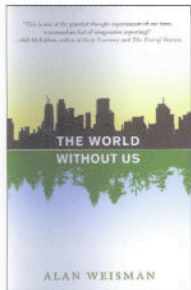


Books You Still Have Time to Read Before the First Holiday Cocktail Parties

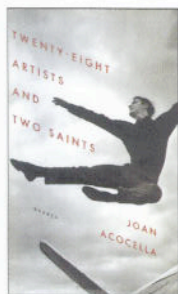
By Drew Coffey



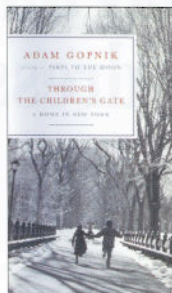
“The World Without Us” by Alan Weisman, *Thomas Dunne Books*, 336 pages. \$24.95. If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one to hear it ... what difference does it make to the tree? The (largely) science-based premise of this riveting book is what the world would be like (will be like?) if the human race disappeared. Absolutely fascinating and perversely reassuring, with an underlying message of what we can still do to slow, if not reverse, the violations.



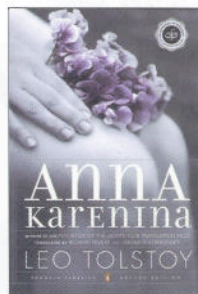
“Hudson Valley Ruins: Forgotten Landmarks of an American Landscape” by Thomas E. Rinaldi and Robert J. Yasinsac, *University Press of New England*, 336 pages. \$35. A deeply evocative book, by turns inspiring and bittersweet. So much has been lost or is on the verge of disappearing, but in pictures and text the authors document success stories, large and small, and challenge the reader to join in the fight to preserve our regional history.



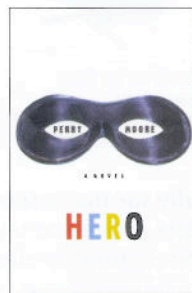
“Twenty-Eight Artists and Two Saints” by Joan Acocella, *Pantheon Books*, 524 pages. \$30. Although known primarily as a dance critic (and there are several pieces on dancers here), Acocella’s essay subjects in this collection range from Lucia Joyce to Mary Magdalene to H. L. Mencken. She is that rarest of *rare avis*, an essayist whose pieces can be read several at a time, as one moves eagerly from one guest to another in a salon, trying to see everyone before the evening is over. Confident and compassionate, no easy pairing.



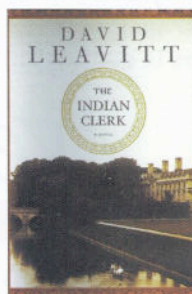
“Through the Children’s Gate: A Home in New York” by Adam Gopnik, *Vintage*, 336 pages. \$14.95. Gopnik could comfortably take his place at the table with Emerson or Thoreau as an essayist whose descriptions and reflections on the seemingly small events of daily life can summarize a whole society or a particular moment in history. His complicated encounter with Mr. Ravioli alone is worth the price of the book.



“Anna Karenina” by Leo Tolstoy, a new translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, *Penguin Classics*, 837 pages. \$16. In this amazing translation, the costumes of 19th century Russia — embroidered velvet, coarse homespun, stiff military wool — are worn by living, breathing characters instead of stiff-backed mannequins or tarted-up supermodels. Tolstoy’s story, or rather stories, move forward majestically and inexorably, like Levin’s horses pulling a plow across the landscape.



“Hero” by Perry Moore, *Hyperion Books*, 432 pages. \$16.99. How do you deal with being the teenaged son of a disgraced superhero? What if you couldn’t tell anyone at school that you had burgeoning superpowers yourself? Add on one more secret that could potentially be even more dangerous. Moore has written a young adult novel (whatever that is) combining the best features of a storyboarded action film and a coming-of-age (while coming out) narrative.



“The Indian Clerk” by David Leavitt, *Bloomsbury USA*, 496 pages. \$24.95. Since his early success in his 20s, Leavitt has fought being marginalized as a “gay” writer. This novel of professional mathematicians and insoluble personal equations is set mainly in the Cambridge University of the early 20th century, but as in all of Leavitt’s writing, the real geography is that of the human soul.