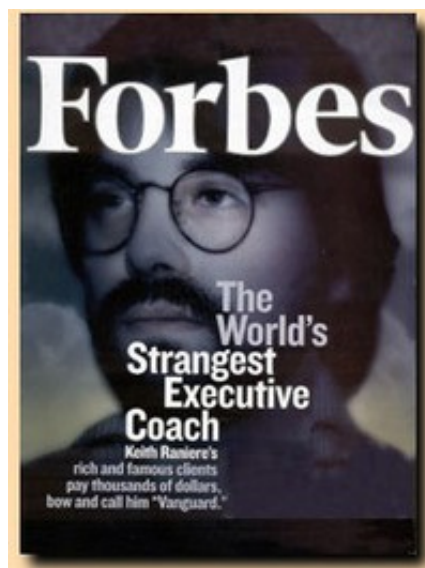




THE NEW YORK OBSERVER VS. NEW YORK'S \$100M CULT: THE TOP 10 LINES

BY FOSTER KAMER

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Have you read this week's *New York Observer* cover story, entitled 'Poor Little Rich Girls: The Ballad of Sara and Clare Bronfman'? No? You should. It's about:

- Absurdly rich young heiresses.
- Absurdly rich young heiresses to the Seagram's Gin fortune -- among other fortunes -- who lost \$100M and counting of their family's money.
- Absurdly rich young heiresses who lost \$100M and counting of their family's fortune to a psychotic New York cult-cum-pyramid scheme you've likely never heard of.
- Absurdly rich young heiresses entangled in cultures of paranoia, fear, jealousy, family drama, quasi-attempted murder, and shittons of money.
- Singer/rapper [M.I.A.'s fiancé](#) and Virgin/Atlantic billionaire Richard Branson.

And it's one of the best things you're going to read in a while.

Interesting that it hasn't had more "pickup" among the New York media set, because it's quite a story, and has all the makings of a classic New York tale: big money, big names, sex, manipulation, crazy people, fear, and power. A lot of power, apparently. The cult based in Saratoga Springs, New York (about an hour north of Albany) is called NXIVM -- pronounced Nex-ee-um -- and is lead by a long-haired sleaze (and apparent super-MENSA genius) who calls himself "Vanguard" (né Keith Raniere, pictured). The beliefs of NXIVM are kinda vague, but it's a bizarre cocktail of ESP, self-help, hypnosis, pyramid schemes, and way too much

Avn Rand

The *Village Voice* touched on the NXIVM story back in 2007 when [Chris Thompson wrote about a guy named Juval Aviv](#), a guy who claims to be ex-Mossad who Keith Raniere/NXIVM hired to smear (and one time, almost kill) an anti-cult activist and "de-programmer" named [Rick Ross](#), who NXIVM also tried to sue on a variety of charges, none of which they've won so far. The *New York Post* also got into the complete and utter insanity of NXIVM last month when they detailed a motherless 3 year-old orphan who Keith Raniere has named "Gaelen" and raised as his "son" despite not being the biological father.

But all of that kinda pales in comparison to Maureen Tkacik's *Observer* story this week, which is, to be blunt, fucking insane. To demonstrate this, and apropos of nothing else, here are my ten favorite lines from it, completely out-of-context, and in no particular order, emphasis mine:

- The first occasion I spoke to anyone with direct involvement in NXIVM was **a phone call from an anonymous Skype account.**
- [Keith Raniere] is what you would get, said one former associate, **"if David Koresh and Bernie Madoff had a child."**
- "For years I was telling them that the scarves, the stripes, all the weird stuff needed to go. I mean, **come on, the bowling?"**
- "In 2007 Edgar Sr. was forced to retire after almost three decades as president of the once mighty World Jewish Congress, the liberal philanthropic organization known as "the diplomatic arm of the Jewish people," after evidence surfaced that his trusted deputy, **Rabbi Israel Singer, had embezzled more than a million dollars.**"
- After the second divorce, she began a brief but tempestuous affair with Lorenzo Ricciardi, an Italian filmmaker in his 60s. **He was arrested in 1990 for trying to kill her.** In 2007, at age 57, **she married the British television actor Nigel Havers, an inveterate lady-killer and wingman to Mick Jagger.**
- "On the last day of class, he presented me with his personal copy of Atlas Shrugged, with all his highlighting and everything, and he looked at me very seriously and said, 'You're Dagny,'" she remembers, a reference to the Ayn Rand novel's heroine. Dagny is dragged down by an endless string of losers-guilty liberal men-before she submits to the industrial superman John Galt. **"It was obvious that he was supposed to be John Galt."**
- No. 11 of NXIVM's 12 "commandments" requires all followers to "pledge to ethically control as much of the money, wealth, and resources of the world as possible," on the grounds that **"it is essential for the survival of humankind for these things to be controlled by successful, ethical people."**
- Mr. Raniere hired Frank Parlato Jr., an Albany property developer, to fly to L.A. with **three "thugs," clad in sunglasses and long leather coats, and impersonate an emissary of "Papa Bronfman"** to intimidate Mr. Plyam into ceding his own assets to cover a portion of Mr. Raniere's losses.
- ...The wealth within the NXIVM network is formidable. It includes former Enron executive Stephen Cooper, **Black Entertainment Television co-founder Sheila Johnson, former U.S. Surgeon General Antonia Novello and actress Goldie Hawn.** Richard Branson has hosted an intensive NXIVM course on the Caribbean island he owns.
- On the evening of my visit to Saratoga Springs, Mr. Tighe called to inform me that a NXIVM member with whom I had met a few hours earlier had been "spotted" talking to me by a few apparent members of the cult. A few times walking along the town's main drag, **I distinctly heard voices call out "Moe" or "Maureen," then disappear into the crowd.**

Scandalous, fun, insane. [Read it](#). It's worth noting that these NXIVM crazies are as litigious as they are freaky! So they might be warming up a lawsuit for the New York Observer as they speak. Not that we'd ever want to provoke a lawsuit, but come on: this is a great story about the way people -- especially people who have been well-protected and cared for their entire lives -- allow themselves to be so easily manipulated. Sometimes, the grass is definitely not greener, and it's actually quite nice -- if not, disturbing -- to know what that kind of life is like: one you'd want to steer very, very clear of.

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