

same assassin who murdered their mother and later killed their father in Shanghai. Alexander doesn't know that Polyak is already in Paris and awaiting the arrival of Katia, who—now the mother of Polyak's son and thoroughly brainwashed by the best Party training schools adept in the art of assassination—is carrying out a mission to kill a Party enemy in Poland. Miraculously, the siblings reunite and flee for Shanghai on the steamer *China Star* while Polyak relentlessly chases them through Cairo, Bombay, Ceylon and to Shanghai. At times more travelogue and tour guide (with some romance) than cliffhanger, Bull has delivered another light, lithe read. (June)

### Last Voyage of the Valentina

SANTA MONTEFIORE. Touchstone Fireside, \$15 paper (416p) ISBN 0-7432-7686-8

Long-legged, lascivious Alba lives on a London houseboat, the *Valentina*, moored in 1971 London. She is the daughter of a WWII romance; her proper English father, Thomas Arbuckle, and stepmother (“the Buffalo”) never mention her mysterious Italian mother—Valentina—who died when she was a baby. As a discovered sketch sparks Alba's curiosity about her mother's past, she takes up with literary agent Fitz Conroy, then breaks it off and goes to Italy to learn the truth about her past. Though this is Montefiore's U.S. debut, more than three million copies of her books are in print in the EU (the press chat notes that Charles and Camilla “made their debut as a couple” at Montefiore's wedding to historian Simon Sebag). Presumably, her EU translators were able to make lines like “Don't talk, you fool. Kiss me,” sound more seductive and surprising in other languages than they do in the King's English. (June)

### Strangers' Gate

TOM CASEY. Forge, \$24.95 (256p) ISBN 0-765-31190-9

In this lyrical novel of love, violence and drug-fueled treachery from Casey (*Human Error*), pilot Jason Walker cashes out of his job as a dot-com executive shortly before his marriage goes up in

flames, partly because he's had an affair with beautiful Charlotte Lansing. Charlotte's husband, Alan, a shady Wall Street investment banker, may or may not know about the affair, but it's clear from the start he's out to get Jason. Jason relocates to St. Croix and a new job flying airboat charters. Life is good until Charlotte arrives with Alan, who's now into money laundering, pornography and drug running. She's trying to escape her marriage, but when Jason attempts to help, he's shanghai'd into a drug scheme that's a one-way ticket to a watery grave. Only guts, quick thinking and some fancy flying save the day. As Norman Mailer's blurb suggests, readers should have no fear of being bored by the flying stuff. Casey, himself a veteran pilot, is too good both in the cockpit and at the keyboard to lose control of this exciting thriller. (June)

### Lilah: A Forbidden Love, a People's Destiny

MAREK HALTER. Crown, \$24 (272p) ISBN 1-4000-5281-5

In his final installment of the Canaan Trilogy (*Sarah; Zipporah*), Halter ambitiously tackles portions of the complicated biblical book of Ezra, which centers on the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple and calls Israel to ethnic and religious purity. In the Persian town of Susa, the beautiful Lilah dreams of marrying her Persian lover and childhood sweetheart, Antinoes. However, her beloved brother Ezra, who has immersed himself in studying the laws of God, refuses to approve of their union since Antinoes is not a Jew. As the story unfolds, with scenes full of rich detail, Lilah becomes the unlikely instrument of gaining royal approval for the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the holy city. However, once there, Ezra orders all non-Jewish wives and children driven away in what is surely one of the most heart-wrenching episodes directly from scripture. A horrified Lilah repudiates her brother and leaves with them. As the cast-off women wander unprotected outside the city, rape, murder and mayhem ensue. (It's confusing that Lilah narrates one violent scene, but readers are unsure how she

survives it.) As in *Sarah* and *Zipporah*, there is plenty of highly charged sexuality and some imaginative storytelling. Unfortunately, as with its predecessors, the story trails off, and the ending is unsatisfactory. (June)

### Chronicler of the Winds

HENNING MANKELL, TRANS. FROM THE SWEDISH BY TIINA NUNNALLY. New Press, \$24.95 (272p) ISBN 1-59558-058-1

Mankell's evocative, quietly powerful novel, first published in 1995, tells the unbearably sad story of 10-year-old Nelio, a mortally wounded street kid in an unnamed African port city. After revolutionary soldiers kill his family and most of the people in his village (“to show us they were serious in their struggle to liberate us and help us have a better life”), Nelio makes his way to the city where he joins a gang of homeless orphans, eventually—and reluctantly—becoming their leader. They have “only one mission in life: to survive,” but that's essentially all they can hope for. Mankell, best known for his Kurt Wallander mystery series (*The Dogs of Riga*, etc.), vividly depicts in this heartbreaking fable the ongoing tragedy of Africa's disenfranchised. At times the narrative strays too far from Nelio's story and the tone slips into a kind of magical realism, but it's impossible not to be moved by the tale of Nelio's short and painful life. (June)

### 24-Karat Kids

DR. JUDY GOLDSTEIN AND SEBASTIAN STUART. St. Martin's, \$22.95 (304p) ISBN 0-312-34327-2

When Dr. Shelley Green joins Madison Pediatrics, a medical practice catering to the rich, peculiar parents of the Upper East Side of Manhattan, this self-described “schlumpy girl from Jackson Heights” is unprepared for the self-centered eccentrics who parade through her office. First-time collaborators Goldstein and Stuart have created them all in this chick-out-of-water comedy: a six-year-old with strep devastated to miss her Bergdorf manicure, a show-biz mom who