

TRUE **Review**

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Donovan Agnostic

"Babe, all I know is what I see."

— Carly Simon

During an NFC East divisional football game in mid-December 2001, thousands of fans at FedEx Field near Washington, D.C., wearing either green or red jerseys, could see the receiver, bouncing around on the field, waving his arms in the air, imploring Philadelphia Eagle Quarterback Donovan McNabb to throw the football. The Eagle receiver, Freddie Mitchell, was wide open. I mean WIDE open. Everybody alive that day could see there wasn't a defender within 15 yards of this guy.

Except the quarterback, Donovan McNabb.

My brother Rob and I were there. We saw Freddie. The Redskins fans saw Freddie. One Redskin fan noted, doesn't Donovan see Freddie? We wondered why Donovan couldn't see Freddie. We wanted to ask Donovan himself, if we could. The conversation would go something like this: "Hey Donovan, did you see Freddie, you know, Freddie Mitchell, your receiver? Recognize him? The guy so open he could have had a tailgate party for fans, caught the ball, scored a touchdown, and autographed it for a fan in the time you took to scramble to find somebody wide open?"

Needless to say, it wasn't a complete pass. We don't remember, alas, whom the pass was made to – because we still see Freddie waving his arms.

Since the days of Dick Vermeil begin-

ning in 1974, members of the Andrews family have been diehard Eagle fans. We think, regarding quarterbacks, we have seen it all, and then some.

As for the current quarterback, we have been watching and waiting and patiently following Donovan's career since Day One in April 1999. Most of the time we scratch our heads and wonder: what is going on?

Since April 1999, the day the Eagles drafted Donovan, I have been quietly informing everyone I know that I had other plans for the Eagles after the many dismal seasons under former Eagle Coach Ray Rhodes. It's draft day, I said to my brother Rob. The Eagles have a new head coach, Andy Reid. Rookie running back Ricky Williams is our guy. No doubt about it.

My 1999 plan: hire free agent quarterback Brad Johnson, coming off some excellent years at the Minnesota Vikings. He was available. Draft the running back Williams. I liked these two players: they were overachievers. They looked like being on the turf was their version of heaven – maybe even more so.

So – instead of taking Brad in free agency, we were resigned to seeing Brad win a Superbowl ring on another team – Tampa Bay.

The very team that beat the Eagles in the NFC championship game in January 2003, the last time the Eagles played at Veteran's Stadium. Brad went on to win the Superbowl with Tampa Bay. The time

we walked away as Eagle fans from Veteran's Stadium on that cold, dismal evening, it felt as if we were at a funeral, it was so hopeless.

My hopes for a Superbowl with Donovan and the Eagles crumbled in the years since, much like Veteran's Stadium – once a very big, very rowdy place – now the ghost facility on Broad Street. Only a parking lot remains.

Yes, I watch a lot of Eagles football. I can remember the ridiculous (and I'm not going to name him) radio host commentary made on an ESPN show about Donovan. I agreed with one thing the guy said: Donovan was "overrated." Probably the only intelligent observation made on the show about Donovan, but perhaps many fans agreed. Gee, after three NFC championship game LOSSES and a Superbowl where Donovan tossed three interceptions in the Red Zone IN A ROW – wonder what people think of that comment now?

Hey, all I know is what I see, and the records speak for themselves. Too many playoff losses. No personal determination on Donovan's part.

Donovan is easily the most complex quarterback in the history of professional football. I can't even imagine why – and I have a pretty good imagination a lot of the time – anyone could think he was a great quarterback. I don't have any Number 5 jerseys in MY closet. I am

Continued back cover

The Unfortunate Internet

Book Reviews
By Andrew Andrews

DROOD, by Dan Simmons. Little, Brown and Company, 2009, 775 pp., \$26.99. ISBN 978-0-316-00702-3

Starting with *CARRION COMFORT*, Simmons has been fascinated by the very concept of a “mind control.” Perhaps great leaders – or great criminals – in history have found a way, through a variety of means, to control a person – or a whole nation – by some sort of mind control. What forces of manipulation can be gathered to make a person do another’s will? Or a leader, like Hitler in World War II, to make people follow him zealously?

What terrors of control are working now between leaders and their followers?

I’m sure Simmons has long been fascinated by the Adolf Hitlers and Jim Jones and Bin Ladens of the world. He remains fascinated by those characters of the past – even ones with as colorful a history as author Charles Dickens and the effect he has had on protégés and many modern literati.

Charles Dickens? The same writer who gave us the almost completely harmless “A Christmas Carol”?

It would seem so.

In early June 1865, famed (or infamous, depending on your point of view) 53-year-old English author Charles Dickens is separated from estranged wife Catherine. The *Inimitable* is observed through the professionally envying eyes of his (colleague? groupie?) author Wilkie Collins. At the time, Dickens is in love with 18-year-old actress Ellen Ternan, a true scandal in those days. While traveling to London with Ternan and others, departing Folkestone and approaching Staplehurst, a railroad viaduct carrying the train collapses over the shallow River Beult, all but one carriage plummeting down to death and destruction – the one carrying Dickens and his entourage. In the rescue attempt on the one carriage remaining, Dickens meets “Drood,” a figure that is “cadaverously thin, almost shockingly pale” who “stared at the writer from dark-shadowed eyes set deep under a pale,

high brow that melded into a pale, bald scalp.” Drood has no nose, with “small, sharp, irregular teeth, spaced too far apart, set into gums so pale that they were whiter than the teeth themselves.”

Ugliness, in other words, personified. If evil were a face, perhaps it would be Drood’s.

Wilkie Collins, laudanum and morphine-addicted protégé of the *Inimitable*, furiously jealous of Dickens’s popularity and wealth, is a short story writer and playwright, frequently contributing to Dickens’ own “All the Year Round” Magazine and (relatively famous) author of novels *AFTER DARK* and the *WOMAN IN WHITE*. Like Antonio Salieri was to Mozart, Wilkie is forever condemned to ride behind Dickens’ coattails, envious and calculating, forever mystified by the high energy and towering talent of the *Inimitable*. What he wants from Dickens: respect. Wilkie simply wants Dickens to recognize him as a professional equal.

But who is Drood? Why does Dickens obsess over Drood? And why involve

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Wilkie?

Does Drood have Dickens in some form of mesmeric mind-control lock to finish a supposed biography, *THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD*?

On a journey deep into the cellar of London's graveyard slums one day, Wilkie accompanies the Inimitable on a mission of research, with the aid of a private detective though some very dark places to find where Drood resides. The place is Undertown. Undertown is one quarter slum and three-quarters opium den, watched over by the distant and calculating King Lazaree of the Opium Living Dead. Is Undertown just a mere opium den among many in the city, or something else?

Is Drood something out of Dickens' imagination, or a serial killer – responsible for hundreds of deaths, a terror to every city resident and constable – sought by Scotland Yard?

Does Drood control Dickens? Is Drood Dickens himself?

Is Drood responsible for Undertown – creating Lazaree and untold hell on English soil? And how to fight him before he commits more murder and mayhem?

Could Drood be a renegade psychopath – or an Egyptian occultist killer? A creature prodding Dickens on, haunting him to finish a biography, *THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD*, or some phantasm concocted by the Inimitable?

DROOD is fascinating in that it brings us a visceral story of the beauty and ugliness that besieged Dickens' England. All the same, it examines the life of one (atypical?) artist, caught up in the horrors of narcotic addiction, beset by his own horrors (and perhaps some created by a denizen who may, or may not, live in Undertown).

The elements of mind control were heavy elements in Dickens time, with the art of mesmerism – hypnotism – and control of behavior, entirely new mental maladies formed by strange narcotics. Could narcotics, a writer's wild imagination, and mesmerism combine in lethal combinations?

Simmons presents to us the beauty and awe of darkness – and evil that is as real as the corrupted mind and the scope of what was truly horrible in mid- to late-

1860s England. There were horrors enough, with a complete lack of municipal sanitation, rampant venereal and sceptic disease, poverty, starvation, class struggle, and overall human misery. Forget the character Drood, Simmons almost has to say, when you are surrounded by Drood.

BLACK AND WHITE, by Lewis Shiner. Subterranean Press, 2008, 367 pp., \$25.00. ISBN 978-1-59606-171-2

For 35-year-old Michael Cooper, things are not what they seem. There are too many questions about his birth, his life, and many of them surround the secrecy of his father, Robert. Robert, for whatever reason, has decided to leave Dallas, Texas to relocate to a former home in Durham, North Carolina, all the while dying from advanced stage lung cancer.

Robert Cooper was a civil engineer in the Durham region, specifically on the Durham Freeway (NC 147) that leveled the many black businesses of Hayti, a prosperous black neighborhood. The project was deemed an "urban renewal" project to clean up vacant lots and abandoned buildings. At least that's what many people believed. Instead, it destroyed a community.

Why is Michael's father obsessed with returning to North Carolina? And what of Michael's very sketchy past – missing vital information, such as the history of his family, and the mysterious questions surrounding their life in Durham?

Michael begins to unravel a world kept from him – such as a mother who is not his. Finding the truth from his father reveals a complex story of white radical groups, race hatred, homespun domestic terrorism – and a present linked firmly to the hated past, including the murder of a black activist and a very large, very involved cover-up.

BLACK AND WHITE tells the story of Hayti and the horrors of its demise at the hands of very powerful folks indeed, about racism and rampant hypocrisy, the soiled histories of a place and people that helped shape the present. It's an engaging, wholly realized tale that could have been lifted from yesterday's headlines.

THE MAN WHOSE TEETH WERE ALL EXACTLY ALIKE, by Philip K. Dick. TOR, 2009, 304 pp., \$25.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-7653-2306-4

Before Dick novels such as *MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE*, before *FLOW MY TEARS*, *THE POLICEMAN SAID*, Philip K. Dick showcased his talents at the Mainstream Book – about middle America and its hangups, fears, and sorrows – giving us *THE MAN WHOSE TEETH WERE ALL EXACTLY ALIKE*, unpublished until 1984, when it was first published by Mark V. Ziesing Publishers.

TOR has reissued it and still the talent remains.

The 1950s and the Eisenhower Years gave America its obsessions with cars, well-paying jobs, memberships in the country club, and the local strappings of status and career success – at what cost? For some, the same years brought a lot of conformity, bleakness, the mad rush to sameness, and despair.

Leo Runcible, who adheres to his stated principles in life like Elmer's Glue to wood, is a Jewish real estate mogul in Marin County, California. Runcible has to deal with antisemitism, an eroding market through competition, and on top of all that, an alcoholic wife.

Meanwhile, neighbor Walter Dombrosio must deal with his doggedly determined, women's liberation movement wife, who insists on a career of her own, made in her own way. Dombrosio feels threatened by her newly found assertiveness and growing independence, becoming the family breadwinner as Dombrosio's life and career fall to pieces.

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The conflicts rise when Dombrosio ends up drunk, off the side of the road – and Runcible calls the cops on him. Dombrosio is let in on the tattler by Runcible's wife – and thus begins a fight that makes the Bunkers and the Jeffersons look like a minor spat between Lucy and Desi on "I Love Lucy."

Walter, in revenge, sets up an elaborate prank involving a skull and bones that are so realistic, the finding sets Runcible on a course to prove his theory that something isn't right in the state of West Marin. In the meantime we get to review a cast of characters that shed lots of light on what was happening in and to the country at the time.

There is a lot of Philip K. Dick in the novel – including those pervasive elements of mid-1950s American discontent, racism, class inequalities, the growing feminist movement, the oppression of the Cold War, and the feeling that the 1960s had to come, and come quickly. These were a foretaste of his disenchanting, disenfranchised characters to come in a spate of novels and short stories to follow.

MIND OVER SHIP, by David Marusek. TOR, 2009, 317 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-7653-1749-0

MIND OVER SHIP proves the idiom that SF is truly a literature of ideas.

There are more new ideas in each of the first 30 pages of *MIND OVER SHIP* than in 30 SF novels. Mesmerizing only begins to describe this adventure in reading.

In *MIND*, Ellen Starke, almost killed in an accident in which only her head was recovered, awaits fast regeneration techniques as her 16-month-old body ages. In the meantime, she is possessed with her belief that her mother, also killed in the crash, could still be alive – and is intensively involved in finding where she is, as well as her murderer.

To describe Marusek's world of the 22nd Century in one word that only scratches the surface – funky. Exemplary funky would not suffice. This is a nicely extrapolated world, typical of what we see from this author.

MASKS, by Ray Bradbury. Gauntlet, 2008, 245 pp., \$85.00. ISBN 1-934267-04-X

MASKS is the signed, numbered edition of a book of a "short story mosaic," similar to *THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES*, begun in 1945, when Bradbury visited Mexico – Patzcuaro, Mexico City, all sorts of places, to collect beautifully ornate and colorful masks – and Bradbury's fascination with the "masks" we wear in life, hiding our true, brighter or darker selves. The masks at work, in social gatherings, and how we hide underneath them, keeping those from seeing what demons we truly face – those make up many stories collected here for the first time. Bradbury could draw quite well himself – lots of inks here, doodlings and scratches, along with story ideas, sketches, even the Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship application form by Bradbury, who was well on his way to not needing any artistic grants, since he was well on his way to having an artistic license, indeed.

FAHRENHEIT 451, by Ray Bradbury. McDougal Littell/Houghton Mifflin, 1998/2002, 216 pp., \$14.82. ISBN 978-0-395-87806-4

"Related Readings" for *FAHRENHEIT 451* are just as rewarding as the tale of the "fireman" who wears the Phoenix – and who knew it was a pleasure to burn. Books, that is.

In the author's afterword, Bradbury notes the novel was written until he ran out of dimes – literally. In the spring of 1950, the author ads up the cost of renting a typewriter at the University of California-Los Angeles to compose *FAHRENHEIT 451*: \$9.80. That's a dime for every half hour of typewriter use.

Bradbury also writes of a sequel in the form of a play at Studio Theatre Playhouse in Los Angeles. A sequel?

Also included is a letter penned to a school board by Kurt Vonnegut Jr., protesting the burning, in the high school furnace, in 1973 of Vonnegut's novel, *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE*. If, according to Vonnegut, people would actually READ the books and get to KNOW the author, and allow people to think for themselves – well, they would not feel so

compelled to burn books.

The best of the related readings was the recollection of growing up in Paterson, N.J. and going to the Greek temple in the "ruins of an American city" by Judith Ortiz Cofer. Her adoration of books gave her courage to walk through some very mean streets, risking assault from a big black girl named Lorraine, ready and willing to pummel poor Judith. But Judith's passion for books overcame her fear – to the author's endless gratitude.

I LIVE BY THE INVISIBLE, by Ray Bradbury. Salmon Poetry, 2002, 85 pp., \$16.95. ISBN 1-903-3922-09

This collection of poetry speaks to us about our ability to rise above things – though we are beasts, we possess spiritual qualities that go beyond our presence, our form. Some very beautiful work collected here by Bradbury.

INFERNO, ed. by Ellen Datlow. TOR, 2007, 381 pp., \$25.95. ISBN 978-0-7653-1558-8

INFERNO, a collection of 20 tales, has one story in it that stands above the rest and is worth the price of the collection:

"The Ease with Which We Freed the Beast," by Lucius Shepard. Droughans Beach is the site in the near future where green EVERYTHING fuels EVERYTHING. This is a growing up tale of teenagers and trouble, lust and acknowledgment – in this case of the evils imparted from father to offspring, of dark behaviors that continue to evolve even as technologies improve.

RECOMMENDED

THE BLACK HAND, by Will Thomas. Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 2008, 295 pp., \$14.00. ISBN-13: 978-1-4165-5895-8

IMPLIED SPACES, by Walter Jon Williams. Night Shade Books, 2008, 265 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 978-1-59780-125-6

FANTASTICAL CREATURES
FIELD GUIDE, by Aaron Lopresti.
Watson-Guptill, 2008, 144 pp.,
\$19.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-8230-1111-7

And
ASTONISHING FANTASY
WORLD, The Ultimate Guide to
Drawing Adventure Fantasy Art,
by Christopher Hart. Watson-Gup-
till, 2008, 144 pp., \$21.95. ISBN-13:
978-0-8230-1472-9

FANTASTICAL CREATES FIELD
GUIDE is supposedly the accounting of
the explorations of Professor Ham Fabri-
catini, who has found some strange in-
habitants of this here Earth of ours.

And ASTONISHING FANTASY
WORLDS is simply one artist's common-
sense, practical approach to drawing com-
mon fantasy figures. You could almost
learn how to do as much from studying
this as going to any art school.

JACK THE TRIPPER, by Gene
Barretta. Harcourt Inc., 2008, 36
pp., \$16.00. ISBN 978-0-15-206132-
6

Students at Benjamin Dizzie Elemen

tary School report a "tripper" in their
midst - Jack the Tripper. He's responsi-
ble for stealing reports, for eating parade
candy - for all sorts of havoc. Is he real,
or are the students just making him up?
If he is, the school must get him before
the Dizzie Day Parade.

WILL ROGERS, by Frank Keat-
ing, illustrated by Mike Wimmer.
Voyager Books/Harcourt, 2002,
2008, 30 pp., \$7.00. ISBN 978-0-15-
206336-8

WILL ROGERS represents the Ameri-
can Dream of honesty and integrity,
sticking to your guns, and keeping your
word. Rogers traveled around the world
in a Wild West show, and was one of the
best entertainers - perhaps THE best in
many people's memories - and reading
this account shows why he is memora-
ble.

MORE RECOMMENDED
DYING INSIDE, by Robert Silver-
berg. TOR, 1972, 2009, 302 pp.,
\$15.95. ISBN 0-7653-2230-7

TOR/Orb has reissued my favorite SF

novel of all time, DYING INSIDE, fea-
turing a telepath who finds he is losing
his powers. The story we can all identify
with - loss - and David Selig is all of us.
A beautiful, haunting, richly told story for
the ages.

BUSTED FLUSH: A Wild Cards
Mosaic Novel, ed. by George R. R.
Martin and assisted by Melinda M.
Snodgrass. TOR, 2008, 398 pp.,
\$24.95. ISBN 0-7653-1782-6

ENCLAVE, by Kit Reed. TOR,
2009, 366 pp., \$25.95. ISBN 0-
7653-2161-0

STEAL ACROSS THE SKY, by
Nancy Kress. TOR/SciFi, 2009,
317 pp., \$25.95. ISBN 0-7653-1986-
1

MIDWINTER, by Matthew Sturg-
es. Pyr/Prometheus, 2009, 345 pp.,
Price? ISBN 978-1-59102-734-8

WWW: WAKE, by Robert J. Saw-
yer. Ace, 2009, 356 pp., \$24.95.
ISBN 978-0-441-01679-2

Book Reviews by Debra Jackson-Andrews

AN IRISH COUNTRY VILLAGE,
by Patrick Taylor. Forge, 2008,
2009 431 pp., \$14.95. ISBN-13:
978-0-7653-2023-0

As a huge fan of the BBC series, "Bal-
lykissangel and Bless Me Father," it's
hard not to like author Patrick Taylor's
book, AN IRISH COUNTRY VILLAGE.
It has a familiar theme: the quaint village
with an abundance of unique residents
and an elder statesman tutoring the
young novice. While the formula may be
similar, the book holds it own; witty, of-
ten humorous, with a zany cast of char-
acters, it hums along from one medical
crisis to another. Thrown in for good
measure are the sometimes funny and
sometimes sad trials and tribulations of
the townsfolk. Being sick is never fun, but
you can't help but think that pulling a few
sick days in this place would do your
body and soul a lot of good!

An Irish Country Village is the second
book in the Irish Country series (proceed-
ed by An Irish Country Doctor and fol-
lowed by An Irish Country Christmas),
which follows the lives and medical prac-
tice of general practitioner Dr. Fingal
Flahertie O' Reilly and his new young
assistant Dr. Barry Laverty in the fiction-
al Irish Ulster village of Ballybucklebo.
Dr. Laverty, fresh from medical school, is
learning the ropes from the elder O'Reilly.
He's also in mad dash to win the heart
of Miss Patricia Spence, college student
and aspiring engineer. Behind every

good man (or two) is a woman who is
really in charge and the woman in charge
here is Mrs. "Kinky" Kincaid. House-
keeper to both gentlemen, Kinky takes
the shenanigans of the two doctors with
a grain of salt.

Kinky's a great cook, and Dr. O'Reilly
has a great appetite. Arriving home, fam-
ished, the good doctors find Kinky on the
floor, scrubbing away. Seems a house cat
with an appetite for butter eats a half
pound of it and proceeds to deposit the
mess on Kinky's clean kitchen floor.
When Kinky informs O'Reilly there's

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been a little accident, he immediately assumes he has lost one of his favorite meals and asks, "Did the cat get the crab cakes"? Assured that his crab cakes are safe and sound, O'Reilly goes on his way, a happy man. And Kinky throws in some chips on the side. All in a day's work.

Author Patrick Taylor is a general practitioner himself. He indicates in his notes that the fictional Dr. O'Reilly is just that – fictional — and has no resemblance to himself. However, if this book series was being made into a television show or series (a great idea!), his book jacket photo would certainly get him a casting appointment. He sure looks the part.

Reading about Ballybucklebo is the next best thing to being there. A fun read that makes you want to curl up with a warm cup of tea and drift off to the land of green.

AN UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP, A Novel of Mary Todd Lincoln and Elizabeth Keckley by Ann Rinaldi. Harcourt, 2007, 2008, 244 pp., \$6.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-15-205597-4

This is actually a children's book but I found it to be a very interesting read. It is the story of Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of the president, and former slave Elizabeth Keckley, who became Mary's dressmaker. The title says it all: An Unlikely Friendship.

There have been many books written about Mary Lincoln. Most leave you with the idea that she was a crazy woman who constantly shopped. She did shop a lot, mostly because she was worried or lonely when her husband, Abraham, was called away. While the author acknowledges that some scenes described in the book have been invented or pieced together for the sake of the story, there is still a great deal of truth in the events that occur here. And you turn the last page and close the book with a much greater sense of empathy for Mary.

I had never heard of Elizabeth Keckley before I read the book. While we think we know all about slavery, this book relates stories that make the senseless concept even more insane. Cruel and heartless, it makes you wonder how people could even think about calling them-
TRUE REVIEW 6

selves civilized.

Elizabeth's spirit would not be broken and she went on to secure her freedom and be a successful woman. But not before she suffered the loss of her son, and cruelty at the hand of slave-owners, one in particular who was even her half brother. Elizabeth was the daughter of a slave woman and the white plantation owner, Armistead Burwell. Everyone "knew" but nobody said so.

It is heartening to know that these women reached across racial boundaries to befriend each other. Each faced incredible trials and tribulations. It's a story unlike the usual history books. And well worth a good read.

PETE'S DISAPPEARING ACT, by Jenny Tripp. Harcourt, 2009, 168 pp., \$16.00. ISBN 978-0-15-206177-7

Pete's in a bind. After biting a chimp and his ringmaster, the circus turns against him. He sets off to become a pet for a rich woman. Just as he's having second thoughts of leaving the spotlight and fame, a twister blows in and sets him and his friends on a new course for adventure.

Never a huge fan of cartoons (and being way past middle grade too), I thought I'd have trouble getting through this book. But after a few pages, I was hooked! Who would have thought a pink poodle and his wacky companions could keep a middle-aged lady on the edge of her seat! One can't help rooting for Pete, Rita and Quakers, the star-struck duck.

This book is one of the "Pete" series and they just scream "Cartoon Network" or silver screen. If it hasn't been picked up yet, it will be. In an age of electronic gadgetry and wild special effects, Pete and his friends are a breath of fresh air—a clean, lively, fun storyline and good old-fashioned entertainment. Buy me a ticket. Soda and popcorn, coming right up!

Put us on your mailing list!

TO BE REVIEWED
NEXT ISSUE:

THE WRECK OF THE GOD-SPEED, by James Patrick Kelly. Golden Gryphon Press, 2008, 361 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 1-930846-51-7

CYBERABAD DAYS, Return to the India of 2047, by Ian McDonald. Pyr/Prometheus, 2009, 280 pp., \$15.00. ISBN 978-1-59102-699-0

NEBULA AWARDS SHOWCASE 2009, ed. by Ellen Datlow. ROC, 2009, 437 pp., \$16.00. ISBN 978-0-451-46255-8

THE THIRD SIGN, by Gregory A. Wilson. Gale/Cengage Learning, 2009, 352 pp., \$25.95. ISBN 978-1-59414-765-4

THE EMPIRE OF ICE CREAM, by Jeffrey Ford. Golden Gryphon Press, 2006, 2009, 324 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 1-930846-58-4

Yes, we are still looking for books from small press publishers, including Wheatland, Wildside, Subterranean, Night Shade Books, and others. I am going to spread this coverage out over this issue and the next. Don't delay!

THE MATTERS AT MANSFIELD, A Mr. and Mrs. Darcy Mystery, by Carrie Bebris. Forge, 2008, 286 pp., \$22.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-7653-1847-3

As a huge Jane Austen fan, I'm skeptical of any book written since her passing. How could anyone write like Jane? It's like Hollywood re-making a movie. Nine times out of ten, it falls flat. Alas, it would appear that the saga of the Darcy's would end with Jane's last book.

However, this is that one out of 10 — a really good book that captures the Austen style and period so well that you forget it's not Jane's writing. Open the cover and the Regency era of the Darcys and the place called Pemberly come to life again. Only this time, there's a mystery to solve. Part Sherlock Holmes, part Jane Austen, somehow it all seems a natural fit.

In this installment of the mystery series, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Darcy's aunt, needs a suitable and lucrative match for her daughter Anne. Unfortunately for Anne, real love isn't a requirement. You have to feel sorry for Anne. I keep remembering her looking so sickly — I'd be sick too if I had Lady Catherine de Bourgh for a mother!

Throw in a murder and all the machinations that go with the period and you have one spell-binding story. And happily, true love really does win in the end when Anne receives a proposal from a colonel worth waiting for! (no spoilers here!)

I have not read the other Mr. and Mrs. Darcy Mysteries yet. You can be sure I will.

GEORGE WASHINGTON, First In War, First In Peace, by James A. Crutchfield. Forge, 2005, 2009, 240 pp., \$14.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-7653-1070-5

If you're like most people, the things that you remember about George Washington are:

- # He supposedly chopped down a cherry tree but couldn't lie about it (false)
- # He had false teeth (true)
- # He was our first president.

This book was a fun read and I learned many interesting things about Washington, his contemporaries, and this time in history. In many ways, Washington was very ordinary man with no extensive schooling or military training, unlike many of his peers with higher educations. We tend to think of him as the "supreme commander," a real military wizard. He certainly had a knack for being a "big-picture" thinker and he was a military giant in his later years. However, in the beginning he made numerous mistakes on the battlefield. He learned by doing and sometimes he just got lucky!

The book gives lots of interesting facts. Smallpox, among other diseases, ran rampant in the 1700s. Washington contracted it on a trip to Barbados and therefore was immune during

Revolutionary times when so many died of the disease.

Time apart seemed to be the rule rather than the exception when it came to relationships. Martha and George, like many of his contemporaries (John Adams and wife Abigail to name one couple), often spent many years apart. In one instance, six years passed since he had seen Martha and his beloved Mt. Vernon. No modern transportation simply turned what we could cover in a few hours today into a trip of weeks or months (if crossing the Atlantic). Communication took the slow route as well. The contents of your letter could be months old by the time it reached its destination.

We also find out, among other interesting tidbits, that...

Benedict Arnold basically sold out West Point, attempting to surrender it to enemy forces in 1780. Although he was a brilliant and much decorated soldier, he sold out his country and defected, most historians agree, because of debt and a failure to receive a promotion. He died in London in 1801, mostly forgotten, when he could have been a leading hero in the fight for independence.

At the time of Washington's death, General Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, father of Robert E. Lee, summed up national sentiment with those famous words, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the heart of his countrymen."

Washington's family owned and resided at Mt. Vernon until 1860, when it was purchased by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association of the Union, who rescued it from ruin. For the next four years, these young women courageously kept the mansion intact despite frequent Civil War battles in the neighborhood.

The Cherry Tree Chopping "I cannot tell a lie" tale was just that, invented by Mason Locke Weems of Maryland, an Anglican clergyman, when the fifth edition of his book, *THE LIFE AND MEMORABLE ACTIONS OF GEORGE WASHINGTON*, was published in 1806.

Ethan Allen wasn't just a furniture store but a real, living human being.

The King of Spain gave Washington a pair of prize jackasses. Although one died in transit, the other flourished and the blood of that animal, appropriately named "Royal Gift," still flows through the veins of most of our championship mules in the U.S. today.

In today's trying and unsettling times, it would be very cool if Washington could return for a visit, just to give us a glimpse of a real hero. As Mr. Crutchfield states, "He was a man of humility, yet strong principle; a warrior who showed no quarter to his enemy, yet when the conflict was over, forgave and even pardoned; a statesman who, in retrospect, so understood and interpreted the workings of a democracy that, today, historians still marvel at his near-perfect insight into problems that faced the young nation. Born British, he became thoroughly American, recognized by friend and foe alike as the

guiding light for the colonies in their fight for independence, and later, of the United States as it began its difficult journey to world recognition and respect."

While school history books do serve a purpose by giving us the quick overview, they can't begin to compare with a book like this. Let's hope teachers are wise enough to include Mr. Crutchfield's fantastic book *GEORGE WASHINGTON* in their study plan.

MR. PUTTER & TABBY "See The Stars," by Cynthia Rylant. Illustrated by Arthur Howard. Harcourt, 2007, 2008, 44 pp., \$5.95. ISBN 978-0-15-206366-5

Books such as *MR. PUTTER & TABBY* make me smile and take me back to my childhood. Simple days, warm summer nights staring at the stars, fun times like sitting on the porch with your neighbor. (It also made me hungry for jelly rolls!) Those were the days! Kudos too to Arthur Howard for his colorful, fun illustrations. "See the Stars" is but one in the Mr. Putter and Tabby series of books that will delight young readers. Definitely a five jellyroll book!

THE SNOW SHOW, by Carolyn Fisher. Harcourt, 2008, 41 pp., \$17.00. ISBN 978-0-15-206019-0

Author Carolyn Fisher takes on the task of teaching readers how snow is made using the set of a cooking show on location in the North Pole. It's a clever idea and I'm betting young readers will enjoy it. The book is packed with lots of information and illustrations. In fact, it probably would make a very good transition to the big screen. Ms. Fisher also includes a download for a free activity kit on her website.

CHRISTMAS FARMS, by Mary Lyn Ray. Illustrated by Barry Root. Harcourt, 2008, 37 pp., \$17.00. ISBN 978-0-15-216290-0

Mary Lyn Ray captures the beauty of the season with this delightful children's book about tree farms. The illustrations are well done and I particularly like the choice of Minister Std. Book, a very crisp, clean typeface. It's an easy, entertaining read for young children but also includes a page on the history of the Christmas tree and facts about the growing process that I found very interesting. The beautiful winter cover scene draws you in — all that's missing is a warm cup of cocoa and your list for Santa!

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astounded when, at one game, his quarterback rating is 53 percent and the very next week it is 110 percent. Can Donovan explain how that happens?

My doubts about this guy go back to a comment that Troy Aikman made during a preseason game in which Troy was seriously doubting Donovan's ability to be accurate in the short passing game. Many Eagle fans saw the same thing - inconsistency, inconsistency, inconsistency in not only the passing game, but a lot of things. We were used to inconsistency since the time of Randall Cunningham and all the quarterbacks since.

Did anybody catch Donovan yawning on the sideline during the Baltimore regular season game this past season? Anybody watch Donovan smile the many times he threw interceptions? Smiling after making mistakes - it will not earn you fans.

In the meantime, we have seen the Manning brothers win Superbowls. We have seen the guy across the state, in Pittsburgh, "Big Ben" win Superbowls. We have seen Tom Brady knock out his critics, time and again, on the way to an eventual birth in the Football Hall of Fame.

Recently I asked this question of Eagles fans: do you remember any game in which Donovan either ran for or threw a touchdown to win the game? Anybody?

To be a quarterback, this is what you have to do:

Handle pressure. Not only handle it, but get better at your game the more pressure there is. Love the pressure. Respect the pressure. Make it work for you.

Be hard on yourself. At every press conference, when the game goes bad, I hear Donovan talking about how "WE didn't get it done, WE committed mistakes, WE did not execute the game plan properly." I understand. WE threw the interception. WE got sacked and fumbled the ball. WE dropped the ball on the handoff. WE? Donovan must have some kind of doppelganger or something. Blame yourself instead.

Follow the Phil Simm's rule. I remember a comment from Phil on a national game broadcast in which he spoke about his own experience as a quarterback with the New York Giants: as a quarterback, he realized that some of the talent on his team was, at times, not the best. So he made the most of what he had. Literally, make your players step up to the plate but know what they could be doing, should be doing, and getting it done.

Be passionate, ridiculously crazy-in-love passionate, about the game. To the fans, football IS sometimes better than life itself. They pay a lot for tickets at their home stadium or when they visit other stadiums with the team. My brother and I have traveled to New York, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Washington, and Charlotte to watch the Eagles play. We were the noisemakers that stopped four attempts made by the Cardinals to get into the End Zone during an Eagles game at Veteran's

Stadium in the 1990s, when the Eagles won 7-3. We were on the visitor's ground side, banging on the platforms, creating the noise in one of the best defensive stops in football history. We were there. We remember.

So this open letter to Donovan is: we need you to win a Superbowl. As for play-off games, we've been there, done that. You deserve to win this now.

If you are in this entirely for the money, or for some longstanding career commitment, or out of simple habit, why not ask for a trade to Chicago, your home team, the team you rooted for growing up, and we can move on? You may be the best quarterback the Eagles have NOW, but with your professional behavior questionable from game to game, I'd rather trade you to a team that needs a quarterback (the Bears) and give us a chance, somehow, sometime in a future not filled with an uncertain quarterback, but an overachiever, a guy who loves the pressure, a guy so competitive he lets nobody win, even his grandmother during a chess match.

I don't believe in you, Donovan. I remain a Donovan Agnostic. I will believe you when I see it.

But I don't see you winning a Superbowl for the city of Philadelphia. Because I only know what I see.

— Andrew Andrews
Publisher

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