December 2003

Night Moves

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Recommended Citation
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O D D

J O B S

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THINK about the jobs that, for one reason or another, YOU WON'T DO. Jobs that don't get advertised. Jobs that don't care if you wear Levis or old, smelly hippie sandals. Or anything at all. Jobs where you're stuck all night with an old guy who has three kids your age and who is convinced immigrants are ruining the world and that 2% milk is some kind of CONSPIRACY. These are the jobs where having total strangers ask to marry you is a common occurrence and where customers are more often referred to as "total fucks."
By no real COINCIDENCE, these jobs take place at night. And so, I spent a night in the greater Ames area searching for people in strange places doing strange things and found that perhaps the strangest thing about these jobs was how normal the people doing them are. They are indeed REGULAR STUDENTS. They all knew they didn’t have the most coveted employment, and some had even started trying to figure out how “able to stay up all night without the benefit of narcotics” was going to look good on a resume.

6:00 p.m.

I’m standing inside Pleasure Palace, ye olde porn shoppe, on Kellogg Avenue. I think junior ISU student Ikki Feuerstein expects me to take her seriously, but it isn’t easy to keep a straight face when you’re surrounded by hundreds of hardcore pornographic videos, pounds of flavored lubricants, and mysterious objects of all shapes (including an arm, complete with fist) that are supposed to go where no proctologist would dare. “I don’t like to think of myself as a porn store clerk, more of a sex-educator,” Feuerstein says.

A woman at a porn store? “I think that a lot of guys see a woman working here and automatically assume she must be some kind of sex addict,” Feuerstein says. A woman at a porn store? “I think that a lot of guys see a woman working here and automatically assume she must be some kind of sex addict.” Judging from her indifference towards my own hot body, I can only assume she isn’t.

7:18 p.m.

Men keep coming in and out (no pun intended) of the booths in the back of the store. I try to peek back there, but I think they’re all full. I wander around, being very careful to obey the first law of the porn store: no eye contact between customers. This unwritten rule seems to revolve around people pretending they are either really not here or invisible. Wait...is that Martin Jischke in a skirt?

7:57 p.m.

Nothing crazy is happening. According to Feuerstein, things do get out of hand every once in a while, usually after the bars close, but most of the time she feels safe. “The worst customers are usually the guys who look the most professional. The typical straight male.” So what I’m on the look out for is the guy who lives next door to you or me. It could be the guy sitting next to you in your biology lecture. Look at him right now. Yep, he’s a pervert, probably into all sorts of freaky shit. If I were you, I’d move quick.

8:26 p.m.

More guys file in. Who shops at a porn store? “The stereotype is usually of uneducated, downwardly mobile people,” Feuerstein says. But that’s not the case. “A lot of people come in for party gifts, bachelor/bachelorette stuff. A lot of customers are gay males, and others are just curious people.”

8:41 p.m.

Someone emerges from the booths—with a mop. Yeah, that guy. I ask her if she ever has to clean up the booths. She cringes. “Oh. We have someone special for that job.”

9:00 p.m.

I am about to leave, but I feel like I just got here. I’ve barely scraped the surface. I’m only halfway through the Asian section. I haven’t even gotten to the midgets. So far, the oldest thing I’ve found is a transvessite blow-up doll, but that’s pretty normal, isn’t it?

Before I head out the door, I have to ask: what’s Nikki’s favorite item? “The slim-line G,” she says without pause. (Use your imagination.)

9:47 p.m.

After a bit of a drive, I find myself at The Lumberyard in Des Moines. It is always hard to tell exactly what is going on inside a strip club. The total lack of any natural light mixed with too many black lights makes all the men look old and sleazy and the women onstage in neon bras and G-strings young, tan, and soft.

10:14 p.m.

Georgia, an Iowa State student, takes the stage. I feel the best way to really get to know Georgia (not her real name, believe it or not) is to see her dance.
Georgia makes good money. A lot more than you.

11:14 p.m.

Georgia is working her way through the crowd of men. Every once in a while she stops and chats with one of them, often sitting on his lap. She eventually works her way over to me. I am blushing. But since I'm in the name of in-depth investigative journalism, it seems right that I let the rest of the crowd enjoy Georgia's company. Before I leave I throw out some Sacagawea gold dollars and flash some of my bling-blitzing. Just so they will remember me as the player I am.

12:06 a.m.

James Eucher is an "Community Service Officer" with ISU Police, his official title intentionally ambiguous. The job is somewhere between a honest-to-goodness sworn officer of the law and a security guard. So don't expect him to go busting in doors any time soon. He describes the position as "an extra set of eyes and ears" for ISUPD. Eucher's a grown man, a graduate student in animal science. He's scary looking, tall and stoick, with spiked red hair and a matching goatee. When he talks, his eyes get really big and he sounds like a public relations handbook. I can't help but think this guy actually believes everything he's saying.

But I'm not here to listen to Eucher talk.

12:21 a.m.

The first call comes in. There's a car alarm going off in some residence hall parking lot. The incident takes about a half hour. Unfortunately, there were no naked people involved and we didn't get to beat up any skate punks.

12:54 a.m.

Eucher and I cruise empty lots looking for terrorists and couples making out. Apparently, evildeers and horny teenagers have something in common: they both agree that it's too friggin' cold to be out and about.

1:17 a.m.

Another call comes over the scanner. Someone is locked out of her car and she needs Eucher's lock-busting expertise. As Eucher reaches into his secret stash of expensive-looking coat hangers, he tells me he's never had a car he couldn't get in to. Unfortunately, I turn out to be the jinx and the lock proves too difficult. I have some chewing gum and a toothpick and suggest we kick it McGuyver style, but Eucher doesn't seem to hear me. His loss.

1:38 a.m.

We cruise some more and I'm starting to wonder if we're ever going to bust some pimps or scare some hippies. Ames is pretty quiet, almost too quiet. However, one thing keeps us on our toes: the inevitable 2:00 a.m. bar closing.

1:52 a.m.

The scanner starts to come alive. A riot nearly breaks out, but it is quickly contained. Two cars are pulled over for field sobriety tests. Just between 2:00 and 2:10, at least three other cars are pulled over for possible OWIs. We head down Welch and see an officer shining his Maglite into a driver's eyes.

2:20 a.m.

Eucher's shift ends in ten minutes, but it feels like we're just getting started. A call comes over the radio requesting Eucher's help with a young man brought in on a possible OWI charge. "This is when it can sometimes get interesting," Eucher says. "With drunks, and especially OWIs, it's always unpredictable."

It isn't unpredictable, though. It's a big letdown. The young man turns out to be extremely polite, probably because he was freaking out at the thought of spending the night in jail and losing his license.

2:30 a.m.

All that's left for Eucher to do is fingerprint the kid and fill out some paperwork. I lead to my car, disappointed that we didn't run into any crazy, toothless old men running around in their underpants or crash in on an opium den.

Life on the straight edge turns out to be pretty tame and now that I'm out from under the heel of "the man," I'm reaching for the sauce.

2:42 a.m.

Or maybe not. The bars are all closed, and Ames is dead. Sure, there are still people out and more business is probably taking place than most of us realize — the kind that requires secret passwords and a higher tolerance for THC than I have.

I could cruise up and down Hayward Avenue and try to find a house party that hasn't been busted, or I could go home. Part of me wants to put on a ski mask and wander into gas stations, scaring the bejeesus out of clerks, but another part of me realizes it's almost dawn and hey, that's just not funny.