

NEW YORK

June 17-30, 2024



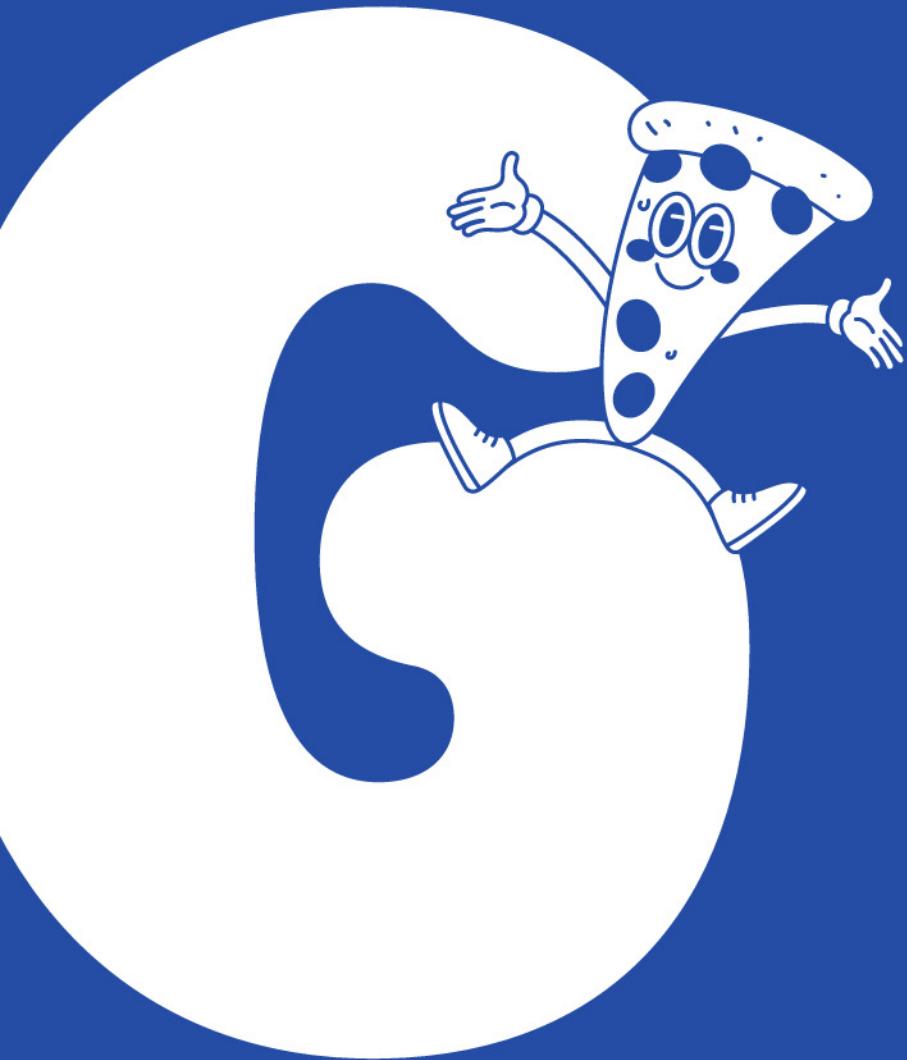
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Michael Cohen on TikTok Live during Trump's trial.

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ON THE COVER: Clockwise from left: Marjorie Taylor Greene, Kristi Noem, Lauren Boebert, Valentina Gomez, Kimberly Guilfoyle, Nancy Mace, and Lara Trump. Collage by Susanna Hayward for *New York Magazine*.
THIS PAGE: A Swedish hot dog from BonBon. Photograph by Bobby Doherty for *New York Magazine*.

COVER: COLLAGE PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY (GREENE, GUILFOYLE); AP (NOEM); LAUREN BOEBERT, WHO IS PART OF A NEW CONTINGENT OF WOMEN LAWMAKERS AGGRESSIVELY SUPPORTING THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS, CARRYING A FIREARM THAT SHE POSTED ON X; VALENTINA GOMEZ/INSTAGRAM; REUTERS (MACE). THIS PAGE: FOOD STYLING BY JAMIE KIMM; PROP STYLING BY ANDREA BONINI; HAIR & MAKEUP STYLING BY ANDREW D'ANGELO; CASTING BY RENEE TORRIERE.

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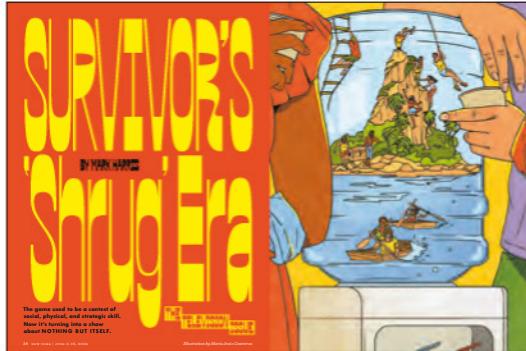
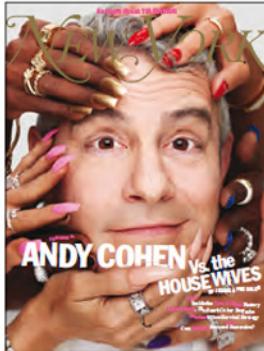
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Comments



1 For the cover of *New York's* annual "TV Issue," Jessica Pressler profiled the *Real Housewives* host and executive producer Andy Cohen as lawsuits and accusations of harassment threaten to dethrone the King of Bravo ("**The Last Inappropriate Man on Television,**" June 3-16). "Andy is more of a *Housewives* staple than the housewives are," wrote writer and producer Kim Dahlgren in a since-deleted tweet. "Although I've heard people say the 'golden age' of *Housewives* is over, you wouldn't know it by the frequency with which we still talk about it." Many commenters debated Cohen, Bravo, and the state of reality television. "Andy wants it both ways," wrote cg1327cg. "**He wants to exploit the lives of his housewives, voyeuristic cameras everywhere, loving the hot mike scandals and the gotcha moments. When the inevitable explosions occur, he holds his hands up with the innocence of a child, and has no remorse or responsibility for creating an environment that requires salacious drama and extremism for these women to keep those Bravo checks coming.**" hollerhither wrote, "**Hey, Andy? You don't get to decide what is or isn't feminist ... You knew exactly what Gloria Steinem would say when you brought her on. The *Housewives* etc., though featuring women, manage to center men and people who serve them and keep their secrets. Wives, ex-wives, mistresses—literally that's the first identifier. Production is the male gaze. Entertaining as it can be.**" "I don't hate Andy Cohen," wrote ucandothatontelevision. "I do hate—and am gobsmacked by—how he remains untouchable and impervious to critique for *failing to perform his actual job*

duties while he wields power to embarrass, favorite, and materially affect the lives of his predominantly female talent base—on a network made lucrative on the backs of women and the vulnerability of their lives." "The tone of this article is over-the-top fawning and flattering," said esreverbrown, while pppppp countered that **Cohen has "built a social and psychological pop cosmos that is so layered, durational, pathological, and spectacular that it has brought joy to millions, and fame and riches to the few who dare to step into the ring (and know how to leverage it).** He's devoted his life to it and he should be applauded and thanked, not attacked."

2 Kathryn VanArendonk looked at *Love Is Blind* and its creator, Chris Coelen, who believes the show is more documentary than reality TV ("**The Love Machine**"). Writer Colleen Kelly joked, "I devoured this story like I was alone with a hard-boiled egg and no one to watch me eat it." Editor Mallika Sen wrote, "This had SO MANY of the logistical details I'd long sought." Jm_la advised, "**Chris, have your couples do couples therapy pre-wedding as part of the process. All of them desperately need it. Your show leans more towards exploitation than genuine love experiment and I think this could shift it in the right direction.**" "*Love Is Blind* aka Stanford Prison Experiment," wrote navpg21, who suggested Coelen conduct an ethics review "to determine if the conditions of the experiment are detrimental to the mental health of their subjects." Them's Michael Cuby had a different takeaway: "Of everything in this article,

the reveal that the creator of *Love Is Blind* eats his cereal with water may be the most disturbing."

3 Mark Harris explored how *Survivor's* new emphasis on gameplay neuters its entertainment value ("**Survivor's 'Shrug' Era**"). Leahaghiradella said, "Thank you, Mark Harris, for articulating most of the complaints—and sighs, hums and ughs—my husband and I have uttered since the new age of *Survivor* reared its rather boring head." English professor Mike Sell praised the "smart ideas about how to disrupt *Survivor's* current metagame by removing idols and restoring a genuine survivalist ethos," while commenter stacieandmats specified that "the constantly changing rules on finding idols/tokens etc is really boring. The challenges have become too similar. The emphasis of the show should be on human dynamics." "**When all the players talk endlessly about 'building my resume,' you know things have gotten too meta,**" commented benthead. doritsfleetingaccent added, "There seems to be too many amenities now. People manage to look pretty well-groomed between muddy or slimy challenges. Remember armpit hair? Picking teeth with weeds instead of brushing? Dirty clothes and grown out roots and facial hair?" rd10012 wrote, "**I used to love seeing amazing people doing amazing things on the show. I'm curious to know how producers could bring back a meritocracy where winners were larger than life, rather than those that gamed the system."**

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INSIDE: *Anti-Israel protests turn menacing / Hermès' Nadège Vanhée / Rememberers vs. Forgetters*



The cameras, part of a \$507 million system, won't be switched on anytime soon.

Getting Around: Nolan Hicks

What Made Kathy Hochul Flip?
Inside the governor's sudden U-turn on congestion pricing.

ON JUNE 5, Governor Kathy Hochul stunned New Yorkers by canceling (or placing on “indefinite pause”) the congestion-pricing fee for driving into lower Manhattan, blowing a \$15 billion hole in the MTA’s budget. The state was set to start collecting tolls in less than four weeks, June 30. Hochul had long highlighted her willingness to see the program through even though it polls poorly, arguing that right decisions are not always popular ones. Few officials, even in her own office, were given a heads-up. Much of the city and state government was left asking, “What got into her head?”

“This came right from her brain,” one Albany veteran says. “When it’s this nonsensical, that’s the origin story.” And from another: “Irrespective of if you agree or disagree with congestion pricing, the handling of this was maladroit. There were more elegant ways of getting out of it than the way that she did.” The person adds, “The real question is, Where does it go from here?”

She doesn't have a plan B, or a plan C, or a plan D." A third, a Hochul insider, says, "It's seismic in ways that we don't even know yet." Or as another Albany insider puts it decisively, "She traded the MTA for a House seat? Are you fucking crazy?!"

In politics circles, the reading of what happened goes like this: Hochul—edgy over Democratic weakness on Long Island—moved to kill the toll after a focus group found that congestion pricing could cost votes in competitive districts. A half-dozen downstate congressional seats are in play. Although reporting has suggested that Hakeem Jeffries, the Brooklyn representative who may soon be Speaker of the House, planted the idea, people close to both their offices say otherwise. Instead, says a person familiar with communication between the two, it was Hochul—not Jeffries—who "put it into the ether. She put this idea of a pause into the meeting."

"She's very, very sensitive to criticism about the election," says an Albany insider, "about Long Island, and about her coattails." In 2022, Hochul won by just 6.4 points as Republicans campaigned on fear of crime and the bail-reform laws approved in 2019. "It's very easy for me to imagine her saying, 'I'm going to get killed,'" the person adds. Three people who have been briefed on the decision say political considerations were at the center. "This was Hochul freaked out—they don't want this to become the bail reform of 2024," says one. "This isn't popular. Look at the polling numbers," another was told by Hochul's right hand, Secretary to the Governor Karen Persichilli Keogh.

Congestion pricing is a proven program that is nonetheless unpopular here. Nearly two-thirds of voters in New York City said they oppose the toll in an April survey by Siena College, and the suburbs sat at 72 percent against, 22 percent for. Yet sources close to those swing-seat campaigns say they have not seen results from any focus group. That's probably because (as Hochul's pollster, Jeffrey Pollock, confirmed to me) the governor's campaign had not commissioned one.

Besides, operatives in the contested races have severe doubts that the issue motivates opposition or causes voters to switch tickets. Republicans hardly mentioned the toll in their battle to hold on to George Santos's seat in Nassau County and northeastern Queens. The Republican candidate, Mazi Pilip, "sent one press release on congestion pricing and then basically ignored it for the rest of the campaign," says one Long Island operative. "We did not see any groundswell back in February regarding this issue at all." Tom Suozzi won by eight points.

Hochul insiders and Albany veterans offer a second theory of her flip: that the

governor was wobbly all along. "She's been very uncomfortable with this," says the Hochul insider. "It took a lot of work to get her there." Staff in the governor's office had to persuade her to back the program when she took over the office. Hochul, after all, had made her bones campaigning against tolls on the New York State Thruway. That's also where she first worked extensively with Keogh, who was the person then—Senator Hillary Clinton assigned to the issue.

Publicly, Hochul had defended the toll. But soon after she won reelection, her office asked job applicants for their ideas on congestion pricing's "future," says one insider. All options were said to be on the table, which implicitly included axing the whole thing. In January, when the teachers union challenged the toll in court, the pushback from the governor's office was notably milquetoast. The last guy, one source jokes, would have punched back by approving 10,000 charter schools in the city.

The last guy was, of course, Andrew Cuomo. Since he was forced from office, Hochul has framed herself as someone who can deliver projects as Cuomo could without his feral persona. In March, Cuomo published an op-ed in the *New York Post* that called for delaying the program, claiming it would slow post-pandemic recovery and citing concerns about violence on the trains. "That's when she spoke to me," says a veteran city political operator. "She was apoplectic." A second Albany source confirms that there were "grumbles directly from people close to her about the Cuomo op-ed." Hochul would go on to cite similar rationales when she backed out. "I'm sure that op-ed loomed large," the insider adds. "She has it in her mind that the only way to look strong is to look like Andrew Cuomo."

"This is false," says Hochul spokesman Anthony Hogrebe. "As the governor stated, her decision was informed by conversations with a wide range of everyday New Yorkers and concerns they expressed related to the economy." A member of her own camp clarified her thinking. "The governor's had some issues with this for a while," the person says. "Economic sentiment has not changed

and is still in a very bad place compared to where we thought it might be. Economic sentiment translates frequently into voter anger at politicians. Come November, winning the House may be the only thing standing between Donald Trump and a unified Republican government that could destroy democracy ... Taking this issue off the table has to help the Democrats."

Hochul played it cool till late May, mentioning the topic to Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and to Councilwoman Gale Brewer a few days in advance. But only on the day before her video went up did it become clear that the program would be halted. Newly looped-in government staff had just hours to propose an alternative. Hiking the city payroll tax was firmly and quickly rejected by lawmakers. Hochul's staff came back with a second offer: A promise to provide the MTA with up to \$1 billion per year for the next 15 years, about as much as the congestion toll was expected to generate for upgrades and system expansion, from ... somewhere in the budget. It didn't fly either.

Sudden moves have fiscal consequences. Wall Street has flagged the MTA's debt and may drop its rating, whereupon a lot of money that could have gone to running trains will go toward interest. New York is now at risk of losing billions in federal funding for projects like the Second Avenue Subway. Planners may defer replacement of the Depression-era tech of the lines under Manhattan's Sixth Avenue and Brooklyn's Fulton Street. Ditto plans to order hundreds of new train cars for subways and commuter lines.

Save a court order or reversal from Hochul, the MTA and transit activists have little to hang their hopes on. New York State's Department of Transportation has to sign off to start the program, and it is fully under Hochul's control. On June 10, MTA chairman Janno Lieber announced an "intensive review" to "reprioritize and shrink" the agency's budget for construction, upgrades, and expansion projects. "We simply cannot award contracts," he said, "without dedicated funding in place."

The damage done to Hochul's close working relationship with MTA chairman Lieber has been on vivid display. At his press conference on June 10, he opened with an extraordinary—by bureaucratic standards—statement about what had unfolded: "The governor plays on a statewide and national field, and sometimes that means we don't look at things exactly the same." Two days later, Lieber's visible sadness was replaced with audible frustration. "Can you just talk a little bit about what you've learned about Governor Kathy Hochul over the last couple of weeks?" I asked him. Lieber's one-word reply: "No." ■

**"It's seismic
in ways
that we don't
even know yet."**



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Neighborhood News: A Threat in Brooklyn Heights

Protests escalate into antisemitic vandalism.

By Matt Stieb

ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 12, Anne Pasternak woke up to find red paint spattered on the doors of her building in Brooklyn Heights. A banner called her a “white-supremacist Zionist,” and BLOOD ON HER HANDS was stenciled on the walk. On the door and windows, the vandals left an inverted triangle, a symbol used by Hamas’ military wing to identify a target. Pasternak, who is Jewish, is the director of the Brooklyn Museum, which has faced protests for its partnership with a bank that invests in an Israeli weapons-maker. In a statement, the anonymous taggers wrote that the museum “must face consequences.” Photos circulated quickly on social media, and by that evening, the NYPD said that its Hate Crimes Task Force was investigating this and three other defacements of Brooklyn Museum executives’ and board members’ homes that night.

Demonstrations by pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli groups have taken on new intensity and menace since the June 8 Nuseirat offensive, which Israel calls a hostage-rescue effort and Gaza health officials call a massacre of at least 274 people. Within Our Lifetime, an anti-Zionist group recently banned from Facebook, led a tense protest to shut down an exhibition commemorating October 7 Nova Festival victims. (WOL has denied vandalizing Pasternak’s building.) It was decried not only by Republicans and centrist Democrats but by progressives like Jumaane Williams and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. AOC wrote that “the callousness, dehumanization, and targeting of Jews on display at last night’s protest outside the Nova Festival exhibit was atrocious antisemitism—plain and simple.”

Pasternak told the *New York Times* that she was “disgusted and shaken,” and a crew was soon laying on fresh white paint. By then, there had been more red paint thrown, at the Palestinian Mission to the U.N. and German Consulate in midtown. A summer of more protests and more aggressive policing likely awaits. ■

PHOTOGRAPH: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS/IX



One of several images of Anne Pasternak's building posted on X by Mayor Adams.





65 MINUTES WITH ...

Nadège Vanhée

The intentionally little-known designer has figured out the most important part of her job: how to cater to the Hermès customer.

BY CHANTAL FERNANDEZ

ON A RECENT Wednesday morning, in a brightly lit photo studio in Chelsea, Nadège Vanhée is standing in front of a rack of clothing eating a croissant and catching the crumbs with an Hermès saucer perched under her chin. “My jet-lag moment,” she says in a thick French accent. Behind us, the model Jill

Kortleve, wearing a black duffle coat over leather leggings, stands at the end of a short runway. Stylist Jodie Barnes looks on from a nearby cluster of sofas. Vanhée strolls over to them. “Can you walk?” she asks, and Kortleve starts to strut. Less than 48 hours to showtime.

After ten years as Hermès’s artistic director of women’s ready-to-wear, Vanhée is “watching the mayonnaise

coming up,” as she puts it, as years of work emulsify into critical and commercial success. Recently, she’s been described as “quietly avant-garde” and “understatedly non-conformist.” But perhaps most important, she’s managed to successfully appeal to the type of ultrawealthy Hermès shopper who’s interested in buying more from the French brand than just Birkins and silk scarves. Vanhée’s supple leather jackets and cashmere trousers have helped Hermès push through the global luxury slowdown that is dogging most of its competitors. Ready-to-wear and fashion accessories, some of which fall under her domain, are now the fastest growing parts of the business. Which is part of the reason Hermès decided to put an extra runway show on its calendar this year—the one Vanhée is preparing for when we meet. For this, the brand turned a pier warehouse into an Hermès-ified vision of downtown New York, where Leigh Lezark and Natasha Lyonne ate plates of Carbone pasta, Caroline Polacheck performed on a cabaret stage in full red-leather Hermès, and Honey Dijon DJ’d a set. Still: Events like these are conceived less for the young people on the dance floor than for the VIP clients, some of whom Hermès flew in for the event, favorite Kellys in hand.

In the decade after she graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp in 2003, Vanhée hopped from one influential designer’s studio to another. She spent a few years at Delvaux in Brussels, then she worked under Martin Margiela at his label in Paris. She believes the Belgian designer, who designed womenswear for Hermès 27 years ago, shaped her more than anyone. “We were like a football team, and he was the coach,” she says. From there she went to London to join Phoebe Philo’s team at Céline, then The Row brought her to New York; she arrived in 2011 with her then-husband, the gallerist Peter Cybulski. Of Ashley and Mary-Kate, she says, “They had a very strong idea of how they wanted to construct the brand, and I just was super-supportive of the idea of creating a very strong, tailored, timeless look.” After another three years, Hermès called; she’s been there since. Which job was the hardest to leave? “None of them.” Because the next job was so exciting? “The next thing was exciting or I had had enough,” she says, wiping her hands in a motion of dusting off the past.

If this all sounds a little safe—well, Vanhée likes to keep it that way. Though she’s been described as extraordinarily influential in, for instance, the very creation of The Row (“There really was a

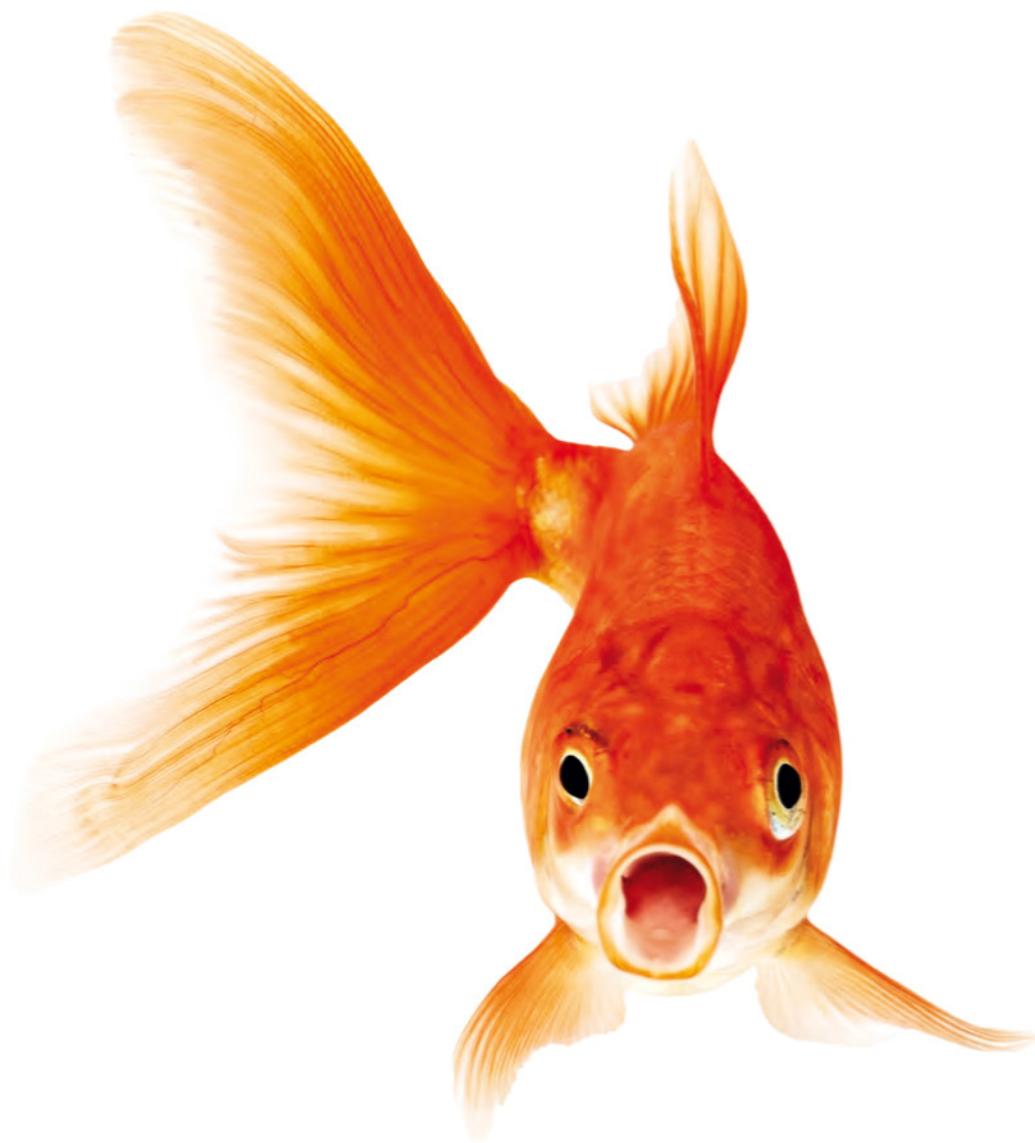
“Can you walk?” she asks, and Jill Kortleve starts to strut. Less than 48 hours to showtime.

before and an after Nadège,” an anonymous source told this publication in 2021), she’s eager to avoid creating a cult of personality around herself. (This makes sense given the brigade of famously private designers she’s trained under and the culture of the publicly traded, but still family-owned, company she works for now.) “I don’t want people to be affected by a certain position that you can have,” Vanhée says, referring to a position she, in fact, has. “I want to be free.” She’s barely on social media; on her private Instagram, she has posted exactly zero times and has only nine followers. When I ask her about her favorite restaurants from her time in New York, she says she’d rather not endorse a place that’s still open. Instead, she says she loved Souen, the macrobiotic Soho restaurant that closed in 2019. Similarly, when I ask her to name her favorite Hermès bag, she hesitates, then points to one of the label’s most nondescript styles, the Plume. When I ask about her recent clothing purchases, she tells me about a pair of Asics.

It’s taken time to figure out the tricky balance that is the crux of her job—how to add a little of herself to the brand’s discreet products. She doesn’t want to make clothes that’ll look dated in a few years, either. “You try to really say, ‘Okay, what is my personal expression?’ You know, ‘What can I bring?’” Vanhée says. A turning point came in 2018. “There was a moment where I’m like, *Oh,*

I really need to come back to the core of the house—the blanket coat, you know, the kind of enveloping silhouettes, the famous pyramid medor. I said good-bye to some of the more psychedelic things that I do, and I became much more quiet with colors.” (Cathy Horyn wrote that year that Vanhée had “finally found the perfect balance of classicism and fashion.”) This New York collection is a little funkier, she says. The basic idea was, in her words, “a woman who had no frontiers with her ideas, and she would go where inspiration would go.” In practice, she says, this will mean piling on the accessories and layering studded belts and chain bracelets and mariner caps over leather flight suits and body-conscious knit sets. And reintroducing a few unusual colors too—though she’s keeping it to ones found in Hermès’ archives. Many of the runway models will be dressed in black and, more specifically, black leather. She tells me she’s felt a little “emo” about hosting a show here. She loved the energy she felt living in the city. She thinks she was hired, in part, because she embodied that energy. “When I came to Hermès, I think people, especially Axel Dumas, kind of had this idea—well, there’s this idea that New Yorkers, women, are quite decisive, driven. You know, there is this vitality,” she says. Paris, she thinks, is a bit more “soporific.”

Before I leave her to her fittings, she wants to show me a leather jacket from the new collection that she’s especially pleased with—it’s camel colored, and calfskin, and will probably retail for around \$10,000. One uninterrupted piece makes up the sleeves and upper back of the garment, rendering the jacket’s shoulders soft and curved. Vanhée says she wanted to re-create the shape of a saddle in the back—a reference, she says, to the brand’s origins in saddlery and harness work. I nod obligingly, but looking at the jacket on the hanger, I don’t really see what she’s describing. Because her fingers are still buttery from her croissant, she asks a colleague to lift the jacket up and put it on a nearby model. On her, the jacket comes to life, puffing up in the shoulders and sweeping down to the tailored waistline. It’s subtle, but I see the saddle. “That,” she says happily, “you’ll only see at Hermès.” The next night, that jacket, paired with bright-red knit pants and pointy boots, will head down the runway as A Tribe Called Quest’s “Luck of Lucien” plays. The song’s a little joke—“It’s about how French people, when they’re in New York, they think they’re cool,” she says. “It’s a bit about that.” She chooses not to elaborate further. ■



Self: Katy Schneider

My Spotless Mind The existential divide between Rememberers and Forgetters.

I CALL MY SISTER all the time to ask her about myself. Like, “Lily, do you remember if and when I completed my HPV vaccination series?” “Yes, in ninth grade. You complained that your arm was sore afterward.” She describes my past with an unnerving ease.

I am 32, I am neurologically healthy, and I have a terrible memory. Not in the sense that I constantly lose my keys or forget the names of colleagues. More in the sense that after I experience something, it doesn’t tend to stick for very long. I believe I have 50 recollections in total, all high-drama events that I’ve repeated to myself so often they’ve become canon. My sister describes her memory as something I more closely associate with the word *memory*: an accessible inventory of her past, filled with both mundane and emotional files, colored with rich detail. In conversation, she casually brings up childhood playdates, Monday-night dinners from a decade ago. I, meanwhile, have begun to feel my college years slipping.

To my mind, the world is split into people like my sister and people like me: Rememberers and Forgetters. My friend Sarah is a Forgetter. “A few

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years after a period ends, it disappears,” she says. “Save for a few especially emotional moments, there are entire swaths of my life that are blank.” My friend Henry is a Forgetter too. (Henry and Sarah are both pseudonyms.) “Whenever I’m reading an interview where someone is talking about how they got to where they are, they’ll drop these anecdotes, and I’m like, *What?* I don’t have anecdotes like that,” he says. When I asked a friend at work about her memory, she said, “I guess if I picked, say, the summer after sixth grade, I could remember what books I was reading, which friend I was hanging out with most, the time she cut my hair, what math exercises I did, and what I was doing on the computer. You can’t?” Rememberer.

This didn’t seem to be a particularly useful distinction until a year ago, when a family friend died. The friend and I didn’t see each other often, so I had only a few memories of her along with a general sense that I’d loved her very much. My sister, who saw her as often as I did, told me she was flooded with memories after her death, that reliving them felt haunting and exhausting. I wondered if this meant she felt much sadder. Of course, memory and selfhood are intrinsically tied; there are entire schools of thought dedicated to the subject. But it seemed as though our capacities for memory—hers, teeming; mine, not so much—might mean we experienced the world differently.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY is a small part of the “larger memory system.” It’s the part that allows us access to our personal histories and lets us piece together narratives about ourselves. The question of whether some people have inherently worse autobiographical memories than others may seem simple enough: Does this kind of memory exist on a spectrum, like intelligence or athletic ability? But when I posed it to several memory researchers, they tended to pause. “I don’t know,” Dr. Charan Ranganath told me. He just wrote a book called *Why We Remember*. The field doesn’t yet have a consensus, he said, on whether people have differences in the ability to retain personal memories. (Ranganath likes to say *differences*; his feeling is that more memories isn’t necessarily better.)

Until recently, research on variabilities in memory often focused on cases involving external factors: trauma, strong emotion, mental disorders, age. But in 2015, researchers published a paper identifying SDAM, or severely deficient autobiographical memory. Tests showed there was nothing seriously *wrong* with these people (no dementia, Alzheimer’s, or brain trauma), but the first-person perspective of everything they exper-

rienced slipped out of grasp basically as soon as it ended. If they did manage to retain any details of their past, those details would seem like they were about another person altogether. A decade earlier, a mirror condition had been identified at UC Irvine: HSAM (highly superior autobiographical memory). People with HSAM don’t forget much of anything; if you give them any date of their conscious lives, they can tell you what they were doing down to the most stunningly prosaic detail.

HSAM and SDAM represent the polar extremes of how memory functions, but their identification has compelled some memory researchers to further consider what lies in between—the variability of autobiographical memory from person to person. And researchers have noticed traits associated with each condition. Those with HSAM seem, on the whole, a bit miserable. “I’ve read interviews of some people with HSAM who struggle with letting go,” says Dr. Brian Levine, the cognitive neuroscientist who helped identify SDAM. “They ruminate about negative things. There’s an obsessiveness. Likewise, I’ve talked to some people with SDAM who are really happy. Bad things don’t stick to them. They don’t seem to feel that emotional pull.”

I described my memory to Levine. It didn’t sound like I had SDAM, he said, though of course he couldn’t say from a phone call. Still, he thought my less-than-stellar memory might not be such a bad thing, based on what he’d learned from his research. Perhaps, like the people he knew with SDAM, I was not so stuck on individual instances. Better at thinking conceptually.

Although it’s impossible to say if being a Forgetter has informed parts of my personality or just enhanced preexisting qualities, I do think my inability to remember has allowed for easier passage in certain ways. It’s hard to feel guilt about things you don’t remember, and it’s hard to hold grudges, too. My Rememberer friend from work, on

It’s hard to feel guilt about things you don’t remember, and it’s hard to hold grudges too.

the other hand, said she sometimes finds it difficult to talk to old friends—the shame of her past offenses feels too accessible, present. And how could she not hold a grudge when the memory of the event that produced it still presents itself in such sharp relief? My father, who is a Rememberer, says his nostalgia often borders on unbearable. If he thinks of his cousin, who died years ago, he can slip into a memory of the two of them at 6, playing hide-and-seek in their grandfather’s house. It sounds beautiful and excruciating at once.

Observationally, Forgetters and Rememberers like to team up. This can serve a practical purpose: e.g., my sister acting as a sort of personal-memory contractor for me. It can also be difficult. Henry the Forgetter is dating a consummate Rememberer and often finds himself at a disadvantage in their arguments. “I want to disagree with her but don’t have the evidence,” he says. “She can speak in more detail. It allows you to control the narrative.” My Forgetter friend Sarah describes this dynamic in her relationship with her Rememberer boyfriend almost word for word: “When we get into fights, he has the transcript, so to speak, and I have the emotional version of it.” The emotional transcript isn’t the winning one, she finds.

The fear in general for the Forgetter is that their side isn’t being represented—that they’re not able to authoritatively tell the story of their own lives or relationships. We can be a shapeless bunch: untethered to our own narratives (what narratives?), our pasts residing primarily in other people’s minds. This strange fact leaves the Forgetter in a sort of perpetually crouched, weakened position. Sarah has a close Rememberer friend, she says, who often reminds her of things she’s done in the past. This can be unsettling. How can she correct a record that she can’t access?

Still, Ranganath cautions against Rememberer-Forgetter essentialism. For the latter, “you have to be careful because often people will remember things very confidently but that don’t track accurately. The more time they spend recalling it, the more it gets lodged.” It does seem to be self-fulfilling. One Rememberer tells me she always considered herself to be someone with a good memory, so she worked hard at it and kept a calendar of daily events that she could look back on. “Because people rely on me to know that information,” she says. Forgetter Henry, meanwhile, said that while he once tried harder to remember things, he has pretty much given up. Now, “I just glide forward,” he says. “I’m not thinking back; I’m not reflective. I don’t go about life with much consciousness of my past.” Me neither. I think it’s easier. ■

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NANCY
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VALENTINA
GOMEZ

REPUBLICAN WOMAN. BY REBECCA TRAISTER

“Can you provide a definition for the word *woman*?”

Tennessee senator Marsha Blackburn lobbied this query at Ketanji Brown Jackson during her 2022 Supreme Court confirmation hearings. Blackburn was doing her bit for her party's effort to enforce transphobic gender conformity, positioning herself as a defender of womanhood as something fixed and narrow. When Jackson declined to provide Blackburn with a definition, noting that she was not a biologist, the senator took the opportunity to dial it up a notch. “The fact that you can't give me a straight answer about something as fundamental as what a woman is underscores the dangers of the kind of progressive education that we are hearing about,” Blackburn said with lip-smacking satisfaction.

Two years later, Republicans remain cruelly closed to the realities of gender fluidity and trans existence. But how the party understands—and represents—womanhood more broadly? Well ... that's getting weird. As we cruise toward November with two ancient white men on the presidential ticket and the rights of millions of people who are not white men in the balance, the public performance of Republican womanhood has become fractured, frenzied, and far less coherent than ever.

“A true conservative woman,” Valentina Gomez, one of several Republican candidates vying to be Missouri's next secretary of state, told me in an email this spring, “speaks the truth, works hard, loves and knows how to use guns of multiple calibers, cares for the wellbeing of children and her family, doesn't sleep with multiple men and most important, does not murder babies.”

The 25-year-old Gomez made a viral ad in February in which she took a flamethrower to a pile of sex-education and LGBTQ+ books from the public library. In May, she filmed herself running through St. Louis wearing a weighted vest and advising, “Don't be weak and gay; stay fucking hard.” The day before, she had

embraced her softer side, posting a photo of herself on X in a pale-pink pantsuit and pumps, with a winning smile and her eyes cast heavenward, under a caption restating Blackburn's question: “What is a woman?”

Gomez told me feminists “have made men the enemy,” adding, “they end up alone with three dogs at the age of 50 with no kids or husband”—a time-honored Republican sentiment that liberal women, unlike conservatives, are sexless, unmarriageable spinsters. But even that rusty rhetorical frame is wobbly: In April, 31-year-old far-right activist Laura Loomer, standing outside Donald Trump's criminal trial in New York, told the *New York Times*, “You think I have a dating life? You think I'm married? You think I have kids? Do you think I go out and do fun things? No. Because I'm always putting every extra bit of time that I have into supporting President Trump.” Loomer told the paper she would not be at the courthouse the next week because she had to return home to Florida to take care of her dogs.

Contradictions abound among conservative women in Washington. In response to Jackson's testimony, Georgia representative Marjorie Taylor Greene attempted to be authoritative on the matter. “I'm going to tell you right now what is a woman,” she said. “We came from Adam's rib. God created us with his hands. We may be the weaker sex—we are the weaker sex—but we are our partner's, our husband's, wife.” But Greene, who has since divorced, regularly refers to men, including Speaker Mike Johnson and President Biden, as “weak” and is not shy about showing off her own brawn. In May, in the wake of a dustup with Democratic Texas representative Jasmine Crockett in which the two traded barbs about each other's appearance, Greene posted a video of herself lifting heavy weights to a song by Sia: “I'm unstoppable/I'm a Porsche with no brakes/I'm invincible/Yeah, I win every single game.”

“Under the surface, subcutaneously, there is a tug-of-war,” said Nancy Mace, a 46-year-old second-term Republican congresswoman from South Carolina. Mace was reflecting on the tension between presenting as traditionally feminine and deploying emasculating language that can make her sound more like Andrew Tate and his overheated manosphere buddies than Republican foremothers such as Margaret Chase Smith or even Michele Bachmann. Mace regularly declares that her male enemies, including former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, with whom she has a bitter rivalry, and Hunter Biden, the president's son, have “no balls.”

“There are the traditional roles of women in society, some biological. We're meant to nurture; we're meant to breastfeed our kids,” Mace told me over Zoom. “But my mom worked. I've worked my entire life since I was 15. It's a balance between what's your feminine side and your Main Character Energy.” Mace was explicit: “I do have Main Character Energy. I am an alpha dog, and so is my little six-pound dog, Libby.”

The Republican women seeking to steer their party into the future are finding themselves in a series of constrictive binds: between upholding a conservative white patriarchy that has outlawed abortion and asserting their value as women; between projecting traditional notions of compliant, cheerful femininity and channeling the testosterone-driven rage of the conservative infotainment complex; and, above all, between trying to build independent political identities and slavishly following Donald Trump. That devotion has come at the cost of alienating suburban white women, who have been crucial to Republicans for decades but, since 2016, have been peeling away in response to Trump's pussy-grabbing malevolence and his party's ruthless campaign against reproductive rights.

It's surely a nasty tangle for them, but for

those of us watching at home, Republican women's efforts to bridge these impossible chasms have a stupefying quality: *What to make of these women?*

As the Alabama political columnist Kyle Whitmire wrote after Katie Britt, his state's U.S. senator, delivered the response to Joe Biden's State of the Union address from her kitchen in a demonic whisper, "Katie Britt glitched out on national television and left millions of Americans asking what the heck they just watched." Weeks later, South Dakota governor Kristi Noem's strenuous efforts to show off her casually cruel streak to Trump derailed her own vice-presidential audition when it emerged that her book contained a story about how she once shot her puppy and left the body to rot in a gravel pit.

Then there are the duck-lipped, smoky-eyed stylings of Donald Trump Jr.'s fiancée, Kimberly Guilfoyle, who danced to "Gloria" shortly before insurrectionists tore through the Capitol on January 6, 2021, and this spring announced a children's book called *The Princess & Her Pup*. The former president's daughter-in-law, RNC co-chair Lara Trump, recently promised "four years of scorched earth when Donald Trump retakes the White House" and posted a video of herself in sequined pants and stilettos as she played "Let It Be" on piano. The gun-toting congresswoman Lauren Boebert has railed against "teaching kids how to have and enjoy sex, even same-sex sex, how to pleasure themselves," yet last fall was ejected from a theater for lewd behavior that included grabbing her date's crotch during the performance. Mace made headlines in 2023 for joking about her sex life to a roomful of Christian conservatives at a prayer breakfast.

Some of this is surely just old-fashioned political hypocrisy, particularly unpleasant coming from a right that has for generations sought to police all sorts of things that it itself engages in: *Do as I legislate, not as I do*. But in a post-*Dobbs* political climate in which Republicans have grown only more aggressive on issues of gender identity, contraception, and sex education, the ways in which the party's women have been comporting themselves loom large.

On the cusp of an election season that could further reshape this democracy and women's place within it, the questions facing the women of the American right are tricky. Are they supposed to be cut-

throat or cute? Cold enough to kill a dog or warm enough to bake an apple pie? To whom is their devotion chiefly addressed: country, husband, God, or Trump? And how might their womanhood complicate their responses to the closing of obstetrics wards or the fact that their party's leader was convicted of falsifying business records to cover up an extramarital affair with an adult-film actress?

The challenge of navigating these thorny questions has left many of them caroming from high-pitched rancor, to contorted eroticism, to the seemingly snug comforts of trad-wife chic. The spectacle can provoke



LAUREN BOEBERT WITH TRUMP IN A "LET'S GO BRANDON" DRESS.

amusement, fury, and a frisson of horror-movie unease. For if the women of today's Republican Party are upending gender conventions in unprecedented fashion, they're doing it in service of a party that has never been more openly hostile to women and their rights.

IN BOTH PARTIES, women have never had it easy; this is a business that remains, 235 years in, overwhelmingly run by men. And for a time, it was Democratic women who encountered the gnarlier complexities.

As members of the party that at least theoretically represented the gains of the women's movement that were so disruptive to the old gendered order, they could not themselves present as too aggressive for fear of being seen as radical, nor could

they be too vulnerable, feminine, or even conventionally beautiful lest they be dismissed as unserious. Jennifer Granholm, a former pageant contestant and the first woman to govern Michigan, has described cutting her hair short and trying to add gray streaks when she ran her first campaign in 1998. "You had to look completely asexual," she once said. "The first thing they think about is how you are shaped, what you are wearing. You have to be as neutral as possible so that people will pay attention to the words coming out of your mouth."

Meeting ridiculous gendered expectations could mean ridiculous micro-humiliations: When Hillary Clinton told reporters in 1992 that she had chosen to pursue a paid profession rather than stay home to bake cookies, she was pressured to participate in a "First-Lady Bake-Off" to prove her wifely chops. Fifteen years later, during her first presidential run, the presence of a body that was not male was such an anomaly on the campaign trail that the *Washington Post* published a fashion feature about how she was choosing to handle her cleavage. Clinton was perhaps the most acute example of an assertive Democratic woman whose efforts to satisfy a ravaging press and public intolerant of female complexity left her so twisted and poll-tested that she became largely illegible as *human*, let alone *female*.

Meanwhile, Republican women faced limitations of their own but for a long time appeared at ease with them. Many came off as maternal and content, conservatively coiffed and shoulder-padded, a comfortable match for a party that wanted to offer reassurance to a nation jittery about women's liberation. Think Elizabeth Dole, a Reagan Cabinet member, future senator, and presidential candidate whose chatty, Oprah-style stroll through the crowd on the night of her husband's 1996 presidential nomination was the (sole) highlight of that convention. But they could also be tough and mean—Barbara Bush once called Geraldine Ferraro a bitch!

The Republican Party, through the 1990s and into the new millennium, included quite a few "moderate" women, such as Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas and Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins of Maine, who believed in fiscal conservatism but also held positions on so-called social issues that were comparatively liberal. They were, like many in their party before its sharp anti-abortion turn, "pro-choice." They worked with Democrats to reach compromises,

and the women on both sides of the aisle appeared to be friendly with one another: Collins partnered with Kirsten Gillibrand on the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” and Gillibrand helped then-Senator Clinton throw Collins a bridal shower.

A turning point in the evolution of conservative womanhood came when John McCain selected a little-known governor of Alaska to be his running mate in his presidential race against Barack Obama in 2008.

Sarah Palin was in her mid-40s, young enough not to be collared by the pearls and propriety that inhibited many of her forerunners in both parties. She was charismatic and uninterested in conforming to outdated gender stereotypes. Or rather, she conformed to a bunch of them simultaneously: She had a sexy-librarian beauty and no qualms about playing it up; a macho snow-machine-racing husband who had taken a leave from his job on the oil fields to be the primary parent to their five kids; and she used her youngest child, Trig, born with Down syndrome, as proof of her hard-core anti-abortion bona fides. She had white-nationalist instincts that led her to counter Obama with language about “real Americans,” and she pioneered a Mama Grizzly persona that was both sporty and menacing (fuck your dead puppy; this lady wanted wolves to be shot from helicopters). She was unafraid to stake her own claim to women’s equality, advocating for a “new, conservative feminism.”

Balancing these divergent identities came naturally to Palin, and she was, at first, chillingly effective, the best to ever play the game of covering the cognitive dissonance of the right’s anti-woman policies with high-gloss girl power. What was the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull? Lipstick, losers.

But if Palin was a model for a new generation of right-wing women, she was also a fundamentally unstable molecule.

McCain had hired Palin as a gimmick rather than as a colleague and thus had no idea what to do with her. His campaign fed her straight into the blades of the press, which exposed such deep ignorance of basic policy questions that Tina Fey could parody her on *Saturday Night Live* by simply repeating what she had said. But even had they prepared and protected Palin better, the combustibility of what she brought to the table was a preview of the metaphysical impossibility of women gaining real power on the right.

She was a star and then, almost immedi-

ately, too much of one. Palin’s poor media showing would be blamed for her ticket’s loss, but the eagerness to throw her under the bus surely stemmed in part from irritation: She had not been subservient. She had, famously, “gone rogue.” She had outshone the man at the top of the ticket.

The brutal irony of women on the right is that their emergence as mighty politicians is reliant entirely on feminist gains, and their experiences track with the feminist critique of inequality, including expectations of acquiescence to powerful men. Palin’s self-assured ethos was made possible by the women’s movement that she was interested in co-opting for herself—and which the modern Republican Party is seeking to destroy.



VALENTINA GOMEZ TAKING A FLAMETHROWER TO SEX-EDUCATION BOOKS.

It was in the post-Palín flameout that the contours of that vengeful project would cease to be subtext and instead become mainstream conservative liturgy. The white-Christian-nationalist brand of Republicanism Palín embodied previewed the rise of the tea party and the right’s relentless drive to defund Planned Parenthood, an agenda accompanied by an open disregard for and cluelessness about women and their bodies.

During Obama’s first term, Republicans at the state level pushed through TRAP laws mandating that abortion clinics have wide hallways or that doctors tell patients about wholly fictionalized ties between abortion and breast cancer. Mis-

souri’s Todd Akin proclaimed that in cases of “legitimate rape,” the “female body has ways to shut that whole thing down,” while radio host Rush Limbaugh said law student Sandra Fluke, who had testified in front of Congress about requiring contraceptive insurance for students, was a “slut” who was “having sex so frequently that she can’t afford all the birth-control pills that she needs.” This period saw the calcification of the Republican universe we now inhabit, in which, just this past February, Alabama senator Tommy Tuberville defended his state’s brief curtailment of IVF services by repeatedly insisting that the decision made sense because “we need to have more kids.”

The possibilities of earlier eras, in which a fiscal conservatism could be imaginatively walled off from social revanchism, thus mitigating contradictions for women like Snowe and Collins and Hutchison, were foreclosed by a post-Obama, post-Palín, post-tea-party right that was flagrant, excited even, about its ability to demean women. Some of the old-guard moderates, including Snowe and Hutchison, left their posts, while those who stayed began to turn right, in line with their ever more misogynistic party.

WHEN THE REPUBLICAN Party of Palín first began to make way for the Republican Party of Trump, he was still best known as a reality-television star. He was the owner of the Miss Universe pageant, a serial adulterer who had cheated on two of his wives and was married to a woman who appeared to be his ideal: a simulacrum of every sculpted, shiny, glittery, enhanced expectation of femininity. Here was a man who regarded women with wolf-whistling lasciviousness or dismissed them as pigs and dogs.

As a presidential candidate, he expressed revulsion for female bodies, claiming that debate host Megyn Kelly had “blood coming out of her wherever” and calling Clinton’s bathroom break during a debate “disgusting.” He was accused by more than a dozen women of sexual assault. When he became president, he stacked the Supreme Court with anti-abortion zealots who proceeded to strike down *Roe*.

For the women in his party who want to gain any political authority, submitting to him and conforming to his standards is the only path to survival, and womanly fealty to Trump can be vividly expressed by meeting the physical demands of his universe.

For years, the right promoted a very par-

ARE THEY SUPPOSED TO BE CUTTHROAT OR CUTE? COLD ENOUGH TO KILL A DOG OR WARM ENOUGH TO BAKE AN APPLE PIE?

ticular version of conservative femininity via its Fox News arm. Lithe blonde couriers of white panic over Black Santa and Sharia were one of Roger Ailes's innovations, and Kelly, Gretchen Carlson, Laura Ingraham, and others gained powerful public perches in exchange for their chaturanga-toned arms and poisonous propaganda. That many of them would eventually come forward to tell of the grotesque harassment and sexual abuse they experienced while working at Fox is perhaps the ultimate portrait in miniature of the dynamic in which women on the right so often find themselves embroiled.

But if the sleek women of Fox were one model of idealized feminine aesthetics, this era demands a different look, one constructed not to Ailes's tastes but to Trump's.

Kristi Noem, like Palin, began her political life as a female herald of the hard-right turn her party was making, elected to the House of Representatives in the tea-party sweep of 2010. A former rancher, she came to office opposed to abortion and marriage equality. Noem was always classically attractive, a Jennifer Aniston look-alike who at the start of her political career worked a rural white middle-class-mom vibe: practical trousers, ill-fitting blazers, weed-whacked hair (there but for the grace of God go any of us).

Noem became a conservative superstar in 2020 when, as South Dakota's governor, she refused to implement any COVID-mitigation efforts in her state. In 2021, the *Times* described "her eagerness to project a rugged Great Plains Woman image." The next year, her first memoir, *Not My First Rodeo*, featured a cover image of Noem sitting astride a horse, in a cowboy hat and a red-white-and-blue western blouse.

In the years since COVID, in which the right's affirmation clearly filled her with the ambition to ascend alongside Trump himself, Noem has undertaken an astonishing physical transformation. Gone are the boxy do and blazers; she now sports long, highlighted waves. Her cheekbones are angular, her lips pillowy, her eyelashes go on forever, and she wears body-skimming dresses. As Vanessa Friedman of the New York *Times*

observed, Noem has begun "to resemble a doppelganger for Kimberly Guilfoyle" or "a dark-haired version of Lara Trump"—in other words, Trump's kind of woman. "You're not allowed to say she's beautiful, so I'm not going to say it," Trump said approvingly of Noem earlier this year.

Generations of women of both parties have been caught in this finger trap. When your value is tied inextricably to sexualized standards contrived by white men, you will not be appreciated, sometimes not even *seen*, unless you meet those standards. Yet if you do hit their (often shifting) aesthetic marks, you risk being degraded by those same men, not taken seriously as their peers but rather understood as their ornament.

In March, Noem cut an infomercial for the Texas dental practice that gave her a new set of front teeth. She said she wanted people "to focus on my thoughts and ideas," instead of her allegedly flawed teeth, unconsciously echoing Granholm, who made herself dowdier for the same purpose. Thanks to the team at Smile Texas™, she continued,

"I can be confident when I smile at people, and know that they can actually appreciate and see the kindness in my face and know the love I have for them."

OR REPUBLICAN WOMEN less driven to cosmetic enhancement, there is another, more traditional

expressive model still available: that of the demure maternal presence. Yet those working this angle are also plying their cozy wares in a manner that jibes with the despotic nihilism of Trumpian America, producing messaging that can feel like an unnerving subversion of maternal tropes as much as a reinforcement of them.

Katie Britt is the youngest Republican woman ever elected to the Senate, a 42-year-old mother of two married to a former NFL player. The pretty white straight woman dating the football player was surely once one of the conservative universe's holy archetypes until gay-friendly Taylor Swift and her vaccine-loving boyfriend, Travis Kelce, scrambled conservative brains and

sent a right-wing media into seething paroxysms of vilification and paranoia.

After the Swift-Kelce meltdown came Britt's rebuttal to Biden's State of the Union address, recorded in her home's sparse kitchen, a glinting cross around her neck. Here was the remnant of the delicate and devout figure the right has long advertised as its heart and soul, the retro view of the comforting lady unadorned by anything but her love for Jesus, ready to make you dinner—while also working as a senator.

Then Britt began to talk. And out came a gruesome tale of how "the American Dream has turned into a nightmare for so many families." If it weren't for her eyelash batting, the speech would have been a direct callback to Trump's inaugural 2017 address about "American carnage." Britt told the story of a woman she'd met "who had been sex-trafficked by the cartels starting at the age of 12" and who'd shared with her "not just that she was raped every day but how many times a day she was raped." (Freelance reporter Jonathan M. Katz would quickly identify the woman Britt was describing as Karla Jacinto Romero, an advocate who'd had this horrific experience between 2004 and 2008, when Republican George W. Bush was president, and not even in the United States.)

By grossly misrepresenting the experiences of a woman of color, Britt was working an age-old reactionary script of white American womanhood being vulnerable to violent sexual incursions by Black and brown people. Yet her fixation on the lurid details struck a contemporary note, one played often in the more conspiratorial corners of the right-wing internet, as if for a brief period she really had been possessed by the voices of Truth Social and was broadcasting them to the nation direct from her home in the uncanny valley. In fact, older videos would show that the breathy, baleful voice she adopted was nothing like her actual, perfectly normal voice.

Even Britt's views on abortion, which are typical for a conservative Republican from the South, have taken on a more frightening cast. In May, she released a video advertising the MOMS Act, which she described, with a smile so aggressive it was audible, as a way to support Americans through "typically

challenging phases of motherhood.” The bill’s approach to these challenging phases almost exclusively entails ensuring that no one ends a pregnancy: It includes the words *abortion*, *terminate*, and *kill the unborn child* 17 times but offers only two references to *housing* and three to *childcare*.

Use of the white mother figure in the past was meant to signal the preservation of the private family sphere from the purported overreach of government: no federal officials reaching their sticky collectivist fingers into your home, telling you how to raise your children. But now, empowered by *Dobbs*, Britt’s motherly warmth was being deployed on behalf of a government project that would gather information about location, menstrual cycles, and pregnancy on behalf of a party that would like your friends to turn you in if you end that pregnancy.

It recalled the hissed threat of Britt’s State of the Union response: “We see you; we hear you.”

P

ERHAPS NO ELECTED official embodies the contortions of the modern Republican woman

more than Mace, who was first sworn in to the House of Representatives on January 3, 2021. Three days later, her workplace was under attack by insurrectionists, anathema to a woman raised on military order. Her father was commandant of the Citadel, the South Carolina military academy of which Mace, in 1999, became the first female graduate. She denounced Trump after January 6, telling CNN the president’s “entire legacy was wiped out” by the coup attempt and later arguing that “we have to hold the president accountable for what happened.”

The Citadel shaped Mace’s identity in more ways than one. Her 2001 book, *In the Company of Men*, tells the story of her experience there: the scrutiny of her physical presentation, sexist intimidation, harassment. This is a politician, in other words, who has thought a lot about gender, power, and inclusion. When we spoke in May, she smiled at me warily and said, “Yeah, in the party, I’m a unicorn.” She has, for example, announced her intent to work on legislation with Democrat Ro Khanna to make child care more affordable. “Collectively, as a party, we’re not traditionally seen as pro-woman, and I’m trying to change the narrative,” she said. “It’s a rather lonely experience.”

Mace is enthusiastically anti-abortion but broke with her party when she was in the South Carolina legislature during a 2019 debate on a fetal-heartbeat bill that included no exceptions for rape or incest.

“No one was talking about rape,” she said. “I felt shattered as a woman because I am a rape survivor.” Mace had been sexually assaulted at 16. “I took the microphone and went to the well, and I gave a speech I never thought I would ever give,” she said.

Mace’s story mirrors the 2013 experience of then-State Legislator Gretchen Whitmer, who, in the midst of a Michigan senate debate over a bill requiring separate health insurance for abortion coverage, surprised herself and advisers by putting her notes aside and speaking extemporaneously about how she had been raped more than 20 years earlier. But for Whitmer, a Democrat, her firsthand experience of assault and its connection to abortion access fit seamlessly with the rest of her politics. For Mace, the connections are far harder to draw.

“I’m a pro-life member in a pro-choice district,” said Mace. “I’m willing to find common sense and common ground. When we knew *Roe* was going to be overturned, I went straight to the microphone; I went straight to writing op-eds, doing interviews, being the voice of reason. Because I saw the visceral reaction in my district and I said, ‘I’m not leaving these women behind.’” Her solution, she said, is a ban at “somewhere between 15 and 20 weeks.” In 2023, Mace introduced a bill to protect contraceptive access, calling it “just common sense.” She introduced a resolution denouncing the Alabama IVF ruling, a position she called “a no-brainer.”

Back in 2021, Mace did not, ultimately, vote for Trump’s impeachment. But he remembered the slight of her initial rebuke and endorsed Mace’s 2022 primary challenger. Mace tried to win him back by traveling to Trump Tower and posting a video documenting her devotion to him; he responded by calling her a “grandstanding loser.” Mace survived her reelection bid thanks in part to the backing of Trump’s future primary rival, former South Carolina governor Nikki Haley.

When I asked Mace if there were any women in politics she regarded as models, she replied, “I respect the hell out of Nikki Haley. She has shattered glass ceilings her entire life. She has stayed true to her values and her principles; I think she’s a remarkable woman.” Yet in January, Mace endorsed Trump over Haley. “I respect her so much,” Mace said when I asked her about this incongruity. “But I could see as clear as day that Donald Trump was who South Carolinians want, hand over fist.”

She also insisted that “Donald Trump is good on women’s issues. He was the most pro-woman candidate in the presidential primary. And he gets it.” Never mind that Trump has called the end of *Roe* a “miracle.”

He pooh-poohs claims that he would restrict contraceptive access one day and say he’s open to state restrictions the next. He has called the state-by-state fight over whether abortion will remain accessible “a beautiful thing to watch.” It is very difficult to maintain a moderate keel through rhetorical gates like this.

Here is the quandary of the ambitious Republican woman laid bare. Mace’s history and profile—her time at the Citadel, her experience of assault, her admiration for the women who paved her way into politics, her self-professed moderation on abortion—might have put her in a position to reclaim the “new conservative feminism” Palin had staked out. Much of that gets warped by the pull of Trump and his politics of domination, a centripetal force that demands the breaking of bonds with mentors, adherence to day-is-night lies and inconsistency, the humiliating recanting of past criticisms, and de facto support of an abortion agenda more extreme than it has ever been. Mace’s efforts were rewarded: In 2024, Trump endorsed her and she won her primary bid on June 11 by 27 points.

There is surely a perverse pride in emerging victorious near the top of a power structure built to exclude you. These are the dynamics that have long rewarded white women for acting as foot soldiers within a white patriarchy, willing to take one another out to get closer to power, their positions adjacent to the brutes at the top a signal of their uncommon tenacity. But there is a difference between the status granted those willing to do whatever unhinged thing it takes to get ahead in contemporary right-wing politics and the political autonomy these women might yearn for just as much as the classical feminists they wage war against.

WHEN VALENTINA GOMEZ agreed to respond to my emailed questions, I noted that she had used “MAGA” to describe her politics and wondered whether she saw a distinction between MAGA and the Republican Party. “I do not use MAGA,” Gomez corrected me. “I am MAGA and The Future of the Republican Party.” Gomez told me she developed her political ideals while swimming Division I, graduating from college at 19, earning an M.B.A. at 21, and “building a real estate empire with my family”—all achievements enabled by the feminist movement. But, she said, “feminism is exactly like the Trans Movement, they are both doomed.”

Mace too turned to certain tools of feminist argument. During the Hunter Biden “no balls” hearing, she used the language of grievance when she was interrupted, asking, “Are women allowed to

SO MANY OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S MOST VISIBLE WOMEN ARE ENGAGING IN A FORM OF DRAG.

speak here or no?" In our conversation, she criticized former Speaker Kevin McCarthy for pushing only one "major women's bill" (as it happens, a piece of anti-trans legislation). Mace went on, "I can't tell you how offensive that was as a Republican woman knowing how important women's issues were going to be. His chauvinism was ridiculous. And his misogyny and sexism."

Mace also cried misogyny when ABC News' George Stephanopoulos asked her during an interview how, as a rape survivor, she could support Trump. And while it is true this question should be addressed to all supporters of Trump, not just those who have experienced sexual assault, Mace deflected the challenging question by claiming Stephanopoulos was "rape-shaming" her.

In the past, it was easier for Republican women to get away with inconsistency and self-contradiction. Phyllis Schlafly, the brilliant, diabolical political strategist, could inveigh against the masculinized ambitions of women working outside the home from pulpits well outside her own home because her professional efforts paid lip service to restoring certain comforting hierarchical expectations about men's and women's spheres.

That paradigm has been subverted. What Schlafly and her generation feared most—that the expanded opportunities and protections for women would become their own kind of traditional expectation—has come to pass. This is why the overturn of *Roe* was not greeted as some welcome restoration of a bygone order but as a threatening attack on the protections that plenty of American women, especially white middle-class women of all political persuasions, had come to count on as an established norm during the 49 years *Roe* stood.

Every one of these Republican women relies on the gains of women's liberation, and well they should. This was, in fact, what the women's movement was for: not just so those who agreed with it might enjoy more opportunities but so those who did not agree with it also could. As an early political ballbuster, former New York congresswoman Bella Abzug famously said, "We don't want so much to see a female Einstein become an assistant pro-

fessor. We want a woman schlemiel to get promoted as quickly as a male schlemiel." Welcome, ladies.

Remarkably, these dark years have seen women on the left conduct themselves with new ease and assuredness. Democratic women at both the center and the left edge of their party now communicate in a range of styles that appear more authentic and less stilted than those of previous generations of female politicians. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is fluent on social media; Elizabeth Warren lets her professorial freak flag fly; Ayanna Pressley is bald and beautiful. They tell stories of abortion, of assault, of pregnancy and childbirth, of their gay and trans offspring, of their disabilities and military service, weaving the facts of their lives into arguments for civil rights, health-care access, and housing.

Whitmer is perhaps the most prominent Democratic woman to experiment with mixing a traditional white femininity and historically masculine cadences. Though her politics could not be more different, she is perhaps the closest we have yet seen to a natural echo of Palin's swashbuckling cheek. In May, Whitmer wore a fuchsia wrap dress to pick up an award for a campaign she undertook as "Governor Barbie." Her five-word acceptance speech was "Wear pink; get shit done." In the days after Noem's disastrous book tour, Whitmer took a break from posting about the NFL draft to put up a photograph of her with her two dogs, Kevin and Doug, with the caption, "Post a picture with your dog that doesn't involve shooting them and throwing them in a gravel pit."

It's certainly all performed in its own way. But for the first time, it's the Democratic women who can articulate the mix of football and Barbie and health care and labor without tripping over themselves, who seem more comfortable in their own bodies. The women on the right appear in perpetual confusion and find themselves, like some negative image of Clinton, twisting into something unrecognizable.

There is nothing inherently wrong with wearing pink and making testicle jokes. Though shooting dogs is not nice and giving hand jobs during *Beetlejuice* is rude, they are part of a range of impulses

a free society should be open to evaluating on their own merits, regardless of the gender of the person engaging in them. If you could separate it from the regressive politics, there might be something exhilarating about Marjorie Taylor Greene's willingness to throw weights around and toss off suffocating norms of feminized civility in the workplace.

But there is no way to understand these varied approaches to gender expression outside the context of their own political aims. These are politicians who regularly refer to gender-affirming health care as "castration" and "mutilation." Boebert famously campaigned against drag story hours, while Noem wrote to South Dakota's college board asking it to ban campus drag shows. Republican women longing to attach themselves to the feminist brand leverage transphobia to do it, a riff on the TERF movement currently flourishing in the U.K. Mace has argued that conservatives laboring to keep trans women out of athletic competitions are "the feminists of today," and Haley has cast anti-trans policy-making as the "women's issue of our time."

Yet these women express themselves via a dizzying mash-up of gendered conventions: They augment their smiles, bedazzle their pantsuits, and broadcast their bench presses. In their fevered performances of hyperfemininity and hypermasculinity, so many of the GOP's most visible women are themselves engaging in a form of drag.

Of course, drag in its queer context offers the chance to slip from and send up the constricting bounds of gender norms, to encourage empathy and celebrate diverse forms of identity. The show these Republican politicians are putting on is its cold opposite: asphyxiated, distended, nasty. Theirs is surely drag's gothic inverse.

Still, it is possible to catch a glimpse of pathos beneath the performance because the show covers for something awful and real: The identities of those women are no more valued or recognized by the party for which they labor than gay or trans or feminist identities are. Women fundamentally cannot lead a party that wants to oppress women; they cannot, in fact, even be fully human within it. ■

HOW THE LOSER WON

SMILING DIDN'T
FEEL QUITE RIGHT.
MICHAEL COHEN
WONDERED:
WAS IT SAFE TO
SMILE NOW?

By
OLIVIA
NUZZI
and
ANDREW
RICE

PHOTOGRAPH BY
Richard Burbridge



M

MICHAEL COHEN WAS at home on the afternoon of Thursday, May 30, in his tenth-floor apartment at Trump Park Avenue, a building still managed by the family company belonging to the man he once called “the Boss.” He was sitting on the floor in the living room, his back against the couch, watching MSNBC with his wife and daughter. He held his breath as he waited to hear the verdict. His face was frozen. Eyes wide. Mouth open. Host Ari Melber delivered the news: “Count one ... Guilty.” Cohen let out a wild sound, as if half-man and half-rescue animal, a hoot and a growl and a howl all at once. “WwwwOOOfugh!” His expression turned awestruck. Melber continued, “Count two ... Guilty.” Again: “WwwwOOOfugh!” His heart was beating hard now, so hard that you could almost see it through his shirt. “Count three ... Guilty.” “WwwwOOOfugh!” His wife and daughter laughed, cried, and applauded. “Count four ... Guilty.” “WwwwOOOfugh!” “Count five ... Guilty.” “WwwwOOOfugh!” He balled his hands into fists, punched the air, and cried out, “Yes!”

Inside a stuffy courtroom in lower Manhattan, Donald Trump was having a more contained reaction to the news. He looked downcast as he absorbed the 34 lashes of the verdict. The judge, New York State justice Juan Merchan, then briskly went through the formalities of conviction: polling the members of the jury to check if they were truly unanimous, scheduling a sentencing hearing for July 11, and ordering up a report on Trump from the Probation Department. He released the convict—the certain Republican nominee for president—back into the free world on his own recognizance.

Four miles north, a few blocks from Trump Tower, a smile flickered across Cohen’s face. He had been there—crushed beneath the heel of the system. It seemed only just that Trump should now feel its weight too.

He had hoped that Trump’s conviction would mean his own vindication. For weeks, the defense had campaigned against his character and other witnesses had needled or knifed him on the stand. “He *said* he was a lawyer,” testified Jeffrey McConney, a former Trump Organization colleague, his voice rich with disdain. “He liked to call himself ‘a fixer.’” Hope Hicks told the court, “and it was only because he first broke it.” Her testimony particularly stung and enraged Cohen. Inside the

Trump Organization, Cohen had been perfectly happy to play the bad guy, and he was perfectly happy—often even proud—to recollect his bad-guy past. But testimony that suggested he was bad at being the bad guy? That was too much for him to take. Cohen was still a Trump man at heart. He couldn’t stand the idea that others close to Trump, who saw the world as he once had—divided simply between winners and losers—had thought him a loser all along.

The defendant left no doubt about where he stood. On social media, Trump called his former henchman a “jailbird” and a “sleazebag.” In rebuttal, Cohen called Trump “Von ShitzInPantz” and a “Cheeto-dusted cartoon villain.” *Inherit the Wind* it was not. Some TV commentators argued that Cohen was such a lowlife, and his testimony so unreliable, that it threatened the prosecution’s case. Trump’s lead attorney, Todd Blanche, used the phrase “Cohen lied,” or some variation of it, more than 60 times in his summation. Cohen, according to Blanche, was reasonable doubt personified. If the jury had ended up deadlocking over a Trump verdict, as the defense was hoping, then it was Cohen who would take the blame for the mistrial. So the unanimous guilty verdict came with a sense of release and revenge. They were even: both officially convicted felons. The loser had won.

Still, on some level, Cohen regretted his

betrayal. He had not had a choice, as he saw it, but he wished that he had, that Trump had not forced him into the role of enemy. He wished that he could have stayed in his good graces, continued to serve as personal attorney to the president of the United States, continued to work as an extremely expensive Trump-world consultant trading on his connections to the administration. Cohen had spent a lot of time thinking through the endless counterfactuals. Even if he believes, as he says he does, that Trump is dangerous, that he’s bad for the country, bad for humanity, and that in fact we have not yet seen just how bad things will get—that if he’s elected again, the country may not survive—Cohen would take it all back if he could. In a heartbeat, he would accept an alternative reality in which he was never put in a position to become the witness who helped convict the first U.S. ex-president ever to be criminally indicted. He didn’t buy it when people said that in such a reality, his life would be much worse. He might have gone to prison anyway, like so many others who remained loyal to the Boss. But Cohen dismissed lines of thinking that complicated his regret.

On the floor of his apartment, with MSNBC still droning in the background, the smile Cohen flashed dissolved fast, replaced by a worried look. Smiling didn’t feel quite right. He wondered: Was it safe to smile now? Could he even wear a smile comfortably? He wasn’t so sure.

A few hours later, he took the elevator to the lobby of the apartment building, walked over the Trump seal engraved in bronze on its marble floor, and went out through the front door. Trump’s name loomed overhead from the gilded awning. A media scrum had formed on the sidewalk upon news of the verdict. The journalists lurched in his direction, pointing recording devices and microphones and cameras. He stared straight ahead, waving them off, and boarded an idling black SUV. As he tried to shut the door, a reporter wedged his body halfway into the vehicle. He pleaded with Cohen for a sound bite, a word, anything. Cohen declined and politely wrestled the door shut. The reporter knocked on his window. Others followed, making contact with the car as it rolled away.

In the quiet, Cohen exhaled. For a few blocks, he was quiet, too. He wore a dark blazer, dark pants, and dress shoes. The stress of the trial had taken its toll and he had lost 30 pounds. When people told him he looked good, he was offended. He had not been doing well, and he was not happy when the evidence of suffering worn on his body was seen as anything else. “I look horrible,” he would shoot back, correcting the compliment. His face, with its marsupial

features, was sunken. He looked out the window at nothing in particular. Finally, as the car passed St. Patrick's Cathedral, he spoke.

"I thought I would feel differently," he said. He had expected something approaching peace or happiness or at least some catharsis, a reprieve from the darkness and anxiety that had consumed him, in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of totality, since 2018, when he turned against Trump, decided to cooperate with prosecutors, and pleaded guilty to eight federal felonies. The list of charges included tax evasion, making false statements to banks and Congress, and campaign-finance violations related to a \$130,000 hush-money payoff to Stormy Daniels—the same transaction at the heart of Trump's Manhattan trial. On cross-examination, he had referred to this process as "my journey," therapspeak that Blanche seized on and ridiculed. ("Well, the journey you have been on, at least for the past few years, has included daily attacks on President Trump. That's part of your journey, right, sir?") But Cohen really did feel as if he had been traveling somewhere, and now that he had reached his intended destination, he was hollow.

"It's hard to believe that after six years, after everything I've been through, that the journey is complete." He let out a one-note laugh. "It's unbelievable that this is the first time in his life that he's been held accountable for anything."

The SUV pulled up at 30 Rock, where he was set to appear on MSNBC. Back in 2018, when Cohen's residences and offices were raided by the FBI, the network's hosts had greeted the news with breathless anticipation. Cohen testified at trial that in those same moments, he was alone and despondent; other witnesses said they feared he would take his own life. Six years later, though, Cohen and the liberal media were on the same team. As Cohen walked across the Peacock-print carpet and made his way to security, MSNBC's biggest stars—Melber, Chris Hayes, Nicolle Wallace, Rachel Maddow, Joy Reid—were locking in upstairs for a night of special coverage. Cohen offered a friendly greeting to the guard as he removed a fig-size coin, a good-luck charm from a fan, from his pocket.

Upstairs, the mood around the green-room was giddy. Maddow sprinted through the hallway, her show notes in hand. MSNBC had been covering the Trump verdict like the fall of the Berlin Wall, and

now it was time to celebrate victory for the good guys. Cohen received a resistance hero's welcome. As the backslapping and handshaking and congratulating crescendoed, he loosened up, the flash of a smile giving way to a perma-grin and his quiet stare thawing into hyperactive animation. He laughed and joked with the hosts and analysts and reporters and pundits who were by now Cohen's old friends, even though he first got to know many of them as he helped fight Trump's war—a sometimes *WrestleMania*-style spectacle—against the "fake news" media.

"Long day?" Hayes asked.

"Six years," Cohen replied. "*Six. Years.*"

He hugged MSNBC host and legal commentator Katie Phang. "I didn't eat the whole day. I was, like, nauseous," he told her. "You know what I ate today? I ate one



With Trump on the campaign trail in 2016.

hard-boiled egg." A producer perked up and offered to show Cohen over to a craft-services table. He eyed the selection with little interest as he made his way to a coffee urn. He drinks it black, no sugar, an order that has become part of his consumable character as described in both of his books. He paced around, coffee in one hand and phone in the other.

Cohen's attorney, Danya Perry, arrived to join him on the panel. "Everyone was emotional," she said, describing the moments after the verdict was read. "I think for a bunch of different reasons." They both proceeded to the makeup room, though Cohen declined a touch-up for himself. As campy and, well, Trumpy as he could sometimes be, he did not possess the showman's vanity, even if he did think he looked, at present, pretty lousy. Perry had been by Cohen's side since his release from a federal prison in 2020 and had helped to

prepare him for his four days on the witness stand. Compared to those ordeals, this TV interview would be easy, but Perry couldn't resist giving him some words of caution. "No gloating," she told him. "No victory lap!" Cohen turned to face her and winked. He was so back. And then he was on.

FOR AS LONG as he could remember, Michael Cohen had had trouble sleeping. As a kid growing up on Long Island, he was nervous and restless. He lay awake deep into the night, eyes fixed on the ceiling, panicked about mortality. There was no God, he was as sure then as he is now, and that scared him. "I believe when you die, that's it, and it saddens me," he said. "There's no soul. No free will. There's nothing." As a kid, he sometimes stole drinks from his parents' liquor cabinet just to settle himself down. (He now drinks only the occasional Scotch, he says.) When he did manage to sleep without chemical assistance, his mind and his body still could not rest. In a recurring dream, he was Moses. He would sleepwalk through his house clutching a hockey stick in his hand like a staff. "Let my people go," he would say.

Sleeplessness continued to plague Cohen in adulthood. His coffee dependence didn't help. Neither did his anxious addiction to work, a condition that only worsened as his conscious hours became consumed with his service to "Mr. Trump." Cohen was rich before he ever met Trump. His father was a surgeon, and his siblings were all lawyers. He married into a Ukrainian American family in the taxi business and, through

taxi medallions and real estate, amassed significant wealth of his own. By the early aughts, Cohen was worth tens of millions on paper (he estimates his net worth peaked at \$104 million), and he and his in-laws began buying units in Trump buildings as both residences and investment properties. He first became acquainted with the Trump family when he helped stamp out a condo-board rebellion. He did so well Trump hired him away from a law firm; Cohen became his personal counsel, and Trump became the Boss.

For a decade, Cohen managed Trump's affairs (business and otherwise), defended him, and drummed up publicity in the papers. In private, he encouraged Trump to pursue the biggest deal of all, the thing he had toyed with doing since the '80s: running for president. Most people laughed, but Cohen never took it as a joke. He still likes to tell people he possesses "the very

first MAGA hat ever made.” It was created by a printing company owned by his sister. When Trump saw the kind of money there was to be made in the headwear business, her services were retired by the campaign and he took the honeypot for himself.

Others who worked with Cohen in Trump Tower couldn’t understand the attraction that held him and Trump together. But Trump kept him around in an office Cohen testified was 50 or 60 feet from the Boss. Cohen was happy to be Trump’s lapdog or, if the circumstances demanded it, his attack dog. Cohen describes their bond as familial, as if he were an unofficial son. He loved Trump, he admits, though there is little evidence that Trump reciprocated his affection. It does seem like he took pleasure in kicking Cohen around like a mutt.

Trump put Cohen on jobs that, in his view, no one else could get done and perhaps no one else would ever want to do, like knocking down invoices from contractors to his unaccredited and financially troubled university. Cohen hired a tech firm to rig an online CNBC poll ranking the greatest business leaders since the network’s founding—and reportedly had the same firm create a sock-puppet Twitter account called “Women for Cohen.” (Cohen’s version is that he simply gave his blessing to one Woman for Cohen who wanted to make the account.) He threatened a reporter who had dug up a divorce-case deposition in which Ivana Trump had accused her husband of rape, then asserted it was impossible to rape one’s wife. In 2016, he ended up handling payments of hush money to women who said they had slept with Trump. Initially, Cohen worked through David Pecker, who was then the chief executive of the parent company of the *National Enquirer*. But when Pecker balked at paying to silence Stormy Daniels, an adult-film actress who claimed to have had a sexual encounter

with Trump in 2006, Cohen took on the task himself, negotiating a payoff and non-disclosure agreement. When Trump hesitated to cough up the \$130,000, Cohen decided, *Screw it, I’ll do it myself*. He used a line of home-equity credit to borrow the money from his bank.

Cohen testified that he expected to get paid back and not just monetarily. In the fall and winter of 2016, as leaders of government, law enforcement, and business—and also Kanye West—were taking the golden Trump Tower elevators to pay their respects on the 26th floor, Cohen was wondering what place he might have in the White House. It was decided he would leave the Trump Organization, and he believed the president-elect might consider him to be his White House chief of staff, which may seem delusional, but then again, Trump did hire Jared, Ivanka, and Omarosa. Even Cohen seemed to realize that chief of staff was a reach. “To take someone with no political navigations for the role would cause everyone to say it’s a banana cabinet,” Cohen texted his daughter, whom he calls Sami, five days after the election. “I only wanted to be considered because it would help me with my business,” Cohen said. As always, he had monetization on his mind.

Cohen is close with his family. He talks to his parents multiple times a day, and his adult children live with him and his wife of 30 years. This is one of the characteristics that makes his devotion to Trump so hard to understand. Which Cohen knows. It just doesn’t make sense. He was not vulnerable. There was no obvious void he was trying to fill. He had a family who loved him. He had his own fortune. What did he need from a reality-TV star? “Have you ever traveled with Taylor Swift?” he said. (“No” was the answer.) That was all he could think to compare it to. “When you’re at the center of things—when cameras are flashing, it

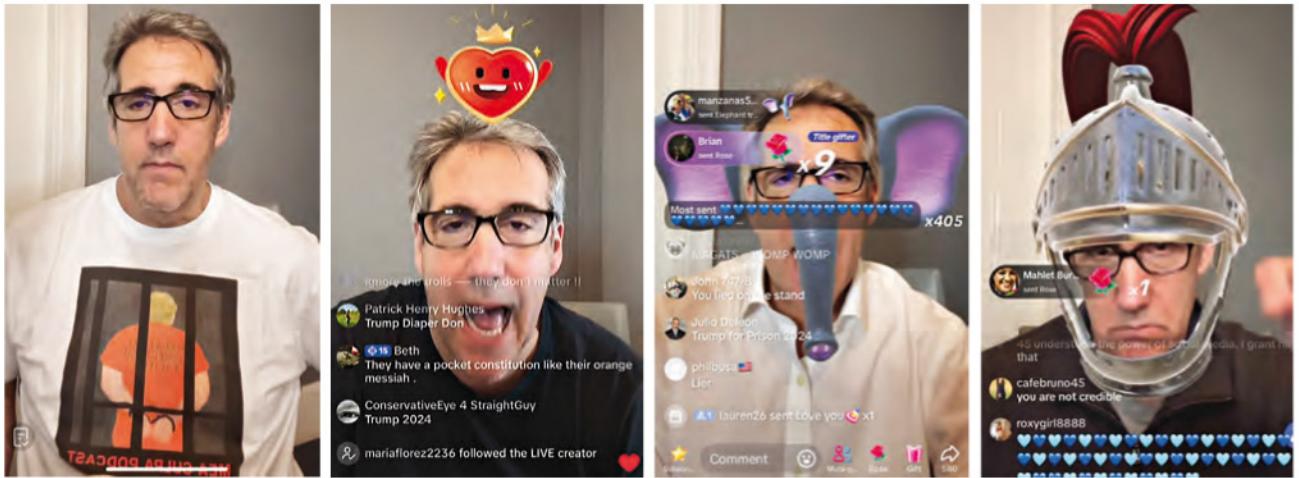
doesn’t matter that they’re not flashing for you.” It was intoxicating. He was intoxicated by it. In any case, his bond with his daughter is particularly strong, and in text messages introduced as evidence in the trial, she is revealed as a sort of sage, acting as a reality check on her father’s ambitions. (She was an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania in 2016.) When the chief-of-staff job went to Reince Priebus, she urged her father to find another role close to Trump in the White House, even if it meant living on a government salary, saying it would give him “unparalleled power for the future.” Cohen reassured his daughter that no matter what, he would maintain his access to the Boss. “I have done so much for him over 10 years,” Cohen wrote, “it can’t be overlooked.”

But in Trump’s world, loyalty ran only uphill. He could be particularly cold-blooded when it came to dealing with his lawyers, whom he treated as blunt, disposable objects. Even his early mentor Roy Cohn—the ferocious model for all Trump attorneys to follow—ended up being cut loose at the end of his life, when he faced disbarment and was displaying symptoms of AIDS. (“Donald pisses ice water,” Cohn complained as he was dying, according to Wayne Barrett’s early Trump biography.) In Cohen’s case, the brush-off came enclosed in a Christmas card signed by the Boss. Cohen opened it, expecting to find a generous 2016 bonus. Instead, he discovered Trump had given him a measly check, far less than the six-figure sum he received most years.

It is worth taking a moment here to consider how catastrophically stupid and shortsighted it was for Trump to stiff his fixer. Had he instead just pulled out his Sharpie and written in a large number—let’s say, hypothetically, \$420,000, the amount he later paid to Cohen via a phony legal retainer—then maybe Cohen would have felt appreciated. Maybe Trump could have said with a wink and nudge that they were all square for Stormy Daniels. Maybe there would have been no need for multiple meetings, including one in the Oval Office, to come up with an overcomplicated reimbursement method and thus no justification for charging Trump with falsifying business records. There would have been no incriminating paper trail, and no 34 felonies, just a generous year-end bonus for a valued Trump Organization employee, which would be hard to question considering their very good 2016.

Instead, Trump chose to be mean, in the Dickensian sense, telling Cohen he didn’t matter to him in a language they both understood. Like any other service worker, he would have to fight Trump if he wanted to be made whole for the \$130,000 he was

COHEN AND TRUMP MADE EYE CONTACT ONLY ONCE AT TRIAL. IT WAS BRIEF AND ACCIDENTAL.



On TikTok Live during the hush-money trial.

out of pocket. Why would Trump treat Cohen so shabbily? Resentment seems to have played a role. David Pecker testified that Trump never liked the idea of paying hush money because he thought, rightly, the truth would come out anyway. Trump had never been ashamed of his womanizing. “I can’t even tell you how many times he said to me, you know, ‘I hate the fact that we did it,’” Cohen told Keith Davidson, the lawyer who represented Daniels, in a recorded October 2017 phone call that was introduced at trial.

On January 10, 2018, Davidson sent Cohen—who had by then settled into a lucrative role as personal attorney to the president—a text. “WSJ called Stormy,” it said. *The Wall Street Journal* was working on a story about the hush-money payment, which appeared two days later. The agreement began to unravel. A liberal watchdog group filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission, saying that the Daniels payment should be investigated as an illegal in-kind campaign contribution. Cohen told the commission the payment was a “private transaction” paid out of his personal funds.

On April 9, 2018, there was a knock at Cohen’s door. When he opened it, the FBI served him with a search warrant, from which he learned the federal government was investigating him for various financial crimes, including campaign-finance violations. Cohen later testified that, in that moment, he felt his “life being turned upside down.” He left a phone message for Trump. Trump called him right back.

“And he said to me: ‘Don’t worry, I am the president of the United States,’” Cohen testified. “There is nothing here. Everything is going to be okay. Stay tough.”

Cohen never spoke directly to Trump again.

AFTER THE CALL, Cohen testified, he resolved to stay “in the Trump camp.” The Trump Organization initially paid for his expensive Washington defense attorney. He also talked for many hours with Robert Costello, a New York lawyer who was close friends with Rudy Giuliani, who was taking control of Trump’s defense in the Mueller investigation. Costello first met with Cohen in a conference room at the Regency hotel on Park Avenue. He later testified that Cohen was distraught and talked about jumping off the roof. Costello offered to open a “back channel” line of communication to Trump via Rudy. Cohen thought it might be an escape route.

Shortly after Cohen met with Costello, Trump posted a series of supportive tweets. (“Most people will flip if the Government lets them out of trouble even if ... it means lying and making up stories. Sorry, I don’t see Michael doing that despite the horrible Witch Hunt and the dishonest media!”) Costello emailed Cohen, telling him that the posts were Trump’s way of signaling he was happy the back channel was open. “You are ‘loved,’” Costello wrote, putting the word *loved* in quotation marks, as if it came from Trump. “Sleep well tonight. You have friends in high places.”

Costello presented Cohen with a retainer agreement, but Cohen never signed it and he never paid the lawyer a penny. He testified that he felt there was “something really sketchy and wrong” about their interactions but said he kept talking through the back channel because he believed that the possibility of a preemptive pardon from Trump was being “dangled.” Still, he assumed that the back channel was meant to benefit Trump, not him. Emails introduced by the prosecution at trial showed that Costello was simultaneously writing to a partner in his law firm that his objective was “to get

Cohen on the right page without giving him the appearance that we are following instructions from Giuliani or the president.”

Trump reportedly did consider giving Cohen a pardon but appears to have calculated that the political cost of protecting Cohen was greater than the legal risk of letting him hang. He cut off the subsidy to Cohen’s lawyer in Washington, who quit the case. Cohen started to waver. On June 21, the Trump-hating comedian Tom Arnold posted a photo of himself and Cohen at the Regency, which Cohen retweeted, and then Arnold told reporters they would be “taking Trump down together.”

“What should I say to this asshole?” Costello wrote his law partner. “He is playing with the most powerful man on the planet.”

“My wife, my daughter, my son all said to me, ‘Why are you holding on to this loyalty?’” Cohen said in his testimony. He hired a new lawyer who had no connection to Trump’s legal team and soon agreed to plead guilty. Trump, who was referred to as “Individual 1” in the charging document that described Cohen’s actions in the Daniels case, responded to the plea by tweeting: “If anyone is looking for a good lawyer, I would strongly suggest that you don’t retain the services of Michael Cohen.”

Cohen gave testimony to Congress in which he called Trump a “con man.” Democrats rejoiced over his turn. But the self-described fixer couldn’t keep himself out of prison. Instead of throwing himself on the mercy of his prosecutors, he didn’t sign a formal cooperation agreement and tried to pick and choose where he would help investigators. Because Trump was considered immune from prosecution as president, he had no bigger fish to offer up. Prosecutors wrote a sentencing memorandum to his judge that portrayed him as deceptive and manipulative and accused him of taking a

“rose-colored” view of his crimes. The judge ended up hitting Cohen with a three-year sentence. He had tried to flip, but he had flopped. (Cohen says this widely reported version of his plea negotiation is “completely wrong.”)

He spent 13 and a half months in FCI Otisville, a federal prison with a minimum security camp that has tennis and bocce courts. He came to believe he was a political prisoner of the Trump administration, that it was trying to torture him, and that the prosecutors and even his judge were all in on it. While inside, he had started writing a book about Trump. In July 2020, the Bureau of Prisons revoked a pandemic-related furlough after a meeting in which Cohen claims federal officials tried to bully him into agreeing not to publish his book. He was returned to Otisville and placed in solitary confinement in a higher-security area of the prison. (The government claimed Cohen was remanded for “defiant” behavior, not book-writing, and that the solitary stint was a standard COVID quarantine.) According to a subsequent lawsuit Cohen filed against the federal government, Trump, and others, the conditions of his reimprisonment were miserable. For 16 days, he was stuck in an eight-by-12-foot cell. It was summertime, and the poorly ventilated box was broiling. His blood pressure ran dangerously high. (The lawsuit was dismissed in 2022; Cohen said he intends to appeal it to the Supreme Court.)

It was at this dire moment that Cohen found Perry, his current lawyer, who has ended up acting as a sort of spirit guide on his legal journey. A former federal prosecutor, Perry took on Cohen—first at a steep discount and then, when the \$200,000 raised for his defense by supporters ran out, as a pro bono client. She filed a petition to get him back out of prison. A federal judge ended up reversing the decision to reimprison Cohen, calling it “retaliatory.” He went back to home confinement until his sentence ended in late 2021 and used the time to finish his memoir *Disloyal*.

Cohen began offering evidence to prosecutors from the Manhattan district attorney’s office when he was still in Otisville and continued to do so over the next four years as the case against Trump stopped and started and pivoted. In 2022, he published a second book, *Revenge*, in which he questioned why the DA’s office seemed reluctant to bring a case. “You’ve been told it’s my credibility,” he wrote. “I call bullshit. Put me on the stand and let me loose.” The newly elected DA, Alvin Bragg, showed no enthusiasm for unleashing a prosecution that depended on Cohen. In the end, though, Bragg and his team seem to have come around to the

wisdom of an old law-enforcement adage: It sometimes takes a small-time crook to catch a world-historical crook.

For Perry, one of the central challenges of trial preparation was persuading Cohen to tame his wilder impulses so he avoided coming off as a madman. An emotional client with a famously hot temper, Cohen required a combination of legal counsel, life coaching, and therapy.

Earlier this year, Cohen and Perry began to meet regularly with a group of assistant DAs who would handle the trial. They would review the case in five- or six-hour sessions in an eighth-floor conference room. Perry would conduct mock cross-examinations, playing the role of Blanche, whom she had known well when she was a line prosecutor at SDNY and he an eager young paralegal and then an assistant U.S. Attorney.

Cohen at times seemed hell-bent on demolishing all these careful preparations. He would at night take to TikTok, yapping about the defendant, sometimes through goofy filters that made him look like a medieval knight or whatever. These shit-posts appeared as an unwelcome surprise to prosecutors, who were trying to build a credible case around Cohen, and to Perry. Cohen dismissed pleas to cut it out—he just couldn’t stop himself.

He ended up on TikTok because, as ever, he couldn’t sleep. Late at night, the world would be at rest, and there he was, alone with his nerves in the dark, scrolling on his phone for hours. He couldn’t eat. He drank too much coffee. His eyes were wide. His pupils stayed dilated. His head swiveled at the tiniest sounds. He had the expression of a hunted man. He thought that he really might be. He expected violence to visit him, he said. Sometimes it seemed like he was looking for it. When Trump held a rally in the Bronx during the trial, he considered showing up but thought better of it. On TikTok, he found some community. He didn’t see the harm. He kept swiping up. Before long, he started posting. Sometimes he streamed live. In one such livestream, he wore a T-shirt that depicted Trump in an orange jumpsuit, behind bars. The defense would introduce it into evidence.

At one point, Justice Merchan asked the prosecutors why they couldn’t get their witness to stop, and one told the judge he had “no power” over Cohen. Merchan told him to tell Cohen to control himself, and “that comes from the bench.”

What finally reached Cohen, he said, was a personal plea: Perry told him that every time he acted out, he made her look like Blanche—another lawyer with an uncontrollable client. He stopped streaming and posting, at least for a little while.

Cohen tried to find other ways to pass the time. He watched cable news until he couldn’t anymore and then he watched true-crime documentaries and a series about Vikings. He spent hours sitting outside at a coffee shop near his apartment, taking meetings or alone and staring at his phone. Sometimes he watched MSNBC live on the device. He said he didn’t like all the attention he received from strangers on the street, but he did come to accept and expect it, and his body language suggested that he yearned for it. When someone passed by his sidewalk table, he would lean his chin forward, angling his face as if to be more visible. Often the person would stop dead in their tracks and exclaim his name or tell him “thank you” or offer a prayer of support. Occasionally, he said, he was heckled or threatened, but if that was happening, it was with much less frequency than he was praised.

One afternoon in May, when he was at the café, two elderly women sitting a few tables away from Cohen began pulling up images of him on their phones. They conferred with each other, confirming they were correct about who they thought he was. One of them then stood up, walked a few feet toward Cohen, and raised her phone in the air, making no effort to conceal that she was snapping photos of him. She didn’t say “hello” or acknowledge her subject at all.

“Ma’am, please,” he said. “Don’t do that.”

She ignored him and continued. He covered his face with his hand.

At last, on May 13, Cohen’s moment came. He and Perry rode down to the criminal courthouse on Centre Street. They arrived early, around 7:30 a.m., and proceeded to a witness room, where they would sit for two hours while the Secret Service locked everything down. During those waiting periods, Cohen’s anxiety spiked. He was operating on no sleep, no food, and no blood-pressure medication, which he stopped taking owing to concerns that one side effect—breaks for frequent urination—would make him look weak in court. Cohen would pace frantically around the witness room, wondering aloud what he would be asked and fretting over how he should respond.

On that first morning, when the prosecutors called Cohen’s name, a side door to the courtroom opened and Cohen walked past Trump, who was sitting sullenly at the defense table. At long last: *the Confrontation*. But as Cohen went through the preliminaries of his testimony, talking about how he had first come to work for Trump, the defendant’s eyes drooped closed. Like everyone else, Cohen had heard that Trump had been drifting off at times throughout the trial. But even now? “I see him,” Cohen narrated later. “His eyes

are closed. His body is thrown back into the chair.” Cohen tried to detect some signs of sentience, some twitches of aggression, behind his eyelids. But he finally came to the conclusion that Trump was unconscious.

“It’s crazy,” Cohen said. “I would say for my very first day, I’m not joking now, 90 percent of the time that I was on the stand, he was sleeping. Well, I shouldn’t say sleeping. He was with his eyes closed and slumped over. Here’s the crazy shit: The jury can see him! They are watching him! Now, if I was a juror and the defendant is so disinterested in his own case? I’d be pissed!”

From the stand, Cohen was able to assess Trump’s face carefully. It was by now familiar in the way that only the face of a family member or lifelong friend could be. He had imagined it, scorned it, and missed it. But now, Cohen mostly felt incensed. He was damning Trump, and Trump was dead to the world. As an insomniac, he felt taunted. “I can’t even sleep in my own bed,” he said. Cohen stared at Trump for long stretches, but defendant and witness made eye contact only once, according to Cohen. It was brief and accidental. “I looked over to my

nothing to do with Trump and suggesting he was making a fortune off his new career as an author and podcaster. (On the stand, he said he made some \$3.4 million from *Disloyal* and *Revenge*.) But Cohen managed to answer in an even tone when Blanche brought up his previous misdeeds and evasions. “You want to call it a lie?” Cohen replied at one point. “I’ll call it a lie.” When Blanche confronted him with his past insults, he would reply, blandly, “Sounds like something I would say.”

Back at Trump Park Avenue after a full day of cross-examination, Cohen was offended by Ari Melber’s assessment of his performance on the stand. Melber said Cohen was a crucial but imperfect witness who had faced a “winding but relentless” cross. Cohen felt this was “hypercritical” and “unfairly biased” regarding his hour-long testimony. He raged about Melber and fantasized about revenge. He calmed down by repeating to himself, “Michael, stay in your Zen. Michael, Stay in your Zen.” Cohen assumed the role of legal analyst to size up Blanche. He thought Blanche would be a better cross-examiner

the contradictory evidence was a surprise.

“That was a lie; you did not talk to President Trump that night,” Blanche shouted. “You can admit it!”

“No, sir, I can’t,” Cohen stammered. He later acknowledged he was “caught off guard” but said he “never backed down from what I knew to be accurate,” which was that he had talked about the Daniels deal with Trump during the call. After court adjourned, TV commentators described it as a devastating setback for the DA. Cohen returned to the stand the following Monday, sounding less confident. His voice was so soft at times it seemed like he might be flickering out. Blanche opened by asking him if he had spoken to any reporters over the weekend. He said he had not. “You didn’t speak to a single reporter about what happened last week?” the attorney asked. “I have spoken to reporters who just called to say ‘hello,’ to see how I’m doing, to check in,” Cohen replied. “But I did not talk about this case.” He may have been telling the truth about his conversations over the weekend. As for the days prior, well, some reporters in the court gallery had to laugh.

The defense did its best to demonstrate that Cohen was an unreliable narrator. In his final argument, summoning his inner Johnnie Cochran, Blanche called Cohen the “GLOAT,” or “greatest liar of all time.” But Trump’s attorney never succeeded in making him look like the biggest liar in the courtroom. Cohen was proud of himself for defying all expectations and keeping his cool on the stand, even when Trump’s team tried to confront him with his past false statements. “What I found interesting,” he said on the phone, “is that a lot of the pundits, they all have me as a bombastic, obnoxious, sharp-elbowed loudmouth attorney who’s gonna lose his shit on the first attack by Blanche, and it’s two days in a row they ain’t seeing that. I mean, look, I would be, obviously, funnier on the stand if it was appropriate, but it’s not appropriate.” Cohen took devilish pleasure when the judge, citing a gag order meant to protect witnesses and others from intimidation, held Trump in contempt for attacking him along with Daniels. “Now, if I was a prick, I would start tweeting nasty shit about Trump.” Then, suddenly, he had to hang up: “Oh, crap, it’s Scaramucci—I’ll call you right back!”

The next morning, in a fruitless attempt to remind the jury of the person Cohen was outside the courtroom, Blanche took another tack, questioning him about some rabid-sounding podcast clips.

“You said, and we played it for the jury,” Blanche said, “that revenge against President Trump is a dish that is—”

“Served best cold,” Cohen said, finishing his sentence for him. (Continued on page 96)

HE WAS BACK IN THE GAME, A WINNER, AND HE FELT FREE. “I’VE GOT 8,000 MESSAGES!”

right, and he looked at me, and I looked at him and then he quickly looked away,” Cohen said.

Maybe Trump had just heard it all before. Cohen’s testimony came as something of an anticlimax because the prosecutors had already introduced much of what he had to say through prior witnesses, lessening the risk of appearing to rely too much on the word of a felon. Cohen would often turn to face the jurors when he testified, and he thought he was reaching them. Still, off the stand, he was insecure about his performance. He was angered or annoyed by media personalities whose opinions about the trial diverged from his own.

When it came time for cross-examination, Blanche attempted to bloody him up, interrogating Cohen about financial crimes he had pleaded guilty to that had

if he “stayed focused on topics without the relentless, meandering style of questioning.” Cohen went on, “I’m not surprised. I should not have expected more after learning that this is only his second trial as a criminal-defense attorney.”

The following court day, Blanche sprang, confronting Cohen with what was either a major memory lapse or an outright lie. On direct examination, he had testified that he had gotten the go-ahead to pay off Daniels in a conversation with Trump on his bodyguard’s cell phone, and the prosecution had introduced records showing a brief call. The defense had discovered texts indicating that, around the very same time the call was placed, Cohen was complaining to the bodyguard about harassing phone calls from a 14-year-old prankster. For all his hours of preparation,

Burning
himself
to death
outside
the Israeli
Embassy
turned
him into
an antiwar
martyr.

What
upbringing
could have
led to
such an
extreme
act?

Aaron Bushnell's Agonies

BY SIMON VAN ZUYLEN-WOOD

*Aaron Bushnell
at his birthday
party in 2022.*



HIS PAST FEBRUARY, Aaron Bushnell was renting an apartment in a two-story complex in a suburb near Kent State University. He said Ohio reminded him of his hometown on Cape Cod: the red brick, the storm doors, the Protestant steeples. But his building, with its beige siding and modest fitness area, its jungle gym and scattered picnic tables, could have been anywhere. He had lived there for three months, working as an intern in the IT department of a home-improvement company. The job was part of the Department of Defense's SkillBridge

program, which transitions servicemembers into civilian life. Bushnell was aiming for a career as a software engineer, perhaps designing video games. He would be out in May, at the age of 25, after his military contract expired.

Knowing nobody in Ohio, Bushnell put unusual effort into meeting his fellow residents, at one point leaving notes at their doors. "Hello neighbor!" they read. "I am Aaron Bushnell (he/him), and I recently moved in at apartment 30. I would love to meet you! I think it's important for us to know our neighbors and build community together." He included a QR code to a Discord server where they could talk as well as his email for those unfamiliar with the platform. On the flip side, in vaguely satanic lettering, he had printed GREETINGS FROM YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD ANARCHIST.

Bushnell texted a photo of the note to an Air Force buddy who gently suggested that his neighbors would see it and imagine murder scenes from *The Purge*. Bushnell conceded that the font wasn't helping: "I didn't realize it would be that ugly. Also I just spent \$30 to print it at the library so this is what I've got."

People didn't seem to mind. An older man named Robert left Bushnell a note of his own, thrilled that somebody wanted to connect. Seventeen residents joined the Discord, and Bushnell suggested they gather in person. "Unfortunately I don't have the furniture and can't cook for the life of me 🙄," he posted. "Do we maybe want to meet in a neutral place like a park?" A few expressed interest in the idea when the weather warmed up.

Bushnell's apartment was sparsely furnished. There was his custom-built PC and a gaming chair. Root beer and not much else in the fridge. Paraphernalia for his cat. On his desk, a copy of *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler's 1993 novel about a young woman living in a walled enclave at a time of ecological disaster and social breakdown—a Jesus figure afflicted with a kind of pathological empathy who winds up founding a new religion.

Also on his desk was a letter from David-Matthew Strunk, a murderer serving a 48-year sentence at a prison in Colorado. Bushnell had come across a piece of Strunk's writing online, titled "Shepherds," in which he posited a "new thing goin on, a kind of social manipulation" designed to screw over prisoners and homeless people alike, which looked to Strunk like the work of a global plot called "Agenda 21." Bushnell had been distributing food to the homeless in nearby Akron and, over time, had come to harbor intense animus toward all forms of law enforcement and the military.

He sent Strunk a letter. "The idea of being 'herded' resonates with the experiences I've heard from homeless people about the way they're treated by institutions," he wrote. "The system just wants to keep people 'on the treadmill.' I think we're all on the treadmill, just to different degrees, under different conditions.

Some of our treadmills are more comfortable than others. We struggle our whole lives to try and get a nicer treadmill, instead of joining together and getting rid of the treadmills."

Bushnell was a prolific Reddit user, posting as r/acebush1. He had lately been writing a lot about the war in Gaza. Bushnell had been living in San Antonio on October 7, the day Hamas militants attacked Israel, killing more than 1,000 people. He had been hanging out with one of his closest friends, a leftist organizer who goes by "E.," when they heard the news. "We were like, 'Cool, fuck yeah, they broke out of their prison,' but then we just kind of went about our days," E. says. Over the next few weeks, however, the conflict grew from a passing interest to Bushnell's primary concern. By the time he moved to Ohio, he was looking for rallies to attend and feeling guilty about his lack of engagement. As the war continued, it became a theater in which he saw his political preoccupations coalesce.

When Bushnell ventured onto software forums, he was deferential and asked for advice. In political settings, he could be brusque and didactic, as though he were the one surrounded by imbeciles. Under a December photo of White House staffers calling for a ceasefire, he commented, "Israel is funded by the US, if our president says stop they will stop." When another user wondered why the U.S. wasn't doing more to end the war, he scolded them for playing "into the white imperialist mindset that it is our duty and burden to save the world from barbarity."

He spent the holidays in Ohio online, posting 20 times on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. He told critics of the slogan "From the river to the sea" that they were catering to "Zionist fragility." He compared West Bank settlements to what the U.S. Army and settlers had done to Native Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries. He called democracy "a sham that was invented by the first great slave state of history, and not coincidentally adopted by the last," referring to the United States and Israel, respectively. Bushnell was as likely to lambaste the right as he was to tone-police the left, and he deemed it a sucker move to vote for anyone at all. Hamas was an "anti-colonial resistance organization." Israel was an "ethnonationalist, settler-colonial apartheid state." He got roped into long threads about whether Israel or Hamas was more like the Nazis.

Throughout the early weeks of the New Year, Bushnell gave little indication he was preparing to die. He ordered a bound script of a TV show he liked and was preregistered for courses at an online university. But he did prepare. On February 24, he signed a will in which he apologized to his brother and left him what he had: \$37,000 in savings and a \$500,000 life-insurance policy that he hoped would not be invalidated by suicide. To his neighbors, he left his cat and a \$2,000 check. To E., the root beer in his fridge. He attached the will to an email and scheduled it to send after he thought he would be dead.

Bushnell drove east in his 2010 Toyota Prius, spending the night at a Travelodge in Silver Spring, Maryland. The next day, he completed the last brief leg of his trip to northwest Washington, D.C., where he parked, took out his phone, and livestreamed himself walking through a cul-de-sac of embassies. "I am an active-duty member of the United States Air Force. And I will no longer be complicit in genocide," he told the camera. The lens captured him in profile, dressed in uniform. "I am about to engage in an extreme act of protest. But compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonizers, it's not extreme at all. This is what our ruling class has decided will be normal."

Bushnell stopped outside the Israeli Embassy and set his phone down in a way that suggested it was affixed to a small tripod. He raised a metal water bottle, which was dark blue and decorated with stickers and his name, and doused his head with liquid. For about 15 seconds, he tried to ignite the hem of his pants with a lighter. Somebody off-camera asked, "Sir, can I help you?"

He succeeded, eventually, in lighting the liquid that had pooled at his feet. Flames rose, engulfing him. He yelled, “Free Palestine,” then yelled it again, repeatedly, until his words became indistinguishable from his screams. Bushnell’s face appeared to melt. Someone yelled for him to get on the ground, then called for a fire extinguisher. Bushnell staggered and crumpled into a fixed position on his back; his left knee buckled. His pants burned away to reveal the silver-black skin of his leg. A number of personnel from the U.S. Secret Service were nearby, and one of them, wearing a white shirt, started spraying Bushnell with a fire extinguisher.

Another appeared with a gun, training it on Bushnell’s charred and supine body. The first agent told him they needed more extinguishers, not guns. Somebody arrived with a medic bag. “What is this?” said one of the agents, picking up Bushnell’s phone, and the feed went dead.

THE SPECTACULAR WAY BUSHNELL ENDED his life almost guaranteed that the reactions to it would come in extremes. Many on the pro-Palestine left received Bushnell as a revolutionary figure or martyr akin to the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc, who set himself on fire in Saigon in 1963, or the Tunisian fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, who did so in 2011 and started the Arab Spring. Stylized images of Bushnell’s blazing silhouette circulated on social media. Protesters began wearing T-shirts with his face and writings. A street was renamed for him in Jericho, and billboards and posters went up in Yemen and Malaysia. Ai Weiwei posted tribute photos on Instagram. An *n+1* elegy called “Burnt Offerings” located a thrilling logic in Bushnell’s act, noting that he was already working for “the mightiest incendiary device that humans have ever constructed.” The author connected Bushnell’s gruesome death with his own feeling of outrage: “Perhaps this is why he did it: he was already burning. I guess we all are.”

In the ensuing cycle of counter-takes, liberals and centrists warned against glorifying suicide, while the right received Bushnell, callously, as the victim of an epic self-own. There’s a meme of his face on a mock cover of *People* with the headline “Hottest Man of the Year.” Military forums filled up with in-group gallows humor: “The only thing he’s been complicit in was falling asleep on fire guard.” A debate about Bushnell unfolded on his father’s Facebook page, which he had not set to private. People seemed to consider Bushnell either incomprehensibly deranged or in possession of great moral clarity.

Becoming an abstraction was, of course, inevitable. He chose a symbolic way to die and broadcast it in real time on the internet, an unprecedentedly visible version of an ancient act. He appears to be the only active-duty U.S. servicemember to kill himself in this way, and he understood the semiotics of doing so in uniform before his contract expired. Posthumously, he became the poster child for a largely leaderless and anonymous antiwar movement.

None of this was remotely imaginable four years earlier when Bushnell showed up at Air Force Joint Base San Antonio–Lackland for basic training. He looked like an ordinary airman: 21 years old, no college, a massive Bible in his bag. It was May 2020, and he didn’t have much in the way of money or job prospects. Before enlisting, he had been running the eBay operations at a pawnshop in Massachusetts and had sought work as an Uber Eats driver.

Basic training was not the stuff of *Top Gun*: It was an eight-week slog of drills, weapons familiarization, explanations of airmanship, and HR presentations. Masking was compulsory. Bushnell’s chores included sweeping dust and keeping dormitory beds aligned with a piece of string. When his fellow enlistees got into political arguments, he mostly held back; his views leaned liberal, but he carried a baseline patriotism and an enthusiasm for the military. “Man, the Air Force does some cool-ass shit,” he once posted, uploading an image of a C-130 Hercules decked out with rockets. When someone complained about the low pay, he admonished them: “You can’t pay someone enough to risk their life for their country.” That’s why, he explained, it was called service.

Religion, more than politics, consumed his inner life. Throughout his teens, he’d had several changes of heart about his faith. He was a believer, then a skeptic, then a self-described “hard-core Christian.” At 18, on a faith trip to Italy, he found himself wavering again before rediscovering the Holy Spirit at the Basilica of St. Anthony of Padua. He recalled, “It was like my entire body was made up of a thousand spinning magnets.”

Bushnell liked arguing with atheists online, a habit he kept up in the Air Force. He was well versed in Scripture and could cite the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer or whip out Bible verses to KO

Christians he felt were being unchristian. He could also operate in a more earnest vein. When someone posted that they were contemplating suicide, Bushnell replied, “Jesus Christ sacrificed himself on the Cross for YOU. You have the unbreakable love and power of Almighty God behind you.” When another poster asked if anyone abstained from sex before marriage anymore, Bushnell answered, “Yup. 21 y/o guy here, planning on waiting.”

In basic training, Bushnell attended Catholic Mass, which for COVID reasons was pretaped and shown on screens in a chapel. One day, a fellow airman, Levi Pierpont, saw him pull out a chair and genuflect beside it. Bushnell explained that he wasn’t actually Catholic; he had grown up in a commune on Cape Cod called the Community of Jesus. He had recently

parted ways with the sect, and he could be cagey about it. It was a little hard to describe: The community was governed by a prioress, referred to as Mother. There was

a monastic order of celibate Brothers and Sisters as well as families, though children sometimes lived apart from their parents. When Bushnell left the grounds, it was often to participate in high-intensity drum competitions. “The life,” the adherents called it. To Pierpont, the son of an Evangelical pastor from Kalamazoo, Michigan, it sounded like a cult. Bushnell demurred. “He was like, ‘No, it was a really great space, but I just had to leave,’” Pierpont tells me.

After basic, Bushnell traveled to Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi for specialized training in information technology. He hoped to then be deployed overseas, and his wish list of bases included locations in Italy, Guam, Japan, Germany, and the U.K. Instead, he was reassigned to Lackland. He moved into an apartment complex on the scrubby outskirts of San Antonio that was hemmed in by Interstate 410 on one side and chain-link fencing on the other. Dogs penned in yards barked nonstop when the rare pedestrian walked by.

Bushnell was one of 6,200 servicemembers, nicknamed Roosters, in the 70th Intelligence, Surveillance, and



*Bushnell
livestreamed
his self-
immolation.*

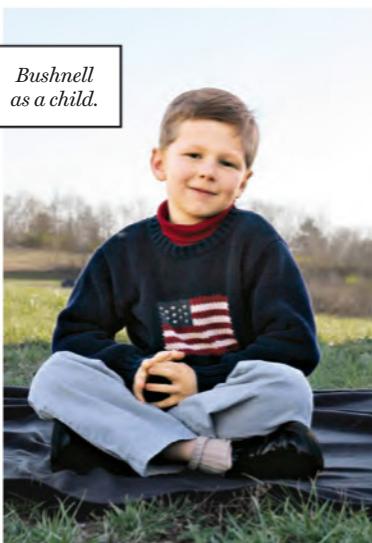
Reconnaissance Wing. His squadron provided cybersecurity support for missions in North and South America. Like most of his colleagues, he worked alongside the National Security Agency, and his apartment was located just a few hundred yards from the NSA's Texas headquarters. Those who knew him think it's unlikely Bushnell had access to high-level government secrets. According to the Air Force, his job entailed "responding to trouble tickets such as outages and service interruption, and performing technical troubleshooting and recovery." He was an IT guy in the so-called Chair Force, where the base pay was about \$2,000 a month.

Bushnell was shy, sometimes awkward, and he forced himself to cultivate social networks. He made a handful of friends in San Antonio after he began attending services at an Anglican church called the Gathering in the summer of 2021. One of them told me their usual routine consisted of grabbing takeout from Whataburger and watching something on a laptop. Bushnell enjoyed the comedian Bill Burr, Netflix's *Unorthodox*, and the universes of *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*. He also kept up a regular correspondence with Pierpont, who is gay and had been assigned to a place where there weren't a lot of men to date. "I'm sure you have a lot more options lol, straight + big city and all," Pierpont texted. Bushnell replied, "Straight + big city - never so much as held a girl's hand before and have no idea how to date = I've been chatting with someone on Hinge for a little while."

That fall, someone broke into Bushnell's car, and he struggled to compute its meaning. "It feels like I've done everything I can to build a good life, and a bunch of senseless chaos is happening to me, and I can't do anything about it," he wrote to one of his new church friends, Stuart Rowe. It seemed clear to Rowe that as Bushnell was drifting from his faith, he was also grieving the loss of the social bonds built into his childhood at the Community of Jesus. "He talked very positively about the overarching sense of belonging," Rowe says.

Around this period, Bushnell visited home, probably for the last time. An adult member of the commune saw him sitting by himself in the basilica, an impressive multimillion-dollar structure by the ocean where Gregorian chants were sung four times a day. "He was one of the few young people who liked services," the member tells me. He went to greet Bushnell, but he seemed closed off, unwilling to discuss his Air Force life. "There was an odd veil in front of him," the member says. Bushnell wanted to stop by a Community-run business he had worked in, he told Rowe, but heard he wasn't welcome. He was an outsider now, and a visit wasn't part of God's will.

ONE FRIEND THOUGHT BUSHNELL'S HOME SOUNDED CULTLIKE. "HE WAS LIKE, 'NO, IT WAS A REALLY GREAT SPACE, BUT I JUST HAD TO LEAVE.'"



Bushnell as a child.



In the percussion ensemble.



One of his last tethers to the Community was a childhood friend named Ashley Schuman, who had recently departed the sect. She worried about Bushnell and his seeming inability to move on. "I personally at that time thought he probably never should have left," she says. "He compared everything in the world to the Community, just because that's all we ever knew."

BUSHNELL WAS RAISED a quarter-mile from the Atlantic Ocean on a street called Defiance Lane. His mother, Danielle, taught history and government to the Community's homeschooled children and worked at the in-house Christian publishing imprint, Paraclete Press. His father, Dave, supervised construction at a Community-run building company. Aaron had a younger brother, Sean, and they lived in a gray-shingled house that was one of roughly 25 owned by and passed among members. It had been christened with a biblical name, Bethel, after the holy site in the present-day West Bank where God came to Jacob in a dream, granting him the promised land of Canaan.

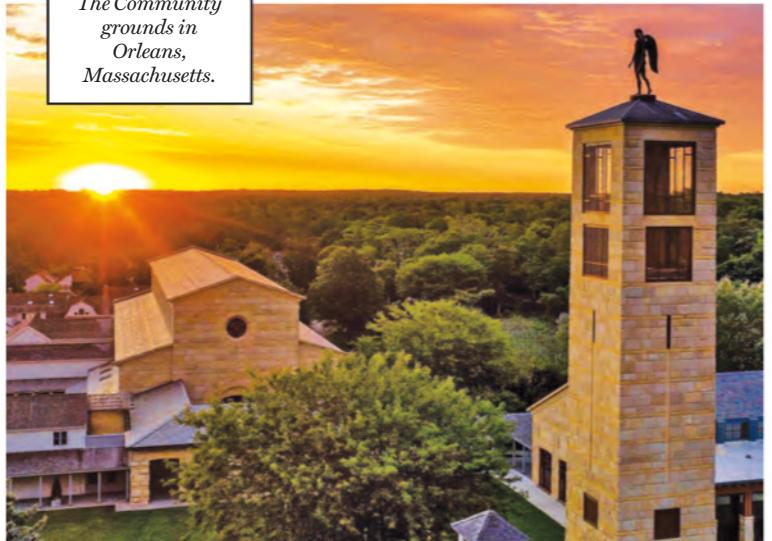
The Community of Jesus is its own kind of exalted place. Its pristine 12-acre grounds are located off Rock Harbor on the bay side of the Cape, where the low tide skims over the sandbanks in a way that practically lets its people walk on water themselves. The organization was incorporated in 1970 by a well-to-do faith healer named Judy Sorensen, who summered in Orleans, and her friend Cay Andersen. Their families began sharing a beachfront home, eventually attracting hundreds to live communally in nearby houses. Befitting its location, the early membership was heavy with Wasp refugees from New York and Boston; it included scions of the extended Rockefeller clan and a future chairman of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. And while there was a class divide between those with inherited wealth and those who arrived with little, fealty to the collective was paramount. "Let go of your independence, mind, and everything you hold close," one of the leaders once wrote to a member. In time, Andersen and Sorensen started wearing long robes and asked to be referred to as Mother Cay and Mother Judy. They began living apart from their husbands, and everybody else, in a large room with a single king-size bed.

The Community cast itself as a refuge. Outside was moral decay: abortion, pornography, drug abuse. The Mothers blamed this partly on the breakdown of the family, which they in turn blamed on parents who had coddled their children, ruining them with love that should have been flowing to God—a dynamic they called "family idolatry." Like an uptight, white-bread version of the free-love communes flowering in parallel across the country, the Community of



Working at the Christian publishing imprint.

The Community grounds in Orleans, Massachusetts.



Jesus dissolved the nuclear-family structure. Families were moved around and recombined at the Mothers' direction. In another hippie inversion, Sorensen and Andersen preached a fire-and-brimstone brand of radical transparency in which members confessed their sins and were excoriated by their peers in purification sessions.

By the time Dave and Danielle Bushnell arrived in the mid-1990s, the local press had published a number of exposés. Each surfaced the same patterns: the authoritarian-charismatic leadership, the way filial love had been contorted into a taboo. A steady flow of members left, but true believers dismissed them as insufficiently devoted. In any event, the Bushnells were grandfathered in. Dave had been raised at an associated boarding school in Ontario, where his father managed the facilities. (In 2023, the school settled a class-action lawsuit, brought by ex-students alleging abusive behavior, for approximately \$8 million. It is now closed.) Danielle's mother had moved to the Community after learning about it at one of Billy Graham's crusades. They got married and had Aaron in 1998.

By then, a new head Mother was carrying out Cay and Judy's teachings. Aaron's friend Ashley, who was first separated from her parents at 16, and whose brother was sent to live with the commune's monastic Brothers at age 6, remembers that Aaron was luckier than many Community children. The Bushnells lived together, mostly at Bethel, she recalls, with other families coming to join them.

Ashley and Aaron were part of a homeschooled cohort of roughly 15 students. Their teachers included lay members as well as Brothers and Sisters, some with advanced degrees. Ashley describes the instruction as surprisingly well rounded given the insularity and reflexive conservatism of the sect. They read the classics, like Shakespeare and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and studied geometry and chemistry. Ashley saw Aaron as moody and combative; he brightened when jousting with his teachers. "He was an instigator," she says. "He liked to be right. He would just sit there casually and banter with them." Unusually, Aaron spent his sophomore year at the local public high school. Ex-members say he was sent there as a consequence after a physical altercation with another child at the Community.

The commune emphasizes sacrifice and rigor. Its leaders prize the arts, and it boasts a chorus that performed in Europe and garnered positive reviews in the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times*. Bushnell and the other children who composed its youth percussion ensemble were held to the same intense standard, logging 12-hour practice days to prepare for competitions. The Community regards itself, in the words of an ex-member, as "God's elite, His Delta Force." Adults work constantly, sometimes supplementing their low-wage

jobs at Paraclete by moonlighting for local senior-care companies. A longtime friend of Dave and Danielle Bushnell's, whom I'll call Beth, tells me the couple drove themselves to exhaustion. "They don't relax," she says. "They don't know how."

While ultimate authority lies with the commune's Mother, individuals are almost radically empowered to police one another's behavior, and communal living means sharing not just groceries and household duties but the disciplining of children. "Any adult, at any time, can correct a kid for any reason. It's frightening for them. They don't feel there is someone on their team," says Beth. Parents may hesitate to defend their children; they are told they are too biased to "see them in reality" and are in danger of appearing idolatrous. This reorients loyalty away from family and toward the sect, says Wayne Schuman, Ashley's father, who also left the group: "The whole basis of the community is to divide and conquer."

The commune has a governing document, the Rule of Life, which explains that "living in close proximity with others makes it impossible to hide our faults from one another. For the sake of maturing in our common life and in our individual discipleship, we are responsible to live in honesty with each other." Dave and Danielle Bushnell were well versed in this dogma. Ben Bott, a former member, shared a home with Dave after he moved down from Ontario. "Every night, the whole dinner table would abuse him verbally. Talk about how bad he was, such a sinner," Bott says. "I remember his face turning red. He was a mild-mannered, decent guy." Others describe Danielle as anxious, rigidly patriotic, and opinionated. "She's not an easy person to be around," Beth says, "because her emotions are very strong and you can kind of get blown over by them."

Jeffrey Robbins, a lawyer for the Community of Jesus, disputes much of this account of the group, saying its "only 'sin' is that it takes the teachings of Christ to heart and attempts to live those teachings in a humble and sincere way." He adds, "There is no policy of separating children." According to the Rule of Life, "Married couples, children, and single adults, some of whom have committed themselves to perpetual celibacy, live as extended families within Community households. Those living in households are prepared to move periodically from one home to another."

It's hard to know exactly what Aaron's domestic life looked like. His parents, who remain members of the Community, did not reply to interview requests. But Bushnell later told his friend E. about the confession rituals, which often took place over dinner. What one was meant to confess, or why it constituted a sin, wasn't necessarily clear. "They were expected to say everything about their day, and that would then be used to manipulate them," E. says. He

remembers Bushnell telling a story about “confessing” to the members of his household that he had a crush on a girl he worked with, prompting them to recommend he quit his job. Bushnell, E. says, was “involved in all the rituals of shaming and being shamed. He was a full believer.”

ONE OF THE FEW PEOPLE WHO helped Aaron gain a view of the world outside the Community was Thomas Ryan, who used to head the Cape Cod Council of Churches. Although he was not a member of the Community, he oversaw its Sunday-school curriculum in the 2010s. He once chaperoned its children on a field trip to Harvard Square, where they attended a Catholic Mass at St. Paul’s Parish. “It was stupendous,” Ryan recalls. “They saw this expressive, joyous liturgy. Aaron came out and said, ‘Other places in the world have this?’”

Ryan also escorted Aaron and his classmates on a trip to the Holy Land. While the Community overwhelmingly viewed Israel in divine terms and believed in America’s duty to align with its interests, Ryan had long advocated for Palestinian rights and statehood. He took Aaron and the others to the West Bank, hoping to introduce them to Palestinian Christians. In the moment, it was hard to tell what impact the visit had on Aaron’s thinking.

Aaron completed his high-school studies in 2016, the year he turned 18. Although the commune’s early members tended to be well educated, Aaron’s generation wasn’t generally encouraged to leave for college. “There’s not a great desire on the part of the adults to make sure their kids get the highest possible education,” Ryan says. “A goodly number would say that they see lots of evil and want to keep their kids free from drugs and other problems.” Aaron went to live for a time in a communal home with several other young men. Under the tutelage of some adults, they took part in a grueling “boys’ camp” meant to hone their spiritual and physical toughness. One day, according to a former member, Aaron committed an infraction and was told to “get out—just walk away right now.” He took it literally, thinking he had been expelled from the Community. “They found him seven hours later behind some shack over in the harbor with a pillow,” the former member says.

His job at Paraclete presented its own trials. Working alongside his mother, he had responsibilities in three areas: printing, IT, and maintenance. Multitasking was a problem for Aaron. He struggled to compartmentalize information, focusing intently on some tasks to the detriment of others. As those who knew him describe it, he could fill the file cabinets of his mind with knowledge but couldn’t always figure out which drawer to open when he sought out information. This sometimes made routine tasks exhausting. In school, it could take him forever to finish his homework.

“Thinking about the level of pressure on him, why the fuck do you do that to a kid when he can’t handle more than one thing at once?” says a Paraclete colleague. “I didn’t do it, but I was part of that attitude. You put pressure on the person until the person pops. And then that is what the ‘healing’ comes out of.”

Children aren’t technically members of the Community, and when they come of age, they are encouraged to declare their permanent membership or consider their options elsewhere. In the fall of 2019, Bushnell chose to leave. The military was an intuitive landing spot and a way to part on good terms. Service ran in his family; Danielle’s father was killed crash-landing a helicopter in Vietnam, and Dave had served in the U.S. Army. The choice also coded as conservative. It too demanded fidelity to a higher cause, and for Bushnell there might have been comfort in trading one regimented environment for another.

Those born into the Community are told God called them to

live there, Beth says. If they leave, they’re largely forced to fend for themselves. Any misfortune that befalls them becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. “If anything goes wrong in their life—well, they became disobedient to God,” she says. “When somebody leaves, they are really expecting the bottom to drop out. They’re expecting God to be angry.”

B

USHNELL’S CHURCH in San Antonio closed in the spring of 2022, but by then he was already losing interest in faith. He spent less time in Christian sub-Reddits, saying he didn’t “technically believe this stuff anymore,” and more time in anarchist forums.

He had been steadily moving to the left. After Joe Biden’s inauguration in 2021, Bushnell approvingly commented on a photo of a bipartisan coterie of ex-presidents, captioned “Civility”; the next year, he was checking out a fringe group called the Party for Socialism and Liberation. That’s where he met E., who got him involved with a group that did good deeds with a progressive bent around the city. They

held weekly trash pickups, which they hoped would be a disincentive to the police to clear homeless encampments, and distributed food, water, Narcan, and contraceptives.

The activists in E.’s circle favored pseudonyms: There was “Moon” and “Moth” and “T-Bear,” a ringleader of sorts with a day job in branding. They were in their 20s and 30s and, like Bushnell, hyperconscientious, wearing masks outdoors and showing sensitivity about pronouns. “He was shy initially,” says Lupe Barboza, one of the few group members who uses her real name. “I think he was concerned with sounding naïve or maybe less educated than other folks who were leftists for much longer.”

Bushnell’s specific commitments calcified quickly. Many strains of socialism he rejected as “class reductionist.” Online, he argued with “MLs”—Marxist-Leninists—whom he felt were as beholden to authoritarian leadership as any conservative. He was attracted to anarchism with its ethos of statelessness and individual autonomy. Bushnell started mainlining videos on anarchist YouTube and adopted the dense vernacular of a seasoned leftist. He sometimes called himself a libertarian socialist.

“I’m definitely more obsessive than most people—as in, when I get into something, I get really, really into it,” Bushnell once told Pierpont. “Most people buy and play dozens of video games, but I really just have four that I play regularly, and I play the fuck out of them.” T-Bear says Bushnell was the single most devoted presence at their weekly “distros,” to the point where he burned out and had to step back. Bushnell messaged the group, “I hope it isn’t oversharing to say that this is due to past trauma I have, which makes it difficult to participate in organizing in healthy ways.”

His political evolution continued, and by the spring of 2023, he was dismissing Bernie Sanders as too conventional. Bushnell favored the abolition of police; he rejected gun control on the grounds that the government would first disarm minorities, who would then be unable to defend against “state violence.”

He began to rebel in small ways. When a superior asked Bushnell if he wanted to walk a 5K to benefit the military and police, he typed back “acab”—all cops are bastards. Writing a bio for a PowerPoint presentation, he paraphrased the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin: “When the people are being beaten with a stick, they are not much happier if it is called the Freedom Stick.”

His day-to-day experiences in the Air Force fueled his opposition to militarism in general. He chafed at the veneration of rank, the “humiliation ritual” of saluting his superiors. “My dad loved talking proudly about how America is the world police when I was a kid,” he wrote. “Now I’m an adult and I’m like ... yep, that’s accurate.”



Antiwar protesters after Bushnell's death.

another being. He believed in “relationship anarchy,” a nearly paralyzing model of love that seeks to neutralize power imbalances. His friends don’t believe he ever dated or slept with another person.

When Bushnell began following Israel’s assault on Gaza, the dynamic struck him as tragically familiar: A stronger force was dominating a weaker one, in this case with the backing of his employer. For someone consumed with authoritarianism, his black-and-white view of the conflict required ignoring the repressions of Hamas, but he was also earnestly reacting to civilian suffering on the Gaza Strip. In any case, he had made up his mind about which side was the victims and which the oppressors. “No aggression against the Israeli colony can be condemned by non-Palestinians,”

he wrote, arguing online with someone denouncing Hamas’s assault. “It’s their land and their people that are being aggressed. The tactics of defense are up to them.”

The November before Bushnell died, he came to a sort of epiphany about suffering, guilt, and empathy. In a text to a friend, he jotted it down like a mathematical proof. It read in part:

be horrified by the realization of what non-white people experience under white supremacy

all of the pain you have locked away senses an opportunity to be processed and comes knocking

still resist looking at your own hurt because that's what you've been conditioned to do and also the suffering of others is easier to focus on

fixatedly gaze at the suffering of others partially as an escape from your own pain

your pain refuses to go away and calcifies into a heavy weight you experience as shame

His friend replied that he thought this all made sense.

BUSHNELL ONCE BOUGHT A SWORD at a thrift store, negotiating the price from \$60 to \$50. He joked with his friends in Texas he would use it to liberate people at the Community of Jesus. Anarchists have bombed buildings and assassinated kings. In the end, Bushnell was violent only toward himself.

If you ask Community members to name the group’s most important line of Scripture, they will cite John 12:24, in which Jesus says, “Unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” On the Community’s literature, a wheat stalk forms part of its insignia. The verse underlines the Christian centrality of self-abnegation, the erasure of one’s ambitions and pleasures—the death of the self for the greater good.

In his will, Bushnell listed a stipulation. “My friends can mourn my death however they wish,” he wrote. “If there is to be a funeral, I do not wish it to have any religious elements, nor do I wish for any members of the Community of Jesus to be present. They are in love with the system that I am trying to burn.” But he signed the document in the absence of a witness, apparently rendering it invalid. In March, he was buried at a cemetery in his hometown after a service led by believers of the Community of Jesus. ■

AT THE SAME TIME Bushnell was transforming in San Antonio, the Community of Jesus was undergoing a radicalization of its own. The sect had once subscribed to a Reaganite vision of conservatism, and Bushnell marveled that many members were turning to “YouTube prophets,” as he called them, who fused Evangelical revelation with MAGA politics. Ex-members say the commune’s leader began recommending QAnon content.

Several people who have been at the Community recently told me they’ve noticed paranoid behavior, including off-site target-practice sessions. Large piles of sand, apparently designed as barricades, began to materialize. One person says he took part in evacuation drills meant to prepare members “if BLM comes marching down to protest us as Christians or if the grid collapses—if things go to hell.” (“Pure bullshit,” says Robbins, the Community’s lawyer.)

Stuart Rowe, Bushnell’s church friend in San Antonio, remembers the anger he bore toward his family as their respective politics cleaved apart. “He was angry that they wouldn’t open their eyes,” he says. To Bushnell, the world’s problems seemed so clear. He saw every evil he could identify—whiteness, settler colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, cishetero normativity—as one thing: “the domination of classes of people by other classes of people.”

Bushnell’s aversion to hierarchy and punishment did not feel accidental. In early 2024, he became obsessed with the BBC program *Fleabag*, which he did not view as a comedy. “I am a survivor of a toxic, abusive family system and this show resonated with me very deeply (in a way I was not prepared for lol),” he wrote on the show’s sub-Reddit. “Fleabag’s family is very abusive towards her ... Whenever they are feeling feelings they can’t deal with, they relieve themselves by dominating her, insulting her, accusing her, or hurting her. When she cracks under the pressure, this is seen as proof of her bad character and her behavior is blamed for the family’s problems.”

To his activist friends, Bushnell’s time in an oppressive cult granted him moral insight. As E. puts it, “He clearly saw the latent fascist logic of our society.” A harsher view is that he merely traded one dogma for another. In this reading, he was predisposed to extreme thinking and had no built-up immune system to resist it—as if within him were a kind of absolute value of radicalism, bound to polarize in one direction or another. The truth is probably in between: His sincere desire for communitarian utopia is impossible to separate from the fact that he grew up in a place that claimed to be just that. He sought to flatten inequality in every domain. He owned cats but fretted about the ethics of owning

POETRY IN MONUMENTS



📍 WASHINGTON MONUMENT, MOUNT VERNON



📍 BILLIE HOLIDAY MURAL, FELL'S POINT



📍 BABE RUTH STATUE, CAMDEN YARDS

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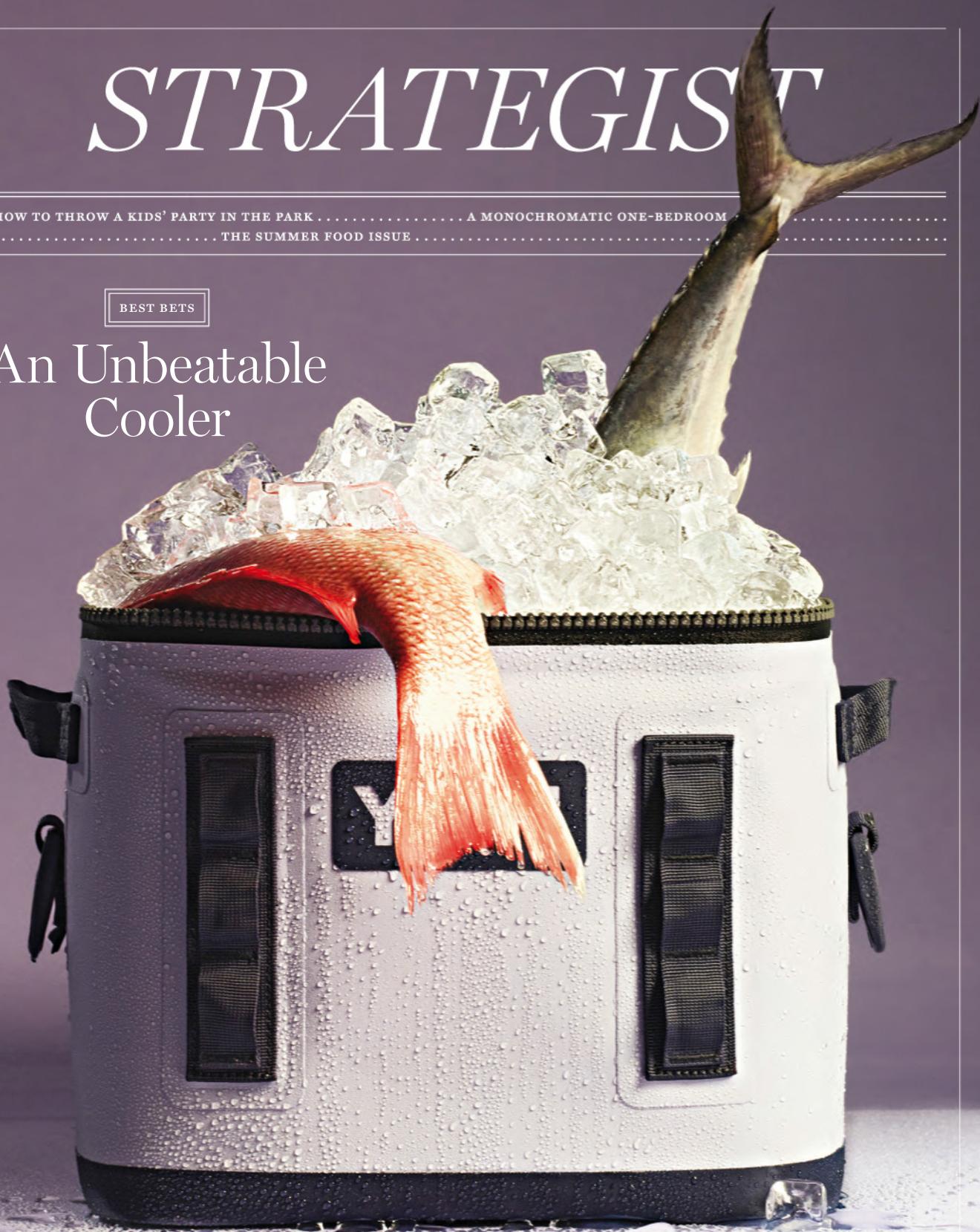

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STRATEGIST

... HOW TO THROW A KIDS' PARTY IN THE PARK A MONOCHROMATIC ONE-BEDROOM
..... THE SUMMER FOOD ISSUE

BEST BETS

An Unbeatable Cooler



➤ THERE HAD TO BE an excellent cooler out there for under \$200. Strategist writer Katherine Gillespie was set on finding a cheaper option to replace the Yeti on our list of best coolers. But after testing several and talking to a dozen experts, she conceded the Yeti is still deserving of its top spot. Rebecca Webb, who studies energy systems, told Gillespie the brand has pulled off the trick of designing something lightweight and roomy by using more expensive insulation and thinner walls. (Coolers become heavier and less spacious as insulation gets thicker.) This means even compact models like the **Yeti Hopper Flip 12 Soft Cooler** (\$250) are large enough to keep “a couple bottles of wine, lunch for two, two water bottles, and a few other drinks” ice cold for a day, according to event planner Julie Lindenman. Chef Dan Pelosi says it’s light enough to tote on bike rides. Strategist writer Dominique Pariso likes that it’s “UV-resistant, mildew-resistant, and practically disasterproof.” It should look (and smell) relatively new summer after summer.

Best Bets

A COLLECTION OF expert-vetted, spotted-around-town, or otherwise just especially excellent products that recently appeared on *thestrategist.com*. To shop all these items—plus the cooler—in one place, scan the QR code.



STRATEGIST HUNT

I Finally Upgraded My Unsightly Kitchen Carts

BY LIZA CORSILLO



Hashtag Home Soft White Gioia Metal Accent Cabinet, \$437

WHEN I FIRST STARTED to search for a replacement for the two messy wooden Ikea carts in my small galley kitchen, I wasn't exactly sure what to type into Google. I needed a counter-height surface that would be comfortable for chopping and storage that is shallow, babyproof (with doors to hide dangerous items and all of our clutter), and easy to keep clean—and all for under \$300. I first tried “kitchen cabinets,” but I mostly found the sort of things geared to contractors. Then I started searching for “kitchen islands.” They were freestanding and had convenient features, but all of them ended up being too big or too expensive. After that, I played around with “kitchen sideboard” and “counter-height storage unit,” which ultimately led me to slim metal storage cabinets with doors. I liked Mustard's metal lockers (from \$329), but none of the height options was quite right. Discouraged, I put my hunt on hold. Not too long after, a sale on Wayfair reawakened my curiosity. That's where I discovered that using the phrase “accent cabinet” would lead me to my prize. I ended up buying the Hashtag Home Soft White Gioia Metal Accent Cabinet when it was on sale, and I have been smiling at it since setting it up. I love how much it holds—including four cast-iron skillet, three huge soup pots, seven baking dishes, and five mixing bowls—and how much more streamlined my space looks now. It's a bit higher than the Ikea carts, but when I put my cutting board on top of it, I can chop fruit, cheese, and bread with no problem. It was easy to babyproof and came with anti-tip straps, which means it won't fall on my son if he pulls too hard on the handles.

CELEBRITY SHOPPING



Nikki Glaser's Eye Mask



MyHalos Migraine Headache Relief Cap, \$20

“I wear eye masks to sleep every single night. Once you use a mask long enough, you train your body to know that when the mask comes down, it's time to go to sleep. I've been committed to this one for a year now. I buy it for all of my friends who have trouble sleeping.”



Luka Sabbat's T-shirt

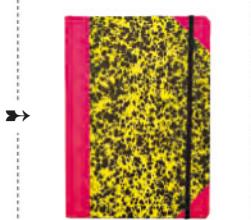


Rick Owens Short Level T-shirt, \$225

“I'll go to great lengths for the perfect T-shirt, and this, to me, is it. I hate when my shirts are longer than my jacket and also when they are too cropped. This goes with everything, has a boxy fit, and the body's not too short.”



Sasha Velour's Notebook



Emilio Braga Composition Notebook, \$24

“I like a blank notebook—not lined or gridded. And I love when you can write on a page and it doesn't bleed through to the next so that you can use all the sides. This is my favorite. It has that '70s-meets-'90s chaotic, colorful fantasy look. For the last six years, I've drawn every drag costume that I have come up with in one of these.”

THIS THING'S INCREDIBLE

The Comfy, Versatile Heels I've Worn to Seven Weddings

Aerosoles Cosmos Silver Metallic Women's Sandals, \$135



AFTER MY ANKLE GAVE OUT ON THE WALK between the ceremony and the reception at a friend's wedding, I knew I needed to find evening shoes that were more supportive and comfortable than the J.Crew velvet platforms I'd been wearing for years. I discovered just what I needed in the Aerosoles Cosmos. The silhouette is classic with a crossover strap, a sturdy three-inch block heel, and an ankle strap with an elegant silver clasp. They proved stable on cobblestoned streets outside a chateau wedding in Provence and kept me on my feet for four hours straight at a black-tie reception. I sing the Cosmos' praises so often that I've influenced multiple friends to buy them—and have even intrigued my podiatrist.

GABY GROSSMAN

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF NIKKI GLASER (GLASER); BALKIS PRESS/ABACA/SHUTTERSTOCK (SABBAT); GETTY IMAGES (VELOUR); COURTESY OF THE VENDORS (REMAINING)

PLEASE ADVISE

What Are the Best Non-Denim Pants for Summer?

IN HIS LATEST column, **Chris Black** responded to a reader in search of seasonally appropriate bottoms that aren't shorts.



• \$125

Stissy Black Brushed-Cotton Beach Pant

"The brushed cotton can be dressed up or down, and the fit is loose but not baggy. They have an elastic waist, so you might not be able to tuck your shirt in, but you aren't going to beat these for the price."



• \$228

Wythe Camp Khaki Flat-Front Cotton-Linen-Twill Chino

"It's a great summer pant made of a cotton-linen slub-twill fabric that is breathable but not too casual. This perfect shade of khaki is based on the original 1940s U.S. chino."



• \$128

Supreme Brown Work Pant

"Supreme makes mostly logo-free pants at a very good price. These are made from a cotton-twill blend that is tough and will wear in nicely. They also come in six colors, but I am partial to brown or green. For this price, get both."



• \$217

Mfpen Brown Striped Scene Trousers

"Everything from Copenhagen-based, Fugazi-loving Mfpen is created using deadstock fabrics. These are made from Italian wool. Double pleats but nice and roomy. You can wear them out on a summer night and look better than everyone else."

I KEEP SEEING THIS

Fermented Oil Is Everywhere

Algae Cooking Club Algae Cooking Oil, from \$25

Zero Acre Cooking Oil, \$30



THE LATEST fermented food to sweep into grocery aisles is oil. Made by fermenting abundant resources, it's healthier and more sustainable than vegetable or canola oil. As a pro chef, I've been targeted by ads for two brands—Zero Acre (made from sugarcane) and Algae Cooking Club (made from algae)—and decided to test them out. They didn't smell like much and were almost flavorless, and both have extremely high smoke points, making them ideal for frying falafel and arancini with remarkably crunchy exteriors. They also emulsified beautifully for homemade mayo and can be used in baking or for making infused oils. If you're looking for a finishing oil, these are too neutral. But I know I'll be using them if I want my croquettes shatteringly crisp.

KIKI ARANITA

BEAUTY BRIEF

This Three-Step Routine Soothes My Parched Skin

I'M ALWAYS trying out moisturizing serums, lotions, bodywashes—anything that'll get me to my goal of being an anthropomorphic glazed doughnut. I recently reached new heights of nongreasy glowiness with this ritual.

BY TEMBE DENTON-HURST

STEP 1



L'Occitane Shower Oil, \$29

First, I shower with this mix of sweet-almond and grape-seed oils, which are known to soften skin. It comes out as a thick liquid and quickly turns creamy and soapy once emulsified with water. My arms are silky smooth, and my legs look freshly lotioned, even before I step out of the shower.

STEP 2



Naturium Bio-Lipid Restoring Body Lotion, \$15

Next, I apply this lotion. I've been using it for years to hydrate my ultradry skin year-round. It is rich without feeling heavy and contains omega fatty acids and shea butter, which help to strengthen the skin's barrier.

STEP 3



Aveeno Daily Moisturizing Body Oil Mist, \$14

Finally, I spritz myself with this. I found this product on TikTok while watching one of those shower-routine videos and picked it up before a trip to Myrtle Beach. It kept my skin hydrated through eight-hour beach days.

A Child's Park Birthday Party

HOW TRICKY COULD IT BE to gather 25 kindergartners and their caregivers in Prospect Park on a Saturday afternoon? Actually quite. **Laura Fenton** spoke to parents, entertainers, and Parks employees for advice.



► **Look beyond the closest playground.** It's worth going farther afield to find parks with better amenities. At a minimum, you'll want a grassy open area, some shade, a table, and a bathroom nearby. "There's a hill between the Parkside entrance to **Prospect Park** and the skating rink that is so perfect for kid parties because of the bathrooms near the rink," says Jennifer McClelland-Smith, a Brooklyn mother. Rebecca McMackin, the former director of horticulture for Brooklyn Bridge Park, suggests **Pier 3** because of the labyrinth and its reliably empty lawn. (Just note you'll have to walk to Pier 2 for a bathroom.) Nellie Laskow, a Queens mom, likes the North Lawn in **Astoria Park**, where there is shade under Hell Gate Bridge on hot days. She also likes **Randalls Island** and **Roosevelt Island**—

specifically the latter for the big hill above FDR Hope Memorial. "It's a little trek, but it feels secret and special," Laskow says. And for a quintessential option, Lauren Smith Brody, a mother of two, recommends **Turtle Pond**, below the Great Lawn in Central Park, "because it's easy to keep an eye on the kids with the border of the pond on one side and the Great Lawn path on the other." Plus you get Belvedere Castle in the background of your photos, and kids love the turtles. ► **If there's no rain date, pick a covered spot.** Brooklyn Bridge Park's **Pier 2** has a giant covered space with tables, and **St. Mary's Playground** in Carroll Gardens is under the F/G tracks, which conveniently provide cover from rain or sun, according to Elisa Pupko, founder of Treasure Trunk Theatre, a children's theater program. Beware, though: St. Mary's does not have a bathroom. ► **Get a permit.** If you're expecting more than 20 people, you need a special-events permit from the Parks Department, which will reveal if someone else is planning to have a party at the same time or if the area will be closed. Apply for your permit at nyceventpermits.nyc.gov/parks at least 30 days in advance (it'll take just a few minutes). ► **Pack like you're going camping.** Caterer and mother of two Jessica Meter has paper towels, scissors, matches, hand sanitizer, baby wipes, trash bags, toilet paper, and table coverings on her must-bring list. And don't forget something to weigh the tablecloth down and a vessel heavier than a paper cup to corral utensils. ► **Don't plan complex activities.** "It's better to have something you can execute successfully rather than going over the top," says Anne McTernan, the Parks Department's director of citywide special events. Erin Boyle, a mother of three and co-author of *Making Things*, suggests beading friendship bracelets and handing out travel watercolor kits for elementary-school-age kids. Laskow likes "toys that allow for the community of kids there to join, like bubble machines and Stomp Rockets." ► **But do consider entertainment.** A skilled performer can add structure to the party and stop kids from wandering. McClelland-Smith hired Joe Magic Man once: "He kept the kids laughing and included the birthday boy as part of the show, which was fun for everyone." ► **Bagel breakfast beats pizza lunch.** Brooklyn mom Marisa LaScala recommends hosting a morning party with bagels. "During that 10 a.m.-to-noon slot, the park isn't as crowded or hot," she says. Plus parents will thank you for not eating up the entire day. ► **If you do plan for lunchtime, order the pizza a day in advance over the phone.** Many pizzerias cannot easily handle a large, last-minute order through an app, says Leah Wiseman Fink, co-owner of Williamsburg Pizza. She suggests meeting the delivery person at a park entrance with another parent to help carry. ► **Bring extras of everything.** LaScala says, "Parents are likely to bring siblings—and they're going to want their own treats."



THE LOOK BOOK GOES TO

The Governors Ball

*Between sets by the Killers,
Sabrina Carpenter, and Sexy Red,
we mingled with amped-up
festivalgoers and a few performers.*

INTERVIEWS BY KELSIE SCHRADER



D4VD

*Musician,
Cypress, Texas*

How did you get into music? My goal since I was a kid was to be a professional video-game player. But my YouTube videos would get taken down because the music was copyrighted. My mom was like, "How about you just make your own songs for the videos?" And I was like, "You know what? I could probably do that."

I saw you do a few backflips onstage. How'd you learn to do those? My dad has been teaching me martial arts since I was 12. I was also in gymnastics and did parkour. Flipping has always been a part of my life, in a way.

Have you ever not landed one? On tour last year, I was trying to look at a sign in the crowd and fell on my back. Everybody was laughing at me. It was like being in school and getting pantsed. I played it off, but that floor was hard.

How was the crowd today? There were a couple of grandmas that were like, "My grandson showed me you, and you were so great." I was like, "Yo. Okay. Generational."

THE LOOK BOOK: GOV BALL CROWD

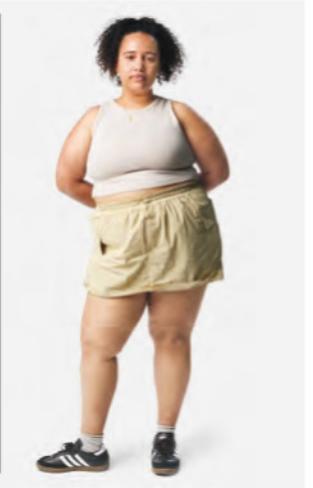


TONY TEDESCO
Data analyst, Stamford, Connecticut



MICHELLE MILLER
Studio manager, Bay Ridge

→ **Any memorable conversations with fellow concertgoers?**
The girl in front of me in the bathroom line told me her boyfriend cheated on her in a porta-potty. She found out because she got gonorrhea. The porta-potty was just a fun detail. The last thing she said was “He had the worst fashion.” Then she disappeared into the stall and I never saw her again.



VICTORIA HILL
Legal-marketing writer, Central Harlem



TAJALEI WILLARD
Clinical-research coordinator, Oakland, California

← **What brought you to Governors Ball?**
My cousin Asher was chosen by his music school to perform back in November, but he didn't tell anyone but his mom. So I was on Instagram when Gov Ball released its lineup, and I saw my cousin's stage name, Kidd Revel, on the fucking playbill, and I was like, “Asher, are you joking me right now?”



TIFF BAIRA
Content creator, Hudson Yards



RICKI LEE STAUTZ
Social worker, Flatbush



AUTUMN LEVASSEUR
Barista, Bangor, Maine

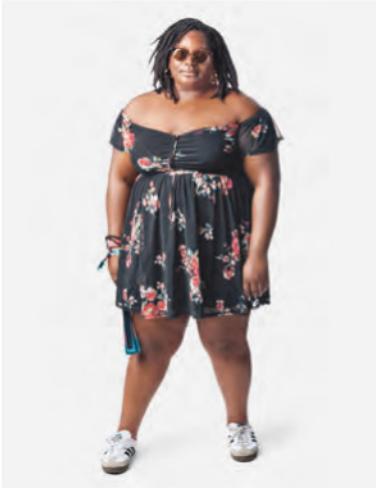


DANIEL KAMRAN
Bartender, Stuyvesant Town

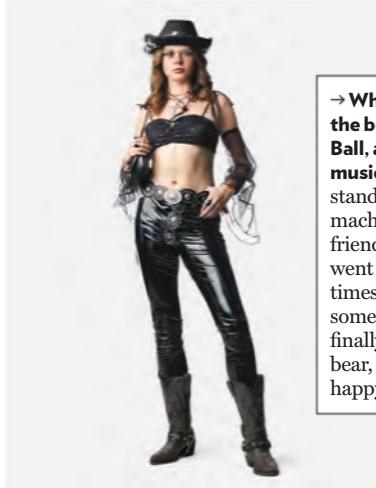
← **What kind of concert pass did you buy?** I have the Freeloaders pass for friends and family of staff. There's this little section that's all you can drink. It's a secret paradise. I'll tell my friends I'm going to Freeloaders, and they're like, “That's not on the map.” I'm like, “Yeah, it can't be.” You just have to know it exists. It's one of those places.



JESSICA MCHUGH
Marketing specialist, West Point



CHINUE FOREMAN
Graduate student, Central Harlem



AUDRA JOHNSON
Model and marketer, Upper West Side

→ **What has been the best part of Gov Ball, aside from the music?** One of the stands has a claw machine that my friend and I legit went back to seven times to try to win something. We finally won a little bear, and we are so happy about that.



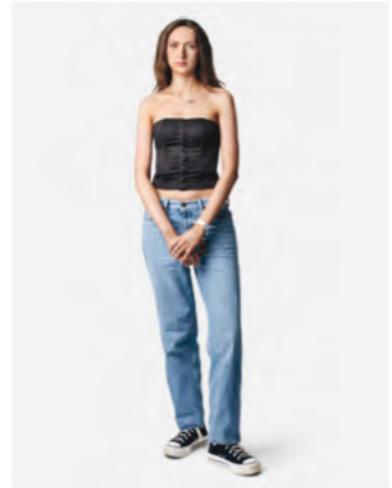
JACOB LOPEZ
Student electrician, Waterbury, Connecticut



COLIN MADDEN
Ramp agent, Greenbush, Maine



ASHLEY RAMIREZ
Retail manager, New London, Connecticut



NICOLLE MCHUGH
Paralegal, Ringwood, New Jersey

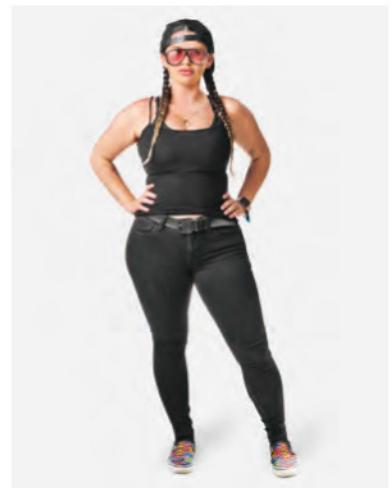


XENSAUREI
Chef, Far Rockaway

← **Get any compliments on your outfit?** Oh my God, a ton. Everybody, everywhere. I was like, *Should I just be famous?* Most of my wardrobe is pretty black, also very urban, also very alternative.



SAMANTHA LAPARE
Entertainment publicist, East Village



AMANDA PHILLIPPS
Revenue-cycle specialist, Hewlett

DESIGN HUNTING



In the Pink

After Anne Hanavan found her 350-square-foot “freedom pad,” her friends helped her get the vibe right.

BY WENDY GOODMAN

PINK WAS ALWAYS GOING to be the color of Anne Hanavan’s new apartment, the “freedom pad” she bought because she was getting a divorce. Pink is everywhere—Benjamin Moore’s 052 Conch Shell, to be precise, chosen after looking at lots of hues and finding that shade subtle and soothing.

“When I got this place, I knew I wanted a different vibe,” she says. “Relaxing, calming, and everyone is going to look great in the apartment.”

A part of the downtown art and fashion scene since moving here from her hometown of Buffalo in 1985, Hanavan has worked as a bartender, a shop owner, and an operations manager for a fashion company. She lived on East 9th Street for 15 years, until 2022, when she found this 350-square-foot place on East 3rd between Avenues C and D. It was the first apartment she saw, but after looking at one other, she knew it was for her.

The Living Room

"I had to think of it as a boat," Anne Hanavan says of the custom-built banquettes that have storage beneath. The paintings are by Tabboo!. The table lamp is by Blue Green Works.





“It was a wreck,” she says, “but I could see the potential.” She envisaged a few changes here and there in the effort to move in quickly, but she soon realized it would be easier to do a gut renovation. She took down the wall between the kitchen and the living room, removed another wall and a small doorway that enclosed the bedroom, and redid the bathroom.

“There was a gross vinyl brown floor,” she says. “The contractor said they put that floor down for a reason, so I just put my new floor on top of it.”

Hanavan, who is a sales representative for the fabric company Cowtan & Tout, was fortunate to have friends who could help realize her vision for the renovation, including interior designer Josh Greene and lighting designer Peter Staples of Blue Green Works. She had three contractors, though the first wasn’t great. But her second, she says, “was the incredible Rock Star Renovation, which swooped in to make it habitable.” The final polish, she adds, came from Arnie Rodriguez of NIC Lab. “The best of the best!” according to Hanavan. “He came in and not only finished it all but elevated the space with his dedication to fine craftsmanship and attention to detail.”

The apartment is filled with art by friends, including Tabboo!, Richard Hambleton, Spencer Sweeney, and Jack Pierson. Ryan McGinley gifted a large print of a photograph he took of Hanavan perched on a truck one evening after they left the NYC Drag March in 2022. It hangs over her bed. ■

↑ **The Kitchen**

Hanavan took down the wall that separated the kitchen from the living area. The smaller-scale appliances are new.

↓ **The Bathroom**

A shower replaced the old tub. The new tiles are from WOW.





The Bedroom

The built-in closets are new. The art on the night stand/shoe-storage unit is by Tabboo! The textile on the bed is by Manuel Canovas from Cowtan & Tout. The photograph of Hanavan over the bed is by Ryan McGinley.

Summer
EATING

One of Every



A&N Fruit
Store's
watermelon
slush.

72 onion-soaked smashburgers, crispy-cutlet subs, cold noodl

thing, To Go

Photographs by
BOBBY DOHERTY



A chicken-Caesar hero at L'Industrie.

es, and sizzling spicy skewers to eat on the street this summer.

By Chris Crowley, Ella Quittner, Zach Schiffman, Matthew Schneier, Alan Sytsma, and Tammie Teclerian



WITH APOLOGIES TO the many thousands of talented cooks and chefs toiling away in this city's kitchens, we must note the most memorable food we've eaten this year hasn't been inside a dining room. It's been shared with friends standing on a corner, snatched from a takeout bag at a park, or unwrapped and messily dribbled onto a bench. This is no knock against proper restaurants, but when the most exciting development to come along recently at an establishment like Eleven Madison Park is the arrival of an alfresco croissant pop-up (Bake It Nice), it's a testament to the joy of great food without any pomp and circumstance. Maybe the act of sitting down to a meal has begun to feel stultifying—"Have you dined with us before?" comes across less like a helpful inquiry and more like a threat to explain the concept of "appetizers"—or perhaps it's that low overhead and a ravenous dining public happy to seek out whatever food appears on TikTok afford a greater range of creative expression. While the weather is warm and New York is at its most walkable, we're choosing to focus on the food right in front of our faces: the crisp-rolled lumpia Shanghai, icy watermelon slushies, oversize Swedish hot dogs, and pork-stuffed Vietnamese doughnuts being slung from carts, counters, stands, and windows all over town. Consider this hit list to be the jumping-off point. It's not an exhaustive catalogue of all the street food in the city—how could it be?—but it's made up of our absolute favorite snacks, drinks, and meals right now; many are brand new, while some have flown under the radar for years. In every single case, they are perfect for gulping down on a sidewalk somewhere this summer.

A.S.

A Bottle of Gazpacho From Mercado Little Spain

Soup that's bright and smooth enough to sip straight from the bottle—and enriched with enough olive oil to count as a snack. *10 Hudson Yards; littlespain.com*

A Savory Vietnamese Doughnut at Banh

Banh tieu is a Vietnamese doughnut that's used here like a kaiser roll, sandwiching quail egg, nubbins of pork crackling, rounds of sausage, pork floss, pâté, scallion oil, and a fat plug of turmeric sticky rice. It's best enjoyed with a tall, fruity litchi slush. *942 Amsterdam Ave.; banhny.com*

A Full Banchan Spread From Little Banchan Shop

Whether you're at the Long Island City original or the new outpost at Pier 57, there is perfect picnic food to be had: dried radish, crunchy and dressed in gochugaru; assorted pickles, including thick slices of onion and pepper; smooth eggplant; and a potato salad supercharged with Korean mustard. *Multiple locations; littlebanchanshop.com*

A French-Fry Sandwich From Merguez & Frites

All sandwiches are improved by the addition of French fries. At this bite-size North African takeout shop, soft bread is stuffed with two snappy links of grilled merguez, a little harissa, and punchy sauce algérienne, plus a fistful of fries that are more creamy than crunchy. *40-06 25th Ave., Astoria; instagram.com/merguez_and_frites*

DIY Pani Puri From Thelewala

These puchka, or pani puri, don't come pre-assembled; instead, the fried spheres (the puri) are whole with their fixings. It's up to you to excavate a hole in the top to fill with potato masala, then drizzle in tamarind water (the pani). The flavors and textures come together like a good song. *112 Macdougall St.; thelewalany.com*

Cold Sesame Noodles From Ivan Ramen

The chewy sesame noodles from this LES ramen shop (and its Downtown Brooklyn ghost-kitchen counterpart) are deeply savory, with no peanut-butter sweetness. They're topped with shredded chicken that's dyed red and made fiery with chile. *Multiple locations; ivanramen.com*

A Gas-Station Smashburger From Smacking Burger

Where Chelsea meets the Village, a blink-and-you'll-miss-it Mobil station is home to the city's most curious new burger grill, a minuscule operation—

next to the candy racks and coolers filled with Gatorade—that specializes in Oklahoma City-style onion burgers overflowing with melted cheese and sweet horseradish sauce. *51-63 Eighth Ave.; smackingburger.com*

Blue Takis Elote at Doña Zita

In front of this outdoor Mexican restaurant famous for its overstuffed tortas is its stand selling mangos on a stick and elote, which you can get with the classic toppings or—better—the IYKYK version that's rolled in a choice of crushed chips. Go for the tangy, fiery, heavily pigmented blue Takis. *1221 Boverly St., Coney Island; donazita.com*

Some Thai Crackers From Khao Nom

The krong krang krob—peppery, sweet-and-salty fried crackers—stand proud among the world's best chips, be that Korean honey-butter or sour cream and onion. They're sticky from the caramelized palm sugar and coconut milk. *42-06 77th St., Elmhurst; instagram.com/khaonomny*



THE NEW ICE CREAM THAT MUST BE EATEN

1. The **tiramisu** flavor at **Pamina** (461 Sixth Ave.; *paminadolcegelato.com*), a bubbly new gelateria, does not skimp on the (gluten-free) ladyfinger cookies.
2. **Soursop** at **Mr. P's** (1397 Nostrand Ave., Prospect-Lefferts Gardens; *instagram.com/mrpsicecream*) is bright, sunny, vegan, and possibly even healthy.
3. **Deep-fried caramel-pecan cornbread** from **Thick** (208 Graham Ave., Williamsburg; *getthickbk.com*) will fight against a spoon with every bite. Let it melt a little first.
4. **Celery gelato** from **Juice Generation** (*multiple locations; juicegeneration.com*) is part of the smoothie chain's long-overdue line of ice creams.
5. **Glace** went viral for its crazy hot chocolates; the **Fluffernutter sundae** is available only at its just-opened midtown food truck (*Rockefeller Ctr.; glacyen.com*).

Ganjang
and egg bap
from Sobak.





Lumpia
Shanghai with
guacamole from
Mucho Sarap.

A breakfast
biscuit from
Norma's
Corner Shoppe.



Sizzling Skewers at Caravan Uyghur Cuisine

Uyghur cooking is defined, in part, by its world-class kebabs: Order lamb ribs, which are fatty and lush on the inside, charred and crackling on the outside, and seasoned with the unbeatable mix of cumin and chile. 60 Beaver St.; [instagram.com/caravanuyghur](https://www.instagram.com/caravanuyghur)

The City's Best Shawarma at Zyara

Freshly baked laffa is tightly wrapped around shawarma just shaved from the spit and a holy trinity of pickles, crunchy cabbage, and toum. Then it gets brushed with drippings and brushed again, after which it's pressed down on the griddle. 25-53 Steinway St., Astoria; [zyararestaurantnyc.com](https://www.zyararestaurantnyc.com)

Chicken for a Picnic From Fat Fowl

Roast chicken in the summer? Yes—

specifically, one treated to a lavender brine with rosemary, thyme, garlic, allspice, and Scotch-bonnet peppers. The skin is blackened in spots, like jerk; it's ideal for shredding and sharing with friends in Fort Greene Park. *Dekalb Market Hall, 445 Albee Sq. W., Downtown Brooklyn; [thefatfowl.com](https://www.thefatfowl.com)*

A Heaping Hot Dog From BonBon

Every Sunday, a stand outside this TikTok-famous Scandinavian candy warehouse sells griddled overlong franks covered with sweet Swedish mustard, bottled rémoulade, crunchy fried onions, pickled cucumber slices, and chives. It costs \$6, which is a bargain for a dog that is so thoroughly topped. *66 Degraw St., Red Hook; [bonbonnyc.com](https://www.bonbonnyc.com)*

A Deli Container of Watermelon Slush at A&N Fruit Store

The city's best soft drink is a lidded quart

container of blitzed watermelon and ice—fitted with an extra-wide straw for rapid consumption. *25 Canal St.; no website*

Stridently Un-Soggy Fish and Chips at Make My Fish

The peppery dredge on the catfish at this no-frills counter creates a light crust that never falls off, even as the food sits in its paper bag while you take it to its final destination. *120 W. 116th St.; [makemyfish116.com](https://www.makemyfish116.com)*

A Chicky Sandwich From Salty Lunch Lady's Little Luncheonette

A giant, juicy chicken meatball is smashed into a seeded roll and made even messier with paprika mayo, charred onions, arugula, and—true to the counter's name—extra-salty feta cheese. *565 Woodward Ave., Ridgewood; [saltylunchlady.com](https://www.saltylunchlady.com)*



The NEW YORK CHICAGO-DOG SHOWDOWN

Who's the best at dragging their dogs (all-beef Vienna sausages, of course) through the garden?

The loaded \$8 Chicago dogs at both **Dog Day Afternoon** (multiple locations; [dogdaybrooklyn.com](https://www.dogdaybrooklyn.com)) and **Bobbi's Italian Beef** (228 Smith St., Cobble Hill; [bobbisitalianbeef.com](https://www.bobbisitalianbeef.com)) stick to tradition with their toppings: pickle spears, tomato wedges, yellow mustard, electric-green relish, celery salt, and tiny sport peppers.

The WINNER is Bobbi's: A back-to-back taste test revealed more generously distributed toppings and warm, pillowy poppy-seed buns owing to a quick steam after ordering.

Sugarcane Juice at Nha Trang One

There is usually a line at Nha Trang One's sidewalk window for the freshly pressed juice an employee prepares to order. The grassy nectar can be enhanced with kumquat, pineapple, and other fruit, but most people opt to take it straight. *87 Baxter St.; [nhatrangnyc.net](https://www.nhatrangnyc.net)*

Hainan Chicken Rice From Lou Yau Kee

This food-court vendor hawks an exceptional poached chicken, smooth and tender, with chicken-rich rice and a side of broth. A friend, a Singaporean cook, says that its

sauces—salty and sweet dark soy, prickly chile, and invigorating ginger—taste like home. *Urbanspace Union Square, 124 E. 14th St.; [instagram.com/louyaukee](https://www.instagram.com/louyaukee)*

A Roll at Kolachi

Bless the single-dish restaurant, a place that knows its strengths. Kolachi, in a little one-room box, makes only paratha rolls, a Pakistani street snack that's little more than a deliciously greasy fried paratha filled with grilled chicken or beef, chutney, and onions, wrapped in a picnic-festive bit of checkered parchment and ready to be eaten on the road. *130 First Ave.; [kolachivrolls.com](https://www.kolachivrolls.com)*

THREE LESS EXPECTED PIZZAS

1. The louché little slice of \$3.50 pizza at **99 Cent Village Pizza** (333B Sixth Ave.; no website) that's decorated with crisscrossing stripes of hot sauce and ranch is not pretending to be better than it is. It's also not pretending to be on the menu: Order one when a pie appears on the counter.

2. It was a Staten Island-born pizza snob, of all people, who convinced us to finally try the **Detroit-style pizza** from **Jet's** (multiple locations; [jetspizza.com](https://www.jetspizza.com)). "It just hits," he said of the chain's extra-crunchy, deep-dish pie.



3. The Roman-style **fried zucchini slice** at **Impasto** (373 Waverly Ave., Clinton Hill; [impastonyc.com](https://www.impastonyc.com)) deploys zucchini in two ways: as thin, dark-fried rounds and blended into a sauce that lines the airy bianca base. It's dotted with gobs of fresh mozzarella and big basil leaves.

Crispy, Creamy Bacalaitos
at the
Freakin' Rican

These salt-cod fritters are one of the better ways to bide your time between beach days. The supremely crunchy edges guard a soft, salty interior. 4306 34th Ave., Long Island City; thefreakinricanrestaurant.com

The Etna Mess at Archestratus

Its café has closed, but this food-focused bookstore will continue its tradition of making weekend-special trifles—sponge, cream, and jammy fruit inside a plastic cup—that change with the seasons: One recent flavor was bright apricot in orange caramel with whipped ricotta. 164 Huron St., Greenpoint; archestrat.us

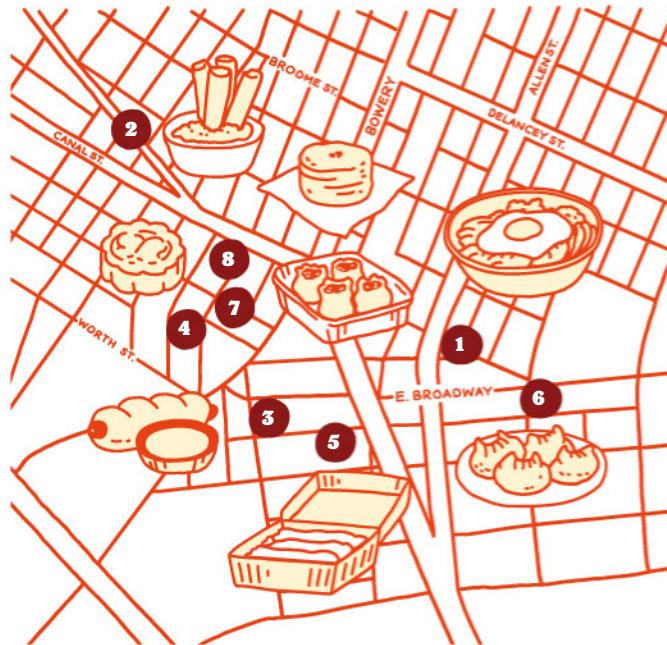
German Fried Chicken at Schaller & Weber

Schaller & Weber hot dogs are all over town, but the best thing the company makes—fried chicken—can be found only at the UES shop. The crust is thicker and crunchier than what you've had before, creating a completely protective shell around the meat. 1654 Second Ave.; schallerweber.com

Pastéis de Nata From Lisbonata

The lines at this Portuguese egg-tart stand have become the topic of the season for Fort Greene farmers'-market loyalists. This

EIGHT PERFECT BITES IN CHINATOWN



1. Ganjang and egg bap—runny eggs over purple rice with cabbage, sesame oil, and an obscene amount of seaweed—at **Sobak**. 51B Canal St.; instagram.com/sobak.han.

2. Crispy lumpia Shanghai and guac—a new classic combo, we say—at **Mucho Sarap**. Canal Street Market, 265 Canal St.; sosarapnyc.com.

3. The cheung zai bao (or hot-dog bun) at **M&W Bakery**. 25 E. Broadway; no website.

4. Beautiful mooncakes stuffed with floral white-lotus paste and black sesame at **New Golden Fung Wong Bakery**. 41 Mott St.; no website.

5. The jiggly steamed roast-pork cheung fun from **Sun Hing Lung Co's** takeout window. 58 Henry St.; no website.

6. The har gow—translucent dumpling wrappers stuffed with shrimp and diced bamboo shoots—from **Wu's Wonton King**. 165 E. Broadway; wuswontonking.com.

7. A four-piece order of earthy-sweet pork-and-shrimp shumai in yolk-yellow wrappers from **Mei Lai Wah**. 62 Bayard St.; meilaiwah.com.

8. Flaky, crispy, too-easy-to-overlook tuna buns at **Fay Da Bakery**. 83 Mott St.; fayda.com.

probably has something to do with the extra-crisp butter crusts, the softer-than-expected middles, and the lovely boxes that make them ideal gifts. Raspberry is excellent, but even the original is great—especially when dusted with an optional shake of cinnamon. *Multiple locations; lisbonata.com*

A Sushi Platter for the 2:43 to Poughkeepsie From Joji Box

Headed out of town on the Metro-North? Skip the Grand Central Shake Shack and duck into One Vanderbilt's basement to pick up an order of sushi from this high-end omakase counter. Tuna rolls, pieces of salmon or yellowtail, and a stack of edamame are all fresh and beautiful and boxed up with as much care as a new iPad.

1 Vanderbilt Ave.; jojiboxnyc.com

A To-Go Container of Peel-and-Eat Shrimp at Lobster Place

The shrimp is as simple as it gets: plump, moist, and seasoned generously with Old Bay. The appeal is the packaging: Chilled with a lemon wedge, any order can be ready for the beach when you are. *Chelsea Market, 75 Ninth Ave.; lobsterplace.com*

A Vegetarian Cubano From Cuban Shack

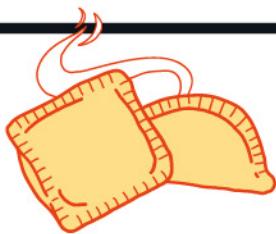
Long-cooked jackfruit is the main ingredient

Detroit
pizza
from Jet's.





Peel-and-eat
shrimp from
Lobster Place.



The Five Best BEEF PATTIES

A flaky larded crust filled with seasoned meat: These hand pies may be the world's most perfect food. Here are our favorites, ranked.

1. The spicy beef patty at Tosh's

(at the Williamsburg and Prospect Park Smorgasburgs; toshspatties.com) is a hand-laminated, turmeric-stained pastry filled with slightly crumbly beef flecked with garlic and orange pepper for significant, fruity heat.

2. The crust on the spicy beef patty at Puff's Patties

(812 Nostrand Ave., Crown Heights; instagram.com/puffspatties) is tender, while the searingly spicy filling is saucier than most.

3. The Guyanese patties at Sybil's

(132-17 Liberty Ave., Richmond Hill; instagram.com/sybilsliberty) look like mini-

pies: Rich short-crust is rolled into tart pans and domed over a filling that favors aromatic spices over hot pepper.

4. Juice oozes out of fork holes poked into the shattering flaky crust of the oxtail patty at M&P Caribbean Delight

(753 Flatbush Ave., Prospect-Lefferts Gardens; no website).

5. The Haitian beef pâté at Immaculee Bakery

(1411 Nostrand Ave., Prospect-Lefferts Gardens; immaculeebakery.com) is all about the rustic, layered crust that is simply folded over a small scoop of sweet-and-spicy ground beef.

in these meat-free Cubanos, draped in sweet sauce and spilling out of the pressed roll. Swiss cheese adds heft while little sticks of fried potato are tucked in for crunch. *75 Hoyt St., Boerum Hill; cubanshacknyc.com*

A Bowl of Beef Curry at Burmese Bites

Until recently, the only place to regularly get Myo Thway's food was at the Queens Center Mall. He's now improving the lunch fortunes of midtown office workers, who can make a weekly habit of his beef curry, thick with gravy and made elite by the addition of balachaung, a spicy, salty, chunky fish-based condiment. *Mona Kitchen, 310 E. 44th St.; instagram.com/burmesebites*

Mexican Sorbet From Nieves Cortés

Fidel Cortés Jr. is the Limón Ice King of Bushwick: Across from Maria Hernandez Park, he sells nieves de garrafa that's hand-churned with a paddle for a smooth texture and pure fruit flavor. Options rotate: There may be cooling melon with small cubes of fruit or creamier pineapple; other days bring mango, watermelon, lime, or the "famous" dragonfruit. *Outside 282 Knickerbocker Ave., Bushwick; instagram.com/fideljr87*

A \$2 Whoopee Pie From Millport Dairy

The Amish farmers of Lancaster County sell these traditional whoopee pies in several flavors, including the classic chocolate cake (rich and moist) as well as pumpkin. Good for a snack when you're dropping in to pick up some of the dairy's Greenmarket-famous eggs. *2583 Broadway; no website*

Panamanian Chinese Skewers at Thao's Family Table

On Sundays, the couple behind this new boardwalk business is making the case that Panamanian Chinese barbecue is what's been missing from Rockaway Beach with sweet and juicy party wings, each one skewered and grilled until it's a glistening rusty shade of orange. *Locations vary; thaosfamilytable.com/location*

The Over-the-Top Venezuelan Sandwiches at Codigo 58

The Pepito 58 is a sandwich in sicko mode: three types of meat (chunks of beef with a hint of lime, plus chicken and bacon), slices of tomato and shredded lettuce, a blanketing of cheese, and four sauces (ketchup, mayo, mustard, and cilantro garlic). It's outrageous, one of those sandwiches that teeter on the edge without going over.

204 Bushwick Ave., East Williamsburg; instagram.com/codigo58bk

A World-Class Bagel Without the Schlep at Utopia Bagels ...

Whitestone's world-famous bagels have landed in Murray Hill, where the hordes descend to experience outer-borough bagel bliss. A bit of scallion cream cheese is all they need. *120 E. 34th St.; utopiabagelsny.com*

... Or the Worth-the-Hype Instagram Bagels at Apollo Bagels

Social media's favorite bagel shop is finally open all day, every day in the East Village. The plain, sesame, and everything options—no cinnamon-raisins here—are indeed as light and crusty as their reputation would lead you to believe. A tight menu ensures the inevitable line moves quickly. Salmon and dill is the sandwich we see most often on our feeds, but we're partial to an everything bagel topped with cream cheese and a couple of slices of red, ripe tomato. *242 E. 10th St.; apollobagels.com*

Guava-Soaked Ribs From Cocotazo

Messy, sticky ribs are a rite of summer. This Puerto Rican stall in East Harlem's La Marqueta has a championship-caliber spread: four pork ribs slathered in guava barbecue sauce, fruity



Banh
tieu from
Banh.

but not too sugary; succulent sweet plantains; a scoop of potato salad; and plenty of rice with pigeon peas.

La Marqueta, 1590 Park Ave.; cocotazocateringllc.com

An Einspänner at Ten Thousand

Absurd iced coffee topped with sweetened cream so thick that a barista scoops it from its metal container, then garnished with a line of cocoa powder: It tastes like tiramisu.

Multiple locations; 10000coffee.com

A Piroshki (or Two) at Sofreh Cafe

A companion café to Nasim Alikhani's excellent Persian restaurant, Sofreh, debuted a block away this spring. You may be tempted by chickpea cookies and almond confections in flavors like orange blossom and jasmine, but we like the baseball-size piroshki, golden turmeric pastries that are thick like knishes. They may be filled with cumin-scented beef studded with

raisins and peas; or kale, mushrooms, and feta. Either one makes for a filling lunch, washed down with Alikhani's sweet cucumber-and-mint sharbat cooler.

216 Flatbush Ave., Park Slope; sofrehnyc.com

A Bag of Buñuelos at Seba Seba Bakery

Spheres of chewy cassava-cheese bread are the perfect thing to snack on while roaming Jackson Heights, debating whether you'll next want to eat some ceviche at Mariscos el Submarino or Birria-Landia's world-famous tacos. *83-03 Northern Blvd., Jackson Heights; instagram.com/sebasebakery*

Salmon Onigirazu at Tokuyamatcha

Made to order with a hefty portion of warm rice, onigirazu fall somewhere between traditional onigiri and a sandwich. Wrapped in plastic, the salmon avocado (one of the most popular options) holds up especially well

OUR FAVORITE...



... **SANDWICH**. "Rolled beef"—according to the slicers at **Prospect Butcher** (*multiple locations; prospectbutcher.com*)—is an "old Jewish cousin of pastrami," a bit milder and intended to be eaten cold. It's peppery, fatty, made in-house, and delicious when laden with Swiss, slaw, and watercress.

... **SUB**. We begged, but the folks at **L'Industrie** (*multiple locations; lindustriebk.com*) won't make their **chicken-Caesar hero**—loaded with shredded romaine—any easier to order. You just have to line up when they post to Instagram. Once acquired, everyone will want to share.

... **SANDO**. You'll be tempted by the classic chicken cutlet on squishy milk bread at **Postcard** (*31-33 Carmine St.; postcardbakery.co*), but the real summer pick is the dessert-y **fruit sando**, a tender, crumbly cake of a sandwich stuffed with sweetened cream and heart-shaped strawberries.

if you're taking it to eat later. *627 E. 6th St.; tokuyamasalon.com/cafe*

A Should-Be-Viral Pastry at ALF

In a city filled with overstuffed sweet croissants, the buttery and brown leek-and-béchamel pastry (it's a Danish, not a croissant) is a savory standout. *Chelsea Market, 75 Ninth Ave.; alfbakery.com*

The Pork Katsu Burger at Chef Katsu

The "burgers" made by Katsutoshi Machida—are

nearly six inches high, a crisp-fried pork cutlet (marinated first in shiro koji for tenderness and flavor) on a soft brioche bun, topped with julienned cabbage for shredduce-like crunch and a sticky-sweet miso sauce. *143 Greene Ave., Clinton Hill; instagram.com/chefkatsubk*

The Baja Fish Taco at Haab

"Taco" is possibly a misnomer for this massive piece of beer-battered fish, properly slathered with habanero mayo and chunky mango salsa. Somehow a corn tortilla contains it all,

but just barely. *202 Leonard St., Williamsburg; haabnyc.com*

Tacos Árabes From Santa Ana Deli & Groceries

This dim corner deli is a shining star and a largely unheralded destination for a Pueblan specialty known as **tacos árabes**: a flour tortilla overflowing with strips of pork, sliced white onion, and a smoky chipotle salsa, kept in check by some extra-creamy avocado. *171 Irving Ave., Bushwick; no website*

And for Dessert ... Sakura Parfait at Cha-an Bonbon

At some point this summer, skip the plain ice cream and go big: This parfait is a full-on dessert with layers of agar, warabi mochi, and cookies surrounding a swirl of hojicha soft-serve. *238A E. 9th St.; chaanteahouse.com*



Are BISCUITS the Next CROISSANTS?

They're fluffy, buttery, and beautiful.

1. The weekend-only **BEC** from **Wheated** (*905 Church Ave., Flatbush; wheatedbrooklyn.com*) is stacked inside a biscuit that bakes up over two inches tall before it's split open.
2. The square **buttermilk biscuits** from **Harlem Biscuit Company** (*2308 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd.; harlembiscuitcompany.com*) are at their best in the bakery's John Lewis

- sandwich: stuffed with hot fried chicken breast, coleslaw, and sweet pickles.
3. The bun-size, dome-shaped **biscuits** at **Norma's Corner Shoppe** (*59-02 Catalpa Ave., Ridgewood; normascornershoppe.com*) are craggy on the outside and soft within. They sell out, so go early and order a Ranchero sandwich with egg, beans, cheddar, and salsa.



Cha-an
Bonbon's
parfait.

SUMMER MOVIES
UNDER THE STARS
THAT'S THE TICKET!

— *Paramount+* —
MOVIE NIGHTS
AT
— **BRYANT PARK** —

JUN 10

FORREST GUMP

JUL 15

FUNNY FACE

JUN 17

**THE TALENTED
MR. RIPLEY**

JUL 22

CINEMA PARADISO

JUN 24

BOOMERANG

JUL 29

**HOW TO LOSE A GUY
IN 10 DAYS**

JUL 01

GLADIATOR

AUG 05

ARRIVAL

JUL 08

OLD SCHOOL

AUG 12

TITANIC

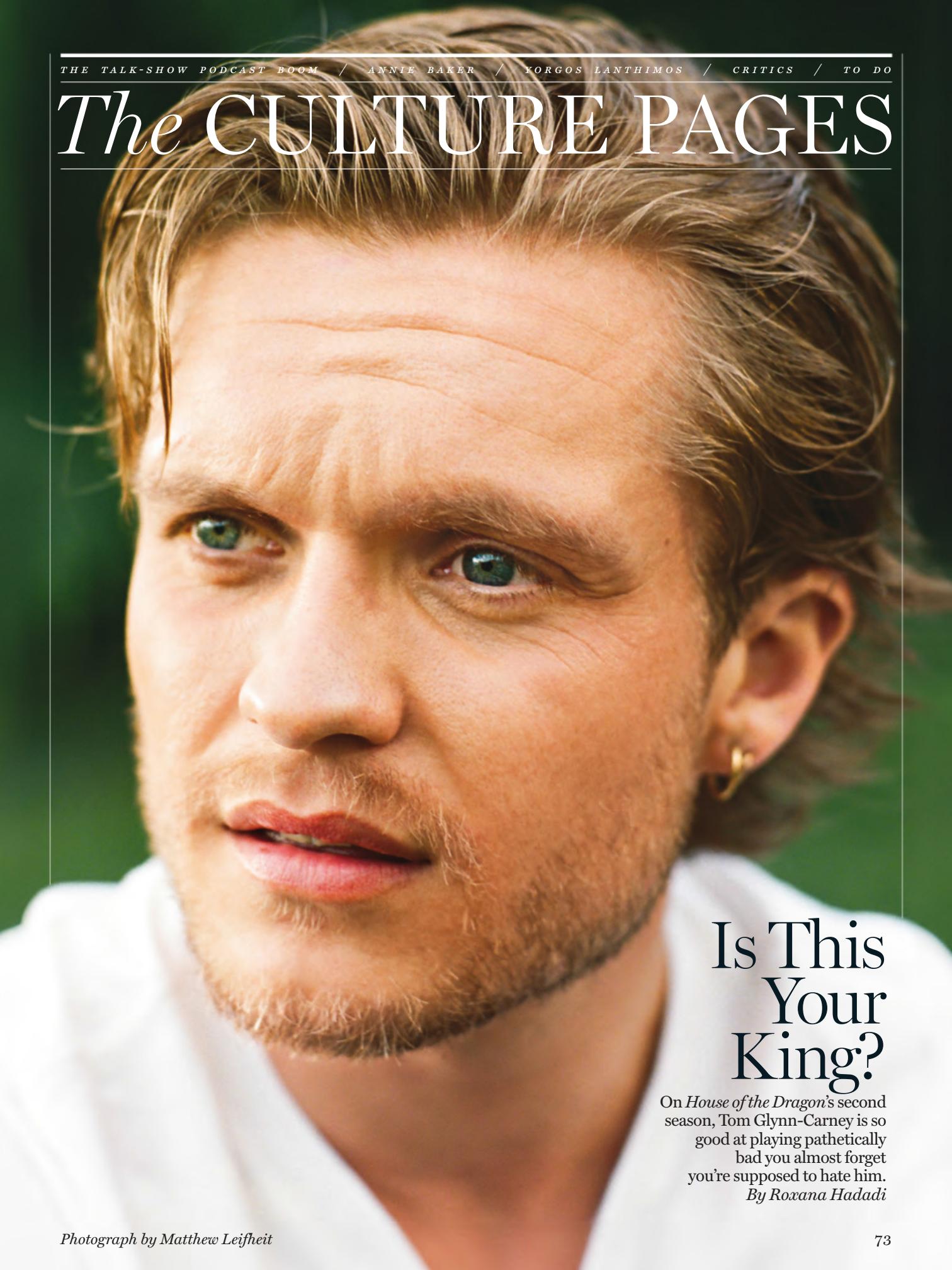
LAWN OPENS AT 5PM MOVIES START AT 8 PM

VULTURE

BRYANT
PARK
CORPORATION

bryantpark.org

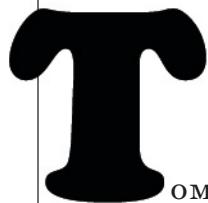
The CULTURE PAGES



Is This Your King?

On *House of the Dragon*'s second season, Tom Glynn-Carney is so good at playing pathetically bad you almost forget you're supposed to hate him.

By Roxana Hadadi



FROM GLYNN-CARNEY is looking to grow his record collection. His parents gave him a record player five years ago, and there's something about vinyl—its tactile nature, its innate romanticism, how it shows its age—that appeals to the actor and musician, whose preferences tend toward the vintage. He's partial to secondhand clothes, and on this sunny late-May day in New York, his outfit is a mélange of earth tones, including a forest-green cable-knit sweater vest that shows off a left arm decorated with tattoos. Petite gold hoops glint in his ears. On our walk to Rough Trade in midtown, he excitedly tells me about the specific record he's looking for: 2008's *The Seldom Seen Kid*, by Elbow, a British band led by singer and songwriter Guy Garvey, whom Glynn-Carney calls “the nucleus” of his musical taste. Inside the store, we make a beeline for the used bins and can't find it; we're not lucky in the alternative-rock section, either. When an employee confirms the store doesn't have the album, Glynn-Carney is disappointed yet quick with a joke: “I'm just more saddened for the people of New York.”

The 29-year-old stars as King Aegon Targaryen II on HBO's *Game of Thrones* prequel, *House of the Dragon*, a ratings juggernaut that feels like one of the last sure bets on television. His ascension to that throne has been swift and steady: His film debut was in Christopher Nolan's 2017 World War II saga *Dunkirk*, he's acted on Broadway in the Tony Award-winning *The Ferryman* and cut his teeth in British historical-drama adaptations like *Tolkien* and *SAS: Rogue Heroes*, and he stole scenes from Timothée Chalamet in *The King*. He was offered the role of the casually violent and emotionally tortured firstborn prince by *HotD* season-one showrunners Ryan Condal and Miguel Sapochnik after only one audition and a day after meeting them. (Condal is the sole showrunner for season two.) Because of the first season's time jumps, Aegon is played in his early adolescence for two episodes by Ty Tennant (who, coincidentally, played a younger version of a Glynn-Carney character in *Tolkien* as well).

Glynn-Carney's Aegon is introduced in the show's eighth episode, “The Lord of the Tides,” at around age 20. He's an easy character to hate: He has raped a serving girl off-screen, fathered numerous children around the capital city, and would rather spend his days in brothels and drowning in tankards than on the Iron Throne. But the actor gives him a pitiable, little-boy-lost core—

wide-eyed and shrinking into himself—that blooms into a steelier, angrier, and more justifiably vengeful personality in season two. Fans and critics have compared Aegon to *GoT*'s sadistic and coddled King Joffrey Baratheon, but “I didn't want that. My aim this time was to try and make someone so unrelatable relatable,” Glynn-Carney says. “When you look at him and go, ‘He's just a lunatic and he's unhinged and he's dangerous and he's toxic,’ you fall into a trap where you're playing that and using it as a sort of template. I think he's way more layered.”

An adaptation of George R.R. Martin's *Fire & Blood*, an in-universe historical tome that chronicles an internal war between dueling arms of the ruling House Targaryen, *HotD* is bloody, fiery, soap-operatic, and full of the stuff *GoT* fans have missed since that series concluded in 2019. Set 200 years earlier, *HotD* has large-scale battles and massive CGI beasts, incestuous relatives and clandestine power plays, and two factions sliding into war. On one side is Queen Rhaenyra (Emma D'Arcy), the firstborn daughter and named heir of the peaceful, pragmatic King Viserys (Paddy Considine). On the other side is Rhaenyra's childhood friend Alicent Hightower (Olivia Cooke), who becomes Viserys's second wife and mother to their four children, including Aegon. Owing to a prophecy, a deathbed miscommunication, and some

long-standing enmity between the families, Aegon is named as king by Alicent and her father, Otto Hightower (Rhys Ifans), at the end of season one, effectively stealing Rhaenyra's crown.

HBO has amped up the tension between Team Black and Team Green (named for the Targaryens' and Hightowers' family colors, respectively) in its marketing for season two with promos using language like “Pick a side” and “All must choose” featuring Rhaenyra and Alicent facing off. It's really Aegon, though, who holds the most power on Team Green by virtue of being king, and the new season's first two episodes shift the show's focus more on him than on Rhaenyra. In the premiere, “A Son for a Son,” Aegon is noticeably less standoffish straight away. Now that he has been convinced by his true-believer mother and opportunist grandfather that Viserys really chose him, Aegon is confident, politically savvy, and even affectionate with his children from sister-wife Helaena (Phia Saban)—well, at least with their son and his heir, Jaehaerys. “Showing that he has the potential to love was interesting to me. I wanted to investigate that,” Glynn-Carney says. Aegon genuinely smiles for seemingly the first time in the series while watching Jaehaerys irritate a member of the Small Council. The actor stands a little taller, moves a little bouncier, and puffs out his chest a little broader as Aegon enjoys “the newfound fame, fortune, respect, and authority,” he says.

Fire & Blood readers know, though, that this lighter, happier version of Aegon doesn't last that long. One of the most shattering acts of violence in the bloodshed between Teams Black and Green occurs this season, a Red Wedding-like sequence *HotD* adapts with squelching sound design and shadowy long takes. Glynn-Carney, who read the book after a season-one conversation with Condal and Sapochnik about Aegon's overall arc, praises the development for its shock factor and the spotlight it gives Saban, who he says is “sensational in every form.” Yet there's some Aegonness in his eyes when he admits, “I'd probably go a little bit more graphic on the gore. I could have done with, ‘Oh, I can't look at that!’ The sadist in me needed it.”

The scene is devastating to watch, and it hurtles Aegon into rage. But unlike Joffrey, whose tempestuous tyranny was purely for his own amusement, Aegon makes decisions this season that at least start out from a place of understandable hurt, and Glynn-Carney walks a thin line between capturing the character's agony and being absurdly funny. A scene where Aegon

smashes up Viserys's model of Old Valyria is furious and melancholy (and real: "They basically just put a crowbar in my hand and were like, 'Roll camera'"). One of his rudest insults aimed at Rhaenyra—"bitch queen of bastards, the smug cunt of Dragonstone"—is destined to be a meme. While everyone else glowers and grimaces, Glynn-Carney often looks like he's having a blast: "It's quite nice being on the villainous side. There's no fun being liked. What's the point?"

His acting style is instinctual, a function of his theater training that feels particularly well suited to Aegon's own impulsiveness. Cooke, 30, first met Glynn-Carney—"the 29-year-old man who's gonna be playing my son," she says, laughing—at one of his gigs with former band Sleep Walking Animals after he had been cast in the series in April 2021. Alicent is generally "disgusted and disappointed" in Aegon, she says. When filming their first scene on the show together, Glynn-Carney encouraged Cooke to actually slap him in the face. "The first go, I did it really haphazardly. I only caught his chin with my fingertips, because I was too nervous. And he was like, 'No, Olivia, just, like, really go for it. Just really go for it,'" she recalls. "I went for it, and the ringing sound that came from the slap reverberated all through the Red Keep. Tears are springing to his eyes and his chin is wobbling." In a scene they share in season two during which Aegon grieves the loss of a relative, Cooke says, "he was throwing himself around the room in just the throes of despair. It sort of took me out of the scene a bit. I was like, *Bloody hell, Tom's doing well.*"

Glynn-Carney grew up in Greater

Manchester accompanying his father, a music teacher who also did amateur musical theater and "was always the leading man," to rehearsals. It was during his first professional performance, playing Macduff's son at the Royal Exchange in a local production of *Macbeth*, that he decided he wanted to pursue a career in acting. "As a 12-year-old boy seeing these adults who would turn up to work, I was like, *I wonder what they do in the daytime as their job because this is fun,*" he remembers. He came from a creatively inclined family:

**"There's no fun
being liked.
What's the point?"**

His paternal grandparents were an opera singer and a choirmaster, and his mother sewed all the costumes for his sister's ballroom and Latin dance competitions. They were supportive of his acting dreams, he says, but urged a plan B—a suggestion he rejected. "I remember being so precocious and being like, 'If I have a plan B, I'm preemptively failing it.' My mom probably thought, *Little dickhead,*" Glynn-Carney adds, laughing. "I always had my eyes on the prize, and sometimes you've just got to be like that, haven't you?"

His roles after attending the Guildhall

School of Music and Drama in 2016 have often been young men with a sense of mission. In *Dunkirk*, he plays a civilian sailor helping his father evacuate British soldiers from the titular French beach after the German invasion in the summer of 1940. His rebellious knight Hotspur is the first major character onscreen in the 2019 Shakespeare adaptation *The King*, and Glynn-Carney's piss-and-vinegar line deliveries give the film an irascible energy it noticeably loses once he's killed off. So does his aggressive sword-swinging in a full-armor duel with Chalamet's Prince Hal: "I'd been going to the gym a lot and put on a lot of muscle mass, and there was one point where Timothée grabs me around my neck and pulls me down and I landed on him and I just felt him crush. Poor guy," Glynn-Carney says. "And then, God love him, he had to do the rest of the movie."

We're only about a half-mile away (or, in his words, "over the road") from Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre, where Glynn-Carney performed *The Ferryman* with his future *HotD* dad, Considine. Glynn-Carney originated the role of the boastful and defiant IRA recruit Shane Corcoran in London in 2017, and he stayed with the production as it moved to the West End and eventually Broadway for its 2018–19 run. The play took home four Tonys, and both he and Considine won Theatre World Awards. One of his favorite days on set this season reminded him of the live energy of performing onstage. They were shooting episode two, when Aegon challenges his grandfather Otto's decisions and remains steely and resolute in response to Otto's insults. "I've always wanted to do a play with Rhys, and that felt like the closest thing I'll get to it for a while," Glynn-Carney says. "It was an empty set, a big room, like a stage. We were allowed complete free rein of the space." The scene ends with Aegon triumphantly gaining the upper hand over his commanding grandfather—but later on, we see Aegon weeping alone, so despondent that Alicent comes into the room where he is, says nothing, then walks right back out. "They're Targaryens, for God's sake," Glynn-Carney jokes of the character's "massively bipolar" mood swings.

That emotional volatility, fueled by shame, guilt, and an obsessive need to prove himself, becomes a major driver of this season's increasing bloodshed and brutality. "Aegon wants to be loved and feared at the same time. But I think it's a dangerous cycle," Glynn-Carney says. "We're not going to get to the core of what's going on. We're just going to go round and round and round and round until everything burns and everyone's dead. Spoiler." ■



As Aegon Targaryen in *House of the Dragon* season two.



Return of the Mic

How chat podcasts have taken over the medium and dominated the cultural discourse (again).

By NICHOLAS QUAH



LESS THAN A WEEK into 2024, Katt Williams went on a podcast and laid waste to the world. Speaking on *Club Shay Shay*, the entertainment show hosted by pro-football Hall of Famer Shannon Sharpe, the comedian aired grievances and let loose on his long career while taking shots at an expansive list of targets, from Kevin Hart (“No one in Hollywood has a memory of a sold-out Kevin Hart show”) to Cedric the Entertainer (whom he accused of stealing jokes) to Harvey Weinstein (the disgraced producer “offered to suck my penis in front of all my people at my agency”).



PHOTOGRAPHS: YOUTUBE

Lasting almost three hours, the episode has been viewed more than 70 million times on YouTube; *Saturday Night Live* built a whole sketch around the appearance; and some of Williams's strays are still rippling through the atmosphere, as his Diddy comments ("All lies will be exposed") did when video evidence of the mogul physically assaulting his then-girlfriend, the singer Cassie, publicly emerged in May. The episode was such a cultural supernova that when Williams's comedy special *Woke Foke* dropped on Netflix a few months later,

it felt like an anticlimax. He left it all on *Club Shay Shay*.

If the public face of podcasting was once thinky narrative shows vying for high-art legitimacy, these days it's chat and interview programs that hustle their way into your life. It's podcasts like *Call Her Daddy*, where Alex Cooper hunts for notoriety and headlines with buzzy bookings. It's *Huberman Lab*, where the pop scientist Andrew Huberman advises the masses to spend more time in the sun. It's the *SmartLess* trio (Jason Bateman, Will Arnett, and Sean Hayes) palling around

with three presidents (Clinton, Obama, Biden) in a bid to keep the dream of American neoliberalism alive.

The significance of these shows isn't necessarily tied to audience size, though many are among the biggest podcasts in the world. Rather, their prominence lies in their ability to seize your attention by producing newsworthy moments or booking noteworthy guests—as well as the way they influence opinions in their respective communities. Last year's grand reality-television drama that was "Scandoval," for example, only partly took place on *Vanderpump Rules*; the rest of the action played out over, and was litigated within, the cottage industry of podcasts hosted by fellow reality-TV personalities: *The Viall Files* with Nick Viall, *Scheanigans With Scheana Shay*, *Give Them Lala*. If all you knew about Scandoval was through Bravo, you were missing out.

You might notice some commonalities among this elite class of chat-casts. Many are either unafraid of controversy or eager to court it. The currency of celebrity is a governing force, and these shows are basically exercises in brand extension. Many of these podcasts are hosted by people who are converting social cachet initially generated elsewhere; somewhat rarer is the podcaster who becomes famous through podcasting itself. Most work to leverage the celebrity of their guests in pursuit of celebrity for themselves; each episode is a kind of transaction driven by the podcaster's intent to become the show's main attraction. Being a good interviewer is a plus but not a strict requirement. Sometimes, they trade in the promise of expertise, whether it's former athletes recapping games or aging comedians reminiscing about how *SNL* used to be, but that, too, isn't a precondition. For the most part, a little fame, a knack for attention, and some predisposition toward building a cult of personality are enough to rise to the top. (At least temporarily, as in the case of Bobbi Althoff's *The Really Good Podcast*.)

Podcasting's contemporary chat-centrism marks a kind of full-circle moment. The medium emerged in the mid-aughts as an extension of blogging that allowed people to reach an audience without having to deal with the hurdles of traditional distribution channels like newspapers, television, and broadcast radio. Narrative shows, whether documentaries or audio fiction, arrived shortly after as public-radio organizations started redistributing their work on iTunes. In 2014, *Serial* catalyzed the narrative-podcast moment and helped draw huge sums of money into the space.

But chat-casts continued to be the bread and butter of the medium all through this period. Joe Rogan, Bill Simmons, and Marc Maron started podcasting around the time of the Great Recession; they're still releasing episodes today. In hindsight, the narrative-podcast moment turned out to be a diversion for the medium. Culture flows downstream from economics and technology in that order: As falling ad revenue caused the podcast industry to rapidly contract, networks found themselves in need of more cost-efficient products. Chat-casts fit the mold perfectly. They can publish more episodes more regularly, which means more opportunities to make money; they can incrementally grow followings through sheer force of ubiquity and habit formation; and they can propel their way in front of even more audiences with big guest bookings that can result in viral moments. If the host is someone with a built-in following, you're halfway to a solid business right there.

In many senses, this new universe of chat-casts reflects an expansion of old-school radio, which still reaches the majority of Americans and remains an influential cultural force. You can see this in how many existing radio subgenres (sports, hip-hop) and biases (the overabundance of male hosts) are robustly represented in the medium. Two traditional-radio giants, iHeartMedia and SiriusXM, are also two of the biggest podcast publishers. Once the domain of upstarts and narrative storytellers, podcasting is now similar to radio in how it has firmly become a star system. It's only fitting, then, that one of the hottest podcasts right now is *New Heights With Jason and Travis Kelce*, led by two NFL brothers who are also Hollywood's hottest free agents.

Podcasting seems to be on the verge of yet another full-circle moment. Some podcast hosts have uploaded episodes as videos on YouTube since the beginning of podcasting, but that practice didn't really take off until Spotify added its own video support in 2020. That's why you'll find anything from *The Diary of a CEO* to *Huberman Lab* on YouTube as well as your podcast app; that's also why your Spotify app is streaming the video version of *The Joe Rogan Experience* while your phone is in your pocket. Indeed, it's probably safe to say that YouTube played a huge role in *Club Shay Shay's* Katt Williams episode going as viral as it did—who knows if it would've made as big of an impact if it had just been audio. ■

The Most Influ

The "Just Asking Questions" Guys



The Joe Rogan Experience

Widely considered the biggest podcast in the world, *The Joe Rogan Experience* set the template for the lengthy and discursive chat-cast. Rogan has generated numerous viral moments in its 15-year tenure, but few episodes left an impression as lasting as Elon Musk taking up behind a mic in 2018.



Lex Fridman Podcast

There's a clear right-wing bent to the MIT researcher Fridman's guest bookings: Jared Kushner, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Tucker Carlson alongside academics and occasional celebrities. Its biggest moment is perhaps the 2022 episode with Ye (né Kanye West), whose statements about the Holocaust would sink him deeper into cancellation.



This Past Weekend With Theo Von

In many ways a direct descendant of *Joe Rogan*, it's hosted by a

stand-up comic. Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was a guest on the show back in September; the week after that, the rapper Sexy Red appeared on the pod and argued that Donald Trump should be back in office.

Pop Culturati



Call Her Daddy

After acrimoniously splitting from her co-host, Sofia Franklyn, in 2020 and Barstool Sports in '21, Alex Cooper has turned *Call Her Daddy* into a premier talk show. Zayn Malik gave his first interview in six years on the pod, Megan Fox addressed plastic-surgery rumors, and Ariana Madix made an appearance shortly after *Vanderpump Rules's* "Scandoval" season.



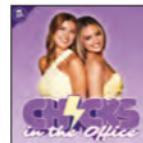
Cancelled With Tana Mongeau

Perhaps the YouTuber who most successfully parlayed her social-media fame into a popular podcast, Mongeau and co-host Brooke Schofield mostly dish on their lives, but the duo are starting to get into celebrity interviews. In April, Jelly Roll and Bunnie XO popped by to talk about their marriage.



Not Skinny But Not Fat

Amanda Hirsch gained a huge following on both Instagram and this podcast with her pop-culture commentary. Now, she has started to attract celebrity guests. Kim Kardashian came on the pod in 2022, Kristen Stewart was on in March to talk about her favorite reality shows, and Drake Bell stopped by in April to discuss the Nickelodeon revelations on *Quiet on Set*.



Chicks in the Office

Part of the Barstool universe, this punchy chat-cast hosted by Francesca Mariano and Ria Ciuffo typically focuses on reality-TV recaps and other pop-culture drama. But the hosts also do interviews, including ones with Jessica Alba and JoJo Siwa.

The New Late Night



WTF With Marc Maron

The OG of "comedians interviewing comedians," Marc Maron has transitioned into a general talk-

show host and a staple for anybody peddling a new project. *WTF*, with over 1,500 episodes to date, has featured notables from Mavis Staples to Lorne Michaels to (jointly) Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio.



SmartLess

Jason Bateman, Will Arnett, and Sean Hayes started *SmartLess* during the pandemic, and today it's a tentpole podcast for famous people looking to be interviewed by other famous people. Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden went on in the spring to try to shore up excitement among Democrats for the election.



Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend

This is the central pillar of O'Brien's post-late-night career. He pals around with stars, artists, and fellow comedians including Rob Lowe, David Spade, Goldie Hawn, and Jordan Peele. Tom Hanks went on during the pandemic to discuss his experience recovering from COVID.



Armchair Expert With Dax Shepard

Together with co-host Monica Padman, Shepard engages guests in long conversations that draw from his

Essential Podcasters (RIGHT NOW)

background as a recovering addict and sexual-abuse survivor. That vulnerability nudges fellow celebrities to open up, as Bradley Cooper did in February when he talked about struggling to immediately connect with his daughter when she was born, but Shepard has also attracted controversy, e.g., when he made Jonathan Van Ness cry while talking about trans rights.



The Viall Files
What is life after *The Bachelor*? For Nick Viall, you become a reality-TV elder statesman with a podcast that mixes reality-show recaps, relationship advice, and blockbuster celebrity interviews. It's where *RHOSLC* breakout Monica Garcia announced her pregnancy and where *Vanderpump* villain Tom Sandoval went to defend his image.



Unlocking Us With Brené Brown
Brown's expansive motivational media empire spans books, TED Talks, television work, and, of course, podcasts—in particular *Unlocking Us*, where she conducts long conversations with guests on thorny emotional subjects,

such as the author David Kessler on grief and the futurist Amy Webb on coping with unnerving change.



Wiser Than Me With Julia Louis-Dreyfus
Louis-Dreyfus seeks life lessons in interviews with famous women over the age of 70, Patti Smith, Ruth Reichl, and Diane von Furstenberg among them. Jane Fonda, now in her 80s, was the inaugural guest of the show, where she reflected on feelings about her body in light of her past as an aerobics pioneer.



We Can Do Hard Things
The author Glennon Doyle, together with her wife, the retired soccer star Abby Wambach, and her sister, the advocate Amanda Doyle, talk through tough subjects like death, sickness, and divorce. Kamala Harris went on in January to share her experience hearing about the end of *Roe v. Wade*.



Huberman Lab
Stanford credentials

and technical wonkishness have turned Andrew Huberman into one of the world's biggest pop scientists weighing in on the human body. Even Reese Witherspoon publicly cites his advice. However, questions have been raised (including by this magazine) about his character and the accuracy of his information.



On Purpose With Jay Shetty
There's no shortage of self-help types moonlighting as podcasters, but only one has officiated at J.Lo and Ben's (second) wedding. The pod has featured everybody from Michelle Obama to Kim Kardashian to Will Smith, all drawn to Shetty's discussions of personal-betterment strategies.



The Diary of a CEO With Steven Bartlett
Bartlett, an investor on *Dragons' Den* (i.e., British *Shark Tank*), started this show as a self-helpish space for entrepreneurs to talk about how hard it is to be an entrepreneur. It's since evolved into more of a grab-bag talk show with scientists, business influencers, and celebs like Thierry Henry and Maisie Williams.



The Tim Ferriss Show
The productivity

author of *The 4-Hour Workweek* fame interviews entrepreneurs, athletes, scientists, and others to gain insight into squeezing more out of one's time. Major guests on the show have included Arnold Schwarzenegger, the late Madeleine Albright, Mark Zuckerberg, and Rich Paul, the sports superagent.



Drink Champs
N.O.R.E. and DJ EFN's booze-filled hangouts are now recognized as a living record for hip-hop nostalgia. Benzino cried about his beef with Eminem when he appeared in February. Eric Adams stopped by in May to affirm his self-declared rep as the "hip-hop mayor."



The Joe Budden Podcast
Once a charting rapper in the early aughts, Budden has carved out a second life as a prominent hip-hop podcaster. He banters with rotating co-hosts about the goings-on in the music world. There's plenty of associated mess: In 2021, Budden fired his co-hosts Rory and Mal in a financial dispute; they went on to start a rival pod.



Million Dollar Worth of Game
The Philadelphia hardcore rapper Gillie Da Kid and social-media personality Wallo267 host this show, which regularly features A-listers such as Alicia Keys, Cardi B, and Sixers star Tyrese Maxey. In February, Latto's appearance fueled further speculation about a feud with Ice Spice.



The Bill Simmons Podcast
Launched shortly after his ouster from ESPN, Simmons's eponymous show is now a massive podcast that doubles as the anchor for *The Ringer*, which Spotify acquired in 2020. Built upon a hefty diet of sports recaps, pop-culture chats, and celebrity interviews, this is a clear instance when the host is the draw—as opposed to the guests themselves.



Club Shay Shay
Former NFL player Shannon Sharpe left

Fox Sports 1's *Undisputed* last year to focus on his podcast, and the bet is working out. He has delivered a reliable pipeline of head-turning guests and viral moments from Amanda Seales chastising Sharpe for claiming her mother was white to Shaquille O'Neal dropping a diss track on Instagram after Sharpe insulted him.



New Heights With Jason and Travis Kelce
This is arguably the hottest podcast on the planet right now. A good deal of this has to do, of course, with Travis Kelce's girlfriend, Taylor Swift. While sports fans gather for hours of wonky NFL-game recaps, trade analysis, and brotherly banter, Swifties everywhere are willing to wade through all that in search of incremental updates on the relationship.



All the Smoke
Former NBA players Matt Barnes and Stephen Jackson offer up extended interviews doubling as career retrospectives with other professional athletes and sports-media personalities. Two-time NBA champion Rajon Rondo announced his retirement on the show during an appearance in early April.

Annie Baker Goes to Hollywood

The renowned playwright switches mediums with her sneakily expansive debut film about a possessive mother-daughter relationship.

By JACKSON MCHENRY

BEFORE STARTING filming on *Janet Planet*, Annie Baker and her sound designer, Paul Hsu, recorded two weeks of the ambient noises of the Western Massachusetts countryside. For the coming-of-age story about an 11-year-old girl, Lacy, and her mother, Janet, Baker had found the home where she wanted to set much of the movie: an angular but cozy wood cabin with large windows huddled in the forest, a droplet of civilization in the midst of the woods. ¶ “The sound of nature around this house was so incredible,” Baker tells me over coffee and a sandwich at a café just south of Prospect Park, where she had arrived in a ’70s-ish brown jacket, toting a well-used orange backpack. “There were, like, bears wandering around.” Baker has a mop of Pre-Raphaelite bangs and an open smile. She’s best known as one of the foremost playwrights of her generation—a precise observer of tragicomic human behavior. *Janet Planet* is her first movie, but her enthusiasm for and knowledge of the nitty-gritty processes of filmmaking are apparent. She and Hsu placed recording equipment in the trees at the locations where they planned to film. The recordings were sensitive enough to pick up the sound of a bumblebee tumbling around a microphone (“It sounds like a plane,” Baker tells me excitedly) as well as the other fauna roaming through the area. Those recordings are the basis of the film’s soundtrack, as Baker had decided to forgo a typical musical score. She and Hsu combed through the reams of audio together, assembling those buzzes, chirps, the rippling of a stream, and whatever else into a soundscape that approximates how summer in New England feels. ¶ When a playwright moves to a different medium, there’s a risk their work may not translate or that they may not even try to adapt to the new language. The history of film is littered with inert play adaptations that leave you wishing the characters would walk into another room. But *Janet Planet* is a movie that could only be a movie. “From the beginning, the whole thing was suffused with filmness,” Baker tells me. For one, she was intent on trying to capture the unique qualities of the Massachusetts countryside. There were philosophical questions about how to depict the passage of time in childhood, for which Baker felt film was a particularly good medium. “The way memory works and how time moves is so interesting to me,” she says. “It’s hard to articulate, and I think that’s why I felt like I could only explore it on film.”

JANET PLANET
is in theaters
June 21.



Janet Planet is set in 1991, around the time Baker was growing up in the area. It unfolds across three chapters separated by relationships that Janet (Julianne Nicholson), an overaccommodating single mother, has with the other adults in her life: her boyfriend (Will Patton), a friend and outdoor-theater performer (Sophie Okonedo), and a Rilke-quoting director (Elias Koteas). Each one makes Lacy (Zoe Ziegler, an incredible newcomer) possessive in an inchoate way. Lacy is introverted but forceful—the film opens with her calling Janet to say she’ll kill herself unless her mom picks her up from summer camp early. Janet tends to be obliging to a fault, even when men give her reason to distrust them. Lacy tries to push away the people who come into Janet’s life, seeming to struggle to understand why her mother might need anyone but her own daughter.

In person, Baker is chatty and inquisitive; she notices, mid-conversation, the movements of people and nature around us, registering both when a woman at a nearby table shifts inside to get away from the sound of our interview and the red flash of a cardinal flying into a tree overhead. She speaks in the same round-about cadence her characters often do. Her early work was set in the fictional town of Shirley, Vermont—a place not unlike Amherst, Massachusetts—and includes *Circle Mirror Transformation*, about an acting class, and *The Aliens*, set among conversations between guys in an alley behind a coffee shop. Those two plays shared an Obie Award in 2010. Baker won a Pulitzer Prize in 2014 for *The Flick*, a three-hour epic about movie-theater employees, and a MacArthur Fellowship in 2017. Her most recent work, *Infinite Life*, in which a group of women try to relieve their ailments with liquid diets at a medical clinic, was written before the pandemic but premiered in New York in late 2023. Sara Holdren called it “prismlike and expansive”; Helen Shaw, in *The New Yorker*, referred to it as a “dry-eyed drama” that captures the unbearable.

What’s true of Baker’s work onstage remains in film—like that shaggy-exact ear for sentences. Baker is also known for her pauses, for making the audience listen to the space between the words, which adds an awareness of one’s own presence amid the spectators at a theater. On film, her actors take their time. “It was never too slow for her,” Nicholson tells me. The movie often takes the perspective of a child, and one has the frequent sensation of listening through a keyhole, alongside Lacy, to the inexplicable dialect of grown-ups.

THIS IS NOT BAKER’S first brush with Hollywood. Unless you, say, write the book of a hit musical, playwriting doesn’t tend to be a financially sustainable profession. Baker’s work has never gone to Broadway. At this point, she supports herself primarily by teaching her craft. She has dabbled in television, developing a pilot for HBO in 2011, which didn’t go anywhere, about a B-school graduate returning home to a Northern California commune, and she worked in the writers’ room for *I Love Dick*. However, she found TV incompatible with how she conceives of a story. “The idea of a cliffhanger is of no particular interest,” she says. Her dark comedy *The Antipodes* imagines a writers’ room as an extractive inquisition with men demanding everyone spin their most personal confessions into content while munching on takeout and sipping LaCroix.

But she had always loved film—perhaps unsurprising considering *The Flick*, in which a character treats the replacement of a 35-mm. projector with a digital one as a

**“I have memories
from childhood
where it felt
like the miraculous
was part of life.”**

moral failure. She possesses what Nicholson calls a near-encyclopedic knowledge of the Criterion Collection. Her influences on *Janet Planet* include Maurice Pialat’s 1968 *L’Enfance Nue*, which takes an unflinching approach to the story of a troubled child, and Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s 2010 film, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. Weerasethakul’s dreamlike pacing, in which reality and something mystical commingle when characters reveal shocking things offhandedly, shares much with Baker’s style.

For more than a decade, Baker had been toying with the idea of a project about a mother and daughter. She got to work on it seriously only in the spring of 2020. At that time, the premiere of *Infinite Life* had been interrupted by the pandemic. Baker had just given birth to a daughter with her husband, the academic Nico Baumbach (brother of the director Noah; Baker has a small role in his film *While We’re Young*). She suddenly found herself with a lot of time on her hands and wasn’t sure when the theater, as a form, would return.

She also felt she could depict a kind of adolescent experience in film that would be difficult to perform onstage. Lacy, Baker’s main character, is a recognizably confident but nerdy girl. She hasn’t yet been hit with teenage self-consciousness. The type of girl who had the wherewithal and self-assurance to do eight performances a week probably wouldn’t have worked for the part. “I’m sure there’s an awesome 10-year-old who could be in *Matilda*,” as Baker puts it. “But she wouldn’t be right for the movie.” Baker spent months looking for her Lacy, approaching parents and daughters on the street with offers to audition, before finding Ziegler, a “little wizard” from Delaware who heard about the part through a scouting email. What made her right was all her non-people-pleaser qualities. “When she walked into the room, she didn’t care about making us happy,” Baker says. “She was uncomfortable in a crowded room and had a powerful, private dialogue with herself at all times.”

Nicholson, a stage and screen actress who most recently won acclaim as Kate Winslet’s best friend in *Mare of Easttown*, was Baker’s first and only choice for the role of Janet. “She embodied a kind of maternal feminine mystery that was exactly what I was looking for,” she says. And like Baker, Nicholson spent much of her adolescence in Western Massachusetts. Their conversations involved a lot of reminiscing about their own experiences. Both of them bought their first bras at the JCPenney in the Hampshire Mall in Hadley, a place Lacy and Janet visit in the film. Unfolding over the course of a single summer, the movie captures the region’s caramelized glow as well as its lost-in-time qualities and political history. “Growing up in Amherst in the ’90s, questions of counter-culture were very big,” Baker remembers. It was important for her to have the characters discuss a man who set himself on fire in the town square to protest the first Gulf War.

Nicholson’s mother is an herbalist, Baker’s is a psychologist, and Janet is an acupuncturist. “I’m not playing my mom, and Annie didn’t write Janet as her mom, but the world she creates is very particular and real,” Nicholson says. She remembers instinctively the kind of hug shared by herself and Okonedo’s character, the theater performer—an extended moment of solace between the two old friends who are reconnecting after a long period apart. The gesture frustrates Lacy, who is at that moment left out. “I used to watch my mom get those long hugs from so many people,” Nicholson says. “And it made me sick!”

In Janet and Lacy’s relationship, Baker was intrigued by the question of the mother as an object of possessive, almost romantic, cross-generational love. Janet and Lacy

are close in a way that may border on the unhealthy: Janet lacks discernment about the men she brings into her life, while Lacy tries to force out anyone close to her mother. The movie contains a late-night confession in which Janet says she believes she can make any man fall in love with her if she really tries. “Can you stop?” Lacy asks. “I found it so sad,” Nicholson says, both in the ways mothers and children always have to negotiate their own boundaries and in how the scene spoke to the perspective of a woman in that period of history. “At that time, the work was getting a man’s interest for validation,” she says.

But the film does not moralize. “I didn’t have any kind of judgment on whether she was a good or bad mother. That’s totally uninteresting to me,” Baker says. “The way a woman born in 1945 might relate to a woman born in 1981 is super-interesting to me.” Is it a question of how their outlooks have been shaped by different iterations of feminism, I ask? “There’s all of that, all of the politics,” Baker says. “But also something harder to explain that I could only capture through mysterious characters.”

Baker conducted some of her interviews and auditions with her eventual collaborators in Prospect Park. We wander there after finishing our coffees and sandwiches. She points to the edge of a pond where she taped Ziegler with her iPhone. Near the Boat-house, she asks if I know the tree that looks like a house. It turns out to be a weeping beech with little doorlike gaps between its leaves, gaps I had never noticed despite years of running in the park. “Here,” she says, encouraging me to walk into the house tree as we approach, “I’ll let you go experience it.” Inside, it’s quiet, cool, and eerie, brown surrounded by a shield of green. I hear each dry leaf crunch under my feet. If I were a kid—and maybe even now—I would be sure it was a place of magic.

A tenet of Baker’s work may be that, if you zoom close enough to reality, it’s possible to discern the supernatural in its warp and weft. The effect isn’t quite magical realism, where a big enough emotion makes things burst into the extraordinary, but something more analytical: Think hard enough about what we experience (and how we experience it) and the evidence says something more is afoot. Her plays have always touched the mysterious through the means of the mundane, and her more recent work has tilted further toward the uncanny: In 2015’s *John*, a millennial couple visit a Gettysburg inn teeming with an unnatural number of dolls; in *The Antipodes*, there’s the cursed endless gloom state of the writers’ room; in *Infinite Life*, the ethereal



With Julianne Nicholson during filming.

un-time of wellness. *Janet Planet* appears to hew more closely to realism, but Baker allows in moments that are unexplainable. From the movie’s child’s-eye view, in an almost George Berkeley subjective-idealist sense, the universe may as well contain magic. “I have memories from childhood where it felt like the miraculous was part of life,” Baker says. “That’s what it’s like being 10. You live in an animistic universe wherein magical acts are not fanciful.”

In *Janet Planet*, Lacy creates little diorama-like scenes with doll-like objects. Some were Baker’s own constructions, which she dug out of storage with her mom’s help. “I made lots of tiny things,” she says. Like Lacy, she would arrange them into dioramas. That impulse to impute something more behind the blank mien of a doll has come to fascinate her on a philosophical level. Dolls are a slate onto which we project so much imagination, the beginning of so many inquiries into religion and art. They can be a means through which a child exerts control over her universe and expresses herself, orchestrating scenes

like a young theater director. Yet in their blankness, they are also unknowable. A doll’s silence is of considerable importance “in a world where destiny and indeed God himself have become famous mainly by not speaking to us,” as Rilke put it, which Baker forwards to me over email.

In addition to those little constructs Lacy plays with, young Annie Baker had a family of Troll dolls. She fabricated even smaller objects for them to consume. She would roll out the dough for a mini blueberry pie with blueberries the size of a pencil dot. “I would feed them three meals a day and then leave the room for them to eat,” she remembers. Her parents were separated, and when she went to stay with her father in New York, she would ask her mother to feed them for her. Could she make them breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the proper appointed hours? Baker’s mother promised to do it, but as a child, Baker didn’t quite believe she had listened. “I asked her recently, ‘You didn’t really feed my Trolls three times a day, did you?’” Baker says. “She actually did it. It makes me want to cry.” ■

Jesse Plemons
in *Kinds
of Kindness*
(2024).



Angeliki
Papoulia
in *Dogtooth*
(2009).



Evangelia
Randou in
Lanthimos's
solo debut,
Kinetta
(2005).



Emma Stone
in *Poor Things*
(2023).



CLOSE READ

Yorgos Lanthimos's Fantasies of Control

The director's latest, *Kinds of Kindness*, which premiered at Cannes, is a return to his primary interest—what makes people submit.

By Alison Willmore



LAST YEAR, Yorgos Lanthimos directed a dark comedy about a woman named Bella who was assembled from the body of an adult and the brain of a fetus in a Frankenstein-like surgery and who went on to fuck her way to self-actualization across a fantastical Europe. It was the most accessible thing the Athens-born director had ever made, which really says more about his overall body of work than it does about *Poor Things*.

Lanthimos is one of film's reigning sadists, though he's always funny about it—if not funny haha, then funny in a tone so arid as to render the humor borderline subliminal. He makes films set in deadpan universes that sit at Dutch angles to our own and feature characters struggling to live in accordance with arbitrary and frequently cruel conventions. All of which is true of *Poor Things* as well. What sets it apart is the way that Bella, the wiped-blank heroine played by Emma Stone, rejects the rules and strictures she's told she has to abide by as she speedruns her way from child to woman of the world. Lanthimos, as unlikely as it seemed, had created a story of empowerment as well as something tailor-made to polarize the internet.

The frankness of the sexual content—which begins with Bella’s innocent explorations of her own body, progresses to her voracious pursuit of what she calls “furious jumping” with a louche lawyer played by Mark Ruffalo, and eventually brings her to work in a Parisian brothel—kicked off arguments about the degree to which *Poor Things* is mired in the male gaze. It seemed as though the only person who didn’t care to weigh in on the validity of the film’s feminism was the filmmaker himself, who shied away from the label like someone being introduced as a boyfriend by a person they thought they were just casually dating.

Watching the world discover Lanthimos by way of one of his least characteristic and, honestly, weakest films has been akin to watching someone you know become the internet’s latest main character, stripped of other context with their actions scrutinized via a very specific lens. Lanthimos is many things—a champion absurdist, an arguable nihilist, an occasional edgelord, and an artist who has maintained a decidedly Euro sensibility despite having worked in English with Hollywood actors since 2015. His movies have the brain-burrowing quality of an insomniac’s thought spiral and are so insistently off-kilter that the Greek Weird Wave, the movement he’s sometimes described as being a part of, feels less like a trend in national cinema and more like a summary of how his distinct sensibility has filtered through to some of his peers. If he considers himself a feminist—and there’s no reason to believe he wouldn’t, even if there is a “please clap” quality to Bella’s journey in *Poor Things* that leaves it lacking in conviction—it has felt largely incidental until this point.

His work does have an awareness of the role that gender plays in the abuse of power and in sexual violence, and his films feature their own fun-house-mirror versions of patriarchy. But when it comes to the degradations his characters are subjected to, he’s equal opportunity. The most challenging aspect of his movies, which run the gamut from the brilliant (*Dogtooth*, *The Favourite*) to the irritatingly opaque (*Kinetta*, *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*), has more to do with the impassivity of his gaze and the delectable swagger behind it. He skewers his characters like he’s pinning butterflies to corkboard, and it’s not always evident whether that’s done in service of some greater purpose or out of a more basic desire to provoke. *Kinds of Kindness*, his hilariously hostile follow-up to *Poor Things*, is a return to the director’s primary interest, which has always been control. In particular, he’s fascinated by what makes people continue to obey, how they fumblingly fit

themselves into roles laid out for them, why they might submit to the will of others even when it causes them harm.

The anthology film, which premiered earlier this year at Cannes, is made up of a trio of surreal fables rife with coercion, druggings, assaults, and self-mutilation. In its first section, Jesse Plemons plays a man who lives his entire life—from the clothes he wears to the house he lives in, the woman he marries, and the size of their family (he puts an abortifacient in his wife’s coffee to maintain their childless state)—according to the dictates of his boss (Willem Dafoe). In the second, Plemons is a cop who subjects a woman (Stone) who claims to be his missing wife to a series of escalating tests in order to prove she’s an impostor. (The ensemble, which includes Joe Alwyn, Mamoudou Athie, Hong Chau, and Margaret Qualley, recurs across each part.) And in the third, Stone belongs to a cult whose members pledge sexual fidelity to its two leaders and are in search of a messiah—a position that involves being able to raise the dead but also having the correct distance between your nipples. Lanthimos has made inroads with American audiences, but *Kinds of Kindness* brings to mind his earlier and less approachable work, which is in Greek and focuses on the dynamics of people devoted to inscrutable group activities that involve turning yourself over to someone else’s whims.

There’s also an obsessive cop in *Kinetta*, Lanthimos’s barely parsable 2005 solo debut, one consumed with coaching a hotel maid and a photo-shop clerk through reenactments of violent crimes, a project they keep coming back to despite its appearing to make them miserable. There’s a cultlike collective in his 2011 *Alps*, a group of four people who, as a service to the bereaved, fill in for people who have died, wearing the deceased’s clothing and parroting past conversations—a process that leads one of its members, played by Lanthimos’s favorite non-American leading lady, Angeliki Papoulia, to become destructively overinvested. These aren’t films about people who overcome limitations and discover themselves but something uneasier: films about people who barely have a sense of self at all and who accept being told what to do because they’re at a loss otherwise.

It’s fair to say that all of Lanthimos’s movies are meant to be received as comedies, even 2017’s *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, which takes on the contours of a thriller when members of a family learn they’re required to sacrifice one of their own. But he isn’t in any way a warm filmmaker, which may

have something to do with how so many of the oddball enterprises his characters are involved in read as distorted versions of filmmaking with someone in charge of direction and others playing parts. His characters are unfailingly stilted and juvenile and a little alien, designed to keep the viewer at arm’s length rather than to invite sympathy. Given how regularly his films veer toward debasement, that distance serves as a protective measure, a means of making the ludicrous and disturbing situations he conjures up easier to tolerate.

The most excruciating sequence in his entire filmography, in 2009’s *Dogtooth*, rests entirely on the mechanical behavior of its participants. Papoulia, as one of three adult siblings who were raised in stunted isolation, is directed to have sex with her brother by their parents, who have created a whole mythology about the dangers of the outside world but who fully buy into the idea that men have urges that must be tended to. Lanthimos shoots the encounter in a series of frank, static shots that leave nothing to the imagination until the end, when the film cuts to Papoulia’s character in profile, her brother visible only in the reflection of the mirror as he moves above her, her face contorted in an involuntary grimace. This framing is echoed in *Kinds of Kindness* in a scene in which one of Stone’s characters is roofied and then raped, her head jostling as her unconscious body is assaulted by someone offscreen. These aren’t moments anyone would trumpet as feminist, though what’s upsetting about them isn’t that they feel exploitative—it’s that they’re presented impassively, with no more compassion than prurience and with an unsparing gaze that provides no guidance for what a viewer is supposed to feel aside from discomfort.

There’s something haunting about how Lanthimos keeps returning to these dynamics. He treats the desire to be dominated as an elemental aspect of human nature, though it’s one he prefers to explore on a granular level. He may not offer empathy to these characters, but he doesn’t hold himself apart from them. If the triumphant found-family ending of *Poor Things* rings false, that’s only because it provides closure when his efforts are very much ongoing.

It’s ridiculous to allow the executive you work for to decide what you should read at night and how many children you can have, but it’s worth reflecting on the forces shaping each of our own decisions on those matters. That’s not an especially friendly way to think about how we all exist in the world—but then Yorgos Lanthimos was never your friend. ■

KINDS
OF KINDNESS
is in theaters
June 21.

The CULTURE PAGES

CRITICS

Kathryn VanArendonk on *Bridgerton's* third season ... Jerry Saltz on "Jenny Holzer: Light Line" at the Guggenheim ... Alison Willmore on *The Watchers*.



TV / KATHRYN VANARENDONK

An Anticlimactic Finish

Bridgerton's latest season has a fatally underdeveloped leading man but is still a ton of fun.

THREE SEASONS INTO its run, *Bridgerton* has fallen into a pattern: great at foreplay, iffy on the climax. No one signs up for a romance with the prospect of an underbaked conclusion, and it's frustrating when the momentum and groundwork of a slowly built relationship culminate in a finale that's just ... fine. Still, *Bridgerton's* third season, with its expansion of bubbly minor characters and ample time spent on the other *Bridgerton* siblings, reduces the pressure on this underperforming high point, and there's enough fun and anticipation in everything around the central couple that it almost doesn't matter that the apotheosis of the Colin-Penelope relationship (Polin) is more of a gentle plateau.

This installment of *Bridgerton*, like the first two, is a delightful romp with towering heaps of confectionary-sweet silliness, an overlay of *Barbie* feminism, and the occasional baffling structural flaw. Every

season of *Bridgerton* has some amount of imperfection, but each is imperfect in its own way: Season one, sexy and unrestrained, saw a mess of racial politics and reproductive anxiety coursing beneath the show's fantasy of a post-racial Regency period. Season two, which included a somewhat more careful approach to the racial aspects of this universe, got pushback for not having enough sex and failing to adequately navigate the emotional ins and outs of its sisterly love triangle. In both cases, the season started from a promising premise, then failed to navigate the complexities of its emotional stakes in the back half.

This third season is built for success. Both Colin Bridgerton and Penelope Featherington had plenty of time for development in the previous two, and Penelope's identity as Lady Whistledown, the anonymous author of the ton's most influential

BRIDGERTON
SEASON THREE.
NETFLIX.

gossip pamphlet, gives the Colin-Penelope matchup an immediate source of tension and an obstacle to overcome. Nicola Coughlan's performance as Penelope is much loved by the show's fans and beautifully calibrated to accomplish the shift from awkward side character to stunning central love interest. Luke Newton's Colin is endearing, gentle, and more than capable of staring at Penelope with both longing and dismay. Colin loathes Lady Whistledown because of all the mean things she said about him and his family; Penelope's secret is a buried bomb with a guaranteed explosive release.

Until the last couple of episodes, everything appears to be ripping along like a brand-new two-horse phaeton on a bright spring day. Colin and Penelope, after dealing with the emotional aftermath of their devastating balloon-based trauma, have a carriage-based digital exploration that launches them into giddy matrimonial accord. The Lady Whistledown secret lurks in the background, even as Colin and Penelope have one of the show's lovelier and more tender sex scenes in their unfurnished future home. Everything's ripe for a big, passionate, highly combustible, and ultimately satisfying conclusion! Except there's a concerning absence of important groundwork relating to Colin. While Penelope has a whole hidden life and an ambitious desire for social influence, Colin had one underwhelming trip to Europe, where he got less mail than he hoped and had to soothe himself with the Regency equivalent of a buy-ten-get-one-free brothel membership card. He wants to be a writer, maybe, an idea introduced abruptly in the premiere, but struggles to actually write anything even though he's a wealthy man with lots of free time and the ability to publish whatever he wants. He wears a big Mr. Rochester-esque greatcoat and walks around with an unbuttoned shirt to signal his flirtation with Brontë-style masculine angst, but his sadness is unpersuasive at best and completely laughable at worst.

This is not necessarily a flaw in *Bridgerton's* chosen storytelling setting or its tendency to focus on wealthy aristocrats; this is a fantasy world in which money almost never matters and all the rules of race, class, aristocratic titles, and the load-bearing capacity of any given hair accessory are invented and discarded on a scene-by-scene basis. The problem is entirely structural. Without money or class concerns, tragedy, trauma, ambition, unfulfilled sexual desire, poor health, or even a hobby he's particularly devoted to, Colin has no obstacles. He loves his neighbor! She's also hot for him. He has ample resources, the social standing to survive a scandal, and

almost no responsibilities. He's the most desired bachelor of the season—he's doing great! So when the inevitable fallout from Penelope's secret identity finally reaches him, the betrayal and sadness that should feel equal on each side instead feel obnoxiously lopsided. Ideally, when two romantic leads clash, the audience should be able to sympathize with both sides, understanding whatever perspective is keeping them apart even if they'll clearly work it out. But because Colin grows so little during the season, the viewer is mostly waiting for him to get over himself.

Unsurprisingly, this does not make for an ecstatic emotional reunion. Penelope and Colin carry on with their wedding as planned, which creates the opportunity for even more heightened tension—they're going to be stuck forever in this deeply miserable relationship! Except *Bridgerton* can't fully commit to an angry wedding, and Colin smiles gently at Penelope as she walks down the aisle. This is lovely for two people who are trying to make it work and terrible momentum for a romance plot. Are they supposed to be fine now? Have they come to some sort of agreement? No, because Colin reverts to being furious with her after the wedding, then everything is apparently solved once she publicly comes clean about Lady Whistledown in the finale. Even though they barely talk about it! And Penelope is clear-eyed about the problems still on the horizon! But there's no reason for concern: They have a baby, Colin publishes his book, and everything is fine.

Despite this anticlimactic conclusion for Polin, *Bridgerton's* third season is still a compulsively enjoyable watch in large part because the unfulfilled potential of the Polin plot is immediately passed along to engaging side characters and the promise of future seasons. This one should be about Polin, but it really belongs to the Featheringtons, particularly Polly Walker's Lady Featherington, who runs away with every scene she's handed and juggles cruelty, pragmatism, fondness, exasperation, sadness, and love while being infallibly funny. She and the two other Featherington sisters are the MVPs of this season, no contest.

Even without the Featheringtons, though, the *Bridgerton* siblings are given so much to do that as the Polin plot starts to cool off, their stories pick up the slack. The best and most outright absurd goes to Benedict (Luke Thompson), who engages in one sexual encounter that should win an endurance award. And there's lots of promise for Francesca (Hannah Dodd) as the finale introduces her love story with an intriguing potential shift for the future of the show. The *Bridgerton* world feels

bigger than it has in the past, to its benefit: Story development for Cressida Cowper, Violet Bridgerton, Lady Danbury, and her newly introduced brother all bodes well for later seasons. This expansion isn't always successful, particularly for the Mondrich family, whom *Bridgerton* clearly wants to invest in for the future but who, for this season, suffer from a near-fatal case of Colin Bridgerton Lack of Problems Syndrome. But these story lines are more than enough to counteract any possible *Bridgerton* fatigue. By the end of the season, the overall sense is, *This was an unfortunate mess, and I'd love to watch more immediately.*

In its efforts to build out the *Bridgerton* world, and to tell stories about more than one Bridgerton family member at once, the series has effectively embraced the narrative changes necessary to translate from a romance-novel series into a TV show. It has also departed enough from Julia Quinn's original books that it has become completely its own work, rather than a pale retelling of the original, which is always the most important standard for any adaptation. A *Bridgerton* series should be able to do both: embrace ensemble storytelling while achieving the full satisfaction and painstaking structural balance of a romance novel. Season three does not pull this off but remains too much fun to consider breaking up with *Bridgerton* anytime soon. ■

ART / JERRY SALTZ

Word Salad In the extended Trump era, an artist's truisms ring false.



JENNY HOLZER'S WORK talks a lot but says very little. An OG post-conceptualist, Holzer, 73, follows a generation of talkative artists like Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, and Robert Barry. Holzer makes her utterances sensual and haunting by materializing words into light. Her primary operating system is the LED readout in a sans-serif font, a formalist leap that is as much her signature as fluorescent light tubes are Dan Flavin's and boxes Donald Judd's. Her work at its best suggests the ghostly, disembodied voice of the collective subconscious, but her current takeover of the Guggenheim reads more like intellectual clickbait for the extended Trump era.



Holzer emerged in the late 1970s putting up “Truisms” around downtown Manhattan. These posters had vaguely provocative sentences printed on them: A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE CAN GO A LONG WAY and ANIMALISM IS PERFECTLY HEALTHY and AN ELITE IS INEVITABLE. The work packed an underground energy by coming from an anonymous artist who turned out to be a woman taking matters into her own hands and demanding that attention be paid—to the streets, to the marginalized, to the masses. She ran MONEY CREATES TASTE on the electric sign at Caesars Palace in Vegas and wrote the words LACK OF CHARISMA CAN BE FATAL on a wooden postcard. We were all in on the joke: Art was infiltrating the world and speaking back to it.

It does so less today. At the Guggenheim’s “Jenny Holzer: Light Line,” her greatest hits, like “Truisms” and “Inflammatory Essays,” snake across the inner rotunda, an update on a show she did there in 1989 with the colors changed and resequenced. (A take on her 2008 façade-projection piece was on display at the Guggenheim last month.) Whatever profundity the original had has been emptied out, and the new material is particularly enervating. *Cursed*

is composed of scores of ruffled metal scraps imprinted with Trump’s tweets and attached to the walls. We follow this for a few bays to where it ends in a pile on the floor.

Holzer’s writing style is not Barbara Kruger’s commanding voice of the Father. She implores, submits, and is passive aggressive. She is probably most famous for her pithy and clever PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT and ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE, but her thoughts can be harder to parse when they run to longer than a sentence: MY OLD MOTHER WAS SCHOOLED BY HER FATHER. SHE HAD A SON DIE. I WOULD NOT DO HER ONE BETTER BY KILLING A GIRL. Ideas of sex, love, and subjugation frequently crop up, mingled with the macabre: WITH YOU INSIDE ME COMES THE KNOWLEDGE OF MY DEATH. In our time of pussy-grabbing and woman-hating, Holzer’s gnomic observations are indictments that hover above and outside of it all.

Elsewhere, a black granite sarcophagus is meant to be an homage to AIDS victims; this, too, empties into bathos. Part of the cringey text reads, I WILL THINK MORE BEFORE I CANNOT. I LOVE MY MIND WHEN

IT IS FUCKING THE CRACKS OF EVENTS. I WANT TO TELL YOU WHAT I KNOW IN CASE IT IS OF USE. One work features the redacted FBI file of the painter Alice Neel, who was investigated for being a “romantic Bohemian type Communist.” We see government documents and paintings about surveillance, interrogation techniques, Nixon and Kissinger. If the point is that the government went too far during the Red Scare, it is one that has been made many times before to more powerful effect.

Holzer forces language to exist in symbiosis with architecture and space. It is the news ticker transformed to make buildings speak in uncanny voices. But as you gaze upward from the bottom of the Guggenheim spiral, the pieces fizzle into generic mall decorations. Or perhaps something you’d see at a crypto convention. Short exclamatory phrases drift by: I AM CRYING HARD. I BREATHE YOU. YOU ARE THE ONE WHO DID THIS TO ME. I LIE. NO ONE KNEW. MY MOTHER KNOWS. I CANNOT WALK. I AM LOSING TIME. I BITE. Gone is the psychosexual otherness of her earlier work and any vestige of speaking to institutional power. Holzer’s “Truisms” have ossified into didactics; at the Guggenheim, it comes off as a misuse of space. ■

**JENNY HOLZER:
LIGHT LINE**
THE GUGGENHEIM
MUSEUM,
THROUGH
SEPTEMBER 29.

Here's Looking at You

An uneven directorial debut tries to capture the horror of being watched.

 YOU JUST KNOW the eerie, eye-catching central conceit of *The Watchers* is going to get less interesting with every bit of information that trickles out. That's the difficult thing about this kind of setup: The mystery is almost always going to be more compelling than the explanation. In this case, the major questions involve the nature of the forest in which four strangers have found themselves trapped as well as the nature of the deadly creatures that inhabit it but emerge only when it's dark. The characters are safe at night as long as they stay inside a mysterious building that has one wall that's actually a two-way mirror, in front of which the beings outside like to gather to study them. When a disoriented Mina (Dakota Fanning), having gotten lost in the weird woods while distractedly driving from Galway to Belfast for work, becomes the latest addition to this involuntary ensemble, she learns the cabin's inhabitants are expected to line up at nightfall as though taking a curtain call, waiting on the sounds of their unseen audience arriving. She is then urged to step forward, an act that's greeted with uncanny applause from her viewers on the other side of the glass.

The Watchers, which was adapted from a novel by A.M. Shine, is the feature debut of writer and director Ishana Night Shyamalan, whose father, M., serves as a producer. When you're the child of a famous filmmaker, comparisons are inevitable, and *The Watchers* does nothing to distance its director from the auteurist signatures of her parent—there's a genuinely effective genre premise, there's a final-act twist, and there are some suspenseful set pieces and camera movements in between. Regrettably, Shyamalan doesn't take to heart the lesson that has been imparted over and over again by works like the series *Lost* and her father's *The Village*, which is that it's best to not just linger with the unknown for as long as possible—because every explanation represents a narrowing down of possibilities—but to understand that the answers are not the point. *The Watchers* doesn't much care to exist in the

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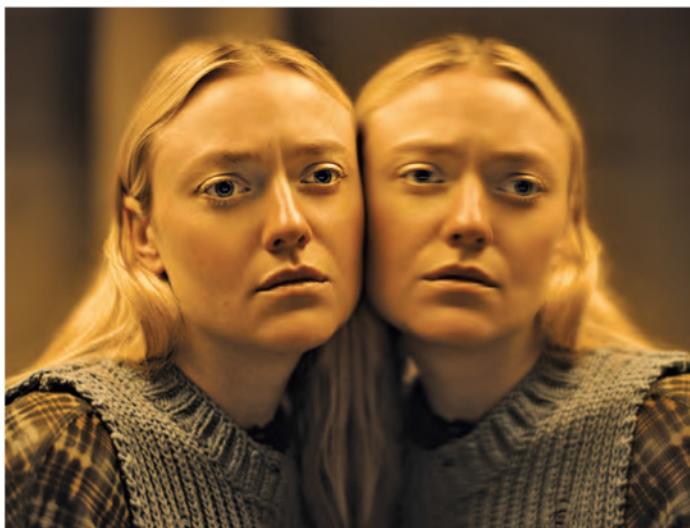
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scenario it presents, which is particularly disappointing given that it's essentially about being forced to star in a very niche reality-TV series—something Shyamalan acknowledges: The only entertainment available to the stranded quartet is a DVD of a *Big Brother*-style program.

Shyamalan addresses the nitty-gritty of this situation enough to let us know that the characters pee in a bucket (another thing she has in common with her dad is a taste for clumsy expository dialogue). Daniel (Oliver Finnegan), the youngest member of the four, mentions this offhandedly. He's not an entirely stable guy and has been in the cabin the second longest after Madeline (Olwen Fouéré), the rule-keeper and authority figure. But the screenplay skips over so many other details about what sharing a small space with limited resources and no obvious route for escape would be like. Wouldn't these people reek after having gone months without bathing or having access to changes of clothing? Are they not starving from having to subsist on crow meat and whatever the spacey Ciara (Georgina Campbell) can forage during the day, when they're able to venture outside? Hell, with comfortable places to sleep at such a premium in the cabin, how is it that Mina is able to commandeer the lone sofa without an epic fight?

A long, circular panning shot that travels from Mina to some barely perceptible movements in the darkness outside showcases the creepy surveillance potential of their living situation. But *The Watchers* otherwise does a dismal amount of telling rather than showing when it comes to the tedium and the tension of being cooped up and on display. It uses Mina's voice-over and notebook drawings to paper over the passage of time, skipping forward to when the characters squabble and thereby

missing prime opportunities to let their interactions give us more about who they are. Instead, Shyamalan relies on single-faceted pasts to signpost each character's personality. Ciara is in denial about the fate of her husband, who tried to escape the woods six days before Mina's arrival, and Daniel blurts out a late line about his father being abusive. Mina is worst of all: a high-schooler's sketch of what a disaffected 20-something would look like. She vapes while working a retail job. Sometimes she puts on a wig and goes out to bars, lying about her identity to random men. Fanning expresses Mina's disaffection by way of a listless monotone—rather than play the character, she comes across

as doing her own half-hearted version of dress-up.

Shocking stuff this is not, but the movie nevertheless presents Mina as an anti-heroine, and the eventual flashback to her tragic past is a truly garbage reveal—a

real groaner. The trouble with the recent tendency of horror movies to be explicitly *about trauma*, turning every supernatural phenomenon and thing going bump in the night into a potential metaphor, is that so few of them are willing to put the work into really rendering the pain their characters are dealing with. It does the scary parts of these stories no favors to be married to the most hackneyed of emotional journeys, represented by single tears rolling down cheeks and calls that are ignored in favor of voice-mails that can be dramatically replayed later. Not every figure in films like this one needs to be depicted with full psychological complexity, but when a horror movie rushes past a promising start in order to wallow in cliché, it feels as though it's squandering a premise. And when that premise involves a reality show for supernatural beings, that really is a waste. ■

THE WATCHERS
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The CULTURE PAGES

To

DO



Twenty-five things to see, hear, watch, and read.

JUNE 19–JULY 3

TV

1. Watch The Bear Season Three

Every second (still) counts.

Hulu, June 27.

Now that Carmy and Sydney have opened their sophisticated restaurant, surely things in season three will be totally calm and devoid of conflict. Like, there's no way that two or more characters will get into a shouting match in the middle of the kitchen during an incredibly busy dinner service; stuff like that never happens on this show.

JEN CHANEY

MUSIC

2. Listen to Crash

Melismatic yearnings.

Atlantic, June 21.

Singer-songwriter Kehlani, 29, returns to futuristic beats with *Crash*, their fourth album on a major label. Early singles—like the bubbly “After Hours,” which samples the classic “Coolie Dance Riddim,” and the resolute “Next 2 U,” whose tie-in merch supports Congolese, Palestinian, and Sudanese families in distress—infer that fans of the gauzy R&B of Lani’s *Blue Water Road* will be happy.

CRAIG JENKINS

THEATER

3. See Oh, Mary!

The First Lady gets an encore.

Lyceum, previews begin June 26.

If you missed its gleefully mad shenanigans downtown, now you can follow Cole Escola’s hit of the spring all the way to Broadway, baby! Escola’s flouncing, seething, delightfully deranged Mary Todd Lincoln—here a booze-guzzling agent of chaos who dreams of regaining her former

glory as a cabaret star—would surely be over the moon to find herself at the Lyceum. You should find her there, too. This show is a wild riot.

SARA HOLDREN

MOVIES

4. See Bound

Being gay and doing crime.

Museum of the Moving Image, June 29 and 30.

The Matrix may have put the Wachowskis on the map, but the sisters’ 1996 debut was a real scorcher—a sultry thriller starring Gina Gershon and Jennifer Tilly as lovers trying to make off with money being laundered (literally!) for the mob. While *Bound* just got the Criterion treatment, these MoMI screenings provide a perfectly timed chance to catch it on the big screen.

ALISON WILLMORE

MUSIC

5. Go to Chelsea Music Festival

There and back again.

Genesis House, June 21.

Some concert programs read like cryptograms: a random-seeming assortment of works that contains a hidden sequence. Opening night of the weeklong “Connecting the Dots” series skitters from new music to old and back again, alighting on pieces by Clara Schumann and Ania Vu.

JUSTIN DAVIDSON

BOOKS

6. Read Woman of Interest

A stylish memoir.

HarperOne, June 25.

During the early days of the pandemic, the novel-

ist Tracy O’Neill, raised in New England to adoptive Irish parents, became suddenly obsessed with the idea of finding her Korean birth mom. This debut memoir recounts the twists and turns in her detective’s hunt, from being ghosted by a private investigator to heading to Korea. O’Neill’s prose brims with intelligence, energy, and humor.

JASMINE VOJDANI

TV

7. Watch Land of Women

The simple life.

Apple TV+, June 26.

The streamer’s dramedy series starring women tend to follow a certain “crappy husband, money problems, need to start again” formula, and this adaptation of Sandra Barneda’s novel joins the category. Eva Longoria stars as a New Yorker who travels to Spain with her mother and teenage daughter to the village their family once fled from, where they rediscover themselves.

ROXANA HADADI

ART

8. Go to By Way Of: Material in Motion

Permanent movement.

Guggenheim Museum, though January 12, 2025.

Here’s a supersexy, smart show drawn from the Guggenheim’s rarely seen permanent collection. Starting with Arte Povera giants such as Jannis Kounellis and Mario Merz, the show peaks with contributions of younger artists Rashid Johnson and Senga Nengudi. Included is Maro Michalakakos’s *Oh! Happy Days*, made in 2012, two great reddish piles of polyurethane foam, polyester fiber, and latex paint that make you want to scratch yourself and jump in.

JERRY SALTZ

MOVIES

9. See A Matter of Life and Death

Featuring a stairway to heaven.

MoMA, June 28.

MoMA’s running a whole Powell and Pressburger series that includes low-budget early work to late-career rarities, but honestly, I just want to see this rapturous 1946 romantic fantasy again. David Niven plays a WWII pilot trapped between life and the afterlife owing to a mishap, leading to a spiritual struggle that slips gloriously between Technicolor and black and white.

A.W.

TV

10. Watch Babylon Berlin Season Four

Willkommen!

MHz Choice, June 25.

At long last, the fourth season of the fantastic German-language Weimar Republic-era drama has an American release! Will you have to sign up for yet another new streaming service to watch it? Sadly yes. But at least you get a fair amount of TV for your subscription (or free trial), including plenty of European crime dramas to hold you all summer.

KATHRYN VANARENDONK

MUSIC

11. Listen to C, XOXO

Another side of Camila.

Geffen/Interscope, June 28.

The fourth studio set from Camila Cabello goes to great lengths to stage a spirited reinvention, demolishing the “Havana” star’s chipper, wholesome image. Testing out coarser language and racier themes, she’s practically surrounded by rappers: “I Luv It” features a Gucci Mane sample and a Playboi Carti verse, “He Knows” taps Lil Nas X, and there are two Drake appearances. **C.J.**

PODCASTS

12. Listen to Backfired: The Vaping Wars

Puff, puff.

Prologue Projects and Audible.

Fiasco and *Think Twice*’s Leon Neyfakh swerves into business journalism with a look at the flavored nicotine vaping market and the public-health debate over it. **NICHOLAS QUAH**

THEATER

13. See Find Me Here

What Dad left behind.

Summerworks at Wild Project, June 19 through 29.

Crystal Finn, who was wonderful in Will Arbery’s *Plano* in 2018, returns to the always-exciting annual fest as a playwright. *Find Me Here*,

directed by Caitlin Sullivan, features the fantastic Miriam Silverman (a recent Tony winner for *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*) and tells the story of three sisters gathering to open the will of their recently deceased father. **S.H.**

TV

14. Watch Orphan Black: Echoes

Clone-content chaos.

AMC+, June 23.

Krysten Ritter feels like an underrated TV commodity. She can be wry, cunning, and pitiable all at once, which should serve her well as the lead in *Orphan Black: Echoes*, a spinoff of the 2013 original series with Tatiana Maslany that required an array of modes from its star. Set nearly 40 years after its predecessor, *Echoes* focuses on a woman questioning whether a young woman she meets might be a version of herself. **R.H.**

BOOKS

15. Read Tell Me Who You Are

Limited patients.

MCD.

In Louisa Luna’s steely thriller, psychiatrist Caroline Strange, usually unfazed by the people she sees in her Park Slope brownstone, meets a new patient who confesses he’s going to kill someone

and who claims to know something about her past. Police activity, a mysterious abduction, and flashbacks to Caroline’s unnerving midwestern childhood ensue. **EMMA ALPERN**

OPERA

16. Go to The Metropolitan Opera Summer Recitals

Open-air arias.

Brooklyn Bridge Park, June 20.

The Met dispatches some of its house stars, both established and rising, to give small-group recitals in the city’s parks. Soprano Leah Hawkins and bass-baritone Michael Sumuel reunite after appearing together in Anthony Davis’s *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, joined by tenor Mario Chang, a veteran of Daniel Catán’s *Florencia en el Amazonas*. **J.D.**

TV

17. Watch The First 2024 Presidential Debate

This should be relaxing.

CNN, June 27.

Tune in for the first debate of this election cycle as well as the first presidential debate ever between an incumbent and a convicted felon. **J.C.**

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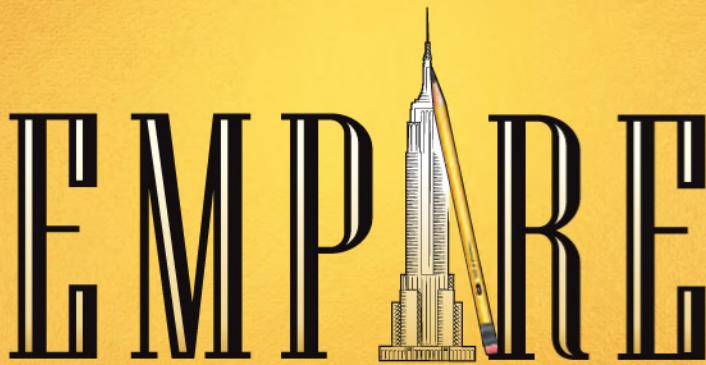
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Pride Night at the Mets,

Citi Field, June 28, 7:10 p.m.

The New York Mets have won nearly 86 percent of their Pride Night games.

Also, Mr. Met is totally trans. ERIN SCHWARTZ

FOR QUEER OLYMPICS

Singers Third Annual Twinks vs. Dolls,
location TBA, June 29, 1 p.m.

Back to remind people that queerness actually is a competition. JASON P. FRANK

FOR A WEEKEND-LONG TRANS-CENTERED DANCE PARTY

Body Hack Nonstop, June 29 at 10 p.m.,
through July 1 at 2 a.m.

Come for the looks;
stay for the video games. E.S.

FOR ONE-ACT HORROR STORYTELLING

**Midnight Coleslaw's Tales From Beyond
the Closet,** the Tank, through June 23.

A production sitting at the fruitful intersection of nightlife and theater gays. J.P.F.

FOR A GAY GIGGLE

**A Gay Show for All People Pride
Spooktacular,** the Bell House, June 27-29.

Josh Sharp and Aaron Jackson return with very funny guests including Joel Kim Booster, Julio Torres, and Sydnee Washington. REBECCA ALTER

MOVIES

18. [See Confessions of a Good Samaritan](#)

When you only need one.

Firehouse: DCTV's Cinema for Documentary Film, June 28 through July 4.

Penny Lane has made a film about the Satanic Temple (*Hail Satan?*) and a divisive smooth-jazz icon (*Listening to Kenny G*), but her new doc comes from a more personal place. Her decision to offer one of her kidneys to a stranger is the starting point for a knotty examination of altruism. A.W.

BOOKS

19. [Read Little Rot](#)

A dark phantasmagoria.

Riverhead Books, June 18.

Aima and Kalu, a Nigerian couple fresh off a breakup, each descend into an enticing but dangerous underworld in the hallucinatory, grim, and gripping new novel by Akwaeke Emezi (*The Death of Vivek Oji*). Before long, they've become party guests desperate for escape. E.A.

TV

20. [Watch My Lady Jane](#)

Historical animorph fiction.

Prime Video, June 27.

Stay with me on this one: It's an adaptation of a YA series, though aged up a bit. It's an alternate

history where Lady Jane Grey, instead of being beheaded after nine days of rule, is *not* beheaded! And goes on silly, anachronistically feminist romps! And ... there are shape-shifters?! And Rob Brydon and Anna Chancellor are in it?

K.V.A.

MUSIC

21. Go to LadyLand Festival

This lineup must be seen to be believed.

Under the K Bridge Park, June 28 and 29.

The New York City Pride event established by nightlife icon Ladyfag returns with an astounding lineup: *RuPaul's Drag Race* stars Kandy Muse and Bob the Drag Queen, *RHONY's* class-conscious Countess Luann, "It" girl Aliyah's Interlude, rising reggaetonera Tokischa, R&B veteran Tinashe, producer-geniuses Arca, Olof Dreijer, and A. G. Cook, and dozens more.

C.J.

ART

22. See Ben Werther

Regiment dreams.

No Gallery, 105 Henry Street; through July 7.

One of the hottest spots in NYC's gallery world is a batch of LES blocks around Henry and Allen Streets. At No Gallery are Ben Werther's complicated color photographs of paramilitary exercises carried out by amateurs. There is no zealotry here; this military fetishism has its own standards, dress, and codes. We see groups of athletic men pursuing some fantasy goal of being.

J.S.

OPERA

23. Hear Robeson

High notes on the water.

Little Island, June 26 through 29.

In a piece of biographical theater directed by Zack Winocur, bass-baritone Davoné Tines assumes the role of his artistic forbear Paul Robeson, who sang spirituals and opera arias with equal flair, balancing art with politics.

J.D.

THEATER

24. See Ulysses

Happy Bloomday!

Bard SummerScape, June 20 through July 14.

Time for a trip up the Hudson. Bard SummerScape commissioned Elevator Repair Service to take on the "Mount Everest of 20th-century literature" in what's sure to be a wild and wily new production, following in the footsteps of ERS' takes on *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and, of course, *The Great Gatsby*.

S.H.

TV

25. Watch WondLa

The children's book comes to the small screen.

Apple TV+, June 28.

This adaptation of the first volume in Tony DeTerlizzi's fantasy series follows a girl who was raised in an underground sanctuary by a robot named Muthr (that stands for "Multi-Utility Task Help Robot"). When she is forced out of her home, she finally gets to see the world she's been missing, which is rendered in vibrant color by the artists at Skydance Animation.

J.C.

FROM HERE

On June 12, 2016, the Pulse Nightclub shooting changed the city of Orlando.

This summer, artists from Orlando bring their story to New York City.

From Here is the beautiful new musical about growing up, coming out, chosen family, and compassion in the face of cruelty.



We're all From Here.

The Pershing Square Signature Center

480 W. 42nd Street, Jim Houghton Way
New York, NY 10036

June 27 – August 11, 2024

fromhere.com

RENAISSANCE
THEATRE COMPANY



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

TRUMP CLAIMED he wanted to testify. And he claimed, falsely, that Merchan's gag order might prevent him from doing so. In the end, on the advice of counsel, he chickened out. The defense called only one substantive witness, Robert Costello. The attorney had gone on to represent Giuliani and Steve Bannon and had recently called the trial "a cancer upon our collective judicial system." He was supposed to help to make Trump's case. His performance was about as disastrous as you could imagine. He was defiant and shifty. Merchan nearly threw him out of his courtroom for displaying contempt. And with that, Trump's defense rested.

Even so, many commentators were predicting a long deliberation and maybe even a hung jury. "We were never willing to say 'This is going to be a conviction,'" Perry said. "It was so hard for me and exponentially harder for him. He went from zero to hero. Everyone was like, 'He's a liar! A thief! A con man!'"

"Michael has told a lot of lies," Perry went on, "but he's been telling the truth for six years about the lies he told. He lied mostly for Trump."

And he paid for it. Cohen remains deeply disturbed by his experience in prison. He brings it up constantly. If someone complains about something—traffic, say, or a long day in court—he can't help but shoot back, "Try solitary confinement!" And when he gets that faraway look, when he falls into that trancelike state that it's hard to shake him out of, he explains this is one of the ways being an inmate transformed him. He can fall into mental recesses, he can stay there, he can forget entirely about his earthly existence, about where he is at that very moment, about the fact that he is sitting at a sidewalk café across from another person as they wait ten or 15 or 30 minutes for an answer to their question. Often, he travels back to the good times with Trump. He admits he still loves him. When it was good, it was great. They had fun. When he remembers, it is as if he were watching a film reel in his head. He describes the scenes slowly. His face is serene. "If I could go back?" he said. He offered the year 2012. He would never have shown Trump polling that suggested

he ought to run for president, which he believes was instrumental in Trump's decision, three years later, to seek the Republican nomination, though the Boss had been publicly floating the idea since 1988. Or how about 2015? Cohen would never have sent Pecker an invitation to a campaign announcement at Trump Tower. He would never have had MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN printed on a hat. "I'd go back further," he said. To 2007. He would never have gone to work for Trump in the first place.

Still, he couldn't help but smile when locked in a memory of the good times with the Boss. "At times, I miss him," he said, "the old Trump." All of Cohen's idiosyncrasies, all of the facets of his personality—he fit so perfectly at Trump Tower. It was like he was made for that time and place. The experience was like finding that he possessed a code to unlock some secret power he had within him all along. It was nice to feel so useful and so skilled. And it was, often, a lot of fun. He would, it seemed certain now, never experience anything like it again.

One afternoon after his testimony had concluded but before the verdict came down, Cohen was sitting outside a café with his wife. A friend of theirs had broken several toes in a freak kitchen accident, and they were looking at a photo of the X-ray. Cohen smiled as he peered away. During one stretch in Otisville, he said, he was chained up the whole day, whether he was sleeping or showering. As he tried to maneuver from the top bunk, he lost his balance and came down hard on his toes. He heard them crack. He knew they were broken. But the guards wouldn't give him medication, nor would they give him bandages to stabilize the bones. Then he received a book someone had sent and ripped the tape from the box and wrapped it around his foot. There. Problem solved. Telling this tale, he beamed with pride as he recalled his own cleverness. He was the fixer, through and through.

He sometimes still wondered whether, if he had been just a little more flexible, he might have been able to fix his relationship with Trump. What if he had stayed on the team, done some time, and kept his mouth shut? He would think about Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign manager, who had been similarly targeted in the Mueller investigation and who had quietly done his time before receiving a pardon. Recently, Manafort has been back to consulting with Trump. Manafort even sent Trump to his own New York lawyer, Blanche, like they were just another pair of old guys sharing tips about urologists. Sometimes, Cohen's mind reeled forward to the alternative life he might be living if he had stuck with Trump. He said he might be "running the RNC. I'd be on Fox News, Newsmax, OAN ..."

Waiting for the verdict was agonizing. Cohen felt the fate of the country was riding on his shoulders. He needed surgery on one of them, in fact, and had been putting it off. That felt just about right. He worried about being killed. If his testimony sealed Trump's fate, he knew, many Americans would want to hurt him, or his family, and maybe some would come looking. And if Trump got off, millions of other Americans would curse him and say it was all his fault.

Then the jury of anonymous New Yorkers came to their decision. Maybe those 12 people didn't like Michael Cohen, but they believed him, or at least believed him enough to find the former president guilty of 34 felonies. "All of a sudden, he's a truth teller," Perry said. "He's gone through hell and back. I don't know if he's back yet."

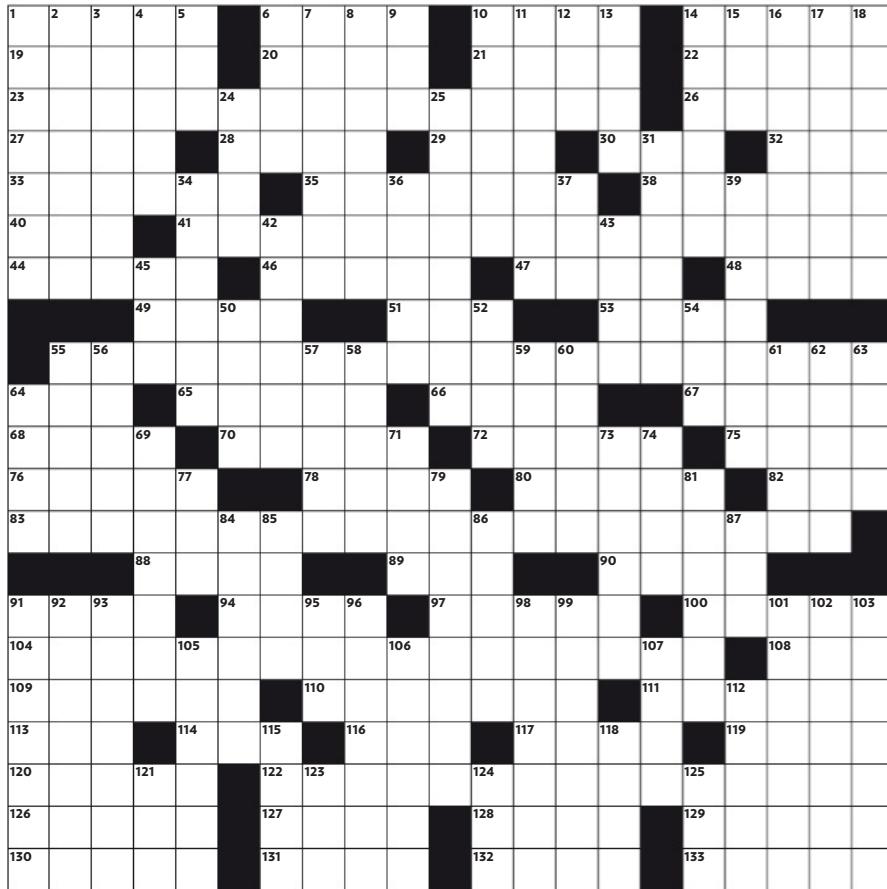
On the night of the verdict, Cohen seemed to have reached a state of, if not contentment, at least temporary satisfaction. At MSNBC, his perceived nemesis Melber patted him on the back, shook his hand, and asked, "How you feeling?" Cohen was cordial, but when Melber walked away, Cohen raised his eyebrows. Vindicated! On the air, he poked back at Blanche, calling him the "SLOAT," or "stupidest lawyer of all time." All night and into the next day, his phone lit up roughly every five seconds as the congratulatory notifications came in, illuminating his lock-screen image of the tide rolling out on a sandy beach. Funny, since Cohen hates the beach so much that, like black coffee with no sugar, the trait is part of the story he tells about himself. He doesn't like the feeling of sand on his skin. Even worse, wet sand. He has a thing about textures in general. And he doesn't like forced relaxation. He won't go to spas for the same reason, plus he doesn't like to be touched by strangers. He physically recoils when recounting instances in which his wife has dragged him to the beach. Asked why he would want to look at an image of a beach every time he gets a call or text, Cohen looked puzzled. "Huh," he said. "That's the beach?" He claimed he'd never noticed the beach picture before.

The phone rang again. He laughed. "Can you believe it? Fox News is calling me." It rang again. *Inside Edition*. He was back in the game, a winner, and he felt free. "I've got 8,000 messages!" he said. He seemed to be determined to comb through them all, even opening obscure inboxes like Facebook Messenger to see what people were trying to say to him.

In the car on the way home from 30 Rock, Cohen answered a call from his mother. "Hey, Mama," he said. Her voice, with her thick Long Island accent, pierced the car. "I cannot begin to tell you how many people told me you were so great and you should have a show!" she said. Cohen smiled, a

I Sea What You Did There

By Matt Gaffney



Across

- 1 Cuba y Puerto Rico, e.g.
- 6 Radio options
- 10 Necklace spherule
- 14 Scoundrel
- 19 Like the air in the Amazon
- 20 "See ya"
- 21 She often sings in Irish
- 22 Neapolitan's northwest neighbor
- 23 Play an elaborate hoax on a sea creature?
- 26 Female friend
- 27 Word with winter or summer
- 28 Plural suffix with distill or sultan
- 29 From ___ Z (comprehensively)
- 30 Shaming hiss
- 32 Jersey Mike's offering
- 33 Press down on, as marshmallows in s'mores
- 35 Be too early with, say
- 38 Business for backpackers
- 40 Sun worshiper's goal
- 41 Where Jonah wanted to be?
- 44 Hack-a-Shaq target
- 46 "That's awesome!"
- 47 Trig function

- 48 Possessive on ice-cream cartons
- 49 Fashionable Christian
- 51 "That's all I have to write," briefly
- 53 "Woe ___!"
- 55 Its tap-tapping may keep you awake at your beach house?
- 64 Former
- 65 Silverman or Hyland
- 66 El ___ Chihuahuas (triple-A baseball team)
- 67 Emmy-nominated Tony
- 68 Dog, disparagingly
- 70 Early cell-phone giant
- 72 Danish toast
- 75 Bread with bubbles
- 76 Maker of 2600 consoles
- 78 Spanish for "she"
- 80 Bric-___ (knickknacks)
- 82 They await your return
- 83 Sea creature who signed up for classes this fall?
- 88 Laundry amount
- 89 Right now, when texting
- 90 Element of "On Broadway"
- 91 Athens and Lima are there
- 94 Netanyahu, in headlines
- 97 Patronize, as a pizzeria

- 100 Tales from long ago
- 104 Seafood set aside for an NFL player's lunch?
- 108 Caviar, e.g.
- 109 Sock pattern
- 110 Set sail
- 111 Items of value
- 113 Ruby in "Do the Right Thing"
- 114 Sugar amt.
- 116 Despite, in verse
- 117 Foreshadowing event
- 119 Ski resort near Snowbird
- 120 Give out, as IDs
- 122 Sea creature with logical thought processes?
- 126 Oil made of rose petals, often
- 127 Louis or Madeline
- 128 Will name
- 129 "Take ___!" ("Get lost!")
- 130 Fire-truck features
- 131 Taylor's current tour
- 132 Letters in summer-camp names
- 133 Xenon and such

Down

- 1 Van Gogh technique, often
- 2 1967 hit for Sam & Dave
- 3 Tax-form spec

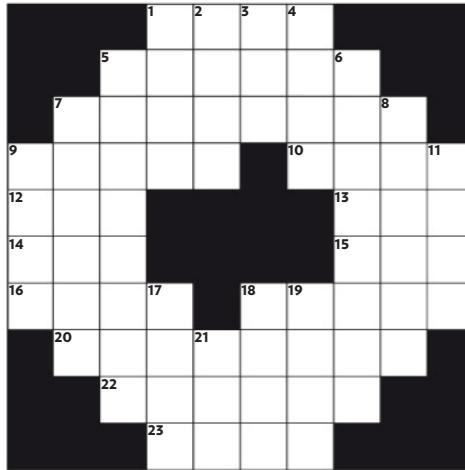
- 4 "Don't ___ many questions!"
- 5 Narrow waterway (abbr.)
- 6 Bank abbr.
- 7 He played Bruce Lee in "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood"
- 8 Be dishonest on a document
- 9 Sound heard when milking
- 10 Super-close friend
- 11 Buries, as a king
- 12 "Batten down the hatches!" reply
- 13 Bull's-eye hitter
- 14 Wavel Royal Castle's city
- 15 Chance at an Oscar, for short
- 16 1997 Spielberg drama
- 17 How you may remember something
- 18 Authorizes
- 24 Island setting of "50 First Dates"
- 25 Dove bar, for example
- 31 "Come on, be reasonable!"
- 34 Pool side
- 36 Turn
- 37 Director Roth
- 39 Ed with the albums "+" and "-"
- 42 Spain's Manolete, notably
- 43 Condo
- 45 Put two and two together, say
- 50 "The Good Earth" protagonist
- 52 Wharton awards them
- 54 Club ___
- 55 Champagne holder
- 56 Shirt-pocket clip-on
- 57 One who leaves few leaves
- 58 Elongated nation
- 59 Mr. Schindler
- 60 Inexperienced gamers
- 61 Broadcasting
- 62 Show named for a range
- 63 Autograph seekers
- 64 Suave Sharif
- 69 "The Godfather" movies, e.g.
- 71 "Manhattan Murder Mystery" actor
- 73 Self-doubting afterthought
- 74 Expose to light
- 77 Seeking, in personal ads
- 79 Where guests may wait
- 81 Big bites
- 84 They're turned for revenge
- 85 Clean up, as copy
- 86 Amherst campus, briefly
- 87 "___ interest?"
- 91 Wealthy prophet
- 92 Toaster's opening
- 93 Consumes
- 95 Very important
- 96 "Psych!"
- 98 Proved proposition
- 99 Language related to Hebrew
- 101 What vines may climb
- 102 First written reaction
- 103 Some bagelry orders
- 105 Makes changes to
- 106 Allen and Hawke, say
- 107 Hand, in Honduras
- 112 Mr. Baron Cohen
- 115 Nudge
- 118 Journo Klein
- 121 Nat. without consonants
- 123 Bugatti or Bentley
- 124 Unlike the life of the party
- 125 Scott Joplin number, often

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THE PROSECUTOR PUZZLE

By Stella Zawistowski

- Across**
- 1 Britpop band
 - 5 Did what Peter Pan refused to do
 - 7 With 20-Across, Apple TV+ show starring Jake Gyllenhaal as Rusty Sabich
 - 9 Warms up
 - 10 Kiss like Idris Elba?
 - 12 Mourning the cancellation of "Schmigadoon!," say
 - 13 "Omigosh!"
 - 14 Tire-gauge reading, for short
 - 15 One of many for a Swiss Army knife
 - 16 Go after
 - 18 Need some full-body deodorant
 - 20 See 7-Across
 - 22 Kelly Clarkson and Beyoncé, for two
 - 23 "You are so right!"

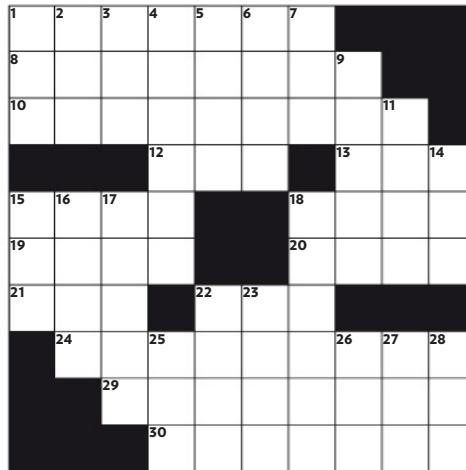


- Down**
- 1 Make some coffee
 - 2 ___ Than Jake ("Anthem" band)
 - 3 Round-eyed emoji
 - 4 Ron Zacapa offerings
 - 5 Color effect in graphic design
 - 6 "Happy Feet" critters
 - 7 Early stage for a clinical trial
 - 8 "___ Really Matter" (Janet Jackson No. 1 hit)
 - 9 Small amts. of liquid
 - 11 Sheldon Cooper, for one
 - 17 "I ___ You Were Trouble"
 - 18 Feature of Tony Montana
 - 19 Watch over
 - 21 Good Grips kitchenware brand

THE EMOTION PUZZLE

By Malaika Handa

- Across**
- 1 Emotion featured in "Inside Out 2" alongside Ennui, Envy, and Embarrassment
 - 8 Stuck in place, in a way
 - 10 "We're on the same page"
 - 12 Classy garnish
 - 13 "The ___ Job" (animated movie with an 11-minute "CinemaSins" video)
 - 15 Media type for digital schedules
 - 18 Discontinued app that limited videos to ten seconds
 - 19 Pinkish
 - 20 Carlita's birthmark, e.g., in "The First ___"
 - 21 "ugh you're ridiculous"
 - 22 Org. for the Eagles, Ravens, and Falcons
 - 24 "I'm not lying!"
 - 29 Religion developed in Cuba with Yoruba influences
 - 30 Take away from

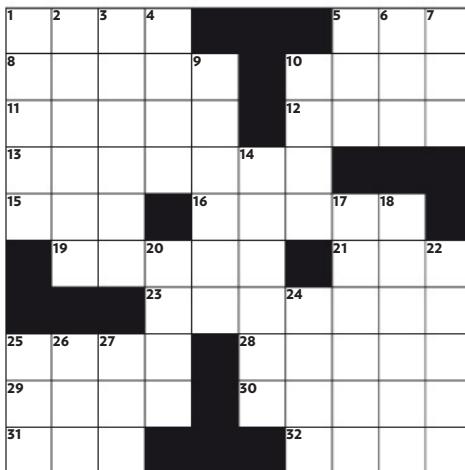


- Down**
- 1 Profile pic, for short
 - 2 Implement for someone trying to catch butterflies
 - 3 Some big T-shirt sizes
 - 4 Nickelodeon show that starred Miranda Cosgrove
 - 5 "Therefore ..."
 - 6 Ripped
 - 7 "___haw!"
 - 9 Material featured in a Canadian tuxedo
 - 11 Planet also known as Arrakis
 - 14 Number of seasons of "Friends"
 - 15 Deirdre Beaubien's org. in "Everything Everywhere All at Once"
 - 16 Item alongside a brush and a bowl full of mush, in "Goodnight Moon"
 - 17 "Angela's ___" (Frank McCourt memoir)
 - 18 Pedro Almodóvar film starring Penélope Cruz
 - 22 Number of seasons of "Seinfeld"
 - 23 Boba ___ ("Star Wars" bounty hunter)
 - 25 British dude
 - 26 Long period of time
 - 27 Device for a stand-up comic
 - 28 Have breakfast, for example

THE JERSEY PUZZLE

By Stella Zawistowski

- Across**
- 1 Joan Crawford's last movie
 - 5 "I Like ___ Way You Kiss Me" (Artemas hit)
 - 8 Showed on TV again
 - 10 Playing a road game
 - 11 Too silly for consideration
 - 12 It's red on a Louboutin
 - 13 "Bad Medicine" band
 - 15 Email end matter, for short
 - 16 "___ of War" (long-running video-game series)
 - 19 Oscar winner for playing Ruby and Judy
 - 21 "And some more like that," for short
 - 23 2024 album from 13-Across
 - 25 "You're gonna need a bigger ___"
 - 28 "The Darkest Hour" actor Hirsch
 - 29 Is on the radio
 - 30 Some "Hamilton" scenes
 - 31 Shade tree
 - 32 2003 movie based on a '70s police procedural



- Down**
- 1 Some daily papers, for short
 - 2 Director Jean or his painter dad, Pierre-Auguste
 - 3 The O in "OITNB"
 - 4 Substance Jorgeous loves to reference in her drag outfits, for short
 - 5 Noah's Ark number
 - 6 It said, "Dave, my mind is going. I can feel it."
 - 7 CBS logo feature
 - 9 Console that got beat out by the Genesis and Super NES
 - 10 Setting for "Shogun" and "Tai-Pan"
 - 14 Went off at an angle
 - 17 Article by Matthew Schneier, often
 - 18 Name hollered by Marlon Brando in "A Streetcar Named Desire"
 - 20 How Grimes made \$6 million in a 2021 auction
 - 22 Colgate competitor
 - 24 Big Australian birds
 - 25 Sweetie, nowadays
 - 26 "There Will Be Blood" commodity
 - 27 Where the bi and tri are

THE APPROVAL MATRIX

Our deliberately oversimplified guide to who falls where on our taste hierarchies.

COMPILED BY DOMINIQUE PARISO AND CHRIS STANTON

HIGHBROW

We were so close to **never discussing congestion pricing** again, Kathy!



Just don't think about **bird flu**.



More than 633,000 applied for 200,000 wait-list spots for NYCHA Section 8 rental vouchers. **Cruel lottery** to ensue.



Martha-Ann Alito plots **saucy, flame-bedecked** anti-Pride flag.

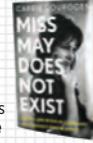


The big guns are out again, **trying to kill Chi Ossé's bill** to have landlords pay brokers' fees.

Aggro Brits **seize crowns** of America's newsrooms.



DMV debuts **zodiac novelty plates**. Now you'll know it's a Gemini cutting you off.



Miss May Does Not Exist, Carrie Courogen's **essential Elaine May** biography.

Audra. Gypsy.



Atlantic Theater Company turns **12 Angry Men on its head** with *The Welkin*.



Ethan James Green's Bombshell.

The reissue of Ed White's 1978 **Nocturnes for the King of Naples**.



Rosalind Brown's *Practice*, about a student's wandering thoughts as she tries to **write about Shakespeare**.



Trump calls January 6 insurrectionists "**warriors**." Has he seen these people?

Netflix-owned Paris Theater **streams Bertolucci** for horrified cinephiles.



Let's argue about **Chipotle boys**.



Stereophonic performance at the Tonys!

Hidden Master, a doc on the **photographer George Platt Lynes**, is playing festivals.



Howard University **rescinds Diddy's honorary degree** (and returns his million bucks).



Losser propagandist Alex Jones is **liquidating assets** to pay Sandy Hook families.

DESPICABLE

BRILLIANT



Not to be homophobic, but "Christopher Street-Stonewall National Monument station" is an **impossible mouthful**.

Costco will only sell books when it's **profitable** (Labor Day through Christmas).



Sam Mendes has supposedly cast all the internet's favorite boyfriends in the **Beatles movies he's threatening** to make.



NYC and L.A. top the list of **mosquitoes' fave** summer spots ...

... And check yourself (and your pets) for **ticks** every day.



Audrey Gelman plans to open a Hudson Valley inn; **bloggers race** to write the first personal essay.



Mission Chinese's **Chinatown pop-up** is even better than the original.

HBO's *Ren Faire* shines an empathetic spotlight on a **Shrek-adjacent** subculture.



Chappell Roan as **Lady Liberty** stole the show at Gov Ball ...



Ellie the Elephant.



Jackson Heights's beloved Mariscos el Submarino **opens second location** in Greenpoint.

... And she turned down a White House invitation, **demanding freedom** "for all oppressed people in occupied territories."

● **Brat Summer.**



Got some O-negative? Go **donate** it.



Hot Dog Summer marred by Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Competition's **embargo of Joey Chestnut** over fake-meat endorsement.



Calling our hottest celebs "**rodent men**" is not the compliment you think it is.

Rudy stuns in latest **mug shot**.



Saucy new beach read *The Memo*.



Jack Schlossberg delivering **big Bouvier summer vibes** online.



Las Culturistas Culture Awards are back to **reward the freakiest**.

LOWBROW

In sign of cultural defeat, rich age-gapping multilingual **big brooders** deliver unwanted reality show.



PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES (CONGESTION, NEWSROOM, INSURRECTION, NETFLIX, ALITO, OSSE, JONES, DIDDY, DUNCE, MCDONALD, O-NEGATIVE, GELMAN, COSTCO, MENDES, MOSQUITO, TICKS, ROAN, CHARLIE, ELLIE, CHESTNUT); BOB DORAN/FICKR (FLU); AMAZON (HOUSING); JULIETA CERVANTES (STEREOPHONIC); HOWARD UNIVERSITY; MACMILLAN (BROWN, COUROGEN); NY STATE DMV (PLATES); GREENWICH ENTERTAINMENT (LYNES); ETHAN JAMES GREEN (BOMBHELL); ARNON R. FOSTER (WELKIN); UNIVERSAL (ROBENT); MAX (REN FAIRE); TLC (BALDWIN); DISNEY (CHRISTOPHER ST.); @JACKRINO/INSTAGRAM (SCHLOSSBERG); @MARISCOELSUBMARINO/INSTAGRAM (MARBISCO); MARIKOPIA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE (RUDY); LAS CULTURISTAS (AWARDS); HARPER COLLINS (MEMO); MOCALLY EDITIONS (NOCTURNES)



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ayad akhtar

directed by
bartlett sher



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Lincoln Center Theater gratefully acknowledges Lynne and Richard Pasculano's visionary leadership support for McNEAL.

McNEAL is made possible in part by the generosity of Dasha Epstein in honor and admiration of Ayad Akhtar's work.

This play is a recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New Play Award and evolved with support from the LCT Daryl Roth Play and Musical Theater Development Program.

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