

Excerpted from

# ISTHMUS

## FOOD & DRINK

### Tightwad's paradise

*Three great take-out options for cheap chow*

By Raphael Kadushin

**Chin's Asia Fresh**

422 State St., 661-0177

8414 Old Sauk Rd., 827-7721

It's time to economize. Now that the Christmas excesses are behind us, literally, and we all need to start saving for our security-less old age, no one can afford to drop cash at the splashy new bistro. How to save the dollars for those senior years in the back of your junked car-cum-retirement home? Try take-out food. It's cheap, sometimes it's edible, and it's cheap....

#### Chin's Asia Fresh

This very small regional chain's Asian food would be worth picking up even if the average entree wasn't priced under \$7. What makes Chin's so surprisingly good is the fact that its dishes manage to avoid all the pitfalls of most local Chinese cuisine: the gristly, indefinable wads of meat; the thick, glutinous sauces that owe more to Kraft canned gravies than Beijing tradition; the wilted, waterlogged vegetables. Instead, everything at Chin's is freshly stir-fried — you can hear the sizzle and see the smoke — and the result is some of the cleanest Chinese cooking in town.

Especially good is a chicken and veggie stir-fry (the vegetables actually retain their crunch) in a tasty coconut curry sauce. The beef stir-fry has tender cubes of beef and your choice of a teriyaki sauce that's sweet but restrained; and the sesame chicken is the only decent rendition of the dish I've ever sampled in Madison, offering thick slices of real chicken meat wrapped up in a crisp, golden batter. And all for \$6.75.