THE (EPSTEIN) TRUTH IS OUT THERE
How conspiracy stories from *The X-Files* to *JFK* are feeding the file frenzy

PARAMOUNT'S GOLDEN PARACHUTES
Shari's not the only one getting paid: Eight-figure kiss-offs for exiting CEOs

CONTRARIAN CASH-OUTS
Dave Portnoy, Pat McAfee and Co. are disrupting legacy media for big bucks

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Ozzy Osbourne, the embodiment of early MTV in the 1980s, lost his battle with Parkinson's disease on July 22.

ON THE COVER
Illustration by **Neil Jamieson**

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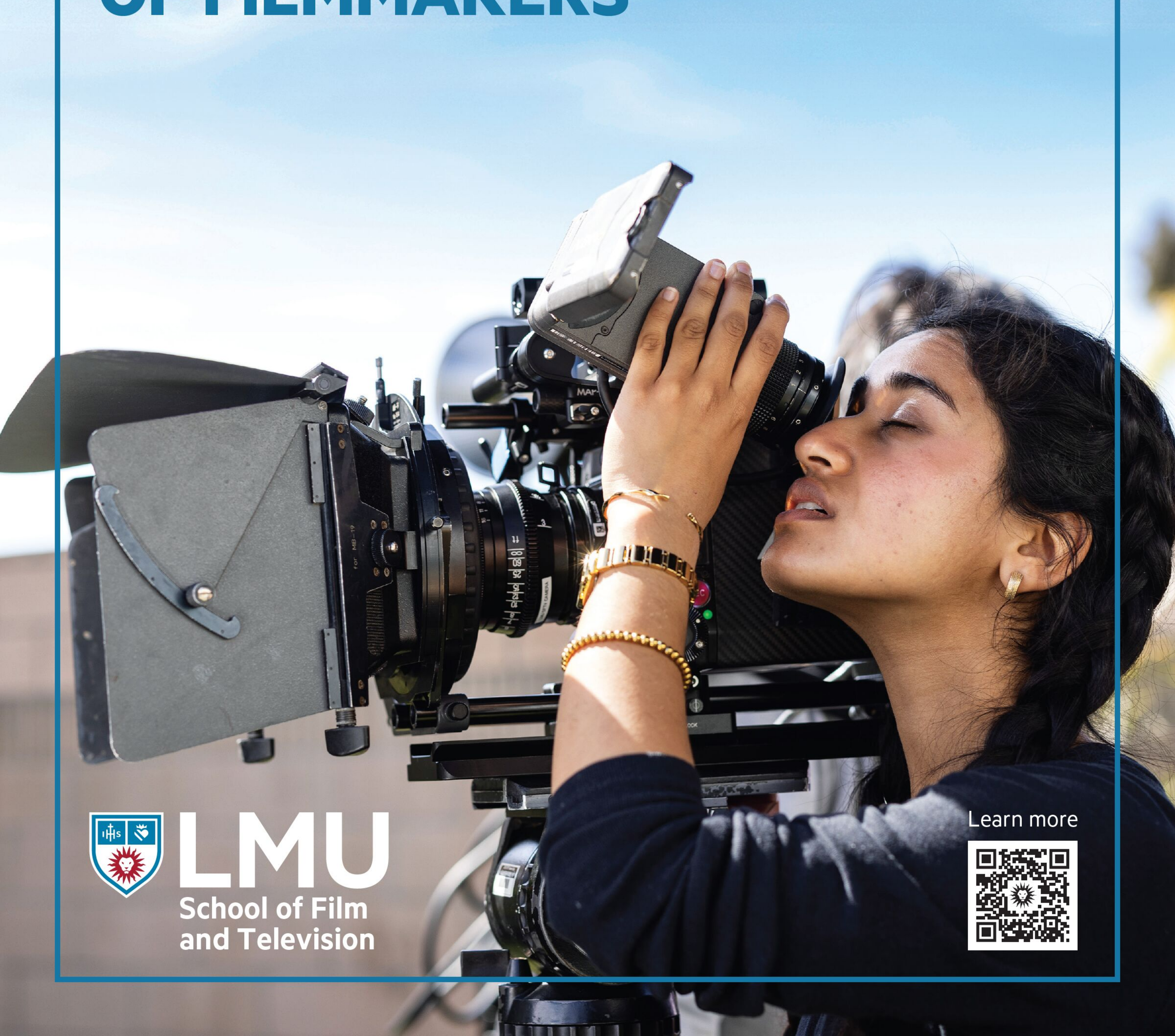

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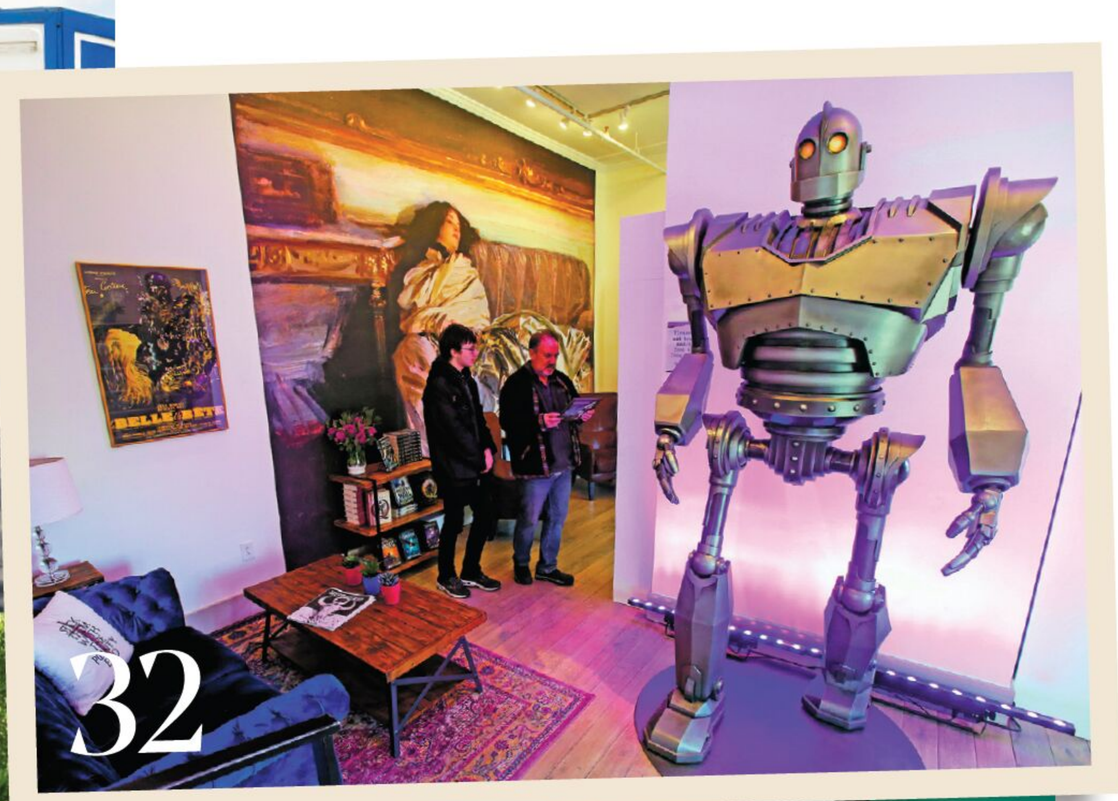
"If you want to talk about fingernail polish or a spray tan, I'm good at that," says Leanne Morgan. She was photographed July 17 at the Bijou Theatre in Knoxville, Tennessee.



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Leanne Morgan photographed by **Kara Hudgens**

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Contrarians Cash Out With Major TV Deals

Barstool's Dave Portnoy signs a huge contract with Fox Sports. Pat McAfee is sitting pretty at ESPN. Brett Cooper has a deal at Fox News, and Bari Weiss might get her shot at CBS. How digital firebrands are finding a lucrative footing in a new media landscape **BY ALEX WEPRIN**

Earlier this summer, Fox Sports CEO **Eric Shanks** jetted into Nantucket for a three-hour meeting that would reshape the lineup of Fox Sports 1 and shake up its *Big Noon Kickoff* college football show. Shanks' brief visit to the New England vacation destination was to help close a deal with **Dave Portnoy** and his digital media brand Barstool Sports. Portnoy's $42 million compound on Nantucket overlooks the harbor, where ferries bring visitors in and out from the mainland all day. It's all paid for by his self-described "pirate ship" of a media brand, which he had sold to Penn Entertainment for $551 million, and bought back just a couple of years later for $1.

Shanks' visit underscores how the sands have shifted in media. It wasn't that long ago that talent would be summoned to meet with execs in their New York offices or L.A. studio lots. Now when there is talent in demand, the execs will go where they need to, even an island 30 miles out in the Atlantic Ocean. Fox had been chatting with Portnoy for "five or six months," the Barstool founder said July 17 on his company's *Unnamed Show*, culminating in the deal revealed the same day, which will see Portnoy appear weekly on *Big Noon Kickoff* and Barstool creating a live two-hour show for FS1, as well as social content.

The world of media has changed, and authenticity rules. Being outspoken is even better, and with cord-cutting wreaking havoc on TV viewing, traditional players that used to develop their talent in-house are increasingly turning to outsiders to help give them relevance.

A lot has changed since ESPN canceled its Barstool show in 2017. Look no further than ESPN's deals with NFL player turned radio and podcast host **Pat McAfee**. McAfee has occasionally found himself in hot water, like when he accused ESPN executive **Norby Williamson** of "sabotaging" his show, or when recurring guest **Aaron Rodgers** made unfounded claims about **Jimmy Kimmel** and **Jeffrey Epstein**. Earlier in July, McAfee apologized to an Ole Miss student who was named in a viral but false internet scandal (Portnoy also apologized for some of Barstool's talent spreading the false report.) Sitting on a panel in ESPN's commissary in Bristol, Connecticut, last year, McAfee exuded confidence as he parried questions from skeptical journalists about his deal, which sees ESPN license *The Pat McAfee Show*, an unusual arrangement for a daily program. "We haven't been kicked off ESPN yet. I view that as a success," McAfee quipped. ESPN chief **Jimmy Pitaro** said that he has been laser focused on the problem of, "How can we resonate with younger people?"

"If you look at my kids, Netflix, Instagram, TikTok, *Fortnite*, they're incredibly distracted," Pitaro said at the time. "So how is it that we can make programs like *Get Up* and *First Take* resonate with younger people? Obviously, Pat McAfee is very, very helpful there." The talent benefits,

Illustration by **Layer Ø**

Heat Index

Chris Appelhans & Maggie Kang
The duo's hit Netflix animated feature *KPop Demon Hunters* tops Nielsen's streaming movies chart as the soundtrack makes waves on the Billboard charts.

Daniel Ek
The Spotify chief may have beat earnings forecasts by hitting 276 million subscribers, but a quarterly loss and renewed artist calls for a boycott are a drag.

Matt Shakman
The *Fantastic Four: First Steps* director helps shake off the curse of the franchise with a $216 million global bow, a win for Marvel Studios.

Rihanna
Smurfs may have been a passion project for the artist who voice-starred and produced the Paramount film, but it was a disappointment, grossing less than $70 million.

Showbiz Stocks

$13.22 (+0.3%)
PARAMOUNT (PARA)
With FCC approval in hand, David Ellison's deal to acquire Paramount is all but assured, improving the share price as the uncertainty was lifted.

$280.59 (-29.1%)
CHARTER (CHTR)
The cable giant saw its pay TV losses slow, but internet connectivity churn was higher than expected, sparking a mild panic on the street.

July 23-29

too. Portnoy told his company's podcast that they are already thinking about how Fox talent like **Greg Olsen** and **Tom Brady** could participate in Barstool segments, while McAfee says that "we got legitimized by ESPN," adding, "Some suits wouldn't let their clients come on our show before because we were just an internet show."

Sports media, with its hot takes, fierce debates and big personalities, has been a natural proving ground for TV's digital creator era (consider **Omar Raja**, the House of Highlights founder who also joined ESPN in 2020), but there are signs that TV news is the next frontier. **Brett Cooper**, a popular YouTube creator who blends entertainment and cultural commentary with conservative values, was signed as an on-air contributor to Fox News, which is also testing out MAGA influencer **Charlie Kirk** as a weekend host. "It's about connecting with the audience, first and foremost," says **Lauren Petterson**, president of the Fox Nation streaming service and head of talent development at Fox News. "[Cooper is] consistent with what she says and what she's doing in her own life."

From left: Bari Weiss, Charlie Kirk and Dave Portnoy are in demand in 2025.

And Skydance has held conversations with **Bari Weiss** about possibly acquiring her *Free Press*, perhaps bringing the outspoken former *New York Times* columnist into the CBS News fold when it takes over Paramount in a bid to expand its digital footprint. FCC chairman **Brendan Carr** noted when approving the deal, "Skydance will also adopt measures that can root out the bias that has undermined trust in the national news media." Weiss, a frequent critic of the mainstream media, could fit that bill.

> **"We haven't been kicked off ESPN yet. I view that as a success."**
> Pat McAfee

And both CNN and MSNBC are in the midst of a podcast expansion push, with MSNBC hiring executives to beef up its digital business ahead of its spinout into Versant later this year. Both cable news channels are leveraging their own talent, of course, but there are signs they are looking elsewhere, too. Last year, podcast hosts **Kara Swisher** and **Scott Galloway** held talks with CNN about moving their show into its orbit, before reupping with current partners Vox Media.

There is connective tissue between these deals. Cultural currency is more likely to be found on YouTube or Spotify, and viewers of linear TV tend to skew older. With news and sports the last content standing, bringing over a more youthful audience could be a way to extend the lifespan of linear. And with YouTube taking over the TV set, news execs are grappling with a world where the shows are just one among thousands being fed algorithmically to viewers. Perhaps it's better to have the creators that figured out how to make that model work inside the house, before the whole thing collapses into itself. THR

C-SUITE SCORECARD

Paramount's Golden Parachutes

Shari Redstone's not the only one cashing in as David Ellison takes over the historic studio. Each top exec is set to get an eight-figure payout if they're let go tied to the ownership change BY ERIK HAYDEN

NOW OWNER

SHARI REDSTONE
The mogul and heir to **Sumner Redstone**'s empire will get $1.75 billion in cash for the controlling stake in her holding company National Amusements as part of the deal close.

C-SUITE

GEORGE CHEEKS
Co-CEO
The exec took home the highest figure among his co-chiefs at $22.1 million last year. If terminated tied to the ownership change, he'll receive $21.8 million in addition to his 2025 salary.

CHRIS McCARTHY
Co-CEO
The TV chief who oversaw the building of the Sheridan-verse on Paramount+ was paid $19.5 million in 2024 and will receive $18.3 million on top of his 2025 pay tied to the sale.

BRIAN ROBBINS
Co-CEO
The film chief, who oversees Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon, saw his pay rise to $19.6 million last year and will receive $18.6 million this year in addition to his 2025 pay tied to the change in owners.

NANCY PHILLIPS
Chief People Officer
The human resources exec received $4.2 million in compensation last year, and in addition to 2025 pay will receive a $5.97 million award tied to the change in ownership.

ALREADY GONE

NAVEEN CHOPRA
(left in June)
CFO
The CFO, who worked on the Skydance deal, was paid $8.78 million in 2024 and jumped to gaming giant Roblox as CFO. Since he left early, he forwent a $12 million Paramount award tied to a sale.

BOB BAKISH
(ousted April 2024) CEO
The silver lining to his abrupt exit: a severance package worth $69.3 million of his total $87 million in pay for 2024. The exec hasn't joined another C-suite since his Paramount Global tenure ended.

Source: Paramount Global investor filings

WEISS, KIRK, PORTNOY: GETTY IMAGES. REDSTONE: TAYLOR HILL/FILMMAGIC. CHEEKS: ROY ROCHLIN/GETTY IMAGES FOR PARAMOUNT+. ROBBINS: ERIC CHARBONNEAU/PARAMOUNT VIA GETTY IMAGES. CHOPRA: UNIQUE NICOLE/GETTY IMAGES. BAKISH: DOMINIK BINDL/GETTY IMAGES. MCCARTHY, PHILLIPS: COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT. APPELHANS: ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES. EK: NOAM GALAI/GETTY IMAGES FOR SPOTIFY. SHAKMAN: VALERIE MACON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES. RIHANNA: AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES.

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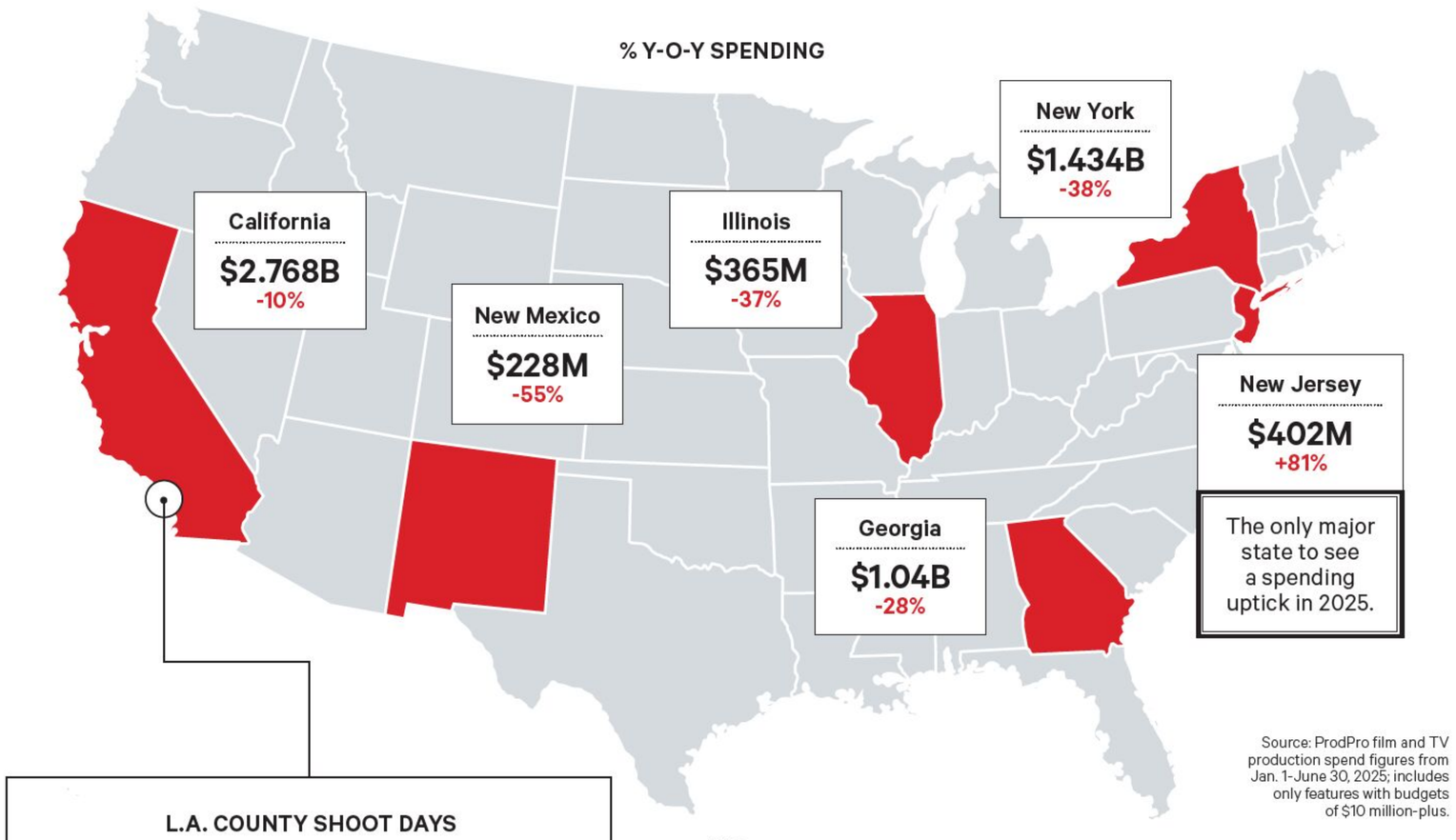
CLOSER LOOK

Where Movies and TV Shows Have Shot This Year

It's not just California. There was a slowdown in feature film and episodic TV spending in most major U.S. hubs during the first half of 2025 and upticks in a few select locales (hello, Australia and New Jersey) as studios place ever more selective bets

BY ERIK HAYDEN



Source: ProdPro film and TV production spend figures from Jan. 1-June 30, 2025; includes only features with budgets of $10 million-plus.

Global Box Office Snapshot

Ne Zha II (Beijing Enlight Pictures)
$1.89B

Lilo & Stitch (Disney)
$1.01B

A Minecraft Movie (Warner Bros./Legendary)
$955M

Jurassic World Rebirth (Universal)
$718.3M

How to Train Your Dragon (Universal)
$605.9M

Mission: Impossible — The Final Reckoning (Paramount)
$591.9M

F1 (Apple/Warner Bros.)
$509.6M

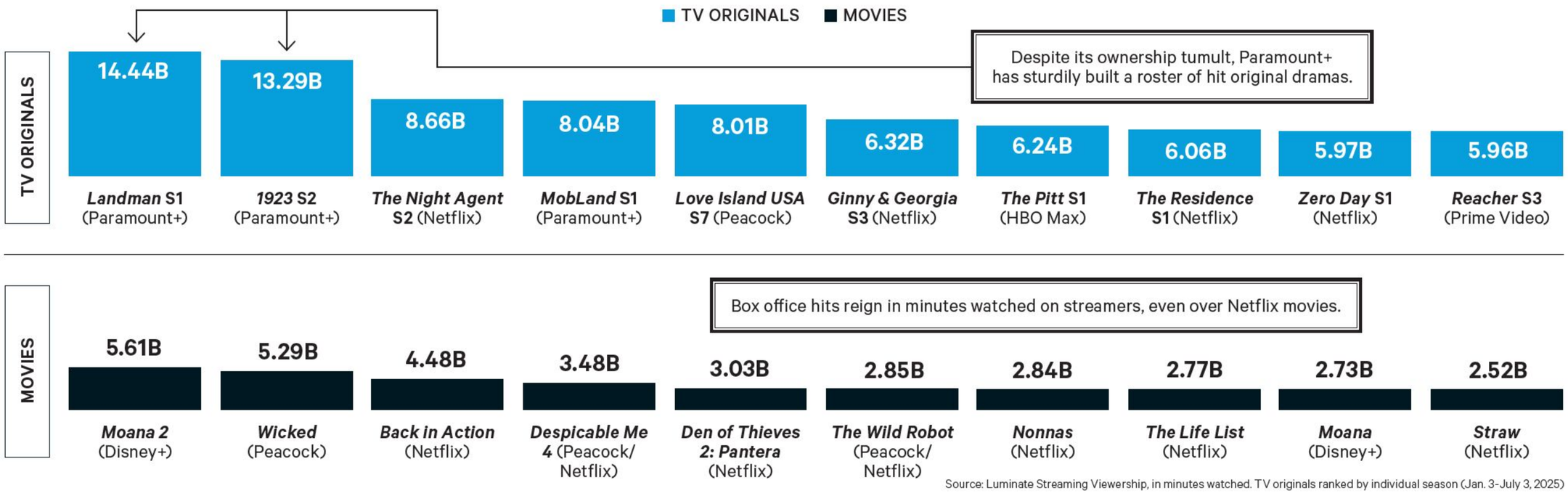
Superman (Warner Bros.)
$502.7M

Captain America: Brave New World (Disney)
$415.1M

Thunderbolts* (Disney)
$382.2M

Source: Comscore (as of July 28)

What's Been Streamed the Most in 2025



Source: Luminate Streaming Viewership, in minutes watched. TV originals ranked by individual season (Jan. 3-July 3, 2025)

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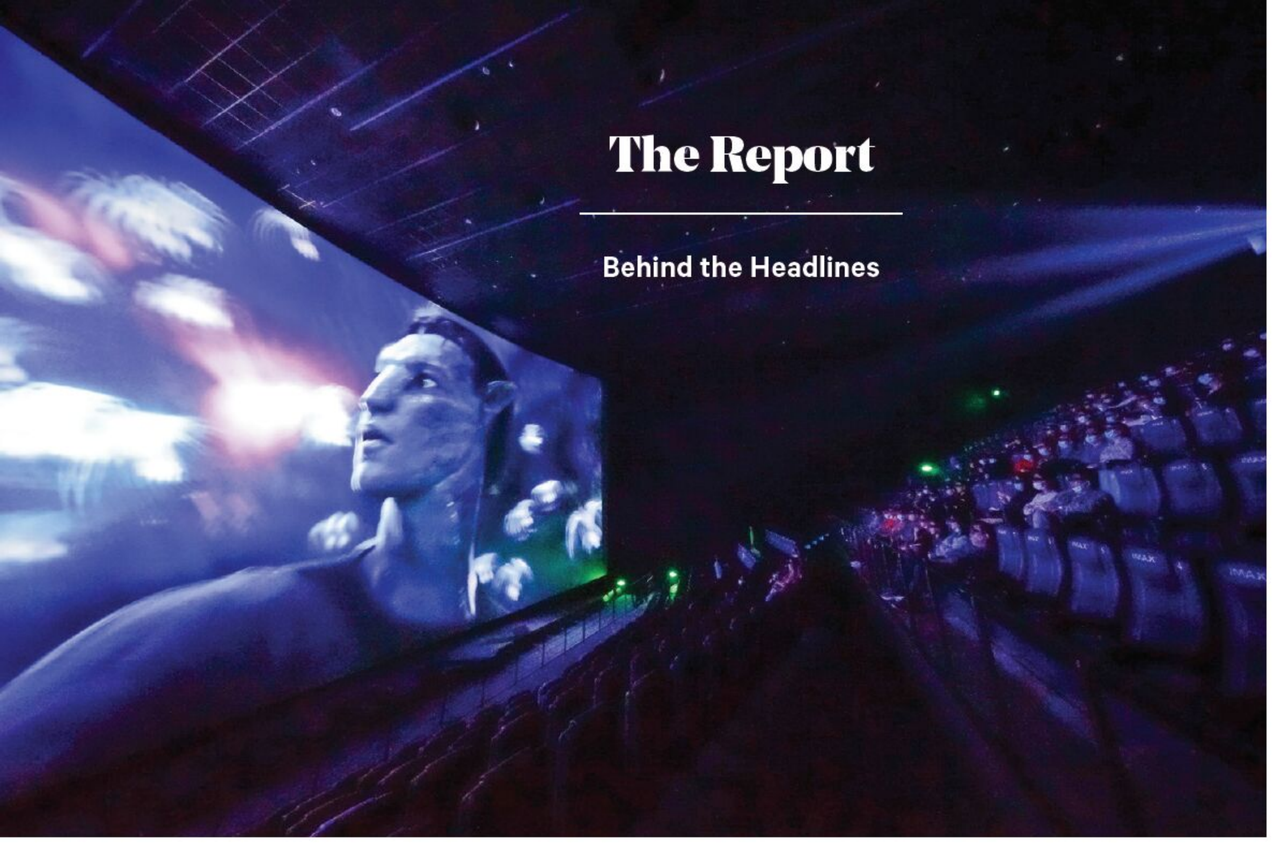


BOX OFFICE

Turns Out Size Matters. Ask Imax

With the 70-foot gorilla now hogging the spotlight (and the grosses), rival premium formats are in a mad scramble to stay relevant BY PAMELA McCLINTOCK

The phrase "premium-large format" (or PLF) couldn't sound more technical. But mention Imax — and its winning streak on Wall Street — and all eyes light up. That wasn't always the case. For years, Imax was only known as the giant screen housed in museums that showcased astronauts taking space walks or an African safari in stunning fashion.

Now, weekend after weekend, Imax's well-oiled publicity machine announces how much of a film's overall gross comes from its screens, both in the U.S. and overseas. Case in point: The second quarter of the current fiscal year marked Imax's best quarter in terms of domestic movies ticket sales as it stays on course to achieve guidance of $1.2 billion for the full year. During the July 11-14 weekend, the 400 or so Imax theaters in North America accounted for $19.1 million of *Superman*'s opening gross, or a record 15.6 percent. Yet lost in the noise was that PLF screens overall, including Imax, turned in 40 percent of the total opening number of $125 million. That means the country's 900 or so other PLF screens ponied up about $26 million. (PLFs produced up to 30 percent of *Jurassic World Rebirth*'s opening gross; that film didn't have access to Imax.)

It's no wonder competing PLF screens might want to band together and promote themselves over Imax. But that's a tricky proposition, considering that mega circuits including AMC Theatres, Cinemark Theatres and Regal Cinemas have their own individually branded PLFs in addition to operating Imax screens. To tout their PLFs could result in consumer confusion.

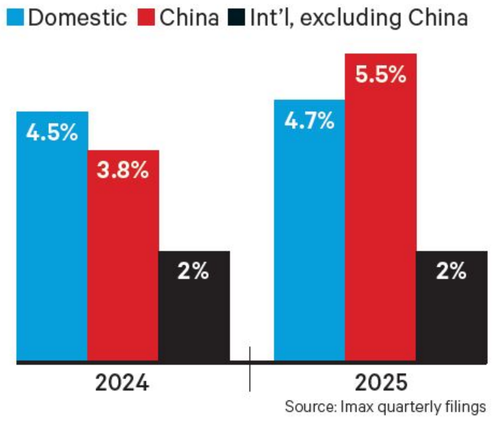
Sources tell *THR* that AMC, which operates the most Imax screens in North America in addition to being the sole destination for Dolby Cinemas domestically — another a high-end, coveted PLF — has no interest in joining such a coalition. It's unclear whether Cinemark and Regal are part of any coalition. Neither replied to a request for comment.

"[AMC Theatres head **Adam Aron**] basically felt that it was remote that any consortium was going to be put together in any way," Imax CEO **Richard Gelfond** said during a recent investors call. "We also spoke with a number of the other big exhibitors in North America, and they reassured us that they're either in the Imax business or want to be in the Imax business." (In 2024, Imax generated 42 percent of its revenue domestically, 35 percent overseas and 23 percent in China.)

Gelfond added that Imax had been indexing a 15 percent market share for premium film releases on their opening weekend in 2025. "That's a real 'aha' moment for exhibitors who haven't been in the Imax business before, and they're kind of scurrying to come up with a strategy," he told analysts. "A lot of people have tried to create competitors to Imax over the years, but the fact is, our brand and relationships with filmmakers are unmatched, and our technology is superior, and audiences know it."

However, one distribution source — this person wouldn't name names — says other exhibitors are at least discussing the idea of banding together to remind folks that Imax isn't the only game in town. *THR*

Imax Box Office Market Share



Source: Imax quarterly filings

Comic-Con Buzz-O-Meter

The studio presentations that hit with fans in San Diego — and the marketing moments that fizzled

BY BORYS KIT AND AARON COUCH

TRON: ARES

Disney turned Hall H into an EDM concert with lasers and dancers rocking out to the **Nine Inch Nails**' score. **Jeff Bridges** was in full "Dude" mode, making the crowd laugh with folksy stories about co-star **Jared Leto**'s Method acting ways.

ALIEN: EARTH

Studios have been scrimping on footage in recent years, partially because of piracy concerns. But FX screened an entire episode of **Noah Hawley**'s cerebral spinoff, teasing the body horror that's to come.

STAR TREK: STRANGE NEW WORLDS

Hooray for showing an upcoming episode of the Paramount+ show. But the *Trek* panel, also featuring members of its *Starfleet Academy* show, laid bare the challenge producers face in making fans care about a new *Trek*.

PROJECT HAIL MARY

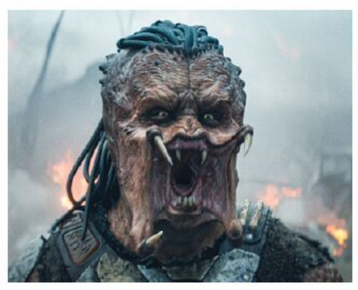
Ryan Gosling is in his post-*Barbie* reinvention phase as a comedic actor with leading-man looks. His charm on full display, combined with Amazon showing the first five minutes of the sci-fi movie, earned the biggest laughs inside Hall H.

FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S

The sequel to the highest-grossing Blumhouse film was a welcome addition to Hall H, but its specialness was undercut when the trailer was released hours ahead of the panel. So much for giving the first look to those who waited hours in line.

THE LONG WALK

Show, don't tell, was the theme to success as studios brought full episodes of TV shows and ample movie footage. Blacking out a brutal kill in Lionsgate's adaptation of **Stephen King**'s *The Long Walk* only added to the intrigue (more on page 27).



PREDATOR: BADLANDS

20th Century showed off to great effect the opening 15 or so minutes from its fall movie that featured a tough inter-*Predator* family squabble of Shakespearean proportions. Plus, Hall H wanderers walked away with a cool mask.

JAMES GUNN

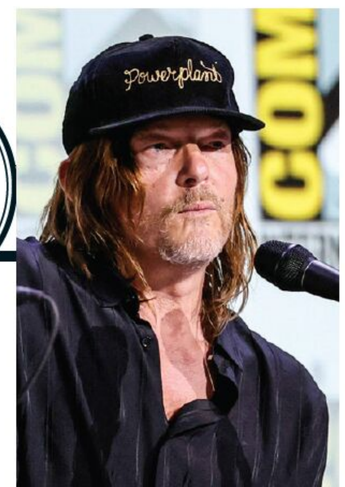
Few people have earned standing ovations at Comic-Con, but Gunn is now among them as he took a victory lap for *Superman* and heaped credit on the creators who dreamed up the stories that made the convention what it is today.

GEORGE LUCAS

There's no doubt his first visit to Comic-Con was of epic proportions, and his museum dedicated to the narrative arts might be a jewel in L.A. But would it have hurt Lucas to actually utter the words "*Star Wars*" or "Indiana Jones"?

THE WALKING DEAD: DARYL DIXON* AND *RESIDENT ALIEN

Fans showed up for both shows, only for news of their cancellations to come amid the convention. Now that's a real con job.



IMAX: TONG YU/CHINA NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES. *TRON*: LEAH GALLO/DISNEY. *WALK*: MURRAY CLOSE/LIONSGATE. *PREDATOR*: 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS. *WORLDS*: MARNI GROSSMAN/PARAMOUNT+. LUCAS: DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES. FIVE: MICHAEL BUCKNER/GETTY IMAGES. REEDUS: AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES.

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DANDELION (top) and SHANGRI-LA (bottom)

7 Days of DEALS

Who's inking on the dotted line this week

Naomi Ackie (*Mickey 17*) is joining the DC Comics movie *Clayface*. ... **Ike Barinholtz** is in talks to play **Elon Musk** in Amazon MGM's AI-themed movie from **Luca Guadagnino**. ... *Superman* actor **Skyler Gisondo** is in talks to join the cast of the next *Meet the Parents* film as the son of **Ben Stiller** and **Teri Polo**'s characters. ... **Chris Sanders**, who co-created the 2002 film *Lilo & Stitch*, is in talks to write the sequel to Disney's hit live-action version. ... Lionsgate optioned the **Stephen King** novel *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, setting *Strange Darling* filmmaker **JT Mollner** to write and direct. ... Warner Bros. acquired **Chris Colfer**'s book series *The Land of Stories* and attached **Phil Johnston** to write the script. ... *John Wick* filmmaker **Chad Stahelski** is adapting the comic *Calexit* for the screen. ... *The Penguin* actress **Cristin Milioti** will star in the indie horror thriller *Buddy*. In TV, Netflix's *Monster* anthology from **Ryan Murphy** and **Ian Brennan** has cast **Ella Beatty** as **Lizzie Borden**. ... Vampire comedy *Eternally Yours* from *Ghosts* showrunners **Joe Port** and **Joe Wiseman** has nabbed a CBS pilot order. ... Hulu's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reboot pilot added **Faly Rakotohavana**, **Ava Jean**, **Sarah Bock**, **Daniel Di Tomasso** and **Jack Cutmore-Scott** to the cast. ... **Christopher Meloni** will star in an untitled NFL drama series at Hulu from *Paradise* creator **Dan Fogelman**. ... NBC's *The Voice* set **Adam Levine**, **John Legend** and **Kelly Clarkson** as season 29 coaches. — ERIK HAYDEN

Ackie

Barinholtz

Milioti

Keanu Reeves

Rep Sheet

Keanu Reeves parted ways with his longtime manager **Meredith Wechter** at Range. ... **Ellen DeGeneres** signed with WME, as did *Atlanta* writer-producer **Stefani Robinson**. ... **Moby**'s film and TV banner Little Walnut and *Reservation Dogs* writer **Chad Charlie** inked with Verve. ... *It Ends* director-writer **Alex Ullom** signed at UTA. ... *The Vow* director **Michael Sucsy** and *The Recruit* actress **Fivel Stewart** signed at Paradigm. ... *Love Island USA*'s **Amaya Espinal** landed at Gersh. — E.H.

From left: Josh Greenstein, Cindy Holland, Dana Goldberg and David Ellison

EXECUTIVE SHUFFLE

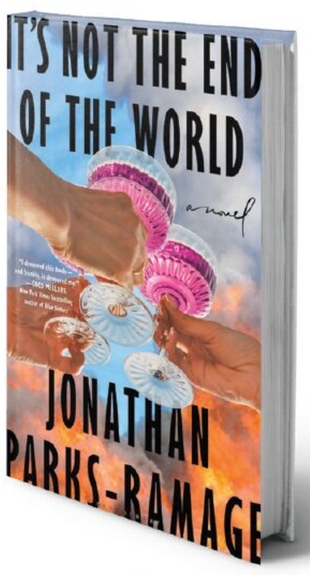
The Skydance Deal's Domino Effect

As David Ellison assembles his new Paramount A-team, rival studios are making their own moves **BY PAMELA McCLINTOCK**

As the Aug. 7 close date for the Paramount-Skydance megadeal approaches, Hollywood's executive ranks are undergoing a shake-up. Sony Motion Picture Group president **Josh Greenstein** is departing that studio for a top job under **David Ellison** once the $8 billion merger closes. A title isn't yet known, but the exec's oversight is expected to extend beyond Paramount Pictures. Greenstein has a long-standing relationship with Skydance chief Ellison, who will take on the CEO title at Paramount while former NBCUniversal executive **Jeff Shell** will be installed as president. Skydance chief creative officer **Dana Goldberg** is likewise expected to play a major role at the newly merged company, as will former Netflix chief content officer **Cindy Holland**, who formally started advising Skydance in October. PR vet **Melissa Zukerman** is said to be taking a comms leadership role. (Of the current Paramount "office of the CEO" trio, only **George Cheeks** is expected to stay on, while co-chiefs **Brian Robbins** and **Chris McCarthy** are said to be exiting.)

At Sony, Greenstein shared the president title with **Sanford Panitch**, with both reporting directly to Sony motion picture group CEO **Tom Rothman**, who recently reupped. Greenstein worked at Paramount from 2005 to 2014, heading marketing and distribution. It was during that time that he got to know Ellison, whose company co-financed some of Paramount's biggest franchises, including *Mission: Impossible*.

With Greenstein gone, Sony is making changes of its own. **Peter Kang** was promoted to president of production of Columbia Pictures, reporting to Panitch, who becomes the sole president of Sony's motion picture group. **Danielle Misher**, head of theatrical marketing, and **Steven O'Dell**, president of international marketing and distribution, will continue to oversee the marketing operation but will now report directly to Rothman instead of Greenstein. "We are all sorry to see Josh go," Rothman added. "The key to a sound organization, however, is to have a strong bench." THR



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A hot new book with Hollywood appeal

It's Not the End of the World (BLOOMSBURY, JUNE 3)

BY **Jonathan Parks-Ramage** AGENCY **CAA**

Parks-Ramage's debut novel *Yes, Daddy* sold to Amazon, and his off-Broadway musical *The Big Gay Jamboree* was nominated for five Lucille Lortel Awards. This time, the author has a dystopian satire of the L.A. one percent, following a self-absorbed (and self-sabotaging) gay couple as they forge on with their extravagant baby shower despite an apocalyptic event descending on the city. The novel tackles climate change, authoritarianism and Erewhon, with a fair share of sex scenes thrown in. — SEIJA RANKIN

ACKIE: DANIELE VENTURELLI/GETTY IMAGES FOR KERING. BARINHOLTZ: THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES. MILIOTI: KRISTINA BUMPHREY/GETTY IMAGES. REEVES: JOE MAHER/GETTY IMAGES FOR LIONSGATE UK. GREESTEIN, HOLLAND, GOLDBERG, ELLISON: GETTY IMAGES. *WORLD*: COURTESY OF BLOOMSBURY.

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THE RACE

Adolescence Is Scary. Tech Doesn't Have to Be

The Netflix hit paints a bleak portrait of kids corrupted by smartphones and social media. But Hollywood's stories about screens weren't always so grim

BY JEREMY DAUBER

Was there a more terrifying horror story this TV season than *Adolescence*? Fortified with a raft of Emmy-nominated performances and a one-take directorial design that leaves the viewer agape with admiration, the Netflix limited series takes aim firmly at that central audience for home viewing: parents. And it goes for the jugular, with its portrait of fathers and mothers clueless about what technology is doing to their kids, how sad and despairing and angry and radicalized and monstrous their kids are becoming as a result. Owen Cooper's Jamie would never have used the knife, the show heavily implies, were it not for being extensively cyberbullied and swimming in the toxic stream of online manosphere rhetoric.

Even the most tech-savvy parents — and Lord knows I'm not one — are susceptible to this kind of terror. Huge numbers of parents of children ages 10 and up grew up in a world without mobile phones and social media. Our brains are pre-Twitter; they predate TikTok. And so we look at our children — who are the closest creatures to ourselves we have — and worry, like Jamie's parents, that they're actually entirely alien to us: the eternal basis of moral panic, but here infused with new technological force.

Or maybe a different *kind* of technological force. After all, technophobia in the movies goes back at least as far as Fritz Lang and *Metropolis*; and anxiety about kids and their crazy-slash-dangerous new machines — from jalopies to hi-fis — has been a staple of generation gap culture for well over a century. But all those stories about kids, for all their concerns, leaned into a sense of wonder, or joy, that seems glaringly absent these days.

For those of us of a certain (parental) age, if there's one pop culture work that stands out as a testament to the dangers of technology in the hands of kids, it's the one in which Matthew Broderick sets out to play a video game and almost sets off a global thermonuclear war. *WarGames* is framed as a cautionary tale, but it isn't, really; at heart, it's about the possibility — the joy — of a kid with a keyboard who has worlds unimagined at his fingertips. It's true, among the iconic images of the movie are those simulations of missiles arcing over an intercontinental map. But the image that stays with you is the one of Broderick, with Ally Sheedy leaning over him, transported, rapt, by the possibility of what sits in front of them.

The highest-grossing film of the previous year — in fact, the highest-grossing film for the next decade — revolved entirely around a kid wanting a phone. That's admittedly a slightly unusual way of describing *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, but technology — as Spielberg frames it through Elliott's eyes — is a kind of ramshackle magic that offers the promise of love and transcendence. Presumably it's science, not magic, that makes those bicycles fly — maybe — but who can tell the difference?

For those who skew slightly younger, that touchstone unquestionably is *The Matrix*. (Notably, when one of the kids in *Adolescence* uses the term "red-pilled," and his father identifies it as coming from *The Matrix*, his son has no idea what he's talking about.) Because while Neo and his crew actually end up in a dystopian computer-vampire hellscape when they take the red pill — the term for a sense of brutal truth also adopted by the manosphere *Adolescence* comes to critique — that's not really what it is. As anyone who thrills to the movie knows, especially and perhaps primarily if you watch it when you're young, taking the red pill means you get to do awesome superhero bullet-time stuff in what the screen persists in making look like "the real world," even if, by the movie's logic, it's the ostensibly computer-generated

Top: Stephen Graham (left) and Owen Cooper in *Adolescence*. Above: Amari Bacchus (left) and Ashley Walters in the Netflix show.

COURTESY OF NETFLIX (2)

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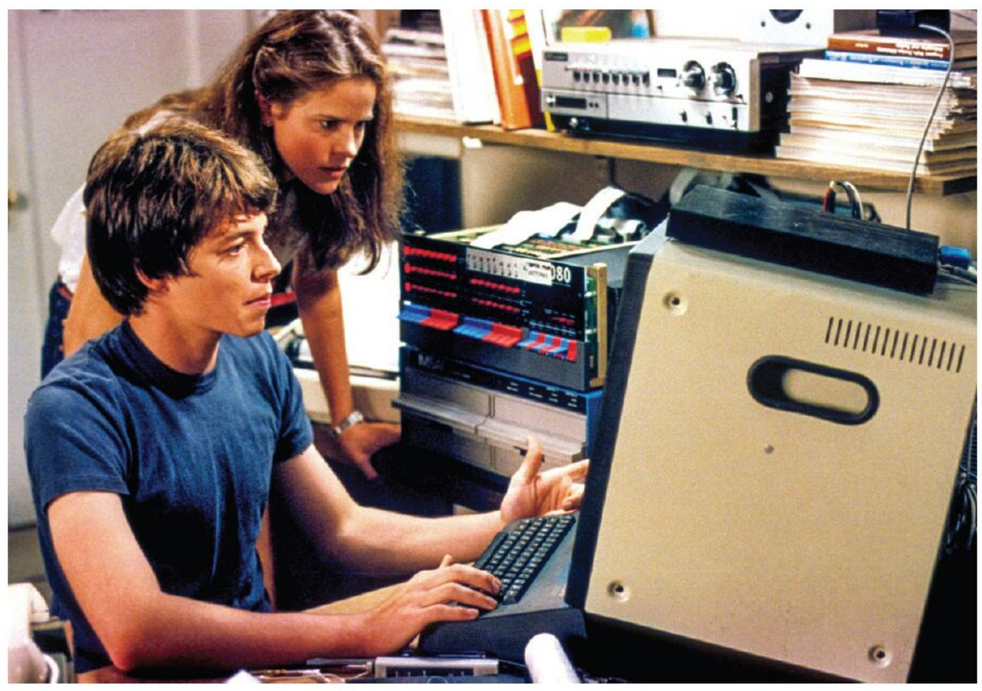
illusion. I acutely remember overhearing a conversation between two roughly 10-year-old boys after seeing *The Matrix Reloaded* in the theater.

BOY 1 That was awesome!
BOY 2 That was amazing!
BOY 1 Just one thing. What's a matrix?
BOY 2 I don't know.

WarGames and *The Matrix*, each in its own quite different way, follow the classic dictum that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. Computers and phones are doorways to Narnia: They allow for the possibilities of fantastic adventure — "fantastic" in both senses of the term. But in a world so technologically changed, so weaponized, when it comes to the stories we tell, getting back to that sensibility seems harder than ever.

In Aaron Sorkin's *The Social Network*, Jesse Eisenberg's Mark Zuckerberg may have created an institution that brought the whole world together — a feat previously beyond the possibilities of even the most impossible fictions. But, as the movie posits (truthfully or not), it does so with serpents at its core, curdling the magic of reaching ever outward into determining which girls around your campus were the hottest, or trying to get your ex-girlfriend to talk to you again.

The Social Network was a kind of turning point from the stories that came before, Exhibit A in suggesting how Internet Heaven was becoming Social Media Hell. Yes, recent entries in the technophobia genre — the biting satire of world politics via tech bro in best TV movie nominee *Mountainhead*, for example — have also focused on the real-world effects of AI slop and the illusory nature of reality when we consume it almost entirely through our screens, a *Matrix* for Council on Foreign Relations types. But, famously, hell really is other people; and certainly that's



From top: Drew Barrymore kisses E.T. in the 1980s touchstone; Ally Sheedy and Matthew Broderick at a computer in the Cold War classic *WarGames*.

true for us in day-to-day life. *Adolescence* hits harder — a lot harder — for parents, because it's a portrait of watching the petty cruelties of growing up, only hypercharged through technologies they don't fully understand. And what they don't understand is how they make the kids feel diminished, more insular, less real than ever. What these technologies that could open up the world, and the imagination, do instead is render their children ever smaller.

Hamlet had the capacity to, as he put it, "be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space"; now our kids' melancholy comes from having infinite space at their disposal and confining themselves to those virtual nutshells.

Is there a solution to this self-imposed claustrophobia IRL? Probably not, at least not totally: It would be too much to ask for kids to give up the desire for immediate processing, communication and secrecy that social media affords. (Who of our generation doesn't remember the burning desire to have their own phone line?) But when it comes to making, valuing and cherishing culture — which shapes mindsets and, thus, realities — we deal with what could be, not just what is. And it could be — and, I think, is — the case that we do that by reckoning with the fact that the way the teenagers of *Adolescence* use these technologies aren't at the heart of why kids want this stuff. Not at first.

My 7-year-old daughter — this is a true story — recently made a phone out of construction paper and tape. (On the back, it had the letter Y; when I asked her what the Y stood for, she responded, "Your battery.") When I asked her why she made the phone, she said, "You can do anything with a phone." Pressed for an example, she suggested that "anything" involved making millions of bananas. And then the conversation segued into other banana-related topics, but you get the point: the thrill of technology and the magic of possibility, not just the downsides. Bananas, not lemons. You can do anything with a phone.

I have a middle-grade novel, *Press 1 for Invasion*, coming out in a few weeks. It's about a 10-year-old who wants a phone to take pictures of the girl he's got a crush on. Then he finds one on the street. When he looks through it at his crossing guard, he sees a goggle-eyed alien in a crossing guard uniform that no one else can see, bent on invading the planet. And it turns out that thanks to that phone — dropped there for him to find by another goggle-eyed alien — he saves the world.

Probably not a good reason to give your own kid a phone. But maybe that's the kind of magic we can encourage alongside the Insta posts. To think of them as portals. As ways to explore, to venture outward. Not, like Jamie Cooper, to retreat into your room and look at distorted, and distorting, mirrors of yourself on the feeds of people that you know.

All those [past tech] stories about kids, for all their concerns, leaned into a sense of wonder, or joy, that seems glaringly absent these days.

Maybe that's just a pipe dream. Not the real world.

But then again, neither, necessarily, is *Adolescence*, or the stuff your kids see on the phone. And the more they learn that, the better.

Jeremy Dauber is a professor of American studies at Columbia University. His middle-grade debut novel, Press 1 for Invasion*, will be published by Simon & Schuster/Aladdin on Sept. 9.*

E.T.: ©UNIVERSAL/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION. *WARGAMES*: ©MGM/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION.

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CREATIVE CLASS

This Southern Grandma Just Might Be the Savior of Sitcoms

At 59, Leanne Morgan has a sold-out tour, a hit Netflix special and a best-selling book. An old-school comedy is next

By Lacey Rose

Leanne Morgan was photographed July 17 at the Bijou Theatre in Knoxville, Tennessee, which she says "kept booking me when nobody cared."

Carolina Herrera dress; **Manolo Blahnik** shoes; **Nancy Newberg** jewlery.

Leanne Morgan had her sights set on Hollywood for as long as she can remember. Her family owned a small grocery store in rural Tennessee, and young Morgan was known for hamming it up in the aisles. Even her teachers recognized her gift, urging her to deliver announcements and emcee school events. But life ultimately got in the way of her comedy dreams. Three children and a working husband meant Morgan couldn't grind it out on the club circuit like many of her male counterparts. For years, she settled for a mix of corporate comedy gigs and the occasional charity benefit, which led to periodic overtures from Hollywood that never amounted to much.

By 2019, Morgan was ready to hang it up. Before she did, however, she shelled out a few thousand dollars for a pair of social media experts to reformat her material for the digital era. This last-ditch effort worked. She went viral. Suddenly Morgan, in her early 50s, was the draw she always imagined she'd be. A sold-out arena tour, a hit Netflix special, a best-selling book and, come July 31, an eponymous **Chuck Lorre** sitcom for Netflix followed. Now, as her 60th birthday looms, Morgan Zoomed in from her Knoxville, Tennessee, home to discuss her late-in-life success and the recurring feedback that nearly derailed it.

You almost had sitcoms go before this, but they didn't have a great handle on your brand, and you didn't have the confidence to push back. When did the latter come?
Oh, darling, I'm still working on it. Because they'll tell you, "We love you," but then they want to change you. Hollywood people can't help it. And I don't blame 'em, they don't know my world. With this sitcom, at first, they were trying to find their footing and I was freaked out but then I thought, "I've got to give them grace. They're trying to learn me just like I am them."

Historically, how has the feedback from the stand-up world compared with that of Hollywood?
Oh, I was raising these children first. I wasn't out here grinding. I was doing corporate [gigs] for men that make carpet fiber. They probably spent more on the shrimp than they did on me.

Corporate gigs are tough …
Oh, they're horrible. They suck the life out of you. These men have been playing golf all day, they're tired, they've probably had alcohol, and I'm up there talking about Weight Watchers and how I don't like low-cut panties.

Yet you kept working. What would you hear from the bookers?
When I was trying to audition for Aspen or Montreal [comedy festivals] or when Comedy Central would come through, they wanted edgy and I was in a kitten heel and a pant with a bird on it, talking about how somebody doodied on a T-ball field. They'd say, "Oh, she's a mom comic." But people in clubs always booked me. They'd go, "Keep going. You're unique." Now, Hollywood loves that mom in the kitten heel. They'd see my new 45 minutes and go, "You've written a sitcom!" Then I'd get there and they'd go, "Let's make your husband a Hispanic man." Don't get me wrong, I love Hispanic men. God forbid something happens to [husband] **Chuck Morgan**, I'm dating a Latino man. But they'd switch everything up, and I'd be like, "Have y'all watched my act?!"

So, what ultimately changed, you or the culture?
COVID hit and people wanted to connect with people who were real, and there I was on the back porch talking about my mama. And that's me. I talk about taking care of elderly parents, launching children, menopause, and it was a niche that nobody was filling.

How quickly did Netflix jump on the Leanne Morgan bandwagon?
It took 'em a while, but then I got some big guns in my camp who could say, "Y'all don't have anybody like her." I ended up leasing my first [hour] to them, and they've been so precious to me. I just shot my second one for them, and I've got a deal for a third in 2027. And then they gave me this show — me and Chuck Lorre walked in there and I said something about having a weak pelvic floor, I was nervous, and they were basically like, "What do you want to do? We'll do it."

It's not altruism on their part …
No, but if you could have seen the crudités and the pickles that they put out for my press junket! I was nervous for that, too. I had a media coach. As if somebody was going to ask me if I'd ever slept with **Ben Affleck** or something. And honey, I would have, had I been out here in my 20s!

"They wanted edgy and I was in a kitten heel, talking about how somebody doodied on a T-ball field."

Initially, you and Chuck wanted to do a single-camera comedy, no?
Yes. But Netflix said, "Would y'all please consider doing a multicam and bringing that [format] back?" I thought, "Don't put that burden on me." Then they said, "We'll greenlight it right now if you do."

Despite the title, it's not autobiographical. For one, you're not starting over as a divorcée.
That was Chuck [Lorre's idea]. I balked at first, but I think it's the smartest thing we did because I really would've felt protective over my children, my grandchildren and Chuck Morgan. Years ago, I met the showrunner on *Reba*, and that was based on [**Reba McEntire**'s] life, and she got very protective. It wasn't a good thing.

I do wonder if people will assume it is based on your real life.
They already have. Women on Instagram started saying, "I knew that Chuck Morgan couldn't handle her success!"

You've likely seen some of Netflix's data around your comedy. What's most surprised you?
I've seen a lot of numbers, and mine [2023's *I'm Every Woman*] did very well. People watch to the end, and then they watch it two, three, four more times. And you just know that **Joe Rogan**, **Dave Chappelle**, **Bill Burr**, all these guys I've admired, are getting these numbers and are thinking, like, "Who is this woman with the big breasts and the flowery dress talking about her panties?"

Unlike them, you've never gotten political onstage. Ever tempted?
Honey, if you want to talk about fingernail polish or a spray tan, I'm good at that. I wouldn't know how to talk about politics. I've also had my **Dolly Parton** to look up to, and, like her, I just don't want anybody to feel uncomfortable.

Before I lose you, you shot a movie, *You're Cordially Invited*, and then did this TV show. How do you feel about Hollywood now?
I'm tickled. I do hope this show gets picked up [for additional seasons]. I've texted everybody I know that's had a TV show, like, "What if people don't like it?" But **Jerry Seinfeld** said to me, "Honey, get ready to worry the rest of your life. That's just part of it." THR

On Netflix's *Leanne*, which counts Morgan (right) as a co-creator, she stars opposite Kristen Johnston (left) as a newly divorced mom starting over.

LEANNE: COURTESY OF NETFLIX.

Photographed by **Kara Hudgens**

Rambling Reporter

Vegas Says Taylor-Johnson Is the Next Bond. Don't Bet on It

Edited by Benjamin Svetkey and Julian Sancton

The name Is Taylor-Johnson, Aaron Taylor-Johnson: Or at least it is, according to VegasInsider. Other insiders doubt it.

James Bond certainly knows his way around a casino, but even he might raise an eyebrow at who oddsmakers are betting will play him next. According to the latest probabilities from gambling site VegasInsider, **Aaron Taylor-Johnson** is now the clear favorite to slip into 007's tux, with odds hovering around 2.4-to-1.

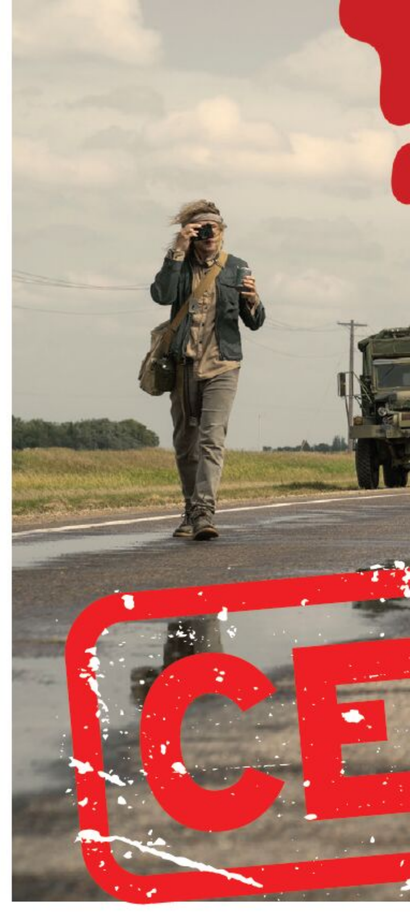
But before anyone bets the house on the 35-year-old *Kick-Ass* actor, industry sources note the game hasn't really begun — the cards haven't even been dealt. In fact, Taylor-Johnson's frontrunner status may owe less to spy-craft than to spin-craft. His odds have been clearly boosted by a string of U.K. press leaks — most notably in *The Sun*, which has been touting him as the next Bond ever since **Daniel Craig** holstered his Walther PPK. In late 2022, the tabloid quoted "insiders" claiming Taylor-Johnson had "impressed" producer **Barbara Broccoli** during a "top-secret screen test" at Pinewood Studios.

A few months later, another so-called insider claimed: "Bond is Aaron's job, should he wish to accept it."

But Rambling's own insiders point out a few issues with that narrative. Historically, Bond screen tests are tightly controlled 007 rituals — usually involving a scene out of *From Russia With Love* — and they don't happen until a director is on board. And in 2022, there was no director. (**Denis Villeneuve** wasn't hired until June.) Besides, even if Taylor-Johnson had knocked Broccoli's socks off at that supposed 2022 test, that shouldn't be influencing his odds in 2025 — Broccoli and her half brother **Michael G. Wilson** sold the franchise to Amazon earlier this year. These days, it's **Amy Pascal**'s socks that need knocking off. She's running Bond now.

Vegas handicappers also might have been swayed by a round of recent online tea-leaf reading after Taylor-Johnson's auspiciously timed deal to become a global ambassador for Omega — the official Bond timepiece — back in May. That was seen by some as a clear sign the role was his. It wasn't. Otherwise, past Omega ambassadors like **Nicole Kidman**, **George Clooney** and **Zoë Kravitz** would've been zipping around in Aston Martins years ago.

What VegasInsider isn't factoring in is that all of the above — the leaks, the whispers, the watch deal — might actually be hurting Taylor-Johnson's chances. As Rambling's insider puts it: "The more you push for the role, the more it can backfire. Wanting it too much can be the best way not to get it."



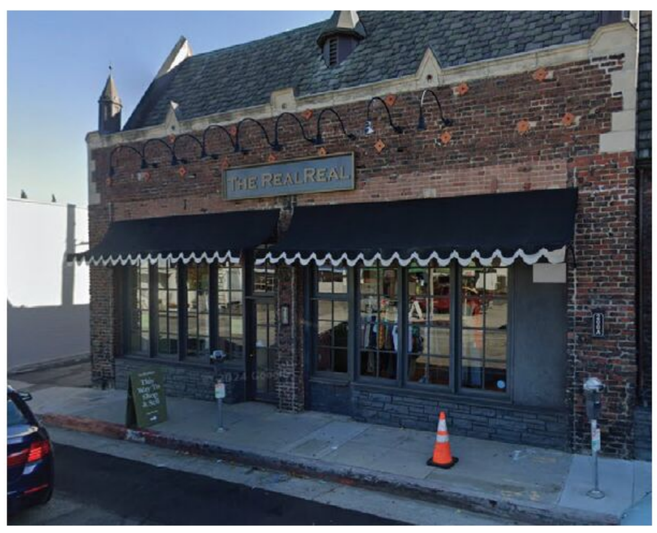
RealReal Robbery Was Really Real. But SMPD Says Nothing to See Here

Times are so tough these days, even the criminals are thrifting.

On July 18, in the latest affront to Santa Monica, more than a dozen masked marauders stormed the RealReal secondhand luxury boutique on 26th Street — near the Brentwood border — where celebrities from **Kim Kardashian** and **Julianne Moore** to **Parker Posey** and **Kate Moss** are said to unload their no-longer-needed Hermès, Cartier and Rolex accessories. It was a brazen, broad-daylight smash-and-grab: Surveillance cameras captured the crew looting high-end resale items and loading them into getaway cars with the license plates removed.

This marks the third flash-mob-style hit on the same store in three years — but unlike the previous break-ins, no arrests have yet been made. In fact, investigators are now looking into whether the crew might be linked to a similar gang that hit an Anaheim jeweler just one day earlier. In that case, thieves wielding hammers and pickaxes were chased off when the store owner fired a warning shot.

A spokesperson for the Santa Monica Police Department tells Rambling that detectives are "aware of the recent incident in Anaheim and are coordinating with law enforcement partners to assess any potential connections" — adding, without prompting, that any perceived increase in criminal activity is purely imaginary. "We have not seen a recent spike in organized retail thefts in Santa Monica," the spokesperson insists. — MERLE GINSBERG



Crime scene: The RealReal in Santa Monica got hit yet again.

Got tips? Email **rambling@thr.com**

VEGAS: GEORGE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES. JOHNSON: DOMINIQUE CHARRIAU/WIREIMAGE. REALREAL: GOOGLE STREETVIEW. WALK: MURRAY CLOSE/LIONSGATE. GRAPHICS: GETTY IMAGES. ZEGLER: AXELLE/BAUER-GRIFFIN/FILMMAGIC. SCHLOSSBERG: BILL CLARK/CQ-ROLL CALL, INC VIA GETTY IMAGES.

Walk like a man: The upcoming Stephen King movie is so violent, Comic-Con blacked out a scene during a screening of footage.

A Jaw-Dropping Screening at Comic-Con ... Literally

For once, the most talked-about title at San Diego's Comic-Con wasn't a Marvel or DC tentpole — it was a dystopian horror story so graphically violent, organizers literally covered it up.

The 6,500 attendees who turned out to see footage of *The Long Walk*, Lionsgate's adaptation of Stephen King's 1979 novel about 100 teenage boys forced to compete in a deadly endurance challenge — walk 3 miles an hour or be executed — were shown 20 minutes of the movie. But what they didn't get to see — because it was blacked out on the screen — was a particularly brutal moment in which a young man's jaw is blown off by a bullet.

"Fans will get a lot out of it when they see it in theaters," was about all **Garrett Wareing**, who plays one of the contestants, would say about the cover-up while speaking to Rambling after the screening.

From the sound of it, shooting the film — directed by *Hunger Games* alum **Francis Lawrence** — was almost as brutal as what ended up in the can. The young cast walked miles daily, developing real blisters and bruises. "At some points, we're not acting," Wareing confesses. "Those limps you see? Those are real limps." He recalls one co-star pausing because he thought he had something in his shoe. "He pulls off his Converse, and his socks were just filled with blood," Wareing says. "I would sit down on the hot road [between takes] and be like, 'God, this is what peace feels like.' I never thought asphalt would be so comfortable."

Still, proving that misery does indeed love company, all the actors claimed to have had a blast on the Winnipeg shoot. Offers co-star **Tut Nyuot**, "I couldn't imagine filming this movie with people that I didn't really get along with." — AARON COUCH

OVERHEARD

Yes, I Did Say That!

A look at who's saying what in entertainment

Compiled by Nicole Fell

My fucking psychiatrist has seen me through all of it.

Rachel Zegler
The actress, to *i-D* magazine, commenting on the disastrous rollout of Disney's live-action *Snow White* — noting it didn't hit her too hard: "I don't choose negativity in the face of it."

One day, if not today, the people at CBS who have manipulated and handled this are going to be embarrassed.

David Letterman
The former *Late Show* host, on YouTube, calling out the network for canceling *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*. Execs publicly stated it was a "financial decision."

We're terribly sorry.

Trey Parker
The *South Park* co-creator, at San Diego Comic-Con, sarcastically responding to the furor over relentlessly mocking Donald Trump in the season 27 premiere.

If you whip somebody's ass when you're our age, you kind of whip your own ass, too.

Eddie Murphy
The *Pickup* actor, on *Today*, joking about the shift in roles he's received as he's gotten older.

I'm still figuring out what that decade of my life was.

Sandra Oh
The actress, to *The New York Times Magazine*, reflecting on her time on *Grey's Anatomy* during the apex of its popularity and before she opted to leave.

A company worthy of our storied past.

David Zaslav
The Warner Bros. Discovery CEO (soon just Warner Bros. CEO), in a statement, formally aligning himself with the film and TV studio — and not the cable company he ran for nearly 20 years that will soon spin off.

Say it to my face.

Jack Schlossberg
The writer, on Instagram, doubling down on his criticism of Ryan Murphy's upcoming series about John F. Kennedy Jr. after the producer claimed Schlossberg "really [doesn't] remember" his late uncle.

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About Town

People, Places, Preoccupations

"Seeing how professional Leonardo DiCaprio was — how he was friendly but never pushed it —inspired me," says Julia Butters, who stars in *Freakier Friday*.

BEN COPE

SPOTLIGHT

She Took on Leo. Now It's Lohan's Turn

When she was only 9, Julia Butters stole scenes from DiCaprio in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. Now the 16-year-old actress is co-starring with Lindsay in Disney's *Freakier Friday* By Seija Rankin

When **Julia Butters** landed her first big role — a scene-stealing turn opposite **Leonardo DiCaprio** in **Quentin Tarantino**'s *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* — she wasn't even allowed to watch the whole movie. Her parents let her walk the red carpet at the premiere but whisked her out of the theater long before the flamethrowers came out. "They didn't want to traumatize a 9-year-old," she says. "But that carpet was insane — I mean, girl, **Britney Spears** was there — and I have yet to top that."

Age appropriateness isn't a problem in Butters' latest project. The actress, now 16, stars in *Freakier Friday*, Disney's long-awaited sequel to the 2003 body-swap comedy. In this updated and slightly more convoluted version, **Lindsay Lohan**'s character, Anna, is now a mom herself — and it's her teenage daughter, Harper, played by Butters, who ends up switching bodies with her. Meanwhile, **Jamie Lee Curtis**' Tess, Anna's mom, swaps places with Lily — played by newcomer **Sophia Hammons** — the daughter of Eric, the man played by **Manny Jacinto** that Anna is about to marry.

Butters initially was invited to audition for either of the two teen roles but ultimately chose Harper because she connected with the character. This meant an added bonus of sharing more screen time with Lohan — a childhood idol thanks to *The Parent Trap* (the Lohan version, not the one with **Hayley Mills** and rotary phones). "Harper values L.A. so much, and I'm born and raised here and really related to that," she says.

The daughter of a Disney animator, Butters got her start with a 2014 episode of *Criminal Minds*, then landed a recurring role on the ABC sitcom *American Housewife* at the age of 7. Tarantino was, famously, mindlessly

Clockwise from top left: Butters got her break with a role in Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, which led to *The Fabelmans* and *Freakier Friday*, with Lindsay Lohan (second from left), Jamie Lee Curtis and Sophia Hammons.

watching an episode when he saw her and cast her in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. "I owe everything to that role," Butters says. "It really changed my future — it was like a domino effect that put me into the race for all these other movies."

Parts in *The Gray Man* (opposite **Ryan Gosling**) and *The Fabelmans* (under the direction of **Steven Spielberg**) followed, offering a crash course in both performance and on-set professionalism. "I see my co-stars getting asked about what advice they would give to their younger selves all the time, so I've always tried not to ask them too many questions about their careers myself, but I learn so much just from watching them," Butters says. "I think seeing how professional Leonardo was — how he was friendly but never pushed it — inspired me."

While her male co-stars modeled restraint, the women of *Freakier Friday* showed Butters a different kind of energy. "Jamie Lee Curtis is so intensely loving — she's an extreme woman, and for that I truly love her," she says. She describes Lohan as helpful on set and passionate — about the film and, in real life, her new role as a mother (she gave birth to her first child in July 2023). It was also Butters' first time working with a female director, **Nisha Ganatra**, who made **Mindy Kaling**'s 2019 comedy *Late Night*. "It was a more personal experience than I've had before," she says. "She really trusted me to give input. She was like a mentor to me."

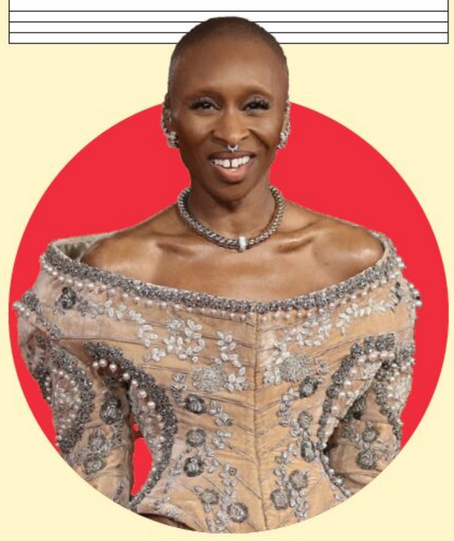
That trust came in handy, especially when the role pushed Butters out of her comfort zone — and into the ocean. Her character is an avid surfer, which meant filming several scenes far from shore. The crew brought her out on a boat and strapped her to a flat rig connected to a Jet Ski. "It wound up being one of my favorite things I've ever done," she says. "I was in a wet suit, so I felt like a superhero, and I just couldn't believe I was out in the middle of the ocean."

Butters doesn't have anything lined up post-*Freakier Friday*, but she's not concerned. Ever since *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, she's been selective with roles, focused on pacing herself. "I only have so many teenage years," she says. She's open to another drama or a character piece, but mostly, she just wants to enjoy the moment — and the rare feeling of walking out of a theater proud of her work.

"Before *Freakier Friday*, I would criticize everything I did onscreen, like, 'Why did I say it like that,' or, 'I was doing too much,' " she says. "But this, it was the first time I walked out of a theater thinking: 'I can live with this being out there in the world forever. I don't have any notes for myself.' " THR

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

THR'S HOT DATES



JULY 30

***Platonic* Premiere**

The Apple TV+ comedy starring **Seth Rogen** and **Rose Byrne** celebrates its second season at the Hammer Museum.

AUG. 1-3

↑ *Jesus Christ Superstar* at the Hollywood Bowl

Cynthia Erivo and **Adam Lambert** headline three special performances of the rock opera, also featuring **Josh Gad**, **Phillipa Soo** and **Milo Manheim**.

KCon LA

The K-pop fan and artist fest, now in its 13th year, takes over the L.A. Convention Center for three days of events.

AUG. 2

Black Authors Festival

The annual toast to literary excellence and civic engagement returns to the Hamptons, this year honoring **Sunny Hostin**, **Don Lemon** and political leader **Marc H. Morial**.

AUG. 4-5

Shakira at SoFi Stadium

The superstar is joined by the **Black Eyed Peas** for back-to-back shows in Inglewood.

AUG. 4

***The Terminal List: Dark Wolf* Premiere**

Taylor Kitsch and **Chris Pratt** debut their Amazon espionage thriller series in Times Square.

↓ Rodeo Drive Fashion Summer Toast

Clueless costume designer **Mona May** is honored at the famed street's fashion celebration, timed to the film's 30th anniversary.

AUG. 5

***Butterfly* Premiere**

Daniel Day Kim brings his spy thriller Prime Video series to NYC.

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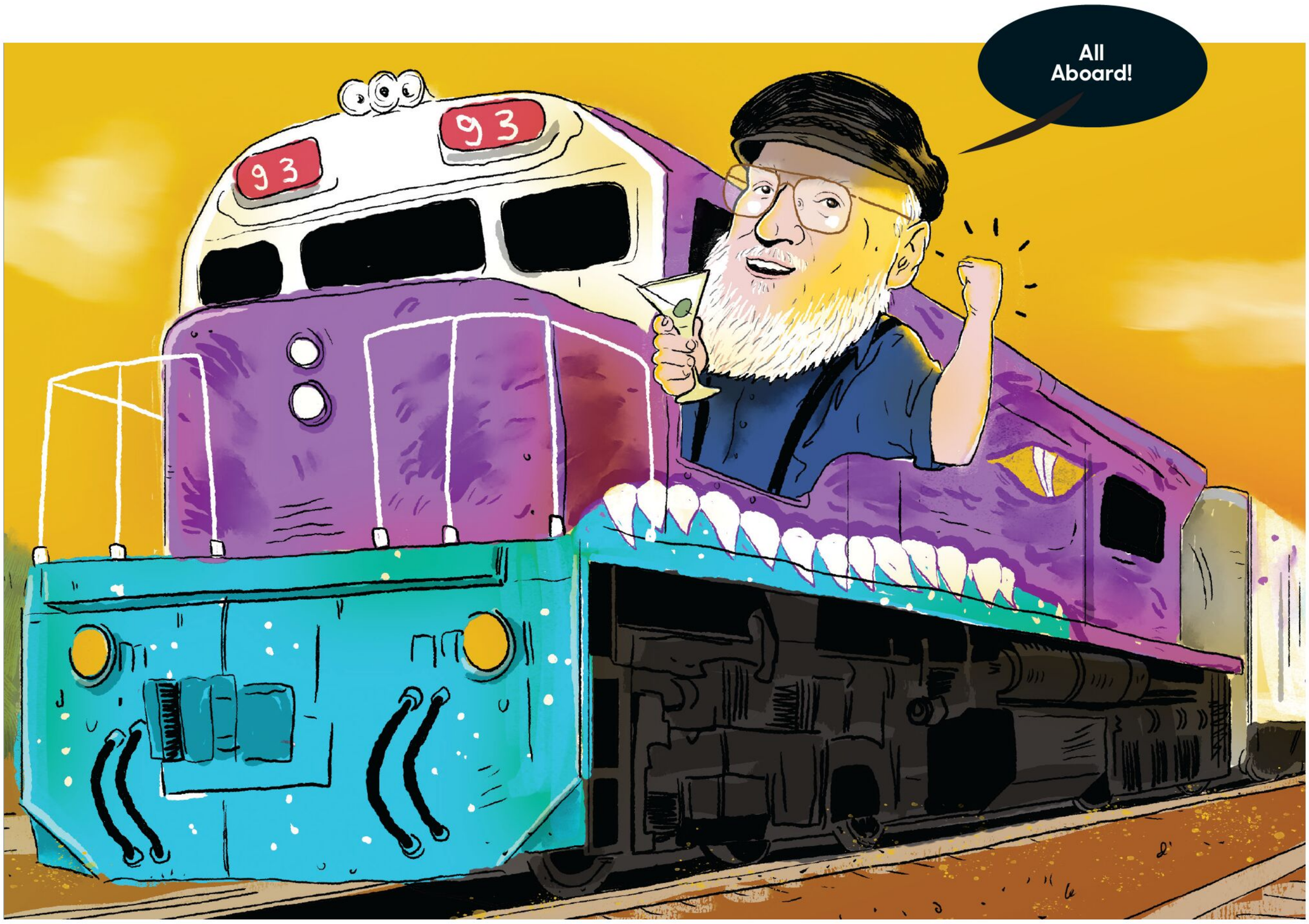

George R.R. Martin's Real Kingdom? A Faraway Land Called Santa Fe

The *Game of Thrones* author hasn't finished *The Winds of Winter* yet, but he has opened a movie theater, a bookstore, a cocktail bar and a railway attraction, all in a realm a million miles from Westeros By Ingrid Schmidt

Forget dragons and dire wolves. In **George R.R. Martin**'s corner of the realm — otherwise known as Santa Fe, New Mexico — power looks more like a movie theater, a short-haul railway line, a bookstore and a bar. And while winter may not be coming anytime soon, a surprising number of business ventures are.

Over the past decade, the 76-year-old *Game of Thrones* creator has been building his own offscreen empire — a quirky, culture-loving kingdom in northern New Mexico, where he owns or funds a growing number of institutions. There's the Jean Cocteau Cinema, the beloved art house theater he rescued in 2013. There's Meow Wolf, the psychedelic art collective he helped fund (and house, in an old abandoned bowling alley). And there's the historic Santa Fe Southern Railway, which he's not only brought back to life but turned into something of a movie star.

Martin may have left Westeros unfinished, but in this sunbaked enclave, his world-building continues apace — one real estate acquisition at a time.

"I fell in love with Santa Fe when I first visited in 1978 — you can get in a car and get anywhere in 10 minutes," he's said. A year later, newly divorced and ready to write full-time, Martin left his teaching job at Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa, and relocated to the high desert, where he would start hammering out his epic saga about dragons, dynasties and deeply questionable family trees — the one that would make him Santa Fe's most famous scribe.

In 2013, he purchased the Jean Cocteau Cinema — a long-closed, single-screen movie house in the city's Railyard District — which he reopened as a venue for film screenings, author events and game nights. Then, right next door, he opened Beastly Books, offering sci-fi and fantasy titles, rare editions and plenty of GRRM swag. Tucked just behind it is

Illustrated by **Brian Taylor**

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Yes, he knows the way to Santa Fe: George R.R. Martin in his adopted home kingdom.

"I just want to make one thing clear ... I'm still writing." George R.R. Martin

Milk of the Poppy, a medieval apothecary-themed cocktail bar. All three are owned by Martin's Highgarden Entertainment.

In true Martin fashion, things only got more sprawling. He bought a shuttered bowling alley on the south side of town — a steal at $2.7 million — and turned it over to what he called "a group of young, weird-ass Santa Fe artists." Those weirdos would go on to become the founding collective behind Meow Wolf, now a national immersive art phenomenon. "None of the galleries wanted them because they were too offbeat," Martin recalls. "They took me down to the bowling alley, explained their vision of other dimensions and weird aliens and pressed all my buttons."

In 2020, Martin joined an investor group to revive the historic Santa Fe Southern Railway. "We're bringing the railroad back," he announced on his blog (called Not a Blog) after the purchase. "Not just as a means of transportation, but as a whole new kind of adventure."

Today, the line runs themed trips between Santa Fe and Lamy, a tiny rail town about 18 miles southeast, and includes holiday excursions with onboard music and immersive performances. Two of its vintage train cars have even made it to the big screen: Both were featured in **Christopher Nolan**'s *Oppenheimer*. And soon, they might be hosting zombies — Martin's railway would be the backdrop for postapocalyptic TV series *Lost Station*, currently in development at Violet Beast, his Santa Fe-based production shingle.

His partner on the project, **Bill Banowsky**, gives Martin full credit for the railway vision: "It was his idea to paint one locomotive like the head of a wolf, one like the head of a dragon," he says.

Coming up, Martin is also about to break ground on a city-street backlot for his Stagecoach Foundation, the nonprofit he founded in 2017 to provide free film and TV job training for New Mexicans and to attract production to the region.

Of course, not everyone in Santa Fe is thrilled about Martin's growing influence. Some locals worry that the influx of tourists and GRRM fandom is helping to drive up congestion in a town already struggling with gentrification. And then there are the readers who would really just prefer he finish *The Winds of Winter*.

"I just want to make one thing clear," he tells *THR*. "While I'm an investor and an owner in some of these things, I do not run them on a daily basis. Every time I announce something on the internet, there's all this crazy talk. 'Oh, he's giving up writing the books!' But I'm still writing. The [sixth] novel, the 'Dunk and Egg' story — those are what I'm focused on."

Still, to many residents, Martin's presence has helped preserve and revive some of Santa Fe's cultural landmarks. Which is exactly what you'd expect from a man who knows a thing or two about building kingdoms — and keeping them alive. THR

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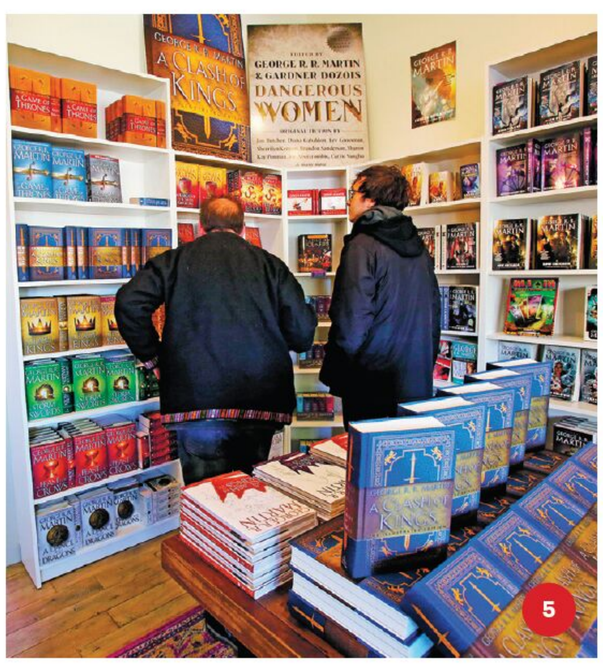

5

YOU'RE NOT IN KING'S LANDING ANYMORE

A brief tour of George R.R. Martin's Santa Fe attractions

1. SKY RAILWAY
430 West Manhattan Ave.
"Sometimes gunslingers raid the train," says Martin of his rolling theater. "Occasionally, one of our riders is murdered and the rest have to decide who did it."

2. MEOW WOLF'S HOUSE OF ETERNAL RETURN
1352 Rufina Circle
Otherwise known as the defunct bowling alley Martin purchased and rented to a group of "weird-ass" artists.

3. JEAN COCTEAU CINEMA
418 Montezuma Ave.
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4. MILK OF THE POPPY
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5. BEASTLY BOOKS
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Best place to pick up an autographed *Game of Thrones* novel, or a plush dragon. — I.S.

4

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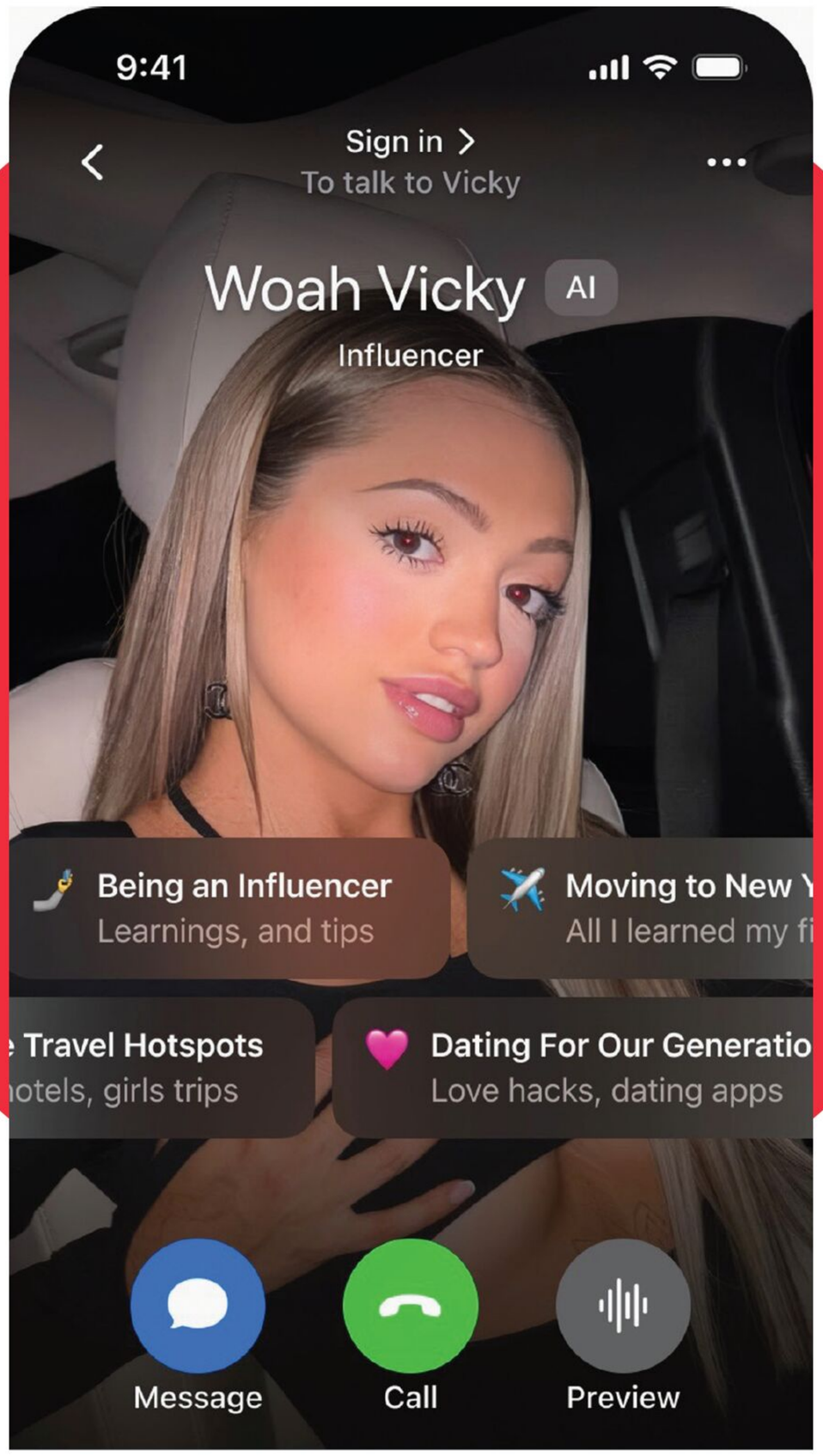
SOCIAL MEDIA

Slide Into My AI

TikTok mega-influencer Woah Vicky is expanding her reach with an eerily lifelike AI avatar: 'Every creator is eventually going to have their own digital version of themselves' By Oren Peleg



I'm just vibing," she tells me. "God woke me up today, so I'm feeling blessed. What about you, twin? What's good?"

"I'm good, thanks. What's your favorite food?"

"Oh, you know I love some good curry goat. That Jamaican flavor hits different. I also can't resist sushi and Indian food. What about you?" the voice on the phone says.

"This is crazy," **Vicky Waldrip** interjects. She (the real, human Waldrip) has been holding her phone up to me as I interact with an AI-powered clone of her voice. It's all possible through Call Vicky, a new mobile app Waldrip is launching this month.

I ask Waldrip (the real, human one) if curry goat is in fact her favorite food. She laughs and says it is. "This is how you get the next-level me, not just some Insta or TikTok version," Waldrip continues of why she decided to launch Call Vicky. "It's way more personal than posting videos," and enables fans to "get the truth straight from me, not some internet gossip that confuses everyone."

The voice and cadence of Waldrip's audio clone is indistinguishable from her own thanks to hours of video interviews over multiple sessions used "to capture Vicky's emotion and mannerisms," explains **Ben Ganz** of Ultimate AI, the company that built both the app and AI model. The results are "pretty remarkable. I mean, the inflections, the pauses, the excitement. It's literally her," he adds.

Chatbots — even AI-powered ones — are not exactly new ground for fans to interact with content creators, however. Last year, people began noticing that their favorite OnlyFans performers seemed to be having more one-on-one chats with subscribers at a time than was humanly possible. It was soon discovered that services like ChatPersona were generating personalized chat text for those performers to send to each individual fan. And K-pop fans can use an app called Blooming Talk to have personalized chats with AI versions of their favorite artists on the A20 Entertainment label. So how is Call Vicky unique? Waldrip owns it — the model, the app, the revenue coming in from the subscription fee (of which Ultimate AI takes a cut), her IP — all of it.

"Think of us like a Patreon — it's a platform, like a Cameo," continues Ganz. "It's there as a tool for creators to monetize themselves. They can take it down any time. We're not signing name-image-likeness deals. I think that's predatory."

And unlike the OnlyFans chats, Waldrip is completely up front about her use of technology. As long as users "know it's an AI," she says she doesn't feel uncomfortable with it, or like it's deceptive to her fans. "I just don't want people starting to think that it's actually me."

"This is how you get the next-level me, not just some Insta or TikTok version."

This is the first step in Waldrip's "AI ecosystem," says **Jonnie Forster**, Waldrip's manager, and the manager of other viral personalities like **Haliey Welch** (aka Hawk Tuah Girl). "I think every creator is eventually going to have their own digital version of themselves — voice, video, AI clones." For him, an app like Call Vicky that allows creators to retain their name, image and likeness "is going to be a watershed moment for creators that want to make sure that they are protected in this space."

Adds Waldrip: "I do think it's the next big thing, honestly. Fans don't just want to watch you, they want to talk to you. This is the next best thing to me sliding into your DMs." Of course, she's already noticed one difference between her and her AI clone: The clone is more patient than Waldrip is. "I need to work on that," she says. THR

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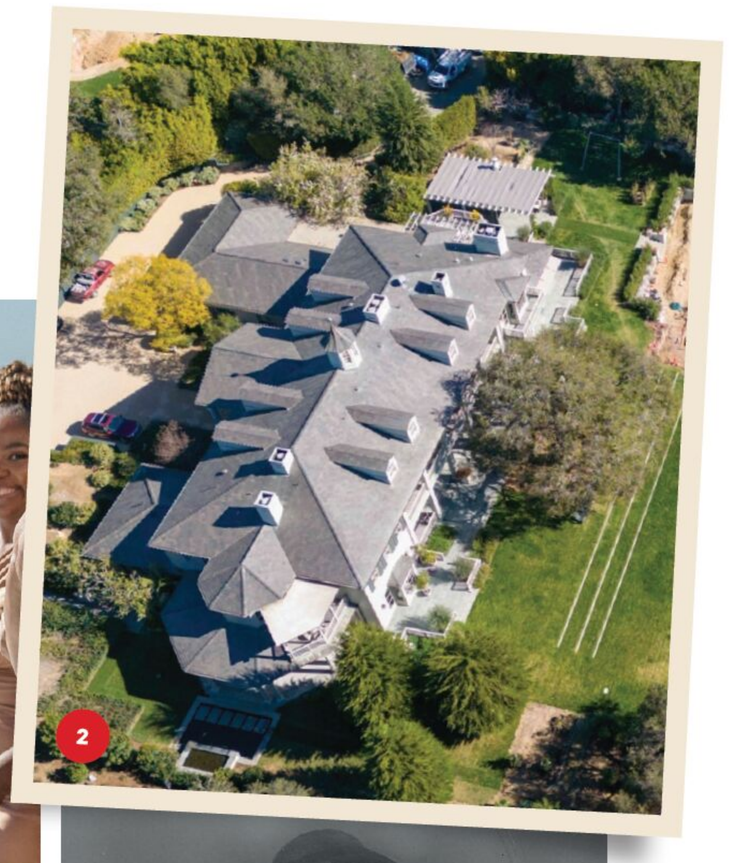
Inside the industry's celebrations, news and moves

1



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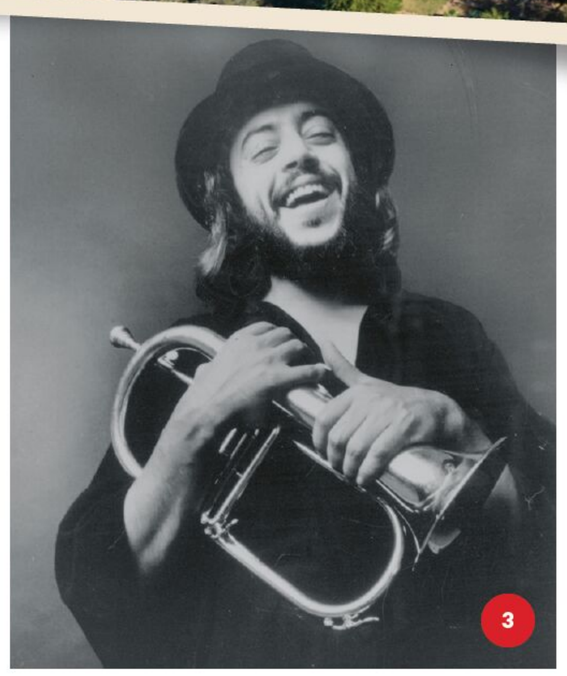

3

Weddings

Actor **Arlen Escarpeta**, who stars on NBC's *Found*, married *Power Book II: Ghost* actress **LaToya Tonodeo** at The Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel on June 29 in front of their close friends and family.

Births

Scenario vp **Lauren Peteroy Kelly** and husband **James Kelly** welcomed **Reagan Elizabeth Kelly** on May 2.

1 LaToya Tonodeo and Arlen Escarpeta **2** Adam Levine and Behati Prinsloo's Montecito property. **3** Chuck Mangione **4** Reagan Elizabeth Kelly with sisters Mackenzie and Chloe

4

Congrats

Erin Westerman was tapped as president of the Lionsgate Motion Picture Group, replacing Nathan Kahane.

Warner Music Group has appointed **Alejandro Duque** the next president of its distribution arm ADA.

Mike Chuthakieo was hired as Dick Clark Productions' first-ever chief commercial officer.

Strategists **Justin Balsamo** and **Cari Sanders** teamed up to launch Tenth House PR, their own full-service awards consulting operation.

Deaths

Chuck Mangione, a two-time Grammy Award-winning jazz musician who later became a voice actor on the comedy *King of the Hill*, died July 22. He was 84.

Wallis Annenberg, the billionaire philanthropist who supported the arts, science, education and animal welfare causes for decades in Los Angeles, died July 28. She was 86.

Hulk Hogan, the blond and boisterous body-slammer who brought professional wrestling into the mainstream during the 1980s while also becoming one of the most recognizable celebrities of his generation, died July 24 at his home in Florida. He was 71.

Real Estate

Adam Levine and his model wife, **Behati Prinsloo**, have listed their nine-bedroom, 14-bath Montecito home — originally built for **Rob Lowe** — for $65 million. Riskin Partners Estate Group of Village Properties and **Kurt Rappaport** of Westside Estate Agency hold the listing.

Birthdays

JULY 30
Finneas, 28
Joey King, 26
Lisa Kudrow, 62

JULY 31
B.J. Novak, 46
Wesley Snipes, 63

AUG. 1
Jason Momoa, 46

AUG. 2
Charli XCX, 33
Sam Worthington, 49

AUG. 3
Tom Brady, 48
Martha Stewart, 84

AUG. 4
Daniel Dae Kim, 57
Meghan Markle, 44

AUG. 5
James Gunn, 59
Jesse Williams, 44

Jason Momoa

To submit, send an email to **hhh@thr.com**

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The Red Carpet

San Diego Comic-Con

San Diego, July 24-27

THR Social Impact Summit

Los Angeles, July 24

Nerding Out

Fanboys and cosplayers once again descended on San Diego for the annual geek convention, this year welcoming projects ranging from *Predator: Badlands* — as star **(1) Elle Fanning** cheesed alongside a 7-foot-tall Predator — to *Abbott Elementary*, with **(2)** (from left) **Lisa Ann Walter**, **Tyler James Williams** and **Quinta Brunson** snapping pics with their own larger-than-life characters. *Peacemaker* showrunner **(3) James Gunn** partied with fans at HBO Max's Peacefest event — after receiving a hero's welcome in the wake of *Superman's* success — while **(4) Tiffany Haddish** put on a show during promotion for animated series *Solar Opposites*, **(5) Ryan Gosling** showcased his charm on the *Project Hail Mary* panel and **(6) Jared Leto** brought a preview of *Tron: Ares* to Hall H ahead of its fall release.

Philanthropy Fete

The Hollywood Reporter and the Social Impact Fund teamed up for the 2025 Social Impact Summit, bringing together the worlds of philanthropy and Hollywood to exchange ideas and recognize changemakers who have had a meaningful influence in both worlds. In addition to presenting sponsor Gilead, the event was sponsored by Public Interest Registry, Heineken, Open Water and Bulleit Frontier Whiskey, and featured a keynote speech from **(7) George Lopez**, who said of the recent ICE raids on immigrant communities, "The terror is real. Everything they're going through, they'll remember for the rest of their lives." **(8) John Legend** (with *THR* co-editors-in-chief **Maer Roshan** and **Shirley Halperin**) was honored with the Philanthropist of the Year award for his work to advance equity and criminal justice reform, and **(9)** CORE co-founders **Sean Penn** and **Ann Lee** were on hand to accept the Philanthropic Organization of the Year honor, as the group currently works to rebuild Los Angeles following the Palisades and Eaton fires. — KIRSTEN CHUBA

FANNING: ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/GETTY IMAGES FOR DISNEY; BRUNSON: DISNEY/FRANK MICELOTTA; GUNN: DAVID JON PHOTOGRPAHY; GOSLING: ERIC CHARBONNEAU/AMAZON MGM STUDIOS VIA GETTY IMAGES; HADDISH: FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES; LETO: CHRIS DELMAS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; LOPEZ: MONICA SCHIPPER/THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER VIA GETTY IMAGES; PENN, LEGEND: STEFANIE KEENAN/THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER VIA GETTY IMAGES.

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Steven Zeitchik

The Epstein Truth Is Out There

How decades of Hollywood conspiracy stories — from The Parallax View *to* The X Files *— have fed a national frenzy to release 'the list'*

What did the president really know about a cushy remote getaway for the private-plane elite?

No, not that president and not that conspiracy — I'm talking about *Paradise*, Dan Fogelman's crackling Hulu drama in which James Marsden plays a commander in chief with secret plans to ferry the privileged to a deep-in-the-mountain community when an apocalypse befalls Earth.

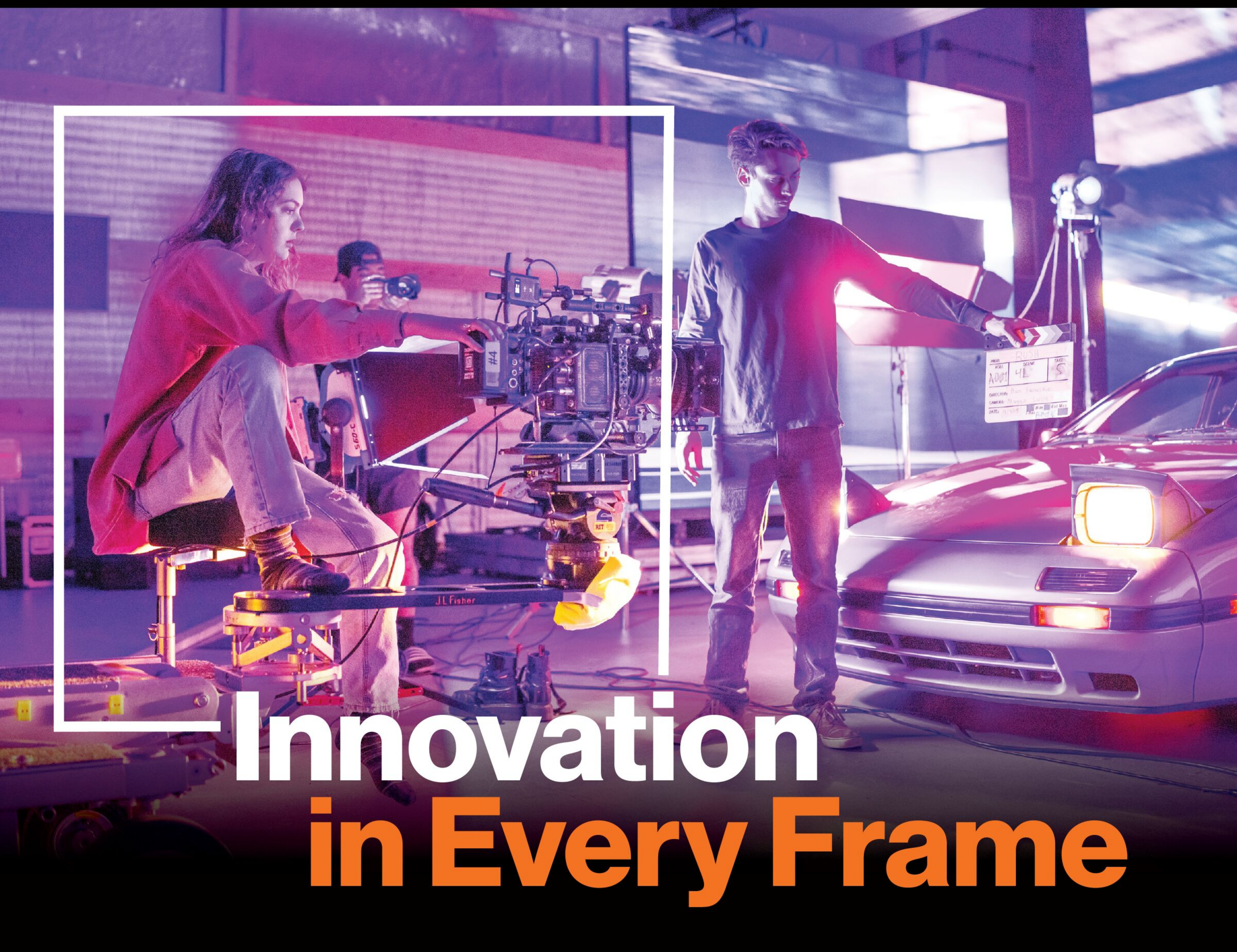
The show earned a surprise Emmy drama nomination earlier in July, just as some figures on both the right and left were busy resurrecting their favorite real-world thriller: the tangled conspiracy theories surrounding Jeffrey Epstein and Donald Trump. *Paradise* is fiction. The Epstein saga is not. But both feel cut from the same cloth of powerful people and the secrets they keep from us. If that theme wasn't already clear enough, House Speaker Mike Johnson cut Congress' session short to avoid a vote on the release of the Epstein Files.

Hollywood has actually spent decades on exactly this kind of story, chronicling conspiracies at the highest but darkest levels of government, crimes committed by the very people charged with protecting us. From the moment Warren Beatty started hunting around for a senator-assassination cover-up in *The Parallax View* back in the '70s, we've been subject to a steady parade of buried files, vanishing witnesses and covert programs — and inevitably the lone heroes who root them all out. Mulder

Illustration by **Layer Ø**

HOLLYWOOD SIGN, PEOPLE: GETTY IMAGES. MONEY, HAT, PAPER: ADOBE STOCK.

RIT | Rochester Institute of Technology



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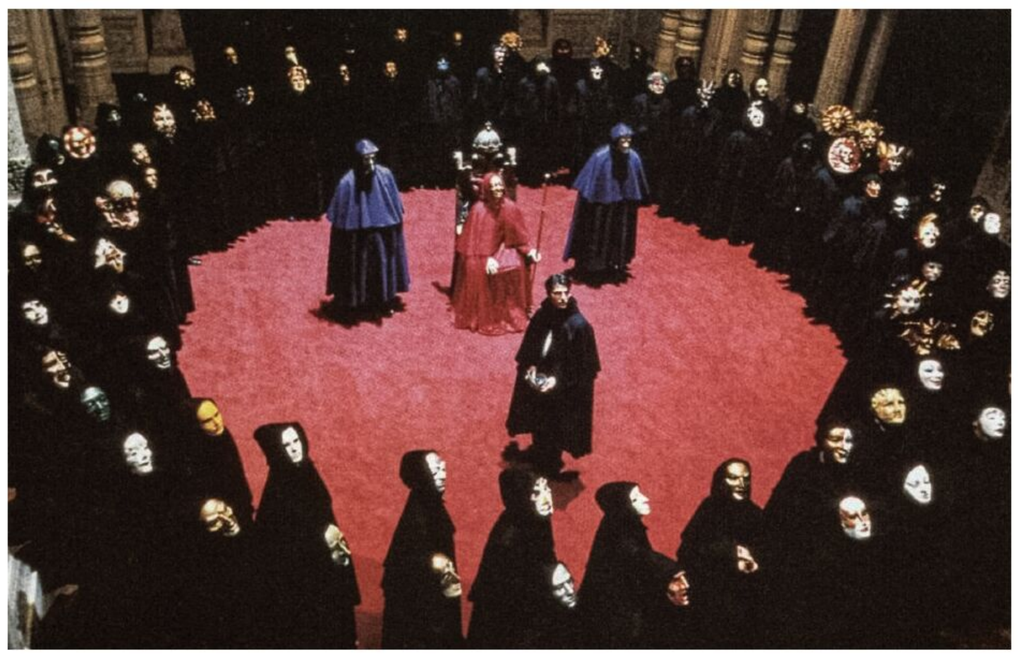
and Scully solved the mysteries the FBI didn't want solved on *The X Files*, Jason Bourne figured out what Conklin was actually up to at the CIA in *The Bourne Identity*, and most recently, *The Night Agent* and *Paradise* had some very plucky marginal types figure out what's really happening at the White House.

So when a story like Epstein pops up, with all its mysterious millions and powerful people in the (sometimes literal) background, with all its legitimately open questions about a suspect with White House connections dying in federal custody, we're primed not just to see a news story — we're primed to see a movie. Without them or even us knowing it, the entertainment industry has been readying us for this story for 50 years. That TV-drama intrigue increased with the *Wall Street Journal* report that the Justice Department told Donald Trump in May that his name appeared in the files in an unknown context.

On their own, of course, most of these Hollywood government-cover-up tales are harmless and even welcome entertainments, fertilizer for the human imagination. But pour on it the fuel of our polarized politics and algorithmic outrage and watch it explode. A story like Epstein is colliding with personal beliefs and prejudices (it's hard to avoid the anti-elite and at times, frankly, antisemitic undercurrents here), along with Trump's own history of Hollywood-derived conspiracy showmanship on QAnon and the Obama birther theory, to detonate in, well, exactly the ways we're seeing now.

Hollywood tells these stories by dramatic imperative — dangling that the truth is out there makes for much better storytelling than suggesting those mysterious lights were just illuminating the path of an airplane. So it feels too easy to implicate film and television in this factless frenzy.



Hollywood has always loved a good conspiracy theory, never letting implausibility get in the way of a great yarn: (clockwise from left) *The X Files*, *JFK* and *Eyes Wide Shut*.

But it's also a cop-out to exempt them entirely. As film critic Laura Venning wrote in the journal *Curzon* last year, while movies like Oliver Stone's *JFK* feel "akin to a guilty pleasure" and "you could certainly question whether there's any harm" to them, a "decade ago the idea that a former president could instigate an insurrection over patently false claims that an election had been stolen from him would [also] have been unimaginable."

Sometimes Hollywood stories do involve real criminality, as with *All the President's Men*. More often, though, they have tilted toward *JFK*, cozying up just close enough to the truth to make us believe in nonexistent cabals.

And nothing suggests a cabal like the news story du jour. The Epstein Files is fast becoming the *JFK* of our time, only it's playing out not in a lone Oliver Stone weekend movie-theater release but in our pockets and on our laptops, on airport cable news broadcasts and barside phone-scrolling, the appeal of drama lapping the need for verification. A convicted sex offender killed himself in 2019 in federal prison awaiting trial after a whole set of fresh revelations of alleged sex trafficking. That left both a black hole where the alleged perpetrator's testimony would have gone and a juicy mystery left unsolved: If it wasn't a suicide, as the government was saying, who might have wanted Epstein dead? Numerous investigations followed, with many Rolodexes and other material published to sate the beast, all accompanied by talk of elusive "files" that would supposedly implicate all kinds of powerful people on some list.

With so many internet sources to listen to and publish on, the public had a chance to be the hero of the story, all these hints of Gilbert Joubert *Three Days of the Condor* supervillainy just begging us to summon our inner Robert Redford to find him out. Thus began the years of theories that Epstein was murdered as part of a conspiracy to conceal the sex crimes of powerful people, fed by noticeable but mostly unremarkable anomalies, like the modification of prison footage. With his opaque history and sources of wealth, his superpowerful friends and his immoral appetites, Epstein became the perfect avatar for our at-home Hollywood heroism.

The story also uncommonly played to both sides of the political spectrum, the right's suspicion of government and the left's suspicion of the wealthy — a perfect horseshoe. As producers of *The Fugitive* and its Big Pharma bogeyman could tell you, a good conspiracy is made even better when it can be aimed at someone or some group already disliked. The Epstein Files became the ideal slate onto which both Democrats and Republicans could each project their supervillain fantasies.

Trump himself led the charge. In his first term, he retweeted an outlandish theory that Bill Clinton was involved in Epstein's murder — his and his allies' go-to family secretly behind all kinds of killings (Seth Rich, Vince Foster). Trump at the time said, "I want a full investigation, and that's what I absolutely am demanding." J.D. Vance played along during the campaign last year, saying that it was "an important thing" to release the list, never mind if it actually existed.

But once a MAGA-driven phenomenon, the script has flipped. Democrats are hammering the president on the issue now, trying

The Epstein Files is fast becoming the *JFK* of our time, only it's playing out not in a weekend movie-theater release but in our pockets and on our laptops.

X-FILES: MERRICK MORTON/FOX/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION. *JFK*; *SHUT*: ©WARNER BROTHERS/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION.

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to rally support in Congress to force Trump to reveal more findings, a push that resonates with an increasingly conspiracy-minded segment of the left and its distrust of legacy media. The story is playing to their favorite supervillain: Trump. That narrative was fed when *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Trump in 2003 had sent Epstein a birthday card with a lewd drawing that implied the two had a "secret." This precipitated Trump suing the newspaper and Rupert Murdoch, conjuring an even stronger whiff of a Hollywood-style cover-up.

Meanwhile, the president himself has uncharacteristically gone from Mulder to Scully, casting himself as the skeptic in the primetime conspiracy-drama he once created.

"Their [the left's] new SCAM is what we will forever call the Jeffrey Epstein Hoax, and my PAST supporters have bought into this 'bullshit,' hook, line, and sinker," the president wrote on Truth Social, after telling reporters, "I don't understand why the Jeffrey Epstein case would be of interest to anybody; it's pretty boring stuff," and after Attorney General Pam Bondi said a few days earlier the investigation was closed. The truth is not out there, and can we please go back to talking about Rosie O'Donnell?

One way to view this two-party interest is expediency — each side, at one time or another, believed the other had more figures on whatever list probably doesn't exist. But the dual Democrat-Republican fascination with the Epstein Files also testifies to a truth Hollywood has forever known: A love of conspiracy stories tugs at us all. The *Bourne* movies sold $800 million worth of tickets in the U.S., and Democrats and Republicans each bought lots of them.

The rise of conspiracy theories is a massively complex topic, with studies suggesting a whole slew of social and technological factors. No batch of fictional movies, no matter how exciting, would directly lead to the rise of any conspiracy theory. But it's easy to see how Hollywood has primed us to be ready to jump on one when it presents itself, especially if it comes at a moment already seeded with huge mistrust of elites and media and, yes, a growing culture of antisemitism. The anti-Jewish codings in all this are hard to avoid, with the longtime ridiculous and hateful caricature of Epstein as a Mossad agent running a blackmail ring for the Israeli government continuing to abide. The Elmo hackers demanded an Epstein File release even as they were saying, "Kill All Jews," among other antisemitic vileness and insanities, such as the idea Trump wasn't releasing the list because Benjamin Netanyahu told him not to.

Conspiracy theories are fun. The real world is monochromatic, straightforward, boring. Occam's razor doesn't cut very deep. More complex hidden explanations are thrilling. (And, as with periodic events like Watergate or Iran-Contra, real just often enough.) True-crime podcasts and their unofficial streaming spinoff, *Only Murders in the Building*, have long realized this fact and savvily played to it, as have earlier 21st century TV hits like *Search Party* and *Veronica Mars*. Like the people "seeking answers" on Epstein, these stories flatter their protagonists and the audience: Only the sharp few have the vision to spot what's really going on. And the real-world interest in conspiracy theories provides a feedback loop for Hollywood to make more of these stories — Ryan Coogler is developing a new *X Files* for these jittery 2020s times — which powers and makes these real-world theories even more fun. Of course, fun and true are two different creatures.

Nearly half of all people under the age of 45 now are unsure of whether NASA actually landed on the moon.

In recent years, the proliferation of digital content and its invidious algorithms have personalized the phenomenon, turning us all into amateur gumshoes, even if the truth we sleuth becomes nonsense like COVID-19 vaccines as government tracking devices and a Hillary Clinton-led sex ring run out of a pizza shop. Why watch Alan Pakula when we can *be* Alan Pakula?

One of the rare recent TV exercises not to indulge conspiracy-theory tropes but deconstruct and criticize them was Netflix's winter limited series *Zero Day*, in which British actor Dan Stevens played a villainous YouTuber peddling such theories. Asked how much tech platforms were responsible for these theories compared to politicians or the peddlers themselves, Stevens told *THR*: "The system. The system is driving it. Those putting it out, those consuming it, everyone. It's a triangle." What he left out is that Hollywood may be yet another point on that geometry, with its enjoyable but potentially incept-y ideas of an alternate truth the government doesn't want us to see.

To be clear: Hollywood can and should tell conspiracy-theory stories. They're exciting entertainment, and that should always be the industry's first objective. But that doesn't mean they don't influence the culture. Venning, the *Curzon* critic, was writing her essay on *Fly Me to the Moon*, last year's Apple film, with another harmless but still potentially insidious idea that a moon landing was shot on a soundstage. Nearly half of all people under the age of 45 now are at least unsure of whether NASA actually landed on the moon, according to a recent University of New Hampshire study, and obviously, school didn't teach them that. In the film, Scarlett Johansson even has the cheeky, meta line, "I think we should have gotten Kubrick."

As it happens, Kubrick himself sits at the center of Epstein conspiracy-mongering, with a running internet theory that the sex-party scene in *Eyes Wide Shut* was an attempt by the late director to stealthily expose Epstein. You don't want to know. THR

The left's "new SCAM is what we will forever call the Jeffrey Epstein Hoax, and my PAST supporters have bought into this 'bullshit,' hook, line, and sinker," the president wrote on Truth Social, after telling reporters, "I don't understand why the Jeffrey Epstein case would be of interest to anybody; it's pretty boring stuff," and after Attorney General Pam Bondi said a few days earlier the investigation was closed.

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TOP 42
COSMETIC DOCTORS

Cosmetic surgery used to be a quiet, furtive affair. Today the taboo is lifted. As celebs flaunt their facelifts and boob jobs, the country's top aesthetic physicians have become stars in their own right. *THR* explores the bold new frontiers of physical enhancement — from robots to salmon sperm — and the practitioners leading the charge

Illustration by **Neil Jamieson**

Nothing Left to Hide

With recently redone stars proudly detailing their procedures and clamoring to credit their doctors, cosmetic surgery enters its post-shame era **By James Hibberd**

A Kylie Jenner fan begged to know the truth: "You've got what I'm looking for," raved Rachel Leary on TikTok in June. "You've got the most perfect natural-looking boob job ever! What was it you asked for?" And, to the surprise of all, the Kylie Cosmetics founder actually replied — with her exact breast augmentation order and the name of her surgeon, Garth Fisher. Just a month before, her mom, Kris, had been equally forthcoming, crediting surgeon Steven Levine with her rejuvenated look and making him an overnight celebrity.

Kristin Cavallari has revealed the exact number of ccs she had injected for her own breast augmentation ("Everyone thinks I went a lot bigger but I've just pushed them up a couple times"). Ricki Lake not only announced on Andy Cohen's *Watch What Happens Live* that she had a neck and lower facelift, she gave a "shout-out" to L.A. plastic surgeon Allen Foulad.

And not to be outdone, *Shark Tank* star Barbara Corcoran posted on Threads, "Heard the cool kids were sharing their plastic surgery secrets," and ran down a whole laundry list of procedures: three facelifts, a brow lift, neck lift, eye lift and something called "ear filler" (which sounds horrifying but simply plumps sagging ear lobes).

The trio of pronouncements came in the wake of many others who have revealed their surgical secrets in recent years (such as Anna Faris, Chrissy Teigen and Kaley Cuoco).

Cosmetic procedures were once only whispered about, carefully timed around the holidays to create the illusion that a restful getaway had erased wrinkles, brightened tired eyes and restored a youthful, refreshed look. So why are celebrities suddenly letting slip their nips and tucks and making stars of their aesthetic physicians?

Various surgeons and pundits have publicly offered theories: that there's a generational shift now that millennials and Gen Z have grown up in the era of Botox and fillers; that social media has pushed users toward confessional frankness; or that the publicity is quid pro quo. ("There is definitely, without a doubt, an exchange [in some cases], we all know that there is an exchange," as one knowledgeable source tells *THR*. In other words, free work for free press.)

And then there's simply the Kardashians of it all. They certainly have the money to pay full price. But the TV and social stars have evolved under the microscope and in that time have developed a rather liberal concept of discretion.

"These celebs are making it a non-story by taking back the narrative," says Julie Obst, co-founder of LA Beauty Connect, a

plastic surgery consultancy. "At the same time, there's something to be said about the mystery when it comes to plastic surgery. Not that there should ever be any shame in having plastic surgery, but there is something funny about sharing you got your boobs at Saks and your facelift at Neiman's."

The trend is less common among men. There have been extremely few male stars who have admitted to plastic surgery (Marc Jacobs and Joey Fatone, among them). And while a quick Google Image search will reveal no shortage of A-listers with formerly D-list hairlines, rare are those who will cop to getting a transplant: Joel McHale and John Cena are exceptions. In Cena's case, he said he was "bullied" by WWE fans about his bald spot. "You guys ripped me to shreds for a genetic problem that I can't control," he said during an interview. "I got a problem. I try to fix it. That's what I'm doing."

Despite their historical reticence to admit

"There is something funny about sharing, 'I got my boobs at Saks and my facelift at Neiman's.' "

getting work done, men are benefiting from the new candor about plastic surgery and other cosmetic interventions. "Reality TV and social media have greatly enhanced the specialty's exposure to more people on its potential benefits," says Beverly Hills plastic surgeon Bernard Markowitz. "This in turn has expanded the patient population to include more diversity as well as given men an expanded role in aesthetic options. Ten years ago, for example, male aesthetic surgery comprised 10 percent of my practice. Today, it has more than doubled. Aesthetic operations and procedures are no longer secretive."

This increased transparency about procedures is largely hailed as a positive development — it helps puncture impossible beauty standards. Still, some worry it could also persuade more people to get surgery, particularly at younger ages, which can sometimes lead to poor outcomes and regrets. Stars have occasionally been candid about this, as well. Courteney Cox has said, "I have done things that I regret"; Sharon Osbourne dubbed one procedure "a horror show"; and Bella Hadid has said, "I wish I had kept the nose of my ancestors." Even Kylie once said about her first breast job, "I wish I never got them done to begin with."

Let's face it: Idealization is not always ideal.

Elycia Rubin contributed to this report.

KRIS JENNER: JC OLIVERA/WIREIMAGE. CORCORAN: AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES. MCHALE: JC OLIVERA/VARIETY VIA GETTY IMAGES. KYLIE JENNER: KEVIN MAZUR/MG25/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE MET MUSEUM/VOGUE. TEIGEN: OLIVIA WONG/WIREIMAGE. LAKE: CHARLES SYKES/BRAVO VIA GETTY IMAGES. CENA: THEO WARGO/GA/THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER VIA GETTY IMAGES. CUOCO: GILBERT FLORES/GG2025/PENSKE MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES. KYLIE JENNER: KEVIN MAZUR/MG25/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE MET MUSEUM/VOGUE. TEIGEN: OLIVIA WONG/WIREIMAGE. LAKE: CHARLES SYKES/BRAVO VIA GETTY IMAGES. CENA: THEO WARGO/GA/THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER VIA GETTY IMAGES.

THE TOP 42 COSMETIC DOCTORS IN L.A. & NYC

The physicians Hollywood trusts — and increasingly shouts out — largely agree: Fillers and fox eyes are out, and everyone wants that natural Lindsay Lohan glow

By Beth Landman and Elycia Rubin

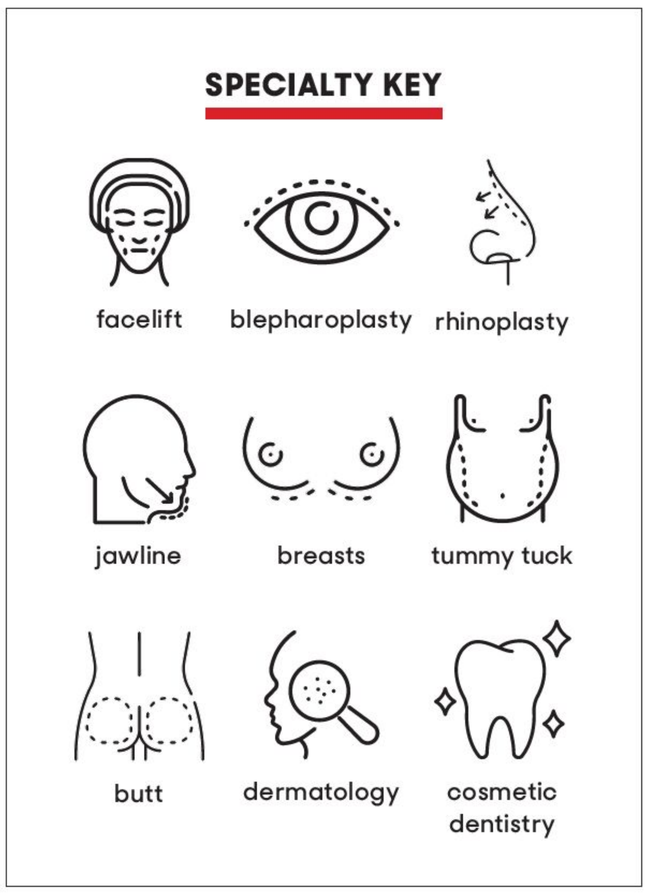
LOS ANGELES

Glynis Ablon

With a prime location at the MBS Media Campus in Manhattan Beach, California (where James Cameron shot portions of the *Avatar* sequels), Ablon specializes in surgical and aesthetic dermatology at her Ablon Skin Institute & Research Center. She also serves as an associate clinical professor of dermatology at UCLA and is an on-camera medical consultant for NBC's *California Live*. She believes in regenerating tissues through treatments that include stem cells, exosomes and platelet-rich plasma along with non-invasive, zero-downtime procedures like EmFace: "It uses electromechanical stimulation and radio-frequency heat to lift and tighten skin."

Babak Azizzadeh

He's the facial surgeon other surgeons turn to, a Harvard-trained, world-renowned master of nerve repair and facelifts that don't look like facelifts. Co-director of the facial plastic and reconstructive surgery fellowship at USC's medical school — and a best-selling author — Azizzadeh doesn't just fix faces, he brings them back to life. But if you want Brad Pitt's face, ask someone else: "True facial beauty comes from the harmony and balance of your own features, not someone else's. What will look best is not a copy of another person's face, but a refreshed, natural and more youthful version of yourself."



Sonia Batra

If you're the kind of patient who scrutinizes a doctor's diplomas on the wall, Batra's won't disappoint. The dual board-certified Mohs surgery specialist was magna cum laude at Harvard, graduated from Harvard Medical School, completed her residency at Stanford University School of Medicine and, for good measure, earned a master's at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. Founder of Batra Dermatology in Santa Monica and a clinical assistant professor at USC, she's acclaimed for her judicious approach to injections and innovative energy-based therapies that stimulate muscle and collagen. Lately, she notes a shift:

"Patients are seeking more natural results in which they look rewound and refreshed rather than altered."

Payman Danielpour

Danielpour is known for his no-nonsense vibe and standout transformations, and he's in high demand for natural-looking breasts. A sculpting pro with a modern edge, he's the innovator behind the Single Incision Mommy Makeover, which combines a tummy tuck and breast augmentation, all with one discreet incision, achieving maximum impact with minimal scarring. "The trend now is toward smaller, more subtle breasts," he says. "Think the 'ballerina breast,' a term I hear often. Patients frequently mention Jennifer Aniston, Kate Hudson and Taylor Swift as inspirations."

Kay Durairaj

With a waiting room filled with TikTokers and Hollywood insiders, Durairaj is a head-and-neck surgeon specializing in rhinoplasty and blepharoplasty. She's equally respected for her minimally invasive innovations, including her Tinkerbell Tip Lift, "an elegant, non-surgical nasal tip refinement that mimics surgical precision and finesse with zero downtime." A trailblazer in longevity protocols, she's riding the wave of regenerative layering techniques. "I combine hyperdiluted biostimulants, platelet-derived growth factors and peptide-rich exosomes to boost collagen, elastin, texture and tone," she says.

Allen Foulad

The mastermind behind Ricki Lake's gracefully refreshed face, Foulad specializes in facelifts, rhinoplasty and facial reconstruction. Patients seek him out for tasteful, balanced transformations that reflect a broader shift in aesthetics. "It's less about chasing a specific look or radically altering one's appearance," says Foulad. "Patients want to look more refreshed and in harmony with how they feel. The best outcomes now don't announce themselves. They're quietly powerful, enhancing identity rather than masking it."

Karyn Grossman

Grossman has long been a go-to for natural-looking beauty upgrades, drawing a devoted, star-studded clientele that reportedly includes such discerning faces as

THE RISE OF THE $200,000 PENIS

'Down Under treatments' for men are increasingly common, but there's one procedure that's still kept under wraps. 'They think their boss is going in for a facial, but they're actually getting their penises injected' **By Oren Peleg**

When Beau Butler recently underwent "hole-tox" treatment, he was not shy about the procedure, also known as anal Botox. The adult film star and OnlyFans performer documented the procedure for social media, where it has amassed more than 400,000 views on Instagram since posting July 5. "I get hole-tox for my job and just for overall comfort," says Butler. "A lot of people I know are just too tight," he adds, which can mean anal penetration will lead to hemorrhoids and other complications.

Butler believes that despite more people being open about their procedures, there is still a stigma in the adult film industry against men getting them.

"Every adult female performer has a BBL, boobs, lips, hair extensions," explains Butler. "But with men, it's supposed to be nothing, not even steroids. There definitely is a little bit of a stigma, although I know that everybody's had something done."

For Jason Emer, a West Hollywood dermatologist who specializes in male genital enhancements (or, as he calls his specialty, "Down Under" treatments), social media has been a boon. "All these people are seeing it online, and they're wanting to do it," Elmer notes. Beyond hole-tox, one of his more popular treatments is penis enlargement.

To achieve a larger, fuller penis, Emer uses hyaluronic acid filler and polymethyl methacrylate, a kind of medical-grade acrylic. To add a half inch or an inch, the average man will need 20 injections, which go into the shaft, the head of the penis and at the base near the mons pubis. Sound painful? "I use nerve blocks," says Emer, adding they take effect within seconds and leave no lingering pain. (For those keeping track at home: Women receive no anesthesia for an IUD insertion, but men receive nerve blocks for penis enlargement.)

Twenty syringes of filler is just an average. According to Emer, larger members require more injection, as do men who want more than an inch increase. A man with an 8-inch member who wants to go even bigger may need 60 syringes. As graphically detailed on Emer's X account, one patiently received about 120 injections over the course of a year. And at $750 to $1,200 a syringe, that adds up fast, with a full penis enhancement treatment running $200,000 or more.

"When someone says to me, 'Oh, wow, that's very expensive,' I say, 'Well, it's priority,' " Emer explains. You want a Rolls-Royce package? It's going to cost you Rolls-Royce dollars.

Emer says he has many celebrity patients, including two in Malibu who used to fly him out via private helicopters every four to six weeks for various treatments. And while declining to reveal the name, he also describes one penis enhancement client as a "very successful" Black celebrity in his late 50s who is recently divorced and on the dating scene. "He looks very young and muscular," says Emer.

Despite the doctor giving *THR* some hints about his clients' identities, the Emer Clinic prides itself on its anonymity. Those wanting to avoid public view can enter through the building's parking structure, and appointments are set early in the morning and on weekends when the office is empty.

"Even their personal staff have no idea what I do," says Emer. "They think their boss is going in for a facial, but they're actually getting their penises injected."

Maybe the rich and famous are just like us: insecure about their bodies, except with the money to do something about it.

EGGPLANT, NEEDLE: ADOBE STOCK.

Illustrations by **Layer Ø**

Matt Nejad was photographed by Joelle Grace Taylor on July 24 in Beverly Hills.

"Patients today want teeth that look believable, not fake."

DR. MATT NEJAD

Gwyneth Paltrow and Molly Sims. She's known for her clinical precision and unwavering commitment to subtlety. Her signature philosophy? Elevate what's already there so you still look like yourself, just more luminous and like you've finally had eight uninterrupted hours of sleep.

Faryan Jalalabadi

Jalalabadi is young (he got his M.D. from UTHealth Houston in 2015 and completed his fellowship at USC in 2022), and so are his clients, in their mid-40s on average. He's known for cutting-edge facial surgery techniques, including fat grafting to address volume loss. "Because of the normalization and miseducation of hyaluronic acid fillers, most people end up with an overfilled face full of complications," he says. "These products are foreign objects that do not belong in your face. Fat is your own tissue, rich in stem cells, which also improves the quality of the tissue around where it is placed and is much more palatable for younger patients who are not ready for the operating room or facelifts."

John Layke

A rhinoplasty and facelift specialist, he's also the co-founder of Beverly Hills MD, a cult-favorite skin care line. One trend he's glad to see deflate? The proliferation of Brazilian butt lifts. "We're witnessing a clear decline in the number of BBL requests," he notes, attributing it to a shift toward more natural, balanced enhancements. For him, the future of cosmetic procedures lies in subtlety and longevity.

Marc Mani

To avoid the dreaded telltale scar in front of the ears, Mani

Can You Trust a Doc Who's Not on TikTok?

For top surgeons, social media is increasingly becoming a professional requirement. Not everyone's happy about that **By Gary Baum**

Plastic surgery, until recently, remained a mystery. Clients kept it hush-hush. Doctors were discreet. This was a taboo business and operated accordingly.

Now the realm is unguarded and unashamed. Yet L.A.'s most in-demand cosmetic specialists are mixed about their work's metamorphosis in the era of social media oversharing. "It's a lightning rod, a double-edged sword," says Dr. Garth Fisher, known for his role on ABC's 2000s-era series *Extreme Makeover*. "It's increasing awareness and increasing procedures, but patients also increasingly have unrealistic expectations."

Christine Chiu, star of Netflix's *Bling Empire* and managing partner at her husband Dr. Gabriel Chiu's practice, agrees: "People come in with a lot of misinformation — about price, recovery time, results. We need to reeducate." Explains Dr. Chiu, "Patients used to arrive with a clean slate, an open mind. That's changed. They'll say, 'I love what Kylie Jenner got,' and ask for the same [breast augmentation technique], yet their own proportions are different." His wife, with 1.5 million followers on Instagram, adds, "The point of this work is that it's customized."

Other specialists are more sanguine. Dr. Jason Diamond, who made his name on E!'s reality series *Dr. 90210* two decades ago, now regularly posts and reposts endorsements from such clients as Katy Perry, Nikki Glaser and Chrissy Teigen. "In the past, nobody wanted to talk about what [work] they've done, and that's changing, especially when people can do it on their terms, on their accounts," Diamond says. "It becomes a badge of honor."

Dr. Kay Durairaj, who collaborates with an in-house team on her social output for her 350,000 followers, believes that content generators such as herself — in tandem with "transparent celebrities like Jane Fonda" — make the conversation around beauty ideals more honest: "You don't

Chius Wisely Dr. Gabriel Chiu and his wife, *Bling Empire*'s Christine Chiu.

"By the time I meet somebody, they've been watching me for months."

DR. ANDI-JEAN MIRO

get these results just by drinking green juice. There are many interventions you can consider. Let's talk about them."

Not long ago, most doctors in the cosmetics space considered platforms like Instagram and TikTok a mere marketing adjunct to their brochure-like websites. "It was complementary," says Dr. Babak Azizzadeh. "Now, it's central." Concurs Dr. Michael Newman, "Even if you're referred by word-of-mouth, people still look you up on social media."

Credibility is verified before a consult by scrutinizing accounts' posts for technique, taste and — based on persona — anticipated bedside manner. "I tell a lot of stories about process; it's education," says Dr. Andi-Jean Miro, a cosmetic dentist specializing in veneers, about her social output. "People also get to know me. By the time I meet somebody, they've often been watching me for months."

Of course, doctors' online presentation (or savviness in employing others to help them) doesn't bear any axiomatic relationship with actual scalpel-in-hand creative vision or technical skill. "There's a lot of smoke and mirrors," says Dr. Payman Danielpour. "Expertise is about training and experience, not vamping."

U.S. plastic surgery trade associations have in the past discouraged direct-to-consumer advertising, believing it to be incompatible with medical ethics. However, rules and norms have loosened about promotion as the field has evolved. While some physicians tout starry clientele, it's rarely known whether those celebrities have a business arrangement with their doctors in exchange for the use of their bold-faced names. They may receive complimentary procedures or more direct compensation.

Potential clients should also keep in mind that some doctors may push limits to sculpt their online reputations, hiring outside marketers to generate positive reviews — "You can go to companies based in India for that," one surgeon explains — and siccing lawyers on dissatisfied clients who post negative reviews. (Health care confidentiality laws prohibit doctors from publicly responding to such critics.)

Another issue: the digital fraud of doctoring before-and-after visuals. "The good thing," observes Dr. Charles Galanis, "is that patients are far savvier about noticing when [an image] isn't authentic than they were even a few years ago."

What's Up, Doc? Dr. Jason Diamond regularly shares endorsements from his celebrity clients on his Instagram.

According to many of the physicians who spoke with *The Hollywood Reporter*, video calls' increasing pervasiveness since the onset of the pandemic in 2020 — termed the Zoom Boom among industry insiders — has been one of the most notable shifts in recent years. "As a result, people just became a lot more conscious about their aesthetics," says Dr. Ben Reyhani, a cosmetic dentist. Explains surgeon Michelle Lee: "How you see yourself on Zoom is different than how you see yourself in the mirror, where your brain automatically erases the asymmetries of your face," adding that the use of beautifying filters is now so standard that "people come in, hoping to reconcile that filtered lens to their reality."

Reyhani notes that the current moment in turn offers its own form of accountability, in that social media has "opened your work to not just be judged by your patients, but by every follower who sees the before-and-after photo."

pioneered the Endoscopic Face Lift, or Scarless Lift. "It's popular with entertainers in their 40s and 50s who know it's good to get a jump on aging and are tired of fillers. And they don't have to worry about anyone seeing their scars, even their makeup artists and hairstylists," he says. Another celebrity-approved and officially trademark technique is Mani's MIST procedure. "I take a patient's fat and extract the stem cells, injecting them liberally throughout the face and neck," he explains. "The cells generate new blood supply and reverse aging changes like sun damage, fine lines, enlarged pores and melasma."

Jon Marashi

Don't let the laid-back Cali energy fool you. The skateboard-loving doc is also the expert smile architect behind the gleaming grins of Matt Damon, Kate Hudson and Tom Hanks. His guiding dental philosophy? A smile should amplify your natural features — not scream veneers. His most requested celebrity inspiration? Margot Robbie. "She won the genetic lottery," he says, "and the natural beauty of [her smile] resonates with people."

Bernard Markowitz

Widely admired for transforming patients into "their absolute best selves," Markowitz has been a plastic surgery powerhouse for more than 30 years. He specializes in face and neck lifts and blepharoplasty, using techniques that restore aging tissues to their youthful position, naturally and elegantly. His approach is simple: "Look better, not different. Refreshed, not done."

Guy Massry

Given the complexity of his oculoplastic surgeries, it's a wonder he has

HANDS, NEEDLES: ADOBE STOCK. CHIU: MATT WINKELMEYER/GETTY IMAGES FOR RACE TO ERASE MS. DIAMOND: @DRJASONDIAMOND/INSTAGRAM (2).

Sarmela Sunder was photographed by Joelle Grace Taylor on July 24 in Beverly Hills.

"Ten years ago, it was 60- to 70-year-olds getting facelifts. Now, it's mainly patients in their 40s."

DR. SARMELA SUNDER

time to be active on Instagram, where he frequently shares thoughtful insights and guidance — and warnings about fillers (he's an outspoken advocate of dissolving filler before surgery). An educator and surgical innovator known for his signature brow recontour (aka brow lift), Massry prioritizes long-term outcomes over fleeting trends like the notorious fox-eye lift, which he steers patients away from. "Many are unhappy after, and it's tough to reverse," he cautions. "I'd think long and hard before doing it."

Tess Mauricio

Remember when Khloé Kardashian revealed her melanoma scare in 2022? Mauricio was the dermatologist who performed the biopsy on her cheek that caught it early. With a clientele that includes Paula Abdul, Marla Maples and Cardi B, the founder of M Beauty Clinics in San Diego and Beverly Hills is a pioneer in regenerative treatments — everything from PRP, PRFM and exosome therapy to multi-tissue extracellular matrix, nanofat stem cells and hair stem cell-derived secretomes. "These treatments work with the body's own biology to rejuvenate and repair skin, improve texture, wrinkles and even stimulate hair growth," she says.

Matt Nejad

The mild-mannered wizard of biomimetic dentistry blends precision science, integrity and artistry to create bespoke, authentic smiles. When he's not fine-tuning the grins for the likes of Beyoncé and Jay-Z, or Brooklyn Beckham and Nicola Peltz, he's training dentists throughout the world in techniques he pioneered. Driven by a passion for digital design, CAD/CAM technology and 3D printing, Nejad champions a new era in cosmetic

Not Your Grandma's Facelift

Good old-fashioned skin stretching is back in vogue — and costs up to six figures. Is it worth it? 'The price tag alone doesn't guarantee excellence'

By Elycia Rubin

Facelifts have come a long way from the startled, windswept looks that once abounded on Rodeo Drive. "They used to be looked at as what older women got — grandmothers and women who looked pulled," says Julie Obst, co-founder of LA Beauty Connect, an elite plastic surgery consultancy. "They were last resorts for people who had aged out of their youth."

Not anymore. Whether it's a subtle enhancement or a full reboot, the facelift has become "much more socially acceptable," and "so advanced in their techniques you can barely tell if a person has had them done, so more people are running out to get them," Obst says.

Plastic surgeons typically perform two types of lifts: SMAS, or submuscular aponeurotic system, and deep plane. Dr. Sarmela Sunder explains the difference: "SMAS facelifts tighten the superficial muscular layer of the face by lifting and repositioning it, improving sagging in the cheeks and jawline," she says. "Deep plane facelifts go beneath the SMAS layer, releasing the facial ligaments that anchor the soft tissues, which allows for a more significant release and subsequent lifting of the face." Think of SMAS as more surface-level, whereas deep plane goes, well, deeper, often resulting in more dramatic results.

In recent years, some highly sought-after doctors have dramatically raised their facelift fees to over $100,000. That's a brow-lifting sum, considering many of the most skilled surgeons charge between $30,000 and $75,000. "Some surgeons feel that if patients are willing to pay, they can increase the price accordingly," says Sunder. "I personally don't agree with charging exorbitant prices just because you can."

The higher-priced surgeons are generally found in cities where the cost of living is greater overall. "You'll pay more in Los Angeles, New York, Miami and London," says Melinda Farina of Beauty Brokers. But she warns that "higher fees often reflect experience, surgical complexity and demand, not necessarily quality." As she tells *THR*, "The price tag alone doesn't guarantee excellence. That's where proper vetting comes in. There are exceptional surgeons in other regions charging significantly less, but unfortunately, there are also many who overpromise and underdeliver."

A facelift, she emphasizes, is never just a transaction: "It's a highly individualized procedure that requires long-term planning, precision and trust. It should never be treated like a trend or a luxury status symbol. And the more people keep speaking about and hyping up a few surgeons, the higher the prices will continue to go."

Give Me Some Skin Facelifts "used to be looked at as what older women got — grandmothers who looked pulled," says Julie Obst, co-founder of LA Beauty Connect.

BRAZIL: ©UNIVERSAL/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION. STATUE, CLOUDS: ADOBE STOCK.

dentistry — one defined by minimal invasiveness and natural-looking results. "Patients today want teeth that look believable, not fake," he says. "They're more aware of the subtle details that make a smile feel real and refined."

Kameron Rezzadeh

There's a reason people who crave a natural, rejuvenated look flock to Rezzadeh's office: His subtle rhinoplasties and facelifts never scream "done." Surgical restoration is trending more than ever right now, and he's noticing a shift in his clientele: "I'm doing lots and lots of facelifts in younger patients, particularly those in their 40s."

David Samimi

As a founding physician at Eyesthetica (The Eyelid & Face Experts), Samimi can claim Academy Award winners and industry leaders among his clients. He's renowned for his minimally invasive brow lifts, upper and lower blepharoplasty, aka eyelid surgery, ptosis or drooping eyelid correction and facelifts as well as his trademark Restore Technique — a meticulous fat-grafting method that replenishes volume in the temples, cheeks and eyes, achieving filler-free results. "This approach helps me deliver natural, safe and long-lasting rejuvenation," he says.

Nancy Samolitis

Co-founder of Facile Dermatology, Samolitis is well versed in injectables and lasers and is a leading expert in skin health and medical dermatology. Refreshingly straightforward, she is committed to achieving real results without unnecessary fuss. "There are a lot of treatments buzzing in the rejuvenative medicine space that sound interesting — for example, PDRN, exosomes and skin boosters," she says. "But many of them are not approved by the FDA, nor do they have robust data to prove they do anything. I am excited about figuring out which of these is the most effective and useful."

Ava Shamban

A Harvard-trained dermatologist and laser expert, Shamban has served as assistant clinical professor at UCLA Geffen and is the founder of AVA MD Dermatology, SKINxFIVE clinics and Althaea Skincare. She doesn't just treat skin, she transforms it, thanks to her command of the latest technologies. "Energy-based devices now include muscle and tissue tightening on the face and body. And injectables have evolved to address facial contouring and bony loss so we can rebuild structure in the jawline, cheekbone, chin and temple," she explains.

Are there any extreme requests you have to draw the line at?

"Requests for specific celebrity features. True facial beauty comes from the harmony of your own features — not someone else's."

Dr. Babak Azizzadeh

Ginger Slack

A virtuoso in breast and body transformations, Slack practices at UCLA's Ronald Reagan and Santa Monica medical centers. She is highly regarded for her expertise in complex breast reconstruction (including DIEP flap procedures that use the patient's own tissue for soft, natural results) as well as precision reductions and advanced body contouring. With the rising influence of the GLP-1 trend (think Ozempic), Slack has seen an increase in patients seeking tummy tucks and breast lifts to address loose skin. "It's a synergistic process," she explains. "Patients lose weight and improve their health, and we step in to help complete the transformation."

Sarmela Sunder

The secret behind some of Hollywood's most age-defying faces, Sunder is a Johns Hopkins- and Stanford-trained surgeon who specializes in deep plane facelifts, blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty and nonsurgical rejuvenation. She works to ensure that each transformation genuinely reflects the individual. "This past year, everyone's been mesmerized by Lindsay Lohan's refreshed appearance," she notes. "It's not about looking like her — it's about capturing that same natural, radiant glow."

Ben Talei

With a clientele that includes celebrities, royals and industry tycoons, Talei is among Hollywood's most sought-after plastic surgeons. Famous for pioneering the AuraLyft (a modified extended deep plane facelift) and his signature Cupid Lift (a deep plane upper-lip lift), he also specializes in hair transplants. Talei is particularly excited about Hallura. "It's a new filler coming out of Israel that seems to prevent problems such as filler fatigue," he notes.

Victoria Veytsman

Acclaimed for proprietary techniques such as her ultra-refined custom porcelain veneers and minimal prep veneer placement, Veytsman combines the science of dentistry with aesthetic intuition at her Manhattan and Beverly Hills studios. Dr. V, as her clients (including Hailey Bieber, Angela Bassett and John David Washington) affectionately call her, is the creator of the Five-Pillar Smile Makeover, an approach that integrates emotional wellness and holistic health. "And this is what excites me most," she says. "We're not just designing beautiful smiles, but through oral health, we're supporting brain health, heart health and even hormonal balance."

NEW YORK

Sean Alemi

An emerging talent in the field of deep plane facelifts, Alemi specializes in neck sculpting — even reducing the submandibular gland to deliver the sharply defined jawline that patients routinely request. (Sienna Miller's, in particular, is the most coveted reference photo.) He's seeing younger patients turn to surgery after too many heat-based devices and fillers backfired. But don't ask for "cat eyes." He warns, "There is nothing natural about changing the canthal tilt in an aggressive way."

HAIR TREATMENT: COURTESY (2); DEAN: GETTY IMAGES.

Hair Today, Hair Tomorrow

Forget toupees or that trip to Turkey: Top hair-restoration doctors are touting less invasive treatments that, coupled with the latest tech innovations, lead to real regrowth **By Elycia Rubin**

In an image-obsessed industry, maintaining a robust head of hair isn't just about vanity — it also signals success and staying power. Check out any over-50 star still working — nearly all have full, Samson-like manes to match their career stamina. And an unknowable number have gone to great lengths, and great expense, to preserve it.

A possible miracle drug — think GLP-1 for hair — might be cropping up. Earlier this year, scientists at UCLA discovered a new molecule, PP405, that reportedly awakens dormant follicles after applying it to the scalp at bedtime for a week. Approval for mainstream use, however, might take a few years.

In the meantime, early detection of shedding is crucial. "If you catch hair loss in earlier stages, patients do much better and require less intervention," says Robert Finney, a board-certified cosmetic dermatologist and hair-loss expert. "If you wait, the same result isn't always possible and you may have to do and spend more." He recommends seeing a dermatologist for proper diagnosis. "Although there are many causes of hair loss, the most common type we encounter is genetic: androgenetic alopecia (AGA), and it's progressive. If not addressed, eventually those hairs will be gone forever."

Patience also is key. "Treating hair loss should be viewed as a marathon, not a sprint," adds Finney. "Men who are suffering from AGA require prescription medications as early as possible. For women, three signs that it's actually genetic are: ponytail thickness has slowly declined over the years, the part has subtly widened, or the hairs at the front become wispier and break easier."

When treating mild hair loss in men and women, Finney is a proponent of the FDA-approved classics: finasteride (via prescription and may reportedly affect libido) and minoxidil, available OTC for less than $15: "Whether orally or topically, they can often be all you need."

For later stages, incorporating regenerative in-office treatments can make a noticeable difference. Says Alexander GolBerg, a double board-certified physician specializing in functional and aesthetic medicine: "I'm seeing incredible results with a combination of Platelet-Rich Fibrin (PRF), low-level laser therapy (LLLT) and exosomes, paired with targeted IV therapy to nourish the body from within."

EXO is one of the newer, patented exosome-infused hair care lines offering real regrowth, which has "been shown to stimulate dermal papillae cells, follicle stem cells as well as the follicle itself," says Dr. Robin Smith, co-founder and regenerative medicine pioneer. "In our clinical evaluations in men and women across all ages, we are seeing extraordinary growth and reduction in shedding, independent of the cause."

Finney also recommends ultrasound and laser treatments, such as TED/Transepidermal Delivery and Keralase, respectively ($600 to $1,500), with the bonus that they're injection-free. He also offers ScalpStim Pro, his blend of dutasteride and growth factors used with microneedling and ultrasound to deliver ingredients directly to the follicles.

Several at-home options also are worth trying. Finney is a fan of Plated and Kerafactor serums used in combination with the Current Body LED Hair Growth Helmet and Ladoura low-level laser therapy devices. But as the $8 billion hair restoration industry continues to explode, buyers should beware. "Many OTC products rely on buzzwords like biotin, caffeine or obscure herbs. While not harmful, they're rarely effective on their own," GolBerg says. "If it sounds too good to be true, like 'overnight regrowth' or 'miracle oils,' it probably is."

Even in cases of advanced thinning or visible balding, there's still a path forward. "While transplants remain an option, many of my patients now prefer a less invasive approach. We can improve density without surgery. I've seen some truly transformational results over time," adds GolBerg.

As for transplants, which can cost upward of $40,000, Finney poses a warning: "It should always look natural, and if it doesn't, you picked a bad surgeon or flew to Turkey [where fees are much lower]. A Turkish hairline is visible a mile away because they create perfectly straight hairlines, and it's an unnatural look. A good surgeon will stagger it and use follicular units with a varying number of follicles to make the procedure imperceptible."

Hold the Line This follicular-challenged male, a patient of Dr. Robert Finney, was already on topical or oral finasteride and minoxidil and had stalled — then he turned to Finney's ScalpStim Pro treatments.

Macrene Alexiades

Sienna Miller doesn't just inspire Alexiades' clients — she actually is one. So are Nicky Hilton and Brooke Shields, the latter having turned to the Harvard-trained dermatologist after a tattoo mishap left her brows orange. Alexiades leans on lasers and such active ingredients as peptides, amino acids and hyaluronic acid to restore glow. "Let's face it," she says. "My patients look better now than they did in their 20s."

Sherrell Aston

A legend on the East Coast, Aston ran the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, where many of the top plastic surgeons trained, and is rumored to have tweaked the faces of Catherine Deneuve, Carolina Herrera and Pamela Harriman. He is as comfortable with men's visages as women's, and word is he worked on Sting and Trudie Styler, as well as Anna Wintour and her then-partner Shelby Bryan. A master of the SMAS technique, he's noticed a surge in lateral subcutaneous brow lifts, which preserve the hairline. And he says good riddance to the recent fad for buccal fat removal, because it's "a good way for a 20-year-old to look 40."

What innovations and new technologies are you excited about?

"The addition of regenerative medicine and gene-editing therapies." Dr. John Layke

Doris Day

The veteran dermatologist, who shares a name with Hollywood royalty, treated Barbara Walters and still sees Vanessa Williams, and thinks the backlash against injectables has gone too far. "There is a lot of fearmongering that comes from those who regret overdoing it, and plastic surgeons are feeding into it," she says. "So now people trying to reverse injectables and plastic surgery is the new trend." She believes in getting to the root of wrinkles, rather than trying to simply erase them. "I look at where the line is coming from and get rid it before it occurs," she explains. The tool she is most excited about is the Sofwave, which tightens and lifts with ultrasound. "The biohacker Bryan Johnson even got his own machine to use at home," she notes. But it's Lindsay Lohan's youthful eyes that are being requested, not Johnson's.

Dendy Engelman

Engelman is bullish on the latest Korean energy devices, which she says are less expensive and avoid the fat atrophy of earlier machines. Plus, they're more comfortable. "They are way less painful and great for those who don't need a $250,000 facelift," she says. She's noted a recent shift in focus toward the neck

FROM NOSE JOB TO NO JOB

You think you look better, but fans and casting directors might not agree **By Seth Abramovitch**

Back in 1996, Howard Stern peered over *Private Parts* director Betty Thomas' shoulder as she reviewed dailies and didn't like what he saw. He felt his nose looked too big.

"He wanted me to remove one shot taken from his 'bad side,' " Thomas told *The Hollywood Reporter* in 2020. "I said, 'I can't remove the shot.' Then he went and got a nose job right after that — and it was before we did the reshoots. You can notice [his nose change] in the movie."

Stern is hardly the first star whose aesthetic tweaks have thrown curveballs mid-production. Some have even derailed careers entirely. Most famously, *Dirty Dancing*'s Jennifer Grey saw her incipient stardom go up in smoke after two rhinoplasties, undertaken in the early 1990s at the urging of her mother, left her unrecognizable to people who'd known her since childhood.

"Overnight I lose my identity and my career," Grey wrote of the chapter she refers to as "schnozzageddon" in her 2022 memoir.

To adapt, Grey veered toward supporting roles and voice acting. Grey's was a cautionary tale, and her name became synonymous with taking plastic surgery too far. In 2007, *The New York Times* referred to Ashley Tisdale as suffering from "a minor case of Jennifer Grey syndrome" after the *High School Musical* star underwent a deviated-septum procedure, the results of which shocked fans.

"Schnozzageddon" *Dirty Dancing* star Jennifer Grey wrote that after her rhinopolasties, "I lost my identity and my career."

Far more common problems, however, are fillers and Botox, whose plumping and paralysis can read as uncanny and emotionless on camera. "I have done fillers and it's been good, and I've done fillers and it's been bad," *And Just Like That* star Kristin Davis said in June 2023. "I've had to get them dissolved and I've been ridiculed relentlessly. And I have shed tears about it. It's very stressful."

Freakier Friday star Jamie Lee Curtis, meanwhile, raised eyebrows with a July 26 *Guardian* interview in which she decried a "genocide of a generation of women" who have "disfigured themselves" through "chemicals, surgical procedures and fillers." Curtis says she regrets undergoing an eye procedure in her early 20s at the urging of a cinematographer, who complained of the "bags under her eyes."

Even for reversible procedures, production schedules don't have time to allow faces to return to normal — leading to awkward, sometimes devastating moments on set. "We brought back a fan-favorite character a season later for an episode and they had obviously gone overboard with Botox and lip fillers," says one leading Hollywood casting executive. The shoot went on as planned. "But the producers were not happy and we never brought that actress back. They just would not consider her," the pro says. "She was young, so what she had done was even more jarring."

"The biggest issue is females who have had face work taking themselves out of the running for projects that are time-period specific," says another top casting director. "Just for the obvious reasons that eyes didn't get done then and filler wasn't invented yet."

The executive adds that it's not a woman-only thing, citing one male star "who had his face completely redone and looked unrecognizable. Unfortunately, he took himself out of the running for a lot of work."

DANCING: VESTRON PICTURES/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION.

Allen Foulad was photographed by Joelle Grace Taylor on July 24 in Beverly Hills.

and jawline. "I love the trend of balance," she says. "Botox was used mainly on the forehead and for fillers on the cheeks, but now the lower face is having a moment."

Brett Kotlus

When rapper Doechii wore visible face tape to this year's Grammys to lift the corners of her eyes, oculoplastic surgeon Brett Kotlus saw it as a watershed moment. "People have certainly become more aware of eyelids, and they are asking for that subtle upward tilt," he reports. This is not to be confused with the fox eye, which plays down the arch and picks up the edge of the brow (à la Bella Hadid) and is so last year. He sees a big increase in upper blepharoplasty, which, unlike lower lid surgery, can now be done under local anesthesia: "It's become a no-brainer, so people are starting to do it at 35 to 45, to get ahead of it."

Michael Kraus

The natural wave also has influenced dentistry, with patients increasingly requesting to keep their own teeth but make them lighter or opt for veneers that appear natural. "They are very cautious about getting results that are too bright," reports Kraus, who has enhanced the smiles of Georgina Chapman, Matthew Perry, Grace Jones, Stephanie Seymour, Walt Frazier and Victoria Clark. "People are very hung up on symmetry," he notes. "Even Tom Cruise was bothered by the unevenness of his front teeth and had them done three times." Fillers, however, present their own challenges. "If you have filled

What to Do About 'Ozempic Body'

Now that the whole town is hooked on GLP-1 weight-loss drugs, surgeons are scrambling to fight the sudden sagging **By Ingrid Schmidt**

For all the miraculous effects attributed to GLP-1s like Ozempic — from craving suppression to fighting inflammation — Hollywood's favorite drugs do not defy the law of gravity. As they've grown in popularity and availability, so has the need for treatments that target that drooping skin that follows rapid weight loss.

Surgeons like New York-based Macrene Alexiades have made a specialty of it. "I have successfully treated and reversed GLP-1 sagginess in my patients with radiofrequency treatments for skin laxity reduction, combined with PRP plus artful strategic filler placement to restore key areas of atrophy," Alexiades tells *THR*. "Usually two treatment sessions, a month apart, is enough to achieve a full correction and restoration."

Dermatologist Simon Ourian, meanwhile, focuses "on restoring collagen and muscle mass, which are often depleted during rapid weight loss." He says, "We use our proprietary [hyaluronic acid-based] Neustem regenerative protocol to rebuild structural support, enhance muscle tone, and restore vitality to the face and body without the risk of overfilling. For the body, we combine regenerative solutions with energy-based skin tightening and contouring to address loose skin and improve definition in areas like the abdomen, arms and thighs."

Paul Jarrod Frank recommends second-generation scarless skin removal — a technique known as Ellacor fractional micro-coring — to treat crepey skin on the face, neck, arms, abdomen, legs and back. "Unlike microneedling, which punches holes in the skin and delivers heat, Ellacor punches holes and literally cores out just under a millimeter of skin, done thousands of times over each area to remove a significant percentage with each treatment," the dermatologist explains. "The advantage is that you are removing, lifting and tightening skin without having to do a more aggressive surgical intervention. Holes close in 24 hours, with full recovery in five days."

Core Work Paul Jarrod Frank treats GLP-1-related sagging with a technique known as Ellacor fractional micro-coring. Below: Image Skincare's Vol.U.Lift cream.

Beverly Hills dermatologist Rhonda Rand (Angelina Jolie is a longtime client) leans into a combo of facial fillers, plus "radiofrequency microneedling to help tighten the skin and high-intensity focused ultrasound to stimulate collagen at deeper levels." She tells *THR*, "In severe cases of facial wasting, even a facelift would be appropriate. When the skin is sagging so much, noninvasive procedures may not be enough."

GLP-1s have also ushered in a new wave of skin care products. Chicago-based plastic surgeon Julius Few (who has collaborated with Gwyneth Paltrow for Goop) recently added a $300 topical DermaReverse serum to his product line "designed specifically for GLP-1 users experiencing GLP Face" as well as a $195 Skin Tightening + SPF 30 with Dermatight to target sagging and laxity on the body. Image Skincare, which has a strong Hollywood following, has introduced $134 Vol.U.Lift, developed by the company's plastic surgeon co-founder to address volume loss, sagging and other side effects of GLP-1 usage.

Launching a whole new industry? Add it to that list of miraculous effects.

lips but they later become smaller, the proportion can look whacky."

Lyle Leipziger

To show patients what they might look like after a facelift, Leipziger, chief of plastic surgery at North Shore University Hospital and Long Island Jewish Medical Center, has them lie down and look straight up at a mirror to counter gravity's effects. He also asks patients to bring photos of themselves over the years to study the trajectory of their droops. "It gives me a better understanding of how skin will re-drape," he explains. He has perfected techniques for breast augmentations and lifts, incorporating internal molding and suspension alongside electrocautery to tighten tissue and stave off sagging.

Steven Levine

When Levine attended NYU School of Medicine, he could never have imagined that one day a patient of his would spark a media firestorm and turn him into a star. Despite not having posted on Instagram in five years, Levine has amassed hundreds of thousands of followers since Kris Jenner named him as the facelift surgeon responsible for her transformation. Countless others, including doctors, have taken to social media to weigh in on his "deep plane" facelift method, even though Levine is actually known as an SMAS surgeon. "I try to ignore all the press," he says. "My only focus is the patient in front of me. He or she doesn't care who I operated on yesterday or last week. They want to make sure I do the best job for them."

Marc Lowenberg

Once seen mainly on the privileged, veneers have become more mainstream, according to Lowenberg, who treats Amanda Peet, Julianna Margulies and Chris Rock. He attributes the shift to social media. "In the past couple of years, I've seen so many people take loans to get them," he observes. While younger patients may lean toward a more natural look, he says, many still opt for higher brightness. "People who are aging want more of a pop because, as you get older, your teeth get darker. Senior patients are coming in after decades to get a new set, and younger first-timers still want a dazzling smile." Lowenberg adds that brighter teeth illuminate an aging face, and "Those people have the attitude that if they are spending a lot of money, they want bling."

Robert Raimondi

Raimondi's patients are willing to give up a little luster on their teeth for a more natural appearance and are becoming much more active in the aesthetic process. "They will go to any lengths to be involved, so we implemented a new flow in the past eight months, where we create a digital version of their smile and they make changes to it," he explains. A temporary set is then made, and the interactive process is repeated. "The process is actually fun," he says. The trend leans toward less boxy chompers, with more curves: "It's a shift to less prominent and more inviting."

Anetta Reszko

These days, Reszko's office follows a proactive, regenerative approach, emphasizing definition and softness over traditional volume placement. And nobody asks for Kybella injections anymore. "We're moving away from fillers and fat-fighting treatments," Reszko explains. "Instead, we

SALMON SPERM: SPAWN TO BE WILD

No, it's not a joke. Celebrities like Jennifer Aniston and Denise Richards really are lathering their faces in fish ejaculate

Forget snail slime and bird poop. The latest miracle goo slathered on celebrity faces is salmon sperm — or, as it's more politely known in the beauty biz, polynucleotides. And yes, it's exactly what it sounds like.

Kim and Khloé Kardashian, Miley Cyrus, Charli XCX, Denise Richards and even Jennifer Aniston have reportedly dabbled in this piscine potion, which originated in South Korea, where a company called Rejuran has been injecting salmon DNA fragments (chosen for their uncanny similarity to human DNA) into faces for over a decade. The goal? Glowy, plump, camera-ready skin. Think trout farm meets red carpet.

In the U.S., where the treatment isn't yet FDA-approved for injection, the salmon sperm serum is typically applied topically — usually after a microneedling or laser treatment to help it sink in deeper. It's gained such popularity that Beverly Hills dermatologist Harold Lancer warns against "cheap knockoffs made out of a crappy trout."

Among the true believers is L.A. derm Ava Shamban (whose clients include Angela Bassett and Michelle Yeoh), who uses it as part of a three-step glow-up: microneedling, followed by salmon DNA, capped with a carboxy gel mask. "It stimulates collagen and reduces inflammation," she says. She compared the mask's effect to a hyperbaric oxygen treatment, for that fresh-from-the-womb finish.

Shamban isn't alone. Beverly Hills cosmetic doctor Simon Ourian (famously linked to the Kardashians) calls it a solid option for short-term luminosity and hydration, but warns it's no fountain of youth: "Results typically last just a few weeks."

Meanwhile, New York-based Paul Jarrod Frank (Madonna, Marc Jacobs) offers a $1,500 version but admits it's not his go-to anti-aging tool. "There are other treatments with more consistent, clinically backed results," he says. Still, for younger patients seeking a quick glow before a big night out?

Fish sperm, apparently, is the catch of the day. — I.S.

From left: Charli XCX, Kim Kardashian and Jennifer Aniston are reported users of polynucleotides.

ELLACOR, VOLUULIFT: COURTESYO OF BRAND (3); XCX: JED CULLEN/DAVE BENETT/GETTY IMAGES; KARDASHIAN: LIONEL HAHN/GETTY IMAGES; ANISTON: JON KOPALOFF/GETTY IMAGES; SALMON, SPERM: ADOBE STOCK.

RED CARPET READY IN 12 HOURS

When it comes to recovery time, patients are become less and less, well, patient

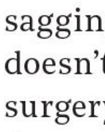
By Ingrid Schmidt

Those in the spotlight can't afford to stay outside of it for long. Many are demanding near-immediate gratification following cosmetic surgery, pushing recovery time ever closer to zero. "There are some people who won't settle for anything less" — or rather more — "than 12 hours of healing," says Beverly Hills dermatologist Harold Lancer (Margot Robbie, Victoria Beckham, Christina Ricci, Kim Kardashian). "If they can't have the procedure at 7 a.m. and look great at 8 p.m., they're not happy. Other people will tolerate 36 to 48 hours of healing. Ninety-six hours is pretty much where it ends." As a result, hard-core procedures that require long periods of recovery — such as CO_2 laser resurfacing or extreme chemical peels, which require six to eight weeks — are becoming less popular. "The newest laser on the block is the AuraLux 2910," notes Lancer, "which is highly maneuverable to almost zero healing downtime."

In more and more cases, doctors are able to accommodate patients' impatience. Simon Ourian says that his clients "want body shaping without downtime," driving demand for "injectable butt contouring and energy-based skin tightening for abs and arms." For her part, dermatologist Macrene Alexiades (Sienna Miller, Brooke Shields, Hollywood makeup artist Gucci Westman) increasingly turns to the new neurotoxin BoNT/E, in development by Allergen Aesthetics, for everything from liquid nose jobs and facelifts (often in combination with Botox) to a trend of injecting the trapezius muscle to improve the neck and shoulder line. Though its effects don't last as long as Botox (about two to three weeks), it boasts a nearly immediate onset, measured in hours. "When we don't have the luxury of waiting for Botox to kick in, this is great for treating my patients right before an event or if they are in front of the camera the next day," she says.

focus on rebuilding skin from within using growth factors, peptides and exosomes — bioactive molecules that mimic those naturally produced by our own fibroblasts." These ingredients stimulate stem cells, replace aging cells, initiate new skin tissue formation and decrease inflammation. Adds Reszko: "We are replacing cells that are 30 or 40 years old and making new skin."

David Rosenberg

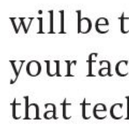


Rosenberg appreciates the new candor among high-profile patients who proudly credit their plastic surgeons. "It's an incredible change, and I benefitted from that," he says, referring to how Kelly Ripa name-checked him in her book, in addition to other welcome celebrity callouts. "It's very generous to their fans to be so honest," he says, "because many people have had work and say it's just skin care products." He is one of the best known practitioners of the deep plane facelift, which leaves the skin and muscle attached. "Lifting the muscle up with the skin is like redrawing a bed sheet, so that symmetry is all done together," he explains. He has recently introduced the "mini deep plane," a version for people in their late 30s, that stops sagging before it begins. It doesn't require as much surgery, but, unfortunately, does require as much money.

Larry Rosenthal

Laminates have become less prone to breakage thanks to advancements in materials, explains Rosenthal, who is reputed to have refined the smiles of Donald and Melania Trump, Wayne Gretzky and Janet Jones, and Vera Wang. "Before, if you used something stronger, it would look too thick and opaque," says Rosenthal, "But now, it's much more translucent." He's also using advanced laser techniques to treat gummy smiles, allowing him to recontour soft tissue after veneers are in place and even to stimulate bone growth. "We can save teeth," he says. "Nothing before has done this."

Lana Rozenberg



"I like to contrast," says Rozenberg. "If you have a square face, I want to give you more oval teeth. If you have an oval face, I think more square teeth look better," says the dentist, who has improved the mouths of Colin Jost and Scarlett Johansson, Helena Christensen, Justin Theroux and Kim Cattrall, among others. "I choose a color that is the same or darker than the whites of someone's eyes — you never go lighter," she says. She has received bizarre requests over the years. "The wife of a Russian oligarch wanted her teeth to be a triangle shape and very large in the front, and I refused," she recalls. Soon, she might not be making all cosmetic decisions on her own, however. "AI can now tell you what type of teeth will be the most flattering for your face, and we will have that technology in '26," she says. Rozenberg has also brought top oral surgeon Nicholas Toscano into her practice. Not only has he been the dentist of record for a slew of model agencies and Victoria's Secret models, he has upped the bites of Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi.

Robert Schwarcz

The social media labeling of "hunter" vs. "prey" eyes is not lost on oculoplastic surgeon Schwarcz, who is said to have upgraded the stares of major runway models. To give the more predatory, heavier appearance, he injects fat into the upper

lids and under the brows. "It looks more masculine," he reveals. He also replaces filler with fat, and rather than remove deposits from under eye bags, he repositions them and grafts additional fat to fill in hollows. "I place it in the cheek eyelid junction so that it becomes a seamless transition," he says. He also works from above: "People are getting more comfy with brow lifting and how it opens the upper eye area."

Is there a formerly popular procedure you are rarely asked about anymore?

"Liposuction, because of Ozempic and other weight loss meds becoming increasingly accessible." Dr. Tess Mauricio

Robert Silich

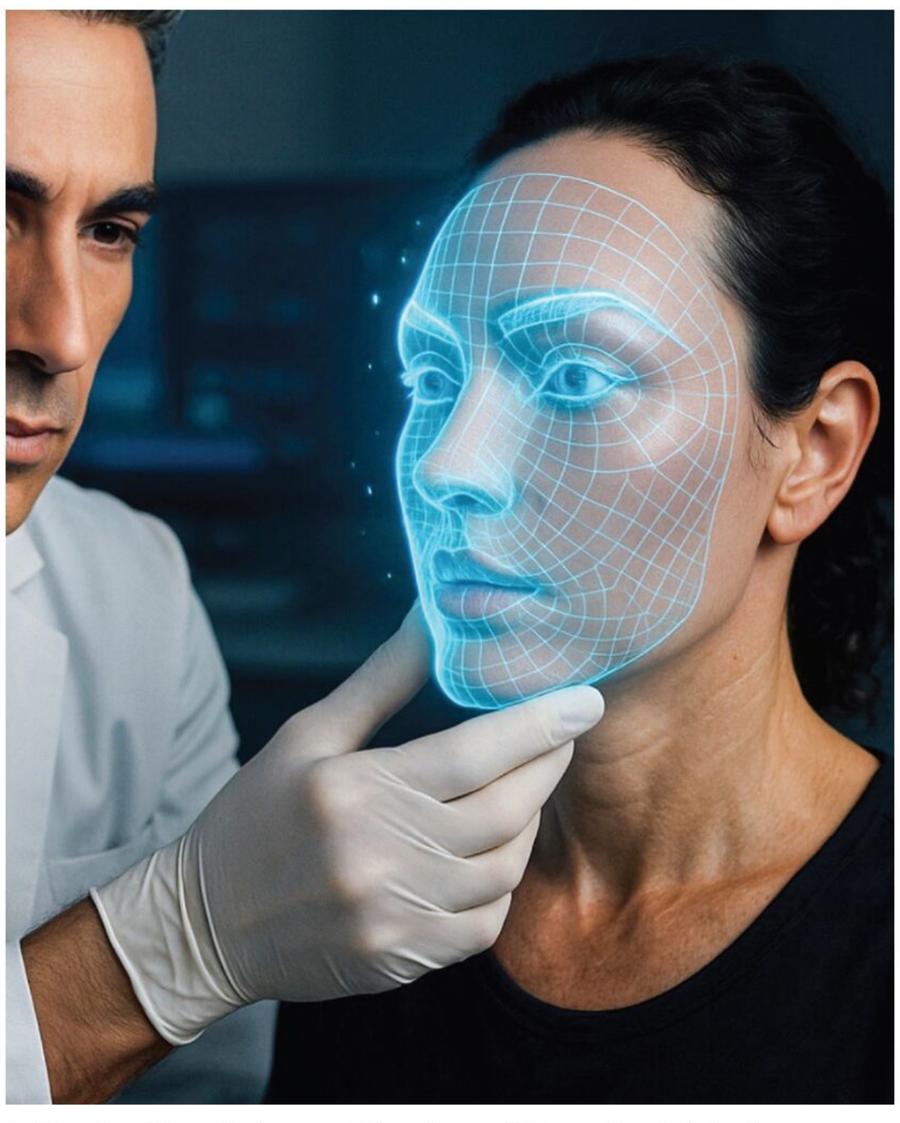
"Everybody can be a star on social media these days, so they are creating their own celebrity and want to look less cookie cutter," says Silich, who has chiseled quite a following, from Oscar winners and studio heads to New York elite and international royals. A third-generation surgeon, he refuses to discuss his clientele and has a strict no-social-media policy. Lately, he has noticed more attention being paid to the neck and lower face. "Even my 12-year-old niece just complimented the jawline on a boy," he says. Luckily for Silich, those areas have long been a specialty of his, along with a mastery of natural-looking SMAS lifts.

Darren Smith

"Instead of extreme alteration, people are now seeing plastic surgery as a part of wellness," says Smith, who specializes in body tailoring. "Over the past 18 months, I've seen a significant shift toward a more natural appearance; people want just a little more volume in their breasts to fill out clothing." The trend is a bit of a relief, he says, because he had been turning down people who would come in asking to look like AI renderings of themselves. "What they wanted would have looked preposterous on an actual human," he says.

Howard Sobel

"We are close to a cure for male pattern and female pattern baldness," assures Sobel, who has perked up the skin of Edie Falco, Katie Couric, Julia Hart, Carol Alt and Bethenny Frankel. His current favorite machine is the Alta TED, which uses ultrasound to penetrate exosomes and growth factor into the scalp. "Before, we used PRP and needles, which was a whole production with drawing blood, and it was painful," he says. "This is relaxing and actually delivers more growth factor." He sees a decline in traditional fillers and a move toward dilute Sculptra, which builds your own collagen. "The gratification isn't as immediate because it takes months," he notes, "but it's a more natural way to go."



In Your Face Simon Ourian uses AI imaging and 3D morphing to help plan interventions and visualize results.

CLOCK: ADOBE STOCK. OURIAN: COURTESY OF SUBJECT.

THE ROBOT WILL SEE YOU NOW

Cosmetic surgeons are increasingly relying on AI and advanced technology to plan — and help perform — procedures

Humankind created machines — could they one day repay the favor, or at least give us a boob job? The groundwork is already being laid. It has become customary for A-list doctors to serve up a personalized cocktail of lasers, radio-frequency and ultrasound devices (combined with injectables and skin boosters) to avoid or largely postpone going under the knife. Meanwhile, with the advent of AI and 3D modeling, aesthetic procedures such as breast augmentation and rhinoplasty can be simulated in detail to help envision outcomes and predict potential complications based on the analysis of personalized patient data. The leap from there to full-fledged robotic surgeons is not so far-fetched.

Simon Ourian, founder of Epione Beverly Hills (Lady Gaga, the Kardashian-Jenners and Megan Fox are clients) underlines the revolution of tech-enhanced consultations with "AI imaging, 3D morphing and virtual planning that help patients visualize realistic results, boosting trust and satisfaction." He adds that "while robots are not yet performing procedures, I anticipate that in the next few years, we will see them taking over some basic and repetitive tasks in our practices such as mapping, marking or assisting with energy-based treatments."

Robots have so far proven helpful in a few specific contexts. Piezo rhinoplasty — a minimally invasive technique that uses ultrasonic vibrations to sculpt bones and cartilage — has been "a key precursor to robotic-assisted microsurgery, by introducing and normalizing several foundational innovations that robotic systems are now building upon," says New York-based facial plastic surgeon Sam Rizk, who counted 13 clients on the red carpet during the 2025 awards season. "It has allowed us to make smaller incisions and more hyper-targeted adjustments than we ever thought possible. As technologies evolve and robotic dexterity continues to improve, it's important for surgeons to lean in and embrace these changes. Robots won't ever be able to replace surgeons, not by a long shot, but they will absolutely enable us to do more for patients than we ever thought possible."

"The future is exciting," says Ourian, "and we're already preparing for it." — I.S.

Mortality

Bites

For Gen Xers, the quick-succession deaths of *Cosby Show* star Malcolm-Jamal Warner, wrestling legend Hulk Hogan and heavy metal icon Ozzy Osbourne resurface an all-too-familiar feeling: despair

By Steven Zeitchik

As a kid, you didn't need to have smoked marijuana or even know what it was (I plead ignorance on both counts — really, Mom!) to vibe with a flustered Theo Huxtable after his suddenly unsmiling parents found a joint in his textbook on a 1985 episode of *The Cosby Show*.

Such a tableau would confound today's generation of young well-meaning miscreants, in part because they smelled pot smoke three times already just walking to the store, and also, what's a textbook?

But Theo meant everything to a generation of kids who saw in him the idea, as Questlove put it after Malcolm-Jamal Warner's death on July 20, of "what does it mean to be an adult without depending on your parents?"

Warner's death at 54 in a drowning accident hit hard. And not just his death. For anyone considered a part of Gen X — roughly, those of us who were kids at some point from the mid-'70s through the end of the '80s — this is now the third year in a row we've lost someone pretty much indispensable from our youth. First Matthew Perry in 2023, then Shannen Doherty in 2024 (a double whammy with *Our House* and *Beverly Hills, 90210*, and especially painful given Luke Perry's 2019 death) and now Warner. All born in or within six months of 1970. Which is to say, too close to any of us.

And then, on July 22, Ozzy Osbourne, who of course transcends generations with all his early 2000s second-life reality show MTV popularity but who was inextricably tied to Gen X, first with the crazy 1980s schoolyard stories (the original internet) about a PETA-unfriendly activity at his concert (actually an accident), and then with his music. If you didn't blast "Mama, I'm Coming Home" out your dorm window on the last day of class, could you really be said to have gone to college at all? On July 24, Hulk Hogan, a fixture in every '80s kid's consciousness, and Trapper Keeper, completed the tragic trifecta.

Ozzy was the embodiment of early MTV. And now he's gone. Along with, of course, MTV itself. It's hard not to feel the symbolism. The stuff we thought would be here forever has left before its time. Theo was teenage possibility; MTV was the cutting edge incarnate. It was all supposed to tell us what was coming — not remind us of what is gone.

Ozzy at least reached a relatively ripe age of 76. But Gen X has lost too many of its childhood musical heroes far too young, Prince and Tom Petty and Whitney Houston and Michael Jackson and George Michael. They would have filled the best cassette mix tape that one summer in camp, where if someone from the future showed up to say they'd all be gone before most of us left our 40s (and, outside of Petty, before any of them got out of their 50s) we would have shooed them from the basketball court and just cranked up the boom box louder.

Iron Men Above: Ozzy Osbourne (second from left) with Phil Soussan, Jake E. Lee and Randy Castillo in 1986. Previous spread, from left: Osbourne at home in 2007; Malcolm-Jamal Warner on *The Cosby Show*; and Hulk Hogan in 1986 in Toronto.

The defining moment of being a Gen Xer, after all, was Kurt Cobain's suicide in 1994.

These deaths and the sense of dread they bring are on the one hand a surprise. But also, maybe not? Gen X is often defined as the first postwar generation to believe it would do financially worse than their parents; bleakness is hardwired into us. We were the first to experience parental divorce on a mass scale; the first to be exposed to the idea that the bad people who grabbed Etan Patz and Adam Walsh could well grab us; the first to see 20th century techno-optimism go up in a fiery cloud of space shuttle smoke — the first, maybe, to be told the world was garbage, and that's if you live through it.

The defining moment of being a Gen Xer, after all, was Kurt Cobain's suicide in 1994. I know, I know, people say the generational divide is the internet or cellphones or being an adult on 9/11. But I think it will always be Cobain. If you are old enough to remember what happened and how you felt that April day when he took his life, you're a Gen Xer. If you're not, you're not. And how we felt was, well, everything sucked, everything will always suck and the one guy who was clear-eyed enough to point out how everything sucks was so overwhelmed by said suckitude that he couldn't go on anymore. A kind of generational irony grew out of that realization. But it was cultivated in a greenhouse of despair. (There is an upside to being forced to adapt to a world that is out to get you: It can render you fearsome.)

Yes, I know all the actuarial stats that Gen X celebrities are not really dying at a faster rate than boomer celebrities did, that there is no greater percentage of them

PREVIOUS SPREAD: OSBOURNE: ROB GREIG TIME OUT/CAMERA PRESS/REDUX. JAMAL-WARNER: NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES. HOGAN: TONY BOCK/TORONTO STAR VIA GETTY IMAGES. THIS SPREAD: OSBOURNE: COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION. JAMAL-WARNER: AL LEVINE/NBCU PHOTO BANK/NBCUNIVERSAL VIA GETTY IMAGES. IDOL: THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME.

passing in their 50s than there was in a previous generation (though there were, thanks to the proliferation of cable and media in the '80s and '90s, more broad Gen X celebrities generally, which does increase the number).

But it is a deep feeling just the same — that a generation marked by loss is now dealing with it again and again. Perhaps too many early years of watching the *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* movies, with their heroes getting picked off one by one, has infused a feeling of grim inevitability. But after learning of Warner's death, a lot of us turned to each other or just to ourselves and frankly asked, "OK, so who's next?"

I don't know how we shake this feeling, except maybe by getting a new Gen X hero. A president might help. Of course, the way things are going, we'll just skip from boomers to millennials. I'd like to think I'm wrong. But I'm too much of a Gen Xer to be that optimistic.

Cool Kid Warner as *The Cosby Show*'s Theo Huxtable.

From One Idol to Another: Billy on Ozzy

The musician on losing a rock god friend: 'He didn't think he had a future' By Billy Idol

Billy Idol is one of many in the music industry grieving after the legendary Ozzy Osbourne died at age 76 on July 22. In Idol's case, he credits Osbourne for "showing us the way" to succeed as punk rockers. Just last October, Idol helped celebrate Osbourne's induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame as a solo artist by performing "No More Tears" at the ceremony (Osbourne also lobbied for Idol's inclusion, though it hasn't happened yet). Here, Idol remembers Osbourne for his indelible mark on music and the path he carved for those who came after him.

I guess he went out his way. I'm still in a little bit of shock because just over two weeks ago, he was on that Back to the Beginning stage in Birmingham. I didn't expect this to happen, really. But I suppose that's the way it always is.

I've known him over the years for a long time now. I did the occasional promotion things with him, that kind of stuff. Then I was part of his solo induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame at the invitation of [Osbourne's wife] Sharon. It was an incredible night, a great experience. It really made me appreciate what the Hall of Fame was really all about. Because you hear all the negative things, I just saw the positive that evening. Being part of Ozzy's induction enabled me to do that.

I'm sure his endorsement helped me get nominated this year. Somebody like that making a statement like that was just incredible. He's like David Bowie. Ozzy's always been here as an inspiration for those of us who love music, showing us the way to survive through it all. Incredible, really. It's hard to believe that both are dead now. Ozzy was just so alive, he had so much personality ... being in the moment and enjoying it. His music was like that as well.

They Love Each Other From left: Ozzy Osbourne and Jack Black watched Billy Idol perform with Robert Trujillo at Osbourne's Hall of Fame induction in 2024.

My bandmate Billy Morrison is one of Ozzy's best friends. I've known Ozzy and Sharon a long time, doing various things with them over the years. Being British and in Los Angeles was a connection, too. He started his solo career at about the same time I started mine. Just the fact he found a way to survive, from Black Sabbath to a massively successful solo career. And then he brought it all back to the beginning with Black Sabbath making an album a few years ago. Just two weeks ago, he was on that stage having the time of his life. He really seemed to be enjoying himself.

Ozzy loved things. He loved The Beatles, rock 'n' roll music and those close to him. It gave him a way to live. At one point, he didn't think he had any future. And it was like that for us in punk rock, too. Rock 'n' roll gave us all a way forward, to go beyond them telling us there was nothing for us. And that was Ozzy. You hear a lot about his wild and crazy side, but he had a lot of love for things in his life ... his music and the people around him. Seeing him at the Hall of Fame induction, it was great to witness all the relationships he's had over the years, how everyone loved him. And he loved them back.

He opened musical doorways for people like me at a time when we were very young and looking for inspiration. Black Sabbath and Ozzy were very instrumental in opening the doorway for punk rock. In many ways, it was fueled by all the things we saw when we were younger, especially the Sabs and Ozzy. — AS TOLD TO ROY TRAKIN

Hulk Hogan Flopped So The Rock Could Flex

No, the WWE superstar's Hollywood forays weren't good – and some were so bad, they became cautionary tales – but they paved the way for Dwayne Johnson's *The Smashing Machine* and John Cena's *Peacemaker* **By Tony Maglio**

Before The Rock morphed into movie star Dwayne Johnson, and well before John Cena traded his jorts for a *Peacemaker* helmet, Terry "Hulk Hogan" Bollea made the leap from a professional wrestling ring to Hollywood.

Hogan was the man who put World Wrestling Entertainment, or WWE (then WWF) on the map — quite literally, in most places. Vince McMahon Jr. dreamt of taking his dad's WWWF (the extra "W" was for the "Wide" in what had been the World Wide Wrestling Federation) from a regional league to a national one (the "World Wide" was just a marketing gimmick). But to steamroll his competitors in their own territories, McMahon needed two things: TV syndication and one huge draw. Fortunately, he had a huge dude, Bollea, who stood 6-foot-7 and famously had 24-inch biceps (really they were 22), on his roster. Together, they created Hulk (because he was big like The Incredible Hulk) Hogan (to resonate with the large Irish population in the WWWF's mainly northeast territory).

It worked — it all worked. Throughout the 1980s, Hogan was by far the most "over" character in professional wrestling. How beloved was Hulk Hogan among children, then the target market of the biz? We literally said our prayers and ate our vitamins just because he told us to.

Hogan, who died July 24, would become the hero in endless good-versus-evil storylines, including a few nationalistic ones. But before Hogan saved us from the likes of The Iron Sheik in 1984, officially spawning Hulkamania, the ultimate baby face got a taste of Tinseltown when he wrestled Rocky Balboa in 1982's *Rocky III*.

McMahon really, really didn't like the prospect of losing Hogan to Hollywood, so he kept his star chained to a turnbuckle for the rest of the decade. But Bollea, being the "Real American" that his entrance song told us he was, soon again felt the pull of destiny. This time, when he went west to film 1989's *No Holds Barred*, McMahon joined him as executive producer. What came next, no one wanted a piece of.

Suburban Commando in 1991 has become a Hollywood cautionary tale of poor packaging, and 1993's *Mr. Nanny* wasn't much better. (*Mr. Nanny* was basically Dwayne Johnson's *The Game Plan*, just 14 years earlier.)

Though Hogan couldn't draw at the movie theater box office, he still could sell out a wrestling arena. So Bollea inevitably returned to what he did best, just not for McMahon. In 1994, Hogan ditched the WWF for WCW (World Championship Wrestling), joining fellow defectors Scott Hall (Razor Ramon in WWF) and Kevin Nash (Diesel in WWF) as the mysterious "third man." Together, they helped WCW top WWF for the first time ever in television ratings, a run that lasted for 83 weeks.

Everyone on the major league wrestling rosters is a physical specimen; it is the talking, not the fighting, that creates a star.

While Bollea wrestled as "Hollywood Hogan" in WCW, Hogan's actual Hollywood career was pretty much DOA by this point, though he continued to get cameos, bit parts and straight-to-home video roles through the '90s.

Hogan was not a good actor, but he was also let down by bad material. What he did accomplish, however, was introducing Hollywood producers to the untapped talent in the locker room. Johnson has been the single biggest benefactor, but Cena and Dave Bautista ("Batista" in WWE) are hot on his heels. They're great wrestlers — much better than Hogan, frankly, though it was a different era — but what has really set their careers apart is their ability to connect with an audience. And why should that have to be limited to wrestling?

Everyone on the major league wrestling rosters is a physical specimen; it is the talking, not the fighting, that creates a star. That's why a WWE promo class is basically a Second City improv class. The skills that go into what's now called — for good reason — sports entertainment translate to entertainment entertainment. Hogan was the canary in the coal mine; what came out was John Cena and a CGI eagle. THR

Box Office Brawlers Left: Hogan is schooled by Sylvester Stallone as Rocky Balboa in *Rocky III*. Above: Dave Bautista's wrestling career launched him into *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Dune*.

ROCKY: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES. *GALAXY*: MARVEL STUDIOS/DISNEY.

THE FIRST-TIMERS CLUB: EMMYS EDITION

They've acted in everything from prestige dramas to animated docuseries, but this year marks their first time on the Emmy ballot. Six brand-new nominees — Jason Isaacs, Cristin Milioti, Jenny Slate, Owen Cooper, Erin Foster and Cooper Koch — invite us into their celebration

What does it mean to you to be recognized by the Academy for your performance?

JASON ISAACS (*THE WHITE LOTUS*) I never dream about it; I never think about it. I do it for the doing of it. I can't pretend it doesn't feel lovely, but I just don't take it personally. I'm just a conduit for bringing these wonderful stories to life. ... The one thing the 23 nominations [that *The White Lotus* received] have in common is three-dimensional, surprising characters. Watching the final show, I was blown away by everybody; the standards across the board are so extraordinary. That's because of the writing ability and how it lifts everyone up and encourages them to go bigger and more truthful.

CRISTIN MILIOTI (*THE PENGUIN*) You never know how these things are going to go, and I'm blown away by the amount of nominations we have and that so many members of our incredible crew got nominated.

ERIN FOSTER (*NOBODY WANTS THIS*) I was actually on an ADR session with Kristen [Bell] and I was like, "Kristen, you know that Emmy nominations are about to come out," and she was like, "Erin, those things don't matter." And I'm like, "OK, well, they matter to me, so I am not going to play cool about it." And then when we were watching, I was like, "Kristen, you just got nominated for an Emmy," and I didn't realize it was her first Emmy nomination. I assumed she'd been nominated 10 times. And then we got ours, and my husband was downstairs at the gym, and he came upstairs right before they were being announced, and we watched together, and then he went back downstairs. It was really cute.

When was the moment you realized you might get the nomination?

OWEN COOPER (*ADOLESCENCE*) I was waiting and waiting, because I got back from school, and then I had to wait an hour and a half until nominations came out. I didn't want to hype it up too much. If I didn't get nominated, then I'd be a bit worried about it. But then I did, and it was really crazy. [The show's] just massive.

COOPER KOCH (*MONSTERS: THE LYLE AND ERIK MENENDEZ STORY*) I don't know if I ever thought it would happen. I hoped that it would.

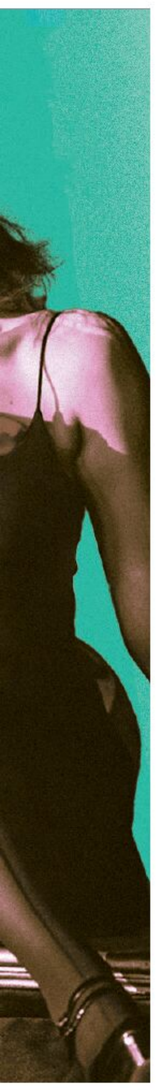
What other nominees are you rooting for?

MILIOTI I'm thrilled to see the nominations for *Black Mirror* [Milioti starred in one episode this season], as well.

KOCH *Severance, The White Lotus, Only Murders in the Building*.

JENNY SLATE (*DYING FOR SEX*) I feel so happy for everyone who is nominated, but there are certain nominations — like Brian Tyree Henry,

From left: *Nobody Wants This* creator Erin Foster and stars Adam Brody and Kristen Bell.



Feels like the first time: (from left) Cooper Koch, Jenny Slate, Owen Cooper, Jason Isaacs and Cristin Milioti.

I love that person so much. I met him through the [awards] circuit. *Marcel the Shell With Shoes On* was nominated for an Oscar the same year he was, and we sat next to each other at a lunch and talked the whole time. He texted me saying, "Congratulations," and I texted back saying, "I'm at the UPS store shipping a lampshade and haven't been on the internet. Please tell me you've also been nominated, don't break my heart right now." And he's like, "Yes. Yes, I was."

COOPER I have to go with Pedro Pascal because I've watched both seasons of *The Last of Us*, and they were just amazing. And Bella Ramsey got nominated, and they're really good.

FOSTER I love *The Studio*. I feel like *The Studio* really is a shoo-in for being the favorite this year, so I guess they're our biggest competition. So if I can wish ill upon those people, I guess that's who I should wish it toward. (*Laughs.*)

Who is the coolest person you've met on the campaign trail this season?

MILIOTI I've had lovely talks with Kathy Bates and Jodie Foster that have been mind-blowingly meaningful to me as someone who worships their work.

What feedback have you gotten from audiences about what your show has meant to them?

KOCH After episode five, I had a couple friends who I think had experienced some similar things in their life in terms of abuse or whatnot. I remember them being incredibly moved and seen and feeling shook to the core in a good way and feeling like, "Wow, I feel represented here." I think that's just so special.

SLATE This show provokes a lot of thinking about, "What are the ways that I think I'm keeping myself in a place of safety, but are actually taking the wind out of my sails?" I've talked to a lot of people who've had their own light-bulb moments while watching the show — strangers in an airport, people who have interviewed me, friends of my mother-in-law, and even my older sister and her colleagues at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

MILIOTI I've had a lot of meaningful interactions with both people inside and outside of our industry about how much episode four [which focused on what led Sofia to Arkham Asylum] affected them. That episode certainly affected me. It's one of my favorite things that I've been a part of. I felt the energy around it, whether it was through interviews or talking to people on the street in my neighborhood. It's rare when the feeling you have about something is matched by the world.

Chris Gardner, Seija Rankin, Brande Victorian and Steven Zeitchik contributed to this report.

PENGUIN: COURTESY OF HBO. *ADOLESCENCE, MONSTERS, SIRENES, FOUR*: COURTESY OF NETFLIX. *DYING*: COURTESY OF FX. BELL: RODIN ECKENROTH/WIREIMAGE. *POKER*: COURTESY OF PEACOCK. *MATLOCK*: COURTESY OF CBS. *SATURDAY*: COURTESY OF NBC. *LOTUS*: FABIO LOVINO/HBO (2). *SEVERANCE*: COURTESY OF APPLE TV+.

Clockwise from left: Meghann Fahy, Cynthia Erivo, Kathy Bates, Colman Domingo and Bowen Yang.

SOLE STANDOUTS AMID THE SNUBS

These actors received Emmy noms for their performances, yet the series they starred in came up short

While shows like *Sirens*, *The Residence*, *Matlock* and *The Handmaid's Tale* (once an Emmy darling) missed out on nominations in the series categories, some of their actors received a singular, standout nod for their performance. In fact, 11 of this year's acting nominees received the only major category nomination for their respective shows.

In the genre of comedy, that distinction goes to Uzo Aduba, who was nominated for her lead role as Detective Cordelia Cupp on the recently canceled Netflix series *The Residence*; Colman Domingo, one-sixth of the tight-knit friend group at the center of the Tina Fey Netflix adaptation *The Four Seasons*; Cynthia Erivo, for her turn as the entire quintet known as the Kazinsky sisters on Peacock's *Poker Face*; Bowen Yang (though *Saturday Night Live* received a nom for outstanding scripted variety series); and Jeff Hiller for his supporting appearance as Joel on the third and final season of HBO's *Somebody Somewhere*.

In the drama sect are Kathy Bates for her titular role as Madeline "Matty" Matlock on the CBS revival of *Matlock*; Sharon Horgan, who stars as the eldest Garvey sibling, Eva, on Apple TV+'s *Bad Sisters*; Cherry Jones for her guest role as Holly Maddox on the sixth and final season of Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*; and Giancarlo Esposito, who guest stars as Stan Edgar on Prime Video's *The Boys*.

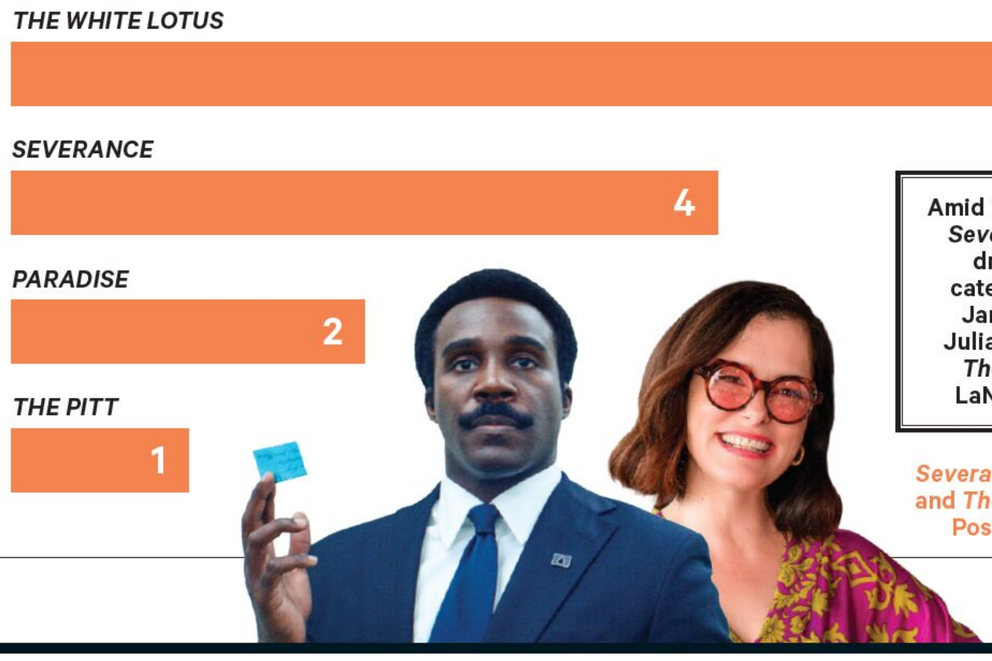
In the limited or anthology series category are Cate Blanchett for her portrayal of award-winning journalist Leila George on Apple TV+'s *Disclaimer*; Meghann Fahy in the lead role of Devon DeWitt on Netflix's *Sirens*; and Brian Tyree Henry, who starred as Ray Driscoll on Apple TV+'s *Dope Thief*.

And while Henry received the sole nomination for *Dope Thief*, the actor sang the praises of his castmates' performances to *The Hollywood Reporter*, saying, "[They're] just masters, and I really wish that the nominations reflected that this year."

— BRANDE VICTORIAN

SUPPORT SYSTEM

In the so-called Peak TV era, 11 out of the 14 noms in the drama supporting acting categories went to *The White Lotus* and *Severance*



Amid *The White Lotus* and *Severance* dominating drama supporting categories, *Paradise*'s James Marsden and Julianne Nicholson and *The Pitt*'s Katherine LaNasa scored noms.

Severance's Tramell Tillman and *The White Lotus*' Parker Posey received noms.

JACK KIRBY
HEROES AND HUMANITY

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From left: *Too Much, King of the Hill, Murderbot, Squid Game* and *Smoke*

CRITICS' CONVERSATION

Summer TV Tumbleweeds

There are signs of life for the small screen — Netflix's sexed-up *The Hunting Wives*, Hulu's toxic treat *Such Brave Girls* — but ongoing fallout from the strikes combined with the post-Emmy-deadline lull has resulted in unseasonable sparseness

ANGIE HAN Once upon a time, when broadcast ruled the roost, summer was a fallow time for TV. The traditional season would end in the spring, to start up again in the fall; it wasn't that there were *no* new shows, but they'd be exceptions in a sea of reruns. Of course, that's all changed in the past couple of decades, with cable and streaming moving the industry to year-round programming. Now there's always something fresh to watch, whether it's sweater or flip-flop weather.

Or … is there?

Technically, yes, we still got hundreds of hours of new TV the past few months: starry launches like Apple TV+'s *Murderbot* and Netflix's *Sirens* and *Too Much*; new seasons of recent hits like Netflix's *Squid Game*, Peacock's *Poker Face* and FX/Hulu's *The Bear*; revivals of older smashes like Showtime's *Dexter* (in the form of Paramount+'s *Dexter: Resurrection*) and Fox's *King of the Hill* (the upcoming 14th season will launch on Hulu). Not to mention long spells when it seemed all anyone wanted to talk about was Peacock's *Love Island*.

And yet, compared to years past, it's felt like tumbleweeds. There have been entire weeks that the TV scheduling gods seemed to abandon, while honest-to-god breakouts have been few and far between. Some of it is due to the fact that even now, summer is that weird period after the Emmys eligibility deadline but before the big broadcast launches of autumn. Some of it is that we're firmly on the other side of Peak TV. But, man, it's dry out there.

DANIEL FIENBERG I never minded those ancient days, as recently as 10 years ago, when summer was about catching up on broadcast shows — "If you haven't seen it before, it's new to you!" — or immersing yourself in *Big Brother* and its live feeds. As you say, it's only relatively speaking to note that the landscape has been sparse this summer. But it's been sparse enough that *Love Island* finally became, in its seventh installment, the sort of sensation stateside that it always was in the U.K. (CBS, which birthed *Love Island* in its domestic incarnation, would be wondering what took Americans so long if the network weren't trying so desperately to kowtow to the FCC and Donald Trump to grease the wheels for its megamerger.)

As you note, it isn't like TV has *entirely* fallen into some equivalent of the pre/post-Dec. 31 binary in the film release schedule. But the May 31 Emmy deadline has nevertheless hit the medium hard. You still get odd shows that straddle that deadline, like *Murderbot* and *Poker Face*, and shows that confuse the window entirely, like *The Bear* and *Squid Game*, which had new seasons arrive just as the previous seasons were being celebrated (*The Bear*) or snubbed (*Squid Game*) by the TV Academy. But there have been very few new shows that could be construed as "prestige."

And those shows have been polarizing, sometimes even splitting individual viewers in two. I found the twists in Apple TV+'s *Smoke* to be ludicrous, but I liked Taron Egerton's tricky performance and Jurnee Smollett's fierceness. I thought stretches of Lena Dunham's *Too Much* were emotionally complicated and amusingly raw; other times I wished Netflix had encouraged more self-editing.

At this point, half the shows we're getting were delayed by the

MUCH: ANA BLUMENKRON/NETFLIX. *MURDERBOT, SMOKE*: COURTESY OF APPLE TV+. *HILL*: COURTESY OF HULU. *SQUID*: NO JU-HAN/NETFLIX.

Poker Face (left) and *Such Brave Girls*

industry strikes and half were developed in the chilly aftermath of those strikes, and it all just feels unsteady. Of the big releases, what has stood out for you?

HAN Mainly the fact that a lot of this summer's "big" releases haven't been, really. Amazon's *We Were Liars* seemed well positioned to capture the Venn diagram overlap between *Big Little Lies* fans and *The Summer I Turned Pretty* fans, but even an insane final twist couldn't spark much conversation about such a dull series. I enjoyed Apple TV+'s Owen Wilson golf-com *Stick*, but it's so squarely in the *Ted Lasso*/*Shrinking* mold that it can't help feeling like a knockoff. Even *Murderbot* was less of a sensation than I expected, not to take anything away from a frequently funny, occasionally moving and always entertaining series.

That said, I have found delight in unexpected corners — including Amazon, which gave us the surprisingly wholesome YA grease-monkey drama *Motorheads* and Benito Skinner's solid college comedy *Overcompensating*; Syfy, which yielded the clever zombie murder mystery *Revival*; Hulu, which provided brisk 19th century American history with *Washington Black*; and HBO, which offered the glossy, prickly celebrity docuseries *Pee-wee as Himself*.

And nothing's felt more "Summer TV" in spirit to me than the one-two punch of Netflix's ridiculous *Sirens* followed by the even more hilariously bonkers *The Hunting Wives*. Both are over-the-top mystery-dramedies about extremely wealthy, irredeemably terrible people with dark secrets, flashy wardrobes and unsettling sexual tension with the (somewhat) less privileged women in their midst. Both are ludicrous and trashy in ways that make it clear they'd wear those descriptors as a badge. And both are thus utterly right for hot, lazy days when it seems even your brain's ditched you for the pool, and it's all you can do recline with a cold drink and chortle at the shenanigans of beautiful rich people.

FIENBERG *Sirens* and *The Hunting Wives* are the latest attempts to funnel TV's love of affluence porn through a semi-satirical lens, à la *Desperate Housewives*. I don't think *The Hunting Wives* has much on its mind that regionally semi-specific *Housewives* knockoffs like *GCB* or *Grosse Pointe Garden Society* didn't. But I have to give it credit for fully committing to its tawdriness in a way that *Sirens*, for me, didn't, however great Meghann Fahy is.

There's just so much familiarity to everything this summer. Even *Dexter: Resurrection* has retreated from the somber finality of *Dexter: New Blood*, resorting to the often cartoonish excesses that characterized both the best and worst of the original.

Half the shows we're getting were delayed by the industry strikes, half were developed in the chilly aftermath, and it all feels unsteady.

Lots of other stuff has felt like a pale imitation. Amazon had *Countdown*, a wannabe *24* that squandered Jensen Ackles' snarky likability (and *Ballard*, which was *Bosch* only without Bosch). Netflix had *The Waterfront*, a wannabe CW/WB North Carolina-set soap, which at least featured a deliciously weird guest turn from Topher Grace as a sociopathic drug kingpin. MGM+'s *The Institute* is by-the-numbers Stephen King, while *Stick* on Apple TV+ and *Untamed* on Netflix worked *despite* an overreliance on clichés, not because of it.

So I appreciated how fresh settings — a sports academy in the Spanish Pyrenees; Tijuana at a moment of political upheaval — gave a bit of novelty to generally formulaic YA soap *Olympo* and police procedural *The Gringo Hunters*, both on Netflix. However powerful the Netflix algorithm often feels, neither show appears to have found much traction.

Only Netflix's *Dept. Q*, with Matthew Goode leading a quirky team of cold case investigators, truly shined by both effectively embracing and upending conventions. It's one of my summer favorites, along with *The Bear*, which continues to give me enough beautifully rendered moments and impossibly long tables to overcome its clear self-indulgence.

But the show I'm trying hardest to get people to check out these days is Hulu's *Such Brave Girls*, a pitch-black, toxically hilarious comedy that, in its second season, confirms creator-star Kat Sadler as one of TV's most distinctive voices. As we look to the rest of the summer, do you see television salvation on the horizon?

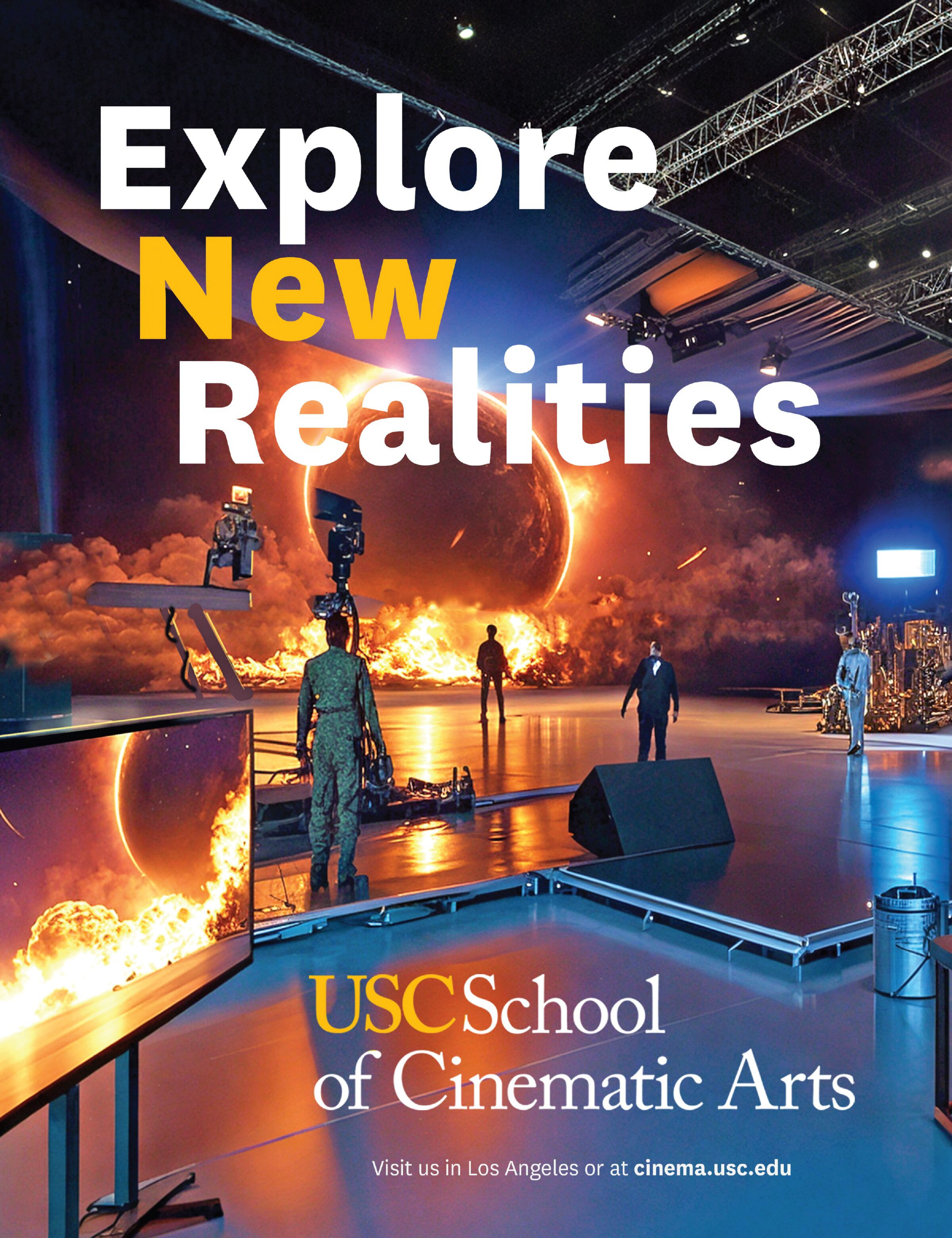
HAN I don't know about salvation, but I do see a less empty calendar — though a lot of what's on it looks familiar, too. I have not yet seen Starz's *Outlander* spinoff or Amazon's *The Terminal List* spinoff or Peacock's *The Rainmaker* remake, but I've already seen a bit of Hulu's *King of the Hill* revival, and while it's nice to be reunited with the gang again (at least once all the table-setting of the premiere is out of the way), I don't know that it's essential when the original, available on Hulu and Disney+, still holds up so well.

Certainly, it's possible to birth a bold stand-alone work out of existing IP — fingers crossed for Noah Hawley's upcoming *Alien: Earth* for FX. But the titles I'm most excited about, sight unseen, are originals from talents I already love, like Netflix's *Long Story Short* from Raphael Bob-Waksberg (*Bojack Horseman*) or FX's *The Lowdown* by Sterlin Harjo (*Reservation Dogs*). And I look forward to being taken completely by surprise by something I never saw coming — which is likelier when there are, y'know, lots of new shows actually being released.

FIENBERG With *King of the Hill*, I'm not sure "freshness" is really required. Look at how *South Park* has come storming back into the cultural conversation, nearly 28 years after its premiere, by doing ... exactly what it always did. Speaking of unkillable animation, there are new seasons of *Beavis and Butt-Head* and *Futurama* returning as well. The dream of the '90s, as we say, is still alive.

But yes, having new shows from Bob-Waksberg, Hawley and Harjo, plus long-awaited *The Office* companion series *The Paper* (Peacock), promising Daniel Dae Kim thriller *Butterfly* (Amazon) and THREE *Welcome to Wrexham*-esque shows about celebrities buying down-on-their-luck soccer teams (Eva Longoria in FX's *Necaxa*, Mark Consuelos and Kelly Ripa in ESPN's *Running With the Wolves* and Tom Brady in Amazon's *Built in Birmingham*) should help keep the tumbleweeds at bay. For now. THR

POKER: RALPH BAVARO/PEACOCK. *BRAVE*: DISNEY/VISHAL SHARMA.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THR Top Schools

The 25 Best Film Schools in the U.S. As the institutions on *THR*'s annual list prepare the next generation of moviemakers for the future, many are turning to virtual production, LED walls and, yes, AI

By Mia Galuppo

Before film school, we were just making short films on our own. We did everything — camera, lighting, acting," say **Matt** and **Ross Duffer**, the duo behind the Netflix smash hit *Stranger Things*. It wasn't until they went to Chapman University that they found what they call their "first true creative community."

Finding future collaborators and a strong alumni network continue to be some of the biggest selling points of film schools. But with cheap filmmaking tech (think iPhones) and access to nascent generative AI, the barrier to entry continues to lower for would-be directors, meaning the nation's top films schools are rapidly updating facilities and curricula to keep pace with a changing industry. Virtual production courses are becoming a must, as schools add LED walls and camera systems to allow real-time virtual filmmaking, while AI is being taught in courses like AI for Creative Professionals (Syracuse University) and Producing and Screenwriting With AI (LMU).

But there was no AI used to compile *The Hollywood Reporter*'s annual list of the world's best film schools. Instead, we did it the old-fashioned way — by considering new facilities, equipment and endowments as well as alumni successes (NYU grad **Sean Baker** swept this year's Oscars, after all).

1 USC

LOS ANGELES

When it comes to selling students on a new class about the success of the movie musical *Wicked*, it's all the more helpful when the school can claim the director, **Jon M. Chu**, as an alum. The private university remains one of the more expensive offerings on this list (485 students received aid directly from the film school, according to USC), with a curriculum and facilities that (nearly) justify a hefty price tag. As Hollywood continues to contend with the realities of AI and emerging tech, the School of Cinematic Arts received an advantageous donation to give their students a leg up. A $25 million gift from the Blavatnik Family Foundation will establish a 15,000-square-foot center with wraparound LED panel walls, new lighting and camera systems, as well as two soundstages and classrooms. Elsewhere, the newly established Steven M. Rales Cinematography Fund will permanently support the school's cinematography program. But more than new equipment or endowments, the nearly century-old film school's alumni network cannot be beat. **Ryan Coogler** met producing partner **Sev Ohanian** in USC's grad program, and this year they released the blockbuster *Sinners*. Ohanian counts the narrative filmmaking course CTPR 546 with producer **John Watson** as his favorite class, where students build out a creative team and pitch a project: "Years later, while working on *Fruitvale Station*, I kept thinking, 'This feels like 546 — just with more zeros.' "

TUITION $73,260 (undergraduate); $49,495 to $65,726 (graduate)

ALUMNI **Shonda Rhimes**, *Anora* producer **Alex Coco**

2 NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

NEW YORK CITY

Alum **Sean Baker** dominated this year's Oscars, bringing home four

Left: AFI students shoot a scene in a Los Angeles studio. Above: Rendering of the future $25 million Blavatnik Center for Virtual Production at the USC School of Cinematic Arts.

statuettes for his film *Anora*, including best picture. With the opening of the Martin Scorsese Virtual Production Center, the school has launched a one-year Master of Professional Study (MPS) in virtual production for which the inaugural class of 22 students trained on two 3,500-square-foot, double-height, column-free virtual production stages. For students focused on traditional film and TV production, there is a Special Topics in Virtual Production toe-dip class that focuses on generative AI. The school has upgraded its fleet of equipment, including new LED lighting gear, Arri Alexa 35 for graduate students, and Canon C70 and Canon XF605 for the documentary-focused curriculum. As for faculty, new additions include screenwriter **Lara Shapiro** (*The Americans*), while *Spider-Man* director and alum **Jon Watts** taught several master classes to undergraduates.
TUITION $72,082 (undergraduate); $79,712 (graduate)
ALUMNI *Hacks* co-creator **Jen Statsky**, **Spike Lee**

3 AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE
LOS ANGELES

At this year's Cannes, AFI alums were all over the lineup, from **Ari Aster** in the main competition with *Eddington* to Un Certain Regard entry *The Plague* by 2017 grad **Charlie Polinger** to cinematographer **Matthew Libatique** with **Spike Lee**'s *Highest 2 Lowest*. AFI's conservatory-style graduate school continues to have a strong alumni network, but it comes with one of the highest tuition costs on this list (the school says it awarded nearly $2 million in scholarships last year). Partnering with Amazon, a $200,000 grant will see students test AI-driven tools that, if successful, will be integrated into the curriculum. *Sinners* cinematographer and AFI alum **Autumn Durald Arkapaw** counts cinematography chair **Stephen Lighthill** (*Gimme Shelter*) as an early mentor that she hopes to carry forward: "Being the first woman to shoot a feature film on 65mm on a film like *Sinners* means so much to me. There will be lots of girls who will look up who shot our film and be inspired to think big."
TUITION $70,487 (graduate)
ALUMNI **Darren Aronofsky**, **Brad Falchuk**

4 CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
ORANGE, CALIFORNIA

Construction has begun on a multimillion-dollar Innovation Hub that will house a new LED wall, the school's second. But having the hardware is only one part of the equation, and Chapman's virtual production curriculum includes an impressive array of classes (from animation to live production) that makes use of the Unreal Engine, a computer graphics game engine used by major Hollywood productions to create real-time virtual sets and environments. New additions include a sound design MFA program and the expansions of the school's career center, which assists students with both internships and post-grad job placement at companies like Amazon MGM and WME. Alumni are also becoming an increasingly regular presence at film festivals (**James Sweeney**'s *Twinless* was in Sundance's 2025 U.S. competition section). **Michael Pruss**, president of film at **Ridley Scott**'s Scott Free, counts producer **Patricia Meyer** as a favorite professor at Chapman, adding that she was both encouraging and realistic about the movie business: "That kind of mentorship makes a huge difference when you're just starting out after college and trying to make sense of it all."
TUITION $67,490 (undergraduate); $51,478 (graduate)
ALUMNI **Duffer brothers**, **Justin Simien**

5 LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY
LOS ANGELES

In a crowded field of L.A.-area film programs, LMU continues to compete with updates to curriculum and an emphasis on financial aid. Partnering with the Loyola Law School, LMU launched a Business of Screenwriting course that looks at the new legal challenges to writing, while another new entry, Producing and Screenwriting With AI, will be a chance for students to learn about AI tech from development to distribution. LMU recently announced a partnership with Sony Electronics to launch the Social Impact Filmmaking Lab, where recent grads will have the chance to have their short films underwritten by Sony. Alum and producer **Effie Brown** recalls a student internship on **Robert Townsend**'s *The Five Heartbeats*, saying that LMU prepared her for the "realities of the industry through hands-on experiences."
TUITION $65,367 (undergraduate); $1,719 per unit (graduate)
ALUMNI **Francis Lawrence**; *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* director **Michael Jelenic**

6 EMERSON COLLEGE
BOSTON

Starting in the fall semester, Emerson has rebranded its Department of Visual & Media Arts as the School of Film, Television & Media Arts. With the new name comes an emphasis on new tech and virtual production, with AI having been integrated across the curriculum. Students also have access to an LED wall and the Unreal Engine for game and virtual set design coursework, as well as other student projects. While most film schools focus on creative coursework, fewer focus on the business of entertainment, but Emerson offers a minor in Business of Creative Enterprises, which is meant to prepare students to become executives and reps.
TUITION $57,984 (undergraduate); $1,495 per unit (graduate)
ALUMNI Warner Bros. film chief **Pamela Abdy**, the **Daniels**

7 UT AUSTIN
AUSTIN, TEXAS

Heading into its 60th year, the Radio Television and Film department is doubling down on its sports production program, now offering a Sports Production and Broadcasting minor to go along with the four new production control rooms at UT's stadium, where the often-top-ranked Longhorns play. Through the program, students will help produce live game broadcasts for ESPN linear and digital networks. Elsewhere at UT, where tuition has stayed fairly consistent year-over-year, a $5 million gift from **Matt Karch**, CEO of Saber Interactive, has helped the school launch a gaming institute where courses like Business of Gaming: From Concept to Console will be offered in the fall. "It was a safe space where someone like myself could experiment freely, without a paralyzing fear of failure," says alum and *Abbott Elementary* showrunner **Patrick Schumacker**.
TUITION $11,230 (undergraduate resident), $43,776 (undergraduate nonresident); $9,996 (graduate resident), $18,816 (graduate nonresident)
ALUMNI **Glen Powell**, *Sing Sing* producer **Monique Walton**

8 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
NEW YORK CITY

From the awards season to the box office, there is often Columbia representation, as was the case this year with *A Complete Unknown* director **James Mangold** and *Minecraft* writer **Chris Galletta**. The posh film school has welcomed *Hala* and *Ramy* writer-director **Minhal Baig** and historian **Elizabeth Ramírez-Soto** onto its faculty. The main draw of Columbia remains receiving a film degree from an Ivy League institution — always the only Ivy on this list — and the proximity to New York City's entertainment sector.
TUITION $73,868 to $77,840 (undergraduate/graduate)
ALUMNI **James Ponsoldt**, **Anna Boden**

9 DEPAUL UNIVERSITY
CHICAGO

The school, which sits within the College of Computing and Digital Media, has long focused on a technical education. Now,

A student in Emerson's Sculpting and Animation class works on a sculpture in the Engagement Media Lab.

USC: HABIB ZARGARPOUR/COURTESY OF USC; AFI: RAY CHANG/COURTESY OF AFI; EMERSON: DEREK PALMER/COURTESY OF EMERSON COLLEGE

it's continuing to expand its virtual production curriculum, adding two new minors in Virtual Production as well as an M.S. in Film/TV Virtual Production and an AI in Film Education Conference. Two alums — *The People's Joker* director-star **Vera Drew** and *Ghostlight* director **Alex Thompson**, were nominated for the John Cassavetes Award at the 2024 Independent Spirit Awards.
TUITION $46,776 (undergraduate); $25,558 to $35,388 (graduate)
ALUM TV director **Daniel Willis** (*Matlock*)

10 UNC SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

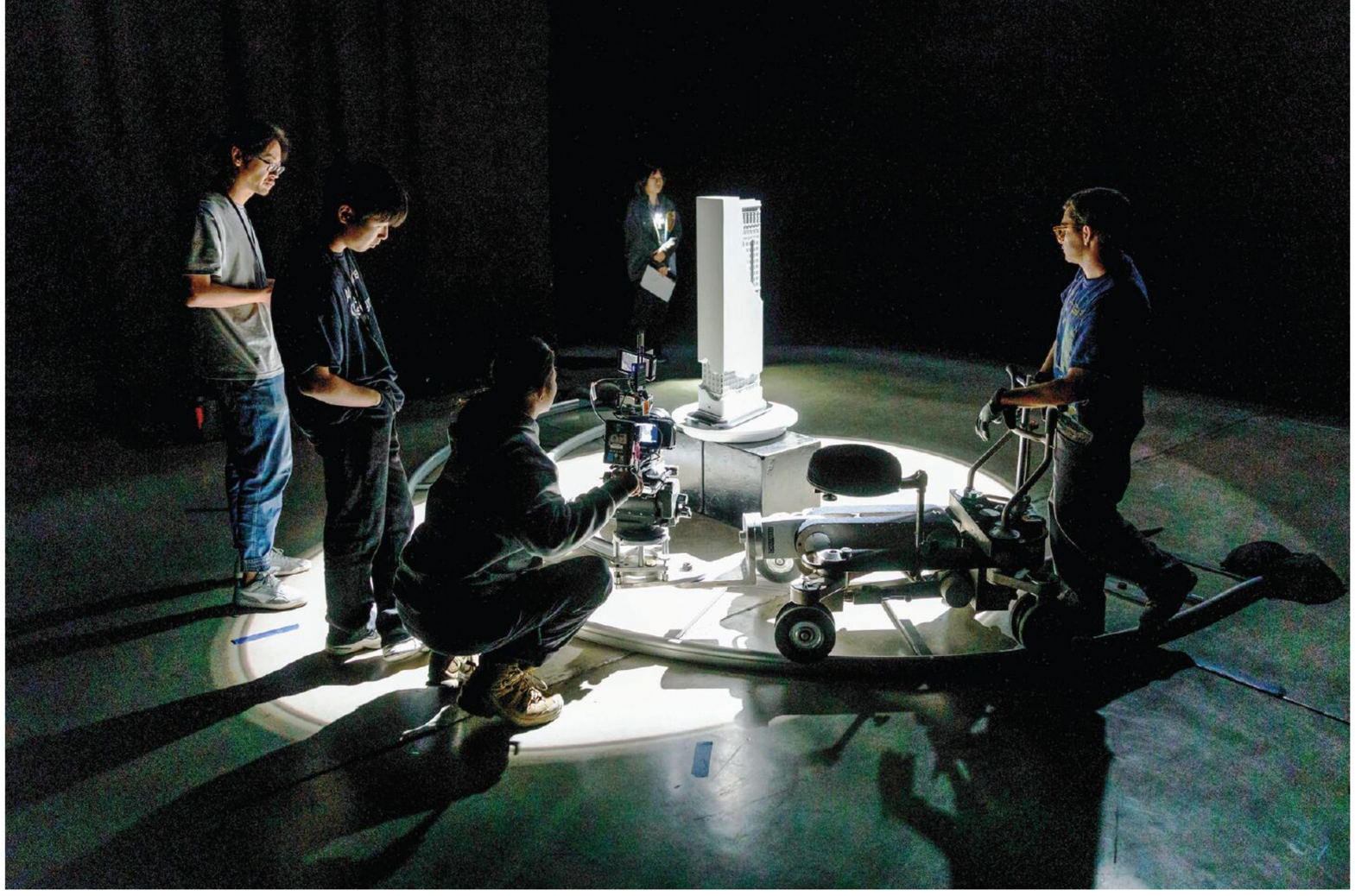
WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

As the economic barriers to a Hollywood career continue to rise, the affordability of this public arts school can't be overstated. At UNCSA, where new courses for the 2025 school year include "motion capture for actors and directors" and "podcast to film production," the school funds student productions. Alum **Danny McBride**, who based his Rough House banner in the Carolinas, says UNCSA's equitable education was invaluable. "It put all the filmmakers on the same playing field," he says. "You really had to rely on the other people that were at school with you, your friends and your collaborators." New for the next school year is an MFA in Media Archiving and Curatorial Practice.
TUITION $6,497 (undergraduate resident), $24,231 (undergraduate nonresident); $9,696 (graduate resident), $24,399 (graduate nonresident)
ALUMNI Jeff Nichols, **Craig Zobel**

11 UCLA

LOS ANGELES

After years of functioning under an interim dean, UCLA has named former UC Santa Cruz Arts dean **Celine Parreñas Shimizu** to head the School of Theater, Film and Television. The hire is seen as sign the school will shift focus toward film theory and away from physical production. Nonetheless, this year UCLA offered a new course for cinematography and directing students in virtual production centered on the LED volume tech. And, the school says, more than 20 film program alumni and professors were part of projects at this year's Sundance, including MFA grad **Sierra Falconer**, whose thesis short film became the feature U.S. Dramatic competition title *Sunfish*. The geographically advantageous UCLA remains one of the top options for California residents looking for a cost-effective film program housed within one of the state's top public universities.
TUITION $19,473 (undergraduate resident), $53,673 (undergraduate nonresident); $37,812 (graduate resident), $50,057 (graduate nonresident)
ALUMNI *The Woman King* director **Gina Prince-Bythewood**, screenwriter **David Koepp**



ArtCenter College of Design students line up a shot. The school is known for producing top talent in the advertising industry.

12 SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

SCAD is forever expanding and will soon have more than 250,000 square feet dedicated to learning that includes two LED virtual production walls, a casting office and an 11-acre backlot. In 2026, SCAD will add two new soundstages to the mix, while other additions include an M.A. in cinematography and an M.A. in editing. The school leverages the city's film festival — now a stop on the awards circuit — into educational opportunities for students, including conversations with filmmakers like **Kevin Costner**.

"UT Austin was a safe space where someone like myself could experiment freely, without a paralyzing fear of failure."
Abbott Elementary showrunner Patrick Schumacker

TUITION $42,165 (undergraduate); $43,155 (graduate)
ALUM 2025 Sundance winner **Alireza Khatami**

13 COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

CHICAGO

An average of $15,810 in financial aid is given to each student in the School of Film and Television, according to Columbia, further offsetting costs at an already cost-conscious school. There is now a B.A. offered in Editing and Post-Sound, while new courses include directing in virtual environments and casting. Columbia is known for graduating below-the-line talent like alum **Eric Frankel**, who was nominated for a 2024 Emmy in set design for *The Bear*.
TUITION $37,344 (undergraduate); $44,583 (graduate)
ALUM Lena Waithe

14 FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

A former Regal movie theater will be put to good use after a Florida State's film school acquisition, with plans to add on four movie theaters, a 2,624-square-foot virtual production stage and two new soundstages. In spite of the changes, tuition has remained steady year-over-year. In 2024, the school launched an optional third year to MFA students to make a genre film fully funded by the college that is crewed by second-year students.
TUITION $6,466 (undergraduate resident), $14,430 (undergraduate nonresident); $21,569 (graduate, production, resident), $49,982 (graduate, production, nonresident); $20,792 (graduate, writing, resident), $45,418 (graduate, writing, nonresident)
ALUMNI Barry Jenkins, *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* director **Wes Ball**

15 ITHACA COLLEGE

ITHACA, NEW YORK

Ithaca already offered mini courses on AI for Media Production and AI's Impact on Screenwriting and now plans to integrate the new tech into more of its education. Along with Arri, Sony and Canon cameras, the school also has all the tech needed for virtual production. And while the upstate New York campus is far from major entertainment hubs (it's a four-hour drive to the city), the school does offer a semester in L.A., with an emphasis on internships.
TUITION $56,750 (undergraduate)
ALUM *Stranger Things* producer **Rand Geiger**

16 BOSTON UNIVERSITY

BOSTON

A new $3.5 million investment will see the addition of a 9,400-square-foot production facility in September geared toward the more traditional directing and cinematography paths. But as the creator economy continues to make gains in Hollywood, launching in the next school year will be a joint bachelor's and master's in Branded Content Production that will prepare students to make content for a variety of clients.
TUITION $69,870 (undergraduate)
ALUMNI Safdie brothers, *SNL* director **Liz Patrick**

17 RINGLING COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

SARASOTA, FLORIDA

Ringling, where class sizes average only 12 students, offers ample hands-on time with industry-standard facilities that include three LED Walls, five soundstages and 15 editing suites. The school now offers a virtual production certificate in which the coursework is followed by industry internships with production facilities or advanced virtual postproduction training.
TUITION $54,400 (undergraduate)
ALUM *Sonic the Hedgehog* director **Jeff Fowler**

18 WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT

After contending with a 16 percent acceptance rate at one of the country's most selective liberal arts universities, prospective film majors get winnowed down further to a group of roughly 60 for their junior and senior years, where the focus is on film history, writing-directing and documentary production. Post-grad, there will soon be a post-baccalaureate in documentaries meant to act as an early career boot camp. The school also offers new career transition grants of up to $5,000 each for graduating first-generation

COURTESY OF ARTCENTER COLLEGE OF DESIGN

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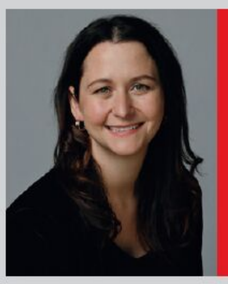

TARA WOODBURY
Director, Content – Canada
Netflix

DANIELLE WOODROW
Director, Content – Canada
Netflix

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and BIPOC film majors who are looking to enter the entertainment industry. Recent alumni accomplishments range from Sundance darlings (*Thelma* director **Josh Margolin**) to MCU entrants (*Captain America: Brave New World* director **Julius Onah**).
TUITION $72,438 (undergraduate)
ALUMNI Mike White, **Alex Kurtzman**

19 SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

The school's BFA and MFA (via the College of Visual and Performing Arts) focus on independent production and animation, while B.S. and M.A. programs (via the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications) encompass screenwriting, doc, sports and new media. New courses include AI for Creative Professionals as well as classes on Black independent cinema and intimacy coordination. A recent donation means $10,000 in grants will go toward BFA and MFA student films each year.
TUITION $66,580 (undergraduate); $35,010 (graduate)
ALUMNI J.D. Dillard, Pixar president **Jim Morris**

20 FEIRSTEIN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF CINEMA AT BROOKLYN COLLEGE
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Founded a decade ago as a public-private partnership with plenty of industry support, Feirstein counts **Ethan Hawke** and **Darren Aronofsky** as members of its advisory council and is a top public offering in the most expensive entertainment hub in the country. The program, based in Steiner Studios at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, offers an MFA with specializations in live-action filmmaking, digital animation and VFX and new courses on casting, intimacy coordination and analogue cinematography.
TUITION $21,134 (graduate resident), $30,564 (graduate nonresident)
ALUM *Palm Royale* editor **Fay Gartenberg**

A film student at work at UNCSA, where all student productions are funded by the school.

Vancouver Film School

THE 15 BEST INTERNATIONAL FILM SCHOOLS

AUSTRALIAN FILM TELEVISION AND RADIO SCHOOL
AUSTRALIA

AFTRS counts a who's who of regional cinema among its alumni — Oscar-winning auteur **Jane Campion** (*The Piano*) and Hollywood director **Phillip Noyce** (*Patriot Games*) are grads — and offers industry-driven programs covering every aspect of filmmaking. Its On Country Pathways Program trains emerging First Nations creators in remote communities.

BEIJING FILM ACADEMY
CHINA

The academy grants bachelor's, master's and even Ph.D. degrees in film, and virtually every major Chinese filmmaker has passed through its halls, including **Zhang Yimou** (*Raise the Red Lantern*) and **Chen Kaige** (*Farewell My Concubine*).

ECAM
SPAIN

Spain is one of the few regions that can boast of a production boom — Netflix has invested heavily in the country — and Madrid-based ECAM has been one of the main beneficiaries. Their school-to-studio pipeline is exemplified by Goya-winning director-writer team **Rodrigo Sorogoyen** and **Isabel Peña**, who met at ECAM and went on to produce the acclaimed Spanish series *Antidisturbios*.

ESCAC
SPAIN

Catalan's premium film and TV training ground — located in the city of Terrassa, north of Barcelona — boasts Oscar nominee **Juan Antonio Bayona** (*Society of the Snow, The Impossible*) among its alumni and prides itself on a balance of film theory and practical training. The school also offers a one-year introductory filmmaking course in English and a bilingual stunt academy.

FAMU PRAGUE
CZECH REPUBLIC

Two-time Oscar winner **Milos Forman** (*Amadeus*) and Polish auteur **Agnieszka Holland** (*Green Border*) are grads of FAMU, which remains the gold standard of European film schools and includes accredited programs in English in directing and scriptwriting.

HONG KONG ACADEMY FOR PERFORMING ARTS
HONG KONG

Hong Kong's premier performing arts conservatory offers practice-based programs in directing, acting, cinematography, producing and more. Uniquely interdisciplinary, the academy brings together filmmakers, actors, musicians and designers under one roof.

KOREAN ACADEMY OF FILM ARTS
SOUTH KOREA

KAFA has been a springboard for the nation's cinematic New Wave since its founding by the Korean Film Council in 1984. The elite two-year academy keeps class sizes small (about 30 students) and offers intensive training in directing, cinematography, producing and animation. *Parasite* director **Bong Joon Ho** is a KAFA graduate who went on to win Korea's first Palme d'Or and Oscar.

LONDON FILM SCHOOL
U.K.

London Film School alumni did more than just shine at this year's Cannes Film Festival, as **Carla Simón** debuted the poignant *Romería* and **Oliver Hermanus** grabbed attention with the buzzy gay romance *The History of Sound*. In June, news broke that LFS has officially partnered with the prestigious Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting.

NATIONAL FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL
U.K.

NFTS highlights from the last year include a 10 million pound ($13.5 million) government commitment to expand its historic campus, four NFTS alumni nominated at this year's Oscars and a history-making Cannes Film Festival world premiere of *Ether* — the only time a first-year student has secured a debut on the Croisette.

SAM SPIEGEL FILM SCHOOL
ISRAEL

The country's premier film school continued with its program for Palestinian and Arabic-speaking students, now in its fourth year, ensuring Sam Spiegel remains one of the only institutions in the region where Jewish, Muslim and Christian students — both Israeli and Palestinian — study, live and create side by side.

TOKYO UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS
JAPAN

Geidai (as the school is nicknamed) emphasizes cross-disciplinary collaboration, with student directors, animators and composers working together on projects. Notable recent alumni include Oscar-winning filmmaker **Ryusuke Hamaguchi** (*Drive My Car*).

TORONTO FILM SCHOOL
CANADA

With local production booming, TFS' continuing focus on below-the-line film and TV talent this year included a $2.5 million collaboration with Sony Canada, allowing students to work with new cameras and production gear in the classroom before reaching U.S. production hubs for major streamers in Toronto.

UNIVERSIDAD DE CINE
ARGENTINA

Arguably the best film school in South America, the Buenos Aires institution offers undergraduate degrees in everything from directing and producing to scriptwriting and animation, though applicants from non-Spanish-speaking countries need to provide a B2 level Spanish language certificate to be considered.

VANCOUVER FILM SCHOOL
CANADA

During the 2025 awards season, VFS boasted 107 alumni credits at the Oscars and 398 at the Emmys. New additions to VFS include foley artist **Diane Schimpl** joining as a sound design instructor.

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON (TE HERENGA WAKA)
NEW ZEALAND

Victoria University of Wellington has emerged as a rising force in film education thanks to its Miramar Creative Centre — a purpose-built facility launched in 2017 in partnership with **Peter Jackson**'s Weta and Park Road studios. Coursework spans directing, VFX and animation, with master's degrees that draw on the country's Hollywood-connected screen sector. — M.G.

COURTESY OF SCHOOL (2)

The Hollywood Reporter

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THR Top Schools

21 CAL STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

NORTHRIDGE, CALIFORNIA

CSUN's Department of Cinema & Television Arts is a top public program in Los Angeles County, with tech rivaling its counterparts that have well over seven times the tuition costs. New faculty includes writer-producer **Talicia Raggs** (*NCIS: New Orleans*), and a fully online Entertainment Industry Management Graduate program prepares students for careers on the business side of Hollywood. And CSUN, a Hispanic Serving Institution, has a diverse student population that is 48 percent Latino.

TUITION $7,850 (undergraduate); $9,464 (graduate)

ALUMNI *The Conners* exec producer **Dave Caplan**, Lucasfilm exec **John Hampian**

22 ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

RIT alumni overindex as VFX and virtual production professionals, making it a good option for the more tech-inclined film student. With a B.S. degree in Motion Picture Science, areas of research include immersive audio and imaging systems. Alums include founders and CEOs of tech-focused entertainment firms like pre-vis company The Third Floor and editing platform Frame.io. Outside of New York, RIT's semester in L.A. program has expanded to include a games design curriculum.

TUITION $60,774 (undergraduate); $61,762 (graduate)

ALUMNI Bad Robot Games CEO **Anna Sweet**

23 RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

The Mason Gross School of the Arts offers a state-school tuition with easy commuter access to both New York City and New Jersey, where Netflix and other studios continue to build out production operations. The school's lauded Documentary Film Lab, an in-house doc unit led by filmmaker **Thomas Lennon**, sees students work on nonfiction projects across all levels of production, while new courses include AI and New Technologies in Filmmaking and Horror Film Production.

TUITION $14,176 (undergraduate resident); $32,132 (undergraduate nonresident)

ALUM Marvel writer **Christopher Markus**

24 HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

HEMPSTEAD, NEW YORK

New courses at the Lawrence Herbert School of Communication include Gen AI for Film and Television and Queer Detective Films and Literature. Seven new Sony FX3 camera kits were added for the intermediate film classes, and the upcoming school year will see the addition of a fourth soundstage space that is 2,000 square feet and two stories high. The school has an array of scholarships and grants set aside for film students, including the Student Experience Fund that supports students looking to do a semester in Los Angeles or take part in the Rome-based study abroad program.

TUITION $58,845 (undergraduate)

ALUM Dawn Olmstead

25 ARTCENTER COLLEGE OF DESIGN

PASADENA

At ArtCenter, the emphasis is on production from the jump, with minimal theory and history classes. The program is known for producing top technical talent that has long found success in the advertising industry, with students collecting top prizes at ad-focused awards shows. New courses include AI Tools in Film and Shooting on Film, while television director **Jude Weng** (*Matlock*) and cinematographer **Robert Elswit** stopped by as guest speakers in the past school year.

TUITION $55,182 (undergraduate); $58,320 (graduate)

ALUM Zack Snyder THR

Chapman students shoot a scene for a sci-fi project. The school is currently building a multimillion-dollar Innovation Hub that will house a new LED wall.

State University of New York at Stony Brook on Long Island

6 UNDER-THE-RADAR FILM SCHOOLS IN LOS ANGELES AND NEW YORK

The best local programs in or near entertainment hubs on either coast

CALIFORNIA

Biola University
The Snyder School of Cinema and Media Arts is still on track to open its new studio facility in 2026, adding to production offerings that already include a 1,052-square-foot soundstage, nine editing bays and Red, Sony and Canon cameras. Its B.A. in Cinema and Media Arts includes concentrations in directing, cinematography, the business of entertainment, and VFX and 3D animation.

Azusa Pacific University
Less than an hour's drive from downtown Los Angeles, Azusa Pacific offers a faith-based art education and degrees that include a B.A. in Animation and Visual Effects, B.A. in Cinematic Arts or a BFA in Cinematic Arts Production. A 2025 student showcase took place on the Warner Bros. lot, and graduates have gone on to work at Hollywood institutions like Disney and DreamWorks.

Cal State University, Long Beach
Alumni of CSULB, where tuition for California residents is only $3,225 a semester, include Oscar-winning sound editor **Karen Baker Landers**. Students can expect to take standardized classes like On-Set Safety and Best Practices. The Department of Cinematic Arts also has a learning exchange program with Hamburg University of Applied Sciences.

NEW YORK

Purchase College
In-state residents will pay only $7,000 a year in tuition (out-of-state residents can expect to pay $17,670) for Purchase's conservatory-style BFA program that focuses on the basics of traditional production. By the third year, students choose a specialization — narrative, documentary or experimental filmmaking — and focus on that area of study.

State University of New York City College
Choosing from a fiction or documentary track, undergraduates can expect to pay $3,465 for in-state tuition per semester at this public institution based in Manhattan. The degree culminates in a 10- to 12-minute thesis film, and graduates have gone to work on series like *Ramy* and *Law & Order*.

State University of New York at Stony Brook
At Stony Brook, students can earn either an MFA in television writing or an MFA in film (a minor in filmmaking is also offered for students from all disciplines), with curriculum headed by Killer Films principals **Pamela Koffler** and **Christine Vachon**. This film program is specifically geared toward indie filmmakers, but students can still access equipment, including RED Epic-W and Canon C200 cameras. — M.G.

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Berlinale, 2024

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THE MOUNTAIN
Toronto, 2024

Rachel House
Co-Writer, Director

THE SURRENDER
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Cailin Yatsko
Cinematographer

BUNNYLOVR
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Emily Cohn
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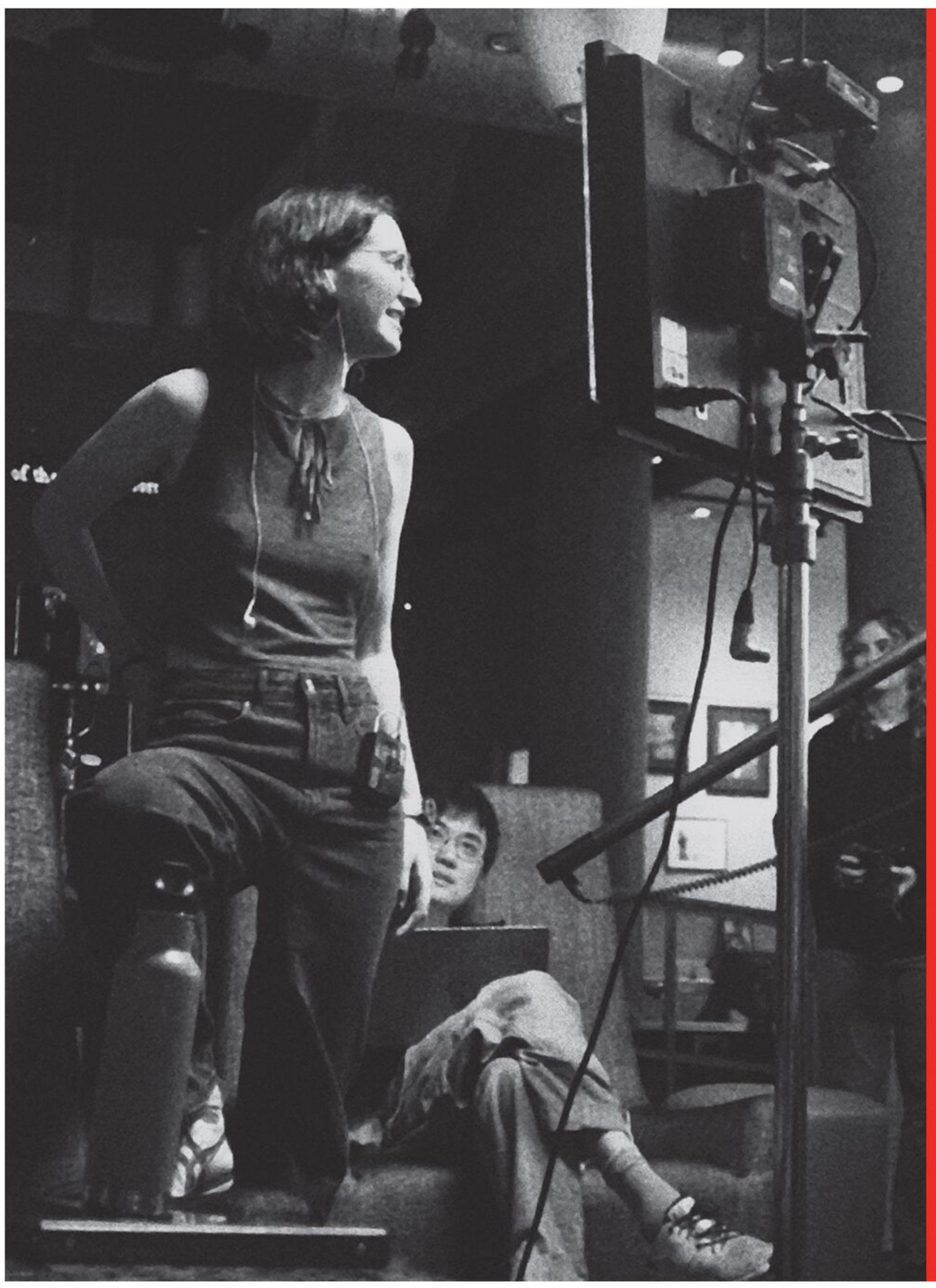

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Hofstra film students on the set of the senior film, "Come to Life," directed by Holly Pasch '25.

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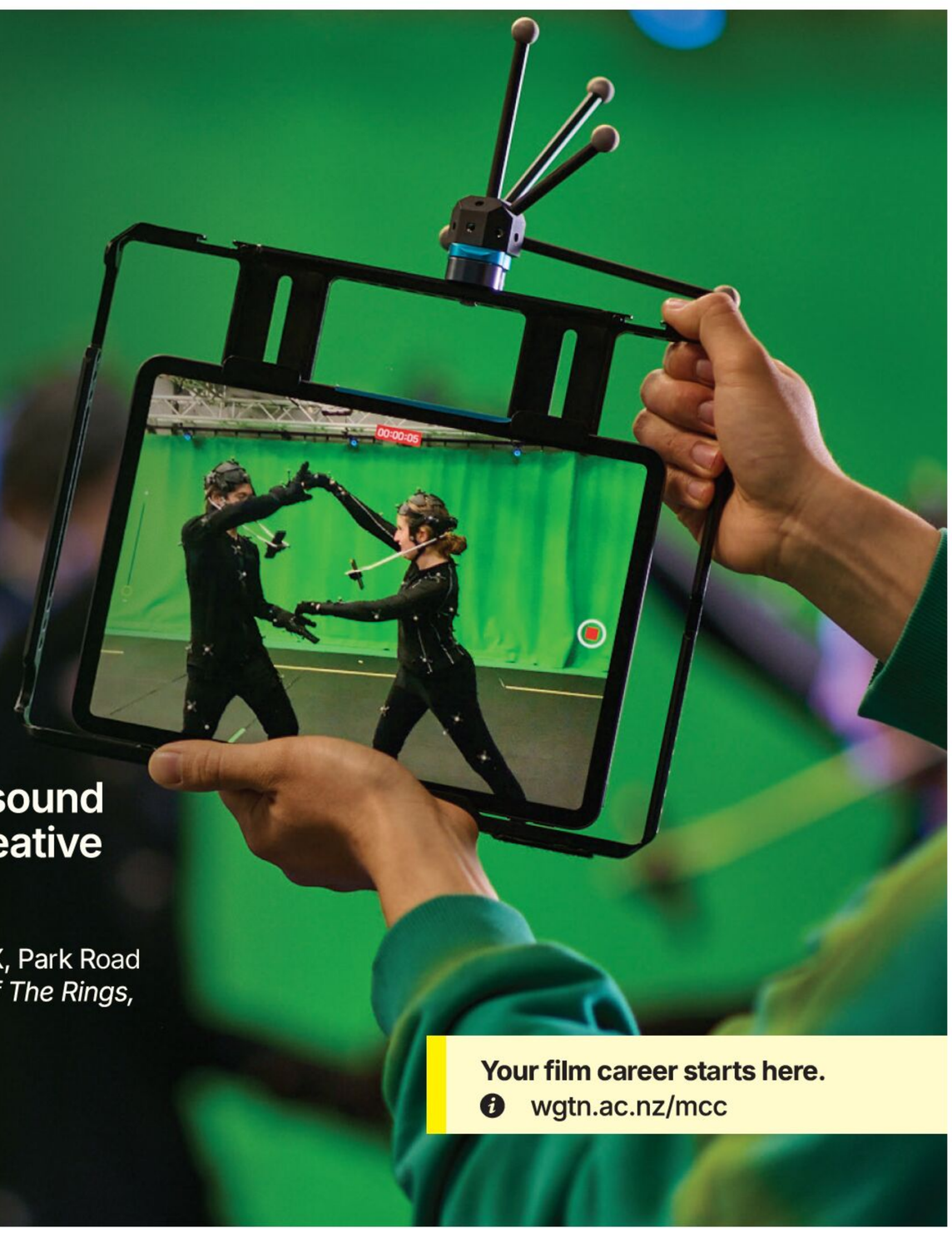

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Pee-wee's Big Adventure Had Audiences Rolling

Forty years ago, Paul Reubens and Tim Burton took viewers on a ride to remember with *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*. The film centers on Reubens as titular Pee-wee Herman, whose hunt for his stolen bicycle leads him to the Alamo. As a member of the L.A. comedy troupe the Groundlings, Reubens developed the childlike character and played him in the 1980s in live stage shows, an HBO special and appearances on *Late Night With David Letterman*. "It dawned on me that I could actually become Pee-wee Herman," Reubens told *THR* in 2020 about his alter ego.

During a run of sold-out performances, the comedian landed a deal with Warner Bros. to write a Pee-wee feature. While on the studio lot, Reubens noticed people riding bikes and asked for one of his own. After being taken with the refurbished 1940s Schwinn he was given, Reubens retooled his movie to focus on the bike. "We had worked for three months, just trying to find a story," says Michael Varhol, who co-wrote the script with Reubens and another Groundlings standout, Phil Hartman. "We found the bike, and that's when all the pieces of the puzzle started fitting together."

After turning down Warners' suggested director, Reubens was granted a short window to land a better fit; he found it in Burton, who had never directed a feature but whose horror-comedy short *Frankenweenie* wowed Reubens. Elizabeth Daily, Mark Holton and Jan Hooks rounded out the cast, while composer Danny Elfman marked the first of his many collaborations with Burton.

Pee-wee's Big Adventure hit theaters Aug. 9, 1985, collected $40 million ($122 million today) and became a cult classic that spawned two sequels, including Netflix's 2016 film *Pee-wee's Big Holiday* from producer Judd Apatow. Reubens also played the character for five seasons of CBS' *Pee-wee's Playhouse*.

Big Adventure endures — the Alamo recently acquired Pee-wee's bike for display. Daily, who played love interest Dottie, told *THR* that she frequently exchanges lines with fans: "Guys will tell me, 'I'm a rebel, Dottie.' And I'll ask them to the drive-in."

— RYAN GAJEWSKI

Film Review

'Pee-wee's Big Adventure'

By KIRK ELLIS

"Pee-wee's Big Adventure" isn't just the funniest movie of the year; it's one of the funniest movies ever. The zany brainchild of comedian Paul Reubens, a former member of L.A.'s

PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE
Warner Bros.

escaped convict (Judd Omen), romances a roadside waitress (Diane Salinger) and terrorizes hapless Texans at the Alamo before recovering his beloved two-wheeler.

Herman is a cross between Harold Lloyd and Jerry Lewis (with a touch of Buster Keaton thrown in for good

Paul Reubens in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*. Before he died in 2023 after a private cancer battle, he executive produced the two-part documentary *Pee-wee as Himself*, now nominated for five Emmys.

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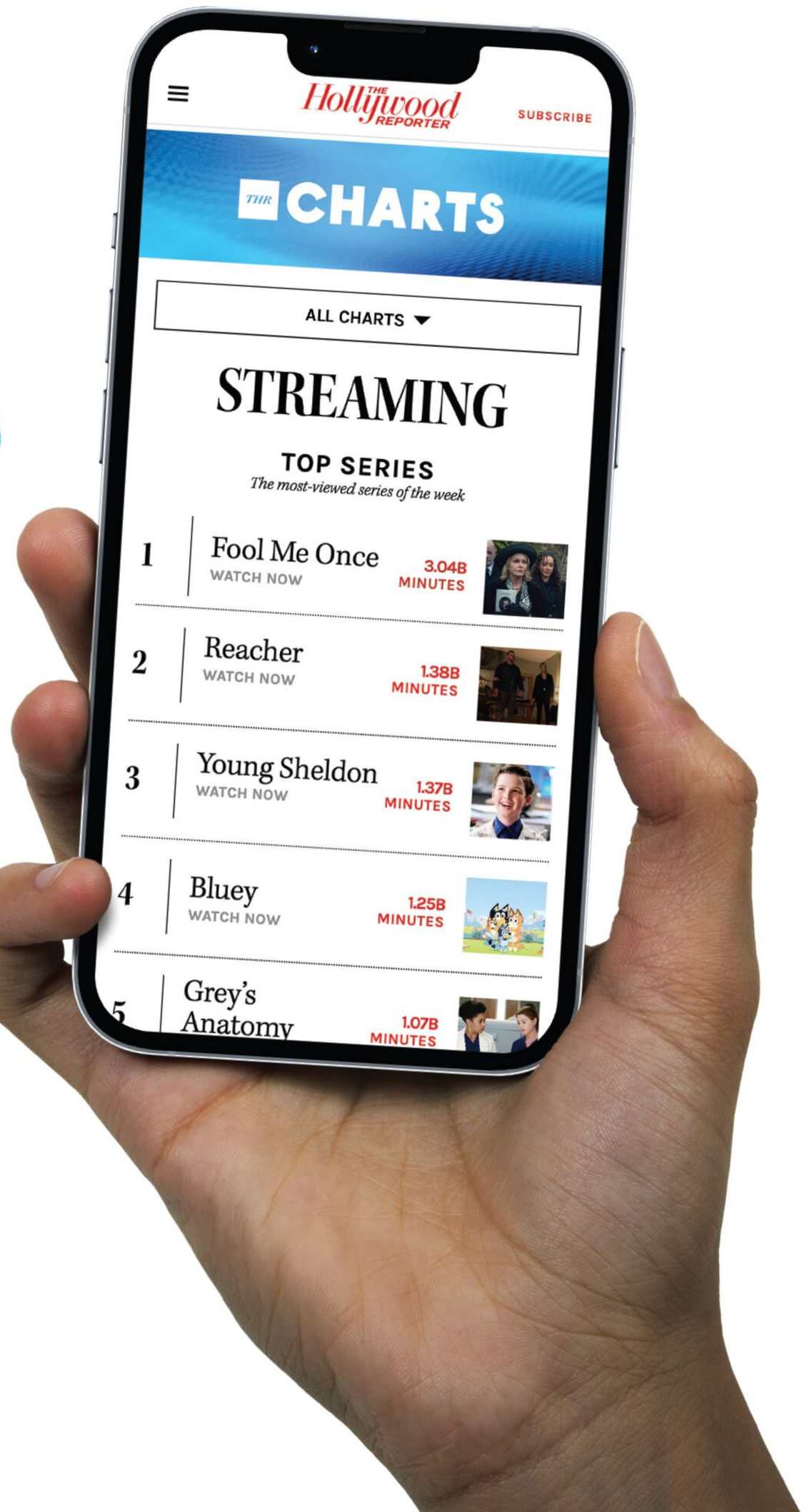

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