

THE X WORD

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Crosswords have never been cool, exactly. A rigid structure defined by expectations - crosswords are everything the alternative press once avoided, but that's true for so many things. Ann Landers fades to Dan Savage. Life Is Hell elbows Family Circus out the door. Horoscopes are tweaked, classified ads grow ever more bizarre and the alternative press becomes, simply, the press for a new generation.

Meanwhile, the crosswords stay the same, printing watered-down facsimiles of franchised puzzles that haven't changed a clue in decades.

The X Word isn't new, exactly, it's just a little better. Rigorously edited to time-honored specifications, **The X Word** throws together general knowledge, wordplay and pop culture references that actually apply to the popular culture - all unified within a witty, sardonic, authorial tone.

Jay Horton, freelance writer and music critic, began a series of local-music-themed crosswords for Portland, Oregon's *Willamette Week* five years ago, and their success led to the creation and development of The Napster Crossword. Hailed by the *New York Times* (10/30/03) as one of the most notable features of the website's commercial launch, Horton crafted puzzles that depended upon a knowledge of rock and rock culture from the audience as well as a respect for crossword standards and desire to have a bit of fun along the way.

The X Word continues that framework and expands the scope beyond music. Designed by accomplished poster-artist Scott Nasburg to blend the traditional grid with a ragged punk aesthetic, **The X Word** delivers a unique graphic vision that never sacrifices usability. It can be difficult - equivalent to a Thursday Times puzzle, say - but the look and uncensored wit should attract newcomers as quickly as the inventive clues and attention to detail rewards the crossword faithful.

It's an art like any other, really - intrigue, suspension, release - and crosswords date back to the earliest days of newspapers. They've both survived for a reason, but the puzzles haven't always kept pace. A new sort of press deserves a new sort of crossword.