



MODERN VICES ♦

Hooked: How the Cigarette Conquered the World

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Draw close to the fire, friends, for tonight's vice may be the most successful product ever sold, a little white tube of shredded leaf that in the span of a single century got a good part of the whole human race to pay, daily, for something that was killing them, all the while being told it was harmless and even healthful. This is the story of the cigarette, Carol, and of the machine, the ad men, and the great lie that hooked the world.

CAROL

The most successful product ever sold, and it was killing the very people buying it. Marty, that is a dreadful kind of triumph. Tobacco is old, though, isn't it? Why do you begin the story so recently?



MARTY

Because of a machine, Carol, and this is the hinge of the whole thing. Tobacco had been smoked for centuries, in pipes and cigars, but the cigarette was a fiddly, hand-rolled luxury, slow and dear to make, so few people smoked all that many. Then, in the eighteen eighties, a young inventor named James Bonsack built a machine that could roll cigarettes automatically, thousands upon thousands an hour, doing the work of dozens of people. Suddenly the cigarette could be made faster and cheaper than anyone could possibly smoke them. The problem was no longer how to make them, Carol. The problem was how to sell that flood, how to create enough smokers to buy them all.

CAROL

So the machine came first, and then they had to manufacture the customers to match. Marty, that is the whole thing turned upside down, making the appetite to fit the supply. How did they do it?



MARTY

With advertising on a scale the world had never seen, Carol, invented largely for this very purpose. A ruthless businessman named James Buchanan Duke seized on the Bonsack machine, and he understood that whoever created the demand would own the trade. He spent staggering sums, plastering the cigarette across

every surface, giving away free samples, printing collectible cards, until the little tube was simply everywhere. And then the two great wars did the rest, Carol. Cigarettes were handed out to soldiers by the millions, tucked into their rations, sold as a soldier's small comfort in the trenches, and whole generations of young men came home from war already hooked.

CAROL

They put it in the soldiers' rations, so a man learned to smoke in the worst hours of his life and carried it home forever. Marty, that is diabolically clever. But surely half the world, women, would not be so easily reached?



MARTY

Ah, Carol, and here comes the master stroke, and it is a chilling piece of genius. For a long time it was considered shameful, unladylike, for a woman to smoke in public. That was half the market, locked away. So the industry hired a man named Edward Bernays, the very father of modern public relations, and he did not sell cigarettes to women as a pleasure. He sold them as freedom. He staged a famous spectacle at a great public parade, arranging for fashionable young women to march along lighting cigarettes in full view, and he fed the newspapers a slogan calling those cigarettes *Torches of Freedom*, a blow struck for women's

equality. It was not an advertisement, Carol. It was made to look like a movement. And it worked. The taboo shattered, and the other half of the human race was opened to the trade.

CAROL

They dressed up an addiction as liberation and let the newspapers do the selling for free. Marty, that is the snake-oil pitch in a fine new coat, isn't it, selling the hunger and hiding the harm. And I suppose they claimed it was good for you, as everyone did back then?



MARTY

They went further than that, Carol, and this is the part that still astonishes. For years the cigarette makers ran advertisements featuring doctors, actual physicians in white coats, declaring that more doctors smoked their particular brand than any other, that their cigarette was gentle on the throat, soothing to the nerves, a friend to digestion. The most addictive and deadly product of the age was sold under the smiling endorsement of medicine itself. And the public, having no reason yet to doubt it, believed. Everyone smoked. It was in the films, in the offices, on the trains, in the hospitals, Carol, it was simply the air the whole century breathed.

CAROL

Doctors themselves vouching for it. Marty, with everyone from your physician to your favorite film star doing it, how would an ordinary person ever suspect the truth? When did the truth finally come out?



MARTY

In the middle of the century, Carol, when careful scientists began to line up the numbers and found something undeniable and terrible. The great rise in a certain deadly cancer marched in lockstep, a few decades behind, with the great rise in smoking. Study after study nailed it down. Smoking was killing people on a massive scale, cancer and heart disease and more, hundreds of thousands of deaths, a slow catastrophe hidden in plain sight. The evidence, Carol, became as solid as evidence ever gets. And here is where our tale turns truly dark, because the industry knew.

CAROL

They knew. Marty, I was afraid you would say that. They had the evidence and they kept selling.



MARTY

They not only kept selling, Carol, they mounted one of the most cynical campaigns in the history of commerce, a campaign not to prove their product safe, for they could not, but simply to manufacture doubt. Their own scientists had confirmed the danger and the addiction in private, and in public the companies funded a fog of it-is-not-provens and more-study-is-needed, anything to keep the customer uncertain just long enough to light the next one. They understood, Carol, that they did not need people to believe cigarettes were safe. They only needed people to feel unsure, because an unsure smoker keeps smoking. Doubt itself was the product they were selling now.

CAROL

Doubt as the product. Marty, that is colder than any pirate or bootlegger we have met, to know for certain you are killing your customers and to spend your genius keeping them confused about it. How did it ever end, if it has ended?



MARTY

It has not fully ended, Carol, but the tide did turn. Warnings were forced onto the packages. The doctor advertisements and the cartoon mascots were banned. The truth, slowly, became common knowledge, and the great lawsuits at last dragged the industry's own secret papers into the daylight, where the whole cynical scheme was laid bare for a jury and a nation to see. Smoking has fallen steeply in many places, and countless lives have been saved. But the little machine that Bonsack built still runs, Carol, and around the world the cigarette still takes millions of lives a year, more than all our wars and murders combined. It remains, quietly, the deadliest vice ever sold.

CAROL

The deadliest of them all, and still with us. Marty, after all the drama of gin and opium, there is something uniquely awful about this one, so ordinary and so patient. What is the meaning you take from it?



MARTY

This, Carol, and it is the sharpest lesson of the season. The old vices ruined you with a certain honesty, the gin made you drunk, the opium made you dream, and you could see the harm coming. The cigarette was something new and more dangerous. It was a vice engineered, deliberately, by machines and ad men and the tools of science and persuasion turned against the very people they pretended to serve, and its final weapon was not pleasure at all but doubt. When an industry knows its product is killing you and spends its fortune not to fix it but to keep you unsure, Carol, that is no longer a vice a person falls into. That is a trap somebody built. And the only way out of a trap like that is the plain, hard-won truth. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I am thinking of the soldiers with cigarettes in their rations and the women marching with their torches, all of them sold a trap dressed as a comfort and a freedom. When they sell you doubt, friends, someone already knows the answer. Come back to the fire.

