

# WEEKEND JOURNAL.

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Friday, February 8, 2008 **W1**

## REVIEW: FILM

### 'In Bruges' Gives Hit-Man Saga Humor and Heart Gangster Film Sparked By Farrell's Comic Turn; Charming 'Band's Visit'

BY JOE MORGENSTERN

**I**N BRUGES takes place, yes, in Bruges, a Belgian city rich in medieval architecture and gothic arches. I say this, perhaps archly, because archness can be an affliction in the movie's whimsical-gangster genre, an increasingly absurdist form in which eccentric thugs spout elaborate language while behaving outlandishly and, of course, shooting people to death. This film follows the form in its fashion. The heroes are two hit men, and the tone is often absurdist. But the film is also very funny and surprisingly affecting.

It was written and directed by Martin McDonagh, whose background helps explain the distinctive quality of this debut feature. An Anglo-Irish playwright with a fondness for mingling humor, horror and violence, Mr. McDonagh won an Oscar last year for "Six Shooter," a coolly—and rather cruelly—calculated short, with Brendan Gleeson as a man who's just lost his wife. "In Bruges" is calculated too, but with a lively wit, a generous spirit and a warmth that plays well against its cleverness.

The hit men, Colin Farrell's Ray and Mr. Gleeson's Ken, have been sent to Bruges after botching a job in London. Their instructions are to wait—not for Godot, though there's a bit of that feeling, but for further instructions from Harry, their boss. Ken may be an accidental tourist, but he's a happy one, eager to see the sights and steep himself in the city's history. Ray, beetle-browed and beady-eyed, is terminally bored by the city's slow pace, and unsettled by the close proximity of Culture. "History," he says, "is just a lot of stuff that's already happened."

For a while the movie promises to be an Odd Couple comedy turning on the question of whether Ken will bring Ray around to the pleasures of a civilized life. Mr. Gleeson's role fits him like a rough-suede glove—he was a teacher before he turned to films—and Mr. Farrell, in case you've forgotten after his mixed successes as a leading man, is an extraordinarily accomplished comic actor. But the writer-director, Mr. McDonagh, has much more on his mind, and he takes "In Bruges" in a couple of different, complementary directions.

In one of them, Ray goes off on his own tour of Bruges, an antic odyssey during which he mistakes a movie set for the real world, karate-chops a racist dwarf and finds a baffling version of his true love, a woman named Chloë (lovely work by Clémence Poésy), who is not, but also is, the person she seems to be. In other words, Ray discovers his own version of the good life, which means coming to terms with who he is, and with a particularly bad thing that he's done.

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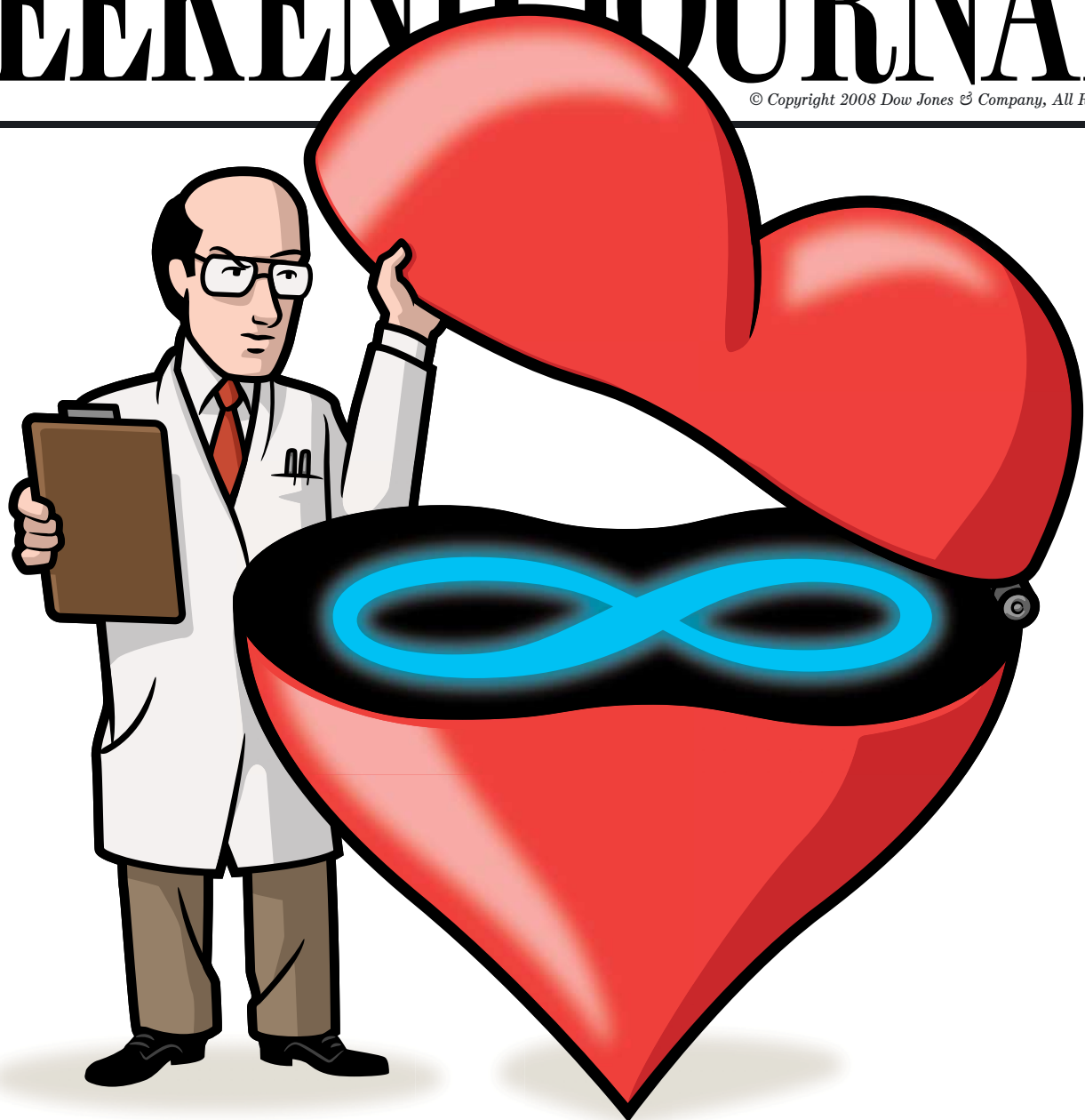
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# Keeping Love Alive

Neuroscientists are probing why some married couples can maintain the spark for years.

By Sam Schechner

**A**NN TUCKER is pushing a shopping cart through the produce section of a supermarket in Plainview, N.Y., when she turns to kiss her husband. The supermarket kiss is a regular ritual for the Tuckers. So are the restaurant kiss and the traffic-light kiss. "I guess we do kiss a lot," says Mrs. Tucker, a 39-year-old mathematician at a money-management firm.

Mrs. Tucker is living happily ever after, and scientists are curious why. She belongs to a small class of men and women who say

they live in the thrall of early love despite years of marriage, busy jobs and other daily demands that normally chip away at passion.

Most couples find that the dizzying, almost-narcotic feeling of early love gives way to a calmer bond. Now, researchers are using laboratory science to investigate Mrs. Tucker and others who live fairy-tale romances. The studies could help reveal the workings of lifelong passion and perhaps one day lead to a restorative.

Philosophers and writers have

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## HOME FRONT



High-end summer rentals hold steady despite housing woes, but the middle softens. **W8**

## ADVISER



One of Ireland's most popular bands is looking to stake its claim in the U.S. **W2**

## THE DRIVER'S SEAT



Subaru's Impreza WRX may stint on creature comforts, but not on sportiness or speed. **W6**

## TELEVISION



Fiennes and Sarandon electrify 'Bernard and Doris,' says Dorothy Rabinowitz. **W9C**

## Plus

**TASTINGS:** Austrian reds offer a taste of adventure .....**W4**

**BOOKS:** Casting doubt on the virtue of happiness .....**W5**

**HOUSE OF THE WEEK:** A hotelier's Ibiza hideaway ...**W8**

Christoph Niemann

## THEATER



Break an ivory leg. Moby Dick hits the road. **W7**

## HOLLYWOOD REPORT

### Who Wants to Take a Polygraph?

#### Amid Strike, Networks Struggle To Cast More Extreme Reality Shows

BY REBECCA DANA

**I**T'S ONE THING to find someone who wants to be a millionaire. It's another to find someone who will strap herself into a polygraph machine and tell 23 million home viewers plus a live studio audience, including her husband, whether she thinks her troubled marriage will survive another five years.

Television producers are facing unforeseen challenges in casting this season's new crop of oddball reality shows, some rushed into production because of a shortage of scripted material created by the Hollywood writers' strike. Even when the strike is resolved, the networks' appetite for reality shows is likely to continue rising. Ratings are relatively high for some shows in the genre and they are cheap to make compared to scripted programming.

But there's a problem: Great oddballs are hard to find. As reality shows



Cheap to make, trickier to cast: from left, 'Battle of the Bods' and 'Deal or No Deal'

with more straightforward premises, such as "Survivor" and "American Idol," have shown their age in recent years, the broadcast and cable networks have reached for more outlandish concepts to keep viewers tuning in. The new shows call for large casts

of mothers, fathers, children, dogs, D-list celebrities, jovial fat people, ripply-muscled athletes, exhibitionists, bisexuals, sheriffs-in-training and self-identified "rednecks." They're all willing to air their deepest secrets on national TV—in the case of that mar-

ried woman, on Fox's new hit series "The Moment of Truth"—for a shot at some prize money and a few minutes of fame.

To fill all the spaces on these shows, the small group of TV producers who specialize in casting reality programs have begun adopting unconventional strategies. They troll social networking sites to find teens; call the parents of child athletes and scholars featured in small hometown newspapers; and interview potential contestants' family members, ex-spouses and high school teachers to feel out their personal histories and psychological profiles.

Because viewers demand on-screen romance—and it isn't always so easy to orchestrate—the producers of CBS's "Big Brother" series added another layer to their casting process this year. They gave all potential contestants a "love match profile" and then cast the contestants in pairs based on people who were closely

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