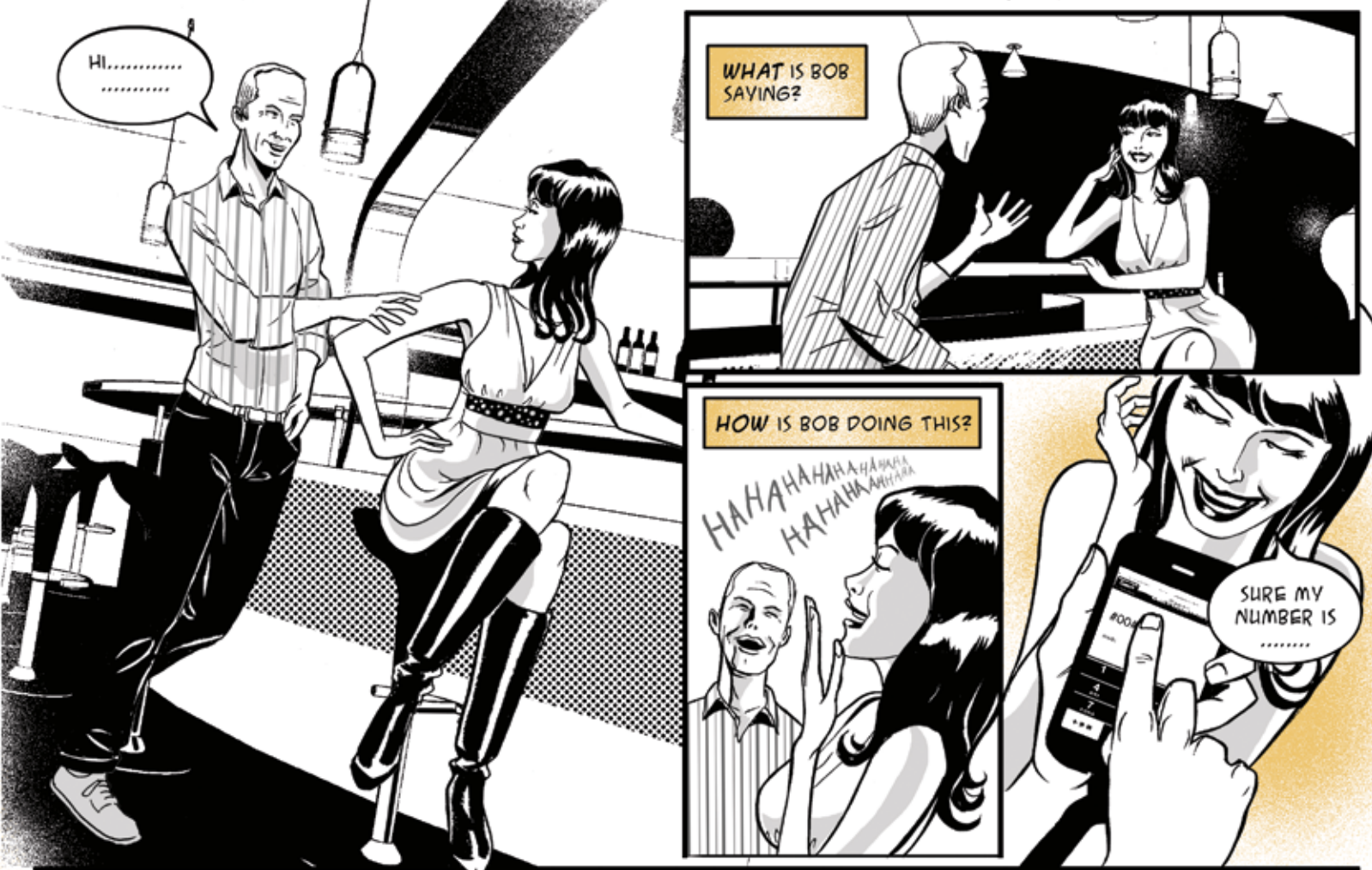


THE MAN'S GUIDE TO PICKING UP!

GIRLS

STORY NIGEL BOWEN
ILLUSTRATION MARCELO BAEZ



1t's 8pm on Friday at Ivy, Sydney's classiest pick-up joint. I'm standing next to pick-up artist (PUA) coach Damien Diecke while he asks three aspiring pants men — let's call them John, Paul and George — to state their goals for the evening.

"To stay in a set for 10 minutes."
 "To speak to six women."
 "To get a girl's number."

Their objectives clearly established, Diecke sends his nervous but excited charges — who've each paid several thousand dollars for his tutelage — out into the heaving throng to work their magic. John and Paul, two average-looking guys in their mid-20s, approach a group (or 'set' to use the PUA jargon) of three women. "The dynamics are all wrong there," pronounces Diecke, shaking his head. Sure enough, two of the women quickly resume a private conversation while John and Paul compete for the attention of their friend, who also soon loses interest.

Undaunted, John and Paul immediately zero in on a nearby group of girls. "Paul's block is introducing sexuality into the conversation," Diecke informs me, adding he's watching for the moment when the eyes of Paul's latest target will widen in

horror or amusement as he makes a clumsy attempt to raunch things up. He doesn't wait long. Paul abruptly leaves the set and returns to get Diecke's feedback on his attempt to "escalate" the interaction, which consisted of the following exchange:

Paul: "Hi, what do you do for fun?"
Girl: "I play volleyball."
Paul: "Do you play it in the nude?"
Girl: Awkward silence.

Next, George, a balding, divorced dad in his mid-40s, walks up to a gaggle of pretty women half his age, singles out the most attractive one and starts talking to her. To my untrained eye it appears he's batting way out of his league and I wait for the inevitable blow-off. It never arrives. Incredibly, the glamazon begins giggling and running her fingers through her hair. After ten minutes, George successfully executes a 'number close'. After typing her phone number into his mobile, George struts back to Diecke, elated. I start to wonder if the impossible promise made by PUA gurus such as Diecke might just be true.

AVERAGE FRUSTRATED CHUMP (AFC)
 Men who enjoy limited success with women due to a lack of insight into them (that is, most non-PUAs).

CHICK CRACK
 Topics — such as royal weddings, Oprah's weight issues, psychic abilities — it's easy to engage women in conversation about.

LET'S JUST BE FRIENDS (LJBF)
 Women's way of indicating they have no sexual interest in you. (The lot of the AFC is to be constantly LJBFed.)

DEMONSTRATION OF VALUE
 Displaying a skill or attribute that will make you seem more attractive to a woman.

Could it be that any man who's prepared to study PUA theory then put it into practice really can nail as many hot babes as he pleases?

Ever since women were invented, men have been trying to work out how to get them in the sack. And, from the Roman poet Ovid to the Italian rake Giacomo

Casanova, there's been no shortage of worldly sensualists throughout the ages who've been willing to offer their befuddled brothers some helpful advice.

But before the pill kick-started the sexual revolution there was little point in the average man boning up on the arts of seduction. The only woman likely to ever sleep with him (without being paid to do so) was the one legally obliged to: his wife. But by the late '60s, extra-marital sex — previously an indulgence restricted to debauched aristocrats and bohemian fringe-dwellers — had been democratised. In 1970, the Urtext of the PUA movement, Eric Weber's *How to Pick Up Girls*, was published. The book sold millions, but Weber wasn't offering anything more than many who'd come before him — written advice.

Ross Jeffries, an LA-based former comedy writer, lay the groundwork for

the modern PUA industry in the late '80s. Jeffries, a devotee of personal development programs, brought a five-year dry patch to an end by using Neuro-Linguistic Programming to seduce women. He then began offering 'Speed Seduction' seminars to men, training them in the Jedi mind tricks he deployed to seduce the fairer sex.

When the internet took off, Jeffries set up a website and a newsgroup. From there it wasn't long before online forums sprung up and men from around the globe were trading tips online and seeking advice from those who claimed to be achieving impressive results. Erik von Markovic, an obscure Canadian magician with an impressive strike rate and a love of theorising, handed out advice for free for years before deciding to turn pro in 2002. Markovic, commonly referred to by his online PUA handle 'Mystery', revolutionised the teaching of pick-up by taking it out of the classroom and into the real world. Mystery accompanied his students to nightclubs and made them keep approaching women until they got a result.

Mystery's first and most enthusiastic student was a journalist called Neil Strauss. In 2005, Strauss released a best-selling book detailing his almost impossible to believe adventures with Mystery, Jeffries and others in the PUA community. After reading *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pick-Up Artists*, millions of men around the world were filled with hope that they, like Strauss, could transform themselves from sexually frustrated losers to charismatic players. Many of them went looking for a PUA guru of their own.

##@%#!

Everyone at the free introductory seminar Damien Diecke is holding in a bland function room in a nondescript Sydney hotel seems to have read *The Game* — all around me strangers are striking up conversations about the merits of "Mystery Method" and the "Cocky and Funny" approach. I've chosen to sit in on Diecke's seminar because he's one of Australia's most high-profile PUA coaches, but there are plenty of other seduction gurus around, be they locals or touring international superstars, hawking their wares to lonely men.

Diecke's confident he's positioned himself well in a growth market. "It's very small in Australia, most people haven't heard of it. You've got 500 on ▶

CYBER PULLING

The mainstreaming of pick-up coaching coincided with the rise of online dating but, surprisingly, seduction gurus have little advice to offer about how to bust a digital move on a girl. Here's **GQ's** tips:

1. THINK FACEBOOK NOT REDHOTPIE
 We're not saying no man has ever successfully arranged a hook up via one of those casual sex-focused dating sites, but the odds aren't in your favour. Even if 'Ms 69er' is a real woman rather than a fake profile created by the site's owner, there's going to be several hundred other guys competing for her favours. A more effective strategy is to get on Facebook, check out your pals' hot friends and ask to be introduced to them.

2. DON'T COME ACROSS AS A TOOL
 You might think that profile pic of you feigning intercourse with a frozen chicken makes you look like a fun guy. Trust us, no woman you're interested in will. Likewise, slang, bad grammar and misspelled words don't make you appear young and hip, they make you look juvenile and moronic.

3. DIAL BACK ON THE BIG-NOTING AND COMPLIMENTS
 What works face to face doesn't necessarily work in cyberspace. A survey of 500,000 'first contacts' on US dating site OKCupid found the most successful men were those who were self-effacing and avoided complimenting women on their looks.

4. DON'T UNLEASH AN E-BARRAGE
 Whether it's Twitter, Facebook, IM, texting or whatever else has been invented by the time this magazine hits the newsstand, nothing reeks of desperation more than getting in touch with the object of your desire several times a day. Keep your tweets, messages, posts and texts brief, infrequent and intriguing if you want to avoid being blocked.

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO PICK-UP by Damien Diecke

1. SMILE
 Smiling makes you look more attractive, honest, happy, intelligent and friendly. Make smiling a habit, even if you have to force yourself to do it at first, and people will gravitate towards you.

2. MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT
 The eyes are the window to the soul and you want to demonstrate you have nothing to hide. You'll feel anxious maintaining eye contact for long periods, so start off by practising on your friends. Focus on one eye — shifting your gaze from eye to eye makes you look nervous.

3. SPEAK CONFIDENTLY
 When we get nervous our muscles contract, raising the pitch and reducing the volume of our voices. If you speak like a scared little sparrow, women will treat you like a scared little sparrow. Present yourself as a proud man and women will respond to you accordingly.

4. CREATE FAMILIARITY
 This is especially important in clubs with loud music. Touching a woman on the arm between her elbow and shoulder before talking is a sure-fire way to make a connection and get her attention. Plus, we like people more if they touch us.

5. VISUALISE
 Close your eyes and picture the ideal version of yourself. What does this person do? How does he behave? Who would be attracted to this person and why? When you approach women, behave like this ideal version of yourself would. That guy most likely isn't insecure, can cope with rejection if it comes and is man enough to get in there and compete for the girl he wants.

the [PUA] forum in Brisbane, 2000 in Sydney and 5000 in Melbourne. We're not at the point where the average man thinks, 'I need help with this stuff, I'll go and get coaching.' You go to the US and almost everyone has heard of pick-up and there are people making \$20 million a year selling their products."

There's about 40 men in the room and if they're embarrassed at the implicit acknowledgement of sexual failure involved in turning up to this kind of event, they're not showing it. The crowd is representative of the broader population: there are white, black, Indian and Asian faces, guys in \$2000 suits chatting to guys wearing reflective vests, 18-year-olds sitting next to 50-year-olds. In terms of their looks ('outer game' in PUA lingo) and personality ('inner game'), once again it's what you'd expect of any random sample of Australian manhood — some are plain and dull, some handsome and charming, most somewhere in between.

Upbeat music plays in the background as rambunctious male energy crackles around the room. At every table men are sharing information, debating seduction methods, trying to crack each other up. I ask the guy sitting next to me why he's come along. "I'm 32 and I've never had a relationship with a woman, never even had one want to be friends with me," he confesses unselfconsciously.

Diecke starts the presentation with his personal story. The standard spiel of most PUA gurus runs something like this: "I was a pasty, *Dungeons & Dragons*-playing nerd who couldn't get a woman to piss on me even on those occasions when the excessive friction generated by my constant masturbation resulted in me bursting into flames. At 25, despairing of ever losing my virginity, I stumbled across something about pick-up while searching for porn on the internet. Having embraced the PUA mindset, my life is now a constant round of threesomes with Swedish backpackers, hook-ups in nightclub bathrooms with adult-industry actresses and admiring glances from lesser men."

Diecke, 27, deviates from this script slightly. Yes he was a nerd (he's got embarrassing pictures in his PowerPoint presentation to prove it) but he did have a girlfriend at high school. Regularly unleashing a high-voltage grin, Diecke soon makes it clear that this was actually worse than having no girlfriend at all.

Exploiting his low self-esteem and

SWEATER UNMASKED



PETER SUN

Alongside Neil Strauss, Australian business educator Peter Sun was one of the three students at Mystery's first workshop. Sun (referred to by his PUA nickname 'Sweater' in *The Game*) is quoted by Strauss as saying, a few months after attending that workshop, "Life is just amazing. Thanks to the [PUA] community, I have health, fun, money, love and great people all around me." *GQ* tracked Sun down in Queensland to ask if Strauss's account of this happy state of affairs was exaggerated. "The only thing Neil got wrong in that book was

confusing the Gold Coast with Brisbane," Sun insisted. "I flew to LA to do the seminar after my second marriage broke down. It wasn't about trying to pick up lots of girls, it was about becoming more confident. I did get results very quickly because it taught me some important communication skills. My confidence went up and that helped me find love and it helped me in my business. Not long after doing the workshop I fell in love with a woman who was very attractive but it ended up being a messy relationship... I didn't think about the consequences of

marrying a party girl. When I got divorced from her in 2008 I was 52. I had a relationship with a 26-year-old for a year, then ended up partying with a 23-year-old for a year. These were beautiful girls — when you use the techniques you become interesting to women because you can communicate and you're fun. The most common thing women say to me is, 'We had the best time with you.' My daughter told me that guys her age have no idea how to talk to girls and if they knew what I know it would make talking to them more fun."

confusion about how to interact with women, his partner pussywhipped him mercilessly. Shortly after starting a degree in telecommunications engineering, Diecke developed a severe anxiety disorder, dropped out of uni and bunkered down in his bedroom for

months, reading up on psychology, religion and personal development. Eventually he found the strength to do some bar and DJing work but, even in that environment, still "never got laid".

Slowly rebuilding his confidence, he enrolled in public speaking courses, studied to be a trainer and got a diploma in life coaching. Five years ago he joined the pick-up community, voraciously consuming books, videos, CDs and online posts on the art of seduction but never studying under a PUA guru himself.

Two years ago, after being made redundant from his job as a trainer at Aussie Home Loans when the GFC hit, he set up his business, School of Attraction.

After the bio comes PUA Theory 101. Diecke argues that feminism, while necessary and largely praiseworthy, has had some unfortunate consequences, chief among them believing they have to suppress their masculinity. The theory of sexual polarity that he subscribes to states that women are attracted to masculine men, just as men are attracted to feminine women. Many men now opt to either be the feminised 'nice guy' (who women like but aren't aroused by) or the cartoonishly masculine 'bastard' (who gets sex

but is too emotionally shut down to have a healthy relationship).

The road to sexual success, Diecke counsels, involves us reclaiming our masculinity without going overboard about it. Among other things this involves: setting clear boundaries (women can't help but test boundaries and lose respect for any man who doesn't have strong ones); taking charge (the ladies love a leader) and having a clear purpose in life (a man who's passionate about his goals is sexy).

Diecke encouragingly argues that women aren't attracted to wealth and power as such, but rather those who tend to become wealthy and powerful — men with a strong commitment to their "personal mission". Next come some exercises where everyone has to write down what their purpose in life is and what their boundaries are.

Wrapping things up, Diecke segues into his sales pitch. For \$2995 we can do the nine-week 'Masculine Confidence Intensive' course, involving three theory sessions and nine field trips.

Pick-up might have gone mainstream in the past five years, but it is still a long way off being respectable. Understandably, there's a widespread perception pick-up is about sleazy men manipulating women into putting out.

After spending a lot of time with PUAs, I came to believe the reality, paradoxical as it seems, is that, firstly, pick-up gurus encourage men to be more, not less, respectful of women and, secondly, the vast majority of men who get involved in the pick-up scene are actually seeking something much more profound than the ability to chat up chicks in clubs.

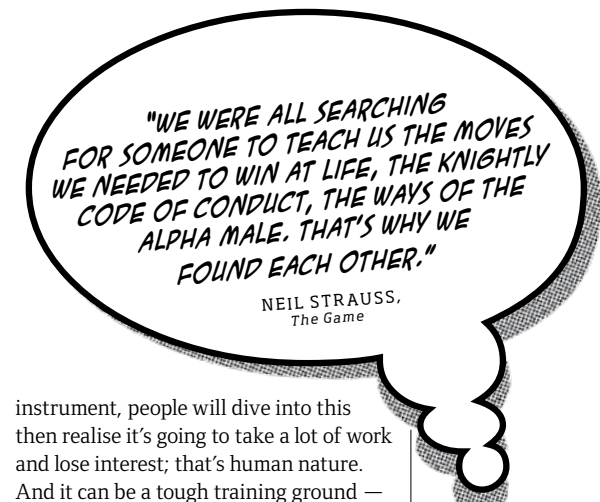
PUA theory holds, probably somewhat over-optimistically, that women want sex as much as men and only social conditioning prevents them from behaving libidinally. It also posits there is nothing a man can do to trick a woman into sleeping with him; all he can do is present himself as an attractive option and hope she chooses to do so. PUA gurus advise men to be scrupulously honest (if only out of self-interest) with women about whether they are after casual sex or a relationship. It would be disingenuous to pretend that there are no PUAs — especially those who've endured long stretches of sexual frustration or who are recovering from messy divorces — with mixed-up attitudes to women. But in all the time I spent with Diecke and his students I never heard misogynist attitudes being expressed. Rather than being resentful or contemptuous of women, PUAs seem desperate to be validated by them.

Of course, no man is going to win the approval of women, or other men for that matter, until he first respects himself. And this is where the PUA scene can be a powerful force for good. If there's one article of faith espoused by everyone in the PUA community it's that a man's 'inner game' will determine his success. The PUA subculture emerged, and still remains strongest, in California, the spiritual heartland of the personal-growth movement. Those who get involved in it are usually chasing self-transformation as much as sex. They want to become the respected, powerful and, yes, desirable man of their dreams.

It could be argued that the pick-up subculture is, well, picking up where the short-lived men's movement of the '90s left off — encouraging men to think deeply about what it means to be a man in a post-feminist world and what they want out of life. "The community is heading away from that sex-crazed, game-playing, manipulative place it started. It's heading towards working out what men are supposed to be. The guys in the industry that are doing well are the guys covering this stuff about being a man," argues Diecke.

Which brings us back to the original question: can PUA gurus deliver what they charge so handsomely for?

Diecke himself admits 95 per cent of aspiring pick-up artists won't stick with it long enough to see life-changing results. "Just like learning a martial art or musical

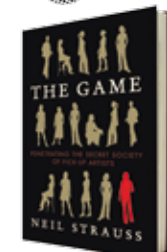


"WE WERE ALL SEARCHING FOR SOMEONE TO TEACH US THE MOVES WE NEEDED TO WIN AT LIFE, THE KNIGHTLY CODE OF CONDUCT, THE WAYS OF THE ALPHA MALE. THAT'S WHY WE FOUND EACH OTHER."

NEIL STRAUSS, *The Game*

instrument, people will dive into this then realise it's going to take a lot of work and lose interest; that's human nature. And it can be a tough training ground — practising scales to learn the piano doesn't hurt your self-esteem the way getting rejected does."

That said, for the five per cent who do have the tenacity to stay the course, the results can be impressive. Cristian is one of Diecke's star pupils. At school he was "very overweight and always the kid that wasn't good with girls". After slimming down he did get a girlfriend but she dropped him after a year, leaving his fragile confidence shattered. He first discovered PUA theory on the internet and began approaching girls to apply



PUA LINGO 101

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS
Making it clear to a woman before you sleep with her whether you're after a one-nighter or something more.

OPENER
A question, statement or story used to initiate a conversation. (Pick-up artists typically spend a great deal of time thinking up and road-testing openers.)

SOCIAL PROOF
The idea that women judge a man based on how other people are treating him. Thus, if you're surrounded by women flirting with you and men treating you deferentially, you'll be perceived as more attractive than if you're standing in a corner by yourself.

NEGGING
A comment that falls somewhere between a backhanded compliment and an outright insult, delivered to a woman you're interested in to make her think you're not interested in her, which, theoretically, will make her interested in you.

SHIT TEST
An aggressive brush-off from a woman, such as, "I'm a lesbian." This is not necessarily a rejection but rather a test that you fail by taking at face value and pass by responding cleverly to.

WHERE ARE THE PUA SUPERSTARS NOW?



ROSS JEFFRIES, 53. Jeffries' claim to be the "Godfather of Seduction" remains uncontested but he's alienated many in the PUA community by disparaging and, on occasion, suing the younger generation of PUA coaches, many of whom are his former students. He was reportedly the inspiration for Tom Cruise's PUA guru character Frank TJ Mackey in the film *Magnolia*, and at one of his seminars Jeffries re-enacted Cruise's "Respect the cock" monologue word for word, complete with the soundtrack from the movie playing in the background. He continues to conduct workshops around the world and market his Speed Seduction memoirs, CDs, DVDs and memory-jogging flashcards.



NEIL STRAUSS (STYLE), 37. While Strauss likes to talk up his nerdiness, even before *The Game* was published he'd co-written biographies with the very ungeeky likes of Marilyn Manson, Dave Navarro and porn star Jenna Jameson. He continues to have a successful career as a journalist and author. The woman he fell in love with at the end of *The Game*, rock guitarist Lisa Leveridge, broke up with him in 2006, reportedly to start a relationship with Robbie Williams. Shortly after that, Strauss set up the online seduction school Stylelife Academy. He's now in a relationship with swimsuit designer Ingrid De La O and recently wrote about his yearning to get married and have a child because "that's the reason we're all here".



ERIC VON MARKOVIK (MYSTERY), 39. After *The Game* made him a star, Mystery wrote his own books, *The Mystery Method: How to Get Beautiful Women Into Bed* and *The Pickup Artist: The New and Improved Art of Seduction*. Inevitably, he ended up with his own reality TV show, *The Pickup Artist*, which ran for two seasons and featured him training socially inept men in the art of pick-up and crowning the winner 'Master Pick-up Artist'. Though he's struck up a close friendship with David Copperfield, Mystery's career as a magician has never really taken off. But his pick-up guru day job sees him travelling the world running bootcamps. He's due in Sydney in September.

what he'd learnt. "I started doing day game [approaching women in public places during the day]. I'd see a woman eating lunch by herself and use a routine on them, like asking for their opinion on how I was dressed."

Did they think he was a nut job? "No, I discovered that most girls are more than happy to talk to you if they're not busy and you're not coming across in a threatening way."

Feeling in need of face-to-face tuition from an expert, he enrolled in one of Diecke's courses. "He pushed me and taught me things I hadn't thought of, like the importance of smiling when talking to girls. I dropped doing routines and focused on being genuine and gained a lot of momentum," says Cristian.

With a cat-that-swallowed-the-canary smile, Cristian declines to divulge how many women he's slept with but says, "I've learnt that women want a man who is genuine and are quite responsive to guys who are honest with their intentions. At the moment my priority is to have fun, but if the right girl comes along..."

"I'm very passionate about pick-up, the men you become friends with, the women you meet, the stories you hear. A lot of what you learn you can apply in real life. Going up and talking to a girl involves facing your fear and that teaches you how to handle your fear in other situations. For me, that's what game is all about — setting goals, trying to improve yourself. Game taught me you have no boundaries if you work hard. My life has improved ten-fold since I got involved."



If there's a major criticism that can be made of the pick-up industry it's this: it doesn't teach men what to do after they've picked up. For, believe it or not, what most PUAs yearn for is not to live out their most debauched fantasies but to have a serious relationship. The happy ending of Strauss's book involves him settling down with a woman who's impervious to any of his PUA wizardry.

Diecke, who slept with about 200 women in his PUA heyday, has been in a monogamous relationship for the past two years. He notes, "85 per cent of my students tell me that, yes, they wouldn't mind getting laid in the process but what they'd really like is to find a really amazing woman. But, statistically, it's very unlikely that they're going to find her unless they have the ability to meet and talk to lots of women." ☞

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