



REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

On Board the Controversial Bus Giving Out Illegal Abortion Pills in Northern Ireland

Northern Irish pro-choice activists are mobilizing in the wake of Ireland's decision to repeal the Eighth Amendment. We join protesters handing out abortion pills in one of the most anti-choice nations in Europe.

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Norma Costello

JUN 4 2018, 4:10PM



All photos by Norma Costello

"Hey, you legislators," activists chanted. "We are not your incubators!" Flanked by



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pro-choice activists in the center of Belfast yesterday.

The women from Northern Irish campaign group ROSA (Reproductive Rights Against Oppression, Sexism, and Austerity) had planned the action to challenge Northern Ireland's strict abortion laws, six days after the Republic of Ireland [voted to legalize abortion](#). For many in Northern Ireland—the only country in northern Europe where abortion remains criminalized, punishable by [lengthy prison sentences](#)—it's time for change.

In an event organized by ROSA and supported by the Dutch-based Women on Web, an organization that [supplies abortion pills](#) to women in countries where abortion is banned, activists swallowed abortion pills in Belfast to protest Northern Ireland's abortion laws, before traveling across Northern Ireland on the aptly named Bus4Choice.



"They know the momentum in the south has spread here," 29-year-old Louise,



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and I personally feel a lot of anger about that." New to ROSA, Louise was questioned by police earlier that day after taking the abortion pill in protest.

While the abortion pill is safe and widely prescribed by doctors in mainland Britain, it's illegal under the 1861 Offences Against The Person Act to take it in Northern Ireland with the intention of terminating a pregnancy. And in recent years this law has been used to prosecute women who have procured the pill to terminate pregnancies: In 2016, a 21-year-old Northern Irish woman [was given a suspended prison sentence](#) after pleading guilty to buying pills over the internet to end her pregnancy.

Cerys Falvey, 21, highlighted how police [have raided the homes of activists](#) accused of illegally importing abortion pills. "They raided one guy's house and seized his laptop," she said. "It's really crazy." Organizations like Women on Web often deliver packages of abortion pills to Northern Ireland. But under Northern Irish law, women could potentially face life in prison for taking abortion pills while pregnant.



Dr Rebecca Gomperts of Women On Web.



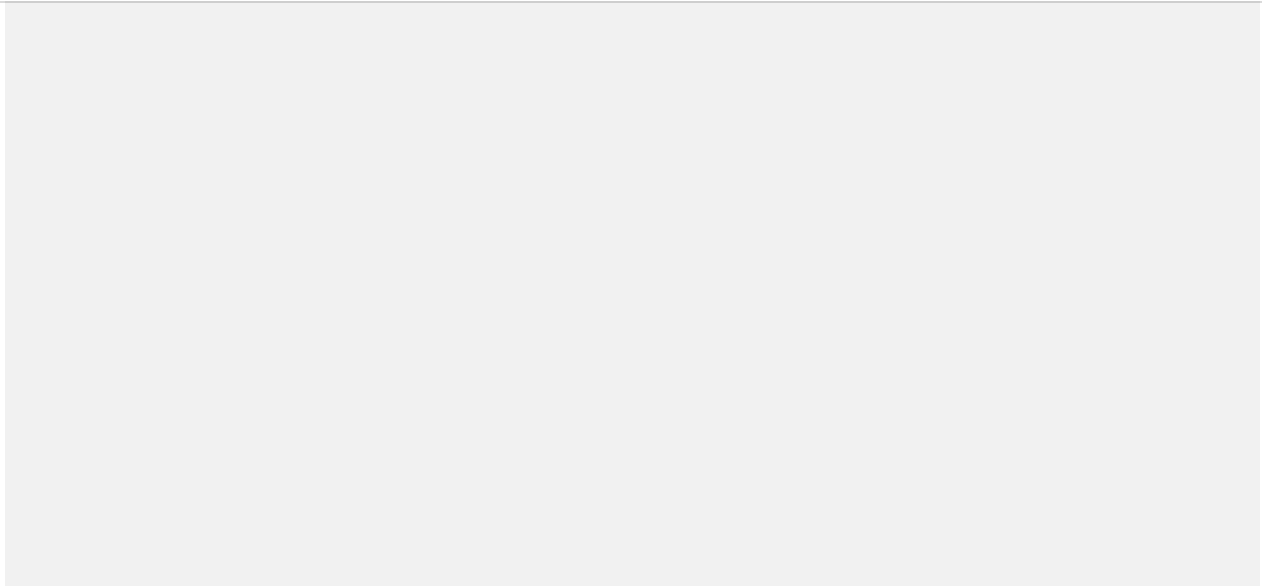
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conservative Democratic Unionist Party, where ROSA plan to protest.

"Why are they bothering with the DUP?" one young man said as the activists arrived, referring to the DUP's anti-abortion, anti-gay rights stance. "They hate everything! You'd have better luck talking to the wall".

Lisburn is a historically DUP stronghold, but the conservative party may be losing the next generation. Social attitudes across Northern Ireland are changing: and abortion rights are at the forefront of the popular consciousness. According to a 2016 Amnesty International poll, 75 percent of the people [believed that abortion should be legal](#) in cases of rape, incest and fatal fetal abnormalities.

As the activists chanted and shouted their demands down a megaphone, DUP politician Jim Wells spoke to media across the road under a giant mural of American cartoon character Top Cat. Known for his conservative values and anti-gay-marriage stance, Wells was forced to step down as Minister for Health [after linking](#) child abuse to same-sex relationships. "We've saved the lives of 102,000 people in Northern Ireland by not having abortion," Wells told reporters over the din of feminist chanting.



Jim Wells talking to press.

Belfast-based ROSA activist Eimear, who preferred not to disclose her name or age for privacy reasons, criticized Northern Ireland's politicians for trying to splinter social movements.

"Our politicians are trying to divide the movement down sectarian lines," Eimear explained. "So the DUP say they'll speak for Protestant women and Sinn Fein (Northern Ireland and Ireland's republican party) say they'll speak for Republican women." As Northern Ireland remains divided into unionist Protestant, and republican Catholic enclaves, those pushing for social change have to navigate complicated and highly sectarian waters.

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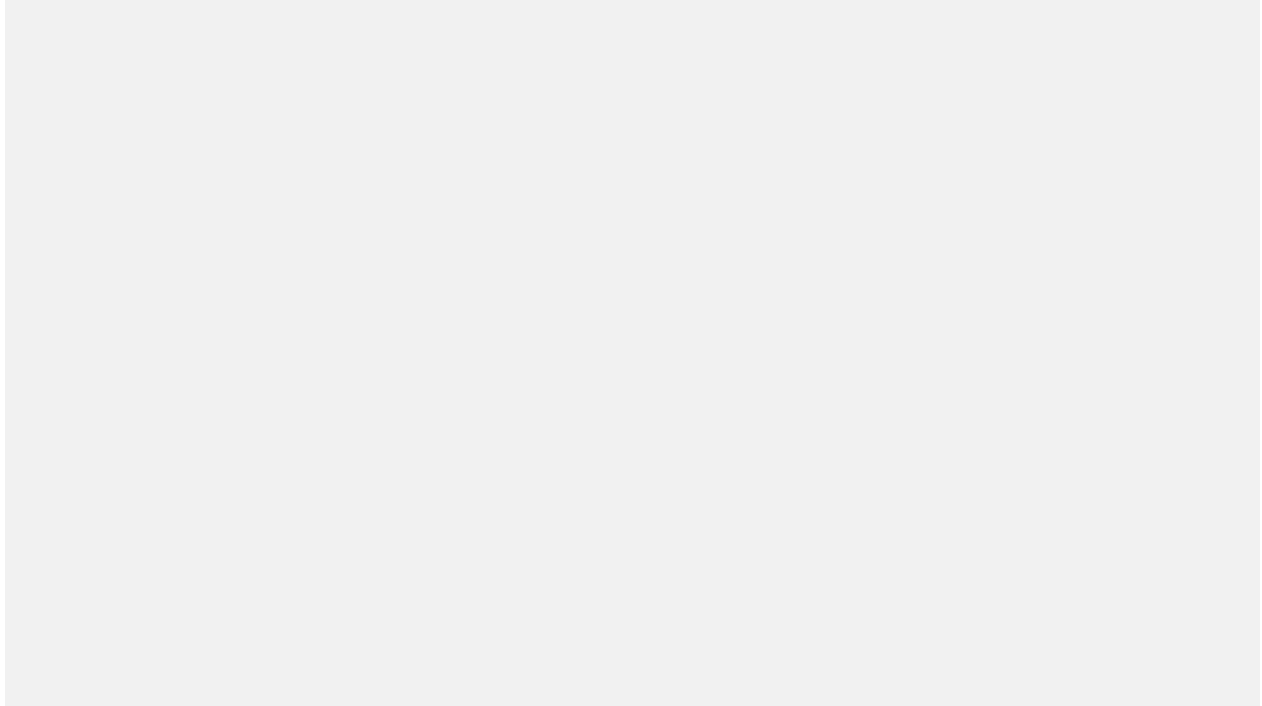
As we left Lisburn an elderly, well-dressed woman asked the activists what they were protesting. When they explained it was for abortion rights, she clapped her hands in glee. "Fair play to ye girls!" she shouted.

A police car marked our arrival in Cookstown where the women prepared to protest outside the offices of republican party Sinn Fein. While nominally more pro-choice than other political parties in Northern Ireland, some criticize the party for its failure to commit to the rights of women for fear of jeopardising their anti-choice voter base. For many, the party's pro-choice stance boils down to political expediency.



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pro-choice and no more about it," the mother says. Meanwhile, her daughter looked mournfully at the protesters, gestured to her three small children, and said she'll fight for "the rights of babies".



Not everyone agrees with ROSA's direct action methods. Some have criticized ROSA's approach, saying it endangers vulnerable women by putting unwanted media attention and police focus on the importing of abortion pills into Northern Ireland. "We have to be extremely careful and thoughtful with precarious access to healthcare. Actions with zero strategy behind them are not tactical. They are publicity stunts," Claire Brophy of the Irish-affiliated Abortion Rights Campaign [tweeted](#) earlier this week.

Wearied women slept on the bus before we arrived into our last destination, Derry. As prepared to go home, I asked 41-year-old Tracy Berry, from Belfast, about how she thought the day went. We walked to Derry's Peace Flame, a symbol of how far the once war-torn city has come.

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"It's been so exciting," Berry enthused. "I feel proud that I'm doing something to help the women of our country who continue to suffer under these laws. It's all



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Why America Is So Obsessed with Dead Girls



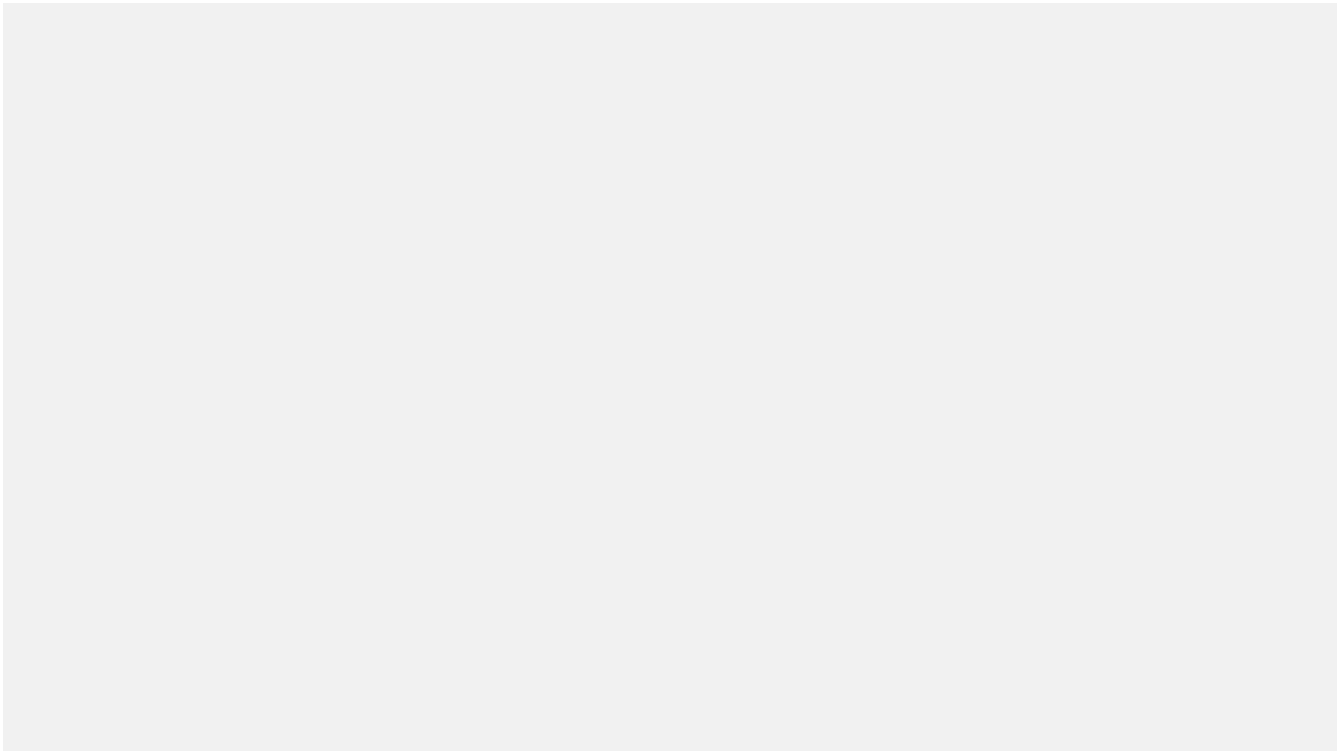
now misogyny shapes media—and now media feeds misogyny.

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Rebecca Renner

JUN 1 2018, 7:21PM



Laura Palmer of "Twin Peaks" (L), Harriet Vanger of "Girl with the Dragon Tattoo."

During a year when male resentment toward women is violently coming to a head—a [school shooting](#) brought on by jilted teenage desire, a man driving through a crowd of pedestrians [because](#) women won't have sex with him—a book like Alice Bolin's [Dead Girls: Essays on Surviving an American Obsession](#) feels particularly relevant. In the entertaining and highly anticipated collection of essays, which comes out June 26, Bolin examines the phenomenon of what she calls "Dead Girl Shows" and other similar media that revolve around a woman's murder in an attempt to understand why America is so obsessed with the subgenre—and, in turn, learn something new about America's deep-rooted misogyny.

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Considering how long feminists have been demanding that women be seen and



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touches on TV shows *Pretty Little Liars*, *True Detective*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, *Making a Murderer*, *Dateline NBC*, *Cold Case Files*, and others. In the podcast realm, there's *Dirty John*, *Serial*, and so many more. There are thousands of books, movies, TV shows, and podcasts I could list here. Audiences (both men and women alike) devour them. But what does that say about us?

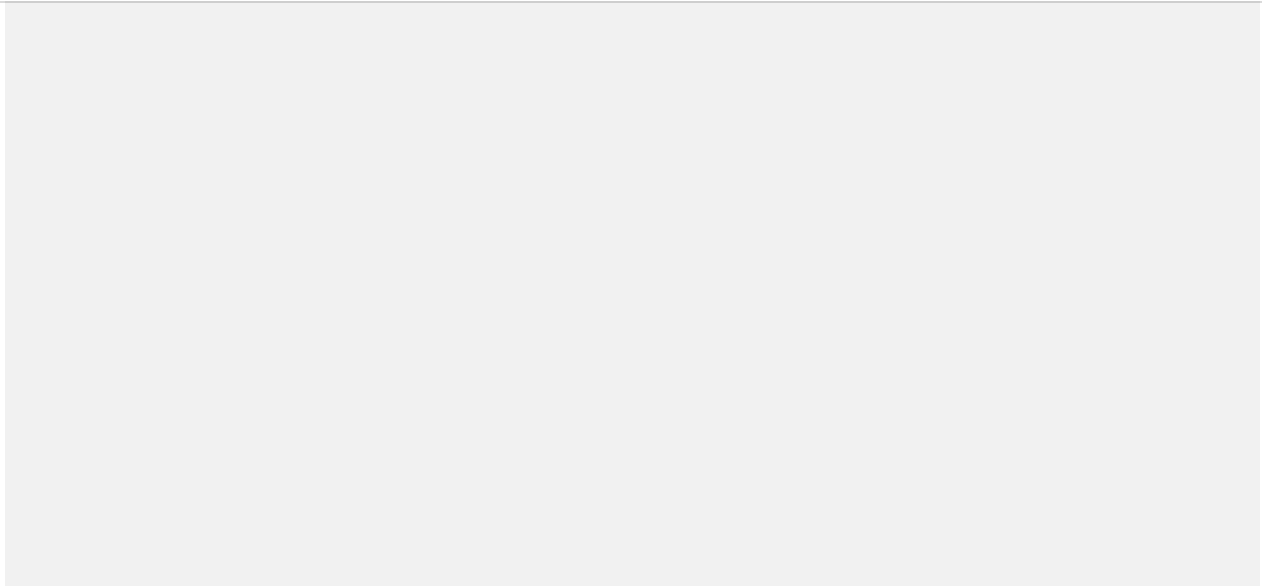
Bolin attempts to answer that by identifying tropes in some of the most popular pieces of media in the subgenre, teasing out what it is about these dead girls that may be keeping our eyes and psyches glued. "*Twin Peaks's* plot is sparked by the murdered body of seventeen-year-old Laura Palmer, washed up on the bank of the river," Bolin writes of the David Lynch cult classic. "Palmer's corpse is *Twin Peaks's* truly memorable image: river-wet hair slicked around her perfect porcelain face, blue with death but still tranquil, lovely." Palmer is little more than a set piece, Bolin points out. She is a canvas on which to paint the character of the male detective investigating her death—a "neutral arena on which to work out male problems."

Similarly, Bolin notes, Harriet Vanger—the disappeared woman in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*—is explicitly regarded as a "puzzle" for Mikael Blomkvist, the book's journalist investigator. "The implication of this choice of vocabulary, if I am being uncharitable, could not be more clear: that women are problems to be solved, and the problem of absence, a disappearance or murder, is generally easier to deal with than the problem of the woman's presence," Bolin muses. The investigator becomes obsessed with the Dead Girl, and often, that obsession is tinged with a sexual charge that mirrors the killer's desire for murder, she notes.



Each has its own nuances, but the tropes that Bolin examines largely point to one implicit desire on the part of both writers and viewers: for women to embody ultimate submission. And the most interesting parts of the book are the (too infrequent) moments in which Bolin explicitly ties those tropes to social phenomena and statistics in real life—in which we can clearly see how these stories both reflect and perpetuate a dangerous relationship to women. Early in the book, for instance, Bolin cites several statistics that show why plots in which the husband is the culprit are considered predictable: Three women die at the hands of a their partners every single day, domestic violence murders accounted for the deaths of some 11,700 women between 2001 and 2012; and in 56 percent of mass shootings from 2009 to 2015, a spouse, former spouse, or other family member were among the victims.

Through these connections, we begin to understand the dark reality of what is at stake in the question of: *Why we are so obsessed with murdered women in fiction?* “Crime stories are ubiquitous in our culture not only for their transgressive lure but for their power to reinforce social order,” Bolin writes. She goes on to reference Joan Didion’s 1990 essay “Sentimental Journeys,” in which Didion details the Central Park jogger case, which centered around the brutal rape of a Wall Street investment banker and the arrest, trial, coerced confession, and conviction of the four Black and one Latino suspects in the crime. “In the Central Park jogger case, black men and white women were cast not only as opposites but as natural enemies,” Bolin points out. Just like the murdered women in entertainment about violent crime, the female victim in the case became a canvas on which to project the racist fears and social anxieties of others.



Laura Palmer's corpse in Twin Peaks. Courtesy Netflix.

Presumably because of the intended scope of the book, however, there are few more instances in which Bolin ventures beyond examining media and into the broader conversation about American misogyny and constructed social hierarchies. Finishing the collection, I was left wondering how these depictions relate to things like [pick-up artist communities](#), [rape on university campuses](#), and [violence against sex workers](#). And in particular, I was left reflecting on the actions of Canadian [Alek Minassian](#), who drove a van through a crowd of pedestrians in Toronto, killing ten people. Before going on this rampage, Minassian allegedly made a cryptic Facebook post linking his attack to the “Incel” (involuntary celibate) community—an online group overrun with men angry that they can’t get women to have sex with them.

Of course, I don’t believe Dead Girl Shows are the cause of Minassian’s rage, or that of men like him. But I do believe that the prevalence of their tropes and Minassian’s murderous rampage are both symptoms of societal gender roles that, for centuries, have told us that women are meant to serve men. And so, in my simplified theorization: At a time when, in real life, men are increasingly losing their dominance over women, Dead Girl Shows offer an acceptable opportunity to see women in the most extreme state of submission—merely a beautiful corpse.

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To try to understand if there's actual validity to this theory, I reached out to Linda Ong, chief culture officer at Civic Entertainment Group, which advises the TV industry on consumer sensibilities. "Today, the popularity of crime programming can be attributed in part to the shifting view of women in society," she said. "Viewers with more traditional tastes like to see men and women in traditional gender roles. They're used to seeing women portrayed as victims...The success of the *Dirty John* podcast is a great example of this."

Dr. Kimberly Davies, professor of sociology and chair of the department of social sciences at Augusta University, offered me another explanation: Crime shows that center on the murder of a woman play on the fears of women. "Men are far more likely to be victims of violent crime," says Davies. "But women fear it more." (In 2015, 78 percent of murder victims were men, and 20.9 percent were women.) But to her, that doesn't contradict Bolin's suggestion that Dead Girl media works to enforce a social hierarchy.

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"I watch a lot of English crime shows. When there's a woman out in the middle of nowhere, in the woods, we know something's going to happen," Davies said. "That's a way of keeping women in their place...[it] shows victims in a light that suggests they contribute to their victimization." In Dead Girl Shows, just like in rape cases, she said, "You know what the woman was doing, what she was wearing, where she was..." In other words, Dead Girl Shows make the dead girl's victimization seem inevitable and deserved.

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In terms of why Dead Girl Shows are so popular *right now*, though, Ong had a theory I hadn't considered—which takes a slightly more optimistic view of things by focusing less on the murder and more on the plot's resolution. "We're living in a time of extreme disorientation in this country, so content with themes of danger,



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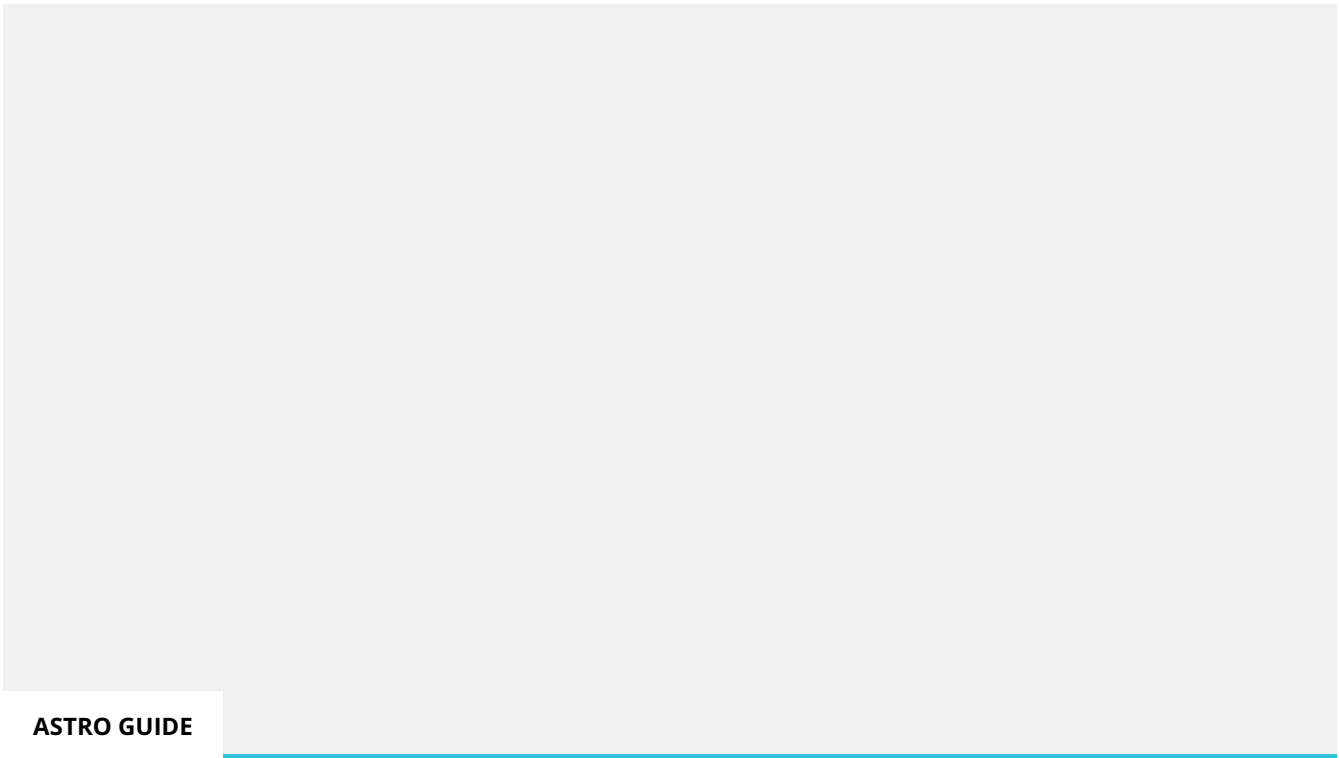
offers viewers hope, purpose, and progress—or at least makes them feel that way.”



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ASTRO GUIDE

Taurus, June 2018

By **Annabel Gat**; illustrated by **Nicole Ginelli**

JUN 1 2018, 3:34PM

Welcome to Gemini season!



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Taurus season has come and gone—hope you made the most of it, sweet cow! Now the Sun is in Gemini, a sign that's been maligned by the internet, but it's actually not so bad. The energy is abundant during Gemini season, and you'll be getting opportunities to show off your talents! On top of that, this first weekend of June will be a dream: Your planetary ruler Venus will connect with lucky planet Jupiter on June 1, creating a fantastic energy within your relationships and social life, and it'll connect with Neptune on June 2, creating a whimsical, romantic energy.

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The 2nd will also be fabulous for networking and meeting people. Creativity will be flowing, your intuition will be strong, and the mood will be very social. Jupiter is the planet of optimism, Neptune is the planet of dreams and fantasies, and Venus is the planet of affection and abundance—this will really be a wonderful vibe, and this confluence in energies will bode so well for your social life and partnerships, as well as your mental wellbeing in general.

The next week won't be so easy: Venus will oppose the planet of the underworld, Pluto, on June 5. After a weekend of easygoing fun, shit's gonna get real. It's possible you could work with this this vibe, either by having a kinky, good time in bed, or by creating an opportunity to handle a difficult conversation with maturity and kindness. With that said, not everyone will be so ready to deal with the confrontational and emotionally intense energy that this planetary combination brings. Be on the lookout for envy, power struggles, and manipulation. Someone may try to bully you into sharing their point of view (or you may try to do that to someone else!). If this is the case, call in a third party to help mediate.

Communication will be strained, too. Mercury will square off with Neptune on June 6, followed by the Sun doing the same on June 7, creating confusion, insecurity, and even paranoia. It's so important to stay grounded during this time. And just because your friends are all doing something doesn't mean you have to, too, Taurus—*especially* not this week.

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A shift in communication will arrive once messenger planet Mercury enters intuitive



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believe in anything so woo-woo, dear cow; however, you have strong intuitive abilities, too... your gut never leads you astray! As Mercury moves through Cancer, keep an open mind, and make time for the flurry of paperwork, errands, and invitations that will come your way. Tap into your intuition as well. As the summer solstice rolls around and Cancer season begins on June 21, communication will continue to be a big theme for you.

Mars begins its retrograde in Aquarius on June 26. This is a major transit, and it'll have you focusing intently on your career and what direction you want to continue going with it.

There's a new moon in Gemini on June 13, which will activate the sector of your chart that rules your finances, as well as your sense of self-worth and security. This will be a wonderful time to work magic around these themes, so release your inner witch and cast a love spell... or at least pick up a book on budgeting! Your planetary ruler Venus also enters regal Leo on the same day. You may feel inspired to give your home a make-over, or to spruce up your altars. Venus in warm fire sign Leo will create an easygoing energy around connecting with your family and loved ones.

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Venus will square off with electric Uranus on June 14, bringing surprises. Uranus is the rebel of the zodiac, and it's just recently entered your sign, so you've been feeling rather stimulated lately. You're eager to shake things up, especially at home—perhaps you're ready for a move! *Freedom* is the word that comes to mind during this time; your autonomy and independence are hugely valuable to you right now, and while home and family will always have a place in your heart, it's crucial to have space and the ability to come and go without feeling weighed down by tradition, expectations, or inappropriate violations of your emotional boundaries.



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Neptune begins its retrograde in Pisces on June 18, asking you to take time to reflect on what your hopes and dreams are for your future—dream big, Taurus! Your fantasy world is *not* the place for you to be practical! Get some friends together to create vision boards today. Thankfully, communication will be flowing way easier now (although you'll have to watch out for exaggerations!), thanks to Mercury connecting harmoniously with Jupiter on June 19 and with Neptune on June 20. Both of these days will be lovely times to socialize.

Venus will oppose Mars on June 21, creating a playfully competitive atmosphere. On June 25, Venus will square off with Jupiter—this should be plenty of fun, especially for your relationships. Just watch out for overindulgence, and take a few days off from work if you can!

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Mars begins its retrograde in Aquarius on June 26. This is a major transit, and it'll have you focusing intently on your career and what direction you want to continue going with it. You've been fighting for something—but is it still worth your energy? Do you need to re-strategize? Toward the end of the summer, you'll realize you still have plenty to learn. As a result of this epiphany, you'll be able to retrieve whatever information you're missing so that you can move forward with the skill, confidence, energy, and *fearlessness* that Mars exudes... when it's not limping backward through the zodiac, that is!

There's a full moon in Capricorn on June 28, which will bring about some big philosophical and emotional breakthroughs. It will also result in a climax in some conversation that's been building. Have you been on a journey of some kind? You'll find yourself arriving at whatever destination you've been seeking now. Messenger planet Mercury will enter Leo on June 29, so wherever you go, home will still be on your mind—you'll be in a nostalgic mood, but remember: Home is where your heart is. Call a loved one if you can.



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