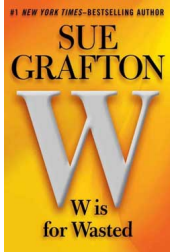


Book Briefs

Written by By TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
Thursday, 14 November 2013 14:47

Here are some brief reviews of recent reads.



It's time for Kinsey to retire

I've been a Kinsey Millhone fan since Sue Grafton introduced the spunky private investigator in 1982 in "A is for Alibi," but it's time to wind it up and let Kinsey enjoy retirement in Santa Teresa.

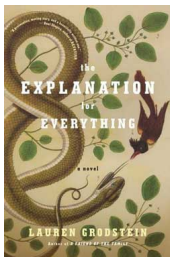
In "W is for Wasted," Kinsey's name is found on the body of a homeless man who died on the beach. The coroner asks Kinsey to identify the body.

Through a series of pretty incredible events, Kinsey learns she has ties to the dead man. And, that's when the trouble – for Kinsey and the book – begins. Another murder that could or could not be tied to the dead man serves to muddy the already murky plot.

Grafton's last few offerings have been weak, but in this one she asks the reader to jump the shark.

Even the presence of Henry Pitts, Kinsey's adorable 88-year-old landlord; his brother, William; and Rosie, the larger-than-life Hungarian bar owner, can't make this plot plausible. It's a bridge too far.

I'll read the next three titles because I want to see how Grafton wraps it up, but it really is time for Kinsey to go to the house.



An interesting look at age-old questions

Biology professor Andy Waite is on the tenure-track at a small college in New Jersey while raising two young girls alone after his wife dies in a horrific car crash.

He's also dealing with a neighbor lady who would like to be more than a friend.

Waite, a "hard core evolutionist," encounters Melissa Porter, an evangelical student who is determined to change Waite's mind about God.

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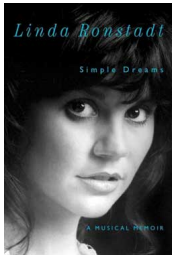
She asks him to be her advisor in an independent study in intelligent design.

“But you should know that I’m a Darwinian. I teach a class some people call *There Is No God*,” Waite tells the young woman.

But, she persists.

“Maybe there’s another explanation for life on earth,” she said. “A better one than just natural selection or whatever kind of crap that is.”

Over the course of “the Explanation for Everything” by Lauren Grodstein, Waite and Melissa must deal with issues larger than the subject of her research. In Goldstein’s capable hands, both sides of the creation v. evolution argument are fairly examined, minds are changed, lives are impacted and nothing is tied up in a neat ribbon – kinda like real life.



Ronstadt shares her musical journey

If you are a child of the 1960s or just a lover of music, Linda Ronstadt’s book, “Simple Dreams: A Musical Memoir,” offers up a wealth of great stories to enjoy.

Ronstadt, who grew up on a ranch in Arizona, was exposed to music from an early age, listening to opera, Mexican folk music and jazz.

She moved to California just as the folk-rock movement was beginning. She hung out at the Troubadour in West Hollywood, fronted a band called the Stone Ponys, had a relationship with J.D. Souther and hired a young backup band that became The Eagles.

After a string of hits that included, “Different Drum,” “You’re No Good” and “Blue Bayou,” Ronstadt stepped out of her comfort zone and sang the lead role in Gilbert and Sullivan’s “Pirates of Penzance.” She also was one of the first pop singers to record songs from the Great American Songbook. She partnered with Nelson Riddle for “What’s New” in 1983 and “Lush Life” in 1984, winning Grammys for Best Pop Vocal Performance for each.

Ronstadt is a natural-born storyteller with a rich, easy style. Hopefully, a personal memoir is on the horizon. This book was finished and at the publisher before she announced her ongoing battle with Parkinson’s, silencing one of the greatest singing voices of any generation.

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