



Sunday food, D4

Even in winter, rural cabins are a way to

LOG OFF

BY HEATHER BALOGH ROCHFORD
Special to The Washington Post

Winter may be coming, but pandemic-weary Americans still want to explore. The 2020 travel season had a rocky start, with virtually nonexistent bookings in March and April because of concerns and quarantines related to the novel coronavirus. But as travel bans lifted, Americans enthusiastically took to the roads this summer for outdoor-focused vacations away from urban centers, the better to social distance. Hosting giant Airbnb reported that rural hosts saw a 25 percent increase in bookings, amounting to more than \$200 million in June.

Shon't Savage, a public health program manager based in Seattle, is one of the many people who opted to flee the city with her family for a few quiet-yet-safe getaways.

"We need these breaks in the monotony," Savage says. "Part of the insanity of being home every day means we don't have the best work-life-personal boundaries anymore. These outings mean we can reconnect and recharge; a replenishment of sorts."

But as chillier temperatures move in and early signs of snow appear in the high country, cabin bookings are not showing any signs of slowing down. Dan DeBlasio, the family reservations manager for YMCA of the Rockies — Snow Mountain Ranch, located in Granby, Colo., notes that while the property cabins always sell out, he is observing a change in reservation patterns compared to previous years.

"Guests are tending to book last-minute cabin stays," DeBlasio says, indicating that folks are looking for opportunities to ditch the stir-crazy confinement at home.

As the pandemic forces people indoors this winter, cabin resorts are betting that business will continue to boom. While

SEE **CABINS** | D3



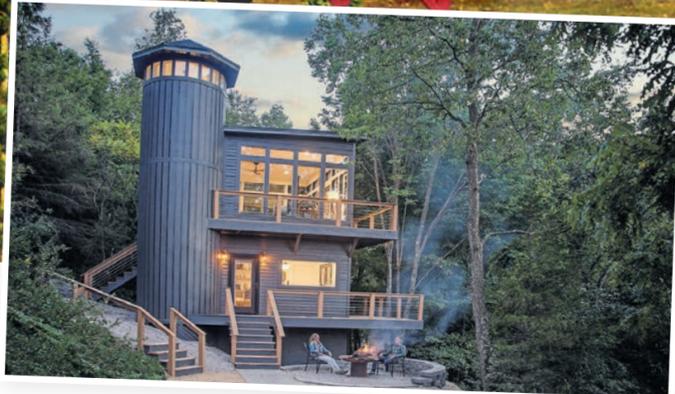
• There are 53 cabins available at **YMCA of the Rockies — Snow Mountain Ranch** in Granby, Colorado. For more information about the cabins pictured here, see **page D3**.

PHOTO BY YMCA OF THE ROCKIES VIA THE WASHINGTON POST



LOGAN MARKS VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

• The "MoonShadow" cabin at **Blue Moon Rising Cabins**.



PETER GODSHALL/CANDLEWOOD CABINS VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

• Exterior of the Woodland House at **Candlewood Cabins**.

ADVENTURES IN PARROTING

Play time with Simon can be quite the sight to see

Play time for my little green quaker parrot has been somewhat of a mystery to me — that is, until recently.

With remote work becoming the norm lately, I am home with Simon more than ever before. In many ways, I think this pandemic has been a boon to our parrot/human relationship, but I also wonder what happens when we come out the other side to whatever passes for normal.

Simon likely won't be able to spend hours head-butting me for scratches while I try to write.

Lunch breaks won't involve a sneaky little food thief who likes the noise empty seltzer water cans make when they hit hardwood.

As I am sure is true for the other pets of the world, Simon's day-to-day life seems enriched by pandemic shutdowns rather than diminished.

In normal times, when I would return home after a long day,



Carrie Sidener

Simon and I would eat dinner and settle into his chair to watch TV together. If the show is boring in a quaker's book, he'll run down to my lap to demand head scratches or occasional play peek-a-boo with a blanket.

Bring him into the office and he'll get into a pen-stealing war with a certain page designer, fussing at her with a noise that mimics an overzealous dog with a squeak toy.

But that is about all I have witnessed when it comes to playing. Toys move around in his condo of a cage, but I never

actually saw it happen.

That is, until a few weeks ago. A close friend and I shared a meal at my dining room table. Since not everyone is as accustomed to the begging and ultimate theft of food that comes with an unfettered parrot at dinner, Simon was tucked away in his cage — which also is in the dining room.

As we chatted and ate, Simon did his best impression of a baby bird begging for a worm.

After a while, though, he finally gave up on us and decided to entertain himself with the

foot toys strewn along the bottom of his cage (many happen to be repurposed dog and cat toys that are tiny enough that he can toss them around, yet nearly indestructible).

He poked around a rubbery ball with holes throughout for a while before launching into a full-scale attack, wings raised like he's a hawk swooping down from a tall tree branch to pounce upon some hapless field mouse.

Then he began that squeak-toy

SEE **PLAY** | D6



the year in books

By The Washington Post

If 2020 was a tidal wave that left us adrift in an ocean of uncertainty, books became our islands, providing safe harbor for our exhausted psyches.

In a year that made history in myriad, often tragic ways, our reading habits reflected our coping methods. As a deadly virus sent Americans into lockdown, novels about pandemics and isolation resurfaced on bestseller lists years after publication. It could be so much worse, realized those surveying the devastation of Emily St. John Mandel's "Station Eleven;" and Amor Towles's "A Gentleman in Moscow," about a man under house arrest, provided instruction for making the most of a homebound existence. As the country faced a racial reckoning, readers tried to make sense of inequality and find solutions to an insidious problem.

Their education? "How to Be an Antiracist," by Ibram X. Kendi and "So You Want to Talk About Race," by

Ijeoma Oluo, among other nonfiction. And a deeply divided electorate found validation in political books reflecting partisan worldviews. Of course, plenty of people opted for escape rather than confronting a dire reality, flocking to romance and science fiction, thrillers and more thrillers.

2020 may not have been bursting with bright spots, but at least there was this: Tremendous books kept coming. In honor of that remarkable abundance, we've put together a celebration of the books that helped us maintain our wits during trying times.

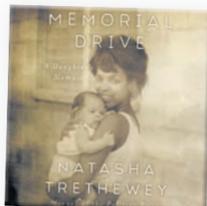
We've singled out several fiction and nonfiction titles worth reading. We also look back at the year's thrillers and mysteries, children's books, audio-books, science fiction and fantasy. And, because this was a year like no other, we explore the books that most uncannily conveyed our year's roller-coaster news cycle. Of course, the year isn't over yet. But here are hundreds of ways to make it a happy ending.

Best audio books of 2020

"Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir"

• By Natasha Trethewey

In this piercing investigation of memory, loss and love, former U.S. poet laureate Trethewey shares the story of her mother's murder by her second husband, a violent, manipulative sadist. Trethewey's narration is elegiac in remembering her mother — and steely as she reads the chilling transcripts of her mother's telephone conversations with her killer. This heartbreaking memoir will stay with listeners long after it ends. (HarperAudio, Unabridged, 5 1/4 hours)

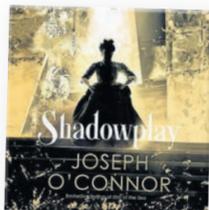


HARPERAUDIO VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

"Deacon King Kong"

• By James McBride

"Sportcoat" is a 71-year-old deacon who lives in a Brooklyn housing project in 1969. His drink of choice is King Kong, a concoction home-distilled by his friend, "Hot Sausage." This hilarious, moving novel is also charged with a current of understated anger. Written in the most glorious prose, its beat and buoyance is delivered by Dominic Hoffman, a master at capturing the rhythm of backchat and in rendering Brooklynese, Southern and Spanish speech. (Penguin Audio, Unabridged, 14 hours)



DREAMSCAPE MEDIA VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

"Shadowplay"

• By Joseph O'Connor

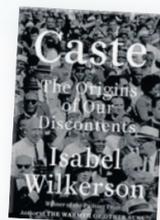
O'Connor's ingenious novel is based on the life of Bram Stoker, author of "Dracula," and his relationship with Henry Irving, renowned actor and impresario. Barry McGovern gives brilliant renditions of the Irishman Stoker and of Henry Irving, whose voice here is a thespian thunder. Anna Chancellor pipes up on occasion as the warm voice of Ellen Terry, Stoker's friend and Irving's leading lady. (Dreamscape, Unabridged, 11 2/3 hours)

— Katherine A. Powers, special to The Washington Post

5 top books of 2020

"Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents"

• By Isabel Wilkerson
• Random House
• Nonfiction



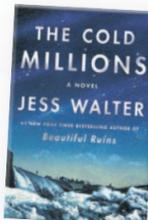
RANDOM HOUSE VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of "The Warmth of Other Suns" (2010) delivers a well-timed re-evaluation of American divisions. Wilkerson's thesis is that the country's current obsession with race is somewhat misplaced; there is a deeper and more intractable system that would more accurately be called American caste.

Released amid the nation's racial reckoning, the book immediately rocketed up bestseller lists with an assist from Oprah Winfrey, who called it her most important book club pick ever.

"The Cold Millions"

• By Jess Walter
• Harper
• Fiction



HARPER VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

Walter structures his book about two lovable, penniless brothers trying to make ends meet in Spokane, Washington, as a concoction of tales swirling around the violent repression of laborers in the early 20th century.

The result could have been an earnest historical novel about the brutal struggle for fair wages, but Walter has instead created a rip-roaring work of harrowing adventures and irresistible characters, including the real-life Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a pregnant 19-year-old who's also an indomitable union firebrand.

"Hamnet"

• By Maggie O'Farrell
• Knopf
• Fiction



KNOPF VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

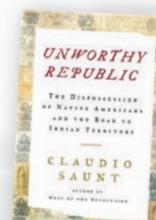
This richly drawn and intimate portrait of 16th-century English life is set against the

arrival of one devastating event: the loss of William Shakespeare's only son to the plague.

O'Farrell is not intimidated by the presence of the Bard's canon or the paucity of the historical record, and she makes no effort to lard her pages with intimations of his genius or cute allusions to his plays. Rather, she constructs a suspenseful and moving story about the way grief viciously recalibrates a marriage.

"Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory"

• By Claudio Saunt
• W. W. Norton
• Nonfiction



W.W. NORTON VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

A National Book Award finalist, Saunt's sweeping work candidly explores the horrors of Native American expulsion while illuminating the crucial role that Southern slaveholders — eyeing native lands to take over for themselves — played in shaping early 19th-century policy.

This alone would make for an important study, but Saunt also manages to do something truly rare: Destroy the illusion that history's course is inevitable and recover the reality of the multiple possibilities that confronted contemporaries. Things could have been otherwise.

"Vesper Flights"

• By Helen Macdonald
• Grove
• Nonfiction



GROVE VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

"So many of our stories about nature are about testing ourselves against it, setting ourselves against it, defining our humanity against it," Macdonald writes in "Vesper Flights." In the 41 essays that make up this collection, the naturalist and author of "H Is for Hawk" seeks to tell another type of nature story, one that asks readers to see the natural world as something other than a reflection of themselves. Doing so, she believes, may just help us save it.

—The Washington Post

Best thrillers of 2020

"City of Margins"

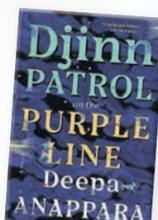
• By William Boyle

In his fifth novel, Boyle again captures the Brooklyn neighborhood where he grew up. He knows the music of the Italian American voices, from punk to bar stool to operatic. Mob goons, college dropouts, melancholy widows and pink-haired rockers mix it up in this deliciously convoluted tale that reads like a fresh new season of "The Sopranos."

"Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line"

• By Deepa Anappara

Set in a sprawling slum in an unnamed city in India, "Djinn Patrol" follows 9-year-old Jai and a group of



RANDOM HOUSE VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

friends as they investigate the murder of a classmate.

Despite the tragic events that unfold, Jai's voice retains a stubborn lightness, a will to believe in the possibility of deliverance in this fallen world.

"Long Bright River"

• By Liz Moore

"Long Bright River" is both a suspense tale and a family saga that explores the relationship between two sisters — one a cop, the other an opioid addict — who live in Philadelphia. This sweeping story twists, turns and subverts readers' expectations, while also growing into something else: an elegiac novel about a blighted city.

"The Searcher"

• By Tana French

The title of French's latest stand-alone crime novel is a nod to the John Ford-vexed masterpiece, "The Searchers," and like that book, it is essentially a Western. A lone man, an outsider — in this case a retired Chicago cop — is drawn into an obsessive quest to find a young person who has disappeared in a small Irish mountain town. This hushed suspense tale about thwarted dreams of escape may be French's best yet.



VIKING VIA THE WASHINGTON POST

—Maureen Corrigan, special to The Washington Post

Bestsellers

HARDCOVER FICTION

1. "Ready Player Two" by Ernest Cline (Ballantine)
2. "A Time for Mercy" by John Grisham (Doubleday)
3. "Deadly Cross" by James Patterson (Little, Brown)
4. "The Return" by Nicholas Sparks (Grand Central)
5. "The Vanishing Half" by Brit Bennett (Riverhead)
6. "Daylight" by David Baldacci (Grand Central)
7. "The Awakening" by Nora Roberts (St. Martin's)
8. "The Sentinel" by Child/Child (Delacorte)

HARDCOVER NONFICTION

1. "A Promised Land" by Barack Obama (Crown)
2. "Greenlights" by Matthew McConaughey (Crown)
3. "Bag Man" by Maddow/Yarvitz (Crown)
4. "Modern Comfort Food" by Ina Garten (Clarkson Potter)
5. "The Last Days of John Lennon" by James Patterson (Little, Brown)
6. "Guinness World Records 2021" (Guinness World Records)
7. "Caste" by Isabel Wilkerson (Random House)
8. "Modern Warriors" by Pete Hegseth (Broadside)

MASS MARKET PAPERBACKS

1. "Moral Compass" by Danielle Steel (Dell)
2. "Texas Kill of the Mountain Man" by William W. Johnstone (Pinnacle)

3. "Unsolved" by Patterson/Ellis (Grand Central)
4. "The River Murders" by Patterson/Born (Grand Central)
5. "A Christmas Message" by Debbie Macomber (Mira)
6. "The Morning After" by Lisa Jackson (Zebra)
7. "The Shotgun Wedding" by William W. Johnstone (Pinnacle)
8. "Wyoming True" by Diana Palmer (HQN)

TRADE PAPERBACKS

1. "Interesting Stories for Curious People" by Bill O'Neill (LAK)
2. "Home Body" by Rupi Kaur (Andrews McMeel)
3. "The MeatEater Guide to Wilderness Skills and Survival" by Steven Rinella (Random House)
4. "Air Fryer Cookbook" by Jenson William (Jenson William)
5. "Burn After Writing (pink)" by Sharon Jones (TarcherPerigee)
6. "The Step-by-Step Instant Pot Cookbook" by Jeffrey Eisner (Voracious)
7. "Layla" by Colleen Hoover (Montlake)
8. "A Promised Land" by Barack Obama (Random House Large Print)

Source: Publishers Weekly

THE MAKING OF ELITE ATHLETES

Book dissects what makes them great — from nature and nurture to 'lucky breaks'

BY LIZ ROBBINS • SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON POST

When Brandi Chastain scored the winning penalty kick in the 1999 Women's World Cup and ripped off her jersey to celebrate victory for the United States, she sent a thunderous thrill through the Rose Bowl crowd and inspired generations of athletes to come. I was fortunate to witness such unbridled moments of triumph, superhuman feats from once-in-a-generation athletes like Roger Federer and LeBron James, in my years as a sportswriter. Journalists, fans and fellow athletes alike cannot help but marvel at greatness as something often intangible. Now a new book breaks down the championship process, from birth to retirement, and the practice hours in between, making it at least relatable. In "The Best: How Elite Athletes Are Made," British sports scientist Mark Williams and sportswriter Tim Wigmore offer an engrossing guidebook for youth athletes, parents, coaches and perhaps even fantasy-league fans looking for a little insight.

"We do not claim there is a simple template to becoming the best, or even maximizing your chances of becoming the best you can be — sport, like life, is altogether more complicated."

— From the prologue

It should not be taken as a bible. Sports do involve variables — a lucky bounce here, a freak break there. How athletes react to such changes, the authors argue, is a measure of their training and their will.

"We do not claim there is a simple template to becoming the best, or even maximizing your chances of becoming the best you can be — sport, like life, is altogether more complicated," they write in the prologue. "Leading athletes benefit from a complex, and interrelated, mixture of nature and nurture."

For readers used to literary sports narratives in the vein of John McPhee or David Halberstam, this is a much more academic enterprise. At times, the work is reminiscent of Malcom Gladwell's "Outliers: The Story of Success," which it references.

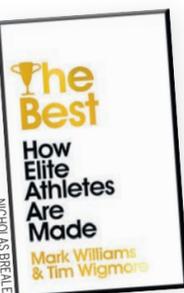
The strength of "The Best" is in its synthesis of hundreds of sports science journals, which Williams and Wigmore condense into clear sections amplified by original interviews with stars such as Steph Curry, Annika Sorenstam and Pete Sampras. The book covers sports as diverse as the National Football League and Norwegian cross-country skiing, soccer's Premier League and England women's field hockey. Even the underhanded free throw shooter Rick Barry gets a couple of pages.

Easy to follow, the chapters are divided into three sections, starting at the beginning: who becomes a champion based in part on siblings, birth date and community support.

"Part Two: Inside the Minds of Champions" is the meat of the material, showing the training and mental makeup athletes need under pressure. The best athletes have intense focus, but where they direct that focus is illuminating.

Joan Vickers, a scientist at the University of Calgary, introduced the concept of the "quiet eye," when in the final milliseconds of preparation for a shot, athletes fixate on one target — like the rim of a basket or the upper corner of the goal. The longer the duration of the "quiet eye," the more successful the outcome.

The tips range from useful to delightful in chapters like "The art of the con" (not a political reference) and "How to hit a ball in 0.5 seconds," which shows how athletes study their opponents' tics that might provide clues in returning a serve in tennis or hitting a ball in baseball or cricket. The Zen master Andre Agassi solved Boris



» **The Best: How Elite Athletes Are Made**

• By Mark Williams and Tim Wigmore
• Nicholas Brealey.
353 pp. \$24.95



SEE **ATHLETES** | D3

Roger Federer (left) and LeBron James (far left) have remained elite in sports as they have grown older.

ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTOS

REVIEW

'Blind Vigil' is tense, fast-paced and hardboiled

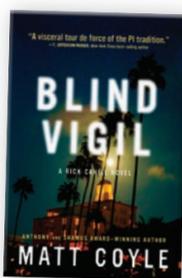
BY BRUCE DESILVA
The Associated Press

It seems unlikely that a sightless private detective could be of much use, but in "Blind Vigil," the seventh book in Matt Coyle's series featuring San Diego gumshoe Rick Cahill, the protagonist is determined to prove the doubters wrong.

Blinded by a gunshot in "Lost Tomorrows" (2019), Rick's nine-month-long recuperation is interrupted when his on-again, off-again partner, Moria MacFarlane, asks for his

help. Rick's pal Turk Muldoon thinks his girlfriend, Shay, might be cheating and want's her followed, but Moria is reluctant to take the case. The last time she exposed a cheating woman, the jealous husband killed her. Would Turk be capable of something like that? Moria needs Rick's help in assessing his state of mind.

After talking things over with Turk, Rick assures Moria that his friend would never hurt Shay, so Moria accepts the assignment.



» **"Blind Vigil"**
• By Matt Coyle
• Ocean View Publishing

And just like that, Shay is strangled to death in her bed, Turk is arrested, and the evidence against him looks solid.

Moria, consumed with guilt and furious at both Turk and Rick, is convinced that Turk is guilty. Rick isn't and, white cane in hand, ventures into the world to hunt down the real killer.

Coyle does a fine job of portraying Rick's adjustment to his blindness — the way he uses his heightened senses of sound and smell to find his way around and sense danger. Gradually, as he pursues his lonely investigation, his eyes begin to perceive bright lights, giving him hope that his sight may

eventually return. Soon, he uncovers enough reasonable doubt about Turk's guilt to draw Maria back into the case.

Rick — stubborn, loyal, and suspicious of authority — is an intriguing character with six previous books worth of backstory. Coyle drops enough hints about the past to avoid confusing new readers, although they also will be keenly aware that they have missed a lot.

The result is a tense, fast-paced, hardboiled mystery told in a clear, unadorned style.