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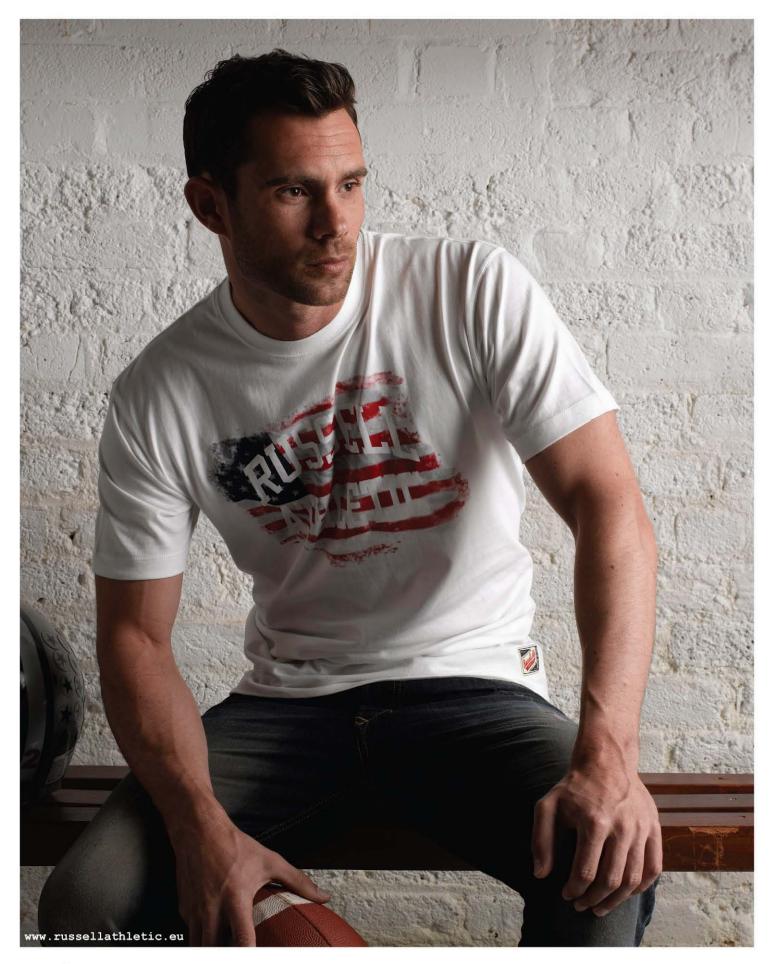


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PLAYBOTS APRIL 2015 SOUTH AFRICA







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PLAYBILL

THIS MONTH'S HIGHLIGHTS

ame three of your favorite things? Three things you can't live without? We always pose this question to our new Playmates, and we've had a myriad of answers (lip gloss, Facebook, sushi, and Ouma, among just a few), but this month, we thought we'd turn the tables on ourselves. After much debate, discussion, and a couple of lengthy lobbying sessions, we ended up with a relatively short list and one that actually wasn't too groundbreaking: it's the tried-and-tested trinity of sex, drugs and rock 'n roll, and the people who partake. Some things never change, eh?

All of which means, you get treated to a smorgasbord of great articles, gorgeous pictures and snippets of small talk on these three subjects throughout this issue, kicking off with our stupendously desriable Maria Eriksson as our cover model, photographed by the talented Dr Dan. We are firmly convinced that whether she's behind or in front of the camera, once Maria has caught you in her eye you'll be

powerless. Check her out on page 120-129.

Our Miss April, Leila Scott on page 78, will also freeze you in your tracks. She's the sweet and sassy Afrikaans girl-next-door we've been waiting for, and photographer Danny Steyn captures her and all her mischievous charm pool-side on a balmy South African summer afternoon.

Still in line with our trilogy of sex, drugs and rock 'n roll, we also bring you – hot off the US presses – the controversial Q&A (and steamy pics) of hip-hop star Azealia Banks. Plus a triple fantasy shoot with Playmates Britany Nola, Ciara Price and Raquel Pomplun, who bare all in an irresistible tribute to sex, music and the women who love both. When it comes to mixing women and music, what more would you want than a PLAYBOY pictorial with a sexy white guitar, lots of shimmery water, and the even sexier Randy Moore? Turn now to page 44 and see what regular photographer, John Zelezny, has in store for you.

To keep things real, our feature articles this month run the gamut of seeking to truly understand the phenomenon of **drug addiction in Hollywood**, to examining how **Lil Boosie, a Louisiana-based rapper**, has emerged from being illegally locked up in one of America's worst prisons and survived to become an icon in Ferguson, to the lighter side of **what it takes to be a DJ** and questioning whether the **bad boy of country music, Eric Church**, is ruining the genre or saving it. We've also got the annual PLAYBOY favorite – **The Year in Sex** – and a fascinating story on the new world of competitive video gaming and eSports.

PLAYBOY is renowned for its **legendary interviews** and we couldn't resist digging into the archives to bring you excerpts from a 1963 interview with **music icon**, **Frank Sinatra**. Our modern profiles include **20Q with actor David Walton** and The Interview with **provocative director David Fincher**. Fiction this month is called "Swallowing" by Steve Amick and it's about an accident during foreplay that no one wants to repeat, except Tiff. Read it for yourself starting on page 138.

With all of this, and so much more, we think you'll have your fill with this issue, whatever your favorite thing might be. And if we didn't identify at least one of your favorites, let us know. We're always open to ideas: editor@playboy.co.za.

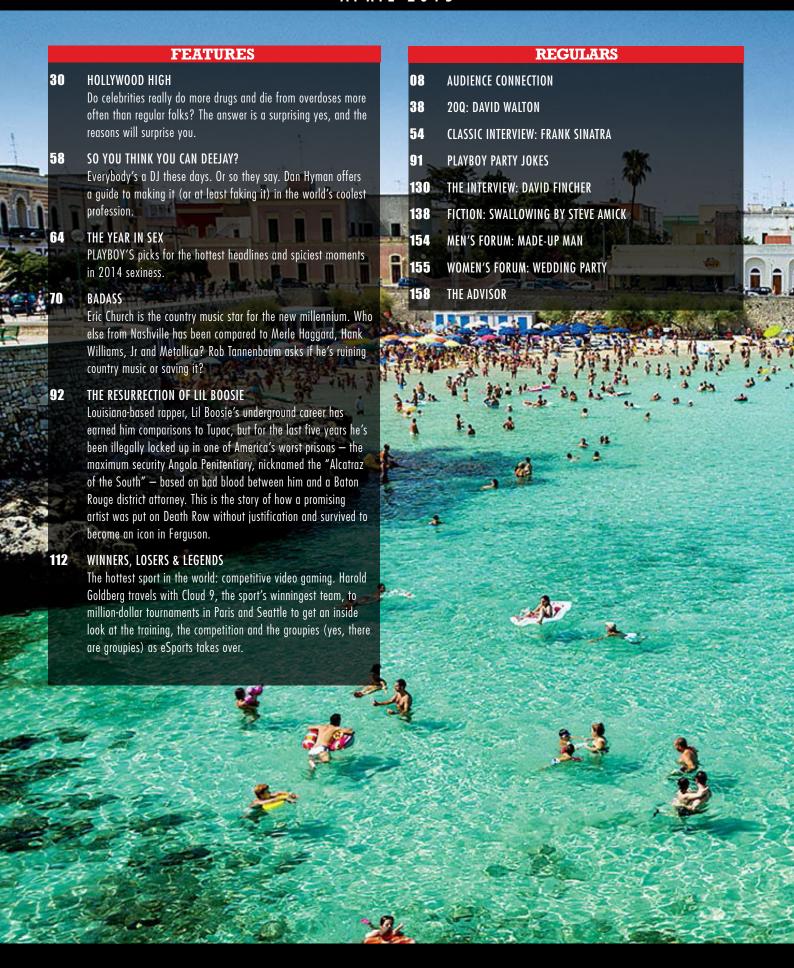
Enjoy the read!





PLAYBOY

APRIL 2015





MANSION NEWS

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT THE MANSION

To close out an extraordinary anniversary year that kicked off with Kate Moss helping us celebrate six decades, Hef and Cooper invited a few of their closest friends to the Mansion for the last bash of 2014. Guests included Playmates Gia Marie, Stephanie



Branton, Marketa Janska and Kimberly Phillips. Todd Morse's band, Toddsplanet, kept everyone rocking before the countdown.

BEYONCÉ'S BUNNY HOP

Always the ambassador of a good time, our Rabbit makes a cameo in Beyoncé's intoxicating music video for her single "7/11." Sporting a sweater from the Joyrich x Playboy collection, Queen Bey grinds and grooves with a gaggle of backup dancers in their skivvies. Flawless, indeed.



BOWLING WITH BUNNIES

Twelve Playmates hit the lanes at Lucky Strike Live in Hollywood to benefit the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank. Lucky attendees, including Entourage's Jeremy Piven, practiced their curveballs alongside Playmates in full Bunny regalia while enjoying a musical performance by Sum 41's Deryck Whibley.



SA NEWS

ED'S PICKS FROM FULL **NUDE PICTORIALS**

MICHELLE CHRYSTAL MISS DECEMBER

www.playboy.co.za/playmates/michelle-chrystal

In case you missed your favorite Playmate's pictorial, you can now see some of our Ed's picks from her shoot on our website just by registering as a free member at www.playboy.co.za. Or, you can always go get a back copy of her digital issue at MySubs www.bit.ly/YEbgkw or ZINIO www.bit.ly/GQ78VD



LOCAL IS LEKKER

Danny Steyn is becoming one of our fav photographers for South African models. And he's not complaining. Here's one reason why.

Left to Right: Maureen Tredway, Leila Scott, Jaqueline Els Photographer: Danny Steyn www.dannysteyn.com MUA: Leanne Roux (LMA Make-up Artistry)

Assistant: Gawie van der Walt

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We're starting to have some fun on Instagram. Come and play. www.instagram.com/playboymagsa

UNLEASH YOUR Frech

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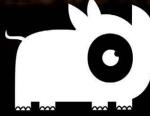
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CUBISM ICE IS THE FOUNDATION OF A GREAT COCKTAIL. HERE'S HOW

f you're serious about making a perfect drink, don't blow it with the ice. Bagged ice melts too fast, watering down a cocktail before you can finish it.

Ice that has been sitting in your freezer can transfer the flavors of leftover pizza to an otherwise meticulously made manhattan. Yes, ice makes a drink cold, but proper dilution is how you dial it in. Here are the essential shapes and how they can up your cocktail game.

Crushed

Juleps, painkillers and other crushed-ice cocktails can be watered down too rapidly by ice made in a blender or food processor. Make like a pro mixologist and crush your cubes in a cloth Lewis bag. The fabric absorbs excess liquid.

Collins

You know how a gin and tonic tastes good for only about the first three sips? That's because you're using the wrong ice. Long and rectangular collins ice looks cool and melts slowly, thereby extending the life of the ideal booze-to-mixer ratio.

Spheres

This is the go-to ice shape for scotch drinkers. An ice sphere's large mass and minimal surface area chill a drink down fast but dilute it slowly. This allows you to taste the nuances of a super-premium spirit as it mixes with water over time and the flavors and aroma evolve.

Cubes

If you're going to invest in only one custom mold, a cube tray is best. Fill it with bottled or filtered water to ensure clean taste, and use the cubes when shaking up cocktails or drinking bourbon on the rocks.

In the Bag

Many bartenders use a muddler and a Lewis bag to crush ice. Originally for holding coins, the bags are made of canvas and won't split like plastic bags.



(1)GANGSTA WRAPS IT'S TIME TO PUNCH UP YOUR LUNCH. LOSE THE BREAD AND LAYER THE FLAVOR WITH THESE EASY YET MANLY WRAPS THAT WILL BREAK YOU OUT OF YOUR CARB-HEAVY, LACKLUSTER SANDWICH RUT. IT'S HOW WE ROLL

Roll Your Own

HOISIN PORK SUMMER ROLL

A pork-centric take on the summer roll. Directions: Spread sriracha and hoisin sauce on prepared Vietnamese rice paper. Layer with precooked carnitas, julienned scallions and thinly sliced kirby cucumbers tossed with rice vinegar, salt and sugar. Roll tightly.

2.вытокуо

The BLT goes to Japan.

Directions: On a sheet of nori, press a thin layer of cooked white rice. Spoon wasabi mayo (one teaspoon wasabi powder dissolved in one teaspoon water and mixed with half a cup of mayonnaise) down the center, then layer with chopped cooked bacon, shredded lettuce and chopped tomatoes. Roll tightly.

3 PROTEIN SPIRIT

A portable version of a Greek salad. Directions: In a whole wheat wrap, layer diced cooked chicken breast, shredded romaine lettuce, crumbled feta cheese, kalamata olives, julienned red bell peppers and thinly sliced red onions. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and drizzle lightly with olive oil and red wine vinegar. Roll tightly.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL SIRISALEE

TUNE-UP TIME

NEIL YOUNG LEADS THE CHARGE FOR AN **AUDIO REVOLUTION**

t's time for the MP3 to fade away, according to Neil Young. The Godfather of Grunge recently revealed the PonoPlayer, a digital-music device he helped develop that plays high-resolution audio files that deliver up to 30 times the sound quality of MP3s. The growing high-resolutionaudio movement hopes to upgrade the MP3 the way HDTV did television. To break it down: Default iTunes tracks deliver 256 kilobits per second of compressed audio, while a CD delivers 1,411 Kbps. High-resolution files can crank out a whopping 9,216 Kbps of uncompressed audio goodness. "High-resolution audio can finally deliver what music is about," says David Chesky, creator of the format and co-founder of HDtracks.com, the largest high-resolution-audio download site. "It's the real sound of what musicians sound like live, not some watered-down version just to fit on some old-fashioned portable device." Here's how to



HEAD CASE

Grado Labs has been creating highquality audio equipment in Brooklyn since 1953. Grado's RS2e headphones (\$495, gradolabs.com) use handcrafted mahogany air chambers and 44-millimeter drivers to pump rich, warm sound ranging from deep bass to smooth high ends. Perfect for the highresolution mix of Wilco's Yankee Hotel Foxtrot.

TRUE PLAYER

With great audio quality comes great file size. Count on high-resolution files to be six to 10 times the size of standard MP3s. Store all that sound on the Sony HAP-Z1ES music player (\$2,000, sonv.com), a one-terabyte hard-disc drive capable of handling highres audio files. Transfer music wirelessly or via a cable, then dial up a tune on the full-color display.



SOUND OFF Highway 61 Revisited shouldn't be confined to the living room. Monster's SoundStage speakers can be connected wirelessly to deliver music throughout the house. The S3 (\$400, monster products.com) includes wi-fi and Bluetooth connectivity, streams music from Spotify, Rhapsody and other services and can jam high-resolution audio files from the kitchen to the bedroom.

PURE GOLD

Neil Young has long derided digital audio's lack of warmth as "underwater listening," To change our listening habits. Young raised \$6 million on Kickstarter, making it the fourth most successful campaign ever. The resulting PonoPlayer (\$400, pono music.com) includes 128 gigabytes of storage and plays sweetsounding highres audio as well as all your old iTunes tracks.

CCTV SYSTEMS









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UNCOMMON SENSE

BY WILLIAM K GOCK

MERCEDES-BENZ GIVES THE CROSSOVER A STYLE MAKEOVER

Crossovers are the most logical consumer vehicles on the road. From solid fuel efficiency to decent cargo space, the CUV is designed for utility. Unfortunately, no man wants to be remembered for his utility, and this truth has made these intelligent choices the last resort among male car buyers. Enter the 2015 Mercedes-Benz GLA class, an attempt at sexy sensibleness. The curves and cues of the GLA mimic M-B's recent, fluid car designs more than its trapezoidal trucks. The suits have smartly opted to label this fresh little star a compact SUV rather than the dreaded C word, a stance we'll co-sign thanks to the ute's sport-minded stance and quick, nimble athleticism. Powered by a standard 208 hp turbo four-cylinder engine, the all-wheel-drive GLA250 sprints to 60 mph in a touch more than seven seconds and has the ability - via ECO start-stop technology - to cut off at red lights, saving its energy (and your money) for the long haul. If that's too rational, upgrade to the AMG-tuned variant, which pumps 355 horses and 332 foot-pounds of torque out of the same engine configuration and luxe trimmings (burled walnut, poplar wood), depending on how many option boxes you're willing to check.

STATS

MERCEDES-BENZ GLA CLASS

Engine: Two-liter turbo four | HP: 208 | Torque: 258 foot-pounds

Zero to 60: 7.1 seconds | Price: \$33,000 base





ROYAL GUIDANCE

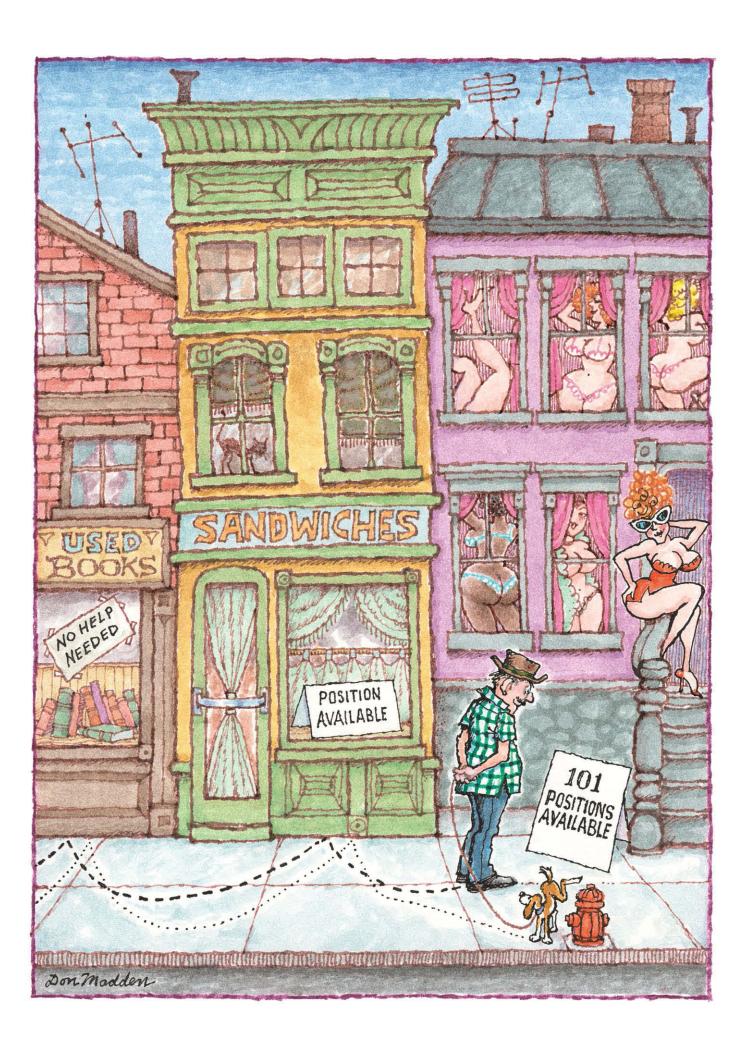
WHEN A SATELLITE TAKES THE WHEEL

Chauffeured life is not for everyone. Coach builder Rolls-Royce recognizes this and has moved your co-pilot skyward. The brand's innovative satellite-aided transmission debuted in the Wraith coupe and the refreshed Ghost Series II.

The technology, which has roots in Formula One motorsport engineering, according to Rolls-Royce product communications expert Andrew Boyle, uses current GPS data paired with a car's position and rate of travel to upshift or downshift accordingly. When the car is in motion, satellites "read" the road ahead as the onboard system analyzes your drive dynamic, propelling you through twists and turns in the most appropriate of eight gears. The goal



is not autonomous travel but rather to deliver "a luxurious, effortless, rapid journey." Let's call it a shift in driving.



ROLLING THUNDER

TEARING UP PAVEMENT ON THE NEW CROP OF COOL CRUISERS

hasing a narrow strip of blacktop to the distant horizon with nothing ahead of you but time, space and freedom. That's the idea behind the cruiser motorcycle, which offers instant entrée to a club of like-minded rebels. The cruiser is as definitively American as the cowboy and the muscle car, and this season a slew of new rides offers classic cruiser style with modern engineering. What was once a class of bike that tried to outdo itself – sacrificing performance and even safety in pursuit of a singular image – has been redefined with fast, capable machinery. We hammered everything out there; here are four of the



HARLEY LOW RIDER

In 1977 Harley invented the "factory custom" with the original Low Rider, a bike modified to follow customizing trends. Based on the Dyna, this new Low Rider

achieves something similar by dropping the seat height more than an inch and adding heaps of slick 1970s styling. **Stats:** 1,690 cc V-twin; \$14.199.



TRIUMPH THUNDERBIRD COMMANDER

The idea here is a cruiser feel with the European handling and performance that have made the Triumph range famous. Consider it a cruiser you can

ride hard. Triumph even fit its paralleltwin engine with a 270-degree crank to give it that uneven, V-twin rumble. **Stats:** 1,699 cc; \$15,699.

STAR BOLT

While previous entries from Star Yamaha's cruiser brand - have tried to reinvent the class's formula, the 2014 Bolt is revolutionary in its derivativeness. Star is open about which bike it has in its sights: the bestselling motorcycle in America, Harley's Sportster. The Bolt is remarkably similar to that definitive hog, with just an extra

dose of 21st century braking and handling prowess, enough to make it a more practical companion for everyday use. The air-cooled, fuel-injected 942 cc V-twin is plenty of muscle for most, while the overall package delivers in the

looks department. Shopping for a first bike or a practical commuting vehicle? Start here. For a bit of added cool factor, the R-Spec version - which includes a sweet woven leather seat, black fenders, additional color choices and blacked-out mirror backs - goes for just \$300 extra.





IMMACULATE COLLECTION

A HOT LAP WITH THE MAN BEHIND THE WORLD'S LARGEST MOTORCYCLE MUSEUM

George Barber launched his Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum in perfect the powered two-wheel machine. Located in Birmingham, Alabama, the 80,000-square-foot complex currently houses 1,400 recognized us as the world's largest motorcycle museum," Barber says. "We have gas-, diesel-, electric- and steam-powered bikes, and everything except the things that don't have motors." The fastest bike in the collection? "A Suzuki GSX1300R. It box. That's insane." Most valuable? "For me, the bikes John Surtees [the only person to win Grand Prix titles on two and four wheels] used to win his world championships in the 1950s. They're priceless to me." More than 200 different manufacturers are represented in the five-story collection, including 84 vintage Harleys and a selection of rare World War II bikes. The oldest? "Probably a 1902 Steffey. It's basically a bicycle started." If he could have only one, which would it be? "You can't have a favorite child, and all these bikes are my children. You know, if you listen, these bikes will talk to you. You get by these motorcycles.



DUCATI DIAVEL

Redefining the cruiser aesthetic, the Diavel is Ducati's fastest-accelerating and strongest-braking bike. The liquid-cooled V-twin is derived from

Ducati's superbike line, but the long wheelbase and low center of gravity are cruiser hallmarks in 21st century garb. **Stats**: 1,198 cc; \$20.995.





VACATION LIKE AN ITALIAN IN THE RUGGED FAR SOUTH OF THE COUNTRY, WHERE THE WINE IS STRONG AND THE WATER IS FINE

f vour idea of an Italian vacation means doing as the Romans do, then maybe it's time to turn your back on Tuscany and head down to the rugged coast of Puglia, Italy's boot heel. Although it clearly flickers on the Italophile radar, Puglia is, as of yet, an unspoiled Italian vacation destination where you can eat seafood pulled just hours earlier from the crystalline waters below, relax in outdoor bars and drive more than 500 miles of coastline road stretching along two seas. So catch a flight to Bari (Alitalia offers connecting flights through Milan and Rome), rent the Italian ride of your particular fantasy (budget allowing), whether it's a Lamborghini Aventador Roadster from Luxe of Italy or a Fiat 500 from Europear, and get ready to experience life

under a different Italian sun.

nta Maria

di Leuca

A road trip along the coast of Puglia starts, for all intents and purposes, in Polignano a Mare, an ancient fishing village perched high over the Adriatic Sea about 20 miles south of Bari. Feast on fried trialie (mullet)

the size of french fries at II Bastione restaurant and take a leisurely afternoon swim with the locals at the town's public beach. Sleep like a caveman at the 25room Hotel Grotta Palazzese (A), built into the limestone cliffs above the massive cave the town is famous for. Cars aren't necessary within Polignano's walls, so park your wheels outside and let your inner village dweller out.



Enjoy the gently winding roads that twist through groves of Italy's oldest olive trees to the 14th century city of Alberobello. This UNESCO World Heritage site is known for its whitewashed, conical-roofed, Hobbit-like houses called trulli (B) constructed using a prehistoric

mortarless building technique that was the original drywall. Head south and catch the Litoranea Salentina, or coast road, and make like an Italian film star as you cruise to Santa Maria di Leuca, the very tip of Italy's boot heel. The Pugliese call it fine terra ("end of the earth"), and they say that on a clear night vou can see the lights of Greece across the water.

GET PRIMITIVO

Don't make the rookie mistake of ordering Chianti. The local grape is the hearty red variety primitivo, which is the same as zinfandel.



After stopping for gelato in the ancient port city of Otranto, stretch your legs and your imagination on an hour-long walk deep into the magical Zinzulusa sea cave, one of the largest Italy has to offer. Enjoy a leisurely seafood lunch with the spray of the Adriatic kissing your face at the family-run Lo Scalo. In addition to delicious, simply prepared seafood, a gallery of framed photos on the restaurant's wall will prove you really are living the life of an Italian movie star. Too much wine? Lo Scalo also has apartments for rent.



"When the dollar goes down, I don't like it.... When the market goes down, I don't like it.... But you, Jennifer...!"

aromas with a hint of patchouli noir.

BACK IN TURN DOWN THE LIGHTS AND TURN **UP THE** HEAT WITH THESE **BOLD AND** SEDUCTIVE FALL PHOTOGRAPHY BY SATOSHI SELECTED BY JENNIFER RYAN JONES ARMANI code 1 | Armani Code Sport by Giorgio Armani, \$92 Wild mint and bright citrus are balanced by notes of sultry vetiver. 2 | L'Homme Sport by Yves Saint Laurent, \$85 Wood, amber and citrus complement one another in a powerful fragrance. **3 | Polo Black by Ralph Lauren,** \$78 This dramatic cologne combines herbal and tropical





















THE NEWS IS FULL OF CELEBRITIES AND THEIR DRUG PROBLEMS. ARE STARS REALLY MORE PRONE TO ADDICTION? THE ANSWER IS YES, AND THE REASONS MAY SURPRISE YOU



BY NEAL GABLER PHOTO BY DAN SAELINGER

So here is what everyone knows about Hollywood: People there often behave badly - sometimes so badly they pay the ultimate price. In the past year alone, Cory Monteith, Chris Kelly of Kris Kross and Philip Seymour Hoffman all died of overdoses, and a slew of celebrities - Josh Brolin, Zac Efron, Trace Adkins, David Cassidy, Chris Brown, Lindsay Lohan (again!) – got treatment for drug or alcohol problems. Most shocking, Robin Williams, who had struggled with drug and alcohol addiction for decades, committed suicide in August 2014 after a brief trip to rehab intended to keep him on the straight and narrow. Go back a decade, and the list of addicts reads like a Hollywood who's who. Of course by now it's an old story with a few minor variations. Sometimes it's barbiturates, sometimes barbiturates and alcohol, sometimes, as with Hoffman, heroin, though usually not in Hollywood (stars have access to better, legal stuff) and usually not at the age of 46 (heroin usually kills you sooner than that). Always there is the rehab that didn't stick and the DUIs, the bar fights, the mug shots, the empty hotel room or apartment.

Addiction experts are quick to tell you addiction isn't just a Hollywood problem; it's a national problem. According to a 2012 national survey from

the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, there are an estimated 23.9 million addicts in America - one in 10 people over the age of 12, about one in four if you include nicotine addiction - and more people die from drug overdoses each year than from auto accidents. Even at the tony Malibu rehab centers that cater to A-list entertainers, celebrities constitute no more than 15 percent of the clients, though they account for 100 percent of the headlines, and for a few of them, including Lindsay Lohan, addiction has superseded performance. Being addicted is what she does. So some of the seeming Hollywood drug epidemic, experts say, is largely a product of visibility. TMZ doesn't care about addicted truck drivers.

But only a part of it is visibility, because some things about Hollywood do seem to give rise to addiction – things that go all the way back to Wallace Reid, a silent-film star who died during morphine detox. Everyone seems to agree that the sources of addiction in the entertainment industry are complicated, with a whole lot of moving parts – a combination of biology, psychology and culture. In fact, there are so many

moving parts, you could almost devise an algorithm for Hollywood addiction.

Before we get to that algorithm, let's start at the beginning. When it comes to the course of addiction, it doesn't make any difference if you're a movie star or a plumber. In fact, most movie stars weren't movie stars when they began using. (Look at Hoffman and Williams.) Constance Scharff, research director of the Cliffside Malibu rehab center and a recovering addict herself, says the vast majority of addicts were exposed to drugs and alcohol as children or teenagers - Lohan and Drew Barrymore, to name two - though they didn't necessarily develop a dependency. The addiction can be, and usually is, dormant for years. Which, physically speaking, is where painkillers come in. One of the refrains of Hollywood addiction is that an actor or singer got hooked on painkillers. To the layman, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. What pain must they medicate for?

But experts say a lot of addiction is sparked by a legitimate medical reason and then escalates. Dr Timothy Fong,

You can attempt to escape the pressures and insecurities, or you can attempt to control them. In short, you can try to medicate your way out of the occupational hazards of the industry. At least you can for a while.

 $director\ of\ the\ UCLA\ Addiction\ Medicine$ Clinic, recounts the story of a patient of his, a studio head, who dabbled in alcohol when she was young. Years later, when she had her wisdom teeth extracted, she got a Vicodin prescription for the pain. As Fong describes it, "She said, 'Wow, I've never felt so good since I had alcohol back then. As soon as I had that first pill, I knew I was going to be off and running with this stuff." She blew through that first prescription, went back to the dentist, got another prescription - 'Oh, it's so painful' - blew through that, then started asking around on the set. People started giving them to her because she was the studio head. The rumor mill got started, 'Hey, she likes pills. You should bring her some pills. You might curry some favor." Indeed, the new formulations of these painkillers are so effective, the addictive process begins almost immediately, and when it does, it hits hard. Another doctor told me of patients who gobbled 50 to 60 Vicodin a day.

The proximate reason an addict takes drugs or drinks isn't all that mysterious. It makes him feel good – hell, it makes him feel more than good. Fong describes another patient of his, who said, "Every time I drink alcohol, I have more confidence. I feel energized. I feel invincible. Every time I go out there when I'm not drinking, I'm double-checking everything. I'm anxious. I'm stumbling over my words." The patient added, ironically, "I'm not as good as I normally am." A former addict puts it more simply: "The voices in our heads quiet." And we all realize that if it stayed that way, if the addict could continue in this euphoric state, there wouldn't be a problem. The problem, says the recovering addict, is that "it ends badly. The story always ends badly." It may take a few years, years in which the addict is constantly upping the ante as his body demands ever-higher dosages, but eventually the wheels come off. Another former addict states it more poetically: "Drugs put the soul to sleep."

The reason we aren't all wolfing down Vicodin, Percocet or OxyContin after we have our wisdom teeth extracted, or gulping down drinks or snorting lines, has a lot – roughly 50 percent for alcohol, 60 percent for cocaine and 70 percent for opiates – to do with genetics. Some people, perhaps

10 percent to 15 percent, according to Dr Greg Skipper, director of medical health services at the Promises rehab center in Malibu, are predisposed

to respond to drugs. It's a function of brain chemistry. They just go off. They don't have any choice.

But here's where show business makes its appearance. If there are genetically endowed characteristics that make one more susceptible to addiction, some of these same characteristics make one more likely to be drawn to show business and even to succeed in it. In effect, Hollywood is a community of train wrecks waiting to happen. According to Dr David Sack, chief executive of Promises and a psychiatrist, studies have shown a correlation between risk taking, which has a significant genetic component, and drug taking. "When you talk to actors," he says, "they frequently talk about having to take risks with their work, to emote or behave in ways that are uncomfortable or dangerous to them." A similar correlation exists between drug use and impulsivity, which psychiatrists define $not\,as\,acting\,on\,the\,spur\,of\,the\,moment\,but$ as not valuing a future reward. Performing, in which you are constantly moving from one thing to the next, is one of the few professions that invites you to focus on the here and now. Most people can't afford to do that.



Far more important than either of these is the high correlation between mental illness, which has a large genetic component, and addiction. Depression is so allied to addiction that doctors even have a name for the combination: dual diagnosis. Robin Williams suffered from deep depression. No one has studied the prevalence of mental illness specifically among entertainers any more than they have studied the prevalence of addiction in Hollywood, but, says Sack, "It is at least tempting to speculate that some of the mental disorders seem to have an unusual relationship to certain forms of creativity." Performing artists may have abnormalities that travel with addiction. (Studies have shown that top athletes also exhibit a higher incidence of depression as well as a higher degree of addiction than ordinary people.)

Finally, there are those areas in which the effects of drugs are actually seen by performer-users to be advantageous in a way they would not necessarily be to people in other, more workaday professions. "A lot of guys come in and want to be on their A- game seven days a week - confident, funny, charming, social," says Fong, because the industry celebrates and practically demands it. "The pathological thought there is, I must have it all." The more common comment among entertainer-users is that drugs lift their inhibitions, which of course they do. "They wouldn't have any street value if they didn't," says Fong. Some entertainers go so far as to say that drugs

are what enable them to perform. As Fong sees it, people take drugs for only two reasons: the obvious one, which is to get high and experience a pleasurable time, and the less obvious one, which is to feel normal, "to take away the feelings of suffering." He admits Hollywood puts a premium on both, which he believes is the reason addiction is so prevalent there. You can attempt to escape the pressures and insecurities, or you can attempt to control them. In short, you can try to medicate your way out of the occupational hazards of the industry.

At least you can for a while.



Even at 66, Michael Des Barres looks and sounds like a rock-and-roller, which is what he was and is as the lead vocalist for half a dozen bands over the years. He is lean, chiseled, his gray hair short and stylishly coiffed, his accent British, and he is dressed in black from head to toe. Most people in entertainment won't talk about addiction. Des Barres is one of the very few who will, and when he does, he knows whereof he speaks. "I've done every drug known to man or woman," he says, "have had every sexual experience known to man or woman." A good deal of that sybaritic lifestyle, he believes, is part of what he calls the "rockand-roll mythology." "How can you be a rock star if you're not fucked-up? That's like being a rock star with no music." Des Barres wound up living within a heightened persona that obscured his person. "I was in a state of euphoria for a couple of years," he says. "It felt perfect. I was fulfilling the rockBut then came the reckoning. After a two-day binge that began with Jack Daniel's and ended with Listerine, he looked in the mirror. "It didn't look anything like me. Bloated. My makeup was running. My hair was coiled. I had that moment of clarity." It was 1981. Des Barres quit drugs and alcohol cold, and he has been sober now for 33 years. He calls it a "divine thing."

He will be the first to tell you, though, that it isn't easy to be a sober rock star. "I was a leper. I went from being Aleister Crowley to Mr Rogers overnight – with a better wardrobe." Everyone, he says, encouraged drug taking, and that didn't end with the cocaine-fueled 1970s and 1980s. No matter how much drugs are stigmatized elsewhere, they still have a cool factor in Hollywood and are part of the culture and community there. Fong says he has young patients, aspiring actors, who admit to going to parties and doing a line with a writer or director to create a connection and advance their careers. And that's where Des Barres thinks Hollywood really is different from so much of the rest of America. It isn't just the lack of stigma. It's that Hollywood has enablers. Lots of them.

It begins with doctors. "Star-fucking doctors are on every corner of Beverly Hills," Des Barres says. Dr Damon Raskin, who was a child TV actor and is now an internist at Cliffside Malibu, agrees. "I think there is a problem with doctors who suck up to celebrities in this town. 'Oh, you need the Vicodin? I want to go to your concert.'" As a result, Raskin believes, "celebrities get worse medical care than you or myself." Skipper remembers getting a call from a doctor friend who had been contacted by a member of a famous singer's entourage



painkillers, even though the doctor had never seen the entertainer in his office. The doctor was tempted, and Skipper had to talk him out of writing it. After all, she was a star. The singer died of an overdose a month later.

But even worse enablers than doctors, Des Barres claims, are the managers and agents and entourage members, because they have a stake in the stars not going into rehab - in their continuing to work to earn money. They also have a stake in facilitating whatever the celebrity wants, because it is a way to hold on to their jobs. "Where are the people who say no?" Raskin asks. "They're just afraid they're going to get fired or be outcasts or not be part of the group." So just about nobody says no. Indeed, one of the appurtenances of Hollywood addiction is the "sober companion," who is hired by a manager to keep a star company while he or she performs. And the fact is, most entertainers can function well enough under the influence of drugs. "How is he going to do the tour and make \$50 million?" Des Barres asks. "Oh, we need a sober companion! The whole notion of a sober

companion is at odds with getting yourself straight through work and meditation and spiritual practices." And when the tour

or movie is over, the sober companion leaves. Such is drug addiction among the stars.



High up a hillside in Malibu, at the end of a winding road and across from the azure Pacific, is Cliffside Malibu, one of a handful of rehab centers with a wealthy clientele that includes occasional stars. It is quiet. It is always quiet at Cliffside. But Cliffside's founder and CEO, Richard Taite, is anything but quiet. Tall and athletic, he is animated, especially when talking about addiction. Taite, 48, like so many in the rehab business, is a recovering addict himself. "From 12 to 32," he says, "I never drew a sober breath. I never even fell asleep. I just passed out." There were six-month runs, he remembers, when he would smoke an ounce of cocaine a day and eat a Big Mac once a week just to stay alive. Eventually, in 2003, he sobered up and decided to open his own Malibu mansion - he had made a fortune in the hospital billing and collection business - as a sober-living center. A year

later he converted it into a rehab center.

As at Promises, Passages and other Malibu retreats, treatment at Cliffside doesn't come cheap. Taite charges \$73,000 a month for a private room, \$58,000 for a semiprivate one, and the recommended stay is usually three to four months. (Like most upscale LA centers, it is nearly always filled.) He has had so many celebrities during the facility's 10-year existence there is a sign warning patients when they might be in the line of sight of a paparazzo. It is a tough line to toe the line between being a celebrity and being a patient. Being treated like ordinary folk may be necessary to address the underlying causes of the addiction, but stars are stars, and they don't get a lot of tough love. Quite the contrary. They have their own network of therapists - four doctors, Taite says, who minister to nearly every big star. He adds, "If I told you the celebrities I see going in and out of my therapist's office, you'd fall down the hill." They have their own interventions, often conducted at a swanky Beverly Hills hotel, sometimes by Taite himself. They even have their own AA meetings, which are called "off-the-book," where they can

devised by the psychologist James Prochaska. While it is by no means exclusive to Hollywood, it certainly has application there. According to Prochaska, most addiction is trauma related, and most of that trauma is rooted in childhood - in neglect, abuse or loss. "I've worked with thousands of addicts and alcoholics," Constance Scharff, Cliffside's research director, says, "and I know one person who said, 'I had a really great childhood.'" Sack of Promises concurs, adding this Hollywood rider: Childhood abuse "may contribute to why performers are attracted to the creative arts, like maybe looking for redemption or acceptance or recognition they didn't get in childhood." Put another way, people who didn't get attention as children may be more likely to become professional attentiongetters, and the same emotional deficit may push them toward addiction. If anything, it is only worse for folks like Lohan and Efron, who may not even have had childhoods to speak of.

And here is the surprising thing. Although addiction almost always begins in childhood or adolescence, as many of us can

> attest from our own high school and college drinking, toking and even hard drug use, the vast majority of those abusers outgrow

years of watching binge their misbehavior -

"mature" out of it, as some experts put it. The recklessness of youth, the imposition of responsibility, the constraints of life are transformative, which is why the frat-boy beer guzzlers seldom turn into alcoholics. But not in Hollywood, where recklessness is often rewarded, irresponsibility is actually encouraged and the only real constraint is being so wasted one isn't able to work. That means addicted performers are always poised on the precipice. The industry's infantilism puts them there.

All it takes is a trigger - some stress, such as a failed romance or a career setback that reactivates the childhood trauma and leads to self-medication for relief. It doesn't take much. So when you think of stars as train wrecks waiting to happen, you're on the money. It doesn't make any difference how long they've been clean when the trigger is pulled. Hoffman had been sober for 23 years. Then he wasn't.



When it comes to the course of addiction, it doesn't make any difference if you're a movie star or a plumber. In fact, most movie stars weren't movie stars when they began using.

mingle with fellow stars.

You may think that with all these amenities, addicted celebrities would be lining up to enter rehab. But that's another thing about Hollywood addiction: The stars are their own best enablers. Few - virtually none - seek help on their own. They have to be forced into rehab by family, friends or their lawyer, typically the one member of the support group who doesn't work on commission. "I don't think I've had an actual entertainer call me for themselves," Taite says. "I've had the children, wives, girlfriends, cousins, brothers, sisters of every major movie star. I'm talking about the world's biggest-grossing movie stars ever. I get them all calling. But not for themselves." And why don't the stars call to institutionalize themselves? Because of those enablers, Taite says. Nobody in Hollywood talks truth to power. Cliffside, like the other rehab centers, gets CEOs, athletes, high-powered attorneys and physicians. But Hollywood, he says, "is the only industry I've seen where you can be drunk or an addict, act badly and still have everybody kissing your ass."

Taite subscribes to a theory of addiction

buy that Hollywood is all that different from the rest of America. Johnston is the two-time Emmy-winning actress from 3rd Rock From the Sun who is as hilarious describing the indignities of her past addiction as she was playing an alien. She has written a best-selling book about it, titled Guts, which refers not only to what it took for her to recover but also to the time she almost lost hers by splitting her insides with drugs. She is now eight years sober and has been traveling the country talking to other addicts, none of them celebrities, though she has had celebrities call and e-mail her for advice and to offer thanks. She's convinced Americans latch onto celebrity addicts as a way of pretending it's

just a Hollywood thing so they don't have to face the truth.

But that doesn't mean she believes performers don't have some predispositions

toward addiction, not because they are professional attention-getters but because they are professional targets. "You're asked to be vulnerable and open and be all these different people and cry at the drop of a hat," she says, "yet you're also supposed to be able to survive when people tell you you're ugly, you're fat, they hate you. To survive without medication or help is very difficult." Drugs, she admits, allowed her to mask her vulnerabilities – "to be large when I didn't want to be."

And Johnston says something else that other celebrity addicts echo: "Ambition is the best painkiller." While this certainly isn't true only of performers, it is more graphic with them. When they're rising, they're fueled by ambition. That is the drug – trying to be famous. Then, if they're lucky, as Johnston was, they succeed. "All of a sudden, everything was free," she recalls. "I had a huge home, I

was in Los Angeles, and I just was lost. I had nothing else to work for." And *that* is when her habit really kicked in.

Which leads to the algorithm. In varying degrees, genetic predisposition plus childhood trauma plus availability of drugs plus an emotional trigger plus encouragement or lack of discouragement is a pretty likely formula for addiction. Hollywood hits it on just about all cylinders. It is the disease of the lost in the industry of the lost.

"We all have this hole inside of us," Johnston says. "And we all try to fill it in some way. Some do it healthily. They write or they run or they have hobbies or whatever. Unfortunately, addicts find the easy road, which is really the satisfy it." Not to put too fine a point on it, but while it is easy to caricature addicted celebs as being self-indulgent and out of control, it is much harder to see them, even somebody like Lindsay Lohan, as people who don't have a clue who they are.

Johnston says that was the big change in her life: finding her identity. In addition to starring on the TV Land series *The Exes*, she now fills the emptiness by talking with addicts and lobbying for a sober high school in New York City. She is at peace and is confident she will stay that way. But experts say the relapse rate among entertainers is higher than the rate among non-entertainers, which is a very high rate itself – as high as 60 percent – and

there are lots of reasons. There is the money that makes drugs accessible and the fawning that destigmatizes drug use, alongside the critical scrutiny of one's work that attacks one's vulnerabilities, the

ongoing pressures of carrying a project that costs tens of millions of dollars and, perhaps above all, the enablement. Stars are more likely to leave rehab before the hole-filling process is complete. Although Richard Taite says he has never gotten a call from an agent or manager asking him to institutionalize an addicted star, he gets calls from them all the time begging him to release stars after a short stay. Too much is riding on them to keep them tucked away in Malibu.

One thing those who believe in Hollywoodaddiction exceptionalism and those who don't may agree on is that whatever else it is, Hollywood is America writ large. Everything there may be more dramatic, more excessive, more expensive, more exposed, but it is all just more. In the end, no matter how we try to deny it, the awful truth is that Hollywood is us, which means that though its addictions may be another form of entertainment for jaded Americans, they are really no different from our own. Take away Lindsay Lohan's beauty and notoriety, and she's just another pretty young girl trying to find herself. Take away Philip Seymour Hoffman's enormous talent and recognition, and he's just another middle-aged man in a desperate midlife crisis. Take away Robin Williams's manic humor, and he's just another depressive staring into the abyss.

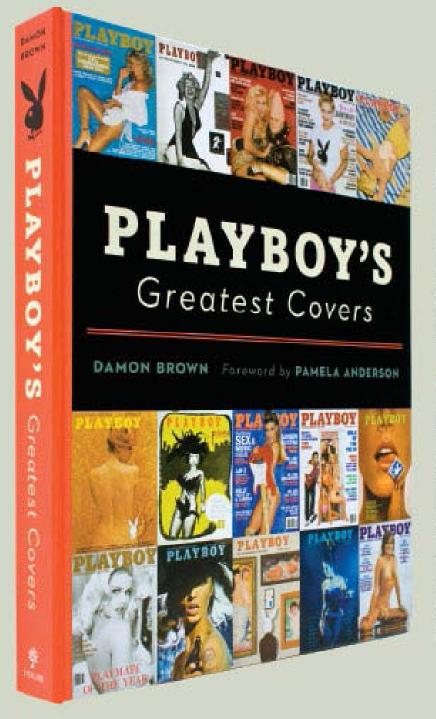
When it comes to the course of addiction, it doesn't make any difference if you're a movie star or a plumber. In fact, most movie stars weren't movie stars when they began using.

hard road." She says this isn't just an addict thing. It's a life thing. Johnston says, "Perhaps this process of filling the hole is what life is really about." Though it may sound like psychobabble, the hole, of course, is that emptiness inside that can only be filled with identity - with knowing who you are. The trouble with performers, especially young performers, is that they are practically in the loss-of-identity business. They may be less likely to know who they are, less likely to be grounded, than most other people, which means the holes in Hollywood may be bigger than holes elsewhere - dug deeper by those childhood traumas, those vulnerabilities, insecurities and disappointments. The hole alienates you from other people, even as it alienates you from yourself. Johnston will tell you that is the pain the painkillers are really meant to dull: the pain of that gaping hole. (That is also why opiates are the Hollywood

drug of choice.) "You are attempting to fill an unfillable hole," Des Barres says. "There's not enough water in the Pacific Ocean, not enough coke in all of Peru to



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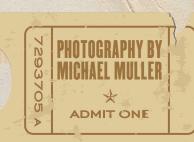
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THE STAR OF *About a boy* explains the TV business and the plight of the tall man

Q1

PLAYBOY: On About a Boyyou play a bachelor who becomes a surrogate father to an 11-year-old boy. Have you learned to be a better dad by playing a half-assed parent?

WALTON: In a way I've learned what not to do. For instance, Will, my character, takes Marcus to a party that basically has prostitutes at it. I'm definitely not going to do that as a parent. But in a weird way Will can be a good dad. A lot of people talk to kids like they're idiots. Despite the fact that Marcus is half his size and prepubescent, Will talks to him as an equal. I try to do that with my kids. When I'm telling my two-year-old that you don't throw a dish on the floor, I explain it as if she's

a 25-year-old who hasn't quite figured it out yet. This method isn't working at the moment, but I'm going to stick with it.

Q2

Playboy: Your co-star Benjamin Stockham is 14 years old. Do you treat him as a peer?

WALTON: I do, yeah. And it's easy, because he acts like a 70-year-old man. He's very smart. When we're on set, he's either studying or arguing with adults, using deductive reasoning and powerful logic. He outwits me constantly. I've been studying Socrates just so I can keep up with him. Next time I see him, I'm going to bust out some old-school argumentative rhetoric on his ass.





Q3

PLAYBOY: About a Boy was originally a novel and then a 2002 movie starring Hugh Grant. Convince us your show is better with some trash-talking.

WALTON: Hugh has such a charming way about him. But he has that quintessential butt-cut floppy hair. It's not good. It really does look like buttocks, don't you think? I need to talk to the hairstylists on our show to see if we can do an ode to Hugh. I'd like to have one episode where I inexplicably have his butt-cut hairstyle. Let's see if Hugh and I can go toe-to-toe.

$\mathbf{Q4}$

PLAYBOY: TV is unpredictable. Your show - any show - could be canceled at any time, so let's cover our bases. First, let's assume Abouta Boy is doing well. To what do you attribute its amazing success?

WALTON: It really comes down to the stories and the writing. The characters are relatable, and it's hard not to fall in love with them. That's the main reason the show is such a massive hit. It's because it balances laugh-out-loud humor with gut-wrenching, heartwarming stories. It just feels like you've gotten a big sweet hug at the end of your 30 minutes. And we all want hugs, right?

Q5

PLAYBOY: Okay, now the less sunny option: About a Boy is canceled. What happened?

WALTON: Well, it's one of those things where the writing was so good and so sophisticated that people just didn't understand it. We were ahead of our time. I mean, it's a shame, but I guess people in America just want to turn on their TVs and not think.

Q6

PLAYBOY: Over the past decade you've starred in six TV shows that were quickly canceled. Are you cursed?

WALTON: It really did feel like that for a while. But if you look at the numbers, only one in 10 series goes on to a second season. And we've made it to two seasons with About a Boy. It's my seventh show, so in a way I beat the odds. Mathematically, I'm a lucky guy.

PLAYBOY: Did you have a plan B? If the TV career went down in flames, how would you make a living?

WALTON: I had two plan Bs. For a while I was convinced I was going to become an investment banker, because I went to Brown and a lot of my friends work on Wall Street. There was another time, after a long drought, when I seriously considered going into the cold-calling business - basically a telemarketer. I went in and started learning how to cold-call, which is just about the most depressing thing you can learn to do. All day you're being hung up on by people who hate your guts.

dining me; this is so sweet. But it was because she was planning to break the news to him that not only was she pregnant again, but she was carrying twins. I'm pretty sure the evening ended with him storming out of the restaurant.

Q9

PLAYBOY: What kind of psychological abuse did your sisters inflict on you?

WALTON: I can't even get into it, because they have lives and I don't want to tarnish their good reputations. But on the very light side, they'd do things like pin me down, let their spit dribble inches from my face and then slurp it back up. They'd be having trouble with the boys at school, so they'd take out their frustrations on their cute little brother who had glasses. We're not talking anything illegal, but we're definitely talking things that were weird. They'd cross-dress me and take pictures, and I always looked super happy, which is really confusing.

Q10

PLAYBOY: You played Jesus in a church pageant when you were four years old. Did it give you a messiah complex?

WALTON: Not

really, but it was a

great lesson in comedy. I took it very seriously. It was a retelling of some Gospel story, and I was supposed to be Jesus pulling on a big net of fish. It weighed like 3,000 pounds and was really hard to pull up, but I put everything I had into it. I was intensely focused. I guess the congregation was expecting something different. A four-year-old goes up there, he should be shy and giggling and not really that into it. But I was fully committed to the task. They started laughing. I had no idea why they were laughing. I wasn't trying to be funny; I was just trying to lift this goddamn net of fish. And that's really when comedy works best, you know? You can't be trying to be funny. As an adult actor, sometimes I muddle it up by overthinking things. I try to remember, What would four-year-old Jesus do?

Q11

PLAYBOY: You were also in a ninth-grade production of The Taming of the Shrew, in which you played Petruchio, a character who has also been famously portrayed by Peter O'Toole, Richard Burton, John Cleese and Morgan Freeman. How did your performance compare?

WALTON: I'm not going to get cocky and claim I was just as good. But it was close. I was 14, and I'm pretty sure my voice hadn't changed yet. I don't think those guys knew how to do a prepubescent Petruchio, but I sure did. The plot is quite sexual, so that made it even more confusing that my voice was high-pitched and girlie. I'm glad there's zero video footage. I made sure of that.

Q12

PLAYBOY: You're six-foot-four, which is ridiculously tall. Have you ever had problems kissing shorter actresses or shorter women in general?

WALTON: I never think of it as an issue, because I can just lean down and do it. But when you're kissing on camera, it becomes an issue visually. It looks like a skinny dinosaur creature is trying to kiss someone. It does not look like a classic romantic kiss. If an actress is five-foot-three and I don't bend down, she'll probably be kissing my lower sternum. If she stands on an apple box while wearing a nice fourinch stiletto, we're in business.

Q13

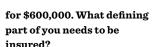
PLAYBOY: When did you become a giant? Were you a tall kid?

WALTON: It happened when I was 13. In one year I shot up eight inches. I went from five-foot-four to six feet. The doctor examined me and said I was going to keep growing like that. He predicted I'd grow to a minimum of six-foot-nine. Which, as a teenager, was devastating. I felt like a freak. I walked out of his office and just sat in my mom's car and cried. But then I started lifting weights and smoking a lot of pot, and my growth spurt slowed down. It all worked out.

Q14

PLAYBOY: Many celebrities have taken out insurance policies on their famous assets. Fred Astaire insured his legs for \$75,000

each. Dolly Parton insured her breasts



It balances laugh-out-loud humor with gut-wrenching,

heartwarming stories. It just feels like you've gotten a big

sweet hug at the end of your 30 minutes. And we all want

hugs, right?

WALTON: I have a Cro-Magnon forehead, so I don't think I'd insure that. According to my wife I need to insure my eyebrows, my lips and my hair, in that order. Wouldn't that be easy insurance fraud? I could just shave off my eyebrows, right? Cash in on the policy? I guess the lips wouldn't be easy. It would be hard to be a lead actor if I didn't have lips. Those are tough to graft back on.

Q15

PLAYBOY: One of your first jobs was selling knives. You were the number one knife salesman for Cutco for one month in 2003. Do you remember your sales pitch? WALTON: Oh yeah. Are you



currently enjoying your knives? Well, let me tell you something: The most dangerous thing in the kitchen is a dull knife. A lot of the extra effort you use to cut things is actually what makes the knife go askew, and you cut yourself. What you really need is 440-gauge, stainless-steel, triple-rivet technology in a thermo-resin handle. Because without those things, you're going to be doing a lot of slipping around. And honestly, if it isn't a Cutco knife, you're just playing with fire. We could start you out with a Studio set, which is a nice beginner. It won't cost you more than a couple hundred bucks, and I'll even throw in the Super Shears, which can cut a penny and are dishwasher safe.

Q16

PLAYBOY: Wow. That's pretty impressive. Were you ever tempted to sell knives during an audition?

WALTON: I actually did. I probably owe my whole acting career to knives. I was in this off-off-Broadway play called *One Day on Wall Street*. A Fox executive came and saw it and got me a meeting with a casting executive. I sat down with her and we started talking. At the time I was pretty broke, so I was trying to sell knives to any person I saw, and she was no different. She liked the pitch so much she bought a set of knives *and* she gave me a \$75,000 holding deal at Fox, which meant they flew me out to auditions in Los Angeles.

Q17

PLAYBOY: Amanda Peet has called you "George Clooney mixed with Matt Dillon." Are those the two actors you'd pick to best describe you?

WALTON: Maybe there's some similarity in the eyebrows. Both of those actors have bushy eyebrows. The comparison I get most often is C Thomas Howell mixed with some

If an actress is five-foot-three and I don't bend down, she'll probably be kissing my lower sternum. If she stands on an apple box while wearing a nice four-inch stiletto, we're in business.

Howell mixed with some Ace Ventura, because of the hair. I traveled to Italy once, and the owners of this small restaurant on Ischia – a tiny island off the coast of Italy

- were convinced I was Jim Carrey's brother. Not just convinced, they demanded that I was Jim Carrey's brother. They made me take pictures with the entire staff in the restaurant. So I guess the answer to your question is, I look exactly like Jim Carrey's brother.

Q18

PLAYBOY: You've been shirtless a lot, from the Christina Aguilera film *Burlesque* to several episodes of *About a Boy*. Do you do anything special to make sure your torso is screen-ready?

WALTON: In the case of *Burlesque*, I wasn't too disciplined about working out prior to that movie. I remember walking into the trailer and seeing Stanley Tucci sitting there without a shirt, just completely jacked. The guy is shredded. We had a morning-after scene together where we're both shirtless, and I made the call right then and there that my character had to wear a blanket for the entire scene. For *About a Boy* I have a no-shirtless clause in season two, so now I can eat without having to worry. But there are ways. When I did *Think Like a Man Too*, all the guys in that movie were doing push-ups the entire time. We're talking thousands of push-ups a day as a group, just getting

nice and disco pumped for every single take. If you ever see an actor in a shirtless scene where his face is bright red and he's breathing hard even though he's supposed to be relaxed, you know what happened right before the cameras started rolling.

Q19

PLAYBOY: You made out with Zooey Deschanel in a bathroom stall on *New Girl*.

WALTON: Zooey's a friend of mine now, but that was literally shot on day one. It was like, "Hey, nice to meet you." *Aaaaaand* action. Two and a half minutes after shaking her hand for the first time we're slamming up against a bathroom stall. That was very weird. I've done a few kissing scenes, but I've never had to do the – *ugh*, I cringe just to think about it – the full sex scene. I honestly don't know how people do it. I know it's super technical and whatever, but I don't know how graphic I can... I guess this is PLAYBOY, but to mimic the act of penetration makes my skin just... It gives me goose bumps. *Ugh*.

Q20

PLAYBOY: What's the best piece of wisdom you've ever received that you've actually used?

WALTON: It's a cliché, but it boils down to this: Figure out what you love to do the most and do only that. Also, no one cares what you do in your 20s. They really don't. So take as many risks and stupid chances as you want. But you mean the best wisdom I've actually used in my life? I met this former Hells Angel, a recovering crack addict, who explained to me in a very gruff voice [rasps], "Every man needs 10 hugs a day to be happy." So

I've tried to do that.
Ten hugs a day. And
for the most part, I've
done it. It gets a little
awkward when you're
on a TV show and you
see the same people
every day. They start

to get suspicious, but what are you going to do? I gotta get those 10 hugs a day. Sometimes I'll just hug my stand-in about five times. It really does make you feel better.

























The Classic Interview: SINATRA

A candid conversation with the acknowledged king of showbiz. Highlights from the February 1963 interview

n an age of superstars, Frank Sinatra is generally conceded to be the biggest of them all. One of the box-office giants of the screen, the highest-paid nightclub performer in show business, among the all-time top recording artists of popular or classical music, seven-time winner of PLAYBOY's All-Star Jazz Poll - including the 1963 award, announced on page 81 – as the favorite male vocalist of both readers and fellow musicians. He is also one of the biggest of the businessman-stars (with a \$25,000,000 empire girdling the entertainment world from such lucrative concerns as Reprise Records to Lake Tahoe's Cal-Neva Lodge), first-name friend of Presidents, unchallenged titleholder as the most controversial figure in show business and lately - to the surprise of many fans and critics alike - self-effacing philanthropist and goodwill ambassador abroad, giving currency to talk of a "New Sinatra."

It was in search of the real Sinatra - new, old or simply mature - that PLAYBOY recently approached the press-shy star with a request for an exclusive interview. Rightly refusing to waste his time with predictable small talk, Sinatra agreed to sit down with us only on the condition that we "talk turkey, not trivia," that we attempt to reach the man behind the image, to elicit his deepest feelings and reflections on the things which move and motivate him as a human being Reassuring him that this very aim is the basic premise and prerequisite of the "PLAYBOY Interview," we gladly agreed. We then spent an entire week with Sinatra as he ambled easily through the breakneck business schedule that has become his normal routine - answering our questions between takes on the set of Come Blow Your Horn, his latest picture for Paramount; in his Dual-Ghia en route home from the studio; during breaks at a Reprise recording session with Count Basie; in corridors

heading to and from staff summit meetings on upcoming movie-record-night-club projects; even for an unexpected hour in his Beverly Hills home following the abortive Liston-Patterson fight, which Sinatra had arranged to pipe in on closed-circuit TV for a group of friends (including Dean Martin, Billy Wilder and Los Angeles' Mayor Samuel W Yorty), invited at \$100 a seat earmarked for SHARE, a favorite Sinatra charity.

The conversation that emerged from these catchas-catch-can taping sessions is a courageous public declaration of private convictions from a major figure in a business wherein most stars seem concerned less with earning good reviews for their performances than with avoiding offense in their personal lives. Many people will be shocked by what he has to say, but many more, we aver, will feel that the candor of his insights adds a new dimension to their understanding of the complex, articulate and thoughtful man who is the chief executive of his profession.







PHOTOGRAPHY BY LORENZO AGIUS

Being an 18-karat manic-depressive and having lived a life of violent emotional contradictions, I have, perhaps, an over-acute capacity for sadness as well as elation.

I can't help myself. If the song is a lament at the loss of love, I get an ache in my gut. I feel the loss myself and I cry out the loneliness, the hurt and the pain that I feel.

I'm not unmindful of man's seeming need for faith. I'm for anything that gets you through the night, be it prayer, tranquilizers or a bottle of Jack Daniel's.

PLAYBOY: Frank, in the 20 years since you left the Tommy Dorsey band to make your name as a solo singer, you've deepened and diversified your talents with a variety of concurrent careers in related fields. But so far, none of these aptitudes and activities has succeeded in eclipsing your gifts as a popular vocalist. So why don't we begin by examining Sinatra, the singer?

SINATRA: OK, deal.

PLAYBOY: Many explanations have been offered for your unique ability – apart from the subtleties of style and vocal equipment – to communicate the mood of a song to an audience. How would you define it?

SINATRA: I think it's because I get an audience involved, personally involved in a song – because I'm involved myself. It's not something I do deliberately; I can't help myself. If the song is a lament at the loss of love, I get an ache in my gut. I feel the loss myself and I cry out the loneliness, the hurt and the pain that I feel.

PLAYBOY: Doesn't any good vocalist "feel" a song? Is there such a difference...

SINATRA: I don't know what other singers

feel when they articulate lyrics, but being an 18-karat manic-depressive and having lived a life of violent emotional contradictions, I have an over-acute

I'm for decency – period. I'm for anything and everything that bodes love and consideration for my fellow man. But when lip service to some mysterious deity permits bestiality on Wednesday and absolution on Sunday – cash me out.

God. But I don't believe in a personal God to

capacity for sadness as well as elation. I know what the cat who wrote the song is trying to say. I've been there — and back. I guess the audience feels it along with me. They can't help it. Sentimentality, after all, is an emotion common to all humanity.

PLAYBOY: Of the thousands of words which have been written about you on this subject, do you recall any which have accurately described this ability? SINATRA: Most of what has been written about me is one big blur, but I do remember being described in one simple word that I agree with. It was in a piece that tore me apart for my personal behavior, but the writer said that when the music began and I started to sing, I was "honest." That says it as I feel it. Whatever else has been said about me personally is unimportant. When I sing, I believe. I'm honest. If you want to get an audience with you, there's only one way. You have to reach out to them with total honesty and humility. This isn't a grandstand play on my part. I've discovered and you can see it in other entertainers - when they don't reach out to the audience, nothing happens. You can be the most artistically perfect performer in the world, but an audience is like a broad - if you're indifferent, endsville. That

goes for any kind of human contact: a politician on television, an actor in the movies or a guy and a gal. That's as true in life as it is in art.

PLAYBOY: From what you've said, it seems that we'll have to learn something of what makes you tick as a man in order to understand what motivates you as an entertainer. Would it be all right with you if we attempt to do just that — by exploring a few of the fundamental beliefs which move and shape your life?

SINATRA: Look, pal, is this going to be an ocean cruise or a quick sail around the harbor? Like you, I think, I feel, I wonder. I know some things, I believe in a thousand things and I'm curious about a million more. Be more specific.

PLAYBOY: All right, let's start with the most basic question there is: Are you a religious man? Do you believe in God? SINATRA: Well, that'll do for openers. I think I can sum up my religious feelings in a couple of paragraphs. First, I believe in you and me. I'm like Albert Schweitzer and Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein in that I have a respect for life — in any form. I believe in nature, in the birds, the sea, the sky, in everything I can see or that there is *real* evidence for. If these things are what you mean by God, then I believe in

at Alexandria, who perpetrated the Inquisition in Spain, who burned the witches at Salem. Over 25,000 organized religions flourish on this planet, but the followers of each think all the others are miserably misguided and probably evil as well. In India, they worship white cows, monkeys and a dip in the Ganges. The Moslems accept slavery and prepare for Allah, who promises wine and revirginated women. And witch doctors aren't just in Africa. If you look in the LA papers of a Sunday morning, you'll see the local variety advertising their wares like suits with two pairs of pants.

PLAYBOY: Hasn't religious faith just as often served as a civilizing influence? **SINATRA:** Remember that leering, cursing lynch mob in Little Rock reviling a meek, innocent little 12-year-old Negro girl as she tried to enroll in public school? Weren't they or most of them – devout churchgoers? I detest the two-faced who pretend liberality but are practiced bigots in their own mean little spheres. I didn't tell my daughter whom to marry, but I'd have broken her back if she had had big eyes for a bigot. As I see it, man is a product of his conditioning, and the social forces which mold his morality and conduct - including racial prejudice - are influenced more by material things like food and economic

> necessities than by the fear and awe and bigotry generated by the high priests of commercialized superstition. Now don't get me wrong. I'm for decency – period. I'm for anything and everything

that bodes love and consideration for my fellow man. But when lip service to some mysterious deity permits bestiality on Wednesday and absolution on Sunday – cash me out.

PLAYBOY: But aren't such spiritual hypocrites in a minority? Aren't most Americans fairly consistent in their conduct within the precepts of religious doctrine?

SINATRA: I've got no quarrel with men of decency at any level. But I can't believe that decency stems only from religion. And I can't help wondering how many public figures make avowals of religious faith to maintain an aura of respectability. Our civilization, such as it is, was shaped by religion, and the men who aspire to public office anyplace in the free world must make obeisance to God or risk immediate opprobrium. Our press accurately reflects the religious nature of our society, but you'll notice that it also carries the articles and advertisements of astrology and hokey Elmer Gantry revivalists. We, in America, pride ourselves on freedom of the press, but every day I see, and so do you, this kind of dishonesty and distortion not only in this area but in reporting - about guys like me, for instance, which is of minor importance except to me; but also in reporting world news. How

whom I look for comfort or for a natural on the next roll of the dice. I'm not unmindful of man's seeming need for faith. I'm for anything that gets you through the night, be it prayer, tranquilizers or a bottle of Jack Daniel's. But to me, religion is a deeply personal thing in which man and God go it alone together, without the witch doctor in the middle. The witch doctor tries to convince us that we have to ask God for help, to spell out to him what we need, even to bribe him with prayer or cash on the line. Well, I believe that God knows what each of us wants and needs. It's not necessary for us to make it to church on Sunday to reach Him. You can find Him anyplace. And if that sounds heretical, my source is pretty good: Matthew, Five to Seven, The Sermon on the Mount.

PLAYBOY: You haven't found any answers for yourself in organized religion?

SINATRA: There are things about organized religion which I resent. Christ is revered as the Prince of Peace, but more blood has been shed in His name than any other figure in history. You show me one step forward in the name of religion and I'll show you a hundred retrogressions. Remember, they were men of God who destroyed the educational treasures

can a free people make decisions without facts? If the press reports world news as they report about me, we're in trouble.

PLAYBOY: Are you saying that... SINATRA: No, wait, let me finish. Have you thought of the chance I'm taking by speaking out this way? Can you imagine the deluge of crank letters, curses, threats and obscenities I'll receive after these remarks gain general circulation? Worse, the boycott of my records, my films, maybe a picket line at my opening at the Sands. Why? Because I've dared to say that love and decency are not necessarily concomitants of religious fervor.

PLAYBOY: If you think you're stepping over the line, offending your public or perhaps risking economic suicide, shall we cut this off now, erase the tape and start over along more antiseptic lines? SINATRA: No, let's let it run. I've thought this way for years, ached to say these things. Whom have I harmed by what I've said? What moral defection have I suggested? No, I don't want to chicken out now. Come on, pal, the clock's running.

PLAYBOY: All right, then, let's move on to another delicate subject:

disarmament. How do you feel about the necessity and possibility of achieving it? SINATRA: Well, that's like apple pie and mother – how can you be against

it? After all, despite the universal and unanimous assumption that both powers — Russia and the United States — already have stockpiled more nuclear weaponry than is necessary to vaporize the entire planet, each power continues to build, improve and enlarge its terrifying arsenal. For the first time in history, man has developed the means with which to expunge all life in one shuddering instant. And, brother, no one gets a pass, no one hides from this one. But the question is not so much whether disarmament is desirable or even whether it can be achieved, but whether — if we were able to achieve it — we would be better off, or perhaps infinitely worse

PLAYBOY: Are you suggesting that disarmament might be detrimental to peace?

SINATRA: Yes, in a certain very delicate sense. Look, I'm a realist, or at least I fancy myself one. Just as I believe that religion doesn't always work, so do I feel that disarmament may be completely beyond man's capacity to live with. Let's forget for a moment the complex problems we might face in converting from a cold war to a peace economy. Let's examine disarmament in terms of man's political, social and philosophical

conditioning. Let's say that somehow the UN is able to achieve a disarmament program acceptable to all nations. Let's imagine, a few years from now, total global disarmament. But imagine as well the gnawing doubts, suspicions and nerve-wracking tensions which must, inevitably, begin to fill the void: The fear that the other side - or perhaps some third power - is secretly arming or still holding a few bombs with which to surprise and overcome the other. But I firmly believe that nuclear war is absolutely impossible. I don't think anyone in the world wants a nuclear war - not even the Russians. They, and we, and the nth countries - as nuclear strategists refer to future nuclear powers – face the incontrovertible certainty of lethal retaliation for any nuclear strike. I can't believe for a moment that the idiot exists in any nation that will push the first button – not even accidentally. PLAYBOY: You foresee no possibility of

world war or of effective disarmament? SINATRA: I'm not an industrialist or an economist. I know I'm way out of my depth when I attempt even to comprehend the complexity of shifting the production of a country from war to peace. But if somehow

all those involved in production of implements

For the first time in history, man has developed the means with which to expunge all life in one shuddering instant. And, brother, no one gets a pass, no one hides from this one.

of destruction were willing to accept reason as well as reasonable profit, I think that a shift in psychology might be possible. And if this were to happen, I believe that the deep-seated terror in the hearts of most people, due to the constant threat of total destruction, would disappear. The result would be a more positive, less greedy, less selfish and more loving approach to survival. I can tell you this much from personal experience and observation: Hate solves no problems. It only creates them. But listen, you've been asking me a lot of questions, so let me ask you a question I posed to Mike Romanoff the other night. You know, Mike is quite a serious thinker. When we spend an evening together, we play an intellectual chess game touching on all topics, including those we are discussing here. Anyway, I asked Mike what would happen if a summit meeting of all the leaders in every country in the world was called, including Red China, at the UN. Further suppose that each leader brings with him his top aides: Kennedy brings Rusk, Khrushchev brings Gromyko, Mao brings Chou. All these cats are together in one room, then - boom! Somebody blows up the mother building. No more leaders. No more deputies. The question I asked Mike, and the one I ask

you, is: What would happen to the world? **PLAYBOY: You tell us.**

SINATRA: I told Mike I thought it might be the only chance the world has for survival. But Mike just shook his head and said, "Frank, you're very sick." Maybe so. Until someone lights the fuse, however, I think that continuation of cold war preparedness might be more effective to maintain the peace than the dewyeyed notion of total disarmament. I also wonder if "total" disarmament includes chemical and bacteriological weapons – which, as you know, can be just as lethal as nuclear weapons. Card players have a saying: "It's all right to play if you keep your eyes on the deck" – which is another way of saying, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

PLAYBOY: Do you feel, then, that nuclear testing should be continued? SINATRA: Absolutely not. I think it's got to stop, and I think it will stop – because it has to stop. The name-calling in the UN and the finger pointing at peace conferences is just a lot of diplomatic bull. Both sides have to live on this planet, and leaders in all countries know that their children and grandchildren have to live here, too. I suspect that when the limits

of strontium 90 in the atmosphere get really dangerous, scientists in both camps will persuade the politicians to call a final halt to testing – probably at

precisely the same time, with no urging from the other side.

PLAYBOY: You spoke a moment ago of the fear and suspicion that might nullify any plan for lasting and effective disarmament. Isn't continuing nuclear preparedness – with or without further testing – likely to engender these emotions on an even more dangerous scale?

SINATRA: Fear is the enemy of logic. There is no more debilitating, crushing, self-defeating, sickening thing in the world - to an individual or to a nation. If we continue to fear the Russians, and if they continue to fear us, then we're both in big trouble. Neither side will be able to make logical, reasoned decisions. I think, however, that their fear and concern over the ideological balance of power in some areas is far from irrational. Our concern over a Sovietized Cuba 90 miles from Key West, for instance, must be equated with Russian concern over our missile bases surrounding them. It is proper that we should be deeply concerned, but we must be able to see their side of the coin - and not let this concern turn into fear on either side.

PLAYBOY: On a practical level, how

would you combat communist expansion into areas such as Cuba, Laos and the emerging African nations?

SINATRA: It strikes me as being so ridiculously simple: Stop worrying about communism. Just get rid of the conditions that nurture it. Sidestepping Marxian philosophy and dialectical vagaries, I think that communism can fester only wherever and whenever it is encouraged to breed – not just by the communists themselves, but by depressed social and economic conditions. And we can always count on the communists to exploit those conditions. Poverty is probably the greatest asset the communists have. Wherever it exists, anyplace in the world, you have a potential communist breeding ground. It figures that if a man is frustrated in a material sense, his family hungry, he suffers, he broods and he becomes susceptible to the blandishments of any ideology that promises to take him off the hook.

PLAYBOY: Do you share with the American Right Wing an equal concern about the susceptibility of our own country to communist designs?

SINATRA: Well, if you're talking about that poor, beaten, dehumanized, discriminated-

against guy in some blighted Tobacco Road down in the South, he's certainly in the market for offers of self-improvement. But you can't

make me believe that a machinist in Detroit, ending a 40-hour week, climbing into his '63 Chevy, driving to a steak barbecue behind his \$25,000 home in a tree-lined subdivision, about to begin a weekend with his well-fed,

got for a Party card. In America – except for tiny pockets of privation which still persist Khrushchev has as much chance of succeeding as he has of making 100 straight passes at the crap table.

well-clothed family, is going to trade what he's

PLAYBOY: In combating communist expansion into underdeveloped areas here and abroad, what can we do except to offer massive material aid and guidance of the kind we've been providing since the end of World War

SINATRA: I don't know. I'm no economist. I don't pretend to have much background in political science. But this much I know: Attending rallies sponsored by 110-percent anti-Communist cultists or donning white sheets and riding with the Klan - the one that's spelled with a "K" - isn't the answer. All I know is that a nation with our standard of living, with our Social Security system, TVA,

farm parity, health plans and unemployment insurance can afford to address itself to the cancers of starvation, substandard housing, educational voids and second-class citizenship that still exist in many backsliding areas of our own country. When we've cleaned up these blemishes, then we can go out with a clean conscience to see where else in the world we can help. Hunger is inexcusable in a world where grain rots in silos and butter turns rancid while being held for favorable commodity indices.

PLAYBOY: Is American support of the UN one of the ways in which we can uplift global economic conditions?

SINATRA: It seems to me that a lot of us consider the UN a private club – ours, of course - with gentlemen's agreements just like any other exclusive club. Only instead of excluding a person, a race or a religion, the members of the UN have the power to exclude entire nations. I don't happen to think you can kick 800,000,000 Chinese under the rug and simply pretend that they don't exist. Because they do. If the UN is to be truly representative, then it must accept all the nations of the world. If it doesn't represent the united nations of

in Moscow starts selling bikinis, we've got a fighting chance, because that means the girls are interested in being girls and the boys are going to stop thinking about communes and begin thinking connubially. I've always had a theory that whenever guys and gals start swinging, they begin to lose interest in conquering the world. They just want a comfortable pad and stereo and wheels, and their thoughts turn to the good things of life – not to war. They loosen up, they live and they're more apt to let live. Dig?

PLAYBOY: We dig.

SINATRA: You know, I'd love to visit Russia, and sometime later, China, too. I figure the more I know about them and the more they know about me, the better chance we have of living in the same world in peace. I don't intend to go there with a mission, to sell the American way of life: I'm not equipped to get into that kind of discussion about government. But I'd love to go and show them American music. I'd take Count Basie and Ella Fitzgerald with me and we'd do what we do best. We'd wail up a storm with real American jazz so that their kids could see what kind of music our kids go for, because I'm sure that kids are the same all over the world. I'm betting that they'd dig us.

> And that's got to create some kind of good will, and man, a little good will is something we could use right now. All it takes is good will and a smile to breach that language barrier. When

the Moiseyev Dancers were in Los Angeles, Eddie and Liz Fisher gave a party for them, and dancers and they shouted, "Allo, babee" back at

although I couldn't speak a word of Russian, I got along fine. I just said, "Hello, baby" to the me. We had a ball. PLAYBOY: Frank, you've expressed some

negative views on human nature in the course of this conversation. Yet one gets the impression that - despite the bigotry, hypocrisy, stupidity, cruelty and fear you've talked about - you feel there are still some grounds for hope about the destiny of homosapiens. Is that right? SINATRA: Absolutely. I'm never cynical, never without optimism about the future. The history of mankind proves that at some point the people have their innings, and I think we're about to come up to bat now. I think we can make it if we live and let live. And love one another - I mean really love. If you don't know the guy on the other side of the world, love him anyway because he's just like you. He has the same dreams, the same hopes and fears. It's one world, pal. We're all neighbors. But didn't

somebody once go up onto a mountain long ago

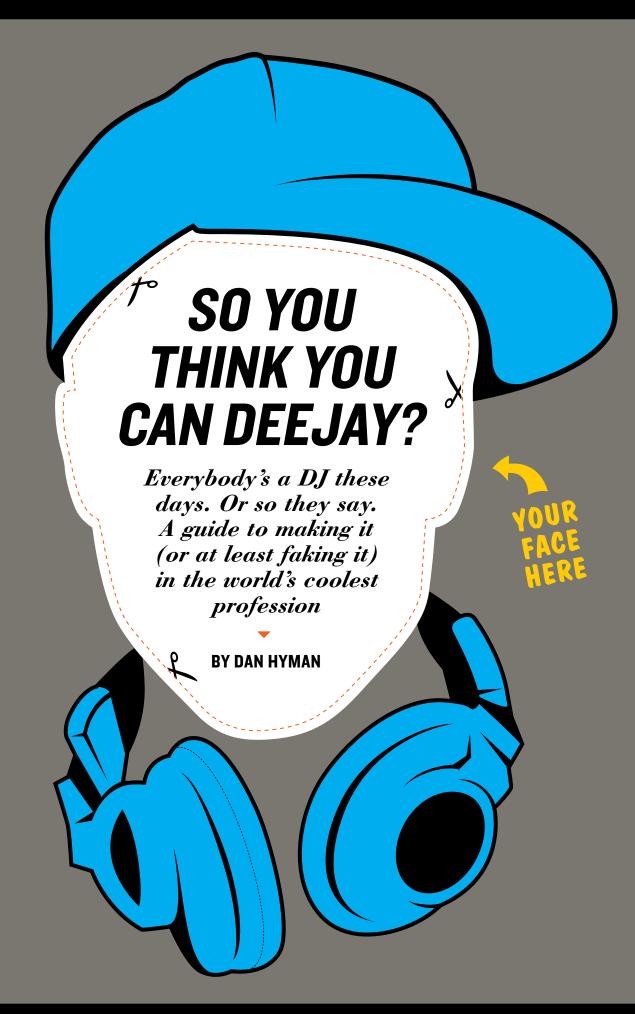
and say the same thing to the world?

When GUM department store in Moscow starts selling bikinis, we've got a fighting chance, because that means the girls are interested in being girls and the boys are going to stop thinking about communes and begin thinking connubially.

> the world, then what the hell have you got? Not democracy - and certainly not world government. Everybody seems to have forgotten that President Kennedy, before he became President, in his book, Strategy of Peace, plainly advocated recognition of Red China. So I'm not too far out on the limb, am I?

PLAYBOY: With or without mainland China in the UN, what do you feel are the prospects for an eventual American rapprochement with Russia?

SINATRA: I'm a singer, not a prophet or a diplomat. Ask the experts or read the Rockefeller brothers' reports. But speaking just as a layman, an ordinary guy who thinks and worries, I think that if we can stay out of war for the next ten years, we'll never have another war. From all I've read and seen recently, I'm betting that within the next decade the Russians will be on the credit card kick just as we are. They're going to want color TV, their wives are going to want electrified kitchens, and their kids are going to want hot rods. Even Russian girls are getting hip. I've seen photos of them at Russian beach resorts, and it looks just like the Riviera. They're thinning down, and I see they're going the bikini route. When GUM department store



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"This is a milliondollar sound system. Trust me, it works." That's Emmett. He's not happy. The wiry middleaged manager of John Barleycorn, a popular bro bar in Chicago's **River North** neighborhood, is growing increasingly annoyed with my apparent incompetence. I stand before him, staring down at two turntables and a mixer, trying to exude machismo while facing a firing squad of underthe-breath. mocking laughter. Emmett sees me for what I am: a suckling pig in the fetal position, sucking on the teat of regret. What grand plans I had: the ambitious writer who

believed he could deejay after a few weeks of private lessons. Now I'm a scared schmuck, one with the audacity, no less, to question the effectiveness of the audio system in Emmett's bar – a behemoth of inputs and outputs and AV cords and speakers providing big-testicled bass to the hundreds of patrons who regularly cram into this watering hole to worship at the throne of the almighty DJ.

The DJ booth overlooks an enormous beer-hall-size, dark-wood-furnished room. A small crowd is gathered beneath. They're expecting something. Anything. When I decided to throw my hat in the DJ ring, my family and friends could only wonder, Can he actually pull it off? Did Dan really dub himself "DJ Lips" for his notoriously large smackers? Tonight is the culmination. Good-bye, sweat-inducing dreams of turntable failure. No more late nights sneaking into my guest bedroom, strapping on headphones and desperately attempting to blend two songs on my laptop. DJ lessons, instructional DVDs, tips from trusted professionals: over. John Barleycorn has tasked me with deejaying for an entire hour. The speakers are primed and ready, Emmett tells me.

"Don't fuck this one up, Lips."

eejaying looks easy. Push some buttons, pump your fists, let the song build, drop a massive beat and the half-naked club honeys eat it up. It's why everyone calls themselves a DJ these days – from the greased-up, backward-hat-wearing, tank-

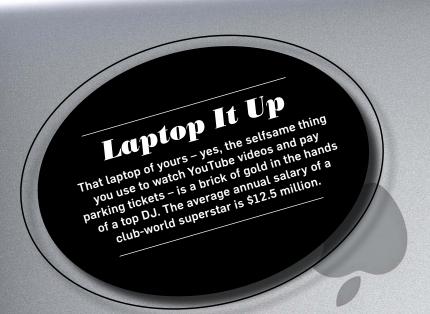
PUSH SOME
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top-rocking bros itching for opening slots in Vegas clubs to the basement-confined trolls uploading their masterworks to SoundCloud and praying for Facebook "likes." Blame it on the trickle-down effect: Those big-dog Top 40 DJs, the Guettas, Aviciis, Tiëstos, Afrojacks – guys who look like they should be ruling the Swiss luge game – are the new rock stars. Dudes rake in six figures a show. But they're just props up there, pushing buttons, right? And plus, every celebrity now claims to be a DJ. Like that one A-list female pop singer who deejayed a gigantic Las Vegas club last year. Anyone can do it, right?

"Um, there was actually another guy onstage deejaying while she fucked around and just showed her face," an executive at a prominent Las Vegas hot spot reveals to me, crushing my cocksure swagger.

Temporarily dejected, I call up Afrojack, the Dutch DJ who has produced some of the biggest pop stars in the world. He claims he could teach me to deejay in five minutes if he had the time. "Deejaying is basically just playing records for people," the superstar explains.

Easy enough. Fabian is unexpectedly ordinary. The Venezuelan-born 27-year-old son of a





former teenage Latin rock star is wearing a gray turtleneck sweater and tight-fitting black denim. His look is more clothes-folding J. Crew employee than DJ instructor. "What did you think I'd look like?" he asks me. "A douchebag?" I nod. "It's all right," he says. "A lot of DJs are douchebags."

I like Fabian.

We're in a nondescript building scrunched next to a culinary school on a rather unimpressive block of North Side Chicago. This is Scratch DJ Academy. I'm here to learn how to become a superstar. Eight turntableand-mixer combos are situated on two rectangular tables in a sterile room oddly decorated with graffiti bunnies. We'll be using the technologically advanced Pioneer machines called CDJ-2000s. These high-tech devices have virtual vinyl platters; most major nightclubs use them nowadays. The rest are traditional turntables that play vinyl records. CDJs, I learn, make life easier: Rather than lug around crates of records, you can put all your tracks on a single thumb drive, plug it into the digital mixer and be slamming tunes in minutes. The CDJ also analyzes each track's beats per minute (bpm) and allows you to set up cue points for where you want to start a song. If you

insist on vinyl, there's an app for that (of course): Many DJs use advanced vinyl-mimicking software such as Serato or Traktor. We're truly living in the plug-in-and-play DJ era.

What's there to even learn, then? I know how to plug in a USB.

Oh, how quickly my cockiness subsides. I realize I have not the first clue about how to even turn on the CDJ, let alone cue up a song. An hour of pathetic attempts later I am unreservedly humbled.

Deejaying is a test of patience and timing, creativity and endless practice. Even executing the simplest of blends – combining one song with another – proves an arduous task. My main challenge, beatmatching, or seamlessly blending one track with another, is brutal. If two songs' beats don't line up, expect an audible train wreck. Becoming a master beatmatcher requires a keen ear for rhythm and tempo, as well as an ability to assess musical taste and style. At first I'm a lost cause

But slowly, with the benefit of the complementary computer program Rekordbox, I'm able to practice at home. At all hours. My wife tells me it has to stop. She starts to instantly recognize all my blends. She's sick of them. I don't care. I'm obsessed.

By my fifth lesson I'm confident enough to finally attempt my own blend on the CDJs. Relying on their beat-recognition technology to assist me in my mission, I choose two songs with similar tempos – Robin Thicke's "Give It 2 U" and Deadmau5's "I Said" – but my head is too busy throbbing with self-instruction. Faders. Cue points. Tempo shifters. "Nudging" the track to keep up with the one currently playing on the



AFROJACK'S ADVICE TO WANNABE DJS

The 26-year-old Dutch DJ, born Nick van de Wall, is one of the world's most prolific beatmasters, pulling in an estimated \$18 million last year. He has produced cuts for bigtime stars from Pitbull to Chris Brown. Naturally, dude started out just as clueless as the rest of us. "I started producing music on a PlayStation game," he admits. We figured he'd know a thing or two about how to jump-start a DJ career. We gave him a ring, and he dished out killer advice.

Anatomy of a Hit

We're not saying every electronic-dance-music radio smash is exactly the same. Then again, most follow a similar formula.

THE CATCHY VOCAL HOOK

• A feel-good vocal greets you on arrival. Female vocalists excel at handling firstverse duties. Australian singer Sia is the master.

See: Calvin Harris's "Sweet Nothing" and David Guetta's "Titanium"

THE SWELL

• It's the beat slowly building to a fever pitch. Before the surefire mammoth chorus, there's said vocalist again, raising a fist to the heavens in anguish.

See: Swedish House Mafia's "Don't You Worry Child" and Zedd's "Clarity"



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endeavor, you're best served if you know what's you pursue deejaying. "Do some tutorials on YouTube and use Google to find out where to take classes," the DJ says. "And then just go there. Just try it. Success is not as far away as vou think."

most technically proficient DJ to party with a superstar. "The for the people," Afrojack explains. want to go see you. They want to listen to your

 Half the battle for a DJ at any level is knowing whether the he or she is playing. "Music is a form of communication, have to read the crowd: "Do they

shout? Do they start jumping? Or do they just stand around like, What the fuck is 2" guy playing?

Take your time when you're first learning the craft – especially when it comes to the production game. "You have to try out every button," Afrojack says, comparing making music to flying a plane. "You don't go in a plane and try to fly right away. You download the flight simulator first and

IT'S NOT

Afrojack make millions a year.

instantly start ponying up for you to deejay. "They didn't pay me money for a long time," Afrojack says. "They didn't even allow me to touch the decks. I was happy just to sit in the DJ booth. It's hard work. If you don't give a fuck and are just there for the fame, disappear really quickly."

speakers. Nausea sets in. I grow a pair and begin the process: I crank up the Thicke track, raising the input-one fader. I then look to the CDJ, which tells me the track is 127 bpm: next I adjust the Deadmau5 track's bpm to match it. Slowly I decrease the CDJ's tempo shifter so it matches

IT'S LIKE

TRYING TO

SOLVE A

CALCULUS

PROBLEM

WHILE

RECEIVING

AN UNDER-

THE-TABLE

HANDIE

FROM THE

PROM

QUEEN.

Thicke's. I must keep Deadmau5 in line with Thicke, so I fast-forward, or "nudge," it to get it synced. Once Deadmau5 is tempoand time-adjusted, I press PLAY on the CDJ and slowly fade in Deadmau5 by raising the input-two fader, and the two tracks become one. I gently lower input one. Thicke is out. Emotionally, so am I.

"Not bad," Fabian tells me after the lesson. "You definitely pick it up a lot faster than most students." Confidence. Then reality: Beatmatching is a multitasker's nightmare. It's like trying to solve a calculus problem while

table handie from the prom queen: nearly impossible but unbelievably

Fabian's praise, for me and his other students, is dangerous, though: In the year and change since Scratch DJ Academy opened in Chicago, enrollment has increased every term. Sure, Fabian says most of his students aren't naive enough to think they'll soon be

headlining festivals. But as more people suddenly fashion themselves as DJs, a crop of unprepared, cheaper "talent" emerges. This semester there's Ruben, early 20s, quietly confident with a bull nose ring and a pair of headphones wrapped around his neck; Jeff, upper

> 50s, wearing a soccerdad windbreaker, dragged here by his teenage daughter but now planning to finish the entire yearlong DJcertification course: and Ali, an early-30s rapper from Turkey, sporting mid-1990sera Michael Jackson circular turquoise sunglasses, here from Istanbul expressly for DJ classes. The vast majority of DJs, like Fabian, gig locally and rely on cash from performances to pay the bills. Now this new crop of DJs is suddenly undercutting them for bookings.

"It's affecting everybody in the DJ industry," Fabian says.



Feel it, Dan!" My brother-in-law Eddie, 34, is yelling at me. I'm standing in my sister and his suburban bedroom, hunched over an old-school DJ setup: two turntables and a mixer. My newborn nephew, Dylan, cries as we blast house music steps from his crib.

receiving an under-thegratifying.

THE DROP

· Can't take the anguish? No worries: Here comes that massive, sweat-inducing electronic breakdown. Cathartic release if only for a moment.

See: Afrojack's "Take Over Control" and David Guetta's "Without You'

THAT VOICE AGAIN

 Breakdown got your head in a tailspin? Come back to earth with the tortured vocalist: he or she is back but still in therapy, forever soul-searching,

See: Calvin Harris's "I Need Your Love" and Avicii's "Wake Me Up'

THE EMPOWERING OUTRO

· No need to feel bummed. The singer will figure his or her shit out. In the meantime, here's another gargantuan electronic breakdown to send you home flying.

See: Tiësto's "Red Lights" and Avicii's "Hey Brother



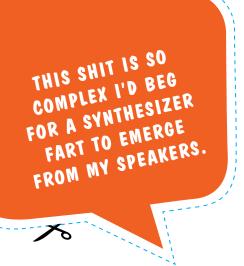




3

4

5



"Soft fingers! I want your hand cupping the edge of it!" Eddie, who deejayed more than a decade ago when he was in college, is teaching me how to deejay using vinyl - not that digital crap - with the subtlety of a snuff-film director. The touch, the feel, the exhilaration of physically interacting with a record - deejaying without technological assistance - gets him off.

I amuse him, trying to understand his rampant passion for meticulous old-school artistry. Still, I can't help but wonder: Even if a DJ is a trained technical wizard, a blending machine, if he doesn't produce his own music, will he ever reach the top of the food chain?

"It really has become a producer's game," Bad Boy Bill says. Bill was ranked one of the top DJs in the 1990s but has never produced a far-reaching, crossover single. He still deejays for a living but is now forced to take any gig he can get, such as a recent suburban club show in a nearly vacant strip mall. He doesn't harbor resentment, however. "The thing

that's sad to me," he says of millionaire production gurus half his age, "is when I see somebody up there using a preprogrammed set. They're not creating anything. They're more of a puppet."

So it takes mad production game to be legit. Fair enough. The next day, I'm firing up my laptop and installing the top-notch audio-production software Ableton Live. For the next 12 hours I stare helplessly at what looks like a nuclear reactor. Constructing a song? Ha! This shit is so damn complex I'd beg for a synthesizer fart to emerge from my speakers.

I'm beyond frustrated. I consult Afrojack.

"Production is insanely hard," I tell him.

"I could teach you to produce in five to 10 minutes," he says. If he had the time.



erhaps it's the ever-present alcoholic beverages I've been guzzling or the fact that the DJ performing after me gives me an approving fist-pound. But when my one-hour set concludes at John Barleycorn, I feel like a legitimate DJ. Sure, my beatmatching

wasn't perfect and I made one glaring error - Trinidad James popped up by mistake during a Swedish House Mafia groove - instantly followed by my wife mock slitting her throat. I don't care. The attention. The approving head nods from the crowd. It's infectious.

"Like, oh my God! That was so amazing!" my overserved friend Blair tells me as I walk downstairs. I need a real opinion. I hunt down my best friend, Jason. He'd never lie to me.

"How shitty was I, dude?" I ask him. "You weren't," he replies. "It sounded like any other DJ when we go out to a

My brain goes into overdrive. I start thinking crazy thoughts: Maybe I'm, like, you know, a real DJ. Then I stop myself, remembering something Fabian told me.

"There are so many wannabe DJs out there," he said bluntly. "It's a real problem."

I know the truth: I'm a wannabe. You think I care? For the next two hours. three vodka tonics and several dozen congratulatory high-fives, I'm DJ "Fuckin'" Lips.



MUST-HAVE DJ



BEDROOM BEGINNER

grabbing an easy-to-use controller, which is an all-digital turntable-and-mixer combo. Go with the **Pioneer DDJ-ERGO-V** (\$499, pioneerelectronics.com), the most cost-effective controller in Pioneer's fleet. We also recommend easy-to-use **Serato DJ** software (serato

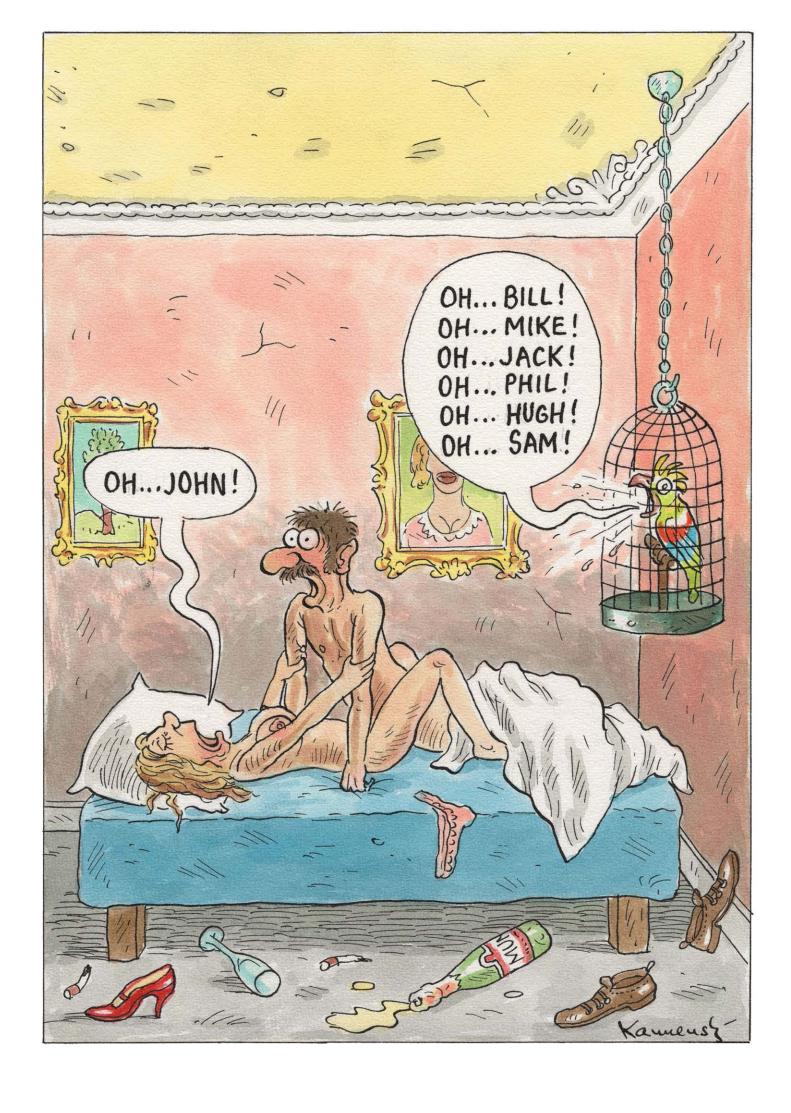


CDJs, or CD-based turntables, are the way to go. Not only are they a staple in most major clubs they're fully compatible with laptops. No need to go crazy and buy the most advanced model, though: Two **Pioneer CDJ-800MK2** decks (\$799) and a **Pioneer DJM-350** mixer (\$599) to bridge the gap are all you need.



CLUB THRASHER

shit? Pony up the cash and invest in some top-of-the-line CDJs. Grab two **Pioneer CDJ-2000NXS** multiformat media players (\$1,999). They're the industry standard. You also need to snag a top-notch mixer: the **Pioneer DJM-2000NXS** four-channel linkable model (\$2,499).



NORA O'DONNELL

PHOTO BY PAUL SIRISALE



OUR PICKS FOR THE HOTTEST HEADLINES AND SPICIEST MOMENTS





"It is not a scandal. It is a sex crime.
The law needs to be changed, and we need to change."

- Jennifer Lawrence, responding to the hacking and leaking of her personal nude photos

CELEBS & SEX TOYS

ROCK HARD

SMOKING GUN

After being subpoenaed to produce a glass dildo as evidence during a sexual-harassment suit, Kid Rock responds, "All parties involved in this glass dildo case can shove one up their ass."



CLEANING HARDWARE

IT'S A GOOD THING

During Martha Stewart's Reddit Ask Me Anything interview, a user asks for tips on cleaning a leather harness for a strap-on dildo. The domestic mogul's sly reply? "What's a dildo?"



BURNING UP

FOR YOUR (SELF) LOVE

While filming a scene with a Hitachi Magic Wand vibrator, porn star Missy Martinez burns her hands when the popular device starts shooting sparks. Luckily the rest of her is spared.



▶ Is 46 the new 21? Twenty-five years after her first PLAYBOY cover, Pamela Anderson poses nude for French magazine Purple Fashion, and she's as stunning as ever. Here's a toast to the Canadian beauty.





LET'S GET THIS OFF OUR CHEST

Activist Lina Esco launches a topless-equality movement with her film Free the Nipple. Chelsea Handler joins the cause when she Instagrams a photo of nerself alongside Vladimir Putin. Her caption. "Anything a man can do, a woman can do better."



BLONDE AMBITION

MILEY DOES MARILYN

She can't stop and she won't stop. Miley Cyrus bares all again for famed fashion photographer Mario Testino and *Vogue* Germany in an homage to the blonde bombshell.



YEAR OF THE BUTT

A Brooklyn salon now offers a Shiny Hiney treatment to improve your butt selfies. Angle is everything.



Pin the tail on the jackass? In March multiple Pinterest accounts are hacked and flooded with

Nicki Minaj demurely displays her posterior.





Inspired by Minaj's cover art, Marge Simpson joins in the fun.

Baby don't got real back. Miley Cyrus mocks Minaj in concert and dons a fake fanny. Cyrus loses the butt battle.



FILM



NYMPHOMANIAC: **VOLUMES** | & ||

Slow burn? Director Lars von Trier takes five and a half hours to explain a woman's life of



GAME OF THRONES

The HBO fantasy drama continues to deliver an array of boobs, butts, most important, fiery dragons.



SEX IN CINEMA

2

SPACE STATION 76

Good casting: Playmate Anna Sophia Berglund makes a cameo as a star angel in this comic

3

black goo.



Important plot point or another excuse for HBO to show a naked woman (Alexandra Daddario)?

6



UNDER THE SKIN MASTERS OF SEX It's not a mud Jane Martin bath! Scarlett (Heléne Yorke) Johansson plays is a secretary an alien who who helps Dr. Masters and then lures experimental





Butt-selfie queen Jen Selter lands a shoot in Vanity Fair.

Miami rapper and rump connoisseur Trick Daddy declares August 5 National Eat a Booty Day.



Meghan Trainor's "All About That Bass" single breaks records and tops the months.



cancels this Spider-Woman cover after her superpowered posterior controversy.

Jennifer Lopez teams with lggy Azalea for the subtly titled "Booty."







TAKE A BOW

THIS YEAR'S RIHANNA

Never a shrinking violet when it comes to her dripping sensuality, Rihanna goes for broke when she re-creates a classic Lui cover. Inside the magazine the singer showcases her backside with better tan lines than the Coppertone girl. A few months later she attends the CFDA Fashion Awards in a custom dress covered in nothing but Swarovski crystals.

SEX SCIENCE



TWIST & SHOUT

► The boomerang effect? A scientist convinces subjects to have sex in an MRI machine. Result: Penises are very bendy.



MEDICAL MIRACLE

b Women born with no (or shortened) vaginas are finally able to enjoy sex with organs grown in a lab from their own cells.



COSMO-NOTS?

The Russian space agency sends a team of geckos into orbit to have sex in zero gravity. They go on to sell insurance in heaven.



BONE TO PICK

Measure up:
According
to a new
study, women
prefer greater
girth for onenight stands,
as long as it's
also at least
6.5 inches
long.



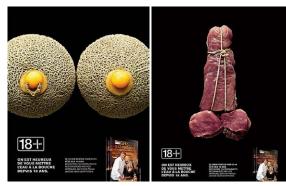
PAIN OR...

In Kenya a study finds that wives with well-endowed husbands are more likely to cheat. Why? Big penises can cause discomfort.

FINE ART

Milo Moiré, a Swiss performance artist, appears at the Art Basel convention wearing only words. It was the best thing we read all year.

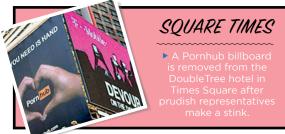




FOR MATURE AUDIENCES ONLY

▶ To celebrate its 18th anniversary, a Quebec restaurant guide releases these sizzling ads as a cheeky play on the 18+ adult-film rating.





N IMAGINE BEING ON YOUR KNEES AT YOUR FATHER'S FUNERAL, BESIDE HIS CASKET - SAYING GOOD-BYE TO HIM - AND THEN YOU HAVE NINE ORGASMS RIGHT THERE WHILE YOUR WHOLE FAMILY IS STANDING BEHIND YOU.

- Dale
Decker, who
suffers from
a condition
that causes
him to have
more than 100
orgasms a day



Vincent

Gallo's sperm

For sale on his

site: \$1 million

Foria

Cannabis

lube: \$44



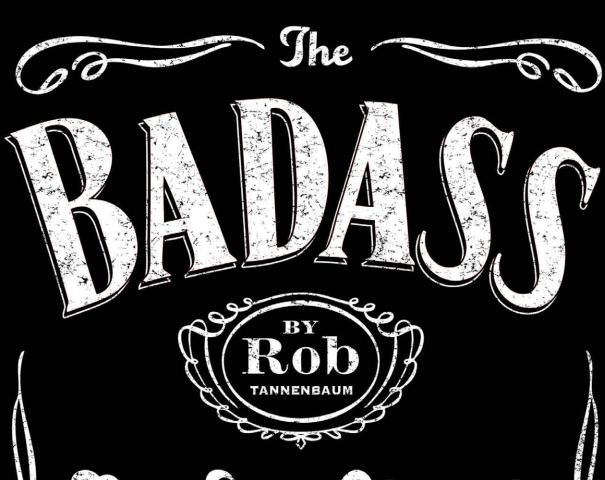
Japanese

doll drink

dispenser:

\$5,000

latex-



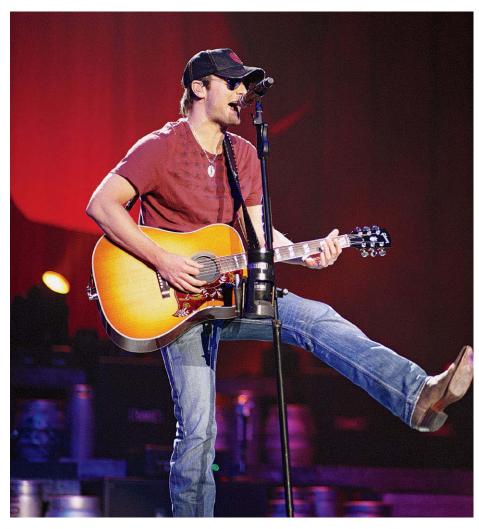
Mix Gaic Church O WITH O S JACK DANIEL'S,

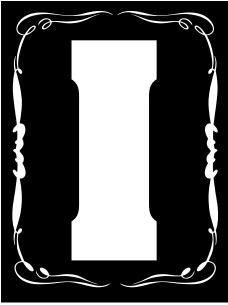
WEED AND METALLICA.

THE RESULT:
THE NEW FACE OF COUNTRY MUSIC

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN MARTENSEN







"I don't like to fight, but I ain't scared to bleed./Most don't mess with a guy like me."

The one time Eric Church played Madison Square Garden, he was fired. Church was a new artist promoting a debut album, and he landed a plum position as the opening act for Rascal Flatts, a trio who play a goopy, mild simulation of country music. Their shows were full of frenzied, fainting female fans – a kind of Beatlemania in boots – and that year Rascal Flatts sold more albums than any other country, pop or rock act

The two were not well paired: It was like matching biker boots (Church) with a silver cape (Flatts). For years, Church had played smelly bars for a dozen people who ignored him while they watched TV. Now that he'd hit the big time, he was playing for nearly 11,000 people who ignored him.

Opening acts work in a kind of veal pen. Contractually they are allowed to use only part of the stage. They have to limit their volume to between 80 and 90 decibels so the star act will always be louder. And most important, they can't exceed their allotted time. If they go even 10 seconds over, they are reprimanded. Those are the rules.

After only three shows with Rascal Flatts, Church was unhappy. He'd gotten used to doing things his own way, and now he had to follow rules. So he celebrated the biggest show of his career by doing things he knew would get him fired. He played too loud and tossed in a bit of Ozzy Osbourne's "Crazy Train." He strutted in areas of the stage he wasn't allowed to use. He played an extended, eight-minute version of his best-known song, "How 'Bout You." By the time he exited the stage, he'd exceeded his 20-minute limit by 10 minutes. Because Madison Square Garden is unionized and has curfews, his antics cost Rascal Flatts about \$30,000 in penalties.

As soon as Church came offstage, Rascal Flatts's manager fired him. (He was quickly replaced by a pretty 16-year-old named Taylor Swift, who was much more willing to play by the rules.)

Church shadowed the tour for a while, playing clubs in the same cities, often for a dozen people, losing money while carrying expenses of about \$5,000 a day. The Rascal Flatts tour was called Me and My Gang; to tweak them Church called his tour Me and Myself.

A month later he was opening for rock legend Bob Seger, which was a better fit. But in the country world, Church had earned himself a reputation as a disrespectful jerk. It's been a long time since being a rebel was a good business strategy in Nashville, which – despite the frequent use of cowboy imagery – is a go-along-to-get-along industry. Church's record label was angry. Other bands refused to tour with him. And radio programmers decided they didn't want an asshole in their format.

"We ended up banished to the wilderness," Church told a reporter a few years later. "Nobody would touch us. It's like we were nuclear."

Only a few months after his debut album, Church had already ruined his career by being prideful and obstinate. Or had he?



"Give me a crowd that's redneck and loud./We'll raise the roof."

Exactly six years after Church was fired from a great job he hated, he's in the middle of another arena tour – this time as the headliner, with two opening acts of his own. "Your job tonight," he tells the audience in a brawny North Carolina accent, "is to drink and sing and party your asses off." The folks in the Friday-night crowd in Biloxi, Mississippi began drinking long before this encouragement, and they roar happily as Church and his five-piece band play "Drink in My Hand," a raucous celebration of alcohol's relaxing properties.

Church's third album, Chief, was his breakthrough. It included two songs that hit number one on the country charts ("Drink in My Hand" and "Springsteen"), sold more than a million copies and was named 2012's best album by the Country Music Association, an award voted on by the same Nashville industry that not long ago thought he was an asshole. Church, now 36, deserved the award: Chief wasn't just the best country album of the year; it was the best rock album too.

How is that possible? Since the 1980s country has been, well, "expanded" if you like the change – "ruined" if you don't – by influences outside its own

The two were not well paired: It was like matching biker boots (Church) with a silver cape (Flatts).

traditions. Garth Brooks, who has sold more albums than anyone else in the past 20 years, was an avowed fan of James Taylor, Dan Fogelberg and Billy Joel, not to mention Kiss, Boston and Styx. A decade earlier, Waylon Jennings sang "Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way," in which he wonders why country should stay unchanged. That battle has long been lost.

Country has evolved because the South has evolved. The family henhouse has been supplanted by Walmart, whose ubiquitous stores add to the homogenization of the region. Family-owned general stores have been replaced by Cracker Barrel, which has fake-rural and faux-retro restaurants at highway exits in 42 states, grossing \$2.6 billion last year by simulating a rustic down-home experience.

Similarly, the country music industry in Nashville creates a packaged and polished product out of an authentic culture that once existed only on porches and at barn dances. This is wonderful, but it's also problematic. Fans constantly (sometimes viciously) argue about who is or isn't real country. The debate is idiotic, because country now has many different traditions, some represented by singers who, in their day, were viewed as untraditional (Patsy Cline, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash).

The fight about whether a singer is or isn't real country illustrates what writer Tracy Thompson describes as "the Southern genius for living in an imagined past." In her book *The New Mind of the South,* Thompson – a Georgia native and Pulitzer Prize finalist – notes that historians have been "lamenting the death of Southern identity for 50 or 60 years now." Symbols that once defined the region – tar-paper

shacks, muscadine vines – have vanished. And the once predominantly Republican states of Virginia and North Carolina voted for Barack Obama in 2008, though voters there were "just doing what the South has always done," Thompson writes, "which is to morph into something else." (Virginia continued to morph, voting for Obama again in 2012.) In other words, the South's many traditions include a tradition of change. Confusing and contradictory, right?

Authenticity is a phantom, even in

wears a wig.

As late as the mid-1950s, drums were officially banned from performances at the Grand Ole Opry because they weren't traditional country instruments. But lately country has entered its heavy metal phase. Here's small-town Georgia boy Luke Bryan onstage, wearing a Mötley Crüe T-shirt, covering Metallica and (as Church did years ago) "Crazy Train." There's Jason Aldean, recently called "a country singer with a hair metal heart" by a *Houston Chronicle* writer,

singing Guns N' Roses songs in concert.

No one in Nashville leans as close to rock as he does, Church declares. "Not even close. A lot of people are trying to now, because it's working

for us. They do a Guns N' Roses or an AC/DC song because they want to look like they love rock and roll."

There are two guitar players in the Eric Church Band. One was in the Black Crowes for four years. The other, who's husky and tattooed, came from a Tennessee thrash-metal band called Bush Hog. If a crowd seems a little bored, Church slaps them with a cover of Pantera's "Walk." His lyrics mention Jennings, Hank Williams Sr, Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard while using gobs of distortion, drum loops and other digital tricks.

"I don't believe country singers should make the same fucking music over and over. Some people hate me. We've been polarizing, and that's okay," Church says.

country, seemingly the most genuine of genres. George D Hay, the announcer and guiding force of country's venerable Grand Ole Opry radio show, was a PR genius who created a hillbilly image for the music, even when it was fraudulent. He rechristened Dr Bate's Augmented String Orchestra as the Possum Hunters, instructed musicians to wear overalls rather than the tailored business suits they usually wore and posed them in cornfields and pigpens for promotional photos - even though they weren't farmers. (Humphrey Bate, leader of the Possum Hunters, was a physician.) None of this has anything to do with the quality of the music, any more than Dolly Parton's "Jolene" is less of a great song because the singer has breast implants and





("We" is the pronoun country singers use instead of "I." It's a way to acknowledge that others have helped you become successful and to declare a humility that might or might not actually be there.)

"I love the heavy backbeat in his music, and he's got a lot of attitude," says Seger. "His records sound hairy and strong. And God, his band is really good. It's heavy country-rock, as close to rock and roll as you can get."

Church's new live album, *Caught in the Act*, is ornery and rough, and it smells like beer

"We're further into rock and roll than anyone else, and that's why a lot of traditionalists have a major problem with me," he says. "I don't have a fiddle player or

steel guitar or the things purists think country is supposed to sound like. I have a banjo – and we distort it through two distortion pedals. I didn't grow up listening to Hank Williams Sr or Ernest Tubb. Well, I did

a little bit, but mostly I grew up with rock and roll, from the Band and Little Feat to Seger and Metallica."

It's not just that Church likes Metallica; Metallica likes Church too. When the metal band organized the first Orion music festival last year, his was the only country act out of 37 bands. (Church and Metallica are managed by the same company.) When they're unhappy, Metallica fans express their feelings by throwing bottles, coins and other injurious objects. Before their Orion set, Church gave his band a curt instruction: "Put the hammer down." Metallica singer James Hetfield

introduced Church as "a rebel," and when the show was over, he said Church "fit right in."



"I'll maybe break out that old rock and roll,/Drink a little drink, smoke a little smoke."

At the close of the Orion set, Church's band added the riff from Black Sabbath's "Sweet Leaf," an ode to marijuana, at the end of "Smoke a Little Smoke," his own pro-pot song that had pretty much salvaged his career.

Church's first album, Sinners Like Me,

iconic in Southern life – call it a Country Checklist song. In this subpar effort, Church lays it on heavy: He mentions beer, barbecue, Jack Daniel's, college football, fishing, trucks, chewing tobacco, NASCAR and cowboy boots. The only thing missing is something about hunting or tractors.

Church wrote it "almost out of anger or spite," says his manager, John Peets. Church had seen similar songs amass a lot of airplay, according to Peets, "and he said, 'If this is the shit that works, let's just write one.'"

"That was my Hail Mary," Church says.

"And the sad truth is, it works." Although
"Love Your Love the Most" became
Church's first top 10 single, it didn't boost
his career, because it was so generic. Radio
play was up, but record and ticket sales
were flat. He felt he was his record label's
redheaded stepchild because it was focused
on more popular acts, including Dierks
Bentley, a friendly and gregarious singer
who could have a fine career in politics.

Church sensed his record company was on the verge of dropping him. His first seven singles hadn't done much. If he was going to fail, he wanted to go down with a song he liked: "Smoke a Little Smoke."

"Everyone said, 'You're crazy. It's an openly pro-pot song. Radio's not gonna play it,'" says Church. There have been plenty of weed anthems in country – by artists including Waylon Jennings, Hank Williams Jr, Randy Houser and Toby Keith – but they are rarely released as singles, and they certainly aren't expected to save a singer's career.

Church would not be dissuaded. "I remember the label saying to me, 'Okay, it's

your funeral," he says. The label sent "Smoke a Little Smoke" to radio. It didn't chart as high as "Love Your Love the Most," but it had a much bigger effect.

"It immediately moved records," says Church. He had finally distinguished himself from the other male singers in Nashville: He was the guy with the pro-pot song.



"I've thrown a punch or two and gave a few black eyes,/But Jack Daniel's kicked my ass again last night."

was not a big success. One of the singles,
"Two Pink Lines," was about a pregnancy

Opening acts work in a kind of veal pen. Contractually

they are allowed to use only part of the stage. They have to

limit their volume to between 80 and 90 decibels so the star

act will always be louder. And most important, they can't

was not a big success. One of the singles, "Two Pink Lines," was about a pregnancy scare. In a typical country song, pregnancy would be celebrated as a blessing. But in "Two Pink Lines" (based partially on an experience he had at the age of 19), Church and his girlfriend express delight when her pregnancy test is negative.

"Radio didn't like the song," he says.

For his second album, Church wrote a song he knew was dumb. It's in the same mold as other predictable rural-pride songs that work well on radio because they celebrate the consumer goods that are



"There are some drunk motherfuckers out there," says Marshall Alexander, Church's cheerful production manager.

Church is on his tour bus, wearing sweatpants, a cigar in his mouth. His wife, Katherine Blasingame Church, and son, Boone, who was born in late 2011, are back home. They regularly tour with him, and Church says Boone keeps rock-star hours: "We've trained my son to sleep until noon and go to bed at midnight, after my show."

He is still an hour away from his set

preparations, which involve the same rituals every night, including a substantial plastic cup of Jack Daniel's and Coke. Church proved his devotion to JD by writing

5

"Jack Daniels," an ambivalent love song, and Jack Daniel's gave him a barrel of 94-proof Tennessee whiskey. Every barrel produces about 250 bottles. Church is on his sixth barrel

The Chief emblem, a shadowy image of Church in sunglasses, looks like a police sketch of a mugger who targets old women, or a guy you'd see loitering at 1:00am in a convenience store parking lot. It's a caricature of Church, who's a sturdy sixfoot-three with a confident oval face, a quick wit and stylishly messy hair.

The sunglasses weren't originally a fashion statement: While playing four-hour sets in bars, Church's contact lenses dried up because of the smoke and stage lights. Someone suggested sunglasses to block the light. It worked and had the added benefit of

making him look like a badass.

Without the glasses and hat, fans don't recognize him. This afternoon he put on a T-shirt and shorts and ran a few miles near the beachfront venue while the parking lot filled with partiers playing his music in their trucks. No one spotted him.

"When it's showtime, I better be the baddest motherfucker on the planet. And a lot of it, honestly, has to do with the hat and sunglasses. They put me in a different mode mentally. Take them off, and I'm not onstage, he wanted to wear them in photos and videos for consistency. So Church ignored the label.

He has even tried to duplicate the hat. "We had a designer come in – I can't believe I'm telling you this. We had a designer try to duplicate the hat," Church says.

"Do you wash the hat?" I ask.

"No, I do not. Katherine, my wife, has tried. No, no, no, I – I can't," Church stammers. "I mean, if something happened to the hat...." His voice trails off as he ponders the

hypothetical tragedy.

"When you're not onstage, where's the hat?"

"I'm afraid to tell you." He laughs. "There's a place on the bus. We made a little cubby for the hat."

I have to ask: "Can I put the hat on?"
"No. *Hell* no. It's locked up. It's in bed. It's asleep."

During tonight's show, which I watch from the soundboard, the manager of one of the opening acts says he's seen an average of three or four fights per night. A large part of Church's success has come from filling a niche in the country market for a rugged, masculine singer. Among Garth Brooks's other achievements, he converted a lot of women to country music, and by 1997 radio programmers referred to country as a "female format."

Because women were listening to country radio, the stations played a lot of songs they thought women would like. Because the stations were playing songs they thought women would like, record companies

It's been a long time since being a rebel was a good business strategy in Nashville.

in that mode," Church says. "Now, if people say that's crazy, fair enough. I know that probably sounds like I need medication. Maybe I do."

He bought the Von Dutch cap about five years ago for \$6 at a truck stop in Mississippi and has worn it at every show since. He's tried to find an identical replacement cap, but it doesn't exist. He searched on the internet. He contacted Von Dutch, which has no record of manufacturing the cap. It's either a cheap knockoff or a magical talisman right out of The Twilight Zone: Mississippi.

Church says he fought with his record company about his look. "You have good hair," they told him, "and good-looking eyes. The girls want to see them!" But since he was wearing the cap and sunglasses signed singers they thought women would like. In the old days, a photo of the 10 top country singers would look like a convict lineup. These days it might look like an Abercrombie & Fitch catalog shot.

Among hardcore traditionalists, this change hasn't been popular. One highly trafficked country website routinely erupts in insults aimed at handsome singer Luke Bryan, who's apparently perceived as too feminine. The blogger who runs the site has referred to Bryan as a woman, claimed the singer has a vagina and alluded to Bryan as gay.

"When we started," Church explains, "male country fans were being ignored. I hunt. I fish. I drink beer and watch football. I love NASCAR. I'm a guy's guy."

His concerts are loud and heavy on pyro and go well with alcohol. Kip Moore, one of Church's opening acts, says, "I drank a whole lot more than usual during that tour. Watching Eric made me want to drink. You're not gonna see a lot of alcohol at a Carrie Underwood concert. But an Eric Church show creates rowdiness. I don't think there's a deep science to that: Testosterone and alcohol don't mix, and that causes fights."

In the middle of his second encore, Church sings "These Boots" (another song that mentions weed), and fans hold up their boots in celebration. One fan near the stage gets a little carried away, tosses a boot onstage, then climbs up to retrieve it. "We've got a climber," a crew member shouts into a walkie-talkie. The one-booted climber isn't arrested, but he is tossed out of the arena

While watching Church's set that night, Moore saw a couple screwing in the audience. "A guy pulled a girl's skirt up, and the dirty deed was going on," Moore reports. "That was a first for me."

It's not a first for Church. He recounts a show last year in Battle Creek, Michigan where "half the crowd was fighting. And I saw guys who had girls bent over the rail, screwing." His lighting designer – a guy who'd toured with nearly every major metal band, including Van Halen, Metallica and Guns N' Roses – was shocked. "He said to me, 'You should call this the Fucking and Fighting Tour.'"

Compared with Battle Creek's, tonight's audience doesn't impress Church much. "There wasn't mass bedlam, which is what I usually see." Tomorrow will be wilder, he predicts.



"These boots have counted off many a band,/Playing one-night roadhouse stands for tips in empty rooms."

When he wasn't auditioning for the school play by singing a Garth Brooks song, Church played basketball at South Caldwell High School in North Carolina, and he's studied the state's greatest hoops player, Michael Jordan. In particular he likes Jordan's 2009 Hall of Fame induction speech, a smirking 20-minute tirade in which Jordan taunted everyone who ever doubted him, including his two brothers.

"I've never seen a person hold grudges like that. And I like that, because I carry a hell of a chip on my shoulder." Like Jordan, Church has memorized a list of those who stood in his way. "I carry that list onstage with me. If you don't have a chip on your shoulder, you're just happy to be there, and I fucking hate that."

And then he starts to tell the story of what happened when he moved to Nashville.



"I come from a long line of sinners like me."

"Sinners Like Me," about coming from a family of badasses, is the Church song that's closest to autobiography. One of the singer's grandfathers was chief of police in Granite Falls for 28 years. Everyone called him Chief, which is also Church's nickname. "But he was the kind of chief of police that partied. He was a good old boy."

Chief came from a family of moon-shiners who brewed white lightning and sold it in nearby counties. On the other side of Church's family were the Stillwells, who "are notorious where I'm from," he says. "They were rough and did a lot of fighting – drunk fighting. The Stillwells were big, like six-foot-six and six-foot-seven. They would get drunk and beat up everybody in a bar."

But Chief had been a boxer in the Navy. "And he was the only guy who could whip the Stillwells' asses." So one side of his family regularly fought with, and arrested, the other side. "He'd beat up the Stillwells, get them in cuffs, put them in jail, and when they sobered up, he'd let them go. So yeah, I am from a long line of sinners."

After high school Church wanted to move to Nashville and become a professional songwriter. His dad, a disciplined businessman, promised to fund Church's first six months there if he graduated from college first. So Church went to Appalachian State and formed a cover band, the Mountain Boys, with his brother and a few friends. His first semester, his grade point average was 0.7. He was kicked out of school a few times, "but when I had to get an A in calculus, I got an A." It took him six and a half years to get a degree in marketing while playing clubs six nights a week. As he tells the story, it's unclear what this has to do with the chip on his shoulder.

Church spent a lot of late nights in brownbag clubs, where patrons bring their own liquor. One night a girl was flirting with his brother during a song, which was fine until her husband noticed and charged the stage. Eric told his brother, who'd been a football lineman, "Go take care of it. Take him outside. Just be back by the next song." His brother came back, a little disheveled, but in time. Years of experiences like that, Church says, turned him from a good kid into a troublemaker.

"When you have to whip their ass *during* a song, that's fucking weird," he says.

He'd been the best songwriter in Granite Falls, so after he moved to Nashville, he assumed he'd step into an open-mike night and quickly be discovered and showered with garlands. "I was so fucking naive," he says. "I got my head handed to me. It was rough." His best song at the time was "Sitting in the Middle of Love."

"Fucking terrible. Don't laugh," he says. "It was about a town called Love, Texas."

He worked at the Shop at Home network, taking phone orders on the night shift at a call center. One night when the network was peddling a \$49.99 set of knives, "a guy called me, drunker than hell, at 3:00am," Church remembers. "He says, 'I've just got to have those knives.' I said, 'Why don't you go to bed. If you wake up in the morning and still want them, I'll take your credit card.' They monitor the calls, so after he hung up, I got fired. That was the lowest point." It's still not clear what a set of knives has to do with the chip on Church's shoulder.

A good Nashville song combines structure, a series of hooks, narrative shifts and small twists on familiar phrases. It seems easy but requires a high level of cleverness, which is one reason Bon Jovi's country album was laughable. Church was learning the craft, but he was broke and discouraged. Even when people in Nashville liked his songs, they told him no one would record them. His engagement to a girl back in North Carolina had fallen apart. His hometown friends had careers and wives and fully formed adult lives. Church had an acoustic guitar and a rented apartment.

"It was like, Fuck this. I was ready to go



home. There was one publishing company that had been courting me, and I'd had meeting after meeting with the second in command. I finally got to meet the guy in charge, and I played him four songs. During my last song, he stopped me. I thought, This is it; this is the moment I get a deal. And he said, 'I don't know where you're from, but I'd go back there. I don't ever see these songs working in Nashville.'"

Church walked to his car, listened to Kris Kristofferson's "To Beat the Devil" – about a broke and busted songwriter who's been spurned by Nashville – and decided it was time to go back to North Carolina. He thought about leaving that night, but his brother had moved to Nashville, so the two went out and got drunk. The next morning, Church got a call from Sony Tree Publishing, which signed him to a songwriting contract and launched his career.

Church would have missed that call if he had listened to the expert who told him to go back home. And now Church comes to the point of his story: "I mean, you talk about the list? That guy is on the fucking list."

After he got a record deal, other obstacles blocked his way for five years, from indifferent crowds to club owners who refused to pay what they owed the band. (One night in Idaho, Church took revenge by spray-painting the venue's brand-new fence.)

"Most sane people would have said, "This is stupid. This is no way to live.' We ain't bathed, we're eating Doritos, and we're in El Paso on a Wednesday night." He laughs. "The coveted Wednesday night show in El Paso. But it beats the shit out of Shop at Home, I'm telling you. And it puts gravel in your gut." Church says he was a well-behaved kid when he left North Carolina; people back home

"are shocked what I turned into."

After they did about 50 shows together, Kip Moore realized Church was performing every night with a chip on his shoulder.

"He never talked to me about it, but you can tell it's there," Moore says. "You think about the years of frustration, the shit-hole gigs you played, the people who shot you down. All that stuff festers inside you until you're out to prove something. 'I told all you motherfuckers what I was gonna do. And now I'm gonna show you.' I don't blame him one bit."



"You sing about Johnny Cash;/The Man in Black would've whipped your ass."

It's a Saturday night in Birmingham, and 11,000 people are filing into the local arena. Fans are eight deep at the merchandise tables, choosing among different tour T-shirts. Some have human skulls, many feature pot leaves, and one says "Eric Fucking Church." The guy who designs Church's merchandise came up with the idea after seeing him in concert, thinking, That's the gist of the show – Eric fucking Church. At first the idea was rejected as too profane. Now it's his top-selling shirt.

Wearing his sunglasses and Von Dutch cap, chewing gum and carrying a cup of JD and Coke, Church strides briskly into a small conference room and plays two acoustic songs for about 100 people who paid \$200 each for a VIP package. "You're so hot!" a woman yells. He encourages the fans to drink a lot and sing loud tonight. After six minutes,

he's done, his drink back in his hand. He proceeds quickly to a room with a private bar and snacks, and schmoozes with local radio DJs. When that's over, he washes his hands thoroughly.

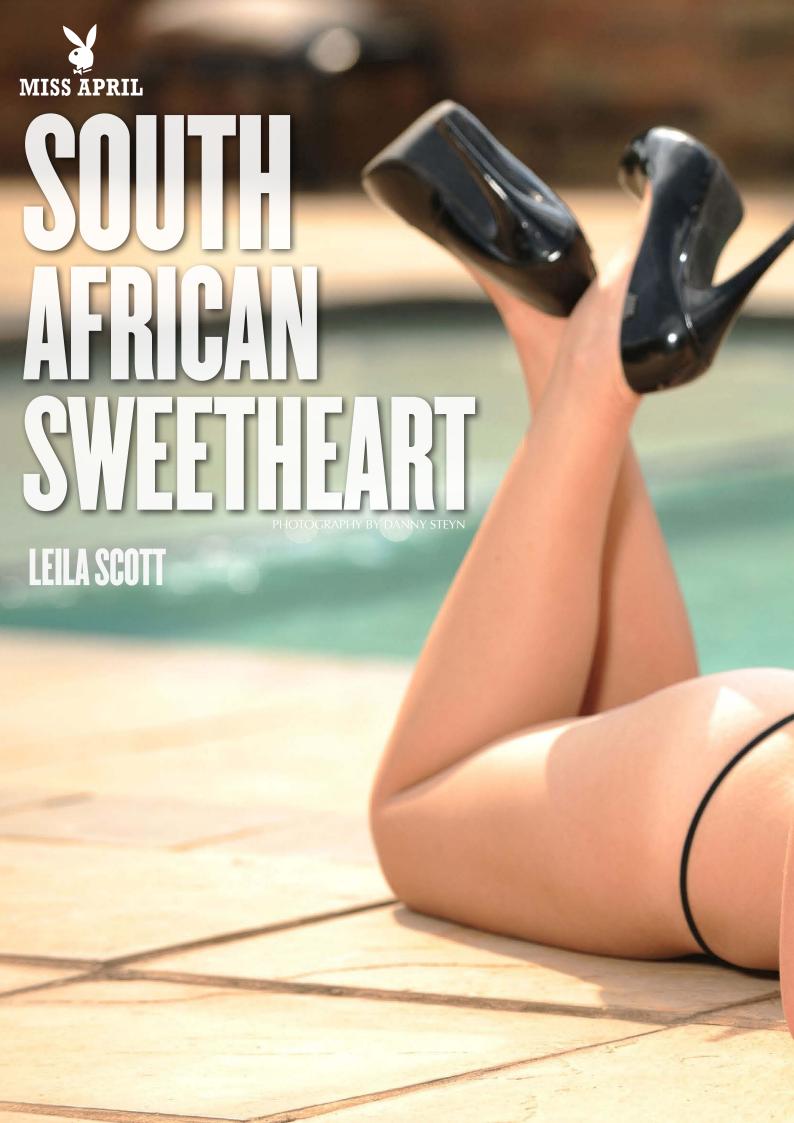
Last year Church created a stir by denouncing reality-TV singing competitions as fraudulent. This prompted angry tweets from Blake Shelton, a judge on The Voice, and his wife, Miranda Lambert, who was a contestant on Nashville Star. Church's argument has some validity - Lambert writes and sings great songs, but Shelton is better as comic relief than as an artist - but he'd broken a cardinal rule of Nashville: If you talk shit about people, do it behind their backs, not in public. One country radio personality accused him of trying to be "the Kanye West of country music." As a result, my meeting with Church was postponed several months until the uproar passed.

"Everybody flipped the fuck out because I said it the wrong way," Church says. "But I don't have anything to apologize for. I've been kind of a lone wolf, and I'm okay with not having a lot of friends in the community." His point was this: A TV show that offers a shortcut is a sham; artists have to tour, endure, learn and get tough and angry. And if he sees Shelton or Lambert at an awards show? Church shrugs. "T'll probably say hello. Or not."

Of the 11,000 people inside the Birmingham arena tonight, 10,500 seem drunk. The other 500 are security. Some people are fighting, some are celebrating, and it's hard to tell which is which. The last song in Church's set is "Springsteen," an unusual song (it doesn't really have a chorus) that ties music to memory and romanticizes the idea of a superstar songwriter and performer. In his shows, Church - a huge Bruce Springsteen fan - adds a bit of "Born to Run" at the song's end. Again, the admiration is mutual: Bruce Springsteen wrote a fan letter to Church on the back of an old set list. It ends, "I hope we cross paths along the way." Church keeps the letter in a locked drawer at home.

When the concert is over and the fans are back home and the roadies are loading out the stage, Church is inside his tour bus. It's 2:00am, and he switches from whiskey to water so he doesn't ruin his voice. He was happy with tonight's crowd, but he's brooding about a show he did about four years earlier, when he was scuffling and headed for failure, at a Birmingham club called WorkPlay.

"It probably held 200 people, and I couldn't even fill it." He remembers the exact number of people who showed up: 126. Church doesn't forget these things.



Local lovely, Leila Scott, is your typical young Afrikanans sweetheart – beautiful both inside and out. She is caring to a fault, always putting others' happiness ahead of her own and, despite her conservative upbringing, she is vibrant and open minded. Leila describes herself as "a little bit of a weirdo" as a kid and "naughty as hell." Though you'd never guess it now, Leila was an awkward tomboy growing up; that is, until she discovered high heels and then, she says, "My mom could never get them off me." She discovered modeling after high school and it was love at first sight. Leila says she had so much fun at this shoot with Danny Steyn that she didn't want to put her clothes back on. We're glad we have the moment frozen in time.



















PLAYMATE DATA SHEET

Name: Leila Scott

BUST: 34C **W**aist: 65 HIPS: 32

Неібнт: 164см **W**eight: *57*

BIRTH DATE: 30 October 1992 BIRTHPLACE: Witbank

What are your professional ambitions? Traveling is very important to me, I would love to travel to more countries for modeling, become Playmate of the Year and then Playmate of other countries.

A man that's confident, smells good, works hard and is adventurous, outgoing, funny and strong.

Turn-offs

Desperation, laziness, bad preath, arrogance, and if he doesn't stand up for anything.

My dream date would be with an adventurous guy who would take me somewhere fun, like a theme park, a stand-up comedy show or even jumping off a waterfall followed by a romantic dinner at his place. I love to laugh, be crazy and just let go.

PEOPLE I'D LIKE TO MEET: Hugh Hefner, Ian Somerhalder and Beyonce.

THREE THINGS I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT:

My toothbrush, my heels, my friends.

My guilty pleasure: Red velvet capcakes,

Get me a plane ticket to: Bali,

Happiness is: Letting go and enjoying life.

I'm not embarrassed to say: / model for PLAYBOY!

If I could change anything it would be: Nothing! I'm a Playmate!

Someone I Look up to: My mother, She's the hardest working woman I've ever met.



FAVORITE QUOTE "And though she be but little, she is fierce,"— Shakespeare





PLAYBOY'S

PARTY JOKES

After terrorist threats against the movie *The Interview* made headlines, we checked in with our buddy who lives in North Korea to see how he was doing. He responded, "I can't complain."



"Why don't you ever whisper dirty things in my ear?" an unsatisfied wife asked her husband.



So then the genie asked me, 'What do you want, a better memory or a bigger penis?'" a man told a woman at a bar.

"And what did you say?" she asked.

He replied, "I don't remember."



"I'd appreciate it if you'd stop degrading your girl-friend," a woman told her chauvinist brother.

"I don't want to degrade her, I want to upgrade her," he answered. "I'm buying her bigger boobs."



In the heat of passion a man whispered in his girlfriend's ear, "Baby, would you ever want to try anal sex?"

"Um," she said and paused. "I guess we could try it if you really want to."

"Only if you're comfortable," he assured her.

"Let me compose myself in the bathroom," she said and walked off.

She returned minutes later wearing a strap-on and demanded, "Turn around."



"This weekend I set up a double date that turned into a mind-blowing date-swap," a guy told his buddy.

"I actually organized a threesome last night," the friend said. "There were a couple of no-shows, but I still had fun." $[T] \label{eq:last}$



"I used to be fucking stupid," a woman told her friend. "But then we broke up." $\,$

Two men are driving through New York City when they get pulled over by a cop. The cop walks up and taps on the window with his stick. The driver rolls down the window and WHACK, the officer smacks him in the head with the stick.

The driver asks, "What the hell was that for?"

The officer answers, "You're in London son. When we pull you over, you better have your license ready when we get to your car."

The driver says, "I'm sorry, Officer, I'm not from around here."

The officer does a check on the driver's license, and he's O.K. He gives the man his license back, walks around to the passenger side and taps on the window. The passenger rolls down the window and WHACK, the officer smacks him on the head with the stick.

The passenger asks, "What'd you do that for?"

The officer says, "Just making your wish come true."

The passenger asks, "Making what wish come true?"

The officer says, "I know that two miles down the road you're gonna say to your friend here, "I wish that asshole would've tried that shit with me!"



A man was sitting on his own in a restaurant when he saw a beautiful woman at another table. He sent her a

bottle of the most expensive wine on the menu. She sent back a note: "I will not touch a drop of this wine unless you can assure me that you have seven inches

in your trousers."

"Give me the wine," he wrote back. "As gorgeous as you are, I'm not cutting off three inches for anyone."



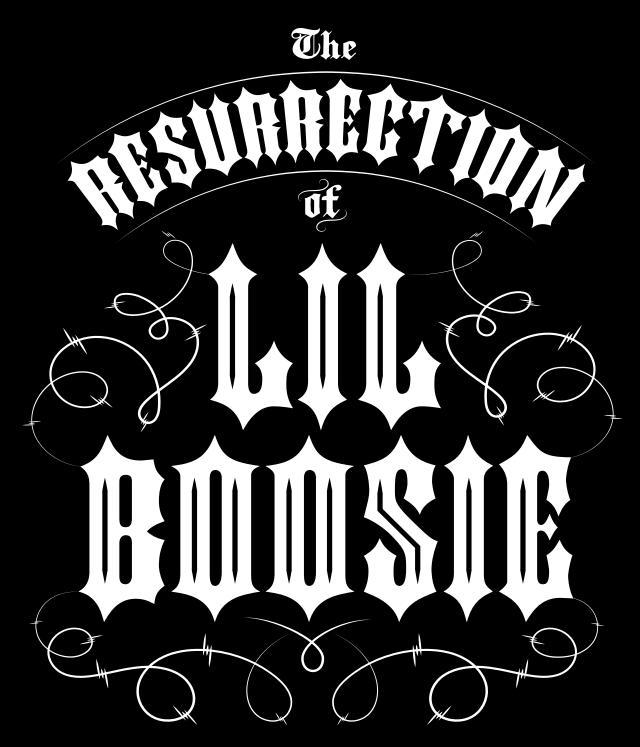
A woman met a man at a club and went back to his place for sex.

"You must be a good dentist," she said in the afterglow.

"How did you know I'm a dentist?" he asked. She responded, "Because I didn't feel a thing."



What do a dildo and soybeans have in common? They're both used as meat substitutes.



IN LOUISIANA, HE'S A RAP LEGEND. IN FERGUSON, HIS LYRICS BECAME A BATTLE CRY. IF HE'D BEEN FOUND GUILTY OF MURDER, HE'D BE BEHIND BARS FOR LIFE

By **ETHAN BROWN**

t's a muggy October night in Louisiana, and the crowd at the 13,500-capacity Lafayette Cajundome is growing restless. Rich Homie Quan, a 2014 breakout

rap star – whose anthem "Lifestyle" is a YouTube hit with more than

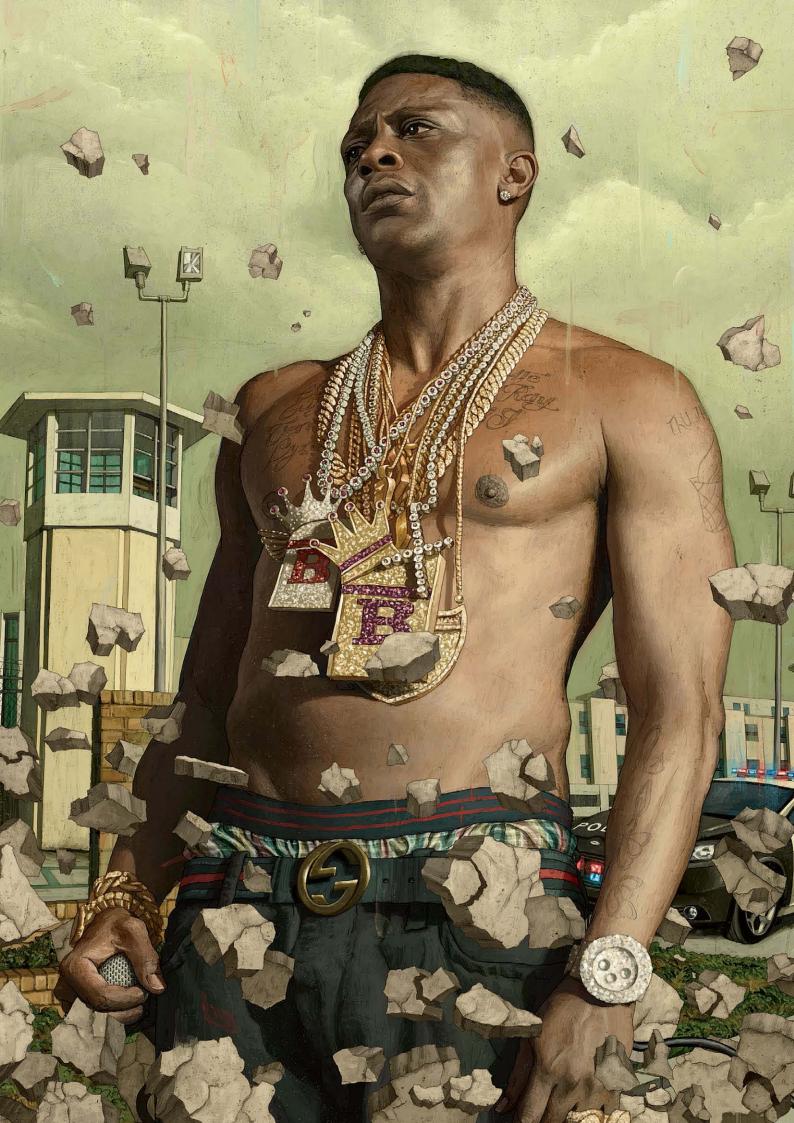
100 million views – is giving it his all on stage. Auto-Tune crooner Future is up next.

But the opening acts elicit only groans from the concession stands. Future abandons his set three songs in, explaining he hasn't been paid properly. Twitter messages start to appear: "Soooooo future walked off stage at the boosie concert in Lafayette & they played fuck u after he left #messy."

After two hours of waiting, all the crowd wants is Lil

Boosie, a.k.a. Boosie Badazz. They're accustomed to long waits, though, because until March 2014, Boosie was incarcerated in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at

Angola. Situated on a former plantation and nicknamed "the Farm," Angola is a veritable terminal ward for inmates on death row or serving life sentences. It's the largest maximum-security prison in America, and Boosie served five years there in near-solitary confinement after his



sentence for drug possession was followed by a false accusation of murder, a case brought by Baton Rouge's much-feared district attorney, Hillar Moore III.

Backstage, Boosie huddles with his mother, Connie; his personal DJ, Chill; and his seven-year-old daughter, Toriana, one of his seven children, who are, as he raps, from "five baby mamas with five different personalities." At a folding table Chill furiously scrolls through Boosie's back catalog to assemble tonight's set. Although he has 1,040 songs, five albums and countless mixtapes at his fingertips, Chill is unsure whether this encompasses the entire Boosie oeuvre. "Boosie used to not even have a DJ," he says. "He would go to Walmart and buy his own CDs to play at shows. I said, 'Boosie, you can't do that no more.' "Boosie, wearing head-to-toe white offset by a 10-pound, \$200,000 gold Jesus piece, wanders toward Chill to discuss his set.

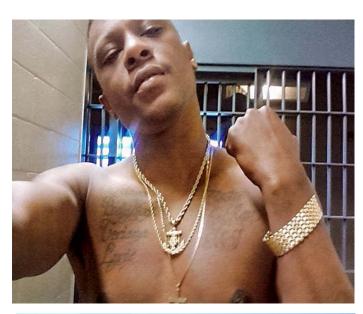
This scene at the Cajundome is overshadowed by outrage building 700 miles away in Ferguson, Missouri as a protest movement set to become the story of the year gains steam. Given Boosie's release just seven months earlier, one might assume it would take time to rebuild his public profile, but in August, Boosie's "Fuck the Police" became the soundtrack for the demonstrations against the police shooting of Michael Brown. In the track, off his 2009 album Superbad: The Return of Mr.Wipe Me Down (named one of the 50 best rapper mixtapes of all time on Complex magazine's website), Boosie vividly describes abuses at the hands of cops. That and the song's calland-response chorus – "Narcotics!/Fuck 'em!/ Feds!/Fuck 'em! DAS!/Fuck 'em!" – make it a compelling piece of protest music.

Little could he have predicted the track would contribute to dozens of arrests in Ferguson, including the one captured in an August 23, 2014 YouTube video in which a protester standing outside a McDonald's blasts Boosie's "Fuck the Police." He's quickly swarmed by officers led by Missouri State Highway Patrol captain Ronald Johnson, whom *Time* magazine dubbed the "star of the Ferguson crisis" for his ability to calm angry crowds. As the protester is arrested, someone yells, "What law was broken?" Johnson responds that the man was "inciting" – as though publicly playing Boosie's music could bring about riots.

It's a plausible conclusion. "Police hot in Laffy," tweeted one fan at the Cajundome show, "cause Boosie around." St Louis rapper and protest leader Tef Poe called "Fuck the Police" "the national anthem of Ferguson protest grounds" in the St Louis Riverfront Times, proclaiming Boosie had "more relevancy to Mike Brown's peers than Al Sharpton." Indeed, a USA Today reporter posted a Vine video just a day before Boosie's show that captures hundreds of protesters furiously rapping the song's lyrics directly in the face of said police.

After a moment of worship with Connie and an aunt who joyously completes a prayer with "Lawd, we gonna set it off," Boosie walks down a cavernous hallway flanked by family and friends to ascend the stage. The stadium erupts, the throng screaming, dancing and rapping along. A sense of resurrection surrounds the man who nearly died at the hands of the Louisiana criminal justice system. The set is raw and compelling, and Boosie concludes it with "Fuck the Police," to which he adds, "RIP, Mike Brown."

"I could go until six in the morning," he tells the crowd. It's a proud return to form, one of several since his release from Angola. "You couldn't hear yourself talk at his first two shows," says DJ Chill. "He could have walked off without performing and the crowds would have been satisfied." That momentum





continued with a fall 2014 mixtape titled *Life After Deathrow*, which garnered more than 100,000 downloads on the day of its release, building anticipation for Boosie's first postprison album, *Touchdown 2 Cause Hell*.

What has made Boosie a central figure in Ferguson, drawing thousands to welcome him back and propelling a career that only strengthened in his absence, isn't jewels and it isn't stunts – it's his music, which touches listeners in ways few rappers since Tupac can. It is music made possible by his birthplace of Baton Rouge and by his fight against the racial injustice of Louisiana's mass incarcerations – what law professor Michelle Alexander has called "the new Jim Crow." And the resurrection that followed was born of a law-enforcement campaign that, despite its best efforts to imprison him for life, could not kill his spirit.

Η

Under an inky black sky on a fall evening in New Orleans, I'm wandering a 650-acre gated community, searching for Lil Boosie's home. This earns me a sarcastic text-message rebuke from the rapper's bodyguard, friend and quasi life coach, which means I've been LOL'd at by Hashim Nzinga, head of the New Black Panthers.

Boosie lives 10 miles outside downtown New Orleans, deep within English Turn, a 500-home development with a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course. A neighborhood of McMansions in a 300-year-old city where 18th and 19th century homes are de rigueur, English Turn is dysfunctional in a distinctly Crescent City manner. The lone security guard smiles and shrugs off

the fact that the development has few working streetlights, symptomatic of the decline from its 1980s heyday, with the celebrities who once called it home – Emeril Lagasse and Mike Ditka among them – long gone. I've plugged Boosie's address into my GPS, but the blanketing darkness makes it impossible to discern the pompously named subdivisions – the Manors, the Estates – leaving me little hope of reaching the rapper.

The aforementioned New Black Panther Party, despite its moniker, is not a successor to the similarly named 1960s civil rights group, which the original Panthers would probably consider a blessing. The Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center have labeled the New Black Panthers a hate group. Its platform merely advocates the "elimination of institutionalized racism," but its rhetoric is often incendiary, such as when a leader of the group's Philadelphia chapter declared in 2009, "I hate white people. All of them. Every last iota of cracker, I hate it.... You want freedom? You going to have to kill some crackers!"

In November, fears in Ferguson were stoked by a CBS News report that the FBI had arrested two New Black Panthers over an alleged plot to detonate pipe bombs during protests. Although CBS retracted the story hours later, the men were indicted in Missouri federal court for using false statements to purchase two Hi-Point firearms. "Weak charges," insists Nzinga. "We will win in court."

After my phone finally lights up with directions, I reach Boosie's 4,000-square-foot mansion, its front door framed by

Grecian columns and an imposingly tall window. In the living room a flatscreen TV plays last October's BET Awards, where

After two hours of waiting, all the crowd wants is Lil Boosie, a.k.a. Boosie Badazz. They're accustomed to long waits, though, because until March 2014, Boosie was incarcerated in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola.

Boosie performed. Bay windows overlook the golf course, palm trees swaying in the dark. For a towering man with wide shoulders and a bald head, Nzinga, who once placed a public bounty on George Zimmerman, is surprisingly gentle as he ushers me into the kitchen.

There Boosie sits, wolfing down barbecue chicken and mashed potatoes prepared by Nzinga himself. The rapper's white T-shirt, jeans and rough, shoeless feet belie his status as one of the country's most talented hip-hop artists. And nothing at Boosie manor resembles the tableaux one might find at the homes of other rappers: no hangers-on, no women, no weed – just Boosie, glassy-eyed after the Lafayette show, and the head of the New Black Panthers nudging him to take his insulin shot. (Boosie, who has type 1 diabetes, has memorably rhymed, "Diabetes steady eating my insides, fucking my vision up / I swear to God I feel like giving up.")

Boosie's friendship with Nzinga is far from radical chic, or extremism as fashion. After all, Boosie is a black man born to working-class parents in the Deep South. He just spent five years in Angola. And "Fuck the Police" is providing the drumbeat to which Ferguson's dissidents raise their arms, crying "Hands up, don't shoot." In other words, Boosie is all radical – and not a damn bit chic.

III

While a rapper like Rick Ross waxes poetic about becoming a billionaire and popping black bottles, Boosie pens lyrics about

growing up poor, washing cars for cash and hoping one day to obtain an elusive bankroll. And while T.I. raps, "If it ain't about the money / Nigga, I ain't gettin' up," Boosie spits about being there for the impoverished and incarcerated. "I Feel Ya," from Life After Deathrow, is one of the most empathetic songs in hiphop today; in it Boosie raps about a raft of outcasts, including an Angola inmate whose commissary account is low and whose mother is suffering from cancer. "If nobody understands you," the chorus goes, "I feel ya / If nobody understands what you're going through, I feel ya."

"It's in the core," he explains, pushing at Nzinga's mashed potatoes. "It's about that class of people who have a real lifestyle. I can't talk about food I'd never eat, my fans would never eat, cars my fans would never see or ride in. I can't talk about Bugattis, because I don't have a Bugatti. I'm the one rapping about the single mother sometimes." He pauses to wipe potatoes from his chin. "My fans know what I had to do to get where I'm at."

It's an enviable place to be. Last March, just before his release, Boosie signed a lucrative three-year contract with Atlantic Records. Touchdown 2 Cause Hell is one of the most anticipated rap projects of 2015. And his fan base grew while he was locked up: A "Free Boosie" movement that began in 2009 exploded into a pop culture phenomenon upon his release; even a TMZ headline proclaimed him "Free at last." High-profile listeners, including Mike Epps and Seattle Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch, are not just admirers – they're obsessives.

Collaborations are slated with rappers from 2 Chainz to 50 Cent to Curren\$y; even Justin Bieber has professed his desire to record together. Last fall Boosie delivered

such a hot streak of guest verses for the likes of Lil Wayne, Young Jeezy and Rick Ross that in November 2014 *Complex* magazine's website compiled his "10 best verses since being released from prison." And his lyrics are parsed with passionate exegesis: A Twitter account tribute to the rapper's rhymes,

@TheMindofBoosie, has nearly 150,000 followers.

"Boosie is an urgent artist, one who drives the culture," says Atlantic Records chairman and CEO Craig Kallman. "Today there's an opening for entrants to the rap game who are doing something powerful and meaningful. Signing Boosie felt obvious. His new album will only scratch the surface of his thoughts on politics, where the country is at economically and in our history. I could see him doing the Clash's Sandinista!" – the 1980 triple album titled after the Nicaraguan liberation movement by the iconic British punk band, the "only band that mattered" – "but two to three times over."

Boosie was born Torrence Hatch on the south side of Baton Rouge, his mother a public-school teacher and his father, Ray, a part-time construction worker. "My dad was in the streets," Boosie says, "but he'd bring home a check too." Baton Rouge, the state capital and a conservative company town, is similar to Washington, DC but with uglier politics. Louisiana is so dominated by oil and gas companies that environmental activists call it a "petrocolonial state." Entrenched racism and violence infect the city. "Separate and Unequal," a recent *Frontline* episode about the Baton Rouge school system, follows an attempt by a group of mostly white parents to form their own town, St George, complete with its own school district.

Since 2006 the city of 230,000 has averaged 60 homicides each year; as a measure of population, its homicide rate is more than three times that of Los Angeles. At one point a despondent local businessman erected highway billboards that read "BR murder rate higher than chicago."

"It's just been like that," Boosie explains. "Murder, murder, murder. Whoever murders most gets the most money. People will try to take your life because of what you've got, make you feel like you owe them something because of it. The dropout rate is sky-high and there's so many guns, so people just be trying to protect themselves, scared for their lives." He pauses. "Baton Rouge is crazy, you know?"

Growing up, Boosie sought shelter from south-side chaos in basketball. He played across the country as a point guard in an Amateur Athletic Union league. While the streets raged,

Given Boosie's release just seven months earlier, one might assume it would take time to rebuild his public profile, but in August, Boosie's "Fuck the Police" became the soundtrack for the demonstrations against the police shooting of Michael Brown.

rap crew, the Concentration Camp, and released his solo debut, Youngest of da Camp, an auspicious work from an 18-year-old artist. The release made him the hottest rapper in the city. "When Boosie came," he says about himself, "it's just been history ever since."

A pair of Baton Rouge music entrepreneurs, Marcus Roach and Melvin Vernell Jr – known as Turk and Mel, respectively – quickly signed Boosie to their label, Trill Entertainment, on the strength of his debut. The presence of their other partner, Pimp C of the legendary Houston rap outfit UGK, persuaded Boosie to choose Trill over its competitors. Through Pimp C, Boosie met Nzinga, who was then UGK's road manager. "I been knowing

Boosie since he first came to Trill. This is nothing new," Nzinga says, referring to their brotherly bond. Atlantic CEO Kallman hails Turk and Mel as

his family life remained warm. He spent his boyhood writing poetry and hanging out at neighborhood suppers, a Baton Rouge tradition of weekend neighborhood gatherings. "You'd purchase a supper," Connie explains, "play cards, listen to music – but not hip-hop. Love songs. Blues." When his father passed away from cancer in 1998, Boosie realized he wanted to rap. "He didn't want to play basketball anymore," says Connie. "He wanted to support the family."

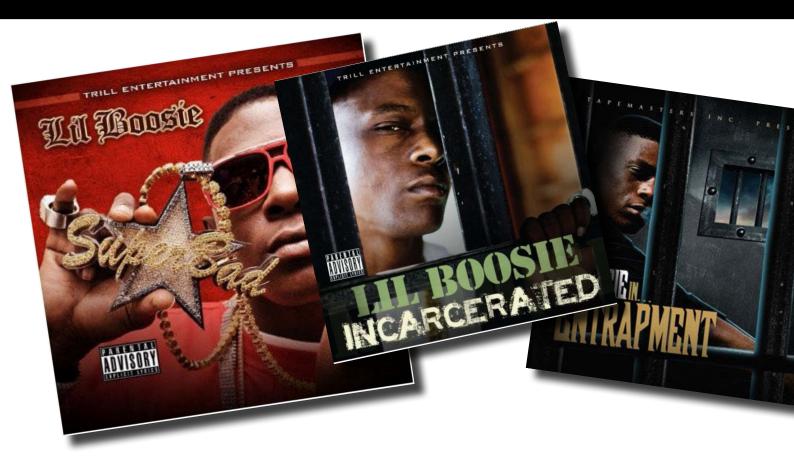
For Boosie, it was a year as transformative as it was tragic.
His cousin Glenn Clifton Jr, under the moniker Young Bleed, released his debut album, My Balls and My Work, on No Limit.

For Boosie, it was a year as transformative as it was tragic. His cousin Glenn Clifton Jr, under the moniker Young Bleed, released his debut album, *My Balls and My Work*, on No Limit, a then-mighty New Orleans rap label. At its peak, the No Limit empire, run by rapper and entrepreneur Master P, was valued at nearly \$400 million. A berth for Baton Rouge rappers in that glitzy universe (so pivotal within the national rap landscape that it popularized the term *bling*) raised the possibility that the smaller city could become a hip-hop epicenter too.

At the time, Baton Rouge had two major rap stars: Young Bleed and C-Loc. In 2000 Boosie joined Bleed and C-Loc's burgeoning

"great record men." Boosie's arrival led to phenomenal records, even after Pimp C, who became Boosie's close mentor, died in 2007 from a codeine overdose. Most rappers boast of their prodigious output, especially in today's mixtape-driven digital era, but Boosie's catalog grew so vast and varied - with songs about two-faced street partners ("Betrayed"), paeans to strange sex ("Finger Fuckin'"), tributes to great mothers ("Mama Know Love"), cautionary tales about the streets ("Chill Out") and sweet, heartfelt tracks dedicated to his children ("Daddy Luv U"), all delivered in his nasally punk snarl – that it is a universe unto itself. Boosie was among the first to popularize the now ubiquitous term ratchet, on a song of the same name, defined in liner notes by the song's producer as "n., pron., v., adv. 1. To be ghetto, real, gutter, nasty. 2. It's whatever, bout it, etc." It's now universal slang: Beyoncé posted a photo of herself on Instagram in which she sports door-knocker earrings that read "Ratchet," and Miley Cyrus has been accused of co-opting ratchet culture with her embrace of twerking and gold grilles in her infamous 2013 video for "We Can't Stop." "When Boosie talks about being





ratchet," says Nzinga, "he's really just telling our stories. And that's how he became the people's rapper."

IV

By the early 2000s Boosie's career had hit its stride. He'd even managed to find a place among Baton Rouge's white elite, with a home in the ritzy Centurion Place subdivision; a neighbor who was a judge brought cookies as a housewarming gift. But the goodwill was short-lived. Before long, Boosie was seen as a newmoney nuisance, and his world began to collide with Louisiana reality, where the *laissez le bon temps rouler* ("let the good times roll") image is little more than tourism marketing.

Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the United States. If it were its own country, it would have the highest incarceration rate in the world. This is due to the state's habitual-offender law, which mandates a prison sentence of "natural life" without parole after three felony convictions. Drug possession in Louisiana can be a felony, depending on the drug and the offender's intent, which means multiple drug convictions can lead to a life sentence. In 2011 a 35-year-old named Cornell Hood II was handed a life sentence on his fourth marijuana-related conviction. According to a *Times-Picayune* series called "Louisiana Incarcerated: How We Built the World's Prison Capital," at least 300 inmates in the state who are serving life without parole have never been convicted of a violent crime.

Given Boosie's revolutionary, power-challenging music, a series of drug-possession charges between 2008 and 2011 brought him serious trouble. In October 2008 Boosie was pulled over by East Baton Rouge Parish sheriff's deputies, who seized a small bag of marijuana, a blunt and a gun from his vehicle (his gun was legal, but it is illegal in Louisiana to carry a firearm while in possession of illegal drugs). In 2009 Boosie pleaded guilty to third-degree marijuana possession and was sentenced to two years in prison. Further drug charges in 2011 didn't help the rapper, who pleaded guilty to attempting to smuggle codeine

into prison. What might have been a misdemeanor in a more liberal city earned Boosie a decade in Baton Rouge, thanks to the harsh political climate and, some said, the perception among the city's elite that his rising national profile made him a dangerous cultural force. Six years of the sentence were suspended, but the conviction's timing could not have been worse, arriving as Superbad debuted in the top 10 of the Billboard 200.

The blow would soon be eclipsed by a life-defining tragedy: At 12:40am on October 21, 2009, a 35-year-old Boosie associate named Terry Boyd was shot to death at his Baton Rouge home. The shots were fired through Boyd's window. A toxicology screen later detected morphine, marijuana and codeine in his blood. The murder was noted in the Baton Rouge *Advocate*'s "Police and Fire Briefs" section and scarcely anywhere else.

Law-enforcement officials claimed to have no leads, but behind the scenes fingers pointed at Boosie, perhaps the unlikeliest suspect – he and Boyd were family, as Boosie has a daughter with Boyd's sister. During the trial, prosecutors alleged Boosie had ordered Boyd's murder to preempt an attack after an Angola inmate warned him in a letter that Boyd was set to "jack and slap him," as reported by *Rolling Stone*. Boosie and his legal team deny the letter's existence. Prosecutors were unable to explain the meaning of "jack and slap" or why Boyd would turn on a man he had previously been amicable with in court. The letter itself has never been released to the public.

Behind bars at the Dixon Correctional Institute, Boosie had no doubt he was going to take the fall: Michael "Marlo Mike" Louding, a teenage Baton Rouge street player whose nickname stems from *The Wire*'s violent drug lord Marlo Stanfield, had confessed to law enforcement that Boosie paid him to kill Boyd.

Curiously, Louding provided police with factually inconsistent statements on May 14 and May 17, 2010. In the first, Louding denied any involvement in the Boyd murder, but then he reversed course. "Boosie was like, 'Y'all need to take care of it,'" he told interrogators, claiming the rapper gave him \$2,800 to do so.

Jason Williams, Boosie's attorney, notes Louding was interviewed over nearly 10 hours, but police began recording only after seven hours had passed. Louding later admitted that prosecutors had offered him a deal for "less than life" for Boyd's slaying if he cooperated against Boosie. Further, Louding claimed investigators lied to him during the interrogation, saying Boosie had a \$25,000 hit out for him; getting Boosie behind bars, Louding was told, would ensure his safety.

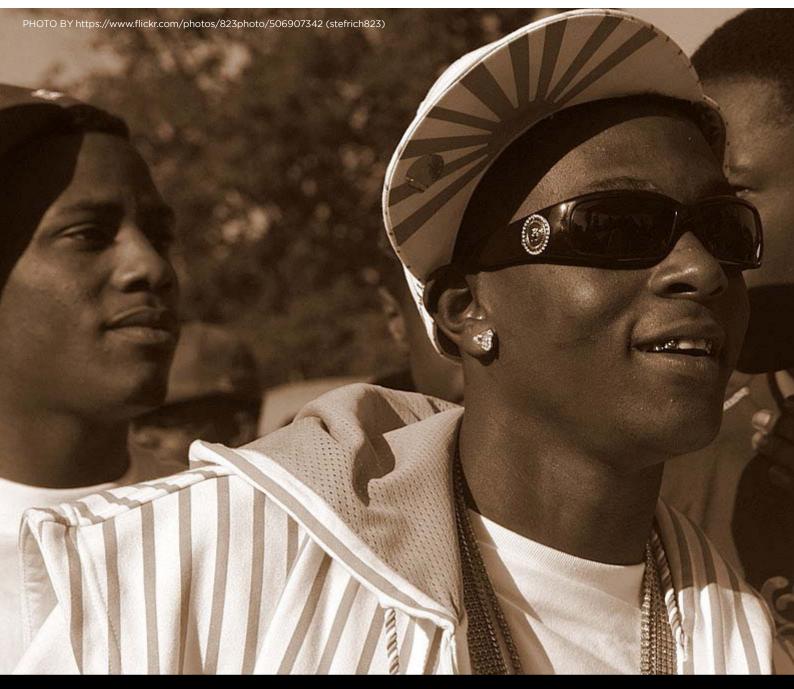
"I was getting word from other jails of what Marlo was saying," Boosie recalls. "I knew what was coming." He believes Louding's claims were the result of a law-enforcement campaign to turn Boosie's network against him. "They were snatching all my people up off the street," he says, "snatching up everybody."

"Boyd was thought to have killed several people," says Williams. "There were bullets in Baton Rouge with his name on them."

On June 17, 2010 Boosie was indicted for first-degree murder

– a charge that carries a punishment of life without parole or the death penalty. East Baton Rouge Parish is particularly death-penalty prone; in 2009 it accounted for 16 of the 82 death sentences handed down in Louisiana, more than any other parish (and all 16 were given to African American males). Boosie coped with the prospect of death at the height of his career by self-medicating. "I got high every day in jail," he says. "I'm like, Hell, I'm in prison. I'm going to live like I'm on the street."

His despair deepened with an intimidation campaign intended to rattle him before his trial. In early 2010 police visited Boosie at Dixon. "Came every two months, telling me they're going to charge me with another murder, another murder, another murder," he says. "They said, 'We got you on seven murders.'" Concurrently, Louisiana DAs held press conferences to brag about their case's strength, the big fish they had caught and the money they'd spent to bring Boosie down. Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal attended one of the press conferences. The prospect



of taking Boosie on as a client seemed so forbidding that few lawyers would bite. Were it not for Jason Williams, the rapper might still be behind bars, or dead.

As Boosie frantically searched for an attorney to represent him at trial, friends and associates urged him toward Williams. "You don't know about the new Johnnie Cochran?" Boosie remembers being told. In reality, Williams shares none of the flamboyance of Cochran, who was best known for his slangy "If the gloves don't fit, you must acquit" defense of OJ Simpson. With his dimpled smile and easygoing demeanor, when Williams slams the state's case against Boosie, it is with quiet conviction rather than thunder. He's quick to theorize why Boosie was indicted: "He was antiestablishment, questioning the authority of the DA and law enforcement in his music," he says, "no different from Bob Dylan."

Williams was elected to the New Orleans City Council last March (the same month Boosie was released), a position far from the flashy career moves – bigger, more famous clients and skyrocketing billable rates – of most high-profile criminal attorneys. As an African American man who has defended rich and poor alike, he is deeply familiar with the unequal scales of criminal justice. In taking on Boosie, Williams "had to go against Governor Jindal, District Attorney Hillar Moore and law enforcement itself," he says, "and say they were wasting taxpayer dollars." Or, as Boosie says in praise of Williams, "I was hollering at everybody, seeing who ready to go to war, to be hated if they beat this case."

As the office of Baton Rouge DA Hillar Moore focused its campaign, the rapper boldly and publicly fought back. On a 2010 mixtape track, "Fuck 'Em All," Boosie rhymes, "Fuck the DA Hillar Moore/Your racist ass going to hell/Probably gonna be dead/When I come outta jail." Boosie's lyrics against a man with the power to seek his death – in combination with his case's high profile, his rising fame and fears for his safety – would result in his being moved from the medium-security Dixon to near-solitary "closed cell restricted" 23/1 confinement (23 hours in a cell, one hour out) on death row in Angola.

Nearly 75 percent of Angola's 6,300 inmates are serving life sentences without parole. Few of the thousands who enter leave alive.

Little could he have predicted the track would contribute to dozens of arrests in Ferguson, including the one captured in an August 23, 2014 YouTube video in which a protester standing outside a McDonald's blasts Boosie's "Fuck the Police."

For a drug offender like Boosie, the placement was extraordinarily unusual. High-profile inmates such as snitches and celebrities often find themselves in protective custody, but as NYU law professor Bryan Stevenson writes, "It is illegal to subject pretrial detainees to confinement that constitutes punishment. Putting someone who has not yet been tried in a prison reserved for convicted felons is almost never done. As is putting someone on death row."

"You have to look at his behavior in prison," responds Louisiana Department of Corrections spokesperson Pam Laborde. "You can't just look at the crime. You have people at Angola with murder and rape convictions who are trustees" – that is, inmates with highly sought-after prison jobs and less-restrictive housing assignments. "I know he had issues at Dixon and Angola and time taken from his 'out date' because of those issues" – presumably including getting high behind bars to cope with his impending trial.

But locking someone away for 23 hours a day on death row over a marijuana charge – or for anything short of insanity or physical risk

– can safely be called overzealous. Indeed, Amnesty International calls such treatment cruel and inhumane.

"Solitary just becomes a way of life," Boosie recalls. "You make the best of what you have." Fan mail kept his spirits afloat. "I got hundreds of letters a day," he remembers, "fans cursing me out, tired of listening to other rappers. Thirteen-year-olds telling me my music was their daddy; I was the closest thing they had to a father. They would damn near have me in tears."

When his murder trial began in May 2012, it seemed the state of Louisiana had deployed its entire legal arsenal against him. His jury was seated anonymously, protection typically reserved for violent drug kingpins. One prosecutor had a 24-hour security guard assigned to her. Snipers were perched on the courthouse roof. "It was like he was an underworld boss," Williams says. Nzinga agrees, describing the prosecution's attitude toward the trial as being "like [Boosie was] John Gotti."

On the stand, key witness Louding immediately recanted his statements implicating Boosie in Boyd's murder. To the chagrin of prosecutors, he turned out to be as unreliable as his 2010 interrogation, testifying that instead of killing Boyd on the night of the shooting, he was with Boosie at the rapper's home. Prosecutors pressed on with flimsy evidence, including a letter from Boosie to Louding advising him to "listen to Donkey, Donkey knows the deal" - referring to Boosie's cousin Carvis "Donkey" Webb, to whom Louding had reached out after his arrest. They argued that Boosie had told Louding to seek advice from Webb on how to tell prosecutors his confessions were coerced. Webb himself flatly rejected that interpretation, testifying that Boyd had several enemies in Baton Rouge, recalling an incident in which Boyd had been shot 12 to 14 times outside a nightclub by a man he'd robbed. When Webb's turn on the stand backfired, prosecutors were left scrambling with scraps from Boosie's lyrics, including "Whoever tried to play me, they dead now" and "Yo Marlo, he drive a Monte Carlo, dat bitch gray / I want him dead today, here go the cake."

But lyrics are just that. Introducing songs as evidence has

become a surprisingly commonplace prosecutorial tactic in criminal cases:
A California rapper named Tiny Doo is facing 25 years to life over his alleged role

in a gang that committed nine shootings; incredibly, prosecutors allege he was not involved in the gang's violence but profited from their activities via album sales. The tactic could target any major artist with violent lyrics. "Bob Marley said he shot the sheriff," Boosie points out. "He wasn't indicted for it. Johnny Cash said he shot a man down in 'Folsom Prison' just to watch him die."

Even without Louding's testimony, there was a chance a jury bullied by prosecutors and blinded by circumstantial evidence could bring a murder conviction, especially in conservative Baton Rouge. But before Williams "could make it two blocks back to our hotel," as he recalls, a unanimous verdict came down: On May 11, 2012, Boosie was found not guilty.

"Karma's a motherfucker, man," Boosie says now. "That's how I feel. After all they put me through, I was acquitted in less than 40 minutes. If I was them, that would hurt."

Louding was not as lucky: In July 2013 he was given a life sentence without parole after a first-degree murder conviction in Boyd's slaying. Then, last February during an appeal hearing, a psychiatrist testified that Louding had PTSD, vividly describing two murders Louding had witnessed at the age of nine. But it wasn't enough to change the mind of Judge Trudy White, who declared Louding "rotten to the core" as she passed him a Bible from the bench.

Boosie's acquittal ensured his eventual freedom, but he had several years left to serve on drug charges. With a new lease on life, he poured himself into his work and art, penning an autobiographical screenplay and composing more than a thousand new songs. He attended church services and found meaning in

menial prison tasks. "I was the vegetable man," he says, laughing.

That newfound focus brought an incredible payoff in his contract with Atlantic. "We solidified the Boosie deal before he was released so he could hit the ground running," Kallman says. But neither he nor Boosie could have predicted the cavalcade of mainstream media attention that accompanied his freedom, with coverage everywhere from Buzzfeed ("Rapper Lil Boosie is finally home - Internet, rejoice!") to Spin ("The Free Boosie Twitter account, which numbers 141,000 followers, can rest easy for a while"). At a postrelease Atlantic press conference, rappers Bun B, Webbie and Young Jeezy stood by his side. "You'll be surprised how many people don't want to see a young black man come home from prison and succeed," iconic rapper and UGK leader Bun B told the crowd. "They waited years for Mandela. They waited years for Pimp C. They waited years for Boosie."

Boosie's release from Angola and his prophetic role in the mushrooming antipolice-brutality movement cannot dispel the long shadow his Louisiana criminal record casts over his future, where any mistake, no matter how

small, could mean decades in prison. After the Cajundome show, Boosie confesses he's leaving Louisiana for good. "I'm just trying something new," he says. "Louisiana is too small for me." He pauses, struggling to place his thoughts. "Got to get on. New York, Rodeo Drive, Atlanta, you know. I'll always love Louisiana; nothing comes before Louisiana. It's just me living here. It's too much going on, too much that's been done here."

Fans from his home state retain their near-religious devotion, with teenagers rocking "Boosie fade" haircuts and LSU sorority girls rattling off his lyrics at will. But "the not-so-Boosie crowd," as

he puts it, knows only his "crucified character." Outside Louisiana he'll have a clean slate; the state's habitual-offender law makes remaining home – where he has contributed so much of his spirit, and where his fans, in turn, see him as family – too risky. Williams personally advised Boosie to move. "If he wants a real shot at freedom, he needs to go somewhere that embraces artists," Williams explains. "We have the highest incarceration rate in the world. I don't want him here."

His new home will be in Atlanta, where Mel and Turk moved after their own scrapes with the law similarly forced them to flee.

He'll still meet with his probation officer and undergo drug testing. And because of the long-distance relocation, most of his children will remain behind for the time being, a significant burden on the proud father.

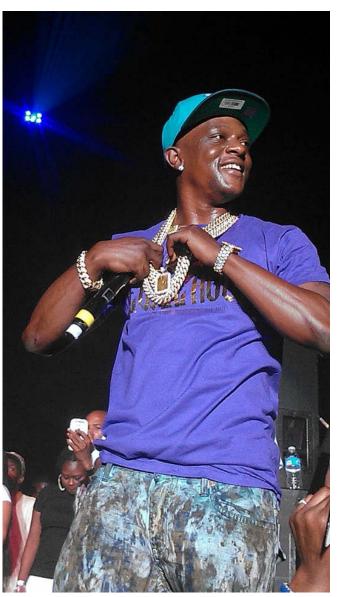
Nzinga, clearing away dishes on the kitchen table, is less resigned to the move, viewing it as yet another dark chapter in a long history of African American artists being driven from Baton Rouge. "Half the south-side black population worked for Trill Entertainment," Nzinga says. "They trumped false charges and chased them out. It's an impossible place to live if you're black and have a certain amount of money and don't depend on white America. That's the truth. It happened with Master P, it happened to Trill, and it's happening with Boosie."

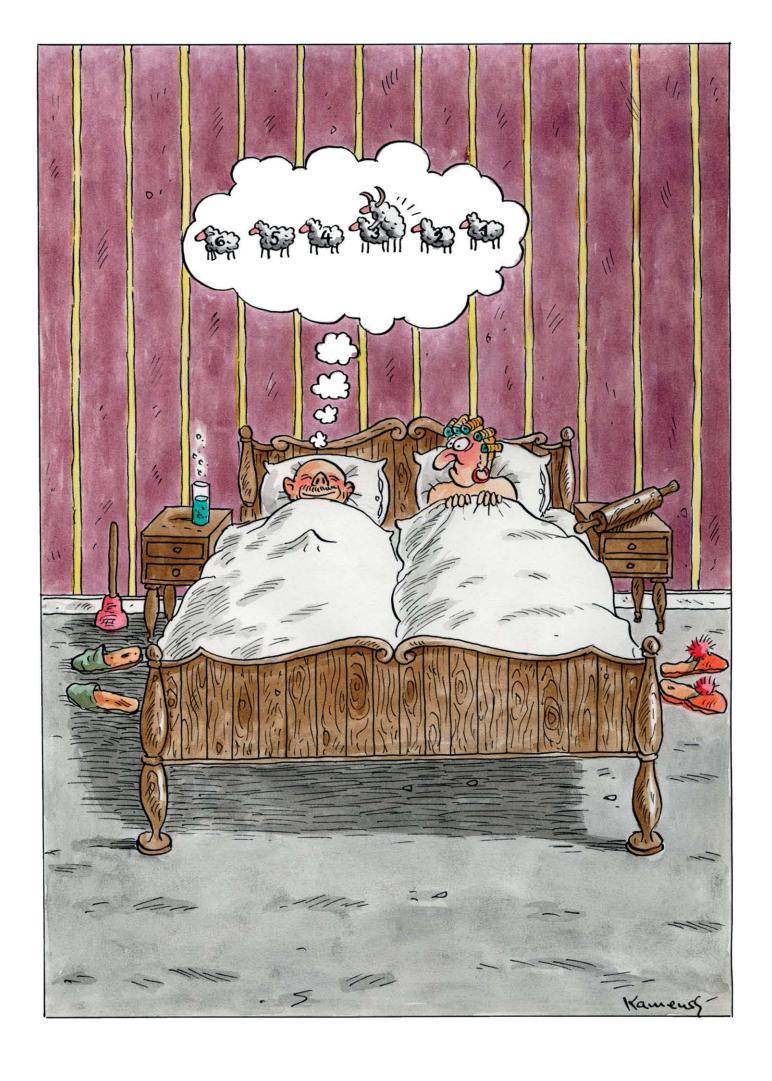
He is naturally nudging Boosie to embrace his newfound status as a Ferguson icon. As we watch the *USA Today* reporter's video, Boosie says, almost under his breath, "I just be feeling like I'm not the only one feeling that way. When I see it, I'm feeling like, Feel me now, feel me now." Aware of the costs of speaking out against law enforcement, he shies away from revealing much more. Still, Boosie is hardly backing down from Ferguson: He recorded a song in Brown's honor in the fall of 2014 called "Hands Up Don't Shoot."

Although his immediate future is in flux, Boosie's prodigious musical output will not be stanched. "What I know is the struggle," Boosie says.

"What I know is what I've seen, what I've been through. And no matter what I'm worth or how much money I make, it won't make me stop rapping, because I am and always will be the voice of people who can't speak.

"It's really all been uphill since the beginning," he continues. "It used to be so easy to piss me off, and it's so hard now. I came home making more than I was before. I know who's real and who's fake. I got a good situation. So when people judge my character, I smile, because I know who I am. I'm an entertainer. The corner was a long time ago."





Hild an







PLAYBOY: Did you grow up in a house where sex was discussed freely? BANKS: Yes, but it was more joked about. My mother was always making inappropriate jokes. We had sex books in the house. She never tried to hide it from me. When I got my period it was very much like, "Boys are going to want to touch your body, but you can get pregnant now, and we not playing that shit." My mom scared me off of getting pregnant.

PLAYBOY: In what ways are you like your mom? BANKS: We both have really good taste in things: food, music, furniture. But I like men a lot, and she's like, "I could care less." My dad died when I was really young, and my mom never dated anyone else. She's into her dogs and books and decorating her house. And I'm like, "Ooh, boys!" I'll have a boyfriend, and then a couple of months will go by and I'll have a new boyfriend, and she'll be like, "Azealia, can't you stay with one?" No! [laughs] They're all too fun.

PLAYBOY: What's the longest relationship you've had?

BANKS: Four years. It started when I was 17. He was 43. There's something very wrong with a man that age who wants to date a 17-year-old girl. I didn't know how to shave my bush and shit like that. I had a hairy pussy. I didn't know how to wear perfume. I had neon pink barrettes in my hair. And as "212" started to pop off and my career started to happen, he became jealous. He choked me and beat me up, and of course you should not be fucking with a man who puts his hands on you, but I was stupid and young.

PLAYBOY: Did that relationship cure you of your attraction to older men?

BANKS: No, I love older men. The things in an older man's house are better – his furniture, even his knives and his pots. And they smell





better. Young guys, they may skip a shower and shit like that.

PLAYBOY: You were signed to two major labels, and after protracted battles with them, you self-released *Broke*With Expensive Taste in November. How did your music change in the midst of all that?

BANKS: Even though I've always made really cool stuff, I did it with a little bit of a pop sensibility because I was signed to a major label. That's why you have songs like "ATM Jam" and "Chasing Time" that are more pop. But now I don't have a label to answer to. All the ideas I'm having are fucking cool and abstract and crazy and dope.

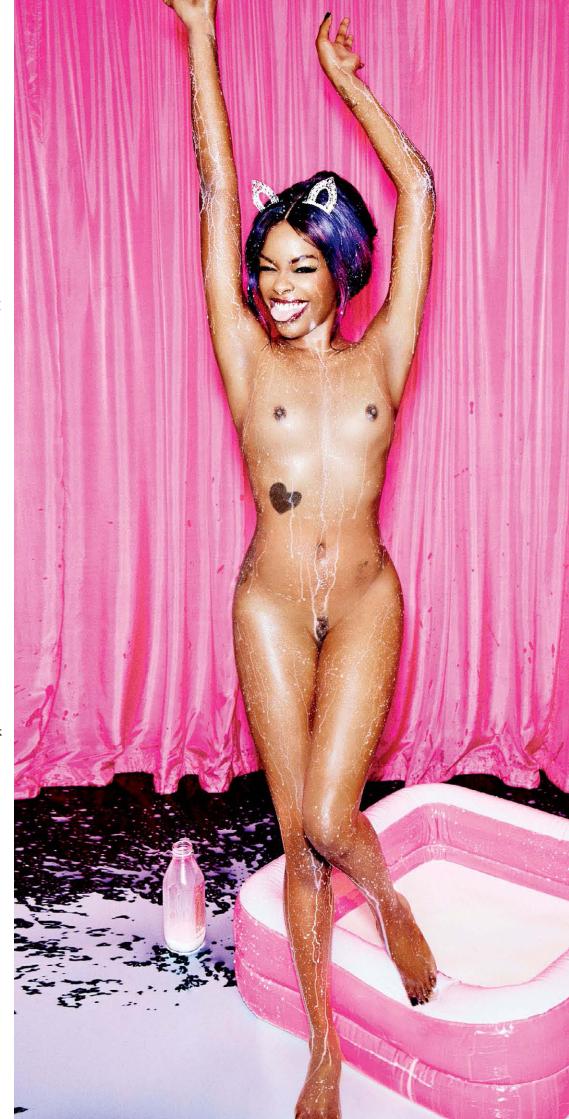
PLAYBOY: It sounds like you don't care whether your songs are on the radio or not.

BANKS: No. There are certain ways you have to behave if you want to get played on the radio. I want to date whoever I want to date. I want to smoke weed. I want to get drunk. I want to go on vacation, you know?

PLAYBOY: At this point, lots of producers want to work with you, but when you were unknown and posting songs on Myspace, you e-mailed producers and almost begged for beats.

BANKS: Seriously. You know how people say "I will fuck for Chanel"? Like, no, I won't fuck for a beat. But almost. I might flash a little. [laughs[] No, I'm joking. But I will fucking beg. PLAYBOY: Is there someone whose career you'd like to emulate?

BANKS: Jay Z. That's the only person I have my eye set on. The race thing always comes up, but I want to get there being very black and proud and boisterous about it. You get what I mean? A lot of times when you're a black woman and you're proud, that's why people don't like you. In American society, the game is to be a nonthreatening black person. That's why you have Pharrell or Kendrick Lamar saying, "How can we expect people to





respect us if we don't respect ourselves?" He's playing that nonthreatening black man shit, and that gets all the white soccer moms going, "We love him." Even Kanye West plays a little bit of that game – "Please accept me, white world." Jay Z hasn't played any of those games, and that's what I like.

PLAYBOY: If people read your Twitter account and don't like you, is that because of race?

BANKS: It's always about race. Lorde can run her mouth and talk shit about all these other bitches, but y'all aren't saying she's angry. If I have something to say, I get pushed into the corner.

PLAYBOY: And whenever you point out that discrepancy, someone on Twitter says, "Why are you trying to make this about race?"

BANKS: Because y'all motherfuckers still owe me reparations! [laughs[] That's why it's still about race. Really, the generational effects of Jim Crow and poverty linger on. As long as I have my money, I'm getting the fuck out of here and I'm gonna leave y'all to your own devices.

PLAYBOY: Do you want to leave the US?

BANKS: Yes! I hate everything about this country. Like, I hate fat white Americans. All the people who are crunched into the middle of America, the real fat and meat of America, are these racist conservative white people who live on their farms. Those little teenage girls who work at Kmart and have a racist grandma – that's really America.

PLAYBOY: If people don't like you, does that mean they're racist?

BANKS: No, not at all. There's misogyny, and then there's something called misogynoir [a term coined by writer Moya Bailey to describe "the unique ways in which black women are pathologized in popular culture"]. We have all these stereotypes in society: The gay man is a faggot





and he's over-the-top, or you're an untrustworthy cracker, or you're a loud black bitch. All these things exist for a reason, you know what I'm saying? Yeah, I am loud and boisterous –

PLAYBOY: And you are black. BANKS: And I am black, and I am a pain in your ass. But I'm not really talking to you, and that's what makes those people mad. You're not invited to this conversation. This is not about you.

PLAYBOY: This has been an issue ever since hip-hop spread outside New York City. It's a black art form that's subject to being critiqued by people who don't understand it.

BANKS: When you rip a people from their land, from their customs, from their culture – there's still a piece of me that knows I'm not supposed to be speaking English, I'm not supposed to be worshipping Jesus Christ. All this shit is unnatural to me. People will be like, "Oh, you're ignorant because you don't speak proper English." No. This is not mine. I don't even want this shit, so I'm going to do whatever the fuck I want with this language. I'm going to call you a fag or a cracker or a bitch.

PLAYBOY: Are you writing about these topics in your new songs? BANKS: No, not in the songs. I get annoyed with the fact that I'm even asked to explain myself. Why do I have to explain this to y'all? My little white fans will be like, "Why do you want reparations for work you didn't do?" Well, you got handed down your grandfather's estate and you got to keep your grandmother's diamonds and pearls and shit.

PLAYBOY: Haven't you put yourself in the position of explaining yourself?

BANKS: No, y'all put me in the fucking position.

PLAYBOY: You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to.
BANKS: But I want to talk about it!
PLAYBOY: Then keep talking about it. There aren't enough musicians who talk about the issues you bring up.

BANKS: You're not paying attention. There are plenty of intelligent musicians. Kanye West, J Cole, Ariel Pink, Lauryn Hill, KRS-One, Q-Tip – lots of people. I'm not special.

PLAYBOY: Do you agree there are more artists who don't talk about it than artists who do?

BANKS: Of course.

PLAYBOY: Then we agree.

BANKS: No, we're not agreeing. We are absolutely *not* agreeing. I get

upset when people are like, "Why don't you just make music?" What would happen if I couldn't sing? Then I'd just be another black bitch to y'all. It's really fucking annoying. Black people need reparations for building this country, and we deserve way more fucking credit and respect.

PLAYBOY: Are your creative impulses closely related to your destructive impulses?

BANKS: Yes. In my adulthood I'm having to destroy all these things society really wants you to think. The history textbooks in the US are the worst if you're not white. "The white man gave you the vote. He Christianized you and taught you how to speak English. If it weren't for him, you'd still be living in a hut." I could write a book about why black people shouldn't be Christians. Young black kids should have their own special curriculum that doesn't start from the boat ride over from Africa. All you know as a black kid is we came over here on a boat, we didn't have anything, and we still don't have anything. But what was happening in Africa? What culture were we pulled away from? That information is vital to the survival of a young black soul.

PLAYBOY: You said black people aren't supposed to be Christians. What religion do you identify with?

BANKS: I don't want to say, but I'll tell you about one form of the religion. It's called 21 Divisions. When they brought the slaves over to the Caribbean, they syncretized all their African gods with Catholic saints. So in 21 Divisions there are black gods and goddesses, and my mother practiced that when I was little. Whenever problems happened, we turned to 21 Divisions to fix it. It's funny, because my friends on the block in Harlem, their mothers would be like, "Oh, you fucking with that witchcraft. You working roots." You can cleanse people with root work or do bad things to them. But 21 Divisions is celestial.

PLAYBOY: It sounds like religion is a big aspect of your life.

BANKS: I don't understand how someone could be an atheist. Think about God as software, right? If you were to look at God's face, your head would explode. Because your head is a calculator, and the amount of information that would be embedded in his face would fit only on a Google-size data center. Your head cannot handle that much information. Stop looking for God.

PLAYBOY: What else should we talk about?

BANKS: Let's talk about sexy PLAYBOY stuff.

PLAYBOY: Were you at all hesitant about posing for PLAYBOY?

BANKS: No, I love getting naked. It's so funny, every time my manager arranges a photo shoot, I'm like, "Let's do a nude photo!" And everyone's like, "Oh, Azealia, you're always trying to bring your butt out." Posing for PLAYBOY was a no-brainer. I was like, "Yes! They want to see me naked."

PLAYBOY: You're bisexual. Do women hit on you often?

BANKS: No, most women are scared of me. People have always been scared of me. I punched my teacher in the face one time when I was in preschool. We were playing house, and the lady was like, "I'm a monster! I'm gonna eat your family!" I punched her right in the eye. [laughs] It was a Head Start program, so I was three.

PLAYBOY: As a kid, were you pretty much the same person you are now?

BANKS: Oh my God. We had journals in second grade. I went to PS 166, on 88th Street and Columbus Avenue, and we had a teacher I could not stand. The black kids got in trouble all the time. We were loud or whatever, but whenever she told a white kid to quiet down and they did, she'd be like, whatever. But if she told a black kid to quiet down and one of them sucked their teeth, she'd put them in the corner. I wrote in the journal one day, "I cannot stand this white bitch teacher. Fuck this white bitch." She found my journal and called my mother, who was embarrassed, because my mother used to say stuff like that - "White people are of the devil. Stay away from them." That teacher was scared of me after that.

PLAYBOY: That's not surprising. How much sex have you had recently?

BANKS: Not a lot.

PLAYBOY: You should be having lots of sex.

BANKS: Right? I should be getting dick all the time. I like to fuck.

[Laughs] But I can't just meet a guy and fuck him. I'm too afraid of getting herpes or some shit. I like to feel them out, and then I start talking about my black female problems, and we get into a conversation about race, and then we disagree and don't have another date. Whatever. I'll just hang out with my mother. It's okay, because pussy is way more sacred than penis.







Members of Team SoloMid celebrate their victory at the North American finals of the League of Legends Championship Series.

glasses perched on his nose, raises his fist in the air. The crowd chants his name: "Bjergsen, Bjergsen, *Bjergsen!*"

The kid hasn't sung a song, rapped a rhyme, ripped a blazing guitar solo or spun a killer DJ set. He hasn't sunk a gamewinning three-pointer or buried a last-second slap shot into the goal.

But Søren "Bjergsen" Bjerg, this adored kid from Denmark who now lives near the beach in Santa Monica, completely rules at a video game called *League of Legends*. His ability is buried within the hyperturbo *click-click-click-click* of a mouse. Put simply, the game involves two teams of five intense guys as they try to capture the other team's base. In this multiplayer online battle arena, gamers choose avatars from a roster of 120 graphic-novel-like characters, each with unique abilities, such as Yasuo the Unforgiven with his sharp, damaging sword that causes a whirlwind of injury, or

Blitzcrank the Great Steam Golem, with his clanky rocket grab, a speedy death grip. To the uninitiated, it all looks like a cartoon without a narrative. To those who know, it's like playing a brilliant mash-up of *Lord of the Rings* meets chess meets soccer meets UFC meets religion.

Created by Santa Monica—based Riot Games, League of Legends is played each month by a whopping 67 million people worldwide. It's the new rock-and-roll gospel, a gospel whose word is the fever pitch heard from the Church of Constant Gaming. And the word never lets up. Day into night, sunup to sundown, 27 million people play League in any 24-hour period. More than 32 million people watched the 2013 world finals, held at a sold-out Staples Center in Los Angeles. That's more than the highest-rated games of this year's NBA finals, NHL finals or Sunday Night Football.

This has turned e-sports into big business.

Amazon recently paid \$970 million in cash for Twitch, a massively popular video service on which millions of fans watch live streams of games including *League of Legends*. Coca-Cola and American Express signed on to sponsor the 2014 *League of Legends* Championship Series.

It's all good for the 20 or so young League gods with such names as Doublelift, Hai, Meteos, Faker, Crumbzz and WildTurtle. They make serious money as the all-stars of competitive online gaming, or e-sports, as it's called. Many, including Bjergsen, will likely be millionaires before the age of 25 through winnings of up to \$1 million for the world finals, sponsorships and extras including \$1,000 daily revenue from streaming their play sessions on Twitch and other sites. (Imagine if LeBron James or Kevin Durant did that with solo practices. They'd be Dr Dre rich quick.)

But it's about the fans too. They also play

to the death, because whether you're Peter Dinklage short or Blake Griffin tall, League is accessible. But fans know how damn tricky it is to win. Their love of the pros is more like adoration. Sure, it's because the pros possess enviable skills, the cougarlike reflexes and the Bobby Fischer strategies. Even more, this fame is about a digital cult of personality stoked by social media that encourages fans to feel extraordinarily close to their idols. All the pros interact with fans on Reddit, Twitch and Twitter (though the constant bashing when players don't do well has driven some to retire early). At its best, it's a AAA-baseball fan-appreciation day where players mingle and sign autographs - except this is online 24/7. And it pays off. Deep down, fans from Texarkana to Seoul yearn to have the rapid-fire synapses of a champion, to win, to win big, to be revered simply for playing games. They want to be heroes. They want to be remembered. And with that online rhapsody comes the money.

It's worldwide, and as Riot Games vice president of e-sports Dustin Beck says, it's the "world's biggest phenomenon that no one truly understands." He means parents, politicians, mainstream journalists, movie producers, anyone who isn't part of the *League* scene. Fans love this punk-ass game featuring monsters and wizards because they can play it for free. And they love it because it's hard. With the deep strategy involved in choosing everything from characters (called champions) to the

innumerable spells and abilities, it can take a year to learn properly.



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The kid hasn't sung a song, rapped a rhyme, ripped a blazing guitar solo or spun a killer DJ set. He hasn't sunk a gamewinning three-pointer or buried a last-second slap shot into the goal. But... this adored kid... completely rules at a video game called *League of Legends*.

At the All-Star Paris 2014 event, fans waited for hours in the pouring rain even though they held assigned seats. The event sold out its four-day stint in 72 hours. Someone sold a one-day pass in the nosebleeds online for nearly \$1,000. Fans milling in the lobby are in complete awe. "These guys," says one French teen, "I could never play as good. I love Cloud9 the best."

That ardor is why the Cloud9 team's intrepid leader, Hai Lam, is stoked to play here with the other big boys of e-sports. Cloud9 beat all comers, including the fearsome Team SoloMid (for which Bjergsen plays), to be part of the all-star matchups.

Hai and Cloud9 dutifully practice up to 12 hours a day in a group apartment less

than a mile from the Santa Monica surf. But Hai rarely hits the beach, because the work of a Leaguer is never done. That work ethic is one reason Hai's lung collapsed during a dinner with friends and members of rival Team SoloMid a few weeks before the Paris tourney. Hai wasn't crushed only physically. His illness affected his body and his head. He was emotional, smacked hard by the possibility of missing All-Star Paris. His position, mid-laner, is like that of an NFL quarterback. He calls the shots for the four other team members, each of whom has a task in this monumental beatdown. Hai made a go of it, though. Loaded with tubes and sporting an oxygen mask over his face, he played League of Legends in his hospital bed for five-hour stretches, because if you don't practice - even when seriously ill - you'll lose your mojo. It didn't matter. "Cannot go to All Stars anymore, sorry everyone," he tweeted to his 170,000 followers.

"It really sucked to watch my team play without me," Hai says later.

Cloud9 members give it their all in Paris, making it to the semifinals. Without their main man, however, they go down to OMG (Oh My God), a Chinese team known for rocking a cocky gangster pose in photos. The Chinese, who later go on to the finals, are so tough, so in the zone, that team members avoid shaking opponents' hands after they lose a match. They're said to be masters of mind games. Even more than in

burnout. Tired and nearly zombie-like from the frantic competition, he explains, "Even though it's 15 hours, it's still not as big as my passion for *League of Legends*. Even after 15 hours I'm still focused, because I enjoy playing *League of Legends* so much. But after the all-star games, we'll have a very long holiday."

How long?

"A week, maybe two weeks."

Outside the cramped hellhole of an interview room, things heat up. Workers scramble to remove groupies from the backstage area. But as soon as their backs are turned, the ladies return.

"Just go for it," whispers a pretty Asian girl. Doublelift is taken aback.

"This girl is aggressive," he says to no one in particular. They continue to flirt, eventually making their way to a couch upstairs.

Peter "Doublelift" Peng, a League of Legends star from Mission Viejo, California who plays for the Counter Logic Gaming team, takes his name from a magician's sleight of hand in card tricks. Outspoken and smart, he tells the woman he was a rebellious kid, his parents "were particularly strong-worded about video games and how much a waste of time they were" and he "was constantly being kicked out of the house" for playing League.

It's not bullshit. Peng's background is Legends lore. It's not a stretch to say League of Legends saved Peng's life – just

as it almost destroyed it. In 2011 Peng's parents pressured the then 18-year-old to quit playing. Many *League* pros, including Bjergsen, tell the same story. When Peng's parents

had had enough, they kicked him out the door. He claims he was homeless and ended up sleeping on a bench. In a long post on Reddit, he wrote that he seriously needed help. Fans sent Doublelift thousands via PayPal. Travis Gafford, a League aficionado who reports on the scene and hosts the State of the League podcast, finally took Doublelift in and taught him skills beyond winning at League. "No matter how long you stay," Gafford advised, "learn how to get a credit card. Deal with your finances." They're still friends.

Just as there's camaraderie between players, there's envy and trash-talking as well. At the Paris event, Gafford interviews both Bjergsen and Doublelift at the Mercure Hotel near the Parc de la Villette, where the world's teams have gathered to duke it out.

China, *League* rules in South Korea, where 80 percent of kids between 15 and 25 play at least three hours a day in internet cafés called PC bangs. One guy played so hard and for so long he had a heart attack and died.

It's no surprise players expect to take a beating from the South Korean teams. In fact, SK Telecom T1 K, a formidable South Korean team with players nicknamed Faker, Piglet and PoohManDu, goes 9–0 in Paris. Even more so than Bjergsen, they bring down the house when they win big. Girls hold up signs reading "Faker, will U marry us?" One woman posts on Twitter that she plans to throw her panties on the stage.

Backstage, Faker, a steely-eyed 18-yearold, says his team practices up to 15 hours a day. Polite, serious, rarely cracking a smile, he's asked how he and his teammates avoid "I can't wait to kick some Doublelift butt," says Bjergsen, smiling.

They even share a hotel room, something that probably wouldn't happen in the NBA or NHL, even for an all-star event.

"When Bjergsen's sleeping I whisper, like, horrible things in his ear, trying to get into his head subconsciously," jokes Doublelift. "Bjergsen is a bad boy. He's a naughty little boy."

Doublelift explains that while the all-star event is competitive, it's not intense enough that "we would try to screw each other over." It would be different if they were at the world finals, he says.

Later, at the hotel restaurant, Bjergsen is mobbed by fans who discovered his location. "I ended up signing autographs for two hours," he says later. "I love *League of Legends.*"



League of Legends was created by Riot Games, a scrappy game developer established in 2006 by two entrepreneurial 20-somethings, Brandon Beck, the then 24-year-old CEO, and Marc Merrill, the 26-year-old president. The pair met while at the University of Southern California and bonded over games, particularly the more elite hardcore games such as StarCraft.

They realized that few games were being made for players like them, the hardest of the hardcore, who enjoyed indulging in games with others online.

It was as if publishers were leaving games

and players in the lurch in order to make the next game. Games didn't update nearly enough, and you could be stuck playing the same maps forever.

In the refashioned entryway to an apartment near USC where the two had their gaming rigs set up, they rhetorically asked why someone didn't make a hardcore game that continually evolved. When they decided to raise money to make such a game themselves, their idea was to outdo the big boys in everything from game design to servicing the community. But with little game-making experience, they "didn't have the cred" of established game makers, admits Beck. They made up for that with detailed proposals that changed with each venture capitalist they encountered. It took them four rounds of financing, 30

employees and three years to make and release *League* of *Legends*. It also required firing key people within Riot, including the development head who ultimately didn't believe in their vision.

Released in late October 2009, League of Legends was far from an overnight success. Riot had horrible defeats after which it had to redo its back-end technology and online store. But Beck and Merrill were quietly confident, so much so they adopted seemingly strange nicknames. Beck's "Ryze" and Merrill's "Tryndamere" are game characters, the latter "a wrathful barbarian king seeking revenge," the former a "rogue mage who's tattooed with spells and seeks the wisdom of hermits, witches and shamans."

With 40 characters and worldwide online play, League of Legends saw an ambitious debut. "We were flying by the seat of our pants. Our work was nowhere near done. We were painfully aware of that," says Beck. The first day didn't exactly set the gaming world on fire. There wasn't even much of a launch party. "We didn't really celebrate with more than some yells and screams," says Beck. "The next day we got back to work, back to firefighting." More gamers came onboard, though not enough. But as the weeks passed, one thing gave Beck and Merrill hope. Players weren't leaving. The retention rate was over the top. Indeed, it was "incredibly higher" than the industry average. In 2009, at the height of

reported was between \$350 million and \$400 million. (Tencent later stated the sum was just over \$231 million.) Whatever the price, opening the game to the Chinese is proving to be a cash cow. "That entrée would have been difficult without Tencent," says Riot CFO AJ Dylan Jadeja. "Look at the problems Twitter and Facebook have faced in China."

While Beck, Merrill and the other Rioters always intended *League* to be an e-sport, the first major competitive season didn't begin in earnest until July 2010. That August *League* became part of the World Cyber Games finals (albeit with an admittedly low \$6,000 first prize). The first season concluded with a bang in mid-2011 at Sweden's DreamHack, where a thendorky Doublelift made himself a legend. Then, with the 2012 launch of Spectator Mode, enabling every fan to watch live games, *League* came into its own.

Riot saw the future of e-sports. So much so that the company gives each of the pro teams \$175,000 in yearly sponsorship money so players have a base salary. It also provides money for housing and travel. And it teaches these usually shy guys how to open up in front of the cameras at twice-yearly player summits. The ownermanagers of some teams employ part-time sports psychologists and life coaches. You need them, they say, when you spend most of your time indoors, playing just one game professionally. To some it can seem

overbearingly cultish. To Riot Games employees, who go through training called "denewbification" while wearing green hats with ears based on the

game's Teemo character, the way it works is the way it works. If they don't like it, Riot offers employees 10 percent of their yearly salary if they leave the company within 60 days. Most are happy to stay.

Although the game remains free to play, Riot makes money by selling optional virtual goods such as skins to customize the appearance of a player's character, which are purchased with \$10 to \$50 gift cards. Rare packages are known to sell for as much as a grand in online marketplaces.

But the primary reason the game remains popular isn't because players are addicted to dressing up their characters. It's because the game continually changes. With a console game such as, say, *Call of Duty*, downloadable updates become available every few months. *League of Legends*

To the uninitiated, it all looks like a cartoon without a narrative. To those who know, it's like playing a brilliant mash-up of *Lord of the Rings* meets chess meets soccer meets UFC meets religion.

the recession, a constantly morphing, everchallenging, free-to-play game was what players needed and wanted. Elsewhere, big console games such as *Brutal Legend* and *Rogue Warrior* were tanking, and gamers were tiring of the rhythm-based music game *Rock Band. Even World of Warcraft*, Blizzard's lauded juggernaut, was peaking. By July 2011, Riot had amassed 15 million players. It snowballed from there – especially the e-sports aspect – so much that 2011 seems like eons ago. The company ballooned to more than 1,600 employees and is readying a bigger space to house its already immense headquarters.

The big bang came when Chinese firm Tencent, the world's fifth-largest internet company, bought a majority stake in Riot for what *Bloomberg Businessweek*



Thousands watched the finals live at the Washington State Convention Center while millions viewed an online broadcast.

changes every two weeks. Those tweaks are both wonderful and maddening to fans, especially to the stars. Cloud9's William "Meteos" Hartman says, "They'll take the really good champions, nerf them, make them really not good. That's one of the most annoying things that can happen. You have to keep practicing a ton."



It's a postcard-perfect summer morning in Santa Monica. Joggers and cyclists hit

the boardwalk.
Kendrick Lamar
blares from a
passing convertible.
The beach teems
with hot bodies.

A mile away, inside the modest two-bedroom

apartment where Hai and the rest of Cloud9 live in a spartan, college-dorm-like setting, the first-floor practice room is darkened by shuttered blinds. Team members sit at computers, preparing for the day's scrims (practice against other teams). Piled on a chair are wristbands, T-shirts and other team paraphernalia, the products of marketing guru and team owner Jack Etienne, 41, a lifelong game aficionado who recently quit his sales job to work full-time with Cloud9. Etienne continually checks his phone for messages in a place that looks lived-in yet temporary, with laundry hampers here and mattresses on the floor there. Some teammates share a room, and none of them have many possessions. But it's better than their last headquarters, where one team member slept in a

bathroom closet just to gain some privacy.

Yet this is gaming nirvana circa 2014. Each Cloud9 member is generally thrilled about playing League of Legends. Optimism is at the team's core, says Hai, who began playing League in earnest in college when a floor mate "started shit-talking" him. The team took time to develop. Hai washed his hands of a player who was physically confrontational and one who disappeared for an entire week before a tournament. After adding Meteos, an affably sarcastic Virginian "who basically made this giant play with a damage-over-time spell that kept us from losing" during a crucial game, Cloud9 was ready. They began to win every

"Balls" Le, a small, reserved guy who keeps extraordinarily fit. Hai began working out after his injury. "When guys grow up skinny and tall," he says, "they get these little air bubbles on their lungs. They could pop at any time. By working out, I'm trying to avoid being sick from now on. I'm still recovering." He'll never be able to do anything that involves dramatic pressure changes, such as deep-sea diving or highaltitude mountain hiking. He shrugs. "I probably wouldn't do that anyway."

Three months after the incident, Hai, though a speedy talker, still appears fragile. The team hasn't performed to expectations since the all-star event, and to make

team called LMQ is
kicking serious ass
and currently tops the
standings.
Later, Meteos, who

Later, Meteos, who is celebrating his 21st birthday with a visit from his family,

matters worse, a new

who made a feast for the team, sits on the balcony, praising Hai. Playing with him, Meteos says, is "super intense, because he's super decisive with his shot calling. He has a good idea of how to win games. He knows what we should be doing at almost any time." But, Meteos says, if things aren't going well during practice, Cloud9 can be involved in "lots of arguments about what we should be doing." That doesn't last long. "It can be a little stressful, but no one ever storms off and says 'Fuck this' or anything."

Just outside the apartment, ownermanager Etienne mentions he flew in from San Francisco to serve as a kind of father figure until Hai gets back up to speed. To boost morale, he does everything from grilling chicken and steaks for the team to taking them to see 22 Jump Street. He even

It's the new rock-and-roll gospel, a gospel whose word is the fever pitch heard from the Church of Constant Gaming.

match they competed in.

Hai named the team Cloud9 because, he says, when you're on cloud nine you're feeling happy and euphoric. Other teams don "dark colors and they wanted to be badass, right? I'm a gamer, dude. I'm not 200 pounds. I don't look like a badass football player. But I am a very happy person, and I feel people can relate to that." An example of the team ethos? They wear hoodies and T-shirts colored sky blue and cloud-like white. "Bright, because that's how the game is. It's bright and makes everyone else feel happy," says Hai.

Now, post-lung collapse, Hai relaxes on his balcony near a hot tub that has been used just once or twice for parties. He talks about his sudden interest in working out at a local gym with Cloud9 member An



manages to organize a rare trip to the beach. "If they lose a match, there's less bickering when I'm here," Etienne says. "Hai's still getting stronger, but he's not there yet. He will be." There's hope in Etienne's eyes – along with the merest hint of desperation.

Beyond the apartment, beyond the beach, in this world of *League of Legends* everyone is counting on Hai. Even teams he battles weekly pull for him to recover – just not enough that Cloud9 will beat them.



Although there were earlier experiments, competitive online gaming rose in popularity two decades ago. It took the

popularity of 56K modems, which provided enough rudimentary bandwidth, to drag players en masse down the rabbit hole to play *Ultima Online, Doom, Quake* and,

soon after, Counter-Strike.

Dennis "Thresh" Fong, the wiliest of professional gamers, began his dominance in 1993. He remembers the thrill of winning a Ferrari at E3 in Atlanta after a *Quake* tournament. It wasn't just any Ferrari. It was a hot red Ferrari 328 with Pirelli P7 tires and a removable roof panel. Not only that, it was owned by one of the geniuses

behind *Doom* and *Quake*, John Carmack. "Carmack was pretty amazed," says Fong. "Thresh means to strike repeatedly. People coined this term Thresh ESP because it seemed like I was two or three steps ahead of my opponent – all the time. I was viewed as the Michael Jordan of video gaming." It's no brag. Thresh never lost a tournament, not once.

Today Fong, who still owns the Ferrari, has bought and sold various companies – enough to make him a multimillionaire – and is now CEO of Raptr, a social community for online gamers. In a dark hotel lobby in downtown Los Angeles, Fong, whose company is about to release a survey stating that nearly 17 percent of all PC gamers are *League* players, says, "The success that pro gaming is seeing came a lot faster than I thought it would. The reason

2003. "It wasn't enough to support one player for a year, let alone a full team," he says. Once, he didn't have \$3,000 to pay for the team's hotel rooms.

In 2007, DirecTV, British Sky
Broadcasting and Asia's STAR TV put
-e-sports on cable with the Championship
Gaming Series. They hired O'Dell,
who eagerly hopped on the gravy train.
His team won \$500,000 in the world
championships. "But they didn't do
it right and spent \$50 million on God
knows what," says O'Dell. It wasn't just
the lavish spending that led to the series'
demise. It tanked because it focused more
on the broadcast aspect than on player
and fan needs.

With League of Legends e-sports, Etienne, O'Dell and other ownermanagers feel their ship is about to come in. Etienne points to what he sees as a more dignified sponsor, the Air Force Reserve, which recently signed up with Cloud9. "It can only grow from here," says Etienne. A few years from now, O'Dell believes, e-sports will be massive. Megacorporations will buy the teams "for hundreds of millions of dollars." That's the hope, anyway. At that point, cautions O'Dell, the pros won't be as accessible. "They'll have security," he says. "Fans won't be able to get close to them like they do now."



Mid-June 2014. Game day is a Saturday afternoon at a Manhattan Beach, California soundstage, and if you dare park in filmmaker Joss Whedon's spot, you will be towed immediately. Autograph-hungry teens await their *League* heroes outside stage 22.

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Inside the dressing rooms there's smack talk among the North American teams competing. This weekend the most compelling attraction is Team SoloMid, featuring

Bjergsen, versus Cloud9, led by Hai. Despite their eminent stars, neither team has lived up to its potential. But it's Hai and Cloud9 upon whose shoulders lie the heaviest weights.

It's not a good day for Cloud9, not even close. During a 36-minute game, they fall behind, and once they do, they keep getting clobbered. You can see it on their

Day into night, sunup to sundown, 27 million people play League in any 24-hour period.

League appeals is because people on a mass level appreciate what goes into playing and winning." Now 70 percent of players watch League online.

Fong and others like him inspired Michael O'Dell, a former pro who owns Team Dignitas, one of the oldest competitivegaming teams. O'Dell remembers his first sponsor offered his team \$10,000 back in hangdog faces as they battle. As Bjergsen and SoloMid shine, Cloud9 becomes sadder and sadder. Clearly Hai still isn't up to par. At one point he appears out of breath. They lose 21-8 and trudge the long walk to greet their fans as every team must do after a match. As the dark of the studio turns into the blinding sunlight of LA, Hai tells teammate LemonNation, "I'm really sorry. I apologize."

Fans, though, seem to prop up Hai and the gang with cheery buoyancy about their chance to top the North American standings. "You'll win next time," says one girl to Hai. She pauses for a moment, then asks, "Can I take a selfie with you?" Hai obliges and manages a small smile. "You'll win next time," she tells him again.

Later, in the maze of spaces above the broadcast studio, Doublelift sits alone in the middle of the room. Even though CLG won, it was against a minor team, and Doublelift seems annoyed when he's offered congratulations. He's ready to blow off steam as well. "I do feel a lot of players don't deserve to be professional players, because they don't put in the practice time. But I'll tell you one thing - Cloud9 is the team to beat. They have a brotherhood that other teams don't have. When you play against them, you feel like you're playing against one person, not five. We fear no team but Cloud9 right now."

The weeks pass as quickly as a mouse click. Even though Cloud9 is improving,

it is one of five teams, including Team SoloMid and Counter Logic Gaming, that are virtually tied in the standings. Beyond them all is LMQ, a Chinese team,

named for its founder's wife, that moved to North America last year to vanquish the US teams. The team had financial problems and sketchy ownership issues throughout the year, but those outward pressures never reveal themselves during competition. In July LMQ seems utterly unstoppable. On message boards, some fans expressed surprise that LMQ, a foreign team, was allowed to play in the US at all. But Riot allows any amateurs a chance to make the pros through a series of playoffs. Brandon Beck puts LMQ's dominance in perspective: "Last year Cloud9 completely blew out everyone else when they were new. With LMQ it's like a new pitcher in baseball. You have to figure out how to hit their pitches."

As the season ends in August, Cloud9 has indeed figured out the new pitcher to mount an amazing comeback. Hai is completely well, and everyone is performing together like a well-oiled machine, annihilating foes with an accuracy and speed they haven't seen since February. When the regular season is done, Cloud9 has tied LMQ. They're headed to the nerdy Pax Prime game conference in Seattle to be one of six teams that will compete in the North American regional finals for one of three spots at the world finals in South Korea and a whopping \$1 million team prize.



Late August. Thousands of fans file into the Washington State Convention Center in Seattle for the North American finals. Outside, a man wearing a floppy-eared Teemo hat buys loose joints from a grungy couple. The overflowing audience spills into the streets, giving the atmosphere a festival vibe, and viewing parties spontaneously spring up at local bars such as the Pine Box, a former funeral home.

Inside, the thousands in attendance stand in stunned silence, thundersticks by their sides. Counter Logic Gaming has fallen to Team Dignitas. Onstage, CLG leader Doublelift appears older, haggard, tired. With the defeat, he and his team now have to beat powerful amateurs or

Defense of the Ancients was among Riot's inspirations for League of Legends, and Valve Corporation, DOTA 2's seasoned publisher, is vying to topple League from its throne. And everyone is still reeling from a South Korean pro's attempted suicide by leaping from a 12-story building after his manager pressured him to throw games. "It's still a bit like the Wild West out there," admits Team Dignitas's O'Dell.

None of this matters to the thousands inside the convention center who are now screaming louder than ever. Cloud9 handily wins its first game against Bjergsen and Team SoloMid, and pundits are predicting a 3-0 shutout. But TSM parries, led by Bjergsen. By game five, Hai and Balls appear twitchy, a slight panic in their eyes. Jason "WildTurtle" Tran takes advantage of Cloud9's missteps with four successive kills (a "quadra-kill"), and TSM prevails. Hai and Cloud9 are beaten after a close, five-hour, five-game match against Bjergsen and TSM, who are now the North American champions.

As TSM celebrates onstage under swirling lights and artificial fog, Hai sits alone backstage, angry, reddening, dejected. "It's about pride," he spews. Nonetheless, as one of the top three teams, Cloud9, along with TSM and LMQ, is heading to South Korea for the world finals and a chance to win the \$1 million team prize. Hai knows Cloud9 has to stay

> focused. The teams will vie in a sold-out 60.000-seat stadium that was home to the 2002 FIFA World Cup. Seoul will be louder than Paris, the groupies more numerous and the

hometown fans less hospitable to any North American team.

Cloud9 leaves the next day for Korea, where the team plans to practice and scrim 12 hours a day. "It's like boot camp," says Hai. Bjergsen and TSM are at it too. Bjergsen, now meditating for focus, has removed his beloved dog from the team house so it won't be a distraction. Becoming supremely triumphant by bringing home the \$1 million team prize weighs on their minds, anvil heavy. Winning the big one would mean financial stability for the team, the possibility of being remembered, even the hope of being respected by their parents for a life spent playing video games. All it takes is 50 fingers of brilliance, locked on mice and keyboards, click-click-clicking.

Competitive online gaming rose in popularity two decades ago. It took the popularity of 56K modems, which provided enough rudimentary bandwidth, to drag players en masse down the rabbit hole to play Ultima Online, Doom, Quake and, soon after, Counter-Strike.

> face relegation, banishment from the League forever. Meanwhile, across the world in South Korea, Faker and his SKT team, both slumping, go down to a savvy Samsung White team, meaning SKT won't be attending the world finals either.

League of Legends and e-sports seem to be stumbling too as a year of growing pains pile up all at once. Bjergsen was fined \$2,000 by a highly concerned Riot Games for trying to persuade a player to change teams, and some pros privately feel the penalty is too low. Behind the scenes, some are calling for player unionization, a scenario to which Riot Games CEO Beck doesn't know how to respond. Riot is also contending with the meteoric rise of a challenger, Defense of the Ancients 2. The first version of



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DRDAN

It's Maria Eriksson

This is not the first time Maria has graced the pages of PLAYBOY South Africa – having been our Miss August 2013 as well as a special feature in our April 2011 launch issue. This time, however, Maria takes front and center, as she rightfully should, in a witty table-turning pictorial inspired by the instrument around which life revolves at PLAYBOY – the camera.

















PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: DAVID FINCHER

A candid conversation with the controversial director of Fight Club, Gone Girl and The Social Network about why his movies are so damn strange

eople tend to think twice about messing with David Fincher, director of perverse, wickedly funny, impeccably made head-twisters such as Fight Club, Zodiac and The Social Network. That's understandable. He is, after all, the dark, icy moviemaker who merrily snuffed Sigourney Weaver's iconic Ripley character in Alien 3, served up Gwyneth Paltrow's head in a box in Seven, trapped Jodie Foster and Kristen Stewart in a home invasion in Panic Room and choreographed Rooney Mara's brutal rape in The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo. He made TV viewers' jaws drop with his series House of Cards when Kevin Spacey's ruthless politician shoves his lover Kate Mara (Rooney's sister) in the path of a subway train. Expect more Fincher-style dread, mystery and uneasy laughs from Gone Girl, his bigscreen version of Gillian Flynn's relentlessly readable whodunit that spent 11 weeks at the top of the New York Times best-seller list, tore through 40 printings, sold more than 6 million copies before hitting paperback and sparked an adult fan base almost as rabid as the young-adult crowds obsessed with Twilight and The Hunger Games. Of the movie, in which Ben Affleck can barely convince anyone he didn't kill his beautiful wife, Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor, who scored the picture with Atticus Ross, says it's "a much darker film than I was expecting. It's a nasty film." Fincher wouldn't have it any other way. With a

reputation for being obsessively perfectionistic and passionate about his creative vision, he has also apparently rattled some of Hollywood's biggest studio bosses and stars. Scott Rudin, producer of The Social Network and The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, has said, "He has an anarchist's mentality. He likes to blow up systems." Robert Downey Jr compared the Zodiac set to "a gulag," and to salute Fincher's notorious proclivity for demanding as many as 60 takes from his actors, he left urine-filled mason jars around the set. But in an industry that often runs scared from off-kilter projects and inconvenient truths, Fincher stands out for bringing to the mainstream what may be hard to hear and watch but can also be entertaining as hell.

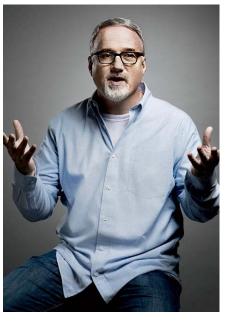
David Andrew Leo Fincher was born August 28, 1962 to Claire, a mental health nurse who specialized in treating drug addictions, and Howard Kelly Fincher, also known as Jack, a Life magazine bureau chief and author. When Fincher was two, his parents relocated the family from Denver to Marin County, California. When he was about to enter high school, his parents moved again, this time taking Fincher and his two sisters to bucolic Ashland, Oregon, where he graduated from high school. Introduced to films by his father and inspired by seeing Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid at the age of seven, Fincher, who was shooting eight-millimeter movies by the time he was eight, returned on his own to Marin County, where he ducked college and instead landed a job with

director John Korty (The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman). By the age of 19 he was working at George Lucas's special effects company, Industrial Light & Magic, where he became an assistant cameraman and matte photographer. Two years later he jumped at the opportunity to make some noise of his own by conceptualizing and directing an attention-grabbing American Cancer Society public-safety commercial in which a fetus puffs a cigarette.

That spot started him on a lucrative career filming TV commercials for Nike, Coca-Cola, Chanel and Levi's, which he alternated with directing awardwinning music videos for such artists as Madonna, George Michael and the Rolling Stones. Fincher's feature-film career was launched — and nearly crushed overnight - when 20th Century Fox hired the 27-yearold neophyte to direct the 1992 film Alien 3, the trouble-plagued, critically skewered second sequel to Ridley Scott's 1979 futuristic masterwork. Oddly, the failure enhanced Fincher's burgeoning reputation as a visionary, and he parlayed that into a successful movie career. Fiercely private and not given to sharing glimpses of his life, Fincher met his longtime companion and producer, Ceán Chaffin, in the early 1990s when she was producing and he was directing a Coke ad. Fincher had previously been married to model-photographer Donya Fiorentino. They have a daughter, Phelix Imogen Fincher, who is 20; Donya subsequently married actor Gary Oldman, and Fincher gained custody of Phelix.



"I'm sure there are people who think I bite the heads off puppies. There's nothing I can do about that. The relationships that matter to me are always with people who wouldn't have preconceived notions based on somebody's work."



"I offer everything to Brad Pitt, not because I'm pathetic but because he's good for so many things. Both Brad and Ben Affleck have a default 'affable' setting. Neither wants you to be uncomfortable."



PHOTOGRAPHY BY LORENZO AGIUS

"My responsibility to myself is always, Am I going to be the commodity that people want me to be, or am I going to do the shit that interests me? I don't like most comedies. I don't like being ingratiated. I don't like obsequiousness."

PLAYBOY sent Contributing Editor Stephen Rebello, who last interviewed Samuel L Jackson, to catch up with Fincher in his cavernous Hollywood production offices housed in a swank 1920s art deco former bank that later served as a location in LA Confidential. Reports Rebello: "You meet David Fincher and know instantly you've been scanned, processed and judged either 'quick' or 'dead.' He doesn't suffer fools. But instead of the cool, brusque, detached man some have described, he struck me as gracious, smart as hell, drolly funny and armed with a lethal dry wit. Tell him you like his films, for instance, and he shoots back, 'Well, it's always nice to meet new perverts.' Back at you, Fincher."

PLAYBOY: You've made movies as different from each other as The Social Network and The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, and earned best director Oscar nominations for both. But you're better known for darker, more twisted films such as Seven, Fight Club, Zodiac and The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo. What frightens the guy whose movies provoke, scare and

unsettle others? FINCHER:

Complacency. Also, I don't like spiders, snakes, sharks, bears or anything that could make me part of the food chain. In

our part of Los Angeles I'm usually okay, but when our daughter was three, this big fucking green garden spider as large as my palm built a gigantic web at about face height for a three-year-old. We were convinced that thing was thinking, If I can just get the tykester to come into my net, I could feed off that little one for two years. It would build this web every single night, and every single morning someone would walk through it. I was like, Dude, seriously? Give it a rest.

PLAYBOY: What else creeps you out? FINCHER: I heard about a German man who put an ad on an internet site saying he wanted to devour somebody. Someone actually answered the ad. The guy videotaped himself anesthetizing the willing victim, segmenting his body and consuming him. Before the victim died, they ate his genitals together. I don't know if it was some bizarre psychosexual fulfillment, but it's one of the most disturbing things I've ever heard. When you can't count on somebody to even fight for his life, when he goes willingly - well, it's so out of left field, it's not even on my radar. Even though that was the most troubling thing I'd heard in a long time, the things that interest me in cinema kind of work the same way. I like starting with an

idea that unlocks a whole Pandora's box of other ideas.

PLAYBOY: Do people ever confront you for unlocking their personal Pandora's box of dark thoughts?

FINCHER: It was offensive to me on a certain level that when Saw and those other movies came out, people said, "Well, torture porn really started with Seven." Fuck you. There's enough pervy shit going on in Seven that I don't have to get on my high horse to defend its artistic sensibilities. It was lurid. It was *supposed* to be lurid. But the thing I appreciated about it and what I thought Andrew Kevin Walker's script did so well was that it got your mind in overdrive. It worked on your imagination. We were extremely conscious of the fact that we were talking about torture, but we never actually showed it. PLAYBOY: It's interesting how even some fans of Seven swear they saw the

PLAYBOY: It's interesting how even some fans of Seven swear they saw the severed and boxed head of Gwyneth Paltrow, who plays the wife of the detective played by Brad Pitt, at the end of the movie.

FINCHER: Exactly, but they never saw it.

she said, "You got him with his shirt off and then you fucked the whole thing up." I was like, "Excavate that line from *Animal House*: 'Hey, you fucked up – you trusted us.'"

PLAYBOY: Obviously a movie star of Pitt's stature helps calm nervous investors so you can make the movie you want.

FINCHER: Yeah. With my first movie, Alien 3, I had to get permission for everything, but my second movie, Seven, was my movie, Andy Walker's movie, Brad Pitt's, Morgan Freeman's and Kevin Spacey's movie. I didn't look to anyone for permission. I made a pact with [studio boss] Michael De Luca and just said, "Dude, the audience wants a revelation. I'm going deep. It's \$34 million and fuck it." He was a thousand percent there, even when push came to shove and we went \$3 million over budget. We gave the audience a revelation with Brad and Morgan and by throwing in Gwyneth Paltrow, whom people had seen a bit of. It was the alchemy of those faces, those careers and the ascendance of different talents in that period. I'd direct Seven in a different way today. I would have a lot more fun. It was

only by the time I did Zodiac or Benjamin Button that I knew what I was doing.

PLAYBOY: Do you watch a lot of crime shows on TV? FINCHER: I like

Forensic Files, that kind of stuff. My wife will turn it on, roll over in bed, and things like "The body was found near the parking lot of the 7-Eleven just off the interstate" go into her ears while she's asleep.

PLAYBOY: Having lived with, raised a daughter with and worked closely with your wife, Ceán Chaffin, as your producer since the 1990s, do you ask her for advice when you're on the fence about material?

FINCHER: Constantly. It's a blessing and a curse, because she's obviously someone who knows me, in some ways, better than I know myself. There are definitely things we disagree about. She was extremely vociferous, for instance, when she said, "Don't make *The Game*."

PLAYBOY: That's the 1997 thriller in which Sean Penn gives his brother Michael Douglas a voucher for a liveaction game that takes over his life. FINCHER: Yeah, and in hindsight, my wife was right. We didn't figure out the third act, and it was my fault, because I thought if you could just keep your foot on the throttle it would be liberating and funny. I know what I like, and one thing I definitely like is not

But in an industry that often runs scared from off-kilter projects and inconvenient truths, Fincher stands out for bringing to the mainstream what may be hard to hear and watch but can also be entertaining as hell.

Because we had Andrew's script and Brad and Morgan Freeman playing the detectives, we were in great shape and didn't have to show the head in the box. Directors get far too much credit and far too much blame. But the fun of movie storytelling is when you know you have the audience's attention and you can see or feel them working to figure out where the movie's going. I'm interested in the psychology of not only leading the audience along but also being responsible for getting them there sooner than the characters, so the audience is watching things and going, "Oh no!" It's an interesting relationship to have with 700 people, even if 200 of them miss it entirely.

PLAYBOY: You've cast Brad Pitt as the star of Seven, Fight Club and The Curious Case of Benjamin Button.
What's the dynamic between you?
FINCHER: Brad fucks with me all the time.
So does Ben Affleck. When we did Fight Club, the studio said, "This is awesome; this is going to be great," because we were going to have a scene with Brad opening the door naked.
When it came time to shoot it, being Brad, he said, "I should open the door and have a big yellow dishwasher scrub glove on." I said, "Perfect." When the studio executive saw it,

knowing where a movie is going. These days, though, it's hard to get audiences to give themselves over. They want to see the whole movie in a 90-second trailer.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever feel trapped by your own track record as a director?

FINCHER: I know that if a script has a serial killer - or any kind of killer - in it, I have to be sent it; I don't have any choice. [laughs] My responsibility to myself is always, Am I going to be the commodity that people want me to be, or am I going to do the shit that interests me? I have a lot of trouble with material. I don't like most comedies because I don't like characters who try to win me over. I don't like being ingratiated. I don't like obsequiousness. I also have issues with movies where two people fall in love just because they're the stars and their names are above the title. I could maybe do some gigantic mythological Hero With a Thousand Faces-type movie, but so many other people are doing that.

PLAYBOY: Super-hero stuff?

FINCHER: I find it dull. I like to anticipate the energy of a movie audience that's waiting for the curtain to come up and thinking, Well, one thing we don't know about this guy is that

we don't know how bad it can get.

PLAYBOY: Things get really bad in your new thriller, Gone Girl, both for the audience sweating it out and

for the ex-magazine journalist played by Ben Affleck, who keeps swearing he had nothing to do with his wealthy, blonde, apparently perfect wife's disappearance. The book is famous for its twists and turns, so it's tough to discuss the movie without spoiling it. You're known for toying with audiences, but do you worry that the big international fan base for Gillian Flynn's best-selling novel may be rocked by alterations you and she made for the movie version?

FINCHER: There are certainly a lot of elements in Gillian's book that are well trod in my movies, like the procedural aspect, people putting together clues and things like that. It's also a very naughty book. But my thought when I first read it was, Fuck, how do you throw away two thirds of this and still end up with the same journey? How do you still play with the Scott Peterson aspect [the notorious case in which Peterson murdered his pregnant wife] - which we all know is the jumping-off point - but make it about something bigger and more universal?

PLAYBOY: Bigger and more universal, such as...?

FINCHER: I think the movie works on a purely procedural level and on a purely pageturning-mystery level. But it has a real riptide to it, taking to task our cultural narcissism and who we think we are as good wives, good husbands, good Christians, good neighbors, good Americans, good patriots. Once you get fractal about every fissure in somebody's public facade, you're going to see stuff you wish you hadn't. Can we hold ourselves to the same scrutiny to which we hold people we've never met? The great gift of Gillian, who's very wry and bright, and the fun I've had on this movie was having a kindred spirit who likes the naughtiness of going, "You can have your cake and eat it too - but it's preachy cake.'

PLAYBOY: The book also says dark, funny, troubling things about marriage. **FINCHER:** I think Gillian's book is talking about marriage and hiding it in an absurdist confection. When you peel back the layers and get to the kernel, you think, Wow, I feel queasy for a whole different set of reasons than I thought I would. Remember the 1970s National Lampoon record That's Not Funny, That's Sick? That was what I wanted to go for in terms of performance and tone. That and

it is that I don't know anything else that's going on when I'm in the bubble of finishing a movie.

PLAYBOY: Given your relationship with Pitt and considering how many actresses' names were floated to star in Gone Girl - including Charlize Theron, Natalie Portman, Reese Witherspoon and Emily Blunt - why did you choose Affleck and Rosamund Pike?

FINCHER: I offer everything to Brad, not because I'm pathetic but because he's good for so many things. Both Brad and Ben have a default "affable" setting. Neither wants you to be uncomfortable. You cast movies based on critical scenes. In Gone Girl there's a smile the guy has to give when the local press asks him to stand next to a poster of his missing wife. I flipped through Google Images and found about 50 shots of Affleck giving that kind of smile in public situations. You look at them and know he's trying to make people comfortable in the moment, but by doing that he's making himself vulnerable to people having other perceptions about him.

PLAYBOY: What kind of perceptions? **FINCHER:** In Ben's case, what many people

> don't know is that sure when he was a 23-year-old and all

he's crazy smart, but since he doesn't want that to get awkward, he downplays it. I'm this career-success

shit was happening for him, he was like, "I just want to go to the afterparty and meet J Lo.' I'm sure he said a lot of glib shit and people went, "Ugh, fake." If you have a lot of success when you're young and good-looking, you realize it's okay to let people write you off. It's the path of least resistance. You don't want to be snowbound with them anyway. I think he learned how to skate on charm. I needed somebody who not only knew how to do that but also understood the riptide of perceived reality as opposed to actual reality.

PLAYBOY: In casting the "girl" of the title, how familiar were you with Pike, the British beauty people may know from An Education and Jack Reacher? **FINCHER:** I wanted Faye Dunaway in

China-town, where you think, This person has experienced avenues of pain that no one can articulate. Or Faye in Network, where it's, You're never going to get to the bottom of this, so just stop. It's crazy how much Rosamund reminds me of Faye. I'd seen probably four or five things Rosamund had done, and I didn't have a good take on her. I realized why when I met her. She's odd. The role is really difficult and Rosamund was born to play it. There was a moment on the set when I overheard

I like starting with an idea that unlocks a whole Pandora's box of other ideas.

> Lolita, because both are unbelievably funny and unbelievably naughty. They're about disturbing ideas and very disturbed people and their facades of normalcy. There are moments when you find yourself torn by what the characters in Gone Girl have done in service of their urges. They're kind of irredeemable and yet intensely human.

> PLAYBOY: You're happily married, but you were previously married to, had a daughter with and divorced a woman who subsequently married and fought a very public and ugly divorce battle with actor Gary Oldman, who recently gave a forthright interview in PLAYBOY. Did any of your history and relationships come into play while directing Gone Girl?

FINCHER: Gary and I certainly have a shared history. I know him very well. In fact, I wanted to cast him in Alien 3, but we couldn't work it out - though, in hindsight, if we had, we probably would never have spoken to each other after that. Gary's not cruel. He's an incredibly thoughtful guy. I see him from time to time, but I haven't seen him in a while. I heard about the PLAYBOY Interview, but I haven't read it yet. It shows you how pathetic

Rosamund asking Ben, "What do you think Fincher saw in me that he would cast me in this role?" Ben said, "Why don't we ask him?" I, of course, turned to Ben and said, "You should be asking the question, What did Fincher see in me that he wanted me for this role?" Because what we asked him to do was "Open vise, insert testicles and turn" for the entire length of the movie. Ben and Rosamund are both great in it.

PLAYBOY: So far your *Gone Girl* cast has been mum, but other stars you've worked with, such as Daniel Craig, Robert Downey Jr and Jake Gyllenhaal, have spoken about the experience as being tough but worth it, with you demanding many retakes of the same scene.

FINCHER: If you didn't get hugged enough as a kid, you won't find what you're looking for from me. That's not my gig and I'm not attuned to it. On Zodiac I had a conversation with Jake, and I said, "I guarantee I'm going to make a good movie out of this. You can decide if you want to be the weakest thing in it, or you can decide if you want to show up." Downey had an interesting relationship with Jake on that movie. I think he felt it was his job to point out how difficult it is to be a 24-year-old actor with a lot of eyes and expectations on you. In spite of all the drama about whether we were allowing Jake to be the best version of himself because we were expecting so many iterations of his performance, to an extent I also felt that way about him. I also empathized with the wizened Downey looking back at himself in his Less Than Zero days and wanting a more nurturing influence for Jake.

PLAYBOY: Both Downey's and Gyllenhaal's complaints were about reshooting scenes over and over. What do you get on take 11, say, that you don't on take five?

FINCHER: Part of the promise when I work with actors is that we may be on take 11 and I'll say, "We certainly have a version that we can put in the movie that will make us all happy. But I want to do seven more and continue to push this idea. Let's see where it goes." Now, I may go back to them after those seven takes and say, "It was a complete fucking waste of effort, but I had to try because I feel there's something to be mined from this." That's a lot of extra work for an actor, and sometimes it pushes them out of their comfort zone. In some cases they're not getting paid as much as they would on another movie. I go out on a limb, and people work harder for me than they do for other people. But I want them to be happy with the fact that we were able to do something singular, something unlike anything else in their or my filmography.

PLAYBOY: Something that doesn't look much like anything else in your

filmography is your big foray into television, the biting, juicy, insidepolitics series House of Cards, starring Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright. The show has won a viewership and a slew of awards, put Netflix on the map and made binge watching the new normal. **FINCHER:** Netflix is fucking righteous, so smart. I directed two episodes of House of Cards and also did the marketing. We were working with a tiny marketing budget, and I knew the cast, so I said, "Let's keep this really simple." I didn't want to drag Kevin away for three days to do a photo shoot, so we had the art department make that Lincoln chair, and we rolled it over in the corner, dropped Kevin in it and took a picture of him. It wasn't born of wanting to put talented photographers out of work as much as it was, "I think we can do this in an hour and a half because I can say to Kevin, 'Okay, that scene in episode 11, give me that look." We whacked this thing together and showed it to Netflix, and they said, "That looks great." I give all credit to Netflix. It was smartly done and very strategic, and they've been able to make a fairly big splash.

PLAYBOY: When The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo was about to hit theaters, some of the press focused on your mentor-protégée relationship with young actress Rooney Mara. Why do you think Mara's co-star Daniel Craig described the relationship as "fucking weird" in one magazine piece?

FINCHER: The thing got cloud-seeded by way of one magazine story. Had that one journalist from Vogue delved as deeply into why people were behaving the way they were as he did into what shoes they were wearing, we might have gotten some insight. But it was more interesting for him to do a Tippi Hedren-Alfred Hitchcock sort of thing. From the beginning I said to the Sony publicity people that the purpose of plucking someone like Rooney from obscurity is that they walk on-screen and you immediately believe who the fuck they are, rather than, "You were on Gossip Girl, right?" Rooney will tell you that I let her do anything she wanted. But it seemed counter to what we were trying to do to see her on the cover of Seventeen or being trotted out on every television show to go, "Here she is, cute as a fucking button and not at all this goth Swedish punker." I said, "I think this is absurd," but it didn't move the needle in any way. The Sony publicity people were frustrated with my getting in the way of the exploitation of the character Lisbeth Salander.

PLAYBOY: Do you know if any actors have backed away from working with you because of what they think you're like?

FINCHER: I'm sure there are people who





think I bite the heads off puppies. There's nothing I can do about that. The relationships that matter to me are always with people who wouldn't have preconceived notions based on somebody's work. I gave up worrying about that years ago. I remember giving a quote, "Tve got demons you can't even imagine." It was a joke. It was fun. It was out of context. My parents were always concerned about things I was quoted as saying. My dad thought for a time that I was playing into it.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about your parents and your home life. You were born in Denver, but when you were two your family moved to California, eventually settling down in San Anselmo in Marin County. What was it like growing up there in the 1960s and 1970s, when the area became synonymous with progressive thought, self-expression and a relaxed view toward drugs and sex?

FINCHER: It was a bizarre, great place to grow up in during that time, with the human potential movement, EST, a lot of drugs and a lot of mixed messages, like "We want you kids to feel free to do whatever you want, just not that." There was always the potential for suffocating liberation. As absurd as it sounds, the movie with Martin Mull and Tuesday Weld, Serial, was a prescient and truthful view of Marin County - a place people think of as affluent, but at the time it wasn't. I grew up before the yuppies, before the Me decade, before "Greed is good." It was never "What are you driving?" I was a latchkey kid. I'd put a note on the fridge, "I'm going to Chris's house" or "I'm spending the night." No GPS, no cell phones. You were trusted. People had a much healthier attitude toward a lot of things.

PLAYBOY: Including sex?

FINCHER: We talked about sex from the time I was eight or nine. I don't think there was any confusion about what people were up to from the time I was in second or third grade. There were a lot of drugs. One of my dad's friends was Thomas Thompson, a writer for Life magazine who also wrote the book Richie: The Ultimate Tragedy Between One Decent Man and the Son He Loved, about a man who killed his son who was on drugs. I had friends with older brothers who were well on their way to being strung out.

PLAYBOY: Did you really slather your sister's dolls in ketchup and hurl them onto the freeway?

FINCHER: I did, because we thought it was funny. We used to egg cars and do all that kind of stupid shit, and it did escalate to all kinds of lunacy. No one was ever injured. I've gotten into a lot of trouble talking about that. You do a lot of dumb shit when you're 10 or 12.

PLAYBOY: Your father also wrote for Life, among other magazines, right?

FINCHER: He was a reporter and then a Life bureau chief. He quit to write nonfiction books on human intelligence, left-handedness and hundreds of magazine stories for Reader's Digest, Psychology Today, Sports Illustrated. Later in his life he wrote a couple of screenplays. He also wrote a novel that he burned in front of my mother. That's a story I was told and it has probably been hyperbolized, by me. But it's who he was. He wanted to get it right.

PLAYBOY: Your mother worked in mental health, specializing in treating drug addiction. Were drugs attractive or scary?

FINCHER: I've definitely been there with my friend in high school on a sodden, rainy, pouring-down night after we'd drunk a bottle of really bad champagne stolen from a restaurant he worked at. I remember trying to keep his mom's Corolla station wagon from slipping off a cliff. I've done all that stupid crap. It's not to say I didn't do my share, but there was no allure for me to see where experimentation could take you. My mom ran a methadone maintenance program, after all. Besides my mom's work, I have too much of a work ethic to disappear into that space. I had a normal teenage life. The only difference was that by the time I was 19, I was working six days a week, 14 hours a day for Industrial Light & Magic.

PLAYBOY: What brought you to a place where you'd be working at the George Lucas-owned, premier visual effects company in the world?

FINCHER: I was the guy who waited in line to see *The Empire Strikes Back*. I was the kid who didn't read the *Time* magazine article about *Jaws* because I was not going to let that fuck it up for me. My dad took me to movie matinees. Movies were all I wanted to do. And I grew up in a perfect time and a perfect place, with all this incredible stuff happening around

PLAYBOY: Like what?

FINCHER: George Lucas lived two doors down from my house. I saw *American Graffiti* being photographed on Fourth Street in San Rafael. They were making *The Godfather* on Shady Lane in Ross, California. *Dirty Harry* was being shot at Larkspur Landing. By the time I was 14 I was on my way to a high school that had film courses, 16-millimeter cameras and double-system sound recording. I couldn't wait

PLAYBOY: So your career path probably hasn't surprised your childhood friends from Marin.

FINCHER: I still have a handful of friends

from there – the most cynical, perverse, sardonic, funny, irreverent, ruthless people. They're dark and sinister but wrapped in this perfectly humane, affable package. They get the cosmic joke. I always wonder, Was it something in the water? Or maybe it was being eight years old and having people say, "Okay, if your school bus gets the tires shot out of it, just stay on the bus. The Zodiac killer has sworn that he's going to pick off the little kiddies." My dad was super dry in his delivery, like nothing was ever cause for alarm. He'd say, "Oh, Dave, you should know there's a homicidal maniac who has written to the San Francisco Chronicle." Years later, when we were making Zodiac, I remember the opening scene of the movie wasn't working until [music supervisor] George Drakoulias brought me Three Dog Night's version of the song "Easy to Be Hard," from Hair. We put that music over the scene, and it was like I was in Black Point and could smell the eucalyptus. I was suddenly in 1965, in a green Impala with a huge backseat and a steel dashboard, like I was transported. I've harbored bizarre dreams of returning, but you can't, you know? Sausalito's not the same thing it was in 1976.

PLAYBOY: Did you pursue your moviemaking passion once you hit high school? FINCHER: My

parents became

disenchanted with Marin just when I was about to enter high school. They were a little too Midwestern and reticent to succumb to Marin's kind of grooviness. They came back from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival convinced that the three of us kids would love southern Oregon, so they moved us there. I was on the cusp of doing what I wanted to do, and to have it snatched from me was like being choke-chained out of the perfect environment.

PLAYBOY: Did you act out because of it? FINCHER: I always sort of acted out, but I wasn't a bad kid. Once I realized my parents weren't going to come to their senses, I knew the only way out of there was going to be on me. I wouldn't be able to be in the film business in southern Oregon and wouldn't witness the things I'd been seeing. So instead, as this scrawny drama nerd who always wanted to be a director, I developed my own curriculum and executed it.

PLAYBOY: What kind of jobs did you have as a kid?

FINCHER: For most of high school, after school until six, I would work on plays and design sets and lighting. From six until 12:30 or one I would rush off to the local secondrun movie theater, where I was a non-union

projectionist. I got to watch movies for free, hundreds of times. That was a great job for someone who loved movies, because I got to see *Being There, All That Jazz* and *1941* 180 times. Of course, I also had to watch things like *Audrey Rose* 180 times. On Saturdays I worked at KOBI in Medford, a local television news station, as a kind of production assistant. I would lug incredibly unwieldy cameras to shoot location stuff, like when there was a barn on fire or something like that. I also had jobs as a fry cook, busboy, dishwasher.

PLAYBOY: Were your parents down with all this?

FINCHER: When I was about 15 or 16, they sat me down and said, "We want to know where you think you're going and what you think you're going to do." I laid it out for them: "After high school I'm going to move back down to Marin. I want to eventually get a job working at Industrial Light & Magic. From there, I'm going to make television commercials and move to Los Angeles. Then I'd like to make sequels to my favorite science fiction movies." My dad, who was big on taking long, deep breaths while thinking about things, said probably the most

what they thought I was doing. My dad was an Okie and my mom was from South Dakota, and because they had a very different view of what one could expect, they wanted to protect me from disappointment. I think it clicked after we started Propaganda Films, and they started to think, Oh wow, he's okay financially.

PLAYBOY: Propaganda was a very successful music video and moviemaking company that you, Dominic Sena and others launched in 1986 and which boosted the feature-film careers of interesting directors such as Spike Jonze and Antoine Fuqua, among many others.

FINCHER: It's weird. Ceán and I were talking about our daughter, who is 20 now. That's the age I was when I directed my first television commercial. The idea of walking in the door, rolling up my sleeves and saying, "Okay, here's what the next 10 hours are about. For the first shot, we're going to..." That doesn't seem so weird or different to me, because that was me at the age of 20. And yet I would have a hard time listening to a 20-year-old tell me, "Here's what we're going to be doing."

PLAYBOY: You
directed some of
Madonna's most
stylish videos, such
as "Vogue" and "Bad
Girl," the latter
depicting the singer
as a film noir femme

important thing ever: "Well, what if that doesn't work out?" I was kind of like, "Fuck you. I'm not thinking about plan B."

If you didn't get hugged enough as a kid, you won't find what

you're looking for from me. That's not my gig and I'm not

attuned to it.

PLAYBOY: Your career pretty much followed that trajectory you laid out as a kid – except for the making-sequels part.

FINCHER: I went back to Marin, where my younger sister had done voice-overs for [filmmaker] John Korty, and I got a production assistant job with him – moving Xerox machines, mopping floors, helping rewire animation stands. I rose very quickly in the ranks because of my work ethic. I was doing effects animation, shooting some second-unit stuff and becoming a visual-effects producer. I met wildly talented, inspirational people there. It was kind of a great film school, though some people were definitely like, "Who the fuck does this 18-year-old think he is?"

PLAYBOY: What did your parents make of the fact that within a few years you were directing commercials for some of the biggest clients in the world?

FINCHER: When I was making commercials for Nike, Chanel and Pepsi, I think my parents thought I was doing stuff like "Come on down to Waterbed Warehouse." That was their idea of what television commercials were, so that's

fatale who gets strangled with panty hose. Why do you think *that* Madonna never translated to the big screen?

FINCHER: Madonna is very crafty. She's street-smart. The video directors who did the best work with her - romantic, amazing stuff like what Jean-Baptiste Mondino did - were the ones she allowed to take risks and the ones who made videos she would throw herself into. I made commercials to make money, but I did music videos as a kind of film school. I learned that the way to be with Madonna was to follow her impetus, because the artist in a music video is not only the star but also the studio. I could say to Madonna, "I need you to do it again. I need you to stop blinking. I need you to get your fucking chin down. And I need you to be better." Whether it was Madonna, Brad Pitt or Ben Affleck, I'm well aware that the work got financed because of them. But they needed to know I had to get them off their mark, get them to a place where it might get warm, because there might be friction.

PLAYBOY: How do you look back on directing your first feature movie, *Alien* 32

FINCHER: I was a 27-year-old rube trying to navigate an impervious bureaucracy. It

was an absurd and obscene daily battle to do anything interesting with what we were allowed to do. It was the same studio but very different players when I made *Fight Club*. There were 80 corporate people who, for all the right reasons, became terrified of what the movie became. The biggest tipping point was, "God, the movie's so homoerotic," and that was a real problem for them. At the time, it was incendiary, but I look back on it now and it's so fucking tame, it's almost a TV movie.

PLAYBOY: After that movie, did guys try to fight you, to take you on just for fun?

FINCHER: I'm not tough, but I'm mean. I think people know I'm way too vindictive to try that shit.

PLAYBOY: If any movie divides your ferociously partisan fanboy base it's The Curious Case of Benjamin Button – a deeply emotional, odd movie clearly made by someone who has grappled with death and the passage of time.

FINCHER: I'd never made a movie with that big a body count. Everybody dies. And the truth of the matter is everyone is going to die, yet we spend so much time ignoring that fact.

PLAYBOY: Whose death has most affected you?

FINCHER: My father died in 2003, and I'd never been with someone when they died before. Almost all the decision-making I'd done in my life was in hopes of pleasing him or reacting against the things I felt he was shortsighted about. All of a sudden there was no north anymore, only south, east and west. When I read Eric Roth's draft of the script, it felt as though it was talking about an experience I'd had. Everybody kept saying the character was a little passive, and I was like, "My dad was a little passive. People do go through their entire lives being passive." Benjamin Button is a bit of a dirge. I thought it was beautiful. I thought it was an accomplishment.

PLAYBOY: What do you think happens after death?

FINCHER: When my father was sick, starting his chemo and puttering around our house after moving from Oregon to LA, I could tell when he was about to appear at the bottom of the steps even if I didn't hear him. Of course, I knew him so intimately. When he passed I could tell he was no longer in the room. I was profoundly aware that the frequency he was on was suddenly gone. I've never been a religious person. I've always felt that the responsibility we have to one another should transcend punishment, that you should do what you feel is right because it's right, not

because you're going to be scalded forevermore. I hope the ether is out there somewhere and all the star children pass on knowledge, experience, forgiveness, whatever.

PLAYBOY: How do you assess *The Social Network*, a movie many people thought deserved to win the best picture Oscar over *The King's Speech*?

FINCHER: It's as close to a John Hughes movie as I can make. For me that was stepping outside my comfort zone by showing nerds in their natural habitat. People said, "Oh, you're making a Facebook movie?" as if we were capitalizing on a trend or doing a Linda Blair *Roller Boogie* roller-disco movie after disco was dead. I was able to say to the studio, "There are no movie stars in this, just kids between 20 and 25." It was incredibly fun and freeing to be able to just put the best people in those roles.

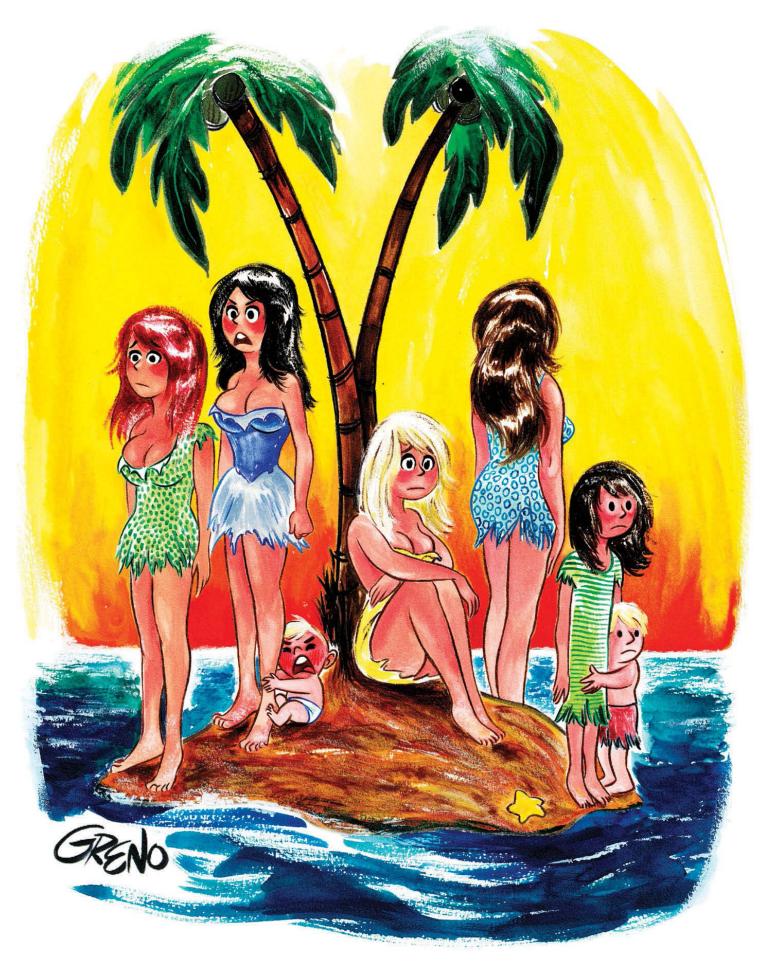
PLAYBOY: For better or worse, over the years lots of Fincher projects have been announced and then vanished, including a top-chef project meant to star Keanu Reeves and a Steve Jobs movie with a script by Aaron Sorkin, who won an Oscar for writing *The Social Network*. But the most intriguing was a proposed remake of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.

FINCHER: Dude, it was fucking cool. It was smart and crazy entertaining, with the Nautilus crew fighting every kind of gigantic Ray Harryhausen thing. But it also had this riptide to it. We were doing Osama bin Nemo, a Middle Eastern prince from a wealthy family who has decided that white imperialism is evil and should be resisted. The notion was to put kids in a place where they'd say, "I agree with everything he espouses. I take issue with his means - or his ends." I really wanted to do it, but in the end I didn't have the stomach lining for it. A lot of people flourish at Hollywood studios because they're fear-based. I have a hard time relating to that, because I feel our biggest responsibility is to give the audience something they haven't seen. For example, Gillian Flynn and I are doing Utopia [about fans of a cult graphic novel] for HBO, and that's all I'm focusing on next year.

PLAYBOY: In the end, what do you most want people to know about you?

FINCHER: Studios treat audiences like lemmings, like cattle in a stockyard. I don't want to ask actors or anyone else on a movie to work so hard with me if the studios treat us as though we're making Big Macs. The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo is not a Big Mac. Gone Girl is not a Big Mac. This TV show I'm doing about music videos in the 1980s and the crew members who worked on them, or this other show, a Sunset Boulevard set in the world of soaps – they're not Big Macs. I don't make Big Macs.





"When I find the idiot who yelled 'Women and children first...!"



FOREPLAY

DIDN'T

USUALLY

REQUIRE

HOSPITALIZATION.

THEN

HE

MET

TIFF

SWALLOWING

FICTION BY STEVE AMICK

iff was into hardware. That fact became clear the moment I saw her bedroom. There was what appeared to be the chopper handlebars from a girl's Schwinn, from the mid-Seventies, complete with bubblegum-pink hand-grips and plastic streamers, mounted with industrial lag bolts to the wall, just above the headboard. Maybe that should have tipped me off. But the barbell through the clit, making its appearance about an hour after the handlebars, was a little more than I'd bargained for.

Then again, Tiff was a little more than I'd bargained for. She was tough and wild and perhaps crazier than anyone I'd had before but fun and up for anything. Certainly more fun than Neva, the obsessive-compulsive 34-year-old I'd been floundering with the past three years. Stacked up against, for example, one of Josef Mengele's Nazi nurses, Neva would still tip out on the lessfun side. But perhaps that's not fair. Neva had her good points, though self-inflicted pain wasn't one of them. This was a woman who often took a Tylenol before brushing her hair. The idea of jamming a metal bar through her clitoris would have seemed, to Neva, like science fiction.

But this new girl, Tiff – she was different. That fact was written all over her. I wasn't exactly used to self-perforation, and it was a little disarming. The tattoos, I was prepared for – a chain of daisies ringing her pullet-like biceps; kissing cousin to Bettie Page, winking coyly, probably cribbed from the Altoids ad; and gothic calligraphy, small of her back, that said "Kyle" (and, I suspected, "I Watch Too Much Six Feet Under"). I saw them when I asked her out, along with the initial piercings – the tongue was obvious in conversation and the belly button dangle, a pendulous gold A-bomb, finned, tumescent with payload, even through the scrim of her blouse.

The last piercing, though, was not as publicly advertised. Word first reached me only as I was nuzzling the peach-fuzz glory trail just below the belly button, gnawing at her hipbones and tugging at the Tootsie Pop–print panties and inhaling the mix of cotton and musk.

"I've got something on my clit," she announced suddenly, and though her tone was more statement than warning or apology – a mere point of trivia rather than alarm – I took her to mean she had some sort of STD. And I thought, perhaps a little crushed, Of course she does. How stupid would I be to expect otherwise? This is a person who walks up to strangers at work and bandies about the word pussy. And those Schwinn handlebars aren't mounted there just because she thought it would dress up the room.

Eventually, I understood she meant something other than a sore or lesion when she hooked her thumbs on either side of her panties and yanked them down, free and clear. She was shaved clean – I thought of spring roasters and Cornish game hens. Her fingers pushed ahead of me, spreading the hood to show me. It was a tiny silver barbell, straight through her clitoris, with two round ends no bigger than those little metallic cupcake decorations I loved as a kid though never understood why they were edible.

But *cupcake* wasn't my initial thought. I swear to God, the first thing that came to mind was an image – from TV medical shows, I guess – of foreign objects found inside the human body – pens and bobby pins, coins, condoms of muled cocaine and, of course, bullets – and that moment when the frowning ER doctor throws the X ray up on the screen and there it is. It must have shown on my face, or in my stunned reaction, my sluggishness in leaping to interact with this souped-up hot rod of a vagina. I must have backed away, bit my lip, registered the horror of a bug-eyed extra in an old haunted-house movie. Because she made a comment: "OK, then! Not something you're used to, I take it," and started to squirm back into her panties like she was closing up shop. "Maybe we should just – maybe it's too much for you," she said. Like I'm some Shriner, in danger of having my ticker poop out.

"No," I said, though of course it was absolutely too much for me. The shaving and tattoos and the other piercings would have been enough to throw me, but I wasn't going to say, No, you're too much for me; no, you're too wild. I wasn't about to say no.

"No," I said. "Really, Tiff. I want to go down on you – obviously – but – "The truth was, the thing gave me the heebie-jeebies. I admit it. Not really my thing. But let's say I could pull myself together enough to do my part – wouldn't it hurt her, having me flick away at it? Weren't there special instructions for handling? "I'm just wondering if there's any special way I need to – "But I didn't wait for directions. I made a tentative lunge, like some slob in a Halloween costume bobbing for apples. Any suavity in getting my head down there was now out the window. This was not going to be an elegant, circuitous arrival, a rolling-in-the-surf or candle wax–dripping Barry White moment, a ballet of serpentine nuzzling. This now fell into the category of scientific experimentation: I moved in with the awkward caution of a wary lab technician, gave it an exploratory flick of the tongue.

The taste of cold metal reminded me of the time I made a move to nibble Neva's earlobe, only she was wearing her grandmother's pearl earrings with very long posts and I guess one of them jabbed into her neck or something because she elbowed me hard and shoved me off

her and I ended up using an old copy of *Mirabella* to quietly squeeze one off in the bathroom.

I'm normally pretty good at it, I think. But my tentativeness must have been showing. "It takes some getting used to," Tiff said before squirming out from under me and rolling me over on my back. She went straight for the nipples then continued on. Having no hardware obstructions myself, she inhaled me straightaway. She was good. It was no real surprise, I guess, but she was good to the degree of showing off, making a point, dusting off her résumé, and I knew that Kyle, whoever he was, had never once gotten squeamish.

"My turn," I said, cutting her off, pulling her away from my joint. "Let me try again –" She was a tiny thing and I wanted to show her I could be bold; I could be manly and in charge. I gripped her around that scrawny waist and pulled her on top of me, so she was straddling me. I scooted down flat, cupping her ass and drawing her closer, bringing that scary little pussy right up to my mouth. She let out a squeal that turned into a sigh as she began to ride my face.

This time there was no escape from the weird taste of metal, but I was set on proving I was just as wild.

I opened my eyes, looking straight up. Since she was shaved,

there was clear line of sight: the underside of alert tits, her clenched jaw, pinched lids, half-slung mouth, the cockeyed wig and her hands as she pressed the wall, sliding upward with a shivery suspiration, her fingers wrapped around the grips of the handlebars.

Now she began to really grind. It was almost hurting my jaw, the torque she exerted. In an attempt to get more oxygen to my nose and to straighten my neck, crimped against the pillow, I began to thrash a little, finally managing to push the pillow aside and stretch my neck, get my head flat on the mattress. But thrashing only egged her on and she shifted into a full-tilt buckaroo cowgirl routine. And then I choked.

It wasn't a hair, it wasn't a bad swallow, a weird spasm. I couldn't breathe.

I thrashed more and so did she. I tried to scream, but it came out as an encouraging moan, a deep vibration, and her thighs clenched, trapping me. So I shoved. Hard. It must have been right at a moment that she no longer had a good grip on the handlebars. Or maybe in my panic I'd mustered superhuman strength. She seemed to take flight, losing her balance and tumbling off the bed,

one foot hitting the floor with a hard clump.

I lurched upright, wheezing, slapping at my chest. There was a sharp pain there that I couldn't account for, though I suppose it could have been because I was pounding on it. I was vaguely aware of what was going on in that moment – including the foggy impression that Tiff was pissed off, cursing me and punching me in the leg.

I made what I felt at the time was the international sign for *I think I swallowed* your clit jewelry. It might have been more hand waggling and pointing at her general midsection, but I was getting through to her because the first nonviolent thing she said was, "You swallowed it? You're fucking kidding!"

She was standing up now and she checked herself, swinging around the pink fake-fur gooseneck lamp on her bedside table, bending it to her crotch. Hunching forward, with bowed legs, she spread her hood again, toward the light. I looked, too. I had the better view.

"Jesus Christ," she said. "It's gone!" Stamping over to the wall switch, she threw on the lights and pawed around on remotely resembling normal. But I didn't. It was all I could do to rasp out, "Water - -"

She understood, but hesitated, not immediately signing off on the plan. "Really? You want to swallow it farther? Maybe you ought to try puking it up." She got behind me on the bed and jammed her fist under my ribs, trying to Heimlich me. I was surprised how strong she was. The pain was sharp; much worse than before. Now I had two separate pains and the ball wasn't budging. I could've told her — if I could have told her — that the Heimlich wouldn't work. The obstruction was deeper than that. It wasn't caught in my throat, but farther down.

She went and got the water. "So you're planning on passing it, is that it?"

I didn't answer, as I was busy gulping from a plastic Snoopy drinking cup.

"You mind crapping into a colander or something? I kind of want it back."

The water didn't help. It hurt. I felt like there were small mechanical parts in my chest that had broken off. It put me in mind of that doomed rattle you get when you try to repair a VCR yourself.

"I've got something on my clit," she announced suddenly, and though her tone was more statement than warning or apology – a mere point of trivia rather than alarm – I took her to mean she had some sort of STD.

the bedspread till she found the other end. "Wait! OK, here it is!" She had the barbell pinched between her fingers and she set it into her open palm and held it under the lamp. Then she turned back to the bedspread. "Where's the cap? The little ball that screws on the end?"

I showed her where, thumping my chest. "How did you do that?" she asked. "What were you trying to do?"

I thought it was obvious what I had been trying to do, but apparently she was looking for an answer more complicated than Trying to give you an orgasm. What did she think I was trying to do? Defuse a bomb? She was spared the sarcastic comments, as I was still too busy banging my chest and gasping for air.

"I've never heard of this happening, OK? This is, like, not normal." I could see where this was going now. It was an interesting tack to take: Clearly it was all my fault. I was the old square boring guy who didn't know how to work a simple clitoris. At least not the late-model ones.

I could have pointed out that when you put a piece of metal jewelry through your genitalia, there can't really be anything She offered to get me some bread. This was so absurd, I tried ignoring it, concentrating instead on trying to swallow and breathe.

Unsolicited, she launched into a long story about how her grand-mother always gave her a slice of white bread when she was choking. I couldn't imagine a dumber proposal – even if I were actually choking and trying to push it down into my stomach, which I wasn't. "Lung – –" I rasped, pointing to one side of my chest. "Stuck..." I then pointed to the center of my chest. "Na' here..."

She wasn't buying it. Rolling her eyes and sighing, she announced fine, she would go make a pot of coffee. "That ought to help get things moving." I snatched a copy of *Bust* and a lipstick from the floor, knocked off the dust bunnies and scribbled, over an Absolut ad on the back cover: *I can't pass it. It's stuck in my lung or something!*

She told me that I was being dramatic, made a sour face and marched into the kitchen, still nude, to brew the coffee. "I think I have some bran cereal," she said. "You should eat a couple handfuls of that. Get things moving."

So I drank the coffee. I ate the bran cereal. And I lay flat on the bed, waiting for things to stir. But only after getting dressed. Because I knew this wouldn't work and we'd eventually have to go to the hospital.



I didn't know Tiff very well. We'd only met earlier that week, while I was looking to rent a costume for my editor's "Come as Your Favorite Failed Dot-Com" party. Shooting for obscurity, I had settled on vetshrink. com, a little-known blip on the radar screen that attempted to provide online advice for animals. I was contemplating the dog suit, actually, which happened to be right next to a cat costume. I didn't even hear her slip up behind me.

"I see you're thinking about pussy, aren't you?"

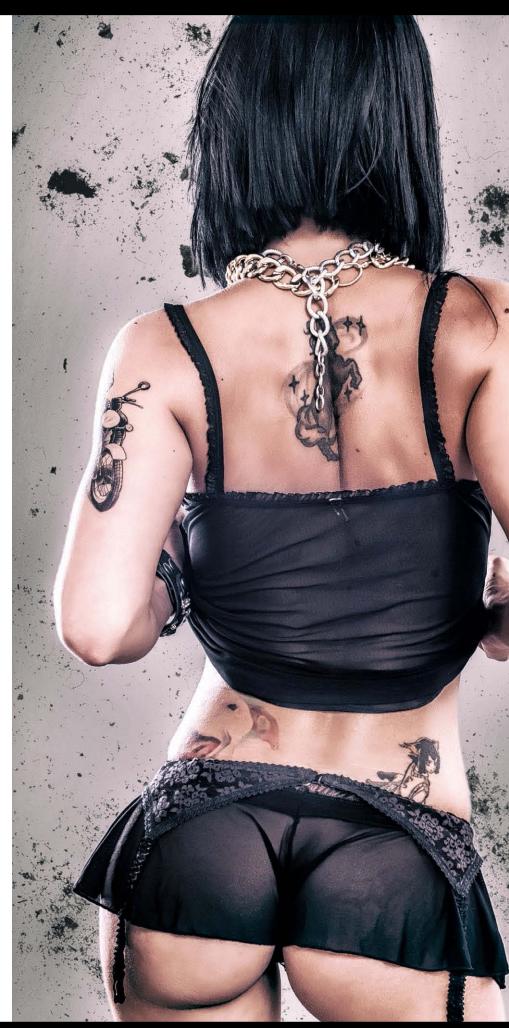
She was so obviously the kind of girl I'd begun to doubt existed when I was with Neva.

Neva. God. This was a woman who refused to have any sort of sex outdoors - even when we were alone in a remote rental in Michigan for an entire week in early September, post-tourists, surrounded by nothing but pine trees, water and stars. Not even out on the deck - she'd made it clear the beach or anywhere on the ground was out of the running. There were Adirondack chairs, which she said would be too hard, so I drove into town and bought a cushioned chaise at Kmart. No good. Still too close to the ground: Nonspecific bugs would crawl up the chaise and enter her "hoo-haw." Believe me, I wanted to tell her, it's not that easy to enter your "hoo-haw." Then I $suggested-foolish\,me-may be\,standing$ against the railing, looking out at the twinkling lights on the distant peninsula. Or, if she required even more bug-height from the ground, with her sitting on the rail and me standing. But no, we'd have to put on repellent for the two or three geriatric mosquitoes still kicking beyond Labor Day and wouldn't we taste the repellent from kissing each other's neck?

She went back to reading *Bridget Jones' Diary*; I went skinny-dipping.

Neva tried. She tried to be bold and unencumbered. But she had her issues. With everything, but particularly with sex.

Particularly oral sex. Neva seemed to think the goal was the actual swallowing. The ingestion. Which is probably why she felt completely incapable of getting to that level. To someone for whom the idea of anything happening, ejaculation-wise, was freaky and upsetting, the idea of then proceeding to gulp it all down probably seemed to her like a paraplegic hoping to not only walk



one day but to walk on the moon. I was torn: On one hand I could tell her it wasn't the swallowing so much as just the riding it out – not switching gears and leaving me hanging out to dry, twisting in the wind. Lower the bar. Spit it into a potted plant.

Except I did sort of care. Because spitting makes you feel crummy and toxic, like you've just had a rattlesnake bite sucked clean by your "pardner," who, except for the danger of your dying of rattler venom, would not be doing this. I never spelled it out for Neva because I wanted more. I wanted down-the-hatch.

And I didn't want it to feel like bartering, like we were hammering out a labor negotiation. I wanted more than a muted sex life, one in which everything had become sanctioned and expected, rehearsed and preordained. Bottom line? I wanted dirty, I wanted wild, I wanted fun. So the one time, very near the end of our relationship, when Neva pointed out, pathetically, "Look. I got some," and indicated, without touching it, a drop of jizz glistening along her jawline, far from the target, I did not point out that it was only there because she had

panicked, once again yanked me out of her mouth prematurely, that she was, at the time of my throbbing, mid-air orgasm, cowering against the pillow, twisted away

from it as if from a botched chemistry experiment and muttering, "Sorry! Sorry!" eyes squeezed closed, hands up and shielding her face. Because I wanted more. I wanted the continued contact, true, but I also just wanted her to swallow. So I was encouraging instead. I told her, "Good, honey," like we had accomplished something together, like we were starting to make progress. It was pathetic. On both sides.

And now here I was, lying next to exactly the type of wild young woman I'd wondered about, and she was naked and ready and now I was mainly just wondering if I was going to die. It was two hours after she'd removed the dress. She was clearly beginning to regret wasting something "dry clean only" on me.

"This sucks," she said. "I was so close to coming."

I chose to be gallant and said I was really sorry. I think she understood me.

"Seriously. I was. You should take that as a compliment. You weren't down there all that long."

I decided to lie there and not respond. She said she still wanted to, that if she were alone, she would probably finish herself off. "Da lemme st' ya . . . ," I mumbled. "Kna' y'seff ow. . . ."

"You're here," she said. "I'd have to go do it in the bathroom or something."

The bathroom wasn't an option. I'd made two trips already and was about to make my third. And it wasn't pretty. I elbowed her, lying there next to me. "G'head...."

But she wouldn't do it. "I'm shy," she said. It was such a ridiculous claim that I wasn't about to expend any more breath trying to respond. I made my fourth run to the bathroom somewhere around 1:15. The pain in my chest was growing worse and it was starting to scare me. I remember being on the toilet, thinking how this would be such a stupid way to die.

That's the last thing I remember.



I came to with an oxygen mask over my mouth. In the hospital. There was a guy in a white coat who looked like an actor, "It's not a BB." Tiff sounded really annoyed now. "It's the cap on my clit ring, OK? The little ball that screws onto the end."

The doctor swiveled on his stool now, all ears. She unfolded a wadded napkin and showed him the remaining part that we'd found in the bedspread. "Like this end, OK? Only it screws off?"

"I see," he said. "I think. Still $\,$ – "

"It was an accident," I said.

He looked at me like I was a moron. "Of course. But are we certain you actually swallowed it? Perhaps the end piece came loose somewhere, and the pain you're feeling could just be anxiety."

I held up my hand, trying to put an end to this. "I swallowed it."

He looked to Tiff for confirmation. She nodded. "I'm pretty sure he swallowed it. I don't think it's in his lung."

"Couldn't you feel it was loose in your mouth before you swallowed it?"

Tiff jumped in to explain. "It fell, like, straight down? He's on his back and I'm on top and he's, you know, eating me."

"OK," the doctor said, getting the picture, then demonstrating with his hands, "so his

head's tipped back, his mouth's open, and the epiglottis is relaxed and probably flopped open..." Tiff shrugged. "I don't know if he

was fiddling with my epigloppis or what. He was just eating me. It was normal, regular, plain old eating my pussy."

"I meant his epiglottis, not yours." He took a moment to consider, as if finally picturing it, and drew a deep breath, letting it out so evenly, with such control, I almost felt jealous. "Yeah, OK. Then I think we better get some shots of this. I guess it very well could be in your lung."

Hadn't I been saying that for the past four hours? While we were waiting for me to get X-rayed, Tiff announced she was bored out of her skull. (Understandable, since nothing was lodged in her lung.) "I'm serious," she said. "If we're still here in five minutes, I may have to kill myself."

I muttered a suggestion that she go find a rest room and "finish herself off." You have to understand, I was scared and she wasn't really helping. But rather than taking offense, she seemed to be considering it. "I could do that again, I guess. But I already took care of it. Before."

I realized then we were talking about two entirely different ways of finishing oneself off. I asked her when she'd managed to do this.

It must have shown on my face, or in my stunned reaction, my sluggishness in leaping to interact with this souped-up hot rod of a vagina.

standing over me, scribbling on a clipboard; a curtain nearby keeping me from some scenario involving a wet sucking sound and a female voice that kept repeating, "Oh baby, oh baby." Only not in a good way. And Tiff was there, not looking real thrilled, her mouth pursed in a little balloon knot. She was seated in the corner, out of the way, and she gave me a half-hearted wave when she saw I was conscious. She was back in the cocktail dress. She hadn't thrown on the nearest sweats or jeans but put it all back on. Including redoing the makeup and Jackie wig. I guess I found that odd.

The oxygen was helping. Or maybe it was calming to know I was finally getting some help. Either way, I found that if I pulled the mask away, I could speak more clearly, between gulps of air.

"I swallowed this ... little metal ball. I think it's in my lung. Is that possible?"

"It's not in your lung," Tiff said, rolling her eyes. I have to say I was getting a little sick of that eye-rolling business.

The doctor asked how big. "Tiny," I said. "Like a BB. Smaller, probably."

"You swallowed a BB? Please don't tell me you put a BB gun in your mouth."

"After you passed out. Before the ambulance arrived."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing.
"What?" she said. "I called first, OK? I
didn't start diddling myself till after I called
911. So don't get all outraged."



Two hours later, Tiff had still not killed herself. We were looking at my X rays. The doctor actually said, "There it is." This I felt was unnecessary. There were no other little round balls in my lung.

"Great." Tiff sounded extremely bored. "Now can you do something to make him cough it up? Or do you have to cut him open, or -"

I told her to shut up. I didn't mind the coughing-it-up idea, but not if it came paired with the other suggestion.

"No," he said. "That's a sterile area, the lungs. Or it's supposed to be. You get anything in there, we're looking at pneumonia. Now, normally, at your age,

with modern medicine, that's not going to kill you. When it's dust, fluid, stuff like that. But what you've done here, that's not normal.

This was not going to be an elegant, circuitous arrival, a rolling-in-the-surf or candle wax–dripping Barry White moment, a ballet of serpentine nuzzling. This now fell into the category of scientific experimentation...

There's no amount of penicillin that can destroy a metal ball." He took another long look at the X ray and said, "Man –"

I hated the way he said it. "So I'm dead. That's what you're saying."

"You're not dead," he told me, "we just have to do a little procedure. A bronchoscopy. Not a big deal."

He explained how it would work, how it wasn't, strictly speaking, surgery. They had a thing he called the FOB – the flexible fiber-optic bronchoscope – that he could insert down my throat with a tiny camera and alligator forceps and retrieve the ball without cutting me open. He went on to explain about the anesthesia, but I was still stuck on the idea that it wasn't a big deal. Maybe this is a guy thing, but anytime someone say she's going to stuff something down your throat, that is, by definition, a big deal.

When I came to, the nurse told me they'd successfully removed the foreign object but wanted to keep an eye on me.

Hours passed as I fell in and out of sleep, the waking moments finding me alone in the room. I wondered if she had gone off somewhere to masturbate. It had been about 12 hours since the time when she was waiting for the ambulance – she was probably due for a refresher. Finally, the nurse came in with my clothes and told me they were going to release me as soon as they found my friend. I got dressed and waited in the wheelchair, as instructed, feeling ditched. After a while, the nurse announced that they'd called my emergency contact. I've had the same insurance policy for years and had no memory who that even was. When the nurse came in again, she was followed by Neva. Brow knitted, just the way I remembered her.

Before I could get my drowsy brain around an alternate plan, she got behind the wheelchair and pushed me out to her car. She tsked as she negotiated the maze of parking lots and exit signs out to the main road. "I imagine this is from wolfing down steak. You never did chew your food properly. Didn't I always tell you – 30 times for each piece?" I wasn't about to start reeling off the details, so I allowed her theory to stand undisputed: I'd choked on food.

not some sort of pioneer woman fighting off the Sioux.

She doled out sedatives from a little manila envelope as I drifted through the rest of the afternoon, a misty parade of scornful TV judges in faux courtrooms. I vaguely recall her returning in the twilight blue, with two more pills and a glass of milk and her rubbing my back in a simple circle and her fingers stroking my hair, momlike.

Next morning, less drug-fuzzy, my tongue capable of Ps and Ts and having had enough time to get my story straight, I confirmed Neva's accusation of the day before: I'd choked eating steak. It had partly obstructed my wind-pipe. They had to get in there and yank it out. Part of me, the bravado part, felt the story was pretty chickenshit – the lousy windpipe? – but I kept my mouth shut and then she asked if it was a date. I told her it was.

"First date?"

Inodded

She winced. "Ooh. Not a great first date, I imagine. And this happened at dinner? So probably no kiss, huh?"

]

Even though Neva wasn't my girl-friend anymore, I didn't like the idea of lying to her. So I didn't say anything either way. "I'm sorry, sweetie. Was she all right about

it?"

"No, not really," I murmured. "She definitely could have been much more – understanding."

"Maybe you two can start over," she said.
"Just act like the next date is your first
date."

I told her I didn't think there'd be a next date.



The third day, with the pain and sluggishness waning, I found forming complex sentences more manageable. When Neva came in with juice and to rewrap the ribs Tiff cracked, I thanked her for rescuing me and told her how embarrassed I was that I'd made things worse by struggling during the procedure. I said, "I guess I was being a real baby about it."

She dismissed that, saying it was nonsense. "Please. Who wouldn't be upset when they're jabbing some long poky thing down your throat?" She told me

She said she was taking me home and I nodded off and woke to see she meant her home. I'd never seen Neva's place, new since we split up. She'd never seen my apartment, either. This was probably the first long-term relationship I'd ever had that didn't end with a slow weaning of sex, a wind-down period. With Neva, it just ended, cold, any booty-call action out of the question.

Her bedroom looked a lot like our old bedroom would have looked if I hadn't been there to veto some of it. I tried to imagine walking in and seeing Schwinn handlebars mounted over the bed.

She told me she would stay home the rest of the day. She owns a little boutique called Scrappy's where she sells scrapbooks and photo albums, though most of her income comes not in retail sales but from the consulting side. She helps clients design and organize their photo albums. For a while, she tried to get her friends to call her Scrappy, but that never really took. She's not exactly "scrappy," if that means, as I think it does, someone who's tough and feisty and resilient. Don't get me wrong – I still really love her in a lot of ways, but she's

to relax, take all the time I needed. But I decided it was time to go home.



Of the dozen calls on my answering machine, only one was from Tiff. It was this: "Hey, it's me. Call or whatever." I didn't call anyone back. I took the pain-killers. When she called again later, I expected some concern, some apologies, some explanation of her ditching me. But there wasn't any. All giggles and fun, she moved on to another topic: Was I up for company? I had to marvel at her ability to ask this without actually asking how I was doing.

I thought about how tender Neva had been with me, how she'd insisted that I take it easy. I told Tiff I thought I'd better pass on company.

"I'm not talking about the kind of company in the hospital, dum-dum – reading magazines and watching you lie there drugged out."

But I knew what kind of company she

meant. It just no longer sounded like such a swell idea. She said, "We've got some unfinished business, remember?"

I laughed rather weakly. It still hurt my

throat. I told her, again, not tonight. I told her thanks, but I really had to pass. I was sure she'd heard me.

She was at my door 20 minutes later.



It's amazing how easy it is for a woman to barge in when she's kissing your neck and gripping a shopping bag that she claims contains a "special outfit." She just kept coming, shepherding me back into the living room, murmuring some pouty-lipped baby talk about how she'd been looking for me at the hospital and couldn't find me and then they said I had checked out and she just was so worried. It made no sense, of course, but there was this thing she was doing to my neck, grazing her lips down the length of it, and she did have my fly unbuttoned. Then she stopped as if she'd heard a noise and said, "Oh!" like she'd just remembered something and reached into the bag for what looked like a fax. "I probably ought to get this out of the way."

A "friend" (how she put it, though I smelled ex or sometime boyfriend), who was a

law student, had drawn up a "silly little" disclaimer for me to sign, which stated that Tiff was not in any way liable for the "accident." She said she knew it was lame but this guy would really yell at her if she didn't cover her bases. I wasn't sure about all this. Not because I was contemplating suing her, but just where the hell had she been the past couple of days when I needed some comfort?"

Hurry up and sign it," she said, "so we can get that out of the way and I can put this on - "She flashed open the bag for an instant and I caught a glimpse of white cotton and that familiar Red Cross on the peak of a cap: a nurse's uniform. There was a downshift in her voice to husky vamp, "and we can play with your bronchoscope. I think I need you to perform a bronchoscopy on me with your big ...long...bronchoscope.Ithinkyoubetter explore my throat, Doctor." The way she dragged it out, lingering over each word, made me squirm. I admit it. But not completely in a good way. A little more wince than squirm. It was dumb and embarrassingly cliché and transparently manipulative: Sign this and I'll dress up like a nurse and blow you. I mean, how obvious can you get?

attention, Nurse. I'll get right on it." She giggled. I moved up to her clit and yanked my hand away: metal.

"I can't believe this," I said. "You just go right out and get another one? You don't even care that -"

"I didn't go out and -"

"You're not even sensitive to the fact that —"
She frowned. "It's not another one. It's the
old one." She leaned closer, into the pool of
lamplight, lifted the white hem. I tipped the
lampshade, caught the glint. She spread her
hood and I peered closer. It was the old one.
The original. I was very familiar with the
original, believe me, and this was it.

"It's clean and all," she said. "Totally. It's fine." I just stared at it, not believing this was happening. Then she added, "Danny gave it to me"

It was a personal history I hadn't heard the other night, but I didn't really care. Danny, Kyle – the emotional value of the thing didn't enter into it. Not for me, at least. "Oh, so because it's some keepsake from an old boyfriend, I'm supposed to –"

"Some old boyfriend? What are you talking about? Your doctor Danny?"

out cold, the doctor took her down to the cafeteria for lunch and they talked about local bands and

She told me how,

while I was still

nightclubs, and then he slipped it to her in a paper napkin. He told her they should go ballroom dancing sometime.

"I'm not going to do this," I told her.
"There are certain things I'm just not
doing, and this is one of them." I handed
her the clipboard.

"This is so lame," she said. "You try to make it special for a guy...."

I tried to remember when I'd ever encountered any clitoris that made me think, Nope! Not special enough! It needs something. Her bag was over by the bathroom door. I got up off the couch to get it and hand it to her. She took the waiver out and gave it the once-over, as if making certain I'd signed.

"Why do you have to be such a baby?" She had disdain in her voice again. I was an old fogy, stodgy, an amateur. She rolled her eyes once more, but I didn't really care. I'm sure, to some, my life could be seen as boring and tame, but, hey, at least I'm breathing.

Besides, the phone was ringing, the answering machine was about to pickup, and I knew before hearing her small voice that it was Neva, just checking up on me.

I made what I felt at the time was the international sign for I think I swallowed your clit jewelry.

Still, I signed. She went to the bathroom with her shopping bag and came out looking like a cartoon nurse straight out of a vintage pin-up calendar: clip-board, Red Cross cap, big thick shoes, her hemline far from AMA-approved. "I suppose you'll need to hear what my symptoms are first, won't you, Doctor?" I just sat there on the couch and watched. Not enough participation, I guess: She stood over me, eyebrows raised, and handed me the clipboard. "Come on. Ask me what my symptoms are." So I asked. She said, "My nipples are very hard and my pussy's very

I really thought I'd be enjoying this, but the little speech was starting to feel like a telemarketing pitch, someone trying to convince me I'd won a free trip to the Florida Keys.

"It is," she insisted. "Check." She bent at the waist slightly, arching her back, the hem rising enough to prove that she wasn't wearing panties. As instructed, I slid my hand up her thigh and found she was right. It made me grin. Despite the clowning around, it wasn't all an act: I did something to her. It was corny, but I could get into this, play my part.

I said, "Thank you for bringing this to my



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FORBIDDEN PLEASURES

AMERICA'S FAVORITE TECH COMPANY GETS AN F IN SEX EDUCATION

hen 24-year-old designer
Tina Gong submitted her
self-created iPhone app
HappyPlayTime to iTunes in
May 2014 for Apple's approval,
she knew she might run into
red tape. "I know how strict Apple can be in its review
process," she says, "but because HappyPlayTime is a
sex-education app, I thought I could get in."

Gong's app features a grinning, anime-style cartoon vulva that users tap, swipe and glide their fingers across. The goal? Score points by making the vulva "very, very happy." In other words, simulate masturbatory motions to get the vulva off. The app also includes lessons on female anatomy, and Gong hopes to use the technology to educate women – both young and old – to become more comfortable with their bodies. "Masturbation is just the start of that process," she says.

Her process turned into a standoff with Apple when its review team rejected HappyPlayTime,

calling it inappropriate. Gong kicked up the suggested age rating from 12-plus to 17-plus and appealed the decision, to no avail. "They said it was rejected for pornographic reasons and crude content," explains Gong, "but nothing graphic happens in the app. There are just cartoons and connotations. It's meant to be tongue-in-cheek."

BY SHANE MICHAEL SINGH

Apple's review process is notoriously fickle, a long-winded odyssey that requires beta testing and design contracts before a reviewer, tasked with auditing scores of new submissions, makes a decision. The content guidelines are frustratingly vague. To hear the company tell it, "We will reject apps for any content or behavior that we believe is over the line. What line, you ask? Well, as a Supreme Court justice once said, 'I'll know it when I see it.'"

That line is anything but absolute. Consider the sex apps that have been approved: Tinder is for hooking up, Hot Tips offers advice for "kinky fun" and "three in a bed," and iKamasutra lets you record your progress in Hindu lovemaking. So why is self-pleasure –

particularly female pleasure - off-limits?

"Sex activates the moral foundation of sanctity and gets judged as bad, dirty and wrong," says Emily Nagoski, a sex educator at Smith College and author of The Good in Bed Guide to Female Orgasms. "It seems Apple is conflating something that is sexually relevant with something that is sexually pleasurable or arousing. They are not the same thing." Nagoski says that Apple's murky methodology is emblematic of why few social advances have been achieved at the nexus of sex and technology. "Apple is making a moral judgment, not an intellectual one," she says. Hence, good intentions - such as Gong's goal of defusing the stigma of female pleasure - are ignored. "You need to grant people a space to approach sex education," explains Nagoski. "Could there be any better medium than technology?"

Researchers have long demonstrated that sex education in any form can improve one's sex life. A study in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* found that 90 percent of women who had difficulty reaching orgasm were able to do so more easily after receiving instruction on how to properly masturbate. A study

Apple is conflating something that is sexually relevant with something that is sexually pleasurable or arousing. They are not the same thing.

in the Annual Review of Sex Research concluded that simply reading a book about orgasms could be more effective than psychotherapy. "Education works," says Nagoski, "and the platform through which it is delivered doesn't matter."

Tom Chen, founder of the China-based sex-toy maker Linkcube, wants to take digital sex education a step further with "smart" toys. Consider Skea, a Kickstarter-funded vaginal device based on Kegel exercises. Skea is designed to strengthen a woman's pelvic floor by syncing with a smartphone game called Alice in Continent, based on the popular game Temple Run. Women squeeze their pelvic muscles around the Skea to make Alice jump, dodge and run. The idea, says Chen, is to help women achieve a better sex life and improve their well-being.

Chen says the response to the game has been positive and he anticipates huge demand worldwide when it hits the market early next year. He is also confident his game will meet Apple's guidelines because he plans to market it as a medical tool rather than a recreational device.

Whether he's right or not, sex-positive developers such as Gong and Chen are challenging Silicon Valley's corporatists to promote sexual health through technology. "Arbitrary rules make it hard for people to innovate sex education for social good," says Gong. "We need that to change and shift technology to support a healthier attitude." Adds Nagoski, "The fact that this conversation is happening shows we're moving in the right direction. I have a lot of hope."



HARD CORE

Apple has wonky guidelines for sex-positive developers. Here are six examples that made it on – or off – the curious banned wagon



BANNED



NOT BANNED



Geometric Porn

England

Designed by visual artist Luciano Foglia, Geometric Porn is just that: animated triangles and circles that mimic penetration. Foglia argued the app was not explicit and the images were "just an allusion," but Apple rejected it for "excessively objectionable or crude content."



Luxuria Superbia

Belaium

In this game of "touch, pleasure and joy," users stimulate cartoon flowers with rhythmic slow and quick taps before being told to "stick it to my stigma!" One reviewer wrote, "This game is as close to sex with your iPad as you can get."



Sex Criminals USA

Apple banned the second issue of Matt Fraction's controversial comic book, about a couple who stop time by having sex, from being sold on the comiXology app, an emporium of digital comics. Sex Criminals is still available on iBooks, however.



Passion

USA

The low-rated Passion app commandeers your iPhone's mike and accelerometer to measure noise and movement during intercourse and to grade your sexual performance. It then ranks you against friends and strangers. Call it sexual networking.



HappyPlayTime

USA

Tina Gong created her app as a reaction to the parochial views of female sexuality she faced growing up in a conservative family and in college. Designed for a younger audience, Gong wanted HappyPlayTime to be "abstract and cute" without being graphic.



iKamasutra

Sweden

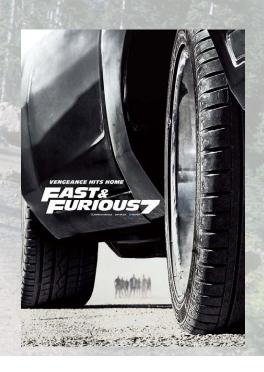
The holy bible of kinky sex is freely available on the App Store. More than 100 positions are candidly explained and illustrated in iKamasutra. Users can also track progress on their bends and balancing acts, improving from novice to grandmaster status.

IN THEATRES NOW

FAST & FURIOUS 7

APRIL 3

Continuing the global exploits in the unstoppable franchise built on speed, Vin Diesel, Paul Walker and Dwayne Johnson lead the returning cast of Fast & Furious 7. James Wan directs this chapter of the hugely successful series that also welcomes back favorites Michelle Rodriguez, Jordana Brewster, Tyrese Gibson, Chris "Ludacris" Bridges, Elsa Pataky and Lucas Black. They are joined by international action stars new to the franchise including Jason Statham, Djimon Hounsou, Tony Jaa, Ronda Rousey and Kurt Russell. Neal H Moritz, Vin Diesel and Michael Fottrell return to produce the film written by Chris Morgan.



INHERENT VICE

APRIL 3

When private eye Doc Sportello's ex-old lady suddenly out of nowhere shows up with a story about her current billionaire land developer boyfriend whom she just happens to be in love with, and a plot by his wife and her boyfriend to kidnap that billionaire and throw him in a loony bin... well, easy for her to say. Inherent Vice is the seventh feature from Paul Thomas Anderson and the first ever film adaption of a Thomas Pynchon novel. With a cast of characters that includes surfers, hustlers, dopers and rockers, a murderous loan shark, LAPD Detectives, a tenor sax player working undercover, and a mysterious entity known as the Golden Fang, which may only be a tax dodge set up by some dentists... Part surf noir, part psychedelic romp - all Thomas Pynchon.

The film stars Joaquin Phoenix, Josh Brolin, Owen Wilson, Katherine Waterston, Reese Witherspoon, Benicio Del Toro, Martin Short, Jena Malone and musician Joanna Newsom.



TRASH

APRIL 10

Based on *Trash*, the acclaimed novel by British author, Andy Mulligan, the film is a contemporary thriller set in the third world, and follows three boys who eke out a living picking through rubbish mounds, until a surprise discovery sets them on a breath-taking adventure pitting their wits against corruption and authority. Directed by Stephen Daldry, the film stars Martin Sheen, Rooney Mara, Wagner Moura and Selton Mello.



RUN ALL NIGHT

APRIL 17

Brooklyn mobster and prolific hit man Jimmy Conlon (Liam Neeson), once known as The Gravedigger, has seen better days. Longtime best friend of mob boss Shawn Maguire (Ed Harris), Jimmy, now 55, is haunted by the sins of his past – as well as a dogged police detective (Vincent D'Onofrio) who's been one step behind Jimmy for 30 years. Lately, it seems Jimmy's only solace can be found at the bottom of a whiskey glass.

But when Jimmy's estranged son, Mike (Joel Kinnaman), becomes a target, Jimmy must make a choice between the crime family he chose and the real family he abandoned long ago. With Mike on the run, Jimmy's only penance for his past mistakes may be to keep his son from the same fate Jimmy is certain he'll face himself...at the wrong end of a gun. Now, with nowhere safe to turn, Jimmy just has one night to figure out exactly where his loyalties lie and to see if he can finally make things right.





BLACK OR WHITE

APRIL 10



Black Or White is the story of a grandfather (Kevin Costner) who is suddenly left to care for his beloved granddaughter. When her paternal grandmother (Octavia Spencer) seeks custody with the help of her brother (Anthony Mackie), the little girl is torn between two families who love her deeply. With the best intentions at heart, both families fight for what they feel is right and are soon forced to confront their true feelings about race, forgiveness, and understanding. Anchored by an all-star cast and inspired by true events, the movie is a look at two seemingly different worlds, in which nothing is as simple as black or white.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK 2

APRIL 17

When a group of orphaned children are forced to move from their home in London, caretakers Eve (Phoebe Fox) and Jean (Helen McCrory) bring everyone to the desolate and eerie British countryside. 40 years after Arthur Kipps (played by Daniel Radcliffe in the first film, The Woman in Black) left, this supernatural horror film introduces this new group to the now abandoned Eel Marsh House; an odd but seemingly safe location. It isn't long before Eve starts to sense that this house is not what it appears to be as the children in her care begin to disappear. As their house of safety becomes a house of horrors, Eve enlists the help of a handsome pilot (Jeremy Irvine) to help investigate what is happening. Eve soon discovers that it may not be a coincidence that she has come to reside in the house inhabited by the Woman in Black.







COUCH POTATO

WINTER IS COMING, SO PREPARE TO SPEND SOME TIME ON THE COUCH CATCHING UP WHAT YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED ON TV LAST YEAR. HERE ARE SOME PLAYBOY PICKS.

GAME OF THRONES THE COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON

By Stacie Hougland

By now it's clear that any character on HBO's Game of Thrones, no matter how important, can get the ax (we're looking at you, Red Wedding). It stands to reason then that the tagline Valar morghulis ("All men must die") perfectly describes season four, in which no one is safe. The shocks and surprises come fast and furious, including a grisly and gratifying death fit for a king in episode two, followed by a disturbing brothersister encounter in episode three. While Tyrion Lannister (Peter Dinklage) is imprisoned, another major villain meets his demise, and Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke) grows in power and struggles to control her dragons. But it's the quiet scenes with little Arya Stark (Maisie Williams) and the Hound (Rory McCann) as they travel the countryside

that reflect some of the season's best writing. Creators David Benioff and D.B. Weiss have said the show won't always follow the books, and hardcore fans have been furious about several omissions. Still, it continues to be one of TV's finest programs, and the epic finale sets up season five, which can't come soon enough. Best extra: The Fallen features interviews with many of the characters killed off this time around.



NIGHTBREED LTD EDITION

By Greg Fagan

When Clive Barker adapted his novella Cabal into 1990's Nightbreed, he delivered a faithful film that was more than two hours long. The studio then butchered the movie, and it flopped. In an unlikely turn of events, the missing elements were found, and Barker's vision is finally realized. The core story and performances (Craig Sheffer and Anne Bobby as young lovers, and David Cronenberg

as a psycho psychiatrist) remain the same, but the new material brings the freaky underworld Midian to the fore. Fans of dark fantasy and wild monsters will be pleased. Best extra: a documentary detailing the film's long, strange trip to longer and stranger.



TRUE DETECTIVE

By Stacie Hougland

HBO's lauded Southern Gothic crime series uses multiple timelines to chronicle two detectives' 17-year hunt for a serial killer in Louisiana. Investigating the occultish murder of a prostitute is loner cop Rust Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) and his partner, Marty Hart (Woody Harrelson), whom we meet in 2012 as they recount the facts of the 1995 case. Cohle is a real downer ("Maybe the honorable thing for our species to do is deny our programming, stop reproducing, walk hand in hand into extinction") who drives Marty nuts with his existential philosophizing; Marty drinks too much and cheats on his wife. The pulpy

swamp noir's mysteries unravel over eight taut episodes as the men learn that making human connections is the only way to overcome their demons. Best extra: "Up Close With Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson" exclusive interviews.



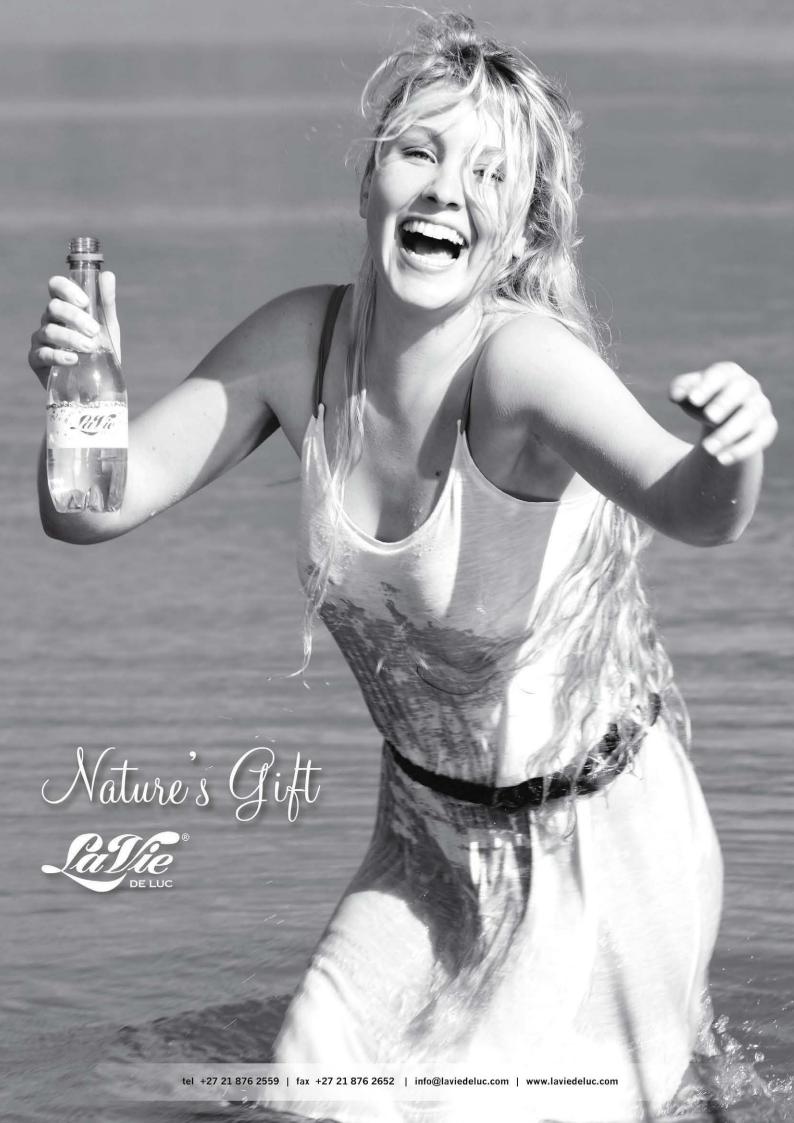
TWIN PEAKS THE ENTIRE MYSTERY

By Robert B DeSalvo

Fans of David Lynch and Mark Frost's cult TV series about a lumber town shattered after the murder of Laura Palmer can now buy both seasons and the theatrical prequel in one HD set. Follow agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) as he hunts Laura's

killer in the supernatural town teeming with out-of-thisworld characters and cherry pie. Best extras: 90 minutes of deleted scenes from Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me and new retrospectives.







PHYSICAL PRINT

By Leopold Froeblich

We all hear about the death of print, but that's an outmoded notion. Certain books work fine on a Nook or Kindle – or even on your Android. But some special books work best when you hold them in your hands and reflect on the glory of ink on paper. Here are three we recommend for your holiday shopping. The Libertine:

The Art of Love in Eighteenth-Century France (1) is the most seductive book published this year. With 496 pages of erotic paintings and text, it's a boudoir

coffee-table book that will put your guests in the proper frame of mind. The Art of Rube Goldberg (2): Over the course of his incredible career, Goldberg (1883–1970) drew and constructed a variety of crazy machines that parodied America's mania for mechanization. The drawings and cartoons in this sumptuous volume should keep any gearhead occupied for days. Speaking of American manias, Hugh Hefner's Playboy (3) might be considered the best survey of our national

sexuality in the 20th century. In six volumes (and 1,910 pages), this boxed set presents the history of PLAYBOY as seen through the eyes of its farseeing founder. In many ways, this is Hef's illustrated autobiography; the pictures and drawings of his Chicago youth are alone worth the \$150 price.

STIMULATING STUFF

EROTIC PHOTOGRAPHY HITS A NEW WAVE

We never tire of looking at beautiful women. Lucky for us, photographers never stop finding exciting new ways to capture their images. The New Erotic Photography (www.taschen.com) collects 50 of today's most intriguing sexy shooters, from the sensual art of Switzerland's Cyril Torrent to the raw power of the Czech Republic's Jan Hronsky, as well as photographers in Japan, Spain, Russia and elsewhere. $Women\ photographers\ make\ the\ most$ exciting contributions to this volume, particularly the porn-star-at-rest work of adult actress Kimberly Kane and the California vibes of Los Angeles photographer Magdalena Wosinska. One eye-catcher: Celebrated lowbrow street artist Coop makes his debut with shots of curvaceous models. Credit editor Dian Janson for curating a mix of styles ranging rom elaborate to stripped down to simply stripped. We appreciate them all.



DREAM WEAVER BY RACHELR WHITE

A BROOKLYN ARTIST USES OLD-SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY TO CELEBRATE MODERN FEMALE SEXUALITY



rooklyn-based tapestry artist Erin M Riley's studio is covered in photos of half-naked women – all in the name of art. For her large-scale wall textiles, Riley finds and re-creates online selfies – those ubiquitous images of young women on social media sites such as Instagram or Tumblr, where the more revealing the photo, the more "likes" it garners.

But while selfie is becoming a disparaging term in popular culture to describe a seemingly endless narcissism, Riley has an affinity for the women in her tapestries. "I know what it feels like, being excited to take a sexy photo," she says. "It is fun, but then there's always some level of disappointment. So much of how we communicate now is image after image. One selfie just isn't

In each of her textiles the faces of the women are made anonymous, blurred, giving the impression that each selfie is connected to something larger. Perhaps fittingly, ${\rm Riley\, sometimes\, uses\, her\, own}$ nude photos, lending the project a personal tone. Although some reviewers have focused on the erotic nature of her pieces, the tapestries also tell a darker tale about technology, the media's obsession with sexting and the judgment young women receive

for being visibly sexual. "There is something strange about how early sexual encounters are now being documented," she says.

Growing up in the early 2000s, Riley experienced this digital sexual experimentation firsthand. She recalls with affection the pre-Facebook era of cybersex in AOL chat rooms, publishing fan fiction on Literotica.com and flirting via instant message. "I think selfies are just a reflection of the times,' she says, then sighs, acknowledging the sinister nature of the trend and the fact that some sexual images possibly some of those used in her tapestries - are leaked online out of revenge. However, Riley hopes her work validates this specific female experience: It's about celebrating a feminine exploration of sexuality rather than condemning the women expressing it.

Riley uses a traditional vintage floor loom and dyes all the wool by hand in her studio. Sitting down to weave, she pauses to note that producing selfies is a methodical process almost akin to the slow act of weaving. For each selfie a significant amount of time is spent primping, posing and editing. "I feel affection for the women in my pieces," she says. "I feel supportive and caring of them. I hope they are happy. I hope they are advocating for themselves and asking for orgasms."



MADE-UP MAN

IS MALE VANITY ABOUT TO TAKE A BOLD NEW TURN? THE ANSWER MAY MAKE YOU BLUSH

he second time I ever met my PLAYBOY editor over lunch he kept telling me how young I looked.

It was deeply creepy – creepier even than his suggestion that I write a long article in which I get trained to perform a bris, or, as he pitched the story in a follow-up e-mail, "Joel adrift in a sea of tiny penises."

Then I remembered: I was wearing makeup. I had come from an appearance on CNN and they'd run out of wipes, so I went straight to our lunch with powder caked on my face. Maybe concealer too; I don't know all the terms. But apparently the stuff worked, even off-camera. My skin was even, smooth and blemish-free. I looked good to a man who looked at airbrushed models all day.

Which is why, in the not too distant future, men will start to wear makeup all the time. I figured this out when a dermatologist told me the most important thing I could do is put moisturizer with sunscreen in it on my face every morning. When he recommended a specific brand, he warned me it had "a little tint in it." What he meant was it had "a bunch of makeup in it."

And now that some dudes are using a little tint, the rest of us have to too, whether we want to or not. Look, I don't want to put on makeup any more than you do, but we men are highly susceptible to peer pressure. I didn't want to play fantasy sports. I didn't want to lift weights. I don't want to wear those ball-strangling skinny jeans either. I sure as hell don't want to wear a tie. But this shift is inevitable unless we band together to fight metrosexuality. Though honestly, the only thing that seems to work against metrosexuality is sharia law, and I'd rather dip my head in a bucket of Lady Gaga's mascara than masturbate to nothing but a woman's eyes.

It's already happening. Sephora has eight items on its site under "male makeup." Tom Ford put out a men's line last year. Mënaji – which names its man makeup manly things such as



CAMO Concealer, packages it in manly ChapStick-like containers and mails it in manly cigar boxes – has been worn by regular dudes including Tom Hanks, Tim McGraw and Neil Young. In South Korea "flower men" such as soccer star Ahn Jung-hwan use and endorse makeup for guys. If we're willing to take that "Gangnam Style" song from Korea, we're definitely taking their grooming trends. A men's manicure and pedicure shop in L.A. called Hammer & Nails is decorated with a punching bag, a rusted car grille, flatscreens showing ESPN and, I'm guessing, the pumped-in smell of farts.

Sure, putting on makeup sounds crazy, but if I told you in 1995 that you would one day be trimming your pubes, you would have thought I was a gay-porn producer in hiring mode. If you told your great-great-grandfather you wore deodorant, he would have mocked you for being

a perfume-wearing pretty boy. If you got in a time machine and told your ancestors from 3,000 years ago that you shaved your face, they would have beaten you with a club and enslaved you. Or you would have disrupted the space-time continuum and your image would have disappeared from photographs. I have no idea how time travel works.

We put so many different kinds of gunk in our hair that it's weird we don't fix our faces. All those powdered-wig guys wore rouge a few centuries ago, and our looks are way more important now. Even if a guy doesn't post selfies – and he shouldn't – more images are taken of him in a month than were taken of Henry VIII in his entire lifetime. Your Tinder photos compete with filters and Photoshop, so it's crazy you don't start by covering your zits. People look so much better with makeup that *Us Weekly* magazine devotes several pages to female celebrities who've been caught without it. "Stars Without Makeup" is what men look like all the time. Our skin is exactly the same as women's. We're operating at 10 percent of our potential. If someone figured out that putting makeup on our dicks made them look an inch bigger, we'd all have urinary

 $tract\,in fections.$

I'm not talking about putting on eyeliner like Adam Lambert or Russell Brand, or turning yourself into a bronze statue like John Boehner. I'm also not talking about giving yourself red lips and cheeks, which are designed to make women look like they're

orgasming and make men look like women who are orgasming. I simply mean putting a little bit of stuff on your face to get rid of zits, wrinkles, redness and shine. Anchorman makeup. This isn't the stuff of vanity that makes people notice you; it's the opposite, a way of blending in, like an ironed shirt or a properly fitted suit.

So you can either wait to be the last puffy, wrinkly, spotted dude in America, or take advantage of this transitional moment, put on some moisturizer with tint and out-handsome the competition. I know what chicks would do.



WEDDING PARTY!

BY HILARY WINSTON

FORGET THE FREE BOOZE AND STUPID DANCING.
THERE'S ANOTHER GOOD REASON GUYS SHOULD SAY
YES TO THAT WEDDING INVITE. WHY? BECAUSE IT'S
NOT JUST THE BRIDE AND GROOM WHO SAY "I DO"

t's summer, which means it's once again wedding season.
Wedding season can be overwhelming, especially when
second weddings start coming around. And between the
travel and the gifts (yes, you still have to buy a gift for the
second wedding), it can get expensive. Weddings take up
weekends when you could otherwise be enjoying the great
outdoors (golf) or the great indoors (golf on Xbox). But if you're a
single dude who likes to hook up with no strings attached, I'm here
to tell you why you should never pass up a wedding invitation.

To begin with, no couple thinks a single dude is going to buy them a wedding gift. They know your brain isn't wired to deal with stuff like that. And if you do buy a gift, it will be considered a miracle and you'll be deemed a hero for the duration of the marriage. "You know who got us this ice cream scoop? Sweetest guy ever!" So you're good on that. And travel expenses? Who cares? It's totally worth it once you get there, because as a single male guest you're almost guaranteed a hookup. That's right, guaranteed. Girls who wouldn't let you buy them a drink will let you get them a free drink. And girls who wouldn't let you come back to their place will be slipping you their hotel room number. Get even the prudiest of prudes to a wedding and she'll be playing footsie under the table with the

minister if she has the right balance of appetizers and "Jeff Loves Christie" signature cocktails. Because weddings equal freedom for single women. They are sanctioned anything-goes free-for-alls. But why?

I once went home with a guy on our first date because I found out he'd attended elementary school in Palo Alto with my agent. That was all I needed for him to go from internet stranger to four-night stand. It was validation that he was safe, worthy and in my world. A wedding is all in your world. Everyone is vouched for, so women are willing to hang up their pesky female inhibitions for a few days. Now, I'm not selling out women, telling you their secrets so you can take advantage of them. Women want you to know this. There's a common misconception that women are just looking for husbands at weddings, that weddings are a good pool of "marriage material." Maybe they are, but what it really comes down to is women like to act like dudes every once in a while and hook up because it's, well, fun. Ladies just want a better story to go with it. Sleeping with the bouncer at her local bar because he gave her free wings during happy hour doesn't sound as good as making love under the stars with the groom's childhood best friend at a destination beach wedding. Even if in both situations she never sees the guy again.

At the start of the wedding weekend you may be strangers, random names on a seating chart, but women know that everyone on that chart made it through each cut of the wedding-invite list. They know there were fights in which either the bride or the groom had to defend his or her selection. "We have known each other since birth!" "I haven't talked to her in three years, but we're still really close!" "We killed someone together! He's the only one who knows my secret!" Those fights are often knockdown drag-outs, and women feel good they made the cut. "She's a writer! From L.A.! She'll probably buy us an expensive gift!" And

they feel good about the other people who made the cut. Good enough to trade in their uptight "I don't think so" face for a too short, too tight, too expensive dress that may or may not still have the tags on it and go all-out. There will most likely be push-up bras, cute underwear, newly waxed lady bits and "fuck-me-be-cause-you're-one-degree-of-separation-from-someone-I-know" pumps. Pumps she can safely wear because the often terrible walk of shame could be a quick elevator ride of shame back to her own room. Wedding weekends existed before Vegas weekends, but the idea is the same. Maybe you end up having a threesome with the bride's college roommate and the groom's law partner. No big deal. You simply got caught up in celebrating the happy couple's infectious (hopefully not really) love. It all seems respectable in the light of the farewell brunch the next day. Nothing to see. We're all friends of friends here.

So if you make the cut and get invited to a wedding, show up and do your part. Women don't always feel as sexually free as men. We have only a few weddings a season before we dust off our inhibitions and get back to the business of being serious and thoughtful about whom we sleep with. Don't rob us of a vacation from our sexual ethics. It's your duty, plus you know there will be cake.

wo days after
Valentine's Day
in 2013, cat
psychiatrist and
self-employed
dog walker
George Leutz
found himself

approaching the Valley of Death. If that sounds like something out of a video game, it's because it is: The term refers to the hazy place marathon video game players reach during their third nonstop night of playing, and Leutz had been staring into the pixelated world of Q*bert, a 1982 arcade classic, for more than 60 hours. By 68 and a half hours he had finally broken the previous high score, a record that had stood for almost 30 years. He celebrated with a quick champagne toast, then returned to the game. By the time his last life was spent, the 38-year-old had played for 84 hours and 48 minutes in total.

His marathon session may sound crazy, but Leutz is one of a growing number of gamers who are exploring the outer edges of what's possible with a joystick, testing their gaming skills and bodily limits all at once.

Like Leutz, Victor Sandberg gained

notoriety in December with a 71-hour, 41-minute Missile Command streak. With more than 103 million points, he shattered his own previous record of 81.8 million. Marathon gaming messes with the mind, and Sandberg experienced a strange, sleep-deprived journey to the top. "Forty hours in, I thought the cities at the bottom of the screen had become female volleyball players," he says. "In my second marathon, I heard the sound of my computer change and began to think someone had hacked it to mess with the record attempt. Occasionally I've felt like someone is standing behind and spying on me."

Marathon gaming, popular throughout the 1980s and 1990s, is facing a resurgence mostly attributable to the 2007 documentary *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters*, which follows Steve Wiebe's attempt to take the *Donkey Kong* high-score record from rival Billy Mitchell. "Many of the current marathoners were inspired by it," says Patrick Scott Patterson, a video game expert and commentator. "It made them re-aware of it, and they thought, Let me go try to take down a record."

Sandberg saw the film and wanted to

go for a record in *Donkey Kong* or *Pac-Man* but settled on *Missile Command*, the only machine he could find in his town ("conveniently placed in my living room so all the girls can see it," he jokes). Leutz chose *Q*bert* because he can eat while playing. Guinness World Records allots five minutes of rest per hour if a player can afford to lose lives as the game continues without him. On his fifth record attempt, Leutz played for nine hours, then slept for 45 minutes. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

Still, Sandberg remains insatiable. "I'm probably going to shoot for the magical 100-hour mark, but when that happens only time will tell," he says.

For now, each is happy with his achievements. Setting a marathon record is nothing less than draining. After his *Q*bert* odyssey, while answering questions from fans on a live stream, Leutz was asked what he would do next. "I'm going to Donkey Kong Country," the delirious man responded, donning a pair of novelty glasses with springy eyes he had saved for the occasion. But he was fading. A friend soon drove him home, where he passed out on a couch for 12 straight hours, Valley of Death be damned.

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THE RECORDS THAT MATTER. TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT



Donkey Kong

Score: 1,138,600 By: Hank Chien

Only four men have held the record. Chien broke Steve Wiebe's mark in December 2010 and has improved on his own figure four times since then.



Frogger

Score: 970,440 By: Michael Smith

The more famous number is 896,980, posted by Pat Laffaye in 2010. It beat the 860,630 held by George Costanza on a Seinfeld episode.



Ms. Pac-Man

Score: 933,580 By: Abdner Ashman

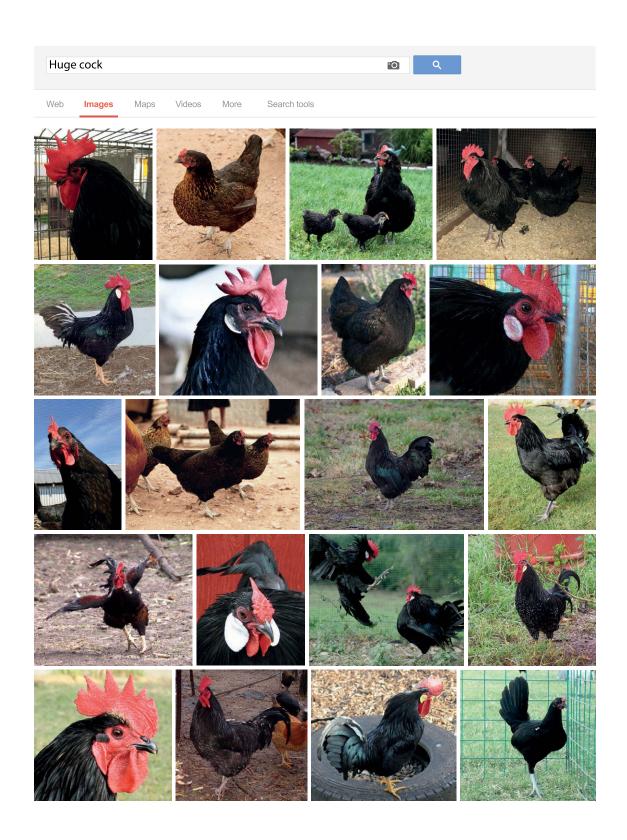
Patterson claims that Ashman's record, set in 2006, will stand as long as players fear the game's randomness, such as the variable value of fruits.



Galaga

Score: 15,999,990 By: Stephen Krogman

The record for one of the most popular games ever has stood since 1989. Patterson awaits a worthy challenger. "That's the big pink elephant in the room."





ADVIS®R

Send your questions to advisor@playboy.co.za. We'll get the best in the field to give you some great advice...

My wife likes to let her pubic hair grow, and I'm not a big fan. She loves to receive oral sex, but I refuse to give her cunnilingus when she has a full bush. She lets me shave it – reluctantly – but claims it burns and itches afterward. She says she doesn't like the feeling of being bald. I shave her pubic hair with the same shaving cream and razor I use on my face because I find it arousing. What can I do to make her feel better post-shaving so she doesn't resent the loss of her pubic hair?

You shouldn't ask her to do anything that makes her uncomfortable or resentful. If she doesn't like the feeling of hairlessness, you should respect that. But there's a middle ground awaiting you that doesn't involve shaving, baldness or a full bush. It could be time for you both to dive into the Bermuda Triangle — currently voted one of the most popular pubic hairstyles by both men and women readers of the blog Pubic Style (pubicstyle. wordpress.com). Smaller than a 1970s-style bush but not as radical as a full Brazilian, it's a neat triangular shape you can maintain with an electric trimmer on a low guard setting. The style tames a wild bush and lets you breathe a little easier down below. If your wife is comfortable with it, she could get her bikini line (the sides of her bush) waxed, which is less likely to produce ingrown hairs. Since it sounds as though she's sensitive, waxing is one of those don't-try-this-at-home projects. She should definitely go to a salon — your treat.

My husband and I have a great relationship. We're good friends and have had a healthy sex life. Lately, the friend thing is still going well, but not so much with the sex life. He wants something different but won't give me any insight into what exactly it is. I don't think he really knows, and I can't figure it out. We have done bondage on me, domination on both of us and just about every position man or beast has conceived. He hasn't cheated on me, but I'm starting to become concerned about how much porn he's watching and how little sex we're having. He once told me, "Sex is sex." This makes me worry that having sex with me is becoming a chore for him. I understand that men have desires, and I'm willing to fulfill his every need, with one exception: no sex with anyone else no cheating, no group sex. I don't care if he fantasizes about other women as long as he still desires me and that trumps any need to stray. My anxiety about him cheating stems not from anything he's done but rather from reading too many articles about unhappy and unfaithful men who have children under the age of two (which we do). I don't want to become one of those women whose husbands are disloyal. I also want to reward him for his fidelity in an adulterous society.

You should tell him exactly what you told us. You sound like an incredibly generous partner, and he's lucky to have you. To put some of his behavior in context, it's worth pointing out that having young kids ranks high on the

list of things that can put a damper on a couple's sex life. There's the sleep deprivation, the diminished energy, the reprioritization of every family member's needs and less time for the two of you as a couple. And that's just the abridged laundry list of reasons couples with young children in the house become unhappy. In addition, one frequent culprit in a man's diminished desire for his wife post-kids is that for the first time in the relationship he sees her not so much as a sexual partner but as a mother; her breasts, previously an erogenous and erotic inspiration, are now figuratively (and literally) meant for someone other than him. Your husband's increased porn consumption and waning interest in sex with you are likely related to the fact that women in porn are pure sex objects whose scripted behavior is removed from the conditions of the real world, with none of the stress of families, jobs, sleep loss, emotional needs and so forth. That said, you're doing the right thing by making it clear you still desire him and see him as a lover as much as anything else. You should remind him how fortunate he is to have a wife who's willing to experiment in bed in wilder ways than most. If you lay this out explicitly, he should realize how good he has it.

My wife and I have been married for more than two decades, and she has had increasing trouble getting wet. We started to use lube during sex, which gave us a bonus thrill: I got into the habit of going down on her and using my tongue to spread the gel around and lube up my fingers before inserting them into her vagina. Once while we were engaging in this foreplay, I put my lubed finger near her ass and she started to moan, so I inserted my finger and she went wild with excitement. This became part of our foreplay routine, with my wife climaxing intensely whenever I inserted my finger into her anus. We've graduated to anal sex and have it at least once a month. Why is anal stimulation causing her intense climaxes now? Second, I've heard anal sex can be bad for your health. Could our bedroom practices be causing our bodies harm?

Congratulations on finding a new way to enjoy sex together at this stage in your relationship. And kudos to you both that you're on the same page regarding anal sex. Let's put your lucky discovery into perspective. You have stumbled upon the pleasures of the "taint," slang for what is otherwise known as the perineum. It's a nerve-packed pleasure center that, as the slang suggests, ain't the vagina and it ain't the anus. When you finger your wife's anus, in addition to putting pressure on the perineum, you're also stimulating the entire clitoral complex, which extends far beyond the visible external portion of the clitoris and deep into the vaginal cavity. Inserting a penis in the anus can also put pressure on the clitoral complex. As for your health concerns, as long as you're gentle and sufficiently lubricated, you'll be fine. You could wear a condom to protect yourself from potential urinary tract infections, and to protect your wife you should refrain from following anal with vaginal sex. The fact that you're using gel and have anal sex only once a month, and that your wife isn't experiencing any pain or discomfort, leads us to believe you're doing it the right way. And you might be interested to know you're on trend: Studies show that heterosexual anal sex is on the upswing.

location - pool, spa, lake, river or ocean - based on water

quality, temperature and salinity?



WHAT TO **DRINK**. WHAT TO **WEAR**. WHERE TO **GO**.



(and where to find a Playmate or two.)

THE NEW PLAYBOY APP







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