

Dear Mr. Carson

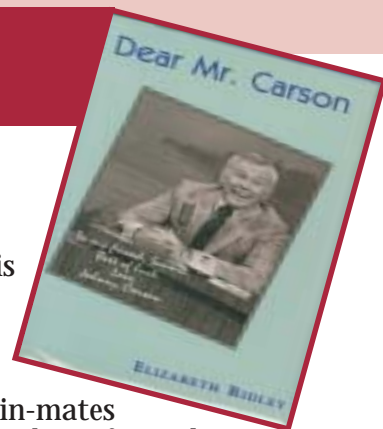
by Elizabeth Ridley

The Permanent Press, 2006

Sunnie Sundstrom, after finishing 8th grade, arrives at fat camp mourning the death of her grandmother and worried about her parents' marriage. The camp is run by a sadistic drill-sergeant-of-a-woman who weighs the girls on a livestock scale in the dining hall.

Seeking some relief, Sunnie and her cabin-mates are soon in trouble because of the visiting boys from the Evangelical camp across the lake. As punishment, Sunnie is sent home on the bus because no one is available to pick her up. However, instead of heading home to Milwaukee, Sunnie impulsively trades in her ticket for one to L.A. in hopes of seeing a taping of the Johnny Carson show. She idolizes Johnny, watching his show every night and talking to his autographed photo. After some frightening adventures, Sunnie arrives just in time for the Carson show taping.

You feel Sunnie's emotions as she struggles with her eating, her family problems and with growing up. Reading about teen life in the '70's certainly hits some of us very close to home.



Holmes on the Range

by Steve Hockensmith

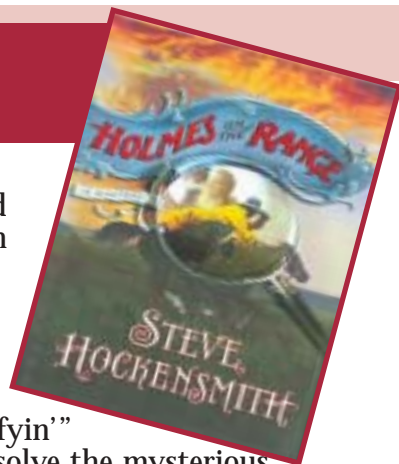
St. Martin's Minotaur, 2006

German brothers Gustav (Old Red) and Otto (Big Red) Amlingmeyer have been reading the adventures of Sherlock Holmes in 'Harper's Weekly' magazine around the campfire. After signing on at the Bar VR Ranch, the boys stumble onto a murder. Now, Old Red considers himself a master at "deductifyin'" and he intends to use his new skills to solve the mysterious deaths of Perkins, the general manager and Boudreaux, the albino foreman. The colorful cast of characters also includes a blustery English lord riding along with a wagon full of British aristocrats who own the ranch, and a cannibalistic mountain man named Hungry Bob.

Between cattle stampedes and prairie ambushes, Old Red's deductive abilities turn up lots of clues and several secrets. The finale is a grand showdown with guns blazing to rival any TV western shoot-out. Big Red's narrative as a skeptical, nervous Watson off-sets Old Red's smart mouth and penchant for trouble. One thing that never wavers is the strong bond of loyalty the brothers share with one another.

This is a humorous western/mystery novel with original characters which we hope Hockensmith keeps alive in future novels.

"Some folks get religion. Gustav got Sherlock Holmes."



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The Attack by Yasmina Khadra

Doubleday, 2006

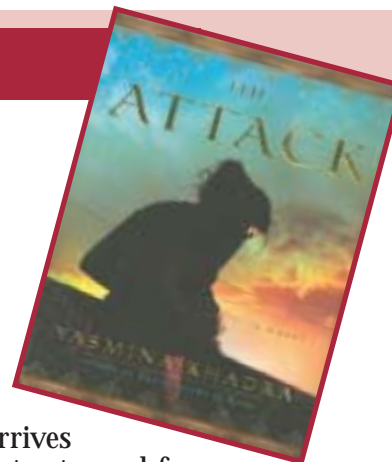
Dr. Amin Jaafari is on duty at the hospital in Tel Aviv when he hears an explosion and receives a report that a suicide bomber has blown up a restaurant. At least nineteen people have been killed including eleven children at a birthday party.

After spending hours at the hospital administering to the wounded, Amin arrives home to find that his wife Sihem has not returned from visiting her grandmother. There are no messages from her because she forgot to take her cell phone and her grandmother has no telephone. Amin soon receives a call from the police requesting him to return to the hospital to identify the mutilated body of his wife found at the bombsite.

The evidence confirms that Sihem was the suicide bomber. Amin can't and won't accept this. He begins a perilous investigation of his own to learn how and why she became involved. Amin puts his life in increasing danger as he draws closer and closer to the truth.

The act of terrorism is brought to a human level in this very personal account. The reader begins to grasp how religious beliefs can drive one to commit such violence. A difficult subject to read about, a difficult novel to put down.

"The woman who blew herself up ... the suicide bomber ... it was your wife ..."



Shelf Life

Grace A. Dow Memorial Library

Fall 2006

Original Reviews of Recommended Books

The Thing about Jane Spring

by Sharon Krum

Viking, 2005

Good things come to those who act like a 60's movie actress.

Jane Spring thinks like a soldier. Her father, the general, raised her to emulate the ideal warrior - honor, duty and discipline. Though she excels as a prosecuting attorney in New York

City, her brutal honesty and aggressive manner alienate her from the people around her. After another date falls through, she admits that she could use some help with her personal life.

Remembering her father's advice to find a mentor and follow their example, Jane searches for a woman who has been successful in love. During a blizzard she stumbles into a Doris Day movie marathon and Jane has found her mentor: a woman who always got her man.

With her grandmother's vintage wardrobe, some new make-up, and a makeover for her apartment, she becomes Doris Day. Then amazing things start to happen. The jury on her current case is more sympathetic to her arguments. Her co-workers, though at first convinced that she has had a mental breakdown, are treating her to the respect and admiration she desires. And now two men start courting her, the lawyer she has admired since law school and the prickly detective she is working with on her trial.

"Jane Spring ...had found her hero. Doris Day was the MacArthur; the Patton, the Eisenhower of love."



Contributors: Melissa Barnard, Ann Jarvis, Jan Kimmel, Wendy Krause, Katherine Redwine

Editor: Jan Kimmel

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Gus Openshaw's Whale-Killing Journal by Keith Thomson

MacAdam/Cage, 2006

Known for publishing novels of a quirky nature, Thomson's sea-faring adventures are a parody on Melville's *Moby Dick*.

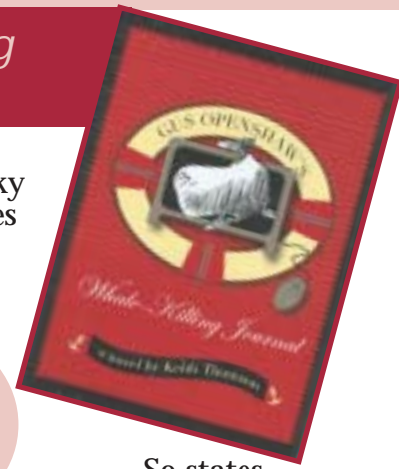
"I Got a Fish to Kill. Don't make me relive the details just now. The short of it: A whale ate my wife, kid and right arm. And he got away. For the time being."

So states the opening entry of Gus Openshaw's blog chronicling his adventures as he sets off in

a rickety boat with a misfit crew to exact his revenge with stubborn single-mindedness. Along the way, Gus finds time to keep the world informed about his bouts of bad luck through his online journal.

Along with a semi-reformed pirate and a clever-happy chef, Gus contends with nonexistent supplies, multiple shipwrecks, pirate attacks and near-fatal imprisonment. Hilarious scenarios arise with every wave as Gus prepares to battle not only the rogue whale, but also pursuing Navy forces, the violent opposition of a whale-protection organization and love.

Complete with pen-and-ink scrimshaw illustrations, this comedy of errors makes an amusing and light-hearted *Moby Dick* for the blog generation.



The Brief History of the Dead by Kevin Brockmeier

Pantheon Books, 2006

In this provocative novel, the dead inhabit a city until no one left on earth remembers them at which time they pass over to the next level. This "extension of life" is much like life on earth.

The novel shifts between the city of the dead and the living on earth. Laura Byrd is stationed at an Antarctic research station when she realizes that she may be the only living person on earth. From a journal left behind, Laura learns that a deadly virus called the "blinks" is the cause of the deaths of the staff that she expected to find at the station. Through radio communication, she begins to understand that the virus is worldwide. Laura decides that with food supplies running low and loss of power she needs to abandon the station and attempt to travel to another location. The recounting of her perseverance is riveting.

An imaginative, thought provoking story that will draw readers into a remarkable journey.



"Occasionally one of the dead... would mistake the city for heaven."

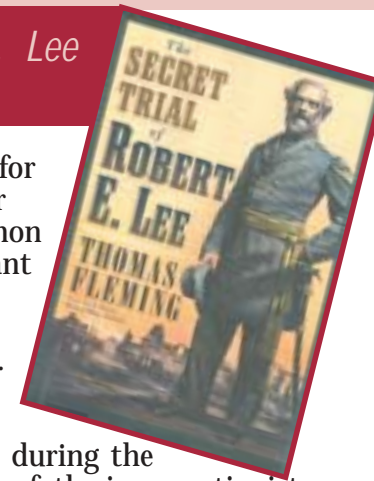
The Secret Trial of Robert E. Lee by Thomas Fleming

Forge, 2006

What if Robert E. Lee was put on trial for treason committed during the Civil War and if found guilty, hanged like a common soldier? Thomas Fleming takes a brilliant look at our country's reconstruction period to examine the possibility of history taking a totally different course. Radical Republicans were looking for someone to "blame" for the loss of 600,000 Union and Confederate soldiers during the war and Robert E. Lee, being the leader of the insurrectionist South, seemed a likely candidate. Led by Charles A. Dana, the Assistant Secretary of War, the Radicals decide to try Lee secretly at his family homestead at Arlington, Virginia which the federal government had seized under the guise of unpaid taxes.

Jeremiah O'Brien, a writer for the *New York Tribune* is brought to witness the trial and write a book about the events. A cast of famous generals and politicians from both the Union and Confederate sides become both judges and witnesses at the trial. Throughout the ensuing testimony, it is O'Brien who must determine the "true" course of events and the ultimate meaning of "honor" during the terrible times of war.

With fascinating insights into the philosophies and politics of the time, this is alternative history at its best.



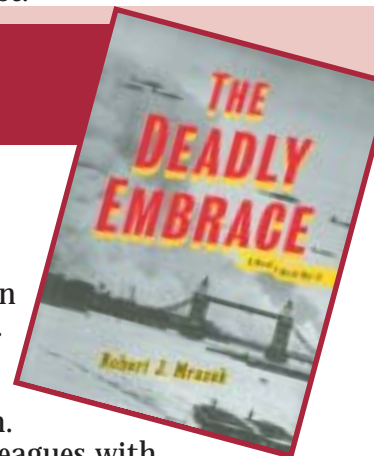
The Deadly Embrace by Robert J. Mrazek

Viking, 2006

Lieutenant Liza Marantz, a trained forensic pathologist, finds herself assigned to the military security office in blitz-torn London during World War II. She is initially given the task of censoring officers' mail to protect the secrecy of the upcoming D-Day invasion. Shortly after her arrival two female colleagues with access to top secret information are found dead of suspicious circumstances. Liza and her boss, Major Sam Taggart, a former homicide detective, are soon deeply embroiled in the murder investigations.

It isn't long before the trail leads to the highest echelons of the military. Both victims, it is discovered, have had affairs with the top brass and potentially could have compromised national security secrets. It is up to Liza and Sam to not only track down the murderer, but also to keep vital information regarding the D-Day plans from falling into the hands of the Germans.

Author Mrazek, a former Congressman from New York, has written a fast-paced thriller with enough historical detail about time, place, and personalities to make a fascinating read.



The Widow's War: A Novel by Sally Gunning

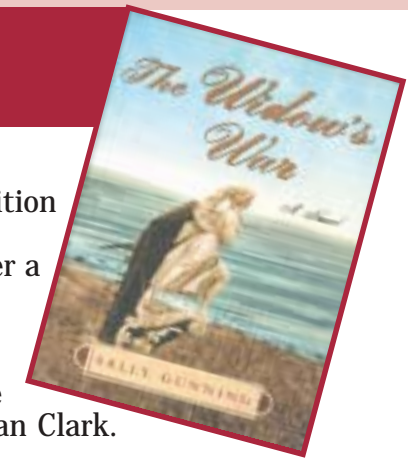
William Morrow, 2006

Lyddie waits for her husband Edward Berry to return from a whaling expedition off Cape Cod in 1761 only to discover that he has been lost at sea, leaving her a widow at the age of 39. Still grieving, she learns that Edward has only left her the standard "widow's third" of the family's assets in his will, with the balance going to her son-in-law, Nathan Clark.

Charged with "keeping" Lyddie for the balance of her life, Nathan wishes to sell the homestead, forcing Lyddie to reside with him and her daughter Mehitable. Family tensions grow as Nathan's interest focuses on the property and it is quite apparent to Lyddie that she cannot remain in the household. She elects to return to her "third" of her own home, negating Nathan's ability to sell it.

She soon befriends her Indian neighbor, Sam, who helps her make a living by offering her a wage for caring for his sick wife. She also makes an impression on local lawyer, Eben Freeman, who assists her in her fight to retain her ownership in the home.

Lyddie's struggle parallels that of many women in that era. Her ability to step forward, defying family, friends, and societal pressures in a fight for individual freedom, resonates even today.



"Do you think I don't know how to be a woman alone?"

Wolf Boy by Evan Kuhlman

Illustrations by Brendon and Brian Fraim

Shaye Arehart Books, 2006

The generally-accepted five stages of grief include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, but guilt is never mentioned. However, each member of the Harrelson family experiences guilt at being alive after beautiful, promising, young Francis Harrelson is killed in an automobile accident.

In dealing with the guilt, each family member withdraws: parents, Gene and Helen, become alienated from each other; younger sister Christine decides to run away with a pop star; and thirteen-year-old Stephen can't believe that God would take his perfect older brother instead of himself. When a counselor suggests to Stephen to "find some way of communicating his grief", he invents "Wolf Boy." He writes stories about Wolf Boy's experiences and then his next-door neighbor Nicole illustrates them.

This is a poignant, yet innovative novel. The illustrators, Brendon and Brian Fraim are well-known for their comic books (www.brosfraim.com). This is Evan Kuhlman's first novel.

