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THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



OUR COLUMNISTS

Jay Caspian Kang on a Mandarin-immersion school that is drawing families from across the Bay Area.



THE NEW YORKER INTERVIEW

Carrie Battan and Ramy Youssef discuss jokes that "touch the stove" and the third season of "Ramy."

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LEFT: ANUJ SHRESTHA; RIGHT: KHOLOOD EID

THE MAIL

FOOD NETWORKS

Carolyn Kormann's profile of the Oglala Lakota chef Sean Sherman and his restaurant, Owamni, captures the chef's character, many of his influences and sources of inspiration, and numerous facts about the mistreatment of Indigenous people ("Tribe to Table," September 19th). But I was puzzled by the article's omission of any mention of Beth Dooley, the co-author of Sherman's cookbook, "The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen." Dooley has authored or co-authored eight cookbooks that celebrate local, sustainable foods and their producers; like Sherman, she believes that eating well and eating locally are one and the same.

Brian Nerney
St. Paul, Minn.

Kormann mentions that, in the nineteenth century, a "government-funded campaign to kill buffalo herds" drove the species nearly to extinction. It bears noting that it was ultimately the industrial harvesting of buffalo hides, which took place toward the end of the century, that wiped out the buffalo. Between 1871 and 1883, commercial hunters exterminated perhaps eight to ten million bison. They destroyed the herds of western Kansas between 1871 and 1874, those of western Texas between 1875 and 1879, and those of eastern Montana between 1880 and 1883. The hunters took only the hides, for which there was a lucrative market, as they were used to make machinery drive belts for Eastern and European factories.

Richard Edwards
Director Emeritus
Center for Great Plains Studies
University of Nebraska
Denver, Colo.

MY ADVENTURE BOOKS

I much enjoyed reading Leslie Jamison's delightful article on the Choose Your Own Adventure books, which were based on my original concept ("Now What?," September 19th). I received many laudatory comments about it from friends and family members, but I was bothered by one line, and wondered if I should tell her. Like readers of my books, I had to make a choice:

Don't tell her. As you've told everybody, when you met Leslie, the two of you got along swimmingly. Why risk impairing good feelings?

Tell her. Why would you be reluctant? Leslie is a real pro and a terrific writer. She probably welcomes well-intentioned criticism.

Decision: Tell her.

My first book, "Sugarcane Island," was not "a story full of branching paths recounting Pete's adventures on a remote island," as the article states. Although Pete was a character in bedtime stories that I made up, the protagonist of "Sugarcane Island" was you, the reader, and the paths you took, leading to multiple endings, depended upon your decisions. As such, this book was the exact prototype for the books in Bantam's original Choose Your Own Adventure series.

Edward Packard
Durango, Colo.

SHALL WE DANCE?

I was grateful for Hilton Als's considerate piece about David Bowie and the documentary "Moonage Daydream" (A Critic at Large, September 19th). But it strikes me as a bit of revisionism to say that Bowie's three nineteen-seventies releases with Brian Eno could "make us move"! At the time, these records were overlooked by much of Bowie's fan base; "Low" and "Heroes" were given little attention other than by New Wave fans. They were definitely beloved by a subset of people, but many of those people just sat and listened to their incredible soundscapes. In terms of invitations to movement, they can't compare to "Let's Dance."

Jeff Wiseman
Toronto, Ont.

•

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



When **Sheku Kanneh-Mason**—a cellist of blazing sensitivity, who catapulted to stardom when he performed at Harry and Meghan's wedding—comes to Carnegie Hall's largest stage for the first time, on Oct. 22, he'll play one of his favorite pieces: Elgar's Cello Concerto, a work that rises and falls grandly in the expression of intimate feeling. "It's an incredibly personal piece of music," Kanneh-Mason said recently. "The interaction between myself and the orchestra is often very conversational, and it's important to have that active relationship for the music to be alive."

PHOTOGRAPH BY LOLA & PANI

As ever, it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

ART

"Aubrey Beardsley, 150 Years Young"

This jewel box of an exhibition at the Grolier Club, an oasis for bibliophiles, founded in 1884, offers an intimate view of the eccentric, erotic, and devilishly satirical illustrations of Beardsley, a British enfant terrible, who died from tuberculosis, in 1898, at the age of twenty-five. (The show's curators, Mark Samuels Lasner and Margaret D. Stetz, are both associated with the University of Delaware, which loaned most of the material.) The decadent artist, an early influence on Art Nouveau, benefitted from his association with Oscar Wilde: Beardsley's exquisitely macabre drawings, inspired by Japanese woodblock prints, accompanied the writer's play "Salomé." The relationship between the artist and the author was contentious, however; the show includes Beardsley's caricature "Oscar Wilde at Work," published in 1914, which portrays the dandyish wit as a slovenly hack. And the homophobic prosecution of Wilde for "gross indecency," in 1895, had consequences for Beardsley as well. He was fired as the art editor of the storied London quarterly *The Yellow Book*—for which he created eyebrow-raising cover art—based on his association with the disgraced playwright. Several copies of that vintage publication are on view among the seventy seldom seen works of art and related ephemera in this wonderful show, accompanied by beautifully written wall text—another rarity.—*Johanna Fateman (Grolier Club; through Nov. 12.)*

"Cataclysm: The 1972 Diane Arbus Retrospective Revisited"

Fifty years ago, a posthumous retrospective broke attendance records for a one-person show at the Museum of Modern Art. Crowds lined up around the block to see a hundred and thirteen black-and-white pictures shot by Diane Arbus, a relative unknown whose brilliance was already an open secret among her peers. (Before she took her own life, in 1971, at the age of forty-eight, Arbus had few collectors, but they included Richard Avedon, Jasper Johns, and Mike Nichols.) The exhibition generated both rave reviews and hot takes; dissecting Susan Sontag's scathing essay "Freak Show," published in 1973, is now almost an academic subgenre unto itself. The images are reunited here, accompanied by the new publication "Diane Arbus: Documents," a doorstop scrapbook that reproduces a half century's worth of writing about an artist who, as Avedon once observed, "made the act of looking an act of such intelligence, that to look at so-called ordinary things is to become responsible for what you see."—*Andrea K. Scott (Zwirner; through Oct. 22.)*

"Hear Me Now: The Black Potters of Old Edgefield, South Carolina"

In 2010, the contemporary artist Theaster Gates paid tribute, via an exhibition and a gospel choir, to Dave the Potter, an enslaved ceramist—whose name was later recorded as David Drake—working in a clay-rich region of South Carolina in the early nineteenth century. Underscoring the importance of such potters to the art-historical record of the African diaspora, this revelatory exhibition of Drake and his fellow-potters, at the Met, features works by contemporary Black artists (Gates, Abedunmi Gbadedo, and Simone Leigh among them), although they don't take center stage. Drake's enormous storage vessels, which greet visitors at the entrance to the exhibition, are remarkable both for their size and for the moving couplets of poetry that he etched into them. ("I wonder where is all my relation / Friendship to all—and every nation," one, from 1857, reads.) The show beyond these tremendous vessels is rich with lessons about regional stoneware manufacturing, although much information (notably, the identities of the Southern potters who made them) went unrecorded by the white owners of the stoneware factories. One of the show's highlights is a selection of face jugs, a form whose emergence in South Carolina coincided with the arrival of abducted Africans on a ship in 1858—after the slave trade was outlawed—many of whom were sent to work in Edgefield potteries. The genre's resemblance to ritual objects, known as *minkisi*, is a testament to the flourishing of African aesthetics and craft during slavery.—*J.F. (Metropolitan Museum of Art; through Feb. 5.)*

"Morris Hirshfield Rediscovered"

In 1942, in a now legendary event that introduced New York to Surrealism, André Breton and Marcel Duchamp installed the startling painting "Girl with Pigeons" in a midtown mansion. The picture, of a supine blonde in a blue dress floating on a red divan, was

ON TELEVISION



ILLUSTRATION BY CARMEN CASADO

Nineties nostalgia is all the rage these days, but there are few series that capture the grungy, lo-fi, often laconic feeling that accompanied pre-Internet teen-age life as well as **"High School,"** a new Amazon Freevee original drama, from the showrunners Clea DuVall and Laura Kittrell. Based on the best-selling memoir of the same name, by the twin musicians Tegan and Sara Quin, the show sweetly unfolds the story of two nearly identical sisters as they navigate the dingy hallways of a Canadian high school, taking divergent paths toward self-discovery. Sara (Seazynn Gilliland) has begun a clandestine romance with her best friend, Phoebe (Olivia Rouyre), a fact that she keeps from her sister for as long as possible; Tegan (Railey Gilliland), feeling alienated and confused, falls in with a partying crowd. Though the twins' sororal bond begins to loosen, they remain bound by a passionate love of music. (The show opens with the sisters glued to a television interview with Björk.) We know that ultimately they will reunite to form a band—but not before they come of age on their own. The show can feel like a slow burn, but it also has the same coziness and gentle angst that made "My So-Called Life" a cult hit. It wears like a baggy wool cardigan.—*Rachel Syme*

by a Polish American retiree named Morris Hirshfield, a former tailor and slipper designer who had been painting for only five years—with such success that the first two pieces he ever made hung at MOMA, in 1939, just a few months after they were completed. A headline-making figure in life (as reviled by the press as he was admired by the avant-garde), Hirshfield has languished in art's lost and found since his death, in 1946. This abundant show rescues the master of pictorial patterning from obscurity, as does a definitive new book, a labor of love by the show's curator, Richard Meyer (with vital research by Susan Davidson). Whether Hirshfield is painting a nude woman, a family of zebras, or a parliamentary building, realism is beside the point. His subjects are ornamental, so highly stylized—static, hypnotic—that paint on canvas performs as beads, trim, and pompoms once did on his patented slippers, a delightful selection of which have been re-created by the artist Liz Blahd for the exhibition.—*A.K.S. (American Folk Art Museum; through Jan. 29.)*

Wolfgang Tillmans

MOMA's immense, flabbergastingly installed retrospective of the German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans, titled "To See Without Fear," persuades me that the man is a genius. There's a downside to the concession—it dampens my quarrels of taste with certain items, among the show's predominantly brilliant several hundred, that I do not like. Geniuses alter the basic terms of their fields; criteria that once applied no longer compel. The ground zero at MOMA is "art photography," its former autonomy diluted in a tsunami of images, in wildly varying sizes, mediums, and formats, which are often mounted from floor to ceiling, and may less risk than exalt banality. Tillmans observes no distinction, in the show's arrangement, between self-generated and commissioned works, original and appropriated images, framed fine prints and taped- or pinned-up photocopies, deliberate and accidental darkroom misadventures, and, in matters of content, the politically committed and the purely aesthetic. The fifty-four-year-old artist soared to fame, in the early nineties, for his ostensibly scattershot but, in truth, acutely selective documentation of soulful youths whom he encountered on night-life outings, in Berlin and London. His party scenes are like panes of glass dropped through the middle of symbioses: beholding them, you are at once viewer and viewed. This body of work put Tillmans on the art-world map, but he has somewhat downplayed it in his choices for the present show, perhaps from exasperation at being lazily identified with a fleeting Zeitgeist that determined only the opening gambit for a game that he has conducted in no end of other directions.—*Peter Schjeldahl (Museum of Modern Art; through Jan. 1.)*

AT THE GALLERIES



Since 2016, the American artist **Zoe Leonard** has taken hundreds of photographs at the border of Mexico and the U.S., following the route of a body of water that divides the two countries for twelve thousand miles, known alternately as the Río Bravo and the Rio Grande (and by at least five ancestral names, in Pueblo and Navajo). The exquisitely installed exhibition "Excerpts from 'Al río / To the River,'" on view at Hauser & Wirth through Oct. 29, offers only a glimpse of Leonard's epic project—ten works consisting of fifty-six black-and-white pictures, hanging singly and in sequences on the walls—but it conveys her rare balancing act of poetics and politics. You might call Leonard's approach concerned conceptualism, as seen in a quartet of near-abstractions portraying lines raked in dirt, a tactic used by ICE to capture the footprints of migrants. These striations are echoed in five views of irrigation canals, attended by flocks of birds (above, in an untitled detail, dated 2020/2022). Leonard's quiet vistas run counter to sensationalist media coverage of borderland conflict. Her camera lingers on landscape, not people, who appear in only six images here, as distant figures enjoying a day at the beach on a riverbank in Ciudad Juárez, under the omnipresent eye of surveillance apparatus.—*Andrea K. Scott*

PODCASTS

Seek Treatment

Do you ever wish your therapist would loosen up and crack a joke, for once? For help processing this feeling, you might turn to "Seek Treatment," a podcast hosted by the comedians and best friends Catherine Cohen (whose special "The Twist. . . ? She's Gorgeous" premièred on Netflix earlier this year) and Pat Regan (a writer for HBO's "Hacks"). They delve into topics that you'd typically discuss with your psychologist—especially those touted in the tagline, "a podcast about boys, sex, fucking, dating, *and* love"—in interviews with fellow comics and writers, including Jo Firestone, Bowen Yang, and Naomi Ekperigin. Cohen and Regan maintain an artful, at times manic, balance between earnest conversations about addiction and eating disorders and nostalgic banter involving, say, the cruelly medieval nature of three-ring binders and the whimsical shape of a TiVo remote. If these chats don't leave you feeling like you've received the treatment you need, Regan's contagious laughter, for which there is no cure, and Cohen's spontaneous, melodic crooning of the "7th Heaven" theme song may help soothe your sorrows.—*Khiara Ortiz*

THE THEATRE

Cost of Living

The two best scenes in Martyna Majok's play—which won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for drama after its Off Broadway début, and is now revived on Broadway, under the direction of Jo Bonney, for Manhattan Theatre Club—come one after the other, toward the middle of the show. In one, a young first-time caretaker named Jess (Kara Young) chats revealingly with her client, John (Gregg Mozgala), a wealthy young Princeton graduate student with cerebral palsy. Between flurries of talk, Jess moves John choreographically: into the shower, where she washes him, then back into his wheelchair, where she dresses

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OFF BROADWAY

The Scottish director John Doyle came to prominence with his stripped-down, deconstructed revivals of Sondheim musicals, before becoming the artistic director of the East Village gem Classic Stage Company, in 2016. He concludes his eight-year tenure with a remounting of **"A Man of No Importance"** (in previews, opening Oct. 30), a 2002 musical by Lynn Ahrens, Stephen Flaherty, and the late Terrence McNally. Set in Dublin, in 1964, it tells the story of Alfie, a humble bus driver who runs an amateur theatre troupe in a church. His decision to stage Oscar Wilde's "Salomé" scandalizes the clergy and forces Alfie to reckon with his own thwarted homosexuality. Jim Parsons stars as Alfie, with Mare Winningham as his sister, Lily.—*Michael Schulman*



and shaves him. In the second, a big, flawed man named Eddie (David Zayas) tenderly bathes his wife, Ani (Katy Sullivan), who has recently become quadriplegic after a car accident. Both pairs carry rich freight—work, intimacy, the total frailty of the body. The play moves elegantly and works just fine, but these tense twentyish minutes make the rest seem like throat-clearing.—*Vinson Cunningham (Samuel J. Friedman; through Nov. 6.)*

Dodi & Diana

A young married couple—Samira (Rosaline Elbay), an up-and-coming Egyptian American actress, and Jason (Peter Mark Kendall), a white Canadian investment banker—spend three increasingly fraught days in their room at the Ritz Paris, the hotel where, twenty-five years earlier, Diana Spencer and Dodi Fayed dined immediately before the car crash that killed them. They've checked in under the exacting instructions of Jason's astrologer, a far too influential presence in their lives, who has convinced him, at least, that the pair are Spencer and Fayed's "astrological doubles," and that a life-changing "convergence" awaits them when Jupiter completes its transit. In this play, directed by Adrienne Campbell-Holt, for Colt Coeur, the intriguingly odd premise occasions a tense, engrossing, and astute study of the mysteries of a marriage; the playwright, Kareem Fahmy, demonstrates a particular skill at doling out insightful nuggets.—*Rollo Romig (HERE; through Oct. 29.)*

Everything's Fine

Directed by John Lithgow, the writer and film director Douglas McGrath performs a droll and gentle memoir of his childhood in Midland, Texas, an experience he likens to "growing up inside a blow-dryer full of dirt." After a few scene-setting anecdotes about his father's glass eye and his mother's friendship with a pre-fame Andy Warhol, he arrives at the show's centerpiece: an extended narrative about his eighth-grade history teacher's outright obsession with him, one that drove her to leave increasingly inappropriate notes, drafted on stationery, in his middle-school locker. The tone is primarily comic, and McGrath does his best to extract wisdom from the tale, but it mostly feels inexplicable and sad.—*R.R. (DR2; through Jan. 22.)*

Leopoldstadt

In Tom Stoppard's "Leopoldstadt," we see the Merzes and the Jakoboviczes, two intermarried and interfaith Viennese families, in five different years—1899, 1900, 1924, 1938, and, at last, 1955. The action all takes place in one apartment, which dwindles from a glittering, golden, crowded peak to the terrible bleak emptiness of post-Holocaust absence. In each section, there are characters who turn to or away from Jewishness, looking for belonging or tradition or safety. (There is, of course, no safety.) Plots and generations rush past, and Stoppard's dramaturgy-of-interruption delays and avoids emotional connection. Could this awkwardness be deliberate? Perhaps it's meant to emphasize the grief of the final scene, in which a Stoppard avatar learns how many of his cousins and aunts and grandparents died in the camps. Yet much of what's most moving about "Leopoldstadt" is not onstage in Patrick Marber's inelegant production: instead, it's in the reading that the play persuades you to do, the memories of other Stoppard pieces, and the knowledge (gleaned from interviews and his biography) of the playwright's actual revelation, when he was fifty-six, that his mother had kept secret the extent of his family's suffering.—*Helen Shaw (Reviewed in our issue of 10/17/22.) (Longacre; open run.)*

peerless

Jiehae Park's vicious high-school reimagining of "Macbeth" ("Heathers" meets "Teenage Dick") searches for Shakespeare's "vaulting ambition" and finds it in the college-application process. A pair of twins, M and L (Sasha Diamond and Shannon Tyo), have sacrificed much to get M accepted into their dream school, strategically holding L back a year, even exploiting their teachers' tendency to confuse them. ("We're Asian." "It's like double hard for white people.") When they're stymied by a fellow-student (Benny Wayne Sully, going for broke) and heckled by a witchy classmate (Marié Botha), they turn to more sinister tactics, as does the playwright: teen suicide, ableist slurs, and lethal allergies become Park's bleak comic fodder. The director, Margot Bordelon, never misses; this show, for Primary Stages, is another of her beautifully performed, pop-literate productions, but although Park's rapid-fire twin-speak text is initially thrilling, the exigencies of plotting soon overwhelm its tartest point—that teaching children to weaponize their own identities puts the culture in a damnable, or, rather, damned, spot.—*H.S. (59E59; through Nov. 6.)*

The Piano Lesson

LaTanya Richardson Jackson's star-studded Broadway revival of August Wilson's exquisite play is, not to mince words, magnificent. She has known this Pulitzer Prize-winning text since its première, at the Yale Repertory Theatre, in 1987, when her husband, Samuel L. Jackson, originated the character of Boy Willie; there are moments in this thrilling production (which again stars Jackson, this time as Doaker, one of the play's elders) when she seems to have known it in some deeper, stranger way even before that. John David Washington plays Boy Willie, the astonishing Danielle Brooks is his sister, Berniece, and Jackson and Michael Potts (both in incredible form) play the feuding siblings' uncles. The setting is Pittsburgh, 1936; at issue is whether to sell an elaborately carved piano that contains (both artistically and supernaturally) the suffering of their enslaved ancestors. To escape a wound or to treasure it? Balance, measure, the weighing of excellence and opposites—"The Piano Lesson" contains these in its smallest and its largest gestures. Despite Wilson himself putting his thumb on the scale (his sympathies clearly lie with Boy Willie), the production has, by casting the charismatic Brooks, evened out the argument.—*H.S. (Barrymore; through Jan. 15.)*

MUSIC

Mary J. Blige

R. & B. Mary J. Blige earned her moniker as the Queen of Hip-Hop Soul in the nineties, after a series of successful collaborations with Sean Combs, Chucky Thompson, and Rodney (Darkchild) Jerkins, among others. Together, they closed the distance between the emergent rap genre and classic blues songcraft, reimagining popular music in the process. Her early songs—built around her earthy voice and the

ILLUSTRATION BY SHANE CLUSKEY





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pragmatism seemingly inherent to her performances—helped lay the groundwork for most contemporary R. & B., and she's since become an unobtrusive figure within a construct that she shaped. The music Blige makes in middle age, including her most recent album, "Good Morning Gorgeous," constantly seeks that same sense of equilibrium—a near-perfect fusion of nascent and vintage ideas.—*Sheldon Pearce (Barclays Center; Oct. 20.)*

Brooklyn Folk Festival

FOLK Through the years, the Gowanus Canal has swallowed untold pollutants, an unhealthy share of beer cans, and the occasional ill-starred body. Once per annum, its waters also make the acquaintance of a funny-looking instrument, hurled into the canal as part of the Brooklyn Folk Festival's most whimsical tradition—its fabled banjo toss. The attraction embodies this homespun festival, launched in 2009 at the Jalopy Theatre and since uprooted to loftier quarters. Returning to full blast from pandemic purgatory, this year's edition presents folk in its many hues, encompassing children's songs from Dan and Claudia Zanes, country blues from Jerron Paxton, and even Chinese traditional work, from Ba Ban Chinese Music Society. The renaissance folkie John Cohen, who served as a patron saint to the festival before his death, in 2019, is fêted through song as well as through documentary screenings. The finale brings the charismatic Louisville singer Bonnie "Prince" Billy, who, like the Brooklyn Folk Festival itself, is a little reverential and a little brash—a human banjo toss.—*Jay Ruttenberg (St. Ann & the Holy Trinity; Oct. 20-23.)*

Dungen: "En Är För Mycket och Tusen Aldrig Nog"

ROCK For two decades, the studio output of the Swedish neo-psychedelic rockers Dungen has been largely the work of the singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist Gustav Ejstes. But, even when his bandmates sit them out, the recordings somehow feel spontaneous and interactive—like human beings listening carefully to one another. A gentle spirit pervades "En Är För Mycket och Tusen Aldrig Nog," despite guitars and drums revving into firework-like climaxes, with Ejstes's foggy, conversational croon grounding the music as it reaches for the cosmic.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Streaming on select platforms.)*

Essential Tremors

ROCK In March, Angus Andrew, the commander of the veteran band Liars and of the newly launched label No Gold, organized a festival in his native Australia, featuring a three-day heap of the slanted and the obscure. Now the musician introduces a slightly pared-down version of the event, Essential Tremors, to Queens. Like Liars, who are among the headliners, the acts selected by Andrew are astute students of bug-eyed noise, be it maniacal (the long-running Japanese band Melt-Banana) or meditative (the composer Faten Kanaan). Often, the sounds engulf every corner of a room—witness Los Angeles's scruffily majestic No Age, a duo that evokes an army. But at other times it's the space between notes that unsettles, as in the work of YL Hooi, an Australian pop minimalist who makes her New York début with spectral, poignant songs that feel disconcertingly hollow.—*J.R. (Knockdown Center; Oct. 21.)*

Jon Faddis Big Band: "Gillespiana"

JAZZ Every modern trumpeter since the postwar era has been influenced by Dizzy Gillespie, the musical polymath who practically invented bebop with Charlie Parker. But none has so absorbed his essence as Jon Faddis, who soaked up artfulness at the feet of the master. To celebrate the late Gillespie's hundred-and-fifth birthday, Faddis leads a large ensemble in a performance of "Gillespiana," an ambitious 1958 composition by Lalo Schifrin—who, years before he wrote the "Mission: Impossible" theme, was a pianist in Gillespie's band. The five-part opus, originally recorded in 1960, touches on Gillespie's expansive embrace of idioms, including his passion for Latin music. Scored for expanded brass and percussion sections (but excluding a reed consort), the ambitious piece provides sufficient room for Faddis's conspicuous bravura and high-note wizardry.—*Steve Futterman (Dizzy's Club; Oct. 21-22.)*

92nd Street Y, New York

CLASSICAL With a new name and a new abbreviation, the 92nd Street Y, New York (92NY), promises a season that cuts across musical genres. With such a broad mission, some programming inevitably skews toward lighter fare—including the violinist Joshua Bell's opening-night concert with his wife, the soprano Larisa Martínez (Oct. 20)—but there are also more serious-minded offerings, such as the bass-baritone Eric Owens in Brahms's "Neue Liebeslieder," for vocal quartet (Oct. 25); the Berlin Philharmonic's staggeringly good principal flutist, Emmanuel Pahud (Nov. 15); and the pianist Angela Hewitt, alongside the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, in Bach keyboard concertos (Nov. 17). Jessica Vosk inaugurates a series for Broadway singers, with the California folk pop of Joni Mitchell and the Mamas and the Papas (Nov. 5-7).—*Oussama Zahr*

Santigold: "Spirituals"

POP Given that performing has become a key means of remuneration for musicians in the digital age, it says nothing good about the music biz that Santigold aborted her tour just before it was scheduled to kick off, this month, citing the road's unsustainability for mid-tier artists. The singer, now a wife and a mom, has built her career on expressing perseverance and resolve. But there's no mistaking the unease at the opening of "Spirituals," Santigold's first album in six years. "It's my life . . . but I'm outside it like I'm a passenger," she sings on "My Horror," her gauzy falsetto simultaneously haunted by viscous synth textures and sweetened by ukulele-like strumming atop one of the Caribbean-inspired lilts that pervade the album. Santigold's sensibility, however, is too cheeky for ceaseless brooding. By the closer—the raucous guitar pop of "Fall First"—she's contemplating Heaven and a dance floor, even if, for now, the party is being thrown from the sanctity of her and her children's bedrooms.—*K. Leander Williams (Streaming on select platforms.)*

NEO-SUFI



The Pakistani composer and vocalist **Arooj Aftab** named her third album, "Vulture Prince," after the fearsome bird known to subsist on the dead—an allegory, she explains, for folklore. With her balm-like songs of longing, rooted in acoustic minimalism and Urdu lyrics, Aftab is now creating her own legend and unorthodox stardom. At the 2022 Grammy Awards, this singer of ghazals was nominated in the Best New Artist category, in company with Olivia Rodrigo and Baby Keem, a heartening ascent following her decade and a half in the New York jazz and new-music scenes. On Oct. 19, Aftab plays a free show at Symphony Space, in a trio that includes the harpist Maeve Gilchrist and the guitarist Gyan Riley, alongside whom her music flies.—*Jenn Pelly*

DANCE

Fouad Boussouf

The Moroccan-born, Marseille-based choreographer and his Compagnie Massala make their début at the Joyce. Inspired by the

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AT THE BALLET



Amid the cluster of ballets in **American Ballet Theatre's** fall season (Oct. 20-30, at the David H. Koch Theatre)—which includes the spirited "The Seasons," by the house choreographer Alexei Ratmansky, and a new work by Christopher Rudd, designed to showcase the company's Black dancers—there is a gem that should not be overlooked. It is Frederick Ashton's "The Dream," based on Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream." It premièred at the Royal Opera House in 1964, and at A.B.T. in 2002. Not only is the music, by Mendelssohn, full of magic, like the plot, but Ashton's fantasia contains some of the most delightful choreography—intricate, funny, plush, and, at times, extraordinarily sensual—ever made. Among the ballet's many felicities is the role of Puck, a creature of the air and of the earth, clever and malicious. Ever since Herman Cornejo débuted in the role, when the ballet premièred at A.B.T., he has become its most ideal interpreter. As Joan Acocella wrote of Cornejo, two years later, "his Puck has about twenty ways of bending—out of elegance, out of subservience, out of tree-branch avoidance." He has even more ways of jumping. Cornejo, now forty-one, returns to the role. It would be a shame to miss it.—*Marina Harss*

pioneering band Nass El Ghiwane, "Näss" ("People" in Arabic) is a workout for seven men in T-shirts that they sometimes pull over their heads, a trance dance that acrobatically explores the overlap between hip-hop and Moroccan musical traditions such as Gnawa and Reggada.—*Brian Seibert (Joyce Theatre; Oct. 18-23.)*

Gallim

Andrea Miller's company celebrates its fifteenth anniversary with a retrospective program. The ever-intense dancers contort their hyper-flexible bodies in a sampling of labored eccentricity from across the company's history, dipping into the more exuberant "I Can See Myself" and the more portentous "Stone Skipping," which Miller presented at the Temple of Dendur while she was an artist-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.—*B.S. (Chelsea Factory; Oct. 19-20.)*

Emily Johnson

At once demanding and inviting, Johnson makes little distinction between her art and her activism. Of Yup'ik descent, she's an advocate for decolonization in many senses. "Being Future Being" is a project that also has an outdoor component. Even if the theatre performance isn't an all-night affair on an island—like her "Then a Cunning Voice and a Night We Spend Gazing at the Stars"—don't think it lacks ambition. With her Indigenous collaborators, including the composer Raven Chacon, Johnson is trying to embody an Indigenous future, using dance, video, and quilts woven with the wishes of volunteers.—*B.S. (New York Live Arts; Oct. 20-22.)*

New York Theatre Ballet

New York's most enduring chamber-ballet ensemble returns, now under new artistic direction. Diana Byer, New York Theatre Ballet's founder, has passed the reins to one of the company's veterans, Steven Melendez, who most recently worked for the dance-education organization National Dance Institute. For now, the programming hasn't changed much—here the company performs a mix of mid-to-late-twentieth-century works, the oldest of which is Antony Tudor's "Dark Elegies," a study in communal grief, set to Mahler's song cycle "Kindertotenlieder." In addition to "Septet," a Stravinsky ballet by Jerome Robbins, and "Mazurkas," by the venerable American modern-dance choreographer José Limon, the company offers Martha Clarke's "The Garden of Villandry," a movement-theatre piece that explores the dynamics of a ménage à trois.—*Marina Harss (Florence Gould Hall; Oct. 21-23.)*

Twyla Tharp

The two Tharp works that make up this weeklong run, "In the Upper Room" and "Nine Sinatra Songs," are not new. "Nine Sinatra Songs," inspired by ballroom dance, premièred in 1982; "In the Upper Room," a driving romp that pits all-American athletic "stompers" against a balletic "bomb squad," dates from 1986. Both capture aspects of America's idea of itself—the energetic sportiness, on the one hand, and a glamorized, slightly synthetic idea of romance, on the other. Tharp, being the force field that she is, has put together a real A-team of dancers, drawing from top companies, including American Ballet Theatre (Cassandra Trenary), Alvin Ailey (Jacquelin Harris and James Gilmer), Martha Graham (Lloyd Knight and Marzia Memoli), and the Bavarian State Ballet (Julian MacKay). This new generation of performers, each a powerhouse, is sure to pour new life into what, by now, are American classics.—*M.H. (New York City Center; Oct. 19-23.)*

MOVIES

John McEnroe: In the Realm of Perfection

In this unusual documentary, the director Julien Faraut chooses to focus—or, rather, to fixate—on the lonely heyday of John McEnroe. Only one match, against Ivan Lendl in 1984, is shown in any detail; for much of the movie, we gaze at McEnroe on his own, darting around the court and reacting to an invisible rival. Faraut makes substantial use of footage that was shot by another documentarian, Gil de Kermadec, which analyzes the player's game as if he were a machine; his strokes are reconfigured as computer graphics, and his serve is slowed down to a dream of coiled-up power. What fans and foes alike remember best are those times when the machine broke down, or overheated. McEnroe was special, perhaps, because of the Cagney-like cohabitation within him of the violent and the deft, which made him so hard to predict. But his snits, the film is charitable enough to argue, were not gratuitous; they were loud laments at a world that fell short of his impossible

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standards. Released in 2018.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 9/3/18.) (Streaming on Pluto, Tubi, and other services.)*

A Life of Her Own

George Cukor's 1950 melodrama takes place in the splashy milieu of fashion and the social whirl surrounding it. Lana Turner stars as Lily James, a young woman who leaves her native Kansas for New York in order to become a model. She meets a veteran of the field, Mary Ashlon (Ann Dvorak), who has squandered her career through a combination of temperament, arrogance, hard partying, and, above all, an ill-advised romance with a playboy. Still, Lily, enjoying her first successes, recklessly gets involved with a married man (Ray Milland); though she's strong, smart, and focussed, she lets her hopes and desires run away with her sense of reality. What distinguishes the familiar story of the other woman is Cukor's, and the actors', control of tone; the movie feels amazingly inward and tamped down, as if the director and the actors are collectively holding their breath in anticipation of romantic disaster. The action could as easily take place in Hollywood, amid the world of movies—or anywhere that young women depend on powerful men for success, experience, and love.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on Prime Video, DAFilms, and other services.)*

Malina

The German director Werner Schroeter's 1991 adaptation of Ingeborg Bachmann's 1971 novel is among the most fertile and furious blends of literature and cinema. Its pedigree is imposing—the script was written by the Nobel Prize-winning writer Elfriede Jelinek—and its embodiment of Bachmann's harrowing vision is exhilarating and terrifying. The film stars Isabelle Huppert as an unnamed writer in modern-day Vienna, who is tormented by memories of her abusive father (Fritz Schediwy), a Nazi, and of the Second World War. She lives with an elegant literary man named Malina (Mathieu Carrière) and takes a younger lover, Ivan (Can Togay); she teaches philosophy and writes poetry in a state of ecstatic rage (in the form of mostly unsent letters). Driven by nightmares, she abuses pills and lives at an exhausting pitch of impulsive chaos. Huppert's performance in this role is among her greatest; even when seated, she seems to be in reckless motion, and her frenzy is infused with a sense of intellectual possession. Schroeter conjures the protagonist's creative and destructive energy with color-streaked, high-contrast images, culminating in a conflagration that evokes the passions of a mind on fire.—*R.B. (Playing Oct. 21 at Film Forum.)*

The Mule

Clint Eastwood directs and stars in this hard-nosed, tenderhearted, rowdy, and anguished crime drama, from 2018, based on a true story. He plays Earl Stone, an ambitious and artistic horticulturist living in Peoria, Illinois, who, after losing his house and garden to foreclosure, accepts an offer to drive loads of drugs from El Paso to Chicago in his pickup in exchange for big cash payouts. Earl has alienated his family—especially his daughter, Iris (played by Eastwood's daughter Alison)—by putting his horticultural career first. Now, enjoying his new underworld adventures and acquaintances, he uses his sudden wealth to mend fences—but federal agents (Bradley Cooper and Michael Peña) are on the trail of the cartel for which he works. Eastwood delights in the role of a roguish coot who, under his crusty manner, is a master manipulator—albeit one of unshakable principle. (Law enforcement and unchecked gun toting come in for stern critique.) The expansive, good-humored, cleverly plotted action has the romantic resonance of a regretful self-retrospective, both for Earl and for Eastwood; it plays like a summing up of a life's work and pain. With Dianne Wiest.—*R.B. (Streaming on HBO Max, Prime Video, and other services.)*

Till

Chinonye Chukwu's passionate and insightful drama shows how, in 1955, the lynching of Emmett Till, a Black fourteen-year-old from Chicago who was visiting relatives in Mississippi, moved to the center of national news and politics, sparking outrage and galvanizing the civil-rights movement—particularly through the ardent determination of Emmett's mother, Mamie Bradley (Danielle Deadwyler). She works daringly to bring his body back to Chicago—and to turn his funeral into a public event, in order to bear witness to his mutilation—and she travels to Mississippi, defying death threats, to testify at the killers' trial. The story moves from family tragedy and local crime to a societal panorama, detailing the legal and social system of Jim Crow and the bold, committed organization of Black activists, in Mississippi and Chicago, in pursuit of justice and freedom. Chukwu films the story with a poised intensity that's centered on extended and grandly expressive closeups of Mamie, whom Deadwyler portrays with a vital and complex presence. The extraordinary cast includes Jalyn Hall, as Emmett; Whoopi Goldberg and Frankie Faison, as Mamie's parents; and Tosin Cole and Jayme Lawson, as Medgar and Myrlie Evers.—*R.B. (In theatrical release.)*

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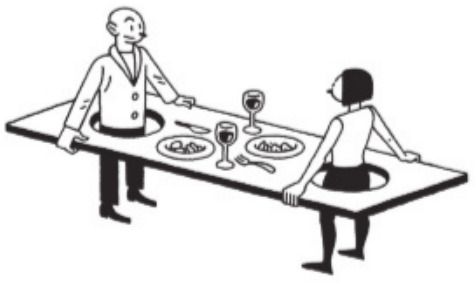
SCREENING AND STREAMING



COURTESY THE CRITERION COLLECTION

The high styles and narrow mores of bygone days meet the melancholy of changing times in Stanley Kwan's romantic drama **"Rouge,"** from 1987, which screens at BAM in a new restoration Oct. 21-27. (It's also streaming on the Criterion Channel.) The story is set in Hong Kong, where, in 1934, a courtesan and singer called Fleur (Anita Mui) and an industrial heir named Chen-Pang (Leslie Cheung), who aspires to be an actor, fall in love. When Chen-Pang's family won't let them marry, they carry out a suicide pact. Then, in the mid-nineteen-eighties, Fleur—who hasn't aged a day—shows up in dated finery at a newspaper office to place an ad in search of Chen-Pang. "Rouge" is a naturalistic ghost story, in which the flesh-and-blood revenant befriends two young journalists (Alex Man and Emily Chu), gets a tour of her drastically altered old neighborhoods, and hunts for traces of her past life. Kwan renders the thirties in florid images and modern times in muted tones; his view of the shock of history feels all the more prescient in light of recent repressive changes in Hong Kong.—*Richard Brody*





TABLES FOR TWO

Le Rock

45 Rockefeller Plaza

What to wear to Le Rock, perhaps the buzziest of a collection of buzzy new restaurants in Rockefeller Center? On a recent Friday night, my dinner companion settled on a canvas jacket somewhere between a blazer and a chore coat. Upon arrival, it became apparent that he had correctly intuited the dress code—of the waitstaff, at least, each of whom wore a garment almost identical to his.

Is Le Rock fancy? Well, yes. Its name, which is meant, I suspect, to be a bit arch, also refers to the generally French theme of its upmarket menu: forty-five-dollar caviar dip, five-dollar-per-ounce côte de boeuf, three house Martinis (twenty-six dollars each). The four-thousand-square-foot dining room, carved out of the lobby of a ravishing Art Deco building, is outfitted with terrazzo floors, a bronze bar, and inlaid mahogany.

On the stereo: the sorts of gentle big-band arrangements that remind me of the spectral ballroom scene in Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining." But for the second coming of the Roaring Twenties everyone's wearing sneakers instead of tails. On a Saturday night, I observed a surprising number of teen-agers playing video games on their smartphones, hulking headphones covering their ears, oblivious to their parents' wining and dining.

It seems reasonable to presume that these were families on holiday. The needle that Rockefeller Center restaurateurs (Le Rock's are the chefs Lee Hanson and Riad Nasr, of Tribeca's Frenchette) must thread is a fine one: cater to tourists, but also to locals, who have traditionally avoided the complex unless required to commute to its offices. As the shift toward a work-from-home economy decreases the market for business meals, the target audience increases to include the category of discerning diners who normally prefer lower Manhattan or Brooklyn.

The result, at Le Rock—whose executive chef is Walker Stern, of Cobble Hill's dearly departed Battersby—is a menu that doesn't pander, but it does ramble. After two multicourse dinners, I felt I'd barely scratched the surface. Moreover, the surface was uneven. *Cervelle de canut*, a house-made cheese spread, brought to mind Boursin, the French equivalent of Philadelphia cream cheese, and the accompanying baguette seemed to have been rewarmed in the oven to mask a hint of staleness—especially disappointing given that Hanson and Nasr's arsenal includes a bakery, also called Frenchette. *Barbajuans*, described by a server as fried ravioli, were more like miniature pastries, pale and doughy, scalloped edges giving way to an uninspiring mix of Swiss chard and ricotta.

The dressed crab, meanwhile, was a relatively worthwhile, if stunning, splurge at sixty-five dollars. A Dungeness carapace, on a bed of ice, was filled with plump, slippery shreds of crabmeat that had been poached in court bouillon and laid with neat rows of snipped chives, chopped egg white, grated yolk, and capers, to be mixed with dollops of mayo à la russe (horseradish, Worcestershire). I appreciated the synergy of the Martini au poivre (featuring vodka infused with green peppercorn, and Manzanilla olives) and the bison au poivre, a lean but luscious, clean-cutting medallion of meat. I was entranced by the ovoid potatoes that came with the halibut *au vin jaune:* peeled and poached in clarified butter, they dissolved creamily, dreamily on the tongue.

A rolling dessert cart turned out to be for a single dish: "beautiful, beautiful baba," a server murmured as he presented the *baba aux muses vertes*, a spin on baba au rhum. A spongy wedge of yeasted cake gets sliced tableside and awkwardly sloshed with the diner's choice from an array of green-hued liqueurs, including a Chartreuse and an amaro; the emperor wore no clothes, but he sure was drunk. The "very, very famous profiterole," meanwhile, exemplifies the restaurant's sweet spot, easy to love but exquisitely refined: a portly puff of choux, filled with salted-caramel ice cream, bejewelled in disks of stiffly whipped *crème diplomate*, and finished with buckwheat-honey hot fudge. *(Dishes $6–$64 and up.)*

—Hannah Goldfield

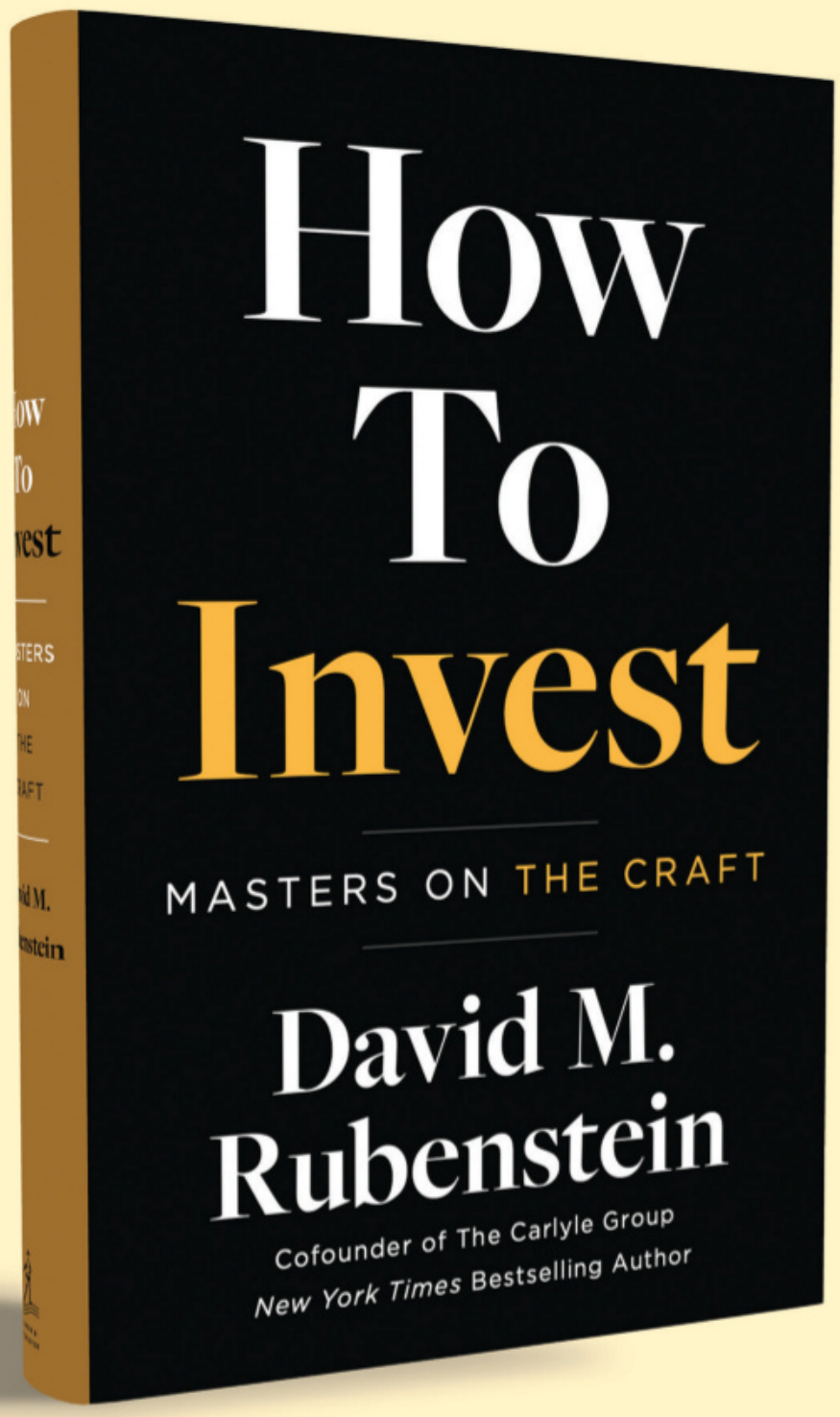
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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
ENDGAMES

There's no shortage of threats to democracy this political season, and, during a debate last week in Ohio, two candidates for the U.S. Senate were asked what they thought the greatest danger might be. Representative Tim Ryan, the Democrat, who spoke first, said that it was "extremism," and then got more specific: his opponent, J. D. Vance, he said, has no ability to stand up to his own party, or "to anybody." At a recent rally in Youngstown, Donald Trump had bragged, "J.D. is kissing my ass, he wants my support." But what was even more troubling to Ryan was Vance's response, which was to join Trump onstage, "shaking his hand, taking pictures." Ryan said, "I don't know anybody I grew up with—I don't know anybody I went to high school with—that would allow somebody to take their dignity like that."

With the midterms now only a few weeks away, one shouldn't expect an overflowing of dignity in any of the half-dozen or so states, including Ohio, where Senate seats are being seriously contested. At the rally, Vance, who came to prominence as the author of "Hillbilly Elegy" and then reinvented himself as a MAGA man, said that Ryan doesn't seem like an Ohioan because he's a fan of yoga. Vance has also suggested that President Joe Biden was letting fentanyl stream across the border in order to punish Republican voters—an insinuation that G.O.P. candidates around the country have echoed. Recent polls have Ryan and Vance within a few points of each other, but Trump won the state in 2020 by more than eight points.

According to projections by the research firm AdImpact, a hundred and thirty-eight million dollars will be spent in the Ohio race on media advertising alone. Roughly a quarter billion dollars is expected to be spent on ads in Senate races in Nevada, in Arizona, and in Pennsylvania, and two hundred and seventy-six million is the estimate for the most expensive race, in Georgia. The motive for these outlays is clear. A sitting President's party usually loses seats in the midterms, and that seems likely to happen in the House, where the Democrats have a margin of just eight. Barring a blue wave, Kevin McCarthy, not Nancy Pelosi, will be Speaker in January. But the Democrats have a decent shot at holding on to the Senate, which is now evenly divided, and even of picking up a seat or two.

It helps that, of the thirty-five seats being contested, twenty-one are held by Republicans. And, owing to Republican retirements, there are open seats that now seem to be in the Democrats' reach in Ohio and in Pennsylvania, where John Fetterman, the hoodie-wearing lieutenant governor, is in a close race against Mehmet Oz, the Trump-endorsed television doctor. The situation is similar in North Carolina, where a Democrat, Cheri Beasley, is running a strong race against Representative Ted Budd. Beasley, who would be the state's first Black woman senator, is a former chief justice of the state's Supreme Court; Budd has said that the January 6th assault was "just patriots standing up."



In the House, Budd co-sponsored a bill that would ban abortion nationwide after about the six-week mark, with no exceptions for rape or incest. Democrats around the country appear to be benefitting from public anger at this summer's Supreme Court decision that overturned Roe v. Wade and made bills such as Budd's plausible. Republicans, in turn, have focussed on discontent with inflation and, in attacks that are more and more crudely drawn, on immigration and crime. In Wisconsin, ads for Ron Johnson, the most vulnerable G.O.P. Senate incumbent, portray his challenger, Mandela Barnes, the state's Democratic lieutenant governor, as an inciter of mobs who wants to empty prisons and unleash havoc in the streets. The January 6th committee linked Johnson to Trump's "fake elector" scheme; the Senator called the allegation a smear and said that he'd been involved for only "a couple seconds."

Pennsylvania, however, has been seen

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

as the Democrats' best pick-up chance. The Fetterman campaign gained ground by portraying Oz as a huckster whose true home is New Jersey. The question is Fetterman's health. He had a stroke a few days before the primary, in May, and by his own account has not fully recovered. He has spoken at some rallies, but still has difficulty with auditory processing. In interviews, he uses transcription software: he reads what is said to him, then responds. That technological work-around will get its biggest test on October 25th, when the candidates debate. The health discussion has exposed the lowness of Oz's campaign, which at one point said that, as a debate accommodation, it would let Fetterman "raise his hand and say 'bathroom break!'" More recently, Oz has focussed on claiming that Fetterman is weak on crime, calling him "Free-Them-All Fetterman."

The Democrats also need to hold on to the seats they have. In Arizona, Senator Mark Kelly has had a small but steady lead over Blake Masters, a Trumpist who is funded by Peter Thiel, the tech billionaire. (Thiel is also backing Vance.) In Nevada, though, in some polls, Senator Catherine Cortez Masto is falling behind Adam Laxalt, the grandson of Paul Laxalt, the late Nevada senator. Earlier this month, Laxalt appeared with Trump at a rally where the former President said that, because of Democrats, American cities are "drenched" in blood.

But the most concentrated locus of G.O.P. indignity is in the race in Georgia between Senator Raphael Warnock, a Democrat who won a special election in 2020, and Herschel Walker, whose tight connection with Trump extends back to his stint, in the nineteen-eighties, with the New Jersey Generals, a team (in the ill-fated U.S. Football League) that Trump briefly owned. In the latest spectacle—in a campaign that has been full of them—a woman told reporters that Walker had pressured her to get an abortion and had paid for it. (She is also the mother of one of his children.) Walker, who supports an abortion ban with no exceptions, has offered bafflingly phrased denials—as he does on many subjects. Mitch McConnell, the Senate Minority Leader, is still standing behind Walker. Last week, Senators Tom Cotton, of Arkansas, and Rick Scott, of Florida, joined Walker at a campaign stop.

Cotton said that fans of the Razorbacks, the University of Arkansas football team, had not forgotten how Walker dominated them when he played for the University of Georgia Bulldogs. But, Cotton said, "they have no hard feelings, because they want Republicans back in charge in Washington." The message to G.O.P. voters is that they all need to see themselves as indulgent Razorback fans. The Republicans are going after the Senate with Trump's team, and they have stopped caring what it takes to get over the line.

—Amy Davidson Sorkin

THE PICTURES

PLAYING EMMETT TILL



On the walls of the New-York Historical Society is an exhibition of work by Kwame Brathwaite, a photographer and an activist who documented life in Harlem and the Bronx in the late nineteen-fifties and sixties and was also a driving force behind the era's Black Is Beautiful movement. Brathwaite found his calling as a teen-ager, when he saw the graphic pictures of Emmett Till's open-casket funeral that were published in *Jet* in 1955. Till, a fourteen-year-old from Chicago, had been lynched in Mississippi while visiting family; beatings and a gunshot left his face obscenely disfigured. His mother's insistence that the world bear witness to what white racists had done to her child was "a turning point in our lives," Brathwaite has written. His response, as the exhibit demonstrates (it was organized by Aperture), was to celebrate Black culture, experience, and physicality—to insist on an African American gaze.

Visiting the galleries one recent morning was Jalyn Hall, the young actor who plays Emmett in the new movie "Till," directed and co-written by Chinonye Chukwu. Hall, whose family divides its time between Los Angeles and Georgia, was in town for the picture's première, at the New York Film Festival. Accompanied by his friendly but non-hovering mom, Yma McGowan, he was wearing a camel-hair coat, a white shirt, and aggressively fashion-forward jeans that appeared to be half denim, half patchwork quilt. Given his evident interest in style—he happily described the blue Givenchy suit he'd worn to the première—it was understandable that he was drawn to Brathwaite's photograph of a model at one of the fashion shows that he had helped organize at the Apollo Theatre, back in the sixties.

"That's a very good picture," Hall said. He plopped down on a mod couch and took it in. For a fifteen-year-old in a museum, he was surprisingly cheerful.

Hall first heard the name Emmett Till when he was twelve or thirteen. This was around the time of George Floyd's killing, and it was in the context of Black Lives Matter that his mother told him the basic facts of Till's murder. "It's one of those things where the earlier you learn the earlier you can adapt, the faster you can be aware," he said. "I have to think about it from my mom's perspective."

Making a film about Till is an obviously delicate endeavor. When Hall auditioned for the role, the filmmakers wouldn't let on what the project was. He was given a few scenes to read—Emmett goofing with his cousins—but identifying details had been removed. "The character probably had the name



Jalyn Hall



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Darrell or something," Hall said. He connected with "Darrell" right away, with the role's playfulness and open-hearted naïveté. His management team called to say that there would be a second audition. "We were, like, 'Yay!'" he said. "But then they were, like, 'Um, uh, the project is about Emmett Till.' Me and my mom, we looked at each other. We were, like, 'Wow.'" Hall started doing his own research. "The fun-loving person in the script was easy to convey, but once you figure out it's Emmett Till you've just got to come up with something more," he said. By the time he returned for a chemistry read with Danielle Deadwyler, who would play Emmett's mother, Mamie Till Mobley, he said, "I was, like, I'm ready. I can't wait to do this. I need to do this."

Hall was not quite Till's age when he started shooting last year, in Georgia. The filmmakers introduced him to relatives of Emmett's. "I just learned what a great boy he was. He loved to sing. He loved to dance. He loved his mother. He was curious," he said. "You never really think of him as the kid he was."

Making viewers do precisely that was Hall's job. He has been working steadily since he was eight and is a regular on the CW drama "All American." Acting was his idea. "If anything, I pushed my mom into it," he said. "When I was four, I had that little moment where I was, like, 'Oh, I want to be in the TV,' but I was looking behind the TV to see how they got in there." He told his mom about this newfound ambition. "She was, like, 'Yeah, sure.' You know four-year-olds, they want to do everything." But, after attending an acting camp at the age of seven, he was determined to get in front of a camera.

The Film Festival screening was the first time he saw "Till" with an audience. "My aunties came down to the city to support me, and they were bawling their eyes out," he said. "They were, like, 'We ran out of tissues!'" He laughed, but only a little. "That's how you know your job was well done."

—Bruce Handy

MASTER CLASS
END OF STORY



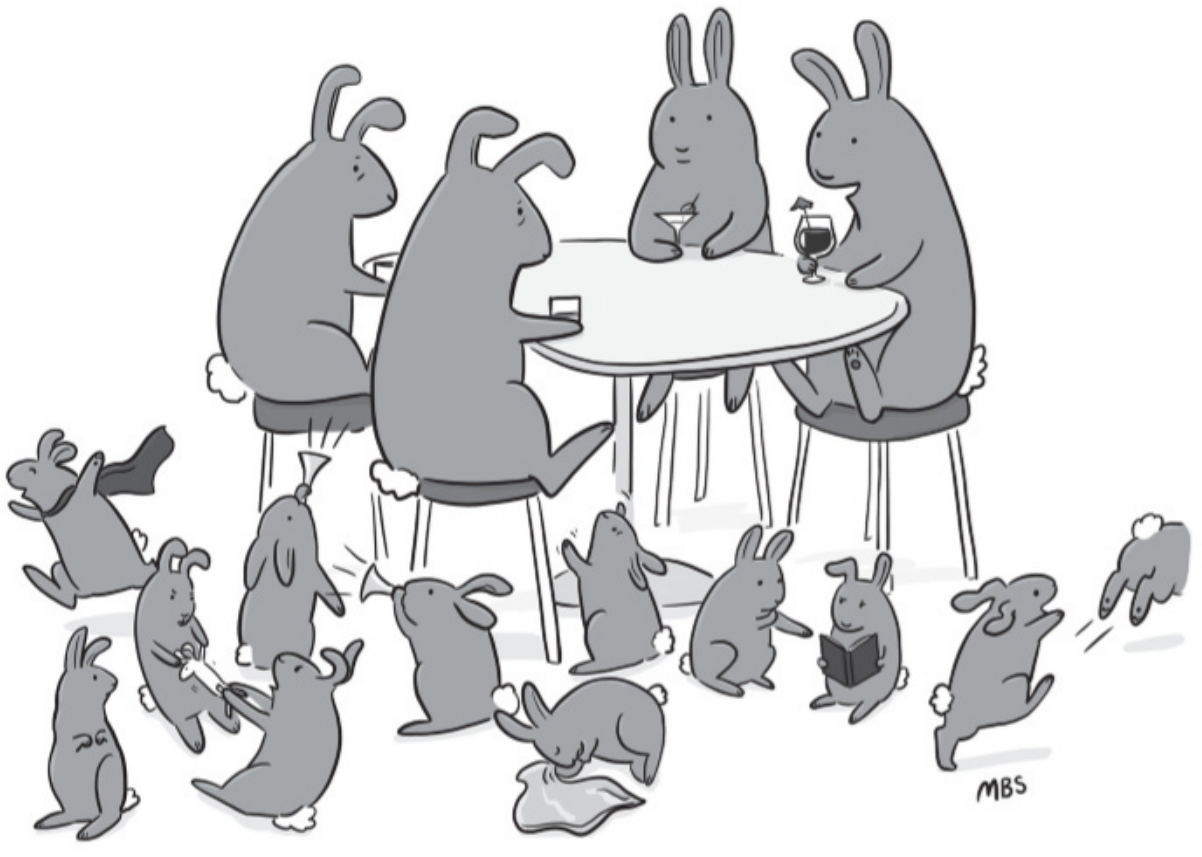
"These days, apparently, I have to offer trigger warnings for you snowflakes," the screenwriting maestro Robert McKee declared the other day, addressing the participants in "Story," a three-day seminar he was conducting, at a Westin near LAX, for approximately the four-hundredth time. "First of all, language. I use profanity because I like to. It keeps my energy level up." Other potentially offensive topics: politics, religion, sex. "Writing, ideally, is rooted in reality, and if you can't see things for what they are you'll never write anything worth shit," he said.

McKee, who is eighty-one, with thick white hair and brows, is on a farewell tour. (After Los Angeles, he'll be in New York, London, Budapest, and Tel Aviv, and then, in perpetuity, online.) He has delivered his seminar to tens of thousands of students, and on every continent. In Russia, he says, the book version of "Story" is known as "The Bible." When he lectured in Paris, three hundred people shot to their feet to applaud. "I always get a standing ovation," he says. "But there are standing O's, and there are *standing O's*.

"The problem with Hollywood is, they've all read the book, they've all been to these lectures," he said. "They know how to tell a story, but they don't have anything to say." Occasionally, he has looked out and seen a famous person taking notes: David Bowie, Faye Dunaway, Diane Keaton, Rob Lowe. More often, his students are as yet unknowns, some of whom have gone on to win Academy Awards. Then, there's Steve Pressfield, who was a successful B-movie writer. McKee says, "He came to my lecture and decided to hell with screenwriting. He was going to do what he'd always wanted to do and write novels. And he did. Out came 'Tides of War,' and 'Gates of Fire,' and 'The Legend of Bagger Vance.'"

McKee is from the suburbs of Detroit, the son of an engineer and a real-estate agent. "I was raised in a family—dysfunctional, of course," he said. "Then I raised a family—dysfunctional, of course. I think all the best families are. You don't want a happy childhood!" One of his "Ten Commandments," along with prohibitions like one against the deus ex machina, is "Thou shalt not sleep with anyone who has more problems than you."

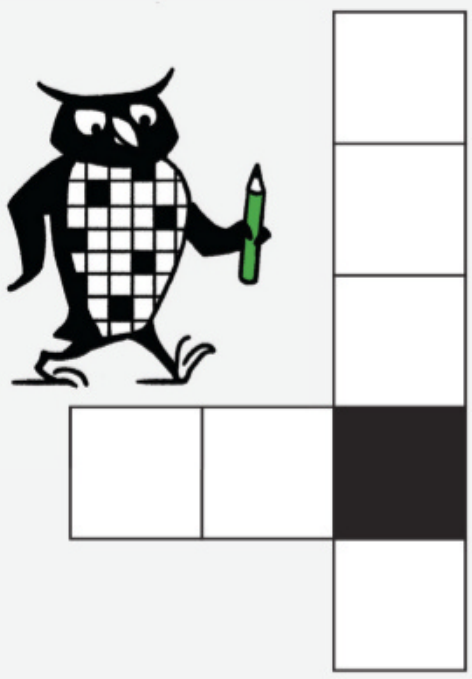
Over a lunch break—salad in his hotel room—McKee expounded. "I grew up in the theatre," he said. "I started acting when I was eight years old." Later, he got into directing, and directed some sixty plays. In his thirties, he moved to Hollywood to become a

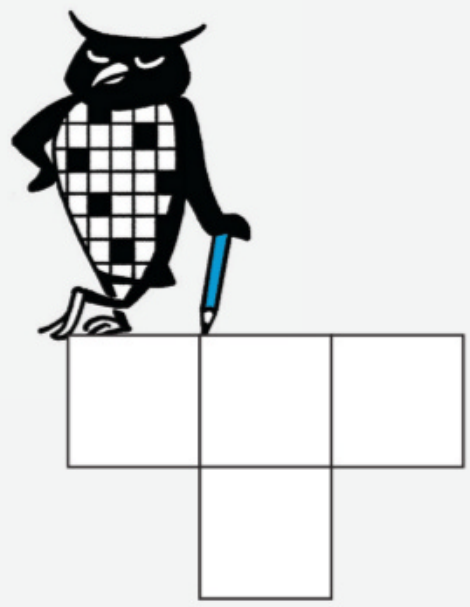


"Given the high cost of raising kids, we opted instead to be childless billionaires."

THE NEW YORKER

CROSSWORD

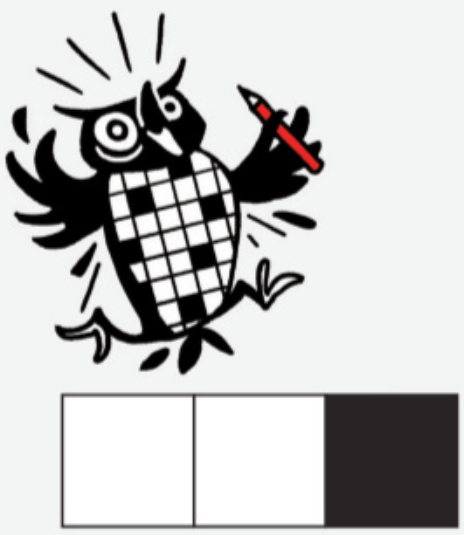


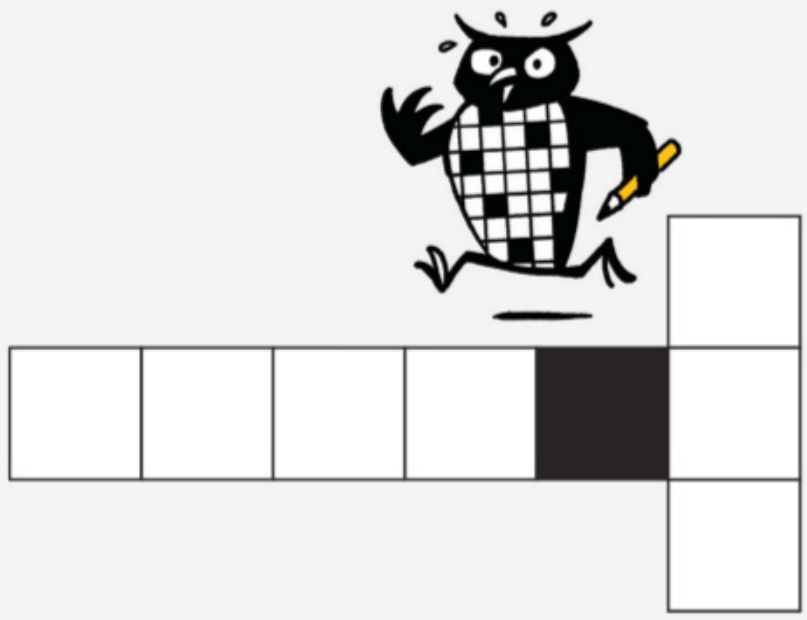


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screenwriter. "It's called development hell," he said. "I had a couple dozen deals, and you can buy a home and put in a swimming pool on those deals. I put my kids in private school. But then the movies don't get made." He was invited to give Saturday-morning talks on story structure at an experimental college in L.A., where Dustin Hoffman taught acting and Sydney Pollack taught directing. Soon, he had to rent an auditorium. In time, he said, "I went from unfulfilled to fulfilled.

"I had seen enough of my writing on the screen to know that I was a good writer, but not a great writer," McKee said. "It was very simple. Ingmar Bergman, in my judgment, is the greatest screenwriter who ever lived, and I would never write to that level. On the other hand, I could tell by the way people were responding to my teaching that I *understood* at that level.

"There's an idea, I think it's still in the world, that writing cannot be taught, period," he went on. "People who say that or think that, they would never say that musical composition cannot be taught, or painting. In the background of everything I did was this naïveté that writing was this spontaneous, mystical thing."

A story, according to McKee, is a series of events building toward irrevocable change. "If you understand your story, you'll be able to say it's about the change from 'this' to 'that,'" he said. "Poverty to riches. Justice to injustice. It's one master arching event." Endings matter most. He writes that "the story's ultimate event is the writer's ultimate task." The success of a movie, he says, often depends on its last twenty minutes.

McKee devotes the final day of his seminar to a six-hour, scene-by-scene analysis of "Casablanca," which he considers a paragon of excellent writing. Walking back to the auditorium after lunch, he said, "The last thing I talk about is being and becoming. Permanence and change. The struggle between keeping who you are and changing who you are. And that's what 'Casablanca' is about. And it is possible to have both, if you love in the fullest possible way. If you love, you can have both."

After he delivers his last "Story" seminar, McKee allowed, he'll be devoting himself to writing a sequel, "Story 2."

—Dana Goodyear

ATLANTA POSTCARD
INFESTATION



The Environmental Protection Agency has ten regional offices in the country, including one in Atlanta, which closed—like most government buildings—during the pandemic. The agency had planned to return to the huge concrete-and-glass Sam Nunn Federal Center this spring, but, in March, an agency director e-mailed the hundreds of employees in the office to announce a delay. In their absence, rats had moved in.

The director's e-mail tried to tamp down concerns. It announced the Fresh Return Initiative. There would be a "post-removal/trapping monitoring" effort, she wrote, as well as services performed by an "Industrial Hygienist." All employees entering the building while it remained the dominion of rats would be provided with masks and gloves. A rodent-free reopening was expected to take place by April 22nd, Earth Day.

On April 25th, the agency's regional deputy director sent out a long follow-up e-mail. He explained that there had been a "pause" in the Fresh Return Initiative. The rodent-eradication strategy now involved a five-step plan—although, as he acknowledged, no pest-management contractor had yet been "procured" to execute the plan and so there were no "specific timelines" or "activity milestones" to share.

Phase one outlined a sensible path: Employees should stay away from the rat-infested office, "unless the purpose is mission critical," the deputy director wrote. A contractor would, eventually, "inspect each work area for rodents or evidence thereof," he went on, including "obvious rodent droppings," rat nests, and food remains. Office plants were deemed items of concern. (Rats, evidently, like office plants as much as E.P.A. employees do.) Shopping bags and other potential "nesting items" would be removed. Papers rifled through by rodents would be "disposed of in consultation with the manager on duty." Trapping, by unspecified means, would then occur. This would continue until there were "zero findings" for five consecutive days. Office carpets would then be shampooed, and the air would be filtered.

Phase two, the deputy director went on, amounted to "de-cluttering," and phases three through five entailed more cleaning, inspecting, and the long-awaited—or dreaded—employee return.

That return has yet to happen. One employee, still working from home, called the situation "just weird." During the pandemic, rats have been running wild in cities such as New York, where they feast on outdoor-dining leftovers—but the E.P.A., as its Web site states, is the agency tasked "with offering the public tools for controlling rodents and the risks they may pose." The employee said, "Like, what the heck? That's so government-like."

The person had stopped by the office just once in recent months: "I was told not to go in, but the security guy said, 'I won't know if you did.'" No rats were visible during the visit, which took place during daytime hours. Nor were the promised gloves and masks. But the employee had heard that "the initial cleaning crew saw actual rats running around." Statistics on rat breeding were looked up: "Two rats can make fifteen thousand other rats in a year. You can Google that. That's just known facts about rat fertility."

"I hate teleworking," the employee said. "But I don't want to work in a place where I'm the only person and there's rats everywhere." A theory had been floated about why—beyond bureaucratic sluggishness and murine ingenuity—it was taking so long to get rid of the rats: "Some folks at the E.P.A. don't want to see rats killed."

An amateur investigator recently attempted to enter the Sam Nunn building, but security guards turned him away, because he did not work for the federal government. The investigator took a seat on an outdoor bench. A man leaving the building, who worked on the seventh floor, below the E.P.A.'s offices, said that colleagues had reported "hearing something in the walls." A woman smoking on a nearby bench said she'd seen the something, and it was rats.



The visitor noticed a black plastic box by an exterior wall and asked the security guys about it.

"That's a rat trap," one said.

"We got rats," another one added, laughing. "They all up in there."

The first guard pointed to a crack in the sidewalk around the building. "They go right underneath there," he said. "They've already got their holes down in there. And they run out here freely." He waved his arms around.

"A couple of them got their own offices," a third guard said. They laughed some more.

The rats have continued to foil the Fresh Return Initiative. In mid-September, the General Services Administration, which manages federal properties, posted an online solicitation for "exterminating and pest control services" for the Sam Nunn building. The required work, the agency estimated, would run through December of 2023.

—Charles Bethea

LIFE'S WORK

WORDS PER MINUTE



A courtroom can be a volatile place. Victims confront assailants. Trauma is relived. During the proceedings to award damages for defaming Sandy Hook families, the professional loon Alex Jones grew so ungovernable that his own attorney asked the judge to order his client to shut up. Throughout a trial, the attendees most focussed on the matter at hand—the court reporters, who transcribe every word as it's uttered—must remain as stoic as Lady Justice. "You try not to react in any way," Dom Tursi, who retired last year after six decades of such work, mostly in New York courts, said recently. "Later on, you become a human being and have your emotions."

Tursi was standing in the Gallery of Shorthand, a permanent exhibit celebrating the stenographic arts, in the airy lobby of the U.S. district courthouse in Central Islip, on Long Island. He wore a blue jacket and a lighter-blue shirt, and spoke a speedy Brooklynese that could have challenged some of his lesser colleagues. Tursi opened the gallery in 2010, after a building administrator familiar with his collection of artifacts invited him to create an installation. "That was shocking to me," he said.

Tursi entered the field by chance. When he was at Hunter College, in the nineteen-sixties, his parents met a court reporter at a dinner party. "They came home and said, 'Why don't you consider doing that?'" he recalled. He worked in Central Islip for the last decades of his career, and lives nearby with his wife, Anneliese, a deposition reporter, and the youngest of their four sons, Matthew, an Army reservist and a deposition videographer.

The heart of Tulsi's display is a series of shadow boxes that trace shorthand's history back to the origins of written language. One held a foot-tall, ibis-headed statue labelled "THOTH—GOD OF SCRIBES." (Freud kept a likeness of Thoth on his desk.) Tursi recounted how shorthand was banned during the Dark Ages ("They saw it as cryptography"), and praised the Sumerians of ancient Mesopotamia, who "did some really clever things." Millennia later, Tursi did, too. "I once had a case where I had thirty-seven lawyers at a deposition," he said. He had to identify each speaker in real time. In 1981, he set a world record by reporting three hundred words per minute for five minutes, with 98.4-per-cent accuracy. "There are people who could have broken that years ago," Tursi said. "But they've been very kind." A Texas court reporter named Mark Kislingbury recently set a new one-minute high: three hundred and seventy words.

Tursi walked past a display of shorthand guides in various languages—"There's even a Chinook one somewhere in there"—and approached a case holding three dozen steno machines, all from his private collection. He began amassing them in the seventies, for students to use at a school he'd opened for court reporters. Some dated to the nineteenth century. "They're all my babies," he said. One held special significance: a 1980 model of a rare machine used by the Italian government. A few years ago, Tursi was disappointed to learn that one had sold at auction. "Then I found out it went for over twenty thousand dollars," he said. "I'm glad I missed that." Friends from Rome whom he'd met through an international shorthand society later gave him one as a gift.

To create the exhibit, Tursi gathered the best books he could find on shorthand history ("There were about three") and pored over trade magazines. His priciest acquisition was an eighteenth-century handbook on Tironian notation, a form employed by Cicero and named for his enslaved secretary. "This cost me a pretty penny," he said—in the mid-four figures. Marshals have told Tursi that visitors browse the display on their way into or out of the courthouse. One court reporter to whom Tursi gave a tour wept. For true devotees, Tursi has self-published a book called "The Legends of Shorthand." (Being a shorthand practitioner, he writes, "is to be part of a fraternity that spans decades.") He has plans for a sequel, with the potential title "The Second-Oldest Profession." "I feel that I have to get my knowledge out there on paper," he said. "Because, if I don't, there's nobody else."

The exhibit contains a book that Tursi put together, devoted to twenty-three icons of shorthand. "These were all heavy-duty people," he said. He pointed out Billy Rose, the Broadway producer, who started out as an ace stenographer, and Tursi's late friend Vivien Spitz, who reported at Nuremberg. The twenty-third icon is Tursi himself. He said that Kislingbury, the new one-minute king, has lobbied for inclusion. Tursi smiled. "I told him, 'We'll see.'"

—Dan Greene

THE SPORTING SCENE

SAND TRAP

Saudi money and Donald Trump roil "the gentleman's game."

BY ZACH HELFAND



Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund is recruiting golfers for a new super-league.

When a professional golfer wants to pass along a rumor, he'll tell you that he heard it "on the range." The pro driving range conjures a serious place where serious men who abide by dress codes and honor systems tweak swing paths and spin rates, but this impression is incomplete. The range, the one location where everyone in the sport gathers, is also golf's back room. Pre-round chat may concern course conditions, or who is sleeping with whose wife. Recently, the range has been preoccupied by one topic. Since late last year, representatives of Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, the multibillion-dollar investment vehicle for the kingdom, have been quietly recruiting players for a new super-league that they hope will rival the P.G.A. Tour. They were calling it LIV; the name derives from the Roman numeral fifty-four, to denote what they consider "a perfect score in golf," and is pronounced as in "live large." LIV life was lucrative. The Saudis, who'd devised a twelve-team league, planned to spend two billion dollars, much of that on guarantees for players. "You'd hear numbers," a longtime golf manager told me. "You'd hear 'a hundred million' a lot." Tiger Woods was said to have declined a package valued at seven to eight hundred million dollars. One line I heard often on the range this summer was that there are only three types of pro—those who've taken Saudi money, those who are thinking about taking Saudi money, and those who aren't good enough to be offered Saudi money.

Most outsiders first heard about LIV in February, from Phil Mickelson, one of the P.G.A. Tour's biggest stars and most consistent critics. "They're scary motherfuckers," Mickelson said of the Saudis, in an interview with the golf writer Alan Shipnuck. He said he viewed LIV as a vehicle for Saudi "sportswashing"—a front for the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, known as M.B.S., to launder his reputation. He also recognized it as useful leverage. He went on, "We know they killed Khashoggi and have a horrible record on human rights. They execute people over there for being gay. Knowing all of this, why would I even consider it? Because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape how the PGA Tour operates." Shipnuck published the story on a golf Web site during the Genesis Invitational, in Los Angeles. (Observers on the range noticed that, all at once, the players stopped hitting and took out their phones to read.) Mickelson issued an apology to those he offended, to LIV's executives, and to his business partners. He began an indefinite leave from the Tour. A few golfers reached out to him and didn't hear back. Reports surfaced that he'd accepted an offer from LIV worth roughly two hundred million dollars.

By August, when I arrived at East Lake Golf Club, in Atlanta, for the P.G.A. Tour's season-ending Tour Championship, professional golf had cleaved into warring camps. The dispute felt deeply personal. LIV gobbled up players. Tour shunned defector. Defector sued Tour. Strange occurrences were interpreted for signs of rancor: players walked in other players' lines on the green—accidental etiquette breach or intentional snubbing? Unusual penalties were levied against the LIV-leaning. I heard stories of LIV types being blacklisted at clubs in Jupiter, Florida, or run out of St. Simons Island, in Georgia.

Greg Norman, the former star player whom LIV had hired to be its C.E.O., was particularly reviled. "He lived in Jupiter for thirty-five years," a golfer told me, on the practice green. "He cannot join a golf club in our area. No one will have him." It was suggested that defectors were hard up for cash. Mickelson

ILLUSTRATION BY MIGUEL PORLAN

was known, through Shipnuck's reporting, to have gambling losses totalling tens of millions of dollars. "I think he was desperate," one old hand confided. (Mickelson has acknowledged a gambling problem but says he is financially secure.)

Generally, the players who cared most about prestige and legacy aligned with the P.G.A. Tour. Its tournaments offered history and gravitas but no guaranteed income; you earned what you won in prize money. Golfers viewed it as the American-individualist ideal—"the purest form of meritocracy," one golfer said. But the fault lines were idiosyncratic and difficult to untangle from old resentments. Whether a person stayed or left could be explained by some combination of political leaning, culture-war affiliation, sensitivity to peer pressure, and, most of all, naked self-dealing. "They don't really care what the Saudis' interest is," the old hand told me. Sometimes it was a matter of a personal grudge. Did Woods stick with the Tour to protect his records or to snub Norman? They'd been at odds since at least 2006, when Woods moved to Jupiter without giving Norman a heads-up. (Last year, Norman sold his Jupiter spread for fifty-five million dollars to Leslie Wexner, the mogul with ties to Jeffrey Epstein.)

By the Tour Championship, LIV had poached enough players to be viable. It had signed a couple of stars (Dustin Johnson, reportedly for a hundred and twenty-five million dollars), some aging has-beens (Ian Poulter, twenty to thirty million), and a handful of lower-ranked players (Pat Perez, ten million, lump sum; "I got it all," he told *Golf Digest*. "It's fucking incredible"). Six more were rumored to be defecting after the tournament.

The enormous sums had a way of revealing priorities even to the players themselves. Johnson told friends he had rebuffed LIV offers until he couldn't anymore. "A lot of guys say D.J. isn't smart—he's street smart," the golfer Davis Love III said. "He told me, 'I got to a number where I'm willing to take the consequences.'" One day at East Lake, while practicing his chipping, Max Homa, a firm Tour loyalist, said that his strategy was to avoid temptation entirely. "I got an e-mail," he told me. He didn't read it. "I don't want to know. My wife told me if I got offered *x* she'd kill me if I said no."

Loyalties could be fluid. When I asked Rory McIlroy, a prominent Tour loyalist, whether players had misled him about LIV offers, he laughed and said, "Yes. Everyone's turned quite cynical." Homa added, "It's like high school. People are lying to your face." Reliable intelligence was essential. One needed to know whom to trust, and, if the winds shifted, when to jump, and for how much. Billy Horschel, another golfer committed to the Tour, confided that he'd cultivated a network of caddy informants, but then most of them jumped to LIV, too. The longtime manager told me, "A lot of these players are talking against LIV publicly. Privately, they're trying to get a deal." He went on, "Players are being shunned, threatened, threatened to be shunned. I thought golf was supposed to be 'We call infractions on each other, we have rules, we're gentlemen.' All of a sudden, they've turned into animals."

Golf has always been about money and power, but in Saudi Arabia it literally came with the oil. The country's first courses, and almost half its current ones, were "sand courses" improvised from the desert landscape by the Americans who helped build Aramco, the state petroleum giant. There was no grass, so golfers carried around little squares of artificial turf to hit from. A woman is said to have killed a sheep with an approach shot. (She had to pay the shepherd.) The ingenuity required just to complete a round was almost inspiring. Landmarks moved with the wind. Balls could be red. Greens were brown. Reading them was tough; camels stomped across. Putting, at least, didn't require the turf mat. To maintain the requisite firmness and speed, the greens were slicked with oil.

Today, Saudi golf operations are within the purview of Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the governor of the wealth fund and the chairman of Aramco. Rumayyan is polite, with wavy black hair and well-cut suits. In 2015, he was running a bank when M.B.S. offered him a job as an adviser. Later, M.B.S. named him head of the fund. Terms were not discussed. "You will do it," M.B.S. said. An American analyst who has dealt with Saudi officials told me that Rumayyan "is known as being sort of obsequious."

Under Rumayyan, the wealth fund, known as the Public Investment Fund, "became the vehicle for M.B.S.'s ambitions," the analyst said. The fund controls some six hundred billion dollars, with investments in businesses, like Live Nation (half a billion), Uber (three and a half billion), and SoftBank's Vision Fund 1 (forty-five billion). Aramco provides a large part of the P.I.F.'s liquidity. The fund operates professionally, with internal structures and board votes, but personal preferences occasionally preside. Carla DiBello, a former reality-television producer and onetime friend of Kim Kardashian turned strategic consultant, has become a go-between. Rumayyan paid more than three hundred million dollars to acquire the English soccer club Newcastle, after meeting with her aboard M.B.S.'s megayacht, Serene, in 2019. When the deal hit a snag, according to news reports, M.B.S. texted Boris Johnson personally: "We expect the English Premier League to reconsider." It did, and Newcastle supporters, thrilled with its wealthy owners, celebrated outside the stadium wearing tea towels as kaffiyehs.

In 2018, Rumayyan appointed a high-school friend, Majed Al Sorour, to be the C.E.O. of the Saudi Golf Federation. Both men are golf obsessives. (Each claims a twelve handicap.) They began asserting their presence in the golf world. At the Masters one year, according to a person familiar with the conversations, they asked about renting Augusta National's clubhouse to host a meet and greet for top golfers. "You can't just do that," the person said. Sorour, a big-biceped, aviator-wearing former soccer player, also began searching for investments. He told me recently that he'd approached the P.G.A. Tour's commissioner, Jay Monahan. "What I said to him is I have a budget of over a billion dollars that I'd like to invest in the Tour," he said. "I got no response." (Tour officials deny that they were approached with such an offer.) Eventually, the P.I.F. agreed to help bankroll the new Premier Golf League, which would have star-laden fields, three-round tournaments, shotgun starts (in which all the players start at the same time, on different holes), and, most radically, a team format. When that fell through, in 2021, the Saudis decided to go it alone. "It is, for all intents and purposes, the same format that we devised," the P.G.L.'s founder has said.

The Saudis' budget, however, was



"We're having the Petersons over for dinner—do you think you could run down to the store and stay there for a few hours?"

• •

notably bigger. M.B.S. isn't known to play golf (he prefers Call of Duty and pickup basketball), but a person who has communicated with him told me that an investment so large would typically require the board's sign-off, and M.B.S. chairs the board.

LIV's first event was in London, in June. The purse was twenty-five million dollars, the largest ever in golf. (LIV's championship, in late October, in Miami, will be double that.) The league held a launch party to introduce its teams. ("With one eye on younger fans, Fireballs has an anarchic, fun, and exciting identity which embodies golf at its wildest!" a presenter said.) Mickelson resurfaced, bearded, in a leather jacket, and looking, in his general gloominess, like a divorced dad. He played in the pro-am with Rumayyan. He was heard exclaiming, "Great shot, Your Excellency!"

The next day, Ari Fleischer, George W. Bush's former press secretary, moderated a press conference, having been hired by LIV. The golf media, by then, were in open opposition to LIV, which they viewed as the vanity project of a despot. The scene was exhilarating in its uncomfortableness—tanned men in funny pants answering moral and geopolitical questions for which they were clearly unprepared. (Earlier, Norman, when asked about the persecution of gay people in Saudi Arabia, responded, "I'm not sure whether I even have any gay friends, to be honest with you.") A golfer was asked if he'd play in a tournament hosted by Vladimir Putin. "I don't need to answer that," he said. Another, Talor Gooch, said, "I'm not that smart. I try to hit a golf ball into a small hole."

Bafflingly, defenders insisted that LIV was a kind of humanitarian organization. Mickelson said, "I have seen the good that the game of golf has done throughout history." Examples were not given. Maybe the LIV adherents were just adopting golf's ambient self-regard. It made for some strange utterances. Graeme McDowell lamented the regrettable "Khashoggi situation," and then added, "If Saudi Arabia wanted to use the game of golf as a way for them to get to where they want to be . . . I think we're proud to help them on that journey."

The golf establishment, with its Traditions Unlike Any Other, its country-club morality clauses, its doffing of the caps before the shaking of the hands, was unaccustomed to such greed and dysfunction, or, rather, to their public display. A common cry was that LIV was unfit for a gentleman's game. This is a sport whose major victories are accompanied by gauzy paeans to character. The customs recall an era of a kinder, more genteel conservatism. It would be considered crude to point out that they've also been great for business.

At East Lake, where you could visit the Comcast Business Pavilion before hitting up the corporate hospitality chalets, I spoke with Peter Cannone, the C.E.O. of Demand Science ("the official B2B sales pipeline generation sponsor of the PGA Tour"), who explained to me that advertising with the Tour was the ideal way to reach America's C-suite. Tom Fanning, the C.E.O. of Southern Company, which sponsors the Tour Championship, told me, "Golf, more than probably any other sport, is notable for behaviors and values that transcend the sport—sportsmanship, character, charity, honesty, hard work." Of LIV, he went on, "I'm not sure what ideals they represent. We don't have any interest in associating with them." Depending on one's vantage, this was either standard marketing or its own kind of reputation-laundering game. A sport that long excluded Blacks, Jews, and women, and with a standard share of avarice and misbehavior, had turned itself into the image of nobility—an ideal advertising vessel.

The Tour itself began as a breakaway league. For decades, the touring pros, among them Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer, split tournament revenue with the "club pros," who gave lessons and sold merch. It was like having Aaron Judge hit against the hot-dog vender and then share the paycheck. In 1968, Nicklaus led a rebellion. Palmer was on the fence—he made millions selling his brand of golf clubs to the club pros—but he eventually joined. (Nicklaus, who once said that golf wasn't more diverse because "Blacks have different muscles that react in different ways," and who himself does golf business in Saudi Arabia, is still held up by Tour loyalists as the paragon of the gentleman golfer.) Today, the Tour has no owners, and the golfers vote on the board. It functions as a players' collective, at least in theory.

As in any quasi democracy, the complaining began almost immediately. The players' beefs are legion: too many tournaments, too little freedom, restrictive media rights, purses too low, purses too evenly distributed, purses not evenly distributed enough, a hesitancy to take up

N.F.T.s. At its heart, the grumbling concerns money and power. The stars want a bigger cut, and they probably deserve it. The rank and file, as a longtime golf writer told me, "always assume they're getting fucked over." (One agent pointed out, "I think we're on a collision course for a union.") Mickelson has claimed that the Tour is sitting on huge cash reserves that it should be giving out to players like him. (The Tour brings in about a billion and a half dollars a year, and roughly half gets disbursed as prizes and bonuses.) He has proposed cutting membership to just thirty golfers, and once spent an entire round pitching the golfer Brandel Chamblee on the idea. "He was totally oblivious to the fact that would eliminate my job," Chamblee has said. The notion wasn't new. In 1994, Greg Norman, then the world's best player, attempted to start a parallel league, comprising the top players. The P.G.A. Tour, using Norman's unpopularity, rallied to kill it; the players themselves, led by Palmer, refused to join. "I felt backstabbed," Norman said recently.

LIV offered an alternative for the stars, without whom the Tour would collapse. This was what Mickelson meant by leverage. "Someone was bound to try this," McIlroy told me. "The Tour has become quite complacent." It has mostly stuck with the same format and hasn't attracted a younger audience. Still, he went on, "I've always thought that the changes could have been made from within, instead of, honestly, from Greg Norman having a thirty-year vendetta."

The Tour considers LIV an existential threat. "They don't want to coexist," Davis Love III told me. But the Tour has taken solace in LIV's actual product, which it views as a joke. On the range, LIV is compared to a member-guest at a mediocre country club.

Trump National Golf Club Bedminster, in New Jersey, on the week in July that it hosted LIV's third tournament, experienced an outbreak of norovirus, according to a person familiar with the club. "It's like food poisoning," the person told me. "You throw up." (A spokesperson for the club denied this account.) In Trump, LIV has found an enthusiastic partner. Trump loathes the P.G.A. of America, which had planned to hold the P.G.A. Championship, one of golf's four majors, at Bedminster this year but cancelled after January 6th. It's unclear if he knows that the P.G.A. of America and the P.G.A. Tour are separate entities. In any case, LIV scheduled two of its eight tournaments at Trump properties, including its championship, and Trump has returned the favor. "I think LIV has been a great thing for Saudi Arabia, for the image of Saudi Arabia," Trump told the *Wall Street Journal*. "The publicity they've gotten is worth billions."

Before the July tournament's first round, with hands washed, I stopped by a protest against the event, staged by families of September 11th victims. I met with Dennis McGinley, whose brother, Danny, a father of five, was an equities trader in the south tower. "I was on the phone with my brother before the second plane hit," McGinley said. "He was crying, he was praying for the people next door that were jumping out the window. I have been haunted by that for twenty-one years." He experienced LIV as a betrayal. "I just want accountability," he said.

I headed over to the course, which was lined with signs that said "DON'T BLINK" and "GOLF BUT LOUDER." LIV wants to appeal to a younger audience with a faster-paced game. Golf being golf, the rounds still run five hours, so the league has curated the fan experience. Tournaments double as concerts; the Chainsmokers were scheduled to perform. In the "fan village," I encountered a break-dancing troupe and a clown making balloon animals.

I went looking for Ivana Trump's grave. The family had buried her on the grounds the previous week. It struck some people as strange. Who would want to spend eternity at her ex-husband's golf club? On Twitter, rumors circulated about how the property was, technically, a cemetery, which would eliminate the club's obligation to pay state property, income, and sales taxes. (NJ.com contacted tax experts who pointed out that this would be true for roughly .026 per cent of the grounds.) But the tax-shelter theory only fed other hypotheses about Trump and LIV that had made the rounds: that it was a money-laundering scheme, or that LIV was a front for Trump to share nuclear secrets with the Saudis—Julius Rosenberg with a 9-iron. In Atlanta, one high-ranked golfer pulled me aside and said, "This thing runs much deeper. Who knows what's going to come out of Mar-a-Lago, but I wouldn't be surprised if it's all intertwined." Not far from the driving range, where Trump and Rumayyan were hitting alone, I found Ivana's headstone on a parched patch of grass. It looked out over the first tee box.

Afterward, I followed Mickelson's group with a sportswriter. He told me that reporters in the media tent had been playing a game of "What's your number?" That is, what amount of money would compel them to quit their jobs to work for LIV? The consensus was somewhere between one and five million dollars.

The crowds were sparse. Some holes had a dozen spectators; tickets were reselling for a dollar. One perk was that you could get right up next to the golfers. It has been pointed out that LIV seems to appeal to a certain type of golfing personality—"a rogue's gallery of assholes," as the golf writer Elizabeth Nelson put it to me. There was Mickelson, and Bryson DeChambeau, who was so polarizing on the Tour that his colleague Brooks Koepka once promised free beer to fans who heckled him. Also: Koepka himself, who complained about LIV at this summer's U.S. Open, and then defected, joining DeChambeau, the day after the tournament. (When asked what had changed, he replied, "Just my opinion, man.") The golfer Patrick Reed, who has never been popular—his fellow Georgia alum Kevin Kisner once told *Golf Digest*, of Reed's college teammates, "I don't know that they'd piss on him if he was on fire"—joined, too. He subsequently sued several reporters for defamation. (One commentator mused, "LIV needs a public investment fund to sportwash its association with Patrick Reed.") An agent told me, "The Tour is milquetoast white guys. I think LIV is going for the W.W.E. model." (The W.W.E. is big in Saudi Arabia. "There's a lot of pent-up male energy," a frequent visitor to the kingdom explained.)

The energy in Bedminster was of the unpent variety. LIV, or Trump, or some combination of the two, had attracted an interesting crowd, part MAGA rally, part high-school lacrosse party. Behind the tenth green, I saw a guy watching porn on his phone. A middle-aged man wore a shirt depicting the Twin Towers

wrapped in the flag and the words "20TH ANNIVERSARY, WE WILL NEVER FORGET." I asked him if it was a protest. "You're, like, the third guy to ask me that," he said, looking perplexed. "I'm just wearing it so nobody forgets."

As the weekend went on, the crowds grew in size and rowdiness. The golf did not appear to be the primary concern. Someone had on a Trump hockey jersey adorned with fake bullet holes. Another guy wore a hat painted with the image of a vape pen and the words "COME AND TAKE IT."



At the final round, on Sunday, I started to follow the lead group but heard a roar from the sixteenth tee and detoured. The hole was a par-3. The tee sat in front of the clubhouse, where Trump was holding court on a patio: Marjorie Taylor Greene, Caitlyn Jenner, Eric, Donald, Jr. Tucker Carlson showed up to belly-laugh at Trump's jokes. Rumayyan and Sorour stopped by periodically. Several hundred spectators were there, just staring. "This is actually Christmas," one said. "Pelosi for prison!" another yelled. Young women began tossing Budweisers into the crowd, prompting scuffles. Someone said, gleefully, "This would never happen on the P.G.A. Tour!" The previous day, Trump had arranged for a microphone. "You wanna do a rally?" he said. "We will make America great again! They're not doing a very good job of it right now!"

Players were still coming through and teeing off, but the crowd hardly noticed. "Where the heck's all the golf at?" someone yelled, to laughter. It was difficult to tell if the indifference owed to Trump's all-consuming presence or to the fact that the product was kind of rinky-dink. There was little of the tension that makes golf compelling. The team scores were hard to follow. The LIV names and logos—Crushers, Smash, the anarchic and fun Fireballs—were, as my colleague David Owen put it, "created by an advisory group of fourth-grade boys, apparently." LIV's chief operating officer, Atul Khosla, told me that the team names were largely provisional. The Australian pro Cameron Smith didn't care for Punch Golf Club and planned an overhaul; Mickelson had ideas for the Hy Flyers. "We view ourselves very much as a startup," Khosla said.

The players appeared to delight in the Trumpiness. As each threesome arrived at the tee, they removed their hats and shook Trump's hand. Broadly speaking, affinity for Trump helps explain the Tour-LIV divide. Professional golfers vote Republican as reliably as any voting bloc; in 2004, *Golf Digest* polled thirty-four Tour golfers and found not one Kerry voter. But, as in the G.O.P., the Tour has its factions.

LIV appeals to the golfers who once identified with the white working class, or to the merely resentment-prone. "Guys who grew up a little hardscrabble, didn't have country clubs to play at, that fought tooth and nail to play on the Tour, they say, Look, I'm gonna get what I can get," the manager Mac Barnhardt told me. The P.G.A. Tour, meanwhile, is for the élite, the club crowd that likes to think there are things more important than money. Of course, it's easier to look down on cash grabs when your cash was grabbed for you generations ago. The savvier golfers also have images to protect; rarefied dignity sells Rolexes and lands Goldman Sachs sponsorships. Nelson, the golf writer, told me that, if LIV embodied Trumpism, "the P.G.A. Tour is not Abraham Lincoln, it's Mitch McConnell—the power structure that says, Well, I don't disapprove of élitist destructive behavior, but this is bad for business."

Exceptions can be found on both sides, and, despite the exodus, the Tour is not wanting for Trump voters. "That's what's been so satisfying—seeing these guys who had no problem with Trump torching the rule of law when it was the Constitution, all up in arms now that Trump is doing the same to their golf tour," one golf writer told me. I talked to a player (described by the writer as "to the right of Attila the Hun") who said, of Trump, "It's forced us into a very odd, odd spot. It's hard to handle."

The final holes in Bedminster lacked any drama. Henrik Stenson won the individual competition by two strokes. A few people clapped politely. Many failed to notice at all. "It's so dope," a young man in a pink polo and a MAGA hat remarked. "There are so many hot bitches here." The Chainsmokers, citing an unspecified illness, pulled out of the post-round concert.

Trump knows from upstart sports leagues; in 1983, he paid millions for a team in the United States Football League, which collapsed two years later. Such efforts typically seem vain, even ridiculous, right up until they succeed. For every Continental Basketball Association, there is an American League. An established league is just a stunt that stuck around. The conventional wisdom is that LIV, as a sportswashing exercise, doesn't care enough about golf to establish itself. But what if this misconstrues what the Saudis want?

David Schenker, a former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, was in charge of U.S. policy and diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region from 2019 to 2021. He's also a golf nut, with a fourteen handicap. "This is the intersection of my personal and professional lives!" he told me recently, of LIV. Schenker believes that LIV is best understood in the context of Gulf geopolitics: the budding rivalry between the Saudis and the Emiratis.

M.B.S.'s stated goal is to diversify the economy and wean it from oil, a program he calls Vision 2030. The P.I.F. aims to spend forty billion dollars a year to bolster new Saudi industries—coffee production, electric cars, tech. One main objective is for Riyadh and Neom, a megacity being built on the Red Sea, to supplant Abu Dhabi and Dubai as the region's de-facto capitals. Schenker said, "There was this picture, perhaps mistakenly, that M.B.Z."—Mohammed bin Zayed, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi—"was sort of a mentor to M.B.S. But Saudi Arabia increasingly sees itself as the leader." M.B.S. has plans to double Riyadh's population in the next decade. The kingdom will require companies that conduct business with state institutions to establish a regional headquarters in the country. The problem has been that a desert with no cinemas or alcohol, and with a religious police force that harasses women, is not very attractive.

To appeal to the Dubai-inclined,

M.B.S. has lifted a ban on cinemas, courted music festivals, and reined in the religious police. A ski resort is in the works. Schenker and others predict that M.B.S. will legalize drinking in some form when he assumes the throne. The centerpiece of his plans is Neom, which he has described, privately, as Dubai but better. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, he envisioned sand that glows in the dark and an artificial moon; canals for swim-commuting have been mentioned. The project, which is expected to consume half a trillion dollars, is a money pit; according to Bloomberg, Neom's C.E.O. displays a graphic that former employees called the "wall of shame," showing department heads who failed to spend enough. But other developments, elsewhere on the Red Sea and around Riyadh, are farther along. Included in the plans is an amenity that the Saudis believe will draw wealthy Westerners: golf.

To build a grass course in the desert, the first thing you need is sand. Saudi Arabia, which now has eight grass courses, is planning to build as many as sixteen more in the next four years. Each requires ten thousand or so dump-truck loads of sweet sand, which provides a better base layer than desert marl. Over the sand goes grass; the Saudis grow heat-tolerant strains in a giant nursery outside Riyadh. Saudi Arabia is one of the most water-scarce countries in the world, so golf officials plan to irrigate the courses using recycled wastewater.

LIV serves as an advertising campaign for the new industry. "You can't deny that even the controversy has inserted the Saudi name into golf," a Saudi consultant close to the government told me. "I think they're getting exactly what they hoped for." He said that he had scheduled his first-ever golf lesson for the next day: "I'm getting with the program, as they say."

Most people who study or work with the Saudi royal family are skeptical of the sportswashing motive. One person who has been in contact with M.B.S. said that the crown prince has given up on trying to fix his reputation in the West. "He's not that naïve," the person said. After LIV's launch, Khashoggi and 9/11 have been talked about more, not less. Schenker believes that establishing Saudi Arabia as a golf destination is LIV's main aim. Joseph Westphal, the U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia from 2014 to 2017, agrees. "This idea that this is sportswashing is completely ridiculous," he told me. Of course, another way of looking at the situation is that LIV is engaging in sportswashing of a different kind, one that the Tour is familiar with. The goal isn't to clean reputations so much as to use them for profit.

A Saudi LIV executive I spoke to maintained that LIV was a legitimate business. Few outside the company see profitability as likely. "There's no way to underwrite making money on what they're doing," a person involved in the Premier Golf League talks told me. On the other hand, one persistent characteristic of P.I.F. investments is abundant optimism. "These are people who have huge ambitions," the person in contact with M.B.S. said. "The ambitions are really to make a shitload of money for the country. And also showing up the other Gulfies." But, he allowed, "maybe their ambitions aren't commensurate with reality."

Over Labor Day weekend, LIV held its next tournament, the LIV Golf Invitational Boston, at a club outside Worcester. Early in the week, I'd become friendly with a club member named Frank McNamara, a U.S. Attorney during the Reagan Administration and a father of twelve. "I'm pro-LIV and pro-life!" he said. As Saturday's round started, he walked over with a man he wanted to introduce.

The man wore pink pants and aviators. "They called me a scary motherfucker!" he said, laughing. It was Majed Al Sorour, the C.E.O. of the Saudi Golf Federation. He had a genial bearing, but seemed bothered by some of the press coverage. Unprompted, he said to me, "We don't kill gays, I'll just tell you that." (As recently as 2020, an activist advocating for equal rights for L.G.B.T. people in the kingdom was arrested and tortured.)

I walked with Sorour up the first fairway. Compared with Bedminster, the crowds were dense. Everyone seemed excited for the golf. "At the end of the day, look at this," Sorour said, in front of the green. On the range, I'd noticed an unusual esprit de corps among the players, almost a rakishness. "They feel like pirates in a way," David Feherty, a golf analyst who jumped from NBC to LIV, told me. (Feherty, perhaps, felt like one, too. When I asked him why he'd joined, he replied, "Money.") Maybe it was the shorts—on the eve of the tournament, the players had voted overwhelmingly



"No, it's a single ingredient—baby carrots."

to ditch golf's long pants, which are required on the Tour. Sorour said he would've voted otherwise, but he didn't object. "Democracy's O.K.," he said. "Sometimes!"

Shortly before the tournament's start, the golf world had reached a tentative stasis. The remaining P.G.A. Tour stars had held a players-only meeting in August, before a tournament in Delaware; it was organized by Woods and McIlroy, who'd become convinced that the Tour's executives weren't acting forcefully enough to protect it from LIV's incursions. Woods wasn't playing, but he flew in on his Gulfstream. "It tells you how much he despises Greg Norman," the old hand told me.

Twenty-three players attended the meeting, in a conference room at the Hotel duPont. They sat around a U-shaped table. According to one attendee, a handful were mulling LIV offers. In the course of three hours, the group went through a long slide presentation. Players asked questions, but, ultimately, everyone agreed to the plan advanced by Woods and McIlroy. Afterward, they followed up with Monahan, the P.G.A. Tour commissioner, who quickly adopted it. The top golfers committed to playing in more tournaments. The Tour agreed to add four "elevated" events with purses of twenty million dollars; to guarantee annual earnings of half a million dollars; and to expand a bonus pool that awarded millions more to the stars. All but one of the players who attended stuck with the Tour. When I talked to McIlroy after the meeting, I asked him if it had been difficult to spurn the potential for hundreds of millions from LIV. (Before LIV, he'd also declined to play in Saudi tournaments, citing moral objections.) "I'm gonna make a shit ton of money here, that's the thing!" he said.

In Massachusetts, after a round, Mickelson, who has mostly avoided interviews, told me with a smirk, "It's great that they magically found a couple hundred million. That's awesome."

The changes meant that the player exodus was likely to stabilize. Sorour and I retreated to a private suite beside the eighteenth green. He sat on a couch, his arms spread on the cushions, and said, "We have many players who want to come in now. But I need to protect my people." He felt a sense of loyalty to the early adopters. The first ten had signed before LIV had announced its launch. Another group had been ready to sign. Then Mickelson made his comments about the "scary motherfuckers," and the league, suddenly, was on the brink of folding. Sorour told me, "I called the boss"—Rumayyan—"I said, 'Everyone's walking away. Do you want to do it, or not?'" Sorour told Rumayyan he had a plan: "Get the biggest mediocres, get the ten that we have, get you and I, and let's go play for twenty-five million dollars." Rumayyan decided to press ahead and announce the launch immediately.

Sorour said the P.I.F. had funding for LIV through 2025. By then, he imagined, they would begin to cash out by selling off ownership in their twelve teams. The franchise model is how LIV plans to recoup its investment. Sorour envisions owners building home golf courses, like a stadium for a football team. LIV had given certain players equity stakes in their teams. (Some of the reported compensation figures, such as the seven to eight hundred million allegedly offered to Woods, included equity and potential sponsorships. Of the Woods offer, Sorour said, "It's not straight-out money. I never offered him that money, not even close to that.") There have been conflicting reports about the valuations that LIV puts on its teams, which consist of four players: a hundred million, half a billion, a billion. Sorour told me it would vary by team. Outside LIV, the numbers are treated skeptically. McIlroy told me, "People have to remember, golf is a niche sport. All you're getting is four golfers. And I get it, some M.L.S. teams are worth seven hundred million dollars. But it's all tied to the economics of the league, and right now that league doesn't have any economics."

LIV's biggest problem is television rights. At the moment, it streams its events on YouTube for free. Broadcasters and streamers have consistently turned down LIV. One TV executive, citing a "long, mutually beneficial relationship with the P.G.A. Tour," told me, "Our strategy is we always want the best. LIV doesn't rise to that level." Ed Desser, a former lead negotiator for the N.B.A.'s media deals, said that LIV's reputation would drive away broadcasters, and that its audience wasn't large enough to make any significant revenue. Sorour told me, "If it was up to me, I'd make it in-house." He seemed to envision a LIV channel, like the N.F.L. Network. According to a LIV spokesperson, Jared Kushner, whose private-equity firm received two billion dollars from the P.I.F., has spoken with a broadcaster about LIV. Late last month, the golf writer Eamon Lynch reported that, after internal lobbying by Lachlan Murdoch, Fox was planning to allow LIV to buy airtime on the network. (LIV issued a statement calling the reporting "incomplete and inaccurate.")

LIV's other pressing issue is that its tournaments don't yet earn golf ranking points, making it more difficult to qualify for the majors. There was speculation that the Masters might ban LIV players. "For now, the majors are siding with the Tour, and I don't know why," Sorour said. "If the majors decide not to have our players play? I will celebrate. I will create my own majors for my players." He went on, "Honestly, I think all the tours are being run by guys who don't understand business."

Sorour got up and went to a railing overlooking the eighteenth green. It was difficult to deny that the weekend of golf had become exciting. Even Mickelson, who'd played miserably since joining LIV, walked up to the green shooting under par. "Finally," Sorour said. "Maybe he needed shorts all along." The players smiled and chatted on the course. As Harold Varner III, the latest LIV addition, had walked past the suite, Sorour leaned over the railing and shouted jokes. If nothing else, LIV had created a counterpoint to the Tour's American-individualist mythos—a sort of Saudi dream. For the players, it looked like a weekend outing among buddies.

The next day, during the final round, the individual competition went to a three-person playoff—the first in LIV history. The gallery around the green was twenty people deep. Dustin Johnson, who'd already won more than five million dollars in his first three tournaments, smoked a long eagle putt way too hard, but it banked off the back of the cup and in, for the victory. The first reaction of his defeated opponents was to burst out in laughter. Everyone was rich, happy, and having fun. ♦



UPDATED COVID-19 HEALTH-SCREENING FORM

BY JAY KATSIR

1. Are we still doing these?
☐ Yes. Go to the next question.

2. Are you completing this form for a child who is younger than kindergarten age?
☐ No. I am completing it as an empty ritual.
☐ Yes. But I acknowledge that protocols are insufficient, toddler life has resumed, and I will contract BA.9 at the Bluey party from the Silent Finance Dads around the cheese-cube platter.

3. Have you experienced any symptoms of COVID-19 in the past ten days?
☐ No. I am one of the four Americans yet to contract COVID-19.
☐ No. I am in my Inter-Infection Invincibility Window. This morning I went to the airport and licked everyone arriving from Des Moines.
☐ Yes. The distemper has visited its cold hand upon my lintel. Though I be fortified since Michaelmas with charms and amulets thrice-blessed, the miasma entered unto my chambers, smuggled there, no doubt, by an unseen Dutchman.

4. If you answered "yes" above, which of the following describes your symptoms?
☐ A fever of less than a hundred degrees Fahrenheit, cough, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, shortness of breath, piping-hot sneeze, shortness of smell, loss of throat, intergluteal elm bark, unmotivated fibula, buffalo moon hump, the Galloping Dancey Boys, increased sensitivity to rhyming insults, Count Scrofula, and fisherman's lonely-eye.
☐ Similar to before I had COVID, with reduced paranoia about catching COVID.
☐ Adrift on my sickbed, I have descended into a spectral tunnel, where I wander through a column of humid twilight, hearing echoes of my children's voices calling out for me, only to suddenly awake and realize that I'm making them waffles.
☐ Spectral tunnel but with diarrhea.

5. In the past thirty days, have you received a positive result from a COVID-19 diagnostic test?
☐ Yes. Also in the past sixty days and in the past thirty seconds.

6. Do you have any idea where you got it?
☐ No.
☐ I think maybe from work, but no one else tested positive. I was the only one in the office wearing a mask, but I'm not sure if it was a real KN95—the box looks pretty bootleg, and the mask straps are constantly breaking. I held a flashlight up to one of the masks, and a lot of light shone through, so maybe they're not actually safe? The only other possibility is I got it at Sturgis.

7. If you recently experienced symptomatic COVID-19 and have since recovered, was it worth it?
☐ Yes. Now I can eat inside restaurants like all the people who never cared.
☐ No. Having the virus was hard enough, but it was worse to have to tweet "Thankful to be vaxxed and boosted!!"

8. If the line on the rapid test shows up slowly and faintly, does that mean that you're less infectious than when it appears right away and is the color of a Flamin' Hot Cheeto?
☐ I found an article that says you shouldn't make decisions based on the intensity of the line. But: if it's light, board your flight.
☐ You are most infectious when the test window shows four pirate ships.

9. Should I expect to get COVID-19 every two months until the end of time?
☐ At some point, you'll also get monkeypox.

10. Is it weird that there are so few current TV shows that exist in a COVID universe? It's like the characters are nominally living on our time line and in our reality, but I guess it would be just too dismal to watch them manage protocols and masking.
☐ No. Mass entertainment is a form of escape. No one wants to watch Ted Lasso come to staggering realizations about his childhood via Zoom therapy.
☐ Kind of. "This Is Us" tried to work COVID into the plot for a while but gave up to focus on ending the series with nine consecutive funerals.

11. I know this is annoying, but do you mind taking a test before we hang out? We're supposed to visit my parents next weekend, and we're trying to be extra safe.
☐ Yes. It is annoying.
☐ Yes. We've decided it's time to stop warping our lives around what's basically an inconvenience at this point. There are a lot of other problems in the world, and we like ignoring those, too. ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

SCRATCH THAT

What we've lost playing the lottery.

BY KATHRYN SCHULZ



At my local convenience store, and almost surely at yours, too, it is possible to buy upward of fifty different kinds of scratch-off lottery tickets. To do so, you must be at least eighteen years old, even though the tickets look like the décor for a kindergarten classroom. The dominant themes are primary colors, dollar signs, and shiny, as in gold bars, shooting stars, glinting horseshoes, and stacks of silver coins. When you are looking at a solid wall of them, they also resemble—based on the palette, font choices, and general flashy hecticness—the mid-nineties Internet. Some of them are named for other games, such as the Monopoly X5, the Double Blackjack, and the Family Feud, but most are straightforward about the point of buying them: Show Me $10,000!, $100,000 Lucky, Money Explosion, Cash Is King, Blazing Hot Cash, Big Cash Riches. If your taste runs toward Fast Ca$h or Red Ball Cash Doubler, you can buy one for just a buck; if you prefer VIP Club or $2,000,000 Gold Rush, a single ticket will set you back thirty dollars. All this is before you get to the Pick 3, Pick 4, Powerball, and Mega Millions tickets, which are comparatively staid in appearance—they look like Scantron sheets—and are printed out at the time of purchase.

The modern incarnation of the lottery arose out of a crisis in state funding.

The strangest of the many strange things about these tickets is that, unlike other convenience-store staples—Utz potato chips, Entenmann's cinnamon-swirl buns, $1.98 bottles of wine—they are brought to you by your state government. Only Alabama, Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, and Utah are not in the business of selling lottery tickets. Everywhere else, Blazing Hot Cash and its ilk are, like state parks and driver's licenses, a government service.

How this came to be is the subject of an excellent new book, "For a Dollar and a Dream: State Lotteries in Modern America," by the historian Jonathan D. Cohen. At the heart of Cohen's book is a peculiar contradiction: on the one hand, the lottery is vastly less profitable than its proponents make it out to be, a deception that has come at the expense of public coffers and public services. On the other hand, it is so popular that it is both extremely lucrative for the private companies that make and sell tickets and financially crippling for its most dedicated players. One in two American adults buys a lottery ticket at least once a year, one in four buys one at least once a month, and the most avid players buy them at rates that might shock you. At my local store, some customers snap up entire rolls—at a minimum, three hundred dollars' worth of tickets—and others show up in the morning, play until they win something, then come back in the evening and do it again. All of this, repeated every day at grocery stores and liquor stores and mini-marts across the country, renders the lottery a ninety-one-billion-dollar business. "Americans spend more on lottery tickets every year than on cigarettes, coffee, or smartphones," Cohen writes, "and they spend more on lottery tickets annually than on video streaming services, concert tickets, books, and movie tickets combined."

As those two sets of comparisons suggest, lottery tickets can seem like either a benign form of entertainment or a dangerous addiction. The question that lurks within "For a Dollar and a Dream" is which category they really belong to—and, accordingly, whether governments charged with promoting

ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL ALCALA

the general welfare should be in the business of producing them, publicizing them, and profiting from them.

Lotteries are an ancient pastime. They were common in the Roman Empire—Nero was a fan of them; make of that what you will—and are attested to throughout the Bible, where the casting of lots is used for everything from selecting the next king of Israel to choosing who will get to keep Jesus' garments after the Crucifixion. In many of these early instances, they were deployed either as a kind of party game—during Roman Saturnalias, tickets were distributed free to guests, some of whom won extravagant prizes—or as a means of divining God's will. Often, though, lotteries were organized to raise money for public works. The earliest known version of keno dates to the Han dynasty and is said to have helped pay for the Great Wall of China. Two centuries later, Caesar Augustus started a lottery to subsidize repairs for the city of Rome.

By the fourteen-hundreds, the practice was common in the Low Countries, which relied on lotteries to build town fortifications and, later, to provide charity for the poor. Soon enough, the trend made its way to England, where, in 1567, Queen Elizabeth I chartered the nation's first lottery, designating its profits for "reparation of the Havens and strength of the Realme." Tickets cost ten shillings, a hefty sum back then, and, in addition to the potential prize value, each one served as a get-out-of-jail-free card, literally; every lottery participant was entitled to immunity from arrest, except for certain felonies such as piracy, murder, and treason.

The lottery did not so much spread to America from England as help spread England into America: the European settlement of the continent was financed partially through lotteries. They then became common in the colonies themselves, despite strong Protestant proscriptions against gambling. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which held its first authorized lottery in 1745, dice and playing cards were forbidden even in private homes.

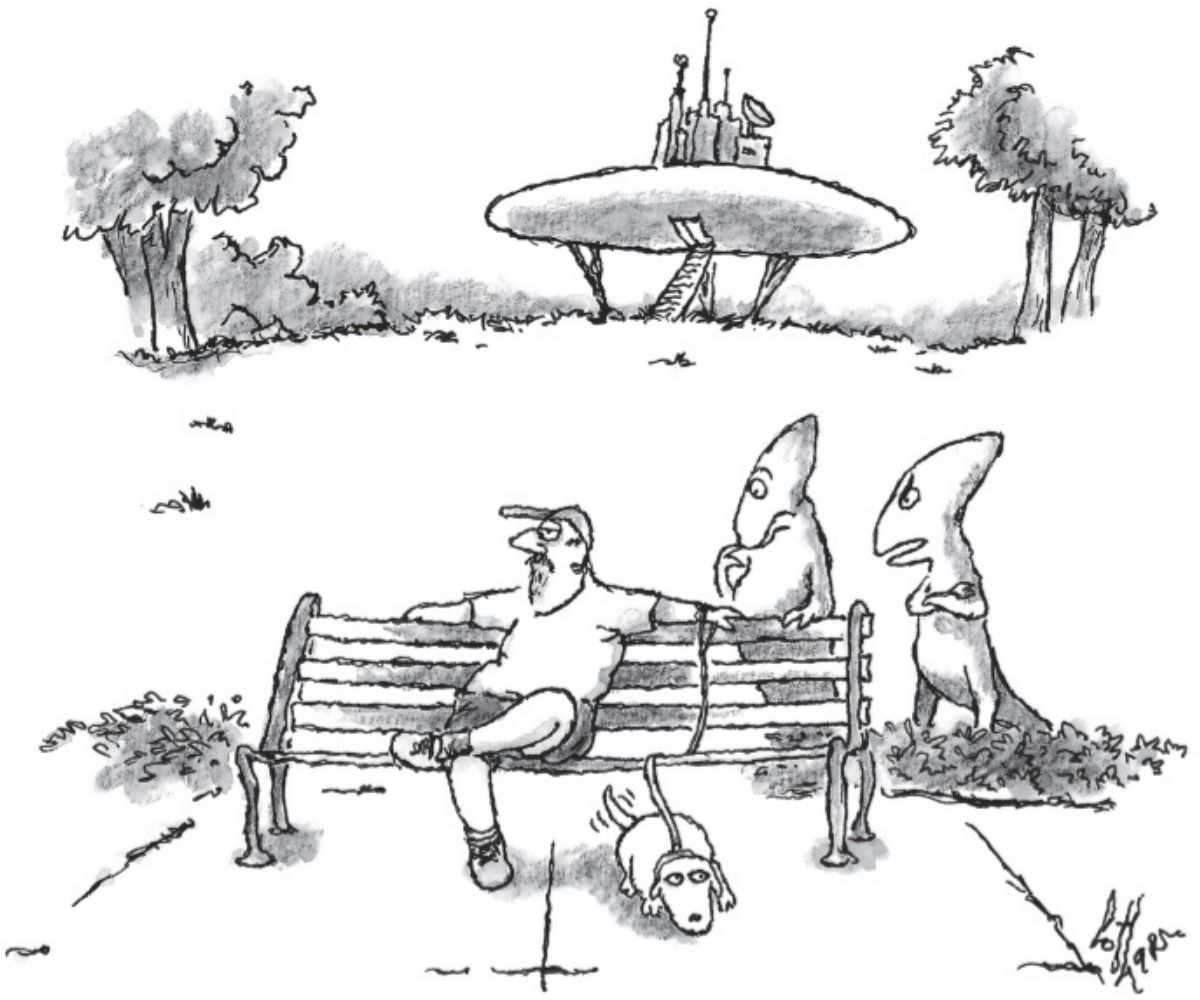
That contradiction can be explained in part by exigency; whatever its moral bent, early America was short on revenue and long on the need for public works. Over time, it also became, as Cohen notes, "defined politically by its aversion to taxation." That made the lottery an appealing alternative for raising money, which was used for funding everything from civil defense to the construction of churches. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton were all financed partly by lotteries, and the Continental Congress attempted to use one to help pay for the Revolutionary War. (Lotteries formed a rare point of agreement between Thomas Jefferson, who regarded them as not much riskier than farming, and Alexander Hamilton, who grasped what would turn out to be their essence: that everyone "would prefer a small chance of winning a great deal to a great chance of winning little.") And, like almost everything else in early America, lotteries were tangled up with the slave trade, sometimes in unpredictable ways. George Washington once managed a Virginia-based lottery whose prizes included human beings, and one formerly enslaved man, Denmark Vesey, purchased his freedom after winning a South Carolina lottery and went on to foment a slave rebellion.

This initial era of the American lottery was brought to an end by widespread concern about mismanagement and malfeasance. Between 1833 and 1880, every state but one banned the practice, leaving only the infamously corrupt Louisiana State Lottery Company in operation. Despite its name, the L.S.L.C. effectively operated across the country, sending advertisements and selling tickets by mail. So powerful was it that, as Cohen explains, it took the federal government to kill it off; in 1890, Congress passed a law prohibiting the interstate promotion or sale of lottery tickets, thereby devastating the Louisiana game and, for the time being, putting a stop to state lotteries in America.

Predictably, in the absence of legal lotteries, illegal ones flourished—above all, numbers games, which awarded daily prizes for correctly guessing a three-digit number. To avoid allegations that the game was fixed, each day's winning number was based on a publicly available but constantly changing source, such as the amount of money traded on the New York Stock Exchange. Numbers games were enormously popular everywhere—in 1964, they raked in two hundred million dollars, about two billion in today's money, in New York City alone—but especially so in Black communities, where they provided a much needed source of income. This was true mostly for their organizers and runners, whose ranks included Ella Fitzgerald and Malcolm X, but occasionally also for players who lucked into a windfall, such as Luther Theophilus Powell, who won ten thousand dollars on a twenty-five dollar bet in the nineteen-fifties and used it to buy a house in Queens for his wife, daughter, and young son, Colin Powell.

Eventually, numbers games proved so profitable that they were taken over by organized crime, sometimes with the aid of police officers who accepted bribes to shut down African American operators. Dutch Schultz and Vito Genovese both used the game to help bankroll their operations, and the Winter Hill Gang, Whitey Bulger's crew, got its start partly by running numbers in Somerville, outside Boston. By the nineteen-fifties, increasing concern about the power and reach of the Mob culminated in a Senate investigation, the Kefauver committee, which judged profits from gambling to be the primary financial engine of crime syndicates in America. This declaration, and the torrent of news coverage it generated, had a paradoxical effect: it made lottery games seem so lucrative that, after decades of dismissing them as inappropriate for the honorable business of public service, state governments once again began to consider getting in on the take.

It is at this point that Cohen's narrative really gets going; although he nods to the early history of the lottery, he focusses chiefly on its modern incarnation. This started, he argues, when growing awareness about all the money to be made in the gambling business collided with a crisis in state funding. In the nineteen-sixties, under the burden of a swelling population, rising inflation, and the cost of the Vietnam War, America's prosperity began to



"He doesn't seem to grasp the historical significance of this moment."

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wane. For many states, especially those that provided a generous social safety net, balancing the budget became increasingly difficult without either raising taxes or cutting services. The difficulty was that both options were extremely unpopular with voters.

For politicians confronting this problem, the lottery appeared to be a perfect solution: a way to maintain existing services without hiking taxes—and therefore without getting punished at the polls. For them, Cohen writes, lotteries were essentially "budgetary miracles, the chance for states to make revenue appear seemingly out of thin air." For instance, in New Jersey, which had no sales tax, no income tax, and no appetite for instituting either one, legislators claimed that a lottery would bring in hundreds of millions of dollars, thereby relieving them of the need to ever again contemplate the unpleasant subject of taxation.

Dismissing long-standing ethical objections to the lottery, these new advocates reasoned that, since people were going to gamble anyway, the state might as well pocket the profits. That argument had its limits—by its logic, governments should also sell heroin—but it gave moral cover to people who approved of lotteries for other reasons. Many white voters, Cohen writes, supported legalization because they thought state-run gambling would primarily attract Black numbers players, who would then foot the bill for services that those white voters didn't want to pay for anyway, such as better schools in the urban areas they had lately fled. (In reality, the oft-repeated claim that legalizing the lottery would merely decriminalize current gamblers rather than create new ones of all races proved dramatically wrong.) Meanwhile, many African American voters supported legalization because they believed that it would ease their friction with the police, for whom numbers games had long served as a reason—sometimes legitimate, sometimes not—to interrogate and imprison people of color.

Lottery opponents, however, questioned both the ethics of funding public services through gambling and the amount of money that states really stood to gain. Such critics hailed from both sides of the political aisle and all walks of life, but the most vociferous of them were devout Protestants, who regarded government-sanctioned lotteries as morally unconscionable. (Catholics, by contrast, were overwhelmingly pro-lottery, played it in huge numbers once it was legalized, and reliably flocked to other gambling games as well; Cohen cites the staggering fact that, in 1978, "bingo games hosted by Ohio Catholic high schools took in more money than the state's lottery.") As one Methodist minister and anti-lottery activist declared at the time, "There is more agreement among Protestant groups on the adverse effect of gambling than on any other social issue, including the issues of abortion, alcohol, and homosexuality." Such adverse effects included fostering gambling addictions, sapping income from the poor, undermining basic civic and moral ideals by championing a route to prosperity that did not involve merit or hard work, and encouraging state governments to maximize profits even at the expense of their most vulnerable citizens.

However valid these concerns might have been, they were largely ignored. In 1964, New Hampshire, famously tax averse, approved the first state-run lottery of the modern era. Thirteen states followed in as many years, all of them in the Northeast and the Rust Belt. In the meantime, as Cohen recounts, the nation's late-twentieth-century tax revolt intensified. In 1978, California passed Proposition 13, cutting property taxes by almost sixty per cent and inspiring other states to follow suit; in the early nineteen-eighties, with Ronald Reagan in the White House, federal money flowing into state coffers declined. With more and more states casting around for solutions to their budgetary crises which would not enrage an increasingly anti-tax electorate, the appeal of the lottery spread south and west.

As Cohen relates in perhaps the most fascinating chapter of his book, those pro-lottery forces had a powerful ally in Scientific Games, Inc., a lottery-ticket manufacturer that first made a name for itself by pioneering scratch-off tickets. In addition to delivering instant results, these tickets, like IKEA furniture, offer the appeal of

active participation, which gives players the illusion of exercising some control over the outcome. Scratch-off tickets débuted to great success in Massachusetts in 1974; by 1976, every state lottery had jumped on the bandwagon. But that triumph presented a problem for Scientific Games, since it meant that the available market was saturated. To keep expanding its business, the company set about persuading more states to legalize the lottery. Starting in the late seventies, S.G.I. began hiring lobbyists, contracting with advertising firms, creating astroturf citizens' groups, and spending millions of dollars to persuade voters in Arizona, California, Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, Oregon, and the District of Columbia to pass lottery initiatives.

Scientific Games was not the only company providing lottery services, but its competitors had largely eschewed lobbying, nominally out of ethical concerns but really because they were reluctant to spend money that they wouldn't recoup if they didn't land the resulting contracts. S.G.I. got around this difficulty by making sure that the lottery initiatives it backed contained language—allegedly intended to prevent the involvement of organized crime—that required extensive financial disclosures not only from all the executives at companies submitting a bid but from all the executives at their parent companies, too. That requirement alone made the bidding process too burdensome to be worthwhile for S.G.I.'s chief competitor, Webcraft Games, since it was owned by Beatrice Foods, which at the time was larger than Lockheed Martin, 3M, and Coca-Cola. The S.G.I.-supported initiatives also mandated tight timelines for the bidding process, giving the company a planning edge while making it virtually impossible for anyone else to complete the paperwork in time.

However dodgy this strategy may have been, it worked. Every lottery initiative backed by S.G.I. succeeded—and, in every case, the company was rewarded with a contract. That meant its lobbying investment paid off, spectacularly; in California, for instance, S.G.I. spent $2.4 million to pass a lottery initiative, then won the resulting forty-million-dollar contract. Wins like that soon turned Scientific Games into an unstoppable force within the lottery industry. By 1982, the company had printed its five-billionth ticket and was producing a million more every hour. At the same time, the lottery industry itself had become unstoppable, too—thanks to S.G.I. and the wave of legalizations, but also thanks to the introduction of a new version of a very old game of chance that, as Cohen writes, "fundamentally reshaped the place of lotteries in American society."

Based on a betting game originally played in seventeenth-century Genoa, lotto is not self-evidently groundbreaking—or, for that matter, self-evidently appealing. To play, you guess a certain quantity of numbers from a specified range. The New York Lotto, for instance, requires six numbers between one and fifty-nine; the North Carolina lotto, five numbers between one and forty-three. The odds of getting all the numbers right are absurdly low—which, paradoxically, is why lotto revolutionized the industry.

Before the game was introduced, state jackpots were relatively modest. Their size was limited by the number of players, since payouts reflected a percentage of ticket sales, as well as by state lottery commissions, which set a cap on the prize money; from 1964 to



1979, jackpots seldom exceeded a million dollars. But lotto was a rollover game: if a drawing was held and nobody won—a common occurrence, given the odds—players could keep buying tickets. For those profiting from the lottery, this created a virtuous cycle. Every time the pot got bigger, more people were tempted to buy a ticket, and the more people bought tickets, the bigger the pot became.

The whole thing was hugely counterintuitive—the worse the odds of winning became, the more people wanted to play. Alexander Hamilton was right: to the average person, the difference between one-in-three-million odds and one-in-three-hundred-million odds didn't matter, but the difference between a three-million-dollar jackpot and a three-hundred-million-dollar jackpot mattered enormously. Recognizing this, lottery commissioners began lifting prize caps and adding more numbers—say, six out of fifty instead of five out of thirty—thus making the likelihood of winning even smaller. The New York Lotto launched, in 1978, with one-in-3.8-million odds; today, the odds are one in forty-five million.

Despite all this, and to the despair of statisticians everywhere, lotto soon became the nation's most popular lottery game. But although ticket sales and prize winnings soared, they did not do so equally across the country, since rollover jackpots disproportionately benefitted states with large populations and therefore more potential players. In response, smaller states banded together to form multistate lotteries, a trend that culminated in Powerball and Mega Millions, each of which started as a collaboration among a handful of states but is now played everywhere the lottery is legal. The resulting prizes are truly astronomical; this past July, two people who bought a lottery ticket in Illinois bucked one-in-three-hundred-and-two-million odds to win a $1.34-billion Mega Millions jackpot.

In some respects, the modern American lotto game is a product of technological change; it could not have existed prior to computer programs that enabled states to know more or less instantly whether anyone had purchased a ticket with the winning numbers. But Cohen makes a persuasive case that it was also a product of cultural change: the end of a shared reverence for middle-class stability and the rise, in the nineteen-eighties, of the veneration of extravagant wealth. The years in which lotto reshaped the national gambling scene were the years of deregulation and Reaganomics, Donald J. Trump and Alex P. Keaton, the première of "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous"

and a remake of "Brewster's Millions." Pastors were preaching the prosperity gospel; politicians were singing the praises of the unfettered free market. Suddenly, Cohen writes, "it was no longer taboo to collect a massive fortune; neither was it offensive to show it off. Wealth—not the prosperity of blue-collar workers but the fortunes of their bosses—became a means of reasserting the bounty of capitalism."

The irony, as Cohen notes, is that this obsession with unimaginable wealth, including the dream of hitting a multimillion-dollar lottery jackpot, corresponded to a decline in financial security for most working people. Beginning in the nineteen-seventies and accelerating in the nineteen-eighties, the income gap between the rich and the poor widened, job security and pensions eroded, health-care costs and unemployment rose, and, for children born in those decades, our long-standing national promise—that education and hard work would render them better off than their parents—ceased to be true. Life, as it turned out, imitated the lottery: for most Americans, it was getting harder and harder to win.

The lottery was supposed to make all this better, not worse. Its advocates claimed that, by filling state coffers without increasing state taxes, it would keep money in the pockets of average citizens. But this premise, which led state after state to approve lotteries, was simply untrue. Evidence from the first legalized lotteries quickly put paid to the fantasy that they would provide sufficient income to fund much of the business of running a state. In New Jersey, where proponents had imagined proceeds on the order of hundreds of millions of dollars, the lottery brought in thirty-three million dollars in its first year—about two per cent of the state's revenue.

When figures like that proved typical of the era, legalization advocates, no longer able to sell the lottery as a statewide silver bullet, ginned up other strategies instead, often with the help of Scientific Games. Rather than argue that a lottery would float most of a state's budget, they began claiming that it would cover a single line item, invariably a government service that was popular and nonpartisan—most often education, but sometimes elder care or public parks or aid for veterans. One virtue of this narrower approach was that it made campaigning for legalization easy. A vote for the lottery was not a way of supporting gambling but a way of supporting veterans; a vote against the lottery was a vote against education.

These campaigns were extraordinarily effective but, as with the earlier ones, fundamentally misleading. For one thing, they, too, wildly inflated the impact of lottery money on state finances. In California, where an S.G.I.-backed lottery initiative passed after a high-profile campaign touted it as a boon for schoolchildren, the resulting revenue covered, in the lottery's first year, about five per cent of the state education budget. As of this year, according to the California Department of Education, lottery income accounts for roughly one per cent of all K-12 funding.

But that was not the worst of it. Again and again, education and other line items that served to persuade people to pass lottery proposals did not actually get any additional funding; instead, the revenue went into the state's general fund. After this happened in California, other states mandated that lottery money flow directly into specified programs, but, as is so often the case, when one loophole closes, another one opens. In Illinois, Florida, and Virginia, among other states, the lottery revenue did indeed go to a designated education fund—whereupon legislators offset those gains by reducing the money coming in from general appropriations. In the end, Cohen writes, "the lottery supplanted, rather than supplemented, state spending on education."

Today, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, lotteries bring in, on average, about one per cent of state revenue per year. Like all money, it matters, but whatever difference it makes is offset by two problems. The first is that lotteries have made it harder than ever to pass much needed tax increases, because, thanks



"Other than moist feet, it's exactly the same as earth."

to years of noisy campaigning followed by decades of heavy promotion, the public wrongly believes that schools and other vital services are lavishly supported by gambling funds. The second is that the money raised by lotteries comes largely from the people who can least afford to part with it. Every state lottery is regressive, meaning that it takes a disproportionate toll on low-income citizens. Rich people do play the lottery, of course; one of the largest-ever Powerball jackpots, a quarter of a billion dollars, was won by three asset managers from Greenwich, Connecticut. But the wealthy buy fewer tickets than the poor (except when jackpots approach ten figures); because of that and because their purchases constitute a much smaller percentage of their income, playing the lottery has a far smaller impact on their pocketbooks. The difference can be drastic: according to the consumer financial company Bankrate, players making more than fifty thousand dollars per year spend, on average, one per cent of their annual income on lottery tickets; those making less than thirty thousand dollars spend thirteen per cent. That means someone making twenty-seven thousand dollars loses some thirty-five hundred dollars to the lottery every year. To put that number in context, nearly sixty per cent of Americans have less than a thousand dollars in savings.



Defenders of the lottery sometimes cast it as a tax on the stupid, meaning either that players don't understand how unlikely they are to win or that they enjoy the game anyway. This suggests that lottery spending is a wholly personal rather than a partly structural decision, but in reality it is responsive to economic fluctuation; as Cohen writes, "Lottery sales increase as incomes fall, unemployment grows, and poverty rates rise." As with all commercial products, lottery sales also increase with exposure to advertising—and lottery products are most heavily promoted in neighborhoods that are disproportionately poor, Black, or Latino. In Texas, where the minimum wage is $7.25, you can buy a fifty-dollar scratch-off ticket at a check-cashing venue or pick up Powerball and Mega Millions tickets, like Snickers bars, while paying for groceries at a Dollar General. Nor are state lottery commissions above availing themselves of the psychology of addiction. Everything about the lottery—from ad campaigns to the look of the front of the tickets and the math behind them—is designed to keep players coming back for more. None of this is particularly different from the strategies of tobacco companies or video-game manufacturers. It just isn't normally done under the auspices of the government.

In the final pages of "For a Dollar and a Dream," Cohen, a fair and meticulous collector of data, finally puts his thumb on the scale. Considering the regressive nature of state lotteries, their predatory practices, their role in fostering gambling addictions, the way they discourage normal taxation, and their relatively modest financial contributions, he concludes that they "should not exist in the modern United States." As he acknowledges, this advice is not likely to be taken anytime soon; no state has repealed its lottery in more than a hundred and twenty-five years. Still, he argues, we should work toward common-sense reforms, such as banning the sale of tickets online, capping the cost of scratch-off tickets and the size of lotto jackpots, and, perhaps most important, closing a loophole that leaves lotteries exempt from F.T.C. regulation, and thus free from the constraints of truth-in-advertising laws.

What would happen if state lotteries waned in influence or vanished altogether? Cohen surely overreaches when he claims that, "without such a blinding beacon, more Americans might be willing to think critically about the economic forces that have degraded access to social mobility and have made it more difficult for people to attain financial security." But he is right that governments in a democratic society should be in the business of improving the odds, not rigging the game, and that there are far more equitable and effective ways for the state to use its mighty powers to improve life for its citizens. As the California Lottery put it in a 2013 advertising campaign, "Believe in something bigger." ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

PATRIOT GAMES

Guo Wengui has been linked to Chinese intelligence, the F.B.I., and Donald Trump. What is he after?

BY EVAN OSNOS

The Sherry-Netherland, a slender neo-Renaissance tower at 781 Fifth Avenue, is known as one of New York's "white glove" co-ops, for the linen gloves that the elevator attendants wear. It has panoramic views of Central Park, décor inherited from a Vanderbilt mansion, and amenities befitting a luxury hotel; room service comes from the Harry Cipriani restaurant downstairs. Through the years, the Sherry has accommodated the occasional celebrity—Diana Ross, Francis Ford Coppola, David Bowie—but, like other buildings of its kind, it tends to prefer quieter money.

On a winter day in 2015, the Sherry's co-op board received an unusual application. A Chinese businessman calling himself Miles Guo wanted the most expensive unit in the building—a penthouse that occupies the entire eighteenth floor, with six bedrooms, nine bathrooms, and three terraces. There was no need to secure a mortgage; he could send sixty-eight million dollars in cash. Although Guo didn't know anyone at the Sherry who could vouch for him, his lawyers, at prominent firms in Washington and New York, delivered confidential documents that identified him as a married father of two, who owned a Beijing real-estate enterprise with assets of nearly four billion dollars. He was No. 74 on a list of China's richest people, but he avoided public attention, and even basic photographs were scarce. A reference letter from U.B.S., the Swiss bank, characterized him as a "modest gentleman with a warm heart." A personal recommendation from Tony Blair, Britain's former Prime Minister, said, "Miles is honest, forthright and has impeccable taste."

The co-op board, moving with unusual alacrity, convened to approve the application. Guo arrived soon afterward, accompanied by a coterie of attendants and, later, by a white Pomeranian named Snow. Around the building, the new tenant was hard to miss. He was a handsome, ebullient man in his late forties, with an array of trim-cut Brioni suits and a broad smile.

From his adopted home on the Upper East Side, Guo spent lavishly and gained access to new worlds. He paid forty-three million dollars for a silver superyacht, Lady May, which had space to entertain fifty people and a living room that revolved on a cushion of compressed air. In London, he socialized at Mark's Club, a members-only establishment, and travelled around town in a white Rolls-Royce. On one visit, he implored an acquaintance, whom he'd met only hours before, to borrow the car for as long as he needed.

Donald Trump became the Republican Presidential front-runner that summer, and Guo's instincts proved well suited to the emerging era; he had already joined Mar-a-Lago, Trump's club in Palm Beach, and he wasn't shy about praising his own business acumen ("I'm a genius at making money!"). He boasted of expensive tastes: handmade Louis Vuitton shoes, a rare variety of tea that he reportedly declared was worth a million dollars a kilo. Even before he was introduced to Steve Bannon, Trump's chief strategist, Bannon had heard enough about Guo to pronounce him "the Donald Trump of Beijing." (Years later, when federal agents went looking for Bannon in connection with an allegedly fraudulent scheme to raise money for a wall on the Mexican border, they found him aboard Guo's yacht, in Long Island Sound.)

At the Sherry, though, Guo rapidly developed a reputation for peculiar habits. He seemed obsessed with the risk of intruders; he tried to block the fire exit in his penthouse, and residents complained that he stationed bodyguards in the lobby. In March, 2015, a spate of reports in the Chinese press offered an explanation for his anxiety: Guo—whom the reports referred to by his Mandarin name, Guo Wengui—was at the center of a burgeoning scandal involving corruption and espionage.

For nearly a decade, he had maintained a secret partnership with one of China's most powerful spymasters, an intelligence officer named Ma Jian, who had recently been arrested by his own government. *Caixin*, a Chinese investigative news organization, reported that Ma and Guo had used surveillance, blackmail, and political influence to amass fortunes and evade scrutiny.

Guo denied any wrongdoing; he told a Hong Kong newspaper that he and Ma were just friends, who had met through work and bonded over a shared appreciation for architecture. But, two years later, he changed his story dramatically. He acknowledged that he had been a longtime "affiliate" of China's all-pervasive Ministry of State Security. The agency, he said, had tasked him with "handling things for them" and connecting with "sensitive figures" abroad, travelling on eleven different passports and employing the code name Wu Nan.

Even more startling, he subsequently declared himself an enemy of the Chinese Communist Party—a position almost unheard-of among China's élite. He applied for political asylum in the United States, and founded a media network, which broadcast incendiary criticisms of the C.C.P. and enthusiastic support for Trump. His businesses reportedly paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to Trump advisers, including Bannon, Rudy Giuliani, and the attorney L. Lin Wood, who joined efforts to overturn the 2020 election. As Guo's neighbors at the Sherry-Netherland watched in confusion, he established himself as an election denier, a vaccine skeptic, and a right-wing provocateur, with a degree of influence that is virtually unique among foreign citizens on American soil.

Through the decades, Washington



NATALIE KEYSSAR

From a sixty-eight-million-dollar penthouse in New York, Guo built a new life as a player in the U.S. media and politics.

has attracted no shortage of wealthy figures who learned to surf the rivalries in American politics. But how, exactly, a Chinese intelligence collaborator was reborn as a darling of Trump Republicans is a measure of the shifting folkways of conservative politics, and the extraordinary power that accrues to people with the wealth and savvy to command the technologies of influence. Depending on whom you believe, Guo has been either an asset of the F.B.I. or a target of its suspicions, or perhaps both at the same time. Under one alias or another—including Miles Kwok, Guo Haoyun, and Ho Wan Kwok—he has been sued numerous times for defamation, libel, and inflicting emotional distress, and has sued many others on similar grounds. The Chinese government says that he is under investigation in at least nineteen cases, for allegations that include bribery, money laundering, and rape—all of which he denies, attributing them to a propaganda campaign. (Guo and his attorneys declined requests to comment for this article.)

Some observers argue that Guo's disruptive behavior makes sense only if he is still linked to the Chinese state. In a federal court filing from 2019, a private intelligence firm in a business dispute with him claimed that he "was, and is, a dissident-hunter, propagandist, and agent in the service of the People's Republic of China." Guo denied the accusation and won the case, but the court left open the question of his actual identity. "The evidence at trial does not permit the Court to decide whether Guo is, in fact, a dissident or a double agent," Judge Lewis J. Liman wrote. "Others will have to determine who the true Guo is."

The farming village of Xicaoying, in the flatlands of Shandong Province, takes gritty pride in its history. A monument marks the spot nearby where Emperor Qin, who unified China more than two thousand years ago, is said to have ordered an embankment built at such speed that workers who died from the toil were entombed in their own earthworks. Guo grew up there in the nineteen-seventies, in an impoverished family with eight children. He started out without much more than the gift of gab—a "tireless tongue," as it is known in Chinese. He had little interest in school. When Chinese reporters later probed his background, a teacher recalled, "he led a group that mostly fought, gambled, and chased girls."

At thirteen, Guo dropped out, and for a time he found work selling clothes and electronics. But, in 1989, before he could build much of a career, he was put in jail. He has offered a high-minded explanation for his imprisonment: Inspired by the pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, he sold his motorcycle and sent thirty-six hundred yuan—about a thousand dollars—to the student activists. When police came to arrest him, his younger brother objected and was fatally shot. Guo served twenty-two months, and, according to a brisk narrative in his court filings, underwent a storybook transformation: "After his release from prison, Mr. Guo became a successful real estate developer and investor."

A copy of the verdict in Guo's case makes no mention of political activism; it lists his crime as fraud, for bilking buyers in a local oil scheme. Moreover, he was detained a week before the crackdown on protests in Beijing. (Guo suggested that prosecutors falsified the charges.)

But jail did change Guo's life, providing him with contacts that shaped his early career. After his release, a fellow-inmate led him to an entry-level job with a wealthy entrepreneur in Hong Kong, a woman named Xia Ping. Guo's new position offered heady opportunities. In 1993, when he was in his twenties, he was running a company called Big Boss Furniture. Soon, he joined a project to build the first skyscraper hotel in Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan Province. Henan is a rough place, where a legacy of poverty feeds an image of endemic crime, as well as a cruel caricature across China. (A Beijing newspaper once lamented that the locals are "generally regarded as cheaters, thieves, troublemakers, and bumpkins.") But Guo thrived there.

The business scene ran on a quasi-legal symbiosis between entrepreneurs and Party officials. Builders needed land and protection from regulators; apparatchiks wanted kickbacks, and they wanted to be linked with the kinds of projects—hotels, railways, coal mines—that inspire promotions. Over time, Guo built enough trust with patrons in high office that he was allowed to handle their most delicate business dealings. In China, such attendants are known as "white gloves," because they help politicians make money while keeping their hands clean.



"Fine—which five-hour ballad of my adventures do you want to hear?"

Life as a white glove is lucrative but risky. "We were like the fish that clean the teeth of crocodiles," a former white glove named Desmond Shum recalled in "Red Roulette," a memoir that he published after fleeing China. According to his account, in the two-thousands Shum, an entrepreneur in Beijing, became a white glove for the wife of China's Premier, Wen Jiabao. To succeed, he had to master what he called the "infinite fungibility of Chinese laws." He and his wife, Whitney Duan, learned how to find political sponsors and how to win deals by supplying bureaucrats with gifts; they learned when to flatter an official's knowledge of poetry and when to buy him a thousand-dollar bowl of soup, made from coveted fish maw. The business relied on appeasing officials' vanity. One of Shum's employees accompanied "so many people to so many bathhouses that his skin started peeling off."

Perhaps the most important principle of survival, Shum wrote, was that Party officials "used corruption investigations to purge their political foes," so they were fanatical about hiding business deals from one another. A prominent Beijing venue dedicated two staff members to staggering politicians' dinner reservations, so that no one could see whom anyone else was dining with. The couple knew they had joined a "life-and-death" game, but they accepted the risk. "We'd come from nothing," Shum wrote. "So why not go for it all?" They were divorced in 2015; two years later, Duan disappeared, presumably detained by the government. Shum has said that his family has not heard from her since, except for two phone calls pleading with him not to publish the book.

Around 2002, Guo turned his focus to Beijing, where the prospects, and the stakes, were far higher. In the capital, he developed a reputation for transactional generosity. A regulator, whom Guo was courting for an approval, is said to have walked out of his apartment to find a new sports car waiting for him. In the glove compartment was a gift card, loaded with the equivalent of several hundred thousand dollars. (Guo has emphatically denied paying bribes.)

Word got around that Guo could be as ruthless as he was generous. He seemed to have access to compromising information—the power to "grab someone by the handle," as the Chinese expression goes. In 2006, while Guo was trying to secure a building permit for a patch of land beside the site of the upcoming Summer Olympic Games, he was rebuffed by Liu Zhihua, a powerful vice-mayor of Beijing. In retaliation, Guo obtained a tape of Liu having sex with a mistress and delivered it to the government. The vice-mayor was accused of corruption and of leading a "decadent lifestyle," and given a suspended death sentence. Guo got his permit.

Guo later revealed that he had obtained the tape from government agencies. *Caixin* reported that it came from Ma Jian, the spymaster, whom he had befriended in Beijing. Ma had heavy-lidded eyes, a rosebud mouth, and sturdy jowls. In three decades at the security services, he had risen to the top of the counterintelligence department—the shadowy specialty of seeking out moles, double agents, and conspirators. He not only led the hunt for snooping foreigners; he also collected files on his comrades in the Communist Party, on the theory that thwarting potential blackmail requires cataloguing the weaknesses of one's own side—who has a young lover, say, or a drug habit that an enemy could exploit. As a former diplomat put it, Ma was the man with a "safe full of papers."

The Chinese security services have long cultivated relationships with "commercial cadres"—businesspeople who share information, and sometimes profits, in return for protection. The ethos, as one leader put it, is to "use business to cultivate intelligence, so that intelligence and business thrive together."

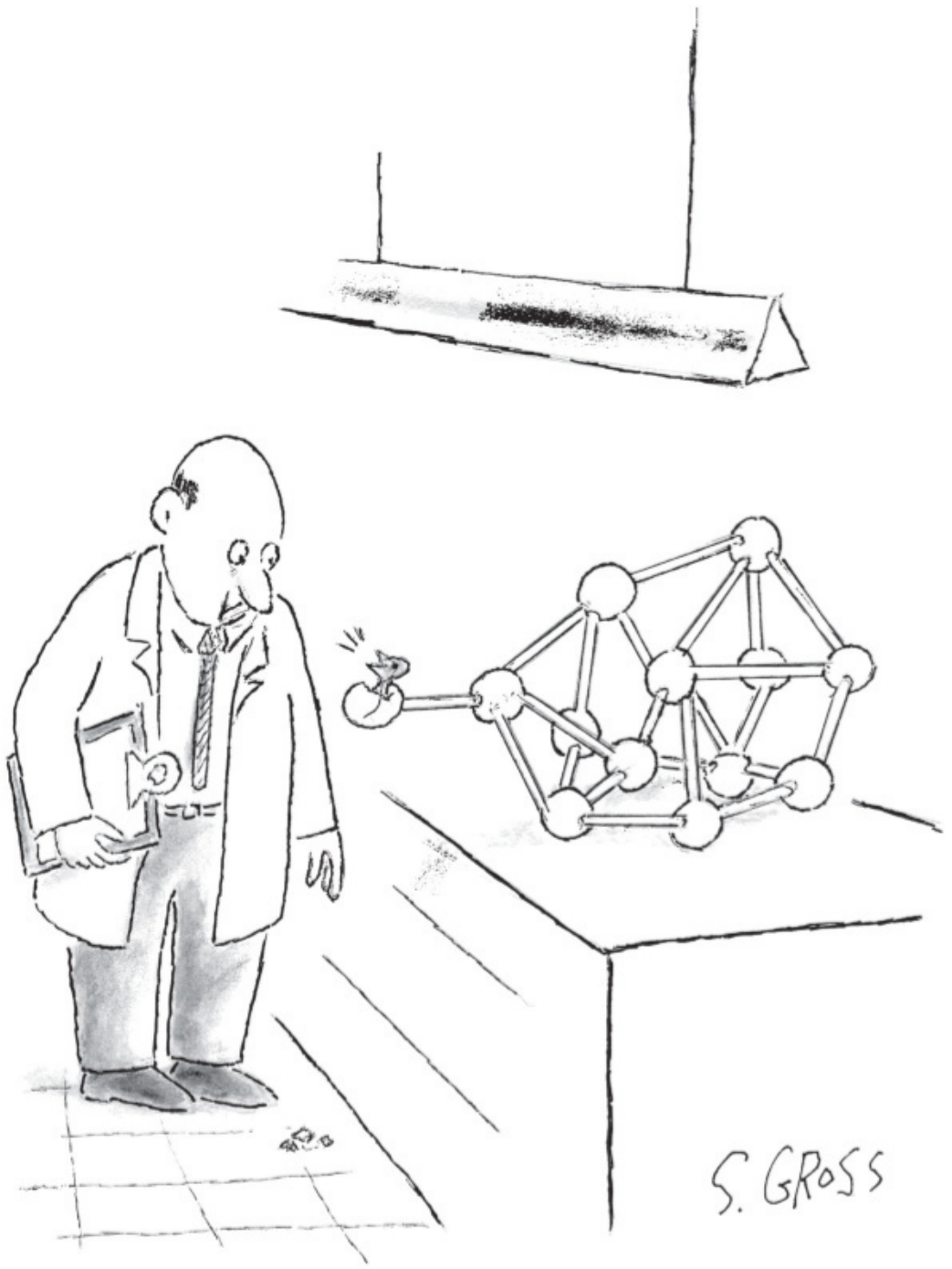
At times, the linkages have extended to criminal enterprises. In 1993, one of China's top law-enforcement officials, Tao Siju, praised "patriotic" elements of the Hong Kong Mafia, a brutal network of drug runners and blackmailers who were known to attack their rivals with meat cleavers. For decades, the security services have built relationships with scrappy young rogues whose ingenuity and underworld contacts might prove useful. A scholar who is familiar with China's security apparatus told me, "They find people in their early stage. They can change their name; they can change their story. They need to be picked up from nowhere."

When Guo encountered Ma, he was already skilled at borrowing the government's power: after arriving in Beijing, he paid a transportation official for license plates bearing the letter "A," which typically signal connections with high officials. (For years, cars with these plates were effectively exempt from traffic laws, because cops rarely dared to pull them over.) Now he evidently began to benefit from his association with the security services. When a man named Qu Long tried to report Guo for strong-arm tactics, he was himself arrested by a team that included an officer from Ma's ministry and sent to prison.

These kinds of gambits fed a fearsome reputation among Guo's business rivals, who nicknamed him the "god of war." Even some of his employees were frightened of him. Chen Zhiyao, a Taiwanese businessman, was once summoned to a company office to discuss a dispute over money. Before going, Chen told his wife to call him every thirty minutes; if he didn't answer, she was to contact his friends—he gave her a list of ten—and raise the alarm. At the office, according to allegations that Chen later published in Taiwan, he was detained, beaten, and threatened with a gun. He sued in a Beijing court, but lost the case.

At the site that Guo had wrested back from the vice-mayor, he developed the Pangu Plaza, a complex containing the Pangu 7 Star Hotel (Guo assigned the rating himself) and a row of luxury high-rises arranged in the shape of a dragon. The tallest of the buildings, with a crown designed to resemble an Olympic flame, became a new landmark on the Beijing skyline. But reporters looking into Guo's background quickly ran aground; the *Beijing News*, a local paper, said that its editors received a letter from Ma's ministry directing them to drop a story for reasons of "national security." Even at the grand opening of the high-rises, where Guo presided, photographers were reportedly ordered not to take his picture.

Guo's relatively low profile made him useful to the spy agency. Operating as a cutout—a civilian who can circulate



without attracting official attention—he took several trips to meet with the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader, whom Beijing regards as a dangerous separatist. Guo said that he conveyed messages back and forth, and that the government offered him awards for his services, which he modestly declined. But, before long, he began to draw international notice. Randal Phillips, who was then the C.I.A. station chief in Beijing, noted that the head of the Chinese military's clandestine service sometimes arranged meetings at Guo's hotel—a sign that intelligence officers considered it safe territory.

Eventually, Guo began talking to American officials directly, though he revealed little of himself. A former government official told me, "The first time the U.S. Embassy ran across Guo Wengui, that wasn't the name he was using—it was Miles Kwok. He introduced himself and talked to the embassy, and the embassy filed several cables. The narrative he gave was that he was a princeling"—a son of the powerful élite. "He made up this whole biography. The embassy did a little bit of digging, and it all fell apart." Still, it seemed possible that he had valuable information. Diplomats dined with Guo at his hotel periodically, and he spoke with unusual candor about which Chinese leaders were womanizing and embezzling. He claimed to have witnessed some of them cavorting on his own private jet. "He'd dish," the former diplomat said.

In Washington, some of those who heard Guo's tales suspected that they were exaggerations, or disinformation meant to tarnish rivals and confuse Americans about Beijing politics. But people who encountered Guo were struck by his access to the government. Not long after the 2008 Olympics, Orville Schell, a journalist and author who leads the Center on U.S.-China Relations, at the Asia Society, was invited to join Guo in his private dining room at the Pangu Plaza. Guo gave him an effusive welcome, Schell told me: "Miles takes to you like a long-lost friend." After dinner, Guo took him down to a basement garage, to show off a collection of luxury cars: "Lamborghinis, Porsches, Maseratis—the whole nine yards." In Beijing, no one acquires such ostentatious wealth without powerful protection.

The two stayed in touch, and Schell noticed that Guo seemed able to draw anyone to his dinner table: Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, politicians from Hong Kong and Macau. He once returned from a visit to North Korea with a pompadour in the style of Kim Jong Il. "He waxed quite elegiac about Kim, and what a close buddy he'd become," Schell said.

At one point, Schell, who had written critically of China's record on human rights, encountered resistance to his visa application, and Guo volunteered to help. "He said, 'I'm going to fix this for you. But you've got to talk to some people.'" Guo took Schell to a series of meetings with two officials of indeterminate portfolio. "Every session was at some fancy tearoom," Schell said. "They never wanted to tell me directly who they were in the government. But we would get together to talk for hours about U.S.-China policy." Schell concluded that they were intelligence officers. "I learned more from them about the inner thinking in Party organs than in all my decades of experience in China. I'm certain they were trying to flip me. They tried to give me presents and take me on trips, but I thought, Well, I know these guys are spooks, and the room is obviously wired." As Schell got to know Guo, it became increasingly clear how closely he was entwined with Ma. "We would be eating dinner, and he'd be on the phone every ten minutes with this guy," Schell said. "This was how he got everything done: Ma Jian."

The competition among China's élite usually takes place behind a kind of virtual curtain. Officials do their best to obscure their infighting, and journalists know that reporting on such behavior is forbidden—unless it becomes too public to be ignored. A decade ago, a charismatic Party boss named Bo Xilai was

purged after his wife murdered one of their white gloves with a dose of cyanide. The deceased was an Englishman, Neil Heywood, and, once the British Embassy publicly acknowledged suspicions about his death, censors had no choice but to allow the topic into the news.

In Guo's case, he might still be in China if it weren't for a secretive power play that spilled into public view. In late 2014, while trying to win control of a financial firm, he attempted to displace a rival, Li You, by accusing him of corruption. Guo's company publicized claims that Li was hiding a billion dollars abroad, manipulating stock prices, and securing protection from high-level patrons.

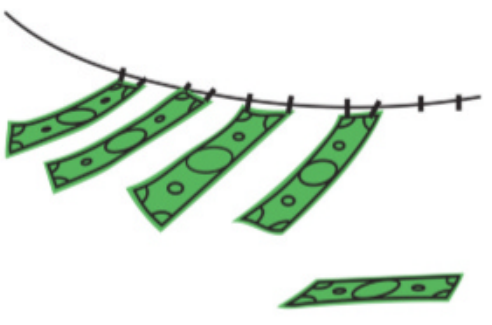
Li did not give up without a fight. When police came to a Beijing hotel to arrest him, his bodyguards stalled while he escaped—reportedly still in his pajamas. Although Li was eventually caught, the conflict with Guo had become too visible to suppress. A Chinese reporter had witnessed the fracas in the hotel, and the feud had triggered investigations inside the government. The details of Guo's ties to Ma started to appear in the overseas Chinese media, which are not bound by censors, and gradually made their way to the local press.

The authorities were alarmed. If the spymaster with a "safe full of papers" went rogue, he could do unimaginable damage. On January 16, 2015, the Party announced that Ma was under investigation. A former intelligence official told me that Guo was nearly arrested, too, but he received a warning just in time: "When the security guys came to Ma's office, trying to detain him, his senior aide was on the phone to Guo, saying, 'Get the fuck out now.'" The government soon seized many of his assets and began arresting his relatives and employees.

Guo flew to Hong Kong, and then to London, where he had powerful connections—including the former Prime Minister Tony Blair, whom he had been courting for years. Shortly after Blair and his wife, Cherie, departed Downing Street, Guo bought five thousand copies of Cherie's autobiography, saying that it would inspire his employees. He also donated to Blair's charities. An affinity grew. By 2013, Blair was working for a sovereign wealth fund in Abu Dhabi, and, according to *Caixin*, he agreed to introduce Guo to members of the Royal Family. The two men flew there together in a jet that Guo chartered, and Guo raised three billion dollars from the royals. (A spokesman declined to answer *Caixin's* questions about the trip but noted that Blair "has never had a commercial contract with Mr. Kwok.")

Ultimately, Guo landed in New York, where he submitted his application for the penthouse at the Sherry-Netherland. It was increasingly clear that he might never go back to China. He needed to master a new terrain, and so he started with a game he knew: intelligence. Around the world, the F.B.I. maintains thousands of formal and informal sources, ranging from government bureaucrats to shoe shiners who monitor foot traffic on a street corner. Some have civic motives, in the way of a grandmother on a porch who quietly notes the make and model of a drug dealer's car. But in most cases the relationships are transactional. The source wants money or protection from prosecution; the handler, as one former agent told me, is "trying to juice as much utility out of that person" as possible.

In New York, Guo spoke to the F.B.I. about Chinese leaders' financial and private lives, according to two sources familiar with the arrangement. "He knew who had girlfriends, who had boyfriends," a former Bureau official recalled. More important, Guo knew which Party families profited from which



companies: "Just going to Miles and asking him these questions will save you three or four months of analytical work." In one instance, the official said, Guo provided information about Xi Jinping's daughter while she was attending college in the U.S.

The C.I.A. was less impressed; analysts concluded that Guo could not be trusted to keep secrets. But the F.B.I. remained in contact. "If you ask ten different F.B.I. and C.I.A. people about Miles, you're going to get seven different answers," the former Bureau official said. "It's not always perfect. But no source is." The official added, "He knows that he needs us to protect him. So he'll constantly give just enough." Guo looked for other forms of protection, too, trying to hire people with connections to the local power structure. In New York, he invited Jeh Johnson, who ran the Department of Homeland Security under President Obama, to his apartment at the Sherry-Netherland. Johnson had left the government and was working as a lawyer at a white-shoe firm, and Guo wanted to hire him. During their meeting, Johnson responded politely, telling Guo, "I feel like you're somebody I want to help." After doing more research into Guo, however, Johnson declined to take him on.

In China, Guo had demonstrated an unshakable instinct for aligning himself with politicians who could help him. In the U.S., he seemed to determine quickly who his likeliest benefactors were. Since Xi Jinping became Party Secretary, in 2012, he has reasserted Party control, reversed reforms, and expanded China's pursuit of power abroad. In Washington, a rare consensus grew among Republicans and Democrats that engaging China, in pursuit of coöperation and openness, has failed. But the two sides disagree on what to do about it. Democrats tend to oppose Xi's government on an array of issues—China's mass internment of Muslims, its pressure on Taiwan, its military activities in the South China Sea—but they still seek coöperation on climate change, health, and weapons proliferation. Republicans have made aggression toward China a measure of conservative credibility, and have edged closer to declaring the Communist Party illegitimate.

In January, 2017, soon after Trump's Inauguration, Guo activated his Twitter account and sat for the first of a series of interviews in the overseas Chinese media. He accused some of China's most senior leaders of corruption. He focussed on Wang Qishan, the Party's anti-corruption chief, claiming that his relatives were hidden stakeholders in HNA, the profitable parent company of Hainan Airlines, and that they owned American real estate worth as much as

ten million dollars. Guo posted personal information online, including passports and flight records. (HNA denied the claims and sued Guo for defamation.)

He started live-streaming from the penthouse and the deck of Lady May, offering other salacious, often unproved, allegations. His social-media accounts attracted hundreds of thousands of followers, mostly Chinese expatriates—many of whom avidly supported Trump, because of his criticisms of China. Guo declared it the beginning of a "whistle-blower movement," and extolled his own courage: "Guo Wengui is from the grass roots, born as a farmer, and not afraid of death."

In China, Guo's disclosures came as a bombshell. They arrived in the run-up to a major Communist conclave, the 19th Party Congress, which would determine the top leadership for the next five years. The accusations were widely perceived as sabotage orchestrated by Xi's enemies, or perhaps by meddling Americans, in order to interfere with the coronation.

The Party struck back swiftly; it asked Interpol, the global police organization, to issue a "red notice" seeking Guo's extradition. A video confession from his former patron, the spymaster Ma Jian, was uploaded to YouTube. Looking bedraggled and reading carefully, Ma said that he had accepted some sixty million yuan in bribes from Guo and had intervened repeatedly to aid his businesses. (Guo has denied bribing Ma.)

Online, Chinese censors sought to block any trace of Guo's accusations, but their efforts were evidently not stringent enough: ordinary Internet users were circumventing the firewall in large numbers. Xiao Qiang, a research scientist at U.C. Berkeley, studied trends in Web searches from mainland China and found a pattern of sharp surges on days when Guo broadcast. Xiao called it "the Guo Wengui effect."

The actual effect on Chinese politics was less clear. Although Wang, the target of the attacks, remained in power, one of his top aides was later imprisoned. HNA went bankrupt, and senior executives were detained by police. In 2018, the company's co-chairman fell off a wall while posing for a photograph in France. The police ruled out foul play, but Guo, in his new role as a media personality, was becoming an avid conspiracist. He called a press conference in New York and suggested that the executive had been killed because he "knew too much."

One day in May, 2017, a team of four officers from China's security services—Guo's former allies—turned up at the Sherry-Netherland. The lobby is an ornate place, with hand-loomed French carpets, marble mosaics, and a ceiling painted with cherubs inspired by frescoes at the Vatican. The officers didn't linger; they headed for the penthouse, where Guo was expecting them.

Guo and the security officers spoke for hours, arrayed on the gold-colored furniture in his solarium. The government was making an audacious push to get him back. He later released excerpts of a recording, in which they could be heard discussing a deal: return to China, and they would leave his family alone and unfreeze his assets. The officers, Guo said afterward, had brought his wife and their daughter from Beijing; permitting his family to leave was a gesture of good will. Guo didn't trust them. "Unless I get Secretary Xi's approval, I won't go back," he said.

The visit caught the attention of Guo's new contacts at the F.B.I. Later that day, the Chinese team was at Penn Station, on the way to Washington, when agents from the Bureau stopped them. The F.B.I. ordered the Chinese officers to leave the country, and to stay away from Guo. Two days later, though, they returned to his apartment, and a debate grew within the U.S. government over whether the provocation was significant enough that the F.B.I. should arrest the officers. A national-security official who was involved in the discussions recalled, "My view was, we had to impose a penalty on them."

As the Chinese team headed to J.F.K. airport for an afternoon flight to Beijing, the Bureau dispatched agents to intercept them. The U.S. Attorney's office in Brooklyn prepared charges of visa fraud and extortion. But the State Department expressed a concern: the Chinese officers might have diplomatic immunity, and arresting them could expose Americans in China to retaliation. A compromise was reached, under which the Bureau could make a limited show of force. Just before the flight took off, agents confiscated the Chinese delegation's phones. (In retribution, according to the national-security official, the Chinese later confiscated a notebook from a U.S. diplomat as she boarded a plane out of the country.)

Having failed to entice Guo to return home, authorities in China tried to force him out of the United States. They made contact with Steve Wynn, who was then the finance chair of the Republican National Committee. Wynn, a hotelier, was contending with recent restrictions on his casino operations in Macau. In June, 2017, according to federal court filings, he spoke by phone with Sun Lijun, the vice-minister of public security, who asked for help in getting Guo back to China. Wynn agreed to raise the issue with President Trump.

In late June, at a dinner in Washington, Wynn conveyed the request and gave Trump's secretary a packet that included the Interpol notice, press reports, and copies of Guo's passport. Afterward, he heard from Elliott Broidy, a venture capitalist and the deputy finance chair of the Republican National Committee, who was in contact with Sun Lijun. Broidy texted that Sun was "extremely pleased and said that President Xi Jinping appreciates [the] assistance." Wynn wrote to another person, who was also involved in the communications, "I remain grateful for the privilege of being part of the Macau and PRC business community."

Soon after the dinner with Wynn, Trump was in the Oval Office, receiving a briefing on China. According to two attendees, he called out to his secretary, "Bring me the letter that Steve Wynn brought from Xi." (One attendee recalls that Wynn's packet contained a letter from the Chinese government, but not from Xi.) Trump told the group, "We should get this guy out of here. He's a rapist."

H. R. McMaster, the national-security adviser, who was also present, studied the packet and concluded that it would be inappropriate to act on the request. The attendee told me, "Trump never followed up on it. He just moved on."

Wynn tried once more: in a meeting with White House staff, according to a participant, he offered the use of his private jet to transport Guo to China. "It

THE NIGHT NURSE

The night nurse turns me in my bed and changes
the white sheets under me. They are wet, they are soiled,

and the night nurse washes my face and changes my gown.
I am clean and refreshed because of the night nurse.

The night nurse comes to me with a pill in a tiny cup.
I take the pill from her beautiful hands

and the night nurse takes away my pain, so that I may sleep
without plague of dream or fear of never waking.

The moon is out. The night nurse does not notice.
The night nurse only watches me. I am life and death

to the night nurse. I am more important to the night nurse
than the full pink moon over which the poets obsess.

The night nurse comes flying low over me like a silent drone.
The heart is beating peacefully like an upside-down bat,

the heart is racing like a Serengeti cheetah. The heart
must be listened to, beat by beat, minute by minute.

The night nurse knows my heart like no one else on earth.
The night nurse comes with a needle. I would cringe

with anyone else, but the night nurse slips the hypodermic
under my skin and into the blue vein, and I do not mind,

for I have given myself up. The night nurse
needs my blood and I gladly give her my blood.

—Emily Fragos

was a rendition that he was proposing," the participant told me. "No one answered." (Broidy and Wynn maintain that they never acted as agents of the Chinese state. The Justice Department sued Wynn, to force him to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, but last week the case was dismissed. His attorney said that Wynn believed he was acting as a "patriotic messenger," and that the offer of his jet was "a hundred per cent tongue-in-cheek.")

The politics of Beijing had prepared Guo well for navigating Trump's Washington—another realm where money bought influence, business mixed with government, and truth merged with fiction. Guo used his resources to make inroads in Trump's world. Bill Gertz, a China specialist at the *Washington Free Beacon*, posted stories on Guo and his claims, calling him a "leading Chinese dissident"—until Gertz left, in 2019, after failing to disclose that he took a hundred-thousand-dollar loan from one of Guo's associates. (Gertz did not respond to a request for comment.) Nevertheless, Gertz helped introduce Guo to influential conservatives, including the man who would become his most important collaborator: Steve Bannon.

Even before they met, Bannon had taken a special interest in corruption among the Chinese élite. Earlier in his career, Bannon had been a naval officer aboard ships in the South China Sea, worked as a banker at Goldman Sachs, and run an online gaming company with offices in Hong Kong and Shanghai. He had come to believe that China's leverage over American businesses was a threat, and he was intent on making China a central target of his brand of extreme conservative politics. Bannon said, of Guo's allegations, "This guy knows details. He's not just throwing shit out there."

Bannon had been in the Oval Office during the discussion about deporting Guo. Afterward, he told others that he had retrieved the packet that Wynn had brought and put it in his office, to make sure that Guo wasn't extradited.

After Bannon was pushed out of the White House, in August, 2017, he and Guo met at the Hay-Adams Hotel, in Washington. "We spent six hours just talking," Bannon said. Like Guo, Bannon was in search of new allies. The Mercer family, the conservative funders who had backed his earlier ventures, were breaking with him. Bannon was preparing to relaunch his media career, and, as a White House colleague put it, he needed a "new sugar daddy."

On the afternoon of June 4, 2020, bobbing on a boat in New York Harbor, Guo and Bannon held a live-streamed press event to announce a joint initiative. The two were an unusual sight: the exuberant Chinese tycoon in a dark, double-breasted suit, alongside the glowering American with his rumpled silver hair and distinctive assemblage of collared shirts. The setting had been carefully arranged, with planes trailing banners overhead and Guo's yacht and the Statue of Liberty in the background. The date marked the anniversary of the crackdown at Tiananmen Square.

Peering into a camera, Guo announced the establishment of a shadow government, which he called the New Federal State of China. In Mandarin, he made an impassioned call to arms. "We can't keep dreaming anymore. We need to take action, action, action!" he shouted, slicing the air with his hand. Bannon, who does not speak Chinese, stood by awkwardly. In 2018, he had signed a yearlong deal with one of Guo's companies for "strategic consulting services," at a cost of a million dollars.

Guo built toward a climactic finish, chanting a slogan—"Take Down the C.C.P.!"—in Chinese. After the ninth repetition, he switched to English, and

Bannon joined in. Guo was in a celebratory mood. He kissed Bannon on the cheek and, gazing up at him, said, "Love you."

"Thank you," Bannon said. "Are we still on live?" To close out the ceremony, they presented a statement of principles, which Guo signed in his own blood. (Bannon skipped that part.)

For all their differences in style, the two shared an unsentimental view of human affairs, a conspiratorial mind-set, and a belief in the power of calculated alliances. They formed a joint venture called GTV Media Group, an alternative-news platform, which ran Bannon's War Room podcast, dubbed in Mandarin, along with frequent live streams from Guo and his fans. The broadcasts touted the Rule of Law Foundation, which Guo and Bannon had founded to reveal the Communist Party's corrupting effects at home and abroad. (Guo pledged a hundred million dollars; Bannon was chairman.) And they hyped Guo's business initiatives, including cryptocurrencies, called G-Coins and G-Dollars; a membership group called GClubs; and an apparel line called GFashion.

Bannon had instructed Guo that success in the media required simplified messages, put on a loop—a principle that he has described as "wash, rinse, repeat." On the air, Guo spoke constantly of the Communist Party's crimes and the hypocrisy of its leaders. "Everything is fake," he said. Despite its eccentricity, Guo's network pulled in hundreds of millions of dollars, mostly from Chinese expats, who thrilled to the promise of challenging the Party. (When Bannon was arrested on the yacht, he left his position as chairman, but was pardoned by Trump. He has pleaded not guilty to similar charges in state court.)

Guo's platforms became popular venues for COVID misinformation, anti-vaccine rhetoric, and the promotion of folk cures. His fashion line included a button-down shirt emblazoned with the word "Ivermectin," for almost twenty-two hundred dollars. As the boundary between his businesses and his politics faded, he made wildly unsubstantiated claims. He announced that his media venture would be a good investment if the Chinese currency collapsed, and promised investors, "I will not let you lose any money." He told fans that donating to his initiatives would give them an advantage on their immigration applications. "It's very simple," he said, in a video in 2020. "If you say you support the whistle-blower movement and you've applied for political asylum, your application for asylum will one hundred per cent get approved."

In the intelligence community, Guo's disclosures on China were fuelling skepticism. When he released what he described as an internal Party plan to boost the number of spies in America, some specialists deemed it a forgery. "It had some of the right things, but it's a very particular kind of art—how they number, where they put certain markings," the former government official said. But it was not until the fall of 2020 that the expats who formed the core of Guo's audience began to question his loyalties. Faced with growing criticism of his falsehoods and his dubious ventures, Guo denounced many of the most prominent Chinese dissidents in America as "fake pro-democracy activists," and said that they "should be beaten up as soon as we see them." He called on his followers to join what he called Operation Elimination of Fake Activists.

Teng Biao, a legal scholar at Hunter College, who fled China after being persecuted for advocating human rights, began seeing comments online from people seeking his home address. One wrote, "I wanna send him a bullet directly into his head!" In December, Teng was at his house in a quiet cul-de-sac near Princeton, New Jersey, teaching a class on Zoom, when his wife came into his office. She was nervous. Sixteen people were standing in front of their house with signs and bullhorns, shouting that Teng was a "C.C.P. spy."

The protesters returned the next day, in a convoy of vehicles, and the day after that, chanting, cursing, and shouting so loudly that Teng's children could hear them from inside the house. The protesters live-streamed the scene on GTV and YouTube, and argued with neighbors who came out to defend Teng.

Similar protests appeared outside more than a dozen dissidents' homes in Texas, Virginia, and California. In Vancouver and Los Angeles, people in the crowd harassed their targets till they emerged, then beat and kicked them. (In a statement made at the time, Guo said that he had "never condoned any type of violence toward any individuals.") For nearly two months, the protesters showed up at Teng's house every day, as if they were punching a clock—shouting from 10:30 in the morning to 4:30 in the afternoon, with a break for lunch. A memo from the New Federal State of China, which was subsequently cited in a lawsuit, showed that some had been recruited for fees of as much as three hundred dollars a day, with a reward of ten thousand dollars for "excellent performance." Among Guo's followers, the protests were a clarifying moment, Teng said: "More and more of his previous supporters have realized that he is a swindler."

Guo's animosity toward dissidents might have been surprising, but it wasn't new. In a leaked recording of a phone call from 2017, he had expressed contempt for them. "They never say anything good about China," he said. "They deserve to die," he added. "I can take these bastards down and help our leaders get revenge."

Some American observers speculate that Guo never entirely broke away from Chinese intelligence. One popular theory holds that he hopes to return to China and regain some of his stature, so he has maintained ties to factions in Beijing. Chris Johnson, a former C.I.A. analyst on China, told me that Guo's disclosures must be read not only for "the people that he chooses to name, but also the people he does not name."

If Guo does represent a faction of the Chinese government, the best bet is that it's composed of powerful families and security officials who have been harmed by Xi's purges. For all Guo's fulminating against the Party, the attendee at the Oval Office meeting said, "he's not anti-C.C.P. He just views himself as a counter to Xi. This is an intra-C.C.P. fight." Teng, the dissident, shares that view. He suspects that Guo is seeking to "replace some C.C.P. leaders with officials more inclined in his favor." The goal, he says, is to "replace well-fed tigers with hungry tigers."

But, in the serpentine logic of intelligence, another theory suggests that Guo is actually representing a faction loyal to Xi, which is using him to attack rivals. He has rarely criticized Xi by

name, and some of the strongest evidence against Guo's description of himself as a dissident has come from his own words. In the summer of 2017, shortly after the Chinese security officers visited him in New York, he released a public letter to Communist Party leaders. He suggested that he could use his "influence and resources" on their behalf, and asked them to "assign me a clear, targeted task, so that I can atone for my past mistakes, and demonstrate my patriotism and support for President Xi." He claimed that his revelations in America were made "under pressure," and promised, "I will continue not to cross the red lines." Hoping to "safeguard our nation's interests and image," he offered to be a "propagandist," employing "my own style of propaganda."

In the years after that letter, Guo's efforts turned more squarely to promoting division and cynicism in U.S. politics. Guo has long claimed to have knowledge of a secret Communist Party plan for subversion, which he calls 3F: "foment weakness, foment chaos and foment the destruction of America," by using leaked documents, bribery, and blackmail—an approach that Guo's critics note precisely describes his own patterns. The national-security official, who was involved in Guo's case, described him as a chaos agent working on China's behalf: "You could make a circumstantial argument that this guy is here to fuck us up. Just tie us in knots."

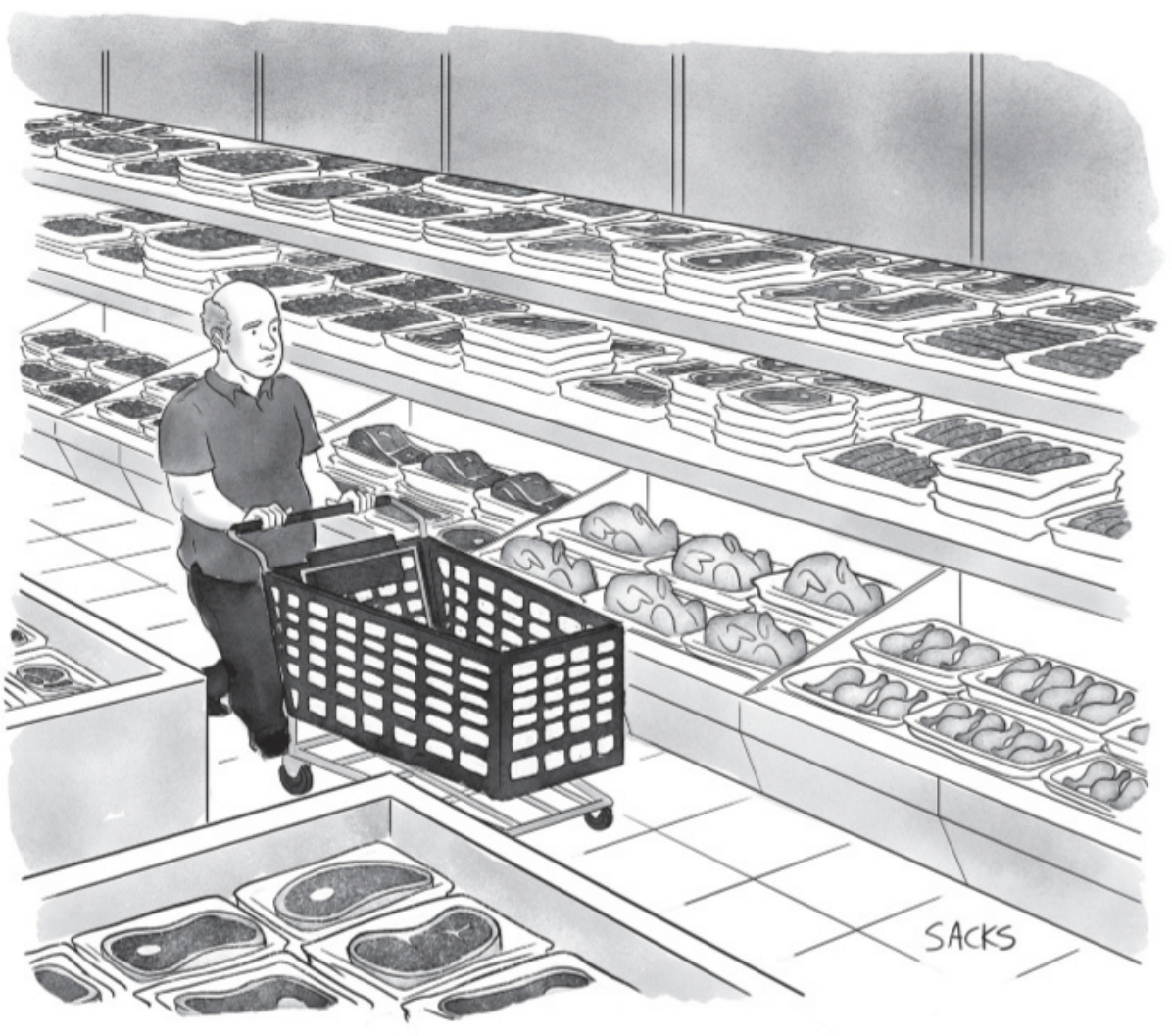
The divisive power of Guo's network became clear as the 2020 Presidential election approached. A study conducted by Graphika, an analytics firm, found thousands of social-media accounts spreading his quotes, along with conspiratorial claims about dissidents, vaccines, Joe Biden, and QAnon. Chat groups for Guo's fans were stocked with templates of pro-Trump messages that users were encouraged to distribute as if they were spontaneous.

During the 2016 campaign, when Trump allies circulated anti-Clinton propaganda, they relied on Twitter and Facebook, but those platforms had since made it more difficult to spread election disinformation. Now Guo's network provided an alternative. Nothing demonstrated its impact more than its promotion of doctored reports about Hunter Biden's laptop.

The Trump campaign had heard of the laptop during the summer, when a man from Delaware reached out to say that it had been abandoned at his repair shop. The first known public mention of it came on September 25th, from a guest on the YouTube channel of Wang Dinggang, one of Guo's collaborators. The guest claimed that explicit material on the laptop was "recorded by the C.C.P." and had "arrived mysteriously in America" to provide the Party with leverage over Joe Biden as he ran for President. Some of Guo's allies followed up by creating and spreading fabricated images, according to Jack Maxey, a former co-host of Bannon's podcast. "It was a huge deflection from reality," Maxey recalled. "I said to Steve on Day One, 'This is a bad idea.'" But, he added, "I can't tell Steve what to do. Apparently, Miles can."

In the final weeks of the race, Rudy Giuliani ignited a media campaign alleging that the computer's hard drive contained e-mails and pictures of Hunter Biden that compromised his father. Guo has denied involvement in disseminating disinformation about the laptop, but leaked messages suggest that he coördinated his followers to edit images and to spread the story. Three days before the election, Bannon met with Guo's supporters and applauded their "editorial creativity over the pictures," according to a recording provided to *Mother Jones*. Bannon said that the laptop story stalled Biden's momentum and "drove up his negatives," which kept the race close enough that Trump could declare victory, whether or not he went on to win. "That's our strategy," Bannon told them. "So, when you wake up Wednesday morning, it's going to be a firestorm."

After Trump lost the election, Guo's network joined the effort to overturn the outcome. On November 14th, hundreds of his supporters travelled to Washington for the Million MAGA March, erecting a stage and hiring advertising trucks to traverse the city. A company controlled by Guo spent more than four hundred thousand dollars on the rally, according to *Mother Jones*, and also gave a hundred thousand dollars to an organization headed by the attorney L. Lin Wood, who was suing to reverse



Trump's loss in Georgia. On January 6th, Guo's network carried live streams of the siege of the Capitol, and promoted comments that hailed the attackers as "patriots."

In the strange economics of Trumpworld, the former President's electoral loss was a gift to his supporters in the media—the radio hosts and conspiracy theorists who profit from grievance. In the months after January 6th, GTV and its related businesses were operating from an office tower overlooking Columbus Circle. One day that September, Guo summoned a collection of former Trump aides to the office for a live stream on the subject of China. To his left sat Peter Navarro, a former business-school professor who had served as Trump's trade adviser and as his Administration's most ardent China hawk. Navarro, who wore a windbreaker with "TeamTrump" stencilled on the chest, looked gaunt and glumly captive—a fierce critic of China working with a self-acknowledged former affiliate of the country's spy services. Bannon had on a black sport coat over a black shirt, with another shirt underneath. He was seated beside Jason Miller, the former spokesman and now the C.E.O. of Gettr, one of several new social-media networks vying to attract conservative users. It, too, had received funding from Guo.

They were all there to celebrate Navarro's installation as the "international ambassador" from the New Federal State of China. But Navarro wanted to talk about vaccines, too; he has been a devoted proponent of hydroxychloroquine. "The illegitimate Biden regime is preventing the use of these therapeutics and killing people," he said. Guo agreed, and made a dark prediction, in his patchwork English: "In six months, ten months, you will see on the street talented drivers, driving their cars, immediately by accident, die because of COVID vaccine. That's murder."

The rhetoric was heated, but Guo seemed to sense that the scene wasn't much to look at. He encouraged his translators to ask questions, and one began to rave about Navarro's appearance: "I have a colleague who is a very beautiful lady, and she is the greatest fan of Mr. Navarro. So when you appear, every time she will just shout, 'Oh, here comes Peter Navarro!'" Navarro, shifting uncomfortably, gave a wan smile. Bannon seemed happy to maintain the spirit of admiration, though. "Miles is the George Washington of the new China," he said, later in the broadcast. "We're talking about a new China and new *Chinese*—Chinese who finally have freedom after millennia of history." Toward the end, one of the translators asked when the U.S. government would recognize Guo's government-in-exile. Bannon answered, "Sometime after 2024—when Trump takes the White House back."

Even as Guo and his allies predicted victory, his operation was in turmoil. Two days earlier, the Securities and Exchange Commission had charged three companies associated with Guo—GTV Media Group, Saraca Media Group, and Voice of Guo Media—with illegal sales of stock and cryptocurrency. The companies neither admitted nor denied wrongdoing, but they agreed to pay more than five hundred and thirty-nine million dollars, including restitution to thousands of investors in at least thirty-nine countries.

Guo's news site played down the charges, telling fans that the companies had reached a settlement "without penalty clauses." In reality, they had been ordered to pay thirty-five million dollars in penalties, and the S.E.C. said that it was continuing to investigate the matter. GTV shut down, and the case marked a turning point in Guo's movement. Some former aides and supporters rebelled, turning their social-media and chat networks into venues for criticism and revelation. Guo lashed out, calling his erstwhile allies liars, rats, and "running dogs" of the Communist Party.



Ultimately, a different legal case dealt a heavier blow to Guo. The operators of a hedge fund, Pacific Alliance Asia Opportunity Fund, had been suing him to repay a loan taken years ago to develop the Pangu Plaza, in Beijing, but Guo had treated the case with contempt. "I think you guys are a bunch of thugs," he said, in a deposition, in October, 2018. "I don't need to pay any attention to you." In 2021, a New York court ordered him to pay the fund a hundred and sixteen million dollars in debt and interest; when he failed to do so, the court tacked on an additional hundred and thirty-four million in fines. The judge wrote that if "billionaire litigants" can "knowingly and intentionally violate Court orders, there is no rule of law."

Guo promptly filed for bankruptcy, claiming to have as much as half a billion dollars in debt and no more than a hundred thousand dollars in assets. The yacht and the penthouse, he maintained, were actually not his at all, but properties of family members, shell companies, and other financial entities. His creditors called the bankruptcy "an obvious attempt to avoid both payment and possible incarceration."

As the case inched through the courts, the image that Guo had erected was wobbling. The signature high-rise in Pangu Plaza had been auctioned off for seven hundred and thirty-four million dollars. Its most audacious design feature—the giant wisp of flame—was dismantled, rendering the building all but indistinguishable from others. In New York, Guo had put his penthouse at the Sherry-Netherland up for sale, and gradually reduced the price to thirty-five million dollars, barely half of what he had paid. The co-op board that once welcomed Guo was now suing him for allegedly failing to pay maintenance fees, which amounted to some eighty-two thousand dollars a month.

As ever, Guo approached the challenges with exuberant aggression. He continued live-streaming from an estate in Greenwich, Connecticut, delivering his messages against the backdrop of a pool house and an expansive lawn. He harangued a lawyer who had been appointed as the bankruptcy trustee, denouncing him as "fully representing the C.C.P." And he dabbled in new ventures, including a hip-hop track titled "The Hero," which featured him in action-movie garb, assuming a series of valiant poses: astride a white horse, wielding a lightsabre in ritual combat, commanding a squadron of backup dancers in front of luxury S.U.V.s and a private jet. On the way to the chorus—"Take

Down the C.C.P.!"—Guo made a resolute proclamation: "To die on the battlefield is my honor."

Guo insists that he is a freedom fighter, and has claimed that he has faced threats of assassination from China. But hunted men do not often release hip-hop tracks, and, as the former intelligence official observed, "If the M.S.S. really wanted to kill his ass, they have the ability to do it."

In trying to untangle Guo's zigzagging identities and feuds and bluffs, I often thought of the late James Jesus Angleton, the longtime head of counterintelligence at the C.I.A. Angleton spent years hunting for Soviet moles in America, straining to see through ploys and misinformation to divine who was working to "confuse and split the West," as he put it. Angleton described his domain as a "wilderness of mirrors," a metaphor borrowed from T. S. Eliot's "Gerontion." The poem, written amid the ashes of the First World War, contains a warning: "History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors / And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions, / Guides us by vanities." By the time Angleton retired, in 1974, his obsession had become so consuming that some people wondered if he himself was the mole.

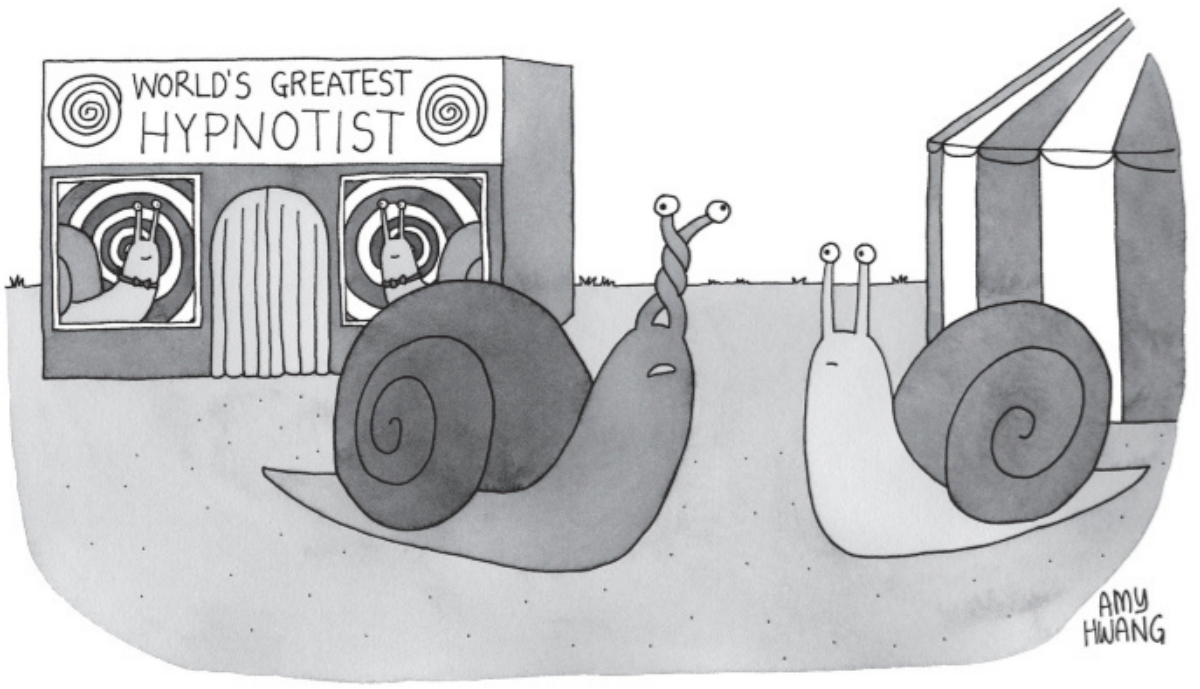
What of Guo was real and what was fake? Was he pulled to and fro by the tensions between the U.S. and China, or was he exerting forces of his own? Was he heightening the chaos in American politics, or simply reflecting our own anxieties back to us? At bottom, Guo may simply be an inveterate grifter. An American who worked at the Pangu Plaza in its early years recalls that, two floors below the garage of luxury cars, there was an unfinished basement, a dark, wet place where wood planks formed a gangway over mud. One part was dedicated to storing high-end Japanese porcelain plates and gold-colored flatware. "You could see lights in the distance," he said. "It was some of the migrant workers, who lived down there. They'd built these little huts out of scaffolding pipes." The migrant laborers in the basement camp were building the fantasy that Guo was promoting up on the surface.

Guo is still selling aspiration. Last year, he proposed that passports from his government-in-exile be made available at a cost of fifty thousand dollars per family. In 2020, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the F.B.I. was examining Guo and the funding of his media work with Bannon. (At the time, both Guo and Bannon said that the Bureau had not contacted them.) It seems possible that his efforts to cultivate various government connections will offer some protection. Guo's dealings with the F.B.I. could make him "messy" to prosecute, according to a former Justice Department official. He could adopt the strategy that prosecutors call "graymail"—threatening to disclose national-security secrets in the process of defending himself. The official said, "Even if you win it, he might be revealing a lot more than anyone ever wants revealed."

Teng, the dissident, sees a lesson for critics of Chinese authoritarianism who made the Faustian choice to support Trump and, later, Guo. "They think the end justifies the means," Teng said. In a public essay, he made a moral argument against coöperating with dubious allies, asking, "Must the enemy of the enemy be a friend? Hitler and ISIS were also anti-communists."

Bannon, Guo's most prominent defender, has heard all the criticisms. "Other guys are saying, 'Hey, all he's doing is feeding you bullshit.'" He doesn't care. "I think in outcomes. Whether he's working for a faction or not, who knows?" Bannon suggested, reviving an old cliché, that China was an impenetrable mystery: "It's like the very end of the movie 'Chinatown,'" when Jack Nicholson's character is told to accept what he cannot understand. More important, from Bannon's perspective, is that Guo has forced Republican contenders to adopt a more bellicose stance: "He's done more than anybody to wake this country up to the threats of the C.C.P. as a transnational criminal organization and an existential threat to America. Whether he's working for a faction or he's hedging his bets, the stuff he's done and what he's galvanized is just relentless."

It is tempting to dismiss Guo as just another wacky artifact of the Trump era. But, if Trump proved anything, it is that seemingly unpersuasive figures can have a lasting effect if they find political partners who, like Bannon, focus only on outcomes. In September, Mike Pompeo, one of several Trump Administration veterans who are competing to be the most hawkish on China, appeared in a video all but calling on Xi's citizens to rise up against the government. "There is no bigger enemy for the C.C.P. than you, the Chinese people," he said. Bannon was thrilled. "That was just unheard-of five years ago," he said, and offered a prediction: "That will be the plank in the Republican Party in 2024. There'll be a huge platform fight over saying that the Chinese Communist Party is not the legitimate government of China." He credited Guo, saying, "He's changed the Overton window in this country." ♦



"Trust me. Don't do it."

ANNALS OF DIPLOMACY

ARMING UKRAINE

How the West helped fight Vladimir Putin.

BY JOSHUA YAFFA

In early September, Oleksii Reznikov, Ukraine's defense minister, travelled from the center of Kyiv to a U.S. airbase in Ramstein-Miesenbach, Germany, where NATO officials were gathering to discuss military support for Ukraine. The trip, a distance of about twelve hundred miles, roughly the equivalent of travelling from New York to Minneapolis, lasted the better part of a day. Because there are no flights out of Ukraine, Reznikov had to take a car to the border and a plane the rest of the way. As he set off from the capital, he couldn't help but hope for good news. Ukrainian forces had opened a second flank in an ambitious counteroffensive, a surprise operation in the direction of Russian-occupied territory in the Kharkiv region. "I learned not to raise my expectations too high," Reznikov said, "especially in wartime."

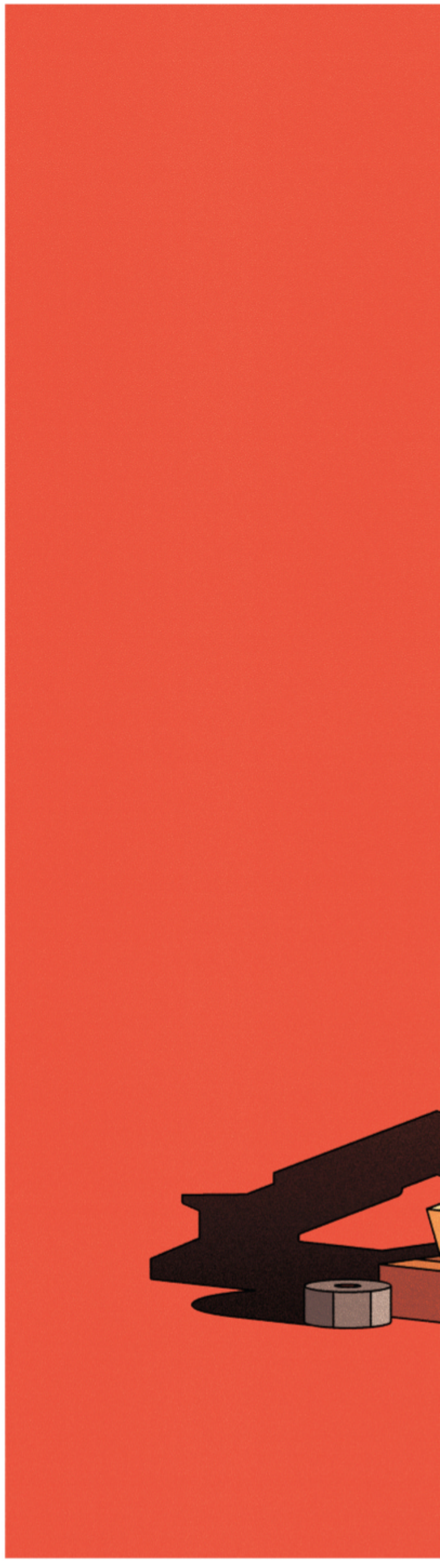
Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelensky, appointed Reznikov defense minister last November, just three months before the Russian invasion. Reznikov is a lawyer and a longtime fixture of Kyiv politics, a veteran of the Soviet Air Force and an avid skydiver. He now serves as a lead negotiator securing the Western arms his country needs to continue its fight. "I get a certain request from the generals," he said. "Then I explain to our partners the need for it."

At the time of Reznikov's trip to Ramstein, the war was in what he called its third phase. "The first phase was simply to hold off the enemy in those places where they managed to break through," he said. This was the battle for Kyiv and for Ukraine's survival as a sovereign state, which Russia effectively lost. "The second was to stabilize the front and achieve something resembling an equal opposition of forces on the battlefield." Russia, which had occupied a number of key cities in Ukraine's south and east, retained a sizable advantage in terms of heavy weapons; its long-distance missiles could rain down terror and death across the battlefield and beyond, clearing the way for its troops to advance. But Ukraine received enough artillery systems and munitions from the U.S. and other NATO states to mount an adequate response. "This allowed the country's military and political leadership to think seriously about the third phase," Reznikov said. "That is, launching an offensive operation."

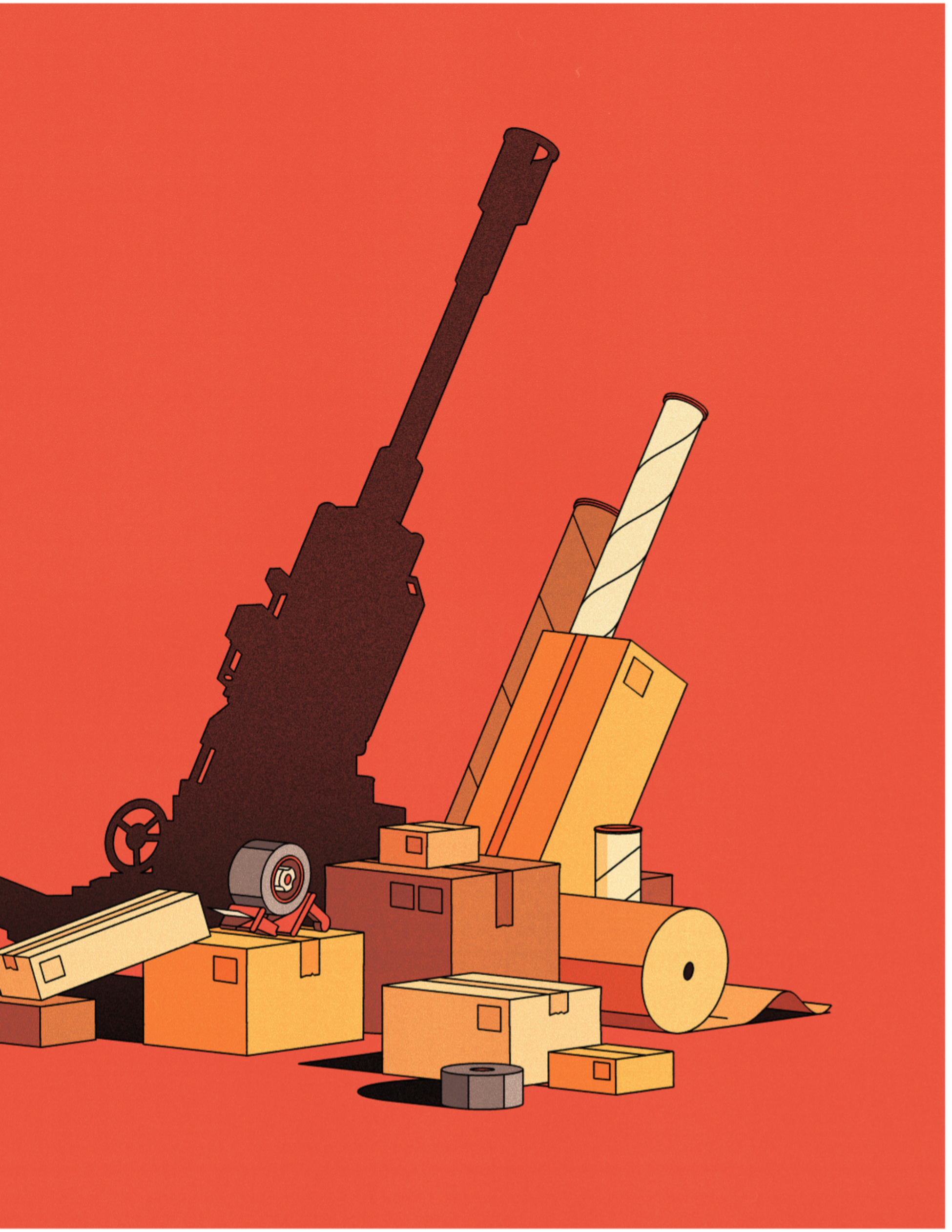
Vladimir Putin had effectively embraced the stalemate of the war's second phase, wagering that, as the front lines held and the conflict increasingly disrupted global energy and food supplies, the Ukrainian public would tire of the war and the West's commitment would wane. There was some basis for questioning the durability of U.S. and NATO support—it seemed to strengthen in proportion to Ukraine's ability to repel Russian forces. "We have seen U.S. arms supplies contribute to real success on the battlefield, which has in turn consolidated support for providing more," a Biden Administration official involved in Ukraine policy told me. "But one could imagine things reversed: if the former were not the case, then maybe the latter wouldn't be, either."

As spring turned to summer, Reznikov sensed a growing weariness in some Western capitals. The attitude, he said, was, "O.K., well, we helped Ukraine resist, we kept them from being destroyed." Reznikov and other officials wanted to demonstrate to their partners in the West that the Ukrainian Army could reclaim large swaths of Russian-occupied territory. "The counteroffensive would show that it's one thing to take part in helping the victim," Reznikov said, "another to realize you can punish the aggressor."

In July, military officials from Ukraine,



"The counter-offensive would show that it's



one thing to take part in helping the victim," Ukraine's defense minister said, "another to realize you can punish the aggressor."

ILLUSTRATION BY ÁLVARO BERNIS



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the United States, and the United Kingdom converged at a base in Europe to plot out possible scenarios. The Ukrainians' starting point was a broad campaign across the southern front, a push to liberate not only the occupied city of Kherson but hundreds of square miles in the nearby Mykolaiv and Zaporizhzhia regions. The military planners met in three rooms, divided by country, where experts ran the same tabletop exercises. They often worked twenty hours a day, with American and British military officials helping to hone the Ukrainians' strategy. "We have algorithms and methodologies that are more sophisticated when it comes to things like mapping out logistics and calculating munitions rates," a senior official at the Defense Department said. "The idea was not to tell them what to do but, rather, to give them different runs to test their plans."

The initial tabletop exercises showed that a unified push across the southern front would come at a high cost to Ukrainian equipment and manpower. It looked ill advised. "They ran this version of the offensive many times and just couldn't get the model to work," the Defense official said.

In the south, Ukraine had been battering Russian positions with American-provided precision rocket systems. In response, Russia's generals had moved a considerable number of units out of the Kharkiv region, in the northeast, to back up forces near Kherson. The assembled planners settled on an idea that would take advantage of this vulnerability: a two-front offensive. Shortly afterward, Reznikov was informed of the plans. "It wasn't the first time I was struck by our military's ability to come up with unexpected solutions," he said. "I understood it was up to me to get them the necessary weapons."

In late August, Ukrainian ground forces started their push toward Kherson. It was a slow, grinding operation, with both sides suffering heavy losses. A week later, troops dashed toward Russian lines in the Kharkiv region, a move that clearly caught Russian military leaders off guard. With so many units relocated to the south, a number of territories in the northeast were guarded by under-equipped Russian forces and riot police with little combat experience. Many of them simply abandoned their positions and ran off, leaving behind crates of ammunition, and even a few tanks. Ukrainian troops sped through one town after another, often on Western-supplied fighting vehicles, such as Humvees and Australian Bushmaster armored personnel carriers.

Reznikov was still en route to the Ramstein Air Base when he first received a text message about the breakthrough near Kharkiv. The Ukrainian armed forces had retaken Balakliya, a key gateway city in the region. Reznikov pictured the map in his head, counting the next towns likely to be liberated. He was travelling with a small delegation that included top officials from the general staff and military intelligence, who were also receiving updates from the front. They began comparing notes. Ukrainian units moved east, toward Kupyansk, an important logistics hub, then spread north and south, retaking key roads and rail junctions. By the time Reznikov landed in Germany, on September 8th, paratroopers had reached the Oskil River, thirty miles behind what had been the Russian front line just hours before. Within days, the Ukrainian military recaptured more than seven hundred square miles of territory.

The next morning, Reznikov met with Lloyd Austin, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, and Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They had been briefed on the counter-offensive, and joined Reznikov in tracking the military's progress on a map. Both maintained their composure, Reznikov noted, but they were clearly excited. "Their faces were glowing," he said. "They knew what was happening, and what this meant."

In the afternoon, Reznikov addressed a group of thirty NATO defense ministers. "The success of Ukraine's counterattack is thanks to you," he said.

He later told me, "Of course, I meant the U.S. most of all."

Prior to this year's invasion, officials in Kyiv often felt as if the political establishment in Washington viewed their country as little more than a bit player in a geopolitical game. "Ukraine was not considered to have its own agency," Mykhailo Podolyak, a top adviser to Zelensky, said, "but rather as just one of the many elements in managing the relationship with Russia."

In 2014, Putin had ordered Russian troops with no insignia—the so-called little green men—to Crimea, a Ukrainian peninsula in the Black Sea, and

sparked a separatist conflict in the Donbas, in eastern Ukraine. At the time, Ukraine retained a largely Soviet-style military, with a baroque bureaucracy and Cold War hardware. Zelensky's predecessor, Petro Poroshenko, appealed to Barack Obama for more and better weapons. Obama's concern, according to the senior Defense official, was that, "if we escalated, the Russians would counter-escalate, and the conflict would spiral." Joe Biden, then the Vice-President, was more inclined to provide arms. The Defense official said, "He had the position that if Putin had to explain to Russian mothers why caskets were coming back home, that could affect his calculus."

Ukrainian officials were particularly adamant in their requests for one weapon: the shoulder-fired Javelin antitank missile, which takes its name from the similarity of its flight path to that of a spear—the missile arcs nearly five hundred feet into the air, then back down, striking a tank or armored vehicle from above, where it's most vulnerable. "The Javelin was the one thing the Ukrainians understood they really needed," Ben Rhodes, a deputy national-security adviser in the Obama White House, said. "It was also a purely defensive weapon, which, they hoped, could make it relatively easier for us to supply."

Obama declined to provide any lethal arms at all. Instead, the Administration focussed its efforts on training Ukrainian forces. At a base near Yavoriv, in western Ukraine, fifteen miles from the Polish border, instructors from the U.S. and other NATO countries taught the principles of small-unit tactics and trained a new branch of Ukrainian special forces. Still, Carol Northrup, who was then the U.S. defense attaché at the Embassy in Kyiv, said, the Ukrainians "were much more interested in our stuff than our advice. They would say, 'We want stuff.' And we'd answer, 'We want to train you.'"

Donald Trump came into office promising improved relations with Russia, which alarmed officials in Kyiv. But his Administration approved the Javelins. The first shipment—about two hundred missiles and thirty-seven launchers—arrived in Ukraine in the spring of 2018. The following year, an anonymous whistle-blower revealed that, during an official phone call with Zelensky, Trump had implied that future Javelin sales could be linked to a "favor." The President wanted Zelensky to look into an obscure conspiracy theory suggesting that the Ukrainian government, not Russia, had interfered in the 2016 Presidential election, and to order the investigation of a case involving the work of Biden's son Hunter on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian energy company. The exchange led to Trump's first impeachment trial. It also unlocked U.S. military aid for Ukraine: Congress, with bipartisan support, insured that a package worth two hundred and fifty million dollars was released.

Zelensky saw Biden's election as a chance to re-start relations with the U.S. In the spring of 2021, Russia began assembling troops and equipment on the Ukrainian border. That September, during a meeting with Zelensky at the White House, Biden announced an additional sixty million dollars in security assistance, including more Javelins. The two Presidents projected an air of mutual interest and bonhomie, but Zelensky left Washington without commitments on two key issues, both of which he had raised with Biden: creating a path for Ukraine's admittance to NATO, and preventing the startup of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which would allow Russia to circumvent Ukraine in supplying natural gas to Germany and the rest of Europe.

That fall, intelligence data showed that Russia had positioned more than a hundred thousand troops along the Ukrainian border. "At that point, we weren't yet sure if Putin had made the ultimate decision to invade," a person familiar with White House discussions on Ukraine said. "But it was without doubt that he was giving himself the capability to do so."

In November, Biden dispatched the director of the C.I.A., William Burns, on a secret trip to Moscow. Burns had previously served as the U.S. Ambassador to Russia and had often dealt with Putin personally. In the course of two days, Burns met with Putin's inner circle of advisers, including Alexander Bortnikov, the director of Russia's Federal Security Service, and Nikolai Patrushev, the head of the Kremlin's Security Council. He also had an hour-long phone call with Putin, who, wary of COVID and increasingly isolated, was hunkered down



"I'm searching for underutilized outlets."

in his Presidential residence in Sochi. Burns thought that Putin sounded cool and dispassionate, as if his mind was nearly made up. Upon returning to Washington, Burns relayed his findings to Biden. The message, according to Burns, was that "Putin thought Zelensky a weak leader, that the Ukrainians would cave, and that his military could achieve a decisive victory at minimal cost."

In January, Burns made a trip to Kyiv to warn Zelensky. The Orthodox Christmas had just passed, and a festive atmosphere lingered in Ukraine's capital, with decorations lining the streets. Zelensky understood the implications of the intelligence that Burns presented, but he still thought it was possible to avoid a large-scale invasion. For starters, he was reluctant to do anything that might set off a political and economic crisis inside Ukraine. He also worried that mobilizing the military could inadvertently provide Putin with a casus belli. Burns was sympathetic with the dilemma, but he emphasized that the looming danger was not hypothetical. Burns specifically told Zelensky that Russian forces planned to seize the Hostomel airport, twenty miles from the capital, and use it as a staging point for flying in troops and equipment.

At the White House, a "Tiger Team," made up of experts from the State Department, the Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs, and intelligence agencies, carried out exercises to anticipate the shape of a Russian attack. After Putin came to power, two decades ago, the Kremlin leadership had advertised a wide-scale effort to modernize its armed forces. The C.I.A. and other Western intelligence agencies concluded that Russia's military would overwhelm Ukraine. Intelligence assessments at the time were that Putin expected Russian forces to seize Kyiv within seventy-two hours. "We thought it might take a few days longer than the Russians did," the Defense Department official said, "but not much longer."

Outwardly, Zelensky acted as if war were not inevitable. "The captains should not leave the ship," he said near the end of January. "I don't think we have a Titanic here." But he did take the prospect of a Russian invasion seriously. "There's a difference between what you articulate with the public and what you are actually doing," Oleksiy Danilov, Zelensky's national-security adviser, said. "We couldn't allow for panic in society."

Behind the scenes, Zelensky and other top Ukrainian officials were asking the U.S. for a significant infusion of weapons. "At each phase, they just said give us everything under the sun," an Administration official said. "We tailored what we provided to the actual situation they were facing." In late January, the Administration announced that it was sending a two-hundred-million-dollar package of military aid, which included three hundred more Javelins and, for the first time, Stingers, the man-portable anti-aircraft systems, or MANPADs, that had played a key role in the mujahideen's defeat of the Red Army in Afghanistan. "You can't take over a country with MANPADs," the Defense Department official said. "But you can defend an airport from an airborne assault."

U.S. Air Force transport planes, carrying crates of arms, began landing several times a week in Kyiv. The Biden Administration had also declassified summaries of its intelligence assessments, issuing public warnings that a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine was imminent. Many U.S. officials believed that Zelensky wasn't ready to accept the urgency of the threat. In multiple conversations with Biden, Zelensky brought up the negative impact that the talk of war was having on Ukraine's stock market and its investment climate. "It's fair to say the fact that those issues remained a priority item as late as they did raised some eyebrows," the person familiar with the White House's Ukraine policy said.

Six months earlier, the Taliban had seized power in Afghanistan within days of the U.S. withdrawal. The Biden Administration had wagered that the U.S.-backed Afghan Army could fight the Taliban to a stalemate over the course of several months. When it came to the Russian threat in Ukraine, U.S. defense and security officials erred on the side of alarmism. "I think in some ways we transposed the Afghan experience onto the Ukrainians," the senior Defense Department official said. Podolyak, Zelensky's adviser, felt that the warnings coming from Washington and elsewhere were incomplete: "They would say, 'The Russians will attack!'



O.K., then, what's the next step? Are you with us? And it felt like there was no answer."

Another underlying source of unease was that U.S. officials had little understanding of the Ukrainian plan to defend the country, or even if such a plan existed. General Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was speaking several times a week with his counterpart in Kyiv, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces. Milley pressed Zaluzhnyi for information about how Ukraine would defend itself, including a request for detailed inventories of weapons stockpiles. Milley also offered his own strategic vision—an emphasis on dispersed mobile units, multiple lines of defense across the country, and a mixture of conventional forces and partisan warfare. "Our message was not, 'You guys are about to get steamrolled, so you should just sue for peace,'" a U.S. military official said. "Rather, the message was that you are about to get steamrolled, so you have to get your defenses majorly shored up."

Zaluzhnyi seemed hesitant to provide any details. Not only was he protective of his plans, he refused to share the placement of arms caches, which he was constantly moving and camouflaging to keep them from being destroyed or captured by the Russian Army. Some U.S. officials worried that Zaluzhnyi, like Zelensky, didn't fully believe the U.S. intelligence. "Others were convinced he believed it, and had war plans on hand," the military official said, "but wanted to keep them secret from Zelensky."

Given Zelensky's reluctance to put the country on a war footing, there was speculation that Zaluzhnyi may have been trying to avoid the possibility of being asked to scale down his preparations. If this was the case, the U.S. military official said, it's possible that Zaluzhnyi didn't want to share them with Milley because he was afraid that Milley would then brief the White House, which would in turn say something to Zelensky.

Finally, in February, Zaluzhnyi agreed to share his plan for defending Ukraine. A defense attaché from the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, an Air Force colonel, was summoned to a meeting at the general-staff headquarters and shown a one-page sketch of Ukrainian positions and defensive schemes. She was not given a copy, and was permitted to take only handwritten notes. Even having stipulated these conditions, Zaluzhnyi was less than forthcoming. His subordinates showed the attaché a false version of the plan, masking the full scope of the defensive campaign.

Ultimately, Zaluzhnyi's strategy was to prevent the capture of Kyiv at all costs, while, in other areas, letting Russian forces run ahead of their logistics and supply lines. The idea was to trade territory in the short term in order to pick off Russian units once they were overextended. "We trusted no one back then," a senior Ukrainian military official said. "Our plan was our one tiny chance for success, and we did not want anyone at all to know it."



In the war's early days, Biden told national-security officials at the White House and the Defense Department that the U.S. had three main policy interests in Ukraine. "One, we are not going to allow this to suck us into a war with Russia," a senior Biden Administration official recalled. "Two, we need to make sure we can meet our Article 5 commitments with NATO." (Prior to the invasion, the Biden Administration had sent several thousand additional soldiers to NATO member states in Eastern Europe and the Baltic region, to show that the U.S. military was prepared to defend them.) "And, three, we will do what we can to help Ukraine succeed on the battlefield," the official continued. "The President was clear: we do not want to see Ukraine defeated."

From a bunker in Kyiv's government quarter, Zelensky led a conference call with Ukrainian officials twice a day, at ten in the morning and ten at night, on the subject of arms supplies. The U.S., along with the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Baltic states, was sending anti-tank weapons, MANPADs, and small arms. But to the Ukrainians, who were suddenly in a fight for survival, these shipments seemed trivial. They wanted more powerful weaponry, including fighter jets, tanks, air defenses, and long-range artillery and rockets. "The deliveries were not so big, not like we would have liked to see," Danilov said. "No one believed that we could hold out."

Zelensky displayed tremendous courage by remaining in Kyiv. According to Reznikov, the country's security services were tracking three Chechen hit squads sent to assassinate the Ukrainian President and other top politicians. Zelensky also proved an adept leader, projecting an air of defiance to promote cohesion at home and support internationally. Two days into the invasion, the Associated Press reported that Zelensky had rejected a U.S. offer to evacuate him from Kyiv, saying, "I need ammunition, not a ride." A senior U.S. official said, "To the best of my knowledge, that never happened." The official added, "But hats off to Zelensky and the people around him. It was a great line."

Ukrainian forces managed to keep Russian transport planes from landing at the Hostomel airport. In the countryside around Kyiv, Russian armored convoys were stranded beyond the reach of their supply lines and became easy targets for ambushes and drone strikes. Washington's fears about the country's armed forces now seemed misplaced. "Obviously, it turned out they had a plan," the U.S. military official said. "Because you don't whip the Russians like that and expertly execute a mobile defense in depth without one."

The Ukrainians benefitted from another factor that the U.S. had not considered: Russian hubris and disorganization. Putin had planned the invasion with a small circle of trusted advisers, who settled on a lightning-fast raid to overthrow Zelensky and his cabinet. Ukrainians were finding dress uniforms inside the Russian military vehicles that they captured—the invading forces had thought that within a matter of days they would be marching victorious down the streets of central Kyiv. Instead, they found themselves deep in Ukrainian territory without access to basic necessities like food and water. As the Defense Department official put it, "We

presumed they had their shit together, but it turns out they didn't."

Ukraine's early success changed attitudes in Washington. "The Ukrainians were putting up a good fight, which helped open the floodgates for a lot more military assistance," the Defense Department official said. Even so, the Biden Administration did not give Kyiv everything it wanted. One wish list circulating around Washington said that Ukraine needed five hundred Javelin missiles per day; at the start of the war, the production of Javelins was only around two thousand per year. Other proposals aired in public by Zelensky and top Ukrainian officials, such as a no-fly zone maintained by NATO aircraft and air defenses, were non-starters. "Our interests highly overlap, but they are not identical," the Defense official said. "When we say things like 'That is escalatory and could draw NATO into the fight,' they are, like, 'Yeah, good. How could it get any worse for us? It's already existential.' Frankly, if I were them, I'd have the same view."

A moment of tension erupted between Milley and Zaluzhnyi. Ukraine wanted more MIG-29s, a Soviet-designed plane that Ukrainian pilots had flown since the eighties. Kyiv reached a tentative deal with Poland, in which Poland would deliver two dozen jets, and the U.S. would give American-made F-16s to Poland as a replacement. The Biden Administration worried that flying aircraft from NATO territory into Ukraine's contested skies would be seen as a clear escalation. U.S. officials were also skeptical of the planes' usefulness to Ukraine. The MIG-29 is primarily an air-to-air-combat interceptor—not a ground-attack plane that might, say, provide aerial support to infantry or attack a tank column—and Russia's more advanced fighter, the Sukhoi Su-35, could easily outmaneuver it. Zaluzhnyi told Milley that Ukraine had almost no fighter jets left. Milley insisted that Ukraine still had plenty. The two did not speak for more than a week. "Early on, their conversations were formal and matter-of-fact," the U.S. military official said. "One would say his long piece, and the other would say his. Now the tone is more familiar, warmer, friendlier. They talk about their families."

No one knew for sure how Russia would respond to Western arms shipments. U.S. officials believed that Putin would escalate given one of three scenarios: if the Russian military faced utter collapse on the battlefield, if Putin felt an immediate threat to his own rule, or if the U.S. or NATO militaries directly intervened in Ukraine. As for Putin's likely response, officials in Washington forecast a range of worrying possibilities, from carrying out a nuclear-bomb test in the Arctic to detonating a low-yield tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine. But the assessment was also that, in the end, Putin could be deterred. A senior U.S. intelligence official said, "It's not like he wants World War Three, either."

In early April, the Russian military announced a full pullout from the Kyiv region, essentially an admission that its initial combat aims had failed. Now it was shifting tactics to an artillery assault in the Donbas, using missile strikes to level cities and towns be-

FINALLY

Not afterglow,
not the last
word. Still
they were able
to more or less
enjoy
the feeling of being
washed up together
on what was not
really a floodplain
from which the not-
quite water
had receded,
leaving a large number
of more or less
interesting artifacts,
which, they had learned,
appeared to them
differently
so that what she saw
as a large wooden
radio, he saw
as a fireplace mantel,
and what she saw
as self-sufficiency, he saw
as strangulation.
In past times,
they had fought bitterly
about what things were,
what they should
or should not be.
Now they tried to guess
what the other would call
any object they spotted;
they had come
to find failure
hilarious, and even
faked it
on some occasions.

—Rae Armantrout

fore sending in ground forces to seize the rubble. This meant that Ukraine required heavy artillery of its own. "There's not much a unit with some Javelins can do if you have two hundred tanks coming at you," the senior Ukrainian military official said.

At the time, according to Ukrainian generals, the Army had enough artillery ammunition to last for two weeks of intensive fighting. Ukraine used 152-millimetre shells, a family of ammunition that many former Warsaw Pact member states inherited from the Soviet Union. NATO forces use 155-millimetre shells, and the two systems are not interchangeable. The problem was not merely the depleting stocks of Soviet-calibre munitions inside Ukraine—they were becoming increasingly hard to find anywhere in the world. At the start of the war, Western governments and private arms dealers had negotiated transfers from places such as Bulgaria and Romania. Among the largest caches were those the U.S. and NATO had designated for Afghan security forces, which had been sitting unclaimed in warehouses in Eastern Europe since the Taliban takeover. Belarus, where Russian troops had amassed before the invasion, had sizable stores of artillery ammunition, but Russia's ally certainly wasn't going to give it to Ukraine. Rear Admiral R. Duke Heinz, the director of logistics for the U.S. Army's European Command, said, "We were seeing fewer and fewer countries raise their hands to say they had munitions to donate."

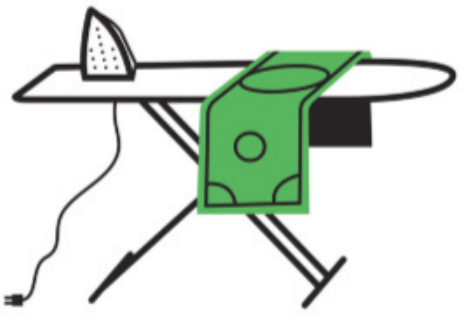
That left another option: Ukraine would have to switch to NATO-calibre weaponry. On April 26th, defense ministers from more than forty countries, including all the NATO member states, met at the U.S. airbase in Ramstein. Austin, the U.S. Defense Secretary, opened the proceedings. "Ukraine clearly believes that it can win, and so does everyone here," he said. "I know we're all determined to do everything that we can to meet Ukraine's needs as the fight evolves."

Prior to the summit, the U.S. had agreed to transfer ninety M777 howitzers to Ukraine, the first time it would be providing the country with heavy artillery. The M777, which was designed to support infantry operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, was more powerful and more accurate than Ukraine's existing howitzer-style artillery. "Austin called and said the decision has been taken," Reznikov said. "I understood we crossed a certain Rubicon."

Within days, the first contingent of Ukrainian soldiers—two-man teams made up of a gunner and a section chief—arrived at a U.S. Army training facility in Grafenwöhr, in southern Germany. Over six days, U.S. instructors taught them how to set up and move the M777, how to manually line up a target, and how to maintain the gun's levels of nitrogen and hydraulic fluid. As one U.S. trainer put it, "This isn't a gun you can beat the crap out of and will keep humming along."

The Ukrainian soldiers in Grafenwöhr struck their American counterparts as highly motivated. During one lunch break, a Ukrainian soldier reported that his village had just come under Russian shelling; the rest of the Ukrainian troops stood up without finishing their meal and returned to their training. "They're not here for R. and R.," Brigadier General Joseph Hilbert, who oversees the facility, said. "They want to get back and put these things to use."

By the end of the month, eighteen M777s were flown to bases in Eastern Europe and brought to the border with Ukraine. Under the cover of night, the howitzers were transferred to small convoys of unmarked trucks driven by Ukrainian teams. As the war has progressed, U.S. defense officials have



opened other routes, shipping equipment on rail lines across Europe and through ports on the North Sea, in Germany. Putin and other Russian officials have threatened to target these transfers. But, according to Heinz, not one has come under fire. "Russia is aware of how security assistance gets into Ukraine," the senior Defense Department official said. "But, so far, they have refrained from attacking those hubs, because they don't want a war with NATO."

The M777s allowed Ukraine to mount a defense in the Donbas. "In any war, of course, it's not only about quantity, but quality," Roman Kachur, the commander of Ukraine's 55th Artillery Brigade, said. "There's a difference when you're fighting with a modern weapons system or one that hasn't been significantly updated since the days of the Second World War." For weeks, his forces had faced heavy artillery fire from a fortified Russian position near Donetsk, a Russian-occupied city in the Donbas. "We couldn't knock the enemy out of there, because we simply couldn't reach him," Kachur told me. Then the M777s arrived. "Within three or four days, the Russians had pulled all their artillery out of there," he said. "It's a new situation. We are dictating their behavior to a certain degree."

The U.S. does not have the ability to monitor the howitzers' locations and conditions from afar, or electronically limit where they could be used. "Once this equipment gets to them, it belongs to them," the senior Biden Administration official said. "We don't have a scorecard." Occasionally, bad news arrived from the field. In one case, forces in eastern Ukraine moved a number of M777s from a firing position to a barn, and within minutes a Russian missile hit the location, destroying both the guns and the trucks used to transport them.

Even as another seventy-two systems arrived—along with dozens of NATO-compatible howitzers from France and Germany—Ukrainian generals estimated that Russian artillery pieces outnumbered Ukraine's by seven to one; each day, Russian forces were shooting some twenty thousand shells, pummelling cities such as Severodonetsk and Lysychansk. Zelensky said that, in June, as many as a hundred Ukrainian soldiers were being killed every day. It was the most difficult moment in the war for Ukraine, with Russia—fitfully and at great cost to its own forces—blasting through Ukrainian defenses and capturing territory one metre at a time.

Washington encouraged Ukraine to rely on judicious planning and the efficiency of Western weaponry rather than try to outshoot the Russian military. NATO had chosen a similar strategy in the latter stages of the Cold War, when it found itself with far fewer tanks

and artillery than the Soviet Union. "We told the Ukrainians if they try and fight like the Russians, they will lose," the senior Defense Department official said. "Our mission was to help Ukraine compensate for quantitative inferiority with qualitative superiority."

Ukraine has a fleet of reconnaissance drones and a loose network of human sources within areas controlled by the Russian military, but its ability to gather intelligence on the battlefield greatly diminishes about fifteen miles beyond the front line. U.S. spy satellites, meanwhile, can capture snapshots of troop positions anywhere on earth. Closer to the ground, U.S. military spy planes, flying along the borders, augment the picture, and intelligence intercepts can allow analysts to listen in on communications between Russian commanders. Since the invasion, the U.S. and other Western partners have shared a great deal of this information with Ukraine. Mykola Bielieskov, a defense expert at the National Institute for Strategic Studies, in Kyiv, said, "That's a major field where the U.S. is helping us."

One evening in April, at an intelligence-coördination center somewhere in Europe, Ukrainian military officers asked their American and NATO counterparts to confirm a set of coördinates. This had become a common practice. Ukrainian representatives might ask for verification of the location of a Russian command post or ammunition depot. "We do that, fair game," the senior Biden Administration official said. In some cases, U.S. intelligence and military officers provide targeting information unsolicited: "We do let them know, say, there's a battalion moving on Slovyansk from the northwest, and here's roughly where they are." But, the official emphasized, Ukrainian forces choose what to hit. "We are not approving, or disapproving, targets."

The Biden Administration has also refused to provide specific intelligence on the location of high-value Russian individuals, such as generals or other senior figures. "There are lines we drew in order not to be perceived as being in a direct conflict with Russia," the senior U.S. official said. The United States will pass on coördinates of a command post, for example, but not the presence of a particular commander. "We are not trying to kill generals," the senior Biden Administration official said. "We are trying to help the Ukrainians undermine Russian command and control."

Still, Ukraine has so far killed as many as eight generals, most of them at long range with artillery and rocket fire. The high death toll is partially a reflection of Russian military doctrine, which calls for top-down, hierarchical operations. In most cases, mid-ranking Russian officers and enlisted soldiers are not empowered to make decisions, creating a need for generals to be positioned closer to the front. "They were depending on them to control and direct troops," the U.S. military official said. "It's a huge operational catastrophe."

The Ukrainian request in April concerned the suspected location of the Moskva, a Russian naval cruiser and the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet. Could U.S. intelligence confirm that the ship was at a certain set of coördinates south of the Ukrainian port city of Odesa? The answer came back affirmative. Soon, officials in Washington began to see press reports that the ship had suffered some sort of explosion. On April 14th, the Moskva disappeared into the Black Sea.

Kyiv said that two Ukrainian-made Neptune anti-ship missiles, fired from onshore near Odesa, had hit the Moskva —a statement that was confirmed by U.S. intelligence agencies. Russia never admitted that the strike took place, instead blaming an onboard fire and stormy seas for the loss of the ship. Some forty Russian sailors are reported to have died.

After the arrival of the M777s, the Ukrainian Army increasingly shared information with the U.S. about the condition of its weaponry on the battlefield, something it had not always been eager to do. Reznikov described it as a "mirror reaction" to Washington's initial approach to the war. "You see they don't trust you with serious weapons," he said, "so why should you trust them?" But, as the U.S. and other Western powers increased their commitments, the relationship improved. According to Reznikov, "When we received one package of assistance after another, and we could see there was a real desire to help, it allowed us to come to an agreement and reach a genuine dialogue." A Western diplomat in Kyiv told me, "It's a common story here. You can be incredibly wary, until you're not. Then you become trusting and open."

When the U.S. military carries out operations with a partner force, such as a fellow NATO member state, it coördi-



"Nap? I'll nap when I'm thirty."

nates battle movements on a common operational picture, or COP, a single digitized display showing the location and composition of forces. "We don't quite have that with Ukraine," the military official said. "But it's close." Ukrainian commanders feed information to the U.S. military, which allows for an almost real-time picture of its weaponry in Ukraine. "These days we know similar information about what we have given to Ukraine as we know about equipment in our own military," the official said. "How many artillery tubes are functioning, what's down for maintenance, where the necessary part is."

In May, Ukrainian artillery crews, using M777s along with some Soviet-era systems, fired on a large contingent of Russian forces that was trying to cross a pontoon bridge on the Siverskyi Donets River. Intelligence provided by the U.S. appeared to allow the Ukrainians to identify the moment of the Russian column's crossing. It was one of the single biggest losses for the Russian Army since the war began. Dozens of tanks and armored vehicles were destroyed, left charred along the river's swampy banks, and as many as four hundred Russian soldiers were killed.



"I know they should be invited to our house next, but can't we just give them the cash equivalent and call it even?"

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For months, Ukraine had one U.S. weapons system at the top of its wish list: the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS. Whereas the M777 can hit artillery pieces, troop formations, tanks, and armored vehicles at what is known as tactical depth, around fifteen miles, HIMARS can reach an entirely different target set: ammunition depots, logistics hubs, radar systems, and command-and-control nodes, which tend to be situated considerably farther behind enemy lines. The HIMARS system is mounted on a standard U.S. Army truck, making it able to "shoot and scoot," in military parlance. Colin Kahl, the Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy, has described HIMARS as the equivalent of a "precision-guided air strike," delivered from the back of a truck.

The Ukrainian military could only take advantage of the HIMARS' extended range if its soldiers had intelligence on where to strike. "Precision fires and intelligence are a marriage," the U.S. military official said. "It's difficult to have one without the other." The dilemma for the Biden Administration was not whether to give HIMARS to Ukraine, but which munitions to send along with them. Each system can carry either a pod with six rockets, known as GMLRS, with a range of forty miles, or one surface-to-surface missile, or ATACMS, which can reach a hundred and eighty miles. "It's not HIMARS that carries a risk," the Defense Department official said. "But, rather, if it was equipped with long-range missiles that were used to strike deep in Russian territory."

Putin is extremely paranoid about long-range conventional-missile systems. The Kremlin is convinced, for example, that U.S. ballistic-missile defense platforms in Romania and Poland are intended for firing on Russia. Even if Ukraine agreed not to use HIMARS to carry out strikes across the border, the mere technical capability of doing so might prove provocative. "We had reason to believe the ATACMS would be a bridge too far," the Defense official said.

The battlefield realities inside Ukraine were another determining factor. "The imperative was 'What does Ukraine need?'" the Defense official said. "Not what they are asking for—what they need. And we do our own assessment of that." The Biden Administration asked for a list of targets that the Ukrainian military wanted to strike with HIMARS. "Every single grid point was reachable with GMLRS rather than ATACMS," the Defense official said.

There was one exception: Ukraine expressed a more ambitious desire to launch missile strikes on Crimea, which Russia uses for replenishing its forces across the south and which is largely beyond the reach of GMLRS. During the war-game exercises held over the summer, when the possibility of ATACMS came up, it was clear that Ukraine wanted them to "lay waste to Crimea," the Defense official said. "Putin sees Crimea as



"We might not have any worshippers, but we're still a viable intellectual property."

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much a part of Russia as St. Petersburg. So, in terms of escalation management, we have to keep that in mind."

In multiple conversations, U.S. officials were explicit that the HIMARS could not be used to hit targets across the border. "The Americans said there is a very serious request that you do not use these weapons to fire on Russian territory," the Ukrainian military official said. "We said right away that's absolutely no problem. We'll use them only against the enemy on the territory of Ukraine." As with other weapons platforms, there is no technical mechanism to insure compliance. Officially, the U.S. has signalled that all Ukrainian territory illegally occupied by Russia since 2014—not only that which it has taken since February—is fair game for HIMARS strikes. "We haven't said specifically don't strike Crimea," the Defense official told me. "But then, we haven't enabled them to do so, either."

The first batch of HIMARS appeared on the battlefield late in June. Within days, videos circulated of Russian equipment and munitions depots outside Donetsk exploding in clouds of fire and smoke. Reznikov announced that the military had used HIMARS to destroy dozens of similar Russian facilities. In response, the senior Biden Administration official said, Russian forces "have had to adjust their tactics and maneuvers," moving command posts and munitions depots out of range—which also diminishes their utility in battle. "They are very mindful of the presence of HIMARS," the official said.

Each launcher costs roughly seven million dollars. According to some calculations, Ukraine could fire more than five thousand GMLRS missiles per month, whereas their manufacturer, Lockheed Martin, was only producing nine thousand a year. "We said straight-away, 'You're not going to get very many of these systems,'" the Defense Department official said. " 'Not because we don't trust you but because there simply isn't an unlimited quantity of these on planet Earth.' "

In July, Russia's defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, instructed commanders in Ukraine to "prioritize the targeting of the enemy's long-range rocket artillery weapons with high-precision strikes." Two weeks later, Russia claimed to have destroyed six HIMARS systems. At the time, the U.S. had provided a total of sixteen launchers; Germany and the United Kingdom had given nine similar systems. U.S. officials insist that all of them remain intact and functional.

In preparation for its counteroffensive this summer, Ukraine used HIMARS to repeatedly strike Russian command posts and ammunition depots in the Kherson region. Several missiles hit the Antonivskyi Bridge, which connects the city to the eastern bank of the Dnipro River. Russian units inside Kherson risked being cut off from resupply lines and logistics support. "The use of HIMARS in the south contributed to a high attrition rate of Russian troops and hardware," Bielieskov, the defense analyst in Kyiv, said. "The whole Russian group on the right bank of the Dnipro is dependent on a very small number of crossings."

The U.S. had also begun to supply Ukraine with AGM-88 HARM missiles, launched from military aircraft, which home in on electronic transmissions from surface-to-air radar systems. The missiles are designed to be carried by U.S. fighters, such as the F-16, but the Ukrainian Air Force figured out a way to mount them on their MIG jets. The senior Defense Department official said, "It was pretty MacGyvery, and opens up the possibility to think of what other munitions could be adapted to Ukrainian platforms." The HARM missiles created a dilemma for Russian forces. They could either turn on their radar batteries and make themselves vulnerable to HARM strikes, or keep them turned off and lose the ability to detect Ukrainian aircraft and armed drones, namely the Turkish-made Bayraktar.

U.S. military and intelligence circles have debated the reason that Putin has not yet attempted an escalatory move

to discourage further arms shipments on Ukraine's western border. "As we have gotten deeper into the conflict, we realized we could provide more weapons of greater sophistication and at greater scale without provoking a Russian military response against NATO," the Defense Department official said. "Was it that we were always too cautious, and we could have been more aggressive all along? Or, had we provided these systems right away, would they have indeed been very escalatory?" The official went on, "In that scenario, Russia was the frog, and we boiled the water slowly, and Russia got used to it."

The embarrassment of the Kharkiv retreat revealed a fundamental weakness of the Russian forces: they had been degraded, in terms of both personnel and equipment, to the point at which they could no longer hold on to captured territory while trying to carry out major offensive operations. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian military was receiving fresh waves of NATO-trained conscripts and Western arms. Throughout September and into October, Ukrainian forces pushed farther, reclaiming the entirety of the Kharkiv region and moving into towns and villages in the Donbas, the "protection" of which was Putin's stated aim for the war. "We continue to see that Putin's political objectives are not matched to what his military can achieve," the senior U.S. intelligence official said.

This paradox is a potentially destabilizing factor. U.S. intelligence agencies had assumed that if Putin were to face what he regarded as an "existential" threat he would feel forced to escalate, possibly with chemical or nuclear weapons. "But seeing as how he understands his own legacy and place in history," the senior U.S. official said, "a humiliating setback in Ukraine can also begin to look existential."

After Kharkiv, with the momentum of the war shifting against Russia, Putin moved to double down on what increasingly appeared to be a losing hand. In a speech on September 21st, he announced a series of referendums to annex Russian-occupied territories in southern and eastern Ukraine and ordered a "partial" mobilization of conscripts in Russia. (It soon became clear that the draft could reach up to a million Russian men.) Putin said that Russia was not battling just the Ukrainian Army but "the entire war machine of the collective West." In a final, ominous threat, he seemed to suggest a willingness to use nuclear weapons to defend the parts of Ukraine that he intended to annex. "If the territorial unity of our country is threatened, in order to protect Russia and our nation we will unquestionably use all the weapons we have," he said. "This is no bluff."

The annexation of these territories—which was finalized in Russia on October 5th and quickly refuted by the rest of the world—effectively announced a fourth phase of the war. Putin has now staked his rule on an ability to hold these lands, which he has declared, with great fanfare, to be inexorably a part of Russia. His wager is that the escalation will not deter Ukraine so much as its backers in the West. Will the U.S., for example, debate the use of its weapons in strikes on Russian targets in Kherson as it had about targets in Crimea? "We have not sorted all the way through that," the U.S. military official said. "But it's clear we're not going to be bullied around by what Putin decides to call Russia." The senior Biden Administration official said, "We monitor Russia's nuclear forces as best as we can," and "so far we haven't seen any indication that Putin has made a serious move in that direction."

In Kyiv, the prospect of a Russian nuclear attack is both horrifying and a nonfactor. "Ukraine has no choice but to liberate all its territories," Podolyak, Zelensky's adviser, said, "even if there exists the possibility of strikes with weapons of mass destruction." Ukraine has no nuclear weapons of its own—it gave up its arsenal in 1994 in a treaty signed by the United States and Russia, among others—so any response would have to come from the West. "The question is not what we will do," Podolyak said, "but what the world's nuclear powers will do, and whether they are indeed ready to maintain the doctrine of deterrence." He called on Western nuclear powers, particularly the U.S., to make their response clear up front: "Send a message to Putin now, not after he strikes—'Look, any missile of yours will lead to six of ours flying in your direction.'"

In early October, Russia launched a series of missile strikes on Kyiv and a number of other cities, killing more than three dozen people and damaging civilian infrastructure across the country. The attacks, which came in response to a large blast that damaged the bridge connecting the Russian mainland to Crimea, offered renewed force to Ukraine's calls for Western air defenses. According to the senior Defense official, the challenge in providing such weapons is more technical than political: "There aren't that many spare air-defense systems to give." The U.S. military is not going to pull its existing Patriot batteries or NASAMS—two ground-based air-defense systems Ukraine has been requesting—from, say, South Korea or the Middle East. They have to be manufactured and procured. However, the Defense official said, Ukraine should be receiving the first two NASAMS in late October or early November, with more to follow.

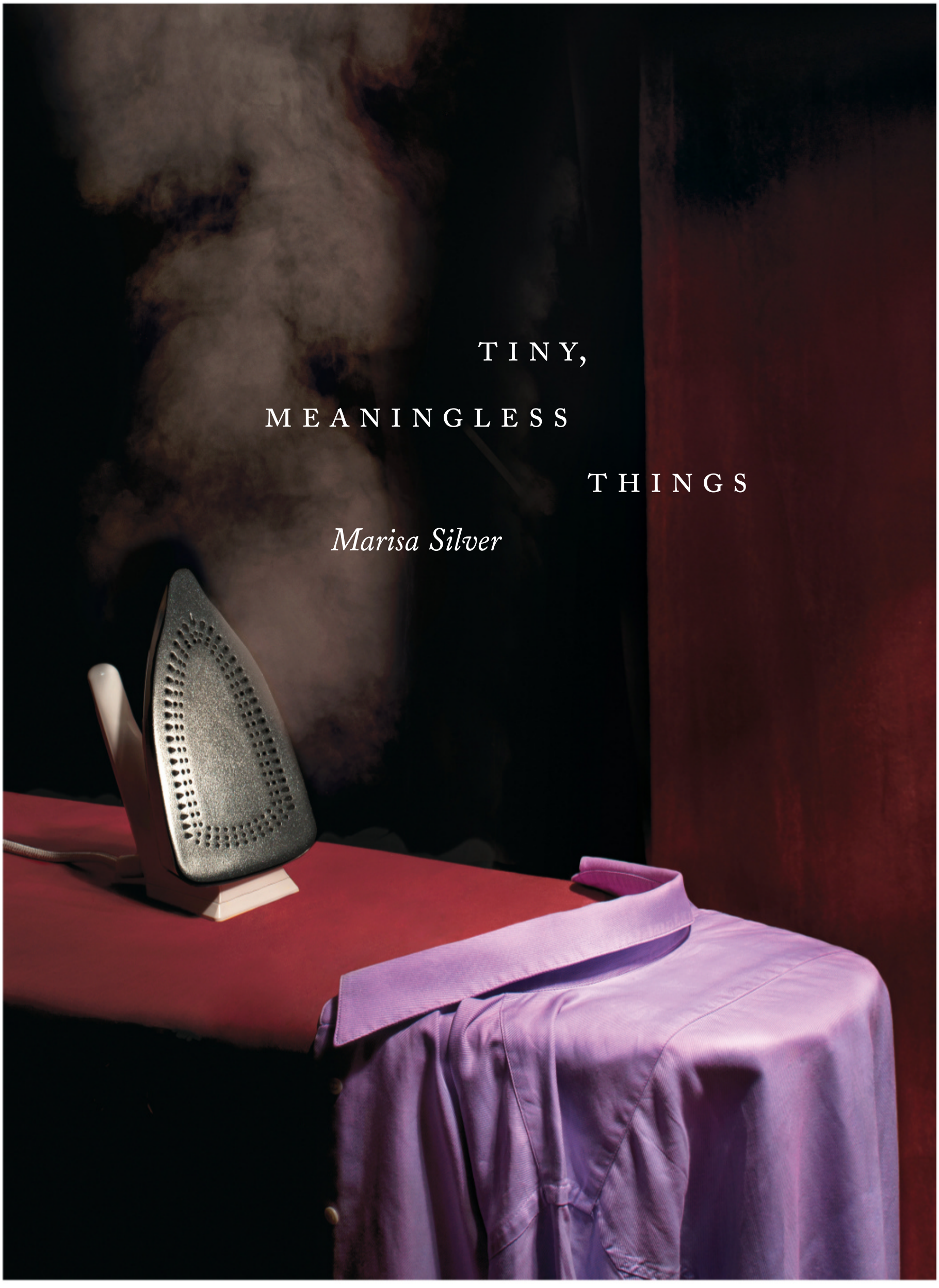
The Biden Administration has also announced a military-aid package worth more than a billion dollars, bringing the total amount the U.S. has spent on arming Ukraine over the past year to sixteen billion. Among the key items in this package were an additional eighteen HIMARS systems, more than doubling the number in Ukraine's arsenal. Ukrainian officials are now eying a number of items that, they argue, would allow even more aggressive counter-offensives: modern NATO-standard battle tanks, fighter jets such as F-16s, and the long-range ATACMS for striking logistics and ammunition hubs in Crimea.

Reznikov is certain that such deliveries are inevitable. "When I was in D.C. in November, before the invasion, and asked for Stingers, they told me it was impossible," he said. "Now it's possible. When I asked for 155-millimetre guns, the answer was no. HIMARS, no. HARM, no. Now all of that is a yes." He added, "Therefore, I'm certain that tomorrow there will be tanks and ATACMS and F-16s."

With the help of the U.S. and NATO, he went on, Ukraine's military has shown that Russia can be confronted. "We are not afraid of Russia," he said. "And we are asking our partners in the West to also no longer be afraid." ♦

TINY, MEANINGLESS THINGS

Marisa Silver



PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZA BOURNER

Wednesday is ironing day, a day of smoothness, the pleasing, embryonic smell of wet heat, and the satisfactions of erasure. How rewarding it is, Evelyn thinks, to work the tip of the iron into the wrinkled underarms of her favorite blouses and watch their instant transformation into material that is fresh and untried. Now that she is seventy-four, and her skin has lost its elasticity, this trick of reversing time is no longer available to her.

It's like a head of wilted lettuce, she thinks, as she mists a blouse with water. All you have to do is put it in ice water and it springs back to life. These were lessons she'd tried to impart to her daughters: the proper way to store vegetables, to fold clothing, to wash their faces (never soap, only water). They hadn't listened, of course. They couldn't imagine decay. Her daughters' bored or frankly antagonistic responses to her attempts to make them understand the value of preservation had agitated her, and she'd repeated her warnings two or maybe three times until they screamed or slammed doors. They were young. How could they know the disaster of carelessness? She knew. She'd been at her cousin's wedding in Tulsa when her husband died so long ago. The doctor had told her that it would be safe to take those days off from her vigil, that Frank had a while yet. Naomi and Ruth were away at school, Naomi in Lincoln, Ruth all the way east at a private college that had given her a scholarship to insure her sharp and critical company. It had been up to Paula to keep tabs on her father that weekend. Evelyn paid for a nurse to come in during the day. All Paula had to do was peek into the bedroom once or twice before she went to bed, just to make sure that her father was sleeping easily. It wasn't a lot to ask of a sixteen-year-old who stayed awake late into the night, whispering on the phone to boys. Evelyn had been surprised that Paula hadn't complained. That had touched her, and she'd thought that perhaps now that Paula's sisters were gone, and she was no longer the youngest, alternately teased or ignored, she was beginning to feel the grownup pleasures of responsibility. Evelyn had left phone numbers for people Paula could call should anything be amiss—Dr. Barnes and Vivian Branch next door. She'd left the number of the house where she'd be staying. But Paula hadn't called anyone. She hadn't even checked on her father when she came home from the party she'd promised to forgo. The next morning, when the nurse called Evelyn, she said that Frank had been gone for "some time." Evelyn hadn't asked how long. She didn't want to know if the nurse had found him with his mouth agape, didn't want to imagine that he'd been that way for hours, his final call unheard. Paula was still asleep, the nurse said. Should she wake her?

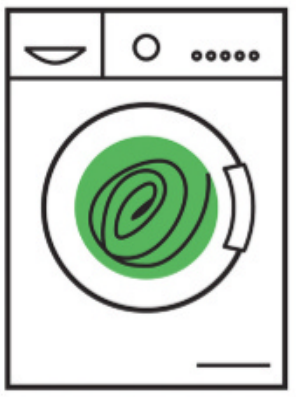
Thursday is the day when Evelyn clears the refrigerator of those vegetables that have been in the bins long past cold water's ability to revive them, when she tosses the slices of turkey that have acquired a slick, iridescent sheen. She eats less now than she used to, but she hasn't got used to grocery shopping with that in mind. She watches the women who roam the aisles gripping baskets barely weighted with a single chicken breast, two oranges, a child-sized carton of milk meant for lunchboxes. Walking advertisements for precarity. Who wants to die alone in her apartment and be left undiscovered for enough time that the smell of soured milk would be the giveaway? And here was another piece of advice her daughters had ignored: Always wear a good pair of underwear and a matching bra. Which was the opposite kind of warning, she realizes, aimed not at longevity but at the possibility of dying suddenly and violently and being discovered with your skirt up around your ears in a pair of sad panties.

Friday, she vacuums, which, like ironing, is a kind of vanishing, this time accompanied by the obliterating sound of her old Hoover. She sometimes thinks of the machine as sentient, the way the motor excitedly revs up when it encounters a density of crumbs, the greedy crackling as the throat of the hose sucks down a pebble she's tracked in on the bottom of her awful-looking but, yes, *sturdy* crêpe soles. The indignities are everywhere.

"How's the wash going, Mom?" Ruth might ask if she calls on a Tuesday. The familiarity is meant to be a gentle tease, but Evelyn knows that her daughters can't fathom how their mother can create enough mess to warrant this constant cycle of chores. "It gives her something to do," she once heard Naomi whisper to Ruth when they were visiting together. She wanted to tell them that jobs, marriage, child rearing—all of it is just something to do. But she kept quiet. No more warnings.

It's when she's ironing the collar of her favorite lilac-colored blouse that she senses Scotty outside the apartment door. She's told him many times that he needs to ring the doorbell, or at least knock, but he never does. It doesn't matter, really. She always knows when he's there. She senses a hovering. She lays the iron in its cradle and goes to the door. There he is, swallowed up by his baseball uniform, which is spotless, even though he's coming from practice. She knows his summer schedule by now. She imagines him on the field, mitt dangling at his side, staring at a bug in the grass or at a cloud, while the other seven-year-olds yell that the ball is heading his way. She's certain that he doesn't care if he misses a catch. Scotty seems uninterested in his childhood. He's marking time, waiting for these years to pass, if possible, without his participation. He's skinny, and his ears stick out. His bangs fall into his eyes no matter how often he brushes or blows them away. Despite his slightness, there is a weight about him, a sombre gravity. She knows not to greet him enthusiastically or to use those endearments which adults so often bestow on children they barely know. Something about Scotty doesn't invite intimacy. Better for her to behave as if he were a worker, clocking in for his shift. He stands, as he always does, at the threshold, waiting for her to walk a few steps into the room before he follows. He doesn't close the door behind him, so she doubles back to do it. This bit of choreography has become so routine that she no longer notices it, although, at first, it irritated her. She assumed that he was one of those children whose parents cut their food or tie their shoelaces well beyond the age when that type of interference is necessary. She once watched a news program about a man who was released

from prison after serving thirty years for a crime he didn't commit. The reporter followed the man around as he tried to get used to the free world. When the man reached a door—the front door of his home, say, or the door of the local bar—he would simply stop and wait for someone else to open it for him. For decades, he had not been allowed to open a door and walk through it on his own. It was this detail that made Evelyn understand that he'd lost something more fundamental than time. No, Scotty isn't spoiled. He asks for nothing and expects nothing.



He goes into her bedroom, humming quietly to himself. He often sings, narrating his activity as it's happening in high-pitched, wandering tunes that he makes up as he goes. "We're folding the sheets," he might sing. "We're watering the plants." He doesn't seem to be aware of his habit, and she doesn't point it out. She's touched by his lack of inhibition. She counts this as a measure of his comfort and, more than that, proof of something about her that is intrinsically good. Children know what's what. Children and dogs. Now Scotty's singing about hangers, and when he reappears he's holding an armload of them. On Wednesdays, it's his job to put the pressed clothing back in her closet. She's taught him how to think of the hanger as a pair of shoulders so that he can properly arrange a blouse to hold its shape, how to fix a skirt on clips, or hang a pair of slacks so that the crisply ironed seams match up. He's too small to reach the hanging rod, so she keeps a step stool next to the closet for him. Forty-five minutes can go by with them barely speaking to each other—an occasional "Here you go" when she hands him a piece of clothing.

They've finished their work, and Scotty sits at the kitchen table eating a piece of cinnamon toast. She made it for him once, and now he prepares it himself, getting the loaf from the bread box, toasting a slice, spreading the butter, sprinkling just the right amount of cinnamon and sugar on it so that it tastes sweet rather than bitter. He holds the toast with both hands and takes small bites around each of the four sides before starting the circuit again. Finally, he's left with the morsel at the center, where the toast is most thoroughly soaked in butter and spice. She admires his patience. Most children would finish off the toast in a few bites. But Scotty is not most children.

She knows almost nothing about him. She doesn't know when his birthday falls, or the name of his school, his favorite color, or the name of his little brother. She doesn't know what he wants to be when he grows up. It would embarrass them both for her to ask the condescending questions adults normally come up with to pretend they're interested in children's lives. The crudity of superficial intimacy would make what goes on between them inconsequential. No, her relationship with Scotty is something else. It is unencumbered by the baggage of the past or by other attachments. They exist for each other only during the time when Scotty helps her with her chores and eats his toast.

He finishes the last bite and slides off his chair. She follows him to the door, opens it, and watches him walk to the far end of the hallway, where he disappears into his apartment. She closes her door, feeling a little bit wholesome, a little bereft.

It's only later, when she's changing for bed, that she notices that Scotty has rearranged her closet, putting her dresses on the left side, the skirts to their right, then her slacks, and finally the blouses. She had organized her clothes in reverse order, based on use—she almost always wears pants and blouses these days. Skirts are for the infrequent lunch out. Dresses are for funerals. She wonders what compelled Scotty to make the change. Is this the way his mother's closet is set up? She's seen the woman only in the hallway or in the garage. She's always overburdened with children, or grocery bags, or pails and shovels if she's taken her boys to the park. She dresses in shorts and tennis shoes, heedless of her cellulite. She doesn't seem like a woman who has time to worry about how her closet looks. Once, earlier in the summer, just after Scotty started coming over, Evelyn shared an elevator with his mother. They acknowledged each other with nods. The woman didn't mention Scotty's visits or ask if Evelyn minded the intrusion. Evelyn took this as an insinuation that an old lady should be happy for the company of a small, odd boy. She was about to say something to clarify who was doing a favor for whom, but then she noticed that the woman's blouse was buttoned wrong, and that her bra showed where the material puckered. Evelyn touched her own blouse the way she might touch her lip to let a friend know about a crumb, but it didn't work. When they reached the garage and went in separate directions to find their cars, Evelyn felt anxious. The woman was going to go out in public looking like that! Throughout the afternoon, she thought of Scotty's mother at the market or in line at the bank and her concern for the woman turned to anger. If she'd only noticed Evelyn's warning, she would have avoided that humiliation.

Evelyn is about to put the clothes back the way she likes them but stops. Scotty, who speaks only when spoken to, who eats his snack with solemn reverence, is communicating something with this rearrangement. Even if she can't grasp his meaning, she feels the interior charge of a shared secret.

It's Saturday, and Scotty helps her with the dusting. With his step stool, he can reach the top of the refrigerator and the lintels above the doors with the chamois cloth. He hasn't yet begun the alternating puff and stretch she noticed in her girls when they were about his age, the way they would amass weight around their middles right before a growth spurt, as if they needed a store of energy in order to blast off. She doesn't know about boys, though. Their bodies don't swell and shrink on a monthly schedule. For a boy, growing seems like a less conditional enterprise. There's a dull honesty to it. The bodies of girls are deceptions that they learn to control so they can use them to their advantage. This was something she never advised her daughters about. She didn't have to.

As Scotty follows her around the

apartment, he hums one of his little tunes. He sings a word or two about a dust bunny he finds under the bed, or about passing the white-glove test, which is something she once told him about. Of course, she doesn't use a white glove. She doesn't even own a pair—who would, these days? But he was captivated by the idea, probably because she told him it was a custom at Buckingham Palace, which was something that might not be true but sounded true. She tries always to be straightforward with Scotty, but sometimes she can't resist the look on his face when he reconsiders her and wonders what further mysteries she might contain.

When they're done with the living room and the bedroom, they go into the den. It irks her that the grass cloth above the television console is lighter where the portrait of Burl's racehorse once hung. She didn't keep her second husband around long enough for him to make much of an impression on other rooms in the apartment, but the den gets direct sunlight, and the reverse stain feels like a rebuke. He was so angry when she said she wanted a divorce. She was surprised by that, somehow having imagined that he'd take it all in the genial manner in which he took most things. He'd done nothing wrong. He hadn't changed. He hadn't cheated. He adored her. But she'd never believed in his ardor. Maybe that was the problem. Frank had been gone for nearly three decades, but another man's professions of love still sounded phony. She'd begun to hope that when she returned home after a day at work Burl wouldn't be there. She couldn't bear the triviality of their life together. *The fridge is making that sound again* meant that he was going to hoist himself out of his chair with his customary grunt, put his shoulder to it, and give it a silencing shove. *I sense an eggroll coming on* meant that he wanted to go to Golden Palace for dinner. Living with Burl was a daily reminder that most of the ways people invented to fill up time were harrowingly insignificant. That was the explanation, wasn't it, she thinks now, as Scotty moves things off the television console, dusts the wood, and puts the magazines and the ashtray and the photographs of her grandchildren back exactly as they were. She couldn't keep up the pretense that any of it mattered.

In the kitchen, when Scotty takes the last bite of his toast she pulls a dollar from her purse and puts it on the table next to his plate. "That's for you." She's never given him money before.

"Why?"

"If someone wants you to do a job, they should pay you for it."

"But anyone could help you."

"But I don't let just anyone help me. I let you."

He stares at the dollar for another moment before he takes it, stands, and heads to the front door. As she opens it, she moves to block his passage. She feels the same welling anxiety that threatened when her daughters ignored her advice.

"Scotty, what I'm trying to tell you is that if you don't put a value on yourself no one else will. People will take advantage of you. It's not nice, but that's just the way the world works. Do you understand?"

"O.K.," he says, which is a maddening non-answer, the kind that only increases her apprehension, her sense that this vital piece of information has not been understood and that she has not prevented him from making terrible mistakes in the future. But she moves aside and lets him leave. She closes the door after him. Her heart is beating fast. It's horrible to care.

An eyeglass chain is the first thing that goes missing. She hasn't thought about it for years, but, the minute it's gone, she notices. She looks at the now empty saucer on her bureau, where the chain lived, coiled and unused. When she'd first seen it at the drugstore, it seemed like a reasonable idea, even cheeky in the way that it suggested a librarian-like efficiency while, at the same time, drawing the eye toward her chest, where



"Ooh, this looks like a cute place to argue."

the glasses were dangling. She wasn't too old to enjoy that. But it turned out that it was annoying to have her glasses bouncing against her all day, and she didn't like the inference that she was forgetful.

The next thing that is gone is a pack of tissues from the cabinet under the bathroom sink. She only just opened a pack of six that she bought at the drugstore. She put one in her purse, and now there are four left. She always keeps one with her to blot her lipstick. Oh, how Frank used to tease her about her lipstick! They'd be in a movie theatre, and right in the middle of a dramatic scene she'd take out the tube of her favorite red and redo her lips. "Vanity, thy name is Evelyn," he'd tease her. But, over time, she could see that he found her habits a comfort, just as she took solace from the way he stored his shoes upright, leaning against the wall like tired men waiting for a bus. There are some things so irrational they simply take your breath away!

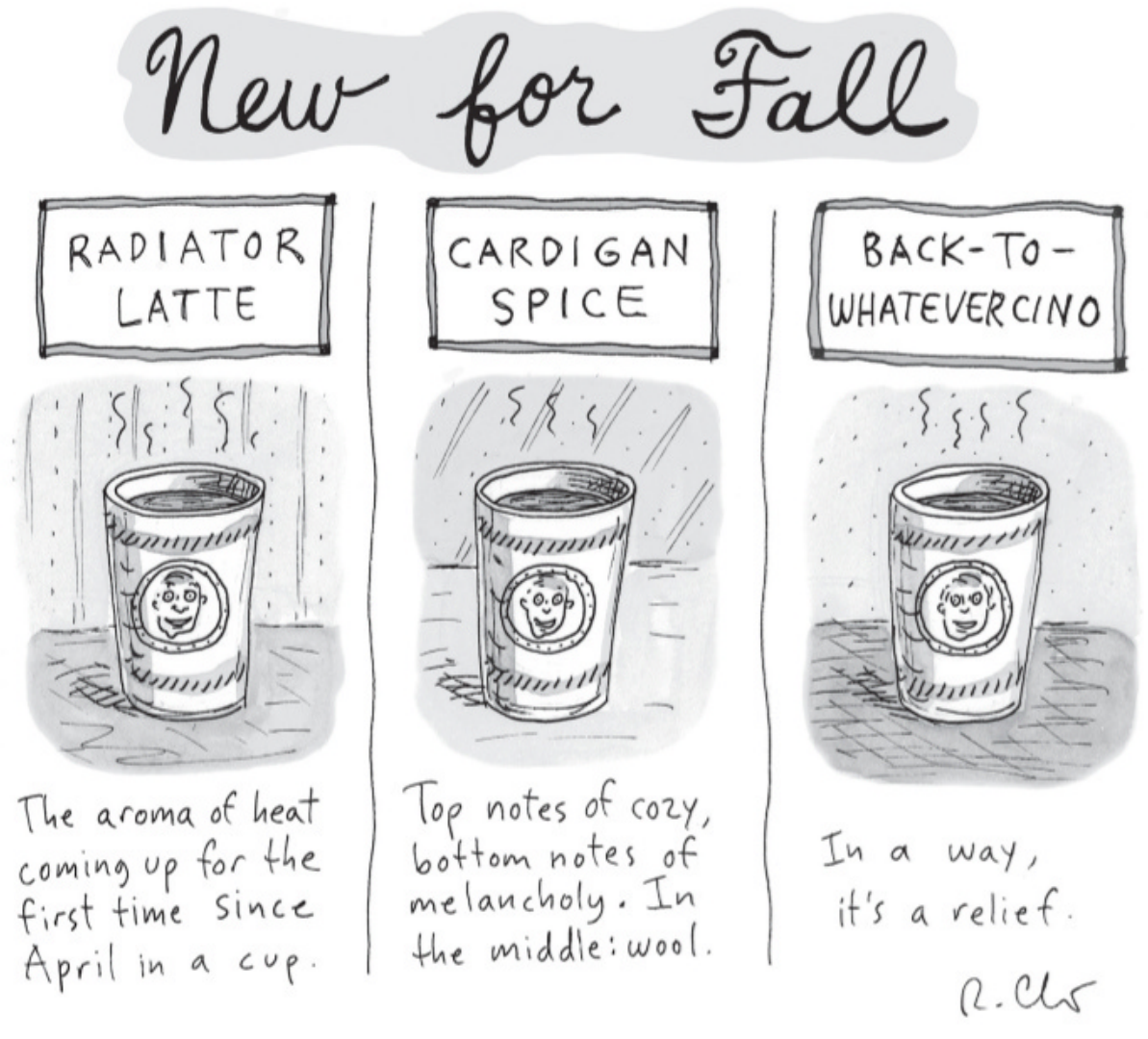
The disappearances continue. A handful of Q-tips. One of the cedar blocks she keeps at the back of her closet to deter moths. A thumbnail-size shell from the small collection that sits on the rim of the bathtub to remind her of all those winters she spent in Florida. Nothing that's gone missing is worth anything. The eyeglass chain was made of plastic and cost only a few dollars. On her last visit, Ruth had told her to get rid of it. But that was a different generation talking. Evelyn's daughters had been trained by advertising to throw out perfectly good things and replace them with the new and (not much) improved. Now look! Evelyn says, in silent conversation with her absent daughter. It turns out that the eyeglass chain was useful, after all. It was something for Scotty to steal.

Because of course it's Scotty. Who else could it be? She and Scotty are the only two people who've set foot in her apartment all summer. She isn't angry—could a person feel angry about Q-tips? Maybe he misunderstood when she paid him the dollar, and thought she'd given him a broader permission. At any rate, she thinks, children are as devious as adults. They lie. They steal. They covet and take what they need. They are ruthless when it comes to relationships. She saw Paula, at eight or nine, in the schoolyard, tell her best friend that she hated her. The girl's mother was standing nearby, so Evelyn gave Paula a smack and made her apologize to the tearful girl. But Paula's apology was bitter and unconvincing. Her hatred was genuine, and Evelyn's anger quickly turned into something approximating awe. She felt as if she were witnessing something both hideous and marvellous: the utter truth.

She should confront Scotty, she thinks, one night, when she's rubbing moisturizer into her skin, contorting her face to make sure the cream gets into the creases and wrinkles. She'd be doing him a favor, stopping him before he shoplifts at the grocery store. She could reassure him that she won't tell his parents, that it will be another secret between the two of them. But does she want him to stop? The thefts are a kind of flattery. She feels, in some unusual way, chosen. Scotty, this peculiar, inscrutable boy, wants to keep these small parts of her for himself. She looks around the apartment, wondering, with some excitement, what he will take next. He's only a little boy, but he's managed to unsettle her. It has been so very long since she was unsettled.

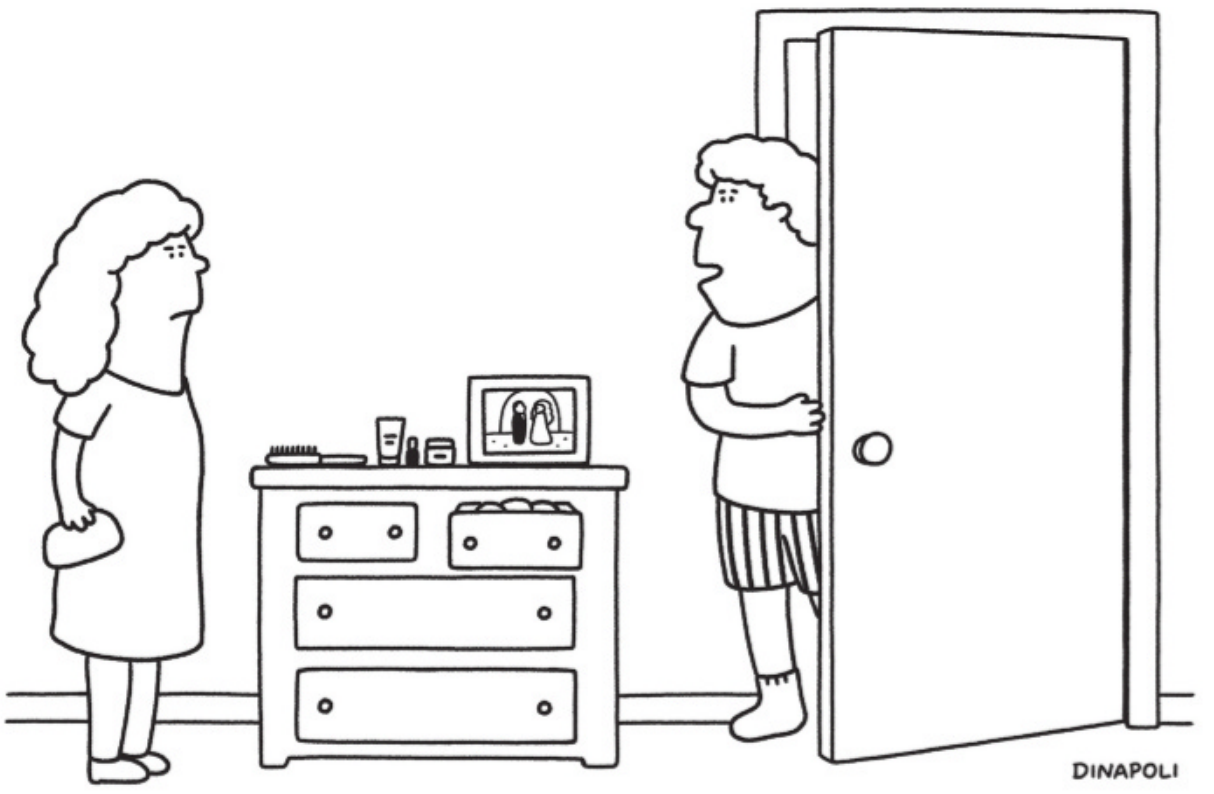
Scotty doesn't always steal something. A week goes by when she notices nothing gone. He comes to the apartment and folds towels fresh from the dryer or helps her wash the windows with Windex and newspaper. He handles his tasks with dutiful seriousness. He sings. He eats around the edges of his toast. During these dry periods, she sometimes places an intriguing object in plain sight—a small porcelain cat no bigger than a walnut, a brightly painted Ukrainian Easter egg a co-worker gave her one year, not realizing that she didn't celebrate the holiday. Scotty doesn't steal the cat or the egg or the fancy pen she was given by the temple women's auxiliary to acknowledge all the candy centerpieces she'd made over the years for various events. That he overlooks these lures tantalizes her.

Another week passes during which she experiences a turbulent alertness that is relieved only when she discovers that he's stolen a travel-sized tube of Colgate from the medicine cabinet. The following day, the golf pencil she keeps in the drawer of her credenza is gone. Her last boss gave her a case of them as a joke retirement gift, in recognition of her preference



for these quirky implements. At her send-off party, he toasted her, saying that she was the brains behind the operation. It was the kind of lift-you-up-to-put-you-down thing that men said to women all the time, the exaggeration implying its opposite. Only in her case it was true. Her boss was fired six months after she left, unable to manage things without the reminder notes she'd always written with her stubby pencil.

And then, one morning, she opens the silverware drawer and discovers that Scotty has stolen the last remaining corn holder that's shaped like an ear of corn. She used to have six sets, but over the years they met various fates, falling out of the silverware basket and becoming disfigured by the dishwasher heating element, slipping into the narrow crevice where the counter and the refrigerator don't quite meet. Frank loved corn on the cob and always challenged the girls to see who could strip theirs the fastest. He'd get out the typewriter and provide the sound effects. His silliness was the first thing to go once his heart started to give out. Unpredictability took too much out of him. Staring into the drawer at the empty place where the corn holder used to sit, she feels a quiet wrenching.



"Ready? I was born ready. I just need a few minutes to get dressed and stuff."

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The phone rings. She knows it's Paula, who calls once every two weeks, usually on a weekday before she leaves for work. The hour—8 A.M.—is a warning that the call will be short and dutiful. Evelyn imagines Paula already dressed in her business skirt and jacket, her pale hose, her heels. She's a divorce lawyer with her own practice in Lincoln. Naomi once called excitedly to say that she'd seen an ad for the firm in a city magazine featuring a glamorous shot of Paula. Evelyn pretended to be impressed, although she thought it was a little desperate for a lawyer to advertise like that.

"How are your spirits, Mother?" Paula says.

She begins every conversation this way, as if she can't imagine her mother's happiness.

"Fine," Evelyn replies. "And yours?"

"I'm about to leave for work," Paula says, starting the timer on the conversation.

Paula rarely visits. She has no children, so there isn't that obligation. She's divorced from Darren, whom she shouldn't have married in the first place. Evelyn had hoped that Paula would see what she so clearly saw in the man: the untenable combination of self-regard and self-hatred. You could not fill the hole in a man like that, she'd told Paula when she announced her engagement. Paula levelled her with a look so cool that Evelyn had the feeling that, in that moment, she no longer existed for her daughter.

Evelyn has never said anything outright to Paula about the night she failed to check on Frank. On the flight home from Tulsa, she was consumed by anger, and she rehearsed versions of her accusation. But, when she fit her key into the lock of the door, a different feeling overwhelmed her. Inside, the sofa, the houseplants, the coffee table—they all seemed like impostor versions of the things she'd lived with for decades. The house was silent. She climbed the stairs and slowly opened the door of her bedroom. Her heart was beating fast, which was foolish—she'd given the nurse instructions to call the undertaker even before she boarded the flight back home. There was the perfectly made bed where Frank had so recently lain. She fought the urge to back away, to creep downstairs as quietly as she could and leave the house so that no one would catch her in this life that wasn't, that could not be, hers. Behind her, there was a sound. She turned and there was Paula, peeking through her half-opened bedroom door, as if to protect herself from an intruder.

It was never easy between them after that. Ruth and Naomi came home for the funeral but left soon afterward to go back to school. She and Paula did their best to avoid each other. Paula would come home at the end of the day and go directly to her room. At dinnertime, she'd say that she wasn't hungry. Evelyn would leave a plate in the oven for her and eat her own meal alone at the kitchen table, hoping that Paula wouldn't change her mind and join her. Any conversation between them, whether it was about the news, or Paula's college plans, or what dress she wanted Evelyn to make for her high-school graduation, included not talking about that night. The house practically vibrated with Paula's impatience to leave, to get away from her mother as soon as possible. Which was why, not two months after graduation, Evelyn found herself converting that same dress into a wedding gown. Paula, marrying at



"Charlie has weaponized apple crisp."

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the courthouse, kissed that sulky boy, and then turned toward the small group that had gathered, her expression fiercely triumphant.

"What are you going to do with your day, Mother?" Paula says now.

It's an innocuous enough question. But still. Evelyn feels a pressure to make her life seem meaningful. "I've been robbed," she says.

"What? Mother? What do you mean?"

"I've been robbed," she repeats. It feels good to say it. Wonderful! The shock of the word in her mouth. The truth of it.

"Oh, my God. Are you all right?"

Paula's concern seems sincere, and, for a moment, Evelyn wants to come clean, to confess what's been stolen and by whom. But suddenly she's confused by feeling and she can't speak. It's too much. The missing Kleenex. The corncob holder. Somehow, if a real thief had come and stolen her television or her jewelry she would not feel as bewildered as she does now.

"It's nothing," she says. "Just some mail."

"Mother, mail theft is a federal crime. Did you report it?"

"It's fine," Evelyn says.

"It's not fine if they stole your Social Security check."

"No one stole my Social Security check."

"They prey on the elderly, these people. And once they get your Social Security number you've got a real problem on your hands."

"Are you charging by the minute?" Evelyn says. Her jaw is growing tense, her disquiet building.

"What are you talking about?"

"You're not listening to what I'm saying."

"You just told me you've been robbed."

But that's not what she was trying to say at all.

"I've got to get to work, Mother. Report the theft. Please."

Evelyn hangs up the phone feeling a sense of panic. She leaves the apartment and walks down the hall and knocks on the door. After a moment, Scotty's mother answers. Behind her, Scotty and his brother lie on their stomachs on the carpet, watching television.

"Can I help you with something?" she says.

"I need to speak with you," Evelyn says. "It's very important."

"All right," the woman says, opening the door further. "Boys, turn off the TV." She leads Evelyn into the living room and gestures for her to sit on the couch. The couch is unusually deep, and when Evelyn settles she feels crowded by the soft cushions that envelop her. She suspects that she'll need help getting up. Scotty's mother has taken a chair opposite the couch. She holds her younger boy on her lap. Scotty stands by her side. They watch her, waiting.

Evelyn straightens her back, and tries to draw herself up, but the couch defeats her. "I thought you should know," she says, "that certain things have gone missing in my home."

"I'm sorry to hear that," the woman says.

The woman looks genuinely concerned, and Evelyn feels emboldened. "Many things," she says.

"May I ask what is missing?" the woman says.

"Personal items," Evelyn says. She enjoys the power that comes with the ambiguity.

"I wonder if there have been other thefts in the building. Maybe you should contact the super?"

"You don't understand," Evelyn says. "The only person who comes to my apartment is your son."

She glances at Scotty, who betrays nothing, his expression as softly impassive as ever.

"What are you saying?" the woman says, her sympathy disappearing. "Are you accusing him of stealing?"

"Ask him," Evelyn says. "Ask Scotty."

But before the woman can do anything Scotty leaves the room. A few moments later, he returns holding a shoebox. He sets it on the coffee table.

"Scotty, what is this?" his mother says, alarmed. She lets her younger son slide off her lap, then leans forward and carefully lifts the lid off the box, as if it might contain a bomb.

Evelyn struggles to inch forward on the couch until she can see the contents, too. Everything that Scotty stole is there. She feels a small sense of triumph until she notices that Scotty's mother is giving her a strange look, as if she were reconsidering Evelyn and now found her odd, even a little dangerous. The woman picks up one of the Q-tips, then drops it back into the box, where it falls without a sound. She picks up the pack of Kleenex, looking not at the stolen item but at Evelyn, as if Evelyn were playing some kind of trick on her, insisting on the value of this box full of trash.

"Those belong to me," Evelyn says, weakly.

Scotty's mother puts the Kleenex back into the box, then covers the box with the lid. "Scotty, apologize to the lady," she says, without much conviction.

"I'm sorry."

"There we go," she says. She hands the box to Evelyn, then stands and walks quickly to the door and opens it. Evelyn can feel the woman's impatience as she works to get up from the couch, and leaves.

As she walks toward her apartment, cradling the box, she feels she's been cheated of something. Her justifiable accusation. The apology. Nothing changes the humbling absence she felt when she looked at the space between her deodorant and the dental floss where the toothpaste once lay. Nothing makes up for the unnerving sensation she had when she discovered that the corncob holder was missing and felt as if she were standing, once again, in that bedroom doorway all those years ago, staring at emptiness.

Don't wash your face with soap or you'll dry out your skin. Wear a bra or your breasts will sag. Check on your father.

Was there anything you could ever say to another person that would make a difference in the way things turned out?

Scotty never returns to her apartment after that. She doesn't expect him, but still, sometimes, when she's dusting the television console or hanging her skirts, she stops, thinking she senses him hovering. But there is no wrinkle in the air to alert her to the possibility of an encounter. She distracts herself with activities. She gets tickets to a concert. She attends a volunteer signup event at the temple. Over Labor Day weekend, she travels to Omaha to visit Naomi and her grandchildren.

One morning in early October, she's standing at the elevator, her car keys in hand. She has a hair appointment and then some errands to run. Scotty's apartment door opens. She feels heat rising up her neck, and then a man and a woman and a teen-age girl she doesn't recognize come out and head toward the elevator bank. The man and woman look dressed for office jobs. The girl carries a schoolbag over her shoulder. Evelyn feels as though she'd woken up in the middle of the night from a fraught dream and has forgotten where she is. When they reach the elevator, the adults acknowledge her with nods, then they talk quietly between themselves about who

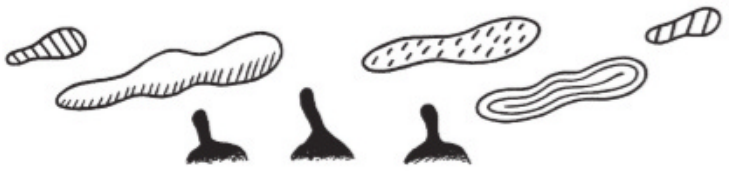


will be home at what time. The girl reminds them that she has practice. The elevator door opens. The family hesitates to allow Evelyn to enter first, but she turns, instead, to the stairway exit next to the elevator bank and pushes through the door. The stairwell is cold and too brightly lit. Her hand, grasping the rail, looks pale and bloodless. Scotty's family must have moved out while she was visiting Naomi. How else could she have missed the moving truck, the boxes and the furniture? She reaches the landing and pushes the heavy door that opens into the lobby. No one is there. The lobby is furnished with black leather chairs and a glass coffee table, but it's all for show. She's never seen anyone sit in those chairs. The room is immaculate and useless. It frightens her.

There was a time, after Frank's death, when she found herself watching other people—a man dragging a garbage can to the curb, a woman putting coins into a parking meter. Her fixation on them was so intense that often they noticed, but she couldn't help it. She was mystified by the way people went about the simplest tasks, the ones that had once seemed so minor to her as to require no thought but that she now had to talk herself through, step by step, as if she were a stroke victim who couldn't remember how to use a fork. Once, when Ruth was home from college, she found herself moving a lock of hair out of Ruth's eyes just the way a woman at the post office had done for her daughter. Ruth pulled back and gave Evelyn a funny look, as if she'd registered the inauthenticity of the gesture, which left Evelyn wondering if she'd ever been the kind of mother who did such a thing. She'd been prepared for Frank's death—his decline was slow, the end inevitable. When it finally came, she didn't feel "lost" the way people often said they did after a tragedy. No, it was that she lost herself. She wonders if the person she's been for all these years is only a vague approximation of someone she never found again.

Scotty will forget what happened. He's seven, after all, and there is so much ahead of him that will consume his attention. If he remembers her at all, it may be years or even decades from now. He'll eat a slice of cinnamon toast and have a vague impression of an old lady, or the warmth of a freshly ironed shirt, or maybe a slight feeling of regret. But before he can place the memory something will distract him. And then he'll forget all over again. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Marisa Silver on logic and the human heart.



BOOKS

BECOMING PAUL NEWMAN

Who the actor was and who he wanted to be.

BY LOUIS MENAND

Is Paul Newman's memoir, "The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Man" (Knopf), really Paul Newman's memoir? As best I can piece together the story, in 1986, the year he turned sixty-one, Newman sat down with an old friend, the screenwriter Stewart Stern, and began recording on a cassette player material for an autobiography.

This continued for several years, during which Stern also interviewed some of Newman's buddies from college and the Navy, his two wives, his brother and other members of his family, friends and show-business colleagues, including screenwriters, directors, producers, agents, and actors—pretty much everyone he could find who'd had some relationship to Newman. By 1991, Stern had recorded more than a hundred interviews. Then Newman asked him to stop. In 1998, Newman took the cassettes to the dump and burned them all.

Newman died, of cancer, in 2008. About ten years later, some of his children (he had six altogether; his only son died in 1978) approached Ethan Hawke to discuss making a documentary. Hawke learned that Stern (who died in 2015) had had transcripts of the tapes made—maybe Stern had worried that Newman might destroy them—and he used the transcripts to put together a six-part series on the lives and careers of Newman and his second wife, the actress Joanne Woodward. It's called "The Last Movie Stars," and it aired this summer on HBO Max. Meanwhile, the transcripts were edited by David Rosenthal, and made into the book that Knopf has just published.

A lot of the television series is Ethan Hawke Zooming with his pals, few of whom knew either Newman or Woodward, and most of whom present on-screen like they just rolled out of bed. (The lockdown look, I guess.) The friends read from the transcripts, each having been assigned a part. Laura Linney reads Woodward, for instance. (Linney actually does know Woodward, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2008 and is still living.) George Clooney does an uncanny Paul Newman. One anomaly is that Stern appears to have done a lot of interviews with Gore Vidal, who knew both Newman and Woodward, and although Vidal is expertly impersonated in the series by the actor Brooks Ashmanskas, he's entirely absent from the book.

Clips from Newman and Woodward's movies (they made around ninety films between them, some of which are forgettable) are used to "illustrate" incidents in the actors' lives, a device that doesn't work perfectly. There are more recent interviews, with people like David Letterman, who teased Newman about his charity work but became a convert, and Martin Scorsese, who directed Newman in "The Color of Money," the role for which he won his only Oscar. Newman's children and two of his grandchildren are heard from as well. "He was a really excellent grandfather," one of the grandchildren says. The children's feelings seem a bit mixed.

Hawke was able to fill in the years after the tape bonfire, when Newman was involved with his philanthropic activities. (He is said to have raised and given away more than half a billion dollars, much of it profits from his Newman's Own brand of food products.) And the series includes classic scenes from the best movies, along with amusing fugitive bits, like a 1953 episode of the television program "You Are There" called "The Death of Socrates," in which Newman plays Plato. When it's Paul Newman, you want to see him, so the show is a lot more satisfying than the book.

One question that no one involved in these otherwise worthy enterprises addresses is why, more than twenty years ago, Newman burned the tapes. Was it because he didn't like what other people were saying about him? Was it because he didn't like what he was saying about himself? Was it because he decided, after five years of reminiscing, that he wasn't a very interesting person? Whatever the reason, the auto-da-fé at the town dump seems a pretty clear indication that Newman did not want a memoir. But now he has one. And he obviously had no say about what got put into it.

Another question is why Newman's children wanted all this stuff to come out. They say it was to set the record straight. As with any star of Newman's magnitude, a lot of myth and rumor accrete to the image. (See, e.g., "Paul Newman: The Man Behind the Baby Blues: His Secret Life Exposed," by Darwin Porter.) But even though the memoir was put together by friends and family, it has a slightly diminishing effect.

Newman was self-deprecating, well past the point of modesty. He was self-deprecating about his self-deprecation. It can grow a little monotonous. The memoir's title is apt: Newman thought of himself (or he said he



JOHN R. HAMILTON / TRUNK ARCHIVE; OPPOSITE: PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

Newman—captured here on set in 1958, reading The New Yorker—maintained that he embodied a suburban blandness.

thought of himself) as nothing special, just an ordinary guy—who happened to look like a Greek god, but that was an accident of birth, a burden as much as a gift. It was not something he could take credit for.

Newman grew up in Shaker Heights, Ohio, outside Cleveland—his father ran a successful sporting-goods store—and he felt that he embodied a suburban, middle-American blandness all his life. He always considered himself Jewish, although his mother was not. He was politically liberal, and served as a Eugene McCarthy delegate from Connecticut at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, in Chicago, where police beat antiwar protesters in the streets. He later made it onto Richard Nixon's "enemies list," a point of pride. But socially he was, in many respects, a square. He once described himself as "an emotional Republican."

His insecurity goes all the way back to childhood. "I got no emotional support from anyone," he said. He disliked and distrusted his mother and believed that his father thought he was a loser. (The father died in 1950, before Newman had had any professional recognition.) He told Stern that, as a teenager, he was a "lightweight." "I wasn't naturally anything," he said. "I wasn't a lover. I wasn't an athlete. I wasn't a student. I wasn't a leader."

He became involved in theatre at Kenyon College, which he attended after being discharged from the Navy, but he claimed that he "never enjoyed acting, never enjoyed going out there and doing it. . . . I never regarded my performances as real successes; they were just something that was done, nothing more important than someone working hard and getting an A in political science."

He said essentially the same thing about his early acting career in New York: "I never had a sense of talent because I was always a follower, following someone else with stuff that I basically interpreted and did not really create." He got into acting, he claimed, to avoid having to take over the family business. "I was running away from something," he says. "I wasn't running towards."

Newman described himself as completely unprepared to be a parent—he had children because that's what people did when they got married—and he worried that he never related to his kids as people. "I would not want to have been one of my children," he told an old college drama teacher of his. When his son, Scott, died from an accidental overdose after a troubled life, Newman felt remorse for not having connected with him. "Many are the times I have gotten down on my knees and asked for Scott's forgiveness," he told Stern.

Like his own father, Newman was a functioning alcoholic. He was said to drink a case of beer a day, followed, until he gave up hard liquor, around 1971, by Scotch. He would often pass out. Woodward called his drinking, before he cut back, "the anguish of our lives."

Newman attributed some of his success as an actor to luck—the death of James Dean in a car crash opened up some big roles for him—and the rest to perseverance. He thought that performing came much more easily to other people—for example, to his wife. Acting is like sex, she once said. You should do it, not talk about it.

Newman always had to talk about it. He needed to understand his characters' psychology; he studied movements and accents he thought he could use in his roles; he asked writers and directors endless "What's my motivation?" questions. During the making of "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," Robert Redford, an instinctive actor, had to get used to standing around while his co-star prepared for the shot.

Newman told Stern that the first role he felt emotionally comfortable in was that of Frank Galvin, the alcoholic lawyer in "The Verdict," which came out in 1982, rather late in his career. "I never had to ask myself to do anything in that picture," Newman said. "Never had to call upon any reserves. It was always right there. I never prepared for anything, never had to go off in a corner, it was there immediately. It was wonderful."

After he made "Winning," in 1969, a movie about a race-car driver, for which he was paid a record 1.1 million dollars, Newman took up auto racing, and he got very good at it. He is in the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest person to win a professionally sanctioned race—the Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona. He was seventy. He attributed his success as a driver, too, to persistence. "The only thing I ever felt graceful at was racing a car," he said. "And that took me ten years."

Among the things the children want to amend is what one of them calls "the public fairy-tale" of Newman's fifty-year marriage to Woodward. Woodward dated a lot of men before she met Newman, including Marlon Brando. But she was not glamorous. You wouldn't know her in the street, which is why she could play many types. You *would* know Newman, which is why he couldn't. They had an intense, lifelong love affair, and a big part of it, which they spoke about frankly in interviews, was sex. "Joanne gave birth to a sexual creature," Newman says in the memoir. "I'm simply a creature of her invention." They also bonded professionally. They made sixteen movies together; he directed her in five of them.

For a long time, though, the relationship was clandestine, because Newman was already married, to a woman named Jackie Witte, and he couldn't bring himself to ask for a divorce. "Impossible times," he told Stern. "I was a failure as an adulterer." (It's not clear what counts as a success in that field.) The affair made him wretched, and, incredibly, it lasted in secret for five years, during which time Jackie gave birth to a daughter. Newman said that he felt "guilty as hell" about his treatment of Jackie: "I'll carry it with me for the rest of my life." Jackie eventually remarried, but she wasn't too happy about what he had done to her, either.

Woodward was as ambitious and, in the beginning, as accomplished as Newman—in 1958, she won Best Actress for "The Three Faces of Eve"—but after they began having children she often stayed home while her husband was on location. "Being Paul's wife is my career," she said then. Over the years, that sentiment seems to have curdled somewhat.

They fought a lot, and it is intimated that Newman had affairs. At least one is known, with a minor Hollywood actress named Nancy Bacon ("Sex Kittens Go to College," "The Private Lives of Adam and Eve"). It began while he was making "Butch Cassidy," seems to have gone on for a year or more, and got into the tabloids. (You won't find it mentioned in either the television series or the book. Bacon recounts it in her own

memoir, "Legends and Lipstick." Newman's biographer Shawn Levy says her story checks out.) In 1983, Newman and Woodward renewed their vows.

The problem with all this biographical insight is not that Paul Newman wasn't Cool Hand Luke around the house. That's no surprise. The problem is that his flaws were so, well, ordinary. People do drink too much, cheat on their spouses even though they love them, and wish they had been better parents. What people generally do not do is become the biggest male star in Hollywood and get nominated for ten Academy Awards. There's got to be more to Paul Newman than this.

It seems that most people who knew Newman thought that there was. In the memoir, the juxtaposition of their testimonies with Newman's self-analysis produces a sort of cognitive dissonance. Here is Arthur Newman, Paul's brother: "Paul ended up with drive and energy and resourcefulness. . . . He gets this self-starting built into him and what happens to him? He becomes a success." And: "He was loveable, had a great personality, and made people instantly like him. Furthermore, he was smart and he was perceptive and he had all the ingredients no matter what he did."

A Navy comrade: "From a thousand yards away, I could tell it was Newman coming. . . . He had a certain stride about him; he was a confident kid even then as a nineteen-year-old." A college friend: "He was probably the most well-known guy on campus. He drank more. He screwed more. He was tough and cold—it turned on the girls. They liked him because he was the devil."

A fellow-student in the Yale drama department, where Newman studied after Kenyon, referring to a coveted role: "Paul got it because he was by far the most magnetic and attractive of all the actors there. . . . He got [it] because he made sure he got it." George Roy Hill, who directed Newman in "Butch Cassidy," "The Sting," and "Slap Shot": "You never saw him act—he just was." A family therapist: "Paul is a very loving and caring father. He has tremendous respect and love for his kids." It's choose-your-own Newman, I guess.

In 1954, Newman broke into Hollywood, after some Broadway success, with

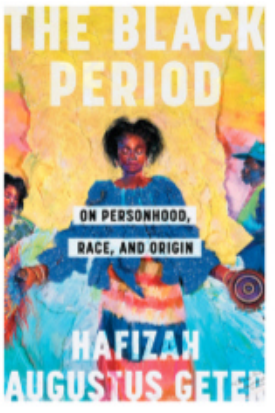
BRIEFLY NOTED



The Book of Goose, *by Yiyun Li (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).* This novel dissects the intense friendship between two thirteen-year-olds, Agnès and Fabienne, in postwar rural France. Believing themselves "old enough for everything," they stave off boredom with increasingly elaborate schemes. Fabienne begins dictating morbid tales to Agnès, and then engineers their publication under Agnès's name. Agnès is celebrated as a child prodigy and her life assumes a new trajectory. The story unfolds in retrospect, after Agnès, now twenty-seven and living in Pennsylvania, learns of Fabienne's death. Her recollections of their friendship and her brush with unearned fame have an ethereal tone, punctuated with sharp descriptions of adolescent convictions.



The Birdcatcher, *by Gayl Jones (Beacon).* With the plush scenery of a travelogue, the misshapen soul of a noir, and the anarchic spirit of a trickster tale, this novel revolves around three Black American expatriates. The narrator, Amanda, is a divorced travel writer invited to the island of Ibiza by her friend Catherine, a prize-winning sculptor, who "sometimes tries to kill her husband." ("He puts her into an asylum, thinks she's well, takes her out again, and she tries to kill him.") Catherine is suspicious of Amanda's intentions toward her husband, but, in Jones's fearsome, fractured narrative, her potential for violence seems no more alarming than anything else that might befall these social outsiders.



The Black Period, *by Hafizah Augustus Geter (Random House).* In this lyrical memoir, Geter, a poet, sets down a powerful vision of Black life in the United States by intertwining dual origin stories: her own (she is the daughter of an African American man and a Muslim Nigerian woman) and the nation's, with its history of Native genocide and African enslavement. Recounting the lives of her forebears (enslaved people, sharecroppers, artists), she expresses grief and rage, but she also sees the potential for liberation, which she terms "the Black Period," a time both prospective and realized, "where, if not our bodies, then our minds could be free." Again and again, she asks, "What would it look like to emerge from erasure?" Her father's oil paintings and charcoal drawings, scattered throughout the book, provide one response.



Master of the Two Left Feet, *by Richard Meyer (M.I.T.).* This biography of the self-taught painter Morris Hirshfield (1872-1946) is also a study of the vagaries of artistic reputation. Hirshfield, a Russian Polish immigrant, worked as a tailor and a slipper-maker in Brooklyn before turning to art, in his mid-sixties. Championed by avant-garde luminaries including André Breton and Alfred Barr for his "primitive" approach to pattern and figuration, he enjoyed brief renown—with a solo show at MOMA, in 1943, and much press coverage—before being largely forgotten. Meyer situates Hirshfield's idiosyncratic output in the popular imagery and fine art of the period, suggesting that he was savvier than his early admirers knew.

a turkey called "The Silver Chalice." He played the part of Basil, an artist who makes the chalice used at the Last Supper. Bible stories were often big moneymakers in those days. This one was not. Newman called it "the worst movie produced in the fifties," and in 1963, when it was scheduled to be broadcast on a local television station in Los Angeles, he took out an ad in the papers: "Paul Newman apologizes every night this week—Channel 9." (The ad seems to have increased viewership.)

In 1958, Newman played opposite Elizabeth Taylor as Brick in an adaptation of Tennessee Williams's psychosexual melodrama "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," for which he received the first of his Best Actor nominations. Newman looked very fine in a T-shirt, and he could play a drunk, both useful in the role. But psychosexual melodrama was not his genre. His persona was too cool, too dry, too laconic.

That persona derived not from the Broadway stage but from Westerns. On the stage, you have to act. In the movies, if the camera loves you, you just have to be in the frame. The movie camera loved Paul Newman as it has loved few other leading men, and he made a career out of underacting—just as the actor he was often compared to starting out, Marlon Brando, made a career out of overacting. (Newman admired Brando, but the comparison annoyed him. "I wonder if anyone ever mistakes him for Paul Newman," he said. "I'd like to see that.")

The movies that established this cinematic persona were "The Hustler" (1961) and "Hud" (1963). "Hombre" and "Cool Hand Luke" came out in 1967, "Butch Cassidy" in 1969. They were all hits, and the posters sold the star, not the film: "Paul Newman *Is* Hud." He was one of the biggest box-office draws of the nineteen-sixties—and there was almost nothing sixties about him. The music he liked was Bach.

Newman was part of the generation of male Hollywood stars who replaced Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Stewart, and Cary Grant—a generation that included Redford, Warren Beatty, Dustin Hoffman, Steve McQueen, and Sidney Poitier. Along with a fresh crop of screenwriters, directors, and producers, they built the New Hollywood on the ruins of the old studio system.

The New Hollywood was a great place for leading men. It was less welcoming to women. The new female stars—Julie Andrews, Audrey Hepburn, Katharine Ross, Natalie Wood—commanded far fewer leading roles than had the "screen goddesses" of Old Hollywood, like Joan Crawford, Vivien Leigh, Bette Davis, Grace Kelly, Katharine Hepburn, and Ingrid Bergman, women who could reliably carry a picture. Marilyn Monroe, potentially the biggest star in the new cohort, died in 1962.

The female characters in Newman's movies are either damaged and expendable, like Piper Laurie in "The Hustler" (she kills herself) and Patricia Neal in "Hud" (she leaves town on a late-night bus), or they are peripheral eye candy, like Katharine Ross in "Butch Cassidy." "Butch Cassidy" is pure bromance. Ross has almost nothing to do in that picture except watch Newman perform tricks on a bicycle while listening to Burt Bacharach's maddening "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head," in a dramatically pointless scene. She leaves the story before the finale.

There is one female role in "Cool Hand Luke," Luke's dying mother (Jo Van Fleet), who has a single, four-minute scene with Newman. (I don't count the young lady washing her car, a part that has, and needs, no dialogue.) There are only minor female roles in "The Sting," another Newman-Redford bromance and one of the top moneymakers of Newman's career. As Newman's fiancée in "The Towering Inferno," yet another big box-office bromance, this one with Steve McQueen (all right, who has the bluest eyes?), Faye Dunaway is tasked mostly with looking concerned. There are many female characters in "Harper," a hardboiled sexist travesty released in 1966. They all have the hots for the lead, who has his way with them (much like in the early James Bond movies).

Even in the later films in which he gives his most Newmanesque performances—"Absence of Malice,""The Verdict,""The Color of Money,""Slap Shot," "Nobody's Fool"—there are only the vestiges of a romantic subplot. Newman is still undeniably sexy in those pictures, but there is very little sex. "In Nobody's Fool," Melanie Griffith flashes her breasts at him and he just shrugs. His characters' take-it-or-leave-it attitude about



"It keeps me focussed."

women is part of their cool, of course, and their cool was what people came to see. "His likableness is infectious," Pauline Kael once wrote. "Nobody should ever be asked not to like Paul Newman."

"The last movie stars" is what Gore Vidal called Newman and Woodward. Discounting for hyperbole (Scarlett Johansson and Denzel Washington are not movie stars?), this seems to capture something about Newman in particular. He can look a little Old Hollywood, more a star than an actor. But that is misleading. In fact, along with Brando and Dean and a few others, it was Newman who brought Method acting to Hollywood.

Newman found the drama department at Yale too academic, so in 1952 he moved to New York, where he became a member of the Actors Studio, famous as the home of the Method. (As usual, Newman attributed his admission to good luck: he was not applying himself, just performing with another actor who was auditioning to get in, and he got accepted instead. He always assumed they made a mistake.) He regarded his time there as the pivotal experience of his career. "I learned everything I've learned about acting from the Actors Studio," he said.

The commonly understood theory of Method acting is that the actor expresses emotion by summoning up personal memories. This is what Lee Strasberg, who directed the Actors Studio, taught. But there was a rival Method theory, taught by Stella Adler, who had her own acting studio. Adler thought that actors express emotions by immersing themselves in the circumstances of their characters.

Actors, Adler believed, are relating not to themselves but to a fiction created by a writer. The aim is to act as though you are not acting, to appear natural. You're living the role, on the stage or on the screen. And living the role was something that Newman, with the right parts, turned out to be very good at. When he had to perform, in movies like "The Silver Chalice" and Otto Preminger's ponderous "Exodus," in which he plays a member of Haganah who is smuggling Jewish refugees into Palestine after the Second World War, he goes wooden. "I know I can function better in the American vernacular than I can in any other," he once said. "In fact, I cannot seem to function in any other."

At the Actors Studio, students workshopped scenes, which were then critiqued by Strasberg or by the director Elia Kazan. Newman said that, after getting ripped apart for one of his performances, he mostly observed. He discovered, he said, that he was "primarily a cerebral actor." He had to calculate, not emote, because he felt blocked off from his own emotions. He believed that he did not have an inner well of feeling to draw on. What this meant, though, was that he was an Adlerian. He needed to understand a character in order to play him. That was the Method that worked for him. He was so good at it that audiences felt he was not acting. They felt he *was* Hud.



Many actors in the New Hollywood were trained by Adler or by Strasberg: Karl Malden, Julie Harris, Warren Beatty, Montgomery Clift, Cloris Leachman, Patricia Neal, Eli Wallach, Rod Steiger. (Brando, though he trained with Adler, dropped in on Actors Studio workshops.) Robert De Niro was a student of Adler; Al Pacino was a student of Strasberg—relationships that form a sort of Oedipal meta-text in "The Godfather Part II," in which De Niro plays the young Vito Corleone (Brando's character) and Pacino has the character played by Strasberg, Hyman Roth, assassinated.

Immersion is challenging because actors are given little to work with. There are some lines of dialogue, an occasional stage direction, or, in a screenplay, action lines, but actors largely have to invent the people they play. An important element in Method acting, for example, is movement. Typically, a screenplay says almost nothing about movement, but the way a character walks can convey a lot of information. Newman created a distinctive walk, a kind of weary swagger, and he used it in all his best pictures.

Newman was blessed with a classic face; he was also blessed with a classic body. "He got to be twenty-nine years old," Woodward once said, "and then he stayed twenty-nine years old year after year after year, while I got older and older and older." You could almost say that the star of "Cool Hand Luke" is Newman's torso, flat and perfectly toned. He looks eighteen. In fact, he was forty-two.

Newman kept that physique his whole life. One of his last roles was the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," which was broadcast on PBS in 2003. He looks like a young actor who has been made up, not very skillfully, to impersonate an old man. He was nearly eighty. To consume a case of beer a day and maintain that body—Newman said he had a good metabolism—is preternatural (and a little unfair).

It's hard to credit Newman's claim that when he entered the Actors Studio he realized that he was emotionally "anesthetized." He felt passion (for Joanne); he felt guilt (about Jackie); he felt rejection (by his parents). He felt plenty of self-doubt. On the evidence of the memoir, he would not have had to dig very deep to channel those feelings.

It seems that his real recognition was that he would never be an actor's actor, because he would never be a nonconformist; he was incurably bourgeois. "To this day," he said to Stern, "people I consider the eccentric people of the theatre, the bohemian people, are the ones whose circles I yearned to be a part of, people like John Malkovich, Geraldine Page, Rip Torn, Scorsese, Nicholson, Brando, Huston. . . . I don't have the immediacy of personality. I'm not a true eccentric. I've got both feet firmly placed in Shaker Heights. Those people, they're authentically themselves. They're not working toward something they aren't."

The idea that to perform—that is, to pretend—you need first to be authentic is part of the mystique of theatre. It belongs to the fan's cherished illusion that the performer is just as charismatic offstage as on, that what is emoted in front of the camera is a genuine expression of the person who is performing the emotion. James Dean really was a rebel without a cause; Muddy Waters was as blue as he sang. If anyone should have seen through this, it's the actor who "was" Hud. It's poignant that Newman, a man with whom most human beings would gladly have changed places, wished so desperately that he could be a person he was not. ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

CHILDREN OF THE COAST

Abdulrazak Gurnah weighs the costs of leaving—and staying—home.

BY JULIAN LUCAS



Armies, like writers, prey on orphans and misfits. Scenes of military recruitment have been a literary staple at least since Bulgarian soldiers kidnapped Voltaire's Candide, but few are more bleakly memorable than the one at the end of "Paradise" (1994), by the novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah. It's around the time of the First World War. Yusuf, a runaway servant in what's now Tanzania, wanders into a camp abandoned by *askari*, or local troops, who have occupied his coastal town in the name of Germany. He finds wild dogs eating the soldiers' excrement, and, when they return his gaze, experiences a shock of recognition. "The dogs had known a shit-eater when they saw one," Yusuf decides, and promptly joins the *askari*.

The grotesque analogy poses a painful question: How did so many colonial subjects end up fighting for their conquerors, living, as it were, on the leftovers of empire? More than a million Africans served in the two World Wars, deployed both in Europe and in their own occupied continent. Gurnah, who grew up in Zanzibar, knew that one of his relatives had been conscripted as a porter into Germany's Schutztruppe. Another had enlisted with the British, in the King's African Rifles. Yet scarcely any testimony survived to account for the experiences of soldiers like them. In "Paradise," his lapidary fourth novel, he tried to envision what kind of life might lead to such an act of desertion.

The novel centers on a rubber- and ivory-trading expedition led by Yusuf's "uncle" Aziz. He is, in reality, a sharkish merchant who has seized the boy from his parents through a predatory loan. Their imaginary bond keeps Yusuf complacent during their long march into the continent. But when the master's caravan fails—spectacularly, in an ironic revision of Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"—the slave takes flight, disgusted with a world where "vengeful acquisitiveness had forced even simple virtues into tokens of exchange and barter." Yusuf's decision to join the Schutztruppe is a gloomy vision of exchanging one oppressive system for another at the dawn of colonial rule.

Gurnah has spent more than three decades chronicling the Swahili coast and its diaspora, in wry, wandering fiction whose understated style belies its narrative sophistication. A novelist in the old-fashioned school of fateful separations and buried family secrets, he is interested not only in the experience of displacement but also in its myriad causes: debt, shame, misguided ambition, and, especially, the toxic entanglement of kinship and dependence. "Paradise," which was short-listed for the Booker Prize, exemplifies the typical arc of his novels, following a young man from provincial innocence to worldly disenchantment. But it also leaves Yusuf's fate as an *askari* entirely to the imagination. How did African soldiers fare in the wars between their colonizers? And, once the smoke had cleared and the borders had shifted, how did they face coming home?

Gurnah's most recent novel, "Afterlives"—published in the U.K. in 2020, and now available in the United States—revisits the era in a spiritual sequel to "Paradise." It revolves around a love story between two young runaways. Afiya is an orphan from a rural village, whose brother entrusts her to cruel neighbors when he goes to fight for the Schutztruppe. Hamza, an escaped servant, also becomes an *askari*, joining a brutal brawl for the continent at a time when "every bit of it belonged

Gurnah's harrowing fiction explores storytelling as a mode of survival.

ILLUSTRATION BY YVAN ALAGBÉ

to Europeans, at least on a map: British East Africa, Deutsch-Ostafrika, África Oriental Portuguesa, Congo Belge." Their search for a place in the world unfolds against the monumental absurdities of empire:

> As [the *askari*] told their swaggering stories and marched across the rain-shadow plains of the great mountain, they did not know that they were to spend years fighting across swamps and mountains and forests and grasslands, in heavy rain and drought, slaughtering and being slaughtered by armies of people they knew nothing about: Punjabis and Sikhs, Fanti and Akan and Hausa and Yoruba, Kongo and Luba, all mercenaries who fought the Europeans' wars. . . . It was astonishing to the *askari* to see the great variety of people whose existence they had not even known about.

A crop of recent narratives has explored Africa's overlooked role in the World Wars. Scholastique Mukasonga's "Kibogo" is set in a Rwanda that's being starved to feed the Allies in their struggle against Nazi Germany. David Diop's "At Night All Blood Is Black" follows two Senegalese *tirailleurs* into the trenches of no man's land. "Afterlives" focusses on the East African campaign of 1914-18. Those who fought in it came from all over Africa—men torn from their communities who tore up others in turn. But the Schutztruppe could also be a realm of social opportunity, where "askariboys" from the ranks of the poor and the powerless could become big men.

Gurnah's novel interrogates the costs and rewards of this violent, cosmopolitan world and its circumstantial solidarities. When Hamza learns German from a lieutenant who recognizes him as a kindred spirit, their closeness elicits suspicions of treachery in the ranks. A postwar return to his coastal home town brings new struggles for acceptance, especially once Hamza meets Afiya and the childless couple who have rescued her from abuse. For everyone, a longing for togetherness is bedeviled by old shames and secrets. "I'm not sure there is a benign form of belonging," Gurnah has said. "Even if you stay put."

When Gurnah won last year's Nobel Prize in Literature, there was little consensus on how to categorize his dark-horse victory. He was the fourth Black writer to win the award, but the universe of his fiction was far removed from familiar histories centered on the Atlantic. He was only the seventh African-born laureate, but some cavilled that he was, more pertinently, one more Anglophone writer based in the U.K. Others wondered why he'd edged out a fellow East African and a longtime favorite, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, known for his insistence that writers from the continent should use their indigenous languages. Even in Tanzania, people struggled with the meaning of Gurnah's achievement. Could they claim a writer whom their country had in many ways driven out?

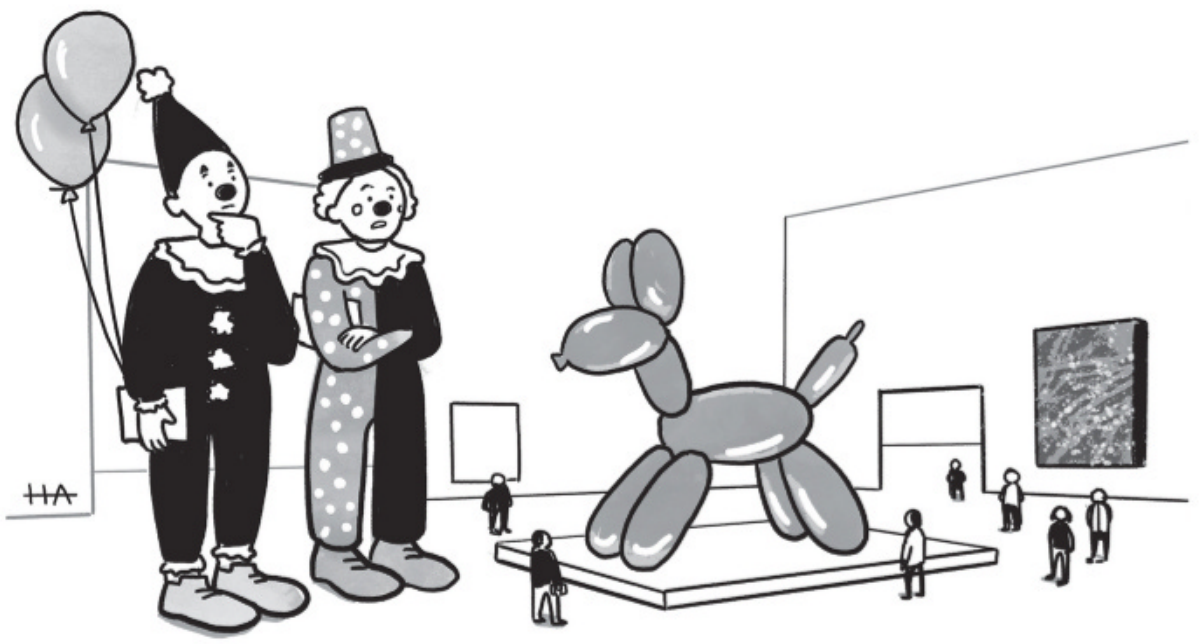
Zanzibar is a small island that is also a major crossroads for Africa, Asia, and Europe. It is one of the historic centers of Swahili civilization, a loose network of coastal societies stretching from Somalia to Mozambique, whose language serves as East Africa's lingua franca. Swahili cities were shaped by more than a millennium of trade with the Arabian peninsula, embracing Islam and developing a distinctive mixture of African, Arab, and South Asian cultures. Their wealth also attracted the envy of empires overseas. Portugal seized Zanzibar in the sixteenth century, but later lost it to the Sultan of Oman, whose descendants turned the island into a base for conquering swaths of the mainland.

Under the Omanis, Zanzibar grew rich selling spices, ivory, and slaves, mostly non-Muslims from the interior, whom the island's élites derided as *washenzi*, or uncivilized. The island reached the peak of its power in the late nineteenth century, when the legendary trader Tippu Tip—Uncle Aziz from "Paradise" writ large—established armed settlements as far west as present-day Congo. His colonial designs ran afoul of rivals in Europe, as they launched their Scramble for Africa. Zanzibar lost its territory to the Germans and then to the British, who reduced its once mighty sultan to a figurehead. "New maps were made, complete maps, so that every inch was accounted for, and everyone now knew who they were," Gurnah writes, sardonically, in "By the Sea" (2001). "Or at least who they belonged to."

He was born, in 1948, in Stone Town, Zanzibar's nineteenth-century capital, where his father traded in fish. Their neighborhood was abuzz with the tongues of the Indian Ocean—Swahili, Somali, Kutchi, and others. He grew up on Hollywood films, Indian songs, the distinctive *taarab* music of the island, and the rock and roll of Elvis Presley. His first language was Swahili, quickly supplemented by Arabic and, later, the English of a colonial education. "By that time I had already been exposed to complex narrative traditions in the Qur'an school [and] in Qasidas," or traditional odes, he recalled in an autobiographical essay. "I had listened to stories at home told by grannies and aunties, I had heard ribald and forbidden stories in the streets. I cannot describe what a rich and unforgettable body of work all this amounted to."

In 1964, a month after independence from Great Britain, Zanzibar was convulsed by a revolution. The sultanate was abolished, the old "foreign" élite—many of whom had been African for generations—was suppressed, and the island's new government joined what had been Tanganyika, forming the United Republic of Tanzania. Thousands of Zanzibaris were killed, and many others left. Gurnah, who saw little future under the revolutionary government, moved to the U.K. with his brother in 1968.

They met with a chilly reception. South Asian emigrants were arriving in Britain from across East Africa, where, as in Zanzibar, many independence governments were persecuting them as accomplices of empire. (Freddie Mercury, who was also born in Stone Town, came in the same wave.) Racist abuse was a part of everyday life; it was the year that Enoch Powell, a conservative member of Parliament, delivered his infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech, warning about the dire consequences of large-scale immigration. "We had no idea we had arrived in the middle of an exodus," Gurnah recalled in a 2001 *Guardian* piece. "But there was no going back." He earned an undergraduate degree at a teacher-training college in Canterbury, and later studied literature at the University of Kent, where he received a Ph.D., in 1982, before joining



"My kid, who is also a giant clown, could do that."

• •

the faculty. His first years in England felt "strangely weightless," he observed, intensifying the "sense of a life left behind, of people casually and thoughtlessly abandoned, a place and a way of being lost to me forever." The distance inspired him to write. In 1987, he published his début novel, "Memory of Departure."

It's a story of truncated youth set in a squalid, post-revolutionary Zanzibar—and an apologia, of sorts, for emigration. The adolescent narrator, Hassan, endures his brother's death, his tyrannical father's alcoholism, his sister's turn to prostitution, and the foreclosure of his Arab family's future by the new government. He leaves the island to pursue an inheritance from a rich uncle in Nairobi, but a romantic transgression forces him to leave Kenya for a life at sea. Despite some abrupt plot twists and lurid melodrama, the novel established a pattern that Gurnah continued to refine: a ceaseless shuttling between the claustrophobia of home and the loneliness of exile.

Many of Gurnah's novels go something like this: A young man from a declining family, ruined by debt, vice, or government repression, leaves home because he wants to seek his fortune, or simply because he has no choice. Abroad, he's forced to contend with revelations from the past, often by confronting an older relative who turns out to be a cause of his own displacement. Grievances are aired, skeletons tumble from closets, and the protagonist's origin story proves to be far more complicated than he previously knew. Yet it's no longer possible to put things right. The mother is dead, the beloved has married another, or the country of childhood has changed beyond recognition. (Dickens, with all his financial riddles and tragically belated disclosures, is a clear influence.) With any luck, though, there's still time to decipher what happened, and to seek solace in the telling.

At first, Gurnah wrote about the immigrant experience separately from East Africa. "Memory of Departure" was followed by two novels set in England, "Pilgrims Way" (1988) and "Dottie" (1990). Only with "Paradise" did he begin to combine these spheres of narrative, delving into the internal displacements of his homeland's history. The impetus was partially corrective. As a scholar of post-colonial, and especially African, literature, he began to realize that few of its landmarks reflected the reality of his birthplace. The paradigm of a local culture's collision with Western modernity (say, in the forest village of Chinua Achebe's "Arrow of God") had little relevance to a multiracial region whose calendar turned on the rhythms of trade in the Indian Ocean. The hybridity of the Swahili coast meant that Gurnah couldn't embrace the back-to-the-land radicalism of a writer like Ngũgĩ. But neither did he share the attitude of an émigré such as V. S. Naipaul, whose disaffection with his homeland had soured into something like renunciation. Gurnah's challenge was to depict a home defined by journeys and losses long preceding his own.

In the ensuing years, Gurnah's fiction came to synthesize the British and the Tanzanian halves of his experience in stereoscopic narratives charged with irony. "By the Sea," the most accomplished of his novels, revolves around a chance encounter between two migrants with bitterly entangled histories. Saleh Omar, a wily old furniture merchant with a memorably sarcastic sensibility, narrates the first section of the novel, which begins when he arrives seeking asylum at London's Gatwick Airport. He pretends not to speak English, believing that this might improve his chances, but amuses himself by pleading the case in his imagination:

> Do you remember that endless catalogue of objects that were taken away to Europe because they were too fragile and delicate to be left in the clumsy and careless hands of natives? I am fragile and precious too, a sacred work, too delicate to be left in the hands of natives, so now you'd better take me too. I joke, I joke.

The gambit works, but costs Omar his prized possession: a wooden casket of rare incense called *ud-al-qamari*, which is confiscated by a vindictive customs official. The name alludes to "The Tale of Qamar al-Zaman," from "A Thousand and One Nights," a story of two lovers who lose and find each other several times in the course of a globe-trotting odyssey. For Omar, an unexpected reunion comes when British do-gooders introduce him to a young expatriate professor named Latif—whose family, it turns out, was ruined by the merchant. Their confrontation inverts the hierarchy that prevailed back home. Latif, once a desperate debtor's child, becomes Omar's confessor, listening to his account of their shared history in successive evening visits that recall Scheherazade's audiences with Shahryar.

Omar is mourning a daughter; Latif, an older brother who went off with a man who had sexually abused him.

With time, sharing their versions of what happened becomes an unexpected form of consolation. "He was my shriver," Omar reflects. "I needed to be shriven of the burden of events and stories which I have never been able to tell, and which by telling would fulfil the craving I feel to be listened to with understanding."

Gurnah's subsequent work reflects this shriving spirit. In "Desertion" (2005), the scandalous love of an Afro-Indian woman and a marooned British traveller reverberates in the lives of their descendants. The thrillingly plotted "Gravel Heart" (2017), a mature reprise of the wicked-uncle trope from "Memory of Departure," ends not with a flight into the unknown but with a conversation between the narrator and the father who failed him. Mischance, as Gurnah said in a recent interview, interests him less in itself than for what people retrieve from its wake.

"Afterlives," too, is a story of retrieval. Possibly the most expansive of Gurnah's ten novels, it reverses the pattern of dispersal that drives most of his fiction: strangers become kin, orphans go home, and a diverse society takes shape in the wreckage of a war-torn colony. But changing direction can be difficult. Gurnah's title refers not only to his characters' postwar aspirations but to the lingering injuries that impede their realization. Both protagonists are wounded early in the novel. When Afiya, whose parents died of illness, learns to write in Swahili, her foster father accuses her of sending letters to a pimp and breaks her hand. Hamza, the *askari*, suffers parallel abuse during language lessons with a mercurial lieutenant, who slaps and demeans him even as he grows dependent on their conversations. After the war begins, and the Schutztruppe is driven deep into the bush, Hamza's abilities elicit a near-fatal slashing, when another officer decides that he has betrayed the unit. The association of wounds and literacy sets the stage for a courtship of narrative cures.

A number of false families precede their union. Several of the novel's most memorable scenes transpire at the German fort, where the *askari* inhabit a world as governed by taboos, intimate hierarchies, and the ever-present threat of dishonor as any traditional household. (A soldier who fails to keep his uniform clean, or dares to look a European officer in the eye, will be lashed.) Gurnah revisits the homoerotic themes of "Paradise"—Aziz's rowdy, all-male expedition is full of "furtive caresses" and led by a "merciless sodomizer" whose bamboo cane is the terror of the ranks—in the scandal of Hamza's relationship with the lieutenant. "You are a shoga," or homosexual, a fellow-*askari* mocks. "These Germans, they like playing with pretty young men, especially ones with such nice manners as you have." As in Melville, worlds collide amid the unruly frictions of men on the margins.

The architecture creaks in places. Lively scenes of *askari* life are joined together by a mortar of historical summary—mostly about troop movements in the East Africa campaign. Afiya, though intended as a co-protagonist, recedes into the background after the strong opening chapters recounting her childhood. Readers of Gurnah's more tightly focussed novels may miss their sardonic voices and hairpin ironies; busy with subplots, and narrated from a distance, "Afterlives" feels more diffuse than "Paradise" or "By the Sea."

The novel's breadth does lend gravity to its central homecoming, which begins, midway through the novel, with Hamza's arrival in the coastal town of his enslaved childhood. He arrives by dhow at twilight. Low tide forces the boat to wait beyond the harbor till morning; Hamza, too, floats in limbo, vainly scanning the quayside for familiar landmarks. "It had been many months of wandering, many years," we read, "and now he was making yet another start in the company of a "spectral host of accusers."

He is returning to a place where everything, however damaged, hovers on the cusp of renewal. Gurnah's cosmopolitan, lovingly satirical vision of an interwar Swahili port—busy with hustlers, hashish-addled fishermen, and merchants from every corner of Asia, Africa, and Europe—recalls the poet Derek Walcott's evocation of his own island corner of the waning British Empire: "These dead, these derelicts, that alphabet of the emaciated, they were the stars of my mythology." Hamza finds a job as night watchman at a local merchant's warehouse, where Khalifa, the Afro-Indian bookkeeper, finds him sleeping in the open. "What are you, an idiot, some kind of saint?" Khalifa exclaims, pressing money into his hand. Eventually, Hamza moves in with Khalifa, his wife, and Afiya, whom they've taken in and raised. Overcoming their suspicions and resentments, the four form a family of the disinherited that mirrors the emerging post-colonial society around it.

The agent of this transformation is neither of the young lovers but Khalifa, a cranky yet tenderhearted old man who listens to their stories. His vocation as a bookkeeper has special significance in Gurnah's debt-governed fictional universe. (The author's first novel begins with a boy's visit to the mosque on his fifteenth birthday—the age of majority in Islam—to "open an account with the Almighty.") Khalifa, though, is no tallier of debts and sins but "a sentimental bearer of crimes," whose understanding ear becomes the story's moral center. When people are repaid what's owed them, we say that they have been "made whole." Appropriately, then, the bookkeeper settles the novel's accounts by playing matchmaker for those whom life has dispossessed.

The worst fate, in Gurnah's fiction, is to be left alone with guilt and grievance. His novels are full of sorrows that never find an audience, and that end by harrowing their hosts. In "By the Sea," a single, vivid sentence delineates the tragedy of an elderly hermit who guards a deserted British barracks: "The caretaker was a shrunken, sprightly old man with scheming eyes, living a secret life of imperial duties and hoarded stores, tending the monuments of an empire which had retreated to the safety of its own ramparts and forgotten him." Hamza's story is haunted by two *askari* who don't find their way back so easily: Afiya's brother, led astray by the Germans, and, especially, Yusuf from "Paradise." Their absences underscore the necessary link between loss and hospitality. Those we lose don't always return—and it's precisely for this reason, Gurnah suggests, that we must welcome strangers and their tales. ♦

POP MUSIC

TAKE ME HOME

With Plains, two indie-rock stars rediscover their Southern roots.

BY CARRIE BATTAN



The record "I Walked with You a Ways" is equal parts fantasy and homage.

In 2018, the singer-songwriter Katie Crutchfield released a pair of covers she'd recorded with her boyfriend, the musician Kevin Morby. They were tributes to Jason Molina, a singer and guitarist who performed under various stage names in the nineties and two-thousands before dying, of alcohol-related organ failure, at thirty-nine. Molina's work sprawled across decades and collaborators, but almost all of it was indie rock that had been suffused with the spirit and the inflections of the blues. When Crutchfield began playing his songs, she had an unexpected breakthrough. Under the name Waxahatchee, she'd risen to prominence as an emotionally evocative indie-rock singer, but when she tinkered around with Molina's songs "Farewell Transmission" and "The Dark Don't Hide It" she was taken aback by how comfortable she felt inhabiting Molina's warbly twang.

After years of touring and heavy drinking, Crutchfield was also reconsidering her relationship with alcohol. The next album she recorded as Waxahatchee, "Saint Cloud," from 2020, reflected a transformation, both personal and stylistic. Newly sober, she moved away from some of the guitar-pedal distortion and thematic heaviness of her previous records, instead embracing the folk and country music that she'd been raised on as a child in Alabama. The pulse of her songs slowed, and her lyrics conveyed a tranquillity that, to anyone familiar with the turmoil of her earlier work, sounded hard-won. She'd also moved to Kansas City, and the record was infused with a fantasy of a slower existence—the sort of unadorned, slice-of-life imagery that modern country songwriting is known for. "I lose my grip, I drive out far / Past fireworks at the old trailer park / And folding chairs, American flags / Selling tomatoes at five bucks a bag," Crutchfield sings on "Arkadelphia," a title that looks like an apt portmanteau, given that she spent much of her twenties living in Philadelphia, but is actually the name of a street in Birmingham, Alabama. (Despite its seeming lightheartedness, Crutchfield has said that this song is about addiction.)

Even in the digital era, much new music is created out of some alchemy between the broader stylistic heritage of a geographic location and the moment-to-moment emotional experience of a lone musician. Being a touring performer is a kind of vagrancy, and musical evolution often takes place on the road. There are few contemporary songwriters for whom this complicated interplay between set and setting has been more fruitful than it has been for Crutchfield. She wrote her widely lauded, unvarnished début solo album, "American Weekend," from 2012, during a few emotionally fraught days spent visiting her childhood home in Birmingham. (Waxahatchee is the name of a creek nearby.) She grew up on the sounds of foundational female country artists like Loretta Lynn and Shania Twain, but, in her youth, she gravitated toward the sound and the ethos of punk and indie rock. (In interviews, she notes the lengths she once went to conceal her Alabama accent.)

As Crutchfield was being drawn back into country and Americana, she crossed paths with another musician who was experiencing a similar trajectory shift. This was Jess Williamson, also an indie-rock singer and songwriter. Early on in her career, Williamson, a Texas native, made melancholy, lo-fi banjo folk, sometimes singing in a raspy whisper that sounded a bit like Cat Power's. Her début album, "Native State," from 2014, chronicled her experience of moving back to Texas after a brief period in New York

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAT MARTIN

City. She released three more solo albums, and experimented with both bracing electric sounds and wispier styles that had hints of New Age mysticism. (Her latest album, "Sorceress," came out in 2020.) But as Williamson grew as a musician she, like Crutchfield, found herself yearning to reëxamine some of the formative artists of her youth.

For years, Crutchfield performed alongside her twin sister, Allison, and she has experience with intimate collaboration. She and Williamson met in Austin in 2017, and quickly struck up a partnership. Together, the two musicians were emboldened to continue their forays into Southern music. They made an album using the band name Plains. The record, "I Walked with You a Ways," which comes out this month, is a broad-strokes exploration of the American South which sounds both lived and imagined. The record is equal parts fantasy and homage—not quite a stand-alone concept album, but not a perfect extension of either woman's solo work, either.

Whereas Crutchfield's "Saint Cloud" took a tentative step toward the nebulously folksy, catchall genre known as Americana, "I Walked with You a Ways" is a playful leap into a distinctly new arena. It's a record that evokes images more than feelings, conveying a sense that both musicians would sooner defiantly drive off into the horizon than wallow in one place, ruminating on the dissolution of a relationship. "We don't need to talk about Abilene," Williamson sings on a track named after the town in central Texas. "Well Main Street was cute / And the rents there were cheap. . . . Texas in my rearview, plains in my heart." On "Problem with It," the duo's first single and their catchiest, most fully realized song, Crutchfield takes the lead in crafting a scene: "I drive fast on high alert / Past the Jet Pep and the Baptist Church," she sings coolly, over some banjo fingerpicks. Williamson joins her on the chorus. "If you can't do better than that babe / I got a problem with it," they sing, in the style of Lucinda Williams, exuding casual sternness.

On "I Walked with You a Ways," Crutchfield and Williamson choose to harmonize rather than duet. It's an approach that allows each of them to maintain a distinctive style. Crutchfield, who seems a bit more trepidatious in unleashing her twang, anchors the record. Williamson, who in the past often had a featherlight vocal presence that sometimes made it sound as if she were haunting her songs, is swaggering and playful. She's the show-woman of the album, evoking the waltzy femininity of early country greats like Tammy Wynette. "It was always fun getting a little drunk / On your back deck in the rain / And I cooked for you like a good woman do," she sings on "Summer Sun," the album's jaunty pop-country opener.

There's an element of jubilant play-acting to "I Walked with You a Ways," and the record represents some of the musicians' cheeriest work yet. Although this approach means that the songs lack the specificity of the artists' solo albums, it also offers them a kind of respite. Both Crutchfield and Williamson have been performing in a golden era of indie rock dominated by women, many of whom are lauded for their emotional rawness. This may explain why some contemporary female artists are so inclined toward collaboration. After a decade of excavating personal strife for public consumption—particularly in Crutchfield's case—side projects like Plains are a pressure release.

It's one thing to be a stylistic tourist passing through a new sound; it's entirely different to settle in for the long haul. Crutchfield and Williamson, both independently and as a duo, seem to be choosing the latter path. This year, Crutchfield, who has long been a fixture at indie festivals, began booking different types of stages. She performed a string of amphitheatre dates opening for Sheryl Crow and the Southern-rock darling Jason Isbell, and she joined the lineup at a country-and-Americana festival called Beachlife Ranch, in Redondo Beach, California. She has also fashioned herself as a student of country and its adjacent styles, spending time with Lucinda Williams and recording a collaboration with Wynonna Judd. Williamson, meanwhile, released "Texas Blue," a two-song EP featuring her interpretations of Townes Van Zandt's "Loretta" and a classic folk tune called "Texas River Song." Plains, the women have said, will be a one-off project. They will tour together this fall only, giving the album not just a sense of place but also a distinct moment in time. ♦

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WILLY LOMAN, JAZZMAN

"Death of a Salesman."

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM



Watching Wendell Pierce act is more like listening to music than it is like taking in a play. It's his job to carry a story forward, but he's best enjoyed on the basis of individual line readings and gestures. At his finest, his scratchy, searching baritone can make the melody of a sentence carry meaning beyond its words. His stocky, solid body, fraught with intention, moves decisively: he twitches a shoulder or points a finger and you know what he means to get across. Often, it's something you won't find spelled out in the script.

Pierce is probably best known for playing the wisecracking detective Bunk in "The Wire," created by David Simon. I liked him better in the less plot-dependent "Treme," also by Simon, in which he plays Antoine Batiste, a wily, tricksterish New Orleans jazz trombonist who finds his calling as a public-school music teacher. Antoine moves through "Treme"'s ambling milieu like a tune through a song, subject to surprising developments but always recognizably himself, suggesting a wildness and a soulful depth beyond the borders of the screen. If acting is an art of compression—where one movement or inflection is meant to crystallize whole social contexts and highly particular ways of being—Pierce achieved a rare mastery in "Treme."

Like Antoine Batiste, Pierce is from New Orleans, and is highly interested in music. Recently, he made a guest appearance on the genre-spanning album "The Ever Fonky Lowdown," by his high-school friend Wynton Marsalis, as Game, a harshly satiric carnival barker and master of ceremonies. Here are some of Game's lines, delivered with cruel and thrilling verve by Pierce:

> Success is my middle name. I became famous for my financial twerking that showed folks how to make money, without even the money working. We could go on and on about me, but we have a lot of stuff to do and tonight's proceedings are all about you. Believe me, O, Glorious People! You are great and we are sooo fantastic.

All of this helps me understand why Pierce, a kind of jazzman of the acting art, was picked to play Willy Loman in the new, weirdly uneven Broadway revival of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," from 1949, directed by Miranda Cromwell at the Hudson Theatre. (The production comes from London, where it was highly acclaimed.) After all, Willy's got a quite understandable case of the blues, and he's supremely susceptible to the dream-selling in which Game so flagrantly indulges. He's a not so successful salesman who nonetheless can't quit his patter, having grown so accustomed to the rhythms of his verbose trade that, as we discover early in the play, he's been talking to people who aren't even there. He's like a peripatetic trumpeter—always a sideman, never a bandleader—whose fingers remember their patterns long after his breath has gone short. Willy has started mysteriously crashing his car; it's become so bad that he can't make the trip from Brooklyn to New England, his long-standing sales territory. His sons, Biff (Khris Davis) and Happy (McKinley Belcher III), are temporarily at home, appalling Willy with their bad job prospects and even worse character.

Willy buys into the bountiful promises of his country, but thinks that the route to happiness—to success, however thinly imagined—is through the self, not the state. He stands alone on the knife's edge between survival and the abyss. In this way, he's an ideological twin of Albert Murray, the jazz critic and gonzo theorist who had a deep influence on Marsalis and, I imagine, on Pierce, too, at least by osmosis. In his book "The Hero and the Blues," Murray fleshed out

Wendell Pierce's Willy is like a peripatetic trumpeter, always a sideman.

ILLUSTRATION BY OWEN GENT

his idea of how the jazzman—a symbol for the daring exertions and possible victories of all art—stands athwart the dragon of history and social unrest, enduring its thrashings in "antagonistic cooperation," not complaining about its fierceness but challenging it to a duel.

That's a brutal construal of society—lofty but, when you think about it, sad. As a guide for life, it works if you are indeed a hero, but if you're made of softer stuff, as Willy is, well, then, too bad. Willy can't swing with the band, and he plays wrong note after wrong note; it drives him off the deep end, and his family with him.

Pierce plays Willy with a grim irony, utterly aware of his aspirations and therefore even more pained by his failures. Pierce—Juilliard-trained, conscious of his body as an expressive engine—makes a meal out of Willy's long-winded rafts of speech. In Pierce's imagining, Willy has the raw materials—the voice, a certain way of straightening his back—to make a good preacher or politician, but his essential silliness turns even his natural faculties against him. He talks too much.

Cromwell's revival casts Black actors as the Lomans, adding a new sociological layer to Willy's travails. Sharon D Clarke plays Willy's wife, Linda; the production takes advantage of Clarke's excellent voice by adding a helping of song. It opens with an eerie group rendition of the spiritual "When the Trumpet Sounds," and at one point Linda sings to Willy, offering sweet if ultimately cheap momentary comfort.

Clarke's voice is as rich and varied when she speaks as it is when she sings; she lilts in questioning, up-turning cadences even when she's not asking a question. That vocal fullness adds to the dignified mien of her physical presence and makes her seem as though she's saying only half (or less) of what she really feels. Her Linda is a clotted, halting creature who sometimes explodes into torrents of reproval at her insufficiently respectful sons.

The last time audiences saw Clarke on Broadway was in last fall's revival of Tony Kushner's tense musical "Caroline, or Change," where she played Caroline, a Black maid in Louisiana whose bitter anger puts her at odds with the young Jewish boy whose family she sullenly serves. In the past year, then, Clarke has offered a two-part comment on the ubiquitous trope of the stoic, strong Black woman, and the ways in which her silence can curdle. In Caroline's case, it bubbles over into words she can't take back. Linda takes devotion to inadvisable extremes, becoming a toxic enabler of Willy's delusions and an unwitting co-conspirator in his ruinous spoiling of their boys.

Despite the genuine glints of insight in Pierce's and Clarke's performances, it's hard to enjoy them, because they haven't been coaxed into coherence with one another. They often seem not to be acting in the same play or pointing out the same unspoken realities. That's doubly true of the larger ensemble. Davis, in particular, can't settle on an angle. In flashbacks depicting Willy's memories, Davis plays a pastiche of a snot-nosed, obnoxious kid, and even in what's supposed to be a more or less naturalistic present he's goofy, then serious, then doing a stilted cartoonish-comedic voice.

The fault lies less with the actor than with the production, which riffles through approaches but can't find a suitable symbolic framework for the tragedy it means to convey. The set (by Anna Fleischle) is intriguingly constructed—it's got all the frames for doors and windows but no walls, a reminder of how we peek into our neighbors' homes and, implicitly, into their pockets, too. But the lights (by Jen Schriever) are a cacophony that matches the muddled direction. "Attention must be paid," as Linda says in her famous speech. But to what? This show won't direct our gaze.

Cromwell dabbles in high-strung, often antic Expressionism, especially in flashback, but those moments tend to be broad—particularly the ones featuring Willy's older brother, Ben (André De Shields), who is dressed up, inexplicably, in campy white, like a vampire or a feeble pimp, appearing and retreating in plumes of smoke. The method undermines the power of these scenes and drains the play of its music.

This new "Salesman" might have used Pierce's finely tuned instrument to make new, unlikely statements about race and capital, the self and the howling winds outside. Instead, it's a clash of cymbals, all sound and little significance. I'm looking forward to seeing Pierce improvise with a better band. ♦

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DANCING

MOBILIZED

Alexei Ratmansky responds to the war in Ukraine.

BY JENNIFER HOMANS



In "Wartime Elegy," folk dance erupts from within an atmosphere of mourning.

According to a running tally compiled by UNESCO, the war in Ukraine had, by early this month, damaged thirty-seven historic buildings, thirteen museums, eighty-six religious sites, eighteen monuments, ten libraries, and thirty-seven other cultural buildings. What about dances? This is harder to calculate, because dance is essentially stored in bodies. When Oleksandr Shapoval, a longtime dancer for the National Opera of Ukraine, died in combat, in September, the Russians killed both the man and the dances he contained. I couldn't help thinking that Alexei Ratmansky had something like this in mind when he made "Wartime Elegy," which recently had its première at Pacific Northwest Ballet, in Seattle. It is the first dance he has made since the Russian invasion, and he has dedicated it to the people of Ukraine. During the opening-night bows, Ratmansky unfurled a Ukrainian flag and held it high over his head.

Ratmansky is both Russian and Ukrainian. Born in Leningrad, in 1968, to a Ukrainian Jewish father and a Russian mother, he grew up in Kyiv, where much of his family still lives. He moved to Moscow to train at the Bolshoi, but he returned after graduating, in 1986, and began dancing with the Kyiv Ballet, where he met his wife, a Ukrainian dancer named Tatiana Kilivniuk. After the Soviet Union imploded, Ratmansky came to the West: he danced with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the Royal Danish Ballet, and since 2009 he has been the artist-in-residence at American Ballet Theatre. But, in the past two decades, he has had a parallel career in Russia, including a stint, from 2004 to 2008, directing the Bolshoi Ballet. In a way that would have been unthinkable for artists a generation older, he did not have to choose between Russia and the West.

On February 24th, that ended. He happened to be in Moscow on the day the invasion was launched, staging a new dance at the Bolshoi. He and his team quickly packed their bags and fled the country; Russian colleagues called him a traitor, but for him it was a reckoning, and his choice left him with a painful schism inside. "To be able to function, I have to shut out this [Russian] side of my history," he has said. "I will come to the moment when I need to glue together my identity and come in peace with that Russian part of my life." In the meantime, he helped form a company of Ukrainian refugee dancers, based in The Hague, with whom he recently mounted his 2019 version of "Giselle." Now, in Seattle, he has given us a dance for Ukraine performed, with precision and poignancy, by American dancers.

The piece is short, just under twenty minutes, and split into three parts: two elegiac sections with a pair of cheerful Ukrainian folk dances stuck abruptly in the middle. The elegiac sections are set to a lyrical and elusive composition by Valentin Silvestrov, Ukraine's most famous living composer. The set designs, by Wendall K. Harrington, feature projections of melancholy paintings and sketches—a fragmented statue or body lying sideways, a stark but impressionistic landscape—by the artist Matvei Vaisberg, a friend of Ratmansky's who was deeply involved in the art scene that grew out of the 2013-14 Maidan protests against Russian influence. The folk material in the middle is performed in front of colorful patterns by Maria Prymachenko (1909-97), whose brightly whimsical folk paintings have become a kind of international symbol for the Ukrainian national cause, particularly after a Russian

ILLUSTRATION BY OLA JASIONOWSKA

strike hit a small museum in Ivankiv that housed a significant collection of her work. (According to Prymachenko's great-granddaughter, a number of works were saved as the building burned.)

At first, Ratmansky's choreographic organization seems almost too clear: a nationalist folk cry surrounded by sad dances of grief and wartime tragedy. And yet the whole production is strangely moving, even haunting. It doesn't fit easily together; the shards are too jagged, the transitions between dark and light, grief and rollicking joy too sudden. But that is part of the point, and, by some logic of loss, memory, and fun woven through the whole, it nonetheless holds, especially in recollection, as the mind allows the borders to soften and meld.

"Wartime Elegy" begins in semi-darkness, with three couples lying in piles. A single man moves from couple to couple, taking each of the women in turn and placing her carefully in an arabesque, profile to the audience. The women stand there, precariously balanced on one leg. Vaisberg's backdrop of body parts emphasizes their vulnerability, and a piano picking its way through dissonance in Silvestrov's score is both quiet and unstable.

The dancers are a group in constant and fluid motion, but each dancer also moves in his or her own time, and their steps seem to circle in on themselves in patterns that evaporate before they are achieved. We feel no will or self-expression, only flow and fate. One of the men splits away—a man always seems to be splitting away, and it is clear that these men are the central figures of the dance. Dressed in black leotards, with bare legs, they appear almost androgynous, with long lines, deep curves, and movements that draw (as Ratmansky has done in the past) from both feminine and masculine ballet vocabularies. There is no narrative, just a soft, sad dancing, full of weeping bends and runs that seem to cross fields to nowhere.

Then the stage empties, and time, place, and mood suddenly shift. An image of an old folk musician is projected on the backdrop, and a voice announces boisterously in Ukrainian, "Hey, guys, play it like our glorious Dovbush"—a folk hero. "Play!" Prymachenko's glorious flowers flood the backdrop, and we plunge into a festive dance, the men in gray tights and white shirts with red folk-style belts, and the women, who dance separately, in gay colors and floral headpieces.

Ratmansky is careful: there is no hint here of the Soviet folk troupes that seduced audiences with a kitschy evocation of rural Ukrainian life, heavy on bravura tricks and ethnic costumes. Instead, these are kids goofing around—having fun, competing, making jokes—and doing these old dances *their* way, free, easy, mixed with detailed and fiercely difficult balletic steps. For anyone who knows the history, though, there is also an invisible story of the Ukrainian peasantry murdered by Stalin in the thirties. Prymachenko spent her life reviving Ukraine's folk art in her paintings, and now Ratmansky reclaims all of this—the art and the history—for us.

The folk dancing—and this is a key to the ballet—doesn't really end. Rather, the flowers on the backdrop darken, turning silvery, like an old photo, and then morph into a drawing by Vaisberg of the Nike of Paionios, a partially preserved statue from the fifth century B.C. The goddess of victory's face is erased, an arm is missing, and her head, having fallen off, has been set precariously back on her neck. Vaisberg's line figure further emphasizes her fragility; she floats in the air without a base to stabilize her forward motion. She hovers over the dancers as they find the thread of the elegy, like a memory of a memory, and the dance eventually winds back to its beginning: the dancers lie on the stage—except for one of the men in black, who takes a woman and places her in an arabesque. This time, she is alone and center stage. He lets go and lies on the floor with the rest. She stays, a living, breathing statue beneath the floating Nike—not triumphant but vulnerable, balanced on that one leg, as the curtain falls.

There has been much talk in the dance world about whether the war is making Ratmansky into a political artist. The question baffles me. Ratmansky has already spent much of his career revisiting past Soviet and Russian ballets, and he has made several ballets on Ukrainian themes. They are not political in the sense of delivering a blunt ideological message, as the Soviets liked to do, but there is a politics to them all the same. He has worked meticulously, for example, in archives of Russian imperial notations to retrieve a more accurate rendition of the dances that Marius Petipa made for the tsar's court, including "The Sleeping Beauty." Ratmansky's fondness for these opulent spectacles—impressive but too decadent and polite for my taste—is a way of grounding himself in a recovered imperial past and thus of excising the U.S.S.R. from the history of Russian ballet.

To the same end, he has—somewhat paradoxically—also revived old Soviet socialist-realist ballets and purged them of their socialism. In "The Bright Stream," he took a ballet from 1935, which had incurred Stalinist censure despite its celebration of workers on a Caucasian collective farm building a socialist paradise, and gutted it, turning it into a countryside romp, with a decorative hammer and sickle on full display. When Ratmansky's version premièred, in Moscow, in 2003, his sunny treatment of such a dark time seemed bizarre, if harmless—as if to say, *That* is all over. Now that it is abundantly clear that Soviet-style brutality is far from ended, things feel different. Ratmansky, in one recent interview, couldn't bear to discuss the work. "I don't know if I want to see this ballet again," he said.

Ratmansky's struggle with Russia and its past has not, to my mind, produced his best work. His voice is strongest in original dances like "Serenade After Plato's Symposium" and, especially, in his dances to music by the Ukrainian-born composer Leonid Desyatnikov, including "Russian Seasons," "Songs of Bukovina," and "Odessa." These dances share an interest in the balletic possibilities of transmuted folk forms, and, like "Wartime Elegy," they are intimate, with their own motives and language. They seem to grow intuitively from Ratmansky's way of bringing together dancers, music, art, and lighting, and catching the life that emerges. "Wartime Elegy" is rawer and more askew, but it also contains a genuine eruption of emotion, as fragile and human as the men in black, the bright flowers, the women in arabesque, and the broken Nike presiding—its own kind of politics. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

COMING APART

"The Banshees of Inisherin" and "Aftersun."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Friendship, on film, can be broken by many things. For Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Saverin, in "The Social Network" (2010), the issue is "Who owns how much of Facebook?" In the case of Tony Stark vs. Steve Rogers, in "Captain America: Civil War" (2016), it's a question of "Should the Avengers submit to an authority beyond themselves?" And, in "Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith" (2005), when Obi-Wan Kenobi sabres off two legs and one arm from Anakin Skywalker, like somebody carving a chicken, there's no hiding the bone of contention: "Which of us, in signing up for this dialogue, was the bigger Jedi schmuck?"



Brendan Gleeson and Colin Farrell star in Martin McDonagh's film.

In each instance, the casus belli is complicated stuff. How refreshing, then, to meet Colm Doherty (Brendan Gleeson), in Martin McDonagh's new film, "The Banshees of Inisherin," which is set in 1923. Sitting outside a pub, with a pint, Colm looks at Pádraic Súilleabháin (Colin Farrell), who is—or was, until now—his best pal, and says, "I just don't like you no more." Simplicity itself. For Pádraic, indeed, the statement is too simple by half. "You do like me," he replies, in a tone at once beseeching and befuddled. His smile wavers and fails. The movie is minutes old, and already the rupture is complete.

If Pádraic seems nonplussed, that may be because his life, hitherto, has been particularly plussed. On the beautiful (and imaginary) island of Inisherin, off the coast of Ireland, where parcels of green land are neatly divided by dry-stone walls, he shares a little house with his sister Siobhán (Kerry Condon). Like children, they still sleep in the same room, and, like everyone else in the story, they are, though poor, decked in item after item of suspiciously lovely knitwear. We have a good idea of Pádraic's typical day. He gets up and lets the donkey in, pretty much as you or I would let the cat out. (The donkey, Jenny, played by Jenny, who comes up to Pádraic's waist, is the most contented and the saddest character onscreen.) Porridge is served. Pádraic herds his handful of cattle down a track, in a desultory fashion. So much for work. As two o'clock strikes, he heads to the pub, where the landlord, Jonjo (Pat Shortt), uncorks a bottle of stout. An ideal existence, crowned by epic chats with Colm. And now the crown has fallen.

As to what follows, admirers of McDonagh will know what to expect: a dark and measured whimsy, borne by its own momentum into violence. Jokes that get stuck in the throat. Such was the pattern established by "In Bruges" (2008) and "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" (2017). Before them came "The Lieutenant of Inishmore," a play that opened in 2001, in which a man called Mad Pádraic travels to the island of Inishmore and, enraged by reports of the death of his cat, Wee Thomas, commits multiple murders. The turf that is trodden by the latest film, in other words, is not entirely fresh. We are not altogether surprised when Colm declares that, if Pádraic won't leave him in peace, he will take a pair of garden shears and snip off his own fingers, one by one. The threat, we soon discover, is not idle. Even a Jedi would flinch.

The danger of so ominous a setup is that it can harden into the schematic. Something of the sort occurs as McDonagh presents us with the minor characters. Each of them, in turn, intensifies the comedy of menace. We get the local policeman, Peadar Kearney (Gary Lydon), who punches Pádraic, right on the dockside, and leaves him in tears; a mean man of God (David Pearse); and Kearney's son, Dominic (Barry Keoghan), who hungers for female company, and is mentally a notch or two below the other inhabitants. (Mind you, his is the sharpest reaction to Colm's intransigence: "What is he, twelve?") There is also a pipe-smoking crone, Mrs. McCormick (Sheila Flitton), who prophesies doom. She is funny, but her divinations have the smack of a skit—"I wasn't trying to be nice, I was trying to be accurate"—and, when Pádraic calls her "you feckin' nutbag," it's hard to disagree.

From Inisherin, you can see the mainland in the distance, and, occasionally, hear the crackle of gunfire. The Irish Civil War is in its bitter final act. One evening, Kearney reveals that his presence is required across the water. "The Free State lads are executing a couple of the I.R.A. lads," he says. Pause. "Or is it the other way around?" That note

ILLUSTRATION BY PING ZHU

of weary confusion is all too believable; less persuasive is McDonagh's effort to frame the private hostilities on Inisherin as a parable of the larger conflict. "I think they're coming to the end of it," Colm says. Pádraic replies, "I'm sure they'll be at it again soon enough, aren't you?" But the parallel doesn't hold. The black humor of the two men's bilious relationship, finally arriving at what you might call a tiffhanger, arises from the fact that it's founded on next to nothing—a grumpy grievance. The combatants on the mainland, by contrast, have fought over matters of fiery political principle, torn by their differing visions of how that land should be constituted and run. Colm wants to be left alone to play his fiddle. Ireland is burning.

What animates "The Banshees of Inisherin" and saves it from stiffness is the clout of the performances. Within the oxlike Colm, thanks to Gleeson, we glimpse a ruminative despair, and Farrell adds Pádraic to his gallery of heroes so hapless that they forfeit all claim to the heroic. The movie, however, belongs to Condon, familiar to viewers of "Rome" and "Better Call Saul," on TV, and now, at last, given her cinematic due. She adds a snap of anger, never dour but zestful and vivifying, to the role of Siobhán, making her so much more than a go-between, or a foil. When Colm complains that Pádraic is dull, she hits back:

> "But he's always been dull. What's changed?"
>
> "I've changed. I just don't have a place for dullness in me life anymore."
>
> "But you live on an island off the coast of Ireland, Colm—what the hell are you hopin' for, like?"

Later, she cautions her brother against all that remains for him in Inisherin: "bleakness and grudges and loneliness and spite." That is not the wail of a banshee. It is the voice of modern exasperation—of anyone, anywhere, who has had enough of hatreds, great and small, and who chooses adventure over atavism. No wonder Siobhán ends up packing a suitcase. To her, the men of the island are barely more than boys, "all feckin' boring," scrapping uselessly in their soft green playground. She is a grown woman, and she wants out.

No fingers are sheared off in "Aftersun," the début feature from the Scottish director Charlotte Wells. Nobody is abducted, shot, or, despite the many scenes that are filmed underwater, drowned. All that happens is that a Scotsman, Calum (Paul Mescal), goes on vacation with his daughter, Sophie (Frankie Corio), to a Turkish resort, where they talk, swim, paste themselves in mud, and briefly bicker. That's it. But a shimmer of vulnerability hangs over the tale like a heat haze.

Sophie has recently turned eleven, and Corio poises her, with startling assurance, on the threshold between unknowing and knowing. Awkwardness jostles with a heedless grace. Sophie receives her first kiss from a boy, sips her dad's beer, and greets with scorn his suggestion that she team up with some other children, at the pool. "They're, like, *kids*," she says. As for Calum, he looks youthful enough to be mistaken, at one point, for her older brother; you can't help but reflect on how painfully young he must have been when she was born. Nowadays, as we gather from their conversation, she lives with her mother, from whom Calum is separated. That is why this holiday, a rare haven of togetherness for him and Sophie, feels both casual and intense.

The movie is set in the nineteen-nineties, and what counts are not the fixtures and fittings of the era—Walkmans, functioning phone booths, and Blur's "Tender," with its chorus of "Come on, come on, come on"—so much as the emotional charge that they emit. The first sound we hear is the whirr and click of a tape; Sophie films Calum, on a camcorder, going out onto the balcony of their hotel room, and Wells is forever shuffling between images of varying texture, including video footage and strobes. It's as if she were grabbing at memories on the fly.

Rumors of something remarkable have circled around "Aftersun" since its première, at this year's Cannes Film Festival, and guess what? The rumors are true. Somehow, Wells retains control of her unstable material, and the result, though intimate, guards its secrets well. We get glances ahead to Sophie's future, in which, as an adult, she views evidence of the long-ago vacation, and more piercing still are the flickers of Calum's past. "When you were eleven, what did you think you would be doing now?" Sophie asks him, and the innocent question tips him into a trough of inexplicable woe; we see him from behind, seated on the bed, his bare torso heaving with sobs. Sophie is everywhere in the movie, but it's not just about the quiet blaze of her childhood. It's about the ghost of his. ♦

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by David Borchart, must be received by Sunday, October 23rd. The finalists in the October 10th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 7th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

.....

THE FINALISTS



"Goodnight trees, goodnight dirt. Goodnight human race on the earth."
Benjamin Vidalis, Santa Fe, N.M.

"Would you like me to read it or just implant it in your head?"
Johannes Epke, San Anselmo, Calif.

"O.K., time to go to sleep. We've got a long trip ahead of us tomorrow."
Steve Lieberman, Lake Oswego, Ore.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"It leaves me feeling empty."
Jesse Spain, Palo Alto, Calif.



HOSTED BY CHIOMA NNADI AND CHLOE MALLE.
LISTEN AND SUBSCRIBE TO *THE RUN-THROUGH* WHEREVER YOU GET YOUR PODCASTS.

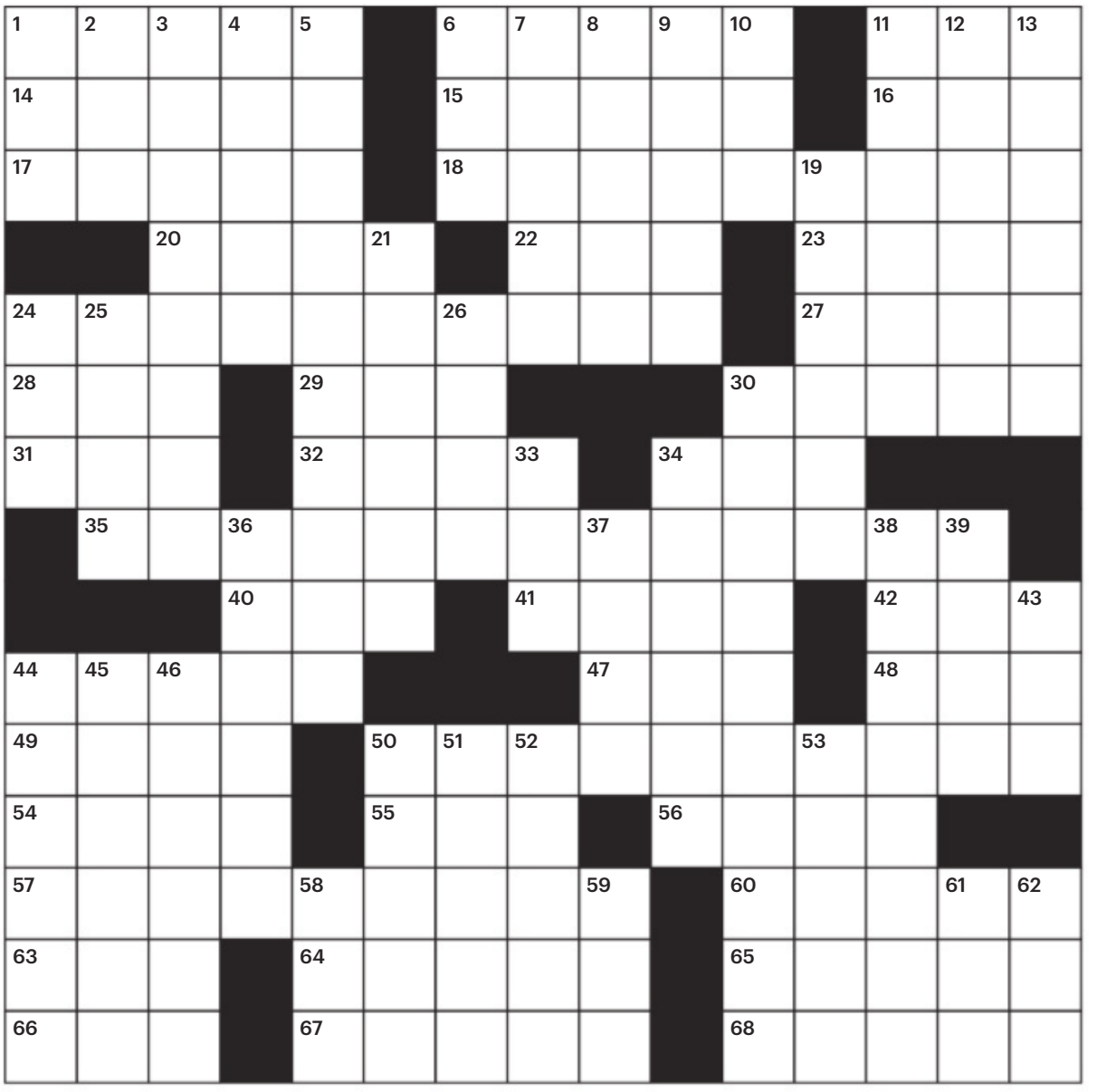
THURSDAYS, PREMIERING NOVEMBER 10

PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

AT THE WATERING HOLE

A themed crossword.

BY KYRA WILSON AND SOPHIA MAYMUDES



ACROSS

1 Coming up
6 Coming up
11 Birmingham-to-Montgomery dir.
14 Value
15 Teensy
16 Roman goddess of peace
17 Lyre-playing Muse
18 Lager + hard cider
20 What picky people pick
22 ___ sum
23 Tabloid couple
24 Vodka + ginger beer + lime juice
27 Stay fresh
28 Sleeve filler
29 "Lost" actor Daniel ___ Kim
30 Neglected to
31 It may show a big heart
32 Jazz locale?
34 Grandma, across the pond
35 Keynesian term for emotional factors that affect financial decision-making . . . or an apt description of 18-, 24-, 50-, and 57-Across
40 Go (for)
41 Chip
42 Swear words?
44 Places to pose for some "Titanic"-inspired photos
47 Thumbs-downs
48 Expected
49 Dance involving lifts
50 Rum + Campari + lime juice + pineapple juice + simple syrup
54 Norse god for whom Wednesday is named
55 G.I. entertainers
56 Major for future I-bankers
57 Gin + lemon juice + honey syrup
60 Samurai without a master
63 Resting place
64 Garlicky mayo
65 Cheetah, to Wonder Woman
66 QB's stat
67 Difference between lead and led
68 Short

DOWN

1 Have student debt, say
2 What may be found between here and there?
3 Brian Michael Smith and Elliot Fletcher, e.g.
4 Room that often has spooky vibes
5 Post-vacation Instagram posts, perhaps
6 Plank targets
7 Holi celebrant
8 Cyber Monday transactions, e.g.
9 "Fire away!"
10 Substance used on hair and eggs
11 Chose to be petty to, perhaps
12 Glossy fabric
13 Free (from)
19 Midriff-baring swimwear
21 Shoo, as flies
24 Kid's noise
25 Largest member of the dolphin family
26 Spread out on a table?
30 Skeleton in one's closet
33 QVC alternative
34 "Nailed It" host Byer
36 Voters traditionally courted early in primary season
37 Signal used for an Internet-speed test
38 Quick and easy 26-Down
39 Tart-sounding début album for Olivia Rodrigo
43 United
44 Reason not to travel by plane, give a speech, or interact with a clown
45 Type of mammal with teeth that never stop growing
46 Point in the right direction
50 ___ B. Jones (kid-lit heroine)
51 Hit with, as a cheesy line
52 Carols
53 North Carolina home of the historically Black Junaluska community
58 Kit ___
59 "*Sprechen* ___ *Deutsch*?"
61 Chats, in a way
62 Bill who got his television start on the sketch show "Almost Live!"

Solution to the previous puzzle:

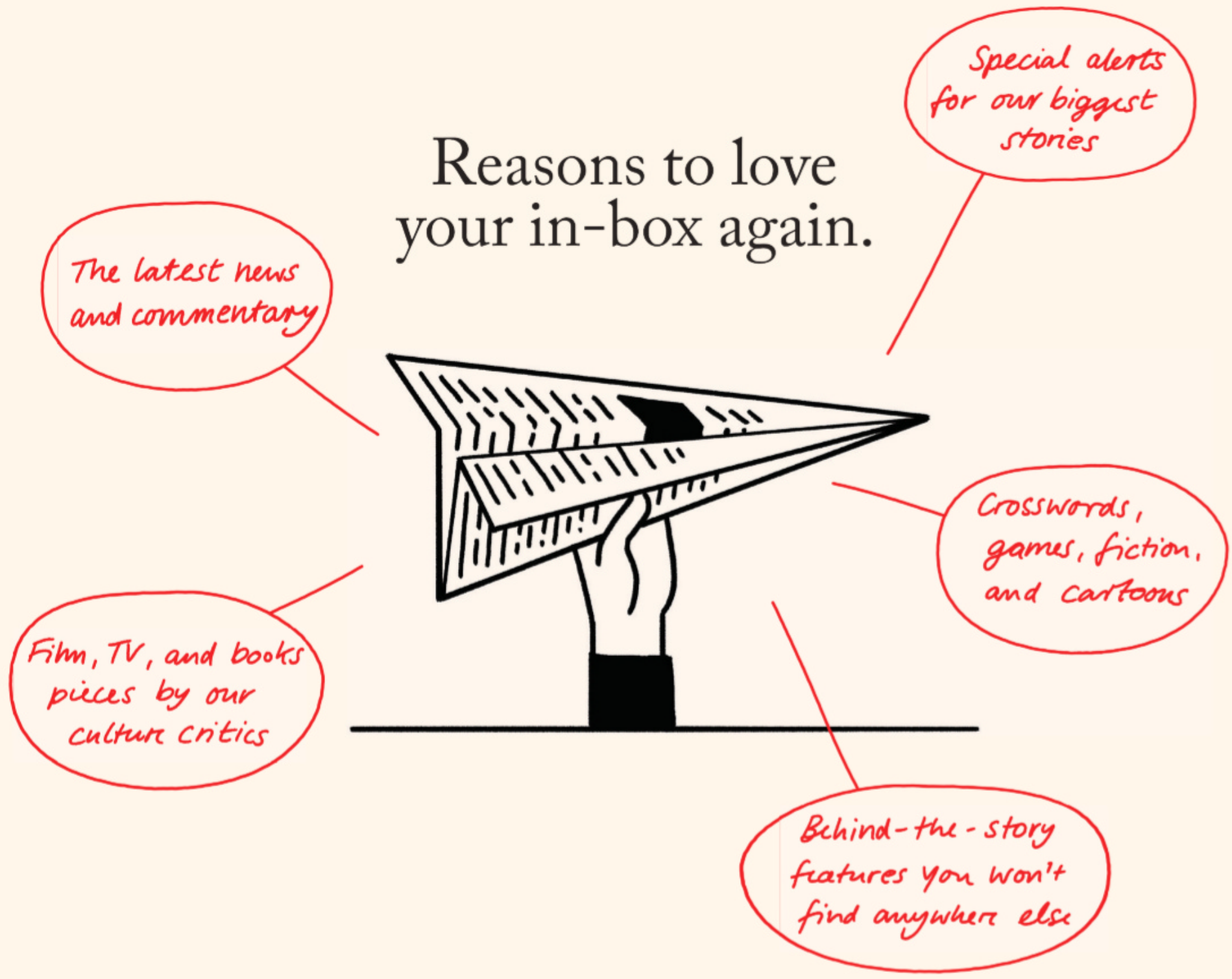
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O	R	B	I	T	■	R	A	P	B	A	T	T	L	E
A	I	L	S	■	S	T	R	E	E	T	■	H	A	T
K	N	E	E	■	L	E	M	U	R	■	S	E	W	S
E	T	C	■	K	I	N	■	P	S	S	T	■	■	■
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C	A	M	O	■	O	T	T	E	R	■	A	L	S	O
R	N	A	■	H	I	R	E	E	S	■	A	T	O	P
A	D	N	A	U	S	E	A	M	■	T	R	A	D	E
B	I	G	C	H	E	E	S	E	■	M	O	L	E	S
■	E	A	T	■	S	P	E	D	■	I	N	K	S	■

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