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## Book bits

**A novel about the road to college, what troops are reading, three books about baseball, and readers' picks.**

### **Acceptance by Susan Coll**

For high school juniors, spring break is no time to be off plucking wild flowers in meadows. If they have any ambition at all, they should be touring groomed college campuses with their parents and fretting about the future. Some high schoolers fit neatly into this mold. Others simply do not.

In **Acceptance** Susan Coll teases out the extremes of the college admissions process in a satirical novel about three neighborhood kids who are either chasing after or running from this stage of growing up and leaving home.

There is Harry, known as "AP Harry" for his well-padded school transcript and encyclopedic knowledge of the SAT scores needed to be accepted into top-ranked schools. Across the street lives troubled, poetic Taylor Rockefeller whose primary concern about college is whether she'll have a private bathroom. And a few doors down is Maya Kaluantharana, the youngest daughter of a wealthy Indian family full of overachieving siblings. Maya shines on the swim team but her mediocre SAT scores have her parents wondering if she is "learning disabled."

All three kids, and their parents, coincidentally end up on the same tour of Yates, a small liberal arts college in upstate New York that is enjoying the benefits of being mistakenly included in U.S. News & World Report's list of top colleges.

The novel follows three rising seniors in their last year of high school, with all of their adolescent insecurities trimmed in modern themes: cellphones that buzz in class with the SAT question of the day, helicopter parents, and visits to the therapist. Readers also get an inside glimpse at the highly politicized world of academia through Olivia, an admissions officer whose pleated skirts don't exactly fit with Yates's Birkenstock set.

There is some delight in watching the parents of Taylor and Maya unravel as their daughters begin to assert themselves in alarming directions – Yates becomes Taylor's first choice and Maya drops out of swimming. Meanwhile Harry's mom, an overworked single parent, wonders how to encourage Harry to be a little less focused on early acceptance at Harvard and a little more focused on being a kid.

Coll neatly captures the irony and humor of an era in which colleges peddle to junior high kids and Saturdays are all about SAT prep. The novel stays Cliff Notes-light, however. Deeper character probes and an attempt to

reveal "what we can learn from this" might have allowed for a more thought-provoking ending to this entertaining story.

– Kendra Nordin

## Books online

When US troops stationed in Iraq have a moment of spare time, what do they do? Some of them, it seems, do some serious reading. Below are a handful of the titles that AbeBooks.com, an online book service, reports having sent to military or secured bases in Iraq.

**Introduction to Criminology** by Frank E. Hagan

**Terrorism, Asymmetric Warfare, and Weapons of Mass Destruction** by Anthony H. Cordesman

**And the Walls Came Tumbling Down** by Frank Fitzpatrick (1966 NCAA basketball title game)

**The Millionaire Next Door** by Stanley Thomas

**Writing Poetry** by Barbara Drake

**Old West Antiques and Collectables** by John Kolpec

**The Catcher in the Rye** by J.D. Salinger

**The New Father: A Dad's Guide to the First Year** by Armin A. Brott

**Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus** by John Gray

## Readers' picks

**The Places In Between** by Rory Stewart is the totally unromantic story of Stewart's walk across Afghanistan, from Herat to Kabul. He's either very courageous or very crazy, but I'm glad he did it, came through safe and sound, and let us go along on his journey.

– Charlotte Lindner, Solana Beach Calif.

I liked **In the Company of the Courtesan** by Sarah Dunant because it had a blind character (well, sort of) and I am blind. I also liked the lush setting of 16th-century Venice and the unique voice of the first-person narrator, a dwarf named Bucino.

– David Faucheux, Lafayette, La.

I am currently enjoying **Reflections from the Keyboard** by David Dubal. I play the piano and have taught my two young sons. So it's good to read how experts approach the piano. The book holds many pearls of wisdom.

– Majda Gilding, Weybridge, England

Who knew a book about a truck would be a good read? **Truck: A Love Story** by Michael Perry is not only about a deep attachment to a much-loved old rust bucket but also to the varied people who are an important part of Perry's rural life. This city-bred, hybrid-driving person thoroughly enjoyed this well-written book.

– Tere Ross, Costa Mesa, Calif.

I'm finishing Michael Lind's **Vietnam, The Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict**. The subtitle is the book's thesis. Lind's view is that the war was a "proxy war" fought in Vietnam but actually waged by China, the USSR, and America. Some or many of Lind's views are controversial, but he supplies telling examples.

– John Mason Glen, Elsay, Ill.

What are you reading? [Write in and tell us.](#)

### Three books about baseball

April 15, 2007 will mark 60 years to the day that Jackie Robinson donned a Brooklyn Dodgers uniform and shattered Major League Baseball's color barrier. In **Opening Day: The Story of Jackie Robinson's First Season**, sportswriter Jonathan Eig ("Luckiest Man") offers a detailed chronicle not only of Robinson and baseball history but of America itself during the season of 1947.

Are there any sports enthusiasts more enamored of statistics than baseball fans? Probably not, and that's why **The Baseball Economist** by J.C. Bradbury should find a natural readership. A professor of economics, Bradbury crunches numbers to help explain the sport he loves, and while his subtitle may be a bit of a stretch ("The Real Game Exposed"), avid fans will enjoy reading (and debating) his conclusions to questions such as which contemporary players are overvalued and how Babe Ruth would perform in today's game.

In a darker look at America's pastime, baseball Hall-of-Famer Dave Winfield writes: "The game I love is hurting." In **Dropping the Ball: Baseball's Troubles and How We Can and Must Solve Them**, Winfield explores possible solutions for some of the problems that dog the sport, including steroid use, contract disputes, player egos, and lack of diversity in baseball's front offices and fan base.

– Marjorie Kehe

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