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BOOT CAMP

with the
Texas Rollergirls

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Friday, December 1st, 2006.
12:37p.m.

I'm in the middle seat of what we fondly call Crash McQueen's Party Van. Crash, Smack Bauer, and I, along with our referee Willie Hall-Nelson, have just left Nacogdoches, Texas for Austin, the birthplace

of modern day flat track roller derby. We've signed up for boot camp with the Texas Rollergirls, widely regarded as the most kick ass league in the nation. For the next three days, we're going to be skating, training, eating, sleeping, and breathing roller derby, in the hopes that the skills we learn, and the bruises we earn, will help our own fledging league grow and thrive. As we barrel towards the capital of Texas at speeds well above the legal limit, (they don't call her Crash McQueen for nothing), we talk about the things we hope to learn and the skaters we hope to meet. I try taking a nap, but the Texas sun outside is too bright, and my stomach is in a knot.

4:27p.m.

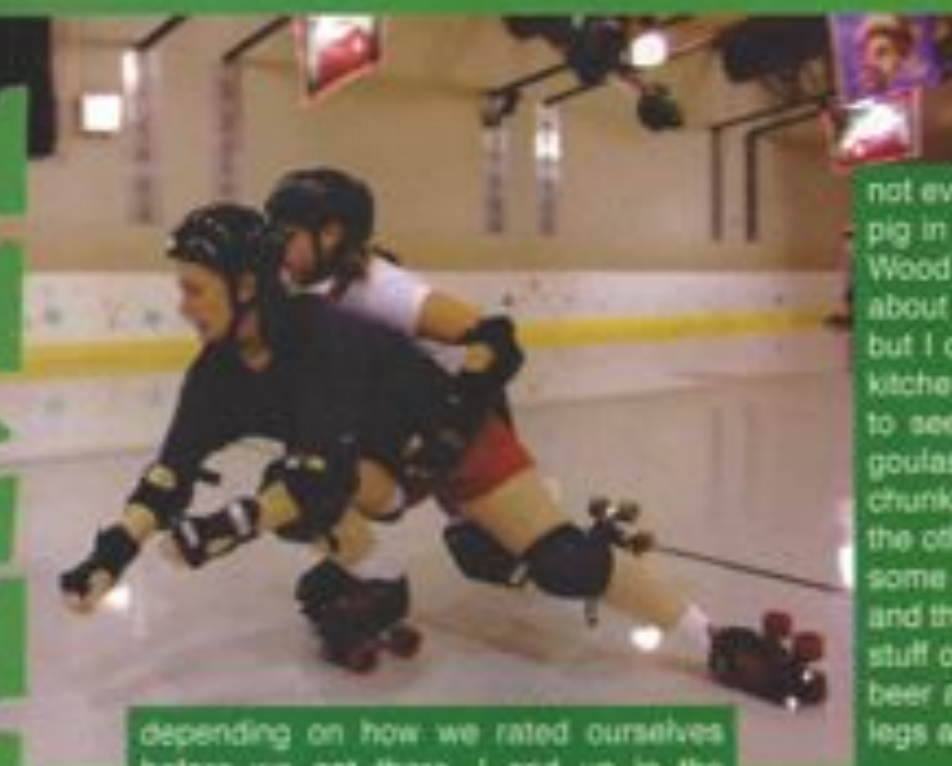
We arrive in Austin and get lost three times before finally finding the La Quinta Inn, Rainbow Fright and No Merci, along with our other referee, Max Wood, have already checked in and are itching to take off for Playland. All seven of us pile into the Party Van, sitting on seats and perched on bags full of gear and skates. We have to register between 5 and 6 o'clock, and getting from the La Quinta to Playland in the middle of rush hour is no easy task. Somehow we make it to Playland in one piece and register at the stroke of six.

I can tell right away who the Texas Rollergirls are,

They're the only ones who look calm. With welcoming grins, they simultaneously hand us a welcome bag full of t-shirts and agendas, while barking at us to gear up and hit the floor. I didn't know we would be skating on our first night, and my muscles are tight after the five-hour drive. I can't complain, though, other leagues traveled as long as twelve hours to be here and are hurting a lot worse than me. I shut my mouth and skate a few warm-up laps before doing stretches with the other girls.

The Texas Rollergirls don't waste any time getting to work on us. They quickly break us up into two groups.





depending on how we rated ourselves before we got there. I end up in the advanced group, the Mods, and for a moment I wonder if maybe I overestimated my own abilities. There's no time for second guessing, though. We do the snake, we practice toe-stops, we learn a new move called shoot the duck and do it so many times that I fall over, my duck dead. By the time the hour is up, I'm sweaty, exhausted, already aching, and all too happy to tear off my skates and collapse on the side of the rink. If this is what registration feels like, I don't know if I want to stay for the rest of the weekend!

6:17p.m.

After cleaning up at the La Quinta, the Nacogdoches Rollergirls find ourselves heading to Derringer's home for a Hungarian dinner party and skate maintenance session. Hosting a party for the entire roller derby boot camp is no easy feat; skaters and referees from nine different leagues have flooded Austin for the weekend, and I wonder how Derringer will possibly feed us all. As soon as I walk into her backyard, I have my answer. Derringer, who rumor has it is

not even Hungarian, is roasting a whole pig in a shallow pit. No Merci and Max Wood immediately start telling stories about the times they have roasted pigs, but I don't want to hear it. I go into the kitchen and am relieved beyond belief to see that there is also a vegetarian goulash on the table, complete with chunks of savory tofu. I leave the pig to the other skaters and hunker down with some girls from the Dallas Derby Devils and the Rocky Mountain Rollergirls. We stuff our faces with hot food and cheap beer and complain about how sore our legs are.

I don't know if I'll find out anything new from the skate maintenance demonstration, but I'm eager for the chance to sit down, so Rainbow Fright, Smack Bauer, and I pull out our skates, balance our beers, and see what we can learn about bearings and wheels. Beside us are Keltic Kami Kaze and Ali Goney, both of the Dallas Derby Devils. Dallas has been around for a few seasons, but the Nacogdoches Rollergirls are still just starting out. We talk about having Keltic and Ali coming down for a visit and helping to train some our girls for a day. Keltic Kami Kaze gives Smack Bauer her card and tells us to keep in touch.

When I first found out about this whole boot camp thing, (three days before the deadline to register), my first thought was not a road trip to Austin, or the chance to learn new drills, or even the opportunity to improve my own skating techniques. What I was most excited about was the fact that I was going to spend three days holed up with over fifty women who love roller derby. Women who have been doing it longer



than me, better than me, and with more grace and talent than I could ever hope to possess. Yes, roller derby is a tough sport, full of bone-shattering injuries, merciless hits, and smack talking like you ain't ever heard before, but it's also a sisterhood, a warped sorority of skates and scabs. Go to any big city, (and even some small towns, like Nacogdoches), and you'll find your sisters, working, organizing, practicing, and pulling together a league of women to join the roller revolution. And now we're in Austin together, still hard at work, still trying to make leagues bigger, better, stronger. It fills me up with a heady kind of passion. I would go outside for a breath of fresh air but remember the pig, still roasting, and stay where I am.

Saturday, December 2nd, 2006
8:27a.m.

The Big Easy Rollergirls, fresh out of New Orleans, are also staying at the La Quinta. We have breakfast with them in the lobby of the hotel. They seem like nice girls, and if I wasn't so exhausted from yesterday I would attempt to talk to them more. As it stands, the act of getting out of bed was hard enough, so I shove a bagel down my throat and cut my losses.

We're due at the Millennium Youth Entertainment Complex at 9:00a.m. The Millennium boasts the largest indoor roller rink in Central Texas, and with our numbers we'll be taking advantage of every last square foot.

Yesterday our referees, Willie Hall-Nelson and Max Wood, skated and did drills with us. Today, they are whisked away as soon as we arrive to a separate area, where they will presumably be learning all the finer points of roller derby rules and regulations. In the meantime, we rollergirls are skating slow, easy laps, trying to ease into the day before the real work starts.

The next three hours are non-stop action. We practice jumping over cones, hitting, pushing, whips, and checks. We get into pairs and lean on each other, then push each other, then hit each other. There are falling drills, where we are instructed on how to get up as quickly and with as little effort as possible. Falling sucks, a Texas Rollergirl tells us, not because it hurts, but because having to get up all the time is exhausting.

For whips, I pair up with Saba Taj of the Northwest Arkansas Rollergirls. Lithe and sturdy, with short brown hair and a friendly smile, Saba Taj proves to be a powerhouse at whips, sending me around turns with

unexpected force. Later, we practice takedowns, and I immediately become very, very nervous.

Takedowns, the Texas Rollergirls explain to us, are not something everyone will – or wants to – do. In fact, as roller derby gains legitimacy, it's relying less on spectacle and more on sport. However, seeing as the occasional fight is inevitable, especially when a bunch of headstrong, passionate women are playing a full contact sport, it's important to know how to fight safely. They tell us to find a partner and take turns pulling each other to the ground. I feel a tap on my shoulder and turn around to see Death by Chocolate from the Houston Roller Derby grinning at me.

DBC is one of my favorite skaters. Nacogdoches likes to think of Houston as our big sister league, and they have been nothing but supportive, giving us shout outs when we go to their bouts, and forming friendships with some of our skaters. DBC is one of their coolest skaters, and not just because she sits on top of me during the takedown drill, grabs my helmet, and repeatedly slams my head into the floor of the rink. After the drill we get a



water break. No Merci and Crash eye me jealously, both wishing DBC had whooped their asses instead of mine. I smile at all six of them and take a long drink of water.

12:30p.m.

After a long morning of skating, the Texas Rollergirls are treating us to lunch at Wahoo's, home of the best black beans I've ever eaten in my entire life. Smack Bauer tips her head back and sighs. "We are so deprived of good food in Nacogdoches," she laments, and it's the truth. Chain restaurants and Tex-Mex don't hold a candle to Wahoo's special sauce.

As soon as our plates are clean, we break up into smaller groups and sit tight. Some of the Texas Rollergirls have volunteered to give us

crash courses on a variety of vital subjects. Hydra, president of WFTDA, tells us how the national organization operates. We learn the ins and outs of production, how to get sponsorship, and the best kinds of merchandise to invest in. My favorite presentation is by Melicious, queen of PR and soon-to-be celebrated author. As an aspiring author myself, just being next to someone with a book deal is unnerving. The fact that she also plays roller derby is more than I can handle. When the Q&A sessions end, I corner her and babble something about how much I'm looking forward to reading her book. She thanks me and tells me to keep in

touch. I am officially in heaven.

7:00p.m.

After nearly two hours of doing land drills outside the DPS, a short shower, and one quick trip through a drive thru, we're back at Playland, but this time we're wearing shoes and drinking beers. This year, the Texas Rollergirls have decided to have boot camp the same weekend as their own bout against the all-star team from Tucson. The Texexecutioners and the Saddletamps are the first and second ranked leagues in the nation, respectively. They've bouted before, and it's always been close. I love a good bout, but now that I actually know some of the





women skating tonight, I'm extra excited to see what my latest idols can do.

I've been to roller derby bouts before, having made the Texas rounds - Houston, East Texas, San Antonio - but the bout between Austin and Tucson is a whole new game. I'm blown away by the way these women own the track. The two teams are equally matched, trading the lead jam for jam, and I can't help but cheer for the Executioners; I'm afraid what they'll do to us in our last day at boot camp otherwise. When the final period ends, the crowd goes crazy... It's a tied score! We're

going into sudden death overtime; a two-minute jam to the end. "Texas, Texas, Kill Kill Kill!" The crowd is wild, but it's all for naught. When two minutes are up and the smoke clears, the score is Texas: 60, Tucson: 62.

The only appropriate course of action is to drown our sorrows at the after party. Which we do, promptly.

Sunday, December 04, 2006
8:08a.m.

When I skate out on to the Playland floor the next morning, my first thought is that this is the same surface that held history last night. My second thought is that I have

soresly underestimated the previous day's land drills, pun intended. After warm-ups and stretches, the ladies of the Texas Rollergirls, still chipper even after a brutal bout and a heart breaking loss, inform us that we are going to spend the next five hours scrimmaging.

We split into two groups, and those two groups split into two teams each. Two teams will skate ten jams, then rest while the next group skates ten jams. And so on and so on until time runs out or we die right there on the floor, whichever comes first.



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2007 BOUT SCHEDULE

February 11 (vs. Washington City Ruff Rollers)	AWAY
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April 21	HOME
May 20 (vs. River City Rollergirls)	AWAY
June 2	HOME
July 21 (vs. Coal City Rollers)	HOME
August 18 (vs. NJ Dirty Devils)	AWAY
September 8	HOME
October 13	HOME
November 10 (Season Championship)	HOME

Visit www.DutchlandRollers.com for more information!

As a league, the Nacogdoches Rollergirls have barely scratched the surface of scrimmaging, but make a silent pact not to reveal our inexperience. Rainbow Fight and Crash McQueen are in first group, while I, Smack Bauer and No Merci are in the second. Willie Half-Nelson and Max Wood are in the middle, trying out all their new referee knowledge.

The next five hours are a blur. I know that Rainbow Fright seems to be skating almost every jam, which astounds me. I know that each of us gets lead jammer at least once, a combination of luck and adrenaline. I know that when I'm not skating, I don't dare sit down, for fear that my muscles will give up, and I'll be stuck on the floor. And when it's all over and we emerge from Playland into the crisp Austin afternoon, the sun valiantly trying to warm our tired limbs and weary bones, I know that this weekend, this experience, is one that I will never forget.

