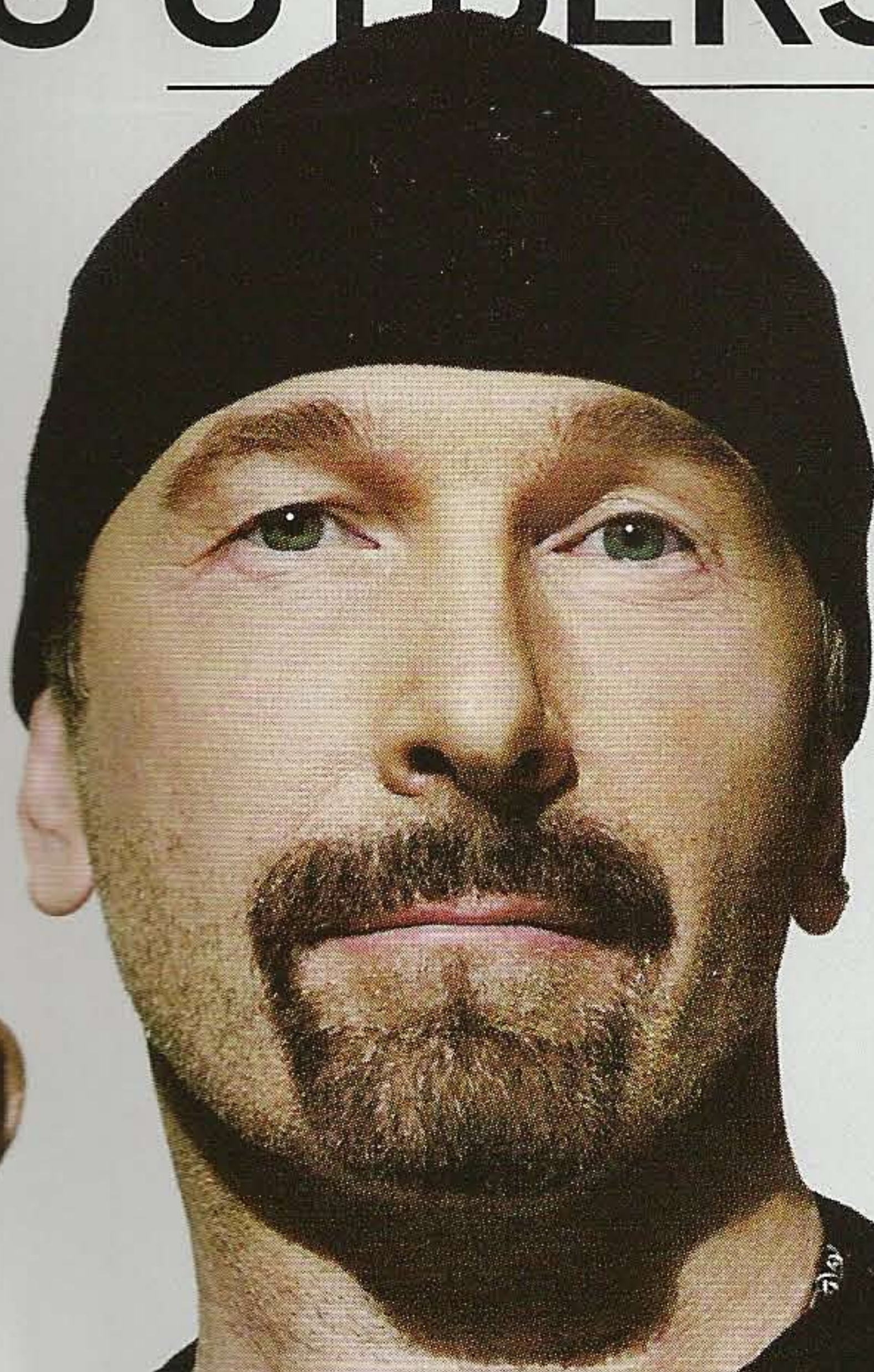


**SPECIAL
REPORT**

ARE YOU BEING CYBERSTALKED?

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WHAT MAKES U2 RUN?

BAT FOR LASHES

THE BIRD AND THE BEE

DEPECHE MODE

RAMONESMANIA!

**...AND THE LIVES AND
LUSTS OF LEMMY**

BY STEVE KANDELL

PHOTOS BY TAKAY

APRIL 2009

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FOR THE
NEW BREED
OF TEENAGE
MICROCELEBS,
EXPOSURE
TO HACKERS
AND
PREDATORS
IS THE
PRICE TO
PAY FOR
ONLINE FAME.
BUT AS ONE
ATTACKER
LEARNED,
AMOR HILTON
IS NOT
GONNA TAKE
IT LYING
DOWN.

BY
DAVID
KUSHNER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
DANIELLE
LEVITT

CRISIS



Amor Hilton,
photographed for SPIN
in Los Angeles,
February 3, 2009

IDENTITY



17-year-old looked half-anime, half-emo. Maybe she'd buy another Hello Kitty purse for her collection, or some bright new nail polish to match her latest dye job. But mainly, like most kids in the San Fernando Valley, she was just going to the mall to hang out.

The Israel-born Hilton was used to being on her own. Growing up in the Valley, she never knew her father, and she bounced between living with her mom and her grandparents. Sometimes, she'd chum around with the other self-described "scene kids"—young punks who trolled Sunset Boulevard in tattoos, tight black pants, and piercings. Or she'd stay home, log on to her computer, flip on her webcam—and try to become a star.

Every Wednesday night, she hosted a live video show on Stickam, a burgeoning do-it-yourself social network. What distinguishes it from MySpace or Facebook is that Stickam lets its 3.5 million subscribers broadcast video in real time as viewers chime in via instant message. It's a place where Hilton and other like-minded extroverts could become their own reality stars, engaging in goofy, sometimes risqué confessionals. Kids talking to kids, without any pesky adults interfering—kinda like *Peanuts*. Or *Lord of the Flies*.

For Hilton, it seemed like the perfect platform when she first logged on in early 2007. As a little girl, she had dreamed of becoming an actress like her favorite, Hilary Duff, but the reality of auditions and compromises got her down. "It's so, like, boring waiting around all the time," she'd say in her Valley Girl-ese. Her mother was a part-time pinup model ("Like Bettie Page," Hilton says. "She's really hot!"), and Hilton craved the same kind of iconic fame. She scored a small role on *Hannah Montana* as a mean girl, but hated how pedestrian she appeared. "I had to sacrifice the way I wanted to look to do the job," she recalls.

On Stickam, though, she could be herself. With her pixieish charm and the bubbly appeal of a lovable bad girl, Hilton insinuated herself into

n Friday, December 28, 2007, Amor Hilton went to the Northridge mall near Los Angeles with two friends. Petite and spacey with wide blue eyes, cotton-candy-pink hair, and a silver nose ring, the

punky popular crowd. She'd preen on camera in American-flag short-shorts on a red shag rug or play drunken voice mails from admiring boys. She began dating and cohosting Stickam shows with an androgynous would-be model named John Hock. One time, she sat at her webcam as two guys soaked in a bubble bath behind her. "I want to get in!" she chirped, before stripping down to her black skivvies and joining them.

And people watched, making Hilton one of the most popular entertainers—or Cam Girls—on the site, racking up more than a quarter million viewers, a modest number relative to TV, but enough to make her a whale shark in this small pond. Hilton saw Stickam as her springboard, and launched her own site for other online pinups, Brutal Dolls. She began hiring other models to pose in Suicide Girl-like regalia. She even parlayed her notoriety into modeling gigs for Hot Topic.

Despite her casual air, she also knew that she was attracting no shortage of creeps. First there were the come-on e-mails. Then the hang-up callers. Once, she found broken doll parts spread out on top of her car. "It weirded me out," she says, "but I wasn't bothered by it." Hilton has a preternatural ability to compartmentalize, to separate her "real" self from the one online. Amor Hilton is not even her real name—Amor was a childhood nickname from her mom, and Hilton was what girls at school called her. They thought she was stuck-up.

When her pink Hello Kitty cellphone rang at the mall that December night around 8 p.m., she didn't flinch at what the caller said: "If you hang up, I'll shut off your phone." Whatever, she thought, and hung up. It rang seconds later. "I'm serious," he threatened. "I'm going to shut off your phone." Hilton laughed it off, and hung up again.

As she sat down in the food court, her friend's phone rang. It was Hock, sounding frazzled, asking for Hilton. Hock was visiting his mother in Phoenix. But just as he was about to leave for the Greyhound station to return to L.A., he got a MySpace message from Hilton telling him not to get on the bus because she was going to come pick him up. She just needed him to give her his mother's phone number and address.

Hock thought it was a weird request. But the message was from her account, so he sent the address and phone number along. Seconds later, a private caller rang his mom's phone. The young guy on the other end told Hock not to get on the bus—or else. Hock immediately hung up

and tried Hilton, then her friend. Hilton said she had never sent him the MySpace message. "Where are you?" Hock asked, frantically. "Are you at a computer? Your phone's not working." Hilton flipped open her phone.

It was dead.

ACCORDING TO HITWISE, A TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH FIRM,

social networks have grown 35 percent over the past three years—more than the proliferation of search engines, and shopping, entertainment, and porn sites.

For teens, the appeal of Stickam in particular is broader than simply keeping track of friends and colleagues; for the generation who grew up on reality TV and YouTube, Facebook and MySpace lack one of the most no-duh big ideas

GREATEST HITS

Because you can't spell "attention-starved" without S-T-A-R

By Abigail Everdell



JENNICAM

From 1996 to 2003, Jennifer Ringley's live feed was the real *Truman Show*, as she slept, ate, and, yep, that too on camera full time. It's been estimated that at its peak, JenniCam attracted 100 million visitors per week.

around: live video. While MySpace allows for video uploads on its MySpace TV section, putting live feeds on it or other sites is considered risky—particularly with heightened concerns over child safety online.

In February 2006, the Los Angeles-based Advanced Video Communications launched Stickam to let DIY webcam broadcasters embed video feeds right on homepages on sites such as Xanga, Friendster, and MySpace. Security was still an issue, but under this arrangement, it would fall on the social networks to do the monitoring. "We tried to have good password security," says Jake Gold, Stickam's chief technical officer, "and to tell users ways to keep safe."

For a short time, the service thrived on MySpace, before it was blocked from the site due to security concerns. To survive on its own, Stickam had to employ a self-policing community standard similar to the kind YouTube uses to keep out sex and violence. Stickam also limits membership to users over the age of 13, though it acknowledges the difficulty of enforcing the policy and provides parental controls to help adults keep tabs.

Keeping tabs of the kids who are making the shows, of course, is another story—especially when parents aren't watching. The horrific potential of this unsupervised frontier was realized last November, when 19-year-old Abraham Biggs broadcast himself overdosing on pills on the live video site Justin.tv. Viewers had egged him on.

The heart of the problem is that, as Gold says, "live feeds can't be taken down." Videos can only be banned after the fact, a task that grew more daunting as Stickam expanded from 200 live feeds to 50,000. In addition to relying on users to flag violations, Stickam now employs round-the-clock moderators to monitor the feeds—a system, the company says, that has proven successful.

Then the company had to deal with an unexpected consequence of pairing live teens with live cameras: celebrity.



AS ENTREPRENEURIAL TEENS BEGAN COMPETING ON STICKAM

to have the most-watched show, few were savvier than Hilton. "I admit to being a complete workaholic," she once blogged. "This is the business and/or industry that I was born in, raised in, grew up in, and will die in. Period."

While many Web-birthered microcelebs may dabble, Hilton was dogged in her pursuit of Tila Tequila-style fame, regardless of the consequences. "I was on from the time I woke up to the time I went to sleep," she says now, during a break in shooting at a makeshift studio in a small Woodland Hills apartment. Stickam may profit from its stars' traffic, but it largely stays out of the way, so the responsibility for staying safe ultimately falls on the talent.

While Hilton had shrugged off the weird fan contact in the past, her new stalker wasn't so easily ignored. When she got back to her grandparents' house in Sun Valley at around 10 P.M. and fired up her laptop, her baby-blue eyes widened in shock.

"Oh, shit," she grumbled.

After entering her passwords, she was unable to log on to her MySpace and Stickam accounts. She had been hacked. She called the phone company to reinstate her service, but within minutes, the line was dead again.

Then her phone rang. Hilton answered, and the strange guy on the other end told her there was one way she could get her accounts back: "Send me some nude pictures."

A chill shot through Hilton. "No fucking way," she said with a sneer.

Hilton listened in horror as he rattled off her Social Security number and home address. Her voice shaking, she asked, "What's your name? What can I call you?"

"VIP," he responded.

Then the phone went dead again. Hilton was staying with her grandparents because she had been fighting with her mother—and they were terrified by the situation. As savvy as Hilton was online, she was still a kid—and had a child's sense of life and death. "Kids don't realize their mortality," says her grandmother, Ginger Cotton. "And the older we get, the more we realize that these things are real, and that bad things do happen." So Cotton took action—albeit not



JUSTIN.TV

In March 2007, Justin Kan strapped a video camera to his head and shot his daily life. Justin.tv has since evolved into a live-video hosting community, broadcasting feeds from their office.



SHIBA INU PUPPY CAM

The 24-hour live feed of six Shiba Inu puppies napping, playing, and wrestling in their San Francisco dog bed rendered more than 14 million viewers paralyzed by cuteness in the fall and winter of '08-'09.



MATTHEW LUSH (GAYGOD)

A sort of all-purpose Internet mini-celeb, with popular MySpace and YouTube pages, the 20-year-old vegan is one of Stickam's highest-ranked entertainers, with close to four million views.



KIKI KANNIBAL

This teen platinum-blonde alt coquette doesn't really do anything, but her live shows on Stickam have accumulated more than a million views since May 2007. She is said to have coined the term "Haters make me famous."

by preventing her teenage granddaughter from bathing in front of hundreds of thousands of strangers. "We had an extra security system put in [the house]."

This wasn't the first time a Stickam entertainer had been hacked. While Stickam was successfully monitoring content the previous fall, it began hearing about a rash of hacker attacks perpetrated by a notorious gang called Team n0d, started by a 16-year-old computer whiz who went by the name Too Live. Too Live, who prefers to remain anonymous, says he considers himself a "gray hat" hacker—one who makes Internet start-ups aware of security flaws by gleefully taking advantage of them. "It's fun, but I help them out by reporting exploits," he tells me over IM.

Stickam didn't mind—at first, anyway—and sent Too Live a free webcam out of gratitude.

STICKAM HAD TO DEAL WITH AN UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCE OF PAIRING LIVE TEENS WITH LIVE CAMERAS: CELEBRITY.

But when Team n0d hacked into the site to show how easy it was to redirect friend-request links to steal—or phish for—personal information, the hackers were banned. So Team n0d decided to strike back against the lifeblood of the site, the entertainers. "We started attacking the website by hacking users' profiles and hijacking administrator accounts," Too Live reveals. "Stickam didn't think we would react in such a destructive manner, so they didn't do anything but let us be."

It was the Net equivalent of the geeks affectionately punking the popular girls. Team n0d would steal passwords, and then vandalize homepages with their gang name. Hilton figured they were the ones behind her harassing calls, and contacted Too Live, who knew right away who VIP was: Jeffrey Robert Weinberg, a 22-year-old hacker who was part of a group indicted for breaching a database at LexisNexis and stealing the private records of more than 310,000 people, including Arnold Schwarzenegger and Demi Moore. In January 2007, Weinberg began serving a ten-month prison term for aggravated identity theft. When he got out, he

faced three years' probation, during which his computer was subject to random searches and he was prohibited from going online.

But he couldn't resist temptation for long, and began stalking Cam Girls, including Hilton's friend Chelsea, an 18-year-old from Florida who blogs under the name Audiowhoregasm. With her blonde hair with black ends, Chelsea was another familiar face on the Stickam scene and was also being harassed for nude photos. "I was really scared," she says. "If he can get my home phone number, he can get anything."

Too Live was no fan of Weinberg's work and wanted to help bring him down. For Stickam, the story had come full circle: The company needed its biggest star and most notorious hacker to capture its most dangerous enemy.

JUST KNOWING WEINBERG WAS HER LIKELY NEMESIS

wasn't enough—Hilton needed proof to have him arrested, so she went to the police and filed a report. And on January 1, 2008, 45-year-old Detective Eric Jones responded. A 19-year veteran of the LAPD, Jones was an old-school gumshoe with a thick mustache. The two became an unlikely dynamic duo—the self-described "analog detective" and the Internet girl. To get up to speed, he stayed up late on the phone with Hilton, as she told him how to log on to MySpace and surf Stickam chat rooms.

When Weinberg called Hilton back angrily the next day, Jones was listening in and had given Hilton specific instructions not to reveal that he was on the line. But seconds into the call, Hilton blurted, "You better watch what you say, Jeffrey, because my detective is right here on the line." Jones slapped his forehead as Weinberg cackled defiantly. "Hey, detective," he taunted, "catch me if you can. I'm a ghost."

After getting Stickam to reactivate her accounts, Hilton scoured Weinberg's trail for clues until she found five numbers buried in her hacked user info—92629—a zip code, she knew, in Orange County. She also found a site urging visitors to prank the reviled hacker, including the message "VIP's hungry, order him pizza," followed by a phone number and address in Dana Point, California, a coastal town near Laguna Beach.

Hilton dialed the number, and a woman answered—Weinberg's mom. When she was told what her son was doing, she started crying. She told them that she was fighting cancer and that her son wasn't home. At 4 A.M. on January 11, Jones and a group of undercover cops approached Weinberg at an LA Fitness club in Orange County, where he worked the front desk. "You know who I am?" Jones asked him.

"No," said Weinberg.

"I'm the ghostbuster," Jones replied with a smile. Weinberg was charged with six counts: attempted extortion, fraudulent computer

access, unauthorized computer access, disruption or denial of computer services, annoying phone calls, and identity theft. They had him. In May 2008, Weinberg pled no contest and was sentenced to two years in California state prison.

The prison declined an interview with Weinberg for this story, but his father, Rodrick, thinks the problem lies in technology as opposed to, say, common sense. (Prohibited from computer use as part of his release, Jeffrey Weinberg used his father's laptop to stalk Hilton. Who knew a convicted hacker could get past Daddy's password?) "When you're dealing with a computer, if you're extremely talented, you can do a lot of things that most people couldn't or shouldn't do," Rodrick says. "And that's the danger of being online."

Stickam now knows that securing a live video community is not just a matter of keeping tabs on the content, but also a watchful eye on the vulnerable young celebrities it might spawn. "The larger one of our shows is now, the more we pay attention," says Jake Gold. "A program like Amor's will have more people targeting it."

Hilton's grandmother says the experience was a wake-up call about her granddaughter's life online. "There is a concern there," Cotton says, "and I think [the kids] should not reveal too much of themselves. But I think a lot of the online celebrities, what they reveal is not necessarily themselves. I think what they're revealing are fantasies." She can't speak to Amor's show, though, because she's never seen it. As Cotton puts it, "I'm respecting her privacy."

Hilton claims the encounter with VIP hasn't deterred her. "I'm more cautious now," she says. "I'm a lot smarter than I used to be."

But she's as exposed as ever, if not more so. She appeared with her mother on the MTV show *Sex...With Mom and Dad* and claims to have a pilot deal at MTVu. (MTV was not able to confirm this.) But she's sacrificing real-life stability for success, couch surfing at friends'; looking for a day job doesn't appear to be an option. "Amor is a motivated young lady and, in some ways, very adult," says Detective Jones. "And in other ways, she's still just a kid."

Though Hilton thinks notice has been served to other would-be attackers that she's not to be taken lightly—"They don't have the balls to mess with me; they know I sent someone to jail," she says brashly—she's still surprisingly naive about the one thing she has achieved after all: online stardom. "I didn't think I was anything special," she says. She tells me how she recently had to ask her younger brother for a reality check. "Do you really think I'm what everyone claims me to be?" she asked him. "Famous? Are they for real?"

"Are you stupid?" he replied. "Of course you're famous!"

"I was like, 'Wow. That's really weird,'" she says, as if waking from a dream. "That's cool, and it can help my business out a lot." ☛