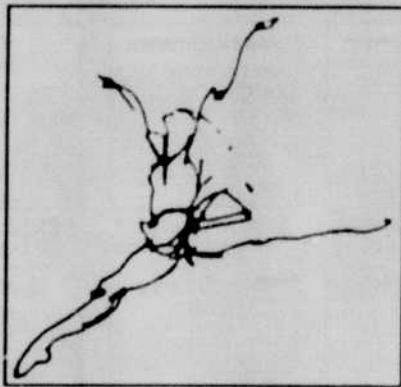


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Book business is war in the '90s

CHICAGO (AP) — A paperback in one hand and a glass of coffee latte in the other, playwright Rinde Eckert feasts on the literature and ambience at the Barnes & Noble superstore on Chicago's North Side.

The store's hunter green exterior, carpeted floors and beamed ceilings invite Eckert and other readers to lose themselves among 100,000 titles.

"I like the music. I love having bookstores where they have chairs, where they encourage you to sit down and read," Eckert said, sitting in the store's cafe. "It's a little bit the sense of a library."

Vast "superstores" are opening in cities from New York to Los Angeles in what some are calling the bookstore wars of the 1990s.

"The '90s are becoming probably the decade when the book business in America is going to explode more than any other in this century," said Steve Riggio, executive vice president of New York-based Barnes & Noble.

Some say the competition is healthy and will encourage more people to read.

"We believe the more bookstores in America, the better off America is going to be," Riggio said.

Others warn that the huge chains opening many of the new bibliogiants are bent on driving neighborhood bookstores out of business.

"They're not in bookselling because they love it. They're in it because it's good business," said Bill Kurland, owner of Shakespeare & Co. on New York's Upper West Side. "The chains have been predatory."

In July, Kroch's & Brentano's, a 86-year-old Chicago-based chain, announced it is closing 10 of its 19 stores and blamed the failures partly on the superstores.

In addition to a huge selection, many of the superstores have music and cafes. Some lure customers with author readings and signings. Most offer deep discounts — up to 40 percent on *New York Times* best sellers, for instance.

Almost all superstores keep long hours. Barnes & Noble, for example, is open seven days a week, 9 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Smaller stores are employing survival tactics. Platypus Book Shop in suburban Evanston extended its hours after a Barnes & Noble moved in nearby. But with just two full-time employees and two part-timers, there's no way to keep up, owner Margriet Schnabel said.

In Santa Barbara, Calif., the Earthling Bookshop, struggling to compete with a Barnes & Noble two blocks away, offers to deliver books and expanded its cafe.

"It's easier to make profit on coffee than on books. But I'm not a restaurateur," owner Penny Davies complained. "I am a bookseller."

And Kroch's, long averse to discounting, is offering 40 percent off best sellers.

According to a study done for the American Booksellers Association, Americans bought 822 million books, excluding children's titles, between April 1991 and March 1992, a 7 percent increase over the same period a year earlier.

Sales during the first four months of 1993 totaled \$2.84 billion, compared with \$2.57 billion a year earlier, according to preliminary estimates from the Census Bureau.

Some bookshops contending with the superstores see being small as a virtue.

"We've thought about the books for you. You don't have to look at every gardening book ever published," said Pat Peterson, co-owner of Barbara's Bookstore, a five-store Chicago chain.

Some say the deck is stacked against small stores. Indeed, the Federal Trade Commission in 1988 charged six major publishers with discriminating against independent bookstores by selling to big chains at lower prices.

But, Davies lamented, "by the time the FTC gets around to doing what they want to do, a great many booksellers will be out of business."

Gen. Powell to tell life story in book

NEW YORK (AP) — Gen. Colin Powell will recount his life from his early days in the Bronx to his rise to chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a book to be written for Random House, which is reportedly paying him \$6.5 million.

The yet-to-be-titled work is planned for publication in 1995, Random House announced.

The announcement did not disclose what Powell would be paid for world rights to the book.

The New York Times quoted unidentified rival publishers as saying Powell would be paid about \$6.5 million, \$1.5 million more than retired Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf reportedly earned for his memoirs.

Powell's agent, Marvin Josephson of International Creative Management, declined to give a figure, but said: "It's obviously a contract we're happy with. There were many publishers interested."

The general will work with a professional writer, Josephson said, but has not begun interviewing potential collaborators yet.

Random House said Powell would begin work on the book after his retirement at the end of September.

Powell, who joined the Army after attending public schools in the city's South Bronx, is the first black chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

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