

THE PEOPLE OF PAPER

Salvador Plascencia

Debut Novel (*McSweeney's*, \$22)



The residents of the small flower-farming town of El Monte, Calif.—“people of paper” because they exist only on the page—are engaged in a cosmic battle against the writer who created them and the readers who invade their lives for entertainment. Plascencia’s surrealistic metanovel, styled à la García Márquez, is a charming meditation on the relationship between reader, author, and story line, filled with mythic imagery (“their necks still cocked to the sky, finally a small piece of Saturn fell: a blue flake floating down...”) and unforgettable personalities: a war commander who burns himself to cure his sadness; a Baby Nostradamus whose vast knowledge leaves him as limp as

a vegetable; and a woman made of paper, whose sharp, origami edges cut her many lovers with deep gashes. Though El Monte literally hides under tortoise shells to evade voyeuristic gazes, readers will find it hard to turn away. **A**—*Channing Joseph*

PLAYGROUND

Jennifer Saginor

Memoir (*HarperCollins*, \$24.95)



Can a book be both breathless and whiny? Saginor pulls off this dubious balancing act in her cliché-crammed memoir. Saginor’s parents divorced when she was very young, and her father—a lecherous, Speedo-sporting Beverly Hills physician nicknamed “Dr. Feel Good” pre-Mötley Crüe—effectively moved into the Playboy Mansion. When Saginor was 6, she watched John Belushi getting it on (“A naked lady is sitting on top of him and she’s bouncing up

and down. Her boobs are flying everywhere”). At 15, she embarked on a steamy affair (“Every touch is sensual, magical”) with one of Hugh Hefner’s girlfriends. But between lines of cocaine and lavishly described moans of pleasure, Saginor insists she was just a neglected kid with crummy parents. Tawdry doesn’t begin to describe the narcissistic demimonde in which Saginor came of age, but it nicely sums up this flimsy tell-all. **D+**—*Jennifer Reese*

MAKE LOVE!*

*The Bruce Campbell Way

Bruce Campbell

Novel (*Thomas Dunne*, \$23.95)



It’s a great, goofy what-if: Suppose stalwart B-movie star Bruce Campbell, of *Evil Dead* fame, found himself cast in a crucial supporting role in a \$35 million A-movie rom-com starring Richard Gere and Renée Zellweger and

directed by the peerless Mike Nichols. Well, if you’re Bruce Campbell spinning this story in your first novel, you adopt a faux-Southern accent that no one takes seriously, run afoul of Colin Powell’s Secret Service detail while researching your character, convince Zellweger to “stuff a few gel sacs into a larger bra,” and induce Nichols to amp up your scuffle with Gere into a full-on Hercules-and-Xena-style brawl. You also have so much fun spinning your own career into a hypothetical toilet that your readers hope Nichols is also reading and hungry for a new project. **B+**—*Adam B. Vary*

LORD BYRON’S NOVEL

John Crowley

Novel (*Morrow*, \$25.95)



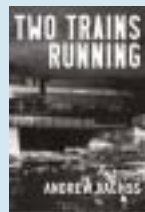
While researching Lord Byron’s daughter for an academic website, Alexandra Novak stumbles across

THRILLERS 101: ADRENALINE CRUSH



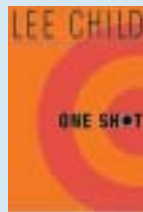
FADE Kyle Mills (*St. Martin's*, \$24.95) After the U.S. government betrays Special Forces

agent Salam al Fayed (a.k.a. Fade), it tries to bring him back into the fold—with predictably poor results. **For fans of... Rambo** **Edge-of-seat quotient** Sky-high **Bottom Line** The action is both awesome and absurd. Despite slowly becoming paralyzed from a stray bullet, Fade rivals James Bond with his hardware-based survival skills (he even has a car with an ejector seat). **A-**



TWO TRAINS RUNNING Andrew Vachss (*Pantheon*, \$25) In 1959, three powerful men vie for

control of Locke City, a small, corrupt, and racially divided Southern town. That is, of course, until one of them hires a freelance killing machine. **For fans of... Miller's Crossing** **Edge-of-seat quotient** Moderate **Bottom Line** Vachss’ ambitious, expansive novel offers long stretches of metaphor-spouting gangsters punctuated by splashes of violence from hired gun Walker Dett, a superb creation. **B**



ONE SHOT Lee Child (*Delacorte*, \$25) In his ninth outing, ex-Army cop Jack Reacher

finds himself in his most exotic locale yet—Indiana—investigating a sniper attack involving a man he first encountered 14 years prior. **For fans of... The Presidio** **Edge-of-seat quotient** High **Bottom Line** *One Shot* is well served by the unsettling, claustrophobic feel of its small-city, heartland setting—until the revelation of its over-the-top, out-of-place villains. **B-**



THE PRACTICE OF DECEIT Elizabeth Benedict (*Houghton Mifflin*, \$23.95) Graying bach-

elor and psychotherapist Eric Lavender meets a beautiful divorce lawyer and quickly weds her. When she has him arrested for molestation, he uncovers her dark past. **For fans of... Sleeping With the Enemy** **Edge-of-seat quotient** Low **Bottom Line** This marital thriller initially unspools with an utter lack of urgency that is remedied in its slightly more gripping final chapters. **C+**—*Gilbert Cruz*