

## Powell's Bookstore

1501 East 57th Street  
828 South Wabash  
2850 North Lincoln Avenue



where  
academic  
books still  
have  
meaning

We Buy  
Books Too!

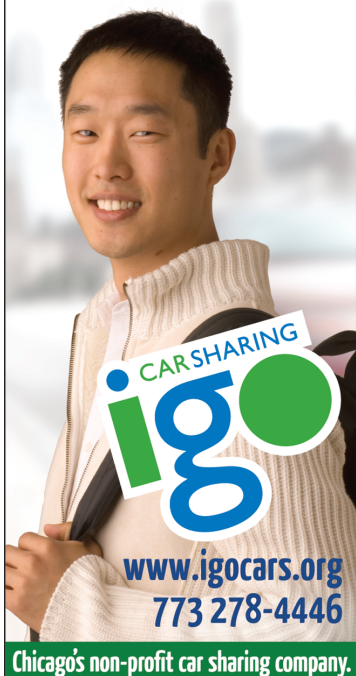
GET  
ON  
THE  
NEWCITY  
LIST

Free Email  
Newsletter

Special Events  
Invites

SIGN UP AT  
NEWCITY.com

Save Money.  
Simplify Your Life.



CAR SHARING  
**igo**

www.igocars.org  
773 278-4446

Chicago's non-profit car sharing company.

# chow



FOR YEARS, I'VE BEEN TELLING PEOPLE PETER BILLINGSLEY, THE ACTOR WHO PLAYED RALPHIE IN THE MOVIE "A CHRISTMAS STORY," WAS NOW A

**PORN STAR.** By the time my family was doped up on rum balls and snoring through their third viewing of the movie, I'd whip out the porn nugget and invariably win friends and influence people. In this age of Google, since no one ever called me on it, I thought it must be true.

If it wasn't bad enough that Billingsley's career had stalled worse than any child actor since Elliot from "E.T." (Gary Coleman and Webster don't count because they were already like 18), I'd also falsely grouped him with Ron Jeremy. I apologize, Pete. Turns out, maybe more appropriately, the kid who stuck his tongue to the frozen pole in the movie had worked in porn. I know this because "A Christmas Story" led me to a great meal on Christmas Eve this year, and while reading up for this column, I discovered the truth.

Porn mythology, Red Ryder BB guns and fishnet-clad leg-lamps aside, the real reason I adore the movie is because of the scene where, with traditional Christmas dinner ruined by hungry dogs, Ralphie and his family are forced to a solitary Chinese restaurant (inspired by the defunct Cam Lan in Hammond, Indiana, once a haunt of Al Capone) meal.

For me, it was the perfect foodie rebellion fantasy, an ideal alternative to being stuck wolfing down overcooked poultry and being regaled with lies (all the kids got 1600 SAT's and we're building vacation houses in Gstaad and Kabul) from the crazy aunt. The idea that I could forsake Christmas drudgery and instead eat a winter's hibernation-worth of MSG-laden goodies was genius. Having plenty of family committed to tradition, the idea remained a fantasy.

Then, last year, on Christmas night, after seeing "We Are Marshall" (Christmas movie viewings being a welcome family tradition, even if I tend to always get cowed by the female members of our clan into seeing Matthew McConaughey or Brad Pitt vehicles), I pleaded like a snot-nosed kid for my father-in-law to stop as we sped past countless Chinese restaurants.

Incredibly, our random stop landed us at the best Chinese restaurant in Lansing, Michigan, Fortune House (Not really "fortunate," as the place closed months after we dined). I can still taste the star anise in the egg roll as I write. Bathed in the glow of a neon "open" sign and hunkered down against a raging snowfall in a warm booth with my wife and in-laws while chowing down on beef and broccoli was everything I expected it to be. A tradition was born.

This year, we stayed in Chicago and met friends at the front door of Spring World, which has some of the best Yunnan-style funghi preparations and also maybe the best Kung Pao chicken in the city. At that moment, my friend realized that Spring World didn't serve liquor, and he really needed a beer. We figured we'd head down to the other end of the Chinatown mall to Lao Sze Chuan, but since it's revered by every food journalist in town, it's gotten more press than Brangelina and lines were out the door.

We headed across the street to Mandarin Kitchen (2143 South Archer). While the spot is also known for its soup dumplings and Shanghai treats, we opted for traditional hot-pot service. The stark dining room is filled with about ten tables, most outfitted with customers hunched over propane burners topped with roiling stockpots infused with a heady brew of cardamom, ginger, garlic and Szechuan peppercorn-infused broth. The meager air duct in the center of the drop ceiling ensures that a cloud of steam hangs over the room and your meal doubles as a pore-cleansing treatment.

We opted for a yin-yang combo of hellfire-spiced broth and a milder chicken-stock-style brew. We supplemented the broth with about thirty plates (this must be where they send the bad dishwashers of the world) that included tendon meatballs, head-on shrimp, a whole host of veggies (pea shoots were exceptional), won tons, scallion pancakes and fresh handmade noodles.

The noodles should not be missed. Likewise, while you can get regular meatballs, the airy texture of the tendon meatballs is better than your typical leaden fare. You should consider two orders of the crispy scallion pancake, as we blew through it in seconds. Plunging the fresh shrimp in the broth for a minute or so yielded tender, sweet pink flesh in a thin, crispy shell. You could peel them, but the shells are so thin, the crunchy counterpoint improves the crustacean. Likewise, you should definitely eat the briny, rich heads.

The hot-pot broth, which had been enriched by all the cooked vegetables and protein, was a sinus-clearing, body-warming and comforting elixir to end the meal. While my description here is compendious, the meal was eminently satisfying. Hopefully the bad luck that befell Fortune House isn't a pattern, because I'd really like Mandarin Kitchen to be part of my Christmas 2008 dining plan.

SLEDDING TO CHINATOWN  
FOR A HOLIDAY DINNER

## A Christmas Story

By Michael Nagrant

# museums

## MUSEUMS

### Field Museum

1400 S. Lake Shore (at Roosevelt), (312)922-9410.  
→ MAPS: FIND OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD.

Amidst the recent rise in popularity of Mapquest and the overwhelmingly intricate Google Earth, the Field Museum's simply titled "Maps" sets out to show that maps were once hand-written and delightfully flawed. Historical heavy-hitters like Charles Lindberg's New York-to-Paris flight chart and J.R.R. Tolkien's imaginary depiction of Minas Tirith highlight the exhibit, but nearly all the pieces exist within their own subjective realm. A February 1944 Los Angeles Times wartime graphic shows an arrow decorated in stars and stripes advancing on Hong Kong while hordes of bombs obliterate Tokyo, suggesting the Americans will have the Pacific war taken care of by the spring. Leonardo Da Vinci's subtle yet professional map of central Italy blurs the line between precise cartography and expressive art, as do most of the pieces, until the grand finale: six large touch-screen computerized maps of the world. It's bright, vivid and mind-numbingly accurate, but lacks the character of a crumpled and torn-up sheet with coffee stains or the boldness of a one-sided view of territorial boundaries (see John Mitchell's 1755 map of how colonial North America ought to look). When it comes to cartography, a little bit of bias makes the end result far more absorbing. (Andy Seifer) Through Jan 27. Hours: Daily 9am-5pm. Fees: \$12 adults, \$7 children 4-11, \$7 students & seniors. With Chicago ID: \$10, \$6 children, \$7 students & seniors.

### Museum of Science and Industry

57th and Lake Shore, (773)684-1414. → THE CANARY PROJECT, photography. With more than twenty poignant photographs on hand, "The Canary Project" isn't meant to scare the wits out of you, but rather give a tangible visual representation of the effects of global warming and what people are doing to try to deter the process. The name represents the efforts of the husband-and-wife team Edward Morris and Susannah Saylor in their attempt to be like canaries, which warn of deadly methane levels. The strength of the exhibit is in this underlying philosophy; it is simply a caution with perhaps a silver lining that lies within the recent efforts of many. Split in two halves, as it is separated by the main concourse of the museum, one half is dedicated to the silver lining—the recent efforts in attempts to halt the problem. On the other side lie photos showing its devastating effects. The photos were taken from all over the world, including some from our own back yard, with the green roof at Chicago's City Hall standing as one example. Elsewhere, there is a photo of a solar teapot in China, which warms the water using only solar energy. Inversely, one can see photographs of melting glaciers in Austria in addition to disrupted barrier reefs in Belize. The photos of the destruction are as chilling as the photos of the efforts in adapting to the climate changes are hopeful. What this exhibit lacks in size, it compensates by simply offering exquisite photos with some worthwhile additional information instead of solely overwhelming with scientific information. A very stark and simple gallery, indeed, but it leaves a lasting impact that perhaps should change the perspective of many. (Thomas Barbee) Through Feb 27. Hours: Mon-Sat 9:30am-5:30pm, Sun 11am-5:30pm. Fees: \$11, \$10 Chicago residents with ID; \$9.50 seniors 65+, \$8.75 city residents; \$7 children 3-11, \$6.25 city residents; children 3 and under & members free. Thu free. Omnimax, U-505 sub tour & CSI exhibit prices not included. Parking \$12 non-members.



AUTHOR VISIT



# Fight Night

**CATCHING UP WITH EUGENE ROBINSON REQUIRES A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF STAMINA.** The journalist, spoken-word artist, musician, mixed-martial-arts cage fighter and, most recently, author, has a pretty full plate. Last year alone saw the release of “The Narcotic Story,” a much-anticipated work from long-running art-rock phenomenon, Oxbow, a grueling tour itinerary and the release of Robinson’s first book, “Fight: Or, Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Ass-Kicking but Were Afraid You’d Get Your Ass Kicked for Asking” (Harper).

“It was an extremely packed year. I’ve gotten used to not getting a lot of sleep,” the new author admits via telephone from San Francisco.

Robinson was among the first journalists to write about mixed-martial-arts, a combat sport that has drawn comparisons to human cock-fighting, in a general interest publication—he’s penned articles on the subject for the LA Weekly and GQ and considers the book to be a “horse-in-the-car-scenario.” “For me, the horse is my involvement in the ‘shadowy realms’ of personal combat,” he explains. “The car is someone coming over later and saying, ‘You should really write a book about this.’ Researching at that point was just academic.”

At times taking a “How To” approach, “Fight” is hardly your mama’s coffee-table tome. Unless, of course, your mama enjoys the kind of reference that explains a knife has to be “longer than four inches to get through all the fascia, chest muscles and the rib cage and into the heart.”

This particular line didn’t sit well with the British Parliament, who immediately banned the Harper UK edition.

“The problem we have here with schoolyard shootings, they have there with schoolyard knifings,” says the author, who received notice from the British publishers with the warning, “If we put this book out, it will make the O.J. thing look like a tea party, you’ll be dragged in front of Parliament.” While UK residents can still buy the book online, it’s safe to assume that the controversy has had a major effect on across-the-pond sales.

Robinson’s rare solo appearance at the Empty Bottle is actually part of the book tour for “Fight” and a proper reading will take place at Quimby’s earlier in the evening. The Bottle set promises to be a chaotic, unnerving experience. Musical? Maybe. Intense? Likely. But Robinson himself doesn’t quite know what will happen. “It’s free form. I’m not interested in doing shtick.”

He says, with a laugh, “It is anarchy.” (*K. Tighe*)

*Eugene Robinson discusses “Fight” January 11 at Quimby’s, 1854 West North, (773)342-0940, at 6pm (free), and then performs at Empty Bottle, 1035 North Western, (773)276-3600, at 10pm, \$8.*

READINGS

THU/10

**Ilana Simons**  
The author discusses “A Life of One’s Own.”  
57th Street Books, 1301 E. 57th, (773)684-1300. 7pm. Free.

**Laura Caldwell**  
The author discusses “The Good Liar.”  
Barnes & Noble, 1441 W. Webster, (773)871-3610. 7:30pm. Free.

FRI/11

**➔ Eugene Robinson**  
See Author Visit. The author discusses “Fight.”  
Quimby’s, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 6pm. Free.

**Jami Attenberg**  
The author reads from “The Kept Man.”  
The Book Cellar, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665. 7pm. Free.

**Michael Ward**  
The author discusses “Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in C.S. Lewis’ Theological Imagination.”  
University of Chicago Swift Hall, 1025 E. 58th. 4:30pm. Free.

SUN/13

**➔Clive Barker**  
The artist and filmmaker signs his newest novel, “Mister B. Gone.”  
Packer/Schopf Gallery, 942 W. Lake, (312)226-8984. 1pm. Free.

**Michael Lowenthal**  
The author discusses his work as part of the “Writers on the Record with Victoria Lautman” series.  
Lookingglass Theater, 821 N. Michigan, (312)337-0665. 11:45am.

MON/14

**Michael Shermer**  
The bestselling author discusses his work.  
International House, 1414 E. 59th, (773)753-2270. 6pm. Free.

EVENTS

**Cocktails & Clay**  
Learn handbuilding techniques and play with clay; plus, DJs, dancing and drinks. Hyde Park Art Center, 5020 S. Cornell, (773)324-5520. Fri 8pm. \$15.

**Date and Dash**  
Book Cellar hosts a date-night for bibliophiles. The Book Cellar, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665. Sat 5:30pm. Free.

**Fun for All**  
A day of hands-on art activities, including collage, ceramics and sun prints, plus a scavenger hunt. Hyde Park Art Center, 5020 S. Cornell, (773)324-5520. Sun Noon. Free.

**Holiday Flower Show**  
Featuring poinsettias, Christmas trees and much more festive greenery. Garfield Park Conservatory, 300 N. Central Park, (312)746-5100. Thu 9am-8pm/Fri-Sun 9am-5pm. Free. Through Jan 13.

**Paws & Refresh**  
The Red Dog House’s annual event features reflexologist Nourhy Chiriboga, who will treat pets and their “people” to a de-stresser, using a variety of therapy methods. Red Dog House, 2031 N. Damen. Thu 5pm-8pm. \$10 donation.

**Uptown Poetry Slam**  
Marc Smith hosts the granddaddy of them all. Green Mill, 4802 N. Broadway, (773)878-5552. 7pm, \$6.

TALKS

THU/10

**Peter Sellars**  
As part of the U of C’s “Artspeaks Fellows Program,” the influential Sellars delivers a talk entitled, “Art and History.” Mandel Hall, 1131 E. 57th, (773)702-8068. 7:30pm.

## Justice, not Generosity

The way to end poverty

**HENRY GEORGE**  
SCHOOL OF CHICAGO  
[www.privilegesucks.org](http://www.privilegesucks.org)  
312-362-9302

**PAT'S PIZZA AND RISTORANTE**

2679 N Lincoln Ave  
773-248-0168

ORDER PAT'S PIZZA TODAY FOR SPECIAL VALUE

# \$5 off any \$20 order

Dining Room Only

Not Including Tax. Not Valid With Any Other Offer. One Coupon Per Table. Expires: Feb 29 2008

**Delivery Hours:**

Mon-Thurs. 3pm-11pm, Fri-Sat- 11am-12:30am, Sun- 11am-11pm

**Dining Room:**

Mon-Thurs- 4:30pm-10:00pm, Fri- 11am-11pm, Sat- 1pm-11pm, Sun-1pm-10pm