

left. Nothing. I ran north to Fountain Avenue, spotted him around the corner, and dragged him back again.

When we arrived, the social workers led him down a long, dark hallway and into a claustrophobic cubicle with a sheet-vinyl floor. The therapist sat behind a desk, running a finger through a black tangle in her hair. She was a slim Asian woman in her late twenties, with high cheekbones, dark red lipstick, and a pinstriped pantsuit.

Mystery slumped in a chair across from her.

"So how are you feeling today?" she asked, forcing a smile.

"I'm feeling," Mystery said, "like there's no point to anything." He burst into tears.

"I'm listening," she said, scrawling a note on her pad. The case was probably *already* closed for her.

"So I'm removing myself from the gene pool," he sobbed.

She looked at him with feigned sympathy as he continued. To her, he was just one of a dozen nutjobs she saw a day. All she needed to figure out was whether he required medication or institutionalization.

"I can't go on," Mystery went on. "It's futile."

With a rote gesture, she reached into a drawer, pulled out a small package of tissues, and handed it to him. As Mystery reached for the package, he looked up and met her eyes for the first time. He froze and stared at her silently. She was surprisingly cute for a clinic like this.

A flicker of animation flashed across Mystery's face, then died. "If I had met you in another time and another place," he said, crumpling a tissue in his hands, "things would have been different."

His body, normally proud and erect, curved like soggy macaroni in his chair. He stared glumly at the floor as he spoke. "I know exactly what to say and what to do to make you attracted to me," he continued. "It's all in my head. Every rule. Every step. Every word. I just can't... do it right now."

She nodded mechanically.

"You should see me when I'm not like this," he continued slowly, sniffing. "I've dated some of the most beautiful women in the world. Another place, another time, and I would have made you mine."

"Yes," she said, patronizing him. "I'm sure you would have."

She didn't know. How could she? But this sobbing giant with the crumpled tissue in his hands was the greatest pickup artist in the world. That was not a matter of opinion, but fact. I'd met scores of the self-

proclaimed best in the previous two years, and Mystery could out-game them all. It was his hobby, his passion, his calling.

There was only one person alive who could possibly compete with him. And that man was sitting in front of her also. From a formless lump of nerd, Mystery had molded me into a superstar. Together, we had ruled the world of seduction. We had pulled off spectacular pickups before the disbelieving eyes of our students and disciples in Los Angeles, New York, Montreal, London, Melbourne, Belgrade, Odessa, and beyond.

And now we were in a madhouse.



MEET STYLE

I am far from attractive. My nose is too large for my face and, while not hooked, has a bump in the ridge. Though I am not bald, to say that my hair is thinning would be an understatement. There are just wispy Rogaine-enhanced growths covering the top of my head like tumbleweed. In my opinion, my eyes are small and beady, though they do have a lively glimmer, which is done up to remain my secret because no one can see it behind my glasses. I have indentations on either side of my forehead, which I like and believe add character to my face, though I've never actually been complimented on them.

I am shorter than I'd like to be and so skinny that I look malnourished to most people, no matter how much I eat. When I look down at my pale, slouched body, I wonder why any woman would want to sleep next to it, let alone embrace it. So, for me, meeting girls takes work. I'm not the kind of guy women giggle over at a bar or want to take home when they're feeling drunk and crazy. I can't offer them a piece of my fame and bragging rights like a rock star or cocaine and a mansion like so many other men in Los Angeles. All I have is my mind, and nobody can see that.

You may notice that I haven't mentioned my personality. This is because my personality has completely changed. Or, to put it more accurately, I completely changed my personality. I invented Style, my alter ego. And in the course of two years, Style became more popular than I ever was—especially with women.

It was never my intention to change my personality or walk through the world under an assumed identity. In fact, I was happy with myself and my life. That is, until an innocent phone call (it always starts with an innocent phone call) led me on a journey into one of the oddest and most exciting underground communities that, in more than a dozen years of journalism, I have ever come across. The call was from Jeremie Ruby-Strauss (no relation), a book editor who had stumbled across a document on the Internet called

the layguide, short for *The How-to-Lay-Girls Guide*. Compressed into 150 sizzling pages, he said, was the collected wisdom of dozens of pickup artists who have been exchanging their knowledge in newsgroups for nearly a decade, secretly working to turn the art of seduction into an exact science. The information needed to be rewritten and organized into a coherent how-to book, and he thought I was the man to do it.

I wasn't so sure. I want to write literature, not give advice to horny adolescents. But, of course, I told him it wouldn't hurt to take a look at it.

The moment I started reading, my life changed. More than any other book or document—be it the Bible, *Crime and Punishment*, or *The Joy of Cooking*—the layguide opened my eyes. And not necessarily because of the information in it, but because of the path it sent me hurtling down.

When I look back on my teenage years, I have one major regret, and it has nothing to do with not studying hard enough, not being nice to my mother, or crashing my father's car into a public bus. It is simply that I didn't fool around with enough girls. I am a deep man—I reread James Joyce's *Ulysses* every three years for fun. I consider myself reasonably intuitive. I am at the core a good person, and I try to avoid hurting others. But I can't seem to evolve to the next state of being because I spend far too much time thinking about women.

And I know I'm not alone. When I first met Hugh Hefner, he was seventy-three. He had slept with over a thousand of the most beautiful women in the world, by his own account, but all he wanted to talk about were his three girlfriends—Mandy, Brandy, and Sandy. And how, thanks to Viagra, he could keep them all satisfied (though his money probably satisfied them enough). If he ever wanted to sleep with somebody else, he said, the rule was that they'd all do it together. So what I gathered from the conversation was that here was a guy who's had all the sex he wanted his whole life and, at seventy-three, he's still chasing tail. When does it stop? If Hugh Hefner isn't over it yet, when am I going to be?

If the layguide had never crossed my path, I, like most men, would never have evolved in my thinking about the opposite sex. In fact, I probably started off worse than most men. In my preteen years, there were no games of doctor, no girls who charged a dollar to look up their skirts, no tickling classmates in places I wasn't supposed to touch. I spent most of teenage life grounded, so when my sole adolescent sexual opportunity arose—a drunken freshman girl called and offered me a blow job—I was forced to decline, or else suffer my mother's wrath. In college I began to find myself: the things I was interested

to finally admit to yourself that after all these years of being sexually active (or at least sexually cognizant), you have not grown up and figured it out. Those who ask for help are often those who have failed to do something for themselves. So if drug addicts go to rehab and the violent go to anger management class, then social retards go to pickup school.

Clicking send on my e-mail to Mystery was one of the hardest things I'd ever done. If anyone—friends, family, colleagues, and especially my lone ex-girlfriend in Los Angeles—found out I was paying for live in-field lessons on picking up women, the mockery and recrimination would be instant and merciless. So I kept my intentions secret, dodging social plans by telling people that I was going to be showing an old friend around town all weekend.

I would have to keep these two worlds separate.

In my e-mail to Mystery, I didn't tell him my last name or my occupation. If pressed, I planned to just say I was a writer and leave it at that. I wanted to move through this subculture anonymously, without either an advantage or extra pressure because of my credentials.

However, I still had my own conscience to deal with. This was, far and away, the most pathetic thing I'd ever done in my life. And unfortunately—as opposed to, say, masturbating in the shower—it wasn't something I could do alone. Mystery and the other students would be there to bear witness to my shame, my secret, my inadequacy.

A man has two primary drives in early adulthood: one toward power, success, and accomplishment; the other toward love, companionship, and sex. Half of life then was out of order. To go before them was to stand up as a man and admit that I was only half a man.

Chapter



A week after sending the e-mail, I walked into the lobby of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. I wore a blue wool sweater that was so soft and thin it looked like cotton, black pants with laces running up the sides, and shoes that gave me a couple extra inches in height. My pockets bulged with the supplies Mystery had instructed every student to bring: a pen, a notepad, a pack of gum, and condoms.

I spotted Mystery instantly. He was seated regally in a Victorian armchair, with a smug, I-just-bench-pressed-the-world smile on his face. He wore a casual, loose-fitting blue-black suit; a small, pointed labret piercing wagged from his chin; and his nails were painted jet black. He wasn't necessarily attractive, but he was charismatic—tall and thin, with long chestnut hair, high cheekbones, and a bloodless pallor. He looked like a computer geek who'd been bitten by a vampire and was midway through his transformation.

Next to him was a shorter, intense-looking character who introduced himself as Mystery's wing, Sin. He wore a form-fitting black crew neck shirt, and his hair was pitch black and gelled straight back. He had the complexion, however, of a man whose natural hair color is red.

I was the first student to arrive.

"What's your top score?" Sin leaned in and asked as I sat down. They were already assessing me, trying to figure out if I was in possession of a thing *called game*.

"My top score?"

"Yeah, how many girls have you been with?"

"Um, somewhere around seven," I told them.

"Somewhere *around* seven?" Sin pressed.

"Six," I confessed.

Sin ranked in the sixties, Mystery in the hundreds. I looked at them in wonder: These were the pickup artists whose exploits I'd been following so avidly online for months. They were another class of being: They had the magic pill, the solution to the inertia and frustration that has plagued the

tools we needed to become fully effective social beings. Now, decades later, it was time to acquire them.

Mystery went around the table and looked at each of us. "What kind of girls do you want?" he asked Sweater.

Sweater pulled a piece of neatly folded notebook paper out of his pocket. "Last night I wrote down a list of goals for myself," he said, unfolding the page, which was filled with four columns of numbered items. "And one of the things I'm looking for is a wife. She needs to be smart enough to hold up her end of any conversation and have enough style and beauty to turn heads when she walks into a room."

"Well, look at you," Mystery said. "You look average. People think if they look generic, then they can seduce a wide variety of women. No true You have to specialize. If you look average, you're going to get average girls. Your khaki pants are for the office. They're not for clubs. And your sweater—burn it. You need to be bigger than life. I'm talking over the top. If you want to get the 10s, you need to learn peacock theory."

Mystery loved theories. Peacock theory is the idea that in order to attract the most desirable female of the species, it's necessary to stand out in a flashy and colorful way. For humans, he told us, the equivalent of the fanned peacock tail is a shiny shirt, a garish hat, and jewelry that lights up in the dark—basically, everything I'd dismissed my whole life as cheesy.

When it came time for my personal critique, Mystery had a laundry list of fixes: get rid of the glasses, shape the overgrown goatee, shave the expensively trimmed tumbleweeds on my head, dress more outrageously, wear a conversation piece, get some jewelry, get a life.

I wrote down every word of advice. This was a guy who thought about seduction nonstop, like a mad scientist working on a formula to turn peanuts into gasoline. The archive of his Internet messages was 3,000 posts long—more than 2,500 pages—all dedicated to cracking the code that is woman.

"I have an opener for you to use," he said to me. An opener is a prepared script used to start a conversation with a group of strangers; it's the first thing anyone who wants to meet women must be armed with. "Say this when you see a group with a girl you like. 'Hey, it looks like the party's over here.' Then turn to the girl you want and add, 'If I wasn't gay, you'd be so mine.'"

A flash of crimson burned up my face. "Really?" I asked. "How is that going to help?"

"Once she's attracted to you, it won't matter whether you said you were gay or not."

"But isn't that lying?"

"It's not lying," he replied. "It's flirting."

To the group, he offered other examples of openers: innocent but intriguing questions like "Do you think magic spells work?" or "Oh my god, did you see those two girls fighting outside?" Sure, they weren't that spectacular or sophisticated, but all they are meant to do is get two strangers talking.

The point of Mystery Method, he explained, is to come in under the radar. Don't approach a woman with a sexual come-on. Learn about her first and let her earn the right to be hit on.

"An amateur hits on a woman right away," he decreed as he rose to leave the hotel. "A pro waits eight to ten minutes."

Armed with our negs, group theory, and camouflage openers, we were ready to hit the clubs.

Chapter



We piled into the limo and drove to the Standard Lounge, a velvet-rope-guarded hotel hotspot. It was here that Mystery shattered my model of reality. Limits I had once imposed on human interaction were extended far beyond what I ever thought possible. The man was a machine.

The Standard was dead when we walked in. We were too early. There were just two groups of people in the room: a couple near the entrance and two couples in the corner.

I was ready to leave. But then I saw Mystery approach the people in the corner. They were sitting on opposite corners across a glass table. The men were on one side. One of them was Scott Baio, the actor best known for playing Chachi on *Happy Days*. Across from him were two women, a brunette and a bleached blonde who looked like she'd stepped out of the pages of *Maxim*. Her cut-off white T-shirt was suspended so high into the air by fake breasts that the bottom of it just hovered, flapping in the air above a belly tightened by fastidious exercise. This woman was Baio's date. She was also, I gathered, Mystery's target.

His intentions were clear because he wasn't talking to her. Instead, he had his back turned to her and was showing something to Scott Baio and his friend, a well-dressed, well-tanned thirty-something who looked as if he smelled strongly of aftershave. I moved in closer.

"Be careful with that," Baio was saying. "It cost forty-thousand dollars."

Mystery had Baio's watch in his hands. He placed it carefully on the table. "Now watch this," he commanded. "I tense my stomach muscles, increasing the flow of oxygen to my brain, and...."

As Mystery waved his hands over the watch, the second hand stopped ticking. He waited fifteen seconds, then waved his hands again, and slowly the watch sputtered back to life—along with Baio's heart. Mystery's audience of four burst into applause.

"Do something else!" the blonde pleaded.

Mystery brushed her off with a neg. "Wow, she's so demanding," he said, turning to Baio. "Is she always like this?"

We were witnessing group theory in action. The more Mystery performed for the guys, the more the blonde clamored for attention. And every time, he pushed her away and continued talking with his two new friends.

"I don't usually go out," Baio was telling Mystery. "I'm over it, and I'm too old."

After a few more minutes, Mystery finally acknowledged the blonde. He held his arms out. She placed her hands in his, and he began giving her a psychic reading. He was employing a technique I'd heard about called cold reading: the art of telling people truisms about themselves without any prior knowledge of their personality or background. In the field, all knowledge—however esoteric—is power.

With each accurate sentence Mystery spoke, the blonde's jaw dropped further open, until she started asking him about his job and his psychic abilities. Every response Mystery gave was intended to accentuate his youth and enthusiasm for the good life Baio said he had outgrown.

"I feel so old," Mystery said, baiting her.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Twenty-seven."

"That's not old. That's perfect."

He was in.

Mystery called me over and whispered in my ear. He wanted me to talk to Baio and his friend, to keep them occupied while he hit on the girl. This was my first experience as a wing—a term Mystery had taken from *Top Gun*, along with words like target and obstacle.

I struggled to make small talk with them. But Baio, looking nervously at Mystery and his date, cut me off. "Tell me this is all an illusion," he said, "and he's not actually stealing my girlfriend."

Ten long minutes later, Mystery stood up, put his arm around me, and we left the club. Outside, he pulled a cocktail napkin from his jacket pocket. It contained her phone number. "Did you get a good look at her?" Mystery asked. "That is what I'm in the game for. Everything I've learned I used tonight. It's all led up to this moment. And it worked." He beamed with self-satisfaction. "How's that for a demonstration?"

That was all it took. Stealing a girl right from under a celebrity's nose—has-been or not—was a feat even Dustin couldn't have accomplished. Mystery was the real deal.

As we took the limo to the Key Club, Mystery told us the first command-

Perhaps it was because attracting the opposite sex was the only area of my life in which I felt like a complete failure. Every time I walked down the street or into a bar, I saw my own failure staring me back in the face with red lipstick and black mascara. The combination of desire and paralysis was deadly.

After the workshop that night, I opened my file cabinet and dug through my papers. There was something I wanted to find, something I hadn't looked at in years. After a half hour, I found it: a folder labeled "High School Writing." I pulled out a piece of lined notebook paper covered from top to bottom with my chicken scratching. It was the only poem I've ever attempted in my life. It was written in eleventh grade, and I never showed it to anyone. However, it was the answer to my question.

SEXUAL MISERATION
BENNETT STRAUSS

*The only reason you go out,
The only objective in mind,
A glimpse of a familiar pair
Of legs on a busy street or
A squeeze from a female who
You can only call your friend.*

*A scoreless night fosters hostility.
A scoreless weekend breeds animosity.
Through red eyes all the world is seen,
Angry at friends and family for no
Reason that they can perceive.
Only you know why you are so mad.*

*There is the 'justfriends' one who you've
Known for so long, who respects you
So much that you can't do what you want.
And she no longer bothers to put on her
False personality and flirt because she thinks
You like her for who she is when what you
Liked about her was her flirtatiousness.*

*When your own hand becomes your best lover,
When your life-giving fertilizer is wasted
In a Kleenex and flushed down the toilet
You wonder when you are going to stop
Thinking about what could have happened
That night when you almost got somewhere.*

*There is the coy one who smiles
And looks like she wants to meet you,
But you can't work up the nerve to talk.
So instead she will become one of your nighttime
Fantasies, where you could have but didn't.
Your hand will be substituted for hers.*

*When you neglect work and meaningful activities,
When you neglect the ones who really love you,
For a shot at a target that you rarely hit.
Does everyone get lucky with women but you,
Or do females just not want it as bad as you do?*

In the decade since I'd written that poem, nothing had changed. I still couldn't write poetry. And, more important, I still felt the same way. Perhaps signing up for Mystery's workshop had been an intelligent decision. After all, I was doing something proactive about my lameness.

Even the wise man dwells in the fool's paradise.

STEP 3

DEMONSTRATE VALUE

Preview from Notesale.co.uk
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Chapter



I'd learned several sleights of hand, a principle of magic called equivoque, the fundamentals of rune reading, and a way to make lit cigarettes disappear. It had been the most productive plane trip of my life. And now Mystery and I were in Belgrade at probably the worst time of the year. Ice and slush lay heavy on the street as Marko drove us to his apartment in a silver 1987 Mercedes that had a habit of stalling every time he put it into second gear.

Mystery, hair unwashed and held back in a greasy ponytail, fumbled through his backpack in the front seat, producing a long black overcoat. He had cut away the bottom third of the coat and sewn in its place black fabric covered with stars. It looked like something one would wear to a Renaissance fair. Mystery had made his ring himself, too, painting an eyeball on the plastic surface. He was clearly more of a geek than I had ever been. His greatest illusion was transforming himself into a good-looking player every night he went out.

"You're going to have to shave your head," he said as he looked at me.

"No thanks. What if I have a strange-shaped skull, or weird marks on my head like my dad?"

"Look at you. You're wearing glasses because your vision sucks. You have a hat on to cover a huge bald spot. You're ghostly white. And you look like you haven't seen the inside of a gym since grade school. You're doing well because you're smart and you're a fast learner. But looks count too. You're Style, so start being Style. Just snap: shave your head, get Lasik, join a gym."

He was a very persuasive geek.

He turned to Marko: "Is there a barbershop around here?"

Unfortunately, there was. Marko pulled in front of a small building, and we walked inside to find an elderly Serbian man presiding over an empty shop. Mystery sat me in a chair, told Marko to instruct the barber to remove my tumbleweeds, and then supervised the procedure to make sure the barber shaved down to the skull.

"Balding is not a choice, but bald is a choice," he said. "If anyone asks

you why your head is shaved, tell them, 'I used to have it down past my ass, but then I realized I was covering up my best feature.'" He laughed. "Or you could say, 'Well, most Greco-Roman wrestlers shave their heads.'" I made a mental note to add both replies to my cheat sheet.

When the barber finished, I looked in the mirror and saw a chemo patient staring back at me.

"It looks good," Mystery said. "Let's see if there's a tanning salon around here. We'll have you looking like a thug in no time."

"Okay. But I'm not getting Lasik in Serbia."

My first thought once I was shaven-headed and tan was: What took me so long? I looked much better. I had transformed from a 5 to a 6.5 on the attractiveness scale. This trip was turning out to be a good idea.

Marko looked as if he could use a makeover himself. A big-boned six foot three, he was much stockier than most Serbians, with an olive complexion and the out-of-proportion head of a Peanuts character. He wore an overcoat that was one size too big, a thick gray Brooks Brothers sweater with flecks of white, and a cream-colored turtleneck that actually made him look like a turtle.

Marko had been unable to live his dream of being a high-society socialite after graduating from college in America, so he'd moved to a smaller pond, Serbia, where his father was a well-known artist.

He drove us to his one-bedroom apartment, which contained only a cot and a twin bed. Because there was no sleeping bag or even a couch, we agreed to take turns sharing the larger bed.

While Mystery showered, Marko pulled me aside.

"What are you doing with this guy?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, he's totally superficial. We went to the Latin School of Chicago. We went to Vassar College. This is not the kind of guy who can fit in at these places. He's not one of us."

"I know. I know. You're right. But trust me, this guy will change your life."

"Well," Marko said. "We'll see. I met a girl last month who's different than all the rest, and I want to do it right. So make sure Mystery doesn't ruin it with all his pickup tricks and embarrass me."

Marko hadn't dated a single woman since he'd moved to Belgrade. But a few months ago, through friend of his, he'd met a girl named Goca, and

he was sure she was the one. He took her out on dates, bought her flowers, treated her to dinner, and dropped her off at home afterward, like a perfect gentleman.

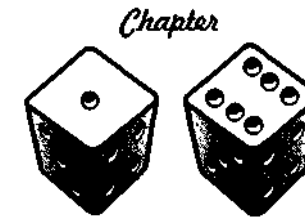
"Have you slept with her yet?" I asked him.

"No. I haven't even kissed her."

"Dude, you're behaving like a total AFC. One day a guy is going to walk up to her in a club, say, 'Do you think magic spells work?' and take her home. She wants an adventure. She wants to have sex. All girls do."

"Well," Marko said, "she's different from all those girls. People have more class here than they do in L.A."

The PUAs have a name for this: They call it one-itis. It's a disease AFCs get: They become obsessed with a girl they're not even dating nor sleeping with, and then start acting so needy and nervous around her that they end up driving her away. The cure for one-itis, PUAs like to say, is to go out and have sex with a dozen other girls—and then see if this flower is still so special.



The prop bag I wore to the Belgrade workshop was black, Armani, and the size of a hardcover novel, with a single shoulder strap so that it could be slung artfully across my torso. With so many magic tricks, gimmicks, and other tools of the trade necessary to use in the field, it was impossible to fit everything into just four pants pockets. So nearly every PUA in the game had a prop bag. The contents of mine were as follows:

1 PACK OF GUM, WRIGLEY'S BIG RED

No matter how good your game is, you're not going to get a kiss—close if your breath reeks.

1 PACK OF CONDOMS, TROJAN, LUBRICATED

Necessary not only in case you have sex but also for the psychological boost of knowing you're prepared to.

1 PENCIL, 1 PEN

For writing down phone numbers, taking notes, performing magic tricks, and analyzing handwriting.

1 PIECE OF DRYER LINT

For the lint opener: Walk up to a woman, stop, wordlessly remove lint (hidden in the palm of your hand) from her clothing, ask, "How long has that been there?," then hand her the piece of lint.

1 ENVELOPE OF PRESELECTED PHOTOS

For Mystery's photo routine.

1 DIGITAL CAMERA

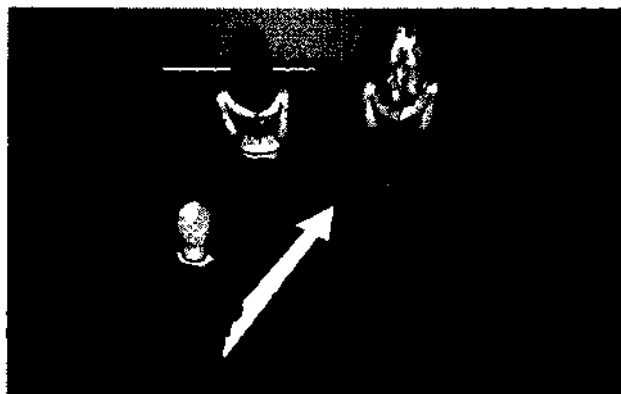
For Mystery's digital photo routine: First take a photo of yourself and a girl smiling, then another one striking a serious pose, and,

a woman. He is then ostracized and his genes, as Mystery puts it, are unapologetically weeded out of existence.

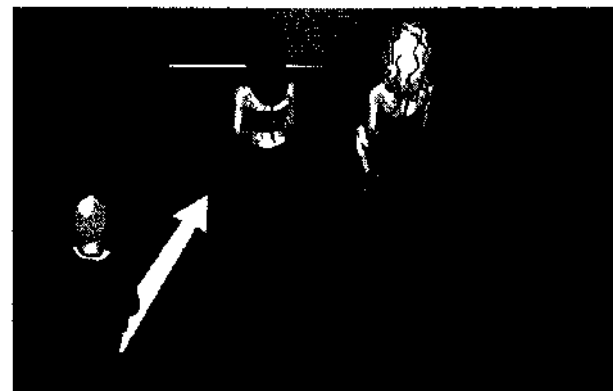
As I approached, I tried to push the fear out of my chest and rationally assess the situation. Sasha's problem was his body position. Both women were facing the bar, and he had approached from behind. So they had to turn around to respond.



But if they wanted to get rid of him, all they had to do was to turn back toward the bar, and he'd be shut out.



I looked back. Mystery and the other two students were watching me as I approached. I had to work the angles right. So I came in from the left side of the bar, next to the black-haired girl—the obstacle, as Mystery would say.



"Hi," I rasped. I cleared my throat. "I'm the friend Sasha was telling you about. So what clubs did you recommend?"

I could sense a silent sigh of relief from all parties that someone had come in to make things less awkward.

"Well, Reka is a fun place for dinner," the black-haired girl said. "And along the waterfront there are some great boats, like Lukas, Kruz, and Exil. Underground and Ra are fun too, though they're not the kinds of places I go to."

"Hey, as long as we're talking, I want to get your opinion on something." I was on familiar ground now. "Do you think spells work?"

By now, I was getting used to telling the spells opener—a story about a friend who fell in love with a woman after she surreptitiously cast an attraction spell on him. So while my mouth moved, my brain thought strategy. I needed to reposition myself next to the Bo Derek blonde. Yes, I was going to steal my student's girl. It's not like he had a chance with her anyway.

When I finished, I said, "I'm asking because I never believed in that stuff before, but I had an amazing experience recently. Here"—I addressed the blonde—"let me show you something."

I maneuvered myself around to the other side of their stools, so that I was next to my target.

made a pass at Mystery earlier, and he'd pretended not to notice. But it was harder not to notice her when she was in my bed, in my nostrils, in my mouth. Sure, she'd had a few drinks, but alcohol has never caused anyone to do something they didn't want to. It only enables them to do what they've always wanted but repressed. And right now it looked like Goca wanted to be with a man who possessed all six of the five characteristics of an alpha male.

Logically, it's easy to say that it's wrong to sleep with a girl your friend is pursuing. But when her body is pressed against yours so submissively, and you can smell the conditioner in her hair (strawberry), and that storm cloud of passion created by her desire has begun gathering around the two of you, try saying no. It's just too ... right there.

I ran my hands beneath her hair and slowly dragged my fingers up toward along her scalp. A shiver of pleasure ran through her body. Our lips met, our tongues met, our chests met.

I couldn't do this. "I can't do this."

"Why?"

"Because of Marko."

"Marko?" she asked, as if she'd never heard the name before. "He's sweet, but he's just a friend."

"Listen," I said. "You should go. Marko will probably be out of the shower soon."

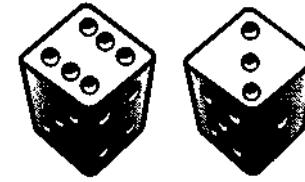
Fifty minutes later, Marko was out of the shower. I heard him and Goca arguing in Serbian in the hallway. A door slammed.

Marko walked wearily into the room and collapsed onto his half of the bed.

"Well?" I asked. He was never one to show much emotion.

"Well, I want to take Mystery's next workshop."

Chapter



I couldn't bridge the fucking gap. There she was, my Bo Derek blonde with an MBA, sitting next to me on a couch at a cafe. Her thigh was grazing mine. She was playing with her hair. And I was wussing out.

The great Style, the apprentice PUA whose magnetism was so strong that it made Marko look like an AFC to his own true love, was still too scared to kiss a girl.

I had great opening game, but no follow through. I should have taken care of the problem before Belgrade. But it was too late. I was blowing it. I was scared of rejection, and of feeling uncomfortable afterward.

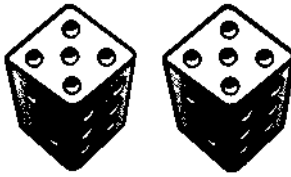
Mystery, in the meantime, was getting along just fine with Natalija, who was thirteen years his junior. They had nothing in common, not even a language. But there they were, sitting together. His legs were crossed and he was leaning back, letting her work to get his attention. She was leaning into him, with her hand on his knee.

I walked my date back to her house after coffee. Her parents weren't even home. All I had to say was, "Can I use the bathroom?," and I could have been upstairs. But my mouth wouldn't speak the words. Countless successful approaches had helped reduce my fear of social rejection and made me seem like a promising pickup artist to others, but inside I knew I was just an approach artist. To become a PUA, there was a far-more-devastating mental obstacle I still needed to overcome: my fear of sexual rejection.

In the course of my seduction research, I'd read *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert. And I remembered how much work and persistence it had taken the aristocratic dandy Rodolphe Boulanger de la Huchette to get just a kiss from the unhappily married Madame Bovary. But once he persuaded her to submit the first time, it was all over. She was obsessed.

One of the tragedies of modern life is that women as a whole do not hold a lot of power in society, despite all the advances made in the last century. Sexual choice, however, is one of the only areas where women are indisputably in control. It's not until they've made a choice, and submitted to it, that the relationship is inverted—and the man is generally back in a posi-

Chapter



There are few moments in life as shot through with potential as that of having a car, a full tank of gas, a map of an entire continent spread out in front of you, and the best pickup artist in the world in your back seat. You feel like you can go anywhere you want. What are borders, after all, but checkpoints letting you know that you've reached a new stage in your adventure?

Well, all this may be true most of the time, but let's say you're working at Rand McNally, finishing the latest edition of your map of Eastern Europe. And let's say there's a tiny country bordering Moldova—perhaps a renegade Communist state—but no other government recognizes this country diplomatically, or in pretty much any other way. What do you do? Do you include the country on your map or not?

A magician, a faux aristocrat, and I were driving across Eastern Europe when we quite accidentally discovered the answer to this question. It had been a fruitless drive so far. Mystery was slumped in the back seat underneath a blanket, unable to conjure his way out of a fever. Oblivious to the dramatic snowy Romanian landscape that passed by each day, he covered his eyes with his hat and complained. Every so often, he'd leap to alertness and disgorge the contents of his mind. And every time the contents of his mind were another map of sorts.

"My plan is to tour North America and promote my shows in strip clubs," he said. "I just need to come up with a good illusion for strippers. You can be my assistant, Style. Imagine that: You and I touring strip clubs and taking all the girls to the show the next day."

After a couple of uneventful days in Chisinau—where the only beautiful women we saw were on magazine covers and billboards—we figured, "Why stop there?" Odessa was so close. Maybe the adventure we were seeking lay further ahead.

So we left Chisinau on a cold, snowy Friday and drove northeast to the Ukrainian border. The snow-blanketed roads out of the city were recognizable only by icy tire tracks stretching into the horizon. The vista looked like a scene from an epic Russian romance, with tree branches coated with crys-

tallized ice and frozen wine groves running along the hilly landscape. The car reeked of Marlboro smoke and McDonald's grease; every time it stalled, it became trickier to restart.

But soon, all of that was the least of our problems. What looked on the map like a forty-five-minute trip to Odessa ended up taking nearly ten hours.

The first sign that something unusual was afoot came when we reached a bridge over the Dniester River and found a military checkpoint complete with several army and police vehicles, camouflaged bunkers on either side of the road, and an immense tank with its barrel pointing in the direction of oncoming traffic. We stopped in a line of ten cars, but a military officer directed us around the queue and waved us through the checkpoint. Why? We will never know.

Mystery wrapped himself tighter in his blanket in the back seat. "I have a version of the knife-through-body illusion I want to do. Style, do you think you can dress up as a clown and heckle me from the audience? Then I'm going to bring you onstage and push you into a chair. I'll play 'Stuck In the Middle With You' from *Reservoir Dogs* while I put my fist straight through your stomach. I'll wiggle my fingers when they reach the other side. Then I'm going to lift you straight up, out of the chair, impaled on my arm. I need you to do that with me."

The second sign that something was not quite right came when we stopped by a gas station to stock up on snack food. When we offered them Moldovan lei, they told us they didn't accept that currency. We paid in American dollars, and they gave us change in what they said were rubles. When we examined the coins, we noticed that each had a large hammer-and-sickle on the back. Even stranger, they had been minted in 2000: nine years after the Soviet Union had supposedly collapsed.

Mystery pulled his hat down to just above his mouth, which was moving with the grandiosity of a carnival barker. "Ladies and gentlemen," he announced from the back seat as Marko worked to start the car, "he levitated over the Niagara Falls, he jumped off the Space Needle and survived... presenting superstar daredevil illusionist, Mystery!"

I guess his fever was breaking.

As we drove on, Marko and I began to see Lenin statues and communist posters through the car window. One billboard depicted a tiny sliver of land with a Russian flag on its left and, on its right, a red and green flag

if a little, and erotically bit the crease on the opposite side of the elbow. She said it gave her the chills.

4. Afterward, I said, "But do you know what the best thing in the world is? A bite . . . right . . . here." I pointed to the side of my neck. Then I said, "Bite my neck," as if I expected her to do it. She refused to at first, so I turned away calmly to punish her. I waited a few seconds, then turned back and repeated, "Bite me right here." This time, she did. It was cat-string theory in action.

5. However, her bite was lame. So I told her, "That's not how you bite. Come here." Then I swept her hair aside, gave her a good bite on the neck, and instructed her to try again. This time, she did a great job.

6. I smiled approvingly and said, very slowly, "Not bad." Then we finally kissed.

We had a few more drinks, then I took her to my place. After a brief tour, I did a Maddash move and had her sit on my lap while showing her a video on the computer. I massaged and kissed the back of her neck until she turned around and started making out with me. Then she asked if she could lie on the floor for a second. I laid down next to her and—guess what happened—she passed out. Cold!

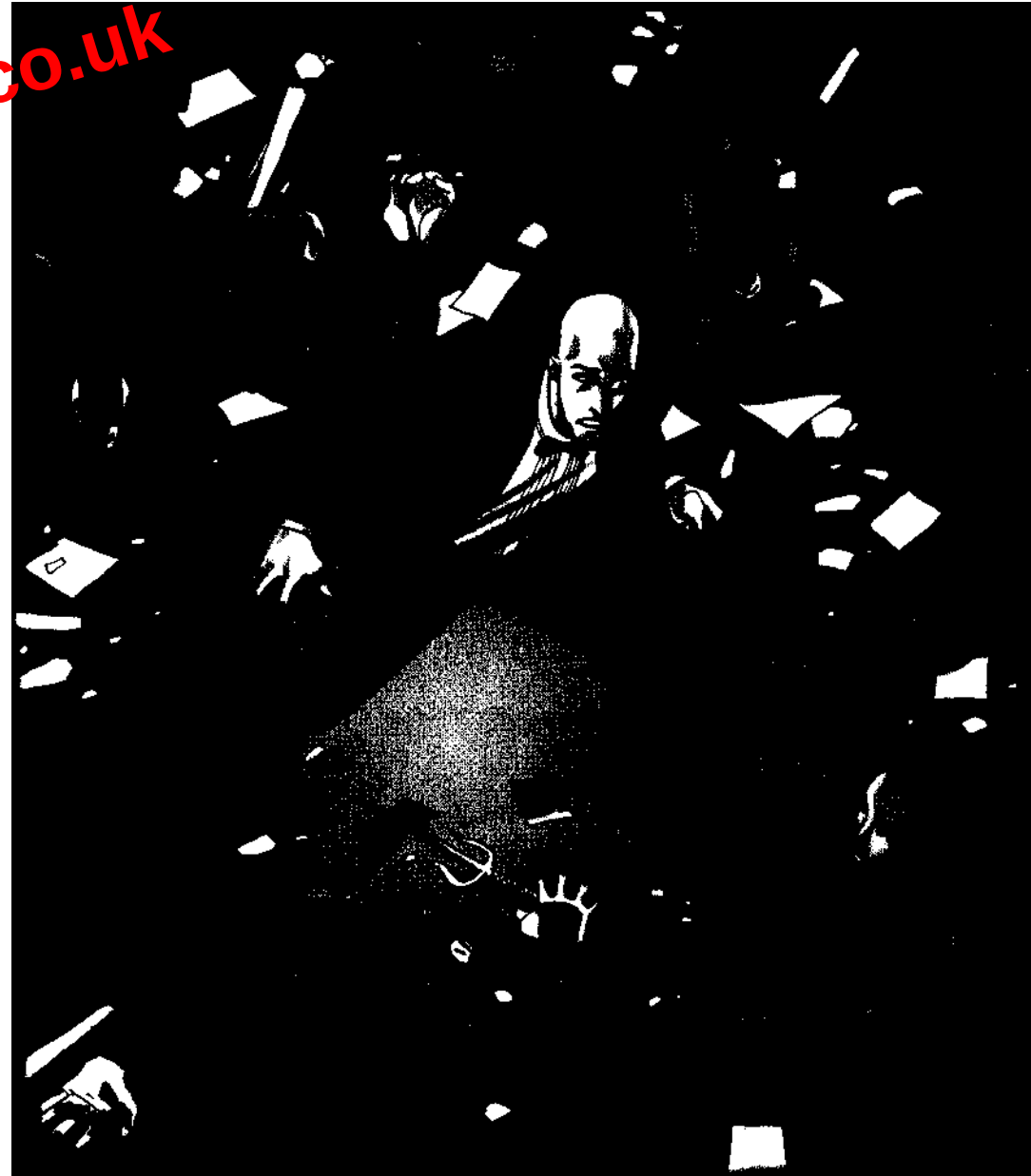
I took off her shoes, threw a blanket over her, put a pillow under her head, and climbed into my own warm bed.

So the joke was on me, but at least I get it now. All it took was one night, really, to get to the other side of this.

I am ready, finally, for the next step.

—Style

DISARM THE OBSTACLES



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We lay on the floor for two hours talking about the game and our progress. Since adolescence, whenever I'd had the opportunity to make a wish (on an eyelash, a digital clock at 11:11, an ever-increasing number of birthday candles), thrown in with the usual pleas for world peace and personal happiness, I'd ask for the ability to attract any woman I wanted. I had fantasized about an incredible seductive energy entering my body like a lightning bolt, suddenly making me irresistible. But instead it was coming in a slow drizzle and I was running around underneath it with a bucket, working to catch each drop.

In life, people tend to wait for good things to come to them. And by waiting, they miss out. Usually, what you wish for doesn't fall in your lap; it falls somewhere nearby, and you have to recognize it, stand up, and put in the time and work it takes to get to it. This isn't because the universe is cruel. It's because the universe is smart. It has its own alchemy theory and knows we don't appreciate things that fall in our laps.

I would have to pick up my bucket and work.

So I took Mystery's advice. I got Lasik surgery, shedding my nerdy glasses once and for all. I paid to get my teeth laser-whitened. And I joined a gym and took up surfing, which was not only a cardiovascular workout but also a way to get tan. In some respects, surfing reminded me of sarging. Some days you go out and catch every wave and think you're a champ; other days you don't get one good wave and you think you suck. But no matter what, every day you go out and you learn and you improve. And that's what keeps you coming back.

However, I hadn't joined the community just to get a makeover. I needed to complete my mental transformation, which I knew would be much more difficult. Before Belgrade, I had taught myself the words, skills, and body language of a man of charisma and quality. Now I needed to develop the confidence, self-worth, and inner game to back it up. Otherwise, I'd just be a fake, and women would sense it instantly.

I had two months off until my next workshop with Mystery in Miami, and I wanted to really blow away the students there. I aimed to outdo Mystery's sarge at Club Ra in Belgrade. So I gave myself an assignment: to meet, in the next few months, every top PUA there was. I planned to make myself a seducing machine, designed from pieces of all the best PUAs. And now that I had some status in the community as Mystery's new wing, it would be easy to meet them.

Chapter



The first person I wanted to learn from was Juggler. His posts intrigued me. He advised AFCs to overcome their shyness by trying to talk a homeless person into giving them a quarter or by calling people randomly out of the phone book to ask for movie recommendations. He told others to challenge themselves and intentionally make pickups more difficult by saying they worked as trash collectors and drove '86 Impalas. He was an original. And he had just announced his first workshop. The cost: free.

One of the reasons Juggler rose so quickly in the community, besides his competitive pricing was his writing: His posts had flair. They weren't the disorganized scrawlings of a high school senior in perpetual conflict with his testosterone. So when I called Juggler to discuss using a field report of his in the book, he asked if he could write something new instead: the story of the day he sarged me at his first workshop in San Francisco.

FIELD REPORT—THE SEDUCTION OF STYLE

BY JUGGLER

I clicked off the cell phone. "Style talks really fast," I said to my housemate's cat, who understands these things and was my longstanding partner in crime when it came to getting girls to the house. (The offer of, "Want to come back to my place and watch the cat do back flips?" hardly ever failed.)

That was my first impression of Style's real life persona. Two weeks later I sat in a restaurant in San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf waiting for Style to arrive, mentally tallying a list of crazy things that could be wrong with him. I ignored the waiter who was trying to upgrade my beer and made a prayer to myself. "Please, goddess of seduction and patron saint of pickup artists and guys trying to get nookie everywhere, please do not let Style be weird."

Talking too fast is usually a sign of a deep lack of confidence. People who feel that others aren't interested in what they think talk fast for fear of losing the attention of their audience. Others are so in love with perfection that they have a difficult time editing it all down and continuously speed up in hopes of getting it all in. Such people usually become writers. That was it: weirdo or

"There's a certain view of women that David DeAnushole, Gun Bitch, and Misery have," Ross continued, working himself into a rage. "These guys are focusing on the worst tendencies of some of the worst women out there and spreading it like a cloud of fertilizer on all women."

Ross reminded me of an old rhythm-and-blues artist who has been ripped off so much that he trusts no one. But at least there are publishing companies and copyrights in place to protect songwriters. There is no way to copyright a woman's arousal, to declare certain authorship over her choice of a partner. His paranoia, sadly, made sense—especially when it came to Mystery, the only seducer with the ideas and skills to supplant him.

The waiter cleared our pasta. "I am so passionate about this because I care about these kids," Ross was saying. "I think that 20 percent of my students have been abused. They have been severely impacted. Not just with women but with all people, male and female. And a lot of problems in society come from the fact that we all have such strong drives, but live in a culture that discourages us from exploring them freely."

He turned around and noticed three businesswomen eating dessert a few tables away. He was about to freely explore his sex drive.

"How's that berry cobbler?" Ross yelled at them.

"Oh, it's good," one of the woman replied.

"You know," Ross said to them, "people have signal systems for dessert." He was off and running. "The signals say: This is sugar-free; this melts in my mouth. And the signal system fires up your body's responsiveness to get ready for what comes next. It's tracing an energy flow through your body."

He had the women's attention now. "Really?" they asked.

"I teach courses in energy flow," Ross told them. The women *ooohed* in unison. The word energy is the equivalent of the smell of chocolate to most women in Southern California. "We were just talking about whether men really understand women. And we think we've figured it out."

In a flash, he was at their table. As he spoke, the women forgot completely about their dessert and stared at him rapt. I couldn't tell sometimes if his patterns really worked on the sophisticated subconscious level he claimed, or if most conversations were so boring that simply saying something different and intriguing was enough to trigger attraction.

"Oh my God," one of the women said when he finished running a pat-

tern about the qualities women look for in a man. "I've never heard it said like that before. Where do you teach? I'd love to know more."

Ross collected her phone number and returned to the table. He turned to me, smiled, and said, "Now do you see who's teaching the true way?"

Then he rubbed his thumb on his chin.

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Chapter



In Sin's eyes, I was a pawn.

"Ross is a seductionist and a plotter," he said when I called him in Montgomery, Alabama, where he'd been stationed. He was living with a girl he'd met who liked being taken out on the end of a leash and collar. Unfortunately, the military frowned on such perversion, so Sin had to drive all the way to Atlanta to walk her on the down town.

"You have a special place in Ross's plans," he warned. "You are the marketing tool he's using to attack Mystery. You are Mystery's first and best student. The only guy who's sarging me now with him. So every time Ross asks you a question like, 'Are you lying to your guru?', and you answer, the presupposition that he's your guru is affirmed. Every little thing he does is to prove you are a convert and you've disavowed your old religion to embrace the true one that actually works. That is his message. So be careful."

There was a catch to learning NLP, manipulation, and self-improvement. No action—whether yours or another's—was devoid of intent. Every word had a hidden meaning, and every hidden meaning had weight, and every weight had its own special place on the scale of self-interest. However, as much as Ross may have been nurturing a friendship with me in order to crush Mystery, he also had a reputation for befriending younger students just so they'd take him to parties.

I invited Ross to his first event the following week. Monica, a struggling but well-connected actress I'd sarged, had invited me to her birthday party at Belly, a tapas bar on Santa Monica Boulevard. I thought it would be a good scene full of beautiful people for Ross to dazzle with his skills. I was wrong.

I met Ross at his parents' place, a middle-class red brick house on the west side of L.A. His father, a retired chiropractor, school principal, and self-published novelist, sat on a couch near his mother, who clearly wore the pants in the family. On the wall were a purple heart and a bronze star that Ross's father had won during World War II in Europe.

"Style's very successful," Ross told them. "He gets a lot of chicks using my material." Even pickup artists in their forties still seek the approval of their parents.

I talked to his mother for a while about her son's line of work. "Some people think if he talks about sex and women, it's terrible," his mom said. "But he's not crude and vulgar. He's a very bright boy." She stood up and ambled to a wall of shelving. "I have a book of poetry he wrote when he was nine years old. Do you want to read some of it? One of them says he's a king and he's on a throne."

"No, you don't want to read that," Ross interrupted. "Jesus Christ, this was a mistake. Let's get going."

The party was a disaster. Ross couldn't handle himself around classy people. He spent most of the night thinking he was flirting by acting as if he were my gay lover and crawling on all fours behind Carmen Electra, pretending to be a dog sniffing her ass. When I was talking to another girl, he interrupted to brag about a pickup he had just done. At 10:00 P.M., he said he was tired and demanded that I drive him home.

"Next time, we should stay later," I said.

"No, next time we have to arrive at the right time," he scolded me. "I can stay out late, provided I get about twelve hours notice so I can take it easy and nap in the afternoon."

"You're not that old."

I made a mental note never again to take Ross anywhere cool. It was an embarrassment. Since I'd started spending so much time with PUAs, I'd lowered my standards for people I hung out with. All my old friends had fallen by the wayside. Now my social life was monopolized by a caliber of nerd I'd never associated with before. I was in the game to have more women in my life, not men. And though the community was all about women, it was also completely devoid of them. Hopefully, this was just part of the process, the way cleaning a house often makes it messier first.

For the rest of the drive back to his apartment in Marina del Rey, Ross harangued me about his rivals. Of course, Ross's detractors weren't any kinder to him. They had recently nicknamed him Mine '99, claiming that whenever Ross took someone else's tactic and made it his own, he liked to insist it was something he had developed at his 1999 Los Angeles seminar.

"That traitorous creep David DeAnushole," Ross seethed as I dropped him off. "His seminar is tomorrow, and I just found out some of my students are scheduled to speak. They didn't even have the courtesy to let me know."

I didn't have the heart to tell Ross that I'd be going also.



Attraction is not a choice.

Those were the words David DeAngelo had projected on the wall. The seminar was packed. There were more than a hundred and fifty people in the room. Many of them I recognized from other seminars, including Extraordinary

It was getting to be an all-too-familiar sight: a person on stage with a headset instructing a group of needy men on how to save themselves from nightly onanism. But there was a difference. DeAngelo was a good-looking guy, like Ross Jeffries had said. He reminded me of Robert DeNiro, if DeNiro had been a mama's boy who'd never been in a fight in his life.

DeAngelo stood out from the other gurus precisely because he didn't stand out. He wasn't charismatic or interesting. He didn't have the crazy gleam of a wanna-be cult leader or some gaping hole in his soul that he was trying to fill with women. He didn't even claim to be good at the game. He was very ordinary. But he was dangerous because he was organized.

He had clearly spent months working on his seminar. It was not only entirely scripted but cleaned up for mass consumption. It was a school of pickup instruction that could be presented to the mainstream without shocking anyone with its crudeness, its attitude toward women, or the devousness of its techniques—except, that is, for his recommendation of reading the book *Dog Training* by Lew Burke for tips on handling girls.

DeAngelo was a bright guy—and a threat to Ross. Many of the speakers at his seminar were, like himself, Ross's former students: among them Rick H., Vision, and Orion, an uber-nerd who was famous as the first PUA to sell videotapes of himself approaching girls on the street. This video series, *Magical Connections*, was considered hard evidence that nerds with hypnosis skills could get laid.

"Seduction," DeAngelo read from his notes, "is defined in the dictionary as an 'enticement to wrongdoing, specifically the offense of inducing a woman to consent to unlawful sexual intercourse by enticements which overcome her scruples.'"

"In other words," he continued, "seduction implies tricking, being dis-

honest, and hiding your motives. That is not what I am teaching. I'm teaching something called attraction. Attraction is working on yourself and improving yourself to the point where women are magnetically attracted to you and want to be around you."

Not once did DeAngelo mention the names of his competitors and rivals. He was too smart for that. He was going to try to take this whole underground world up for air, and he was going to do it by not acknowledging the underground world at all. He had stopped posting online and, instead, let his employees stick up for him when he was flamed. He wasn't a genius or an innovator like Mystery and Ross. But he was a great marketer.

"How do you make someone want something?" he asked, after making his students practice giving each other James Dean underlooks. "You give it value. You show that others like it. You make it scarce. And you make them work for it. I want you to think about other ways during lunch."

I joined DeAngelo and some of his other students for a burger and found out a little more about him. A struggling real estate agent from Eugene, Oregon, he moved to San Diego for a fresh start. Lonely, he yearned to cross that invisible barrier separating two strangers at a club. So he began searching the Web for tips and cultivating friends who were good with women. One of those friends was Riker, a Ross Jeffries protege who turned him onto using America Online to meet women. Sending instant messages was a way for DeAngelo to practice flirting the way his new player friends did, but without risking public embarrassment.

"That was the *chi*" he said as students milled about awkwardly, trying to overhear. "I was learning new ideas, implementing them, and then noticing how women responded on AOL. That's when I learned that busting women's balls and really slamming them immediately didn't have the effect that the intuitive mind would guess it would. So I became cocky and funny. I stole their lines, teased them, accused them of hitting on me, and never gave them a break."

Flushed with his new findings, DeAngelo delivered a fifteen-page screed to Cliff's List, one of the most established online seduction newsletters. The then-nascent seduction community ate it up: A new guru had arrived. Cliff, the middle-aged Canadian businessman who ran the list by day and hunted for new master PUAs to bring into the community by night, helped convince DeAngelo to spend three weeks turning his manifesto into an e-book, *Double Your Dating*.

ZAN: *[Motioning for her to come over and pointing at my knee]* Stephanie, come and sit down. I'll tell you a bedtime story. *[Smile, wink]*

I have used that last line for years. It is gold.

Some of you guys are probably thinking, "Okay, now what? How do you transition from funny ball-busting to more serious, romantic, sexual talk?"

It's simple, actually. At some point, I just talk to her quietly alone. Remember to turn on the bedroom eyes.

ZAN: *[No longer cocky funny]* Stephanie, do you want me to call you?

HER: You know I have a boyfriend.

ZAN: That's not what I asked. Do you want me to call you?

HER: Tempting, but I can't.

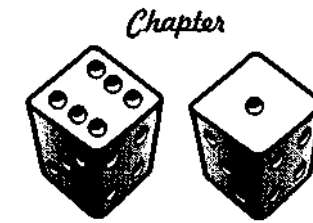
ZAN: Sneak away with me, girl. I'll take you higher up the slopes of Paradise than you have ever been. Etc.

Everything you just read actually happened last Thursday and Friday evening with me and a waitress named Stephanie. She was easily the hottest thing around in a long time. The jury is still out on this one, but she has no illusions about my intentions. My friends she views as nice guys, but not me. She knows that any interaction with me is going to be passionate from the start. And now she can choose to accept it or reject it.

The truth is, she may very well reject my overtures. But it doesn't matter. She won't soon forget me. And you can bet that the other waitresses know all about the things I said to her. And that is very good, especially since I have said almost the exact same things in the exact same way to all the other waitresses there. And I will continue to do so—right in front of Stephanie.

The net effect is social proof. When you go in, you own the place. You wave the waitresses over, point to your cheek, and say, "Hey, girl, where's my sugar?" No one is intimidated because you treat them all the same way. In this particular restaurant, there are four waitresses who have come home with me, three less attractive waitresses who want to come home with me, and several more who are works-in-progress (including Stephanie). And you can bet they all know about each other. But, again, that is very good.

—Zan



The highlight of the seminar was an appearance by two people who would give me my much-coveted inner game and more: Steve P. and Rasputin. These were guys I'd heard whispered about in the seduction community since I'd joined—the true masters; leaders of women, not men.

The first thing they did when they walked onstage was hypnotize everybody in the room. They both talked at the same time, telling different stories—one to occupy the conscious mind and the other to penetrate to the subconscious. When they woke us up, we had no idea what they had installed in our heads. All we knew was that these were two of the most confident speakers we'd ever seen. Every ounce of fire and charisma that DeAngelo lacked, they possessed in bulk.

Wearing a leather vest and an Indiana Jones hat, Steve P. was equal parts Hell's Angel and Native American shaman. Rasputin was a strip club bouncer with mutton-chop sideburns who looked like a steroid-jacked Wolverine. The two had met in a bookstore while both reaching for the same NLP book. Now they worked as a team and were among the most powerful hypnotists in the world. Their advice on seducing women was simply: "Become an expert in how to feel good."

Toward that end, Steve P. had figured out a way to get women to pay to have sex with him. For anywhere from several hundred to a thousand dollars, he trained women to have orgasms from a single vocal command; he taught them five different stages of deep throat he had devised; and, most fantastically, he claimed to give hypnotic breast enlargements, which he said could make a woman jump as much as two cup sizes.

Rasputin's forte was what he called hypnotic sexual engineering. Sex, he explained, must be viewed as a privilege for the woman, not a favor to you. "If a woman wants to give me a blow job," he elaborated, "I tell her, 'You only get three sucks. And you may only go down as far as you receive pleasure.'" His chest stuck out like the top of a Volkswagen. "Afterward, I tell her, 'Didn't that feel nice? Next time, you get five sucks.'"

"What if you're scared of getting caught trying to manipulate her?"

Grimble had told me months ago that he was going to test his seduction skills by auditioning for the dating show *Elimidate*. I just didn't realize he'd gone through with it—and actually been accepted.

"When's it airing?" I asked.

"Tomorrow night."

"Who won?"

"I'm not allowed to talk about it. You'll have to watch."

I searched his face for a clue, but he betrayed nothing.

"Well," Heidi prodded. "Go pick up a girl. I bet I can get anyone you can."

It looked like I would be competing in my own *Elimidate* that night. I was exhausted from months of travel and constant pickups, but I wasn't going to pass up the challenge.

Heidi spun around and approached three girls who were sitting on the patio smoking. The battle had begun.

I opened a nearby three-set—two men and a lady who looked like an anchorwoman in search of a camera—with the cologne opener. Afterward, I asked the usual fact-finding question: "How do you all know each other?" Unfortunately, she was married to one of the guys in the set.

Just as I was about to eject, Heidi marched in.

"So," she asked my former target. "How do you know Style?"

"We just met him," she said.

"You looked like old friends," Heidi told her with an obsequious smile. Then she turned to me and whispered, "They're boring. Let's move on."

As we left, I asked how her three-set had gone.

"The girls were all twenty," she said. "I could have turned them out in a half hour." Evidently, pickup to Heidi Fleiss meant recruiting girls as escorts.

Minutes later, she was in another group. I had to give her credit: She had no fear of approaching. I decided it was time to humble her with the awesome power of my newfound game.

She was kneeling on the ground in front of two women with gold glitter lightly dusting their cheeks, talking about local restaurants. I walked in with a new opinion opener I had made up about a friend whose new girlfriend won't let him talk to his ex-girlfriend from college.

"Is she being fair?" I asked. "Or is she being too possessive?"

The point was to get the glitter girls talking amongst themselves, but Heidi blurted, "The guy should just fuck both girls. I mean, I always put out on the first night."

The line must have been part of her routine; it was the second time I'd heard her say it. I also noticed that she always kneeled on the ground after approaching, so as not to intimidate the girls. I was glad Grimble had called: Heidi Fleiss was one of us.

In recent weeks, I'd figured out my own routine. It was a simple structure that allowed me to determine the direction in which I needed to take a girl: First, open. Then demonstrate higher value. Next, build rapport and an emotional connection. And, finally, create a physical connection.

So now that I'd opened the set, it was time to demonstrate value and blow Heidi out. I ran a piece I'd invented after meeting the fake sisters in Miami—the best friends test.

"I have to ask you guys: How long have you known each other?" I began.

"About six years," one of the girls said.

"I could totally tell."

"How?"

"Rather than explain, I'll give you two the best friends test."

The girls leaned in toward me, thrilled by the idea of an innocuous test. Guys in the community have an expression for this phenomenon: I was giving them "chick crack." Most women, they say, respond to routines involving tests, psychological games, fortune-telling, and cold-reading like addicts respond to free drugs.

"Okay," I said, as if I were about to ask a serious question. The girls huddled in closer. "Do you both use the same shampoo?"

They looked at each other to decide on an answer, then turned to me and opened their mouths to speak.

"The answer doesn't matter," I cut them off. "You already passed."

"But we don't use the same shampoo," one of the girls said.

"But you both looked at each other before you answered. See, if you didn't know each other well, you'd keep eye contact with me. But when two people have a connection, they look at each other first and communicate almost telepathically before answering. They don't even need to speak to each other."

The two girls looked at each other again.

"See," I exclaimed. "You're doing it right now."

They burst out laughing. Big points for Style.

As the girls started telling me how they'd met on the plane the day they'd moved to Los Angeles and been inseparable ever since, I looked at

ened him in comparison with the people he'd met in Israel. So he packed his bags, left his week's worth of girlfriends, and arrived in Jerusalem on the eve of Passover.

"I stopped by," he said, "to ask your forgiveness for some of my past actions."

I had no idea what he was talking about. He'd always been a great friend.

"I idealized a lifestyle and behavior that were corrupt," he explained. "I abhorred kindness, mercy, human dignity, and intimacy. Instead, I used, degraded, and exploited women. I thought only about my pleasure. I despised the good instincts within me and within others, and attempted to corrupt anyone I met."

As he spoke, I couldn't help thinking that all these things he was apologizing for were the very reasons I had befriended him in the first place.

"I promoted and dragged you into this whole pickup thing, as if what I was doing were the highest ideal a person could live for," he went on. "So, to whatever extent I am guilty of affecting the natural goodness of your soul, I am deeply sorry."

It all made sense intellectually. But I've never trusted extremes, whether it be drug addiction, religious fanaticism, or zero-carb diets. There was something odd about Dustin, or Avisha. He had a hole he was trying to fill—first with women, now with religion. I listened to him, but I had a different opinion.

"I accept your apology," I told him, "but with the caveat that you have nothing to apologize for."

He looked at me softly but didn't say anything. I could see why he was so seductive: It was those eyes that glistened like the surface of a mountain lake, that intense power of focus, that way of making you believe that nothing else existed for him except what you were saying at that very moment.

"Think about it," I continued. "If a guy wants to improve his odds of meeting women, he's going to have to make some changes to himself. And it just so happens that all the qualities women look for in guys are good things. I mean, I've become more confident. I started working out and eating healthier. I'm getting in touch with my emotions and learning more about spirituality. I've become a more fun, positive person."

He looked at me, listening patiently.

"And I'm not just more successful with women now, I'm more success-

ful in every other human interaction, from dealing with my landlord to handling credit card overcharges."

Still looking.

"So I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm learning how to pick up women, sure, but in the process, I'm becoming a better human being."

His mouth began to move. He was going to speak. "Well," he said.

Yes? What?

"I am eternally here for you as a true friend, and also to make up for what I did."

He wasn't convinced. Fuck him. I was going to take a nap.

"Mind if I stay over for a couple of days?" he asked.

"No problem, but I'm leaving for Australia on Wednesday."

"Do you have an alarm clock I can borrow? I need to pray with the sunrise."

After I found him a small travel clock, he reached into his bag and pulled out a book. "Here," he said. "I brought this for you."

It was a small hardcover edition of an eighteenth century book called *The Path of the Just* with a note he had written for me inscribed on the title page. It quoted the Talmud:

Whoever destroys a single life is as guilty as though he had destroyed the entire world; and whoever rescues a single life earns as much merit as though he had rescued the entire world.

So he was trying to save me. Why? I was having fun.

Caroline and I put Carter in his stroller and pushed him around the block to a park. As I sat down on the bench, I thought about what a pathetic couple of pickup artists Mystery and I were. Kids around the world thought we were in hot tubs surrounded by bikini-clad models. Instead he was alone in his apartment, probably crying and watching lesbian porn, and I was in the suburbs pushing a baby around in a stroller.

In the morning, Caroline and I fetched Mystery from the city. He hadn't shaved since I'd last seen him, and thin patches of stubble dappled his baby-white skin. He wore a gray T-shirt that hung loosely over faded jeans.

"Just make sure your family doesn't ask me to do any magic for them," he told Caroline.

Yet that night, when Caroline's mother asked him what he did for work, Mystery launched into a spectacular performance. He introduced each illusion—mind reading, bottle levitation, self-levitating, sleights of hand—with ten minutes of patter and panache that put every other illusionist I'd seen to shame. He charmed everyone in the room: Caroline's mom was flabbergasted, her younger sister was attracted, and her brother wanted to learn how to levitate chalk to freak out his teachers. In that moment, I realized that Mystery actually had the skills to achieve his dream of being a superstar daredevil illusionist.

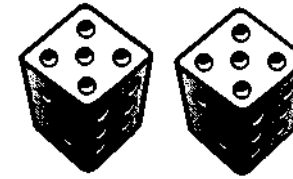
After Caroline's family turned in for the night, Mystery asked her if she had any sleeping pills.

"All we have is Tylenol #3, which has codeine," Caroline told him.

"That'll work," Mystery said. "Just give me the whole bottle. I have a high tolerance."

Already thinking like a nurse, Caroline brought him just four pills. But they weren't enough to knock him out. So while Caroline and I slept, Mystery, on a codeine high, stayed up all night writing posts on Mystery's Lounge.

Chapter



GEN GROUP: Mystery's Lounge

SUBJECT: Life Goals

AUTHOR: Mystery

I'm staying at Caroline's place right now because I've been upset over Patricia. Caroline is Style's Toronto girlfriend, and it must be tough for him. She is really beautiful, but she's got a kid. Style and Caroline look great together, but I understand the limitations too. Damn.

Solution: Be fair. Love her, dude. Be true to your feelings and don't hurt her but also know that you are polyamorous and want more. The idea of having many girls in many ports can be wholesomely nurtured.

She has a great family. I did magic for her eighteen-year-old sister, who's a cutie, and her brother and mom for like forty-five minutes. It was fun. I did a rune cast for the mom. Caroline is like my sister. I get that feeling of caring for her and her baby. And it's great to have Style here!

Then I took codeine to sleep because they all went to bed at normal hours, and I'm fucked up with my sleeping. But I didn't sleep. I just felt love. Don't get me wrong. I'm fully aware it's the Tylenol I took but, hey, the feeling is good nonetheless. I love this lounge. You guys are super bright. I hope we can all have a huge party one day.

And all this will wear off when the codeine gets pissed out, haaa.

This is what I want to see happen in the future: I want us to become closer friends—you think we can manage that? Grimble and Twotimer, your game is so different from mine. I want to sarge with both of you sometime to legitimately attempt to understand where you are coming from.

Papa, the game you played was fucking mint when you were up here. It was great to do a workshop with you, and you are welcome anytime, man. I don't even mind that you call me every day.

I envision this lounge as not being about pickup, but rather about something bigger: life goals. Women are a huge part of that, and we work together to help each other obtain them. However, I'd like to extend our topics to money, social status, and other ambitions.

hold so we could go to New York and Bucharest together. I'd already bought the plane tickets. And now, because of some mixture of Steven Spielberg and codeine after effects, he was bailing out.

"Not enough people. Oh well."

"Come on," I said. "You're already making eighteen hundred dollars. And I'm sure more guys will sign up at the last minute. It's New York, for chrissake. No one commits to anything in advance."

"Living," he sighed, "costs too much."

It was all too melodramatic for me. The guy was a black hole sucking up attention. Fuck him.

"You are so fucking selfish," I seethed. "What about our tickets to Bucharest?"

"You can go if you want. I'm canceling all shows, all agents, all seminars, all workshops, all trips. I'm stopping everything. I don't want to be known for being a loss afflies."

I gave him a mule kick from behind. I have a long fuse, but when it hits bottom I explode. Though my father may not have taught me much about women, he did teach me that.

An orange prescription bottle hit the floor, scattering pills. I picked it up and looked at it. The word Rivotril was on the label.

"What are these?"

"They're my sister's anti-depressant pills. They really aren't about dealing with depression so much as making me sleep." Cold. Clinical.

I figured they couldn't be doing much good. So I left three in the bottle and stuffed the rest in my pocket. I didn't want him overdosing.

Mystery logged on to Party Poker, an online gambling site, and started playing mechanically. The Mystery I knew was too logical to gamble.

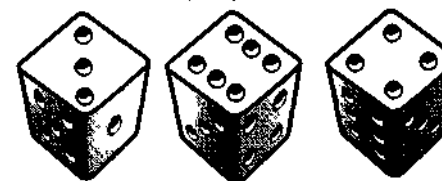
"What are you doing?" I said. But I didn't wait for an answer. "Never mind."

I slammed the door behind me and found Caroline in the front room.

"Let's go back to your house," I told her.

She smiled weakly, sympathetically. She didn't know what to say. In that moment, I hated her. She just seemed so useless.

Chapter



So I went back to Caroline's house in the suburbs—to her mother and her brother and her sister and her son and her Britney Spears movies.

I could tell I was becoming a burden to her and a distraction from her son. And she could tell she was becoming a bore to me. It wasn't her constant fretting over her son I minded; it was her complete lack of initiative. The days and nights spent imprisoned in her house doing nothing were getting to me. I refuse to take time for granted.

One of the primary rules of pickup is that a girl can fall out of love with you as quickly as she falls in love with you. It happens every night. The girls who start rubbing your chest and making out with you in a club in two minutes will leave you just as quickly for a bigger, better deal. That's the game. That's life in the field. And I understood that.

During a workshop in San Francisco, I'd spent the night at the house of a lawyer named Anne. On her nightstand there was a thin book by a guy named Joel Kramer. Unable to sleep, I picked it up and leafed through the pages. He explained the emotions Caroline and I were feeling best: We have this idea that love is supposed to last forever. But love isn't like that. It's a free-flowing energy that comes and goes when it pleases. Sometimes it stays for life; other times it stays for a second, a day, a month, or a year. So don't fear love when it comes simply because it makes you vulnerable. But don't be surprised when it leaves, either. Just be glad you had the opportunity to experience it.

I'm very loosely paraphrasing, but his ideas reverberated in my head as I spent yet another night in bed with Caroline. I had originally memorized the passage to use as a routine. I never thought it would actually apply to my own life. Love was supposed to be something women chased, not men.

I spent the next day juggling airplane tickets and travel plans. I kept my flight to Eastern Europe, but instead of watching Mystery hunt for bisexual slave girls, I decided to meet a group of PUAs operating out of Croatia. I'd been corresponding with one of them, named Badboy, since the day I'd joined the community.

One of the reasons I became a writer is that, unlike starting a band, directing movies, or acting in a theatrical production, you can do it alone. Your success and failure depend entirely on yourself. I've never trusted collaborations, because most people in this world are not closers. They don't finish what they start; they don't live what they dream; they sabotage their own progress because they're afraid they won't find what they seek. I had idolized Mystery. I had wanted to be him. But, like most everyone else—perhaps more than most—he was his own worst enemy.

When I checked the seduction boards that day, there was one new message from Mystery. Its title: Mystery's Last Post.

I won't be posting here anymore. Just wanted to say thanks for the memories and good luck to you all.

You know,
Mystery

I went to Mystery's website, and it had been taken down already. It's impressive how quickly years of work and effort can be dismantled.

An hour later, my cell phone rang. It was Papa.

"I'm scared," he said.

"So am I," I told him. "I don't know whether this is just a cry for attention or the real thing."

"I feel the same way as Mystery." His voice was distant and weak. "My life is going all the way down. All I am is game. I haven't opened a book since school started. And I need to get accepted into law school."

Papa wasn't an exception. There was something about the community that took over people's lives. Especially now. Before Mystery started doing workshops, it was just an online addiction. Now everyone was flying around the country meeting and sarging together. It wasn't just a lifestyle; it was a disease. The more time you devoted to it, the better you got. And the better you got, the more addictive it became. Guys who had never been to clubs could now walk in, be superstars, and leave with pockets full of phone numbers and girls on their arms. And then, as icing on the cake, they could write a field report and brag about it to everyone else in the community. There were people who were quitting their jobs and dropping out of school in order to master the game. Such was the power and lure of success with women.

"One of the things that attracts a woman is lifestyle and success," I told Papa. "Imagine how easy the game would be if you were a high-powered entertainment lawyer with celebrity clients. By getting into a good law school, you'll be improving your game."

"Yeah," he said. "I need to prioritize. I love the game, but it's become too much of a drug for me now."

Mystery's depression was affecting not just his own life, but the lives of the kids who looked up to him and modeled themselves after him. Some, like Papa, were still modeling him, even in his downward spiral.

"Everyone who gets too absorbed in the game is depressed," Papa said. "Ross Jeffries, Mystery, me. I want Mystery's game, but not at the expense of life."

The problem was that this epiphany was coming too late for Papa. He'd already signed up for seminars with David X and David DeAngelo. All of it, of course, meant blowing off days of classes.

"My dad called yesterday," Papa continued. "He's really worried about me. All I've been doing is game for half a year while ignoring my education, finances, and family."

"You have to learn balance, man. Pickup should just be a glorified hobby."

It was wise advice—advice I should have been following myself.

After I hung up, I called Mystery. He wanted to give me his motorcycle. He wanted to give Patricia his computer. And he wanted to give the illusions he had designed for his ninety-minute show to a local magician.

"You can't give away the magic tricks you've worked so hard on," I protested. "You may want them later."

"Those are illusions. I'm not good at anything but bullshitting people. I never meant to be a bullshitter, so I'm stopping now."

I didn't need to be a high-school guidance counselor to recognize the warning signs. If I didn't take them seriously, I might regret it later. I couldn't turn the other way while my mentor walked off a cliff—even if it was a cliff of his own making. I once had a friend whose ex-boyfriend was always threatening to kill himself. One day she didn't respond to his cry for help. He shot himself on his front lawn an hour later.

As Mystery had noted in his codeine-high Lounge post, we had a valuable network at our disposal. The Lounge linked together surgeons, students, bodyguards, movie directors, fitness trainers, software developers, concierges, stockbrokers, and psychiatrists. So I called Doc.

In the months since Mystery's breakdown, I'd turned a new corner in my game. Once I'd gotten the number of a woman, it was easy to meet and have sex with her. In the past, I was too obsessed with trying to get some to actually take a step back, assess the situation, and act appropriately. Now, after a year of accumulating knowledge and experience, I had finally gotten out of my own head. I understood the process of attraction and the signals women gave. I saw the big picture.

When talking to a woman, I could recognize the specific point when she became attracted to me, even if she was acting distant or felt uncomfortable. I knew when to talk and when to shut up; when to push and when to pull; when to tease and when to be sincere; when to kiss and when to say we were moving too fast.

Whatever test, challenge, or objection a woman threw my way, I knew how to respond. When Maya the belly dancer wrote and said "Thanks for the multiple orgasms. Call and we can discuss when you'll be taking me out for dinner. You owe me for the cab ride" and I feel like being taken out on a real date," I didn't assume she was a bitch or pushy at all. She just trying to get validation for having put out so quickly and testing to see how much she could control me. I didn't even need to think about the response.

"I'll tell you what," I wrote. "I'll pay you back for the cab, like I promised, and then you can take me out to dinner in exchange for all those orgasms." She took me out to dinner.

I saw the matrix.

I was Mystery.

Chapter



WHO IS THE BEST PUA?

BY THUNDERCAT

FROM THUNDERCAT'S SEDUCTION LAIR

Okay, so the debate has been raging for a while now over who is the best pickup artist out there.

Obviously, a lot of egos are involved in this assessment, and everyone has their own opinions about who the best really is. In fact, it's so subjective that I don't really think there will ever be a clear and honest answer on the subject. It's like asking who the best warrior or soldier is in a war. But that doesn't stop some people from categorizing the guys in our little community as the best. So I've decided to rate the top PUAs operating out there.

Style is definitely, hands down, the best operating in the game today. This guy is probably the most evil, sneaky, manipulative bastard I have ever seen in operation. The thing is, this guy comes in totally under the radar, and that is why he is so dangerous. His subtlety is so amazing that before you know it, you are qualifying yourself to him and he has you right where he wants you. And the thing is, he does it with both girls and guys. No one is safe.

To give you an idea of how incredible Style is, he's invented most of the techniques a lot of the fop guys are using and teaching. He is practically Machiavellian in nature and is someone I both admire and fear. Add to this the fact that he's a rather average-looking guy, and you have the most powerful of the Jedi, bar none.

Chapter



MSN GROUP: Mystery's Lounge

SUBJECT: Field Report—Speed Closing

AUTHOR: Tyler Durden

Okay, this just happened not even fifteen minutes ago, and I can't tell anyone other than you guys about it.

I was pretty bored today, so I went to the Rideau Centre shopping mall in Ottawa, hoping to meet some new HBs to hang with tonight because my AFC friends were all with their girlfriends.

I cruised the mall, and I couldn't find any HB higher than a 7.5, so I was pretty pissed.

I was about to leave when I saw this new Booster Juice place with a cute little redhead working there—about a 7.5 like every other damned Rideau Centre chick.

I ordered a juice, and here's what happened:

TD: Which mango is better: mango hurricane or mango breeze?

HB: Mango hurricane.

TD: Awesome. I'll have the breeze.

HB: Ha ha, okay. Which booster do you want?

TD: What are boosters?

HB: Those things on the sign on the wall.

TD: Ooh, so I can get like vitamins and energy and shit in it. Awesome! I'll be like a new man after I drink this. This is the shit!

HB: Ha ha.

TD: High-five!

HB: Okay! (*She high-fives me.*) Wow! That was like the coolest thing that's happened to me all day.

TD: Pretty bored, huh?

HB: Yeah, it sucks here.

TD: Hmm, well, guess what?

HB: What?

TD: I love you.

HB: Ha ha. Um, okay. I love you too.

TD: Awesome! We're going to get married. Wow, you can really find love in the strangest of places, like right here at the Booster Juice.

HB: Ha ha.

TD: Wait a sec. I know, close your eyes.

HB: Why?

TD: Just do it.

HB: Are you gonna steal my cash register or something?

TD: No, nothing like that. I swear. Remember, I love you.

HB: Okay, (*closes eyes*)

The counter was pretty wide. I leaned way over, so that I was Superman-style horizontal over the top, and kissed her.

As soon as I kissed her, she started screaming like fucking crazy.

HB: Aaaaaaaahhhh! Aaaaaaaahhhh!

All these people started looking over at me. She was freaking out, screaming her head off like a banshee, flailing her arms around and shit.

I was thinking, "Fuck, fuck, fuck. I knew this shit would backfire someday. Fuck. I should have waited for more IOIs or something. Fuck. I thought I had the IOIs! I'm never doing this ever again!"

TD: Um, I said I loved you first.

HB: Aaaaaaaahhhh! Aaaaaaaahhhh!

TD: Um, are you okay?

HB: Aaaaaaaahhhh!

TD: Uh-oh.

HB: Um, okay. That will be five dollars and thirty-one cents. Aaaaaaaahhhh!

She was trying to regain her composure by talking, but she kept screaming intermittently.

TD: Please calm down.

HB: Um, yeah. I'm okay. What's your name?

TD: Please don't call the police on me.

HB: No, no. It's just for the computer. I ask everyone.

TD: Okay. It's Tyler.

giving the appearance of deep intensity. "Now is that guy you wrote about in your article really saying that the character in *Magnolia* is based on him? Is he saying that?"

He was talking about Ross Jeffries. One of Ross's claims to fame was that he was the inspiration for Frank T.J. Mackey in Paul Thomas Anderson's film *Magnolia*. Mackey was the character Cruise played: an arrogant seduction teacher with unresolved father issues who wears a headset during his seminars and orders his students to "respect the cock."

"He shouldn't," Cruise continued. He swallowed a salt pill and chased it down with a long swig of bottled water. "That's not okay. It's not true. Really. That is an invention that PTA had." PTA is Paul Thomas Anderson. "That guy is not Mackey at all. He is not Mackey." It seemed important for Cruise to establish this. "I worked on creating that character with Paul Thomas Anderson for four months. And I didn't use that guy at all."¹⁰

Cruise sat me in his 2000 CC Triumph motorcycle and taught me how to start the engine and shift gears. Then he raced around the track, popping wheelies, while I wiped out going five miles an hour on his top-of-the-line bike. Afterward, he brought me into his trailer. The walls were covered with pictures of the children he and his ex-wife Nicole Kidman had adopted.

"Has this Jeffries guy turned his character more Mackey-ish since the movie?" Cruise asked.

"He's arrogant and megalomaniacal like Mackey. But he's not as alpha male as Mackey."

"I'll tell you something," Cruise said as he sat down at a table spread with finger sandwiches and cold cuts. "When I did that monolog as Mackey, we didn't tell the audience anything about what we were doing. And the guys just started getting pumped up as I was talking. So at the end of the day, PTA and I had to get on stage and say, 'Look, man. We just want to tell you that where this character is going and what he's saying is not good. And it's not okay.'"

Here came the lecture. First Dustin; now Tom Cruise. I couldn't understand it. What was wrong with learning how to meet women? That's what we're here for. It's how the species survives. All I wanted was an evolution-

ary edge. So why not work at it and learn to do it well, like I'd done with everything else in my life? Who says you're allowed to take lessons in motorcycle riding but not in interacting with women? I just needed someone to show me how to start the engine and shift to higher gears. And I wasn't hurting anyone. No one was complaining after I slept with them, no one was being lied to, no one was being hurt. They wanted to be seduced. Everyone wants to be seduced. It makes us feel wanted.

"We made this whole speech, because the guys were taking what we were saying and going with it and getting into it. So PTA and I were saying, 'Hey man, oh my God. Easy.'"

See, I wanted to tell him. Seduction is seductive. But I couldn't, because as he remembered that moment, Cruise let out a laugh. And Cruise doesn't laugh like ordinary people do. His laugh takes over a room. It comes on just fine, a regular laugh by any standards. You will be laughing too. But then, when the humor subsides, you will stop laughing. At this point, however, Cruise's laugh will just be crescendoing. And he will be making eye contact with you. *Ha ha HA HA heh heh*. And you will try to laugh again, to join him, because you know you're supposed to. But it doesn't come out right, because it's not natural. He will squeeze out a couple words sometimes between chuckles—"It's not real," in this case. And then he will stop, as suddenly as he started, and you will be relieved.

"Well," I told him, squeezing out the last breath of an awkward laugh. "That's easy for you to say."

We spent the next week together visiting various Scientology buildings. It's no secret that Tom Cruise is a member of the Church of Scientology—a religion, self-help group, charity, cult, and philosophy started by the science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard in the 1950s. But Cruise had never taken a journalist into that world before.

The more I learned about L. Ron Hubbard, the more I realized that he was the exact same personality type as Mystery and Ross Jeffries and Tyler Durden. They were wickedly smart megalomaniacs who knew how to synthesize great bodies of knowledge and experience into personality-driven brands, which they sold to people who didn't feel like they were getting what they needed out of life. They were obsessive students of the principles that guide human behavior. But the ethics of and motivation for their use of those principles made them controversial figures.

On our last day together, Cruise took me on a tour of the Scientology

¹⁰ When asked how he had come up with the character of T.J. Mackey in an interview in *Creative Screenwriting* in 2000, however, Paul Thomas Anderson did mention researching Ross Jeffries.

"The three most influential people in my life," Papa told us as he sat down on the couch at Mystery's feet, "have been you two and my father."

Papa's hair was now spiked and gelled, and he looked like he'd been working out. I left him to talk with Mystery in my living room while I ran downstairs to a Caribbean food stand to get dinner for everyone.

When I returned, Papa was Mystery's manager.

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?" I asked Mystery. I couldn't believe he was going to let a protegee-turned-competitor manage him. Mystery was an innovator. If Ross Jeffries was the Elvis of seduction, Mystery was the Beatles. Tyler and Papa were merely the New York Dolls: They were brash, they were loud, and everyone thought they were gay.

"Papa likes the business and he can fill workshops every weekend," Mystery replied. "So all I have to do is show up."

Papa, in his networking mania, was in constant contact with nearly every major sage. He knew all the laid presidents and was on all the seduction mailing lists. With just a few e-mails and phone calls, he could recruit a dozen students nearly anywhere in the world.

"It's win-win," Papa insisted. Ever since he'd gotten into the pickup business, that had become Papa's favorite phrase. He was smarter than I'd given him credit for. He was going to become the middle man for the biggest pickup artists in the community. And they were all going to let him, because most artists have the same fatal flaw: They're too lazy to deal with anything practical themselves.

We never actually invited Papa to join us in Project Hollywood that day. It just happened because he was willing to do the work. There was a Coldwell Banker office across the street from the hotel, and Papa walked in and found us a real estate agent named Joe. Real estate agents don't make much money on rentals, but Papa managed to talk Joe into working for us by promising to teach him the game.

"He's going to take us tomorrow to look at houses," Papa said when we met him in the lobby of the Furama Hotel one afternoon. "There are three places I really like. There's a mansion on Mulholland Drive; there's the former Rat Pack crib off Sunset; and there's the supermansion, which has ten bedrooms, tennis courts, and a built-in nightclub."

"Well, I'm for the supermansion," I told him. "How much is it?"

"It's fifty thousand a month."

"Forget it."

Papa's face clouded. He didn't like the word no. He was an only child.

He disappeared into his hotel room and emerged a half hour later with a sheet of paper in his hands. On it, he had sketched out a plan to earn \$50,000 a month. We'd throw a weekly party in the club, and make \$8,000 by charging admission and \$5,000 in drinks per month; various pickup and lifestyle seminars would earn the house \$20,000; we'd offer tennis lessons that would add up to \$2,000 a month; and the ten residents of the house would pay \$1,500 each in rent.

It was completely impractical. It wasn't worth spending all our income on overhead. But it was impressive. Papa was going to make Project Hollywood happen, no matter what it took. I began to understand why Mystery wanted to work with Papa. He was one of us: He was a go-getter. He had initiative. And, unlike Mystery, he was a closer.

As a pickup artist, Papa also seemed worthy of Project Hollywood. He'd proven his fearlessness in the field over and over since we'd met him in Toronto. And he would prove himself once more the following day, when he picked up Paris Hilton at a taco stand.

Chapter



Every word Papa told Paris Hilton had come from me: the jealous girlfriend opener, the C-shaped versus U-shaped-smiles routine. Even his delivery of the Cube was the exact same as what he'd recorded at his first workshop with Mystery and me, down to the way he said, "Interesting" and "Cool." He was a great robot, and he had just outperformed his program.

We walked back to the house to meet the owner and sign the papers. The former home of Dean Martin (and later the comedian Fiddli Griffin), the Rat Pack crib was just above Mel's Diner on Sunset Boulevard. It was \$36,000 a month for the house, and it was walking distance from the clubs on Sunset Boulevard.

The living room looked like a ski lodge. There was a fireplace, a sunken dance floor, a thirty-foot-high ceiling, a massive wood-inlay wall mural, and a large bar in the corner. The space could easily hold a few hundred people for seminars and parties. There were two bedrooms off the living room on the ground floor. Outside each of these rooms was a staircase leading up to another bedroom. And then there was a small maid's room off the kitchen.

The crown jewel of the house was the multitiered backyard. On one level, there were two patios shaded by palm and lemon trees. On the second level, there was a large brick terrace with a peanut-shaped pool, a Jacuzzi, a dining area, and a working barbecue and refrigerator. Beyond it lay a landscaped hill with a path winding up to a small, secluded deck at the top of the property. From there, we could see the glittering lights and ten-story movie billboards of Hollywood. The place was a chick magnet. There was no way we could fail here.

Papa put his name down on the lease. This, in addition to paying the larger of the rents, earned him the right to the master bedroom, which came equipped with a raised platform intended for a bed, picture windows, and a fireplace. The bathroom was decked out with a glass-encased circular shower, two walk-in closets, and a whirlpool bathtub built for three.

The possibilities were limitless. Papa had visions of renting the house for after-Grammy parties, movie premieres, and corporate events. He no

longer sarged girls when he went out; instead he sarged promoters and celebrities, trying to make connections for Project Hollywood after-parties. He even used Speed Seduction and NLP tactics to try and hypnotize people into investing in the house.

In his spare time, he made bids for tanning beds, movie projectors, pool tables, and stripper poles on eBay. He wanted to make Project Hollywood a place Paris Hilton would want to come every weekend to party.

There were still two bedrooms that needed to be filled, so we issued a call for roommates on Mystery's Lounge. The response was terrifying: Everybody wanted in.

legs against the flank of the bull, and raised my hand to signal I was ready. In an instant the machine shuddered to life, vibrating me so quickly that my eyes lost focus. I remember feeling my brain about to fall out of my skull, my hips rocking faster than they'd ever moved before, my legs losing their grip, and my crotch jackhammering into the saddle handle in time with the bull. But just as I was about to slide off the side, the bull stopped. I had lasted seven seconds.

At first, I was elated. I felt like I had accomplished something—even though it was really nothing. It wouldn't change my life, or the life of anyone around me in the least. I began to wonder why I had cared so much. Within minutes, I already had buyer's remorse.

Afterward, Min said she was tired and asked me to walk her back to Project Hollywood.

I understood the subtext.

As we ambled back to the mansion, arm-in-arm, she talked about her older brothers and their difficulty learning the game. "They're real protective and get mad when I go on dates," she said. "But I think they're jealous because they're not going on dates themselves."

When we returned to Project Hollywood, I brought her to the Jacuzzi.

"My last boyfriend was the sweetest guy, and he did everything for me," she went on. "But I didn't like him. He got on my nerves. After I started reading my brothers' pickup stuff, I understood why I wasn't attracted to him or any of the other guys at school. They're all so boring. They don't understand cocky funny."

I stripped down to my boxers and jumped in the water, soothing my bull-bucked wounds. She joined me in her bra and panties. She was thin and delicate, like a marionette. I took her hands and pulled her toward me. She straddled my legs, and we began making out. I took her bra off and put her gumdrops in my mouth. Then I carried her naked and dripping to my bedroom, put on a condom, and slowly entered her. There was no LMR. By looking up to me so much, her brothers had driven her into my arms.

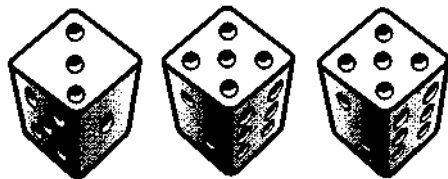
She was my first groupie. And she would not be my last. This whole PUA thing was getting too big. With so many new competing seduction businesses aggressively marketing their services online, the community was growing exponentially, especially in Southern California, where the Sunset Strip was transforming before our eyes.

No woman was safe. Workshops of fifteen people wandered the street

like gangs. Bands of former students patrolled every club—the Standard, Dublin's, the Saddle Ranch, Miyagi's. When the bars closed at 2:00 A.M., they'd invade Mel's, walking up and down the aisles, seating themselves at any table with a female. They carted women into the house by the truckload.

And they were all using my material. They were running around Style-mogging and delivering the best-friends test like they were Spanish flies. In every club, I saw their shaven heads, their diabolical goatees, their shoes that looked like the pair I'd bought in the Beverly Center a week before. Mini-mes were everywhere. And there was nothing I could do about it.

Chapter



Was there a lot of pressure on you while making this album?

What, now?

Was there a lot of pressure from yourself or the label to have a major hit this time around?

I have no idea.

You have no idea?

I have no idea.

I heard you did a track with the DFA that wasn't included on your new CD. Why was that?

What's the DFA?

They're two producers from New York, James Murphy and Tim Goldsworthy, who call themselves the DFA. Does that ring a bell?

Yeah, maybe they did something.

My interview with Britney Spears was going nowhere. I looked at her, crossing her legs and fidgeting on the hotel-room couch next to me. She didn't give a shit. I was just an amount of time blocked off on her calendar, and she was tolerating it—poorly.

Her hair was tucked under a white Kangol hat and her thighs pushed at the seams of her faded blue jeans. She was one of the most desired women in the world. But in person, she looked like a cornfed Southern sorority girl. She had a beautiful face, lightly and perfectly touched with makeup, but there was something masculine about her. As a sexual icon, she was unimimidating and, I imagined, lonely.

A gear slammed down in my head.

There was only one way to save this interview: I had to sarge her. No matter what country I was in or what age or class or race of woman I was

talking to, the game always worked. Besides, I had nothing to lose by gaming Britney Spears. The interview couldn't get any more boring. Maybe I'd even get a decent quote I could actually print.

I folded my list of questions and put them in my back pocket. I had to treat her like any club girl with attention deficit disorder.

The first move was to hook her attention.

"I'll tell you something about yourself that other people probably don't know," I began. "People sometimes see you as shy or bitchy offstage, even though you aren't."

"Totally," she said.

"Do you want to know why?"

"Yeah." I was creating what's called a yes-ladder, capturing her attention by asking questions that require an obvious affirmative answer.

"I'm watching your eyes when you talk. And every time you think, they go down and to the left. That means you're a kinesthetic person. You're someone who lives in her feelings."

"Oh my God," she said. "That's totally true."

Of course it was. It was one of the value-demonstrating routines I'd developed. The eye goes to one of seven different positions when someone thinks: Each position means the person is accessing a different part of their brain.

As I taught her how to read different types of eye movements, she clung to every word. Her legs uncrossed and she leaned in toward me.

The game was on.

"I didn't know this," she said. "Who told you this?"

I wanted to tell her, "A secret society of international pickup artists."

"It's something I observed from doing lots of interviews," I answered.

"In fact, by watching the direction peoples' eyes move when they speak, you can tell whether they're telling the truth or not."

"So you're going to know if I'm lying?" She was looking at me entirely differently now. I wasn't a journalist anymore. I was someone she could learn from, someone who offered value. I had demonstrated authority over her world.

"I can tell from your eye movements, from your eye contact, from the way you speak, and from your body language. There are many different ways to tell."

"I need to do psychology classes," she said, with endearing earnestness.

pickup artists and planned her appearance that evening on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. Mystery and Herbal taught her about concepts like social proof, and NLP ideas like framing. She needed to be reframed. The current frame everyone saw her through was that of a crazy woman. But having lived with her for two weeks, we knew she was just going through a bad period. She was eccentric, but not crazy. In fact, she was incredibly smart. She understood and internalized every concept they taught her.

"So my new frame, then, is that I'm a damsel in distress," she said.

That evening, she shone on *The Tonight Show*. Unlike during her tabloid-headline-making *Letterman* appearance, she was composed and well-behaved on camera—and her performance with her all-female band the Chelsea, was a reminder that she wasn't just a celebrity, she was a rock star.

I had driven to the show in Katya's car with Herbal, Mystery, Katya, and Kara, a girl I'd met in a bar a couple of days before. After the show, we went upstairs to Courtney's dressing room, where she was sitting on a stool surrounded by the Chelsea. I was stunned by her guitarist: She was a tall, gorgeous bleached-blond rock-and-roller oozing attitude. Why couldn't I ever find girls like that in the clubs?

"Can I stay in your room for two more weeks?" Courtney asked Herbal.

"Sure," he replied. Herbal never had a problem with anything or anyone. While Mystery had been moping in his room, he was out helping Katya keep her brother entertained.

"It may be a month," Courtney called after us as we left the room.

In the parking lot, Mystery climbed into the driver's side of Katya's car. He hadn't spoken a word to her all day. She sat in the passenger seat and slipped a dance mix by Carl Cox into the CD player. Her musical taste was confined to house and techno; Mystery listened almost exclusively to Tool, Pearl Jam, and Live. That should have been a warning sign.

As we pulled out of the parking lot, Mystery's phone rang. He turned the music off to answer it.

Katya reached over and turned the music on quietly.

Mystery angrily turned it off again.

And so it went: on, off, on, off—each twist of the knob with more venom than the last until, finally, Mystery slammed on the brakes, screamed "fuck you," and jumped out of the car.

He stood in the middle of Ventura Boulevard blocking traffic, with his

right arm thrust out and a middle finger in the air, directly in line with Katya's face.

Katya crawled into the driver's seat and drove to the intersection, then turned around to fetch Mystery, who had started walking along the sidewalk. When she pulled up next to him, he stopped, shot her a scornful look, crossed his arms into the fuck-you position, and then continued walking.

She drove off without him. She wasn't angry; she was just disappointed by his childishness.

That night, Mystery didn't return home. I called him several times, but he didn't answer. When I woke up the next morning, he still hadn't returned. Every time I dialed his number, the call went straight to voice mail. I began to worry.

A few hours later, there was a knock on the door. I answered it, expecting Mystery, but found Courtney's driver standing there instead. One of Courtney's many talents was the ability to turn anyone within a hundred-yard radius into a personal assistant. Seduction students visiting the house for the first time found themselves running to Tokyopop for a manga book Courtney was in, picking up bedding from her corporate apartment, or sending e-mails to the financial expert Suze Orman.

"Shitballs!" she called to Katya's brother. "Can you go back to my apartment with the driver and get my DVDs?"

After he left, Courtney told Katya, "He's a nice kid, and kind of cute."

"You know, he's a virgin," Katya said.

"Sure," Courtney replied. She went silent, contemplating this piece of information for a few moments, then nodded her head and told Katya, "I'd give him a mercy fuck."

That night, Mystery returned. He had a stripper on each arm. They looked like they'd been working in the same dark club for twenty years; our hundred-watt lightbulbs weren't serving them well.

"Hey, buddy," he said, as if he'd just come back from the grocery store. "Where were you?"

"I went to a strip club and spent the night with Gina."

"Hi," said a horse-faced brunette on his left arm. She lifted her waving hand meekly.

"Well, dude, you should have called. It's okay to have your little spat with Katya, but Herbal and I were really worried. That wasn't cool."

some bizarre evolutionary justification for it all. "It's selfish genes," he'd say. "It's the nonexistent potential baby punishing me for leaving."

When Herbal returned from shopping on Melrose with Katya, I warned him, "You're being tooled. She's using you to get back at Mystery."

"No," he said. "It's not true. We have real feelings for each other."

"Well, can you do me a favor and just try not to see her until Mystery gets better? I'm going to ask her to leave the house for a while."

"Fine," he said, with some reluctance. "But it's not going to be easy."

That night, I took Katya and her brother to the movies. Plan A was to get her out of the house and away from Herbal so that Mystery didn't get any worse. Plan B was to fuck her in order to show Herbal that his connection with Katya wasn't so special.

Fortunately, plan A worked.

"You are destroying Mystery," I told her as I drove her back from the theater. "You need to leave the house. And don't come back until I say it's okay. This isn't about you anymore. Mystery has a serious psychological problem, and you've set it off."

"Okay," she said. She looked up at me like a child being disciplined.

"And promise me not to sleep with Herbal again. You're hurting one of my roommates, and you're about to break the heart of another. I can't stand by and watch it."

"I promise," she said.

"The fun is over. You've made your point."

"Okay," she said. "I'm done."

"Pinky swear?"

We locked pinkies.

I should have made her swear on something more serious.

Seduction was easy compared to this. Even if people were just programs designed by evolution, as Mystery believed, they were apparently too complicated for any of us to truly understand. All we had figured out were a few simple cause and effect relationships. If you lower a woman's self-esteem, she will seek validation from you. If you make a woman jealous, she will become more attracted to you. But beyond attraction and lust, there were deeper feelings that few of us felt and none of us had mastered. And these feelings—for which the heart and the word *love* are just metaphors—were tearing Project Hollywood, a house already divided, further apart.

And so it came to pass that Mystery scared everyone out of the house

and he started talking about killing himself and I got him a Xanax from Katya and I put him in my car and I took him to the Hollywood Mental Health Center and he tried to run away twice and he wanted to hit on the therapist but couldn't.

Six hours later, he left the clinic with a package of Seroquel pills in his hand and another Xanax in his system. I'd never heard of Seroquel before, so when we returned the house I looked at the pamphlet that came with it.

"For the treatment of schizophrenia," it read.

Mystery took the pamphlet from my hands and looked it over. "They're just sleeping pills," he said. "They'll help me get to sleep."

"Right," I told him. "Sleeping pills."

He's even charging fifteen hundred dollars now for boot camps where he teaches my material." Mystery glared at Papa; Papa stared right through Mystery. "And now that he doesn't need me anymore, he wants to move me out and turn my room into a twelve-person dorm."

At the time, I thought Mystery was in denial, that he was still refusing to take responsibility for his actions. "It didn't have to turn out like this," I told him. "Every step of the way, you've made bad decisions, and now you have to live with them. We're not even kicking you out. You're deciding to leave."

Mystery folded his arms across his chest and looked at us dismally.

"Can't you see that the actions you think are alpha-male ways to solve a problem actually prevented you from getting the outcome you wanted?" I continued.

"It was a tactic designed to keep Katya out of the house, and it worked," he maintained. "She hasn't been back since."

I lost my cool. It was time for him to wake up and take a good look at himself.

"You need some tough love," I said, raising my voice for the first time all meeting. "You're the best illusionist I've ever seen, yet you haven't taken a single step toward your ninety-minute show—or any show, for that matter—since I've met you. Your pickup business is a mess, and your former students are raking in all the money that should be yours. As for your love life, ever since Katya, you've driven away every girl you've slept with. I would not recommend a girl ever dating you. You are a financial, mental, and emotional mess." With each sentence I felt like a weight was being lifted off my chest. "You have nothing: no health, no wealth, and no relationships. And you have no one to blame but yourself."

Mystery dropped his head into his hands. His shoulders started shaking. Big Mystery tears rolled out of his eyes. "I'm a broken man," he cried. "I'm broken."

The wall of sophistry and self-deception that had been propping him up came tumbling down. "What should I do?" He looked at me. "Tell me what to do."

Tears began leaking out of my eyes. I couldn't help it. I turned and faced the wall so Herbal and Papa wouldn't see. The tears ran faster. Despite all of Mystery's flaws, I still cared about the guy. After two years in the seduction community, I still didn't have a girlfriend, but for some reason I

had bonded with this big blubbery genius. Perhaps it was really shared emotion and experience that creates relationships, not seven hours of routines followed by two hours of sex.

"You need therapy," I said. "You need treatment or counseling or something. You can't just keep doing this to yourself."

"I know," he said. His eyes filled with tears as viscous as mercury. He balled his hand into a fist and hit his head self-castigatingly. "I know. I fucked up."



I walked out of Papa's room and left the house. I had a headache. It had been a long day.

As I started down the hill to grab a burrito at Poquito Mas, a black Mercedes convertible whipped around the corner and began climbing the hill. Inside were two blondes.

The car screeched to a halt in front of me, and a voice yelled my name from the driver's seat. It was Lisa. My heart skipped a beat.

She wore a red Diesel jacket with a wide ruffled collar that made her look like a cross between a supermodel and a racecar driver. I was unshaven, wearing sweatpants, and frazzled from debating with my roommates all day. I felt so many emotions at once: embarrassment, excitement, resentment, fear, joy. I didn't think I was ever going to see her again.

"We're going to get a drink," Lisa yelled. "Do you want to join us?"

"What are you doing here?" I tried to keep my cool and appear unfazed by her sudden reappearance.

"Going to the Whiskey Bar."

"Didn't you just pass it?"

"Yeah. I came by to ask you to go with us. Do you have a problem with that?"

A touch of attitude. I still liked her. She was a challenge. She didn't let any sarcasm, neg, or cocky funny get past her without a verbal smackdown.

"Let me change," I said, "and I'll meet you there."

I slipped on a pair of Levi's Red jeans with fake cat scratches down the front and a military-collared button-down shirt I'd bought in Australia, and ran down the hill to join them.

I was anxious to talk to Lisa and find out why she'd disappeared after Atlanta. But when I arrived, Lisa and Sam were at a table with two stocky, heavily tattooed rockers. They were the type of guys I had imagined Lisa dating. I sat between them, dwarfed by ink and hair dye.

As they gossiped about local rock scenesters I neither knew nor cared about, an overwhelming anxiety took hold of my body. I didn't want to

make small talk or pretend to enjoy it. I wanted to be alone with Lisa. I wanted to connect with her.

When the first drip of sweat rolled down my forehead, I jumped up. I couldn't take it.

"I'll be right back," I said. I needed to sarge—not because I wanted to pick up women, but because I wanted to get into a positive state and talkative mood. Otherwise I was going to just crack sitting there so awkwardly.

As I ordered a drink at the bar, I smelled lilacs behind me. I turned around to see two women in black evening dresses. "Hey guys, let me get your opinion on something," I began, with a little less enthusiasm than usual.

"Let me guess," one of the women said. "You have a friend whose girlfriend is jealous because he still talks to his ex from college."

"Like, every guy keeps asking us that," her friend said. "What's the deal?"

I grabbed my Jack and Coke and shuffled out to the smoking patio—the site of my pickup battle with Heidi Fleiss. With some trepidation, I delivered the spells opener to a two-set sitting on a bench. Fortunately, they hadn't heard it.

"Hey," I said afterward. I really wasn't feeling it, but I wanted to push myself to be talkative. "How long have you guys known each other?"

"About ten years," one of the girls said.

"I could tell. I have to give you guys the best friends test."

"Oh, we know that one already," she said politely.

It had finally happened: The Sunset Strip was sarged out.

The community had grown large and reckless; too many competing businesses were teaching the same material. And we had saturated more than just Los Angeles. PUAs in San Diego, Montreal, New York, San Francisco, and Toronto had been reporting the same problem lately: They were running out of fresh girls to sarge.

I walked back to Lisa and her friends. "I'm wiped out," I told Lisa. "I'm going to head home. But I'm driving to Malibu tomorrow to surf. You and Sam should join me. It'll be fun."

She looked up at me, and we connected for the first time all evening. For three extraordinary seconds, the rest of the club disappeared. "Yeah, all right," she said. "Sounds cool."

"Great. Meet me at the house at noon." Connection over.

"No way, dude. I want to do this right. I don't want to lie in bed next to Lisa, feeling guilty for something I can't tell her about. It will break the trust we have."

I leaned over the edge of the Jacuzzi and dipped my hand into the pool. It was just as warm as the hot tub. Someone had left the heat on again. Our gas bill was going to be astronomical.

"Do you know the story of the frog and the scorpion?" Mystery asked.

"No, but I love analogies." I jumped into the pool and treaded water as Mystery leaned over the edge of the hot tub and recited the story.

"One day, a scorpion stood on the side of a stream and asked a frog to carry it to the other side. 'How do I know you won't sting me?' the frog asked. 'Because if I sting you, I'll drown.' The scorpion said.

"The frog thought about it and realized that the scorpion was right. So he put the scorpion on his back and started ferrying him. But midway across the stream, the scorpion plunged its finger into the frog's back. As they both began to drown, the frog gasped, 'Why?'"

"The scorpion replied, 'Because it is my nature.'"

Mystery took a triumphant sip of his screwdriver, then fixed his gaze on me as I floated in the pool beneath him. He spoke slowly and deliberately, like the Mystery who'd first told me to snap and shed the boring skin of Neil Strauss. "It is your nature," he continued. "You are a pickup artist now, You are Style. You've bitten from the apple of knowledge. You cannot go back to the way you were before."

"Well, dude." I took a couple strokes backward. "That's very cynical talk from a guy who's talking about marrying and having children with a girl he just met."

"We're polyamorous," he said. "As a result, we have to cheat on our girlfriends. And if that threatens our relationships, so be it." He emptied his drink and held his temples, as if fighting off a dizzy spell. "Never underestimate the power of denial."

"No." I couldn't look at him. I wasn't going to let him ruin this. "I don't need any more advice."

I climbed out of the pool, threw a towel over my shoulders, and walked into the living room. Xaneus, Playboy, and Tyler Durden were sitting there. As soon as I entered, they walked up to Papa's room without even acknowledging my presence. It was odd behavior, but nothing unexpected after living in Project Hollywood this long.

I went up to my room, showered, and paged through a copy of the medieval legend *Parsifal* I had recently bought. People often read books to search for themselves and find someone who agrees with them. And, right now, the nature of *Parsifal* agreed with me a lot more than the nature of the scorpion.

As I interpreted the legend, it's the story of a sheltered mother's boy who meets some knights and decides he wants to be just like them. So he goes off into the world, has a series of adventures, and progresses from legendary fool to legendary knight.

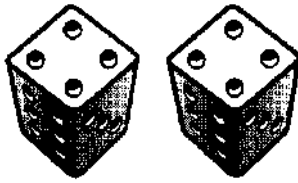
The country, at the time, has become a wasteland because the grail king (who guards the holy grail) has been wounded. And it just so happens that Parsifal is led to the grail castle, where he sees the king in terrible pain. As a compassionate human being, he wants to ask, "What is wrong?" And, according to legend, if someone pure of heart asks that question of the king, he will be healed and the blight on the land will be lifted.

However, Parsifal does not know this. And as a knight he has been trained to observe a strict code of conduct, which includes the rule of never asking questions or speaking unless he is addressed first. So he goes to bed without talking to the king. In the morning, he wakes to discover that the grail castle has disappeared. He has blown his chance to save king and country by obeying his training instead of his heart. Unlike the scorpion, Parsifal had a choice. He just made the wrong one.

When I walked through the living room to get a drink from the kitchen, I saw Mystery nursing another cocktail in front of the TV. He was watching a video of *The Karate Kid* and crying. "I never had a Mr. Miyagi," he sobbed, wiping tears off his reddened cheeks. He was drunk. "My dad didn't teach me anything. All I wanted was a Mr. Miyagi."

I suppose we were all searching for someone to teach us the moves we needed to win at life, the knightly code of conduct, the ways of the alpha-male. That's why we found each other. But a sequence of maneuvers and a system of behavior would never fix what was broken inside. Nothing would fix what was broken inside. All we could do was embrace the damage.

Chapter



Lisa and I spent the next day together, and the day after that, and the day after that. I kept worrying that I was going to ruin it, that we were spending too much time with each other, that she was going to get tired of me. Rick H. had always said, "Give her the gift of missing you." But we couldn't seem to part.

"You are so perfect for me," she said as we lay in my bed for the fourth night in a row. "I've never had sex with a guy I liked this much before. I'm afraid I'll get attached."

Beneath that tough exterior, she was a baby. All her push-pull wasn't a pre-planned psychological tactic; it was her heart warring with her head. Perhaps the reason she'd been so reluctant to open up was that she was protecting something fragile inside. Like me, she was afraid to actually feel something for somebody else—to love, to be vulnerable, to give someone else control over her happiness and well-being.

When I slept with all those other girls, I just had sex with them once a night—and, *if* I liked them enough, a second time in the morning. But something amazing happened with Lisa when we had sex for the first time. After I had an orgasm, it didn't go down. It remained, as the old Extramask would say, rock-hard and luscious.

I did it with her a second time.

"Feel it," I said afterward. It was still ready to go.

We did it a third and a fourth time that night, and it never went soft. I couldn't understand it. My dick, which I had thought was a completely mindless animal desperate to stick itself in any hole, actually responded to emotion. It had feelings too. And it wasn't just built-up anticipation. It stayed up through three or four orgasms every time Lisa and I made love. We fucked in cars, in alleys, *in* restaurant bathrooms, and in the vending-machine room in a hotel hallway, where a maintenance man caught us and tried to extort twenty dollars from me.

When I'd gone impotent in the bathroom with the porn star, perhaps it didn't have anything to do with the whiskey. My body was responding to

the lack of emotional foreplay: I neither cared about nor really desired her. And I'm sure she felt the same. It was just entertainment. Sex with Lisa was not entertainment. It was not about validation and ego-gratification, as with all those pickups I'd been so proud of. It was about creating a vacuum where nothing else existed except the two of us and our passion. It made the rest of existence seem like a distraction.

And then, one afternoon, just when I'd forgotten all about her, Courtney returned. She pulled up to the house in a limo and leaped out, looking radiant in a blue dress and white shawl.

"There's blood flow to my pussy again!" was the first thing she exclaimed.

"Did you land that director you were chasing?" I asked.

"No. I got a new man in New York. And it's going to be his fault for making me a slut, because now I want it all the time."

She danced toward me, light like a ballerina.

"Well," I said. "We had a bet about your director crush."

"That's right. I guess I lost."

"So that means I get to choose the middle name of your next child."

She smiled and stared at me expectantly, as if I were supposed to just select one on the spot.

I shuffled through a list of possible names in my head. "How about Style?" I finally decided. "I'm going to be retiring the name anyway, so I might as well pass it on." I thought about the idea for a moment. It was really a stupid moniker. Then again, her daughter's middle name is Bean.

She squealed and gave me a bone-crushing hug. "You know, I've found you sexually intriguing these last few months," she said.

I swallowed and prepared to tell her about Lisa. Before I opened my mouth, however, she continued. "But I heard all about you and Lisa. I think that's great. So some good came out of having me in the house after all?"

"Yeah. For you too, I hope."

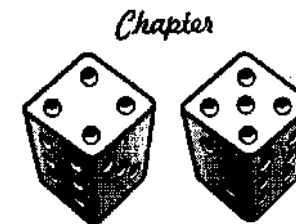
"I don't even want to think about what went on in that house."

"Well, you look great. Getting laid has done wonders for your complexion."

"Well, that and rehab."

She winked at me and smiled. Her prayers had been answered. She was normal again.

"I'm going to get out of your hair and live at the Argyle hotel until I get



my daughter back, which should be very soon," she said. "I came by to give you the money I borrowed from Mystery."

She handed me a check and bounded back into the limo. As I watched her leave, she unrolled the window and yelled, "And this one won't bounce."

I was really going to miss her.

A few days later, Lisa and I went to the Scientology Celebrity Center. We hadn't become Scientologists; we liked our income too much. Tom Cruise had kept his word and sent me an invitation to their annual gala. It was one of the most star-filled events I'd been to in Los Angeles.

After dinner, Cruise, clean-shaven in a perfectly pressed black tuxedo, walked toward the table. His approach was hypnotic; There was no doubt in his walk, no effort in his smile, no intricacy in his intentions. I stood to shake his hand, and he clapped my shoulder forcefully. I kept my balance. Barely.

"Is that your girlfriend?" he asked, looking Lisa up and down in a non-lecherous way. I couldn't imagine him ever being lecherous. "You didn't tell me how gorgeous she was."

"Thanks. I can't remember ever feeling this fulfilled by someone."

"So you got tired of picking up women?"

"Yeah, after a while it started to feel like filling a bucket with a hole in it."

"Exactly," he exclaimed. "Cameron Crowe and I, when we were doing *Vanilla Sky*, would talk about what a one-night stand is and what a fuck buddy is. And when you kind of get down to it, those things are a false intimacy. And they're unsatisfying. In a real relationship, sex means more. You just want to keep going, and you want to hang out all the time and talk about life. It's very cool."

"Yes, but the problem is that I don't want this to be the end of my journey in this subculture. It just reaffirms society's message of monogamy and true love conquers everything and all those Hollywood happy endings. It seems so cheesy."

"Who says it's cheesy?" Cruise asked, his eyes narrowing and his hands reaching out to attack me with a friendly gesture. "You know what? I got past that. Since when is it cheesy to be in love?"

He had AMOGed me again.

Ghosts.

We were just phantoms, drifting invisibly through a putrefying house that hadn't seen a maid or repairman in months.

Mystery wasn't talking to Herbal. Herbal wasn't talking to Mystery. Papa hardly spoke to anyone. And for some reason Sickboy, Playboy, Xaneus, and all the other Real Social Dynamics worker bees had stopped interacting with Mystery and me. Even the junior PUAs who hung out in the house—Dreamweaver, Maverick, and other former students—didn't say hello when I passed by. If I tried to engage them in conversation, they were curt. They wouldn't even look me in the eye.

The only person who spoke to everyone was Tyler Durden. But interacting with him was never a conversation; it was an interrogation, like someone might have with an actor who wanted to play him in a movie.

"I really want to ask you something," he said one afternoon as he emerged from the kitchen with Sickboy. I'd always liked Sickboy. Despite the name, he was a well-raised, mild-mannered New Yorker.

"What do you have that enables you to get Lisa?" Tyler Durden asked. "Because I go out every night and work so hard on myself, and I know that I couldn't get her as a girlfriend."

What was amazing about Lisa was that despite her roughness, she was one of the most generous women I'd ever been with. She'd make my bed every morning; she'd cook meals and bring them up to my room when I was working; and she rarely came over without a small gift—a tube of Origins face cleanser, a bottle of John Varvatos cologne, a copy of *Henry IV, Part I* I'd been looking for. Perhaps I had found my Caresse.

"I guess I have life experience," I told him. "All you do is sarge every night. You're only working on one aspect of yourself. It's like going to the gym every day and just doing bicep curls."

His brows knitted, and his mind began turning rapidly. For a moment, he appeared to take the advice to heart. Then he rejected it, and his eyes began to blaze. If it wasn't hatred they contained, it was at least resentment.

"Those are nice nails; are they real?" 2. *Verb*: to actively demonstrate a lack of interest in a beautiful woman by making an ambiguous statement, insulting her in a way that appears accidental, or offering constructive criticism. *Also*: *neg bit*. Origin: Mystery.

NEWBIE MISSION—*noun*: an exercise designed to help shy men overcome their fear of approaching women. The newbie mission involves spending a day in a public area, such as a mall, and saying "hi" to every woman who passes by.

NLP—*noun* [neuro-linguistic programming]: a school of hypnosis developed in the 1970s based largely on the techniques of Milton Erickson. Unlike traditional hypnosis, in which subjects are put to sleep, it is a form of waking hypnosis in which subtle conversational cues and physical gestures are used to influence a person on a subconscious level. Origin: Richard Bandler and John Grinder.

NONCONVERSATION—*noun*: a conversation in which one person isn't paying attention to what the other person is saying, generally due to lack of interest or being distracted. Origin: Style.

NUMBER-CLOSE—1. *verb*: to obtain a correct phone number from a woman. Note that giving a woman one's own number does not constitute a number-close. 2. *noun*: a woman's phone number, obtained during the course of a pickup. *Also*: *#close*. Origin: Mystery.

OBSTACLE—*noun*: the person or people in a group whom the pickup artist does not desire, but whom he must win over in order to run game on the woman in the group he does desire. Origin: Mystery.

ONE-ITIS—*noun*: 1. an obsession with a girl whom one is not dating; pickup artists believe that such an extreme fixation on one woman significantly lowers a man's chances of dating or sleeping with her. 2. a girl with whom one is obsessed. Origin: John C. Ryan.

OPENER—*noun*: a statement, question, or story used to initiate a conversation with a stranger or group of strangers. Openers may be environmental (spontaneous) or canned (pre-scripted); and direct (showing romantic or sexual interest in a woman) or indirect (not showing interest).

OUTALPHA—*verb*; see AMOG.

PAIMAI—*noun* [pre-approach invitation, male approach invitation]: a nonverbal action or series of actions meant to induce a woman or group to notice a man and passively express interest in meeting him before he actually approaches her. Origin: Formhandle.

PATTERN—*noun*: a speech, usually scripted, that is based on a series of neuro-linguistic programming phrases designed to attract or arouse a woman.

PATTERN INTERRUPT—*noun*: an unexpected word, phrase, or action performed suddenly in order to halt a person's auto-pilot response before it's completed, such as cutting off a woman who's talking about her ex-boyfriend and quickly changing the subject. Origin: Richard Bandler and John Grinder.

PAWN—1. *verb*: to approach and talk to one group of people in order to meet a woman or group adjacent to it. 2. *noun*: a person one approaches in order to meet a nearby woman or group. A pawn can be an acquaintance or stranger. Origin: Mystery.

PEACOCK—*verb*: to dress in loud clothing or with flashy accoutrements in order to get attention from women. Peacocking items include bright shiny shirts, light-up jewelry, feather boas, colorful cowboy hats, or anything else that makes one stand out in a crowd. Origin: Mystery.

PHASE-SHIFT—*verb*: to make the transition, during a one-on-one conversation with a woman, from ordinary talk to slower, sexually-charged talk, touch, or body language; intended to precede an attempt to kiss. Origin: Mystery.

PIVOT—*noun*: a woman, usually a friend, used in social situations to help one meet other women. A pivot serves many functions: she provides social proof, she can create jealousy in the target, she can make it easier to open difficult sets, and she can brag about the pickup artist to his target. *Also*: *wingwoman*.

PROXIMITY ALERT SYSTEM—*noun*: the state of being aware of a woman or group of women who are standing awkwardly nearby in hopes of being talked to. Generally, the woman will have her back to the pickup artist, so as to make her presence there seem accidental. Origin: Mystery.

PUSH-PULL—*noun*: a technique used to create or increase attraction, in which a man gives a woman indications that he is not interested in her followed by indications that he is. This sequence can take place in a few seconds—such as taking a woman's hands and then dropping them as if you don't trust her yet—or over time, such as being very nice during one phone conversation but then very distant and abrupt during the next one. Origin: Style.

RAFC—*noun* [reformed average frustrated chump]: a seduction student who has not yet become a pickup artist or mastered the skills offered by the community.

Mystery has always dreamed about and has detailed their adventures in a series of careening field reports that are worthy of their own book.

Thanks to Judith Regan, who accused me of attracting her thirteen-year-old daughter on page six of the *New York Post*, She was joking, I think. And even if she wasn't, I'd forgive her. She supported me in this whole crazy adventure from day one, and has been not only a publisher but also a patron saint.

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Finally, yes, Lisa and I are still together. And though I've learned everything there is about attraction, seduction, and courtship in the past two years, I learned nothing about maintaining a healthy relationship. Being together has required a lot more time and work than learning to pick up women ever did, but *it* has brought me far greater satisfaction and joy. Perhaps that's because it is not a game.