

Winter Reading

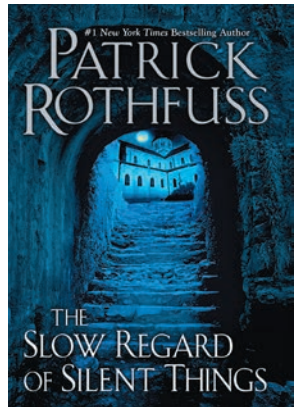
To steal a name from that vast bookstore in Portland, Eugene is a city of books — and of readers. Our small local bookstores and excellent city library, not to mention free and inexpensive book sources such as Gertie the Bookbus and St. Vincent dePaul, ensure that Lane County's literary lovers can have a book with their coffee or kombucha to curl up with this winter.

■ = OREGON AUTHOR OR OREGON-CENTRAL BOOK

fiction

The Slow Regard of Silent Things by

Patrick Rothfuss. DAW Books, Inc., \$18.95.



When an author says on page one, “You might not want to buy this book,” there’s a pretty good chance that what follows will not fit the parameters of an everyday novella. And that’s certainly the case with *The Slow Regard of Silent Things*, a pet project of fantasy writer Patrick Rothfuss. First of all, it’s difficult to understand if you haven’t read Rothfuss’ first two novels, *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise*

Man’s Fear — and as someone who’s read them, I have to say even that doesn’t help entirely. The 159-page novella takes a meandering, artsy glimpse into a week in the life of one of Rothfuss’ peripheral characters, Auri, a semi-insane former student of magic who lives underneath a mystical university.

The writing is unmistakably beautiful. Without using dialogue, Rothfuss sculpts Auri’s story with gleaming descriptions of her underground world, and his personification of the commonplace objects she anthropomorphizes and treats as equals is truly convincing: I never thought I could feel so closely connected to a metal gear. Auri is a fascinating character, and though the plot weaves and ducks with her erratic mind, it manages to crescendo at the end while hinting at the genius of her past, the lost potential of her present and the questions of her future. It’s not a normal read, by any means, but for those with a penchant for the unusual, this book fits the bill. — Amy Schneider

Silence Once Begun by Jesse Ball. Pantheon, \$23.95.

Jesse Ball is a poet and none of his novels escape that fact. They are spaces you enter and moods you encounter more than guided tours through someone’s carefully crafted rendition of possibly realistic scenarios. They try to convince you they are important or entertaining for one reason or another.

He epitomizes the writer who loves language and romances its subtle, complex mechanism as a bridge between lived experience and the hard-to-pinpoint, wispy climbs where the lines between logic, meaning, fantasy and pure exploration are drawn and surpassed.

He is not grappling with the big questions as much as playing on the ground they spring from. He does not posture as one who provides answers to anything, but somehow culls an ancient sensibility that cuts to the heart of something vague, deeply human and unsettling in its spirit and contour; an element eerie, vast and subconscious in his writing.

Silence Once Begun is no exception, though its narrative path is more linear than his other novels. It is a story told through the journalistic fragments of a writer named Jesse Ball, trying to unravel a group of disappearances. I will omit any additional plot details, as they are ultimately irrelevant. — Paul Quillen

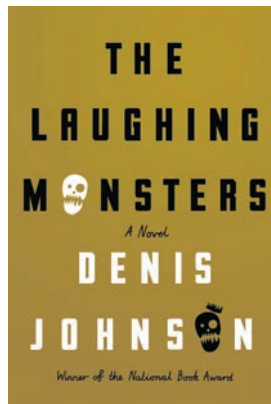
Written in My Own Heart’s Blood by

Diana Gabaldon. Delacorte Press, \$35.

The recent Starz miniseries bringing Diana Gabaldon’s *Outlander* series to sexy, kilt-wearing life has likely brought a horde of new readers to the tale of time-traveling Claire Beauchamp and her hot 1800s Highlander husband Jaimie Fraser. *Written in My Own Heart’s Blood* is the eighth official book in the series that has taken readers from Scotland, pre-Battle of Culloden, to the American Revolution. The premise of the series sounds silly — a nurse is accidentally swept 200 years back in time after encountering Stonehenge-like standing stones in Scotland, but Gabaldon’s vivid writing, with better-than-the-average-romance-novel love scenes and exquisite attention to the detail of life in the 1800s, makes it work. The *Outlander* books are a guilty pleasure that make you feel smarter for reading them. The weighty tomes are perfect for evenings curled up by the fire — just make sure you have whiskey at hand, because a taste for the hard stuff feels integral to the tales. — Camilla Mortensen

The Laughing Monsters by Denis Johnson.

Farrar, Straus, Giroux, \$25.



With the first sentence of Denis Johnson’s *The Laughing Monsters*, readers are deposited into the chaos that is the Freetown, Sierra Leone, airport — a place of sweltering heat where the PA system plays only the vowels. From there, within one short page, it’s a hustle through customs, scheming taxi drivers and then Freetown itself, “a mass of buildings, many of them crumbling, and all around them a multitude of shadows and muddy rags

trudging God knows where, hunched forward over their empty bellies.” Johnson, a master of economic prose, sustains this initial sense of dislocation and disorder throughout his new novel, which he self-described as a “literary thriller.” *The Laughing Monsters* follows Roland Nair, a rogue-ish intelligence officer who’s been sent to track down his old friend Michael Adriko, an African soldier of fortune who made loads of money with Nair 11 years earlier during Sierra Leone’s bloody civil war. Rogue-ish rather than rogue, because one of the threads of *The Laughing Monsters* is America’s sprawling, post-9/11 intelligence apparatus, which Johnson makes as wild and as tangled as the jungle mountains the book is titled after. As Nair says, “you realize it’s all myths and legends here, and lies, and rumors.”

TOP 10 BOOKS AT TsunamiBooks

Lila by Marilynne Robinson. Farrar Straus Giroux, \$26.

The Co-Creation Handbook by Alida Birch. Luminaire Press, \$12.95.

Falling From Horses by Molly Gloss. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, \$25. (See review this issue)

Roadside Geology of Oregon, Second Edition by Marli B. Miller. Mountain Press, \$26. (See review this issue)

The Bone Clocks by David Mitchell. Random House, \$30.

The Magicians by Lev Grossman. Plume, \$16.
Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson. Nancy Paulsen Books, \$16.99.

The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey. Little, Brown and Company, \$14.99.

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Milkweed Editions, \$18.

The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible by Charles Eisenstein. North Atlantic Books, \$19.95.

Propelled by razor-sharp dialogue and the tension of never quite knowing who is screwing over whom until the very end, *The Laughing Monsters* is another masterwork from Johnson, who won the National Book Award in 2007 for his epic novel *Tree of Smoke*. — Eliot Treichel

■ Down in the River: A novel by Ryan

Blacketter. Slant, \$22.



Set in Eugene, *Down in the River* is both a sympathetic depiction of bipolar disorder and a macabre take on youth culture. Now in Idaho, author Ryan Blacketter spent his teen years in Eugene, and the novel’s geography, from the river to the university, takes the reader through protagonist Lyle Rettew’s troubled existence.

Central to the book’s plot is when Lyle steals the corpse of a young girl from a mausoleum.

Blacketter’s details are stark and somehow all the more disgusting for their sparseness. Yet Blacketter somehow maintains Lyle on his manic highs and lows as a sympathetic character. Adults in the novel, even Lyle’s 23-year-old brother who is trying to keep him on Lithium, are flat characters, paper dolls in comparison to the troubled youth on the streets of Eugene. The plot is disturbing, but you keep reading for Blacketter’s textured prose. — Camilla Mortensen

We Built This City

In the crazy world we live in, sometimes you have to create your own magic. That’s what *EW*’s resident graphic designers and artists extraordinaire Sarah Decker and Trask Bedortha did with this year’s Winter Reading cover, a favorite issue in our office. Whereas the rest of the year’s cover images are tied to something newsy, Winter Reading is a time for some freewheeling fun. Decker and Bedortha created this cozy cityscape over two days with books from St. Vincent de Paul and miniatures from Eugene Toy and Hobby, meticulously cutting out tiny images with X-Acto knives to create glowing hearths through the windowpanes, all blanketed with a sprinkling of snow (i.e., baby powder). Because let’s face it — a good book is another home for the heart.

