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## Paperbacks

By CARLA MCKAY

### **REASONABLE DOUBTS by Gianrico Carofiglio (Bitter Lemon Press, £8.99)**

Carofiglio, until recently an anti-Mafia prosecutor in southern Italy, is particularly well-placed to write legal thrillers, and he does so with considerable brio, humour and skill.

This is his third work featuring the lawyer Guido Guerrieri, a man who struggles with his own demons as much as with his stressful caseload ? stressful because Guido is attracted to seemingly hopeless causes, and because it sometimes feels as though he's the only honest lawyer in Bari.

When an old neo-fascist adversary, Fabio Paolicelli, is convicted of drug running and wants to appeal, Guido is torn between the desire to keep him in jail (not least because he has a passion for the man's wife) and fighting for justice for his client whom he comes to believe is innocent.

### **THE DISCOMFORT ZONE by Jonathan Franzen (HarperPerennial, £8.99)**

The wonderful and disconcerting author of *The Corrections* shines his laser-beam eye on his own upbringing in his second collection of essays.

'I grew up in the middle of the country in the middle of the golden age of the American middle class,' he says. But that was the best bit. Franzen as a boy was a self-confessed geek with horn-rimmed glasses, a squeaky voice, a huge vocabulary, poor arm strength, 'irresistible urges to shout unfunny puns', a big chemistry lab in his basement and 'a penchant for insulting any unfamiliar girl unwise enough to speak to me'.

But realising this constituted social death, Franzen attempted to toughen up his image by continually exclaiming 'Son of a bitch!' only eliciting the reply: 'Yes, you certainly are one.' This has to be one of the funniest and most self-deprecating journeys through puberty ever recorded.

### **MIRRORS OF THE UNSEEN: Journeys In Iran by Jason Elliot (Picador, £8.99)**

Elliot's first book ? the award-winning *An Unexpected Light* ? illuminated Afghanistan and the Afghans, relatively unknown to us, before we heard about them on the news.

In a series of off-the-beaten-track journeys in Iran, Elliot, a Farsi speaker, does the same for Iran.

In three years of travel, research and meetings with all kinds of people, he reports on the 'double life' of most Persians: loathing the ruling mullahs, desperate for outside contact and nostalgic for the time of the Shah when life was not perfect, but better.

Elliot is saddened by the ugliness of modern Iranian cities, the only available money being spent on banks and mosques, and reminds us of the astonishing Persian legacy when its empire's administration, military organisation, coinage, transport and postal systems were the envy of the world.

He obsesses about Islamic architecture, discerning underlying purpose where others have seen

only decoration, and provides a welcome insight into the workings of this misunderstood nation.

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