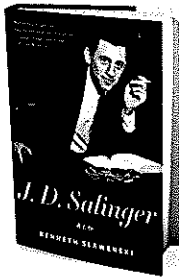


RECLUSE REVEALED

Some long-awaited truths about one of our most secretive and beloved writers.



WHEN J.D. SALINGER DIED in January 2010, readers wondered whether, after 45 years, the author's silence would finally be broken. Did he leave behind a novel that approached the perfection of *The Catcher in the Rye*? Kenneth Slawenski's exhaustively researched, affectionate biography, **J.D. SALINGER: A LIFE** (Random House), should partially satisfy curiosity about the writer, although it finds neither bombshell nor master-

piece. Instead, drawing on never-before-published letters, fiction, and photographs, Slawenski, creator of the authoritative Web site *deadcaulfields.com*, weaves literary criticism with the author's personal history. Describing Salinger's privileged childhood, Slawenski includes plenty of what Holden Caulfield would have derided as "David Copperfield kind of crap." But Slawenski sheds light on Salinger's romances, including the one with the much-younger writer Joyce Maynard. He also chronicles the author's misbegotten relationship with Eugene O'Neill's teenage daughter, Oona, and how he reconciled their breakup (she left him to marry Charlie Chaplin) in his fiction. Another enlightening section reconstructs Salinger's service in World War II—he wrote while fighting on the front line—and his brief encounter with Ernest Hemingway. While Slawenski races through Salinger's final decades, his definitive biography argues that it's fiction, even more than fact, that reveals the most about a generation's patron saint of alienation. —MICHAEL SOLOMON



BEWITCHED, BOTHERED, AND BEDEVILED

She's a Yale history professor who's uncovered a mysterious ancient text in Oxford's Bodleian Library; he's a geneticist with a lab nearby. She's also a New England witch; he's a 1,500-year-old vampire. This intriguing pair are the lovers at the center of *A Discovery of Witches* (Viking), the romantic, erudite, and suspenseful first novel by Deborah Harkness. The first in a planned trilogy, it sets up blood drinkers and spell weavers as enemies for eternity in a feud as old as the Crusades; the duo confront social disapproval and intolerance as they elude evildoers and puzzle out enigmas throughout history.

A professor at the University of Southern California (and an award-winning wine critic), Harkness attends to every scholarly and emotional detail with whimsy, sensuality, and humor.

—CELIA MCGEE

Desperate Housewives

Fort Hood, Texas, is the largest military installation in the free world—340 square miles, as Siobhan Fallon notes in her fascinating **YOU KNOW WHEN THE MEN ARE GONE** (Amy Einhorn/Putnam). Fort Hood also functions as a small town; everyone in these eight interconnected tales knows everyone else's business—or tries to. Neighbors read ordinary objects like tea leaves: Contents of a shopping cart may foretell child neglect, an unclaimed pickup truck portends marital



discord, a freshly mown lawn whispers of cancer. Mostly, though, the women wait

FALLON near her home in California, 2010.

for their husbands to come home and provide an intimacy that never arrives. Fallon, the wife of an officer, writes with understatement about the divide between those who go and those who stay: "Then, in the dark, he almost told her about Sergeant Schaeffer, how his body had pinned Kit down, his arms outstretched over him like some Old Testament angel. How he could smell Schaeffer burning and he thought it was his own flesh." Whether or not characters agree to the unwritten pact of secrecy between soldier and civilian, war marks them as surely as medals on a uniform.

—BETHANNE PATRICK