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The Monitor Guide to The Bestsellers

Staff

BOSTON— 1. **SOUTHERN CROSS**, by Patricia Cornwell, Putnam, \$25.95 Southern Cross boasts one consistent element the characters are despicable. In the second book of her latest series, Cornwell sets police chief Judy Hammer and her two sidekicks down in crime-ridden Richmond, Va., to clean house. One would guess its intended as a portrait of Southern culture, urban decay, and a dysfunctional police force, but 200 pages in, the plot is still fogged. The big ideas are muffled by ridiculous and one-dimensional characters. Coarse language is used throughout. (359 pp.) By Kristina Lanier

2. **A MAN IN FULL**, by Tom Wolfe, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$27.50 Wolfes panoramic study of Atlanta from the ghettos to the corporate palaces suggests the fundamental issue in America is the relationship between whites and blacks. Filled with memorable characters of Dickensian proportions, the story ingeniously brings the paths of divergent players together while wrestling with the challenges that modern life presents. Only a writer who can handle wit and cynicism as deftly as Wolfe could pull off such a daringly moral novel. (Full review 11/12/98) (742 pp.) By Ron Charles

3. **SEIZE THE NIGHT**, by Dean Koontz, Bantam, \$26.95 Extremely sensitive to light because of an unusual genetic disorder, Christopher Snow has learned to live and thrive in a world of darkness. Armed with sharpened senses that compensate for his condition, the refreshingly insecure investigator leads the reader on a tense, first-person thrill ride in his search for a missing boy. With its tight, crisp descriptions of nocturnal nuances and deliciously dry dialogue, *Seize the Night* is gripping indeed. (384 pp.) By Carleton Cole

4. **BILLY STRAIGHT**, by Jonathan Kellerman, Random House, \$25.95 A 12-year-old survivor, Billy Straight, escapes an incredibly abusive home in a small California town and finds refuge in a Los Angeles park. But he witnesses a brutal murder, and his world becomes even more dangerous. After running and living through several more gruesome murders, Billy finds loving adults and lots of money, too. The authors abrupt changes of points of view and so many peripheral characters convolute the otherwise simple plot, making it a bumpy read. (400 pp.) By Faye Bowers

5. **WHEN THE WIND BLOWS**, by James Patterson, Little, Brown & Co., \$25 The bestselling author of suspense thrillers *Cat and Mouse* and *Kiss the Girls* has left the streets of Washington for the mountains of Colorado. In his newest adventure, a recently widowed young veterinarian crosses paths with a FBI agent whos working a case hes been told to leave alone. This story is about murder, betrayal, romance, and flying children yes, flying children. While its true that in todays world, genetic engineering is not so far-out, Pattersons novel is. (432 pp.) By Anne Toevs

6. **THE SIMPLE TRUTH**, by David Baldacci, Warner, \$25 After 25 years in prison for murder, Rufus Harms discovers new evidence that could reveal the hidden truth. He knows that many lives could be shattered by that truth, but he proceeds to file an appeal with the Supreme Court, where everything but the truth is simple. As the characters unfold, this stunning novel incorporates love, loss, guilt, jealousy, and many surprises. Though the body count is high at the end, Baldacci has written a pleasantly puzzling thriller. (480 pp.) By Letitia Adu-Danso

7. **IN DANGERS PATH**, by W.E.B. Griffin, Putnam, \$24.95 In the eighth installment of his battle-happy Corps

chronicle, Griffin intertwines the stories of US Marines and their commanders during World War II. With the Allies scrambling to dominate the Pacific, Brig. Gen. Fleming Pickering is singled out to lead reconnaissance missions in the Gobi Desert. As he implements air strikes against the Japanese, Pickering manipulates anyone in his way, including his own son. The writing tends to be prosaic a boring paean to war. (549 pp.)

By Elisabetta Coletti

8. THE POISONWOOD BIBLE, by Barbara Kingsolver, HarperCollins, \$27.50 Kingsolvers story rotates through a series of haunting monologues by the wife and four daughters of a Baptist preacher whos determined to bring his version of salvation to the Congo in 1960. The Rev. Price fails to convert even one soul, but refuses to let his family leave. The daughters react in strikingly different ways, but Kingsolvers success at portraying them is uneven. Still, the strands of history and politics woven through will make for particularly good discussion. (Full review and interview 11/19/98) (546 pp.) By Ron Charles

9. THE CAT WHO SAW STARS, by Lilian Jackson Braun, Putnam, \$22.95 Koko and Yum Yum the feline heroes as well as their pet human, Qwill, become fascinated with UFOs when a backpacker mysteriously disappears near Mooseville. The cats have a hunch the guy was abducted by aliens. This is Brauns 21st addition to her Cat Who mystery series. As usual, her goofy, straightforward style creates light reading. The book doesnt build up the suspense one anticipates, but the story is good, clean fun. (240 pp.) By John Christian Hoyle

10. ANGELS FLIGHT, by Michael Connelly, Little, Brown & Co., \$25 Angels Flight is the name of a historic railroad in old Los Angeles. For Connellys veteran LAPD detective (and favorite hero), Harry Bosch, it is the scene of his most politically dangerous murder case yet. One of the two victims is a Johnny Cochran-esque civil rights attorney who was in the middle of suing the LAPD. The combination of Connellys believably complex characters, intriguing plots, and feel for Los Angeles Realpolitik make the Bosch novels some of the best hard-boiled crime fiction out there. (400 pp.) By Phelippe Salazar

11. MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA, by Arthur Golden, Alfred A. Knopf, \$25 Goldens debut novel unlocks the world of a traditional geisha. Told through the voice of Sayuri, a young girl sold into the near-slavery of a geisha house in the early 1930s, the story offers a historically enlightening glimpse of this age-old element of Japanese culture. Tracing Sayuris emergence from lowly maid to geisha of renown, Golden shapes solid but predictable characters. Sexual situations are handled tastefully. (416 pp.) By Kristina Lanier

12. A NIGHT WITHOUT ARMOR, by Jewel Kilcher, ReganBooks, \$15 This book sells because of whos on the cover. As one teenage boy told me, Of course Ill buy it; Jewels gorgeous. But being gorgeous doesnt make one a poet. The popular singer-songwriter does show promise in these poems about love, sex, childhood, and her travels. But most of the work contains just one good stanza or image. Her poetry is typical of beginning writers, and her young- angst wisdom will underwhelm most people over 23. (139 pp.) By Elizabeth Lund

13. BAG OF BONES, by Stephen King, Scribner, \$28 Mike Noonan, a well-respected writer, loses his wife in an accident that turns his world upside down. He returns to their eerie lakeside vacation home only to become embroiled in a child-custody lawsuit and a small towns haunted past. Amid all these problems, Noonan finds he cant write anymore. Kings novel boils in parts but barely simmers in others. The supernatural elements are overdone (malevolent refrigerator poetry?) and detract from what starts off as a well- crafted plot. (560 pp.) By Lane Hartill

14. RAINBOW SIX, by Tom Clancy, Putnam, \$27.95 In this bloody tale, John Clark returns as the head of a new counterterrorist group battling an international conspiracy of ... ecologists?! Not only is there no sense of morality on the part of the characters, but theres nothing new plotwise. Weve seen plague attempts and attacks on the protagonists loved ones from Clancy before. When a terrorist is deliberately shot in the gut to cause slow death, you have to wonder who Clancy thinks the good guys really are. (800 pp.) By James Turner

15. THE VAMPIRE ARMAND, by Anne Rice, Alfred A. Knopf, \$26.95 Get out the garlic. The latest entry in Rices Vampire Chronicles traces the life of the vampire Armand (a recurring character from Rices earlier works) from 14th- century Venice to present-day New Orleans, combining dark sensuality with breathless prose and an anemic plot. Readers who havent read the previous books are likely to find it hard to follow the action. It may be past time to put a stake in this increasingly overwrought horror series. (384 pp.) By

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