

# MiNT *Express*

## A Review of "Tracers"

Fall 2004 Volume 1

by Mark Pifher

One Tuesday night, a couple weeks back, a friend and I made our way to Brodie Hall for a showing of *Tracers*. Because of the Vietnam War theme, I had some reservations about going to the show, since I myself am a veteran of the Army. I completed a five-year contract, some of which I spent in Colombia and Honduras. Perhaps even more important, my father is a Vietnam veteran, so I grew up in the presence of strong feelings about the war.

While perusing the program before the play began, I read the two poems within: "Victory" and "Anthem for Doomed Youth." A vague, foul feeling bubbled up in my gut, but the irritation began to subside when I read the "Debt of Gratitude." In it, the director, Randy Barbara Kaplan pointed out she had received much help from Jeff Dean, a student and former Marine; and Tony Cappella, a Vietnam vet. With that knowledge, I suddenly felt much better, so I sat back and eagerly awaited the show.

The first part of *Tracers* sat very well with me. I could certainly relate to irritating questions from folks who can hardly imagine a strange experience in a far and foreign land. I often smiled as I was reminded of the peculiar military lingo, which once was so

ready on my tongue. I respected the actors in the basic training sequence, as I can recall how often I'd poured out sweat in the midst of shouts from angry NCOs in the sweltering Texas heat. I let out more than one chuckle at Michel D. Porters' performance as Sergeant Williams, though I seem to recall my Drill Sergeants as much angrier, and far louder.

Things took a wicked turn at the end of the first battle scene when one of the soldiers cut off a Viet Cong soldier's ear as a souvenir. Why was this necessary? A searing, nearly violent anger immediately rose within me. This is the most vicious and terrible stereotype attached to the Vietnam soldier. I am not implying these sorts of horrific actions never transpired in Vietnam, but to include this in the story of an otherwise seemingly normal character is an atrocious contribution by the playwrights. Then, to leave that action unexplained, with hardly an eyebrow raised by his fellow soldiers, one is left to conclude that this is a vile and morbid troop and that it is representative of the fighting American youth in Vietnam. It takes a seriously disturbed individual to commit such an act, and to leave the disturbed side of the character largely unexplored

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## KanJam

by Ivan Cash

A new, fun, exciting, and easy-to-learn game is taking SUNY Geneseo by storm. KanJam is a hybrid version of Frisbee and golf, requiring two teams of two people. There are two official "KanJam" buckets about 30 ft. apart. A person from each team stands by each bucket. The object of the game is to reach 21 points before your opponents do. Scoring sounds complicated at first, but it is easy to pick up after playing a single game.

To begin, a player throws the disc toward the opposite can where his or her teammate is. While the disc is still in the air, the teammate tries to "jam" the disc into the can for 3 points. If the teammate misses the "jam," but hits the side of the can with the disc, that team receives 1 point. If the disc hits the can without aid from the teammate, the team receives 2 points. There is a slot located on the side of each can. If the thrower can get the disc in the slot, that team automatically wins! The same rule applies if the thrower can get it in the can without the partner touching the disc.

This game is easy to learn, fun to play, and a great way to get your competitive juices flowing. So next time you see a KanJam game being played on campus, ask to join. KanJam is also a great way to meet new people! For more information, check out <http://www.kanjam.com/>.



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# Tales of a Frustrated Democrat

by Mark Thiehl

There I stood, on March 12th, excited beyond all reasonable expectations at the prospect of exercising my recently granted voice in our democracy. The poll worker told me that since they were experiencing lower-than-expected voter turnout for the New York State Primary, I could have the entire sheet of "I Voted Today" stickers; it was my first time voting, after all. This moment stands, well preserved in my mind, as the last time in recent memory that I have been genuinely excited about politics.

My excitement stemmed from the discovery of a politician who struck me as genuinely progressive. He supports, among other things, instant runoff-voting, abolition of the death penalty, and repealing free trade agreements that encourage the outsource obsession of corporations. But what surprised me even more than finding a candidate who eloquently represented most of what I believe in, was finding this candidate in the Democratic Party.

Of course, by the time I was voting in my state's primary, the media had long ago anointed my preferred candidate, Dennis Kucinich, as an irrelevant long shot, a sentiment echoed in the early primaries and caucuses. Believing that the primaries are for voting one's conscience and not for, as *The Daily Show* once described John Kerry, the "least objectionable alternative," I still cast my vote for Kucinich. He was after all, the overwhelming reason I had registered as a Democrat (An "Elect Dennis J. Kucinich" poster hangs over my bed as a constant reminder of this.).

Having already realized that the Democrats, in their never-ending quest to pander to moderate "swing" voters, would never

embrace a progressive Kucinich-esque candidate for President, hope for at least a somewhat progressive nominee rested in Howard Dean, the "Peace Candidate." But the overplayed clip of Iowa scream killed any chance of him receiving the Democratic nod for President.

The disappointment of the primary season set up a nifty 1 dilemma for progressives nationwide. At best, a Kerry victory would be bittersweet for progressives. His victory would all ensure his nomination in 2008, leaving me to wait until 2012 another chance to nominate – probably unsuccessfully – a truly progressive Democrat for President.

Don't get me wrong, Kerry would represent more than just a marginal upgrade over George W. Bush, but he is still a candidate who voted for the Iraq War and the Patriot Act (the fact that he opened the second debate with a ringing endorsement of the erosion of civil liberties still has me shaking my head). What to do? Do I give in to the Democrats' bullying and vote for the lesser of two evils, or should I vote for the candidate who most accurately represents me?

What scares me is the prospect of being forced into making this concession year after year. A part of me believes that if the Democrats had nominated someone like Kucinich—whose platform aligns itself almost perfectly with Ralph Nader's—then the independent candidate may have thought twice before jumping into the race. If I trust that the Democrats have learned their lesson—both this time around and from the 2000 election—then maybe, just maybe, I'll stomach voting for John Kerry. If not, it seems I'll be doomed to a life of hopelessly voting for irrelevant, yet inspiring, "fringe" candidates.

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conveys a message that is not only unjust, but irresponsible and inexcusable.

Throughout the second half of *Tracers*, I was continually impressed by the performances of the actors. In particular, I thought Kyle R. Camping delivered a powerful rendition of the Dinky Dau Character's reaction to a "Dear John" letter he received. But as the performance went on, the plot became too thick. The insistence on following every character led to focus on no one. Problems were heaped onto the soldiers just to bring about the most dysfunctional squad imaginable. As the plan to portray every single character as seriously deranged became clear, anger began to well up in me once more.

When the lights came on I felt like knocking somebody's lights out— I really did. But I figured that if I gave into a blind rage, demanding answers from those responsible for the injustice I perceived, I would only be validating the picture of demented, irrational veterans *Tracers* had drawn. So I contained myself, and walked out silently instead.

As we made our way to the car, I could barely talk. I was still mad as hell, but mostly I felt betrayed and dejected for my brothers in arms: those soldiers who returned from Vietnam dishonored by terrible rumors. I recalled my father's stories of returning home

from a year in the jungle, only to be spit on and denounced as a baby killer. I wanted to call him to apologize for the actions of degenerates, and to express my gratitude for his thankless service.

At first, I could see no reason for putting on a play that depicts all soldiers who went to Vietnam as unprofessional, halfcocked, drugged out, vicious, madmen. I certainly know this to be an inaccurate representation of the Vietnam veteran. I need only to go with my father to one of his Vietnam veteran's meetings at the VFW for proof of that.

As I drove home, I wondered about the political motivations. Why else would this show come up now? I felt terrible about the implications. Perhaps folks will come away thinking that our soldiers over in Iraq are composing themselves like that. As a friend of some of the boots on the ground over there in the desert, I can most certainly disagree. The true backbone of the military is its core values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. These are the things I took away from the military, and these are the things *Tracers* chose to utterly ignore about the military.

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New members are always welcome!*

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