

# Wordplay (the movie)

 [devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20060527-40](http://devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20060527-40)

May 27, 2006



Raymond Chen

This morning I saw a screening of *Wordplay*, a documentary on crossword puzzles featuring Will Shortz. If you're a crossword puzzler, this movie is a must-see. In addition to Will, there are plenty of other rock stars of the crossword puzzle subculture who play major roles: Merl Reagle, Trip Payne, and Ellen Ripstein. (I was particularly amused by this entry. Hey, if you're not going to appreciate Ellen Ripstein's autograph, give it to somebody who will!) The audience loved this movie, laughing so hard in places that it drowned out the dialogue. (And gasping in horror when... well, you'll have to watch the movie to find out.) Crowd-pleasing one-liners (paraphrased):

- Getting Merl Reagle to compose a Tuesday puzzle is like getting Barry Bonds to play on your Little League team. — Daniel Okrent reacts to seeing Merl Reagle's byline on a Tuesday puzzle. (Monday puzzles are easiest, with the difficulty increasing as the week progresses.)
- I had a boyfriend who would put me down, but I would just come back with, "Oh yeah? And what are *you* the best in America at?" — Ellen Ripstein, 2001 American Crossword Puzzle Tournament champion.
- "I hate, hate, hate, hate, hate you. Sincerely..." — Will Shortz reads a letter from a frustrated puzzle solver.

As a recovering crossword-aholic myself, I found myself using the on-screen clues to race against Al Sanders as he himself raced the clock to solve a New York Times crossword. Although I'm no crossword slouch, I'm no match for Al Sanders.

Wholeheartedly recommended.

Raymond Chen

**Follow**

