

Books

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2015

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLERS

- | | |
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| <p>FICTION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 The Girl in the Spider's Web by David Lagercrantz (Knopf) 2 The Martian by Andy Weir (Crown) 3 The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins (Riverhead) | <p>NONFICTION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 A Walk in the Woods by Bill Bryson (Random) 2 It Is About Islam by Glenn Feldman (Threshold Editions/Radio Arts) 3 The Boys in the Boat by Daniel James Brown (Penguin) |
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(Source: combined print and e-books for the week ending Sept. 20)

A lightness falls on Rushdie's 'Nights'

REVIEW FROM HERE

Tyler Sage

Tyler Sage is an adjunct faculty member in the English Department at Santa Barbara City College

It's easy enough to call Salman Rushdie's new novel an homage to, or a playful manipulation of, the materials of the classic collection of tales "One Thousand and One Nights." It's more difficult to say what Mr. Rushdie's book actually is.

The plot involves an invasion of our world by jinn (or genies), who have come here from their own world to wage a kind of gauntlet war of good versus evil. But it also features a tribe of humans descended from a jinn, a theologian and a philosopher waging an 800-year argument about God (the vast majority

of which is conducted when they are in the form of dust in their graves); a gardener who discovers himself floating an inch above the earth, a baby in whose presence anyone who lies begins immediately to decompose, and much more. Oh, and it's also narrated by an unnamed "we" who live a

thousand years from now and understand this tale of "the cataclysm in our world to be the beginning of the more peaceful, rational time they occupy.

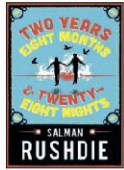
When we think of Mr. Rushdie, we generally think of him as a kind of serious satirist. We might think of "Midnight's Children," his exploration of the end of British Colonialism in India, or we might

remember that the Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for his assassination after the publication of "The Satanic Verses." But we forget. I think, the deep cultural density of his work, along with its radical playfulness. We forget that the opening page of "The Satanic Verses" has a character singing "The Doors' 'Alabama Song (Whiskey Bar)," which was, of course, not written by The Doors at all, but by the German poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht.

This kind of playful connection and cross-connection and double connection hidden under another

connection fills his new book. In some sense, these connections and references are "the book." It is about love, and old-world myths; it is also about our hyper-electronic new media age. And it is about stories — how we tell them, why we tell them, and what they mean. It is not a traditional novel, even by Mr. Rushdie's standards. There are moments when it can feel unmoored, or wandering. But it is written with a joy, a masterful prose, and an absolute freedom that is all too rare in today's literary world.

email: books@newspress.com



TWO YEARS EIGHT MONTHS AND TWENTY-EIGHT NIGHTS
Fiction
By Salman Rushdie
Random House, \$20



BRETT LEIGH DICKS / NEWS-PRESS PHOTO

A former journalist with CNN who now works in communications for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, local author R.K. Jackson has just released his debut novel, "The Girl in the Maze."

Georgia on his mind

Local author's debut novel is an atmospheric journey through the coastal south

By BRETT LEIGH DICKS
NEWS-PRESS CONTRIBUTOR

The creeks and estuaries that form a maze of watery passageways between Georgia's coastal barrier islands and main land not only offer a moody setting for local author R.K. Jackson's debut novel, but are a fitting metaphor.

Following the exploits of an aspiring journalist as she uncovers some deep, dark truths in a windswept Georgia town, "The Girl in the Maze" is as mysterious and suspenseful as it is intriguing — much like Georgia's coastal marshland where the tale is set.

"If you were to look down, from above, on the marshland around the islands along the coast of Georgia, it looks like a labyrinth of creeks and rivers," Mr. Jackson recently told the News-Press.

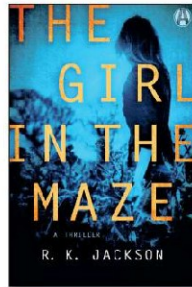
"I grew up in the deep south and used to go out to the islands to visit relatives who lived there. There's a labyrinth of creeks that is very easy to get lost in, forests of ancient oak trees, and droppings of Spanish moss; it's a very mysterious place and your imagination can run wild there."

Which is precisely what Mr. Jackson has done in his haunting novel, released earlier this month as an e-book by Random House Africa. The imagery Mr. Jackson weaves across its 301 pages is so vivid you can almost smell the salt and feel the humidity in the air.

It's not all fiction though. The book's protagonist, Martha Covington, is a journalist, and like the author's familiarity with the story's setting, the career of its hero is something he could also draw on from his own life experience.

Mr. Jackson works in communications at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, but prior to relocating to California in 2001 for the job, he spent many years working as an Atlanta-based journalist.

Born and raised in Milner, Ga., Mr. Jackson started his



"The Girl in the Maze" draws on the Georgia-born author's own experiences in the South along with the region's atmosphere and mystery.

journalism career working for a series of community newspapers in the Atlanta area before becoming a desk editor at the Marietta Daily Journal in the early 1990s. In 1995, he moved into online journalism, joining CNN as it was launching an online news site.

"That was the first big news organization to make a splash on the Web with cnn.com and I was the second editor they hired," Mr. Jackson recalled. "I have always been a space nut and at CNN.com, I was a senior editor for science and technology. And then an opportunity came up at JPL doing communications for the Explorer Exploration Program. That was a dream come true."

While communicating the deep space exploits of JPL's space exploration program as they unfolded in Mr. Jackson's dream job, another aspiration he has long held is writing a novel.

Having written several plays that were performed in Atlanta, Mr. Jackson and his wife, Elizabeth St. Andre, purchased a cabin nine years ago in the Los Padres National Forest off

San Marcos Pass. The location provided the perfect setting to write while the long commute from Santa Barbara County to Pasadena offered plenty of opportunity for contemplation.

"I do that commute twice a week and I always end up with a lot of voice memos full of ideas," he said. "I take the back way so there's not a lot of traffic, and I'd be listening to music or a book on tape and an idea would come and I would press record on my iPhone and start dictating."

Missing the soul of the South and the unique characters that favor the region since relocating to Southern California, Mr. Jackson decided to reconnect with the area by writing a book set in it.

"That, and it's my inheritance," he said with a laugh. "I was born there and lived around all these characters so I thought I may as well cash in."

Along with his childhood experiences in coastal Georgia, a visit to Sapelo Island near Savannah and Morgan Island in South Carolina in the early 1980s laid the foundations for "The Girl in the Maze." Ms. St. Andre, as part of her graduate studies, was researching animal behavior in a resident colony of rhesus monkeys on Morgan Island and the trip gave Mr. Jackson plenty of opportunity to learn about local issues.

The backdrop to the book is the battle to save the fictional barrier island of Shell Heap from development.

"It was on that trip that I started finding out about the Geechee community, the descendants of African slaves who have maintained a very unique and fragile culture out there," Mr. Jackson said. "Development is a big threat there, and as I found out more about that I thought it would be a really good subject for a book or screenplay."

One of the last unincorporated islands on the Georgia Coast, Shell Heap Island is home to a community of Geechees who are descendants of African slaves

PLEASE SEE **GEORGIA** ON **A7**

BOOK REPORT

By Dave Mason
Photos by Helena Day Bryese

What are YOU reading? Give us your book report (don't worry, you won't be graded on it). Email: books@newspress.com or write to Book Report, c/o Santa Barbara News-Press, P.O. Box 1583, Santa Barbara, CA 93102-1583. Please include your name and phone number.



Darnell Campbell, 29
Santa Barbara

"Rich Dad Poor Dad" by Robert T. Kiyosaki

The author had a poor dad. But his friend had a rich dad. The book is about the way people such as the two dads think and how you should set your goals super high, so if you fall short, you don't end up in the basement.



Virginia Mariposa, 73
Santa Barbara

"The Cider House Rules" by John Irving

The novel is set in an orphanage, and the doctor is performing abortions and also acts for unwed mothers. I liked that it dealt with abortion, and some of the characters are interesting. But the author's wacky. The book is 500 pages.



Edward Hammond, 67
Ojai

"In the Garden of Beasts" by Erik Larson

The well-written book about Nazi Germany in 1933 is very cinematic and should be made into a film. I felt Martin Dink, daughter of American ambassador William E. Dodd, was late to recognize the advent of fascism and made a mistake in later supporting communists.



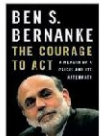
Leah Stokes, 30
Santa Barbara

"A Tale for the Time Being" by Ruth Ozeki

The diary of a young girl in Japan, washed up on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. The novel covers a lot of ground. Eudaisism, a samurai and the dark side of Japanese culture and the pressure for conformity. You've got to read it!

BOOK MARKS

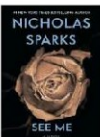
10/5



THE COURAGE TO ACT: A MEMOIR OF A CRISIS AND ITS AFTERMATH

Nonfiction
By Ben S. Bernanke
W.W. Norton & Co., \$35
This memoir by Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke, who served from 2006 to 2014, details how he barely had time to start working at his new job before having to deal with the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

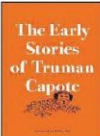
10/13



SEE ME

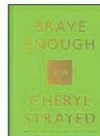
Fiction
By Nicholas Sparks
Grand Central Publishing, \$27
A man and a woman, both burned by love and hiding secrets from their past, start a tumultuous relationship in their small town, only to find the past returning to haunt them.

10/27



THE EARLY STORIES OF TRUMAN CAPOTE

Fiction
By Truman Capote, foreword by Hilton Als
Rancon House, \$25
Recently rediscovered in the New York Public Library's archives, these short stories were written when Truman Capote was in his teens and early 20s, long before "Other Voices, Other Rooms" and "In Cold Blood."



BRAVE ENOUGH

Nonfiction
By Cheryl Strayed
Knopf, \$18.95
From the writer of the best-selling "Wild" comes this gift book of inspirational quotes drawn from her various writings.



DEPAVED HEART: A SCARPETTA NOVEL

Fiction
By Patricia Cornwell
William Morrow, \$28
Dr. Kay Scarpetta, chief medical examiner and crime solver, is back for a case that cuts too close to home and includes the Barruda Triangle, the death of a Hollywood mogul's daughter and more.

— Iad Mills, News-Press correspondent

She finds herself lost in a maze

GEORGIA

Continued from Page A6

freed after the Emancipation Proclamation. They and their ancestors have lived on the island since the end of the Civil War. But both their land and existence are threatened. As a result, a local historical society sets out to document the disappearing culture.

The society has hired Martha Coakley to write a book on the Geechee culture. She believes she's hit a recent breakdown behind her, but she starts hearing voices, and when she becomes the prime suspect in a recent murder, there is no one who can vouch for

her sanity. After escaping into the coast's wilderness, she finds herself lost in a maze, figuratively and literally.

"Martha has schizophrenia," Mr. Jackson explains. "In reading about people who have schizophrenia, they're often portrayed as objects of fear, like villains and murderers. I thought it would be nice to show someone with schizophrenia in a different light, someone smart and functional and the hero of the story."

While the book has only recently been released, Mr. Jackson is already hard at work on a sequel, titled "The Kiss of the Sun," in the Martha Coakley series. Does being so familiar

with the setting and characters make book two easier to write than book one?

"It's easier because my craft is better," Mr. Jackson said. "But it's harder because this time I have a deadline."

email: haines@newspress.com

FYI

"The Girl in the Maze" is available in e-book through Amazon Kindle for \$9.99. For more information about R.K. Jackson, visit www.rancaikjackson.com.

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Literary Events

TODAY

Book Signing: 5 p.m. *The Wright Brothers* by David McCullough, 124 S. Valley Road, No. 52, Montecito. Ken Berris, author of "Wild Cards." Free. 693-4977.

SAT 9/26

Twilight Zone & Science Fiction Festival: 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Bank of America, 749 E. Main St., Ventura. Featuring, from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m., Marc Zierer of "The Twilight Zone Companion"; 1-3 p.m., Stephen Woodworth of "Through the Veil: Eyes" and "With Red Hands" and His wife, Kelly Dunn, editor of "Mutation Nation"; 3-5 p.m., Larry Niven of the "Ring World" series. Free. 643-3154.

WED 9/30

Book Signings: 7 p.m. Chaucer's Books, 3321 State St. Featuring choreographer and performer Carol Prose, co-editor of "Creating Dance: A Traveler's Guide"; Robin Sisler, producer of dance films; and Katyja Bloom, author of "The Embodied Self: Movement and Psychoanalysis." Free. 682-6767.

THURS 10/1

David McCullough to Speak: 9 a.m. The Grand Shops, 2622 E. Main St., Ventura. Doreen Thomas, author of "What's Inside Finding the Light One in Light of the Beattitudes." Free. 643-5350.

FRI 10/2

Autograph Party: 2-4 p.m. Ancient Book Shoppe, 2622 E. Main St., Ventura. Doreen Thomas, author of "What's Inside Finding the Light One in Light of the Beattitudes." Free. 643-5350.

SAT 10/3

Breakfast with the Authors: 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. Santa Barbara County Education Office, auditorium, 4400 Cathedral Oaks Road. Enjoy a quick brunch and

conversation with children's authors and illustrators. Sponsored by the Education Office. RSVP by Monday at <http://sbceo.org/BAWA2015Reg>. \$16 general, \$12 students. For more information, call Rose Keller at 934-4710, ext. 5222, or email rkeller@sbceo.org.

Education Author to Speak: 3 p.m. UCSB Campbell Hall. Dale Russakoff, author of "The Prize: Who's in Charge of America's Schools?" Presented by UCSB Arts & Lectures. Free. 893-3535 or www.artsandlectures.ucsb.edu.

TUES 10/6

Book Signing: 7 p.m. Chaucer's Books, 3321 State St. Christopher Macsen, author of "Towdy." Free. 682-6767.

To submit events two weeks in advance, email listsings@newspress.com.

Patrick deWitt's 'Undermajordomo Minor' winks at fairy tale conventions

By DAVID L. ULIN
THE DUNE NEWS SERVICE

On the acknowledgments page of his third novel, "Undermajordomo Minor," Patrick deWitt cites as inspiration a variety of writers, including Thomas Bernhard, Italo Calvino, Roald Dahl, Shirley Jackson and Jean Ilyss. This tells us something important about his intent. Like Mr. DeWitt's last book, "The Sisters Brothers," which was shortlisted for the 2011 Man Booker Prize, "Undermajordomo Minor" is a work of fiction with its roots in literature, a response to other books more than to any interaction with the world.

That's not a criticism, just an observation: Mr. DeWitt is not interested in straight naturalism so much as in the mechanics of a particular kind of story narrative as fairy tale. In "The Sisters Brothers" it was the western, which he deconstructed as neatly as Charles Portis and E.L. Doctorow did. This time, it's the fable, as Mr. DeWitt tells the story of a young man, Lucien — also known as Lucy — Minor, who travels from his home village of Burg to become the "undermajordomo" (or assistant to the assistant) of one Baron Von Aux's estate in the remote wilderness of the eastern mountain range.

Such a setting is as Mitteleuropean as anything in Franz Kafka, even if the author of "The Castle" is not on Mr. DeWitt's list of influences. Neither, for that matter, is Jorge Luis Borges, although his fingerprints emerge in places here as well. It's not pastiche, however, that Mr. DeWitt is after, maybe "reanimation" is a better word. What I mean is that, throughout the novel, he seeks to play against our expectations, to take the moral lessons inherent in his chosen form and rewrite them, give them additional dimension and left.

Lucy may be inexperienced, with no real friends and only minimal connection to his family — his mother puts his room up for rent before he has even moved out of the house — but he is also resourceful and in his own way seductive, charming in the ways of love. Indeed, the central movement of "Undermajordomo Minor" involves his relationship with Klara, a young woman from the Baron's village, with whom he has a passionate affair.

That this causes complications goes without saying. Klara is involved with Acropolis, leader of a rebel insurrection that fights in the hills above the castle for reasons of its own. She is also pursued by the Baron's friend the Count, who recognizes Lucy's infatuation and jokingly challenges the younger man to a duel.

"He was merely making sport," Mr. DeWitt writes, "and yet there was an undercurrent of true violence at play as well. You had had to look at the man to see he'd never in his life asked twice for anything he desired."

That's a terrific line, a jolting challenge the veteran Washington Post reporter examines the highly publicized strategy to create a model for national education — one that failed despite a \$100 million pledge from Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg — revealing a cautionary tale for those who care about the state of America's schools.

And yet part of Mr. DeWitt's point is to challenge even these preconceptions, our sense of how, exactly, a novel like this is supposed to go. Were this a standard bildungsroman, Lucy would learn something important from his confrontation with the Count, something terrible that would change both him and (not coincidentally) the movement of the plot.

"Undermajordomo Minor," though, doesn't offer such easy satisfactions: Mr. DeWitt raises the stakes only to reduce them, only to leave the tension unresolved. This I think is the whole idea — to comment on the conventions of form while subtly undermining them, winking at all the while.

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David McCullough

Lessons in Leadership from the Pioneers of Flight

THU, OCT 1 / 8 PM / GRANADA THEATRE
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A Granada facility fee will be added to each ticket price.

"McCullough is one of our most gifted living writers."
The Washington Post

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The Prize: Who's in Charge of America's Schools?

SAT, OCT 3 / 3 PM
UCSB CAMPBELL HALL FREE

The veteran Washington Post reporter examines the highly publicized strategy to create a model for national education — one that failed despite a \$100 million pledge from Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg — revealing a cautionary tale for those who care about the state of America's schools.

Diane Ackerman

The Human Age: The World Shaped By Us

MON, OCT 12 / 8 PM
UCSB CAMPBELL HALL FREE

The Pulitzer Prize finalist and author of *The Zookeeper's Wife* explores how humans have become the singular dominant force of change on the planet.

Community Partner: ORFALEA FOUNDATION
Books will be available for purchase and signing at each event
Chaucer's Books
(805) 893-3535 / www.ArtsAndLectures.UCSB.edu
Granada event tickets can also be purchased at: (805) 899-2222