



Playmates Images from the new Playboy tome, clockwise from left: Hefner lands a big one; a pair of early cartoons, from when he called himself Goo; two famous covers.



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Before the mansion and the grotto, the clubs and casinos, the circular bed and the Big Bunny DC-9, Hugh Hefner was like every other teenage boy: looking for an identity and finding it in fantasy. For students of psychology — which Hefner himself was in the late 1940s — Taschen's new six-volume Playboy compendium offers new insight into the creation myth of a magazine that ignited the sexual revolution. Many aspects of what Hefner would become are visible in the early cartoons he drew; he would imagine himself as a master storyteller, a crusading freedom fighter and an accomplished lover. "With the comic book I created a world of my own and set myself center stage," Hefner confirms. "That evolved into a graphic autobiography — a scrapbook — that's grown to a work of 2,000 volumes." Playboy, in other words. Hefner's transformation began with a change from Hugh, a name he didn't like, to Goo. Then, at 16, "I was rejected by a girl and reinvented myself for the first time. I started referring to myself as Hef, changed my wardrobe and became a jitterbug." In 1959, in the context of Elvis, Marilyn, the Kinsey report and the pill, Hef reinvented himself once more. "I became Mr. Playboy." It was a fantasy complete with a television show ("Playboy's Penthouse"), an annual jazz festival, the Chicago mansion, pajama parties, cigars and a veritable harem. Fifty years later, Hefner's impulses live on. He bought the burial plot next to Marilyn Monroe, "so we'll be spending eternity together." But even at 83, thoughts of mortality don't linger. There are the two new, semi-official girlfriends — the blond twins Kristina and Karissa, age 19 — and he still shows up for work. "I pick the Playmates, the covers, the cartoons, the party jokes, and edit the letters and pictorials," he says. A soldier of love is never at rest. **EDWARD HELMORE**