

PATTON



UNDEREMPLOYED? MEET YOUR ARCHNEMESIS: STAND-UP COMIC, DRAMATIC ACTOR, CARTOON VOICE, AUTHOR, INTERNET SCOLD AND PROFESSIONAL GEEK



★Q1★

PLAYBOY: Princess of the United Kingdom” is how Kate Middleton listed her occupation on her son Prince George’s birth certificate. What would you write down as your occupation, considering your numerous jobs, including playing a constable on *Justified*, delivering an epic *Star Wars* rant on *Parks and Recreation*, getting dramatic in *Young Adult*, writing books and voicing animated characters in *Ratatouille* and two *Grand Theft Auto* video games? Plus, there’s your longtime career in stand-up comedy.

OSWALT: Kate Middleton should write down “princess,”

and I would write “princess” too, except what I do can’t compare with all that boring stuff the royals are obligated to do. Honestly, I always say I’m a stand-up comedian who, through sheer luck, has been allowed to write books and be in some pretty great movies and some pretty amazing TV. Stand-up comedy is what brought me to the dance, and I will leave with the one who bring me.

★Q2★

PLAYBOY: In the new movie *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, you play an online-dating counselor to

OSWALT



By Stephen Rebello
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GAVIN BOND



“
**THE ONLY THING
 I LIE TO MY WIFE
 ABOUT IS WHAT TIME
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 SLEEPING LATE.**
 ”

Ben Stiller’s sad, meek title character, a guy who finds reality so unfulfilling that he fantasizes alternate identities and big adventures. When have you been at your Mitty-est?

OSWALT: When I was a little kid movies bled into my life, a lot like with Walter Mitty. I would create fake drama. I always had to be the wronged hero, the aggrieved party. I had affection for monsters and still do. Indulging my fantasies now, I would probably become a mystery man and get myself a weird non sequitur nickname like Patton “Busted Flush” Oswalt.

★ **Q3** ★

PLAYBOY: *Busted Flush* is the name of the houseboat owned by Travis McGee, John D. MacDonald’s beach bum and righter-of-wrongs character. What fantasy world would Patton “Busted Flush” Oswalt inhabit?

OSWALT: It would be something from a book, and I’ll stick with John D. MacDonald. I wouldn’t want to be Travis McGee, but I’d want to be friends and hang around with him, living in the Fort Lauderdale of the early 1960s as described in those books, like *The Deep Blue Good-by*, *Nightmare in Pink*, *Darker Than Amber*. They’re elegiac. They’re tragic. They’re about paradise, but a paradise blown.

★ **Q4** ★

PLAYBOY: You grew up with a father who was a colonel in the Marines, and your parents also named you after one of the most famous and controversial U.S. Army generals in history.

OSWALT: My dad was in the service for 20 years and did three pretty awful tours in Vietnam, where he got shot in the leg and watched a lot of people die. But when he was a little tipsy, he’d tell me and my brother, who’s more of a jock, “You will never join the military or go to war. Over my dead body.”

★ **Q5** ★

PLAYBOY: Did you deal with military-type strictness at home?

OSWALT: The only thing that annoyed my parents was when I got into my early OCD completist nerd shit and got upset and demanding about it. For example, I had to have every freaking Dungeons & Dragon thing, and I had to have all the books in the series. But they weren’t like, “Don’t be into this stuff.” They said, “Be fascinated by it, but don’t be into it like a schmuck. You don’t have to own the complete set of everything.” I was crazy.

★ **Q6** ★

PLAYBOY: Was that the worst of it? You were just an OCD type who collected too much stuff?

OSWALT: There was more. I got into the kind of trouble gotten into by kids who wanted to be rebels but were pussies. Freshman year of high school, I had the most days absent and the most days of detention that you could have before getting expelled. I’d skip school to watch a movie on TV or go see *Rashomon* or *Wings of Desire*.

★ **Q7** ★

PLAYBOY: That sounds like a nerd gone mildly wild. No drugs? No fights?

OSWALT: Sure. I would instigate fights, then get beat down. Once, I saw a bunch of big kids beat the shit out of my friend Steve. So I walked up to one of the biggest guys and slugged him in the stomach, and all the other boys just fell on me. I mean, how did I think that was going to end—that I would be like Steve Austin and floor him with a superpunch? It was a good thing I was really good at making people laugh.

★ **Q8** ★

PLAYBOY: What jobs did you have before you broke into stand-up comedy?

OSWALT: I was a sportswriter, and when I was that, I thought, Hey, do I really want to be a sportswriter? When I was a paralegal, I thought, Maybe I should be a lawyer. Then, in the summer between my freshman *(continued on page 000)*

and sophomore years in college, when I had no idea what I was going to do with my life, I started doing stand-up—just walked right in. Right away, it fit me. I thought, I want to be onstage; I want to be in this world where stuff is happening, not in an office somewhere getting jokes second-hand. I want to hang out with comedians.

Q9

PLAYBOY: You maintain a high, often hilarious, social-media profile. You posted a moving Facebook comment about the Boston Marathon bombing that went viral, but you were slammed when you defended Daniel Tosh for making a rape joke during a comedy-club set.

OSWALT: Daniel Tosh was trying to see if he could make rape funny. He was failing. You're allowed to do that at an open mike. This woman got angry and interrupted him before he could get to the point he was making. She was wrong for doing that. But he was wrong because he had been trying to kick upward at this terrible thing—rape—but then he kicked downward by saying about this drunk woman, "Wouldn't it be funny if she got raped by five guys?" You always have to consider who is the victim and what is the context. Sarah Silverman joked, "I was raped by a doctor, which is so bittersweet for a Jewish girl," and she's come onstage to music saying, "Oh, I was raped to that song." Is she a misogynist? If you listened to only part of a Lenny Bruce bit, you'd say, "He's a racist." But if you had waited three more minutes, you would have seen he was horrified by racism and was finding new ways to make a run at the subject.

Q10

PLAYBOY: You tweeted your support of Tosh but then followed up with a lengthy essay on heckling, joke stealing and rape. Were you walking back your position?

OSWALT: I've always tried to maintain that when you see a comedian making a run at a subject, if they're failing, at least let him get to the end. During the lead-up to the Iraq war, I got booed off the stage when I was talking about George Bush and his motivations. People came at me, wanting to fight me. I'm like, "I'll talk with you about it, but you can't just yell things away that you don't like." That's what Fox News does.

Q11

PLAYBOY: Who is your most surprising Facebook or Twitter follower?

OSWALT: I talk on Twitter now with Uzo Aduba, who plays Crazy Eyes on *Orange Is the New Black*. I have, like, a terror crush on her. I'm such a champion of the show, it's like I'm a junkie and they put a bag of heroin in front of me and said, "This will have to do until next season." And I'm like, "Fuck it, I'm probably gonna do all of it tonight."

Q12

PLAYBOY: You and writer Michelle Eileen McNamara have been married since 2005 and you have a four-year-old daughter. How do you deal with female groupies on-

line and in person?

OSWALT: That doesn't happen all that much. My rule is, if someone makes themselves sexually available, especially over the internet, there's something kind of wrong, damaged or sad about that person. It would almost be like taking advantage of somebody who needs help. But I have to admit, I have a weird sense of awe for people like John Edwards, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Tiger Woods, who have kids and still have the energy to go fuck other people. I have one daughter, and if a woman comes up to me after a show and says, "Hey, we should go back to your hotel room," I'm like, "Yeah, we should. And you're gonna sit outside and make sure no one wakes me up for *12 hours!*" When I'm on the road, the only thing I lie to my wife about is what time I get up. I know she's getting up early with our daughter, so I'll go, "Yeah, I snapped awake at 6:30 A.M.," but really I slept till 10. Basically, I'm having an affair with sleeping late.

Q13

PLAYBOY: That's really the only thing you'd lie to your wife about while you're on the road? What about, say, masturbation?

OSWALT: Masturbation is a preventative measure against mass murder. If suddenly tomorrow we couldn't masturbate, the whole planet would be stabbing each other to death. Part of the new wedding vows should be "And you have free rein to think about whatever you want when you jerk off. There's your playground. Go."

Q14

PLAYBOY: As professional as you are, what's your method for dealing with bodily functions on the job? What would you have done if you'd gotten hot and bothered while filming intimate scenes with Charlize Theron in *Young Adult*? Or if you burped or farted while doing stand-up in front of a live audience?

OSWALT: Charlize Theron is a great-looking woman and a very cool person, but in my mind, even thinking about anything other than the job we had to do just seemed rude. Also, when I was doing that movie, I was a new dad. I didn't think I'd be into fatherhood as much as I was, and I was becoming a different person. But if you burp or fart or something during stand-up, you just go with it and make it part of what you're talking about.

Q15

PLAYBOY: You make everyone's short list of the top contemporary comedians. Would you put yourself on such a list?

OSWALT: The best stand-ups working right now, in no particular order, are Louis C.K., Dave Chappelle still, Bill Burr and, just to fuck people up, I'll mention some guys not enough people know about yet, and that would be a tie between Kyle Kinane and Hannibal Buress. They'll be huge.

Q16

PLAYBOY: You once said, "I get jealous when certain people get really big." Were you talking about the talented ones, the untal-

ented ones or both?

OSWALT: That part of the quote was a set-up to the other part of that quote, which mentioned Louis C.K.—the kind of talent who ups the bar for everybody else. That actually benefits comedians. There's competition, absolutely, but I try to concentrate on the aspect of, "Oh good, that person's success is going to be great for comedy in general."

Q17

PLAYBOY: Do you ever secretly hope your biggest acting competitors will get tied up on a long-running TV series or go off and do a Broadway play?

OSWALT: I'd like to think I'm competing as a third or fourth choice with Jonah Hill, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Paul Giamatti. Philip Seymour Hoffman is like the Muhammad Ali of actors, and yeah, he goes off and does Broadway, but TV is as good as, if not better than, movies right now. That's where the real plum roles are. I'd love for him or Paul Giamatti to walk away from TV, because if they committed to a show, it would be some amazing thing with an amazing director, a show that I'd want to be on, not *It's Philip!* Fridays on CBS. Give me TV at least, you guys.

Q18

PLAYBOY: With all the stuff you've done, there's a whole cohort of people who best know you as the voice of the lead character Remy in the animated movie *Ratatouille*. What reactions do you get from fans of that hit?

OSWALT: They'll want me to do something in character, but Remy doesn't sound like Shrek, where it's like, "Oh, I'll just do my Scottish accent for them." They ask, "Can you say, 'Don't just hork it down!' in that voice?" I'm like, "Well, I'm talking to you like Remy right now. I didn't do a voice in the movie." And they're like, "Oh." I always feel I'm disappointing them.

Q19

PLAYBOY: You're a major sci-fi and fantasy geek. What's your favorite experience at Comic-Con, the massive yearly convention for fantasy and sci-fi fans?

OSWALT: Years before Comic-Con became crazy, I saw this guy walking around in an amazing Klingon costume he'd made—costume, makeup, everything. I told him, "Wow, I'm stunned. What do you do for a living?" He told me he was an actuarial accountant and was explaining his life to me, and I said, "You should do costumes in films and TV." He looked at me and said, "But then I wouldn't have time to watch the shows I watch." It was almost as if he didn't want to watch the magic being made; he wanted it to impact him. It was his fantasy world that he didn't want messed with. That's another Walter Mitty.

Q20

PLAYBOY: Salon.com has a history of going after you on any number of topics. In response, you've tweeted, among other zingers, "Salon.com: The Fox News of Beta Male Humorlessness."

OSWALT: With all my battles with Salon and my hate for Fox News, I'm just realizing now that whether it's heads at Fox News exploding, Al Sharpton's head exploding or heads at Salon exploding, they're exploding for a tiny sliver of the population. They actually don't count. That's the show they put on. That's their job. At this point, they have different ideologies but are in the same business: "We don't care. Anything to get eyes on us." The rational discussions are going on in other places, by people who are really looking at the issues.

