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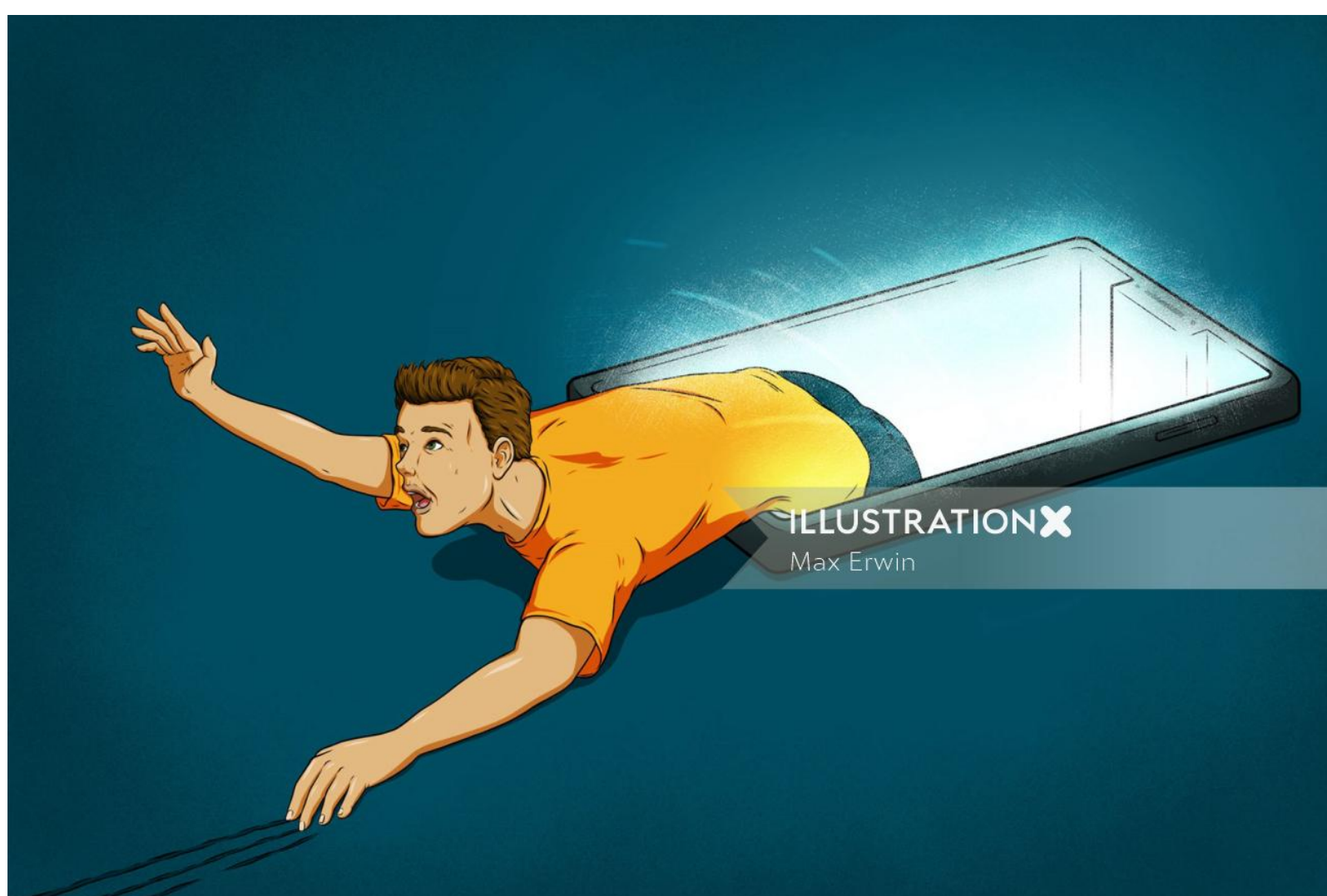
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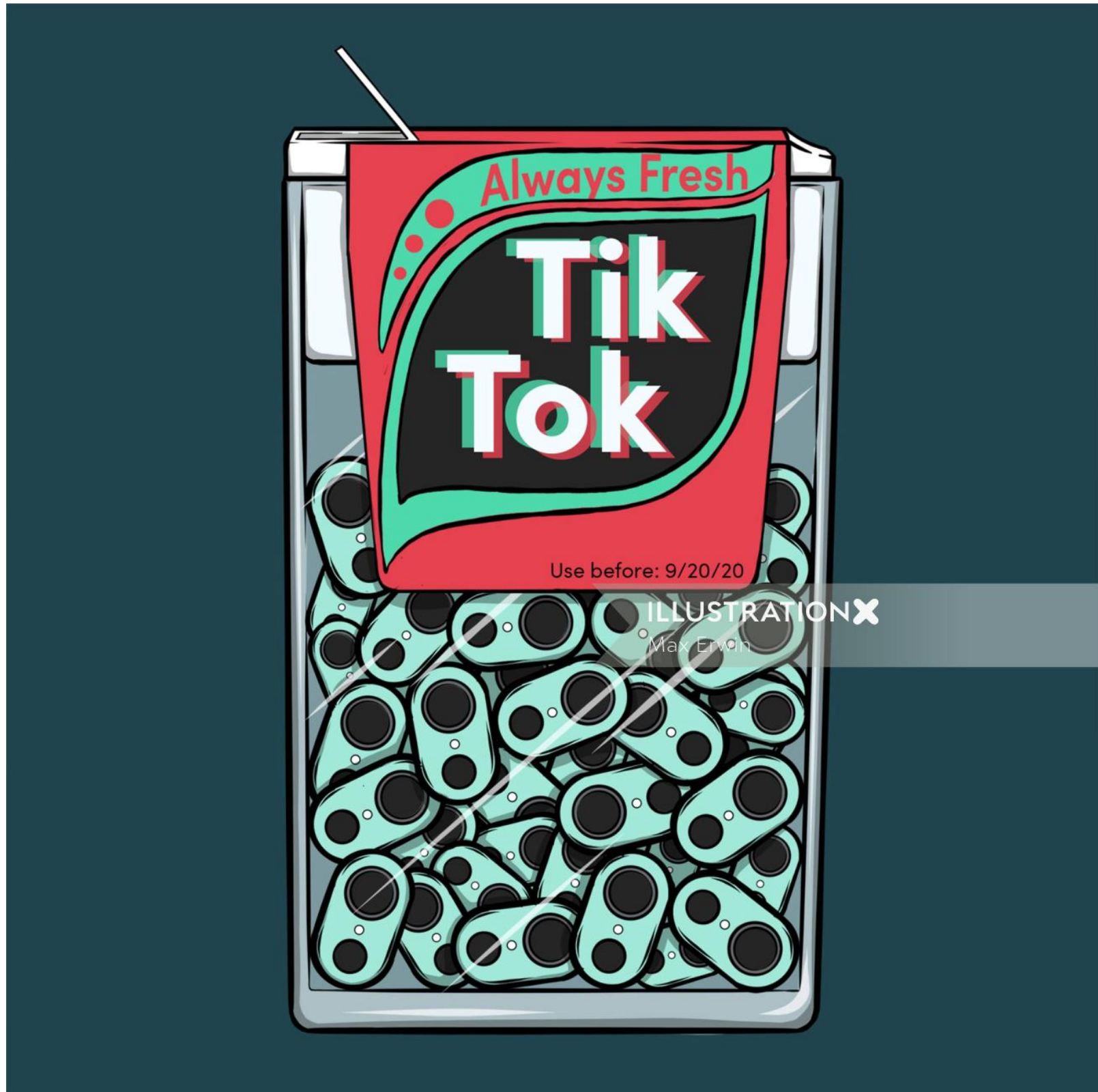
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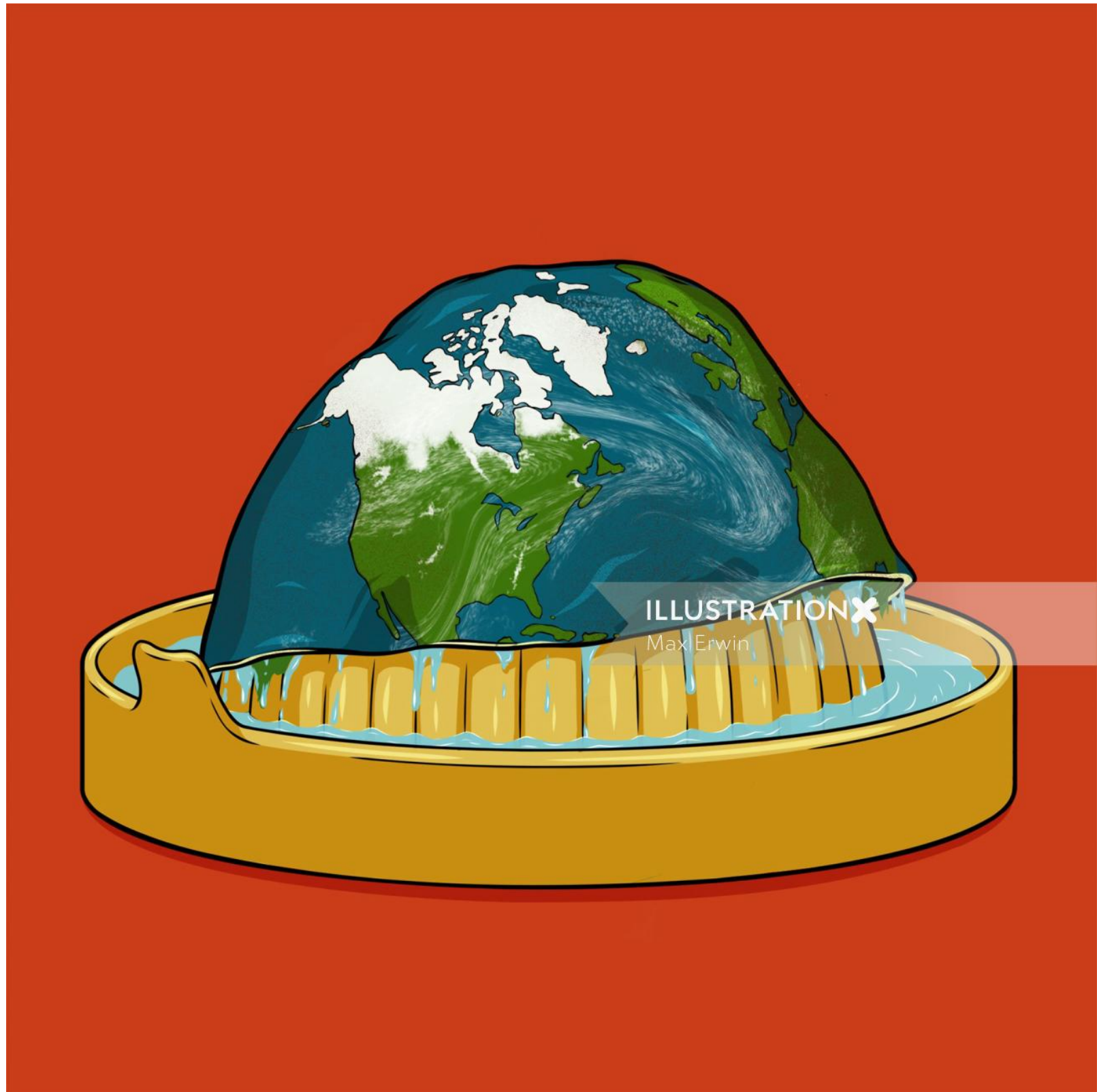
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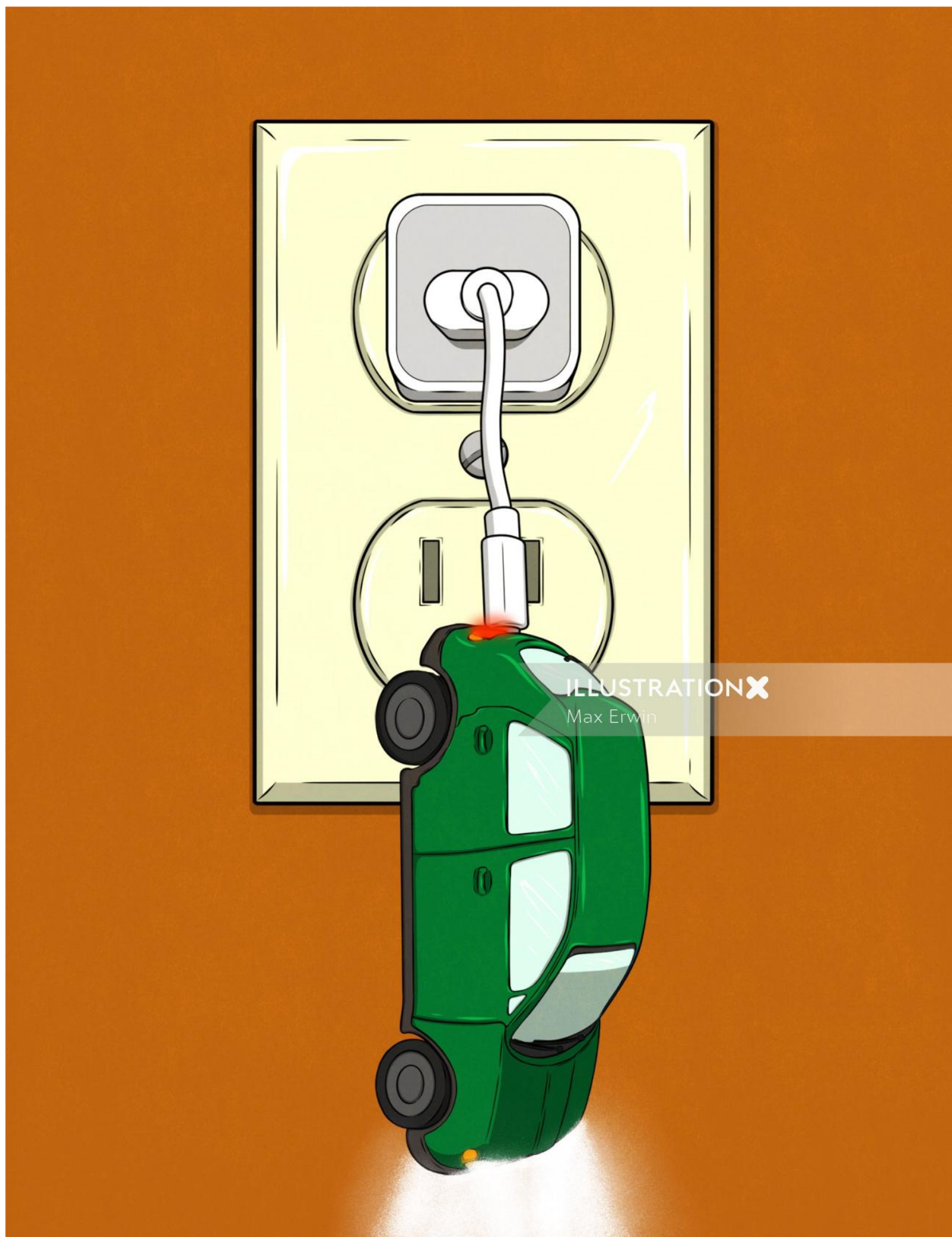
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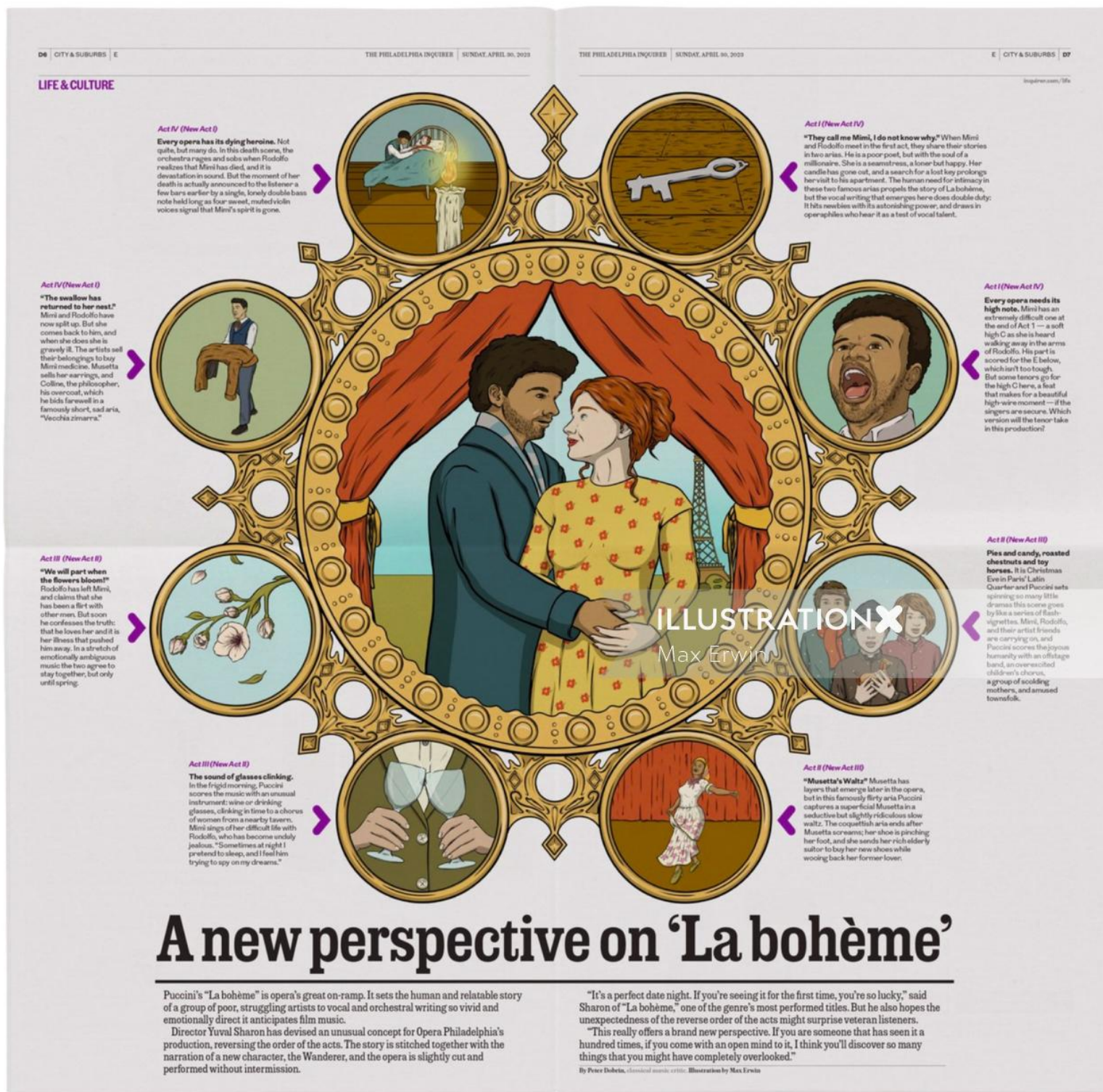
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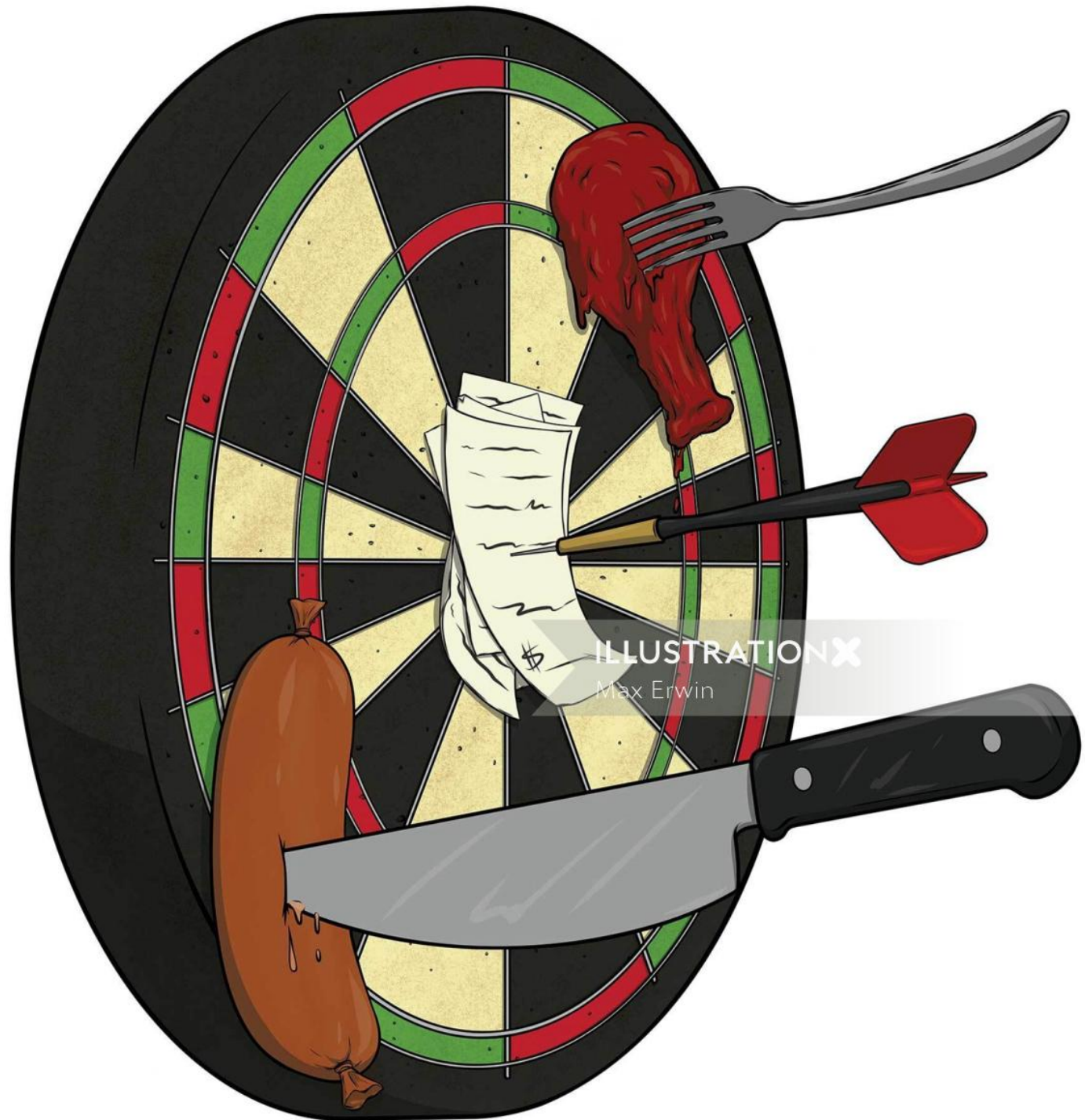
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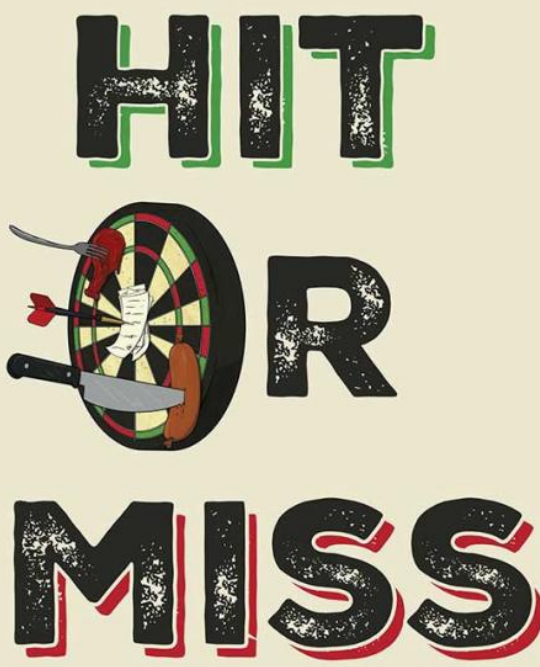
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HIT

OR

MISS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MAX ERWIN

After hours and hours of R&Ding, it's always gratifying to see a new menu item become a customer favorite. But sometimes, even when you and your team can't help yourselves from stealing bites during service, some things just don't sell. We chatted with chefs, bartenders, bakers, and pastry chefs across Central Texas to figure out which of their menu items **HIT**, which **MISS**ED the mark, and why.



CHEF PETER KLEIN OF HOLIDAY
For us, the ricotta cavatelli will always stay on. As soon as I put this on the menu, it started selling and it hasn't stopped. It's a comforting territory for a lot of people, and it's certainly one for me. The nice thing is that guests have been very receptive to whatever seasonal changes we make on the dish—whether it's tomatoes and basil or mushrooms, corn, and preserved lemon. It's nice to have that level of trust with our guests and it makes it easy to keep the cavatelli in rotation and update the set as needed for seasonality.

PASTRY CHEF ELISE RUSS OF CLEMENTINE
When we opened six years ago, I had put a chocolate-clementine crunch bar on the menu thinking I would change it in the next three months. It's still on the menu today. People have told me they would riot if I removed it from the menu, and so it has stayed on through the years. It's still one of my favorite desserts to eat. It's like a grown up version of the chocolate oranges that I used to get in my Christmas stockings as a kid.

CHEF RENE GARZA OF UPTOWN SPORTS CLUB
When we first opened, there were a good amount of people that were upset that our fried green tomato po'boy wasn't a side dish. They would often try to order it without the bread and end up digging through everything just to pick out the tomatoes. I think it was overshadowed by our hot roast beef or shrimp po'boys. Interestingly enough, we added the option to include bacon on the tomato sandwich a few weeks later and it's made the dish one of our highest selling items (recipe on pg. 94).

CHEF DANIEL BEN-DAVID OF CANNON & BELLE
We will never take off our half-roasted rotisserie chicken at Cannon & Belle. The guests see the chicken roasting in the rotisserie when they enter the restaurant and it becomes a no-brainer for them. The chicken is seasoned with our custom "Belle's Bird Dust," which has a heavy citrus and pepper presence. The chicken stays super juicy and we'll never be able to go back to a different chicken entrée again.

CHEF TAYLOR CHAMBERS OF SUERTE
I was figuring out how to incorporate fish head scraps onto the menu and I decided to steam the fish, fold it into a hoja santa roll, and serve it on a tostada with bright, fresh vegetables. It didn't do so well. The dish went through a few changes, and it still wasn't selling. I ended up using the same approach except instead of a tostada, I rolled the herbed fish scraps into a tortilla and fried it for some flautas. It was an instant hit served with a cilantro crema, pickled onions, and crunchy radishes.

BARTENDER JERET PEÑA
The first drink I had as an adult was a gin and tonic. It's been my go-to drink for years. I also love pickle juice, because I am a degenerate. In recent years, I have become a huge fan of highballs and bucks. One night, I had a eureka moment of adding pickle juice to a gin and tonic and bam! My new love was created. It doesn't sell often, but I know once people try the drink, they will fall in love with it. It's not going anywhere anytime soon.

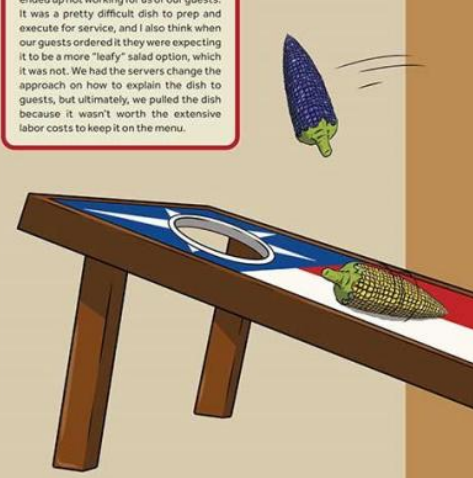
BARTENDER KATE HOUSER OF EMMER & RYE HOSPITALITY GROUP
With every menu change, I always include a martini variation, and it's always the least ordered menu item. It stays because I love them, the staff loves them, and industry folks love them. There has to be something on the menu that feels like a reflection of you, otherwise you will lose a connection with your own menu! I never want to have a meal at any of our spaces and feel like the cocktails are geared towards what everyone else wants. It feels necessary to carve out a space for something I know other booze nerds will get excited to drink, including me.

BARTENDER CHRISTOPHER CROW OF EDEN COCKTAIL ROOM
The Giness cocktail doesn't move because people see gin and tonic and immediately have negative feelings about the cocktail. They rely on past experiences with this combination, and don't allow themselves the opportunity to enjoy it in a new way. I found that by taking the emphasis away from the ingredients and placing more energy into the presentation of the cocktail, people became more open to it. Everyone loves a pretty cocktail.

CHEF EVAN LEROY OF LEROY AND LEWIS BARBECUE
We will never take off our smoked burger. It works for us and for our guests. We use extra beef scraps for the patties, so it's profitable and it's a bonus that people love it. As a Texas barbecue restaurant, we sometimes run out of items, so having something on the menu that we can cook in quick batches helps us better monitor our inventory throughout the day (recipe on pg. 94).

CHEF CHRISTINA CURRIER OF COMEDOR
We had a beautiful hominy salad served with picon salsa macha, butternut puree, and corn nuts on the menu for a bit. It ended up not working for us or our guests. It was a pretty difficult dish to prep and execute for service, and I also think when our guests ordered it they were expecting it to be a more "leafy" salad option, which it was not. We had the servers change the approach on how to explain the dish to guests, but ultimately, we pulled the dish because it wasn't worth the extensive labor costs to keep it on the menu.

BAKER ABBY LOVE OF ABBY JANE BAKESHOP
Cinnamon rolls. I love cinnamon rolls. It was important to me to get them right for the menu—from the dough, to the correct ratio of filling to the perfect icing. When we first opened, we had to do a lot of customer education on the flours we use and why the breads and treats look and taste like they do. We used to get "burnt" and "not French" comments when in fact we just needed our customers to trust us and learn that whole grains are naturally darker in color. We wore them down for sure. The cinnamon rolls are a customer (and staff) favorite for a reason, and we will never not have them.



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PASTRY CHEF CHELSEA SMITH OF SOUTH CONGRESS HOTEL
One of my favorite eliminated pastries was the garlic herb croissant. It was unfortunately not a hot seller at Café No Sé. We originally titled it as a fine herb croissant on the menu. When it didn't sell, we assumed it was because of poor explanation to the guests, despite our best pre-shift discussions and efforts. We changed the name to garlic herb croissant and still didn't see a shift in sales. We even tried lowering the price slightly and after that still didn't help, we were forced to cut it. It was a BOH favorite and we were all surprised that it didn't succeed. Besides our ham and cheese croissant, it was the only other savory pastry offering, so I guess there can only be one!

CHEF JAKUB CZYSZCZON OF GARRISON
Our tater tots absolutely crush and can't ever come off the menu. They are served with aerated Gruyère and a mountain of shaved black truffles, and literally every table orders them. I sometimes wish I could change them up but they are just so popular. It's an over-the-top play on a classic and I guess our guests just relate to it and clearly can't get enough of them.

BAKER ANNE NG OF BAKERY LORRAINE
There is only one pastry item that we can never take off the menu: our fresh fruit tart. It's a go-to for a lot of our customers, and with the warm weather season only getting longer and longer in Central Texas, this is a nice pick-me-up for our guests. We change out the fruit depending on what's good and in season, so that helps us keep it fresh. Our customers are pretty flexible with trying different versions, so we don't get as much push back on that as we do when certain savory menu items are taken away.

CHEF DANNY PARADA OF LADINO
The dish that stands out was our agristada—fish that's cured and poached in a lemon-egg sauce. It's absolutely delicious and a recipe that has been passed down in Executive Chef Bert Richter's family for generations. At first, we wouldn't take it off the menu simply because we loved it and it made so much sense for the restaurant, but it was consistently the lowest ordered menu item. Ultimately, we decided that trying to force something that wasn't being received well just didn't make sense. The reality is that as much as this restaurant is about showcasing a new cuisine to San Antonio, it is just as much about providing the community with a space where they feel welcomed, seen, heard, and accepted.

CHEF CASSIE RAMSEY OF RESTAURANT CLAUDINE
Our blue crab beignets are a big hit. They are pretty complicated to make, but are a real crowd favorite, and I know we would get a lot of negative customer feedback if they ever came off the menu. We make them fresh every single day. The dough takes an hour to rise and rolling it out takes another hour or two. But, we often have guests stop by and just get a few orders of these to-go, so it would be hard for us to take this one off!



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IT'S JIMMY NOT A DRINKS PHASE WORLD

BY LIZZIE TAKIMOTO
ILLUSTRATION BY MAX ERWIN

You're at your favorite local dive, the jukebox (or more likely, a streaming service) is blaring hits, and you and your best buds are singing along to every word. The only thing missing? A cocktail to match the vibe. Enter: Bartender Hayley Wilson. At Jimmy Drinks World, Wilson's pop punk-themed cocktail pop-up, it's all about "cocktails, community, and rock and roll."

The project started when the pandemic hit, and Wilson wanted to find a way to support not only local bars and restaurants in and around Portland, but music venues, too. As an avid pop punk fan who frequents the scene, she saw a natural marriage between the two worlds about bringing the similarities of music and hospitality together. And so many people work in both worlds.

Wilson kicked the project into high gear by reaching out to bars, concert halls, and practice spaces, and calling in friends and fellow industry members to come work. Wilson's first pop-up was at Portland Hunt & Alpine Club, where she works as the event and programming coordinator. Proceeds went to Sun Tiki Studios, a performance venue that also provides by-the-hour practice spaces. From day one, it has been important to Wilson that each event would directly support a local music venue, and that any beneficiaries would be small and privately owned. "[Venues] are a lot of big rooms and corporate-operated spaces, but opportunities need to exist for bands to build a base and community. Without that, bands don't have a platform to showcase their art and grow their fanbase." Additionally,

it was equally important that the bars or restaurants they would be popping up in were similarly minded. "We build community by making sure we are in safe, inclusive spaces," says Wilson. "We always try to [pop-up] in spaces that, for whatever reason, need a little extra love."

While there is no shame in enjoying a cold beer and a shot of whiskey while cranking Taking Back Sunday, Wilson's theory is that the right drink, when expertly matched to the environment it's enjoyed in, is transcendent. "A big thing for me is that music affects what you want to drink—the music sets the mood not so much if I'm at a punk show. For each Jimmy Drinks World event, Wilson curates a menu of original cocktails (non-alcoholic options included), each tailored to the space and theme. For a pop-up at Portland Zoo, a beer hall, Wilson created the Hello Houston (named after a Starting Line song) with green chile vodka and hop syrup. And for an event at tropical bar Shore Leave, there was an aged rum Old Fashioned with coconut and sea salt called Hot Tropic. "We won't bring things into spaces that they wouldn't carry themselves—that's who they are and that's what we want to highlight. We don't want people expecting a grand cocktail coming out of a beer bar. We have to think of all these little things."

The next piece of the puzzle was the music itself. Wilson's husband, business partner, and former sound technician, Zack Wilson, makes the playlists (all available on Spotify), filled with their favorite millennium-era pop punk

bands, like Alkaline Trio, Piebald, Motion City Soundtrack, and of course, Jimmy Eat World. "We strive to keep it in the early 2000s. If we branch into anything newer, it's an event all in itself. Like, emo revival is having a moment, so we will do an event." Zack also barbacks and sells merch at the events, with the proceeds going directly to the venue partner. Beverage sales are split between the house and the pop-up.

"We didn't know if people were going to dig this or not. It's not an emo night, or a live band performance, it's its own thing with a cocktail program. We had a line down the street for the first one full of people that wanted to come listen to pop punk while the sun was out!" The Wilsons market their events through social media and fliers posted at bars, restaurants, and venues, and partner with local artists to do the artwork and merch, as well as drag queens, The Curbside Queens, who come perform to pop punk songs. "It's about giving back, but also community building and meeting people with the same values."

Wilson hopes to soon take Jimmy on the road, while continuing to host community events in New England, whether through vinyl listening parties, holiday makers markets (complete with an Emo Santa), or Karaoke nights. "Without community support, restaurants wouldn't exist, but [neither would] these venues. Support your bartenders and your local bands. All of these places can't do what they do and give back if we don't give back to them."

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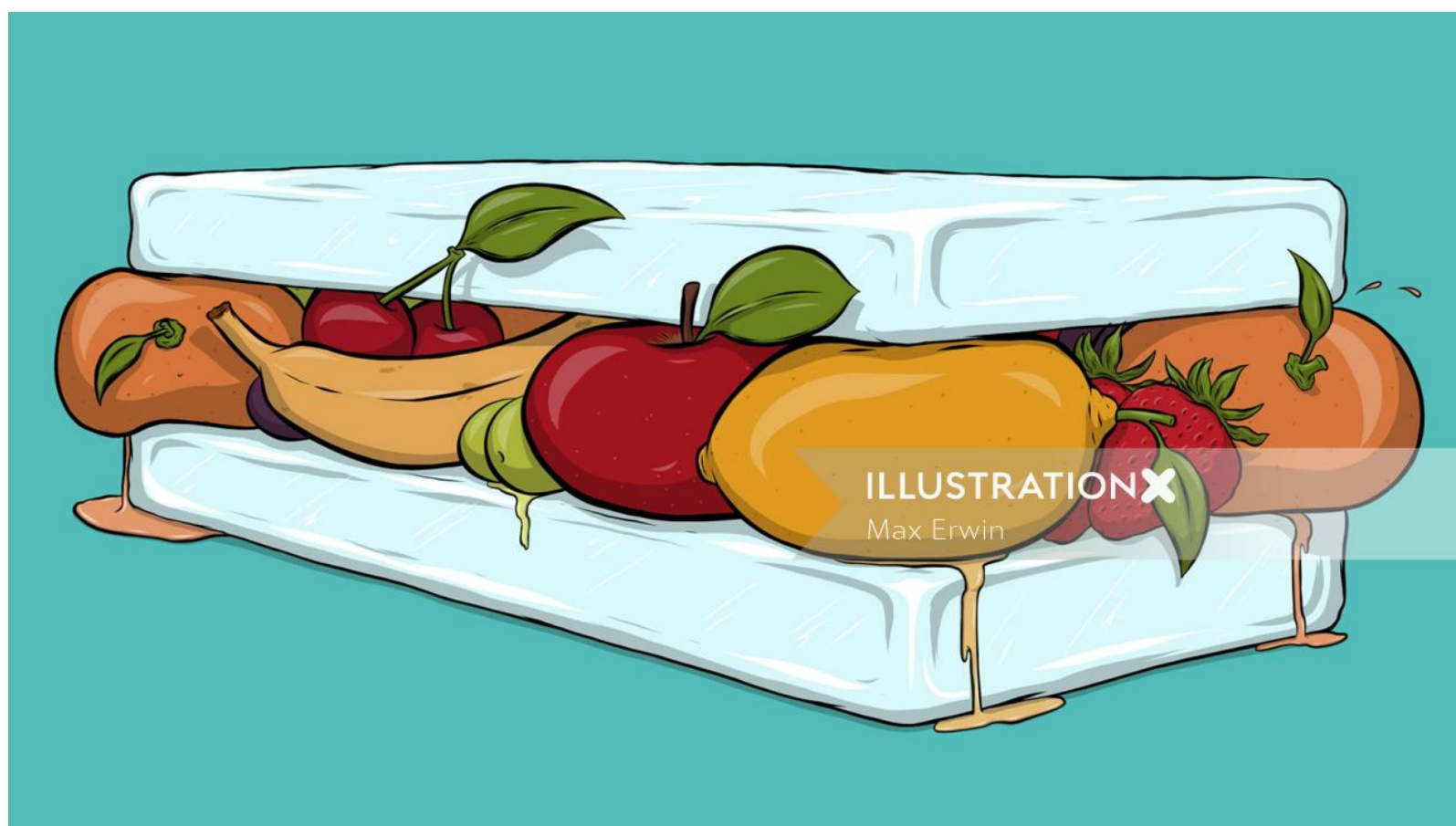
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