

Scott's Grab Bag - March 2011

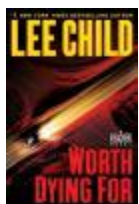
Fiction



The Arrival

Shaun Tan [JP Tan]

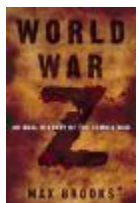
Classified in the libraries' collection as a juvenile picture book, this graphic novel is an extraordinary look at the immigrant experience, filtered through a fantasy lens. The story, told entirely in images, with absolutely no dialog, follows one man's experiences as he leaves his wife and daughter behind to try to establish a new life in a new country. Confused and bewildered by the new customs, foods, and environments of his new home, the Immigrant eventually finds new friends who help him acclimate and he is ultimately able to send for his family to join him. The fantasy elements of the world in which this takes place may be off-putting to some, but this is a powerful story, told in an experimental yet very successful format.



Worth Dying For

Lee Child

Latest volume in the long-running Jack Reacher series by Child. Reacher, a former military police officer, roams the U.S. without a home, and invariably gets pulled into local conflicts, where, with his wiles and personal combat skills, he is able to help right wrongs and stand up for the underdog. In this volume, set in central Nebraska, Reacher's one-night stop turns into a nightmare, after his attempts to help a victim of spousal abuse end up placing him in the middle of a very dangerous situation.



World War Z

Max Brooks

Told in "interview" style – much like Studs Terkel's "The Good War" – World War Z tells the story, from the point of view of dozens of different survivors, of the events surrounding a global catastrophe

in which zombies (reanimated corpses with a taste for human flesh) threaten the very existence of humanity. Those unable to get past the basic premise will have missed out on a truly engrossing examination of modern political history, medical experimentation, military strategies and both the best and worst of human behavior. This "novel" is absolutely captivating.



Babel-17

Samuel R. Delany (not in the library system)

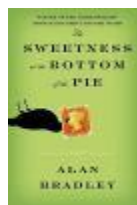
Babel-17 is a classic science fiction novel from 1966, featuring a rare (at least in that time period) strong female protagonist. Rydra Wong is a writer – actually a poet – with an uncanny ability to read and interpret both codes and foreign languages. When the enemy in a galactic conflict appears to have developed a new and unbreakable code, Wong identifies it instead as a completely new language and way of thinking. She also puts together a rogue spaceship crew to journey to front lines of the war, to see if she can translate the new language – Babel-17 – and prevent tragedy and loss of life from occurring.



Steamed

Katie MacAlister

I was hoping for so much more from this novel. Steamed advertises itself as a Steampunk Romance. It is about 85% slap-dash romance at 15% steampunk trappings. When a high-tech accident throws Jack Fletcher and his sister from his computer lab into a faux-Victorian world of airships, political intrigues and high adventure, Jack must become a swashbuckling hero...whether he believe it or not.

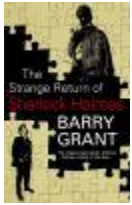


The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie

Alan Bradley

The first in Bradley's new series, featuring a fascinating heroine in 11-year-old Flavia De Luce, a hyper-intelligent chemical genius with a passion

for poisons, living in the English countryside in the 1950s. Flavia must investigate on her own when her father is accused of the murder of an apparent stranger in the gardens of their estate home.



The Strange Return of Sherlock Holmes

Barry Grant

A retired war journalist (James Wilson) in modern times finds himself rooming with an eccentric genius (Cedric Coombes) in a small British countryside town. Coombes is called upon by the police to investigate a strange murder in the community. By tagging along on the investigation, Wilson soon realizes that Coombes is actually the legendary Sherlock Holmes, and begins to uncover Holmes' bizarre story of how he came to still exist in the 21st century.



Dog On It

Spencer Quinn

Chet is the narrator in this, the first in a new series of mystery novels featuring Chet and Bernie. Chet is also a dog, and his narration, while intelligent, is filtered by his own very dog-like limitations – short-term attention span; easily distracted by smells, foods, and other animals; and a very limited memory. This humorous, yet serious story, features Chet and his private-eye master Bernie, investigating a teenager's disappearance, that may be tied up with a shady real estate deal. This series is very readable, with very likeable characters.



Doctor Who: The Dalek Conquests

Nicholas Briggs [Compact Disc Briggs]

A treat for science fiction fans, especially fans of the British series Doctor Who. In that series, which has existed in one format or another for over 40 years, the Doctor's arch-enemies are the Daleks – hideous, mutated beings encased in military war machines. The Daleks have reappeared dozens of times over the years, and this audio attempts to create some sort of continuity that ties together all their previous appearances. Using actual sound clips from Doctor Who episodes, tied together with a researcher's narrative, this is an intriguing

look at how a ruthless, bloodthirsty species came to be a threat to the entirety of time and space.



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Stephen King [Compact Disc King]

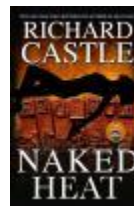
Horror writer King produced this tiny novella to explore the idea of an E-reader with paranormal capabilities. When a frustrated college professor gets an unusual Kindle, he soon discovers that it is able to tap into the literary works of parallel earths – providing him with access to works by such authors as Hemingway that never saw the light of day in "our" world. Unfortunately, it also taps into newspapers from days in the future, and the professor must decide whether to avoid tampering with reality, or attempt to prevent a tragedy from occurring. Delightfully disturbing.



Nightmare at 20,000 Feet: Horror Stories

Richard Matheson

The title story, immortalized as an episode of the classic b&w Twilight Zone (starring William Shatner) and as a segment of the Twilight Zone feature film (starring John Lithgow), serves as the centerpiece of this collection of creepy and unsettling stories by a master fantasist.



Naked Heat

Richard Castle

The second tie-in novel to the TV series Castle – supposedly written by the author Richard Castle (portrayed on the series by Nathan Fillion) – reunited New York cop Nikki Heat and journalist Jameson Rook. Heat takes on the case of a murdered tv journalist, who was preparing to write a tell-all biography. Rook was interviewing the victim for his own purposes, and they team up to share details as the murder investigation proceeds. Though the set-up is less fresh than the first novel, the writing is snappy and the mystery holds up pretty well.



The Lifecycle of Software Objects

Ted Chiang

This thought-provoking novella follows the creation, growth and progress of a piece of intelligent software – a borderline Artificial Intelligence – and the impact on its development by organic and natural changes in the research and business worlds from which it originated. What could have been dry and uninteresting, instead becomes an emotionally and morally-charged story about how far human responsibility goes in taking care of what we’ve created, and/or whether we control that which we create.

Harper Connelly series on Compact Disc

Charlaine Harris

Bailey Ruth Raeburn series on Compact Disc

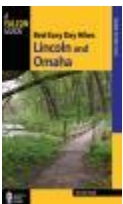
Carolyn G. Hart

Non-Fiction

The Last Good War: The Faces and Voices of WW II

Thomas Sanders [not in LCL]

Tremendous coffee-table-style oversized book that collects Sanders’ beautiful photographs of World War II veterans (all now in their 80s and 90s – or older), with personal essays from those same veterans that share some of their war experiences. Although only about 1 out of every 6 photos includes an accompanying essay, this is a powerful book.



Best Easy Day Hikes: Lincoln and Omaha

Michael Ream [917.822 Rea]

Interesting volume, from a national publisher of trail guides, that focuses on about 20 trails (or trail sections) in both Omaha and the Capital city (with a few others nearby thrown in for good measure). Each Day Hike’s entry provides a detailed description of the terrain (mostly urban and/or parks) through which the trail goes, plus elevation changes and potential walking challenges. If you’re looking for some nice places to

pursue some local exercise, check this book out...you may learn about some trails you haven’t tried yet!



Valentines

Ted Kooser [811 Koo]

This collection of poetry by Nebraskan and former U.S. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser assembles a series of Valentines-themed poems that he produced annually. Kooser started a tradition of mailing a Valentines poem to female friends to arrive on Valentine’s Day. Eventually, after over 20 years, his “mailing list” grew to over 2000 recipients and so he has since called an end to the tradition. But this volume collects all of those quirky poems, and accompanies them with pen-and-ink sketches by Robert Hanna. The tone and themes of these poems range from romance, to biology, from sweetness to bitterness, and from personal to universal. This is an excellent Kooser collection to start with, especially if you’ve never sampled his work before.



Cover Story: Volume 2

Staff of Wax Poetics [Music 781.49 Cov]

Vaguely disturbing collection of obscure and bizarre album covers from the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. Inspired by periods of heavy drug use, free love, and psychedelia, many of these images will haunt you if you gaze at them too long.



Michael Jackson: The Making of Thriller – 4 Days/1983

Douglas Kirkland [Music 781.66 Jac]

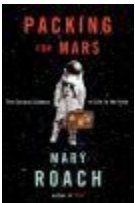
Photojournalist Kirkland was hired by Life magazine to document the behind-the-scenes images during the making of Michael Jackson’s ground-breaking Thriller music video. This oversized volumes collects dozens of his photos from that 4-day filming event, showing Jackson at his most human, and before his fame launched him down somewhat dark paths.



Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption

Laura Hillenbrand [Biography
Zamperini]

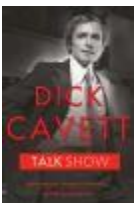
Hillenbrand's follow-up to *Seabiscuit* is this biography of World War II veteran Louis Zamperini. This volume tells Zamperini's story in exacting detail, from his days as a trouble-making kid, to his years in college and beyond as a record-setting runner (he competed in the 1946 Olympics in Berlin), before settling down for the bulk of book's focus – Zamperini's wartime experiences. And those experiences are harrowing and inspiring, to say the least. Zamperini survived for a record number of days aboard a rubber raft afloat in the Pacific after his plane crashed, before being taken captive by the Japanese. Zamperini was maltreated to the point of torture during time spent in three Japanese prisoner-of-war facilities, and the behavior of his captors there was both heinous and criminal. The fact that Zamperini survived is nothing short of heroic, and the book's final few chapters, as he deals with post-war psychological trauma and finds his life's calling are almost anticlimactic after the earlier parts of the book. An unforgettable read!



Packing for Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void

Mary Roach [571.091 Roa] (book and CD)

Roach brings her trademark humor to an exploration and examination of the types of studies being done by space programs around the world to prepare astronauts for a potential lengthy mission to Mars. Her topics range from the effects of space travel on the human body, to the science of preparing food for use in space, to how to "eliminate waste" in zero gravity. Peppered throughout the lengthy essays are tons of scientific statistics, but the "data" is heavily leavened with sarcastic observational humor. If you've ever wonder what life is like in space, check this out!



Talk Show: Confrontations, Pointed Commentary and Off-Screen Secrets

Dick Cavett [791.45 Cav]

Johnny Carson wasn't the only famous talk-

show host to have grown up in Nebraska. Dick Cavett has hosted several talk shows over the years, and has hobnobbed with the literati of New York culture. When the New York Times offered him a position as occasional columnist, he reluctantly took up the challenge. This book is a compilation of his first couple of years' worth of columns, in chronological order. Cavett is a witty, intellectual humorist, and his bon mots pop up throughout his writings. Subject matter runs from reminiscences of his talk show days, to his publicly-shared bouts of depression, and back to his growing up in Lincoln and attending Prescott school. Hard-core conservatives may find him hard to read, as his liberalism is fully on display. But as a look back at an icon of talk TV, this is excellent.



Wings Over Nebraska: Historic Aviation Photographs

Vince Goeres [629.13 qGoe]

Goeres is a long-time volunteer and research at the Nebraska History Museum, and this book is the culmination of years of looking through their records related to Aviation history in the state of Nebraska. The photos in this volume are tremendous – though not always in the best of condition. Almost all are in b&w, and I particularly liked the advertisements for flying schools and aerial events. Noteworthy chapters include entries on female flyers in Nebraska history, air crashes in Nebraska, and (of course) Charles Lindbergh's period when he learned to fly in Nebraska.



The First Time I Got Paid for It: Writers' Tales From the Hollywood Trenches

Peter Lefcourt [808.23 Lef]

Humorous insiders stories about working as a writer in the entertainment industry – focused on the first sales made by many noteworthy screenwriters of today. If you're a writer who aspires to breaking into the TV or movie business, this book may cure you of that aspiration!



BBQ 25

Adam Perry-Lang [641.578 Per]

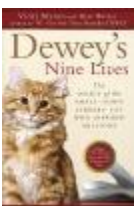
Interesting addition to the libraries' growing collection of cookbooks associated with BBQ or smoke cooking. Adam Perry-Lang is a British writer/cook, but don't hold that against him. This book is relatively thin and spends two pages each on a variety of types of meats, cooking styles, and various side dishes. Perry-Lang breaks his cooking instructions down to simple lists of the tools and ingredients necessary for each dish, and provides tips or hints for "finishing" each dish. This would be an excellent single-volume cookbook for someone looking to get started with the basics of barbecuing or smoke-cooking, with its fairly simple recipes and instructions.



Double Exposure: Take Two

Roddy McDowall [SOS 779.12 McD2]

Another excellent combo of photos and essays. In this case, actor Roddy McDowall took all of the photos, mostly of his fellow celebrities in the performing arts. The cool thing about this one is that the essays that accompany each photo were written by someone hand-picked by McDowall – usually a mutual friend of his and the subjects. Some of the photo&essay combinations are quite enlightening. Take Two is the second in what ultimately became a three volume series, although it is the only one owned by the Lincoln City Libraries.



Dewey's Nine Lives: The Legacy of the Small-Town Library Cat Who Inspired Millions

Vicki Myron [636.8 Myr]

A follow-up volume to Myron's "Dewey", this volume revisits Spenser, Iowa's famed library cat for three additional stories of his exploits and the impact he had on local residents. But the primary focus of this book is to tell the tales of other special cats and the people in their lives. Myron received thousands of letters from people after the publication of the first book, many sharing their tales of the impact their feline pets had on them. For this book, she selects a half-dozen noteworthy stories to share.



The Night Bookmobile

Audrey Niffenegger [741.5 Nif]

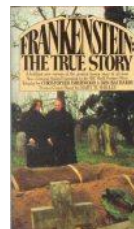
This looks like a children's picture book, but it isn't, really. From the same author who brought us *The Time Traveler's Wife*, this is the story of a young woman who stumbles across the "Night Bookmobile", a somewhat magical library on wheels where every book she's ever read is on the shelves...but nothing else. It becomes a life-long quest for the narrator to re-discover that bookmobile, and hopefully to be able to work there. Her quest takes her through the worlds of literature and library school, and a fulfilling life. But watch out for the twist at the end.



The Walking Dead, Book 1: A Continuing Story of Survival Horror

Robert Kirkman [741.5 qKir]

This is a compilation of the first 12 issues of Kirkman's b&w graphic-novel in comic book form. The setting is the United States after an uncontrolled infestation of the undead. At its core, a horror story, this is also a human story, focusing on one small band of survivors as they struggle to work together to forge a new life under horrible circumstances. Sporadically interrupted by scenes of disturbing violence, this tale of survival has impact. This was turned into the TV series *The Walking Dead*, which had a six-episode first season on the AMC cable network and will return with a second season in the fall of 2011.



Frankenstein: The True Story

Christopher Isherwood [812 Ish]

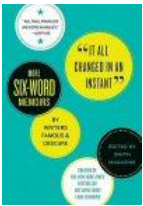
This is the screenplay to the 4-hour TV-movie of the same title, a cult film that is very fondly remembered by those who have had the chance to see it.



A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Future

Michael J. Fox [Biography Fox]

Very short biography from Fox, who has previously published longer volumes about his life and his current struggle with Parkinson’s Disease. Fox has a very light writing style, even when dealing with serious topics, and for those who fondly remember him from Family Ties, Back to the Future or Spin City, this is a pleasant visit with a nice actor.



Six Word Memoirs series

Rachel Ferschsleiser and Larry Smith [808.88 Fer]

Six Word Memoirs – the libraries own three volumes in this series, or you can sign up to follow them online.



Making Toast

Roger Rosenblatt [Biography Rosenblatt]

A grandfather’s heart-rending memoir of his and his wife’s efforts to step in and help with the parenting of their grandchildren after their daughter dies unexpectedly at an early age. Rosenblatt shares his life in tiny, fragile snippets, which accumulate into a very touching narrative. For anyone who has lost someone at an unfairly early age in their family, you will connect with his story.



Rare: Portraits of America’s Endangered Species

Joel Sartore [578.68 qSar]

Award-winning National Geographic photographer (and Lincoln native) Joel Sartore combines his photos of some of America’s endangered and/or nearly-extinct species with short remembrances of the experience of taking the photographs, plus scientific background on the efforts being taken to save the creatures.



Cake Wrecks: When Professional Cakes Go hilariously Wrong

Jen Yates [not in LCL]

In the vein (though not quite as good) of the the books by James Lileks, comes this collection of photographs of Cake Wrecks – professionally decorated cakes and cupcakes that either went horribly wrong (misspellings, incorrect phrasing etc.) or which were done with questionable taste. Many of these will just make you shrug, but some of these images are truly mind-boggling bad.



Stephen Fry in America: 50 States and the Man Who Set Out to See Them All

Stephen Fry [917.3 Fry]

British actor/humorist Stephen Fry traveled through all 50 states of the U.S. with a film crew, for a British documentary. This is the book that accompanied that documentary. Fry offers his wry British observations about life in America, with the perspective that he almost was born an American himself. Fry may have issues with the politics of America, and certainly with many of the spiritual beliefs of the common American, but he generally loves this country and its working class. In nearly every state, he finds temporary employment with the locals, to get a better impression of their lives and values. Sometimes, it takes observations from an outsider to make us appreciate what we have even more.



Your Hate Mail Will Be Graded: A Decade of Whatever

John Scalzi [not in LCL]

Scalzi is a science and science fiction writer, who maintains an online blog – called “Whatever...” – in which he expounds on topics both serious and silly. His blog entries are posted with comments open – allowing readers to respond to his thoughts and writings. This can sometimes create quite the furor, especially when his blog entries address touchy subjects. This book is a collection of some of the best and worst of his columns, and explorations of the responses he engendered. Once again, probably not a book to be enjoyed by arch conservatives, but even Scalzi’s own liberal philosophies come under intense scrutiny at times in these entries. Quite fascinating reading.