

tsunami books READING LIST

■ *The Orchardist*

By Amanda Coplin. Harper, \$26.99.
(PROPRIETOR SCOTT LANDFIELD'S FAVORITE)

State of Wonder

By Ann Patchett. Harper, \$15.99.

Me and Lee: How I Came to Know, Love and Lose Lee Harvey Oswald

By Judyth Vary Baker. Trine Day, \$21.95.
(PUBLISHED LOCALLY)

The Art of Fermentation: An In-Depth Exploration of Essential Concepts and Processes from Around the World

By Sandor Ellix Katz and Michael Pollan. Chelsea Green, \$39.95.

Auntie Yang's Great Soybean Picnic

By Ginni and Beth Lo. Lee and Lo, \$18.95.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid #7: The Third Wheel

By Jeff Kinney. Harry N. Abrams, \$13.95.

essays

My Heart is an Idiot

By Davy Rothbart. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$25. *Amazon Best Books of the Month, September 2012.*

Indeed, Davy Rothbart's heart is an idiot. But so is mine. This 16-essay book opens with Rothbart's recount of childhood trickeries aimed at his deaf mother. What had me shaking my head halfway through had me smiling by the end, effectively hooking me for the rest of the book.

Rothbart is the founder and publisher of *Found Magazine* and author of 2005 anthology *The Lone Surfer of Montana, Kansas*. Like many of us, Rothbart is constantly falling in love, always with the wrong people, and occasionally before he's even out of love with another. Feeling heartsick yet hopeful is the common thread weaving through each of the 16 essays.

Throughout each essay his sentimentalism strikes close to home, funny and melodramatic all at once. Each woman he meets is beautiful in her own right; each experience he has is fraught with meaning. He is always searching for "the one," no matter what else he is doing.

However, these small tales, these seemingly insignificant experiences Rothbart has, all seem to add up to some-



thing bigger with each page turned. Although he may seem perpetually heartbroken, his words are sweet and meaningful. Hope and humor never leave his heart.

Do you read way too much into small exchanges with strangers? Do you often find yourself imagining future scenarios based on fragments of information? Do you believe life is a series of beautiful, fleeting interactions? Your heart might also be an idiot. It feels good, doesn't it? — Jackie Varriano

The Tangled Bank: Writings from Orion

By Robert Michael Pyle. Oregon State University Press, \$18.95.

Lepidopterist Robert Michael Pyle came to the Eugene Natural History Society last May from his farm in southwest Washington to give a talk on butterflies, a topic for which he is well known. I missed the talk, but lucked into eating dinner at a downtown restaurant with Pyle and a fellow writer who is working on a book on road kill. I forget where we ate or what we ate because all I remember was the fascinating conversation.

Pyle can discourse on a variety of topics and make all of it fascinating and somehow make you feel, as you chat with him, that you just might be fascinating, too. Reading Pyle's collection of essays, *The Tangled Bank*, is a bit like having dinner with him: The topics are diverse and fascinating; Pyle manages to be both chatty and scientific and in his efforts to show his reader how fascinating the natural world is, he lets you know that you can see these fascinating things as well. The essays are pulled from Pyle's *Orion* and *Orion Afield* column, also called "The

Raygun Dreams

2012's sci-fi graphic novels

The past year produced some incredible graphic novels, especially in the science fiction arena. One of 2012's strongest premieres is ***Saga, Vol. 1*** (IMAGE COMICS, \$9.99). Against a backdrop of interstellar war, creators Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples cast an intimate story of one young family's struggle to survive. Alana and Marko, a pair of (quite literally) star-crossed lovers, take a break from trying to kill one another long enough to go AWOL from their respective extraterrestrial armies, elope and produce a hybrid baby. Hijinks ensue.



As always, Vaughan propels his tale with requisite heart and soul. The organic rocket ships, teenage ghosts and other sci-fi trappings are secondary; it's the family dynamics and the honest writing and art that propel this story.

At the other end of the spectrum is ***Prophet, Vol. 1: Remission*** (IMAGE COMICS, \$9.99), an unrelated sci-fi project from the same publisher that could not be more different in tone. Writer Simon Roy drops the reader into the middle of the aftermath of an interstellar war as John Prophet, the last known human, awakens from suspended animation on a long-changed planet earth, compelled by programming and patriotism to carry out a mission to re-launch his nearly extinct species.

Where Vaughan's *Saga* is primarily character-driven, with a focus on romance and adventure, *Prophet* is a work

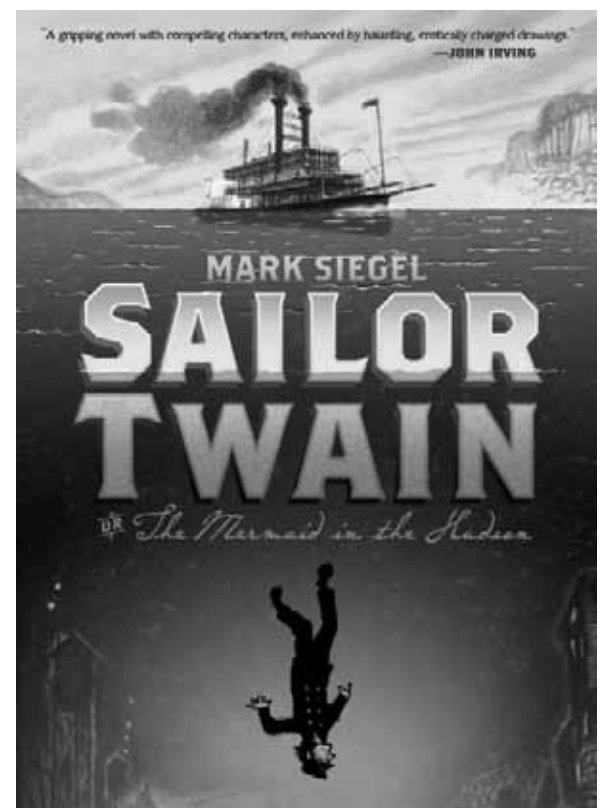
driven by its apocalyptic setting, bursting at its spacesuit seams with mind-blowing visuals and concepts.

Fans of ironic, message-driven ultraviolence (and hey, who isn't?) will enjoy ***Nature of the Beast*** (SOFT SKULL PRESS, \$23.95), co-written by Eugene author Douglas McGowan and Adam Mansbach of *Go the F**k to Sleep* fame. An alien race has targeted humanity for extinction, and only one man can save us: Bruno Bolo, an alpha male gator wrestler from Florida. To establish his dominance as Earth's champion, Bolo must compete in a bizarre TV reality show, fighting his way to the death through a phalanx of angry animals and hard-case humans, before he can earn the right to represent his planet.

Illustrated by Owen Brozman in a clean, cartoony style that belies its blood-spattered gonzo violence, *Nature of the Beast* chronicles Bolo's drug-fueled rise to ultimate interplanetary fighter.

From a book no kid should read to a book every kid should read, the season also sees the publication of a graphic novel adaptation of ***A Wrinkle in Time*** (FARRAR STRAUS GIRoux, \$19.99), Madeleine L'Engle's perennial classic of kid lit — and unfortunately the only book on this list appropriate for children.

Indie cartooning darling Hope Larson may seem an odd choice to illustrate this quasi-religious, interplanetary rescue mission to the planet Camazotz, but amidst all the winged centaurs and friendly witches and extrasensory perception, *Wrinkle* is, at its heart, the story of a girl's first faltering steps on the road to adulthood — and no tesseract is required for the journey. Meg Murry, the story's young protagonist, must find the strength to not only stand up to bullies from another planet, but the next homeroom. As in *Saga*, the story walks between the poles of humanity and fantasy, and in this regard Larson makes a perfect choice, with a blue, black and white palette that will appeal to children and adults alike.



Meg may know a thing or two about witches, but Captain Twain of the steamboat Lorelei has the mermaid market cornered. In Mark Siegel's complex, black-and-white masterpiece ***Sailor Twain, or: The Mermaid in the Hudson*** (FIRST SECOND, \$24.99), the dutiful captain is shocked one day to pull from the river a wounded mermaid. He hides her away in his cabin on the ship and nurses her back to health.

Parents should banish from their minds all thoughts of Disney's Ariel — Siegel's period piece rumination on river lore and American folk legend restores the mermaid's original association with sex and death. With the mermaid's coming, those two elements descend in full force on the steamship on its journey down the river, and Twain must unravel a literary mystery while combating his own growing obsession, in a situation that quickly grows mythologically complicated. — Aaron Ragan-Fore