

CELEBRATING VALENTINE'S DAY WITH WHIPS AND CHAINS
THE ORGANIC JUNGLE • FROM ANNA TO ZAC POSEN

the eye

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VOL. 2, ISSUE 4, 2.8.07

HOLY CALAMITY

THE SCANDAL AND THE
SOUFFLÉ AT ST. A'S



the eye

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The Eye is the weekly, student-run magazine published for the Columbia University community. You can call us at (212) 854-9547. To place an ad, call (212) 854-9558.
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Cover Story



Urbanities



Spank Cupid
Forget the roses and break out the handcuffs this Valentine's Day.



From Published to Practitioner
Barnard student Robyn Schneider dishes on her new book and future.

A&E



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From the Editor...

Those of you who have read my Letter From the Editor for the last three weeks (admirers, detractors, my father) will have noticed a pattern. I begin my template letter with an event—preferably concerning the media, preferably polemical, insightful even—tease the anecdote into a grandiloquent pronouncement, and then weave three or four of the week's stories through it.

Some of you may already be appalled that I am using my own articles as an example of a media event.

Others will recognize that this meta-analysis could be applied to almost every other article in this magazine—or any other publication, for that matter.

Magazine writing is typically distinguished from newspaper writing for its personality, its charisma—its free-wheeling individuality. That's hardly the case. The newspaper story is characterized by its use of the lede, that zippy, stage-setting introduction, and the nutgraf, the no-nonsense thesis. Classroom setting with unruly ethnic children; inner city schools are in trouble: Bam!

The structure is called the inverted pyramid, which opens with a general introduction, presents the thesis, and unfolds with a climax, placing the most important information at the top and gradually getting to the gritty details.

Contrast this with the linear structure—where the event unfolds like a narrative to its conclusion—which is designed for suspense, and the omission structure—where the thesis is presented, the process unfolds, and then the problem is introduced. They are employed to achieve suspense and curiosity, respectively.

Short-form magazine articles, for all their pizzazz, are generally written in the inverted pyramid system. The articles are often longer, but rarely is the thesis farther than two paragraphs into the story. Complex, subsidiary claims are dealt with as microcosms of the larger story.

A 2004 study at UC Davis found that the inverted pyramid resulted in the least suspense and curiosity—that is to say, it was delivered with aspirations of detachment, objectivity, and intellectuality. It's news.

Countless studies have attested to the way in which packaging affects shoppers' choices, and likewise, the packaging of information within an article affects reader reception.

What does this mechanical article mean for me? Probably that I would be better off plugging information into a formula than writing it myself. The implications are even more dire for you: you probably spend a lot of time processing what you're reading (editorial, trend reports) as fact (news).

How might we subvert the effects of this misunderstanding? By offering self-conscious analysis to confront truth within every article, I respond!

This week in *The Eye*, Jen Spyra examines the rumor—often presented as scurrilous fact—of Saint A's secrecy. Laura Anderson takes on the American public's naive faith in organic labels. Yet again, Matt Mireles brings a dispatch unlike anything you'll see on network TV.

It's not news: it's meta-news.

CORRECTIONS: Last week's article, "Potluck at 114th St.," gave the wrong address for the Symposium House, which is actually at 606 W. 114th St. It also inaccurately titled Mark Holden, who is a *Spectator* editor. It also said that the house was granted special interest status this year, but the house actually received the status last year while it was situated in East Campus. *The Eye* regrets these errors.

INTERVIEW

By Ezra Koenig

Don't Call It Kid Core!



PHOTO BY ISABELLE MILLS-TANENBAUM

What were you doing your sophomore year in high school?

*Whatever it was, **Julian Bennett-Holmes** has got you beat. He's the cofounder of Beautiful Records, which puts out rising stars (and sixth graders) Care Bears on Fire. Bennett-Holmes, along with partner Lucian Buscemi, records seven other underage artists, as well as two bands Julian is in himself. He caught up with The Eye to talk about his label, growing up in Park Slope, and why he won't record bands with over-involved parents. —Sara Davis*

Do you actively seek press? Clearly, you've got a commitment to school. Is it hard to know how much to push for the company?

We push pretty hard. Neither of us is too concerned with academics or getting into a great college.

Do you think that you want to go to college at all?

I'll probably go to college. But if Beautiful Records gets big, and I can make a living on it, I see no reason to go to college because this is, like, our end goal.

You're not interested in pursuing anything else as a career?

No, I mean the music business has a lot of places to be. And Beautiful Records is definitely a bigger moneymaker for us than playing shows.

It's kind of a big question, but do you have any thoughts as to the weird fate of the music industry? The way that the big companies are kind of fumbling a little bit ... is that for the same reason that Beautiful Records is able to do pretty well?

I hope they crumble! It's not right to have just two huge record labels. That's a recipe for exploiting artists. If anyone says they think that's good for artists, I think they're lying.

Is there something that ties together anybody who's 12 or 13 who has the drive to make music?

I think there's a connection like kids going, "Wow, I can do that, too." I think that's cool 'cause bands are inspired by each other. Something that I think is disturbing is

when it's their parents behind it. I wouldn't say a band like Care Bears on Fire, but a lot of times, it's completely their parents.

You think the parents are living vicariously through the kids?

Yeah. Maybe they were in bands when they were in their 20s, and maybe their band didn't do so well. So then they tell their kids, "Here's how to play the song, and here's the song you should play, and this is what you should say—here are your lyrics." There's a band ... maybe I shouldn't say their name, but their parents are always standing right there when they play, and the kids look dead bored at their shows! It doesn't seem like a fun thing for them. It's OK for parents to be supportive, but it's different when it's like, here's your music and here are your lyrics. I wouldn't record a band like that.

So when you're recording a band, are there adults there?

When Care Bears on Fire recorded, the guitarist's mom was there, but they were like 10 and 11 at the time. I mean, that makes sense to me.

Do your parents come to every show?

Not every show, but most. They're very supportive.

So as a high school student having a band, have you ever come into contact with the opposite end of the stereotypical spectrum, like a jock or something? Have you ever felt persecuted for being interested in what you're into or... having long hair?

I've never felt persecuted... Like, I've had like, "Oh, you should go to our show." "No, you guys suck!" But nothing serious.

Where does the name Beautiful Records come from?

Well, we were just like, well, what are some names, and we were thinking like Palm Tree Records, Ginger Records ... you know, things that sound nice. We just had a list, and we typed them all into Google, and every single one had a record label already existing except Beautiful Records.

Where do you record?

In the other cofounder's basement.

So you've lived in Park Slope your whole life?

Yup.

Is your family a music family?

My dad was in high school bands, my mom was no more musical than... I guess she played oboe or bassoon in the high school orchestra. My sister plays piano casually—somewhat casually. Overall pretty musical, though I wouldn't say it's like the Partridge family.

Did you grow up listening to certain records in the house?

My dad was really into classic rock like Jefferson Airplane, psychedelic stuff like that. I still like those bands, but I don't listen to that as much any more.

Was there a specific record that you were really into? Obviously, most kids take whatever's coming in through MTV...

I'm glad to have been spared MTV. I don't have cable TV, and also I don't have a radio in the house, so I don't really know what the big music is right now.

The cable must have been a conscious decision on your parents' part.

Yeah.

They didn't want you in front of the TV? Or did you just end up watching PBS all day?

I watched PBS a little. I guess I started to get away from classic rock was when I was in seventh grade, with my first band, which covered a lot of Rage Against the Machine.

So is there a philosophy to Beautiful Records, like "people below a certain age?"

No, that's just how it's turned out. We just like to have any music on the label that we ourselves like to listen to.

Can you think of any reason why there are suddenly so many underage bands?

I think there have always been bands of this age. They just haven't been recognized. But definitely since that article in the *New York Times* that called us "kid-core," which, by the way, please never use "kid-core."

You don't like "kid-core"?

No.

Is that a fear that you're gonna be labeled?

I just don't think that defines the sound of the music. It just seems, like, factually incorrect to me to have a genre about your age. Like Care Bears on Fire and Fiasco [another Beautiful Records band] sound completely, 100 percent different. It's kind of, like, a hip thing to put "core" on the end of the genre, but...

It seems redundant.

It's completely redundant. "Core" just means extreme of what it is, and we're not extremely kids. We're kind of kids, but we're not 3-year-olds! I could see calling it "kid-core" if we were 3-year-olds. ■

urbanities

(S)exchange of Power

Columbia's BDSM group "Conversio Virium" opens up for Valentine's Day

BY MELANIE WENIGER

It's the same procedure every year. Valentine's Day is coming up, and lovers all over the world are getting ready to profess and celebrate their attraction. With posters advertising the sale of flowers in Lerner, Feb. 14 promises to be another annual commemoration of red roses and romantic cards. But can't we do better than that?

Author and political commentator Ann Coulter might be getting a very interesting Valentine this year.

"We're thinking about sending

on campus, even though they've been around for over 10 years. The name is Latin for "exchange of power" and is related to BDSM, which stands for bondage and discipline, domination and submission, and sado-masochism. "BDSM is loosely related to sex as in part of someone's sexuality, but for a lot of members, or a lot of people, it's not so much about sex but the exchange of power," explains Tyler.

CV prides itself on being an educational group rather than an activity group. At their Monday night meetings in 306 Hamilton, CV invites weekly speakers who give presentations on topics like saran wrap bondage to puppy play, where you role play treating your partner as a pet.

The group stresses safety above all else, however. "Safe, sane, and consensual" is the club's motto, and they go over it at every meeting. The club suggests that all their members take safety precautions in all their activities, and that they do not engage in BDSM under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or in any kind of heightened emotional state, and most importantly that they obtain the explicit informed consent of all participants involved.

Hannah. "We don't recommend any sorts of particular practices."

So, if CV isn't spilling their secrets, who will?

If you're too afraid to Google, here's a breakdown of some common BDSM practices:

-Sensation play: A form of play that focuses on physical sensation. Many partners who don't consider themselves into BDSM are familiar with these activities—it can involve stimulation using props

Where to Tie Up Your Loose Ends

The Leather Man
111 Christopher St.
(212) 243 5339

The Noose
261 W. 19th St.
(212) 807 1789

London
84 Christopher St.
(212) 647 9195

Toys in Babeland
4 Rivington St.
(212) 375 1701

Religious Sex
7 St. Mark's Place
(on 8th St.)
(212) 477 9037

DeMask NY
135 W. 22nd St.
(212) 352 2850

Purple Passion
211 W. 20th St. (btw 7th & 8th Avenues)
(212) 807 0486
<http://www.purplepassion.com>

PHOTO BY DANIELLA ZALCMAN

her a 'Happy Valentine's Day' card," says Tyler, BC '08, and Vice President of Columbia University's now-notorious BDSM club, Conversio Virium, known as CV. "She helped us out a lot," adds Tyler. "She gave us a lot of free press. She should have a Valentine's Day just like anyone else."

If you're living under a rock (or just don't read Bwog), last semester an undercover reporter for the *New York Daily News* infiltrated one of CV's meetings, posing as a University affiliate. The journalist subsequently published an "exposé" on the sexual practices of University students, with a special focus on CV. Ann Coulter ran with the piece and soon after appeared on Fox News, publicly denouncing the group as a sex club for "the biggest losers on campus."

Conversio Virium is not the most visible group

Which all begs the question—what does the kinkiest club on campus due to celebrate V-Day?

Officially, CV members are planning to celebrate Valentine's Day just like everyone else. Tyler, BC '08 and president of CV, says that, in addition to reaching out to Coulter, "We [club members] are planning to send out kinky Valentines with dirty poetry" to other people as well.

"One of our members is having a 'seven deadly sins' theme of parties," Hannah says. "Like seven consecutive parties and this one is envy for Valentine's Day. So, you know, I think the BDSM community does sort of entertain this holiday in a light-hearted way."

Light-hearted, hmm. But what sexual practices does that actually involve? "Every person should do what makes them feel good," responds

like scarves, oil, ice, or feathers. It can also be the act of biting, clawing, and tickling.

-Flagellation: An act of whipping using instruments like rods.

Have a slap-happy Valentine's Day!

-Sensory deprivation: An act that involves impairing one of the senses. This can include blindfolding, earmuffs, or hoods.

-Physical restraints: Think handcuffs, rope, straitjackets.

-Suspension bondage: Self-explanatory.

The Eye encourages readers to be safe should they choose to engage in any of these activities. ■

Letter From Baghdad

Last time, Josh wrote about a lopsided gunfight that pitted dozens of American infantrymen against one AK-47-wielding Iraqi. Josh was especially proud that his men had shown restraint and had refrained from shooting civilians. The story continues...

Dec. 19, 2006

That night, the platoon and I felt pretty good about ourselves and our disciplined actions as we returned to the battalion headquarters, briefed the commander and intelligence officer, and then returned to our staging area to continue our role as a Quick Reaction Force. That was still our mood the next morning when we were about to be relieved as QRF and we heard a loud explosion in our area of operations.



COURTESY OF JOSH ARTHUR

We didn't think much of it at first—after all, explosions of some sort are routine, and I'm sure that's the case in most parts of Baghdad. But I knew something had gone wrong when I heard another patrol from another company in our battalion request medical evacuation immediately after the blast. They said they would need a helicopter and began to move to our location, one place that helicopters are equipped to land to evacuate casualties. We prepared the helicopter landing zone, waited for the patrol to come in with its casualty ... and when it did, well, it was without a doubt the most vivid, enduring memory of my time in Baghdad so far. I can't imagine—unless one of the patrols I'm on involves a wounded soldier—that anything over the course of the next year could replace it.

The wounded soldier was a staff sergeant from another company, and it was tragically obvious to me and I think to anyone who saw him as he was pulled out of the Humvee that there was virtually no hope for his recovery. I can't begin to describe what it was like to prepare yourself to receive a casualty with a shrapnel wound, or maybe a half-amputated foot or leg, and then see someone in the shape he was in. His wounds were probably—thankfully, in a way—irreversibly fatal. The trauma to his head was severe and I don't think it would have made one bit of difference if they'd had an operating room with a surgeon standing by at the site of the blast. It seemed like a truly hopeless situation.

I say "thankfully" because I can't imagine a more horrible feeling than that of the guilt that you could have done something to save someone's life, but didn't. In this case, I just don't think anything could have been done. It was a horrible sight, one that I'm quite sure I will never forget, and a horrible reminder to everyone in the battalion—just weeks after we arrived in Iraq—that we're still involved in a very deadly struggle, like it or not.

So you see why, although it's been a mostly uneventful few weeks since I last wrote, that's not to say that certain very pointed events haven't been foremost in everyone's mind. For my platoon, those were undoubtedly some of the most memorable hours of our lives, and I think I can speak for all of my soldiers who were there in saying that sudden change of emotions, that instant evaporation of any feeling of success or a job well done, was all too grave a reminder that our job here is dangerous and far from over.

—Lt. Josh Arthur

Compiled by Matt Mireles



PHOTO BY MAX TALBOT-MINKIN

Better Than Chick Lit

Robyn Schneider takes on the publishing world

BY HILLARY BUSIS

Being a writer is a lot like being a physician—you're obsessive," Barnard student and published author Robyn Schneider says as she methodically rips off another piece of her cheeseburger.

Fellow writers and pre-med students probably know what Robyn means. What they may not know, though, is that she isn't just another stressed-out undergraduate venting about her course load—Robyn's first novel, *Better Than Yesterday*, was released Jan. 9 and she has two more books coming out this June and early next year.

"I started writing *Better Than Yesterday* as a senior in high school," Robyn says over lunch at Strokos.

Strangely enough, it isn't easy to get Robyn to start talking about her books. She seems extremely nervous about appearing full of herself. "I just don't bring it up anymore," she says. "I avoid the subject by a) talking about my boyfriend, b) asking people questions about themselves, or c) talking about wanting to become a physician."

Wait a minute—Robyn Schneider, the college student who is going to have three published books under her belt within the next year, wants to be a doctor?

"It's funny because when I was younger, my mom wanted me to become a dermatologist, but I was like, 'No, I'm going to be J.K. Rowling,'" she says. "But my books just entertain, they don't help anybody, and I always wanted to help people."

Although she appears to be reluctant to get into more detail about how she landed her contract, she writes on her Web site, robyschneider.com, "When I was 18, I submitted a query letter to a bunch of literary agents via e-mail and then I sent a bunch of requested manuscripts out to agents. One of them offered representation."

Robyn describes *Better Than Yesterday* as "*Ferris Bueller* and *Catcher in the Rye* meet *Dead Poets Society*." The novel tells the story of Skyler and Charley, two "obsessive AP scholars competing for valedictorian" who suddenly find their world turned upside down when their friend Blake runs away from their prestigious boarding school.

J.D. Salinger's iconic novel was an especially strong influence for Robyn—as she says, "I always thought that *Catcher in the Rye* had the wrong narrator. It should have been Holden's roommate, after Holden runs away."

Her second book, *The Social Climber's Guide to High School*, is also intended for a young group of readers, although this one is nonfiction. It's a "hip handbook for aspiring high school A-listers," she

describes, reciting as if she's memorized the blurb for the back cover.

Third in her line of novels is *The Ivy Legacy*, which is aimed at a slightly older readership. It's the first book Robyn has written that takes place in a college setting. The novel is "slightly hysterical," she says. "Then again, I don't have the edits back yet, so it could be slightly crap."

Robyn waves off those who judge her book by its cover.

"*Better Than Yesterday* is always mistaken for chick lit because there's some pink on the cover. But I know plenty of boys who've read it and enjoyed it—and none of the reviews call it chick lit."

With editing, promotion for *Better Than Yesterday*, and her sudden shift to a pre-med curriculum, it's not surprising that Robyn has taken the year off from Barnard. "Last year, I interned, hosted a reading series, edited my books, took classes at Barnard, did some freelance book editing, and commuted from my apartment—it was exhausting," she says.

She still lives near campus, though—after lunch, Robyn and I walk to her apartment, where she lends me a copy of *Better than Yesterday*. Her place is surprisingly spacious, considering she lives there alone—as she unlocks the door, Robyn asks me to forgive the mess, explaining how she hadn't cleaned up from the party she threw the night before. Although there's some evidence of a celebration—empty wine bottles litter the table—the sheer number of books her living room contains is more of a surprise. Young adult novels fill the majority of Robyn's bookshelves, although she also has a few classics and fantasies here and there.

Having some more free time certainly seems to have given Robyn a chance to catch up on her reading. She's also done a lot of traveling lately. "I went to England and France for a little bit, I went on a road trip, I just got back from Boston," she says.

Since she isn't taking classes, she also "started watching TV again" this year. If she had her way, though, Robyn wouldn't just be passively staring at television shows—she'd be helping to make them.

"After Amy Sherman-Palladino left *Gilmore Girls*, I wanted to apply to be a writer and take her place," Robyn says. "But the spots were already filled."

Closet Alexis Bledel fans, take note. "If I had been hired, Lane would not be pregnant with twins right now, and Rory definitely would not have bangs." ■

LOG ON

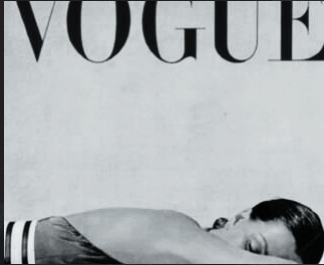
Immerse yourself in Robyn's world with an excerpt from *Better Than Yesterday*. Visit eye.columbiaspectator.com.



style: fashion week

BY JESSICA WONG, JESSICA THOMPSON, ALEXANDRA REISNER, AND ANNA GERMAN

André and Anna, *Vogue's* power team, make numerous appearances every season and are known for their anticipated entrances, quick exits, and for always having the best seats in the house.



Marc Bouwer showed a stunning collection of faux fur coats that looked like the real thing, but without the emotional baggage. Stylish and socially responsible: the perfect combination.



Celebrity sightings are better than ever. Rumor has it Baby Phat was delayed for an hour to wait for Britney Spears (she was a no-show).



The Daily is Fashion Week's official glossy, providing the perfect mindless indulgence when waiting for a show to start. It's free, and far more readable than *AM New York*.



Patrik Ervell is a former contributing fashion editor at *V* who is now revolutionizing menswear. Downtown kids know this Swedish-born designer for his clean cuts, pleats, and cuffs.



For the rest of the alphabet, go to eye.columbiaspectator.com.

Vera Wang shows today in the tents. And she's not just bridal-wear. Catch all the juicy tidbits of the show on eye.columbiaspectator.com after the show.

Women's Wear Daily is handed out in the tents alongside *The Daily*. *WWD* tracks all industry news, from international trade laws to silhouette trends.

The X-Factor is that *je ne sais quoi* of the Fashion Week experience. Will it be an amazing collection from a hot designer like Doo.Ri Chung, an amazing celebrity sighting, or a date with a model?

Yigal Azrouël, an Israeli-born designer, is best known for the gorgeous bone-white coat that Anne Hathaway wore in *The Devil Wears Prada*. This week, he showed a classically tailored collection of muted tones.

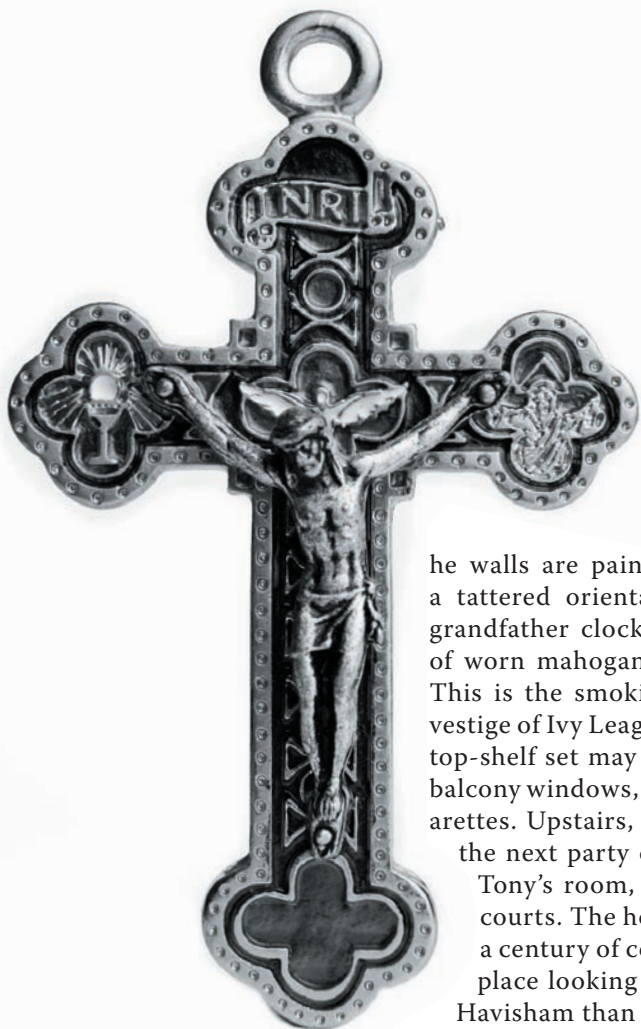
Zac Posen, loved by the celebrity set for his party-boy ways and photoworthy frocks, continues to reign over the designer scene. Watch in the coming months as looks go from runway to red carpet.

PHOTO BY DANIELLA ZALCMAN

The Passion Of St. A's

Article by Jen Spyra

Photo Illustrations by Daniella Zalcmán



he walls are painted an apt wine; the carpet, a tattered oriental. Abused status symbols—grandfather clock, grand piano, appointments of worn mahogany—complete the impression. This is the smoking room at Saint A's, a rare vestige of Ivy League glamour where Columbia's top-shelf set may be glimpsed through latticed balcony windows, indulging in postprandial cigarettes. Upstairs, the ballroom lies fallow until the next party or movie night. Further up is Tony's room, the attic, and former squash courts. The house was grand once, but over a century of collegiate caresses have left the place looking decidedly shabby, more Miss Havisham than Her Highness.

Saint Anthony's Hall is the founding chapter of the National Delta Psi fraternity, and according to Columbia University historian Andrew Dolkart, the building was the first to be erected in Morningside Heights for the exclusive purpose of student housing. Saint A's began at Columbia in 1847 as a literary society dedicated to "the love of learning and the appreciation of a well-rounded education."

The society now counts eight other chapters amongst its brethren, and though it is named after Saint Anthony, the patron saint of writers and cofounder of Christian monasticism, there is no trace of that sensibility in the Early French Renaissance architecture of the building. Dripping with

sculptural Beaux-Arts motifs, the house reflects the aesthetics popular under the reigns of Henry VI and Louis XIII and, according to Dolkart, was clearly modeled after the elegant Place des Vosges in Paris. The mini-mansion tucked into Riverside Drive is the refuge of 20 hand-picked Columbians, and its ornately keyed limestone and brick-paneled walls have been shrouded in mystery—until now.

If Carman is a playground for pubescent alcoholics and ADP is a gay harem, then Saint A's is where Columbia's wealthiest let down their long, rich hair. Famous for tall, pristinely coiffed girls with Blackberries tucked into designer clothing and elite-looking guys with influential moms and dads, Saint Anthony's Hall is known—to those who have heard of it—for three things: parties, secrecy, and money. It may be a literary society, but the place is better known for its bar than its bards.

My fireside interview with Dan Normal and Bunny Money (CC students who prefer to remain anonymous—Dan Normal's pseudonym was given to him while Bunny Money's was self-appointed) is conducted while sitting on cracked leather furniture. I ask them what was served for dinner that evening. Bunny Money thinks for a moment before pronouncing, "Tonight we had Cornish game hen."

Dan corrects her, "No, no—it was just regular chicken breast. Nobody likes Cornish hen, he [the chef] keeps making that."

"But tonight it was [Cornish game hen]," Bunny contends.

Conscious of the faux pas, Dan says, "It was just chicken breast."

The gracelessness of mentioning Cornish game hen to the likes of myself is like a feudal lord discussing pheasant with a serf. While conscious

of Dan's reticence to admit the meal, she does not appear to understand why. In their contradictory relationships to wealth, Dan Normal and Bunny Money together embody the spirit of Saint A's: on one hand, they seem embarrassed about it, but on the other, they want you to know they've got it.

Squabbling over the breed of fowl served for dinner is probably something that few other Columbians have the interest or opportunity to do. But at Saint A's, quarreling reaches new heights of sophistication as I learn that an interpersonal conflict led to the acquisition of an exotic animal.

There is a girl in the hall who is terrified of snakes. Bunny, none too fond of the ophidiophobe, played a singularly Saint A's joke on her. Dan explains, "She bought a snake and named it after the girl who doesn't like snakes and told the girl who didn't like snakes that she named the snake after her, at which point the snake was donated to charity." Relaxing into a self-reproachful laugh, bright-eyed Bunny weighs in: "My snake was cute. It was pink on pink."

Cornish game hen and pink snakes aside, my sit-down with Dan and Bunny is far from a simple recitation of stereotypes. The pair is friendly and down-to-earth, explaining that Saint A's is really just nice off-campus housing with its own meal plan and tight social network. They gush about the sense of community and laud the Hall—as they call the house—as a well-appointed refuge from the chaos of Columbia. "It's just nice to come in here, have a cup of tea, start a fire," Dan says. Bunny adds, "There's also no clocks in any of these rooms so there's really no sense of time." I gesture toward a staid grandfather clock hedged in between a vintage leather couch and balcony window. "That one doesn't work."

Bunny elaborates on the peaceful rhythm of life at Saint A's, describing the ritual of the midday meal. "I generally spend at least an hour at lunch every day. You have four courses, you have your soup, and then whatever, and then a salad, and then you sit down, dessert, and then tea. It takes a long time." The chef, employed by Saint A's for the past 15 years, "loves working here," according to Dan, and serves breakfast, lunch, dinner, and an afternoon tea daily. Bunny recalls that they had tea sandwiches that afternoon. "You can have some if you like. They're in the fridge," Dan offers.

The sense of intimacy born of living in close, fin de siècle quarters is another perk of belonging to Saint A's. "I know that I feel like it's my family," Dan says. "I guess I sort of started here just through a couple friends bringing me by, and ... I never would've met them without this place. And I'd say, of everyone here—and I'm not going to give you a number of people who are here—but I'd say there's a good portion who will be my friends for life." Of course, Dan concedes, "There are some people who don't feel that way. Some people get very involved, some people come to meals occasionally, it's whatever you make of it." Bunny concurs, elaborating on the understated spirit of the society: "We're very bonded to each other, but I don't think we see each other on the street and are like 'Rah, Saint A's!'" Dan shakes his head, laughing, "We definitely don't." While Saint A's members might eschew public expressions of fraternity, they certainly do not in their e-mail messages, which are signed YITB, "Yours in the Bond."

Extolling the choice membership of Saint A's, Bunny admits, "I really did not like the people I met at Columbia." But she explains, "Saint A's does a very good job of finding very eclectic people who are very talented in their own ways. They bring something to the table that's very different." Dan interrupts, ever ready to debunk the society's reputation for elitism: "Some don't." Ignoring him, Bunny continues, "I think it's a lot of fun being here. It's much more than the housing or the food. The quality of the people who live here, they're very good quality people." Reflective for a moment, she says, "There's different religions, different political views, everything. I would say eclectic is a good way to define it."

The folks at Saint A's are not as opinionated as their critics, however, who range from gentle detractors to full-blown archenemies. "I think people pigeonhole," Bunny says. "They think, stereotypical Saint A's kid. But I don't think that really exists." Dan acknowledges flak as par for the course. "We're pretty happy, happy in our little private lives over here. So people can think what they think. Most people have negative thoughts about us."

In a moment of literary allusion, Bunny offers, "It's like Herodotus, the *Histories*, with the headless men with eyes in the breasts. It's like when you don't know about something and it's really far away you start these rumors about it, because no one will validate it one way or the other."

For many Saint A's critics, 116th and Riverside isn't so far away, and their observations are validation enough to support the conclusion that members are, as Jessica Glavin, CC '07 and outgoing president of Delta Gamma, told a Yale reporter last year, "ostentatious, ridiculous and pretentious." She cited

an autumnal ritual as proof: "Every year, at Homecoming, they square off a portion of the tailgating area and—outfitted in blazers and monogrammed oxfords—sip champagne and nibble on aged cheeses served to them by uniformed caterers." Noting a distinct sociological divide, Jessica concluded, "While most Columbia students spend their time shotgunning beers and fielding hot dog mustard bombs from detonating all over their Columbia T-shirts, Mr. and Mrs. St. A. spend their time trying to navigate the muddy field in their Tod's loafers."

A recent GS grad and former paramour of a Saint A's member, Guy Lebowitz, whose name has also been changed by request, marvels, "It was absolutely ridiculous how seriously they took themselves. I was dating a girl there and she actually kicked me out once because they were having a secret meeting in one of the rooms and they didn't want me in the building." Speaking of the organization as a whole, Guy shrugs. "It's not really worth thinking about, to be honest with you."

Then, of course, there's the incident of the tea party. Dan confirms the story that Jacob McKean, CC '06, was walking by the Hall one evening last year when, from the smoking room balcony, a member threw a teacup at him and yelled, "Fucking faggot!" Bunny says that the member had thought they heard someone throw something at the house. Dan emphasizes that it was not an accurate reflection of Saint A's.

Jacob's account of the story is somewhat more vivid. "As I walked past Saint A's two guys standing on the patio in front started cursing at me. One of them then hurled a glass—not a teacup, a rock glass like the kind your grandfather uses for a gin and tonic—at me, missing my head by an inch. If it had hit me, I'd have been bleeding and unconscious on the sidewalk." Stopping and looking back at them, Jacob says that a former president of Saint A's screamed "Faggot!" at him. Jacob then went to Woodbridge security and reported the incident, but Saint A's refused security entry to the building. According to Jacob, both members were eventually issued summons by the police. Teacup or tumbler,

the unsavory incident rather clashes with the refined reputation of the historic literary society.

Michael Magdaleno, CC '08 and president of Alpha Delta Phi, a commensurate coed literary society, but located on campus and affiliated with the Greek Council, says, "I guess their reputation would probably be as a very wealthy organization with very wealthy members that is very selective about who they choose—but a lot of it has to do with one's background, more so than one's character." He mentions that he heard rumors of discrimination at Saint A's, and that he was glad that those kinds of practices were absent from the recruitment process at ADP.

The Columbia chapter of Saint Anthony's is known for its secrecy. "We're the first, and we're more reclusive," Dan explains. The Brown chapter has a Web site and photo gallery. Trinity, MIT, Ole Miss and UNC have Web sites including names of active members, a schedule of events, rush dates, and photos. The Penn chapter has its complete archives online, Virginia has a page on the Greek Life Council Web site for UVA organizations, and Princeton has a cryptic, albeit alluring, Web site. The founding chapter is the only one without one. Also, unlike most of the other branches, it does not have nor advertise a typical rush period. When asked if members thought rush tacky, Dan answered, "We do, but that makes us elitist."

Dan and Bunny were tight-lipped when it came to the topic of member selection. "I don't feel comfortable talking about the process that much," Dan says. When I inquire about a prominent rumor, wherein a new member of Saint A's proves her mettle by buying and burning a ticket to China, Dan and Bunny are tickled. "I think the typical one we hear is Paris," Dan says. Laughing, Bunny blurts, "Paris isn't that expensive—just kidding."

"We actually just have them buy off-season tickets to exotic destinations, and we do have them burn them, actually. Davidson here, we made him purchase a ticket to Tunisia, and he had to burn it," Dan said. Davidson, a first-year, piped up, "Actually, I've always wanted to go to Tunisia, so I was crushed." Dan jokes, "And I hear Tunis is lovely this time of year."

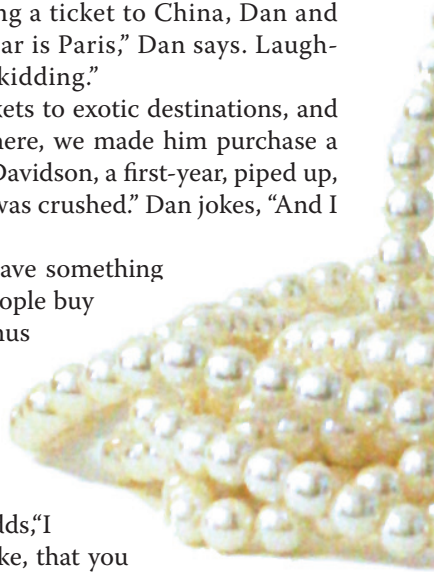
"Typically, we try and send them places that have something to do with Saint A. For instance, we like having people buy tickets to Portugal so that they can see Hieronymus Bosch's 'Temptation of Saint A,'" Dan says.

Confused, I ask if the member actually goes to the destination. "No, they burn the ticket," Dan affirms.

Do they think they're going to go?

"Oh, yeah. It's all a mind fuck," Dan says. Bunny adds, "I got Paris ... but you also kind of hope that it's a joke, that you

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TEA. IT TAKES A LONG TIME."





don't really have to burn it—till you see the lighter and you're like, 'Ahh!'"

Addressing the reputedly prohibitive member dues, Dan says, "Well, you have to be able to afford it, and we have had some problems, some people that we joined with found out later on that they wouldn't be able to afford it. So it's unfortunate in that event. We've lost a couple people, really quality people, but for the most part we're pretty egalitarian. If we meet someone that we like, it's not a big issue and things can be worked out."

The dues for members who do not live in the house—of which there are an estimated 10-15 at any given time—are \$2,600 per semester, which pays for 10 meals a week and alcohol for parties.

"You're expected to pull your own weight," Dan says of new members, who are responsible for grunt work at parties. "People typically enjoy bartending." The live-in members—currently 20—pay much more. According to Dan, "our dues are more than other fraternities at Columbia, but if you go down south to a place that has a huge house, or a nice house like ours, they're pretty similar." Dan and Bunny declined to say what "similar" was.

Continuing on the sordid topic of money, Dan explains their unique situation. "We have nothing to do with the school. We have our own trustees who own and operate the building. The building is pretty much operational off of our dues and our rents." Saint A's is neither funded by nor affiliated with the University.

Dan and Bunny would not name any trustees. Indeed, most questions posed to them were met with a smiling "no comment," including—Do you have a charter? Who decides who gets admitted? When do you admit new members? What is the admissions process? Even the most benign of queries—As a literary society, what do you guys do that's literary?—was answered by Dan, "No comment. It's there, but I'm not commenting on it."

Walter Dansby, CC '06, would comment on it. Putting to rest fantasies of coed naked William Blake readings and whatever else Saint A's self-styled secrecy might lead one to surmise, he calls their bluff. "This idea that Saint A's is a literary society, this is devoid of reality, actually. The idea that the place is this sort of creative haven with eccentrics, that's not the reality of Saint A's." Walter is not a member—nor is his name actually Walter—but he has an inside perspective on the organization that he prefers not be described in this article. While Walter admits that their history is alluring and that they throw the best parties, he is unimpressed with the self-aggrandizing secrecy of the organization. Walter estimates that "if you go looking for the interesting thing about Saint A's, what you find is that the guy from MTV News, Gideon Yago, is a member."

Walter expounds on the reasons why an exclusive, moneyed organization like Saint A's thrives at an egalitarian university like Columbia. "What's important to mention is a place like Saint A's could exist at Columbia but it couldn't exist at most other Ivies because everyone would be a part of it. If you think about the general culture at Columbia, it's very much not an elitist culture, especially not with money. Georgetown, for instance, it very much is a money culture at Georgetown. People care about what other people are wearing. At Columbia you don't see that. Everyone is far too in the light, so to speak, to be snobs. But then you run into the problem that there are kids who are used to a certain kind of lifestyle, and for a lot of people ... Saint A's is a place they won't be judged."

When Dan and Bunny denied a rush period at Saint A's, they did so sincerely. The Saint A's recruitment period is not called rush but the "friends process," and for some, like Walter, it's not as appealing as it may sound.

"The first night of the friends process is usually like a scavenger hunt. It's supposed to be fun. You get a Lincoln town car for the night, a driver, and you have to do different things... They give you money, too. They split you up into teams. They'll say, 'You're not going to be a member of Saint A's if you don't get to 44th and Madison in 10 minutes!' The whole thing is kind of a bad experience." Walter recalls, "There's a driver. There is definitely a dress code for the scavenger

hunt. It's supposed to be like, fun, this is spy world, but it comes off as kids who don't get friends without an apparatus."

When I ask if anyone could go to a Saint A's party, Walter says, "Yeah, of course. Sure. They're insecure, they love attention, they love to be respected. It's this kind of weird mix of people ... who maybe feel ashamed [of their wealth] but at the same time want people to know. It's a weird dichotomy."

Commenting on the differences between some of the chapters, Walter says, "Supposedly the Brown chapter of Saint A's is touchy-feely, with sensitive hippies—and the Columbia kids don't like or relate to them at all. Trinity Saint A's kids are the worst—they have a tower where they do coke all the time." At Columbia, Walter affirms, "Saint A's wants people to come and enjoy themselves and look up to them."

According to Walter, hopeful prospectives are told to meet somewhere where they will be handed an invitation to join. Another ritual of the initiation process is "a night when you're supposed to share something. I found that to be pretty lame. No one had anything interesting. Then you sleep over, everyone gets drunk, then you paint or clean the house."

"Being selected for something exclusive and secretive and cool is exciting, but it all goes downhill from there," Walter remembers. "There's a few people that are not defined by it; it's practical for them to live there."

Even the administration of Saint A's is bound in secrecy. I was told by members that the president of Saint A's was Beccy Dunnan, CC '07. When contacted, Dunnan would not comment about the society.

Little did I know that she may not even be the real president. "One thing about Saint A's is that the person who functions as the outward president doesn't function as the inward president. It changes from year to year. They elect their own inner—and outer—president," Walter says. The outer president, Dunnan, is the person who Saint A's recognizes publicly. The inner president, who walks among us yet in anonymity, is known only to Saint A's members. Since Dunnan declined to comment on anything having to do with the group, one wonders as to the purpose of her position, and also why everyone in this article, with scant exception, asked to be quoted anonymously.

When asked how the boarding school contingent achieved such a sizeable representation in Saint A's membership, and more to the point, how current Saint A's members recognize the new boarding school crop for member selection, Walter says, "They just know each other. Boarding school kids know each other. Some of their families know each other."

"IT'S THIS KIND OF WEIRD MIX OF PEOPLE ... WHO MAYBE FEEL ASHAMED [OF THEIR WEALTH] BUT AT THE SAME TIME WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW. IT'S A WEIRD DICHOTOMY."

Doubting the values of the organization, Walter remarks, "You just take a look around and you realize, why have these people been brought together? It's not like they discriminate for the right reasons—like merit or anything. It does come down to perceived wealth." Noting the practical side of membership, he concludes, "I've heard of one kid who was there and said it was an investment in his career. He couldn't really afford it but he thought that he could make connections."

Reflecting on the squandered potential of the organization, Walter says, "What's sad about Saint A's is that it could be really cool when you think of the idea of what it could be. Yeah, it's appealing, having dinner on Thursday nights, discussing things, mocking themselves a little bit maybe. But then what you realize is the bond that is tying all these people together is really money, you know. It doesn't have anything to do with cool."

The myth of the blue-blooded boys and girls club is a quaint one, and ever since the Gilded Age ended, Saint A's has inspired mystery, mockery, and admiration as a living relic. While the secrecy is alluring, one wonders why it's even there—the secrets seem sadly tame.

Delving into the goings-on at Saint A's is an exercise in defanging: what the mystery conceals is not much more than the controversial habit of exclusivity. ■



Lincoln Center focuses on the roles of psychedelic Donald Cammell this weekend, including *Performance* (starring Mick Jagger) and *Lucifer Rising* (with music by Charles Manson collaborator Bobby Beausoleil).



It's sad, but with Eddie Murphy's impending Oscar win, his days of donning fat suits for roles as obese women may be over. See his swan song performance in *Norbit*, opening tomorrow.



BIPPITY BOPPITY EWW THOUGH MOST VIEWERS ARE RESISTANT TO DIRECT-TO-VIDEO SEQUELS, *CINDERELLA III* IS ESPECIALLY BLASPHEMOUS GIVEN THE ORIGINAL'S LASTING APPEAL.

COURTESY OF BUENA VISTA PICTURES

Losing More Than Glass Slippers

The current commitment to direct-to-video sequels reflects a troubling era for those raised in the golden age of Disney animation

BY ANNIE BERKE

Earlier this week, Disney bypassed theaters and put *Cinderella III: A Twist in Time* directly onto store shelves. For a generation raised on the original animated classic—in the golden age of *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, *The Lion King*, and *Beauty and the Beast*—the DVD brings up an intriguing mystery: who exactly is Hayden Panettiere, and why is she in a music video featured on the disc? Though it may just be evidence that we're getting old, memories of movie music written by Elton John, rather than a 'tween songstress, are likely rushing back. That this gig was so lousy that even Hilary Duff wouldn't touch is a bad sign for the movie and for us.

Given that *Cinderella III* is a straight-to-video release—as was *The Return of Jafar*, *The Lion King 2: Simba's Pride*, and *Beauty and the Beast: The Enchanted Christmas*—expectations of quality are fairly low. Clearly, these videos are for children who are too young and unruly to watch movies in a theater.

The void left in theaters by the disappearance of traditional animation is now filled by companies like Pixar, but computer animation is an altogether different animal. Though flashy 3-D graphics may seem impressive at first, realism isn't a cartoon fan's utmost priority. The great weakness of computer animation is its inability to create good human characters—the hyper-realism results in a dead look behind their eyes. To compensate, animators must focus on characters that aren't supposed to look real, like inanimate objects like bugs and cars, which in turn obligates children to idolize ants and tow trucks. Knowing that sequels like *Cinderella III* are circulating in the world means that young children may cease to be able to tell the difference between good Disney and bad Disney, a skill developed only after being exposed to long hours of the best of what Disney has

to offer. These sequels, prequels, and midquels aren't fairly repaying Simba, Aladdin, and Mrs. Potts, considering their valiant efforts at improving the Disney name.

The original *Beauty and the Beast* was nominated for "Best Picture" at the Academy Awards. Not "Best Animated Feature"—"Best Picture." And while the Oscars may not be the ultimate or most reliable test of a film's quality, they are a fairly apt record in awarding movies that aren't terrible, and the nomination spoke to the film's power over adults and children alike. Even Gaston, the villain of the film, manages to be complex in his obsessive narcissism and violent tendencies. The stuffy British clock, the candelabra modeled after Maurice Chevalier, the mischievous young teacup... there is not a major misstep in the entire film. And, let's not forget, any little girl who grew up being told to stop reading at the dinner table or to put down her book while crossing the street could look up to Belle as a positive example.

But what girl can look up to the Belle of *Beauty and the Beast: The Enchanted Christmas*? This Belle is obsessed merely with the material trimmings and trappings of Christmas. This Belle says she likes reading yet never actually reads during the movie. This Belle's great adversary is an inexplicably cranky and sadistic pipe-organ voiced by Tim Curry (who, with any luck, was very handsomely reimbursed). Belle has become a brand-name, and kids in a video store will gravitate toward a familiar animated face, much to their parents' chagrin. But what will happen to the little Belle fans who are growing up now admiring a mere shadow of the true Belle? Never mind that the jokes in this one just aren't funny. The longest running joke in *The Enchanted Christmas* is that the axe Belle uses to cut down the Christmas tree is Jewish and seems to be from Brooklyn. Oy gevalt is right.

If Disney can't treat these characters with respect, perhaps they should leave them be. They could create an-

other doofy princess named Isabellatini and give her her own movie—leaving the memory of Belle alone. As Walt Disney said, "I've never believed in doing sequels. I didn't want to waste the time I have doing a sequel; I'd rather be using that time doing something new and different." And, one might imagine, he meant it.

Though director Frank Nissen urges the public to watch *Cinderella III* before judging it, the problem is that the original *Cinderella* didn't leave audiences wanting more. Like a good fairy tale, it was completely self-contained, and Cinderella and her prince simply lived "happily ever after." And if it had left any sort of cliffhanger, certainly *Cinderella II* did plenty to tie up those loose threads. In this third installment, *A Twist in Time*, the evil step-mother uses magic to turn back time so that Cinderella's glass slipper somehow does not fit when the prince arrives. Will Cinderella get that "happily ever after" she's managed to nab in the last two movies? Probably—but maybe, just maybe, she won't. Granted, that may scar some children for life, but at least it will give America an actual reason to rent *Cinderella IV*. ■

ACTUAL DISNEY SEQUEL TITLES (And What Should Have Happened in Them)

1. **Homeward Bound II: Lost in San Francisco**
Shadow and Chance ride the trolleys and chow down on Rice-a-Roni, while Sassy spends more time than one might have expected at a local lesbian bookstore.
2. **Pocahontas II: Journey to the New World**
One of Disney's shorter features, since Pocahontas falls ill and dies before the ship even reaches the open seas, just like in real life.
3. **Cinderella II: Dreams Come True**
Unlike the first one, in which her dreams were shattered.
4. **102 Dalmatians**
In which Pongo is neutered. It was time.
5. **The Brave Little Toaster Goes to Mars**
The original title was Half-Baked 2: Still Wasted.

Portrait of The Killer as a Young Man

Hannibal's life is revealed, but not for free—it's quid pro quo

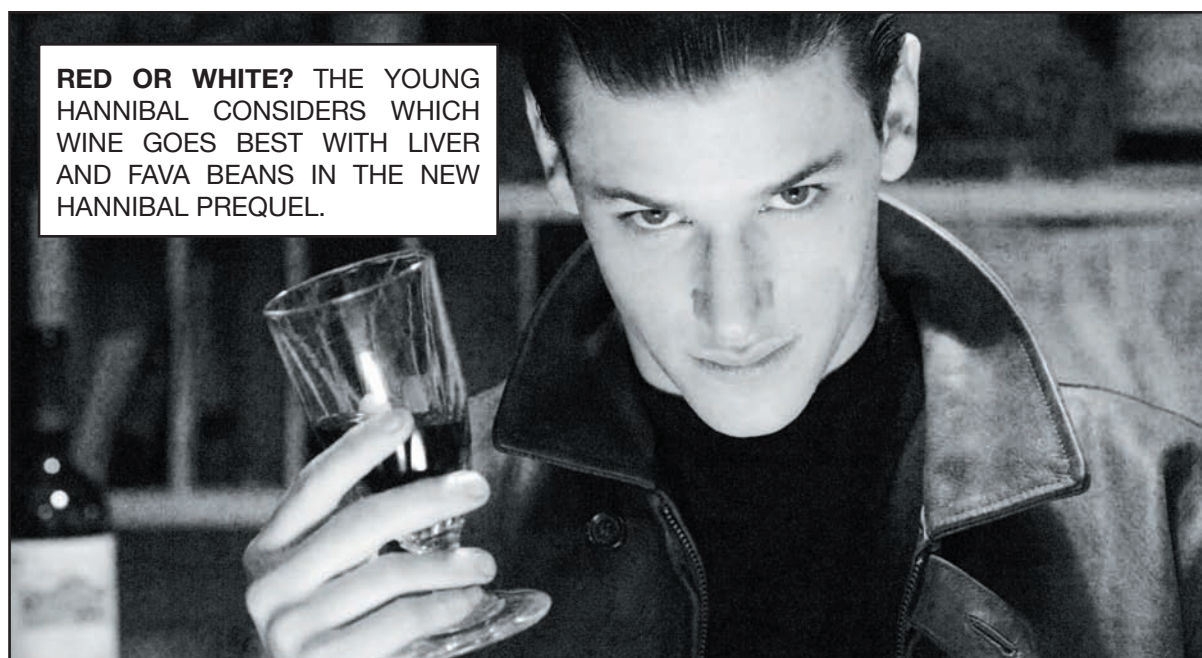
BY EMILY RAUBER

In creating a likeable hero, some filmmakers face a bigger challenge than others. Sure, it might be a little difficult to convince moviegoers that Matthew McConaughey is yet another wacky bachelor waiting to be reformed by the right woman—but at least he's never dissected someone and then eaten his face. With the return of Hannibal Lecter this week in *Hannibal Rising*, serial killers seem to be staking their claim as the year's hottest plot trend.

Only one of these films has been bold enough to promise audiences "the true story of the most prolific serial killer in history," despite the glut of competition. The advertisement strategy was intentionally vague, arousing fans' interest before delivering any actual information. The accuracy of the ad depends, of course, on one's definition of "serial killer." The movie is *Primeval*, and the killer is? An enormous crocodile named Gustave.

But even little Gustave played into many of the necessary conventions of the genre, despite the question of whether a reptile can actually be considered a serial killer. Reason is key in gaining in audience's acceptance. Gustave, for example, is relatively sympathetic because he has a good reason for his killings—he is a crocodile, and he is hungry. And as the movie progresses, it becomes clearer that he is actually the victim of a more bipedal—and easier blamed—enemy. He is thus absolved of his crimes, even garnering a bit of pity along the way.

A human killer is less easily explained, though, since human-to-human killing is not usually justifiable by the current moral standards of our society. *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* was released to reviews as widely varied as its olfactorily-inclined antihero, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, suggests there are varying scents of wood. His murders are brutal and unapologetic, though he is never explicitly seen killing anybody—this would, perhaps, be too much for most viewers to overcome. As the audience's lone guide in the narrative, though, our



COURTESY OF THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

alliance to him is forced, and perhaps most disturbingly, his psychotic rationales begin to seem almost logical. He has a reason, but it isn't reasonable. And with his almost mythic powers, he becomes more than just an antihero—he is an anti-superhero.

Hannibal Rising similarly documents the rise of an infamous serial killer—we just already know the end to this one. Far-removed from the classic *Silence of the Lambs* (though not the first to depict Hannibal on screen, it was certainly the most well-regarded film), *Hannibal Rising* is set in the mysterious depths of a war-torn Europe and attempts to explain what led to the liver-eating incarnation of the doctor.

But was Lecter's main appeal in *Silence of the Lambs*, and the rest of the Hannibal series, actually his unexplained past? Though flashbacks and backstories provided some clues to his upbringing and past murders, there was no canon novel that explained his early life, as there had been for all the other films. But Thomas Harris alleviated this situation by simultaneously penning the book and the screenplay, publishing the *Hannibal Rising* novel late last year—so the project clearly has Lecter's creator on its side.

"The audience wants to see the beginning of life for Hannibal Lecter," producer Dino De Laurentiis said. "This is a picture about the creation of a monster. But he's a monster who becomes a hero. A monster who kills only the people the audience wants to kill." This angle is entirely different from the previous Hannibal films, in which the audience's support of Lecter depended on its acceptance of cinematic crime—and it certainly wasn't unanimous or understood as justified. Though viewers might have been sadistically entertained by seeing his victims devoured by

wild pigs or being fed their own brains, there was never anything to suggest that they deserved this sort of treatment—and that's what made Hannibal such a frighteningly unpredictable villain.

"There was this very important aspect to the character, to give a sympathetic aspect, a small human aspect to the character," Gaspard Ulliel, who plays the teenage Lecter, said. "That was one of the main goals of the film, I think."

The perspective of *Hannibal Rising* distinguishes it clearly from the upcoming *Zodiac*, in which investigators attempt to discover the identity of the killer. *Zodiac's* format more closely resembles last year's severely misguided *Black Dahlia*, since the killer is unseen (or at least, unknown) for the majority of the picture. These both seem to stem from the *Law and Order* and G-Man influence, portraying fairly traditional and definite ideas of good and bad. It's not difficult to set an audience against a criminal—the right lighting and some ominous chords make all the difference—when considered with their crimes.

What connects all of these films, however, is the personal nature of the crimes. The enemy is not a faceless terrorist, nor are the victims simply anonymous bodies killed as collateral damage. These murders are committed in close range by an identifiable, and often sympathetic, source. Perhaps in a world that so frequently neglects to consider conflicts from a personal level, these serial killers are, in their own odd sort of way, providing their audiences with some much needed attention.

"He's very charming and somebody the audience can love," De Laurentiis said of Lecter, suggesting that his affiliation is, most definitely, right alongside the cannibal himself. ■

Front of the Queue


As a photographer at Mercedes Benz Fashion Week, Steven Kelly will be spending the next seven days fighting for camera space, not bathing, and subsisting on free coffee samples for the sake of fashion. But after that, he has some definite cinematic plans. Here are the next five he's planning to see:

- 1 *Pan's Labyrinth*: "I just saw it last week, but I really want to see it again to figure it out."
- 2 *Day for Night*: "I studied film in college, so I've been meaning to watch this one."
- 3 *The 400 Blows*: "I'm in a Truffaut mood."
- 4 *Babel*: "It looked good, and I figured I should see it before the Oscars."
- 5 *Notes on a Scandal*: "Probably have to wait for it on DVD at this point."

—Compiled by Emily Rauber

DVD

DOUBLE
FEATURE



☒ *Mommie Dearest* (1981)
☒ *Running with Scissors* (2006)

Who needs Frankenstein when you have mothers? In two of the best screen-monster performances from the past 25 years, Annette Bening and Faye Dunaway take bad parenting to new heights in *Running with Scissors*, out on DVD this week, and the classic *Mommie Dearest*, respectively. Many may already be familiar with Dunaway's infamous portrayal of Hollywood legend Joan Crawford, with her over-the-top delivery of such classic lines as, "Christina, bring me the axe," and, of course, "No. Wire. Hangers. EVER!" Yet, Bening matches Dunaway's commitment to scenery-chewing and scene-stealing by crying, screaming, and, yes, even dancing her way to a place in the pantheon of awful screen mothers, putting her somewhere between Dunaway's Crawford and Betty Buckley's Margaret White from *Carrie*. While Bening is in the same league as these women, the movie in which she appears does not, unfortunately, offer half as much campy fun as *Mommie Dearest*. Still, if you need a reminder that there's no place like home, this double feature will leave you crying for your mommy. —Jesse Horwitz



Lily Allen
Webster Hall
Sat., Feb. 10,
6:30 p.m.



Akron/Family
Europa
Wed., Feb. 14,
8 p.m.



DOCK OSCAR AND THE SHENAGO COUNTY LINE MAKING PEOPLE SMILE IS WHAT THEY DO BEST

COURTESY OF VIVIAN EPSTEIN

Anything but Country

Dock Oscar brings a little bit of small town to the big city

BY ASHRAYA GUPTA

Kings County is the most populated county in New York State and home to the Kings County Opry, a monthly celebration of bluegrass and country music. As the county—better known as Brooklyn—and its burgeoning country music scene blossoms, it's becoming home to hipsters and Hank Williams fans alike. You're likely to see some of both at the third annual Brooklyn Winter Hoedown, Feb. 15-18.

The festival, hosted by Brooklyn Country Music, is as straightforward as its name. Founded by two musicians, Alex Battles and Oscar Stern—though he prefers the country moniker Dock Oscar—Brooklyn Country Music grew out of a desire to showcase Brooklyn's distinct country movement. At a Brooklyn Country Music event, you can expect to hear everything from traditional string band—disciples of the Bill Monroe school of bluegrass—to edgy, raw, cow-punk steeped in Johnny Cash on one side and Dinosaur Jr. on the other. It's gritty, heartfelt, and great for dancing.

"It's not really pretentious," Stern says, "It's very accessible."

And that must be a refreshing escape from the ubiquitous indie electronica that has characterized the standard last half-decade of nights out. "People like to actually dance together," Stern says. "It's more intimate."

Remember the sweaty-palmed thrill of square-dancing in middle school? Imagine that with a lot

less pressure and a lot more alcohol. Dock Oscar himself came to country music right from the start. Raised in the dairy farming region of upstate New York, he was surrounded by the genre early in his musical development. He describes it as a "kind of a time bomb waiting to go off, a computer chip playing in my head." Since the time bomb exploded, he's studied bluegrass banjo with Orrin Star, performed as a solo artist, and he currently fronts the alt-country band Sweet William. Recently, he's begun playing with the Chenango County Line, which experiments with bluegrass. They'll be performing at this year's hoedown, opening the Friday night set. Stern says of the band, "We smile a lot. I think that's what we do best."

The remark typifies the easygoing nature of Brooklyn's current country scene. The shows and the bands are very much committed to a simple objective: to bring back the sheer joy of a good night out. In a *Village Voice* interview, Alex Battles put it succinctly, "We play for free beer and girls who smile at us."

Most of the events are free or have a minimal cover charge, meaning that the bands generally perform

just for the fun of it. Brooklyn Country Music also hosts a number of jambo-ree and song circle sessions, allowing beginners and pros to play together. Check out their CasHank Hootenanny Jamboree, the second Tuesday and last Thursday of every month. Participants are instructed to bring "knowledge of three chords, sometimes four, a good-spirited heart, beer money."

There is a communal spirit, an ethos of good times and hard liquor that connects the Brooklyn country scene back to the very beginnings of the genre. Country music was always meant to be shared. Individual showmanship, while ever-present, came out of a joint effort, a joy in playing together.

The bands at this year's hoedown will be showcasing that same spirit. Stern personally recommends seeing Alicia Jo Rabins and the Halo Boys, who will be performing the first night, Thursday at Freddy's Backroom. Rabins is a fiddler adept in everything from klezmer to bluegrass, and on Thursday, she's likely to evoke the very best of Appalachia.

Friday's show will be held at Superfine, a restaurant and bar in DUMBO. Dock Oscar will be taking the stage, as will bluegrass band Citigrass and Grizzly's Banjo Assault, a psychobilly outfit.

Continuing at Superfine, Saturday features the well-named American String Conspiracy and the elfin-voiced Jan Bell with backing band the Cheap Dates. But it's the Sunday-Super-Brunch-Madness set that's likely to garner the most attention. With live music playing from 11:30 a.m. to about 7 or 8 at night, it's bound to be a day full of the very best that Brooklyn country can offer. The M. Shanghai String Band, an 11-person ensemble, will be closing the festival and they're

one of the best bands to do it, as they really represent what Brooklyn country is all about: lots of friendly people making lots of fine noise.

Stern advises anyone attending, "Don't be afraid to dance, to hoot and holler and scream—that's mandatory." It's a small price to pay.

Brooklyn Country Music's Third Annual Winter Hoedown will be held Thursday, Feb. 15 through Sunday, Feb. 18, at Freddy's Backroom and Superfine. For more information about Brooklyn Country Music, visit their Web site at www.brooklyncountrymusic.com.

Dock Oscar and Alex Battles will also be appearing on WKCR's Moonshine Show with Alex Statman on Sunday, Feb. 11, at 10 a.m. ■

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The Rebirth of a Troubadour

How Vashti Bunyan survived a 30-year musical hiatus

BY JENNIE ROSE HALPERIN

If the only way to get to Carnegie Hall is through practice, Vashti Bunyan has beaten the odds. “Carnegie Hall is just beyond my wildest dreams... There was no way I could have ever thought that, in a year, I would see myself on that stage” she said. “I suppose you could just take 30 years off and then wake up one morning to an e-mail from [Talking Heads star] David Byrne in your inbox.”

When *Just Another Diamond Day* was released in 1969 to virtually no commercial response, Vashti Bunyan gave up writing and moved to the English countryside to live as a wife and a mother. Though she has been hailed as “the female Bob Dylan,” Bunyan remains remarkably humble. “I think what I’m doing now is what I ached to do back then. This really was what I wanted, and I didn’t manage it in any way, shape, or form. People talk about me coming back, but I’m not coming back. I’m starting over again.”

After a 30-year hiatus, Bunyan typed her name into an Internet search engine in 1996 to discover that artists such as Devendra Banhart, Andy Cabic (of Vetiver), and Animal Collective had discovered her album, long out of print, and considered it a lost classic. “I didn’t even have a copy of the tapes, but when I got my hands on them, I immediately set about a reissue,” Bunyan said. The reissue was critically acclaimed and led to Bunyan’s collaborations with Animal Collective and Banhart, about which Bunyan said, “I owe them a huge amount. Never mind me godmothering them. I owe them.”

While *Diamond Day* sounds almost childish in its blind idealism and hope for the future, Bunyan’s second

album, *Lookaftering* is an opus about motherhood, the past, and Bunyan’s love for her children. “I think on *Lookaftering*, it is more focused on my life and looking back on what happened, versus what is going to happen,” she said. “Certainly when I was making *Diamond Day*, I would never have thought there would be that gap or that there would be any difference between what I did then and what I’ve done now.”

Recounting her past, Bunyan said, “When I was kicked out of art school and moved here in the West Village, there was a record store, and *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* was there, and I just grabbed it, and I listened to it for just hours and hours. I, there and then, decided that this is what I wanted to do, to be this troubadour singer with a guitar on my back and go around singing my own songs.”

A woman who only pressed 100 copies of her first album “couldn’t expect to be a wild, runaway success,” Bunyan said, but now she looks to new artists as her inspiration and credits them and the changing musical landscape with keeping her optimistic.

“Through the Internet, there is room for everyone to be seen, to be heard. If you’re good, you will get through... And I think that has allowed for people to be more generous toward one another.”

Bunyan has strong commercial inclinations, as well, evident in her allowing “Diamond Days” to be featured in a T-Mobile advertisement last year. “I felt that, back in the day that I made *Diamond Day*, I wasn’t intending for it to be lost, obscured, precious, so when I got the chance for it to be used in an ad, I knew a lot of people wouldn’t like it, that they would feel it was selling the



VASHTI BUNYAN THE GODMOTHER TO ANIMAL COLLECTIVE AND BANHART’S MODERN FOLK

PHOTO BY TINA GAO

song away,” she said. “I really loved the fact that it had been rejected from the commercial world at first, but it made it worth it that now people were listening.”

As Bunyan took the stage last Friday at Carnegie Hall, she was far from a “trembling mess,” as she characterized herself. Tall and statuesque, she collaborated with Banhart, Scottish folk collective Adem, and Cabic in a truly mutual feat of musicality.

More than anything, *Lookaftering* is an album about memory.

“I think that a lot of what I’ve come to understand over these last couple years is how hard I would have found it to carry on music and look after my children,” Bunyan said. “And I wish it were possible for women to do that and not get so caught up in the domestic life, which is obviously what happened to me. My life was just completely taken over by *Lookingaftering* ... I’m glad that I was able to go back to what I’ve done before and to do it afterwards, but I know a lot of people don’t get that chance.” ■



GIRL TALK MASHING MAINSTREAM WITH THE OBSCURE AND REINVENTING DANCE MUSIC IN THE PROCESS.

COURTESY OF FANATIC PROMOTION

The Importance of Being Earnest

Girl Talk and the rediscovery of pop music

BY GEOFF AUNG

Laptops cannot experience loneliness, but if ever they could, Girl Talk’s Dell notebook, onstage before his performance at the Mercury Lounge, was as lonely as they come. Perched on a small table on an otherwise empty stage, it’s a small wonder that a concert—and one as complex as Girl Talk’s—was about to emerge from it. But as the opening Ciara sample filled the room, and Girl Talk (nee Greg Gillis) pushed his way to the stage

while moving more or less in those scenes, mines a much more consciously Top-40 aesthetic. Indeed, *Night Ripper*, Girl Talk’s third full-length, is a record that is littered with music that is very much pop: Biggie raps over Elton John, the Verve’s “Bittersweet Symphony” sidles up to Oasis, and, in the track “Too Deep” alone, Dr. Dre, Mariah Carey, Juelz, Aerosmith, Smashing Pumpkins, Phantom Planet, and Clipse all get intimate in a 2:29 stretch that somehow avoids both schizophrenia and banality.

Gillis emphasizes the pop element of his record while acknowledging the competing hip-hop and indie rock strains. He particularly bristles at critics who argue he uses the latter to sell an album about the former. “It’s not a hip-hop record, it’s a pop record,” he said. And when it comes to indie rock, he argued that he uses “so few” indie rock samples—and most people, he believes, overstate their importance. “85 percent of the samples are Top 40,” he says.

in a three-piece suit and orange sunglasses, the crowd was hardly prepared for the 90-minute performance accompanied by the shedding of layer after layer of sweaty clothing.

Gillis, a Pittsburgh-based DJ known best for his sample-heavy records, is not the first to shake the hips of hips not often shaken—a slew of other DJs and bands have been making music in the “dance music for indie rockers” vein. What sets Girl

Talk apart is that his music,

Despite his investment in *Night Ripper* as a pop project, Gillis seems to recognize, if only implicitly, his relationship with—and, furthermore, his commentary on—styles of music less likely to be on the radio. Though critics often associate Gillis with the likes of DJ Shadow and RJD2, he says, “I come from a bit more of an experimental background. You can understand underground music and not be the biggest fan.” On *Night Ripper*, unlike his two earlier efforts, this concern seems to manifest itself as an attention to accessibility.

These days, with Gillis famous for being “the guy who mashed up Biggie and ‘Tiny Dancer,’” Girl Talk’s experimental roots can be difficult to acknowledge. Gillis seems eager, though, to make known his fairly “unpop” beginnings.

In high school, Gillis played in a noise band heavily influenced by Merzbow and the Boredoms. “Once that band ended,” he says, “I got a laptop for the first time in my life.” And so flowed the creative juices.

But true to his traditional approach to music, Gillis hasn’t given up on being in a band.

“It would be cool,” he says, “to have a band just based on recontextualizing pop music. Back then I was focused on making weird music ... My interest in that scene has faded a bit.”

Night Ripper, then, begins to look—and, ultimately, sound—like Gillis’ honest discovery of pop music. “From about 2004 to 2006,” he says, “I was getting into more pop music, just straight-up dance music.”

The result is a pop record that bears the marks, however vague, of an experimental sensibility—a record infused with all the giddy delight of a one-time noise rocker finally finding his dancing shoes.

The lonely laptop, avatar of a music democratizing its own production, is not at all alone. “Music,” Gillis says with some finality, “is finally coming back to the people.” ■



Drink Powerade
New study at Extreme Thirst Insitute calls it "The Drink of Champions."



Strike Up the Band
Band goes on strike.

Wild \$ex at Poi\$on Ivy Anarcho-fa\$ci\$t\$ \$tudy porn and \$ubterfuge

BY JIMMY VIELKIND

Maybe they should call it the hard-core curriculum.

The latest discovery in Fox News' ongoing investigation of the out-of-control anarcho-fascist liberal-jihadists that populate Columbia University's New York City campus is the pornography and left-wing propaganda forced down the throats of any Columbia College student with the audacity to demand a degree.

In a course called "Masterpieces of Western Literature," entering students are forced to read about anal sex in a book by Giovanni Boccaccio called *The Decameron*, lesbian political domination in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and even bestiality in *The Golden Ass*, by Apuleius.

In one book, students are given detailed instructions—which could easily fall into the hands of America's enemies—about stealing pears from privately held trees.

"It's just out of control," said Philip Southmorestone III, CC '08. "I didn't even know I had a penis until I read about the ancient Greeks, and the things they did with them I had no idea you could do, let alone with a goat."

Southmorestone III was found by Fox News to be an accurate representative of all undergraduate opinions after an ex-

haustive survey of the student body. He may or may not be an active leader in several mainstream and popular student groups like the Columbia University College Republicans.

A spokesman for Columbia University confirmed the syllabus when confronted by Fox News, but claimed that the texts were "a foundational part of Western ... Civilization" and a "decades-old tradition that sets us apart from those bitches at NYU."

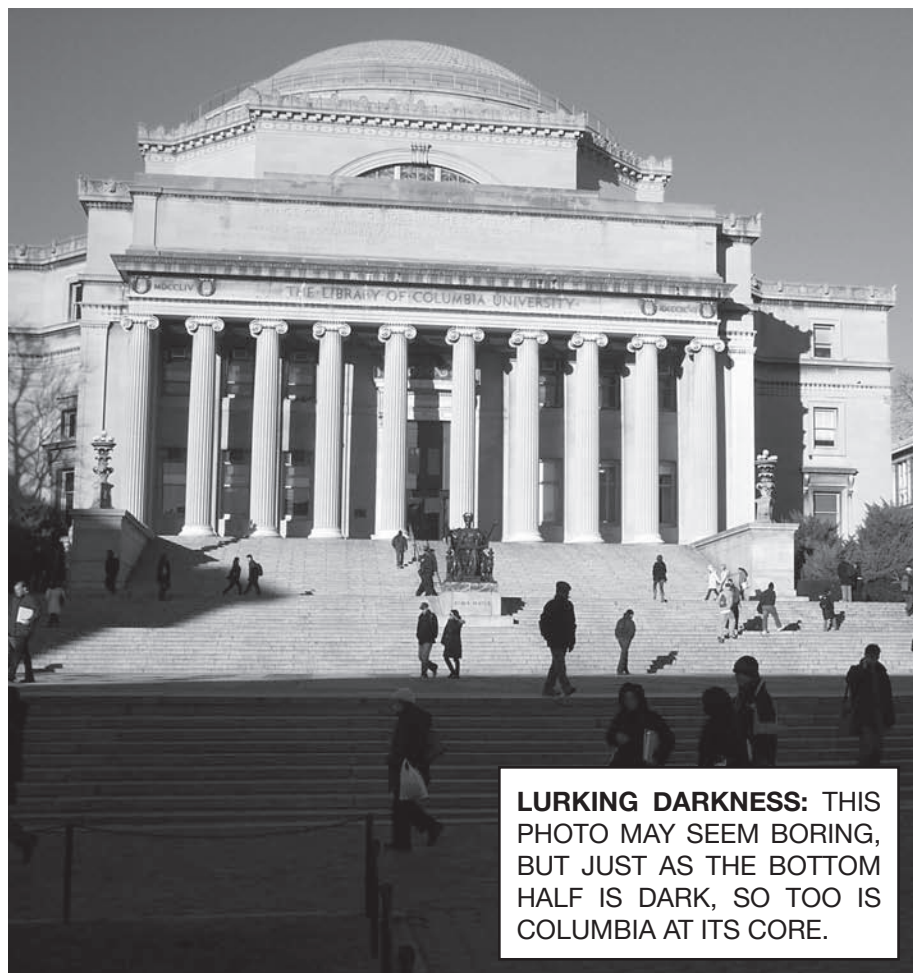
When asked if exposing students to such pornography has contributed to the sexual free-for-all on campus, University President Lee C. Bollinger replied: "Duh. Reading ... pornography ... is important to to fulfilling our mission as the emerging Global ... University."

He continued: "Wait, you're a reporter? What are you doing in my home?"

The seemingly uncontrollable students drew a sharp rebuke from noted social commentators.

"Where I went to school, Cornell, the closest the co-eds come to sex was milking the cows," said Ann Coulter, a Fox News commentator, before blowing away in a light breeze.

But arguably more dangerous than



LURKING DARKNESS: THIS PHOTO MAY SEEM BORING, BUT JUST AS THE BOTTOM HALF IS DARK, SO TOO IS COLUMBIA AT ITS CORE.

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the pornography is the political sedition force-fed to sophomores. An extensive review of the required syllabus for a class called "Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West" found pro-terrorist texts like the *Communist Manifesto*, the scientifically discredited *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, by Charles Darwin, and some texts that Fox News was unable to obtain but which likely contain jihadist thought written by one "Al-Ghazali."

"How can you learn about politics without reading any books written by Americans and only 90 percent written by white men?" demanded Chas Whitridge Williams, CC '09, who said he plans to transfer to Brown University in search of

"old-fashioned American values."

(Editors note: Williams overlooked the fact that one of the required texts, the Bible, was written by God. An American.)

In one seditious excerpt, French anti-American Jean Jacques Rousseau lays the groundwork for the axis of evil, saying "man is born free and everywhere is in chains."

This report is the latest in breathtaking revelations by Fox News that Columbia students have had thoughts about sex, voting for Democrats, and granting equal rights to women and minorities.

The network was unable to confirm reports of anal sex in Columbia's library, but several students—even co-eds—were overheard by an undercover reporter talking about "going to the But." ■

GRE PREP

BY GILAD LANDAN

Try your luck with this authentic question from the GRE!*

How much do you love your adopted child?

- A. As much as two dogs minus Grandpa
- B. Less than anticipated
- C. Exactly two-thirds as much as a regular child
- D. I'd love her more if she didn't stutter
- E. Adopted?
- F. I just wish we looked the same

*Not an authentic question from the GRE.

ANSWER: B

- 3 oz. Absolut Pear vodka
- 1 oz. Midori
- 1 organic pear

Directions

Shake with ice, strain into martini glass. Slice organic pear into thin wedges, and garnish drink in circular form to make it look like a beautiful Japanese flower.

-Courtesy of Chas Carey



An Inorganic Truth

Official standards frequently fail to meet consumers' expectations

BY LAURA ANDERSON

When you see the word "organic," what comes to mind? For many, the word conjures images of rolling green pastures on small family farms, chickens brightly clucking as they roam free-range, and orchards brimming with fresh, crisp apples. People buy organic foods, believing them to be healthier for both the earth and the consumer.

But after last year's publication of Michael Pollan's best-seller *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, which painted a picture of organic corporations that increasingly resemble the industrial food chain in scope and in environmental effect, and the recent E. coli outbreak stemming from bagged organic spinach, consumers are beginning to think twice about organic foods and to question whether "organic" is all it's cracked up to be.

Until 2002, when the 1990 Organic Foods Production Act's final compliance deadline went into effect, the word "organic" had no definition under the law. Today, the United States Department of Agriculture regulates the use of the term "organic." Organic produce must be grown without pesticides (unless given express permission by the USDA, in certain circumstances), synthetic fertilizers, or radiation. Land must go through a three-year process of fertility-building in order to achieve organic status. Organic meat, eggs, and milk must come from animals raised on organic feed. Animals may not be given antibiotics or hormones. Packaged food products may be labeled "organic" if 95 percent of their ingredients are organic, and packaging may state "made with organic ingredients" if at least 70 percent of ingredients meet organic standards.

Julie Raskin, CC '08, president of CoreFoods, Columbia's organic food co-op, says that the environment is the main reason her group promotes organic foods. "This is the same reason we try to buy products that are locally produced—so as to cut down on 'food miles,' or using extra energy to transport food from far away when we can get it from sources close by," Raskin said.

However, not all organic foods are locally produced, which means that a food labeled "organic" might actually leave a negative mark on the environment due to the fossil fuels burned to transport it across the country or around the globe. Furthermore, as Pollan reports in his book, organic produce is often grown on large-scale farms that deplete the soil and burn fossil fuels during packaging. Organic farms may do damage on another level, as well. Organic cattle and chickens are often crammed into the same, small, less-than-humane feedlots that typify the industrial food chain. It's a far cry from the stereotype of the organic family farm.

Another aspect of the Organic Rule—the handling standards that forbid commingling between organic and conventional produce—is contro-

versial for another reason. Detractors find these standards arbitrarily stringent and helpful only to major, high-volume organic groceries, like Whole Foods. The standards mean that grocers cannot use the same bins for organic and conventional produce, that organic and conventional items must be stored in separate locations, and that if a customer takes an organic apple to checkout and then decides she doesn't want it, it can no longer be sold as organic.

"At a coffee shop, you're supposed to have a separate roaster, a separate grinder, and a separate coffeemaker from conventional coffee," says Nora Bryant, a first-year Columbia Law student who worked at Whole Foods in Austin, Texas, for over three years. Whole Foods boasts on its Web site about its role in getting the organic legislation passed, but Bryant suspects that the company's motives for wanting exceptionally strict handling rules weren't entirely pure. "It's a money-making scheme. ... [Whole Foods] wanted additional measures that people had to go through so smaller stores wouldn't present competition," she says.

Farmers, too, must jump through bureaucratic hoops to meet organic standards, and some simply choose to ignore them. "We're not organic, we're low-pesticide," says Craig Acton, a vendor and farmer for Stannard Farm, which sells its produce at a Greenmarket stand at 115th Street and Broadway on Thursdays and Sundays. "If it were all organic, we'd all starve because it's so labor intensive," he says, citing blight, an inability to use fungicide, and a need for frequent sprayings as problems facing the organic farmer. "You can't even use black plastic because it's all made out of petroleum," he said. Acton says that once he explains his farming methods, customers are rarely upset that Stannard's produce isn't certified organic. "Apples, once they get golf-ball sized, they never get sprayed again, so [pesticides] are pretty much gone" by the time you buy them, he says.

Does it bother him that Stannard's produce cannot legally be called organic, when foods grown and sold by huge corporations are? Acton shrugs. "One way or another, [the government is] going to be in control," he says. "They already have their hands in it." ■

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Pre-concert talk at 7 PM with Walter Frisch,
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This concert is funded, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts.

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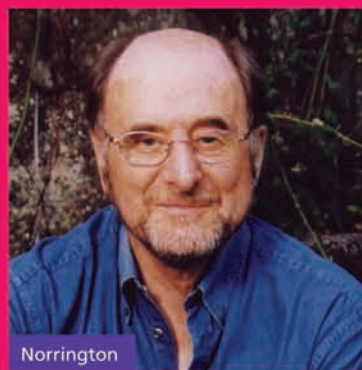
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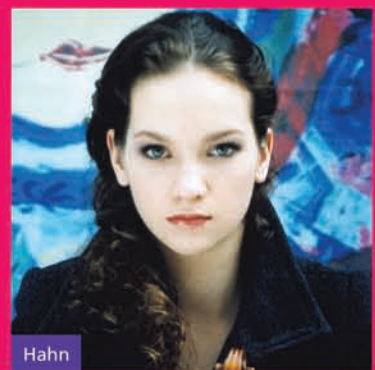
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