

Books

Literary events

Festival of the Arts Boca's Authors & Ideas program: Patricia Engel, "Vida," 4 p.m. today; Thomas Keneally, "Schindler's Ark," 7 p.m. Monday; Michael J. Sandel, "Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?," 7 p.m. Wednesday. Info: 561-368-8445, 866-571-ARTS, festivalboca.org.

Julie Kramer, "Shunning Sarah," 3 p.m. Tuesday at the West Boca Library, 18685 State Road 7, 561-470-1600.

Alison Gaylin, "Into the Dark," and Wendy Corsi Staub, "Shadowkiller," 7 p.m. Wednesday at Murder on the Beach, 273 Pineapple Grove, Delray Beach, 561-279-7790.

Harry A. Kersey, "Seminole Voices," 7 p.m. March 13 at the Boca Raton Historical Society & Museum, 71 N. Federal Highway, Boca Raton. Free for members, \$5 nonmembers. Call 561-395-6766, ext. 101; bocahistory.org.

Nick Flynn, poetry collection "The Captain Asks for a Show of Hands," 7 p.m. Thursday in the Majestic Palm Room at Florida Atlantic University, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton. Call 561-297-2974.

Stacey Battat, "The Thread: Real Stories of Hadassah Life Changing Moments," 2 p.m. Friday at the Delray Beach Public Library, 100 West Atlantic Ave.; 561-266-9490, delraylibrary.org.

Lynne Barrett, "Scene of the Crime: Using Place and Mapping in Mystery and Suspense," Mystery Writers of America, Florida chapter, 11:30 a.m. Saturday at Doubletree by Hilton, I-95 and Hillsboro Boulevard. Cost is \$25 for members, \$30 non-members. Email reservations@mwa-fl.org or mwafloida.org/meetingspage.

Email events to olinecog@aol.com.

Whoa! Dave Barry to cross county line

By CHAUNCEY MABE
Correspondent

Any resemblance between Dave Barry's latest novel, "Insane City," and the hit movie "The Hangover" is purely coincidental, even if both involve the increasingly wacky drunken adventures of a groom and his pals.

After all, Barry has been trading in this kind of absurdist humor, rooted in the endless possibilities for lurid Miami mayhem, since his first novel, "Big Trouble" (1999).

"They say write what you know," says Barry. "That's what I know."

Barry is referring to the novel's title metropolis — the "insane city" of Miami, where, he says, "anything can happen."

For example, as Barry left for his book tour, Florida's Python Challenge, a hunting contest to rid the Everglades of giant invasive snakes, was being organized.

"I thought I could just stay home and write a book, 'Python Challenge,'" he says. "It wouldn't take that much imagination."

For more than 30 years, Barry has made a spectacularly successful career of his patented style of low-high humor, a mix of booger jokes and astute social commentary that won him a Pulitzer Prize in 1988. Readers seem never to tire of it, and neither does Barry.

The reviews of "Insane City" have been good, and it made The New York Times bestseller list "for a couple of weeks," which, Barry says, makes his publisher happy.

"I don't get bored," Barry says. "I've been really lucky. I like it all. I loved writing a newspaper column. I enjoy the process of writing a book, and then meeting readers."

Even though Barry was voted "Class Clown" by classmates at Pleasantville High School in New York (1965), he did not set out to be a humorist. He loved newspapers, and would have been content to work as a daily reporter all his life.

Barry began writing humorous essays as a freelancer in the early 1980s, and these proved so popular that by 1988 he was fielding offers from The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Washington Post, LA Times and The Miami Herald. By then, he had fallen in love with Miami.

Barry has written more than two dozen nonfiction humor books and essay collections, three "largish novels for grown-ups, the ones with dirty words,"



ANGEL VALENTIN/COURTESY

If you go

What: Feast's Night Out with Dave Barry
When: 7 p.m. March 17
Where: Hyatt Regency Pier Sixty-Six, 2301 SE 17th St., Fort Lauderdale
Tickets: \$40
Info: bplfoundation.org

and several children's books, including a Peter Pan series written with Ridley Pearson.

Barry admits his upcoming appearance marks a rare foray into Fort Lauderdale.

"I once wrote a whole essay about Dade vs. Broward," he says. "Broward people fearlessly cross the county line, but Dade County people don't."

As for his talk, Barry says he never prepares.

"I seldom have an actual topic," Barry says. "I don't have anything important to say. If people come out just a little stupider than when they go in, then I've done my job."

BOOK REVIEW

When the legal system runs amok

By OLIVE H. COGDILL | Correspondent

C.J. Box's high standards have never been more evident than in the 13th novel in his series about Wyoming game warden Joe Pickett. "Breaking Point" skillfully shows how government can enhance lives and preserve the environment while also portraying the legal system run amok. But "Breaking Point" is no treatise pitting an individual vs. the big bad government. The tense plot of "Breaking Point" provides edge-of-the-seat suspense filled with unpredictable twists and realistic characters worth caring about set against the vivid wide open spaces of Wyoming.

Many people are near breaking point, as Joe learns when he becomes personally and professionally involved in the problems of neighbor Butch Robertson. The hard-working owner of a construction company, Butch is the prime suspect in the murder of two armed EPA agents who had come to stop him from building on his land. Butch planned to build a retirement home for himself and his wife, which they had scrimped and saved for years to build. But they suddenly found themselves in a legal quagmire from which there seemed to be no solution. A vindictive EPA director, a former sheriff with a grudge and a former soldier are now after Butch, who has fled to the mountains. Joe agrees to lead a posse, hoping if he finds Butch first he can stop more violence.

Based on a true incident, Box infuses "Breaking Point" with the frontier spirit of an old-fashioned western as the good guys try to track down the bad guys — only in "Breaking Point" the sole person without another agenda is Joe. While out-of-control bureaucracy fuels the plot, "Breaking Point" carefully shows how rampant abuse of power can erupt anywhere.

Box's contemporary spin on the western makes "Breaking Point" an explosive thriller that careens from one unpredictable twist to another.

Oline H. Cogdill can be reached at olinecog@aol.com.

Meet the author

C.J. Box will discuss "Breaking Point" at 2 p.m. March 17 at the Wellington Library, 1951 Royal Fern Drive, Wellington, 561-790-6070; and at 5 p.m. March 17 at Murder on the Beach, 273 Pineapple Grove Way, Delray Beach, 561-279-7790.



'Breaking Point'

By C.J. Box.
Putnam, 384 pages,
\$26.95

Bestsellers

HARDCOVER FICTION

- | | Last week |
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| 1. "Alex Cross, Run" by James Patterson (Little, Brown, \$28.99). In this latest addition in the Alex Cross series, the detective returns to track down a slew of serial killers in Washington, D.C. | 1 |
| 2. "Calculated in Death" by J.D. Robb (Putnam, \$27.95). Eve Dallas returns with her partner, Peabody, to solve a murder on Manhattan's Upper East Side. | — |
| 3. "The Storyteller" by Jodi Picoult (Atria, \$28.99). A woman befriends an elderly man she meets in a grief support group and faces a moral dilemma when he asks her for an extraordinary favor. | — |
| 4. "A Week in Winter" by Maeve Binchy (Knopf, \$26.95). An unlikely group of characters spends a week in a renovated mansion on Ireland's west coast. | 2 |
| 5. "Gone Girl" by Gillian Flynn (Crown, \$25). Nick is the No. 1 suspect in his beautiful wife's disappearance, but could this golden boy really have killed his beloved? | 3 |
| 6. "A Story of God and All of Us" by Mark Burnett and Roma Downey (FaithWords, \$24.99). A dramatized account of events and characters from the Bible, based on the TV miniseries "The Bible." | — |
| 7. "Until the End of Time" by Danielle Steel (Delacorte, \$28). The intertwined stories of two couples, separated by almost 40 years | 4 |
| 8. "Guilt" by Jonathan Kellerman (Ballantine, \$28). In this latest entry in the Alex Delaware series, the psychologist joins a homicide detective in trying to solve a series of horrifying events in an upscale Los Angeles neighborhood. | 5 |
| 9. "Private Berlin" by James Patterson and Mark Sullivan (Little, Brown, \$27.99). Agent Chris Schneider mysteriously disappears, and it's up to his ex, agent Mattie Engel, to find him. | 6 |
| 10. "A Memory of Light" by Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson (Tor Books, \$34.99). The final book in Robert Jordan's popular fantasy series. | 7 |

HARDCOVER NONFICTION

- | | Last week |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. "Life Code" by Dr. Phil McGraw (Bird Street Books, \$26). Dr. Phil offers his insight on how to identify and avoid negative people. | 1 |
| 2. "Shred: The Revolutionary Diet" by Ian K. Smith, M.D. (St. Martin's, \$24.99). A six-week strategic dieting plan. | 2 |
| 3. "Killing Kennedy" by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard (Henry Holt, \$28). The authors revisit the details of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. | 4 |
| 4. "No Easy Day" by Mark Owen with Kevin Maurer (Penguin, \$26.95). A former Navy SEAL who was on the team that killed Osama bin Laden, writing under a pseudonym, recounts his version of the mission. | — |
| 5. "Sugar Salt Fat" by Michael Moss (Random House, \$28). The Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter argues that the rise of the processed food industry is linked to obesity. | — |
| 6. "I Declare" by Joel Osteen (FaithWords, \$21.99). The Texas pastor expounds on the Scriptures and their role in everyday life. | 8 |
| 7. "My Beloved World" by Sonia Sotomayor (Knopf, \$27.95). Justice Sotomayor's memoir of her early life and journey to the U.S. Supreme Court. | 9 |
| 8. "Slim for Life" by Jillian Michaels (Harmony, \$25). The "Biggest Loser" trainer shares what she has learned about diet, fitness and health. | 7 |
| 9. "The MELT Method" by Sue Hitzmann (HarperOne, \$25.99). Hitzmann's lifestyle plan to release stress and improve quality of life. | 5 |
| 10. "The Soundtrack of My Life" by Clive Davis (Simon & Schuster, \$30). Davis' memoir of his early life and his 40-plus years working in the music industry. | 3 |

For the week ended March 3, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide.

— Publishers Weekly

An emasculated man fights his way back

Joshua Mohr crafts an amusing look at a life going nowhere

By HECTOR TOBAR
Tribune Newspapers

The San Francisco writer Joshua Mohr's fourth novel, "Fight Song" is a book about that weak and blubbery American species known as Emasculated Man. The novel's protagonist is the symbolically named Bob Coffen. He's a designer of computer games who isn't quite dead — but whose manhood is definitely on life support.

As the novel opens, Bob is getting one of those corporate work trophies that are supposed to be a boss's thank-you for loyalty but end up making the underling who gets one feel pathetic. It's a "plock," a plaque with a clock that doesn't actually keep time.

Bob is carrying the useless, weighty plock in his backpack on the bike ride home through an unnamed suburb when he has the first of a series of encounters that turn his life around: He gets run off the road by a neighborhood bully.

Finally he realizes he's been enduring a life in which the people around him "mock Bob like it's nobody's business."

The new Bob resolves to throw common sense and pragmatism out the window because "What have these things brought him besides boredom, mediocrity?" A series of bizarre adventures follows, involving a sexy dispenser of "Mexican lasagna," the philosophizing members



'Fight Song'

By Joshua Mohr
Soft Skull Press, 272 pages, \$15.95 paperback

of a Kiss tribute band and a marriage-counselor-cum-sorcerer.

"Fight Song" is a novel that shares qualities with the conflicted dad whose story it tells. It's a work that's uneven and slapdash in parts and seemingly uncertain what it wants to be. But it manages to be funny and endearing in the end.

Mohr begins with obvious satirical intent and has a wonderful eye for the details of manly humiliation. Bob's wife has him riding a bike to work to lose weight, but when he gets to work he goes to the office bathroom and "wildly paper-towels away the pond of sweat from his crack."

But for every precise and cutting observation in "Fight Song" there is also a moment of broad and not especially deep humor. There's a "scourge of a mother-in-law" who's a predictably irritating foil. And when one of Bob's new friends commits a crime and makes him an

accomplice, Bob responds with the kind of joke about jail and sodomy you've heard a thousand times before.

Eventually, however, it becomes clear that satire might not be all that the book is after.

In his quest to win back the affections of his wife, Bob meets a janitor, Ace, who is also the guitarist in a Kiss tribute band. Ace doesn't have much, but he's in love with a beautiful woman. Ace is at once down-to-earth and articulate, and he charms Bob with his down-market earnestness.

"Dude ... this is an odd-ball world. Look around you, look outside, it's only getting weirder," Ace says. "I firmly believe that we should all boogie to our own beat ... Make a world that's going to make us happy. I'm making up mine."

Not many authors can shift from satire to sentiment so easily, but Mohr is a clever enough writer that he manages to pull this off.

His ear for comic dialogue rescues his scenes and lifts up his novel again and again.

As the plot in "Fight Song" becomes increasingly surreal, it gets funnier, and the emotional veins it taps into grow more real and textured. The novel becomes a kind of parable, a story of man searching for redemption.

"He has to fight," Coffen tells himself. "There's still time. But how?"

In "Fight Song" Mohr's answer to this question is clear. A real man fights back with a sense of humor and a sense of wonder.

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