

# Periscope

EXCLUSIVE

## Raines Writes



**ROCK WRITER?** Raines riffs on his son's becoming a musician

**I**N THE ISSUE OF DETAILS out Sept. 15, Howell Raines, the recently fired executive editor of *The New York Times*, writes a personal essay that he concludes by saying, "I was wrong and you were right." It's the first piece of journalism Raines has committed (to borrow one of the poetically inclined Alabamian's pet phrases) since he left the Times in June. But Raines's essay isn't about his divisive tenure at the newspaper; it deals with the fears and joys of watching a son grow into a professional rock musician. (His son Jeff, 31, plays guitar in the funk band Galactic.) The piece, written with the same panache that Raines used in his memoir, "Fly Fishing Through the Midlife Crisis," is by turns humorous and poignant, and focuses on Raines's ability to keep his "mouth shut" with his anxieties about whether being in a band is a suitable profession. "I was guided by my own belief that you cannot tell a child to pursue his artistic instincts for the first 18 or 20 years of his life and then say, 'Just kidding. Time to go to law school,'" Raines writes. (Raines also admires his

son's early ability to recognize the "kinetic relationship between playing music and getting girls.") "He's a masterful writer," says Details editor Daniel Peres (who is Jeff Raines's age). "It's a rare pleasure for a young editor to publish something from a real master." Peres says that he never asked Raines if he would consider writing about the Jayson Blair scandal: "We didn't want to push it too far," Peres says. The coup for Details comes during a fertile stretch for the magazine: its ad pages are up 37 percent over last year's, and Peres has recently signed up a crop of literary contributors such as "Jarhead" author Anthony Swofford and Augusten Burroughs of "Running With Scissors" fame. But it's unlikely that Raines will appear in the magazine's pages again. "I don't expect it to become a regular thing," says Peres. "It's not like he's going to be hard up for work." —SETH MNOOKIN

## PUBLISHING French Twist

**W**ho Killed Daniel Pearl?" is big news for a small press. Melville House, which released the French best seller by author Bernard-Henri Lévy last week, was an unlikely candidate to win U.S. rights from publisher Grasset. Dennis Johnson, who, with his wife, Valerie Merians, is the Melville staff, made a bid at Grasset's offices while on their honeymoon in France; they'd negotiated with Grasset on another Lévy book. The Hoboken, N.J., press wooed Lévy with promises of exclusive attention for his account, which retraces the slain journalist's steps and concludes he was killed not because he was Jewish or American, but because he knew too much. Lévy's on a media whirlwind, and is being positioned by Melville in press materials as an advocate of "anti-anti-Americanism society." Lévy told the Overseas Press Club last week he was influenced by American authors like Ernest Hemingway, who wrote "books of reality." (As with Hemingway, there are questions about how Lévy mixes fact with fiction.) Johnson and Merians, who've published only some poetry and a lit-crit essay, are thrilled. "I met Charlie Rose," Johnson says. "That's pretty exciting." —ELISE SOUKUP



**BEST SELLER:** Lévy



**'EVIL EMPIRE':** New transcripts shed light on Khrushchev (left)

COLD WAR

## Bluster Before the Fall

**K**NOW THINE ENEMY is an old rule of war and geopolitics, but one that often cannot be obeyed, especially if the enemy is a totalitarian state and hard to spy on. Throughout the cold war, American policymakers often had to guess at the intentions of the Kremlin, and they often guessed wrong. It was only after the Soviet Union collapsed in the late 1980s that Washington realized that the "evil empire" had long been rotting from within.

The Soviets' weaknesses are vividly demonstrated in a trove of documents that will be released this week by the Russian government: the deliberations of the Politburo from 1954 to 1964. They show Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev and his comrades worrying about planes that won't fly and bread lines that won't go away. At the same time, the Soviets are willing to take hair-raising risks. Khrushchev talks about shooting down American planes over Berlin in 1961 and asserts that the United States would "capitulate," a dangerous assumption that could have escalated into World War III. The Soviet chieftain is full of bluster. Should Jackie Kennedy be given a silver tea service before the 1961 Vienna summit? "Presents can be given even before a war," Khrushchev says. JFK is a "son of a bitch."

The Soviets of the early '60s sound a little like North Korea's despots of today, "shouting 'We are here! We are here! Respect us!'" says Timothy Nafatali, a historian at the University of Virginia's Miller Center who spent three years examining the documents under an arrangement with the Russians (his book, "Khrushchev's Cold War," will be published next fall). If so, it would be a mistake to overestimate North Korea's strength—or underestimate its recklessness.

—EVAN