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CHICAGO READER

CHICAGO'S FREE WEEKLY | THIS ISSUE IN FOUR SECTIONS
FRIDAY, SEPT 2, 2005 | VOLUME 34, NUMBER 49

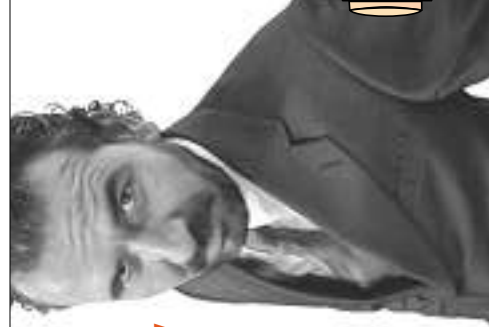
Ivan Brunetti arrives

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Movies Alex de la Iglesia's dark comedy El crimen perfecto

p. 26



PLUS Miner on the anatomy of a hoax, Joravsky on the Park Grill's woes, Lynn Becker on Mies's Crown Hall, Liz Armstrong on getting weird shit in the mail, and more.

Our complete pullout guide to the
CHICAGO JAZZ FESTIVAL

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End Game

Gary Stern is the only guy in the world still making pinball machines.

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This week's crossword: Crossing the Finish Line

ON THE COVER: ELIZABETH M. TAMNY (PINBALL), SHEILA SACHS (INSTRUMENTS)

End Game



Gary Stern at his factory in Melrose Park



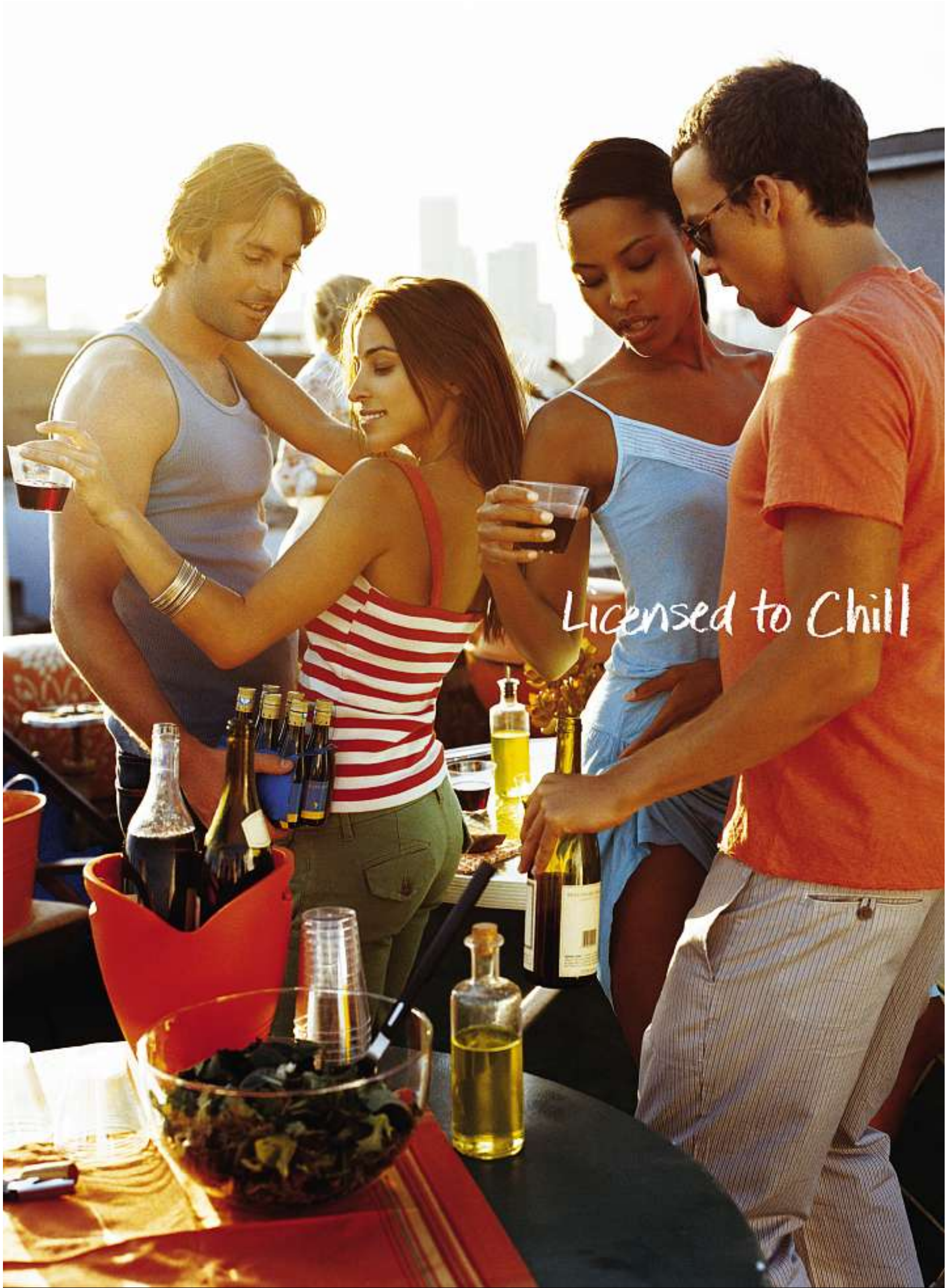
Gary Stern is the only guy in the world still making pinball machines.

By Seth Porges | Photographs by Marty Perez

Taped to the door of a small room next to the factory floor at Stern Pinball is a memo telling employees they have to sign up to play the company's latest game and test it for bugs. "If you don't sign up," it says, "you obviously don't want to work at a pinball factory."

Gary Stern, owner of the company and author of the memo, is inside playing Elvis. The room is dark, and only the flashing lights of the game's playing field illuminate his face. Asked a question, he says, "Shhhh. This is serious business." When he makes a good shot, a plastic figurine of the King shakes its hips, and the machine plays the hook from "All Shook Up." He laughs.

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Letters

Where Indymedia Puts It

Dear editor:

In response to the criticism of the Chicago Independent Media Center (chicago.indymedia.org) in last week's letter by a Protest-Warrior [August 26], we would like to call attention to our editorial policy, which is on our Web site:

"The collective that maintains the CIMC website can hide posts if the material is far outside of, or in conflict with, the principles of the project and this website.

Examples of material that may be hidden include newswire posts that are racist, sexist, homophobic, or that clearly fly in the face of our mission to serve as a space for the exchange of news, dialogue, and opinion that advances economic and social justice.

"In addition, posts that serve as commercials for for-profit companies will be removed. We respect and support a diversity of opinion, but our site, as well as other sites in the Indymedia network, have unfortunately been increasingly targeted by quantities of right-wing disinformation and hatred-promoting messages. We would appreciate it if such persons would instead use [other Web sites], or set up their own . . . rather than subjecting our readers and posters to their objectionable cant."

However, when we find postings which violate our editorial policy they are not erased; they're merely moved into the "hidden articles" section of our Web site. Those articles can be viewed by selecting the "hidden articles" link on the lower right of our home page. The articles, which Mr. Fleming says we are "deleting," can be found there.

We should also say that ProtestWarrior is notorious for harassing bona fide left organizers during protests, rallies, events, and in the digital realm. While we welcome civil, honest, and constructive dialogue from a variety of perspectives, we do not tolerate abuse, but we have yet to hear anything besides incessant abuse from ProtestWarrior and their ilk.

In solidarity,

Mitchell Szczepanczyk
Rita Sand

Don GoldhamerChicago Independent Media Center
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Hypocrite Hackers

Your cover story ["But Can He Hack Prison?" August 19] does a good job of documenting the sorry state of "radical" politics these days. I can just see all these left- and right-wing computer nerds trying to figure out how to shut down Web sites they don't like. Talk about hypocrisy. Jeremy Hammond trumpets himself as being the defender of the "free Internet." What he seems to mean is that the Internet should be "free" as long as he agrees with the content in question.

Gary Baldwin

River North

It's Not Easy Being Lefty

While I typically find extreme activists on both ends of the political spectrum to be, at best, annoyingly cute but rarely informative (god, everything was so very black-and-white when I was younger too!), Mr. Fleming [Letters, August 26] and the rest of his ilk need to be aware of, or at least acknowledge, one very glaring difference between activists on the left and right: groups such as [ProtestWarrior] haven't been infiltrated by the FBI, weren't subjected to preemptive arrests prior to political conventions, weren't threatened with grand jury subpoenas, and on and on and on. And Justin, please drop the "center-right" appellation. There is nothing even remotely centrist about anyone who supports the current administration.

Jake Daab

S. Union

Cheap Thrills

I am disheartened that the *Reader* chose to run an article that described the cruel prank pulled by Julia Rickert and her roommate Derek Erdman in 2001 ["My Muff Has Tusks!" August 19]. The snarky



Justin Fleming
of Protest-Warrior in Letters, August 26: "While the social justice movement covers their faces with bandannas when speaking their truest convictions or shriek about "persecution" whenever their message, means, motives, and associations are called into criticism, those of us who have gone out into the street with our support for the U.S.'s prosecution of a war against terror haven't seen the need for such protections."

tone of the article, posted under the heading High Jinks, is clearly meant to entice us to find their stunt clever and amusing; instead I am thoroughly disgusted. It does not seem that the men who responded to the chat room invite were looking to commit statutory rape or a crime of any kind. Rather it seems that they were just men with a mild kink looking for some clean fun with a consenting adult. The *Reader*, after it has made a fortune in advertising revenue from phone sex and other adult-themed services, now sees fit to mock the people who patronize these services.

But Ms. Rickert and Mr. Erdman didn't just lure them to phone; they then proceeded to humiliate them with messages that insulted them with stock phrases recorded on a sampler. All of this is lurid and debasing for all concerned, but where Rickert and Erdman descend into the truly creepy is in recording the voice mail and releasing a CD. I am pretty sure that after Steve Allen, the FCC does not approve of phone calls being unknowingly used for entertainment purposes. Are we supposed to find their illegal behavior funny?

Look, I understand that there is something pathetic about people trying to meet sexual needs over the phone with strangers. But what's disgusting is the willingness of people like Rickert and Erdman to embarrass others simply because they are vulnerable. Simply put, they are bullies. And Ms. Rickert's attempt to justify this sadism is lame, to say the least.

Suppose Rickert and Erdman had posted a picture of a young stud and enticed gay men to call with their fantasies and then be held up for mockery. It is hard to imagine that such an article would have been allowed to be published. But what exactly is different?

I have always felt like the *Reader* existed in a slightly utopian space, where if we were just a little more tolerant of other people's quirks the world would be a better place. To find the *Reader* glorifying the wanton humiliation of mild deviants and rewarding one of the perpetrators with a job is a dispiriting sign of the times.

Joshua Kilroy

Hyde Park

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You Can Fool All of the People Some of the Time

In the history of hoaxes, the Kodee Kennings story is a doozy.

By Michael Miner

In 1989 *Tribune* investigative reporter Bill Recktenwald took a call from the daughter of Vito Marzullo, a 91-year-old former alderman. The *Tribune* had just published Marzullo's obituary, but in the background Recktenwald could hear him cackling, "Tell 'em I'm still alive!" Two years later the *Tribune* ran a story about a Green Beret from Palos Hills who'd parachuted behind Iraqi lines on a secret mission during the gulf war. A lot of callers questioned the story, and an editor told Recktenwald to check into it. "It took me five minutes to find out this guy was not in the army," he says.

These things happen. In the spring of 2003 sports editor Michael Brenner of the *Daily Egyptian* of Southern Illinois University in Carbondale invited an eight-year-old girl who'd written a fan letter to stop by for a visit. Dressed in army fatigues, little Kodee Kennings arrived with her "guardian" from nearby Marion, Colleen Hastings, who told a touching tale: Kodee's mom was dead, and her dad had gone off to fight in Iraq. The story Brenner wrote about Kodee was too vivid—he described Sergeant Dan Kennings's heart-wrenching farewell at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, as though he'd been there to see it. And even though Brenner had only one grown-up source—Colleen—he didn't double-check what she told him with

the Department of Defense.

For obvious reasons Recktenwald, who now teaches journalism at SIU, has spent some time lately recalling those old *Tribune* mistakes.

Everything that went wrong then went wrong in the Kodee Kennings hoax—and a lot more.

In the fall of 2003 Brenner became editor of the *Egyptian*, and Kodee's colorfully misspelled letters to the paper were turned into a popular column; the little girl who longed for her warrior father was a voice of the war. "Dear Mr. Presadent," she wrote. "I'm rily mad at you and you make my hart hurt. I don't think your doing a very good job. You keep sending soldiers to Iraq and it's not fair. Do you have a soldier of your own in Irak? Why can't our soldiers come home?" Kodee and Colleen dropped by the *Egyptian* every few weeks, and the girl often called; staffers passed the phone around, and she talked for hours.

If you've been reading the *Tribune* in recent days you know how this story comes out. Colleen let it be known that Dan Kennings had died in Iraq and there'd be a memorial service August 20. Alerted by Recktenwald to this human drama, the *Tribune* sent a reporter to cover it. But he says that 1991 Green Beret story taught the *Tribune* a lesson. As a matter of routine, the *Tribune* tried to confirm the death with the Depart-



Caitlin Hadley, aka Kodee Kennings

ment of Defense. It couldn't. Recktenwald tried to help the *Egyptian* confirm it by exchanging e-mail with someone he knew in Baghdad. Eventually that contact concluded: "The facts of his death are clear that he did not die here. His life is a question now."

There was no Colleen Hastings. She was actually Jaimie Reynolds, a radio-TV major who graduated from SIU in 2004. It seems beyond belief that one journalism student could have fooled so many other journalism students for so long, but Recktenwald says the communications and media arts building is huge, and the radio-TV studios and the newspaper office are so far apart that the *Egyptian* editors probably never saw her. One *Egyptian* ad worker did run into

"Colleen" in another part of the building and asked what she was doing. Reynolds laughed and replied, "Oh, you have me mixed up with my twin sister."

There was no Kodee Kennings either. She was actually Caitlin Hadley, the daughter of a minister in Montpelier, Indiana. And there was no Dan Kennings. The man who occasionally portrayed him—such as during a visit to the *Egyptian* while he was supposedly home for special training—was actually Patrick Trovillion, a nurse from Vienna, Illinois. He and Hadley and Hadley's parents have tried to explain to reporters that Reynolds told them she was making some kind of movie with hidden mikes and cameras and that they believed her. Those letters and phone calls from "Kodee" to

the *Egyptian* newsroom? Hadley's parents say it wasn't their daughter who made them.

The paper admits all in a statement on its Web site, "DE duped in hoax." It's posted every last word of its Kodee Kennings coverage, and to read those 16 stories now is to marvel at human credulity.

Even Moustafa "Mous" Ayad believed. Born in Egypt, Ayad lived in Kuwait until 1991, when he was ten. Two days before Iraq invaded, the family left on a vacation to Disney World, and they didn't go back. Ayad wound up an SIU journalism student and staffer at the *Egyptian*, where he had no use for Kodee. "We were allowing all these misspellings, and everybody was 'Oh, it's so cute,'" he says. "But it wasn't cute to anybody in the newsroom who had any respect for the opinion pages. It was only cute to anyone smitten by her charm."

Ayad says Kodee would come around with Colleen every couple of weeks to toss a football with Brenner and fire off her Nerf gun in the newsroom, where a banner on a wall says, "If your mother says she loves you check it out." The horseplay drove Ayad nuts. "I was like, 'I've got to write a story and go home and study for a test. I don't have time for a nine-year-old.'"

When Ayad became editor of the *Egyptian* in the fall of 2004 he had big plans: he wanted the paper to focus on the elections

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The Straight Dope® by Cecil Adams

I recently watched a karate/tae kwon do demonstration of breaking boards, and once again I wondered: What is the important part in making the board break? Is it the speed with which the martial artist moves his hands/feet/elbows, according to the laws of physics, meaning any other trained sportsman who achieved that same speed could do the same? Or is it mostly concentration, summoning of chi, etc, as martial artists claim? —Constanze W., Germany

and to dig into a potentially scandalous audit of the university. "I wanted to change the way this newspaper worked, and the last thing on my mind was what little Kodee Kennings was going through." He promptly banished her from its pages—an unpopular decision. "I took a lot of heat from readers. I got hate mail."

He'd been affected by war himself, but though he's sure it makes him sound "heartless and cold," he says, "I didn't identify with her at all." Yet he didn't doubt her story, and he didn't doubt Dan Kennings when he met him. "I said, 'How much Arabic do you know?' And he said the Arabic word for 'stop'—*qif*—and I was, 'Oh, this guy knows a little Arabic.'" (Ayad knew so little himself that as a career move he'd gone back to Cairo one summer to study it.)

Now a reporter in Pittsburgh, Ayad points out that none of today's *Egyptian* editors were there when Kodee was. Neither was Eric Fidler, the new faculty managing editor. Fidler says that in more than 20 years as a reporter for the AP and various papers he never saw a story so bizarre. Like Recktenwald and Ayad, he doesn't believe Brenner was in on the plot, though Reynolds has said she was trying to help him further his career. Beyond that, Fidler's at a loss.

But when the truth came out, he says, "I sent Mous an e-mail saying, 'Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.'"

Credit Report

Thomas Ryan was known as a tough man in a tough job—superintendent of the Sauk Village school district, one of the poorest in the state. His zero-tolerance

discipline policy dragged the district into lawsuits, but he was backed by his board and honored by his peers. He sat on the governor's Education Accountability Task Force. He sat on the board of the Illinois Association of School Administrators.

This March the *Daily Southtown* reported that an audit of the 2003-'04 school year discovered that school funds were used to buy cabinets for Ryan's home and insurance for his car and to cover more than \$6,000 of a daughter's college tuition. Ryan dismissed the irregularities as honest mistakes, the *Southtown* reported, and despite the audit the school board gave him a new contract with a 9 percent raise.

The *Southtown's* education writer, Linda Lutton, kept poking around. She reported finding a dozen more tuition checks drawn on school funds, and after-school-program money that had paid for Blackhawks tickets, graduation gifts for Ryan's three daughters, and a DJ for a staff party.

When Cook County state's attorney Richard Devine personally announced Ryan's indictment on August 23, he said, "It is the worst case of financial fraud by a public official I have seen in my nearly nine years as state's attorney." Ryan was accused of stealing more than \$100,000 from the district (some \$70,000 of which went to his daughters' colleges), of awarding a buddy a \$72,000 no-bid lighting contract, of demanding kickbacks from employees paid overtime, and of intimidating employees into doctoring records to cover his tracks. "He also milked the milk fund, stole library fees, and made off with book fees," said Devine. "The financial havoc he wrought in the district will be felt for years."

continued on page 6

Considering what an exercise in participatory science this turned out to be, you might guess I started by consulting ancient masters and visiting martial arts shrines to get a handle on the subject. Nah. I googled it. Topping the results was a paper promisingly entitled "The Physics of Karate Strikes" by Jon Chananie at the University of Virginia. On inquiry I learned that Jon, a good fellow who's now a UVA law student, had been an undergraduate writing in the short-lived e-pub *Journal of How Things Work*, a venue that didn't inspire the same confidence as, say, the *Acta Gynecologica Scandinavica*. Then again, other *JOHTW* articles included "How a Cruise Missile Works" and "Crafty Connie's Hot Glue Gun Experience," so I figured, hey, maybe this guy's OK.

He was. Jon had done his homework, among other things citing a genuine (in my book) ancient master, my friend Jearl Walker, who'd expounded on the subject in 1975. His article informs us that karate is governed by such axioms of physics as $F = ma$, $\Delta p = Ft$, and so on, the practical significance of which is that the *karateka* (karate artiste) should hit the boards as fast as possible, minimizing the contact surface of the blow so as to maximize impact. No mention is made of chi, concentration, or any such; Jon merely observes, "Karate black belts often advise white belts (rookies) ... not to try to break the board, but to break the floor under the board. This is to ensure that the hand does not decelerate prior to contact with the target." No disrespect to Jon, but imagining one's civilization-softened hand encountering a stack of kiln-dried two-by-fours at bone-shattering speed, one thinks: There's gotta be more to it than that.

Back to the Internet. Ten more minutes of browsing elicited the following additional insights: (1) In the typical karate demonstration—strictly speaking, the typical karate demonstration as performed by a physics teacher—the boards aren't packed solid but rather are separated by pencils,

meaning that you don't strike the boards en bloc, as it were, but rather one at a time. (2) The boards aren't two-by-fours laid lengthwise; instead, they're six-inch pieces of one-by-twelve (nominal; true thickness three-quarters of an inch) laid so that the blow strikes parallel to the grain.

Now we were getting somewhere. Time to repair to the lab. I bought some one-by-twelve pine board and a box of number-two pencils, sawed the former into pieces of the requisite dimension, and upended a couple concrete blocks to serve as a platform. Never one to be accused of rashness, I started with one board. Easy. Three. Knife through butter. Five. I'd had more trouble swatting gnats.

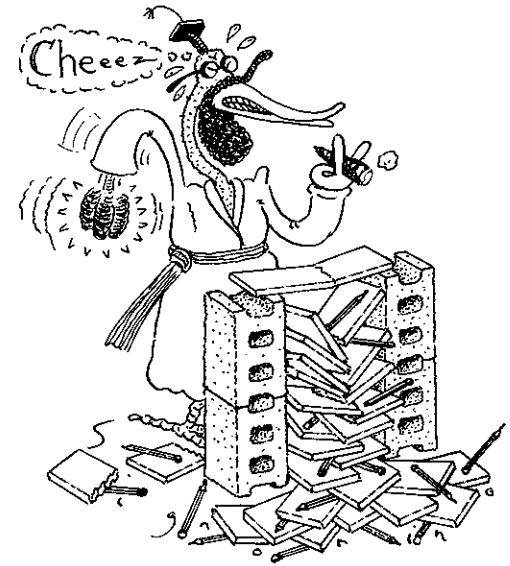
Seven. Well. Advantageously grained and interpolated with pencils though they may be, seven boards is a formidable stack of lumber. I reviewed my sparse knowledge of karate. Chi is not a thing readily summoned on short notice. Likewise, while it's fine to speak of breaking the floor under the board, landing the blow inside your opponent's body, etc, it's something else to actually do it. I pretty much just hauled back and let fly.

Shoot. I split five boards, cracked the

sixth, left the seventh intact—call it five and a half. Recuperating briefly, I tried again. Same result. Thinking that my low platform was preventing me from getting enough back into the project, I got a couple more concrete blocks, made the thing higher, and on my next try endeavored to uncoil my physical being in stages so as to maximize the velocity of the blow. This time I cleanly split six boards, but the seventh remained unscathed.

I called it a night but in the morning resolved to have at it again. Two more attempts, the second using both hands. (Hey, I was on deadline.) No go. Mrs. Adams sweetly suggested having one of the little researchers try, reasoning that, being taller and younger, he would have the advantage of leverage and a fresher supply of testosterone. Ha. The kid split three, cracked two, and left two on the table. Once more for the old man, this time with six boards. I split five.

Am I quitting? No, merely taking a breather till the swelling goes down. Verdict so far: It's likely just physics, but if somebody has a line on some chi, I'm game to give it a go.



Comments, questions? Take it up with Cecil on the Straight Dope Message Board, www.straightdope.com, or write him at the Chicago Reader, 11 E. Illinois, Chicago 60611. Cecil's most recent compendium of knowledge, *Triumph of the Straight Dope*, is available at bookstores everywhere.

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Hot Type

continued from page 5

On August 16 a raid of Ryan's home in Orland Park netted some \$730,000 in cash stashed there. The same day the former school board president—a Ryan ally who'd resigned in late July—was indicted for theft, misapplication of funds, and official misconduct.

By that time other papers had begun taking notice of the scandal. The *Sun-Times* and *Tribune* both covered Devine's press conference. But until she moved to Mexico in July, Lutton worked the story pretty much alone.

Devine praised the *Southtown* for its work, and assistant state's attorney Scott Cassidy, who led the investigation, told me, "They did a

wonderful piece of journalism."

That's not what other papers said. The occasional pettiness of newspapers can take your breath away, especially big papers that treat small papers' stories as if they don't exist. The AP account of Ryan's indictment cited the *Southtown*, but neither of the downtown dailies did, even though the *Sun-Times* and the *Southtown* are both Hollinger papers.

I asked Phil Jurik, who runs the *Tribune's* Orland Park bureau, why his bureau didn't touch the Ryan story until July. "I just don't think I'm going to go there," he said. But he conceded, "Probably most papers don't do a

good enough job of giving each other credit." Not content with giving the *Southtown* no credit, the *Tribune* reported that Devine's office swung into action after getting a letter from the state board of education.

Lutton e-mailed me, "The only reason the state board did ANYTHING at all—and all they did was pass on the audit I uncovered—was because I was all over them asking, 'What is the state board going to DO about this??'"

Lutton said the *Tribune* had no reason to mention her by name. "But at least they could have said that 'newspaper reports' sparked the investigation."

Ray Nordstrand, 1932-2005

WFMT's vernacular quality made the station an easy habit to get into. It exuded comfortable midwestern intelligence; the brow was high but seldom arched. Ray Nordstrand, who spent 52 years there in one capacity or another, died last week, and when the station played highlights of his old *Midnight Specials*, I heard the plain, awkward voice of a Jack

Overheard

On the Red Line, a big galoot in a Cubs cap bitching about "Crusty Baker": "They haven't won a World Series in a hundred years," he says to his buddy. "Do you know how long that is?" —Kate Schmidt

Brickhouse with different enthusiasms.

WFMT was largely Nordstrand's creation, as was *Chicago* maga-



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zine, which began as the station's program guide. Ron Dorfman, an editor who left the magazine in the late 70s because of an exposé Nordstrand wouldn't run, gives Nordstrand credit for "real entrepreneurial genius." He says Nordstrand managed to persuade the audience, staff, and advertisers of WFMT and *Chicago* "that they were, for the most part, a mutually respectful community, all participating in the same high-minded enterprise."

Nordstrand was more comfortable as a champion of culture than of muckraking journalism, but by the late 80s staffers at both places felt his leadership was too complacent. His board eventually stripped him of his executive authority and sold the magazine, and WFMT entered a time of turmoil, from which it was slow to emerge. "Ray was curiously unbitter about the raw deal he'd received," remembers Tony Judge, WFMT's sales manager until he was fired in a 1990 bloodletting. Nordstrand even continued to work for the station as a consultant. If he ever wondered why so many good things end so badly, he must have decided they don't need to. ☐



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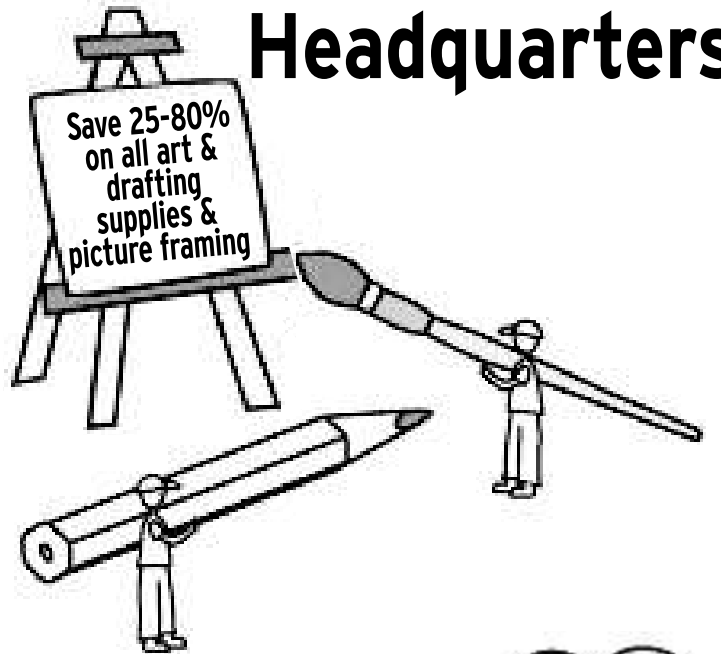
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The Poor, Poor Park Grill

Even if they end up paying property taxes, they still have a ridiculously good deal.

By Ben Joravsky

James Horan and Matthew O'Malley, the well-connected proprietors of the Park Grill restaurant in Millennium Park, got a sweet deal. In 2003 they signed a 30-year contract with the Park District that allowed them to pay relatively little for the right to operate a restaurant, a souvenir shop, a bakery, and several kiosks and concession carts in the park. The deal was so sweet it drew lots of attention from the media—and from the county tax assessor. Now they're about to get hit with a big property tax bill, even though Park District concessionaires rarely pay property taxes.

As I wrote in February, the Park Grill soap opera began in October 2001, when the Park District selected Horan and O'Malley for the restaurant contract, even though two rivals were offering to pay more for the privilege. After many months of negotiating, the Park District signed a contract giving Horan and O'Malley the exclusive right to operate the restaurant and other concessions, as well as the right to hold private concerts and admission-only special events in Millennium Park's "concession area," which is roughly everything west of the Pritzker Pavilion. Last summer the Park Grill held a smooth-jazz series in the concession area, and in the fall it had an Oktoberfest event, charging admission for both. The Park District also agreed to pay for the Park Grill's gas, water, and garbage collection.

It's still not clear exactly what Horan and O'Malley are supposed to pay in return. The contract states that they have to pay either an annual minimum fee of \$275,000 or a percentage of their gross, whichever is higher. But because the two paid to build the restaurant, the minimum fee has

been temporarily waived, and they're paying a percentage of their gross. Between opening day, in December 2003, and March 2005 they paid a total of only \$162,656.72, so the first year's payment was half what the minimum fee would have been. I don't know how much they've paid since then. "You should call Jody Kawada in the mayor's press office," Park District spokesperson Michelle Jones told me. "We were instructed to refer all questions about that particular vendor to the mayor's press office." Kawada said she didn't know how much the Park Grill paid but promised to get back to me. (She didn't.) City officials I've talked to say that when you subtract all the things the Park District's paying for, it's probably losing money on the Park Grill.

The contract became a major political embarrassment for Mayor Daley last February, when the *Sun-Times* revealed that O'Malley had had a baby with Laura Foxgrover, the Park District official whose department oversaw the bidding process for the restaurant in Millennium Park, and that the Park Grill's roster of investors included friends and associates of the mayor's. The paper also pointed out that the Park Grill wasn't paying any property taxes.

When the story broke, Daley defended the contract, arguing that the city had gotten the best deal it could given that it was taking bids right after 9/11, but within a few days he and other administration officials were backtracking. He told reporters that the Park District had been too eager to get a restaurant up and running, and through his aides he demanded that the Park Grill negotiate a new deal.



Park Grill

Soon afterward the city was negotiating with Horan and O'Malley.

The brouhaha apparently caught the attention of Cook County assessor James Houlihan. On March 16 his office sent Horan and O'Malley a letter notifying them that their restaurant was being assessed at \$502,550 and that they would be sent a bill in the fall for their 2004 property taxes.

On August 5 Horan and O'Malley filed suit against the assessor, asking that a judge prohibit the county from imposing taxes on the restaurant.

According to Stephen Novack, the lawyer who filed the suit, other vendors who have some form of property on Park District land aren't paying property taxes. But the heart of his argument is that the county doesn't have the right to impose a tax on the Park Grill because its contract with the Park District isn't a lease. "The law allows the county to impose property taxes on businesses on tax-exempt property—provided they have leases," he says. "But my client does not have a lease." He says the Park Grill simply has a license or concession

agreement. "There's a difference between a lease and a license or concession agreement. The difference is that of control. In a normal lease a landlord does not exert the kind of control that the Park District has here in terms of prices they charge or how long they stay open." He points out that the Park Grill's contract never uses the term *lease* and doesn't refer to the parties as *lessor* or *lessee*.

John Gorman, a spokesman for the state's attorney's office, which is defending the assessor in the case, says the contract is a lease, even if it doesn't specifi-

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cally call itself a lease. "We have not yet filed our response to their suit," he says, "but our position is that the Park Grill is a leaseholder and as a leaseholder they are subject to taxes." I asked Novack why the county went after the Park Grill. He thinks it was because the media pointed out that the restaurant wasn't paying any property taxes. "The county did not want to be accused of ignoring its obligation to collect taxes," he says.

Other City Hall observers suspect that Houlihan was playing hardball on Daley's behalf, putting pressure on the Park Grill as a way to force it to renegotiate its contract with the Park District. (A publicist for the city says the two sides are still negotiating.) But Andrea Raila, who runs a property tax appeal service, agrees with Novack: she thinks Houlihan was acting on his own. "They have staffers who scour the papers looking for property

like this that's not being taxed," she says. "They probably sent them a notice soon after they read about it in the press." Raila says the county has the right to tax property even if it's on tax-exempt land, pointing to a hot dog vendor in a CTA space who had to pay. "It doesn't matter who owns the land—the city, the county, the CTA, the Park District," she says. "The land may be tax-exempt, but the building's not."

By her calculation the Park Grill will get hit with a \$30,000 tax bill sometime in the next few weeks. "And it will probably go up next year, because this is prime real estate," she says. "If I were them, I'd start preparing a tax appeal now, 'cause that lawsuit over the lease could drag on for years." Some Park District concessionaires worry that the county will now go after them. "Everyone's watching this—once

they start imposing property taxes, where do they stop?" says one. "It's not that I'm crying for the Park Grill. But a deal's a deal. If the city didn't like the bids that came in for the restaurant they should have rebid them. They were in such a rush to get Millennium Park going they signed a deal they regret. This is the fallout to a contract they probably shouldn't have signed in the first place." ■

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Left: at the Packit party. Right: actual stuff Liz got in the mail.

Hey, Thanks for the Fetus

And other mysteries of the mailbag

By Liz Armstrong

One occupational hazard of my job is occasionally getting weird shit in the mail. Some weird shit I like, like the lady who drew pictures on manila sales tags with cryptic messages like “Can I help you? You missed a good moment when I walked down to the lake.” Some of it confuses and disturbs me, like the guy who sent a magnet showing old women talking about penises and a birthday card with cartoon lesbians excited about a giant dildo—and it was nowhere near my birthday. And some of it grosses me out: last week I got a package that included a tiny fetus of indeterminate species (but definitely not human) in a baggie filled with red liquid. That was pretty revolting, though I’m flattered that the responsible party was brave enough to risk federal prosecution just to send me a present.

But one package last May really freaked me out. A brown envelope addressed to me showed up at my house with no postmark. Where the return address should have been there was just the name Liz Birch and the word “Packit!” Inside was a photo of a blond

woman and a cat, a couple short stories about an unnamed writer who was missing and possibly dead dotted with names of places I frequent, and the floor plan of an apartment a few blocks away from mine. I’d just moved, none of my friends had been over yet, and I hadn’t informed the post office of the change.

At first I thought about sleeping elsewhere for the night. Then I reconsidered—it was probably some kind of arty malarkey delivered by some press whore. I liked the stories, actually. They had a private quality, like the writer was talking to herself. But I was determined not to satisfy this person’s jones for publicity.

A month later I got a brown envelope, again with no postmark, full of soft feathery fluff, maple tree whirligigs, a drawing of teeth, and a surreal sort of miniplay:

(toms sin is warm winter is over it’s spring!)

sunburnt buildings: it’s april 7th tommy!

tommy: hurray!

The space for the return address said Tommy D’Angelo, and again the “Packit!”

Within a few days I’d figured out most of the mystery. I found Liz Birch on Friendster and saw that she knows my friend Margaret Chapman. I e-mailed Chapman and got the scoop. Chapman, Birch, and D’Angelo are former schoolmates from the Art Institute. They decided to take 45 people—each artist selected 15 friends—on a literary journey by mail. Everyone’s first two envelopes came from the strangers; only the third envelope bore a familiar name.

Chapman’s package finally arrived a little over a month ago. Besides a hand-bound booklet about two girls growing up in the westward-ho expansion era who were kidnapped and then left in the woods, she included a map of the Union and Central Pacific railroad routes, tiny illustrations of giant rocks in Kentucky, and a little calico fabric pouch filled with a plastic cowgirl trinket, printouts of old tintype photos, and a scrap of

paper the size of a fortune-cookie fortune: “clear out a little home among the bones and make our bed,” it said.

I got one more envelope a couple weeks ago. Inside were these instructions: “Pack this empty Packit full! Create your own Packit as best you see fit. Feel free to be unedited & uncut—this is for an anonymous Packit raffle exchange!”

Per the instructions, last Saturday afternoon I showed up in the courtyard of Phyllis’ Musical Inn with my Packit, which included a mock rough draft of one of my columns, plus a torn-out copy of the real thing, a friend’s poems about hyenas, a romantic Hallmark card that I’d glued shut, and the fetus, which had turned into goo. I gave it to Chapman and she gave me a scrap of paper with the letter B on it. When my letter was called, I learned, I would get someone else’s Packit.

I ran up to a young woman with blond hair and big brown sunglasses who was smoking a cigarette. I knew from her

Friendster picture that this was Liz Birch. “You scared the shit out of me!” I exclaimed, shoving her shoulder. She laughed and pushed me back.

Birch has always been infatuated with the shipping of goods. “One of my favorite pictures of myself in the future is getting and shipping and receiving lots of things,” she says. “I’d be the one who understands where they all go. It just seems like a really awesome thing to have a walkie-talkie and have a huge dolly of boxes. . . . That’s what I really want to do with my life.” Chapman, meanwhile, has been making packets and kits since she was a kid putting together boxes of games for her siblings. Now, she says, “I have my screen-printing kit, my embroidery kit, my beading kit. I just like to keep things in little boxes. It’s the way I like things.” And D’Angelo, says Chapman, “had been thinking about the epistolary quality of writing in general and about giving away stuff.” All these tendencies came together in the Packit project. “We just decided to send stuff out, individually, to people,” says Chapman.

I wandered through the couple dozen folks who’d gathered as they gently fondled the contents of their gifts. One couple sat on the cement poring over a handwritten bio of Fannie Lou Hamer, a handwritten account of the Haymarket riot, and a page cut out of the creator’s seventh grade journal. A friend of Chapman’s showed me his loot: a rectangular slice of an old album cover painted with Wite-Out and decorated with stick-on lettering. Inside was half an LP with letters stuck on to spell CICADAS WHIRRING.

My friend Annie sat at a table despondently rifling through her Packit. It contained a page cut from a magazine about “botched boob jobs” that’d been fixed, complete with before and after pictures: swollen udders with hard raisins way underneath traded in for turbo tits, rock-hard curdles smoothed out, a crooked nipple blob set tidy. She also got lots of porno shots of naked shaved women cut up almost like snowflakes; dictionary entries for such relevant words as abnegation, denial, and nihilism; and a few capsules full of fake blood, one of which broke all over her hands, staining them pink for the rest of the day. She’d filled her own Packit with homemade chocolate-chip oatmeal cookies and a logic puzzle she’d written about a cookie-eating contest.

When my letter was called I giddily ran up to get my Packit. Chapman handed me the envelope. It felt really flat. I reached in and pulled out a single sheet of white paper. About halfway down in a tiny lowercase font was the message: “you just have to wonder why.” Yeah, I guess so. **B**

ANDREA BAUER



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Adversity Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

It took a losing streak to get Sox fans to show some emotion.

By Ted Cox

If the White Sox' recent troubles served any purpose, it was to make their fans admit to each other how much this year's team meant to them. As delightfully unexpected as their early success was—the White Sox had the best record in baseball for most of the season—the fans seemed almost blasé about it. But that's the south-side manner—or, more accurately, the Sox-fan manner—and it's often misinterpreted.

An article earlier this month in *Slate* by a self-loathing Sox fan declared, "The team's futility has no romance, glamour, or meaning." Ridiculous: Sox fans are simply adept at masking their feelings. Cubs fans act like they've got a monopoly on curses, but the Sox dwell under a deservedly cursed cloud, the Black Sox scandal, and it's a burden their fans bear not with self-flagellating histrionics but with stoicism. But as the Sox' bright season, the playoffs a foregone conclusion, tumbled into a seven-game losing streak, doubting Sox fans I know clutched at one another in ways that defied the stereotypes. Late-night phone calls were placed and anguished e-mails exchanged, some of them rehashing or second-guessing the games' events in the most minute detail. Sox fans met in bars to insist they weren't worried, only to hurriedly order another round. When the Sox emerged from that troubled spell, I believe their fans emerged more committed—more accursedly devoted, if it comes to that—than before.

The Sox knew their August stretch of 15 straight games with the New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox, and Minnesota Twins—including home-and-home series with the Yanks and Twins—would be a critical test. After losing the opening game of that sequence in Yankee Stadium, they twice beat the Yankees 2-1; Aaron Rowand particularly distinguished himself with his smooth, gliding play in center field. Yet when the Sox traveled on to Fenway Park, Mark



Brian Anderson after a two-run homer in Seattle

Buehrle couldn't hold a four-run lead as the Sox lost to Boston 9-8, and the next night Jon Garland got clobbered in a 7-4 defeat. When rain washed out the Sox' 5-2 fourth-inning lead in the Sunday finale, the Fates seemed to be conspiring against them.

If Sox fans weren't worried yet as the team returned home, that would soon change. The Sox were just plain outplayed in the opener of a three-game series with the Twins, losing 4-2. The next night I took my teenage daughter and her best friend, a Cubs fan, to Sox Park, wanting them to see the excitement swirling around the south side, but the Sox were listless—the loss of leadoff man Scott Podsednik to a groin injury was clearly hurting—and so, strange-

ly enough, was the crowd. When the Sox took a 4-3 lead it didn't seem deserved, and the game-tying homer that bullpen closer Dustin Hermanson gave up to Michael Cuddyer in the ninth felt almost expected. The Sox couldn't push a run across, and the game dragged on—while we drove home listening on the radio and then watched on TV—until pitcher Jon Adkins was pounded in the 16th and the Sox lost 9-4. The next night Buehrle got smacked around while the Twins' Johan Santana took a no-hitter into the seventh and coasted to a 5-1 win. The Sox had been swept and had now lost five straight.

That's when the fans tried to put the team on their shoulders. A raucous sold-out crowd of 39,496 turned out on a Friday

night determined to cheer an end to the Sox' skid as they met the hated Yankees. But the Sox again could muster no offense, and Mike Mussina outdueled Garland 3-1. Saturday's matinee was worse—the Sox were shut out. Their lead was down to eight and a half games over the Cleveland Indians, they'd conceded the best record in baseball to the Saint Louis Cardinals, comparisons with the cursed '69 Cubs had replaced the clinching magic number in the newspapers, and erratic Jose Contreras was going against fearsome Randy Johnson in the series finale.

Contreras looked impressive warming up in the bullpen, but in the third his wild pickoff throw helped the Yankees move ahead 1-0. Johnson, meanwhile, had been mowing down the Sox when Tadahito Iguchi came to the plate with one out in the bottom of the fourth. Iguchi's swing is a sort of modified version of the one-legged flamingo stance of Japanese home-run king Sadaharu Oh. A right-handed hitter, Iguchi keeps a firm right side, weight on his back foot, then draws up his left foot before striding into the pitch. This allows him to wait on the delivery while giving him surprising power to right field, which is exactly where he hit a high Johnson slider—into the seats. Rowand followed, stiff-necked, elbows out, and hit another slider into the same area. Paul Konerko came up, fell behind 0-2, and then smacked a Johnson curve into the left-field seats for the third straight homer. A rattled Johnson gave up two more hits in the inning and then another homer to the unlikely Chris Widger. The fans were elated, the losing streak was over, and all was right with the world.

"I was coming from the grocery store and turned on my radio just in time to catch the magic inning," a mutual friend, Steve, e-mailed my Sox pal Kate. "Unbelievable! Called my son at his college in Michigan to tell him about it."

I thought the Sox would run off a streak if they managed to beat Santana the following night in Minnesota, and though they didn't they played so well and crisply—Minnesota's Shannon Stewart and the Sox' Jermaine Dye both made running catches crashing into the outfield wall—the cloud lifted anyway. Santana hurled a shutout; Freddy Garcia lost a no-hitter, a shutout, and the game in the eighth inning when he left a curve out over the plate and Jacques Jones hit it so hard over the center-field fence his bat seemed to recoil at the end of his swing.

The Sox ran off four straight wins after that, and as e-mails circulated I found myself reveling in details. Such as bench player Geoff Blum pulling his feet in as he slid to elude a swipe tag at third base in the tenth inning (he then scored the winning run); and flame-throwing rookie Bobby Jenks nailing down that victory by fanning the last two Twins batters on curveballs; and Orlando Hernandez out-pitching teenage phenom Felix Hernandez in Seattle with the help of two homers by golden-boy rookie Brian Anderson; and Iguchi winning the game with a 12th-inning homer after the bullpen had blown the lead.

Not even Garcia's loss on Sunday could put a damper on things. By that time Sox fans were back to being unflappable, and I recalled an incident toward the end of that skid-snapping game with the Yanks. Among the joyous fans in the left-field corner, where I was sitting, was a guy wearing a Red Sox cap who started giving grief to some Yankees fans seated nearby. They jawed back and forth as if the White Sox were beneath contempt, as if they didn't exist. The funny thing was, the Chicago fans didn't seem to mind. It was as if the skid had returned the White Sox to the role of underdogs and let their fans be what they're comfortable being: secure in their insecurities and hopeful that one year—maybe this year—things will change. ■

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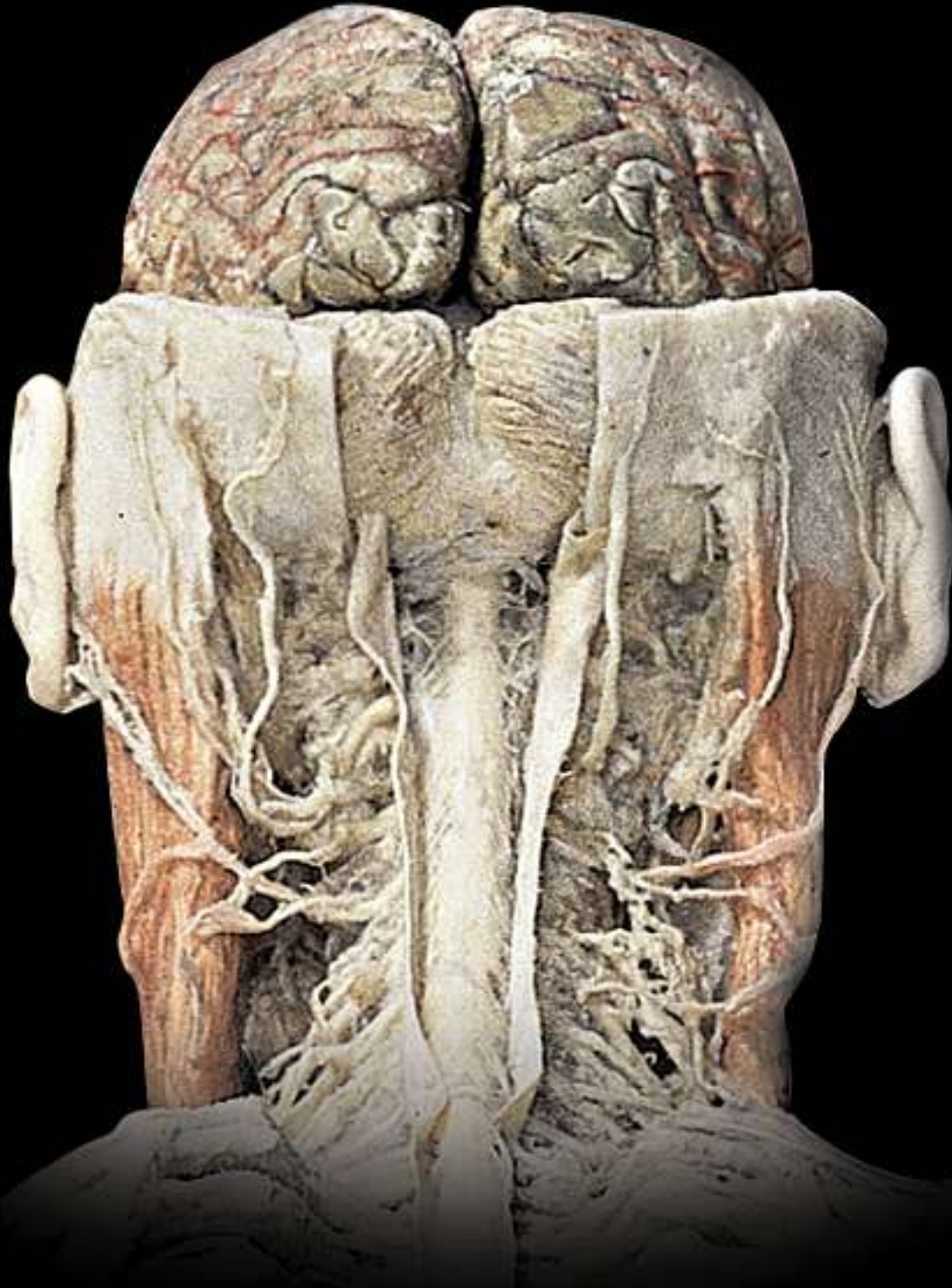
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Architecture

Sweet Nothing

Mies van der Rohe's gloriously simple Crown Hall isn't just restored—it's improved.

By Lynn Becker

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's goal as an architect was to use emerging technology to build something besides fortresslike rock piles, to create buildings that were "almost nothing." In 1921 he proposed a skyscraper whose walls were made entirely of glass. It would be over a quarter century before he could achieve this vision, and it would happen not in his native city of Berlin but in his adopted home of Chicago.

Mies emigrated here in 1938 to be the architect for the new Illinois Institute of Technology campus, on State Street between 31st and 35th streets. But administrators and finances forced him to keep his early buildings simple, with lots of brick. He came closer to achieving his heroic ideal after World War II, with glass-walled structures such as the high-rises at 860-880 N. Lake Shore Dr. and the Farnsworth House in Plano. Finally IIT let him design a building for his own department of architecture.

That building, the 1956 Crown Hall, would be the purest working out of Mies's dual obsessions: achieving maximum transparency and creating the largest possible building with the least possible structure. He created a single open room—120 feet wide by 220 feet long by 18 feet high—whose roof is suspended from just four enormous girders, leaving the interior completely free of columns. The floor is gray terrazzo, the ceiling a continuous sweep of white acoustic tile. Along the building's perimeter the structure was pared down to an ultralight steel frame surrounding huge glass windows. Each of the clear upper panes is a spectacular 11 and a half by 9 and a half feet. The window frames, the blinds, even the tables for the architecture students who worked there were designed by Mies, and everything fit together perfectly with simplicity and grace. The result was a communal space that eloquently expressed the idea of freedom within order.

The intervening years have not been kind to Crown Hall. Moisture that got into the highly porous travertine marble used for the south porch froze and expanded over many harsh winters, cracking and crumbling the stone. Rust attacked the often poorly maintained steel frame and made the air vents inoperable. Peter Beltemacchi, associate dean at IIT, says the white blinds over the windows turned yellow from "tar and nicotine and haze and age."

In 2003 Helmut Jahn's State Street Village, the first new



Crown Hall

building on the campus in decades, opened up across the street from Crown Hall, faced in shiny corrugated stainless steel. It was soon followed by Rem Koolhaas's riotous McCormick Tribune Campus Center to the north. Koolhaas claimed that the blazing orange glass in his building helped set off the color of the older buildings on campus, but Crown Hall's black paint had faded to a smudgy gray. It remained a shrine to Mies and modernism, but it had become like a beloved old aunt. You might bring her flowers, but if you were looking for a good time you'd call Jahn or Koolhaas.

Crown Hall just reopened, after the \$3.6 million second phase of its restoration, and it's never looked better. The sleek, shiny black of the new paint job is as vivid as Koolhaas's orange—and a lot more elegant. Beltemacchi remembers that the original paint was the same black. "Mies was very proud of it," he says. "It didn't turn gray for a year and a half." The restoration project's architect of record, Mark Sexton, says it wasn't easy for the contractors to get the new paint exactly right. "They would spray an entire elevation, and we would reject the entire elevation," he says. "They would say OK. And they sprayed the entire east and south elevation, and we said, 'Rejected.' The amazing thing is that there was very little whining. They were actually very conscientious."

Replacing the building's 340 windows wasn't easy either. The original glass of the upper win-

dows was a quarter-inch thick, and it moved and sometimes broke in the wind. City code now requires glass to be a half-inch thick. "As glass gets thicker it gets greener," says architecture dean Donna Robertson. "We switched to what is a low-iron glass—some people call it the superwhite glass. There are only two manufacturers from whom we could buy a piece of glass of that type in this size. It took ten men and a crane to hoist the glass in the air and then slide it into the steel frame of the building."

Each of the massive new panes weighed 700 pounds, more than the original Mies-designed "stop," the piece of metal that holds the glass in place, could support. Arguments raged over "what would Mies do," and the decision to go with a slightly heavier, trapezoidal stop was opposed by the purists as a betrayal of his commitment to right angles. Unlike the originals, the new stops had to be custom-made. "There's a lot of scrap metal out there, because huge amounts were rejected," says Sexton.

The smaller, lower panes of glass presented another problem. Mies's originals had been sandblasted to create a translucent white finish. They were replaced in 1975 with two eighth-inch panes of glass and a plastic film sandwiched in between, but these laminates were less translucent than opaque, casting reflections back into the building. Sexton and his colleagues compared more than 100 types of glass, then mounted the five full-size finalists in the hall's

north facade next to glass that matched Mies's originals. The final choice was a sandblasted glass that achieves the translucency of the original.

Free of controversy was the restoration of the vents along the bottom of the windows. Mies's later glass boxes would become sealed environments dependent on mechanical air-conditioning, but Robertson says he was a "protogreen" architect who "understood natural air." Fresh, cool air flowed through the vents at floor level, and hot air flowed out through vents in the ceiling—a simple convection effect that's been rediscovered by contemporary green architects.

Building managers tend to love sealed boxes because everything's automated, but when Crown Hall opened, the lighting and ventilation system consisted of venetian blinds and a man named Ludwig Hilberseimer, who came with Mies from Germany and taught planning at IIT. "Hilberseimer used to walk around and adjust them all day long," says Beltemacchi. "A lot of it was to get some light up onto the ceiling to get it out onto the tables. When he died in 1967, that's when the venetian blind business went to hell. We don't have anyone who does that anymore."

Robertson and Sexton hope to get a surrogate during the third phase of the restoration, estimated to require another \$5 million. "We're going to cut down on the energy consumption of this building, which we can do very dramatically in terms of electricity," says Robertson. "We're going

to build a building brain that will automate the blinds. Right now the concavity of the [blind] blade goes down. We're going to flip that, so it goes up. That way sunlight is going to bounce further into the interior, rather than relying so much on the electrical lights. And the lights will be controlled by the building brain as well, because it will read what the foot candles are at any point in time." Robertson also hopes to use the original radiant heating tubes in the floor to cool the building during warmer weather.

Mies once said that "God is in the details" but some architects think his attention to detail was much too anal—even the hall's worktables were designed to fit the grid of the terrazzo flooring. Perhaps they see his controlled, linear, simple architecture as a relic of a despotic age. Yet the simplicity of Mies's masterpiece, with its spare, paradoxically open enclosure, can be extraordinarily freeing. A story told by Peter Roesch, now a professor at IIT, about a day when Mies stopped to look at his work suggests a parallel between the way Mies taught and the effect his buildings can have on people. "The good news was that he didn't walk away," Roesch says. "The bad news was that I didn't know what he didn't like. He did not say one word for 20 minutes. It forced me to look at my own work, and I found all the mistakes—everything. After 20 minutes of silence, I said, 'Mies, could you come back tomorrow? I'll fix it all up.' And he laughed, and he puffed his cigar, and he left." ■

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Our Town

[snip] **Park the space shuttle already**, argues Maciej Ceglowski at idlewords.com. It's expensive, dangerous, and pointless, while comparatively cheap unmanned probes of Mars, Titan, and various comets are

making valuable scientific discoveries. NASA clings to its mission of "exploration," citing the European voyages of discovery 500 years ago. But as Ceglowski notes, "The great explorers of the 1500s did not sail endlessly

back and forth a hundred miles off the coast of Portugal, nor did they construct a massive artificial island they could repair to if their boat sprang a leak." —Harold Henderson | hhenderson@chicagoreader.com

Comics

Ivan Brunetti Gets Happy

With a little help from Buddha and Chris Ware, a classic sad-sack comics artist succeeds in spite of himself.

By Susannah J. Felts

A couple years ago Ivan Brunetti published a comic in the *Reader* in which a weepy, scruff-jawed character recounts his attempt to off himself with 300 aspirin dissolved in whiskey and Coke. "That's a true story," he says. "I put it to my mouth many times, but I couldn't do it in the end." He finds it a little disconcerting to look at that strip now that "everything's just hunky-dory." Without a trace of the sarcasm you might expect from a guy who's notorious for his bile-soaked outlook on life—and for cartoons about baby killing, raunchy sex, and homicidal pranks—he adds, "I've got nothing to complain about anymore."

Lately Brunetti, who's paid the bills working as a Web designer and freelance illustrator over the years, has been busy curating an exhibit called "The Cartoonist's Eye: Artists Use the Comics Medium to Tell Real Stories," opening at Columbia College's A + D Gallery this week. He says he thinks of the show, which features more than 50 cartoonists from Charles Schulz to R. Crumb to Daniel Clowes, as a "metaphor" for the book he's almost finished editing, *An Anthology of Graphic Fiction*, due in a year from Yale University Press. He also has a gig teaching graphic novel writing at the University of Chicago and a similar class at Columbia. And he's getting married in November.



Ivan Brunetti

"I'm in the middle now," Brunetti says. "Most of my life has been this process of trying to find that gray area where you're not going from one extreme to the other." Though he knows better, Brunetti often sees things in dichotomous terms: "Good Ivan is curating the show," he says, "trying to do a dignified exhibit." And then there's bad Ivan. "I have a very Victorian sense of morality, so sometimes I surprise myself with what goes through my head," he says, referring to the brutal gag panels collected in two books, *Haw! Horrible, Horrible*

and *Hee!* "Every time I do it I say, well, that's the last time, but then I get ideas."

Brunetti's more personal work hasn't been much more sanguine. The first three issues of his comic book *Schizo* were preoccupied with suicide and self-loathing; the last appeared in 1998, around the time Brunetti's first marriage ended, and he slogged through a particularly rough period. It's taken almost eight years for him to produce *Schizo 4*, due out in December, but growth is evident here: Brunetti looks beyond himself in a clever series of biogra-

phies, and his sensitive, sentimental side surfaces for the first time. In one elegantly drawn and oddly touching wordless strip about a rainy day he feeds his adoring cat, laughs at a *Peanuts* book, and meditates. His new work is "not just about being depressed and sad," he says. "I'm laughing at myself, almost chiding myself at times, showing the worst part of my personality. I'm encouraging people to laugh at me. I know I can be ridiculous."

Brunetti practiced Buddhism for several years. He credits it with helping him more than any of the meds



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[snip] "While popular culture is obsessed with fashion and style, fully two-thirds of American adults have abandoned conventional ideas of attractiveness by becoming overweight," writes Daniel Akst in the *Wilson Quarterly*. "Nearly half of this group is downright obese." That leads

Akst to suspect that "we as a culture have engaged in a kind of aesthetic outsourcing, transferring the job of looking good—of providing the desired supply of physical beauty—to the specialists known as 'celebrities,' who can afford to devote much more time and energy to the task." —HH

he's tried—and he says he's tried them all. But his friend Chris Ware gets the credit for keeping his cartooning career alive. Brunetti had admired Ware's work but only felt comfortable calling him up to ask a technical question after signing on with Ware's publisher, Fantagraphics, in the late 90s. Soon they were hanging out regularly. These days they gab on the phone a lot. "We're like a couple of old ladies," he says, "calling each other to commiserate about this thing we've devoted our lives to."

Without Ware's input "I probably would have quit," Brunetti says. "He's been very encouraging and supportive. My friendship with Chris turned me into more of a human being, and I think because of that my cartooning got better. I don't think it was a coincidence."

Last year Ware got a call from Yale University Press asking him to edit an anthology of comic art. He declined, as he'd just finished a similar project, the all-comics issue of *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*. Instead he suggested Brunetti, who'd

assisted him with the book and whom he'd also recommended for the U. of C. teaching job. Brunetti had shown his syllabus and handouts to Ware, who liked what he saw. "He knew that I worked really hard on it," Brunetti says.

Serendipitously, the very day that Ware mentioned Brunetti to Yale, the *Sun-Times* published an article about "Comics on the Verge," a show that included some of his "good Ivan" work. The article was the first thing the Yale editor came across when he googled Brunetti. Brunetti submitted

a proposal and landed the job.

"Five years ago I'd debate whether it was worth it to get out of bed or pick a scab; it was a metaphysical issue," he muses. "Now it's like, How do I get the things I want to get done? Not, Are they worth doing? I realized it's pointless to debate that." Then the old pessimism rears its head. "Probably the answer is no, they're not worth doing," he says. "The pointlessness of it all, that's just always there anyway. You can't change that; that's like the rules of the universe." ■

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Pinball

continued from page 1

Stern, whose father was a partner in the world's biggest pinball manufacturer, Williams Electronics, has loved the game since he was a little kid. "It's an American icon—part of the fabric of life," he says. "It's not a video game that every action has a programmed reaction."

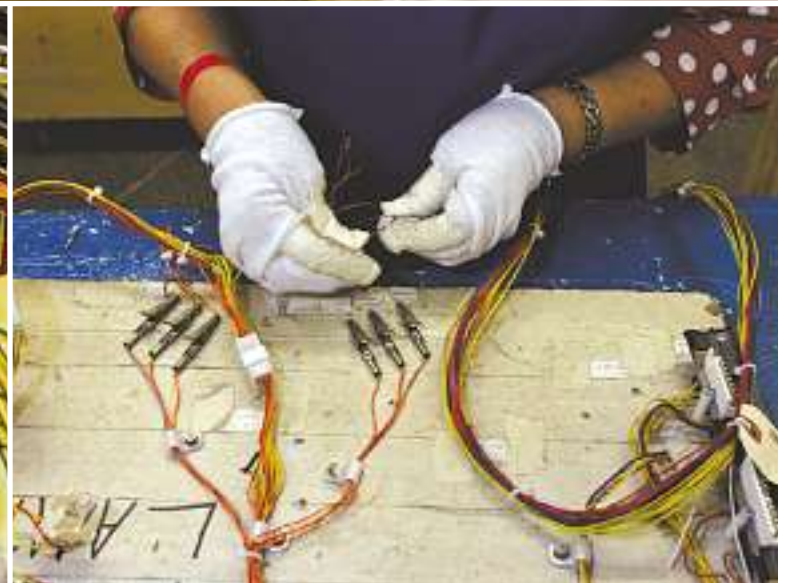
His 40,000-square-foot factory, at 2020 Janice in Melrose Park, about three miles west of Chicago, has around 65 full-time employees making some 10,000 machines a year. At the moment they're the only people in the world making pinball machines, and Stern insists that's the way it's going to stay. "If we ever quit," he says, "that will be the end of pinball."

Pinball has its roots in games such as the 19th-century French bagatelle, in which players used sticks to push balls into numbered holes on a table. But Chicago has always been the center of the modern game. In the early 1920s the city became the base for the coin-operated machine industry, manufacturing peep-show and gambling machines, and in 1929 some unknown Chicagoan invented a coin-operated pinball machine. In 1932, as the country was sinking into the Depression, another Chicagoan, Raymond Maloney, designed the first pinball machine that could be mass-produced. The game was called Ballyhoo, and according to Michael Colmer's *Pinball: An Illustrated History*, more than 50,000 of the machines were sold across the country within seven months.

The success of Ballyhoo led to an explosion of manufacturers looking to cash in on the craze—some 150 companies, most of them in Chicago, were soon turning out the games. Some of them became legends—Bally, Chicago Coin, D. Gottlieb & Company—but most were small shops. As the Depression got worse, the small manufacturers went under, and by 1934 only 14 manufacturers were left. Many of the remaining factories were in the area between Diversey and Belmont, Western and Elston.

Stern's father, Sam, got into the business in the early 30s in Philadelphia, setting up games in bars and restaurants and taking a portion of the earnings. "In those days," says Stern, "pinball machines were countertop games with a bunch of nails in them."

Most of the early machines were designed just for entertainment, though some rewarded winners with cash, and gamblers routinely bet on the outcomes of others. The games were popular even though many people were desperately poor. "Inexpensive entertainment, diversions from the issues and problems of the day-to-day were most definitely in favor," says Roger Sharpe, a Chicago native and author of the history *Pinball!* "If you could be entertained and have a chance to make



The machines are assembled entirely by hand from more than 3,500 parts; Stern's Harley-Davidson game

some money, so much the better."

The American public soon saw pinball as just one more game of chance, not a harmless amusement and certainly not a game of skill. It got lumped in with gambling devices such as slot machines, which were popular with Chicago's gangsters, and so became associated with the city's seedy underbelly. "A lot of it was this Hollywood image," says Sharpe.

But the image stuck, and pinball became a target of antigambling zealots. According to Sharpe, the first antipinball law was probably enacted somewhere in the rural south in the mid- or late 30s, and bans then "spread like wildfire" through small towns.

Antipinball fever didn't take hold in big cities until World War II, even though production of the machines ground almost to a halt. Pinball manufacturers were among the country's largest makers of copper wiring, and they quickly shifted their production to the war effort, churning out wiring, parachute straps, and aircraft parts for the military. The new games that did appear

were almost all conversions: operators would bring in their old machines, and the factories would rework and repaint them to look new. Many of these refurbished games had what were seen as patriotic names: Marines, Yankee Doodle, and Smack the Japs.

Big-city politicians weren't impressed. "Pinball machines are a harmful influence because of their strong tendency to instill desire for gambling in immature young people," said New York City police commissioner Lewis Valentine. "Children and minors who play these machines and frequent the establishments where the machines are located sometimes commit petty larcenies in order to obtain funds, form bad associations and are often led into juvenile delinquency and eventually into serious crime."

"I think there's always been this attitude that where there's a lot of young people gathering, something must be desperately wrong," says Sharpe. "If they're congregating at bowling alleys, bowling is bad. If they're congregating at a penny arcade, then that's no good.

It was like that with pinball."

New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia, who called the pinball industry a "racket dominated by interests heavily tainted with criminality," demanded a citywide ban on pinball machines, and in late January 1942 a judge declared one. Newspaper front pages ran pictures of police and screaming crowds surrounding La Guardia as he pushed over and smashed pinball machines with a sledgehammer. The photos were strikingly similar to those of prohibition-era officials swinging axes into barrels of booze, though according to Sharpe, some of the machines La Guardia demolished were actually jukeboxes.

La Guardia's campaign attracted lots of publicity around the country, and soon mayors of other big cities—Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Salt Lake City—followed his lead. Even Chicago banned the games, though illegal pinball machines remained scattered around the city. But the ban was rarely enforced during the three decades it was in place, and

Sharpe remembers machines in the train station at Randolph and Michigan, in a game room in a building that stood on what's now Block 37, and in a game room on South State.

The end of the war allowed manufacturers to get back to full-scale production, and in 1947 yet another Chicagoan, Harry Mabs, invented the flipper. Players had learned to manipulate a ball by tilting and shoving the machine, but flippers required a lot more skill—one reason the game's popularity soared again. It was the beginning of a golden age that would last through the 50s.

Sam Stern, who'd been making decent money in Philadelphia from the pinball machines he was distributing, visited Chicago in 1947. He went to see Harry Williams, who'd founded his company a year earlier. Gary Stern says his father put his feet up on Williams's desk and asked if he wanted to sell his company. Gary thinks Williams was surprised. **continued on page 22**

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Pinball

continued from page 20

prised but intrigued by Sam's audacity. "They were young guys," he says. "Williams wasn't much of a company—none of these businesses were very big. I'm not sure how serious Sam was in asking to buy or if he was kidding—kidding on the square. Harry lived in California and Chicago. I guess he wanted someone else involved so he could spend more time in California." At any rate Williams soon offered to sell Sam half his company, and the Stern family moved to Chicago.

Williams was the ace designer—he would design more hit pinball games than just about anybody who ever lived, in addition to inventing the "tilt" device that ends a game if a player shoves the machine too hard. Sam Stern was the savvy businessman. They made a good team, eventually turning Williams Electronics into the world's largest pinball manufacturer.

"I entered the game business in 1945, the year I was born," says Gary Stern. "I attended as a kid many business dinners where I sat and listened and learned." His first paycheck came in 1961, when he worked a summer job in the Williams stockroom. After graduation he went off to college, majoring in accounting, then got a law degree from Northwestern University. He practiced bankruptcy law for a couple years, but in 1973 he was back working full-time at Williams with his father. "Practicing law wasn't for me," he says. "If I represented a bank it was fine. If I represented a small businessman I got a little nervous—



Roger Sharpe today (top and right), helping overturn New York's pinball ban in 1976

story. But even though business was booming, the games were still illegal in many cities, including Chicago and New York City.

There'd been attempts to repeal the bans on the game, but most

had written about the game in *GQ* and the *New York Times* and was known as a superb player, to be its star witness.

That April Sharpe walked into a Manhattan courtroom, where,



MARTY PEREZ (TODAY), COURTESY OF ROGER SHARPE (1976)

In a move he compares to Babe Ruth calling his home run in the 1932 World Series, Roger Sharpe pointed to a lane at the top of the playing field and said, "I'm going to pull the plunger back, and the ball will go there."

'cause I could mess up their life." By that time interest in pinball, which had dropped off in the early 60s, was surging again, partly in response to the 1969 release of the Who's pinball saga *Tommy* and the 1975 movie of the

had failed. In 1976 the Music and Amusement Association decided to try to persuade New York City to overturn its laws, hoping that if it did, other towns and cities would follow its lead. The MAA asked Roger Sharpe, who by then

surrounded by cameras and reporters, he stood before a committee of the city council. "I didn't expect it to be a spectacle," he says. "I feel my heart beating now just thinking about it."

He knew that one member of

the committee had sponsored a bill to overturn the ban and that the other five would be tough sells. He told them that pinball had become a game of skill, not chance, that it was an all-American art form, not gambling. Then he began to play one of the two games that had been set up in the room. In a move he compares to Babe Ruth calling his home run in the 1932 World Series, Sharpe pointed to a lane at the top of the playing field and said, "I'm going to pull the plunger back, and the ball will go there." The ball went exactly where he said it would, and the astonished committee members promptly voted to allow pinball machines back into the city. Sharpe acknowledges that it was, ironically, a lucky shot. "There was divine intervention," he says. It wasn't long before other

cities dropped their bans—that December the Chicago City Council voted to make pinball legal again. Yet Nashville didn't overturn its law until last fall, and Ocean City, New Jersey, still forbids pinball playing on Sundays.

New technology, especially microprocessors capable of producing endless flashing lights and ringing bells, was changing pinball machines. In 1976 Gary and Sam Stern decided to leave Williams Electronics and try to make it on their own. Stern says Williams "was a public company, and we didn't necessarily agree with what they were doing. It was time to go." He refuses to be more specific. The two bought Chicago Coin from a bank that had foreclosed on it and rechristened it

continued on page 24


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Pinball

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Stern Electronics. Stern says it became the “fourth or so” biggest manufacturer, and they ran it together until Sam died in 1984.

After his father’s death, Stern shut down the company. But he immediately started working on a plan for a new pinball business and two years later sold it to a Japanese video-game company, Data East. The company set up a separate pinball division, and he became its general manager. He says he often developed machines with licensed titles connected to a well-known name, because the name widens a game’s audience beyond pinball devotees: “We say that the license gets the first quarter.” He also says, “The

licensors have to want to be in pinball. They all take some free games. We had one license where they took almost no cash and we paid them in games.” In 1990 he developed a game called *Back to the Future*, based on the movie Steven Spielberg produced. Stern tried to send Spielberg a free machine, only to find out he’d already bought one.

Sales of pinball machines peaked around 1992, when more than 100,000 were manufactured; among them was Bally’s *Addams Family* game, the best-selling machine ever. But consumers were shifting to home video and computer games, and mall arcades were closing. One after another the remaining

In 1990 Stern developed a game called *Back to the Future*, based on the movie Steven Spielberg produced. He tried to send Spielberg a free machine, only to find out he’d already bought one.

manufacturers folded. By 1996 only Williams Electronics—which had absorbed Bally and another legendary company, Midway—and Data East were left.

In 1999 Stern bought Data East’s pinball division and renamed it Stern Pinball. A few months later Williams Electronics unveiled a new game that melded video games and traditional pinball, projecting video images onto the

playing field. The company marketed it as the “future of pinball.” But the machines were expensive to produce, and it was soon clear that a hybrid wasn’t going to save pinball. Williams built only two games—*Attack From Mars* and *Star Wars: Episode I*—and that fall it decided to get out of pinball and focus on more lucrative slot machines. “I am the last man standing,” says Stern.

Stern Pinball produces only two or three new games a year, all licensed titles—the *Lord of the Rings*, the *Simpsons’ Pinball Party*, *Elvis*. NASCAR came out in July. Places such as bars and restaurants buy 45 percent of the company’s machines, and sales to nostalgic baby boomers who want pinball games in their homes account for another 20 percent. The remaining sales are overseas, mostly in western Europe, Russia, and China.

Nevertheless, Stern says, “Pinball is America. Take a look at our workforce—our factory is America.” His employees, most of them Mexican-American, put together the 3,500 parts of each machine by hand. “There’s about three and a half man-days of labor in a pinball machine, give or take,” Stern says. “That’s more man-hours than in a Ford Taurus that’s built around here, from what I’ve read.” Across the country robots have taken over this kind of work, but he insists they won’t replace people in his factory. He says pinball machines are so complex they require the attention of engineers the entire time they’re on the assembly line.

He also insists he isn’t afraid of competition from China or anyplace else, and he isn’t afraid he’ll be forced to move his company to China someday, though he admits some of his parts are already made overseas. “We’d all have to move there,” he says. “I don’t think there’s any blues bars I want to go to in China.”

Still, Stern might be aware that he sounds a little like he’s whistling in the dark. “They teach you in business school that you’re supposed to be in love with business, not in love with your business,” he says. “But we’re in love with our business.”

A tour of Stern Pinball will be offered to attendees of the 21st annual Pinball Expo, held November 17-20 at the Wyndham O’Hare in Rosemont. Admission is \$110 to \$135; more info at 1-800-323-3547 or pinballexpo.net.

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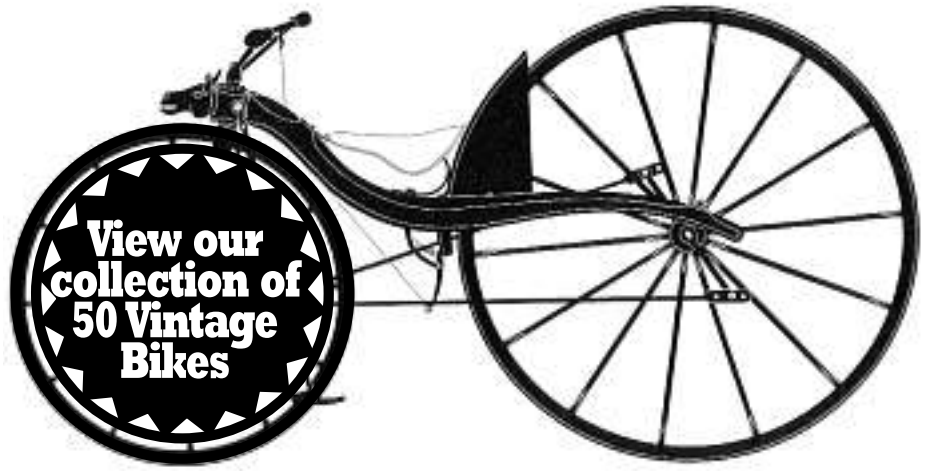
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Movies

EL CRIMEN PERFECTO ★★★

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WRITTEN BY IGLESIA AND JORGE GUERRICACHEVARRIA

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The Fat, the Odd, and the Ugly

Spanish director Alex de la Iglesia has won a cult following by celebrating society's losers—and punishing the winners.

By J.R. Jones

Alex de la Iglesia isn't much to look at, and he knows it. The director of such cult favorites as *The Day of the Beast* and *Common Wealth* appeared at the Gene Siskel Film Center last weekend to introduce *El crimen perfecto*, his latest film and the first to get a commercial release in Chicago. A mountainous Spaniard with a full black beard, dressed in two layers of dingy black T-shirt, he explained that the Spanish release title was *El crimen ferpecto*, a spelling error that's key to the film. "Everything in life was a mistake," he explained. "Even my movies. My movies are a mistake. I am a mistake. I am not perfect, obviously. You know, I am a fucking fat guy."

Like any good maker of black comedy, Iglesia measures his humor in deviations from the norm. His debut feature, *Mutant Action* (1993), was a grungy sci-fi adventure about a group of deformed gonzo who carry out terrorist missions against beautiful celebrities and the culture of personal attractiveness. In his much-loved *The Day of the Beast* (1995), a trio of oddballs—a Basque priest, a slick TV mystic, and a thuggish black-metal fan—team up to hunt down and kill the Antichrist. And his wonderful Hitchcock homage *Common Wealth* (2000), a *Rear Window*-type story about a real estate agent who finds a pile of money in a dead man's apartment, features a rogues' gallery of neighbors that includes a balding geek

who lives with his mother and dresses up as Darth Vader.

El crimen perfecto is Iglesia's most interesting examination of human oddity yet, revisiting the theme with the fervor of *Mutant Action* but expanding it into a satire of advertising and consumer culture—and all the while unreeling a tale of sex, lies, and homicide that recalls the classic noirs of the late 40s. Guillermo Toledo is fascinating as the repulsive hero, Rafael, a dapper ladies' wear salesman in a Madrid department store. Bearded and handsome, Rafael lives a life of consumerist splendor, parading around in the latest fashions and bedding his sensationally beautiful clerks in the furniture department, but when he loses a big promotion to his dreaded rival in menswear, Don Antonio (Luis Varela)—a portly man with lumpy features and a bad toupee—their mutual antipathy boils over into a scuffle in the dressing rooms and Antonio winds up accidentally impaled on a wall hook, hanging there from the back of his skull like a human overcoat.

Rafael gets one of the flashiest introductions Iglesia has ever afforded a character: as a catchy funk tune plays on the sound track, the camera pans over a table of half-empty liquor bottles and motivational paperbacks (*Machiavelli, ese hombre* reads one), then over a naked woman lying in bed and clothes scattered across the floor. Rafael steps out of the shower and dresses, explaining himself to the camera:



El crimen perfecto

"I'm just an elegant man who wants to live in an elegant world. Is that asking too much?" Walking to work through busy Madrid streets, he argues that life is for the taking, and to prove his point, he grabs a stunning woman in the middle of a busy crosswalk and they spin around kissing as startled pedestrians pass this way and that. Arriving at the store, where he's worked for years, he drinks in the glamour: "Welcome to my world, where everything's

perfect. The light, the music, the colors . . . the aroma. . . I'm the priest in a pagan temple, surrounded by my followers."

Yet Rafael fails to recognize his most ardent follower, a homely young woman named Lourdes (presumably to evoke the sick and disabled pilgrims to the French cathedral). Played by Monica Cervera, she's a real fright, with bug eyes, frizzy black hair, and a smile so fierce she actually looks better scowling;

first seen descending on a store escalator as Rafael ascends on the adjoining one, she turns away in shame. Rafael is uniformly smug and cruel toward those less attractive than he is, but he gets a monumental comeuppance when Lourdes witnesses the death of Antonio, steals the body from the store basement (where Rafael has been trying to stuff it into a furnace), and blackmails the department store princeling into becoming her boyfriend.



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This sharp dichotomy between the beautiful and the ugly is most reminiscent of the superlow-budget *Mutant Action*. It's hardly a great film, spinning off into chaos in the second half, but it seems closer to Iglesia's heart than those of some of his later features. The terrorist group of the title counts among its members a hunchbacked dwarf, a retarded deaf-mute, and a pair of conjoined twins; as a newscaster informs us, they've spent the last decade carrying out attacks against "persons known for their physique, institutions for public health, and sperm banks." They kidnap a plastic surgeon and plant explosives at a fashion show. They kill the president of a body-building federation and his attractive lover, leaving her to soak in a burst heart-shaped water bed as the theme from *Mission: Impossible* plays on the sound track. During a TV exercise show they storm the soundstage, mow down the lithe host and her students, and hoist a MUTANT ACTION banner for the camera.

Six features into his career, Iglesia may not be quite that angry anymore, and he celebrates beauty as well as ugliness, introducing Rafael's stable of sexually willing clerks in a series of gauzy slo-mo shots. But after the killing he sticks mostly with Rafael, the increasingly possessive Lourdes (whose family includes a horribly angry mother, a narcoleptic father, and a noxious eight-year-old daughter who claims to have AIDS), and a walleyed but diligent police detective (Enrique Villeri, an Iglesia regular), who slowly unravels Antonio's mysterious disappearance. By the end of the film, Rafael's trials have driven him to a bitter insight that may not be entirely credible coming from his lips but certainly reflects the director's resignation: "You're ugly, Lourdes," he shouts as the two wrestle on the floor. "It's not your fault, but it's not mine either. It's the world we live in that makes me hate you. People, magazines, TV. We're raised to, whether we like it or not."

El crimen perfecto is actually more pungent in its commentary than *Mutant Action* because of the cosmic joke visited on its protagonist. Early in the film, when Rafael is locked in a battle to outsell Antonio, he flatters an overweight middle-aged woman into buying a fur coat, but after her check bounces he cruelly berates her, finding exactly the right place to turn the knife. For his meanness he winds up in the romantic clutches of Lourdes, who uses Antonio's corpse as the ultimate charge card. By the time she surprises Rafael in a wedding gown, accompanied by the crew of a TV reality show, he's become something of a fur coat himself, a beauty accessory bought to prop up a seriously damaged ego. Only then does he seem to realize that he'd be better off like Antonio, literally hanging from a hook. ■

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Theater

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The Improbable Past

Michael Frayn's acclaimed *Copenhagen* is everything historical fiction shouldn't be.

By Justin Hayford

In his 2000 Broadway smash *Copenhagen*, playwright Michael Frayn makes the case that a brief 1941 meeting between Werner Heisenberg and his mentor Niels Bohr, the fathers of quantum physics, might have altered the course of World War II and thus the fate of humanity. But for all the play's supposed brilliance, Frayn is peddling a lie, and not doing a very good job of it. A creaky dramatic frame renders the action implausible and even slightly ludicrous. In the opening, Heisenberg, Bohr, and Bohr's wife, Margrethe, announce that they're all dead and planning to meet in the afterlife to hash out what happened in 1941. After delivering an extended expository introduction, they relive the meeting in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen—three times—as though it were 1941 again (luckily a heavenly seamstress provided them with period costumes). They also step outside the action to describe one another or their innermost thoughts—a prerogative of the dead, I suppose. Much of the narration reiterates what's already obvious; Margrethe even announces “silence” when the men stop talking.

Historically, only a few facts about the meeting are known. Heisenberg, who'd been Bohr's student in the 1920s, was head of Hitler's nuclear program when he visited Denmark to deliver a lecture at a conference. He also got clearance to meet with Bohr, a half-Jewish Dane who discovered nuclear fission—a man Hitler could only have viewed as a serious threat. Though not a Nazi, Heisenberg was a staunch patriot, and Bohr was so alarmed by his discussion of the German nuclear program—just acknowledging its existence to an enemy scientist was treason—that he cut the meeting short. Heisenberg returned to

Germany, and Bohr stayed in Copenhagen until he escaped to America in 1943 and joined the Manhattan Project. The 1941 meeting, which the director of the Niels Bohr Institute characterized in a 2002 essay as “comparatively trivial,” resulted in little beyond hurt feelings that mended quickly: the two scientists visited each other many times after the war and even vacationed together in Greece. Yet Frayn repeatedly asserts that the meeting destroyed their friendship.

Over the past 65 years many theories have been advanced about Heisenberg's motives in contacting Bohr, and Frayn alludes to all of them: the ethical complexities here are compelling, if you can stomach the play's improbabilities. Perhaps Heisenberg wanted reassurance from his colleague that the technical challenges to creating atomic weapons were nearly insurmountable, which might have been a relief to him. Perhaps he was seeking moral guidance: Heisenberg asserted years later that his first question to Bohr was “whether or not it was right for physicists to devote themselves in wartime to the uranium problem.” Or maybe he was spying for the Nazis, hoping to learn something about the status of weapons research in the United States and Britain. Perhaps he was trying to persuade Bohr to join the German effort, because in Bohr's recollection, Heisenberg asserted that German victory was certain and that the war would probably be decided with atomic weapons. One speculation, which seems



Copenhagen

highly unlikely given that Heisenberg knew how many Allied physicists were working on fission, is that he hoped to forge a pact with Bohr to prevent development of the bomb.

There's an inherent dramatic interest to the mysterious Copenhagen meeting: why did it happen at all? A playwright might easily ask, to use Bohr's words, “how and with what authority such a dangerous matter could be taken up with someone in an occupied and hostile country?” But rather than successfully dramatizing the tension between the two friends, each of whom might be concocting a weapon intended to vaporize the other's country, Frayn resorts to various fanciful scenarios to give the scene interest. A significant element of the plot is imagining

what might have happened if Bohr had returned to his teaching role and suggested to Heisenberg a crucial calculation that would have enabled Germany to build the bomb first. But Germany lacked the resources to construct a bomb. And unlike the Manhattan Project scientists, working in the perfect safety of Los Alamos, Germans were working in cities that were routinely under fire. Though Heisenberg managed to produce a small, malfunctioning reactor, he had to keep shuttling it around the country because of the air raids.

The play's conceptual muddle prevents real stakes from developing, a problem compounded by Frayn's amateurish dialogue. Certainly audiences need to understand something about

quantum physics to appreciate the issues at stake. But that knowledge rarely flows organically from the action in the way the concepts of chaos theory do in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*. Worse, the scientific discussions in *Copenhagen* barely move beyond freshman physics. Imagining these two geniuses engaged in such facile debate is like imagining Mozart and Beethoven arguing over the number of sharps in the key of D. The characters even dispute scientific issues that were settled long before they died.

Louis Contey's TimeLine Theatre Company production is handsome and grounded, but it only comes to life when the play does—when Frayn moves beyond the inconsequential meeting to consider Bohr's and Heisenberg's

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political and ethical situations. A harrowing scene in the second half of the first act shows how much real drama is missing from the rest of the script, as Heisenberg recounts the moral nightmare of running a nuclear program for a madman. Charged with using the insights he gained from Bohr to exterminate Bohr's world, he's struggling to produce enough results to remain in control of the Nazi program without actually wanting it to succeed.

In this static play, Contey's small, smart ensemble is beautifully arranged on Brian Sidney Bembridge's set, which suggests both a decaying manor house and a surgical gallery. Terry Hamilton as Bohr and P.J. Powers as Heisenberg are initially over-animated, which makes their copious dialogue nearly impenetrable. But later they settle into more natural rhythms, and these give the proceedings a welcome warmth. The two also seem to have a keen understanding of the scientific and political realities involved, and many of their exchanges are utterly engrossing. In the pointless role of Margrethe—who spends the play skulking about, doing little but defending her husband—Isabel Liss is convincing and aptly unobtrusive.

Playing fast and loose with history is a dramatist's prerogative. Where would Shakespeare be without it? But when a playwright abuses artistic license, diffusing tension and rendering characters implausible, it should be revoked. **A**

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Books

WHAT'S MY NAME, FOOL? SPORTS AND RESISTANCE IN THE UNITED STATES DAVE ZIRIN (HAYMARKET BOOKS)

The Political Arena

Lefty sportswriter Dave Zirin argues for sports as a force for social change

By Ann Sterzinger

In the partisan dung fight that is the culture war, the left too often smears bellowing sports fans with the same shovel it uses to bury shrieking war boosters. It's an easy elision—too easy, according to sportswriter Dave Zirin. In his first book, *What's My Name, Fool? Sports and Resistance in the United States*, a collection of columns previously published in outlets from Basketball.com and *SportsFan* magazine to the tiny *Prince George's Post* (where he's the news editor) and his Web site, edgeofsports.com, Zirin tackles the assumption that all jocks are mindless jingoists. Written with a gleeful ear, the book intertwines the history of the labor, civil rights, and antiwar movements from the Depression to the present with biographies of sports figures who've leveraged their fame for political impact.

Though the sports arena is often used to stage morality plays shoring up the status quo—no other country in the world kicks off every game with the national anthem, Zirin says—he believes it once was a ring where the establishment was challenged and can be again.

Makes sense to me. When the Green Bay Packers take on the Dallas Cowboys, for example, I can't help but see a symbolic battle between good and evil. On one side there's the last real hometown team in the NFL, a crew of working stiffs whose stock is still owned mostly by locals and doesn't pay dividends;

on the other, megarich Texas owner Jerry Jones and his Astroturf-chewing pawns.

Zirin engages the Packers legend in a section that mourns the untimely death of a Packer hero, defensive end Reggie White. For the 1996 season, White turned

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down a lucrative deal with Dallas to play for a franchise he admired and with guys he respected, like QB Brett Favre. Then he led the Packers to Super Bowl glory.
But Zirin also takes a close look at

the moldy underside of the Reggie White myth. When White's mainly black evangelical church in Tennessee was burned to the ground in '96, the "Minister of Defense" took a bold stance against racist hate, speaking out forcefully against the white supremacist groups responsible. Then, empowered, he seized a chance to speak before the Wisconsin state legislature—and spewed racist, homophobic, Bible-thumping venom. Before dying last year at the age of 43, he'd become a spokesman for the Christian right.

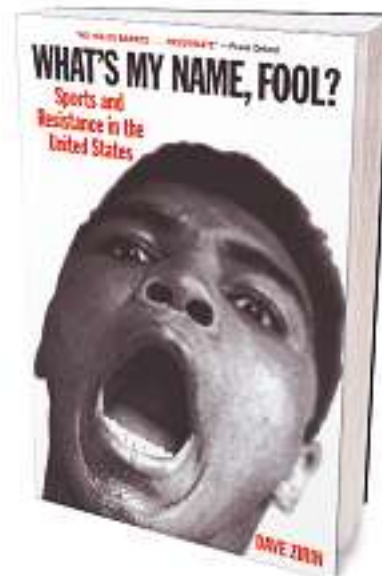
Zirin doesn't vilify him. "I will miss Reggie White," he says. "I will miss seeing if there may have been another chapter in his life

down the road, where he would have devoted body and soul to standing against the moneyed bigots of this country, instead of alongside them."

This hopeful, unjaded tone buoys most of the text. In his introduction Zirin politely takes down Noam Chomsky for his facile dismissal of sports as mere bread and circuses, declaring that "we need to look at sports for what they are, so we can take apart the disgusting, the beautiful, the ridiculous, and even the radical." Chapter one dives into history with a biography of 94-year-old Lester "Red" Rodney, who as sports editor of the communist *Daily Worker* during the 30s turned the party organ's sports page into a forum for investigative journalism that pushed to end the ban on black players in major league baseball.

Zirin goes on to reexamine the legend of Jackie Robinson, who was the first black player in the big leagues but was later shunned by the Nation of Islam as an establishment patsy. He argues that Muhammad Ali's antiwar stance during Vietnam was a force in turning the tide of public opinion against the war, and he interviews members of the 1968 U.S. Olympic team, most notably John Carlos, who with gold medalist Tommie Smith shocked the world by raising the black power salute on the victory stand.

These bios are dry by Zirin's standards, and some of his questions to the 60s icons are softballs. (To Carlos: "Many



people say that athletes should just play and not be heard. What do you think about that?") But his interview with George Foreman—who spent his own turn on the '68 Olympic dais waving a little American flag—is more interesting. Unfortunately, when Foreman makes the astonishing statement that only black athletes who were "college guys" were approached by organizers of the ultimately unsuccessful African-American boycott of the games, Zirin does nothing to refute or corroborate the story—by, say, asking Carlos for his take, or asking Foreman what the hell he's talking about—and the resulting essay is the closest thing in the book to leftist boilerplate.

Still, Zirin's close attention to history sharpens the reader's appetite for more. Much of the rest of *What's My Name, Fool?* is dedicated to recent events, which

are dissected by a driving, inspired voice that gets funnier as it gets angrier. "In the Shadow of Ali: Sports, War, and Resistance Today" highlights the antiwar activities of Danielle Green, a college basketball star once profiled in the *Reader* who lost her left hand in Iraq, as well as the story of Pat Tillman, the NFL player turned army ranger who became a media hero after he was killed in Afghanistan—a PR coup so important to the military that the Pentagon suppressed the inconvenient fact that he had been felled by friendly fire. Throughout, Zirin hammers his point home: sports fans don't all buy into the jingoistic hoopla that often threatens to smother play-by-play coverage. In one of my favorite subchapters, "Are We Ready for Some Football?," Zirin gives peace-loving fans a name we can be proud of: "radical helmet-huggers."

In "Sports, Racism, and the Modern Athlete," Zirin contrasts the taunts and insults that dogged players of color in the 60s with subtler slams against contemporary players who are "too arrogant" or "too hip-hop"—in other words, "too black." He takes guilty pleasure in cheap (if accurate) shots, landing one on Rush Limbaugh, who got kicked off ESPN for saying that Eagles QB Donovan McNabb was "over-rated" because the media was desperate to see a black quarterback do well, and then rejected the opportunity to explain himself on air. Snickers Zirin: "I don't want to say Rush is a cow-

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24. Noted ukelele player
26. Marshall, e.g.
29. Word said while shaking
32. Address a fracture
33. Super Mario aids
35. Ambitious course
40. Greasing choice
41. Passes on truth
42. Slurpee competitor
43. Modern discussion forum: var.

LAST WEEK: FLAT FEATURES

S	T	A	T	S	L	I	D	S	S	W	A	N		
A	R	B	U	S	A	S	I	A	E	A	S	Y		
P	E	R	F	E	C	T	L	O	C	A	T	I	O	N
S	E	A	T	H	O	E	R	H	U	F	F	Y		
	S	L	A	Y	A	P	O	P						
A	R	F	A	L	A	R	M	S	Y	S	T	E	M	
D	O	E	S	O	K	E	A	T	H	O	M	O		
A	T	L	A	S	I	D	S	L	O	W	E	R		
P	O	L	Y	A	M	I	S	U	P	E	R	S		
T	R	A	C	K	L	I	G	H	T	S	L	Y	E	
	H	E	A	T	O	A	T	H						
L	I	M	E	Y	A	C	T	S	E	Z	R	A		
A	C	C	E	S	T	O	T	H	E	R	O	O	F	
M	O	A	S	T	O	N	I	M	O	O	L	A		
A	N	T	E	U	R	G	E	U	N	S	E	R		

45. Water or rust
46. Wanted-poster letters
47. Graceland middle name
49. Opium room
50. Letter-writing, some say
54. Tap a butt
56. Not fooled by
57. Only an old-fashioned transmission?
63. Green and black, for two
64. ___ Eduard Leopold von Bismarck-Schönhausen
65. Martini dirtier
66. It's a long story
67. Get better
68. Dough state
69. Visa alternative, briefly
70. Neptunes side-project
71. Phil Collins, in *A Hard Day's Night*

DOWN

1. Hot brand creator
2. Half a course
3. Took to the sky
4. Permits
5. Prepares another round
6. Like some boxers
7. Invent, as a word
8. Hold out for
9. Some on the left
10. Soiled cereal?
11. Like helium
12. The blahs
13. Freud's ___ and *Taboo*
21. Way to go: abbr.
25. Bull foe
26. Dubya in 1972, allegedly
27. Landlocked North African nation
28. Dubya in 2005
30. In the distance
31. Incipient bug

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
14						15				16				
17						18				19				
20					21					22				
			23				24		25					
26	27	28		29		30	31		32					
33			34			35		36			37	38	39	
40					41					42				
43				44						45				
			46				47		48			49		
50	51	52				53			54		55			
56						57		58	59			60	61	62
63						64				65				
66						67				68				
69						70				71				

34. Idaho jazzman's horn?
36. Clairvoyant
37. Trip agent?
38. Relinquish
39. Sharp
41. Termination letter
44. Jamaican genre
45. Like lighthouses
48. Granola grain
50. Many, slangily
51. Late bedtime
52. Play ground?
53. Apprentice
55. Spiral
58. The sun, for one
59. Tattled
60. It's made for fighting
61. State firmly
62. Lucy Lawless role

ard, but he would sooner sing 'We Shall Overcome' in a pink thong than debate outside the friendly confines of right-wing talk radio."

By the third quarter, unfortunately, the book starts to drag. The historical background in the chapter on women in sports, for instance, would have hit harder had it been interwoven with the civil rights history laid out early on. And the inspiring final chapter on recent acts of rebellion would have been stronger had it wrapped up with some analysis rather than another Q & A. But I'm glad he got this stuff on the streets just as oil prices deliver a right hook to tailgaters' pocket-books and our commander in chief's approval ratings are worse than the Milwaukee Brewers'. Zirin offers no miracle cure for the queasiness induced by starred-and-barred Super Bowl commercials, but he provides hope that if we tap into the legacy of rebels like Ali and Carlos and Billie Jean King we can "build a broader movement for social justice outside the arena" and turn our ball fields into staging grounds for the forces of sanity. **B**

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