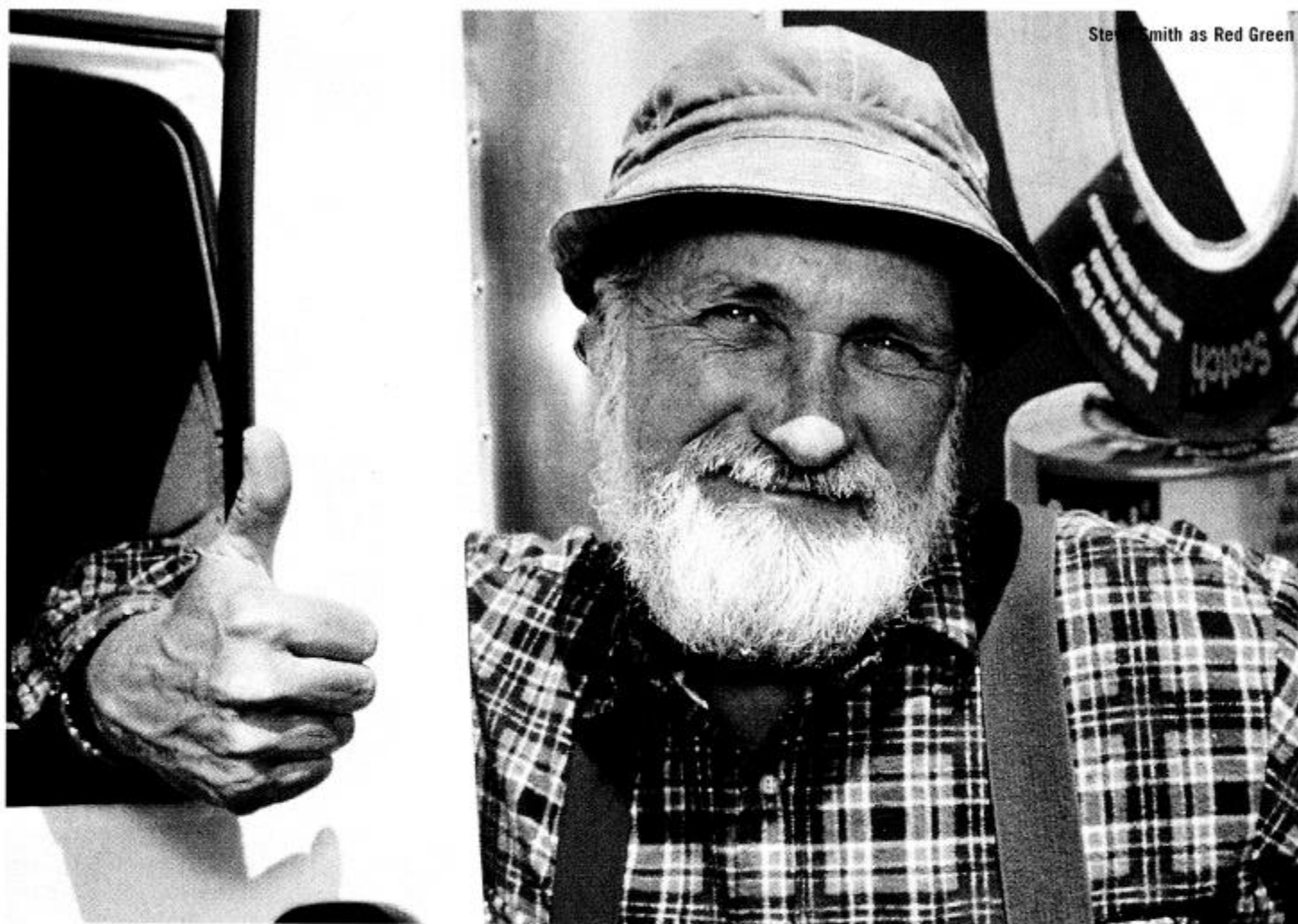


sean davidson

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portfolio 2002



Red. Tape.

The union of the two — Steve Smith's bumbling Red Green character and his multipurpose duct tape — have been an archetype of Canadian comedy for 11 years. But only now, after about a decade of filmmaking bureaucracy, are the pair coming together on the big screen **BY SEAN DAVIDSON**

Less than 30 seconds into the interview, Steve Smith's secret was out. Surprising, nay, even *shocking*, but true. The star of CBC's long-running *The Red Green Show* — the flannel-clad outdoorsman who personifies small-town, backwater life in the Great White North for millions of viewers worldwide — spends his winters in Florida.

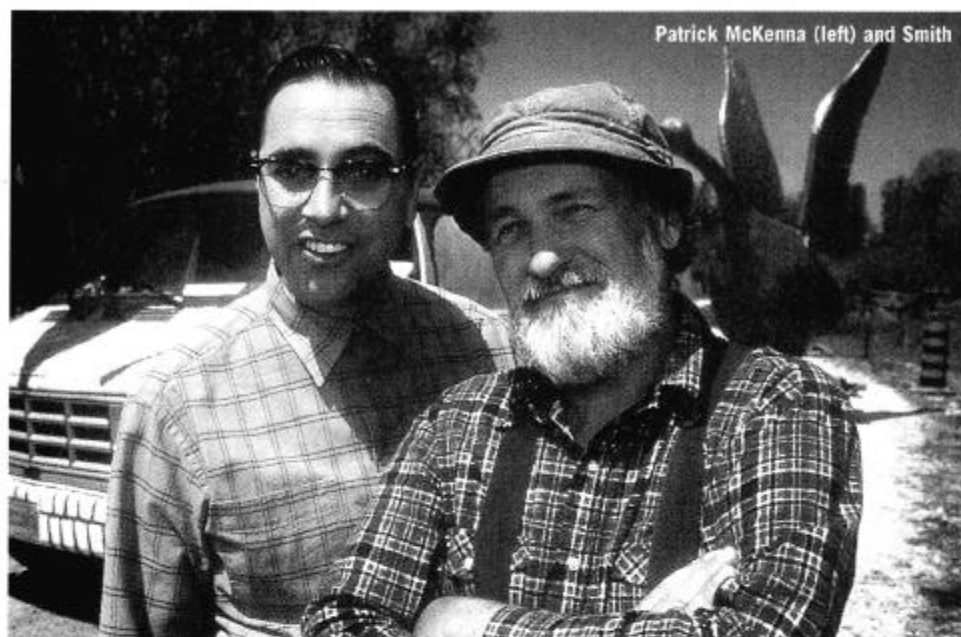
"I know. It's so shameful," says the 56-year-old comic, chuckling, on the phone from his Gulf Coast home. "I've hated Florida my whole adult life until five years ago. And now I don't know what the heck I was upset about. It's a great place to be for winter."

Oh, no doubt. All those birds and retirees can't be wrong. But don't people

give him a hard time about being a fair weather Canuck?

"People aren't actually aware of it," he says. "As soon as they are, they'll be all over me."

It was down in the land of orange juice and electoral irregularities that Smith — in between writing his books, newspaper columns and TV scripts — hammered out the 90-or-so page screenplay



Patrick McKenna (left) and Smith

for *Duct Tape Forever*, the big-screen debut of his alter-ego Red, and of Red's many dim-witted friends. In various stages of development and demand since the early '90s, the comedy was finally shot last summer, on a pocket-change budget of just \$3.5-million, in the country outside Hamilton, Ont., and gets a limited release across Canada this month.

But even though he's written all 11 (yes, 11, going on 12) seasons of the show, and put in another 20 years as a comic and entertainer before that, penning the script was tough work, says Smith. "I think in television you can get away with doing less. If I have six good jokes in half an hour that'll probably do it," he says. "In a 90-minute movie you've gotta have 85 minutes of real content that's funny, that keeps it moving along."

"In a movie theatre we're demanding your attention for every second," he offers, "so we better be worthy of having it."

The story gets going in front of Possum Lodge, familiar to TV viewers as the swampside hang-out of Red and his buddies, where the limo of a wealthy tyrant (Richard Fitzpatrick) gets sucked into a sinkhole. Red and the other Possums are stuck with the \$10,000 tab, and the only feasible way to raise the money — after selling roadkill on the internet is voted down — is to enter a duct tape sculpting contest in Minneapolis, the third prize of which just happens to be an even 10 grand. Unorthodox use of duct tape, "the handyman's secret weapon," is, of course, a

"The only reason I would stop doing the show is if the audience said, 'Please stop,'" says Smith. "And I would stop in a New York minute"

running joke in the series. And so, a giant duct tape goose is hitched to the back of his van, and Red heads south. Series regular Patrick McKenna (*Traders*) tags along as geeky nephew Harold, and is joined on screen by Graham Greene (*Snow Dogs*) and love interest Melissa DiMarco (*Riverdale*). Eric Till, journeyman director of innumerable TV dramas and, before that, Jim Henson's *Fraggle Rock*, was behind the camera.

It's McKenna, says Smith, who's really the centre of the movie. "In a feature film, the main character is supposed to undergo radical change," he says. But Smith didn't want to rewrite his signature character, "so we focused more on doing that with Harold," he says.

"He's a better actor anyway," Smith says of the Second City alum, who recently returned to the show after a brief hiatus. "The Red Green character tends to be more of a reactor."

But surprisingly, Rick Green, a series regular for the first eight seasons, is not in *Duct Tape*. Known to fans as accident-prone hayseed Bill Smith, Green is routinely

blown-up or run over in the show's man black-and-white shorts. His slapstick has been a big part of the series, and, give that the film includes ample pratfall: presumably would have earned him an equally large role in *Duct Tape*.

"The thing with Rick is, he's always done work that's been him supporting a group or him supporting another person. The whole time he was with [comedy troupe The Frantics he was one of the four, and then he was with my show. He just wanted to do something that was all him," says Smith. Green now hosts and writes his own show, *History Bites*. "And he didn't want to compromise it by working on something else," says Smith.

Smith has been playing Red Green, in one form or another, since the '70s. It was after a short musical career that this former teacher, steam fitter and mailman together with his wife Morag, produced and starred in the variety program *Smith & Smith* on a local Hamilton station. ("I haven't had a job since 1971," he declares.) Red Green was among the show's many characters. Back then audiences understood that Red was a caricature of another Canadian TV personality — real-life woodsman Red Fisher, who hosted a bizarrely rudderless fishing show back in the 1960s.

"He was a slow talker," Smith recalls, "he was a very slow man and it didn't bother him that he would take five minutes to give a 10-second thought. And then it would cut to film of a fishing trip — and I mean film, 16mm. The whole show would go by and sometimes they didn't catch anything. What kind of fishing show was that? Fisher, also like Red Green, frequently read poetry out in the woods."

It made *Front Page Challenge* "look like an adrenaline rush," says Smith.

These days, Red Fisher is mostly forgotten. But *Red Green* is seen around the world and, as it enters moviedom, has attracted thousands of card-carrying fans from Canada, the U.S., Australia and elsewhere. Red could be with us for a long time yet to come, seeing as Smith says he's nowhere near tired of playing the character.

"The only reason I would stop doing the show is if the audience said 'Please stop. And I would stop in a New York minute,'" he says. But otherwise, he says he could keep playing Red until they're both well into their '70s.

Maybe Red could retire, and move to Boca Raton. **F**



Interview with the vampire

Sean Davidson talks with Willem Dafoe about how the debonair actor transformed into a hideous, churlish old fiend for *Shadow of the Vampire*, and with director Elias Merhige about why vampires make perfect film subjects

S*hadow of the Vampire* wasn't even in theatres yet, and Willem Dafoe had already heard the same compliment so many times that he cut me off in mid-sentence.

There's one scene that really... I start.

"The one in the cave?" he asks. Oh, umm, yes, the one in the cave — the perversely funny exchange between Dafoe, playing a bloodthirsty actor, and his director, in which the pair argue over which crew members the actor is allowed to kill. The cameraman? No. The writer? No. What about the script girl?

A lot of people have said a lot of good

things about *Shadow* since it played at Cannes last spring. And this past September it caused a stir among critics and audiences when it made a stop at the Toronto International Film Festival, bringing Dafoe (*Platoon*, *The English Patient*) and director Elias Merhige (*Begotten*) to town for interviews and schmoozing. Last month, *Shadow* had a limited release in New York and L.A., in an apparent effort to slip in before the deadline for Oscar consideration, and, this month, it opens in theatres continent-wide.

The film is a fictional re-telling of the making of *Nosferatu*, the 1922 vampire movie by celebrated director F.W. Murnau.

John Malkovich (*Being John Malkovich*) plays Murnau as a reckless zealot who, about to make his masterpiece, casts an unknown and very creepy actor named Max Schreck as the vampire. Schreck, played by Dafoe, is either the most dedicated actor ever — remaining in costume, character and makeup on- and off-set — or he really *is* a vampire who has struck some kind of Faustian deal with Murnau. British comedian and actor Eddie Izzard (*The Avengers*) and Catherine McCormack (*Braveheart*) play the unlucky actors cast alongside Schreck, while Cary Elwes (*Cradle Will Rock*) and Udo Kier (*Breaking*

the Waves) also star as crew members.

Shadow is the first time Dafoe and Malkovich, both known for appearing in dark and unusual movies, have worked together, and the cave scene is one of many they share. "He's a very charming guy. He's very bright, he's a self-starter," Dafoe says of Malkovich. We're in a small hotel room overlooking Toronto's Bloor Street West and Dafoe, who comes off as a little distant, perks up, and almost gushes, when we talk about his co-star.

"If he was here," Dafoe says, gesturing to the empty half of the couch, "I'd get a little self-conscious, but the truth is I really identify with him and how he's dealt with his career, the choices he's made, his taste in movies. We have similar backgrounds in the theatre, we both come from the Midwest, we're both about the same age. Here's a guy I really didn't know that well, but I felt very comfortable with. He's very..." Dafoe stops and thinks for several seconds for the right words, "pragmatic and whimsical at same time."

Stage experience means a lot to Dafoe, who came up through the world of experimental theatre and remains very active with New York City's Wooster Group, ("I'm still in the ghetto," he remarks) an offbeat theatre company he co-founded with girlfriend Elizabeth LeCompte. "People that don't have that kind of theatre background get annoyed, not only by the interruption, but by the marks and having to deal with camera obligations," he says in that calm, coarse voice of his, "where I embrace it, it defines what I'm trying to do. It makes you able to be more motivated when working in film."

One obligation he embraced for *Shadow* was spending four hours a day in makeup. Schreck isn't one of those fashion plate Anne Rice-ish vampires, and playing the part required the 45-year-old Wisconsin native to work with several pounds of pasty white makeup and prosthetics glued to his face. "The mask was everything, the makeup was everything. That was the biggest toy I had to play with for this role," he says, adding that four hours of sitting still gave him a unique chance to get into character. "It became part of the working day — to look in the mirror and see myself go away. That's the nice thing when you're working with that kind of makeup, it makes the pretending so much easier. You don't feel like yourself and you don't look like yourself. And when you don't feel like yourself, who do you feel like? That gives you a fast track to the character."



Dafoe (left) and Merhige on the set of *Shadow*

Even under all that latex, Dafoe, especially his distinctive mouth, is still easily recognizable. "It's a nice balance between using my face as a base," he comments, "and riffing on the original Schreck." Makeup is just one of a few categories that could earn *Shadow* Oscar nods later this month, Dafoe's performance is clearly another — but he doesn't want to speculate about that. "I try not to think about it," he says, "if people like the movie, I'm very happy."

A few days later and down the street, director Elias Merhige shares his thoughts on vampires, expressionism and the Austrian philosopher Wittgenstein. Ashen-faced and dressed in black leather, the 36-year-old filmmaker looks oddly out of place in his flowery, pastel-hued hotel room at the Four Seasons. He's friendly and talkative, but it's hard to keep him on topic. Our conversation about *Shadow* keeps making sharp left turns into the world of art theory and academics.

"*Nosferatu* is the mother of all vampire



John Malkovich, being F.W. Murnau, in *Shadow*

films and with *Shadow of the Vampire* we're out to deconstruct the myth," he explains in a faint Brooklyn accent. "There are many different vampires in this movie and one of them is the camera — as it fixes its gaze on its subject, it drains it of flesh and blood, it reduces it to shadows. What better medium to explore the nature of vampirism?"

Shadow is Elias Merhige's second movie, following 1991's *Begotten* — a black-and-white, silent and (to say the least) conceptual film wherein God gives birth by disemboweling himself with a razor. Although not exactly a top renter at Blockbuster, *Begotten* caught the eye of Nicolas Cage who had just started his production company, Saturn Films, and was shopping for directors. The pair joined up to make *Shadow*, working with a script by Stephen Katz, who had also worked on 1994's *Interview with the Vampire*.

Early filmmakers like Murnau, as well as many expressionist painters, are a "big influence" on Merhige. "I studied everything from that period — the metaphysics, the poetry, the art — every form of art and thought of the time," he says, all of which informed the look and feel of the movie. *Shadow* is drenched in deep photo browns and sickly green-whites, and re-produces scenes from the 1922 original in exacting detail.

And yet, he adds emphatically, the movie is not some kind of post-modern re-creation of the Murnau original. "I want to get people back to the year 1921," he says. "You don't do that by repeating the master, or making a documentary."

He's watched *Nosferatu* almost 30 times.

Dafoe has seen it too, of course, and likes old horror movies that deal with big questions about life and death. His favourite is *Bride of Frankenstein*. "I'm very fond of the moment where [Dr. Frankenstein] reaches for the lever that's going to destroy the castle. And he looks up at the sky and a single tear goes down his cheek." Here Dafoe sits up, puts his hand on an imaginary lever and runs a finger down his cheek. "And he says, 'We belong dead,' and he blows up the castle. That really appealed to me when I was a child and I've never been able to shake it. I think I recognized the poetry of it."

So was he thinking about mortality when he played Schreck? Surprisingly, no. "Not consciously, I'm just playing the scenes," he says, snapping out of his reverie. "It's on my mind a fair bit of the time, but you can't play ideas. You can't play questions." ☛



King Size

He already rules the wrestling ring. And with the release of next month's *The Scorpion King*, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson might just steal the action-adventure crown from aging heroes Schwarzenegger and Stallone. Here, Johnson talks about the movie, WrestleMania 18 and being down-and-out in Calgary

BY SEAN DAVIDSON

Dwayne Johnson sounds tired. On the phone from a noisy room somewhere in South Carolina the pro wrestler explains that he's in between shooting two pay-per-view specials for the WWE. Last night, the six-foot-five, 270-pound bruiser better known to his zillion fans as The Rock — a.k.a. The People's Champion, the Brahma Bull and the Most Electrifying Man in Sports Entertainment — was busy whaling on, and hollering at, his spandex-clad colleagues, whipping the crowd into a froth with his trademark slogans ("Can you smell what The Rock is cooking?") and laying, as they like to say ringside, the smackdown on any candy-ass jabroni fool enough to climb into the ring. And tonight, he'll do it all over again.

"Then I fly back to L.A.," he says, clearly a little worn-out and fighting a persistent cough, for some last-minute work on *The Scorpion King*. The third instalment of the *Mummy* series has kept 29-year-old Johnson busy since his appearance in last year's *The Mummy Returns* so wowed studio execs that they approved, and rushed to production, a third film based entirely on his character.

Mummy Returns hadn't even wrapped when he got the good news. "I was so overwhelmed from being sick. I had sunstroke and whatever else you can get from the Moroccan desert," he recalls. "I told my agent 'That's fantastic but I've got to go to bed, 'cause I've got to be up in an hour and I've got things coming out of my body you wouldn't believe.'"

So it's probably best for all involved that they shot *Scorpion King* in Arizona. Set in ancient Egypt, the swords 'n' sandals prequel casts Johnson as Mathayus, a ruthless assassin recruited to take out a sorcerer who's in league with an evil warlord. But when said sorcerer turns out to be a beautiful woman, Kelly Hu of TV's *Martial Law*, he instead takes off with her into the desert, hoping to unite the local tribes and raise an army against her former boss. Michael Clarke Duncan (*The Green Mile*) also stars and Chuck Russell (*The Mask*) directs under the, no doubt, watchful eye of WWE head honcho and executive producer Vince McMahon.

So Mathayus is a good guy? But in *Mummy Returns* the same character was a CGI monster. To borrow again from wrestling jargon, is this guy a baby face? Or is he a heel?

"Hmm, good question," Johnson says, stopping to think. "He's a baby face with



Johnson makes a point in *The Scorpion King*

"I TRIED TO GET THE BEST MATTRESS THAT HAD THE LEAST AMOUNT OF BODILY FLUIDS ON IT," JOHNSON RECALLS. "AND I LIVED THAT WAY FOR MONTHS."

heel qualities. That's the great thing about this character. Not only is he born to kill but he's also born to lead thousands of men."

As in the ring, Johnson says it's important for his screen character to seem human. A key to The Rock's popularity, it has been observed, is that he's not invulnerable to pain or suffering. "I lose," he explains quietly. "I'm one of those guys who wins often and loses often. But as much ass kicking as I do it's important to have that balance of being in jeopardy and being flawed."

"There are some unbelievable fight scenes in this movie," he continues, but adds that unlike the previous *Mummy* movies, *Scorpion King* doesn't make much use of splashy special effects. Computer- and effect-heavy films, he offers, make it hard for audiences to connect with the action and the characters. "Every fight scene is very relate-able. Everything that happens — man, woman, child, from eight to eighty — can put their finger on it and know that it could actually happen."

The third-generation wrestler and six-time World Wrestling Federation champ certainly knows a thing or two about stage fighting. And playing to crowds. But unless his Bronze Age assassin beats his enemies into the sand with a folding chair, surely Johnson had to learn a few new tricks to make this movie?

"Oh yeah, I had to learn a lot of new things. Obviously, coming from the industry I come from — a very frenetic, energized, live industry — was a great thing and really helped my transition into film," he says. But his acting and swordplay needed some coaching, so Andy Cheng, one of Jackie Chan's fight co-ordinators and stunt men, was brought in. "He's amazing," Johnson exclaims, "I had to work very closely with him on sword fighting, staff fighting. Not necessarily martial arts but really becoming a student in terms of sword knowledge."

Maybe he can put that to use on March 17, when he and the WWE hit Toronto for the highly anticipated WrestleMania 18. ("WrestleMania X8" on the posters.) At the very first mention of the SkyDome bout, Johnson perks up and shifts into his Rock persona.

"I absolutely cannot wait. This will be the biggest WrestleMania of all time," he exclaims. "I know I said that last year, and I made it happen with Stone Cold Steve Austin. We broke attendance records. This WrestleMania will top that for the simple fact there's a fantasy match-up that you thought you'd never see." By now he's into what sounds like a well-practised monologue, boosting a bout that will "answer the age-old question of what would happen if Muhammad Ali faced Mike Tyson? What

would happen if Dick Butkus played in the NFL today? Could Jim Brown run over linebackers today? It will be icon versus icon. Do you see where I'm going with this?"

I don't. He'll have to spell it out.

"The Rock versus Hulk Hogan," he booms. Big news for wrestling fans. And assuming he sees himself as Iron Mike, quite a compliment for Hogan; but not entirely inaccurate seeing as Hogan's not much younger than the ailing heavyweight.

This won't be Johnson's first trip north of the border. He's been up for matches before and, in an earlier life, spent time in Calgary at the tail-end of a failed football career. Rather than follow in the footsteps of his dad, wrestler Rocky Johnson, or his maternal grandfather, Peter Maivia, Dwayne Douglas Johnson started out on the gridiron — making All-American in



Warrior. King. Copy-cat.

Keen-eyed veterans of the fantasy genre might feel the slightest glimmer of déjà vu watching *The Scorpion King*, resembling as it does the dungeon crawling epic that launched the career of another brawny body-builder. Arnold Schwarzenegger had been in just a few movies — mostly anonymous bit parts — when he finally hit it big with 1982's *Conan the Barbarian*, playing a super-buff fighter/assassin and future king on a quest to kill the sorcerous warlord who slaughtered his people. The similar plots and pedigree might go overlooked, if not for *Scorpion King's* use of the *Conan* theme in its trailer. Heck, even the tag lines are damn-near identical: "Warrior. Legend. King." (*Scorpion King*) and "Thief. Warrior. Gladiator. King." (*Conan*).

high school and getting a scholarship to the celebrated football program at U. of Miami. He finished his degree, criminology but an injury- and alcohol-plagued senior year cost him his shot at the NFL.

"When I didn't get drafted it was a huge disappointment," he recalls, "because you spend five years of working hard to attain this one goal and you only get one shot at it. It's like the Olympics."

The only team that would take him was the Calgary Stampeders' practise squad, up in the Siberian gulag that is the CFL. "Making \$350 a week, Canadian, living with three other guys," he says. "We had no furniture, no food, and I had to go get my mattress from a seedy hotel, one of those hourly motels that are used for sex and drugs, in the back dumpster. I tried to get the best mattress that had the least amount of bodily fluids on it. And I lived that way for months." Eventually cut from the team, he had just \$7 left when he called his dad from a payphone. He was coming home and would he train him to be a wrestler?

A minor-league tour as Flex Kavana led to his WWF debut in 1996 as Rocky Maivia. A year later he became The Rock and climbed a "predetermined" path to the WWF's top ranks. These days he draws an estimated salary of \$15-million, American, plus another \$5-million for the movie.

"I'll never forget [Calgary] but I'm glad I went through it. It's a chapter in my life I knew was gonna end...my inspiration comes from knowing where I came from and knowing I never want to go back."

Two new chapters have opened for Johnson. He now has a movie career and 11 months ago, he and his wife Dany had their first child, a girl named Simone. "It's by far the biggest blessing I've ever had in my life," he beams. But it's never easy for career people — she's a vice-president with Merrill Lynch in Miami — to make time for family, least of all when one of them is on the road wrestling or making movies. Johnson's a strong guy, but can he carry two careers and a family?

"Somehow, someway, some form, some fashion," again a spurt of ringside banter. "I will always be a part of the WWF. There's nothing like a live audience and getting that immediate reaction." But, at the same time, the hardest workin' man in wrestling says, "Changes will definitely happen."

"The hardest part for me right now is juggling and balancing two very big careers," he admits. "And I'm not sure how long I'll be able to balance both." **F**

DIAL F FOR FRAUD

WHO PAYS THE BILL WHEN A HIJACKED COMPUTER CALLS AFRICA? | BY SEAN DAVIDSON

Odds are, you don't know anyone in Chad. Or Madagascar. Or Sao Tome. And, let's assume for the sake of argument, you are not in the habit of making long-distance calls to the far side of the Atlantic in order to gamble or download porn.

But that doesn't mean you won't get stuck with the bill, as victims of a recent internet scam learned when their modems — hijacked by a new breed of malicious software — dialed some very expensive numbers in various faraway lands.

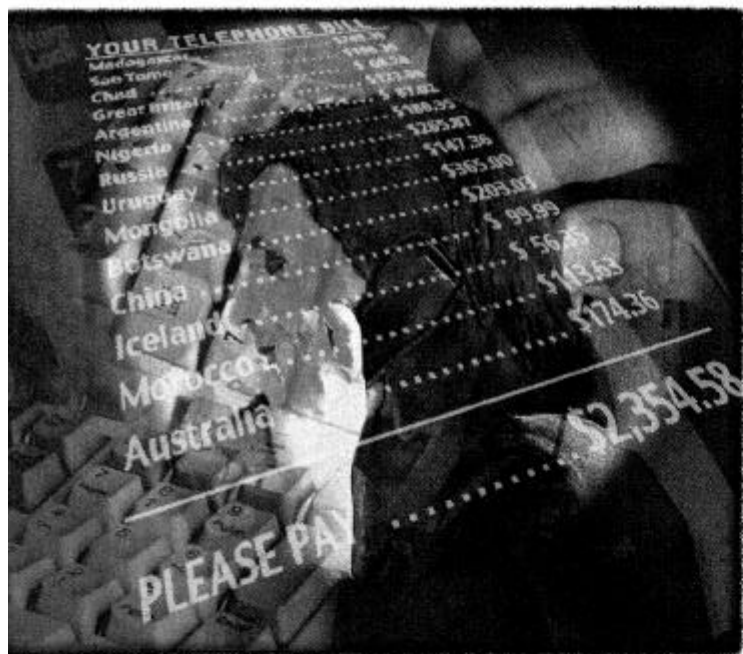
the so-called "spyware," and were having little luck pleading their cases to Bell Canada. Other incidents throughout the 705 and 519 area codes had also been reported by local media.

Bell agreed to investigate Stephenson's bill. "I told them I'd pay what I owe, the rest I'm not going to pay," he says. "It's fraud."

Except that it's not, at least not according to Bell Canada. The phone company says it doesn't matter who or what dialed the phone, or why — if the call was made as described on the bill, the customer is responsible for the charges. "The bottom line is people should be more aware of their actions online," says spokesperson Andrew Cole, "in particular reading online warnings and disclosure boxes before downloading anything."

Spyware often comes bundled with other, frequently shady software and secretly writes itself to the hard drive during the install process. Notice can sometimes be found buried in the lengthy end-user agreements. But security weaknesses in certain software — most notably the notoriously flimsy Microsoft Internet Explorer —

make it possible for malicious code to sneak onto a computer without so much as a single "OK" click. Virus scanners are little or no help. The exact behaviour, and origin, of the Sao Tome dialer remains unclear, but Cole says only "a very small percentage" of customers have been hit. PhoneBusters, a joint anti-fraud unit of the RCMP and the Ontario Provincial Police, has 102 cases on the books, to the tune of \$62,000. But Detective Staff Sergeant Barry Elliott thinks the actual numbers are much higher, in part because



David Stephenson of Midland, Ontario, was surprised to find almost a dozen calls to the African island nation of Sao Tome on his April phone bill, bringing it to a grand total of \$371. He insists no one in his family made the calls, and blames virus-like code that infected his PC.

"It's piggy-backed down into my computer. It's set up its own files. It's set up its own dialer," says Stephenson, a police officer. "Someone put a program into my computer without my consent or knowledge."

He soon learned that two co-workers and a neighbour had also been stung by

fight back

Don't panic just yet. Not all spyware, or its cousin adware, is as malicious as those long-distance dialers. But safety-conscious surfers should be aware of this new and growing nuisance.

Ad-aware

www.lavasoftusa.com

Available *gratis* from software developers Lavasoft, Ad-aware has quickly become the remedy of choice against this sort of invasive, troublesome code. Like a virus scanner, it snoops through the hard drive in search of, and deleting, known spy- and adware. Always be sure to use the most recent version.

PhoneBusters

www.phonebusters.com

Although set up to foil telemarketers, this Canada-wide anti-fraud unit also deals with other phone-related crimes across Canada. Call toll-free at 1.888.495.8501.

Spychecker

www.spychecker.com

Every day this public database of known spyware products is updated — thanks to tips from ad companies, the net and "reliable sources" in the software biz.

phone companies, he suspects, are playing dumb.

"I think Bell's hiding the true numbers," he says. "They're trying to stick it to the customer.... There's very little co-operation by telephone companies in this country to fight fraud."

Cole says Bell isn't hiding anything, but repeats that the Sao Tome scam doesn't fit the company's definition of fraud.

Until it gets sorted out, David Stephenson is still on the hook for more than \$300. He says he had to wipe his entire hard drive to get rid of the dialer, and is thinking about installing a firewall for added security.

"And from now on, I leave the phone unplugged from the computer," he says. "Even when it's turned off."

Sean Davidson is the deputy editor of Famous.

TO CATCH A CHEAT

CAN ONE LITTLE WEBSITE STOP THE RUNAWAY
PLAGIARISM ON CANADIAN CAMPUSES?

BY SEAN DAVIDSON

could easily have stolen this article.

All I'd have to do is type the topic "online plagiarism" into a search engine and start copying and pasting all the other stories — from the *New York Times*, *Wired*, CNN, *National Post*, the *L.A. Times* — that pop up. It's a quick way to turn out 600 words, and who's gonna know? It's a safe bet that few of you saw that article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

It's just as easy, and apparently far more common, for college and university students. Thanks to the explosion of the web, and the proliferation of hundreds of so-called "cheat sites" that sell pre-written

last fall, became the first Canadian campus to subscribe to Turnitin.com, an online service that scans students' work for signs of plagiarism. "We want to foster an atmosphere of academic honesty," adds Dawson.

Students submit essays to Turnitin.com, where papers are checked against the entire internet and a hefty database of books, periodicals and other academia. If too much of a paper matches what's online, it gets flagged and the prof is sent a word-by-word report that highlights all the suspicious material, complete with links to the original sources.

Dawson stresses that it's still up to the



papers, plagiarism of online material has spread like a bad case of Ebola through campuses in Canada and the U.S. Early this year, Simon Fraser University was scandalized when 47 students were caught cheating on a third-year economics assignment. This followed 120 who were nabbed at U. of Alberta in 2001, 122 at U. of Virginia, and the 150 undergrads who are currently under investigation for plagiarism at the University of Toronto.

So it's not surprising that schools are clamping down, and using the net to fight the same problem it spawned.

"Plagiarism isn't a new problem, it's just that now we've got new tools to combat it," says Debra Dawson, a spokesperson at the University of Western Ontario — which,

faculty, not the service, to decide if a paper was actually plagiarized. Mistakes do happen, after all, and even properly cited quotes can get a paper flagged. "All it does is it tells the faculty member that 'This portion of the paper came from this particular source.'"

On the phone from his California office, Turnitin.com creator John Barrie adds that the site also remembers every paper it has ever checked, so that even material "shared" by classmates will sound an alarm. And switching around a few words, he says, won't fool the system. "If you changed every other word...you still wouldn't escape detection," he says proudly.

Well, not necessarily. Turnitin.com found nothing suspicious, rightly so, in my

MOSS

www.cs.berkeley.edu/~aiken/moss.html
Programmers pilfer too, which is why the Measure of Software Similarity application has been made available by the computer science crew at Berkeley. Developed way back in 1994, it compares programs written in C, C++, Java, Pascal and other languages for signs of plagiarized code. The University of Sydney (www.cs.su.oz.au) has another one called YAP. Hope they didn't steal it.

Cyber Essays

www.cyberessays.com

One of several sites that offer pre-written papers on subjects as varied as B.B. King, the Chernobyl meltdown and, ironically, copyright law. Someone should tell whoever writes this site's film papers that it was Eleanor Coppola, not "Eugene Coppola" who made *Hearts of Darkness*. And to the whiz kid behind the Leonardo da Vinci essay? Most of us spell "genius" without an "o".

old fourth year paper about 1950s sci-fi movies. But it missed entire paragraphs of stolen material in a 1,000-word dummy essay. Yes, the material copied word-for-word from Mark Twain, a cheat site, Betty Friedan and P.J. O'Rourke all got flagged. But Turnitin.com didn't catch the paragraph by author Douglas Rushkoff. It also failed to recognize two paragraphs, every other word of which had been rewritten, which were taken from another cheat site and essayist Thomas Frank.

Those last two are "sort of extreme" examples, says Barrie, but concedes that the system can, sometimes, be beaten.

Nonetheless Turnitin.com is getting good reviews as a deterrent against academic dishonesty, and has since been picked up at U. of New Brunswick, UBC and the Royal Military College. Dawson says the service performed "tremendously" through Western's busy end-of-term in December and will again be put through its paces this month and next during finals.

Oh, and the site also checked out this article. Not stolen, just in case you were wondering.

Sean Davidson is the deputy editor of *Famous magazine*.

Troubled kids, bad science?

Home drug-test kits may strain bonds of trust between parent and child

BY SEAN DAVIDSON

David had worked hard to get clean. He had a drug problem that included cocaine, marijuana, hallucinogens and amphetamines but had entered a treatment program at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children. He commuted in every weekday from his hometown — going to school in the morning followed by therapy in the afternoon.

But for some reason, his foster parents didn't believe he was sticking to the program and David, who asked that his real name not be used, feared he was about to be kicked out of an otherwise supportive family. He asked to be given a drug test, so he would have proof.

The urine test, and a lengthy letter of explanation from the hospital, confirmed that the teen was staying away from drugs and re-established the trust that had disappeared from his foster home. He completed the program a few weeks later and continued working toward a goal of complete abstinence from even tobacco and alcohol.

But out of the hundreds of cases she's worked on, Dr. Karen Leslie says David's is the only family that has been helped by drug testing — and only because he was so eager to participate.

"He would be the only kid I can think of where urine testing did provide some significant positive impact on the treatment," says Dr. Leslie, a staff physician at the Hospital for Sick Children. Whenever parents ask if they can have their kids tested for drug use, she and her colleagues are reluctant to even discuss it. Urine testing has no part in the hospital's drug treatment program because it tends to erode

trust, rather than build it, she says.

But parents can now run the tests themselves, in the home. Earlier this year, Toronto-based pharmaceutical company Novopharm introduced its KnowNOW Multiple Drug Detection Test, a urine screening test aimed at parents who want to check their kids for illegal drug use. Available at pharmacies across Canada, it is the first drug test to be sold over the counter in North America.

The test checks for six common categories of street drugs — marijuana and hashish, cocaine, heroin and other opiates, amphetamines, PCP and methamphetamines such as Ecstasy. Each drug type is represented by a test strip that is dipped in a urine sample. After five minutes, a section on each of the strips will turn pink if no drug has been detected.

It's a simple procedure, similar to a home pregnancy test. But social workers and drug experts warn that, with few exceptions, home testing can cause more problems than it solves. Rather than gaining the peace of mind suggested by the literature, parents are more likely to damage the all-important communication and trust with their child — setting off a battle of wills and inflaming what is likely an already strained relationship.

"How is it going to help the kid get better?" asks Dr. Leslie. "Is it going to make them more likely to say, 'Oh you're right. I should get treatment'? Probably not. It's probably going to make them say, 'You're accusing me.'"

On those rare occasions in therapy when a urine test is called for, usually for safety reasons, she says, it's a job best left to medical professionals. "If you look at the recommendations for collecting a urine

sample, the ideal is that it's observed, and I don't think it's appropriate at all for a parent to observe their adolescent peeing into a cup." And as she explained to David and his foster parents, they don't necessarily prove anything.

Health-care professionals worry that taking testing out of the lab or hospital encourages a narrow or oversimplified attitude to drug treatment.

Joanne Shenfeld, a social worker at the Centre on Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, also has doubts. "I think if someone is struggling to give up a drug addiction and is having some success and wants to prove that, then testing can be a positive thing," she says. "But if people are using it in a policing kind of way and it feels imposed, it might not be as beneficial."

Novopharm, however, stands by its product despite the controversy. "All the information that we give out, and the product itself, stresses communication," says vice-president David Windross, pointing to the voluminous literature available with the test. He insists that home tests are not meant to replace the work of health-care professionals or formal treatment, adding that parents can easily take questions or concerns to their pharmacist or family doctor.

But emotional fallout or the absence of professional medical treatment are just two of many potential problems. Although the technology has improved considerably in recent years, urine screening is not 100-per-cent accurate and there are many ways a test can be misused, misread or sabotaged.

"For every company that makes a drug test, there's a company that makes a way to get around it," says

Richard Garlick of the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse in Ottawa. Sure enough, a quick Web search turns up many companies selling so-called detoxification drinks and other products, which promise to mask the telltale chemical traces of drug use. One drink, cheekily called "Urine Luck," is even endorsed by Tommy Chong, formerly of the drug-addled comedy duo Cheech & Chong.

Other tips for foiling urine tests are just a mouse-click away. Drinking coffee, cranberry juice, beer or spiking the sample with bleach, Drano, or Visine are recommended. Even drinking a litre or two of water can flush out one's system, so that only a high-end test in a lab could spot signs of drugs.

Mr. Garlick also warns that, faced with testing, kids who are taking drugs might simply switch to different ones that would pose even greater risks to their health. "It's a well-known phenomenon that whenever people feel drug use can be detected, they move to more potent drugs — drugs that are harder to detect," he says.

LSD or "acid," for example, is hard to detect with any real accuracy — even when using a sophisticated lab test. Likewise, signs of hard drugs such as cocaine, heroin and amphetamines can clear out of the system in as little as one or two days, unlike marijuana — generally considered a soft drug — which can linger for days or even weeks.

Taking advantage of drug "clearance times" is a common means of dodging tests. A parent wishing to strictly monitor his or her child's activities could face the challenge of running a test every day — an expensive habit, considering that they cost \$50 each and can't be reused.

Parents could also face legal

obstacles if they try to force a child, either physically or through intimidation, to take part in urine-testing. It's a grey area — there are no laws or precedents that relate specifically to in-home testing — but Canadian courts tend to favour the rights, and privacy, of children over the authority of parents or even medical professionals.

All this of course assumes that one administers the test properly and gets an accurate reading. Dr. Zul Verjee, a clinical biochemist and toxicologist, also at the Hospital for Sick Children, advises that even a simple test can make mistakes. "There is always a tradeoff between turnaround time and the accuracy of a test," he says. "The faster you want it, [the greater the chance] you introduce areas where you are more prone to false negatives and false positives."

Parents could encounter the common problem of cross-reactivity. Certain foods and medications can cause a "false positive" on urine tests, the most common example being a poppy-seed muffin, which, if eaten shortly before taking a test, can cause someone to test positive for opiates.

Over-the-counter and prescription medications can also throw a wrench into the works. Cold and allergy medications such as Nyquil and Sudafed can cause a false positive reading for amphetamine use, as can asthma medications like Bronkaid and Primatine. Painkillers such as Pamprin and Advil have been known to cause positives for marijuana and cough syrups such as Robotussin DM can turn up in tests as PCP. Novopharm provides lists of substances that cross-react with its test, but toxicologists warn that such lists aren't always exhaustive.

"Home tests are extremely sensitive," says Dr. Verjee, adding that even someone who inhales second-hand marijuana smoke can test positive.

Too much hassle for too little help? Quite possibly. Health-care workers say outside of those rare occasions when a child is willing, without being coerced, to take part in a drug test, it's not likely to help the situation. Parents are advised to stick with what they do best, talking with their kids and, if need be, supporting them through treatment.

"It's a lot of work for families to get into treatment," says Dr. Leslie. "So I worry about a urine test as something that a parent can do which doesn't require them to do much else. Like get involved."

Mr. Garlick agrees, "These tests are a cop-out from being the best parent you can be. They're a shortcut to being a parent just like drugs are a shortcut to feeling good."

Special to The Globe and Mail

Deaf to the dangers of noise

From fitness classes to a night at the movies, the everyday sounds we take for granted are seriously damaging our ears

BY SEAN DAVIDSON

The Toronto subway train makes a hard left turn on the way into Union Station, setting off a painfully loud metal-on-metal screech as it rounds the bend. Near College Street and Spadina Avenue, the tat-tat-tat of a jackhammer almost, but not quite, drowns out the traffic noise, an ambulance siren, two barking dogs and a car alarm, all of which are sounding off during the morning rush hour.

At a park in the city's west end, two city workers are shouting directly into each other's ears to be heard over the racket of their gas-powered lawn mowers. And at System Sound Bar, in Toronto's nightclub district, the techno pounding out of the speakers is so loud you can feel every bass beat deep down in your bones.

But Phil, a 24-year-old clubgoer, likes it loud. "What's the point of going if you can't really hear it? If the music isn't really loud?" he says, waiting in line. Yes, he has no-

ticed a faint but permanent ringing in his ears. And yes, he says, sounds do seem muffled when he comes out of the club. But no, he isn't worried that it could hurt his hearing.

Maybe he should be. Evidence is piling up that all that banging, barking and bass is doing gradual, irreversible damage to our hearing.

"The world is getting noisier," says Arline Bronzaft, a retired professor and antinoise activist. "We've created a society that associates noise with glamour and excitement. There are so many noise sources, every time I think I've heard it all, I get another call asking for help."

Bronzaft has been researching and lecturing about noise, and its ill effects on health, for 25 years across the United States and Canada. And, like many in her field, she warns about the dangers of so-called "toxic noise."

"We need stronger data," she concedes, "but it's safe to assume that the increasingly noisy environment we're all subjected to is taking

its toll."

Recent studies suggest that people — most notably baby boomers and Gen Xers — are losing their hearing sooner and in greater numbers than expected. A 1999 federal study in the United States found a 26-per-cent increase in hearing loss among people aged 46 to 64, and a 17-per-cent jump in 18 to 44 year olds.

That same year in Britain, researchers reported a hearing-loss increase among regular concert- and clubgoers of 72 and 62 per cent respectively, prompting one official to warn that the country's youth were "roller-coastering towards an epidemic."

Statistics for Canada are scarce, but Dr. Margaret Cheesman of the National Centre for Audiology at the University of Western Ontario, agrees that there's a lot of anecdotal evidence that hearing loss is on the rise. She warns that many everyday activities can be dangerously noisy.

"Have you been in a movie theatre lately?" she asks, lamenting the painfully loud sound systems at the big, flashy megaplexes. "Or fitness classes? The fitness craze is good for a lot of reasons but not necessarily for the ears. They're notorious for having their sound levels too high."

Dr. Cheesman says technological changes have made our lives, and our free time, a lot louder. "It could be a leaf blower, it could be a Walkman or jet skis, snowmobiles, dirt bikes, arcades," she says. "Thirty years ago you had to go out to a concert to really get blasted, now we do it to ourselves on a regular basis."

Doctors say hearing loss, once caused mainly by age or disease, is now increasingly self-inflicted. But because the damage is so gradual, and because most adults don't get tested until middle age, a problem can get quite bad before it's noticed.

Warning signs such as tinnitus, a

sometimes permanent ringing or whooshing in the ears, often go unheeded, say doctors. As nerve cells in the ear die off, sufferers lose their hearing, starting with high-frequency sounds, such as voices.

Other problems can also develop. Sufferers can lose the ability to focus on particular sounds, such as a conversation in a noisy room or, in a condition known as hyperacusis, relatively mild sounds such as running water or a ringing phone can seem painfully loud.

"Hairs [on the nerve cells] swell, then they glue together and break off and then the cell dies," explains Dr. Cheesman. "If you're exposed for just a short time those hairs may recover a bit but they'll never be normal or perfect again."

Even moderate noise can continue to do damage. "Ears do not get tougher," says Tommy Choo, senior audiologist at the Canadian Hearing Society. "You don't get used to noise. Once you have hearing loss, it doesn't mean you won't get more."

What's doing all this damage? Audiologists stress that it can't be pinned down to a single source, but most agree that electrically amplified sound — introduced to the baby boomers with home stereos and loud concerts, and passed on to the Gen Xers with Walkmans, surround-sound theatres and really loud concerts — is a leading cause.

Early critics of rock music may have been wrong about a great many things, but it seems they were at least partly right about the long-term damage loud music can do to human ears. At concerts or inside nightclubs, the sound can climb as high as a punishing 120 decibels.

How loud is that? On the decibel scale, a whisper is 30, a normal speaking voice is 60, traffic noise is 80, most power tools clock in at 110 and a jackhammer is 120. At 130, noise causes physical pain in the ears. A jet airliner puts out 160.

In most of Canada and the world, 85 decibels is considered the safe limit for an eight-hour workday. Anything over that — more noise or longer exposure — can cause permanent damage. At 88 decibels, the safe limit is four hours. At 91, two hours. At more than 120 decibels, damage can set in after just a few minutes.

"A rule of thumb," says Dr. Cheesman, "is if you can't carry on

a conversation — if you're a metre away from someone and you have to shout to be heard — that's more than 85 decibels."

Portable stereos such as Walkmans also pose a unique danger, says Marshall Chasin, co-founder of the Musicians Clinics of Canada, because users often crank up the volume to drown out loud background noise such as subways or construction.

"They're a major element," he says. "We routinely see children coming in who listen to portable stereos, and their hearing in the higher pitches is decreasing." His clinics in Hamilton and Toronto have treated more than 5,000 music-related hearing disorders since opening in 1986.

But household sounds pose a risk too, according to Hans Kunov, a professor at the University of Toronto and researcher at its Institute of Biomaterials and Biomedical Engineering. He says even a common hammer should not be used without hearing protection.

Sounds such as hammering are very hard on the ears, he explains. A single hammer strike puts out roughly 140 decibels. But because each sound is extremely brief, the brain doesn't realize that it's also perilously loud.

"In the old days, blacksmiths went deaf all the time," he says. "A 40-year-old blacksmith would be hard of hearing and a retired blacksmith was always deaf."

He adds that power tools, or even a hair dryer, pose risks. "My wife uses a hair dryer every morning for 20 minutes," he remarks. "It's really very loud. It's right next to her ears and it's really very . . ." He stops, frowns, and says, "I should test that thing and see how loud it is."

Doctors say the only recourse is to avoid excess noise or, failing that, to wear protection such as ear plugs, available for a few dollars at any drug store. Preventing hearing loss is simple, they say. The hard part is getting people to take it seriously and listen, while they still can, to the warning signs.

"People need to know what the consequences are," says Dr. Cheesman, and to understand that seemingly harmless sounds can come back, years later, as premature hearing loss.

"It would be a lot easier if, when

you got hearing loss, blood gushed out of your ears," says Mr. Chasin. "It certainly wouldn't be known as the 'invisible handicap.'"

Back outside System Sound Bar, Phil hustles down the steps and into the club. A young woman follows him. "My ears don't hurt or anything," she says, "so I figure they must be okay."

Special to The Globe and Mail

Debunking the no-sex rule

It's a common belief among athletes that a pregame roll in the hay impairs performance, but experts say sex is getting a bad rap

BY SEAN DAVIDSON, TORONTO

Jesse Marsh was warned. The fourth-generation boxer and three-time Ontario gold medalist was told, by his father and coach, to stay away from sex when he was in training. "My dad would literally lock me up," he recalls with a laugh. "I wasn't allowed to see my girlfriend for 30 days before a fight. If it got really bad I couldn't talk to them on the phone."

Women, according to the old boxing adage, weaken the legs. "Every boxer in the older generation believed this," he says, perched on a chair ringside at Florida Jack's, the downtown Toronto gym where he trains. Behind us, a single fighter is hopping around the ring, jabbing at air. The place is crammed with boxing memorabilia and it's quiet, except for the budda-budda-budda of speed bags. "It's been passed down through generations. If you've ever seen the movie *Raging Bull*, there's a scene where [he] goes to the bathroom and pours ice cubes down his pants."

Sitting next to Mr. Marsh is Ashley Cook, an amateur welterweight looking to go pro this year. She heard the "no sex" rule a lot when she played hockey. "Because it was

a team sport," she says, "you didn't want one person letting anyone down just in case they had a long night of sex. It can be quite draining."

It's a common belief among athletes, especially in team and male-dominated sports, that sex impairs performance. College coaches have been known to round up and sequester entire teams in hotels and to run bed checks the night before a big game. Heavyweight Lennox Lewis, like Muhammad Ali, is abstaining before his June 8 title bout with Mike Tyson. Germany and Argentina kept their soccer teams away from all female company before the last World Cup. And the Buffalo Bills reportedly slept alone before all four of their Super Bowls.

But the Bills lost all four games. Neither Germany nor Argentina took the cup. And researchers say sex has no harmful physical effect on exercise.

"There's really nothing to support it," says Dr. Tommy Boone. "There's just no physiological rationale." In 1995, Dr. Boone, then with the University of Southern Mississippi, put the theory to the test. He recruited 11 men and ran them on treadmills, once 12 hours after sex and again having abstained. They performed the same both times — heart rate, blood

pressure and oxygen intake unchanged.

Not surprising, he says, since the average sexual encounter burns a mere four calories per minute — which is nothing compared to, say, the 140 consumed by running a six-minute mile.

He sees pregame abstinence as a superstition, kept alive by habit and misinformation. "There's always been a void between research and the real world," he says. "And there's a very hard set of rules that these people embrace as the way of doing something. I don't see them changing, no matter what gets published."

But Dr. Boone admits that his experiment, one of surprisingly few on the topic, doesn't necessarily prove anything. "The whole subject is still open for debate until we get 25, 50 or 60 studies on the subject on a variety of conditions." It's possible, as suggested by everyday experiences and a similar study by Swiss researchers, that sex within a few hours of a workout could have negative side-effects. But then, so would any other intense activity, amorous or not.

"A person who's well-trained and has all their attributes to carry out their sport, I can't imagine that they can't get with it when the time comes," says Dr. Boone.

A pregame roll in the hay might even sometimes help. A survey of the 2000 London marathon found that runners who had sex the night before also had the fastest finishing times. It has been suggested that body chemicals released during sex, such as serotonin and endorphins, could dull pain and enhance performance in endurance sports.

That theory got its first and biggest boost at Super Bowl III in 1969, when famed playboy and quarterback Joe Namath led the New York Jets to a surprise win over the Baltimore Colts. He then shocked the sports world, admitting he'd spent the previous night with one of his many girlfriends. Basketball star Julius Erving has also said he played his best game ever the day after conceiving one of his children. And if the 12,000 condoms handed out at the Salt Lake City Olympics are any indication, even the world's top athletes, at the world's toughest competition, don't always sleep alone.

Runner John Craig, a veteran of the PanAm and Commonwealth games, was on Canada's Olympic team in 1980. He says that track and fielders usually saw sex as a healthy diversion. "There's a feeling of tension that surrounds a major competition like that that's often relieved by some sort of sexual activity," he says. "It takes your mind off it, which is often a good thing." That's assuming, he adds, one has any energy left after a full day of training. "There are nights you get home and you can't even lift the fork off the plate. So you're not going to engage in any extracurricular activities."

Experts agree that sex can make a psychological difference. "If a

person believes strongly that sex has an effect, it may give a person a sense of self-confidence that boosts performance," says Dr. Anthony Bogaert, a psychologist at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont.

Or it can just as easily hurt, cautions Prof. Gretchen Kerr, a sports psychologist at the University of Toronto. "Athletes are notoriously superstitious," she says. "They talk about having to put on their right shoe before their left, and having their lucky socks. So if they've had a negative sports experience after having sex then, my guess is, they would weigh that in as something that one shouldn't do."

The thought crossed Jesse Marsh's mind. The young boxer scoffs at the "no sex" rule, but admits there have been times, on those rare occasions when he lost a fight, when he's wondered if, just maybe, his love life made a difference. "It was kind of sitting in the back of my head, if my legs felt a little weak," he says. "Instead of it being because I wasn't in shape, I'm thinking, well, maybe it's because I had sex last night."

Curiously, warnings against sex are rare among female competitors — probably, says Prof. Kerr, because women are still thought to be less athletic and aggressive. "Much less attention has been put on women's sport in general, whether it be strength training or illegal substances or any topic," she says. "Historically [sex] has been more important in men's lives and to men's identities. And so, because it's not viewed as important to women, why would it be important to athletic performance for women?"

Ashley Cook doesn't give it a sec-

ond thought, and thinks champ Lennox Lewis is wasting his efforts by abstaining. "He's so focused and working so hard that he's got to release once a week, y'know?" she says, leaning forward in her chair. "Most people like to have sex three times a week, and you're going to tell your body you can't do that? It makes no sense."

But Mr. Marsh thinks it's better to err on the side of caution. "Mentally speaking? I think it's a good move," he says. "He's probably going to have the toughest fight of his life in front of him and he doesn't need to be thinking in the back of his head, is sex going to hurt him?" Abstaining might not help but it also won't hurt, he says.

"In order to accelerate, you've got to cut something out. Is the sacrifice of not having sex for a month such a big deal when it comes down to a world title shot?"

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