

middle of a murder investigation, s to retrace the path of Chris- arch, uncovering tangled con- among the prestigious college, ood mental facility and her own story. This is an artful thriller, vivid descriptions of works of art, iver Valley scenery and the knot- errain of its characters' hearts. *retta Barrett. (July)*

TWISTED CITY

JASON STARR. *Vintage/Black Lizard*, \$12 paper (224p) ISBN 1-4000-7506-8

After fumbling a casual pickup in a bar, financial journalist David Miller realizes his wallet has been lifted, and he quickly descends into Manhattan's underbelly in Starr's sinister black comedy. Life has been rough lately: deeply depressed after the death of his beloved sister, David lost his job with the *Wall Street Journal*. He hates his new job and despises his younger live-in girlfriend, who seems more and more psychotic every day. But that was yesterday—today he's negotiating in a sweltering closed-in room in an Alphabet City tenement with a junkie hooker who claims she "found" his wallet. David knows she must be in on the sting, and the wallet isn't that important except for his favorite picture of his sister he keeps in it. But from facing mere extortion, it takes only a few hours for the reporter to find himself vertiginously plunged into murder and blackmail. Starr (*Tough Luck*), an heir of the bleakly noir mantle of Jim Thompson, is a master at portraying New York as a city of the damned. In David he gives his ever-expanding cult readership a normal guy, calmly accepting a ticket to hell, where an ending worthy of Charles Willeford at his most absurd awaits him. (July 2)

FYI: Starr has been hired to write an original screenplay for Halle Berry.

ZERO OVER BERLIN

JOH SASAKI, TRANS. FROM THE JAPANESE BY HIROKO YODA WITH MATT ALT. *Vertical*, \$22.95 (352p) ISBN 1-932234-098

A major Japanese talent in detective and thriller fiction appears in English with this excellent, compact WWII tale. Hitler decides to build a Japanese Zero fighter, and Japanese navy officials, with mixed feelings about the alliance with Germany, have to find some way of getting two Zeros from Japan to Germany. This involves picking two maverick pilots, Lt. Keichi Ando and NCO Kyohei Inui, and arranging for airfields in British territory (India) and British-patrolled territory (Iran and Iraq). Both pilots are well-drawn characters, Ando especially, and competent sketches of people like Gaj Singh, an anti-British maharajah; Ando's sister Michiko; and American pilot

of fortune Jim Purvis lend depth to the book. So do the flying scenes (including a raid on British Victoria bombers in Iraq, into which the Japanese pilots are blackmailed by Iraqi Colonel Hussein). Sasaki also draws on the wartime history of Japan to deal with themes not well-known to Western readers, including the rivalry between the Japanese army and navy and the "culture war" between Japanese patriotically sticking to traditional ways and those maintaining modern tastes. The writing is sometimes awkward but never incomprehensible, the pacing breakneck, the cast a trifle large for the length, but the total effect a compact Japanese version of a W.E.B. Griffin novel. *Agent, Anne Ishii. (July)*

THE STREAM

BRIAN CLARKE. *Overlook*, \$23.95 (240p) ISBN 1-58567-528-8

The creatures of a pristine valley stream struggle against the changes wrought by the construction of an industrial park in Clarke's debut novel, which documents the deterioration of a rural ecosystem in poignant detail. After a ponderous opening that describes the forces of nature in wooden prose, Clarke hits his stride as he interweaves the story of the stream's denizens with the story of the machinations behind, and protests against, the park's development. The human characters are forgettable stereotypes, ranging from a corporate activist trying to save the stream to the various executives of Cogent Electronics, the British firm underwriting the industrial project. But the dilemma of the various animals and insects is described in loving, painstaking detail, as Clarke chronicles the demise of the local trout and salmon, then works his way down to the plight faced by mayflies as their environment is overrun with chokeweed and silt. As a work of fiction, Clarke's book is deeply flawed: the animal passages are repetitious, and the human characters severely underdeveloped. But as a naturalistic treatise, this narrative works because it brings home the interdependence of the various animals and their helplessness as their world is altered and they are destroyed. The novelistic blemishes may put off mainstream readers, but the book should find admirers among fans of environmental fiction. *Agent, Anderson Grinberg. (July)*

TALES OF A DRAMA QUEEN

LEE NICHOLS. *Red Dress*, \$12.95 paper (288p) ISBN 0-373-25063-0

What's a pampered 20-something to do when her rich fiancé goes on a business trip and comes back married to someone else? That's the dilemma facing Elle Medina in Nichols's delightfully silly, vivacious debut. True to type, the novel begins with a self-

absorbed, ill-starred narrator with a case of logorrhea—yet it's actually funny. Clever lines tumble over one another as Elle quits D.C. for Santa Barbara, Calif., where she must find a job, a car, an apartment and a man. Getting the car isn't too hard, despite her gargantuan credit card debt, and the apartment is affordable, even if it's a converted trolley. Finding a job spotting shoplifters is easy, too. So it's too bad about the hottie who pretended he was stealing, sued and got her fired—and what about that architect who keeps catching Elle at her worst moments? Misadventures pile on misadventures, and Elle's haplessness begins to grate—that is, until she finds success as a phone psychic and starts growing up. Best friends, difficult parents, a bad boy and a good one—the necessary ingredients—are here, plus a clever plot, an over-the-top climax and a grab-a-hankie-even-though-it's-happy-side-story about Elle's adoption of a mangy boxer named Scab. *Agent, Nancy Coffey. (July)*

Forecast: This good-natured, irrepressible fairy tale is better than a box of bonbons; Shopaholic fans may have a new heroine.

FIDDLER'S GREEN

VAN REID. *Viking*, \$25.95 (296p) ISBN 0-670-03320-0

The fifth (and ostensibly final) installment in Reid's charming series about rural Maine's Moosepath League tracks familiar faces through an epic wedding, a society ball and a bizarre backwoods feud that gets one Moosepathian in hot water. The primary protagonist is wise "gentleman's gentleman" Sundry Moss, who observes the joyous 1897 nuptials of Moosepath chairman Tobias Walton and willowy Phileda McCannon, which are very nearly ruined by the inexplicable appearance of a keg marked "rum" that's filled with turpentine. Moss tests the romantic waters with the fetching Priscilla Morningside at a Portland ball shortly after the wedding, but their fledgling courtship is interrupted when Moss becomes part of a plan to help young Melanie Ring, previously camped out in a coal cellar with her alcoholic father and disguised as a boy, move with her father to Brownville. As the journey progresses, Melanie is spirited away by the peculiar Charles Normall, and Moss is also engaged by the man to scour the local pond for the body of a young drowning victim. Reid recaptures the optimistic, homey, quirky tone of his earlier books in the wedding and ball sections, and the later murder mystery adds a touch of darkness, while a parallel story involving an optimistic sailor searching for the titular, possibly mythical paradise offers a compelling counterplot. This will undoubtedly please Reid's numerous fans. *Agent, Barbara Hogenson. (July 12)*



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