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Film lifts lid on Austria's secretive Glock pistol empire

From Hollywood to hip hop, it's the weapon that is wielded by cops and outlaws alike. The Glock pistol has achieved global cult status but the business is still shrouded in mystery in its native Austria. A new documentary about the Glock, titled "Weapon of Choice", says that since it was invented in the early 1980s by a previously unknown Austrian engineer called Gaston Glock, the brand has been the object of a "cult of secrecy".

Directors Fritz Ofner and Eva Hausberger have tried to shed some light on the company, whose 89-year-old founder has always shunned publicity. "Hundreds of press articles (on Glock) have appeared in Austria but they're almost all about the company's charitable activities or society events," Ofner told AFP. That could be because the firm is not reticent about taking action in the courts against those it deems to have unfairly damaged its reputation.

Ofner said the filmmakers were threatened with legal action when the documentary was in its early stages, followed by a letter from the company's lawyers once it was finished, "asking for a list of all the people we had worked with on the film". That "sword of Damocles" meant a year's delay to the release date, said Ofner.

'Steve Jobs' of the pistol

The strict secrecy around the Glock empire is of a piece with the character and background of

its mould-breaking founder, said Ofner. In the early 1980s Gaston Glock was running a business making knives and curtain rods when he decided to answer a call for tenders put out by the Austrian army, which wanted to update its pistols. He devised a firearm that revolutionized the field: made largely of non-metal components, "lighter, easier to take apart, more reliable, able to carry more bullets" than other brands. "You can really compare Glock—who had no experience at all in firearms—to Steve Jobs who invented the first Apple product in his garage," says Ofner.

Once the contract with the Austrian army was in the bag, the company's worth soared when it entered the American and then the global market, being adopted by police, gangsters and even jihadists. Between 2014 and 2017, the company's worth is estimated to have risen by almost 50 percent to 464 million euros (\$538 million). It employs some 1,325 people in four production sites, including at its headquarters in the town of Deutsch-Wagram, 20 kilometers (12 miles) outside Vienna.

American pop culture in particular has helped Glock attain its iconic status. "It's a new weapon which coincided with a new music: some hip hop and gangsta rap artists immediately adopted this minimalist black object, which fitted so well with their aesthetic," Ofner said. And as luck would have it, Gaston Glock's surname offers ample rhymes: lock, pop, cop, shock, drop...

"At the end of the 1990s, Glock was the most

mentioned brand in the American Top 50," according to Ofner. As for security forces, the Glock is also used by most US police forces as well as the US, Iraqi and Norwegian armies.

Larger-than-life characters

The film adds to the air of intrigue surrounding the firm with interviews with two notorious ex-associates of the company—the only ones who would talk to the filmmakers. Gaston Glock's former right-hand man in the United States, Paul Jannuzzo, was jailed for fraud before being released in 2013 when the conviction was quashed under the statute of limitations. Jannuzzo said he was the victim of a vendetta on the part of his old employer.

The filmmakers also travelled to a Luxembourg prison to interview Charles Ewert—also known as "Panama Charly"—who is currently serving a 20-year sentence for attempting to have Glock killed in 1999 after they fell out over financial disagreements. Faced with a cast of such larger-than-life characters, the directors don't even attempt to get into the story of Glock's ex-wife Helga, with whom he has been embroiled in a legal battle for years over the terms of their divorce.

Now remarried to a woman 50 years his junior, the billionaire has lately been investing in horse-racing, opening a vast equestrian complex in southern Austria. The Glock Horse Performance Center plays host both to races and red-carpet



events graced by the likes of Robbie Williams and Naomi Campbell. According to an investigation carried out jointly by the Dossier website and Austria's Der Standard newspaper—and which was published to coincide with the film's release—three government ministers from the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) have been hosted at the Center as guests of the Glocks. —AFP

Cinematographer and director Fritz Ofner, creator of a documentary movie Weapon of Choice with Eva Hausberger, poses in front of the Film Casino movie theater in Vienna, Austria on October. — AFP



(From left) Photo shows Seinfeld and Friends.

Once kings of TV, US broadcast networks face reckoning

They once produced must-see television shows like "Seinfeld," "ER" and "Friends" but America's broadcast networks are facing a major crisis, as more and more viewers cut the cord in search of innovative content elsewhere. Some are even wondering if there is a future for scripted television at ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox, which were roundly snubbed in major categories at last month's Emmy Awards. NBC came away with 16 statuettes, half of them for sketch comedy juggernaut "Saturday Night Live," and nearly all of them in technical categories. Fox got three, CBS two and ABC a lonely award.

By comparison, premium cable network HBO got 23, as did streaming giant Netflix. "It is sad to say, but if the networks don't change the way they do business, chances are they won't be around five to 10 years from now," Martie Cook, a writer and producer who also teaches at Emerson College in Boston, told AFP. America's traditional networks basically invented the concept of the television series, and dominated the format for 40 years—from the 1950s to the end of the 1990s. Shows like "Dallas," "Star Trek" and "M*A*S*H" are part of television history. But the pioneers have been trumped, with basic cable (AMC), premium cable (HBO, Showtime) and streaming services (Netflix, Amazon, Hulu) churning out top quality programming with major stars and huge budgets—that wins major awards. At the Emmys and the Golden Globes in recent years, only a handful of network shows were even nominated. "They have to start taking more risks and stop pumping out the same kind of shows," said Cook. "They have to realize that what has worked in the past no longer works in the present... and what no longer works in the present surely won't work in the future."

Snobbery or too much good TV?

Some industry experts say the demise of the broadcast networks is simply a question of snobbery. "Entertainment-industry awards honor the productions they feel make them look good, not the ones the audience likes best," Rich Heldenfels, a veteran pop culture writer, said in a column for the Tribune Media Service. And indeed, if the networks are not raking in awards, they are snaring millions of viewers—for scripted series, reality shows and sports programming. On CBS, comedy "The Big Bang Theory" and crime drama "NCIS" each earned more than 12 million viewers during the week of October 1.

Over at NBC, singing competition "The Voice" earns roughly 10 million viewers twice a week. At HBO and Netflix, most shows, even the critical darlings, cannot boast of such viewership. "The audience now has so many more options," says Amanda Lotz, a professor of communications and screen arts at the University of Michigan. "Going forward, it requires them to recognize what they can do well as opposed to what a streaming service can do well."

'Do something different'

In recent months, some of network TV's biggest names—notably, "Grey's Anatomy" and "Scandal" guru Shonda Rhimes, and CBS comedy creator Chuck Lorre ("The Big Bang Theory") — have made huge production deals with Netflix. While Lorre's deal is not exclusive, Rhimes definitely

seems to be shifting her allegiance from ABC. Of course, the networks still create popular shows that do well.

NBC's "This Is Us" has earned critical praise and won multiple Emmys for acting in recent years, while Fox's music drama "Empire" was must-watch TV for younger viewers when it started in 2015. But most of the successful network shows are long-running series like "Big Bang," now in its last season, or crime procedurals popular with older viewers, like "NCIS." "They can still capture baby boomers and up with crime shows and family comedies, because those folks grew up on network television, so it feels familiar," says Cook.

"But to younger generations—the age range the networks most want to attract—network television is not something they race to. For many, if not most, it's not even on their radar screens." Lotz says the departures of big-name creators such as Rhimes are not necessarily a death blow for the networks. "It's still the case that producing for a broadcast network is in general far more lucrative," she told AFP. "So there still will be creative talent available for the broadcast networks as long as their pay rates are comparable or superior." After all, while they trail Netflix, which invested \$8 billion in content for 2018, traditional networks are still pouring \$3-4 billion a year into their content budget—and scripted series are only a part of that.—AFP

Japanese TV hit 'Train Man' finally cracks America

Hit Japanese series "Train Man" will be adapted for American audiences, its producers said Tuesday, reversing a historic trend that has almost always gone in the opposite direction. The half-hour musical series based on a true story about a nerdy young man who asks for dating advice on an online comic book chatroom, is a cultural phenomenon in Japan. His agonizing over how to talk to a girl he sees on a train has spurred a novel, a manga and a feature film as well as the hugely successful TV series.

Known as "Densha Otoko" in Japan, the American version of "Train Man" will be directed by Adam Shankman of "Hairspray" fame, its producers said at MIPCOM, the world's biggest entertainment showcase at Cannes on the French Riviera. It is the first time in its 50-year history that Fuji Television, one of the country's biggest networks, has sold a show to the US market. Its managing director Toru Ota said: "No words can express how thrilled I am that the Hollywood remake of our megahit drama has begun. 'Train Man' may have depicted our 'otaku', or anime cartoon nerd, in a comical way but audiences found him authentic and embraced him."

The US version of the series will be written by Phil Rosenthal and Tucker Cawley, who wrote the series "Everybody Loves Raymond". Executive producer Michael Connolly of Vertigo Entertainment said the show was "really ahead of its time in the way it used a social media platform to tell a Cyrano story." Meanwhile, British actor Joseph Fiennes announced earlier that he is in talks to make a new TV series drawn from "Cyrano de Bergerac", Edmond Rostand's classic play.—AFP

Ask WW1 questions before it's too late, director Peter Jackson says

Director Peter Jackson premiered his World War One documentary "They Shall Not Grow Old" on Tuesday, urging those whose family fought in the conflict to talk to their elderly relatives with knowledge of it before it is too late. The Oscar-winner, known for "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Hobbit" movies, presented his edit of footage from the "Great War" at the BFI London Film Festival, where he was joined by Britain's Prince William on the red carpet.

The film takes the viewer to the frontlines, with archive video footage from the trenches brought to 3D life by colourists and actors voicing conversations between soldiers there, which were deciphered by forensic lip-readers. "There's nobody alive that fought in the First World War but some people have probably got grandparents that their parents were in the First World War so now is the last time that people can ask questions in their family," Jackson told Reuters. "If you have any grandparents that their parents were in the First World War start to ask them questions because at some point in the future that opportunity won't be there. It'll be very hard to find out anything."

An estimated 17 million people were killed in the war, many of them on the battlegrounds in northern France and Belgium. Around 1 million of those who died were from Britain and its then-empire. Voiced by former soldiers, "They Shall Not Grow Old" shows how the men, some of them young teenagers, trained for fighting and survived or perished in the fighting. "What stood out for me once we saw the footage was that the men in the pictures were



Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge (left) shakes hands with New Zealand film maker Peter Jackson as he attends the world premiere of Peter Jackson's film "They Shall Not Grow Old" during the BFI London Film Festival in London.—FP

exactly like us," Jackson, whose grandfather fought in the conflict, said.

Supporting the director at the film's world premiere was actor Dominic Monaghan, who starred in "The Lord of the Rings" and visited Jackson in his native New Zealand when he was working on "They Shall Not Grow Old". "I think Pete was struck more than anything else by the youth of the people that were in the war," Monaghan said. The "Lost" actor is set to make an appearance in "Star Wars Episode IX", the last film in the latest trilogy of the sci-fi saga. Asked if he could reveal anything about the movie due for release next year, he said: "Nothing, I'll get in trouble." — Reuters

Roseanne Barr character killed off in overdose, new show reveals

Roseanne Barr's eponymous character has been killed off by an opioid overdose, the first episode of the replacement sitcom revealed Tuesday, after the actress was fired for a racist tweet. The new ABC show "The Conners" still centers around a straight-talking working class American family struggling to make ends meet. But Barr's character has been written out, dead from an overdose of painkillers she took for a knee injury. Barr's original show was abruptly axed in May after she went on a Twitter rant in which she compared Valerie Jarrett, a black former advisor to president Barack Obama, to an ape.

The actress apologized but it was in vain. She tried to justify herself saying she had written the tweet while under the influence of the sleep-inducing medicine Ambien. Barr linked to a statement via her official Twitter account Tuesday evening which said the method of her character's death "lent an unnecessary grim and morbid dimension to an otherwise happy family show". "After repeated and heartfelt apologies, the network was unwilling to look past a regrettable mistake, thereby denying the twin American values of both repentance and forgiveness," the statement added.

She also tweeted separately: "I ain't dead, b***es!!!!" ABC had initially canceled the show altogether but then came up with the idea of doing it without Barr. Her husband is still played by John Goodman and the action starts



In this file photo actress/executive producer Roseanne Barr attends The Roseanne Series Premiere at Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, California.

three weeks after her funeral. Barr in real life and on the show is a supporter of President Donald Trump. Trump publicly weighed in on the cancellation of Barr's show but did not condemn her tweet. The first episode addresses the opioid crisis in America. In 2016 a total of 42,249 people died of overdoses, according to the Centers for Disease Control. — AFP



In this file photo (from left to right) Executive producer Whitney Cummings, actors Michael Fishman, John Goodman, Jayden Rey, Roseanne Barr, Sara Gilbert, Sarah Chalke and Emma Kenney attend The Roseanne Series Premiere at the Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, California. — AFP photos