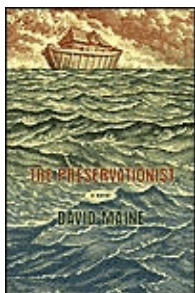


**FICTION**

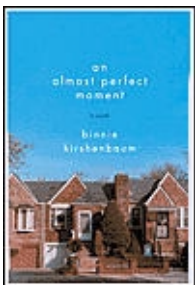
new in hardcover, 2004



**The Preservationist**

**David Maine. St. Martin's Press: 2004 (hardcover). ISBN: 0312328478. 240 pages.**

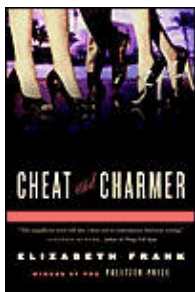
David Maine gives an old wet story a new spicy twist, in this novel that re-imagines the epic adventures of Noah and the Ark. With help (a lot of help, because remember, he's a few hundred years' old) from his wife, sons, and remarkably resourceful daughters-in-law, Noah builds his boat and stuffs it full of all the things that walk, crawl, swim, and fly upon the earth. This novel is theologically serious—a philosophic look at faith, prophecy, and apocalypse—but also seriously fun—just picture you and *your* entire extended family trapped in a giant leaky canoe with all of nature frantically attempting to mate and eat each other. And you. And you definitely don't want to look at what's on the floor when you have to go to the bathroom.



**An Almost Perfect Moment**

**Binnie Kirshenbaum. HarperCollins: 2004 (hardcover). ISBN: 0060520868. 288 pages.**

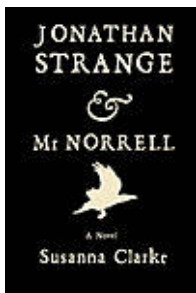
An almost perfect title for a novel that comes freakishly close to perfection. Set in Brooklyn "on the cusp of the great age of Disco," Kirshenbaum's story features a pair of unusual star-crossed lovers: sixteen-year-old Valentine Kessler (a sweet but spacey Jewish girl who happens to be a dead ringer for the Virgin Mary), and her socially-challenged math teacher John Wosileski (he lives with his parents). Obstacles to their blissful union include Valentine's best friend Beth Sandler, who despairs of Valentine's increasing descent into "weirdness," and John's lukewarm girlfriend Joanne Clarke, the bitter, malevolent biology teacher who is determined to hang on to her only available male specimen. If anyone in this novel deserves to be bitter, it would be Miriam Kessler, Valentine's mother, who has lost the love of her life in Valentine's faithless father. But Miriam takes unabashed pride in her beautiful daughter, delights in daily mah-jongg with The Girls (three bejeweled and bouffanted Brooklyn ladies who function like a Greek Chorus to the drama of the novel), and focuses on the pleasures of eating herself into oblivion. The wonder of this novel is its eerie balance of happy and sad, of hope and despair, delusion and acceptance—it's as delicious as disco and doughnuts, but as deep as death and the Virgin Birth—both of these last being elements which are soon to rock this conventional community.



**Cheat and Charmer**

**Elizabeth Frank. Random House: 2004 (hardcover). ISBN: 1400060915. 560 pages.**

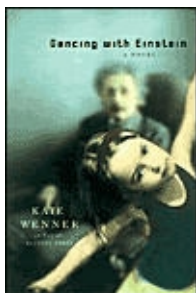
Flip to the inside cover of Elizabeth Frank's enticing new novel and you'll find this ambitious promise: "Twenty-five years in the making, a first novel that has already been compared to the *Sun Also Rises* and *The Last Tycoon*, *Cheat and Charmer* is certain to be one of the most admired literary debates of the season." Well, we're happy to say that we concur. And we're also happy to endorse the endorsement of John Guare, author of *Six Degrees of Separation*, who offers this persuasive pitch: "*Cheat and Charmer* begins with an act of betrayal that escalates with dazzling skill and moral complexity into every form of betrayal imaginable. . . . The few times I put it down to leave the house and do reality things, I found myself missing the world of this book and hurried happily back home to it." Okay, now that we've let everyone else do the talking for us, we'll see what we can add to the general hoopla. In short, *Cheat and Charmer* is the Great American Novel of the Hollywood Blacklist. It's the story of a Hollywood wife who rats on her beloved-but-treacherous sister in order to save her increasingly successful screenwriter husband from the vicious clutches of the Great American Witch Hunt of the Twentieth Century. This debacle from our not-so-distant past was also known as the House Un-American Activities Committee, headed by Grand Inquisitor Joseph McCarthy. Sex, sisterhood, scandal, cinema, politics, and betrayal—an irresistibly mouth-watering recipe for your vicarious pleasure, served up by Pulitzer-prize winning biographer Elizabeth Frank. Not too shabby for a first novel.



### Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell

Susanna Clarke. Bloomsbury: 2004 (hardcover). ISBN: 1582344167. 800 pages.

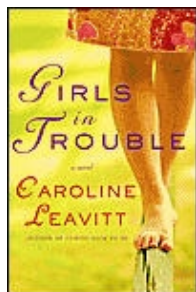
At a whopping 782 pages, this novel might seem scary to the slow reader. But fear not, because those pages go whipping by. The year is 1806 and things look grim, both for the English people as a whole and for the ragged bunch of Englishmen who persist in calling themselves magicians. The future of Britannia is threatened by that pesky petite Frenchman who will lend his name to short, insecure men for generations to come, and the nation has no hope of a modern-day Merlin who might lend a supernatural hand. Hundreds of years have passed, we learn, since any English magician has actually *practiced* magic—those erudite few that remain confine themselves to writing and presenting densely theoretical papers on Britain's murky magical history. But just at this most depressing of hours, the York Society of Magicians stumbles upon a blast from the past in the form of one Mr. Norrell, a genuine practicing magician who can deliver miracles on cue. Giddy with his new popularity, the formerly reclusive and fatuously boring Mr. Norrell decides his government needs him in order to defeat Napoleon. Unfortunately, just as he's settling down to enjoy himself as England's greatest (and by his order, its *only*) authorized magician, Norrell is challenged by the emergence of an even greater magical talent. The tall, dark, and handsome young Jonathan Strange becomes Norrell's grudging pupil, but chafes under his master's jealous, fussy, and obstinate insistence that English Magic should Keep it Simple. As Strange grows more and more interested in the long-buried secrets of English magic and its elusive founder (a folklore hero known as the Raven King), he becomes more and more oblivious to a certain unexplainable gentleman with thistledown hair who's taken quite a shine to Strange's pretty wife. You, however, aren't likely to overlook this particular gentleman; in fact, you are likely going to become increasingly and acutely aware of every tiny hair creeping up the back of your neck each time he appears. You've probably guessed by now that fans of fantasy and historical fiction are going to lose their minds over the joy of this book. But we predict that the ridiculously brilliant *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* will make a clean sweep in the seduction of book lovers of all kinds—even those who tend to get impatient with Rings and Towers and Time Travel. (GBL's Ellen Moore addresses any fellow cynics: "Take it from me, because in general I hate fantasy and sci-fi and all that weird Dungeons and Dragons cr\*p. But this book is awesome. In all seriousness, your great-great-grandchildren are going to be reading it. And Harry Potter is going to get really jealous.") On more respectable authority, we'll turn you over to a sound byte from *Time* magazine: "Ravishing. . .combines the dark mythology of fantasy with the delicious social commentary of Jane Austen into a masterpiece of the genre that rivals Tolkein." Fantasy guru Neil Gaiman add his own unequivocal stamp of approval: "unquestionably the finest English novel of the fantastic written in the last seventy years." Tempted yet?



### Dancing with Einstein

Kate Wenner. Simon & Schuster: 2004 (hardcover). ISBN: 0743251644. 223 pages.

A wonderful story of a young woman who cheats on her shrink with another therapist. But polygamatherapist Marea Hoffman isn't stopping there. When fate drops a third, then a fourth psychologist into her lap, she decides to go for all the help she can. At the age of thirty, having wandered the world for the past seven years, Marea decides it's time to face the questions that have kept her running for so long. The story she tells her therapists is in some ways typical of a 1950's childhood—McCarthy on television and "duck and cover" drills at school reinforce the ever-lurking terror of a nuclear attack. But the horrors of war and annihilation live especially close to home for this little girl. Marea's beloved father, Jonas Hoffman, a holocaust survivor for whom the threat of fascism is only too real, worked on the Manhattan Project and later on the building of the hydrogen bomb. Jonas's continued involvement in the development of weapons of mass destruction creates harsh discord in the family—he is opposed by both his Quaker wife and the Hoffman's close friend, Albert Einstein. Now, with the help of four very different mental health professionals, Marea seeks to discover the truth about her father's death and her own travels to the edges of the earth. Kate Wenner's writing and characterization is crisp, sharp, and resonant. Our book groups in Denver are crazy for this novel, and call it a must-read for 2004.



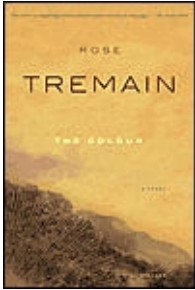
### Girls in Trouble

Caroline Leavitt. St. Martin's Press: 2004 (hardcover). ISBN: 0312271220. 368 pages.

Yes, folks, we're talking about girls in the very oldest kind of trouble. Sara is sixteen and pregnant, but manages to talk herself into the idea that she isn't. For the immediate future, all she's worried about is the disappearance of her once-devoted boyfriend. As the weeks turn into months, Sara's best option seems to be George and Eva, an older couple willing to partner in an open adoption. In the months before the birth, Sara, George, and Eva form a little family of their own. But when baby Anne arrives, all three realize that perhaps they've taken their intimacy a little too far. Eva gets jealous, George gets possessive, and Sara gets desperate, desperate enough to get Anne back for herself, with consequences that will echo far in the future for all three of these girls in trouble. Check the back jacket and you'll find authors like Pam Houston, Elizabeth Strout, Gail Tsukiyama, and Kate Greenville in harmonious agreement that this emotionally wise novel will keep you glued to the page.

## FICTION

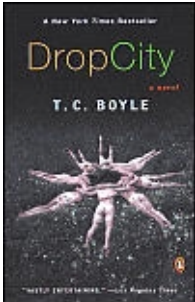
new in paperback, 2003-2004



### The Colour

Rose Tremain. Picador: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 0312423101. 400 pages.

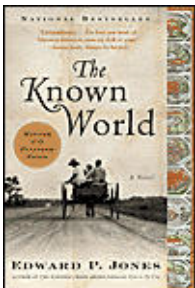
If Rose Tremain's *The Colour* doesn't become a bestseller and a book group classic for the ages, it will be nothing short of a crying shame. This historical novel of the gold rush in nineteenth-century New Zealand has it all—a terrific cast of multi-faceted characters, a heart-racing pulse of plot, an exotically unfamiliar setting, and, of course, "the colour." Newlyweds Joseph and Harriet Blackstone flee England for a new start at farming in New Zealand, leaving behind a terrible crime that Joseph hasn't yet gotten around to revealing to his wife. But when Joseph makes a surprising discovery in his new land, he finds a reason to hoard a new secret, and to abandon his family and farm in favor of future reward beyond his earlier wildest dreams. Harriet is left behind, but soon finds herself compelled by overwhelming desires of her own to hit the road. You'll be as amazed as the characters themselves about what (and whom) they find in this tantalizing, tortuous wilderness—in short, you're going to freak out at how good this novel is.



### Drop City

T.C. Boyle. Penguin: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 0142003808. 512 pages.

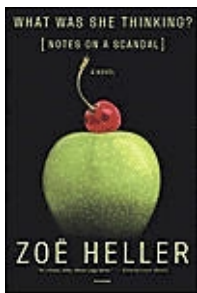
Almost a decade ago, T.C. Boyle dropped a potent little bomb on the American reading scene in the form of his button-pushing novel *Tortilla Curtain*—perhaps you remember the bile rising and your heart thudding in your throat as you followed the adventures of the family of illegal Mexican immigrants who unwillingly gate-crashing a gated community of well-meaning white California liberals. In *Drop City*, Boyle is back at what he does best, exploring the crash of cultures that takes place when two very different groups of people try to make a home in the same smallish place. In our opinion, *Drop City* does *Tortilla Curtain* one better; *TC* is a great book for group or classroom discussion because it does get everyone so riled up, but is stymied somewhat by the extreme moral polarization of its characters (the Mexican immigrant family so sweet and good and the Californian liberal family so politically-correct despicable). The two equally appealing and annoying sets of characters that will fight it out in *Drop City* earn our loyalties and frustrations pretty much evenly on both sides. The novel takes its name from an alternative-lifestyle commune taking its last great hash-brownie gasp in 1970 Southern California. With the commune going broke and the members bickering down to their last nerves over whose turn it is to wash the dishes with biodegradable soap, the commune's wealthy founder makes the bold decision to load up the magic buses and move the entire community to a truly isolated part of Western Alaska. Everyone's completely groovin' over this welcome change, this happy chance to coexist peacefully with the ultimate in nature in the ultimate in the outskirts of mainstream society. Of course, they're not taking into account what endless months of midnight sun and a complete absence of local strip mall health food stores may do to test their commitment to authentic unspoiled experience. Nor are they thinking about the other American drop-outs who have been happily carving out a hippie-free existence in the most isolated outpost of the United States, the no-nonsense trappers, hunters, lumberjacks, and fisherman who aren't exactly hip to the whole tie-dye thing. As the two groups wage an extremely volatile balance for co-existence, you, safe in your armchair, will be having the time of your life. And this is one of those rare books that picks up momentum and simply doesn't stop for breath—we read the last 50 to 100 pages literally gasping for air waiting to see who would come back alive.



### The Known World

Edward P. Jones. HarperCollins: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 0060557559. 416 pages.

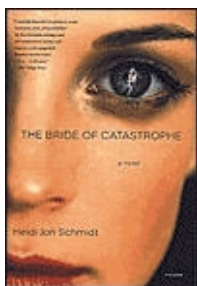
The very newest winner of the Pulitzer Prize for literature (would that be for 2004? How did they decide already? Anyway). Inspired by his own research into a relatively overlooked phenomena in America's pre-Civil War historical past, Edward P. Jones has unleashed a powerful but poignant punch to the gut of our collective ideas about the dirty little misfortune of a once-very-popular industry. Sure, it wasn't a common thing, but in certain areas of the American South, free black men and women could and did own black slaves. Jones sets us up with two slave-owning plantation families, one owned by a decently open-minded but severely self-satisfied powerful white landed gentleman, the other by his protégé, a freed slave who runs an almost equally prosperous operation. It took us a few pages to get into the rhyme and rhythm of this elegantly ambitious novel, but by the end of the first chapter we were utterly hooked. It's the kind of story of fuzzy boundaries, confusing loyalties, and the best of misguided intentions that's so vividly alive it literally bounces off the page—you can picture the movie that you just know they're going to make, and hope that Hollywood doesn't attempt to tidy it up. Definitely a must-read choice that will delight and devastate the discerning reader of the twenty-first century—and prepare yourself to be knocked flat on your posterior by the blood-rattling ending.



### What Was She Thinking? (Notes on a Scandal)

Zoe Heller. Picador: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 0312421990. 272 pages.

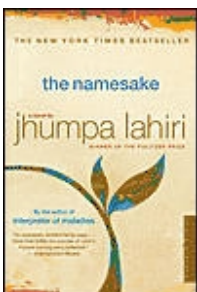
You've probably heard something about this novel by now, seeing as it's been on everybody's "Top Ten of 2003" lists; everybody like *Entertainment Weekly*, *New York Times*, *New York Post*, the Man Booker Shortlist, etc., etc. What you may not know is just how much sheer *fun* this novel is; it's the rare nifty little novel that allows you to snicker in a superior sort of way while encouraging you to think about some fairly big and important social/cultural issues. In present-day England, schoolteacher Barbara Covett is leading a sanctimonious and thus not-surprisingly-solitary life (her last close friend has deserted her under mysterious circumstances). But then she bonds with new art teacher Sheba Hart. Barbara doesn't know that Sheba is also developing another new friendship at school, of a very passionate and intimate nature, with one of her teenage students. The inevitable discovery leads to the inevitable media circus, leading Barbara to the decision to write an account of the affair in defense of her maligned and misunderstood friend. An account that reveals much about Barbara, possibly, than she ever intended, perhaps even more than it reveals about Sheba's questionable motives in falling head-over-heels-in-love with a sulky fifteen-year-old schoolboy.



### The Bride of Catastrophe

Heidi Jon Schmidt. Picador: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 031242342X. 432 pages.

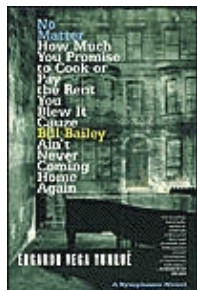
Those among you who fell willing victim to Heidi Jon Schmidt's delectable short story collection *Darling?* (like GBL's ardent fan Kira Stevens) will be glad to know that Schmidt is back at the top of her form, working her evil literary magic. Heroine-at-a-loss Beatrice Wolfe grows up in a decidedly dysfunctional family scratching out a living on a small farm in Connecticut—whose main agricultural concern seems to be an unsuccessful ping-pong factory. At college, Beatrice is determined to escape from her family's maniacal whimsy, to become the sort of regular person who does regular sorts of things—although she doesn't quite grasp the concept of regular. Beatrice finds a thrillingly sympathetic listener in her literary tutor Phillipa, an outspoken scholar and lesbian who seems fascinated by Beatrice's unfolding life story. Despite evidence to the contrary and the protests of nearly everyone who knows her, Beatrice decides that she, too, is a lesbian, and thus a part of the revolutionary women's movement that is sweeping the nineteen-seventies. This novel walks a marvelous emotional tightrope between the terrifically funny and the desperately sad, making for a joyful but unsettling reading experience.



### Namesake

Jhumpa Lahiri. Houghton Mifflin: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 0618485228. 304 pages.

"Short stories don't sell." That's what they say, at least in terms of the general reading public. And unfortunately, in the eyes of the publishing industry, it's the general public (and what they'll shell out twelve to twenty-five bucks for) that counts. No to harsh on the publishers, because after all it's not their fault that we live in a completely consumer-driven society. A couple of years ago, however, a little book of short stories put a significant dent in that marketing theory, when Jhumpa Lahiri's collection *Interpreter of Maladies* won both the Pulitzer Prize and the rabid adoration of millions of readers worldwide. Now Lahiri follows up with her first novel, and you'll be glad to know she shows nothing but ever-increasing promise and talent. In *The Namesake*, Lahiri continues to explore and enrich the themes that made her collection an international favorite: "the immigrant experience, the clash of cultures, the conflicts of assimilation, and most poignantly, the tangled ties between generations." That's according to the book-jacket copy, and we couldn't have said it better ourselves. Following their approved and arranged marriage in Calcutta, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli settle together in Cambridge, Massachusetts. When their first child, a son, is born in an American hospital, the choice of a name for the boy betrays the mixed blessings of trying to honor the old ways in an utterly strange new world. Ashima's grandmother has named the children of her family for generations, but when her letter is lost in the mail, Ashoke Ganguli decides to name his son for his favorite Russian writer. Gogol Ganguli knows nothing of the tragedy nor the redemption that has shaped his father's life. All he knows is that his name is neither American nor Indian, which doesn't help his continuing struggle to navigate the conflicting cultures by which he's trying to define his identity. In search of his real name, his true identity, Gogol struggles along a first-generation American path cluttered with divisive loyalties, darkly comic pitfalls, and soul-shaking love affairs—unfortunately for Gogol, as a literary character, he can't take comfort in that we the readers will be rooting for him every inch of the way. Oh, and by the way, if you're wondering if Jhumpa Lahiri is still as "it's just not fair" beautiful as she looked in her *Interpreter of Maladies* author photo, we must warn you that she seems to have gotten even more breathtaking in the past couple of years.



### No Matter How Much You Promise to Cook or Pay the Rent You Blew It Cauze Bill Bailey Ain't Never Coming Home Again (a Symphonic Novel)

Edgardo Vega Yunqué. Picador: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 0312424027. 816 pages.

No matter how much you may fear asking your local librarian or book seller to find this book for you—quick, name that title in one breath!—you don't want to be responsible for Bill Bailey never coming home again, now do you? This is yet another giant of a book (a mere 789 pages), but yet again, we wouldn't encourage your eyestrain if it weren't utterly worth every elliptical, explosive page. Winner of the 2004 Latino Book Award, *Bill Bailey* is a story for every shade of color and culture that make up the ever-shifting ethnic stew known as America. This multi-family epic takes us from the hustling streets of present-day Manhattan's Lower East Side to the gummy jungles of war-ravaged Vietnam to the silent, stubborn cabins of the Civil War South to the long, terrible walk of the Cherokee Nation's "trail of tears"—then snaps back forward to join Puerto Rican homegirls singing the 1960s hit "Latin from Manhattan" as they take the Number 6 to

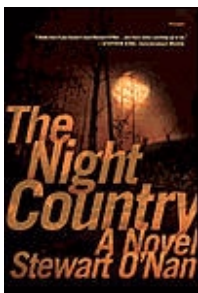
Orchard Beach. And that, my friends, is just in the first couple of chapters. The heroine at the heart of this miraculous collective is precocious teenager Vidamia Farrell, half Puerto-Rican, half Irish, and half analyzed-to-death by her socially ambitious psychologist mother Elsa Santiago. Vidamia sets out to find the father she has never known, despite her mother's desperate determination to keep things that way until roughly the end of time. In Billy Farrell and his delightful second family, Vidamia discovers an entirely otherworldly side to her cultural identity. But despite the blissful satisfaction and sense of place she enjoys with the Farrell clan, one or two pressing questions just won't go away. Namely, why did her father, in 1968 a skinny-white-boy jazz pianist of such unnerving talent that he was courted by none other than Miles Davis, turn down an offer to become a member of the Miles Davis Quintet because he felt he "had" to serve in Vietnam? And why, still, so many years later, does the very sight of a piano make Billy break out in shuddering sweat? And what about that other mysterious musical genius from Elsa Santiago's estranged past—why is Vidamia forbidden access to her own maternal grandfather? *People* magazine sings the praises of Yunqué's 'symphonic novel': "In an exceptional epic shaped by the jagged rhythms of jazz. . . you'll be humming 'Bill Bailey' long after the music stops." We agree, but add this reader's caveat (Yunque doesn't sugarcoat so neither will we) there's a scene or two here that are among the harshest we've ever run across in any kind of reading. Still, the novel as a whole is among the richest, deepest, juiciest celebrations of the panoply of American Life that we've ever encountered anywhere in literature. Bill Bailey might not never be coming home again, but Yunqué's account of his troubled wanderings in search of The Dream is truly stunning in its sheer comprehensive blue-note history.



### Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?

**Lorrie Moore. Vintage: 2004 (paperback reprint). ISBN: 1400033829. 160 pages.**

During our life-changing meeting (for us, that is, not for her!) Oprah Winfrey told us that she's a big believer in first sentences, in opening paragraphs, as indicators of that truly special and rare book that will take over your heart and mind. Which, of course, made us feel incredibly justified in our own devotion to the prophetic power of first impressions! So check out this first paragraph from Lorrie Moore's achingly wondrous first novel: "In Paris, we eat brains every night. My husband likes the vaporous, fishy mousse of them. They are a kind of seafood, he thinks, locked tightly in the skull, like shelled creatures in the dark caves of the ocean, sprung suddenly free and killed by the light; they've grown clammy with shelter, fortified vulnerability, dreamy nights. Me, I'm eating for a flashback." If the main body of that elegant prose seems too high-falutin' for your taste, you can't overlook the tight practical jab of those first and last sentences. As near as we can get to explaining the sheer magic of Moore's writing, it has something and everything to do with the way she combines such lovely lyrical phrases with such glib, merciless humor—Kira Stevens discovered Moore's complicated gift for GBL when she chose Moore's short story collection *The Birds of America* for our very first ever Greedy Reader Menu in January of 2000. We know that we've overloaded you with some huge books in this new menu, so we're especially pleased to offer you this tiny perfect gem of 148 pages. And we know something else about all greedy readers out there, that is if you were once fifteen and had a best friend—that best friend who made you laugh like a maniac as you explored all the possible crimes and misdemeanors of youth. The heroine of *The Frog Hospital* is one such lucky soul, a grown woman who is looking back with bittersweet nostalgia for the wildness of her youth. The summer that Berie and Sils were fifteen, they got into some really terrible but also terribly funny trouble, and now Berie, like so many of us as adults, is missing that lost best friend who can't be replaced by any marital partner, no matter male or female, no matter how clever or devoted. Berie's story is milk-spurting-shockingly-from-your-nose funny, but also so undeniably tender and true that you're going to find yourself underlining quotes that capture something that's been lurking at the back of your wandering mind for as long as you've been a productive member of society.



### The Night Country

**Stewart O'Nan. Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 0312424078. 240 pages.**

Some of you may remember the heady days when you took charge of your book group or personal pleasure reading destiny. When you took the pledge against the whole gruesome literary subgenre (so randomly popular in the mid-to-late-nineties) that we'll call the "Dead Kids" category. Remember when you said "thanks-but-no-thanks" to Oprah, to Martha, even to Kathie Lee (for these were back in the pre-Kelly Ripa years)? Well, it seems like you got their attention, because while no topic in literature can remain taboo forever, we noticed that the pre-millennium glut of (mostly) fairly good novels that featured that death, dismemberment, or disappearance of children slowed to a more refined trickle. Please forgive the casual tone about what is no doubt the most serious tragedy a family can experience, but if you were a regular reader of contemporary American fiction during the last decade, you know what we're talking about. So, all this said, we've got to tell you about a truly great, utterly gripping dead-kid book. As it happens, three of the novel's major characters are ghosts, the restless spirits of three teens who died in a fatal encounter between a speeding car and a motionless tree. These weary, wise-cracking ghosts spend the majority of their time with the three living people who survived the crash: one a former high-school student who is half the boy he used to be, having lost the greater part of his personality to irreversible brain damage, a second the unlucky teen who climbed from the car intact and whose guilt is driving him to count the days until he can commit suicide, and the third the cop who was first on the scene of the accident, a once-devoted keeper of the peace whose life has been as utterly ruined as the teenagers and their families. As the ghosts keep their vigil over their still-breathing favorites, they realize that unless they can find a way to interfere, history is about to repeat itself. Only this time, things are going to get *really* bad. This would be a terrific read for young adult readers as well as adults, it's scary and funny and spooky and beautiful—if you can take the ride, you're going to find some unexpectedly important gifts along the journey.

## SOME LIGHTER FARE

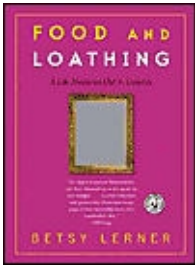
fiction and non-fiction



### I Love You Like a Tomato

Marie Giordano. Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 0312424078. 240 pages.

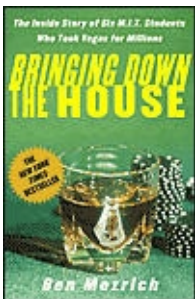
Yes, you can pick up this mass-market paperback in the magazine aisle at Walgreens (or you could circa Summer of 2004, anyway). But don't let that fool you. *I Love You Like a Tomato* is seriously good literary fiction, as unique and delightful as its title suggests. ChiChi Maggiordino has made the treacherous journey from Italy to America with her mother, grandmother, and very sick little brother Marco. The family is expecting to stay with their American grandparents, awaiting the return of the American soldier ChiChi's mother married in 1944. Unfortunately, this plan doesn't work out as they had hoped, since the aforementioned American soldier's family has absolutely no idea what's about to arrive on their doorstep. As the family struggles with debilitating poverty, and Marco grows sicker and sicker, ChiChi becomes impatient with her mother's efforts to "be making a plan of her brain" and takes things into her own hands. So long as she performs a hundred magical rituals—walking backwards everywhere she goes, fasting for forty days, tapping her toe a hundred times under the table, hopping on one foot for the day, and so forth—she will keep her darling brother safe and her fragile family together. As ChiChi begins growing up in 1950s America, her fervent quest to find her place in a foreign culture is reminiscent of Rita Mae Brown's main character in *Rubyfruit Jungle* (in this case, an Italian-American outsider instead of a Lesbian-American outsider). There's something, that is, about Marie Giordano's writing that is just that good, just that distinctive and nuanced. And that doesn't even address how incredibly fun this book is to read. GBL's Ellen Moore admits she consumed it twice through, back-to-back, in one week, and wants Marie Giordano to know she is VERY ANXIOUSLY awaiting the next book in the promised trilogy about the Maggiordino family.



### Food and Loathing

Betsy Lerner. Simon & Schuster: 2004 (paperback). ISBN: 074325550X. 290 pages.

For every woman (or man, let's not be calorie-sexist) out there who has counted calories for so many years that she can tell you today's exact number so far before you finish asking the question, here's a story that will win over your heart—and all your other "problem areas." Betsy Lerner serves up some truly excellent grub on her life thus far, a life that, as far back as she can remember, has been measured in food units, fad diets, secret binges, and size 8 jeans nestling hopelessly but reproachfully in the back of her closet. Beginning with her adolescent addiction to Overeaters Anonymous (think about that for a moment—here's a support group that equates "foodism" with alcoholism, and preaches the same total abstinence approach), Lerner explores the deeply shameful, endlessly hungry life of the professional dieter. Laugh if you want, call it crazy, but we found a lot we could relate to in this story of a life in which major events, landmarks, relationships, achievements, vacations, job changes, losses, celebrations, etc., are all evaluated and remembered by a number on a scale, a size on a waistband. While Lerner's account of life in the fat lane contains some very sad, indeed devastating material, this award-winning writer never loses her sense of humor for too long. In other words, this isn't one of those complete downer tales of relentless stuffing and vomiting and suicide attempts—Lerner doesn't spare us these very real patterns, but she's too clever and sharp and funny not to see the black comedy of her obsessions as well. At the heart of Lerner's memoir is Betsy's long-cherished conviction that almost all of her pain and problems stem entirely from being fat—not of course, from any real emotional suffering that might be feeding her insatiable appetite—again, it might sound crazy to all you ectomorphs and skinnies and hard-bodies out there, but this is a very real and very pervasive emotion. Isn't it something like 60% of our country that's technically obese? Read Lerner's memoir on your own, or with your class or book group; or maybe you'll pair the book with last year's subversive documentary *Super Size Me*; in any combination, you'll find plenty of very tasty food for thought, both substantial as fiber and orgasmic as frosting.



### Bringing Down the House

Ben Mezrich. Simon & Schuster: 2003 (paperback). ISBN: 0743249992. 259 pages.

Turn on your TV for a moment or two these days, and it's hard to miss the fact that America has a new capital city, and we call it Las Vegas. As the World Poker Tour events, celebrity poker show-downs, "What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas" commercials, and Sin City Reality shows and favorite fictional crime-and-gambling dramas continue to expand their empire on the small screens of our sets and the lurid fantasies of our subconscious, it's a perfect time to explore a fresh perspective on the lovely pleasures of money-for-nothing. Ben Mezrich's hero is a real-life card counter, an M.I.T. undergraduate who discovers that a great head for numbers can take him out of the dorm room and into the luxurious suites of the high-roller. Working with a hand-picked team from the most prestigious of Ivy League universities, our ambitious nerd learns how to beat the odds in Blackjack, the one casino game in which a picture-perfect memory for the cards that have already appeared can give the player a serious advantage in the odds. For many glorious months, it's all too damn good and green to be true. But eventually casino officials target the M.I.T. teams, and our hero and his fellow conspirators find themselves in more serious jeopardy than they could ever have wagered in their most paranoid nightmares. This is great stuff for both the avid reader or the weekend game gambler, and gets freakier and scarier with each passing page.

## NEW IN SPORTS

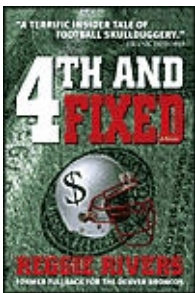
biography and fiction \* recommended by our in-house insane sports fan, David Moore



### Caddy for Life: The Bruce Edwards Story

John Feinstein. Little, Brown: 2004 (hardcover). ISBN: 0316777889. 320 pages.

Renowned sportswriter John Feinstein is known not only for his encyclopedic command of his subject matter, but also for his ability to reveal the real people inside the mythology of athletics, making us feel his subjects' loves, hurts, and hopes as our own. In *Caddy for Life: The Bruce Edwards Story*, Feinstein has done it again. On one fine afternoon in June of 2003, Olympia Fields saw an affirmation of the depth of the human spirit. Press room volunteer Steve Malchow said of that day: "All my years in the business, I've never seen reporters crying. They did it that day and I don't think one of them was ashamed to do it." Millions more sat at home watching with tears in their eyes as fifty-three year old Tom Watson and his best friend of thirty years, caddy Bruce Edwards, walked off the 18<sup>th</sup> green arm-in-arm with the lead after the first round of the U.S. Open. This last moment in the spotlight for Bruce, one of the most respected caddies and human beings on the PGA tour is what most of us saw, but the real story is not this heartbreaking scene. The real story is the heart-warming story of friendship, love, loyalty, and optimism that was the life of this Dean of caddies. Although Bruce was diagnosed in January 2003 with ALS and given one to three years to live by the doctors, he finished his life with the same spirit for which he had always been celebrated on the PGA tour.



### 4th & Fixed

Reggie Rivers. Sourcebooks: 2004 (hardcover). ISBN: 1402202199. 368 pages.

Our GBL sports expert David Moore complains that sportswriter Frank DeFord "has already stolen" the best single line to describe this novel—"a terrific insider tale of football skullduggery." In this first novel by former Denver Broncos fullback Reggie Rivers, we have the dubious pleasure of meeting with Jonathon Kinneson, the not-quite-as-rich-as-he-claims-to-be new owner of the San Antonio Stallions, a very mediocre NFL team. Just as Kinneson discovers he's in serious trouble and needs to sell his team for a healthy profit, the seriously clever wiseguy Michael Gasca show up uninvited to lead the Stallions to the Superbowl. With the help of his lifetime partner Roscoe Evans, a 320-pound enforcer of considerable persuasive talents, Gasca uses both mind and muscle to fix games with such subtle flair that nobody, or almost nobody, gets suspicious. The first notable exception is the Stallions otherworldly football genius Trevor Deale, a brilliant quarterback who can read a defense in the blink of a center's snap. But Trevor's got his hands full with his gorgeously bitchy and possessive girlfriend Vanessa, a smokin' redhead who's determined to direct Trevor's off-the-field life down to the smallest palatial mansion. The second exception is Steve Oquist, an special agent charged with keeping the grubby greedy hands of the mob and illegal gambling off the sanctity of NFL Sundays. As any football fan could tell you, sometimes a very small nudge one way or the other—a fumble inside the twenty, a wide receiver fighting off the runs—can create a drastic shift in a game's momentum, can flip the switch on anticipated odds for victory. Reggie Rivers' story of blackmail, scandal, game-fixing, and the murky underworld surrounding professional football has the frighteningly plausible feel of inside knowledge. It's all fiction, of course, yet it's eerily convincing. The football purist may find it shocking, but you've got to admit that it's not such a stretch to imagine such manipulation taking place in real life. Bursting with clever characters, snappy dialogue, and fast-paced action, this book would be a great gift for the football fan in your life, even if he or she isn't typically a big reader.