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"When I tell you
to lose 15 or 20
pounds, I really
mean 50."

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Things
Doctors
Never
Tell You

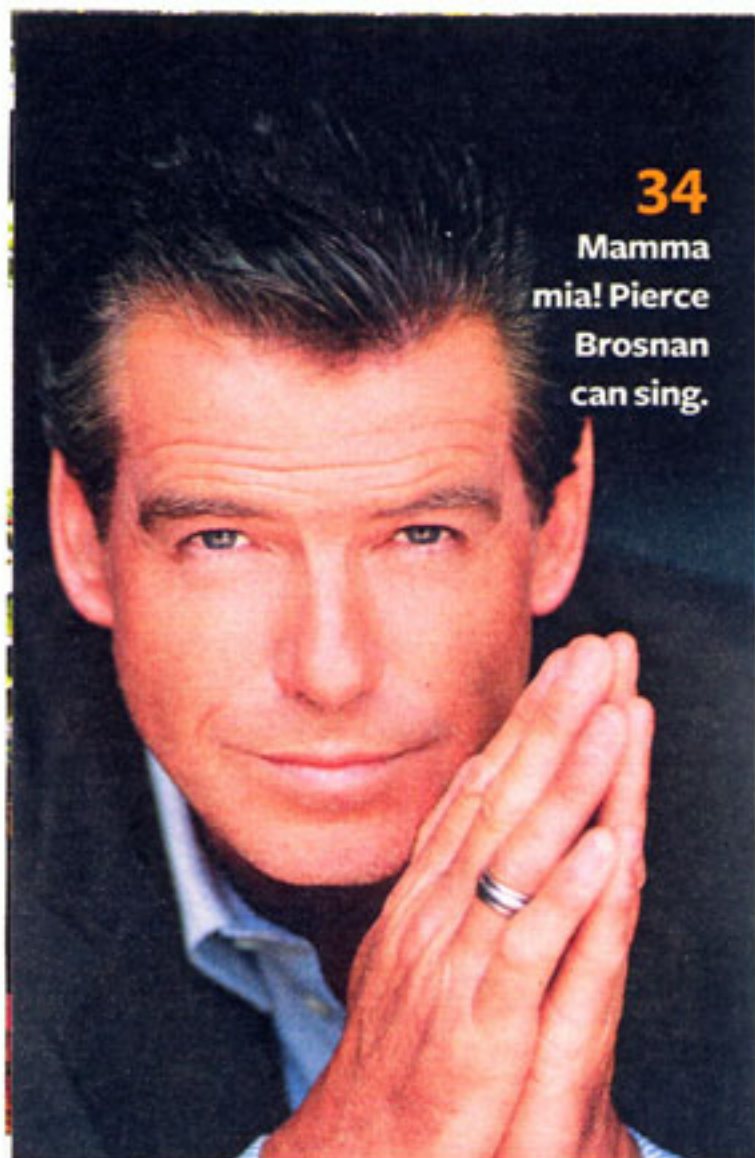
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Mamma
mia! Pierce
Brosnan
can sing.



Jennifer
Donovan,
astronomer
turned eight-
wheeler.

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A Galaxy Apart

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde have nothing on Jennifer Donovan

BY LENORE SKENAZY

Jennifer Donovan is sitting at her desk in the astronomy department at Columbia University in New York City. With the aid of a super-high-tech VLA radio telescope, the fifth-year PhD student is fixated on a blue-green computer screen showing stars that are hundreds of millions of light-years away. It's a violent galaxy out there, with explosions and implosions creating a colorful array of swirling action in the dark heavens.

"Did you ever see that movie with Jodie Foster, where she goes out with headphones and she's listening to the intergalactic static as it comes through the satellite dishes?" asks the 27-year-old. "That's crap. Great

This astronomer and roller derby queen share the same mother, father, fiancé ...



movie. But that part? Uh-uh. Anyway, that's the telescope I use."

She picks up a knitting magazine, leafs through it quickly, and then tucks it in a drawer. It's time to go.

CUT TO: a former cigar factory in Queens, two hours later.

Luna Impact is at the back of the pack—that's where jammers start—but she's ramming her way through like a raging bull.

With a braid.

Bam! Buh-bye, Daizy Chainz.

Hip thrust! Tough cookies, Kandy Kakes. *Zoom!* Watch out, Beyonsláy, here comes Luna—whoa!

Impact!

Luna slams into the wall, and an old mattress topples over. So much for fancy padding here where the Gotham Girls Roller Derby League practices. Soon Luna's back on her feet, body leaning forward, arms tight at her sides, ready to fly around the track again.

They may call themselves Auntie Christ, Tankerbelle, Bluebonnet Plague, and even Surly Temple. But when they take off their skates, some 60 women from this league head off to jobs as commercial producers, graphic designers, accountants, and lawyers. And then there's Luna, aka Jennifer Donovan.

Black-and-white TVs and Frankie Avalon are long gone, but roller derby is back, and a new breed of woman is strapping on the gear and dishing out the blows.

In its heyday in the '50s and '60s, the sport was staged—more of a spectacle. Donovan embodies the modern derby diva: empowered rather than exploited. “We’re not pinups,” she insists, in her tight red shirt and black short shorts with checkered trim. “We’re athletes.”

**“We’re not pinups,”
insists Donovan, in her
tight shirt and short shorts.
“We’re athletes.”**

So what’s a nice scientist like Jennifer Donovan doing trading elbows with someone named Surly Temple? It goes back to those exploding stars. It also goes back to when she was 12 years old. Back then, when she wore roller skates, she also wore chiffon and sequins. That’s because she was a competitive roller figure skater—think Michelle Kwan on four wheels. Falling in love with astronomy in college ended that career.

Then two years ago, Donovan went to her first roller derby bout. Rowdy fans rooted for young women like her, women who wanted nothing to do with tutus.

“I’d never seen people so excited about roller skating,” she recalls.

She contacted the team. A hundred women tried out for the league. Donovan and 11 others made it.

“My first bout, we played—and beat—the reigning league champi-

ons, the Queens of Pain,” she says. “It was scary but wonderful!”

Just like that, her inner demon was unleashed.

Although only a second-year player, Donovan now occupies the prized position: jammer. As jammer, she’s charged with getting to the front of the pack any way she can, usually by whamming and slamming her way through four opposing players who are busy using

their teammates as human battering rams. Once she’s accomplished that, she has to do it again and again. Each time she passes a blocker, her team gets a point.

“She’s thorough and calculating,” says her friend and teammate Murder City Mandy. “And since she’s quiet all day, she brings that energy to the track.”

Roller derby today is a do-it-yourself sport. Whenever the team goes off to a bout, they pick up their derby floor—a jigsaw of about 8,000 plastic squares—load it onto a truck, and reassemble it on-site. At the end of the match, they do it all in reverse. It’s a long day, but the rewards?

“Have you ever hit anyone?” asks Luna, her eyes shining. “You should put skates on. You have a bad day, you go to practice, and it’s just great.”

Especially if you don’t mind seeing stars. ■