

# noted

→ Columbia College Chicago faculty members **Mort Castle** and **Sam Weller** edited the upcoming collection, “Shadow Show: All-New Stories in Celebration of Ray Bradbury.” The anthology features 26 stories by authors including **Margaret Atwood**, **Neil Gaiman**, **Alice Hoffman**, **Jacquelyn Mitchard**, **Dave Eggers** and **Audrey Niffenegger**, who’s also a faculty member at Columbia College Chicago. Bradbury, a Waukegan native, died this month.

→ “A Killing in the Hills,” the new novel by Chicago Tribune Cultural Critic **Julia Keller**, was named a Publishers Weekly’s Pick of the Week. The novel revolves around Carla Elkins, a teenager who witnesses the murder of three men. Publishers Weekly praised Keller’s depiction of Appalachia as well as her character development: “Some characters turn out to be better than they appear, some much worse, but the ensemble cast is unforgettable. So is this novel.” The novel is due out in August.

→ **David Carani’s** story, “The Paradise Aperture,” was recently anthologized in “L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future Volume XXVIII.” Carani grew up in Park Ridge and lives in Palatine. An illustration by Chicago-based artist and writer **Rhiannon Taylor** was published in the same collection.

→ The June issue of Poetry magazine will feature pieces by local writers **Stuart Dybek**, **Naomi Beckwith** and **Paul Durica**. **Will Oldham**, whose record label, Drag City, is based in Chicago, and Will Butler, a member of Arcade Fire and graduate of Northwestern University, also have poems in the issue.

→ “P.S. I Still Hate it Here: More Kids’ Letters from Camp” edited by **Diane Falanga** was recently released. A sequel to her first anthology, “P.S. I Hate it Here: Kids’ Letters from Camp,” the book is a humorous collection of real letters written by kids ages 8-16 about their away-camp experiences. Falanga lives in Wilmette.

→ “The Trinity Game,” a new mystery from former private investigator and Columbia College graduate **Sean Chercover**, will be released July 31. Local author Marcus Sakey will interview Chercover during the book’s launch party on Aug. 7 at The Hidden Shamrock.

→ **Steve Fiffer** and **Keiler Roberts** collaborated on “Arctic Bears Chase,” a recently released children’s book.

→ **Recently self-published:** “Backseat” by **Tom Wascoe** and “What’s Going on at the Montcliff?” by **Linda Stone**.

— Courtney Crowder

*Do you have literary news to share? Let us know at [printersrow@tribune.com](mailto:printersrow@tribune.com).*



## In a lowbrow spirit?

Jay Ruttenberg will host readings and musical performances during The Lowbrow Reader Variety Hour at 9 p.m. July 5, The Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia; \$10.

Andrew A. Nelles/  
photo for the  
Tribune

# Finding the art in toilet jokes

BY COURTNEY CROWDER

A 1995 Chicago Tribune film review described the comedy “Billy Madison” as “a highly innocuous piece of cinematic shoe gum specifically designed to showcase the limited and uninspiring talents of Adam Sandler.”

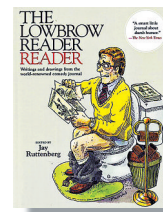
The introduction to “The Lowbrow Reader Reader,” a collection of stories from the comedy journal The Lowbrow Reader, calls the film a “masterpiece.”

“I say that without any irony,” said Jay Ruttenberg, a 36-year-old Highland Park native who founded The Lowbrow Reader. “I am a big fan of the Marx brothers, and I feel like ‘Billy Madison’ is one of the only contemporary movies that has a similar type of comedy and maybe even a similar Jewish sensibility. It seems like a dumb movie, but it’s a really smart movie.”

Ruttenberg has created a lowbrow safe space where like-minded fans can chuckle over dirty jokes, viral videos and the genius of Gene Wilder films. Here is an edited version of our conversation with Ruttenberg, who spoke to us by phone from his Manhattan apartment.

**Q: Where did the concept for The Lowbrow Reader come from?**

A: I’ve always had this idea to start a zine about comedy because I felt there was such a dearth of good writing about comedy, especially lowbrow comedy. Like I said, my favorite movie is “Billy Madison.” It was a film that was beloved by younger people, but slaughtered



## ‘The Lowbrow Reader’

By Jay Ruttenberg  
101 Distribution,  
297 pages, \$19.95

by critics. I wanted to create a forum where lowbrow art and entertainment could be addressed in what I hoped was an intelligent way.

**Q: Where did you get your humor?**

A: Mike Royko was a huge influence on my comedic sensibility. In general, my favorite comedy is really mainstream stuff. I think Chris Rock is the greatest comedian in America right now. I also really like Larry David because he basically created a new map for comedy. My mom is pretty funny too. Joan Rivers reminds me a lot of my mom in that they both say things that can be perceived as mean, but are really just funny.

**Q: Why did you decide to use Chicago-based publisher Drag City?**

A: Drag City has been my favorite cultural company since I was in college. I got to know them through their record label when I was writing for my college paper. I wrote to them about the book first. The second they said yes, that was case-closed.

**Q: One of the trademarks of The Lowbrow Reader is the use of scato-**

**logical humor on the cover of every issue. What’s up with that?**

A: I had the idea for the first cover of the guy sitting on the toilet using Burberry-pattern toilet paper. The economy was doing really well in 2000, and it seemed like Burberry patterns were everywhere. It was supposed to be a funny, one-off joke. But when John Mathias turned the illustration in, it was so great that we decided to have some kind of toilet joke on every cover.

**Q: You wrote about music for more than 10 years at Time Out New York. Do you think there is a connection between comedy and music?**

A: Yes, definitely. You can distinguish between different eras of comedy by rhythms, which are influenced by the music of the time. Truly funny music is ... really rare and really hard to pull off. The Beastie Boys did a good job of it. They were very serious about what they were doing, but there was still a lightness and humor to their work.

**Q: Do you worry about becoming too highbrow?**

A: I like highbrow comedy. Middlebrow is what I hate. If I started a middlebrow reader it would be called O, The Oprah Magazine. Middlebrow is just the worst of our culture; it’s what gets Mitt Romney elected. I believe that there are interesting, smart things happening on both the high end and the low end of culture. The best comedy is actually the stuff that mixes the two ends of culture.