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FRIENDS OF ABRAMOFF
by Hendrik Hertzberg

NAMING NAMES

The N.S.A. wiretapping story is the latest in which journalists may be asked to reveal sources. What's behind the new legal push? Jeffrey Toobin reports

Death of a prodigy

Eric Konigsberg on the mystery of a gifted child

Why we're so fat

Steven Shapin on the culture of obesity

A kick in the head

Elif Batuman on the brutal art of Thai boxing

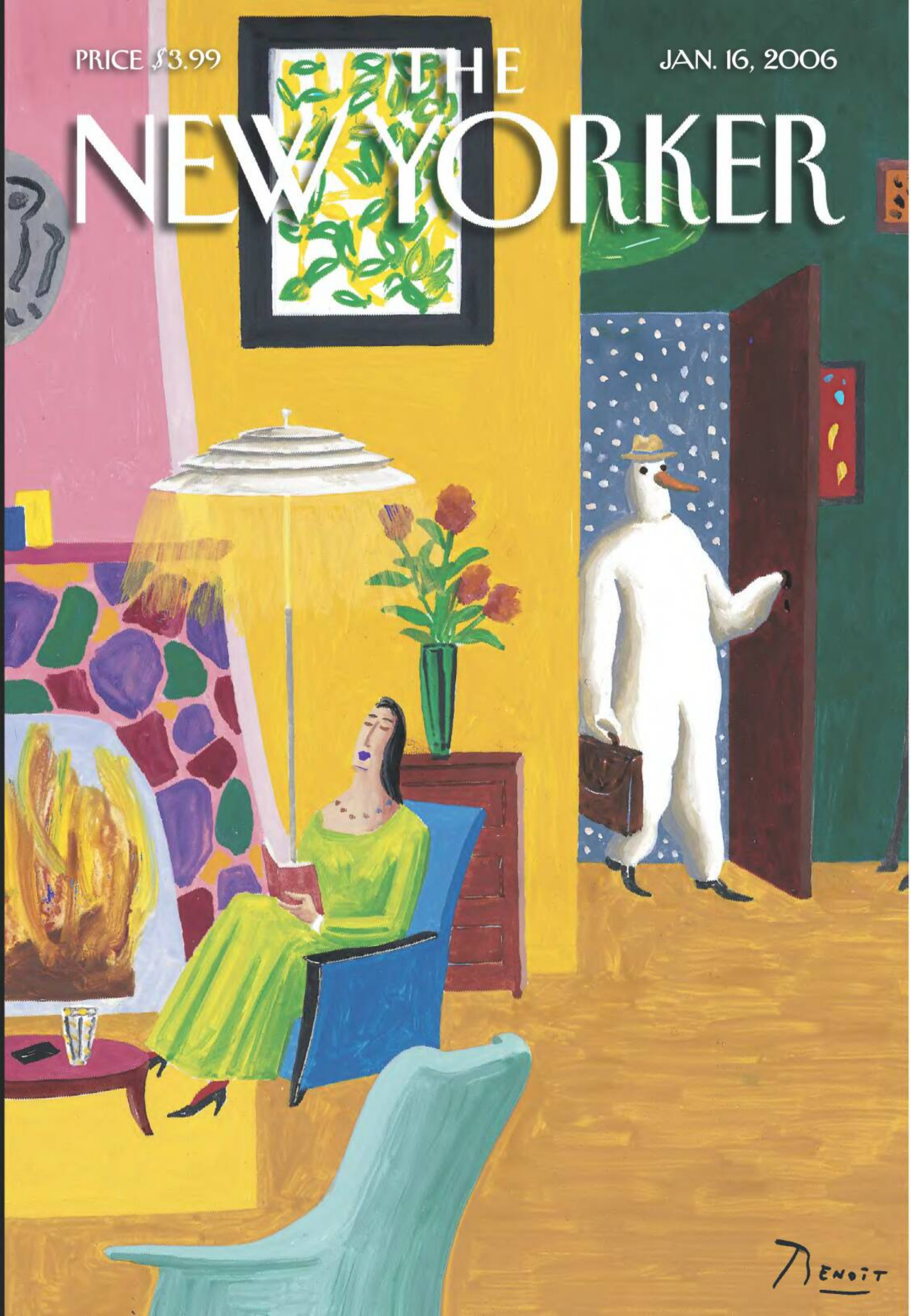
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Plus: Roger Angell on what's written in stone • Nancy Franklin on The Simpsons' offspring

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JAN. 16, 2006

THE NEW YORKER

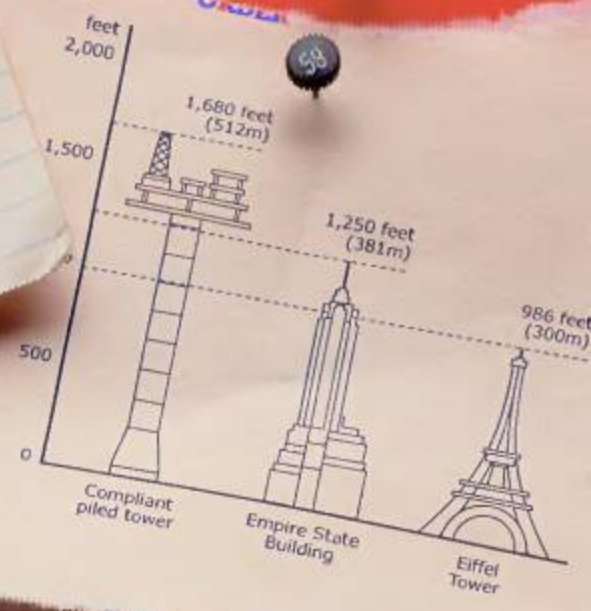


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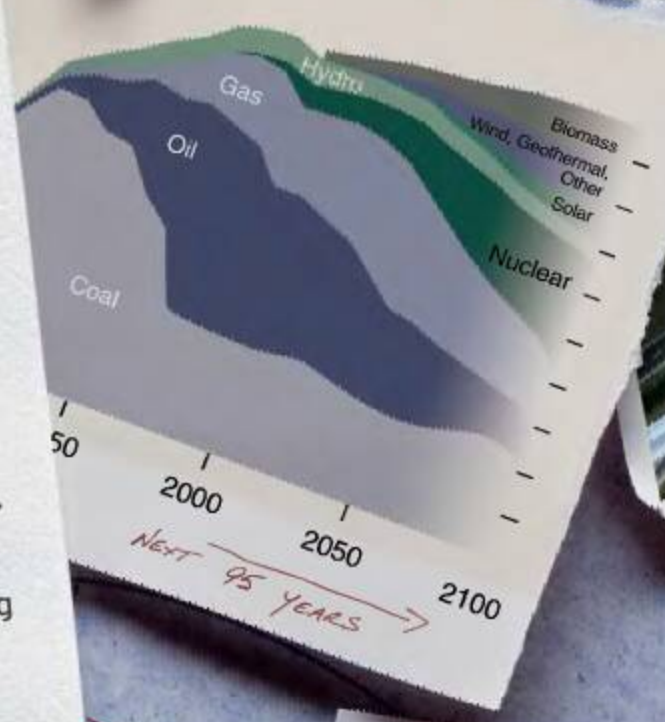
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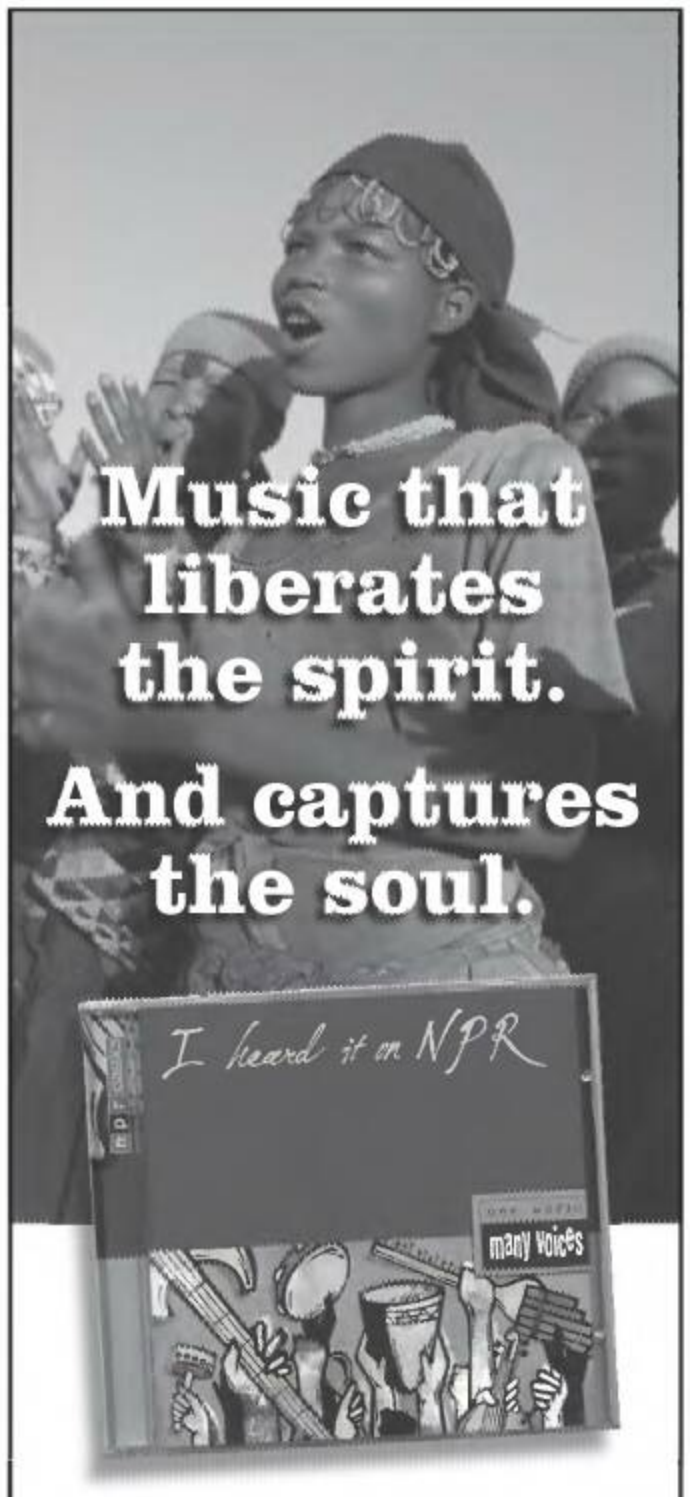
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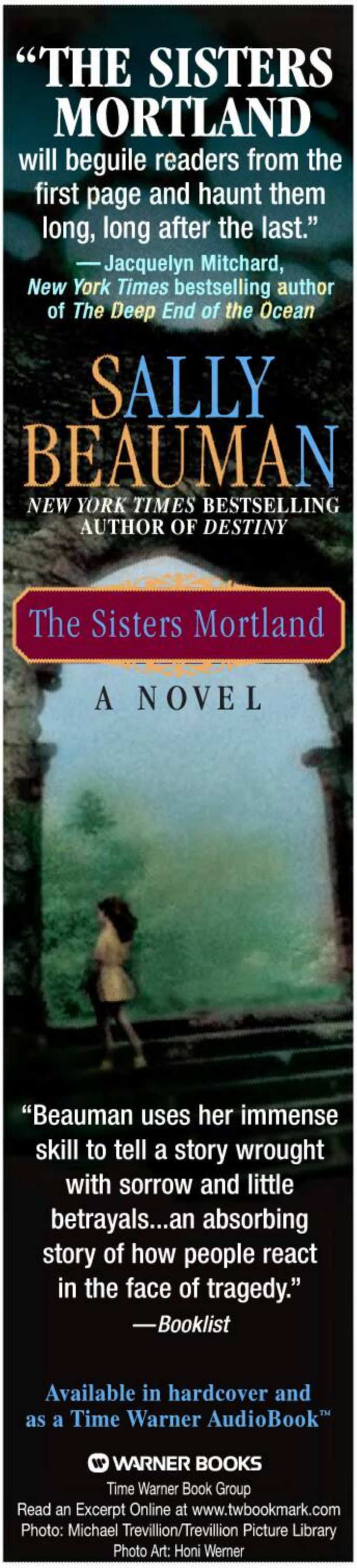
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Sasha Frere-Jones (Pop Music, p. 84) is the magazine's pop-music critic.

Nancy Franklin (On Television, p. 86) writes a regular column on television for the magazine. ♦



"Winter in Central Park just isn't the same without all of last year's Christo crap."

THE MAIL

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

Margaret Talbot, in her excellent report on the Dover intelligent-design trial, makes an observation that is worth expanding on ("Darwin in the Dock," December 5th). As she points out, intelligent design is "an argument by inference" that "declines to specify who the master designer might be." As such, it is far more compatible with Deism than with Christianity, although Christians are currently promoting it. A century ago, the philosopher William James, in "The Varieties of Religious Experience," wrote that proofs of God's existence drawn from the order of nature were no longer convincing. It was impossible, he argued, to find "in the driftings of the cosmic atoms" any "distinguishable ultimate tendency with which it is possible to feel a sympathy." The merely inferential God, "who can raise no particular weight whatever, who can help us with no private burden, and who is on the side of our enemies as much as he is on our own," as James wrote, is a far cry from the God of David's Psalms, and could never have enriched the history of literature, art, and music as the Biblical God has done.

Cushing Strout
Professor Emeritus of English and American Studies, Cornell University
Ithaca, N.Y.

Talbot's otherwise interesting piece on the Dover school board intelligent-design trial may have left some readers confused about the York *Daily Record* editorial page's stance. Talbot observed that the paper "had a *Wall Street Journal*-like divide between its front section and its editorial page" and claimed that our "opinion pages were sympathetic to the school board." In fact, our opinion pages reflected both sides of the case. In many editorials printed over the last year, our institutional voice opposed the reckless decision of the school board to bring intelligent design into high-school biology classes. The columnist Mike Argento's voluminous writings on the trial, which Talbot correctly characterized as critical of the school board, also appeared in our opinion pages, as did the essay Talbot cited as evidence of sympathy for the school board's actions. That piece was written by our copy editor and occasional guest op-ed writer Dave Dentel and expressed his own opinion—not that of the newspaper's editorial board.

Scott Fisher
Editorial Page Editor, York Daily Record/Sunday News
York, Pa.

THE *SARBOX* PROBLEM

The usually insightful James Surowiecki misses the mark on the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (The Financial Page, December 12th). For senior executives struggling to create wealth and build businesses in the real world, SarbOx ineptly shackles the majority of honest, publicly held companies in response to sleazy dealings at a few of them. Surowiecki cites "nearly a thousand earnings restatements" as evidence of wrongdoing, but often these restatements are simply mandated by accounting rules. And investors are now worse off as well. As Surowiecki notes, some companies are going private because SarbOx is too costly; others shun American markets to go public overseas, and soon foreign giants may begin pulling their stocks from the U.S. listings. Worst of all, SarbOx won't stop chicanery at the bad-guy companies it targets, because the next Enron happily will sign off on all that new paperwork—and lie all the way to the next big scandal.

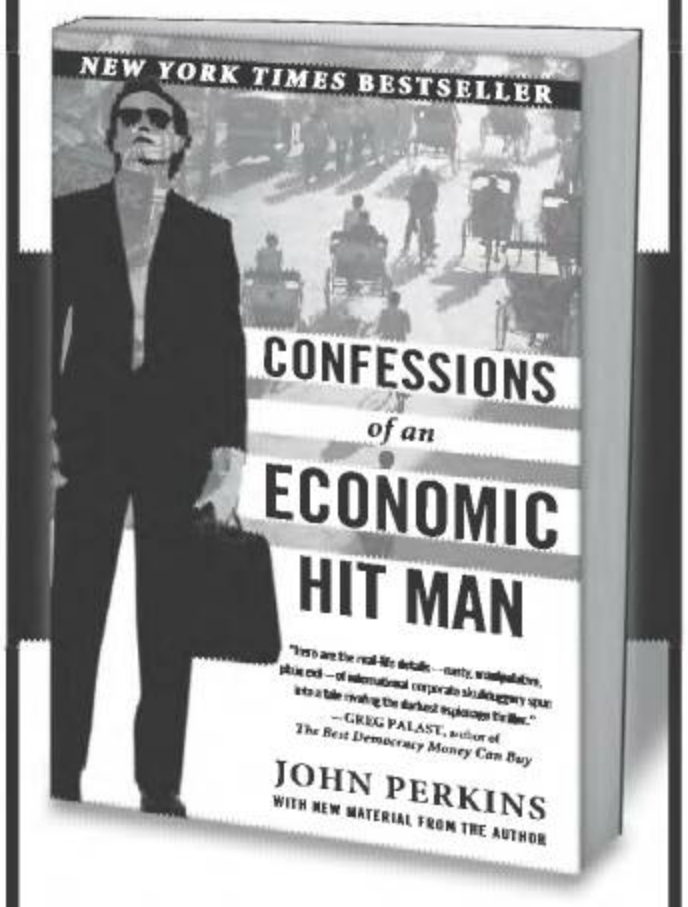
Dennis Kneale
Managing Editor, Forbes
New York City

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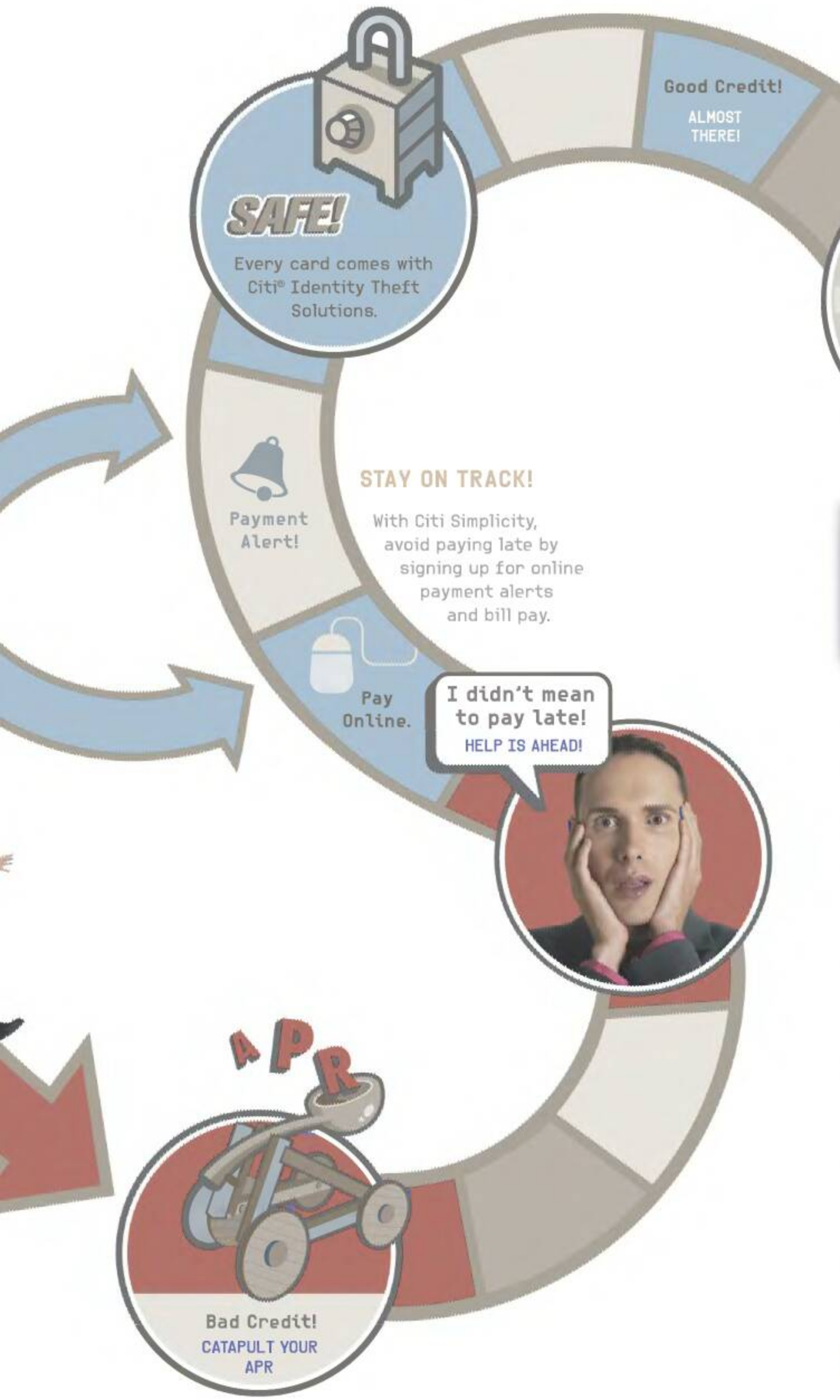


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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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15	16	17	11	12	13	14

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
BRIDGE WORK

The playwright, poet, and actress Sarah Jones became a star in 2004 with her Off Broadway hit, "Bridge & Tunnel." The one-woman show, which won an Obie and a Drama League Award, found Jones playing fourteen different characters of varying races, ages, and political persuasions who reflect on the vagaries of the modern world. The show, slightly updated and revised, now moves to Broadway for a two-month run at the Helen Hayes Theatre. (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
OPEN ALL NIGHT

The New York Guitar Festival gets under way with a free interpretation of Bruce Springsteen's sparse 1982 album, "Nebraska," with performances by Michelle Shocked, Mark Eitzel, Laura Cantrell, Dan Zanes, Vernon Reid, and others. (See page 15.)

DANCE
DANCE ON FILM

A festival of dance films continues at the Walter Reade Theatre, offering a rare chance to glimpse the Kathakali performances of the octogenarian Indian dancer Kalamandalam Ramankutty Nair, as well as the U.S. première of Henry Chalfant's documentary "From Mambo to Hip Hop." (See pages 18 and 23.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ALMA MATER

The New York Festival of Song, which consistently presents the city's most rewarding vocal recitals, teams up with the Juilliard School for a concert entitled "100 Years of Juilliard Composers in Song," which includes works by Babbitt, Corigliano, and Richard Rodgers, among others. (See page 19.)

MOVIES
COLLECTIVE MADNESS

The medieval ferocity of rural Eastern Europe was frozen in place by the Soviet chill. As the thaw began, Béla Tarr attempted to film the monumental forces it unleashed, in "Sátántangó," a seven-and-a-half-hour document of the mental and physical cruelty resulting from the breakup of a communal farm in Hungary. MOMA will show it in one sitting, and also over successive days. (See page 22.)

A fur seal at the New York Aquarium, in Coney Island. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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ALMOST, MAINE
A romantic comedy set in a remote northern town, by John Cariani. Directed by Gabriel Barre. In previews. Opens Jan. 12. (Daryl Roth, 101 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

ANTON
Pierre van der Spuy's play explores Anton Chekhov's quest for love and happiness. Opens Jan. 11. (Greenwich Street Theatre, 547 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

BRIDGE & TUNNEL
Sarah Jones's extremely successful downtown one-woman show comes to Broadway. Previews begin Jan. 12. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

FUNNYHOUSE OF A NEGRO
Classical Theatre of Harlem presents a revival of Adrienne Kennedy's play from 1964, in which a young black woman on her deathbed struggles with issues of culture and identity. Previews begin Jan. 11. (H.S.A., 645 St. Nicholas Ave. 212-868-4444.)

HECUBA
The Pearl presents Euripides' tragedy from 425 B.C. In previews. Opens Jan. 15. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

HUCK & HOLDEN
Sex, pornography, and a certain J. D. Salinger novel become the focus of an Indian engineering student's existence, in a new play by Rajiv Joseph. Previews begin Jan. 17. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-989-2020.)

LOVELY DAY
The Play Company presents the New York première of a political play by Leslie Ayvazian, about a couple whose son's school is visited by military recruiters. Blair Brown directs. Previews begin Jan. 12. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

RABBIT HOLE
Cynthia Nixon stars in the world première of a new play by David Lindsay-Abaire ("Fuddy Meers," "Kimberly Akimbo"), about a husband and wife who drift apart after a terrible accident. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. Previews begin Jan. 12. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

ABIGAIL'S PARTY
In the New Group's New York première of Mike Leigh's 1977 comedy, Jennifer Jason Leigh turns in a fiendishly good performance as Beverly, the self-appointed It Girl of the London suburbs and, as her unfortunate party guests discover, an excruciating shrew whose beguilements are the frilly instruments of doom. In fact, everyone who enters Beverly's presence—including her beleaguered husband (the excellent Max Baker) and an assortment of unwitting neighbors—appears to be the worse for it. As the group loses its collective good sense to gin, Beverly's soirée goes thoroughly south and the comedy grows blacker. By then, the play is nearly drunk on its own caustic abandon; in the able hands of the director, Scott Elliott ("Hurlyburly"), though, it offers an uneasy portrait of middle-class implosion. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

BEAUTY OF THE FATHER
Manhattan Theatre Club presents the New York première of a play by Nilo Cruz ("Anna in the Tropics"), about a woman who travels to Spain to reconnect with her father. Michael Greif ("Rent") directs. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

CANDIDA
The Jean Cocteau Repertory's season of "five classic women" continues with George Bernard Shaw's 1904 sendup of the institution of marriage. (Bouwerie Lane, 330 Bowery. 212-279-4200.)

CELEBRATION / THE ROOM
A fascinating Harold Pinter double bill (well directed by Neil Pepe, at the Atlantic Theatre Company) brings together his first play, "The Room" (1957), and "Celebration" (1999). In "The Room," a jejune and portentous one-act, Pinter stumbled on a psychological truth that he continued to explore brilliantly for half a century: mankind's passion for ignorance. In "Celebration," which takes place at two adjacent banquettes of an elegant restaurant, language is the main character. With mockery, weasel words, tall tales, the syncopation of repetition, and, of course, a carapace of pauses, the characters perform a sensational exercise in denial. The silence—the force that compels all of Pinter's manic motormouths—is huge, terrifying, and, in Pinter's masterly hands, visionary. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/19/05.) (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

CHITA RIVERA: THE DANCER'S LIFE
Rivera, supported by a cast of ten, stars in a musical about her life and career, touching on shows by Jerome Robbins, Leonard Bernstein, and Bob Fosse. With a book by Terrence McNally. Directed and choreographed by Graciela Daniele. (Shoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

CULTUREMART
A festival of new works by resident artists of the HERE Arts Center that include music, dance, visual art, and puppetry. (145 Sixth Ave. 212-868-4444. Through Jan. 22.)

DOG SEES GOD: CONFESSIONS OF A TEENAGE BLOCKHEAD
In an acid little comedy by Bert V. Royal, the "Peanuts" gang has evolved into a group of depraved, damaged high schoolers. Sly in-jokes and the thrill of sacrilege provide the fuel for this Fringe Festival transfer, but when the play takes a darker turn toward suicide and homophobic hate crime, even the most irreverent Charles Schulz fans may shudder. Directed by Trip Cullman. (Century Center for the Performing Arts, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

GONER
In a new comedy by Brian Parks, the President gets shot and ends up in the care of three twisted doctors. (Kraine, 85 E. 4th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED
A new comedy by Douglas Carter Beane, about a closeted gay Hollywood star. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
The Vital Theatre Company, in association with HonkBark Productions, mounts a new production of Shakespeare's romantic comedy. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-352-3101.)

MR. MARMALADE
In Noah Haidle's exhilarating new play (well directed by Michael Greif), which is reminiscent of a 2002 article by Adam Gopnik for this magazine entitled "Bumping Into Mr. Ravioli," the title character is the imaginary friend of a lively but neglected four-year-old called Lucy (Mamie Gummer, making her impressive Off Broadway début). Mr. Marmalade (Michael C. Hall) is a buttoned-down, briefcase-toting simulacrum, one suspects, of Lucy's absent father. Although grownups occasionally intrude on Lucy's busy world—she's the only child of a divorced mother in suburban New Jersey—the events of the play mainly concern the games with which she peoples her solitude, and Lucy's pretensions to adulthood are alternately hilarious and heartbreaking. (12/5/05) (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION
George Bernard Shaw's satirical play about the clash of mores between a mother who profits unapologetically from the world's oldest profession and her Cambridge-educated daughter, whose passion is for the placid life of an actuary, receives a tepid revival at the Irish Repertory. The director, Charlotte Moore, has an undeniable asset in Dana Ivey's flinty vitality as Mrs. Warren, but Laura Odeh's kittenish Vivie never seems adequate to the task of bettering her formidable mother. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

NEW YORK GILBERT & SULLIVAN PLAYERS
The troupe's thirty-second season features repertory productions of "H.M.S. Pinafore," in which a sailor falls in love with the daughter of a socially ambitious captain, and "The Mikado," a satire about the downfall of a cruel emperor. On Jan. 12, a one-night-only performance of "Quintessential G. & S.!" (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through Jan. 15.)

THE STONES
The Melbourne-based Zeal Theatre presents a two-man drama about the 1994 death of an Australian motorist that was caused by two teen-age boys kicking a stone off a freeway overpass. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)



TABLES FOR TWO
FATTY CRAB

643 Hudson St. (212-352-3590)—This may be the only Malaysian restaurant in the city with the Beastie Boys on the stereo at lunch. Members of the staff have a studied scruffiness that says they're thinking about their bands, not their soap-opera auditions. The room has ceiling fans made up of what look like rotating desk fans, and the red walls, the enormous heaps of cilantro piled atop each dish, and the pencil holders of assorted chopsticks at each table give it color. Asked about the music, a waiter with a handlebar mustache who was wearing German Army surplus said, "Yeah, we keep it tame during the day. At night we bust out N.W.A. and the Dead Kennedys!" Despite the culture clash, the aggressive attitude is perfect for the food, a fearless combination of exotic chiles and unapologetic servings of fat.

Some things that sound the most outrageous provide only a momentary thrill, like the poached quail eggs topped with spicy fish and chile pastes and punctured so that they can be sucked out of their shells. More pleasing is the salad of fried pork belly and watermelon, dusted with sesame seeds and set on the pickled rind of the melon—a sweet and savory contrast that makes you long for humid weather. The chef, Zak Pelaccio, lived in Malaysia for a little more than a year, and his experience comes through in the more esoteric dishes. A look into the bowl of *Assam laksa*—rice noodles in a broth made sour with tamarind skins—reveals a hundred little fish eyes looking up at you. They belong to tiny anchovies called *ikan bilis*, which, if you ignore their plaintive stares, are a pleasure to crunch. The Fatty Duck—a small plate of brined, steamed, and fried pieces of duck served in a palm-sugar syrup studded with black peppercorns—is the best dish on the menu. A close second is the Dungeness crab, which is expensive, messy, exhausting, and wonderful. It comes with thick pieces of Pullman toast for mopping up the heavy, greasy chile sauce. It also comes with a Wet-Nap, but you'll feel like taking a shower. (Open daily for lunch and dinner, and Thursdays through Saturdays until 4 A.M. Entrées $6-$28.)

—Owen Phillips

SWEENEY TODD
Under the bold direction and design of John Doyle, this imported British revival at the Eugene O'Neill, which shrinks the cast of thirty to ten, with actors doubling as musicians, is almost unbearably exciting. Michael Cerveris is a terrifying Sweeney, a model of sulfurous restraint, and Patti LuPone, as his pragmatic and pathological helpmate, Mrs. Lovett, is a gargoyle of toughness. (11/14/05) (230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL
A beautifully realized presentation of Horton Foote's 1953 play about the longing to reach backward to a time of surety. In this sterling production by the director Harris Yulin, Lois Smith portrays Carrie Watts with a luminous purity and slight befuddlement, making her quest to return, before her death, to the tiny Texas farm town of her birth an almost heroic one. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

WHAT THEN
A new play by Rinne Groff, about a family trying to adapt to the deteriorating environment around them. Hal Brooks directs. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

Also Playing

ALTAR BOYZ: Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DOUBT:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FOOLS IN LOVE:** Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IN THE CONTINUUM:** Perry Street Theatre, 31 Perry St. 212-868-4444. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE ODD COUPLE:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **RFK:** The Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100. **A TOUCH OF THE POET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **THE WOMAN IN WHITE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—**Gordon Chambers** has written songs for Queen Latifah, Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston, and Beyoncé. On Jan. 14 the Brooklynite steps into the spotlight with his own classic R. & B. material.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Jan. 12: **Commander Cody** takes his hot-rod Lincoln to the small screen as he celebrates the release of the DVD "All the Way Live." Jan. 13: **Johnny Winter,** the legendary albino blues guitarist, returns to New York. Later that night, the hydra-headed m.c. **Kool Keith** takes over. Jan. 16: **Olu Dara,** a Mississippi-born avant-garde jazz cornettist who's also proved adept at the blues guitar but may be better known as the father of the hip-hop star Nas, celebrates Martin Luther King Day. He'll be joined by the Woodstock vet **Richie Havens.** Jan. 17: The Syn was the band that the bassist Chris Squire was in before he formed the juggernaut Yes. The version of the Syn currently on tour is missing one of its founding members, the guitarist and fellow Yes-man Peter Banks, but it does have its original vocalist, Steve Nardelli, and a new album of unreconstructed prog rock, "Syndestructible."

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Jan. 12: **We Are Scientists** is a trio of wisecracking indie kids who play sharp, danceable guitar-based rock. Their major-label début is called "With Love and Squalor." The experimental synthesizer-tweakers **Oxford Collapse** open. Jan. 14: The Santa Cruz ensemble **Camper Van Beethoven,** the former standard-bearer for mid-eighties college rock, gained notoriety for their dry, absurdist wit and their disregard for genre restrictions. Chugging between punk, ska, folk, and traditional rock, the band became an underground favorite, though it broke up at the end of the decade. Re-formed in 2000, the group has continued to tour and release albums ever since.

CANAL ROOM
285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—Jan. 13: The **English Beat.** The flagship band of the U.K.'s ska boom of the late seventies paired the rhythms of classic ska with the energy of punk and an infectious pop sensibility that earned them success with several singles, including "Mirror in the Bathroom" and "Save It for Later." The original members of the band parted ways long ago, but the vocalist and songwriter Dave Wakeling continues to perform with the name.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Jan. 17: West African music has not been generally associated with Asheville, North Carolina. But the Asheville-based quintet **Toubab Krewe** blends African rhythms with rock. Its members have spent time in Mali, Ivory Coast, and Guinea, picking up new instruments including the kora, a twenty-one-string harp, and the *soku*, a type of fiddle. Their music avoids cliché with authentic extrapolations of traditional Manding beats, percussion, and a jam-band flare.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Jan. 14: **Akron/Family,** purveyors of passionate and unorthodox folk music, are joined by **Mi and L'au,** a Finnish former model and a French composer, respectively. A few months after meeting in Paris in 2001, the two left the city and moved to a cabin in the woods in Finland. They spent a year and a half writing songs for their self-titled début album, and their spare acoustic music is, in its own way, romantically adventurous.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Jan. 14: A mighty long way from fraternity row, **O.A.R.** (the name stands for Of a Revolution) is the latest jam band to follow the Dave Matthews Band out of the college circuit and into the big time. Without any real assistance from the mainstream, O.A.R. have attracted new listeners to their complex roots rock via a grassroots word-of-mouth campaign and are now playing the biggest room in the city.

NEW YORK GUITAR FESTIVAL
Jan. 14: **Michelle Shocked, Laura Cantrell, Dan Zanes, Meshell N'degeocello, Vernon Reid,** the **National, Chocolate Genius, Mark Eitzel, Martha Wainwright, Jesse Harris,** and many others open the festival with their interpretations of Bruce Springsteen's stark 1982 album, "Nebraska." (Winter Garden, World Financial Center, Battery Park City. No tickets necessary.) Jan. 15: The Guitar Marathon explores four hundred and fifty years of Spanish guitar, with **Pepe Romero, Eliot Fisk, Bill Kanengiser, Paul O'Dette, Hopkinson Smith, Martha Masters,** and others. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St.) (The festival runs through Feb. 8. For more information, visit www.newyorkguitarfestival.org.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Tuva, a small republic in the southern Siberian fold above Mongolia, was once known principally for its exotic postage stamps. It has since gained broader recognition through the musical ambassadors **Huun-Huur-Tu,** who practice the art of *khöömei*, or throat singing. *Khöömei* masters sing

JOHN HENDRIX

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THEY GOT THE SILVER



So what do you get for your $454.50? You get a prime ticket to see the Rolling Stones, the only band endorsed by the Queen of England, Ameriquest, and the Devil. Most of the band members are past sixty, but their new album, "A Bigger Bang," is their best in a decade or two, and their loose-limbed, smiley, staggeringly expensive show suggests that they know it. As any paying customer at Madison Square Garden can tell you—for $64.50, you get the same things, but from farther away—it doesn't so much matter how good the new album is. The set list has steered clear of darker material, including the thirty-six-year-old "Gimme Shelter" and the brand new "Sweet Neo Con"—which will please Ameriquest's investors. Still, the band sounds a lot like the Rolling Stones and the singer is undoubtedly Mick Jagger, the fittest and most energetic sixty-two-year-old in popular music. But is this popular music? Wasn't there something in the Magna Carta of pop about it being by anyone, for anyone? The tour is deeply entertaining, but it has nothing to do with pop or rock. This is money watching other money.

—Sasha Frere-Jones

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FAMILY MAN



With just under fifty photographs, Nicholas Nixon's show at the Yossi Milo Gallery probably has too many pictures, but who's complaining? Certainly not anyone who cares about the history or the future of photography, both of which Nixon is careful to keep in mind. Made between 1975 and the present, the work is almost defiantly old-school; with the exception of a few cityscapes, all of the images in the survey are eight-by-ten-inch, black-and-white contact prints made with a traditional view camera. Nixon's subjects are traditional, too: he photographs people, often his family, with a frankness that is never dispassionate. His wife and two children have aged and grown up before his lens; so have his wife's three sisters, who have posed with her every year since 1975 for group portraits that are as casual as snapshots but electric with emotion. The combination of delicacy and directness that illuminates "The Brown Sisters" series (the entire thirty-one-print set is here) informs all of Nixon's work. Whether his pictures are of people with AIDS, loving couples, the elderly, or, in an ongoing series, the terminally ill, they're all shown as if they were part of his family, with concern, candor, and love.

—Vince Aletti

in three basic styles, each of which involves the production of two to four tones simultaneously. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. Jan. 14. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
Manly sensitivity, potent vocal projection, and charisma to spare will always get you far on Broadway. On Jan. 12, **Brian Stokes Mitchell,** the toast of the Great White Way, leads off this Lincoln Center series. Jan. 13: The shows continue with **Andy Bey.** Jan. 14: The acclaimed indie rocker **Sufjan Stevens** helps draw a younger crowd. (Allen Room, Rose Hall. Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Jan. 13: The eclectic saxophonist and composer **Peter Apfelbaum,** who was recently spotted jamming at Roseland with the former Phish guitarist Trey Anastasio, leads his band New York Hieroglyphics.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Jan. 10-15: What do Jaco Pastorius, Gil Evans, and Lennon and McCartney have in common? A promising ensemble featuring the keyboardist **Gil Goldstein,** the saxophonist **Chris Potter,** and the trumpeter **Randy Brecker** radically transforms the music of these disparate composers in search of an answer.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Jan. 10-15: Music associated with two equally great and lamented masters, the vibraphonist Milt Jackson and the pianist Tommy Flanagan, receives royal treatment from the pianist **Renee Rosnes** and the vibist **Steve Nelson,** who will be backed by one of Flanagan's most acclaimed rhythm teams, the drummer **Lewis Nash** and the bassist **Peter Washington.**

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Jan. 12-15: **Wallace Roney,** a prodigious trumpeter who has shared the stage with both Ornette Coleman and Miles Davis (who remains a key influence), stops by with a quintet. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Jan. 12-14: Even New York-centric jazz fans have to give credit to Detroit, a city that has spawned scores of significant players over the years. One of the most celebrated, the multi-instrumentalist **Yusef Lateef,** who is now in his mid-eighties, presents a new work, supported by such fellow Motor City improvisers as **Ron Carter, Curtis Fuller, Charles McPherson,** and the undersung trumpeter **Marcus Belgrave,** along with the **Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Maxjazz, a smallish label with a sturdy and steadily growing roster, grabs a week to showcase its impressive artists, among them the **Dena DeRose** trio (Jan. 11), the **Jeremy Pelt** quartet (Jan. 12), the **Terell Stafford** quintet with **Carla Cook** (Jan. 13), and the **Mulgrew Miller** trio (Jan. 14).

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Jan. 10-15: Last year, on the album "Deep Song," the guitarist **Kurt Rosenwinkel** provided further evidence that he can bring flair to crafty originals as well as well-chosen standards. The saxophonist **Mark Turner,** a longtime collaborator, enlivens his quartet. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Robert Rauschenberg: Combines."** A thoroughgoing examination of Rauschenberg's poetic constructions, from the untitled 1954 combine that is believed to be his first to the series's 1964 finale, "Gold Standard." Through April 2. ♦ The small but notable exhibition **"Antonello da Messina: Sicily's Renaissance Master"** includes the masterly, enigmatic "Virgin Annunciate." Through March 5. ♦ The devotional paintings in **"Fra Angelico"** are lit up with heavenly blues, blood reds, and pure golds. Rewarding long contemplation, they can feel like love letters, passed down through the centuries from the fifteenth-century Tuscan artist. Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Santiago Calatrava: Sculpture Into Architecture."** Through March 5. ♦ **"Clouet to Seurat: French Drawings from the British Museum."** Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"David Milne Watercolors: 'Painting Toward the Light.'"** A subset of a larger show organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario, these forty-five watercolors provide a rare chance to see the work of the Canadian artist (1882-1953) outside of his home country. Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Adorning the World: Art of the Marquesas Islands"** is a small show of objects, dating from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, from the Polynesian island group that was Paul Gauguin's last home. The Marquesans embellished everything—their bodies with tattoos, pipes and musical instruments with carving, headdresses with feathers—and let little go to waste. One vitrine is filled with ornaments sculpted from the bones of enemies killed in battle. Through Jan. 15. ♦ The Costume Institute presents **"Rara Avis: Selections from the Iris Barrel Apfel Collection."** Through Jan. 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—A sickly, lonely boy who grew up roaming his parents' country estate, Odilon Redon (1840-1916) later found his métier in symbolist and decadent dream life. **"Beyond the Visible: The Art of Odilon Redon"** emphasizes the artist's debts to other blackhearted fantasists like Poe and Baudelaire, Flaubert and Goya, in charcoal drawings and lithographs tending toward the nightmarish—spiders have grinning monkey faces, eyeballs sail disembodied through dark skies, and mutant innocents are beset by monstrous shapes. Then, at the turn of the century, Redon explodes into jewel-toned oils and pastels, and the floating creatures turn aquatic, floral, angelic. Through Jan. 23. ♦ **"Pixar."** Paintings, sketches, sculptures, models, and digital installations, as well as a program of animated films, from the company that brought us "Toy Story" and "The Incredibles." Through Feb. 6. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Last chance to see the sprawling exhibition **"Russia!,"** which includes most everything you might think could fit under that rubric: gilt religious icons dating from the Middle Ages, Renaissance-era Western European paintings from imperial collections, romanticized portraits of peasant life, socialist-realist propaganda, early modernist masterworks from the collections of industrialists, videos made just this year. Through Jan. 11. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"The Art of Richard Tuttle."** The post-minimalist artist whose work helped blur the lines separating painting from sculpture from drawing, Tuttle is edging toward grand-old-man status, with a retrospective spanning from the sixties to the present. He is, of course, an odd candidate for grandeur of any kind. His wonky constructions of poor materials—cardboard, plywood, rope, the occasional twig or soda can—strenuously resist beauty, opting instead for a fey fragility that, when it works, embodies serendipity with assemblages that pit flatness against relief, poise against entropy, bright, flat color against dull or scuffed texture. When it doesn't work, the willful innocence tempts a response of the "My kid could do that" variety. Through Feb. 5. ♦ **"Follow Through,"** a "mobile audio-visual project" (not a tour!) created by the artists Jennifer Crowe and Scott Pat-

NICHOLAS NIXON, "ATLANTIC CITY, NJ" (1978)

erson, which tracks the Director's Tour of the fifth-floor permanent collection. Through Jan. 29. ♦ Ed Ruscha's **"Course of Empire"**—which shares a name and theme with Thomas Cole's 1833-36 cycle of paintings, in the New-York Historical Society's permanent collection—was a hit at the Venice Biennale and is on view at the Whitney through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Raymond Pettibon."** Thirty-seven drawings and an animated film. Through Feb. 19. ♦ The retrospective **"Oscar Bluemner: A Passion for Color"** reveals a painter (1867-1938) who melded Old World influences with an architect's training and eye—updated later by the lessons of the Fauves, Die Brücke, and artists like Franz Marc—to produce images of buildings and landscapes broken into bright structural shards, like segments of stained glass. Through Feb. 12. ♦ **"Still Life: A Vital Theme."** Through Jan. 15. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Darwin"** traces the discoveries and influence of the great naturalist (1809-82) with, among other things, a re-creation of his study, samples of fossils he collected, and live specimens of the types of tortoises, frogs, and iguanas that he encountered in his travels to the Galápagos Islands. Through May 29. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter"** is back for an eighth year. Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Vietnam: Destination for the New Millennium—The Art of Dinh Q. Lê."** Through Jan. 15. ♦ **"Rockefeller Collection in Focus: Jizo Bosatsu."** An in-depth examination of a wooden statue dating from thirteenth-century Japan. Through Jan. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Sarah Bernhardt: The Art of High Drama."** Through April 2. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 8, and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Egon Schiele,"** an exhibition of more than a hundred and fifty paintings and drawings by the Austrian artist, who died in 1918, at the age of twenty-eight. Through Feb. 20. (Open Saturdays through Mondays, and Thursdays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Peter Hujar."** Hujar (1934-1987) survives frequent comparisons to Arbus, Weegee, and Brassaï because his work is just as dark and definitive of his time and place (downtown Manhattan in the nineteen-seventies and eighties). But he adds an almost unnerving degree of soulfulness and a dead-on feel for dead-end chic, both of which are evident in his famous portrait of Candy Darling on her deathbed. A variation of that picture is in this retrospective, along with seventy-two other black-and-white prints that cover the full range of Hujar's subjects, including male and female nudes, animals, drag performers, desolate urban landscapes, and the occasional celebrity (Peggy Lee, John Waters). Curator Bob Nickas's selection may be skewed to unfamiliar images, but it captures Hujar's spirit brilliantly. Through March 6. ♦ **"Ari Marcopoulos."** Through Jan. 23. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Frequency,"** a selection of work by black emerging artists active in the U.S. Through March 12. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

LARA TOMLIN

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

NOBUYOSHI ARAKI
Japan's most prolific living photographer presents a problem for many viewers when he stages and exhibits pictures of nude women in bondage. This show confronts that problem head on, displaying large-scale black-and-white shots of trussed-up or confined women (one has been packed into a suitcase) alongside equally big color photos of flowers dripping with paint, as if to set up a dialogue on extreme erotic stylization or, perhaps, the grotesque. Araki's images of ritualized, fetishized violence might be textbook illustrations of the (often mutually) exploitative nature of the relationship between artist and model. Instructive but alarming. Through Jan. 14. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)



Camper Van Beethoven plays the Bowery Ballroom.

STANLEY BROUWN
The veteran Conceptualist Brouwn presents a series of drawings dating from 1998 to the present. He has not shown in this country since 1989, and students of European idea-performance will not want to miss the chance to see this newer work. That said, it must be admitted that there's not much "there" there. The room is hung with simple panels of white paper under glass, each marked with a few ruled lines and pencilled notations, which explain that the lines represent Brouwn's idiosyncratic units of measurement (derived from his own body) as applied to exhibition spaces in various cities where he has shown. Through Jan. 14. (Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611.)

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON
A ghostly face hovering on a dark screen—a digitized version of the actress Tilda Swinton—asks you to speak into a microphone and state your name and origins. "What are your concerns?" she asks in a clear, British-accented voice. The resulting dialogue between humans and "DiNA," as she's called, is invariably disjointed, unsettling, and amusing (particularly when she announces, "I want to be smarter than humans"). It also illuminates vividly the marvels and limitations of artificial intelligence. Other works in the show, gathered from Hershman Leeson's thirty-year career, explore the ways in which humans interface with technology, using it to improve life or destroy it, like the M16 semiautomatic rifle outfitted with interactive video that puts viewers themselves in the crosshairs. Through Jan. 14. (Bitforms, 529 W. 20th St. 212-366-6939.)

Short List

HARRY CALLAHAN: Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778. Through Jan. 21. **MARK DION:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Through Jan. 14. **NICHOLAS NIXON:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through Jan. 21.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

SUZAN FRECON
Rust, plum, mustard, moss, lapis—the colors in Frecon's big, elegantly simple abstractions fall together like swatches in a clothing catalogue. In fact, her palette derives from sources like Lascaux cave paintings and the mantles worn by Renaissance Madonnas. And in this case, somewhere between visually pleasant commodity and dematerialized essence isn't a bad place to be; Frecon's compositions, which balance the rich, earthy tones against one another in sensual curves and ruled lines, are simultaneously soothing and invigorating. Through Jan. 14. (Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

RICHARD TUTTLE
The Whitney's retrospective of Tuttle's work is complemented by this modest gathering of plywood relief paintings from the mid-sixties, a pivotal moment in his career. As with much of his post-minimalist output, the reliefs blur the boundaries between painting and sculpture. Similarly shaped objects taunt each other from locations on both floor and wall. And titles make a difference, as in the profile of a piece called "Table" that looks for all the world like a simple teal T-shape. "Fire," a loopy pink square on the floor, invokes a primordial gathering place. A cartoony plywood frame painted yellow is actually a "Flag," but, unlike the austerity of Jasper Johns's flags, Tuttle's representational complexities are playful, irreverent, and rather fun. Through Jan. 28. (Peter Freeman, 560 Broadway. 212-966-5154.)

"HAPPENSTANCE"
Nine artists from L.A. deal with accidental juxtapositions and ephemeral beauty. Michael Queenland's readymade is helpfully titled "Standing Brooms Until All or None Fall Over"; there were two up and nine down on a recent visit. Rodney McMillian makes an insolent but surprisingly painterly gesture with a big piece of very dirty beige carpet tacked to the wall. Amir Zaki manipulates—too much, perhaps—a series of photos of a house demolished in a California mudslide, but Leslie Hewitt takes it as she finds it in C-prints examining sad bits of decoration in an abandoned Chinatown apartment. Through Jan. 21. (Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290.)

GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

K. K. KOZIK
Acid urban fairy tales are Kozik's specialty, and the acidity applies whether one is referring to her tweaked, hot colors, hallucinatory details, or the mordancy in her dreams of apartment-dwellers' delight. Pajama-clad Manhattanites read the Sunday *Times* in a snow-shrouded penthouse, a giant polar-bear rug





Exhibited for the first time in twenty years, these three untitled pictures, all taken surreptitiously on Chicago city streets around 1950,

sprawled like a pet across the shaggy black carpet at their feet. A resourceful Brooklyn lunatic moon-bathes on her rooftop, and a motorcycle hobo hides out in a lamp-lit alley, incongruously embowered by rosebushes. Kozik paints with a tightly controlled, almost illustrational hand, and kooky, compressed narratives hover in her pictures. Through Jan. 23. (Black & White, 483 Driggs Ave. 718-599-8775.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
"Swan Lake" embodies everything we think of as classical ballet: hyper-acute femininity, a magical, moonlit plot, and a breathtaking score by Tchaikovsky. It also presents one of the defining technical challenges for a ballerina: the wicked sequence of thirty-two fouetté turns in her victory dance at the end of the third act. Peter Martins's 1996 version combines elements of previous versions—including the 1895 Petipa-Ivanov classic, post-Soviet variations, and the 1951 Balanchine précis—with his own ideas. He eliminated most of the mime, inserted some of his characteristic quick, complicated footwork, added abstract sets (by the contemporary Danish artist Per Kirkeby), and closed it with a new, anti-Romantic ending. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Jan. 11 at 7:30, Jan. 12-13 at 8, Jan. 14 at 2 and 8, Jan. 15 at 3, and Jan. 17 at 7:30. Through Feb. 26.)

SAVION GLOVER
The tap-dance virtuoso concludes his run at the Joyce with "Visions of a Bible," which pairs him with the soulful singer Laurie Ann Hunter. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Jan. 10 and Jan. 12-13 at 8, Jan. 11 and Jan. 14 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 15 at 2.)

FULL CIRCLE
When the husband-and-wife team of Kwikstep (Gabriel Dionisio) and Rokafella (Anita Garcia) met, they were both break-dancing on sidewalks for tips. Their journey from street to stage is explored in their latest co-creation, "Innaviews," which intersperses imaginary interview bits with high-energy dance passages. The charismatic, ultra-confident Kwikstep splices his flashy power moves together with virtuoso popping, while the limber Rokafella doubles as a kind of modern-day vaudeville comedienne. The contagious hip-hop grooves radiate unexpectedly positive vibes, while the spare workshop production puts the focus on the two hypnotic, quick-jointed stars. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Jan. 11-14 at 7:30.)

LAVA
In "(W)hole," which stands for the "(Whole) History of Life on Earth," Sarah East Johnson's troupe of female acrobats go through all kinds of hoops to present their signature balances, handsprings, and trapeze work as illustrations of geological phenomena such as magnetic polarity reversal. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 12-14 at 7 and Jan. 15 at 5. Through Feb. 19.)

DAVID GORDON AND PICK UP PERFORMANCE COMPANY
"Aristophanes in Birdonia" is Gordon's topical adaptation of "The Birds" by Aristophanes. In this Danspace Project version, Stan and Ollie, two citizens from the land of Hysterica, fed up with celebrity trials and faith-based initiatives, try to sell the birds a scheme to build a utopia in the sky. As Valda Setterfield, playing Aristophanes, dryly remarks, a living director can do as he likes with the work of a long-dead playwright. This production's primary pleasures lie in such self-reflexive gestures, amid vaudeville songs and asides, a courtly adagio for molting birds, and endless jokes about the Greek language, "cocks," and various species of titmouse. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Jan. 12-15 at 8:30. Through Jan. 22.)

EMIO GRECO/PC
The hard-hitting abstract dances produced by the Italian choreographer Emio Greco and the Dutch theatre director Pieter C. Scholten are celebrated in Europe but rarely seen here. The Amsterdam-based company's Joyce début marks the New York première of "Conjunto di Nero" (2001), a piece for six men and women in thin black woollen dresses that fit like an animal's skin. The theme is chiaroscuro: a tiny band of white light limns the bottom of the stage wall, silhouetting the dancers' ankles, or shafts of light drop from the rafters onto their bent black shoulders. At its most aggressive, Greco's movement is a fury of flailing arms, jerky necks, and twitching feet—all issuing from irreducibly upright, graceful bodies. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Jan. 17 at 8. Through Jan. 22.)

"DANCE ON CAMERA"
Highlights of the final weekend of this year's festival include a pairing of "Butterfly Lovers," a ballet film based on a Chinese fairy tale, with "Kathakali: Kalamandalam Ramankutty Nair," a documentary about the Indian dance master. "Vincent Peterson: Master of All Media" celebrates the director-choreographer. Henry Chalfant, the director of the groundbreaking 1983 hip-hop film "Style Wars," returns to the South Bronx for a deeper look into history in his new film, "From Mambo to Hip Hop." (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5600. Jan. 13-14. For a complete schedule, visit www.dancefilmsassn.org.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

NEW YORK GILBERT & SULLIVAN PLAYERS
Albert Bergeret's group—arguably the best G. & S. troupe in the country—carries the torch for the Savoy Operas; they present two of the greatest in repertory this month. Jan. 13 at 8 and Jan. 14 at 1: **"The Mikado."** ♦ Jan. 14 at 8 and Jan. 15 at 3: **"H.M.S. Pinafore."** ♦ Jan. 12 at 8: The company offers a Savoy rarity, the claustrophobic little comedy **"Trial by Jury,"** along with "Quintessential G. & S.!," a suite of favorite numbers from the various shows. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. These are the final performances.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
There was a time when such high-calibre classical composers as Copland, Thomson, and Takemitsu would take regular breaks from writing concert works to compose a movie score. John Corigliano is one of the very few to do so today; his Violin Concerto, "The Red Violin," is based on his Oscar-winning score for the film of the same name. Joshua Bell, its leading advocate, offers the New York première in a concert that concludes with Strauss's grandiloquent "Alpine Symphony"; Jonathan Nott, the young British conductor noted for his new-music expertise, leads the program. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Jan. 12 at 7:30 and Jan. 14 at 8. Note: In the first of this season's "Hear & Now" concerts, held on Jan. 17 at 6:45, the composer Steven Stucky discusses "The Red Violin" with Corigliano prior to a performance of the work with Bell, Nott, and the orchestra.)

HARMONIE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
The music of Cherubini—whom Beethoven called the greatest composer of his time—has fallen out of favor, but it combines a Mediterranean lyricism with an almost Beethovenian concentration and intensity. His seldom heard Symphony in D Major (in the Toscanini edition) highlights Steven Richman's latest program with the ensemble, which also performs Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 and the "Leonore" Overture No. 3. (Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, Madison Ave. at 73rd St. Jan. 15 at 3. No tickets required.)

VOICES OF ASCENSION
Dennis Keene's excellent downtown choir continues its season with a Bach program: the Cantata No. 147 ("Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben")



are from the series "Women Lost in Thought," by Harry Callahan (1912–99), now on view at Danziger Projects.

and a selection of choruses from the Christmas Oratorio. (Church of the Ascension, Fifth Ave. at 10th St. 212-358-1469. Jan. 17 at 8.)

RECITALS

MIDTOWN CONCERTS: MACHICOTI
The free lunchtime concert series at the Church of St. Francis of Assisi welcomes the medieval vocal trio, which will offer Spanish and French sacred music from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. (135 W. 31st St. Jan. 11 at 1:15. No tickets required.)

BARGEMUSIC
Mark Peskanov, the floating chamber-music society's executive director, performs and discusses the complete Beethoven Violin Sonatas, accompanied by the pianist Gerald Robbins. Jan. 12-13 at 7:30: Sonatas Nos. 1-5 ("Spring"). ♦ Jan. 14 at 7:30 and Jan. 15 at 4: Sonatas Nos. 6-10 (including No. 9, the "Kreutzer"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

STEPAN SIMONIAN
This impressive Armenian-Russian pianist studied not only with the piano faculty of the Moscow Conservatory but also with his grandfather—the chief conductor of the Red Army Chorus. He makes his New York recital début with a program of works by Bach, Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition"), Glinka, and George Perle. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 12 at 8.)

AVALON STRING QUARTET: "ROMANTIC FRONTIERS"
The vibrant young ensemble offers two concerts pairing music by the First and Second Viennese Schools. Jan. 12 at 8: Schoenberg's demanding First String Quartet—a fulsome farewell to late Romanticism—precedes Beethoven's first "Razumovsky" Quartet (in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1). ♦ Jan. 14 at 8: Webern's sumptuous "Langsamer Satz" (from 1905) is performed as a bridge between Beethoven's second and third "Razumovsky" Quartets. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330.)

GLASS FARM ENSEMBLE: "THREADING THE WIND"
Willy Burkhard's "Lyrische Musik," a post-Romantic homage to the poet Georg Trakl, anchors the avant-garde collective's latest concert (featuring the flutist Margaret Lancaster), a dark-hued program that also includes works by Mantovani, Shohl, and Kagel ("Phantasiestücke"). (Tenri Cultural Institute, 43A W. 13th St. 212-244-6422. Jan. 13 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
György Ligeti, one of the most engaging, dazzling, and virtuosic composers of our time, receives a worthy tribute from the society, which mounts a mini-festival of his small-scale works, performed by musicians long familiar with his music. Jan. 13 at 8: Reinbert de Leeuw conducts a chamber-orchestra program of works both nostalgic ("Old Hungarian Ballroom Dances") and challenging (the Chamber Concerto, the "Hamburg Concerto," and the fantastically complex quasi-operas "Aventures" and "Nouvelles Aventures"); the artists include the hornist William Purvis and the baritone Omar Ebrahim. ♦ Jan. 15 at 5: Pierre-Laurent Aimard performs four of the solo Études for Piano (including "Automne à Varsovie") along with the Trio for Violin, Horn, and Piano (with the violinist Mark Steinberg and the hornist Marie Luise Neunecker); the Shanghai Quartet performs the String Quartet No. 1 ("Métamorphoses Nocturnes"). ♦ Jan. 17 at 7:30: The Brentano String Quartet and the Imani Winds are featured in a concert that includes the String Quartet No. 2 and the Six Bagatelles for Wind Quintet. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

THIRD BIENNIAL GUITAR MARATHON
The world's best guitarists love to play in the warm acoustics of the auditorium at the 92nd Street Y, and a growing audience has insured that they come back. This year's focus is "450 Years of the Spanish Guitar," a daylong event embracing Renaissance, contemporary, and flamenco music performed by such artists as Pepe Romero, Paul O'Dette, Jason Vieaux, and Eliot Fisk. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Jan. 15 at 2 and 7. For complete schedule, see www.92Y.org.)

"MANUFACTURED LANDSCAPES"
The Brooklyn Philharmonic's chamber-music series, "Music Off the Walls," begins its season with a program of works by Cage, Debussy, Varèse, Theodore Wiprud, and John Luther Adams ("Drums of Winter"), designed as a pendant to the Brooklyn Museum's current show of industrial photographs by Edward Burtynsky. (Brooklyn Museum of Art, 200 Eastern Parkway. 718-488-5913. Jan. 15 at 3.)

"100 YEARS OF JUILLIARD COMPOSERS IN SONG"
Steven Blier and Michael Barrett, the directors of New York Festival of Song, reach back to the school from whence some of their best singers—and composers—have come for a concert celebrating the works of such disparate creators as Babbitt, Berio, Corigliano, Rorem, and Richard Rodgers; a clutch of songs by current students will also be included. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. 212-769-7406. Jan. 17 at 8.)

MOVIES
OPENING

APRIL'S SHOWER
The chef at a bridal shower for a lesbian couple reveals that she has been the lover of one of them, in a romantic comedy directed by Trish Doolan. Opening Jan. 13. (Quad Cinema.)

GLORY ROAD
A drama about the coach who led the all-black 1966 Texas Western basketball team to the N.C.A.A. championship. Directed by James Gartner. Opening Jan. 13. (In wide release.)

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON: THE IMPASSIONED EYE
The photographer's life and work are examined in this documentary, directed by Heinz Bütler. In English, French, and Italian. Opening Jan. 13. (Quad Cinema.)

HOODWINKED
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Jan. 13. (In wide release.)

LAST HOLIDAY
Queen Latifah plays a terminally ill woman who splurges on a vacation in Europe. Directed by Wayne Wang. Opening Jan. 13. (In wide release.)

LIBERTY STREET: ALIVE AT GROUND ZERO
A documentary, directed by Peter Josyph, about life in downtown Manhattan in the days after 9/11. Opening Jan. 12. (Pioneer Theatre.)

STATE OF FEAR
Pamela Yates directed this documentary, about the conflict between the government of Peru and the Shining Path guerrillas. In English and Spanish. Opening Jan. 11. (Film Forum.)

THAT MAN: PETER BERLIN
A documentary about the model, photographer, and gay icon Peter Berlin, directed by Jim Tushinski. Opening Jan. 13. (Cinema Village.)

TRISTAN & ISOLDE
In this medieval romance, directed by Kevin Reynolds, James Franco and Sophia Myles star as the ill-fated lovers. Opening Jan. 13. (In wide release.)

WHEN THE SEA RISES
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Jan. 13. (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOW PLAYING

BLACKMAIL
This rare silent version of Alfred Hitchcock's first talking film is a revelation. The story remains the

same—a young woman (Anny Ondra) follows a suave artist (Cyril Ritchard) to his studio; when he tries to rape her, she kills him in self-defense and says nothing when her policeman boyfriend (John Longden) is put on the case. It is Hitchcock's lifelong master plot—a woman yields to temptation and enters a vortex of calamity—but using images alone, Hitchcock tells it in a strikingly different way. He registers emotional shifts in intertitled dialogue through jolting changes of angle and, unhindered by the stage-bound methods of early sound recording, brings the film's documentary elements to the fore. The street views from aboard speeding paddy wagons and the attention to police procedural detail suggest Hitchcock's great works of decades to come, and the film's most astonishing shot—of the artist and his prey creating together on canvas an alluring portrait of a woman—shows that in 1929 Hitchcock had already found the definitive metaphor for his creative method as well as for the carnal motives behind it. Silent.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum; Jan. 12.)

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

In the summer of 1963, Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) herd the sheep on Brokeback Mountain, in Wyoming, and fall in love. Ang Lee's movie traces the ups and downs of that love over many years, making it clear that the downs are fated to outnumber the ups. The film has a curious motion to begin with, managing to seem at once hectic and sluggish; once the heroes start to grow up, however, and thus to struggle against their feelings, the story comes painfully alive, and the performances stretch toward the tragic. There is fine support from Anne Hathaway and Michelle Williams as the baffled wives of the two men and from Kate Mara as Ennis's teen-age daughter, but the picture belongs to Ledger, whose downcast gaze and chewed-up words bear almost unbearable testimony to a heart under siege. Any attempt to promote this as an issue movie, gripped by an agenda, feels badly misplaced; the only issue here is the oldest and most sorrowful one of all.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/12/05.) (In wide release.)

CACHÉ (HIDDEN)

The latest attempt on the part of the Austrian director Michael Haneke to disturb our peace. As with "Code Unknown," the story takes place in Paris and stars Juliette Binoche, whose blend of suavity and panic seems ideal for Haneke's purposes. This time, she plays Anne, whose husband, Georges (Daniel Auteuil), is a talk-show host; in the opening minutes, they receive a videotape that suggests that their lives are being scrutinized by a spy. As the fear of being watched intensifies, the secrets of Georges's past come to light, and the movie, thanks to a gentle and dismaying performance by Maurice Bénichou, as Georges's childhood acquaintance, turns into a pitiless probing of France's colonialist hangover. Some people will find it horribly harsh, especially toward the complacent Georges, and a little prior knowledge of modern French history might be useful; on its own terms, though, the film, not least in the creepiness of its open ending, remains an efficient wrecker of nerves. In French.—*A.L.* (12/26/05 & 1/2/06) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

HOODWINKED

Cory Edwards's computer-animated film is a "Rashomon"-like take on Little Red Riding Hood, with Red (voiced by Anne Hathaway), Granny (Glenn Close), the woodsman (James Belushi), and the wolf (Patrick Warburton) each telling his or her side of the story to a sly frog detective (David Ogden Stiers). The film is independently and cheaply made, and it shows: if the visuals are a little rough around the edges, the project nonetheless has the homemade and joyful tone of a high-school skit. The story is set in the cell-phone-and-personal-computer-free nineteen-seventies and features bell-bottoms, kung fu, and a clutch of songs that channel the era's hits, from ZZ Top's to Kurtis Blow's. Some of the subplots seem a bit farfetched, but when the music kicks in and the gags score—as with a banjo-bearing ram with interchangeable horns and an antically caffeinated squirrel—the film is an effervescent high for all ages.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

THE INTRUDER

Inspired by the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's essay on his experience as a heart-transplant patient, Claire Denis has made a film that attempts to convey internal experience in unmediated form. She does not succeed, but the results linger in memory nonetheless. Louis Trebor (Michel Subor) is a reclusive figure residing deep in the French countryside, a cool killer, an uncaring father, and a secretive master of international finance and intrigue. Suffering visibly from a coronary ailment, he withdraws cash from a vault in a Swiss bank to pay for a black-market heart transplant. The vast story, which passes from France and Switzerland to South Korea and Tahiti, is realized in brief, impressionistic scenes with little dialogue. Most of the film is filled with flowing imagery: close-ups of bodies, hazy natural splendors, the hypnotic passing show. Subor, an actor with an admirable way with words, is given little to say and little to do, though his brooding presence is itself a source of fascination. Denis uses images from an early film of Subor's as a sort of living memory for her own film, but the idea, though ingenious, merely makes for a late and brief adornment. The attempt to fuse narrative with what is familiarly called "experimental" cinema is unrealized. In French.—*R.B.* (Cinema Village.)



"Glory Road," directed by James Gartner and starring Josh Lucas, opens on Jan. 13.

ZOHAR LAZAR

KING KONG

The big guy is back—the same chocolate-doughnut nose, seriously mashed, as if he'd been sleeping face down in the jungle for decades, and the matted hair, worn natural as always. The director, Peter Jackson, who co-wrote the screenplay with Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens, returns the pop myth to the Depression year—1933—in which the great original, directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, was made. Naomi Watts is the blonde this time—a starving, eager-to-perform vaudeville actress. When she realizes, in the jungle, that the ape isn't going to hurt her, she does corny vaudeville stuff—cartwheels and juggling and slinky Egyptian moves—and her solitary auditor, clearly amused, grunts and snorts and shifts his weight. Jack Black, rather restrained, is the reckless huckster moviemaker Denham, and Adrien Brody is the nominal hero, though he actually receives less affection from Watts than the ape does. The original and the dreadful 1976 version were about an ape that wants a blonde and can't have her, and a woman who comes to like the big dope; this version is more an impossible match between partners equally in love. Peter Jackson is a master of brilliantly colored fantasy, but the movie, more than three hours long, stops for a dinosaur show on Skull Island, and almost every scene feels padded.—*David Denby* (12/19/05) (In wide release.)

MATCH POINT

In the opening half hour or so of Woody Allen's new movie, which sets the scene in upper-class contemporary London, the exposition feels a little lame: two impoverished outsiders—Chris Wilton (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), an Irish-born tennis pro, and Nola Rice (Scarlett Johansson), an unsuccessful young American actress—are both trying to marry into a very wealthy English family. At first, the conversational idiom is falsely debonair, the plot too easily manipulated. But then the two interlopers face each other in a bar, and the movie takes off. Rhys Meyers, who has widely spaced blue eyes and a flattened upper lip, can look angelic or brutally calculating at will. Johansson, poured into a white dress, also has an unusual upper lip, curved and fleshy, and a low, smoky voice. What follow are the most passionate and explicitly erotic love scenes that Allen has ever directed. The movie's narrative scheme becomes urgent and will-driven in the manner of Dreiser: Chris suddenly has one woman too many on his hands. Against our better instincts, we are with this cold-blooded murderer every inch of the way. With Brian Cox, Penelope Wilton, Emily Mortimer, and Matthew Goode. Shot in Belgravia and along the banks of the Thames. Enrico Caruso, on the soundtrack, sings of love and despair.—*D.D.* (1/9/06)

MR. HULOT'S HOLIDAY

People are at their most desperate when they are working at enjoying themselves; it is Jacques Tati's peculiar comic triumph to have caught the ghastliness of a summer vacation at the beach. Fortunately, his technique is light and dry slapstick; the chronicle of human foibles and frustrations never sinks to the moist or the lovable. As director, co-author, and star, Tati is sparse, eccentric, quick. It is not until afterward—with the sweet, nostalgic music lingering—that these misadventures may take on a certain depth and poignancy. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 12.)

MUNICH

Steven Spielberg's latest film begins at the Olympic Games in 1972 with the kidnapping and kill-

ing of Israeli athletes. It then follows the Israelis' plan to eliminate those whom—rightly or wrongly—they suspect of having backed the attack. Eric Bana plays a Mossad agent who, leaving behind his case officer (Geoffrey Rush) and his pregnant wife (Ayelet Zurer), heads to Europe, where a band of fellow-specialists (Ciarán Hinds, Mathieu Kassovitz, Hanns Zischler, and Daniel Craig) join him in the quest for revenge. This, for all the director's well-oiled narrative skills, is largely a matter of statistics: the film starts to drag as the team works its way through eleven specified targets (plus the slaying of a Dutch hit woman, the most gratuitous scene that Spielberg has ever devised). There has been much inflamed debate over the movie's politics, but the efforts of Spielberg and his screenwriters, Tony Kushner and Eric Roth, to strike a balance—by gesturing to Palestinian grievances or to the assassins' own qualms—leave the film looking agonized and heavy. Good intentions, and a range of strong performances, are never quite enough to quicken the pulse.—*A.L.* (12/26/05 & 1/2/06) (In wide release.)

THE NEW WORLD

On the evidence of this new film, Terrence Malick has lost none of his ability to infuriate and bewitch at the same time. His retelling of the Pocahontas story may be grounded in historical research, but it floats toward the airiness of legend. Colin Farrell plays Captain John Smith, who lands in 1607 at what will become Jamestown, Virginia. There he encounters a young tribal princess (Q'Orianka Kilcher) and falls in love with her—or, rather, with the purity of body and spirit that she enshrines. This lasts until the outbreak of hostilities between the locals and the British; with peace restored, and Smith reassigned, Pocahontas travels to England with her husband, John Rolfe (Christian Bale), and child. This final act is the consummation of the film's concerns, and of its semi-stoned amazement at the world. When Malick (with help from Mozart and Wagner) is at full blast, his peculiarities—the preference for monologue over conversation, and for lyrical meandering over forthright action—somehow fall into place.—*A.L.* (12/26/05 & 1/2/06) (Lincoln Square.)

PORK AND MILK

Valérie Mréjen has made a documentary of the rarest kind, in which the subject and the form converge. She interviews ten Israeli Jews who traded their ultra-Orthodox traditions for secular ways, and conveys their stories with long, unbroken takes, filmed at incisive angles using natural or available light. The technique holds at an analytical distance such moving tales as that of the young man who, as a child, rummaged through public garbage cans in order to read forbidden newspapers. The intimate, minimalist touches suggest the great, overarching themes without presuming to resolve them: if Mréjen's film raises provocative questions about enlightenment and art, and about what remains distinctively Jewish in the apostates' new way of life, her concentrated focus on the participants' sophisticated, self-aware discourse nonetheless points the way to tentative yet resonant answers. In Hebrew.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 12 and Jan. 16.)

THE PRODUCERS

Susan Stroman directed the smash Broadway musical that Mel Brooks (along with Thomas Meehan) adapted from his madcap 1968 film about a Broadway producer and his accountant who put on a hopefully doomed Hitler musical after learning that they'd make more money from a flop than from a hit. Stroman has now directed its film version, transferring her superb musical numbers and recapturing the brilliant performances of some of the original Broadway cast. Nathan Lane, who stars as the about-to-pop Broadway impresario Max Bialystock, and Matthew Broderick, who plays the nervous, harried accountant Leo Bloom, are a great match, gleefully lobbing verbal volleys at each other. No matter how familiar the material may seem, Stroman's intelligent direction reproduces the energy of the original.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

SYRIANA

Stephen Gaghan's tense, outrageously complicated thriller—a major film but not a great one—is about oil, a corrupted C.I.A. that strong-arms for the oil

Words on Music

Borders Pop music expert Andy Sibray says:
"Hard to imagine a finer gathering of Crescent City musical royalty than this. The performances are soulful, the emotional voltage is high and the cause is as worthy as they come."



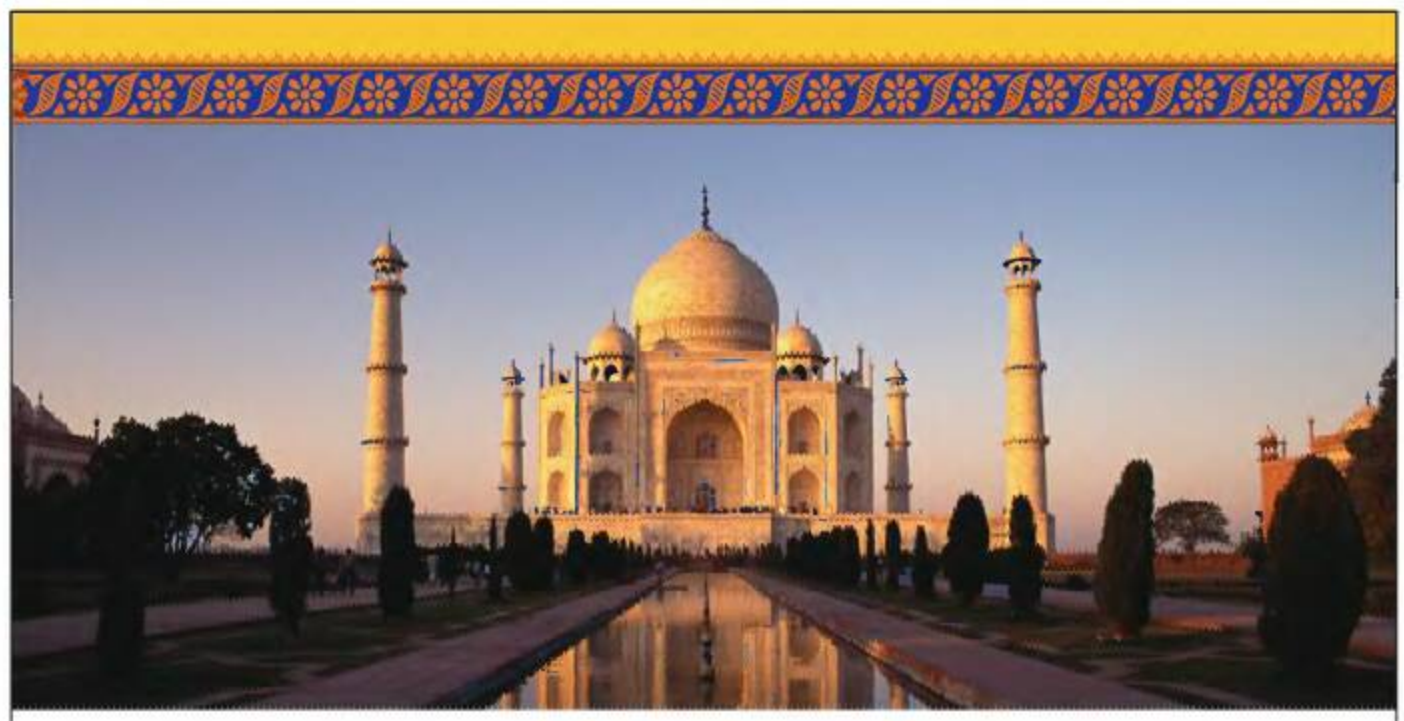
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JAZZ NOTES

Ten favorite CDs from 2005, listed alphabetically.

Dave Douglas, "Keystone" (Greenleaf): The trumpeter Douglas is one of a growing number of jazz musicians who have recently established their own Internet-only music operations. His second release on his new label is inspired by the work of the silent-film comedian Fatty Arbuckle. If the sonic connections to the great clown are blurry, Douglas's affinity for hip-hop aesthetics are clear as day, and the rhythmic strategies and production reveal an authentic understanding of the genre.

Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, "Town Hall, New York City, June 22, 1945" (Uptown Jazz): This was a momentous year for archival discoveries, as treasures by Monk, Coltrane, and Miles were released. This masterpiece gives an unexpected glimpse of a musical revolution in action: 1945 was the year bebop went public, and here we have the avatars of the style presenting the explosive new sounds live. The performances are everything you'd imagine; the vivid sound is icing on a sweet cake.

Charlie Haden/Liberation Music Orchestra, "Not in Our Name" (Verve): Like most of Haden's recent albums, this project—featuring his on-again, off-again Liberation Music Orchestra—could use more grit. But there's still enough politically inspired indignation to set off creative sparks among the bassist leader, the arranger, Carla Bley, and, especially, the many gifted soloists, including the saxophonists Tony Malaby and Chris Cheek.

Jim Hall & Enrico Pieranunzi, "Duologues" (CAM Jazz): The guitarist Hall thrives in intimate musical settings, especially in this one-on-one union. Partnering with the little-known but formidable Italian pianist Pieranunzi, Hall demonstrates his ability to say much with condensed means.

Shirley Horn, "But Beautiful: The Best of Shirley Horn" (Verve): Three previously unreleased tracks recorded at the recently deceased singer's final New York appearances, in January, 2005, elevate an already impressive collection. Each selection reveals Horn's sly way with a lyric and inimitably understated delivery, but "You Won't Forget Me," featuring a solo by her early champion Miles Davis, is time-capsule material.

Marc Johnson, "Shades of Jade" (ECM): The saxophonist Joe Lovano is in great form on the bassist Johnson's mix-and-match session with friends (the guitarist John Scofield, the drummer Joey Baron) and family (his wife, the pianist Eliane Elias). Johnson's team-player restraint and organizational smarts, as well as Lovano's sparkling contributions, make for an exceptionally polished gem.

Hank Jones, "For My Father" (Justin Time): The wizardly eighty-seven-year-old pianist Jones shows no signs of weakening as an improviser more than six decades into his career. His touch remains crystalline, his inner swing immaculate, and his interaction with the bassist George Mraz and the drummer Dennis Mackrel is a model of fluidity and trust.

Paul Motian Trio, "I Have the Room Above Her" (ECM): The guitarist Bill Frisell and the saxophonist Joe Lovano are esteemed solo artists in their own right, but it is in their ongoing work with the drummer Motian that they truly shine. Subtly probing Motian's pithy originals, this threesome remains a paragon of contemporary chamber jazz.

Kenny Wheeler, "What Now?" (CAM Jazz): The Canadian brassman Wheeler, here concentrating on the flugelhorn, has a knack for eliciting vital performances from his sidemen. The bassist Dave Holland (Wheeler's former employer), the saxophonist Chris Potter, and the pianist John Taylor form a cohesive quartet that benefits from its lack of a drummer.

Lizz Wright, "Dreaming Wide Awake" (Verve): The producer Craig Street worked wonders with Cassandra Wilson, and in the twenty-something Wright he has found another ready-to-emerge diva. It may be stretching it to label this sophomore album a pure jazz recording—the material is mostly folk, classic rock, and contemporary songcraft—but Wright's gorgeous tones and slinky way with time speak of her jazz leanings.

—Steve Futterman

companies, and the politics of the Middle East. The principal players are a large Houston-based oil concern and its Washington law firm; an emirate in the Gulf; an aging C.I.A. field operative (George Clooney); an industry analyst (Matt Damon) based in Europe; a couple of Pakistani oil workers who lose their jobs and wind up in a madrassa; and assorted terrorists, cynical bureaucrats, and bullying legal and corporate types. There is no real protagonist—or, rather, the protagonist is the oil business itself, which gets people killed, tortured, blown up, thrown on the junk heap. Gaghan constructs short, bristling scenes that often end abruptly, with nasty implications hanging in the air. He hops all over the globe, and his method makes it impossible to develop anything in depth (you really have to see this movie twice in order to fully see it once), but he has a sharp tongue, moral urgency, and an amazingly fluent way with actors. With Christopher Plummer, Jeffrey Wright, Amanda Peet, and many, many others.—*D.D.* (12/5/05) (In wide release.)

WHEN THE SEA RISES
In this artfully engaging comedy, written and directed by Yolande Moreau and Gilles Porte, Irène (Moreau) has left her family at home to go on the road with her darkly funny one-woman show, in which she dons a grotesque papier-mâché mask with beady eyes and an exaggerated beak and proclaims that she has just committed a murder. When Dries (Wim Willaert), an odd but helpful stranger, fixes Irène's broken-down car, she invites him to her show; he soon won't leave her alone. Irène's act, if a bit overplayed in the film, has a hypnotic effect, and as she and Dries start to fall for each other, the fantasy life to which she increasingly yields is well juxtaposed with the natural performances: the excellent actors capture the giddiness of relating to someone in just the right way at just the right moment. In French.—*Shauna Lyon* (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Also Playing

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE: In wide release (12/12/05). **THE FAMILY STONE:** In wide release. **WOLF CREEK:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—New Filmmakers Presents the Black Documentary Collective. Jan. 11 at 6: Short-film program. Jan. 11 at 8: Feature presentation. ♦ "Essential Cinema." Jan. 11 at 8: Short films by Jordan Belson, Bruce Baillie, and Douglass Crockwell. ♦ Jan. 12 at 8: "The Text of Light" (1974, Stan Brakhage). ♦ Jan. 14 at 8: Short films by Brakhage, Program One. ♦ Jan. 15 at 6: Short films by Brakhage, Program Two. ♦ Jan. 15 at 8: Short films by Brakhage, Program Three. ♦ Special presentation. Jan. 12 at 7: "Mr. Hulot's Holiday" (†). ♦ In revival. Jan. 13 at 7 and 9, Jan. 14-15 at 5, 7, and 9, and Jan. 16-17 at 7 and 9: "Beyond the Rocks" (1922, Sam Wood; silent).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"Essential Hitchcock." Jan. 11 at 1:30, 5:10, and 9:10 and Jan. 12 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, and 9:30: "Strangers on a Train" (1951). ♦ Jan. 11 at 3:20 and 7:10: "I Confess" (1953). ♦ Jan. 12 at 7:30: "Blackmail" (†). ♦ In revival. Jan. 13-17 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "One, Two, Three" (1961, Billy Wilder).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Feb. 28: "To Murder the Cinema: The Films of Marguerite Duras." Jan. 17 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Hiroshima Mon Amour" (1959, Alain Resnais; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Jan. 13-17: "Marjoe" (1972, Howard Smith and Sarah Kernochan). Call for showtimes.♦ "Waverly Midnights." Jan. 13-15: "Raging Bull" (1980, Martin Scorsese). ♦ "Weekend Classics." A series of films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Jan. 14-15 at noon: "The Merchant of Four Seasons" (1972; in German).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Special screening. Jan. 11 at 5: "Sátántangó," part one (1994, Béla Tarr; in Hungarian). ♦ Jan. 12 at 5: "Sátántangó," part two. ♦ Jan. 13 at 4:30, Jan. 14 at 3, and Jan. 16 at 1: "Sátántangó," parts one and two. ♦ Through Jan. 25: "Asian Cinevisions." Jan. 11 at 8:30: "Incense" (2003, Ning Hao; in Mandarin). ♦ Through Feb. 6: "Pixar: 20 Years of Animation." Jan. 12 at 5 and Jan. 13 at 8:30: "Toy Story 2" (1999, John Lasseter) and short films. ♦ Jan. 16 at 8: "Monsters, Inc." (2001, Pete Docter) and short films. ♦ "Early Autumn: Masterworks of Japanese Cinema in the National Film Center, Tokyo." All films are in Japanese. Jan. 12 at 7: "A Fugitive from the Past" (1965, Tomu Uchida). ♦ Jan. 13 at 5:45: "A House in the Quarter" (1963, Tomotaka Tasaka). ♦ Jan. 14 at 2: "Love Under the Crucifix" (1962, Kinuyo Tanaka). ♦ Jan. 14 at 4:30: "The Born Fighter" (1966, Seijun Suzuki). ♦ Jan. 16 at 6: "Wolf, Pig and Man" (1964, Kinji Fukasaku). ♦ "Gregory La Cava: An Encore Presentation." Jan. 14 at 6:30 and Jan. 15 at 3: "The Half-Naked Truth" (1932). ♦ Jan. 14 at 8 and Jan. 15 at 5: "Bed of Roses" (1933).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Best of Stash 2005." Jan. 13 at 7:30: An international program of short animated and graphic-arts films. ♦ "New York Film Critics Circle Series." Jan. 14 at 1: "Hamsun" (1996, Jan Troell; in Norwegian, Swedish, German, and Danish). Screening introduced by Peter Rainer. ♦ Jan. 14-15 at 4: "Naked Lunch" (1991, David Cronenberg). The Jan. 15 screening will be introduced by Stuart Klawans. ♦ Jan. 14-15 at 6:30: "The Man Who Fell to Earth" (1976, Nicolas Roeg). The Jan. 14 screening will be introduced by Stephen Whitty.

PIONEER CINEMA
155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300)—"Bizarro Monday." Jan. 16 at 7: Clayton Patterson presents archival night-club footage shot in the nineteen-eighties.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Jan. 13-15: "The Muppet Movie" (1979, James Frawley).

THALIA CINEMA
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Bearing the Unbearable: Israeli and Palestinian Films about the Conflict." Jan. 15 at 4: "Divine Intervention" (2002, Elia Suleiman; in Arabic,

Hebrew, and English). ♦ Jan. 15 at 5:45: "Checkpoint" (2003, Yoav Shamir; in Hebrew). ♦ Jan. 17 at 6: "The Inner Tour" (2001, Ra'anan Alexandrowicz; in Arabic and Hebrew). ♦ Jan. 17 at 7:45: "Until When" (2004, Dahna Abourahme; in Arabic).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Jan. 26: "The New York Jewish Film Festival." Jan. 11 at 1:30 and 9:15: "Golub: Late Works Are the Catastrophes" (2004, Jerry Blumenthal and Gordon Quinn). ♦ Jan. 11 at 3:30 and Jan. 12 at 1 and 6:15: "Belzec" (2005, Guillaume Moscovitz; in Polish, French, and Hebrew). ♦ Jan. 11 at 6:15: "Live and Become" (2005, Radu Mihaileanu; in Amharic, French, and Hebrew). ♦ Jan. 12 at 3:30 and 8:45 and Jan. 16 at 8:15: "Pork and Milk" (†) and "Keep Not Silent: Ortho-Dykes" (2004, Ilil Alexander; in English and Hebrew). ♦ Jan. 14 at 7, Jan. 15 at 8:15, and Jan. 17 at 6:15: "Rosehill" (2004, Mari Cantu; in Hungarian). ♦ Jan. 14 at 9:15, Jan. 15 at 5:45, and Jan. 17 at 8:30: "Only Human" (2004, Dominic Harari and Teresa de Pelegrí; in Spanish). ♦ Jan. 15 at 1: "The Living Orphan" (1939, Joseph Seiden; in Yiddish). ♦ Jan. 15 at 3:15 and Jan. 16 at 3:30: "Best Sister" (2005, Ira Wohl). ♦ Jan. 16 at 12:30: A program of silent films featuring Sarah Bernhardt. ♦ Jan. 16 at 6: "A Cantor's Tale" (2005, Erik Greenberg Anjou). ♦ Jan. 17 at 3:30: "The Two Lives of Eva" (2005, Esther Hoffenberg; in French, English, and German). ♦ "Dance on Camera Festival 2006." Jan. 13-14 at 1: "Kathakali: Kalamandalam Ramankutty Nair" (2005, Adoor Gopalakrishnan). ♦ Jan. 13 at 3:30: Program Five, short films. ♦ Jan. 13 at 6:15: "Vincent Paterson: Master of All Media," film clips and discussion. ♦ Jan. 13 at 8:30: Program Fourteen, including "From Mambo to Hip Hop" (2005, Henry Chalfant). ♦ Jan. 14 at 3:30: "Been Rich All My Life" (2005, Heather Lyn MacDonald).

READINGS AND TALKS

DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

The author of "Infinite Jest" reads from his latest collection of essays, "Consider the Lobster." (Strand Bookstore, Broadway at 12th St. No tickets necessary. Jan. 11 at 6:30.)

"EAT, DRINK & BE LITERARY"

The dining and reading series at the BAM Café, in which dinner, wine, tax, and tip are included in the price of admission, gets under way for the season as Kurt Andersen interviews the writer Gish Jen, who will also read from her work. (30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-3100. Jan. 12 at 6:30.)

"HOMER'S LIVING ILIAD"

A twelve-hour reading of the Greek epic, presented by the Dahesh Museum of Art and the Readers of Homer, a nonprofit group that has arranged similar events across the country. (Madison Ave. at 56th St. For registration, which is required, call 212-759-0606, ext. 244. Jan. 14, starting at 10 A.M.)

MATTHEW BOGDANOS

In the new book "Thieves of Baghdad," the Marine colonel recounts his efforts to recover stolen Iraqi antiquities following the U.S. invasion. On Jan. 17 at 6:30 he goes into detail at the Explorers Club. (46 E. 70th St. 212-628-8383.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

WALDMAN'S FOLLY

After the Secretary of State William H. Seward arranged for the U.S. to buy Alaska from Russia in 1867, the sizable purchase of frozen land became known as "Seward's Folly." That was long before statehood, the discovery of oil, and the arrival of Ken Waldman, a self-proclaimed fiddling poet. Waldman, a former college professor and Philadelphia native, moved to Alaska twenty years ago and has been a travelling minstrel for more than ten years. He brings his instrument, a few fellow-musicians, and his poems about surviving a plane crash (locals once called him "a walking dead man"), watching grizzlies feed in a garbage dump, and other adventures in the forty-ninth state to the Living Room on Jan. 16 at 7. (154 Ludlow St. 212-533-7235. For more information, visit www.kenwaldman.com.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Christie's begins the post-Christmas crescendo with one of its moderately priced House Sales on Jan. 10-11, followed by a two-part sale of American Indian art on Jan. 12. The first session of that sale—featuring two hundred lots from a private collection—contains such important pieces as a Navajo man's handspun wearing blanket with indigo stripes and a set of five shields painted with symbolic animal images; the impressive selection of garments includes a deep-red European-style frock coat decorated with beaded buffalo-hide stripes, reportedly worn by Old Joseph, a Nez Percé chief, at the signing of an 1855 treaty marking the creation of the Nez Percé reservation in the Pacific Northwest. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Swann presents its annual Discovery Sale on Jan. 12, a selection of reasonably priced prints and drawings ranging from Old Masters to contemporary works. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ Bargain hunters can also head to **Doyle**, which is presenting one of its occasional Doyle at Home sales—an auction of furniture and decorations—on Jan. 11. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)



MICHAEL WELDON

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
GOLIJOV UNBOUND
Jan. 22–Feb. 21

Osvaldo Golijov's music reflects his international background: he was raised in Argentina by Eastern European Jewish parents and came to the United States in his mid-twenties. Lincoln Center now honors Golijov with a festival that includes the opera "Ainadamar," the song cycle "Ayre," and the "Passion According to St. Mark"; the performers include the soprano Dawn Upshaw and the St. Lawrence String Quartet. (212-721-6500.)

THE THEATRE
HARE TODAY
Feb. 2

Cynthia Nixon, John Slattery, and Tyne Daly star in "Rabbit Hole," a new play by David Lindsay-Abaire ("Fuddy Meers"), presented by Manhattan Theatre Club. Daniel Sullivan directs. (212-239-6200.)

NIGHT LIFE
CAN YOU DIG IT?
Feb. 2

Who is the man who's gone from Stax to South Park? Isaac Hayes, that's who—the soul legend has recently released a retrospective collection, and he brings "The Theme from 'Shaft'" and other twentieth-century classics to Irving Plaza. (212-777-6800.)

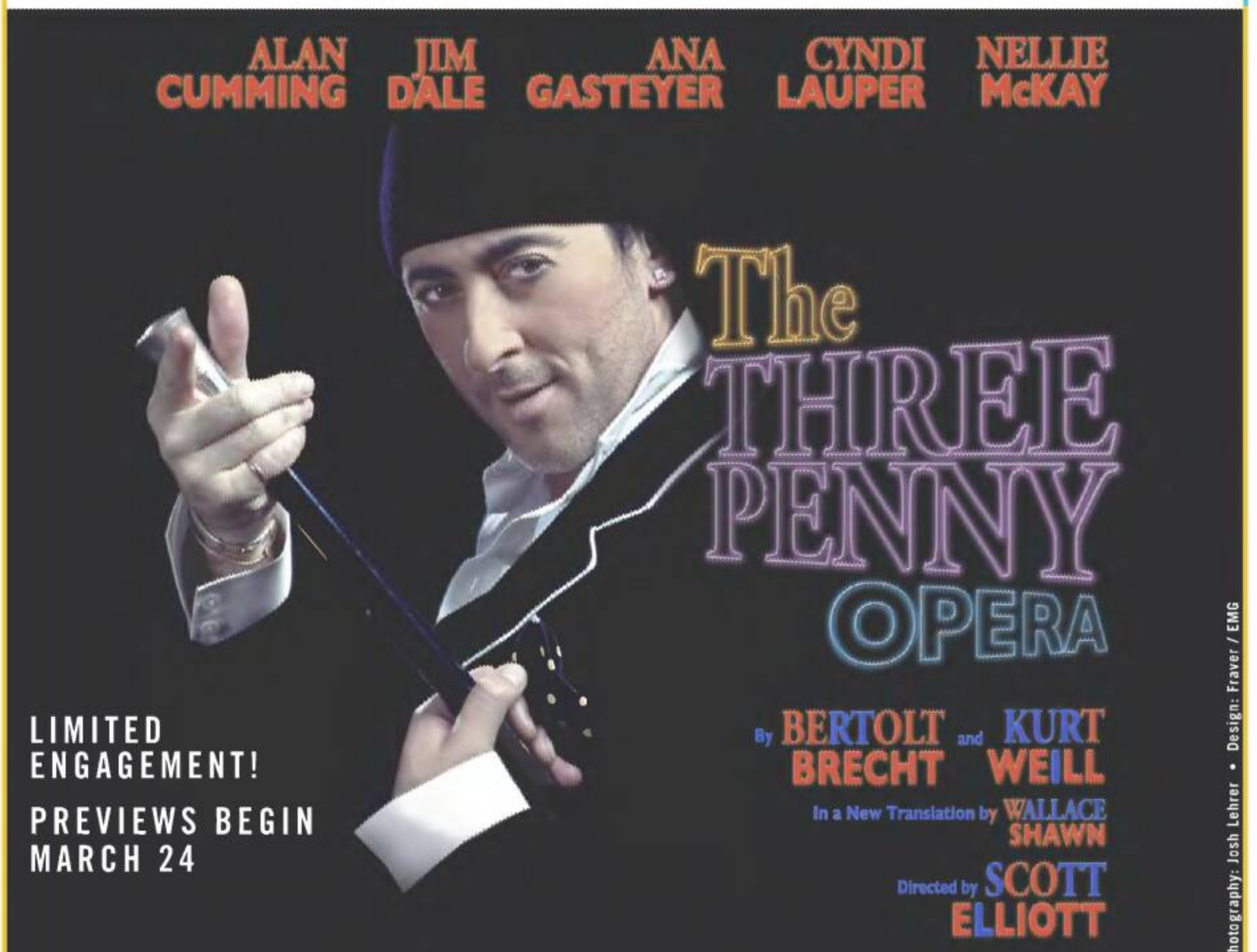
MOVIES
MONSTERS, PLUS
Feb. 3–9

Justly famed as Frankenstein's monster, Boris Karloff was an actor of far wider range, as this Film Forum series reveals. Along with the original "Frankenstein" and "The Mummy," the series features such non-monster masterworks as Howard Hawks's "The Criminal Code" and John Ford's "The Lost Patrol," about a dozen British soldiers on a doomed mission in the Mesopotamian desert. (212-727-8110.)

ART
"DAY FOR NIGHT"
March 2–May 28

The Whitney Biennial has always been a free-ranging show, embracing all manner of media and philosophies. This year, under the guidance of the curators Chrissie Iles (a veteran of the 2004 Biennial) and Philippe Vergne, it will be geographically broader as well, reflecting an art world less and less bound by the constraints of borders and nationalities. (800-944-8639.)

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
ABRAMOFFED



If present trends continue, and if ordinary Americans follow the inspiring example set last week by their elected leaders, 2006 should be a record year for charitable giving. President Bush himself led the way with a six-thousand-dollar donation to the American Heart Association. Capitol Hill Republicans rushed to join the philanthropic parade. Democrats got caught up in the spirit, too, though it must be said that their donations were not nearly as numerous or, on the whole, as generous as those of their colleagues across the aisle. And, almost without exception, the gifts have gone to charities located in the states or districts represented by the givers, where they can do a little good for somebody besides the recipients. Still, what an outpouring! In just four days, according to figures collected by the Associated Press, sixty-five members of the 109th Congress contributed some four hundred and fourteen thousand dollars for the relief of the less fortunate. Were they to keep up the pace for the remaining fifty-one weeks of 2006, their collective charitable giving would add up to about twenty-one million dollars—enough to make up for more than four years' worth of the cuts their latest budget made to the Mine Safety and Health Administration.

But of course they won't keep up the pace. The charitable outgo corresponds, dollar for dollar, to the political income from campaign contributions received from or arranged by Jack Abramoff, the lobbyist, who, at the beginning of the week, pleaded guilty to five federal felonies, including fraud, tax evasion, and conspiracy to bribe public officials. How many decades Abramoff spends in jail will depend on how comprehensively he tells the Justice Department's prosecutors about the details of his "lobbying," particularly with respect to the public officials he conspired to bribe—some of whom, it may be assumed, were among last week's Ladies Bountiful. Not empathy but embarrassment (coupled, in some cases, with outright fear) was the motive behind the munificence.



The Abramoff affair, according to the Washington *Post*, is potentially "the biggest congressional corruption scandal in generations." But what kind of corruption scandal? Abramoff, Bush told Fox News, "was an equal money dispenser." The scandal, numerous commentators have assured us, is "bipartisan." Was he? Is it? Well, that depends on your definitions, and your measurements.

If a scandal is defined as an unusually egregious display of squalor that sooner or later involves prosecutors and indictments, then this one is as Republican as privatized Social Security. By the charitable giveback standard, it's either eighty per cent Republican and twenty per cent "bipartisan" (i.e., Democratic) or 83–17, as measured by, respectively, the party affiliations of the givers-back and the aggregate amounts they let go of. By the standard of straight (apparently legal) campaign contributions, the scandal is sixty-four per cent Republican: of the $5.3 million Abramoff funnelled to candidates and PACs through clients and associates from 1999 through 2004, "only" $1.9 million went to Democrats. But Abramoff, who is forty-six, has been a Republican operative since his college days. Every cent of his personal political giving—two hundred thousand dollars since 2000—has gone to Republicans. He is a Bush-Cheney "Pioneer," meaning he raised more than a hundred grand for the ticket. The shin-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



ier baubles—skybox fund-raisers, jobs for wives, lavish golfing trips, meals at Abramoff's upscale restaurant—went almost exclusively to Republicans, especially those in the circle of Tom DeLay, the suspended House Majority Leader. And of those fingered in the Abramoff indictments as being involved in unlawful activities, from Abramoff himself to "Representative #1" and "Staffer B," one hundred per cent are Republicans.

Abramoff was the apotheosis of the "K Street Project," a highly successful, years-long effort to turn the capital's "lobbying community" into a Republican auxiliary, by pressuring lobbying firms and trade associations to support a broad conservative agenda, hire only Republicans, and give money overwhelmingly to Republican politicians. In some ways, the K Street Project is a national, and grander, version of the big-city political machines of old. But those machines, corrupt though they were, had their Robin Hood aspects. The pols got the graft and the diamond-stickpin boys got the contracts, but the poor got turkeys, jobs, and, sometimes, genuinely useful public programs. The K Street Project is strictly Sheriff of Nottingham. K Street, by its nature, promotes the interests of the rich, especially the well-organized corporate rich: they're the only ones who can afford its services. The lobbyists' alliance with the dominant wing of the Republican Party is a near-perfect match. The reigning conservative ideologues in the White House and on Capitol Hill believe, with apparent sincerity, that the path to economic and social progress for all is to reward—"incentivize"—the rich and to liberate private business from the wealth-destroying fetters of regulation. When these become the highest purposes of public policy, and when the ameliorative functions of government are held in contempt, then a single thread ties together upper-income tax cuts, the dismantling of environmental and safety protections, the shredding of the social safety net, the peopling of regulatory agencies with cronies hostile to their purposes, and, finally, outright corruption. If government is seen as a whore, why not treat her like one? All that remains is to fleece the johns and divide the take.

The attractions of a K Street sinecure are actually more perilous to the souls of Democrats, who are supposed to be tribunes of "working families." Still, many of them succumbed to its lure when their party was in power. (Some still do, in the unlikely event that they can get a job there.) But hypocrisy tinges their prosperity with shame. No such guilt need trouble those whose ideology glorifies Mammon as a matter of course. And a legislator who identifies wealth with virtue but is condemned, for the time being, to live on the salary of a public servant may come to see the lobbyist's skybox as his natural habitat.

The genius of the K Street Project goes beyond a ruthless willingness to use all the powers that come with control of every branch of government. K Street has also helped to cement the alliance between economic and social conservatives, who have different (and, in some cases, potentially incompatible) priorities. It is no accident, as the Marxists used to say, that Grover Norquist, the little Lenin of the anti-tax movement, and Ralph Reed, the conservative Christianist operative turned candidate for lieutenant governor of Georgia, were among Abramoff's closest collaborators. Partly as a result, K Street cash subsidizes faith-based politics, and the abolition of the inheritance tax has become a sacrament.

"The scandal is not what's illegal. The scandal is what's legal." So goes Michael Kinsley's Law of Scandal, handed down many years ago by the iconoclastic writer. By this definition—probably the more pertinent one—the Abramoff affair is not just a Republican scandal, and not just a "bipartisan" one, either. It's simply the moment's most visible excrescence of a truly national scandal: the fearful domination of private money over the public interest. And it's going to take something a lot more serious than the fall of Jack Abramoff—or an outbreak of bogus charity—to fix it.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

MASCOT DEPT.

FROG TALE



A rumor came around recently that the employees at Bloomberg LP, the financial-information company that Michael Bloomberg founded and still owns, have adopted, as an unofficial corporate mascot, an albino frog. Word had it that the frog is a killer. Mike Bloomberg loves tropical fish and has long maintained aquariums in his company's offices around the world, as well as at home and at City Hall. According to the story, this frog had been introduced to a tank or two at global headquarters here in New York and had devoured all the other inhabitants, and, as a result, had earned the esteem and even the empathy of the humans in the building, who were perhaps eager to think that to gather financial news you need to be voracious,

even deadly. This seemed plausible. The Mayor, anyway, has something froggy in his face, a fly-eater's permanent grimace.

A white frog. Herman Melville had some interesting things to say about whiteness. Melville wrote, in "Moby-Dick," that for all the associations the color white has "with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood."

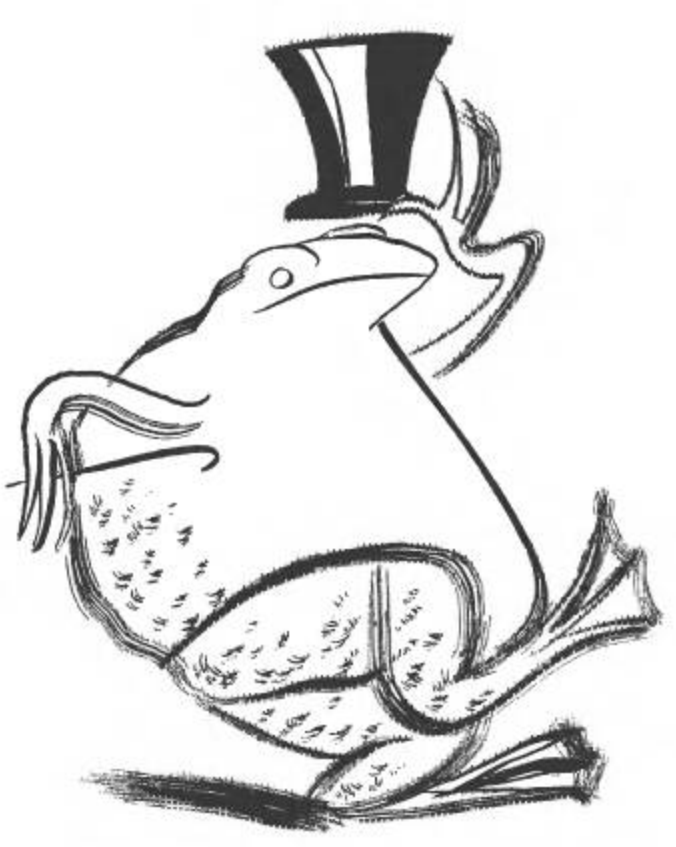
And so, off to see the watery part of the world, or at least the watery part of Bloomberg's new headquarters, at Fifty-ninth Street and Lexington Avenue. All the walls are glass, and there are luminous fish tanks everywhere—seventeen in all. The theme is transparency, but, of course, the effect, if you are in an aquarial frame of mind, is that even the humans begin to seem like fish, especially when you see them convening in conference rooms, in their colorful shirts and blouses. You can't hear them. They don't move much. They are nibbling on things. You half expect a giant hand to appear overhead, sprinkling down pretzels and chips.

Bloomberg LP employs four people full time to look after the tanks. One of them is Scott Williams, who first discovered the frog. The frog is a foundling. One day four years ago, a new shipment arrived—a box full of fish, each in a plastic baggie of water. The frog, in a baggie of its own, was wedged among them. No one had ordered it. But Williams felt that the frog needed a home.

Williams did a little research and learned that it was an albino clawed frog, *Xenopus* ("strange foot") *laevis*, native to southern Africa. *Xenopus laevis*, on occasion, will eat its young; it was the first vertebrate to be cloned and has flown aboard the space shuttle. For decades, it was used to detect pregnancy (a pregnant woman's urine, injected into a female frog, would induce the frog to lay eggs). From the bump on its tail pillar, Williams could tell that this one was female. He named it Ronnie, after one of his bosses, a man named Ron Godsey, who works "in facilities."

The other day, Williams, under the watchful eye of Judith Czelusniak, the company's communications director, took a visitor to see the frog. Ronnie lives in a koi pond, near the desk of the company's chairman, Peter Grauer, who, like everyone, works out in the open (and who, like everyone, thinks that Ronnie is a male). The pond is a giant oblong tank, about thigh-deep, containing a thousand gallons of fresh water and some two dozen hoagie-size koi. The frog was in a corner, hovering near the bottom. She was about the size of a fist. Her legs were outstretched. Her feet were webbed and clawed; her hands, which consisted of three long digits each, were not. She was, frankly, hideous—pallid and swollen, as though she'd been soaking for a week in old milk. She brought to mind Leigh Bowery, lounging nude in a Lucian Freud painting, or a corrupt, gluttonous alderman as depicted by Thomas Nast.

Williams sprinkled some protein pellets into the water. After a while, the frog rose to the surface, grabbed hold of a pellet with both hands, and shoved it into her mouth. This seemed the right time to broach the subject of Ronnie's reputation as a killer. Czelusniak and Williams looked at each other.



"I've never heard that," Czelusniak said.

Williams pointed out that the koi were much bigger than the frog, and said, "She can only eat what she can fit in her mouth." The smaller fish at Bloomberg were all in saltwater tanks, anyway.

Czelusniak explained the frog's appeal with a statement that sounded like a little poem:

"People are amazed / To see a frog / In a pond / In an office."

A pair of Bloomberg employees walked up.

"That's the frog?" one said.

"She looks like chicken," said the other.

"Very unattractive."

"Oh, come on," Czelusniak said.

—Nick Paumgarten

UP FOR GRABS

WANNA BUY A BRIDGE?



Hi, Mr. Vandemark? Are you there? . . . Can you pick up? . . . I guess you're not there. O.K., this is the Talk of the Town Realty Office. I'm still working on apartments for you and Mrs. Vandemark, but something else just came up that I thought, maybe, might really work for you. I remember you said you had an island—Maine, or somewhere?—and I wonder, is this island by any chance either three hundred and one feet or two hundred and forty-four feet from the shore? Because if it is I have a really unique property. Actually, it's more of an accessory. Anyway, it's a bridge. The Willis Avenue Bridge. New York City is selling the Willis Avenue Bridge. For a dollar. First New York City bridge ever offered for sale, far as anyone knows, and I wouldn't advise holding your breath for the next one. The kicker? Delivery anywhere within fifteen miles of its present site, at 125th Street and the Harlem River, is free. Comes in sections on a barge. I'm thinking this bridge might make a terrific approach to your island. Think how 6,213 tons of steel and 29,546 cubic yards of masonry would look in Penobscot Bay. Is that a statement, or what?

I know you're probably thinking, What's wrong with the bridge that the city's selling it? Nothing, they're just replacing it, starting in 2007. According to Iris Weinshall, the commissioner of the city's Department of Transportation, the city usually dismantles a property like this one, "decomposes" it, she says, but since some of the funds for the new bridge are coming from the federal and state governments, the city's required to try and find a new use for it. It's old—it opened in 1901—and it needs some attention, but it handles so much traffic that the city can't shut it down to repair it. The

new Willis Avenue Bridge, by the way, will occupy space beside the old one. It's the first time the city is building what the Commissioner calls an "in kind" bridge.

I know you're also wondering what it looks like. To be honest, it's an unusual-looking structure. It's a swing bridge—it opens for traffic on the river—so it's in two sections, which is why I mentioned the footage, and it looks a little like two different bridges that weren't really meant to go together. In real estate we call this charm, but I guess when it opened some guy named Livingston Schuyler wrote that it had an "adventitious ugliness," whatever that means. He also wrote, "One says, with confidence, that the arrangement would be intolerable to a designer of any aesthetic sensibility." I know, not good, but you have to bear in mind they had different standards then. "People usually think of the bridges on the East River as the city's jewels," Commissioner Weinshall says. "The Harlem River bridges are the city's workhorses."

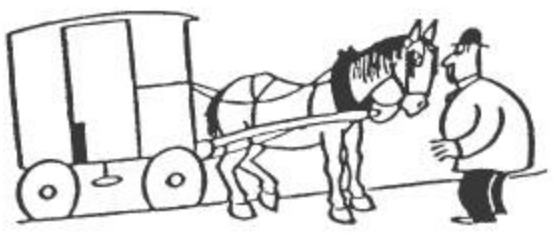
Commissioner Weinshall says she hasn't got any calls on the bridge yet, but I doubt it'll last, not in this market. She thinks any civilian interested might be up against someone in the federal highway department who has a bridge to put up and thinks, Why pay for a new bridge? Why not install this historic one?

I'll mention the one stipulation the Commissioner imposed and then I'll hang up: if you purchase the bridge and take it past the fifteen miles, it's yours. "No bringing it back," she says. "We don't want people knocking on our door in a couple of years saying, 'We tried it. It didn't work.' "

Let me know if you want pictures. Buh-bye.

—Alec Wilkinson

HERE TO THERE
MUNICIPAL VELVET



What's black, brown, or white and guaranteed, by local law, an accommodation with a nine-foot-high ceiling, along with free access to a bucket of water and mineralized red salt? A carriage horse, of course, any one of the two hundred and four that are licensed to work (if the temperature is between twenty and ninety degrees) in New York City. This wasn't always so. In the late eighteen-hundreds, when the town counted some two hundred thousand steeds on its streets, it was common to encounter manure mixed with snow, or carcasses rotting in public view. And so the news, last week, of a grisly animal-car collision on Ninth Avenue, near the site of the old American Horse Exchange, felt strangely out of time, as if the neat and virtual New York of the Bloomberg era had reverted, for a moment, to the brutish, bricks-and-mortar one of Boss Tweed.

In order to drive a horse-drawn carriage, one must complete a home-study course given by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Last week, an aspiring coachwoman scoured the city's official Web site, finding no sign of equine driver's ed. She called the D.O.H.M.H., veterinary division, to ask about registering for the course. The world of the urban horse-drawn carriage, it turns out, is an almost completely seamless anachronism. "You just come here in person, and we take care of it," the person who answered said. "You'll need a money order in the amount of twenty-five dollars."

The applicant set out for Room 1522 of 220 Church Street, where she was handed two booklets: "Rules of the Road" and "Horse Drawn Carriage Operator's Course Training Manual," which featured the silhouette of a buggy and top-hatted driver on its cover and a quaint *Old Farmer's Almanac*-ish font. Applicants were to come back on the seventeenth to watch an educational video. The morning after, there would be a written test, and later that day, for those who had passed, the "practical." Another registrant, a Nigerian physician who had never been on a horse, was alarmed to discover that the afternoon exam involved actual horse-driving. He tried to reassure himself. "It is easy—all you do is direct the animal," he said. "Plus, there is money in it."

Prospective drivers had two weeks to acquaint themselves with the full-page diagram "Parts of a Horse," not to mention more advanced topics: "Deworming and Parasite Control," "Nasal Discharge," and "What to do if your horse is lame." There were Norfolk harnesses and modern-shaft harnesses to master, horse fevers, sole abscesses, hitching techniques, and review questions—"List four steps to take if your horse bites a person"—at the end of each unit. A glance at the index attested to the manual's scope: "teeth, temperature, Tetanus, Theater District, Thrush."

On a key issue, however, the curriculum seemed skimpy. "The following is an incomplete list of things that alarm horses," one section warned. (Steer clear of wooden plank bridges, hay balers, and marching bands.) A call was made to Cornelius Byrne, who, along with his brother Patrick, owns Central Park Carriages, the current incarnation of the horse company that his forebears founded in 1848, upon arriving from County Mayo. (Their business was funeral processions. Back then, it took three days to get from Far Rockaway to the cemeteries in Woodside.)

Byrne offered some veteran's wisdom, won over four decades of driving a horse in the city. "One of the things horses are most afraid of is garbage trucks," he said. "They have an odor to them and a noise to them and a size to them." He went on, "Many years ago, there was a slaughterhouse on Eleventh Avenue. Horses didn't like that, either." He mentioned that novice drivers are usually paired with especially docile horses. "We call them bombproof."

The official operator's manual has a section called "Dealing with Hostile People," which asserts that "in New York City, it is common for strangers to approach drivers and begin loud and/or hostile criticism of the carriage horse industry." Here was a subject any New Yorker could ace. "Smile and ignore them," the answer goes.

Byrne said that the people he carts around are the best part of the job. "People who ride in carriages are pretty happy," he said. "People who ride in cars are never that joyous." But he did have one thought about how to burnish the trade's image. "There's a lot of credit to be taken for doing things nice. We're not allowed to have advertisers, but a corporate sponsor would be really welcome to this business." And, just like that, it was back to the year 2006.

—Lauren Collins

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
LIFERS

In the summer of 2004, at the Republican National Convention, President Bush declared that the rules of the American job market had changed for good. "The workers of our parents' generation typically had one job, one skill, one career, often with one company," he said. "Today, workers change jobs, even careers, many times during their lives." Job instability has become a consistent source of anxiety for American workers: one recent poll found that forty-six per cent of respondents worried that a member of their household would be out of work in the near future. And that anxiety—magnified by major layoffs in the past year at companies like Hewlett-Packard and General Motors—has a lot to do with why, despite brisk economic growth and low rates of unemployment and inflation, most Americans remain pessimistic about the economy.

Yet the surprising reality is that long-term employment hasn't disappeared at all. It's certainly easier than it once was (and more common) for people to move from job to job, but when you look at the economy as a whole, little has changed. For instance, a recent study by Ann Huff Stevens, a labor economist at the University of California at Davis, compares the careers of older men in 1969 to those of older men in 2002, looking at how many years members of each group spent working at the job they held the longest. In 1969, the average was 21.9 years; in 2002, it was 21.4 years. In 1969, slightly more than half of the men had held one job for at least twenty years, and the proportion was almost identical in 2002. In the same vein, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has found that median job tenure among all workers over the age of twenty-five has fallen only slightly since the early eighties. And a 1999 study of fifty-one major corporations found that the percentage of employees with more than ten years of service increased in the nineties.

What, then, is fuelling the overwhelming sense of job insecurity? In part, it's that a few high-profile examples tend to sway opinion more than broader statistics do. (Psychologists call this the "salience bias.") The downsizing at big companies like A.T.&T. in the early nineties was taken as proof of an economy-wide transformation, even though those job losses, in the context of the total U.S. economy, were small. Furthermore, our view of the golden age of lifetime employment is skewed: the average American worker in 1978 had held ten different jobs before retiring. This doesn't mean that long-term jobs are as easy to come by as they once were—less-educated workers, in particular, have more trouble finding and keeping jobs today. But the changes in job tenure are more media myth than workplace reality.

American workers do, though, have



plenty of other reasons for feeling anxious. Although the way companies hire and fire has not changed much, there have been dramatic changes in the kinds of risk that individual workers have to bear. Corporations have scaled back on benefits, most notably health coverage and pensions. The percentage of companies that offer health benefits to their employees has dropped thirteen per cent in the past five years, and even employees who are covered now generally pay more of their own costs. With pensions, the shift has been fundamental: defined-benefit plans, in which companies guarantee a set payout to employees, have been gradually replaced with defined-contribution plans, like 401(k)s. (Just last week, I.B.M. announced that it would stop contributing to employee pensions in 2008.) With a defined-benefit plan, the company assumes the risk of investing assets, absorbing the impact of market downturns, but with a 401(k) it is entirely up to the employee to prosper or plummet. Compounding these problems is the fact that the workforce has become increasingly stratified. Companies now tie compensation more closely to performance, so that people at the top take home much more, relative to their colleagues, than did the high-fliers of thirty-five years ago.

Meanwhile, the risk exposure of anyone unfortunate enough to lose a job has soared. People who are unemployed stay unemployed, on average, about fifty per cent longer now than they did in the seventies, and only about half as many receive unemployment insurance as did so in 1947. Furthermore, the explosion in health-care costs means that the consequences of forfeiting company health insurance are graver than ever. So even though incomes have risen over the past three decades, they fluctuate much more than they once did. Economists estimate that income volatility is about twice what it was in the early seventies.

Some of these changes make good business sense. But cumulatively they add up to what Jacob Hacker, a political scientist at Yale, calls "the great risk shift." The underlying problem is that workers are not being compensated with higher wages for taking on all this new risk. Real wages for the eighty per cent of Americans whom the government labels "production and nonsupervisory workers" have actually fallen since 2001, and, even after a burst of growth in the late nineties, the average household income is only slightly above where it was in 1973. This, and not rates of lifetime employment, is the true difference between employment today and in the sixties. Back then, real wages grew steadily year after year, rising roughly in tandem with productivity. Today, real wages are stagnant, and most of the economy's gains in productivity are going to shareholders or to people at the top of the corporate pyramid. More risk, less reward: now, that's something to worry about.

—James Surowiecki

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ANNALS OF LAW

NAME THAT *SOURCE*

Why are the courts leaning on journalists?

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

On December 16th, the *Times*, citing anonymous government officials, reported that the National Security Agency has engaged in extensive, warrantless wiretapping of American citizens in a secret program authorized by President Bush in 2002. At a press conference three days later, the President defended the eavesdropping. "We're at war, and we must protect America's secrets," he said, adding that the *Times*' sources, by disclosing the program, had committed a "shameful act" that had undermined American security. By the end of December, the Justice Department had begun a criminal investigation of possible leaks of classified information to the *Times*. As part of the inquiry, the leaders of the investigation will almost certainly seek to interview the reporters who wrote the story, James Risen and Eric Lichtblau. The reporters may receive grand-jury subpoenas demanding their coöperation, and may face contempt charges and jail time if they refuse to comply. Thus the N.S.A. leak investigation may join a growing list of cases in which journalists, under threat of legal sanction, are being asked to identify their sources.

In the best known of these cases, Patrick J. Fitzgerald, the special counsel investigating the leak of the name of Valerie Plame Wilson, a former C.I.A. agent, subpoenaed at least six Washington journalists to appear before a grand jury last year; one, Judith Miller, who was then a reporter for the *Times*, was jailed on contempt charges for eighty-five days before agreeing to testify. Reporters are also being subpoenaed to testify in civil cases. Wen Ho Lee, a nuclear physicist who formerly worked at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, in New Mexico, has sued the government for improperly disclosing his name and other confidential information in the course of an espionage investigation in 1999, and in the past two years the judges in the case have issued contempt findings against Risen and Jeff Gerth, of the *Times;* Walter Pincus, of the Washington *Post;* Bob Drogin, of the Los Angeles *Times;* Pierre Thomas, formerly of CNN and now with ABC News; and H. Josef Hebert, of the Associated Press, all of whom have refused to testify, and ordered them to pay fines of five hundred dollars a day. An appeals court affirmed the judgment against all the reporters except Gerth, who was found to be too peripherally involved to be cited, and the journalists have asked the Supreme Court to intervene. (The fines are stayed pending the appeals.)

Steven J. Hatfill, a former government scientist who was identified in the press as a possible suspect in the anthrax investigation, has filed a similar lawsuit against the government, in connection with leaks in his case, and in December, 2004, his lawyers subpoenaed thirteen news organizations for testimony. The lawyers have since withdrawn the subpoenas, while they interview government officials they suspect could be responsible for the leaks, but the subpoenas are widely expected to be reissued.

In October, Patrick Fitzgerald charged I. Lewis (Scooter) Libby, Vice-President Cheney's chief of staff, with lying to the grand jury about his conversations with reporters, including Miller, Tim Russert, of NBC, and Matthew Cooper, of *Time*. (Libby immediately resigned.) As Libby's lawyers prepare for his trial, which will probably take place this year, they are expected to ask to see the journalists' notes, and they may subpoena other reporters who covered the investigation. At the trial, Libby's team will try to undermine the journalists' credibility by challenging them on everything from sloppy note-taking to evidence of bias. "This guy is on trial for his freedom, and it's not his job to be worried about the rights of the witnesses against him," a

person close to Libby's defense team said. "There are going to be fights over access to the reporters' notes, their prior history and credibility, and their interviews with other people. By the time this trial is over, the press is going to regret that this case was ever brought."

Media lawyers and journalism advocacy groups are alarmed by the increase in demands for reporter testimony. "Thirty-five years or so ago, reporters started getting a lot of subpoenas, and then there was a long lull," Lucy Dalglish, the executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, told me. "But starting about two years ago we got this sudden pop. There are more grand-jury leak investigations, not just with Fitzgerald but in Rhode Island and other places." (Last year, Jim Taricani, a local television reporter in Providence, served four months under house arrest for failing to reveal a source of a leak in a criminal investigation.) "The civil cases are maybe the scariest of all," Dalglish continued. "You're talking about daily fines for contempt that last the length of a case, which could be years. That's what's really giving editors and publishers indigestion."

The subpoenas are coming at a time when the legal status of reporters is as unsettled as it has been in more than two decades. Public esteem for the media is low, and neither Congress nor the courts seem inclined to grant special protection to journalists. As Robin Bierstedt, the chief lawyer for *Time*, put it, "There is certainly an atmosphere out there that says it's O.K. to subpoena journalists." As a legal matter, the question is whether a reporter should be treated like any other citizen who is asked to testify.

The last time journalists received subpoenas in significant numbers was during the early seventies. Protests against the Vietnam War were at a peak, and government officials were increasingly anxious about domestic unrest and national security. In 1972, for the first time, the Supreme Court addressed the right of journalists to protect their sources, when it decided Branzburg v. Hayes, a combination of four cases in which reporters had received grand-jury subpoenas. (Two of the cases involved the Black Panthers; the two others concerned drug dealers.)

Justice Byron White's opinion for the five-to-four majority began, "The issue in these cases is whether requiring newsmen to appear and testify before state or federal grand juries abridges the freedom of the press guaranteed by the First Amendment. We hold that it does not."



The legal status of reporters is as unsettled as it has been in more than two decades.

White's opinion was a scathing dismissal of the journalists' position. "The preference for anonymity of those confidential informants involved in actual criminal conduct is presumably a desire to escape criminal prosecution, and this preference, while understandable, is hardly deserving of constitutional protection," he wrote. In short, he held for the Court that the First Amendment provides no "exemption from the ordinary duty of all other citizens to furnish relevant information to a grand jury performing an important public function." In a brief concurring opinion, Justice Lewis Powell suggested that under certain circumstances—which he defined vaguely as criminal investigations that were "not being conducted in good faith"—journalists might be justified in refusing to testify.

The reaction of lower-court judges to Branzburg was unprecedented in American legal history. Many federal courts simply ignored the Supreme Court's opinion. "There were some extremely capable First Amendment and mass-media lawyers who were able to spin a win out of a loss, by persuading courts to follow Powell's concurring opinion instead of White's majority opinion," Rodney Smolla, the dean of the University of Richmond School of Law and the author of "Free Speech in an Open Society," said. "Instead of citing White's rejection of the privilege, many lower courts used the Powell opinion to create a balancing test. These judges would evaluate, on a case-by-case basis, whether they thought a subpoena to a journalist was legitimate, and they wound up quashing a lot of them."

Branzburg was decided only a few months before Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, in breaking the story of the Watergate scandal, demonstrated the importance of protecting government whistle-blowers, and judges became reluctant to impose limits on journalists. "After Branzburg, you had the romance of Woodward and Bernstein, and judges saw how important confidential sources had been to uncovering Watergate," Smolla said. "They were

RICHARD THOMPSON

ARRIVING AGAIN AND AGAIN WITHOUT NOTICING

I remember all the different kinds of years.
Angry, or brokenhearted, or afraid.
I remember feeling like that
walking up the mountain along the dirt path
to my broken house on the island.
And long years of waiting in Massachusetts.
The winter walking and hot summer walking.
I finally fell in love with all of it:
dirt, night, rock and far views.
It's strange that my heart is as full
now as my desire was then.

—Linda Gregg

just a lot more sympathetic to the press." Many states created shield laws, which ban or restrict subpoenas to journalists for information about their confidential sources. (The District of Columbia and all states except Wyoming now have shield laws or some form of protection for reporters, but these don't apply in federal criminal investigations or in civil lawsuits filed under federal law.) In the three decades after Branzburg, on the rare occasions when journalists were called into court, their lawyers, brandishing their peculiar readings of Branzburg, typically managed to protect them from testifying.

In 2003, however, an opinion by Judge Richard A. Posner transformed the debate over the so-called "reporter's privilege." A prolific scholar and perhaps the nation's best-known federal appeals-court judge, Posner wields singular authority from his chambers, in Chicago. In McKevitt v. Pallasch, a case that grew out of the prosecution in Ireland of an alleged I.R.A. terrorist named Michael McKevitt, Posner took a fresh look at the Supreme Court's decision in Branzburg. A key government witness in the case was David Rupert, an F.B.I. informant who was widely reviled among supporters of the I.R.A.'s cause. Abdon Pallasch, a reporter for the Chicago *Sun-Times*, and several colleagues were writing a biography of Rupert, and they had tape-recorded interviews with him. McKevitt wanted his lawyers to have access to the tapes, and Rupert did not object. But the reporters wanted to keep the tapes secret, because, as Posner put it, "the biography of him that they are planning to write will be less marketable the more information in it that has already been made public."

Posner ruled that the journalists had to turn the tapes over to the defense. Reviewing interpretations of the law since 1972, Posner wrote, "A large number of cases conclude, rather surprisingly, that there is a reporter's privilege." He added dryly, "These courts may be skating on thin ice." According to Dalglish, of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, "Prosecutors and civil litigants who want reporters to testify have really felt empowered, largely, I think, because of Judge Posner. He said, 'Everybody go back and reread this case. Branzburg is just not there as a decision that helps the press.' "

Judicial conservatives like Posner have never held the press in especially high regard; witness his essay in the *Times Book Review* in July, in which he argued that the news media have become "more sensational, more prone to scandal and possibly less accurate." But the Fitzgerald investigation revealed a less obvious corollary: a festering hostility toward the traditional news media from the left. The role of the press in the events preceding the investigation amounted to an almost precise inversion of the whistle-blower model. In a column on July 14, 2003, the conservative commentator Robert Novak revealed that Valerie Plame was a C.I.A. operative, citing as his sources "senior administration officials." The leak may have been a politically motivated attack on Plame's husband, Joseph C. Wilson IV, who had published an Op-Ed piece in the *Times* a week earlier questioning the Bush Administration's assertion that Saddam Hussein's government had tried to buy uranium for nuclear weapons in Africa. As the investigation has unfolded, it has come to seem likely that several senior Administration officials, including Libby and Karl Rove, the President's top political aide, disclosed Plame's status to reporters. To some liberal critics of the Administration, and of the journalists who reported the White House officials' charges, this kind of transaction between reporter and source deserves little protection from the First Amendment.

"What I am concerned about is the way in which the powerful have learned to game the system," Martin Kaplan, the associate dean of the Annenberg School for Communication, at the University of Southern California, said. "What they did in the Plame case was to use the press's requirements for observing ground rules with sources as a way of making reporters enablers of a smear campaign. Anonymous sourcing in Washington exists today much more to protect government spinners than it does actual whistle-blowers. It's reasonable to separate the whistle-blower from the garden-variety attempt to float anonymous charges." The fact that the Plame leaks followed the general failure of the press to uncover the Bush Administration's misstatements about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq—and that some of the Plame leaks went to reporters like Miller, of the *Times*, who had been especially credulous of the Administration's claims—has given complaints from the left a special intensity.

But criticism from the left and the right may not be the worst problem for reporters at the moment. Their loss of public esteem has been accompanied by the rise of a new and potentially lucrative kind of lawsuit, which is also based on news leaks. In these cases, the subject of the leak sues the federal government, and journalists are forced to testify as witnesses. So it may not be just

good politics to pick fights with journalists these days; there may be money in it, too.

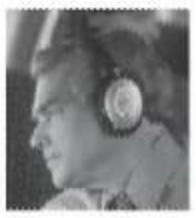
The greatest threat to journalists' ability to protect their sources may be a legacy of Linda Tripp, Monica Lewinsky's former confidante. Shortly after the Lewinsky scandal broke, in 1998, there were reports in news publications (including two articles in *The New Yorker,* by Jane Mayer) about Tripp's background. In one of the lesser-known tangents of the Lewinsky saga, Tripp sued the Pentagon, where she then worked, arguing that the release of information about her violated an obscure federal statute known as the Privacy Act. That law, which was passed in 1974, was designed to prevent the unauthorized disclosure of government records, but it is an unusually vague and complex statute. "To bring a case under the Privacy Act, there are complicated requirements like showing that the records were part of a 'system of records,' and that the disclosures were 'willful,' so the law hadn't really been used to bring many cases," David Colapinto, Tripp's lawyer, told me. In 2003, the government decided to settle with her on favorable terms, which included a payment of five hundred and ninety-five thousand dollars. (Tripp, who is recovering from breast cancer, now runs a year-round Christmas shop, called the Christmas Sleigh, in Middleburg, Virginia.)

"I followed the Tripp case very closely," Brian Sun, a Los Angeles attorney who represents Wen Ho Lee, said. The first account of a potential scandal at the Los Alamos laboratory appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on January 7, 1999, and Walter Pincus, of the Washington *Post*, published his first piece about the case on February 17th. In the article, headlined "U.S. CRACKING DOWN ON CHINESE DESIGNS ON NUCLEAR DATA," Pincus wrote that an F.B.I. investigation had come "to focus on an Asian American scientist at Los Alamos who had contacts with the Chinese and has since been transferred to a job outside the national security area." In a story on March 9th, Pincus identified Lee by name, as the "weapons designer . . . who was under suspicion of handing nuclear secrets to China." As with the other reporters subpoenaed in the case, Pincus's references to Lee were attributed to unidentified sources. (The *Times* also identified Lee by name in a story the same day.)

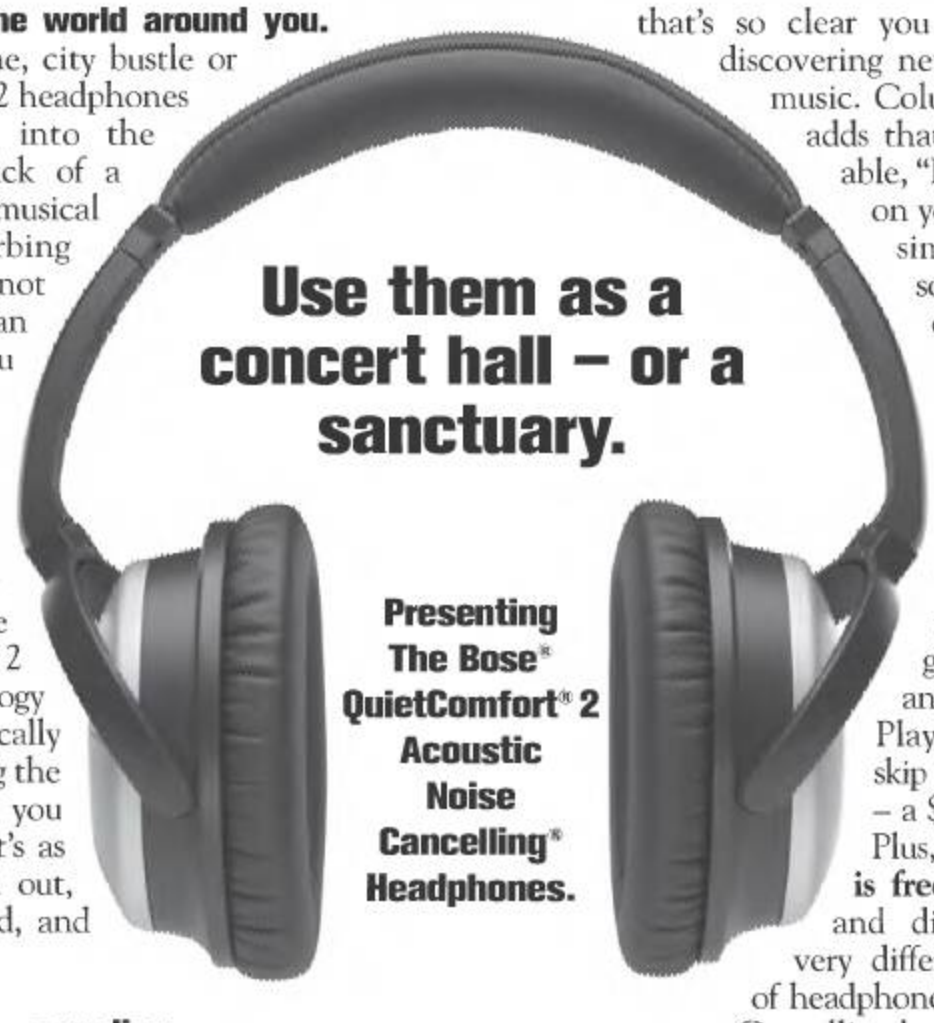
In December, 1999, Lee filed his case against the federal government, making an argument analogous to Tripp's—and seeking similar damages—that the leaks to Pincus and the others constituted repeated violations by government officials of Lee's rights under the Privacy Act. In such a case, the plaintiff must establish that government officials improperly disclosed information. At the time, the District of Columbia was one of the jurisdictions in which judges had interpreted the Branzburg case in a way favorable

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to journalists. Based on a 1981 ruling, plaintiffs in D.C. had an "obligation to exhaust possible alternative sources" of information—in other words, to interview possible leakers—before they could subpoena a reporter. In the past, this requirement has discouraged some litigants from pursuing journalists, or even from filing cases.

But Lee's lawyers were dogged. "We made every effort to find out the leakers without going to the journalists," Sun said. He took depositions from six employees of the Department of Energy (including Bill Richardson, the former Secretary), eight F.B.I. officials (including the former director Louis Freeh), and six officials at the Justice Department. "We came up with bubkes," Sun said. In August, 2002, he started issuing subpoenas to the reporters.

Lawyers for the journalists moved to overturn the subpoenas, and, in a decision rendered on October 9, 2003, Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson issued what amounted to a cry of revulsion at cozy journalistic-source relationships in Washington: "The deposition transcripts [of the government officials] generally reveal a pattern of denials, vague or evasive answers, and stonewalling. None of the deponents, plaintiff says, has admitted to having personal knowledge of the source of any disclosures. Thus, in the absence of the serendipitous, last-minute appearance of a willing independent witness with personal knowledge of the facts, at the moment only the journalists can testify as to whether defendants were the sources for the various news stories."

Jackson ordered the journalists to testify, and last June his ruling was upheld by the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, in a decision that was even more dismissive of the journalists' concerns. Accusing lawyers for the *Times* reporters of being "inaccurate to a point approaching deceptiveness," the appeals court ordered the journalists (except Jeff Gerth) to identify their sources or start paying the fines. (For procedural reasons, the contempt proceedings against Pincus trailed some months behind those of the other reporters, but the ruling in his case was the same.) Steven Hatfill's lawyers are pursuing a strategy similar to Lee's, first deposing the government officials who are suspected leakers in his case, and then, presumably, going after the reporters. The best hope for the subpoenaed journalists in both cases is that the government settles the lawsuits before the contempt rulings are affirmed.

The First Amendment instructs Congress to "make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press," but the Supreme Court historically has been reluctant to treat the press clause as meaningfully distinct from the speech clause. As Rodney Smolla says, "The Court has generally been unwilling to say that journalists have more rights than other citizens. Whenever the Court has had cases about access to courtrooms or disaster sites, it talks about the right of the public to be there, and journalists are just part of the public. The idea behind the cases is that everyone should be treated the same."

This principle has made it difficult for journalists to persuade courts to recognize a special privilege to protect them from testifying. "When you look at other privileges, like attorney-client or doctor-patient, they arise out of confidential relationships that have a formal quality to them, and there is a powerful and ancient interest in promoting candor," Smolla said. "If you have a journalistic privilege, it might apply to everyone a journalist meets in reporting a story, even if he has no preëxisting relationship with them. The journalist can make the promise of confidentiality on the spot, as needed. The courts are loath to hand that kind of power to journalists to put information off limits."

The converse argument—that journalists should be allowed to promise confidentiality to their sources, and the courts should honor those promises—was made by Justice William O. Douglas, in a dissenting opinion in the Branzburg case. "A reporter is no better than his source of information," Douglas wrote. "Unless he has a privilege to withhold the identity of his source, he will be the victim of governmental intrigue or aggression. If he can be summoned to testify in secret before a grand jury, his sources will dry up and the attempted exposure, the effort to enlighten the public, will be ended. If what the Court sanctions today becomes settled law, then the reporter's main function in American society will be to pass on to the public the press releases which the various departments of government issue." A modern version of this argument was elaborated in a series of editorials in the *Times* defending Judith Miller. "Inside sources trust reporters to protect their identities so they can reveal more than the official line," one of these editorials stated. "Without that agreement and that trust between reporter and source, the real news simply dries up, and the whole truth steadily recedes behind a wall of image-mongering, denial and even outright lies."



This argument didn't command a majority of the Supreme Court in 1972, and, in the current political and legal environment, the most the press can probably hope for is a compromise, like the one proposed last April by Judge David S. Tatel. A Clinton appointee to the D.C. Circuit, Tatel sat on the three-judge panel that rejected Judith Miller's appeal of the contempt order against her for refusing to testify before Fitzgerald's grand jury. Like Posner, Tatel recognized that the decision in Branzburg essentially foreclosed the claim that the First Amendment protects journalists from grand-jury subpoenas. But Tatel went on to note that the Federal Rules of Evidence give the courts broad latitude to develop evidentiary privileges "in the light of reason and experience." It was on the basis of these rules that federal courts came to recognize privileges for clergy and attorneys. Tatel sought to determine whether journalists were also entitled to a common-law privilege, as the D.C. Circuit had recently found for psychotherapists regarding their confidential communications with their patients. "In sum," he concluded, " 'reason and experience,' as evidenced by the laws of forty-nine states and the District of

Columbia . . . support recognition of a privilege for reporters' confidential sources."

But what Tatel gave Judith Miller with one hand he took away with the other. He stressed that the privilege "cannot be absolute," and, based on the evidence in her case, she was not entitled to its protection. The leak of Valerie Plame's name was a "serious matter," he argued, but the disclosure "had marginal news value. . . . Considering the gravity of the suspected crime and the low value of the leaked information, no privilege bars the subpoenas." But Tatel did cite several examples of leaks that might justify a reporter in protecting his sources. One was a 2004 story in the Washington *Post* about a "budget controversy regarding a super-secret satellite program." The story was co-written by Walter Pincus.



"We beat the spread!"

• •

Pincus joined the staff of the *Post* in 1966, and ten years ago he turned sixty-three, an age at which many people start contemplating retirement. "But both my parents lived to be ninety-five, and I thought I needed something to do when I turned seventy, so I went to law school part time," he told me. It took him six years, but in 2001 he graduated from the Georgetown University Law Center. Pincus has never practiced law, however, and he remains an investigative reporter in the national-security field. He has a full head of snow-white hair, bushy eyebrows, and a slightly distracted air that is common to investigative reporters. When he bought me a soda in the *Post's* decrepit employee cafeteria, coffee from a broken machine was spewing onto the floor, but he stepped around the torrent without comment. When we sat down, I asked him why he had never practiced law. He replied that Katharine Graham, the longtime chairman of the Washington Post Company, had been a close friend. "She died right before the bar exam," he said. "I was with her and her family. I didn't study, so I failed."

Pincus has an idiosyncratic view of his legal predicament. He's skeptical of the notion that subpoenas to journalists necessarily have a chilling effect on sources. "My sources are not drying up," he told me. "It hasn't hurt me. There is a misconception generally about sources. When you talk about a leak, you are usually not talking about a single person handing you something. You get a little bit here, and a little bit there, and often you can't even identify the single source of a story. Anyway, most of my confidential sources are people I know extremely well. I've built up these sources over the years. Reporting in the intelligence field is talking to a lot of people. The idea that sources are people who come to you over the transom is not true in my case. And those people who come to you over the transom are often trying to plant things that turn out not to be true. My experience is that most sources you don't know personally will give you bad information."

Pincus believes that reporters are facing more subpoenas as much because of bad habits that the profession has acquired as because of an unsympathetic public and judiciary. He thinks, for example, that reporters are often too ready to grant confidentiality to their sources. "The whole subject of confidential sources has gotten mixed up between gossip, opinion, and fact," he said. "I cover intelligence, and people are really risking their jobs and perhaps their freedom by telling me information that they know is classified. That's very different from people going on background to tell you that Britney Spears is pregnant, or that Hillary Clinton shouldn't run for the Senate because it will hurt her chances of running for President. Just because someone asks for confidentiality doesn't mean you have to give it to them. And just because someone tells you something, even if it's true, doesn't mean you have to put it in the paper."

Two days before Novak revealed Valerie Plame's name in his column, an Administration official had discussed her husband's trip to Africa with Pincus. The official, to whom Pincus promised confidentiality, said that Wilson's trip had been arranged by his wife. (The official told Pincus that Wilson's wife worked at the C.I.A. but did not identify her by name.)

Miller chose to go to jail rather than coöperate with Fitzgerald; Pincus took a different tack. Rather than defy the prosecutors, as Miller did for so long,

Pincus and his lawyers made a deal that would allow him both to honor his agreement with his source and to give Fitzgerald the information he requested. First, Pincus received a waiver from his source to talk to Fitzgerald, but only for the purpose of letting him answer Fitzgerald's questions. (Pincus will not identify the source publicly, except to say that it wasn't Lewis Libby.) Pincus's lawyers established that Fitzgerald's team would ask a limited number of questions about the timing and content of his interview with the source, and Pincus testified with little fanfare. (Ultimately, Miller also accepted a waiver from her source, Libby, and testified before the grand jury.) "A lot of reporters are egomaniacs," Pincus said. "Some people want a confrontation. They want us to be above the law. We're not."

The risk, of course, is that successful subpoenas of reporters will lead to more such subpoenas. As the federal appeals court in New York observed in 1999, in upholding a privilege claim by reporters for NBC, "If the parties to any lawsuit were free to subpoena the press at will, it would likely become standard operating procedure for those litigating against an entity that had been the subject of press attention to sift through press files in search of information supporting their claims." The burden of subpoenas on journalists' time, and on their employers' budgets, would be bad enough, but there would also be, as the New York court put it, "the symbolic harm of making journalists appear to be an investigative arm of the judicial system, the government, or private parties."

Pincus's accommodating approach goes only so far. With one exception, his sources in the Wen Ho Lee case have not waived confidentiality, and Pincus will continue to honor his agreement with the remaining sources, the contempt order notwithstanding. (If Pincus and the other reporters continue to defy Judge Rosemary M. Collyer, who took over the case after Jackson retired, she could order them jailed.) Today, Lee is remembered by many as a victim, who served nine months in solitary confinement after his indictment on fifty-nine counts of mishandling classified information, and was the subject of a lengthy editor's note in the *Times*, apologizing for the paper's harsh coverage of his case. But Pincus has little sympathy for Lee, arguing that the Privacy Act does not cover the kind of information that was disclosed to him, and that the substance of what he was told was made public anyway when Lee was indicted. He maintains that Lee suffered no legal damage from the news reports; although the government eventually dropped most of the charges against him, Lee did plead guilty to a felony count of copying classified documents onto computer tapes without authorization. In an opinion by Judge Collyer on November 16th, she wrote that Pincus was free to make these arguments, but only after he answers questions from Lee's lawyers in a deposition.

Pincus might be able to avoid testifying if the D.C. Circuit created a common-law journalistic privilege along the lines suggested by Tatel. If the court applies Tatel's balancing test—weighing the public benefit of the leak against the harm that the leak caused—then Pincus might not have to name his sources. "Walter accurately reported news about an important espionage investigation, with major foreign-policy implications," Kevin Baine, Pincus's lawyer, said. "That's a major benefit to the country. And there's no harm, because all the information was released by the government in a matter of weeks anyway, when Lee was indicted."

Tatel's reasoning could also help Risen and Lichtblau protect the confidentiality of their sources in the N.S.A. wiretapping story. "In the current N.S.A. situation, I think Judge Tatel's test would clearly be struck in favor of our reporters," George Freeman, the assistant general counsel at the New York Times Company, said. "This was a leak to determine whether the law was broken, and that is something that ought to be brought to the public's attention, so there can be public debate about it." (Risen and Lichtblau declined to comment.) At the moment, however, Tatel's rule is not the law of the federal courts in Washington, D.C., much less of the United States, so the reporters have little reason to be optimistic. ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

YOUR THREE WISHES: F.A.Q.

BY DAVID OWEN

You have been granted three wishes—congratulations. If you wish wisely, your wishes may bring you great happiness. Before wishing, please take a moment to read the following frequently asked questions.

1. *Do my wishes have an expiration date?*

No. Your wishes are good until used. Once you have made a wish, however, you cannot revoke it, except by using another wish, should any remain.

2. *May I wish for absolutely anything?*

A wish, if it is to be granted, must not violate the physical laws of the universe. You may wish for a particular co-worker to be fired (for example), or for Mt. Everest to collapse into a heap of rubble; you may not wish to live literally forever, or for the speed of light to be lowered to five miles an hour.

3. *May I use one of my wishes to wish for more wishes?*

No. You have been granted exactly three wishes. You cannot increase that number by wishing.

4. *What happens if I merely think a wish?*

No wish will be executed until you speak it out loud, so "wishful thinking" does not count. Note: If you inadvertently use one of your wishes to render yourself permanently speechless—by turning yourself into a pig, for example, or by wishing that you were dead—you will be unable to use your remaining wishes, if any are left, to correct the error.

5. *How specific do I have to be? If I wish for "world peace," will you know what I'm talking about?*

As a practical matter, no one ever wishes for "world peace." But it is always best to be specific. "I wish for my penis, when erect, to measure eighteen inches in length and six inches in diameter" is clear and concise—and it counts as one wish only, because length and diameter are two dimensions of the same object. "I wish for my penis, when erect, to measure eighteen inches in length and six inches in diameter, and I want it to be erect all the time" is two wishes. "I wish to be a global celebrity, but not Michael Jackson or Tom Cruise" is three.

6. *If I wish for money, how much may I wish for?*

There is no preset limit. However, you should keep in mind that money has value only in a functioning economic system. If you wish for "all the money in the world," you may have no opportunity to spend your fortune. It is best to be both realistic and unambiguous. If you wish merely for "great wealth" or "untold riches," you could end up with (for example) attractive grandchildren, stimulating hobbies, or a clean bill of health.

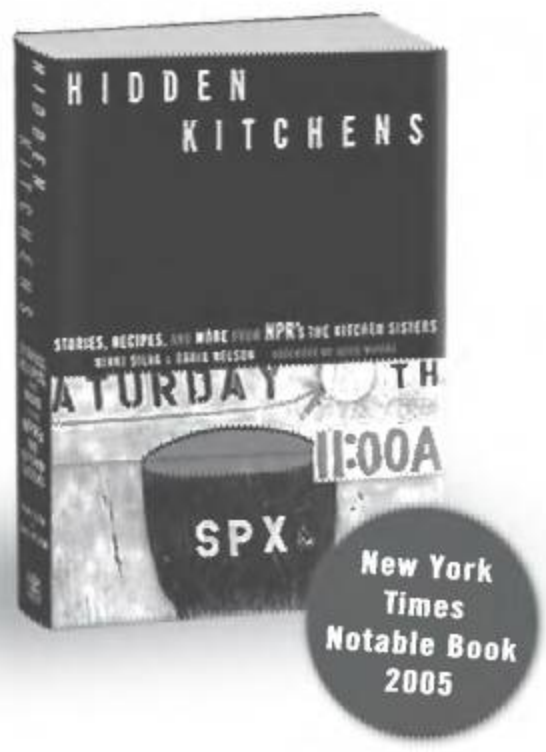
7. *How come people who get three wishes always seem to wish for something that they regret, big-time—like that woodcutter and the sausages?*

The grantor of your wishes does not take ironic pleasure in human folly. Nevertheless, you alone are responsible for the outcome of your wishing. Hint: Avoid phrases that are open to catastrophic interpretation, such as "for the rest of my life." Also, keep in mind that the media tends to focus on wishes that turn out badly. "Man gets three wishes and lives happily ever after" is not considered news.

8. *Can I use one of my three wishes to guarantee that neither of my other wishes will have negative consequences that I failed to foresee?*

Hmm. I'm going to say no. ♦

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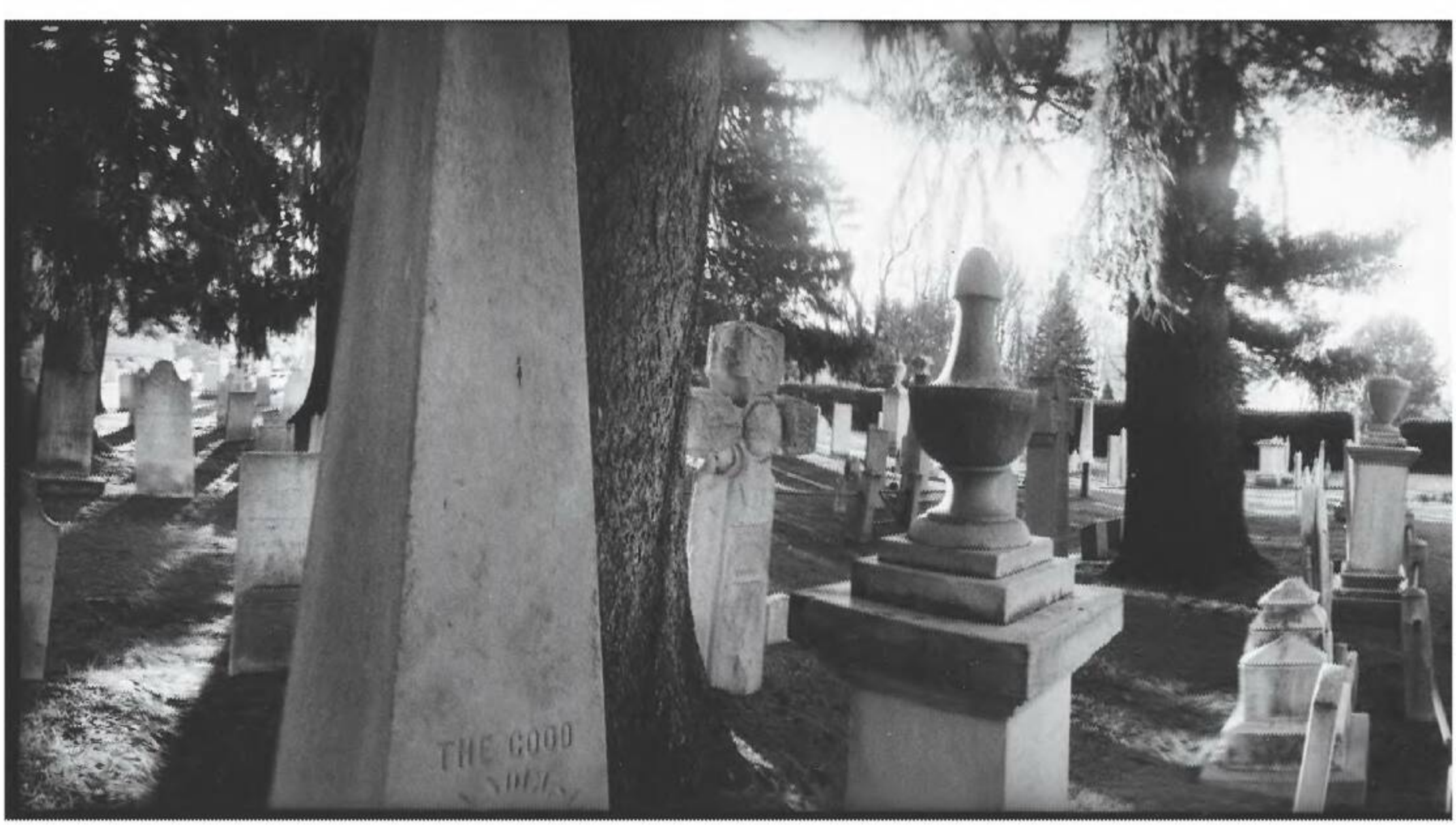
What's written in stone.

BY ROGER ANGELL

On a spring Sunday three years ago, my wife, Carol, and I drove out to the Palisades Cemetery, which I hadn't visited in forty years. The place was harder to find than I'd expected, and we had to ask for help at the back door of one of a row of wooden houses that ends with an antique store near the corner of Route 9W. Redirected, we poked our way up a little private driveway and then through some tall shrubs to find the graveyard. It was a quiet, foggy morning, and once there I felt as if we'd walked into a green-and-gray room furnished with leaning stones. Many had surfaces thickened with lichen and decay, where inscriptions had become indistinct, with some words missing. It was like a half-heard conversation. There were rusty iron chains lying on the long grass here and there, and fenced-off small enclosures that you could reach only by opening a stiff little gate. Early lilacs were in bloom, and there was intense spring birdsong all around us. (When you visit a cemetery, the stage effects arrive without effort.) Some of the several hundred stones dated back to the eighteenth century, but in among them I found some bygone friends of mine, including Bentz and Kitty Plagemann. There were long-ago Snedens as well. Palisades is a village on top of the steep west bank of the Hudson, about fifteen miles above New York City, and Snedens Landing, a hillside suburban community where I once lived as a commuter in the nineteen-fifties, lies off a narrow, twisting road that leads down to the river.

Now, near the western fringe of bushes in the cemetery, Carol found one of the markers we were looking for: a silvery granite oblong, with the letters fading into invisibility. With effort—and a few impromptu rubbings done with a pencil and a scrap of notebook paper—we made out:

ISAAC D. TALLMAN
ENGINEER
Was killed on the
N.Y. & E. RR
While running the night express
ENGINE NO. 97
Caused by a rock laying on the track
April 11, 1855
Aged 30 years, 3 months
and 26 days



Ancestors lie in close company under ancient trees in the Stockbridge, Massachusetts, cemetery. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

There were a couple of vanished lines, and then, near the bottom, in small italics:

No more to make the engine rattle
No more to sound the shrill whistle

An other eloquent marker nearby was a tall and faded pinkish-brown slab—perhaps it's brownstone—with a scalloped top and the pleasing old willow-tree-and-stone-urn drawing, barely visible here, that you find in this part of the country. Care and money had gone into its making, and pain, as well:

DANIEL POST,
Who died July 22d, 1814
aged 52 years.
A pale confumption gave the fatal blow!
The ftroke was certain, but the effect was flow,
With wafting pain death found me long oprefs'd
Pityed my fighs, & kindly brought me reft.

We looked about for another favorite of mine, but decades of acid rain had smudged away its name, leaving the decedent anonymous. The stone, as I recall, once presented the name and dates of a departed lady—perhaps another



one of the local Posts—who had succumbed around the turn of the old century, with a closing "*Who died of epilepsy* in her sixty-first year.*" At first glance, the asterisk looked decorative or accidental, but at the bottom of the stone it was repeated, in footnote fashion, and the medical slur corrected: **apoplexy*.

A few weeks later, Carol and I headed up to the Berkshires to visit friends and on the way decided to make a further swing to the north and pay a call at the Stockbridge, Massachusetts, cemetery. It's an impressive place, still almost the main event in town. We'd walked around here before, when one of my daughters was attending a nearby boarding school, and had come to know some family graves, including that of John Sergeant, a multi-great-grandfather of mine, on my mother's side, who came to this area as a missionary to the Mohican Indians in 1734. He was a founding settler of Stockbridge. I own a tall Queen Anne secretary of his, part of a striking four-piece set in gleaming cherry—he married money—now scattered among my closer relatives. He is said to have sat at the secretary while he wrote his weekly sermons in the language of the Stockbridge tribe.

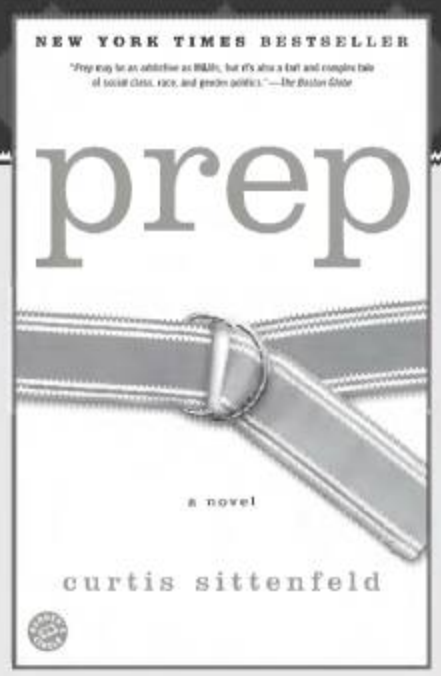
It was the Fourth of July, a blazing-hot summer's day, and Carol and I and our fox terrier, Harry, were the only visitors. We kept losing our bearings among the rows and neighborhoods of graves and surrounding tall pines. The young dog, white against the green grass, cast eagerly about, keeping a steady pull on his leash and panting in the heat. There was a small house almost within the confines, with a back fence adjoining some of the oldest graves. A woman sitting in the yard asked us if Harry wouldn't like some water, and brought out a big metal cooking vessel, filled almost to the brim, which he lapped up noisily, with his forelegs in the pot. When she and Carol began talking, she said, "When people asked why we lived right here, so close to the cemetery this way, my father always said, 'It's not who's outside who matters, it's who's in.'" The John Sergeant gravestone—it's pronounced "Surgeant" in the family but "Sargent" locally—had once been elevated, lying flat on four legs like a pool table, but thanks to our informant we knew to look for it now at ground level. The raised stone had been tottering, she'd said, and had lately been repositioned:

HERE LYES
the body of the Revd Mr.
John Sergeant who dy'd
the 27th Day of July AD 1749
in the 40th Year of his Age

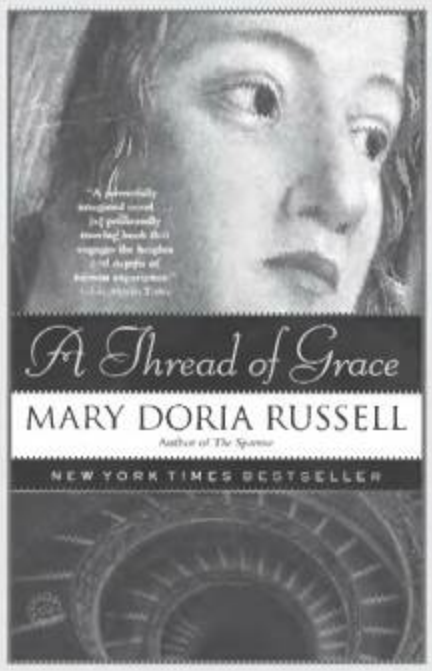
The monument has a long extolling verse below this, with a joke—a joke back then, at least—at the end:

Here's not a Sergeant's body or a Sergeant's MIND
I'll feek him hence for all's alike Deception here
I'll go to Heav'n, & I shall find my Sergeant there

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There was a scattering of later Sergeants nearby—Sewall and Erastus and George—dating on into the nineteenth century, all of them recently cleaned to a startling and elegant white.

What we had come this distance to see once again, however, was not a family marker, and though I thought I knew its shape and location, not far from the roadside stone fence, it kept eluding me. Hot and out of patience, I said, "I give up—it's got to be around here somewhere," when my gaze went down again and there it was, bang at my feet, and almost exactly as remembered:

> Erected to the Memory
> of Solomon Glezen jr
> who, made Prsoner by the
> Insurgents, fell at the Battle in Sheffeld Feb 27th
> 1786, in the 26th year of
> his age.

> "Oh for a lodge in some vaft Wilderness
> Some boundless contiguity of Shade,
> Where rumor of oppression & deceit,
> Of unsuccessful or successful War,
> Might never reach us more."

All this was carved in a modest lowercase. I had written down the poem when I first found it, years ago, and its elegance and startlingly modern and apposite thought quickly imposed itself on my memory. The verse—this took a while to find—is from a much longer poem, "The Task," by William Cowper, an English poet long out of fashion. Somehow I'd convinced myself that Glezen was a British officer who'd died in captivity during the Revolution, but the date of his death didn't match up. That same night, I mentioned this puzzle to Gardner Botsford, the friend (along with his wife, Janet) we'd come to visit in South Egremont, and he instantly said, "It was Shay's Rebellion that got him. There was a firefight in Sheffield, and a lot of local men and boys got killed."

Daniel Shays (it should be "Shays' Rebellion") took part in a doomed uprising of local farmers, put down by the militia. The armed dissidents had been enraged by economic conditions imposed by the lawyers and merchants of coastal Massachusetts: an argument perhaps not quite sufficient to die for, as Glezen's little editorial reminds us.

Another attraction of the Glezen epitaph is the close resemblance of its lines to a celebrated poem by Queen Elizabeth's fallen favorite, Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, written two centuries before. I first came upon this as an impressionable sophomore English major, and was knocked flat by its subjunctives and by the notion that a man of adventure and high office (he was played by Errol Flynn in a Warner Bros. epic of 1939) could whip this off in his spare time—think, oh, Donald Rumsfeld, laptop open, in his Pentagon-bound limo:

> Happy were he could finish forth his fate
> In some unhaunted desert, most obscure
> From all societies, from love and hate
> Of worldly folks, then might he sleep secure,
> Then wake again and give God ever praise,
> Content with hips and haws and bramble-berry;
> In contemplation spending all his days,
> And change of holy thoughts to make him merry:
> That, when he dies, his tomb may be a bush
> Where harmless robin dwells with gentle thrush.

I don't know if these lines are on Devereux's tomb, in St. Peter ad Vincula Church, inside the Tower of London, but we can be sure they were in his head just before the executioner took it off, on February 25, 1601. I memorized this yearning prophesy, and used to recite it drunkenly to my roommates late at night, or even to Boston débutantes I was cruising around the dance floor at the Copley Plaza. I told them this would be my epitaph, too, and only a slowly advancing maturity made me accept that I was neither an Elizabethan knight nor a potential friar, and that I would grow old in a time of blank or blah tombstones.

I am not a churchgoer or a stone-rubber, but over the years I've logged a surprising number of hours at Père-Lachaise, in Paris; at Hollywood, rising sweetly beside the James River in Richmond, Virginia, where the old soldiers' graves, once tended by the Daughters of the Confederacy, were badly in need of mowing; and at Woodlawn Cemetery, a No. 4 Lexington Avenue express subway ride away from me in the Bronx, offering hilltop stands of enormous trees and a nice range of urban housing, from Jay Gould's massive Grecian temple to Fiorello LaGuardia's wayside nook, which befits his stature better than his grand contributions to our city. I have also called at Hope Cemetery, in Barre, Vermont, where generations of stonecutters from the local granite works have left memorials celebrating their worldly preoccupations—a soccer ball, a racing car, a tilting biplane, an armchair. Here also is that much photographed life-size double bed, wherein a couple sits stiffly up, hand in hand above the granite percales, he in his breakfast wrapper and she in a chaste negligee: a celebration of eternal fidelity barely marred by the fact that the widower (who'd ordered the monument) later married somebody else. Nor can I forget the gravestone I was guided to in East Haddam, Connecticut—an ancient news extra saying goodbye to a parishioner who was struck dead by the falling counterweight of the steeple bell on his way into the church for Sunday services. There's an inexorable secular echo here in the diner who strolled out of Le Pavillon,

on East Fifty-seventh Street, after lunch (this was in the sixties), and was terminally conked by a dumbbell accidentally nudged off a high windowsill by a maid of the television celebrity Arlene Francis. No last words were taken from the victim, but Le Pavillon was a five-star eatery, and it's always been my guess that his last nanosecond of consciousness may have produced the thought, You should have passed up the profiteroles.

Two or three times each summer, I pay a call on my own future retirement home, in the Brooklin, Maine, Cemetery. Brooklin, with a population of eight hundred, has ten graveyards, the most beautiful of which, the Naskeag Cemetery, sits across the road from the gemlike Beth Eden Chapel. Most of the others are half-forgotten family plots, containing Babsons and Freetheys who go back to Revolutionary days. The Brooklin Cemetery has a more purposeful, everyday air, and lies in the middle of town, which is to say two hundred yards or so north of the Brooklin General Store and the Friend Memorial Library, and across the street from the First Baptist Church. The front sector, close to the road, holds the older stones, going back to the late eighteenth century: skinny marble or granite markers now weathered to seagull white. Later graves illustrate current options in the memorial line: pink or oatmeal granites, and thick, low slabs offering smooth façades with roughened tops, like weathered roofing. There are floral and religious motifs, and, just lately, darker blocks faced with what look like color engravings, running to seascapes and lighthouses, beside the names of the departed. Fifteen years ago, Carol and I met here with the friendly cemetery representative (a sign on his pickup truck advertised his other line of work, taxidermy) and for two hundred and twenty dollars signed on for a nice double, close to an oak tree in the northeast corner.

"That's—uh, per year?" I asked.

"No, that's the whole of it," he said.

What we visit here, to be sure, is not just our own plot, now marked off with green metal tabs, but my mother's and stepfather's graves, a couple of yards to the east, and also close at hand, that of my brother Joe, who died in 1997. The oak tree was planted by Andy White when my mother died, in 1977, and it has thrived. Mother, a passionate gardener, would appreciate its flecked shade and those festive three- or four-leaf sprigs that oaks let drop during a windstorm. I think she would also put up with the little memorial piles of stones or acorns or mussel shells, faded bunches of wildflowers, or plastic pigs that visiting-pilgrim readers of "Charlotte's Web" or "The Elements of Style" keep putting down in front of Andy's grave or on the edge of his stone, though she'd want them cleared away the next morning. Similar symbols of respect get dropped off at Joe's grave by people who loved his boat designs. What would drive her batty, though, and (if it were possible) would result in a three- or four-page typed letter to me or someone else in the family, laying out this fresh problem—"*appalling* problem," in her words—and its possible solutions, with afterthoughts scribbled at the end and up the sides of the page in pencil, is the slovenly state of the two stones: hers and Andy's. Sad and bereft after she died, he'd picked a mournful charcoal-gray slate for her marker, which was matched eight years later by his own glum replica, next door. The gravestones are midsize, with a classic curve along the top and elegant shoulders, but the years have demonstrated that slate—or *this* slate, at least—ages poorly. A corrective metal sheath or splint now covers the top of each slab, to check the fine cracks that have appeared along the sides and front. The fading slate, silvered to a happier tone, has almost smoothed away the names and dates. Soon the Whites' wish for privacy, well known to everyone in town, will be complete.

Mother's gravestone was the first decision of any magnitude that Andy had to take on without her. With the help of an art-director friend of mine, Hank Brennan, he settled on a subtle style called Centaur for her stone's svelte, slightly flared typeface: "KATHARINE SERGEANT WHITE" on three separate lines; then a single small nondenominational design, more a plus sign than a cross; and then her dates, 1892-1977, below. If, as seems likely, Andy wondered about her reaction, he might almost have heard her response here: "Well, perhaps, but are we sure about the capitals? Do you think of me as a capitals sort of person?"



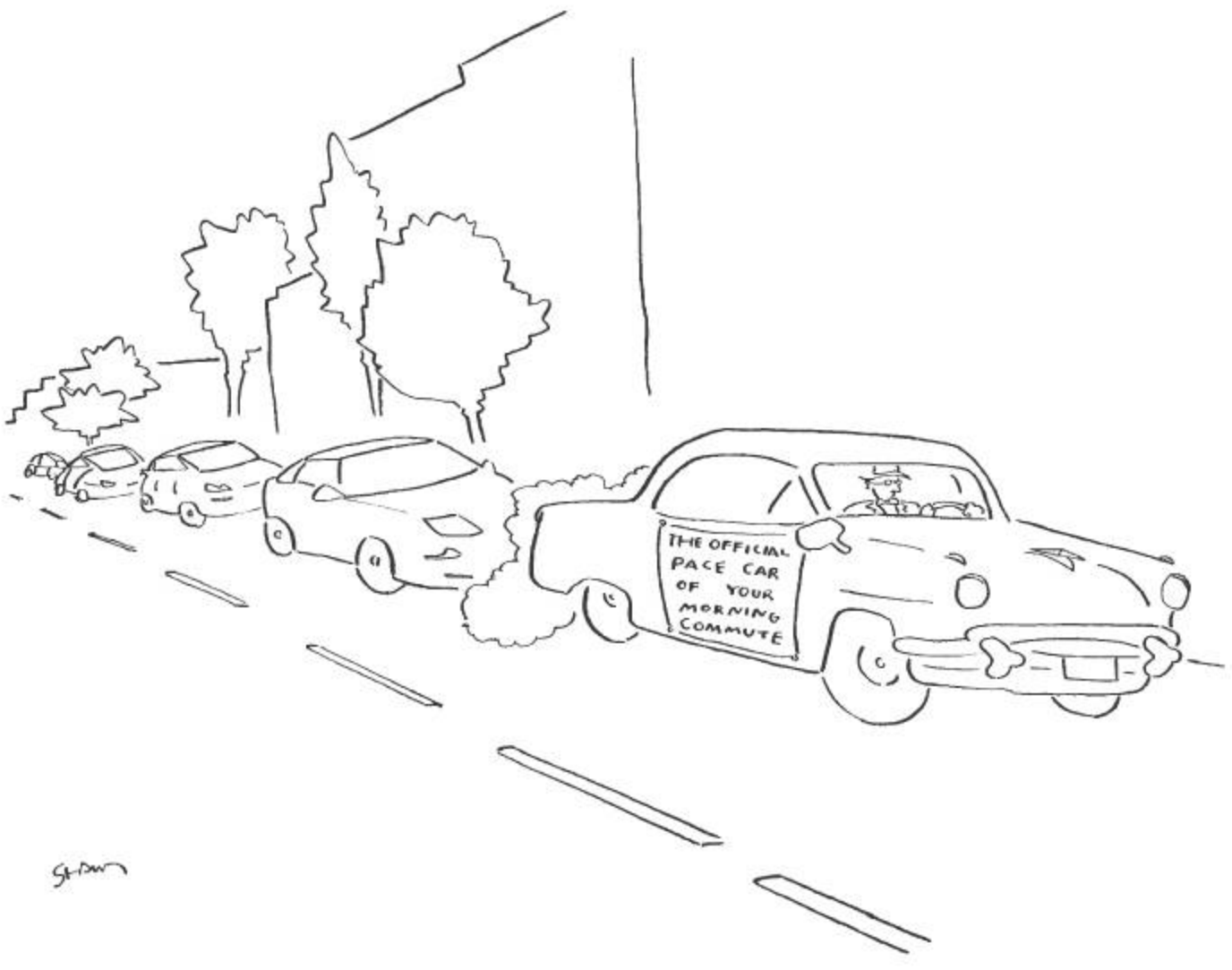
Design and arrangement had always fallen to her in their forty-eight-year marriage, and her Olympic-scale worrying would have briskly taken on the darkness of the slate had she still been around. She would have set her mind to finding out everything about the durability and legibility of slate, as against granite and marble and limestone and porphyry: her letter to me would instruct me to consult somebody in *The New Yorker's* checking department about all this, with a backup verifying conversation with Joe Mitchell, who'd written about graveyards so well. There was also the question of site. The spot Andy had picked out was way in the back of the Brooklin Cemetery, close to the woods and so many yards removed from the nearest existing graves that Mother's lone stone, when first put up, reminded me of the mystery slab in "2001: A Space Odyssey." Andy's adjacent 1985 grave and the subsequent natural proliferation of Brooklin deads have done away with this distracting idea. The only provision about her burial that Mother left was that there were to be no prayers or Bible readings of any sort. But if, as seems possible, she and Andy did actually talk about the grave site at some point, I can unhesitatingly provide her train of thought: *We don't want anyone in town to think that we're snobbish or distant, or that, good heavens, we want to* hide. *We've lived here a long time and we have friends who are buried here, but this is their cemetery, not ours, and we wouldn't want people thinking that we're taking up space in the middle of things because we want to be accepted in ways that we're not—that now we're one of them and not From Away—just because I'm gone. This way we're showing respect. But will they understand?*

William Maxwell once told me that one of the great mercies we are provided with is that within a few months after someone close to us has died the vision of him in sickness or

great age is replaced with a much younger memory of that same parent or husband or friend, now seen at his youthful best. I thanked Maxwell for this wisdom and later passed it on unhesitatingly to others, in letters of condolence, but now I'm not so sure. It's true that just lately I've remembered that my mother, before essaying her feeble and more sidearm than overhead tennis serve, used to lick the ball of her right, racquet-hand thumb, but nothing has grown up around this mannerism that could be called a fresh portrait. She rarely took to the courts, and had given up the game for good by the time she was forty. Most of my memories of Mother are affectionate and cheerful, but still center on the bottomless worries and overthoughts that descended on her late in her life. And not always so late, come to think of it. Last summer, my nephew Jonathan Stableford, who is now close to sixty, unexpectedly told me about the time he'd competed in a Fourth of July footrace in Brooklin at the age of ten or eleven. Brooklin always puts on a parade up Route 175 on the morning of the Fourth, and later celebrations at the nearby town green, but back then the road that branched off from the Williams General Store toward Naskeag Point would be closed off for athletic events. Jon entered the Boys Twelve-and-Under Hundred-Yard Dash and won it, collecting a prize of thirty-five cents. He was headed for the candy counter inside Williams's when his grandmother appeared, gave him a congratulatory hug (well, sort of), and put her foot down when she heard the plans for his loot. "This is town money," she explained. "It's not exactly *ours*. You'll understand this someday." And in no time she'd persuaded him to donate the thirty-five cents to the library, across the street.

I groaned and laughed when I heard this tale, which so perfectly summed up Mother's noble sense of duty and her terrible—no, appalling—judgment about kids. For her a fistful of candy never had a chance against the complicated right thing. She loved us all, anxiously and bemusedly, but forgot to hand out kisses because we were great runners or really good-looking or the smartest kid on the block. Stuff like that went without saying, only she never said it at all.

Nancy Franklin, in a remarkable piece about my mother in this magazine in 1996 (she'd never met her), wrote, "It's funny; as an editor she was maternal but as a mother she was editorial." This made me laugh, not cry, and it has come to me over time that my own way of loving her was often simply to try to cheer her up. Despite Maxwell, I don't envision her much at a younger best—slim and stylish at lunch with me in Schrafft's, around the corner from her office, in 1928, say—but instead find her sitting at the head of the dining-room table in North Brooklin, in her late seventies, with her elbow on the table and her head wearily resting in one hand while she eats. Andy is at the other end, and Carol and our son, John Henry, and I—or maybe this is earlier, with my two daughters there, instead—in our usual places. Callie and Alice, burnished with their sailing suntans, are wearing skirts instead of shorts, for Grandma. It's our customary last dinner together before we Angells head back to New York at the end of another vacation. Andy's Martinis have brushed aside the sad import of the occasion for the moment, and he is regaling us with the latest neurotic doings of his Norfolk terrier Jones. Late August sunlight falls into the room, competing with the table candles, and the usual homemade mint sauce and homemade piccalilli are in their usual silver dishes. Mother smiles and sighs and picks at her roast potato, and, watching her, I try to imagine which of her immediate deep concerns is topmost at the moment: whether the blue Chinese willow-pattern vegetable dish on the mantel behind her should be left to Alice, as written on her current and endlessly rewritten twelve-page adjunct-to-her-will list, or, for some complex reason, to Callie or perhaps to another granddaughter altogether, Kitty Stableford; how many of her nine grandchildren attended or ever will attend a school or college where they would get to learn their way around not just "Middlemarch" but "Cranford," too; why the cosmos, some blossoms of which are in the arrangement she's put together this afternoon in the copper vase in the far-left corner of the living room, has been looking so leggy of late and whether the northwest bed, where the cosmos are, doesn't need a wholesale cleanout and replanting this fall; whether Jean Stafford, the widow of Joe Liebling, was drunk again when she called last night or in the grip of something more dire; whether Edith Candage, in the kitchen, has remembered to get the dessert floating-island egg white whipped to a proper firmness; whether poor Catherine Allen's failing eyesight will keep her from laundering and ironing these organdie curtains, come spring, and if not who in the world can be found to replace her; whether Joe, away at the moment on a cruise east to the Bras d'Or in



his cutter Northern Crown, may encounter the tropical depression in the Caribbean mentioned on the radio tonight, on his way home; whether Roger, never as lean as his father, Ernest, hasn't picked up a bit of weight over this vacation with too much beer and too many lobsters, and may be overloading his heart; why Ernest made me carry that enormous frying pan around my neck on our 1915 honeymoon camping trip, and so perhaps beginning the back troubles that have been killing me ever since; whether Vladimir Nabokov doesn't still have a couple of pieces of short fiction in him for the magazine, and whether the current fiction department is still regularly in touch with him and Vera, and how long has it been, anyway, since I've had a letter, one of those "V.N." specials, from him; who that new person in checking is who last week crazily circled a phrase of Andy's on a galley and wrote "zeugma?" in the margin; whether Milton Greenstein will call us back tomorrow about the estimated September tax figures we've mailed him, and about Shawn's concerns about the paperback of the appalling Gill book; and isn't it time for seconds? She puts down her fork and lights up a filtered Benson & Hedges.

What can I say? Looking at Mother, I suddenly remember the line "In the absence of faith, indecision is the mind's great stay against death," which I've happened upon again just lately in some book. It's by a French writer, Benjamin Constant, and now I want to relay it to her, here at the dinner table, because it so perfectly applies to her. But then I think better of it. Mother doesn't talk about death or really think about it, ever, and it won't exactly make her laugh in the first place. So I turn and say, "Did you hear about Carol's idea for a name for our house here, out on the point? The kind of thing we'd put on the side of our old wooden station wagon, if we had one?"

"You're putting a name on your *station wagon*?" Mother says in alarm.

"No, no," I say. "Try to pay attention. This is a joke. She wants to call it Beside the Point."

Andy doubles over, laughing into his napkin, and my mother, smiling and radiantly herself, shakes her head and begins to laugh, too. ♦

"At once hilarious, fascinating, and just plain weird, *Animals* is one of those rare books that elicits a 'wow' on almost every page. A." ***—Entertainment Weekly***

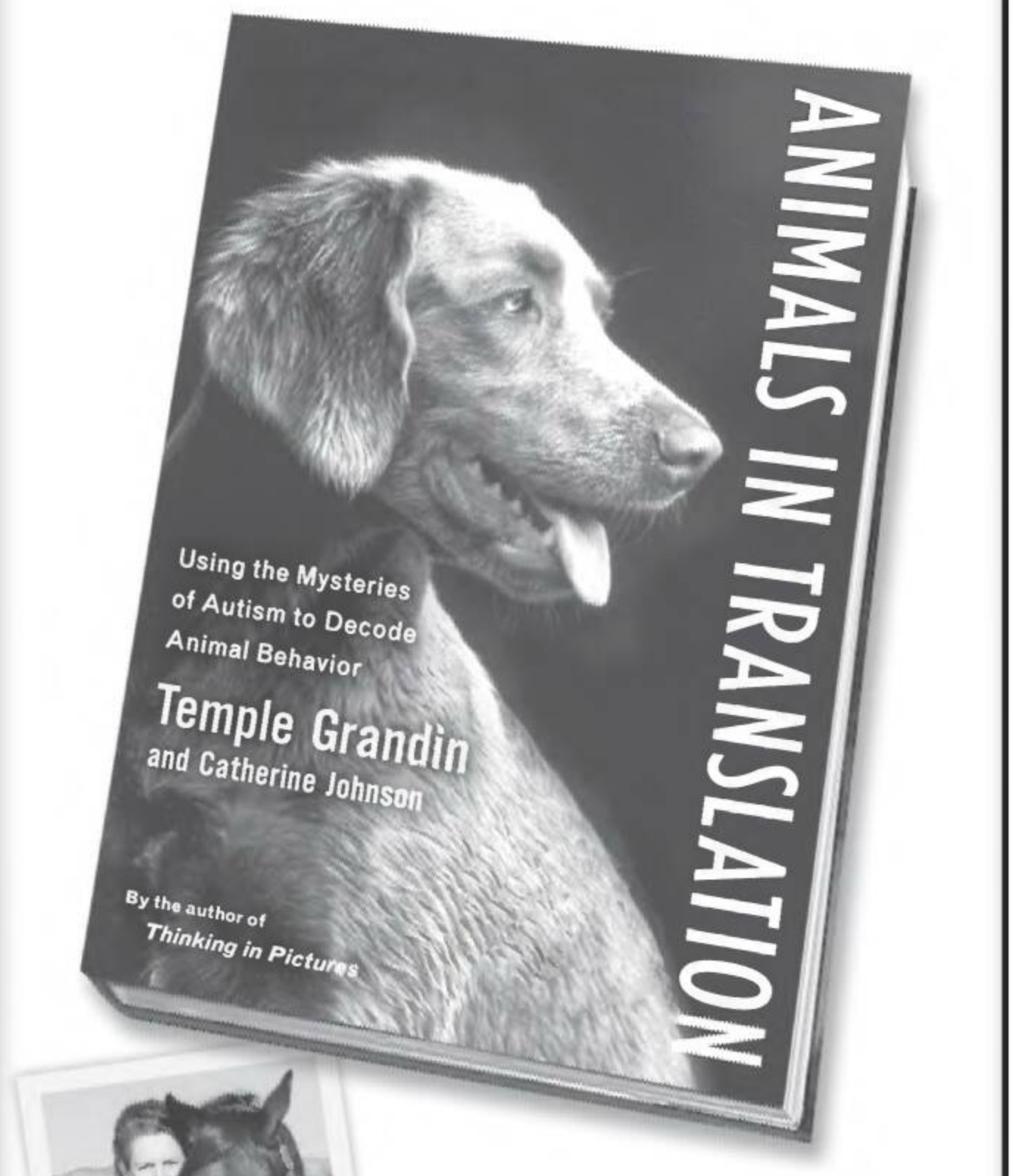



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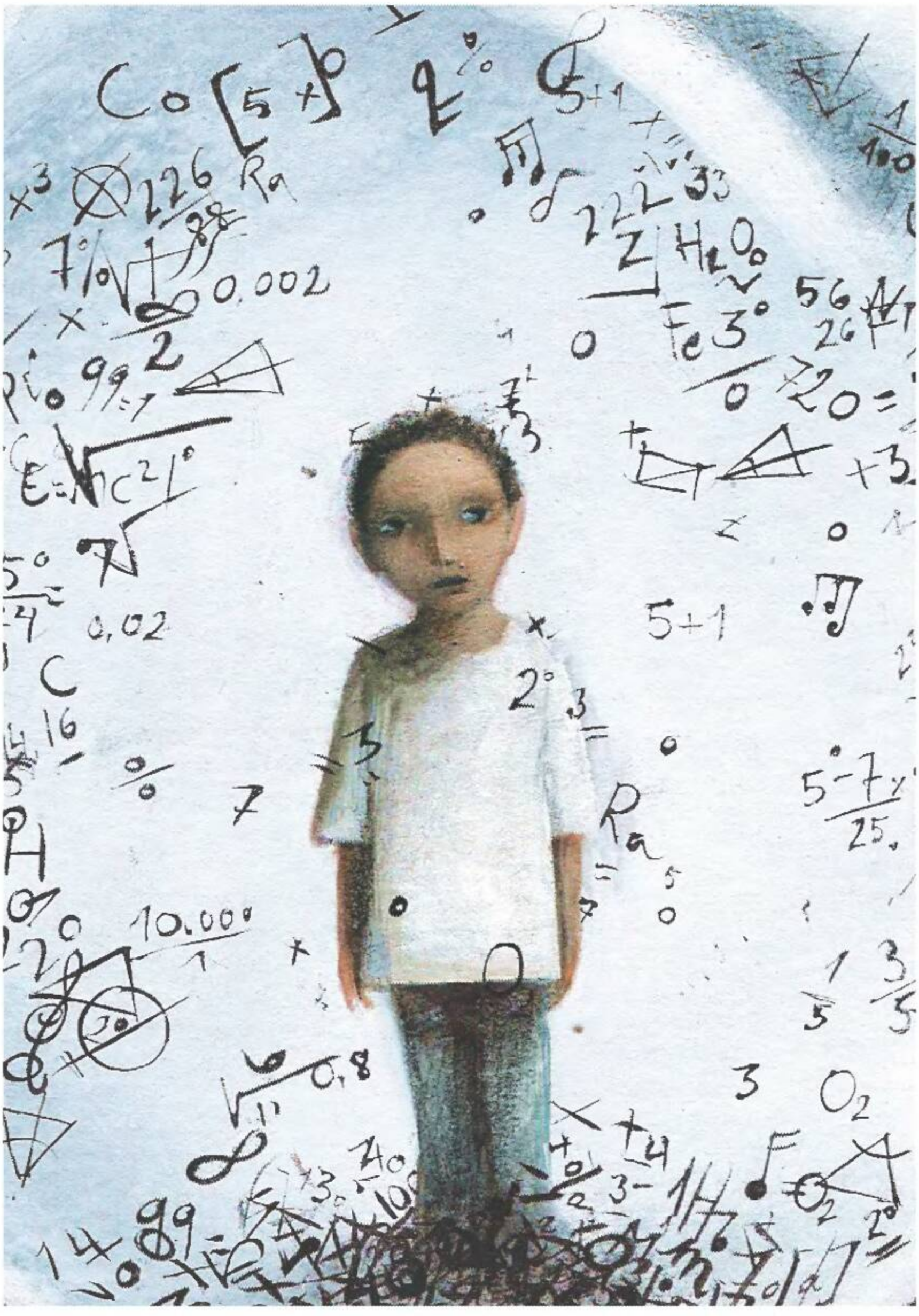
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LETTER FROM NEBRASKA

PRAIRIE FIRE

The life and death of a prodigy.

BY ERIC KONIGSBERG



Last May, Patti and Martin Bremmer promised each other that they would get through the second Sunday of the month without mentioning that it was Mother's Day. Brandenn, their son, had committed suicide in March, at the age of fourteen, and Patti was intent on treating the day like any other. To the Bremmers, who live on a farm in western Nebraska, in the village of Venango (population a hundred and sixty-five), and who have earned money over the years by raising organic grain and by breeding dogs, this meant getting up at five-thirty to feed the animals and pitch tumbleweed—the very chores, they could not help but be reminded, that Brandenn used to do.

"We're having a real hard time right now, because we didn't have any routines that didn't involve Brandenn," Martin said. It was a little before noon, and they were sitting down to eat. Their dining room has lavender walls and a large picture window overlooking the front porch. In the distance, they could see a cluster of outbuildings on their property: an old horse barn, a bunkhouse, a washhouse (where Martin's ancestors made soap and did their laundry), a kennel building, and a quonset hut they had long ago converted into a storage shed for grain and tractors. Patti had prepared a freshly killed chicken, baked potatoes, and a salad with red-orange Dorothy Lynch dressing. For dessert, there was a store-bought cherry pie. With Brandenn gone, she didn't have the energy for baking.

Their son had killed himself with a single shot to the head from a .22-calibre rifle. It was his own varmint gun, which he'd been using on intrusive skunks since he was ten years old. He had been shooting since he was six, an early age at which to become acquainted with a firearm, but almost from the time of his birth the Bremmers had known that he was exceptionally precocious. "He was born an adult, basically," Patti said. "He chose when he would wean himself. I wanted to nurse for a full year, but at eleven months he crawled into the kitchen and motioned for a cup." Though Brandenn didn't talk until fifteen months, Patti said, "he started right off speaking in complete sentences." He potty-trained himself at eighteen months and memorized an entire book of "Mother Goose" nursery rhymes when he was two and a half. At the age of four, he drove a tractor that had a hand-controlled throttle and gearshift, and once, when he was eight, he sat on his father's lap and drove the family car home from town.

Brandenn was known as a child prodigy by almost everybody in this part of Nebraska. When he was a little boy, his I.Q. was scored at 178, and his parents decided to make sure that he was adequately engaged and challenged. They homeschooled him, and when he was six years old they enrolled him in high school through a distance-learning course at the University of Nebraska. He was ten when he finished, in 2001, the youngest graduate in the history of the program.

"We never pushed him," said Patti, whose own experience with higher education, like her husband's, went only as far as some commuter-college credits. "All of his motivation came from within. We never could explain why it was, but one day when he was nine and a half he just decided to finish up, and we didn't want to stand in his way. So he did the last two years' worth of classes in seven months, going at it twelve hours a day, six days a week."

Brandenn went on to take piano lessons through Colorado State University, in Fort Collins, two hundred and fifty miles away. In 2004, he recorded and released a CD of his own compositions, New Age-style washes of chords and arpeggios, entitled "Elements." In January, 2005, he enrolled in an introductory biology class at Mid-Plains Community College, in North Platte, Nebraska, the first step on an intended path to medical school. He was planning to become an anesthesiologist.

Brandenn was handsome and gangly, with blue eyes and curly auburn hair that in the final year of his life he had allowed to grow past his shoulders. He liked the musician Yanni, medieval history, making jewelry, baking cheesecake, lifting weights, playing video games (especially SimCity, SimFarm, and the Command and Conquer series), and "Late Night with Conan O'Brien." He was also interested in animals, gross-out humor, and science experiments that he devised at home.

Late in the afternoon on Mother's Day, Martin and Patti took me upstairs to Brandenn's bedroom. In opposite corners of the room, each of them curled up in the same position: arms around legs, knees to chin—a child's pose. Martin, who is tall and lean and sharp-featured, sat on the bed with his back against the wall. Patti—small and fair-skinned, with a Friesian mane of hair—was on the floor. For a while after the suicide, Martin stopped by Brandenn's room almost every day. "Now I don't come up," he said. His eyes were filled with tears.

Brandenn and his father had remodelled the room in a Middle Ages theme, gluing floor tiles resembling rough-cut stone to the walls and festooning them with brocaded tapestries. There were swords and shields that Brandenn had ordered from a theatrical-supply Web site, a carved chest full of his piano trophies, wrought-iron candle holders, figurines of dragons, colored crystals. Patti pointed out five perfume bottles that were for Brandenn's ashes; they were made of red glass and had pewter screw tops. "Brandenn always liked expensive," she said.

His suicide was a mystery to them. They had searched the house for clues, and found nothing. He had left no note, and they hadn't seen any warning signs. "Brandenn wasn't depressed," Patti said. "He was a happy, upbeat person. There weren't sudden changes in his behavior." Neither recalled him being particularly upset about anything in the preceding months. He hadn't suffered a breakup, or endured a personal rejection. He hadn't been giving away prized possessions. In fact, Patti said, he'd just added to what he called his "unfinished list": he was selling some old Nintendo games on eBay in order to buy a PlayStation 2 console. And they'd ruled out the possibility of an accident. "Brandenn knew way too much about guns for that," Martin said.

Patti led the way down to the basement so that we could watch videotapes of Brandenn on TV. "We didn't want him to feel like he had to hide his gifts," Patti explained. "But we were very care-

ANA JUAN

"It was kind of like the Biosphere Project," Martin Bremmer said of the farm where his son grew up. "He had everything he needed."

ful to protect him from doing too much media." When he was four, he appeared on "Real Life," a nationally syndicated show ("Meet the next Doogie Howser"). The segment depicted him adding four-digit numbers, and then, with another child prodigy, playing pool and fencing with a plastic sword.

"See? He was normal," Patti said. "He got along with everybody."

"It was almost like he was amphibious," Martin said. "He was good on water and he was good on land. Adults took to him and children took to him." Brandenn's personality seemed to invite such metaphors. "He was like a therapy dog at a nursing home, making people feel better just by being himself," Patti said. "He calmed a whole roomful of children as soon as he started playing the piano."

A segment on "Leeza" showed Brandenn at the age of five, wearing a thrift-store suit. The Bremmers had been flown to California for the taping. "Martin and Brandenn had never seen the ocean," Patti said. "The waves knocked Brandenn down and took his breath away."

Watching Brandenn on the tapes was difficult but enchanting. He had freckles and long, giraffe-like eyelashes, and when he opened his mouth he really did sound like a little man. He spoke fast and in complete sentences. He had strident elocution and charm-school intonation. We watched as, at the age of eight, he told a local reporter about his high-school correspondence work. "I thought it would be neat if I graduated from high school in the year 2000," he said with convincing modesty, "but if I don't—well, what the heck?"

"That was Brandenn's attitude," Martin said. "No pressure." Then he held his head in his hands. "The three of us ate and lived and worked together every single day," he said. "Each of us knew what the other two were feeling at all times. We would have known if something was wrong."



Brandenn Bremmer, age seven, at home with his parents.

Martin's maternal forebears came to Nebraska from Illinois by covered wagon in the eighteen-eighties, and received free land from the government near Venango, in Perkins County, on the condition that they stay for five years. (About half of the people who came to Nebraska under the Homestead Act managed to stick it out.) The high plains of western Nebraska were particularly rough country, and, to hold on to what was theirs, Martin's ancestors survived a drought in 1892, a plague of grasshoppers in 1904, and a prairie fire in 1905. Eventually, the family prospered. The descendants in Martin's line still own some four hundred acres, half their original portion of the land.

Martin was born in 1966 and grew up in Denver, where his mother had moved as an adult. In junior high school, he was briefly placed in a pilot gifted program, but he didn't take to it or to the other children, and he was a C student through high school. He took classes in agronomy and business at a local college, but didn't get a degree. "I knew I wanted to be farming," he says. "I came to my grandparents' place for a summer and never went back."

He met Patti in 1989, when she asked him to audition for a bit part in a production of "Grease" that she was directing for a local community-theatre troupe. After two failed marriages, Patti was living with her daughters, aged eight and thirteen, in a small house on the Colorado border, next door to the dairy where Martin worked. "The first time I visited Martin's family's farm, this feeling came over me: I'm going to live here," Patti recalled. Six months later, she and Martin were married.

Like Martin, Patti was an expatriate from city life. She'd come to Perkins County from Omaha, three hundred miles to the east, a dozen years earlier, with her first husband, a horse trainer. Patti had been marked as gifted in elementary school, and was put on an accelerated schedule that allowed her to skip seventh grade (although she ended up repeating eighth grade). She attended a vocational college in Omaha, but dropped out and worked as an accountant. As a single mother, she had a business raising greyhounds and selling them to racetracks.

Martin's grandparents were happy to keep the land in the family, and sold him the house. Branden (he added the extra "n" on a computer when he was two years old) arrived within a year of Patti and Martin's marriage. His sisters' time at home did not coincide much with his childhood; both moved out and married young, and Brandenn later said that in many ways he felt like an only child.

"He was definitely the focus of my mom's attention," said Patti's younger daughter, Dawn, who dropped out of high school after ninth grade, homeschooled herself, earned her diploma, and now lives in California with her three children. "When she puts her attention to a project, she expects it to get

JOE DUGGAN/LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR

her noticed. She's always working on a masterpiece."

In the past few years, Patti has tried her hand at writing mysteries, and set up a vanity press to publish four of them. She says that she decided early on not to seek a commercial publisher. "I don't want an editor telling me how to change what I write," she told me. "I don't follow all the conventions of mystery writing." Once, when she was thinking about turning one of her books into a screenplay, she asked a friend's advice. "He told me, 'You've got too many characters, and you don't have enough action at first.' Well, I *like* to let it build slowly." Patti also likes having control over the books' covers, which feature photographs by Brandenn or, more recently, Martin, who then does the layout on his computer. In 2004, for the cover of her third novel, "Death Foreshadowed," Martin took a picture of Brandenn outside on a foggy morning, dressed as the Grim Reaper, with a hooded cloak and a scythe.

Even before Brandenn was born, Patti had definite ideas about her child. She and Martin knew that this was the one child they would have together—he had a vasectomy as soon as she gave birth—and Patti wanted a boy. She consulted the book "How to Choose the Sex of Your Baby," which says that intercourse within twelve hours of ovulation is more likely to result in a male. "So we timed it," she recalled. As a baby, Brandenn was colicky and in constant need of stimulation. When books and pictures were held in front of him, he looked as if he were already reading or comprehending them. When he wasn't being challenged or engaged, he squalled.

One day when Brandenn was eighteen months old, the Bremmers say, he clamored vigorously for his mother's attention while she was doing some bookkeeping. Brandenn had been playing with a set of magnetized plastic letters, and she absent-mindedly tried to keep him occupied by telling him to bring her an "A." When she looked up, a few moments later, Brandenn was holding up the letter "A." When she asked for a "B," he retrieved a "B." And on he went through nearly the entire alphabet.

"I ran outside and told Martin," Patti said. "Martin wanted to see. So Brandenn did it again."

At the age of two, the Bremmers say, Brandenn read aloud all the Dr. Seuss books they could order from a book club. "It gave me goose bumps," Martin said. "His muscles were still working to verbalize the words, but he knew all of them, and what they meant. He never had to sound them out." By the time Brandenn was three, he had read everything in the curriculum for first-grade students at the public school in Grant, a nearby town, so his parents asked the kindergarten teacher to enroll him a year early. The teacher told them that this was a bad idea. "She said, 'Just take everything away from him and slow him down,' " Patti recalled. "She wanted us to let the other kids his age catch up to him for a couple of years."

Patti and Martin were outraged, but Brandenn was perfectly happy to spend his days around his parents. "The kids were so below him intellectually that he had no desire to be with them," Patti said. "The teacher was giving them paper cups with seeds in them to teach science." Brandenn's sister Jennifer says, "He preferred adults." He once told his mother that he wouldn't mind going to school if the teachers were there and all the kids stayed home. If the Bremmers had another family over for dinner, he insisted on sitting at the adults' table. "It was almost a phobia he had about doing things associated with children," Patti said. He comported himself as if he were a grownup, clipping on a necktie to leave the house and telling women at the grocery store, "Excuse me, Madam, but you're looking exceptionally lovely today."

In November, 1994, just before Brandenn turned four, the Bremmers drove to Denver to meet with Linda Silverman, a psychologist with a practice devoted almost entirely to gifted children and their families. They'd got her name from Brandenn's pediatrician. On the parent questionnaire that Patti had filled out in advance, she described their son as "very strong willed" and "exhausting." She also wrote, "He questions authority on a regular basis and is quick to pick up on how serious the situation is and how far he can push. He doesn't like to be asked questions. He often responds with 'Why don't I ask you a question?' "

He was given an I.Q. test consisting of verbal, mathematical, and pictorial questions and problem sets that began at a level deemed answerable by a typical child slightly older than Brandenn. Each correct response increased his "mental age" score, and was followed by a more difficult question. Since Brandenn was three years and eleven months, his mental age went up by one month for each correct answer to questions appropriate for children aged between four and five. For every correctly answered question aimed at children between six and eight years old, he received two months' credit.

Brandenn's orneriness made a precise I.Q. score difficult to ascertain. He scoffed at age-appropriate questions (when a tester asked him what eyes were for, he said, "To bug out"), and tried to leave the room whenever he didn't know the answer to a question. Although Brandenn, according to the evaluation form, grew "bored" and refused to answer enough questions for the tester to complete the assessment, he got as far as answering questions at the level of a nine-year-old. Using a scale that compares a child's mental age with his chronological age, Silverman's office recorded Brandenn's I.Q. as 146.

At Silverman's recommendation, the Bremmers had Brandenn retested a year later. This time, although his attitude toward the test-taking was playful—he answered math questions in Spanish, which he'd been learning from a computer program—his I.Q. was scored at 178.

The scale that Silverman used on Brandenn classifies people who score between 130 and 144 as "moderately gifted" (the range for average intelligence is from 85 to 115), those who score between 145 and 159 as "highly gifted," between 160 and 174 as "exceptionally gifted," and above 174 as "profoundly gifted." The probability of someone's having an I.Q. above 176, according to standard I.Q.-distribution theory, is roughly one in a million, which means that at any given time there ought to be fewer than three hundred people in the United States with an I.Q. as high as Brandenn's.

Since 1979, Silverman's testing facility and practice, the Gifted Development Center, has given nine hundred and eleven children I.Q. scores of 160 or above, including sixty-four in the 200s.

Unless almost every young genius in the country is coming through her office, then, she is recording a far higher incidence of profoundly gifted children than the statistical distribution of I.Q. results should allow. The particular I.Q. test that Silverman, almost alone among her peers, relies on may have something to do with this. Although she begins each assessment with one of the more widely employed I.Q. tests, when a child scores extremely high Silverman goes to the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, Form L-M.

The Stanford-Binet was first developed in 1916, and enjoyed the status of the most widely accepted I.Q. test through three iterations, up to and including the Form L-M. The Form L-M (after the first names of its authors, Lewis Terman and Maud Merrill) came out in 1960, was updated in 1972, and then was replaced in 1986, by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, Fourth Edition. The update was never well liked by psychometricians, and several more recently developed tests, such as the Stanford-Binet Fifth Edition and the current Woodcock-Johnson exam, are considered more comprehensive and reliable. Silverman uses the Form L-M because it's the only version that officially calculates scores above 160. "There's nothing else to use with kids this gifted," she told me. But some critics of the test say that it not only assesses higher scores; it tends to produce them. "The Form L-M uses children from several decades ago as its comparison group, so of course the scores are going to skew much higher if it's used on today's kids—every generation of children is more academically and environmentally advanced than the previous generation," Susan Assouline, the associate dean of the gifted-education program at the University of Iowa, said. "It's not a useful test in this day and age."



Modern-day I.Q. tests were designed primarily to assess learning difficulties—to find the children in a typical classroom who might be lagging behind and in need of remedial attention. "These tests are most reliable at scoring average children or determining whether a child falls somewhere outside of average, but they're not intended to assess various levels of extreme giftedness," Sidney Moon, a gifted-psychology expert at Purdue, said. And a number of Silverman's colleagues say that there's no practical reason for an I.Q. test to measure high levels of intelligence. "Many of us who are lifers in the field agree that there are the gifted, and then there are the rare few who are really superstars among the stars," said Tracy Cross, a professor of gifted studies at Ball State University, in Indiana, and the editor of the *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. "It's hard to argue that those superstars don't exist." But, Cross said, "I don't believe there's much difference between a person with an I.Q. of 160 and one with 170, or 180."

Silverman disagrees strenuously. When I visited her at her house, an A-frame high in the hills above Golden, Colorado, she bristled at her peers' lack of interest in these distinctions—and at the standard public-school practice of placing exceptionally and profoundly gifted children in classes designed for merely advanced students. She described an effort, in the nineties, to eliminate gifted programs in public schools as "a form of discrimination that makes me think of Nazi Germany."

Silverman is a slight woman in her sixties, with dark, stiff hair set in a grandmotherly pouf, and a manner of severe, white-knuckled resolve. She and her husband, Hilton, have reared two children of their own and have taken care of sixteen foster children. Their house was decorated with Jewish- and Christian-themed art, and dozens of photographs of gifted children. "The gifted are my passion," she said, noting that her own children "didn't come out technically gifted."

Even her adversaries in the field of gifted education say that they have yet to encounter a more ardent advocate for children than Silverman, and speak of her intimate and youthful manner around prodigies and their parents. But there was nothing about her that seemed the slightest bit playful, except perhaps the leopard-print blouse and costume jewelry she wore. When a telephone call came and went unanswered, and the woman on the other end introduced herself to the answering machine, Silverman cautioned Hilton not to pick it up, explaining to me that it was one of their foster children. "She's trying to sell us insurance," she said.

Silverman arrived in Boulder in 1972, after receiving a Ph.D. in educational psychology and special education from the University of Southern California, and taught at the University of Colorado. When her contract was not renewed after the first year, her family struggled for a time (they briefly went on food stamps). Meanwhile, she independently pursued her interest in gifted children, and her husband opened a day-care center in their house and a group home for wayward or abused kids. Over the years, she has published numerous books, including a widely used textbook, "Counselling the Gifted and Talented," and she was a research consultant for the Stanford-Binet Fifth Edition. Though she has held college teaching posts since she left the University of Colorado, her work, unlike that of most of her gifted-education colleagues, isn't funded by a university.

Her reputation was damaged in 2001, after an eight-year-old boy whose I.Q. she had scored at "298-plus" (she said that he was "way beyond genius" and "probably unique in the world") threatened suicide and was later found to have been heavily coached on the Stanford-Binet test by his mother, who had obtained a copy in advance. The *Rocky Mountain News* revealed that Silverman had allowed the boy to take the test while sitting on his mother's lap, because he had an auditory-processing problem that sometimes made it difficult to understand his answers if his mother wasn't there to translate. Silverman appeared to be heavily invested in her appraisal of the boy's genius; he and his mother moved to Colorado from New York State, and she secured sponsors for them—they had been living in subsidized housing—and helped him enroll at a school for the gifted near Boulder. Even after his mother admitted that she had also forged his S.A.T. scores (800 math, 650 verbal), Silverman continued to insist that he was a prodigy: "Just memorizing the hardest I.Q. test would take an I.Q. of around 200!" she wrote in an e-mail to an acquaintance.

Silverman felt that the boy suffered from a culture that treats extremely bright children as freaks—that he was pressured not to achieve but to be average. "You would have appreciation for the

difficulty for the parents of a seventeen-year-old trapped with a nine-year-old's mind," she told me. "But what about a seventeen-year-old trapped in a nine-year-old's body?" It can make for a miserable childhood, she said. "These are the children who are often told by educators and even parents that they're too much—too driven, too perfectionist. It's the gifted kids who are beaten up in school. It's not safe to be gifted."

After a second meeting with Silverman, Patti and Martin gave some thought to moving to the Denver area, which had eight or ten very strong gifted schools and programs, and where Brandenn had grandparents and cousins. But Silverman encouraged them to homeschool their son. They were initially skeptical. "We had always considered homeschooling something for religious freaks, and both of us were hard-core anti-organized religion," Martin said. "But Dr. Silverman told us that, even in the gifted programs, out of twenty kids maybe three would be able to keep up with Brandenn."

"All of these schools have had mixed success up in Brandenn's range," Silverman told me. "Their programs are aimed at the 130-ish kids—that's three standard deviations from him." On an I.Q. distribution chart, she counted three standard deviations down from 100, the average I.Q., and landed at 55. "Putting Brandenn with them would be like putting an average kid in school with the 55-I.Q. kids. A kid who has an I.Q. of 55, do you know how developmentally delayed that kid is?"

Besides, moving to Denver would have meant giving up the farm in Venango. "Martin's family had had the land for generations," Silverman, who once spent a weekend at the Bremmers' house, told me. "They had an idyllic life style and the most beautiful family relationship. Brandenn had trees to climb and animals to be around. It meant so much to his parents that he was on that farm."

When Brandenn was four, his parents started him on the Perkins County elementary-school coursework, and within two years he'd finished the fourth-grade curriculum. Their routine varied from day to day. Typically, Brandenn was in charge. "We'd say, 'O.K., it's nine o'clock. What do you want to learn about?'" Patti recalled. "If he was passionate about reading that month, we'd do that. If he said, 'I want to learn about a dairy,' we talked about how cows work, making milk, all that. His goldfish died one day, so we dissected the fish under the microscope."



"It was kind of like the Biosphere Project," Martin said. "He had everything he needed: a greenhouse, books, land. It was like the ultimate school. He got to see birth, death, to see seasons in their entirety."

Along the way, the Bremmers became advocates for other parents in their situation. When they had started out, the state of Nebraska allowed homeschooling only on the ground of "sincerely held religious beliefs," but they persuaded a state senator to get a bill passed that broadened the exemption. They also started a charitable organization that raised and disbursed money to help needy parents of gifted children pay for tutors and tuition. For their part, the Bremmers realized that they were spending thousands of dollars a year on school materials that were typically free, and because Brandenn was absorbing information so rapidly anyway they decided to save money by skipping grades five through eight and going straight to the high-school curriculum. "Dr. Silverman said he was ready; we just had to follow his lead," Patti said. "She told us he was having every stage of a normal childhood—he just did it faster. He'd done the terrible twos in a few weeks."

The high-school correspondence program run by the University of Nebraska was designed for children who live far from the nearest school. Although it has a self-paced format that makes it a popular option for parents of gifted children, the program is more commonly used as a supplemental measure—for those who, according to a school catalogue, "find themselves short a few credits close to graduation" and still want to graduate on time, as well as for N.C.A.A. aspirants looking to boost their grade-point averages and students who want to take courses that may not be offered in small rural high schools.

There was no homework and few papers to write. Exams were administered in town and monitored by a neighbor who was registered with the program as a proctor. At first, the Bremmers limited Brandenn to two classes per year. "We were dragging it out, because we didn't know what else to do when he got through it all," Martin said. Eventually, Brandenn went on his tear.



"I'm thinking of waxing my back."

His transcript for the final two months looked like this:

4.03.2001: Personal Finance, B+
4.04.2001: World Geography 1, A
4.04.2001: Multicult Literature, B
4.10.2001: Small Engine Repair, B+
4.10.2001: Career Planning, A
4.19.2001: General Math 2, B+
4.19.2001: World Geography 2, A
5.15.2001: American Government, B+
5.18.2001: Ninth Grade English 1, B
5.19.2001: First Year Spanish, A
5.29.2001: American History 1, A
5.31.2001: American History 2, A
5.31.2001: Health Sciences 1, A
5.31.2001: Ninth Grade English 2, B+

He took only one year of a foreign language and no advanced math, and had his fair share of gut classes—nutrition, career planning, personal finance, and driver ed (which he completed when he was nine years old). And it was strange that Brandenn, who intended to go to college, followed the curriculum that, according to the catalogue, was recommended for "students whose immediate after-graduation plans include vocation or technical school, a job, or other noncollege situation."

Still, Silverman assured the Bremmers that what he studied was irrelevant. "He was so smart he didn't need to follow anybody's curriculum," Silverman told me. "It didn't even matter if he read books or not. He could already read at an adult level at the age of six." When it came time for college, she said, he would be able to adapt.

As Brandenn was finishing his last round of courses, Patti and Martin asked him if there was anything he wanted to do to celebrate. They offered to have a set of "senior pictures" taken, and Brandenn was delighted. He was photographed in a coat and tie, and then in a Harry Potter costume. He'd always liked the idea of graduating in a traditional cap-and-gown ceremony, so he persuaded the principal of the program to hold one, for the first time in the program's history. Only five other kids, all of them seventeen or eighteen years old, took part, out of a hundred and ninety students in Brandenn's class. (Among the qualifying graduates was Britney Spears, though she has no connection to the state of Nebraska.) Local news reporters were invited to film Brandenn at the event. From a lectern he could scarcely see over, he gave a very brief address—a stock commencement speech that he had found on the Internet, he said—and then ran through the auditorium playing tag with his nieces and nephews.

For the next three years, Brandenn focussed on the piano. With his parents' encouragement, he travelled across Nebraska for Lions' Club competitions—"He always took first place," Martin said—and put out his first CD. ("All music on this CD is original and composed by Brandenn Bremmer," the album cover says. "Produced by Brandenn Bremmer: Age—13.")

Beverly Dismukes, a kindly woman in North Platte who taught Brandenn music theory and gave him piano lessons for two years, said that, despite what his parents thought, she didn't consider him one of her musical prodigies. "But you could play something once, and he would play it back to you—that's unusual," she said. "He was gifted in that he could do that." On a "fact sheet" that Patti and Martin had printed and distributed to the media, they listed, along with Brandenn's high-school grade-point average of 3.8, the items "His music has made it to Japan"; "Writes a song sometimes in less than an hour"; and "He holds all of his music in his head, never writes it out."

"He was what they call globally gifted: intellectually, physically, emotionally, musically," Martin said. "Mozart had his mathematicality going, and Brandenn's talent was more on the emotional, spiritual side of the music." He said he had always assumed that when Brandenn was in his twenties and thirties someone might "write a little biographical book and look back at when he was fourteen and see that this was when he was learning the groundwork for what was going to make him famous in music."

Every corner of the Bremmers' house reveals the extent to which their lives were built on his: a microphone dangling from the ceiling of the den, which served as his recording studio; a life-size plastic skeleton, for the study of anatomy, in the dining room; a grand piano on which Patti and Martin still have another year and a half of payments to make. For a time, Martin kept above his computer a black-and-white photograph of a smooth-faced woman in a Mission rocker, her hair pinned up in a Willa Cather bun. The woman, Leta Stetter Hollingworth, is known to many today as the godmother of gifted education: she was a founder of the first public school for the gifted, in New York City, and, while on the faculty at Columbia's Teachers College, she started the world's first long-term study of the extraordinarily gifted. Hollingworth became particularly interested in children with an I.Q. above 180, and from 1916 until her death, in 1939, she found only twelve of them. In a landmark, posthumously published work, "Children Above 180

IQ (Stanford-Binet): Origin and Development," she presented case studies of these children, vast accumulations of detail pertaining to family histories ("A's great-grandfather... a tailor, devised and patented a union suit, said to have been the first union suit"), head circumferences, grip measurements, and prepubescent doodles.

Hollingworth's enduring legacy stems from the emphasis that she placed on understanding the social and emotional difficulties endemic to extreme giftedness. By studying peer relationships among children of differing levels of giftedness, she came to define the I.Q. range of 125 to 155 as socially "optimal," because those children were most likely to be outgoing and confident—not so smart that they couldn't win over their peers. But children with an I.Q. above 170, she said, were so unlikely to find mates of like ability that they were demoralized. "To have the intelligence of an adult and the emotions of a child combined in a childish body is to encounter certain difficulties," she wrote.

Her findings about this profoundly gifted minority contradicted the work of the Stanford psychologist Lewis Terman, her contemporary, who, in his famous longitudinal study tracking some fifteen hundred high-I.Q. children, asserted that his subjects were as socially well adjusted as anyone else, and that as adults they tended to be more emotionally stable than average. Hollingworth brought her personal history to the issue as well. She had grown up, like Brandenn Bremmer a century later, on a pioneer farmstead in the westernmost part of Nebraska, and she spent most of her childhood in self-imposed solitude. According to her biographer, Ann G. Klein, the ten-year-old Leta, beset by a string of family tragedies, willed herself to become an adult overnight. As Hollingworth later described the moment in a letter to her future husband, "I decided to grow up then and there, solemnly renouncing the rest of childhood."

Hollingworth's work fell into obscurity after her death, and was rediscovered only decades later. In 1980, a seventeen-year-old prodigy named Dallas Egbert III committed suicide. Egbert was from Dayton, Ohio, and had entered college at fifteen. "Before his death, almost nobody had thought to look at the social or emotional components for these kids," Elizabeth Meckstroth, who is now a consultant for families of gifted children, told me. The next year, she was moved to help start a support group for parents of gifted children, and later she wrote, with James Webb and Stephanie Tolan, "Guiding the Gifted Child." "The National Association for Gifted Children conference until then had been all about finding tutoring, improving the math curriculum at schools, and so on," she said. "But Dallas Egbert's suicide was a call to arms."

Many articles have been published during the past two decades on the subject of suicide among gifted children, and, although there is no good evidence for it, some people think that their rate of suicide may be higher than average. Among the factors cited, besides the risks of social and intellectual isolation, are the attendant pressures of perfectionism (described by one psychologist as "an emotional need to develop themselves and master the world") and the possibility that the gifted have heightened sensitivity: even if they treat success and failure as equals, they take them both hard.

"The way these kids' minds work has to do with more than just being quick and right," said Meckstroth, who got to know the Bremmers over the years at various functions for gifted children and their families. "It's an ability to make connections between all kinds of things and sense meaning in the abstract: everything matters to them." If an average child's mind is like a pair of rabbit ears that picks up four basic TV channels, Meckstroth said, the minds of profoundly gifted children are like satellite dishes, receiving hundreds of signals at once. "It can be overwhelming," she said. "An ordinary four-year-old might dig a hole in the ground for the pleasure of digging the hole. And one of these children might be digging and thinking of all the animals he'll encounter underground, and the children in China he could help."

Linda Silverman believes that there is a higher incidence of a compassionate streak among gifted children, and told me of several ten-year-old peace activists she has encountered. "A lot of gifted kids are angels who are on this earth with responsibilities to help others," she said. "There's no other way to explain it."

Between homeschooling and the self-containment of a rural existence that didn't involve much dependence on, or obligation to, fellow-townspeople, Brandenn was seldom in the company of children his age. A major exception was the week or two each year that he and his parents spent at retreats and conferences for the highly gifted. The first gathering they went to, when Brandenn was



"I won't be in tomorrow. I'm taking a personal snow day."



J. J. SEMPÉ

eight, was the Davidson Institute's inaugural Young Scholars program, at Lake Tahoe. The program was filled with activities, like a public-speaking workshop, in which participants designed advertisements, and a class for future archeologists, in which participants dissected owl pellets.

"Brandenn and I became good friends right away," a boy from Long Island who met him at the Lake Tahoe retreat said. "I think we both figured anybody who'd been willing to go this far was willing to make the best of it. The whole thing was fun—a group of kids like me, you know? Although I had some friends back home who were pretty bright, this was different. Everybody was just very engaged."

The boy, who has asked that I call him Duncan, was about Brandenn's age, and the two stayed in touch over the years. When I met him this summer, at his home, he told me that he was helping a physics professor in a study of fluid dynamics and organizing a Wiffle-ball league with his friends. He and Brandenn shared a goofy sense of humor. In the summer of 2004, he visited Brandenn, and they made a short documentary film about Venango. It began with a shot of the single block that constitutes downtown, and then the camera rested on a street sign that said, "Slow Children," as Duncan walked in front of it and, in slow motion, pretended to trip and fall. They filmed a vending machine outside the laundromat and made note of the bullet holes in its coin-operating mechanism. "We can safely say that this vending machine is past its prime," Duncan said. "Let us have a moment of silence for this vending machine." Then Duncan lowered his head, and Brandenn, who was holding the video camera, followed, tilting the lens down and filming his own feet.

Patti and Martin drove Brandenn to Denver that summer for a four-day retreat hosted by the Gifted Development Center, Linda Silverman's organization. Brandenn hit it off immediately with K., a pretty girl from the West Coast. They were together constantly that week, K. said, and added that she and Brandenn weren't quite boyfriend and girlfriend, though she wasn't sure how to characterize the relationship. "What would you call someone who makes you a ring and a necklace on Valentine's Day, and a brace-

let on your birthday?" she asked. "And the person who, when you decide to make him a scarf for Christmas, you spend three hours picking out the wool?"

In Denver, Brandenn, Duncan, K., and a few other kids spent most of the time together in their hotel, watching movies on TV ("Groundhog Day," "Spaceballs") and sitting around talking. "The thing about being gifted is the way you can be totally consumed by passionate interests," said K., who, at fourteen, is enrolled full time as a college student, plays three musical instruments, competes on a high-school gymnastics team, and cantors at her synagogue. "Lots of normal thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds find us off-putting. By 'normal,' I mean kids who are basically able to move from school to hobbies to their social lives, from subject to subject, without having to get obsessed about things. So for four days it was nice to pretend we were normal teen-agers."

K. described Brandenn as "a true gentleman." One night, there was a dinner dance to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Gifted Development Center, and Brandenn performed "Spirit's Dream," a piano piece that he'd named for Silverman's Doberman pinscher. Later that night, he asked K. to dance, but she told him that she would have to take a rain check. She found Brandenn formidable, she recalled, which made her nervous around him: "He wasn't just a musician—he was a performer." A few days later, as the kids prepared to depart, they made plans to stay in touch and reconvene at the next summer's retreat. K. helped Brandenn carry his bags to his parents' car and told him, "You owe me a dance."

Patti and Martin enjoyed meeting other parents on the summer gifted circuit—who often refer to themselves as POGOs, for "parents of gifted offspring"—but say that a high I.Q. was the only thing that Brandenn had in common with many of the kids. "A lot of them were the stereotypical gifted kids, with emotional deficiencies, manipulating their parents like a trainer would be leading a horse," Martin told me. "Some of the kids had real frailties—they wouldn't let different foods on a plate touch each other. One kid had a rat tail hanging down his back—hair that was ten years old. He said to cut it would be like cutting off a part of him." It frustrated Brandenn to be around kids like these, Martin recalled. "Brandenn wasn't a geek, he wasn't overweight, he wasn't pimply-faced."

"Which is why his suicide rocked their world," Patti said. "Many of these kids across the country are in counselling now because of Brandenn." She smiled a wistful smile. I thought Patti was referring to K., but when I mentioned her the Bremmers were dismissive.

"All the girls were madly in love with him," Patti said. "They were all planning to marry him. None of them knew about each other."

His parents were in no hurry for Brandenn to start dating. "I went all the way through high school without doing the girlfriend thing," Martin said. "The temporary girlfriend—what a waste of time."

Even though the Bremmers seemed to want to protect Brandenn from an immature adolescence, their description of the kind of mate and marriage he hoped to find someday sounded a lot like a young boy's idea of adulthood.

"He wanted someone who would share his interest in computer games and in music," Martin said. "Someone who liked to cook, who was good with raising kids, who wasn't dependent on him to make decisions for her. He wanted a house in Lincoln and one in Omaha for medical school"—the two cities are only forty-five minutes apart. "He wanted to trade in his old Ford Escort for a stylish new car. And then he would pursue a relationship." When he met the right girl, he would buy her an engagement ring that should probably, he figured, cost three hundred thousand dollars, because that was what he'd heard doctors earned in a year.

In the fall of 2004, Brandenn settled back into his routine at home, which included a piano tutorial he'd been taking for a year with David Wohl, a member of the music department at Colorado State. When Brandenn first performed for Wohl, he played a New Age piece he had written—"a lot of pedal, a lot of floating textures," Wohl told me. "It's like water music, basically. It doesn't require tremendous technique. I said, 'I'll take you on, but you're going to learn how to read music and you are going to learn the "Moonlight" Sonata and Bach.'" In return, Wohl taught Brandenn how to improvise more thoughtfully, manipulating harmony and using different chord spacings. Brandenn abruptly terminated his lessons in December, although he continued to compose and work in his music studio on his own. "It was odd," Wohl recalled. "I thought, Why stop now, just as he's getting into it? He'd been making a lot of progress, especially toward the end." Brandenn explained to Wohl that he was quitting lessons because he wanted to become a doctor, and after the holidays he was going to begin taking premed classes. "I guess I'm not going to make a career in music," he said.

"He had it all stepped out," Patti recalled. Brandenn planned to start with a couple of classes at Mid-Plains Community College, in North Platte, ninety miles from Venango. When he turned fifteen, he would get the rest of his premeds out of the way at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, where his oldest sister, Jennifer, is a surgical nurse. When he turned sixteen, he would start medical school.

"He liked the challenge and he liked the income," Martin said, referring to Brandenn's talk of becoming an anesthesiologist. "I think he also liked the idea of not having to see patients all day long. He didn't want to be dealing with a lot of hypochondriacs coming in."

"He wanted to ease people's pain," Patti said.

He began in January, with an introductory college biology course. "He was a quiet boy who seemed at ease for the most part," his instructor, Sara Morris, told me. "The other students didn't know how young he was. One time during lunch break, his parents came and brought him a sandwich. Sometimes he ate in the cafeteria with the other kids."

There were a lot of new academic challenges. "He was kind of feeling his way along," Morris said. "I'd assigned a term paper on natural history. I knew from talking to him that he'd never done anything like that, and of course he had to learn how to do the citations. And he was nervous. We talked about doing some typing of his notes and how that might help him. It was an adjustment for him, but he was going to do just fine."

Brandenn spoke frequently on the phone with Duncan. "His biology course—he said he wasn't trying all that



"Have you given much thought to what kind of job you want after you retire?"

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hard at it," Duncan recalled. "He just was never excited about it. He said, 'Basically, O.K., there's this living stuff and we call it organisms.' He found it incredibly abstract." It wasn't such a big deal to be disenchanted with a class, Duncan understood, but he was surprised to hear Brandenn sounding so listless. "He always went with such rapid fire at stuff he liked. But, with the bio, he was kind of detached from it."

At the time of his suicide, Brandenn had been graded on only a single exam, the course midterm. "It was either a B-minus or a C-plus, I can't remember," Patti said. "But it was scaled, so he was carrying a high B. He wasn't happy with it. But he always finished all his classes super. He sometimes got a C on a test in high school, and he'd always bring it up. It was like burning a piece of toast: 'I'll just put in another one.' "

Brandenn's sister Dawn didn't come home for Christmas in 2004, but she called from California. He was making cookies, he told her, and he was bored.

"Well, that sucks," Dawn said.

"Yeah, it does," Brandenn said.

Dawn wasn't speaking to Patti at the time. "My mom and I have fought my whole life," she told me. "I was the complicated sibling. I moved out when I was young." As Dawn saw it, her mother and Martin had created a life for their family that cut them off from the rest of the world. "They liked being that isolated, that whole all-we-need-is-each-other thing," she said. "I always called it Bremmer Island."

Brandenn talked with K. in intermittent bursts through the fall and winter. "There was probably a month when he called me every night," she said. "It always sounded like he was hiding, going outside the house to make calls, or only calling when his parents weren't there. He'd say, 'Oh, I gotta go—my mom's home from the grocery store.' "

He told her that he hoped to move to New York for medical school. "I want to go to school where there are people," he said. They talked about how much they missed each other, and began counting the days until Silverman's summer retreat in Denver. "He said he wanted to be there, but his parents might have something else for him this year," she said.

K.'s mother wrote Patti an e-mail in December. "I said our kids have created this nice relationship, albeit long distance," she recalled. "I just wanted to let her know how much Brandenn meant to my daughter. Patti wrote back that Brandenn had mentioned her, but his private world was all his own. She said she wasn't sure he was going to go to the POGO retreat, because of summer school."

Something else was going to change for Brandenn. Because the commute to the Mid-Plains campus was so long, Patti and Martin had made arrangements for Brandenn to start boarding in North Platte during the week, at the home of a Venango neighbor's grandmother. "He wasn't worried about being lonely, because he was happy with himself," Patti said. "He didn't need to have someone around all the time. He thought about it for a couple of days and then he said, 'No, I want to make the move.' We let him know he didn't have to. We kept telling him he could stay home and wait until he was in his twenties."

Over the holidays, K. received a text message from Brandenn. His mother had taken him to the library in Ogallala, where she was signing copies of her latest novel, "Victim Wanted," and at the moment he had little interest in being there. "Save me," he wrote, and later, in an e-mail, "IT'S HER FAULT I WAS BORED OUT OF MY MIND." He had complained in the fall that Patti had put him up to delivering a speech to a group of children at the library, and wrote, "I'm still kind of mad at my mom, since I wasn't asked for my opinion on doing this thing at all, it was just a 'Hey Brandenn, your going to give a talk at the end of the month to a bunch of kids.' " Still, he had said he wasn't that upset: "It was alright, and we ate at a Subway that day, so hey you can't go wrong with that (I'm a healthy eater so Subway is my favorite place to eat out). So yeah, I'm content with my life right now."

K. wrote to ask how Brandenn's Christmas had been. She said that she and her parents had spent the day at the movies. A couple of hours later, Brandenn responded that, aside from watching "Shrek 2," the Bremmers had done "nothing, as a family anyway." He explained in another e-mail, "Yeah, that's kind of what it's like here, I mean, we're a close family. . . . we just don't spend much. . . . time. . . . being. . . . that. . . . way. . . . Yeah."

In the middle of their exchange, a gift for Brandenn arrived in the Bremmers' mailbox. It was the scarf that K. had knitted, in marled gray alpaca, with suède fringes. He wrote to thank her:

> Your timing couldn't have been better, for the past week or so I've been depressed beyond all reason, so this was just what I needed, thank you very much.

She wrote back:

> Now, what's this about you being depressed all week? Talk to me, I want to hear about it. Because trust me, I've been there, done that and all I got was this lame t-shirt. ;) Just let me know okay? I want to help if I can, and it's really important to me that you're happy and all that jazz.

Brandenn replied:

> Thanks . . . I'm glad there's someone who cares. I don't know why I'm so depressed, before it was just every now and then, and you know, it was just "bummed out" depressed. But now it's constant and it's just, "What's the point of living anymore?" I don't know, maybe I just don't spend enough time around good friends like you. But like I can. Not out there in the middle of nowhere. At least there's this family kind of near by that aren't "Cowboys," or else just plain idiots, that I can spend time with. But even still, that's only like once every other week at the most. Oh well. Well I should probably go, thanks for being such a good friend.

Brandenn phoned K. that night. "He just said he was feeling down about everything," she recalled. "What teen-ager doesn't go through unhappiness, you know? I told him to talk to his parents. He said, 'Yeah, I'll think about it,' but he never mentioned them again." The two of them fell out of correspondence for a while, "not for any good reason," K. said. "We were both probably just too busy." On Sunday night, March 13th, Brandenn called her to say hello, but she was out.

Two days later, on March 15th, Brandenn finished recording a second CD of piano music, which he planned to call "Dimensions." He listened to it with his parents at around noon, then went upstairs to sew up a hole in one of his favorite shirts. Martin came up to discuss Brandenn's design for the CD cover; it was an Escher-like tableau of three-dimensional geometric shapes assembled in a desert before a reflecting pool. A bit later, Patti and Martin drove to the town of Grant, thirty minutes away, to run errands. They stopped first at the public library to pick up a stack of unsold copies of Patti's novel, and then bought groceries.

At five-forty-five, when they pulled up to the house, Patti heard what sounded like choking noises coming from inside. She ran upstairs to Brandenn's room and saw his body crumpled on the floor. He had shot himself in the head. He was unconscious but breathing shallowly. She screamed for Martin.

"I knew right away what had happened," Martin said. "Seeing him like that was like stepping into a room and none of your five senses work. It was like seeing the snow falling upward."

Martin carried Brandenn in his arms to the car, called 911, and began driving him toward town until they were met by an ambulance. The hospital doctors in Grant tried unsuccessfully to revive Brandenn, and told them that he was not going to make it. A hospital employee asked the Bremmers whether they were willing to allow their son's vital organs to be harvested. They immediately said yes. Back in December, when Brandenn turned fourteen and obtained a rural student's driving permit, he had checked off the organ-donor box. The subject came up at supper that night, and Brandenn had told his parents that he was all for it.

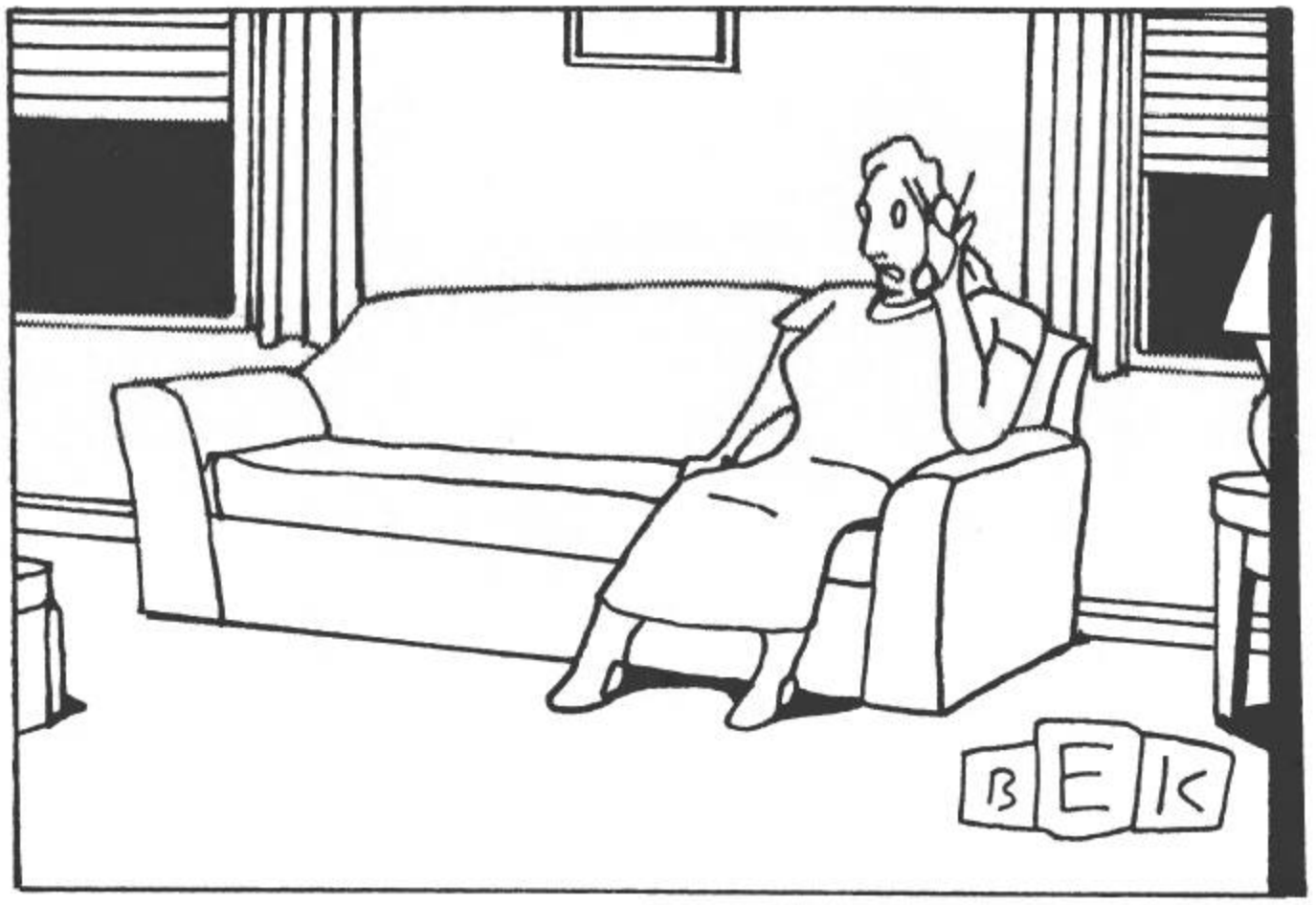
While a helicopter airlifted Brandenn's body from Grant to Children's Hospital, in Denver, Patti and Martin drove through the night in order to get there. A neurologist performed a CT scan and a radiograph and rushed Brandenn to the I.C.U., again in vain. Martin cut a lock of his son's hair to save, and gently removed the stud earring that Brandenn wore. He got his own ear pierced right away, so that he could wear the earring himself.

The harvesting of Brandenn's organs took place over the next two and a half days. Despite extensive damage to his brain, the rest of his body was functioning. "They used everything—organs, veins, arteries," Patti said. "The hospital said his epidermal tissues will help fifty people. They said they were fortunate to get a body in such good shape."

The next afternoon, Patti sent an e-mail to more than seventy people, including friends, family, reporters, and POGOs:

> The latest from the hospital a few minutes ago was that Brandenn's kidneys were a "Perfect Match" there were only 6 perfect matches in the US and the chances of those 6 getting kidneys were almost impossible. Once again Brandenn did the impossible. His liver went to a 22 month old baby that would have . . . died within days without it. His heart is now beating in the chest of an 11 year old boy who was down to hours. He was flown to Children's as a last ditch effort in a holding pattern counting the minutes for someone in the United States to find a match. His heart was on a man-made machine to keep him alive until they could find a donor. . . . Brandenn was in the next operating room they thought what are the chances and he was a perfect match....
>
> I am trembling and crying as I write this but I want to share with you and the rest of the world that knows him.

The Bremmers had no health insurance, and to pay the local hospital and



"I feel that if I wait here long enough Oprah will give me something."

ambulance bills they sold the CDs that Brandenn had recorded and the Bernese-mountain-dog puppies he'd raised. After the suicide sank in, Patti says, she became taken with the idea that perhaps he'd actually killed himself so that his organs could be put to use in those who needed them.

"Brandenn was so spiritually aware that if he sensed that people needed his help he would have helped," she told me once.

"So you're saying he had the ability to sense that people needed something from him and that's why he did what he did?" Martin put in, elaborating on the thought.

"Yes," Patti said. "I'm ambivalent about Christianity, but a lot of people have said he reminded them of Jesus. You know: 'He came, he taught, he left.' "

Patti told me that she thought Brandenn might have been an "Indigo Child," a concept that she learned about after his death, and that was described in a book by the New Age authors Lee Carroll and Jan Tober. "The Indigo Children: The New Kids Have Arrived" includes essays by psychologists and doctors, and suggests that a new breed of children born in recent decades possess not only great cognitive ability but supernatural insight. While these children are often misdiagnosed as having attention-deficit or hyperactivity disorder, they may actually be old souls reincarnated. Linda Silverman told Patti she believed that Brandenn was spiritually gifted, and that his mission to assist others in this lifetime may have been fulfilled by his death.

The idea that gifted children have supernatural abilities has gained some currency in the past few years. They have some origin in observation: intelligent children often pick up what's going on around them so well that they're able to intuit others' emotions; they can be extremely aware of themselves and their environment. "It's not so much of a leap to see that if all kids sense their mother or father's bad mood, a more intelligent kid can sense his mother's bad mood with less data," Sal Mendaglio, a psychologist and professor at the University of Calgary, told me. "And a child who sees more is more likely to experience anxiety himself when his mother is anxious. So that child's ability for greater empathy, his interest in doing altruistic things, then, is not so mysterious, either." Some people like to interpret this behavior, Mendaglio explained, as evidence of psychic ability or a divine mission.

"It wouldn't surprise me, the way he was, if he was so connected that he knew his organs were needed," Silverman told me. "There was always something otherworldly about Brandenn. He had a kind of ancient wisdom that was beyond anybody I'd ever seen."

During one of my visits to Silverman's house, just after she invited me to stay for lunch, she said, "Patti and Martin had contacts with him after he'd left his body. There was none for forty-eight hours. Martin cried the entire time. But then they both felt a sense of peacefulness. And he took the memory away from them of finding him." In effect, she said, Brandenn was healing his parents.

"With a suicide, especially of a child, the assumption we make in this society is that somebody is to blame for it," she went on. "I was extremely undone the night I found out that Brandenn had been lost. You couldn't help but examine the possibility of something going wrong. I asked him for guidance, because I could have missed something." And when she woke up the next morning, she said, "I had this overwhelming sense of peace, and just the feeling that he'd gone home."

Hilton Silverman, who had been in the kitchen, brought a platter of Reuben sandwiches to the table. Hilton has a gray beard, a wrestler's posture, and a heavily lined forehead. He wore fleece pants, a zippered skiing turtleneck, and flip-flops with socks.

"Well, I can tell you what the spirits are saying," he said. "He was an angel."

Silverman turned to face me. "I'm not sure how much you know about my husband. Hilton is a psychic and a healer. He has cured people of cancer."

"It kind of runs in my family: my grandfather was a kabbalist rabbi in Brooklyn, and my father used to heal sick babies with kosher salt," Hilton said. "Brandenn was an angel who came down to experience the physical realm for a short period of time."

I asked Hilton how he knew this. He paused, and for a moment I wondered if he was pulling my leg and trying to think up something even more outlandish to say next. "I'm talking to him right now," he said. "He's become a teacher. He says right now he's actually being taught how to help these people who experience suicides for much messier reasons. Before Brandenn was born, this was planned. And he did it the way he did so that others would have use for his body. Everything worked out in the end."

"I'll tell you who else is an angel," Linda Silverman said. "I think Martin's an angel."

"Oh, Martin, for sure," Hilton said. "He has a positive spiritual alignment. He and Brandenn meet a lot when he's asleep."

Linda looked at me helpfully. "You see, we don't know how to explain these kids—not scientifically."

"Scientifically!" Hilton scoffed.

Silverman seemed to hold fast to her interpretation of events, even after she saw the unhappy e-mail messages that Brandenn had written. She doubted they were representative, and suspected that they'd been taken out of context, or even manipulated.

At first, K. struggled to make sense of the e-mails. She worried that perhaps she ought to have prevented Brandenn's suicide. "I think I'm cycling through all stages of grief at once," she told her parents. They brought her to Vancouver to see a psychologist, and had her talk on the phone with another. K.'s mother shared the e-mails with Duncan and his family, and—through a coincidence of mutual acquaintanceship in Dawn's home town—ended up sharing them with Dawn, too.

All of them found something like relief in the e-mails. At the very least, the suicide appeared now to be something they had the vocabulary to understand. Brandenn hadn't been under a strange influence that told him he'd be doing something good for others by killing himself; it didn't seem that there was some awful secret behind his death. His friends



and his sister agreed that he had probably felt alone or sad or frustrated or some combination of those things, and was momentarily helpless to find a way out. And, unfortunately, he had been in a position to act on a suicidal impulse. Perhaps if the gun hadn't been in his room just then, he wouldn't have gone through with it.

When Dawn tried to discuss the e-mails with her mother, she says, Patti dismissed them immediately, saying, " 'Depressed' is a word we use all the time around here. It's just a figure of speech. It meant he was having a bad day." K.'s mother, she added, "is probably just into doom and gloom."

Patti told me that she thought it was K. who might have been unhappy. "Maybe Brandenn wanted her to feel better, so he wrote that he was miserable, too," she said. "That was Brandenn: if one of his sisters was struggling in school and said, 'I'm so dumb,' he'd say, 'Well, I'm *really* dumb.' He never sent any e-mails like that to anyone else."

Brandenn's sisters doubted that if he was feeling low he would ever have shared it with his parents. "He wasn't the sort of kid who'd have ever complained to us," Jennifer said. Dawn said, "I still feel a lot of guilt, like I should have done something to help—talk to him or let him know that life gets better when you're older. I'm sure my mom and Martin feel guilty, too. But with Brandenn it really would have been hard to see it coming."



One afternoon when I was with the Bremmers, the sky darkened over their front porch. It had been hot and dry for weeks, and finally a severe thunderstorm was rolling in from central Kansas. "We used to watch how Brandenn walked from the sidewalk to his biology class," Patti said. "In the past year, he became such a graceful young man."

"He glided," Martin told me earlier. "Until then, he walked like any other kid does, like Shaggy from 'Scooby-Doo,' you know? Like he has no bones in his body." Patti had added, "Oh, and he had a six-pack. His stomach was rock hard. I'd punch his stomach and make a joke about how it hurt my hand."

On the porch, Martin took off his glasses and wiped them with his undershirt. "It's hard to convince yourself right now that we were good parents," he said. He felt embarrassed that, all these years, he and Patti had offered their services as advisers to parents of gifted children. "What right did I have to tell them how to raise their kid if this is my track record? I thought I had it all figured out, and then he kills himself. Now I think I must be a total failure as a person, because the one thing I devoted my life to was raising Brandenn."

"We did everything right," Patti said, wrapping her arms around her husband.

Martin said, "I see moms who smoked all through gestation, or moms who yell at their kids at the grocery store, and I look at the kids and they're just so beaten down. Then I think, Why is that family getting by?"

It started raining, gently for perhaps a minute, and then hard and fast. The Bremmers' Bernese mountain dogs—two mothers and a litter of new puppies—scampered from their pen into the kennel, a converted milk barn. When Brandenn was thirteen and taking time off from music class, Patti recalled, Martin had taught him construction. They'd gutted the barn, put in insulation and sheeting, and reinforced the walls with two-by-sixes. Over a single weekend, Brandenn learned woodworking and how to pour concrete, and he put up most of the aluminum siding himself.

This memory brought to mind a horticulture project that Brandenn had done when he was eight, in which he developed a sprinkling method—one that actually worked in their yard. "It's too windy here, and our pool sprinkler sprayed so hard it wasted a lot of seeds," Martin said. Brandenn found a misting hose and kept it going lightly twenty-four hours a day. The land remained soaked, even on ninety-five-degree days, and the grass seed finally took. "He changed all the rules," Martin said. "It was the first year we had a real lawn." ♦

THE *SPORTING* SCENE

COOL HEART

The lethal art of Muay Thai.

BY ELIF BATUMAN

Bunkerd Faphimai, a three-time world champion in Muay Thai, or Thai boxing, has a gym called Fight and Fitness, on Bryant Street in San Francisco, across from Dad's "No Collateral OK" Bail Bonds, on the tail end of bail-bond row. In the evening, the street is dark and deserted, the warehouses locked for the night; inside, the gym has the mesmerizing aura of a beehive, all yellow light and subsuming, languageless activity.

I first went there for a trial class last winter. Electronic music was droning from a set of speakers. An electric bell was beeping at thirty-second intervals, jump ropes ticked clocklike against the mats, and the movement of the speed bags produced a hypnotic triplet rhythm. I remembered a Turkish expression, "The bear knows forty stories, but all of them are about pears," which is used to describe someone who is always harping on the same subject. The boxers at the speed bags had a dogged eloquence that reminded me of that bear. On a high shelf near the entrance sat a green enamel Buddha with a glass of Gatorade.

I didn't notice Bunkerd until he was standing in front of me: a diminutive man in his early forties whose nose clearly had been broken several times. He instructed me to hold out my left hand, which he proceeded to bind in boxer's hand wraps. When he had finished both hands and closed the Velcro around my wrists, he patted my arm. I had never met anyone who so manifestly radiated good will.

After a week or two, I was hooked—I invested in my own hand wraps and a pair of beautiful red fourteen-ounce boxing gloves with "Bunkerd Sportswear" printed on them in white. (Bunkerd has his own line of gear, manufactured in Bangkok.) I started spending all my free time at the gym—drawn by the universal pleasure of kicking and punching one's fellow-man, and also by Bunkerd's personal magnetism. Every day, I was increasingly impressed by his gentle and lively demeanor, pedagogic skill, and volubility. It was difficult to label him. He couldn't be the "boxer with a heart of gold," because that is a fundamentally conflicted, ironic figure, and Bunkerd didn't seem to be in conflict about anything. He was more like a small person made entirely of gold. (He often wore a tiny hoop earring, a big gold watch, and a gold ring.) Although his English was limited, he spoke with an air of sincerity and persuasiveness, and didn't seem bothered by the thought that people might not understand him. His teachings were devoid of any tormented, get-inside-the-other-guy's-head rhetoric. A move either worked ("Easy knockout") or it didn't ("No fun"). "No fun," he said flatly, demonstrating an incorrect stance. "Lose balance."

One day soon after I started, I was having trouble with high kicks, and Bunkerd came over and began explaining something in a heartfelt, meaningful tone. "||| || ||||!" he said, an utterance that I pictured as a row of vertical lines, like Woodstock talking to Snoopy. "|||| ||||| ||| kick," he added, pointing at my leg.

As I stepped back to try another kick, my partner called, "Look out! I think he's going to grab your leg."

Sure enough, Bunkerd seized my leg, rotated it ninety degrees, moved my arm back, and executed the entire kick for me, as if I were a puppet. "That's right!" he said, beaming. "Perfect!"

I started to get the hang of it, and toward the end of class Bunkerd ap-



The boxer Bunkerd Faphimai at his Fight and Fitness gym, in San Francisco. Muay Thai is known as the Science of Eight Limbs. Photograph by Brian Finke.





"You know, you can do this just as easily online."

• •

proached me from a distance. "|||| || ||||," he declared, raising one hand.

"Ah, thanks," I said, when it became clear that he was expecting some response.

"|||| || ||||!" he repeated, his boxing glove still aloft.

Finally, I understood what he was saying: "Give me five!"

Muay Thai is known as the Science of Eight Limbs, because fighters use their fists, feet, elbows, and knees. The basic movements include punches, high and low kicks, elbow strikes, and a wide variety of knee kicks. Of all the "eight limbs," Thai boxers are most partial to elbows and knees. Elbow strikes, which typically result in deep gashes to the face, are prohibited in most American fights.

Muay Thai was brought to the United States in 1968 by a retired Thai fighter named Surachai Sirisute. He opened a training camp in his back yard in Pomona, California, where his pupils included several Hell's Angels. Sirisute became a guru in the martial-arts community, worked with members of the Dallas Cowboys, the F.B.I., and the C.I.A., and was instrumental in the rise of Muay Thai in America throughout the seventies and eighties.

The first professional American Muay Thai championship was held in Los Angeles in 1974, under the designation of "full-contact karate." The main American sanctioning organizations—the International Sport Kickboxing Association (I.S.K.A.) and the U.S. Muay Thai Association (U.S.M.T.A.)—were established in the eighties and nineties. Today, there are four or five hundred fighters on the professional Muay Thai circuit in the United States—about ten per cent of them women—and thousands of amateurs.

In Thailand, there are hundreds of thousands of professional boxers and tens of millions of fans, many of them gamblers. Thais love to bet, and will bet on almost anything. (When the former Muay Thai champion Somluck Khamsing won a gold medal in Western-style boxing at the 1996 Olympics, people all over Thailand started buying lottery tickets corresponding to his license-plate number.) At the two most prestigious stadiums in Thailand, Lumpini and Rajadamnern, nearly every audience member has some money on the fights. Bookies and professional "prognosticators" offer odds not just on who will win each match but on the type of win (K.O. or T.K.O., unanimous or split decision), on the outcome of individual rounds, on whether the first blow will be struck by foot or by hand, and even on whether said blow will come from the left or the right. Thai politicians regularly endorse boxers as a means of gaining publicity. The King, the Prime Minister, the Mafia—everyone cares about Muay Thai. Boxing in Thailand is what poetry was in Soviet Russia: an aesthetic form treated as a vital affair of state.

Muay Thai is a ring sport, and low on philosophical rhetoric. The point is not to achieve Zen but to knock out your opponent. In tae kwon do, the motions are choreographed according to dense non-pugilistic narratives: one set of moves, known as Heaven and Earth, is supposed to suggest the creation of the world, while another, Dosan, is a twenty-four-step pantomime of the life and achievements of Changho (Dosan) Ahn, an educational reformer from the Korean independence movement of the nineteen-twenties and thirties. An example of a metaphor used in Muay Thai is "extinguish the lamps," which means "punch your opponent in the eye."

Little is known about the history of Muay Thai. Bunkerd says that it has been around as long as the Thai people; the earliest existing reference dates from 1411. Whereas tae kwon do, kung fu, and jujitsu are believed to have been invented by monks in order to defend their temples from marauders, Muay Thai is believed to have been invented by the Thai Army in order to defend the country from invaders. (It was, however, taught in temples until the turn of the twentieth century.) Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia never to have been colonized by Europeans, and although it hasn't been established that Muay Thai played a significant role in Thai independence, nearly every Thai king is associated with some legend of boxing prowess. The national mythology holds that to be independent is to be Thai, and to be Thai is to box.

In the early days of Muay Thai, rounds were either untimed or timed in only an approximate fashion—for example, by floating a pierced coconut shell in a tank of water. (When the shell sank to the bottom, the round was over.) Biting and eye-gouging were allowed, as was the practice of dipping hand wraps in resin and ground glass. The number of rounds was potentially

unlimited: a match ended only when one fighter was unconscious. There were a great number of deaths in the ring—one reason, perhaps, for the introduction of the Queensberry rules, in the nineteen-thirties. The rules were not fully standardized until after the Second World War. Bouts now consist of five three-minute rounds, and fighters are required to wear protective gear and Western-style boxing gloves.

Most professional boxers in Thailand are between fifteen and twenty years old, and are welterweights or lighter. When you watch a Western boxing match, you can often follow the course of the fight just by observing the boxers' expressions: relief, calculation, defiance. You can tell from the boxer's face whether he has just pulled off a successful fake or delivered a righteous counterstrike. This transparency seems naïve and touching in comparison with the opacity of the Thais, who hone their poker faces from early childhood. In Thai fights, counterstrike succeeds strike quickly and mechanically, and no feeling is betrayed. The boxers fly at each other relentlessly, dispassionately, unceasingly, their bodies buffeted to and fro as if on an invisible sea.

Some of the fighters move so fast that they seem to violate the laws of physics. Panya Kraitus, the author of "Muay Thai: The Most Distinguished Art of Fighting"—the definitive English-language source on Muay Thai—writes of "great jumpers, capable of boosting themselves with a foot on the waistband of an opponent's boxing shorts and delivering a stunning kick to the head." In Thailand, fights are accompanied by the music of the *pi*, or Javanese clarinet, an instrument prized for its eerie timbre. The music escalates in rhythm and pitch throughout the fight—"to increase the adrenaline of the fighters," Kraitus writes.

Muay Thai, like much of Thai culture, is subject to the Buddhist emotional ideal of *jai yen*, or "cool heart." (Physicians at the Phuket International Hospital recommend *jai yen* as a strategy to maintain health: "Adopt what Thais call a 'cool heart' . . . and just walk away from troublesome situations.") Kraitus writes that a boxer must always be able to "replace hot, volatile and murky emotions with those that are cool and rational." Outside the ring, he should "act as if [he] were not well versed in the lethal art of Thai boxing."

Muay Thai is also associated with magic and rituals. Before a fight, each boxer circumambulates the ring, gliding one hand along the ropes; according to the anthropologist Peter Vail, this is meant to "seal the ring against outside influences." Traditionally, the boxer then recites a secret incantation, called *kata*, imparted to him in private by a trainer or manager. Vail describes one popular *kata*, "four-faced Brahma," which is said to have the double function of making the opponent see four faces instead of one and causing the boxer himself to radiate extra *metta* ("loving-kindness"), so that nobody can bear to hit him too hard. During these pre-fight ceremonies, all fighters wear a protective headband called the *mongkon*, which is approximately the same shape as a tennis racquet, and is worn with the handle sticking out in the back. Rolled up inside are talismanic items—usually paper inscribed with magical letters and numbers, though boxers have also been said to include clippings of their fathers' hair or scraps from their mothers' robes, dried pieces of venomous snakes, and even fragments of their ancestors' bones. Kraitus's book includes an entire chapter about such charms; he also mentions boxers who recite spells in graveyards, particularly seeking out those which are "reputed to be very much haunted."

Nowadays, Muay Thai instruction takes place in boxing camps, which are run for profit by entrepreneurs and businessmen. Still, as Vail has written, the analogies between Muay Thai fighters and Buddhist monks persist. Monks live in monasteries, for example, and boxers live in secluded camps; monks are celibate, and boxers aren't allowed to have sexual relations in the twenty days leading up to a fight. Boxers and monks change their names when they take on their new vocation, suffer physical mortifications, possess charismatic powers, and wear special clothing. But, unlike monks, boxers have close ties to the *nakleng*—the criminal underworld—and must negotiate with thugs and bet-fixers; they sometimes make extra money by working as leg-breakers and bodyguards.

Rajadamnern Stadium opened in 1941, and Lumpini in 1956. A story is frequently told about one of the first female television announcers, in the nineteen-seventies, who allegedly climbed under the ropes at Rajadamnern and walked around the ring in front of the cameras. That night, every fight ended in a bloody T.K.O. owing to cuts. The female announcer was held responsible, on the strength of a murky associative link between



"Uh-oh, your coverage doesn't seem to include illness."

women, menstrual blood, and T.K.O.s, and women were banned from entering a boxing ring. Today, women do fight professionally, but not at Lumpini or Rajadamnern.

In 1998, the celebrity boxer Parinya Kiatbusaba—he was one of Thailand's numerous transvestites—refused to take off his underwear for a weigh-in at Lumpini. Since Kiatbusaba made weight even in his underwear, the management eventually let him into the ring. Wearing his trademark red lipstick, Kiatbusaba easily defeated his opponent and then kissed him on the cheek. Kiatbusaba had become a boxer because it was the only way that he could earn enough money to achieve his lifelong dream: sex-reassignment surgery. After the surgery was performed, in 1999, he, too, was banned from the major stadiums.

Kiatbusaba's situation reminded me a bit of Bunkerd's. From earliest childhood, Kiatbusaba wanted to be a woman, despite his body; from earliest childhood, Bunkerd wanted to be a boxer, and this, too, was despite his body.

STUPID MEDITATION ON PEACE

He does not come to coo.
—*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

Insomniac monkey-mind ponders the Dove,
Symbol not only of Peace but sexual
Love, the couple nestled and brooding.

After coupling, the human animal needs
The woman safe for nine months and more.
But the man after his turbulent minute or two

Is expendable. Usefully rash, reckless
For defense, in his void of redundancy
Willing to death and destruction.

Monkey-mind envies the male Dove
Who equally with the female secretes
Pigeon milk for the young from his throat.

For peace, send all human males between
Fourteen and twenty-five to school

Bunkerd's physique resembles not that of a lion but that of a lion statue, with a large head and a compact body. This is the wrong build for Muay Thai, the ideal being that of the retired champion Diesel Noi, who is six feet tall and fought at a hundred and thirty-five pounds. Bunkerd, who is five feet three and looks healthy and well proportioned at his non-fighting weight of a hundred and forty pounds, had to starve himself in order to become a champion.

Throughout Bunkerd's career, most of his opponents have been taller than he. One afternoon at the gym, I saw him sparring with five of his larger students, one by one, three rounds each. It was astounding to see these enormous men, in protective helmets and mouth guards and shin guards, flying to all corners like discarded robots while Bunkerd stood in the middle of the ring, cheerfully wiping blood from his nose and displaying no sign of fatigue or ill humor.

Later, Bunkerd lent me a videotape of his three consecutive matches against the Moroccan-Belgian fighter Bilam Nesradine. The first fight, for the I.S.K.A. Intercontinental title, took place in August of 1995, at Table Mountain Casino, near Fresno. Bilam, like many European fighters, favored fancy, karate-style high kicks and spins. For the first round—known by Thais as "garbage time," because it is typically used for observation rather than action—Bunkerd made no offensive moves, dodging kicks, hopping from one foot to the other, and hiking up his little white trunks. When Bilam managed to land a blow, Bunkerd nodded approvingly. In the second round, when Bilam came at him with a high right kick, Bunkerd seized his leg mid-air and knocked the standing leg out from under him. He repeated this sequence several times, blocking, evading, or grabbing Bilam's kick, and landing a low kick or knee. Bilam was taller than Bunkerd, with longer arms, and more skilled as a boxer, but Bunkerd was better at kicking. Bilam began dancing backward, stalling for time. Bunkerd trotted after him, chased him into every corner of the ring, and kicked him in the leg. Bunkerd won the title by majority decision.

The rematch took place two months later, again at Table Mountain. In the second round, Bilam landed a textbook uppercut to Bunkerd's chin. Bunkerd's head flipped backward in an undignified posture—which, however, he promptly turned to his advantage. Lowering his gloves, Bunkerd gestured at his own head, moving his lips. "Go ahead!" he was saying. Bilam pummelled Bunkerd with two uppercuts and several hooks; Bunkerd's head bobbed eerily to and fro, his face wearing a vacant expression. Suddenly, Bunkerd sprang back into action, leaping at his opponent with a flying knee to the chest. The audience went wild. "Wherever he goes, Bunkerd is an instant cult hero," the announcer said. Bunkerd lost a point for an illegal knee to the head ("I think he just *forgets*," the announcer opined), and the match was scored a draw.

"One more! One more!" Bunkerd cried, holding up one finger, meaning that there would have to be another rematch. He threw his arms around Bilam's neck, reached up to pat his head, and then, from an excess of joy, kneed him in the ribs. Bilam smiled gamely but looked as if he didn't really want another rematch.

But Bunkerd got his way, and the third fight took place in San Jose in the spring of 1997. Early in the fourth round, Bilam landed an almost comi-

On the Moon, or better yet Mars.

But women too are capable of Unpeace,
Yes, and we older men too, venom-throats.
Here's a great comic who says on our journey

We choose one of two tributaries: the River
Of Peace, or the River of Productivity.
The current of Art he says runs not between

Banks with birdsong in the fragrant shadows—
No, an artist must follow the stinks and rapids
Of the branch that drives millstones and dynamos.

Is peace merely a vacuum, the negative
Of creation, or the absence of war?
The teaching says Peace is a positive energy.

Still something in me resists that sweet milk,
My mind resembles my restless, inferior cousin
Who fires his shit in handfuls from his cage.

—Robert Pinsky

cally effective right cross to Bunkerd's head: one moment Bunkerd was standing, the next he was flat on his stomach. He got up immediately, but seemed dazed for the rest of the round. When the bell rang, his three cornermen leaped into the ring like attendants at some strange car wash: one sprayed water into Bunkerd's face, another polished him with an enormous sponge, and a third propped his legs on his shoulders and rubbed them with a big, round ice bag. Throughout these ministrations, Bunkerd stared straight ahead, maintaining a philosophical expression. He went on to dominate the fifth round, with a barrage of low kicks and knees. When the last bell rang, both Bilam and Bunkerd knew that they had put on a top-notch show: they marched arm in arm around the ring, and Bilam leaned down and kissed Bunkerd on the cheek. The decision was announced, to the apparent delight of both fighters: another draw.

After I'd been taking classes for about six months, I asked Bunkerd to tell me more about himself. "O.K.," he said. "Tomorrow after class, I tell you about my life."

But when I came out of the locker room the next day he was nowhere to be seen. Finally, I found him in a corner near the weight machines, peering at himself in the mirror. He was wearing only his shorts, and holding a pair of tweezers.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello," he replied, glancing at me in the mirror.

"Is now a good time for us to talk?"

"Yes," he said, and, with great concentration, plucked a hair from his chin.

"Have you had lunch?" I asked, after a brief pause.

"No."

"May I invite you for lunch?"

"No," he said. "I'm O.K." Then, removing another hair: "Thank you."

It was shaping up like one of those investigations on "Law & Order," where all the people in New York are so busy that they can talk to the detectives only while operating jackhammers or restoring Renaissance paintings.

"Maybe we can go to a coffee shop?" I suggested.

"We can talk here," Bunkerd said.

I went to the front desk and pulled up two chairs. Bunkerd appeared a minute later, now wearing a shirt, and sat across from me, setting his tweezers on the desk.

"Yes," he said. "I'm ready."

Bunkerd told me that he was born in December, 1962, on the Khorat Plateau, in a provincial city in the northeast called Nakhon Ratchasima. Like many up-country Thais, he was brought up speaking both Lao and Thai. When he was six years old, his family moved to a rice farm in the northeastern province of Chaiyaphum; they travelled on foot, through a jungle inhabited by tigers and snakes. Bunkerd carried his baby brother in one arm and "some pots and pans" in the other. He attended a Chaiyaphum elementary school for four years, until, at the age of eleven, his parents sent him to work at a neighboring farm.

"I go to somebody's farm. The somebody tell me, 'Bunkerd do this, Bunkerd do that.' I have to do everything—I baby-sit for him, farming, everything. For one year. And he give me fifty baskets rice." He looked at me expectantly.

"Wow," I said.

"Fifty baskets, that's it," he said. "Five zero. For one year!"

"That's not very much," I hazarded.

"No!" he said emphatically.

Bunkerd knew that he wanted to be a boxer from the moment he heard a Muay Thai fight announced on the radio.

"I thought, Oh, wow, this guy is good! I love the fight," Bunkerd said. Though he hadn't yet had any formal instruction, he apparently spent the winter months in an uninterrupted brawl with his brothers. "After the rice harvest, we have no work, we do nothing," he said. "We're farmers, bad kids. We're sparring all the time!" They had no headgear, so they wore rice baskets on their heads and used towels for gloves.

"Towels?"

Bunkerd nodded. "Like this." He removed his shirt and wrapped it around his hand. We both regarded his wrapped hand.

"I'm cold," he said after a moment. He unwrapped his hand and put his shirt back on.

As a child, Bunkerd saw real Muay Thai fights only once a year, at a festival after the rice harvest. During the

festival, his family ate "good food," meat and chicken; the rest of the year they ate sticky rice. The festival featured Thai folk theatre, puppets, acrobats, Muay Thai bouts, and cowboy movies, of which Bunkerd was particularly fond. When I asked which movie was his favorite, he looked regretful and said that he didn't remember the name. "But look what I can do," he said, and, sitting up straight in his chair, he began to whistle a spooky yet buoyant melody: the theme from Sergio Leone's "For a Few Dollars More." (Later, I burned the track onto a CD for him. The next time I walked into the gym, he jumped up and hugged me. "Thank you for the song! When I hear it, I think I am in my home town!")

Bunkerd's first professional fight took place in a neighboring village when he was thirteen. He entered the fight without his mother's knowledge; she did not support his boxing aspirations. As soon as the fight began, Bunkerd knew that he could win; he felt stronger and faster than his opponent. But he was careful not to knock him out: boxers got paid ten baht per round, so he hit not so much to cause damage as to score points. At the end of the fifth round, his brother and their friends ran down to congratulate him—only to have the judges score the match in favor of the local fighter. Bunkerd and his friends narrowly escaped a fight with the entire village, and had to walk the five miles back to Chaiyaphum in the dark.

"I learned knockout is best," Bunkerd said. He challenged the boy to a rematch, and knocked him out in the second round.



Six years and thirty-one professional bouts later, Bunkerd left home and set out to make his fortune in Bangkok. At the time, the two-hundred-mile journey from Chaiyaphum entailed a dangerous ten-hour bus ride through the mountains. ("Sometimes the bus falls down the mountain," Bunkerd said.) In Bangkok, Bunkerd found a trainer who put him on a program of remedial drills: all day, every day, for an entire week, Bunkerd stood in front of a mirror repeating a simple jab-cross sequence. He lived in the gym, and ran for an hour every day in a nearby stadium.

The trainer introduced Bunkerd to a manager, but a month passed, and Bunkerd still hadn't got a fight. The manager, it turned out, wasn't exerting himself on Bunkerd's behalf, because he thought that Bunkerd's arms and legs were too short. Bunkerd refused to be discouraged: "In my heart I say, 'One day I win.' " Bunkerd told both his trainer and his manager that he was going to go back north to work on the rice farm. He packed his bag and set out in the direction of the bus station, but instead he went to Fairtex, a big new Bangkok gym that was starting to produce champions in impressive numbers. Fairtex belonged to a wealthy Bangkok entrepreneur and Muay Thai aficionado, Khun Bunjong Busarakamwongse, better known as Philip Wong, who had made his fortune in T-shirts. (Today, Fairtex is a major manufacturer of Muay Thai gear.) In 1978, Wong became a promoter for Lumpini Stadium, fashioning himself as Muay Thai's ambassador to the West. He recruited European fighters to train and compete in Thailand, and helped get ESPN coverage of Lumpini title fights.

Bunkerd joined the gym and, deferring to tradition, surrendered his last name. Twenty-five days later, as Bunkerd Fairtex, and weighing a hundred and four pounds, he won the title at Rajadamnern. Even in a sport whose champions are primarily underdogs, Bunkerd stands out as an underdog's underdog. He barely went to school, learned Muay Thai on his own, and didn't undergo a day's formal training until he came to Bangkok, at nineteen—an age when most Thai boxers are already thinking about retirement. Muay Thai champions often retire after about five years (or as soon as they can afford to). As Wijarn Ponlid, a gold medallist at the 2000 Olympics, announced in 2003, "Now I do not need to leave my family to attend the camp and suffer unbearable pain for money." Bunkerd, however, fought at Lumpini Stadium with visible relish for ten straight years, and travelled by bus all over Thailand to fight in local tournaments—an unheard-of practice on the part of a champion. Bunkerd was a "good boy": he prayed to the Buddha and thanked his parents before every fight, saved all his money, and, until he was twenty-nine, never drank a drop of alcohol. Because of his great modesty and his love of fighting, Bunkerd became a popular hero in Thailand. His rise to fame is recounted in a short essay on the Fight and Fitness Web site: "Because of Bunkerd's humble disposition and fierce fighting style, he became known as 'the People's Champion.' "

One day in class, we were jumping rope to the usual "ill" vocals and "sick" grooves when Bunkerd went to the stereo and put on a new record, and the room was filled with the beautiful cascading waves of a nineteen-eighties synthesizer, interrupted by a gentle human voice. It was impossible not to recognize Bunkerd. He sounded exactly like himself, only singing. (He had made the recording in a California karaoke bar.) Next came a reggae-inflected chorus. I looked around the room, half expecting the boxers to drop their jump ropes and start break-dancing. But everybody was just stolidly hopping up and down, the same as always.

In 1984, Bunkerd met and married a young Bangkok woman named Noi Duangdon—something of an achievement for a country boy who spoke in the northeastern dialect. Their son, Arphit, nicknamed Boy, was born in 1985. Noi went into labor while Bunkerd was fighting at Lumpini. "On Friday, I win the big fight," he recalled. "On Saturday, I have Boy." They lived at the Fairtex boxing camp, where there was a pet tiger and a tame falcon. Boy says that Bunkerd also kept a rice-field mouse, which used to follow him when he went jogging.

Today, Boy is a twenty-year-old amateur fighter, known for his talent and his artistic temperament: he is said to be more interested in technique than in winning, and has had mixed success in the ring. (Owing to a foot injury, he took the past year off and worked as a cook at a pub a few blocks from the gym.) Boy is three inches taller than his father, with an equally infectious smile,

and a taste for baggy cargo pants, which he wears slung impossibly low over his boxing trunks, the waist at his knees. Boy began studying Muay Thai with his father at the age of three, and fought his first amateur fight when he was five, against a much larger boy, who was nine.

When, in 1993, Philip Wong decided to open a Fairtex camp in America, he chose a suburb of Phoenix as the location, and recruited Bunkerd as the head trainer. At the time, Bunkerd had an English vocabulary of three words: "yes," "O.K.," and "hello." Bunkerd's first American student was Chris Cariaso, a twelve-year-old sports fanatic who lived in the area. It was Cariaso who, while doing situps, first taught Bunkerd to count in English. The two became "very close, like father and son." Cariaso slept in the gym and paid his tuition by cleaning the bathrooms.

By 1995, Bunkerd had saved enough money to bring his wife and son to Arizona. But the camp was losing money, and soon failed. After Fairtex Arizona closed, Wong sent Bunkerd to Carmel, Indiana, near Indianapolis, to teach Muay Thai at a local martial-arts gym. (Noi and Boy stayed behind in Arizona.) Bunkerd says that he was the only Thai person in all Carmel, and he was lonely and bored. There was nobody to train with, and in the winter he resorted to kicking snow banks for practice.

The following year, a new Fairtex gym opened in San Francisco, under the direction of a champion middleweight, Alex Gong, who also held a business degree from San Francisco State University. Bunkerd was hired as the head trainer, and in 1998 he won the I.S.K.A. world championship. He retired officially in 2001, at the age of thirty-nine, with a World Muay Thai Association Lifetime Achievement Award and about three hundred and fifty professional fights to his credit—he says that he stopped counting at three hundred. Bunkerd and Noi divorced shortly after their arrival in California, and two years later Bunkerd married one of his students, a hair stylist named Maureen McGrath. They have two sons: Louie, who is four, and Wilson, who is three.



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Fairtex San Francisco prospered, until one afternoon in August, 2003, when a driver hit Gong's parked car outside the gym. Gong ran outside to confront the man, who turned out to be a paroled felon. He pulled out a gun and shot Gong through the heart. In the ensuing administrative turmoil, Bunkerd decided to realize his dream of opening his own gym, and brought in Cariaso as his partner. It was difficult for Bunkerd to break ranks—as Maureen puts it, there is "sort of a caste system in Thailand, and Bunkerd thought of himself as a worker." But Cariaso and Maureen backed him up, and Fight and Fitness opened in the spring of 2004. The gym, which, according to the Web site, possesses "a feeling of positivism," has flourished, and an eight-hundred-square-foot expansion has just been completed—the second in a little more than a year. There are six instructors and about three hundred students.

Cariaso is just an inch taller than Bunkerd, with big, serious eyes. He is twenty-four but looks younger, and has the solemn boyishness of an orphan in an old movie. (I once overheard him debating whether to enter a fight at a hundred and thirty or a hundred and thirty-five pounds—"If I fight at a hundred and thirty-five pounds, I can go to the weigh-in *eating a sandwich*," he said, his tone implying that this would be the height of decadence.) Cariaso owns two rehabilitated pit bulls, and volunteers for an organization called One at a Time Pet Rescue. Every month, he e-mails all the gym members, urging them to adopt some beleaguered mutt. In his fight poster, he resembles one of his animal protégés: he looks out with raccoonlike eyes; his raised hands, in wraps but no gloves, resemble bandaged paws.

Cariaso also teaches standard boxing five days a week, along with a retired pro named Paris Alexander. During his classes, Alexander blasts Marvin Gaye on the stereo, stomps in circles, waves his fists, and shouts laryngiti-



"O.K.—so we'll call it beef Rachmaninoff."

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cally: "One, two! *We're all sensitive people!* I said *jab!*" In the course of his professional career, he fought six world champions, including Oscar De La Hoya. "I didn't win, but I fought them all," he told me reflectively. "Yeah, I'm oh-for-six with those guys."

In March, when Bunkerd and Cariaso threw a party to celebrate the gym's first anniversary, the positivism was so thick you could cut it with a knife. The boxers had brought some of their favorite things: several pounds of raw cauliflower, Michael Jackson's "Ultimate Collection," a strobe light, a keg of beer, a big white dog (one of Cariaso's rescues), and a vat each of lemon cupcakes and barbecued spare ribs. Bunkerd, who was wearing a black beret and an earring, started a line dance: we were all supposed to shimmy closer and closer to the floor. He spent most of the evening a few inches from the floor—perhaps, I thought, to get a better quad workout. A bit later, Alexander started to dance, going lower and lower, until he, too, was barely hovering above the floor. It was as in the old days of Thai boxing, when each fighter would perform a ceremonial dance called a *ram muay*, and you could tell from the style of the *ram muay* which region and camp he came from.

Not long after the party, I saw Cariaso fight in the livestock pavilion of a disused fairground in Fresno. When his entrance music started playing, he appeared, but instead of marching to the ring he just stood there in the aisle holding up one bandaged hand.

"Gloves, gloves," people began murmuring, and in fact Cariaso didn't have any—he ended up using the gloves from the previous fight.

During the fight, Bunkerd hung off the ropes, as if the ring were a boat and he didn't have a ticket. He was wearing a beret and expressionlessly chewing gum. Cariaso was a good six inches shorter than his opponent, whom he nevertheless managed to kick in the jaw early in the second round. The opponent looked sheepish and started spitting blood into a bucket: his jaw was broken, a T.K.O. for Cariaso. Bunkerd's face lit up, and he jumped into the ring and picked Cariaso up and waved him around.

In June, Cariaso went professional. He won his first fight, at the HP Pavilion, in San Jose, among flashing L.E.D. signs announcing the upcoming 50 Cent "Anger Management Tour."

Shortly after Cariaso's professional début, Bunkerd made a surprising announcement: he was coming out of retirement. On August 20th, in New York, he would fight the flyweight championship against a thirty-two-year-old Polish boxer named Mariusz Cieslinski.

"Where in New York?" I asked.

"Man. Hat. Tan," Bunkerd replied.

When I asked what had prompted this, Bunkerd exclaimed, "Because I love to fight!"

On the evening of the fight, I took a bus to Penn Station and made my way to the Hammerstein Ballroom. The event had been dismally publicized and the place was less than half full, with maybe a thousand people in attendance. Demographic groups represented in the audience included hip-hop-influenced, text-messaging Hispanic and Asian couples; middle-aged Thai men; white couples in sweatshirts and jeans; black men in dark glasses and silk shirts; Russians from Borodin's Gym, in Brooklyn; and Cieslinski fans from Poland.

The preliminary rounds featured local amateur fighters; perhaps the most charitable thing you could say about them was that they were good at looking as if they were not well versed in the lethal art of Thai boxing. The first fight that seemed to generate any audience interest was between the two-hundred-and-thirty-pound Jarrell (the Gorilla) Miller and the two-hundred-pound Zadie Morris. The Gorilla looked like a turn-of-the-century circus strongman, in a tight sleeveless jersey and short shorts that exposed his quivering thighs. Morris danced in circles around the Gorilla; he was faster and more skilled, and won the first round, but, through sheer perseverance, the Gorilla prevailed. When the judges announced their decision, the Gorilla got so excited that he burst into applause, bowed, and hopped up and down.

Soon, the m.c. announced the first professional match: Mohamad (Moe) Fawzy versus Moti (the Hebrew Hammer) Horenstein. The Hebrew Hammer was something of a cult figure: a three-year veteran of the Israeli Special Forces, a fighter, and the proprietor of a martial-arts academy in Miami, specializing in a variant of the Israeli self-defense technique known as Krav Maga.

The fight began, and Horenstein's cornermen yelled at him in Hebrew and English: "*Hisardut! Hisardut!*" Then: "Think, Moti! Think, think!" He did appear to be thinking: he kept clinching Fawzy and absently punching him in the head, ejecting and reabsorbing his own mouth guard with a disaffected expression. At some point, Fawzy managed to knock Horenstein down, then he tripped over him and fell out of the ring. He briefly hung over the judges' table, suspended by the ropes, like a drunk in a hammock. Finally, two of the judges got up and pushed him back in. Horenstein went in for a clinch and was visibly drooling on Fawzy's shoulder. The judges called a tie.

When the sweeping, beautiful cascade of electric synthesizers filled the hall, I realized that Bunkerd had chosen his karaoke recording as his entrance music. A hundred-and-twenty-eight-pound, hollow-cheeked Bunkerd appeared in a cloud of blue smoke. He wore a green *mongkon* and a tense smile. Then Cieslinski made his entrance, in a droopy red satin robe and droopy red shorts. He was four inches taller than Bunkerd and weighed a hundred and twenty-nine pounds, with a sullen and anxious, though not unsympathetic, expression. He took off his robe and jogged in place. Bunkerd stood facing his corner post, palms together and hands raised, silently moving his lips.

The bell rang, and Cieslinski assumed the conservative posture of one who has decided to do the bare minimum in order to win on points. He kept backing off, beyond Bunkerd's reach, firing an occasional punch. Bunkerd tried to move in for a clinch; twice, Cieslinski tripped him and he fell to the mat. The only lively moment in the entire first round was when Cieslinski was backing away from Bunkerd, and Bunkerd ran after him and kicked him in the leg.

I was horrified when the first bell rang: Bunkerd had done next to nothing, and Cieslinski, who had done next to next to nothing, was ahead. A bikini-clad, breast-enhanced ring girl announced the second round, and the fight continued with a kind of grim inexorability. During a clinch in the second round, the fighters' heads collided. Bunkerd broke his nose, and Cieslinski got a cut on his head. Soon, both fighters were covered with blood. The audience was full of Cieslinski fans, who began to chant, "Mariusz, Mariusz." Bunkerd's fans, for the most part, regarded the ring with silent, heavy-hearted fixity, like the audience at a play with an unhappy ending. The only exceptions were a tall man in a powder-blue shirt and powder-blue pants, who was shouting advice in Portuguese, and a woman in boots and a miniskirt, with hawklike features and waist-length hair. "Bun-*kerd!*" she yelled over and over, in a hoarse, abject voice.

"What is this Bunkerd?" a boy behind me said. "Fuck Bunkerd. It's over, finished."

The rest of the match went by in clinches, with Cieslinski getting in some punches and Bunkerd getting in some knees. They grappled, and grabbed each other's head, and there was blood on their faces, their bodies, their gloves, the canvas. The fight dragged on for the full five rounds, and the decision went to the judges. One of them scored it a tie, but the other two ruled in favor of Cieslinski.

Bunkerd hopped down from the ring and was hugged by a great number of people; every now and then you could see his stunned, mournful face over someone's shoulder.

I didn't get back to the gym until one sunny day late in September. Bunkerd was sitting at the computer playing solitaire, round-faced and cheerful. He explained that the problem had been weight loss. The week before the fight, he'd had to lose seventeen pounds. The fight was on a Saturday, and at Thursday's weigh-in he didn't make weight. He didn't eat anything on Friday, and spent most of the day in the sauna, and on Saturday he woke up dizzy and weak. Could there be a more melancholy scene: Bunkerd all alone in a sauna in New York City, trying to become even smaller?

At the fight, I had taken a photograph of Bunkerd's ring entrance. In it, he is walking with a light, purposeful step, and appears to be about to skip right out of the picture. You can almost tell that his recording is playing in the background. When I gave him a copy of the photograph, he accepted it cautiously and held it up to his eyes.

"Thank you," he said. A smile lit up his face: "Oh—it's me." ♦

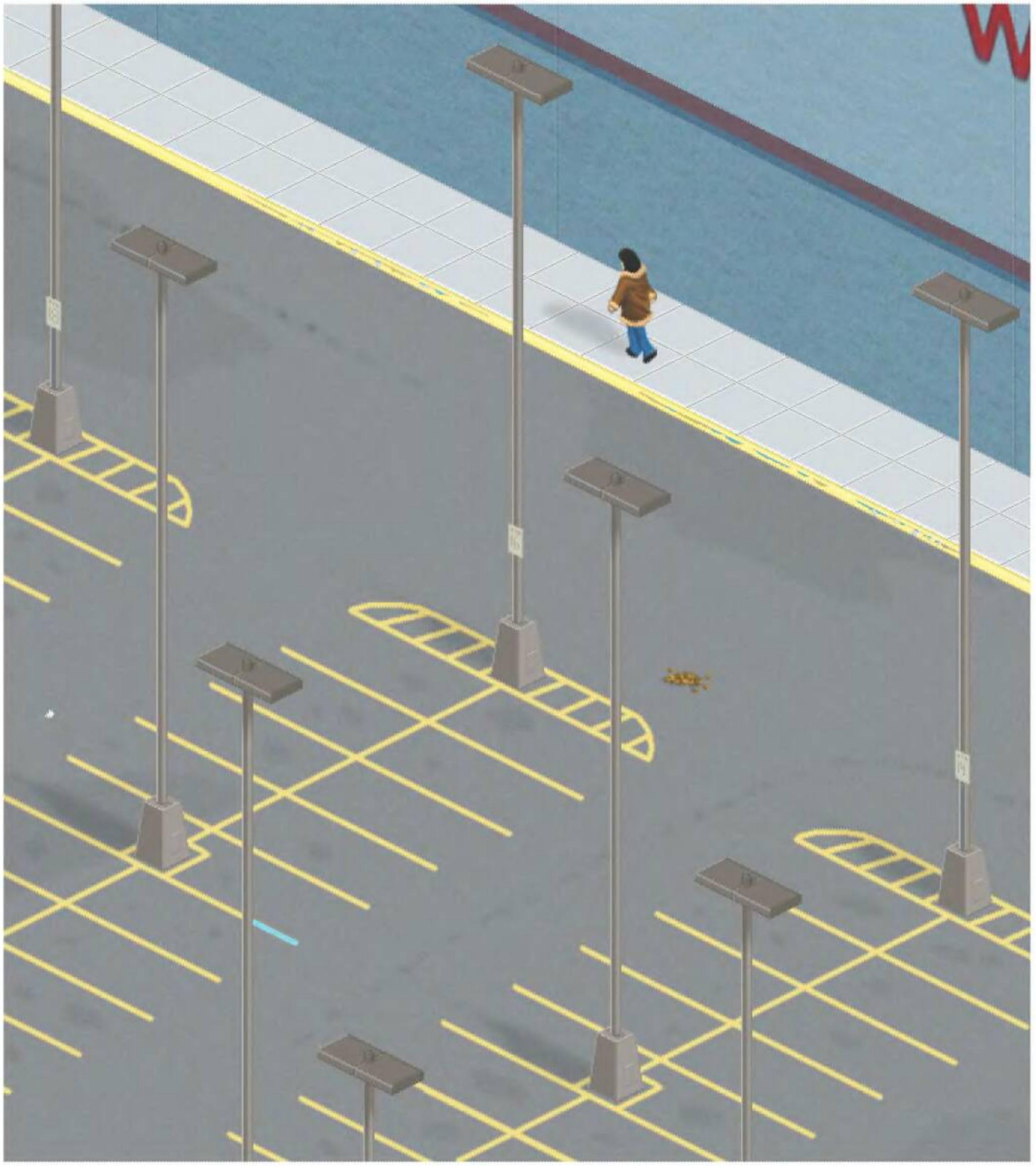


"Clear my calendar, Miss Wetzel—I'm feeling ad hoc today."

FICTION

THREE DAYS

BY SAMANTHA HUNT



It's starting to get dark. Beatrice walks along the highway from the bus depot up to her family's house. She avoids the roadway by walking just outside the guardrail in the long, dry grass that's been matted down by road salt and rain, strewn with trash and the surprisingly bloated body of a dead raccoon. Beatrice imagines that every car and truck passing holds someone she once knew in high school. Inside their cars they are shaking their heads and asking, "Is that Beatrice? What the hell is she doing with a bloated raccoon carcass?"

Beatrice turns up the drive. She hasn't seen the farm in more than a year. After her father died, she moved away to the city—not for any good reason, just for a change, and now she likes it there. She likes the fact that all the humiliations involved with entering her thirties as a single woman are happening behind her closed apartment door, out of the view of her family and everyone she has ever known.

There are some weathered plastic Duane Reade Easter decorations—a hip-high bunny rabbit and a bright-green egg—wired to the front porch. It is Thanksgiving. And so from the road where Beatrice stands it appears that, in the time she's been gone, redneck clones of her brother and her mother have moved in and had their perverted redneck way with the house.

The farm is now an island in a sea of big chain stores. While the surrounding farms were plowed under, one by one, and turned into shopping centers, her parents had stood by. They had waited rather than selling their land, as the neighbors all had, and now, along a ten-mile strip of parking lots, stores, gas stations, banks, and supermarkets, their farm is the last one left.

It isn't even much of a farm. Beatrice's parents had given up farming seven years before when, one morning, Beatrice's mother told her father, "I don't feel like getting out of bed." He looked her over and, holding her jaw in his hands, he studied her face for a long while before saying, "Yeah. I can see it. Right there on your forehead," as if there were some word written across her brow, a word that excused her from farmwork for the rest of her life.

JON HADDOCK

Within a few weeks, Beatrice's father had become an expert crossword-puzzle solver. He'd even considered writing a novel, before realizing that soon they would be broke. Beatrice's parents had to start working or sell the farm, and so they made a decision. They leased their land to a conglomerate soybean operation and applied for jobs in the new industrial park. Her father got work as a loan adjuster, her mother got a job in advertising, working in the satellite office of a company called Mythologic Development, which turned myths and sometimes history into marketable packages used for making new products and ideas more digestible to the consumer public. Her father didn't like having an office job. He used his sick days as soon as he got them, but Beatrice's mother had always been very dramatic, someone who swooned or leaped without provocation; the sort of person who would sing while grocery shopping and then wonder why people were staring at her. She flourished during the brainstorming conference calls that were a regular feature of her new job. She'd dominate the conversations with her patched-together notions of Leda and the swan, the void of Ginnungagap, the bubonic plague and Hathor the Egyptian goddess, whom she reënvisioned as a nineteen-year-old Ukrainian supermodel spokesperson for a vodka company.

Beatrice's parents hadn't been born farmers. Rather, it was one of many bright ideas they'd developed in their twenties, ideas like dropping out of college in their junior year, forgoing regular dentist visits, and having children, children they decided to name Beatrice and Clement.

"Right," Clem says after Thanksgiving dinner. He stands to leave the table. He shakes his head at his mother and Beatrice. Clem works as a carpenter, though he's mostly interested in small projects like cabinets and decks and hand carving the names of rock bands he likes into soft pieces of wood.

"Going to toke up?" Beatrice's mother asks him. He pops his head back inside the kitchen. He is stocky and solid, like a bolted zucchini that has grown too long. He holds a finger and thumb up to his lips, inhaling, pinching together a vacancy in between them.

Their mother has put a feather in her hair for the holiday, her "Indian headdress." She can't stand it that her son is a pothead and sometimes she'll get a look, as if she's trying not to cry just thinking about it. She's a very good actress. She stares at Clem. She is drunk. They all are. Beatrice's mother can make her bottom jaw tremble so slightly that the movement is barely perceptible. She looks just like Clem—dark hair, red skin, and papery lips. She stares at him with her mouth wide open, waiting for him to feel guilty. Beatrice looks away. It is extremely difficult for Beatrice to think of her mother as someone with thoughts and desires, with plans and schemes, as someone who, quite possibly, keeps a Rimmed Rod vibrator in her bedside drawer, the way Beatrice does, as someone who might dream about a tremendous ice cube, the size of a sofa, melting in the middle of a hot desert, and wake up having absolutely no idea what the dream means—someone just like Beatrice.

"Dude, I'm so stoned," Clem says, laughing once, faking a stumble before disappearing. As he opens the front door, the flat sound of road traffic sneaks inside. Beatrice's mother sighs while Beatrice stands to clear the table. She holds the turkey over the garbage by its breastbone, dangling it there while her mother splits what is left in the last wine bottle between their two glasses.

"When Atlantis was sinking there was an awful period of"—and Beatrice's mother stops to think of the proper word but can't. "Of sinking," she says and places her open hands on either side of her face, like the sunshine. Her mother resorts to theatrics when she is nervous. Beatrice cringes at the gesture. She knows that her mother is going to try to tell her something she doesn't want to hear. "Imagine," her mother says, her hands still in place. "People went to sleep inland and woke up with the ocean right there at their door. And when they stepped outside in the morning to pee or to feed their goats all the neighbors were gone without a trace and the only sound was waves lapping." Beatrice's mother still works for Mythologic and now she firmly believes that all concepts are better communicated through specious retellings of ancient

myths. Most of the time, Beatrice can't see the connections.

Her mother slowly drags a finger across the kitchen table and then does it again. Beatrice remains entirely still, frozen like a field rabbit, hoping that her mother will decide not to tell her whatever it is she wants to tell her. She can already imagine its perimeters: "Honey, I wish you would think about a job that offers insurance," or, "I know a real nice young man you might like to meet, Bea." But he wouldn't be a nice, young man. He would be another forty-five-year-old divorced actor her mother had met through community-theatre projects, a man who also holds his hands up around either side of his face like the sunshine when he wants to make a point.

Or else maybe she wants to tell Beatrice that she is finally going to sell the farm.

Beatrice is wrong. Her mother doesn't say anything like that. Instead she says, "When your dad was in the hospital the doctor gave me a choice, Bea." She rubs her palms across her skinny thighs, exhaling. "The doctor asked me, 'Do you want to stop his pain?' And at first I said, Yeah, of course, but then the doctor asked again, 'No. Do you really, really want to stop his pain?' And Bea, I knew what he meant and I said yes. I killed your dad, Bea."

She is drunk. They both are.

"*You* killed him?"

"Well, not me, but the doctor. I told the doctor to go ahead and get it over with."

"What does that have to do with Atlantis?" Beatrice asks.

Her mother has to think for a moment. She looks up to the ceiling before asking Bea, "We all have to die sometime?"

Beatrice stares straight ahead like a TV stuck on static, the remote control gone dead. She blinks a series of gray and black squiggled lines. No reception. Nothing. Her mother's words are not getting through; they are stones dropped into a bottomless hole, the hollow known as Beatrice. They fall and fall until they are too far away to be heard.

Beatrice watches the unwound egg timer beside the stove until her mother interrupts. "You want to watch a movie, hon?" The question is like a slap to the side of the TV. The static clears, the program resumes. Beatrice shakes her head. It's a story, Beatrice remembers, about a mother and her kids on a farm in Pennsylvania, a dull after-school special broadcast for the Thanksgiving holiday. Beatrice studies her mother's face.

Beatrice thinks, If I sit in the living room with my mother watching a movie, I will explode and all that will spill out, all that I will have left inside will be a dark-green syrup of boredom that my mother will have to sponge off the floor with some Fantastik and a towel. "No. I'm going to go see what Clem's up to," Beatrice says. She is still holding the turkey by its breastbone. It has started to sway. Beatrice drops the bird into the trash and it makes a great swoosh as it falls into the white plastic garbage bag.

When Beatrice was a girl, Clement still a baby, and the farm in O.K. shape, she and her father used to walk the fields at least once a day. The furrows were dry and bulging and Beatrice liked how it felt when the dirt broke underneath her Muck Boots. Before the harvest, corn plants rose so far up over her head that, walking under their canopy, she'd lose sight of everything except her father's legs marching ahead of her. She'd put her hand inside his and he'd hold it a bit roughly, as if her hand were a tiny mouse he'd captured. She'd pretend that he was not her father at all but a boyfriend, someone handsome from the movies or TV.

He once told her, "Bea, don't say anything to your mom, but I'm the king of all the farmers." They walked on a bit farther and came across an irrigation hose that had cracked its rubber tubing. Her father fingered the leak and stared out at the land as if he had every intention of coming back and patching up the cracked hose. But he'd never come back. He just liked to look that way from time to time.



"Farming," he'd say, "takes ten per cent perspiration and ninety per cent inspiration." Beatrice had always heard this the other way around, but there was a conviction to her father's way of talking. Maybe he was the king. He wasn't a bad farmer. He just didn't do things the way they had always been done. For instance, pruning trees—he had no time for it, or thinning plants. He hated to yank up seedlings that had been eager enough to sprout, and so he'd let the vegetables grow right on top of each other. He'd let the carrots and beets twist around each other, deformed by their proximity to other carrots and beets. "They still taste just as sweet," he'd say, but no one wanted to buy the bulbous and bent oddities that came from such close growing quarters. Beatrice's father also rarely wore proper farmer clothing. Instead he dressed in chinos, button-down Oxford shirts, and canvas sneakers. "They're cheap" is all he ever had to say. Beatrice thought her dad looked like James Dean in the movie "East of Eden." James Dean riding on a John Deere.

He'd hay the fields, and Beatrice would follow along behind him in the trail of the tractor's exhaust—fumes that made her dizzy, gave her a sour stomach. Her head would fill with the sound of Munchkins singing, "Follow the yellow brick road," because that was what the cut hay looked like. James Dean and the yellow brick road. She would have followed wherever he led her.

Outside, the sodium-vapor lamps from the shopping-center parking lots wash away any definition. Everything on the farm glows the same gray color at night. It makes it difficult to see and Beatrice trips on an old pig trough that her mother has been using as a planter for impatiens.

"What's up, dude?" her brother asks when she yelps. Clem has converted half of the barn into an apartment, where he lives. There are no locks on his apartment because his door is an old cellar hatch from a house that was demolished to make way for a Dunkin' Donuts. His kitchen countertops are built from plywood that one of the malls had used to make concrete molds and



"They're cheaper in bulk."

• •

then tossed. Most of his apartment was built from salvage or from stuff he lifted off construction sites at night. It is a common practice among Clem's friends. Lots of the local contractors steal from the shopping-center construction sites, too. "This used to be where Matthew Campbell's milking pavilion was, so I guess we can just help ourselves. He wouldn't mind."

"Let's go downtown," Beatrice says. "Let's see if the stores are open on Thanksgiving."

"All right. I guess," Clem says, uncertain if he wants to go out in the cold but still enough under the sway of his older sister that he'll do what she wants to do. He detaches himself from his video game.

"Can I try that first?" she asks.

"This?" He holds the controls up. "Yeah, yeah sure," he says and begins to set it up for her, re-starting the game. "Do you know how to play?"

"No."

"I'll start you off slowly," he says and slips her hand into a glove that is rigged with controls. It is filled with tiny nodes, like suction cups. She thinks of the dead raccoon's puckered skin. "Sit down," he says and she does.

At first nothing happens. The screen turns blue and the nodes tickle her hand. She looks around the apartment while Clem fusses with the machinery. The space is tiny and the walls are mostly covered with shelves and cabinets. Clem moved out of the main house right after high school when he fell in love with a girl named Anna. They lived in the barn together for almost five years but Anna moved to the city a year ago. She hasn't yet picked up all her stuff and Beatrice can see some of Anna's clothes, some textbooks she and Clem kept from school, and a nice set of silver that Anna's grandparents gave her. Everything is covered with small balls of dust and bits of old hay from the barn. Sometimes Anna and Beatrice meet up for coffee in the city. They never talk about the farm or about Clem. In fact, they act as though they are survivors who lived through some sort of low-budget, straight-to-DVD apocalypse that is too painful, too cheap to mention.

Finally the video game starts up. Onscreen a woman is walking though a Zen Buddhist garden. She is wearing a tight silver outfit and carries a long sword. "That's you," Clem tells Beatrice. "Use the glove to go forward." So Beatrice does. She walks through the garden, but slowly, because she knows that at any moment someone is probably going to tiptoe up behind her, wielding some horrible machete, and she has already had a number of glasses of red wine. She's not sure she can fight back.

With her hand in the glove Beatrice can feel the girl walking. It makes her shiver, as if someone had cracked an egg on the crown of her skull and the yolk was oozing down her ears and neck, as if she were inside the girl's digital skin.

Behind her, Clem lights a joint and starts to softly hum the video game's TV jingle, giving Bea a soundtrack. He watches the girl on the screen slowly creep forward and flash the blade of her sword. Beatrice starts to smile and he passes her the joint, which she takes with her ungloved hand. She is very jerky with the controls and sometimes the girl on the screen suddenly starts to walk backward or just stands there doing nothing, flicking her sword. Beatrice takes a drag and holds the smoke, wondering if the girl in the video game will also get high. There are pathways off to the left and the right in the garden but Beatrice can't quite figure out how to turn yet. Clem hums the jingle and Beatrice exhales, imagining a handsome man with a deep radio voice speaking over the hum. The man whispers directly into Beatrice's ear as if reading her the fine print. He whispers a message that she can't quite hear though it fills her with longing just the same.

A pack of ninja warriors surprises her from above and after a very short fight Beatrice is dead.

It is colder than most Thanksgivings. The ruts in the driveway have solidified, forming seals of creaky ice. Beatrice and Clem walk to his truck in silence and she feels as if she were still onscreen. She imagines that the video game has somehow sharpened her abilities. She feels as if she could control the world with her hand, sense sounds with her skin. She thinks she can hear her brother's fingers jangling the keys in his pocket. She can even hear her mother sigh as the commercial break starts. Beatrice hasn't smoked pot in a long time. She thinks she can feel every person who has ever stepped on the driveway

before her. Oil deliverymen. Insurance salespeople. Lenape Indians. Everyone. She feels the outline of all these people so precisely that they become solid bodies beneath her feet. She worries that she might be squishing their faces with her boots.

Clem pulls his keys from his pocket and Beatrice has an idea. "Let's take Humbletonian," she says, letting go of the truck's door handle. Humbletonian is a horse. When her parents sold the farm animals, they kept a few chickens for eggs and one horse named Humbletonian. Her father named the horse this because she was not a Hambletonian. A Hambletonian is a very distinguished trotting horse. A Humbletonian is nothing. It is like changing your name to Stonerfeller because you are not a Rockefeller.

"In the trailer?" her brother asks and then answers the question himself, "No. You mean we should ride the horse into town? Right? Right. Cool," he says, his eyes a bit glassy. They walk back to the barn, breaking the ice again.

After their father stopped farming, he liked to take a sleeping bag up to the loft above the horse's stable after dinner. He'd smoke cigarettes up there and spend the night as if he were a Boy Scout. He thought that the horse's wild nature would make him feel better about working in an office. He thought the horse would soothe the unease inside his rib cage. From the loft, her father used to pretend that he was Jerry Lee Lewis, using an old table-saw platform for a piano. He'd sing "Breathless" to the horse. "You. Leave. Me." Pause. Pause. "Breathless." Though her father's odd behavior seemed exciting at the time, Beatrice now thinks that horses aren't wild at all, horses can't soothe our unease in the world. Horses are about the most broken, unwild creatures in existence, except for maybe burros and dogs. They do exactly what humans tell them to do. So when she thinks of her father sleeping in the loft above his horse or riding Humbletonian across their forty acres because he thought it would cure him of that unease in his chest, pity drips from her like a bit of drool out of the corner of her mouth. She thinks, How stupid. She thinks, Dad, that wasn't unease. It was lung cancer.

"Hello, pumpkin pie," Clem says to the horse. He pets Humbletonian's nose and rests his own face there for a moment before attaching her reins. The barn smells yellow, like urine and old pine boards.

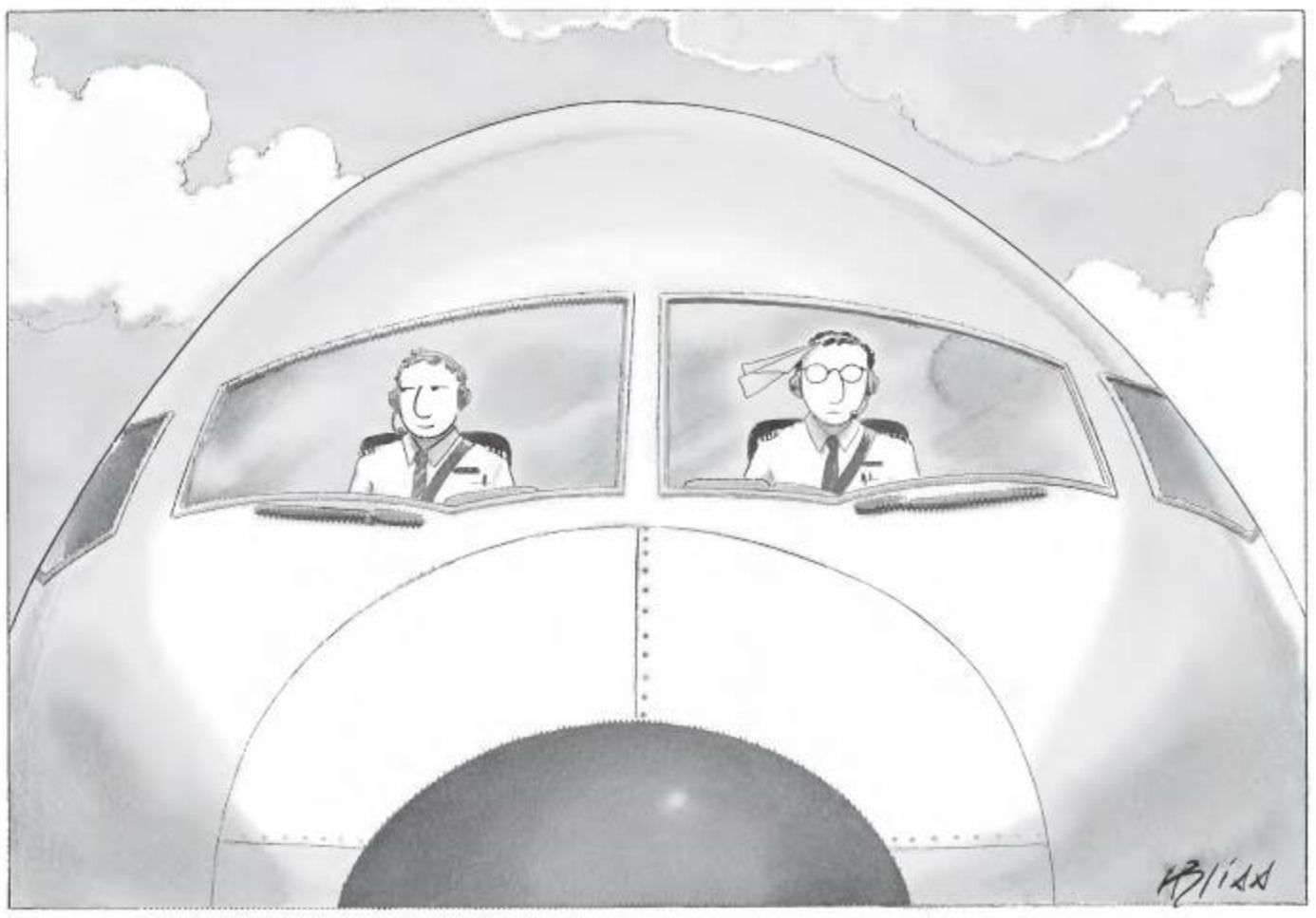
The horse's belly sags in a way that reminds Beatrice of a velour reclining chair. "Hello, La-Z-Boy girl," Beatrice says and also kisses the horse. Humbletonian does not look particularly happy to see her. Clem puts a hand on the saddle that is straddling the stable wall but Beatrice shakes her head no. So he leads the horse outside by the reins and crouches down on one knee, keeping the other lifted square. Beatrice uses Clem's knee as a boost and climbs up onto the horse's bare back. "Whoop," Beatrice whoops. In a moment her brother is seated behind her. He is so strong that she barely felt him lift himself up. He wraps his big zucchini arms around her sides, reaching for the reins.

Brother and sister are quiet as they trot out to the end of the driveway, through the fields that have been harvested for the year. The sound of dead stalks and frost crunching under Humbletonian's hooves fills in around the gray quiet of the night. The video game's jingle is still rattling in the back of Beatrice's head.

"I don't know what she'll think of the road," Clem finally says. "I don't think she's ever been past the far field." Their mother barely uses the horse these days except when she gets her car stuck in the muddy divots of their driveway and she has to harness Humbletonian to the bumper to pull while she pushes. But they reach the end of the driveway and Humbletonian turns left and trots along the breakdown lane as if she can't wait to get down to town, as if there were nothing to it.

Out on the road Humbletonian's hooves sound like winter—metal on ice or an empty galvanized pail tossed down a stone staircase, a full, complete sound. They pass an abandoned barn that is wedged between two service stations and two narrow swaths of dried red clover. Someone has spray-painted the words "Luv Shak" below a tin sign advertising the Crystal Cave tourist attraction. The land is flat and open here. The road is the straightest road there is. It runs all the way down to where the Pennsylvania Dutch people live in villages that have kooky names like Paradise, Intercourse, and Blue Ball.

An eighteen-wheeled tanker speeds up behind Humbletonian. The whoosh it makes blows Beatrice a bit to the right. The truck is followed by a car honking its horn to get past the truck. Beatrice turns to look at the car as it goes by and the man in the passenger seat stares out at Beatrice and Clem and their horse on the highway. The man does not seem surprised to see a horse and riders on the highway on Thanksgiving evening; rather, he seems angry, unimpressed. He throws his ciga-



rette butt toward them and it explodes against the asphalt like a bomb sized for insects.

"I just thought that cigarette was an insect bomb," Beatrice says but then she realizes that Clem will think she means one of those actual bug bombs that you load into your house if the house has fleas, before vacating the premises for a few hours. "I mean," she says, but a truck passes and then another and then she decides not to bother with the sublime clarification she was just about to make. Instead she starts to laugh. Her stomach feels alone and nervous. She cannot stop laughing until she burps a burning red-wine burp. She laughs until she thinks she will vomit. "I'm going to puke," she says.

"No. No, you won't," Clem answers and pats his older sister on the back one, two, three times. And he is right. Beatrice leans forward against Humbletonian's neck and the warmth of the horse feels good on her stomach. They ride the rest of the way in silence except for the click of Humbletonian's hooves and the rush of the horse's warm pulse.

One of the myths Beatrice's mother was responsible for developing was a fictionalized version of Montezuma meeting Cortés for the first time. Her company had no qualms about taking history and turning it into myth. Her mother's co-workers rarely bothered to differentiate between those things that had actually happened and those things that people just used to say had happened. They'd take history and add to it and no one knew the difference anymore. For example, they might say that Montezuma could fly through the air carrying three virgins at a time to a sacrificial altar in the sky. They might say that there was bloodshed when these two men met or that Cortés was part man, part horse.

Mythologic Development sold the Montezuma-Cortés myth to an amusement park in Maryland, which used it for a roller coaster called the Aztecathon. The concept sold for a good price but her mother was a salaried employee and so she saw very little of the money. Now the amusement park owns Montezuma. He is the park's intellectual property.

Beatrice's mother keeps a painting of Montezuma over her bed. In the painting he looks more like a famous movie star than like an Aztec ruler. Beatrice's mother likes that about him. She tells Beatrice that she is in love with Montezuma now that Beatrice's father is gone.

"But Montezuma is also dead," Beatrice says and her mother smiles as if that were a really good joke.

"Who-ah," Clem says and Humbletonian turns into the Middleland Mall Complex. They pass through a very large empty parking lot that is dotted with circles of light. It is freezing cold. "Who-ah," Clem says again and Humbletonian clops to a halt outside the Wal-Mart entrance. At the doors, they wait on the horse. Their breath is visible in the cold air. Humbletonian stomps her hoof as though she were asking, "What next?" Her motion is detected by a sensor, which swings open the door to let them in. The store is not closed. Humbletonian is surprised and takes a few steps backward before she steadies again.

"Why don't we just ride her into the store?" Beatrice asks. Clem and Beatrice would have to duck their heads to make it through the entry but it would be great. "I bet they've never had a horse inside there," she says. Clem is tilting his neck, considering the option, when a security officer stationed by the theft-deterrent metal-detector station stands to adjust his utility belt. The security guard eyes Clem and Beatrice's transportation with more than suspicion. He steps outside.

"I know you're not even thinking about bringing that beast in here," he says.

"But I *was* thinking of it," Clem answers quickly. "So that's weird that you would say you *know* what I was thinking, because you would be wrong." Clem doesn't crack a smile or move. The guard palms his nightstick. They stare each other down, Clem and the guard.

Beatrice thinks that the guard looks like just the sort of security officer who would be thrilled to call the cops and have her and Clem ticketed or arrested for some inane livestock violation that is still on the books from 1823, like No Horse-Riding on Public Holidays. Clem looks away and leaps down off Humbletonian, leading Beatrice and her over to the corral for collecting shopping carts. He ties Humbletonian's reins to the metal bar and Beatrice slides down off the curve of her flank.

Inside, few people seem to be shopping. Clem says to one young man wearing a Wal-Mart smock, "Excuse me. What's going on here?"

The young man raises his eyebrows but makes no response, waiting for some clue as to how he can assist them. "Lots of things are going on here," the boy says finally.

"I mean, how come Wal-Mart's open?" Clem asks. "It's freaking Thanksgiving."

The boy says nothing. He looks as if he wants to punch Clem. Instead he stares straight ahead at the dog food he's been pricing. He looks to the back of the shelf as though he can see something golden there that's invisible to everyone else. Clem bends to see what the boy's looking at. There's nothing there. Just the back of the metal shelf. "Thank you," Clem says quickly. He grabs Beatrice's arm and leads her away.

Up front, the store is ready for Christmas. Past Christmas comes an aisle of automotive and craft/hobby supplies, then an aisle of hair products and footwear, then an aisle of watches and diamond-chip rings. All of these aisles dead-end at the wall of sporting goods / hunting gear. Ladies' and menswear is intersected by a row of birthday cards, logic-puzzle books, scented candles, deodorant, and toothpaste. Beatrice and Clem pass the electronics division. They're sold out of the game Clem was thinking about buying, Dead or Alive 5000. There is a paper "Sale" sign that Clem swipes at.

"Do you need anything?" he asks. "While we're here?"

The fluorescent lighting is beginning to drive Beatrice crazy because she imagines that she can detect its flashing pulse. "Nope. Let's go."

Clem takes a pack of gum, looks at it, and then puts it in his pocket. "For Mom," he says and they leave quickly, without paying for the gum.

Outside, Humbletonian is no longer tied up. She is gone and Beatrice bets it was the security guard. "Shit," Clem says and giggles because, by the shopping-cart corral, there is a pile

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of horseshit that Humbletonian left behind.

"Fuck," Beatrice says and laughs.

Clem scans the parking lot. The circles of light underneath each lamp are still there but there is no horse. "You go that way," Clem tells Beatrice. "I'll go this way and I'll meet you around back. We'll flush her out." Clem departs around one side of the giant complex and Beatrice walks off in the other direction.

The store is so long that she feels as though she'll never even reach the corner of it. Beatrice imagines that she is an astronaut dragging a two-hundred-pound spacesuit and that is why her footsteps seem not to be carrying her forward. She stops. "I wouldn't have killed him," Beatrice says out loud and waits until she hears a question from the far side of her brain, from her mother. "What would you have done? Just let him suffer? Let him go on breathing that bubbly wet breath that sounded like a damn water fountain?" "Yes," Beatrice answers. "Yes, I would have."

The Wal-Mart does not seem to end. It goes on and on, windowless and solid. Beatrice thinks of the old cartoons where an illustrator would draw two panels of background, a desert or a pine forest, and then, by bringing one panel in front of the other, he could repeat it and repeat it and repeat it, a duplicated landscape that Wile E. Coyote could run through without end. If she had four legs she'd be able to get around the back of the mall faster. She thinks to skip but after ten or eleven lengths her lungs chug and backfire on the cold air. She stops and walks the rest of the way.

Behind the shopping center there are bulldozers, at least twenty of them, and they seem to be huddled with their backs to Beatrice, as if they are in a private conference. It's freezing. Apart from the dozers there's nothing here except for a gigantic hole. It is tremendous, far larger than a football field, and it is filled with water. In the dark, the hole extends beyond the limit of Beatrice's vision. Clem is already standing at the edge, looking down into it. Humbletonian is there, too, only she has climbed down into the pit and is walking across the surface of the ice that has formed there. It's like a lake. Maybe one of the bulldozers broke a water pipe while digging. There is a lot of water here, a reservoir's worth of drinking water, or, Beatrice hopes not, frozen sewage. Humbletonian is walking across the ice, bending every now and again to lick the surface. Gross.

"Woohoo! Humbletonian!" Clem yells. "Good horse. Good horse," he shouts, so that Humbletonian turns from where she is, halfway across the ice, and when she sees Clem and Beatrice she begins to trot across the very center of the pit toward them, more like a dog than a horse. Her coat is nearly as silver as the ice, and beautiful.

Beatrice lifts up her arms and shakes her hips. "Woohoo! Horsy!" she calls. Time slows to a speed where Beatrice can notice every single thing. She notices Humbletonian's muscles, her breath coming out of her flared nostrils, and the odd rhythm of her trot. She notices the gorgeous ice and dirt and the lovely darkness, thick like felt, that exists in this ugly place. She can hear each hoof as it falls against the ice. Beauty is standing somewhere nearby, Beatrice thinks, and it's a shadowy person whose exhales become Beatrice's inhales, warming her up, and this moment of warmth, this beautiful horse is why, Beatrice feels certain, a jealous hole cracks open in the ice, a hole that swallows the back legs and hindquarters of Humbletonian faster than a greedy thought.

Humbletonian tries to clear the water, to get a hoof back up on solid ice, but each clop of her front hooves shatters what she's grabbed and pulls it under with her. There can't be that much water underneath her. But there is. She's not touching the bottom. Humbletonian is flailing. Clem starts to swear, but slowly, everything is happening so slowly at first that it seems time will come to a halt and the world behind the shopping center will be all right. It seems as if it might even be possible to ignore the drowning horse altogether, as though Beatrice and her brother are here only in a dream, and they will both wake up very soon.

Beatrice reaches her arms even higher. "Clem," she says. Clem wrings his hands. He lowers himself into the pit, down to where the ice starts. He is moving slowly, carefully. Humbletonian is thrashing. It's the only sound

there is. The water must be freezing. Humbletonian is thrashing in it. "Clem," Beatrice says again, and again Clem wrings his hands so hard he looks as though he might tear them off from his wrists. He steps out onto the edge of the ice and creeps toward Humbletonian. She is in up to her middle. Only her front hooves and her head are above the ice. Clem stops. The horse is twisting and snorting. She is screaming as much as a horse can scream. Clem raises his hands to his face. He takes another step toward the horse. "Clem," Beatrice repeats his name a third time, and finally he turns to look at her. A seam has been cut open in Clem right through the very center of his face. She sees it. A seam that says there is no way to stop this. No fucking way for a man to save a horse drowning in freezing water. Clem stands still. He brings his hands up to his ears and, pressing the small knobs of cartilage there, he stops listening.

Quiet moments pass. The static returns, as though it were being broadcast from nearby. Humbletonian starts giving up. She falls still. The water has dropped her into shock. Beatrice can see a lot of white in the horse's eye, as though it had been pried open. It blinks dry air once more, for the last time. Humbletonian's head goes under and all Beatrice can see are her forelegs above the barrier of the ice. Her legs kick, emptying what's inside them. It is a gruesome convulsion. "She's getting away," Beatrice finally says and skids on her heels down to where her brother is standing. She passes him and walks out onto the ice. A loud crack bellows from the frozen water, like a whip pushing Beatrice back, away from her horse. Beatrice drops to her knees on the ice and Humbletonian goes under all the way. Their horse is gone. The water flattens out over her head.

Clem lowers his hands. "Don't," he says but Beatrice doesn't listen. She sits down on the ice and watches the hole where Humbletonian went. She slides closer toward it on her knees. The hole doesn't do anything.

It's difficult to say what happens next. The silence fills in around Beatrice and Clem like insulation. The two of them stare for a long while, looking down into the black hole where their horse disappeared, waiting, maybe, for some triumphant geyser, a phoenix, or Pegasus to rise up out of the hole. Nothing happens. Perhaps fifteen minutes pass or maybe half an hour before they recognize what they are staring at: an empty black hole.

"Clem," Beatrice says with her back still turned to him, still looking at the hole. "You know what Mom told me?"

"What?"

"She gave the doctors permission to kill Dad."

"Yeah, I know," Clem says.

"You know?"

"Yeah, she asked me what I thought before she did it," he says.

No one asked Beatrice. She sat by her father's hospital bed for days, rubbing lotion into the dry skin of his calves and feet and no one said anything to her. "No one asked me," she tells Clem.

"We already knew what you'd say."

Since her father's death, Beatrice has tried to turn her parents into two-dimensional pieces of paper she can fold up, tuck into her back pocket, and forget about when she does her laundry, picking them out of the lint trap later: her mother all things bad, her father all things good. But Clem ruins it every time. There's Clem, sitting on the ice, shaking his head, saying, "It's no one's fault, Bea. It's no one's fault."

Beatrice would like to find someone to blame.

Even with the static, she sees clearly, as though there were a map in front of her, a map of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. She sees that they arrived here at this future rather than a different one. One with horses. Maybe that future would have been better. But instead they had arrived here to a time when their farm is dead, when Beatrice has moved away to the city, when Clem is stuck in place, and when, most nights, her mother walks down to the end of the driveway, out to meet the incoming tide in Pennsylvania.

Beatrice leans forward, lowering her whole body onto the ice. She pushes herself on her stomach out to where the horse disappeared. She lies there. She rests her cheek there for a long time. She pets her horse through the ice.

"Don't go any farther!" Clem yells as Beatrice dips her hand inside the hole, into a land that is already lost. ♦

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Why we're so fat.

BY STEVEN SHAPIN

On January 20, 2003, the English journalist William Leith decides he has to lose weight. That's the day he gets on the bathroom scale and finds that it's "the fattest day of my life": he's just over six feet tall and he weighs two hundred and thirty-six pounds. He feels lousy. He feels repulsive. In fact, he *is* repulsive. His girlfriend tells him to stop tucking his shirt into his trousers—"It just bulks you out"—and she doesn't want to have sex with him anymore. He resolves, not for the first time, to do something about it. He gets on a plane and goes to New York to see Dr. Atkins, and he decides, more or less at the same time, to write a book about his eating problems. "The Hungry Years: Confessions of a Food Addict" (Gotham; $25) is the result: Bridget Jones with a Y chromosome, a significant coke habit, and a sneaky sort of intellectual ambition.

Leith's book is about food addiction, but he's interested in all sorts of addictions and what it is about our culture that makes it so easy to stuff ourselves, leaving us filled but unfulfilled: "This is the fat society. This is where people come, so they can have exactly what they want. And what they want is . . . more." Most of all, he's interested in himself. If he can figure out why he's a food addict, then maybe he can figure out why he's unhappy: "I am fat because I have other, deeper problems." And if he can figure out what these deeper problems are then maybe he can stop stuffing himself. The cure has two courses. The physical bit is getting the weight off; the psychological bit is getting the weight off his mind. Dr. Atkins takes care of the first. Leith arrives at Atkins's Manhattan clinic just months before the great man's death, and about two years before the "low-carb craze" will itself be pronounced dead, with the venture-capital-crammed Atkins Nutritional, Inc., going into bankruptcy. But Atkins is then enjoying a boom: some months before, Gary Taubes published a pro-Atkins polemic in the *Times Magazine* ("What If It's All Been a Big, Fat Lie?"), and a copy of *New York* that Leith picks up declares, "Welcome to a City in the Throes of CARB PANIC." Leith masters the Atkins metabolic mantra: carbohydrates cause a rush of insulin; the insulin reduces blood glucose, causing cravings for more carbs; the body becomes insulin-resistant; and it shifts its attention to saving fat. Food fat doesn't make your body fat; carbs are the culprit. As the pounds fall off—thirty in four months—Leith becomes an evangelist: his obituary of Atkins in the *Guardian* of April 19, 2003, is a panegyric. He reads Thomas Kuhn's historical theory of scientific development and decides that Atkins is achieving nothing less than a dietary "paradigm change." Atkins is a hero of our time.

The other part of the cure is psychotherapy. The Atkins diet is the instrumental arm of a psychodynamic search: it's good to lose weight in the most effective way you can, but Leith still feels the need to sort out the psychic reasons that he's become a fatty. There's much recollecting of childhood traumas; original sin for Leith was not an apple but an apple pie—one of his grandmother's that he secretly gobbled down at the age of seven. By the end of his therapy, Leith has concluded that there are "many many reasons" for his food addiction. It's too complex for him to understand and, perhaps, too complex for any specific diet to remedy or therapy to analyze. As the Atkins diet works its wonders, he feels happier: he gets fit, and he even goes for a twenty-five-mile hike with his (new?) girlfriend, at the end of which they pop into a pub and tuck in like ordinary human beings—"spaghetti with a meat sauce, and some garlic bread, and a bottle of wine." He's genuinely hungry for the first time in ages. As the proverb has it, hunger turns out to be the best sauce. He winds up—like the growing number of Atkins dieters who have fallen away from the faith—edgily wondering if moderation in all things might, after all, be the answer.

Leith wants to lose weight because he wants not to be repulsive, and he's not alone. A fifth of American men and more than a third of American women say they would like to lose at least twenty pounds, and you don't need a statistical survey to establish that sexual appeal is a big part of the reason. Thundering denunciations of the equation between female thinness and sexiness have little effect. The world is unfair that way—possibly almost as unfair to fat men as to fat women. In Paddy Chayefsky's 1955 play "Marty," the title character whines, "I'm just a fat little man. A fat ugly man." Moreover, statistics do establish that fat people earn less: possibly because the sort of people who make less money tend to be fat, possibly because fat people are discriminated against, or, most likely, a bit of both.

It was not always so. When the Duchess of Windsor pronounced that "you can never be too rich or too thin," it was a sign of a demographic shift with far-reaching cultural consequences. The language that our ancestors used to assess people's weight generally had a qualitative and whole-body character: "thin," "gaunt," "lean," "lanky," "stout," "fleshy,"

MARK ULRIKSEN



The feast, in times past, was a meal set off from the ordinary by its abundance. Our feasts are now as ordinary as they are mobile.

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"corpulent," "beefy," "plump," "portly," and, finally, "fat." With some exceptions, it was good to be fat: in the Oxford English Dictionary, one definition of the adjective is "in well-fed condition, plump," and in its figurative usages it signalled an abundance of good things—"the fat of the land," a "fat living" for a cleric. In 1825, the French gourmand Brillat-Savarin wrote that "to acquire a perfect degree of plumpness . . . is the life study of every woman in the world." Male or female, body fat showed you were a considerable person, that you commanded resources. Holbein's great portrait of Henry VIII depicts not an obese man but a Big Man. And fat John Falstaff was, in his own estimation, "a goodly portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent, of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage." In societies marked by dietary scarcity—which is to say in practically any period before the twentieth century and in practically any present-day country outside the developed world—bodily bulk functions as a visible mark of power, affluence, and even good humor. In the late Middle Ages, the starving masses fantasized about the Land of Cockaigne, where you could idly gorge yourself on cakes and cream, and the American hobo anthem "Big Rock Candy Mountain" was a version of the same never-satisfied dream of abundance: "There's a lake of stew / And of whiskey too / And you can paddle / All around it in a big canoe." It's hard to avoid the conclusion that fat became ugly when the poor became fat.

But being fat isn't just an aesthetic bane; it's understood to be a medical one as well. And this, too, is a historically recent development. When Prince Hal dismissed Falstaff by telling him that "the grave doth gape for thee thrice wider than for other men," he meant to make a joke, not to offer a summary of epidemiological evidence. Writers from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century were, of course, aware that health risks might attend the very fat. Even Brillat-Savarin, for whom obesity was essentially a moral, mechanical, and social problem, not a medical one, noted that extreme obesity "opens the way for various diseases, such as apoplexy, dropsy, and ulcers of the legs, and makes all other ailments more difficult to cure." Yet our ancestors certainly did not recognize a linear relation between increasing weight and health risk, and an overall association between the gluttonously fat and a shortened life span was sometimes even denied, as when Francis Bacon judged that "the greatest gluttons are often found the most long-lived." Whatever objections the early moderns had to corpulence were as much moral as they were strictly medical. People who gorged themselves gave a visible sign of poor self-control; what mattered was their flawed character, not their mortality risk. Gluttony was a vice before obesity was a disease.

And not just any disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control, which is the federal government's official voice on public health, being overweight or obese "increases the risk of many diseases and health conditions," including type-2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers, notably of the breast, colon, and endometrium. The World Heart Federation has just warned that being overweight or obese "can advance a first heart attack by four to eight years." To the extent that there is an official consensus on such things, this is it: if you're overweight or obese, you're running a substantial risk of ill health and premature death; if you want to avoid these evils, lose weight.

The phrase "obesity epidemic" expresses the sense that obesity not only is a disease itself but gives rise to a wide range of other diseases; it also reflects the indisputable evidence of fat's growing prevalence. About two-thirds of American adults can be officially classified as "overweight," and more than a quarter are "obese." The C.D.C. sees the epidemic as sweeping the country state by state: the "fattest" states make an arc that runs from Texas through Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama to West Virginia, with obesity



rates greater than twenty-five per cent; the "thinnest" include Massachusetts, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, with rates below nineteen per cent. (Prudently, the C.D.C. draws no political conclusions, though its vivid map of our burgeoning national bulk colors the fat states red and the thin ones blue.) Averages can also be broken down by gender, ethnicity, education, and income level. Since 1970, according to one source, the average American man has gained seven pounds and the average American woman thirteen. However, there's a lot of lumpiness hidden in these statistics. Some groups of individuals, such as the Pima Indians, of southern Arizona, are getting much fatter than other groups, such as white professional men with advanced degrees and personal trainers. It's been some time since the average capitalist fat cat was actually fat.

What counts as overweight? In the United States, as in other countries, the body mass index is the officially approved way of deciding whether or not you're too heavy. Leith, who curiously makes no mention of the medical issues associated with obesity, never seems to have worked out his own B.M.I. Had he done so, the answer would have been 32. (To calculate your B.M.I., divide your weight in pounds by the square of your height in inches, and then multiply the result by 703.) The C.D.C. tells you that a B.M.I. over 30 means you're "obese," while values between 25 and 29.9 mean you're "overweight." Still, the B.M.I. net catches some surprising fish. At six-six and a playing weight of two hundred and sixteen pounds, Michael Jordan was "overweight" (with a B.M.I. of 25); and, on the Boston Red Sox, Manny Ramirez and David (Big Papi) Ortiz are "overweight" (27.1 and 28, respectively), while the pitcher David Wells is "obese" (31.2), though that won't come as a shock to Red Sox Nation. (Yankees fans should not feel too smug: both Jaret Wright and Hideki Matsui, at 29.5, are a Fenway Frank short of obesity.) The B.M.I. doesn't tell you the percentage of body fat you're carrying or how your fat is distributed, and it hasn't got much to do with how you feel or whether you're repulsive to potential sex partners. What it's meant to do is provide a rough-and-

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ready index of a population's health risks.

Precisely what those are, however, is less settled than it appears. Dr. Julie Gerberding, the head of the C.D.C., was one of the authors of a paper that was published, in March of 2004, in the distinguished *Journal of the American Medical Association* warning that obesity was responsible for killing four hundred thousand Americans a year—almost as many as tobacco. Some obesity treatments are now tax deductible as medical expenses, and some are reimbursable by health insurers. Three-quarters of Americans apparently see obesity as an "extremely" or "very" serious public-health problem, and the avoidance of premature death is a major reason that Americans seek to lose weight. J. Eric Oliver, a Chicago political scientist and obesity researcher, finds this whole state of affairs remarkable. His "Fat Politics: The Real Story Behind America's Obesity Epidemic" (Oxford; $26) is an extended polemic against the causal association of overweight and ill health. He finds no reason to believe the usual assertion about the health effects of the "obesity epidemic"—that two-thirds of Americans weigh "too much," that hundreds of thousands of us are dying each year from fat, that obesity costs hundreds of billions of dollars in health-care expenditures—and, though he's not an epidemiologist, he stitches together a patchwork of epidemiological evidence to make his case.

Epidemiologists don't even agree on whether overweight people who manage to lose weight improve their health. As one group of C.D.C. researchers put it, "Evidence that weight loss improves survival is limited." We are getting fat, but, Oliver says, we're not getting sick because of it. Excess body fat, and its effects on your joints, can contribute to osteoarthritis, Oliver concedes, and he grants that there is a decent causal story about cancer of the uterus and the higher estrogen levels found in overweight women, but that's about it. A high B.M.I., in Oliver's opinion, is most likely a proxy for things that are the direct causes of both obesity and disease, such as poor diet and lack of exercise. If you have a high B.M.I. and you're fit, Oliver thinks that there's no evidence that you're more likely to suffer ill health than anyone else. Fat people are not usually fit, and they often eat foods rich in saturated fats, sugar, and refined carbohydrates, but it's the lack of exercise and a poor diet that make for bad health, not "excessive" weight. Oliver discusses a number of studies purporting to show that weight loss is responsible for remediating a range of illnesses. However, epidemiologists are too quick to ascribe to weight loss what might be better attributed to the life-style changes that produce weight loss. This, Oliver claims, "is like saying 'whiter teeth produced by the elimination of smoking reduces the incidence of lung cancer.' "

As it happens, a little more than a year after Julie Gerberding's report appeared in *JAMA* one of her employees, Katherine Flegal, published a paper in the same journal which came to strikingly different conclusions. Flegal argued that obesity's body count was far lower than Gerberding estimated; most of those deaths were among the small number of the very obese (B.M.I. greater than 35); people in certain age groups who were by C.D.C. criteria overweight but not obese had a *lowered* risk of death compared with those who were "normal"; and being *underweight* killed about thirty-four thousand Americans a year. The *Times* announced the good news on the front page: "SOME EXTRA HEFT MAY BE HELPFUL." A number of epidemiologists and nutrition researchers welcomed Flegal's paper. Obesity "is presented as a crisis and it's presented as this horrible problem which has exploded onto the scene," one expert said. "What this paper shows is that it's just not true." Not surprisingly, Flegal's research was also met by heavy counterattacks, and the argument continues.

We can believe the dissenters or not—the way things are going, we probably won't—but on several points Oliver's is a valuable voice: obesity is an extremely complex phenomenon; inference from the population to the individual is always highly problematic; no one knows what course of behavior is certain to be good *for you;* some "cures"—bariatric surgery and the Atkins diet among them—may turn out to be more dangerous than the condition they seek to remedy; nutrition scientists and epidemiologists routinely contradict each other on matters of

A SEAGULL MURMUR

is what they called it,
shaking their heads
like trawlermen;

the mewling sound of a leaking heart
the sound
of a gull trapped in his chest.

To let it out
they ran a cut down his belly
like a fish, his open ribs

the ribs of a boat;
and they closed him,
wired him shut.

Caulked and seaworthy now
with his new valve; its metal
tapping away:

the dull clink
of a signal-buoy
or a beak at the bars of a cage.

—Robin Robertson

public policy and in the advice they give to individuals. The problem for the concerned but disinterested observer is not that there is no certainty in these matters; it's that there are too many certainties. A diet slightly richer in humble pie might do nutrition experts some good.

For a skeptic like Oliver, the question is why, given the state of the evidence, we live in fear of an "obesity epidemic." Why do so many of us want so urgently to lose weight? One answer he offers is that we're largely ignorant about the endemic uncertainties and the disagreement among experts in this area. Another is that we have an irrational revulsion toward obese people. What he calls—God help us—"fatism" is a way of smuggling in prejudice against women and racial minorities. Significantly more African-Americans and Latinos are obese than non-Latino whites. Oliver generated computer images of men and women and noted that observers judged women to be "fat" at relatively lower body weights than men. He claims that seventy per cent of all Americans—and almost that many physicians—think that laziness and poor self-control are the predominant causes of obesity, and so obesity can be a vehicle for our moral prejudices.

Having told us that our attitudes toward obesity are irrational, Oliver thinks we should just give them up and move on. But that's like fat William Leith telling the girlfriend who doesn't want to have sex with him anymore that she's being irrational. Maybe it *should* work, but it never does. The "soft" cultural, social, and moral facts of the matter about obesity turn out to be harder to shift than beliefs about the relevant scientific facts. Fat was once considered a sign of substance and now it isn't. It was once thought sexy and now it's the opposite. Historical and cultural variability in such things are also facts of the matter, but we're snagged in the ropes of our own culture, and to be told that things once were, and ought to be, otherwise is of little help to fat people living in the here and now.

So even if you accept Oliver's account of the evidence, you may still





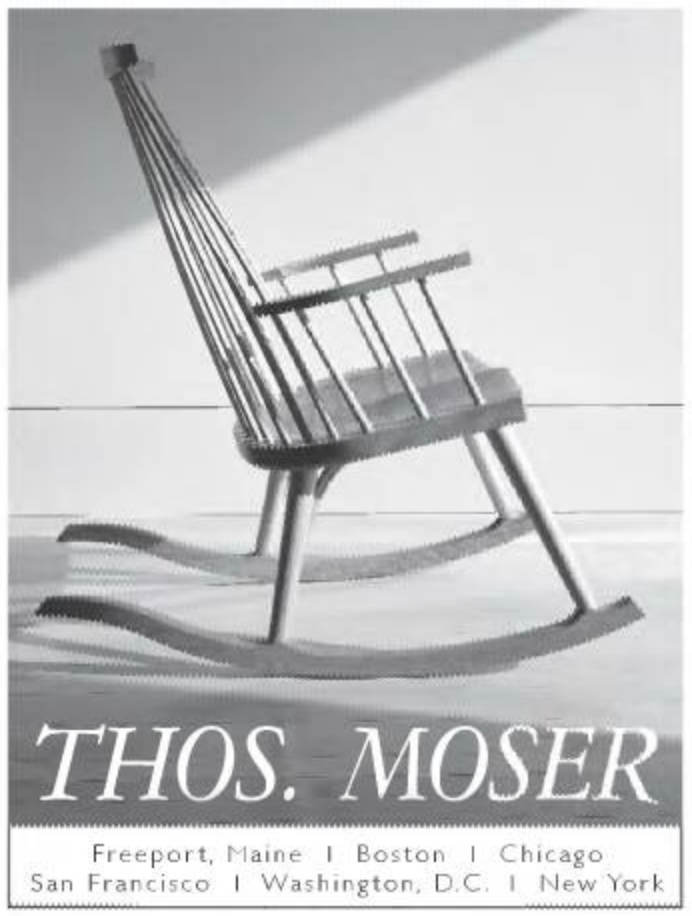
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want to lose weight, and those who are interested in the psychic as well as the bodily health of contemporary American society may still want to understand why we've grown so fat. Maybe, after all, we can do something about it; and maybe, if we can't, we can understand why not and so save ourselves the money and the worry. Here Oliver joins other obesity researchers in having one really good idea: the key to the spread of obesity in America is technology-produced abundance. There are a lot of calories around; they're cheaper than they ever were; and they're more accessible as we move about in the course of a day. Our genetic constitution, having evolved in scarcity, was designed to store up as much fatty tissue as possible in rare periods of plenty, and, since we now live in permanent glut, nature has programmed us for obesity, some of us more than others. The Land of Cockaigne is a nice place to visit; the trouble is that we're stuck living there.

As the economist David Cutler and his colleagues have shown, since the mid-nineteen-seventies the average American's calorie intake has increased by about ten per cent and American food production per capita has increased by twenty per cent. Some commentators also blame lack of exercise, and our working lives have indeed become more sedentary, but we wind up running around more, and Cutler isn't convinced by the evidence that our over-all levels of exercise have declined. Others blame burgeoning portion size for obesity, but Cutler disputes that, too. It's not that we're eating more at meals; it's that we're eating more often and what we're eating is often calorie rich. We don't eat meals; we snack, graze, and nosh. We've become an eat-on-the-run, absent-mindedly feeding, cup-holder culture. Technology has made calories bountiful, cheap, and easy to consume, while new patterns of work, residence, mobility, and child rearing have squeezed the time that we are able or willing to commit to family or communal meals.

In the early-modern period, books of manners recommended that a gentleman always eat in company. King James I warned his son never to eat alone, lest people think it was for the "private satisfying of your gluttonie, which ye would be ashamed should be publicklie seene." The social setting was understood to set moral limits on consumption. The shared meal marked the beginning and the end of eating: there was a time to eat and a time to stop. The meal defined the when, the what, the how, the how long, and the how much. You adjusted your consumption to those who were eating with you. You didn't have exactly what you wanted, exactly when you wanted it, and exactly as much as you might want. The marking, ordering, and, above all, limiting character of the shared meal remained largely intact into the twentieth century: Leith's grandmother used to warn him about appearing "greedy" at the table, and, while my own grandmother absolutely required that we have "seconds," it was not a great idea to be seen eating when she wasn't feeding you. Sometime in the postwar era, though, the domestic meal began its unremitting decline. Now, like many of us, Leith mostly eats standing up—no grandmother, no mother, often no one at all to witness "greed." The individualization of eating has done much to cut us free of dietary limits. We've been told that an index of our times is that we "bowl alone"; something similar might be said of our gastronomic habits. We eat alone and we get fat together.

The feast, in times past, was a meal set off from the ordinary by its abundance and richness. Our feasts have now become as ordinary as they are mobile. It's a little more than a mile from my house, in Central Square, in Cambridge, up Massachusetts Avenue to Harvard Yard. As I walk to work I pass forty establishments where I can get fed (only five of which happen to be franchised fast food). There are five all-you-can-eat buffets (three Indian, one Chinese, and one Tibetan), and fifteen places where high-fat, high-sugar drinks and finger foods are visible from the sidewalk or available within several steps of the entrance. Many of the people I pass are eating or drinking as they walk, and others are doing the same alone in their cars. When I get to the building where I work, I pass, on the way to my office, a cafeteria whose display features an assortment of doughnuts, brownies, croissants, and pastries. It looks pretty good today, so I pick up a prune Danish. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Brooklyn Follies, *by Paul Auster (Henry Holt; $24).* After a "sad and ridiculous life" in the suburbs, Nathan Glass retires, gets divorced, and moves to Brooklyn to die. To pass the time, he decides to write an account of mishaps and mistakes, beginning with his own—"The Book of Human Folly." "The tone would be light and farcical throughout," he says, "and my only purpose was to keep myself entertained." Auster seems to have had a similar intent. A chance encounter with a long-lost nephew leads Nathan into an unlikely second act, involving a longer-lost niece, her runaway daughter, and a host of lively Brooklyn caricatures—a gay used-bookstore owner, a tough widow, an H.I.V.-positive drag queen—all in the midst of unlikely second acts themselves. Nathan narrates increasingly absurd events with persistent cheer, a tone mirrored by the blinkered optimism and liberal conviction of pre-9/11 Park Slope; it's a combination that soon seems less hopeful than hollow, and profoundly disengaged.

Jejuri, *by Arun Kolatkar (New York Review Books; $12.95).* Available for the first time outside Kolatkar's native India, this sequence of poems (written in English, and first published in 1976) describes a trip to a Hindu pilgrimage site in the state of Maharashtra. Amit Chaudhuri's excellent introduction tells us that Kolatkar was both an amateur musician and a successful art director in the Bombay advertising world, which perhaps explains the acuteness of his ear and eye. Veering between the epigrammatic and the incantatory, these poems capture a place that is both ancient and modern, with crumbling temples and "stock exchange quotations." Kolatkar's pages are populated by saints, beggars, prostitutes, and priests, by rats, stray dogs, and the occasional butterfly, a creature whose transitory beauty is meticulously described: "There is no story behind it. / It is split like a second. / It hinges around itself."



The Wit in the Dungeon, *by Anthony Holden (Little, Brown; $29.95).* A friend of Shelley's and a foil for Byron, Leigh Hunt was a poet, editor, and essayist whose most notable achievement was to foster talents greater than his own. In this engaging biography, Holden stresses Hunt's abilities as a networker, arguing that he gathered the "widest circle of acquaintance" in nineteenth-century English letters. Ten thousand supporters turned out at his trial for libelling the Prince Regent; after being convicted, he made his prison cell into a literary salon. Keats, whom Hunt liked to challenge to speed-sonnet-writing contests, dedicated his first volume of poetry to him, while Dickens made his childlike optimism the subject of a wounding caricature. Holden's account is rich in anecdotes about Romantic luminaries, but he seems uncertain about literary matters and makes no real attempt to appraise Hunt's output.

Time Was Soft There, *by Jeremy Mercer (St. Martin's; $23.95).* As a crime reporter in Canada, Mercer received a threatening call after naming an underworld source in a book. Fearing for his life, he quit his job and flew to Paris. As his funds dwindled, he stumbled upon Shakespeare and Co., a small bookstore on the Left Bank across from Notre-Dame, and spent nine months living rent-free in the upstairs library, along with a rotating cast of backpackers and aspiring writers. Despite Mercer's predilection for melodramatic flourishes, the memoir ably captures a romanticized version of the bum's life, with elaborate schemes to scrape up money (like buying designer handbags on behalf of Asian tourists) and nights spent drinking wine and swapping stories. But the real star is the eccentric and charming bookstore proprietor, George Whitman, who remarks, after losing a stack of two-hundred-franc notes to nest-building mice, "At least it's not the books."



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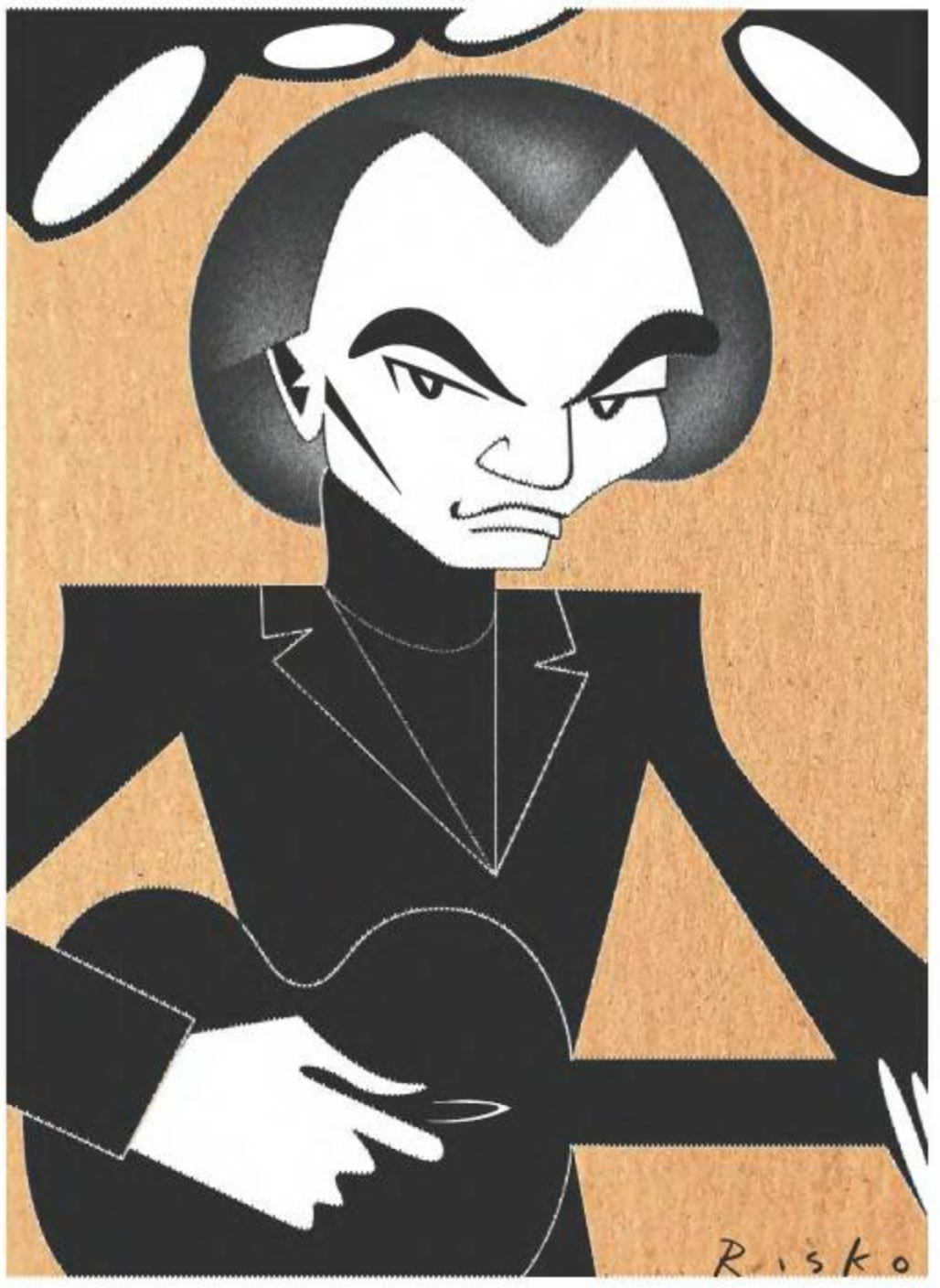
HELLO, AGAIN

Neil Diamond's long, serious career.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

During a performance at Madison Square Garden last August, the sixty-four-year-old singer and songwriter Neil Diamond asked everyone in the audience to turn to a neighbor and say, "I love you very much." Several thousand people, many of them women over the age of forty, did as he requested, but some giggled after saying the words. "Why are you laughing?" Diamond asked. "Love is not funny."

Nothing is funny in Diamond's songs. They can be inexplicably grave and mysteriously worded, even at their sunniest and most catchy. The best ones sound like the pleas of a love-struck man from another place—perhaps a small Eastern European city—who has an unusual gift for melody but who grew up not speaking English. "'I am,' I said, to no one there, and no one heard at all, not even the chair," is a typically opaque lyric. Diamond's new album, "12 Songs," which was produced by Rick Rubin, exhibits both his chivalrous approach to romance and his awkwardly phrased enthusiasms, qualities that have been evident since the start of his forty-five-year career. Happily, Rubin reins in Diamond's floridity more than any other producer he has worked with since the sixties, highlighting the weird mixture of guilelessness and gravitas at the center of his work.



Diamond's earnestness almost makes him radical.

Diamond, who grew up in Brooklyn, began writing songs and making records in the late nineteen-fifties, while attending New York University on a fencing scholarship. His first musical collaborator, Jack Packer, has described Diamond's performance style as "*very uptight*, to say the least. Somber. I realized that performing per se was not his forte whatsoever." Diamond's voice is handsome and sturdy, but he sings like a man who, though he experiences emotions intensely, must work too hard to express them; his words emerge with excessive force. There are very few settings on his voice machine: he can do less Neil or more Neil. If he sings about regret, he will not slip in a shiver of delight. If he pleads with a woman who has left him, there won't be a hint of relief in his voice. But what Diamond cannot do as a singer he makes up for as a songwriter.

Diamond's strongest work—including "Sweet Caroline," "I'm a Believer," "Cracklin' Rosie," "Cherry, Cherry," and "Song Sung Blue"—was recorded between 1966 and 1972. In those early days, even the duds came with conversational melodies that had a balance of sweetness and economy. Diamond's tendency to write slightly incomprehensible lyrics was offset by the vigor of his musical ideas. "Cracklin' Rosie," for example, manages to cram a string arrangement that could have been lifted from a fifties Percy Faith record, the shoo-wops of a sixties girl group, and the carefree guitar strumming of seventies rock into an exhilarating two minutes and fifty-nine seconds.

Soon after Diamond released his 1972 hit, "Song Sung Blue," however, he became a staple of easy-listening radio, a comfort to older—or at least more readily startled—listeners. (When I asked friends and acquaintances for their impressions of Diamond, even those in their sixties began their recollections with the statement "My parents listened to Neil Diamond.") His soupy duet with Barbra Streisand, "You Don't Bring Me Flowers," went to No. 1 in 1978, and "Love on the Rocks," from the 1980 movie "The Jazz Singer," went to No. 2. Diamond's last major pop hit was "Heartlight," in 1982. Inspired by the flickering glow in E.T.'s chest, he announced that we all have a "heartlight," and life would be better if we turned it on.

Most of the songs that Diamond wrote in the eighties and nineties are mired in genteel strings and keyboards or, worse, harsh synthesizers, which made him sound louder but no hipper. His 1986 album, "Headed for the Future," got it completely wrong; nobody has ever been less headed for the future than Diamond. Since the early eighties, his most consistent source of income has been live shows, which are famous for his shiny shirts and heartfelt presentation, and for his ability to commune with his predominantly female fans. The shows have made Diamond rich while turning him into a kitsch icon: the 2001 movie "Saving Silverman," about a Neil Diamond cover band, pokes fun at his sincerity.

ROBERT RISKO

But, if Diamond is ponderous and melodramatic, he is also a perfectionist, who has produced more than five hundred variations on a single theme. Even when few critics were paying attention to his albums, and only the faithful were buying them, he was still trying to find new ways to parse love.

In 1996, Diamond released "Tennessee Moon," an album that was largely ignored by critics but that suggested he was eager to reclaim some of the vitality that had dimmed in all the candlelight. Rick Rubin had already approached Diamond, hoping to record him. (At the time, Rubin was working with Johnny Cash, with whom he recorded twelve albums' worth of material.) Diamond and Rubin finally got together in 2003 and the following year began to record "12 Songs." The album is revealing in its spareness. What few instruments Rubin uses are acoustic, and there is drumming on only one track. At Rubin's insistence, Diamond played the guitar himself, something he hadn't done on a recording in nearly forty years. Rubin understood that Diamond, by being forced to play and sing at the same time, would be less likely to ham it up: "12 Songs" shows what Diamond can do when he is relieved of his crowd-pleasing duties and spangly uniform.

The mood is sombre, perhaps the first time that a Diamond record has been as sombre as the man himself. The first five songs are elegiac; the best one, "Save Me a Saturday Night," is actually understated. The melody, built around three chords, is as anodyne as any of his cheery sixties pop numbers, but the pace is slower, and there is an undercurrent of gloom. Diamond asks his baby to save him a Saturday night, but "time is hurrying on"; by the end of the song, when he asks for "some room at your table," it's not clear whether he is importuning a woman or God.

Mortality is a recurring motif on the album, and that makes the sixth song, "Delirious Love," a pleasant anomaly. It could have been the B-side of "Cracklin' Rosie." Backed by a simple piano ostinato and three chiming chords played on a twelve-string guitar, Diamond sings about cavorting with his lover, and merrily tosses off malapropisms, including the declaration that his love "felt like a bolt out of hell." "It wasn't how to make sense we were thinking of," he admits, "just the two of us bent on delirious love." The song sounds the way a good pop tune should, wound up and barely able to contain itself, and Rubin gives Diamond all the room in the world to declaim and swear and chew the scenery.

"Hell Yeah," a more characteristically solemn tune, sounds like a reimagining of Sinatra's signature song "My Way." "Is it worth what I paid?" Diamond sings, building to a predictable crescendo. "You're gonna hear me say, 'Hell, yeah, it is.' And I say it loud: 'I loved it all, and I'm not too proud.'" Keep listening, and it is apparent that Diamond's victory lap is not as self-satisfied as Sinatra's. You can hear the empathy that has made his records proxy friends for so many: "Will you ever work it out? Will you ever take a chance? Just believe you can. Hell, yeah, you will."

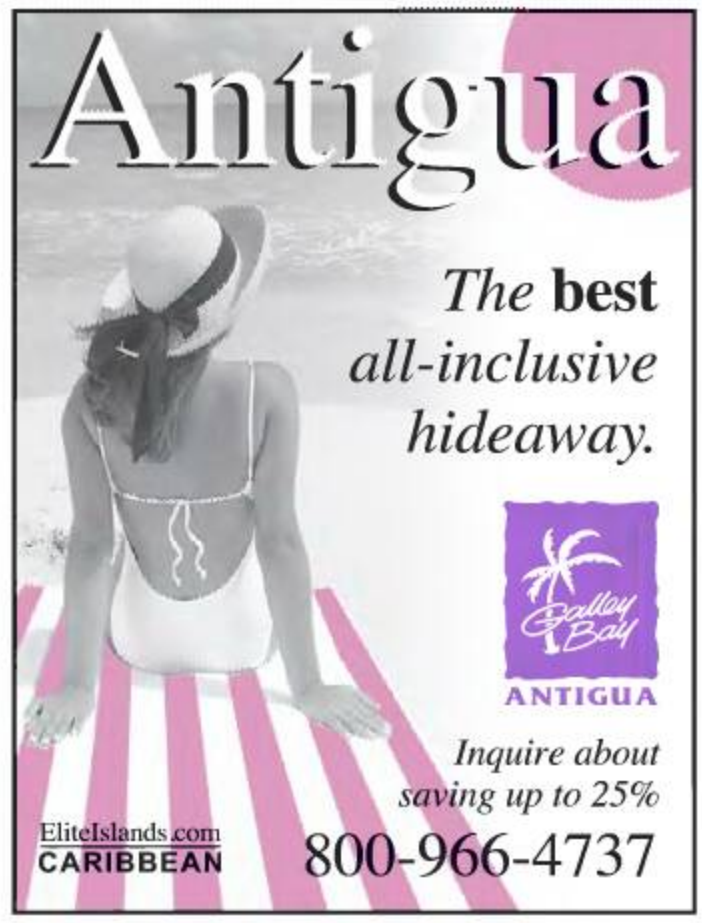
The album's opening track, "Oh Mary," is less a pop song than an invocation. At its core is a sustained piano chord (played by the keyboardist Benmont Tench), accompanied by a slowly plucked acoustic guitar and, eventually, an organ and a small string section. The song sounds like something you'd hear on a record by the Yogic chanter Krishna Das (a favorite of Rubin's) and is as stylistically remote from Diamond's early hits as it is possible to be. Diamond is his own choir; every few lines, he sings, "Mary, ooh, Mary, ooh," more to himself than to us. "I am talking about love," he declares, and becomes specific: "I am looking for something I never knew—Mary, ooh, Mary ooh—oh Mary, you know I'm looking for you."

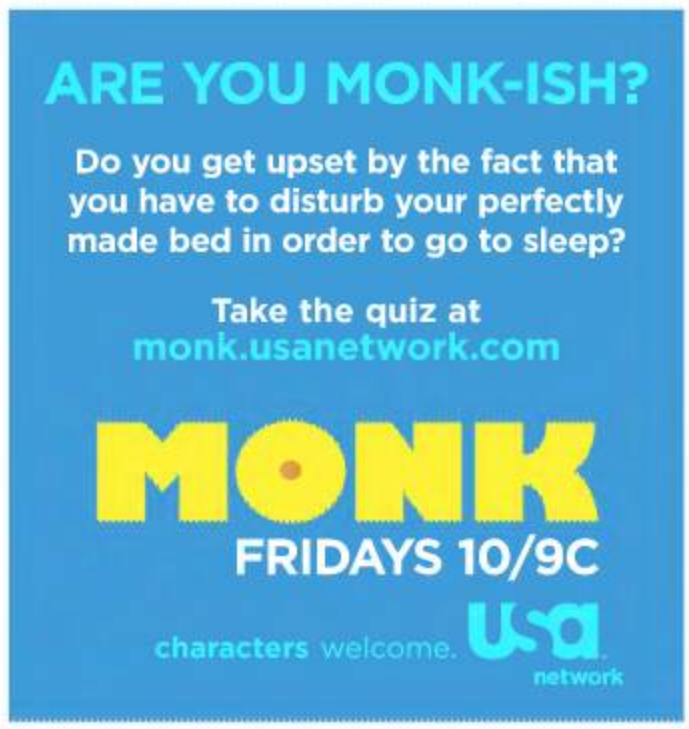
"12 Songs" suggests that serious interactions may always have been what Diamond was after. "I love you" is a weighty obligation, and Diamond wants it to mean something, no matter how many times he says it. In pop music, a medium distorted by decades of irony and evasion, that earnestness almost makes Diamond radical. On "12 Songs," Rubin almost makes him great. ♦

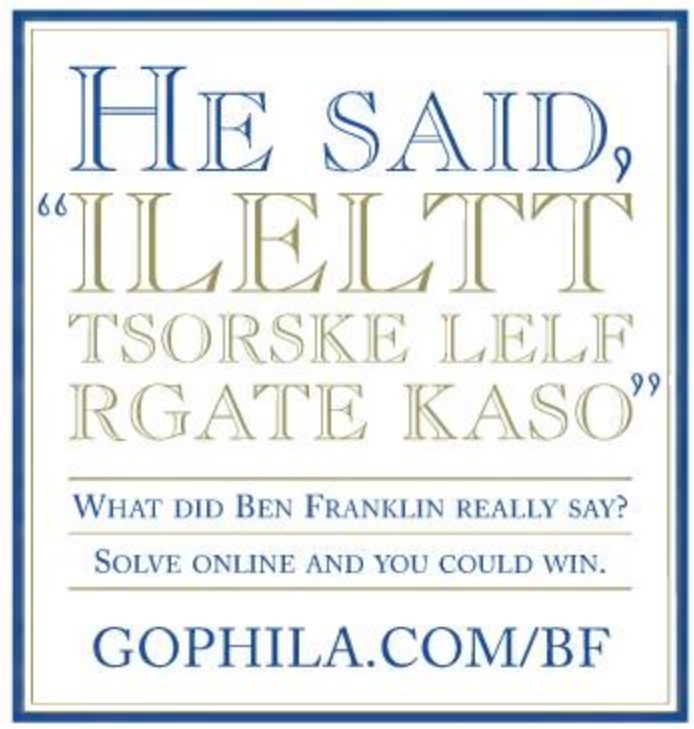
WE DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT DEPARTMENT

From Reuters.

Quaker Maid Meats Inc. on Tuesday said it would voluntarily recall 94,400 pounds of frozen ground beef panties that may be contaminated with E. coli.









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ON TELEVISION

AMERICAN IDIOTS

Seth MacFarlane's animated empire.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

Animated television shows and the economy of the United States have something in common—they both depend on a precious natural resource. But, while the oil the country relies on will run out someday, the fuel that keeps TV cartoons going, natural gas, is endlessly renewable. As long as there are human beings—particularly boys and overgrown boys—around to fart, and make fart jokes, there will be cartoons. Of that you can be sure. This is not at all a criticism of boys or what they turn into; it just happens to be a fact, and a diamond-hard one, that boys aren't subject to the depredations of the Four Horsemen of Appropriateness—Received Notions About Femininity, Fear of Not Being Perceived as Nice, No Boy Will Ever Want You If You Act / Look / Talk Like That, and Caring Too Much What Other People Think of You. These soul killers, having been loosed on the world by all the manufacturers of pink toys and spaghetti-strap toddlerwear, and sometimes by well-meaning, anxious mothers, come after girls before they even start elementary school and turn them into polite (if sometimes mean) little beings. So it's easier for boys not to lose sight of the important facts of life: that bathroom humor *is* hilarious (if you don't believe me, call an ancient Greek playwright), and that "butt" really is the funniest word in the world. It's a place from which all manner and degree of embarrassment, shame, and humiliation emanate—a quality it shares with the body parts that are its neighbors down there, though mention should also be made of those parts' pleasurable aspects, since they, too, provide so much opportunity for comedy. Adults, if they're honest with themselves, know that this is true, and if they've forgotten it they'll certainly get a reminder when they have children. (There is a series of Japanese children's books about the bodily functions that children tend to become preoccupied with; the most famous volumes in the series—"Everyone Poops" and "The Gas We Pass: The Story of Farts"—got that way because adults buy them as gag presents for other adults. At least, they do in *one* family I know.) For better or for worse, though, girls are encouraged to be dignified and self-contained, and while women play a role in TV animation (voicing characters, writing, and, sometimes, producing), all but one of the high-profile cartoons that have aired since "The Simpsons" débuted, in 1989, were created by men—and watched mostly by teen-age boys. ("Daria," whose protagonist is a smart, sardonic teen-age girl, was co-created by Susie Lewis Lynn.) Even the three little dynamos in "The Powerpuff Girls" were brought to life by a dude.

Currently, the blue ribbon for pull-my-finger comedy goes to Fox's "Family Guy," on the basis of both ribaldry and popularity; it's the most watched show among teen-age boys and college-age men. It can't be said—not by me, anyway—that "Family Guy" has surpassed "The Simpsons" in terms of quality and reach, but the show is definitely having a moment in the sun. And it isn't only a fartfest, of course. It's also a slapstick sitcom about a middle-class suburban Rhode Island family, headed by Lois and Peter Griffin, she a standard-issue loving housewife who married down and he a hugely fat happy idiot. The show, which was created by Seth MacFarlane, a now thirty-two-year-old graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, débuted in 1999, and didn't do well in the ratings, though it did last for fifty episodes before it was cancelled, in 2002. Reruns began airing on the Cartoon Network, during the block of programming called "Adult Swim," which runs late at night six nights a week. "Adult Swim" features three dozen or so shows aimed at post-pubescent viewers, includ-

ing odd, arty, anime-inspired shows, series that are familiar from their network runs, such as "Futurama," and ones that throw the history of TV cartoons into a blender and serve up pastiche on wry bread, such as "Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law," which brings an old Hanna-Barbera character into a contemporary setting. (Comedy Central has done something similar, but much more wicked, in "Drawn Together," an animated "reality" show featuring cartoon archetypes—a musclebound superhero, a Betty Boop look-alike, a Pikachu wannabe—living together in a house and displaying the undiscriminating libidos and tiny minds that seem to be prerequisites for most reality shows. It's filthy, and sometimes it's even funny.)

"Family Guy," which had never had a consistent time slot when it was on Fox, became a hit on the Cartoon Network, and then it became a hit all over again when it was released on a series of DVDs: the first volume was the best-selling TV series in 2003, and it's the all-time best-selling DVD of any animated show. In 2004, Fox announced that it was bringing "Family Guy" back; it was the first time that DVD sales had driven a show's return to the airwaves. Then, to capitalize on the show's success, MacFarlane was asked to come up with an additional package of three linked episodes that were released on DVD last fall, before airing on TV; if you do the math, you'll see that you pay much more per episode for this set—and they're episodes that you can later see for free—than you did for the previous collections. To make a long story short, when it comes to "Family Guy" Fox is rolling in it.

Several characters on the show have become stars—they're on T-shirts and mugs, and can be bought in ringtone form. There's Stewie Griffin, the one-year-old baby of the family, whose voice is modelled on Rex Harrison's in "My Fair Lady"; he's foppish and maniacal, and creepily pansexual, and he's always plotting to kill his mother. Brian, the dog (an overfed Mr. Peabody), is the smartest member of the family, though he is a little too fond of Martinis. But describing cartoon characters is a losing business—so much depends on the voices. "Family Guy" is almost like a radio show, and that's one of its pleasures. (As it happens, MacFarlane himself voices Peter, Stewie, and Brian. His real voice, low and resonant, sounds like Brian's.)



Psycho toddler: One-year-old Stewie Griffin has it in for his parents.

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

MacFarlane and his writers deserve every penny they make—except maybe some of the pennies they pocket from their new series, "American Dad!," a satirical take on the bland family shows of the fifties, when father knew best and mother stayed home, which premièred on Fox last year. Here the dad, Stan Smith, is a C.I.A. agent (and also not all that bright), emotionally vacant, unreflective, and cheerfully overbearing—the personification of America and its actions on the world stage. One problem with "American Dad!" is that it comes on right after "Family Guy," and the effect is of both too much and not enough of a good thing. The two shows have a lot in common in terms of look and sound and sensibility, and yet "American Dad!," six years younger than "Family Guy," seems stale already. Watching a cartoon sendup of American values and establishment attitudes makes us restless now; the comedy is too broad. (The exclamation point in the title virtually announces that.) We want to know what the real lies and the real facts are, and for that we've got Jon Stewart.

"Family Guy" is laugh-out-loud, timelessly loopy—it's a Dadaesque vaudeville turn, often literally. Peter will be talking about something, anything, and all of a sudden the show cuts to a song-and-dance team in straw boaters and red-and-white striped jackets capering in response. And then they're gone. "Family Guy" takes so much from "The Simpsons" that it's impossible to count all the ways, though it's very easy to spot them—the dim-witted dad, the (mostly) sensible housewife, an obsession with TV and celebrity, preening local newscasters, musical production numbers, and on and on. The show's signature is its constant cutaways to scenes packed with inspired non sequiturs and references to everything that was thought up by Hollywood and Madison Avenue in the past hundred years—from Fatty Arbuckle to the DuMont Network, Mister Rogers, "Laugh-In," and the Hope-Crosby "Road" pictures. The show pokes fun at every race, color, creed, interest group, and nationality, and throws in physical disabilities, too. In an episode a couple of months ago, Brian got a job at *The New Yorker*. On his first day, he found out that there were no toilets in the bathrooms; the people who worked there, he was told, didn't need them, because they didn't have anuses. Later that day, Brian was fired when the editor discovered that he hadn't graduated from college. We're all terribly sorry that Brian had such a bad experience, and we'd like him to know that he can come back anytime. There will always be a toilet here for him. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

CHILL

The year of living strenuously.

BY ANTHONY LANE

If you were out of the country, or out of your mind, for the past year, you may wish to know what you missed. One glance at the titles of the most admired films, and you will wonder what the hell was going on. "Brokeback Mountain," "Broken Flowers," "Crash": that's an awful lot of breakage. Yes, you might say, but those are fancy pictures. How about the rugged weekend viewers, hauling their good sense to the multiplex? What did they pay to watch? "Wedding Crashers." Ouch.

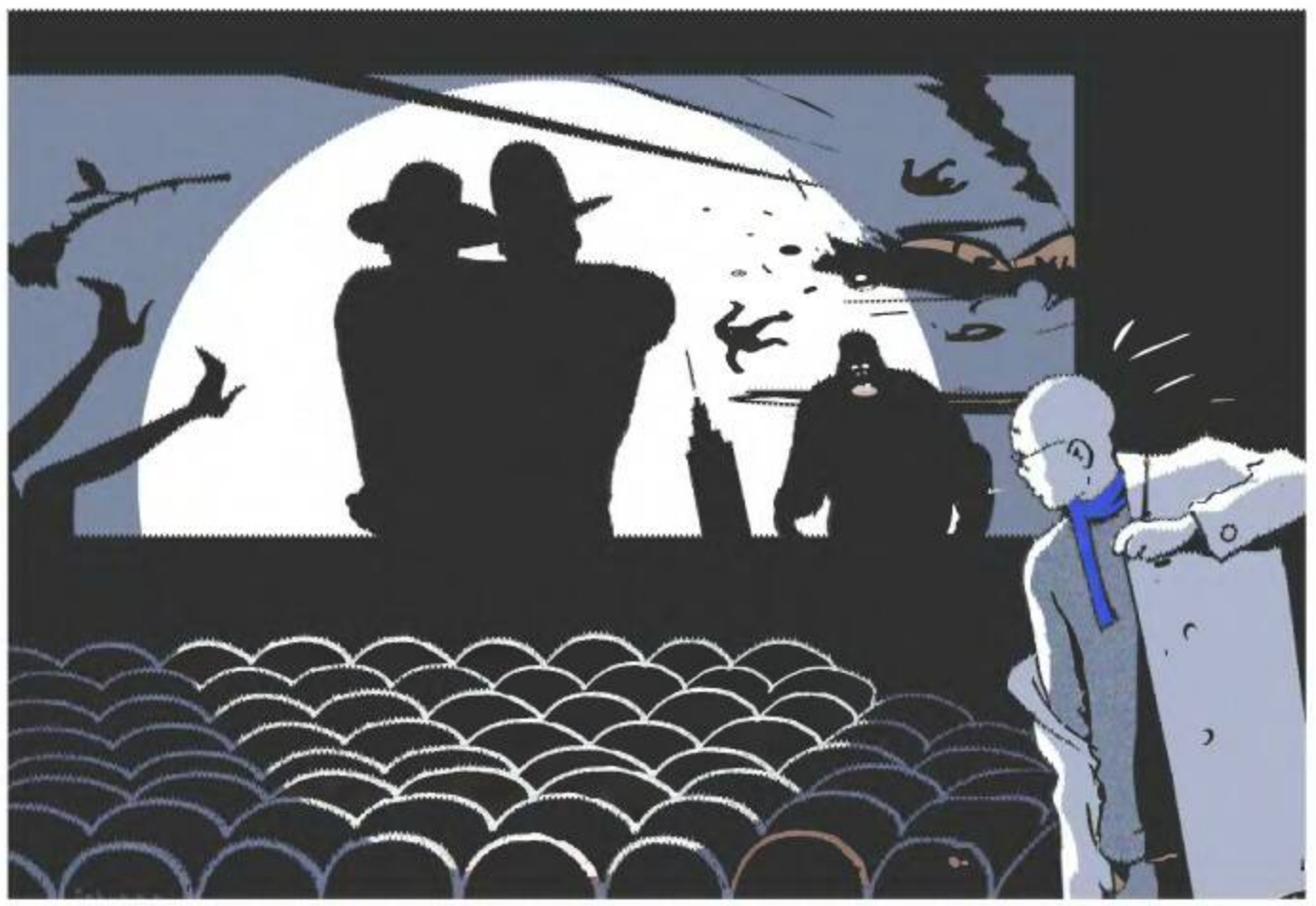
There is nothing new, of course, in the promise of fracture. Whether you crash a wedding or an Imperial Starcruiser, movies are the place to do it. This year will mark the seventieth anniversary of "San Francisco," in which Clark Gable and Spencer Tracy keep body and soul together in the jetsam of an earthquake. After the literal wreckage of 2005, which began with the aftershock of an undersea quake, and whose litany of the homeless stretched from New Orleans to Kashmir, cinematic fantasies of disaster feel more flippant than ever. Yet "San Francisco" is an exercise in American stoicism, and the wryness and proficiency with which its characters respond to chaos remain a defensible dream. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, amid the finger-pointing, lay a tempting thought: If only Spencer Tracy had been in charge.

No wonder Hollywood has turned to old John Carpenter films. He was one of the last directors to trade repeatedly in underreaction, that most precious of screen commodities. In his glory days, he made wiry thrillers like "Assault on Precinct 13" (1976), which closed with this exchange between a cop and a prisoner:

> "You're pretty fancy, Wilson."
> "I have moments."

Both that film and "The Fog" have been remade in the past year, neither to any purpose; producers, in their lavish innocence, seem to believe that cool, like Christmas leftovers, can be reheated ad infinitum. Still, one understands their plight. CGI has encouraged cinema to hit levels of bombast that even Cecil B. De Mille, dozing in his boudoir, would have considered a touch de trop, and if we worshipped Orlando Bloom's Legolas, in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, that is because he seemed elfishly underwhelmed by the very spectacle that was wowing the rest of us. Hence the crushing comedown of this year's "Kingdom of Heaven," Ridley Scott's crusader epic, in which Bloom wore the air not of a militant knight but of a worried boy who badly needed to pee.

In its dicing with political prejudices that it dimly knew to be important and its fatal inability to relax, "Kingdom of Heaven" was a workable median for the movies of 2005. From the unarguable tripe of "Alexander" and "The Phantom of the Opera," at the back end of last year, through the torn families of "Proof" and "Cinderella Man," to the furrowed indecision of "Munich," there has been a marked reluctance to breeze through any setup. Movies come *loaded* these days, more like a cart than a gun. The forthright Bill Murray of "Ghostbusters" ("This chick is toast") was anesthetized into the Bill Murray of "Broken Flowers," cast as an unfeasible Don Juan in search of former belles, and urged to sit perfectly still in a tracksuit, with the lights turned down, until we saw in him our common nullity. Even "Brokeback Mountain," for all its delicacy, felt obliged to add a couple of chunky scenes, not in Annie Proulx's original tale, in which Jack rebuked his father-in-law, and Ennis chewed out a pair of apelike bikers. As he stood there, with Fourth of July fireworks flaring behind him, I thought, O.K., we get the point—gay men can be strong Americans, too.



In the movies of 2005, there was a marked reluctance to breeze through any setup.

The box-office returns for 2005 are not yet complete. "King Kong" is still slugging it out with "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," and my money is on Tilda Swinton to beat the crap out of the primate. Other slots have already been filled, by such masterworks as "Star Wars Episode III: The Revenge of the Sith," "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire," "War of the Worlds," "Batman Begins," and "Mr. and Mrs. Smith." All their plots depend on a fear of the unknown (or, if you are Brad Pitt, a fear of Angelina Jolie), and yet their creators' deepest fear is that we might not know in advance what the unknown consists of. That is why most of the high-

ISTVAN BANYAI

earners are either sequels or remakes—born, in other words, with brand recognition intact. We must not kid ourselves that the market leaders of old sought to frolic with the avant-garde; the most successful movie half a century ago was Disney's "Lady and the Tramp," and a decade before that it was "The Bells of St. Mary's," with Bing Crosby in a dog collar. Nevertheless, today's contrast between the mayhem onscreen and the splintered nerves of the industry behind it feels freshly ominous. The studios, hunting for templates, trust nothing but a proven winner, however ropy it was in the first place, and they dread to think that we, in turn, might dare to take new characters on trust.

A while ago, I spoke with a class of film students. Each of them, smart and keen, sketched out for me the bones of a screenplay that he or she was writing. Two things rapidly became clear. First, there was not a speck of comedy in sight. These kids were not just serious about their work; they could conceive only of characters who were serious about their lives. Second, when I suggested that those characters might be slipped, unheralded, into the action I was gently corrected, not by the students but by their teacher. "We don't do that here," he said. I knew, courtesy of Hamlet, that there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow, but it now appears that the sparrow will request a cut of the DVD sales and a backstory the size of "Moby-Dick."

It is this want of resolution—of the will to believe that a movie, like a poem, can deliver a person or a predicament straight into our hands—that leads to a bummer like "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." Tim Burton decided to burden Mr. Wonka with a miserable childhood and a package of flashbacks; since when did a Roald Dahl hero or villain need to be explained? Burton is a dreamy and inventive fellow, so why does he think we're so dumb? Stranger by far was David Cronenberg's "A History of Violence," in which Viggo Mortensen, after a heroic defense of his small-town diner against robbers, winds up on the TV news, and thus finds his misty, murderous past creeping back at him, like smoke under a door. The movie was all backstory: tense and tormenting while it was hinted at, but slackening into silliness, complete with puffed-up gangsters, once it was fleshed out. Nothing in the second half of the movie told you as much as the terrifying grace of Mortensen's gunplay in the diner. Reactions speak louder than words.

So, what were the highlights of 2005, and what hopes can we summon for a year in which the densest streams of ticker tape will float for "X-Men 3"? Well, we got Ralph Fiennes starring in, and surpassing, "The Constant Gardener"; we got Philip Seymour Hoffman doing the same with "Capote"; and, above all, we got Kevin Pollak's impersonation of Christopher Walken in "The Aristocrats," which I would describe as hair-raising if Walken had ever been hair-lowered. The most rackety fun I had all year came in the first twenty minutes of "Wedding Crashers," which demonstrated that Vince Vaughn is either a genius or an escaped lunatic who should not be approached without a stun gun, yet even that farce declined into soulful whimsy, as did "Hitch." I did laugh at the end of "The Revenge of the Sith," but that was from pure relief, much as the people of Stalingrad gave a bitter, mirthless grin when the siege was finally lifted.

As for complete films, the one that struck me most forcefully was a German-Turkish production, "Head On." The year before that, my favorite was Russian ("The Return"). In 2003, it was Swedish ("Lilya 4-Ever"). In 2002, it was Mexican ("Y Tu Mamá También"). In 2001, it was Swedish again ("Together"). In 1999, it was French ("The Dreamlife of Angels"). This is not as I would wish. America is a formidable machine for moviemaking, with all the fuel it needs, but the kinds of story that it now chooses to tell of itself, and the appetite for such nourishment—the taste for mass public shows, that is, rather than unhypnotic home entertainment, which you can snap out of when you need a beer—may be shrinking beyond recall. The last year in which our wits and our senses alike could feed on homegrown products, thanks to such disparate dramas as "Gladiator" and "Wonder Boys," was 2000; before that, there were delights from Richard Linklater, with "Dazed and Confused" and "Before Sunrise"; from Wes Anderson, with "Rushmore"; from Bryan Singer, with "The Usual Suspects"; and from Curtis Hanson, with "L.A. Confidential." All of the above were amused, grown-up entertainments made by men who weren't trying too hard. One hopes that Hanson's "In Her Shoes," of last year, was a soft-soled blip, and that order and toughness will be swiftly restored to his work. If 2006 is going to yank American movies out of the rut, we need something pretty fancy from Hanson and his peers. We need moments. ♦

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Standard Mail Piece included in Edition 7.

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Matthew Diffee, must be received by Sunday, January 15th. Finalists in the December 26th & January 2nd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 6th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"If I'm not back at the maze by eight, my wife reels in the damn string."
Lou Primus, Horsham, Pa.



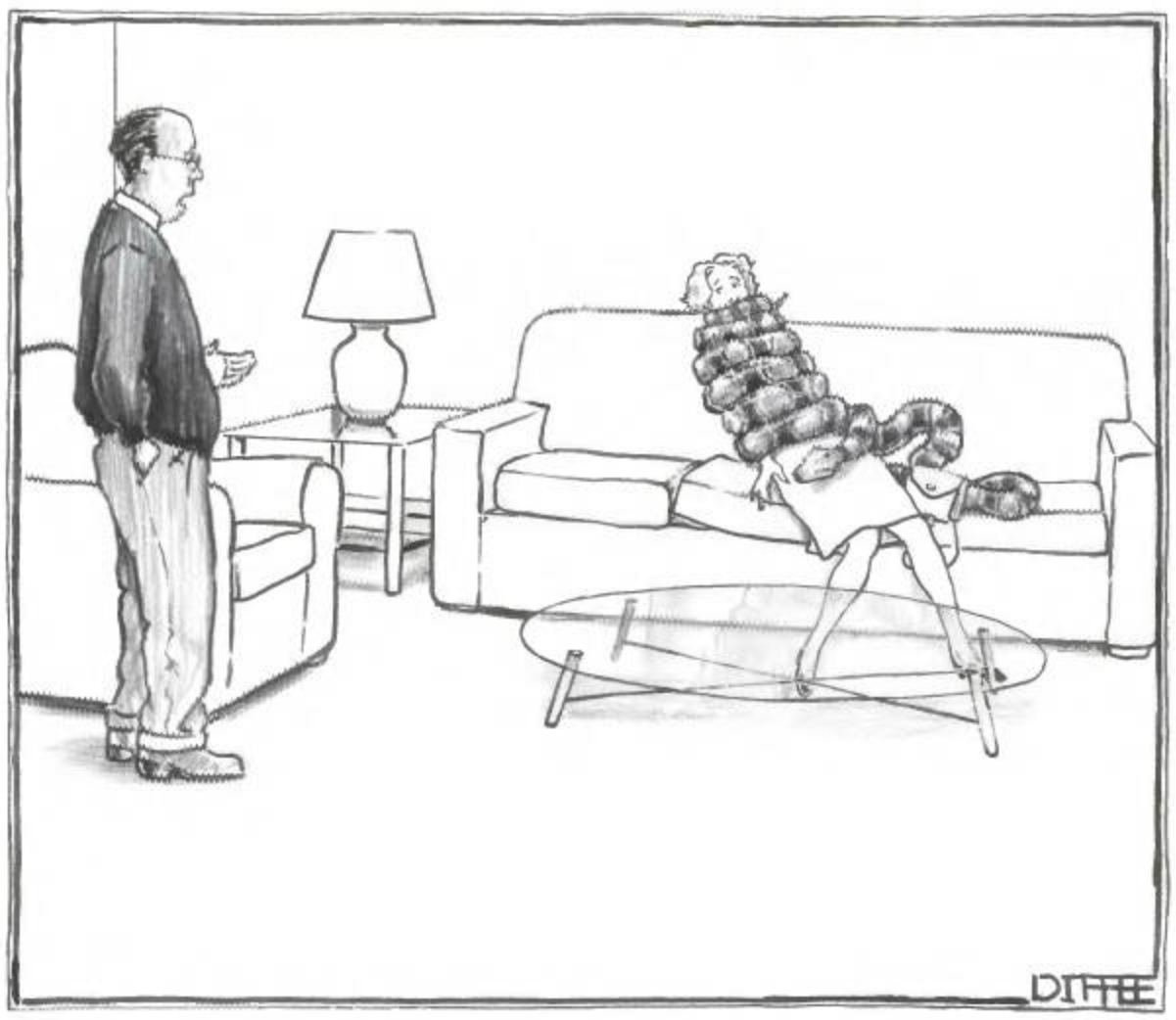
THE FINALISTS

"I never know what to pack."
Hilary Taylor, Worthington, Ohio

"I just thought of something. What if your parents don't collect dead goldfish anymore?"
Jake Baerkircher, Chillicothe, Ohio

"So, then, I guess the Johnsons are feeding our clothes."
Chip Bolcik, Thousand Oaks, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



" "

laid-back business dinner on the 52nd floor of Park Hyatt Tokyo: $359

(thinking I love my job: priceless)



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