

Tuesday, June 18, 2019

*Book & Film*  
**GLOBE**



# Sex Sells

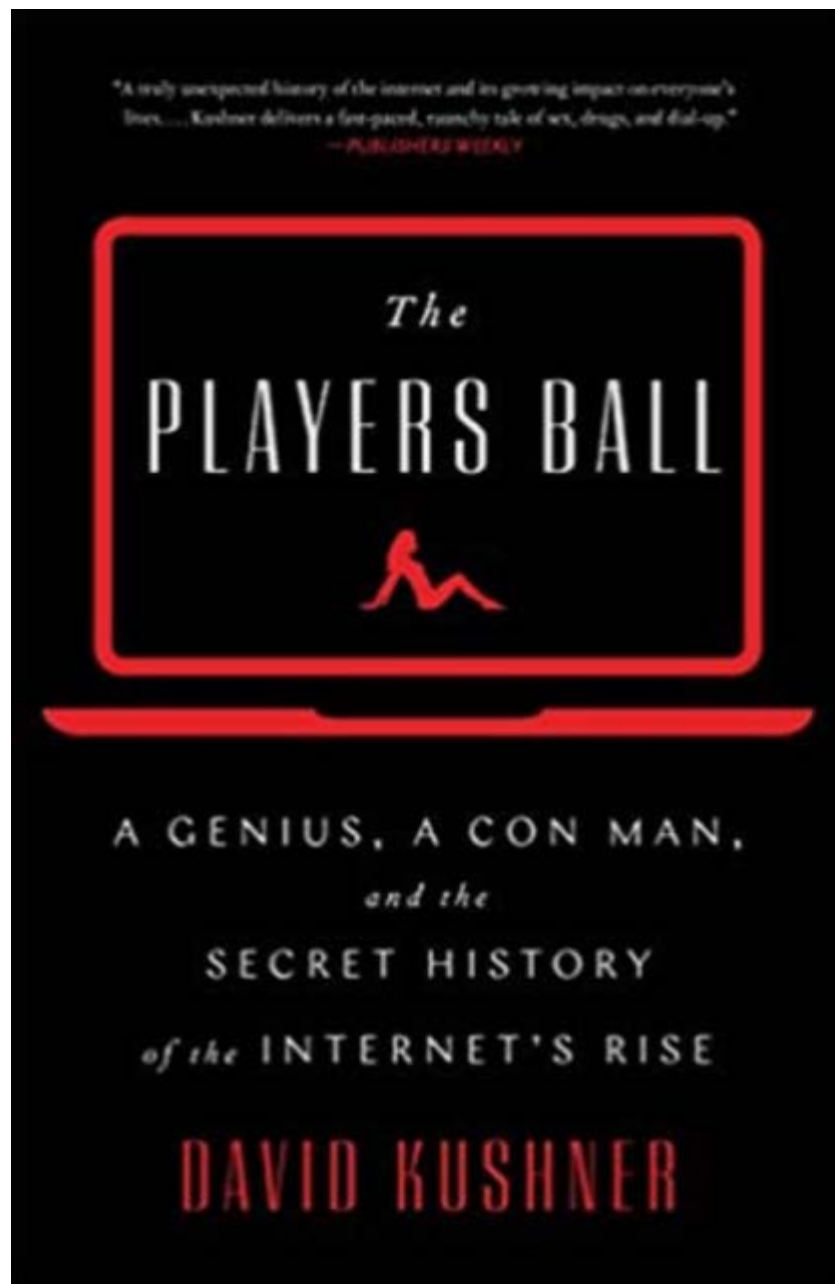
## *How the Creator of Match.com Found His Soul Mate in a Con Artist*

April 8, 2019      Michael Giltz

You only need to be right once. During the very early days of the Internet—before it was even called the Internet—Gary Kremen, the protagonist of the new book *The Player's Ball*—was right that communicating online was a new frontier. He loved the nuts and bolts of computers, the ones and the zeros, the joy of soldering parts together to build a motherboard, the coding, the community of fellow nerds and the orange glow of those early monitors.

Like a lot of obsessive, socially awkward guys, he found a home on the Internet. Thank god, since in the real world he couldn't get a date to save his life. That's when Kremen was right again. People want to connect, but blind dates are scary and personal ads misleading or too generic. Who can be charming and personal in just 75 words?

In a flash, he thought of *Match.com*. People would post their real photos; they could share more of their personalities with longer profiles or even by chatting online in a safe, anonymous environment. Heck, a computer program could give you a quiz and then find your soul mate for you! It worked, of course, and Kremen shot to fame as the guy who created *Match.com*. But he still longed for romance.



Then he was right *again*, the bastard. Kremen predicted domain names would be as valuable as owning the orange properties in a game of Monopoly. He snapped up tons of them, including Sex.com, and then got on with the business of building Match.com.

When Kremen pivoted back to Sex.com, he was shocked to discover some bastard claimed it as his property. That would be the con artist Stephen Michael Cohen, who lied the way Kremen compulsively and rudely told the truth. Cohen ran private parties for swingers, relished crime, posed as a lawyer, and did time in prison.

Cohen had realized some putz owned Sex.com and wasn't doing anything with it. So he relieved the guy of the domain name by conning the company that served as a clearing house for online rights. Cohen then promptly made his own contribution to the Internet. Cohen didn't sell content, he exploited banner ads. He just sold ad space to all the sleazy companies peddling sex in one way or another and he made a fortune doing it. Fast.

Kremen sued. Cohen counter-sued. This launched a nutty, years-long battle, forcing the courts to acknowledge

domain names like Match.com and Sex.com as property, just like real estate. Their battle also upended the lives of Kremen and Cohen, again and again.

Peas in a pod, they haunt each other like the doppelgangers in the Jordan Peele film *Us*. You might say Kremen is the respectable one living above ground, but he gets addicted to meth, ends up in a roach-infested flophouse, and dates an adult film star. She's a smart cookie, so that time he did something right.

Cohen is the bad guy from the underground, but he clearly loves his wife and family, makes a lot of legitimate money for himself and others, and yet still manages to piss off pretty much everyone in the world of porn. When you're making people a lot of money and they *still* hate your guts, you must really be a pain in the ass.

It's not like the adult film industry will appreciate Kremen more. When he wrests Sex.com out of the hands of Cohen, our hero doesn't plan to sit back and rake in big bucks or sell it off for tens of millions of dollars. No, he wants to take Sex.com, clean it up, and make it respectable. That's like snapping up religion.com or Jesus.com so you can sell people on atheism, except a thousand times stupider.

To the astonishment of those around them, these two mortal enemies won't leave each other alone. Even when Cohen is on the lam in Mexico, he calls Kremen on the phone all the time. One minute they're cursing at each other; the next they're swapping ideas or cooing over the latest computer gear.



*Author David Kushner*

Author David Kushner covers this tale in comprehensive fashion, to say the least. By the end, it's just exhausting as they prank each other, damn each other, and swap out lawyers like undershirts over and over again. You get bored of their cat-and-mouse game, just as everyone else in their life gets sick of it as well. Just kiss already, you want to say to these straight dudes who can't quit each other.

The legal precedent on domain names was hugely important. Yet Kushner sticks with the human drama rather than what proves a perfunctory, if profound court decision. So all we're left with is a match made in hell—two guys who got everything right, except their own lives.

**(Simon & Schuster; April 9, 2019)**

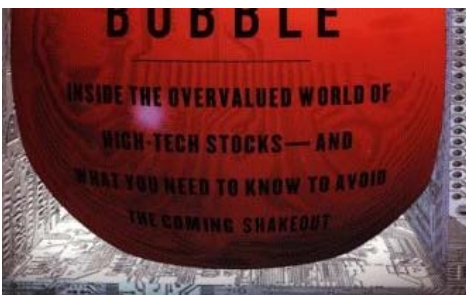
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## Michael Giltz

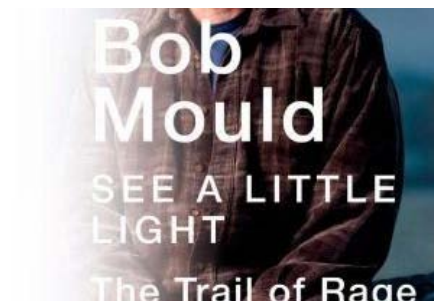
Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment, politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for the New York Post, New York Daily News, New York Magazine, The Advocate, Out, Huffington Post, Premiere Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, BookFilter, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times. He co-hosts the long-running podcast Showbiz Sandbox.

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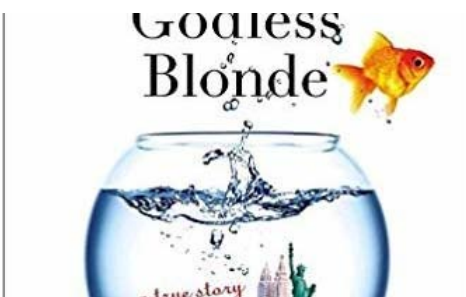
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