

THE LATE NIGHT INVENTOR

Tommy Habeeb

By J. Amodio

I remember it well. Very well. I had just started dating this guy who worked the door at the only Hollywood clubs that mattered. He basically just stood there and said, "NO," to crowds of desperate people. Normal people. He lifted the velvet ropes for celebrities and professional elitists only. If your name was scribbled across a piece of paper with a short list on it, there was a possibility you were in. I no longer frequent these horrid places, but at the time it was something I indulged in often. So this glorified bouncer, let's call him Ted. Ted came over one night to watch TV. Well, maybe not to watch TV, but the TV was on and I didn't have any cable. I was trying to convince myself that intellectuals don't need cable. The truth is, I do need cable – desperately. Without cable I had about four or five channels. That is not a lot of channels. I think there was a game on. I watched them toss the ball around while Ted took off his pants and climbed into bed. He moved in closer to me, but his

skin was cold from standing outside a club on Hollywood Boulevard for hours. "I don't like this team," he said. I didn't either. I flipped through the four or five channels and settled on a woman storming through a parking lot. The woman was not happy. She went up to a car and banged on the glass. The man inside was sweating. He looked up at the cameras filming, then at the crazed woman pounding, then at the woman in the passenger seat. He made sure the door was locked.

"I know you have a girlfriend," I said passively. He said nothing. He stopped breathing. Ted looked out my bedroom window and then at the door.

"Do you know her?"

"No."

"Who told you?"

"It doesn't matter. But I'll never trust you." And I never did.

The show was appropriately called *Cheaters*. I haven't watched it since that time with Ted, but it's what reminds me of him. He went on to marry the girlfriend that he was cheating on with me, and I wish them well. But the truth is there. People are not good to each other. Everyday someone falls out of love and into love with someone else. Someone will get hurt. Someone will grow blind with rage. Drama will ensue. Put a camera in front of them, get some lights and microphones on them and let the story tell itself. This is what Tommy Habeeb, the producer of *Cheaters* did.

A mutual friend introduced Tommy to a lawyer named Bobby Goldstein. Goldstein had an idea for a show called *Cheaters*. The idea was to find people in relationships and have them confront each other live on TV after following and investigating the suspected cheater. Then they would confront them live on camera. Goldstein had an outline too. He handed it over to Tommy at a lunch meeting. Tommy looked at it and said, "This is the craziest thing I've ever seen. Give me two years and I'll have it on the air." Within two years he built a pilot, a show, and a series and had it on TV. He even hosted the first one hundred episodes.

This was back in 1998. They rolled the show out in 2000. People were shocked. Jaws dropped. Back then there was no Tila Tequila on MTV. The only reality TV out there was *Survivor* and the *Real World*. *Star Magazine* called and did a two page spread, and people read it. Tommy was flying across the country to do press. He was on the *Today* show one day and on FOX the next. But when they needed distribution, all the stations said the show was too risky. They didn't want to take a chance. "I actually went to TV stations and shook the station managers hands and said, 'Please

"This is Stag. It's pretty much the next transition from Cheaters. It takes Cheaters to the next level."

give us a shot.' A few of them got on board with us and the ratings went through the roof. The rest of them regretted their judgment." When Tommy first pitched the show to KTLA, the general manager said he couldn't touch it with a ten foot pole. KCAL took a risk and put it on the air. The numbers were huge. Three years later KTLA noticed the success of Cheaters – they had a change of heart.

People originally questioned the morality of the show, but Tommy sleeps fine at night. His standpoint is that he was documenting what people were doing. For him, it was an expose show. When he started meeting and interviewing possible candidates for Cheaters, it ripped his heart out. It made him stronger and even more passionate about their vision. In the end, he received tens of thousands of emails from people expressing their thanks. One of the nuns from Tommy's church ap-

audience and demographic, but it's edgier. The cameras follow a couple headed down the aisle. One of them goes on a bachelor or bachelorette party. The rules are laid out the day before:

1. Don't touch the strippers.
2. No kissing, and on and on.

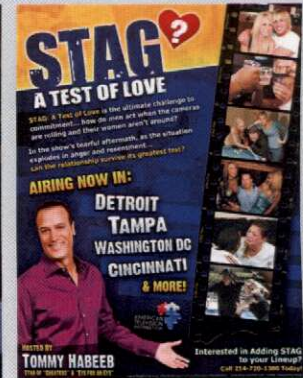
Hours later they show the tape from the party to the other half of the couple. One bachelor takes a number from a girl at the bar, another actually cheats and tells his fiancé that he was doing "research" for sex tips. Basically, every rule is broken and the colliding confrontation ensues. The show is Stag: A Test of Love.

There's more to Tommy than just late night TV. In Dallas Tommy was pushing his six month old son's stroller through the Texas heat. The kid was thirsty. There was no baby bottle. They had left it standing on

most enviable automobiles in the world, while providing an exclusive glance into the lives of their affluent owners.

Tommy recently traveled to Kaliningrad, Russia to co-host the 14th annual Mrs. World competition with Florence Henderson. This international production, which promotes the inherent beauty found within all women, invites married contestants, regardless of age to participate. This year, thirty-four countries were represented. The two-hour television special will be distributed globally through Tommy's own company, American Television Distribution.

There is no limit to what Tommy Habeeb can do when handed over the reigns to produce, host, or even invent. He possesses a vision unseen by most men, and a rare sensibility that enables him to provide distinct insight into the human condition.



proached him and said they did the same thing Tommy was doing on Cheaters, just a little differently.

We're at our own lunch meeting. Tommy Habeeb hands me a DVD. "This is Stag. It's pretty much the next transition from Cheaters. It takes Cheaters to the next level. We push the envelope with this show as well." Stag is now entering its fourth year on the air. It has been televised on IN Demand this year, Tommy started syndicating it on broadcast television stations across the country. The stations are now pairing the show with Cheaters episodes back to back. It's geared towards the same

the kitchen table. Tommy had his own bottle of water and tried to give it to his son. For children that age, it is impossible to sip. The water spilled everywhere except down the baby's throat. "I thought there had to be a better way. So I went home and started cutting things up and came up with the nipple adapter." It's now sold in 7-Eleven and Target stores. Tommy Habeeb is also the producer of Billionaires Car Club, an internationally syndicated show hosted by Andrew Firestone, the handsome heir to the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company. Billionaires Car Club is a one-hour television series that exhibits the

