Our complete pullout guide to the CHICAGO JAZZ FESTIVAL

Section 3

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CONSTRUCTION SALE
as featured on ABC-TV's "Best Values in Chicago" and in "Mr. Cheap's Chicago"

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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.
Dear editor:

In response to the criticism of the Chicago Reader’s Independent Center (chicagoreader.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 defy 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 convos for profit-seeking compa- nies will be removed. We respect and support a diversity of opinion, but our site and other sites in the Indiana media network, have unfortunately been increasingly targeted by quantities of right-wing content, fake news, and, in the name of promoting messages, we would appreciate it if such persons would instead use [other Web sites], set up their own... rather than subjecting our readers and posters to our objectionable content.”

However, when we find posts 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 anyone who agrees to their objectionable content.”

Don Goldhamer

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Where Indymedia Puts It

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 suspect that all those left and right-wing computer nerds trying to figure out how to shut down Web sites don’t like it. Talk about hypocrisy. Jeremy Hammond trumps 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 leftists on both ends of the politi- cal spectrum to be, at best, annoyingly cute but rarely informative and, at worst, marginally oppressive, that sentiment is not borne out in the case of Richardson’s letter titled “The Not-So-Lefty Warrior” in the August 26 edition of the Chicago Reader. I would be hard pressed to believe that the matter now before the courts isn’t the result of political pressure from the current administration. There is nothing even remotely cen- trist about anyone who supports the current administration.

S. Union

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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 2004 [“My Muff Has Ticks” August 19]. The nearly 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 for- tune in advertising revenue from phone sex and other adult-themed services, now sees fit to mock the people who patronize these services.

But Mr. 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 debaseing for all con- cerned, 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 entertain- ment purposes. Are we supposed to find their illegal behavior funny?

I look forward to the day 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 have been allowed to be published. Simply put, they are bullies. And Mr. Rickert’s attempt to justify this sadism is laughable.

Suppose Rickert and Erdman had posted a picture of a young stoned and enthralled gay man to call with their fantasy and then be held up for mockery. It is hard to imagine that such an article would have been allowable to be published. But what exactly is different? I have always felt like the Reader exists in an ungovernable 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 wan- ton humiliation of mild deviants and rewarding one of the perpetra- tors was a discovery which was disturbing.

Joshua Kilroy

Yelp Park
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 Yito 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 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 Brenner as though he’d been killed in action.

In the fall of 2004 Brenner wrote about Kodee, and Colleen dropped by the newspaper office to focus on the elections and phone calls from “Kodee” to Colleen. “I’m rilly mad at you and you make my hart hurt. I don’t think it’s fair. Do you have a soldier of your own in Iraq? 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 came 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 newspaper office is so far apart that the exchange 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 Jamie Reynolds, a radio-TV major who graduated from SIU in 2004. It seems beyond belief that one journalist 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 studies 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 supposed-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 Nerf gun in the newsroom, where a radiation vault warns, “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 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 had only one grown-up acquaintance in the newsroom: a Nerf gun in the newsroom, and phone calls from “Kodee” to anybody in the newsroom who had any respect for the opinion pages. It was only cute to anyone smitten by her charm.

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When Ayad became editor of the Egyptian in the fall of 2004 he had big plans: he wanted to focus on the elections...
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 banned 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’—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 Fuller, the new faculty managing editor. Fuller 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 on the pot, though Reynolds has said she was trying to help him further his career. Beyond that, Fuller’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 96,000 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 Blackhawk tickets, graduation gifts for Ryan’s three daughters, and a DA for a staff party.

When Cook County state 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 attorney.” Ryan was accused of stealing more than $100,000 from the district (some $70,000 of which went to his daughter’s colleges), of awarding a buddy a $72,000 no-bid lighting contract, of demanding kickbacks from employees paid overtime, and of intimidating employees into destroying 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.”

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 but if somebody has a line on some chi, (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. I’m quitting? No, merely taking a breather till the swelling goes down. Voilà for it! It’s likely just physics, but if somebody has a line on some chi, I’'m gawin’ it a go.

considering what an exercise in participatory science this turned out to be, you might consider starting by consulting ancient masters and visiting martial arts shrines to get a handle on the subject. I did, and I found it didn’t inspire the same confidence as, say, the Acta Dignissima Scandavicae. Then, again, other JOMF articles included “How a Cruise Missile Works” and “Crafty Conan’s Hot Shoe Gauntlet Experience.” I figured, hey, maybe this guy’s OK.

He was. Jon had done his homework, among other things citing a genuine on 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, and on so, the practical significance of which is that the karateka (karate artiste) should hit the board 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 advance white belts (rookies) ... to try to break the board, but not 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 entrenching a stack of 32-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 information: (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, thickness three-quarters of an inch) laid so as to maximize the velocity of the blow. 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 spent a couple more blue boards as a platform. Never one to be accursed of rashness, I started with one board. Easy. Three, Knife through butter. Five. I’d had more trouble swatting gnats. Seven. Advantageously grained andinterspersioned with pencils though they may be, seven boards is a formidable stack of kibber. I reviewed my sparse knowledge of karate. Chi is not a thing readily summoned as to maximize the velocity of the blow. As to maximize the velocity of the blow. As to maximize the velocity of the blow.

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The Straight Dope by Cecil Adams

I recently watched a karate/kae kdo demonstration of breaking boards, and once again I wondered: What is the important part in making the board break? Is 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 thing? Or is it mostly concentration, summoning of chi, etc, as martial artists claim? —Constance W., Germany
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 Midwest 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-

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 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 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 Southtown are both Hollinger papers.

“I asked Phil Aurk, 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 ‘newspaper reports’ sparked the investigation.’

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WFMT was largely Nordstrand’s creation, as was Chicago maga-
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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The Poor, Poor Park Grill

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 2005, 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, and running, and through his 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 specifically state that it is.

The Poor, Poor Park Grill

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

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.

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ally 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 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 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, because 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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Hey, Thanks for the Fetus

By Liz Armstrong

One occupational hazard of my job is occasionally getting something sent 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 spot.”

But one package last May really disturbed me, like the guy down to the lake. “Some of it grosses me out,” I reconsidered—it was probably a hand-bound booklet of very small, delicate little doodles.

When my letter was called, I reached in and pulled out a single sheet of white paper. About halfway down the page, in a tiny lowercase font was the message: “you just have to wonder why.” Yeah, I guess so...

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 Friends and saw that she knows my friend Margaret Chapman. I e-mailed Chapman and got the scope. 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 envelope as best you see fit. Feel free to be unedited & uncut—and 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 Friends and Birch 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 am 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, craft kits, and screen-printing kits.

“Clear out a little home among the bones and make our bed,” it said.

My friend Annie sat at a table despondently riffling through her Packit. “It is like raffling out of a magazine about ‘botched boob jobs’ that you’d first cut from a magazine about hard raisins way under-neath traded in for turbo tits, rock-hard, means she’s been out, a crooked nipple blob set tidy. She also got lots of porno shots of naked shorewomen cut up almost like snowflakes; dictionary entries for such rele vant 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 ice cream, a bunch of drugs and a logic puzzle she’d written about a cookie-eating contest. “You just have to wonder why,” I guess so...
The Sports Section

Adversity Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

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

By Ted Cox

I’ve never seen a Sox team struggle as much as the current one, and it’s been fascinating to watch. The team is full of talent, but it’s clear that they’ve never been through anything like this before. The lack of depth in the rotation and the bullpen has been a problem, and the team has struggled to consistently hit the ball. But the worst part has been the defense, which has been terrible.

The Sox fans have been through a lot of ups and downs over the years, but this is a new level. They’ve seen their team win the World Series just a few years ago, and now they’re watching them lose game after game. It’s been a tough pill to swallow for many of them.

But despite the pain, the fans have remained steadfast. They’ve continued to support the team through thick and thin, and it’s clear that this is more than just a game to them. The bond between fans and team is stronger than ever, and it’s been a beautiful thing to witness.

I’m not sure if the Sox will make the playoffs this year, but I do know that the fans have been through an incredible amount of adversity. They’ve shown incredible resilience and I’m proud of them for that. Here’s hoping for a better season to come.
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Body Worlds will be open 24 hours a day from Saturday, Sept. 3 to Monday, Sept. 5.

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**Body Worlds hours:** Sept. 3, 9:30am to Sept. 5, 9:00pm

[Image of the exhibition]
Sweet Nothing

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

By Lynn Becker

udwig Mies van der Rohe’s goal as an architect was 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 financiers 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 transparenciness and creating the tallest possible building with the least possible structure. He created a single open-core 120-foot-wide floor plate by 220 feet long by 18 feet high—whose roof is supported from just four enormous girders, leaving the interior completely free of columns. The floor is gray terrazzo, with a continuous sweep of white acoustic tile. Along the building’s perimeter the structure was parded down to an open-frame steel frame surrounding huge glass windows. Each of the clear upper panes is a spectacular 31 by a half by 9 and a half feet. The window frames, the blinds, even the tables and chairs are students who worked there designed by Mies, and everything fits 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 it very inoperable. Peter Beltemacchi, associate dean at IIT, says the white blinds over the windows turned yellow from “tar and nicotine and baze and age.”

In 2003 Helmut Jahn’s State Street Village, the first new 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 rotund McCormick Tribune Campus Center to the north. Koolhaas claimed that the blaring 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 as vivid as Koolhaas’s “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, trappedical stop was opposed by the purists as a betrayal of his commitment to right angles.

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, trappedical 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.

“Their is 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 “protoprogren” 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 any one who does that anymore.”

Robertson and Sexton hope to get a surrogate during the third phase of the restoration, estimat 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 electrici,” 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 furr-ther into the interior, rather than relying so much on the electrical lights. And the lights will be con-rolled by the building brain as well, because it will read what the floor 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 worktable work was 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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Ivan Brunetti

With a little help from Buddha and Chris Ware, a classicssad-sackcomicsartist 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 l ittle discon-certing to look at that strip now th at “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 any more.”

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.

“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 exhib-it.” 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, 

Our Town
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 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.”

[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—if 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

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Pinball

continued from page 1

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ner in the world’s biggest pinball
manufacturer, Williams Electronics, has loved the game
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Harry Mabs, invented the flip-
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Stern’s father, Sam, got into the
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Most early machines were designed just for entertainment,
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The games were popular even
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The American public soon saw
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But the image stuck, and pinball
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Sharpe remembers machines in the
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continued on page 22

The machines are assembled entirely by hand from more than 1,500 parts; Stern’s Harley-Davidson game

Pinball: An American icon—part of the fabric of life, he says. “It’s not a video game that every action has a programmed reaction.”

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 Culmer’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 a few were small shops. As the Depression got worse, the small manufacturers were 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 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—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 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 areas of prohibition-era officials in the 1920s. City police commissioner Lewis 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 twenty-three years 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 17, 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’ desk and asked if he wanted to sell his company. Gary thinks Williams was surprised and accepted the offer.

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.”
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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—’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 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 failed. 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 Pinball.

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.”

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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 Pinball. Continued on page 24
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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. 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 workplace—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 anywhere 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 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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Spanish director Alex de la Iglesia has won a cult following by such cult favorites as the Beast, Common Wealth and in a dead man’s apartment, features that include a balding geek and 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 unrelenting a tale of sex, lies, and hommicide that recalls the classic noirs of the late 40s. Guillermo Toledo is fascinating as the repulsive hero, Rafael, a dapper ladies’ wear salesmen 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 department 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: “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 acowling; 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 consequence 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.
This sharp dichotomy between the beautiful and the ugly is most reminiscent of the super-low-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 bodybuilding 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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The Improbable Past

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

By Justin Hayford

I t was a dark and stormy night. In fact, it was a dark and stormy Thursday evening in September 2005, and the world was in the midst of a global financial crisis. The stock markets were plummeting, the dollar was tanking, and the world was on the brink of collapse. But, in the midst of all this chaos, a group of people gathered together to discuss the fate of humanity.

The meeting was convened by Werner Heisenberg, who had been Bohr's mentor and collaborator for many years. Heisenberg had heard rumors that Bohr might be planning to join the Nazi's nuclear program, and he wanted to discuss the implications of such a move.

Bohr, on the other hand, was not convinced that the war could be decided with atomic weapons. He believed that the war could be won with conventional means, and that the use of atomic weapons would only serve to prolong the conflict.

The meeting was held in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen, and it was a tense and acrimonious affair. Bohr and Heisenberg argued heatedly, and Bohr threatened to leave if Heisenberg continued to push his arguments.

Heisenberg, however, was determined to convince Bohr to join the Nazi's nuclear program. He believed that the war could not be won without atomic weapons, and that the world was facing an existential threat.

Bohr, on the other hand, was determined to resist. He believed that the use of atomic weapons would be catastrophic, and that the world was facing a moral crisis.

The meeting ended in failure, and the two scientists never spoke to each other again.

The meeting, however, was not the end of the story. Bohr and Heisenberg continued to correspond, and they exchanged letters and notes in an attempt to bridge their differences.

Over the years, many theories have been advanced about the meeting between Heisenberg and Bohr. Some have argued that Bohr was trying to learn about Nazi's nuclear program, while others have argued that Heisenberg was trying to persuade Bohr to join the Nazi's.

The meeting, however, is not the only time that Bohr and Heisenberg have been discussed in the context of nuclear weapons. In his 2000 Broadway smash *Copenhagen*, playwright Michael Frayn makes the case for the implausibility of the meeting, and he argues that the meeting was not a factor in the development of the bomb.

Frayn asserts that the meeting was a failure, and 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 imperatives, theRecording resonance, the ethical complexities here are compelling, if you can stomach the play's implausibilities. 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 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 shuffling 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 Conyne'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
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, Conley’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 overanimated, 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, confusing tension and rendering characters implausible, it should be revoked.
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—to easy, according to sportswriter Dave Zirin. In his first book, What’s My Name, Fool? Sports and Resistance in the United States, Zirin engages the Packers legend in a section that mourns the untimely death of a Packers hero, defensive end Reggie White. For the 1996 season, White turned 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 XXXI, glory.

Dave Zirin

When: Thu 9/8, 7 PM
Where: 57th Street Books, 1301 E. 57th
Info: 773-684-3100, semcoop.com

When: Fri 9/9, 7:30 PM
Where: Left of Center Bookstore, 1043 W. Granville
Info: 773-338-1312, leftofcenterbookstore.com

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 supremacists groups responsible. Then, empowered, he seized the opportunity to explain himself on air. Snickers Zirin: “I will miss Reggie White,” he says, “I will miss seeing if there may have been another chapter in his life 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 killed by friendly fire. Throughout, Zirin hammers his point home: sports fans don’t all buy into the jingoistic hoopla that often threatens to another 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 guilt pleasure in cheap (if accurate) shots, landing one on Rush Limbaugh, who got kicked off ESPN for saying that Eagles QB Donovan McNabb was “overrated” because the media was desperate to see a black quarterback do well, and then rejected the opportunity to explain himself on air. Smackers Zirin: “I don’t want to say Rush is a cow-
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’ pocketbooks 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.

Ink Well
by Ben Tausig

Crossing the Finish Line

ACROSS

LAST WEEK: FLAT FEATURES