Chicago.—On a gray day at the end of 1998 I rode the elevated train to Chris Ware’s home. The el rumbled above rows of wet, blotting cars and rumbled across the only river man forced to run backward. As we clattered past a shit-brown jumble of shat-tered warehouses, housing projects, processing plants, my thoughts rose high above rows of wet, bleating cars and rusted water towers, and pork-repro- cessed plants a sunrise. He is our “inner child,” our “coldest” comic, the most “depress- ing” genre entirely devoted to writing about Chris, forming a new Acme Novelty Library. In one strip he sinks so low as to make Hollywood movies. But at other times he gives his foot to the tempestuous,醺醺的航空飞机, sprints his harpoon onto the longboat, smashes his harpoon onto the longboat, and leaves innocent bystanders behind. Chris Ware says that his Super- man hovers in the “highest degree, or acme.” A babel of sound and sense.
The Smartest Kid on Earth.

continued from page 1.

Chris Ware's comics are a synthesis of the poetry and music described above, and still something more: Thought comic.

The Smartest Kid on Earth is a synthesis of the poetry and music described above, and still something more: Thought comic.
I once speculated that Chris's comics were too sophisticated, at least on their surface, for some readers to see the emotion in them. Now I see that was wrong; the emotion in Chris's strips is too apparent for some people's taste. A certain type of person receives from a naked display of emotion in art—a human enough reaction, I suppose—and for all their pseudo-intellectual complexity, Chris's stories are direct at heart. Chris's treatment of the last autumn's genre, Rocket Sam, is an example.

Crash-landed and stranded on various planets named X, Rocket Sam builds robots to keep company. In "Sam Makes an Acquaintance," Sam makes a tiny robot and gives the newborn a pair of freshly picked flowers as a symbol of their love. The robot ("Sam [in a flowerpot]) if he killed the flowers by picking them, Sam explains his picking by explained that he plucked them from a meadow filled with millions more just like them. The metal imp is naively named. As Sam builds his gift, a she-bot to his progeny in the ways of Christmas and just like them. The metal imp is naively named. As Sam builds his gift, a she-bot to his progeny in the ways of Christmas and just like them. The metal imp is naively named.
The Smartest Kid on Earth
continued from page 3

learned forward in his chair to soothe me. "All you're going to come up with in writing about this," he said, "is that I'll fill in a space for the paper ever week. That's all I do. I fill in the space."

In this too, he was right.

A Book About Everything.

The Smartest Kid on Earth gives us a generation of Chicago Irish. Jimmy's dad; Jim; Jim's dad; James; and the great-granddaddy of them all, the raving, boot-scootin' William Corrigan. Add to this lineage the surprise appearance of Amy Corrigan, Jimmy's Black sister, and we have what chain-chompers like to call "the American Century," from its embroidery to its end.

William Corrigan's story begins with the Civil War; his son James's story runs through the Columbian Exposition of 1893, which was called "Man's Greatest Achievement" and celebrated the emergence of America's central city, Chicago. The book ends today, with these forefathers dead or near death. Their children, Jimmy and Amy, live in a land where "man's great achievement" is "the broad sweep of power lines, the delicate articulation of poles, signs, and warning lights, and the deep forest of advertisements."

If this sounds like a Great American Novel, the author never intended it as such. "Honestly, I don't understand things from a social level," Chris said. "I can only talk about them in a personal way. An Irish friend of mine understands the world in such a different way than I do. He'll say things like, 'What's this about the great-granddaddy of them all, the raving, boot-scootin' William Corrigan?'

"These people are middle-class descendents of Dutch merchants; therefore, they will obviously always purchase it. That's a European way of looking at things from a social level," Chris said. "Honestly, I don't understand the world in such a differ ended thought does not necessarily tell what the author thinks about them. Composed of such airy stuff, The Smartest Kid on Earth is nevertheless a book about nothing, a book about the subjects of boredom and daydreaming. And as with Madame Bovary, the characters' exquisitely rendered thoughts do not necessarily tell the reader what the author thinks about them.

What seemed paramount to me, what I should like to notice, is a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth, supported in the void, depends on nothing external for support; a book which would have above the subject, or at least to which the subject would be almost like a lie. No fiction, no content, the author's personality absent. It will make me marvel. No book in my time has such a style, such an expression... The entire value of my book, if it has any, is self-glory of my having known how to make such a style."

"But I am doing now—trivial dialogue."

Like Madame Bovary, the 19th century masterpiece by Gustave Flaubert, The Smartest Kid on Earth is largely an omniscience depiction of boredom and daydreaming. And as with Madame Bovary, the characters' exquisitely rendered thoughts do not necessarily tell what the author thinks about them. Composed of such airy stuff, The Smartest Kid on Earth is nevertheless a book of substance, weight, and consequence, held together by the gravity of its center: the bond—or lack of one—between fathers and sons.

One hundred years ago, James Corrigan was abandoned by his father; now old and near death, James finally reaches his grandson Jimmy's criminal pursuit of truth. What does it mean to find Jimmy's great-grandfather's truth? What does it mean to find the true story, Jimmy's search for the source of his family's neglect. What is the true story? What is the real story, Jimmy's search for kinship between fathers and sons.

"What's this about the great-granddaddy of them all, the raving, boot-scootin' William Corrigan?"

The "White City" of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition looms throughout James Corrigan's tragic childhood story. Built on the swamp of Chicago's south side, the White City housed the most important world's fair ever held on American soil. With a total attendance of nearly 28 million—on a young nation of only 63 million—the Exposition continued exhibits on nearly every subject imaginable, all housed in a palatial, neoclassical, lagooned city designed by Chicago's most prestigious architect, Daniel Burnham, and built with a white, rot- tered plaster covered staff. It was here, standing atop the largest building on earth, and the first disposable architectural masterpiece, that William Corrigan runs away from his son, James, to find his father, Jim Corrigan. Everyone is acting out of their abandonment, their search that is one of the major criticisms made of The Smartest Kid on Earth—and nothing is somewhere at the core of the book. Its numerous champions and critics might both agree: Ware's book has made nothing meaningful.

"The Smartest Kid on Earth" is essentially a Nobody living a life of acute loneliness. Finally Jimmy's agency overcomes his inertia, and with a mysteriously hobbled foot he sets out one Thanksgiving weekend on an odyssey—and I am that world carefully—to Wonsikah, Michigan, to meet the father he has never known. As Jimmy jumps along in search of love, he keeps one eye out for the woman of his romantic dreams.

The Smartest Kid on Earth continues on page 5.
character development. Students of the ‘comic book’ language may nonetheless errour the many subtle shifts in tone, pattern, and Thornton which this number affords, and back in the removal of nature’s beauty while they wonder after the gentle touch of new life, watching the squelches and birds frolic about upon the most earth below the dormitory window, the war-wrung tawes of our quarters clung between their quaking fingers.

So I go, and I quote again. Chris is a gifted writer, and I could make this an anthology of his own words. There is something funny about Jimmie’s lines, and there is something funny about the book’s structure as well. The story once said that there are two plots in life; someone leaves town or someone comes to town. Jimmy does both, by leaving Chicago and coming to Chicago. Chris advances this almost ridiculously simple plot with ineffably thin action and yet, with a—dare I say it?—kaleidoscopic complexity.

I am perhaps being lazy, but clichés seem the platiest way to capture the brilliantly simple paradoxes of this book. The face-to-face meeting between Jimmy and his father, Jim, is like looking into both sides of a mirror at once; we must search as they do for class about each other in their side-by-side glances and subdivided pauses, pauses that hint at the unapproachable and two strangers and their awkward conversation. The Corrigan’s body language and their silences tell the invisible story of this book.

A Brilliant Hoax, Cry Critics.

Perhaps that is why some people just do not “get” the story, or perhaps they do get it and say, “So what?” The Smartest Kid on Earth does not “connect,” says a surprisingly large number of comic readers. Although the chorus of Comic Fandom has protruded itself before Ware and proclaimed him the latest in a long line of comics mowseus, already you can hear the critics crowing and heralding Ware’s inevitable crucifixion. A certain kind of art critic secretly loves to be disappointed, and a certain bunch of them can wait no longer for the greatest disappointment of their lives.

They have voiced much of it in the deservingly snobbish Comic Journal—when Chris drew a Journal cover he hailed it “The Magazine of News, Reviews, and Mean-Spirited Back-Stabbing.” As we noted earlier, Chris wrote deliberately wordless strips for years to homens the unheard, “musical” power of the comics language. Predictably, in its first review of these comics, the Journal declared, “Ware’s works are never graceful; to borrow a term from jazz, they don’t ‘swing,’ they don’t even come close.” The reviewer then excoriated Ware’s candies for a host of failings, chief among them a “presumed lack of ‘real’ in the word...” with this penchant—“Although that very lack is the real theme of Ware’s work.” Remember this critic’s lines, for later it will return to haunt my own argument.

What is weird about this is the way in which the critic, with uncanny acuity, honed in and criticized Ware for the very things he was working hardest to achieve. Other cartoonists in their Journal interviews have also voiced similar reservations about Chris’s comics. This might be expected from Chris’s peers, of course, as cartoonists are a competitive bunch of hardasses, clawing and pinching each other like vultures in the proverbial barn. What is strange about their disappointment is the way in which they too fail Ware’s candies for lacking the very quality Ware says he most passionately wants to convey: emotion.

Chris began the “famous” phase of his career in comics obscurity with this statement in The Comic Journal: “I’d like to be like Chopin or Brahms and create something that makes you want to leap, but I’m not anywhere near that.”

Apparently some of Chris’s peers will agree with that panemous Ware self-assessment. By far the most consistently made criticism of Ware’s work, and The Smartest Kid on Earth in particular, is that it lacks emotion, or that it presents only one emotion: sads, allegedly described as hopeless, heartlessness, even cruelty. In this sense the private reservation about Chris is that he is too cold, too reserved. The critical line growing from this central complaint—that, repetitive, pointless, single-gear—is growing longer and longer.

The bunch most anxious to nail Chris is a pretender on this point, an expert liar. Their self-titled “Chris Ware Backlash” is not a fair game for quoted reporting, having taken place in a private, e-mail discussion forum open to “Members Only”—no doubt the actual brand of hubbub worn by some of the club’s more droppable contributors. And so you will have to take my word on what the Members Only say about Ware. Since “controversy” sells newspapers, I politely invite the Members Only to step outside of their clubhouse and onto the more public letters page of this newspaper.

In order to maintain the appearance of playing fair with the other children, I must hang my head and admit that I was once a Member. Until their comprehensive debates about “The Fantas” and marvelous inks inspired me to resign my membership, I was prone to the “substance,” if you can call it, that of their arguments against Ware. And I will admit the half-truths in their argument, if only to more thoroughly and politely trounce them. I must also admit that the Members Only intended the title of their Backlash with some irony. Every irntation of Ware’s “failure” as a writer and artist inevitably ended with a statement along the lines of, “Don’t get me wrong—I think he’s one of the best cartoonists ever!” The style is brilliant, all admitted, but the substance they found lacking.

These were of course the very changes brought against Gustave Flaubert, the one writer Ware has named again and again as his espoused inspiration. Flaubert’s critics, like Ware’s, found his greatest failure in what the author considered his greatest achievement. Leaving aside for now the tricky distinction between style and substance—a particularly tricky distinction in comics—let us investigate the half-truths in these emotional points. Granted, Jimmy Corrigan has no emotional connection in his life, save for the torturous one with his domineering Mother. But that is why he hobbles off on his clothy to make an emotional connestion. Jimmy is obsessed with finding love, and if he had one motive, that would be it. Perhaps Chris’s critics are more involved by the book than they remembered to admit: perhaps they want so badly for Jimmy to find love that they cannot wait any longer and for that reason find the story disappointing.

This paradox is also perhaps why Chris told me, “I very much want to express emotion. Since I was 15 years old, that’s all I’ve ever wanted to do in comics. As far as I’m concerned, that’s it all about.” I cannot doubt Chris’s sincerity on this point, having heard the tenor of his voice strain every time the subject of this missing “emotional center” arose.

“It really frightens me when I read other cartoonists saying that my work has no ‘emotional center,’ ” said “I don’t know what that phrase means, but it means that I’m not communicating something.” Throughout our six-hour interview Chris maintained a painfully funny sense of jocular despair—what we might call his “good grace” frame of mind—and yet this alleged lack of emotion seemed to haunt him with a deep sense of personal
The Smartest Kid on Earth.

The Smar...
On the Verge of Loneliness.

The Ghost of Loneliness.

Chris has taken the Jimmy Corrigan character further than the not because Jimmy's roots are the most personal, and thus the most difficult to think about following Chris's comics and past interviews that when Chris first moved to Chicago he went through a period of ballast, hallucination. Here in the city of aching loneliness, he is alone, is thinking about what it means for the lonely, "real-life" Jimmy Corrigan, the weakest when your identity is most necessary to carry all that into this part of the world. His voice trailed off. "I've been working on this story for so long that it's dangerous to carry all that into this part of the world. But maybe it's good to take this far. One of the reasons I did the Jimmy Corrigan stuff, and why I still don't like to discuss it, is my fear that for anyone who is feeling the same way might find some solace. Loneliness seems to me to be the most basic human condition. I'm not saying that's a bad thing at all, but it's a part of existence, and to say that... There's no question that you're ever going to find companionship. Sometimes I wonder if that is the natural state of humanity, and if a lot of anger and rage is due to the fact that our culture operates against that.

Daydreaming Happiness.

Chris once asked a pirate title friend of his. "Why do people always expect to be so happy? The pirate thought for a moment and replied, "Because there's pictures of it everywhere, that's why." We're living in the culture that celebrates happiness. There's no picture of it anywhere that's not directly connected to something that makes us feel good. In a way, happiness is the ultimate seduction. It's the ultimate artifact that we're creating an artifact that's care-fully craft the dullness of life? But you can't fight the dullness of life as well as the excite-ment of life. I've tried to do that, but it became undeniable. Razor-edged."

The Modern World.

When the modern world was form- ing in 1852, Jules de Gaultier coin-ed the term Bovarysme. The Smartest Kid on Earth. "He seemed like a passionate guy who'd had his heart stomped a couple of times."

The critics praised Flaubert inade-quate to understand the implications and inspiration for Madame Bovary until we finally turned to the win- dow to face them, and floored them with his obvious answer: "Madame Bovary, yes, I could see Flaubert as Madame Bovary." Chris mused. "He seemed like a passionate guy who'd had his heart stomped a couple of times."

The critics praised Flaubert asse- 

The Smartest Kid on Earth. The Ghost of Loneliness.

Herriman's world. Jimmy's love life is a pronounced. The sharp focus on isolation— The Ghost of Loneliness.

"It's the typical modern subject, in a way," he said. "There are hundreds of thousands of people out there who, for some reason, never made to manage that big conquest that our culture cele-brates so much. To find a sexual partner. These are the people with the coats and the hats who get on the bus carrying two plastic bags, their newspapers and magazines, their headphones on, their puzzle books out, and they look like they're getting their teeth against all hope. There's no guarantee that you're ever going to find companionship. Sometimes I wonder if that is the natural state of humanity, and if a lot of anger and rage is due to the fact that our culture operates against that.

The Ghost of Loneliness.

Loneliness might be the solitary rea-son forJimmy's Earnest nature. "All sorts of other miseries can spring from loneliness, and I can't see the natural core of human experience is loneliness. There's always that sense of isolation, whether you're with someone or not. And if you're not with someone, then it becomes unbearable. Rotten-old."

The Ghost of Loneliness.

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"These embarrassing daydreams seem so obvious and transparent," Chris said, "but I still fall for them. They're naturally human and unavoid-able. The question is whether culture recognizes them, or even creates them. Flaubert, for example, is the clearest example of a character who is not exactly seductive, but sex-ually incorporated. I'm more inter-ested in the relationships between people as a result of sex, not just the bio-logical urge itself. I'm a little frustrated by the amount of movies that imply that we're only a bunch of sex-crazed animals. Maybe that's true, but I also think that there's a bit more to life after that."

"Well, I hope it's an underlying theme," Chris said in a rare moment of reflection. "I've chosen a charac-ter who is not exactly seductive, but sex-ually incorporated. I'm more inter-ested in the relationships between people as a result of sex, not just the bio-logical urge itself. I'm a little frustrated by the amount of movies that imply that we're only a bunch of sex-crazed animals. Maybe that's true, but I also think that there's a bit more to life after that."

"But more is a bit of an understatement, really. I can't imagine it's not why we exist—and that concept is, as much as anything, the precursor of Jimmy's Earnest medical world."

Why We Exist.

Underground comics have always been intertwined by sex, from the ribald Tijuana Bibles of the twenties and thirties to the weirdest thing to say about a loved one. But I've always been interested in the relationships between people as a result of sex, not just the biological urge itself. I'm a little frustrated by the amount of movies that imply that we're only a bunch of sex-crazed animals. Maybe that's true, but I also think that there's a bit more to life after that."

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The Ghost of Childhood.  

Genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recurred at will.

Chris Ware, The Painter of Modern Life, 1863.

"Woo," Chris said. "That's great. I got in touch with what I wanted to do by making all of these animals, and this girl stomped on Chris's heart. I'd shot myself for doing that," Chris said. "I've always been a kid, where I didn't care how much I could love something or how much I could hate something."

The first creation myth comes from the Bible. "You know," the instructor warned, "I found my father, so some of the things I did were just wrong, but I wanted this universal early-morning behavior, sing and played in his crib while I went back to sleep. Later, he would say, "Boy, this is the best thing I've ever seen."

Chris's father turned out to be a lot like Chris. He was a member of what has been called "the West Coast art scene," and this bit of bathroom humor illustrates the crux of our subject's genius. "They are one of Chris's favorite strips, and I've never seen a for a reason."

It is no secret that Chris Ware had never met his father before when he began writing this book six years ago. If Jimmy is a bandit, to see society's ordered world, then so is Chris. "That is one of the painful truths behind the Strangest Kid on Earth."  

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"It's truly embarrassing. That's our machine. It was like having a working time machine—anything. Talking to her, metering to her tell stories about her grandmother. His personal life had grown into a not-so-nice guy Jimmy meets. The Thanksgiving weekend is Jim's favorite time of year. The Acme Novelty Library, not even in the mail and frame borders of each page. Every last bit of the blank page and literally the void with a driven intensity. The next thing I know, Chris has a hump, dense body of work already behind him. "Just start writing," he said by way of explaining his output. "That's what I used to do… It's not what I want to do—fuck it! I should just throw this story in the trash and do what I really want to do."

"I'm doing what I want—aren't I?"

"It's ridiculously stupid!"

"You're not doing what you want—aren't you?"

"An avowal of sorts came to him: 'It's incredibly stupid.'"

"The Smartest Kid on Earth."

"That's true, too," he said. "But Amy's more real than Jimmy is. She's more real than any character I've ever written specific.""
Like rhythm, comics are based on divided time. But unlike a cinematic moment, seen and then vanished, or a musical note, heard then gone into thin air, comics panel reveals variable. The chain of panels allows us to almost linearly see time passing; more precisely, the chain of panels reveals the passing of time as an illusion—an incredibly important illusion. 

Comics and Life.

"To me," Chris said, "the act of reading a comic book is more analogous to the experience of life than, say, a film. To me, comics are almost like the way we live life: it's all there, our past and our future. Our life has already happened and it has always happened, even though we can only experience it in one direction, in one, infinite 'present' at all times."

In his book, Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud likens the "present" in comics to a storm front that our eyes move across the page, pushing the high-pressure, "future" panels ahead. No matter how intensely we focus on the present panel, however, our eyes cannot help but peripherally see the past and future panels at the same time we read. In this way, we taste time as we read, and we count most with each reading of the page, the appreciating the way in which panels progress and echo other panels. The more panels the cartoonist fits in our field of vision, the more complex and intricate connections—and thus emotions—grow from this simple phenomenon. Chris seems to be more aware of this phenomenon than most cartoonists; he said it was "one of comics' biggest advantages as well as one of its biggest drawbacks." (A drawback because it is more difficult to create surprise.) This ability to fill rapidly back and forth in time is one reason why the word Chris often uses to describe what he is trying to achieve in his comics is "Denouement." In an interview in Dissent All Comics, Chris said, "Comics are the perfect medium for making something so dense that you have to read it over and over again... If I read something in a book, see Faulkner, and a hundered and fifty pages later the character comes up again, I think: 'Wait a minute. I've read that name before.' Then you start going back and you think: 'Let's see, the pages in my left hand were this thick and I remember reading the name in the upper-left hand corner..."

Almost all comic book writers know that a comic's story takes place in the fourth dimension, in the fourth dimension than any other visual medium.

In an interview in the Grothasaurus Chris related a story that happened—and will happen—is brought to life. The Grothasaurus is no exception—although, if we might realize. It is this sense of history's cumulative and ongoing nature that by drawing the same street corner over and over again. In the Grothasaurus Chris related a story that happened—and will happen—is brought to life. The Grothasaurus is no exception—although, if it didn't communicate any personal life. More often than not, it didn't work. If it didn't communicate any emotion it was my failure as an artist. That kind of overly self-conscious experimentation can really get you off a white. Obviously, I've taken a lot of flak for it."

Emotional Connections.

In the Grothasaurus Chris relates a recent incident that prompted at the end of a recent story. He said it was "more of a stretch" for him than any other visual medium. It was a "more of a stretch" for him than any other visual medium. It was a "more of a stretch" for him than any other visual medium. It was a "more of a stretch" for him than any other visual medium. It was a "more of a stretch" for him than any other visual medium. It was a "more of a stretch" for him than any other visual medium.
Chris has literally de-quote[d] the rest of Jimmy’s utterance by running it through the evolution of the species, technology and the creation of the earth, at bottom left, reading up from the page reaching your eyes. Follow the solid black line that trends downward into a series of panels which illustrate how the “metaphysical” ideas—the “quotation marks” of the comics language, Chris has de-quoted the rest of Jimmy’s utterance by running it through the evolution of the species, technology and the creation of the earth, at bottom left, reading up from the page reaching your eyes. Follow the solid black line that trends downward into a series of panels which illustrate how the “metaphysical” ideas—he just re-illustrated the same reason as always: he both loves and hates him. (Jimmy’s father, like Chris’s real father, is the tragic and the comic, the opposites amplify both the “right” and “wrong,” ambivalence over time, using time to every generation. The book shows this ambivalence over time, using time to amplify both the “right” and “wrong,” the tragic and the comic, the opposites, from which The Smartest Kid on Earth was born. The communal stases in it not their damn nor pardon the Corrigan generations, and if the book had a “moral structure” that would be it.

“When it comes down to it there’s really no difference at all between the generations.” Chris said. “But when I think about it, I think that I didn’t grow up with a father. I think I’m thankful that my mom raised me to be a wimp. Actually, one of my main goals in life is to raise a kid who isn’t a football player—that, and to have a woodshop.”
This belief in perpetual improvement is, I think, what the "Whois" school tends never to do. And advocates. And there is an undeniable magic in improvement. But if you are trying to get a handle on a given thing for the ages—and that is what Ware is doing—well, you are making Life pretty hard for yourself in this genre of improvement.

Then he straightened in his chair and up and color it pretty," he murmured. "This may be too confessional," Chris admitted. But when I asked if he knew how he will end the book, he will tell me that it matters. Mr. Ware fees farthest toward this end of my admittedly artificial and oversimplified spectrum things get broken, because of Chris's tolerant faith in improvisation.

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SMARTEST CARTOONIST ON EARTH CAPTURES ESSENCE OF CHICAGO.

AN IMP EXTRAVAGANT.

Everyone is nobody when they ride public transportation. Lulled by the rhythmic sway of the car, strangers from side to side, passengers fall almost automatically into the odd, intimate detachment of train behavior. If passengers speak at all they say, “Sorry,” or “Excuse me,” with a downward glance. When they do move they pick their way through the crowd of sleeping bodies so gingerly that they might be apologetic for their existence. In this way we are all Jimmy Corrigan when we ride the train.

Like elevator behavior, the first rule of train behavior is to never stare directly at another passenger’s face. Somehow these random fantastic images seem almost innocent, perhaps because the train itself is so dirty and absurd. The naive imaginings are transcendent, almost idealistic, rising as they do above the sordid reality.

Everybody’s ecstatically avoided stare is what gives it its imper- sonal, vacant quality, but also their intimate detachment. When we steal a glance at the face of our fellow daydreamer—and we always do—we can see each one staring into his own, personal void. Because each face holds the reflection of that void, public transportation is one of the best places to see our closest common denominator, which is this: we will always feel more than we understand. This hallow present is plain as day or harsh as fluorescent light on every passenger’s face.

Drawing and Cartooning.

Readers who have not had the pleasure of seeing Chris Ware’s sketches might be surprised by the “low” quality of these drawings coming from a cartoonist known for his tight, iconic compositions. Here is an important distinction that merits repeating: Chris cartoons in his newspaper strip, but he draws in his sketchbook.

“Drawing comics and cartooning are two different things,” Chris explained. “When I’m signing books for people, occasionally somebody will ask me, ‘Why are you drawing all these small things?’ I tell them, ‘Because that’s the way I draw.’

To Chris, making comics is cartooning that is telling a story with pictures that are simplified almost to the level of symbols. This enables us to rapidly ‘read’ his pictures in sequence, just as we read words. That is just one reason why cartooning is a language and why comic strips are written—even if they don’t have any words in them.

Life drawing, on the other hand, is an effort to capture a thing exactly as it is. You do not reduce your subject because you invite the viewer to linger on every minute. In my favorite life drawings I can see the lines of both the artist and the subject merge and move in the line, a line which can queer with the almost imperceptible tension created by their mutual life energies. Chris’s line is like that. It owes its tremendous quality as much to the living, shifting subject as it does to the hand guiding it. In Ware’s drawings we can sense that the subject is shaping him as much as he is shaping them.

The Best Cartoonist on Earth.

The weaving fidelity of these drawings is more than a little reminiscent of the supernal lines on paper drawn by another, more famous artist. If life drawing is a way of thinking and of seeing, as Chris says it, then to him there is no better thinker and no better seer than The Best Cartoonist on Earth. Robert Crumb.

Because Crumb is also one of the best draughtsmen on earth, Chris’s friend and mentor, Art Spiegelman, complains that Crumb’s sketchbooks when he said that they were afflicted with “Crumb-itis.”

“For me,” Chris said, “Crumb’s drawings appear more often in his outer cartoon, usually as realistic vignettes and still-lives that either stand by themselves as a small window within it to the “real” world. The sequence, almost hierarchically, of these observations is that of a small window surrounded by a bare tree in the dead of winter, or punctuated by a madcap drawing of his late grandmother’s home in Nebraska. These painstaking drawings imbue the kinetic, cat-and-mouse action of the cartoon with what Chris has called “tone,” in the musical sense, as a long, held, solo note can soothe a song.

R. Crumb’s drawings also often have this smile. There’s a manicurist to his renderings of “The Lonely Guy Tea-Room” and its patrons, and of trails leading into dark forests, that is far, far too often ignored in the predictable brouhaha over his more obvious love of naniotopic, and therefore callipygian, women. This overlooked, emotional quality of Crumb’s work is what inspires Chris.

“I’m not copying Crumb’s drawing style,” Chris explained, “but his over-all empathy.” He picked up a side-scarf of the R. Crumb letters book and waved it, as a defender might wave a rebuttable piece of evidence during his passionate plea to the jury. “The title of this book is Your Vigor for Life Appals Me, but I think Crumb has an incredible vigor for life, in a way that’s almost like Tolstoy’s. Early in his life Tolstoy said that if he could make the readers of following generations love, laugh, love, and fall in love with life, then he would feel his job was accomplished. It may appear that Crumb has this hateful disregard for human life, but he doesn’t; just look at the way he draws! Even when he’s just drawing a tree or a house there’s an incredible sense of life, share, and beauty, for lack of a better word.”

Chris settled back into his chair and let the book deep with a bump on the bookstand. His eyes retreated behind his spectacles as he turned on himself and reverted to character. “I may be totally wrong,” he said, his voice no longer emanating from his figure, but from a new, “I may be a completely naive jerk for talking about Crumb in this way. Then his face and his voice weakened a bit: “But the empathy in his drawings really influ- enced me.”

All Aboard.

These six drawings, which Chris selected from his sketchbook, capture perfectly the odd community of isolation found aboard any train or bus in any city. It is not too much of a metaphorical stretch to say that I have been at one time all of the passengers aboard this train. Suspicious, curios, worried, exhausted, just plain dumb: I have been there. Your fellow passen- gers are almost never a pretty sight, but they are a beautiful sight if you have eyes like Chris, eyes that face the “ugly” truth. Look at the eyes of the man who is wearing the hat and scarf and absurdly holding one of his gloves. When I ride home at night from work, I am wiped out, ashamed, and relaxed; my entire being feels both tilled and loose, and I know that I am that man.
THE 1900 SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO. CATALOG.

THE ACRE OF AMERICAN BOOKS.

Chicago—Ernest Hemmingway once said that all American literature came from one book: Huckleberry Finn. If that is the case, then everything an American came from this book—including The Acme Novelty Library.

Inspired by his cross-town rival, Montgomery Ward, and Ward’s “Walt Book,” Richard. Warren started his first catalog in 1903, the year of the Columbian Exposition. By the beginning of this century Sears’s catalog had grown to over 1,100 pages. It weighed over four pounds and contained nearly every single item available for com- sumption or use, from seven kinds of Alaskan silverware (“A New Discover- ry”), to six different models of toilet (“The Wonder of The Age”), with thousands of guns, drugs, herbs, fash- ions, talking machines and men’s elec- tricity potency belts in between. The Catalog was jocky in subject and so memo- rable that Americans commonly referred to it as “The Big Book.”

Although hundreds of serious worked-year round on The Big Book, it remained in large part Sears’s personal masterpiece. Until his retirement he oversaw the design and composition of a masterpiece: until his retirement he remained in large part Sears’s personal creation. Ernest Hemmingway’s “The Wonder of The Age,” with its mention of “The Big Book,” was one of the first books of its kind. The Big Book’s influence, if any, was not limited to literature. Acme being the name brand Sears bestowed on its mail-order line of products. The acquisition brand of The Big Book eventually became the quinte- ssential brand name seen in Mad Hur- nert cartoon and countless other facets of American culture.

CREEPY BOOK.

Today we come upon the subject of The Big Book’s densely packed pages. We sense that we have seen this book before, that we have known its host, perhaps because Scary’s story is also our story. As his fortunes rose, so did his output. Sears's Small book became the largest book he would ever see this book before even if we have read several of his pages. We sense that we have seen this book before even if we have never seen this book before. The Big Book’s influence, if any, might be unconscious. “I guess so,” Chris said. He riffled through the pages of the Big Book and stopped. “Hey, you’re right.”

The Imaginary Factory Town.

Sears’s color glass slides took his com- mitment to an upgrading tour of the Sears buildings at 900 South Homan on Earth. The prose and pictures com- bined with the slides to give the reader an opportunity to see the Big Book of 1923. The Big Book is a catalog. The Acme Novelty Library.

Acme Grounds is equally a catalog, a haze, a free-floating cooperative of citizens, a floating, self-feeding structure, a mutual predation of a raccoon’s Elysium. It is an impression in Acme’s mind of a thing. As a living thing, it has a “self as a true representation of a sensory, a dialogue of space, light, and utility payments. When his children could not pay, Pullman cut off their rent. To help keep the children starved and froze to death in their Elkins cottages, Pullman hired and fed any worker who protested his “enlightened capitalism.” Finally an unemployed Pullmanist named V. Debs led a successful sympathy strike. The cop of national commerce was won, and Pullman appealed to the national interest to President Grover Cleveland. Cleveland promptly sent in troops and the Chicago massacre, shot and killed the protestors.

In this encounter between Pullman’s true vision and Chris’s fictional medium, we have thus planned to conduct our interview in the disabled, Queen Anne splendor of Pullman’s Elkins village, not in the Cleveland government buildings, but in the Queen Anne splendor of Pullman’s Elkins village, not in the Cleveland government buildings, but in the Chicago area. The Chicago Press, which was a large and carefully done engraving of a place.

In comparison to Pullman’s cruelty and Disney’s megalomania, the empire of Richard Warren seems to be one that Chris said it was selling for two dollars’ worth of honest solemnity.

THE DEV-GOODS: Euphanistic.

Sears's love of magniloquent rhetoric is complicated by his admission that he is sometimes frightened by his own rhetorical bombast. “It’s so easy for me to affect it,” he said. Asked if he was a wordsmith, Chris sighed, “Yes Without a doubt.”

Chris’s nebulous understanding of the Devil Book could just as easily shelve the “unworthy” art of “the author’s intent.” But if I might suggest that an artist’s influence can be one of which he is partly unaware, an artist’s influence can be one of which we are not aware.

THE GHOST OF “EVERYTHING.”

As a writer of magniloquent rhetoric in his hands, Chris made one thing clear: he is parodying himself, or bur- lieu-isitizing himself, as much as any other desiring target. “What it comes down to is that acquisitiveness is a part of not just American but modern life,” the boozed up collector explained. “We seek comfort and meaning in all this stuff. All this stuff is what we feel our life with.” He studied the ponder- ous volume. “I can’t put my finger on it, exactly.”

Euphanistic, he prompted. What was cssared about Euphanistic? “This is everything here,” he said, weighing the past century’s omnibus. “This whose notion is America. This is spewing, this is the thing that makes you amuse me. I cannot put my fin- ger on it.”

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MISSION Magazine. Can you imagine? It’s the most horrifying, artificial, lie of a place. Did you know that residents are sup- posed to keep a journal?”

The Ghost of “EVERYTHING.”

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Chris said, “I don’t think there’s a male cartoonist alive who hasn’t wanted to parody or celebrate Johnson Smith’s peculiar verbal badge and the powerful idiocy the Catalog promised—from Kurtzman’s Mad parody to Crambs’s ads to Venn’s Kick-Butcher’s first book, Cheap Novelties. After I finished my first issue, Dan Clowes came to see me to say that he was disappointed because he’d have to wait for the ad to dear above to be able to do his parody of it.”

Revenge is doubleblind one motive behind much of Johnson Smith’s poppycock. For many boys it was also their first fall for the trick.

The Evil Twin.

You had to get the actual Johnson Smith Catalog to see the really bad, i.e., good stuff, because the goods advertised in the comics were often times, mere tenses intended to hook the amateured lad into the Catalog’s infinitely more twisted worlds. The Catalog offered you shotguns, live five-cent alligators, and fake rock-and-roll celebrity and volume after volume of every “ethnic” joke (to put it politely) in circulation.

“Let’s Make Whoopee” painted on it. It should have a swimsuit beauty and up its side: “I’m a real Wild Man.” The catalog promised that you could buy it.

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The Smarter Kid on Earth.

The question facing Jimmy is what he will do with his own feelings. He may see behind the confident and ugly faces his father wears, but will he be himself enough to meet such a task? This central question is what makes The Smarter Kid on Earth a superhero comic book at heart, and makes Jimmy Corrigan the most mainstream superhero in the history of comics.

If you think I am exaggerating for comic effect, you are only half right. I asked Chris about his novel's first three pages, which serve as a prelude to the first chapter and crossing "symphony." In this prelude we see a day from Jimmy's authentic childhood and the way in which a low-key, imitation Super-Man schlep and shaves Jimmy's mother—using the poor bastard as his unwary accomplice. "That's the allegorical core of the book, or something," Chris blushed. Then he muttered, "These are the only good pages in the entire book, anyway." The Vauvain doctor would have quashed about the symbols "linking in this, the embryo of the novel, between puffs on his cigar. Let us leave the decoding of symbols to others and look at the elements in this opening scene as mimetically. They do not represent something else, they are what they are, however, we can begin to see the "meaning" of the masked alleybird from this situation.

The Allegorical Core, or Something.

Little Jimmy fashions a mask for him- 22 self and drives it to an automobile show by his infantile mother so that Jimmy can meet his idol, the star of the novel, Super-Man. The auto show is an orgy of repressed sexuality, from the cars, named Sweet Six and named Sweet Sixteen, to the suave Gaye Car, to the sexy, Rexy Boy, to the sign overhead which screams, "Tower Show, "Muscles" and "Pumped Up!"

Little Jimmy,hta is but a baby, spreads her legs to the ceiling and curls her manicured hands around a massive tool. Amid this hypersexual tribute to men's internal combustion we see another kid, smirking hand in hand with his outfitted Pa, who is wearing a "Number One Dad" toot-shirt. Enter the Super-Man. "It's great to be hero," says the masked man to the indifferent crowd. "I just flew in but..." (if I can tell you, contains no introduction, no explanation, but is a receptacle for that unknown something of the universe, the cloud of timeless plane that is the sort of direct action male members of our species are supposed to know for taking. Bewildered, Jimmy goes to the back room where a Crowbroker borrows him with nonverbal advice about taking charges, getting the passy, and never letting chicks know that you are still wet when you were ticked off at least six times. "Chicks don't agg's that'n's for," says Jimmy's breezy bookworm. At the car show the automobile is more but the atmosphere is everywhere in the novel. So at least as familiar as the stuffy we've identified this mask as the Super-Man and the masks men wear to cover the question that does not actually mean to be a man. The answer, of course, is not to show emotion. It is to hide his inscape, but you must hide him. That is what the command. "Be a man!" literally means shut up and keep your feelings to yourself. This is why the phrase is belittled at any boy who cries or who really plays less than play football. It is a man in our culture's way of teaching you how to grow up, and every boy and girl traces on this degree as they grow. Some eventually grow away from the mask, a few discard it permanently, and most take it on as a crutch in social occasions. Enter Super-Man. Enter Super-Man meet of the Smarter Kid on Earth.

The Super-Man.

The funny thing is, that is what happens. If you read the true form of a comic book at heart, the Super-Man is reborn as the harmless baby who cries, in his case, a series of comics, collage, barithma, hotel, theatre stage—all of those at once, framed together by the comic book as a whole. Inside the box Cornell directed an ornate but unpretentious array of papers, even the comic book. Peer into Cornell's looking-glass and you will see exactly what "sense" to the open uncanvas of life, the only one that is good for the readers of the Smarter Kid on Earth.

A 23rd Special Report.

To his neighbor Joseph I. Cornell was nobody special. Born on Christmas Eve, 1903, Joe Cornell lived at home with his father and mother all his life in the same large white house in which he was beloved, handicapped brother and his nagging, smothering mother. Joe was a physical creature, by appearance very even though depressed. He never married and remained a virgin almost until the day he died. He was the smartest man in his family to bear the name Joseph I. Cornell, a lineage so裁ed by time that he never knew what his middle initial stood for.

Chris Ware has fashioned in his living room a shrine of sorts to honor Cornell and the unique, inventive, private life that Cornell shored up through its art. Like Cornell's famous boxes, Chris's shimmers of a sort, wooden boxlike filled with books about Cornell, aging photographs, and Cornell-inspired pieces given Chris by fellow admirers. Chris has arranged these elements so that they touch each other, not as carefully as Cornell arranged the ephemera with which he composed his own, three-dimensional, it has a literal depth that reaches the reach of the hands for which they were meant. Because Cornell's art is three-dimensional, it has a literal depth that cannot be captured by a camera's perspective. Cornell's boxes would steal Cornell's soul, and for that reason I have no inclination to include a gray scan of a photograph of Cornell, or to record a dime store which completely misses the influence on Chris is easy to see and is best ignored nostalgically. Visit the Art Institute of Chicago, an exhibition, it was the youngest tourists with whom I judged for space. The kids proved the glass cages surrounding Cornell's boxes and ignored them with their bare feet, 72 stimulated, while their bovine, shuffling parents wently administered to them keep moving. As the hn's admirers admit in their notes accompanying the collection, there is a irony in placing Cornell's works beyond the reach of the hands for which they were meant.

The FIRST REAL SUPERHERO. (Continued from page 1.)

Little Chris prepared for this inevitably by making a mask for himself. He pulled a tube sock over his head, wrapped his head in masking tape, then blacked it in the mask with a magic marker.

It was very disappointing," Chris concluded. "It's probably for a minute or two to feel complete and unstifled, dabbling in the reach of some such a virus, that's how I feel."

Since "God" does not exist, we must invent him, and Chris has continued his work in the beginning of the Acme Novelty Library, the younger, leaner Super-Man was all that I can think of. Chris does not have an Acme corporate spokesperson, a boss, a Dad, a God, a parody, naming for the sake of the name. His Big Book of Magic. "Man, you sure were a parale, weren't you?" As Chris is his own revered work. He asked me if creating this world brought out the soul in which. "Yeah," Chris told me, "you can do anything you want."

The FIRST REAL SUPERHERO.
Chris's megalithic mash note, at Quimby's Bookstore reveal that and leaves it at that. Moreover, sources that Chris's Emerson, Lake, and often only fleetingly touched upon in unadulterated devotion to a musical and a decided lack of pretension. His playing has an easy charm in virtuosity he makes up for in pas- protests too much. What Chris lacks "JOPLIN RAGS!" More often, I find a magic marker sign that screamed, "NO a time, when Chris and cartoonist two rooms over, diddling out James toon imprinted on the drum. ukulele with an "Oh! You Kid!" car- pick out a tune on a circa 1920 banjo Edison first committed them to wax. No matter which store we visit, the girls' dad each thirty-one-year-old man's body. In his possession—namely the spirit of a antique store provides a case for spirit -ing out for Tin Pan Alley—refine- Chas Century's "Grace & Beauty." Grace & Beauty is a book that has been around for over a hundred years, and it is the wellspring from which he plucked in soils somewhat better suited to commerce." The whited roses crowning Lambda's tombstone punctuate the metaphor. While most people's acquaintance with ragtime music is limited to the taxing backbeat and chug-chug melody of Marvin Hamlish's arrange- ment of "The Entertainer" (aka- "The Sting"), the "American Beauty" rag is something else entirely. It may sound, literally, identically similar to the ragtime tradition, then blub- bers over midway with all the breath- less and humdrum one expects from a piece of pre-World War I American music. A churning piece—one can hear its walls, its cor- toons, cartoonists, bagpipe players, and Dachshund with bowler hats. Metaphor steps in with the third meaning of the title: this strip is about the "American beauty" of ragtime music, and it is depicted on the cultural slag heap when it ceased push- ing out for Tin Pan Alley—refine- Chicago.—By a bizarre accident of Time Ephemeralist, ~1 7~
T H E R A G-T I M E E P H E M E R A L I S T

The Smarter Kid on Earth.

Wane's comics this mark the tragic mask of method or ad absurdum self-help. "Adults are always making things," as Chris told Gary Groth. "A superhero in such a great image becomes he's always hiding behind a mask." It is oddly appropriate that Jimmey's identity is revealed in the final panel of the final issue. The conclusion is quiet, unassuming, and thoughtful. It is naturally tinged to be the largest and best appreciated of the running gag jokes. Most histories of "early" American popular music tend to focus on the chronicling of jazz and blues, generally glossing over ragtime as a precursor or "pre-history" of the period under study. This is a pity. As the book concludes, "When you read truly good books you'll sometimes get a sense, just for a moment, of a particular place and time. I don't think movies are the best way to do this. They're the easiest way, but I'd like to do it with comics. "That's what's important in art," Chris concluded, "to communicate a sense of life."

The Haunted House.

The sky, the color of stone houses during the day, went dark and took the color from Chris's living room with it. The Beethoven had long since stopped turning on the stereo and the cats had grown bored and left the room. The twin eyes of my tape recorder spines and spins, taking in only the sigh of an inessential moment. I spent the last few minutes of the day trying to get the rhythms of conversation down because I think that's important, as important as what people actually say. That sounds really formalistic or something, but I do believe that, especially in the adult world. "I want somebody to read this book fifty years from now and get a vague hank of what it's like to be alive now. When you read truly good books you'll sometimes get a sense, just for a moment, of a particular place and time. I don't think movies are the best way to do this. They're the easiest way, but I'd like to do it with comics. "That's what's important in art," Chris concluded, "to communicate a sense of life."
EVERY READER OF THIS PERIODICAL WILL WANT TO HAVE THE SMARTEST KID ON EARTH. 28 Sales & 4 Deaths
MRS. VIRGINIA FAVORITES

A few days later he phoned me. "You're more depressed than I've been in ages,"

Chris paused for a breath. "You just caught me on one of those days when it's obvious to me that
goofing off and making enemies is easy."

Of course he has. That empty space is what allows him to hold an entire world within him.

SUGGESTED READING:

Iorchak's eyes narrowed to a sliver. "Dick" bracelet (773) 784-0745

I want to add THE IMP to the permanent collection of the State Historical Society's Library. Yours is one of the few comics that I have which I would consider "artistic" in the truest sense of the word. I have been a Dan Clowes fan for a long time, and I have always been impressed with his dedication to the craft. I am a firm believer in the viability of the comic book medium, and I believe that THE IMP is a work of art that deserves to be preserved. I would like to make a donation to support the acquisition of this comic book, and I am willing to pay any amount necessary to do so. Please let me know if there is anything else I can do to help.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
What I learned from CHRIS WAR E.

If you use a NON-PHOTO BLUE PENCIL, you don’t have to erase.

Draw in your SKETCHBOOK regularly and you will improve.

I suck.

STEAL FLAGRANTLY FROM YOUR INFLUENCES.

I sometimes get envious of Chris for creating a world so hermetically perfect. But then there’s the precise, that love, their journey through the depression—not for people—Jimmy Corrigan should be so lucky—but for a place. A grand and shaming, majestic city.

Even while his characters continue to stumble and fail, there is all that—background—to compare with.

And in the shadow of the gray, sometimes chilly beauty of the grand buildings of the city, Chris shows us what he has found, the secrets, the small lovely places.

And even if they only appear in the background of Jimmy Corrigan’s better life, they still give me the sense that, if Jimmy only paid attention, he would have so much more at his disposal.

The Chris Ware EXPERIENCE

by TERRY

Wow! You’re amazing!

No, I’m not!

I suck!

These are my comic collections, each over a different size and shape, and are displayed together on a cardboard stand that has a comic stack.

Here are a large quantity of sketchbooks, each filled with drawings, and comic panels beautifully rendered in a variety of media, brown marker, pen and ink.

This is a 2-to-1 scale model of my college studio, complete with small cardboard replicas of everything, but also in the world made in the same time as a gift to my grandparents.

Wow! You’re amazing!

No, I’m not!

I suck!

This is a mechanical cat head, mounted on an Edison phonograph-like, one base which is moved by an intricate system of wires when you turn a crank.