

Take this job and love it!

BY TRICIA LAINE

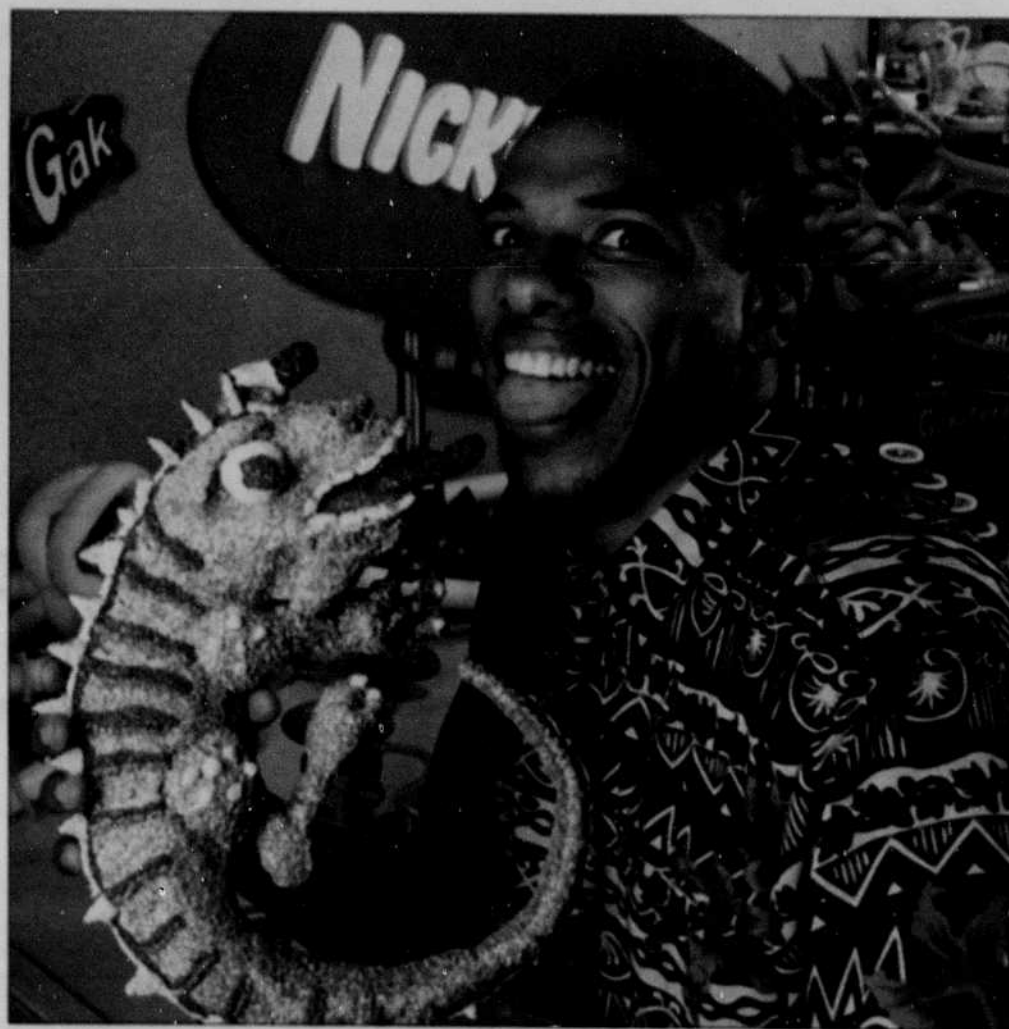
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**Some
grads
have all
the luck**

THE QUESTION: "SO, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO AFTER YOU GRADUATE?" You've probably been forced to answer the big Q at least a million times since you chose a major. If a non-peer asks you The Question, it's always in a sly, "This better be good" tone. It seems to be the consensus that the days of finding a good job — much less a cool job you'll love — are over.

Face it. Since we've been old enough to grasp catch phrases like the job market, economic status and the unemployment line, all we've heard is we're headed for doom. We're slackers, remember? Forget the American Dream. We're Generation Hexed.

Wrong. Cool jobs are out there, and recent grads are landing them. We've tracked down some 20somethings who are living proof that life after college doesn't have to mean fetching coffee and sharpening pencils for your boss.



Sean Lee and friend: Hey, no French kissing in the office!

Funny business

In Sean Lee's business, you won't be told to quit fooling around. In fact, being too serious could get you in trouble if you're a toy designer.

The '93 graduate of California State U., Long Beach, fell into the toy industry when he landed a sweet internship at Mattel Inc. the summer before his senior year. He was studying industrial design, which covers everything from VCRs to toothbrushes.

After graduation, Mattel rehired him to work with the activity toys design group.

"I don't think I could do anything else," Lee says. "There is constant communication and playing around. It's a very fun group atmosphere at Mattel."

There's no such thing as a typical work day for Lee, who is involved in everything from brainstorming toy ideas to meeting with the engineers to decide how a toy will actually operate.

"Some days, our group will get together and go to Venice Beach and spend the whole day there coming up with new ideas for toys," Lee says.

So what will the toy maker think of next? He won't say — of course. But his favorite project so far is some gooey goop called Gak.

In case you haven't seen — or touched — Gak, here's Lee's description: "It's a really colorful, very slimy, ooey stuff that's cold and clammy when you touch it." Here's a comparison. When you were a kid, did you ever have Slime? The green stuff in the plastic trash can? It's no coincidence that Mattel made that, too.

"Slime was the '70s and '80s," Lee says. "Gak is the '90s. Kids love it, and I'm sure that it's ruined a lot of carpets."

Sense and sensibility

The next time you crack open a beer or a box of Cheerios, chew on this little morsel: People actually get paid to taste test these products. The pros call themselves "sensory analysts," but to the layman, they're taste testers.

But don't think it's only about eating and drinking. This is a huge field that caters to more than just the taste buds.

"I have a friend who was doing sensory analysis on golf clubs," says Renee Thresher, a '92 graduate of Cornell U. who works for General Mills Inc. "Sensory is used in everything from food to cars to ink and paper."

Sensory, as the pros call it, is becoming an accessible profession because more companies than ever are using it. Most analysts majored in food science, chemistry, psychology or biology in college, but these days even an English major can land a tasty job as an analyst. Thresher says that many companies send employees to conferences to learn the tricks of the trade.

The secret to achieving the perfect balance of barley and hops involves a lot of people drinking on