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LET'S DANCE

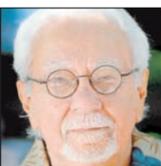
USC squeaks into the NCAA Tournament as a play-in game team. UCLA opens against Michigan State. **C1**



DEAL OF THE DAY

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AL MARTINEZ

Sheen isn't alone in the scary world of showbiz

Every once in a while someone tells me they've spotted a guy they call The Drifter wandering the Valley, lurching along Ventura Boulevard looking for a drink or a fix, mumbling to himself.

He is indistinguishable from a lot of homeless men with the same kind of booze and drug problems, except that most of them didn't have the shot at fame that The Drifter once had.

He was on top of the world as a 10-year-old, cast in a hit television series of the 1970s, a comedy show that just about everyone watched. He was a natural as an actor and could deliver lines with the aplomb of a pro. They told him he had a great future.

But the star that everyone could see rising on the horizon suddenly flared and darkened when the same producers who had praised the kid's performance in the pilot suddenly decided to drop his role when the actual series began; the boy who had been a wunderkind was no longer needed.

He was like an abandoned pet without the "home" that had been the studio, without the fans that had been his audience, without the glow that had been his future. Doors slammed shut in his face, no other jobs were offered and he drifted away from the world of entertainment.

What happened from that point on defined what he is today. He turned to drugs and alcohol to ease the anguish he must have felt from the utter rejection of the person he had become. He found himself in and out of juvenile facilities and eventually ended up in prison and then in mental hospitals.

The Drifter had a lot of people trying to help him, including his mother, but nothing worked. He was finally left to wander the streets mumbling like a fool that the FBI was out to get him and had planted a device in his brain to control his thoughts and actions.

Sometimes he was picked up for creating a public nuisance by screaming and crying in the streets, but then released to stumble through his own scary world, haunted by all of the yesterdays streaming by in his damaged brain.

His life was a dream unfulfilled, a star on his dressing room door that had been unceremoniously removed when the applause ended.

I thought about him today as something of a symbol of self-destructive behavior in the era of Mad Charlie Sheen. Nothing is permanent in show biz. It wasn't for The Drifter and it won't be for Sheen. Whether or not the troubled actor ends up mumbling and screaming in the streets will depend on the kind of treatment he receives and ultimately on whether or not he is willing to accept it.

I feel sorry for The Drifter, whom I used to know personally, and I feel sorry for Mad Charlie, whom I never knew. While their situations may differ, they share the common reality that in the world of make-believe, stardom is transitory but one's pain is eternal, and no drug will ever take it away.

Al Martinez writes a column on Mondays and Fridays. He can be reached at almtz13@aol.com.

MOUNTING CASUALTIES

The official death toll is now at 1,800, with estimates suggesting the total will top 10,000.

NEW TSUNAMI THREAT

Soldiers order coastal residents to higher ground today amid fears of another giant wave.

WORST CRISIS SINCE WWII

The prime minister calls the earthquake the biggest challenge of Japan's postwar era.



A woman in northern Japan searches through the rubble Sunday of her home, which was destroyed in a powerful earthquake-triggered tsunami. Kyodo News

'NOW WE HAVE NOTHING'

NUCLEAR CRISIS: Six injured as plant rocked by explosion. Fears of a meltdown increase.

By Eric Talmadge and Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Six workers were injured in an explosion today at the stricken Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, the Tokyo Electric Power Co. said.

It was the plant's second explosion in three days.

Japan's chief cabinet secretary said a hydrogen explosion occurred Monday at the facility's Unit 3. The blast was similar to an earlier one at a different unit at the facility.

Yukio Edano said people within a 12-mile radius were ordered inside following the blast. AP journalists felt the explosion 25 miles away.

Edano said the reactor's inner containment vessel holding nuclear rods was intact, allaying some fears of the risk to the environment and public.

More than 180,000 people have evacuated the area in recent days.

Four nuclear plants in northeastern Japan have reported damage, but the problems appeared to be greatest at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear complex. Operators have lost the ability to cool three reactors at Dai-ichi and three more at another nearby complex using usual procedures, after the quake knocked out power and the tsu-

NUCLEAR A10



A police officer prays in front of a body found in the rubble in northern Japan. Officials have confirmed about 1,800 deaths from the earthquake and tsunami. Kyodo News

EARTHQUAKE: Families pick up the pieces of what's left of their homes and other possessions.

By Jay Alabaster and Todd Pitman
The Associated Press

SOMA, Japan — Rescue workers used chain saws and hand picks today to dig out bodies in Japan's devastated coastal towns, as Asia's richest nation faced a growing humanitarian, nuclear and economic crisis in the aftermath of a massive earthquake and tsunami.

Millions of people spent a third night without water, food or heating in near-freezing temperatures along the devastated northeastern coast. Also, the containment building of a second nuclear reactor exploded because of hydrogen buildup while the stock market plunged over the likelihood of huge losses by Japanese industries including big names such as Toyota and Honda.

More than 10,000 people are estimated to have died in Friday's twin tragedy that has caused unimaginable deprivation for people of this industrialized country that has not seen such hardships since World War II. In many areas there is no running water, no power and four- to five-hour waits for gasoline. People are suppressing hunger with instant noodles or rice balls while dealing with the loss of loved ones and homes.

QUAKE A13

FOR COMPLETE QUAKE COVERAGE, TURN TO PAGES A10, A12 AND A13.

China eyed in industry's piracy crackdown

By Bob Strauss Staff Writer

With movie box office down, music sales in a nose dive and even the once-invincible video game industry experiencing a slump, the last thing the entertainment industry needs is to be raided by pirates.

But that's exactly what's happening around the world and in cyberspace, where thieves are stealing some \$58 billion annually from the pockets of those who hold copyrights, according to a 2007 report by the Institute for Policy Innovation.

"It's a constant battle," Congressman Howard Berman said last week during an interview at his Van Nuys office. "Every time

we employ strategies to try to protect intellectual property, smart people who have no respect for the rule of law try to find ways to get around those protections."

Berman, a Democrat and former chairman of the House Judiciary subcommittee on intellectual property, competition and the Internet, has been fighting for years to toughen U.S. protections and get foreign governments to enforce international copyright laws.

In January, for example, Berman made sure that the big U.S.-China summit addressed such issues as massive Sino search engine Baidu's many links to pirated prop-

CHINA A5

The Savings Must Go On Event

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Battle for the box office

A sci-fi action film about an alien invasion in Los Angeles is the weekend's top draw. **LOCAL A5**



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