

BREAKING THROUGH THE **Bubble**

Iraq's new government takes office

Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari pledged to unite Iraq's rival ethnic and religious factions and fight terrorism as the nation's first democratically elected government was sworn in amid escalating violence. One by one, al-Jaafari and members of his Cabinet walked to a podium and pledged to defend Iraq and its people as Iraqis faced a surge of violence that has killed nearly 170 people in six days. But five ministries — including the key defense and oil portfolios — remained in temporary hands and two deputy prime minister's slots were unfilled as al-Jaafari struggled to bring the disaffected Sunni minority into key posts while balancing the demands of other groups. He will act as defense minister until consensus can be reached on a new one. Former Pentagon favorite Ahmad Chalabi, the Shiite deputy prime minister, was given temporary responsibility for the key oil ministry.

Customer finds finger in frozen custard

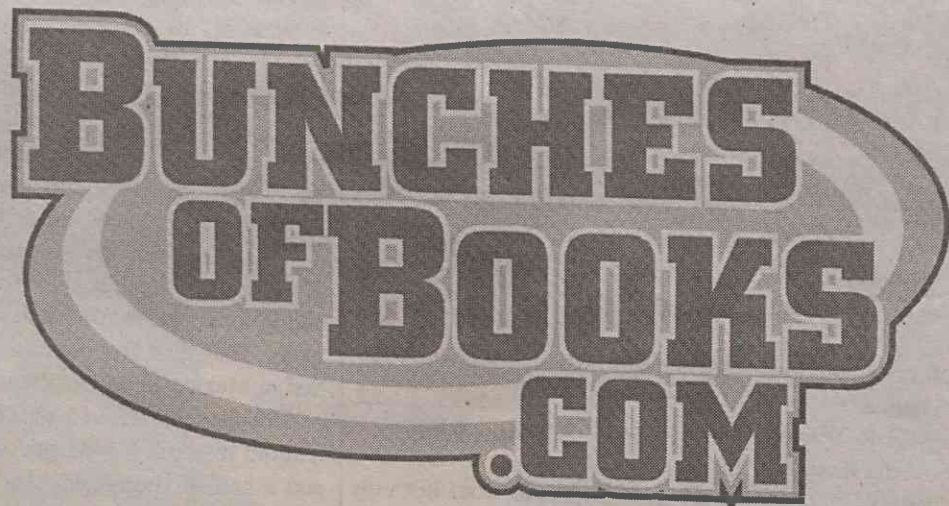
A man who ordered a pint of frozen chocolate custard in a dessert shop got a nasty surprise inside — a piece of severed finger lost by an employee in an accident. Unlike a recent inci-

dent at a Wendy's restaurant in California, no questions of truth have been raised about the finger served up to go at Kohl's Frozen Custard and found later at home by Clarence Stowers. Officials from the state departments of agriculture and labor went to the shop, and the owner confirmed one of his employees lost part of a finger in an accident with a food-processing machine.

Macaulay Culkin to be one of first defense witnesses for Jackson

Actor Macaulay Culkin, longtime friend of Michael Jackson, will be one of the early witnesses to take the stand in the pop star's defense against child molestation charges. Culkin's testimony is expected to follow appearances by two other young men, Brett Barnes and Wade Robson, as the singer's defense begins this week. The three all spent close time with Jackson as boys, all have publicly denied being molested by the singer and no case has ever been brought against Jackson involving any of them. Culkin, a longtime defender of Jackson, has repeatedly said their friendship was completely innocent.

— Compiled by Sarah Moser from <http://www.msnbc.com>



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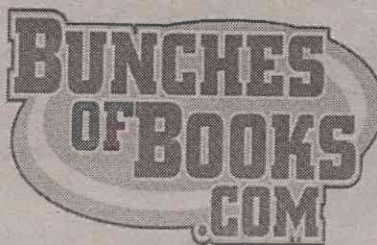
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