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Hopkinton author gives 'the Kid' another swing at life

By [Lisa Kocian](#) | GLOBE STAFF JUNE 02, 2013

The year is 2092, most of Boston is under water thanks to global warming, and Ted Williams, widely considered the greatest baseball hitter of all time, has been brought back to life 90 years after he was cryonically preserved.

This dystopian, gadget-filled world is the creation of Hopkinton resident Bruce E. Spitzer in his novel "[Extra Innings](#)." It's a genre-bending sci-fi/sports/military thriller and love story. But mostly it's about starting over.

"Part of the overarching theme . . . is this idea about second chances and redemption,"

Spitzer, 53, said during an interview at his home. "For all of his success in life, for all of his fame," Spitzer said of Williams, "he was also rather famously flawed."

Although self-published, Spitzer's book was reviewed in Publishers Weekly, got a mention in Sports Illustrated, and has sold about 15,000 copies. Spitzer said he is talking with a couple of literary agents about the possibility of going the traditional publishing route. But perhaps most intriguing of all, the novel was



KAYANA SZYMCAK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

edited by Alan Rinzler, who worked with the likes of Toni Morrison, Hunter S. Thompson, and Robert Ludlum before retiring from traditional publishing in 2010.

“I decided to edit his book because although it was rough at the time, it was a terrific idea,” said Rinzler, in a phone interview from his Berkeley, Calif., home. “It was just so fun.”

While the dialogue is sometimes stilted, especially that of the women characters, and the plot takes on a few too many themes, the book is packed with fun details for both futurists and sports fans. And imagining Beantown 80 years from now is highly entertaining. Spoiler alert: Boston is still a baseball town. But just as interesting, perhaps, is the window the book opens on cryonics.

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The Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Scottsdale, Ariz., where the late Red Sox slugger is being kept in a type of frozen state while awaiting medical advances that could bring him back to life, still sees the occasional Williams fan during tours of its facility, according to chief executive Max More.

“It would be interesting to see how he would apply his energies,” More said of Williams, post-reanimation.

More, who has a doctorate in philosophy, said he has glanced at Spitzer’s book, and called its timeline for what Alcor calls recovery “in the ballpark.” Quick to acknowledge that cryonics is uncertain, More said people who are interested seem to feel if it’s going to work, it won’t take more than another 100 years to become possible.

He said he sees small signs of increasing acceptance. Alcor has 117 human patients and “a number of pets,” More said. Successful reanimations have been depicted in popular culture — most recently in the new Star Trek movie, he said.

And hospitals are not as unwelcoming to Alcor staff who collect remains for deep-freeze storage (actually called vitrification because it's different than freezing, although it involves super-low temperatures), said More.

The news that Boston's beloved Teddy Ballgame was stored in such a way after his death in 2002 raised some consternation, but Spitzer, who spent five years working on "Extra Innings," doesn't spend much time looking back there.

Spitzer, director of communications for the Massachusetts Bankers Association, researched cryonics as well as baseball, futurism, and the military for his book. (Williams was a Marine pilot in real life and is called upon again by the military in his fictional second life.) But most of all, Spitzer said, he wanted to stay true to "the Kid."

"I knew as this famous personality, particularly around Boston where so many people knew him, that people would read this and say, 'You're not getting it right,' or maybe, hopefully, 'You nailed it, that sounds like Ted,' and thankfully I have gotten a lot of that," he said.

To get there, he watched video, and for the words you can't say on television, he interviewed people who knew him.

"Ted Williams was famously foul-mouthed," said Spitzer. "He could turn a phrase with multiple streams of cuss words mixed in like no other man. There was a pace and a cadence to it, and an art and almost a poetry to the foul language."

Bob Lobel, a former Channel 4 sportscaster and now a public address announcer at Fenway Park, said Spitzer succeeded in capturing Williams, whom Lobel interviewed many times and knew socially.

"There's no doubt from what I saw Bruce did a pretty darn good job of characterizing the guy," Lobel said in a phone interview. "He was vulgar, he was loud, he was charismatic, but he was also driven to be absolutely the best at whatever he did."

“While he was driven to be the best at whatever he did and he usually was, I think he knew he was not a great father, and he knew he was not about family, and that really bothered him,” Lobel continued. “Spitzer kind of gave him a second chance. I suppose all of us should get a second chance.”

Lobel liked the book so much that he wrote a blurb that appears on the back. (As did inventor/futurist Ray Kurzweil, who wrote, “Bruce Spitzer has reverse-engineered the brain of Ted Williams, reanimated a great American, and created a novel with memories intact.”)

When Williams died in 2002 and was frozen, it ignited a battle among his children, who were split over whether it was appropriate. None of his offspring are characters in the book, and Spitzer said he did not try to contact any of them during his research.

The Globe reached out to Claudia Williams, who sided with her brother John Henry, who has since died, in the decision to preserve their father. She said through an intermediary that she was not interested in commenting on the novel.

Much of the book focuses on giving Williams a “second chance” with relationships. (One more spoiler coming . . .)

“We showed, basically, Ted Williams becoming a better man the second time around,” said Rinzler, the editor, “to be more selfless and human and warm and loving and brave and self-sacrificing.”

But it’s an unusual premise, he acknowledged, and traditional publishers and book agents have become risk-averse in what is a tightening industry. That’s made room for self-publishing, which is no longer predominantly a “vanity press,” said Rinzler, for “losers who aren’t good writers.”

Rinzler said he sees more good things for Spitzer.

“I think Bruce is doing a great job of promoting the book and marketing the book, but he needs to pump it up.

“I think the book could sell a million copies if people knew about it, because it’s so much fun and so interesting.”

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