



HART
HANSON
ON THE SET
OF BONES.



IN PROFILE

THE POPULIST

How did a guy who wanted to teach college on Vancouver Island end up a giant of American television?

By CURTIS GILLESPIE

Photo: Dan Sackheim

THE FIFTY OR SO BUILDINGS ON THE SPRAWLING

Fox Studio lot in Beverly Hills, California, take three primary shapes: the sleek glass and steel of the executive offices in the southeast corner, the giant airport hangar-like sound stages in the middle, and the low-slung two-storey apartment-style production offices along the west edge of the lot. Strolling through this environment is an exercise in compulsory humility. Were you to ever feel insecure about how much money you make, how good-looking you are, or how much clout you have, you would be well-advised to meander elsewhere. Funky and purposeful technical people criss-cross the avenues and grassy areas. Tall executives in gorgeous shoes and designer labels strut about exhibiting their minxy locks, toned flesh and flawless teeth (as do their female counterparts). Creative-looking types—writers probably, though they could also be gardeners—loll around dressed in carefully rumpled clothing. Phalanxes of studly, stubbly assistants wear designer jeans and tight T-shirts. Even the aging Ecuadorean waiter at the cafeteria exudes the class and rectitude of a Spanish James Mason. We haven't even come to the stars. Being gifted the sight of Sofia Vergara, in heels and a tight skirt, mounting the short staircase to the *Modern Family* sound stage is to abruptly have one's inner Neanderthal made flesh. Your flesh.

Amidst this live catwalk of the rich, hip, and gorgeous, there is one person who appears oblivious to it all. He isn't gorgeous, doesn't signal wealth and can't be bothered to even learn what passes for hip. He is neither tall nor short. He wears plain glasses that are frequently askew. It is possible he's modestly hiding rippling abs under a wrinkled and baggy T-shirt—a T-shirt that looks suspiciously like the one he wore the day before—but the available physical evidence suggests otherwise. And Temperance “Bones” Brennan, the main character of the popular Fox show *Bones*, wouldn't need to deploy even the most basic of her forensic skills to conclude that the man either cuts his own hair or pays someone else to create the effect.

Yet when this same man stops to chat, people stop to listen. When this man approaches the cafeteria door, the maitre'd does not direct him to the change room to don a busboy's uniform, but instead sweeps the door open and greets him

obsequiously. When this man steps into the kitchen of the production office, people do not presume that he is delivering fruit and pastries, but instead try to secure even a second's conversation.

Why do they do these things?

The obvious answer would be because this man is Hart Hanson, one of television's most influential and successful creative minds, the Canadian creator of the long-running TV hit, *Bones* (a comedic crime procedural about a brainy female forensic anthropologist and an all-action male FBI agent), and its popular spinoff, *The Finder* (a frothy *crimedy* about a decorated but lovably damaged Iraq war veteran who can find anything anywhere). But the real reason people do these things, the reason why people appear to be drawn to Hanson and treat him more like a friend than a power player, more one of the guys than *the* guy, might just be because there are days, many days, when Hanson still can't quite believe it himself. He laughs often and uniquely, a laugh so infectious it should come with an antidote, and he's just as likely to stop and talk for ten minutes to the guy who really *is* delivering the fruit and pastries as he is to the network executive wanting to discuss a sixty-five million dollar season order. People pay attention to Hart Hanson because he's a powerful show runner, but people fuss over him because he himself can't understand what the fuss is all about, although if you follow the entertainment news, you will know that due to recent events there almost wasn't a Hart Hanson to fuss over at all.

On January 3, at approximately nine a.m., the fifty-four-year-old Hanson was riding his motorcycle south along the Pacific Coast Highway between his home in Malibu and the Fox lot. He was in the fast lane, heading inland onto Highway 10 doing sixty miles an hour, when the pickup truck he was following suddenly jammed on its brakes and swerved wildly to the right to avert a car stopped on the left side of the freeway. Hanson had no escape path. The bike went under the car and he went over it, cartwheeling down the pavement like a gymnast on acid. He dislocated both hips and a shoulder, and broke his left ankle. Labelling it a close call is akin to observing that Charlie Sheen likes the occasional night out; Hanson knows it was a brush with death.

Though he is not the brooding, philosophical type, Hanson enjoys those rare moments when he gets some downtime to think or write or read; he got a lot of those moments sitting in the hospital recovering. As he did so, many in the world of popular entertainment were wondering a few things about Hanson and his creative arc. First, how long will the incredibly popular *Bones* run (it was recently renewed for an eighth season), and, more to the point, how long might Hanson choose to remain at its helm? Second, how successful could the *Bones* spinoff, *The Finder*, ultimately become? (As recently as early April, no decision had been made on renewing it for a second season.)

Third, and perhaps most importantly, there is the question of what Hanson—who is certainly one of the most successful Canadians in the history of television; to date Fox has supplied him with nearly half a billion dollars to create his shows—might do next, regardless. Yes, he might keep doing *Bones*. Sure, he could keep doing *The Finder*. He could even, and might even, do both while also developing new network shows. Or, more tantalizingly, he could turn all or part of his creativity towards the darker, edgier world of cable, a move he acknowledges would satisfy part of his storytelling brain.

“Hart happens to be on network now,” his good friend, the SCTV alum Dave Thomas told me one bright morning in late January, as we sat outside at a Malibu coffee shop. “But Hart is an artist. He'll be on cable one day. The most exciting part of watching him as a friend is wondering what he's going to do next.”

I asked Hanson, the next day, if he cared to share his thoughts about his future. “I'm a network asset,” he told me. “The network owns whatever I produce right now, so it's kind of a non-issue.”

When, I asked, did this state—his personal “overall” deal at Twentieth Century Fox, that is—expire?

“I don't necessarily think of it that way,” he replied. “Partially because I really like the actors I'm working with. We've created these shows together.” He sat back in his chair. “But since you're asking, my deal is up in June.”

HART HANSON'S OFFICE, IN BUILDING 1 ON THE far northwest corner of the Fox lot, is a spacious, low-slung room with brown

carpet, a large desk, and some punched-up couches and chairs. Hanson can usually be found behind his desk, strumming his fingers either on the desk top or lightly over one of the many guitars he keeps behind his desk, as he chats with, primarily, one or all of three people: his executive assistant, Nick Larsen; his manager of creative affairs, Josh Levy; or Stephen Nathan, the executive producer and head writer of *Bones*, and Hanson's longtime friend and collaborator.

If any of these three are in Hanson's office, particularly Nathan (who owns an air of wearied experience so profound you sense that even the appearance of the Devil before him would elicit nothing but a shrug and a “meh”), business may ensue, but it will be preceded, interrupted, and post-scripted by stories, jokes, anecdotes, gossip, and expletive-laden debriefings of disparate events. In one such meeting between Nathan and Hanson, ostensibly to talk about how to overcome a plot glitch in one of the final *Bones* episodes of the season, Nathan (a showbiz vet who launched his career by originating the role of Jesus in the musical *Godspell* off-Broadway in 1971), first offered up donuts baked by his chef daughter, and then launched into the protracted, highly physical telling of a joke he'd heard from Carl Reiner the night before, about two elderly Jewish gentlemen sitting on a park bench, one of whom keeps trying mightily, and failing, time after time after time, to simply get up, all of which caused Hanson no end of merriment. The punch line (“What's the rush?”) was funny, but wasn't nearly as funny as Nathan's performance of the joke. Upon the conclusion of the joke, the two discussed an episode plot point for approximately fourteen seconds before Nathan stood up, a radical action that seemed to spark in Hanson a note of tender concern for his friend.

“...Is this a pajama bottom day, Stephen?” Hanson turned to me to explain. “On tough writing days, when he's just got to knuckle down and break a story, Stephen has been known to put on his pajama bottoms. It's the only way he can work sometimes.”

Nathan shrugged. “It's not at that point yet.”

STRAYS

Dogs of the world, anonymous wanderers, moral conundrums, I find them by the road, scavenging milk cartons thrown from the bus: feist pups galled with mange, old hounds, blind and lame, at the end of their utility.

Such I once whispered secrets to and begged to keep and was commanded to lead into the woods to execute and bury. And my father was not a bad man. And Saint John Perse wrote, “I had a horse. Who was he?”

Do animals have souls? My favorite channels the spirit of Veronica Franco. Veronica Franco or Marie Duplessis. She is orange, small, and elegant, a golden-lab beagle mix—I do not know why she comes to me. I do not feed her and she is not my dog.

—Rodney Jones

“That's a relief,” said Hanson.

Nathan departed. Later that day, I came across him in Building 1—he still had his pants on.

IT REMAINS UNDETERMINED IF GYPSY BLOOD courses through the Hanson line, but it would hardly come as a surprise to find it so. Given the famed impermanence of the Los Angeles lifestyle, it's surprising to learn that his time in L.A. has by some considerable measure been the most stable period of Hanson's life, at least in terms of physical movement. Hanson was born in 1957, just outside San Francisco, to a Canadian mother (who passed away two years ago) and an American father. They were about to return to Victoria, British Columbia, but decided to wait a few days, given Hanson's imminent arrival.

Hanson's father worked as a travelling salesman most of his life, and the family (Hanson is the oldest of five children) moved frequently, living in Victoria,

Vancouver, Kamloops, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Toronto. The family history is equally all over the map, and it's no accident Hanson grew up to be a storyteller. His father, for instance, was such a fine track athlete in his day that Hanson's grandmother used to claim her son's high school had once won the state track championship, even though her son, Hanson's father, was the only person on the team. Hanson assumed this was family hyperbole until many years later when he happened to see some old newspaper clippings from the Potlatch, Idaho daily, which noted that Hanson *père* had indeed won every single event at the state championships. “Except the relay,” deadpanned Hanson in the retelling.

Hanson's mother also had a sense of the fantastic about her. The first time she visited him after his move to L.A., she was standing on the Fox lot with him, taking it all in, marvelling out loud at the magic and strangeness of it all. “Well, mom,” said Hanson, “what do you think?”

“I guess everybody has to try this once,” she said. “I did it when I was here in L.A. working as a chorus girl dancer.”

“You WHAT?!”

She looked back at him, all 4'11" of her utterly nonplussed. “Sure, I was a dancer, a chorus girl, and I lived in Wittier, and I always took the bus up here to this studio and the other studios.”

“Those are just a few of the stories about my family that I thought couldn't be true,” said Hanson, as we spoke on his sunny patio high above Malibu beach. “Only thing was, they were.”

POST-PRODUCTION SUITE 12 AT THE SONY LOT calls to mind the sort of movie theatre a wealthy cinephile might place in the basement of his or her mansion; a large screen runs the show in loops up front, much as an ordinary cinema might, but at each of the room's three tiers are banks of computers and screens and keyboards and motherboards, each manned by a sound expert of some variety. It is the job of the seven people in the room to ensure there are no glitches in the show and that the music and sound effects match onscreen

events. “I’m in awe every day of every one of these people,” Hanson told me later. “Of everyone. The stars, the directors, the technicians. Not a day goes by where I’m not in a meeting or sitting in some room and it hits me that I’m the least intelligent guy in the room.”

Dan Sackheim, the director of the episode, sat munching grapes while offering suggestions and self-mocking criticisms. After each run-through of an act in the show, the technicians would stop and solicit feedback. A sample:

Sackheim: “Hart? What about you, anything from that segment?”

Hanson: “Yeah, at 18:15, that moment where Walter unlocks his underground vault. When he unlocks it and pulls it up, there needs to be a different sound. It’s too light. Too... I don’t know what I mean. What do I mean?” Here Hanson looked to Sackheim and various technicians in turn. “There’s a sound. I can’t describe it. It should be more a clicky sound, like clanging tumblers turning in a giant safe or something. That sound. You know that sound? Anybody know what I’m talking about? I don’t even know what I’m talking about! Somebody, help me. Please. The longer you let me keep talking, the more I’m going to prove I shouldn’t be running this show!”

Technician: “I think I know what you mean.” Knobs were twirled, buttons were pushed, and in under a minute the loop was replayed; this time the vault door, which sat like a manhole cover on a road, unlocked and was lifted to the sound of crisply metallic spring-loaded sequential unlocking noises. It was a radically different sound to the previous one, and gave opening the vault a deeper and somehow more playfully mysterious overtone.

Hanson: “Magical!” To Sackheim: “How come you didn’t suggest that? Why do we keep you around here anyway?”

Sackheim, laconically munching another grape: “I’ve often wondered that myself.”

Hanson: “We keep you here so that somebody smart can run the show when they fire me.”

Sackheim: “That’d be a mixed blessing.”

Hanson: “You’re my hero.”

Sackheim: “I accept that.”

The next day, I spoke with Bruce

Margolis, the executive in charge of production at Twentieth Century Fox. Margolis puts Hanson “in the same league, on the same pedestal,” as Howard Gordon, the famous show runner of *24*, who is currently receiving accolades for his new conspiracy drama, *Homeland*. “I give Hart sixty million dollars a year and he’s never let me down.”

I asked Margolis to account for Hanson’s apparent popularity amongst the dizzyingly diverse strata of people he necessarily has to interact with whilst extracting maximum performance from them all. “Easy,” said Margolis. “He’s successful. He’s efficient. He’s accessible. He holds a point of view. He’s a model show runner. There isn’t anything to not like.”

“He’s a normal guy,” Emily Deschanel, the co-star of *Bones*, told me the next day, when I spoke with her in her trailer between scenes. “He drives around in a car with no doors! He’s still the same guy as when I met him seven years ago when I auditioned for *Bones*. I’ve seen new layers of him unfold, but his success has not changed him at all to the core. He’s kind of goofy. The guy is just real, and in this town that’s very, very rare.”

The trouble with the picture being created by these friends, collaborators, executives and stars, of course, is that it can’t be complete, since it would be humanly impossible for anyone to achieve so much while alienating so few. Where, I wondered, as I criss-crossed the Hollywood landscape researching Hanson, was the coke, the hookers, the double-crossings, the spurned starlets, the financial malfeasance, the backstabbing, the alcoholism? Anything? An OxyContin addiction? A weakness for the ponies? A diet low in fibre? Anyone? Anything??

“I heard he kicked a squirrel once,” Emily Deschanel told me, her voice lowering a shade. “But I didn’t actually see it.” Confirming this with Hanson in lieu of alerting the SPCA, he told me that he was merely testing the hypothesis he’d understood growing up in Ontario — and which he shared with Stephen Nathan as they walked on the lot outside the squirrel-friendly Building 1—that it was impossible to kick a squirrel due to their lightning-quick reflexes. The hypothesis failed at the test stage; shoe met squirrel. “Either the theory is a complete falsehood,”

Hanson told me, “or California squirrels aren’t as spry as Ontario squirrels.” The squirrel in question appeared to suffer no lasting damage; upon landing, it resumed the chestnut hunt it had been carrying out on the other side of the lawn.

I finally asked Hanson himself how he’d managed to achieve his current status without making any enemies, or, even more incredibly, while managing to have people actually seem to like him. Surely it couldn’t be legitimate? Where was his dark side?

“I have one,” he finally confided, as we sat in his office near the end of a long day on set. “I swear a lot at people, especially the suits. A lot.”

Anger management issues, I wrote in my notebook.

“The only thing is, I wait till I’m alone in the car. Then I really let loose at people. It’s even better when it’s just me inside my bike helmet. Then it’s like it really is inside my own head.”

Of course, there is always the conspiratorial brand of black humour he shares with Stephen Nathan; together, they bleed off a lot of the pressure that would otherwise get sprayed over other people. During the third season of *Bones*, Hanson was in Nathan’s office when they happened to take a call from an executive Hanson declined to name. Hanson put the executive on speaker phone as they tried to decipher what the suit was saying; something to do with the tone of a show. “The point is,” said Hanson, “Stephen and I were making faces, shaking our heads, doing everything we could to not swear or laugh, so that we could, you know, keep our jobs.”

Near the end of the conversation, the suit made a suggestion Hanson strenuously objected to, but which hierarchy and diplomacy compelled him to respond to with: “Okay...that’s an interesting suggestion...I guess we could always consider that.” However, as he’d uttered these words, he’d stood up, extracted his penis from his trousers and begun to whap it against the phone, against the cradled handset, against the number buttons. Nathan did all he could to contain his laughter until the call ended a few seconds later, at which point he and Hanson laughed so hard their stomachs hurt and tears formed. But then, as if



CAN-ICONS

THE BEAVER

The DHC-2 Beaver bush plane is often credited with opening up the Canadian North. It was manufactured by de Havilland Canada in Downsview, Ontario, between 1947 and 1967, yet it remains a common sight throughout the country due to its rare abilities. It’s easily recognized by its very loud “Wasp Jr” engine.

Beavers have been called the workhorses of the North. Still used as air taxis between small communities and hunting and fishing lodges, they’re also used to ship heavy freight, and were even designed to carry external loads (such as canoes or household furniture strapped to the outside).

At the end of World War II, de Havilland Canada decided to design a rugged plane suited to the extremes of the North. They asked bush pilots across the country what they needed and the answer was lots of power, combined with STOL (Short Take-Off and Landing) performance and a design that could be fitted with skis or floats. Other suggestions included doors wide enough to accommodate forty-five gallon drums, located on both sides to facilitate loading no matter how the pilot tied up to a dock.

All de Havilland Canada aircraft were named after animals at the time; after some debate, it was decided the new bush plane was much like the hard-working beaver.

Hollywood’s Harrison Ford flies his own Beaver and sings its praises.

—Clive Holden

governed by a switch, Nathan stopped laughing, his face suddenly an ashen mask. He stopped laughing because he remembered they were seated in his office. And that that was his phone.

BY THE TIME HANSON WAS READY TO ATTEND university, he was hearing the call of Vancouver Island. He enrolled at the University of Victoria, where one would think the logical thing for him to study would have been literature or the performing arts or perhaps Roma history. Which was why he chose physics and calculus.

“Yeah, that didn’t work out too well,” he told me.

Over the next few years, Hanson managed to complete a bachelor of arts at

the University of Toronto, while his wife, Brigitte, pursued biochemistry (though she would eventually attend and graduate from art school). He worked part-time at the Christie’s biscuit factory and ended up giving up on his dream of becoming a rock musician due, ostensibly, to an unfortunate incident with a fondue fork which caused paralysis in two fingers. “Luckiest break of my life,” said Hanson. “I wasn’t that good.”

Hanson began to pursue his passion for writing, though he had no idea what direction that passion was leading him in (after graduating he did technical writing for his father-in-law, among other clients, as well as columns for the *Toronto Sun* on such diverse subjects as Toronto bars

and a cycling trip across Canada). “Those were actually really great times,” he said.

“We didn’t have kids,” added his wife Brigitte. “We thought we were rich!”

“We had an apartment,” said Hanson. “I had a gig writing about bars. It’s probably the richest we’ve ever been.”

But the key step had already been taken; Hanson had had the fire of writing ignited in him while in the final year of undergrad. He’d been scribbling away at some short stories and had a nascent idea for a novel. Then one day he saw that there was a reading later that night on campus (held, believe it or not, at a U of T arts think-tank called Hart House), by the esteemed Canadian novelist Jack Hodgins, whose work Hanson knew and loved. That was when everything changed.

Jack Hodgins (who has won nearly every literary prize worth winning in Canada and who has produced exceptional writing for close to five decades now) was, in 1981, probably the kind of figure Hanson imagined, or hoped, he might someday become: a recognized novelist producing works of lasting literary value. Hanson attended the reading, and joined the party at a local pub after the reading. Hanson approached Hodgins at one point, carrying a copy of Hodgins’ CanLit classic *Spit Delaney’s Island*, and announced himself a fan. “I’d been teaching for quite a while by then,” Hodgins—a famously generous editor—told me in a recent email, “and I knew an enthusiast when I saw one. He finally confessed to me that he wanted to write fiction.”

Hodgins offered to read some of Hanson’s work, and Hanson later sent Hodgins a short story. “I recognized true promise in what I was reading,” said Hodgins. “I gave him some feedback and eventually invited him to consider attending a workshop I was scheduled to teach in Saskatchewan.” Hanson applied, got in, and spent two weeks in Hodgins’ fiction workshop, an experience that helped give him enough writing time, and confidence, to apply to the graduate writing program at the University of British Columbia, to which he was accepted. Hanson also set to work on a novel that he eventually finished, a novel, says Hodgins, “that a major Canadian publisher took a long time admiring and considering” before eventually turning down.

Still, a corner had been turned; Hanson has always held Hodgins in great esteem, and he honoured Hodgins, in his own winking way, so many years later, by naming T. J. Thyne's character in *Bones* Dr. Jack Hodgins...and by giving the character fantastic private wealth, three doctorates and boyish good looks. The feeling is mutual; when Hodgins was appointed to the Order of Canada in 2010, he invited Hanson to join him in Ottawa for the ceremony.

While at UBC, however, Hanson was taking a variety of courses. One of these was screenwriting, taught by Jake Zilber. Hanson had never really given much thought to the idea of writing for television or film, but he enjoyed the class with his friend, Scot Morison, the respected Edmonton television and film writer. Zilber, through his connections to the Canadian television industry, offered an internship every summer, and Hanson told me that Zilber offered the internship to Morison, but that Morison had already accepted a summer job writing for a magazine back in Alberta. Hanson was Zilber's second choice ("Because Scot was the really talented one in the class," Hanson told me), and he said yes.

"Honestly," said Hanson. "I had no interest in becoming a screen writer until then. It was that internship that allowed me to meet Brian McKeown, the guy who ran *The Beachcombers*. When Brigitte got pregnant and we needed some money, I just started faxing story ideas to Brian. I got to write an episode of *The Beachcombers*, and then he hired me as a story editor."

That was in 1989. By 1992, he was writing episodes of *The Road to Avonlea*, by 1994 he was writing for *North of 60*, and by 1995, he'd developed *Traders*, a show that ran for eighty-three episodes from 1996-2000, and which attracted the attention of Hollywood agent Matt Solo.

"I called him up out of the blue in 1998," said Solo, his mouth creasing into a wry smile as we sat in his eighth floor office at the William Morris Endeavor offices on Wilshire Boulevard (WME is the template agency for the popular HBO comedy *Entourage*). "And he never returned my calls. Ever."

Perplexed, Solo (whom Hanson calls He Who Works Alone) continued to try to reach Hanson, with no success. "I

couldn't figure it out," Solo told me. "I was working with David Shore"—of *House* fame—"at the time, and he'd taken over running this show called *Traders* because Hart was sick." (Hanson was off work for many months due to a kidney infection.) "I always wanted to meet the guy who'd created *Traders*, but I'd call him and he'd never answer any phone calls. I finally ended up going to Toronto for a film shoot, so we met, somewhere really ridiculous, like a Red Lobster or something."

Solo (who, with his untidy hair and disheveled dress, looks more like an overworked legal aid lawyer than a killer Hollywood agent) was impressed that Hanson put on no airs and expected no favours. "He just agreed to pick up sticks and come, but the thing was that no one in L.A. had ever heard of him. Everything he'd done in Canada counted for nothing. You almost have to start over. And so I had to ask him, this guy who'd created shows and won awards, to write a spec script to show people in L.A. what he could do. He didn't complain. He just did it."

Solo invited Hanson to stay at his house when he came down to L.A. for their first set of meetings with the network suits. The only thing Hanson brought with him was a spec script. It was his take on *Ally McBeal*. "To this day," Solo told me, "it remains one of the funniest things I've ever read. It was just fantastic, really absurd and really funny, and yet the guy who wrote it was sleeping on the couch at my old house. As soon as I sent the script out, people were crying laughing, and he got a job almost instantly."

Hanson set to work as a writer on shows like David Kelley's *Snoops* and a show run by Rob Thomas called *Cupid*, establishing himself as versatile, reliable and easy to work with. The *Cupid* experience was invaluable, Hanson told me, because, due to a falling out between Thomas and the two show runners, Thomas ended up as the last man standing...except for Hanson, who happened to be standing there, too. "Suddenly, Rob is the show runner, and he makes me the co-executive producer. Overnight, I'm sitting in on meetings with studio bigshots, and I've only been in L.A. for a few months. I learned so much those first six months. Even though the show only lasted fourteen episodes, at the end of it I was a co-executive producer!"

Which led to higher profile gigs with shows such as *Joan of Arcadia* and *Judging Amy*. Another project, which ended up not getting made, led to him meeting the producer Barry Josephson, known for getting movies like *Men in Black* and *Enchanted* made, but also for being linked to the Heidi Fleiss prostitution scandal in the mid-nineties. Hanson, being an equal opportunity kind of guy, was happy to meet Josephson, who gave Hanson a documentary on a forensic thriller writer named Kathy Reichs. Hanson took it home and watched it and said to himself, "Okay, there's a show there."

This speaks to a rather common misconception about *Bones*, which is that the show is based on Reichs' books; it is not. It's based purely on Hanson's interpretation of the work and life of a forensic anthropologist according to what he saw in that documentary. He read the books later, of course, and adopted many of the characters. But early on, Hanson expressed a fear to Josephson that would recur as a problem after the first year of production, namely that the studio, Twentieth Century Fox, and the network, Fox Television, would want to make it into a *CSI*-style forensic show, rather than the relationship-based crime comedy Hanson envisioned. Josephson endorsed Hanson's approach, and so did the studio, more or less. Dana Walden and Gary Newman, high-ranking studio executives, were at that first pitch meeting, along with the head of network development, Jennifer Nicholson Salke, and as a unit they listened to Hanson hum and haw and twitch and fidget.

"You have to understand," Hanson told me of that meeting. "I'm the world's worst pitcher. These people laughed at me. They looked at each other. I kept talking, not even sure what I was saying. They interrupted me and said, 'Umm, Hart, is it going to be...an hour long show?' *Yeah, yeah, I said, right...an hour. Sure, it'll be an hour.* 'And can you say something about, you know, the tone, maybe?' *Right, the tone, right, yeah, well, it'll be, well, like me, like my personality.* They looked at each other. 'Okay, can you perhaps quantify that in some way?' *Well, you know, it'll have some humour, some pathos, some bathos. But I'm not doing a CSI show. That's not me. I'm not your guy on that kind of show.*"

ROTHKO VIA MUNCIE, INDIANA

The 1980s. Beginning of the long decade, the century's late works. Snow on the grid, field bisected by a late model John Deere's progress in low gear with a front-end load of straw bales. Its operator's daughter dons her brace, thinks her scoliosis the devil's work on her, a not-good-enough Christian. Her mother talks scripture on the phone in the kitchen and the kitchen smells of coffee and it smells of dog. Christmas lights

strung along the eaves of bungalows, vehicles moored to bungalows by their block heater cords. Rumours of drunkenness and corruption sunk the Democrat's bid for mayor: *For we favour the simple expression of the complex thought. The large shape's impact of the unequivocal. Flat forms that destroy illusion, reveal truth.* Now the union's eye has twilight in it, and the city dump will stay where it is. Evening falls, or rises, or emanates from the figures. The SportsPlex and Model Aviation Museum, the Muncie Mall and both quadrangles of Ball State University shed their associations, perform an unknown adventure in unknown space. Halogens illuminate an anecdote of the spirit. You won't see his face around here again. The violet quarry hosts a greater darkness further in, the White River sleeps in its cabin of pack ice. Among the graduating class an abstract feeling develops,

an inclination to symbolism born of the fatal car wreck on New Year's, a spike in requests for Bob Seger to the call-ins from a quasi-religious experience of limitless immensity. To achieve this clarity is inevitably to be misunderstood. Their lives take on the dimensions of the fields, the city, its facades and its plan, whose happiness will be their own. Rent, food budget, sweaters indoors. Basketball, basketball, and a second marriage.

—Karen Solie

The three studio executives assured Hanson they supported his vision, as did, initially, the network executives. They ordered thirteen episodes, the show went into production and that's when the problems began.

"It became clear very early," Hanson told me, "that despite everything, they really did want a *CSI*-style show. I just kept telling people, 'I'm not going to do it'. Honestly, I thought I was going to lose my job a few times." The pressure to change the show was coming from every corner, but Hanson closed his ears and kept working. "I kept saying I wanted it to be about the characters, and people in suits kept saying things like, 'You haven't earned it yet with these characters. It has to be more plot-driven.'"

The network kept moving the show, which premiered September 13, 2005, all over the timetable map, which wasn't helping, but the fourth episode, in which a bear was opened up to find it had ingested most of a human arm, proved popular with the audience. Also, the network found that no matter where they moved the show—Monday night, Tuesday night—there were always seven or eight million people who managed to find it. The show was resonating with viewers, surprising the network, surprising the studio, surprising even Hanson somewhat, given the fact that it was not being given preferential or even stable time slots. Then, perhaps due to the positive reviews of an episode just before Christmas, the show made a quantum leap.

Just over seven million people watched Episode 9 of *Bones* in Season One. Nearly eleven and a half million people watched Episode 10. The day those numbers came in, the pressure started to ease.

"I think it was Preston who first came to me and said, 'You know, there's something about this show. No matter what happens to it, you just can't kill it.'"

Hanson is referring here to Preston Beckman, the Fox Network Executive Vice President of Strategic Program Planning and Research who is one-third of the three-person team that decides what gets made and where it goes on the schedule. I met Beckman in the soft glass and brushed steel of Building 101 on the southeast corner of the Fox lot. I asked him what it is that has made *Bones* and Hanson so successful, and he noted first that network success is usually defined by ad sales, whereas cable defines success through critical reviews and subscribers. "Still," he continued. "What's notable about *Bones* is how shockingly consistent the ratings have been over the years. But it's a smart, funny, fun show that leaves you feeling good and good about yourself. You don't finish an episode feeling like you want to kill yourself."

As for Hanson, he said, "I think there's a modesty there, a bit of a twinkle in his eye, that maybe he doesn't take it all too seriously, although he's very passionate about what he does, of course. I get the feeling that he probably hasn't changed all that much from when he started. And I think he can distinguish between what he does for a living and what his personal tastes might be. He understands what his job is, and who he is appealing to."

Executives like Preston Beckman and Bruce Margolis applaud Hanson's work, but there is still the view held by some that his shows are the pack animals of network television doing the heavy lifting of bringing in the numbers so that the sexier, edgier work can be done by more high-profile Emmy-bait. Hanson's friend Dave Thomas sees it that way. "I don't think Hart's shows are treated with the respect they're due by the network," he told me. "Hart's shows are the bread and butter of television, and they wear their learning and humour lightly, whereas something like *Terra Nova* is a failed experiment in network indulgence. Shows like *Terra*

Nova hit you over the head with a baseball bat, but people respond to Hart's shows because they're good, smart, and, most importantly, don't insult me by overstating everything. I'm telling you, Hart couldn't write stupid if his life depended on it."

THE MAKING OF EVEN A SINGLE EPISODE OF a network TV show is a logistical nightmare; any given set at any given moment is crawling with dozens of extras, directors, assistant directors, directors of photography, assistant directors of photography, makeup artists, producers, assistant producers, executive producers, carpenters, electricians, lighting crew, sound crew, prop masters, caterers, agents, personal assistants, and even occasionally one or two of the stars. And all of these people have opinions and egos. Someone needs to be there to make the trains run on time while also steering the creative vision. That's the show runner. He or she has to be a cross between Stalin and Mother Teresa.

But Hart Hanson on set appears to be neither. He looks and acts like a sound technician, like some guy hanging around waiting for someone to tell him what to do and when to do it. This would be okay, except that he's the guy who is supposed to tell everyone *else* what to do. Walking from the *Bones* set back to Hanson's office one day, I asked him what it was like to be in charge of shows that tens of millions of people watch every week, whether he felt that conferred any particular status or power. He shook his head vigorously.

"Absolutely not," he said. He took a hand off one of the crutches he was using to support his broken ankle and waved it around the Fox lot to indicate the entire operation. "What I do, what we do, these are passing entertainments. My show, it just glances off people. Someone who writes a great novel—take a novel by Jack Hodgins—that is a piece of work that might literally change someone's life. A great novel is part of someone's mental furniture forever. Maybe he sells ten thousand copies of a book, I don't know, but every single one of those people is going to remember that book, and probably be changed by it. Millions of people might watch my shows but an hour later they can't remember what it was about. What I do...it just glances off people."

Hanson's modesty in this regard may simply reflect the tension he feels between what he's doing (entertaining millions), and what he might think he ought to be doing but isn't (creating lasting works of art). "I've heard Hart imply that he considers what he does to be somehow 'inferior' to writing great novels," Jack Hodgins told me. "But I think he says that only because of the short life-span of a show in series television." Assigning cultural value can be a bit of a mug's game anyway, as Hanson's friend Dave Thomas noted when I spoke with him in Malibu: "I remember talking with Marty Short about this sort of thing one time, and he was agonizing about whether he should take this part or take that part, and I said to him, 'Marty, Jesus, in the Year 2500 all show business will be remembered in one paragraph with a picture of John Wayne. It doesn't fucking matter'."

Maybe not in the Year 2500, and maybe not even in the greater or even the smaller scheme of things, but it might matter to Hart Hanson, if only because at every crossroads in his career, when faced with a choice—leaving the sciences in university, moving to UBC to study writing, taking the internship with Jake Zilber, making the no-safety-net move to L.A.—he's taken the bold step. And then, when he was finally given the opportunity he'd waited so long to realize, the kind of opportunity that so few get and that so many in the entertainment business would not just sell but would subdivide their first-born to get—namely, being given sixty million dollars by a major network to create your own show—only to have the network turn around and almost demand that you change the entire tone and thrust of the show, Hanson simply said no. "I'm just not that guy," he told them.

Hanson's next step may, again, be the bold one, but the trick is going to be figuring out precisely what the bold step is; sometimes the hardest thing to do is to remain in the right place. In *Stardust Memories*, Woody Allen, via his alter ego Sandy Bates, meets a group of Martians, and he asks them what he should do with his life and talent, the implication being that comedy, film, art, all of it, is pointless in the face of human tragedy. "Shouldn't I stop making movies and do something that

counts, like...like helping blind people or becoming a missionary or something?"

"You want to do mankind a real service?" says the spokesalien. "Tell funnier jokes."

Hart Hanson tells funny jokes. He tells them to a mass audience. He might carry on with *Bones* and *The Finder*, he might move to cable, he might even quit and go find a publisher for the novel he wrote thirty-two years ago. But whatever he does, we should ignore him when says his work glances off us. He Who Works Alone seconded this notion. "There's every chance that Hart could alternate between the kind of work we're aware of and the kind of work that will surprise people. I wouldn't be shocked to see him go in a complicated character direction in the future, even though he loves the work he's doing now."

"What's going to happen in Hart's career," said his friend Dave Thomas, "is that people he worked with will tell people, *I worked with Hart Hanson*. Because the next thing he does is going to be better, and the thing he does after that is going to be better still. And people are just going to be hoping some of it rubbed off on them."

One evening, after a shoot for *The Finder*, set in a church where the lead character Walter and his brother infiltrate an AA meeting to help them find their long-lost mother, I asked Hanson if he truly wants to do something different, something darker or with more complicated characters, or if he's happy and content making people laugh and giving them an hour's entertainment once a week.

"What I know I'm good at, is that I can work fast," he said. "Which is a good thing in network television. But I'd love to find out what would happen if I didn't have to work fast. On cable, to do fewer episodes, to have the luxury of having all your scripts done before you even start shooting a season, wow, I wonder what that would be like? On network, a season is just a track you're sprinting on and there's a train closing on you. All the time, and faster and faster towards the end of the season. I guess I'd be a bit worried about cable. I mean, what if I found out all I had going for me was that I was fast?" Hanson paused, thought about it for a minute. "But still, it'd be nice to work without hearing that train coming at you all the time." ■

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