

SOCIAL INTERCOURSE

New Works

Runs from 28 August–22 September
FAB Gallery

Printmaker Osamu Matsuda spent most of last year on U of A soil as the international guest artist in residence, and now he's exhibiting a collection of his freshest pieces in this aptly titled show. He's probably been inspired by the students as much as they've learned from him—just like Robin Williams in *Dead Poets Society*.

Desiderada

With *Ghosthouse*, *Baby Control*, and *Animal Names*
31 August at 8pm
Starlite Room

Desiderada hail from the northern oilfields of Fort McMurray, where the Oil Barons play hockey and the recently expanded casino is called Boomtown. They managed to escape, however, and now reside in our far less crude metropolis. Signed to Champion City Records, the band's fresh off of a summer-long tour, and will be reminding their adopted hometown of the spastic-rock they brandish.



The Arrogant Worms with the ESO

Saturday, 1 September
\$17, Heritage Amphitheatre in Hawrelak Park

I don't know when I first heard the classic foot-stomper "The Last Saskatchewan Pirate," but I know that it burrowed into my head like, well, an arrogant worm. It resurfaces at the most inopportune of moments, eating away at my common sense and commanding me to hoot and holler, whether I'm in a movie theatre or a book store.

And just when I thought I'd managed to cure myself, the comedy-folk Worms are coming through town, again backed once more by the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. They get to make us all feel patriotic with tracks like "We Are the Beaver" while we giggle like idiots. Just be prepared to have the songs pop back into your head long after you leave the concert.

Afternoon Chess

Every Sunday from 2pm–10pm
Blackspot Cafe

How long has it been since you sat down and played a game of chess? Years? Well, the Blackspot Café is giving you chance to shake off your rusty queen-based strategies with weekly chess match-ups. The atmosphere's intended to be casual, more like a club and less like a tournament with the emphasis placed on "having a good time" rather than "crushing your opponents repeatedly until they cry."

The level of competition you'll face will obviously depend on who shows up, but it's co-sponsored by a group called the Roving Chessnuts, who can probably whip your sorry ass into submission with a single bishop. But on the bright side, you can leech their strategies, hone your skills, and then come home and finally beat dad at his favourite game.

Stanley written for the urban city that doesn't have a voice

The Book of Stanley

Written by Todd Babiak
Available now

RENATO PAGNANI
Arts & Entertainment Staff

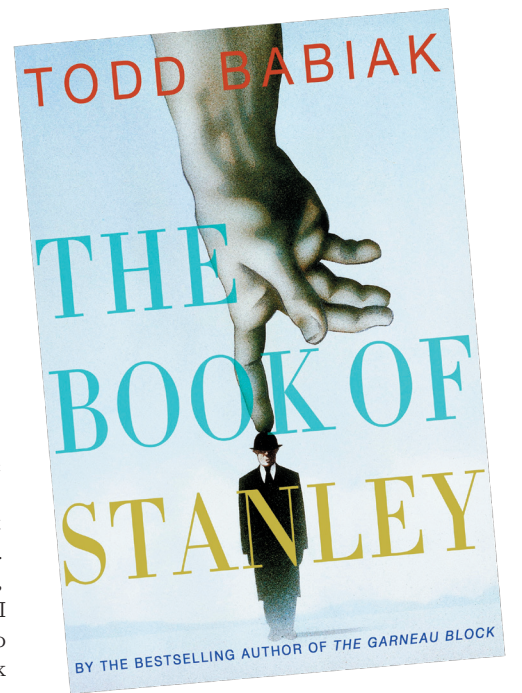
Edmontonians suffer from an inferiority complex—at least, that's what Todd Babiak figures. The local author and *Edmonton Journal* columnist has no other explanation for why writing about his hometown might be considered a gimmick to some—including critics who panned his last novel, *The Garneau Block*, for being too "Edmonton-centric."

"With cities like Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver, we're so new that we just know we're not world-class cities yet," Babiak reasons. "I grew up reading books set in Paris and New York that included all types of names of streets and locations. And to see [Edmonton] in print is, I think, freakish for people. Some people who didn't like *The Garneau Block* thought, 'Oh, he's just writing about local stuff too much and making an obsession of it,' when all I was doing was writing an urban novel."

The Garneau Block premiered in serial format in the *Edmonton Journal* in 2005 before being published as a standalone novel the following year. It was the first serial novel published in a Canadian newspaper, and the fact it was set in Edmonton was crucial to the book's theme of mythic power in a city.

"I think the urban reality in Alberta has been ignored," Babiak notes. "We're the most urban province in Canada, statistically, yet our mythology and the way that we think of ourselves is primarily rural. Our political power centre is rural Alberta, and our population lives in urban Alberta. I think it's been a clever trick by people who want to maintain the status quo, to talk about this place as though we're an agricultural or natural resource sort of province, not only economically, but spiritually and mythically. I don't know anyone who lives in rural Alberta anymore. I grew up in Leduc, and I have no connection to that anymore. It's as urban a place now as anywhere in Canada, and we just don't tell stories about it, and I think as more and more people do, it'll stop seeming like a gimmick."

Babiak's new novel, *The Book of Stanley*, is a satiric look at modern organized religion that's once again set in Edmonton, but is situated also "partly



in Banff, partly in Montreal, partly in Saskatoon, and partly in Vancouver." And just like its predecessor, it was serialized—this time in both the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald*—before being published as a book on its own, something Babiak was happy to do again for a number of reasons.

"In the 19th century, it was always the way writers published their books," Babiak explains. "Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, Dostoevsky, George Eliot—they always published their books in newspapers first, for financial reasons. It's a way to reach an audience, and having it serialized develops a relationship with readers that is unique to the format."

The University of Alberta alumnus also understands that satirizing religion is something he might catch some flack for, but doesn't seem to mind the potential backlash.

"I think it's the job of art, to ask these questions," Babiak argues. "There's nothing in *The Book of Stanley* that says, 'Religion is wrong' or 'Your religion is wrong.' It's just asking questions, really. The job of a book, certainly one about religion, is to keep it all open: the beautiful and, well, the less beautiful."

"Some of the reviews I've read already, they almost always mention that it's going to be insulting to some people—and it will be—but I don't try to think of it as insulting so much as raising questions about a fundamental

aspect of our lives that is both beautiful and horrible at the same time." Babiak adds. "I think that the cliché, 'Don't talk about politics or religion at the dinner table,' holds true with a lot of folks still."

Since the novel was serialized, Babiak has gone back and reworked some of it, changing things he felt didn't work, and adding aspects he had to skirt around for the family-orientated newspapers it was published in—like instances dealing with sexuality and language.

"I think if you've read the serial version, you should still buy nine of the books for your family and friends," Babiak laughs.

Unless, of course, the City of Champions just seems too prosaic for a whole novel to be set in. But judging from the overwhelmingly positive response both *The Garneau Block* and *The Book of Stanley* garnered during their serial runs, you'd be alone in that thought.



MIKE OTTO

PAUL BLINOV

Because Jonn's climbing Everest or something