



THE
CHRISTIAN
SCIENCE
MONITOR



EXPLORING THE WORD

This is the year publishers had to confront their worst nightmare: Oprah closed her book club. After six years of creating or boosting a best-seller every single month, the TV talk-show host claimed she couldn't find enough good books to recommend. If only she'd returned my calls....

Traveling through the 40 titles we receive here *every day*, our reviewers have braved the far corners of the world – and beyond – to discover the year's best in fiction and nonfiction. Inside, you'll find 10 highly recommended books and almost 60 noteworthy ones.

On our website, each of these capsules is linked to the full review we ran during the year. Before setting off on an adventure, do your homework and read up on the destination.

Happy exploring.

– Ron Charles

OUR 2002 COLLECTION OF BOOK REVIEWS

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

FICTION

CARAMELO, by Sandra Cisneros, Knopf, \$24

This swirling dinner-table collection of family tales is worthy of the anticipation that's built up over the 18 years since Cisneros wrote "The House on Mango Street." Her story of four generations of Mexican-Americans moves across literary borders as easily as its characters trek between Mexico City and Chicago. Little Lala Reyes tells the first part of the novel, a sweaty car trip to visit the Awful Grandmother in Mexico. But then Cisneros jumps back to tell the story of that Awful Grandmother as a young woman – with the voice of the grandmother often interrupting the narrator. The story spreads out across the whole fabric of Lala's family history with tales of foolishness and passion, tragedy and sacrifice, showing us, in the end, the conciliatory power of storytelling. (Oct. 10)

ATONEMENT, by Ian McEwan, Doubleday, \$26

In this comic, moving, ultimately unsettling novel, Booker Award-winner McEwan captures the brutality of love and war and guilt. The story opens on a sweltering day at the ugly Gothic estate of the Tallis family. McEwan rotates through the perspectives of several residents and guests during a ludicrous and ultimately disastrous weekend, turning subtly through a kind of mock tribute to Jane Austen, Henry James, and Virginia Woolf. As the novel moves on through three more sections, 13-year-old Briony Tallis clears the fog of adolescence and confronts the destructive power of fiction, even while she pursues its redemptive possibilities. Each of us, McEwan suggests, is composing a life. (March 14)

GOULD'S BOOK OF FISH, by Richard Flanagan, Atlantic Monthly, \$27.50

With this weird and wild testimony of William Gould, a 19th-century forger imprisoned below the tide line in a Tasmanian penal colony, Flanagan has written a fish story that's THIS BIG, surely the slipperiest, most outrageous novel of the year. The tale Gould tells of the land way down under is captivating. But be forewarned, it's also scatological and shockingly violent, a nightmare inversion of the elegant British society that constructed this place. As the narrative loops back on itself in a series of mind-bending poststructural tricks, Flanagan develops a grander and more ghastly vision that leaps beyond his country's history toward the biggest questions that love and language can pose. (March 28)

IN THE IMAGE, by Dara Horn, W.W. Norton, \$24.95

This debut novel storms with crosscurrents of the Old Testament: the trials of exile, the burdens of orthodoxy, the inexplicable nature of evil, the awesome power of God. When a young driver hits Naomi Landsmann in the novel's first paragraph, she and her killer vanish from its pages. But her death brings together an unlikely pair: her best friend, who reacts by becoming mute, and her grandfather, who attempts to capture everything on earth in thousands of carefully organized slides. This exuberant novel about the tenacity and mystery of faith is a book to press into other people's hands and pester them to finish so you can talk about it together. (Sept. 12)

PRAGUE, by Arthur Phillips, Random House, \$24.95

With emotional accuracy and gymnastic irony, Phillips follows five friends through Hungary in 1990. The novel focuses on a sensitive, principled young American named John, who's arrived in Budapest in a futile attempt to bond with his older brother. The story moves fluidly through John's experience in a culture that's swirling with nostalgia, deception, and promise. Phillips holds a precarious balance, satirizing the rituals of modern culture while cradling John's desperate search for a worthy life. The result is a sophisticated and profound debut novel – a witty, humane tale of a generation stumbling in a dim glow that could be dawn or twilight. (June 20)

NONFICTION

THE AGE OF GOLD, by H.W. Brands, Doubleday, \$29.95

For Brands, the California Gold Rush was an accumulation of "hundreds of thousands of small stories of the men and women who traveled to California in pursuit of their common dream." This bestselling author has now assembled those stories in a dazzling setting that conveys the world-changing effects of the era. Most of the people he describes are unknown, like Vicente Pérez Rosales, who came from Chile with four brothers, a brother-in-law, and two trusted servants. Others are still famous, like Samuel Clemens, who "lit out for the territories in 1861." Brands's well-documented study presents a compelling argument that those small stories record "a seminal event in history, one of those rare moments that divide human existence into before and after." (Aug. 22)

CHARLES DARWIN, by Janet Browne, Knopf, \$37.50

Darwin spent 20 years working out evidence to support his theory of natural selection, secure in the knowledge that his idea was too radical and the details too arcane for anyone else to have discovered. Then one morning in 1858, he received a letter from Alfred Russel Wallace, laying out the theory in words that could have been Darwin's own. So opens the second book of Browne's riveting two-volume

biography. In the entire range of intellectual history, it's doubtful there's a moment that tops the Darwin-Wallace collision for human drama. Over the course of these two volumes, we come to intimately understand Darwin – a very unmodern man who brought modernity to science. (Sept. 26)

MASTER OF THE SENATE: THE YEARS OF LYNDON JOHNSON, by Robert Caro, Knopf, \$35

This third volume in Caro's award-winning biography chronicles more of Johnson's ruthlessness, which dominated the second volume. But it also marks a return to what Caro terms the "bright thread" of Johnson's life: the public-policy changes he helped bring about during his two terms in the US Senate, especially the civil rights improvements. Caro also calls attention to Johnson's genius as a political organizer. Nobody, he argues, has ever wielded legislative power more skillfully. Though the previous two volumes are superb, a newcomer won't be lost by jumping into this painstakingly researched, beautifully written installment. National Book Award nominee. (May 2)

ABRAHAM, by Bruce Feiler, William Morrow, \$23.95

The bestselling author of "Walking the Bible," Feiler here focuses on Abraham, the one man to whom Judaism, Islam, and Christianity all trace their roots. Well aware of the power that history wields in the imag-

ination of the region, Feiler was hoping to find an Abraham of the sacred texts that could serve as a bridge for all the faithful. Instead, he encountered a multitude of Abrahams – some 240, he says! – as the interpretive works of each religion over four millennia reshaped and often made more exclusive the story of this remarkable figure. His wonderfully readable book inspires because it grapples honestly with how all three faiths have reinterpreted their original truths. That realistic understanding provides a basis for fostering genuine communication. (Oct. 17)

EYE OF THE ALBATROSS, by Carl Safina, Henry Holt, \$27.50

Albatrosses spend 95 percent of their lives at sea, usually in flight. Safina wondered what we might learn about the world if we could see it from their perspective. After shadowing these great birds by foot, ship, and satellite, he has painted a beautiful, awe-inspiring tableau of the world as you've never seen it: an interconnected universe of wind and waves, sun-blasted islands, teeming polar seas, broad-winged birds, and the far-reaching effects of civilization. But today, albatrosses' lives are tangled up with those of humans. Though their world is far removed from civilization, they're inundated with pesticides, antibiotics, and hormone mimics. The lesson, Safina writes, is that there are no longer any places on earth unaffected by man. (May 16)

NOTEWORTHY

FICTION

PARADISE ALLEY, by Kevin Baker, HarperCollins, \$26.95

Set in Manhattan during the Civil War, this historical novel rescues from national amnesia the worst riot in US history. A new law has made all able-bodied white men eligible to be drafted into the Union Army, but for the thousands of poor Irishmen who've recently escaped starvation, the suppression of Southern rebels seems a distant irrelevancy. Baker's enormous story burns for just three days, but it generates so much heat you feel the pages might disintegrate into ash as you turn them. (Oct. 17)

ANNIE DUNNE, by Sebastian Barry, Viking, \$24.95

Annie Dunne – an unpleasant, cranky old hag – lives with her cousin on a small Irish farm. Not much happens there until a nephew drops off his son and daughter to spend the summer. Annie couldn't be more delighted, but a threat to her security and a suggestion of sexual abuse cloud her enthusiasm. Rarely has the interaction between the old and the young been captured in such beauty and tenderness. There's plenty of Barry's signature despair here, but the emotional range is far broader. (Aug. 22)

BIG IF, by Mark Costello, W.W. Norton, \$24.95

Costello's black comedy is a sprawling portrayal of the natural disasters, social unrest, criminal plots, and international threats that the Secret Service repels minute by minute without blinking. Costello shows these blank-faced guards sacrificing their lives every day, throwing their

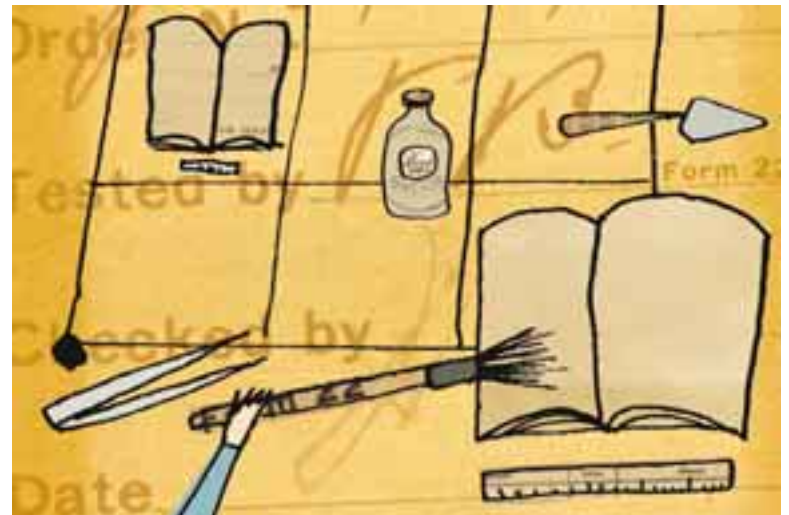
hearts and minds into the paths of terrors that never make the evening news. Full of ragged realism and edgy satire of the world just after tomorrow. National Book Award nominee. (June 27)

PASADENA, by David Ebershoff, Random House, \$24.95

The farms and orange groves of southern California are the backdrop for this smoldering romance between Linda Stamp and Bruder, a quiet soldier her father brought home after World War I. The pieces of this story, which is told to a real estate buyer years later, accumulate from shards of gossip polished into legend. Everything in this luxurious tragedy weeps with regret – for the loss of love and land and potential, but especially for the passing of the grand literary style of the 19th century. (July 18)

INSECT DREAMS, by Marc Estrin, BlueHen, \$26.95

Jumping off from Franz Kafka's novella, in which Gregor is transformed into an enormous bug, "Insect
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Dreams" describes a stranger metamorphosis: That bug mutates into the savior of humanity. In the most natural way, Estrin manages to insert Gregor (the cockroach) into the major developments of the first half of the 20th century. His novel is a massive tour of science, culture, and politics. It's also perpetually funny. (Feb. 14)

THE EYRE AFFAIR, by Jasper Fforde, Viking, \$23.95

When detective Thursday Next first hears that the manuscript of Dickens's "Martin Chuzzlewit" has been stolen, she's not particularly alarmed – until it becomes clear that the perpetrator is a master criminal and arch-villain. In this debut novel, Fforde has cross-bred "Jane Eyre" with James Bond and Harry Potter. The result is clever, loopy, and unabashedly ridiculous – about as much fun as you can have in the classics section without being thrown out of the library. (Jan. 31)

THE IDEA OF PERFECTION, by Kate Grenville, Viking, \$24.95

This Australian winner of Britain's Orange Prize tells the story of a chronically shy engineer and a museum curator who's been having a bad-hair day since she was 12. Though Grenville makes them the subject of great comedy, she regards these sweet losers with patience. The result is an irresistible comedy of manners that catches the agony of chronic awkwardness. (April 18)

ENEMY WOMEN, by Paulette Jiles, William Morrow, \$24.95

Jiles's debut novel about the Civil War skirts along the border of history, following the alarmingly common tragedy of 18-year-old Adair Colley, a Missouri farm girl whose family owns no slaves, but who still falls victim to the brutality of the Union's program to quell rebellion. Jiles is a poet, but she proves herself a remarkably effective historian as well. And her steely style never wastes a word across the cold mountain of desperation she describes. (Feb. 21)

THE NAVIGATOR OF NEW YORK, by Wayne Johnston, Doubleday, \$27.95

Johnston uses history – the race for the North Pole – as a stunning backdrop for a young man's search for his own past. Devlin Stead, a precocious orphan, leaves Newfoundland to join Frederick Cook's exploration. By the time he's finished describing their remarkable competition against Lt. Robert Peary, Johnston has braved the coldest spot on earth but delivered us to a place of genuine warmth. (Oct. 24)

ROSCOE, by William Kennedy, Viking, \$24.95

Kennedy's latest novel about Albany (his seventh) opens as World War II closes. With the Nazis vanquished, the new enemy is a Republican governor determined to attack the corrupt Democratic Party, run by three crafty crooks who've been friends since boyhood. "Roscoe" barrels along with wild vitality – a winking, confident novel, full of snappy irony but capable of dropping into dark horror or sweet sympathy. (Jan. 10)

DARLINGTON'S FALL, by Brad Leithauser, Knopf, \$25

Leithauser tells this quiet story of a wealthy butterfly scientist at the turn of the century in 600 10-line sonnets. A long poem about lepidoptera is a tough sell, but this novel in verse catches one's eye with all the charm and

complexity of an Ozark swallowtail. Leithauser's story doesn't suffer from its form; there's nothing he can't catch in this net. (April 4)

LOST NATION, by Jeffrey Lent, Atlantic Monthly, \$25

Lent's second novel is loosely based on the short-lived efforts of a group in upstate New Hampshire to secede from the Union two decades before the Civil War. It opens as a trader named Blood is leading an oxcart with a 16-year-old girl he won in a card game leashed to it. Lent renders their violent story in a spectacular fury of language that cracks and flashes with desperate insight into the nature of remorse and redemption. (May 2)

BY THE LAKE, by John McGahern, Knopf, \$24

In this wonderful Irish novel about a lake – and the community that surrounds it – nothing much happens except for the rustle through a year with a few villagers. But the life McGahern resurrects here sounds like the melody of a forgotten favorite song. He conveys the profundity of ordinary lives, his wit and wisdom collecting as gently as dew. (March 7)

THE PIANO TUNER, by Daniel Mason, Knopf, \$24

A strange, often beautiful story about a London piano tuner who receives a remarkable request from the military that plunges him into England's conquest of Burma. It's a smart, entertaining adventure, but ultimately a story of disillusionment. Mason delivers a timely critique of the self-justifying nature of military action, but also develops an equally troubling theme about the dangers of quixotic rogues and "misplaced munificence." (Sept. 19)

SIMON SILBER: WORKS FOR SOLO PIANO, by Christopher Miller, Houghton Mifflin, \$23

This satirical debut novel poses as a biographer's revengeful notes on Simon Silber, a failed avant-garde composer with a pathological hatred of sound. In creating this symphony of absurdity, Miller demonstrates perfect pitch for straight-faced comedy. (May 16)

THE DREAM OF SCIPIO, by Iain Pears, Riverhead Books, \$27.95

Pears's canvas has never been larger or his concerns more profound than in this category-buster of a novel. He follows three historians in Provence at three moments

when Western civilization seemed ready to shatter: the fall of Rome in the 5th century, the Black Death in the 14th century, and Nazi occupation in the 20th century. The novel's greatest mystery is, "How can Pears know so much?" (May 30)

THE CAVE, by José Saramago, translated by Margaret Costa, Harcourt, \$25

Cipriano Algor, a 76-year-old potter, lives with his daughter and son-in-law outside the walls of an enormous residential shopping mall – his only buyer. When his contract is canceled, he must find another way to make a living and a life. Not so much an attack on capitalism as a heartfelt lament for its disruptive force. This profound allegorical tale is delivered by an agile, irrepressibly funny, often cerebral voice. (Nov. 14)

THE LOVELY BONES, by Alice Sebold, Little, Brown, \$21.95

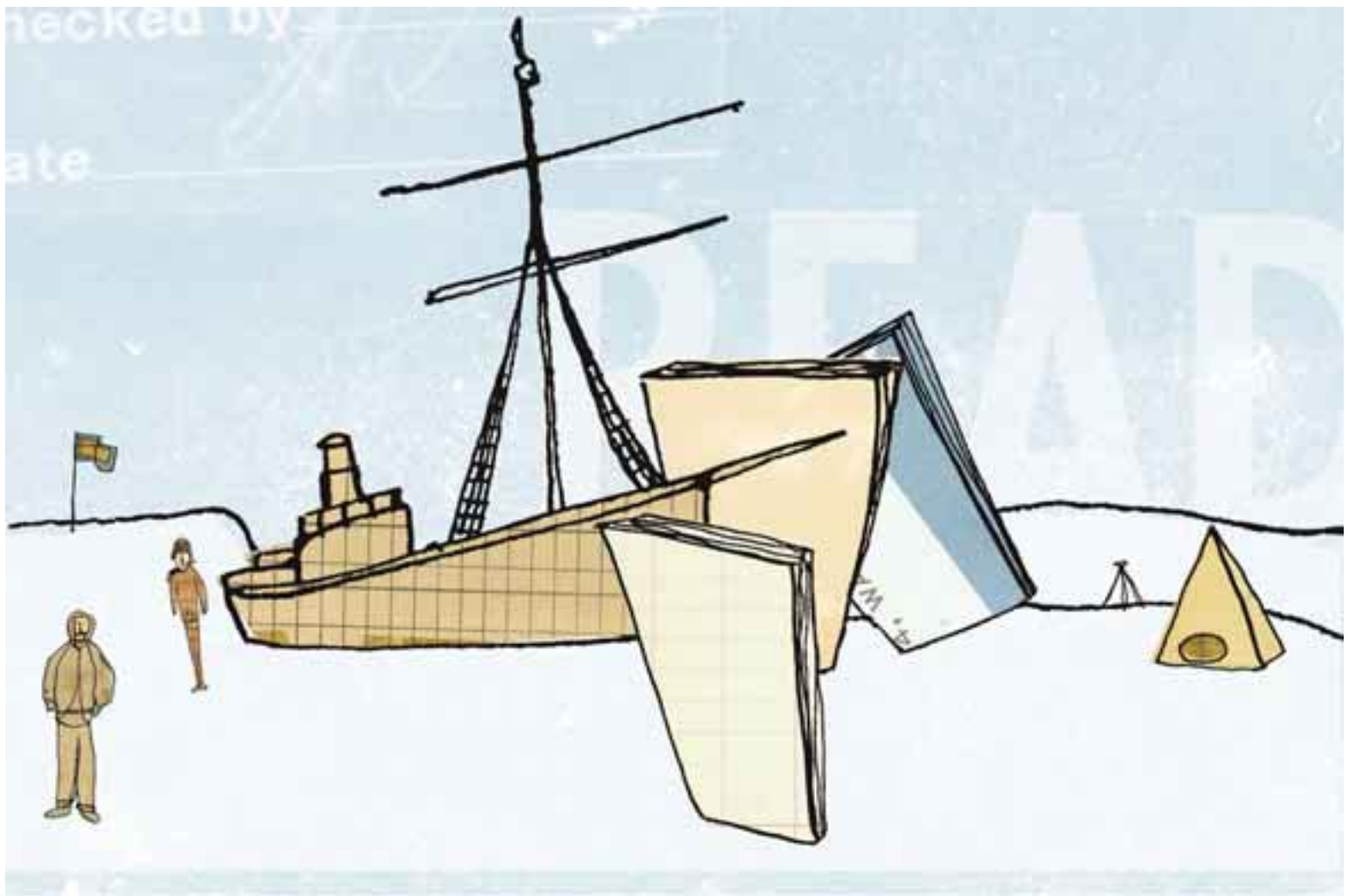
In the first chapter of this runaway bestseller, 14-year-old Susie Salmon is enticed into a cave by her neighbor, who rapes and dismembers her. For the next seven years Susie describes, from heaven, how her family and friends – even her murderer – cope with her absence. It sounds mawkish, but Sebold has done something miraculous. (July 25)

UNLESS, by Carol Shields, Fourth Estate, \$24.95

Reta Winters, who once had all the trappings of success, is devastated by her daughter's decision to drop out of college and sit on a street corner, begging, with a sign on her neck that says, "Goodness." For Reta, the calamity calls everything into question, particularly her family's baffling reflex to carry on with normal life. In this mischievous monologue, Shields is as subtle and unsettling as ever. (May 9)

TEPPER ISN'T GOING OUT, by Calvin Trillin, Random House, \$22.95

Murray Tepper knows where to park in New York City. In the evenings, he likes to spend an hour or so in his car next to a paid-up meter, just reading the paper. So begins Trillin's perpetually amusing fable of a simple man with a simple pastime who disrupts America's biggest city. Trillin treats the Big Apple with the droll wit of James Thurber, and he knows human nature the way Tepper knows parking spots. (Jan. 24)



NOTEWORTHY

NONFICTION

WEST OF KABUL, EAST OF NEW YORK,
by **Tamim Ansary, FSG, \$22**

A raw, poignant memoir of Ansary's upbringing in Afghanistan, this book captures a lost era and one man's decades-long mourning of it. (April 11)

JAZZ MODERNISM, by **Alfred Appel, Knopf, \$35**

A piquant, playful book that shows the parallels between key jazz influences such as Fats Waller and Louis Armstrong, and their literary and fine-arts contemporaries such as Ernest Hemingway and Henri Matisse. (Sept. 19)

BRIGHT EARTH, by **Philip Ball, FSG, \$30**

At one time, artists were virtually chemists, Ball explains in this fascinating history of pigments and their relation to art. (March 14)

LINKED, by **Albert-László Barabási, Perseus, \$26**

Newly discovered principles show the similarities among networks of all kinds, from the Internet to Al Qaeda. (June 6)

ETHICAL AMBITION, by **Derrick Bell, Bloomsbury, \$19.95**

The autobiography of a law professor and civil rights lawyer, whose life demonstrates that it's possible to live a successful and virtuous life. (Oct. 10)

THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES, by **Philip Bobbitt, Knopf, \$40**

This massive tome is really three treatises in one: a history of diplomacy from 1500 to 1990, a theory of the history of the state, and an analysis of globalization. (June 13)

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A MASTERPIECE,
by **Monica Bohm-Duchen, University of California, \$29.95**

Lucid "biographies" of eight masterpieces – such as Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" and Munch's "The Scream." The author restores the private intimacy these works have lost through overexposure. (May 16)

THE SAVAGE WARS OF PEACE, by **Max Boot, Basic Books, \$30**

A nuanced history of America's "small wars," little-known conflicts where the US was called upon to suppress irregular forces in inhospitable locales around the globe. (May 16)

THE LESSONS OF TERROR, by **Caleb Carr Random House, \$19.95**

Published while smoke was still rising from the World Trade Center site, this little book shows that attacks on civilians have never accomplished their stated goals and never will. (Feb. 14)

EISENHOWER, by **Carlo D'Este, Henry Holt, \$35**

D'Este's compelling biography eschews a look at Eisenhower's entire life, focusing instead on his early life and the resulting military career it spawned. (July 18)

SEEING IN THE DARK, by **Timothy Ferris, Simon & Schuster, \$26**

Ferris uses the personal experiences of hundreds of backyard astronomers to ex-

plain the 20th-century revolution in spectroscopic analysis of very distant light from celestial bodies. (Sept. 5)

A CALL TO HEROISM, by **Peter Gibbon, Atlantic Monthly, \$25**

What makes a hero? Gibbon urges students to look beyond the athletic field, the movie screen, and the recording studio for their models. (July 18)

THE LAST AMERICAN MAN,
by **Elizabeth Gilbert, Viking, \$24.95**

An engrossing portrait of Eustace Conway and his crusade to convince Americans to return to the land. National Book Award nominee. (May 9)

HOLY WAR, HOLY PEACE, by **Marc Gopin, Oxford University, \$29.95**

An American rabbi with years of experience in grass-roots conflict resolution in the Middle East offers a fresh angle from which to view the struggle. (May 23)

FROM HARDTACK TO HOME FRIES,
by **Barbara Haber, Free Press, \$25**

In this wide-ranging selection of personal stories and recipes, Haber offers a



savory history of American cooking and the cultural forces that have shaped it. (April 18)

FIREHOUSE, by **David Halberstam, Hyperion, \$22.95**

Halberstam analyzes the culture and values of the firehouse, telling the story of the men of Engine 40 and Ladder 35 who answered the call on Sept. 11. (June 13)

THE SILENT TAKEOVER, by **Noreena Hertz, Free Press, \$25**

Thanks to the combination of Hertz's populist style and rigorous political commentary, this is fast becoming the central text of the antiglobalization movement. (Oct. 3)

THE MUSLIM JESUS, edited and translated
by **Tarif Khalidi, Harvard University, \$22.95**

In Muslim writings, Jesus has a life of his own. He spends time with ascetics rather than with sinners, and has hot words for scholars who advance themselves by working with the government. (Feb. 28)

MY FORBIDDEN FACE, by **Latifa with****Shékéba Hachemi, translated by Linda Coverdale, Talk Miramax, \$21.95**

A riveting memoir that details how life under the Taliban devastated one urban, educated, middle-class family. (May 30)

WHAT WENT WRONG? by **Bernard Lewis, Oxford University, \$23**

Lewis assumes that something *did* go wrong in the Middle East, starting in the late Middle Ages when progress in science and technology simply halted. (Feb. 28)

SINCLAIR LEWIS, by **Richard Lingeman Random House, \$35**

A major reinterpretation of the life of a writer who helped chart America's literary and political path for more than three decades. (Jan. 10)

CRADLE TO CRADLE, by **William McDonough and Michael Braungart, North Point, \$25**

McDonough and Braungart want us to design everything so that it can be composted safely and rapidly or turned into industrial feedstock. As an example, their book is printed with a nontoxic ink on waterproof "paper" made from plastic resins. (April 4)

THE FOUNDING FISH, by **John McPhee, FSG, \$25**

Everything you ever wanted to know about shad, from a beautiful writer who captures the whole history of America in this fish story. (Oct. 10)

CROSSROADS OF FREEDOM: ANTIETAM,
by **James McPherson, Oxford University, \$26**

In this highly readable narrative, Princeton historian McPherson describes the indecisive, bloody battle that he considers the turning point of the Civil War. (Sept. 12)

SPECIAL PROVIDENCE, by **Walter Russell Mead, Knopf, \$30**

A senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations describes four factions that have been at work in the formation of US foreign policy throughout its history. (Jan. 10)

THE ORNAMENT OF THE WORLD, by **Maria Rosa Menocal, Little, Brown, \$26.95**

In medieval Spain, from AD 750 to 1492, the three monotheistic faiths clashed, intermingled, and produced a rich, tolerant culture. (July 25)

LINCOLN'S VIRTUE, by **William Lee Miller, Knopf, \$30**

Lincoln's greatness and goodness are widely known. This book seeks to explain how he got that way by peering behind his words and deeds to examine his thoughts and moral precepts. (Feb. 7)

SEARCH FOR THE GOLDEN MOON BEAR,
by **Sy Montgomery, Simon & Schuster, \$26**

A nature writer tracks an elusive and potentially new species of bear through Indochina, racing against political and culture forces that threaten to destroy the animals. (Oct. 3)

LISTENING TO WHALES, by **Alexandra Morton, Ballantine, \$26.95**

In this coming-of-age story, a scientist finds her true calling only when she follows killer whales to their native waters. (July 18)

THE PARADOX OF AMERICAN POWER,
by **Joseph Nye, Oxford University, \$26**

A concise, well-reasoned argument for an American foreign policy that works primarily in concert with that of other nations, not as a Lone Ranger. (April 18)

THE GOD OF HOPE, by **John Polkinghorne, Yale University, \$19.95**

Physicist and theologian Polkinghorne provides an energizing discussion of eschatology – the study of death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and humankind. (March 28)

A BED FOR THE NIGHT, by **David Rieff, Simon & Schuster, \$26.**

A brutal critique of international aid efforts, which the author claims breed a culture of dependency. (Oct. 31)

GLOBALIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS,
by **Joseph Stiglitz, W.W. Norton, \$24.95**

A Nobel Prize-winning economist's harsh criticism of the International Monetary Fund and its policies. (June 27)

THE MAN WHO CHANGED HOW BOYS AND TOYS WERE MADE, by **Bruce Watson, Viking, \$24.95**

A.C. Gilbert invented the Erector set in 1913 and then went on to construct a radically new marketing strategy that spoke directly to boys and their ambitions. (Oct. 10)

COGITO, ERGO SUM, by **Richard Watson, Godine, \$35**

This biography of mathematician and philosopher René Descartes is idiosyncratic, iconoclastic, highly personal, wildly opinionated, and informative. (June 6)

THE FUTURE OF LIFE, by **Edward O. Wilson, Knopf, \$22**

In the midst of mass extinctions, we must be more aggressive stewards of planet Earth, Wilson argues in this elegant though sobering warning based on solid scientific research and profound moral imperatives. (Jan. 17)

THE PIRATE HUNTER, by **Richard Zacks, Hyperion, \$25.95**

In this reexamination of the legend, Zacks argues that Captain Kidd was a respectable mariner, framed by the British government. (June 27)