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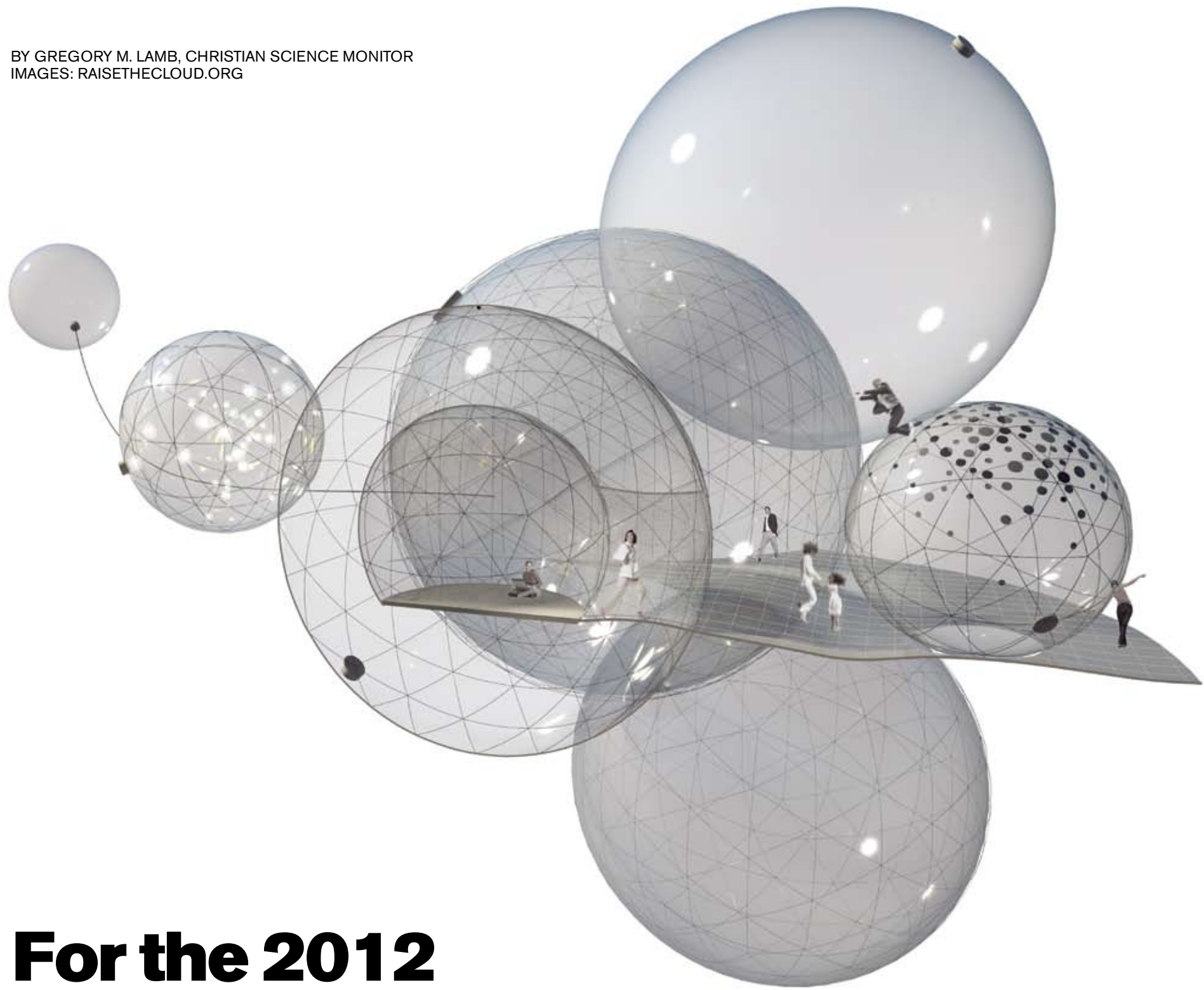
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INSIGHT

JANUARY 2010, ISSUE 4 - A Product of Vero Beach 32963

P.30

London dreams of a Cloud castle for the 2012 Olympics



For the 2012 Olympic Games, London dreams of a Cloud castle

The ambitious structure planned for the Olympics, has airy spheres, spiral walkways and data projection.



A group of architects, artists, and other big thinkers are certain that they don't have their heads in a cloud as they plan what could be the most startling structure to emerge from the London Olympic Games of 2012.

Called simply "the Cloud," the monument would consist of two slender towers rising hundreds of feet into the air. Atop the twin spires float digital displays and viewing platforms for the public, who would climb up by foot or bicycle using spiral ramps wrapped around one of the towers.

The summit would also feature giant inflated plastic spheres, some of which visitors could enter. Real-time information about the Games and the surroundings would be displayed by Google.

In an emerging century with more and more online experience, the Cloud aims to form a connection from the virtual world to the real world, "from the world of bits to the physical world, the world of atoms," says Carlo Ratti, head of the SENSEable Cities Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a member of the international team working on the project.

Other players include Arup, the architectural firm that designed the Sydney Opera House. Umberto Eco, the Italian philosopher and popular novelist, is serving as an adviser.

The Cloud team wants both the finished product, and the way it is conceived and financed, to be revolutionary. While traditional monuments emphasize their grandeur and permanence by expressing a sense of mass and weight, the Cloud "upturns the monumental tradition" with its airy, almost ephemeral design, says Sarah Goldhagen, architecture critic for *The New Republic*.

"I think the idea is incredibly cool," she says. Ms. Goldhagen, who also edits an academic journal on modern architecture, is one of three experts the Monitor asked to look at the plans for the Cloud, which are posted online at raisingthecloud.org.

The Cloud is designed to be "carbon neutral," creating the energy it needs to operate from the use of regenerative brakes (similar to those used on hybrid cars). While visitors put in the initial effort by climbing the monument, the Cloud scheme then produces electricity as an elevator lowers visitors back to the ground. Solar panels will also generate electricity.

An Internet-based effort

The design team, which has met only once, last summer, includes members in Britain, Germany, Italy, Australia, and the United States. It mostly works over the Internet with little formal structure, though Professor Ratti at MIT is acting as a coordinator.

The project is among a handful being considered

by London Mayor Boris Johnson to become an official part of the London Games.

But even if the Cloud isn't chosen by the mayor, its designers plan to find an appropriate venue in London in which to build it in time for the Games. "We can build our CLOUD with £5 million [\$8 million] or £50 million," says Ratti on the group's website. "The flexibility of the structural system will allow us to tune the size of the CLOUD to the level of funding that is reached."

The group will raise funds via the Internet using social-media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

"[W]e would like the Cloud to become a symbol of global ownership built through a bottom-up fundraising effort," Ratti says on the website, akin to the effort used by President Obama's campaign to collect a large number of small donations online.

The idea of a cloud also evokes "cloud computing," the concept of storing, manipulating, and sharing data online rather than in an individual computer. Ratti also uses the high-tech buzzword "crowdsourcing" to indicate how he expects a wide number of people to contribute thinking and funding to the effort.

Google says it will supply content for the Cloud's digital displays, using Google Trends, Google Maps, and its social-networking feature Google Latitude.

"For instance, we could provide a custom feed of (aggregated and anonymous) searches made by



Londoners during the Olympics to give a real time ‘barometer’ of the city’s interests and mood,” reads a statement from the search-engine giant. In addition, Google promises free advertising for the project through its website and YouTube, including fundraising efforts.

Google’s feeds, Ratti says, could provide information to viewers near the Cloud about “energy use, spectator numbers, decibel levels, medal up-

dates, transport patterns, mobile phone activity, Internet traffic, and [more].”

The shape of the Cloud evokes the elongated triangle of the Eiffel Tower standing on its head, something its designers see as itself a metaphor. While that 19th-century monument was a groundbreaking homage to the age of steel and heavy industry at the time, the Cloud involves “a lighter process that produces reams of data rather than

plumes of smoke,” writes Dan Hill, a team member and consultant at Arup, on the website.

Could the Cloud become a seminal example of 21st-century architecture? “I very much hope so. I mean, I can’t think of a precedent like it,” says team member Alex Haw, a London-based artist who trained as an architect.

He contrasts the Cloud to the London Eye, the giant observation wheel that opened on the banks of

the River Thames in 2000 as part of the millennium celebration. The operators of the Eye claim it is now London’s most popular paid tourist attraction.

“The Eye is almost an 18th-century phenomenon, really, a 19th-century structure,” Mr. Haw says. “It’s an incredibly old-fashioned idea, a Ferris wheel.... We hope the Cloud will be a good example of something that could replace it.”

The chief challenges ahead, Haw says, are find-

ing a large donor, whose commitment would then attract smaller donations, and looking for an appropriate building site.

Best use of resources?

Experts contacted by the Monitor remain intrigued by the Cloud, while expressing some reservations.

“The real test will be whether the carbon footprint of this large-scale design will fulfill the original inten-

tions,” says Mikyoung Kim, an environmental artist, urban designer, and professor at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. “I look forward to seeing ... this design concept come to fruition and only then can an assessment about its innovation be understood.”

Peter Bohlin, a partner at Bohlin Cywinski Jackson in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., questions whether physical projects on this scale are appropriate given the world’s economic predicament.

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“One wonders if one can do many of these things in a more modest way that is more resource sensitive, and be more touching in the process,” says Mr. Bohlin, who was honored by the American Institute of Architects with its Gold Medal, the profession’s highest individual honor, in December. “I don’t know, but certainly these are questions.”

Bohlin adds that he doesn’t mean to sound negative. It’s “a wonderful, extraordinary challenge and one that interests me ... greatly,” he says. But in trying to employ cutting-edge technologies, the Cloud may confront long-range problems. “You can very easily be trapped in those technologies” after hitting unforeseen complications, he says.

“The Cloud is quite ethereal,” he says. “It’s really an interesting challenge how to make ephemeral things out of real materials.... It is hard to make dreams out of physical things.”

Some of the technologies may not work as expected, The New Republic’s Goldhagen points out. Each of them “has to pan out in the way they say it will in order for this monument to have the kind of effect that they are hoping it will,” she says. “We all should wish them absolutely the best and cross our fingers that they’re going to be able to [get it built].... These people are very cutting-edge engineers, so maybe they’re going to be able to pull it off.”

Team member Ratti, for one, says he’s optimistic that when the Olympics open in 2012 the Cloud will be a technological marvel floating overhead – and for a long time to come. “Hopefully, like the London Eye, it will stay forever,” he says. ●



Are Latin America’s drug cartels creating Air Al Qaeda?

BY SCOTT BALDAUF, Christian Science Monitor

It’s known as the Coca Cola plane. In early November, drug traffickers landed a Boeing 727 in the Malian desert in Gao state and offloaded as much as 10 tons of cocaine. Then, rather than fly it back across the Atlantic to Latin America, they simply burnt it.

“That shows you the strength of the drug cartels, and how much money they have,” says Rinaldo Depagne, a West Africa expert at the International Crisis Group in Dakar, Senegal. “It’s like a plastic [Coca Cola] bottle to them. When you are done with it, you just throw it away.”

According to UN reports, nearly 60 percent of the cocaine sold in Europe transits through weak West African states such as Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and Guinea Bissau – a flow of cash and contraband that undermines the credibility of each country’s ability to govern itself.

As many of these same countries are now becoming a haven for a shadowy group calling itself Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), there are growing concerns that Islamist radicals and Latin American drug cartels may be working together.

“At this point Al Qaeda in the Maghreb seems to be nothing more than just facilitators, but more and more we see evidence of them working together,” says an official for the US military at the Africom command center in Stuttgart, speaking on back-

ground. But it is safe to assume, the official adds, that Al Qaeda “is profiting from the drug trafficking trade going through its areas” of the Sahara.

A 2008 Department of Homeland Security report warned of a growing fleet of rogue aircraft – at least 10 aircraft including executive jets, twin-engine turboprops, and aging Boeing 727s, crisscrossing the Atlantic. The DEA also said all aircraft seized in West Africa had departed from Venezuela.

When it comes to traffickers use of planes between West Africa and Latin America, US military experts say there is a clear potential threat to American security. “We know what those planes are carrying across the Atlantic to Africa. But what goes back [on those planes] to [Latin] American shores?” says one US military official. “You know what the condition of the [US] southern borders are. You see the beginning of a process of thought.”

If Al Qaeda is getting into the drug trade, it would not be the first terrorist organization to do so. Through much of the 1990s and 2000s, the Colombian leftist rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), has largely funded its 40-year insurgency through kidnapping and cocaine production.

The motives of Al Qaeda would seem to be very different from those of the drug traffickers. But in the West African Sahara, there’s growing evidence that the two have found common cause in using the vast unpatrolled desert areas for transporting drugs up north to Europe, and as bases for military operations and training.

For West African nations, keeping up with the traffickers and now the insurgents may seem an impossible task. In 2006, a UN report found that the annual value of smuggled cocaine through West Africa is more than twice the gross domestic product of Guinea Bissau.

Yet, confronting the traffickers and the insurgents is precisely what the US military hopes these nations will do in the very near future. In the past two years, Americans military trainers have increased their visits to West Africa, and conducted joint training exercises under Operation Enduring Freedom – Trans-Sahel Initiative.

On land, US Army trainers – many of them Special Forces commandos – train African soldiers in counterinsurgency methods, and the US government has begun to provide the army of Mali, Niger, and Mauritania with basic arms and equipment.

Last month, three suspects from Mali were extradited from Ghana to the United States to face charges of offering Al Qaeda protection to move cocaine from West Africa, through the Sahara, and up to Spain. The three suspects, Oumar Issa, Harouna Toure, and Idriss Abelrahman, told DEA informants that they were members of Al Qaeda’s North African branch, and they could protect drug shipments at a fee of \$4,200 per kilo.

Given the scale of what drug traffickers are willing to pay – and what Al Qaeda apparently earns for its part of the business – the challenge of stopping the drug trade through West Africa will be immense. ●



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When CIA operatives die, the agency stays quiet

BY TED GUP, WASHINGTON POST

When it comes to death, the CIA's default setting has always been silence. Historically, the agency has not publicly identified its fallen operatives, much less said anything about their missions. And its headquarters features the most unusual of memorials: a Wall of Honor, into which 90 black stars are carved, and below it, a Book of Honor, in which the year of each loss is recorded, alongside a name (in 55 cases) or an anonymous star (in 35 others).

Together they form a unique tribute to hidden casualties and hidden deeds.

The murders two weeks ago of seven CIA officers and contractors in Afghanistan, in the second-deadliest attack in the agency's 63-year history, present Langley with an obvious tragedy and an enormous loss of human assets. But how it handles those deaths -- whether it cloaks the identities of those killed or names the fallen -- will reveal something of the agency's current character.

Not since 1983, when the CIA lost eight of its own in the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, has it faced such a staggering toll or such a complex dilemma as to how much information to release. Twenty-seven years later, the agency still has not divulged the identities of those it lost that day -- a position in keeping with its history.

But already, its handling of the casualties in Afghanistan has diverged from that tradition. In the blizzard of news reports that followed the bombing at the base near Khost, neither President Obama nor CIA head Leon Panetta took long to acknowledge the losses.

Some funerals have been televised, and the agency has allowed its personnel to speak at memorial services. In equally short order, the identities of some of those killed made their way into the media. Now, should the CIA release the names -- some, all or none -- of the dead?

The agency maintains that post-mortem secrecy is necessary because naming the casualties can endanger the living and compromise sensitive "sources and methods," the who and how of intelligence gathering. But at times, Langley's obsession with concealment has bordered on ludicrous, add-

ing to the suffering of loved ones without any apparent benefit or justification.

For 36 years, the CIA refused to acknowledge the names of the four pilots killed in the ill-fated 1961 Bay of Pigs operation, as if clinging to the fiction that the CIA had no part in the invasion. In such instances, the agency's treatment of its dead has reflected a stubborn unwillingness to admit what was already widely known. Its reticence also left some of the families of those pilots alone to fend off allegations that their loved ones were simply mercenaries.



Douglas S. Mackiernan, who was spying on China when Mao Zedong came to power, was killed along the Tibetan border in 1950, but it took more than five decades for the CIA to enter his name -- rather than an anonymous star -- in the Book of Honor. The Chinese knew he was a spy; only the American public did not.

Such denials supposedly preserve important political and diplomatic fictions -- for example, that the United States has not sought to destabilize governments, support counterinsurgencies or court treasonous behavior.

The losses experienced by CIA families are especially complex. Their loved ones are often killed in the prime of life, in their 30s or 40s, and in violent circumstances, like the losses suffered in war. But unlike military families, if the deceased had been under cover or had previously served in the clandestine ranks, the loved ones left behind are forbidden from speaking the truth of what hap-

pened -- if they even know. Being tethered to cover stories for decades can be a harsh burden.

Until the 1970s, families were sometimes misled about the circumstances of their loved ones' deaths. John Merriman's widow was told in 1964 that her husband, who had been shot down over the Congo, had passed away quietly in a Puerto Rican hospital after receiving the best of care.

It was years before their enterprising son would uncover the full truth: Merriman had suffered greatly and died in a transport plane over the Atlantic, in no small measure because of medical neglect.

In past decades, several families were told they could not look inside the coffins holding their loved ones. Only later did the family of Pharies "Bud" Petty learn that the casket they buried in 1989 was empty.

Some agency officials charged with dealing with grieving families, such as the late Ben DeFelice, the longtime chief of the CIA's Casualty Affairs Branch, could not have been more compassionate, but sometimes their hands were tied. DeFelice would draft a letter of condolence, take it to the CIA director for his signature and then hand-deliver it to the widow or widower.

But as soon as the grieving spouse had finished reading it, he would often take it back, because the agency did not want to leave any evidence connecting the death to the CIA. The letter was deposited in the personnel file.

That practice has been abandoned, and, short of identifying their loved ones, the CIA insists it does everything it can for the families -- including counseling, invitations to yearly memorial services and scholarships for children.

Today, except in the most sensitive cases, the agency is struggling to move beyond its old rigidity. It had little choice in Afghanistan. Within days of the bombing, the names of some of the deceased were in newspapers and on television, on the Web and in social media.

The story of all those operatives who have died over the years is the story of the CIA itself. The woman who was the base chief at the camp outside Khost, and who was killed in the bombing, has been described as signaling a new era, one in which women lead dangerous CIA field operations.

But she is hardly the first woman to die in service to the agency. Before her, at least five others lost their lives, only one of whom is named in the Book of Honor. Among the memorial's stars are young and old; male and female; black, white, Asian American and Native American.

A decade ago I wrote a magazine essay and a book about the lives behind the anonymous stars. Before publishing my accounts, I told the CIA that I had learned the identities of all its unnamed casualties.

George Tenet, then the director of central intelligence, made a compelling argument that the most recent fatality should be excluded, and it was. But to my surprise, he made no additional request.

Those who volunteer for CIA service are a special breed; they recognize that they will probably receive no public credit for their risks, successes or sacrifices. But they have a right to expect that, absent compelling national security interests, their families will not be smothered in secrecy.

That is the task that confronts the agency: protecting sources and methods while exercising reason and compassion. ●

The CIA's long struggle of ensuring safe interrogations

BY DAVID IGNATIUS, WASHINGTON POST

As the CIA mourns the officers who died in Khost, Afghanistan, last month, there's an understandable desire not to second-guess the procedures that allowed a Jordanian suicide bomber to enter the agency's base. But this practice of meeting with agents "inside the wire" has a controversial history within the CIA, and it offers some useful background as the agency considers changes.

The debate about how to handle agents in war zones surfaced in Iraq in 2003. The question was how to balance the safety of CIA personnel with the needs of intelligence gathering. Headquarters argued for meeting agents inside the Green Zone; case officers in the field countered that this would actually put them and their agents at greater risk -- and choke the flow of information.

The tradecraft dispute went on for more than a year, but in the end, the headquarters view prevailed. By 2005, CIA officers had generally stopped meeting agents in the "red zones" of Iraq, outside secured areas. Agent-handling procedures in Afghanistan also evolved toward "inside the wire" meetings.

Some CIA veterans continued to argue privately, however, that the new approach was potentially risky. This account is based on their comments.

CIA officers in the field began to develop their Iraq tradecraft in the months after the March 2003 invasion. The dangers were highlighted by a shootout in Baghdad in midsummer that year when insurgents attacked three case officers riding in military Humvees. The Baghdad station developed procedures to operate more stealthily, using ordinary civilian vehicles.

The biggest danger, CIA officers concluded, was crossing the checkpoints to enter the Green Zone in Baghdad and other secured locations. The insurgents maintained surveillance outside the gates. And on several occasions, jittery soldiers shot at agency vehicles. In the spring of 2004, for example, Kurdish guards opened fire on CIA officers at a checkpoint in Sulaymaniyah, and a CIA security officer was killed.

In the spring of 2004, the chief of the agency's Near East division, worried about such incidents, ordered a halt to most meetings in red zones. The CIA station in Baghdad protested: "If you pull people inside the wire, it's unsafe."

The Baghdad station argued instead for using its fleet of cars, which could be repainted and retagged repeatedly, to avoid detection. When headquarters proposed using only armored vehicles, the station again balked, arguing that these behemoths would be giveaways. Instead, the Baghdad tech shop devised homemade armor for some of its beat-up civilian cars.

The Baghdad station felt so strongly that it would be a mistake to bring agents inside the wire that its leaders in mid-2004 proposed moving case officers to safe houses outside the Green Zone. That way, the officers and agents wouldn't have to worry about running the gauntlet at checkpoints. Headquarters refused.

Through 2004, a standoff developed between headquarters and the Baghdad station over which approach -- inside or outside -- was safer. The field officers continued to operate relatively safely with the war zone tradecraft they had evolved, even as violence increased. But the dangers were obvious.

The leadership of the Baghdad station changed

in 2005, and the new bosses are said to have opted for the approach that headquarters preferred. Meetings out in the hostile red zones declined. In Afghanistan, too, agency officers reduced their movements in high-threat areas.

CIA Director Leon Panetta is conducting a high-level review of the Khost tragedy, in part to explore what tradecraft procedures make sense for the future. Agency veterans argue that the Iraq experience -- like the agency's tradecraft in Lebanon during the 1980s -- shows it may be safer to operate out in the field, away from "protected zones" that, in reality, have become targets for the enemy. ●

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City Council



1. Change you can believe in

So now, we know that the dysfunctional Vero Beach City Council couldn't even figure out an intelligent way to choose among three candidates after ranking them equally qualified for the seat that had been awarded by the voters to Charlie Wilson.

One obvious approach when three tied for first at least week's meeting might have been to immediately narrow the field from the original five candidates to the three who got top marks, and hold a round of voting on these three.

That would have struck everyone – except, it would appear, the four sitting City Council members – as a logical and fair way to proceed.

Let's see now. There would have been three candidates, and four Council members voting.

If any one of these three candidates had received all four votes or even three, he would have had a clear majority, and could have been declared elected.

At a mathematical minimum, one candidate would have gotten at least two votes. The Council could then have voted on this candidate first. Or if two candidates each got two votes (with one of the three being blanked), the Council could have conducted a further run-off between the two.

Pretty simple, huh? And it has the added virtue of actually sounding fair.

What seems increasingly clear from after-the-fact discussions is that utilizing this or any other kind of fair process, candidate Richard Kennedy either would have won outright, or received enough votes to have at least put him first in line for an up-or-down vote from sitting Council members.

And again, from after-the-fact discussions with sitting Council members, it appears Kennedy would have had enough support – had his name ever been put to a vote – to have become the fresh face on the Council that the people made clear they wanted.

But nooooo. All this makes way too much sense. So instead of a vote on all three, the Council decided

to vote first on whether to name Al Benkert to the Council (he only got two votes; not elected) and then to vote on Ken Daige, who to the amazement of still stunned observers, got three Council votes and was promptly sworn in as fellow Council member.

To those voters who ousted Daige from the Council in 2008 in favor of an unknown 26-year-old Democrat, then declined to put him back on the Council in the 2009 election, this is really change you can believe in.

If you find this all a bit depressing, think how Kennedy must feel. He puts his name in nomination, acquits himself well in his Council interview, emerges from the process as one of the top-rated candidates – and suddenly, he is dismissed and sent home without his name ever being put to a vote.

And the electorate wonders why better candidates show little interest in running for the Vero Beach City Council. ●

2. Don't ask, don't tell

How is it possible that when the City of Vero Beach was looking for a new long-term power provider – and the city's consultants finally unveiled Orlando Utilities Commission as winner of their million-dollar search – four of the five members of the City Council asked to approve this choice never thought to ask, 'Who had the second best proposal?'

Is it even remotely conceivable that you would decide to award a \$2 billion contract for anything to anybody without asking who the runner-up was? Can you believe a Council member would have never inquired: "Where was Florida Power & Light in all this?"

Frankly, when we heard that four of the five members of the City Council had been kept in the dark on the fact that FPL finished second in the competition for a 20-year contract to serve Vero Beach customers (Tom White claims he knew), we flatly disbelieved this was possible.

It seemed amazing enough that City Manager

Jim Gabbard, City Attorney Charles Vitunac, and the city utility team would ask Council members to approve locking ourselves into a contract with the Orlando Utilities Commission that will run through 2030 without telling them that OUC narrowly beat out FPL for the award.

But one by one, the members of the City Council at the time have now told us the city bureaucrats and their consultants never volunteered the information; and while a couple said they had their suspicions, they admitted they had never posed the obvious question.

Kind of gives a whole new meaning to "Don't ask, don't tell."

But there is a larger point here. We have suggested before the major challenges the City of Vero Beach is facing, particularly in the utility sector, stem from the willingness -- no, eagerness -- of members of the City Council to simply rubber stamp, with no questioning, the proposals of city management.

We see little chance that this is going to change in any significant way between now and next election day, when four of the five City Council seats will be up for grabs.

But if there ever has been an opportunity in recent times, this coming November is it. Is it too much to hope that four credible candidates – people like Richard Kennedy, with a solid professional background and a lifetime of experience to commend them – will step forward and run for Vero Beach City Council?

Maybe. Things have got to change. Vero Beach is a wonderful place to live – an incredibly beautiful place, with a spectacular quality of life -- which is why most residents are here. But it won't stay wonderful a lot longer in the absence of sane people on the Council making thought-out decisions.

The next election is critical. We intend to seek to influence it. Things have got to get better. When the city's million-dollar utility consultant tells Council members, 'Sign here,' we plan to back candidates who will not only ask: "What are we signing?" but who will also inquire: "What are our other choices?" ●

BY THE ECONOMIST

A first-year report card: Time for Obama to get tough

How far away it seems, that biting cold, crystal-clear morning – exactly a year ago this week -- when almost 2 million people filled the Mall from Capitol Hill to the Washington Monument to hear the new president talk of the victory of hope over fear, of unity of purpose over conflict and discord.

Recalling the dark days of the war of independence, he pledged, like George Washington, that in the face of common danger, Americans under his leadership would come forth to meet it.

One year on, how well has he done?

In his first 12 months in office Obama has overseen the stabilizing of the economy, has ended the era of torture, is robustly prosecuting the war in Afghanistan while gradually disengaging from Iraq; and perhaps more precious than any of these, he has cleared away much of the cloud of hatred and fear through which so much of the world saw the United States during George Bush's presidency.

More generally, Obama has run a competent, disciplined yet heterodox administration, with few of the snafus that characterized Bill Clinton's first year.

Just as important have been the roads not taken. Obama has resisted the temptation to give in to the populists in his own party and saddle Wall Street with regulations that would choke it. He has eschewed punitive taxation on the entrepreneurs who animate the economy; and he has even, with the notable exception of a boneheaded tariff on cheap Chinese tires, turned a deaf ear to the siren song of the protectionists. In short, what's not to like?

Only one thing, really; but it is a big one, and it is the reason why most of the achievements listed above must be qualified. Obama has too often remained above the fray, too anxious to be liked, and too ready to do the popular thing now and leave the awkward stuff until later.

Far from living up to the bracing rhetoric of his inaugural, he has not been tough enough. In this second year of his presidency, to quote his formerly favorite preacher, his chickens will come home to roost.

At home Obama's dangerous diffidence explains why the health bill that now seems likely to pass is a big disappointment.

Yes, it makes provision for tens of millions of Americans who lack insurance, and many more who fear being cast into that boat should they lose their jobs. But it is expensive, and it takes only hesitant steps in the crucial direction of cost control.

Constantly rising health-care charges threaten the entire federal government with bankruptcy. So it is tragic that the most comprehensive health reform in generations does so little to tackle this problem.

Yet that, alas, is exactly what you would expect to happen if a president leaves the details to be written by Democrats in Congress, barely reaches out



to the admittedly obstructive Republicans on issues such as tort reform, and remains magisterially aloof from much of the process.

What has spooked many voters is the sheer cost of the health care reform scheme -- and the idea that Obama is unable to tackle the deficit.

They are right to be worried. The national debt is set to reach a market-rattling \$12 trillion by 2015, more than double what it was when Obama took over.

It made sense for the government to pump money into the economy in 2009; but this year Obama must show how he intends to deal with the debt. So far, he has not offered even an outline.

Because he failed to be harsh with congressional

Democrats (whose popularity ratings, incidentally, were a fraction of his), he will now have to do more with Republicans.

This same reluctance to get tough, or even mildly sweaty, is felt in America's dealings with other nations. His long-drawn-out decision on Afghanistan mirrored that on health care.

Yes, by sending more troops, he did more-or-less the right thing eventually. But it seemed as if the number of troops was determined by opinion polls, rather than the mission in hand. And the protracted dithering was damaging to morale.

Obama has been on a goodwill tour of the world, proffering the open hand rather than the fist. Yet he has nothing much to show for it, other than a series of slaps in the face.

Israel dismissed his settlement freeze. Going to China with human rights far down the agenda and the Dalai Lama royally snubbed seems to have done Obama no good at all, judging by the fiasco that was the climate-change summit in Copenhagen.

Cooperation between the "G2" was supposed to help fulfill Obama's grandiose promise that his presidency would be "the moment when our planet began to heal." Hitting the reset button on relations with Russia has produced nothing more than a click. Offering engagement with the Iranians was worth a go, but has produced nothing yet.

This generosity to America's enemies also sits ill with a more brusque approach to staunch allies, such as Japan, Britain and several east European countries.

Some worry that Obama will always be a community organizer, never a commander-in-chief. In fact he did not get to the White House by merely being nice, but by being bold and often confronting awkward subjects head-on.

It is not too late for him to toughen up. Firm talk about the budget in his State of the Union message would help. Now that the administration's priority has shifted from engaging Iran to imposing sanctions, Obama may be able to apply the stick and not the carrot.

He might even, if he can relearn the virtues of bipartisan deal-making, bully a climate-change bill through Congress. But this will all be a lot more difficult than anything he did in his first year. ●

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500 Beach Road
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#203 - 3BR/2BA, 1800± SF : \$1,275,000
#104 - 3BR/2BA, 1800± SF : \$1,300,000
#211 - 3BR/2BA, 2000± SF : \$1,550,000
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251 John's Island Drive	\$1,725,000
310 Sabal Palm Lane.....	\$1,725,000
321 Sabal Palm Lane	\$1,795,000
460 Indian Harbor Road.....	(REDUCED) \$1,895,000
306 Island Creek Drive	\$1,995,000
221 Clarkson Lane	\$2,200,000
751 Shady Lake Lane	\$2,300,000
290 John's Island Drive.....	\$2,300,000
20 Dove Shell Lane	\$2,300,000
561 Sea Oak Drive	\$2,450,000
389 Island Creek Drive	\$2,450,000
71 Cowry Lane.....	\$2,700,000
120 Sago Palm Road.....	\$2,750,000
275 Coconut Palm Road.....	\$2,800,000
601 Sea Oak Drive	\$2,800,000
400 Indian Harbor Road.....	\$2,850,000
381 Sea Oak Drive	\$2,940,000
180 Orchid Way	\$2,950,000

220 Indian Harbor Road	\$2,950,000
580 Indian Harbor Road	\$2,950,000
351 Indian Harbor Road	\$3,375,000
150 Clarkson Lane	\$3,650,000
370 Indian Harbor Road	\$3,650,000
35 Waxmyrtle Way	\$3,750,000
310 Island Creek Drive	\$3,995,000
228 Island Creek Drive	\$4,050,000
380 Island Creek Drive	\$4,100,000
640 Indian Harbor Road.....	\$4,450,000
330 Palmetto Point.....	\$4,650,000
391 Sabal Palm Lane	\$4,750,000
30 Gem Island Drive.....	\$5,450,000
21 Sago Palm Road	\$5,700,000
255 Island Creek Drive	\$6,950,000
646 Ocean Road	\$7,500,000
801 Shady Lake Lane	\$7,500,000

Homesites

580 Sea Oak Drive.....	\$825,000
541 Sea Oak Drive	\$1,100,000
551 Sea Oak Drive	\$1,100,000

280 Sea Oak Drive.....	\$1,450,000
225 Coconut Palm Road.....	\$1,750,000
270 John's Island Drive.....	\$2,300,000
80 Stingaree Point.....	\$2,300,000
100 Stingaree Point.....	\$2,600,000
13 Sea Court.....	\$3,775,000
60 Gem Island Drive.....	\$4,150,000
1 Sea Court.....	\$4,350,000
662 Ocean Road.....	\$4,900,000

Townhouses, Cottages and Island House

431 Silver Moss Drive, #105	\$350,000
777 Sea Oak Drive #720, 2BR/2BA	\$400,000
777 Sea Oak Drive #717, 2BR/2BA.....	\$410,000
777 Sea Oak Drive #714, 2BR/2BA.....	\$450,000
431 Silver Moss Drive, #104	\$485,000
401 Silver Moss Drive.....	\$625,000
111 John's Island Drive, #17.....	\$675,000
777 Sea Oak Drive #702, 3BR/3BA.....	\$685,000
777 Sea Oak Drive #725, 3BR/3BA	\$685,000
777 Sea Oak Drive #707, 3BR/3BA.....	\$695,000
777 Sea Oak Drive #701, 3BR/3BA.....	\$710,000

111 John's Island Drive, #12.....	\$775,000
213 Silver Moss Drive.....	\$820,000
251 Silver Moss Drive.....	\$825,000
173 Silver Moss Drive.....	\$850,000
233 Silver Moss Drive.....	\$850,000
111 John's Island Drive, #4.....	\$975,000
111 John's Island Drive, #5.....	\$975,000
111 John's Island Drive, #19.....	\$1,775,000
Island House (590-660± SF efficiencies)	
#121.....	*\$195,000
#120.....	\$199,500
#147.....	*\$225,588
#151.....	*\$230,588
#251.....	\$248,000
#210.....	\$287,500
#144.....	\$325,000
#224.....	*\$395,000
#237.....	\$395,000
#235.....	\$445,000
#243.....	\$450,000
*Assumable Land Mortgage not included in price.	

Condominiums

950 Beach Road #192, 2BR/2BA	\$710,000
700 Beach Road #355, 2BR/2BA	\$725,000
600 Beach Road #331, 2BR/2BA (REDUCED)	\$725,000
750 Beach Road #304, 2BR/2BA	\$749,000
100 Ocean Road #104, 2BR/2BA	\$750,000
700 Beach Road #159, 3BR/2BA	\$750,000
100 Ocean Road #111, 2BR/2BA	\$825,000
700 Beach Road #158, 3BR/2BA	\$975,000
1000 Beach Road #297, 2BR/2BA	\$995,000
950 Beach Road #193, 3BR/2BA.....	\$1,000,000
900 Beach Road #382, 2BR/2BA (REDUCED)	\$1,190,000

Sold Or Under Contract Since January 2009

71 Dove Plum	700 Beach Road #250	650 Indian Harbor Road	850 Beach Road #375	1 Dove Shell Lane
300 Ocean Road, #1E	311 Indian Harbor Road	401 Indian Harbor Road	381 Sea Oak Drive	531 Sea Oak Drive
730 Beach Road	110 Coconut Palm Road	511 Sea Oak Drive	430 Coconut Palm Road	210 Live Oak Way
8 Sea Court	241 Sundial Court	103 Island Creek Drive	291 Sabal Palm Lane	1150 Beach Road #3L
900 Beach Road #181	750 Beach Road #303	130 Sago Palm Road	281 Sea Oak Drive	353 Silver Moss Drive
800 Beach Road #169 & #371	381 Sabal Palm Lane	500 Beach Road #109	950 Beach Road #391	231 Silver Moss Drive
400 Beach Road #133 & #222	111 John's Island Drive #3 & #4	100 Ocean Road #212	321 Island Creek Drive	652 Ocean Road
400 Beach Road #228 & #230	111 John's Island Drive #5 & #10	250 Ocean Road #2C	400 Ocean Road #183	351 Sea Oak Drive
600 Beach Road #135 & #330	450 Beach Rd. #120, #223 & #324	1000 Beach Road #295	191 Terrapin Point	

900 Beach Road #285, 2BR/2BA	\$1,260,000
100 Ocean Road #112, 3BR/2BA	\$1,275,000
1000 Beach Road #396, 2BR/2BA	\$1,290,000
800 Beach Road #172, 3BR/3BA.....	\$1,350,000
1000 Beach Road #294, 3BR/3BA (REDUCED)	\$1,350,000
700 Beach Road #148, 3BR/2BA.....	\$1,400,000
700 Beach Road #149, 3BR/2BA.....	\$1,400,000
250 Ocean Road #3C, 3BR/3BA.....	\$1,600,000
900 Beach Road #281, 3BR/3.5BA.....	\$2,295,000
1050 Beach Road #3H, 3BR/4BA	\$2,400,000
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Seduced by the almighty discount

BY WILLIAM POUNDSTONE, Los Angeles Times

Remember when Apple slashed the price of the iPhone, and the brand's fanboys were upset? That's how many holiday shoppers felt this year.

It used to be that, when a store sold something before Christmas, it was making an implicit promise to defer any steep discounts until after the holiday. But clearly that rule has gone the way of "no texting at the dinner table." Just as politics has become a permanent campaign, retailing is entering the age of the permanent sale.

This past holiday season, "doorbuster" sales began before Thanksgiving. Retailers -- both on the Internet and in the malls -- slashed prices early and often during December, and then, on Dec. 26, the real sales began. A few days later (with fewer gift cards burning holes in pockets), stores cut prices yet again.

Why? Without question, retailers were spooked by 2008's dismal holiday sales. This year, the malls adopted the Internet philosophy: draw the eyeballs; worry about monetizing them later.

Indeed, the competition between Internet and bricks-and-mortar retailing -- played out most dramatically in a price war between Amazon and Wal-Mart -- contributed to 2009's ever-expanding sale calendar.

Web sellers tend to have longer price promotions, and the malls have had to match that. But there's another factor at work. In recent years, marketers have forged an exact science of discounts. Aided by a new breed of professional, the "price consultant," they've become expert at pushing our buttons.

Grab a bagful of stylish deals

SALE
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Suppose you were in a store and saw two similar flat-screen TVs. One costs \$879; the other is \$899, marked down from \$1,049. Which would you rather buy?

Most people pick the one "on sale" -- even though it's \$20 more than the one that's not on sale, and even though they don't know if it's any better.

Like so many of our consumer products today, TVs are too complicated for the average

consumer to intelligently compare. (Show of hands: Who's read their TV's manual?) We infer quality from prices. In this case, consumers automatically assume a \$1,049 TV is "better" than an \$879 one.

In high fashion as well as in high-tech, price is the index of desirability. Jimmy Choo pumps are better than Steve Madden pumps because, well, they cost more.

But here's the insidious thing: We're sophisticated. We know that there's a lot of air in some prices and that advertised "original" prices have to be taken with a grain of salt. That original price might have applied for about 20 minutes in October, in anticipation of discounting it. Or, as the fine print says, "Intermediate discounts may have been taken."

Today's cynical shoppers adjust for all that (discounting the discounts) and still conclude that a marked-down item is likely to be better than a similarly priced item without a discount.

Dubious discounts go back to the days of the Yankee traders. What's new is the flood of quantitative data provided by bar codes and Internet sales. The data demonstrate that shoppers (even mobile-Internet-enabled ones) are not as rational as they think. In the new understanding, prices are a collective hallucination. Buyers are sensitive mainly to differences, not absolute values -- to discounts, not "everyday low prices."

Price consultants use this psychology to engineer sales and rebates -- a project that is not so altruistic as it sounds. As the profession's patriarch, Hermann Simon, once put it: "Willingness to pay must be exploited to the full."

Like ninjas, the power of price consultants resides in the invisibility of their methods. We all assume that we can judge whether a price is a good one and won't be fooled by sleight of hand. But the sales data tell a different story.

Even the experts can be fooled by their own tricks. Donald Lichtenstein, a University of Colorado marketing researcher, told of shopping for a tennis racket. He found himself paying as much attention to the discounts as the purchase prices: "I knew better, but I just couldn't help myself."

Ten years ago, the pitch for the Internet was that shoppers would never again have to pay full price for anything. As the saying goes, be careful what you wish for -- you might get it. ●

Why does Wall Street make the big bucks? A nation with 10 percent unemployment is understandably puzzled and outraged when the very people at the center of the financial crisis seem to be the first to recover and are pulling down fabulous pay packages.

At Goldman Sachs, the average bonus for 2009 has been estimated at nearly \$600,000; at JPMorgan Chase's investment bank, it's reckoned around \$450,000. These averages conceal multimillion-dollar bonuses for top traders and investment bankers; underlings get smaller sums. Are Wall Street's leaders that much smarter and more industrious than everyone else?

By their own admission, they're not. Testifying last week to a congressionally created commission, Wall Street CEOs conceded that their errors contributed directly to the crisis. Wall Street money moguls may be bright and diligent, but they're not unique. It's where they work - not who they are - that's so enriching.

A study of Harvard graduates found that those who went into finance "earned three times the income of other graduates with the same grade-point average, demographics and college major," reports Harvard economist Lawrence Katz, the study's co-author.

Is it possible that what Wall Street does is three times more valuable to society than other well-paid occupations? That's hard to believe. It's not that Wall Street is just the vast casino of popular imagination. It helps allocate capital, which - done well - promotes a vibrant economy.

In 2007, Wall Street firms enabled businesses to raise \$2.7 trillion from the sale of stocks, bonds and other securities. But Wall Street sometimes misallocates capital, as the 1990s' "tech bubble" and today's crisis painfully remind. The huge social costs (high unemployment, lost income) refute the notion that Wall Street consistently creates exceptional economic value that justifies exceptional compensation.

The explanation for Wall Street's high pay lies elsewhere. Most of us are paid based on what we produce or, more realistically, what our employers produce. By contrast, Wall Street compensation levels are tied to the nation's overall wealth. Investment banks, hedge funds, private equity firms and many other financial institu-



It doesn't seem fair

BY ROBERT J. SAMUELSON, WASHINGTON POST

tions trade stocks, bonds and other securities for their own profit. They also advise mutual funds, pension funds, endowments and wealthy individuals on how to invest and trade.

There's a big difference between annual production and national wealth. In 2007, the last year before the crisis, annual production (gross domestic product) equaled almost \$14 trillion. In the same year, household wealth was \$77 trillion (5.5 times production); that covered the value of homes, vehicles, stocks, bonds and the like. Eliminating nonfinancial assets (mainly homes)

cut wealth to about \$50 trillion (3.5 times).

Deducting household debts from financial wealth pushed net worth to \$35 trillion (2.5 times income).

People who are trying to protect or expand existing wealth are playing for much higher money stakes than even hard-working and highly skilled producers. That's the main reason they're paid more. Similar percentage changes in production and wealth translate into much larger gains or losses in wealth - up to five times as much based on the crude math above.

Many lawyers enjoy the same envious position of being paid on the basis of wealth enhancement or protection. They're involved in high-stakes mergers and acquisitions, estate planning, divorces and tax planning. On average, partners in the top 25 law firms earned from \$1.3 million to \$4 million in 2008, reports The American Lawyer magazine.

All this provides context to today's pay controversies. Wall Street may be greedy - who isn't? - but the explanation for its high compensation is its economic base (wealth, not production). That's why it's so hard to control or regulate. Since the 1960s, the industry has changed dramatically. Then, revenues came mainly from commissions on buying stocks and bonds for others. In 1966, commissions were 62 percent of revenues.

Now, firms mostly make and manage investments for themselves and others. In 2007, commissions provided only 8 percent of revenues.

The transformation has made Wall Street a greater source of potential economic instability. Some compensation packages exacerbated the crisis by offering big bonuses if big risks paid off. Because government provided a safety net for the whole system, it's justified in taxing the industry - as President Obama proposed last week - to cover the costs, as Douglas Elliott, a former investment banker now at the Brookings Institution, correctly argues.

A larger issue is: How much should society concentrate on existing wealth as opposed to creating new wealth? Wall Street's lavish pay packages may attract too many of America's best and brightest. "It's bad for the rest of the economy," says economist Thomas Philippon of New York University, a student of the financial sector. "We also need smart brains outside finance." If that somehow happens, the crisis may yet have a silver lining. ●

JAMES GEIDNER HAIR STUDIO



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PIPER SPREADING ITS WINGS



BY IAN M. LOVE, STAFF WRITER

In what is being viewed by some in the industry as a shift in strategy, Piper Aircraft is venturing into the light sport aircraft market by purchasing a 49 percent stake in Czech Sport Aircraft, a move the company hopes will attract and keep young pilots buying Piper products.

While the move allows Piper to enter what is considered to be one of the hot new aviation markets, it does not appear it will lead to an immediate rise in manufacturing employment in Indian River County. The new plane, to be dubbed the PiperSport, will continue to be manufactured for the most part at two factories in the Czech Republic.

But the news is another signal that Piper, though not flying high, is beginning to see better days ahead. The company is expecting an uptick in orders this year compared to 2009, and has begun hiring back some employees laid off in the economic downturn that battered the general aviation market.

One worker estimated he had seen perhaps as many as 60 laid off employees back on the job since late last year, though he noted not always in the positions they had left. Also a thing of the past is the one-week-a-month furloughs workers had endured last year. "Since Jan. 1 we have been back to 40 hours a week," the worker said.

A Piper spokesperson said the company also has hired approximately 50 engineers at all levels in recent months to work on the PiperJet, its top-end plane which it hopes to have in production within a few years.

"With the new PiperSport, Piper is entering what is undeniably one of the most exciting market segments in general aviation -- one that is vital to our

within the industry in general. That increase will not be tied to any one segment."

It is also a sign that Imprimis, the Singapore investment company that bought Piper last year, is willing to put up cash for investments that fit its strategy of turning Piper into a company with a worldwide footprint with an emphasis on tapping into Asia.

"The changes at Piper during the last eight months have positioned the company to grow in what has and will be unprecedented in recent memory," said Gould. "For the first time since I came to Piper in 2005, we now have a strategic owners group (Imprimis) one that's more interested in helping us grow and achieve new levels of performance than any other owner in Piper's recent history."

As of press time, details of the deal had not been released. Piper officials were to make the announcement at a Thursday press conference at the U.S. Sport Aviation Expo in Sebring. Piper will be exhibiting at the Sebring event for the first time.

Speculation about the deal has been rampant on the internet among industry experts. Most seem in agreement that the move makes sense given new CEO Gould's desire to make Piper competitive in more segments of the market from low end aircraft to the yet-to-be-launched PiperJet.

Writing on Flightglobal.com, John Croft said: "If Piper does go forward with the purchase, it will signal a major shift in policy following a change in management at the top. Piper, under the direction of chief executive James Bass until his replacement last summer, had been driving to 'dominate' the \$600,000-\$2.5 million product range, eliminating production of low-end aircraft.

"The new chief executive, Kevin Gould, put in place after Singapore investment firm Imprimis bought 100 percent of Piper from American Capital (last) May, has since said he wants to 'make the company relevant to current times' and that new models that 'address gaps in the product line' are under way. ... the ability to earn loyal entry-level customers who will remain loyal to the company and eventually buy the \$2.2 million PiperJet, the company's flagship offering, is a strong incentive."

The widely circulated reports put the price tag at \$30 million for Piper's stake in Czech Sport Aircraft, which is owned by a Slovak investment group Slavia Capital formed after its predecessor Czech Aircraft Works went bankrupt. CSA currently builds three versions of the SportCruiser ranging in price from \$117,000 to \$150,000 and, according to Flightglobal's Croft, plans to build 450 planes this year and 700 by 2011.

The light sport aircraft market came into existence in 2004 when the FAA created the category to cover one or two-seat single engine aircraft with a maximum gross takeoff weight of 1,320 pounds for land-only aircraft or 1,430 pounds for aircraft intended for operation on water and a maximum airspeed of 140 miles per hour.

The advantage to these types of planes is that it takes less time and money for them to be certified by the FAA.

Don Ayers owns U.S. Sport Aircraft Sport Pilot Training Center in Fort Pierce, has the SportsCruiser distributorship for most of the south and eastern seaboard. He trains pilots on them and some other

types of light sport aircraft and -- much in the vein of Piper's strategy -- in turn hopes they will buy one from him when they are ready to fly on their own.

"This could be a good thing or a bad thing," he said, noting he had only heard about a possible sale as an internet rumor. "I just don't know how it might go."

The Light Aviation Manufacturing Association says there were 1,758 fixed wing special light sport aircraft registered with the FAA in the United States at the end of 2009, with CSA's SportCruiser accounting for 108 of those or 6.1 percent of the U.S. market. For the year, a dismal one with registrations down 42 percent from 2008, the Czech company had 31 registrations -- second only to Remos of Germany with 32.

Cessna has also just entered the market with the SkyCatcher, a two-seat LSA being built in the U.S. for \$130,000. Many in the industry are waiting to see what will happen with the light sport aircraft market with two major players in the game.

For the last two years, Piper's upper management has spent hours every week calibrating orders to workflow, making sure they had a buyer for every plane that came off the factory floor. It was at times a cruel process leading to layoffs and furloughs.

As Gould sees it, life, while far from perfect, is a little less cruel these days.

"We are on an exciting path, and Piper is committed to Indian River County and to the men and women who manufacture, market and sell our aircraft," Gould said. "We are already seeing improvement, and with our projected increases in deliveries



in 2010 (50 percent more than 2009), we believe that Piper -- and, by extension, Indian River County -- will see better days sooner rather than later.

"Progress in PiperJet development is another case in point. Among other things, it has meant the hiring in Vero Beach in recent months of approxi-

mately 50 engineers at all levels, both senior and entry-level professionals, and across all engineering disciplines, including structures, systems, flight test, and manufacturing. Those jobs would not have come here to Indian River County if not for our commitment to the PiperJet." ●

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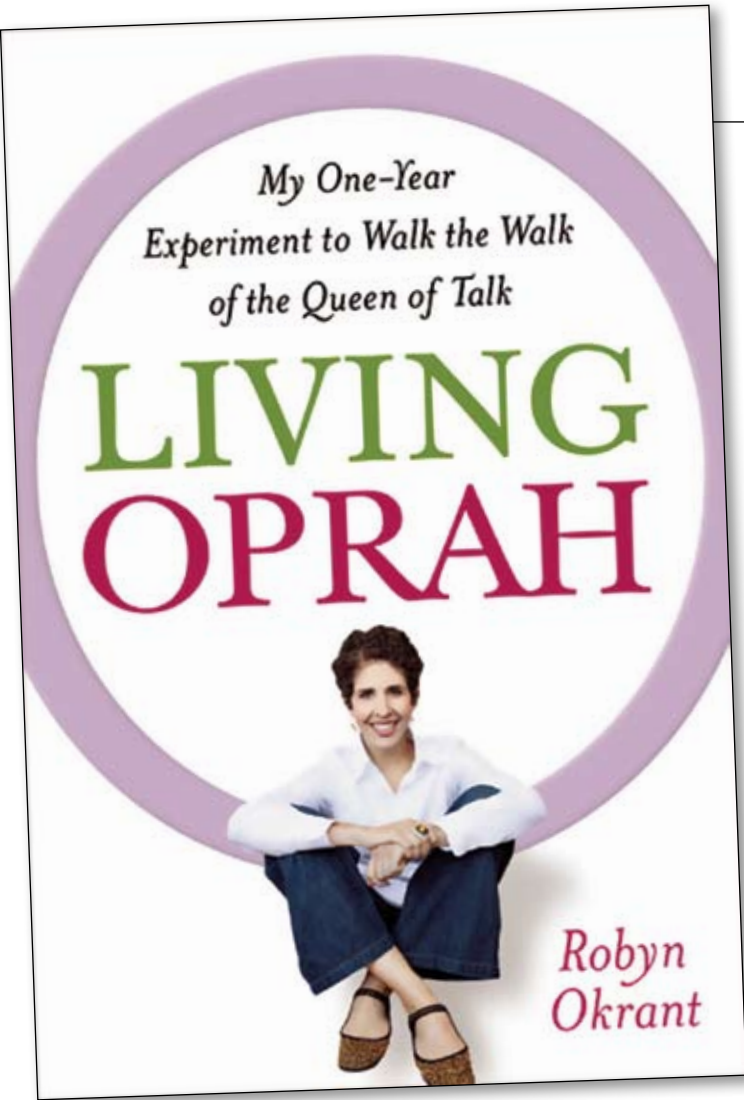
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BOOK REVIEWS

For the year 2008, Robyn Okrant will OBEY – Oprah Winfrey. Oprah is a cultural phenomenon. Her general influence as a source of inspiration and advice (especially for women) is so pervasive that it obscures the impact she might have upon individual lives, which is exactly the subject Robyn Okrant explores in *Living Oprah*.

In her twist on Jim Carrey’s role in the movie “Yes Man,” Okrant, a 35-year-old yoga instructor and theater artist, undertook a yearlong social experiment of saying “yes” to every Oprah-ism, whether as an examination of the psychodynamics of Oprah, or merely a test of her own endurance.

If “the Alpha girl in the pack” suggests abandoning ceiling lights and filling your home with mellow overhead lamps, Okrant redecorates. If Oprah recommends a particular 30-minutes-a-day exercise routine, Okrant buckles down.

“Living Oprah” includes monthly expense charts, detailing the fiscal costs of blind obedience to a much-loved television guru. (The expenses run from \$250 to \$700 dollars a month.)

Okrant was not a dedicated fan before she conceived her project. “I was not an everyday Oprah viewer. I did not read her magazine, or peruse her website. Until I began this project, I would have considered myself only a casual audience member.”

But she focuses on the Oprah Winfrey show because it stands “at the pinnacle of the self-improvement, popular culture mountain. Oprah teaches us how to live.”

But does Oprah truly intend viewers to do everything she suggests? Doesn’t she primarily have an obligation to produce a weekday show and a monthly magazine? Isn’t any reasonably intelligent viewer going to pick and choose from the Oprah catalog?

Okrant could have framed her book as a series of essays drawn from her judgments after consistently watching the show. The “living Oprah”

angle may be gimmicky for some tastes. Okrant believes she can deepen her understanding of the hallucinogenic power of the self-help industry by following Oprah’s advice to the letter.

“Living Oprah” records Okrant’s misadventures month by month. In January, Okrant accepts the show’s “Living Your Best Life” challenge, which includes the directive to consistently terminate the consumption of all food two or three hours before bedtime. “There are some days when I don’t get home from teaching until 9:30,” Okrant complains. “I need to eat when I get in.”

In March she takes a Q&A test on the Oprah website that diagnoses her as having hoarding disorder. This is the beginning of small-scale rumblings in Oprahville. “Isn’t hoarding a psychological problem that should be diagnosed by a specialist rather than an online quiz?”

By May, Okrant is feeling pestered enough by her project that she risks incisive language. “I think Oprah devalues women by focusing so much on our bodies. She spends an inordinate amount of time asking other women how they lost weight, how they got their muscular arms, how they got their abs.”

Okrant couches such criticisms in a light fantasy that she is in private communication with the TV legend. “Oprah, I am begging you to break this cycle.”

Okrant often uses self-deprecatory humor featuring stock characters such as her supportive husband (Okrant has no kids) to lighten her narrative. She mocks her project, but she remains steadfastly faithful to it.

Eventually, she hears from an Oprah staffer. Familiar with her project, the staffer delivers Okrant a Kindle reader. (Oprah has given them away free of charge to her audience that day.) Okrant struggles with the feeling that accepting the gift will compromise the integrity of “Living Oprah,” which she has funded at her own expense.

Unfortunately, the angst over the Kindle seems artificial melodrama. Nearly 300 pages long, and top-heavy with Okrant’s domestic adventures, much of “Living Oprah” reads like filler. The issues that Okrant raises regarding her subject are fairly obvious.

Of course, Oprah is appealing to very traditional conceptions of beauty, love, and success, and, obviously, the advice she bestows to millions of American women is hardly fine-tuned to a multitude of familial and economic variables.

But wouldn’t an exploration of Oprah-dynamics be better served by multiple voices – a host of stories by women from different backgrounds explaining why Oprah’s ubiquitous message seemed to speak to each of them individually? The critique would benefit from the voices of mothers and childless women, young and old, divorced and single.

“Living Oprah” is strictly an “Oprah and me” narrative with guest appearances by the author’s husband and neighbors. If you don’t find Okrant’s life as potentially intriguing as Oprah’s, it’s a long read. ●

Living Oprah by Robyn Okrant
Center Street, 272 pp., \$24.99
Reviewed by Darryl Wellington
Christian Science Monitor

BOOK REVIEWS

During elections, people make judgments about who should hold office. They also make judgments about the journalists who cover the campaigns.

John Heilemann, national political correspondent for New York magazine, and Mark Halperin, editor at large for Time, have been subject to some pretty harsh judgments of their coverage. Both are members in good standing of the “Village,” the derisive term widely used in the blogosphere to convey what critics see as the insular and complacent quality of mainstream journalism.

Halperin has been dismissed as a “babbling idiot” (Jason Linkins of the Huffington Post), as “hilariously predictable” (Digby of the blog Hullabaloo) and as the author of “the most vapid, smug, and innate commentary that has come out of the Village in a long time” (Jonathan Zasloff, the UCLA law professor who posts at the Reality-Based Community).

The lefty bloggers’ basic complaint is that the Washington press corps deals in trivia, reflects conventional wisdom and is all too respectful of the politicians it should be challenging. “Game Change,” the new book by Heilemann and Halperin, offers this reviewer a chance to judge the judges: Are the bloggers on to something, or are they just jealous of the fact that inside-the-Beltway journalists such as Heilemann and Halperin are quite skillful?

At one level, “Game Change” is a familiar retelling of the key moments of a presidential campaign. Compared with the classics of the genre, it more than holds its own. At times, the authors cannot help restating the obvious, as in this strikingly unimaginative sentence: “With his war heroism, famously independent streak, and reformist stances on matters such as campaign finance, McCain’s maverick image was sterling.”

Yet despite such banalities, they not only tell the story of the 2008 campaign in an engaging and readable way, they come up with some real reporting. Much of that reporting, it must be said, is of the gossipy sort, such as Harry Reid’s by-now famous comment about black speech.

Still, although I had some sense of the dimensions of the Palin disaster before reading this book, the authors’ account of how she failed to prepare for her debate with Joe Biden is chilling: “When her aides tried to quiz her, she would routinely shut down -- chin on her chest, arms folded, eyes cast to the floor, speechless and motionless, lost in what those around her described as a kind of catatonic stupor.”

There are also juicy details about the fear that leading Democrats had about Bill Clinton’s reputation as a ladies man, as well as the outsize ego and bullying behavior of the seemingly angelic Elizabeth Edwards, who, the authors write, “was forever letting John know she regarded him as her intellectual inferior” and “routinely unleashed profanity-laden tirades on conference calls.”

I doubt that any other book about the 2008 election will top this one in narrative drive.

But Heilemann and Halperin purvey a lot of material in stenographic fashion, which only feeds into the complaints of their critics. Joe Biden tells them that he really did not want to be vice president, and they write that down, as if Biden actually was content just to ride Amtrak back and forth to Delaware as a senator.

In the authors’ account, Biden was not the only one reluctantly drawn into national service: Hillary Clin-

ton worried about her daughter, both Obamas were concerned about Sasha and Malia, and Cindy McCain hated the limelight.

But pretending that one is not all that interested in running for office is now one of the steps a candidate takes in the campaign process. “Game Change” made me wish that political reporters were more skeptical about what candidates feed them.

Finally, and most annoyingly, Heilemann and Halperin, while playing down their journalistic roles in the campaign, elevate their contribution as historians of the election. We all know how each World Series is hyped as the greatest ever or how each new winter storm portends a historic blizzard.

The subtitle of this book proclaims that the election of 2008 was “the race of a lifetime,” a theme repeated throughout the narrative. To be sure, the election took on historic significance because of the nomination of an African American and the candidacies of two prominent women. When it became clear that the Democratic nominee would not be a white male, an important barrier had certainly been broken.

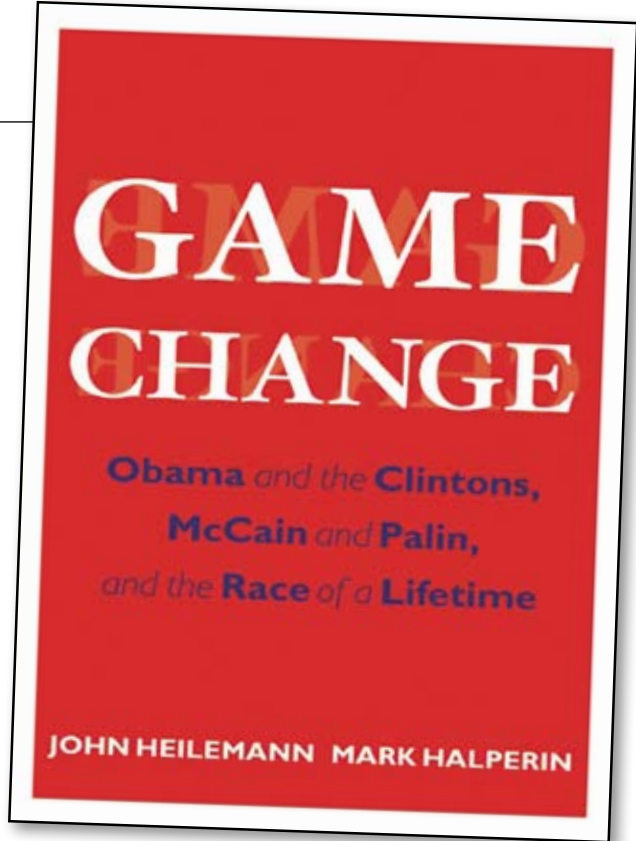
Yet historically significant elections turn on matters of policy, not demographics. The year 2008 might have given us the election of a lifetime because of the economic collapse that accompanied it and the desperate sense around the world that the United States needed new leadership.

But while the authors of “Game Change” have much to say about John McCain’s dreadful response to the economic crisis, they shy away from any discussion of economics.

To talk about real historical significance would mean addressing matters of substance, and that would violate the chatty inside-dope approach that characterizes Village journalism.

I read the bloggers and, while I admire their energy and commitment, I often find their near-hysteria off-putting. When they write about the Villagers, I detect, if not jealousy, then smugness, as if they believe they could do a better job than the journalists who take home the big bucks.

As someone who grew up reading great political reporting, even the kind that produced the classic campaign books of previous years, I wish that all those who scoff about insular and unself-critical Villagers



would be proven wrong. It is too bad that Heilemann and Halperin have proved them, by and large, right. ●

Game Change by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin, Harper, 448 pp., \$27.99
Reviewed by Alan Wolfe, Book World

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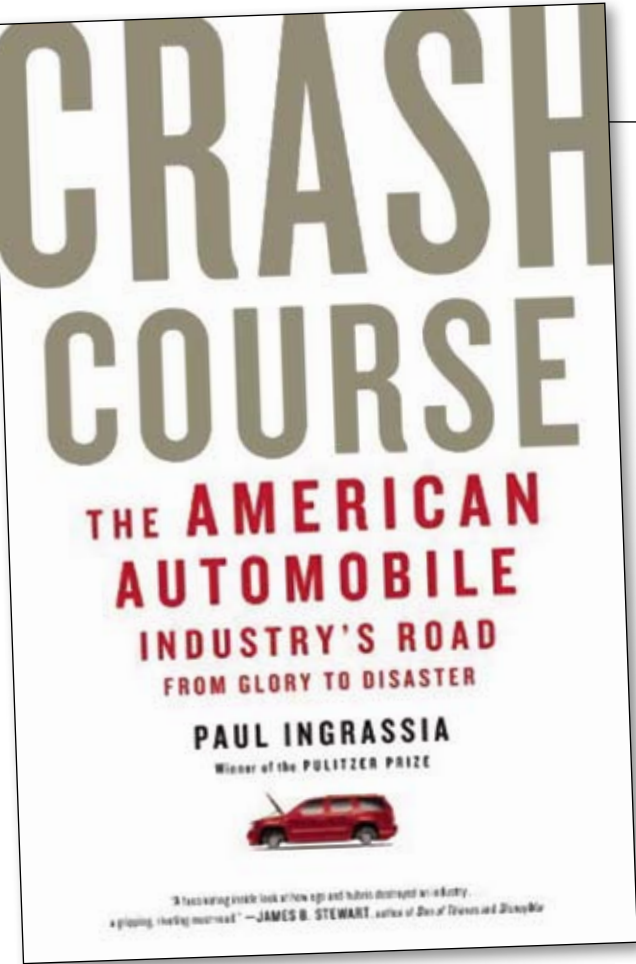
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Dr. Tate’s interests include cataract and multifocal intraocular lens surgery, glaucoma and retinal management and is available for general eye exams as well. Please join us in welcoming Dr. Tate and his family to our community.



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Paul Ingrassia of the Wall Street Journal, who covered the American auto industry for a quarter-century and probably knows it as well as any journalist, begins this account of its spectacular collapse by describing something called the “Jobs Bank.”

No, I’d never heard of it either. It was established by the manufacturers and the United Auto Workers in the 1980s “to provide temporary security for hourly workers on layoff,” but “by the 1990s laid-off workers could remain ‘bankers,’ as they were nicknamed with knowing irony, for an unlimited time, making 95 percent of their wages while not working.”

This in turn led to “inverse layoffs,” wherein “senior workers volunteered to be laid off and thus bumped junior workers back onto the assembly line.”

Ingrassia asks: “After all, why should a worker with high seniority slave away building cars when workers with lower seniority collected virtually full pay just for sitting around? Such was the logic of Detroit’s dysfunction.” Indeed, “dysfunction” barely begins to cover it. “Self-destructiveness” or “insanity” would come a lot closer.

Yes, by the time the feds finally forced General Motors and Chrysler into bankruptcy last year, most sentient Americans doubtless were aware that the domestic auto business was a mess, but in order to understand just how much of a mess it was -- not to mention how it got that way and how, if at all, it can be cleaned up -- you really need to read “Crash Course.”

Ingrassia is not the most gracious prose stylist on the planet, and his efforts to weave in the stories of a car dealer in Maine and father-and-son auto workers in Illinois tend to get lost in the bigger picture. But this is a vivid and wholly persuasive depiction of what can happen when “confrontation instead of cooperation” between labor and management becomes the “default mode” of operation.

“Hubris and sclerosis had been building for years in Detroit,” Ingrassia writes, “in a heedless union and feckless managements.” This isn’t a story about good guys on one side and bad guys on the other, because for decades there was more than enough badness on both sides -- arrogance, incompetence, tunnel vision, irresponsibility, selfishness -- to satisfy even the most morbid screenwriter or novelist’s desires.

Along the way the occasional good guy makes a cameo appearance -- William Clay Ford Jr. and Alan Mulally, the man he hired to rescue the family business, being the most notable of recent vintage -- but this is such a rare occurrence you almost want to stand up and cheer.

For three decades after its inception in the early 20th century, the auto industry was a work in progress, with companies starting up and disappearing, gradually sorting themselves into what became mythologized as “the Big Three” -- GM, Chrysler and Ford -- with smaller companies such as Studebaker, Packard and American Motors playing lesser (but in some cases important) roles in the shadows.

Labor relations did not really become a problem until the 1930s, when the combination of the Depression and rising union militancy brought the issue to the fore. Management, to put it charitably, did not meet the challenge well.

Though leadership in other industries was intransigent at the time, it was especially so in Detroit, where striking and/or protesting workers were met by security guards or local police who used “tear gas and billy clubs,” especially those under the thumb of “Ford’s thuggish personnel chief, Harry Bennett,” a truly villainous character even by the standards of 1930s Detroit.

The result was that once the UAW won recognition and began to organize the labor force, a mood of intransigence had calcified on both sides.

“The UAW’s early battles fostered antipathy toward the car companies that would stay with the union forever,” and by the 1970s -- under the bellicose, short-sighted leadership of Leonard Woodcock

-- the union “made gains in wages and benefits, but it also single-mindedly emphasized protecting the rights of workers, often without expecting workers to fulfill their responsibilities.” A case in point:

“When a machine broke down and stopped the assembly line, workers would take an unscheduled break and wait for an electrician or machinist instead of rushing to fix it themselves. Only skilled tradesmen were allowed to repair machinery, even if ordinary workers were capable of doing it -- rules enforced not only by the national contract but also by the separate local contracts at each factory.

“The electricians or machinists often took their time getting to where they were needed, so that the plant would have to go into overtime to make up for lost production, and everybody would get more money.”

Management was effectively complicit in this. Managers “understood the problem but deemed giving in to the union to be the path of least resistance -- especially because consumers had to pay up regardless.”

If you’ve ever wondered why a Detroit clunker often costs significantly more than a comparable and vastly superior import -- or a car with a foreign name-plate but manufactured in the United States -- there’s your answer, though it’s necessary to throw into the equation the greed, arrogance and complacency of management.

At GM there actually were separate men’s rooms for salaried and hourly-wage workers, “part of an apartheid system in which the behavior of white-collar managers constantly sent humiliating reminders to blue-collar workers that said, in effect, ‘I’m better than you are.’ “

While Detroit was bogging itself down in rules and regulations, not to mention pensions and health-care guarantees that gave retirees a lifelong free ride, foreign companies -- especially the Japanese -- were showing how to make cars that were significantly better.

Not only that, but once they started manufacturing in the United States, they proved that American workers were entirely capable of responding positively to management that welcomed their ideas about improving assembly-line efficiency and even treated them like mature adults.

Detroit’s answer to all this? The SUV, the pickup and, most egregious of all, the Hummer. For a while these monstrosities gave Detroit an adrenalin boost, but that lasted only so long as gas was cheap and the economic bubble was still inflated. When gas climbed toward \$4 a gallon and the bubble popped, Detroit self-destructed with extraordinary speed.

Ford, which had taken precautionary steps earlier, managed to avoid government rescue and bankruptcy, but GM and Chrysler, after decades as kingpins of the American economy, were humiliated.

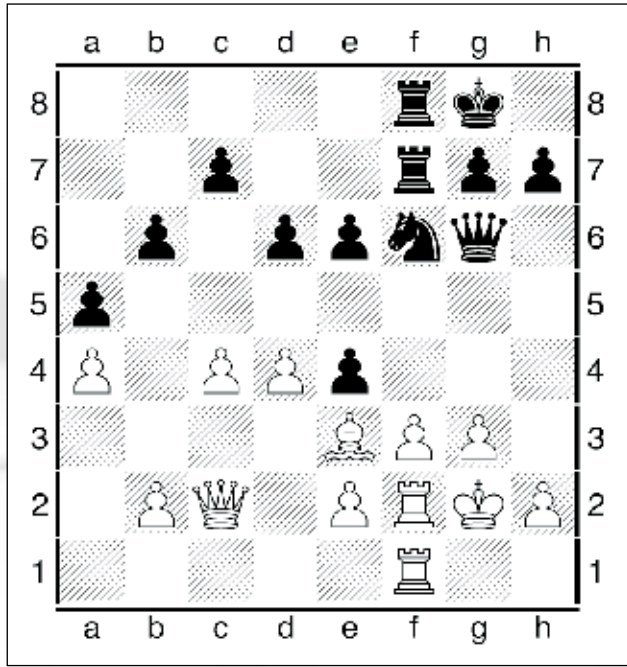
Many people wondered whether bailouts were the right solution to their problems, but there was surprisingly little schadenfreude. The companies may have deserved to go down, but few people wanted them to do so.

It remains to be seen whether the various efficiencies in which they and the union most reluctantly acquiesced are sufficient to allow their recovery. ●

*Crash Course by Paul Ingrassia, Random House, 306 pp., \$26
Reviewed by Jonathan Yardley, Book World*

BOOK REVIEWS

FOR THE LOVE OF CHESS BY HUMBERTO CRUZ - CHESS COLUMNIST



Former world champion Boris Spassky, playing Black, punished my careless move, Kg1-g2.

A one-sided loss still my most memorable moment in chess

In half a century of playing chess, my most memorable game was a decisive loss almost 25 years ago.

What if I lost? I had the privilege of playing an official tournament game against Boris Spassky, chess champion of the world from 1969 to 1972 (when he lost to Bobby Fischer).

I played Spassky during the 1985 U.S. Open in Hollywood, Fla., an annual event open to all chess players from beginner to grandmaster. As luck would have it, following customary procedure the top-rated Spassky was paired in the first round against the player rated just below the halfway point -- me.

I was a bit awed and made some inaccuracies in the opening. But with the advantage of playing White,

I was still even after 14 moves: 1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.Qc2 b6 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.Qxc3 Ne4 7.Qc2 f5 8.g3 0-0 9.Bg2 Bb7 10.Nf3 d6 11.Ng5 Qf6 12.0-0 Qg6 13.Nxe4 Bxe4 14.Bxe4 fxe4.

Here I thought of playing 15. f3 but “settled” for 15. Be3 because it seemed “safer” against such a formidable opponent. The late grandmaster Arnold Denker told me after the game I should have indeed played the more aggressive 15. f3. I learned you should always play what you think is the best move, regardless of who your opponent is. Here is the rest of the game, including my blunders in moves 20 and 24: 15. Be3 Nd7 16.f3 Nf6 17.Rf2 a5 18.a4 Rf7 19.Raf1 Raf8 20.Kg2? (see diagram) exf3+! 21.exf3 Ng4 22.Qe2 Nxf2 23.Rxf2 Rf5 24.Qc2? Rxf3! 25.Qxg6 Rxf2+ 26.Bxf2 hxg6 and I extended my hand in resignation.

Humberto Cruz is a United States Chess Federation correspondence chess master and certified tournament director. He can be reached at askhumberto@aol.com.

THE BRIDGE COLUMN BY PIETER VANBENNEKOM - BRIDGE COLUMNIST

Flustered Flo was mighty chagrined when she went Down One in what appeared to be a routine 3 No-Trump Game contract by getting greedy. She was even more chagrined when she found out her perennial nemesis, Smug Sam, had gotten tops on the board by making an overtrick.

East-West vulnerable; North Dealer. Flustered Flo was South; her partner Loyal Larry North.

The bidding:	South	West	North	East
1	Diamond	Pass	2 No-Trump	Pass
2	Diamonds	Pass	3 No-Trump	All pass.

Opening lead: 7 of Clubs.

Flo didn't think she'd have much trouble. Her partner opened and her 16 points made a total of at least 29, surely more than enough. After dummy came down she didn't see much to change her mind: 8 sure tricks, and lots of chances for a 9th. Alas, she picked wrong every time.

After the Club Ace won the opening trick, she came to her hand with the high Hearts to unblock dummy's Jack. She now decided to establish Diamonds: How nice would it be if they split 3-3 and the finesse worked?

Naturally, that finesse failed, and East returned a club, on which West captured Flo's Queen with her King (she discarded a Spade from dummy). West was almost end-played, but had a Diamond to escape. Flo took dummy's Ace and hopefully led the King as well, thinking she might still get a 3-3 split and run Diamonds.

That didn't work, either, and now Flo also discovered that it's possible to squeeze yourself instead of getting squeezed by your opponents. When she cashed her winners from dummy, she had to choose between Spades and Clubs for discards. She didn't think she could afford to pitch Spades, so she parted with another Club on the Jack of Hearts.

When she next led a Spade from dummy, her Jack fell to West's Queen, but West once again got out with a Club to Flo's Jack. Then Flo had to put West in the lead again with the Spade Ace and let her collect her Club 10: Down One.

Flo couldn't resist her curiosity and went to Sam afterwards, explained she'd gone Down One by attacking Diamonds and asked how he'd managed to make an overtrick.

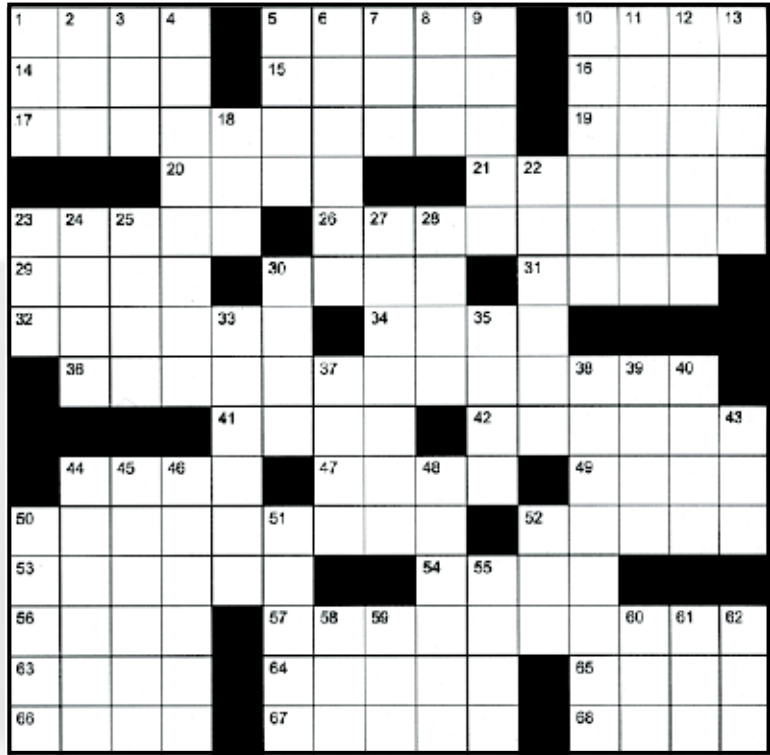
"Simple," said Sam, ever smug. "Your play had little chance of success. A finesse barely succeeds 50% of the time. To pick up a 9th trick, Spades was the ticket. Even in the worst possible scenario with Ace-Queen behind my King-Jack, I have the 10 so I'm going to make at least one Spade trick."

NORTH			
WEST		EAST	
♠ 8 4 2	♥ J 9 7 6	♠ 9 6 5	♥ 10 8 5
♦ A K J 4 3	♣ A	♦ Q 10 8 5	♣ 6 5 4
♠ A Q 3	♥ 4 3 2	♠ K J 10 7	♥ A K Q
♦ 7 2	♣ K 10 8 7 2	♦ 9 6	♣ Q J 9 3

Crossword

SOLUTIONS TO LAST ISSUE ON PAGE 75

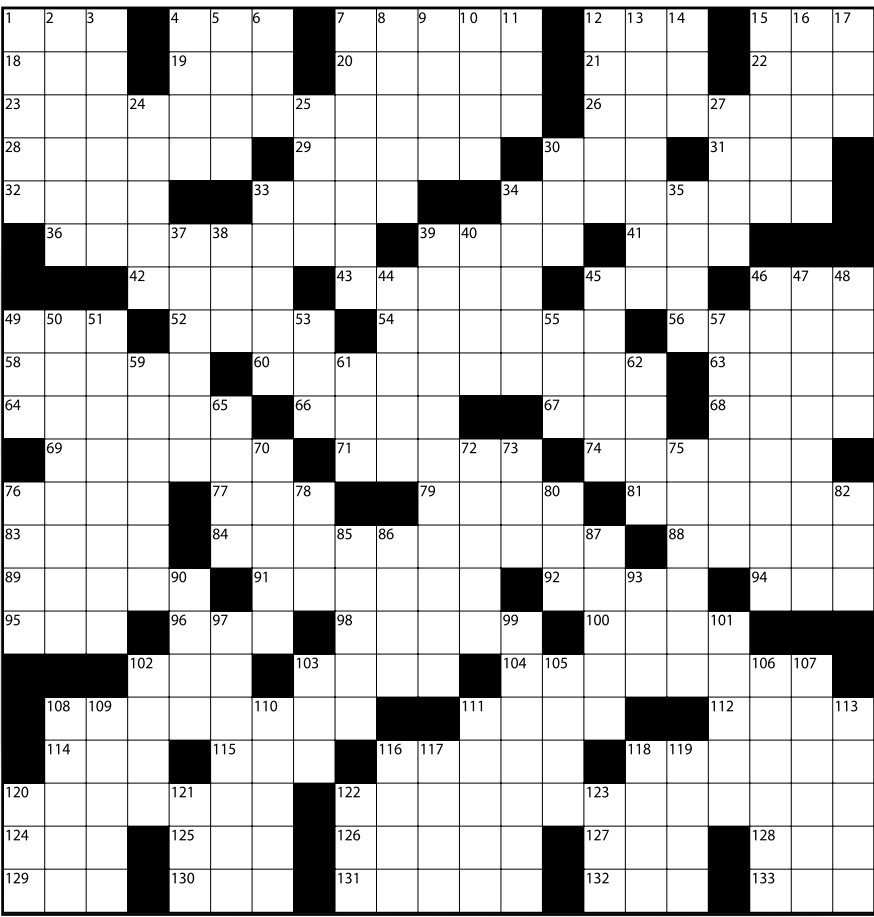
GONE FISHING



The Christian Science Monitor | By Philip Anderson | Edited by Charles Preston

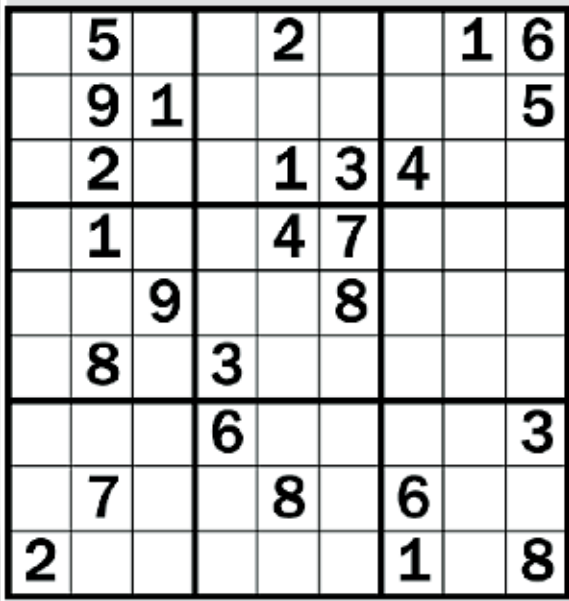
- ACROSS**
- 1 Former PBS host Alan
 - 5 Pretoria prime minister, twice
 - 10 Precursor to duke or bishop
 - 14 Winter wear
 - 15 Mountain fortress
 - 16 Sport of princes
 - 17 Fortification slope
 - 19 German/Polish border river
 - 20 Middling
 - 21 Straggler's position
 - 23 Notre Dame coach Lou
 - 26 Back talk
 - 29 Operatic song
 - 30 Fox or turkey step
 - 31 Littlest of the "Little Women"
 - 32 Legendary Italian director/actor
 - 34 Artists' inspiration
 - 36 Nautical splicing tools
 - 41 Controversial apple spray
 - 42 Emphatic typeface
 - 44 Sometimes follows A
 - 47 Actor Brad
 - 49 Place for memories
 - 50 Auspicious
 - 52 Cashew relative
 - 53 Grand Tour locale
 - 54 Snack between meals
 - 56 Sometimes follows C
 - 57 Envoy's superior
 - 63 Head, in Le Havre
 - 64 Mock
 - 65 Yahoo
 - 66 Scorch
 - 67 Wastemaker
 - 68 Genus Capra
 - 22 Even if
 - 23 I've ___ it!
 - 24 City near Provo
 - 25 Actress Kudrow
 - 27 Without basis
 - 28 NHL's Grimson and Barnes
 - 30 Beginning of the end
 - 33 Get quiet
 - 35 Meat turner
 - 37 Calif. valley
 - 38 Botswana mirage site
 - 39 Dash
 - 40 Express praise
 - 43 Every Co. has one
 - 44 Head warmer?
 - 45 Corrigenda
 - 46 Expiator
 - 48 Renter
 - 50 Jazz events
 - 51 Below, poetically
 - 52 Pub. submissions
 - 55 Bone prefix
 - 58 Broncos' Tanuvasa
 - 59 Crosstown, at times
 - 60 Make a knight
 - 61 UK award
 - 62 Tyrannosaurus ___
- DOWN**
- 1 Dazzle
 - 2 Opener to Alamos
 - 3 "What's up, ___?"
 - 4 Sim, of St. Trinian's
 - 5 Suckers
 - 6 Biography
 - 7 Cult follower
 - 8 10th anniversary gift
 - 9 Scrap
 - 10 Highest point
 - 11 Chinchilla, for one
 - 12 Hands and teeth do it
 - 13 Tartar's golden group
 - 18 Ms. Russell, to friends?

- ACROSS**
- 1 Hollywood release, briefly
 - 4 High court action?
 - 7 Turns sharply
 - 12 One who gets plaudits for averting audits
 - 15 Barn bedding
 - 18 Most of the time, in dict.
 - 19 Justice Fortas
 - 20 "As You Like It" setting
 - 21 Part of a nonprofit's URL
 - 22 "Part of the bargain"
 - 23 Natural defense of a sort
 - 26 Hydra's slayer
 - 28 Refer
 - 29 Vacant
 - 30 Is saddled with
 - 31 Slangy driving maneuver
 - 32 Falco of "The Sopranos"
 - 33 Mandamus, e.g.
 - 34 Award-winning Chinese film of 1993, "Farewell, My ___"
 - 36 Math statement
 - 39 Slow-going area
 - 41 Prussian "plus"
 - 42 Of the dawn
 - 43 Old flag?
 - 45 Urchin's home
 - 46 Peeled-grape requester of filmdom
 - 49 Conspirator's add-on
 - 52 Ways around France
 - 54 "... blackbirds baked ___"
 - 56 Kuwaiti neighbor
 - 58 Lifter's crouch
 - 60 "Woodstock" and "Woodplay," e.g.
 - 63 Salinger girl
 - 64 Lee Marvin TV oldie
 - 66 The L of A.L.A.
 - 67 Satchel's mom
 - 68 Julio's here?
 - 69 Old Merrill Lynch slogan, "___ Apart"
 - 71 Easy ___
 - 74 "The Hairy Ape" penner
 - 76 Other, in Oaxaca
 - 77 Explosive sound
 - 79 Gala getup
 - 81 Role for Talia
 - 83 Inveterate ___
 - 84 Defense's opposite
 - 88 "This ___ good time"
 - 89 Tiny amounts
 - 91 Going nowhere
 - 92 Powder type
 - 94 Velvet add-on
 - 95 Famous square?
 - 96 Forecasters' grp.
 - 98 Censoring sound
 - 100 Course
 - 102 "So long"
 - 103 Goes to the last roundup
 - 104 Hockey great Phil
 - 108 Scuba weapon
 - 111 Paris-___ Airport
 - 112 Churn and bubble
 - 114 Afflict
 - 115 Status ___
 - 116 Anatomical furrow
 - 118 Pain-in-the-neck producer?
 - 120 Smooch
 - 122 Apt signoff for this puzzle
 - 124 Tempe sch.
 - 125 Ingenuous intro
 - 126 Alphabet quintet
 - 127 Forensics test
 - 128 Hit the buffet
 - 129 Deli buy
 - 130 Write quickly
 - 131 Squander
 - 132 Giovanni, e.g.
 - 133 ___ Lanka
 - 3 Written flourish
 - 4 Southern Cal force
 - 5 Tony's cousin
 - 6 Johnson or Jonson
 - 7 Household chore
 - 8 Burst forth
 - 9 Make changes in
 - 10 Depend (on)
 - 11 Jimmy Fallon's former home, briefly
 - 12 Oscar role for Cagney
 - 13 Almost, to Alain
 - 14 Cabinet dept.
 - 15 Suspense writer
 - 16 Not bat ___
 - 17 Rushing abbr.
 - 24 London line
 - 25 Architect Saarinen
 - 27 Slangy pounds
 - 30 Break new ground?
 - 33 Did half the entertaining?
 - 34 Mummy's place
 - 35 ___ B'rith
 - 37 Busy arteries
 - 38 Greek letter
 - 39 Rainier III and Grace Kelly, e.g.
 - 40 Persepolis's land, today
 - 44 Depicts
 - 45 Unfunny prefix
 - 46 Like Gable or Crowe
 - 47 Gather
 - 48 With "O," a refrain
 - 49 Ology kin
 - 50 Charge
 - 51 Burn the midnight oil
 - 53 Mr. Price of Price Club fame
 - 55 "___ Oz!"
 - 57 Broadcasts again
 - 59 ___ borealis
 - 61 Sine/non divider
 - 62 Extinct people of northern California (or backward, an opposing vote)
 - 65 Cinema Johnny
 - 70 Day or Lessing
 - 72 Mesa's kin
 - 73 A fifth of DX
 - 75 Fiats
 - 76 Hodgepodge
 - 78 Got the cup
 - 80 Little one
 - 82 Palindromic girl's name
 - 85 Vaccine figure
 - 86 Perry's creator
 - 87 Devon diaper
 - 90 ___ few words
 - 93 Philosopher ___-tzu
 - 97 Romeo's poetic friend
 - 99 Strong Louisiana tobacco
 - 101 Whiskey's Walker
 - 102 Statistical-curve shape
 - 103 Small team
 - 105 Eastern European, often
 - 106 Chefs' hats
 - 107 Petroleum carrier on the tracks
 - 108 Sprightly
 - 109 Arouse
 - 110 Motel customer
 - 111 Hot ___ hot (restaurant choice)
 - 112 Actress Christine
 - 116 Durocher's venue
 - 117 Mai-___ (cocktails)
 - 118 Bond villain
 - 119 Clancy hero
 - 120 Cause of paddle fatigue?
 - 121 Ready, willing, or able: abbr.
 - 122 Fancy playing marble
 - 123 Baseball Hall of Famer Roush
- DOWN**
- 1 Cocoon contents
 - 2 Tristan's love



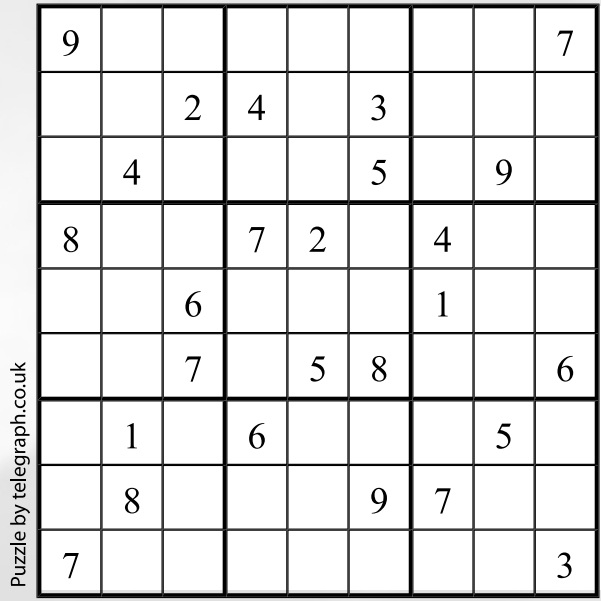
RIGHT ON CUE
By Merl Reagle

Sudoku

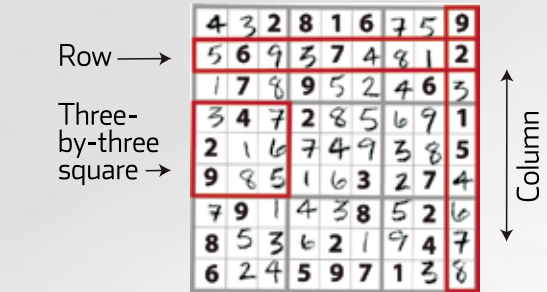


★★★★☆

How to do Sudoku:
Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once in every column, row and three-by-three square. See example (right).



★★★★☆



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Tales of a Mechanical Misfit (Part 2) By Jay McNamara

Learning when you are twelve that you have limited mechanical aptitude is a good thing. It prepares you for a world of technology by alerting you to seek help. As I face the dilemma of buying a new computer, I need all the help possible.

As a twelve-year-old, my experience in taking shop in junior high school was guided by two very different teachers, Mr. Doberman and Mr. Masterson. I have described Doberman in an earlier column. He was a man with little interest in teaching or kids, a disheveled person whose primary preoccupation was betting on race horses. As he perused the local tabloids during class, we students plundered the wood supply which Doberman left unattended.

In sharp contrast, Masterson was impeccable in every way, beginning with an inventory of well-pressed suits, white shirts and stain-free ties which adorned his slender physique. His dress was just one indicator of his approach to life, which was precise in every way.

His treatment of the wood supply was equal to the most conscientious Ft. Knox protector of the nation's gold. The door to the room where the wood was kept was under lock and key and only opened by Masterson on rare occasions. At the beginning of the term, each student was given a carpentry assignment based on the student's capacity. He doled out wood like precious jewels.

In my case, Masterson had determined early that even the most humble project would be a test of my skills. It was decided that I would construct a wall bracket consisting of two pieces of curved wood somehow connected together. The finished piece would cover wall space of about six inches square and would act as a stand for a plant. At least, that is the way Masterson explained it to me.

As the weeks passed, I toiled with the impossibility of turning a square shaped piece of wood into a curved one. The finished product would have two curved pieces, the bottom support and the semicircular shelf above. How the two were to be joined is something Masterson did not disclose. No matter how hard I tried I could not achieve a reasonably curved piece of wood.

A few of my classmates, who in another time would have served in the court of Louis XIV because of their carpentry brilliance, attempted to help me achieve reasonable results. After a month or so, two sort-of rounded pieces of wood began to emerge.

Meanwhile, in Doberman's class, bored by the process of making random holes and cuts in the wood supply, we decided one day that we would make ourselves some wooden swords, items we could duel with in the playground after school. The expert kids guided the rest of us in the construction of these objects, 3-feet long with tapered ends and nifty handles. We were busy bees uninterrupted by Doberman.

One day, Masterson eyed the two pieces of wood I presented to him. After significant sanding on the school's lathe, they were more or less smooth. At this point, rather than risk the prospect of starting over, Masterson helped me stain and varnish the wood which he connected with a hinge. The work was complete.

So were the swords, with which we assaulted each other in the parking lot, brandishing them like Errol Flynn. Teams were assembled and points were awarded. The duels became quite competitive and spirited. It was during one of these games that the principal appeared. She halted the action and for reasons I still don't understand remanded me to her office for a private conference. Other than the confiscation of the swords, I don't recall any punishment being delivered.

The next week, Masterson informed me that it was allowable for me to take my little pot holder home to my mother. With pride I handed it to her. "Here, Mom, I made this in shop." "It's beautiful," she said. "What is it?"

When the final report cards were handed out, mine had a notation on it from Masterson. "Dear Mrs. McNamara. In the interest of the safety of your son and of that of the other students, your son will not be participating in shop henceforth."

And so ended my training in all things mechanical. To this day, I face the tech world with amazement and bewilderment. How I will be able to buy a new computer amongst this haze is a question to be answered. (to be continued)