry, with thousands of prostitutes catering to the legions of workers who flooded there during China's boom. In recent years, however, the city has been cleaned up in Chinese president Xi Jinping's anticorruption campaign.

In the morning we pay a visit to Sloan's Autoblow collaborator, a Chinese-owned, U.S.-managed company. In a tote bag he's carrying a new stroker, made by a company in Japan, that he wants the engineers to examine. "There are a lot of nice sex toys in Japan, but they have no fucking clue how to market them to Westerners," Sloan tells me on the walk over from our hotel. "I mean, it's called the A10 Piston. It's not a fucking car!"

Inside the modern, well-air-conditioned office we meet sales director John Hui. Hui is a genial 39-year-old Taiwanese American sporting a short Mohawk and wearing shorts, shower sandals and a baggy T-shirt featuring a stylized skull; he looks a bit like the Buddha. Sex toys of all varieties clutter his office, and a hologram on the wall features the face of former Chinese leaders Mao Tse-tung or Deng Xiaoping, depending on the angle.

Sloan and Hui discuss the new 3Fap toy they're working on (*fap*, according to Urban Dictionary, is the sound one makes while masturbating) and manufacturing details of the Autoblow 2+. Sloan worked closely with Hui on the development of the Autoblow 2, and he travels here every two or three months to discuss product development—one of the main ad-

vantages of living in China. The engineers and design team were tasked with taking Sloan's original vision and making a product that both worked effectively and "wasn't too crazy so that you wouldn't stick your dick in," Hui says.

Later we drive to the nearby sex-toy factory where the Autoblow is made. Riding in a company SUV, Hui reflects on the debauched city Dongguan once was. "You know they say Vegas is Sin City? Well, this city would make Vegas look like Martha Stewart's home," he says.

The factory is clean and sterile and smells of glue and cleaning products—a high-tech factory for high-tech sex toys. In a glassed-off room are two configurable lines where workers in white lab coats and caps sit on baby blue stools and work under bright neon lights. Before entering we put on coats and hats of our own and slip little booties over our shoes.

a half 10-gallon coolers with ejaculate. "That's a lot of semen," he says, "and I'm proud of that."

•••

Back in Berlin, Ruby Temptations has been successfully scanned and Britney, the Liverpudlian, is up next. She's accompanied by her boyfriend, Max, and they're both nervous. Britney is on the bed on her hands and knees, with Max spreading her butt cheeks apart as Dirk mans the scanner.

Sloan tries to cut through the tension. "Are you going to enter my balls contest?" he asks Max.

"My balls are a bit wonky."

"All balls are beautiful. I want to see your balls in my balls contest!"

Britney is followed by Carmen from Bavaria, Anna from Hungary and Giulia from Italy. The last to be scanned is Nancy, the winner. She wears a black long-sleeve top, ankle socks and a Pussy Riot-inspired face mask with the slogan

#KEEPITCOOL printed on the front.

When the scanning is finished, Sloan reaches into a safe in a cabinet under the television. As Nancy looks on, arms folded and wearing the balaclava, he counts out \$5,500 in crisp greenbacks.

"Congratulations on winning first place in the world's most beautiful vagina contest," he says, handing Nancy the cash.

Dirk claps quietly off to the side.

The next evening, Sloan and I grab dinner in Kreuzberg, Berlin's version of Brooklyn. He's happy with the contest; there were no major disasters. A few of the women were upset that a free breakfast

wasn't included with the hotel room, and Britney and Max charged five hotel-priced Cokes to Sloan's room. But it could have been worse. "I thought we'd get a crier, I thought we'd get an alcoholic, I thought we'd get a girl who changed her mind at the last minute." In the end, he says, "a group of pretty well-adjusted, intelligent women showed up to make a little bit of money."

The contest cost him \$30,000 in all, but he figures he's already made that back in Autoblow sales. But most important, it was another campaign that went viral, gaining Sloan and the Autoblow more exposure (and notoriety).

He's excited to get the scans made into sleeves. They'll also be used on his next big development: the Autoblow 3. Features Sloan is considering include movements that will sync with those of an actual adult star—say, Ruby Temptations—as they play out on internet porn.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the future. ■

## CHINA PRODUCES 70 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S SEX TOYS, GENERATING \$2 BILLION IN SALES.

Inside, the room is silent other than faint mechanical squeaks and clicks and an air-pumping sound similar to Darth Vader's breathing. They're not manufacturing Autoblows today. Instead, workers on one line are assembling a vibrator called the Tracey Cox Super-Sex Bullet Vibrator; on the other, they put together tiny motors for a cock ring. (Neither the vibrator nor the cock ring is a Sloan product.)

We exit the workroom into a large storage facility where a dozen crates of Autoblows and another dozen crates of Autoblow sleeves await shipment.

"I've never actually seen so many Autoblows in one place. It's kind of cool," Sloan says.

"Your jerk-off robot," says Hui.

"I actually did a calculation once based on how many we've sold so far, and if every man used it once, how much semen that would create," Sloan says. According to his mental math, all the Autoblows sold would have theoretically filled six and





# GOOD-BYE TO ROOTINE

BY  
**RON CARLSON**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
**STACEY ROZICH**

ROZICH

*Sheridan Hayes had not seen Donnie's new hat. There was a great deal of loud talk and extended debate about whether he had sat down on Donnie's black Stetson on purpose, and how could he not see such a fabulous and not-small hat and how could he not see the shine of the silver hatband which alone had cost Donnie \$23 cash, which was more than a week's pay at the Rising H.*

Sheridan Hayes complicated the discussion deeply by saying—after the excitement subsided and Donnie was in the one-room clinic behind Doctor Wattel's bungalow on Back Street and Sheridan himself was in the one cell in the jail, his nose still dripping blood—that he hadn't seen the blinking hat, and further that if he had seen Donnie Gumson's stupid blinking hat, the blinking hat of a main-street cowboy if there ever was one, he would have not only sat on it on purpose, he would have stood on it marching in place for the rest of the night. He did not use the word *blinking*. As it was, he did not see the black hat in the dim barroom of the Enterprise Club and he sat on it and then jumped up before any real damage was done, except the insult that results from sitting on someone's hat, someone who had been sitting by Rowena Balfour, a young woman who had after one year resigned her post as the only schoolteacher in Rootine, an outpost on the Manditory River consisting of almost a thousand souls.

It was June 3, the last day of school, and Miss Rowena Balfour, after being shipped to Rootine, Wyoming from Probity, Massachusetts almost one year before to teach the children of the village, had found that Rootine was not a village at all but 33 buildings, some of them lean-tos, at the foot of the San Blister Mountains, and that the children were actually small untutored savages, and that the Rootine Unified School was a platform tent with a malfunctioning barrel stove and a two-hole outhouse it shared with the jail. Just that noon, Miss Rowena Balfour had pinned her notice to one of the two tent poles in the sour structure and it read, in her gorgeous

loopy cursive: "Good luck with your blinking ABCs. I hereby resign. R.E. Balfour." She did not use the word *blinking*. She had told her one confidant, Mrs. Slater, with whom she boarded, that she had been stalling in her life long enough and was going to set out for something new, something that her father, 2,000 miles away, could not stop her from doing. Miss Balfour had saved all her money except for the \$7 a week she paid Mrs. Slater for room and board and she was going to use this bankroll of almost \$400 to see the world or some part of it beyond the claustrophobic hills of Probity and the sage flats of Rootine. She was young and ready for adventure. At least two cowboys in the Enterprise Club, the injured parties on the night in question, would have said she was beautiful. She was the most pulchritudinous female in the hamlet of Rootine, and she did have two form-fitting apron dresses that made it difficult to speak to her, and the days she wore those gowns she saw no one on the street but felt the curtains parting all along her way.

She had learned to ride a horse this spring with the help of Donnie Gumson, who had given her his sister's old saddle, which was still in good shape, and he also volunteered the horsemanship instruction gratis, and she had learned camp skill and shooting from Sheridan Hayes, who volunteered his services and gave her his old six-shooter Colt pistol, calling it old when it was not old and still quite valuable, but more valuable to him as a gift to her than as a sidearm. He had other guns. And he gave her a canvas tent and its five piñon poles and necessary sisal rope.

All spring long she had ridden on Wednesday and Friday in the muddy corral of the Rising H, just a mile from town, under the guidance of Donnie Gumson, and on every other Saturday she had gone into the San Blister Mountains with Sheridan Hayes to learn how to select the best campsite and how to set up a tent and

then how to shoot her bone-handled pistol at targets close at hand and then some at a farther range. These were day trips always, and twice Mrs. Slater went along as a chaperone, but it was apparent to the town and every love-struck pup, both the schoolboys and their fathers, that a chaperone was not necessary. Miss Rowena Balfour did not need a chaperone. She learned to ride without allowing Donnie to board the horse behind her regardless of how necessary and dangerous the instruction seemed to be, and she learned to shoot her Colt without allowing Sheridan to stand behind her and guide her arm. She erected the tent in 15 and then 10 and finally six minutes and when it was right and tight, she had Sheridan go inside and see that it was square. She was never in the tent with him and everyone in the town knew it. By June, Miss Rowena Balfour was ready in the ways she'd wanted to be. Now she needed someone to give her a horse or sell her one at a charity price, and she would leave Rootine, going north or south or west. "Not east," she'd say every time. "Never east again." Just this week, Donnie Gumson had given her a horse and she'd stuffed his reluctant hand with \$11, which is quite a markup on what he wanted to be a gift.

The Enterprise Club was the biggest room in Rootine, having previously been a warehouse for raw foodstuffs for the roughnecks working on the railroad. It had a crude lumber floor and at the time the walls and roof had been gray waxed canvas erected with piñon pine. When the railroad finally came this far west, they ran it 90 miles to the south and after a month there was nothing but the great wooden emporium floor out in the weather. Miles DeLock bought

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it for \$40 figuring the lumber was worth \$80, which it was. That very month Mr. DeLock was shot in an accident with a scatter gun during a poker game, and in an evil coincidence his own plank cabin, famously known to have been assembled without a nail, burned to the ground that same night and the group of Portuguese shepherds with whom he had been playing cards marched through the town chanting his name in foreign slogans that made all the citizens of Rootine nervous. It was an entire town with thin walls, many of them fragile. Mr. DeLock had no place to go except his gargantuan wooden floor, and Mrs. Slater and Givern Borkel, her Swedish cousin, carried the wounded Miles DeLock along the rutted main street and onto the dry lumber floor and erected Mr. Borkel's cotton travel canopy as a tent. It served for several days, wearing hard in the increasing weather until it was consumed in total by a northeastern wind that swept through town in three cruel strokes, carrying the flimsy shelter into the Manditory River, which held the raw town in one loopy oxbow.

Fortunately, Mr. DeLock was able to invoke his fortune, which he had installed in Rootine's First Thrift, money he had garnered from two years of gambling with his own deck of playing cards in his first wooden shelter, a place which before its demise came to be called the Red Tower and then, before it

collapsed, Cheater's Tower, Cheater's Palace and sometimes Cheater's Hellhole. Everyone knew Miles DeLock was cheating at cards, but no one could catch him, and, as they say, it was the only game in town, not that Rootine in those years was even a town. Despite its reputation, the round table was always full, never an empty seat. There will forever be a call in the rushing sound of a deck of cards being shuffled—even a deck of cards marked perfectly for the practiced cheater—that is irresistible to a lonely traveler at the end of a day, especially travelers who found themselves camped along the Manditory River near Rootine, Wyoming. Even those who had been warned could not stay away. Those who were warned were sometimes the worst, marching with their doomed money into the nasty A-frame eagerly with the certainty that the common fate would not capture them too. Miles DeLock prospered.

He bought the railroad warehouse and had as his original plan the idea of taking it apart and building a proper saloon where he might be able to cheat at as many as four tables, but then he was shot by an unhappy shepherd and the bird shot that entered Miles DeLock's torso and arm served as a vivid and permanent epiphany for the middle-aged gentleman who saw, and felt deeply, the wages of sin. He vowed as Mrs. Slater, who had been

a nurse for one year as a young woman in Virginia, pried steel BBs from his epidermis in his makeshift recovery clinic on the biggest wooden floor in the county to build a hall for wholesome entertainment, and if not wholesome, honest—in other words, a dance hall—and make his living as a legitimate businessman. As he heard the steel shot *tink-tink* one by one in the pan Mrs. Slater was dropping the BBs in, he knew he would call it the Enterprise Club, a name that felt to him rich with respect and possibility.

The Enterprise Club was the only saloon of its size west of the Mississippi River that was built floor-first, and Mr. DeLock lay in his cot all that summer as the outer walls were erected around him and the two massive ponderosa poles were installed in the middle to hold up the roof, and the sweeping stairway and the second-floor balcony, all with pine struts and beams. When the windows arrived from St. Louis that October, they were installed in the front and witnesses swear that when they were fitted in the sills and tapped tight with wooden mallets, that was when the wind started to blow again. By the time it snowed, Mr. DeLock was captain of this ambitious manor, his bedroom on the rear of the second floor with a balcony from which he could see over the many shacks lining the Manditory River and out to the great gates of the two ranches that dominated that world, the Rising H and the Bar Bar, both with a dozen hands—sometimes more—who would all become loyal customers of the Enterprise Club. The long sign reading THE ENTERPRISE CLUB arrived by wagon the next week, a varnished masterpiece with the one-foot-high letters burned into the beautiful oak. They hung it with four-inch chains, and Mr. DeLock stepped backward down the two front steps and held his arms up to the sign and read it aloud to the assembly, the name of his proud establishment, though for years throughout the West it was referred to as Floor First.

The night that Sheridan Hayes sat on Donnie Gumson's new black Stetson in one of the huge red leather banquets in the back of the Enterprise Club, thinking he would take the opportunity to sit next to his camping student Miss Rowena Balfour, a woman he had taken on a dozen day trips into the beautiful San Blister Mountains and a woman for whom he bore overt affection, was the first time a gun had been fired in that place. Sheridan had not seen the hat where Donnie had left it to keep his place while he went out back to the men's privy, and Sheridan sat and stood quickly,



but not so quickly that Donnie Gumson did not see him commit the act. Donnie grabbed Sheridan by the collar and yanked him into position for a crushing blow to the nose, which did in fact break Sheridan's nose but not enough to deter what followed: Sheridan, who suddenly found himself inverted and stunned, instinctively drew his six-shooter and fired a .45-caliber bullet into Donnie's chest at that close range, where it struck his heart-rib and angled out under his arm, lodging finally in the lush red leather of the booth. "Goddamn it, Dave, you've shot me now!" Donnie said, still standing and examining the blood that kept appearing on his palm. Then Donnie folded onto the floor, sitting up with his hand pressed to the wound. "You sat on my hat," he said. Doctor Wattel had been shocked out of his deep study of two red sevens in his hand and whether they merited a raise at the poker table, and he arrived in time to catch Donnie as he fainted onto the biggest barroom floor in Ardent County. Sheridan Hayes himself was also sitting on the floor with his handful of bloody nose. "I didn't see his blinking hat," he exclaimed in a nasal moan, "and my name is not Dave and he knows it."

The doctor quickly made a makeshift compress for Donnie's injury and enlisted his card partners to carry the young man across to his clinic. He knelt briefly at Sheridan, whom the sheriff already stood over, and the doctor reached up and reset Sheridan's nose with his hand, making a wet snapping noise that put half the drinkers in the big room off their drinks and the other half deep into them. Sheridan had been explaining that the bullet was one of a box that he himself had re-loaded with half a charge and he was surprised it even broke the skin. When the doctor moved his nose that way, Sheridan passed out and thereby missed his transference to the jail.

The portrait of beauty itself, the newly retired schoolteacher Miss Rowena Balfour, had witnessed the proceedings without moving her chin. Her calm and sumptuous appearance was a formidable obstacle to overcome, but seeing her two young mentors hauled from the room, both bleeding, several cowboys orbited closer to her table, and Griffin Boatright and his newly trimmed mustache lifted Donnie Gumson's hat, pressed his hand inside to right the dents, set it on the table out of the way of the bottles

and glasses, and then sat down and removed his own hat with a modest sweep and a smile.

"Are you all right, young lady?" Griffin Boatright said. "What a horrid exchange."

"And now you cover my hand with your hand as a comfort and a surety?" she said. "And later you walk me home with your arm around my waist and attempt to kiss me in the weeds

the most docile and teachable of her students.

Mr. Boatright, sensing in her ardor an opportunity he had never sensed before, sprang up like a rider for the Pony Express and returned a moment later with an entire sealed bottle of the aforementioned rye whiskey, its yellow label like a warning for poison, and his other wrist bathed in spilled beer from the

## "AFTER A SHOOTING, I ALWAYS LIKE TO DANCE. A PARTNER, PLEASE."

outside Mrs. Slater's house? But then you imagine that I invite you in, shocking Mrs. Slater completely, and I draw you into my boudoir, Mr. Boatright, that is what we call it: boudoir. And there in my boudoir you help me with the difficult buttons on this old dress." Here, Miss Balfour leaned forward so the gentleman beside her could see the line of buttons down the back of her form-fitting garment.

Griffin Boatright's face was a pale blank slate. He had never in his 29 years, 12 of them as a livestock auctioneer, ever been so confused. To his credit he cleared his throat and asked the young lady how he might be of any service at all, given the rough interlude she had just witnessed.

She responded directly in Mr. Boatright's face without hesitating, "The rough interlude I have just witnessed was in fact the interminable school year among the cretin children and troglodytes who came to this hideous school, their only intention to insult me and rob me of my native optimism, but I am free of that lingering malady and would most appreciate another big glass of the Raw Rain rye and a beer back, or so I think it is termed." No one within earshot of the former teacher's remarks understood what she had said in the word *troglodyte*, which she meant as nasty hyperbole, but in fact seven of the 43 students who had attended Rootine Unified School did live in caves at the southern end of the San Blister Mountains, aborted and abandoned old silver mine shafts really, which provided more complete cover and protection from the elements than many of the frame houses near the center of the hamlet. Some of her cave dwellers had been among

pint glass of soapy lager he carried.

She immediately raised her glass of rye and said, "Here's to the blood of the cowboys, Donnie and Sheridan, and the great luck that none got on me or this dear old dress which is almost impossible to launder!" She examined herself for errant spots of blood. With her mention of the dress, all the cowboys in the larger circle of her table, including the eager Griffin Boatright, felt free as they raised their smeared glasses with her to let their avid eyes fall upon the contours of the dress. There was an audible sigh, a moan like the letter *N*, from the small masculine assemblage. Seeing glassiness in her eyes, which Griffin mistook for worry and sadness and fear, he now pressed his fingers on her forearm and said, "It's going to be all right, Miss Balfour. There'll be no further violence this evening." She elbowed him and shifted so he would stand and let her out of the booth. "Well, that's too bad, Mr. Boatright. I was hoping you might shoot somebody next."

Before the confused auctioneer could respond, Rowena Balfour crossed the great lumber floor to where Ludwig Yarborough was picking out a repeating melody, some soft carnival ditty, on the shiny black Seethammer, a piano that Miles DeLock had purchased in Chicago the year before. It had been shipped in six pieces and assembled and strung by Mr. Yarborough as the first terms of his employment at the Enterprise Club. It was whispered that the elderly musician had killed a man in Boston or Richmond or Albany, or maybe it was a woman he had killed. Regardless of his legend, he was a success in Rootine for he knew 400 songs. Early that spring, Rowena Balfour had marched the entire

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school on a field trip into the Enterprise one morning before it opened and Ludwig Yarborough had demonstrated how the piano worked. For two hours he played music for the students and they were pacified almost into slumber and Miss Balfour rued not knowing how to play the instrument by which she might have tamed her raw minions.

In the Enterprise Club, Rowena Balfour now placed her hand upon the worn suit-coat shoulder of the ancient musician and asked if he could play something lively. She had had four powerful beverages already in celebrating her new freedom from employment, but she spoke without letting a word be squashed or shortchanged and she said, "After a shooting, I always like to dance. A partner, please." She lifted a hand and displayed an empty palm while she turned a circle and then another for the barroom crowd, so that the compelling shadows of her bosom were cast in a rollicking turbulence and echoed by the turbulence within every cowboy's heart, or not heart but close enough, until Griffin Boatright was pushed forward and he took the bold young creature in his arms in a posture as stiff as the sepia funeral photographs that were becoming popular that year. They danced, or moved herkily and jerkily together for the six bars of a waltz that Ludwig Yarborough played at double time. The picture of such a sterling beauty in the stiff arms of a man who danced exactly in the manner that many people take their

placed herself in the man's position, leading Rowena smoothly through the fluid machinations of the waltz, which turned out to be one of Ludwig Yarborough's own compositions, titled "The Orphan's Return." There were three women in the entire grand room of the Enterprise and now two of them were dancing together. When the night was retold, this terpsichorean event many times outshined the shooting as the highlight of the evening. The third woman was Lorraine Dinner, called Lorrie, and as Ludwig played the last note of his sweet song and the dancers stopped and bowed at each other, their smiles like lamps in the wilderness, Lorrie Dinner raised her glass of sparkling grape wine and from the second step to the balcony she said, "It's a tough world and we'll take tenderness when we find it. Bless this young woman! We have only been dance hall girls, which is to say whores," a word which received its own warm ovation, "but she has been a schoolteacher and for almost a year. It is a wonder she's alive!"

There was now applause anew and Ludwig commenced a challenging drinking tune which many of the cowboys knew a version of, the lyrics being a long, grinding ballad that inventoried all the things the wind steals from a cowboy in a year. It was a song that was open-ended. If the singers were young enough and drunk enough they could go through spring to summer and enter the fall again and the wind was renewed in its pernicious quest to

back to his small table in the back, where he sipped plum wine from a small jar of the stuff and rested for his midnight set. In the vacuum created by the lapse of the music, the craps-table stickman, Wendell Phardo, rapped his stick on the worn green felt with a smart snap and called to the room, "Coming out. Your dice next. We're playing craps right here." A cluster of men tightened around the table and the dice began to roll.

Miss Rowena Balfour had stepped up to Lorrie Dinner, who was the unofficial queen of the Enterprise Club and Mr. Miles De-Lock's highest-paid employee, and delivered her a sisterly hug in thanks for her toast. "I'm not long for this town," Rowena told the older woman, "but I'll stop in before I depart for my adventures."

"Please do. You can dance here anytime you'd like, dearie."

"Now, I'm off to see my injured friends and offer them my condolences, good-byes and this one black hat."

Rowena threw the blue shawl her mother had knitted her over her shoulders, picked up Donnie Gumson's big new black cowboy hat and walked across the big board floor and out the beveled doors of the Enterprise Club. The room reacted to this loss by growing suddenly louder and more animated, and as if her presence had forestalled it, a fistfight began at the bar over nothing at all and the raw edge of belligerency emerged as it does sometimes when the teacher has left the room.

The biggest danger in the cluster of sheds known as the town of Rootine was the footing in the street where ruts had begotten ruts, some of the mud dried to a stony blade and some of it still greasy and wet, ready to swallow a shoe. In the light from a few window lamps, Miss Rowena Balfour lifted her skirts and stepped along the worn path be-

tween the unpainted plank buildings until she arrived at Doctor Wattel's hovel marked by a painted board above the door that said: M.D. There was a candle working in the window and Rowena peered in and saw a man in a black suit coat sitting over the body of the young cowboy. She knocked lightly and entered the room and found her nose, which had been lulled by the corpuscle-loosening molecules of rye whiskey, suddenly stunned and chastened by the powerhouse astringent of rubbing alcohol. The man whispering to the young cowboy, however, was

## THE KISS LIT THE COLOR IN HIS CHEEKS, STARTED HIS HEART ANEW.

last mortal breath, pushing the pitcher and china teacup and kerosene lamp and its glass chimney from the bedside table to the floor, struck Glornina Soft so deeply that she stood from the lap of Tim Grush, who was inebriated into a smiling rictus. She straightened her red satin dress as well as she could, tucking herself or most of herself back into the puckered elastic bodice, and she stepped to the dancing pair and pulled Griffin Boatright away from the schoolteacher, an act which relieved everyone and drew a brief laugh before Glornina re-

get hoof, hide and bone. A cowboy's hat, kerchief, last dinner plate and own true love. The list was long.

After that melody, Mr. Ludwig Yarborough wiped his forehead with the only monogrammed handkerchief in the town of Rootine, Wyoming, the ornate initials in black silk thread reading FNQ and being a prime part of his mystery. People who had seen the thing remarked that it was taken from the body of the man he had killed so long ago. Or woman. The musician stood from his instrument and went

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not Doctor Wattel of course, as the young former schoolteacher had just come from seeing that medical doctor about to throw the dice in search of a nine. Donnie Gumson sat propped on a pillow, pale with bright eyes, and his consultant was Miles DeLock, who had come calling to see if Donnie's wound had served the same kind of life-changing blow that Miles himself had received some years before when shot by the righteous Portuguese shepherd. Miss Balfour could hear the older man's pleading questions. "Did you feel, when the bullet traversed your body and turned away when it struck the bone over your heart, that you wanted to renounce your evil ways and choose a new path?" Rowena could see Donnie consider the question.

"It hurt like nothing," Donnie said. "I knew instantly that I wish it had never happened. I haven't felt anything like it since I lost my little finger in an accident with a bad barn door when I was just six years old."

"Do you play cards?" Miles DeLock asked the cowboy.

"We play in the bunkhouse, some poker and some catfish."

Mr. DeLock quickened at the news. "Did you feel as the bullet entered and exited your body that you wanted to renounce your card playing and the questionable techniques you employed while playing with your friends?"

"I've been shot, Mr. DeLock," Donnie Gumson said. "I'm glad I'm alive and I can still move my arms and legs and that the doctor has sewed me up the way he did so that I'll see my horse Caliber again as well as my friends and maybe, if I ever make any money, my dear mother, back in Tuscaloosa."

"Are you going to change your life?" DeLock continued. "Tell me."

"I'm going to have to get back to you on that," Donnie said. "But thanks for asking."

The older man stood up from his inquiry and looked at the woman, his expression fresh frustration, and then a new idea printed itself on his face and he said it: "It's the difference between bird shot and a bullet. Bird shot will change a man's life." With that, he departed and Donnie Gumson looked into the beautiful face of his riding student Rowena Balfour. She held up his hat and handed it over.

"It don't look too mangled," he said.

"No, it's good for the next rodeo, I'm sure."

"Thanks for bringing it over."

"I'm glad to. I'm glad you're not going to perish from the earth because of being gunshot," she said. "I wanted to thank you for the



lessons and for that saddle which you've given me and that horse, and I wanted to say goodbye, for I am leaving this town very soon, tomorrow or the next day, and I will remember your advice as a rider for a long time to come."

"Did you decide where you are going?"

"Not really, but generally," she pointed out the western window in the little clinic, "that way." She was still standing, and now she bowed and kissed Donnie Gumson on his cheek. "I'm sorry we did not get that dance. Perhaps on another day."

"On another day," Donnie Gumson said, though he was whispering. The kiss had lit the color in his cheeks and started his heart anew. "I'll be the guy who was prevented from dancing with Rowena Balfour by being shot."

"You are," she said at the door. "But you're the guy who taught me how to ride a horse."

"It's an honor," he said, closing his eyes on the first tear since his injury.

In the dark of the town now, Rowena Balfour could hear the syncopated *clip-clop* of Ludwig Yarborough's horse-racing song rising and falling in the summer air and she walked past the glowing facade of the Enterprise Club, the only painted edifice in town, and behind it to the jail and stepped up two steps to its uneven porch, the creaking of which had woken the sheriff to visitors on more than this occasion. The sher-

iff of Rootine was Red Hannigan, known for his colorful neckerchiefs and the fact that he never wore or carried a firearm of any type. He considered his post as constable to be a sinecure that paid for his daughter's tuition (\$45 a semester) at Youdraw Academy at the southern tip of St. Louis. Red Hannigan had heard the porch yowl and was already standing when Miss Rowena Balfour pushed open the crooked door and entered the small office. It was the only room in Rootine with a wall calendar. The oversheet on the calendar featured advertisements for Wonder Powder, a glowing green vial that had conveniently 12 uses, one for each month (including January as a frostbite preventer, June, a blister cure-all, and October as a vitamin and vitality enhancer). The calendar, which was two years out of date, gave the law officer's quarters an official air, along with the two handmade signs that hung beside it: NO SPITTING AND REPENT!

"I have come to see your prisoner," Rowena told the official.

Red shrugged off the nap he'd been involved in and swept his arm to the open rail doors of the one-cell jail. Sheridan Hayes lay on the cot, his knees up, his fist on his nose. He became aware of the young woman and swung his legs over so he could sit up.

"Is your beautiful nose crushed?" Rowena said.

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"I didn't see him swing at me or I would have ducked," the cowboy said.

"Show me your injury," she said. Sheridan was still cross-wired by her appearance at the jail and then her question to him; in all their camping tutorials they had not exchanged a personal note, what is sometimes called an encouraging word. And now, he seemed to have heard her say "beautiful" in regard to his nose.

He looked at her through the top of his eyes and then he removed his hand from his dark rosy proboscis.

"Oh relief," she said. "You look just fine. Doctor Wattel has put the pieces back together." The former schoolteacher turned to the sheriff. "What will become of this young man?"

"He'll go on trial for murder and all of its legal cousins when the regional magistrate visits our fair town in seven weeks. Until then, he'll eat his beans exactly where you see him now."

She nodded at the benevolent official. "Sheriff, I have recently called upon the victim of this crime, the shooting in the bar, and found him somewhat improved, in fact, by its occurrence."

"I understand that Mr. Hayes was shooting with diminished payloads, but still in many cases this is considered deadly force."

Sheridan Hayes spoke, his hand still on his nose, "Oh my God, with all due respect, Sher-

iff Hannigan, everyone knows the diminished potency of my powder loads. I am the cheapest of the reloaders in the state of Wyoming. I load to make a caseful, not a killing. I knew my shot might discourage my rival, but I also knew it would not kill him dead."

"Your rival?" Rowena Balfour said suddenly. "Rival in what?"

"Oh my dear Rowena," the anguished cowboy moaned. "I have fallen in love with you as you must know, and I know that I am not alone in that condition. This has not befallen me before and I have been paying attention. This signal event has altered my plans. Please do not depart Rootine until my legal problems are at an end."

"What in heaven," Rowena said, looking at the cowboy as if for the first time. "I'm going. I've come to say good-bye. I thank you for what you've taught me about camping and my gun, but I must head out for parts unknown, or at least unknown to me. There is a plenitude."

"You say good-bye, but I'll tell you right now, Miss Balfour, I will find you again and not be so slow then to show you my true heart."

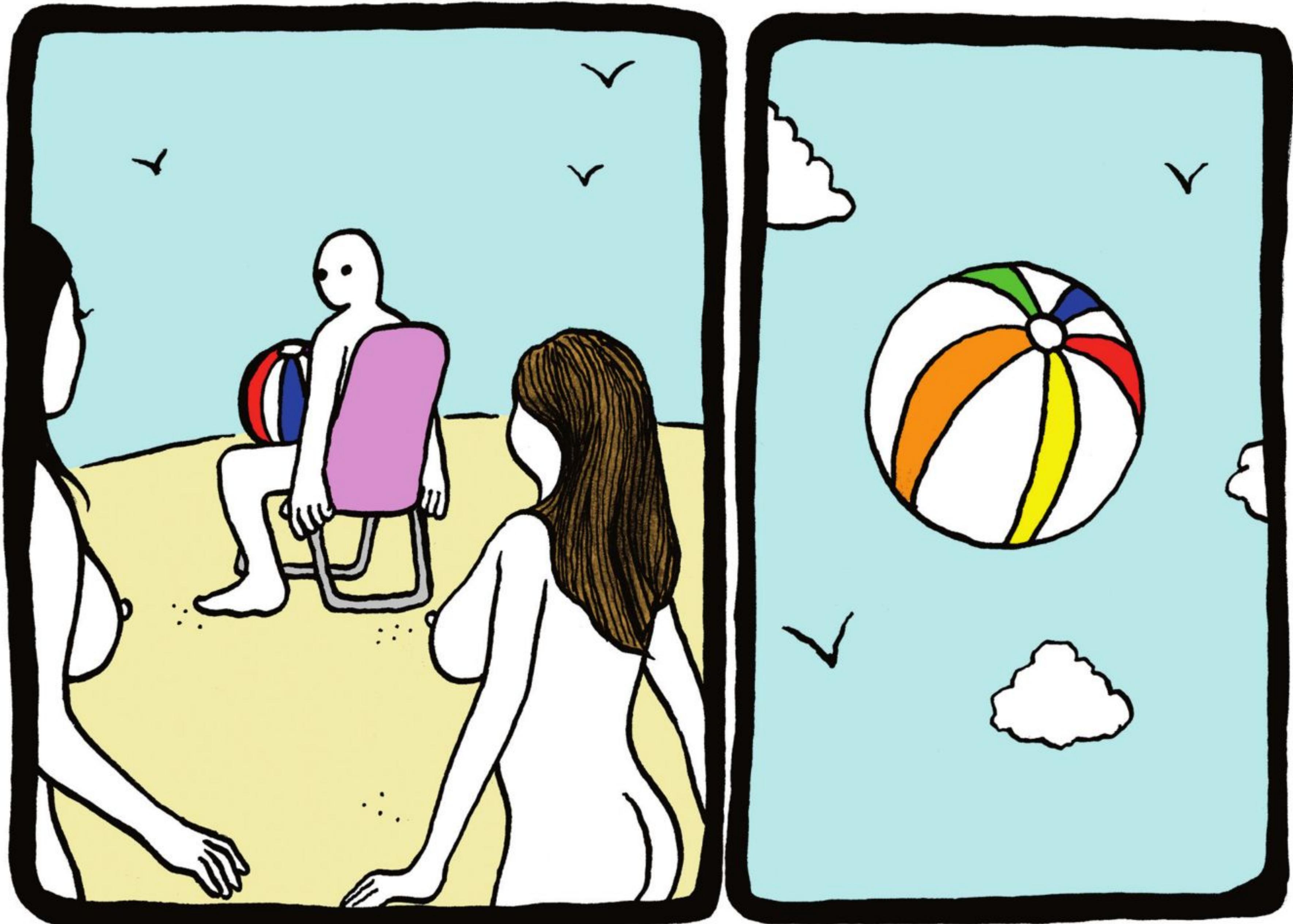
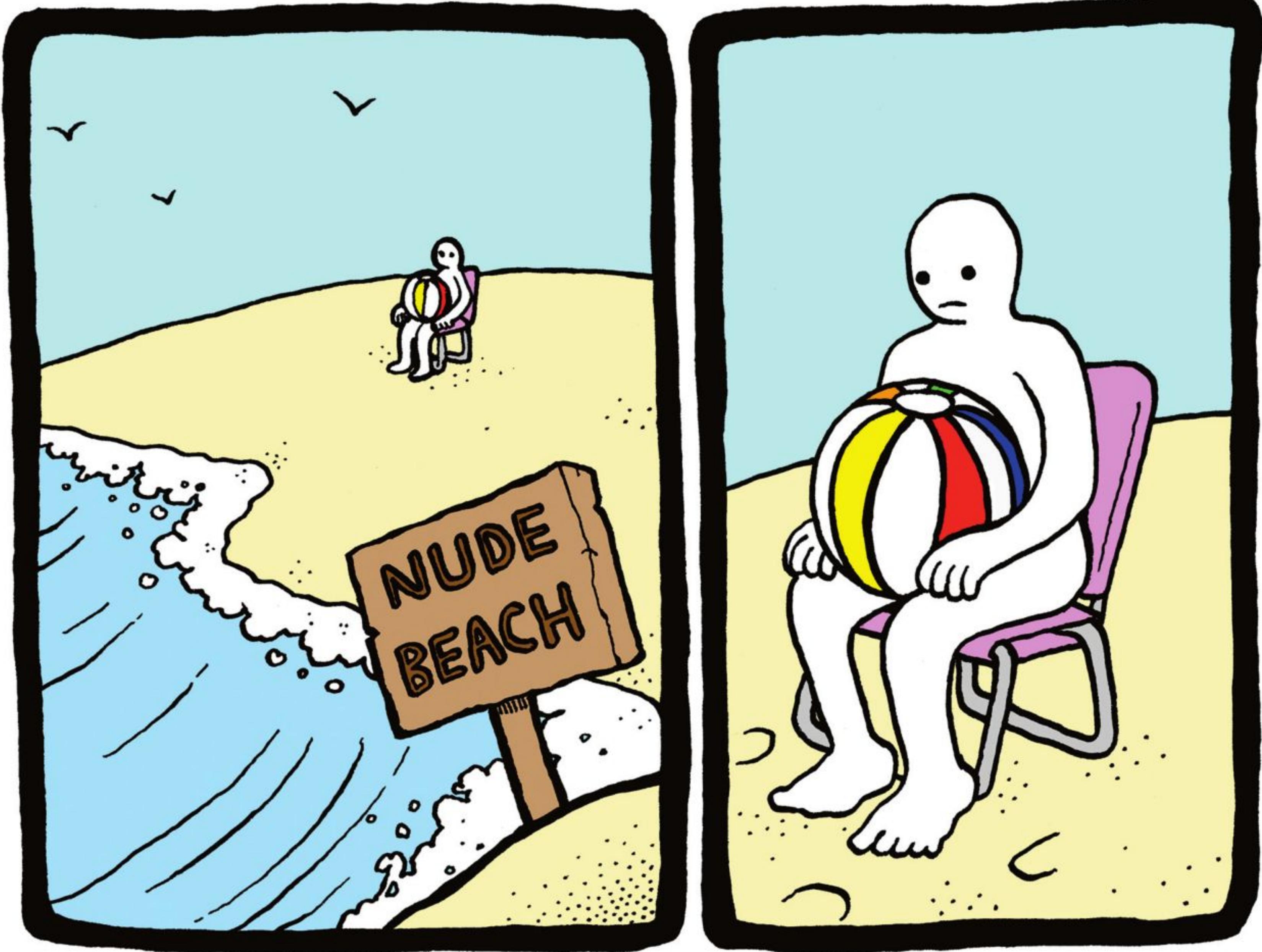
The sheriff was unaccustomed to hearing whispered sincerity or hearing the word *plenitude*, and he was stilled by this strange moment and he sat down again as the young woman went out the front door, lifting her

skirts toward Mrs. Slater's boarding house and her travels beyond.

•••

Rowena Balfour, her real troubles ahead of her, did leave Rootine even sooner than she'd planned. Stirred and shaken by the loud and sanguinary episodes of her evening at the Enterprise Club, she packed her kit in an old canvas mailbag that had been left in her shabby schoolroom by one of the children of an unemployed rider for the defunct Pony Express. She went to bed in her little room, but it didn't take. She understood that to stay even for half an hour more would only lead to further noisy doings in the morning. She did not want to recount the history of Sheridan Hayes shooting Donnie Gumson, regardless of the reason; it was all atangle and she wanted done with it. She pulled on her denim trousers under her teacher's dress, and she secured the canvas carry to the back of her saddle with knots she'd been studying all spring, and at five minutes to midnight in a breeze that was cold but run with the warm scent of prairie grass, Rowena Balfour mounted Necessity, the horse who was six years old that year and whom she'd bought for a dime on the dollar from Donnie Gumson. She walked quietly back between the careless shelters of Rootine and headed west or more northwest, but it would do. Her fatigue vanished at being astride a horse in the significant dark and at the prospect of whatever world awaited. She'd had a feeling some many months before when she embraced her mother and said goodbye to her father and climbed on the Western Limited, a narrow-gauge rail carrier whose standard-class seats were boxes and trunks they were shipping, and sitting on a box of ammunition destined according to the stencil to Fort Payne she felt her heart fill with what... hope? No, she decided, room. It was room and she wanted it.

Necessity was a stolid horse who whenever bitten by the great horned Western horsefly just lifted his head in annoyance and quiet suffering and blinked his eyes as if to say, Feel free, you tiny man, you can't eat all of me. It was a good trait for a horse stepping steadily forward on a night trail of uncertain provenance and destination. Rowena Balfour snugged herself in the saddle and slept the way any person would sleep on the largest animal she had ever encountered as it paced into the unknown. The night figure of the two of them climbing up and through the desolate hills was a fantastical caution to the nocturnal critters jostling in the sage. ■



NICHOLAS GUREWITCH

PLAYMATE OF THE YEAR

# Eugena

Washington

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JASON LEE PARRY**





When we first encountered Eugena Washington last year, she was determined to flaunt a different side of herself—a side unseen in her appearances on runways and in TV commercials. Stripped down, Miss December 2015 proudly said of her pictorial, “For once, I didn’t have to be anyone except myself.” Readers responded to the sex, charm and truth in her photos and voted Eugena our 2016 Playmate of the Year. To celebrate her new title, PMOY 2015 Dani Mathers met Eugena for an intimate chat about her path to PLAYBOY, what she’ll do next and then some. As Dani learns, Eugena’s vivacious spirit is nothing short of stimulating.

**DANI:** *The first time you and I met was in December when Nightline interviewed us for a segment about PLAYBOY. But I've actually known about you for some time. We have a few mutual friends, and they told me how much fun you are and how you're a total badass. You've already built a successful career as a fashion model. What attracted you to PLAYBOY?*

**EUGENA:** As a model, I've done a lot of nude shoots in the name of artistic nudity. European clients specifically go for that, but those projects always end up feeling the same. With PLAYBOY there's a brand behind the visual, and that brand is iconic. I was like, “Yes, absolutely yes.”

**DANI:** *How did you become a Playmate?*

**EUGENA:** A PLAYBOY photographer texted me to say he thought I would be a great fit for the magazine. I was a little hesitant at first, but only because I didn't know whether being a Playmate would overshadow what I'd done previously. Ultimately I knew the photographer would capture my best angles and my personality—and he did.

**DANI:** *In February you traveled to San Francisco with 23 other Playmates to attend Playboy's Super Bowl 50 party. How was the transition from working the catwalk to wearing the Bunny suit?*

**EUGENA:** I literally had this epiphany yesterday. I said, “Oh my God, I'm one of those girls in a Bunny suit!” It just hit me. I don't want to sound cliché and talk about how girls aspire to this, but not everyone gets this opportunity. I have a Bunny suit. That's kind of cool. Being a Playmate is definitely different from anything I've done in the past, but I'm making it my own experience.

**DANI:** *It bears remembering that you became a Playmate only in December. This all happened to you in the span of six months—and now you're the first African American PMOY since 2009.*

**EUGENA:** It's a great time for this. The world is changing. I hope this brings different eyes to the magazine and new

audiences. I always like going into situations with the idea that I can change them. I'm not the type of person to conform to what's happening. It feels like it's the perfect time for some change.

**DANI:** *Let's talk about your upbringing. I know you're from South Carolina, but tell me more. What did you like to do growing up?*

**EUGENA:** Listen, I was born in South Carolina, but that's it! [laughs] My mom drove us out of there a month later. My entire family is from the South, but I grew up in California. Growing up I was—and I still am—a girlie girl. I wanted to be a makeup artist since I was 10 years old. I'd watch newscasts to see how the anchors did their makeup. In high school I was the girl braiding everyone's hair and plucking everybody's eyebrows. I always wanted to be a makeup artist, but modeling happened first. Strange as this is, in the back of my mind I always knew I was going to be in the fashion world—I just didn't know in what capacity.

**DANI:** *Something I've noticed is that you always have a big smile on your face. I don't doubt that you're happy. Many people don't realize that happiness is a choice, but you do. That's a huge strength to play on.*

**EUGENA:** When I started in this career, I told myself I wouldn't pay attention to anything that could make me feel insecure. Someone else's negativity has nothing to do with me. Thankfully, I don't get much of that, but I know who I am. I like to present myself in such a way that people don't have room to say anything bad. A lot of people aren't in touch with themselves anymore because they don't have to be. Social media has given us an excuse to be half a person.

**DANI:** *Speaking of that, one reason I love following you on Instagram is that you don't pigeonhole yourself. You'll post a photo of yourself wearing no makeup and being a total goofball with your*

*friends, then a stunning photo from an editorial and then a photo of you with your family.*

**EUGENA:** This is my life. People will always try to tell you who you are or what you stand for. I am a person who knows who I am, where I come from and where I'm going. I like to get along with everyone, but to do that, you have to find compassion. You have to find that space where you can connect with someone. I'm a big advocate of humanity. I know I can suck in different ways; I don't always take into account other people's feelings, for example. But if I see that someone's not having a great day, I try to connect with them. You never know where someone else is coming from.

**DANI:** *I like meeting Playmates, because I love hearing their stories. We're entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers and more, and it's up to us to show outsiders what we're about. What are your goals? What do you want to accomplish as PMOY?*

**EUGENA:** Someone in my life I'm close with has bipolar disorder. It's a terrible way to live. God puts challenges in your life, and you can either work through them or run away from them. I really want to get involved with this disease and become a mental health advocate.

**DANI:** *As the outgoing Playmate of the Year, the only advice I have for you is to keep pushing for what you believe in. We have this platform only once. Get out there and show people what you want them to see.*

**EUGENA:** This is a story and a chapter in my life to build around. I'm enjoying the ride, and right now I'm doing whatever I want to do, day by day. That's how I live. That's what my life is about. As long as I'm doing what I want to do, I'm happy. Right now, being a part of PLAYBOY is what I want to do. I'm still processing what it all means, but this is going to be fun. It's going to be interesting. I'm thankful I'm able to be in this position. I mean, how many people can say that? ■















# CHRIS “DAZE” ELLIS

*It’s no accident that the two seminal films about New York graffiti and hip-hop culture in the early 1980s both have the word “style” in their titles (*Style Wars* and *Wild Style*). When you’re tagging a subway car with one eye looking out for the police, style is just about the only thing you have time for. No one knows this better than Chris Ellis, the veteran graffiti writer and street-art pioneer whose intricate, angular signature—DAZE—was a familiar sight in 1970s and 1980s New York. Decades before Banksy and Shepard Fairey became household names and museums started to exhibit street artists’ work, Daze successfully transitioned from tagger to studio artist. Both “style” movies feature a young Daze in his element at a pivotal moment in graffiti and his career, and he never lost that sense of immediacy as he moved from tags to murals and large-scale paintings, all of which are joined by a sense of place and dynamic movement. A 2012 Daze painting, appropriately titled *Life in the**

*Fast Lane*, drops the viewer at street level, flanked by a speeding cab and a motion-blurred tourist bus racing down a Manhattan avenue toward a singular dark point in space. Although Daze has shown his work internationally in museums and galleries, New York City remains his inspiration. Despite the fact that New York is hardly the gritty urban scene it was 40 years ago when Daze got his start, he says the city continues to motivate him and his work, both in the gallery and on the street. “I don’t think of myself as a street artist,” Daze insists. “I came aboveground a long time ago. Simply put, I am an artist who likes to paint in public.”—Eric Steinman

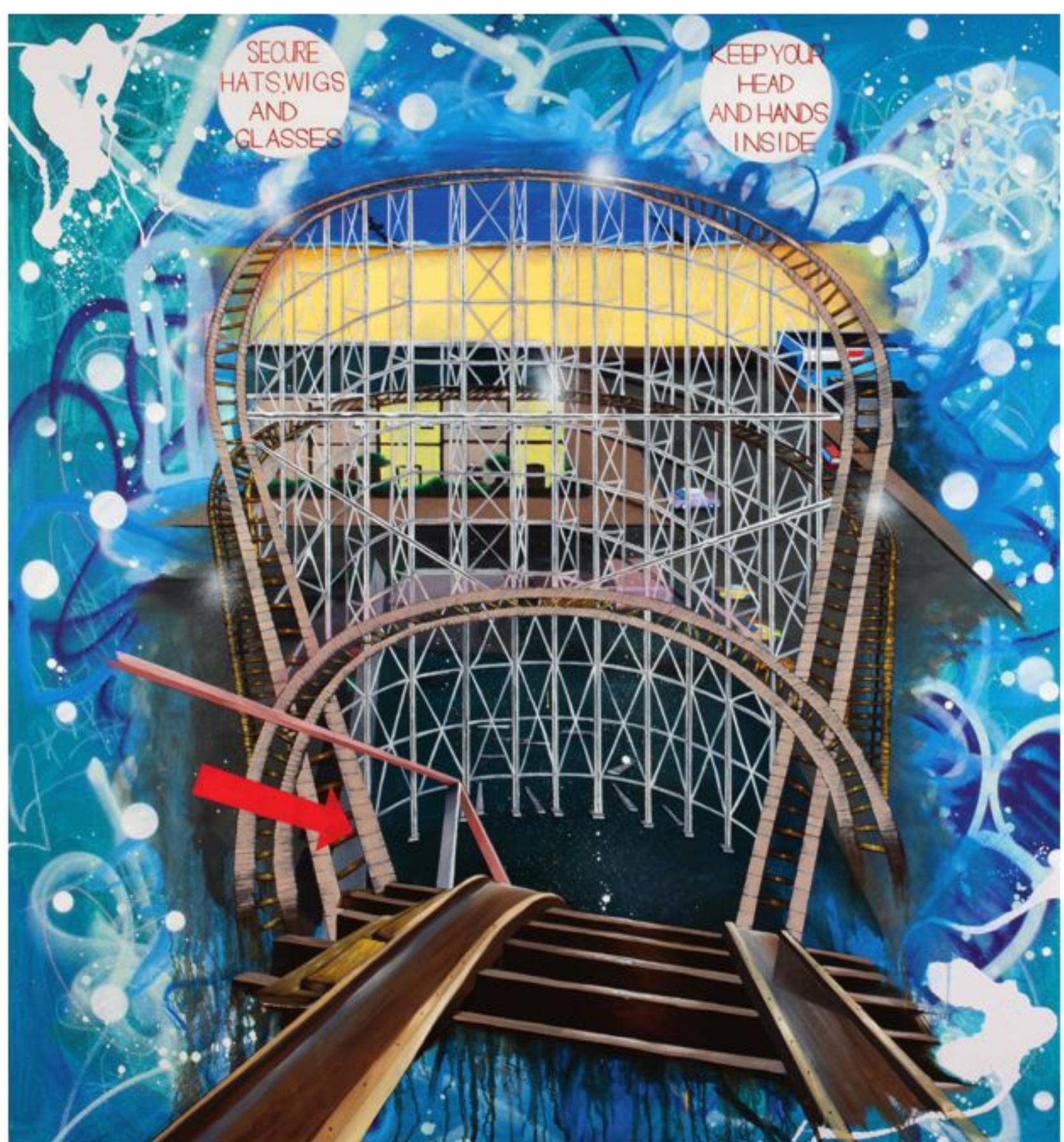


**Above:** Daze at work. **Opposite page:** *Watery Grave*. Acrylic, oil, spray paint, pumice on canvas, 82 x 66 inches, 2012.

*The City Is My Muse*, Daze’s most recent exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York, runs through May 31; Schiffer Publishing is releasing *DAZEWORLD: The Artwork of Chris Daze Ellis* this year.







**Opposite page:** *Golden Years*. Spray paint, acrylic, charcoal on canvas, 46 x 40 inches, 2009. **Top:** Mural, Los Angeles, 2011. **Bottom left:** *Cyclone Drop*. Oil, spray paint, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 56 inches, 2011. **Bottom right:** *Reflections on Times Square #2*. Spray paint on wood, 96 x 132 inches, 2013.

## PLAYBACK

**JUNE 1969**

Outtakes from Playmate of the Year 1969 Connie Kreski's photo shoot.



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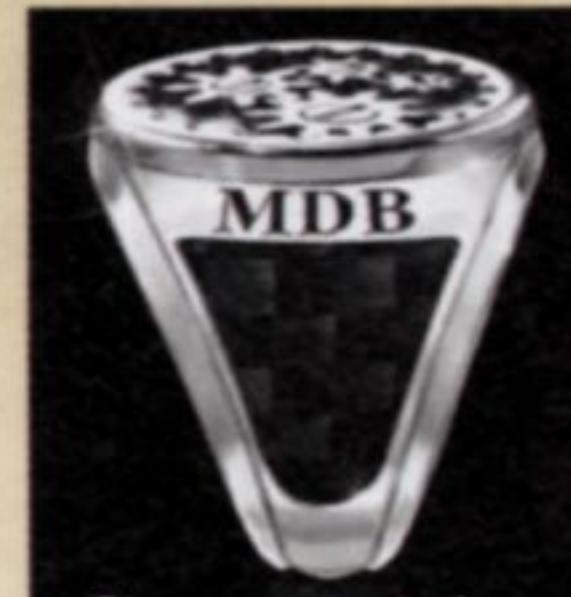
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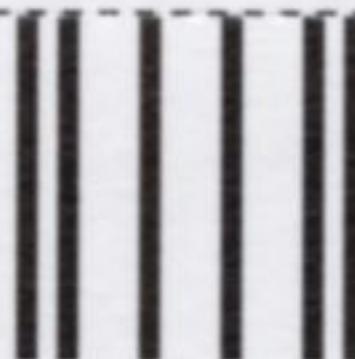
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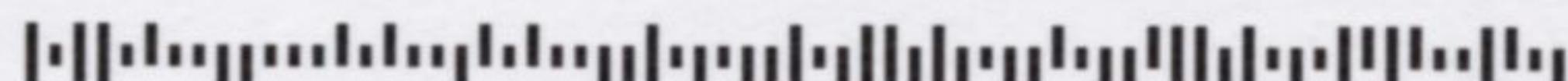
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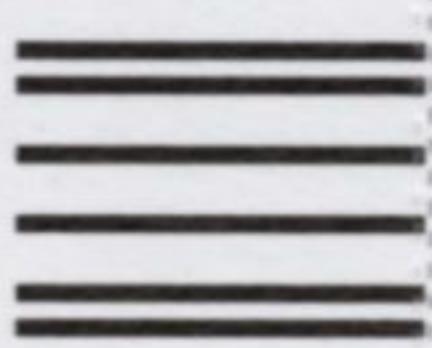
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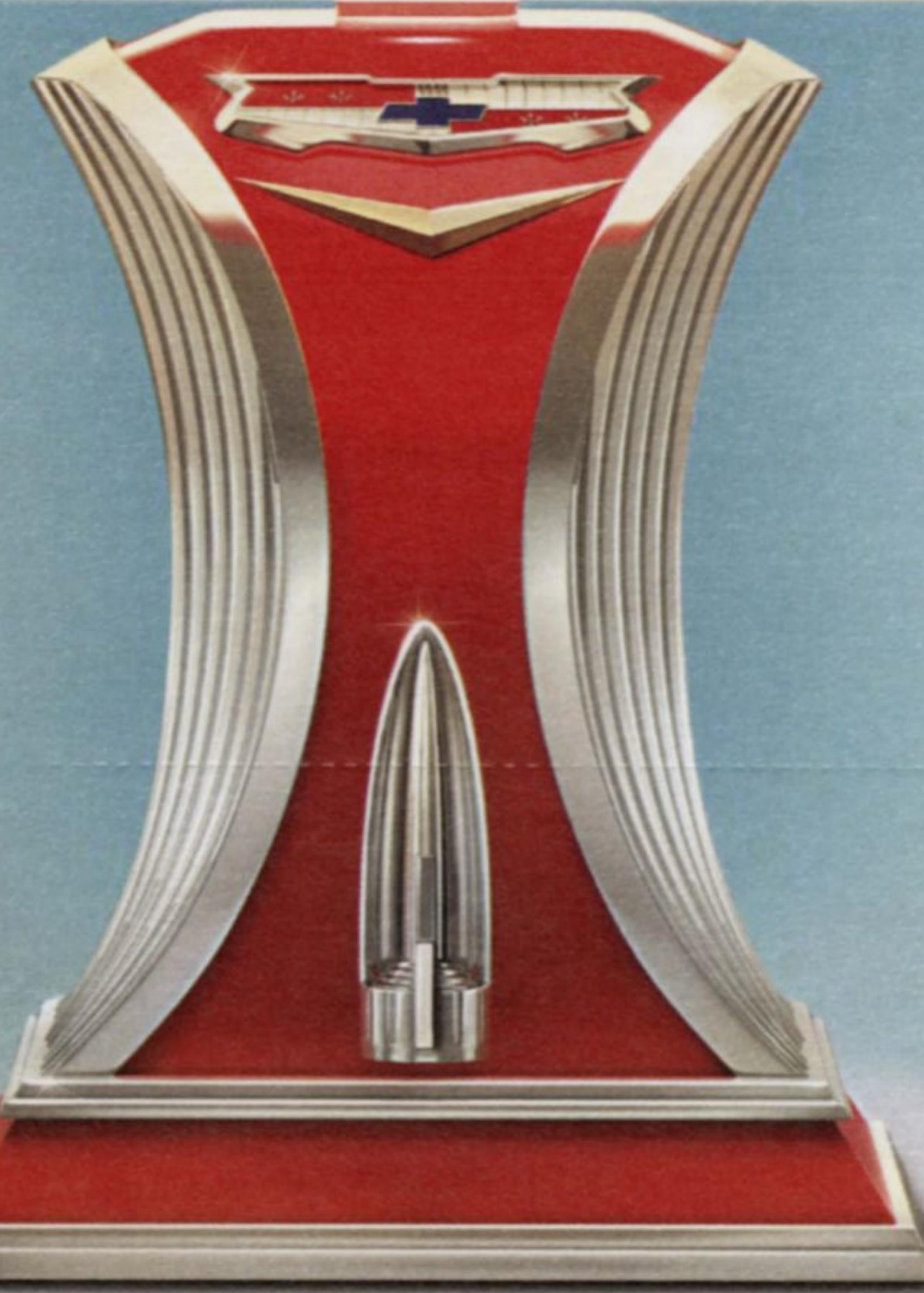
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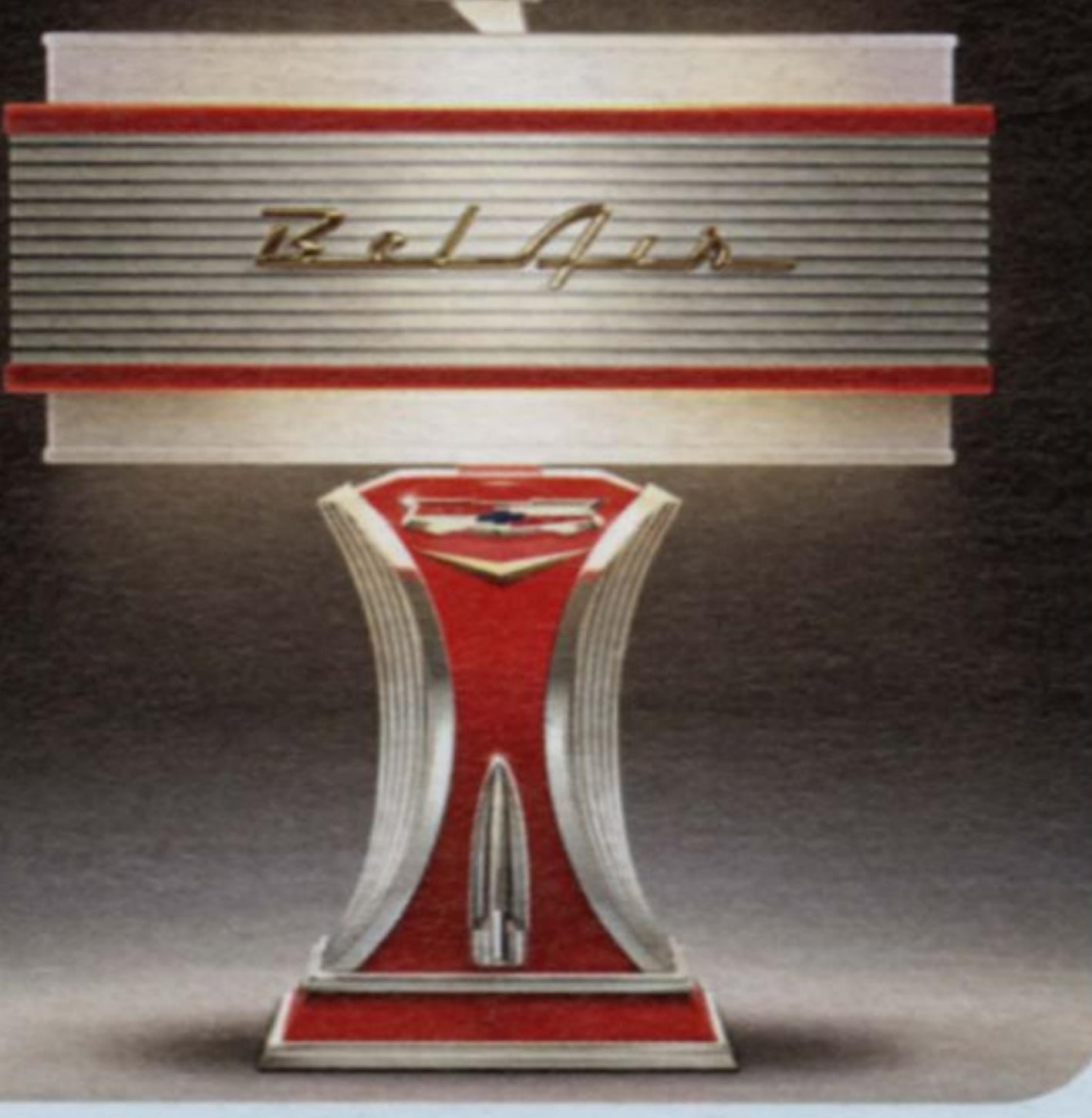
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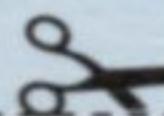


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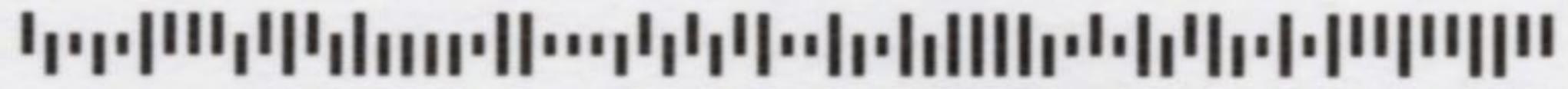


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