

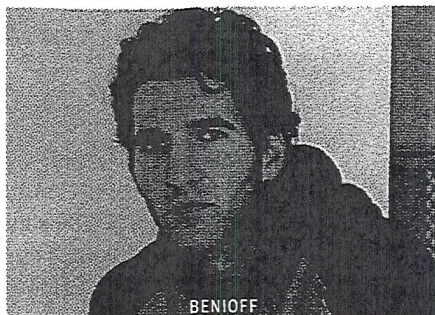
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Books



WHEN THE NINES ROLL OVER

David Benioff
Stories (Viking, \$23.95)



Benioff may be best known as the screenwriter of Brad Pitt's homoerotic—sorry, Homeric—*Troy*, but don't hold that against him. When Benioff steers clear of Grecian formula, he's an ace storyteller. Following his debut novel, *The 25th Hour* (the basis for Spike Lee's underseen and underrated 2002 film), this mostly fantastic collection kick-starts with the masterful title story, in which a music exec cherry-picks a sexy punk singer for stardom against the wishes of her drummer boyfriend. "The Devil Comes to Orekhovo," about a trio of Russian soldiers on night patrol in Chechnya, may be the best Hemingway story Hemingway never wrote. And the wistful "Barefoot Girl in Clover"—an ex-jock's reminiscences about a romance he now realizes was the love of his life—could teach even the Greeks (if not Pitt) something about tragedy. **A-** —Chris Nashawaty

THE CLOUD GARDEN

Tom Hart Dyke and Paul Winder
Nonfiction (Lyons, \$22.95)



In early 2000, two twenty-something Brits—orchid expert Hart Dyke and avid adventurer Winder—did a very stupid thing. Ignoring vehement warnings, the pair trekked into the Darién Gap, a dense, unpoliced jungle straddling Panama and Colombia, where drug running and civil war are rampant. Sure enough, they were kidnapped by guerrillas. The authors take turns vividly recounting their scary, absurd ordeal, which was punctuated by boredom, tropical parasites, and frustration with the bumbling band of AK-47-toting youngsters who held them hostage

for nine months. "I found that my fear of death was subsiding," Hart Dyke writes. "Far worse to contemplate was these idiots getting their cash." The duo achieve a new kind of suspense—a tale in which their captors' names, their exact location, and their well-being matter less than getting the hell out. **A** —Joshua Rich

COPIES IN SECONDS

David Owen
Nonfiction (Simon & Schuster, \$24)



It was the size of a big desk and weighed 648 pounds. It was manufactured by the tiny Haloid Company (which later became Xerox), based in Rochester, N.Y. Called the 914 Office Copier, it was the first modern photocopying machine, and its introduction in March 1960 did no less than change the world. The series of inventions and technological triumphs that led to what Owen calls "the biggest communication breakthrough since Gutenberg" came from the singular vision and perseverance of one Chester Carlson. Both the tale (including the heartrending poverty of his youth) and Owen's unfettered appreciation for his subject make for a fascinating read that, unlike the purpose of these machines, is not easily duplicated. **B+** —Wook Kim

HAD A GOOD TIME

Robert Olen Butler
Stories (Grove, \$23)



Vintage postcards adorned with rustic landscapes, spooning young lovers, and wish-you-were-here greetings are the jumping-off point for this uneven but affecting series of vignettes of early-20th-century America. Sometimes the tone is wryly comic, as in "The Ironworkers' Hayride," where a shy accountant and a woman with a wooden leg express romantic longing in a discussion of female suffrage and Halley's comet. Occasionally, Butler strains for contemporary relevance: In "The One in White," a brief flirtation between a Mexican laundress and an American reporter during a U.S. military incursion comes off as a too-obvious allegory of not-so-innocents abroad. Yet in the standout "Carl and I," a librarian reaches out to her consumptive, dying husband with clear-eyed, aching poignancy. **B+** —Ben Spier