

Update

Back To Hustling

Doctors gave publisher **Larry Flynt** only a 50-50 chance of regaining full use of his legs after he was ambushed by a gunman in Lawrenceville, Ga., last March. Now, after several operations, Flynt, 36, plans to be up on crutches next month to resume control of his pornography empire. But a bundle of trouble awaits him: this fall, there have been two subsequent violent attacks on members of the Flynt hierarchy; there are widespread reports of a feud between Flynt and his brother Jimmy; he could still face stiff prison sentences in two separate obscenity cases; and *Hustler* magazine, the linchpin of the Flynt business, is in circulation trouble.

No one has been arrested yet for the Lawrenceville assault on Flynt and his lawyer, Gene Reeves. Flynt discounts rumors that organized crime resented him for muscling in on the sex market, and proposes instead a more sinister conspiracy: "I feel the attempt on my life was a direct means to stop the questions I was asking in my publications about the JFK assassination. I have my own theories on who shot me and why the FBI hasn't done more."

Lie-Detector Tests: Flynt offers no theories as to who bombed the empty car of William Rider, brother-in-law of Flynt's wife, Althea, last September, or who later shot and wounded Bill Abrams, vice president of Jimmy Flynt's sex-paraphernalia firm. While investigators are still trying to figure out whether the three attacks are connected, Flynt has quietly—and without explanation—asked the mutually hostile Rider and Abrams to submit to lie-detector tests. "I don't suspect them of anything," he insists. "There's no hurry about it. I just want to know where they stand on a few issues."

The press has speculated that a feud between the Flynt brothers may have divided the loyalties of their employees. After evangelist Ruth Carter Stapleton presided over Larry Flynt's religious awakening a year ago, Flynt began doling out thousands of dollars to support charitable causes, to raise employees' pay and to buy up smaller publications. Jimmy Flynt sought a court order to have his older brother committed to a mental institution, but later asked to have the order withdrawn. Both men play down rumors that a feud persists: Larry Flynt shrugs off the whole thing as an ordinary "family disagreement."

Flynt could have more trouble if an Ohio Supreme Court ruling, expected this month, upholds his 7-to-25-year conviction on obscenity charges, handed down in Cincinnati in 1977. But Flynt, whose case became a *cause célèbre* among crusaders against censorship, is ready to go to the U.S. Supreme Court. "The fight to protect the First Amendment has become an obsession with me,"

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he says. "I plan to continue this battle until pornography is not a political buzz word." He'll get a chance to battle again in February when he testifies at his Atlanta trial on similar charges.

Porn Again: Whatever the outcome, there are fewer copies of *Hustler* around these days: circulation has plummeted this year from a peak 2 million to little more than 1 million. After his religious conversion, Flynt had turned the magazine into a bizarre mixture of raunch and religious fervor; when he was shot, Althea, 25, stepped in to check the new trend and revert to mostly porn. But the

Larry Flynt with Althea, brother Jimmy: Feud rumors



magazine is suffering from tangles with distributors and financial problems. "I was in the hospital for eight months, so of course the business was not run the same," Flynt says. "As for cash-flow difficulties, everything is working out." Perhaps. But when he takes over again in January, saving *Hustler* may have to be Larry Flynt's top priority.