

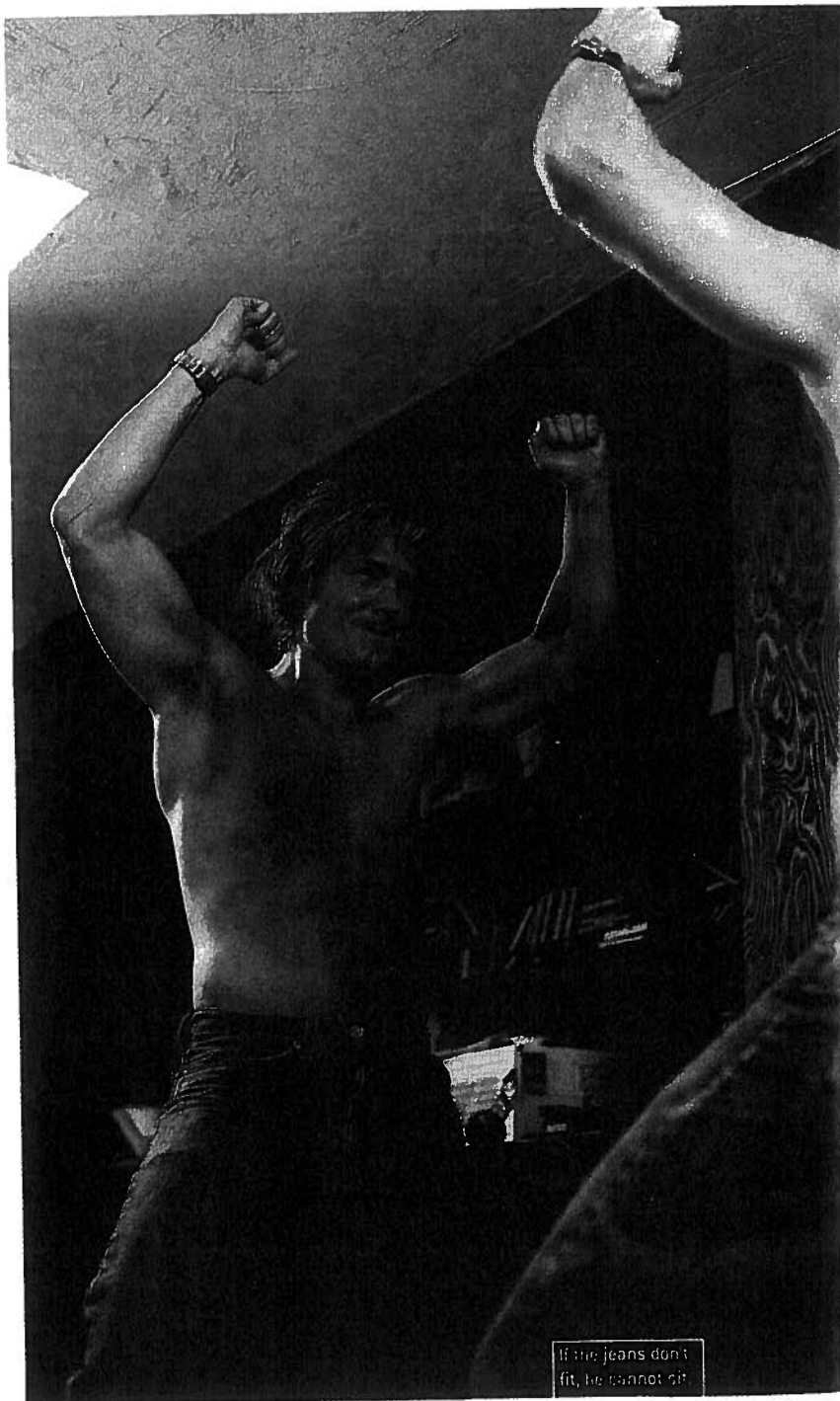
Fifteen Minutes and Counting

Four years after the O.J. trial, Kato Kaelin's still struggling to keep his tenuous grasp on fame. The scary thing is, dude's actually succeeding. **By Larry Platt**

SEEMS LIKE KATO KAELIN'S public appearances always begin like this, with him bounding onto a stage, all energy and nerves and dimness, only to be greeted by an audience's stony, perplexed silence. Undeterred, he starts talking in a way that's more stammer than speech. He keeps talking and talking, and then something happens, something inexplicable. A ripple moves through the crowd, dividing it. On one side, the puzzled faces remain: What the hell is this guy doing up there? On the other, there are those who get it. Who get him. They smile and hoot and scream his name—just the first, of course, because four years later, Kato still has one-name status in America, like Elvis, Madonna, or more to the point, Charo.

Tonight, the ones who get him shoot up their hands, because Kato is taking bids for something they want. He's with 20 or so NFL stars—the guy never strays very far from football celebrities—in an Atlantic City casino ballroom for an auction to benefit underprivileged children. The item he is auctioning off is the night's only non-sports-related piece of memorabilia.

He holds it up and the bids fly fast and furious. "That's right, that's right," he says, speaking in the halting cadence that once had America believing he was on something. "It's a blow-dryer, signed by me!" The bids keep coming, especially when he sweetens the offer: "I've got some gel—I'll throw that in, too!" Kato-mania sweeps the room; when someone pledges \$375 for the Revlon dryer, Tony Siragusa, defensive lineman for the Baltimore Ravens and the evening's host, ends the madness. "Sold!" he barks, a bit confused. Kato, triumphant, jumps off the stage and into the crowd.



The last decade gave rise to plenty of circumstantial celebrities, but think about it: Have you heard from Richard Jewell, Rodney King, or Gennifer Flowers lately?

"Do they know it's just a blow-dryer?" he asks, a little proud, a little bewildered. The, uh, winner poses with him for photos, and then Mike, a 5-foot-9-inch, 340-pound 21-year-old who's been shadowing Kato for the last hour—ever since he heard Kato mockingly complain to hotel management that he'd been promised "an air bag in my bed's headboard!"—sidles up to his new hero. "Hey, Kato, you think you could put me in the movies, in, like, an eating scene or something?" he says. "Seriously, if you ever need a fat fuck, I'm your guy."

Kato's eyes widen. "Dan, write that down: that's funny. That's a show, right there. Mike's a show," he calls to Dan Frisch. Beavis to his Butt-head, George to his Jerry. Frisch, who has worked on seven Jean-Claude Van Damme flicks, is a longtime Kato bud. Together they've spent the last year in Hollywood pitch meetings, hawking a sitcom, *The Sixteenth Minute*, which Kato, in full pitchman form, describes as "Larry Sanders meets Fawn Hall."

Kato and Dan collect more material for *The Sixteenth Minute* the next day on the golf course, where Bill, a frail-looking CPA, has paid to play with Kato. When Bill's ball gets lost, the two Stooges explain to him that they're on the Dick Hole: If a golfer loses his ball here, he's got to play the rest of the hole with his dick hanging out of his pants. Bill protests, and they cut him a break, but they spend the next 11 hours joking about Bill sightings: "Hey, I just saw Bill wandering the halls with his dick out!" Kato says, barely containing his laughter. "I told him, 'Put your dick in your pants, Bill. Where do you think you are, the golf course?'"

Milking the Media

Four years have passed since Kato Kaelin stumbled onto the national scene, a literal court jester in the so-called trial of the century. The last decade gave rise to other such circumstantial celebrities, but have you heard from Richard Jewell, Rodney King, or

Gennifer Flowers lately?

Yet here's Kato, 40 now, his foppy mane shortened and coiffed, still at it. Sure, 5,000 screaming fans no longer show up to see him at a shopping mall, as they once did in Terre Haute, Indiana, but he continues to milk his fame, winking at us all the while, inviting us to get in on the joke. He's in the business of being Kato, and he's open 24-7; even checking out of a hotel room is a chance to perform, as when he tells the normally granite-faced concierge to warn housekeeping that "the Spice Girls are still asleep in my room."

How to explain the Kato phenomenon? He is the quintessential postmodern accidental celeb. If media in the '90s has become a self-referential cut-and-paste of itself—media commenting on media commenting on media, all the

while pretending to be something objective and important—Kato's whole angle has been to let us in on the charade. On his most recent gig, a recurring role on Showtime's *Beggars and Choosers*, he plays Kato the pool boy, who wears a T-shirt that reads "As Seen on TV" and who obsessively pitches a script to his boss, a television executive. Just last month, on the E! Entertainment channel, he appeared on a one-hour special called *Celebrity Homes*, only he was the celebrity and he knocked on random Hollywood doors, looking for a place to crash.

And then there's his script for *The Sixteenth Minute*, in which he plays Kato, a talk-show host with attention deficit disorder who interviews the fleetingly famous—from Ross Perot's one-time running mate Admiral ►►

SALEM

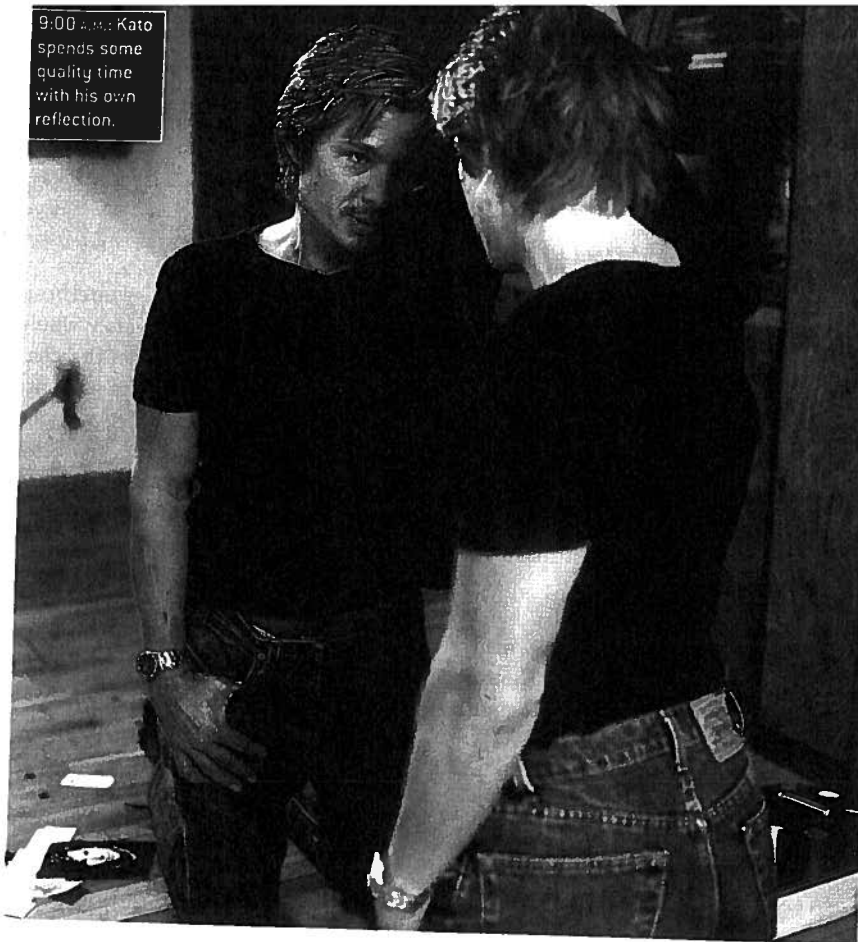
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9:00 a.m.: Kato spends some quality time with his own reflection.



James Stockdale to Vanilla Ice—and is haunted by visions of Andy Warhol. (“This is my show, Andy!” he says to Warhol, who shows up at the most inopportune times. “You’re dead!”)

Yes, his shtick seems rather one-dimensional, but it manages to strafe Hollywood’s current infatuation with self-referential irony. Is this on purpose... or is Kato just lucky? Talking to him, it’s hard to distinguish what he knows from what he simply senses. He certainly didn’t wake up one morning, take a deep ponder on the state of the cultural zeitgeist, and decide to fashion himself into a self-referential parody of celebrity. But the truth is, he didn’t have to go to all that trouble: Kato’s whole life is so infused with media that he simply *feels* these things. Even his relationship with his teenage daughter, Tiffany (who won’t reveal her age because that could hurt her when she goes for roles), takes its cue from media. “My dad and I are real close,” she says, “just like David Spade and Chris Farley.” The product of Kato’s brief marriage in the early ’80s, Tiffany then launches into her dead-on Farley voice: “You know, ‘Brothers don’t shake hands. Brothers gotta hug!’”

One night, on the casino floor in Atlantic City, Kato’s talking about his relationship to media; he’s just dropped \$240 in blackjack but shrugs it off by noting that, sometimes, blow-dryers cost more than that. “ABC is owned by Disney now—you mean to tell me news and entertainment haven’t merged?” He pauses for a split second to collect his thoughts, then coughs up, “And *I’m* supposed to be the joke!” But before he can elaborate on his thesis, a hot babe walks by and he’s in quick pursuit, trying to guess her sign. “I got it! I got it!” he yells. “Slippery when wet!” She giggles, and you think, My God, it actually works.

At a time when seemingly every celebrity, B-list or otherwise, bitches and moans about the perils of fame, Kato relishes it. There’s something honest and charming about that. Maybe the girls still listen to his lines, maybe the crowds continue to cheer for him because we’ve grown tired of real celebrity—and Kato offers us celebrity lite. He seems to know it. And for his part, Kato

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He drives a black hardtop BMW because tooling around in his convertible Beemer just wasn't safe—at red lights, girls would try to hop in while removing their halter tops.

seems satisfied with the arrangement.

He intuits, at least on some level, that American culture has split into two distinct groups. On the one hand, there are the dour-faced Literalists, those who respond to something like Columbine by grumbling about the evils of trench coats or video games. On the other side are the Absurdists, those who see the irony of today's media landscape. If you still talk about the arcane intricacies of DNA evidence when the subject of the O.J. trial comes up, you are a Literalist. Kato, Absurdist to a fault, offers this one-liner when talk turns to the trial: "I always thought DNA stood for 'Dude Needs Apartment.'" That's his act, yes, but the ironic tone makes him a barometer for the cultural divide. In every audience, remember, there are those who get him and those who don't.

His testimony four years ago perfectly illustrated the clash. Prosecutor Marcia Clark, trained as a Literalist, became enraged at his inconsistencies. But Kato just kept quipping his way through five days on the stand—when Clark asked if he'd ever sought help in his acting career from O.J., Kato deadpanned: "We weren't going for the same roles."

People who get Kato understand that this is a party guy, a guy for whom only the moment matters. So what if there were conflicts between his testimony at the preliminary hearing and at the trial? Fat Mike, who spent a weekend in Atlantic City trying to become part of the party, understands this... if nothing else. "He's one fun guy," Mike says, after Kato introduces him to a group of fans in a casino restaurant as "a star in his own right—you ever see the Weather Channel? Mike, say, 'Precipitation.'" Mike doesn't seem to get the joke, but it's okay. He knows when someone is carping some diem when he sees it.

Partying With Pauly Shore

Kato lives near Kevin Costner in the Hollywood Hills, where he rents a three-bedroom duplex overlooking a steep canyon. The money from *Beggars and*

Choosers, in addition to his personal-appearance earnings, covers the bills plus a little more, he says. He drives a black hardtop '95 BMW because tooling around in his convertible Beemer just wasn't safe—at red lights, girls would try to hop in while removing their halter tops.

HE SPENDS FOOTBALL SUNDAYS OVER at Charlie Sheen's. Once, when Sheen left town for a month, he gave Kato his new Maserati and told him to "put some miles on it." Kato's a regular at Hef's bashes at the Mansion, and he hangs with Bill Maher and Pauly Shore. When Shore's 1995 film *Jury Duty* debuted, Shore asked Kato to be his guest at the red carpet premiere. There they were, the two of them in the limo, drinking beer, when all of a sudden Shore unzips and pisses into his plastic

cup; a few minutes later he and Kato emerge from the limo in front of the cameras and lights and paparazzi holding what everyone assumes to be a cup of beer. When Kato retells this story, he laughs uproariously.

But for all the limos, premieres, fast times, and big laughs, it's not as if Kato's writing his own ticket. In fact, he's living a present-tense life that, post-40, could turn fairly bleak; at some point, always borrowing rather than owning the Maserati ceases to be cool. When it comes right down to it, Kato's grasp on fame is rather tenuous—and Kato is keenly aware of it. Not surprisingly, he wants to extend the run. That's why so much of his time is spent pitching *The Sixteenth Minute*; it would turn him from joke into jokester. "In my heart, I truly believe that in the next five ►►

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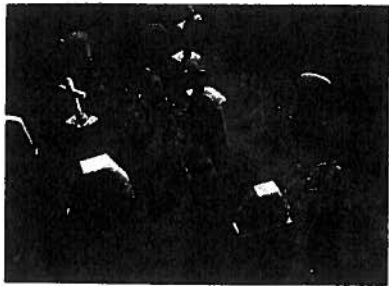
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GAMES

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Halloween 1999 will be a nightmare-come-true for action and adventure gamers anxiously awaiting the release of *Nocturne*, a horror-themed PC game from Terminal Reality. Combining a next-generation engine with sumptuous art and animation, *Nocturne* was widely regarded as one of the most dazzling previews at this year's E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo) in Los Angeles.

Nocturne takes place in the film noir world of the 1930s. Reminiscent of classic horror films, a host of ghoulish nasties — including werewolves, vampires, vampire brides, ghouls, and flesh-eating zombies — wander the night. You play a special agent employed by a secret investigative bureau created to counteract these growing monstrous threats. *Nocturne*'s cast of characters is impressive, including 70+ unique characters, 40+ unique enemies, 25+ friendly NPCs, and nine fellow agents from whom you can enlist help. The game is divided into four episodes that take place in Paris, Germany, Chicago, and rural Texas.



The use of dynamic physics and a rendering engine that employs a skeletal animation system mean that *Nocturne*'s characters look and move like real humans, and

limbs get blown off like real limbs when hit with a weapon. Volumetric fogging provides eerie rolling fog, and volumetric lighting creates *Nocturne*'s moody film noir atmosphere of shadows, reflections, and the play between dark and light.

Meant to be played with the lights down low and the volume up high, *Nocturne* utilizes a leading-edge audio engine to surround players in a truly ghoulish world where flesh-eating zombies munch loudly on limbs and screams pierce the night. Lovers of the macabre will have all the creepy kicks they can handle this Halloween with *Nocturne*. It will require a Pentium II-class machine with plenty of RAM that supports up to 32-bit color, and it will be available for purchase through retail stores nationwide October 31. For more information or to purchase on-line, visit www.godgames.com.

KATO'S BIG IDEAS

If a magazine were stupid enough to turn over half a page to Kato, what do you think he'd do? Pitch, bro, pitch. By Kato Kaelin

Even for a man of Kato Kaelin's obvious talents, extending one's 15 minutes of fame is no easy task. So his pals at *Details* decided to turn over half a page of magazine real estate to the Coiffed One so that he might pitch a few ideas publicly. Who knows—with *Details* being read by the movers and shakers of the entertainment world (including several highly placed executives at the Home Shopping Network), he just might get a bite.

Kato the Pool Boy Swimwear

If you've seen Showtime's *Beggars and Choosers*, you've seen me play the pool boy. And you've no doubt checked out the duds: the snug trunks, the tight tank top that reads "As Seen on TV." Now you too can show off your guns by purchasing my collection of activewear. Tank tops will read: "No Kato on Duty." Chicks'll be diggin' ya.

Kato Hair-Care Products For a mere \$39.95, you can get the Kato Pak, which includes detangler, shampoo, a blow-dryer, and gel. The shampoo, called KatoPoo—"the only kind of poo you want in your hair"—is what I really use on my hair. (It's a mixture of honey and egg yolk added to soap.) The blow-dryer (a \$375 value, occasionally) comes with various settings: "Cool, Dude," "Warm, Dude" and "Hot, Dude." And finally, you get KatoGel, which is ultra megahold. You could ride a

motorcycle without a helmet on and your hair would still be perfect. It's the only gel that's approved by the Department of Transportation for that stiff look. And what guy doesn't want a stiff look?

Kato on Ice I don't know what I'd do here, but people would definitely come.

The Kato Doll This is a natural. After all, there are many similarities between me and a Barbie doll. We're both 40, we're both endlessly fascinating, and we both take up space in other people's homes. The Kato doll would come with a dial on the back to control its hair length. Pull its cord, and it would say, "Things are going great, dude" and "I have no complaints." I really believe there's a market here, particularly among college students, who would want nothing more than to sit around smoke-filled dorm rooms, drinking beer and vegging out with Kato.

The Sixteenth Minute I want to pitch this again and in public because it's so good. It's a half-hour weekly series, a hip, smart, and behind-the-scenes look at Hollywood culture. I play Kato, an amiable, attention-challenged host of a popular talk show who interviews people whose 15 minutes of fame are up—from Anita Bryant to Dr. Rene Richards. But when the cameras are off, I use my ultra-celeb status to make my dreams come true. For instance, when Vanilla Ice appears on my show, I figure, How hard can it be to be a rapper?

So I try to become Puff Kato, and release a rap CD of my own, titled "Houseguesta." These wild and naive escapades get in the way of my only source of income, the talk show. But it's hard to tell me no when all I'm doing is going after my dreams and having so much damn fun!

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Two people bound together by a love of Kato's hair

years, I'll be the host of my own show," he says. "And all my friends will work with me and for me."

There are signs he's settling down in other ways, too. Though he was a virgin when he married Tiffany's mom at 23, he more than made up for his late start. Tales of his past pussy-hounding are legendary, but now he's involved with Alana, a twenty-something beauty who, he says, keeps him "centered."

"Kato was always a ladies' guy, even before the trial," says his partner in juvenilia, Dan, who met Kato 16 years ago when Kato was running a business—and working 15-hour days—providing extras for film shoots. "Whenever we went out, I was always invisible to the girls. Every once in a while, one fell off the truck for me, but not often."

Back in Atlantic City, Kato and Dan are cruising around in a limo provided by the casino, talking about women, relationships, and commitment. Kato is being the mature, sensitive guy now. "When I'm in a relationship, I'm committed," he says. "I'm good to the person I date when I'm committed, even if it's only been for a month or so." Still, the temptation is always there. Over the years, he's saved a stack of business cards he's been handed that contain lurid invitations on the back. "You'll be in a hotel and a girl will say 'I'm a casting agent,' and give you a card; on the back it says, 'Meet me at the pool at one o'clock,'" he says. "But the best are the girls who are, like, 'Oh, it's Kato. Who cares?' And then

In the end, Kato is the only O.J. survivor who seized the moment and turned it into the full-time job of being Kato.

they start talking to you and get a different opinion, like, 'Oh, he's funny; this could be fun.'"

Just then, a carload of young women drives by. Kato lowers his window. "I'm in a limo! I'm in a limo! I'm in a limo!" he shouts, bouncing up and down in his seat, like a hyper little boy. The girls laugh and wave. "Chicks dig that," he says.

Trial and Error

"This is all about the trial," says Kato. He glares at the TV, watching a Honda commercial featuring Jackie Chiles, the character based on Johnnie Cochran and first seen on *Seinfeld*. "Even this guy is getting work out of the trial." As Kato sees another actor capitalizing on the trial, it becomes clear: He's the least likely hero of the O.J. saga. "He turned

that trial into what it was—a fucking joke," Dan succinctly observes.

Indeed, today, it's the Christopher Dardens and Marcia Clarks who have become the jokes. Darden has acted, badly, in some TV movies, Clark and Cochran have become laughable talking heads on the Geraldo circuit, and O.J. has continued his exhaustive search for the real killer... on L.A.'s golf courses. Kato is the only one, it turns out, who seized that moment four years ago and turned it into the full-time job of simply being Kato. "Hey, let's go to the casino," he says, with none of the dreariness most of us express when we're about to return to work. "Fat Mike's probably eating somewhere, and Bill's probably got his dick out."

Kato Kaelin's eyes go wide. And then he says, "My people need me." ■