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Publishers Weekly

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distributing food in Angola. The swashbuckling but self-effacing Liberte is a prototypical Robbins creation, and the details about the diamond industry give this novel more depth than usual; there is a chilling reference to a Saudi billionaire and potential diamond buyer named Osama bin Laden. Robbins's literary legacy remains very much alive, and his thousands of fans should experience a pleasant sense of déjà vu as they race through this latest installment. (Oct. 29)

**SIXTY-SIX**

BARRY LEVINSON. *Broadway*, \$24 (256p)  
ISBN 0-7679-1533-X

Film director Levinson (*Diner*; *Rain Man*; etc.) returns to Baltimore in a rambling debut about high school buddies trying to cope with grown-up life. It's 1966, and narrator Bobby has decided to ditch law school for a low-paying job at the local TV station, much to his girlfriend's dismay. Enigmatic Neil has declined a deferment and is heading to Vietnam. Ben, one-time "King of the Teenagers," is marrying girlfriend Janet because he's losing his hair and Janet's father has offered him a job in the Cadillac showroom. Odd-couple pals Turk and Eggy are 1950s holdovers marveling at organic foods and loose hippie chicks. The boys help each other deal with it all by meeting at the diner to retell stories they've all heard before. Though Ben presents these anecdotes as sidesplitting or life changing, most come across as pretty dull stuff: a kid plays a pinball machine and doesn't win; the zany diner guys drive a car in reverse and hit some trash cans; Bobby makes up a TV traffic report and gets away with it. From these stories Bobby draws conclusions that are as pedestrian as the episodes themselves: "when we're young we understand so little about what we are"; "[l]ike tears, laughter often comes when you least expect it"; and "destiny is what we make it." It's clear that Levinson is shooting for elegy and wisdom, but even though the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement are mined for drama and relevance, readers will find mostly tedium and platitudes. (Oct.)

**Forecast:** *Levinson is one of several Hollywood directors (Steven Bochco, Death by Hollywood; DJ Leven, Swagbelly) to try his luck with novels, and his celebrity should stimulate coverage and sales. But poor word of mouth may stifle the latter—with characters and situations closely resembling those of 1982's Diner, the verdict may be: just rent the movie. Major ad/promo; five-city author tour.*

**THE SNOW BRIDE**

DEBBIE MACOMBER. *Mira*, \$14.95 (240p)  
ISBN 1-55166-736-3

Prolific Macomber puts a new twist on the smalltown romance with this lightweight Christmas caper, which takes place in the one-woman town of Snowbound, Alaska. Despite having a population of only seven, Snowbound has a cafe, a grocery, an airstrip and, as 31-year-old Los Angeles native Jenna Campbell soon learns, several bighearted bachelors. Having spent six years mooning after her workaholic boss, Brad Fulton, who barely knows she's alive, executive assistant Jenna is now ready to seek snowier pastures. She quits her job and heads to Beesley, Ala., to meet Dalton Gray, a poetic outdoorsman who has been corresponding with her via e-mail. But when Dalton doesn't arrive at the airport to greet her, she hires Reid Jamison, her annoying seatmate, to fly her to Beesley. Reid knows Dalton and has good reason to despise him, so he changes directions and whisks Jenna away to his home in Snowbound. Meanwhile, Brad decides he can't function without Jenna and vows to do anything (even offer marriage) to get her back, and Dalton frantically searches for her in the local bars. Add Jenna's flighty, five-times-married-and-divorced mother, Chloe, to the mix, and the madcap race is on for who will win Jenna's heart. Macomber's characters never evolve beyond their stock roles, and the romance between Reid and the exasperatingly prissy Jenna is superficial. Dialogue-heavy and virtually devoid of the kind of descriptive details that would wrap readers up in the book's snowy setting, this tall tale has all the intensity and substance of a fall flurry. Still, it's a fast, frothy fantasy for those looking to add some romance to their holidays. (Oct.)

**THE GIRL WHO PLAYED GO**

SHAN SA, TRANS. FROM THE FRENCH BY ADRIANA HUNTER. *Knopf*, \$22.95 (312p)  
ISBN 1-4000-4025-6

In her first novel to appear in English (her two previous novels, published in French, won the Prix Goncourt and the Prix Cazes), Sa masterfully evokes strife-ridden Manchuria during the 1930s. The first-person narration deftly alternates between a 16-year-old Chinese girl and a Japanese soldier from the invading force. As in the Chinese game of go, the two main characters—the girl discovering desire, the soldier visiting prostitutes, both in a besieged city—will ultimately cross paths, with surprising consequences for both. Sa's prose shifts between lavish metaphor—the girl's sister, grieved by an adulterous husband, is "not a woman but a flower slowly wilting"—and matter-of-fact concision ("We weary of the game and kill them," the soldier says of two Chinese prisoners, "two bullets in the head"). The most absorbing subplot is Sa's careful rendering of the girl's sexual awaken-

ing. Though at first intrigued by a liaison with a revolution-minded student, she is reluctant to enter adulthood, a state she views as fraught with injury and falsehood, "a sad place full of vanity." To escape her increasingly troubled life, she becomes a master at go, eventually taking on the soldier, who is in disguise. As the two meet to play, they gradually become entranced, even while war rages around them. The alternating parallel tales add an extra spark of energy to this swift-moving novel, as Sa portrays tenderness and brutality with equal clarity. (Oct. 16)

**POLITICS**

ADAM THIRLWELL. *HarperCollins/Fourth Estate*, \$22.95 (256p) ISBN 0-00-716366-5

In this nery, self-conscious debut novel, British writer Thirlwell airs the unspoken anxieties and confusions of two lovers, crafting a talky deconstruction of a relationship. Moshe is a character actor, "the sketchy one, the sardonic one, the oddball cool"; Nana is an architecture student, "tall, thin, pale, blonde, breasty." It is the off-stage narrator, however, who is the book's most notable presence, with his countless digressions, "simple" theories, lengthy explanations and bossy directives. Despite his repeated assertions that the book is not about sex ("sex isn't everything"; "sometimes I think that this book is an attack on sex"), Moshe and Nana are constantly experimenting ("oral sex, use of alternative personae, lesbianism, undinism"), though their experiments usually end in failure. This is true of their biggest experiment, a three-way affair involving Anjali, an Anglo-Indian actor friend of Moshe's. Reading Thirlwell's novel is similar to watching a film with the director in the room, guiding the viewer through every scene. While many of the resulting narrative flourishes are clever or endearing, their humor and intellectual cachet wear thin as the ratio of window dressing to substance tips heavily in favor of the former. Still, Thirlwell's brave attempt to debunk the primacy of sex (while elaborately describing his characters' hapless pursuit of it) is surprisingly convincing. (Oct. 1)

**Forecast:** *Thirlwell was chosen this year as one of Granta's best British novelists under 40 (born in 1978, he is the youngest yet). His deadpan blend of irony and earnestness should particularly appeal to readers of Dave Eggers and George Saunders.*

**OUTLET**

RANDY TAGUCHI, TRANS. FROM THE JAPANESE BY GLYNNE WALLEY. *Vertical*, \$15.95 paper (272p) ISBN 1-932234-04-7

A young Japanese finance writer tries to uncover the truth behind her older brother's mysterious death in Taguchi's bizarre, provocative and sometimes grisly debut novel, which was a bestseller in Japan. After a steamy one-night stand with her old friend

Kimura, Yuki Asakura learns that her brother Taka's badly decomposed body has been found in his apartment; it seems he has starved himself to death. After Yuki helps her shaken family—brutal alcoholic father and distraught mother—make it through the funeral, she turns to her college psychology professor and former lover, Atsuo Kunisada, whom she hopes will help her cope with her loss. Yuki has also begun smelling the stench of death on people who appear healthy, including Kimura, and has been troubled by surreal dreams about her brother. When she runs into an old classmate, Ritsuko Honda, who's now studying shamanism, Ritsuko steers Yuki to a shaman named Yamagishi, who further interprets the dreams as Yuki closes in on the heart of the mystery. She struggles to maintain her sanity as she's torn between dreams and reality: "I'm way past neurotic and into schizophrenic," she says. But the truth is more complicated: it becomes clear that what she'd smelled on Kimura was cancer, for which he is successfully treated, and that her sexual encounters may have a healing power. Taguchi's blocky but absorbing prose links the mystical to the technological, and the novel's dark twists and turns should keep readers hooked until the surprising climax. (Oct.)

**SIEGFRIED**

HARRY MULISCH, TRANS. FROM THE DUTCH BY PAUL VINCENT. Viking, \$22.95 (180p) ISBN 0-670-03253-0

What if Hitler had a son? Mulisch (*The Discovery of Heaven*) mixes philosophical reflection and psychological inquiry into an exploration of the single-minded quest of a Dutch writer determined to understand the source of the German dictator's terrible power. Revered author Rudolf Herter is in Vienna to promote his new book; during an interview, he suggests that someone as evil as Adolf Hitler could be "place[d] in a completely fictional, extreme situation" and thereby be better understood. Herter quickly becomes preoccupied by his own proposition, and by Hitler himself. After a reading at the National Library, an elderly Viennese couple, Ullrich and Julia Falk, approach Herter, suggesting that they have insights into Hitler. When he visits these "ancient people in this old-people's home," the Falks reveal the shocking fact that as Hitler's personal servants at his mountain retreat, they were charged with concealing Siegfried, Hitler and Eva Braun's son, born on Kristallnacht. Despite the book's title, Siegfried is a minor character; Mulisch is more concerned with the aging Herter and his drive to ponder the nature of the German dictator as a leader, father and as a "metanatural phenomenon," as "Nothingness." Herter's philosophizing—he makes much use of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer—is a bit on the self-indulgent side and

strips the story of suspense; an italicized chapter revealing the inner thoughts of Eva Braun is unconvincing. Nevertheless, this slim novel is a thought-provoking read. (Oct. 27)

**A DISTANT SHORE**

CARYL PHILLIPS. Knopf, \$23 (256p) ISBN 1-4000-4109-0

★ Desperate, displaced people populate the latest from award-winning essayist, critic and novelist Phillips (*Crossing the River; The Nature of Blood*). Dorothy is a divorced retired schoolteacher with a troubled past and an increasingly precarious present, drifting further into depression and mental illness in the small northern England town of Weston where she has gone to flee the death of her sister and a series of reckless love affairs with married men. Solomon, in his early 30s, is a survivor of a war-torn African country, witness to events and atrocities almost too painful to recount, which include the execution of his own family. They meet in a small corner of England, given one last chance at redemption and belonging—this time with one another—before prejudice and brute violence destroy even that. Phillips crafts his novel with great skill, portraying his characters with a faithful eye that reveals their inner beauty as clearly as their defects. A true master of form, he manipulates narrative time (which skips, speeds and sometimes runs backward) and perspective to create a disjointed sense of place that mirrors the tortured, fractured inner lives of his characters. Phillips's vision is of a splintered, fragile world where little seems to have inherent meaning and love is opportunistic and fleeting. As Dorothy reaches her tragic end, she receives a visit from the husband who left her long ago for a younger woman; he himself has now been abandoned. The message of our inherent aloneness is clear. As Dorothy herself says, in a note to one of her married lovers: "Abandonment is a state that is not alien to man." The book expresses an even bleaker view: that abandonment is not only a risk, but our natural condition. (Oct. 19)

**EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT**

TESSA HADLEY. Holt, \$23 (352p) ISBN 0-8050-7065-6

In this complex, intelligent family epic, Hadley (*Accidents in the Home*) chronicles the lives of three generations of English women over four decades of social and political change. After her father is killed in WWII, 11-year-old Joyce and her mother, sister and brother go to live with Joyce's stern schoolteacher aunt and her aunt's family. Escaping from this cozy menagerie when she goes away to art college, Joyce, by now a striking, warm-hearted redhead ("Men liked Joyce"), falls in love with her married professor, an intense painter who leaves his wife for her. Joyce adapts well to married life (like Mrs. Dal-

loway, she throws elaborate parties), but her marriage is less conventional than it seems. Her daughter Zoe, quieter and more self-contained, does well at school and goes away to Cambridge, where she studies history and embarks on a tormented relationship with clever, rigid Simon ("you know he never touched me—I mean, literally, even with his hand—except when he wanted to make love to me"). Against Simon's wishes, Zoe has his baby, but shortly after Pearl's birth Zoe leaves him, making a life for herself as a successful conflict expert and academic. Pearl, Zoe's rebellious daughter, has Joyce's red hair but is defiantly herself, reveling in disorder and roving with gangs of friends. The novel itself is an unruly domestic tangle of family members, lovers and friends, crowded and intimate. Cutting abruptly across decades and then zeroing in on a few months or years in the life of its endearingly human protagonists, it expertly captures the texture of daily existence and the struggle of three memorable women to make their way in the world. (Oct.)

**Forecast:** Fans of Margaret Drabble and the Doris Lessing of *The Sweetest Dream* are the target readership for this thoughtful, analytical domestic novel.

**A FAKER'S DOZEN: Stories**

MELVIN JULES BUKIET. Norton, \$23.95 (240p) ISBN 0-393-05816-6

Bukiet (*Strange Fire*, etc.) loses his bearings in this strained, wooden collection, which strives so hard to be clever that subtlety flies out the window. The 11 stories are best compared to Woody Allen's fictional sendups of great writers, but lack Allen's intelligent wit and insight. "The Two Franzes," a story about the young Franz Kafka, reads like a discarded skit for an intellectual's *Saturday Night Live!*, with 12-year-old Franz playing messenger boy to his first mentor, playwright Franz Grillparzer. Kafka's budding talent is ploddingly noted ("he often had ideas that he didn't know what to do with"), as is the genesis of *The Metamorphosis* ("You little insect," hisses his sister). Many of the entries focus on writers and the theme of literary envy. In "Squeak, Memory," Vladimir Nabokov is stalked by a young fan in 1973, with the Watergate scandal providing a contrived backdrop. In "Paper Hero," an unknown novelist plans a ridiculous publicity stunt at a German book fair that goes predictably awry (he's flogging a novel called *Strange Fire*). In the ambitious metafictional story "Tongue of the Jews," a WASP-y corporate lawyer becomes a guilt-ridden chronicler of Holocaust stories and is drawn into the plot of a Philip Roth-type novel, but the effort is marred by broad caricatures of wealthy Jewish New Yorkers. Throughout, Bukiet's pacing is uncertain and his tone uneven, literary pastiche alternating with bald colloquialisms ("Randall sometimes knew when he had been