

MIXTAPE BOOKJONKERS

Compiled by Chris Ryan, Eric Ducker and Alex Wagner

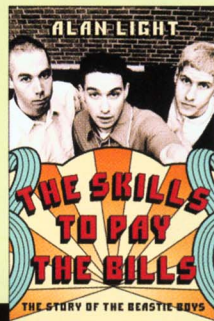


Thomas Roma *In Prison Air* (Powerhouse)

In his introduction to *In Prison Air*, John Szarkowski (the Museum Of Modern Art's director emeritus in the Department Of Photography) makes the obtuse and largely irrelevant argument that audiences might be well suited to read this book in the event of future incarceration. Nothing could be further from the truth. The book is the result of photographer Thomas Roma's time spent documenting the cells of Philadelphia's Holmesburg prison, one of the most infamous penitentiaries in America. Built in 1897, Holmesburg was the site of controversial chemical experiments—sponsored by the US Army, Johnson & Johnson, Dow and the University Of Pennsylvania—that were performed on its inmates without their full comprehension of what, exactly, was being done to them. Trials included testing the effects of substances ranging from the benign (deodorants and hair dye) to the malignant (radioactive isotopes and chemical warfare agents). Said experiments were later found to be in violation of the Nuremberg Trial and Holmesburg was closed in 1997.

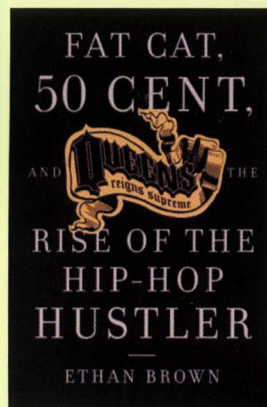
Roma's return to the prison shows the cells in decay and disrepair; one wonders how they could have housed, at one point, five prisoners in a room six feet by eight. But most striking are the wall etchings—pencil drawings featuring tally marks to track the days and years spent locked up, crosses and Christian imagery, rough estimations of Biblical passages, and cartoonish femme fatales. Holmesburg's iron window grates seem menacing and institutional, but it is the writings on the white plaster walls that pinpoint the human suffering and misery.

In this way, Szarkowski's introduction seems not only foolish but callous: we should hope that our justice system, flawed as it is, would never make these mistakes again; that no citizen would be forced to undergo such terror in the name of penance. His assertion that he, too, would have opted for experimentation in the name of escaping the "deadly routine" of prison life seems naive at best. Human beings suffered thoughtlessly—their lessons should not easily be forgotten. AW



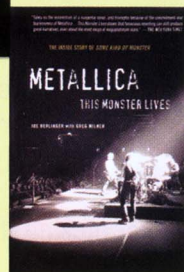
Alan Light *The Skills To Pay The Bills* (Three Rivers Press)

Alan Light's oral history on the Beastie Boys that *Spin* ran back in '98 gets the expanded version six and a half years later with more trash talk and anecdotes. Their former DJ (and *Yo! MTV Raps* VJ) Doctor Dre's controversial and contested comment that they used the n-word in front of an all black audience in their early days has been excised, but Molly Ringwald and Q-Tip still represent in their cameos. The narrative that really runs through the book is the Beasties' tumultuous relationship with their first producer Rick Rubin, and by the end—according to ex-Def American executive Dan Charnas—only DJ Double R and his former best friend Ad-Rock are still beefing. Can we get an Ian MacKaye moderated peace summit or what? ED



Ethan Brown *Queens Reigns Supreme* (Random House)

Queens Reigns Supreme tracks the soapy drug operas of Kenneth "Supreme" McGriff and Fat Cat, and how they impacted the careers and practices of Murder Inc and 50 Cent. Ethan Brown got his elbows greasy getting interviews with most of the major players and he even talks about his shookness at airing all this out on paper. But there ain't no such thing as halfway, um, authors, so Brown's fear strikes out and he comes through with something that can only be described, were I to review it for *Publishers Weekly*, as "HARROWING." CR



Joe Berlinger with Greg Milner *This Monster Lives* (St Martins)

Now with more neuroses! This book is a companion to the 2004 documentary of the same name (that chronicled the most hard-bodied metal band maybe ever), during the making of their almost comically bad *St Anger* that showed them to be a withering group of men on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Heshner points were already running in the red. The book's got transcripts of Lars and Het talking about trust wombs, as well as behind the scenes drama between the filmmakers. An excellent read for those who enjoy fly on the wall views of other folks' emotional havoc. CR