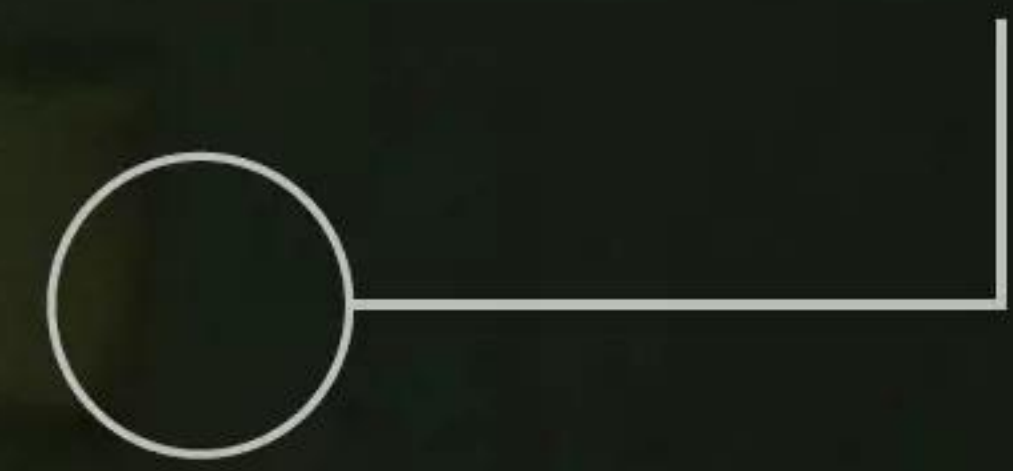


# TIME

*Alice Charton, 87,  
slowly lost her sight.  
A surgically implanted  
chip brought it back*



HOW BRAIN-  
COMPUTER  
INTERFACES  
WILL SHAPE  
HUMANITY

## SEEING THE FUTURE

BY JEFFREY  
KLUGER



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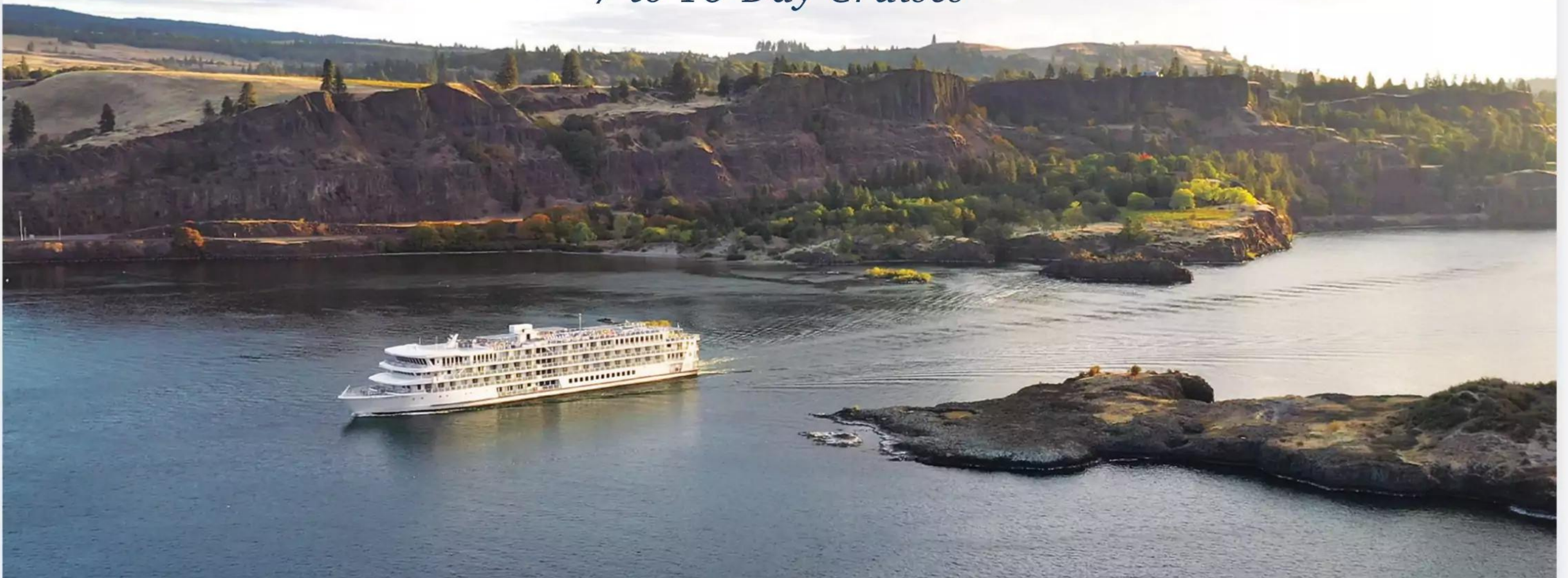
▲  
*Lindsey Vonn in the women's downhill in Hintertglemm, Austria, on Feb. 8*

*Photograph by  
Fabrice Coffrini—  
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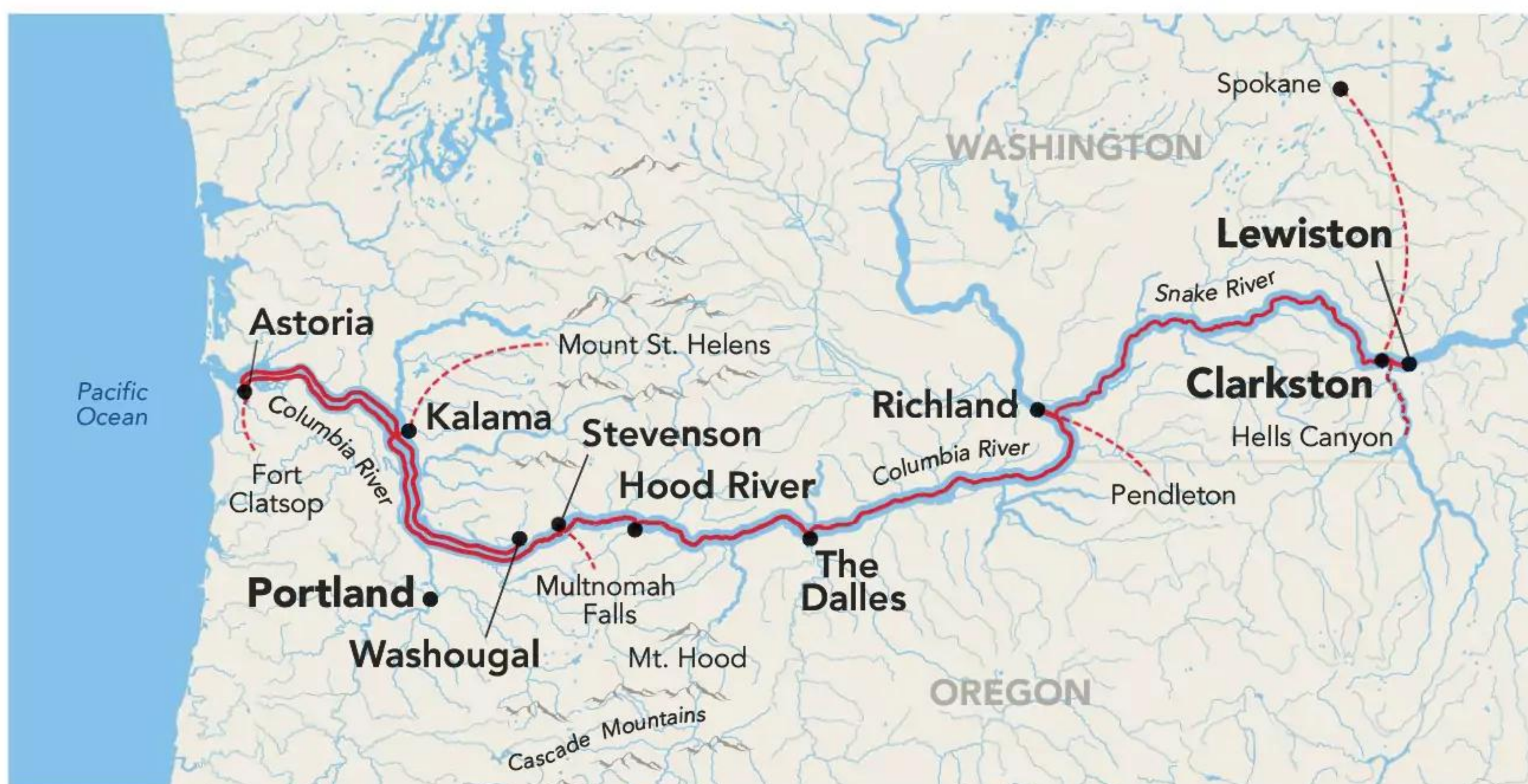
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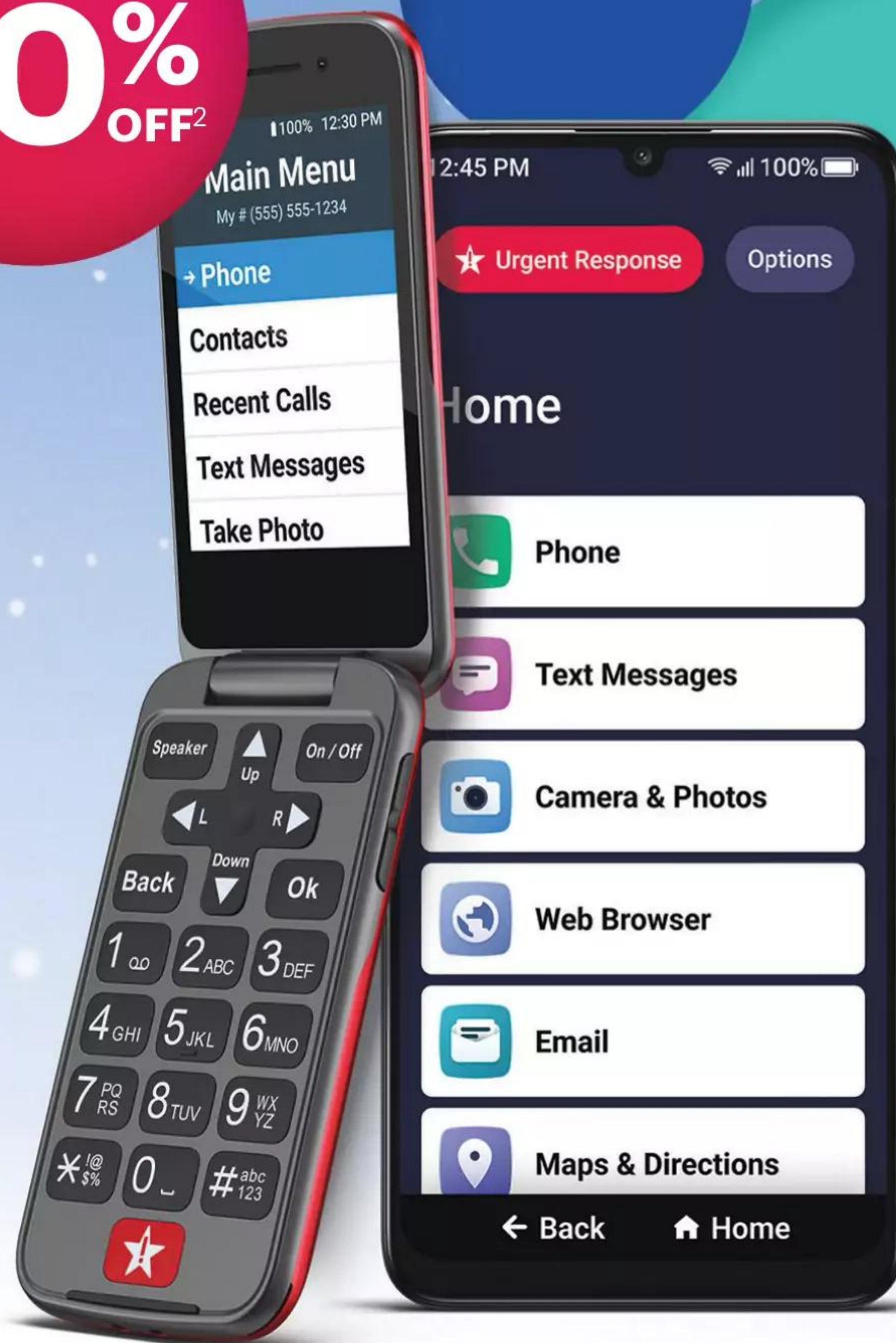
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**Learn More**

## TIME100 Next Gala

TIME hosted a gala Oct. 30 in NYC to celebrate the 2025 edition of its TIME100 Next list of leaders to watch in health, climate, business, sports, entertainment, and more. Clockwise: pop star Tate McRae performed her hits “Tit for Tat” and “Revolving Door”; Emmy winner and *Severance* star Tramell Tillman offered a toast to his grandparents, who ran an NAACP chapter in Virginia; *Bridgerton* star Jonathan Bailey’s toast urged audience members to spend more time in person with loved ones; and actor Nomzamo Mbatha presented a TIME Earth Award to Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, co-founder of Urban Oceans Lab. See photos and video at [time.com/t100next-gala-2025](https://time.com/t100next-gala-2025)



## TIME in Brazil

Jennifer Geerlings-Simons, the newly elected President of Suriname, offered a toast to equitable financial action on climate change at a TIME100 Impact dinner celebrating the launch of the TIME100 Climate List in Rio, on Nov. 4, during COP30, the U.N. climate summit. [time.com/rio-dinner](https://time.com/rio-dinner)



## Making waves at COP30

Also on Nov. 4 in Rio, TIME senior correspondent Justin Worland interviewed scientist Sylvia Earle at a TIME100 Talks event, presented by Rolex, on raising awareness about ocean health. “It should be cool to care,” argued Earle, who set a record for deepest untethered sea walk. [time.com/earle-talk](https://time.com/earle-talk)

## On the covers



Photograph by Julien Pebrel for TIME



Photograph by Chris Gurney for TIME

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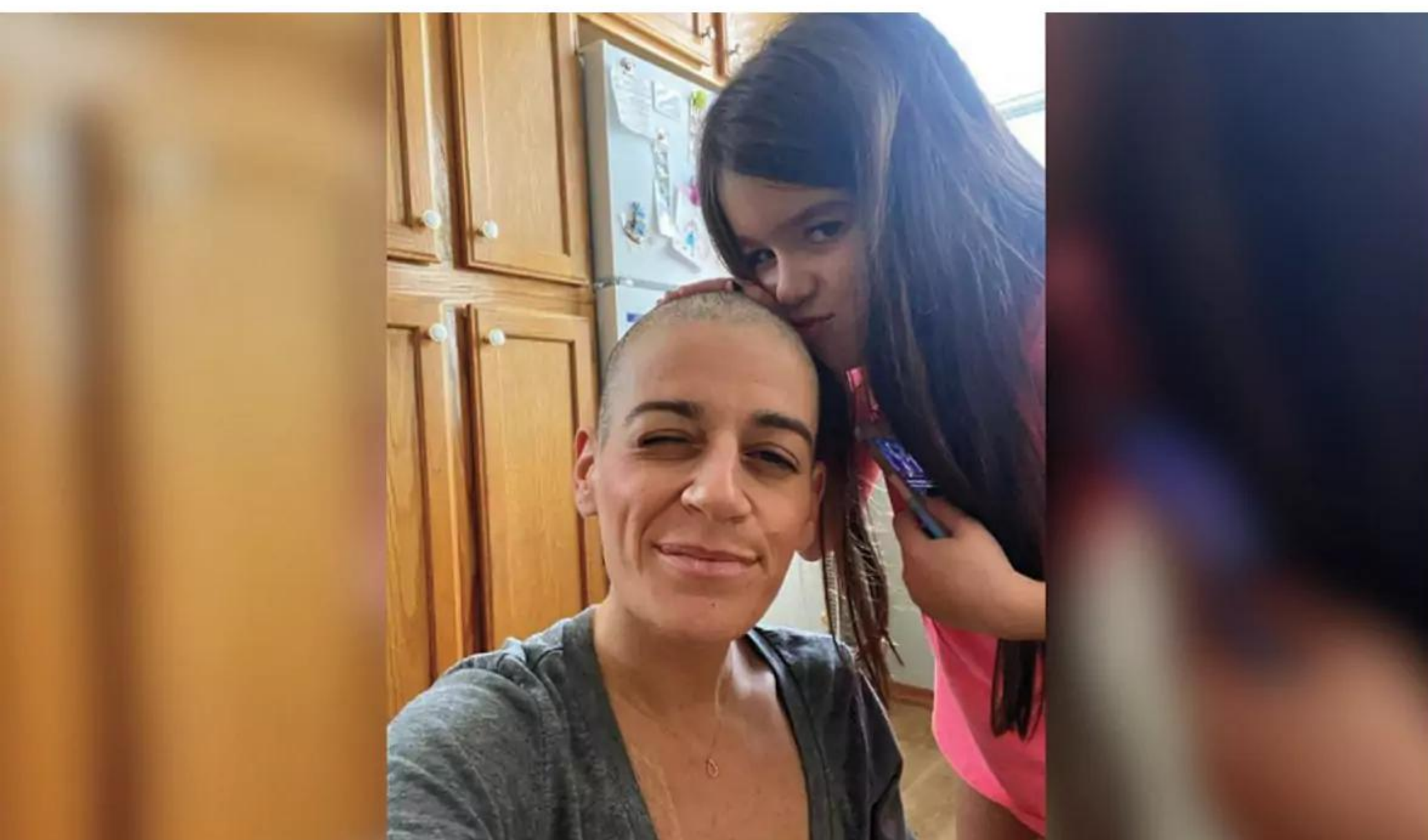
# How an Innovative Cancer Therapy Offers Hope for Patients with Lymphoma

Sponsored by Bristol Myers Squibb

After six months of chemotherapy for Hodgkin lymphoma, Jenna thought the hardest part of cancer was behind her. But a biopsy revealed a new diagnosis: primary mediastinal B-cell lymphoma – a type of large B cell lymphoma (LBCL).

It was a blow, but she had some familiarity with what might come next. Early in her treatment, Jenna's doctor had mentioned a chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T cell therapy from Bristol Myers Squibb called *Breyanzi*<sup>®</sup> (lisocabtagene maraleucel), a one-time infusion as part of a treatment process\* used to treat adults with relapsed or refractory large B cell lymphoma (LBCL), a type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma. It's an innovative treatment that reprograms a patient's own white blood cells to fight cancer.

Please see the full indications and the Important Safety Information provided on the following page, including **Boxed WARNINGS** for *Breyanzi* regarding Cytokine Release Syndrome (CRS), Neurologic Toxicities (NT), and Secondary Hematologic Malignancies.



Jenna, 38, with her daughter

"It sounded really cool and scientific, but I thought I'd never get to the point of needing it," says Jenna, 38 from New Jersey. But after other treatments had failed, *Breyanzi* became her best option.

Like Jenna, Dean, 73 from Washington, also found hope through CAR T cell therapy. Dean had always been active—until back pain sent him to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with stage 3A non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

After six rounds of chemotherapy, his cancer went into remission, but it later returned, forcing him to undergo even more aggressive chemotherapy. Dean felt like he had struck out—until his doctor told him, "Don't lose hope. There's a treatment called *Breyanzi*. I think you are an excellent candidate."

For both Jenna and Dean, first their T cells were collected and reprogrammed in a lab to fight cancer. The reprogrammed T-cells, called CAR-T cells, become the basis for their personalized, *Breyanzi* product. They then received low-dose chemotherapy followed by the *Breyanzi* infusion a few days



Dean, 73, with three of his grandchildren

later. Staying nearby the treatment center allowed them to be monitored for potentially serious side effects over the following weeks, so both Jenna and Dean temporarily relocated to be closer to their treatment centers when they began *Breyanzi*.

Serious and potentially life threatening side effects are possible. After treatment, Jenna and Dean experienced fatigue and fever. *Patients should tell their doctor right away if they experience any signs or symptoms of serious side effects while on Breyanzi treatment including fatigue, fever, muscle pain, severe nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and headache, as these are possible side effects of cytokine release syndrome (CRS) and neurologic toxicities.*

Though the process seemed intimidating at first, Jenna says she never felt alone. Her family visited often, her mom kept her fed, and her friends sent gifts and flowers.

"My support network kept me sane—they kept me laughing," she says.

Dean found support in his wife of 47 years, Mary. She stepped into the role of care partner. The couple joked it felt something like "dorm life."

"It changed the partnership and Mary really leaned into it, recognizing that she would need to do things differently to encourage me," says Dean. "She is a hope-holder."

While outcomes may vary, within a month of their treatment, both Dean and Jenna were in remission. Jenna called her first Christmas after treatment "the best ever." And now, Dean is soaking up time with his three daughters and seven grandchildren.

While Jenna and Dean understand there is potential that their cancer may one day come back, both cancer survivors feel lucky to have received *Breyanzi*.

"I appreciate every moment," says Jenna.

"I feel like I have been given a gift," Dean adds.

Learn more about *Breyanzi* at [www.Breyanzi.com](http://www.Breyanzi.com) or talk to your doctor about what treatment options may be right for you. To hear more from Jenna and Dean, please visit [time.com/BMS/thecaregivers](http://time.com/BMS/thecaregivers).

\*The treatment process includes blood collection, CAR T cell creation, administration, and side-effect monitoring.

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**Breyanzi**<sup>™</sup>  
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FOR IV INFUSION

## Patient Information

# BREYANZI

### Indications

BREYANZI is a prescription medicine used to treat large B cell lymphoma, a type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma, when:

- your first treatment has not worked or your cancer returned within a year of your first treatment, OR
- your first treatment has not worked or your cancer returned after the first treatment, and you are not eligible for hematopoietic stem cell transplantation because of medical conditions or age.

BREYANZI is different than other cancer medicines because it is made from your own white blood cells, which have been genetically modified to recognize and attack your lymphoma cells.

### Important Safety Information

#### What is the most important information I should know about BREYANZI?

BREYANZI may cause side effects that are life-threatening and can lead to death. Call your healthcare provider or get emergency help right away if you get any of the following:

- difficulty breathing
- fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher)
- chills/shaking chills
- confusion
- severe nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- fast or irregular heartbeat
- dizziness/lightheadedness
- severe fatigue or weakness

It is important that you tell your healthcare providers that you have received BREYANZI and to show them your BREYANZI Patient Wallet Card. Your healthcare provider may give you other medicines to treat your side effects.

#### Before getting BREYANZI, tell your healthcare provider about all your medical problems, including if you have or have had:

- Neurologic problems (such as seizures, stroke, or memory loss)
- Lung or breathing problems
- Heart problems
- Liver problems
- Kidney problems
- A recent or active infection

**Tell your healthcare provider about all the medications you take,** including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

#### How will I receive BREYANZI?

- BREYANZI is made from your own white blood cells, so your blood will be collected by a process called leukapheresis.
- It takes about 3-4 weeks from the time your cells are received at the manufacturing site and are available to be shipped back to your healthcare provider, but the time may vary.
- Before you get BREYANZI, you will get 3 days of chemotherapy to prepare your body.
- When your BREYANZI is ready, your healthcare provider will give it to you through a catheter placed into your vein (intravenous infusion). BREYANZI is given as infusions of 2 different cell types.
  - You will receive infusions of one cell type, immediately followed by the other cell type.

- The time for infusion will vary but will usually be less than 15 minutes for each of the 2 cell types.
- During the first week, you will be monitored daily.
- You should plan to stay close to a healthcare facility for at least 2 weeks after getting BREYANZI. Your healthcare provider will check to see that your treatment is working and help you with any side effects that may occur.
- You may be hospitalized for side effects. Your healthcare provider will discharge you if your side effects are under control, and it is safe for you to leave the hospital.
- Your healthcare provider will want to do blood tests to follow your progress. It is important that you do have your blood tested. If you miss an appointment, call your healthcare provider as soon as possible to reschedule.

#### What should I avoid after receiving BREYANZI?

- Avoid driving for at least 2 weeks after you get BREYANZI.
- Do not donate blood, organs, tissues, or cells for transplantation.

#### What are the possible or reasonably likely side effects of BREYANZI?

The most common side effects of BREYANZI are:

- fatigue
- difficulty breathing
- fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher)
- chills/shaking chills
- confusion
- difficulty speaking or slurred speech
- severe nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- headache
- dizziness/lightheadedness
- fast or irregular heartbeat
- swelling
- low blood pressure
- muscle pain

BREYANZI can increase the risk of life-threatening infections that may lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you develop fever, chills, or any signs or symptoms of an infection.

BREYANZI can lower one or more types of your blood cells (red blood cells, white blood cells, or platelets). After treatment, your healthcare provider will test your blood to check for this. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get a fever, are feeling tired, or have bruising or bleeding.

BREYANZI may increase your risk of getting cancers including certain types of blood cancers. Your healthcare provider should monitor you for this.

Having BREYANZI in your blood may cause a false-positive HIV test result by some commercial tests.

These are not all the possible side effects of BREYANZI. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. For more information, go to [BREYANZI.com](http://BREYANZI.com) or call 1-888-805-4555. You may report side effects to the FDA. Visit [www.fda.gov/medwatch](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch) or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Please see full Prescribing Information, including **Boxed WARNINGS** and Medication Guide.



# IMPORTANT FACTS

The information below does not take the place of talking with your healthcare professional. Only your healthcare professional knows the specifics of your condition and how BREYANZI® may fit into your overall therapy. Talk to your healthcare professional if you have any questions about BREYANZI (pronounced braye an' zee).



## **What is the most important information I should know about BREYANZI?**

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- severe fatigue or weakness

It is important that you tell your healthcare providers that you have received BREYANZI and to show them your BREYANZI Patient Wallet Card. Your healthcare provider may give you other medicines to treat your side effects.

## **What is BREYANZI?**

BREYANZI is a prescription medicine used to treat four types of non-Hodgkin lymphoma:

- Large B cell lymphoma, when:
  - your first treatment has not worked or your cancer returned within a year of your first treatment OR
  - your first treatment has not worked or your cancer returned after the first treatment, and you are not eligible for hematopoietic stem cell transplantation because of medical conditions or age OR
  - two or more kinds of treatment have not worked or stopped working.

BREYANZI is different than other cancer medicines because it is made from your own white blood cells, which have been genetically modified to recognize and attack your lymphoma cells.

## **Before getting BREYANZI, tell your healthcare provider about all your medical problems, including if you have or have had:**

- Neurologic problems (such as seizures, stroke, or memory loss)
- Lung or breathing problems
- Heart problems
- Liver problems
- Kidney problems
- A recent or active infection

**Tell your healthcare provider about all the medications you take**, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

## **How will I receive BREYANZI?**

- BREYANZI is made from your own white blood cells, so your blood will be collected by a process called “leukapheresis” (LOO-kuh-feh-REE-sis).
- It takes about 3-4 weeks from the time your cells are received at the manufacturing site and are available to be shipped back to your healthcare provider, but the time may vary.
- Before you get BREYANZI, you will get 3 days of chemotherapy to prepare your body.
- When your BREYANZI is ready, your healthcare provider will give it to you through a catheter (tube) placed into your vein (intravenous infusion). BREYANZI is given as infusions of 2 different cell types.
  - You will receive infusions of one cell type, immediately followed by the other cell type.
  - The time for infusion will vary but will usually be less than 15 minutes for each of the 2 cell types.
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- You should plan to stay close to a healthcare facility for at least 2 weeks after getting BREYANZI. Your healthcare provider will check to see that your treatment is working and help you with any side effects that may occur.

- You may be hospitalized for side effects and your healthcare provider will discharge you if your side effects are under control, and it is safe for you to leave the hospital.
- Your healthcare provider will want to do blood tests to follow your progress. It is important that you do have your blood tested. If you miss an appointment, call your healthcare provider as soon as possible to reschedule.

## **What should I avoid after receiving BREYANZI?**

- Avoid driving for at least 2 weeks after you get BREYANZI.
- Do not donate blood, organs, tissues, or cells for transplantation.

## **What are the possible or reasonably likely side effects of BREYANZI?**

The most common side effects of BREYANZI are:

- fatigue
- difficulty breathing
- fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher)
- chills/shaking chills
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BREYANZI may increase your risk of getting cancers including certain types of blood cancers. Your healthcare provider should monitor you for this.

Having BREYANZI in your blood may cause a false-positive HIV test result by some commercial tests.

These are not all the possible side effects of BREYANZI. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

## **General information about the safe and effective use of BREYANZI.**

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in a Medication Guide. If you would like more information about BREYANZI, talk with your healthcare provider. You can ask your healthcare provider for information about BREYANZI that is written for health professionals. For more information, go to BREYANZI.com or call 1-888-805-4555.

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# The Brief



## VOTERS PUSH BACK

BY BRIAN BENNETT

In Virginia—and elsewhere—Donald Trump's erratic economic policies spurred a backlash

INSIDE

SUDAN'S CONFLICT  
WORSENS

THE COMPLEX LEGACY  
OF DICK CHENEY

WIKIPEDIA'S FOUNDER  
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**A**FTER A YEAR IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS, Democrats rode frustration over high prices and President Donald Trump’s disruptive economic policies to win a raft of elections across the country on Nov. 4. In Virginia and New Jersey, voters handed the party the keys to the governor’s mansions by larger-than-expected margins. In California, voters overwhelmingly approved new congressional districts to benefit Democrats, after Texas passed its own new map to favor the GOP.

But it was a series of decisive victories in down-ballot races against Republican incumbents that stunned leaders in both parties and bolstered Democrats’ hopes that they had landed on a viable playbook for next year’s midterm elections.

Pennsylvanians voted to keep three justices backed by Democrats on the state Supreme Court. Democrats in Georgia won two utility-commission seats by double digits, the widest margins Democrats have seen in statewide contests there in two decades. In Mississippi, where absentee ballots were still being counted days later, Democrats appeared poised to flip two seats in the state senate, breaking a GOP supermajority.

In the wake of months of polls showing much of the electorate was dissatisfied with both parties, the initial response from many Democrats at running the table in such a hodgepodge of contests was a mixture of jubilation and disbelief. Democratic National Committee chair Ken Martin says the Democrats are now “full steam ahead to take back the Congress next year” as the “party of affordability.”

Republicans are scrambling to chart their own path forward. The party has a year to show it’s making a difference on the issues the electorate cares about most, says Whit Ayres, a longtime GOP strategist. He called the margins of victory voters gave to Governors-elect Abigail Spanberger in Virginia and Mikie Sherrill in New Jersey “pretty remarkable,” and the Republican losses in Mississippi and Georgia concerning. “The less visible races are as much of a concern as the most visible races,” Ayres said.

Democrats are giving a particularly close look to the upset in Georgia, where they managed to flip two seats on the Georgia public service commission, which oversees the Georgia Power Co. Democrats Peter Hubbard and Alicia Johnson both won with more than 60% of the vote. Party leaders see the results as a sign that the cost of utilities has emerged as one of the most salient issues for voters. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, home electricity bills rose 6.1% from August 2024 to August 2025.

But a widespread Trump backlash is also part of the story. Exit polling suggests Trump dragged down Republicans in multiple races. In New Jersey, 97% of voters who voted for Sherrill said their vote was to oppose Trump, according to NBC exit polling. A year after Kamala Harris carried the state by 6 points, Sherrill won it by 13.

**TRUMP HAD SOME EXCUSES** for the GOP’s poor performance, including the fallout from a government shutdown that his party has tried to blame entirely on Democrats. The shutdown was a “big factor,” Trump told GOP Senators at the White House the morning after. “I don’t think it was good for Republicans.” Trump himself decided not to campaign in person in Virginia or New Jersey.

Vice President J.D. Vance posted on X that “it’s idiotic to overreact to a couple of elections,” but acknowledged that Democrats’ focus on the cost of living broke through with voters. He argued that Trump’s policies had helped lower interest rates and inflation, and that making “a decent life affordable” is “the metric by which we’ll ultimately be judged in 2026 and beyond.”

But the other GOP strategy appears to be tying Democrats to Zohran Mamdani, the democratic socialist set to be New York City’s next mayor. Mamdani drew more than a million votes in a campaign focused on hiking taxes on the wealthy to pay to make childcare, rent, and transportation more affordable.

In the run-up to the election, some Democrats held Mamdani at arm’s length. Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer, a New York City resident, refused to say whom he voted for in the race.

Republicans insist Mamdani is a warning sign that Democrats are veering further to the left. “Working families watching this play out have a right to know that socialism and communism are not just confined to New York City,” House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters on the steps of the Capitol the morning after Mamdani’s win. “They are quickly coming to a town near you unless you stand up and let your voice of common sense be heard.”

But Democratic leaders say the results show them that the party does best when candidates reflect the local electorate, pointing to the moderate campaigns of Spanberger and Sherrill. In her victory speech as Virginia’s first woman elected governor, Spanberger delivered lines that Democrats will likely echo over the next 12 months. “We chose our Commonwealth over chaos,” Spanberger said. “You all chose leadership that will focus relentlessly on what matters most: lowering costs, keeping our communities safe, and strengthening our economy for every Virginian—leadership that will focus on problem solving, not stoking division.” □

## ‘Make no mistake—the Democratic Party’s back.’

—KEN MARTIN,  
DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL  
COMMITTEE CHAIR



**THE BULLETIN**

## Fears of new genocide as Darfur burns again

DARFUR HAS ONCE MORE become the center of a wave of violence in Sudan's brutal civil war, sparking warnings of a repeat of the genocide that blighted the region two decades ago. After a suffocating 18-month siege that had trapped tens of thousands of people and caused widespread hunger, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) captured El Fasher on Oct. 26. The city was the last holdout in the region of the Sudanese armed forces, which has been fighting the RSF for the past three years. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobe, the Assistant Secretary-General of the U.N. for Africa, told the Security Council on Oct. 30 that the fall of El Fasher

marked a "significant shift in the security dynamics" of Sudan, warning that "the territorial scope of the conflict is broadening."

**KILLING FIELDS** Reports of massacres, executions, and sexual violence carried out by the RSF soon followed, as thousands attempted to flee the city. Graphic images of those atrocities circulated on social media as the paramilitary group, a descendant of the same Arab militias implicated in what the U.S. termed genocide in Darfur two decades ago, carried out ethnically targeted massacres. "It was like a killing field," Tajal-Rahman, a man in his late 50s, told the Associated

Press. "Bodies everywhere and people bleeding and no one to help them." One of the worst incidents took place at the Saudi Hospital, the last medical facility operating in the city, where some 460 people were killed in "several waves" of attacks, according to the World Health Organization.

**THOUSANDS MISSING** The U.N. estimated that more than 70,000 fled El Fasher in the week after it fell. But only a fraction of that number—5,000—had arrived in the nearest city, Tawila, 37 miles away, during the same period. "Where are all the missing people?" Michel Olivier Lacharité, head of emergencies at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), asked as reports of mass killings proliferated. "Based on what patients tell us, the most likely—albeit frightening—answer is that they are being

Smoke rises from a fire in a residential area near El Fasher airport on Oct. 26

killed, blocked, and hunted down when trying to flee." MSF said many who made it to Tawila were severely malnourished and reported torture and sexual violence along the way.

**FAMINE DECLARED** On Nov. 3, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) declared famine in El Fasher and the town of Kadugli in South Kordofan province, which is also under siege by the RSF. Famine has been declared in five other locations in Sudan since the war began in April 2023. The IPC said 20 other areas in Kordofan and Darfur are also at risk. —REBECCA SCHNEID and RICHARD HALL

## GOOD QUESTION

## Is the NFL safer than high school football?

BY ALANA SEMUELS

SCIENTISTS ARE STARTING TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE degenerative brain disease chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), even as more athletes say they believe they have it. What causes CTE, says Dr. Daniel Daneshvar, chief of the division of brain injury rehabilitation at Harvard Medical School, is “the cumulative force that a person gets exposed to”—perhaps most infamously on, say, a football field.

Because CTE is caused by cumulative head impacts and not just one big blow, people who start playing football as kids—even those who may not play past high school—can end up with CTE. But while the NFL has made some changes to try and help players avoid repeated head impacts, advocates point out that the groups that operate organized football for younger players have done relatively little.

“Everybody in football is aware of what the NFL has done and has made an active choice not to follow,” argues Chris Nowinski, the CEO and co-founder of the Concussion Legacy Foundation, who has been talking for years about the need to better protect athletes of all ages from CTE. “It’s just a dramatic failure of leadership.”

Indeed, in 2016, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell acknowledged that football-related head trauma was linked to brain disease, a big step for a league that had been reluctant to admit any connection. Since then, the NFL has prohibited tackling during offseason practices and in early stages of preseason, reduced the length of overtime in the preseason and regular season, and banned players from lowering their heads to make contact with an opponent using their helmet. Perhaps most importantly, the NFL significantly changed the kickoff in the 2024 season, moving teams closer together to limit how fast players run at one another.

The changes appear to be reducing concussions. Recorded concussions decreased 17% in 2024, the year the new kickoff rules went into place, compared with those in 2023.

**FEW COLLEGE, HIGH SCHOOL,** or youth leagues have made similar changes to how the game is played—or even acknowledged the connection between the game and CTE.

The NCAA, for example, still allows a relatively high number of live-contact practices—those in which players wear full pads and practice tackling and blocking. After a few days of acclimatization in the preseason, schools are allowed to have eight full-contact practices, and they are allowed to practice tackling and blocking for as long as 75 minutes in each practice. The NCAA, which declined to

comment for this story, also has not adopted the NFL’s kickoff changes.

High school football has done even less. In 2014, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) issued recommendations for minimizing head-impact exposure and concussions in football that included limiting full-contact practice to the regular season and limiting contact in practices. But the recommendations still allowed full-contact practices two to three times a week for up to 90 minutes per week.

Karissa Niehoff, CEO of NFHS, wrote in a 2019 blog post that there was no link between CTE and playing high school football. She says she still believes that today, and that there’s

no way for researchers to disentangle the possible effects of playing other sports when they study this question.

Youth football may be the least regulated of all. It’s easy to find TikTok videos of young kids running the Oklahoma drill or the “bull in the ring” drill, both of which pit two players against each other in close contact. Both lead to high incidents

of injury and are not allowed at the professional level.

The best strategy to protect youth, Nowinski and other experts say, is to set minimum ages for the most dangerous activities, like tackling. In 2011, USA Hockey banned body checking in the 12-and-under leagues, and in 2016, U.S. Club Soccer banned heading for players under 12. There seems to be little interest in banning tackling in football for kids under 12, though, Nowinski says.

In 2023, the Concussion Legacy Foundation worked with legislators in California on a bill banning tackle football for children under 12. The bill had the support of legislators but in January 2024, Governor Gavin Newsom, citing “parents’ rights,” vowed that he would not sign it. If California won’t pass such a bill, Nowinski says, it’s unlikely any other state will. □



**‘It’s just a dramatic failure of leadership.’**

—CHRIS NOWINSKI,  
CONCUSSION LEGACY  
FOUNDATION

**APOLOGIZED**

Canadian Prime Minister **Mark Carney**, to U.S. President Donald Trump, for an antitariff TV ad that prompted Trump to suddenly end trade negotiations with Canada.

**BLOCKED**

The Trump Administration, from mandating that people provide **proof of citizenship** on federal voter-registration forms, by a federal judge in Washington on Oct. 31.

**ARRESTED**

Three of the four suspects who police believe were directly involved in the Oct. 19 **heist at the Louvre**. The \$100 million worth of jewelry stolen from the Paris museum is still unaccounted for.

**ANNOUNCED**

Her retirement from Congress in 2027, by **Nancy Pelosi**, on Nov. 6. The California Democrat has served in Congress for 38 years and was the first and only female Speaker of the House.

**DIED**

► **Maria Riva**, an actor who was the only child of Hollywood star Marlene Dietrich, on Oct. 29. She was 100.

► **Donna Jean Godchaux-MacKay**, a singer in the rock band the Grateful Dead, on Nov. 2, at the age of 78.

**DIED**

## Dick Cheney

### American regent

IN A HALF-CENTURY NAVIGATING the heights of U.S. executive power, Dick Cheney went from being widely admired as the competent public servant overseeing the U.S. victory in the first Gulf War, to profoundly polarizing, albeit in ways that might now make many wistful: the divisions Cheney inveigled were grounded not in personal aggrandizement but in differing concepts of duty to nation.

His legacy, at the time of his death on Nov. 3 at 84, was as the most powerful U.S. Vice President in history, who after 9/11 intrigued for the CIA to use torture; for the National Security Agency to scoop up the communications of every American; and for the invasion of Iraq, which killed hundreds of thousands, shifted the balance of regional power to Iran, and ultimately expanded the terrorist threat.

Cheney mined the powers

of his office so effectively that in the first term of President George W. Bush, he was described as regent, the nominal subordinate who wields the real power over a boy king. His reputation for stealth and rigidity gratified conservatives, and in liberal circles sketched a caricature of villainy laid on thick in *Vice*, a 2015 feature film that portrayed Cheney as a henpecked bumpkin who a few scenes later has become a diabolical mastermind.

**NO OTHER AMERICAN** politician in recent history moved so swiftly from light to shadow without the accelerant of personal scandal. “He would run the gauntlet of being the toast of America

**‘He was always going to be both the most powerful and the most controversial Vice President in history.’**

—ERIC EDELMAN,  
CHENEY ADVISER



*Cheney sought a strong President, but called Trump dangerous*

after Gulf War One and then being this monstrous hideous person, this warmonger, torturer—“Blow up the world!” his late friend former Senator Alan Simpson told TIME in 2021.

Cheney embraced the notoriety, joking in speeches about his reputation as “Darth Vader” and dressing his black Labrador for Halloween as the Dark Lord of the Sith. The reputation distracted from Cheney’s failure, as the official Bush had placed in charge of terrorism, to heed warnings about 9/11. But he preferred working in the shadows, eyebrow cocked in meetings where he maintained a sphinxlike silence. In a capital where information is power, Cheney warned subordinates not to characterize his views to outsiders while manipulating the processes of a federal government he had learned from the inside out. His Secret Service code name was Angler.

Cheney physically embodied both prudence and paranoia: in 2007, the wi-fi was disabled on his cardiac defibrillator lest a malign actor induce cardiac arrest in the man a heartbeat from the presidency. When President Trump was conniving to remain in office after losing the 2020 election, Cheney organized a letter of warning signed by all 10 living former Defense Secretaries—advocacy all the more effective coming from a former public servant who had become synonymous with a maximalist position on presidential power. —KARL VICK



# Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales on rebuilding trust online and off

BY HARRY BOOTH

JIMMY WALES DESCRIBES HIMSELF AS A “pathological optimist.” And yet, when the co-founder of Wikipedia spoke with TIME in October, he still seemed somewhat surprised that his online encyclopedia actually worked. “Wikipedia is very trusting, in a way that always seemed a bit crazy,” Wales says. If you think about the chaos of social media, Wikipedia’s model of allowing anyone to edit any entry seems “completely insane,” he says.

We’re speaking because Wales just penned his first book, *The Seven Rules of Trust*, which tries to distill what Wikipedia and a few other bright corners of the internet—Wales cites Airbnb, Uber, and Ebay—can teach us about rebuilding trust in a world awash in skepticism. Since Wikipedia’s launch in 2001, trust in politicians, mainstream media, and “to some extent each other” has all plummeted, Wales says—with consequences extending beyond political deadlocks. Wales, 59, was friends with Jo Cox, the British Labour Member of Parliament who was murdered in 2016 by a far-right extremist days before the Brexit referendum. He believes the rise of politically motivated violence is “a natural result of this feeling of a complete breakdown of societal norms and of the idea of trust—of being able to say, ‘Look, I disagree with you, but I trust that we can have a dialogue and we’ll find a compromise and we can move forward,’” he says. And yet, “Wikipedia has gone from being kind of a joke to one of the few things people trust.”

Lately, though, that breakdown of trust has started nipping at Wikipedia’s heels. Billionaire Elon Musk, who was once a big fan of Wikipedia, has turned on the encyclopedia, as has White House AI and crypto czar David Sacks, conservative commentator Tucker Carlson, and even Wales’ estranged co-founder Larry Sanger, who have all claimed Wikipedia is biased.

In October, the day before Wales published his book, Musk released a Wikipedia rival called Grokipedia, which he said used his AI chatbot Grok to generate entries. Currently, the AI-driven encyclopedia has more than 885,000 articles—many of which appear very similar to their Wikipedia counterparts. While Grokipedia is dwarfed by Wikipedia’s more than 7 million English-language articles, Musk said in a post on his

## JIMMY WALES QUICK FACTS

### Early adopter

Wales went to Auburn University at 16 to study finance. Later, while on a Ph.D. program at the University of Alabama, he played internet fantasy games and developed an interest in the web.

### Internet entrepreneur

In 1996, Wales left his job in finance and co-founded Bomis, an early web portal that laid the groundwork for his later online ventures.

### Web pioneer

In 2000, Wales launched Nupedia, an expert-written online encyclopedia. Its rigorous peer-review process made publishing painfully slow, with only a handful of articles completed in its first year.

### A new way forward

Frustrated by Nupedia’s pace, Wales co-founded Wikipedia with Larry Sanger in 2001, letting anyone contribute—an experiment that quickly eclipsed its predecessor, becoming one of the world’s most visited websites.

social media platform X that Grokipedia will exceed Wikipedia by several orders of magnitude in breadth, depth, and accuracy. Musk has been critical of Wikipedia for some time, calling it “Wikipedia” and in 2023 offering to give the platform, which is overseen by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation, \$1 billion if he could rename it “Dickipedia.”

Early responses to Grokipedia have split along familiar lines. Musk fans have lauded Grokipedia for having “no human bias and no errors” and for its “nuance and detail” in entries on topics like George Floyd’s death. Grokipedia’s article foregrounds Floyd’s criminal record in its opening lines, mentioning his murder by a police officer only later. Critics, meanwhile, note that articles about Musk and his companies are longer than their Wikipedia counterparts yet omit unflattering details. Unlike Wikipedia, Grokipedia can’t be directly edited by users. They can inspect the sources and submit correction suggestions, but these aren’t debated on public talk pages or decided by human moderators the way Wikipedia’s are. They are instead processed by Grok, a version of the same AI chatbot that made antisemitic statements after an update in July, forcing xAI to apologize and deactivate the update. Wales’ response to Musk? He told Bloomberg in October: “If you feel like Wikipedia has got some bias, encourage people to come and participate—people who agree with you. Don’t paint us as ... crazy left-wing activists or something. We aren’t.”

**WALES SEEMS KEENLY AWARE** of Wikipedia’s shortcomings. His book revisits infamous episodes like when an online troll used the site to falsely implicate journalist John Seigenthaler in the Kennedy assassinations. Wales writes that governments, activists, and ideologues have sought to use the platform’s editing tools to push their worldview. But the site’s continued growth suggests these interests haven’t won out over the voluntary army of “Wikipedians,” he says. “The fact that Wikipedia is still massive, more popular than any newspaper, is partly because we try really hard—not perfect for sure—to stick to the facts and to give transparency,”



Wales says. “You can see where the information came from. You can click on it and check.”

Wales himself waded into an editing conflict over the site’s entry titled “Gaza genocide” on Nov. 2, writing on a page for discussing edits that the article “fails to meet our high standards” for stating in Wikipedia’s voice that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. He called it “a particularly egregious example” of the site’s broader neutrality issues. Wales’ comments prompted pushback from some editors. “Why should the opinions of the largely impartial U.N. and human rights scholars be weighed equally to the obviously partisan opinions of commentators and governments?” one commenter asked. “Because that’s what neutrality demands,” Wales responded.

**‘We try really hard to stick to the facts.’**

—JIMMY WALES,  
CO-FOUNDER,  
WIKIPEDIA

“Our job, as Wikipedians, is not to take sides in that debate but to carefully and neutrally document it.” (The Wikimedia Foundation said in a statement that even as co-founder, Wales is just “one of hundreds of thousands of editors, all striving to present information, including on contentious topics, in line with Wikipedia’s policies.”)

**GROKIPEDIA ISN’T** the only AI-driven threat to Wikipedia. Some 65% of the nonprofit’s most server-straining traffic now comes from bots, some of which scrape the site to feed into chatbots for training. Instead of clicking through to Wikipedia, search-engine users can now often find their answers in—sometimes wrong—AI-generated summaries. That’s if they don’t go straight to ChatGPT or Claude. Wales says all of this means islands of human-generated content like Wikipedia “become more important than ever.” He says his principles of trust are just as relevant to AI developers, “because every time you get an AI answer and find out that the AI hallucinated and just made that up, it reduces your trust.”

That’s where the “real world” comes in. Part of Wales’ pitch is that most of us already practice trust in “very routine ways,” such as getting into a rideshare or sharing an elevator with strangers. He points to Braver Angels, a U.S. group that hosts in-person conversations between people with opposing politics. Participants often emerge “a little more understanding ... a little more ready to think about compromises,” Wales says. The challenge is designing institutions and online spaces that tap into those impulses. Wikipedia’s collaborative culture, at its best, is a web version of that: slow, structured, and imperfect.

And for internet interactions, Wales’ best advice is disarmingly simple. Direct your attention toward activities that build trust. Audit your feeds. “If you find yourself spending too much time using social media and being fed information that you don’t trust, then stop doing that,” he says. He offers one specific nudge: delete X from your phone. □

LIGHTBOX





## Back-to-back

The Los Angeles Dodgers celebrate their win over the Toronto Blue Jays in the 2025 World Series at the Rogers Centre in Toronto on Nov. 2. The Dodgers beat the Jays 5-4 in a nail-biting Game 7 that went to 11 innings. Yoshinobu Yamamoto (center) was named World Series Most Valuable Player after delivering remarkable pitching performances in three of the games. It was the second year in a row the Dodgers secured the title, the first time in more than two decades a team has earned consecutive championships.

Photograph by Patrick Smith—Getty Images  
► For more of our best photography, visit [time.com/lightbox](https://time.com/lightbox)

## 5 phrases that drive therapists up a wall

BY ANGELA HAUPT

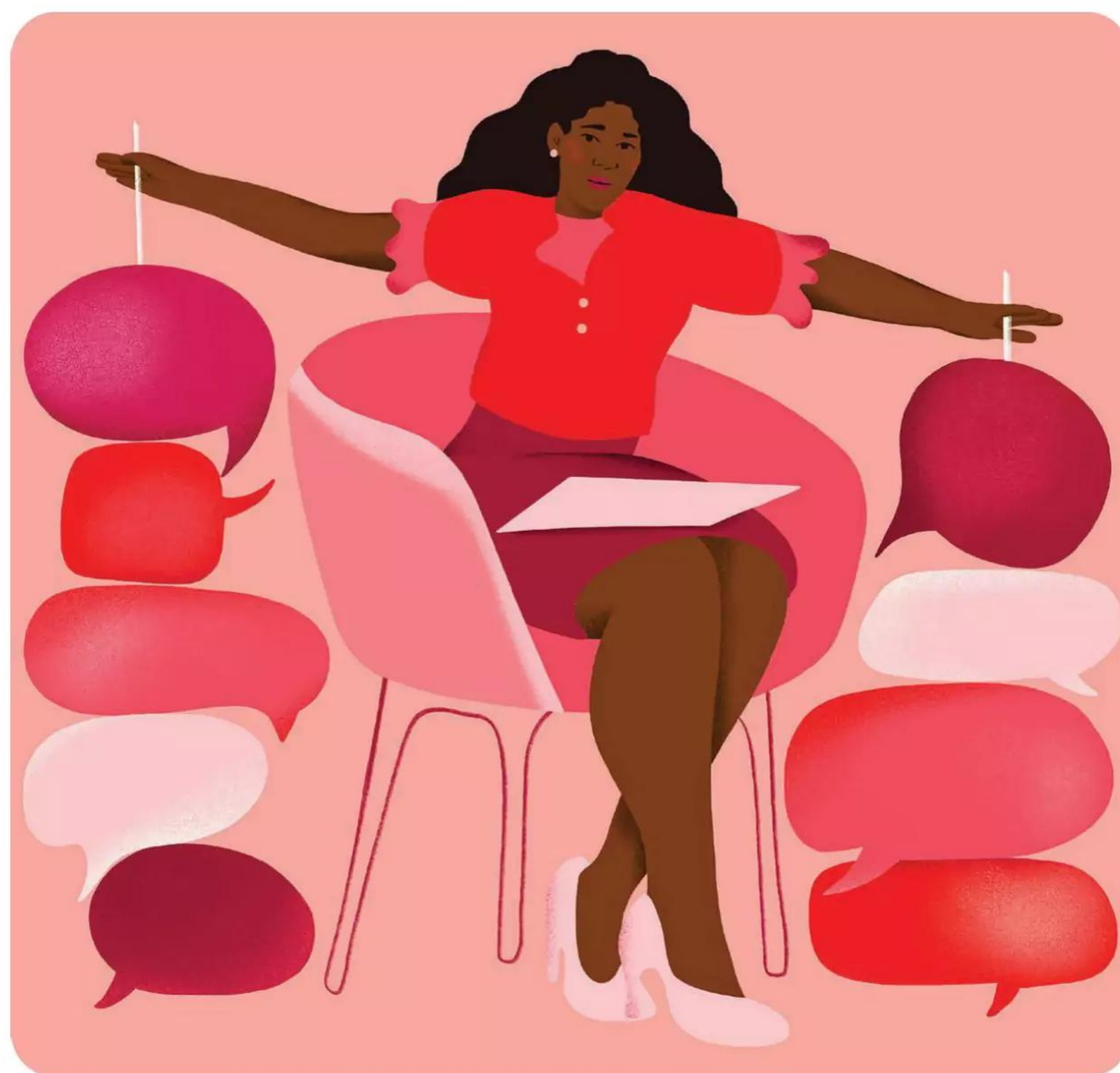
A therapist's job is to listen—but not all words are music to their ears. Some indicate that clients aren't taking the process seriously; others reveal misunderstandings that need to be clarified or deep-rooted beliefs that should be corrected. We asked a handful of therapists which phrases drive them up a wall and why.

### “I don't want to take up too much time.”

Apologizing for being in therapy just wastes precious time, says Lauren Auer, a therapist in Peoria, Ill. “It's literally my job,” she says. Yet she ends up needing to devote part of the session to convincing her clients they deserve to be there. There may be **underlying beliefs about worthiness** at play: “A lot of times, it's rooted in what they've learned about taking up space or being too much,” Auer says. She often responds gently: “Let's talk about that. What I'm hearing from you is ...”

### “Sorry for crying.”

Uttering these words “is like apologizing for breathing in my office,” Auer says, yet she hears them daily. She typically reminds clients that **“crying is actually really healthy,”** and it means they're feeling safe enough to let their guard down, which is a good sign of healing.” When someone clearly feels bad about all the waterworks, Auer smiles and says, “Hey, no crying allowed in therapy,” in a way that



makes it clear she's joking. “It usually gets a laugh, and that can break the shame spiral,” she says. “It helps them realize how ridiculous it sounds to apologize for crying in therapy.”

### “What should I do?”

It's a common question for people who want guidance. But therapists “have absolutely no idea—and we're not supposed to know

what you should do,” says Nicole Herway, a therapist in Murray, Utah. **“We're here to empower you to make decisions for yourself, to try things and fail, and to learn and to grow.”** A better way of phrasing things, Herway adds, is to ask your therapist “Can you help me consider some options?”

### “Therapy has never worked for me.”

Clients often ask

Lisa Shows to make promises or guarantees about therapeutic outcomes. They might add that therapy has never worked for them in the past—so why would it this time? “They're trying to hook me into saying ‘Well, *this* therapy will work for you,’” says Shows, a licensed professional counselor in Flagstaff, Ariz.

“I absolutely want it to work, and I also want to instill hope that it can work. But at the same time, I can't promise that it's going to be the thing that's suddenly helpful.” **Therapy is a collaborative relationship,** she adds, that requires engagement and work on both parties' part to be successful.

### “I'm just going to take this call real quick.”

You might be surprised how often clients check their phone throughout sessions, texting or taking nonemergency calls. “They'll be a little preoccupied with it, and getting notification after notification, and even if they have it on the chair, I can hear it buzzing,” Shows says. **Ideally, clients will silence their device** and drop it into their bag, Shows says, so it's there if they need it. That way, they're not distracted and are able to give themselves the space “to do something a little different than we do the rest of our lives,” she says.

# The View

TECHNOLOGY

## THE AI BAN WE NEED

BY ANDREA MIOTTI

No one knows how to control AIs that are vastly more competent than any human, yet we are getting closer and closer to developing them, with many experts expecting superintelligence in the next five years, at the current pace. This is why leading AI scientists warn that developing superintelligence—AI that outperforms humans across all cognitive tasks—could result in humanity's extinction. ▶

INSIDE

WHY TRUMP IS PREPARING  
FOR WAR IN VENEZUELA

THE RISING GLOBAL DEATH TOLL  
FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

A CALM CONSIDERATION OF  
THE OVERREACTION EPIDEMIC

Tech companies are pouring billions of dollars into reaching superintelligence as fast as possible. Once we develop machines significantly more competent than us across all domains, we will most likely be at the mercy of the superintelligent machines themselves, as currently no country, no company, and no person knows how to control them. In theory, a superintelligent AI would pursue its own goals, and if those goals were incompatible with sustaining human life, we would be annihilated.

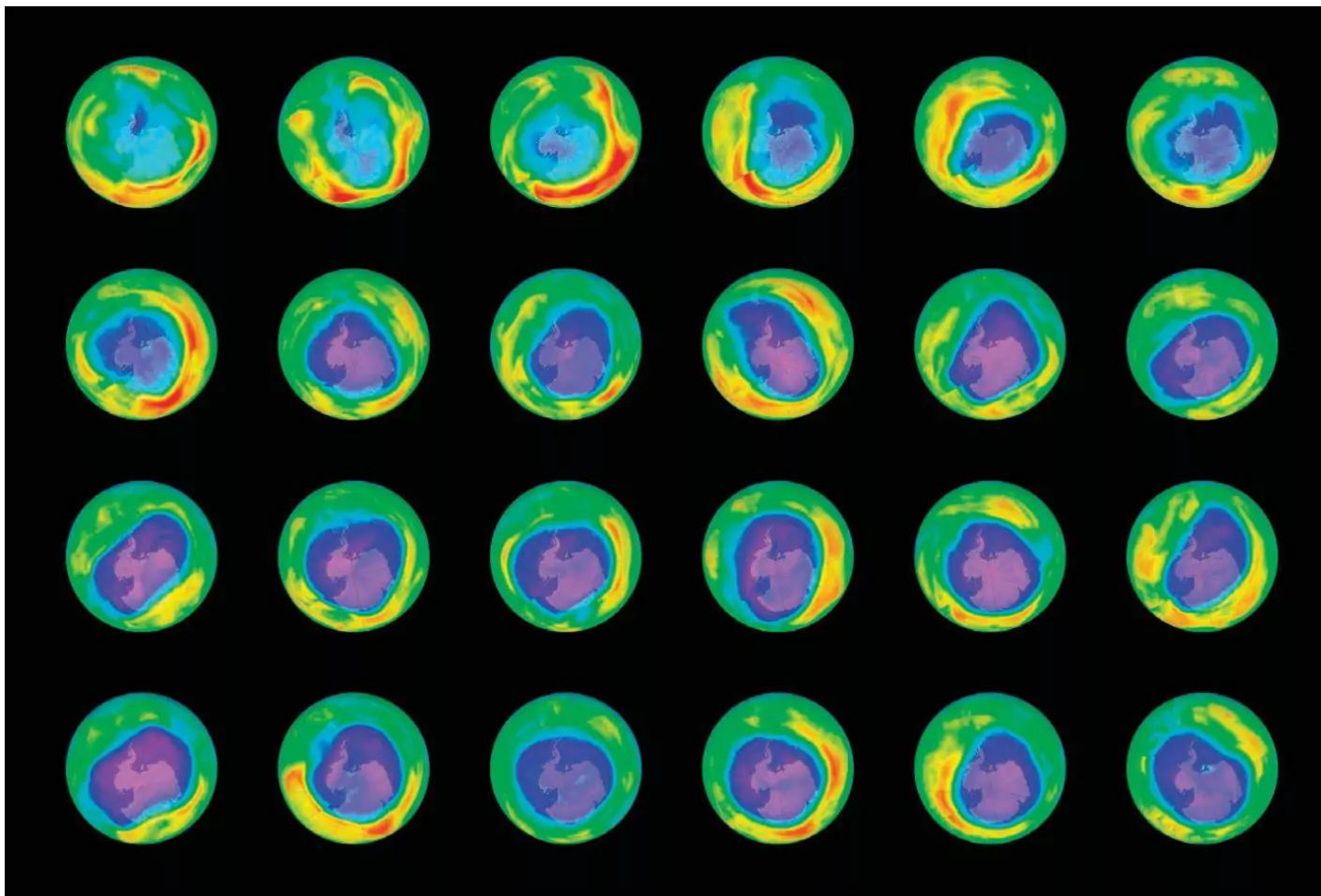
To make matters worse, AI developers do not understand how current powerful AI systems actually work. Unlike bridges or power plants, which are designed to precise human specifications, today's AI systems are "grown" from vast datasets, through processes their own creators cannot interpret. Even Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei admits that we only "understand 3% of how they work."

Despite this danger, superintelligence remains the goal of leading AI companies: OpenAI, Anthropic, Google DeepMind, Meta, xAI, DeepSeek. And given the skyrocketing valuation of these companies, they are not about to stop by themselves.

A coalition of scientific, religious, and political leaders are calling for a global prohibition on developing superintelligence. I was one of the early signatories to the petition, alongside Nobel laureates like Geoffrey Hinton; the world's most cited AI scientist, Yoshua Bengio; former adviser to President Donald Trump Stephen Bannon; former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mike Mullen; and Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex.

Governments worldwide must step in before it is too late. Yet the international situation is not encouraging. We live in an era of rising geopolitical tension. Countries are rushing to invest billions in data centers to power AI at a time when developing and deploying dangerous AI systems remains less regulated than opening a new restaurant or building a house.

In this climate, is an international ban on the development of superintelligence even possible? Yes, because we've achieved such global prohibitions before.



*Satellite images of a growing, then stabilizing ozone hole show an existential threat to humanity stopped when the world quickly came together*

In 1985, the world learned there was a hole in the ozone layer above Antarctica. The culprits were chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), ubiquitous industrial chemicals. Unless something was done, the hole would keep growing, and millions of people would get skin cancer or go blind because of the lack of UV protection.

**INSTEAD, MILLIONS BANDED** together to ban CFCs. Scientists made the threat tangible with colored satellite pictures and clear discussion of the health consequences. NGOs orchestrated boycotts of huge brands and directed concerned citizens to write protest letters. Schools worldwide ran educational programs, and the U.N. endorsed public-awareness campaigns.

In 1987, a mere two years after the ozone hole was made public, every existing country signed the Montreal Protocol. Signed during the Cold War, it demonstrates it's possible to quickly reach decisive international agreement amid geopolitical tensions.

One key factor was that the ozone hole endangered nearly everybody in the world. Superintelligence is a similarly universal threat: loss of control of AI means that even those who develop

it will not be spared from its dangers. The extinction risk has the potential to cut through every division. It can unite people across political parties, religions, nations, and ideologies. Nobody wants their life, their family, their world to be destroyed.

As with the ozone hole, worry must be catalyzed into civic engagement, building a global movement that works with governments to make a prohibition on superintelligence a reality. Unfortunately, most lawmakers simply still do not know about the threat of superintelligence or its urgency, and AI companies are now deploying hundreds of millions of dollars to crush attempts to regulate AI.

The best counterbalance to this gargantuan lobbying effort is for lawmakers to hear from their constituents what they truly think about superintelligence. Very often, lawmakers will find that most of their constituents want them to say no to superintelligence, and yes to a future where humanity survives and thrives.

We know the movement to avoid this fate can be built. The question is: Can we build it fast enough?

*Miotti is the founder and CEO of ControlAI*



## The Risk Report By Ian Bremmer

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

SIGNALS ARE GROWING LOUDER that U.S. President Donald Trump wants Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro out of office. He'd like to accomplish this without starting a war that might not go to plan.

So far, U.S. military action against Venezuela has been limited to strikes against more than a dozen boats the White House insists are carrying narcotics toward the U.S.—drugs that Trump said in a Nov. 2 interview on *60 Minutes* are “destroying families all over our country.” Asked if that meant war, Trump said, “I don’t think so. But they’ve been treating us very badly.” At least 64 people have reportedly been killed by U.S. strikes on boats in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific in recent weeks.

The U.S. has now moved significant military hardware into position in the Caribbean, deploying an aircraft-carrier group and placing significant naval strike capability and U.S. troops just off Venezuela’s coast.

The next U.S. step could be to hit targets inside Venezuela that the Trump Administration insists fuel the drug trade. “I’m not gonna tell you what I’m gonna do with Venezuela, if I was gonna do it or if I wasn’t going to do it,” Trump said in the same *60 Minutes* interview. In addition, U.S. officials reportedly told the *New York Times* last month that “the Trump Administration [had] secretly authorized the CIA to conduct covert action in Venezuela.”

Although Venezuela plays a minor role in the trafficking of drugs that reach the U.S., a hard line against Caracas appeals to Trump’s

MAGA base and Latino backers who think the U.S. is too soft on Latin American leftists like Maduro, who has been in power since the death of Hugo Chávez in 2013 and is accused of stealing the 2024 election.

**Enter the growing U.S. pressure, which appears aimed at persuading Maduro’s inner circle that the cost of continued loyalty to Venezuela’s strongman has become too high, and that he should be removed from within** to avoid



President Nicolás Maduro in Caracas on Oct. 12

military escalation. If these tactics fail, the Trump Administration might target Maduro directly.

A move against Maduro from within Venezuela’s security services would probably lead to U.S.-Venezuelan negotiations that allow a member of Maduro’s team to replace him. A new President from within the armed forces might mend fences with Washington. In a less likely scenario, given deep military mistrust of the opposition, some segments of the military could side with opposition leaders María Corina Machado and Edmundo González or push for fresh elections.

But dealing with Maduro’s men remains the only way to avoid war. The ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela controls all of the country’s powerful institutions, including state-run oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.*, the regime’s cash cow. To cut Maduro loose, the security services would demand guarantees that their safety, and control of the country’s power and access to wealth, would be protected, likely with international mediation that makes Trump Administration commitments more credible.

**YET SENIOR VENEZUELAN** military leaders know that Maduro uses Cuban intelligence to spy on his own generals, and that any move against their President risks execution. To persuade them to move, the U.S. could also directly target senior members of the regime, like Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello—for whom there is an outstanding \$25 million U.S. reward—to press others to act.

Trump knows that failure to remove Maduro could prove humiliating. And if Maduro is removed by direct U.S. military action, the situation inside Venezuela could quickly spiral out of control, forcing the U.S. President into decisions he’d rather avoid. Widespread social unrest could cost Trump the ability to influence who’s in charge in Caracas and, assuming a deep reluctance in the White House to put American troops in harm’s way to keep order, could leave Trump responsible for an ensuing bloodbath as Venezuela’s army and security services fight to contain the risk of civil war.

The U.S. President will make the final call, and while he appears supportive of an escalating pressure campaign, there’s no indication yet that he has settled on a single strategy to get what he wants. □



<  
House Speaker Mike Johnson  
and Agriculture Secretary  
Brooke Rollins on Oct. 31

While the SNAP cutoff reverberated from coast to coast, red states may have felt it more acutely. In the 30 states that Trump carried last year, 25 of them were more reliant on SNAP than the national average. In 29 of the 30 Trump states, the proportion of SNAP recipients with kids passes the national average of 62%. (The total share under 18 nationally? Some 20 million kids.)

**THE SECOND POINT** in this fight is the health care system. In order to pay for tax cuts this summer, Trump used some budget gimmicks: he pulled subsidies for low- and middle-income families—included in a Joe Biden-era pandemic-relief package—to cover the costs of a \$3.4 trillion law that disproportionately helps the richest Americans. Trump says those subsidies for single individuals making more than \$64,000 are no longer needed now that COVID is over. It's just an added bonus that the health program most benefited by the subsidies is known as Obamacare.

If 22 million people losing access to those subsidies was politically palatable on its own, those who have unsubsidized health care are going to get hit too. Congress's scorekeepers estimate 4 million of those subsidized Americans will choose to go without coverage, further pushing up costs for those who stay in the insurance pool. Preventing that exodus comes with a hefty cost: \$350 billion, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

The sting was strong. Insurers upped rates in federal plans by about 30% and state plans by about 17%. While the prices could still drop, insurers work off the assumption that Congress will not get its act together in time for new insurance terms to kick in before the sign-up deadline. And in normal times, insurers like to have rates settled shortly after Labor Day. These, of course, are not normal times.

Trump states again are the biggest losers if things go as planned.



## The D.C. Brief

### By Philip Elliott

SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

AS THE GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN crossed the one-month mark, the country hit two milestones that made it feel all too real for many Americans. On Nov. 1, food-stamp benefits dried up and open enrollment began for those purchasing health insurance for the next year, complete with steep, double-digit rate hikes.

The impact stung. Some found it tougher to put food on the table, although conflicting judicial edicts suggested aid was still flowing, albeit at slower rates. Others wondered if they could still afford insurance. Many found themselves in both groups.

Neither challenge is likely to be resolved soon, and both left red states hurting the most. Players on both sides believed they were “winning” this fight and thus saw no need to reach across the aisle. The shutdown that began Oct. 1 was a major force a month later in off-year elections. “The shutdown was a big factor, negative for the Republicans,” President Donald Trump told Republican Senators at a breakfast on Nov. 5, a day after the GOP failed in races in Virginia, New Jersey, New York City,

and California. “We must get the government back open soon—and, really, immediately.”

Many Republicans in Congress realized their constituents were being hit harder than those of the Democrats on both of these issues. It's a reality that left at least 40 million Americans watching as their meals, medical tests, and savings accounts were being pressure-tested without mercy.

The program commonly known as food stamps, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is used by about 1 in 8 Americans, or 42 million people, and offers a meager lifeline to poor families. The Department of Agriculture shut off SNAP's aid for November—about \$9.2 billion—and economists predict that would have a downstream effect on everything from farmers and grocery stores to truck drivers and gas stations.

**‘The shutdown was a big factor.’**

—PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP,  
ON REPUBLICAN ELECTION LOSSES

Nationally, the Urban Institute's state-by-state modeling estimates there will be a 38% decrease in subsidized health care coverage. But in Georgia—where Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene has been sounding the alarm from inside the MAGA revival tent—that number hits 53%. In Louisiana, the dip reaches 61%. And in Texas, a staggering 60% of Lone Star State residents enrolled in a subsidized health plan will be cut out.

What that will look like to red-state lawmakers is a spike in uninsured constituents. In Mississippi, the number of folks choosing to drop coverage is projected to soar 65%, per the Urban Institute's numbers. Half of South Carolina subsidized families would drop insurance if the help stays dead. In Tennessee, the numbers would be a sizable 41%. In Texas, 39%. In West Virginia, 35% of subsidized Americans would do without if the aid goes away. This is a slap to the core of the MAGA base.

**All of these red-state constituents seeing red—both in rage and in their bank statements—makes clear why even some conservative warriors were loudly complaining about the shutdown from the start.** And the results from the Nov. 4 elections suggested voters were not punishing Democrats for the standoff, even as it was reaching the longest in U.S. history.

The same is true for a stand-alone extension of the Obamacare subsidies. The day after the Blue Wave, Senate Republicans hinted to colleagues that those could be in the mix as a stand-alone measure. But getting their colleagues in the House and, in particular, the President, to go along looked like a tall order.

There remained a profound disconnect between lawmakers who wanted to win a political brawl and families who just wanted the government to hold up its end of the bargain. Even if a compromise materialized, the damage, to both, had already been done.



## Health Matters

### By Simmone Shah

REPORTER

GLOBAL FAILURE TO ADAPT TO climate change is taking a toll on people's lives and is responsible for millions of deaths every year, according to a new report from the *Lancet*.

"This year's health stocktake paints a bleak and undeniable picture of the devastating health harms reaching all corners of the world—with record-breaking threats to health from heat, extreme weather events, and wildfire smoke killing millions," declared the Countdown on Health and Climate Change report, led by University College London and produced in collaboration with the World Health Organization.

Twelve of the report's 20 indicators for the health risks and impacts of climate change in the report set new records, including extreme precipitation events and food insecurity from climate extremes.

**The report found the number of heat-related deaths has surged 63% since the 1990s, averaging 546,000 a year.** In 2024, the hottest year on record, the average person was exposed to a record 16 additional health-threatening hot days. Air pollution from wildfire smoke was linked to a record 154,000 deaths last year.

Delays in the adoption of clean energy are also taking a toll on our health. Each year, 2.5 million deaths are attributable to the air pollution that comes from continued burning of fossil fuels. Many of these deaths could be prevented by the transition to clean energy—air pollution resulting from the household use of dirty fuels and

technologies across 65 countries resulted in 2.3 million deaths in 2022, according to the report. Energy-related emissions have reached new highs, the report says, with the world's largest fossil-fuel giants having increased their projected production to a scale three times greater than a livable planet can support. According to the Paris Agreement, global emissions must peak before this year at the latest and decline 43% by 2030 in order to limit global warming to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels.

The report calls on leaders to focus on green solutions that can also improve health outcomes. The need to do so is particularly urgent, it notes, given a "political shift towards reduced foreign aid support from some of

the world's wealthiest countries." Despite rollbacks on climate action in the U.S., many governments and communities are taking action—and reaping the health benefits that come along with it. According to the most recent data the study analyzed, an increased shift away from coal, particularly in wealthy countries, prevented an estimated 160,000 premature deaths annually from 2010 to 2022. "Climate change action remains one of the greatest health opportunities of the 21st century," said Tafadzwa Mabhaudhi, director of the Lancet Countdown Africa Centre, "also driving development, spurring innovation, creating jobs, and reducing energy poverty."

**'Destruction to lives and livelihoods will continue.'**

—MARINA ROMANELLO,  
LANCET COUNTDOWN



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SOCIETY

# Our overreaction epidemic

BY MARC BRACKETT

REACTING HAS BECOME OUR DEFAULT—WE POUNCE, panic, and amplify distress rather than pause and regulate. A teenager posts a selfie and spirals when it doesn't get enough likes; a parent reads a critical email from a colleague and assumes their career is at risk; a friend scrolls social media and erupts over a post that wasn't even meant for them.

These quick escalations reflect what I have termed an overreaction epidemic: small triggers snowball into outsize emotional responses. Perhaps predictably, the response has been extreme. After a piece I wrote about the topic ran on TIME's website, thousands of people messaged me and commented at me on social media. Many accused me of being tone-deaf. Some argued I was asking people to "calm down" while fascism rises. "Imagine the layers of privilege it takes to gaslight people into thinking they are overreacting," stated one critic.

Others have pushed back in the opposite direction, insisting our constant state of panic is unsustainable. As one person put it, "You can't fight for what's right if you're so emotionally decimated that you're living your day-to-day in fight-or-flight mode." Another countered: "We are not overreacting—we're underreacting."

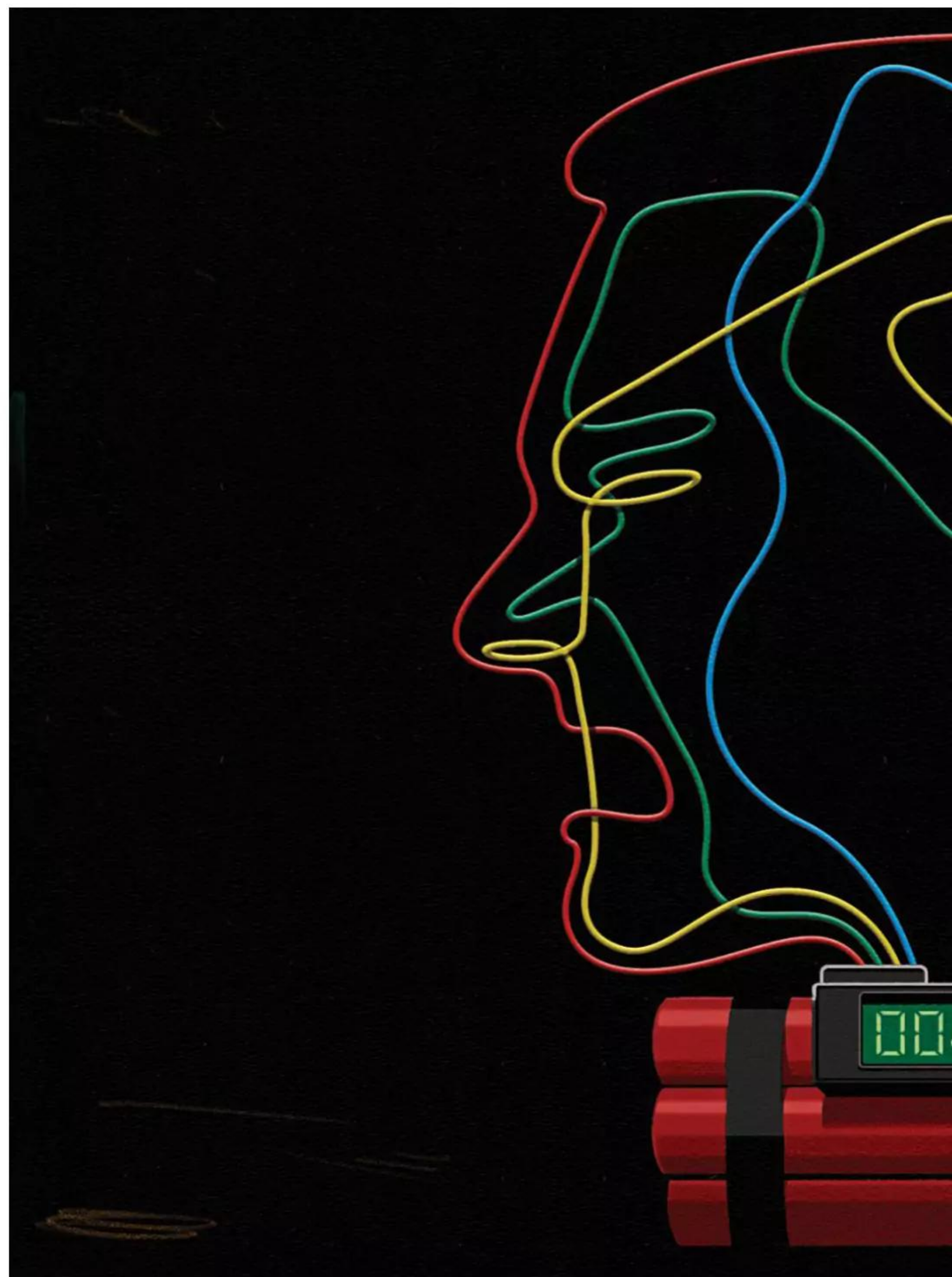
All of these perspectives hold truth. And their passion highlights why we need a deeper, clearer conversation about what emotion regulation is—and just as important, what it isn't. Let's be clear: anger, fear, and grief are not weaknesses. They're evidence of caring. But the solution to the overreaction epidemic is emotion regulation—which will be vitally important to address our global challenges ahead.

**EMOTION REGULATION IS** a set of intentional, learned skills for managing feelings wisely. At its core, it's about choosing responses that reflect our goals and values. This can include calming ourselves down before a meeting, reframing a negative thought, or expressing frustration constructively with a loved one. But no matter the emotion, emotional regulation keeps us in the driver's seat.

Clearly, the word *overreaction* can be a lightning rod. For many, it signals dismissal, as if I were saying "Your fear is invalid" or "Your outrage is excessive." That is not my message. Emotions are not the problem. Fear, anger, grief—all of these are human, appropriate responses to real crises.

The problem is what happens when our emotions run unchecked. We lash out at loved ones, doomscroll until 2 a.m., or paralyze ourselves with despair. Over time, our nervous systems stay locked in fight-or-flight. We burn out before we can meaningfully act.

This is why emotion regulation so often gets misunderstood. Many people hear "regulate" and think "suppress."

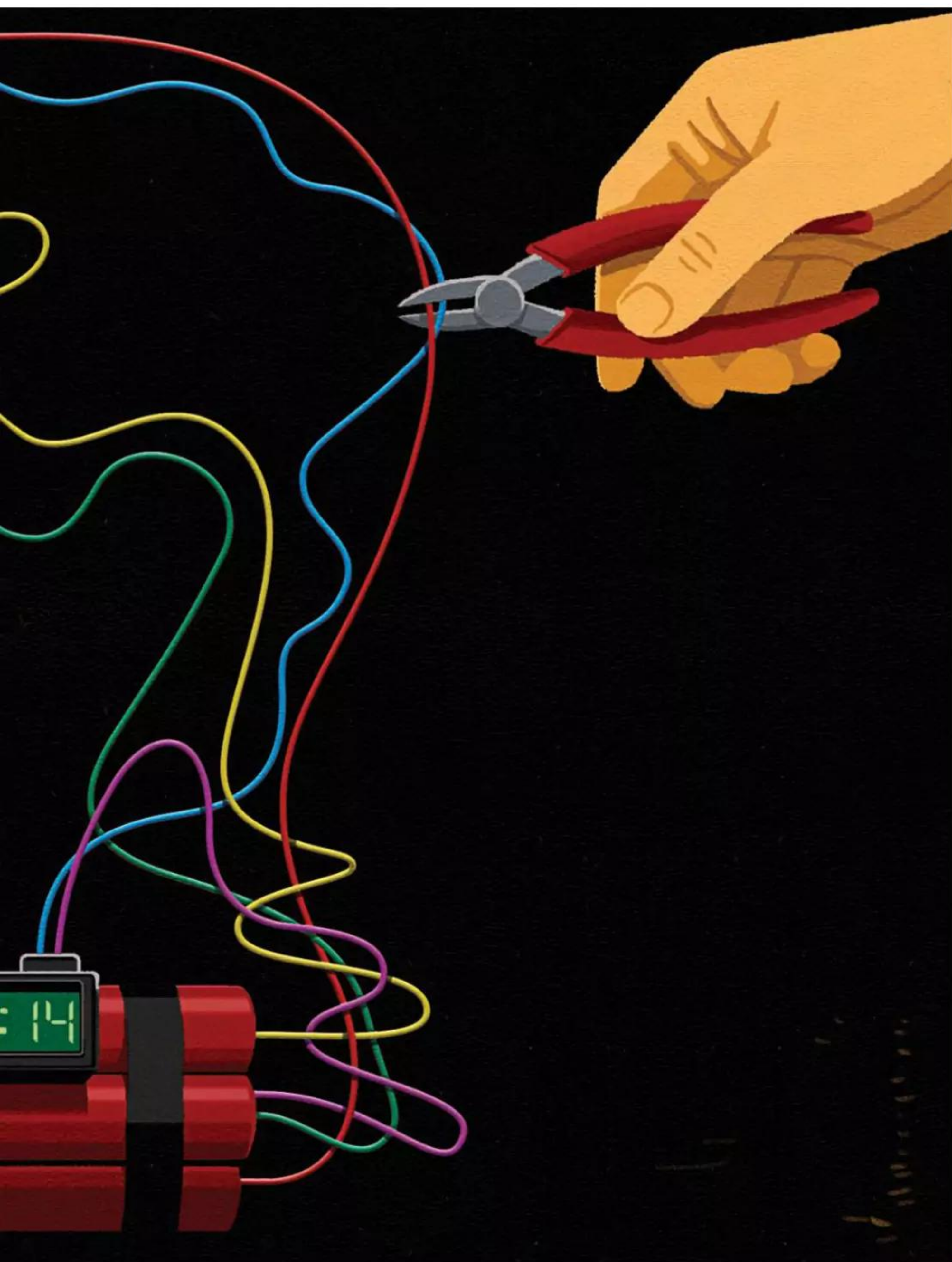


They imagine some kind of emotion police telling us what we may and may not feel or should and should not do. But that's not it. Emotion regulation is about choice. It's about deciding how to use our emotions wisely so they fuel action rather than hijack it.

Emotion regulation should never mean silencing anger. Anger is not a problem to be eliminated—it is crucial data that tells us we believe something unfair has happened. Outrage tells us our moral code is being violated. These are not feelings to be ignored. They are signals.

The challenge is that dysregulated anger can turn destructive—both personally and collectively. I've spent decades studying and teaching emotion regulation, and I've learned that anger without direction is like a wildfire. It burns hot and fast, then leaves nothing but ashes. With emotion regulation, that same anger becomes a steady flame—a force that warms, guides, and endures.

Civil rights leaders didn't succeed because they lacked rage; they succeeded because they learned to channel it without being consumed. That's the difference between fury that scorches



everything in sight and anger that fuels justice.

Another misconception is that regulation makes you soft—that if you pause before reacting, you’ve lost your edge. Some have implied that my call for regulation is a call to “calm down” in the face of injustice, a recipe for complacency. But regulation isn’t about compliance. It’s about power.

Consider this: snapping at a friend or colleague because you’re overwhelmed may feel cathartic in the moment, but it can erode trust. Pausing long enough to express anger with clarity instead of rage-blindness? That’s not weakness. That’s strength.

Researchers have studied the effects of emotion regulation for decades. People who regulate effectively are more likely to think clearly about solutions and to sustain the relationships that make collective action possible. Far from being pushovers, they are more likely to be effective in standing up, speaking out, and persisting.

So what does healthy regulation actually look like? It’s not about “just breathe and ignore it.” It’s a set of concrete, science-based skills:

**Civil rights leaders succeeded because they learned to channel rage**

*Name it.* Accurately labeling emotions—fear, anger, despair—helps us target our responses. Anger may fuel protest. Grief may lead us to seek solidarity.

*Shift, don’t suppress.* Reframing how we see a situation can turn “This is hopeless” into “This is a call to organize.”

*Anchor before acting.* A pause for breath isn’t avoidance. It’s ensuring your nervous system is steady enough to act with clarity rather than rashness.

*Choose renewal.* Rest, joy, and connection are not escapism. They are how we resist burnout so we can keep showing up tomorrow, next year, and for the long haul.

Without these skills, outrage can spiral into paralysis or misplaced aggression. With them, outrage becomes fuel for sustained, wise action.

**AND IMPORTANTLY, WE** almost never regulate alone. Our nervous systems are permeable. We catch emotions from each other. We shape one another’s states all day long. That process is called co-regulation. Think of the teacher who calms a nervous child before a test, the colleague who steadies a panicked co-worker during a crisis, or the friend who listens with empathy instead of judgment. These small acts are not small. They are the fabric of resilience.

Of course, co-regulation can also go wrong. While “co-” suggests helping, it simply means we can influence one another for better or worse. That’s why dismissing, shaming, or escalating someone else’s feelings is also a form of co-regulation, just the unhealthy kind. But when we co-regulate with warmth, empathy, and respect, we literally lend our stability to one another.

That’s why movements endure only when people create microclimates of safety and trust. Outrage may spark action, but it cannot sustain it; only co-regulated communities can. Regulation never means silencing marginalized voices, excusing injustice, or encouraging apathy. Regulation is not resignation. It’s what allows us to keep going when the fight is long.

We need not only personal skills but also cultural and structural supports—schools that teach emotional intelligence, workplaces that value mental health, and media platforms that stop monetizing outrage.

We live in terrifying times. Authoritarianism is on the rise. Rights are being eroded. Climate disasters grow more frequent. No one is suggesting we look away. But let’s be honest: living in constant panic will not save us.

Emotion regulation is how we turn fear into courage, outrage into justice, and grief into solidarity. It doesn’t tell us to ignore crises. It equips us to face them without losing ourselves—or one another—in the process. So the next time you feel like freaking out, don’t silence the feeling. Name it. Anchor it. Share it with someone who can co-regulate with you. Then use it. Because the world doesn’t need less passion. It needs passion that lasts.

*Brackett, the author of Dealing With Feeling, is the founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and a professor in Yale’s Child Study Center*

## POLITICS

## Zohran Mamdani is what big cities look like

BY SADIQ KHAN

A COUPLE OF WEEKS BEFORE HIS ELECTION VICTORY, Zohran Mamdani stood in front of a mosque in the Bronx. There, he gave the most personal speech of his campaign—a speech that sounded like it had been months, perhaps years, in the making. Just days before, a New York radio host had suggested Zohran would be “cheering” if another 9/11 happened on his watch. It was the high-water mark of a rising tide of anti-Muslim hatred that he had faced since the moment he declared his candidacy last year.

Zohran’s response was defiant. He spoke about his pride in his faith. He talked about the climate of fear which, like many other Muslim New Yorkers, he had faced for much of his life. The speech took courage. He could have chosen to stay quiet and spend the final fortnight of the campaign focused on his core messages. Sometimes, though, we must stand up and say enough is enough.

Sadly, this is an experience I know all too well. I’ve never defined myself as a Muslim politician, but rather as a politician who happens to be a Muslim. My decision to run for mayor of London was motivated by one thing alone: my determination to improve the lives of people in my city. During my first mayoral election campaign, I promised to be a mayor for all Londoners. Yet time and again, rival candidates sought to define me solely by my faith.

These kinds of attacks have persisted. Rather than opposing my decisions as those of a politician they disagree with, a small but vocal minority have tried to deride them as those of a Muslim man. Just last month, the President of the United States claimed in his address to the U.N. General Assembly that I was trying to introduce Shari’a law in London! These outlandish claims may find an audience somewhere, but it’s clear that in places like London and New York City, this form of toxic politics does not work. The fact that both cities will now have mayors who are Muslim is extraordinary, but—in two of the most diverse cities on earth—it’s a bit beside the point. We did not win because of our faith. We won because we addressed voters’ concerns, rather than playing on them.

**IN RECENT YEARS,** we’ve heard a growing chorus on both sides of the Atlantic attacking cities for their liberal values. Painting a picture of a lawless dystopia, they advocate the same old authoritarian solutions—from deporting hundreds of thousands of migrants by removing their right to remain, to deploying the National Guard to clamp down on dissent. Ask most Londoners or New Yorkers, though, and

you’ll find that this narrative falls on deaf ears.

They don’t care about the place your family is originally from or the God you worship. They are proud of the diversity of their city and don’t choose their politicians by creed, color, or culture. They choose them because they want bold, ambitious policies commensurate with the size and scale of the challenges their cities are facing. They want greener cities; they want fairer societies; they want help with the cost-of-living crisis; they want a prosperous economy where growth leaves no one behind.

Mayor-elect Mamdani and I might not agree on everything. The chal-

lenges our cities face are not identical. Policy differences aside, though, it’s clear that we are united by something far more fundamental: our belief in the power of politics to change people’s lives for the better.

For decades, doubters have predicted the decline of London and New York. But each time we face a crisis of confidence, we’ve emerged stronger. That’s not just

because of the City or Wall Street, the West End or Broadway, the green lawns of Wimbledon or the bright blue acrylic of Flushing Meadows. It’s because ours are cities where the dream of social mobility is still alive.

Today, an affordability crisis means that dream is under threat. But Mamdani’s election shows that New Yorkers—like Londoners—know that the answer is not to renounce the values that define us. Instead, we must defend them, with policies that protect the promise of our cities: that no matter who you are or where you’re from, you can achieve anything. As some seek to turn back the clock on progress, we are standing firm. In our cities, fear and division won’t get you far. Hope and unity will always win.

*Khan is mayor of London*



Mamdani on election night in New York City

**We did not win because of our faith. We won because we addressed voters’ concerns**

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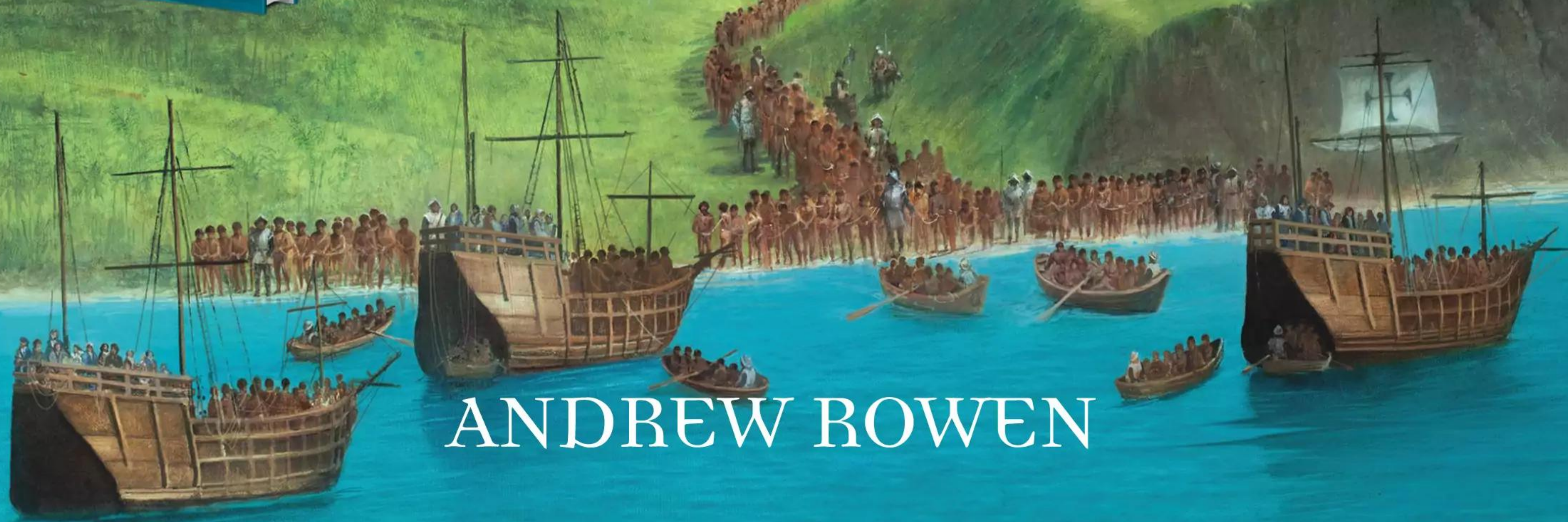
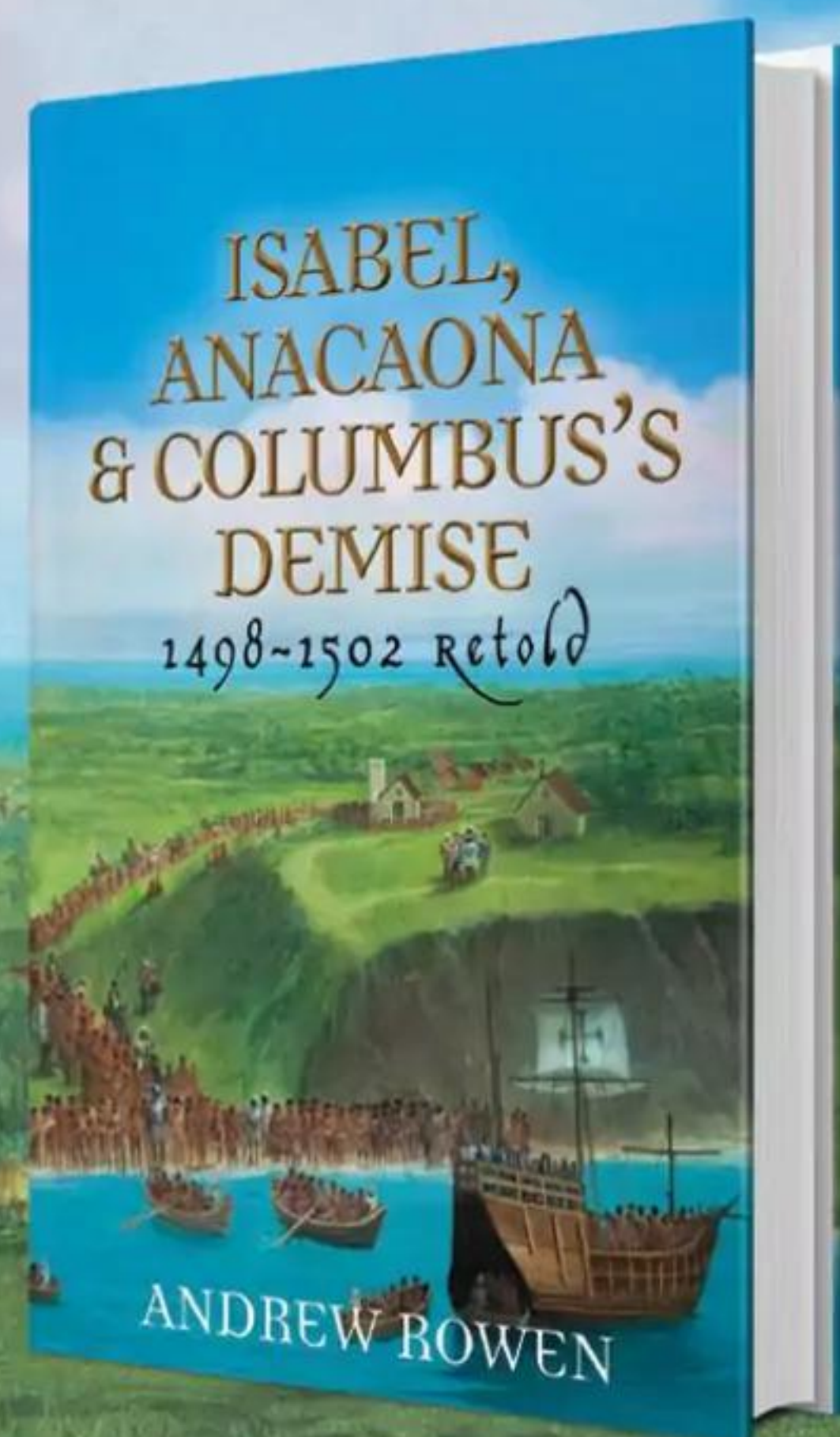
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SCIENCE

# Mind Meld

THE BRAIN-COMPUTER INTERFACE IS REAL.  
IT'S CHANGING LIVES—AND COULD SOON  
CHANGE THE WORLD **BY JEFFREY KLUGER**

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
JULIEN PEBREL  
FOR TIME

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*Alice Charton,  
87, is able to read  
again, thanks to an  
implanted computer  
chip that restored  
part of her sight*

## It's been a long time since Alice Charton got a good look at a human face.

There are plenty of people moving through her world, of course—her husband, her friends, her doctors, her neighbors—but judging just by what she can see, she'd have to take it as an article of faith that any one person was there at all. It was five years ago that the 87-year-old retired schoolteacher, living in a suburb of Paris, first noticed her eyesight failing, with a point in the middle of her field of vision going hazy, muddy, and dim. Soon that point grew into a spot, and the spot into a blotch—until it became impossible for her to recognize people, read a book, or navigate unfamiliar places on the streets.

The cause of the problem was age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a disease that afflicts some 200 million people worldwide and involves a breakdown of the cells in the retina, particularly in the area known as the macula, which is responsible for central vision. AMD does not typically cause blindness, but vision can be severely impaired. As for a cure for AMD? Nonexistent.

“I always worked with children, teaching them how to read,” says Charton. “So it was especially devastating for me not to be able to read.”

But three years ago, everything changed. After battling two years of slowly deteriorating vision, Charton was able to claw back a small portion of her lost world. Today, while she still can't see faces or walk the streets unassisted, she does read—not very much; just an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon. But restoring even that small portion of her lost sight was transformative. “This brought me hope,” she says. “It literally changed my life.”

The breakthrough came about thanks to the work of Science Corp., a four-year-old neuroscience company based in San Francisco and led by biomedical engineer Max Hodak.

In an experimental procedure dubbed Prima, which the company has now performed on a few dozen people, surgeons working with the company implant a 2-mm-by-2-mm computer chip with 400 hexagonal electrodes directly on the spot in the retina that the AMD has destroyed. Patients like Charton then put on a pair of bulky, black plastic glasses equipped with a tiny camera that looks out on the world and beams what it sees in an infrared impulse directly to the chip. The system uses the infrared wavelength—invisible to the naked eye—as opposed to visible light to prevent the signals from interfering with the residual peripheral vision the subjects still have. From the chip, the signal is transmitted to the optic nerve and then to the brain, restoring something resembling normal vision.

**THE CHIP THAT WORKS** this optical magic is not much to see. Under a powerful microscope attached to a computer at the Science headquarters, it resembles an oversize circuit board. To the naked eye, it is a tiny flake of nothing, but a flake of nothing that brings sight—imperfect, maybe, but sight all the same—to the nearly blind.

“There is an eye chart that [healthy] people are supposed to be able to read at a distance of 4 meters; even at 1 meter, untreated patients can barely read the biggest letters on the top line, using their peripheral vision,” says Hodak. “In a clinical trial of Prima, patients were able to read down to the fifth line on the eye chart.”

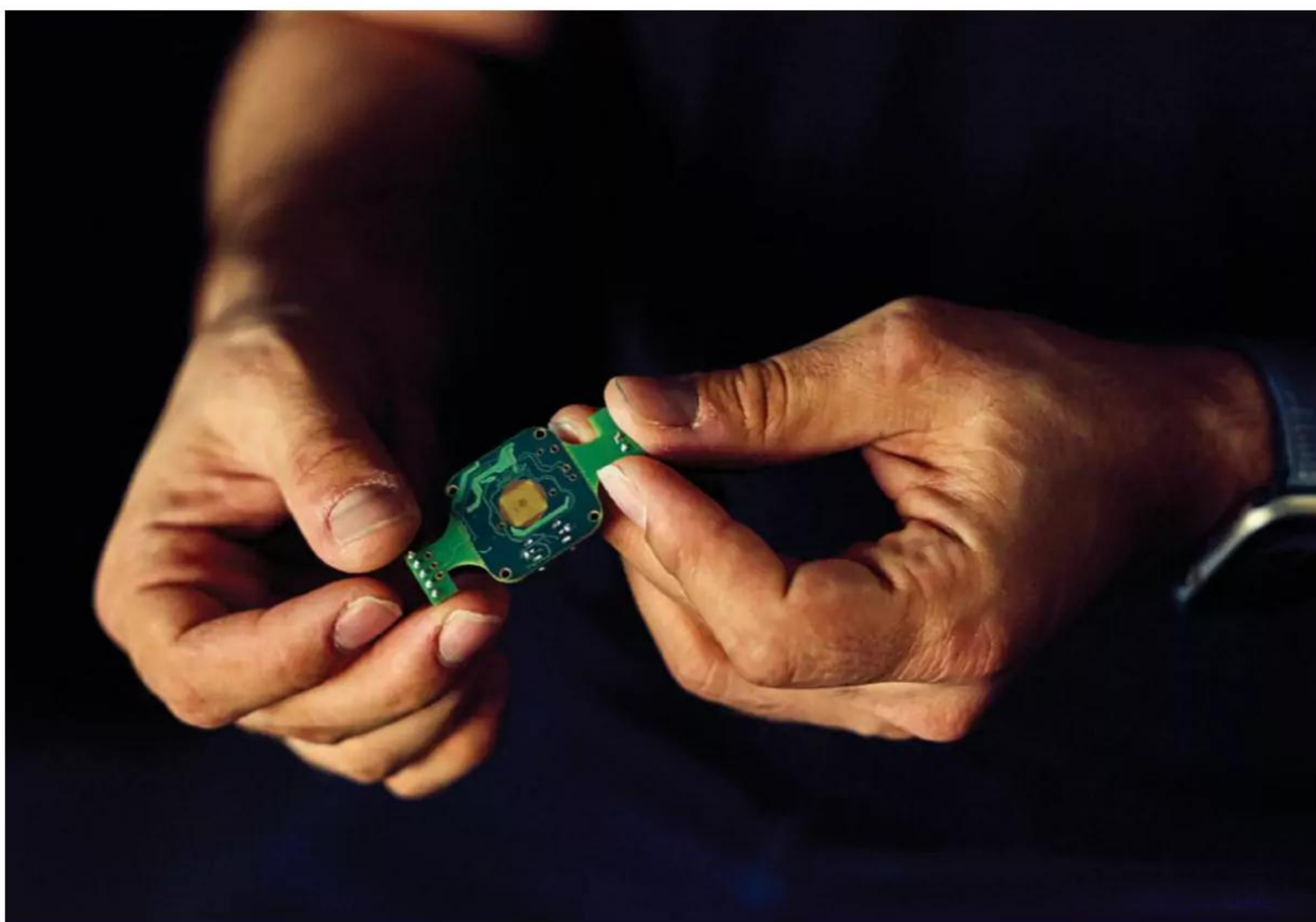
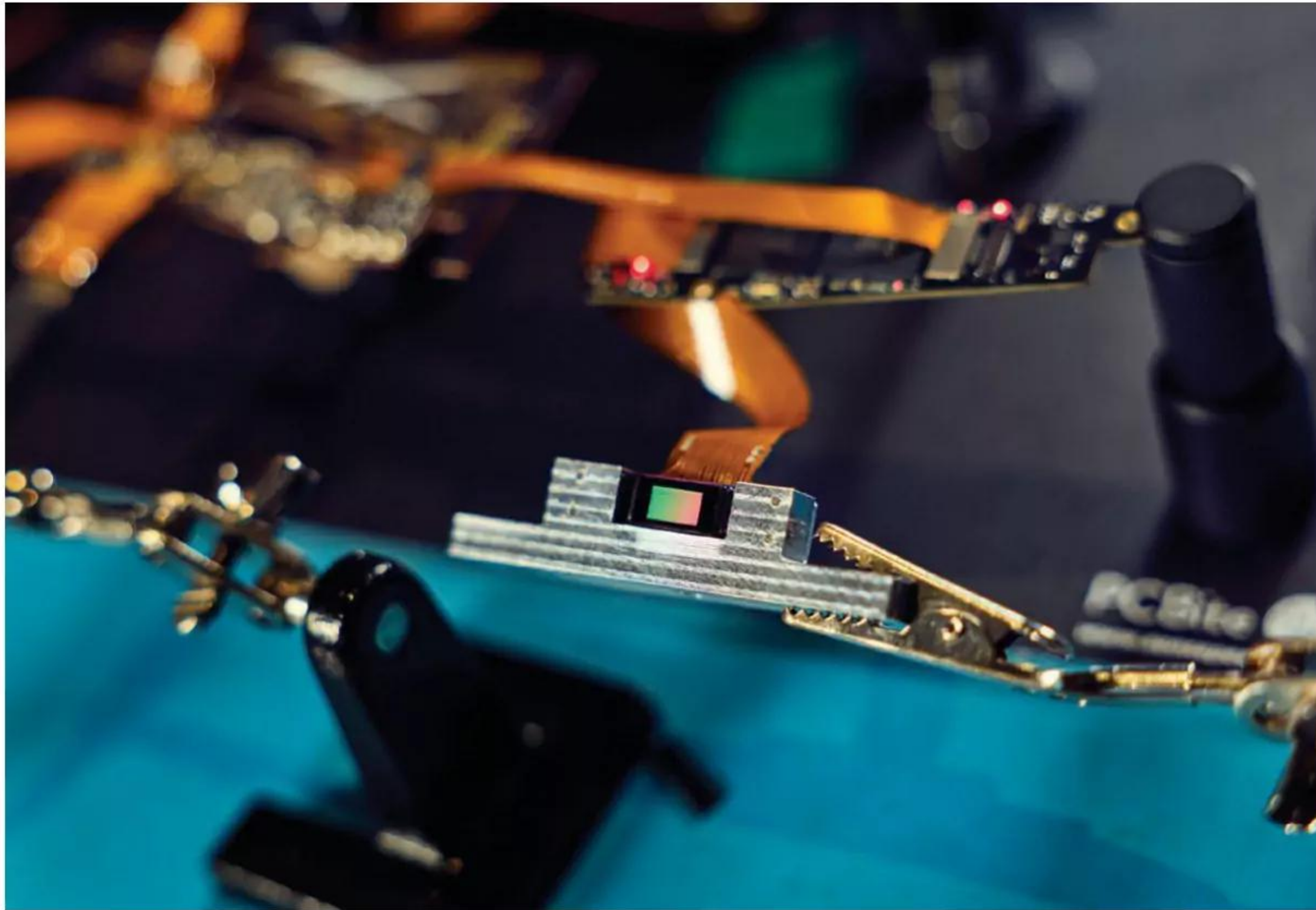
That trial, just published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, involved 38 patients, including Charton, recruited from across Europe, all of whom underwent the Prima procedure. Postsurgery, nearly 80% of them improved their performance on the eye chart



by 20 letters, and 84% of them could read letters, numbers, and words at home.

“AMD patients in our clinical trial were able to read and write again, not just letter by letter but word by word,” said Daniel Palanker, professor of ophthalmology and electrical engineering at Stanford University, in a statement that accompanied the release of the journal study. Palanker conceived of the Prima system in 2004, and has recently been working closely with Hodak and the Science team, serving as a part-time consultant on the Prima project. “The next-generation implant should have pixels that are five times smaller and more of them, going from about 400 in the current implant to 10,000. This should allow for visual acuity of 20/80, and with the help of the camera’s zoom function could even reach the equivalent of 20/20 resolution.”

Science Corp. is not stopping there. The company’s researchers are also



developing technology that involves implanting a chip directly on the brain, which could allow people who are paralyzed by a stroke, an accident, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) to operate a computer, a smartphone, a wheelchair, or even lights and appliances, with their thoughts alone. For those whose condition has robbed them of speech, the chip could one day make it possible to translate thoughts into words and sentences and paragraphs on a screen. The technology could even translate those thoughts into spoken, computer-generated words—in the person's own voice, if video or other recordings of them speaking before their illness were available, which the AI loaded into the computer could copy.

In this system, the implanted computer chip would not just sit on the brain, but become part of the brain. Using a technology Hodak calls the bio-hybrid model, the chip would be seeded

with stem cells which would grow into the brain tissue, forging useful connections with neurons that govern thought, speech, creativity, and more.

“You can imagine making a chip with 100,000 electrodes that, when this grows into the brain, you could get a billion synapses,” Hodak says. “Right now you can get information into the brain very easily. Getting information out of the brain is limited. Imagine if you could get imagery or audio or imagination or memories out of the brain.” He says James Cameron’s *Avatar* movies are “a pretty good reference” for how bio-hybrid interfaces work. Paralyzed people would not, of course, inhabit new

bodies as they do in the films, but they would gain some control over their worlds as if they were up and about.

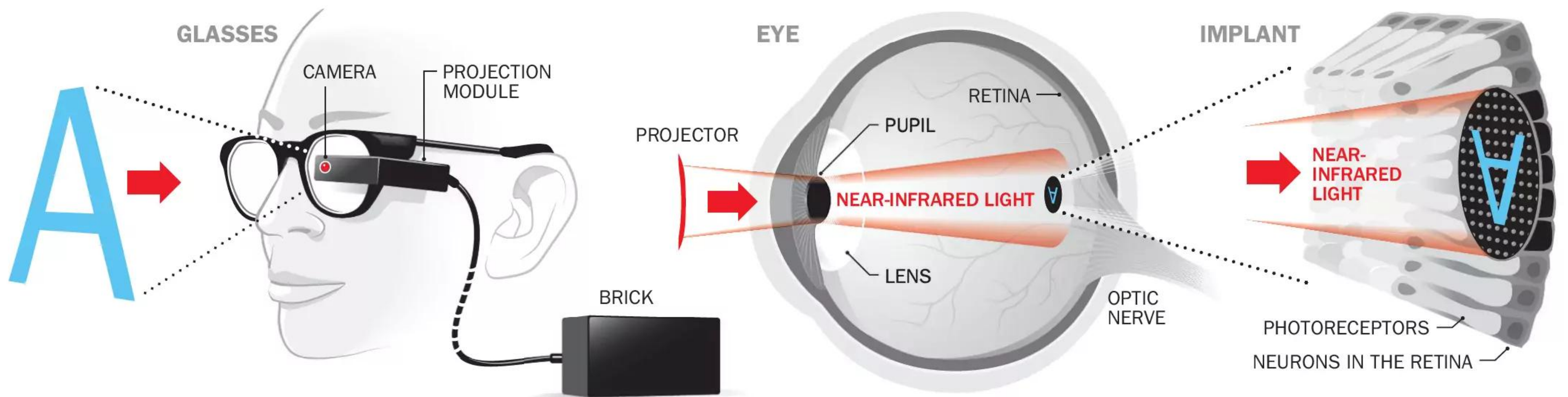
Science Corp. is not remotely alone in pursuing this union of the computer and the brain—this wedding of cold silicon and warm carbon. According to the World Economic Forum, there are up to 680 companies worldwide at least dabbling in brain-computer interface (BCI) technology, making for a sector valued at \$1.74 billion in 2022, and expected to grow to \$6.2 billion by 2030. BCI today is what the personal computer was in the early 1980s—an infant technology that could grow in globe-shaking ways, with some of the companies talking about not just treating patients with ALS or other forms of paralysis, but also using the technology with firefighters, the military, and other first responders, speeding reaction times and communication. BCI could even be used by the general public—or at least that part of the general public that wants to have mind-to-mind access to AI systems.

“People with brain implants will be able to interact with AI in ways that people without brain implants do not,” says Matt Angle, CEO and founder of the Austin-based BCI company Paradromics. “That is in some sense a superpower.”

The new science is causing not just a technological sensation, but also a cultural one, twanging a live wire in the popular mind. No sooner were the COVID vaccines released in 2020 than unfounded rumors swirled that they contained microchips that would be injected in the body—giving the government access to your thoughts. No sooner did reports go around that the U.S. and China were installing dashboard cameras and other equipment to detect signs of fatigue in long-haul truckers than the internet spun that up into stories about both countries using hardware that could read the drivers’ minds. It’s not for nothing that Apple TV’s *Severance*—the addictively twisty thriller about office workers who undergo microchip brain surgery to separate their work minds from their home minds—earned a staggering 27 Emmy nominations at the 2025 awards. The public reaction to developments in the

▲  
*Clockwise from left: Hodak in the lab; a Prima component that will fit into the glasses’ temple bar; a circuit board that receives signals from a brain chip*

## How the retinal chip works



**A patient viewing the letter A with the Prima system**

**1** Special glasses capture video, and a **2-lb. plastic brick** processes the image and sends it back to a **projector** on the glasses

**2** The **projector** transmits **near-infrared light patterns** through the eye onto a subretinal photovoltaic **implant**

**3** The **implant** stimulates **neurons** to send signals through the **optic nerve** to the brain. The patient sees the image right side up

BCI field is all of a piece with this—equal parts healthy fascination and troubling misinformation.

“Over the last 20 years, every time there was an advance in this technology, the principal investigators would get calls saying that someone—the government, their wives—had put a chip in them,” says Florian Solzbacher, the co-founder and chief science officer of Utah-based Blackrock Neurotech, a BCI company. “There’s a lack of training in critical thinking.” BCI, for better or worse, is here. The job now is for scientists to figure out how to use it—and for laypeople to figure out what to make of it.

**THE BEST KNOWN** of the BCI companies—thanks to the ubiquitous presence and deep pockets of its founder, Elon Musk—is Neuralink, based in Fremont, Calif. Founded in 2016, the company has so far placed its implants in the brains of 12 people, hoping to allow them to operate a computer or smartphone with their thoughts. Neuralink is currently running a clinical program dubbed Prime, which is seeking to enroll patients 22 years old and up, who have quadriplegia and are willing to have a 1,024-electrode chip, about the size of a quarter, implanted for a study expected to last six years.

In January 2024, the company implanted its first chip, into the brain of Noland Arbaugh, a 29-year-old Yuma, Ariz., quadriplegia patient who lost movement below the shoulders in

a diving accident. The implant allows him to control a cursor on a screen with only his thoughts—playing video games, surfing the web, and communicating with friends. Hodak was part of this groundbreaking work, as one of Neuralink’s founders and its president before leaving to launch Science.

There is, too, San Francisco-based Echo Technologies, led by University of California, San Francisco, neurosurgeon Dr. Edward Chang. In 2021, Chang and his colleagues published a paper in the *New England Journal of Medicine* reporting that they had developed a so-called neuroprosthesis allowing a paralyzed man who could not speak to generate words on a computer screen with nothing but his thoughts. In 2023, as reported in *Nature*, they improved the system to include computer voice synthesis along with the text, as well as a facial avatar that can display emotions and expressions as it speaks, reflecting the subject’s words. In 2024, as reported in *Nature Biomedical Engineering*, Echo upgraded the hardware to allow another patient, who was bilingual, to toggle between English and Spanish.

“Our system is fully wireless,” says Chang. “The onscreen avatar is designed to resemble the person who’s doing the speaking. But in reality it could be anything. It could even be an emoji if that’s what the person wanted.”

With the rise of AI in information processing it’s no surprise that it’s at play here too. BCI speech systems rely on so-called large language models

that interpret speech and predict the next word or words—much as word-processing programs will suggest the word *juice* if you type out *orange*, or *States* if you type *United*.

“The things we’re decoding are not just single words but the probability of any single word,” says Chang. “We’ve been working to learn how the brain processes words, how the electrical activity of the brain gives rise to consonants and vowels, how they give rise to the planning of words.”

The system also recognizes the parts of the brain that control the lips, jaw, tongue, and larynx. By thinking about speaking, even people who have lost the ability activate these brain centers in ways that would form any given word. Think about saying *ball* and your brain would send a signal for you to press your lips together to pronounce the *b* and move your tongue to the back of your front teeth to pronounce the *l*. The computer recognizes these signals and helps convert them to words.

Elsewhere, Blackrock Neurotech has implanted over 50 people with brain chips, and boasts of amassing thousands of patient-days without adverse events. The most common of these events are infection of brain tissue at the site of the implant; malfunction of the implant, causing it to send spurious signals that would damage the brain; or fibrous encapsulation of the chip, as tissue grows around it, causing it to fail. With these risks avoided, Blackrock focuses on using its system

to allow patients to operate computers and, as with Echo, speak via an on-screen avatar. Solzbacher describes one ALS patient whose disease had progressed to what is known as locked-in syndrome, in which the mind remains alert but with no way to communicate with the outside world. That patient underwent surgery to have a chip implanted and a computer voice created.

“He was able to talk with his 3-year-old daughter,” says Solzbacher. “That was the first time that happened in his daughter’s life and it’s quite powerful, actually.”

The matter of how a locked-in patient gives consent to the surgery is a tricky one. Typically, says Solzbacher, consent is given earlier in the course of the disease, before the subject slips into a completely locked-in state. Relatives may also be in possession of advance declarations the patient made while still able to communicate.

Blackrock has been at this work for a while. In 2014 it ran a clinical trial in which a subject named Ian Burkhart, who was paralyzed from the elbows down at age 19 when he was swimming off the Outer Banks of North Carolina and dived into a wave that pushed him into a sandbar, was implanted with a brain chip and then outfitted with electrodes on the skin of his forearm, hand, and elsewhere. Merely by thinking of moving his extremities he could activate the electrodes, which would cause the arm or hand to move as commanded, allowing him to grasp and hold objects and even play *Guitar Hero*. Burkhart felt a sense of triumph—and even vindication—at the results.

“For quite a few years I heard doctors saying, ‘Well, you’re never going to be able to move this, move that, do this, do that,’” he says. “And now I was able to.”

Brain-computer interface technology sometimes doesn’t even require scientists to bother the brain at all. Even minimal, lightly invasive brain surgery is still, well, brain surgery, and at New York City–based Synchron Inc. they’re able to avoid it. Instead, they thread a probe carrying a chip through the radial artery in the forearm or the femoral artery in the thigh up to the brain and deposit the chip in the main vein between the brain’s two

motor cortexes. From there, says Kurt Haggstrom, Synchron’s chief commercial officer, “you can actually listen to the brain and understand it, without ever having to touch the brain itself.”

**THE FIRST BCI SURGERY** occurred in 1998, when neurologist Philip Kennedy implanted a chip in the brain of a man who suffered from locked-in syndrome caused by a brain-stem stroke. After intensive practice, the patient was able to move a cursor on a screen—a significant achievement, but a painstaking one. The limitations in the results were partly the result of the limitations of the chip, which was a four-channel model that was able to carry only minimal information.

“It was a very primitive device,” says Jamie Brannigan, a resident neurologist at Mount Sinai in New York and a BCI expert. “But it was the first example of

**‘You can actually listen to the brain and understand it.’**

—KURT HAGGSTROM

an in-human brain-computer interface.”

Since then, a more powerful chip, the Utah array, has become the default device for the BCI field. The chip measures 4 mm by 4 mm and includes 100 needlelike probes, each measuring 1.5 mm, which penetrate brain tissue. It was first implanted in a human being in 2004, and has been the go-to chip for most BCI work since.

“The Utah array has a proven track record of safety, reliability, and longevity,” says Solzbacher.

Blackrock’s 50 implant surgeries certainly suggest that there’s evidence behind what it claims it can do with the chip, but the company’s competitors aren’t so certain. For starters, even at 4 mm by 4 mm, the Utah array would be too big and clumsy a hunk of hardware for Science to implant in the eye or Synchron to thread through a vein. And the 100 probes, while a not inconsiderable number, put a ceiling on

how much data the system can carry.

“The thing about the Utah array is that it’s a 1990s device,” says Brannigan, “and if you were using a 1990s chip in your smartphone, you’d very quickly know about it.”

There is also the sort of controlled trauma inflicted on the brain when the 100-wire chip punches 100 tiny holes in its surface. At Paradromics, researchers have developed a chip with thinner wires than the Utah array, something that reduces, but does not eliminate, the damage done to brain tissue.

“There’s a fairly considerable amount of brain injury and cell loss with those technologies,” says Chang. “There is a term in the field called *butcher ratio*, and it refers to the number of cells killed for every one neuron you can record from. The more electrodes you put into the brain, the cumulative injury rises. The worst-case scenario is that a patient has some residual function, and this is lost as a result of the implantation.”

His company, Echo, sidesteps the problem, using not a chip with probes, but a thin film that sits on the brain without penetrating it. “The film is just laying safely on the brain surface monitoring signals from there,” says Chang.

It’s Hodak’s biohybrid model that would represent the real revolution in chip design, but the technology is not yet ready for human experimentation. In one section of the Science labs is a modified, tractor-trailer-size shipping container housing a small colony of cynomolgus monkeys. The animals have room to climb and jump and perch on a few branches—a big improvement over the tiny wire boxes in which they would have been forced to live their entire lives in the past. But they still don’t appear terribly happy.

“Don’t look them in the eye,” Hodak says. “They take that as a threat display.”

Happy or not, the monkeys will make their contribution to science. Last summer, the first of the animals was implanted with a biohybrid chip, and the company is now tracking its progress and seeing if the stem cells actually grow into the brain.

Hodak concedes that the biohybrid model poses perils. There is always a chance the stem cells could grow uncontrollably, crowding out native cells and

damaging the brain. To prevent that, the system has a “kill switch,” in the form of an antiviral drug called ganciclovir that could be used off-label to attack the new cells and stop the growth process.

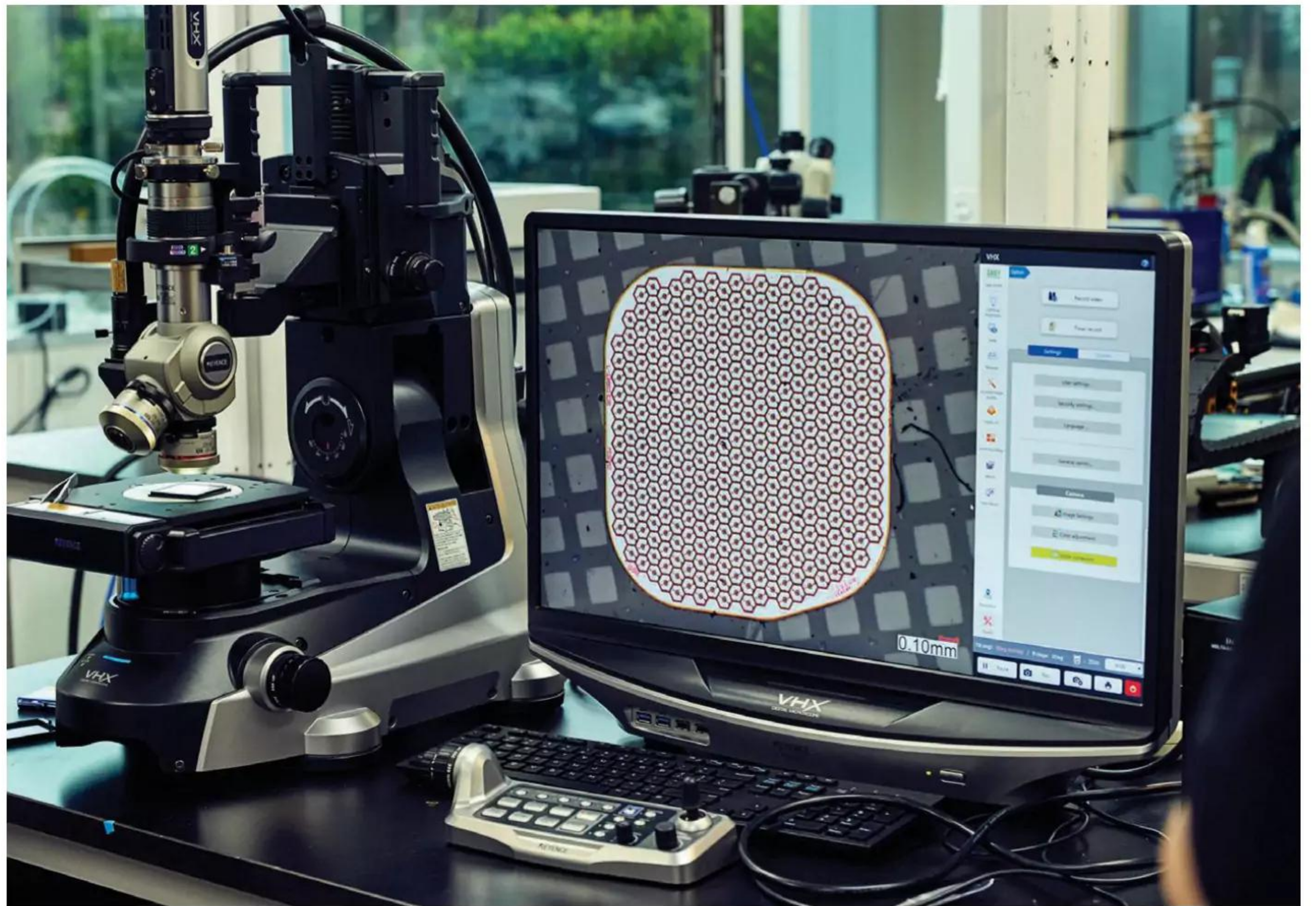
**THE HARDWARE** the BCI players are building might be impressive, but it’s very much in the beta stage—not remotely ready for release. The Prima system has given Alice Charton the ability to read the newspaper, but the glasses are wired to a 2-lb. plastic brick that houses the processing computer and the battery. It is difficult to carry around, especially for someone trying to navigate the street, and it tends to grow hot. On lab bench after lab bench in the Science headquarters, researchers are working on a second-generation Prima system in which the hardware currently in the brick will be miniaturized and housed in the glasses’ temple bars. But Prima 2.0 is not ready for release yet, so for now users are stuck with the brick.

Burkhart, whose Blackrock implant enabled him to move despite his paralysis, had the chip removed seven years after it was implanted. The system included a wire that ran from the implant to a small hole in his skull to which a cable was screwed when he was using the chip. Over time, the skin of his scalp would try to grow over the port, leading to repeated infections and causing him enough discomfort that he gave up on the system. He would have it reimplanted, he says, but only if it were wireless and required no port.

“I’m looking forward to getting another device,” Burkhart says.

He could be part of a group that may one day number in the millions—including able-bodied people who see BCI as a force multiplier for their natural abilities. Solzbacher envisions a lot of uses for BCI technology on the battlefield and among firefighters and other first responders, who could control the tools of their trades with their thoughts.

“There are performance parameters that can be made better and faster,” says Solzbacher. Performing a physical action like launching a weapon or calling for help takes time. “A signal goes out, and it has to go from intent and planning to premotor to motor execution to the



*The 2-mm-by-2-mm Prima chip and its 400 electrodes under the microscope at the laboratory of Science Corp.*

spinal cord to the muscles until you push a button on a joystick. You lose relevant time. You could shortcut all of that. If you’re a firefighter or a soldier this could make the difference between coming home alive and unharmed or not.”

And none of that touches the benefits that could accrue to other people outfitted with BCI chips, who could then communicate and interact with AI systems. “As the devices become more powerful,” says Angle, “healthy people will want those abilities and be willing to undergo surgery to get them. The capabilities that will enable augmentation of natural human abilities are inseparable from those that restore function for persons with disabilities.”

For now the work goes on—slowly. Most BCI studies in the U.S. are conducted under the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) investigational device exemption, which permits developers to work with animal and human subjects before a device is approved. Planning for clinical trials, running the trials, writing up the results, and then waiting for permission to market the device can take five years. Still, most of the leaders of the BCI companies agree with the FDA’s go-slow way of doing things—at least for the public record.

“These are Class III medical devices, which means a permanent implant,”

says Haggstrom. “You really want to make sure you develop a good safety profile while the device operates over time. After that, the FDA usually requires a 12-month follow-up study.”

Finally, there is the inevitable matter of what all this shiny new technology will cost. The companies aren’t at all ready to discuss marketing so nascent a product, but Hodak does venture a number—on the order of \$100,000 to \$200,000 for a Prima implant.

“Even though we would like this to be as low-cost as possible,” he says, “the reality is that this technology cost several hundred million dollars to develop and bring to market.”

BCI is now at a profound inflection point—a young science that is only now beginning to mature. The matters being sorted out in the lab and in the field are not just technical and medical. They are existential. Humanity has developed a lot of new technologies in the past 150 years—powered flight, automobiles, electric lights, radio, television, the telephone, motion pictures, and more. But there has always been an unbreachable barrier between them and us. The machines stood over there and we stood over here. Computers demolished that wall. They actively engage our eyes, our hands, our ears, our minds. With BCI, they are becoming part of our physical selves. In at least small ways, the machines are becoming more human and the humans, by definition, are becoming more machine. The benefits are real. So too are the questions they raise. □

WHAT'S "NORMAL" BLOOD PRESSURE FOR 80?!

HOW DO I (NICELY) TAKE AWAY HER KEYS?

REFILL MOM'S MEDS

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

FOR WHAT I'M CHECKING I'M MISSING LONG TERM CARE?

CALL THE HELPING HAND BEFORE I LOSE IT!

IS THERE A SUPPORT GROUP FOR THIS??

IS "CAREGIVER BURNOUT" A REAL DIAGNOSIS? ASKING FOR... ME!

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Yvette Nicole Brown, Actor/Caregiver

# The Tragedy of Eric Adams

A DAY IN THE CITY WITH  
THE MAYOR OF NEW YORK  
BY MOLLY BALL

BEFORE ERIC ADAMS CAN START EXPLAINING THE CONSPIRACY THAT took him down, the soon-to-be-former mayor of New York City must make his morning smoothie. On a chilly recent Friday, he is standing in the stainless-steel kitchen of Gracie Mansion, the stately official residence on the Upper East Side, layering blueberries and ginger and flaxseed and greens into a Nutribullet blender.

“People think that our stomachs are like a washing machine—that when you eat, everything mixes up together—and it is not,” he says, whirring the mixture into a greenish-brown sludge. “Our stomachs are like a sink, where what you put in it first goes down the drain first.” He pours me a sample. It tastes like ginger-flavored grass.

We are speaking a week and change since Adams bowed to the inevitable and dropped his bid for re-election. There is a lot he wants to get off his chest. When he was elected four years ago, Adams seemed poised to be a transformational figure. Amid rising crime and racial tensions, the former police captain promised there need be no compromise between safety and justice. Like Joe Biden’s election a year earlier, his win was a triumph of the Democratic Party’s moderate Black base over the radical-chic faculty liberals and their alienating ideas. “I’m the Biden of Brooklyn,” Adams boasted. “Look at me and you’re seeing the future of the Democratic Party.” Aides whispered that he could run for President.

Four years later, the Democrats’ future looks murkier than ever, and Adams’ lofty ambitions lie in ruins. His approval rating sank as low as 20% in the wake of his federal indictment on bribery and corruption charges and its subsequent dismissal by President Trump’s Justice Department. In the mayoral race between Zohran Mamdani and Andrew Cuomo, Adams was relegated to an afterthought, an object of ridicule





AT THE END OF  
HIS TENURE,  
ADAMS' LOFTY  
AMBITIONS  
LIE IN RUINS

and scorn. The cloud of scandal has obscured the message he wants to leave on his way out.

“I could have made better choices,” he says, reflecting on all the appointees who broke the rules and betrayed him. “But I had a city to run. And when you look at it, even with the crew that I assembled, there was not one year that we were not moving the city forward.” He’s been punished, as he sees it, for telling unpopular truths, harassed by an unfair justice system, hammered by a biased press, his achievements diminished by a system he threatened.

It’s hard not to think about what might have been. “It strikes me as Shakespearean in its tragic outcome, because there was so much there to admire,” says Juan Williams, the Fox News analyst who has known Adams since the 1990s, when *Playboy* assigned him to write a profile of the young lieutenant who’d risked his career to testify about racism in the NYPD. “There was so much energy and determination,” Williams recalls, “a sense that this guy was going somewhere and he was going to take other people with him, especially Black people. But I don’t think there’s any question it’s his fault. He was selfish, and it clouded his thinking—his sense of right and wrong.”

Adams proceeds to a peach-colored parlor, the smoothie in one hand and a container of carrot slices in the other. All he is asking, he says, is for people to look at his record. To put the good alongside the bad and see how it all adds up. The crime and homelessness he reduced, the jobs numbers and test scores he improved, the nightlife he brought back from its COVID-era slumber.

Settling onto an orange couch, a carrot stick in each hand, he turns the conversation to his late mother, who he says left school after third grade, worked three jobs, and raised six kids on her own. A black-and-white photograph of her adorns the cuff links he’s wearing. “There was one point during this whole thing that it took everything to get out of bed,” Adams says. “And it was only thinking about Mommy—how she always got up, no matter what she had to go through—that I said, Listen, Eric, you just can’t surrender.”

He came so far, only to end up isolated and diminished. “They didn’t think I could do it,” he says. “You’re a darn former cop, how are you going to run a city this complex? And there was a body of people that was not even willing to give me a chance.”

**ADAMS GRABS THE SMOOTHIE** and his suit jacket and climbs into the back of the black Suburban that is his de facto office. There is a packed day

ahead. The next 12 hours will take us to 10 stops across three of the city’s five boroughs, from a run-down police precinct to a glitzy nightclub, from a subway platform to a taxi drivers’ gala.

The indictment is on Adams’ mind as we make our way to City Hall. “No gold bars, no bags of cash, nothing—the case was about upgrades,” he says of the bribery charges. “Over years of investigating me, they could never find anything. So they had to concoct this.”

Adams was born in Brooklyn and moved to Queens in elementary school. By his teens he was a street hustler affiliated with a local crew. At 15, he was arrested with his brother after being caught stealing. In police custody, officers repeatedly kicked the brothers in the groin, according to Adams, leaving him urinating blood. The encounter left Adams’ brother with a hatred of cops—but it motivated Eric to become one. In 22 years on the force, he became known as an outspoken internal critic.

Adams left the NYPD and ran for state senate in 2006, where one of his first causes was pay raises for lawmakers. (“Show me the money!” he said in a floor speech.) He served four terms before being elected the first Black Brooklyn borough president in 2013. In 2020, he joined a crowded Democratic mayoral primary that included tech executive Andrew Yang and several liberal technocrats. Adams’ focus on public safety stood out. His upset victory, powered by outer-borough Black voters, signaled that the party’s working-class silent majority wanted more and better policing, not the “defund the police” of the fashionable activist slogan.

Under Adams, the city has seen a decline in both violent and property crimes. This year, shootings are down 54% and murders are down 36% compared with the same period four years ago, according to the NYPD. Subway crime in the third quarter of 2025 was the lowest in recorded history excluding the pandemic. And crime isn’t the only area where Adams’ accomplishments have been “substantial,” says Kathryn Wylde, president of the powerful Partnership for New York City, who has worked with mayors since the 1970s. The city’s economy has grown at a faster pace than the rest of the country, hitting records for gross output and jobs last year. Adams’ zoning reform, the biggest in decades, is projected to spur the construction of 80,000 new homes over 15 years, and his “Trash Revolution” has begun to move the city’s notorious garbage piles off the sidewalk and mitigate the rat problem. As one X user argued: “Eric Adams is legitimately insane and literally committed treason in exchange for airline miles. He’s also the only NYC mayor in ~50 years to make progress on two of the biggest issues the city has: trash & housing.”

Adams cut billions from the budget and took on entrenched urban nonprofits, weathering criticism from homelessness advocates when he ramped up the city’s use of involuntary commitment for those with severe mental illness—a policy Mamdani has vowed to roll back. His chief of staff, Camille Joseph Varlack, tells me Adams has a skepticism of government grounded in his upbringing. “He feels the city failed his family, and that drives him in a way I don’t know if he even understands,” she says. “I tell him, ‘I always think of you as Batman,

‘It’s his fault.  
He was selfish.’

—JUAN WILLIAMS,  
FOX NEWS ANALYST





▲  
GREETING  
SUPPORTERS  
DURING THE  
PRIMARY CAMPAIGN  
IN JUNE 2021

and not just because you like to go out at night.’”

New Yorkers are not convinced. In a recent CBS News poll, 61% of respondents said that things in the city are “going badly.” Just 22% said crime had decreased over the past four years, while 46% said it had increased. Ana María Archila, co-director of the left-wing Working Families Party, says Adams doesn’t deserve credit for declines in crime when rates have been falling nationally. Adams, she says, has been too willing to see police as the answer, and has governed the city for the benefit of his wealthy patrons rather than his working-class constituents. “He spent so much time fearmongering about crime,” she says, “and at the same time he put police officers on the front lines of the approach to mental health and homelessness in ways people perceived as highly ineffective and not very humane.”

But political leaders are often defined not by the plans they make but by the crises forced upon them. For Adams, it was the migrant surge. When he came into office, the Biden Administration was insisting there was no crisis at the border. Texas Governor Greg Abbott then began sending buses of asylum seekers to Washington, D.C., in protest. In July 2022, Adams called Abbott’s action “heartless” and vowed that New York City would welcome migrants and provide them with shelter and services. Abbott was happy to oblige, and in August he announced he had sent buses to Manhattan. (Adams contended that Texas was busing migrants to New York before the announcement.)

A year later, Adams’ tone changed. New York was spending billions housing the migrants, whose numbers had reached six figures, in shelters,

encampments, leased hotels, and a cruise terminal. Adams began criticizing the Administration, saying Biden had “failed New York City.” In private meetings, Adams says, he urged Biden and his team to secure the border. He says Administration officials urged him to be quiet and compared the crisis to gallstones—it would be painful, but it would pass, and the best thing to do was tough it out.

For Adams, who was cutting back library hours to pay for the shelters and taking political heat for giving handouts to migrants, that was not a satisfying answer. Adams wondered who was really in charge at the White House: in his later meetings with Biden, he says he noticed a marked decline, and suspected the President wasn’t well served by his staff. He found himself frozen out by the White House, dropped from the advisory council of Biden’s re-election campaign. (A Biden spokesperson did not return a request for comment.)

On Nov. 2, 2023, Adams was headed to Washington to confront federal officials about the migrant crisis when the FBI raided the home of his chief campaign fundraiser. The mayor turned his car around on the way to LaGuardia and canceled the trip. Four days later, the feds stopped Adams on the street and seized his phones and iPad. To Adams, the connection seems obvious: he called out Biden, and then Biden’s Department of Justice went after him.

A few months later, Trump went on trial in Manhattan, and Adams began to sympathize with the former President’s claims of political targeting. Adams read the book *Government Gangsters*, by Kash Patel, the erstwhile MAGA influencer who is now Trump’s FBI director, which painted a sinister picture of the “deep state” that would stop at nothing to destroy Biden’s enemies. He watched Biden decry Trump’s subversions of justice and then pardon his son on his way out of office. “Take Trump’s name off it,” Adams says. “They basically had a hit list.”

Back in the car after taping a TV interview about subway surfing, the mayor takes a sip of his smoothie, which has been sitting untouched for hours. “My spinach,” he says, “like Popeye.”

**WE PASS THE FLASHING SCREENS** of Times Square and descend the steps to its subway station, where a dozen reporters and a row of television cameras await. Adams, as is his custom for even the most banal announcement, enters to the strains of Jay-Z’s “Empire State of Mind.”

The press conference begins normally enough. Adams and his well-respected police commissioner, Jessica Tisch, tout the program they’ve instituted to reduce crime and homelessness on the subway, which they say has removed 2,100 people for quality-of-life violations and connected thousands with shelter beds and permanent housing. It’s when the reporters start asking questions that things start to go off the rails.

One asks about the latest gruesome subway crime, a 64-year-old man beaten to death at a Brooklyn station. Another asks if Adams’ campaign failed because his claims of progress weren’t convincing. Adams blames the media. “My campaign didn’t struggle because we failed,” he says. “My campaign struggled because the story has not been told by the same people that are not telling the story right now.”

Perhaps, another reporter suggests, there are shootings not being

recorded in official statistics. Tisch takes this one. “If the suggestion is that we are in some way hiding people with bullet holes in them, I think that’s absurd,” she says.

Adams seizes the lectern. “Let’s be honest,” he says. “You didn’t think I could turn this city around. Many of you thought, ‘He’s just a cop. What does he know about running a city this complicated?’ You don’t want to deal with the fact of more housing than ever in the history of the city, lowest crime in the history of the city, more jobs—we broke the record 11 times. Outpacing the state in reading and math. We have dropped unemployment all across the city, but particularly in the Black and brown community. All of these indicators. You didn’t think I could do it in four years.” The same statistics the press uses to judge other mayors demonstrate his success, Adams argues, yet “you’re still talking about how we’re fudging numbers.”

He’s getting heated now, lapsing into the third person: “Eric has turned around the economy. Broadway had the best 12 months in recorded history. Crime is at record levels. Just report the facts. Stop coming up with all of these creative ways of saying Eric failed. Eric didn’t fail. Eric did the job of a working-class mayor.”

Now Adams points a finger at his least favorite reporter, Chris Sommerfeldt of the *Daily News*, whom he banned from City Hall press conferences earlier this year. In today’s paper, Sommerfeldt has a story about *Political Humanity*, a new memoir self-published by Adams’ former girlfriend Jasmine Ray, who later worked in his administration. Their relationship first turned romantic, according to the book, in a 2014 encounter at Brooklyn Borough Hall. Adams takes issue with Sommerfeldt’s description of this as “the first time she slept with Adams.” (The book strongly implies it, but Ray tells me they merely kissed.)

“You’re a dark, sick person, man,” Adams says, glaring at Sommerfeldt. Tisch and some of the other officials are starting to look uncomfortable. He dismisses them: “Y’all can depart. Let me do this.” A prolonged diatribe at Sommerfeldt ensues.

New York Attorney General Letitia James has just been indicted by Trump’s Justice Department, but her indictment, Adams notes, is being widely portrayed as politically motivated payback, unlike his own. “People attacked me. They called me names. They destroyed an impeccable record in the city,” he rants. “Folks, I’ve been doing this for 40 years. I have 40 years of delivering for the people of the City of New York. And within months, because of a lawfare, you all of a sudden turned me into a criminal.”

Adams goes on in this vein for some time. “So don’t start asking me about what’s going on now,” he finally concludes. “I want to know what did y’all think about when my life was destroyed in this city. And I wish I had a mic so I can drop it right now.”

He turns on his heel, exuding the calm of a man whose anger has escaped his body. The small crowd that has gathered on the other side of the turnstiles breaks into a mix of heckling and applause. As Adams strides back up the subway steps to his waiting car, a voice calls out behind him: “Would you take the upgrades again, Mr. Mayor?”



▲ ADAMS AT HIS FIERY PRESS CONFERENCE IN THE TIMES SQUARE SUBWAY STATION ON OCT. 10

Adams settles into the back seat, turns to me, and grins. “For the next three months,” he says, “I’m going to have so much fun.”

**THE FEDERAL INDICTMENT** of Eric Adams, unsealed in September 2024, alleges that before he became mayor, Adams accepted valuable gifts from the Turkish government in exchange for official favors, and that his mayoral campaign accepted illegal donations by laundering them through straw donors. Among the alleged gifts in question were airline upgrades on Turkish Air from 2016 to 2021; the official favor is that he called the FDNY in 2021 to see what was holding up the inspection of the new Turkish consulate building.

As we make our way through traffic to a police precinct in the Bronx, Adams lays out his defense. “When you get an upgrade, if you’re in your official capacity, there’s no problem—you’re allowed to do it,” he says, with the confidence of a man who has carefully scrutinized what the ethics laws permit. As for calling the fire department, he says, he was just trying to make sure the city’s bureaucracy was working to meet the needs of an important resident. “I was indicted for calling the fire department and saying to them, ‘Hey, the President of Turkey is coming in and they have a new building. Can you go do a building inspection?’ I didn’t say pass them. I said, if you can’t do it, let me know and I’ll manage their expectations.” (In fact, the indictment describes a lengthy back-and-forth between Adams, the fire commissioner, and a Turkish representative as he sought to facilitate the building’s opening without an inspection.



In the course of urging the commissioner to get it done “today if possible,” Adams says that if it can’t be done, he will “manage their expectation.”)

Adams is not the only one to find both the quid and the quo alleged in the case underwhelming. The CNN legal analyst Elie Honig, a former federal prosecutor, opined that it was “not a slam dunk.” Former mayor Bill de Blasio, whose campaign was also investigated for alleged campaign-finance violations, says there ought to have been a higher bar to bring the first-ever indictment of a sitting mayor. “I did not see how on earth he would ever be convicted on those charges,” de Blasio tells me. “Something involving airline upgrades? An allegation of foreign money, but nothing linking him to it directly? It seemed very thin.” Adams’ staff refers to it as “an indictment over legroom.”

More vexing to many New Yorkers than whatever he did or didn’t take from the Turks were Adams’ dealings with Trump in the aftermath. The two men met for the first time, according to Adams, in October 2024, three weeks after Adams was indicted and three weeks before the presi-

dential election, when they both appeared at the Al Smith Dinner, an annual white-tie charity roast. At the time, top Democratic politicians had disowned Adams, and Governor Kathy Hochul was considering using an obscure state law to force him from office.

Trump saw a fellow victim. “I’ve never met a person who’s a vegan who liked Turkey so much,” Trump razzed, before adding: “I was persecuted, and so are you.” He continued to champion Adams’ case on the campaign trail. In January, as Trump prepared to move back into the White House, Adams traveled to Florida to meet with him. He skipped Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebrations in New York to attend Trump’s Inauguration; I found him in the Capitol before the program began, sitting with his eyes closed. After I interrupted Adams’ meditation to ask if he was angling for a pardon, he insisted he wanted only to talk to Trump about their shared policy priorities.

Trump’s Justice Department filed to dismiss Adams’ case in February. At least 10 prosecutors resigned in protest. In her resignation letter, then acting U.S. Attorney Danielle Sassoon wrote that the case was being dismissed in exchange for Adams’ cooperation with the Administration’s deportation efforts. “I cannot agree to seek a dismissal driven by improper considerations,” she wrote. Two days later, Adams went on *Fox and Friends* alongside Tom Homan, Trump’s immigration czar. “If he doesn’t come through, I’ll be back in New York City,” Homan grinned, “up his butt, saying, ‘Where the hell is that agreement we came to?’”

A judge, while observing that “everything here smacks of a bargain,” dismissed Adams’ case in April, saying he could not force the Justice Department to prosecute. The next day, Adams dropped out of the Democratic primary, staying in the race as an independent candidate. His reelection bid was hobbled by the city’s Campaign Finance Board, which denied him more than \$4 million in matching funds, citing the corruption charges. Cuomo, the former governor who’d once vowed not to run if Adams was in the race, had already reversed himself and entered the field.

Rumors swirled that Trump’s allies were working to lure Adams out

of the race. He was offered the ambassadorship to Saudi Arabia, or a position at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, per various reports. Adams says none of it was ever true: “There was never a deal with Trump.” The proof, he says, is that he was consistent when it came to the migrant crisis. “I said pre-election that if you break the law you need to get the hell out of this country,” he says. “I said that after the election.” He has urged Trump not to send the National Guard to New York City—successfully, thus far—and criticized the Administration for a recent ICE raid.

“The visceral hate for Donald Trump, and the feeling that he did something for me—the city turned on me,” Adams says. “It was like I became the symbol of their hate.” New Yorkers were convinced Adams couldn’t be trusted, and he, in turn, was radicalized—disillusioned about the justice system, the law-and-order apparatus he’d held dear.

To hear Adams’ critics tell it, the mayor was not a victim but a serial offender, a machine pol on the make who was never really vetted before he won the keys to the city in a stroke of lucky timing. Adams was repeatedly investigated for alleged ethical lapses before his mayoral election. Once in office, he surrounded himself with cronies, many of whom were quickly enmeshed in scandal.

“In 2021, I warned people that he would be corrupt and there would be chaos, and unfortunately I was right,” says Curtis Sliwa, the Republican who ran against Adams four years ago and is once again the GOP nominee. “He is the most corrupt mayor in the history of New York City, and

that’s saying a lot. He created his own destruction, but like every politician, he can never acknowledge it, can never apologize. It’s always a conspiracy.”

By the time Adams was indicted, dozens of city officials had resigned or been fired, and many had themselves been indicted for al-

legedly selling contracts and trading favors. An October 2024 *New York* magazine cover blared, “Last one out of City Hall, turn out the lights.” It is a testament to either Adams’ governance or New York’s vast and competent bureaucracy that the city continued to function smoothly as members of the mayor’s cabinet fell like dominoes.

Adams’ car pulls up to the NYPD Academy in the Flushing neighborhood of Queens, where this year’s class of more than 1,000 cadets has assembled in a massive auditorium. He stands at the front beside a pair of flags, a tiny figure against a big gray wall. “It takes a special person to complete their career and not be bitter, because you’re

‘I wish I had a mic so I can drop it right now.’

—ERIC ADAMS,  
NEW YORK CITY MAYOR



going to watch the worst things that man can do to man,” he says, speaking with feeling and without notes. “And you can either leave your career being engulfed by the pain and devastation of that, or you can embrace it.”

He urges the young officers to take care of their families and relationships, and to learn from one another about their diverse communities. “Wearing that shield and that gun and that vest is a commitment. It’s a dedication. And you cannot do anything to tarnish that.”

**ADAMS IS VAGUE** about what he’s going to do next. Back at Gracie, as he microwaves a vegan dinner for one—a lentil-based pasta and medley of vegetables smothered with nutritional yeast—he tells me he’d like to travel the world and work in the private sector. In recent days he has regaled the city press corps with talk of a book, a documentary, a Ph.D. he wants to pursue.

Our conversation turns to the election. Adams considers Mamdani’s promises unrealistic; he predicts buyer’s remorse when the front runner’s supporters realize he can’t actually freeze most people’s rent, make buses free, or bring down the cost of living. Adams is also concerned about the threat of Islamic extremism, with which he thinks Mamdani is too comfortable, and perplexed by polls that show Mamdani getting a large proportion of the Jewish vote. (In public comments, Mamdani has cast such criticism as Islamophobic.)

In 2023, Adams hosted Mamdani and his father, a scholar of postcolonialism at Columbia

▲  
ADAMS, PICTURED  
SEPT. 15, FAULTS  
THE MEDIA FOR  
FAILING TO COVER  
HIS ACHIEVEMENTS

young Black and brown men tell me they think he got a raw deal. Then it’s on to a club opening in downtown Manhattan, where he’ll pose with a pair of puffy-vested DJs at an outdoor roller rink while a deafening beat thumps, and crypto billionaire Brock Pierce will urge him to re-enter the race. He’ll swap his suit coat for a maroon dinner jacket and head back uptown, where a celebrity chef, an ambassador, and a selection of imported wines await in a private room.

But for now, as he eats his plant-based meal standing up in his taxpayer-funded kitchen, he seems like a man who is very much alone. “There won’t be anybody like him again,” the veteran New York Democratic consultant Hank Sheinkopf tells me. The city’s demographics are changing, becoming more Chinese and Muslim, less Black and Jewish and white ethnic, and its politics have been taken over by an educated, professionalized cohort. “The political-industrial complex is now in control, and they don’t need the Eric Adamses of the world. He wasn’t from Harvard, wasn’t from Yale; he was from the streets. He was held to a different standard in many ways. He never had a shot.”

The Democratic strategists who have chewed over their party’s unpopularity in memo after memo since last November pine for an authentic tribune of the working class. A candidate who plays to the middle. Someone who can sound tough on crime and immigration without being a malicious racist. Someone who understands the aspirations of regular people. Who can embody masculinity without disrespecting women or gay people, who can speak to the men—particularly young men of color—leaving the party in droves. Someone who can work the system and deliver for the people.

“You had a mayor that was probably one of the finest mayors for working-class people, and the city turned against him,” Adams says. “But no one said it’s supposed to be fair.”—*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN

“There won’t  
be anybody  
like him again.”

—HANK SHEINKOPF,  
NEW YORK DEMOCRATIC CONSULTANT

# TIME 100

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MILANO CORTINA  
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Winter Olympics  
Special Report

# LEGEND RETURNS

**INSIDE LINDSEY VONN'S  
UNPRECEDENTED ATTEMPT  
AT AN OLYMPIC COMEBACK**

**BY SEAN GREGORY/  
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIF.,  
AND PARK CITY, UTAH**

LINDSEY VONN LIFTS HER MIDDLE FINGER IN the Southern California sun. Vonn, the Olympic gold-medal skier, all-time leader in World Cup downhill wins, and rare figure in her sport whose talent, charisma, and celebrity have transcended the snow-covered slopes, is hiking a canyon near her Beverly Hills home. Not so long ago, this might have seemed unfathomable, as she struggled with not just standard wear and tear that comes from decades of competing at a professional level but also swelling and pain caused by numerous crashes while flying down mountains. Since her partial knee-replacement surgery in the spring of 2024, however, Vonn, 41, has felt like a new person.

The gesture, though, is not just one of defiance as she walks briskly on the somewhat hilly terrain. It's a message to her detractors.

When Vonn launched a surprise comeback last year, after having been retired from the tour for five seasons, many fans cheered her return. But critics made themselves heard as well. They suggested her decision—and goal of earning a spot atop the

podium in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, at the 2026 Olympics—revealed an unfulfilling life and wondered why she'd even try such a thing at her age.

Vonn was undeterred. Besides the faith she had in her newly restored knee and her unflagging work ethic, she had planted a little pep talk for herself years earlier. Before her last Olympics, in 2018 in PyeongChang, she got a tattoo on the middle finger of her right hand of the word *believe* in Greek, the language of the birthplace of the Olympic Games. "Believing in myself has always been so important," says Vonn. "Now it has probably never rang more true." And so as she directs the digit at her doubters, with an impish grin, she displays the word in all its glory. Then, for good measure, she does it again.

As the world's best winter athletes gather in February for a celebration of speed, acrobatics, and artistry on snow and ice, Vonn's attempt to earn another Olympic medal will likely be the buzziest story of the Games. During her illustrious career, Vonn, a Minnesota native who learned to ski on a

*Vonn at the  
Roundhill Ski Area  
in Lake Tekapo,  
New Zealand, on  
Aug. 17*



tiny hill south of the Twin Cities, won a record-tying 20 World Cup crystal globes, awarded annually to the best performer in the various disciplines of skiing (downhill, slalom, etc.), plus the best all-around performer. She earned gold and bronze medals at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, becoming the first U.S. woman to win gold in downhill, and her campaign to ski against men, which the sport's bigwigs denied, drove considerable attention. Before injuries got the best of her, she was on pace to pass the mark for all-time World Cup victories: 86, set by Ingemar Stenmark of Sweden. Instead, Vonn won 82 times, and American Mikaela Shiffrin has since set a new record, with 101 and counting.

Vonn's bionic quest will do nothing less than test the boundaries of human capabilities. No ski racer, male or female, has ever returned to the top level with titanium implanted onto the sport's central piece of hardware. With another Olympic medal, she'd shatter the previous record for the oldest female alpine Olympic medalist: 33, Lindsey Vonn, in PyeongChang. Advances in sports science have allowed a host of high-profile male athletes to extend their greatness into middle age: Tom Brady winning a Super Bowl at 43; Tiger Woods, whom Vonn dated for nearly three years in the 2010s, victorious at the Masters at the same age; LeBron James still making all-NBA teams at 40. Female examples, Vonn notes, are harder to find.

Since retiring from skiing in 2019, Vonn has faced tribulations that made her arrival at this moment even more remarkable. And after some disappointing results in her 2024–2025 comeback season that left her questioning the efficacy of her endeavor, a second-place finish at the World Cup Finals in Sun Valley, Idaho, in March gave her momentum going into her upcoming campaign, which starts Dec. 12 in St. Moritz, Switzerland. That performance, plus a full offseason dedicated to rigorous strength workouts, has boosted her confidence. "I am *not* a long shot," says Vonn during an expansive pre-hike conversation on her living-room couch. "I am back in the game."

**SOME 48 HOURS** after what she thought would be her final ski race, a bronze-medal downhill run at the 2019 World Championships in Are, Sweden, Vonn woke up in Nashville, where her boyfriend at the time, P.K. Subban, was playing for the NHL's Predators. She called her agents, antsy, asking them to book something, anything, for her to do. They laughed. "The postcompetition chill-out," says Mark Ervin, one of her reps, "did not last very long."

Vonn had first put on a pair of skis at age 3 and competed in her first race at 7. Without skiing, she struggled to find her identity. "I felt a pretty big hole," she says. "You don't want to get out of bed



▲  
*Racing slalom at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics; celebrating gold in the downhill at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics*

and you've got no drive." She'd felt depressed after prior ski injuries, especially the ACL tear during a November 2013 training crash that ultimately kept her out of the Sochi Olympics. Back then, however, she could at least look forward to returning to the mountain. "It was the one thing that really made me happy," says Vonn. "When I retired, that first year was like, 'How do I get out of this funk? What is going to make me feel like I have a purpose?'"

It didn't help that her personal life was also undergoing upheaval. Vonn and Subban, who got engaged in August 2019, split in December 2020. "I don't want to get too into the weeds on it," says Vonn, "but I'm not the kind of person that is going to stay home and not work." (Subban declined to comment.)

**'I AM NOT A LONG SHOT. I AM BACK IN THE GAME.'**

Vonn's friends have called her "the most confident unconfident person" they know, and her new therapist, Armando Gonzalez, would spend days with her in her homes in Beverly Hills and Park City, Utah, talking through Vonn's adjustment to her new life. "It's reckoning with some of these limiting self-beliefs that I would call lies," says Gonzalez, who spoke with TIME with Vonn's permission. "When you get to the root of them, they were plaguing her and limiting her in a lot of areas. She would need to remove them."

Her retirement funk gradually faded. Vonn co-directed a documentary about U.S. Olympic ski champion Picabo Street, her childhood idol and later mentor. She wrote a memoir, launched a ski-wear line with longtime sponsor Head, and invested



in a pair of National Women's Soccer League franchises. Vonn put more energy into her foundation, which over the past decade has awarded more than \$1 million in scholarships for girls who show both athletic and academic promise. "I definitely have grown a lot since I retired," she says.

Vonn also drew strength from her mother Linda Krohn, who had a stroke while giving birth to her in 1984. (Vonn gained a younger sister in 1986 and three more siblings, triplets, in 1992; Krohn and Vonn's father Alan Kildow split in 2003. The last name Vonn is a remnant of a marriage that ended in 2013.) In the summer of 2021, Krohn, who already had limited mobility from the stroke, was diagnosed with ALS. "It was full meltdown," says Vonn. But even with the additional burden of this new diagnosis, Krohn stayed upbeat. Someone told her that when she couldn't lift her arms above her head, she was nearing the end. So she'd raise her hands and declare it another great day. "One thing that my mom's really given me is the ability to pick myself back up," says Vonn. "That's what she did her whole life, and I'll never stop doing that." Krohn died in August 2022.

Still, mental fortitude could not erase the reality: Vonn's body was breaking down. Upon retiring, Vonn says, "I didn't really factor in the unfortunate part of not having a full-time physio. Like, 'Sh-t, everything hurts. Who's here to fix me?'" After two ACL tears, an MCL tear, shinbone fractures, and nine knee surgeries, she couldn't complete a flat hike with a friend and the friend's two kids. Even Vonn's dogs looked at her askance. "They were like, Why are we stopping?" To take pressure off

*At the closing ceremony for the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics, at which she won bronze in the downhill*

her knee, she'd elevate it on a chair at galas, on the dashboard while in a passenger seat. Kildow, a former competitive ski racer, felt guilty about introducing his daughter to the sport. "She's going to have a physical deficit for life," says Kildow. "And that really bothered me a lot."

Vonn walked with a limp, which contorted her body in a way that put stress on other areas, like her hips and ribs. "I was like, 'I just can't do this,'" says Vonn. "I can't keep managing my body in this way. It's not sustainable in any way."

She connected with Dr. Martin Roche, a South Florida-based surgeon, who recommended a robotic-assisted partial replacement for Vonn's right knee. Vonn's major pathology was cartilage loss on her lateral, or outer, side. A minimally invasive procedure would keep her ACL, her medial meniscus, and the cartilage on the inner part of her knee intact. This would aid her postsurgery proprioception, or "sixth sense" ability to be aware of the movement and location of her knee joint for improved stability and balance.

Through a CAT scan, Roche built a virtual 3D model of Vonn's damaged knee. Before the April 2024 surgery, he used it to size the titanium implant. In the operating room, Roche guided the robotic arm that removes damaged bone and cartilage. "It's almost coloring within the lines," he says. "I can get down to millimeter precision." He didn't touch any muscle, ligaments, or tendons. "Recovery is much faster because we haven't traumatized or damaged any soft tissue," he says.

But no one—not even Roche—expected Vonn to bounce back as quickly as she did. She could fully



extend her knee. She was back in high heels within a month. “Every day,” says Vonn, “it was becoming more and more clear that this was different.” She played tennis, on a hard court, with her ski coach, Patrick Riml. “She’s running around like a 15-year-old, going after every single ball,” says Riml. “I’m like, ‘Holy cow.’” Vonn sent Roche a video of herself doing a single-leg jump onto a box, something she hadn’t been able to do in years. Roche calls this his aha moment: he would sign off on any ski comeback, confident that Vonn’s implant could withstand even the downhill’s twists and g-forces.

**THE SKI BUG** had never left Vonn. Doing NBC commentary for the 2022 Beijing Olympics was difficult. “Everyone is texting me, ‘You would have crushed this course,’” says Vonn. “And I’m like, ‘Can you please not say that? This is not helping.’” Before her knee replacement, a return was out of the question. But in June 2024, after another robust weight-lifting session, she informed her agents of her plan to return to the mountain for a few training sessions, with the potential to launch a full comeback targeting the Olympics. After a moment of stunned silence, they were on board.

Fear wouldn’t be a factor. As part of their therapy, Gonzalez insisted that he and Vonn spend an afternoon rewatching her worst accidents, so she could release them from her subconscious. Vonn told him this exercise wasn’t necessary. “I’m like a goldfish,” she says. “You have to have a three-second memory.” They viewed the crashes anyway: Vonn broke them down as if they were routine football plays. “She has a superhuman ability,” says Gonzalez, “to disassociate from pain.”

“I’ve got a few circuits missing,” says Vonn, in a less clinical assessment. “I love what I do. I love going fast. I don’t think that will ever change.”

In July 2024, Vonn was waking up at 3:30 a.m. every morning to ski a glacier in Austria. “Seeing her up there, pretty much in the middle of the night with the sun coming up, the smile on her face, the look in her eye, it’s like, ‘This is what she wants,’” says Riml. In New Zealand, she trained super-G with top Kiwi racer Alice Robinson and nearly matched her times while skiing in a vest and shorts. (Robinson, Vonn says, was wearing a more aerodynamic racing suit.) Word spread that Vonn was toying with a return. Norwegian skiing star Aksel Lund Svindal, the two-time Olympic gold medalist whom Vonn recently added to her coaching team, texted her about her plans. Vonn usually responds to Svindal right away. This time, she went silent. “I caught onto her,” says Svindal. “Yup, she’s definitely considering a comeback.”

Vonn dreaded calling her father. She figured he’d chew her out for putting her finally healthy knee at risk. So she sent him a formal email. When



they did connect on the phone, Kildow told her he knew how much she loved skiing in Cortina—it was the site of her first World Cup podium, almost 22 years ago—and that she deserved another shot at the Olympics. And, he added, even if he had disagreed with her decision, his hardheaded daughter wasn’t going to listen to him anyway.

The call went well. Perhaps too well. “I was like, ‘Aren’t you going to be a little concerned with my health?’” says Vonn.

After Vonn publicly announced in November 2024 that she was returning to World Cup skiing, a few of the sport’s prominent voices questioned her motives. “She should see a psychologist,” said two-time Olympic champion Michaela Dorfmeister of Austria. “Does she want to kill herself?” The downhill great Franz Klammer, also of Austria, said Vonn had “gone completely mad.” Swiss four-time overall World Cup champion and 1988 Olympic

**‘WHAT ABOUT THIS IS SO CRAZY? I DON’T NEED THIS. I’M DOING IT BECAUSE I LOVE IT.’**



▲  
Vonn doing  
physical training  
in New Zealand  
on Aug. 18

downhill gold medalist Pirmin Zurbriggen suggested she was starved for attention. “I have the feeling that Vonn hasn’t recognized the meaning and purpose of her other life in recent years,” he said. “She has probably suffered from no longer being a celebrated champion.”

Vonn despised these remarks. “They have no idea who I am. They have no idea what I’m doing,” she says. “They just want to be heard. It’s much more exciting when they say sh-tty things about me.” (Klammer, Dorfmeister, and Zurbriggen did not return requests for comment.) Yes, Vonn concedes, the Zooms involved in her investments, foundation, and other projects don’t give her the same adrenaline boost as zooming down a mountain. “As much as I love business and it challenges me, it’s not going 80 m.p.h. downhill,” she says.

But that doesn’t mean Vonn required this comeback to give meaning to an empty existence. “I need to see a psychologist for what? What about this is so crazy?” says Vonn. “I don’t need this. I’m doing it because I love it. It’s fun and it’s a challenge. And

I think it means a lot to a lot of people. It’s not like I lack fulfillment. I don’t lack purpose. I don’t lack joy. I have all the things that I need in my life. Even though I’ve been through a lot of sh-t, I’m lucky enough to do what I love one more time. The only danger this presents is to myself. I am not endangering anyone else in this process.”

The negative headlines offered Vonn extra fuel. “I know exactly who said what about me,” she says. “It can tear you down. Or you can reframe it and use it as motivation. And that’s what I do.” Plus, Vonn is honoring the memory of her mother, who because of symptoms from her stroke couldn’t participate in most sports. “She would give anything to have this type of opportunity,” says Vonn. “My mom would be disappointed in me if I didn’t take it.”

**ALTHOUGH VONN SPENT** 19 years competing in World Cup races, she had to start from behind in the standings. At the beginning of the season, she raced with the group of women outside of the top 30 in ranking points, later in the day. The more established skiers go down the mountain first, potentially wearing out the course for the also-rans. Visibility can also erode in the afternoon when the sun dips lower.

So one of the greatest downhill skiers of all time essentially had to hang with the JV squad. “It was weird,” says Vonn. Some of the women were new to the tour, half her age, and asked to take pictures with her. “They’re like, ‘I used to watch you when I was growing up,’” says Vonn. “Can we please not say that anymore? If I hear that one more time ...” Slovenia’s Ilka Stuhec, 35, started calling Vonn “grandma,” a label Vonn grew tired of. “She did it to get under my skin,” says Vonn. “Like, why are we doing this? I get it if it’s the 18-year-old calling me grandma. You’re 30-something. So let’s reel it back.” (Stuhec did not return requests for comment.)

Her references to her generation’s comedies, like *Dumb and Dumber* and *Talladega Nights*, were usually met with blank stares. “Never mind,” says Vonn. “I take it back. Just f-cking go ski fast.”

Vonn’s team figured last season would serve as a tune-up. “But there’s one word in Lindsey’s world that doesn’t exist,” says Riml. “And that’s *patience*.” At just her second World Cup event, in St. Anton, Austria, in January, she finished sixth in the downhill and fourth in the super-G. And while her results in Cortina the next week were less inspiring—20th in the downhill, a failure to finish the super-G—at Vonn’s favorite pizza place in the Dolomites resort town, she learned that she had performed well enough to race with the top competitors group in future downhills. “I was like, ‘Good job! You’re such a good little ski racer,’” says Claire Abbe, Vonn’s friend since childhood and partner



at Après Productions, the media company they launched in 2019. An all-time great was celebrating making the top 30. The table shared a chuckle.

But the World Championships, three weeks later in Saalbach Hinterglemm, Austria, failed to offer such levity. Vonn wanted to make a statement podium. Instead, she crashed into a gate in the super-G, finished 15th in the downhill, and 16th in the team combined event, which makes its Olympic debut in Cortina (a downhill skier pairs with a slalom skier; fastest total time wins). “I felt slightly embarrassed,” says Vonn. “I left Saalbach thinking, ‘If I don’t figure this out, what am I going to do? Because this isn’t going to work like this.’”

Vonn switched her boots after Worlds, to an older model that offered her a better feel on the course. But at March’s World Cup finals, she was dealing with a difficult distraction: the failing health of her Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Lucy, whom she got after her 2015 breakup with Woods. Lucy accompanied Vonn everywhere on tour, even holding three passports. “She was my navigator,” says Vonn. “She was my companion. She was always there. I was hoping she would always be there.” Vonn tried not to check her phone for Lucy updates before the super-G—“I didn’t want it to destroy me for race day”—but she couldn’t help it.

Vonn put Lucy to sleep when she got back from the finals. But she managed to compartmentalize her sadness in Sun Valley. Vonn called the race, in which she won silver, the second most emotional finish of her career, behind only her Olympic gold 15 years ago. “Everyone told me I was crazy. Everyone told me it couldn’t be done, and it made me doubt myself,” says Vonn. “That really hurt me.”

Grandma Vonn, by the way, finished ahead of Stuhec in the overall standings. “Joke’s on her.”

**VONN AND TWO FRIENDS** pile into her Range Rover in mid-September for the short drive from her 20-acre property overlooking Park City to a disco-themed fundraising gala for her foundation. Vonn, who’s going through a country-music phase, puts on “20-20” by Ella Langley and belts out the lyrics. As she pulls up to the hotel, she notices that a sign directing vehicles to the gala is misplaced, too far up a hill for drivers to notice. So she leaps out of the car and jogs down the road in heels. There, passersby may have noticed Lindsey Vonn, wearing a silver fringe dress, sticking a sign in the mud off the interstate.

At the event, Vonn takes pictures with a group of former scholarship recipients who now serve as youth ambassadors; in that role, these young women talk to adolescent girls about subjects like self-confidence, body image, and emotional intelligence. She also plays cajoling auctioneer assistant. When the bidding for tickets and a hotel stay for a



Manchester City–Liverpool game starts slow, Vonn ups the ante with her powers of persuasion. “Tom Brady goes to this sh-t,” she announces. (Brady is a minority owner of another English soccer club, Birmingham City.) The package sells for \$5,750.

“Who’s ready to party?” she says. “We look too good not to dance.”

Judging by her enthusiasm on this night, not to mention her social media feeds, Vonn seems to be enjoying her 40s. In late July, she shotgunned a beer onstage at a Dierks Bentley concert, something she would not have done when she was younger and in training. “Maybe it’s because I have a different perspective, because I’ve been retired for a long time, maybe it’s because I’m

40 and I just don’t give a f-ck anymore,” Vonn says. “But I need to enjoy my life.” She points out that she had two workouts that day: letting loose occasionally won’t compromise her goals. “My 40s, I was really dreading it,” she says. “It’s the beginning of the end. And then you get past it and realize how good things really are.”

Vonn, who now sits on the advisory board of

**‘MY 40S, I WAS REALLY DREADING IT ... THEN YOU GET PAST IT AND REALIZE HOW GOOD THINGS REALLY ARE.’**



Athena Capital, a female-led venture firm, has grown close with a group of accomplished women, including actor and entrepreneur Reese Witherspoon; venture capitalist Amy Griffin, whose 2025 memoir *The Tell* became a *New York Times* best seller; psychological researcher Angela Duckworth, a MacArthur “genius” grant recipient and author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*; and actor Mariska Hargitay, star of Vonn’s favorite TV show, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. On the road, Vonn uses Olivia Benson as her alias. In July, a car-service driver complimented Vonn on an episode. “Oh,” he also told her, “you dyed your hair blond.” Vonn rolled with it, thanking the guy.

Vonn knows that some people think she cares too much about celebrity hobnobbing. We are hiking near Hollywood, she’s a regular on red carpets, and during the U.S. Open final between Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz in September, she showed up on national TV, in Sinner’s box. (Sinner grew up skiing and was a fan of Vonn’s, and they’ve become friends.) But she calls the idea that she’s obsessed with fame the biggest misconception about her. “I’m not meeting these people because they’re famous,” says Vonn. “I’m interested in who they are, how they got there, and I enjoy watching

^  
Vonn knows the world will be watching her. “I like it when the stakes are high,” she says

their professions and they enjoy watching me.”

While Vonn’s quite content with her life at the moment, she still wants to start a family. She’s frozen her eggs, she tells me, which eases some pressure on that front. “I’m not stressed about it, which gives me peace of mind,” says Vonn. “But that’s definitely something that I’m really looking forward to.”

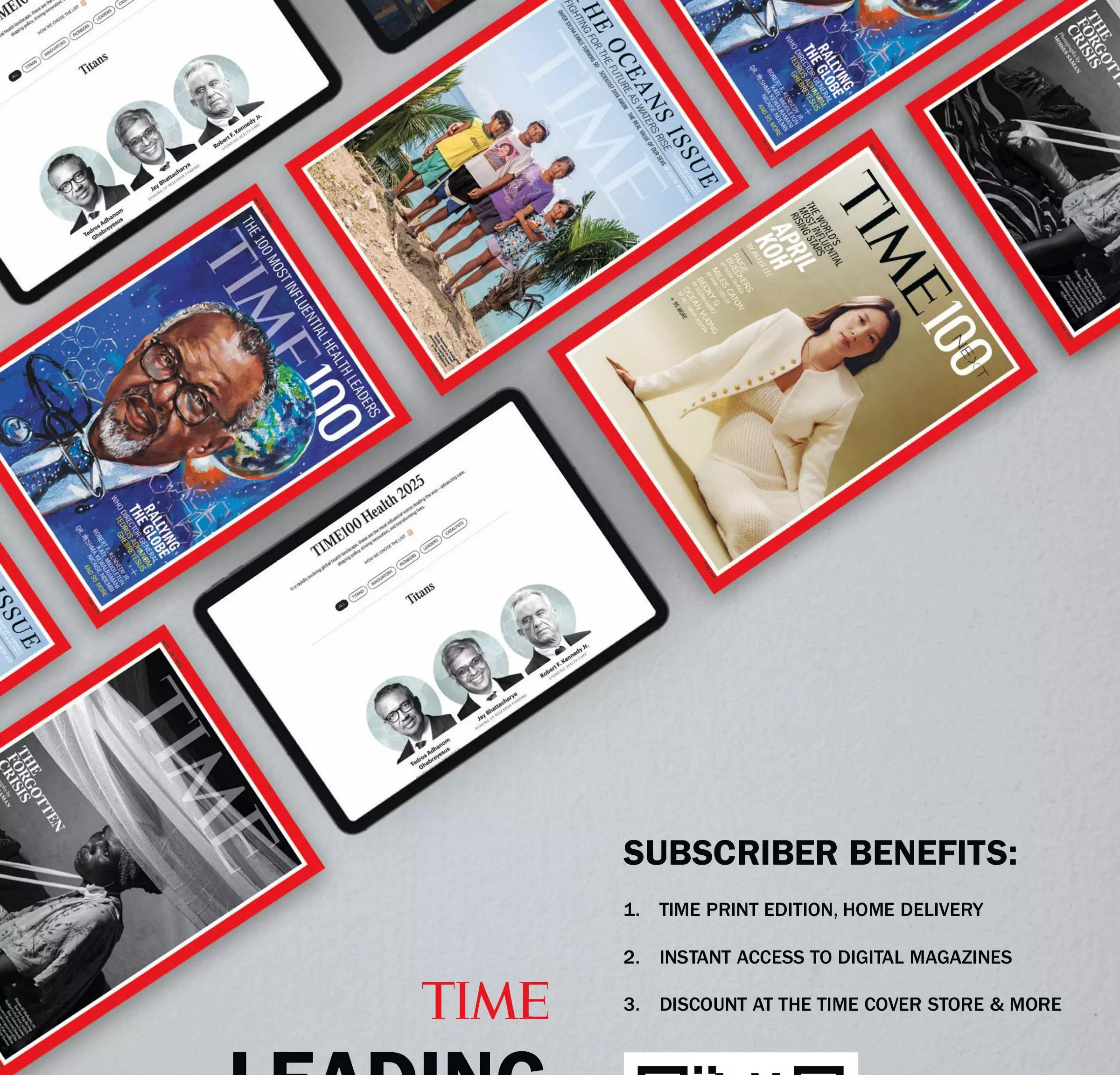
For now, another pup will do. After Lucy’s passing, Vonn questioned whether, at this point in her life, she really needed a dog with her all the time. But her sister reminded her that she’s happier around her pets. “The only negative about the sport is you just go home to an empty hotel room,” says Vonn. “It’s a tough life to live. I don’t have to live it that lonely.” In August she adopted Chance, a Cavalier like Lucy, but with a brown polka dot on his head. Before the fundraising event, Chance tried his best to mangle duck and Lamb Chop chew toys, and peed on some bricks in front of Vonn’s home.

Friends know Vonn’s feeling good psychically, and with Chance in her carry-on, she’s in a positive place. So she has inspired some certitude. In Cortina, Vonn will likely compete in three events: the downhill, super-G, and the combined team competition. “She’s going to win one of them, if not more,” says Picabo Street, who’ll be commenting for NBC. “It’s not a matter of if, it’s when.”

Since her announcement nearly a year ago, Vonn has come to realize that an Olympic medal—especially a gold—will elevate her place in sports history. Such knowledge can overheat an athlete’s brain. But sitting on her Beverly Hills couch, Vonn says she doesn’t see it that way. “I think it’s a good thing,” she says. “I like it when the stakes are high.”

While Shiffrin has the most World Cup victories ever, and Vonn considers her the greatest skier of all time, Vonn also doesn’t object when her own name comes up, as it did when Bentley called her the GOAT at his concert. Vonn, for example, calls Roger Federer her tennis GOAT, even though Novak Djokovic has more major victories. “I don’t think it necessarily always comes down to how many wins you have,” says Vonn. “I think it’s also the impact you have on sports and culture. I do think I’ve changed the way people view certain things in skiing and in sports and in culture. My goal is not to just be a ski racer. I’m not a robot. I’m not just there to win. I’m there to enjoy the mountain and to be myself. I wouldn’t do it otherwise.”

Winning Olympic gold, in such historic fashion, could certainly alter that GOAT conversation. “I don’t know how satisfied I would be if I walked away with no medal,” says Vonn. “But I don’t think that’s going to happen.” What Vonn knows for sure is that if she makes it to the Cortina starting gate, you’ll be watching. “I’ve already done more than anyone ever expected,” she says. “I’ve already done the impossible.” □



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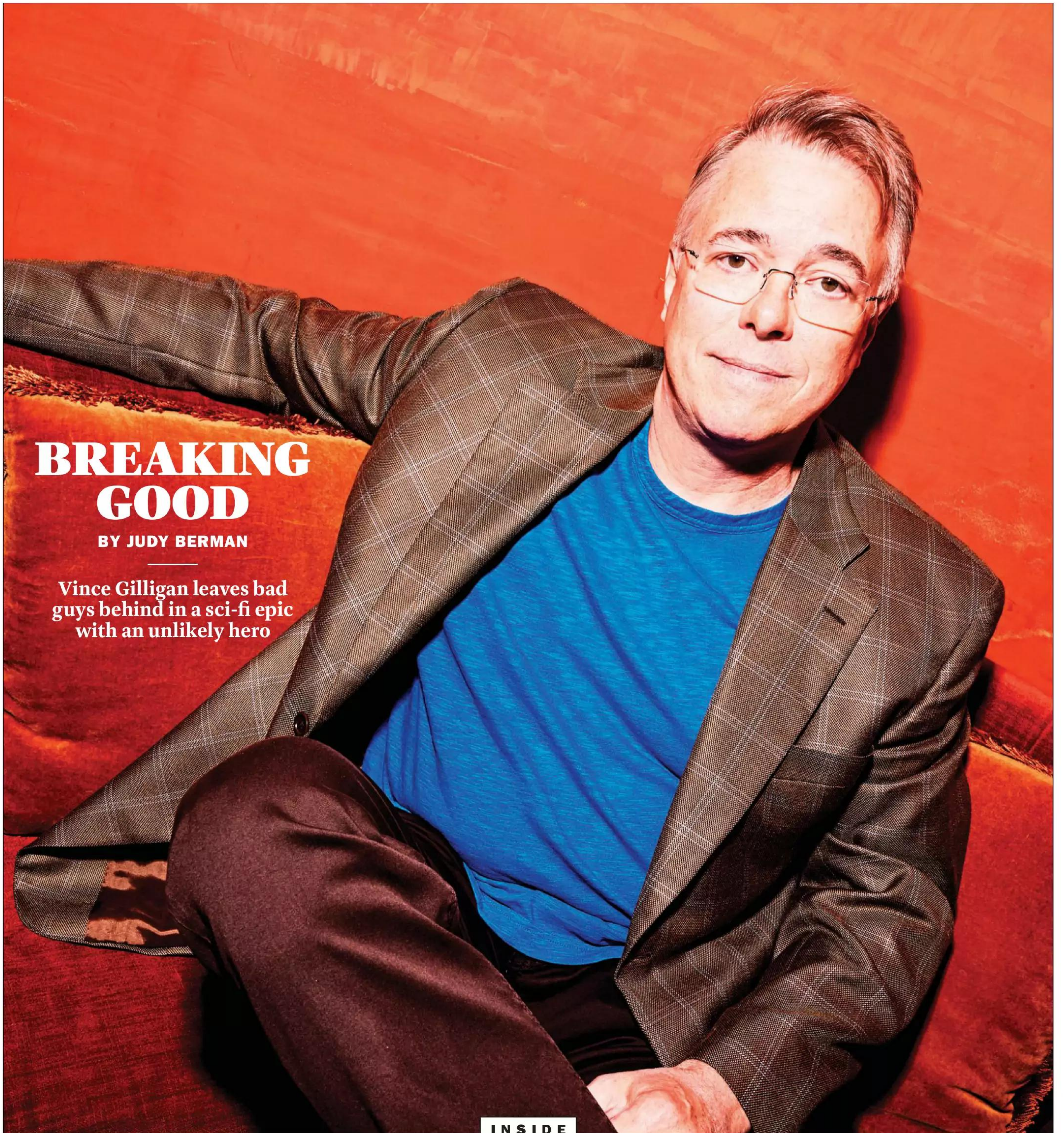
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# Time Off



## **BREAKING GOOD**

BY JUDY BERMAN

Vince Gilligan leaves bad guys behind in a sci-fi epic with an unlikely hero

INSIDE

GEORGE CLOONEY PLAYS  
A MOVIE STAR IN CRISIS

A NEW COMEDY EXAMINES  
A CREW OF L.A. STRIVERS

THE ZODIAC KILLER  
THROUGH A NEW LENS

**V**INCE GILLIGAN KNOWS BETTER THAN TO TRY to explain where his stories come from. Like the extraterrestrial transmission that kicks off his new Apple TV series, *Pluribus*, their origin is a mystery. But the writer, producer, and director best known for creating the era-defining crime drama *Breaking Bad* can approximate where and when he started mulling the idea for the sci-fi epic that would become his first major project since leaving the Walter White universe.

It was probably 2016, in Burbank, Calif., where Gilligan had convened the writers' room for Season 3 of *Better Call Saul*, the *Breaking Bad* spin-off he created with Peter Gould. "We would take lunch breaks that seemed to stretch longer and longer," he recalls. "I'd walk around the neighborhood, and my mind would wander." His thoughts coalesced around the concept of wish fulfillment. "I thought ... what if everyone in the world was suddenly really, really nice to me?" When he took himself out of the scenario, the question became: "Why would one guy be that interesting to people?"

The answer forms the wild premise of *Pluribus*, which premiered on Nov. 7 and whose particulars are best discovered as the show unfolds. But as for that irresistibly interesting guy, well, he turned out not to be a guy at all. Gilligan recruited Rhea Seehorn, who earned two Emmy nominations for playing *Saul's* beloved Kim Wexler, to anchor the show as his first female protagonist, Carol Sturka. Despite press materials that introduce Carol as "the most miserable person on Earth," she is also his first bona fide hero.

For a creator synonymous with the rise of antihero television, who made his name telling what he famously called "a story about a man who transforms himself from Mr. Chips into Scarface," this is a seismic shift. Yet it's also a reflection of the keen moral sensibility that has always permeated Gilligan's work. Though he remains proud of *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul* (both of which aired on AMC), the once avowedly apolitical storyteller has become convinced that pop culture's recent supersaturation with antiheroes has been unhealthy for society. His most ambitious series to date, *Pluribus* can be seen as a corrective of sorts—a grand, artful, mind-bendingly philosophical, darkly funny, sometimes heartbreaking, but consistently humane vindication of our fractious species.

**WHEN GILLIGAN REFLECTS** on his trajectory, from a kid making Super 8 movies in the Richmond, Va., area to, at 58, one of TV's most acclaimed creators, the word that keeps coming up is *luck*. "I really feel like I'm the Kramer of the TV-writing world," he says in October at a boutique hotel in New York City. "I fell ass-backward into good luck time and time again." This self-assessment undersells the talent of a man who has made two of the medium's best dramas. But rather than false modesty, it reads as the genuine humility of a guy who reflexively credits his collaborators.

It's about a month before *Pluribus* is slated to debut, and Gilligan, who lives in New Mexico—his new show, like the *Breaking Bad* universe, is set in Albuquerque—is in town for press and a preview screening during New York Comic Con. Dressed in a bright blue T-shirt that matches the

➤  
Carol (Seehorn) struggles to get a grip on a rapidly shifting reality



hotel room's azure-and-white decor, in an accidental echo of the meticulous production design for which his series are known, he speaks largely in anecdotes, with a soft Southern twang. As if to mark a new phase of his career, he has shaved the goatee that was his signature throughout the AMC years.

He's been through several eras already. Gilligan was studying film at NYU when, in 1989, he won the Virginia Governor's Screenwriting Award for the script that would become the movie *Home Fries*. He spent the next few years writing features. But by 1994 that work was drying up; he was broke. When his agent got him a meeting with *The X-Files* creator Chris Carter, Gilligan only intended to compliment him. But Carter asked for ideas, Gilligan pitched an episode about a character whose shadow came to life, and his future boss hired him on the spot to write it.

Gilligan's three-decade tenure in TV has paralleled the evolution of the medium. In the '90s, broadcast networks dominated prime time



with megahits like *Seinfeld*, *ER*, and *The X-Files*, whose viewership on Fox peaked at a now inconceivable 20 million. *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul* emerged into what has been called the Third Golden Age of Television, a renaissance in audacious, cinematic cable programming, spurred by the success of *The Sopranos* and sustained by Netflix's need to build a streaming library. Now he's making *Pluribus* for Apple, one of the few companies still reliably funding expensive streaming series at a time of consolidation and austerity in Hollywood.

And yet Gilligan initially doubted he could make it as a TV writer. "The thing I was most trepidatious about is, I am so lazy," he says. Surely, he figured, a guy whose process involved frequent video-game breaks wouldn't last past his 13-week *X-Files* probation. "I thought, *I don't really need to clean out my fridge in Virginia. The ketchup will keep 13 weeks.*" But he took to the hard work. "The two things about TV that are so great,"

he discovered, are that "your writing actually gets produced"—unlike film scripts, which can take years to reach the screen, if they do at all—and "working with smart, talented people you can stand to be in a room with for 12 hours a day, five or six days a week."

Gilligan counts himself, yes, lucky to have been pitching *Breaking Bad* amid a boom in cable networks making bespoke scripted series, an escape hatch from broadcast's grueling 22-plus-episode seasons. The 2008 premiere of the show, which follows a terminally ill teacher (Bryan Cranston) who cooks meth to stockpile money for his family, failed to generate the same buzz as AMC's flagship original, *Mad Men*. A 2011 New York

**'I'm lucky as hell to be known for *Breaking Bad*. But I don't want to be a one-trick pony.'**

VINCE GILLIGAN

*Times Magazine* profile ventured, in an observation that has aged awkwardly, that Gilligan might be "TV's first true red-state auteur." Just when it looked as if that crowd might not be enough to sustain it, Netflix licensed the show, driving millions of new viewers to AMC for new episodes.

*Breaking Bad* not only ended its five-season run with a record-shattering 10.3 million viewers tuning in for Walter White's Shakespearean send-off, but also yielded a more ruminative companion show in *Saul*, about Walt's crooked lawyer (Bob Odenkirk), and a feature-length Netflix sequel, *El Camino*, that followed Walt's puppyish partner in crime, Jesse Pinkman (Aaron Paul). Gilligan isn't wrong that he benefited from serendipitous timing. Yet it's equally true that none of *Breaking Bad*'s rivals maintained both the huge audiences and the consistent quality of what became basic cable's crown jewel of the 2010s.

**PLURIBUS, WHICH ARRIVES** three years after the final episode of *Saul*, opens by having a bit of fun with the clichés of prestige apocalypse dramas, from *The Last of Us* to *3 Body Problem*. The premiere hints at many types of extinction events before pivoting to a cataclysm so surprising, it's useless to guess. Within the first half hour, the world we know is transformed beyond recognition.

What is clear from the outset is *Pluribus*' global scale, which required a much larger canvas than Gilligan had ever been given. Portions of the nine-episode season were shot in the Canary Islands and northern Spain. The production built Carol's entire neighborhood in the desert outside Albuquerque. "We picked a spot with this beautiful view of the Sandia Mountains," Gilligan says. "And we said, 'OK, in however many months we're gonna have a whole cul-de-sac here.'" It wasn't just a flex. "We knew we couldn't shoot in a real neighborhood," Gilligan explains, "because the neighbors would kick us out after the second episode." Suffice to say, a lot of weird stuff happens at Carol's house.

This cul-de-sac at the end of civilization feels like a physical

manifestation of the loneliness Carol radiates even before the cataclysmic incident. A best-selling romantasy author with a perma-grimace, she dismisses her books as “mindless crap” and hates her fans in what Gilligan says is a projection of self-loathing. Her manager and romantic partner Helen (Miriam Shor) serves as a buffer between Carol and everyone else. When your hero has so many flaws that they initially obscure positive traits like independence and grit, it doesn’t hurt to cast an actor your loyal audience adores. For Gilligan, who wrote the character specifically for Seehorn, the reunion meant getting to spend more time with a performer who was “as sweet and kind and pleasant to be around as anyone I’ve ever worked with.”

He didn’t take the challenge of crafting his first female protagonist lightly. (While Kim was so popular that viewers lived in fear she’d be killed off, Walt’s wife Skyler, played by Anna Gunn, was widely despised for her perceived shrillness.) “I always worry about writing female characters,” he says. “A lesbian character as well, because that’s not my experience.” But women are well represented among the series’ writers and directors. Besides, what makes Carol, like Kim, a great character is that she isn’t defined by gender or sexuality; she’s a person first. “It doesn’t feel like he had an agenda of ‘I’m going to write a female-empowerment story,’” Seehorn says. “He wrote a fascinating, complex, incredibly reluctant hero with a lot of flaws but a lot of strengths, some of which she didn’t know she had.” Only in hindsight did he realize that her anxious, misanthropic tendencies—“standard writer problems”—mirrored his own.

Still, for all that *Pluribus* is a departure from male-antihero crime capers, it’s also unmistakably a Vince Gilligan creation: mournful undertones cut by dark humor; visual grandeur and distinctive characters. His trademark cold opens, which can transport us halfway around the world or introduce new characters, remain a masterly way of calibrating suspense. Exiting the New York screening, I heard one



Gilligan directs Seehorn in a scene from the *Pluribus* premiere

attendee regale her companion with a list of *Breaking Bad* Easter eggs I hadn’t noticed. In many ways, returning to speculative storytelling has felt like a homecoming to Gilligan, even as swerving away from crime presents a chance to expand his legacy. “I’m lucky as hell to be known for *Breaking Bad*. That’ll be the first thing on my tombstone,” he reflects. “But I don’t want to be a one-trick pony. If I have any life left in me, I want to do a few other things before I’m done.”

**IN 2016, THE NEWS BROKE** that Gilligan was developing a drama about the Jonestown massacre. But the project never got off the ground; he found himself paralyzed by the task of doing justice to the victims without elevating the perspective of their leader. “I realized I better stay in my lane,” he says. “I’m better at making up stories. Then I don’t have to feel responsible” for dramatizing real people’s pain.

As adaptations and franchises crowd out the original storytelling

on TV, Gilligan is notable for what he doesn’t do as well as what he does. You’re not likely to find him helming the next *Andor* or *The Penguin* or any other prestige-branded series based on monolithic IP. “We’ve got modern mythologies now, with *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* and Marvel and DC—and all that stuff’s great,” he allows. “But that stuff was created for people who are now in their 60s and 70s. It’s good that they continue. It shows that they have a fundamental worth in terms of myth.” But, he says, “every generation deserves its own mythology.”

Another lucrative option that would surely be open to Gilligan is the megaproducer route, in which a big-name creator like Ryan Murphy or Shonda Rhimes develops a stable of series, each with their imprimatur but its own showrunner. “I probably should figure out how to do that, because there’s a lot more money,” he muses. But the idea of parachuting into a writers’ room, dispensing high-level feedback, then moving on to the next? “That sounds like hell on earth.”

Though often described as an auteur—a term he has rejected—

Gilligan continues to thrive on the collaborative spirit of the writers' room. "There are writers who write every episode of a TV show, and my hat is off to them," he says. (Think Mike White's *The White Lotus*.) Not only does he appreciate camaraderie, he also believes that, were he to script every episode solo, he'd have "a poorer show creatively." Seehorn describes him as "the composer in the middle of the orchestra," working to realize "this beautiful story in his mind" but leaving room for each musician to contribute. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Gilligan alums were represented in almost every department of the *Pluribus* crew.

In his book *Difficult Men*, which profiled the mostly prickly personalities behind contemporaries like *The Sopranos* and *Mad Men*, Brett Martin wrote that Gilligan "was known as a good man to work for—someone who managed to balance the vision and microscopic control of the most autocratic showrunner with the open and supportive spirit of the most relaxed." This reputation has persisted; even the mildest criticisms are difficult, though not impossible, to find. When Seehorn joined *Saul*, she found herself surrounded by "people that are all working at the very top of their game." Even more remarkable, she says, is that it was "in service to the story, not ego. And you come on and they cannot wait for your contribution."

**STANDING BEFORE A CROWD** of peers in February to accept a lifetime achievement award from the Writers Guild, Gilligan argued that pop culture needed to move on from bad guys like Walter White. "We are living in an era where bad guys, the real-life kind, are running amok," he said. "Bad guys who make their own rules, bad guys who, no matter what they tell you, are only out for themselves. Who am I talking about? Well, this is Hollywood, so guess." It was time, he believed, for heroes to make a comeback.

Gilligan has been expressing similar sentiments since at least 2018. What changed to make a creator who spent the better part of the Obama years cultivating his own Scarface nostalgic for Mr. Chips? Gilligan doesn't

mention names. But Donald Trump took office in 2017, so guess. "I've been studiously apolitical my whole career," he says, because he found that polemic "instantly turned off half the potential audience." *Breaking Bad* and *Saul* were concerned with larger moral truths: "At their heart, both say: actions have consequences." Simple though it is, Gilligan points out that this message eluded TV for years, as characters in the episodic fare that predominated before DVR and streaming enabled serialized storytelling could commit murder in one episode and never speak of it again.

Now, he feels compelled to re-examine the kinds of characters he's creating because "what's going on does not seem like it's about left or right anymore. It's about maintaining a democracy, a civil republic and the rule of law, and the right to free speech vs. giving it all away." Though it seems, to him, as if the U.S. is "right on the edge of civil war," he's convinced that no one actually desires that outcome.

"We've got to find a way to talk to each other," he says. He's as stumped as anyone on how to make that happen. But he hopes *Pluribus*, a show too removed from our reality to explicitly address current politics that is nonetheless "about people struggling to do the right thing," can play a small part in facilitating those conversations.

The series captures the loneliness that has pervaded society since the COVID pandemic and the dread of a future in which artificial intelligence might render human interaction obsolete. (Gilligan didn't have LLMs in mind when he conceived *Pluribus*, but says he's "happy if this show, in any way, shape, or form, could turn people off to AI.") In the imperfect hero who is Carol, viewers get a role model who doesn't let her anger or grief stop her from trying to save the world.

Gilligan is probably incapable of saccharine. *Pluribus* is as dry, ironic,

**'Every generation  
deserves its own  
mythology.'**

VINCE GILLIGAN

brutal, and alert to the horrors festering in no small number of human souls as anything he's made. Yet Carol's quest becomes kind of inspiring. This reflects not just Seehorn's charm and Gilligan's frustrations with anti-heroes, but also his anxiety about the prevalence of postapocalyptic sci-fi stories. "It was like it was priming people for the apocalypse, instead of priming them to avoid the apocalypse at all cost," he says. Distilled to its essence, the message of *Pluribus* might be: Humanity is worth fighting for.

**BY THE TIME** *Pluribus* premieres, Gilligan will be back in the writers' room, at work on a second season that was greenlighted along with the first. Does it bother him that he won't get to hear audience feedback first? No, he says, because "I don't think that's the job." Ever since *The X-Files* became one of the first shows to engage the internet, he's avoided fan chatter. "Fellow writers would say, 'You need to check out this chat room. They're talking about your episode,'" he recalls. "I instinctively knew to never do that."

Not that he's closed off to all input. "He never, ever shuts me down," Seehorn says. And as meticulous as he is in constructing his richly detailed stories, Gilligan also values spontaneity. *Breaking Bad* lore is littered with major plot changes made on the fly and characters as key as Jesse kept around much longer than Gilligan intended because he liked the performances so much. He has a clearer sense of how he wants to wrap up *Pluribus* than he did for previous shows at this point in their runs but makes no guarantees that he'll stick to it.

"I want to stay open to the possibilities of going a different way," Gilligan explains. "It's like if you get in your car and you say, 'I'm in Virginia, I want to head out to California. So I know, basically, the direction I need to head.' But there's all these side trips and back roads you can take along the way—and that makes the trip more exciting." Luck is part of that ride. You may get a flat tire or run into a long-lost friend at a rest stop. But if the destination is appealing and the driver adept, the journey is bound to be worth taking. □

## MOVIES

## George Clooney is quietly touching in a deeply meta role

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

ONE MINUTE A MAN IS A HOT YOUNG MOVIE star; the next, he's a silver fox. Who knows where the time goes? There are lots of movies about aging actresses—*Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve* are prime examples—but we're supposed to assume that growing older doesn't faze men as much. It's easier for a man to ease into a state of sexy gravitas. That's true of both George Clooney and the George Clooney-like character he plays in Noah Baumbach's *Jay Kelly*, which hits select theaters Nov. 14 before streaming on Netflix Dec. 5. You couldn't find a more fitting performer for this successful actor who, after an encounter with an old friend that begins with reminiscing and ends in a fistfight, reconsiders his entire life. The idea gives Clooney lots to work with: he gets to razzle-dazzle one minute and brood over his mistakes the next. Clooney can do it all.

Yet there's something strangely inert about *Jay Kelly*. Baumbach co-wrote the script with Emily Mortimer, who also shows up in a few brief scenes. While a handful of moments are beautifully written, acted, and directed, *Jay Kelly* feels more sentimental than truly thoughtful, particularly in the motif that resounds in Jay's brain: Why didn't I spend more time with my kids? Jay has two, an older daughter (Riley Keough) who harbors bitterness toward him, and a younger one (Grace Edwards) who understands him better, though she's heading off to college. His only true friend is the guy who gets a 15% cut of everything he earns, his manager Ron (played, superbly, by Adam Sandler). And is that really a friend at all? He and Ron confront that question, and the answer makes neither of them happy.

**ALIENATED FROM HIS DAUGHTERS**, Jay is delighted when he runs into an old acting-school friend, Billy Crudup's Timothy. Timothy, now a child psychiatrist, heaps praise on his old friend. Then Timothy turns on him. In interviews, Jay has told a story about accidentally getting his first big role because he tagged along on a friend's audition. Timothy was that friend, and in his view, Jay used him. "You stole my life," he says, and Jay is crestfallen. He may be oblivious—but he isn't cruel.

There's plenty to dig into there, but before you know it, *Jay Kelly* is off to the next thing.



^  
Sandler and Clooney inhabit a friendship built on business

**Clooney makes you care about a man who may pretty much be empty**

This is a restless, wriggly movie. There's the film festival in Tuscany that wants to honor Jay. Jay says no, then changes his mind when he realizes his younger daughter will be in Europe then. The movie is packed with supporting actors who show up for a scene or two, including Jim Broadbent as the benevolent director who gave Jay his big break, Alba Rohrwacher as a charming festival gofer, Greta Gerwig as Ron's harried wife, and Stacy Keach as Jay's difficult father. Laura Dern shows up as Jay's frustrated publicist; she and Sandler have the best scene in the movie, reflecting on the time they almost got together forever.

Clooney's Jay Kelly is the beaming, brooding star at the center of this constellation. As much light as he gives off, he soaks up more from those around him: he needs them in a way they don't need him. Clooney makes you care about a man who may be pretty much empty. When he finally gets to that tribute in Tuscany, he sits with the audience as they watch the laudatory assemblage of film clips drawn from his career. Only it's snapshots from Clooney's career we're seeing: clips from *Michael Clayton*, *The Thin Red Line*, even 2020's *The Midnight Sky*, in which Clooney plays a loner scientist with a big gray beard. We watch him watching himself—this is not just Jay Kelly watching Jay Kelly, but George Clooney watching George Clooney, in roles where he looks impossibly young, a baby movie star taking his first steps. The look on his face—on Jay's face, on Clooney's face—is one of pure wonder. Who is that person? he seems to be asking himself, enchanted and seduced by his own image. It's the best visual question mark in a movie filled with unanswerable questions. □

## TELEVISION

## A woman under the influencer

BY JUDY BERMAN

*INFLUENCER* IS A DIVISIVE WORD. Your gut reaction to it—one that’s likely to be more negative the older you are—will probably be a good gauge of how you’ll feel about HBO’s *I Love LA*, a hangout comedy created by and starring *Shiva Baby* breakout Rachel Sennott. The latest in a wave of shows by and about young adults (including FX’s *Adults* and Amazon’s *Overcompensating*) that is breaking a little over a decade after *Girls* touched off a monsoon of controversy about and among millennials, *I Love LA* understands that there is humiliation inherent in chasing fame, success, and wealth for their own sakes. Sennott has a keen eye for the absurd workings of the influencer world, not to mention some great jokes about it. But her engagement with this new form of celebrity is so superficial for most of the first season that it’s hard to tell whether the show, airing weekly as part of HBO’s flagship Sunday-night lineup, is meant as a commentary on shallowness or if it’s just shallow.

Also known for the black comedy *Bottoms*, Sennott brings her signature mix of awkwardness, intensity, and smolder to the lead role of Maia, who aspires to a “big life” but is languishing as an assistant at the confusingly named talent-management firm Alyssa 180. We meet her on her 27th birthday, as she scrolls on her phone; has loud sex with her sweet teacher boyfriend, Dylan (Josh Hutcherson), during an earthquake; then frets about her frequent UTIs from the toilet while he brushes his teeth. This is all very West Coast Lena Dunham. But despite its frankness, the show turns out to be more interested in ambition than in sexuality or gender relations.

**ASIDE FROM DYLAN**, who seems to be the only grounded person in all of *La La Land*, Maia is surrounded by narcissistic clout chasers. Her employer, Alyssa (a smartly cast Leighton

Meester), a sometimes-intriguing twist on the girlboss archetype, claims to be her mentor but gets cagey about promotions. Maia’s flaky friends Alani (True Whitaker) and Charlie (Jordan Firstman) are, respectively, a nepo baby with a titular vice presidency at her famous father’s production company and a mouthy stylist genuflecting at the feet of small-time pop singers.

The sudden arrival of Maia’s old best frenemy, Tallulah (Odessa A’zion), a rising New York influencer, presents both an opportunity and a threat. If Maia signs Tallulah to Alyssa 180, her boss will have to promote her to manager. But bubbly, unstrategic, free-spirited Tallulah also has a tendency to suck up all the oxygen in a city, relegating Maia to the role of sidekick. *I Love LA* chronicles our type A hero’s efforts to mix business with friendship, pinning her dreams of industry domination on an It girl who might be a bit too authentic to be a good investment.

***I Love LA* is a fun but mostly forgettable hang**

Sennott and A’zion are perfectly matched, the former all nervous energy while the latter glides on charm and impulse. Some character development does, thankfully, take place over the course of the season. Maia questions how cutthroat she really wants to be; Tallulah chafes at the distortion of her image. And the show can be uproarious when it’s spoofing the norms of its subculture, from at-home vitamin IVs to virtue-signaling snack-food brands to unironic rhapsodizing over an influencer-branded Chipotle bowl. Guest stars are deployed sparingly but well.

It makes for a fun but mostly forgettable hang. I kept waiting in vain for hints that *I Love LA* possessed more insight than its characters. Sennott never steps outside the frame to ask what kind of person flocks to the influencer sphere and why, or whether any meaning can be found in such apparently soulless work. Maybe existential soul-searching is too much of a luxury for a generation that will likely have to fight harder than any other still living to survive. But why make art grounded in your own experience if you’re not prepared to do some introspection? □



Sennott, far right, leads a cast of California dreamers

FEATURE

# Telling the truth of true crime

BY ESTHER ZUCKERMAN

DIRECTOR CHARLIE SHACKLETON THOUGHT HE COULD have his cake and eat it too.

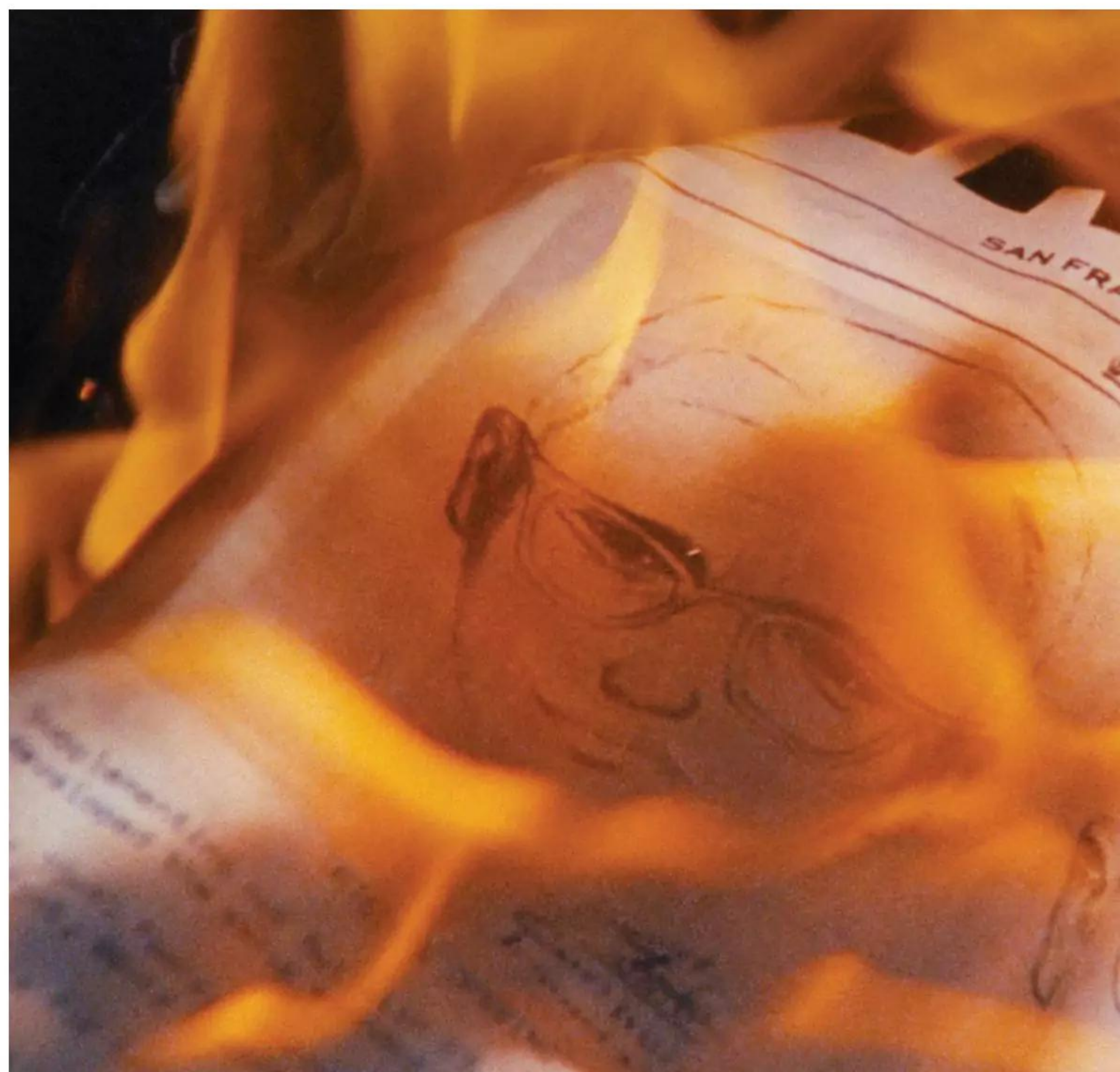
For years, Shackleton had been considering the idea of making a documentary centered on the Zodiac Killer. The mysterious and legendary serial killer haunted the Bay Area in the late 1960s, killing at least five people and claiming dozens more victims, though those were never confirmed. He has been a fixture of pop-culture fascination ever since, from David Fincher's 2007 thriller starring Jake Gyllenhaal to last year's Netflix docuseries *This Is the Zodiac Speaking*.

"I had a sort of love-hate relationship with true crime," Shackleton said in a video call earlier this year, when the film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. "It seemed like the way to make something that would genuinely interest me but could also potentially be quite commercial."

The director, whose previous features include the essay-like *Beyond Clueless*, about teen movies, and *Fear Itself*, about the horror genre, found his angle when he came across the book *The Zodiac Killer Cover-Up: The Silenced Badge*. Published in 2012 by Lyndon Lafferty, a California Highway Patrolman, the book homes in on a suspect he calls George Russell Tucker and chronicles how Lafferty believed his efforts to bring Tucker to justice had been thwarted. Alas, Lafferty's family did not grant Shackleton the rights to the book.

So instead, Shackleton made *Zodiac Killer Project*, which hits limited theaters on Nov. 21 and expands through early December. This documentary is about the documentary that Shackleton *would have* made had he secured those rights, and in turn serves as a deconstruction of the entire genre of true crime and how filmmakers in his position often manipulate their audiences. Shackleton narrates, with a charming British accent and a wry sense of humor that often veers into the self-deprecating, how he would have approached Lafferty's tale. Instead of the re-enactments he might have staged, the images on the screen are largely static shots of California locations, often devoid of people. When it won the NEXT Innovator Award at Sundance, the jury citation singled out its "funny and insightful commentary on the very kind of film it was originally meant to be."

Shackleton steps back to reveal how his movie might have adhered to the tropes of the true-crime genre. For instance, how the title sequence would have used "country-inflected music, but with a sort of dark edge" as it cycles through layered images of landscapes and shadowy men. He uses examples from paragons of the genre like *The Jinx* and *Making a Murderer*. He introduces us to terms like *evocative B-roll*, the kind of stock footage of, say, cigarettes burning or ominous-looking out-of-focus figures that get the blood pumping.



Unable to tell the story he'd hoped to, Shackleton interrogated the ethics of the entire genre

"I was never blind to the many complex ethical lapses of these things," Shackleton explains. "And it wasn't until I got my hands dirty that I began to engage with those questions more actively."

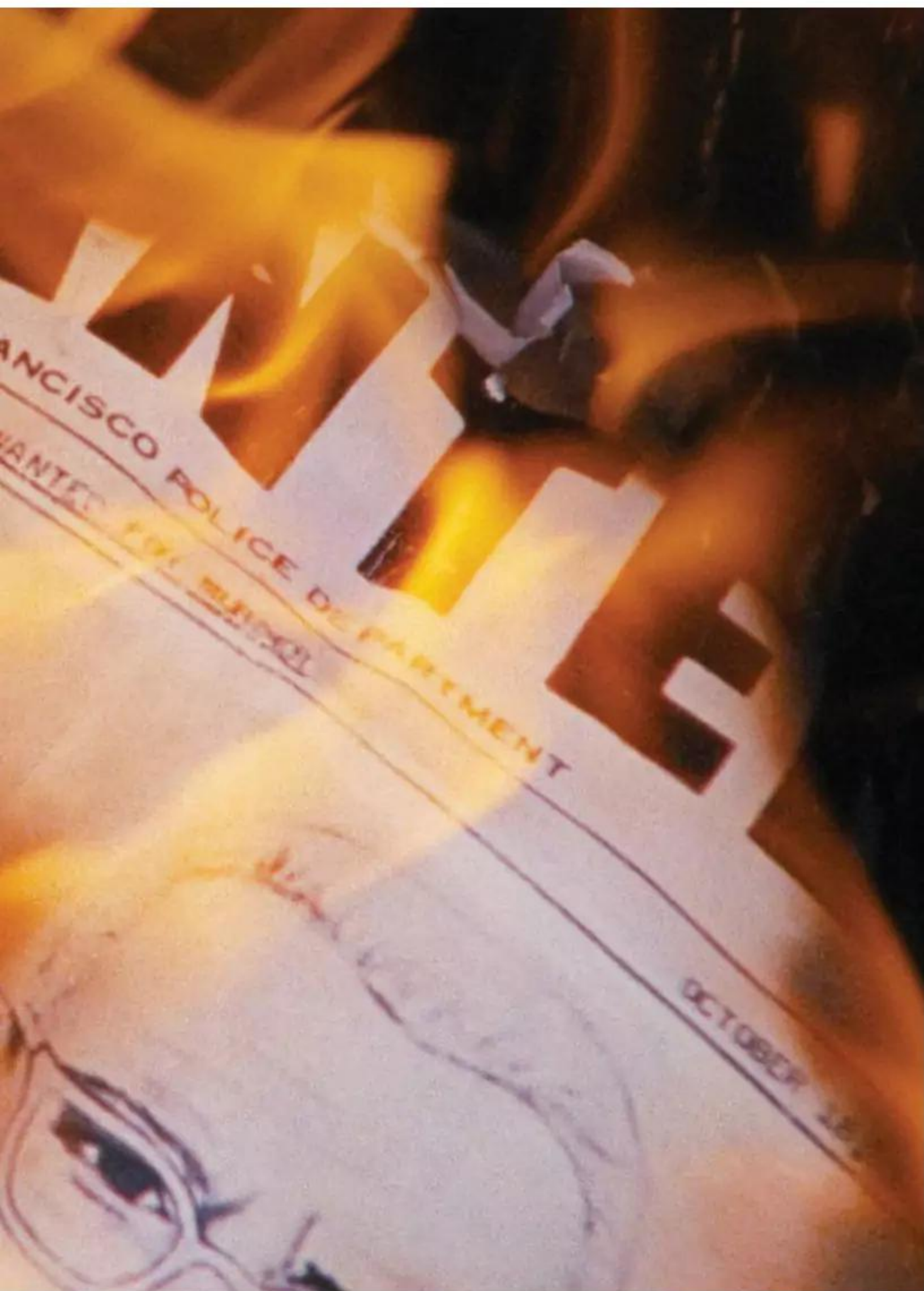
**THE IDEA FOR WHAT** *Zodiac Killer Project* eventually became emerged from conversations Shackleton had with friends, talking up his idea over beers at the pub. Despite the fact that he legally couldn't make a movie based on Lafferty's book, he couldn't let the idea go.

"I started thinking about how it would be to have me tell it as I had already so many times to friends," he says. "But I was working within the restriction of not being able to adapt the book. Not being able to have any of the content of the thing. So what was left without the content? It was just the shape and the feelings that I was convinced people would have felt if only I could have done the thing."

This led him to the idea of empty images of locations. If he couldn't tell the whole story, what was left but absence? It may sound dull, but it's not, because Shackleton makes the lack of

**'I was never blind to the complex ethical lapses.'**

CHARLIE SHACKLETON,  
DIRECTOR



action oddly hypnotic, allowing viewers to fill in the spaces with his intelligent, often funny descriptions of what might have been.

But the shape *Zodiac Killer Project* ultimately took proves most fascinating for the way Shackleton calls himself out for ethical leaps he might have taken. He acknowledges that there's a degree of exaggerated "glibness" in the way he talks about what he might have done, and that he doesn't know how far he would have actually gone in taking salacious liberties. Still, he casually notes, calling out his own hypocrisy, he doesn't show the house of Lafferty's Zodiac suspect because it didn't look spooky enough for the lair of a potential murderer, especially based on the way Lafferty describes it in the text. The completely unrelated building Shackleton shows is eerily shrouded in trees, unlike the real thing.

"If you make documentaries, when you watch documentaries, you have quite a heightened awareness of where those sorts of deceptions are happening, because you're watching with an eye on how it's been made," he says. "It appealed to me to kind of wrap the

SURVIVING R. KELLY: LIFETIME; I'LL BE GONE IN THE DARK: HBO; LAST CALL: HBO; MURDER IN BIG HORN: SHOWTIME

## GOING BEYOND THE UNSAVORY DETAILS

*Our list of true-crime docs that set a higher standard*



### *Surviving R. Kelly*

dream hampton's 2019 Lifetime docuseries amplifies the perspectives of Black women long decentered in crime narratives.



### *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*

Liz Garbus sensitively unspools the story of the late crime writer Michelle McNamara's search for the Golden State Killer.



### *Last Call*

HBO's 2023 docuseries interrogates why it took police so long to catch a killer who preyed on men in gay bars in the early 1990s.



### *Murder in Big Horn*

This 2023 Showtime docuseries draws attention to the movement for missing and murdered Indigenous women.

entire audience into that scrutiny so that they could scrutinize my choices just as I would anyone else's."

**SHACKLETON WAS CAREFUL**, however, not to call out viewers for being drawn to true crime, nor shame them for liking exploitative stories of blood and guts. In fact, he believes that true crime itself has co-opted that narrative, scolding while still trying to offer up all the addictive material of the genre. During *Zodiac Killer Project*, he specifically calls out the highly watched and highly criticized Jeffrey Dahmer installment of Ryan Murphy's *Monster* franchise, showing how the series offers up hours of actor Evan Peters as Dahmer committing heinous acts, while simultaneously asking for respect for Dahmer's victims.

"Whatever value that analysis might have had has been completely cannibalized now by the true-crime industry," he says. Instead, Shackleton wants to turn the lens on the industry itself. He adds that the other part of the equation is the question of supply. "The streamers and everyone else are constantly saying, 'Well, this is what viewers want, there's a huge demand for this, so we just make it.' But of course they are also putting out so much of it that often it's just the thing that's there when you pull up Netflix."

Shackleton is not dismissive of all true crime. When asked to point out a documentary that he thinks does the style well, he calls out Errol Morris' seminal 1988 film *The Thin Blue Line*, about the wrongful conviction of Randall Dale Adams, accused of killing a police officer. "It holds up perfectly," Shackleton says. "It set the mold of all these clichéd shots that I'm taking the piss out of in my film, but obviously when it was doing it they weren't clichés." But he struggles to think of a recent true-crime documentary that gets a clean bill of ethical health.

So has making *Zodiac Killer Project* killed Shackleton's desire to make a real true-crime doc? Most likely. It seems decreasingly possible "to lean into that genre and also make something interesting," he says. "I'd be a lot less confident I could have my cake and eat it." □

## CHINA WATCH

PRESENTED BY CHINA DAILY 中国日报

## Forbidden gates swing wide open

An exhibition in Beijing honors treasures and the generations who have preserved them through ebbs and tides of war, exile and restoration

BY WANG KAIHAO

The Meridian Gate towers above the entrance to the Palace Museum in Beijing, China's imperial palace from 1420 to 1911 and also known as the Forbidden City. During the imperial years, numerous royals, high officials and nobles walked through this gate, which stands for solemnity, ritual and order. They stepped into a place closed to outsiders, a place in which the course of their own destinies — and often the fate of the country — was shaped.

In October 1925 the Palace Museum was established, unlocking the gates for the public and marking the beginning of a story about custodians devoted to safeguarding and extending an unbroken civilization.

A century later tourists ascend the Meridian Gate Galleries, a privilege that was unimaginable even for most high officials who passed the doorway in ancient times. Here the exhibition *A Century of Stewardship: From the Forbidden City to the Palace Museum* opened on Sept. 30, and runs until the end of the year.

More than 200 carefully chosen exhibits, including paintings, calligraphic works, jade, bronze ware, gold ware, porcelain and architectural components, are on view. A half-day tour of its three galleries is akin to undertaking millennia time travel.

"Cultural relics are the best records of civilization," said Xu Wanling, chief curator of the exhibition. "Through relics we want visitors to see those

historic moments and the people behind them."

One monumental treasure on view, and perhaps the most famous Chinese painting, *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, was unrolled for the first time in a decade.

This silk scroll, created by Zhang Zeduan of the imperial painting academy of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), and more than 16 ft. long, depicts the flourishing landscape of the national capital of Dongjing (present-day Kaifeng, Henan province) through vivid portrayals of about 600 figures, 100 houses, 25 boats and countless details of urban life.

Seals of nearly 100 collectors, impressed over centuries, testify to the painting's journey through history.

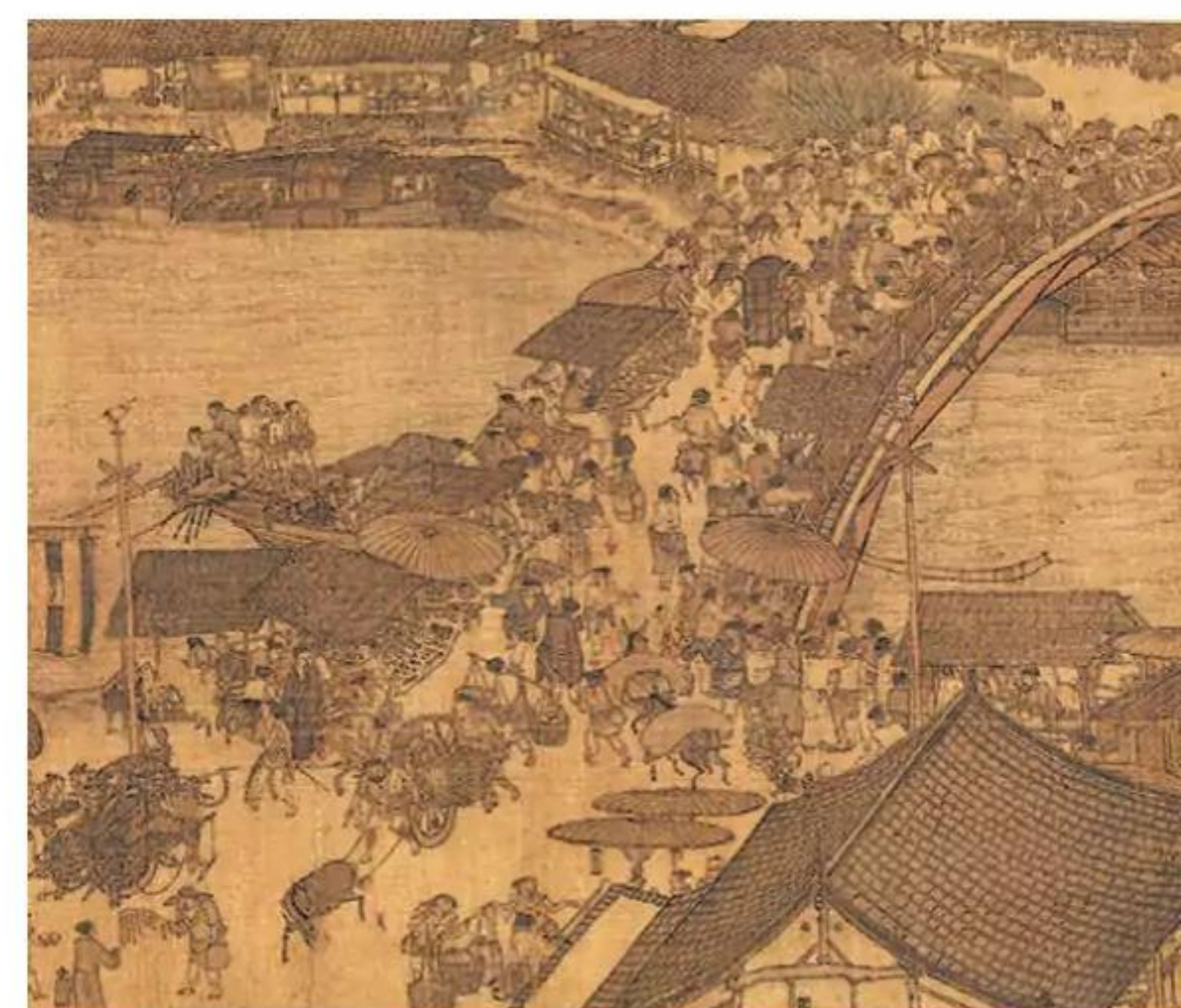
The scroll was lost during the war that ended the Northern Song, stolen from the palace, passed from one literati's hand to another and from some powerful minister's residence to the next, before eventually entering the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) royal collection in the late 18th century. However, turmoil returned. The last emperor Puyi, who continued to live in the Forbidden City in the 1920s after the monarchy fell, managed to get the painting out of the palace again. He later took it, along with many other relics, to Changchun, Northeast China, where he presided over a puppet regime under Japanese occupation. Many assumed the painting was lost forever during the chaotic end of World War II.

Against all odds it resurfaced

*Five Oxen*, a Tang Dynasty painting, is on show at the special exhibition in the Palace Museum in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A jade royal seal from Qing Dynasty. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



in 1950. Cultural relic researchers found it in a wooden case abandoned by Puyi when his puppet state collapsed. The painting later returned to the Forbidden City, intact.

Xu Tong, a researcher in the painting and calligraphy department of the Palace Museum, said: "Many relics did not always stay in the palace peacefully. The hardships they endured just tell the exceptional history of this museum."

Another highlight, the Tang Dynasty (618-907) painting *Five Oxen*, portrays a modern tale of perseverance. This scroll in the Qing royal collection, one of the earliest surviving Chinese paintings drawn on paper, disappeared after the Eight-Nation Alliance invaded Beijing in 1900.

It surfaced again in the 1950s in a Hong Kong auction. Premier Zhou Enlai then directed efforts to negotiate and buy the painting and some other relics, making the mission a matter of national urgency. Xu Bojiao, a banker from a family of cultural relic appraisers, was entrusted with the task.

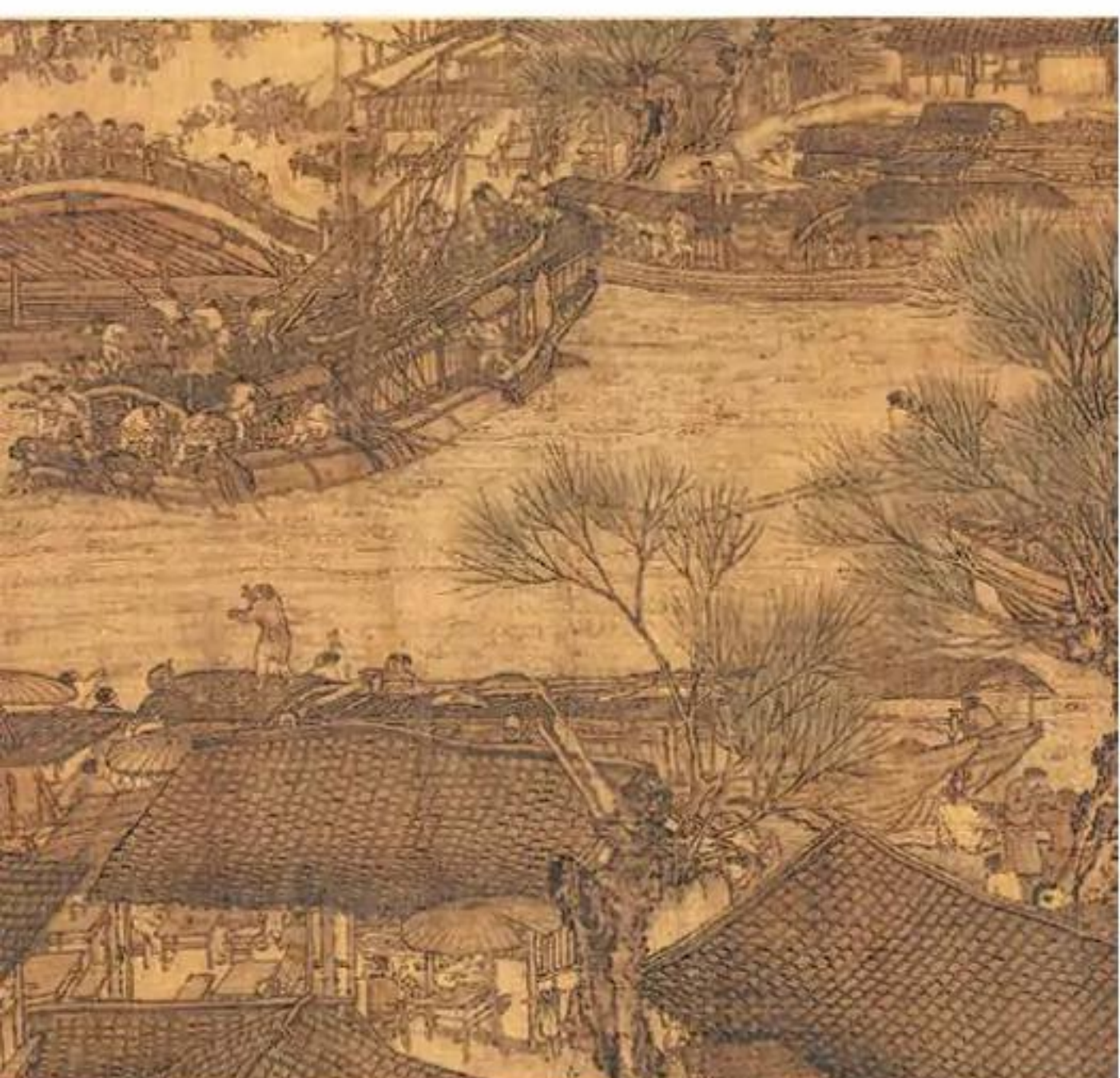
In a letter written to Zheng Zhenduo, then the country's cultural heritage administration chief, he said: "One more relic we acquire, one more thing we've done for our nation." This letter is displayed in the exhibition.

"We're not qualified to judge history," Xu Wanling said. "But people from history have spoken for us."

"In the early 20th century,



Dasheng Yiyin, a Tang Dynasty guqin (zither) on show. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A Warring States Period jade disc known as *bi* with dragon and phoenix patterns. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Above: *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* was unrolled for the first time in a decade. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Left: Lianhe Fanghu, a bronze jar with lotus and crane decorations, on show in the exhibition.

JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

A roof decoration from the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihe Dian), the highest-level architecture in the Forbidden City, is also on display.

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A Gold Cup of Eternal Territorial Integrity of the Qing Dynasty. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

when the country endeavored to overcome years of weakness, some cultural relics were lost. Thanks to our predecessors' efforts the treasures came back. It's also a reflection of the times."

In the eastern gallery of Meridian Gate stands a bronze square jar with lotus and crane decoration, or Lianhe Fanghu, at the center, dating back to the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.). A cast figure of a crane perches on top of the jar with its wings fully spread and its beak slightly open as if about to call. It is surrounded by two layers of flourishing lotus petals. The body is decorated with sacred animals in various shapes.

To the south lies the Gold Cup of Eternal Territorial Integrity, created during the Qianlong era (1736-95). The vessel reflects the wealth and social stability of the peak time of the Qing Dynasty, whose Emperor Qianlong was an ardent connoisseur of art.

Today, digitized editions of many highlights appear on screens with glasses-free 3D effects. Modern visitors may take the wonders of such technology for granted, but for any visitors stepping into the Forbidden City for the first time 100 years ago, the visual impact of these long-hidden cultural relics would have been overwhelming.

# Ancient writings come back home

BY LI MUYUN  
and HE CHUN

Two volumes of an ancient Chinese silk manuscript illegally taken overseas 79 years ago have returned to their home in Changsha, Hunan province.

A ceremony was held at Hunan Museum on Oct. 13 to mark the official repatriation of Volumes II and III of the Zidanku Silk Manuscripts, titled *Wuxing Ling* and *Gongshou Zhan* respectively. They will be permanently archived in the museum.

The manuscripts, the earliest Chinese silk texts discovered, and the only known ones from the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) found in China, are named after the Zidanku area of Changsha, from where they were stolen by grave robbers in 1942, before being smuggled to the United States in 1946.

The 2,300-year-old manuscripts, comprising more than 900 characters, are the earliest known examples of a classical Chinese book in the true sense, playing a crucial role in the study of ancient Chinese characters and historical documents.

After nearly 80 years overseas, two volumes were handed over by the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art and transferred to China's National Cultural Heritage Administration in May.

The return of these manuscripts is a significant achievement, resulting from years of collaboration between China and the U.S. in the fields of culture and museums. It sets an example for international collaboration in artifact restitution, said Rao Quan, head of

the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

Chase Robinson, director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, says the decision to transfer the manuscripts to China demonstrates the museum's firm commitment to jointly preserving humanity's cultural heritage and its long-standing tradition of collaboration with Chinese cultural institutions.

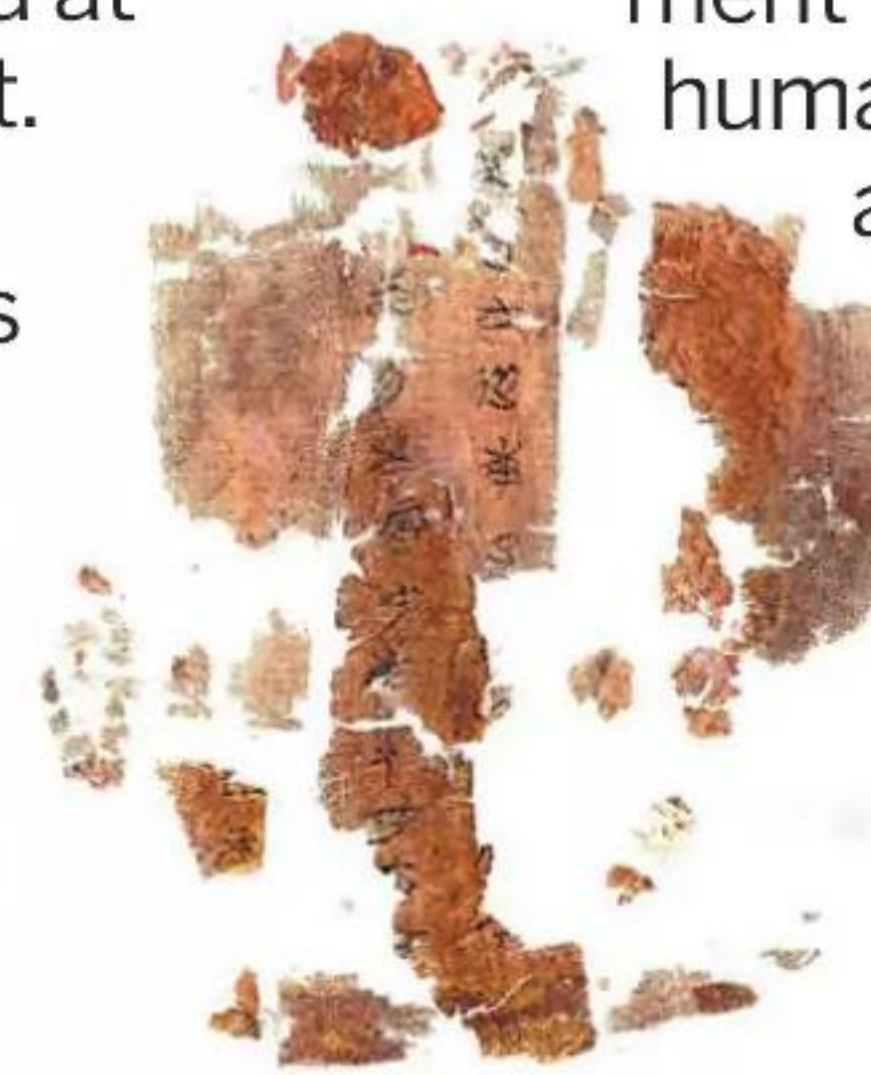
After the manuscripts arrived at Hunan Museum in September they underwent a 14-day environmental adaptation observation period and are preserved in a stable environment with precise temperature and humidity controls, the museum says.

A holographic data collection project was established to create digital imaging of all texts on the manuscripts. After a high-resolution scan, more than 40 ink-written characters, invisible to the naked eye, were found on one large piece of the manuscript remnants that had not been fully separated from the others.

"We believe the newly found words belong to *Wuxing Ling*

(Volume II)," says Yu Yanjiao, a researcher at Hunan Museum. Some characters, such as those referring to vessels and food containers, are identical to the ones in the known *Wuxing Ling* text, she says.

This volume discusses taboos and auspicious times for travel throughout the year, while *Gongshou Zhan* (Volume III) guides military actions by predicting the most advantageous times to launch attacks or defend cities, Yu says.



The 2,300-year-old manuscripts, comprising over 900 characters, are the earliest known examples of a classical Chinese book in the true sense, playing a crucial role in the study of ancient Chinese characters and historical documents. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

## **Bess Wohl** The playwright behind *Liberation* on the legacy of second-wave feminism, her mother's role in it, and the state of women's rights today

***Liberation* has been called the best play on Broadway this season. What made you want to write it?** Because my mom worked at *Ms.*, I grew up steeped in the ideas of second-wave feminism and women's liberation. I loved sitting on the floor of her office under a giant *Wonder Woman* poster while I could hear her clacking away. As I got older, I started to come into contact with those ideas in a personal way. I got married, had children, tried to have a career. All of a sudden, I started to experiment with these ideas in my own life: "What was wrong, what was left out? Are these practical?"

**The structure is unique: a memory play that's not a memory, because the narrator is telling her mother's story, while playing both characters. How did you crack that open?** Once I introduced the narrator, the whole play opened up. I had started thinking this is going to be about this group of women in the '70s trying to change the world. It is about that, but it is in direct conversation with today, because this character goes back and forth in time. So much of my life was a conversation in my head about whether or not I was going to become my mother. Having a character physically embody [that] struggle felt really powerful.

**When I saw the play, a woman in the audience consoled the narrator when she mentioned her mother was no longer alive. How have you experienced the audience reaction?** I've observed those things too. People feel they have a stake in what's happening and permission to show up in that way. It's something I wish happened more at the theater. The fourth wall can be a sad thing, because ultimately, we're all here in community together in this moment. That's the point of theater.

**Feminist causes are experiencing setbacks. How much did that influence the play?**

I couldn't have anticipated how women's rights would be under assault in our current world. That only upped the urgency and affected deeply how people are receiving the play. The audience comes in ready to receive and speak up.



**The play is explicit about your limitations as a white woman telling this story. How did you approach that?** The research really helped me. The form of the play is overtly grappling with this in the way it allows actors to step into the shoes of multiple characters. That theatrical language is asking what the limits of identity are, and can we overcome them. The goal was to create representation while being honest about the limitations of my understanding.

**At the top of the second act, the women appear nude and discuss their bodies. How did that come about?** It came from my conversations with women [who had been in a consciousness-raising group]. I knew it would be risky. This scene where women are nude but not sexualized feels important. Women's bodies can exist in space in this way. We can be subjects, not objects, and you are going to witness it now.

**What are some of the most surprising reactions you've heard?** A lot of people leave saying they want to call their mom. Other people see their relationship with their partner in a different way. That's been huge, that this play can penetrate the walls of people's homes. This play asks a lot of political questions, but the intimacy has been the real surprise.

**Has it transformed your relationship with your own mother?** Thinking about my mom as a young woman is something I've been able to hold in a different way. Betsy Aidem says in the play, "Maybe I should have showed you more of who I was." I'm a mom to three daughters. Am I showing them too much? Not enough? Will they ever see me as something beyond mom? To see the full humanity of my mom has been transformational. —ESTHER ZUCKERMAN



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