

company over a year ago and that it was never an escort or prostitution business but a special-appearance booking company that hired out girls for everything from casual meetings to casino openings. "My service was for people to meet famous people," Braun tells me over the phone. "Not like Julia Roberts, more like B-actress famous." She also made it clear that she wanted me to stop working on this article, adding that she thought I'd be the perfect writer for a book about her life because her story was "much bigger" than a magazine piece, and convincingly tossing out the names of an agent and a publishing company. "It so happens that in the past six weeks we've been more aggressively pursuing a book deal," she says.

Braun is also smart enough to have hired a top lawyer, Donald Etra, a Yalie and a Skull and Bones brother of President Bush. Retaining legal counsel would appear to be prudent, as anyone intent on filling Fleiss' shoes is running a risk: Two sources, one of whom is an FBI informant, said that the agency is investigating Braun. (FBI spokesperson Vicki Hampton-Franklin said that she couldn't confirm or deny such an investigation.) When I started researching this story, [www.nicisgirls.com](http://www.nicisgirls.com) was a fully functional Web site that required a membership number to delve any further than the home page. Several days after Braun and I spoke, the site had been replaced with a note saying that the domain name was for sale.

There are detractors of the Web-site business model, of course: "The girls look beautiful," says Fleiss, "but then you order them and Miss Piggy shows up." Several entertainment high rollers say they combat this possibility by hiding near their front doors and spying on the girls as they ring the doorbell. If she looks good, they'll let her in; otherwise, they'll just let her buzz. It's a risk they're willing to take. Men who want to establish themselves as regulars on the sites often must submit to a background check; once they've passed, they can order at will by wiring payment to the site's proprietor, who then doles out 60 percent to the girl. Those who try to duck their financial obligations may find themselves having to answer questions they'd rather avoid. One Hollywood agent received an office visit from a pimp after he'd stiffed several prostitutes. (He paid quickly, before any of his partners got wind of the situation.) In the previous decade, the payment process was far looser. "Some guys would give you 'shopping,'" recalls Daisy White, a high-class call girl turned physical therapist who is taking a one-woman show about her experiences to New York after a successful L.A. run. "Some men from the Middle East have a certain amount allotted on credit cards

from their family and like to pay that way."

During the Fleiss epoch, getting to know the gregarious madam with a penchant for throwing pool parties was crucial—and not at all difficult if you were in the appropriate tax bracket. A producer remembers how Fleiss once befriended him at a party; the next time they ran into each other she offered him a girl on the house. Fleiss clearly loved her Hollywood players—so much so that she seemingly started fancying herself one. Though many feel it was Fleiss' limelight-loving ways that brought about her arrest, prison doesn't seem to have dampened her ambition. "Alexander the Great conquered the world at 32 and died," she says while hyping the brothel she plans to open in Las Vegas as soon as prostitution is legalized there (a measure Las Vegas mayor Oscar Goodman supports). "I did it when I was 22."

Although L.A. madams can now protect their privacy by logging on instead of stepping out—which has allowed a number of these businesses to enjoy relative secrecy—police, ironically, claim prostitution is diminishing. "When I became a police officer, 18 years ago, you'd see hundreds of girls on Sunset and Hollywood," says LAPD spokesman Jason Lee. "Now you only see a couple at most." And online prostitution for the most part is not under LAPD jurisdiction, because the sites could be based anywhere. If you're a big name, that's a gamble you'll take: There's less chance of getting caught Hugh Grant-style when you're cruising the Net rather than cruising Sunset.

**P**ROSTITUTION WILL ALWAYS HAVE A HOME in Hollywood, where one of the most popular parties in town is a weekly roving strip club and brothel that requires a constantly changing password for entry and is attended by big players such as a top action-movie director and his producer. Populated with hookers, strippers, and successful men, these underground shindigs might be held in a Hollywood Hills house one week and the downstairs of a closed Valley restaurant the next. After paying the \$30 cover, guests are free to roam a location that's been subdivided for privacy by walls or even just hanging sheets. "You can get lap dances, blow jobs, or whatever," says one semi-regular. "It's an unspoken law—no one will say anything about what goes on there." If this is a town where the captains of industry manufacture perpetual adolescence, they've found the perfect professional partners. "Most men in the entertainment business who have money," says Adam, the executive who knew just what to give the boss who had everything, "will find themselves dabbling in hookers, just because they can." ■



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