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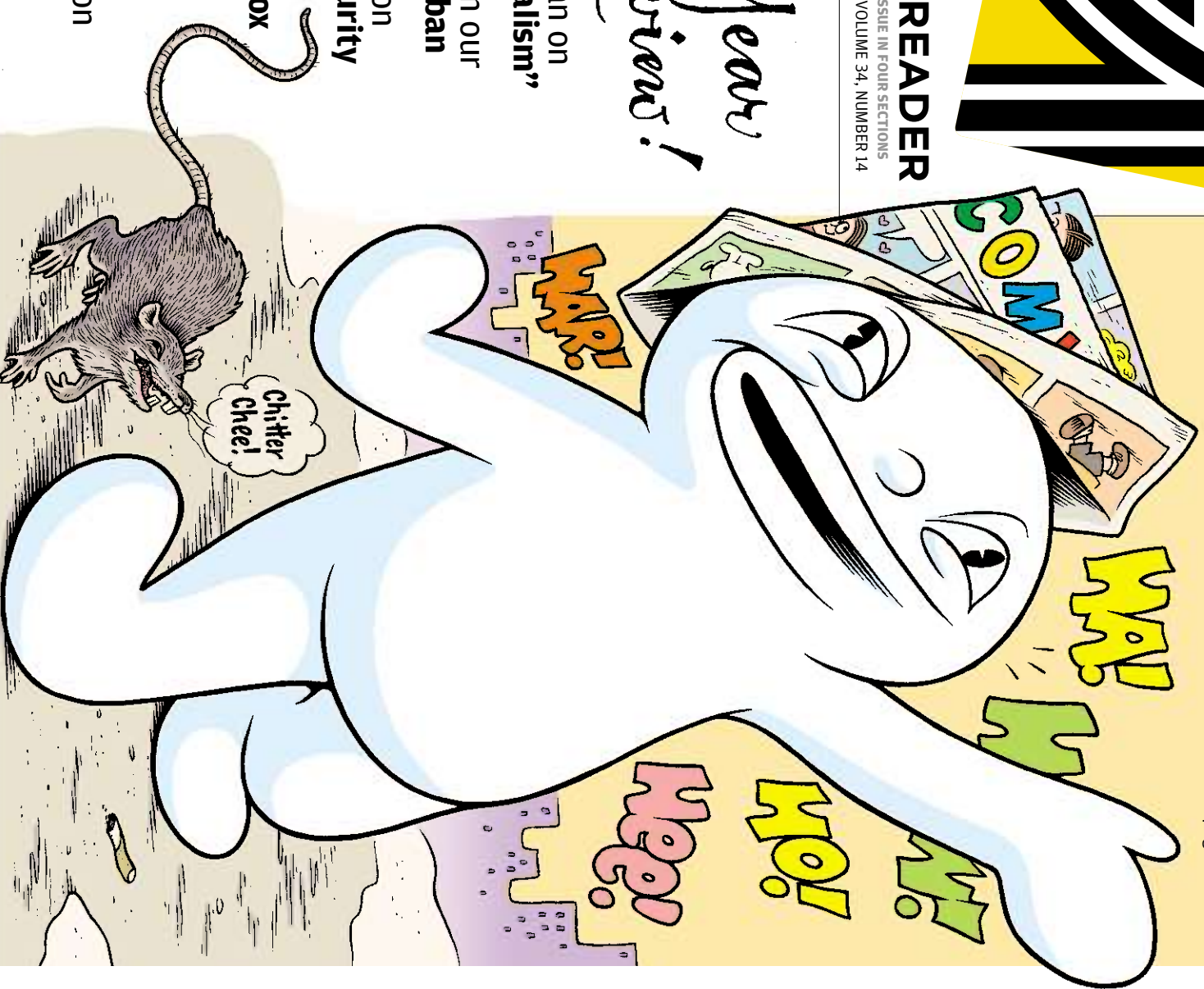
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CHICAGO READER
CHICAGO'S FREE WEEKLY | THIS ISSUE IN FOUR SECTIONS
FRIDAY, DEC 30, 2005 | VOLUME 34, NUMBER 14

*The Year
in Review!*

- Michael Lenehan on "citizen journalism"
- Ben Joravsky on our lame **smoking ban**
- Michael Miner on **homeland security**
- Ted Cox on the **Cubs and the Sox**
- Bob Mehr on the **RIAA's latest victory**
- Liz Armstrong on **Liz Armstrong**



Our annual
COMICS
SPECIAL starts on page 11

PLUS The granddaddy of the graphic novel, a showcase for sustainable art, Chicago SketchFest starts, where to eat after midnight, and more

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December 30, 2005

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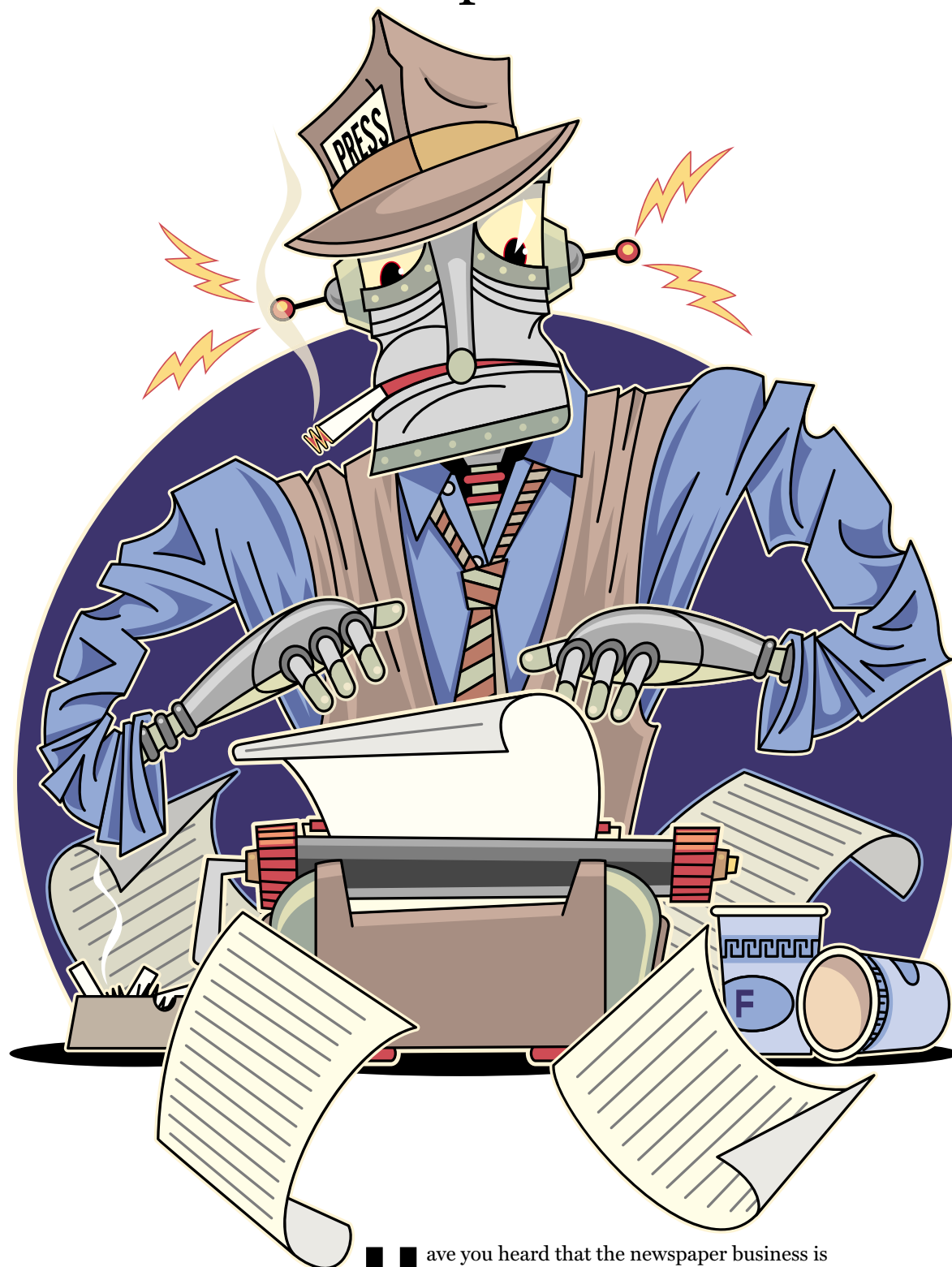
This week's crossword: Sounds Like Love

ON THE COVER: ARCHER PREWITT

Modest Proposals

A Year Without Journalism

Let's see what our brave new media future looks like when there are no real reporters to steal from.



MARK S. FISHER

By Michael Lenehan

Have you heard that the newspaper business is going to hell? It's in all the papers, but nobody reads the papers anymore so you might have missed the news. Assuming you still care about news, which you don't, according to the papers.

Circulation's down, ad revenue's down, jobs are vanishing everywhere you look. A few weeks ago the Tribune Company capped a series of buyouts and layoffs by spiking the New City News Service, formerly the City News Bureau, the venerable Chicago institution that used to train the journalists of the future. Evidently it's not needed

continued on page 26

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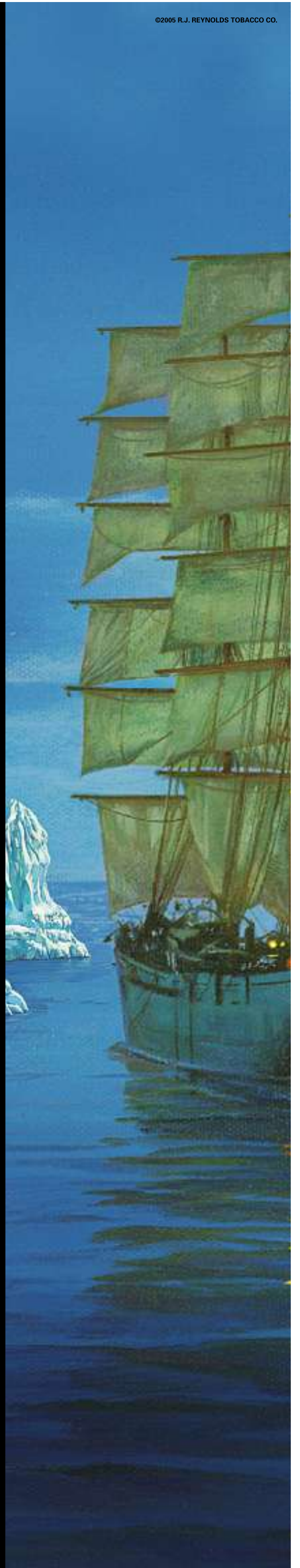
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Letters

In Defense of Layoffs

If I'm understanding the numbers right, the *Trib* is cutting 28 newsroom jobs while creating 13 new online jobs, so a net reduction of 15 journalists from an editorial staff of 540 [Hot Type, December 9]. A 3 percent change? Corporate payrolls fluctuate by more than that every year just by accident—what's the big deal about this?

It's not like any of the specific layoffs will have any effect on the coverage of local, state, or international news. WomanNews has been a waste of newsprint for years: its silly parts, like its fashion coverage, were unnecessary or should go to *Red Eye*, which is aimed at the age cohort that cares about that stuff. Its smart parts—from the Miss Manners column to the serious pieces about honor killings and female circumcision—always should have been in the Tempo section or the main section rather than in a women's ghetto.

The business features department can certainly afford reduction with zero impact on news values. Does anyone think that two huge car sections each week, or four weekly sections on real estate full of wire-service copy, were improving our civic square?

The City News Bureau was effectively abolished six years ago because the business reasons for its existence had evaporated. The *Tribune's* attempt to keep it on life support by establishing a department to sell useful information to competitors never made any sense.

They have made a very small trim and made it entirely around the edges—they have protected metro, national, and international news. They didn't close any bureaus or cut the foreign-correspondent budget. If anything, the movement of positions to the Web site may have the effect of improving local coverage. So what crime, exactly, is the Tribune Company guilty of here?

Name withheld

Oak Park

PS: Not that I or very many regular readers still think they are getting good value from their payroll anyway. My wife was astounded: "It takes 540 professional journalists to produce that pile of dull mush each day??"

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Hijacking Christianity

Regarding the review by J.R. Jones of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* ["Good Is Good," December 16]:

I read Jones's review in agreement right up to the end of his attempt to frame the real-world battle over good and evil ignited by this new film. It is his last paragraph with which I took issue, where he noted that secularists might be overreacting, to the point of paranoia, over this film. "What's the problem with [Christian] ideals being celebrated in a story that's openly a fantasy?" he asks.

What is at issue here, right now in the U.S., is not whether the film or Lewis's original stories (or for that matter Christianity) present valid "conventional morality" from which everyone could learn. Forgiveness, redemption, and other themes in Lewis's tales are certainly nothing from which to run. The issue here is whether those themes, those conventional moralities, have been hijacked for other purposes. The Christianity of the current conservative Christian movement is not even the Christianity of Christ, much less of Lewis.

The argument from the secularist side of the cultural battle over this film is less concerned with whether children will be indoctrinated by yet another allegorical film depicting a struggle against the temptations of evil, which is agreeably the stuff of much Western (and Eastern) literature and cinema.

The argument is also less concerned with Christian messages of sin, redemption, and forgiveness coated in lion's fur. The argument here instead is that this new Christianity itself has little to do with these ideals.

This new Christianity is one that reacts with vengeance at every turn. This is a Christianity that does not remember the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes, much less that whole "thou shalt not kill" part from the Old Testament. This is an evangelical Christianity married as much to militarism, globalized corporate



"Even if you respect Christian ideals but consider the New Testament a fantasy, what's the problem with those ideals being celebrated in a story that's openly a fantasy?"
—J.R. Jones, December 16

capitalism, PowerPoint presentations, and demographic market research as anything I learned in Sunday school.

And most un-Christian-like, it is a Christianity that demands "faith" through dogmatic enforcement—even Jesus had his faith questioned. Hence the debate, from a secularist point of view, is how this movie (similarly to *The Passion of the Christ*) is being used as a marketing strategy or an economic tool (like a Christian hedge fund) rather than as a platform for questioning, learning, and debate.

I write this as no stranger to a Christian-based spirituality that demonstrates the "conventional morality" to which I think you refer. I grew up in a very progressive Episcopal church. Mine was one of maybe eight white families in an otherwise all-black church in Syracuse, New York. Our reverend was a woman, and our church opened its doors to local chapters of South American peace activists, Buddhists, and pretty much anyone who wanted to hold meetings there. I have no problem with anyone putting "conventional morality" into practice. The problem with America in 2005, as exemplified in the debate surrounding this film, is that so much of contemporary Christianity no longer does. Therefore it seems to me that Christians, like Walden Media's Philip Anschutz, stand to learn a lot from Lewis's tales, should they follow through with the whole series.

Paul Lloyd Sargent
W. Armitage

Bona Fides

Note that John Lavine [Hot Type, December 16] was the longtime owner/publisher of Wisconsin dailies, including the Chippewa Falls *Herald*, and a former professor of media management at the University of Minnesota. So I'm not sure Lavine is any less qualified to lead a journalism/mass comm school than many, many other chairs and deans over the decades.

Michael NormanProfessor (emeritus)
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Burying the Bomb

Homeland security failing, page 30

By Michael Miner

An AP story out of Washington on December 6, 1941, that began "If the Japanese ever launch a sneak attack against Pearl Harbor, experts say it's a sitting duck" wouldn't have been plastered across the front pages because no newspaper would have accepted the premise. A September 10, 2001, story warning of hijacked planes used as missiles would have gotten an equally cold reception.

Today it's a given that 9/11 was merely the first assault and the enemy will come again, but stories that sound an alarm still go begging. This month the 9/11 Commission did the work newspapers have refused to do and gave Washington a homeland-security report card full of Cs, Ds, and Fs. The story AP offered papers for December 6 began "Time, money and ever-present terror threats have done little to close gaping holes in the nation's security system, the former Sept. 11 Commission said Monday." The *Sun-Times* ran this story on page 30, below a piece on Tom DeLay and a story with the headline "Are we ready for movies about 9/11?"

I don't know why this performance astonished me. On August 5 I wrote a column marveling that almost four years after 9/11 American newspapers still weren't thinking seriously enough about homeland security. My exhibit A was a *Sun-Times* editorial touting the wonders of Santiago Calatrava's pro-

posed 2,000-foot Fordham Spire. Build it, said the *Sun-Times*, to show we're not "caving in to the shallow threat of terrorism." Was putting the 9/11 Commission's report on page 30 its way of showing us it still refused to cave?

The *Sun-Times* wasn't the only paper to misjudge the news. The *New York Times* put its version of the AP story on page 22 of the national edition on December 6, and plenty of other papers didn't think the story deserved page one. The *Tribune* properly topped its front page with the headline "9/11 panel: U.S. not safe," but it still fell short. The *Tribune* borrowed its story from the *Washington Post*, and there was no sidebar covering the Chicago angle—as if a report giving the government a D for cargo and luggage screening and an F for communication between first responders didn't suggest one. Papers in other cities quoted former Illinois governor Jim Thompson, a member of the panel, but on December 6 the Chicago papers didn't.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* was a model of competent journalism. Its story ran on page one (with an editorial in the same edition), and the local angle dominated. It identified Utah's Orrin

Hatch as one of a "handful of senators" standing in the way of a change in federal law that would allow homeland security funds to be distributed on the basis of risk, instead of on the basis of what commission chairman Thomas Kean called "pork barrel spending."

This change obviously matters to Chicago. The *Sun-Times* figured that out in time to publish an editorial on December 7 that was longer than its news story the day before. The editorial

The *Tribune* borrowed its story from the *Washington Post*, and there was no sidebar covering the Chicago angle.

denounced the "obstinacy of Congress" and quoted Thompson wondering, "What's the rationale? What's the excuse?"

The Unfilled Hole

The last vestige of Chicago's hallowed City News Bureau disappears at the end of the year, when the *Tribune* pulls the plug on its New City News Service.



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The Straight Dope® by Cecil Adams

OK, before asking my question, I have to admit that I got the idea for it from an episode of *Beavis and Butt-head*. Anyways, can I hop in a box, have a friend take me to the post office, and send myself to far-off destinations? If I can, would it be cheaper than airfare? I'm sure Beavis and Butt-head aren't the first to think of this; has anyone else tried it? —Arvind Karwan, Fort Collins, Colorado

The *Tribune* says it no longer wants to pay reporters to provide content to TV and radio stations that put it online in competition with the *Tribune's* own Web site.

When I wrote about New City News's death sentence on December 9 I thought the chances were good that the hole it was leaving in Chicago journalism would be filled by City News Service of Los Angeles. I was wrong. City News Service boss Doug Faigin tells me he ran the numbers and decided the only way he could afford to set up shop here would be to increase rates by about 50 percent. He rounded up 11 potential clients—New City News has had 14, City News Service well over 100—but they balked at the price. "Their [2006] budgets are pretty locked in," he told me. "It's hard for them to come up with the money. More than one said they'd like us to contact them again in late summer."

At that point they'll be writing their next budgets, and they'll have a good idea how much they'll need the package of local hard news and future events Faigin wants to sell them. "We're leaving this door open," he said.

His business plan—which he's hanging on to—was to operate at a manageable loss for a couple of years while his operation demonstrated its competence, then start adding clients. Like maybe the *Tribune*, which he told me didn't say yes but didn't say no. And the *Sun-Times*, which said no. And the *Daily Herald*, which he didn't ask.

Permashuffle?

Last August the *Tribune* told its critics that while things were slow the paper was going to shift a few chairs around and see what hap-

pened. First-string theater critic Michael Phillips would review movies for a couple months, second-stringer Chris Jones would handle theater by himself, and film critic Michael Wilmington would focus on Sunday essays. "I was told not to read anything into it," Wilmington told me at the time, though of course every critic affected by the job shuffle did.

Two months turned into four, and the lassitude of summer gave way to the frenzy of Christmas openings. But the new order still stands. "Arts critic" Jones covers theater. "Arts critic" Phillips covers film—with a lot of help from "staff reporter" Allison Benedikt. "Movie critic" Wilmington handles art films and writes essays.

"We're happy with the way things are playing out on all fronts," says James Warren, deputy managing editor for features. Though he still describes the arrangement as an experiment, a return to the old status quo isn't likely. Jones and Phillips seem comfortable in their new assignments, and even Wilmington, who got the short end of the stick, is in a job that suits him better: he's writing about ideas now instead of airheaded \$200 million blockbusters.

Now That's a Team Player

Last January 14 in these pages Scott Eden told the story of prep football guru Tom Lemming and the kid he believed in, Libertyville High standout Santino Panico. Panico was so determined to reach the NFL he already had his own personal trainer, dietician, and speed coach, yet none of the major foot-

continued on page 6

I too have an admission to make: I got a little help on this answer from the Teeming Millions via the Straight Dope Message Board. But come on, it's been a long year. You guys can carry me for once.

For reasons to be shortly elucidated, not the least of which is that travel by post makes the most dimensionally challenged coach seat look like Cleopatra's barge, mailing yourself is not something that I can in good conscience advise. But yes, it's been done, occasionally in a noble cause, although more commonly in stupid ones. Herewith the facts, noble cause first:

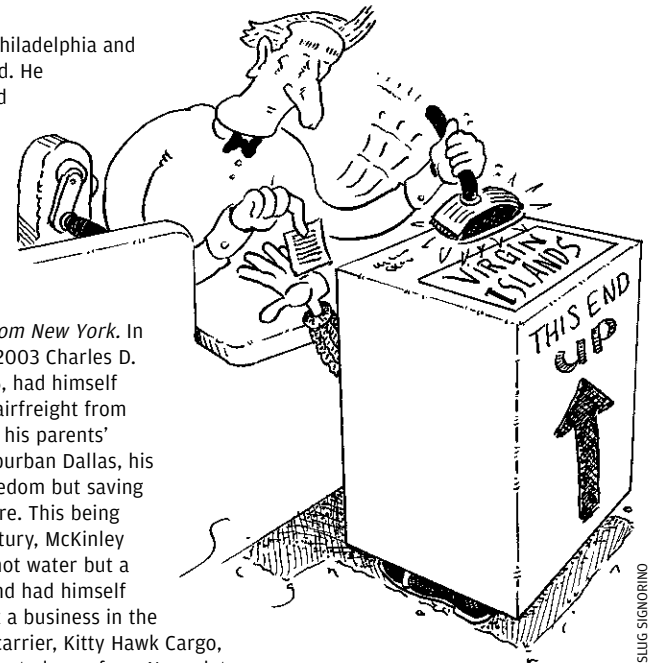
Escape from slavery. From the 1851 memoir that bears his name we learn of one Henry "Box" Brown, a slave residing in Richmond, Virginia, in the 1840s. Desperate for freedom, in March 1849 Brown poured acid on his finger in order to be excused from work; then, anticipating Beavis and Butt-head by nearly 150 years, he arranged for a pair of associates to nail him inside a three-by-two-and-a-half-by-two-foot wooden box, his only accommodations a bladder of water and a tool with which to bore additional airholes. That done, the accomplices delivered the goods to the railway express office, presumably paid the freight, and wired a friend in Philadelphia to await delivery of the male (Brown's joke, not mine). The journey was no walk in the shade. Despite the fact that the box was marked THIS SIDE UP WITH CARE, it was placed upside down for hours at a time (freight handlers being no more attentive to instructions then than now), causing the blood to rush dangerously to Brown's head. Just as he felt about to lose consciousness, though, a couple jamokes turned the box over, the better to sit on it. At another point the box was flung from a wagon, knocking Brown cold and nearly breaking his neck. After some additional travail the fugitive arrived at the desired

address in Philadelphia and was uncrated. He emerged and promptly fainted, bruised and battered but, thank God almighty, free at last.

Escape from New York. In September 2003 Charles D. McKinley, 25, had himself shipped by airfreight from New York to his parents' house in suburban Dallas, his goal not freedom but saving the plane fare. This being the 21st century, McKinley took along not water but a computer and had himself picked up at a business in the Bronx. The carrier, Kitty Hawk Cargo, flew the encrusted man from Newark to Buffalo to Fort Wayne, Indiana, to Dallas, whence he was transported by truck to his folks' house. He'd have gotten there undetected except that at the last minute he apparently removed a covering of some kind, allowing the deliveryperson to see him while unloading the box. The jig up, the driver called police, who arrested McKinley on some old warrants. A federal official conceded that U.S. air security measures clearly weren't the impenetrable shield one might like in the wake of 9/11.

Escape from reality. In the kids' book *Flat Stanley* by Jeff Brown (1964), a bulletin board falls on young Stanley Lambchop and nonfatally flattens him to four feet by one foot by half an inch. Pops Lambchop takes advantage of this unforeseen turn of events to mail Stanley to California for a visit. Stanley returns the same way unscathed, proving "jet planes were wonderful, and so was the Postal Service." It's fiction, OK?

Practical considerations. As the above



suggests, the U.S. Postal Service is not the carrier of choice for human freight, among other things having a 70-pound weight limit. Package delivery firms are more liberal about such things (weight and dimensions, I mean; nobody is knowingly going to take a living person); UPS will ship up to 150 pounds. Air cargo services generally speaking will take whatever you can fit on a pallet—more than that if you're willing to pay for it. But there's the rub. Take our friend Charles McKinley. Let's suppose he wants to try again and arranges to ship himself via UPS in a Henry Brown-size box with a loaded weight of 150 pounds (hey, he can diet). Cheapest rate from NYC to DFW: \$152—but he'll spend four days in transit. No way. Second-day air, still pretty uncomfortable: \$345. Compare that to the best deal for a conventional flight I could find on Priceline: \$126 for a one-stop via ATA, and you don't even need to provide your own box.

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

ball schools wanted him. Miraculously, largely thanks to Lemming, he wound up at football powerhouse Nebraska, playing for a new coach who'd arrived too late to recruit anyone but leftovers. The coach, Bill Callahan, showed his appreciation for Panico's sure hands by installing him as Nebraska's punt returner.

Panico didn't fumble away a punt the entire 2004 season. But he didn't run any back for big yardage either. What scouts other than Lemming had said about him was true: he didn't have breakaway speed. Nebraska had a horrible season, finishing

5-6 and without a bowl invitation for the first time in 36 years, and if Panico wasn't the reason for the disaster, in the fans' eyes he was a symbol. After the season Callahan brought in one of the country's top recruiting classes, and Panico, reading the handwriting on the wall, dropped out of the program and out of school.

But there's more. During that dismal season Panico happened to have lunch one day with John Cook, coach of the women's volleyball team. "He was a real character," Cook recently told *Lincoln Journal Star* columnist John Mabry. "Anytime he was at the training table, he was talking

about something." That day Panico was talking up a book he swore by, Gary Mack's *Mind Gym: An Athlete's Guide to Inner Excellence*.

Cook checked it out and gave copies to his players for Christmas. The book didn't hurt. Nebraska's always strong in volleyball. This year's team wound up 33-2 and played for the national championship.

News Bites

► The Reader's Tori Marlan has won an Alicia Patterson fellowship and will spend

the next six months exploring the lives of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the U.S.

► Last week I reported that John Lavine, the new dean of the Medill School of Journalism, "comes out of" Medill's Integrated Marketing Communications program. That's wrong. Lavine is the founding director of Medill's Media Management Center, which, to quote the Web site, "explores how to advance media strategy, marketing, culture and sales force productivity," among other things. The

center's concerns overlap with the IMC program's, but Medill listed Lavine as a member of its "journalism," not its IMC, faculty. While he was with the Media Management Center, Lavine played a key role in developing both the ill-fated Network Chicago marketing concept for Window to the World Communications and *RedEye* for the *Tribune*. This record, coupled with Lavine's announced desire to meld the journalism and IMC faculties, helps explain the sense of unease I described among many Medill alumni and some faculty members. ■

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"Where You At?"



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Way to Go, Tough Guy

Faced with a choice between saving face and saving lives, what did our mayor pick?

By Ben Joravsky

When the City Council finally got around to passing its smoking-ban ordinance on December 7, the aldermen cheered, broke into song, and wore themselves out pounding each other on the back for a job well done.

I don't know why they were so ecstatic: the ordinance is a mockery of itself. It devotes two single-spaced pages to laying out the case for a complete ban on smoking in all public spaces only to turn around and delay implementation of the ban in bars and taverns for two and a half years. If secondhand smoke kills, as the ordinance unequivocally states, why wait until July 1, 2008? For that matter, why didn't the city ban it sooner?

The answer to this question hasn't changed since I wrote about the subject in May and July: Mayor Daley. Flower beds in the middle of the street, iron fences around the parks, Meigs Field ripped up in the middle of the night, a giant subway station beneath Block 37—what Daley wants Daley gets, and what he doesn't want we don't get. He's opposed a ban since at least 2002. Despite countervailing evidence out of New York City, Boston, and Los Angeles, the mayor clings to the notion that a smoking ban is bad for bar and restaurant business—as if that were an acceptable reason to expose people to carcinogens. “I've been told by many different people that the mayor eats out three or four times a week, and he picks up things from the people who run those restaurants,” says one lobbyist, who like pretty much everyone else around City Hall doesn't

want to be identified when talking about Daley. “The thing with the mayor—and I say this with all respect—is that once he gets something in his head it's very hard to get it out.”

But continuing to resist the antismoking campaign—which was backed by many of the city's restaurants, not to mention its public-health groups—got to be so embarrassing that even Daley had to back off. Not completely, of course. He conceded no mistakes, made no apologies, and expressed no regrets, even though hundreds of thousands of people have been exposed to secondhand smoke since he torpedoed the last great push for a ban. Instead, toward the end of November, he announced that he had no stand on the issue.

After several days of entertaining debate, the City Council was looking at two possible ordinances: Alderman Ed Smith's outright ban and Alderman Burt Natarus's watered-down ban, which exempted bars and taverns. It looked as though the two sides were heading for a winner-takes-all showdown at the City Council meeting on December 7.

“I think City Hall underestimated our tenacity, but after a while they realized, ‘Uh-oh, these folks are staying the course,’” says longtime south-side activist Kwesi Ronald Harris, who closely followed the debate as membership chair of the National African American Tobacco Prevention Network.

On Monday, December 5, John Dunn, Daley's chief legislative aide, passed word along to both sides that the mayor wanted a



MIKE WERNER

deal. “Dunn said, ‘It's dragged on long enough, the mayor wants it over with,’” says the lobbyist. “And he wanted everyone to agree on one ordinance. He didn't want a divisive vote.”

Thus the stage was set for the great “compromise” allowing patrons and employees in bars to be exposed to another two and a half years of secondhand smoke, which, according to the ordinance, contains “4,000 chemicals, 63 of which cause cancer,” is “the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States,” and “is responsible for the early deaths of as many as 65,000 Americans annually.” Good work.

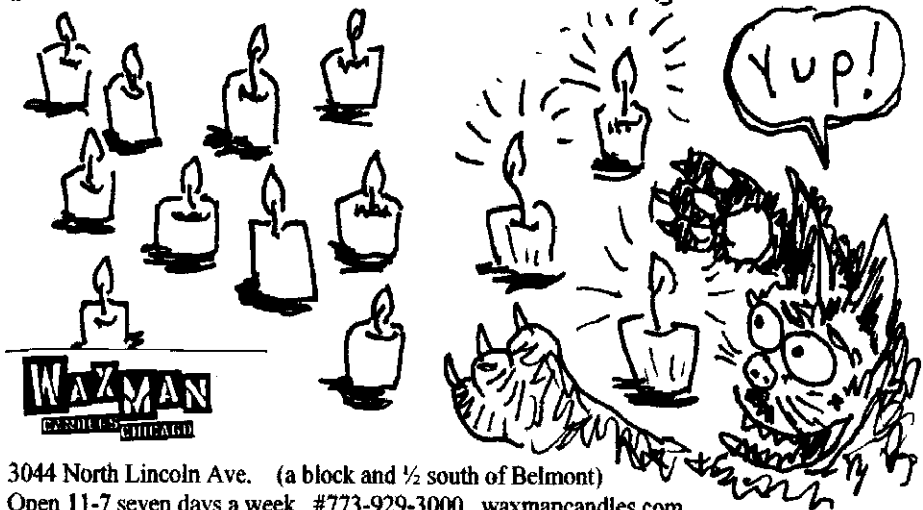
For the record, city officials say bars and taverns need the extra years to prepare for the ban. But I don't know anyone who believes this. “You're telling me they need over two years to prepare for a ban? Come on, man, don't treat us like we're stupid,” says Harris. “All you have to do is put up a big old NO SMOKING sign. There, that does the trick. You can do that tomorrow.”

Aldermen, lobbyists, and various other City Hall insiders say privately that Daley insisted on the delay to save face for himself and the businesses that had long resisted the ban. “It's completely illogical,” says Joel

Africk, CEO of the American Lung Association of Metropolitan Chicago. “When the state of Illinois lowered the legal limit for blood alcohol content did they say, ‘OK, this protects lives. Now we're going to take two and a half years to make it effective because we don't want to hurt bars?’”

The delay is hardly the ordinance's only flaw. Embedded near the end are three troubling exemptions. One allows for smoking in retail tobacco stores. Sure enough, on the day the ban passed R.J. Reynolds opened the Marshall McGearty Tobacco Lounge in Wicker Park. In addition to premium cigarettes, “the

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lounge offers light food, baked goods, and a selection of coffee beverages, including lattes and espressos," the Associated Press reported. "There are plans to sell alcoholic beverages."

The ordinance also allows smoking in private clubs or lodges. "The city insisted on that for VFW halls and American Legion posts," says Africk. "It was put to us like, 'How can we tell veterans they can't have their simple pleasures?' We'll be watching to see if bars and taverns try to escape the ban by becoming private clubs."

Finally, there's the provision permitting smoking in any public place whose "owner can demonstrate, to the satisfaction

of the commissioner of public health and the commissioner of the environment, that such area has been equipped with air filtration or purification devices or similar technologies as to render the exposure to secondhand smoke . . . equivalent to such exposure . . . in the ambient outdoor air surrounding the establishment."

With that mischievous clause the city walks into a dispute being waged between big tobacco and health groups. "For years and years," Africk explains, "big tobacco has been arguing about whether there was a safe level of exposure for secondhand smoke. There were two battlefronts—the Environmental Protection

Agency and the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers, or ASHRAE. Once the EPA declared secondhand smoke a class A carcinogen, meaning no level was safe, that argument was over. So big tobacco moved to a second battleground—ASHRAE."

According to Africk, big tobacco companies had been hoping ASHRAE would endorse a ventilation system that guards against secondhand smoke. "But in June ASHRAE issued a pronouncement that the only way to make a room safe from secondhand smoke is to have no smoking in the room," he says. "Some ventilators might get out

the thick smells, but not the tiny particles that are harmful. You would need a tornadolike ventilation to get smoke particles out of the air."

Lawyers for the city insisted on inserting the ventilation clause into the ordinance, Africk and other insiders tell me. "In the 11th hour, with no hearing and no testimony, out of purely political expediency, the city put in that ventilation clause," says Africk. "I told them, 'You don't understand. Big tobacco is going to spend millions on a study to "prove" that blah-blah machine reduces particles. And it will be fiction—because you can't get the dangerous particles out of the air—

but you will have to respond.' They gave me one of those responses: 'Nobody can meet this test. Let them have it.' I fought on and they eventually said, 'Say whatever you want about it—it's going in.'"

This means that come late winter or early spring of 2008, prosmoking forces will likely launch a debate over ventilation in a last-ditch effort to kill the looming ban in bars and taverns. "You watch—they'll have all these 'studies' about their Buck Rogers ventilation machines that work like magic," says Harris. "The aldermen will sing and dance and entertain us all. It'd be funny if so many people weren't dying." ■

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Clockwise from top left: wine guzzler and bad pasties at Crobar (September), dancer at Food Mart in Wicker Park (April), cheering the White Sox' World Series win at *Stop Smiling* headquarters (October), Rotten Milk outside Big House in Lincoln Park (September)

Mistakes, I've Made Two

Sandra the Huntress gets back in touch, Reserve loses a star

By Liz Armstrong

After an entire day and night of spiked hibiscus tea and martinis with my friend Hilary, I decided I should call my boyfriend.

"Hey, are you OK?" he asked worriedly.

"Yeah," I slurred. "Why?"

"Some woman called me saying she's your mom. She said you and Hilary drank Lemon Drops and the cops were there and she was nervous. She told me to bring her \$62. She keeps calling me. What's going on?"

"Don't give her a penny," I said.

The caller was Sandra the Huntress, an excitable, leathery legend in her own mind whom Hilary and I had met in front of a mansion on Astor Street while staking out a celebrity for a gossip magazine. A couple months ago I wrote about the wild ride through the Gold Coast Sandra took us on, an adventure that included drinks at the Pump Room, ringing buzzers at random mansions in search of Jennifer Aniston (who, according to Sandra, "wants" her), and checking out a condo she claimed to be buying (I had my

doubts, but with Sandra, as I soon learned, one can never be sure). She acted like we were her daughters, dubbing Hilary "Paris" and me "Nicky," and she kept telling us about her many lovers. It was all pretty hilarious and exhilarating—until Sandra led us to a hotel room where we were all supposed to get it on. Then the night lost a bit of its charm.

Before we managed to disentangle ourselves, I gave her my boyfriend's number, saying it belonged to my "bodyguard." But I kind of forgot to tell him this.

Sandra called Ringo the next day. "I saw Paris and Nicky earlier today," she said, and instructed him to bring us to an address on the 100 block of East Erie at 8 that night.

"They're in an interview right now," he lied. "They should be done later. I'll let them know."

Sandra called him back at 8:30. "I stuck my head out and looked for the girls, but I didn't see them. What's the number for the Crystal Palace?"

He said he didn't know, which was true.

"Great, give it to me then," she said.

"No, Sandra, I don't know it."

"OK, I'm going to the Crystal Palace at Madison and Pulaski. I'll tell the door guy they're coming and have a private room set up for them in the back."

I couldn't find a listing for such a place, so I didn't go. Sandra continued to call Ringo for the next three days, giving him addresses and times of where we should meet her. Each time he gave her a different excuse why we couldn't—we were out of town, we had another appearance to make, the press would be there and we didn't want to deal with it—making our lives sound infinitely more glamorous than they really are. (My actual late-night plans when I'm not working usually involve reruns of *Dr. Phil*. It's sick, I know, but I really love him.)

After that it seemed Sandra the Huntress was out of our lives for good. Until October 28, the day my column came out, when she called Ringo again.

"Hi, hon," she said, and

informed him that she was at a mental hospital, a real one I won't name here. "My lawyer can't get here. Will you please come visit with an attorney? I gotta get out of here." She gave him loose directions, the landmarks including the White Castle where she was going to have her first meal as soon as she was released. "If you can't get me out by tomorrow I'm going to bust out. I know how to do it—I've done it before."

I was sitting next to him, listening to their conversation. Feeling guilty for having encouraged a bona fide crazy person's paranoid delusions, I whispered to Ringo to tell her we'd come visit. She gave him two hospital phone numbers where she could be reached—they both checked out. But after he hung up we figured out there was no way we'd make it before visiting hours were over. He called her back.

"I'm sorry," he told Sandra. "We can't make it in time."

"That's OK," she said. "I'm here with Paris. She's really tired. She's been in restraints all day. Is Nicky here? If she is, I

don't recognize her."

"No, Nicky's with me," he said gently.

"Oh, I didn't think she was here. But Paris definitely is."

"We'll visit you tomorrow," he told her, and he meant it.

But in the tenderness of the moment, he forgot we were moving the next day. We haven't heard from Sandra since.

Back in August, *UR Chicago* changed its format from newsprint tabloid to glossy-cover magazine. The "30 Under 30" issue was the first in the new style. This cheerfully ageist annual tradition presents people in their 20s and younger who are doing things that editor in chief Stacey Dugan and her staff deem interesting and worthwhile—turns out I was one of them, so I happily went to the relaunch party at the River West club Reserve. But at the door the bouncers were pulling some exclusive New York bullshit, letting in slick-headed dude after fake-titted chick coming out of fancy cars with tinted windows and drivers, despite a long line of people behind the velvet rope, a few of whom were also highlighted in the issue—I'm not naming names because it's embarrassing enough to be excluded from a party in your honor without having people reminisce about it months later.

After waiting outside for half an hour I had to pull an embarrassing "but I'm in the magazine!" move with the bouncers just to get inside, where we'd been promised there would be free drinks and food. Surprise: there wasn't.

"Why invite people you think are special if they won't be able to attend the party celebrating their participation in your publication?" I later wrote to Dugan in an e-mail. "I think choosing a nasty, selective club like Reserve did a great disservice to your magazine."

Dugan apologized and said she'd had a similar experience there. "I'd never been before," she wrote, "although I'd heard pretty good things from others, including from yr column."

It's true: early this year I called Reserve "cozy," "polished," and "fun," if "a little too slick." If it's not too late, I'd like to take that back.

Staying out till the wee hours several nights in a row every week in search of fun, beauty, enlightenment, and drama is hard enough when you're driving the party train. Imagine having to tag along, convincing half-dressed drunks to pose for the camera—oh, and this will be for publication, OK? Andrea Bauer, this column's official photographer, gives up most of her weekend nights to take pictures like the ones you see above—some of her favorites from this year. ☐

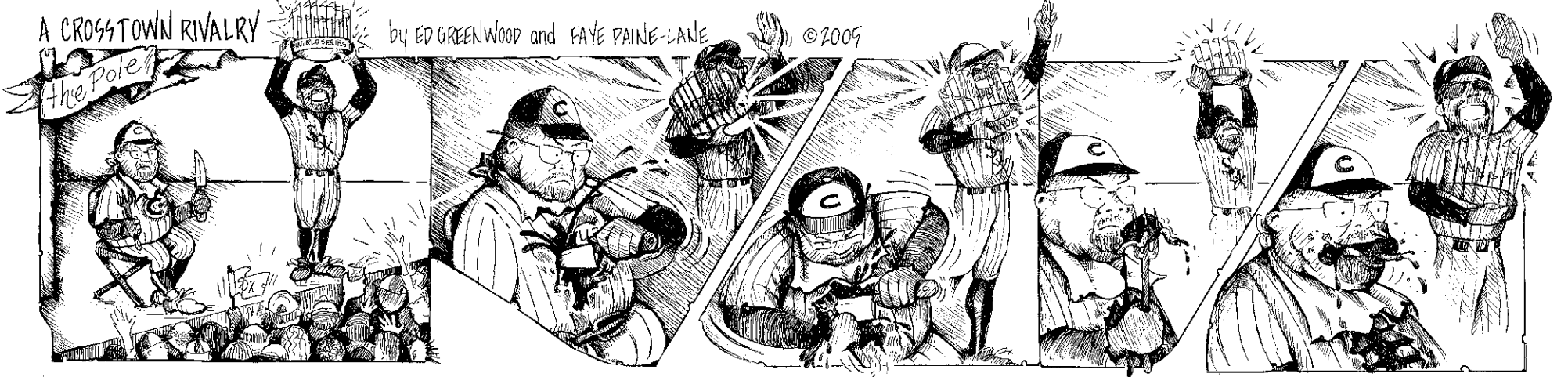
COMICS

The Year in Review



ELIZABETH M. TANNY

A CROSSTOWN RIVALRY by ED GREENWOOD and FAYE PAINE-LANE ©2009

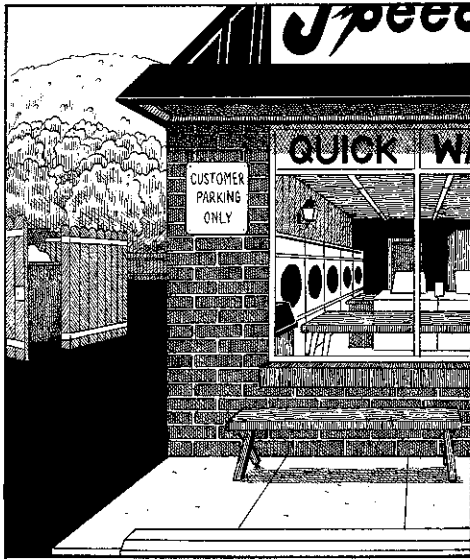


-ED GREENWOOD AND FAYE PAINE-LANE



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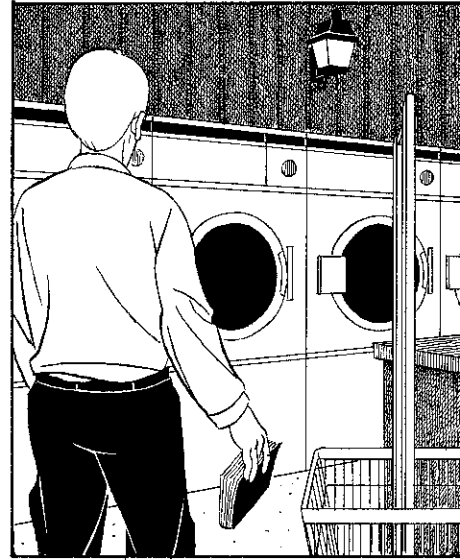
A PARAGRAPH BY SAUL BELLOW (1915 - 2005)



Ten years ago, I was a graduate student at Ohio University, studying English and teaching writing. One Sunday in October, I took a copy of Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* to the laundromat. I read distractedly, mostly worrying about what to do with my writing class the next day.



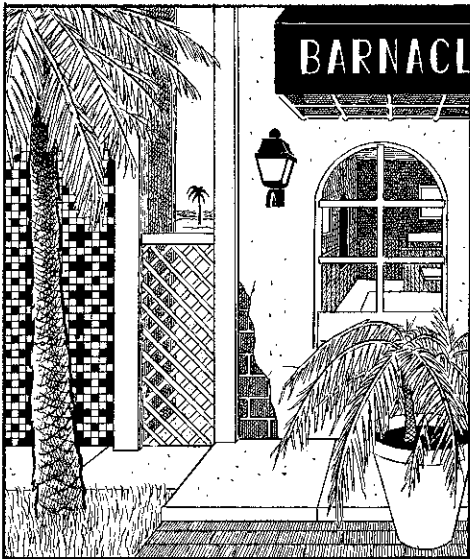
Augie is an imposing book, easy to set aside, and I'd picked it up and put it down several times in the year since I moved from Westmont to Athens. But if a book has life, as Augie does, that book creates a need in the reader.



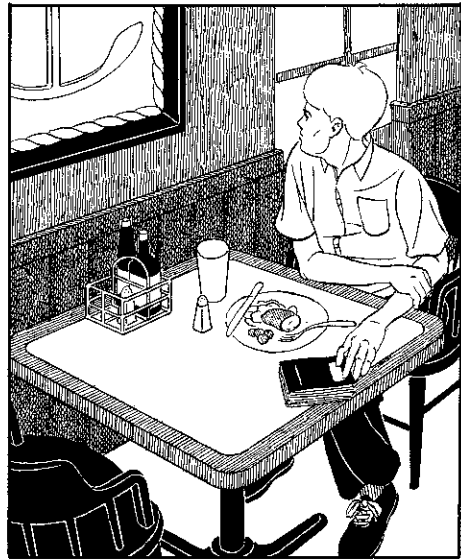
Again and again, I needed to come back to Augie, not so much for the fulsome plot as for the life in the prose. Often I'd skip back to passages I'd already read, and marvel anew at their color and rhythm. Invigorated by Bellow's writing, I seemed to notice more, think more nimbly.



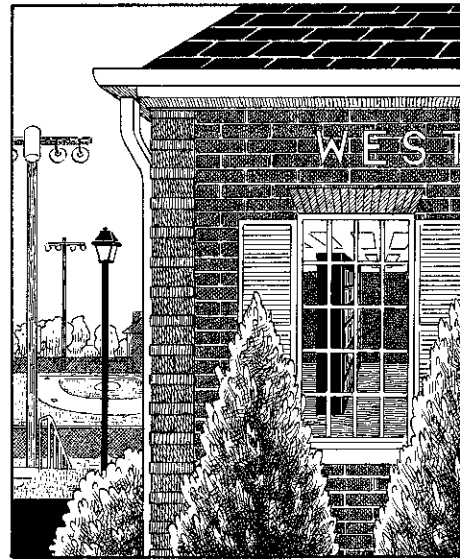
Then I'd put the book down, for one reason or another, and I'd be back in my everyday mind, suddenly less in love with thinking. But that is the core comedy of Bellow's fiction: having to think and live at the same time. To borrow the life of a book may also be to borrow a salutary release from living.



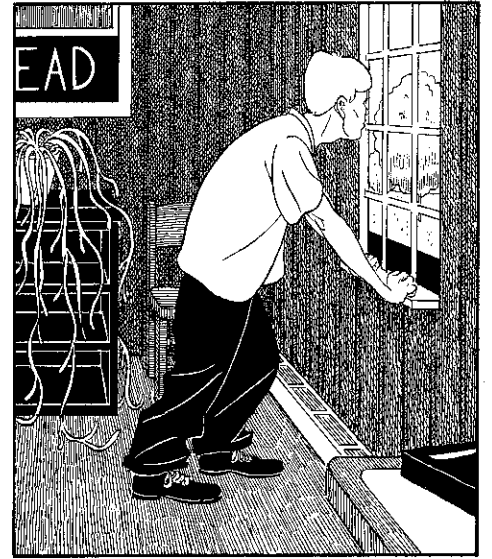
Again and again I came back to Augie, in Illinois and then in Ohio, over many months, even if it was just to revisit one particularly fine paragraph in which Augie sits on a bench by a courthouse, in the sun, and ponders the effect of fresh summer air on his being.



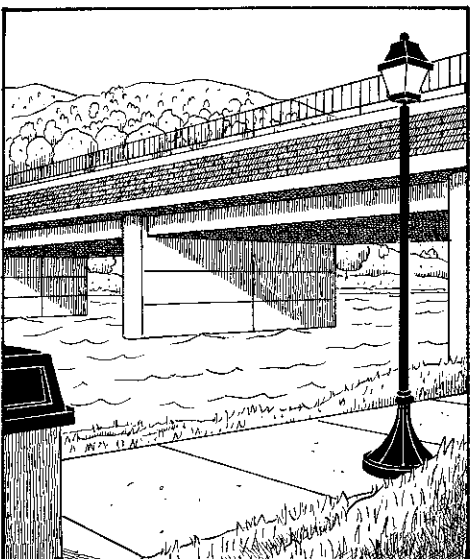
That paragraph, which is in no way essential to the plot but absolutely essential to the life of the book, always made me slightly dizzy, a little rapturous. The writing was like the very air Augie inhaled.



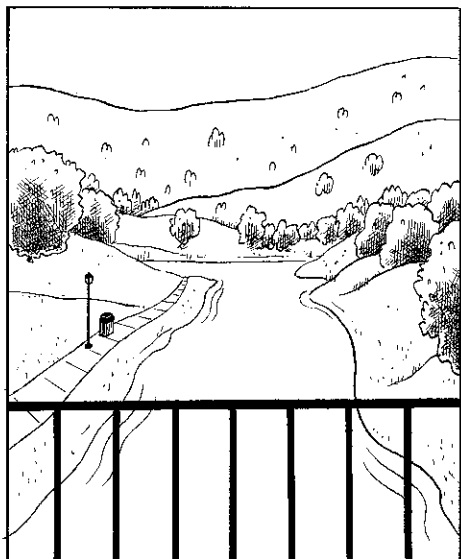
I first read that paragraph as I ate fish in Sarasota, where I bought the book; I read that paragraph aloud, mumbling it, in the Westmont Library. I thought about that paragraph later that October day in Athens, as I walked along the Hocking River.



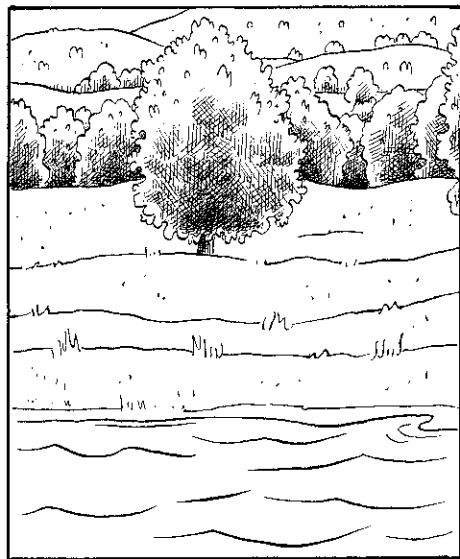
I suddenly felt as if I'd been dropped there, in the Hocking Valley, in Ohio, on Earth, for no good reason. It was the feeling that comes between abandoning purpose and gathering commitments, in the pause after youth.



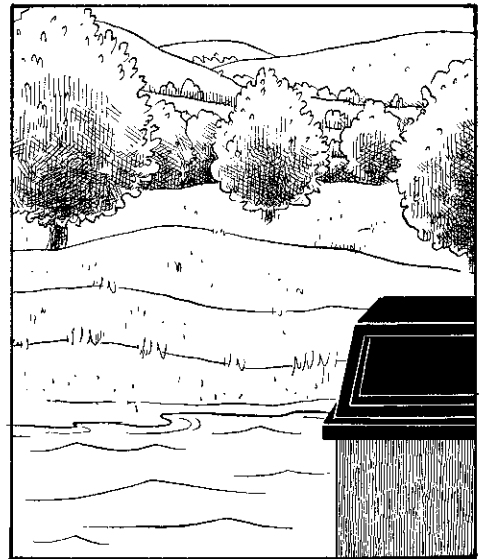
When you become a teacher, you become, all at once, old. In the eyes of the students in front of you, you discover what seems to be the original blank stare: the template for the way everyone will eventually stare at you, if you live long enough.



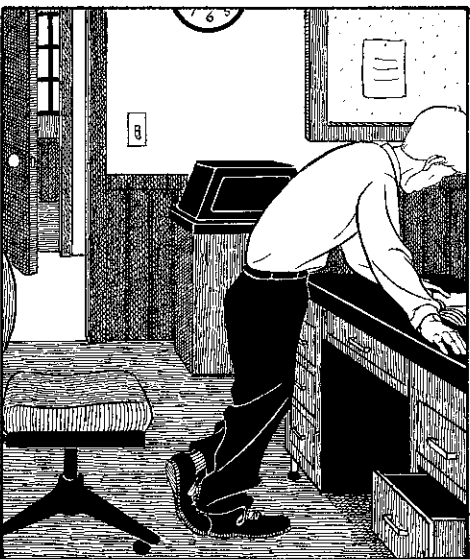
After a month or so in the classroom, some of my fellow teaching assistants began to refer to their students as their "kids": "my kids didn't like this assignment"; "my kids are tired this week." I didn't say "my kids"; I told myself I couldn't feel it.



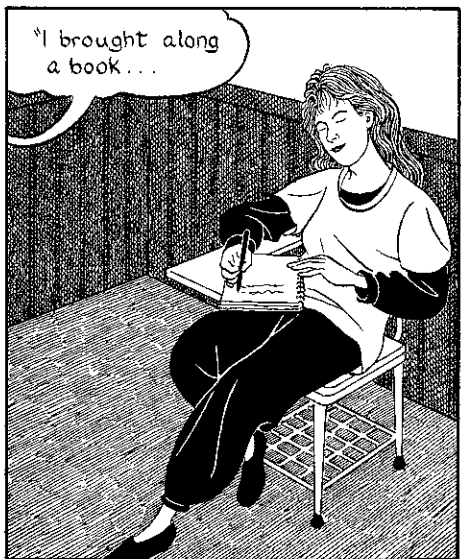
Suppose you are paid to teach writing. Are you paid, then, to draw your students (your kids, if you like) into your mind, as a writer draws a reader? That is how writing is taught, in that communion. But no one is paid for such a thing. You are paid for something else.



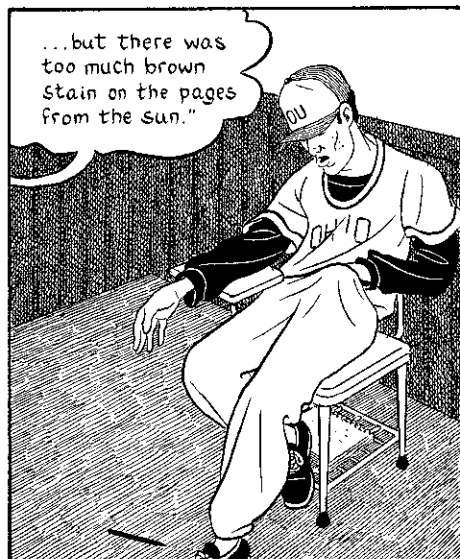
All of my purpose faded in the Hocking Valley that day, and all that was left of me was my body and the hills and the steady water. If I had a mind, all that was left of it was what clung to the paragraph by Saul Bellow.



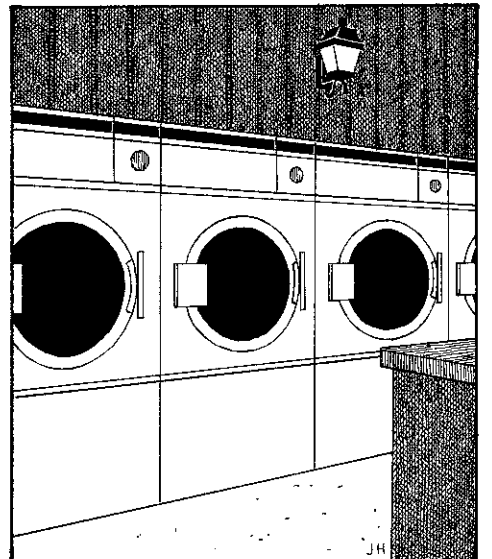
The next day, I stood behind a big desk in front of my students and read that paragraph aloud, the paragraph of Augie in the sun.



Thus it was that the girl who always wore blue sweatpants to class and turned in fifty poems for extra credit heard the paragraph by Saul Bellow.



Thus it was that the star pitcher for the Ohio University Bobcats, the freshman fireballer who once in a while (but maybe not that day) wore his uniform to class, heard the paragraph by Saul Bellow.



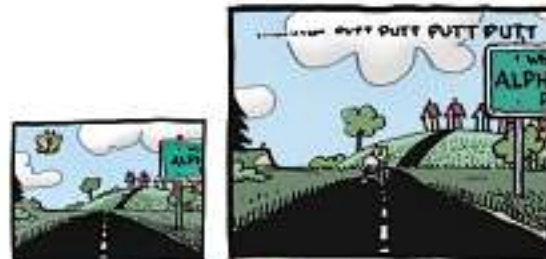
I was a fool to read it to the class—but I did. And it is foolish of me now to picture that paragraph hovering, floating somehow, in all the places I ever read it, aloud or silently—but I do.

MAYHEM IN ALPHABET TOWN.

by Bernie Mireault.



NOTE: ALL CHARACTERS SPEAK WITH BARE BRITISH ACCENTS.





TRUE TALE

BY ROB SYERS and MARK FISCHER

FOSTER BROTH: ASPIRING CARTOONIST



THE END!

-ROB SYERS AND MARK FISCHER

CHICAGO MUSIC

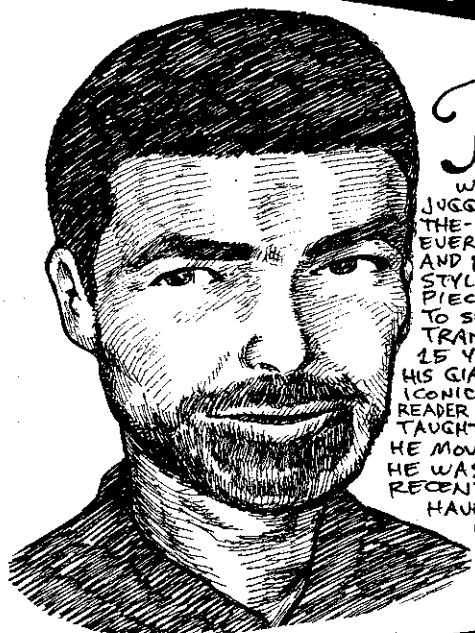
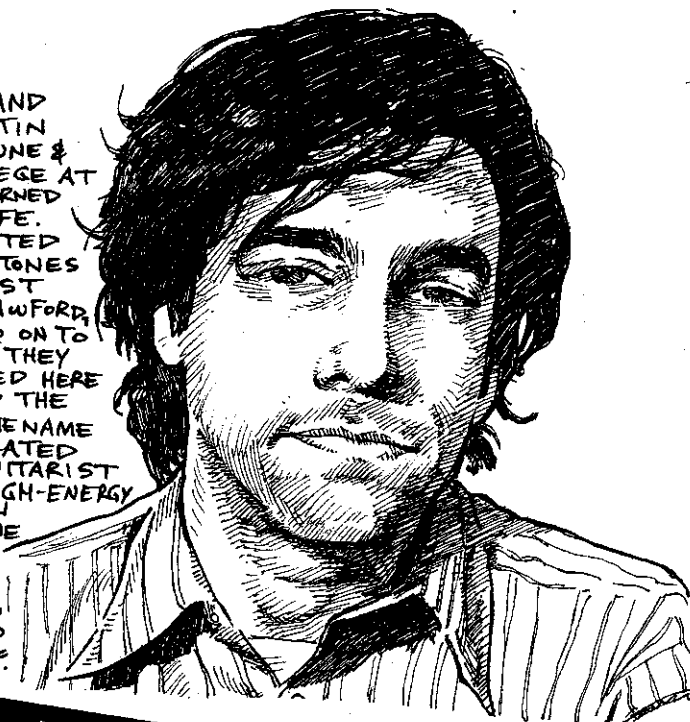
MEMORIAM

BY PLASTIC CRIMEWAVE

ON JULY 14, 2005, CHICAGO LOST THREE STELLAR MUSICIANS IN A CAR WRECK. MICHAEL DAHLQUIST, JOHN GLICK, AND DOUG MEIS, LONG-TIME FRIENDS WHO ALL WORKED FOR THE SHURE MICROPHONE COMPANY IN NILES, WERE ON LUNCH BREAK TOGETHER WHEN THEIR VEHICLE WAS STRUCK FROM BEHIND AT A RED LIGHT.

← JOHN GLICK

WAS BORN ON FEBRUARY 7, 1970, AND GREW UP IN BOSTON. HE STUDIED LATIN AND THEATER AT THE BUCKINGHAM BROWNE & NICHOLS SCHOOL IN CAMBRIDGE, THEN WENT TO COLLEGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON, WHERE HE EARNED A FILM DEGREE AND KICKED OFF HIS ROCK'N'ROLL LIFE. HE GOT A JOB AT MADCITY MUSIC EXCHANGE, STARTED HIS FIRST BANDS, FEZ PETTING ZOO AND AN UNDERONES TRIBUTE BAND CALLED THE UNDERCLONES, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY MET HIS FUTURE WIFE, REBECCA CRAWFORD, WHO WAS IN A GROUP CALLED RHODA AND WOULD GO ON TO PLAY IN CHICAGO BANDS THE PUTA-PONS & THE DIALS. (THEY GOT MARRIED IN SEPTEMBER 2004.) THE COUPLE MOVED HERE TOGETHER IN 1998, AND THAT SAME YEAR GLICK FORMED THE RETURNABLES, PLAYING GUITAR AND SINGING (UNDER THE NAME BOBBY JAMES LEE RAY) ALONGSIDE TWO OTHER RELOCATED UNDERCLONES, BASSIST BRAN HARVEY AND RHYTHM GUITARIST JOHN SCHUPPEL. THEY BANGED OUT CLASSIC, HOOKY, HIGH-ENERGY ROCK'N'ROLL WITH RECKLESS ABANDON, AND GLICK IN PARTICULAR WAS THRILLING TO WATCH, HIS SHAGGY MANE FLYING ALL ABOUT. THE RETURNABLES OPENED FOR LEGENDS LIKE THE DICTATORS & THE FLESH TONES AND LANDED A TOUR WITH THEIR IDOLS THE REAL KIDS IN JULY 2003. DESPITE A FEW LINEUP CHANGES, THEY ALSO PUT OUT TWO FINE ALBUMS: THE 1999 EP "550 WHEN CAN I SEE YOU AGAIN?" AND "2001'S "UNREQUITED HITS."



Michael Dahlquist

WAS BORN ON DECEMBER 22, 1965, IN SEATTLE. FROM A YOUNG AGE HE ENJOYED JUGGLING, PUPPETEERING, AND SKATEBOARDING, AND HE PICKED UP A LOVE FOR SEAT-OF-THE-PANTS WORLD TRAVEL FROM HIS ADVENTUROUS FAMILY. IN THE MID-80S HE ATTENDED EVERGREEN STATE IN OLYMPIA, LIVING IN A STUDENT SQUAT CALLED THE HOUSE OF PHEGGM AND DELVING INTO LITERATURE, MYTHOLOGY & MYSTICISM. FROM THERE HE GOT INTO FLUXUS-STYLE PERFORMANCE ART, WHICH LED HIM TO HIS FIRST DRUM KIT, A BATTERED TWO-PIECE, WHICH HE USED IN BANDS LIKE FLOWERS FOR FUNERALS & DUNG PUMP. HE MOVED TO SEATTLE AND BECAME A CABDRIVER, THEN IN 1990 AUDITIONED TO JOIN THE MONTANA TRANSPLANTS IN SILK WORM. HE WOULD GO ON TO PLAY WITH THE BAND FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS—RIGHT UP UNTIL HIS DEATH—AND THE IMAGE OF HIM FEROCIOUSLY ASSAULTING HIS GIANT, ANCIENT SLINGERLAND KIT, BARECHESTED AND WEARING GARDENING GLOVES BECAME ICONIC. (ENGINEER STEVE ALBINI, A LONGTIME FRIEND OF THE BAND, PAID TRIBUTE IN THE READER BACK IN JULY.) DAHLQUIST THREW HIMSELF INTO MOUNTAINEERING & SNOWBOARDING, TAUGHT HIMSELF COMPUTER PROGRAMMING, AND EVEN PLAYED IN A GAMELAN ENSEMBLE. HE MOVED TO CHICAGO IN 2001, AND LAST YEAR BOUGHT A HOUSE ON SOUTH ASHLAND. HE WAS PARTWAY THROUGH A VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY DEGREE AT DE PAUL AND RECENTLY EDITED A DOCUMENTARY ON CHRISTIAN ROCK, "WHY SHOULD THE DEVIL HAVE ALL THE GOOD MUSIC?" WITH HIS BOUNDLESS ENERGY AND INSATIABLE CURIOSITY, HE SURELY WOULD'VE GONE ON TO MASTER MANY MORE PURSUITS.

Doug Meis

WAS BORN IN CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS, ON AUGUST 14, 1975, BUT HE WAS A NAVY BRAT AND HIS FAMILY MOVED CONSTANTLY. HE STARTED DRUM CORPS IN FOURTH GRADE AND PICKED UP JAZZ DRUMMING IN MIDDLE SCHOOL IN SEATTLE. AFTER GRADUATING FROM ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY WITH AN ENGINEERING DEGREE, HE CAME TO CHICAGO IN 1998 AND JOINED THE SKA BAND GREENHOUSE (WHERE HIS COMPRADES INCLUDED ETHAN D'ERCOLE, NOW OF THE WATCHERS & THE MANNEQUIN MEN). IN 1999 HE STARTED PLAYING WITH REBECCA CRAWFORD IN THE PUTA-PONS. HE JOINED EXO. THE PUTA-PONS BROKE UP IN 2001, BUT THREE YEARS LATER MEIS REUNITED WITH CRAWFORD IN HER CURRENT BAND, THE DIALS—HE APPEARS ON THEIR DEBUT ALBUM, "FLEX TIME," WHICH CAME OUT THIS FALL. MEIS'S AMAZING TECHNIQUE, FILLED IN WITH A LONG LIST OF BANDS OVER THE YEARS, INCLUDING BANG, BANG, THE NEGLIGENTS, AND CATTIVO, AND WORKED AS A SESSION DRUMMER FOR A SLEW OF ONE-OFF RECORDING SESSIONS. MEIS WAS ALWAYS TRYING TO FIT MORE MUSIC INTO HIS LIFE, AND IT SHOWED—HIS ENTHUSIASM WAS CONTAGIOUS.



TUNE INTO A DISCUSSION OF THIS WEEK'S "SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC" ON WGN RADIO 720, SUNDAY NIGHT AT MIDNIGHT WITH HOST NICK D'GLIO. COMMENTS? plasticcw@hotmail.com



SHIT'S GETTIN' CRAZIER ALL THE TIME.

TRUE THAT! TERRORISM, WAR, FUCKED ECONOMY, SOARING GAS \$'s, KILLER BEES, KILLER STORMS, LAME TV SHOWS MADE INTO LAMER MOVIES.

JEREMY WHEELER art

MATT DELIGHT words

YEAH, JUST THE OTHER DAY I SAW THIS CHICK ON THE INTERNET POOP A BANANA INTO ANOTHER GIRL'S MOUTH!

I KNOW! I SENT YOU THAT LINK... IT'S HOT!

WHEN LIFE GETS STRANGER THAN A MEXICAN PORNO COMIC... YOU KNOW IT IS INDEED!

THE END TIMES

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YOU KNOW, I'VE NEVER READ 'THE BABBLE,' BUT...

DUDE, IT'S THE BIBLE.

ARE YOU SURE?

WHATEVER, IT'S THE END OF THE F-IN WORLD AS WE KNOW IT.

AND WHILE WE CAN'T ALL BE SHIRTLESS TWERPS IN AN REMVIDEO (you bastards), HERE'S SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHILE IT ALL GOES DOWN.

WEEP 4 THE CHILDREN (THEY'RE OBESE & HAVE ONLY SEEN THE REMAKE)

RUIN & CONFUSE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE AROUND YOU...

POINT FINGERS, STARE IN DISBELIEF, AND SWEAR! (IT WON'T HELP, BUT YOU'LL DO IT ANYWAY)

LOOT IT UP!

OR MATT'S FAVORITE... GET DRUNK AND SHOOT RATS!

I LOVED YOU EARLIER, SURE... BUT THAT WAS TODAY. BUT WHAT ABOUT TOMORROW, HUH?

HOLY FRACKEN SACKIN DAGGIN WAGON!

I DON'T GIVE A HOOT- LOOT LOOT LOOT!

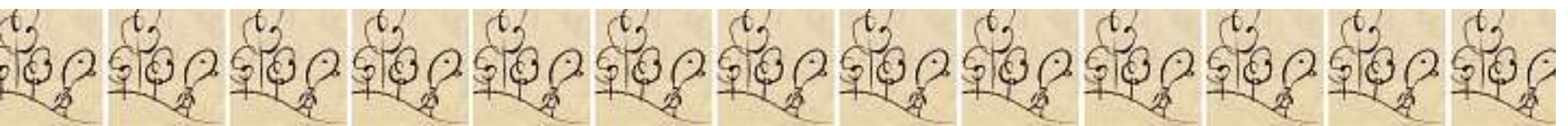
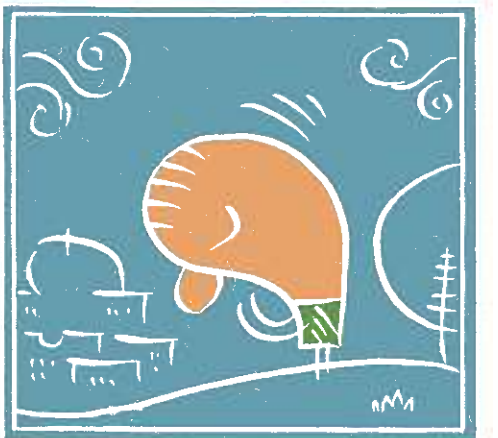
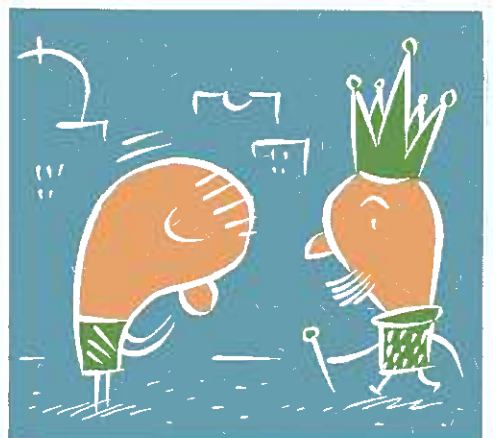
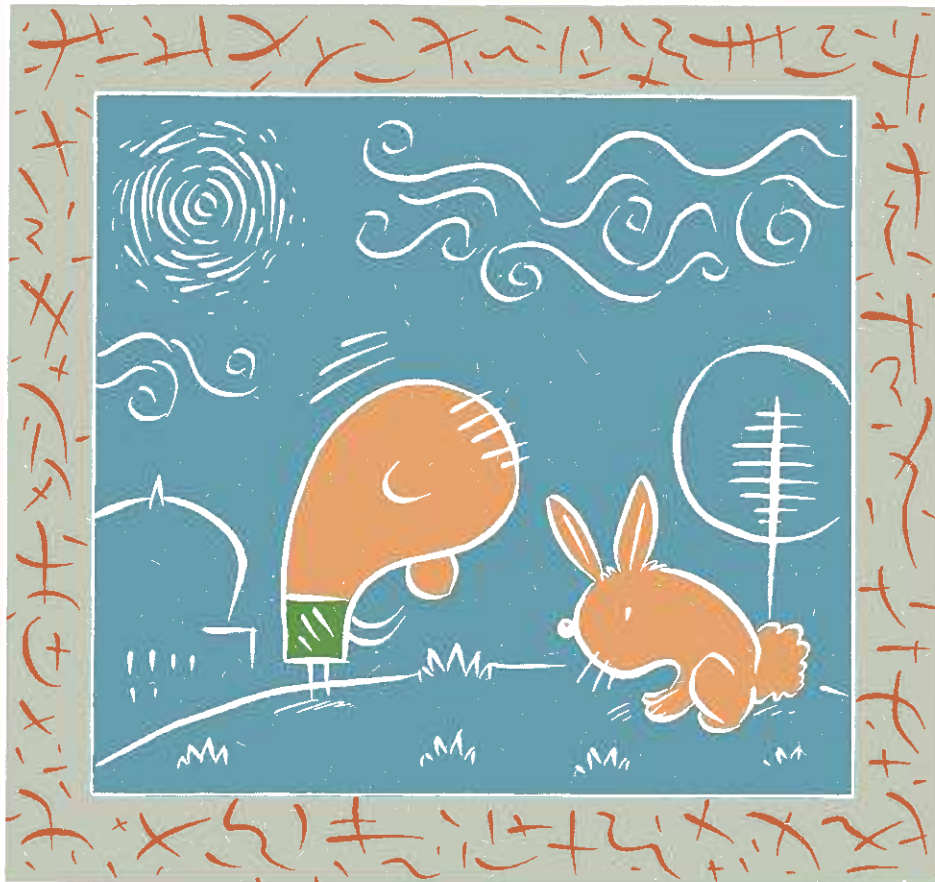
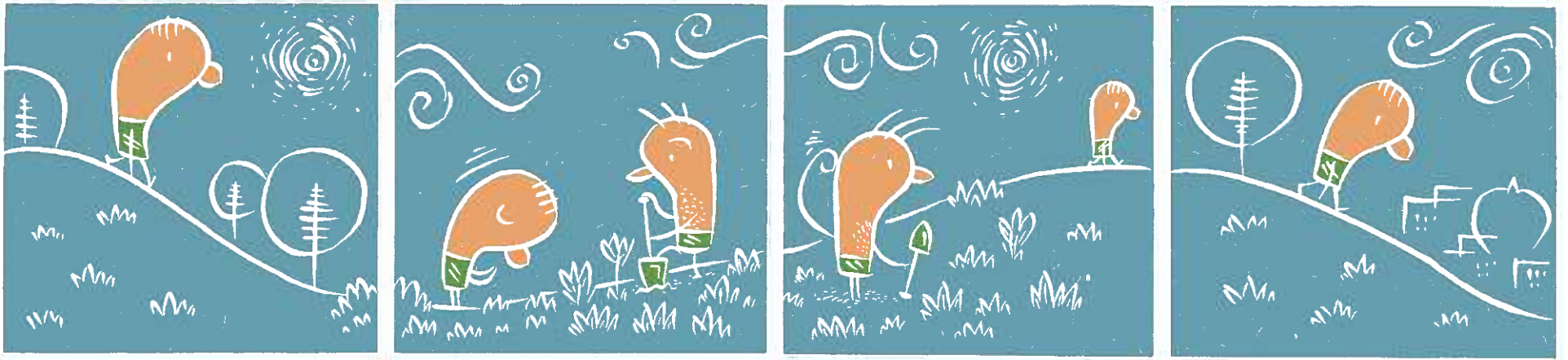
I'VE STARTED A LEAGUE NIGHT!

WELL I'M SURE YOU FOUND THAT COMPLETELY UNHELPFUL... BUT THAT'S THE POINT

CUZZ IF WE'RE GOIN' DOWN...

WE'RE TAKIN' YOU WITH US!!!!

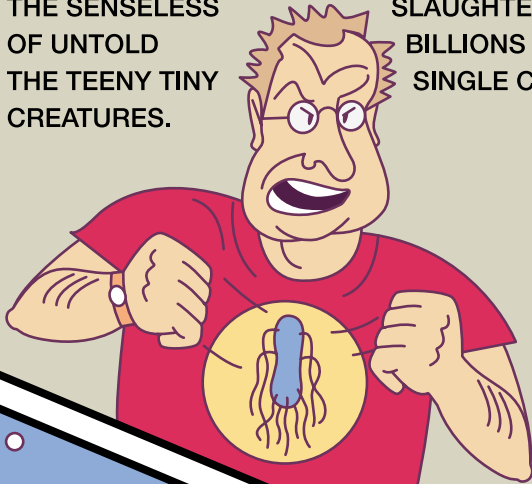
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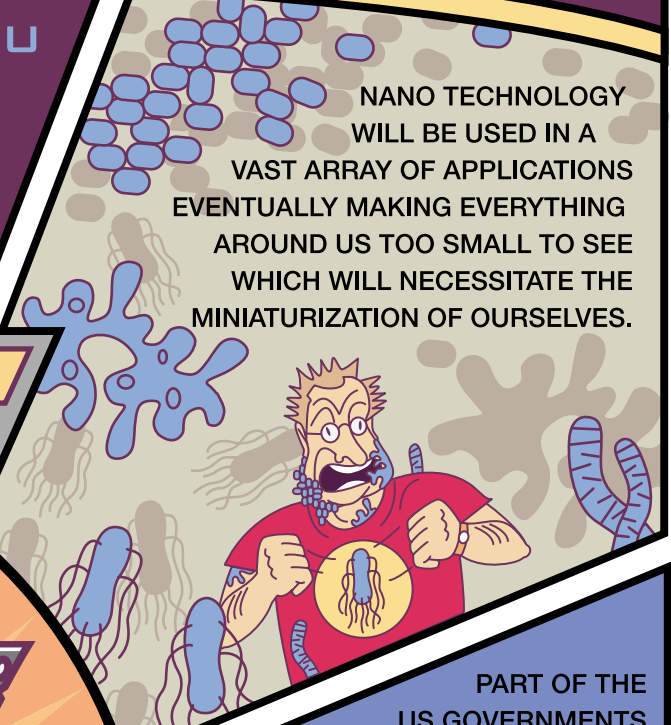
ZEALOTS OF PETA RENOUNCE THE USE OF ANTI-BACTERIAL SOAPS PROTESTING THE SENSELESS OF UNTOLD THE TEENY TINY CREATURES.

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NANO TECHNOLOGY WILL BE USED IN A VAST ARRAY OF APPLICATIONS EVENTUALLY MAKING EVERYTHING AROUND US TOO SMALL TO SEE WHICH WILL NECESSITATE THE MINIATURIZATION OF OURSELVES.



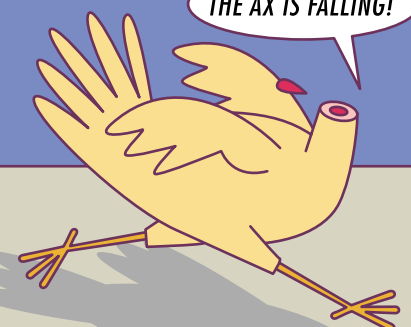
I WONDER... SHOULD THEY LOOK LIKE ME?



THE BITTER BATTLE BETWEEN THE BELIEVERS OF DARWINIAN EVOLUTION AND CREATIONISM'S INTELLIGENT DESIGN ENDS, BUT NOT TO THE SATISFACTION OF ANYONE.

PART OF THE US GOVERNMENTS STRATEGY FOR COMBATING THE BIRD FLU IS TO DESTROY CONTAMINATED BIRDS.

THE AX IS FALLING!



IF SUCCESSFUL THE PLAN IS TO USE SIMILAR METHODS TO ERADICATE GERMAN MEASLES, ASIAN FLU, LEGIONNAIRES DISEASE, ATHLETES FOOT AND WRITERS CRAMP.



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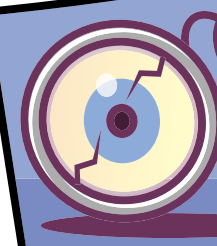


THE GREAT WALL MART OF CHINA



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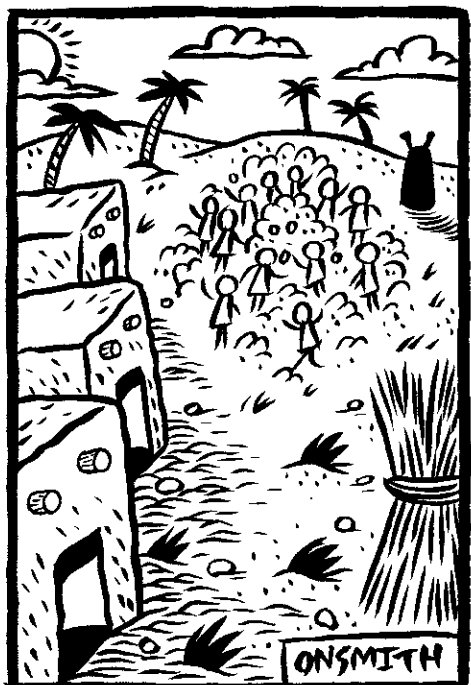
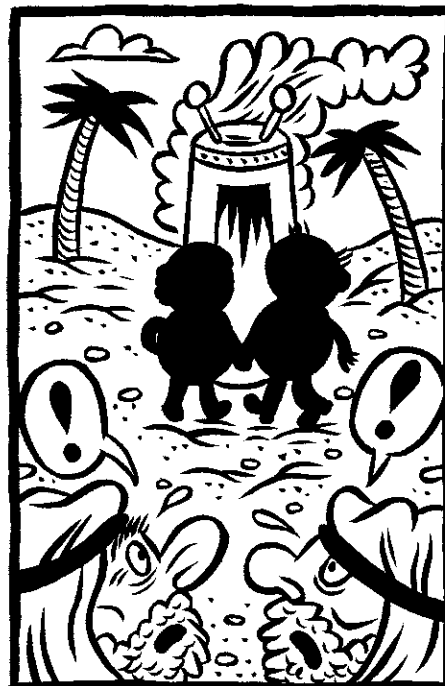


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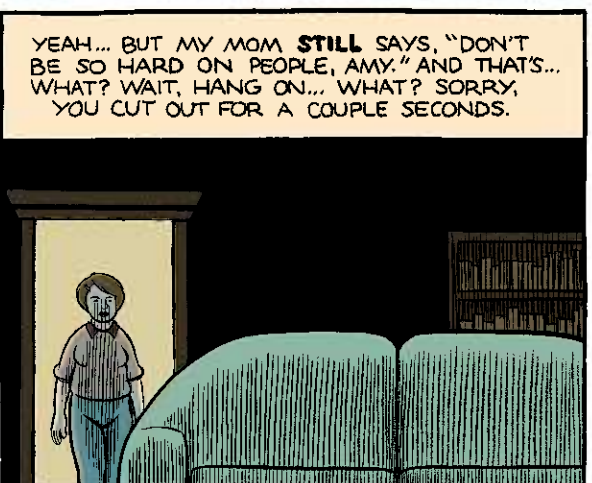
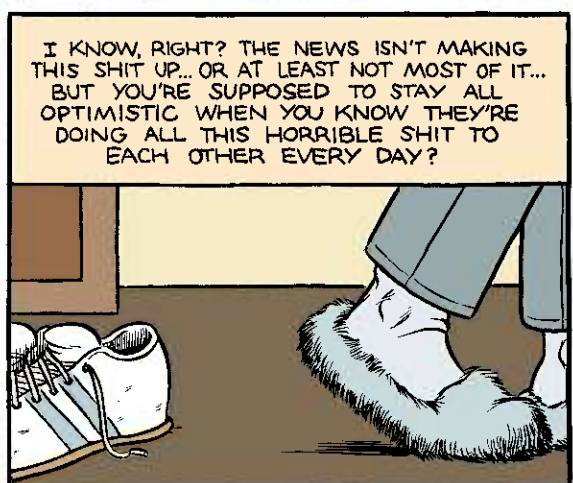
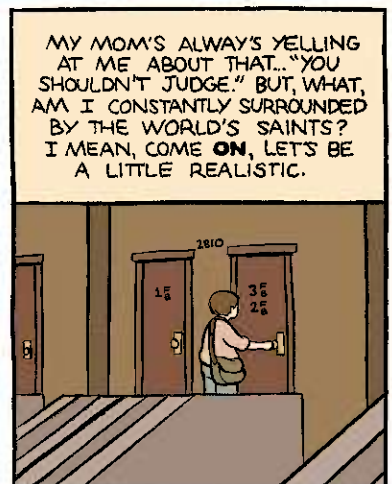
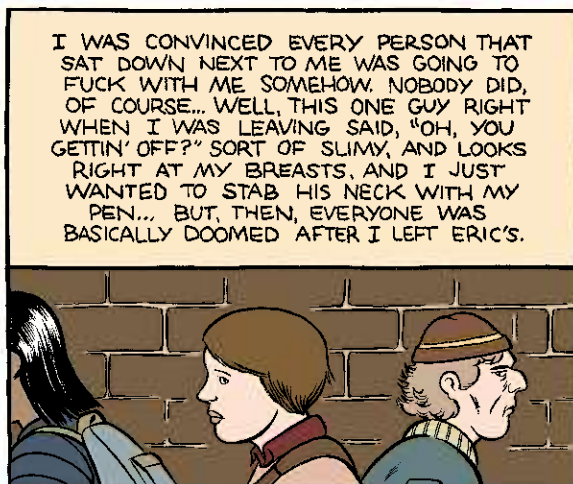
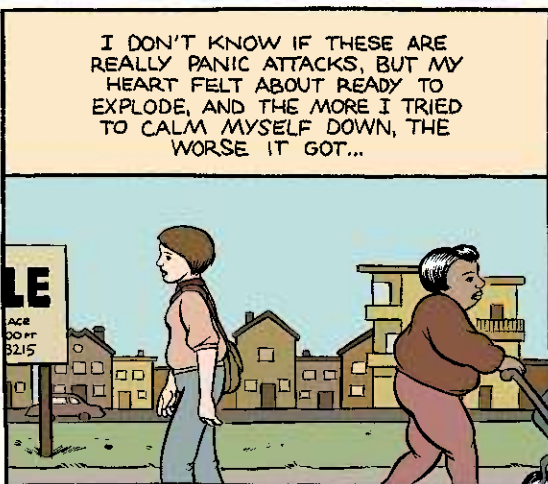
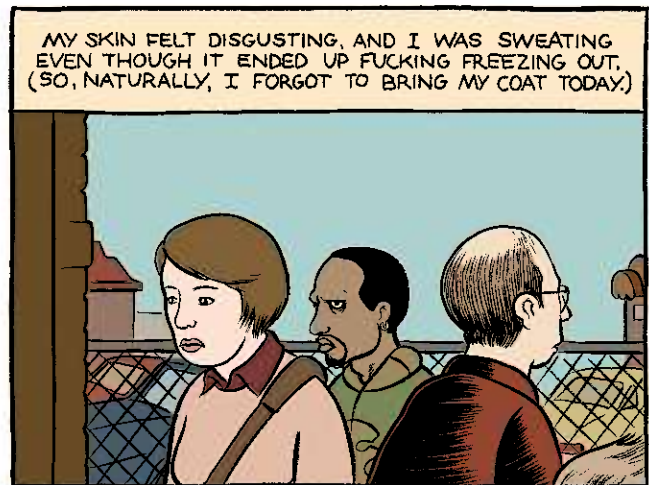
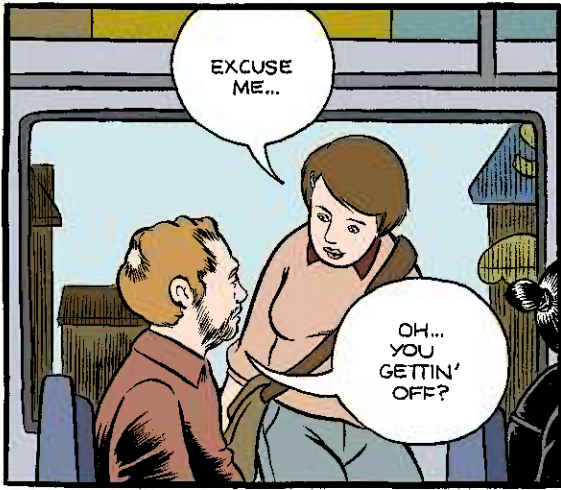
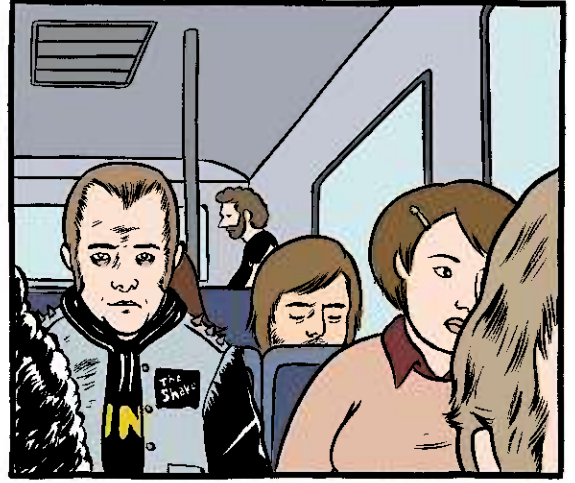
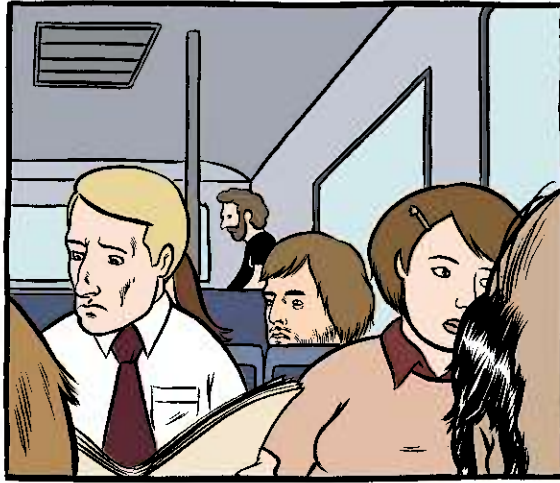
HOLY WARP

ONSMITH
=2005=



AMY BREIS THEATRE
PRESENTS

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HER MOTHER, AND
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The Sports Section

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Unscripted Entertainment

Victory is never a sure thing, but what was great about the Sox' victory is that it never even felt like one.

By Ted Cox

In hindsight, championships look inevitable. Of course the Bulls were destined to win six NBA titles in Michael Jordan's last six complete seasons with them, so the dangers they encountered along the way now seem minimal. All but forgotten is the way Scottie Pippen had to rally the scrubs with a 14-2 run to open the fourth quarter of the sixth game in 1992, setting the stage for Jordan to return and close out the Portland Trail Blazers, who would have had all the momentum going into the seventh game. So would the Phoenix Suns the following year, if John Paxson hadn't hit the trey that won that series in six. Lost to memory is the scare the mighty Bears faced in Super Bowl XX when Walter Payton fumbled on the opening series, allowing the New England Patriots to take a 3-0 lead. Because the Bears scored the next 44 points, that fumble seems inconsequential today.

The great thing about the White Sox' world championship was how rife it was with danger. Before this season, Sox fans had memories like the one of the Jerry Dybzinski fuckhead catastrophe in the 1983 playoffs, without which the Sox would have pushed a run across for Britt Burns and no doubt won the fourth game, which would have allowed LaMarr Hoyt to clinch the series the following day and send the Sox on to certain victory in the World Series against the aged Philadelphia Phillies. But 88 years of tragedy schooled fans in how to savor things going right. Jose Contreras's masterful start against the New York Yankees in August—which halted a seven-game skid and sent him on a personal nine-game winning streak extending into the playoffs—was one critical moment. Another was Joe Crede's game-winning homer in the tenth

inning against the Cleveland Indians in late September. Without that victory, the Sox actually would have fallen behind the Tribe two days later.

The nerviest moment of the playoffs was Orlando Hernandez, "El Duque," coming on with the bases loaded and no outs in the sixth inning of the clinching third game of the Red Sox series and somehow working out of the jam with two pop-outs and a checked-swing strikeout of Johnny Damon. The Championship Series would have been entirely different if A.J. Pierzynski didn't steal first in the ninth inning of the second game and Crede didn't follow with the winning hit. And in the World Series, what if Paul Konerko hadn't hit his first-pitch grand slam off Chad Qualls in the second game and Scott Podsednik hadn't hit his sayonara off Brad Lidge? The Astros would have stayed alive if they'd won the third game, but Crede rallied the Sox with his homer off Roy Oswalt and Geoff Blum finished off Houston with his homer in the 14th.

Even though the Sox led their division wire to wire and took the Series with only a single postseason loss, the moments that linger in memory are the ones where that championship was in grave jeopardy.

Cubs fans remain firmly in the mode of savoring tragedy, and the Sox' triumph—combined with the season's other top baseball story, the steroid scandal—prompted me to reassess the Cubs' loss to the Florida Marlins two years ago. Forget Steve



LINDA MONTALBAN

The Sox' triumph—combined with the season's other top baseball story, the steroid scandal—prompted me to reassess the Cubs' loss two years ago.

Bartman for the moment. What if Ivan "Pudge" Rodriguez hadn't followed the Bartman snafu with a run-scoring single? What if the Rodriguez who was named most valuable player of that series had been replaced by, say, the Rodriguez who caught for the Detroit Tigers this season? Rodriguez was a monster with the Marlins. Maybe he wasn't built up like Hulk Hogan, but his muscular back seemed a yard wide. Rodriguez was one of the players named as a steroid user in Jose Canseco's tell-all book this year—which gained in credibility when Mark McGwire, another of the names named, declined to deny using steroids in sworn testimony before Congress, and when Rafael

Palmeiro, who did deny use in the same hearing, tested positive during the season. Rodriguez, meanwhile, turned up in Detroit looking more like a shortstop in oversize catcher's gear than the beast who'd beaten the Cubs.

Rodriguez encountered the Sox in their division-clinching game in Detroit the last week of the season. When he seemed to have hurt himself sliding into second base late in the game, Detroit manager Alan Trammell was noticeably reluctant to go out and see how he was—or to pull him from the game for a pinch runner. There seemed to be thinly veiled animosity between the two, and while that was no doubt due to Trammell being in his last days as manager

and to Rodriguez being among his public detractors, allow me to read into it some personal contempt as well.

But Cubs fans who might bristle at the possible injustice should remember they had their own dubious star two years ago in Sammy Sosa, who was even more diminished in skills than in body this season while playing for the Baltimore Orioles.

Baseball finally got clean this year, and even if it did so largely by sweeping the past under the Astroturf, it avoided a public-relations calamity on the order of the 1919 "Black Sox." It went all but unnoticed that the White Sox, responsible for baseball's last great scandal, were the first champions of the reform era that's followed the steroid scandal. Whether by making their own breaks or taking advantage of their opponents' misfortunes, the Sox fully earned what they achieved this season. There was nothing funny, fixed, or foretold about it. **Q**

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Caroline Myss

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A Year Without Journalism

continued from page 1

any more because journalism doesn't have a future.

Who's to blame for all this? Mostly Craig Newmark, the geek who started Craigslist ten years ago as an e-mail guide to "cool events" in the Bay Area. Now, with just 18 employees—fewer people than it takes to deliver the *Reader* every Thursday—Craigslist is a global juggernaut sucking up millions of dollars that used to go to newspaper classifieds. According to one much-repeated estimate, it cost daily papers in San Francisco alone about \$50 million last year.

But Craig is not the only culprit. There's also eBay, which has siphoned off who knows how

many more millions of dollars by making camera-for-sale ads obsolete. And Google, which has rocked the advertising world by delivering ads to people who might actually want to see them. And online journals like Slate and Salon, and Yahoo and Microsoft, which lurk behind their mountains of cash waiting to spring out and copy anything that works for Google or eBay. And Wonkette and InstaPundit and the Decembrist and all their blogging friends whose idea of a good time is giving yourself a funny name and distracting normal people who used to read newspapers.

And of course there are the newspapers themselves, which, back in the days of Internet

Bubble #1, in their desperation to maintain "mindshare" trained readers to look for their news online, for free, rather than on newsprint spread out on the kitchen table, as God intended.

Hardly a day goes by, it seems, without some Web behemoth announcing a major new initiative to suck the lifeblood out of the news business. Of course it's not their intent to destroy journalism, or to bankrupt companies that employ thousands of decent, hardworking taxpayers, or to force the teenage daughters of reporters and editors into lives of prostitution. They're just trying to make a better world.

Last month, when Google introduced Google Base, they

presented it as a service that allows people to post "all types" of information online and assign "attributes" to it that will make it easy to find. For example, you can post Grandma's chicken and dumplings recipe and assign to it such database attributes as "recipes," "chicken," "American," and "traditional"; these become categories that searchers can use to find the recipe. Neato.

What Google did not say, but weary newspaper people were quick to notice, is that you can also post a description and some pictures of your apartment on Dayton Street and assign to it such attributes as "Apartments," "Chicago," "Lincoln Park," "two-bedroom," "\$1,400." And if you happen to run a rental agency and have hundreds of apartments to list, and if you happen to know how to put them in a database or have a sixth grader at home who can do it for you, Google Base gives you a way to upload your "items" (please don't call them classified ads) in bulk. Just in case Craigslist is not easy or free enough for you.

Craig, too, is also bent on making a better world. And now that he has done so for job seekers, apartment hunters, and sexual predators, he's turning to journalism. Just before Thanksgiving he let it be known that he's involved in an online project that will use the same "wisdom of the masses" approach that informs Craigslist. He's being coy about the details, but he has dropped phrases like "citizen journalism," "networks of trust," and "reputation mechanisms," suggesting that he's talking about a cross between Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia edited by its readers, and Google News, which boasts of presenting "the most relevant news first" by compiling reports from more than 4,500 sources "solely by computer algorithms, without human intervention."

The day after Craig first talked publicly about his new project, I noticed the lead item on Wonkette, about an announcement that Dick Cheney would appear at a fund-raiser for beleaguered congressman Tom DeLay. I noticed that, according to Wonkette, the news story that inspired her fulminations ("Evidently the more event-appropriate MC team of Jack Abramoff and Duke Cunningham is already booked for that night") had come from Yahoo, via Splid. In other words Wonkette, whose blog is owned by Gawker Media, spotted this news on another blog owned by Gawker Media, whose writer had spotted it on Yahoo. Nowhere does Wonkette betray even the vaguest awareness of the person who actually reported that story or even the "mainstream media" that disseminated it. The Yahoo story came from the Associated Press, which had picked it up from the *Houston Chronicle*. For the record, the *Chronicle* story was written by a Washington

bureau reporter named Samantha Levine. But as far as Wonkette was concerned, it came from Yahoo, via Splid. That's the way it works in the blogosphere. The stories are just . . . out there.

That item about Cheney and DeLay remained at the top of Wonkette for five days, thanks to the long Thanksgiving weekend. Wonkette doesn't do weekends.

A couple days earlier, David Carr's column in the *New York Times* told of a "plague week" in the newspaper business, a gruesome series of layoffs, ethical questions, and technology-induced travails including Google Base (but not Craig's foray into citizen journalism, which was yet to be announced). At the end Carr reminded his readers of the gaping void at the bottom of our brave new media future. "For Google's news aggregator to function, somebody has to do the reporting, to make the calls. . . . News robots can't meet with a secret source in an underground garage or pull back the blankets on a third-rate burglary to reveal a conspiracy at the highest reaches of government." And, I would add, you can't rely on bloggers to do it, because something might happen over Thanksgiving weekend.

"Tactical and ethical blunders aside," Carr concluded, "actual journalists come in handy on occasion."

I think it's time for actual journalists to drive this point home. Today, therefore, I am proposing a yearlong journalism strike. I am urging reporters and editors around the world to put down their notebooks, close their laptops, hang up their phones. Lie down and be counted! Let's have no reporting, no editing, no application of any human intelligence whatsoever to events public or private till January 1, 2007. I'm calling it the Year Without Journalism. Let's all relax, let go, and float blissfully in the information-free state (excuse me, I mean free-information state) that our public awaits so eagerly. Let one of those news robots handle the hired truck scandal and further crimes of the Daley administration. Let's see if Wonkette can deal with the deviant bastards in the executive branch any better than Judith Miller did. Let's have some of those citizen journalists call Burt Natarus and see if they can figure out what the hell he's talking about. With no news to aggregate, no facts to ruminate, the algorithms and the bedroom pundits will turn on each other like mirrors, producing a perfect regression of narcissistic self-reflection, repeating endlessly, adding nothing, ever shrinking, ad infinitum.

Meanwhile our beaten-down journalists will get a much-needed year of rest and relaxation. Or maybe some time to learn a new skill, like computer programming. **G**

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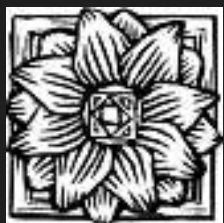
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Art

BEYOND GREEN: TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE ART
SMART MUSEUM OF ART

Combating Cast-Off Culture

Artists' novel and attractive solutions to social and environmental issues

By Kim Theriault

It's not easy being green, but a show at the Smart Museum of Art makes it look that way. A collaboration between the museum and New York-based iCI (Independent Curators International), "Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art" includes fledgling and established artists who address the issue of sustainable design, meaning that present needs are met without compromising those of the future. These 13 individual artists or groups pose sometimes humorous, sometimes brilliant solutions to environmental and social problems. They also challenge the idea of what art can do, breaking down the barrier between aesthetic and usable designs. The many collaborative efforts, both local and international, also defy the model of the artist working alone. Loosely, these artists' predecessors are such groups as the German Bauhaus and the Russian constructivists.

Many of the displays are interactive, allowing viewers to explore projects further on computers, watch videos, or walk into models. The exhibition is arranged thematically in three parts, "Objects," "Structures," and "Processes and Networks." But the boundaries between these categories—and the reasons for them—aren't always clear. No matter: the pieces' cleverness and insight are their *raison d'être*.

Of the established individual artists, perhaps Andrea Zittel best sets the tone for the exhibit. Her wall-label quote reads: "I am not a designer—designers have a social responsibility to provide solutions. Art is more about asking ques-



From Michael Rakowitz's "paraSITE" series

tions." She's been asking questions for a while now. In the early 90s Zittel created a brand, "A-Z," meant to simplify daily living by reducing consumer choices. Her "products" have included one outfit to wear for an entire season, a modular apartment with variable components, and a single food that has all the nutrients needed

to sustain life. She's experimented with these concepts in two studios—first A-Z East in Brooklyn, then A-Z West in California—where she makes items from found objects, recycled paper, and renewable living materials like wood, cotton, and wool. Here, in *Rough Shelving Unit With Fiber Form Bowls and Found Objects*

From A-Z West, a red carpet on the wall and floor serves as the backdrop for a shelf unit made from a large piece of plywood cut into a keylike shape. As shelves she uses some of the cutout plywood and three boxlike compartments; on the shelves she's placed felted bowls and scavenged objects, such as a liquor bottle

filled with dried flowers, an empty perfume bottle, a broken porcelain swan, and a wooden acorn.

Chicagoan Dan Peterman's *Excerpts From the Universal Lab* consists of visually compelling, intellectually engaging junk sculptures. The three "travel pods" here are large, waist-high Plexiglas spheres on metal legs

fitted with wheels, making them movable carts. They're filled with materials from the Universal Lab, an amateur scientists' building on Chicago's south side (closed in 2000) that in turn scavenged its materials from the University of Chicago labs. Each sphere is like a sealed time capsule of science and technology. Travel pod three contains old pamphlets from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, slides, lightbulbs, and projectors. Inside the pod a large case holds a Type K-20 camera, made for the military during World War II, and what looks like an old Polaroid. Only bits of the pamphlets can be read, like the headline "Experiments in Death—Soviet scholars bring dead dogs back to life."

One of the most ingenious projects is Michael Rakowitz's "paraSITE" series. First constructed in 1998 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, paraSITES are portable plastic houses for the homeless made of cheap materials like vinyl, tape, and garbage bags; one cost only \$5. These cute igloo-like homes are intended to be attached to the warm-air vents of big buildings, which not only inflate but heat them. As if he were a contractor creating a custom design, Rakowitz collaborates with a homeless person on each dwelling, and some of the sketches, other images, and stories that were part of these exchanges are on display. One man wanted a



Collected Material Dwelling, Model 1:1 by Learning Group

home he and his girlfriend could share, with a "love nest" in the center. When he found out how much his girlfriend talked, he asked Rakowitz to change the design to two separate chambers connected in the middle, directing that it should look like a bra. These playful yet respectful structures act as both temporary solutions and billboards for the problem of homelessness.

Learning Group (whose four members are American, Mexican, Danish, and Swedish) likewise piggybacks on the existing environment. Among other projects, they've developed a plan for growing mushrooms in subterranean tunnels under Chicago buildings. This idea and others—such as the sandwich-board-like wearable buildings they produced in Japan—are documented with posters and drawings. They've also instituted a collection system for unused recyclable materials like PET plastic. On display here is a gazebo-shaped shelter, *Collected Material Dwelling, Model 1:1*, made of recycled cardboard, bottles, fabric, rope, metal, and a hose.

Another innovative collaborative is the Vienna-based activist group WochenKlausur, which created the witty *Intervention to Upcycle Waste and Museum Byproducts*. Their aim was to produce a community of artists to upcycle, or reuse without reconstituting, the waste products of

various cultural institutions. During a three-week residency here that involved U. of C. and SAIC students, they used cast-off objects and materials from museums and theaters to make a cheerfully striped table and chairs, now ensconced at the women's shelter Deborah's Place. Drawings and a video document the process.

Jane Palmer and Marianne Fairbanks of JAM, based here in Chicago, put a little funk into the idea of sustainability. They've created *Jump Off*, five solar-powered shoulder bags in different styles and colors, each with a flat, black solar-collection panel on one side to power electronic gadgets. The red bag displays a video cartoon by Arthur Jones that explains the reason for these self-sufficient designs: to emancipate the user from the usual power sources and to challenge the preeminence of government surveillance and aggression (the bags look like the solar-powered portable communications devices used by the military).

All the artists here blur the boundaries between art, architecture, design, construction, sociology, environmentalism, and activism. Or, perhaps more accurately, they recycle them all into something new. Bono may have made environmental awareness sexy with his Edun clothing line, but this exhibition makes it smart. **B**

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Books

THE CONTRACT WITH GOD TRILOGY: LIFE ON DROPSIE AVENUE WILL EISNER (NORTON)

The Granddaddy of the Graphic Novel

A year after his death, Will Eisner finally gets some respect.

By Whet Moser

By the mid-1970s Will Eisner was already an eminence grise of the comics world. He'd started out during the Depression as a 19-year-old prodigy, drawing for the short-lived kids' publication *Wow, What a Magazine!* When that folded he cofounded a lucrative comics studio; three years later, in 1940, he created *The Spirit*, a seven-page, full-color weekly now famous for its visual innovation. Despite a detour to serve in World War II, he kept the strip going until 1952, launching the career of *Spirit* assistant Jules Feiffer along the way. After that he started a graphics company and settled into a teaching career at the School of Visual Arts in his native New York City. The Eisners, the comics industry's annual awards for excellence, are named in his honor.

But despite his reputation as a visual genius and canny businessman, when Eisner decided to venture back into the comics medium in 1978 he had trouble selling his first property—a bleak, elliptical quartet of stories about tenement life titled *A Contract With God*. Eisner wanted a large publishing house to lend legitimacy to the ambitious, uncategorizable work, which he called a “graphic novel,” but had to settle for Baronet Books, publishers of the Great Illustrated Classics line. When published, the book was critically acclaimed but found little popular success.

Eisner died this past January at 87, and this winter, in a bit of dark irony that could've come from one

of his books, the genre he legitimized has finally legitimized its founding work: Norton, which published his final original novel last spring—*The Plot: The Secret History of the Elders of Zion*—is now rereleasing 14 Eisner works, beginning with a handsome hardcover volume that combines *A Contract With God* with two related books, *A Life Force* (1988) and *Dropsie Avenue* (1995).

Readers familiar only with the current generation of graphic novelists—with Chris Ware's quiet, stuttering loners or Ben Katchor's dreamy, cryptic sketches of city life—will find Eisner very, well . . . cartoony. While contemporary artists often go for a stylized, emotionally subtle look, Eisner is a master of the outsize gesture. His characters are quick to tears, quick to violence. Aspiring to literary significance, he aped the writers of his youth, combining O. Henry's telegraphed morality with the social realism of Dos Passos, and his scratchy technique hums with the vitality of the big city.

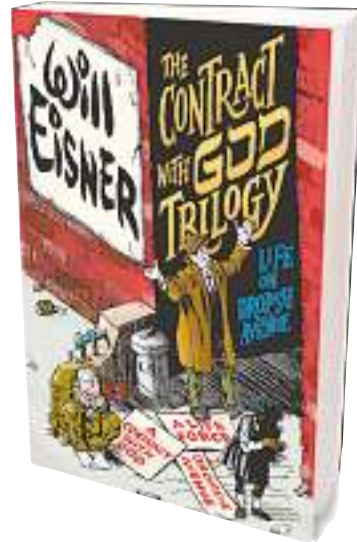
Eisner wrote *A Contract With God* while grieving the loss of his only daughter to leukemia, and the book is drenched in a kind of existential bad luck, a sense that the only order in the world leads things to work out the way they shouldn't. The title story concerns an idealistic young Russian who, orphaned and then sent by his village to America to escape a series of pogroms, inscribes a contract with God into a stone he carries with him, promising a life of good works

in exchange for good fortune. Aiding the elderly and committing himself to a New York synagogue, he enjoys a modicum of success until a baby is left on his doorstep and he undertakes his most generous project—raising the anonymous child. When she dies from an unknown illness, he spits on the contract and hurls it out the window.

Thus released from his obligation to behave morally, he amasses great wealth and lands a pretty shiksa girlfriend. Near the end of his life, however, he has a change of heart and has a group of rabbis write him a new contract. On the day he's given the document, he promises to rededicate himself to God and promptly dies of a heart attack.

As Eisner increases the number of plot threads in each story, the hammy tragedies mount and the body count increases. His storytelling is visually as well as structurally striking—Eisner uses the vertical landscape of his tenement childhood to dramatic effect. And in addition to his literary influence, he owes a clear debt to the hard-boiled moralizing of early Cagney movies and the operatic excesses of the tabloids of the day.

The trilogy's final book, *Dropsie Avenue*, departs from *Contract's* lean fables by charging through the history of the fictional Bronx street where the first two take place. Beginning with the 19th-century Dutch farmers (the Van Dropsies) who originally held the land, it follows the area through waves of immigration and eco-



omic cycles, touching on civic corruption, the Mafia, race riots, the drug boom, and white flight. The result is a time-lapse narrative that relies on cliché to keep up the breakneck pace.

It's the second novel, *A Life Force*, that uses Eisner's theatrical, compressed narration to best effect. A series of interconnected life stories, it's no less than a social history of New York during the Depression combined with a philosophical investigation into the self-conscious nature of mankind. It opens with a moving if maudlin scene in which an unemployed carpenter named Jacob carries on a one-way debate about the purpose of life with a cockroach that he's saved from the foot of a passerby. Later, when his wife asks how his day was—a day when he's been fired—he responds, “Today?? Today I saved the life of a cockroach.”

This act of benevolence is fol-

lowed by better fortune, but only with the help of a mob-connected Italian carpenter and a down-on-his-luck Yankee with big-business ties who has eyes for Jacob's daughter. Over 140 pages Jacob endures a wedding (his son's), a divorce (his own), a reunion (with a Holocaust escapee from his past), a Mafia hit, Marxist revolutionaries, and a fire.

At the end of the story Jacob is left in his apartment with his ex-wife, saving a cockroach from her rolled-up newspaper. Eisner's cornball fearlessness carries him through this overstuffed, circular narrative. It requires as much suspension of disbelief as the social realist classics that inspired the story, but the graphic novel turns out to be a good—perhaps better—format for such cinematic sweep. Eisner, whose *Spirit*, after all, was a criminologist masquerading as a superhero who lived out of his own grave, recognized that an inherently fantastic medium made such bathos permissible.

More importantly, the overflowing drama of *A Life Force* provides its own moral—don't sweat the big stuff, because it will be overshadowed by even bigger stuff. The first time Jacob rescues a cockroach, it contrasts modestly with the narrative that follows. The second time it reframes the melodrama as a modest narrative in the grand scheme of history.

Eisner's heirs—who include heavy hitters like Art Spiegelman and Frank Miller as well as Ware

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LOOKINGGLASS THEATRE COMPANY is hiring telemarketing/fundraising callers to be part of their Patron Services Campaign. A few positions are now open for ambitious and articulate people interested in earning money while helping Lookingglass raise ticket sales and donations to the theatre. Excellent compensation, including tickets to Lookingglass shows. Evenings and Saturday mornings. Part-time. Will train...

CATERING MANAGER. HELP start a catering service with new River West restaurant. Need motivated self-starter. Be responsible for all sales and customer service functions. Incentive-based compensation program. Need car...

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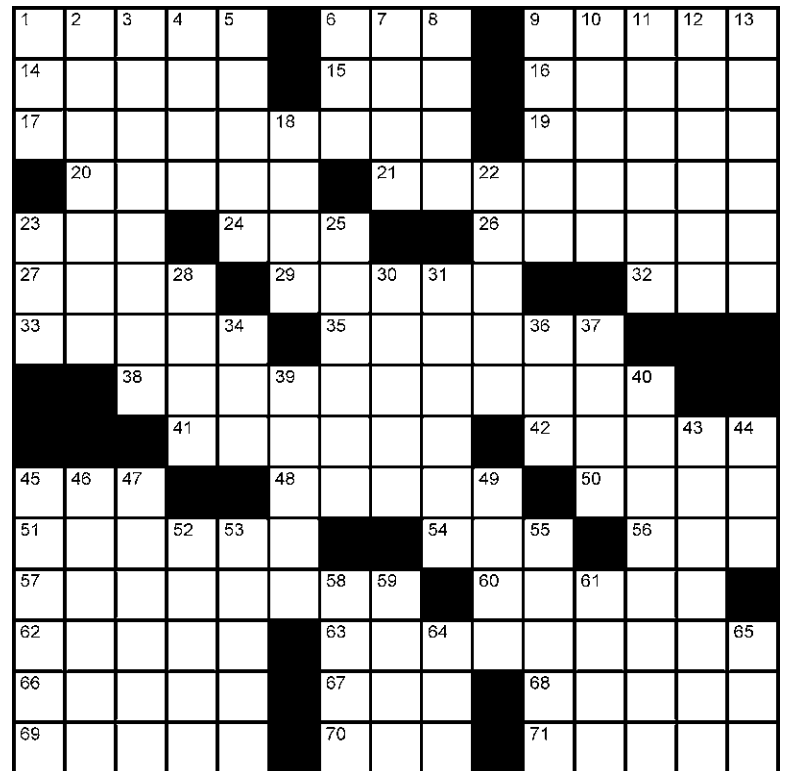
ACROSS

1. Embattled
6. "Oh, how adorable!"
9. Domesticates
14. It may go down on one knee
15. Acupuncturist's life force
16. Multiple choice choices, perhaps
17. Casual Encounter: hotel employee seeking partner for a discreet ____
19. Cattail's locale
20. El entrance
21. In Search Of: Southeast Asian boyfriend; maybe you can work out as my ____
23. Zeta follower
24. The norm; abbr.
26. Good times
27. Material in a trucker cap
29. Make your case
32. Parts of pts.
33. Optimal
35. Broken candy dispenser
38. In Search Of: Central European guy who swings both ways; hoping to receive a ____
41. Skull & Bones members, for instance

42. Violet variety
45. Includes on a memo
48. Having more rings, in the forest
50. Sit at a light
51. They've got your back
54. Crossed (out)
56. North Avenue Beach objective
57. Missed Connection: You gallantly lent me your umbrella during a down-pour, then disappeared—my ____!
60. Back at the track
62. Former Department of Homeland Security head
63. In Search Of: Lady friend for a foreign exchange student in Yorkshire—where can I find my ____?
66. Astral hunter
67. It may be stroked or massaged
68. Principle
69. Is inclined
70. Snare
71. "Giant" of pro wrestling

DOWN

1. Pecs' neighbors
2. Had confidence (in)
3. "Keep yer pants on!"
4. When "Good Morning Baltimore" plays in *Hairspray*
5. Where film winds up
6. King topper
7. Stimulate
8. Spanish con, here
9. Language of Sri Lanka
10. Addis ____
11. To a greater degree
12. Artificial
13. Downhiller's run
18. Physical prefix
22. Crosswise, on a ship
23. Daft Punk's label
25. TV host with a PhD in psychology
28. Unclear
30. Taunted
31. For boys and girls alike



34. Meadow
36. Start the keg
37. Jai ____
39. Well acquainted
40. How tables may be placed
43. Sling mud
44. Craving
45. Subject of a myth about night vision
46. Danes of *Shopgirl*
47. Paul Simon's "Slip ____ Away"
49. Yanks' foes
52. U.S. coin motto starter
53. Utopias
55. Mississippi triangle
58. "Couldn't have said it better myself!"
59. Baltic capital
61. New driver, usually
64. Type of story or sister
65. Quebec place name starter

and Katchor—have taken a step back into a cooler, more subtle form within a more mature medium. In that context his grandiosity seems dated, even quaint. Eisner's excess of ambition, however, expanded the possibilities of the nascent genre. Social history, religious fable, character-driven miniatures, explicit sexuality, cinematic violence—the explosion of narrative forms Eisner compiled into the trilogy can be as enervating as it is enthralling. But in creating a world too big for one book, he created a world big enough for those he inspired to make their homes in, and they've been working in the light of his creation ever since. **B**

LAST WEEK: BOOK GROUPS

SCUBA IS NOR A FMS TODOS
 INNATE ICESKATE APtle
 TOTHELIGHTHOUSEOFFRAIN
 ITIS DOH ICON PGT BVD
 NEE MONTANA ZIT FLEA
 OFMICEANDMENATWORK
 STARR AAS OYE VID
 REVISE POVICH TIEN TOP
 OLEG RESPIN EDHS MAUL
 SEMINAL CARRIE LATTY
 GANGSOFNEWYORKDOLLS
 ARRAS POTISON JACOGGA
 PAUL SEPT REMEDY GOOS
 UMA LOS REDSOX SPEARS
 OAF LIV TIX ANTED
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