

Kirkus Reviews

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OF 2017

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MOST OF US WOULD LIKE TO THINK

of literature as a pure art, unencumbered by sales, charts and positions on bestseller lists.

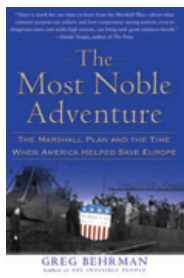
The reality, however, is of course more complicated, as each year hundreds of excellent titles are overlooked by the media or just don't sell as briskly as expected. For this Special, the editors revisited books that received strong reviews in *Kirkus*, then investigated how much public attention each received. The books featured are our picks for the outstanding overlooked fiction and nonfiction titles of the year. Works highlighted include fun, lighthearted books, sad, poignant novels, extensively researched accounts of history's most awe-inspiring moments and heartbreaking and uplifting personal memoirs. In addition, we've compiled our lists of the best overall fiction and nonfiction titles of the year—some that received due recognition, and some that did not. We hope you'll agree after examining our picks that 2007 was a great year for books. —THE EDITORS

The Most Noble Adventure: The Marshall Plan and the Time When America Helped Save Europe

Greg Behrman

Free Press / August / 9780743282635 / \$27.00

Greg Behrman could have picked no better time for this gripping account of the most inspired foreign-policy strategy in American history. The author employs first-rate storytelling to relive the days when America poured incredible imagination, resources and strength into its efforts to rebuild Europe after World War II. By focusing on the leading players, including President Truman and George Marshall, as well as their less-famous brethren, Behrman shows a world hanging in the balance. "This was a time when human agency really mattered," he says. "The ideas that these men had and the force of their character were key factors. The choices that they made mattered." The author purposefully chose to focus on and maintain the integrity of the history, and his rigorous objectivity holds fast. He admits, however, that *The Most Noble Adventure* gives contemporary leaders an opportunity to learn lessons



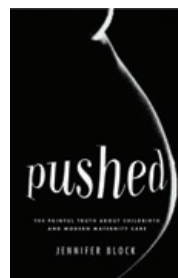
implicit in Marshall's elegant idea. "This was a change to reflect on a time when America got it right," says the author. "It wasn't perfect. Mistakes were made. But this was a time when our strategic interests were pursued through a policy that also reflected the best of our national ideals. It was a creative, constructive and ultimately effective act of statesmanship. It is exactly the sort of action that is appropriate to reflect upon given where we are in the world today."

Pushed: The Painful Truth About Childbirth and Modern Maternity Care

Jennifer Block

Da Capo Lifelong / June / 9780738210735 / \$26.00

Were there ever any doubts as to the personal being political," said *Kirkus*, "this former editor at *Ms.* and editor of the revised *Our Bodies, Ourselves* convincingly lays them to rest in a gripping exposé of American obstetrics." Jennifer Block presents a grim picture of maternity care in the United States: More than half of women who give birth are given drugs to induce or speed their labors and nearly a third of pregnancies end in Cae-



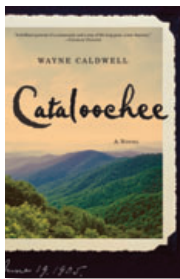
sarean sections. Approaching birth as a feminist issue, Block examines the choices women have in orchestrating their own experiences and why they're routinely pushed down an increasingly "medicalized" path. The book was partly inspired by Block's realization that another reproductive choice isn't often available. "There are states where a home-birth midwife is essentially a criminal," she says. "Certified midwife professionals can't get licenses and must practice underground—pregnant women must find them through word of mouth, pay in cash...the parallels to '60s back-alley abortions are striking." With *Pushed*, Block hopes to "get the message out that only about two percent of women are having the optimal experience of a normal, physiological birth." Such an experience includes letting a woman's body dictate when "it's time," as well as giving her the emotional support and wisdom of a trained midwife and the freedom of mobility during labor. Instead, she says, women are pushed "to lie flat on their backs, to go faster, to be perfect...pushed into situations where they're likely to be unassisted or facing a lack of support." Doctors also face pressures, notes Block, "afraid of being sued, practicing in a system with many restrictions." *Kirkus* called the book a "provocative and hotly controversial analysis."

Cataloochee

Wayne Caldwell

Random House / May / 9781400063437 / \$24.95

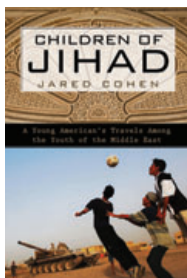
Though Wayne Caldwell didn't start writing until he turned 50, the debut novelist is now working on the sequel to his historical novel *Cataloochee*, which centers on fearsome patriarch Ezra Banks and portrays 60 years of a real-life community that once existed in rural North Carolina. The book features incredibly true-to-life, well-drawn characters, the "kind of people," said *Kirkus*, that "the reader misses when the last page is turned." "I hope people get a sense that we have lost this place and enjoy my re-creation," says the author. "I became interested in Cataloochee the first time I went there. It was one of the most beautiful places I'd ever seen. I wrote a short story about my grandfather, which won a prize, and that started me forward." To boost the book's authenticity, the author revisited the setting with a Cataloochee native. "My cousin Raymond Caldwell was born there and had vivid memories of living there," he says. "We would go hiking, and he could point out the cedar tree that used to be in someone's front yard." Caldwell also collected family stories and country lore to spin into his narrative. "I spent a lot of time with older folks like my wife's great-uncle and those informed the book greatly," he says. The sequel will follow the diaspora of Cataloochee's denizens as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park comes into being in the 1930s.

**Children of Jihad: A Young American's Travels Among the Youth of the Middle East**

Jared Cohen

Gotham / October / 9781592403240 / \$25.00

Children of Jihad is Jared Cohen's artful account of his journey to the Middle East to document young lives in a place where social and political fires burn brightly and constantly. "I stumbled onto a youth culture that was all too familiar to my own," says the author. "And I was inspired by what I saw as similarities rather than differences between us. At first it was the youthful rebellion of underground parties in Iran, where



young men made alcohol in their bathtubs; then it was the numerous edgy conversations with Hezbollah at fast-food restaurants like McDonald's in Beirut. I went to gay and straight raves in Syria, and I saw that Internet dating takes place everywhere in the Middle East." *Kirkus* praised Cohen for his "natural confidence and flair as a writer," adding that "Cohen rarely hides the fact that he is Jewish and American, and his openness appears to have been highly respected among the people he encountered." It is not too small a point that what Cohen discovered is heart-gladdening. "The largest political 'party' in every country is a de facto 'youth party,' which doesn't necessarily have a political, ethnic, religious, national or sectarian face," he says. "As the young search for their identity, they are drawn to recognizable social and recreational indulgences and escapes. While it is

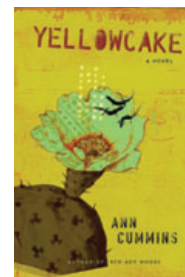
impossible as an American to relate to the turmoil they have experienced, I could always relate to them as fellow youth and felt that this was the beginning of a real dialogue."

Yellowcake

Ann Cummins

Houghton Mifflin / March / 9780618269266 / \$24.00

For Ann Cummins, researching her debut novel, a follow-up to her acclaimed collection of short stories *Red Ant House* (2003), was a particularly personal experience. In what *Kirkus* called a "complex, unusually mature debut," Cummins follows a dispute between two families—one Navajo and one Anglo—over possible uranium exposure known as yellowcake in a Southwestern mill town similar to the one where Cummins was raised, the daughter of a mill worker, on a Navajo Indian Reservation. "To a large part, all of my characters, Navajo and non-Indian, start from memories, not of any specific person, but from remembered conversations and incidents," she says. "But after leaving the reservation, I began to gather the information that wasn't accessible to me on the playground as a school kid. I took Navajo folklore and history classes, which provided important background for the novel." While Cummins's own experiences certainly informed the novel, her ability to transcend her background and adopt each perspective is particularly impressive. She is equally convincing in her renderings of a young Navajo loan officer, an aging white mill supervisor, a childless wife who has endured years of mistreatment, a destitute man trying after many years to be a father to his illegitimate son and a 25-year-old mixed-blood bad boy with his own moral code, the character who Cummins called her hero. "I relate to all of them," she says. "Toni Morrison says the act of imagining is the act of becoming. That's what I strive for."

**The God of Spring**

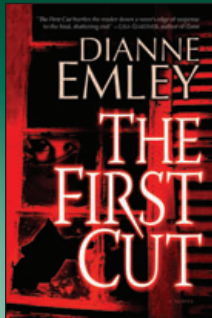
Arabella Edge

Simon & Schuster / March / 9780743294843 / \$24.00

In *The God of Spring*, Arabella Edge gathers together threads of artistic obsession, urgent sex, beyond-horrific deprivation, the dizzying spin of madness, scandal and the need to make palpable the awful and awesome possibilities of the human condition. The 19th-century painter Théodore Géricault needed an

Check Your Stacks:

2007 Staff Favorites from  Random House, Inc.

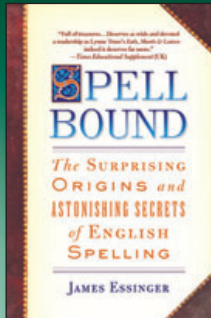


Dianne Emley
The First Cut

In this riveting white-knuckle thriller, a female Pasadena homicide detective tracks a kinky husband-and-wife murder team. "This gripping debut page-turner examines the shadier side of humanity while providing readers with a first-rate story."

—*Library Journal*

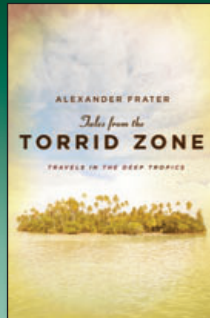
978-0-345-48617-2 | \$23.95/\$31.95C
Ballantine | HC



James Essinger
Spellbound: The Surprising Origins and Astonishing Secrets of English Spelling

The intriguing story of how the spelling of words has evolved over the centuries, from runes to Anglo-Saxon, Middle English to the early dictionaries, and up to the mobile phone text-messaging of today.

978-0-385-34084-7 | \$13.00/\$17.00C
Delta | TR



Alexander Frater
Tales from the Torrid Zone: Travels in the Deep Tropics

Frater is one of Britain's most celebrated travel writers. Born on the tiny island of Iririki, in the South Seas republic of Vanuatu, his travels have taken him to more than 70 of the 88 countries that make up this remarkable, steamy swath of the world.

978-0-679-40871-0 | \$25.95/NCR
HC | Knopf

978-0-307-38826-1 | \$14.95/NCR
TR | Vintage | February

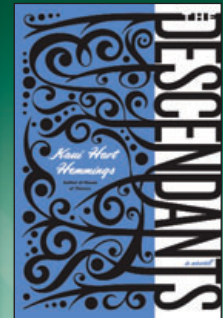


Marcus Hearn and Alan Barnes
The Hammer Story

The now-legendary British company made international stars of Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, and inspired a generation of Hollywood filmmakers, including George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, and Tim Burton. For the first time, experience a film-by-film dissection, dripping with rare promotional materials and previously unpublished photos.

—*Library Journal*

978-1-84576-185-1 | \$35.00/\$44.00C
Titan | HC



Kai Hart Hemmings
The Descendants: A Novel

A funny and affecting novel chronicling a Hawaiian royal descendant who, upon learning that his dying wife was having an affair, joins forces with his two troubled and spirited young daughters on a strange journey to find her lover.

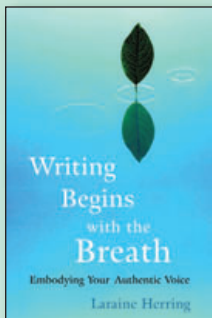
"The characters are vivid, and the book flows along with strong narration. Highly recommended for all public libraries." —*Library Journal*

978-1-4000-6633-9 | \$24.95/\$32.00C

Random House | HC

978-0-8129-7782-0 | \$14.00/\$16.50C

RH Trade Paperbacks | TR | May

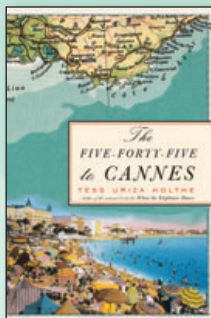


Laraine Herring
Writing Begins with the Breath: Embodying Your Authentic Voice

A unique guide to creative writing that focuses on the importance of body and breath as a way to access the authentic voice that emerges when the ego is quiet, the mind is still, and the heart is open. "The result is a worthwhile and motivating read for all writers."

—*Library Journal*

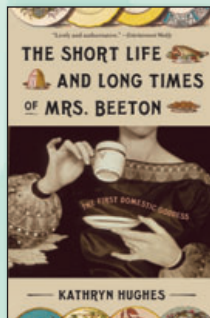
978-1-59030-473-0 | \$12.95/\$16.95C
Shambhala | TR



Tess Uriza Holthe
The Five-Forty-Five to Cannes

An appealing collection of linked stories set in the appealing French Riviera and Italy by the author of the acclaimed bestseller *When the Elephants Dance*. Charming, complicated, and compelling characters populate these stories—all connected by fate and circumstance. An examination of the human experience and how the past shapes the future.

978-0-307-35185-2 | \$23.95/\$29.95C
HC | Crown



Kathryn Hughes
The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton: The First Domestic Goddess

Beeton's *Book of Household Management* was Victorian England's bible on all matters ranging from fashion to puddings to scullery maids. A revelatory portrait of home and its attendant anxieties, nostalgia, and aspiration—not so different from our home life today.

978-0-307-27866-1 | \$15.95/NCR
TR | Anchor



Arimasa Osawa;
Translated by Andrew Clare
Shinjuku Shark

A serial cop-killer is running rampant in Tokyo's Shinjuku ward and only one man has the connections and the courage to find and stop him—The Shark. "The nonstop action and suspense keep the pages turning...a good selection for libraries with a large crime fiction and mystery following."

—*Library Journal*

978-1-932234-37-4 | \$14.95/\$19.95C
Vertical | TR



Terri Persons
Blind Spot

FBI Agent Bernadette St. Clare's gift of sight allows her to see things others can't. But some things are better left unseen... "The first in a new series; recommended for public libraries."

—*Library Journal*

978-0-385-51869-7 | \$23.95/\$29.95C
Doubleday | HC

978-0-7393-4061-5 | \$29.95/\$37.95C
RH Audio | CD

image, something triumphant, to get his work back on track (not to mention back into the Paris Salon). The wreck of the French ship Medusa—notorious and cruel and chromatic—would serve well. “Géricault pounced on the catastrophe to liberate himself from a guilt-ridden affair with his uncle’s young

wife,” says Edge, who also recognized the artistic possibilities of the incident. “A sea voyage brings together a disparate group of characters, here confined in the claustrophobic and unfamiliar world of a small wooden vessel bound on a perilous journey,” she says. “The potential for conflict is simmering on-

board, and individual reactions to extreme circumstances have always fascinated me as a writer. However, I am only drawn to shipwrecks in the sense that they act as a catalyst for powerful, unexpected narratives: in Géricault’s case, a story of creative obsession and grand passion.” Edge is also a master storyteller, maintaining a balanced narrative where less-skilled writers would pour on the melodrama. Said *Kirkus*: “Sparkling...Intensely pictorial, keenly sensitive to the artist’s eye for color, form and the swirling context of humanity and landscape that feeds [Géricault’s] hungry imagination...A quite literally gorgeous novel and a reading pleasure not to be missed.”



In what *Kirkus* called a powerful combination of “vivid travelogue, heart-wrenching family saga and harrowing political intrigue,” journalist **Peter Godwin** (*Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa*, 1996) uses the atrocities committed in his native Zimbabwe under dictator Robert Mugabe as the backdrop for a personal yet universal story of coming to terms with the death of his father, and the discovery of how the father’s secrets shape his son’s sense of identity.

Do you still consider Zimbabwe your home?

Doris Lessing [who lived in Zimbabwe too] talks about a writer’s “myth country,” the place that will always remain their spiritual home. Zimbabwe, and more generally, Africa, remains my spiritual home. I was born and raised there and left the continent for the first time only as an adult. So it still retains a grip on my imagination and my creativity.

Why didn’t your parents leave the country when conditions became so threatening?

It was their home, and for them it was a matter of pride to stay, not to be driven out. And later on, as I explain in *Crocodile*, when my father revealed to me that he was Jewish and that most of his family had perished in the Holocaust, I realized that to him Zimbabwe was his sanctuary, and that having been driven from his original home—Poland—he was determined not to be forced from home again. My father’s physical decline mirrors the collapse of Zimbabwe around him.



Why have the atrocities committed under Mugabe generated so little outrage, particularly in the West?

Zimbabwe lacks two exports that are vital to getting a country onto political prime time: oil and terrorism. Historically Mugabe was given a free pass because his early atrocities, in particular the Matabeleland massacres [of 1984], happened under the smoke screen of the Cold War and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. More recently he has become adept at exploiting the tenacious remnants of Western colonial guilt by spinning the violent oppression of his own people to make it seem as though it’s principally about the eviction of white farmers—which it isn’t.

Themes of identity and discovery pervade your book. What have you discovered about yourself through the experiences that you’ve written about?

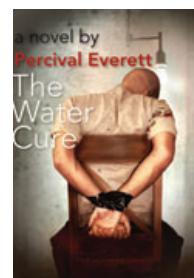
The discovery of my father’s Jewish history helped me to understand why he was so remote and emotionally guarded as a father—because he had fabricated this new identity, he was playing a role almost all his adult life. And toward the end of his life, once he had leveled with me, we came to a new understanding, a new intimacy. And I hope that has also helped me to be a better father. The heartbreaking collapse of Zimbabwe these last seven years, as described in my book, also confirmed my status as an exile, something I hadn’t really dealt with before. I’ve become fascinated by the differences between exile and immigration, the different states of mind.

The Water Cure

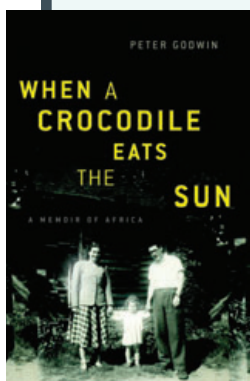
Percival Everett

Graywolf / August / 9781555974763 / \$22.00

In a riveting novel of guilt and revenge, the prolific Percival Everett (*Wounded*, 2005, etc.) takes the reader inside the twisted mind of his first-person narrator as he attempts to come to terms with the rape and murder of his 11-year-old daughter. Since narrator “Call me Ishmael” Kidder is also a novelist, who writes romance fiction using a female pseudonym, themes of identity, creativity and the nature of storytelling and literature pervade the story. The reader may or may not believe the time-tangled tale that Ishmael tells as the narrator somehow feels complicity in his daughter’s tragedy and refers to the unnamed murderer that he tortures in atonement as his “victim.” Some readers may also see political implications, since Kidder’s method of “water cure” could have been drawn from recent headlines on torture. “Whether read as thriller or allegory, Ishmael’s fall from grace has a lacerating power,” said *Kirkus*. “So-called reality never comes to us as a coherent story,” says the author. “The world finds us as a bombardment of stimuli, and that’s what I was thinking as I constructed this book. I did not write a story and then shuffle time. I wanted the work to reflect a mind at work, not a narrative. But of course narrative is inescapable. Though always a construction, narrative is the only way we understand anything. Maybe.”



© Sigrid Estrada

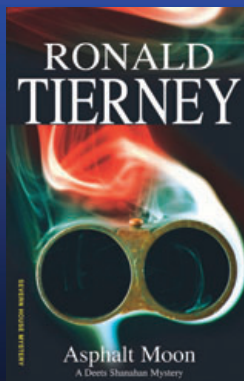


When a Crocodile Eats the Sun: A Memoir of Africa
Peter Godwin
Little, Brown
April / 9780316158947
\$24.99

Severn House Publishers – BEST BOOKS of 2007

These titles all received STARRED REVIEWS in one of the big four* US review journals

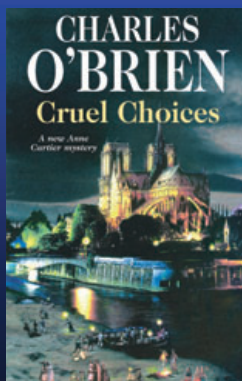
BB-01-11-07



RONALD TIERNEY
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978 0 7278 6493 2 / US\$27.95

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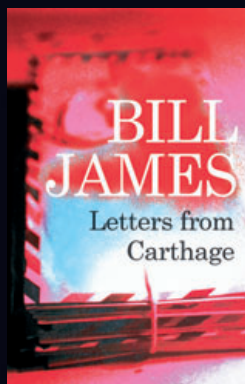
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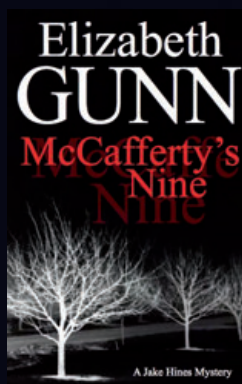
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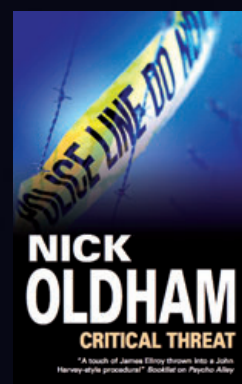
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* *Booklist, Kirkus Reviews, Library Journal, Publishers Weekly*



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The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam: An Illustrated Memoir

Ann Marie Fleming
Riverhead / September / 9781594482649
\$14.00 paperback

To paraphrase the great, mixed-race bard Bob Marley, you have to know where you come from so you can know where you're going to." So writes Ann Marie Fleming, born in Okinawa of mixed Chinese and Anglo-Australian heritage, a Vancouver resident and a well-traveled citizen of the world. Her debut book was born of a documentary film that she made in 2003 about her great-grandfather, another traveling artist, his magic and acrobatics. Long Tack Sam—his name means "a vendor who is a mountain of virtue"—capitalized on the widespread sentiment that anything Asian involved a certain amount of mystery and danger, though he was one of the few supposedly Chinese magicians on the circuit who was actually Chinese, Western impersonators having long since carved out a niche in the magic trade. Long Tack Sam acted in movies, founded a theater chain, lived in Shanghai during World War II and fled China just before it fell to the communists. Fleming unfolds his story through a blend of collage-like artwork, photography and captions, all inspired by the original film. "I wanted to explore the possibilities of different kinds of information on the page," she says, "since the art of reading is so different from that of watching. I wanted it to be accessible to preteens as well as people who were conversant in Asian history, geopolitics, vaudeville and the worlds of magic and acrobatics." The author is now working on a film "riffing on the story of Long Tack Sam" while planning a graphic novel based on her 2005 feature comedy *The French Guy*.



Sticklebacks and Snow Globes

B.A. Goodjohn
Permanent Press / October / 9781579621551 / \$26.00

The stickleback is a small fish that inhabits the waters around the industrial cities of northern Europe, where they certainly ingest plenty of pollutants. "They're rather unspectacular fish," says B.A. Goodjohn—"Bunny" to her friends—who grew up in North London and now lives in rural Virginia. "As I kid, I used to go out most weekends with a jam jar

The Best of 2007 NONFICTION

The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944
Rick Atkinson
Henry Holt

Inner Workings: Literary Essays, 2000-2005
J.M. Coetzee
Viking

American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic
Joseph J. Ellis
Knopf

The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America
Susan Faludi
Metropolitan/Henry Holt

The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War
David Halberstam
Hyperion

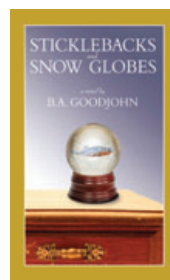
Einstein: His Life and Universe
Walter Isaacson
Simon & Schuster

The Braindead Megaphone
George Saunders
Riverhead

Prime Green: Remembering the Sixties
Robert Stone
Ecco/HarperCollins

Poor People
William Vollmann
Ecco/HarperCollins

and a nylon fishing net and catch them on the Grand Union Canal just down the road from my house." The stickleback is also the totem animal, as it were, for the four girls who inhabit the pages of Goodjohn's debut novel, all born into the working class and condemned to live around the industrial waters of the grim housing estates that circle the British capital. Eight-year-old Tot Thompson, the book's central character, knows her fish, but her own talismans are the snow globes that fill her room, reminders of travels that her itinerant



jazz-musician father has made, emblems of the safe miniature worlds of childhood that turn out to be not so safe after all. Stricken with epilepsy—"not great roll-around fits, but quiet ones"—Tot is at once innocent and acutely aware of all that goes on around her. "She watches," says Goodjohn, "and she figures things out, and she's able to cut through the crap that we adults often dress situations up with." Being watchful and aware does not solve all of Tot's problems, but she's a step or two ahead of other children her age and her older sister in struggling to make sense of life in post-swinging London. Goodjohn's evocation of childhood in that time, and of the timelessness of childhood, is assured and illuminating. She's now at work on another novel in which, she promises, Tot will appear, "cropping up and telling the story when I can't."

In War Times: An Alternate-Verse Novel of a Different Present

Kathleen Ann Goonan
Tor / May / 9780765313553 / \$25.95

When his only brother is killed at Pearl Harbor, Army engineer Sam Dance embarks on a quest to end the war, and perhaps prevent future warfare, in what *Kirkus* called a "thoughtful and often dazzling journey through worlds that might, and perhaps should, have been." The creation of more peaceful alternate worlds comes by way of a device Sam painstakingly constructs from design plans entrusted to him by an enigmatic Eastern European physicist who believes that the machine can transform the quantum nature of humanity's consciousness for the better. Yet it takes the devastation unleashed by an atomic bomb over Hiroshima to help activate it. Sam's desire to understand the nuances of scientific creativity is matched only by his love of modern jazz musicians—Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie—and their artistic originality. While fighting the war in Europe and the Pacific, Sam befriends like-minded enthusiasts, and together they perform the nascent tunes of bebop. An engineer who doubles as a jazz aficionado is no anomaly in the mind of Kathleen Ann Goonan. "I think throughout history there's always been a strong relationship between technology and art," she says, adding that modern science has "deeply influenced the consciousness and the art of the Western



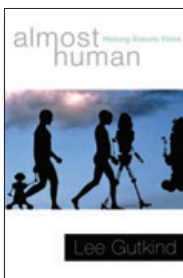
world...making it more fragmented.” Stylistically, Goonan demonstrates strong kinship ties between her characters by interspersing Sam’s first-person accounts of the war, addressed to his deceased brother, within the third-person narrative. This familial bond isn’t just fictional—Goonan says her father’s real-life experience as ordnance specialist in World War II served as the inspiration for the novel.

Almost Human: Making Robots Think

Lee Gutkind

Norton / March / 9780393058673 / \$25.95

When Lee Gutkind decided to write a book about the eccentric scientists responsible for engineering a new generation of robotic technology, he didn’t realize that he would be interviewing mostly people under age 25. But many of the important figures profiled in *Almost Human*, Gutkind’s fascinating examination of research focused on the creation of highly advanced robots, haven’t even finished graduate school. Gutkind refers to these individuals, the majority of them students in the Robotics Institute at Carnegie



Mellon University, as the “rookie revolution.” The author tracks the progress of their studies as they embark on designing several complex robots used to supplant human responsibilities. “I was fascinated by the key contributions of young people,” says Gutkind. “They wrote the code [and] designed and built, from ground up, the robotic creatures who did all of the amazing feats described in the book.” In one of the riveting story threads, Gutkind follows the development of Zoe, a robot intended to engage in scientific discovery without human influence. In another, a rover called Groundhog explores mineshafts to simulate a process that could be used to search for life on Mars. The scientists’ means of tackling these goals forms the book’s engrossing narrative. Although Gutkind acknowledges that research is transient and the book won’t always be perceived the same, he hopes its content will continue to have contemporary relevance. “Most of the technology in *Almost Human* will be old and outdated in ten years, but the young people I have written about may well become leaders and change-makers in their fields,” he says. “I am hoping that readers can look back and see them evolving [in order to] recognize the qualities that shaped the future of technological progress and innovation.”

Without a Map: A Memoir

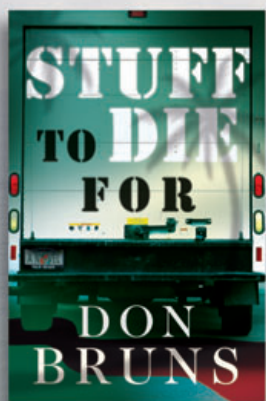
Meredith Hall

Beacon / April / 9780807072738 / \$24.95

Meredith Hall was a good girl growing up in rural New Hampshire until her life took a sudden turn in 1965. Pregnant at age 16, she was expelled from school and told by her mother, “You can’t stay here,” words of betrayal that resonate throughout these eloquent, insightful essays. “I hadn’t understood until I wrote the memoir,” says Hall, “how much of my life had been about a kind of exiling.” Shunned by her community, Hall served out the sentence of her pregnancy with her father and stepmother, who asked her to stay out of sight. Forced to give up her son for adoption, she was expected to return to the world and “make a new start.” Hall finally rebelled and dropped out of college to begin a nomadic international wandering that’s detailed in the book’s title essay. Existing on handouts and by selling her blood, Hall eventually found herself barefoot and penniless on a beach in Lebanon. “Even then I was an earnest, oddly trusting, yet reckless girl,” she says. “I



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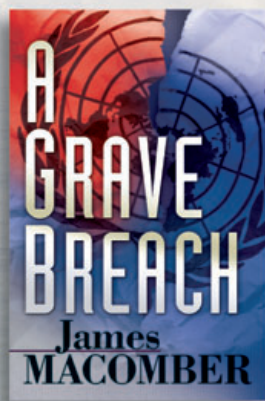


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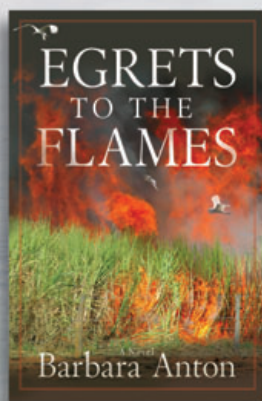
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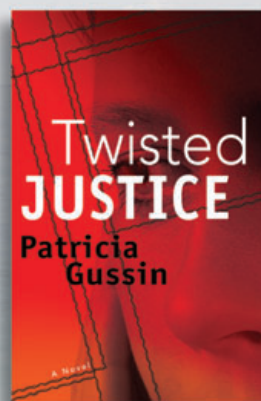
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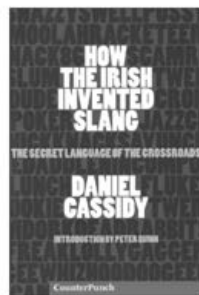
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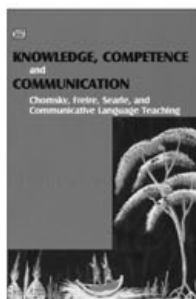
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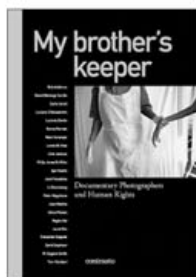
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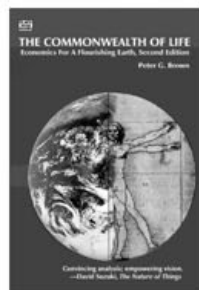
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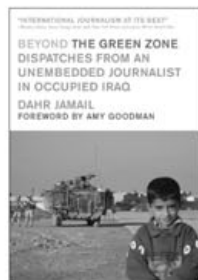
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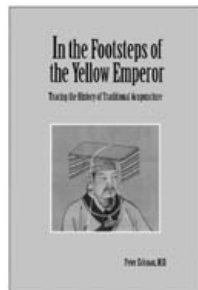


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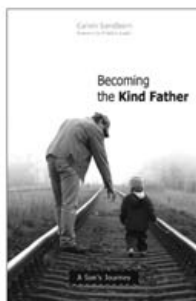


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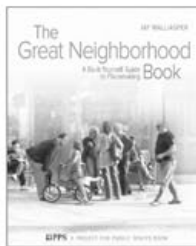
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A.C. Baantjer

The trail of a recent crime leads Inspector DeKok to Bloedberg, Belgium.

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believed what had happened had already gutted me out...there was nothing left that could harm me." Years later, Hall's grown son, raised in an abusive, impoverished home, found her. Their complicated reunion gave her a more compassionate understanding of her parents' behavior and, ultimately, her own. Hall's memoir gives voice to a story that remained unspoken for years; caught off guard by its critical acclaim and attention, Hall wanted to "dive out of sight." Readers would approach her, telling their forbidden stories, which was initially overwhelming. "But then I softened to it," she says. "There's something about the importance of finally telling our stories out loud."

Love & War in California

Oakley Hall

Dunne/St. Martin's / April / 9780312357627 / \$24.95

Veteran West Coast author Oakley Hall's *Love & War in California* deftly follows journalist Payton Daltry, navigating the unsteady course of his life through the political and personal upheaval of World War II and its aftermath. "The use of a first-person narrator always makes you think writing is autobiographical," says the 87-year-old Hall. "Payton is partly me, and his attitudes are my attitudes, but what happens to him is fiction." An aspiring mystery writer who fashions himself after Raymond Chandler, Payton attends San Diego State College, then becomes a columnist at a socialist newspaper, *the brand*, where he criticizes mainstream media and is exposed to writing about molested children. Both topics provide Payton with valuable insights, which he takes to the battlefield. "With the war, he moved on to molested people and then saw molested continents," says the author. "Ultimately, he finds that war turns out to be the greatest molester you can find." Like many war stories, there's a girl. While still in college, Payton falls in love with Bonny, who comes from money and already has a beau. Bonny's parents don't think Payton is a suitable match for her and they fall out of touch. It's only years later, after Payton returns to California, that they meet again, revealing a surprising link that's connected them all along. *Kirkus* called the book "old-fashioned storytelling by a peerless old pro for those who've half-forgotten why they love novels."



Findings: Essays on the Natural and Unnatural World

Kathleen Jamie

Graywolf

March / 9781555974459 / \$14.00 paperback

What makes Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie's essays extraordinary is that they don't ignore nature's "gritty underbelly," says Jeffrey Shotts, editor of Graywolf Press. "The book is so lovingly written you can tell it's written by a poet...But what I really love is that she never leaves out the rubbish, the piece of plastic that's sitting by the tomb or the piece of trash that is washed up on the beach. She takes it all in, both the natural and the unnatural." That quality of unflinching honesty, the mix of the "natural and unnatural world," separates these essays set in Scotland from "other nature writing, which tends to be kind of lovely and beautiful, but leaves out what happens when the natural and the unnatural [human-made] collide," says Shotts. "She has the feeling of 'here's the reality of the natural world as we live [with] it in the 20th century.'" *Kirkus* also noted that "she powerfully mingles the personal and the natural, helping us realize that they are, of course, the same." Short essays about subjects such as "Darkness and Light" (why is "dark" thought "bad"?); "Fever," when her husband nearly dies from pneumonia; "Skylines," what a telescope taken to Edinburgh's Carlton Hill shows about city roofs; and "The Braan Salmon," about creatures in the natural world, all reveal an observant eye and a voice both lyrical and intelligent.



Conquering Gotham: A Gilded Age Epic: The Construction of Penn Station and Its Tunnels

Jill Jonnes

Viking / April / 9780670031580 / \$27.95

There were very few rules in the Gilded Age," says historian Jill Jonnes, who sees it as era enjoying an "amazing flowering of technology." Jonnes's compelling narrative traces Pennsylvania Railroad president Alexander Cassatt's successful struggle to overcome obstacles to link its mainland rails by subaqueous 16-mile tunnels to the island of



Manhattan and to create the Pennsylvania Station terminal. "I was looking for a person that we would have all forgotten about, but who did something that we all know," says Jonnes about her decision to focus on Cassatt and his ambitious engineering project. When she found the original files from the company, she had her story. "Railroads were the pivotal corporate entity," she says. "They remade the whole country; they created new industries; they were the most powerful corporations of their day, and they really were the model of what a corporation was. This was the age of the robber baron, but the Pennsylvania Railroad was not run that way." Jonnes admits to a fascination with the interplay among visionary individuals, technology, government and urban spaces, an interest also seen in her previous books, *Empires of Light* (about electricity) and *South Bronx Rising* (urban spaces), and her current project, a study of the Eiffel Tower. *Conquering Gotham* was lauded by *Kirkus* as an achievement in "the tradition of David McCullough's narratives of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Panama Canal" and as an "elegy to a mighty engineering feat...clearly reported and populated with a well-delineated cast of robber barons, heroic builders and a few crooks sporting handlebar mustaches."

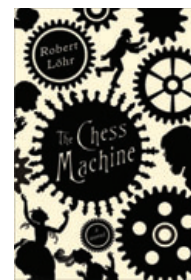
The Chess Machine

Robert Löhr

Translated by Anthea Bell

Penguin Press / July / 9781594201264 / \$24.95

German journalist and playwright Robert Löhr revisits an 18th-century scam concerning the titular machine, which can apparently outthink any human. Amid that century's infatuation with technological possibility, the implications for the computer age are pervasive, though never ponderous, as Löhr brings a light, humorous touch to the tale of this "thinking machine." The chess-playing automaton, an import from the exotic, inscrutable East dubbed "the Mechanical Turk," conceals chess prodigy (and dwarf) Tibor Scardenelli, a devout Catholic who answers to the amoral "inventor," Baron Wolfgang von Kempelen, an ambitious but minor Viennese nobleman, and his Jewish assistant. The story also includes a murder mystery involving a beautiful seductress, as well as plenty of narrative tension as the



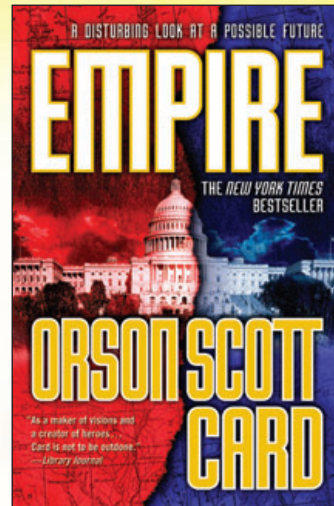
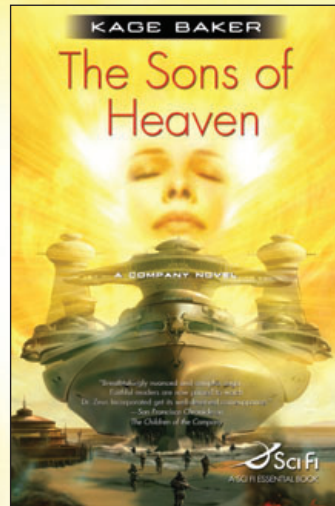
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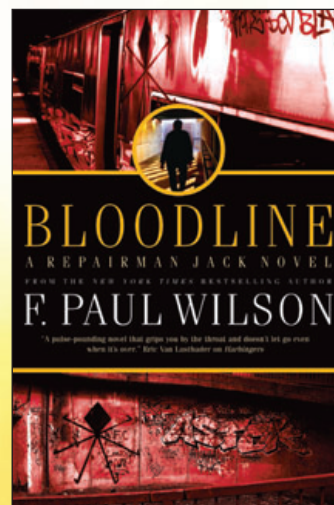
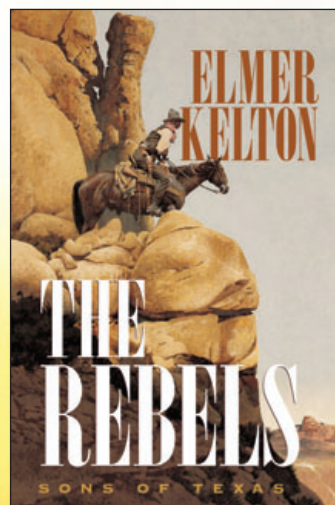
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Turk's fame grows along with Tibor's distaste for the ruse. Said *Kirkus*, "Ultimately the major characters seem to be enacting a real-life game of chess, one in which winning or losing has the most serious consequences... This is a work of such marvelously creative imagination that it makes little difference what is factual and what isn't—it all rings true." Barnes & Noble subsequently included the novel as a fall seasonal selection in its Discover Great New Writers promotion.

The Office of Desire

Martha Moody

Riverhead / August / 9781594489495 / \$24.95

As a practicing physician, Martha Moody's experience with the inner workings of a doctor's office lend her latest page-turner an air of authenticity sure to thrill fans of her acclaimed debut *Best Friends* (2001).



"An office works well as a novel setting," the mother of four sons says, "because it combines claustrophobia with outsider relief. *The Office of Desire* is set in a stand-alone medical office consisting of two doctors and three employees. The people in this office are together all day, and no one can really escape or avoid anyone else. What keeps it from feeling like a submarine is the outsiders—the patients—who pop in and go out. [They] can be distractions, consolations, nuisances and witnesses—sometimes all at once. With a setting like this that is simultaneously closed and open, a writer has a lot of freedom." But Moody explains that the narrative structure of this deeply felt novel was not always so clear-cut. "Originally, the story was told in the alternating voices of all five people who worked in the office," she says. "My agent thought it was too busy, and that not all the voices were convincing. She wanted me to strip it to only Caroline-the-receptionist's voice. I knew that wouldn't work because Caroline, as an employee, couldn't know things about the office and the doctors that one of the doctors would." So Moody decided to utilize the voices of both Caroline and the lovable Dr. Hap Markowitz. "It took me about six weeks to do this...[it] was a technical challenge more than an imaginative one," says the author. "By then, I knew the characters so well that writing about them from any angle felt like simply transcribing what had happened."

The Best of 2007 INDIE BOOKS

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Toby Press

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Roman's Journey: A Memoir of Survival

Roman Halter
Arcade

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Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-first Century

Sherrilyn A. Ifill
Beacon

Findings: Essays on the Natural and Unnatural World

Kathleen Jamie
Graywolf

The Sister: A Novel of Emily Dickinson

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Overlook Press

The Power of Flies

Lydie Salvayre
Dalkey Archive Press

A Woman Trapped in a Woman's Body: (Tales From a Life of Cringe)

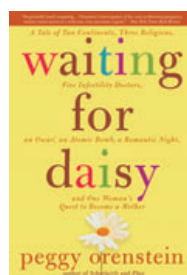
Lauren Weedman
Sasquatch

Waiting for Daisy

Peggy Orenstein

Bloomsbury / February / 9781596910171 / \$23.95

Veteran journalist Peggy Orenstein's moving memoir chronicling the often painful process of having a baby—from in-vitro fertilization to adoption plans—sheds light on this topic through one couple's long path to parenthood. Discussing the emo-



otions she grappled with, however, Orenstein has a surprising confession. "When I do a reading someone always asks how I kept going in the face of the odds, of the sorrow, of the trauma of what Steven and I were going through. I don't see that as an act of courage," she says. "I think the greater act of courage, of true hope and optimism, would've been to walk away from it all, to move forward and embrace whatever life had to offer us whatever the outcome of our attempts to have a child." *Waiting for Daisy* also addresses the media's magnification of the idea that time is running out for women, balanced with a very real account of the biographical truths at the heart of the reproductive process. "I think the lesson I learned," says Orenstein, "was more about living the life you're given, that the best-laid plans can go awry. You can try to fly through life on your Palm Pilot, but things probably won't come out the way you expect. So what are you going to do if you don't get the kids, or you don't get the husband, or you don't get the promotion? Who are you going to be? It's about not wasting your life regardless of what happens...[O]ne of my biggest fears was that my book would be spun by the press to hector women about 'waiting too long.' I'm totally against that whole 'baby panic' idea. I don't want to scare women back into the home."

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The Unforeseen

Christian Oster

Translated by Adriana Hunter

Other Press

October / 9781590512654 / \$13.95 paperback

Acclaimed novelist Christian Oster's biting humor and distinctive Gallic sensibilities are at the forefront of his latest novel, which echoes with the bleak absurdity of Eugene Ionesco. *Kirkus*



called the book "a lucid allegorical gem... eccentric, elusive and at times explosively funny." With a vivid translation by Adriana Hunter, the book is an unconventional love story narrated by a man with no name who suffers a perpetual cold. "The 'hero' of *The Unforeseen* is conceived on the same models as the ones of my previous books," says Oster. "He is indeed an ordinary man, average, who has nothing remarkable about him except for an acute awareness of the trials that he goes through—when it is not blurred by the vapors of alcohol. He is a way for me to formulate a

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"Never, ever drink and surf," a dear friend advises Cassie Moore, a 28-year-old Seattleite who, after having lost in the same day her job, fiancé and apartment, wakes from a drunken stupor to find that she's not only booked herself

JESSICA MORRISON

a flight to Buenos Aires but somehow managed to e-mail the six-month itinerary to her entire address book. The lesson is the first of many painfully learned by **Jessica Morrison's** witty,

endearing and control-issue-plagued protagonist for whom venturing south of the equator was never part of *The Plan*. Cassie's South American retreat leads her to reach out to the world in unforeseen ways, lending this hilarious first novel a warmth and subtle depth characteristic of its author.

Did you write this as an escape for yourself?

I sort of did because I'd gone to Buenos Aires, and I sort of left everything behind. I just really wanted to travel on my own. I'd never done that, and I was 31 at the time, so I figured now or never. I left my job, I left my boyfriend and I left my apartment. When I came back, I thought, well, I'll figure it out when I come home. And I came home to sort of this nothing and culture shock on top of it. No one ever tells you there's reverse culture shock, which is quite unsettling... I hated to leave, so I kind of tried to go back to it through the book.

The novel has a very autobiographical feel to it. Did it feel that way to you while you were writing it?

I certainly did draw on my experiences in Buenos Aires, but Cassie is

The Buenos Aires Broken Hearts Club

Jessica Morrison

5 Spot/Grand Central Publishing

May / 9780446699129 / \$12.99 paperback

definitely not me. I've never had a plan about anything. I sort of fly by the seat of my pants.

Have you ever experienced a particular horror that people then told you was the best thing that ever happened to you?

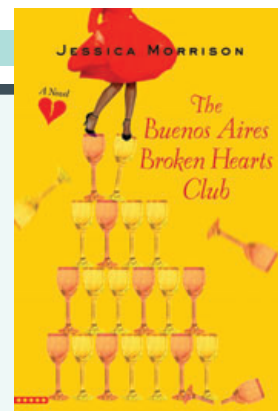
I don't think I have, I really don't. But I have certainly been the perpetrator of that sort of platitude with other people. I have a girlfriend who has everything happen to her. She's one of those people who takes nothing in stride, and, of course, I'm right there with, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," and I think, "Oh God, am I actually saying that?!" I think at some level we all need to believe that's true—you know, "a door closes, a window opens," and all those wonderful things.

Do you, like Cassie, believe that "you get hurt when you hope"?

Well, you know what, I guess I do. I hate to say I sort of agree with her a little bit on that. One of my attitudes about life is that I never expect great things. There's a line that Cassie's mother kind of instills in her: "If you don't expect anything then you'll never be disappointed." That is definitely autobiographical. It sounds depressing, but I never think of it that way. I just always am pleasantly surprised. I'm always kind of cautiously optimistic... Maybe that's why I live sort of off the cuff because if you don't have any expectations, then it's all wonderful... Wow, maybe I am a bit like Cassie but in a perverse way. Scary. We have to stop talking because now I need a therapist.

So have you ever gotten drunk and surfed the Web?

Aah... I've drunk and e-mailed, which is very dangerous—especially for a writer because you think you're being so eloquent, and then the next morning, you're like "please don't read that!"



picture of what certain critics call 'daily life,' and which is, for me, simply the framework of adventure that life consists of." Left to his own devices when his lover succumbs to his illness, the narrator loses his way on a strange journey to a party among strangers. "I always write to break away from my last book while remaining in my own register," says the author. "In *The Unforeseen* there is a will to escape the classical scheme of the amorous encounter. Therefore, at the onset there is a breakup which evolves into a wandering and then resolves itself through a disengagement. Death is also present in the novel in a latent, concealed form."

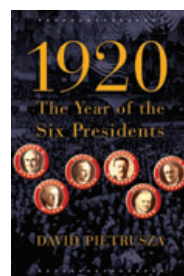
1920: The Year of the Six Presidents

David Pietrusza

Carroll & Graf / February / 9780786716227 / \$28.95

David Pietrusza's *1920* may seem a surprising departure for fans of his award-winning sports writing on the history of baseball, including the biographies *Judge and Jury: The Life and Times of Judge Kenesaw Mountain*

Landis (1998), about the first baseball commissioner, and *Rothstein: The Life, Times, and Murder of the Criminal Genius Who Fixed the 1919 World Series* (2003). But in his first foray into political history, Pietrusza ably navigates the paths of six presidents—and the cast of thousands around them—who combined to comprise a significant part of the backdrop of the 1920 political conventions and election. "It takes time to sort out the details," says the author. "If you just go chronologically, you get tangled up in not knowing whom everyone is, hence the biographical chapters in the beginning to get the context of why and how people are acting. One leads into another. I wanted to have as many interactions highlighted as possible. There's a human process of interaction during the political process, it's a personal-driven thing in many cases." The book also high-



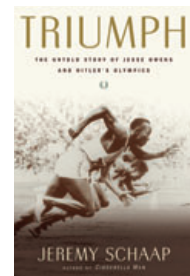
lights the issues of the times: immigration, women's suffrage, Prohibition. "You might have three presidents in a year tops, not just alive but somewhere running in the process," he says. "You look at 1920, at six in one year, and there's such a wide variety in ideology and in personalities. It was a unique time."

Triumph: The Untold Story of Jesse Owens and Hitler's Olympics

Jeremy Schaap

Houghton Mifflin / February / 9780618688227 / \$24.00

There have been so few serious attempts to look at what Jesse Owens achieved," says ESPN journalist Jeremy Schaap. "The Olympics are the most important period in Jesse's life by far. It was the two-week period in which he defined himself and arguably pulled off one of the greatest achievements in sports." To debunk the many legends sur-



rounding one of America's most beloved sports heroes, the author pulls together accounts from sportswriters, eyewitnesses and former competitors, including a previously unpublished interview with Owens's Olympic teammate, the Jewish runner Marty Glickman. From Owens's meager beginnings in rural Alabama to his struggles as a black athlete at Ohio State University to the controversy behind U.S. participation in an Olympics sponsored by Hitler's Nazi regime, Schaap sets the stage for Owens's athletic dominance at the Games. Against the backdrop of an ascendant Third Reich and an America in which the four-time gold medalist was regarded as a second-class citizen, *Triumph* chronicles "the impact Jesse Owens made on two societies through athletic greatness," says Schaap, whose previous book, *Cinderella Man* (2005), was made into the film starring Russell Crowe. "He affected geopolitics at the time by winning as an African-American at Hitler's Olympics," says the author. With this lap-by-lap account, Schaap ensures that *Triumph* "removes much from the realm of myth and brings it back into reality, setting the record straight."

Throw Like a Girl: Stories

Jean Thompson

Simon & Schuster

June / 9781416541820 / \$13.00 paperback

Jean Thompson recently commented online that "the short story has been declared dead more times than a horror movie villain, and in similar fashion, the corpse always rises up to attack one more time." She



proved this true in 1999 when her short-story collection *Who Do You Love* was nominated for the National Book Award, and, with critical acclaim piling up for her latest, largely female-dominated collection, she asserts that both she and the short story have staying power. *Kirkus* praised Thompson's ability to capture the rhythms of the mundane, saying that "each of the 12 stories is precisely fashioned, distinguished by complex and unsparing characterizations and studded with metaphors made from the stuff of everyday life...the Illinois author emerges as something very like America's Alice Munro... Thompson rivals Munro at her greatest." The women in Thompson's stories have breadth in every sense of the word—they range from an

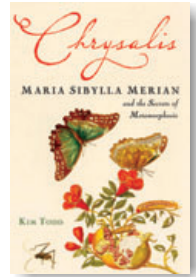
angry teenage misfit to a middle-aged newlywed with second thoughts to a lonely Iowa widow desperately hanging on to tradition—and it is this great diversity that sets Thompson's story collections apart, even, from her own four novels, which follow a more focused, limited plot. While some might consider the short story a dying literary art, it is Thompson's quest, in part, to prove them wrong. "I've always loved short stories, both as a reader and a writer," she says. "And I'm going to keep writing them no matter what." Readers will thank her for that sentiment.

Chrysalis: Maria Sibylla Merian and the Secrets of Metamorphosis

Kim Todd

Harcourt / January / 9780151011087 / \$27.00

An eye-catching drawing on a postcard in a Missoula, Mont., gift shop was science writer Kim Todd's (*Tinkering With Eden: A Natural History of Exotics in America*, 2001) seemingly innocuous introduc-



★ "Haunting...a timeless stunner."

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tion to Maria Sibylla Merian, a German artist and naturalist who became famous in the 17th century for her engravings of caterpillars. On the postcard, the captivating combination of the drawing's beauty and scientific quality suggested to Todd that it was the work of an exceptional woman. "She just wouldn't let me go," says Todd, who spent three years on the biography. "Merian wrote four books about metamorphosis, left her husband, traveled to South America on her own steam to do research, was a self-made member of the scientific community in Amsterdam, and yet there was very little out there about her." Todd's lush, insightful prose captures Merian's own metamorphosis, from teen wife and young mother to a woman who funds her own research journey across the sea. Eschewing the popular philosophy of spontaneous generation, Merian observed instead the "complex ecological tales" unraveling on the flora before her. Her sumptuous drawings matured from purely decorative art to studies that would put her on par with her scientific contemporaries. Todd narrates the history of the study of metamorphosis with a lyrical universalism, drawing parallels among Merian's life, the budding philosophy and greater metaphoric implications. The story is a rich emotional exploration of one of the most literary and poetic sciences. "The metaphor of metamorphosis is universally attractive," says Todd. "Everybody fantasizes that they're going to have this dramatic change where they transform from this plodding caterpillar to this beautiful nectar-sipping butterfly."

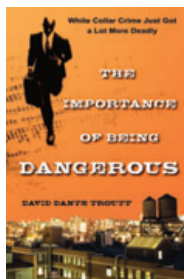
The Importance of Being Dangerous

David Dante Troutt

Amistad/HarperCollins

April / 9780060789299 / \$24.95

David Dante Troutt's first novel presents the complex tale of three disparate individuals—single mother Sidarra, defense lawyer Griff and comedian/computer programmer Yakoob—in search of a way to overcome their personal struggles while making a profit. *Kirkus* gave the book "good marks for its nifty premise, crisp dialogue and well-handled plot," though it's the trio of main characters who drive the story. Sidarra, Griff and Yakoob "felt robust to me," says Troutt, "which meant they could carry the burdens of their lives in revealing ways, and they could



live the story in ways that kept us interested in what they were trying to do. The novel is about many things, but it is also about [the characters'] coming of age once they have left the excuses and the regrets of their youth...[and] grief was big enough to contain, if not explain, each of their motivations." Having incorporated political and romantic elements into themes of racial injustice in previous short stories and nonfiction, the author was faced with a new challenge in trying to infuse the story with more thrilling elements as the characters are drawn into a scheme to defraud individuals who have harmed the black community, a scheme that turns violent when Yakoob's drug-dealing neighbor gets involved. "Finding the balance was extremely tricky," says the author. "As I schemed or wrote, I was always conscious of my newness to thrillers, so I was sometimes overtechnical...I kept practicing until I felt pretty familiar with all three. Eventually, when each was mature and felt solid in its own right, I tried to integrate them effectively to achieve a kind of seamless balance." That he did with aplomb.

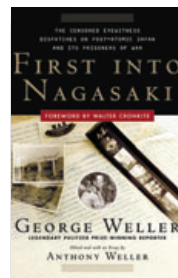
First into Nagasaki: The Censored Eyewitness Dispatches on Post-Atomic Japan and Its Prisoners of War

George Weller

Edited by Anthony Weller

Crown / January / 9780307342010 / \$25.00

George Weller was a Pulitzer Prize-winning, hard-boiled war correspondent, a writer of acute visual sensibility and the first Westerner into Nagasaki following the devastation of the atomic bomb. The city, or what was left of it, had been declared a no-go zone for reporters, but Weller was clever and diligent, poking his nose in places the authorities thought he shouldn't. Unfortunately, his dispatches were confiscated by Gen. Douglas MacArthur's censors. But he made copies, and they were found by his son, novelist Anthony Weller. "After MacArthur cordoned both nuclear sites, my father—who'd bucked censorship for the entire war—felt the world had a right to know what'd happened," he says. "He sneaked into Nagasaki ahead of the U.S. military, told the Japanese he was a colonel and demanded full cooperation. From Nagasaki he 'opened' several nearby POW camps of Allied prisoners who still didn't know the



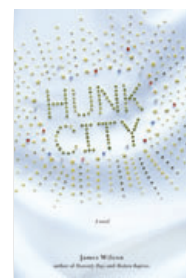
war was over...I also wondered what it meant to be a correspondent before satellite phones, when the tendrils of government strangled you by different methods than now. I ended up even more amazed by what he'd achieved." *Kirkus* called the book "potentially explosive...A stark confrontation, but also rich in evocative anecdotal material that recalls the war in the Pacific with amazing immediacy."

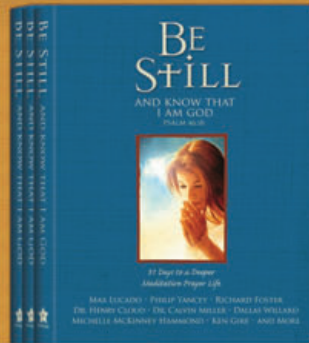
Hunk City

James Wilcox

Viking / March / 9780670031528 / \$25.95

In *Hunk City*, his ninth novel, James Wilcox revisits characters from his critically acclaimed first novel *Modern Baptists* (1983). "I was fascinated by the chance to see how these characters from *Modern Baptists* had changed over the years," he says, "what was different about them, and what remained essentially the same." Years later, the residents of Tula Springs, La.—Burma, her mother Mrs. LaSteele, Mr. Pickens and Donna Lee—are still learning about themselves and how to live with each other's quirks. Wilcox believes humor is integral in helping people accept their differences. "Humor provides a surprising perspective on ourselves, helping us see the otherness in ourselves," he says. "It's this perspective which we all need if we wish to build a community based not on exclusion, but on embracing differences with an overarching sense of love and acceptance." The author worked at Random House with legendary editor Albert Erskine and was part of a literary community that included Erskine's authors, such as Eudora Welty and James Michener, as well as Toni Morrison and Jacqueline Onassis. "After I left NYC and after being a visiting writer at Mississippi State University," he says, "I arrived at Louisiana State University to teach in the very same building where my former boss, Albert Erskine, and Robert Penn Warren had been working on *The Southern Review*...So you see I'm now part of a thriving literary community that ties in to my past. I feel as if I've returned to the origin of the literary circle I enjoyed at Random House while working for Albert Erskine." With all the eccentricities and originality we've come to expect from the residents of Tula Springs, *Hunk City* brings Wilcox's characters full circle as well.

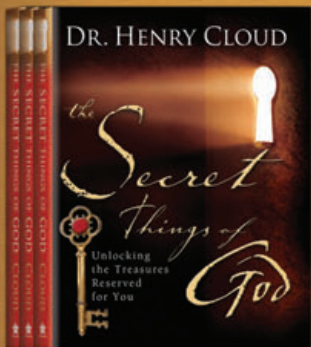




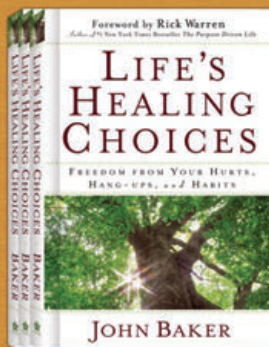
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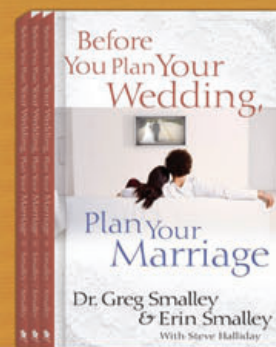
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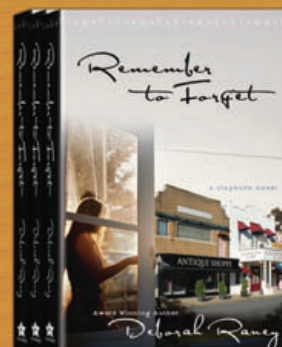
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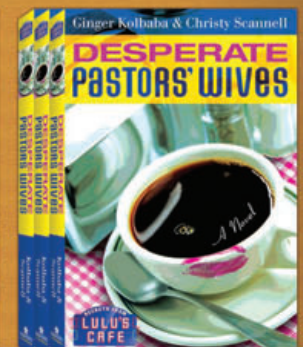
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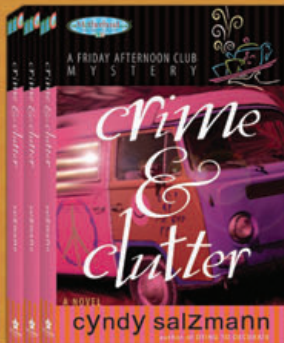
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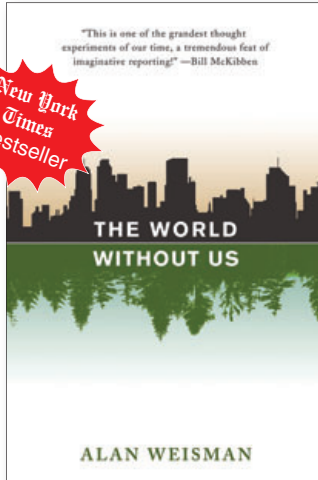
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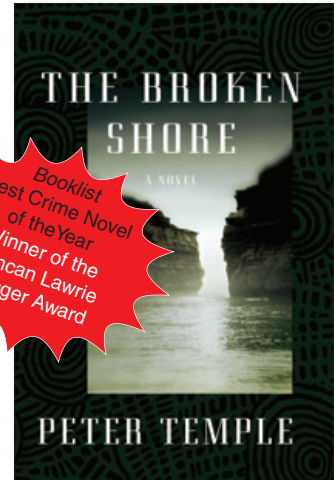
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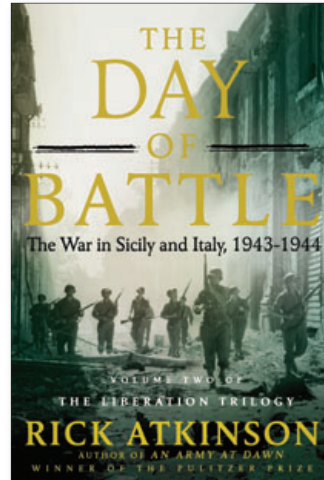
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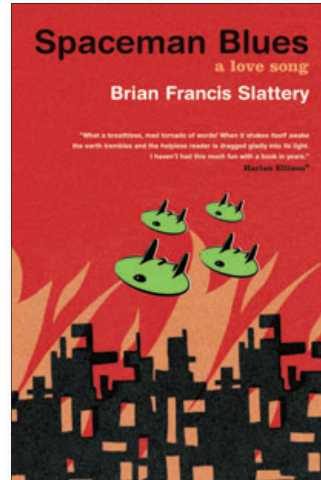
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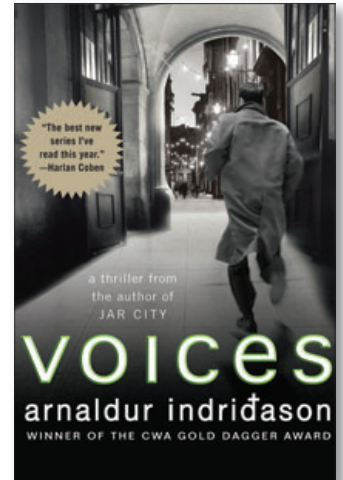
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