

kills underling after underling with astonishing heartlessness. No one can doubt Carcaterra's firsthand knowledge of the mean streets of New York (see his best-selling memoir, *Sleepers*), his extensive vocabulary of cop-speak (*Apaches*) or his expertise regarding the city of Naples (*Street Boys*), but his made-for-TV writing may prove a stumbling block for more literary readers. Veteran cop-story aficionados will find that the eventual attraction between Lo Manto and partner Jennifer Fabini, detective daughter of NYPD legend Sal Fabini, comes as no surprise, and the connection between the cop and crime boss Rossi will garner few gasps. But those readers unafraid of a little purple in their prose ("Get ready to taste it, cop," the Squid said. "Get ready to die.") will have a perfectly good time following Lo Manto and his unusual allies. *Agent, Owen Laster*. 5-city author tour. (Sept.)

THE FALLS

JOYCE CAROL OATES. *Ecco*, \$26.95 (496p)
ISBN 0-06-072228-2

★ Oates is not only on her authentically rendered home ground in this sprawling novel set in the city of Niagara Falls during the 1950s, she is also writing at the top of her form. Her febrile prose is especially appropriate to a story as turbulent as the tumultuous waters that have claimed many lives over the years. Widowed on her wedding night when her new husband, a young minister and latent homosexual, throws himself into the falls, Ariaiah Littrell, the plain, awkward daughter of a minister, henceforth considers herself damned. Her bleak future becomes miraculously bright when Dirk Burnaby, a handsome, wealthy bon vivant with an altruistic heart, falls in love with the media-dubbed Widow-Bride. Their rapturous happiness is shadowed only by Ariaiah's illogical conviction over the years that Dirk will leave her and their three children someday. Her unreasonable fear becomes self-fulfilling when her increasingly unstable behavior, combined with Dirk's obsessed but chaste involvement with Nina Olshaker, a young mother who enlists his help in alerting the city fathers to the pestilential conditions in the area later to be known as Love Canal, opens a chasm in their marriage. His gentle heart inspired by a need for justice, Dirk takes on the powerful, corrupt politicians, his former peers and pals, in a disastrous lawsuit that ruins him socially and financially and results in his death. Oates adroitly addresses the material of this "first" class action lawsuit and makes the story fresh and immediate. "In the end, all drama is about family," a character muses, and while the narrative occasionally lapses into melodrama in elucidating this theme,

Oates spins a haunting story in which nature and humans are equally rapacious and self-destructive. *Agent, Jane Hawkins*. Author tour. (Sept. 16)

Forecast: *This is likely to be one of Oates's biggest sellers—its heft, striking setting and sheer excellence should make it her highest-profile novel since Blonde.*

ADMISSIONS

NANCY LIEBERMAN. *Warner*, \$23.95 (368p)
ISBN 0-446-53303-3

"The Tuesday after Labor Day marked the official start of admissions season, the Manhattan parents' version of a blood sport." Readers in the know will groan in recognition at Lieberman's opening and the antics that follow. Even decent, psychoanalyzed, liberal folks such as Helen and Michael Drager are provoked into ludicrous, self-absorbed behavior. Unlike the more viciously cartooned narcissistic parents, they genuinely want what's best for Zoe, who's applying to high schools. But that doesn't stop them from running amok. Helen goads Michael, a producer on the Cooking Network, into offering a show to the ghastly admissions director of the Fancy Girls' School, then almost goes too far with Phillip Cashin, a handsome widowed father she meets on the admissions circuit. Only Zoe keeps her head, falling in love with a fellow musician, Max, and actually considering a defection to (gasp) public school. Debut novelist Lieberman's writing is a little giddy on the big dose of venom she pours. The author peoples her world with a blur of hyphenated, latte-swigging, multicultural, gender-blending parents and megalomaniacal school administrators. Whole scenes are setups for puns: "Kid pro quo"; "nocturnal admissions." But any New York parent contemplating a move to the suburbs will find this novel fabulous ammunition. And readers everywhere else will be gratified by the wild ending, a fundraising cruise all too aptly titled "A Night to Remember." *Agent, Robin Rue*. (Sept. 15)

THE EGYPTOLOGIST

ARTHUR PHILLIPS. *Random*, \$24.95 (432p)
ISBN 1-4000-6250-0

How was Phillips to follow up a debut as startlingly brilliant as *Prague*? By doing something completely different. His story, set mostly in Egypt in the early 1920s, stars Ralph Trilipush, an obsessive Egyptologist. Trilipush is more than a little odd. He is pinning his hopes on purported king Atumhadu, whose erotic verses he has discovered and translated; now he must locate his tomb and its expected riches. Meanwhile, an Australian detective, for reasons too complicated to go into, is seeking to un-

mask Trilipush, who may have had some relationship with a young Australian Egyptologist who died mysteriously. Trilipush and the detective are two quite unreliable narrators, and the effect is that of a hall of mirrors. Where does fact end and imagination, illusion and wishful thinking begin? Phillips is a master manipulator, able to assume a dozen convincingly different voices at will, and his book is vastly entertaining. It's apparent that something dire is afoot, but the reader, while apprehensive, can never quite figure out what. The ending, which cannot be revealed, is shocking and cleverly contrived. *Agent, Marly Russoff*. (Aug. 31)

Forecast: *It remains to be seen whether the admirers Phillips won for Prague will come out for something so very different, but Random is giving this title a big launch and it can be strongly handsold to readers in search of refreshingly original characters and situations.*

WHEN THE NINES ROLL OVER & OTHER STORIES

DAVID BENIOFF. *Viking*, \$23.95 (251p)
ISBN 0-670-03339-1

★ Benioff is on a roll. His first novel, the crime drama *The 25th Hour*, was made into a critically acclaimed film directed by Spike Lee. He also wrote the screenplay for the summer blockbuster *Troy*. In his latest project, an octet of thoughtful short stories, he takes it down a notch from those high-profile projects, but he definitely doesn't rest on his laurels. The book begins with the title story, about a jaded hipster record executive who is trying to steal a talented and sexy young singer away from a small label. It's a tautly told tale with a wonderfully evil edge. Hip is hard to do, but Benioff can pull it off, as when the reader follows the protagonist into a series of increasingly restricted VIP rooms: "Tabachnik had been places with four progressively-more-exclusive areas, where the herds were thinned at each door by goons with clipboards, turning away the lame." Like a lot of great short stories, it leaves you wanting to continue on with the characters to see where they end up. The other seven stories in the collection are a varied lot, ranging from the tale of a young soldier grappling with the moral complications of having to execute an elderly woman to a drama about a lovesick young man's decision to secretly scatter his girlfriend's father's ashes. The stories are offbeat, but not overly obtuse, and each one is driven by fully formed characters. This is a superb collection, and it proves that Benioff can handle the long and the short of the fiction game. *Agent, Jennifer Rudolph Walsh*. (Aug. 28)



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