

THE COMEDY GAZELLE

THE LATEST IN CHICAGO COMEDY



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:

DALE MCPEEK

ABOUT THE GAZELLE

When I moved to Chicago last October, I was immediately struck by the level of talent in the scene. "Fuck, she's good," I thought as I watched Kristen Toomey supercharge herself with a firm slap of the puss.

Why haven't I heard of her before?

It's a question I come back to often, and a major problem here. The city's bursting with household-name-level talent, but unless you're in the midst of it, it's easy to miss.

That's why I'm starting The Comedy Gazelle — to bring outsiders into the heart of Chicago comedy, and to showcase this city's unrivaled talent. To keep everyone up-to-date on the scene, and to do it in a fun way. And not just in a one-off article, but all the time.

Each issue will feature an exclusive interview, as well as whatever else I can pull together.

Hope you enjoy.

— Jerry

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THE COMEDY GAZELLE'S TIPS FOR SUCCEEDING IN COMEDY

**STUDY THE GREATS. THERE'S A REASON BILL COSBY'S A
HOUSEHOLD NAME.**

**COCAINE CAN'T SUSTAIN A CAREER, BUT IT CAN SUSTAIN A
LEGACY.**

**FORGET WHERE YOU CAME FROM, ALL THOSE HICKS HAVE BAD
TASTE ANYWAY.**

FOLLOW THE MONEY, THE TALENT WILL COME LATER.

**TRUST YOUR GUT. IT'S NEVER CHEATED ON YOU WITH ANOTHER
GUT.**

BE COMFORTABLE IN SILENCE. IT'S ALL YOU'RE GONNA GET.

**IF PEOPLE LAUGH AT YOUR FETISHES, IT MEANS THEY WANT TO
SEE THEM.**

DENY, DENY, DENY.

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE SHOW, IT'S ABOUT GETTING THE CLIP.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS, START A COMEDY MAGAZINE.

INTERVIEW: DALE MCPEEK

Dale McPeek (@realcutedude) is a former forklift driver turned undertaker, and is known for burying comics all around the city. We talked about his shyness, his recent trip to Bisbee, getting discovered by Louis C.K., Chicago comedy, and more.



What do people not know about Dale McPeek?

I'm a sweet boy, man. I'm a sensitive kid. I'm in love with every girl I see. I don't know, I'm a nice guy. I got a hard persona, but it's because I don't like people bugging me who I don't know. People who are real nice and have been doing comedy for years, they gotta talk to 30 people before they can even get a drink at the bar. People just don't talk to me. I love it.

As a sensitive guy, I feel like you'd like people saying hi.

Yeah, but I also have a big ego. It's like, "You're talking to me right now?" You better pay your dues before you make eye contact with me. I'm a quarterback.

Let's see, what else? I gave away my cat the other day. I miss him. I got a trans brother that doesn't have to post every feeling they have on the internet because they don't have social media. And he's a punk ass bitch and I'll kick his ass too.

You just got back from a trip to [Doug] Stanhope's, right?

Yeah, me and Junior [Stopka] did a cross-country trip. We went to Colorado, went to Kansas. Nothing in Kansas, they should get rid of that. Utah, Vegas, then we went to Arizona, then we went to Doug's in the middle of nowhere.

In Bisbee?

Yeah, he'd have fans show up and he'd have a beer with them. He's a nice guy. He called me Clark or Tubby the whole time. Had no recollection of me opening for him ever, by the way. We were in The Fun House, which is like his bar, and Chaille, his right hand man, goes, "Who are you?" I go, "Dale." He goes, "Alright. Who are you, though?" I was a low man on the totem pole there. That's why I had to get back here. To be the quarterback.

It was a good time, man. Got to meet Michael Biehn, who's his neighbor and good friend. Michael Biehn, if you don't know, he's Kyle Reese from Terminator. So I'm watching the Bears game with John Connor's dad. Me and Junior are telling him all about 90 Day Fiance, and I felt like I was in Bizarro World. At one point we were all drunk and Doug calls Roseanne on speaker phone and I go, "We gotta leave. We gotta leave tomorrow." It was a real good time, man.



DALE IN BISBEE, AZ.

NOT PICTURED: DOUG STANHOPE

Do you plan on staying in Chicago?

There's no reason to move to LA or New York anymore. Those cities are dead for comics. If you look at the comics who visit from New York or LA, they get buried by the simplest comics here. And they love to mention on stage that they're from LA or New York. We don't give a fuck, dude. Just tell your jokes.

I kinda want to move to the desert now. I rented a cabin in the woods for a week and I was like, "This is the life for me." Just sitting out there, staring at a pond all night. Then if I have a show, I'll go to the show.

Just stare at your pond and go to your show?

No one's around me, if I wanna interact with somebody I just go on Instagram. I can't go on Twitter anymore. It's too much. Everybody's saying the same fucking thing. Acting like they're arguing with somebody. Okay, Ellen Page came out as trans. Why are you acting like there are a bunch of people complaining about it? Nobody gives a fuck. You can't win with these people. They had such a terrible time in high school. I did too, I was a fat fuck.

Were you bullied in high school?

No. Nobody fucked with me. I was the only white kid. I barely went to high school.

Did you graduate?

Yeah. Five years. Half in Wisconsin, half here.

Where in Wisconsin?

Wausauke. It's way north, by the UP. One of the people that was a year ahead of me is now the world famous Trixie Mattel, the drag queen. And she sold out Laugh Factory three years ago, \$40 a ticket just doing musical comedy. So I'm not even the biggest comic from that school. And that's a graduating class of 35. Not even the biggest comic from that school.

That's a shame.

It's a goddamn shame. Honestly, I'm enjoying not doing stand up at all right now. I'm just relaxing, dude. I'm relaxing, watching everybody fight on Twitter.

You gotta miss it a little bit.

Yeah, of course I do. There's nothing that feels like that. But I don't have to worry about bombing. That's a great feeling, not having to worry about bombing.

**But doesn't bombing give you motivation to improve as a comic??**

No. Motivation to fuckin' jump off a bridge. I sit in my room at 1:00 am, just staring off into the wall.

Why does it bother you that much?

Because I care about it. That's what blows my mind. I see these comics bomb, bomb consistently, or do mediocre very, very consistently. And they're happy with it. And it's like, how do you sleep? I can't sleep because I have sleep apnea. How do you sleep? You should be awake more than me.

How's everything with Louis?

I just sit by the phone and wait for Papa Louis to send me an email. His special came out and he sent me a bonus. He sent all the openers a bonus for a very generous amount, dude. And that was the only way I was able to pay rent. I was surprised. I was surprised he even thanked me in his special.

Did you watch the special?

Yeah, illegally.

You didn't even buy it?

No I didn't fucking buy it, dude. Hard times bro. The quarantine. You think he cares about eight bucks?

Can you talk about when you were at Zanies and you found out Louis was in the room?

I was doing a benefit at Zanies [Old Town]. I had just seen Louis a few days before at Zanies Rosemont, and it was fucking nuts. It was incredible. Then three days later, I'm doing this benefit. I needed to tip the bartender, but I didn't have cash, so I stuck around for the second show. I asked Jim [Weber], "Are you coming here? I'll venmo you 20 bucks if you have 20 bucks cash." And while I'm waiting for Jim, I hear, "Louis is here." I go up to the green room and he's sitting in there. And I'm just like, "What the fuck?" He's pulling out his flip phone and shit. Then the show started and we all went downstairs. Jim asked his buddy, the headliner, Pete Lee, if I could do a five minute set or whatever.

Jim (chiming in): Dale goes, "No don't ask him, don't ask him." And I go, "Too late, I already did." Dale tried to talk me out of it.

Dale: I didn't want to do it. And my buddy Mike Early, who was touring with Louis, was the host. He went up on the show and I went up after him. And I knocked it out of the park, dude.

Jim: I was sitting right behind Louis and he was laughing his ass off. Standing up clapping when Dale got off. When Dale got off stage, he didn't even wanna look at Louis. And Louis jumped up to shake his hand, then Dale finally looked over and shook his hand.

Dale: Which is fucking nuts, dude. Then I was waiting for the bathroom and Louis was sitting right there. He shook my hand, "You're really good." I go, "Thanks man." He was like, "No, I really mean it. You're really good." It was nuts. He got my email and then I was refreshing my email like a motherfucker for three weeks.



PROOF.

Did he give you any advice at all on tour?

Yeah, he said don't move to New York. He said just go on the road, try to be a middle act at these clubs. Feature. Send out all the emails you can. Took zero of his advice. I go, "I'm just gonna wait for your emails." He also said if clubs don't get back to you, don't take it too personally. If you bomb, don't let that define your next set. But like I said earlier, I dwell on it. Probably for a day or two.

What if you bomb and have a set right after?

Usually it's the opposite. Anytime I've had two shows in the same night across the city — I'll do something at Laugh Factory and have a great set, then I'll go to Beat Kitchen and I'll just bomb my ass off. Is it cause I'm drunk by the time I get there? Probably. Is it cause I'm making fun of all the hipsters in the crowd? Yeah. "Oh you miss Obama? Baby gonna cry? You miss Sasha and Malia?"

I feel like you hate hipsters.

I just don't like their too-cool-for-school attitude. It's not just hipsters. I don't like anybody I can't relate to. Or anybody that isn't a nice person. I started comedy at Cole's Bar. I would first go there to watch it. I'd see it was real cliquey. Then you go up and start to do well, and then they want to be your friend. I get it, dude, I write off a lot of people, but I'm never rude to anybody. I just mind my own business. I'm a shy guy.

I'm not fucking around dude. I was ordering coffee yesterday and I was rehearsing it in my head how I was gonna say it, cause I didn't want the guy behind me to judge me: "Can I get a medium with cream and splenda and a shot of espresso?" And if they say, "What?" I go, "Nevermind" and I fucking walk out, dude. I get NERVOUS at the grocery store —

How do you do standup?

You gotta compartmentalize. When you're doing standup, they're there to see you talk. So you gotta talk. People behind me in line at Jewell are there to get their shit and get out.

You feel more pressure shopping at Jewell?

Oh, fucking-A dude. God forbid there's a fucking teenager behind me in line. Three teenagers, that's my worst nightmare, bro. I cross the street if I see teenagers coming towards me. I'm a real shy guy.

When you started at Cole's, I'm assuming that's why you were scouting it out?

I remember going there the first time. Tim Meadows came in to do standup and I go, "Oh my god, this is what it's like? Celebrities all over the place?" And clearly it's not like that. But then I went back the next week and I got so drunk, I fell down before my set and I got thrown out. So I came back a week later to do the mic, and then I fucking killed, dude. I remember practicing at my mom's apartment. I'd set the oven timer for four minutes and I'd talk into a remote.

Are you still doing the same jokes?

I wish. Dude, that's the thing. You think about those jokes now, you're like, "What the fuck." I had something about Ethiopians, just like real generic jokes. But I wrote a new set every week for a couple months. And then some comic goes, "You should just work on the ones you have now." And that's the worst advice I ever got, because now I've been doing the same set for fucking three years.

Anything to not bomb.

Well that's the thing. It's like, let's just go with this good feeling that I know is guaranteed, instead of chancing it. Why do I wanna take another chance in life? Those haven't worked out before.

Do you feel like your approach or delivery has changed over time?

Yeah, my delivery's changed a lot. When I first started, for like the first six months it was pretty obvious I was emulating Hannibal. Then I branched off of that and did a real slow paced standup. I had this gimmick where I'd be talking and I'd just [stare off into space], and that worked. But that wasn't who I was, I guess. Then like five years ago, this comic I was dating did me real dirty, and I was like, "Let's talk about it," and then I just got real angry.

On stage?

I started to be more direct in what I was saying and not like trying to be all cutesy and shit. I wrote like a fucking half hour about it. It was good. I was just real direct. Then I was like, "Well, I'm done talking about her, so I gotta write other things." But I liked the way I was doing it. It had a better reaction. Just like, "I don't give a fuck." That's the main feedback I get back from people in the audience. I'll see them after, and they're like, "I love how you just don't give a fuck." Which is crazy because that's like the opposite. I'm freaking out in my mind. I think every comic that cares is.

I freak out in my head, but I just go faster.

You gotta let that shit marinate, bro. The reason you're going faster is cause you just want it to be over with. You're like, "Alright let's just get this out of the way." But that's not how this works. I still do that too.

Do you write often?

I don't. I mean, I'll try to fuck with something on stage. It's so weird to even think about writing. I tried to write shit over quarantine – there were a few shows here that I did, and it's just like, "What the fuck am I doing?" I'm so rusty and I'm trying new shit? I don't like producing stuff because it gives me a headache. I go days without thinking about standup.

Really?

There's no standup right now. I don't know, maybe I'm not a real comic. I'm a fraud man. I wrote a half hour that was good and now I'm skiing down that 30 minute mountain.

Do you have any interest in getting to an hour or doing a special or something?

I've done an hour before. It's just really rare in Chicago. Most of my shows are 20 minutes max. And like I said earlier, I like feeling good. And I know if I do my 20 minutes, I'm gonna feel good, and then a girl that is out of my league will talk to me.

That's good enough for Dale?

I feel like I do standup just for pussy. But I gotta change it up. I've been reflecting the last few weeks. I was sitting in my room, I go, "What am I doing?" That's why I'm getting my shit together. I mean, I'm definitely drinking nowhere near as much as I was. I've been waking up, exercising every day. Cause I realized if I've accomplished all this shit half-awake, imagine what I could do if I could focus. On Thanksgiving, my mom was like, "You should try to go work at the airport. So you can get benefits." She doesn't understand. I try to tell her about the Louis thing and she's goes, "What's a Lou C.K.?" Oh nevermind.

Where'd your interest in comedy come from?

Probably from when I lived with my dad in Wisconsin. We watched Chris Rock a lot. Also, I guess, you're a poor fat kid in the middle of nowhere Wisconsin and you just moved there, and everybody there has grown up together. Then this guy comes in 8th grade, and you're like, "Well I gotta do something to get these motherfuckers to like me." So let me fuck up my grades by being funny.

I always wanted to do it, but was too busy working at Sam's Club. I became a manager at Sam's Club when I was 20. Then my car broke down and I got fired cause I couldn't make it out there. Then I moved back in with my mom for a few months and was looking up open mics and I saw Cole's Bar. I found some website that said you get a free slice of pizza with every set. And I go, "Oh I'm gonna check that out." And it ended up being fun. Now here we are.

Is there anything you wish was different about the Chicago comedy scene?

I don't like that a lot of people who are better at the business aspect of standup get booked more than people who are ten times funnier. People like me, if I lost my phone I wouldn't know how to log into my email. But I could bury these motherfuckers any day of the week. It's a pain in the ass, man. I also wish it wasn't so focused on "Let's have so much diversity in here." You can only have so much diversity before — why is this girl who started six months ago featuring at this club and I can't even get a guest set? God forbid you have two white guys on a show. So the diversity shit, and the business aspect of it. I don't want to be good at the business aspect. I just wanna fucking tell jokes.

Do you like anything about the Chicago scene?

I like that everyone respects me. No, it's fun. It's better than any other scene. You go to LA, everyone's out there to make their "big break." Everyone out here is working on shit. They're grinding.

You're grinding?

I'm a chameleon. I look like I'm grinding, but the people around me are. I probably don't like this scene at all. I don't like any of it. I don't like any aspect of this business whatsoever. It has ruined standup comedy for me. If I could, I'd go back in time and get a new car and keep working at Sam's Club.

Get the fuck outta here.

I swear to god, dude. Then I don't gotta worry about my mom fucking telling me to go work at the airport. Not even the airline or a certain job. Just, "The airport is hiring." That's the shit I gotta hear on Thanksgiving. I don't think I like anything about this scene. I like that I made friends here, but they all move. For selfish reasons. It's a selfish business. Nobody's in this to make friends, I guess.

What're you in it for?

Selfish reasons. I'm in to make money. And to be that motherfucker, bro. Get laid and get paid. If I'm gonna be depressed I'm gonna fucking do it somewhere very nice. I'm gonna be in my hotel room sad as fuck. That's how I'm going out. Heath Ledger. Nobody'd be talking about Heath Ledger if he died in a studio apartment. Or a garden unit, nobody gives a fuck. "Oh the Brokeback Mountain guy died." But I don't think there's any aspect of standup in Chicago that I like.

Do you think if the “industry” came here —

More people would move here, and then it would be more of a pain in my ass. I'd just be more annoyed. But more people would respect me.

What do you value more?

Respect. That's why I hate bombing. “Fuck I just bombed. These people think I'm a mortal.” I don't want them to think I'm like them, you know. “Oh he bleeds, too?” Like Batman.

Since I've started, comedy has been very hard for me. It's been hard for me to make any advancements at all. Even when I was just starting to do bar shows, I'd see people I was better than, but they were booked ten times as much as me. And they'd be like, “What do you got coming up?” “Oh, I got nothing.” I got no shows. Nobody wants anything to do with me.

How did you power through that?

I made some friends and shit like that. I kept going up. I became an alcoholic and I liked being at bars. And I enjoy making people upset. I enjoy walking into a room and knowing that there are people there who don't like me. And I like smiling around them, letting them know that them not liking me doesn't affect me.

I feel like you had to develop that.

I'm just used to people not liking me. Half my family don't like me, since I was a kid. My aunt has been in my pending friend requests for seven years. That's how I push through. If my family don't like me, what the fuck do I care if these people who suck at standup or work at Groupon care about me? I'm better at what they do than they are. And it eats them up. Because you can't deny a crowd laughing. At all. There's nothing they can do, bro. They're so powerless. And that's my favorite thing, dude.

Do you feel like you always had a grasp on punchlines?

Yeah I think I got it real quick. Timing came real easy to me. Punchlines were my main focus. Then I started doing wordier bits and I figured out where to put them. You gotta space them out perfectly. A lot of comics you see, they'll think of a lot of funny tags and stuff like that and they'll try to say them one after the other. You gotta space them out. Maybe it's a fun idea or a fun thought or fun saying, but you gotta space it out. Give them time to catch back on to what you're saying.

Alright, last question. Where do you see yourself in five years?

Working for you. Dude, I might be in the desert. I'm done here, bro. I saw a truck today letting out so much smog. I'm so done with this city. I fantasize about going to a small town and working at a gas station in the middle of nowhere. It's crazy, I'm gonna have to find a real job soon.

Where do you see me in five years?

Calling the police. You found me in a hotel room.

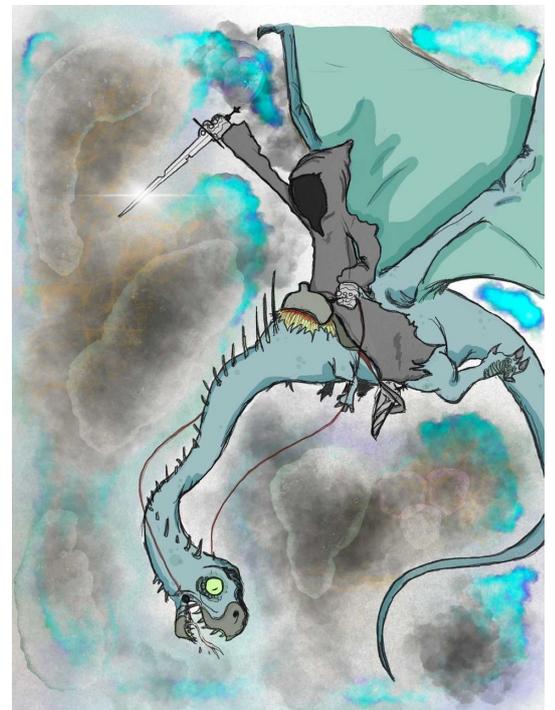
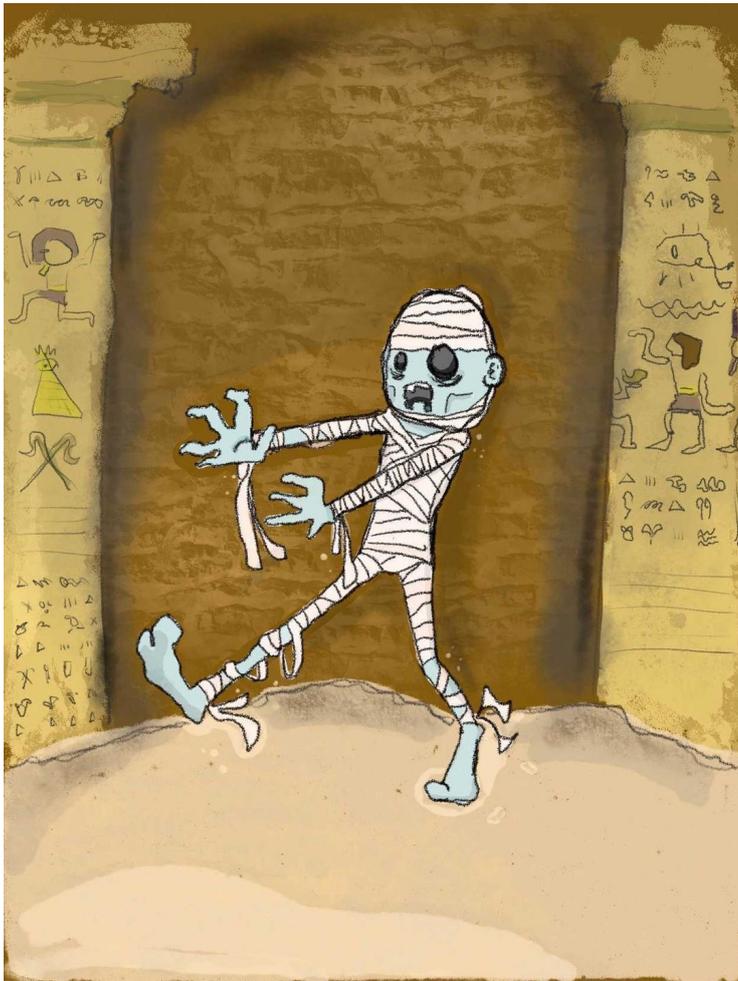


BONUS: DALE'S TOP 10 CHICAGO COMICS

- 1. RUSS WILLIAMSON**
- 2. JOE MCMAHON**
- 3. KRISTEN TOOMEY**
- 4. EM BROWN**
- 5. NATE BURROWS**
- 6. MARTY DEROSA**
- 7. CORREY BOYD-BELL**
- 8. BLAKE BURKHART**
- 9. MICHAEL MEYERS**
- 10. JOEY VILLAGOMEZ**

HONORABLE MENTION: LAEL O'SHAUGHNESSY

ARTWORK



ERIC EMERSON IS A CHICAGO-BASED COMEDIAN AND ARTIST. HE ALSO JUST DID HIS FIRST HEADLINING WEEKEND AT COMEDY BAR, NASHVILLE. CONGRATS ERIC!  @TWOBIKESSTEVENS



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COVER ART BY COMEDIAN / ARTIST TOM RYAN

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BOOK REVIEW: WE KILLED: THE RISE OF WOMEN IN AMERICAN COMEDY

By Keay Crandall (@keaycrandall)

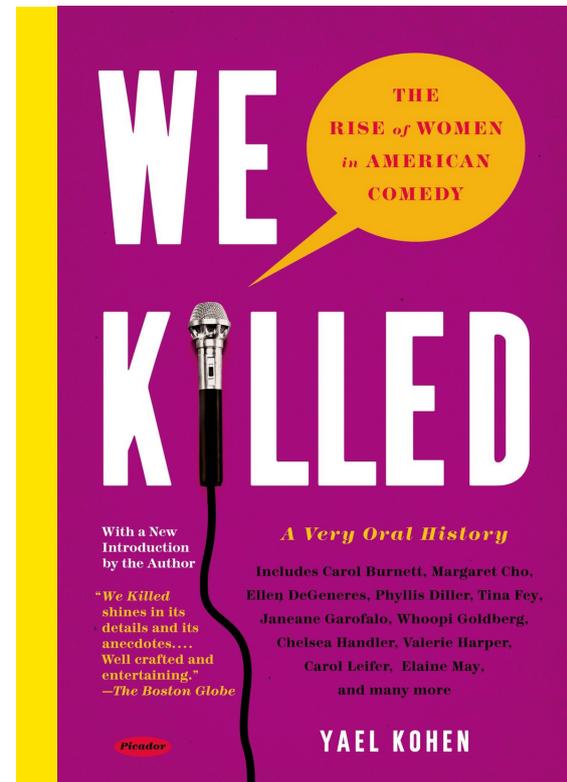
We Killed

I liked this book because it gave me a lot of perspective on American women in comedy. Yael Kohen created a cohesive storyline of everyone's take on women in the industry from Phyllis Diller to Whoopi Goldberg to Chelsea Handler. We killed is like one of those historical timeline projects you did in 5th grade about US presidents, except it's about people who are inspiring and still relevant. This book has every angle on the big female stars in comedy since the 50's! I don't know about you old fucks, but I wasn't around to experience the development of comedy pre-internet.

Has anyone ever asked you who your favorite comedians are? Most people only come up with names like Carlin, Pryor or Burr, but the world is bigger than that. Maybe I'm just a wannabe feminist, but these stories about women in comedy are truly motivating.

The format is not only chronological, but topical. Every decade describes issues and successes of the hottest broads on stage. I fell down so many internet rabbit holes looking up comedians and their work mentioned in this book. Days of entertainment. Anyone who is looking for comedic inspiration should read We Killed.

Overall ranking: 9/10 Gazelles.



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