

The Houston Chronicle

May 27, 2007 Sunday
2 STAR EDITION

SUMMER PREVIEW; A fictional feast; Harry Potter keeps company with wide variety of new releases, both literary and popular

BYLINE: FRITZ LANHAM, STAFF

SECTION: ZEST; Pg. 18

LENGTH: 2568 words

IS it my imagination or is the frenzy that usually greets a new Harry Potter novel more subdued this time around? Maybe fans are already mourning the fact Potter No. 7 brings the saga to a close.

Maybe they're a little bummed by J.K. Rowling's announcement she'll kill two characters.

That said, I'll wager my Hogwarts scarf that all 12 million copies of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Scholastic) - arriving in bookstores at the stroke of midnight on July 21 - get snapped up before the frost is on the pumpkin. That makes it the biggest book of the summer.

Not, however, the only book of the summer. HP will share shelf space with a particularly strong lineup of fiction, with literary novels from Annie Dillard, Ian McEwan and Khalid Hosseini and popular novels from such favorites as Michael Connelly, David Baldacci, Sandra Brown and Jeffrey Deaver.

Nonfiction fare is thinner but not wholly lacking. Ex-Vanity Fair editor Tina Brown and talk-show host Larry King have new books on Princess Di, dead 10 years come August. Shock rocker Alice Cooper describes how he traded his booze addiction for a golf addiction. Novelist Barbara Kingsolver turns to food for her first book-length foray into nonfiction, while biographer Nancy Isenberg buffs the reputation of black-sheep Founding Father Aaron Burr.

What follows is a sampling of the books of summer. Publication dates may change.

May

A Thousand Splendid Suns (Riverhead), which arrived last week (see review on Page 21), is the long-awaited sophomore effort from Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini. Set in war-ravaged Afghanistan, like *The Kite Runner*, his 2003 debut, it explores the precarious place of women in a violently patriarchal society.

Also just out and No. 2 this week on the best-seller list is Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (HarperCollins), an audacious marriage of crime fiction and alternate history.

Another literary novel riding the best-seller list, Chuck Palahniuk's *Rant* (Doubleday), "takes the form of a fictional oral history of Buster 'Rant' Casey, in which an assortment of friends, enemies, admirers, detractors and relations have their say about this evil character, who may or may not be the most efficient serial killer of our time," in the publisher's words.

Speaking of killers, Susanna Moore's *Big Girls* (Knopf), set in a women's prison, weaves together the voices of four narrators, including a woman who killed her children and the female psychiatrist who treats her.

Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist* (Grove) is about a woman who spends the night with an attractive stranger, then discovers she's become the country's most-wanted terrorist. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (Scribner) is being hailed as the finest novel yet to emerge from Sept. 11. The main character is a survivor of the Twin Towers collapse, and the plot explores the day's lingering effects on his life.

Michael Ondaatje, the Sri Lanka-born Canadian novelist best-known for *The English Patient*, traces elusive links between past and present in *Divisadero* (Knopf), which opens on a farm in Northern California in the 1970s and circles back through the life of a pre-World War I French writer.

Those who like to lose themselves in times past might pick up Tim Willocks' *The Religion* (Sarah Crichton Books/Farrar, Straus & Giroux), a 618-page doorstop about the 16th-century Turkish assault on Malta, stronghold of the Knights of Saint John the Baptist. Much blood-letting, much derring-do.

Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho has sold more than 75 million copies of his mysticism-infused books, so he must be doing something right. His new novel is *The Witch of Portobello* (HarperCollins), a series of recollections by those who knew - or thought they knew - Athena, a decidedly modern witch.

Set closer to home is *Stormy Weather* by Paulette Jiles (Morrow), about a widow and her three daughters struggling to survive in Depression-era Texas.

Eric B. Martin's *A Virgin's Guide to Mexico* (MacAdam/Cage) follows a young woman who disguises herself as a boy and leaves Austin for Mexico to learn how her Mexican mother transformed herself from a maid's daughter to a dot.com honcho's wife.

The title says it all with J.C. Conklin's debut comedy, *The Dallas Women's Guide to Gold-Digging With Pride* (Ballantine). Transplanted New Yorker Jenny Barton, boyfriendless, learns from the natives how to bag a rich Texan.

Three A-list crime/thriller practitioners have new novels. Michael Connelly's *The Overlook* (Little, Brown) is another in his series featuring Los Angeles police detective Harry Bosch. David Baldacci brings back former Secret Service agents Sean King and Michelle Maxwell, last seen in *Hour Game*, in *Simple Genius* (Warner). Carl Webster, "Hot Kid of the Marshals Service," is the main character in Elmore Leonard's *Up in Honey's Room* (Morrow); he's out to corral German spies in World War II United States.

June

Novels by Annie Dillard and Ian McEwan land just after Memorial Day. Dillard's *The Maytrees* (HarperCollins) tells the story of a free-spirited poet who leaves his wife for

another woman, then 20 years later returns to his former spouse, his dying companion in tow. It's billed as a lyrical, sensitive exploration of marriage and love.

McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* (Knopf), at 176 pages more novella than novel, follows the 1960s-era fate of a young couple, both virgins, whose wedding night goes awry with disastrous results for their marriage.

Armistead Maupin, best-known for his gay-themed *Tales of the City* series about '70s San Francisco, brings back *Tales* character Michael Tolliver, now deep into middle age. The book is *Michael Tolliver Lives* (HarperCollins).

In *Gravedigger's Daughter* (Ecco), the ever-prolific Joyce Carol Oates tracks the life of a German immigrant's daughter and her struggle to forge an identity in post-World War II America. In *The Shadow Catcher* (Simon & Schuster), Marianne Wiggins fictionalizes the life of famed Old West photographer Edward S. Curtis.

Right Livelihoods (Little, Brown) comprises three edgy novellas from Rick Moody, including *The Albertine Notes*, set after a dirty bomb has leveled half of Manhattan.

For something frothier, pick up Danielle Steel's *Bungalow 2* (Delacorte), about a suburban mom who wins the chance to become a big-time Hollywood screenwriter, or the latest installment in Janet Evanovich's *Stephanie Plum* mysteries, *Lean Mean Thirteen* (St. Martin's).

In *Houstonian* Katherine Center's debut novel, *The Bright Side of Disaster* (Ballantine), Jenny Harris, pregnant and abandoned by her boyfriend, turns to her plucky women friends to pull her through until Mr. Right comes along.

For guy fiction there's Jeffery Deaver's *The Sleeping Doll* (Simon & Schuster), in which special agent Kathryn Dance manhunts a psychopathic killer dubbed "Son of Manson." Richard K. Morgan's *Thirteen* (Del Rey) is a near-future thriller about a government-trained hit man who has lost his will to kill but can't escape his past.

July

In Stephen L. Carter's *New England White* (Knopf) the murder of a prominent black economics professor threatens to uncork the racial secrets of a college town's past. Carter's first novel, *The Emperor of Ocean Park*, astonished in part because nobody believed a Yale law professor could write such an entertaining book.

Popular fiction takes the limelight in July. Master art restorer and Israeli intelligence operative Gabriel Allon returns in Daniel Silva's *The Secret Servant* (Putnam). Allon's task: to find the daughter of the United States' ambassador to Britain, kidnapped by Islamic radicals. In *The Quickie* (Little, Brown) a female cop's scheme to revenge herself on her wandering husband goes disastrously wrong. Veteran thriller writer James Patterson teams with co-author Michael Ledwidge on this one.

Jason Goodwin's debut novel *The Janissary Tree*, set in 19th century Istanbul and featuring eunuch investigator Yashim Tögalu, won the Edgar Award for best mystery of 2006. Goodwin isn't resting on his laurels. He's already brought Yashim back for a new adventure involving a scheme to revive the Byzantine Empire. The book is *The Snake Stone* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

With *Killer Weekend* (Putnam), much-lauded crime novelist Ridley Pearson launches a new series featuring Sun Valley, Idaho, Sheriff Walt Fleming. The assassination of a presidential candidate sets the wheels in motion.

The end of the month brings Ana Castillo's *Guardians* (Random House), a fictional foray into the world of illegal immigration. The plot revolves around a Mexican man who goes missing during a crossing and his sister's efforts to track the coyotes who may have had a hand in it.

August

Sandra Brown has the patent on novels melding steamy romance with a tight crime plot. It's *Ricochet* (Simon & Schuster).

Kathy Reichs' *Bones to Ashes* (Scribner) is another in her series featuring Tempe Brennan, forensic anthropologist. Faye Kellerman's *Burnt House* (Scribner) is another in her Peter Decker/Rina Lazarus series.

Much-admired science-fiction novelist William Gibson (*Neuromancer*; *Pattern Recognition*) includes a summary of new novel *Spook Country* (Putnam) on his Web site. I've read it twice and still am not sure what it's about.

Deidre McNamer's *Red Rover* (Viking), about three Montana men caught up in World War II and its aftermath, is getting favorable early reviews.

...

Noteworthy nonfiction

May

Billed as "part memoir, part journalistic investigation," *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (HarperCollins) describes how Barbara Kingsolver and her family tried "realigning our lives with our food chain," vowing to eat only food they grew themselves or that had been raised in their neighborhood.

Ex-prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi wins the prize for fattest book of the summer. His *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy* (Norton) runs to more than 1,500 pages and aims to put to rest, once and for all, conspiracy theories about JFK's assassination. Lots of luck. Bugliosi is best known for *Helter Skelter*, his book on the Charles Manson killings.

A couple of JFK's successors appear prominently. Robert Dallek's *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (HarperCollins) explores the curious mix of admiration, distrust and rivalry in the Nixon-Kissinger relationship. This is the season's most-talked-about contribution to recent history.

Historian Douglas Brinkley, the high-profile recruit by Rice University, edited *The Reagan Diaries* (HarperCollins), Ronald Reagan's daily, handwritten observations on his life in the White House.

Aaron Burr, the most prominent American politico ever formally charged with treason, gets a major image makeover at the hands of University of Tulsa historian Nancy Isenberg. In *Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr* (Viking) she "proves that

Burr was no less a patriot and no less a principled thinker than those who debased him," says the publisher.

What would summer be without golf books? John Feinstein's *Tales From Q School* (Little, Brown) profiles players at the annual PGA Tour Qualifying Tournament, the six-round contest where aspiring newcomers and veterans alike compete for a place on the pro tour. It's "the one event in golf guaranteed to break hearts," the publisher says.

Alice Cooper, *Golf Monster* (Crown) is billed as the rocker's "tell-all memoir" about how he beat booze by hitting the links, eventually becoming, according to his publisher, a "serious Pro Am competitor." AC's makeup would be enough to scare balls into the hole.

June

Tina Brown, who knew Princess Diana personally, argues that to understand her you need to understand the women in her life - "Diana's sexually charged mother, her scheming grandmother, the stepmother she hated, her competitive sister." Add the inlaws, from Sarah Ferguson to the formidable Queen Mother to other woman Camilla Parker Bowles, and you've got quite a "treacherous mix," in the publisher's words. The book is *The Diana Chronicles* (Doubleday).

The month also brings *On Royalty* (PublicAffairs), in which journalist Jeremy Paxman grapples with the role and enduring appeal of the British royal family.

Historian John Ferling stresses how close the American colonies came to losing their bid for independence in *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War for Independence* (Oxford).

Death of a Dissident by Alex Goldfarb and Marina Litvinenko (Free Press) is a timely examination of the mysterious poisoning of former KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko. Co-written by the dead man's wife.

Biologist Bridget Stutchbury explains why the world's songbirds are disappearing at an alarming rate and what we can do about it. The book is *Silence of the Songbirds* (Walker).

Speaking of birds (and bees), noted sexologist Pepper Schwartz dishes out sex and relationship advice to women older than 40 in *Prime: Advice and Adventure From a Sexologist on Life and Love in the Sensuous Years* (Collins). "Prime inspires women to celebrate sexuality at every stage of their lives," we're told.

In *Uncommon Arrangements: Seven Portraits of Married Life in London Literary Circles, 1910-1939* (Dial) Katie Roiphe examines the unions of, among others, H.G. Wells and Jane Wells, Clive and Vanessa Bell, and Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry. Publishers Weekly called the book "provocative, dishy, substantive and fun."

July

Midsummer brings more royals, ancient and modern: Larry King's *The People's Princess* (Crown) assembles recollections of Diana from people who knew her in her public and private roles. The **Pirate Queen** by **Susan Ronald** (HarperCollins) explores Elizabeth I's cunning use of piracy to advance England's interests in the

16th century. In *King, Kaiser, Tsar* (Walker) journalist Catrine Clay weaves together the overlapping lives of George V, Wilhelm II, and Nicholas II, three royal cousins who saw their insular world destroyed by World War I.

World War II and the years immediately after in East Asia are the subject of Ronald H. Spector's *In the Ruins of Empire: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Postwar Asia* (Random House). The book is a sequel to Spector's much-lauded history of the Pacific War, *Eagle Against the Sun*.

With hurricane season upon us, Chris Mooney's *Storm World* (Harcourt) bears examining. It's subtitled "Hurricanes, Politics, and the Battle Over Global Warming."

August

In *Once Upon a Quinceañera: Coming of Age in the USA* (Viking), Dominican-American novelist Julia Alvarez, explores the 15th-birthday celebration that marks a Latina's transition to womanhood and how it has changed with the growing, evolving Latino presence in the United States.

Gregory Rodriguez, a senior fellow at the New American Foundation, teases out the implications of Mexicans as a mestizo people and the "long-term cultural and political influence of Mexican-Americans on the character of our nation" in *Mongrels, Bastards, Orphans, and Vagabonds* (Pantheon).

Cultural critic Stanley Crouch gets inside the head of a troubled jazz genius in *Kansas City Lightning: The Life and Times of Young Charlie Parker* (Pantheon).

While it's doubtful anyone has called Duane "Dog" Chapman a genius, he's apparently good at what he does - bounty hunting. He'll tell you all about it in *You Can Run But You Can't Hide: The Life and Times of Dog the Bounty Hunter* (Hyperion).

And let that be the final word on summer books. You can run from them, but you can't hide. They'll find you, kick down your door, and throw themselves on your person. Just give up peaceably.