

# The New York Times

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## A Magazine Challenges The Big Boys

There is a room in our house where time has been stopped. There are no flat-panel TVs, no docking stations for the iPod, and no keyboards save my wife's ac-

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### THE MEDIA EQUATION

— cordion. In that room — the quaint description is "living room" — there is a large comfortable chair, a good lamp, and a magazine rack groaning with the fruits of American journalism. Almost every day, I drop a magazine there or a longer newspaper article, with the best intention of getting to it when things slow down a bit.

The bounty is undeniable. There are nutritious morsels there — a piece in the Columbia Journalism Review calling for a nonprofit newspaper model, a Fortune article about a high-powered chief executive who regrets his ruthlessness on the way to the top, and a New York Times Magazine article on Hugo Chávez's brand of nationalization.

Less topically, there is Esopus, an engrossingly eclectic publication that deconstructs crossword puzzles and a copy of the shooting script for "A Short Film About Andy Warhol." And there are less weighty delights, like Blender's take on the greatest 100

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*Reading matter piles up at home, but The Week is read.*

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indie-rock albums and Esquire's declaration that Charlize Theron is the Sexiest Woman Alive.

But I have not sat in that chair for a month. Like most Americans, I am overwhelmed by the velocity of everyday life and the volume of media that goes with it.

Last Friday, a respite finally came with the holiday weekend, and I lit a fire and made a nice cup of coffee. But before I dug into that ever-growing pile, I grabbed a laptop just to check on a few things at work. Two hours later, I came to, having tripped across some a compelling video with Holly Hunter made in support of the writer's strike, watched Howard Stern go ninja on a paparazzo, and a montage of the best saves of the week by NHL goalies. The fire had burned down, dinner was calling, and the magazines, a glorious stack of them, remained untouched.

Perhaps it is a personal problem, one born of having the attention span of a gnat and being too jacked-in for my own good. Yes, I keep The New Yorker on my nightstand, and when it's time to cook, I page through Cook's Illustrated in search of something to make, but in general, I seem to be losing the magazine habit.

Felix Dennis, the British raconteur who brought the world the lad magazine Maxim, has my back. His magazine The Week riffs through all the content in the known universe and digests it into a form that can be disposed of in 20 minutes.

Last week, the power grab by Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan was boiled to a few hundred words, name-checking (and grabbing content) from The Weekly Standard and The Economist, along with The Boston Globe and The Washington Post. That way, when I go to a dinner

## A Slender Newsmagazine Challenges the Big Boys

From First Business Page

party tomorrow night and Benazir Bhutto's steadfast opposition to his use of mass arrests to maintain power comes up, I can sound as if I actually made my way though that stack.

Recession, the presidential candidacy of Rudolph Giuliani and soccer hooligans in Italy all get the same short-form, high-density treatment. Rather than inveighing against the Web's hit-and-run informational ethos, Mr. Dennis has rendered it corporeal, producing a 42-page primer on the week that was, without getting bogged down in, or even acknowledging, the details.

A success in Britain, the American version of The Week has posted double-digit growth in the last eight reporting periods of the Audit Bureau of Circulations. It has hit a nerve, coming at a time when the familiar American newsweeklies are struggling to maintain their footprint.

Newsweek, for example, announced this month that it was cutting almost a fifth of its circulation, dropping its rate base from 3.1 million to 2.6 million. The Week is tiny by comparison, with a total circulation of just under that same half a million that left Newsweek, but Mr. Dennis is convinced that the format will counteract industry trends.

"The Week is going to be a huge global brand. Cross my heart and hope to die, I have already been offered hundreds of millions of dollars for it," he said this month, sitting in the sun at the Terrace Club in Midtown Manhattan. "If Henry Luce were to come back from the dead and was offered any magazine as a reward for coming back from the dead, I think he'd say he'd take The Week, because his first idea was doing exactly what this magazine does. His original idea was offering readers of précis of what was happening around the world in a given week."

Mr. Dennis recently sold the American version of Maxim, a juggernaut that was showing the strains of increasing competition. Given that he was pulling back in the United States, why not just add The Week to the sale?

"I will throw The Week onto no pile until it becomes a half a billion or billion-dollar franchise,"

he said. "The Week is my baby."

He also believes he can get a toehold in the newsweekly market because, he says, the established players Time, Newsweek and U. S. News & World Report have lost touch with the news.

"Golfing for Cats With Jesus Who Has Cancer" is not something that people need to know about," he said. The Week is all news, all the time, with editors who comb publications and republish annotated accounts from a disparate group of sources. Not only does it have the editorial reach of the Web, but it has the same significant cost benefits because most of the data and reporting are borrowed.

Throughout his career, Mr. Dennis has railed against the wobbly circulation economics of an industry built on maintaining a rate base for advertisers at whatever cost to the consumer.

"They forgot about the reader. Publishers got fat with their cigar-smoking, suspender-snapping, breast-beating, with the huge lunches and all of the lying about their circulation," he said. "Excess should be a personal thing, not how you run an industry."

Mr. Dennis knows about excess. In addition to being a publisher, he is also a published poet whose does his book tours by personal jet and spends much of his time in an enclave on the exclusive southern Caribbean island of Mustique. But he is not nearly so profligate when it comes to making a newsweekly. A planned version of The Week in the East will have five editors in Australia and one-man bureaus in Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand. William Falk, the editor of The Week here, came along for lunch and confirmed that they put out the magazine with a total of only 15 editors.

"The American magazine industry has been massively over-staffed for years and years. It is one of the most inefficient businesses in the history of the world. And you know what? The chickens are coming home to roost," Mr. Dennis said. "They can sit around the campfire listening to the scary noises out in the dark, wondering where it all went, but what I would suggest is that they take some of the chickens, skin 'em, and stick 'em on the campfire and start eating."

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