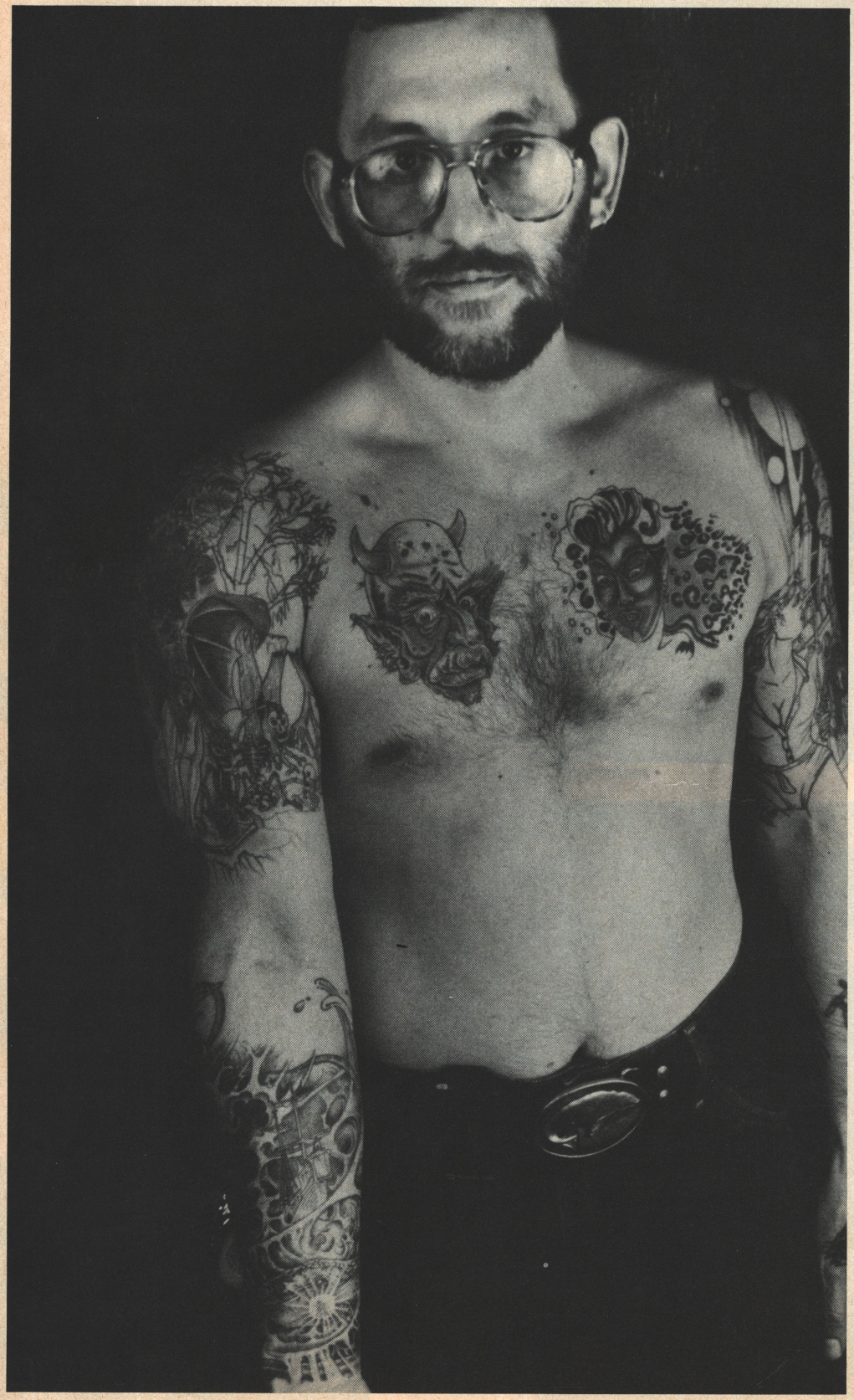
Windy City's

A tattooist who descended from the high-rises



BY TOM GUNN

Dean Spooner's interest in tattoos goes back almost as far as his memory. The seed was planted at age six, when Dean accompanied his dad on a business trip to Kobe, Japan. There he saw a tattooed Yakuza (member of the Japanese Mafia) in a public bath. "The guy came out of the water, and he was covered," Dean remembers. "It blew my mind."

By age 15, Dean was ready to try his hand on a self-tat job. "My little cross came out okay," he says, "considering I used India ink and a couple of needles."

Dean's first piece with the gun was a dripping-cherries-with-Rolling-Stones-tongue design he did for his wife. He soon decided to become a part-time tattooist while working for 13 years as a high-rise window washer. Dean eventually opened his own shop, but he was overcome with the place's rowdiness and his own personal demons. But he returned to full-time tattooing recently at Chicago Tattooing, where he works for former window-washing buddy and fellow tat man Dale Grande. The shop also includes tattooist David McNair and full-time graphic artist Jim Ronin, so people can opt for original pieces, flash, or variations of flash. A few of Dean's recent pieces include Spider Man, the Iron Maiden logo, and a mythical horse.

Dean's own tats display the work of three promin

Dean Spooner

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ent Chicago tattooists, "...doing mostly cover-ups from the past 21 years." Instead of choosing designs that have personal significance, Dean says, "I seek out a good artist and turn him loose." His chest piece by Bob Olson of Custom Tattooing attracts the most attention. "I had a craving for ink at the time," Dean says, and Bob came up with the female vampire and devil. Dean affectionately refers to them as Mom and Dad.

Dean's upper left arm features a Space Odyssey piece by Guy Aitchison, who works with Mad Jack the piercer at Guilty and Innocent Productions in Chicago. Guy also did the marine scene on Dean's lower right arm that includes Jonah and the whale and an octopus fighting a dragon. Dean's upper-right arm displays the artistry of Dan Melzer; he describes the piece as "the bonehead family and skulls falling into hell." Throughout, Dean's designs show an underlying sense of humor. "I can't see crying about everything," he says. "I'd rather find humor in things to get me through the day." However, Dean can get a little testy about unfinished business. "I have a lot of work in progress," he says. "I wish these guys would hurry up and get my work done!" •