

ROBERT IRVINE

MAGAZINE

FEB-MARCH 2020

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE

TO THE STARS WITH

BRANNON BRAGA

THE PRODUCER OF
COSMOS ON SUCCESS
& GETTING UN-STUCK

THE
UNBELIEVABLE
TRUE STORY
OF VETERAN
JOHN PECK

EXCLUSIVE LOOK

DAVID MOSCOW'S

FROM SCRATCH

+

RESTAURANT: IMPOSSIBLE

ALL-NEW RECIPES



ROBERT IRVINE MAGAZINE

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE

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Thirty years in Hollywood have taught Brannon Braga a lot. He shares the biggest lessons beginning on page 20.

ROBERT'S LETTER

THE ONLY WAY TO LOSE IS TO QUIT

And you're no quitter.

This month's cover subject isn't just one of Hollywood's most wonderfully-talented writer-producer-directors, he's also a dear friend. And while I've been lucky enough to work with Brannon Braga and see what he can do firsthand, he's not on the cover because of his talent or his resume. He's on the cover because his career path has taught him some invaluable lessons, lessons that he very generously shared in his interview, beginning on page 20.

When people outside of the entertainment industry hear about someone like Brannon, they usually think of him as someone who "made it" in Hollywood. And while Brannon has certainly made a name for himself, the thing that continues to make him so successful is the fact that he takes nothing for granted. He knows that past success doesn't guarantee future success, and he wakes up every morning and puts in the same level of passion, care, and work ethic that got him noticed as a young intern on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*—and saw him catapult up to being the show's most prolific writer.



Follow Robert on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#).

ROBERT'S LETTER



Braga, second from right, on the set of *Books of Blood*, which releases this October. Braga co-wrote, directed, and produced the film, which is an adaptation of the Clive Barker stories.

As I read his interview, it dawned on me just how many readers could find real value in the advice and example he offers. Brannon was laser-focused on what he wanted and no matter what got in his way, he wasn't going to give up. And I get e-mails every day from people who tell me they've hit rock bottom and are ready to give up.

So many of the people who give up do so because they believe their obstacles are insurmountable. They believe that tomorrow can't offer them anything. And when you're down—be it from a massive amount of debt, a relationship that's falling apart, or an inability to lose weight—this negative thinking starts to build momentum, and it becomes very hard to see the truth.

And the truth is this: every single person alive has something—some talent, some gift—that only they can offer the world.

I'm blessed to have the platform that I have with *Restaurant: Impossible*. I'm able to step into the lives of people who are facing tremendous pressure and are about to give up. With two days and \$10,000 I'm able to give them a second chance.

But here's another truth: You don't need a TV show to make a difference in someone's life. You don't even need a dime. The paradox of giving—the fact that when we give more, we have more—is my north star. To me, it's an absolute truth that has informed everything I do from *Restaurant: Impossible* to touring with the USO to the creation of The Robert Irvine Foundation. And it's why I urge you—in whatever way you can, in any area of your life—to give back.

There are people in your life right now who need help. They might need a shoulder to cry on. They might need someone to listen. They

might need someone to recognize their talent and urge them to pursue their passion. These are gifts, which, when given from the deepest part of yourself, are priceless.

So, as you go off to explore the rest of this issue, I ask you to wake up tomorrow and commit to sharing these gifts with someone in need. You might just change someone's life.

That life might even be your own. And remember:

Nothing is impossible,

THE CURE FOR LOW BACK PAIN

Listen up, desk jockeys: there's nothing you can buy to fix your wonky low back. You're going to need to put in the work and squat



DR. TOMMY RHEE

Dr. Tommy Rhee has pretty much seen it all in his career. The former team chiropractor for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers—and physical therapist to one Chef Robert Irvine—knows how to tweak just about everything in the human body, allowing him to optimize everyone from world-class athletes, the average stiff and sedentary office worker, and everyone else in-between.

We asked Dr. Rhee to address the number one concern amongst our

readers: how to deal with lower back pain. He shot back a one-word answer: Squat.

Then he elaborated, “Show me a weak back and I’ll show you weak legs. They go together.”

Training the muscles of the back is of course a good idea, Rhee continued, but the emphasis should first be placed on the larger muscle bodies of the legs: the glutes, hamstrings, and quads—these aren’t just responsible for leg movement,

but form a base of support for the spine. Problems tend to travel up the body’s “kinetic chain” which is how knee pain can often become shoulder pain over time. When you have muscle weakness or an imbalance, the body falls into bad movement patterns, which can wreak havoc throughout the body.

“I tell people all the time, I can fix the back pain, but it will keep coming back until you train your legs,” Rhee says. “The transition from

IN THE GYM: PRO TIPS



Prolonged sitting leads to low back pain. While weak muscles of the core—spinal erectors and abdominals—bear some responsibility for the spinal compression, Dr. Tommy Rhee explains why the fix begins with the legs.

sitting to standing is where the pain really comes in. People who stand up and feel low back pain, that's often because they didn't load their legs before they stood; they loaded their back. You want to center your weight over your heels and push through them as you stand up."

Rhee says he works patients up to performing 100 squats. This might start as 10 sets of 10, working up to five sets of 20, four sets of 25, and eventually a single set of 100. For patients who don't have the strength or stability to do a regular

bodyweight squat, assisted squats using hands on a chair or other support are one starting option.

Just don't forget that it's a bad idea to neglect any part of the body in your training. Every muscle needs work. "When a muscle isn't activated it says, 'Well, then I'll just activate myself,'" Rhee says, explaining the potentially-excruciating phenomenon of muscle spasms.

When working with the average desk jockey, Rhee admits it's sometimes difficult to get the patient to put in the work. As one would

expect, he faces no such difficulties with Robert.

"Robert's a super-trooper," Rhee says, explaining that following rotator cuff surgery, Robert had only 10 percent range of motion in his right shoulder. That number is now 60 percent and climbing. "I actually have to be careful with him. He has a high pain tolerance and he would just keep going if I let him."

Check out the total-body workout with emphasis on squatting beginning on the next page. Learn more about Dr. Rhee at physicalchiro.com

WHAT'S IN THE TRUNK?

The foundations of a healthy, strong body begin with your legs.

The more muscle you have, the higher your metabolism and the more calories we burn. If that's true, then why do so many people neglect to train their legs, which is the largest muscle group? In short, because it can hurt. If you've never trained legs before, or if you haven't done much leg training for a while, then you can expect to be pretty sore even after a basic leg workout.

Well, here's a neat little trick to

deal with that soreness: TOUGH-EN UP. Seriously. It's gonna hurt a little bit. So what? You know what hurts more? Neglecting all of this important foundation work and then being too frail to enjoy your golden years. You're going to do this workout—which calls for four training days per week, two lower body days and two upper body days—and for the first two, maybe three weeks you'll resent

it. And then it will be part of your new normal. It doesn't get easier. You get stronger. That's what you should want. There is nothing to be gained by going an easier route. (FYI, riding a stationary bike for about 10 minutes after your leg workout will help spread some of that lactic acid around and mitigate some of your soreness. It's by no means a cure-all, but it can definitely help.)



THE UPPER-LOWER SPLIT



THE WORKOUT

Directions: Perform the following workout for 6-8 weeks. Alternate between Leg Day and Upper Body Day for four total sessions per week.

LOWER BODY DAY

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Bodyweight Squat	2	15
Barbell Squat	4	10
Box Jump*	2	10
Walking Lunge	4	20
		(10 each leg)
Leg Press	3	12
Hamstring Curl	3	12
Quad Extension	3	12
Calf Raise	4	20

*(PICTURED ABOVE) Stand in front of a box or bench at least as high as your knees. Squat low to the ground and then explosively reverse direction, jumping with both feet straight onto the box. Land softly, crouching into the landing to decelerate.



UPPER BODY DAY

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Bench Press	4	10
SUPERSET WITH		
Barbell Row	4	10
Pushup	4	15
SUPERSET WITH		
Inverted Row*	4	10
Barbell Curl	4	10
SUPERSET WITH		
French Curl**	4	10
Military Press	4	10
SUPERSET WITH		
Plank	4	60 seconds

*Lie under a bar set on the safety pins of a power rack. Grab the bar with an overhand grip and pull your chest to the bar, initiating the move by retracting your shoulder blades. Hold the position at the top for one second and then slowly return to the start.

**Hold a single heavy dumbbell behind your head with both hands on the inside of one of the plates; the dumbbell should be straight up and down, perpendicular to the floor. Bend your elbows all the way to let the dumbbell sink behind your head, then contract your triceps to push the weight straight up.

IN THE KITCHEN: CLASSIC RECIPE

CORNERED BEEF & CABBAGE

SERVES 8

YOU'LL NEED

2 gallons chicken stock
3 ½ cup pickling spice
6 cloves garlic
4 bay leaves
4 cloves
2 pounds raw beef brisket, cut into
4 equal portions
2 heads cabbage, cut into wedges
Salt and pepper
Vegetable oil, for frying
3 medium Idaho potatoes, cut into
wedges
½ lb baby carrots

MAKE IT

1) Pour the stock into a large 4-gallon stockpot over medium-high heat and bring to a simmer. Add the pickling spice, garlic, bay leaves and cloves. Reduce the heat to medium, then add the beef, cabbage, and carrots. Simmer until tender, 3 hours. Season with salt and pepper.
2) Heat a few inches of oil to 325 degrees in a deep pot.
3) Fry the potatoes wedges until tender, 6 to 7 minutes. Remove and season with salt and pepper.
4) To build the plate, place wedges of cabbage on a plate with cornered

beef next to it, then add potatoes and carrots and finish with 2 to 3 ounces of the cooking broth on top.

THE MACROS

CALORIES: 450
PROTEIN: 37 g
FAT: 21 g
CARBS: 29 g



IN THE KITCHEN: CLASSIC RECIPE



IRISH SODA BREAD

SERVES 12

YOU'LL NEED

2 ¼ cups All purpose flour
½ cup cake flour
1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp baking powder
½ cups light brown sugar
1 tsp salt
1 cup raisins
1 cup currants
1 cups buttermilk
12 oz. Guinness Stout
1 cup quick cooking oats
1 tsp caraway seeds
1 tbsp vanilla extract

MAKE IT

1) Preheat oven to 425 degrees F
2) Prep a cake pan, smearing it with butter and flour.
3) In a large mixing bowl add all-purpose flour, cake flour, baking soda, baking powder, sugar, salt, raisins, and quick cooking oats and currants.
4) In a separate bowl add butter-milk, beer, and vanilla extract.
5) Form a well in the middle of the dry ingredient mixture, add the wet ingredients to the flour mixture.
6) Incorporate with your hands, it will look more like a cake batter

than a bread dough.

7) Add the batter to the butter and floured pan bake for 40 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean.
8) Cool bread on baking rack, and allow to cool completely before serving.

THE MACROS

CALORIES: 338
PROTEIN: 8 g
FAT: 2 g
CARBS: 75 g

LET'S HELP OUR HEROES

Text GIVE to 813-536-5006



The Robert Irvine Foundation is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to enriching the lives of our military personnel, first responders, and their families. 100% of all funds raised go directly to those who need it most. To learn more about Robert's commitment to our military and first responders, please visit RobertIrvineFoundation.org





John Peck's Gift to the Nation

He gave his arms, his legs, and his memories for his country.
You won't believe how much more he has to give.

BY ROBERT IRVINE

JOHN PECK

The first explosion should have killed him. It was 2007 and Marine Sgt. John Peck and his unit had just seized a cache of homemade explosives. When Ground Ordinance Disposal arrived to detonate the cache, Peck and company started making their way back to base. Peck manned the machine gun turret on top of the Humvee. As the vehicle rolled along a dirt road, it hit a pressure-triggered IED.

The explosion rocked the vehicle and threw Peck up and forward, his head smashing hard into the machine gun.

He stepped down from the turret and wandered the road, conscious but with no idea what was happening. He told his fellow Marines he was looking for his Microsoft Zune.

He laughs about that last detail now. His ability to maintain a sense of humor about his traumatic brain injury and severe memory loss is one of the many things that makes him so remarkable.

But the memory loss he suffered wasn't temporary and the brain injury was serious—a tear in his frontal lobe that affected short- and long-term memories as well as balance and speech. It took two years of physical therapy for Peck to regain coordination. At the same time, he needed occupational therapy to relearn the basics of his job, like driving. Today, though, he still suffers from memory loss and often struggles to find the right word when he speaks.

By the time he had recovered in 2009, he was eligible for an honorable discharge, but he wanted to re-enlist. Doctors insisted that his time in the military was finished. But where there is a will, there is a way, and I haven't met many men with a



Book John Peck as a motivational speaker at JohnPeckJourney.com

stronger will than John Peck. He begged, pleaded, and essentially argued his way back into service, but his next stint in the Marines didn't last long.

The second explosion should have killed him, too. On May 24, 2010 while serving in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, Peck was clearing an

JOHN PECK

empty compound, searching for explosives. He was the first man in, using a slow, sweeping arc with his metal detector. His fellow Marines followed close on his heels, stepping only where it was clear. Room by room, Peck gave the OK. He turned to face his sergeant to tell him he was going outside to work security. As he stepped, he touched and IED and the explosion bolted him through the air.

"I felt a kick to the head," Peck says. "I think it was my own foot."

After that, he saw only darkness, but could cry out to his brothers for help. He told them he didn't want to die. They said he wouldn't. Then they administered an IV directly into his bone marrow and knocked him out. It's his last memory for the next two-and-a-half months.

He lost both legs and his right arm that day. Doctors fought to save his left arm, but couldn't. Making matters worse, a flesh-eating virus—native to the sands of Afghanistan—tore through what remained of his

left leg, his left biceps, and the top layer of his abdominal muscle. He became the third quadruple amputee of the war.

Bear in mind that his mission in Afghanistan that day was community outreach. His unit was meeting with locals to let them know that Americans weren't to be feared, that they could be called upon for help. In the aftermath, no one could blame Peck if he became bitter or depressed. No one would call him a coward if succumbed to the initial impulse when he woke

up, which was to end his life.

But when I met John Peck in 2014 at a benefit for the troops—one of Gary Sinise's Invincible Spirit Festivals—I met a bright-eyed, funny, and above-all, fantastically driven young man.

He told me that he had always wanted to be a chef. Originally, he had planned to attend the Culinary Institute of America through a program with the Marines as soon as his tour in Afghanistan was finished. After that, he planned to tour France and Italy and learn from



Peck shows Robert his new hands while his wife Jessica looks on at SkyBall XVII in 2019. After receiving the arm transplant, nerves grew into his new arms at a rate of one millimeter per day.

JOHN PECK

world-renowned chefs, return home, compete on *The Next Food Network Star*, and win. It was a big, audacious goal. As he told me about it, I did my best not to tear up. A dream derailed in service to your country—that is bittersweet, indeed. Perhaps he could see where my mind was going as I curled my lips and gave him a sympathetic look. He had to be used to it at that point because he stopped me immediately, looked into my eyes, and said, “That is STILL my goal.”

His resolve was breathtaking, but it was still difficult for me to reconcile that with his situation. It was a lofty goal to begin with. Now, of course, there were even bigger obstacles in the way. He was in a wheelchair with one ill-suited prosthetic arm.

To pursue this goal seriously, he would need to get mobile and need use of two fully functional hands, which would require a rare and highly risky double-arm transplant.

He knew this, of course, and was patiently waiting for his chance. In October of 2016 he got the call that his donor arms had come through. After a marathon 13-hour surgery, the transplant was complete. Peck then underwent more grueling physical therapy as his nerves slowly and painfully grew into his new arms. The nerves grow at the rate of one millimeter a day, or about one centimeter a week. That’s one inch per month. There’s also this grim fact hang-

ing over him: Even now, almost four years later, his body could reject his arms at any minute and he could lose them, sending him right back to square one.

He is undeterred, and his spirit carries him through the days. That spirit is infectious. In February 2016 he found Jessica Parker on Match.com. She didn’t care about his disabilities, only his unbreakable will and sense of humor (his profile outlined his injuries and said he’s a “blast to be around”). Today, they are married.

Whenever I have a day that I think is tough, or I look back on any of the hard moments of my life, I try to think of John and he instantly brings the whole world into perspective.

I am floored not just his incredible strength and positive attitude, but by his generosity. Remember: He had to fight tooth and nail to go back to war when he had already given so much.

There is generosity in the common sense which I believe most of us understand—I give you the extra that I’m not going to use—and then there is generosity that



Peck has come a long way since his initial stint in rehab. In 2016 he received a double-arm transplant and has his sights set on culinary school.

gives of your deepest self, the kind that John Peck showed. He gave his arms, legs and even his memories for his country.

As this issue of Robert Irvine Magazine heads to publication, John is trying to schedule a trip to the Culinary Institute of America to see if he’ll be able to attend classes this fall. I don’t know if John will ever reach his goal, but I’ll be rooting for him every step of the way.

And I hope he knows that by even getting back up and trying, he’s given this nation yet another gift: inspiration, hope, and perspective.

Follow John Peck’s Journey on Facebook, and book John as a motivational speaker at: JohnPeckJourney.com.

His biography, *Rebuilding Sgt. Peck: How I Put Body and Soul Back Together After Afghanistan* is available [HERE](#).



A Matter of Honor

Three Hots & a Cot offers homeless veterans more than a roof.
It gives them a chance to reclaim their dignity.
With the help of the Robert Irvine Foundation, they're
better-suited to the task than ever before.

BY MATT TUTHILL

3 HOTS & A COT

Rich Cislak rubbed his eyes in disbelief. The number couldn't be right. The director of Three Hots and a Cot, the Birmingham, AL-area shelter for homeless veterans was looking through the day's mail and came across an envelope from the Robert Irvine Foundation. Inside was a check for \$10,000. His eyes didn't deceive him. The number was right. But he still didn't believe it. There are enough scams that start out with the receipt of a phony check.

Rich called his partner JD Simpson, who confirmed the check was real. JD had applied for a Robert Irvine Foundation grant at the behest of his grandpa, a fan of Robert Irvine and British Royal Navy veteran who served during WWII. JD's grandfather passed away last summer and never got to see his idea come to fruition, but he'd be happy to know that his advice had paid off.

"The timing couldn't have been more perfect," Rich says, explaining that the shelter—which is now entering its tenth year of operation—had just undergone some renovations and were now approved by the health department to sleep 20 veterans, up from 13. However, he was "scrambling" and in desperate need of further renovations to the dining room and kitchen, as well as new equipment. The shelter had been subsisting on four hand-me-down residential refrigerators and three freezers to store food to feed the estimated 1,500 veterans who have come to their doors in search of a meal and a place to stay.

The grant enabled Three Hots to purchase a commercial three-door refrigerator and a commercial freezer to replace their old equipment. These purchases saved a tremendous amount of space—while lowering the electric bill—and helped them get the most out of their renovations—a bigger dining room,

bigger kitchen, and a wider entryway that made it easy for wheelchair-bound vets to move in and out of the house, whereas it had been cumbersome under the old layout. Better refrigeration also means that veterans can eat more nutritious meals; Three Hots was previously limited in what it could serve at mealtime, and



TOP: The crowded kitchen before. BOTTOM: The commercial three-door refrigerator, which will allow the shelter to expand its offerings.

3 HOTS & A COT

canned and other non-perishable goods like spaghetti were mainstays.

“It all fell into place,” says Rich, who, like his partner JD, is a US Navy veteran. “We’re not a normal halfway house. We do everything we can to make it homey, to make it comfortable, to make it a place where guys can be proud to hang their hat for the night.”

“And there are no free rides,” JD adds, noting that the veterans who live there are motivated by cleaning and other responsibilities.

The shelter has come a long way since opening its doors nearly a decade ago.

“I remember just about doing back flips when someone donated \$20,” JD recalls. “I ran down to the grocery store to get two loaves of bread, some mayo, and three packs of bologna and that’s what the guys had for dinner that night.”

“So, the \$10,000 from the Robert Irvine Foundation is a huge amount of money and we couldn’t be more grateful to Robert. I know he’s a tough-as-nails son-of-a-bitch on TV, but he’s got the heart of a teddy bear and he has a passion for helping people, especially our veterans.”

From the shelter’s humble beginnings it’s gone on to feed and house veterans from every era dating back to WWII. Of the 46,000 veteran charities in the United States, former President George W. Bush chose Three Hots & A Cot as one of 25 most successful; JD and Rich traveled to Dallas to meet him and accept his thanks.

With that growth and success,



however, a dark truth hangs over their work.

“There will be no end to the homeless veteran issue,” JD says. “They come to us with no hope for tomorrow... and many of them are not looking for a place to live. They’re looking for a place to die. Some have cancer and just don’t want to die in the street. One man sat in his wheelchair in front of the house in the rain just waiting until we had room...”

Through tears, JD recalled the story of going upstairs with Rich to the room of a 22-year-old veteran of the war in Afghanistan to put the man in a body bag after he had committed suicide.

“He didn’t believe that tomorrow

offered him anything,” JD says. “We want all these men and women—who have given so much to this country—to know that tomorrow does hold something for them. It can be beautiful.”

“And it can start right here,” Rich says. “You walk in, and you’re part of our family. Then, with a good meal, a shower, and a warm bed, you can turn your attention to building a new life.”

And for the veterans who find that prospect too daunting, they can at least find dignity.

To support Three Hots & A Cot, click [HERE](#).

To support the Robert Irvine Foundation, click [HERE](#).

RI MAG COVER INTERVIEW: BRANNON BRAGA



The prolific writer-producer-director reflects on what he's learned in his incredible life and career—and offers advice on how you can get unstuck in yours.

INTERVIEW BY MATT TUTHILL

INTERVIEW: BRANNON BRAGA

You know his work even if you don't know the man. Brannon Braga has been a prolific writer and producer of television and film since the early 90s when he joined Star Trek: The Next Generation as an intern. He quickly worked his way up to being a writer and executive producer, eventually penning more episodes than any other Star Trek writer—including the show's excellent two-part finale, "All Good Things..." He went on to produce and write for a huge number of projects—including 24, Salem, The Orville, and the return of Cosmos hosted by Neil de-Grasse Tyson—not to mention two more Trek series and a pair of big-screen Trek adventures.

While taking a brief break from the editing bay of his upcoming Books of Blood—a film adaptation of the Clive Barker novels—he spoke to Robert Irvine Magazine about the upcoming Cosmos: Possible Worlds, what he's learned in his legendary career—and the surprising parallels with Restaurant: Impossible.



Braga directing on the set of *Books of Blood* in late 2019. The film is set to release in October of 2020.

Robert Irvine Magazine: The new season of *Cosmos* is called *Cosmos: Possible Worlds*. What can viewers expect to see?

Brannon Braga: There are

infinite stories to tell in nature. And this time Ann [Druyan, the show's writer/producer and Carl Sagan's widow] had the concept of *Possible Worlds*, meaning, we

INTERVIEW: BRANNON BRAGA

are going to do some extrapolations and theorizing about what far away exoplanets might be like and what life might be like if it exists. The show is still very science-based. *Possible Worlds* is also metaphorical: the human brain is a world of its own. The possible worlds of the future. There's a lot of different meanings and layers to possible worlds. It comes out March 9th on National Geographic. ... The original *Cosmos*, which was made by Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan in 1980, is a show that I saw when I was just entering high school and it had a huge impact on me. The original is still regarded as one of the great science programs of all time.

RI: I want to rewind to the start of your career to another show that you worked on that was set deep in the cosmos: *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. It is suddenly relevant again right now with the premiere of *Picard*. When you watch the new show, will you be able to do that as a fan, or will the writer in you be thinking about what you might have done differently?

BB: I can do both. I can sit back and enjoy *Star Trek* as a fan, but I'd be lying if I said my writerly instincts don't kick in from time to time because I worked on that show for the first 15 years of my career. I feel like I have a very deep connection to Captain Picard. I did four seasons and

two movies with him I really love Patrick Stewart. I look forward to the show. Of course, I know what's going to happen. I'm going to think, "Man, I wish we could have afforded all those visuals." We were still using models back on *Next Generation*. There were no computer generated effects. But I'm looking forward to it. It sounds very relevant and I am glad Patrick decided to go back to the character.

RI: You must have some fond memories of working with him.

BB: Yes. Working with Patrick, he was a perfect gentleman and very nice to work with. I think just by coincidence, I wrote the episode that he directed on *Next*

Click the image below to watch a trailer for *Cosmos: Possible Worlds*.



INTERVIEW: BRANNON BRAGA

Generation. So I worked with him more as a director than an actor. He's a really good director.

And I think what I learned from Patrick was indirect, in that the hardest character to write for was his because he brought so much intellect and empathy and thoughtfulness to his character. Whenever Picard was in a scene, it was important. He wasn't in every scene. He was just so great.

You know, I'm not Picard, I don't feel any of those qualities that Picard has on any given day. So it was challenging to write for him. And part of the reason Picard was so effective was because Patrick could even make my dialogue sound great. He just brought a believability and gravitas to everything. It's really hard to separate the two—the actor from the character. Patrick's just kind of an exquisitely trained actor, so well rounded, so instinctive, and it forced me to up my game any time I was writing. It's not that I wasn't doing the same with the other characters, but Picard for me was especially challenging.

RI: Everything gets rebooted these days. Even the original cast of *Star Trek* got rebooted in these newer films, but no one's touching a *Next Generation* reboot. If I were you, I would take that as a nice testimony to the finale that you came up with. Kevin Feige cited it as an inspiration for *Avengers: Endgame*.

BB: Yeah, but that's not to say that someone won't reboot those



characters one day. I wouldn't rule it out. I am not saying they are. I'm just guessing. But there's probably a reality where that could happen. I just don't know.

RI: *The Orville* [which Braga produces alongside Seth McFarlane] carries the spirit of *Next Generation* with it so well and I've been pleasantly surprised by all the hardcore *Trek* fans that I know that have embraced it. They wisely see that *Trek* is about more than the alien races, more than the ships, the backstory. It's a worldview, it's an optimism, it's about creative problem solving and *The Orville* has all that. I thought it was interesting that it was developed around the same time as *Discovery* which has a darker tone to it, and doesn't feel like classic *Trek*. I

wouldn't want to ask you to get into comparing the two, but I am very curious about what made you realize that now was the right time to bring that optimistic kind of sci-fi back to the mainstream.

BB: It was Seth McFarlane's idea. He came up with *The Orville*. Seth and I had been talking, I've been friends with him for quite some time and he was a *Star Trek* fan, so he would bring up *Star Trek* from time to time. I think his feeling when he was first telling me about *The Orville* was, "This kind of storytelling is not on television." The stand-alone episode, a tale well told in an hour. As you say, *Star Trek* to me is a worldview. A very optimistic one... I think you put it really well; it's an optimistic view of humanity and what future we could have.

INTERVIEW: BRANNON BRAGA

He explained that *The Orville* would have a more casual set of characters in that it's like a real workplace would be. perhaps. And Seth came up with some wonderful characters, but make no mistake there was an ethos—and you can call it a *Next Generation* ethos—but it wasn't aiming to mimic *Next Generation*, but it was aiming to capture a certain kind storytelling and a certain aspirational ethos that was missing from what's out there now.

Because with sci-fi, I think of some very successful franchises about children murdering each other for food, and I just can't imagine any more grim future than that. I love working on the show and I really missed that kind of writing. I'm glad the audience has embraced it. We were nervous because it with Seth you might think it's going to be *Spaceballs* or a satire or something. We were trying to do something a little more dramatic.

There was an episode that was supposed to be a later episode. I'll call "About a Girl" which was about a transgender metaphor using our Moclan characters. The Moclans are an all-male society and with a female child it's customary to have the sex changed at birth, and in this episode the father doesn't want to do it. It's a very dramatic episode. And we decided to pull it up in the air

date order to the third episode because we had to know, "Is the audience going to embrace what this show really is?" And they did. And in the third season, which we're filming right now, it's even more dramatic. And I think it's our best season yet.

RI: You work in a job that, in the age of the internet and the age of peak TV, you are capable of drawing as much scrutiny as a politician. If you

"People have to know that asking for help is not a bad thing. It doesn't mean that you're a failure."

look on Twitter and you look at the way people scrutinize casting decisions and who's writing what, it can be pretty wild.

With that in mind: We have readers reach out to us for all kinds of advice, including how to process criticism from a friend, family member, or boss. I thought you might have some good advice in this area, seeing as how passionate and protective genre fans—and Trek fans in particular—can be. At this point in your career have you developed such a thick skin that criticism

doesn't affect you? How do you process it?

BB: It's a question that goes back to the early days of the internet when there were *Star Trek* forums going on and I looked at them. Of course I did. It was a new thing I could see the next morning and then later, as the internet got faster, I could get reviews and see people responding as the episode was airing. And it replaced fan mail and became something much more

broad in the media. I didn't obsess over the reviews, but I did look at a lot of them because I wanted to know what the general feeling was about things.

You can't look at reviews—particularly with a fan base as passionate and detailed as *Star Trek*—and expect them all

to be glowing. Because *Star Trek* is different things to different people and people always have something to criticize, and that's fair. Have I developed a thick skin since then? Not really.

Criticism always is a little painful especially when you know it's correct. Not everything you do is successful, but there are some criticisms that are personal and aggressive and you wonder where all that anger is coming from sometimes. But I still do a *Star Trek* convention from time to time. Generally speaking, it's fun and can be wonderful.

INTERVIEW: BRANNON BRAGA

RI: A lot of readers are also feeling pressure at their jobs and in their family lives. How do you deal with pressure? You're dealing with multi-million dollar budgets and everyone's job depends on you doing yours well.

BB: Well, in my particular instance, I'm in a leadership role as a show runner and the one thing I have learned over the years is that yes, I'm responsible to some degree for making sure the show I'm doing is successful because there are hundreds of people's jobs on the line. But those very same hundreds of people who you feel responsible for, are also people who are working with the exact same motives, in most cases. And you have to trust them to do their jobs. It's actually not all on your shoulders. There are many people around you and when I hire a crew, or writers, or whatever, I'm looking for people that I can rely on and not control. I want people to do their best and bring their best. And when you realize that you're all in it together,



Star Trek is generally safe to watch with the kids. *Books of Blood* won't be.

er, it makes it a lot easier.

There's a recurring scene you see in Robert's work on *Restaurant: Impossible*—for instance, is that people have to know that asking for help is not a bad thing. It doesn't mean you're a failure. Me writing a script and asking for help with writing a scene or figuring something out isn't a sign of weakness. And I wouldn't have the career I have without people helping me along the way. Absolutely none.

I would have no success without other people. I would remind people that when you feel alone, you're really not alone. It's one

of the reasons I wanted to meet Robert. I was a big fan of *Restaurant: Impossible*—not so much because I'm a foodie or interested in restaurants. I was interested in how he managed difficult situations with people feeling hopeless. And just as recently as last night's episode, he's telling somebody, "Get out of your own head. There are people around you who can help and I'm here to help."

RI: People refusing to delegate is a big theme in the show.

BB: And they compartmentalize and don't deal with the prob-

INTERVIEW: BRANNON BRAGA

lems because it's too stressful and they can't face the failures that are there. Whatever the reason, they've isolated themselves, which is the last thing you should be doing in those situations.

RI: So you know that it's okay to reach out for help, but how much of that do you think is

natural on your part or learned behavior? Earlier in your career, was it much harder for you to do that?

BB: It's learned. I've learned a lot. I was a showrunner at a very young age and I certainly had some creative ability to do the job, but it took a lot of learning to get to all the other things that make someone a good leader.

And it was a learning process for sure. Absolutely.

RI: Another thing that readers are always asking Robert is, "How do I get unstuck?" They say, "I'm 300 pounds and I can't lose weight," "I'm in this dead-end job," "I'm stuck in this loveless marriage." I'd love to get your advice on how to get

BRAGA'S GREATEST HITS: Click any of the images below to go to the show's respective streaming page.



INTERVIEW: BRANNON BRAGA

unstuck because not only have you found a lot of success in your career, you're a writer and I'm certain that you have some experience with feeling stuck. So how do you deal with it and how do you think readers can?

BB: It's a very broad question and I can only speak from my own very narrow realm of experience in my own profession. And the one thing I would say is that in order to get unstuck or in order to move through what feels like being stuck, you have to have a certain tolerance for discomfort.

You have to be comfortable being uncomfortable because sometimes if it's a job that's causing you stress, you're worried about quitting the job because you don't think you'll ever work again. That's the situation I was in when I was in my early twenties and I quit the job and it was really uncomfortable for a couple of weeks, but things worked out. I was coming from a place of fear.

And in terms of even my daily writing work, it took me a long time to realize it's not going to be perfect the first time. I want it to be perfect coming from my brain onto the keyboard, but it's not going to be. So, you just have to have a tolerance for discomfort and trust that it's going to get there. Even if it's really bad at first, you're just going to come at it again and again and again until it gets where it needs to be.

There are situations on *Restaurant: Impossible* where people

are \$500,000 in debt and have a failing restaurant and they've reached out for help in the form of Robert Irvine and every episode starts with discomfort. They have to hear uncomfortable truths from Robert and they deal with it and then they move through it and make big changes and there's no guarantee those big changes are going to be successful in the long run. Who knows? But it's definitely better than the situation they're in.

People talk about writer's block. I can't afford to be stuck creatively. I have to deliver material. So even if I have a terrible day where I don't actually write anything but just go round and round in my head, at least I was trying and got something, some idea down on paper, even if it's crappy. I'll come back at it.

So being stuck is a frame of mind for me. You're never really stuck unless you are physically mired in quicksand. There's always a way out. And again, ask for help.

There must be people all around willing to throw you a lifeline to you if you just ask. I also think—and this is a really hard one for me to do—you need to take breaks. A few days of vacation is so important. I hate to admit it because I really love working and it's my main passion in life, but getting a clear head and stepping away from situations is very important.

RI: *Books of Blood* is a movie that you wrote, directed, and

produced. What is this movie about and when can folks expect to see it?

BB: When I was 21, I read *Books of Blood* by Clive Barker—all six volumes. And I was just completely blown away. These were just radical.

The best horror is radical and Clive Barker did something like HP Lovecraft; he wrote things that you just have to read, you can't describe them. They're just so original, and I was a fan.

And over the years I always thought, "Gosh! What a good anthology show that would be." And in developing the project with Fox and Hulu we realized it might be better as an anthological horror film. So, the movie, which was written by Adam Simon and me—and based on one original story from *Books of Blood* and two new stories that Clive and I came up with along with Adam—make up the movie. And the three stories are kind of independent, but they cross pollinate each other.

We kind of call it the *Pulp Fiction* of horror. Terrible comparison because it's not going to be nearly that movie, but it has that kind of structural vibe. We're cutting it now and it will be out in October.

Follow Brannon Braga on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#), and watch *Cosmos: Possible Worlds*, premiering on *National Geographic* on March 9.



WHAT DREAMS MAY COME

Nicholas Irving is better known as The Reaper, an Army Ranger sniper and machine gunner with 33 kills in a single deployment and an unconfirmed kill total that could easily be into triple digits. He has since retired to raise a family, but every night, his enemies still rise from the dead to haunt his dreams.

BY MATT TUTHILL

THE REAPER

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This story originally ran in the Jan-Feb 2017 issue of Robert Irvine Magazine. At the end of the story you'll find an update from our recent follow-up interview with Irving..

The nightmare is always the same. The first man that Nicholas Irving ever killed appears as a ceiling fan above his bed. The man's head becomes the center of the fan; his arms and legs are the blades. Irving is pinned down and can't move. The fan spins faster and faster and descends toward Irving. Eventually, it flies out of control and explodes in a spray of blood that covers him and everything in the room.

"It's guaranteed that I have that same exact dream once a year," Irving says.

The first time he had this nightmare it was the night after that very first kill.

Irving was a newly minted Ranger at the time, serving the 3rd Ranger Battalion out of the Army's 75th Regiment, an 18-year-old serving as a machine-gunner in Tikrit in 2004. He was an expert in variety of heavy guns, and that day he worked behind the iron sights of a .50-caliber. For the uninitiated, the 50-cal is designed to take down vehicles, strong enough to chew through tank armor and mangle the treads.



Nicholas Irving became known as The Reaper after 33 kills in a single deployment. An NBC miniseries based on his life and experiences will air later this year. With the birth of son last November, Irving says he believes the worst of his PTSD is behind him, and he has quit drinking cold turkey. Follow him on Twitter and Facebook, and visit his website, hardshoot.com.

Its effect on a flesh-and-blood human burned images into Irving's head that he'll never forget.

"He turned to jelly, mist... and just... weird looking," Irving says. "He just disintegrated, evaporated in his vehicle."

Over the next seven years, Irving

deployed a total of six times; three as a machine gunner, three as a sniper. He killed at least another 59 men, including 33 confirmed in a single tour as a sniper. The latter figure earned him the nickname The Reaper, and in 2015 he released a biography of the same

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name. The Weinstein Company is currently developing a miniseries based on Irving's experiences for NBC. It is expected to release in 2017, and actors Sterling K. Brown, Michael B. Jordan, and Ludicrous have all been considered for the lead role. *[Editor's Note: the Weinstein scandal and ensuing company bankruptcy ended those plans; the rights have recently been optioned to The Humble Company with a feature script in development.]*

Irving will never know the actual number of enemy combatants that he killed in action, which could climb higher than 100 men. That's because Irving was involved in several hellacious firefights like a 2007 battle in Mosul which he refers to

as "the hotel party."

"It was a multi-story hotel. It was... a hornets' full of bad guys," Irving says.

Irving and his fellow soldiers used every weapon system at their disposal. By the end of the firefight, the Army had dropped 500- and 1,000-pound bombs on the enemy position. Helicopters providing air support depleted all of their machine gun and rocket ammunition, and began firing handheld weapons out of their windows. Irving emptied canister after canister of 50-cal ammunition into the building—going window-by-window in a process he likened to wack-a-mole. At the end of the day, every man in Irving's unit was out of

ammo.

"That was a good day," Irving says.

He still talks excitedly about his exploits and compares the adrenaline rush of combat to playing in the Super Bowl. His ability to speak so openly about his experiences, and his keen recollection of specific, often gory details makes him almost as much of an anomaly in the veteran community as his prodigious battlefield statistics.

But the price Irving paid was a high one. Besides the fact that his first ever kill comes back as an annual nightmare, the other 364 nights of the year are filled with even worse terrors. He only ever dreams of one thing—that the



Irving and his spotter in Afghanistan. Some of Irving's kills were up to a half mile away.

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A final team picture before leaving Afghanistan in 2009. Irving appears bottom right. The other Rangers' faces are obscured for security reasons.

men he killed are coming back for him. But in his dreams, Irving's bullets are useless. The dead march straight through the fire and chop him to bits with hatchets, axes, or broken bottles.

"I want to say they've gotten better," Irving says. "The whole chopped up part, it cuts off once it's happening. I used to watch the whole thing happen, like an out-of-body experience."

DREAMS OF BEING A SNIPER

In an ironic twist, when he was overseas—and before his body count started to climb—he would

dream of home. Specifically, high school just outside of Baltimore, where he was bullied incessantly for being undersized—he's 5'7", 160 pounds at his heaviest—and for being a sincerely enthusiastic ROTC cadet.

As early as sixth grade, Irving says he dreamed of being a sniper. Both of his parents were in the Army, and Irving grew up on the grounds of Fort Meade in Maryland. His mother Angie made him his first ghillie suit. An otherwise poor student, Irving's only A came in ROTC. He graduated with a 1.7 GPA. Nevertheless, his father

Gerald always foresaw great things in his future.

"My dad kept saying, 'One day, you're going to write a book and people are going to want to read your life story.' I said, 'I have a 1.7. What the heck is he talking about?'"

Military life might have been all Irving wanted, but if you're a stickler for the rules, he should have never been accepted at all. Irving is color blind, an automatic disqualifier for the infantry. He only learned this at the MEPS, or military entrance processing station, while taking a physical to get into

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the Navy where he planned to become a SEAL. He failed twice, but after his second try, an Army nurse overheard what his issue was, and took him aside for another try.

The nurse traced his fingers across numbers he couldn't see, so he could read them out loud and pass.

"I saved my medical records," Irving says. "There's a one-day gap where it's a 0 out of 14 and then 14 out of 14, flying color passed."

BRINGING THE WAR HOME

To this day, when Irving wakes up in the morning, it takes a while to work the kinks out of his joints. He's perpetually sore, a side effect of parachute drops and carrying so much heavy gear over so many miles. When equipped with all of his weapons, gear, and a full complement of ammo, he tipped the scales at 315 pounds, a weight at which it was typical for him to march 15 miles or more.

It turned out that wear-and-tear was the least of his worries. The intense combat experiences and subsequent nightmares, combined with a lack of direction for a new career once he left the military in 2010, led Irving to drink

heavily—a full bottle of Jack Daniels plus an almost unbelievable 20 beers per day. This crippling habit didn't just leave him blind drunk, it emptied his bank account and nearly cost him everything; his car was repossessed by creditors, his home was on the verge of foreclosure, and he was left to beg his wife and parents for money, which he also drank away.

Through all of this, Irving didn't seek help and didn't talk to his wife about the obvious underlying issues of his drinking. In fact, throughout his military career, Irving kept his role within the military a complete secret from his wife Jessica, going so far as to tell

her that he didn't see combat when he deployed.

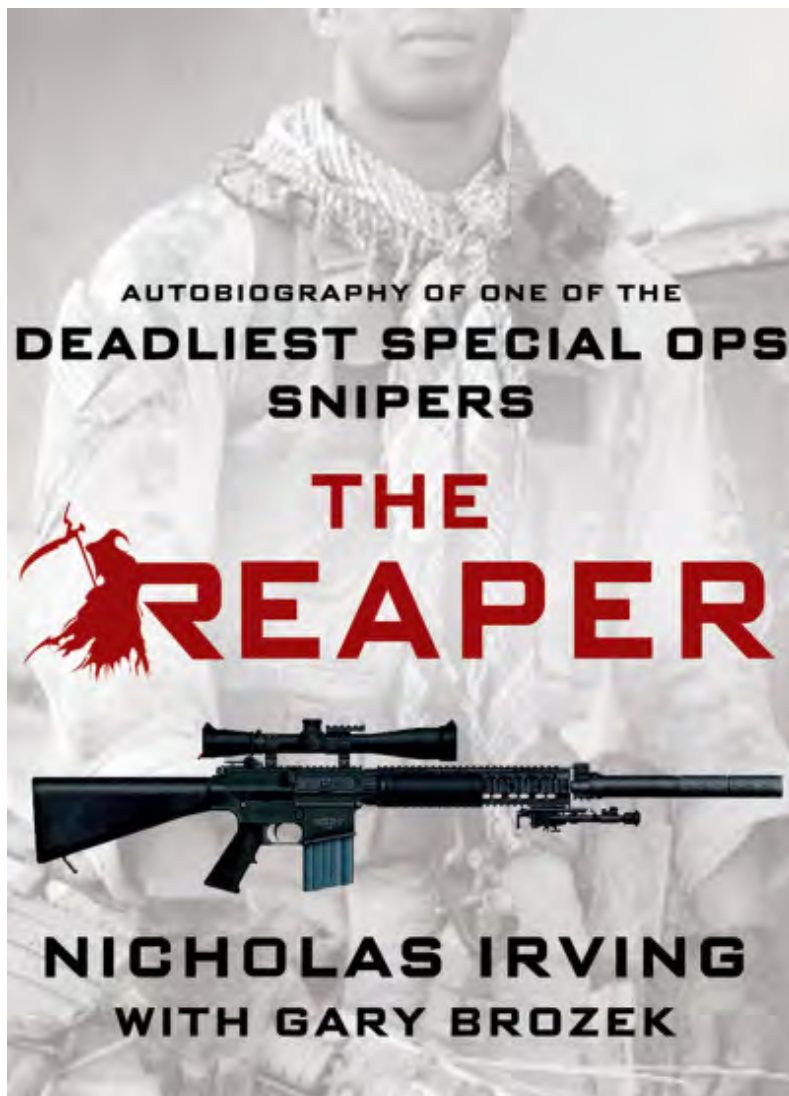
"She didn't find out until 2009," Irving says. "One of my guys slipped up. He was like, 'Dude, I heard you killed 50 guys overseas.' She was standing right next to me. She looked at me like, 'What?' We went home that night and it was weird. She said, 'I've been sleeping with a guy who's killed people...' Then she said, 'That's why you drink.' I was like, 'I guess. I'm not really sure.'"

The shame of his spiral into alcoholism nearly made him a statistic—one of the 22 veterans who commit suicide every day. It would hardly be new in Irving's circle.



The buttstock of Irving's SR25 after a four-month deployment in Afghanistan. The 33 tally marks represent Irving's 33 kills during that time.

THE REAPER



Read portions of Nicholas Irving's memoir and order it on Amazon.

Thirteen men he served with chose to end their own lives.

"You go from this stellar background to watching some of the missions you do on CNN to calling your parents saying, 'Hey can I borrow \$200?' It's really depressing. At that point I thought, 'I'm just a burden on people.' I contemplated suicide twice. I had one failed attempt."

On that day, Irving walked out

to a secluded area behind his home, an area he chose because he thought, "It won't be too much of a mess to clean up." Then, with a round loaded into his favorite Glock, he put the gun to his head.

"I pulled the trigger and nothing happened," Irving said. "Nothing happened. It's a Glock so there's no safety... I walked back inside. I had to find another round. Somewhere in that thought process of looking

for another round, I passed out drunk."

Irving says he can't explain what happened, but he'll happily give credit to God. He says that of all the hundreds of thousands of rounds he's fired in his life, he had only experienced one other weapon malfunction or jam. But surviving the suicide attempt would be right in line with other unexplainable miracles he's seen on the battlefield.

"We were in this one firefight, it lasted about 12 hours," Irving recalls. "Almost to a man, all of us had bullet holes in our clothes, but we weren't hit. I saw some weird stuff that day, like a bullet entry on the front part of someone's chest and then exit wound on the back but the round never touched him. A chaplain that day had to put down his Bible and pick up a gun... I saw an RPG shot at us at a close distance and then it just bee-lined straight up to 12 o'clock and exploded instead of hitting us. I couldn't explain that, either."

Irving began to taper his drinking in 2015 and quit cold turkey on November 28, 2016—the day his first child, a son named Kayden, was born. The day also happened to be Irving's 30th birthday.

"I was sitting in a hospital for 18 hours that day. We were concerned. He had a heart condition, a murmur," Irving recalls. "All my focus was on him, making sure he was fine. I didn't care about anything else. It was the first time in a long time, many years, where I

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didn't crave or think about a drink. Usually, in a stressful situation like that, I would want to decompress with something, Jack Daniels or a beer, something like that, but it was the first time it never happened. I realized it's not that bad. I'll just quit it right now.

Then when they pronounced, 'Oh, he's fine. He's good to go,' I said, 'Well, maybe that's a sign.'

The birth of his son gave Irving hope that he thought he'd never find again. Today, he has a simple message for veterans contemplating suicide: There is light at the end of the tunnel.

"Don't be afraid to talk about anything," Irving says. "A lot of guys think that you become less alpha, if you talk about your emotions and talk about what you feel. I think keeping it inside—it's what I did—it gets really, really bad the longer you do it. But talking about it and not being ashamed and feeling sorry for yourself for the things that you've done helps a lot. I've forgiven myself a long time ago things that I've done. I do believe that everybody I killed deserved it and they were trying to do bad things to us and prevent my guys and me from going back home. I never had a regret about doing that.

It should be noted, too, that Irving's ability to talk so openly about his experiences has given him a second career as a writer. A follow-up to his first book, called *Way of the Reaper*, released later in 2015, and detailed operations not covered in the first book. In

turn, the notoriety gained from the books earned him a job as a military consultant for some movie and television projects, and in the spring of 2016 he worked onscreen alongside John Cena in the military-themed reality show *American Grit*.

"No one should be afraid to talk about what's on their mind," Irving says. "Even if you think no one's listening, I'm a big believer that someone's always listening somewhere. When people have those Facebook rants, someone's always listening. You'd be surprised whose life you can impact—or whose life is exactly the same as your life. You're not alone in anything in this world.

"I thought I'm the only guy who's losing his house, the only guy who's losing his car, about to lose everything. You find out that no, you're not the only guy. There's a lot of other guys going through this, too. Keep working hard. Don't quit. There's always going to be light at the end of every tunnel."

Follow-up: Irving's dreams persist to this day. "I just had one the other night," Irving said when reached by phone. "I was in a park with

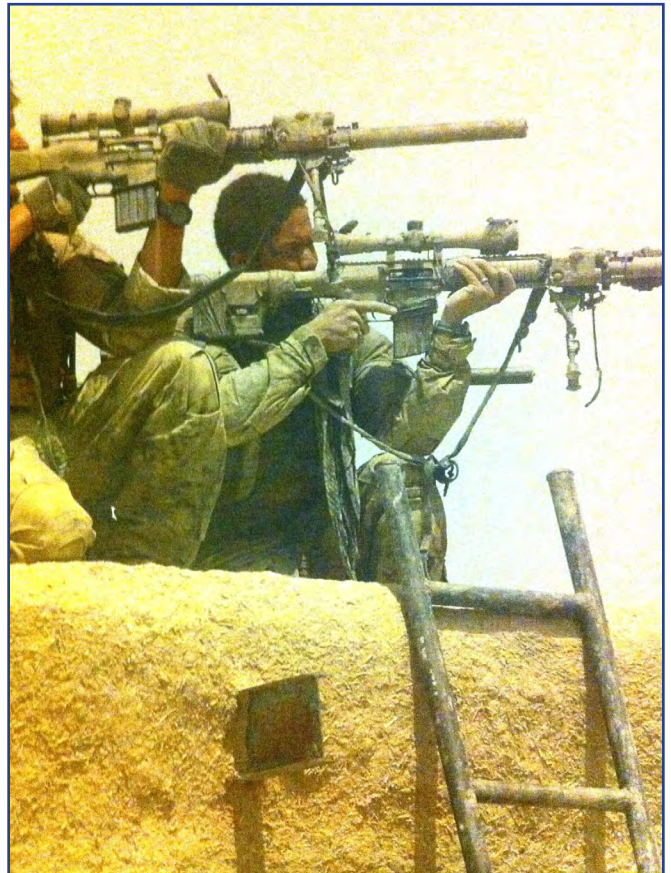
my family having a picnic, and all of a sudden there are guys jumping out of bushes and shooting at us. I'm shooting them, but it won't stop them."

He admits the dreams are upsetting, but he has a routine for dealing with them, taking a brisk 30 minute walk to clear his head and start the day.

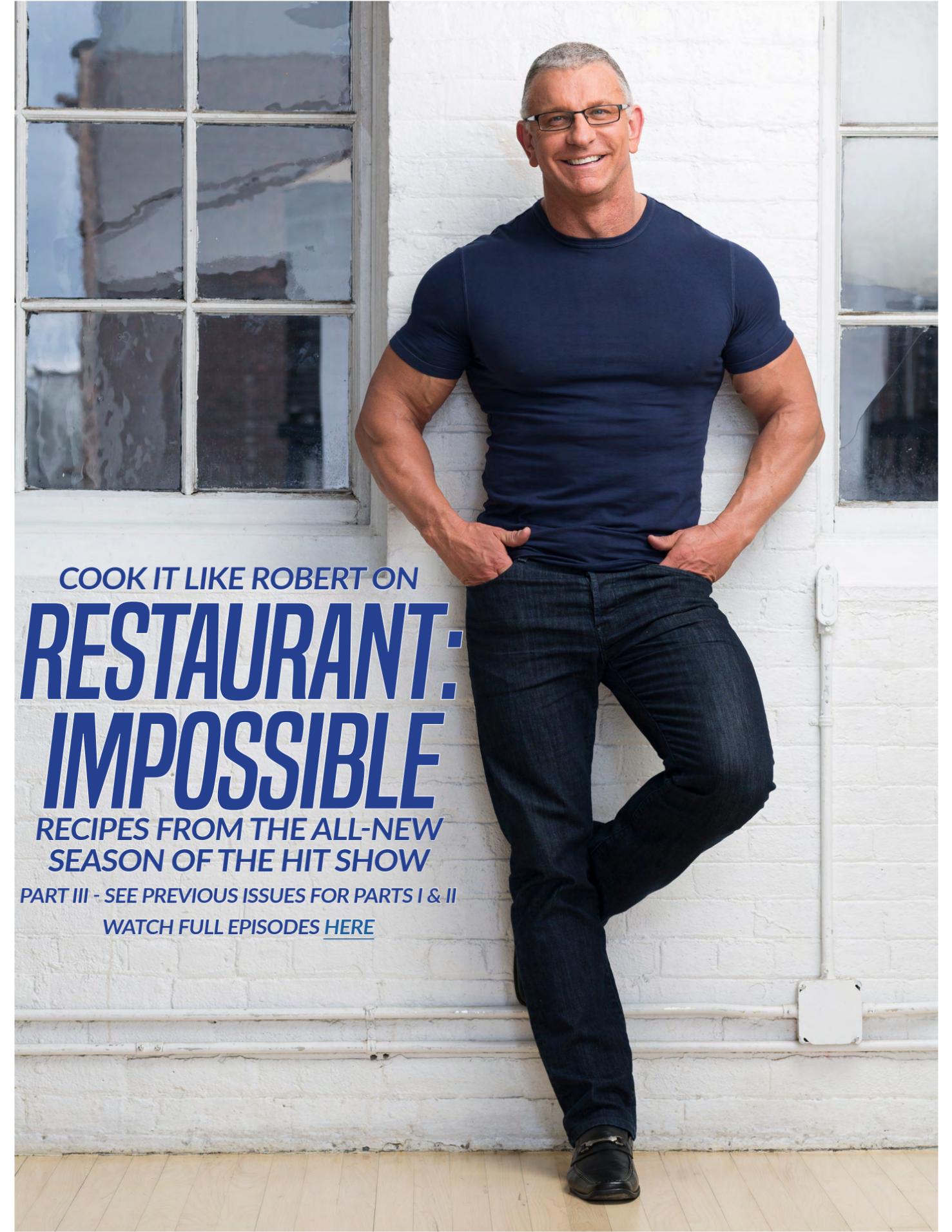
His wife and son are doing well; three-year-old Kayden is vocal and, not surprisingly, willful.

His third novel in The Reaper series, [Reaper Drone Strike](#), releases in May and can be pre-ordered now.

"After that, I want to write other fiction—not about military operations," he said. "Maybe horror."



In action, eliminating targets.

A full-page photograph of Robert Irvine, a muscular man with short grey hair and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue short-sleeved t-shirt and dark blue jeans. He is leaning against a white brick wall with his hands in his pockets. To his left is a large window with multiple panes. The floor is light-colored wood.

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BANGERS & MASH with PEA PUREE

From the episode, "Saving a Piece of History"

SERVES 5

YOU'LL NEED

FOR THE PEA PUREE

2 tbsp butter
1 cup shelled English peas
¼ cup onion, diced small
1 garlic clove, minced
1/3 cup heavy cream
½ tbsp parmesan cheese

FOR THE PICKLED RED ONIONS

1 medium red onion, thinly sliced

1 cup red wine vinegar
2 tbsp honey
1 tbsp granulated sugar

FOR THE MASHED POTATOES

4 russet potatoes, peeled and diced
1 stick butter
1 pint heavy cream

FOR THE BANGERS & SAUCE

10 brat-style sausages
1 stick butter
2 medium onions, diced small
2 shallots, diced small
¼ bunch thyme, chopped
¼ cup all-purpose flour
½ cup cooking sherry

½ cup heavy cream
3 cups beef broth
MAKE IT

PEA PUREE

1) In a small sauce pot over medium heat add butter, peas, onions, and garlic.
2) Allow to sweat, making sure not to get any color on them.
3) Add heavy cream and boil.
4) Remove from the heat and incorporate Parmesan cheese.
5) Place mixture in a blender and puree until smooth.

PICKLED RED ONIONS

1) In a small sauce pot. add red

AS SEEN ON TV

wine vinegar, honey, and sugar.
2) Stir all ingredients while boiling until dissolved
3) Pour hot liquid over sliced onions and allow to cool.

MASHED POTATOES

1) In a medium sauce pot add potatoes and seasoned water. Bring to a boil and cook for 10 minutes. Drop to a simmer and cook for 15 more minutes. Strain into a colander.
2) Allow potatoes to steam in the colander for 4 minutes, allowing them to dry out.
3) If you have ricer pass potatoes through or you can place in

a stand up mixer with a paddle attachment.
4) In a small pot, add heavy cream and butter. Bring to a simmer allowing butter to melt into cream. Slowly incorporate butter and cream mixture into potatoes. Season with salt and white pepper.

BANGERS & SAUCE

1) In a sauce pot over medium heat, add butter, onions, shallots, and thyme. Cover.
2) Allow to cook for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add flour and allow to cook for another 5 minutes, continuing to

stir.
4) Add cooking sherry. Allow to cook for another 5 minutes. Add beef stock and bring stock to a boil. Add heavy cream. Season with salt and pepper.
6) In a sauté pan over high heat, sear sausages on both sides. Place sausages in the onion gravy to finish.
7) On a plate, place pea puree and then top that with mashed potatoes. Place sausages on top of mashed potatoes. Finish with onion gravy and pickled red onions.



AS SEEN ON TV

CRISPY PORK BELLY SALAD

From the episode, "Old Habits Die Hard"

SERVES 5

YOU'LL NEED

FOR THE DRESSING

1 cup balsamic vinegar
3 cups extra virgin olive oil
1 tbsp Dijon mustard
1 cup honey
1 tbsp garlic

FOR THE SALAD

1 lbs pork belly or bacon, cut into 1-inch cubes

3 balls each Burrata, pulled
8 oz arugula
10 oz honey balsamic vinaigrette
3 whole red beets, roasted and cut into 1-inch cubes
3 tbsp pistachios

MAKE IT

BALSAMIC VINAIGRETTE DRESSING

1) In a large mixing bowl, add garlic, balsamic vinegar, and mustard.
2) Using a hand blender or whisk, slowly incorporate oil, creating an emulsion.
3) Season with salt and pepper.

SALAD

1) Crisp pork either in a sauté pan or in a 450° oven for approximately 10 minutes.
2) Place crispy pork belly in a mixing bowl and dress with honey vinaigrette.
3) Next add arugula, beets, season with salt and pepper, and toss. Top with Burrata and pistachios and serve.





BACON BLUE BURGER

From the episode, "Out with the Old, In with the New"

SERVES 5 YOU'LL NEED

FOR THE RED ONION JAM

2 red onions (small diced)
1 tsp grape seed oil
1 cup red wine
3 tbsp red wine vinegar
½ cup granulated sugar
5 strips bacon, cooked and chopped

FOR THE APPLE AIOLI

1 cup mayonnaise
¼ whole grain mustard
¼ cup chopped chives
½ apple, peeled and diced small
1 tbsp lemon juice

FOR THE FONDUE

3 cups heavy cream

16 oz gorgonzola cheese

FOR THE BURGERS & FRIES

5 beef patties (8 oz each, 80/20)
5 pretzel buns
½ cup frisée lettuce
20 oz French fries

MAKE IT

RED ONION JAM

1) In a small sauce pot over medium heat, add oil and diced onions.
2) Allow onions to cook for about 7 minutes.
3) Add sugar, red wine, vinegar, salt.
4) Bring to a boil and allow to cook for about 45 minutes.
5) Add 5 strips of cooked, chopped bacon

APPLE AIOLI

1) In a large mixing bowl add mayonnaise, whole grain mustard, peeled

and diced apples, and lemon juice.
2) Finish with salt and pepper.

GORGONZOLA FONDUE

1) In a large sauce pot, add heavy cream and bring to a boil.
2) Drop heat to a low simmer.
3) Using a whisk, slowly incorporate crumbled blue cheese.
4) Season with salt and pepper.

BURGER & FRIES

1) In a large sauté pan over high heat, add seasoned burger patties and cook for 6 minutes on each side.
2) Fry French fries until crispy.
3) In a separate pan toast the pretzel bun. Coat both sides of the bun with apple aioli and red onion jam.
4) Place lettuce on top of bun; place burger on top of lettuce.
7) Finish with 1 oz. of hot fondue.

AS SEEN ON TV

CONFIT CHICKEN PARM

From the episode, "Old Habits Die Hard"

SERVES 5

YOU'LL NEED

FOR THE TOMATO SAUCE

2 cloves garlic, sliced
½ white onion, diced
16 oz San Marzano tomatoes
1 tsp. tomato paste
½ cup red wine
1 tbsp grapeseed oil

FOR THE POLENTA

1 cup polenta (dry)
2 cups heavy cream
1 cup whole milk
3 tbsp grated Parmesan

FOR THE CHICKEN

1 tbsp salt
2 tbsp brown sugar
1 tsp chili flakes
1 cup all-purpose flour
10 eggs, cracked and whipped
1 cup Panko bread crumbs

1 lb shredded mozzarella cheese
2 bunches broccolini
5 chicken thighs
3 qts blended oil (or favorite fat)
10 oz tomato sauce
2 tbsp grapeseed oil

**MAKE IT
SAUCE**

1) In a small sauce pot over medium heat, add onions. Allow to cook for 3 minutes. Then add garlic and allow to cook for 2 more minutes.



AS SEEN ON TV



2) Next add tomato paste and red wine and allow to cook for another 4 minutes.

3) Last add crushed canned tomatoes and allow to cook for 1.5 hours. Season with salt and pepper.

CHICKEN

1) In a mixing bowl add salt, sugar, and chili flakes and mix.

2) Coat 1 tbs of cure on each chicken thigh 24 hours prior to cooking chicken.

3) Place chicken in a roasting pan or a deep pot and cover with oil. Place in a 250° oven for 1.5 hours.

4) Pull chicken from fat and allow

to chill.

5) Blanch broccolini in a pot of boiling water. Finish in a sauté pan over high heat.

BREADING AND FRYING

1) In 3 separate mixing bowls, add flour in one, eggs in another, and Panko bread crumbs in the third.

2) Place already cooked chicken in flour, then eggs, and last in Panko bread crumbs.

3) Place chicken in a 350° fryer and cook until chicken is golden brown.

POLENTA

1) In a small sauce pot add heavy

cream and milk. Bring to a boil.

3) Using a whisk slowly incorporate polenta. Allow to cook for 10 minutes.

4) Incorporate cheese, butter, salt, and pepper.

PLATING

1) Pull chicken and place on a cookie tray. Top chicken with 1 oz of tomato sauce, and top with shredded mozzarella cheese.

2) Place in a 350° oven and cook until cheese is melted.

3) Plate chicken on top of polenta and broccolini.

AS SEEN ON TV

CHICKEN PAPRIKASH PASTA

From the episode, "Saving a Piece of History"

SERVES 5

YOU'LL NEED

4 tbsp butter
1 onion, diced small
1 tbsp sweet paprika
1/3 tsp cayenne pepper
3 cloves garlic, minced
5 boneless skinless chicken thighs, cut into 1-inch cubes
4 tbsp all-purpose flour
3 cups chicken stock
1 lb gemelli pasta

1 tbsp sour cream
1/3 cup heavy cream
Salt and pepper

MAKE IT

1) In a large sauce pot, add butter and onions and allow to cook over low heat until onions are cooked through.
2) Add paprika, cayenne pepper, garlic, and chicken.
3) Allow chicken to cook over medium heat for about 3 minutes.
4) Add flour. Using a wood spoon stir for 1-2 minutes.
5) Add chicken stock and bring to

a boil. Drop pot to a simmer and allow to simmer for 1 hour.

6) Place another sauce pot on the stove with seasoned boiling water. Cook the gemelli pasta until al dente.

7) Finish pasta with chicken paprikash mixture.

8) Make the sour cream sauce: In a mixing bowl, add sour cream and heavy cream. Incorporate with a whisk. Season with salt and pepper. Top finished dish with sour cream sauce.





STEAK ROMESCO

From the episode, "Old Habits Die Hard"

SERVES 5

YOU'LL NEED

FOR THE STEAKS

5 (10 oz) NY strip steaks
2 tbsp grape seed oil
20 fingerling potatoes, roasted
1 head cauliflower, cut into florets
2 bunches Swiss chard, chopped
16 oz beef sauce (veal demi glace)
1 tbsp butter
Sauce Romesco (see sub-recipe)

FOR THE SAUCE ROMESCO

2 roasted red peppers, cut into quarters
10 roasted cherry tomatoes

3 tbsp grapeseed oil
4 cloves garlic
1 tbsp roasted almonds
Juice of ½ lemon

MAKE IT

SAUCE ROMESCO

1) In a blender, add roasted peppers, tomatoes, and puree.
2) Next add oil, almonds, and garlic.
3) Finish with salt, pepper, and lemon juice.

STEAK

1) Season the strip steak with salt and pepper on both sides.
2) Place the steak in a sauté pan over high heat and sear on both sides.

3) Pull steak from the pan and finish in 350° oven for about 5 minutes until the internal temperature reaches 145° for medium rare or to desired temperature.

4) Season potatoes and cauliflower with salt and pepper. Roast separately in a 350° oven.

5) Blanch Swiss chard in a pot of boiling, seasoned water.

6) In a sauté pan over medium heat, add roasted potatoes, cauliflower, and Swiss chard. Season with salt and pepper.

7) In a small sauce pot, add beef demi glace. Bring to a boil.

8) Finish with butter, salt, and pepper.

9) Top steak with beef sauce, and sauce Romesco.

David Moscow Heads Back Where It All Begins



The actor's new fyi series *From Scratch* is an often-thrilling look at the journey food takes from nature to the table.

INTERVIEW BY MATT TUTHILL

FROM SCRATCH

The premise sounds simple enough: Host David Moscow eats some very delicious-looking exotic cuisine, then tracks down the ingredients in real life. But while From Scratch is ostensibly about food, from the opening frames it's immediately apparent that you're really watching an adventure show. The dramatic cinematography, orchestral score, and helicopter shots convey a sense of scale not typically seen in food television. Then there's the level of difficulty: in the episode we previewed, Moscow harvested his own salt from sea water in Iceland, and it was only one component in a fairly complex dish. Moscow sat down to chat with us in advance of the show's February premiere on fyi (where the show will air at 6 pm Eastern every Sunday) and talked about how he came up with the concept and what's in store for Season One and beyond.

Robert Irvine Magazine: In the intro to the show, you talk about the disconnect between us and our food and wanting to address it. Was there a eureka moment where that disconnect really landed on you?



Moscow, far left, works alongside chef Gunnar Karl of the restaurant Dill in Reykjavik. After eating, Moscow went out to source all the ingredients from nature that he would need for Karl's Icelandic Cod dish. Watch the episode [HERE](#).

David Moscow: It was a mix of things. My mom grew up in Montana. All my cousins and aunts and uncles live in Utah, and they hunt, and fish, and have gardens, and they build their own homes. As a New Yorker, I always looked at that and thought that it was pretty amazing. I always looked to them and admired that they did this. Once a year they would go out and get a deer and they put that in the freezer, and that would be meat for all winter, basically.

Then to wake up 20 years later and have Postmates being delivered to my house and not really engaging with the food at all, it just kind of felt bad. It was like,

"Oh, this is what we've become." It's almost like a scene from Wall-E where everyone's floating around in their chairs and food is popping up and they're eating it.

That was one thing. The other: initially, it was just going to be a documentary about Mexican food. Then that documentary became one of the episodes. I had the idea around the time when Trump was running and really disparaging Central Americans and a lot of immigrants. I wanted to go down to Mexico and work with subsistence farmers and make tacos from scratch. But it was also to show these people who were rallying behind Trump that our

FROM SCRATCH

Mexican friends, neighbors, and family, were hard-working and probably closer in their lives than their cousins in LA.

RI: Every home chef has had that experience where they first make something from scratch and say, “Oh my gosh, this is worth the extra work.” Say you’re making sauce. It can take all day but it’s so much better than the jar. And then there is that thought, “Well how much better would it be if I had actually grown my own tomatoes?” You took this to an extreme and went and did it with every aspect of each dish. I’ve only seen one episode, but do you have that experience with each dish? I imagine

it’s harder in your case because you’re trying to recreate world-class cuisine.

DM: In general, I have the chefs right next to me, so I’m coming close to reproducing what they made. Only rarely do I mess up, come up short, and not get things—or there are certain things that you just can’t get seasonally. But I’m usually making what the chefs made. But I will say that when you actually do the work of foraging, or hunting, or gathering, or farming, the work itself and the patience that you need have to have—the delayed gratification—makes the food taste better.

I don’t know if it’s like, “this is a fresh tomato that I picked that makes it taste better.” That could

be part of it. But it definitely is, “I picked this tomato knowing that later on I’m going to cook this into something.” And that goes in my mind, and it builds anticipation, so that when you do finally eat it, it’s, “Oh my God.” Good things come to those who wait.

This is obviously not something that everybody in their daily lives can do for every meal, but it is something that people should take the time to do when they can, every so often. Really step back and engage with what’s going on out there, what’s going in our body. And I also think it’s a really cool snapshot to see how hard people in agriculture work. I have nothing but respect for them.

Americans often talk about how, “I did this all by myself. I’m a self-made man” or something like that. I mean, just in a slice of pizza, there’s 60 people that it took to make that pizza for you, so you’re not alone, alright? We are all interconnected and food is an incredible way to see that.

RI: You’ve touched on something really interesting, too, which is mindfulness—a deep appreciation and gratitude for all that we have. A slice of pizza is not a slice of pizza.



Moscow fishing for fresh Icelandic Cod. Moscow says catching and gutting fish as a young boy under the tutelage of his grandfather was a seminal experience.

FROM SCRATCH

It's kind of a miracle when you consider the sourcing of each ingredient. I don't know that your show would make people want to harvest their own salt from the ocean, but it could increase mindfulness. Our obesity crisis is due at least in part to a lack of mindfulness—just eating out of habit. Is that what you consider to be the greatest lesson from your show?

DM: Oh yeah. I feel like there have been huge changes to my eating habits throughout the course of the season. I hunted for the first time in my life in the Mexico episode. And then in the Texas episode—where we did barbecue—I slaughter a cow. As a result, today I eat dramatically fewer animal products. Because of what happened in killing the cow and killing the pig. Basically, I try and be vegan four to five days a week. I have some dairy products on Saturday or Sunday, and then I have one day where I eat meat—and the meat is special again.

That's how it was for previous generations. When my mom was growing up, meat was only on their table once or twice a week because they couldn't afford it. Meat was really expensive. It wasn't the agribusiness, the factory farming that we have today. So my mom and her parents barely ate meat unless they went out hunting or fishing themselves. At the beginning of this, I realized I ate beef probably five meals a week. And let's say I did that throughout the course of my life. That's about

11,000 cows that I killed to eat.

Then when I killed the animal myself, that reality landed in a different way. All those thoughts came together and it was an epiphany. Now that's not to say I don't love beef; I do. I think it's amazing. And doing BBQ across Texas made it even more incredible. I was basically going out each day and working with these barbecue guys who were artists, But it did make me much more mindful about it.

“Just in a slice of pizza, there's 60 people that it took to make that.”

RI: Your premise seems especially tough: to recreate something made by a world-class chef. Would you ever consider taking it in the other direction, making something very pedestrian from scratch? I'd love to see you make something like a McDonald's McGriddle from scratch.

DM: I think you and our marketing people are on the same page. But it definitely isn't just world-renowned chefs. We get into other things. In the Texas episode,

we do a food truck in Austin. And I wanted to do a Thanksgiving episode where my mom was the cook so I thought that was pretty fun because my mom is hilarious in the kitchen.

But I think breakfast in America would be a cool episode. Going to Dunkin Donuts and then going out to make coffee and a donut. That means I've got to get chocolate and I've got to get sugar and I got to get coffee beans and almond milk. I think that would be a neat episode.

RI: That would be fun.

DM: I think there's all these high-minded reasons to do it. Better for your body, better for the environment, engaging with your food, finding local places to harvest and farm. But I also think that there's a really playful thing about it. And I see it with my kid now, it's just fun.

It reminds you of your childhood. It's an excuse to get in the dirt. It's an excuse to go sit in a strawberry patch and eat half of what you're supposed to bring home. We're always giving excuses like I'm too busy or too old or whatever, but this is a way to continually be serious and engaged in the world and have a lot of fun.

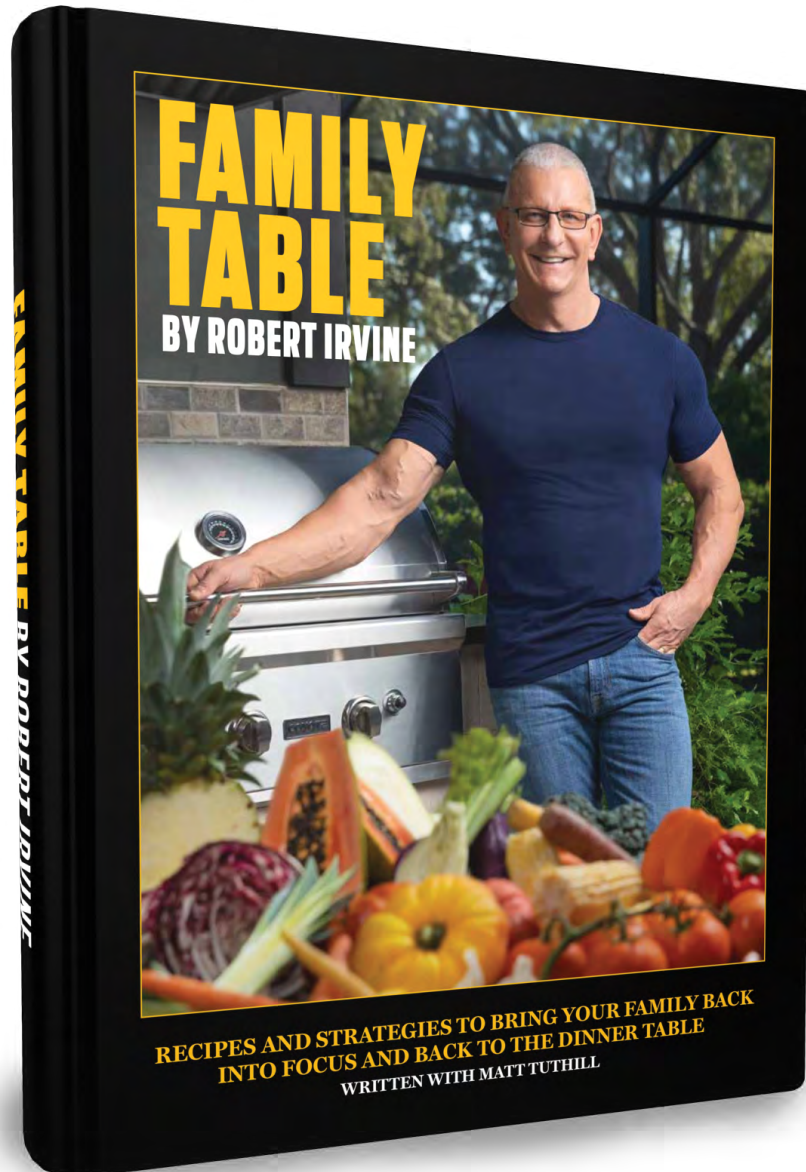
RI: The selfish reasons are just as good as the high-minded reasons, aren't they?

DM: Sure are.

From Scratch airs every Sunday at 6 Eastern on fyi. Check your local listings.

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NOT SO FAST

Training on an empty stomach only guarantees you'll hit a wall. So what do you do if you absolutely hate to eat before you train?

QUESTION: I used to be one of those people that thought that if you worked out on an empty stomach, that you would burn more fat. After crashing in enough workouts, I've finally been dispossessed of that old wives' tale, but that doesn't change the fact that I HATE eating before I work out. No matter how light I go, I seem to feel sluggish in the gym, like my food is just sloshing around in my stomach. Any advice?

— Samantha S., via e-mail

ANSWER BY [SL McSHANE](#):

Although the topic of fasted exercise and its fat-burning ability has been debated for some time now, what we do know is that each body is different and may react differently to a host of workout methods.

With that said, the good news is you've found how your body responds to fasted training which brings you one step closer to being able to detail your workouts to fit specific goals. This is how we all find what works best for us: experience, trial, and error.

As far as the discomfort you experience during exercise due to

eating pre-workout, there are a few things you can do to avoid energy crashes and the feeling of being full while training:

Consider a Fast-Fuel

To experience more energy during workouts, having glucose readily available to be used as fuel to power-through is key. One way you can execute this without eating pre-workout, per-say, is by providing your body with a simple

carbohydrate/simple sugar such as one serving of honey.

Just one serving of honey provides the body with 60 calories, 17 grams fast-digesting carbs. If you need more energy, you can always double the serving.

There are also fast-fuel gels available in pre-made packets like "GU". Many long-distance runners use them for a quick energy source to keep them from crashing mid-run without filling up their stom-



ASK US ANYTHING



Training on an empty stomach doesn't just limit your energy, it can increase the stress hormone cortisol, which triggers your body to store fat.

achs. The serving size is roughly 1 ounce and will not cause your stomach to feel full.

More fast-fuel options: Pre-workout drinks, (use less water when mixing the drink to prevent a full feeling), Energy Chews, a small cup of green tea with 1 serving of honey, agave nectar, or a shot of fruit juice.

Keep in mind, fast fuel needs to be consumed right before training, as it will be digested quickly and ready to be used.

Time Meals Around Exercise

If you aren't waking up in the morning and heading straight to

the gym—let's say you are planning a workout in the afternoon or evening—one thing you can do is consume a well-balanced meal that consists of complex carbohydrates, good fats, and protein about 2-4 hours before training. This way your body will most likely have steady energy to power through your workout without the feeling of undigested food sloshing around in your stomach.

Since the body stores carbohydrates in small amounts in the liver and muscles as glycogen, it's important to make sure that the glycogen stores in the body are optimal before exercise as they

get depleted during training. The carbohydrates in your diet 2-4 hours before you train will provide the most energy during exercise. Focus on slow-digesting carbohydrates that provide your body with energy over an extended period without a rapid elevation in blood sugar, such as sweet potatoes, oats, legumes, quinoa, and non-starchy vegetables.

SJ McShane is a fitness expert and author and Senior Writer for Robert Irvine Magazine.

Follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) and visit her website: sara-jane.com

TRENDING FOR VETS

How #CrunchForaVet Raised Money For Our Military Heroes.



Click on any of the above images to see additional content.

Robert on Fox & Friends

The February 19 episode of Fox & Friends featured everyone's favorite chef answering questions about Restaurant: Impossible and its incredible 78% long-term success rate. Robert also told the hosts about #CrunchForaVet - his Instagram hashtag challenge through his [Fit-Crunch](#) protein brand. When host Steve Doocy heard that FitCrunch

would donate \$1 up \$25,000 for every crunch posted under the #Crunch-ForaVet hashtag, he jumped right down to the studio floor to get going. Robert held his feet and Doocy was able to do 20 crunches, raising 20 bucks in the process. The promotion runs through the end of February 2020, so be sure to do your part to raise money for the Robert Irvine Foundation!

Robert in Sunseeker Magazine

The February West Coast edition of Sunseeker magazine features a guest column by Robert listing his 10 top spots in Vegas including his favorite shows, attractions, places to work out, and restaurants (and no, he didn't just make his own restaurant #1). Click the image above to read the magazine on [issuu.com](#). Robert's column appears on page 20.

WORDS TO LIVE BY



*“For small creatures such as we,
the vastness is bearable only through love.”*

- Carl Sagan