A tech mini-mogul from New Jersey moves in and starts

THE GRAFFITI WAR

For as long as I can remember, a graffiti guy has drawn chalk comics on the walls and landings of a public staircase that shortcuts the big hairpin turn from 22nd Street to Collingwood.

Sometimes they’re 1 panel. Sometimes they’re 2 panels. Sometimes they’re 4 panels.

They always disappear in the rain: they’re done IN CHALK.

His themes are: loneliness, longing, sex, drugs, ghosts, and the shadows thrown by street signs and fence rails. His style is distinctive.

HEY! COUGH! HI! All’s well.
That is, all was well until a Type A mini-mogul (software? new media? self-tanning? automatic sprinklers?) from New Jersey moved into one of the houses near the hairpin.

He was of the ‘graffiti begets graffiti’ school and was quick to erase graffiti guy’s efforts with an endless supply of gray paint from the city. He scuffed the chalk marks from the sidewalk too. He wouldn’t wait for the rain.

His aesthetic sense could be summed up in the following way:

A BLANK RETAINING WALL IS A GOOD RETAINING WALL.

And unless you pay, it isn’t art.
No sooner did the gray paint dry, the graffiti guy—or perhaps one of the graffiti guy’s graffiti henchmen—retaliated.

Overnight they nozzled spray paint onto the wall. This time, instead of whimsical pictures, they scrawled (and re-scrawled) meaningless slogans over the length of the wall.

Soon gray paint covered the words.

Then there was spray paint—then gray paint—then spray paint—then gray paint. The cycles were swift, the battle ferocious.

Of course the battle might’ve only existed in my imagination (for certainly the mini-mogul from New Jersey couched his actions as civic-minded clean-up), but it was an exciting battle to watch nonetheless.
Who won? You might wonder. I know I wondered.

Late one drizzly November night—it might’ve been 1 AM—as I trudged up the hill in the dark to check the wall for new work, I heard a loud buzzing.

“Awfully late to be starting up that scooter,” I thought. It always parked at the top of the hill. “Maybe he should take it to Scuderia for a tune-up.”

WHAM! A tree shuddered and crashed down the dark stairs.

*That was no scooter buzzing and farting—that was a chain saw.*

If I’d have started climbing the stairs two seconds earlier, I’d have been TOAST. TOAST!
“What’s going on?” I asked a guy who was smoking a cigarette across the street from the action. He couldn’t see what was going on either, but perhaps he just knew.

He shrugged.

“Awfully late to be running a chain saw,” I said. He didn’t answer. I kept walking.

Who was the mad man? Was it the New Jersey mini-mogul? Was it graffiti guy and his graffiti henchmen? Or was it the guy with Google license plate frames on his Saab sedan? (Goggle it!)

A flashlight played across the remaining treetops. Someone was examining his handiwork. The pine trees bent in the wind and rain.

I’ll never know who it was, who was crazy enough to be chainsawing at 1am. And it’s too early to say who won the war.

My money’s on graffiti guy.