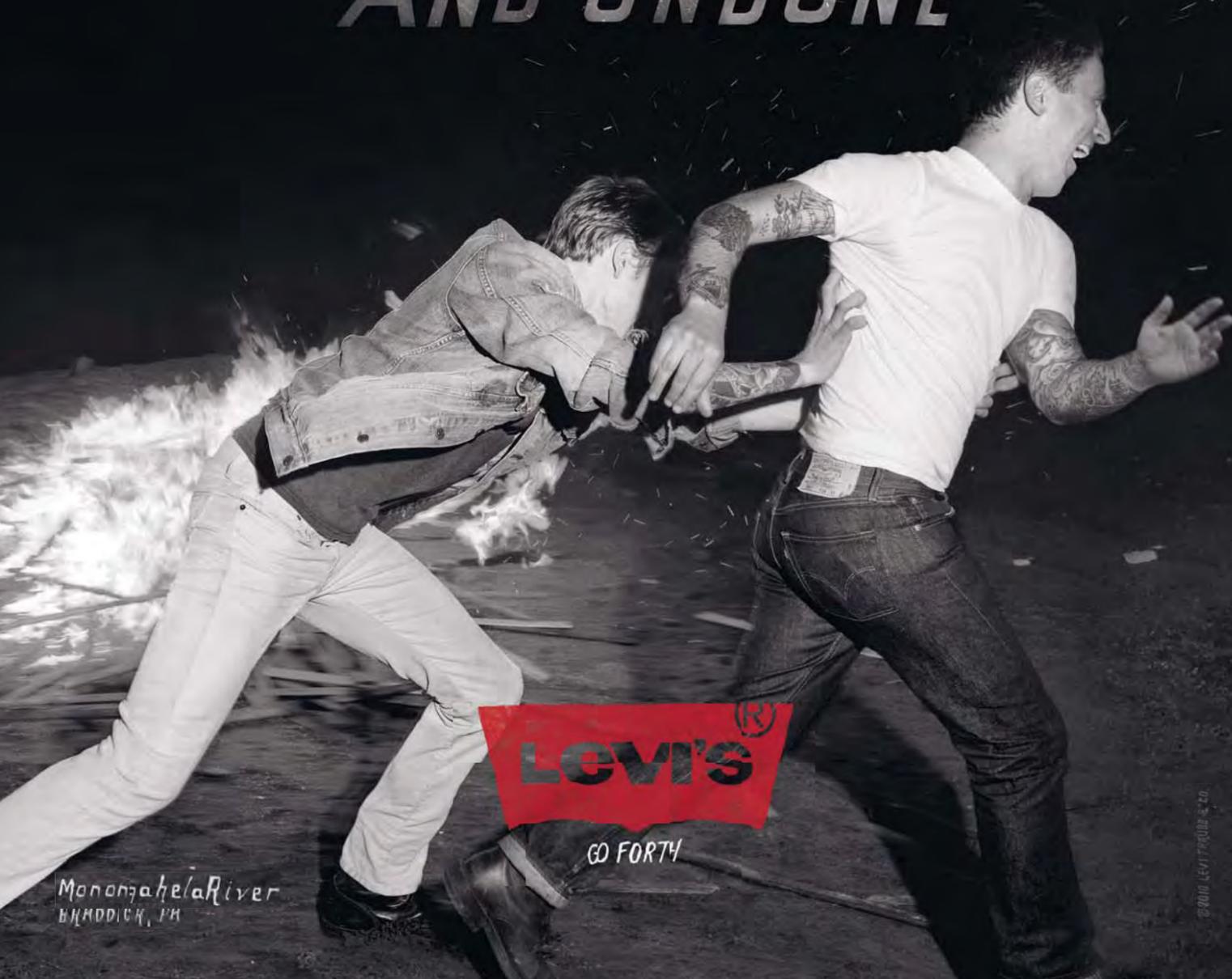


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Danny McBride rolling out in a Kenny-fucking-Powers-approved red-hot 'rrari on the set of *Eastbound & Down*. Photo by Richard Kern.

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Jody Hill, co-creator and executive producer of Eastbound & Down, discussing some sort of crazy bullshit with Danny McBride. Photo by Richard Kern.

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MASON GRANGER, SPOKEN WORD POET
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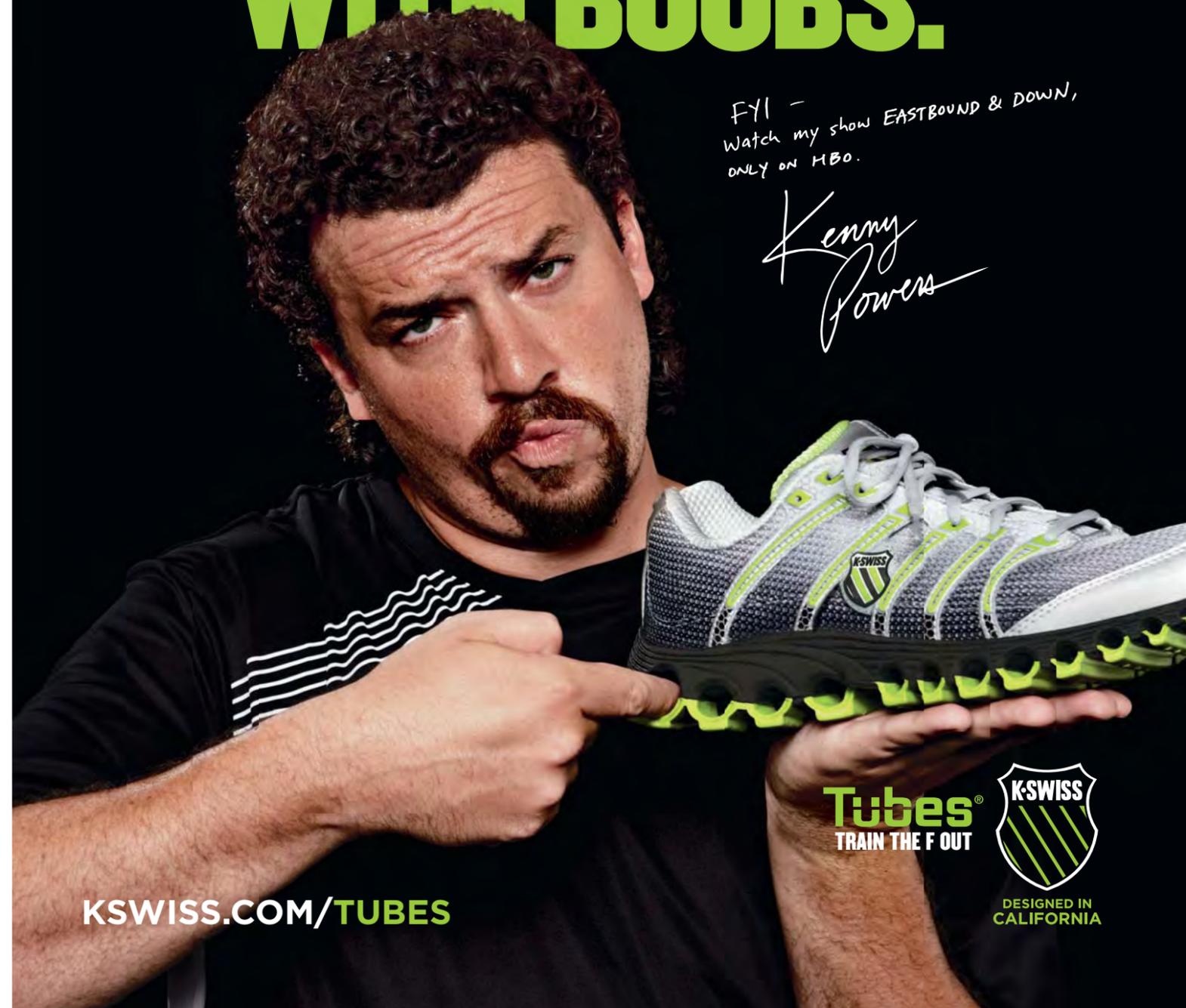
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CHELSEA PERETTI

Chelsea Peretti is a writer and comic who seems to split her time between New York, where she does things like be a member of the simply wonderful Variety Shac comedy troupe and act on the Louis CK show *Louis*, and Los Angeles, where she is currently writing for *Parks and Recreation* and doing stand-up when the mood strikes her.

See CHELSEA PERETTI ANSWERS THE QUESTIONS OF CARL BENNETT, page 48
Photo by Evan Sung



PAUL RUST

Paul Rust is an actor, writer, and comedian. He's appeared in *Inglourious Basterds* and *I Love You, Beth Cooper*. He's currently co-writing the new Pee-wee Herman movie with Paul Reubens. www.paulrust.com

See A MESSAGE FOR PRINCE, page 38
Photo by Seth Olenick



ROB DELANEY

Rob Delaney lives by the beach in Los Angeles. He writes for TV and does stand-up around the country. Follow him on Twitter: www.twitter.com/robdelaney.

See COMEDY, page 30



BRETT GELMAN

Brett Gelman, whom New Yorkers will know immediately as that "Little Bit of Luck" imp from the lottery commercials, is a funny, funny man. For quantifiable proof, go to YouTube and search "1,000 Cats." Make sure you set aside the rest of the afternoon to recover from the comedy brain-fucking that will ensue. In the photo above, Brett is in character as the poetic soul who wrote his story in this issue. He doesn't just run around looking like that. At least we don't think he does.

See NOTES FROM THE ARIST (AKA THE POET), page 42
Photo by Janicza Bravo

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Comedy

BY ROB DELANEY

I'm going to talk about comedy here, but it won't be funny. Or maybe it will be. Or maybe you can blow it out your ass and see if I give a shit, because it's my article and you're basically trespassing. Did you think of that? Did you think you were going to just waltz in here and be served tea and biscuits by some well-dressed article from Vienna or San Francisco, whose sole existence was centered around massaging your TV-deadened brain and telling you that you look nice in that shirt, which you very much do not? Did you? Is that what you thought? Oh great, are you crying? Are you fucking crying, you little... you little... Nancy doodle? I just had to make up a very gentle insult for you right there because I know you'd go pee-pee in your silly little trousers if I told you what I really thought.

I'm sorry, this is no way to begin an article. The fact is, I'm nervous. I'm nervous to tell you how I really feel, and it was easier to yell at you. I'm actually a very nice person who cares very much what you think about me, and I have a whole host of defense mechanisms I use to cover that up, including yelling, and look where that got us.

And who are you, my lovely reader? Possibly, your name is Susan, but definitely you have at least a passing interest in comedy and that is why you have saved up your money over the past few months to purchase the "Rob Delaney Comedy Issue" of *Vice* magazine, as I've requested this issue be called. Believe it or not, the editor had proposed we call it "Stop What You're Doing and Build an Alabaster Reading Nook in Which You'll Devour This, the Apex of the Western Canon, Luminescently Set Down in Full Deliciousness, by the Exalted Servant of our Lord, Rob Delaney."

Shit. I think I may need to junk this approach too... This is just me trying desperately to prove myself to you, and doing a poor job of it.

Attempt Number Three: I'm just going to tell the truth from here forward because I think that might be more useful to a reader (like Susan) who is truly interested in comedy.

When a magazine does a "comedy issue" it's usually just a few pages of pictures of famous comedians (or more likely comic actors, who aren't really "comedians" at all) wearing expensive clothes in a silly photo shoot that, despite its purported aims, winds up being

the opposite of funny. I'd like to offer a tiny antidote to those offensive shit rags.

So if I have your permission, I'm going to shift the tone a bit and talk about subjects that will seem dark at first, but which I will reveal as actually not being that bad by the end.

As a comedian, I talk about comedy all the time, every day, with comedians and noncomedians. There is a popular belief, in and out of comedy, that comedians tell jokes and endeavor to make others laugh as a means of treating the pain they feel inside; that depression and drug and alcohol abuse plague the world of comedy. Is this true? For me, the answer happens to be yes. Among the first things I do each morning is take two prescription depression medications, Lexapro and Cymbalta. Right before or right after that, I post my first joke of the day on Twitter. I take the medication because I deal with severe suicidal depression and have for years. It has come close to killing me two times in the past eight years: once before I became a professional comedian, and once after. I post the jokes on Twitter because making people laugh makes me feel really, really fucking good. I would even go so far as to say, "It gets me high." And I like getting high. I like it very much. I used to get high on alcohol and drugs and I was extremely good at it, right up until the day I wasn't. You see, nine years ago I drank myself into a blackout and drove a car (not my car, that would be stupid) into the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. No one else was involved in the accident, but I didn't know that until I asked the cops if I'd killed anyone and they said, "No." Upon being confronted with the unassailable fact that my alcohol and drug use could kill other people if I continued, I stopped. It helped that I was in jail in a wheelchair, with two badly broken arms that would require surgery and knees that were ripped open to the bone. When the cops wheeled me around in jail, I would occasionally slide down out of my wheelchair. My broken arms couldn't grip the wheelchair's arms to prevent me from sliding out, nor could my busted knees bend to brace myself against the floor. Thus, I would slide right out of the wheelchair onto the floor and my bloody hospital gown would come up, exposing my dick and balls to everyone in jail. An enterprising person would have also had pretty easy access to my defenseless asshole. If you've been in jail or even read a

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book or seen a movie about jail, you know that you really, really want to keep that stuff to yourself in there. It was during those moments, sprawled on the jail floor before a couple of beefy guards would pick me up and place me back in my wheelchair and cover my no longer “private” parts, that I thought to myself, “It is time to make a lifestyle change.”

So as you see, I rather capably support the stereotype of the depressed, alcoholic comedian. I’ve sought heavy-duty treatment for both maladies, and I know that if not respected and attended to daily, they’ll kill me dead. And I don’t want to die. Though my brain has certainly told me “You should die” on many occasions, and fantasized myriad ways it could happen, I’ve chosen not to listen or act. Not only do I not want to die, but having gotten sober and treated my depression, I actually want to be happy too. Pretty demanding, huh? Part of that getting happy has been becoming a comedian, which I only began to seriously pursue after I’d started to deal with alcoholism and depression. So while I may be “depressive” and a “drunk,” I don’t wallow in it and ruminate on my misfortune, railing at the world. Rather, I deal with it, then go forward and write and perform material geared toward squeezing the maximum laughs possible out of a supple crowd. And as someone who still needs to get high and relies on the laughter of others to activate the serotonin cum shots of happiness inside my brain, I squeeze that crowd like a motherfucker. And since I’ve gotten healthier, I’ve gotten funnier too, by a lot. One myth I’d like to beat to death in an alley with a bat is that you need to be “tortured” to be funny. I actually heard one comic urging another comic NOT to go to therapy when he was having a tough time with panic attacks and drinking because “the angst is where the funny is.” What a stupid asshole. First of all, therapy’s not magic, so if you go into the therapist’s office a weirdo, you’ll come out a weirdo. Here’s an example: I’m a 33-year-old married straight man. One thing I didn’t tell you earlier about my morning rituals concerns my most treasured physical possession: my page-a-day cat calendar. It is so fucking awesome. People from around the world send in their candid cat photos all year long to this benevolent company and then they pick the best 365 and make a calendar. And they’re amateur pictures too! Just like I like amateur porn with real women who have cellulite and hairy bushes actually enjoying themselves, I like amateur cats too, in real, fun situations! I hate inbred, shiny-coated, pedigreed cats, being posed in totally sterile studio settings in which NO neighborhood cat would be happy! Anyway, each morning before my wife and I go to work, we (I) excitedly grab the calendar and admire yesterday’s cat one final time. Then with bated

breath, I rip it off and reveal the NEW cat beneath! Sometimes I almost jizz if it’s a particularly cute or fun photo, like a big old orange cat hugging a newly adopted black kitten! I can’t even fucking handle it, it makes me so happy! Now why did I tell you that story? Because I wanted to illustrate to you that I’m not well, at all. And I’ve been in therapy for almost ten years without interruption! Every other Tuesday I go and I talk to my therapist and we work shit out. But I’m still nuts, by any yardstick you could choose to use. And therapy, plus not drinking, plus taking my little pills, allows me to put one foot in front of the other and put one word after another and produce the comedy that makes me, and often others, happy. Therapy lets you work out issues, thereby allowing you to stop sobbing in your closet and actually write jokes and book gigs. I don’t see the allure in being a “tortured artist.” Life, as any moron knows, will torture us all real good from time to time, and there is no use, and no *utility*, in relishing the torture. And I can assure you: Nobody cares. And I don’t mean “Nobody cares” in a mean way; rather, I mean if you think you stand out and are unique in your pain, you’re ridiculous and you’re not really going to be able to add anything of enduring value to others’ lives or your own. If you don’t want to take my snot-nosed, whippersnapper word for it, listen to Maria Bamford or Louis CK, people who’ve been doing it for most of their careers. They’re two comedians who do a magnificent job talking about the pain in their lives. They’ve spoken in their acts about their horrible experiences (and going to therapy too, by the way) as they try to navigate life and not blow their heads off or just shut down completely. And I cordially invite you to go behind a 7-Eleven and stick a zucchini up your dad’s asshole if you think they’re not hilarious. They understand that life is sometimes a slow-motion journey through a slaughterhouse, rife with pain, jam-packed with disappointment, and ending in stomach cancer or a plane crash. But with their comedy, they effectively alchemize the “lead” of pain into the “gold” of laughter, thereby making their audience genuinely happy and ready to lead their lives in an ever-so-slightly kinder fashion. They help people.

If I sound like I’m preaching now, it’s really only because I am. Good, honest comedy gives me a big fat boner and I like showing it to people. And I want to see your big fat boner too, or in the ladies’ case, your hard nipples and your tasty, wet pussy. I want us to gather in a field and marvel at each other’s ripe genitalia and truly understand that without the world’s comedians turning the horror and drudgery of our lives into sweet, melodious laughter, none of this would be possible. ■



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A Rave Review

BY BOB ODENKIRK

The following is a rave review of a book that I have written. Not a “book” that I’ve written, but a rave review “of a book” that I’ve written. Publishers may quote from this rave review for a price, or if someone just wants to buy the entire thing, we can probably make some kind of “overall” deal. I also think there’s a movie in it. Not in the book, there is no book, this is a generic review that will work for any book. I think there’s a movie in THIS REVIEW. But that’s probably just me.

Every time a book comes out, I wonder: Will this book be the best book I have ever read, and will I need to talk to others about its greatness? Well, this one is, and I do. This book, the book you are holding, is filled with just... so much, so much... It’s a great book. A great, great, great, book. Four stars. Fuck that. Five stars. Thumbs-up, yes, of course. This book is so... good and... great and... you know what’s really cool about it? It’s not a dick about it. Other books think it’s being a dick, but it’s not. This book is not being a dick because it is aware of how great it is. It’s really that good. This book is like George Clooney and Sting hanging out together, listening to jazz music, drinking electrolyte-rich water, and smiling at you. I don’t like either of those guys that much either, but hopefully you get my drift.

You want specifics? Fine. This book is so good because of its words! What about the words? They’re great. Great, great, words. I like every single one of the little bastards. They’re adorable, these words. You just want to pick ’em up with your eyeballs and roll ’em around in your sockets till they fall asleep in your brain. And they’re in the perfect order, too! The words in this book are in the exact perfect arrangement! They form such thoughts! I’m sorry for shouting, it’s just that the thoughts and descriptions that the words in this book form, well... I’m really excited. You understand.

Let me see if I can make clear how the concepts in this book are so very, very good. The things described in this book’s writing are mind-blowing concepts, and at the same time, ideas as familiar as an old shoe. But here’s the deal, even the ideas and “things” that are familiar are made “cutting-edge” by their presentation and arrangement. Suddenly, these simple, “old-shoe” truths are made as stunning as a new shoe! And in this revivification process, these timeworn notions are transformed and made as powerful and impactful as a ten-ton mechanical shoehorn. A real German-engineered shoehorn that pries your feelings loose from where life has impacted them into the recesses of your dark, dark soul. That’s a helluva shoehorn, don’t you agree?

This book is a quick read, but it’s long, too. So, for the price, it’s a bargain. In fact, it would be a bargain at any price, but if you’re reading this and it’s already on the bargain table, well... get outta town, you lucky sonofaB.

Another thing about this book: Who knew math was so much fun? I didn’t. I hated math. Not anymore!

And this book has pictures of tits in it. ■

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Here's the poop, Scoops!

YEARS 1-3: LEARN THE BASICS!

This is where we cover LOTS of ground! All the terminology of screenplay writing: conflict, resolution, conflict resolution, character arcs, Joseph Campbell-isms, the "third" act, character "spines," subtext, super-subtext, twists, fish-out-of-water, fish-in-water, Bob McKee-oroonis, etc. Then we apply it. There is a FREE brainstorming KIT for each attendee. We critique one another's screenplay ideas and encourage ourselves to dream big. You are required to work in a Starbucks or other approved coffee shop at least part-time to "get the vibe" of screenwriting. These basics will help you as you head into...

YEARS 4-7: EXPERIENCE, THE TEACHER OF ALL TIME

Now it's time to make notes, journals, and lists! Based on reality and imagination (two of the best sources of story—aka "story sources"), you will be REQUIRED to LIVE YOUR LIFE and make note of your experiences and the people AROUND YOU. Get married, get divorced, get remarried, adopt a kid, get a REAL job, get FIRED, nearly

KILL YOURSELF. This is all grist for the mill! By the time this section is over you should have TONS OF RAW MATERIAL and some truly compelling characters!

YEAR 8: RELEARN THE BASICS!

Back to the drawing board. In year 8 we will concentrate on the TERMINOLOGY OF SCREENWRITING: the page 60 flip-flop, the interior antagonist, the fourth-act floozy, meta-anterior motivations, and so many more TERMS.

YEARS 9-11: LOSE THE THREAD

Drop it. This is the part most screenwriting workshops MISS. These are three years when you DO NOT PUT PEN TO PAPER. Instead, this is a time to let the ground lie fallow and STARE AT THE SUN. A painful but necessary two-year step usually ending in REHAB, after which it's time to head...

YEAR 12: BACK TO BASICS!

The final year we'll re-relearn AND create new SCREENWRITING TERMS! The anti-nonhero, the second-act undertow, the Dirty Sanchez, the page 35 conundrum, side-sub-über-motivators, and some I haven't thought of yet! It's all very exciting!

Just give me 15 minutes a month for 12 years and suddenly you'll find yourself at Sundance or Slapdance or one of the other festivals, or maybe just AT YOUR OWN HOME surrounded by FRIENDS AND FAMILY... OR MAYBE NOT ANYWHERE!!! I'm so excited for you and your screenplay to send me a check right now, sign up, get on board, and finally become THE MAN YOU WISH YOU WERE instead of CONTINUING TO SUCK! Let's do this! ■

0102 63

1001

"THIS YEAR'S *DISTRICT 9*."

- PETER HALL, CINEMATICAL

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THEY'RE RESIDENTS.

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OPENS IN THEATERS ON
OCTOBER 29
AVAILABLE NOW ON DEMAND AND ITUNES

Dear Prince...



A MESSAGE FOR PRINCE

BY PAUL RUST

Hey, Prince. It's Paul Rust. I apologize for reaching out to you through a magazine, but it's important I talk to you.

A couple weeks ago, I was out for a walk when a gentleman drove by and yelled out at me — I'll never forget what he said — "Hey, Prince called. He wants his jacket back." Prince, I'll be honest with you: I don't have your jacket.

I don't know if there's been a misunderstanding or a miscommunication, but I bought my jacket in Kansas City while on vacation. So if you could tell your friend who drove by me in the car that I don't have your jacket, that'd clear this whole thing up, I think.

And just for future reference, Prince, feel free to contact me directly. It might be more efficient than calling your friend and having him coincidentally drive by on the street. But hey, I'm not the musical genius here (big fan!!!).

To be honest, I didn't really know who you were until a couple weeks ago, but I looked you up online and I gotta say... we share a very similar sense of style! It's so funny no one's ever pointed that out to me before. Not even, like, somebody walking by on the street or anything. Huh. Strange.

Well, gotta go. I got my eye on a new raspberry beret I want to buy. Hey, that's not a bad title for a song (hint hint).



SINCE 1904

Regarding Purchasing and Return of Important Businessman

BY T. CHRISTOPHER GORELICK

Dear Archetypal Pets Company, Consumer Complaints Division,

On November 18, 2009, I purchased an Important Businessman from your retailer on Chambers Street in Newburgh, New York. As I have explained to your customer-service representatives, Kathy at extension 4-2486 and Donald at extension 4-2491, this animal was purchased as a bat mitzvah gift for my press agent's daughter. I subsequently learned that she is allergic to dogs. I was told at the time of purchase that I could return the animal at any time for up to six weeks after the purchase date for a full refund, no questions asked, as advertised in your commercials. Upon attempting return, I was told by the manager at your Newburgh branch, Spencer, that this breed is not covered by your standard return policy. I was denied a refund.

I am familiar with the problems associated with this breed. However, this particular animal is either severely inbred or suffering from psychological damage inflicted before my purchase.

He has soiled and destroyed his entire wardrobe—20 made-to-measure suits—sparing only one urine-soaked pair of silk boxers, which is now all he wears. He has also destroyed his Italian-leather briefcase. It is unreasonable to hold me responsible for these damaged accessories.

The literature provided with the animal at the time of purchase states "(Important Businessmen) work hard and play hard. They track the markets from open to close. They make urgent phone calls regarding high finance. They smoke expensive cigars, drink fine wines, and make love to high-class call girls." The Important Businessman I purchased from your store does none of these things. He instead sleeps during the day, spends the afternoon crying in the shower, and is awake all night watching cartoons in my attic.

The literature you provided also states that my Important Businessman needs to exercise his networking skills on a regular basis, but when I took him to the park to interact with other Important Businessmen he made no attempt to share or acquire stock tips, nor did he practice his putt. Instead, he attacked another Important Businessman with a steak knife he stole from my kitchen. Fortunately, the other dog's owners agreed to dismiss the incident when I paid the resulting veterinary bill, which was substantial.

Furthermore, I have not yet received a Certificate of Pedigree for this animal, which was included in the purchase price. I have been in touch with members of the Important Businessman Owners Association, who have advised me to send out tissue samples for a full genome-sequence comparison. They suspect that the animal is not a pedigree, but rather a mixed breed of Important Businessman and Career Criminal, or possibly Dingo.

The Important Businessman Owners Association defines the breed as "marked by fortitude, single-mindedness, perspicacity, and excellence." None of these are qualities that can be used to describe my Important Businessman.

My Important Businessman hides behind the sofa when guests visit. If I try to shake his hand, he bites me. If I ignore him, he deliberately cuts himself. He screams in his sleep and has a seizure every time the doorbell rings. He gets drunk on cheap beer, then falls down the staircase. He urinates on my floor. He defecates on my neighbor's lawn. He has destroyed my azalea bushes.

I have made numerous calls to your toll-free customer-service line and several trips to your Newburgh branch. I have given your company every opportunity to remedy this situation. If you do not refund my purchase and allow me to return the animal, I will be forced into legal action. I am in contact with a lawyer regarding this issue.

To reiterate, I require a full refund and unconditional permission to return the animal. I await your reply.

Sincerely,
(Unhappy Archetypal Pets Customer)



Notes From The Artist (Aka The Poet)

BY BRETT GELMAN (AKA THE ARTIST, AKA THE POET)

The world is a fuckhole right now. Scratch that, it's always been a fuckhole—we're just now starting to realize it. That's why I hang out in the desert, man. It cleanses my brain. Cleanses me of all that concrete. Of all that "FUCK YOU, ASSHOLE!" Of all that "GET IT THROUGH YOUR THICK FUCKING SKULL, I DON'T LOVE YOU NO MORE, MAN! I LOVE YOUR BROTHER! HE'S BETTER LOOKING THAN YOU! HE'S GOT A BIGGER DICK THAN YOU! HE'S FUNNIER THAN YOU! OH YEAH, A LOT FUNNIER THAN YOU! WHY, JUST THE OTHER DAY HE TOLD ME THIS JOKE ABOUT A PEDOPHILE AND A PRIEST WALKING INTO A BAR! I'M NOT GOING TO EVEN TRY AND RETELL IT, BECAUSE I WOULD-N'T DO IT JUSTICE, BUT THE JOKE ROCKED MY GIGGLE METER THE MOST! NOW, PACK YOUR GARBAGE CLOTHES AND GET OUT OF MY LOFT, DIRTFACE!"

Yeah, you need to cleanse that junk out of your veins. 'Cause make no mistake, it's junk. And just like junk, when you get that junk in your junky bloodstream you feel real junky funky. Junky funky all night long. Actually, to tell the truth, and I don't mean to pitch something here, but the Junky Funky is the name of a new dance I made up. It's sure to be sweeping the nation real soon. All the hip-hoppers are gonna hop to it. You just wait and see. How do you do it? I thought you'd never ask. Well...

1. Take your right leg and cross it over your left leg.
2. Bend your left leg almost like you're going to kick.
3. Instead of kicking forward, kick back.
4. Raise up your hands to the sky, like you're about to pray.
5. Extend your middle fingers like you're flippin' off the clouds.
6. Twist once.
7. Turn twice.
8. Jump four times.
9. Stop, drop, and roll like you were on fire. (I guess in a way you are on fire. On fire with funk.)
10. Jump back up.
11. Twist two more times.
12. Blink seven times.
13. Poke your privates.
14. WHAM! You got a good case of the Junky Funky!

Anyway, back to the desert. Yeah, man, when I'm in that desert, I'm whole. I get on that nature trip and I just see shit that most people thought they'd never see—that most people don't never want to see. The shit that's inside. The shit that's inside, but now it's outside. And as the inside goes outside, the outside goes inside, and you take that ride. That magic inside-outside ride on that sideways tide. And you see the world for what it is.

You see, the world's a person, man. Might as well be named George. Here's a question. What would you do if you met George on the street? What would you say to George? (Little reminder here: George is the name I'm using for the world. So when I address George I'm really addressing the world. Just want to make sure that's clear. Hope it's not too confusing.) Wonder what I'd say if I ever met George. It would probably go a little something like this:

The Artist (aka the Poet) walks the urban streets. He's thinking while he walks, which is one of his favorite things to do. All of a sudden he runs into an old friend (or enemy, depending on the day), George (aka the world). George is a big, fat, sweaty scum pig with dark circles under his eyes. He has more hair on the back of his neck than most people have on their heads. His beard is filled with shards of metal from old tin cans, and he wears earrings made out of dirty condoms. The Artist (aka the Poet) at first pretends that he doesn't see George, but George sees the Artist (aka the Poet), and the Artist (aka the Poet) has no choice but to say hello to George.

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): Oh, hi George.

GEORGE (AKA THE WORLD): Hi, the Artist (aka the Poet). How's it going?

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): Fine.

GEORGE (AKA THE WORLD): Whoa! Hold up. Are you mad at me?

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): No. Why would I be mad at you?

GEORGE (AKA THE WORLD): I don't know. You just seem like you're mad at me.

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): Well, I'm not mad at you, George.

GEORGE (AKA THE WORLD): I really feel like you're mad. You got a mad tone.

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): George, how many times do I have to tell you? Don't read too much into my tone. Sometimes my tone just comes across more aggressive than I mean it to. I have a confusing tone.

GEORGE (AKA THE WORLD): Whoa. You basically just yelled at me.

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): What?! No, I didn't!

GEORGE (AKA THE WORLD): Yes, you did.

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): No, I didn't, George. Believe me, when I yell at you you'll know it.

GEORGE (AKA THE WORLD): Oh, will I?

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): Yes, you will.

GEORGE (AKA THE WORLD): All right. Sorry, I guess I'm a bit sensitive lately.

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): I should say so.

GEORGE (AKA THE WORLD): Well, it was good seeing you, the Artist (aka the Poet).

THE ARTIST (AKA THE POET): Good seeing you too, George. Say hi to Natalie (aka Mars).

You see, man? That's what I'm talking about. The world don't give a fuck about me, and I don't give a fuck about the world. It's lying to me. I'm lying to it. We're all just gears in one big lie machine. But I'll tell you this—us gears gotta stop turnin'. 'Cause if enough of us stop, the machine'll break down. Now, I know what you're asking. What'll happen when the machine breaks down? Good question. Real good question. Those are the kinds of questions you should be asking. I'm proud of you. Unfortunately I don't have an answer, though. No one does. We're all stuck in one giant collective "who knows." But you know what? I'll take a "who knows" over a "who gives a shit" any day.

Sincerely,

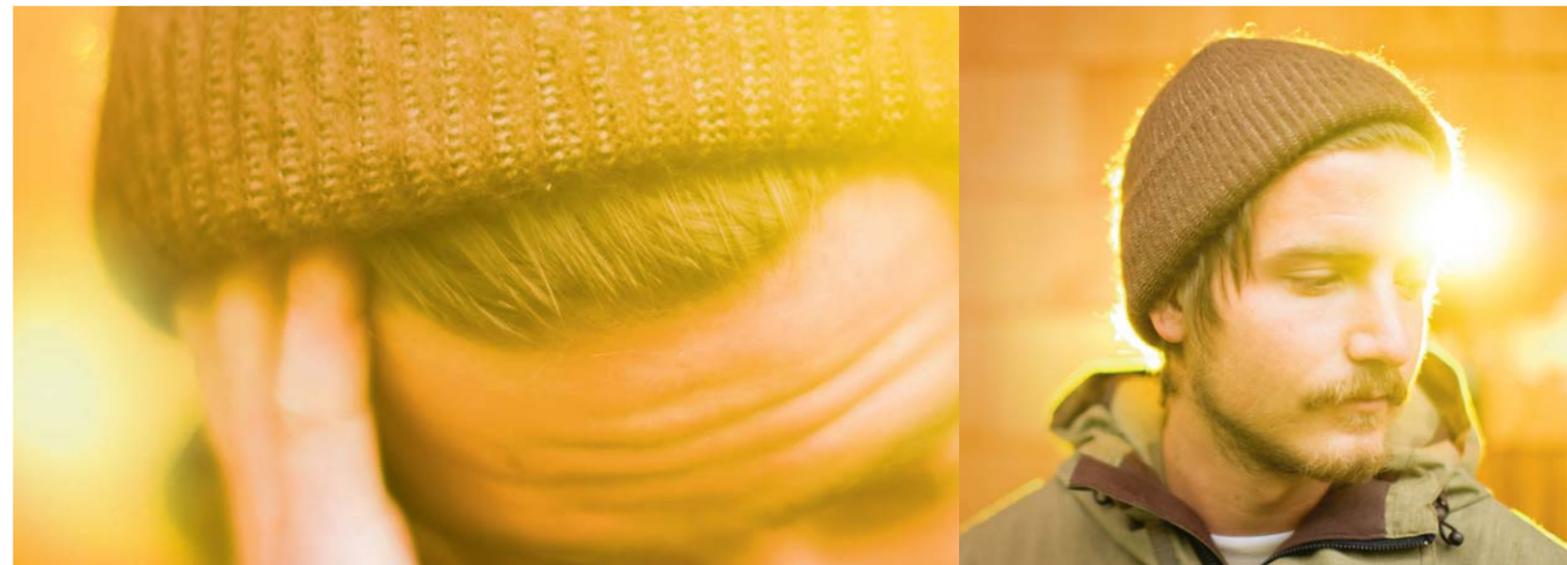
The Artist (aka the Poet) ■



Mark Welsh photos.
coalheadwear.com

Cale in the Scotty.

COAL



Spice Up Your Marriage

BY SAM MCPHEETERS

All couples find themselves in a rut every now and then. It's easy to take your spouse for granted, fall into a routine, and wind up neglecting the one you love. But marriage is like driving a nice Cadillac—if you take your hands off the wheel for too long, you're eventually going to drive into a Mexican restaurant. Occasionally you need to shake things up. Spontaneity is the key.

Here's an easy way to break out of a rut. Call your spouse at work and say, "We need to talk." Then disappear for a few days. Nothing breeds fond feelings like conspicuous absence. When you do return, act distant and have your eyebrows shaved off. Anything to break out of the dull old routine you've both been stuck in since forever. The trick to making this one work is the phrase "What." "What?" you can say innocently. "What?"

Arranging a "date night" is always a good way to freshen up a relationship, but take care that you both don't fall right back into old routines. A meal at a restaurant is still just a meal at a restaurant... unless you spice it up. Take your spouse out to the fanciest eatery in town. After you order, look down at the bread basket and say, "Did that pat of butter just... say... something?" Later, do a sexy striptease.

Role-playing is always a great way to jumpstart a case of the 'Til-Blahs-Do-We-Part. Husbands: Try approaching your spouse as "Frank," a 49-year-old loner who has held a variety of jobs in Colorado and Utah and has yet to come to terms with his father's death. Wives: What if you started the day as "Gaaaaaaa," a 3,000-year-old fungus from the planet Meganurniak? Let Frank and Gaaaaaaa paint the town purple! You can bet they won't be talking about the car repairs over dinner!

Staging a break-in is a surefire romantic routine wrecker. While your significant other is buying groceries, knock out a back window, and then go nuts on your own house—smash furniture, slash upholstery, splash some red food coloring all over the walls, and top off the debris with some rose petals. After you help him or her carry the groceries in from the car, you can look around the destruction and then say, seductively, "Looks like the love bandit struck!" (Tip: For extra realism, buy some animal offal from a slaughterhouse and stuff it under the couch.)

Nothing beats a heartfelt love letter. Have a lawyer or process server deliver the letter to heighten the romantic tension. If you're not much of a writer, what about making some "love coupons" for your spouse? Try drawing up coupons for "30 percent off back rubs" or "Half-Price Sexy Tuesdays." For yuks, you could make one that says, "Good for one month of no murder-suicides." But be sure to write in blackout dates and restrictions—it's important that no one gets taken for granted.

Intimacy is the key. Sleep is the enemy of intimacy. If your partner is asleep and you're not, it's kind of like they're cheating on you with their dream buddies. If this happens to you, yell out, "Did you hear that?" If that doesn't work, play "Pump Up the Volume" by MARRS.

And if all else fails, always remember those 11 little words that can reboot even the soggiest of marriages: "Do you have any idea how insane you sound right now?" ■



James Brockman

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Rejections I've Recieved When Submitting Humor Pieces

BY FRANK FERRI

If you're trying to write humor, get ready for lots of rejection. And if you're ever feeling dejected, just read the below editorial rejections and think about what I went through. Don't feel bad for yourself. Empathize with me, you selfish bastard.

Frank, this one made me chuckle. But then I realized I was thinking about another submission I read earlier. I'm going to pass on this one. But if it makes you feel any better, I'm going to accept that other piece—the one that made me chuckle.

Frank, this one made me giggle. But only because it reminded of me of something funny that my niece did the other day. So cute. She's only four, but her humor is highly evolved. I think I'm going to talk to her about submitting some of her stuff to us. Anyway, I'm passing on this one.

Frank, see attached for my response. Actually, I'll save you time. It's just a Word doc that says, "I'm passing on this." It also has your name crossed out inside clip art of the Ghostbusters symbol.

Frank, this one made me sneeze. Going to say no.

Frank, this one also made me sneeze, and it's starting to freak me out. It could be a coincidence, because I've had this nagging cold. But I don't want to take any chances, so I'm passing. Thanks for the look, though.

Frank, great news! My cold is finally gone. Didn't sneeze while reviewing your submission. But I did fall asleep as I read it, drooled on my keyboard, and had to send my laptop back to the manufacturer for repair. Needless to say, I'm passing. You'll understand that I need to send you the bill for the damaged computer.

Frank, this one made me laugh, but not to the point of having me in stitches. Keep trying.

Frank, well, after reading this submission, I'm in stitches. But only because I had an emergency appendectomy. So I can't credit you for the stitches. That would be cheating. Sorry.

Frank, you hard-hearted asshole. I'm passing on this one. When an editor tells you that he just had emergency surgery to remove his appendix and also provides you with his mailing address and link to his Amazon.com wish list, well, you

send something, Frank. You send something. Being cheap is unbecoming. I just wish your parsimony extended to your writing. You send way too many submissions. Frank, it's to the point where I actually cringe when I see your name in my inbox.

Frank, thanks for the electric teakettle from Amazon. Completely unexpected! Works like a charm. And I also love this humor piece you sent. Great stuff. Passing, though. It wouldn't be ethical to accept a gift and in return publish a story. I know what you're thinking: Return the teakettle and publish the piece. Problem solved, right? Sorry. I used the teakettle a ton already. Plus, it's been more than 30 days. So my hands are tied. Besides, I really love it and don't want to part with it. Sorry... and thanks again.

Frank, I like the concept, but it needs more jokes. A lot more jokes. Packed with funny to the point that it's going to make me laugh a maniacal cackle. A cachinnation so creepy that fear flashes across the face of my girlfriend, and my dog buries his ears underneath his paws. A laugh that starts innocently enough but then turns into a scary howl—a howl so powerful that it causes me to fall and smack my head on the corner of my brick fireplace causing severe damage to my orbitofrontal cortex, which in turn causes me to go on a remorseless killing spree. Hope that helps.

Frank, no blood on my hands, no publication for you. Read my previous advice.

Frank, great job! I just killed 12 innocent people and critically wounded three others after reading your hilarious piece. It was that funny. But I just don't think it fits with the kind of humor we're looking to run right now. Sorry. But I am looking forward to your next submission. Please send it via snail mail to the Department of Corrections (address below). Please know that responses will be extremely delayed (25 years to life, depending on the skills of my court-appointed attorney). ■



Chelsea Peretti Answers The Questions Of Carl Bennett

Chelsea Peretti is a comedian and writer whom we respect and admire. Carl Bennett is a comedian and writer whom we know and who loves Chelsea Peretti. Carl wrote questions, and Chelsea answered them.

1. What got you started?

I was temping after college in New York and this other temp told me to come with her to an open-mic night at the Parkside Lounge.

65. What is a turn-on for you?

DSLs, big dicks, cologne.

33. Do you like cats? Wait, don't let it out of the bag... Joke I've been working on. I'm a bit of an aspiring comedian. Any advice?

Rework this Q.

U. What kind of shampoo?

I use Nounou, currently. Cheaper one: Pantene. I also like the orange-bottle Kérastase shampoo. Always open to a new shampoo. Always.

88. What is your favorite oldie?

Did you mean who is? Hard to pick, I love and am obsessed with old people.

T. What's the longest you can hug for?

A whole Stevie Wonder concert.

4. You have a beautiful smile. Why can't I have it all to myself? Ha ha, just kidding, but you really do have a beautiful smile.

Thanks for the smile compliment! I wish I had DSLs but will work with what God gave me. Isn't that weird that God gave some people DSLs?

F. I love you.

I love YouTube.

6. Why don't you return my emails?

Sometimes I get a li'l behind on emails. And sometimes they're weird and I don't know how to respond. This feels like a good way for us to catch up!

11. How many boyfriends have you had? Did you love any of them?

I probably deeply loved two of them. I think I've had ten (starting from junior high school but it still sounds like a lot, sorry everyone).

8. Who is the first person you think of when you wake up?

Jah, primarily, then whoever I'm working for or, if I'm not working, whoever will go eat with me (in that order—L to R). Also sometimes a guy if that whole thing is going on.

9. What makes you smile?

Butterflies jk.

e10. When's a good time for me to come over?

Ha, just kidding, I know you're super-busy. Good one.



11. 84?

88,986,657!!

28. On Facebook you often ignore my replies to your posts. What is up with that?

88,986,657!!

15. What's the craziest thing you've ever done?

88,986,657!!

14. Did you really go out on a date with Louis CK, and is that serious?

That was on a TV show on FX. It's a comedy.

16. What is our, I mean your, favorite song? I think it's "Moonshadow," but what's your answer?

Close! "Blow the Whistle"—Too Short.

17. I read on Facebook that you like the Lakers coach Chuck Jackson. What is that relationship to you?

His name isn't Chuck, it's Phil. He is a fantasy father. I have a whole fantasy-father dream team: Dr. Drew, Phil Jackson, Tim Gunn, and the Dog Whisperer, for starters. White hair is a common denominator. And gentle power. Blech, I am disgusting.

1D. I've got a big collection of adult comic books. What is your middle name? On Twitter it starts with the initial V.

You seem cool! Venix.

20. I favorited more than 50 of your posts on Twitter, what is your favorite dog? How much do you like that dog?

My favorite specific dog was Rufus the jet-black toy poodle my dad and stepmother had in my youth. I also met a Portuguese water dog named Gus in New York that I was really fond of, and I think Labradoodles are cute. I used to love a friend's longhaired Chihuahua named Chupa. She's in New Orleans now. I like this dog Jackson in LA but it's a I-don't-think-he-cares-if-I-live-or-die type deal.

21. I heard that you're writing a TV show?

I got hired to write for *Parks and Recreation* on NBC. Hopefully I'm still there as of print date.

G. Where do you go for your favorite cup of coffee, and about what time?

I used to go to a few NY places: Aroma (their mocha has real choc on bottom), Gimme!, and Mogador. In LA I like Intelligentsia's coffee and Vietnamese coffee at Viet Noodle. I don't have a set schedule, sorry. Also, I omitted two of my favorite LA places.

73. I don't have a license but I saw a really bad car accident yesterday. Have you ever been in a car accident and was it scary?

I'm sorry you saw that. Were there brains? Someone once told me they saw a head crushed by a bus like a watermelon—or is that an urban myth? Can that happen? I've only had fender benders and they were scary because I was a teenager and very emotionally tender at the time. Once in Oakland I side-swiped an older black man's huge shiny American car. It was a waking nightmare.

52. Do you do your own laundry or do you drop it off?

I used to drop it off in New York, in LA I do it myself.

82. You have a lot of friends on Facebook. Do you know most of them?

No.

K*. I am a very BIG fan of your stand-up. When you're up onstage have you ever looked at one audience member in particular and thought, "I would like to be with that person?" If not, that's cool, but it seems like it's bound to have happened.

Thank you. Yes. There have been some cute guys at shows before where I've gotten momentarily distracted from killing. But nothing is worth losing focus over. I kill every time I get onstage. It's exhausting and requires total concentration. My arms get tired from motioning audiences to sit back down after all their standing ovations. This sounds cooler than it is in practice—it really fucks with my rhythm.

22. Do you wanna come over to my friend Gus's house? Do you like raisin pancakes?

I like all sorts of pancakes (lemon ricotta, pumpkin, blueberry, buckwheat, etc.), but I think it's fair to say that raisin pancakes sound gross. Not to be a dick about raisins—they're real good combined in a pan with sliced kale and browned garlic and pine nuts. Google those ingredients, there's a great recipe online. I guess this is it. We'll end on that. ■



PHOTO BY: RACHAEL PORTER

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AUTHENTIC LOS ANGELES WORKWEAR



SINCE 1991



Behind the Scenes with Johnny Knoxville

PHOTOS BY SEAN CLIVER
INTERVIEW BY JESSE PEARSON

Vice: It's been four years since *Jackass 2*. Were you guys always going to do a number three, or was it up in the air for a while?

Johnny Knoxville: Totally up in the air. Everyone, all the guys, wanted to do one, except for me. I didn't feel like we needed, or I needed, to do another one. I didn't see it.

After a *Jackass* movie finishes shooting, you must be feeling pretty destroyed. It probably takes a long time to recover.

Yeah, but that's never my concern when I'm thinking about doing another one or not. I don't know what is. Somewhere deep inside me, I just get an overwhelming urge. I find myself watching Tom and Jerry and Buster Keaton films a lot, and then just jotting stuff down, and then the next thing I know, I'm like, "Fuck." I just want to get the guys together immediately and start shooting. Lucky enough, when I got that feeling for number three, all the guys were down to do it. Really down to do it.

Just ready to go.

Yeah, everyone was *really* ready.

It's interesting you brought up Buster Keaton because I was going to ask you if you ever think about the place of *Jackass* in the history of comedy. I think of it as having roots that go all the way back to vaudeville.

I'm a huge fan of slapstick comedy and a big fan of cartoons and all the stuff they get away with and, you know, we try to get away with that stuff. I never think about *Jackass* in a historical context, but now that you ask me that, yeah, I guess that hopefully it's in line with the slapstick stars like Buster Keaton and with Tom and Jerry. Tom and Jerry are, like, two of my heroes.

That's awesome, to think of cartoons as inspirations for real-life stunts. I know that, in *Jackass 2* when I was blindfolded and got hit by a yak, that was straight from a Tom and Jerry cartoon. Tom gets a blindfold on him and a bull hits him.

A classic.

And I guess I didn't see this in a cartoon, but that giant hand—the high-five in *Jackass 3*...

Right, the huge hand full of powder that slams into Bam.

Yeah, that is cartoony for sure. But I don't think I saw it in a cartoon. I just thought it would be funny to hit someone with a hand that's five feet long.

And it is. It really is.

Thanks. [laughs]

What's the creative process like when you're coming up with stunts for a new movie? Do a few of you sit down and talk, or do you shoot around emails or phone calls?

Sometimes, Jeff [Tremaine, *Jackass* co-creator and director] and I will sit together in the office and think of stuff. But mostly, I work the best when I get up before my son wakes up. At least on number three, I would wake up a couple hours before him and then I'd just sit there either watching cartoons or thinking about this or that, or looking on the internet trying to find a funny picture and then going, "Oh, here's what I can do off of that." Like, I was looking on the internet one day and I saw this Chinese artist who was painting himself into the backgrounds of paintings...

Oh yeah, the guy who paints his whole body to match his larger work. Yeah, and I thought that was great! I was like, "Well, that's a good start of an idea for *Jackass*." So I think, "I can't just paint myself into a background and, you know, embarrass someone." So I tried to think how I could up the stakes on it, and it was like, "Oh, if I paint myself into a background in a bullring, I can become a not-so-invisible man."

And I'm looking at this photo of you right now as, like, a half-rainbow, half-tree man. I was wondering where you're standing in it, because your feet are in the mud. So you're in a bullring?

Yeah. I'm in a bullring, painted into the background, moments before they release the bull. Like, probably about two minutes before. Bulls don't see color. Everyone says that bulls hate red, but they don't. They don't even see red. They go after movement. So the idea was that I was going to stand still in the background when the bull was released and when it got closer to me I was going to move and then we'd get some footage. But the bull passed me a couple times. He'd run at me and I would move, and he would run at me again and then he would veer off around the side of the painting. He did that a couple times and then on the third time, he got behind the wall and I didn't know where he was. I was like, "Is he close?" and right as I said that he looked around the corner and was like, "There you are! I'm more than close." What a cunt. And then he smoked me.



“I had to go to the dentist and tell them, you know, ‘What happened to you, sir?’ ‘Well, a bowl of dicks blew up in my face.’”

What’s going through your mind at a time like that? I don’t suppose you’re worried about camera placement or anything like that anymore. No, I leave all the cameras and shit. We’ve done this enough that that’s not a concern. I know that Jeff and Dmitry [Elyashkevich, longtime *Jackass* camera operator and producer] have that covered. We have the big-rig camera set up and we also have a lot of guys with hi-def cams, those little handhelds. So somebody’s gonna get it... Well, I’m gonna get it, but somebody’s gonna film it.

Right.

So cameras are the least of my worries at that point. You never really know what’s going to happen with a bull. If I get knocked out while I’m on the ground, he could just be stomping my head and face. But also we shoot with Gary Leffew, who was a world-champion bull rider in the 70s. He supplies all the bulls. He’s got the best bullfighters and great bulls—“great” as in “mean.” So I know that the bullfighters who are there have my back if I go down.

I always liked how when you guys do something like this, you bring in experts for that sense of authenticity.

And with Gary Leffew, you bring his spirit along too. He’s a real positive guy and he’s like, “When you’re working with bulls, you’ve got to be positive. If anyone’s negative, someone is going to get injured, badly.” If he walks on a set and there is anyone being negative, they’re gone. We stand behind him on that. And that made it over into the cast. If Gary Leffew isn’t even around and we’re doing a stunt one day and there are negative vibes going around, we won’t do it. We’re like, “Fuck it. Let’s either do it another day or just not do it at all.”

That seems smart. And by negative vibes you mean someone acting kind of squirrely or pissy or freaked out?

Yeah. We were shooting this one thing where we were going to go down this huge hill up at Mammoth Mountain in California—it’s bigger than an Olympic ski jump—in one of those blowup kid things, for parties. A bouncy thing? A bouncy house?

Right, a bouncy castle. Jesus.

We were up there getting it ready, and someone on the same mountain we were on, not associated with our film crew or cast or anything, had died on the slopes that day. And that was just a huge, huge, gnarly negative thing. And also, the Donner Party died on the mountain we were on way back in the day.

It was probably an Indian burial ground at some point too.

Yeah. So there were these two huge strikes. And then one cast member, I forget who it was, saw that behind the bouncy house was a 150-pound generator that would be towed down with the thing behind us, and was like, “I think this is fucked, I don’t think we should do it.” That just ate its way through the whole cast, and so we didn’t do the stunt. But if everyone can’t wait to do a stunt, then it gets done.

OK, now I’m looking at the photo of you with a huge bowl of dildos. Oh! Am I smiling?

Yeah, it’s what I’d call a shit-eating grin.

Yeah, that was for the end of the movie. We shot the beginning and the end of the movie on film, like big Hollywood-style sequences. *Jackass* is anything but Hollywood. It’s very backyard. But the beginning and ending of the movies are always proper productions. So for the new movie, for the last shot at the end of the ending sequence, everyone gets stuff blown up on them or around them. Spike [Jonze, *Jackass* co-creator and director] and Jeff and me, we were all sitting there like, “What should blow up on me?” And I just threw out there: “How about a bowl of dicks blows up in my face?” [laughs] I was just joking, but Spike was like, “Yeah! That sounds great!”

We have the action shot too, with Spike behind the camera.

In that picture the bowl of dicks just blew up, but Spike and Jeff—actually, I blame this mostly on Spike—had an air cannon filled with dildos about five feet from my head to the left of me. He turned it up so high that, and I didn’t know this until a week later, it knocked one of my top teeth out.

I was going to say, you could chip a tooth on one of those things.

I had to go to the dentist and tell them, you know, “What happened to you, sir?” “Well, a bowl of dicks blew up in my face.” It wasn’t a real tooth. It was an implant, with a cap on it. The implant had set in there for six months and they finally put the cap on, and a week later Spike explodes it out of my jaw with a bowl of dicks.

What about this photo that looks like it’s a post-football tackle?

That big dude standing over me is Jared Allen of the Minnesota Vikings.





Oh, right! Of course.

I had an idea where I wanted to catch a pass running across the middle and have an NFL player hit me while I was all stretched out. Jared Allen, when we reached out to him, was just the perfect guy for it. He's funny and he's a *big* dude, man. He hits hard. He had a great sense of humor about it, but he did have a reservation or two because when he showed up I was like, "We're going full speed today. I want you to just smoke me." And he was like, "No problem." But right before we were ready to do it, he was like, "Man, I'm having mixed emotions. I think I was raised better than this." [laughs] But he chuckled after he said it, because he was still going to do it—and he wasn't afraid to talk a little smack after it either.

So did he go easy the first couple of times? Or did he just lay into you from the start?

He didn't go easy at all. You know, we did it three times across the middle. The first two hits were *really* hard, but something about the way they looked didn't satisfy me. On the third one, he knocked me completely out of picture frame.

Holy shit. That's great.

Yeah. And then he's like, "Man, you know I play defensive end, and sacking is the thing I do best. Can I blindside you?" and I was like, "Uh, sure..." So, I dropped back to pass and he just completely smoked me again. He rammed my helmet into the ground so far that I had about two or three inches of sod in my facemask when I stood up.

"[Jared Allen was] like, 'Man, you know I play defensive end, and sacking is the thing I do best. Can I blindside you?'"

When a guy like that hits you, is it like when you get in a car wreck, where you don't remember the actual impact? Or are you pretty much aware the whole time?

On the first two I was aware. The third one didn't knock me out, but I was spinning a little. It didn't knock the air out of me. On the second one my sternum kind of just, I don't know what you would call it... It was sticking out. That took a few weeks to get over. But it turned out really good because he had such a good spirit about it. We were just having a ball. I like that dude.

I have a photo here now of Steve-O holding a trumpet, wearing a band-major kind of uniform, getting hit in the balls by a ram... That bit turned out really great. I wanted to see if music could calm the wild beast. So Ryan Dunn and Steve-O jumped in there with the ram to, you know, see if it would. And thank God it didn't. I was supposed to be in that because I wrote the idea, but the Jared Allen thing



“We know enough animal wranglers, so depending on what animal it is, we know who to call. ‘We need a ram. A really fucking pissed-off ram. Do ya got one?’”

was the next day and I didn’t want to get a ticky-tack sprained ankle or something, or a busted knee, and not be able to do the Jared Allen stunt. So I stepped out.

Is it hard to get an animal wrangler who knows how to get a ram to come at you like that?

Well, we know enough animal wranglers, so depending on what animal it is, we know who to call. “We need a ram. A really fucking pissed-off ram. Do ya got one?”

Now this next picture, I don’t know what’s going on in it but it looks like it could be really bad. It’s Steve-O, and it looks like he’s about to drink something kind of disgusting.

Oh yeah, that was more than kind of disgusting. That was the

Sweatsuit Cocktail. We got Preston Lacy in a heated room, put him on a treadmill, and then scraped the sweat off him into a cup. Then we were wringing sweat out of shirts too. I had the room painted red because Lance Bangs [*Jackass* camera operator] doesn’t like red. It makes him angry and a little disoriented. He ended up puking. We couldn’t even put it in the movie because there was just too much explanation involved, but yeah, he hates red.

That’s funny as hell.

We’re gonna release a DVD at Christmas of all the stuff that we love but that we didn’t put in 3. So we’ll explain more of that in 3.5.

The final photo here looks like it’s making fun of those old Maxell ads from the 80s, where the guy is getting his hair blown back by his stereo.

That’s Ryan Dunn. We had a jet engine and we were just thinking of ideas to do behind it, so the Maxell ads came up and it worked really well.

Do you go on the shoots even when it’s not you in the stunts?

Yeah, I’m on every shoot. It’s fun, man. On the first film I was just out partying all the time. They could never find me. But on the second and third films, I was there every day.

Have you curtailed your partying since back in the early days?

Well, I’m there for the work during the day, and then I hit the bar at night. I regret that I wasn’t there every day on the first movie. Now I don’t want to miss anything. I love it. ■

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Charlie Day

INTERVIEW BY JESSE PEARSON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARAH SOQUEL MORHAIM

Charlie Day, along with his friends Glenn Howerton and Rob McElhenney, created and stars in the comedic television series *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*. Though it's just entered its sixth season, the show still somehow feels like a cult phenomenon. Or, rather, its rabid fans, us included, can't figure out why it isn't the number one sitcom in the country. Maybe it's that too many people are offended by jokes about glue huffing, dumpster babies, pedophilia, alcoholism, sadness, dry heaving, violence, selfishness, power bottoms, and stalking. And maybe everyone who is offended by such things is, as a result, missing out on one of the funniest things currently happening. Which is this show.

Every performer on *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* is great. Howerton's Dennis, McElhenney's Mac, Kaitlin Olson's Sweet Dee, and Danny DeVito's Frank Reynolds—which is the pinnacle of his already legendary comedy career—are all finely honed and hilarious. But Charlie Day, who plays a character named Charlie Kelly, is the heart of *Sunny in Philly*. He's an intensely manic yet deeply nuanced comedian, and he can make one piss oneself with a simple flick of his eyes. Let's chat with him now.

Vice: I started looking you up on YouTube the other day and I found a clip of you on *Law & Order* from a while back.

Charlie Day: [laughs]

It made me wonder what sort of an actor you initially set out to be. Was it always going to be comedic, with things like *Law & Order* to pay the bills, or were you open to anything?

Like most young actors starting out, I really just wanted to act. Whether you find yourself stumbling into a drama or a comedy, you're going to jump on whatever you can. I started out doing plays. When I moved to New York, I was as enthusiastic about the possibility of doing what I'm doing now as I was about the possibility of becoming Al Pacino or something. And I still want to do both. Anyone who really likes acting likes all of it. But I don't consider myself a comedian, if that makes sense.

You're a performer in a more general sense.

I think so, or I'm just a funny guy who knows how to act.

How much do you and the rest of the *Sunny* cast feel like a part of a larger comedic community? It seems that you don't get talked about at the same time as a lot of the other well-known groups of young comedians.

No, we don't. We don't. And I don't know why that is. I don't know if it's because we didn't come up in a sketch-comedy group, or we're not

stand-up comedians. I'd hate to say anything *too* cynical in terms of why that might be because I don't want to sound like a bitter person...

Feel free!

It's just always surprising when people talk about what the best comedies out there are now and our show isn't mentioned among those other shows.

It's kind of shocking.

To our credit, I think that our fans enjoy the fact that they're not subject to the onslaught of media that other shows sometimes receive, where you sort of feel like, "Why is this show being shoved down my throat?" So maybe it's a blessing in disguise.

Yeah. Having promos for a show in your face all the time can cause burnout.

Definitely. When it comes to comedy, I think there's a burnout factor. For years, we were upset that the show wasn't getting the media recognition or the acknowledgement of how popular and, I think, good it is. But then I really do start to wonder if in some ways we dodged a bullet. We get to reap all the benefits of the show being successful and having great fans. We don't have any little golden trophies, but I think that's not really the point.

When you guys sit down to begin writing a new season of the show, do you have the worry of comedy burnout in mind?

If only to not burn ourselves out, yeah. We're always trying to keep it fresh but not trying to overreach or overextend ourselves. We don't say, "Oh, we have to make it more shocking." We just want to find different behaviors for these characters, and different scenarios. I think that we're always excited by the challenge of seeing where these characters can go and what we can do as performers. You know, one thing that we thought was going to be an issue going into this year was Kaitlin Olson's pregnancy. But once we decided to embrace it and write to it, it really kind of opened up a series of episodes for us—all these great avenues for story lines.

I'm really looking forward to seeing how her character, Dee, deals with being pregnant.

We have an episode where we try to figure out who got her pregnant, and then obviously an episode where she has the baby. We just don't do it in the usual sitcom way. We find great ways for these characters to care—or not care—about her pregnancy. [laughs]

Any other teasers you can give me for the new season?

We're going to do a *Lethal Weapon* spoof. You'll see the home-video version of *Lethal Weapon* that Dennis and Mac made with Frank and



Charlie. They actually show it to a bunch of high school kids to settle an argument over blackface. It's pretty out-there.

A lot of TV series, once they see what's hitting with the audience, play that aspect up until it becomes self-parody. *Sunny in Philly* doesn't do that.

Yeah, and in fact we make an effort to not repeat ourselves. It's a slight limitation as the years go on, but we'll sometimes say, "We can't do that joke because basically we've done it already." After 70-something episodes, that gets tricky because we've done a lot. But we do have the liberty of only doing 12 or 13 episodes a season.

How is that different from other sitcoms?

The American *Office* or *The Big Bang Theory* or something like that are cranking out maybe 22 a year.

Sweatshop sitcoms.

But things like our show or *South Park* or *Curb Your Enthusiasm* have shorter runs—and we have basically a whole year to prepare each season. We use that time to really carefully craft the comedy and make sure we're coming up with original stuff.

How many people are in the writing room besides you, Glenn Howerton, and Rob McElhenney?

About five, sometimes eight people are throwing ideas around. Then we have three other producers—David Hornsby, who plays Rickyety Cricket on the show, and a writing team by the name of Scott Marder and Rob Rosell. They are our kind of go-to other writers. Rob, Glenn, and I make a pass through everything before it goes to air.

Is it the traditional sitcom writing process with everyone in a room tossing riffs around and writing on index cards?

I couldn't tell you because I've never worked on another sitcom, but we do all get together in a room and write down ideas on note cards. Maybe what we are doing is traditional. [laughs]

Do you guys do that weird thing that lots of comedians and comedic writers do when they're throwing ideas around, where they don't laugh at something that's hilarious? They'll just kind of say "That's funny" in a clinical way.

Well, that's probably why all those shows are so painfully unfunny. [laughs] If you're not laughing your ass off in the writers' room, then it's probably not that funny.

So there are chuckles in your writers' room?

Oh my God. When we strike on a funny riff, we're on the floor dying. There was an episode last season called "The Waitress Is Getting Married," where the guys try and set my character up for a dating service.

Oh man, I love that one. It has some of the best lines in the show's history.

And we were just going through my list of likes and dislikes...

I think I know what you're going to say.

That was a run that, in the writers' room, everyone was coming up with different suggestions, and we were all uproariously laughing. And then someone threw out "milk steak," and people were on the floor.

I really want to see a milk steak in real life one day. And it's good to know that *Sunny's* writing staff isn't all po-faced.

It should be funny. I can't imagine someone saying "That's funny" and checking it off like it's some sort of math equation.

There's also this stereotype about funny people being kind of damaged or fucked up. You guys don't seem damaged at all.

The truth is that everybody's a little bit damaged in some way or another. But I know what you're referring to. There are a lot of angry

"There are a lot of angry comedians. I think we made a reference to that in the Sinbad episode, where we said, 'Sinbad, like most comedians, is a really, really angry man on the inside.'"

comedians. I think we made a reference to that in the Sinbad episode, where we said, "Sinbad, like most comedians, is a really, really angry man on the inside." [laughs] Which, by the way, he may or may not be. I don't know him that well. We just shot with him for two days. Anyway, yeah, there are a lot of angry comedians but definitely not the three of us. We're pretty well-rounded guys and we're also businessmen who are running a [laughs] business, so we have to sort of have our heads on our shoulders. I was never that bitter, angry guy, and neither were Glenn or Rob. I feel like that angry personality usually lends itself more to stand-up comedy.

Yeah. There's something kind of aggressive about stand-up in the first place.

And they hate each other, and they hate themselves, and the audience hates them until everyone loves them. Acting is a different thing. Rob and Glenn and I were never in that comedy world and we don't particularly care for it. We weren't sketch-comedy guys, we weren't stand-ups. We're not desperate to make people laugh. I mean, Glenn went to Juilliard for acting and I was equally ambitious about it. Rob was pretty serious about writing as well as acting. That might be the difference, and that might be why we're not in those circles.

Have many comics gone out of the way to tell you guys that they like your show?

I don't run in a bunch of comedy circles, but I should hope that people who do comedy for a living find the show funny. I ran into Dave Foley at a charity thing that we were both doing and he said that he was a big fan. And of course I enjoyed *The Kids in the Hall* growing up.

I just watched their pilot episode again recently on DVD. It's still amazing.

It's great. And we ended up having him guest-star on the sixth season of *Sunny*. He was hysterical in his role.

What were your favorite comedy shows when you were a kid?

Like everyone else, I was a fan of *The Cosby Show*.

Everyone but me, I guess. But there aren't that many direct precursors to *Sunny*, are there?

I think you can make comparisons to *Seinfeld* in terms of some of the structure of stories—how things that get set in motion at the beginning of an episode might come back around to bite you in the ass at the end. That's purely from a structural standpoint. But, to our benefit, we weren't sitcom writers working on ten different shows before we started this one. We were three guys who had a unique sense of humor and a unique vision who didn't really know



another way to make a television show, so we just made it our way. We found our own voice. If anything was an influence, I'd say the British *Office* was. We thought it was so funny and so conversational. And we liked the look of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*—handheld cameras, no fancy lighting. Those two shows made us realize that we could probably do this ourselves. We didn't need a giant Hollywood crew—though we have that now. But to do the initial thing, we knew that we could just do fly-on-the-wall shooting and make something funny.

One of my favorite moments ever on the show is from the episode where you and Dee switch lives.

Uh huh, right.

Well, actually my favorite moment *ever* on the show is a tiny bit in that episode where Dee is trying to do stand-up but she keeps dry heaving. I could watch that on a loop for an hour.

[laughs] Kaitlin Olson is brilliant in that scene.

Incredible. But the scene I'm thinking of now is the one where you bring Dee back to your apartment and show her your nightly ritual: huff glue, eat a can of cat food as quickly as possible, and pass out before the neighborhood's stray cats start shrieking outside your window.

[laughs] In that season, we had a few scripts that were on the longer side. That episode, "Dennis Reynolds: An Erotic Life," was one of them. It ended up seven minutes long, and we cut so much out of it. There are major story-line things about Charlie's life that had to go. I think there was a paper route at night. We really had to lose the majority of walking in each other's shoes. But that scene you're talking about is a testament to Rob and Scott, our writers, who dreamed up the peeing-in-a-can thing when Danny comes running in.

That scene is also great because it reveals a lot about the character of Charlie. How much do you think about backstory for the characters on the show?

Well, that episode was one of those things where we said, "Let's get a glimpse into these two men and their strange night rituals." And I think it's always funny in the series how we can delve deeper and deeper into these people's lives. You get to know and love these characters and yet there's so much you don't know about them because you only get them for 22 minutes a week. It's like, you look back on something like *Cheers*, where eight seasons in you finally went to Carla's house and saw how she lived.

Yeah, I remember getting jazzed about things like that as a kid. Like when you got to see the world outside of a sitcom's usual weekly set. That's right. And so getting to dive into the warped and sad life of Charlie Kelly and Frank Reynolds in that episode was a lot of fun.

Do you think about the character of Charlie at random times when you're not actively working on the show?

Yeah. I don't go around with a little notepad in my pocket—I'm not one of those guys. But certainly if something pops up that stands out, I'll try to remember it and bring it to the show. But my actual life is pretty different from the character's life. *[laughs]*

I'd hope so.

There isn't an evening where I think, "Well, this particular brand of cat food is really quite delicious, and I think I should add it into the show."

The show is about a group of morally bankrupt people, but they're still totally lovable. Charlie is so endearing.

It's about morally bankrupt people who are super-enthusiastic getters. I think you sympathize with them because you always know what their want or desire is, even though it's something that's purely in the moment. And they might do the wrong thing, but their inten-

tions are usually not *that* wrong. Like, they might just want to get into the World Series. They might wind up doing some terrible things to do that, but it's not such a terrible thing to want to go to the World Series.

Their motivations are pure, but the way they go about things is a little bit skewed. Or a lot skewed.

Exactly. I mean, if it were a show about people doing nasty things because they wanted to be nasty, then you wouldn't like them.

Do you know how many seasons you want to do, or are you going to just keep going until it feels like the right time to stop?

It's tough to say. I know that we definitely have another season, the seventh season, after the one that just started airing, which is the sixth season. We're contractually bound to do that. After that, a lot depends on what the network wants, but ultimately we'll know before we start writing the seventh season whether they'll want more because if they don't, then we have to write to the show ending. But I imagine that they and we are going to want to continue it, just a little bit longer at the very least.

Good.

I wouldn't want to keep making it if people weren't into it anymore, if the jokes felt stale and the audience wasn't enjoying it.

Has there been much talk of doing a *Sunny in Philly* movie?

People are starting to ask that a lot. I don't see any reason why not, if the time was right and we had the right idea.

OK, there have been a few sort of famous things from the show that I'd like to run by you to see if there's anything interesting behind their origins.

Sure.

We already did milk steak.

You know, that literally might have been someone saying "milkshake" and the rest of us hearing "milk steak."

I guess the top of the heap so far for most fans is the Dayman/Nightman thing, the episode with the musical that Charlie wrote—which you guys then turned into a real stage show that sold out every performance it had.

We wanted to do an episode with music in it, where the guys started a band. This started in the episode that had the guy where you couldn't tell if he was a hip-hop guy or if he was slightly mentally retarded.

Right, the rapper that Dee dated.

Who was sort of based on someone I knew. *[laughs]* So we broke down a really funny episode, and we sent the writers I mentioned before, Marder and Rosell, to work on that. I think it might have been the first script that they did with us. It was the third season, but it was their first season on the show. They came back, and we liked the script. They had these lyrics for the "Dayman" song that Charlie and Dennis would do. "Dayman, fighter of the Nightman, champion of the sun, you're a master of karate and friendship for everyone." And I thought, yeah, this could be funny. There was a keyboard in the writer's room—actually the same one that we use in the episode—and we started to write a little melody to the lyrics. And then Glenn, who plays Dennis and has a fascination with the *Flash Gordon* soundtrack by Queen—you know, "Flash—Ah! Ah!"...

Oh my God, that's what it is! The "ah-ah" in "Dayman" is totally from *Flash Gordon*.

Totally. So, almost like it happens in the episode, Glenn starts adding these falsetto ah-ahs to the melody that I'm writing. *[laughs]* We're in

"Of course the network said, 'We can't sell this on our website.' So we asked if we could sell them ourselves, and we became the dick-towel guys."

the writer's room, and we're starting to laugh our heads off. So that actual discovery of the ah-ahs got kind of re-created in the episode. I think that was the first scene that we shot for season 3. The following week, the whole crew was still singing the song. So we were thinking, "Gosh, I guess that's a catchy song. But then in the editing room, we weren't loving the episode even though that scene was really funny. We sent it to the network and they said, "This is one of the funniest ones we've ever seen!" So we kind of stepped back from it and looked at it from the outside in and said, "You know what? This is funny." Maybe we had one thing in our head and what we ended up with was different, but it was funny on its own terms. We truly didn't know that that episode or that song would be as popular as it was.

What about the Dick Towel? I bought one online when that episode aired.

Chad Ochocinco twittered a picture of himself wearing a dick towel.

Nice. Did he use the big side or the little bird side?

He used both. *[laughs]* Anyway, I think the dick-towel idea was all Rob McElhenney.

It's so good. For those who don't know, it's a huge beach towel with a drawing of a man's lower half with a gigantic dick on one side, and the same thing with a tiny dick on the other side. Wrap it around your waist and hilarity ensues.

We said, "That's really funny, but how are we going to put it on the air?" Then we realized we could just put a big black square over the dick when it aired on TV. Ninety percent of our audience is online half the time anyway. Of course the network said, "We can't sell this on our website." So we asked if we could sell them ourselves, and we became the dick-towel guys.

In real life.

There was an initial wave of about 20,000 or 30,000 dick towels.

And what about Green Man, where you don the skintight green Lycra suit that covers your whole body and face? Where does he come from?

I think it was one of Rob's buddies who did Green Man in real life first. Apparently he wore that suit to all the Eagles games. That was another one where we thought, "Yeah, it's kind of funny..." But you never really know what's going to resonate with people. It turned out that everyone really got a kick out of it and now you see that Green Man everywhere.

Did you initially have reservations about putting that thing on? It's pretty revealing.

It's revealing for sure. And I can't see a thing when I'm wearing it. I truly can't see a thing. ■



Robert Smigel

INTERVIEW BY ROCCO CASTORO
PHOTOS BY JESPER DAMSGAARD LUND

Sometimes I find it hard to believe a person like Robert Smigel actually exists. He's made a good living pouring salt in the wounds of popular culture, and he's done it in ways that are simultaneously hilarious and innovative. There is no other person on earth who can get away with screaming "Asshole!" in Simon Cowell's face multiple times on national television just because a dog puppet is hovering between them.

But besides Triumph the Insult Comic Dog, Smigel has been responsible for a large chunk of the best American comedic television of the past 25 years. Throughout the mid-80s to early 90s, he wrote some of the most memorable sketches to appear on the Second Coming of *Saturday Night Live*. In 1996 he became the executive producer of *The Dana Carvey Show*, which lasted for only eight episodes but was a template for the future of television comedy and served as an amniotic sac for people like Steve Carell, Louis CK, and Stephen Colbert. It also spawned *The Ambiguously Gay Duo* (its titular characters voiced by Carell and Colbert), which after *Carvey's* cancellation ended up airing on SNL among an ongoing series of animated shorts called *TV Funhouse* that eventually became one of the only reasons to watch the show.

The cartoons led to a dedicated *TV Funhouse* series on Comedy Central that aired in late 2000 and was the first kids' show blatantly made for grown-ups. It ran for just one season, but you can easily see the influence it had on the perverse short-form stuff found on places like Adult Swim and *Funny or Die*. Smigel was also the initial head writer for *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*, where he conceived Triumph and a whole bunch of other recurring sketches my dad thought I was stupid for staying up late to watch as a kid.

Smigel agreed to this interview on the condition that I refrain from asking questions about the intellectual-property situation regarding Triumph and NBC because it could cause him a lot of unnecessary grief. He also said he did not wish to comment on the Jay Leno versus Conan shitshow altogether. I was fine with that because a) I was not looking to resuscitate a dead horse, and b) it's pretty easy to guess what he thinks about the situation. Above all else, I wanted to speak with Smigel because he's figured out a way to distill honesty into comedy without compromising the laughs or coming off as preachy.

Vice: Most of your work relies on subverting childhood entertainment like cartoons and puppets and kid shows to poke fun at adult topics. Do you think your style of comedy taps into greater truths than a typical stand-up routine or sitcom?

Robert Smigel: I would hope so. I think you're ultimately more effective anytime you can be less specific when you're trying to make fun of things. Your scope is wider and there's more art to it. I'll do something right down the middle if it's too funny to ignore, but sometimes it's almost joyless to go that way.

Did you grow up watching a lot of cartoons and reading comic books? People assume that I loved superhero cartoons when I was a kid, but I actually didn't. What I loved about them was their theme songs, and then I would turn the channel back to *Magilla Gorilla*. I was a very weird kid in that I could not sit through anything on TV that took itself seriously. I did, however, love the George Reeves *Superman* show because my sister got me into it. I also remember loving *Lassie*. My sister and I would literally kiss the TV at the end of the *Lassie* credits. I couldn't follow stories, though. If someone asked me about the story line for a particular episode I would've just said, "I don't know, but she's so brave and beautiful." My favorite cartoon was *Peanuts*—well, more so the comic strip than the cartoon—and I loved Hanna-Barbera stuff. The Adam West *Batman* series is one of my favorite shows ever. Everyone in my class loved *Batman*, but none of them thought it was funny. They thought it was serious, including me. I have a very vivid memory of being the only one in the class whose favorite show wasn't *Batman*. It was *Gilligan's Island*. I felt like a complete loser.

I've read that you initially went to college to become a dentist, which is perhaps the most humorless profession in the world besides terrorism. What happened?

Dentistry is a profession that's often passed on, especially when I was a kid. There was no glamour in dentistry. There were a million jokes about being a dentist; they were like mothers-in-law. My father's father was a dentist, and he didn't really enjoy it. I didn't particularly want to be a dentist. But in my mind, I had no confidence that I could succeed in show business or writing. It seemed way out of my reach. I would think about it because I was funny at school, but what I really wanted to do when I was a little kid was to be a cartoonist. I was very good at drawing popular cartoon characters, but it just seemed like a pipe dream. Going into dentistry was a completely fear-based decision. It's strange because I was a complete pain in the ass in terms of making fun of my teachers and friends, but at the same time I took life very seriously and didn't want to fuck up. I went to Cornell and the entire time I knew that I really didn't want to be a dentist. Science-related stuff in general gave me the most trouble, so I dreaded going through pre-dental and I sucked at it. I failed so badly at what I was doing that my parents felt sorry for me. I transferred to NYU to study communications. No one should study communications. *[laughs]*

Yeah, that's what I studied at college and look where it got me. It was a tragic mistake.

It's a complete waste of time, the last thing you should be doing at college. I would take radio production and TV production and whatever—you'd alternate between different "jobs." It was always the weeks where I was supposed to be the writer or the director or the



performer when I would shine. It reminded me that I wanted to be a performer. Everything else was a waste of time. There happened to be a stand-up-comedy contest at NYU, and I didn't think anyone at the school knew me because I wasn't allowed to live in a dorm so I thought the element of surprise would work in my favor. I had to stay with my parents because they lived in Manhattan and the school wouldn't allow me to take up a spot on campus. It was a very strange time in my life. Then I entered this contest and ended up being one of the winners. It changed everything. I was like, "Wow, I made strangers laugh!" Ultimately, I got to perform at the Comic Strip comedy club after winning another contest. I had a very strange act where I would come on and wear a cotton-candy beard, dressed as an Orthodox Jew with a very dour face, and slowly turn the pages of the *Chumash*—licking my finger each time I turned a page. I would do that until people started laughing and then I would eat some of my beard.

From there you ended up in Chicago with Conan and Bob Odenkirk, where you took part in an improv revue called *Happy Happy Good Show*. It seems kind of weird that you wanted to be in the comedy business but moved from New York to Chicago.

Around the same time I was doing stuff at the Comic Strip I ran into the actor Tim Kazurinsky, who had just started on *SNL*. I was obsessed with the show, and he was shocked that I recognized him. *SNL* had just gone on temporary hiatus due to a writers' strike a few weeks after his debut. He told me about this class in Chicago where he got his start and said I could take it over the summer. I liked the sound of that because I was so afraid of committing to anything. That was pretty much the springboard for the rest of my career. I also met my wife there.

Are you involved with *SNL* whatsoever these days? I've noticed that there haven't been any *TV Funhouse* segments for a bit.

I'm not. Over the summer Lorne Michaels asked me if I would think about coming back, but I'm busy working on movie scripts right now. I have a lot of movie ideas and TV projects that I'd love to do, and it's so hard to get them going. I'd go back to being a sketch writer if I had to but I'm not at that point right now. The problem with *TV Funhouse* was that its budget was too big to sustain. It's very expensive to turn around cartoons that look good in such a short amount of time. Looking back, I never felt bad that NBC forced him to put an end to it because I couldn't believe I got to do it for 11 years. When I first started *TV Funhouse* my attitude was that I'd do it for a couple of years, and then it got to the point where I couldn't believe I had a gig like that. I was the only person in the country who could make a cartoon about whatever I wanted that was broadcast on such a big platform. As the years went on, short-form cartoons became a much more common thing, especially on the internet. Part of me thought that what I was doing wasn't as special anymore.

Was there ever a time when NBC executives or the standards-and-practices board intervened to the point where an entire concept had to be axed?

Some of the stuff that would make me the angriest at *SNL* was when I made a cartoon that would almost have a conservative point of view and they just didn't get it. There was a cartoon that featured Pat Robertson talking about stem-cell research that segues into another cartoon about Britney Spears—this was before she married the dancer guy. Part of it was about her teaching little girls how to cut Underoos into a thong. She also sang this song about how there were so many holes you could use without making Jesus mad. In other words, you could stay a virgin by using these other holes. It didn't have any dirty words in it, but they were just so mad at me. Meanwhile my whole point was that this girl is a role model for eight-year-olds, and maybe she shouldn't be. We got around it eventually by making fun of the fact that they censored us, but all some of the standards-and-practices people care about is if 1 percent of the audience doesn't get it and decides to boycott. That's all that matters to them.

"I had a very strange act where I would come on and wear a cotton-candy beard, dressed as an Orthodox Jew with a very dour face, and slowly turn the pages of the Chumash."

Do you feel like you've ever gone over the line?

Yeah, when I did the Triumph comedy album *Come Poop With Me*. I wrote a bunch of songs with my friends, and I thought each one was very funny individually. I wasn't aiming for a huge audience, but the thing got picked up by Warner Bros. I didn't really adjust the tone of the album according to the larger audience it was now going to reach because I just wanted a parody of 60s albums that had dirty songs on them. People's expectations were much different due to the scope of the promotions. It sold incredibly well for like four weeks and then sales literally fell off a cliff. People were looking for *Star Wars* fans being made fun of. They got bestiality and the like and were not very happy.

During your tenure as the initial head writer for *Late Night* you set some pretty strict parameters for the other writers, which makes sense because the show was so cohesive. Yet I feel like that approach is unique in the world of late-night talk shows. Would you turn down ideas that might've been funny but didn't fit into your idea of what the show should be?

A lot of the way that show was conceived was by thinking about what talk shows weren't doing. Dana Carvey was asked to do that gig months before it landed in anyone else's hands, right after Carson announced that he was retiring. Lorne knew that he was going to get to oversee the show, and the first person he wanted to host it was Carvey. He wanted Conan and I to sort on it, and at that time no late-night talk show was doing any sort of sketch comedy at all. That idea expanded when it was decided that Conan would become the host. But before that happened I thought that the show would feature Carvey playing a lot of different characters. Months later Conan called me and said that this idea would work in reverse—he could be the straight man to all of these crazy characters. The sketches evolved into playing with visual jokes because Conan and I bonded over our love of cartoony humor.

In terms of parameters, it was important to me that the show have a very specific feel that was different from everyone else's. Not only was it about doing a certain kind of comedy, it was about not doing certain types of comedy. I've said in other interviews that I talked Conan out of doing remote segments for the first year, which makes me look like the dumbest man in the world. But at the time Conan sort of understood the logic of it because everyone was trying to do what Letterman was doing and nobody was doing it as well. I was a little obsessive over parameters in those first years, and it would've been a very bad thing if *Late Night* were canceled. I would've felt like I was the one to blame, at least partially.

Do you think his new cable show will be a refreshing new beginning and allow him to do some things that might not have worked on network television?

I think it will be refreshing and sweet and cleansing and lemon-lime. He will be able to focus on making a show that is absolutely about him having a good time. It should translate into comedy he's excited about and bits that play to his strengths. I imagine the studio will be a little

“I remember one time in particular when Triumph was supposed to be getting a blowjob from a poodle in the back of the limo. I was literally on the floor of the limousine with my legs sticking out of the door.”

more intimate—that was one thing we were worried about going into *The Tonight Show*. Though I think that stuff is a little overstated... a lot of late-night television is about viewing habits, and it would've been hard for anyone to take over that show and succeed right away. In general I think there'll be less of a concern at TBS about pleasing some kind of imagined audience. Conan will get to do the show he wants to do. The title *Conan* is probably an indication of that. And if he adds an exclamation point it can be a daytime show. You know, “Everybody in the audience is getting a Robot on the Toilet!” [laughs]

Triumph originated on *Late Night*, and I've always wondered where you found the original puppet?

I found it at a store called Mable's. It doesn't exist anymore, but it was a country-furniture store. I was looking for country furniture. [laughs] My wife and I bought a lovely kitchen table there. In the corner there were these realistic-looking animal heads. I pulled one out of the rack and immediately started sniffing my wife's rear end with it. Yet we actually didn't buy one that day. My wife came home with a few of the puppets as a surprise another day—a couple of dogs and a seal and a cat. I was just delighted. The fact that they looked so realistic is what really got me excited. It's funny that you brought up the crazy parameters and mandates I had for *Late Night*, because one was that whenever we did a show with a fake animal it had to be a realistic-looking one. It couldn't be cartoony or an animal that had a cutout face for the human actor. Or if it was an inanimate object, it had to be realistic. If it was a fruit joke, it had to be a piece of real-looking fruit. It couldn't be a Fruit of the Loom joke where the fucking face is cut out. I remember a few years later they did some sketch—I think it was with gargoyles or something—where the faces were cut out, and my heart was broken. It was like “My God. You're really fucking me up the ass with that one! They know that's wrong!” [laughs]

Are you a dog lover?

I was a big cat guy when I was a little kid. We were given a cat, and I was in love with it even though I was allergic. I lived through my teenage years with a runny nose and watery eyes, and I couldn't have cared less. When the cat died my sister replaced it with a fruffy little bichon. I was really disappointed, but eventually I fell in love with this ridiculous dog. I never realized how hilarious dogs were—their faces and all the expression. They lend themselves to anthropomorphic comedy. My wife used to have the dumbest dog in the history of dogs. It was this half-wolf, half-husky tail-chasing idiot that inspired the dog that would constantly chase its tail on *TV Funhouse*.

Has doing the Triumph routine all these years had any physical or mental repercussions? You're sitting there bent over all the time, your hand raised, with a sheet of paper taped to your face so people don't make eye contact. It's got to be hell on your knees and dignity. Oh my God, it's so degrading! Sometimes the only reason people will

talk to me is because I look so pathetic. I'm this balding, middle-aged guy and I'm crouched in this weird position. That's how I got Jennifer Lopez, I think. I looked so unthreatening and like such a loser she thought she was doing me a favor. I remember one time in particular when Triumph was supposed to be getting a blowjob from a poodle in the back of this limo. I was literally on the floor of the limousine with my legs sticking out of the door. There's a trainer on top of me, and food is being passed in order to keep this poodle interested in Triumph's crotch. I've suffered for my art.

You've had a history of creating shows and writing screenplays that are uncompromising but last for a short period of time or never see the light of day at all. It's one of the things I admire most about you—there's no intention of pandering to an audience. After being in the business this long, do you have a better idea of why certain things get off the ground and others don't?

A good example is the *Anchorman* script, which was rejected by everybody for years. Then Will Ferrell did *Old School* and everybody wanted to do *Anchorman*. Sometimes it's just that simple; it's all about the stars. I was involved in a script based on the Hanz and Franz sketch on *SNL*, which is something we wrote with Arnold Schwarzenegger. He had all the momentum as far as that project went. Then *Last Action Hero* came out and it was a horrible bomb so he didn't want to do it. If we really pushed to get that movie made we probably could've made it, but I didn't have any intention to turn it into something else.

When we were setting up a time for this interview you mentioned that you were very busy planning your semi-annual autism benefit, which will air in late October on Comedy Central and feature pretty much every funny person on the planet. What can we expect this year?

I can't give away certain bits for obvious reasons. Some people will be doing some musical bits that will hopefully be surprising. We have Steve Carell coming into New York, performing live at the Beacon Theatre for the first time, so we're excited about that. We'll have some unbilled surprises too, which I can't tell you about because they're unbilled and also surprises. [laughs] The biggest people in comedy are doing it and they're incredibly busy, so my highest priority in doing this show is that the people who do them come away feeling like “This was so much fun” and not like “I did these guys a favor and I got through it.” We want to pay them back by writing some great bits for them and make them really psyched to have done it.

What else do you have brewing?

I rewrote a script for *Jack and Jill*, which is a new Adam Sandler movie that will be coming out soon. It's a silly setup, but it has some very funny and surprising twists. It's looking like Shaq has a cameo, although it's nothing that changes the course of the movie particularly. It's based on a character Adam has done for many years in writing rooms, a voice we all really like. Beyond that, there's shit in development: sitcom ideas that I've been pitching around and movie ideas that I haven't had time to flesh out for various reasons. Hopefully I'll get to those. Even *The Ambiguously Gay Duo* live-action movie that I wrote with Stephen Colbert might work out. There are people who are interested in that.

Are you looking to get Colbert and Carell back together for it? I think they both feel that they're maybe too old for the roles.

Maybe they can just dub over the voices of Tobey Maguire and Michael Cera, or whatever pair of actors you can find who are capable of reaching such extreme levels of homosexuality.

Actually, we've talked about getting really hunky guys and letting Stephen and Steve do their voices. That absolutely cracks me up. Whether we could sustain that for an entire movie is another question. ■



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Buck Henry

INTERVIEW BY STEVE LAFRENIERE
PHOTOS BY TERRY RICHARDSON

As a writer and an actor, Buck Henry has one of the most interesting profiles in the history of television. Uncommonly, he also occupies that same position in 60s and 70s American film. In those years especially, his was one of the voices that brought movie and TV comedy into wider focus, rendering it more political, sexual, and trippily referential than it had previously been, basically creating its current template.

Henry's overall list of achievements is boggling and places him at the center of umpteen legendary creative scenes. Working for early-60s TV wags like Steve Allen and Garry Moore and on the broadcast-news spoof *That Was the Week That Was* got him in shape for what was to come, a four-year period in which he created and wrote 130-plus episodes of the sweetly subversive spy-com *Get Smart* (with Mel Brooks), penned the screenplays for both *The Graduate* and *Catch-22*, and adapted Terry Southern's infamous *Candy* for the big screen. A few years later saw him codirecting *Heaven Can Wait* with Warren Beatty, launching the cult TV spoof *Quark*, and in the lap of his long association with *Saturday Night Live* (until recently, Henry held the record for most episodes hosted). Then there are his performances in movies by Milos Forman (*Taking Off*), John Cassavetes (*Gloria*), Nicolas Roeg (*The Man Who Fell to Earth*), Robert Altman (*Short Cuts*), and Gus Van Sant (*To Die For*), each one sly and indelible.

At 79, Henry still makes appearances on shows that interest him—*30 Rock*, *The Daily Show*—but would otherwise seem to be in retirement. I talked to him a few days after he arrived in New York for one of his regular months-long visits. He has the gift of making you quickly feel as if you've been friends for years.

Vice: You were acting in theater and on early television when you were a teenager. Was there a lot of crossover between the two at the time?

Buck Henry: There was. I think most of the people we came to know as theater stars in the 40s and 50s were also television stars. The networks didn't want to fly people in from LA when they had a whole theater world here.

What sorts of roles did you get?

It was pretty scattershot. I didn't have what we would call a solid career in television. I did things like *GE Theater* and *Studio One*. I was in small parts, almost a glorified extra.

I assume this was all drama?

Yes, all drama. I did once play Wally Cox's cousin, as a sort of look-alike joke. That was about as near as I got to a comedy on television in those decades.

Before you began working for Steve Allen in 1961, were you writing for theater?

No, I was always trying to write for television. I had kind encouragement from a number of television guys, the editors of various shows. They were famous names then, and I can't conjure them up anymore, partly because I have trouble with names from the past now. They've all gone to rest somewhere in the corner of my brain where proper nouns go when you're past a certain age. Or when you've had chemo. Anyway, these guys were well known in the literary establishment, because they were mostly authors themselves who

story-edited the drama shows. *The Philco Television Playhouse*, *Studio One*, *GE Theater*, *Playhouse 90*. They were all pretty great shows. So I was trying to figure out a way to get a script sold. I could get them read, but I couldn't get them sold. Looking back on them today, I don't wonder at it.

Do you keep them?

No, I don't. But I recently ran into one that, for some reason, I had kept. Because it won some kind of award, from a television-something in Chicago that I had sent it to. It won an award and got produced. I read it, and it was so derivative and so naive that I think I immediately destroyed it.

Well, no worries about the video. That was the era that they wiped almost everything once it was broadcast.

Exactly. There's almost nothing left of *That Was the Week That Was*. I've seen two or three little bits and pieces at the Museum of Television. A couple of times I've done a night there with friends, and they unearthed half a dozen little bits and pieces that I didn't remember. I didn't remember any of it.

Pieces that you were in?

Yeah. So I was sort of thrilled to see myself doing something I'd completely forgotten.

***That Was the Week That Was* was a groundbreaking show.**

Well, it wasn't a great show, but it was an interesting one.

Sometimes I confuse the American version with the British one of the same name.

They were radically different. The Brits had no time constraints at all. Their show went from an hour to two and a half hours. When Kennedy died, they did a special show that was completely pick-up. Just the whole bunch of them sitting around a long, long table. It was incredibly interesting and worth a look if you can ever get your hands on it. Our show was strictly television rules. Half an hour at a certain time at a certain date. And the second year—it only lasted two years—it was preempted so many times by the Republicans.

What do you mean?

Well, it was the perfect time slot. It was 7:30 to 8, as I recall. It was network, and its nature was liberal. So, if you're going to buy out a show, you're going to buy out a show that roots for the other team. So that's what they did. Several weeks in a row we got preempted. By that time the audience had forgotten we were there.

Was Tom Lehrer part of TW3?

Yes. I don't know if I ever saw him or not, but we did a number of his songs. I did his famous song about the New Math, which I struggled to learn. There was also "The Vatican Rag." He did a lot of that, and he may or may not have contributed to the title song that Nancy Ames sang, with the tricky, political, current events in the lyrics.

Tell me about the Premise, the New York improv group you were in around that time. It was geographically unusual, as most improv was coming out of Chicago and the Midwest then.

But the guy who ran the Premise, Ted Flicker, was from St. Louis. He ran the Crystal Palace and that comedy bunch out there.



I know Flicker and Elaine May came up with the original rules for improv. Did that make the Premise like Second City?

Same kind of stuff. We would do prepared pieces and then we'd do audience suggestions. But we intended to be slicker, and we were reviled by many of our compatriots in the improvisational biz for that. We didn't like to do anything past six minutes; we wanted a punch line; our guy on the lights was considered a member of our group, because he decided when something had its proper end.

He hit the blackout switch.

Right. I think more in terms of *commedia dell'arte*. I'm much more please-the-crowd. Once we had really interesting set pieces, we never let them go. But I was only there about a year.

It seems like by the early 60s a lot of the interesting comedians and the improv people were getting into writing for television.

Well, we all knew each other. We were all interrelated, and many of us had worked with each other in one place or another. Let me think. Alan Alda was on *TW3*, as well as all sorts of people. After *TW3* we all interrelated. Arkin and Nichols and everybody else. Everybody did everything with everyone. But there were always some people we couldn't fit into our new age of success. We couldn't get them out of Chicago and into the rest of the world. The most obvious two were Severn Darden—who was a god to all of us—and Del Close.

Darden ended up in movies and TV with some frequency. Del Close, I can't remember ever seeing him in anything offstage.

Because Close was so crazy that even... Well, I'll tell you a story. Del came out to California, and all of us who knew him sent him everywhere that had a show, resulting in him getting dopey parts on things like *My Mother the Car*. My show then was *Get Smart*, and I said, "Del, just go meet the casting gal," who was Pat Harris, very famous in the casting business. "Just show up, so she has an idea of you physically, and we'll put you in the lab as a scientist, which is more than perfect for you." So he went to meet her. I think he wore a white lab coat that he picked up somewhere. And he took a little box, a machine, with him to prove, I guess, that he was a lab-technician type. He told her to hold onto the two handles, and he put about 500 volts through her. She ended up on the floor. Thank God he wasn't arrested.

I lived in Chicago when Del Close was still teaching, and the stories you'd hear...

Oh, sure. They're all legendary.

Broadcast pranksterism started showing up around then. You played an elaborate hoax for years, where you went on talk shows as G. Clifford Prout, president of the Society for Indecency to Naked Animals, an organization that raised money to clothe animals. What sort of subversion did that create?

Prout did *The Today Show*. [Host Dave] Garroway knew it was a gag immediately. But Barbara Walters, who was his sidekick then, didn't, or else pretended not to. So she says, "Mr. Prout, all animals—we as well as dogs and horses and cows, the animals you want to clothe—God has already given us something to keep the cold and rain away. Animals have their shaggy coats, have hair in certain places..." and she goes on and on. "I myself have a great big, black, hairy..." and she paused. The cameras began to shake. The cameramen were trying not to scream with laughter. It took her what seemed like eons, before she said "Labrador." But for a moment everyone watching had an image emblazoned in their mind.

You started writing for and appearing on Steve Allen's show in 1961. When I was a kid, he was the first TV personality that made me realize you could be both really smart and really funny.

That was my feeling too. He was the one person I wanted to work for, and I did. Although it wasn't a great success. I didn't think I contributed

"I think more in terms of *commedia dell'arte*. I'm much more please-the-crowd. Once we had really interesting set pieces, we never let them go."

enough to make it really worthwhile. I got on *Steve Allen* because my friend Bob Rafelson brought Dan Melnick, who was programming for ABC, down to the Premise to see the work. That got me hired. But *Allen* folded very fast. Not a successful show. I think it was on for 15 weeks. But the best thing about it for me was that I was partnered with a guy named Stan Burns, who is one of the very, very few people who deserves the word *legendary* to be put in front of his name. One of the funniest people in the world and a master craftsman at jokes. Not big ideas, not stories, not scenes. Jokes. I would call him up very early in the morning and tell him the news, like, "Marilyn Monroe just died." He'd give me ten jokes without taking a breath. Amazing. So we shared an office for those however many months they were. And later he worked on *Get Smart*. I dearly loved the guy. He was so funny and so good as a person.

Was *Steve Allen* the first time you wrote for TV?

It was the first time I wrote for anyone. And I really knew how to do it. I didn't have any trouble figuring that part out. But the politics of it took some figuring out, like which other writers were going to be on your side, and which ones weren't. What lengths you'd have to go to, or not go to, to get your material read and played.

I imagine that was also true with *Saturday Night Live*.

It was totally true of *Saturday Night Live*. I watched some writers get close to suicide. There were writers that Lorne [Michaels] had who worked there for years, and they never had a piece done. I like to think it was just his loyalty to people he liked, because it sure wasn't helpful to the show or helpful to the network. I would have gotten rid of a lot of people much earlier.

Regarding politics in the larger sense, it seems like comedy people of that time had a better grasp than almost anyone.

Well, comedy people then had attitudes about politics, but the networks did not smile on attitudes about politics. Although every now and then some really interesting piece came along, particularly in the shadows of HUAC and McCarthy and all that. And, you know, those were long shadows, and they went right into the 60s and through them. Which also is the reason, of course, that there were the liberal doxologies in everyone who came into those arts in the 60s.

As a response?

Yes, absolutely. We were recovering from a very bad time, and very bad ideas. All that junk. But the comics have always been the most irreverent, so of course they're going to be the most suspect. I mean in spite of the rocks, like Bob Hope, who we were then making fun of.

It's interesting that you ended up on *The Garry Moore Show* after that, writing funny but very safe material for the likes of Durward Kirby and Carol Burnett.

There were no political attitudes whatsoever on Garry's show. And of course, because he was the nicest man on earth, nobody ever tried to rile him up, upset him, or anything else. He was a completely decent guy. And what can one say about Durward Kirby? We weren't in a



hotbed of brainy, political folks there. I knew what I was doing. All I wanted was a job.

What did you do there?

I wrote lots of what were called crossovers. Durward walking onstage like he was going somewhere, and Garry would be there and they would talk about something. There were one or two of those every show, so I would say, "Why don't we talk about the flood, or why don't we talk about the price of... you know, anything." I would write two or three pages of nonsensical dialogue.

Let's get back to the new vibe in comedy we were talking about a minute ago.

I don't know, I suppose it evolved. Steve Allen's voice was clear from the moment he got there. *The Tonight Show* was a form he invented. Along with him, Stan Burns and Herb Sargent wrote almost all of it—almost all of everything that anyone said. So it was their voices that got into the mainstream of television comedy.

I've always figured the triumvirate that molded American 60s comedy was the intellectual Nichols and May improv crowd, the rantings of Lenny Bruce, and then Harvey Kurtzman and *Mad*. The new Jewish funny. But you're saying it's these guys in the network writing rooms.

Oh yeah, totally. It was the voices of the great comedy writers of radio and television, all the way back to the 20s and 30s, and on through to the late 60s. I knew a lot of them when I was a kid because they were friends of my parents. My mother [Ruth Taylor, a silent-film actress] and father knew the Hollywood gang, and so I would sit in a room when I was eight, nine, ten, eleven, and listen to these hotshots who kept each other laughing hysterically in the course of an evening. No audience knew who they were, but everyone heard their jokes on their favorite shows. I thought, "That's really interesting—it's Jack Benny making people laugh, but it's Harry So-and-so who's his voice." The proof of that theorem now is that it's Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David, who are richer than the characters they invented. I remember in the *SNL* years, walking up Broadway with Alan Zweibel, a writer for *SNL*. He said, "There's Larry, I'll introduce you." Larry's standing on the street corner looking slightly lost, and we talked for a few minutes. I said to myself, the guy knows how to write a joke, but he's so off-center that he's going to die on this street corner. Two billion dollars later...

Let's talk about *The Graduate*. There's this persistent rumor that Calder Willingham, who supposedly wrote the screenplay with you, in fact...

I never met Willingham. I long admired him. I loved certain things that he wrote. Mainly, for instance, *End as a Man*, which was a book and a very interesting play and then a really interesting movie. He wrote a few books, including a gothic novel that I loved. Anyway, I was sort of dopey because it never occurred to me to ask, nor did anyone tell me, that there were scripts prior to mine for *The Graduate*. In fact, not one, but three! And I didn't know you could get credit for any damned thing you wanted to. I have been sued over the years by people for credit on things that they had nothing to do with, but at the time of *The Graduate* I had no idea. Willingham thought that he had something to do with this because we used the same dialogue from the same book, and the same characters. As a [Screen Actors] Guild member pointed out to me when the suit came up, "Well, you should have changed all the names."

You were both nominated for Best Screenplay. What would have happened if you'd won?

I was out West. He was in New York. I think he was staying away. He'd taken quite a bit of heat from Nichols and others for doing

"I was doing it for my own amusement, which I assumed would be the general amusement of an audience. I was trying to think a little slicker and a little smarter."

this. And he was not unknown for doing this. Altman also had a movie that Willingham claimed a credit on, and Altman fulminated against him. Frothing at the mouth when his name was brought up. But I mean, the guy was totally talented. That's what pissed me off.

Yeah, his credit is still on the DVD cover.

I ended up really hating him for a while, and then I got over that.

It would have been strange if you'd both won the Oscar.

I was not looking forward to that possibility. That was the only year I went to the show, which relieved me forever from having to do it again. I have never since been to an awards show, and I try to skip all the lifetime-achievement awards, for myself or anyone else.

Around the time of *The Graduate* you and Mel Brooks conceived and wrote the original *Get Smart*. Did you ever get any reaction from the CIA?

I don't know any CIA people, but I did know some FBI people and they were all rather amused by it. It was treading on ground that hadn't been trodden yet, in quite that way. What we were also trying to do, without being verbal about it, was do a show where a certain amount of it was for the adult audience and a certain amount of it was for kids. The kid part was obvious. The adult part is when I would slip in Washington jokes, bureaucracy jokes, and other elements. We weren't doing conventional television. Unfortunately, we had to have a laugh track. Those were the rules. But we were making little movies, with one camera and a cast that included new people every week.

You did another oddball TV comedy around that time, *Captain Nice*. *Captain Nice* was a little bit self-indulgent, I guess. But it had a wonderful cast.

It was pretty trippy.

It also had a political aspect. Or at least I tried, for instance by having the town run by Liam Dunn, as the mayor, who I always wanted to give a job to. It was interesting, but it never found an audience. Also, CBS, in their infinite wisdom, counterprogrammed it with a superhero of their own, *Mr. Terrific*, or whatever it was called. Which was really a shitty trick.

I don't recall that one.

Nobody does.

Dropping the political content into these shows, was that for your own amusement?

I was doing it for my own amusement, which I assumed would be the general amusement of an audience. I was trying to think a little slicker and a little smarter when I did that stuff. Like I would rewrite the openings and the closings of *Get Smart*. But, you know, I was only there for two seasons. There were three more after I left. I haven't seen a lot of the episodes.

“With certain things I’ve adapted, I didn’t give a shit about the original author. The Day of the Dolphins, I didn’t care. I thought it was a stupid book. I tried to move it in the direction of a less stupid film.”

You got your chance to be political with the *Catch-22* screenplay. Did you know Joseph Heller, by the way?
We weren’t longtime friends, but I had met him.

There’s got to be a lot of pressure adapting a beloved book.

Yes, there is. There’s the fear that you’re going to upset the author, whom you admire. With certain things I’ve adapted, I didn’t give a shit about the original author. *The Day of the Dolphin*, I didn’t care. I thought it was a stupid book. I tried to move it in the direction of a less stupid film. I won’t even comment on whether I, you, or anyone else thought that I was successful. The worst stuff I’ve done, there are people who will say that it’s their favorite film of all time. Even much lower than *The Day of the Dolphin*. But it’s tricky. You want to make the original author happy. I was once walking out of a theater that was showing *The Owl and the Pussycat*, and on the way up the aisle I saw Bill Manhoff, the guy who wrote the play. He was this really nice guy, well known in those days because he was a successful playwright. He was blind, so he didn’t see me. I thought, “He’s been sitting here listening to my version of his dialogue for an hour and a half. I gotta get out of here!” I don’t want to be anywhere near him! But yeah, I was worried about Heller. I wanted him to like it.

Did he?

He told me he thought it was a terrific movie. He could have been lying, and I would have accepted it. But then one day on the radio, on one of the left-wing stations, which are the only stations one can listen to, there was a gal interviewing Joe. She was desperately trying to get him to say that the film version was a piece of shit. He wouldn’t do it. It was really nice.

It’s still amazing.

I love it. I see it every now and then because it’s screened at various film festivals, and so forth. There are interesting lessons in there for me about how to do and how not to do certain things. I know I lost the audience.

You think so?

It’s too complicated. I know that kind of storytelling is un-American, that winding style of going back and forth. We do not breed filmmakers like Resnais, for all sorts of reasons. It’s interesting when we do it well, though. But the audiences don’t like it. I know where I made the mistakes in the film, and when Mike and I first screened it for an audience we saw it happen.

How so?

We saw the audience not knowing whether to laugh or to be serious or to cry. In the last third of the movie, when I usually start to cry, the audience is either looking confused or laughing. The things that I thought were there to make a person cry... like the scene with the family of the dying soldier visiting him, and later

Yossarian is convinced to take his place because he’s dead—it’s a real horror scene.

The Graduate and *Catch-22* are excellent examples of your ability to write to a character’s voice.

I can write to anyone. I can do what Faulkner did. Did you ever read *Furioso*? No, you’re too young. *Furioso* was a great little magazine. In it you would find Diane Arbus’s brother, Howard Nemerov. He was an intellectual comedy writer—among other things—for magazines. He would do things like successfully write a baseball game as reported by Faulkner. Why have I brought this up?

Writing for the voice.

Right. I read a lot of his stuff and I thought, isn’t that interesting. I’d already read all the American writers by the time I was 20, and I thought, God almighty, what a fabulous talent to be able to write in their voices. It’s intuitive. I’ll slip in a little story here—I once asked Mike [Nichols], how did Elaine know how to do all that stuff? She must have been really well-read. He said, “She never reads anything.” She intuited the sense of it. At the end of their set they would do a suggestion from the audience. Well, part of the trick, like with any improvisational group, was that by the time we did a few months of shows we had a hundred different free-floating ideas that could be quickly folded into a new matrix. So if somebody said, “Robert Frost in the men’s room,” you immediately remembered that a month before you’d done Emily Dickinson in a Chinese restaurant. You could push one into the other. But Mike said, “No, Elaine is not well-read. It’s that her instincts are absolutely accurate about everything.” That’s true about a lot of improvisational actors. It’s also true about a lot of comedy writers.

You know, I’m not going to ask you about *Heaven Can Wait*. I’d rather spend that time talking about a great, obscure TV show you wrote around then called *Quark*. For the readers, it was a kind of spoof of *Star Trek*. But it was so much weirder than that. I did the pilot and then went away.

Really? I always thought that Richard Benjamin sounded exactly like you speaking.

Yes, I can hear that. But, I mean, he sounds the same in *Catch-22*. He has what we used to call a “boulevardier” voice. There used to be actors that specialized in that, and only he is left. I wanted to have more to do with *Quark*, but they took a year after the pilot to decide to make the show. By that time I was up to my neck in *Heaven Can Wait*. I begged them to hire smart writers, and I begged the writers to read Stanislaw Lem. None of that was done, of course. I was totally inspired to do that show by a little movie called *Dark Star*. If you’ve never seen *Dark Star*, I suggest you do. It’s a great little science-fiction gem of a parody. But instead, *Quark* became a parody of *Star Trek*, which I was really unhappy about.

Dark Star was John Carpenter’s first film. It’s great. As someone who never cottoned to *Star Trek*, I got a huge kick out of *Quark*. They nailed it.

Well, I never liked *Star Trek* either, and I would have really skewered it if I’d had the chance.

I’ve always been interested in your relationship with Terry Southern. How did you end up writing the screenplay for *Candy*, instead of Southern, who wrote the book?

I haven’t a clue. Terry had enormous trouble in his lifetime delivering material. Ultimately he was bought out more than not. Because I was hot after *The Graduate*, everybody came and said, “Do this, no, do this.” And *Candy* came along and I thought, “Gee, this is probably a sinkhole into which we’ll all be pulled and drown. On the other hand, I get to live in Rome for a while, stay at my favorite hotel, the Excelsior, eat the best food in the world, hang out with some of the most beautiful women, and all that stuff.” So, I said OK—notwithstanding the fact that I would be writing just a few pages ahead of them. I can’t



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“I withdrew from Facebook a couple of months ago, because it was too much of a burden. I’m very sorry, my 2,000 new friends, but this is not everything I hoped it would be.”

remember how it happened, but they started shooting and I was like 14 pages ahead of them. So whether they had a previous script or not, I’m not sure. I suspect they must have, and Terry probably wrote it. None of them spoke English fluently. The director was French, the producers were German and Italian, and the production company was Italian. More of the actors than not were European, and some of them spoke no English at all. It was fascinating. *[laughs]*

Yeah, it was a wildly international cast. Elsa Martinelli, Charles Aznavour, Sugar Ray Robinson, Anita Pallenberg, Walter Matthau, Ringo.

Don’t forget Brando. A few years ago, the guy who owned the studio that made the film asked me if I would look at it and do some work on it, maybe redo the track and put new dialogue on there, to make it re-releasable. I looked at it and said, “I don’t know how to do it.” It was much, much worse than I even remembered.

I’d like to hear your thoughts, briefly, on three other films that you either wrote or starred in. First: *Taking Off*.

I loved *Taking Off*, I always have. I loved it in the years that Miloš [Forman] hated it. He hated it because it got such a bad reception here. It was huge in Europe. I was a movie star in France the year it came out. *[laughs]* The only movie that beat it in business was *Jaws*. It was incredible. It’s a monster cult film here. I saw a relatively new print of it a few months ago. They played it at the Arrow in LA, and it was really nice to look at.

What’s Up, Doc?

What’s Up, Doc? is the only movie that I wasn’t present for. I think it’s wonderful, and I love what Peter [Bogdanovich] did with it, and I always have.

I think it’s one of the funniest movies ever made, and I’m not exactly a Streisand fan.

It does rattle along. It’s got a lot of really good stuff in it, good set pieces. I wasn’t in San Francisco when they filmed it, and I’ve always regretted it.

The Man Who Fell to Earth.

Never quite understood the script. Still don’t. I like some of it enormously. It’s got a great look—Nicolas [Roeg] is a fabulous shooter. And of course it’s a set-up for David [Bowie]. What can I tell you? In what other film would a director have allowed me to blow a spit bubble? Not just allowed, but encouraged?

I like your character. Aggressive in a strange way.

I also like that he was gay, with no reference to it at all. Nothing physical, nothing verbal. It was just there.

How was Bowie to work with?

Perfect. Totally easy. What I really liked, if I recall this correctly, was that he arrived in Santa Fe in his limo, driven by his guy, with nothing but two steamer trunks full of books.

So, how did you become associated with *Saturday Night Live*?

I knew Lorne, but kind of in passing. He’d always been a big fan of *The Graduate* and of Nichols. He or someone on his staff called me. Later, *Time* magazine wrote, in a piece about the show, “The turning point came when well-known people like so-and-so and Buck Henry crawled to NBC to beg to be on it.” Which, of course, is total bullshit. At that time, very few of us who hosted the show had actually even seen it. But earlier in the week that they called me, I had been down to somebody’s house for a party with lots of young Hollywood folks, and suddenly it all stopped at 11:30 to watch the show. I was aghast. So I saw it and thought, “Yeah, of course I’ll do that, it looks like fun.”

You always looked like you were having a blast.

I was. And I could do it without a rehearsal, because I’m a sight reader. I can do Shakespeare sight reading. That’s really a weird boast, but it’s true.

Sight reading. You mean from cards.

Yeah. I’m not saying I reach Ralph Richardson’s level, but I can do it without stumbling around. And I know how to fake it. So, really, all of it was fun. Rehearsing was fun. Playing it was fun. And they ran my kind of hours, because I’m a very, very late getter-upper, like Lorne. So I had nothing but a good time on the two episodes I would do a year.

Until recently you held the record for most times hosting SNL. Some people thought that you were actually a cast member.

A lot of people did.

I recently watched the infamous 1977 Mardi Gras show that you hosted, the only live remote they ever attempted.

I haven’t seen that since we did it. Jane [Curtin] and I were sitting up on that platform, with Herb Sargent handing us notes about things to say. And the parade that we were supposed to be commenting on never got there. It was freeform and total chaos.

Are you interested enough in the new version to host?

I haven’t watched in a long time, but I always thought I would like to do the news. Since I’ve been doing it all my life, from *That Was the Week That Was* on. And all of Herb Sargent’s specials, which were news parodies. I’m saying that not expecting or hoping that anyone will call me about it. They won’t and they shouldn’t.

Someone might start a Facebook campaign for you.

I withdrew from Facebook a couple of months ago, because it was too much of a burden. I’m very sorry, my 2,000 new friends, but this is not everything I hoped it would be.

Are you a fan of new American film comedy, like Judd Apatow’s movies?

No, I’m not. But then, my instinct as an audience is not for comedy. The melodramas and the weird stuff are much more interesting to me. I’d rather wait for David Lynch. So, no, I don’t like the new stuff. I understand why people do, and I understand why they get big audiences. But the stuff is so dirty. Dirty without... without... what’s the word I’m looking for?

Anything behind it?

There’s no sublime in it at all. That last one that Seth Rogen is in, which starts with a comic riff on his girlfriend taking a shit. I’m out of the theater in my head at that point. People say to me, “Grow up, these are different times.” Now, I can do shit jokes with the best of them, but it’s too easy. It doesn’t accumulate. It doesn’t lead to anything.

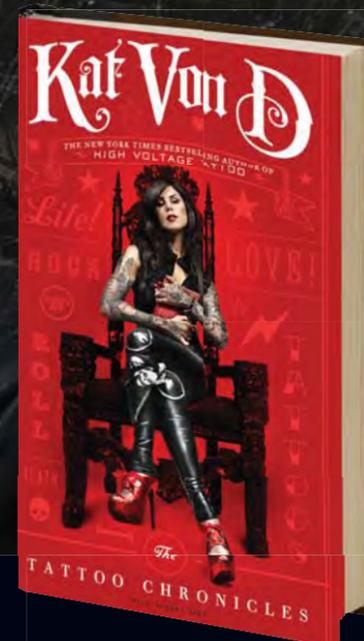
Have you seen anything lately that made you happy?

In terms of film? I haven’t been to a movie in a long time. When I get back to New York, which I just did, I tend to have an orgy of play-going. I’ve done a lot of that in the past few weeks. Tonight, in fact, I’ll be at Shakespeare in the Park, trying once again to figure out what the hell *The Winter’s Tale* is all about. ■

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Fred Perry top, Rachel Antonoff skirt, Wolford socks, Marais shoes, Ray-Ban glasses, Levi's shirt and jeans, Adidas shoes

I love pets, pasta, shoes, and glasses.

I love pets and pasta, and I wear shoes and glasses.

I love pets because they're not phony. They're not full of shit, nor are they apologetic, pathetic pussies. They might feel embarrassed on occasion, but they're never self-conscious. If they have a huge mangy beard, or a hairless tail, or bad breath, they own it. If they get nervous, they'll just take a shit, or pee, or puke. And then feel better. They're cool like that.

I love pet owners because they are constantly massaging and scratching their pets, whispering sweet nothings into their ears—even if they don't have any ears (do snakes have ears?).

I just googled it. Snakes do not have ears, but they feel vibrations.

Pet owners are so free with their love toward their animals. Humans can't deal with that kind of adoration. It can be annoying, and suffocating. (People who adore too much can turn into John Hinckley Jr.) Animals, on the other hand, have an endless capacity to be emotionally smothered, especially if you feed them and let them run around and smell stuff.

Fred Perry top, Rachel Antonoff skirt, Wolford socks, Swedish Hasbeens boots, Paul Smith for Oliver Peoples glasses, Village shirt and accessories, Levi's shorts, American Apparel socks, Yohji Yamamoto for Dr. Martens boots



I love homemade pasta. I'm not a latchkey kid, stoner, or white-trash loser, so I hate the stuff out of a jar. I love that pasta is doughy and easy to digest. I rarely get the shits from a bowl of quality pasta. Plus, it's visually stimulating—this stuff comes in all shapes and sizes. I like colors, and depending on the sauce and what's mixed into the dough (e.g., beets), pasta can be all kinds of colors.

I like to eat pasta, and then pray, and then love. (That was an *Eat Pray Love* joke.)

I love glasses because I have to. When I was eight years old I wished for glasses, and then my wish came true. And now I'm a four-eyed fuck with astigmatism and a case of dry eye. So I'm always looking for a new pair of specs (that's what the cool kids and the yuppie fucks call glasses).

I love shoes because though they're necessary (as I'm not a barefoot tribal lady living in the Amazon), they feel like the earrings of an outfit. They are decorations on our hooves. They draw our suitor's eyes from the top of the body all the way down to the bottom (not the butt, the feet). And hopefully, your shoes will give your suitor the idea to massage your feet. That's the best, right? A nice foot massage! ■





Fred Perry top, Rachel Antonoff skirt, Wolford socks, Marais shoes, Ray-Ban glasses, Altamont shirt and pants, Eriks socks, Converse shoes



Fred Perry top, Rachel Antonoff skirt, Wolford socks, Vans shoes, Ray-Ban glasses, Topman shirt, Levi's jeans, Vintage shoes, belt, and glasses



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Whenever anyone talks about designer drugs these days it's all "k-holes" this and "depleted serotonin levels for the rest of your life" that, as if the part where they turn house parties into a weekend-long Siberian sex rite didn't count for shit.



Whoa, what are those, Tomie dePaola juggler pants? Do those even exist? This kid is either the Temple Grandin of getting fagbashed or the most effective jock-baiter since Neil Hamburger did his Red Hot Chili Peppers set at the University of Oklahoma.



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Girls who think guys will talk to them if they dress up like video game characters created by guys who are too scared to talk to girls is an even vicious cycle than poverty.



Speaking of vicious cycles, you could stage a third-grade production of Rapunzel with the hairs these two pull out of their assholes in the shower.

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While moms think a pair of checkered Vans and mismatched socks is all it takes to retain their "kooky" cred, the real lifers are too focused on finding shoes that go with Betsey Johnson lounge troll to even care.



Seeing European tramps like Bruno S. (R.I.P.) hold their shit together and retain a touch of class always makes me wonder how often there but for the grace of a scarf and hat go our bums.



Have you ever noticed how often girls with big areolas tend to be more or less completely out of their fucking minds?



That's fair, I can't even touch a joint anymore without my stoned mind conjuring an army of cops telling me my parents died, meanwhile this guy gets to walk around looking so zenned out it's like the Sugar Crisp Bear had a kid with a sleepy baby.



Don't tell me New York is over when there are still hairdressing Sikh vogue artists *destroying* the Bowery on their way home from work. Please.



As Ally Sheedy proved nearly a quarter of a century ago, the easiest way to make guys lose their shit is to not have yours together.

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Thanks for the photo, but not sure what exactly you expect us to say here. Way to die of something? Artificial resuscitation is so last season? Help us out here.



Watching screamo and deviantART kids move into their preppy nautical phase must be what it felt like when Indians started wearing shit like top hats and suit jackets.



Something tells me I would be physically incapable of agreeing with anything that comes out of this guy's post-steampunk mouth. He could be reading my mom's homemade brownie recipe aloud and I'd still be like, "Fuck that. NO."



I know we're living in hybrid moments and cultural boundaries are permanently blurred and the Future and everything, but I still think you might have gotten "death rock" a little mixed up with "being a four-year-old girl."

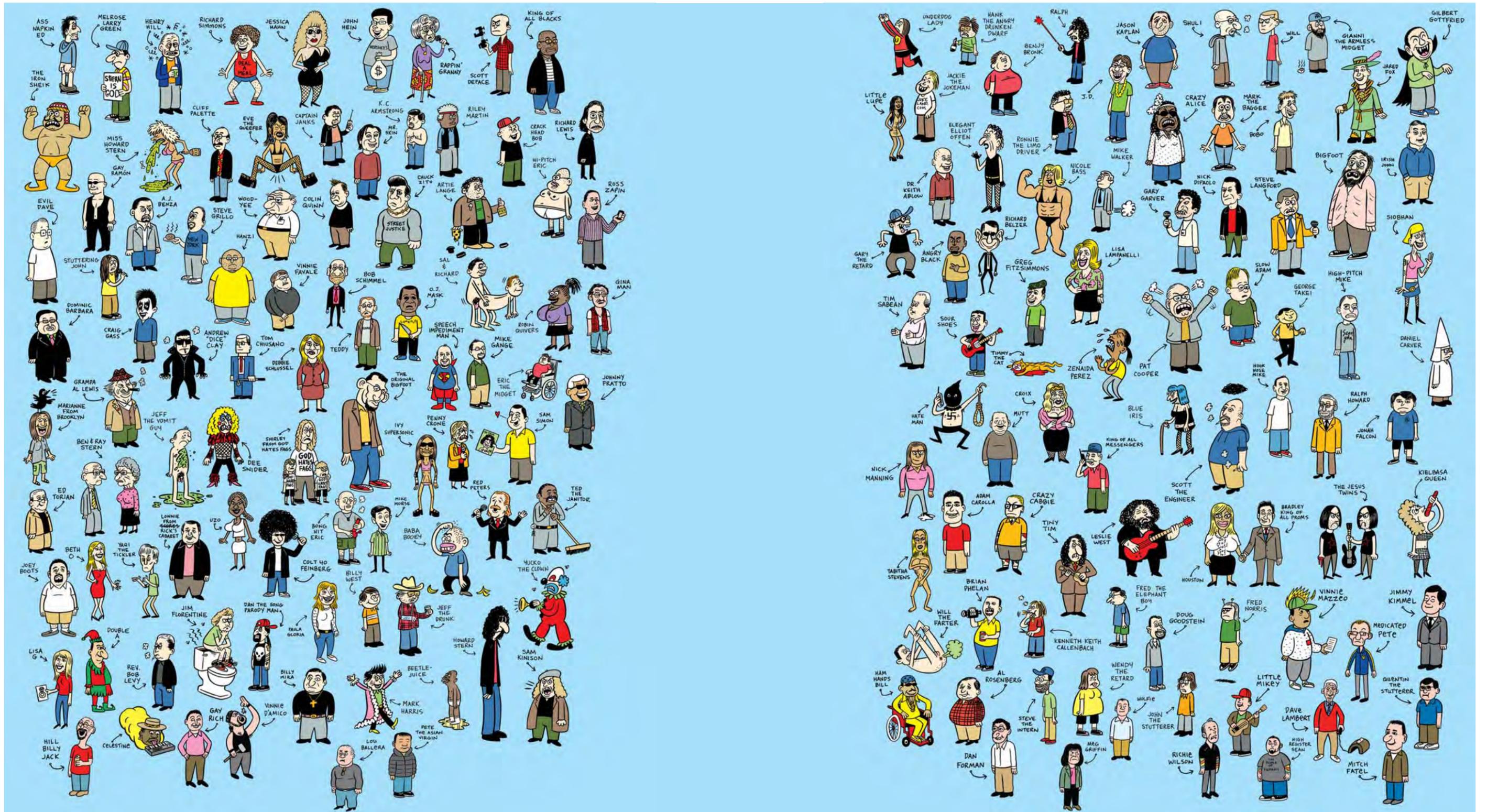


Oh good, the dry heaves I ordered just got here.



Johnny Ryan's Wacky Pack of Wack Packers

Johnny Ryan is a Howard Stern Show superfan. He's followed the shock jock since 1990, back when Stern's Saturday-night TV show was included in his family's cable package. Every couple of years he updates an ongoing poster project that features Stern and his band of Wack Packers. Here's his take on who's who from the bizarre and fascinating world Stern created more than 20 years ago. Go to viceland.com for detailed commentary and annotations.





Bring It on Home

The Southern Boys Behind *Eastbound & Down* Send Kenny Powers's Ass to Mexico

BY HUNTER STEPHENSON
PHOTOS BY RICHARD KERN

The morning after Richard Kern and I arrived in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the call came in from the publicist at HBO. “We’ll need to leave soon. Let’s meet at the La Concha Hotel. It’s roughly an hour’s drive to the set. The guys are shooting scenes with Kenny at the mansion.” Further details were not provided, yet the vague specificity of “the mansion” brought about as many thoughts as the hills around us, stacked up and against a skyline like exotic greenery in a Ziploc bag. Before the trek, there was a breakfast of dry cornflakes and grapes in a dirty bowl and a quick ocean swim that allowed me the time to imagine what was in store. Up till then, the whereabouts of America’s very own Kenny Powers, last seen driving a black Denali on a North Carolina interstate on the verge of tears, had been restricted to tantalizing details released online. The gist was that he’d spend the second season of *Eastbound & Down* in Mexico. (For budgetary reasons, and possibly concerns involving Mexico’s preoccupation with murder, Puerto Rico was chosen as a substitute shooting location.) The personal confirmation that Kenny Powers was indeed roaming this foreign land, sweating balls, boozing and drugging, a big white fish on a hard foreign street, was like a finger of dip against my mind’s bottom lip. Soon enough, we departed the city. The day was growing noticeably hotter. As we headed south in our caravan, the highway took us past sandblast-beige condos and houses of bleached tropic color layered into the hillside like power boxes, a giant hornet’s nest in a tree next to the road, and a conjoined baseball academy and high school. I tried to fight off unbidden mental images of Kenny, inflated with gringo entitlement and stretched out in a palatial mansion, sunburned dink in hand, stroking it to Bang Bros on an affluent stranger’s dime. As we came around a bend and into the coastal city of Humacao, I saw the first of three flimsy production signs, pops of bright yellow against the foliage, that read “EBD —>.” Our van was soon stopped by a security guard in sunglasses, who cleared us through, and we ventured on, deeper into Palmas del Mar—one of the largest upscale beach resorts in the Caribbean, with its own school, golf course, and equestrian club. We finally parked on a private road, midway up a steep hill capped with white production tents and dotted with equipment and crew members who were scarfing breakfast tacos. Directly before us was the mansion. A formidable job the color of mustard, it conjured the vaguely complicit oceanside men’s shelters in *Weekend at Bernie’s* and *Blow*. An assistant to one of the producers later shared with me the info that it was on the market for \$5.5 million. “Not that they’ll get that,” she added, “the economy being so fucked.”

When I last met up with K-fucking-P two years ago, I simply parked next to a house in a suburb of Wilmington, North Carolina, and walked around to a “b-b-q” in the backyard. Since then, a lot of people around the world have started to give a shit about no one giving shit about Kenny Powers. Kern and I entered the manse super-quietly by way of a staircase that led from the garage to a grand foyer filled with lighting gear and the pregnant silence of filming in session. Sunlight poured in from windows overlooking an outdoor terrace and an unobstructed, almost cleansing view of an infinity

pool, and then the sea, and then the white line of the horizon. At that moment, two men on the terrace were engaged in a samurai-sword fight. It’s the freaking last thing I expected to see. Crew members in headsets and shorts, both outside and inches away from me, observed the combat with a professional intentness. I began to wonder whether the previous world of *Eastbound & Down*, informed by and set in the American South, hadn’t come untethered and floated into an 80s action VHS, or into Michael Bay’s wake-up exercise regimen. Across the foyer, next to a bar and pool table, I spotted Danny McBride. KP himself. He was surveying the action, goatee pulled to a no-nonsense angle, one arm on a production chair, and dressed in his “casual outing” Kenny get-up. These appeared to be the same faded blue jeans, dry-sweat athletic gear, and busted white sneakers from last season. (He would later confirm this: “I’m wearing the same tennis shoes I was wearing two years ago! We want that authenticity.”) The curly mullet was shining just so. Kenny Powers’s style had not acclimated to his new environment.

One of the swordsmen outside grunted, and I recognized him as actor Michael Peña, who previously costarred as a corrupt mall pig with a pimp lisp in Jody Hill’s sophomore feature, *Observe and Report*. Peña was dueling shirtless. His brown, well-fed belly and soul patch amusingly countered the determination of his game face. Not unlike his character in *Observe and Report*, Peña was blinking rapidly in a way that suggested his eyelids were able to turn his brain on and off. Peña’s adversary was a well-kempt Korean man dressed in a traditional black sensei robe. After a few takes, a man in dark shades smoking a cigarette walked over from a far corner of the terrace and yelled, “OK. Let’s keep the energy going!” It was Jody Hill, the 33-year-old co-creator/writer/director of *Eastbound*. Hill, who is more than six feet tall and a third-degree black belt, later informed me that the Korean man was none other than actor and tae kwon do master Simon Rhee. He was appearing today in a bit part. Or, in Hill’s words, “Dude, the guy from *Best of the Best*! With the eye patch!” Hill’s eyes, an aggressive glacial blue, popped wide with adolescent sincerity as he shared this. Stoked. Therein was a proud warpath, from an adolescence spent in the glow of quality junk franchises like *Best of the Best* and *American Ninja* to this breezy nod, this reality, being consecrated here.

Many of the scenes scheduled that day covered the formal introduction of Kenny Powers to a pivotal character in season 2, a young and incredibly rich man named Sebastian Cisneros (played by Peña), who is the owner of both the manse and a Mexican ball club called the Charros. After interrupting Sebastian’s bout of swordfighting with his instructor (“I fly him in from Tokyo, man. Straight from the tap!” Sebastian bragged), he and Kenny have an impromptu business meeting on the patio table next to the pool. The table sat adjacent to a dizzying 60-foot drop, and one could faintly hear the ocean crashing on the jagged rocks below. I walked nearer to the table, where McBride and Peña, now clad in a silky blue robe decorated with Asiatic gold dragons, were seated. Hill joined them for a brief run-

When Kenny expressed his approval of the digs, saying, “I’m rich also,” Sebastian nodded his head with instinctive bite and quickly added, “In spirit.”

through of the scene, planting himself on the patio tile in front of the table, legs stretching out from dark gray cargo shorts. Hill remained on the ground to direct once the camera was rolling. The three guys were in their own triangular world for the reading, but when “Action!” was called, it didn’t take long for McBride to instigate bursts of improv. Peña, though shaky and snagged in a stutter at first, was up to the challenge.

For example, when Kenny expressed his approval of the digs, saying, “I’m rich also,” Sebastian nodded his head with instinctive bite and quickly added, “In spirit.” The Spanish lisp Peña uses often caused “Kenny” to come out like “Candy.” For certain lines, however, Hill was vocal about what he wanted. After Kenny patronizingly joked, “How much does a Mexican ball team cost anyway, \$10 and a burrito?” Peña barely got out an answer before Hill advised him to say the next line slowly, emphasizing each word: “That’s racism! I love racism, bro!” On a subsequent take, Hill laconically broke down another line: “I want fame. Because I want everybody to know me and accept me.” During these takes on the patio, Sebastian and Kenny became aware that they shared a bond: a fatherless existence. “I’m an orphan, too,” Kenny confided to Sebastian. “All [my dad] left was a batch of hepatitis on the toilet seat.” Struggles with his past are rumored to be a major theme for Kenny this season. Later I asked Peña about his character’s orphanhood, which explains the source of his wealth. “Sebastian’s not soft,” Peña told me. “He’s just a spoiled rich dude who inherited a baseball team. And he wants to be famous and doesn’t want to work to get it. Both of his parents died in a plane crash. Well, his mom... I mean, after three days, that’s just a lot of time, you know? He had to pull the plug. Seventy-two hours, man! I don’t know if he feels good about it now or not, but *whatever*. I wouldn’t say he’s evil though. The thing about Jody’s characters, they are totally right in their perspective.”

Shooting ceased twice on the patio, partially due to the heat. On both occasions, a crew member quickly switched out the melting umbrella cocktails in front of Kenny and Sebastian with frostier replicas. Makeup artists swooped in to retouch McBride’s brow and Peña’s chest, where the actor sports a tattoo from his days as a drummer in the band Nico Vega (“I love *Vice*! You did a story on my band!” Peña shouted, half in character, after we were introduced). By and by, I reached the conclusion that it was hot as fucking shit. I was wearing black jeans. Beneath my sunglasses, sweat flooded down into my beard. McBride walked over from the table to greet Kern and me, seemingly getting a tidy kick out of our pathetic appearances. “Welcome to the PR, brothers,” he said, offering a sturdy handshake. Hill, following Danny inside, stopped to chat. “This season is a lot more ambitious than the last season,” he told me, “with the weather and all the locations. But [those shots] looked funny.” Touches of gray expanded in the sky, and talk of

approaching rain was spreading among the crew, many of whom sported black t-shirts from recent Hollywood productions like *The Losers* and *The Rum Diary*. Fickle weather explained the noticeably accelerated pace onset. I hung around on the patio next to a local ESL crew guy who looked like a roadie for Cypress Hill circa *Temples of Boom*. As I soaked up the view, he asked me if I was here when they shot the scene where “that guy got shot. Kenny poured liquor all over his fucking leg in the bathtub! There were beer bottles everywhere!” Nope, I said, can’t say I was. Though it certainly set me to wondering. His broad-set pal, an electrician, laughed big and asked, “What about the fucking donkey Kenny bought and painted like a zebra?” No, missed that too. He offered to email me pictures, and then B-Real’s roadie randomly butted in with, “You better learn Spanish in the years to come, my friend. Or they throw you off this cliff, feed you to the dogs.” He looked at me, and then added, “This house is owned by capitalism. You know?”

Miles away from their LA production office (and hometowns in North Carolina and Virginia, respectively) Jody Hill and Danny McBride nevertheless managed to surround themselves here in Puerto Rico with a roundtable of coworkers, ranging from sound guys to the editor and production designer, all of whom were pals and fellow alumni from the North Carolina School of the Arts. Also present were the two other core members of what has been loosely referred to online as the North Carolina Posse: head writer Shawn “The Machine” Harwell and *Eastbound*’s codirector/producer David Gordon Green (*Pineapple Express*). To understand this seemingly sui generis collective of scrappy Southern outsiders-turned-industry-players and what is fast becoming the most exciting, raucous talent pool since the Miramax-backed auteurs of the 90s, we need to look back a decade, to Green’s tobacco-country indie dramas *George Washington* (2000) and, especially, *All the Real Girls* (2003). *Girls* marked the first credited acting performance of McBride, who was in a class below Green at NCSA. The comedic potential in unleashing McBride’s id loose in Mexico for *Eastbound 2* can be first gleaned minutes into *Girls*, when his character, a disarming, perceptive third wheel named Bust-Ass, chats with a table of down-on-luck Carolina buddies at a local diner. “I’m not Spanish,” said Bust-Ass, “I’ve been to school, that’s about it, dude. I’m not supposed to know all the words in the dictionary from it. I know that *albondiga* is meatball soup.” Written out, the line’s goofy stubbornness and small-minded complacency is amusing enough, a Southern stereotype to attract if not invite a Yankee critic’s eyeroll. On screen, the natural charm and afterthought masculinity in McBride’s cadence combined with his economy of words really gets your attention. There’s a wit and profundity skimmed off Bust-Ass’s mug of poor grammar. Laughed with or laughed at, like McBride’s homegrown characters, the South will still be standing.

I asked Harwell to describe his college days with McBride and various members of the ambitious collective: “I think I met Danny at a really lame orientation thing on the first day [at NCSA], where we were put in a small group. An older, very openly gay dance student made us spell our names in the air by making the shapes of the letters with our asses. If that makes sense. It was like, ‘Welcome to art school!’—you know? There were a lot of older students in the film program, but Jody, Danny, myself, and a handful of others were all straight out of high school, and I think that added a sort of unspoken comfort level among us. It did for me at least. Within our film class there was definitely an aura around Danny, but it was as a director and writer instead of as an actor. David Green had the same vibe around him. Ben Best and Craig Zobel, too. You just knew at the end of the year, when we all watched





each other's student films, that those four guys were going to have made the best. But I had no clue Danny could act until I saw *All the Real Girls*. And Jody, too—he wasn't even a directing major when he graduated. He was a good writer, and in particular I remember Jody being the one who was really good at pitching ideas, making people excited about them. *The Foot Fist Way* blew me away when I saw it."

Released two years after its 2006 premiere at Sundance by a then-fledgling and now-defunct Paramount Vantage, *The Foot Fist Way* grossed under \$40,000 domestically on its opening weekend (less than its micro \$79,000 budget. The film was partially funded by Hill's savings from commercial work in LA, with added help from his family). However, by then Will Ferrell and Adam McKay, whose company Gary Sanchez Productions secured the film's marketing and distribution, were claiming to anyone who would listen to them to have seen it no less than dozens of times each. To them, it was a revelation; black-comedy gold seeping from an untapped frontier worthy of Daniel Plainview. Hill's homegrown R-rated indie arrived just as Ferrell's exploration of his Carolina roots (both of his parents are natives) and red state-lunacy were hitting top gear with 2006's *Talledega Nights*, his tale of an entitled Nascar driver from NC (partly shot in Charlotte, only miles from locations used in Hill's film). Looking back, if one could ignore the creative isolation and frustration that fueled *Foot Fist* and the film's anticlimactic release, the timing seemed serendipitous of the zeitgeist. As a pudgy instructor at a strip-mall tae kwon do academy, McBride (still a total unknown) displayed a full range of comedy chops that playfully ebbed method and matched any male comedy star, of that year or today. On the surface, McBride's character of Fred Simmons belonged to the "man-children" who populated comedy movies in the aughts; the difference was that Simmons's arrested development wasn't voluntary or a badge of privilege. His entire life was dedicated to separating himself from the boys by surrounding himself with them, spouting a martial-arts dogma free of Eastern philosophy and full of Americanized bullshit. What should have felt like a one-note character sketch on *SNL* was instead, thanks to the writing (by McBride, Hill, and Ben Best) and Hill's eye, at moments bizarre and touching. By the end, it had mastered and dismissed Hollywood's man-child trend.

When I caught up with McBride later on set, he emphasized the importance of maintaining and expanding the NCSA ethos and team. "I think we all push each other to fucking be rebellious," he told me. "I think if we were all on our own, well, we'd each try to do what we could. But we're in this together and it definitely feeds the fire for us to say, 'Fuck the man.' To just push things. We're not interested in a lot of the movies that are out there, so we're making them ourselves." McBride, Hill, and Green all view the first season of *Eastbound & Down* as a three-hour movie, and Hill said this can be applied more so to season 2, given the scope, the locations, and the fact that they shot on 35 mm. On set, they frequently referred to it in casual conversation as "the movie." McBride rattled off a clip of sequels they looked to for inspiration, including *Lethal Weapon 2* (character growth, heavier action) and *The Empire Strikes Back* (darker, unfamiliar terrain, daddy issues). And then there's the absolute antithesis of what they were hoping to accomplish: *Revenge of the Nerds II: Nerds in Paradise*. Really, I asked, refusing to mask a fondness for it? "Yep, I'm shitting on it," said McBride. "Everyone loved the burping contest with Booger in the first one, right? So now there's a goddamn Asian who can burp a full minute. We wanted to avoid that type of shit. We wanted to invent a new world with new characters." For most of our visit, Harwell is said to be cooped up in a trailer polishing the script for the top-secret finale. This may or may not explain his hyperbole-free choice of reference

McBride told me, "We're in this together and it definitely feeds the fire for us to say, 'Fuck the man.' To just push things."

when discussing what the production had been like. "This season is completely night and day from Wilmington," he said. "I kind of feel like we [are on] *Apocalypse Now*. Everything just seems more difficult. Only having five days to shoot 30 pages is a lot more doable when there aren't animals and baseball teams and a stadium full of extras who don't speak English as their primary language." Adding to the pressure, McBride said the budget for this season was almost exactly the same as the first, even though it's one "chapter," or episode, longer, making for seven total. When I asked why it was originally announced that there would be eight episodes, he sighed and said that was the plan, but the budget wasn't there. They had to go back to rework the scripts, only to learn shortly after arriving in Puerto Rico that HBO had agreed to pony up for an eighth. "We said fuck it, and went with seven," said McBride. "It's fun, but we are running and gunning like this is an independent film. Last year, our locations were a school, a bar, and a few houses. But every single day we're here, we're in mansions, or the barrio, or a baseball field. Plus we're getting *pissed* on with rain every single day. It makes you feel like you're in the fucking trenches. You gotta hustle."

For the first part of our visit, Green was nowhere to be found. I finally ran into him as he was descending a staircase from the mansion's second floor. Judging by his hair, he had just finished a nap upstairs. "The temptation for me this season was to rough it up," he explained. "But honestly, it's just been insane. Last time we'd go jump in the ocean boogie-boarding at sunset, and now, literally before we've hit the bars, we're falling asleep in the elevator. We're lugging equipment up massive hills that you can't bring trucks up. I think it's important for the local crew to see our work ethic, to see that we're creating from a real and soulful place. That helps them go the extra mile." On the Wilmington set in 2008, I was surprised to encounter Green on the set and not Hill, who had hit an unfortunate overlap doing postproduction on *Observe and Report* for Warner Bros. This time, Green is again directing three chapters while Hill has four, including the premiere and the finale. "It's crazy for the crew, because they have Jody and me coming at them with full energy 15 hours a day," Green said. "There are plenty of guys out there who direct and who want to be the sole creator and the *artiste*, and that's fine. A lot of my idols are like that. But to me, this is perfect. It's almost the opposite of last season, where Jody was finishing *Observe*. Now I'm here while special-effects work is being finished on *Your Highness*." The film Green is referring to, due for release in April, is financially the riskiest of his career, and easily the weirdest and grossest: a hard-R \$50 million fantasy-comedy shot in Northern Ireland, *Your Highness* is inspired by sword-and-stoner epics like *Krull* and *Yor, the Hunter From the Future*. Continuing his graduation to lead roles, McBride stars as a wizard/weed-toking prince who is joined by a skeleton crew that includes Natalie Portman, James Franco, and based on what I saw during a set visit last year, a cracked-out animatronic bird. Compared to my time on his other productions, in Puerto Rico Green seemed especially at ease, talking and joking about a range of topics whether he was behind the camera or not. He was aware

“Where *Eastbound* is different is that it’s a comedy but it has dramatic gravity,” Green told me. “I personally don’t look at it as a broader social analysis.”

of a vocal following online that wishes/demands to see him return to his roots in drama. He said, without any concern, that he plans to, and then we moved on to his gestating remake of *Suspiria* that he hoped would be shot in Europe shortly and “just take the original’s concept, using real ballet dancers, and make visual fireworks.” The next evening, his shift complete, Green spryly walked into the mansion’s main room and announced to no one in particular, “I’m ready to get fucked up!” He wandered over and surveyed an elegant liquor cabinet belonging to the mansion’s absent owner (an oily doppelganger for Panama Jack) and considered raiding it. Instead, he settled on having his assistant fetch a case of prop Dos Equis. (The assistant was tasked with keeping up with every bottle cap. The empties, it was said, would be refilled with water and used the next day.)

McBride’s work on that given evening was far from over, but he seconded the emotion. “When you pound that cold beer at the end of the day here,” he said, “you feel like you’ve earned it, for sure. When I first got to Puerto Rico, though, I had to shave off a few pounds. I packed them on filming [*Your Highness*] in Belfast. Eating all those meats and potatoes and drinking all that Guinness. I was sweating my face off,” he said. “But I’m still maintaining my comedy fat.”

Jody Hill asked, “Mind if I smoke?” as he took a Bic decorated with an American flag to a Marlboro Light. We were sitting outside at a dining table with a blurry glass top. Afternoon drizzle gleeted the surface of the infinity pool and added a weak shine to everything. Clad in a black t-shirt (the *New York Times* would better elaborate on the brand and cotton blend) and with a wing of dirty-blond bangs pushed back over his ear, Hill had the build and reserved angst of a pro skater in the 90s. That is to say, he didn’t look like the funniest guy in the room. Last winter, when Quentin Tarantino unexpectedly endorsed *Observe and Report* as one of his favorite films of 2009, he explained in one interview, “That’s a real movie,” and said of Seth Rogen’s bipolar Ronnie Barnhardt, “That’s fucking Travis Bickle.” Now, Hill isn’t anywhere near the first or hundredth independent-minded director to evoke Martin Scorsese’s and Paul Schrader’s *Taxi Driver*. He is, however, representative of a new wave of filmmakers from the South, and his comedies give off a punk energy authentic to the region, down to the settings and language, not unlike early Scorsese and his northeastern Italians. What makes Hill’s comedies unique is how he indulges his male characters—their convoluted dreams and goals so affected by movie-arc structures that they are measured in heroic climaxes and resilient comebacks. Consistently as a writer/director, he laughs at and bullies his characters with the tough love of a mean-ass dad, and then arguably sides with their loner-bred dedication and self-reliance all the same. The Hollywood comedies of the last decade tended to avoid making light of or even acknowledging working-class anxieties and depression in favor of horny postgrad aimlessness and blog-friendly

pop-culture references. And then there’s *SNL*’s neverending fixation on stuffy, awkward dinner parties. Hill’s three works target the mundanity of reality and the darkest spectrum of the modern male experience. His two characters played by McBride and one by Rogen—a former pro-athlete, an instructor, a mall cop—are seen at their most vulnerable, teetering on nervous breakdowns and fits of sadness, the shittiest sadness imaginable, on beds, albeit ones befitting a child or a dumb, slutty wife. Ask Hill if he’s seen a funny movie lately, and I’ve found he’ll find a way to say, “Not really,” and tend to switch the conversation to music. During our interview for this article, he said he was surprised to learn that Jack White was a big fan of *Eastbound*. Directing a White Stripes video has long been a dream of his, he said, because their music speaks to the raw power and fun he aspires to achieve on film. Hill reverently speaks of rock ‘n’ roll (“Anything that gets my juices going, I love it.”) in a way that suggests to me that it rivals his passion for film. Whether it’s the Dwarves, Patto, or the Black Keys, rock informs Hill’s comedy, from the tasteful selections on his soundtracks to the escapist use of drugs by his characters. The deliberate, impatient style in which his works are cut is often accompanied by a wild charge of music. A chapter of *Eastbound* is free of fat like a great rock album. There is no room for dragging dialogue, exposition, elaborate set dressing, or distractions in the frame. Each scene is in tune with the power of McBride’s facial expressions, which can be memorable, almost quotable like the stupid-smart lines uttered by Kenny.

“Where *Eastbound* is different is that it’s a comedy but it has dramatic gravity,” Green told me. “I personally don’t look at it as a broader social analysis, but subversive parallels can probably be made with Kenny to the state of the country. He’s identifiable, that’s why people want to watch him. He’s the guy down the street, but he can also be the creep looking back at you in the mirror.”

“I’ve never been to improv school,” said Hill. “I don’t go to improv nights. It’s not my thing. And I feel like that influence is everywhere now in comedy. And many of the improv programs, they like to place the joke first, rather than the character. That’s why I like working with a [here he made half-assed air quotes] serious actor like Michael Peña. He’s able to have full conversations as his character, he inhabits that character, and he can react on the spot to any situation that happens. I pay a lot of attention to casting. Another example of what I’m looking for is John Hawkes [who plays Kenny’s brother, Dustin]. Now, Dustin is based on a friend’s older brother who used to beat on us when I was younger.” Hill laughed. “He was the guy who always had the eight ball of coke. So Danny and I made up a backstory for Kenny’s brother, where he had the nickname ‘D-Ball’ in high school and he liked to party. Danny and I like to provide a hard fact for each supporting character. Something that shines light. So Dustin has a pot tattoo on his shoulder. You may not see much of it, but it’s there, and all of us know it’s there.”

“There are times in my life where I’ve felt like I’m about to go crazy,” continued Hill. “I find myself seeping into a hole and looking for a way out. And it’s never like a movie. Eventually, you get over it, or something happens and changes your direction. Now, *The Foot Fist Way* and *Observe and Report* were about guys who basically go crazy, and there’s an element of that in season 1 of *Eastbound & Down*. Before [*The Foot Fist Way*], Danny and I had similar life experiences. He came back home [from LA] to teach school, I came back from LA hating the fucking place, and I ended up living at my parents’ house in Concord, North Carolina, and writing a screenplay. I drew from some of those moments for Kenny. But now, I’m past the weird breakups and the struggling to find work. In a way, season 2 is about Kenny’s quest





for enlightenment. Maybe that's where my head is at now. Last season we saw Kenny coping with being out of the spotlight, but this one's about filling a hole in his life. There's a shift from him living in the past to being forced to live in the present with responsibilities. And the way we like to teach Kenny lessons is to have him think he's learned the lesson that he's still learning. [Hill laughed here.] But the main thing..." Hill paused. "You won't really see it until the last episode. That's our big thing, that's where the true lesson is learned this season." Hill let out a sly grin that had me convinced that Kenny Powers is a dead man. Then I remembered that Hill had previously mentioned that a desired ending to season 3 is mapped out. I reconfirmed, just in case. "In terms of structure, we know where it all ends and where the next season would be set. Danny is the biggest fan of all of those old epics. The whole idea is that Kenny's a fallen hero and that his trajectory remains loosely based on the *Odyssey*."

Hill said that the first episode of season *dos* was the hardest thing he and McBride have written, including screenplays for feature films. McBride attributed the difficulty to the time that passed between seasons and to, yeah, the high expectations of fans. Joined by Harwell, the trio decamped to Big Bear Mountain in California last November, renting a "shitty cottage that we stocked with beer and whiskey. We'd write, then bullshit and talk music at night, and when we got bored we rented out a pontoon boat to go fishing." During the preceding months, they had agreed not to think about possible story lines and new characters. On the first night of the retreat, McBride said, they cracked the entire season, only to spend the remainder of their time tearing the blueprint apart. When they finally put the first episode's script to bed, the fucker had consumed three months—out of the total five they allotted to writing—and ten drafts. "The original idea for the season was always Mexico," said Hill. "But we said it with a smile. And then over those months spent writing, the setting changed a handful of times. Ultimately, we decided to do what TV shows never do. We followed our main character rather than have him stay put and do situational comedy." A ballsy move even by the standards of creative freedom permitted at HBO, they chose to forge ahead without the established characters of the first season, and minus the chemistry and comic timing brought by those cast members, actors (Hawkes, Katy Mixon, Andy Daly) whose profiles had risen in the many months between. In forcing themselves to largely leave behind April and Principal Cutler, McBride equated the drastic change to Kenny's estrangement from the characters at the season's start. "I'm sure some people will think it was a mistake to do that," added Harwell. "And others may think the season is one big joke at Mexico's expense. It's a lot dirtier. But Kenny saying Mexico sucks is not the same as us saying it does. In the end, hopefully people will appreciate us doing something different."

Tonally, Hill wants the new season to play like a mix between the original *The Bad News Bears* and *Amores Perros*. "At the same time, Kenny basically sees himself as Pale Rider," said Hill. "We discussed how he's watched all of the Clint Eastwood movies." Hill laughed. "And that's also, um, how we're covering up for Mexico shit we don't know much about." While Hill promised that Kenny will be packing a gun and that cocaine will remain his drug of choice, he said that they purposely chose not to address the macabre cartel violence that has swept Juarez and wafted up and over the border. "Who knows how that shit is going to play out?" said Hill. Kenny will, however, branch out into the sport of cock fighting. And what about the subject of illegal immigration? McBride told me, "You know, back at home, Kenny probably agreed with putting a wall up around

Hill was quick to mention another equally pertinent transformation: "He also goes from being a tit man with April in season 1, to an ass man in season 2. That's a big crisis for him."

the entire country. But I think he comes to find that Mexico is pretty similar to the South." Hill was quick to mention another equally pertinent transformation: "He also goes from being a tit man with April in season 1, to an ass man in season 2. That's a big crisis for him." Cushioning the ass revelation is a new love interest named Vida, played by Ana de la Reguera, who is an A-list actress in her native Mexico and who, judging by YouTube, is not afraid of nudity and sex scenes. "She padded her ass out and everything," said Hill, shaking his head. "She's got this thing called a Booty Pop. A lot of American actresses wouldn't be on board with [so much focus on their asses]. She's been awesome. Another reason why Kenny falls for her is that she's in a band called Más o Menos [More or Less] that does covers of Bob Seger. That shit goes straight to his heart, especially the song 'Still the Same.'" Reprising his duties as music coordinator is Wayne Kramer, best known as the front man of the MC5. Hill said that Kramer went the extra mile and personally contacted Seger about reworking a few of his songs into Spanish.

Hill, McBride, and Harwell only speak high-school-level Spanish. Hill told me that his time spent in Mexico was limited to a brief visit earlier this year, when he was married in Cabo San Lucas to the actress Collette Wolfe. Wolfe, who has appeared in both of Hill's films and played a horny future MILF in *Hot Tub Time Machine*, had recently flown back to the states when *Vice* was on the set. And during my visit, friends and family were all around. One night, I mistook McBride's cute, petite fiancée for a production assistant. She was wearing a headset and carrying a clipboard, and politely corrected me. At another point, Hill was glued to live monitors that showed Green directing upstairs, his legs dangled over the side of an arm chair, when a guy in a ballcap wandered over and whispered, kind of loudly in a thick Carolina accent, "Jody? I'm leavin' now. Going to pick Mom and Dad up at the airport. Love you." Turning his head slightly, Hill said, "OK, love you," and then a moment later, said, "That's my brother." It was pretty funny at the time, like an exchange that might have played out when they were teens in NC. Unfortunately, I didn't have a chance to meet Hill's mom or dad, who played a thick-skinned man in a silky button-up decorated with liquor bottles in *The Foot Fist Way*. In just a few minutes on screen, Hill's dad expertly bottled up a certain type of hard-living sonuvabitch native to Cakalaka. The character's bank account, wife, and life be damned, he's goin' to buy himself a used 'rrari.

Amid the communal vibes, I couldn't *not* notice a conspicuous absence in Puerto Rico, that of Ben Best, a creator of *Eastbound*, who

Feet away from us, crookedly parked in front of the mansion, was a fire-red Lamborghini—actually a kit for a Lambo atop a Pontiac Fiero—its interior littered with cheese doodles.

cowrote the first season and who plays Clegg, Kenny's drug-rug-wearing hometown buddy and head bartender at Shh-boom Shh-boom's. Clegg is a fan favorite, a character who is the blitzed antithesis of the type-A egomaniac that is Will Ferrell's Ashley Schaeffer. Similar to his character Chuck "The Truck" Wallace in *The Foot Fist Way*, Clegg feels lived-in and could probably hold his own as a standalone character. On the set of *Eastbound* in 2008, Best was the first person to offer to show me around the home of Principal Cutler. He spent a good half hour pontificating on the crew's dreams of a takeover. After all, Kenny Powers was conceived by McBride, Hill, and Best a few years ago in his backyard in Charlotte, one of several ideas hatched as they soaked in a kiddie pool nursing a case of beer. When I broached the subject of Best's whereabouts with Hill, he hesitated. Ben's still in Charlotte working on music, he told me, and then made a polite cutting motion with his hand and requested we move on. At a separate juncture, I asked McBride the same question, mentioning that I was surprised not to see Best in Ireland, since he has a screenwriting credit on *Your Highness*. The question didn't catch him off-guard. "It's probably best to talk to Ben about Ben," he said. "I can tell you he will be coming back this season. You'll see Clegg. Yeah, Ben and I are on good terms for sure." Attempts to contact Best for the piece were unsuccessful. A rep kept a phone inquiry short and said that he wouldn't be doing any interviews for at least a few months. Whatever the end of the season holds, I'm happy to report that when we screened the season 2 premiere, Clegg got some big laughs in a flashback-like cameo.

I was scheduled to meet Steve Little in the lobby of the Conrad Hotel in San Juan, but I was unsure if I would find him at the hotel bar or at the lobby's shark aquarium. Finally, an elevator opened and there he was. Without thinking, I called out, "Stevie! Over here, Stevie," and then immediately regretted not calling him Steve. And then I started to wonder how often Steve is greeted by strangers as Stevie, or by the full name of his character: "Hey! Stevie Janowski!" How much might that irk him? It has to irk him. "Yeah, that happens a lot," he said as we sat outside on the hotel's patio overlooking the ocean. "People are so nice. The thing about *Eastbound* fans, I can tell they really love the show. But it's really the internet... I don't know if I should go on there *anymore* and read about Stevie, because the comments are not, like, 'Who is that actor?' They're like, 'What is *wrong* with that dude?'" I laughed and said, well, it's a convincing performance. But the comments seem to genuinely bother Steve. "I dunno, do I seem crazy?" he asked, and then admitted that he hasn't done many interviews. What's there to do around here for fun, I asked him. "It's weird, I'm just getting used to being here. I was freaked out the first week, but the same thing happened in North

Carolina. Some days I don't have any scenes, so it feels like my friends are shooting [an hour away] but I'm not. Yesterday, I sat in my hotel room, but I've gone out drinking and I did some snorkeling. I'm working, but you look out here [points to swimmers] and everyone's in short pants." Suddenly, playing a sidekick seemed like a mindfuck, but Little gradually started to relax. "This season is really about Stevie getting to live," Little told me. "He toughens up and becomes a man. Stevie's been working at a Starbucks since Kenny left Shelby. We actually filmed at the Starbucks here. It's just a little scene. This walk-the-line-type Starbucks girl, she had to train me to make a fuckin' mocha or whatever. You know? I did a take where I'm like [obnoxious, slippery Stevie drawl], 'Double mocha!' And afterward, she comes up to us and said, 'It's not right, he's not making eye contact with the customer.' And then the next take, I slam it down and yell, 'Here's your fuckin' coffee!' [laughs] I don't think she liked that. Stevie's like this lost soul since Kenny left." I asked Steve how Stevie comes to find Kenny in Mexico, his character being the only one besides KP from the first season who will appear regularly. "He thinks Kenny has left him a trail of bread crumbs," he told me, "and then he gets down there and thinks he'll be protected from the shit because of Kenny." He grinned and asked if I'd like to see a few photos. He handed me his cell phone. The photo showed Stevie standing next to a dark-skinned midget in a wifebeater. They were both giving the camera the bird. "That's me and Deep Roy," said Little. "He's great. He plays a character named Aaron." As far as sidekicks go, Deep Roy is something of a legend in Hollywood: Best known for his collaborations with Tim Burton, he also plays Princess Aura's flamboyantly dressed pet in 1980's *Flash Gordon*, Hill's favorite movie. Bread crumbs of influence. "This season is going to be deranged," said Little. "Danny was saying, like, 'How many characters are there on TV where everything that comes out of their mouth is a lie?'" [laughs] It's true. I think that part of the appeal of the show, though, is that this is how people talk and joke with each other... Oh, and I have a pretty sweet scene with a donkey this season," he said. "Bob the Donkey, who is really gentle."

"What did *he* tell you?" asked McBride with a smirk, when I returned to set from interviewing Little. After I waited a beat, McBride added, "God knows." We were having a pep talk outside with the HBO publicist and Gary Sanchez's Chris Henchy, who cowrote Ferrell's *The Other Guys* and *Land of the Lost* but was on set supervising as an executive producer. The crew was setting up the next scene. Feet away from us, crookedly parked in front of the mansion, was a fire-red Lamborghini—actually a kit for a Lambo atop a Pontiac Fiero—its interior littered with cheese doodles. Soon, I found myself in the usual preemptive chat to make sure spoilers and certain scenes wouldn't be included in this piece. "Don't worry, I'm not going to fuck up the show," I kidded, after declining Henchy's request for preapproval on the article. "I work for *Vice*, not Nikki Finke." The mention of Finke's name caused McBride to lift an eyebrow and Henchy to mutter something to the heavens. It was several days after the fact, and they still didn't know how her industry tyrant of a website, Deadline Hollywood, obtained and posted a spoiler about season 2 (regarding the appearance this season of a figure from KP's past). "Somebody in that meeting must have talked," said McBride, still outfitted as Kenny, his hands on hips, a hint of industry muscle behind the words. "And it wasn't *us*. Either that, or the room was tapped." McBride can seem strangely intimidating when he's dressed in character, makeup adding an odd peach complexion and debauched, self-hating rings under his eyes. He appears slightly





older and fatter, and his nose is somehow bigger. We decided during that chat to post the first photo of Kenny on the set from my Twitter account, and back inside as I readied the post, I asked McBride if he wanted to type anything as Kenny. Over my shoulder, he glanced at my netbook monitor and said, “Yep, looks like a tweet. Nah, you go ahead and write it, I trust your judgment.” And then he asked me what was up with the “fag on Twitter” who’s pretending to be Kenny Powers (@KfuckingP). No one on the set knew or cared who it is, but there was concern. A growing number of fans seemed to think the account was official and approved by HBO. Kenny Powers was in front of me as I tweeted about him telling me he wouldn’t join Twitter, how that shit’s for girls and not his style. Twenty-first-century schizoid, man. McBride, who won’t be joining anytime soon from the sound of it, proceeded to ask what I think of the iPad and told me he enjoys reading scripts on it. (This was funny to me, since Kenny may or may not use a MacBook Pro in a Luddite-appropriate act of self-defense this season.)

It got late and the countdown to my early-morning flight to New York began. Without warning, the lights inside the mansion had dimmed and it was eerily quiet. Turned out, Hill had to direct a sex scene. It was so loud it seemed to inspire the island’s coquis to ribbit their eyeballs out for hours afterward. Exhausted, I could hear the fuckers from indoors while I scribbled notes and sipped a beer. And then the words “What’s up, muthafuckkkkka?” were fired into my left ear. It was genuinely startling. It was the maniacal whisper of the crackhead gangbanger McBride played in *Observe and Report*, up close. He crept away, smiling. It felt similar to the season 1 scene where Kenny fails to dunk his lunch tray into the cafeteria trash can. McBride continued over to say hello to a few dudes who had flown in from LA. They worked for Rough House Pictures, the production company McBride founded last year with Hill, Green, and Matt Reilly, one of said visitors, who left his position as the veep of production at Warner Bros. to posse up and, in his words, “blow the fucking doors off the industry.” McBride circled back and said, “Alright. Let’s do this shit.” He was sporting a crisp button-down and dark gray knee-length shorts. Dressy, by surf-shop standards. Freshly showered, the mullet and the makeup cake was gone. At times like this, I switched from speaking to McBride the actor to speaking with McBride the 33-year-old writer-producer. We got on the subject of NC, and I asked him whether, on Kenny’s drive of shame, we’ll see him pass South of the Border, the famed truck stop-cum-tourist trap in Dillon, South Carolina (where, coincidentally, Ben Bernanke, current chairman of the Federal Reserve, once worked as a waiter). McBride nodded. Perhaps it was a habit he picked up recording Kenny’s audio books (note: He works on a new one this season about depression), but McBride sometimes cocked his head slightly to speak into the recorder. “We got chickenshit about Mexico for a hot minute,” he said. “And at one point, we considered opening on a shot of the big sombrero at South of the Border, so you think Kenny’s in Mexico. And then he would have said [*voice-over tone*], ‘I went down to the butthole of the Carolinas.’ [*laughs*] We actually thought about setting the entire season in Myrtle Beach instead of in Mexico.” No shit, really? “I gotta say, the Myrtle Beach idea was pretty brilliant. It would have really been something. Maybe he ends up there next season. [*beat*] Who knows? South of the Border is still incredible to me. I remember being a kid and my family would drive down to Georgia to see my relatives. The signs would start around Richmond. ‘Chili Today! Hot Tamale! 290 Miles Ahead!’ I love that place. I would buy whips, pocket switchblades to comb my hair. I feel

Kenny Powers was in front of me as I tweeted about him telling me he wouldn’t join Twitter, how that shit’s for girls and not his style. Twenty-first-century schizoid, man.

like that place has crept into my subconscious and stayed there.”

McBride is as down-to-earth as one could expect. Late at night and ready to get a hang in with his buddies, there were flashes in our conversation of a real competitive streak. He’s played his cards quietly and deftly. When the worldwide box-office take is tallied for the films he has carefully appeared in since 2007 the figure hovers above \$600 million, and surges to \$900 million with the inclusion of the animated film *Despicable Me*. While the receipts can’t be attributed to his singular star power, these days Hollywood is obsessed with an actor’s global numbers over anything else. It’s a reality that can be observed simply by counting the number of leading men today whose abs are marketed over interchangeable, exfoliated faces and personalities. McBride has satiated the system thus far with supporting roles in mildly subversive R-rated blockbusters like *Tropic Thunder*, while keeping his shirt on, and gradually closed the gap using *Eastbound’s* unusual format as the bridge to the edgier, signature fare that will define his new company. There’s even a film that can be interpreted, at least by me, as a surreal illustration of McBride’s arrival, possibly as the more stable John Belushi of a generation. In last fall’s *Up in the Air*, the actor who embodied the politics and renaissance-man luxury of the aughts (George Clooney) spends the film toting a cardboard cutout of McBride’s grounded character around the globe and back. When Clooney’s character returns to the States, he finds himself envious of McBride’s, attempts to remedy his shallowness, only to end up the casualty of a different era and shit out of luck. The movie is practically Clooney saying, “America is so fucked. By the way, welcome to the club.” McBride, for one, ain’t buyin’ it. “Would I categorize myself as [the new Belushi]? No way. I don’t have an ego that big. Belushi was amazing. I have a hard time seeing myself as other people see me. I see through my tricks. And I’m still getting my head around people letting me do this show our way, and with my friends. You know, the first season ended on a really ominous note, and HBO’s been great this season, they didn’t give any script notes. But the finale to the first season really freaked them out. That and the scene where Kenny does ecstasy. In the end, we got the show that we wanted on the air. In college, we all helped out on each other’s projects, we got along. We really want to maintain the feeling we had on David’s films, like *George Washington*, where buddies came out of the woodwork to help. Back then, you know, we quit our jobs, we ponied up, and it started to feel natural. It evolved into us getting paid. Films from the 70s are definitely romanticized, but we look to that era, we look to the people who were movie stars rather than to the ones now, to the stories being told. The spirit of that time inspires us. At the same time, I’d cum my pants when the goddamn HBO theme song came on before a movie when I was a kid.

“I don’t think Hollywood underestimated us,” said Green. “It’s more like they never saw us coming.”

I lived for that shit. The birth of VHS, all of those 80s blockbusters. We want to meld those times together but still be different, be now. We want to put people on their ass. So, naturally, we all became blood brothers over a secret ceremony. [laughs] “Oh yeah?” I asked. “No, not really.”

“But it was kind of like a blood pact.” I was on the phone with Matt Reilly, Rough House Pictures’ 31-year-old head of production, whom McBride referred to as the company’s secret weapon. “My first question to these guys was, ‘Do you want to *kill*? Do you want to take over the world?’” Having returned from Puerto Rico, Reilly was back on the grind at Rough House’s offices, which he described as a “two-story clubhouse we share with the *Eastbound* [postproduction] team in Old Hollywood.” The second season was the first of nearly a dozen projects on the company’s slate. “None of us really know shit about navigating studios and all that stuff,” McBride told me. “We wanted a guy who hasn’t been corrupted by the studio mind-set, by the bottom dollar. Matt is smart, he has a lot of fucking energy, but he knows how the system works. He isn’t jaded, he isn’t shooting down every weird idea that comes up. He pushes us forward.” Hill, who hungrily expressed that he wants to begin directing a film every one or two years, added, “Honestly, now we don’t have to deal with producers and Hollywood assholes. We literally have one person at Mandate Pictures [owned by Lionsgate] to answer to. Essentially, Mandate has the power of a studio with the freedom of a financier, so we’re not considered ‘indie.’” Tentatively scheduled for 2011, Hill’s first film for Rough House is a postnoir detective tale set in modern-day Los Angeles. It’s entitled *LAPI* and will star McBride as the titular character. Hill described it as a comedy with a serious labyrinthine bent. “The film will have a ‘plot’ in the vein of *Chinatown* or *The Long Goodbye*,” said Hill. “It’s cool because I’m technically not writing this one, and I know that directors like Altman, they created companies where they developed scripts so they could be more productive.”

“Look, here’s what happened,” said Nathan Kahane, the president of Mandate Pictures. “I came to them post-*Pineapple* and said, ‘This is your moment and I want to finance it.’ Hollywood is excited but slightly terrified of these guys because they don’t come from the usual places, they aren’t doing prebranded projects. A lot of industry people don’t get it, but to me *Eastbound* is like redneck Princeton. It’s early going, but we are looking at Jody’s *LAPI* as a franchise for Danny. The first draft of the script reminds me of *Fletch*, but it’s got a more classic, gritty feel. Mandate and Rough House are based on an old-school model, where thoughtful artists have total creative control. Look, I think in some aspects Hollywood has gotten lazy and relied too much on formulas and remakes, and we’re swinging back to original voices and provocative entertainment. And I’ve been talking to Danny about him directing something as well. Look, I got to say, I’m pretty excited.”

“I don’t think Hollywood underestimated us,” said Green. “It’s more like they never saw us coming. Our tastes are anchored in the emotionally challenging movies of the 70s, movies that expressed a

unique point of view and broke down the acting styles informed by radio and TV of the time and used glossy camera techniques to get at the rawness of people.” In July, the real-life subject of Green’s first planned feature for Rough House made national headlines. *Taking Flight* will tell the story of Colton Harris Moore, a mischievous teen fugitive from a broken home in Washington State accused of hijacking a number of small planes, cars, and boats, and whose sizable Facebook following lends itself, Green feels, to a semi-tragic update of the mythic American outlaw. Moore was apprehended in July in the Bahamas, an event that was met instantly with typed sighs from hundreds of people on Twitter. “R-rated comedies will be our bread and butter,” said Reilly, “but something like *Taking Flight*, that’s a dramatic thriller. We also have some horror in development, action films, another thriller, comic books, and we’ve set up a deal for a series at Comedy Central. HBO wants to do something else, too. We want to make movies that will scare the shit out of you, blow you away, and have you laughing at the same time. We are a home for renegades by renegades. We are about creative anarchy. I feel like when I walk into the movies now, I already know where the story is headed two minutes in. It’s not respectful to audience members, who are smart and have so many choices now. Movies need to deliver.” So far, Rough House has had friendly talks with horror writer-director Ti West (*The House of the Devil*), and Hill said they hope to finance a low-budget feature from Bobby Hacker, whose short film *Cars*, a mock commercial for a used-car dealership infused with devil worshipping, became an internet sensation. I asked Green which actor, besides McBride, embodies the company, and he offered up pal Michael Shannon (*Shotgun Stories*, *Boardwalk Empire*).

“I don’t take any of this for granted,” said McBride. “We’re given one chance and if it doesn’t work, hopefully we’ll survive. I didn’t plan to have an acting career and don’t plan on acting forever. Let’s just say I don’t have all my eggs in one basket.” Immediately following *Eastbound*, McBride will head to Michigan for a villainous role, as will Peña, in *30 Minutes or Less*, from *Zombieland* director Ruben Fleischer. “I remember when I first read the script,” said McBride, “I was like goddamn, didn’t this shit really happen? That’s kind of fucked up. [laughs] But it’s not based on the actual events or anything.” The film stars Jesse Eisenberg as a pizza-delivery duder given an ultimatum to rob a bank by a pair of sick thugs (enter McBride). It all bears a twisted resemblance to the case of Brian Douglas Wells, a pizza-delivery guy who died in 2003 when a bomb exploded on his person during a bank heist. Wells was later said to be in on the scheme. Comedian Aziz Ansari, who costars in the film as Eisenberg’s bewildered best friend, recently sold a pitch to Rough House, that will pair him on screen with McBride. The title is *Olympic-Size Asshole*. “I’ll run into McBride occasionally at these fancy Hollywood-party things,” Ansari told me, “and Danny will usually come over to me, bored, and ask if I want to go back to his car and get a handjob. I’ll laugh it off. Inevitably, a few minutes later, he’ll look me dead in the eyes and go, ‘For real, if you want a handjob, I’m down.’ At this point, I usually leave or talk to someone else. But as far as humor based in the South, *The Foot Fist Way* was the first time I’d seen the place where I grew up [South Carolina] depicted in a film. The comedy they do is interesting because it’s real.”

“When we started Rough House, it was like I was ten years old again, building a fort with neighborhood kids,” said Reilly. “We’re having a lot of fun, but I told these guys, at some point I think each of you can win an Academy Award, whether it’s together or individually.” For now, McBride doesn’t share the enthusiasm in little gold men. As he said to me in Puerto Rico, “I’d rather be on a couch passing a joint at a friend’s house, making fun of everyone’s acceptance speeches.” ■

OFF!



THE DEFIANT DEBUT FROM
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FEATURING

KEITH MORRIS
(BLACK FLAG / CIRCLE JERKS)
DIMITRI COATS
(BURNING BRIDES)
MARIO RUBALCABA
(EARTHLESS/HOT SNAKES/ROCKET FROM THE CRYPT)
STEVEN MCDONALD
(REDD KROSS)



Truly Tasteful Jokes

Courtesy of the Dinner Party Download

COMPILED BY BRENDAN FRANCIS NEWNAM AND RICO GAGLIANO

Every week our public-radio show, the Dinner Party Download (www.dinnerpartydownload.org), opens with a celebrity telling a joke. It usually blows. Comedians are the worst at telling jokes. They call what you and I think of as jokes (What do you call a...? A guy walks into a...) "street jokes," and tend to look down on them. We can't blame them, the joke is dead. Unless you're a kid. Kids love joke-jokes. And old people. Old people like jokes. That's because back in the day everyone had a joke ready. At dinner parties or family gatherings, jokes were like a verbal shot of booze that would steel you for a long night of conversation. They primed the pump. They broke the ice. This was before people brought out their laptops to vamp the latest viral YouTube video. Jokes even used to help us process serious events. Like the space shuttle crashing. Or the time Richard Gere got a gerbil stuck up his ass. But nowadays the joke, unlike the gerbil, is an endangered species. That's why we built it a refuge at the beginning of our show. We now have dozens of jokes, and we're eager to release them back into the wild. Since our show is on public radio, all our jokes are clean. That means you can tell them to kids, old people, and your peers when you're unable to call up the "Bed Intruder" song on the internet.

This guy goes into a store and grabs a gallon of milk and a loaf of bread and walks up to the counter. The woman behind the counter says, "You must be single." And he says, "How do you know?" And she says, "Because you're ugly."

Rich Fulcher of the *The Mighty Boosh*

Q: Why didn't the lifeguard save the hippie? A: He was too far out, man.

Christopher Owens from the band *Girls*

"Knock-knock." "Who's there?" "Frank Sinatra." "Frank Sinatra who?" "Come on!"

Black Francis, of *The Pixies*

Q: What do you call a conformist cloud? A: Stratus quo.

Cass McCombs

A guy walks into a bar and he sees, sitting at the bar alone, a guy with a big fat orange head. It's really big. It's the size of two beach balls. It's cartoonish and insane. So the guy walks up to the guy with the big fat orange head and says, "I have to ask. What happened?" "Well," the guy says, "I was shipwrecked on a desert island and there was a genie and a lamp. And I know what happens with genies and lamps; they try to trick you if you're greedy. You have to be careful. So for my first wish, I asked simply for love. Just a woman I can love and share my life with. And I received that." "Well, what was your second wish?" the guy asks. "Well, I wished for money, but not a ton of money, just enough so my family and I could be secure and I can do my charity work, and I got my wish and it's worked out beautifully." The guy says, "OK, what happened with the third wish?" And the guy with the head sighs and says, "Well, that's where I think I might have gone wrong. I wished for a big fat orange head."

Phil Hay, writer of *Clash of the Titans* (2010)

Q: How do you turn a duck into a popular soul singer? A: Put it in the microwave until its bill withers.

Ed Harcourt

There is this guy driving down the road. He's got 17 penguins in his car. This cop sees him, stops him, and says, "I don't know what's going on here. But you've got to take these penguins to the zoo." The

guy's like, "OK." The next day the guy is driving and he has the same 17 penguins in the car. The same cop pulls him over and says, "Look, man, I stopped you yesterday and I told you to take these penguins to the zoo." The guy says, "I took them to the zoo. Today we're going to the beach."

Ezra Feinberg from the band *Citay*

Q: Why did Jesus cross the road? A: He was nailed to the chicken.

Anthony Bourdain

A penguin walks into a bar and he says to the bartender, "Have you seen my brother here?" And the bartender says, "What does he look like?"

Tom Jones

Q: How many Freudians does it take to screw in a lightbulb? A: Two. One to change the lightbulb and one to hold the penis, I mean, ladder!

Billy Bragg

Two men are flying in an airplane. Unfortunately, one fell out. Fortunately, there was a haystack. Unfortunately, there was a pitchfork in the haystack. Fortunately, he missed the pitchfork. Unfortunately, he missed the haystack.

Stewart Brand, founder of *The Whole Earth Catalog*

Descartes walks into a bar and the bartender says, "Hey, Descartes! Can I get you a drink?" And Descartes says, "I think not," and disappears.

Abigail Chapin of the *Chapin Sisters*

A dog walks into the post office and says, "I want to send a telegram," and the guy says, "OK, what do you want to say?" And the dog says, "I want to say, 'Woof woof. Woof, woof, woof. Woof woof. Woof woof.'" And the man says, "OK, that's fine, but for the same price you can put another 'woof' in there." And the dog says, "Yeah, but that wouldn't make any sense."

Sarah Lyall, London correspondent for the *New York Times*

I am not the kind to tell a joke to start party conversation. Not at all! That's the last thing I would do.

Leslie Caron, grande dame of cinema, star of *Gigi* and *An American in Paris* ■

Eric
Koston

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Meet Aisha. Born in London, Aisha moved to the States at age 9, and currently lives in LA. We met her when she submitted model photos and started working trade shows for us in Las Vegas. She now works as a model for us from time to time, while attending school for journalism. We photographed her in the Steel Gray Riding Pants, one of three new colors for fall.

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