

As the badass with a heart of gold in *Freaks and Geeks*, Franco reminded me of the guy I wanted to be in high school. Between Daniel Desario's hard surface and soft core, he seemed to have effortless chemistry.



Just when I thought he'd sell out after hitting it big in *Spider-Man*, Franco followed his mentors into unique projects like *City by the Sea* with Robert De Niro. His method acting, though not always on point, surprised me.

NOSTALGIA

INTRIGUE

BEING FRANCO

James Franco toys with our EMOTIONS.

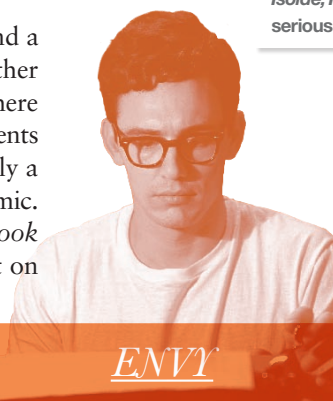
TEXT: STEPHEN BALDWIN

Predicting the evolution of Oscar-nominated James Franco's disparate body of work is next to impossible. Between modern-art installations and a regular gig on *General Hospital*, it's unclear whether he's becoming more talented or more confused. There was, however, a point when Franco's accomplishments left me feeling inadequate as not only a man but also a writer and an academic. As *James Franco: The Dangerous Book Four Boys* hits bookstores, I reflect on my path to acceptance.



While I was initially impressed by Franco's bohemian flashes, he was starting to take his role as an artist a bit too seriously. He wrote, directed and starred in *The Ape*, a pretty terrible film about moving in with a belligerent monkey, and went from doing passion projects to a multitude of uninspiring B movies (*Tristan & Isolde*, *Flyboys*). Result? A serious downward spiral.

SKEPTICISM

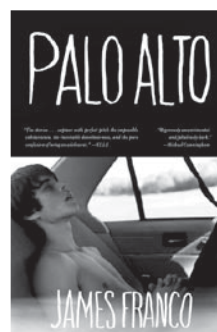


Now I was jealous. He is probably the only man who will ever be voted Stoner of the Year and Sexiest Man Alive. His near-perfect performance in *127 Hours* made my blood boil. He finished off a B.A. in English at UCLA, was the face of Gucci and starred in the film adaptation of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*. How can any man compete with that?

RESPECT

ENVY

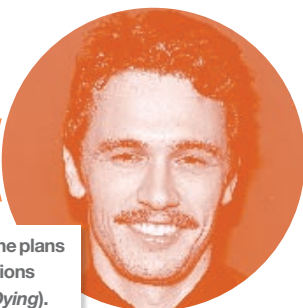
I saw his stoner turn in *Pineapple Express* and his appearance on *SNL* as signs of maturity. He wasn't afraid to make fun of himself! I reconciled my issues with him just in time for *Milk*—easily the best performance of his career.



APATHY

AVERSION

I am now at peace with Franco. I don't mind that he plans to take on the likely-underwhelming film adaptations of my fave books (*The Adderall Diaries*, *As I Lay Dying*). I now realize that his intentions are good, if misguided. So, the last art installation, soap-opera appearance and short story are just water under the bridge of bohemia. □



My envy subsided when I heard that Franco was simultaneously attending Columbia, NYU and Brooklyn College. He gave up on pretending to be a "starving artist" by letting his name (money) secure his acceptances. When his short-story collection, *Palo Alto: Stories*, was published in 2010 to pretty nasty reviews, I found great pleasure in my genuine aversion to his writing.