

# bookmarks

LIFE IS SHORT.

**READ GOOD BOOKS.**

## NEW BOOKS GUIDE

We summarize the latest book reviews and ratings from over 50 newspapers and magazines. The result is a one-stop at-a-glance round-up of which new books received the highest praise, which received mixed reviews, and why.

**"The signature feature that could put *Bookmarks* over the top."**

David Kipen, *San Francisco Chronicle*

**"You have hit the mark on what real readers crave in a literary magazine!"**

Alison Shurtliff, a reader from Benicia, CA

**literary** FICTION

**Life of Pi** ★★★★★  
By Yann Martel

The son of an Indian zookeeper, Pi Patel is a teenager who simultaneously practices Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, having taken to heart Gandhi's word that "all religions are true." The first third of the book explores his life and philosophies; the remainder tests them. Forced by political conditions to leave the country, the family departs India for the safer shores of Canada with several of their animals. When their cargo ship sinks, the boy finds himself aboard a 26-foot lifeboat with a hyena, an orangutan, a zebra, and a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. Soon, only Pi and the tiger remain. Pi's struggle to survive becomes an epic adventure as he sails the seas in search of land, life, and understanding. Harcourt, 336 pages, \$25.

**CRITICAL INSIGHT**

NY Times Book Review ★★★★★  
"Although the book reverberates with echoes from sources as disparate as Robinson Crusoe and Aesop's fables, Robbins' own foray into Ernest Hemingway's own foray into existentialist parable. *The Old Man and the Sea*." GARY KRIST

San Francisco Chronicle ★★★★★  
"It's a real adventure: brutal, tender, expressive, dramatic, and disarming. The sort of novel one might share with one's children (of appropriate age), confident in its power to nudge them toward becoming properly curious lovers of books and life." JONATHAN KIEFER

Seattle Times ★★★★★  
"Each chapter is a well-polished pearl... For all survivalists, escapists and thinkers alike, losing yourself in this novel is virtually guaranteed." DAVID FLOOD

Spectator ★★★★★  
"A book of sometimes perplexing, often disconcerting but always remarkable originality.... Apart from its intensely vivid descriptions of Pi's incidental treasures of thought and style." FRANCIS KING

Los Angeles Times ★★★★★  
"Life of Pi is the literary version of a large, friendly dog: hardly has it committed some mild offense when it rebounds with such enthusiasm, impishness and charm that one promptly forgives it." FRANÇOIS LIN

**Big If** ★★★★★  
By Mark Costello

Political intrigue meets everyday human life in this second novel by Mark Costello. Costello, a former prosecutor and now a law professor, initially kept his writing career a secret by releasing his debut novel, *Bag Men*, under the pseudonym John Foster Wallace. Fans of David Foster Wallace may recognize Costello's name from the book the two co-authored, *Signifying Rappers*.

Big If follows a team of Secret Service agents protecting the nameless, most-oftenly faceless vice president who is now running for the presidency. Each of the agents has his or her own personal issues to deal with—infidelity, a tormented brother, and raising a teenage son—which put pressure on the very immediate demands of protecting the VP.

W.W. Norton, 325 pages, \$24.95.

**BOOKMARKS RATINGS**

- ★★★★★ CLASSIC  
One of the best of its kind.
- ★★★★ EXCELLENT  
A recommended book for all readers.
- ★★★ GOOD  
Enjoyable, particularly for fans of the genre.
- ★★ FAIR  
Some problems, approach with caution.
- ★ POOR  
Not worth your time.

## CLASSIC AUTHORS

IN BOOK-BY BOOK PROFILES

Our author profiles focus on the books themselves, providing a complete overview of an author's body of work as well as a detailed discussion of individual classics.



## READER RECOMMENDATIONS

Each issue contains lists of meaningful works and personal favorites submitted by our readers. In addition to the many "Top Ten" lists we receive, themes have ranged from "Art & History for Children" to "Tough Guy Authors."

# bookmarks facts

## ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

- **IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BOOKS.** *Bookmarks* magazine was created for readers as a guide to the best in books—from the latest releases to time-honored classics. Each issue contains our “New Books Guide,” “Book-by-Book” profiles of classic authors, and reading recommendations from authors, booksellers, and readers.
- **A BEST NEW MAGAZINE OF 2002.** *Library Journal* recently included *Bookmarks* in its list of the ten best new magazines launched in the last year.
- **TERRIBLE TWOS.** Our first newsstand issue was dated Nov/Dec 2002 – We are nearing our second anniversary.

## A UNIQUE APPROACH

- **SUMMARIZING MAJOR BOOK REVIEWS.** Our “New Books Guide” is created by summarizing book reviews that have appeared in major newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet. We compile several hundred reviews for each issue and then apply a rating to each book. To help readers prioritize their selections, we calculate a final “consensus” rating for each book, based on a 5-star system.

### **WHY DO THIS?**

- Most readers are simultaneously overwhelmed and under-informed. Even the most dedicated reader can be overwhelmed by the number of books available. Advice, word-of-mouth, and individual reviews can be difficult to remember or reconcile, do not provide complete coverage, and can be unreliable.
  - Individual reviews don't tell the whole story. With *Bookmarks*, serious readers can assess reviews beyond their own newspaper or magazine subscriptions and can account for the subjectivity of any single reviewer.
  - Book groups and everyday readers crave insight in a simple, at-a-glance format. Book groups appreciate our insight into individual books and our help in streamlining those prolonged “What should we read next?” discussions. Casual readers welcome our bottom line approach; our system makes them more confident about their choices.
- **NOT JUST THE NEW.** *Bookmarks* also focuses on classic works and reader recommendations. Books are timeless—so is our coverage.

## ABOUT DISTRIBUTION

- **AT A STORE NEAR YOU.** In addition to independent bookstores, readers can find us at national chains such as Borders, Books A Million, and Barnes & Noble.
- **AND A MAILBOX TOO.** Subscriptions are available at the introductory price of \$24.95 per year. *Bookmarks* is published bi-monthly (six times per year). Visit [www.bookmarksmagazine.com](http://www.bookmarksmagazine.com)!

## ABOUT US

- **IXNAY ON THE OTCOMDAY.** *Bookmarks* is published by Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. The magazine is our first publication. Jon Phillips and Allison Nelson met at Harvard Business School. After toiling night and day in the software and technology industries, they decided to do something much more interesting. The toiling continues.

Box 27, Sagaponack, NY 11962, September 11, 2003

Dear BOOKMARKS --

I thank you for your Sept/Oct 2003 issue, in which you are the first publication to summarize my career as a writer. About to turn eighty-one, I was resigned to going to my grave without anybody's having done that. You have given me the most precious gift any American can ever wish for, which is, and this is a word so full of magic in television newscasts, "closure."

Can I go home now?

But seriously: You are so new that I had never heard of you before, and I am beguiled by your physical beauty, and I am moved by how head-over-heels in love with books you are. And nowhere else have I found such thoughtful and literate reportage on the state of the American soul, as that soul makes itself known in the books we write.

News of the hour indeed!

Cheers!





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## Easy Reader

May 1, 2004 12:00 PM  
Marina Krakovsky



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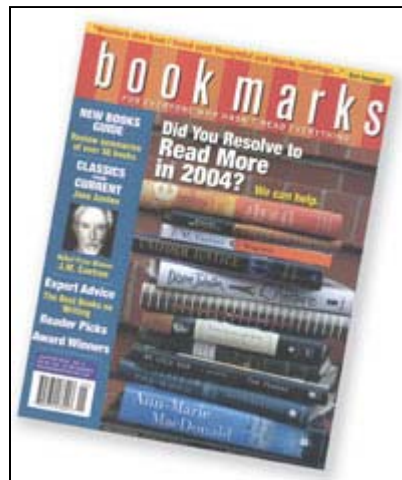
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**Name a fast-growing pastime of the educated and affluent that could support a new magazine.** Pilates? Gardening? How about book clubs? Since 1994, the number of book groups has jumped from between 400,000 and 500,000 to well over 750,000, says Rachel Jacobsohn, president of the Chicago-based Association of Book Group Readers and Leaders (ABGRL).

Those groups, from men's groups to mother-daughter groups, have become a staple of modern life. They may be truly serious about literature or perhaps it's just an excuse to socialize, but book groups share a need for reliable tips on what to read and discuss next. That's where *Bookmarks*, a bimonthly started by two novice publishers, is carving its niche. Publisher Allison Nelson says that reading groups are such a key part of her magazine's circulation that each issue now profiles a different book group.

Nelson started *Bookmarks* in the summer of 2002 with Jon Phillips, a friend from Harvard Business School. Both had been Silicon Valley executives who were looking for meaningful work they could do from home. They pooled \$50,000 and hit the books.

### UNFULFILLED NEED



Why *Bookmarks*? Because there's nothing more profitable than a literary magazine, quips Phillips. The serious answer, according to Nelson, is that they identified an unfilled market for easy-to-digest information about the overwhelming choices facing book buyers. The pair, both 35, say that friends and focus groups confirmed their hunch: People just didn't know what books to read, book groups were growing and individual recommendations provided hit-or-miss results.

Their solution: summarize and aggregate book reviews from sources such as *The Atlantic* and *The New York Times*. The editorial includes snippets from reviews and



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**- About Us**

a one- to five-star rating system.

While most of the reviews come from other sources, *Bookmarks* has a budget for freelance writers who summarize the reviews and write the original content. It's not too highbrow, says Bill Jourdan, the newsstand buyer for the Borders Group. But, it has caught on with customers. We think of it as the core of our book review titles now, he says, adding that *Bookmarks* tends to outsell *Pages*, a competitor that includes reviews, profiles, genre fiction and book publishing trends. *Bookmarks* also sells through Barnes & Noble stores, Canada's Chapters chain and many independent bookstores.

The magazine, which launched ad-free, now boasts a rate base of 20,000 and is taking advertising from a handful of publishers and independent bookstores. The quoted rate is \$1,300 for a full-page ad. A listing in a directory spread featuring books by self-published authors runs \$175 for a slot that's about one-ninth of a page. Still, ads, including those for *Bookmarks*' products (such as gift subscriptions, T-shirts and tote bags), make up only four to five pages of a typical 72-page issue.

The unaudited magazine is flying below the radar of most ad buyers. So, for now, the owners have focused on boosting circulation. To make the \$24.95 yearly subscription price more attractive, they upped the sticker price from \$4.95 to \$5.95, and ask readers in house ads to subscribe and spread the word. Nelson and Phillips, who serves as the editor, run *Bookmarks* out of their homes and fulfill back-issue requests from Phillips' garage. Nelson says they broke even last summer and have stayed in the black ever since.

## GRASS-ROOTS GROUPS

Perhaps the best thing that has happened to the startup has been the demise of *Book*, the glossy bimonthly that Barnes & Nobles funded and discontinued last fall. Ever since, Nelson says, *Bookmarks* has seen a large spike in subscription inquiries and single-copy sales.

Now the founders are working on ways to leverage the reading-group phenomenon, but they remain elusive marketing targets. There are no comprehensive lists. Jacobsohn of the ABGRL acknowledges that her estimates are little more than professional guesstimates. "Because this is a grass-roots effort, there are no specifics and demographics available," she says. To reach more readers, *Bookmarks* owners are planning a direct-marketing campaign and Barnes & Noble end-cap displays. They recently signed a deal with Amazon to provide the online bookseller with critical summaries of the books in each issue's "New Books Guide."

But all that is just a start. To capitalize on customer loyalty, *Bookmarks* will branch out into higher-margin products such as greeting cards and nonfiction books. "Five years from now, if we're still *just* publishing this magazine", says Nelson, "I think we'll feel as if we've failed."

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## entertainment guide

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## Magazines

The Arizona Republic  
Mar. 7, 2004 12:00 AM

### 'bookmarks'

This bimonthly magazine for readers offers a sweeping view of the world of books. The New Books Guide in this issue looks at more than 50 books, succinctly reviewing and rating them. Two works, Robert Harris' historical novel *Pompeii* and Nathan Philbrick's real-life adventure story *Sea of Glory*, receive special attention. Both reviews are supplemented with numerous comments from newspapers and magazines and nicely presented lists of additional reading. The remainder of the guide is divided into the categories of arts, science, history, biography, general non-fiction, science fiction, crime, and literature. Another section looks at the work of two modern masters of the novel: William Faulkner and Doris Lessing. You'll find brief but informative biographies and book-by-book rundowns of their major works. There's also a section on 2003 cookbooks and a readers' picks section. *bookmarks* is a must for those trying to navigate the ever-expanding sea of reading.



### 'Jane'

An interview with actress Meg Ryan is the cover story of this flashy fashion and lifestyle magazine aimed at young women. Hailed as America's sweetheart, Ryan, 42, proves a tough nut to crack for reporter Claudine Ko, deflecting questions about rumors that she has had plastic surgery: "It's a sort of like a tabloid question," she says. "And I feel like when you comment on it at all, it perpetuates that thing that's out there in the world." Although best known for her roles in romantic comedies, including *Harry Met Sally . . .* and *Sleepless in Seattle*, Ryan says they account for only eight of her 30 films and that she objects to the message they put across: "The romantic mythology is that there is such a thing as happily ever after . . . and that you'll find a guy who's gonna give that to you. We don't question the mythology, and I think it's a flawed one." Another piece looks at the seeming indifference to the brutal killings of two Native American women - yes, *Jane* occasionally runs weightier articles, too.

### 'Cricket'

*Cricket* offers short stories, poems and articles for kids by some of the world's best children's authors, with most of the pieces accompanied by nice illustrations. In this issue you'll find the poems *Blue Bird in Spring*, *Shopping Song* and *Envisioning Buffalo* ("When I see an earth curve worn into the range, / I like to think it's a wallow where some buffalo has lain / rubbing off his itchy robe, rolling in the lovely dust.") The short story *A Birthday Suit for Jeremy* tells about some mysterious elfin visitors. Non-fiction pieces include

### arts

- Looking for tickets? Buy, sell online
- Rep's Best 2003

# Best New Magazines of 2002

By Michael Colford

**D**ESPITE A DIFFICULT ECONOMY that has sliced into advertising sales, we still saw an increase in new magazine launches last year. According to Mr. Magazine himself, University of Mississippi professor Samir Husni, 745 new magazines hit the stands in 2002 compared with 702 in 2001.

Predictably, within 12 months, more than half of these titles will fail to reach their first anniversary owing to economic stress and a highly competitive market. These days, the key to success would seem to lie with publishing specialty titles to fit ever-narrowing niches, such as those defined by *Life Imitating Art*, *Topic*, and *eDesign*.

On the other end of the spectrum are the high-profile, general reader publications such as *O* and *Martha Stewart Living*, centered around an already established celebrity looking to expand his or her franchise. With built-in fan bases, these magazines have high readership potential, but whether the trade-off for a sure thing is questionable product quality lies with each publication.

The industry remembers all too well the dangers of mixing the wrong product with the wrong celebrity. With 2002's *Rosie*, Grunner + Jahr disagreed with O'Donnell on not only who should have creative control but on what exactly *Rosie* the franchise stood for. While the jury is still out on that,

Michael Colford, Assistant Director, Saugus Public Library, MA, writes *LJ*'s Magazines column

*Rosie* folded late last year.

The newest famous face to try his luck is Gene Simmons, bass player for the legendary band Kiss, entering the market with *Gene Simmons Tongue*. Ostensibly geared toward the revved-up sex drive and hard rockin' attitude of twentysomething males, *Tongue* takes its cue from *Maxim*, providing music and entertainment news with the obligatory scantily clad models. Unfortunately, it appears to be simply an ego-trip for Simmons, who writes, "We may not in fact have very much profound content. We will certainly not pretend we do.... The magazine will, however, be an extension of my personality." If the 2002 *Rosie* debacle is any indicator of the success of these types of projects, the future does not look appetizing for *Tongue*.

Celebrity is certainly not synonymous with longevity, and present anonymity does not eliminate the possibility of being the next big thing. It seems that in this economy, the pressure of the market is forcing weaker competitors to fold. And what is the deciding factor? For once, it seems it all depends on quality.

## BOOKMARKS

bi-m. \$29.70. Ed: Jon Phillips, 775 E. Blithedale Ave., #393, Mill Valley, CA 94941-9929.

[www.bookmarksmagazine.com](http://www.bookmarksmagazine.com)

For those looking for their next read but not wanting to wade through lengthy book re-



views, *Bookmarks* should be a primary reference. Similar in purpose to last year's notable launch *The Week*, *Bookmarks* is something of a clearinghouse for information from primary sources. Writings from *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Boston*

*Globe*, and *Entertainment Weekly* are compiled into evaluations that are direct and to the point; in fact, a five-star rating system is a streamlined alternative for readers who want a bare-bones analysis. While the magazine also includes a feature article or two (the most recent issue takes a look at Virginia Woolf), the reviews ranging from fiction and biography to history and science are the meat of *Bookmarks*.

## BUDGET LIVING

bi-m. \$19.95. Ed: Sarah Gray Miller. 317 Madison Ave., Suite 2300, New York, NY 10017; ISSN 1541-3675.

[www.budgetlivingmedia.com/](http://www.budgetlivingmedia.com/)

With articles on fashion, home design, finance, travel, entertaining, and crafts, *Budget Living* marries a hip sensibility with the DIY creativity and money-conscious attitude of the modern



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## Books invade the magazine stand

By [Doug Rieder](#)  
doug.rieder@timesnews.com

This changed dramatically with Book magazine's September-October 2001 issue. On the cover was a life-sized portrait photo of author Sebastian Junger ("The Perfect Storm"), and inside was a letter from editor Jerome Kramer welcoming us to its radical redesign.

"All in all, the magazine is cleaner and more contemporary than the previous model," Kramer wrote.

One quick glance at its strong color photography and slick, professional illustrations told you this was no longer your father's magazine.

And why shouldn't Book be brought kicking and screaming into the new millennium? Magazine lovers expect no less than bold photographs (usually of naked people) and professional illustrations (usually of naked people). (And as long as we're speaking in parentheses, why doesn't Rolling Stone get it over with and print nothing but pictures of naked women? They seem to have a lot more commitment to *them* these days than music.)

The new issue of Book — November-December 2002 — features stories about the ubiquitous Donna Tartt ("The Little Friend"), Dave Barry ("Tricky Business"), Michael Connelly ("Chasing the Dime"), John McCain ("Worth the Fighting For") and José Saramago ("The Cave").

Tartt's cover photo isn't as humongous as Junger's was, but the format of the redesigned magazine remains the same: Short, easily digestible tidbits in the front (In the Margins, Biography, Crimetime, Group Dynamics, For Young Readers); feature stories in the middle, mostly on authors but a good one this month, if somewhat premature, on "The Best of 2002"; and book reviews in the back.

In all, the magazine reviews 40 to 50 books an issue, including poetry selections and audio books. About seven of them are given full-length treatment by the magazine's 14-person reviewer staff, which includes Sven Birkets and Terry Teachout. And all books are alphabetically listed in a helpful index.

Pages is bigger than Book, both physically and by page count (112 to 92 this month). There's tons of front-of-the-book material and loads of author profiles, but it's not as well-edited and designed as Book.

In addition, there's a certain *rah-rahness* to Pages — magnified by the lack of reviews — that makes it seem more partial to publishers than readers. Not every author and book can be as interesting as they're profiled here.



## Featured Sponsors

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Education

If Pages disappoints, Bookmarks — "for everyone who hasn't read everything" — should help balance the scale. In an age where magazines are nothing if not superficial, Bookmarks is thorough with a capital "T." This month's issue has only two feature stories — on Charles Dickens and Carol Shields — but it devotes six pages to each of them.

And if you like to read book reviews, you've come to the right mag. Here, you get opening remarks, followed by critical themes, critical insight and a critical summary of the critical insights. Which all sounds critically critical.

Critical insights are actually one-paragraph signed excerpts from book reviews in the New York Times, Boston Globe, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Entertainment Weekly, Esquire, Salon.com and other places. Each of them is rated by Bookmarks on a five-star scale, and then they're all boiled down into a "final rating." Sounds portentous, doesn't it? Like "final resting place."

In its November-December 2002 premiere issue, Bookmarks rated, reviewed, and excerpted reviews of 60 books. It also provides a handy list of its favorites from the issue — "12 Books to Start Reading NOW!"

If you can't find something of interest here, you better go back to Rolling Stone and Christine Aguilera.

Yet sometimes you just don't feel like jumping right back into Chapter 63 of Stephen Wolfram's 1,263-page "A New Kind of Science."

Sometimes — after a hard day when you're feeling a little superficial yourself — you don't mind discovering that "Signs" director M. Night Shyamalan likes reading Joseph Campbell. Or that Birmingham's Irondale Café was the inspiration for Fannie Flagg's "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café."

Fortified with such vital meaninglessness, you're more than ready to attack Wolfram's Rule 30 of the cellular automata theory.

Or maybe that's just me.

Last changed: November 21, 2002 9:24AM

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# C-SPAN

# Book tv

September 22, 2002



Bookmarks's editor, Jon Phillips, was part of a panel on Book TV's 2002 Fall Books Preview Show. The ten books selected by Jon were:

Devlin, Keith "THE MILLENNIUM PROBLEMS: The Seven Greatest Unsolved Mathematical Puzzles of Our Time" (Basic Books);

Ferris, Timothy "SEEING IN THE DARK" (Simon & Schuster);

Horwitz, Tony "BLUE LATITUDES: Boldly Going Where Captain Cook Has Gone Before" (Henry Holt & Company);

MacMillan, Margaret "PARIS 1919: Six Months That Changed the World" (Random House);

McKillop, A. B. B. "THE SPINSTER AND PROPHET: H.G. Wells, Florence Deeks, and the Case of the Plagiarized Text" (Fou Walls Eight Windows);

Myers, B. R. "A READER'S MANIFESTO: An Attack on Pretentiousness in American Literary Prose" (Melville House Publishing);

Norton, Mary Beth "IN THE DEVIL'S SN 1692" (Knopf );

Pinker, Steven "THE BLANK SLATE: The Modern Denial of Human Nature" (Viking Penguin);

Star, Alexander "QUICK STUDIES: Millionaire Metaphysicians, Scientific Hoaxes, Ex-Literary Critics, and Other Favorite Subjects from the Pages of Giroux);

Zimmermann, Warren "FIRST GREAT TRIUMPH: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power" (Farrar, Straus and Giroux

# San Francisco Chronicle

July 13, 2002

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DAVID KIPEN

*Books*

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A slightly more original literary idea comes from other Internet refugees, the Harvard Business School-educated tandem of **Allison Nelson** and **Jon Phillips**. It's *Bookmarks* magazine, billed as "Your Guide to the Best in Books."

Unlike *Pages* magazine in San Diego and list-happy, Barnes & Noble-backed *Book* magazine, *Bookmarks* brings to the coffee table a welcome willingness to spotlight backlist titles as well as new releases. The prototype issue refreshingly hypes **Steinbeck** and **Naipaul** alongside the more predictable **Ian McEwan** and the late **Stephen Jay Gould**. (That *Bookmarks* doesn't appear to know that Gould died last month is a pity, but these things go with the territory of long-lead journalism.)

Promisingly, the editors appear determined to transform the notoriously slow turnarounds of magazine work into an advantage. Rather than try to predict six weeks ahead of time what new books will be well or widely reviewed, *Bookmarks* waits until the books come out. It then gives about 60 of them a half a page apiece, rounding up a sentence or two from a varying handful of major reviewing outlets.

This is just the signature feature that could put *Bookmarks* magazine over the top. Web sites

now exist where all a visitor has to do is type in the name of a new film or CD to receive links to practically every review of it in Christendom. For books, though, the reader wanting to compare reviewers' opinions with his own — or with one another — is fresh out of luck.

Sure, Amazon's great for soft-ball trade reviews from *Publishers Weekly* or *Library Journal*, but after that things get spotty in a hurry. And *Book Review Digest* hasn't ironed out the bugs that would've made it the same gold standard on the Web that it used to be in the periodical room.

In other words, the field is just about clear for *Bookmarks* to become not only a decent magazine about books but also the long-overdue, searchable, cross-referenced, constantly updated online database of reviews that a lot of people have been waiting for.

Step 1: Hire a copy editor who knows there's no such book as "Tortilla Flats." Step 2: Bag the modishly multiethnic fashion models grinning like fools all over the magazine. And Step 3: Beef up that Web site. Surely there must be one or two unemployed Internet professionals hereabouts.

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*E-mail David Kipen at [dkipen@sfrchronicle.com](mailto:dkipen@sfrchronicle.com).*

# Los Angeles Times

July 10, 2002

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## A Book Fix for Web Refugees

### Regarding Media

By TIM RUTTEN  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Independent and niche publishers are the real success stories of the contemporary American book trade. So it probably was only a matter of time before a new niche book review emerged.

The "preview issue" of Bookmarks, based in San Mateo, began circulating this week. Its founders are two former software and technology company executives; its target is media-savvy Gen-Xers who haven't really read a book since college but are eager to reconnect with literature, though uncertain how to do it.

Bookmarks—which bills itself as the journal "for everyone who hasn't read everything"—is a glossy, slightly fizzy bimonthly survey of classic and contemporary literature designed for readers who like their graphic interfaces glitzy and their information in strobe-like bites.

Think of it as a literary halfway house for recovering dot-comers and their codependents.

What it shares with traditional book reviews is a certain idealism about books and reading. Publisher Allison Nelson and editor Jon Phillips met at Harvard Business School, then spent several years working in business development, marketing and technology development at Silicon Valley firms. When both found

themselves with young families and in need of a change of direction, they conceived a start-up based on their love of reading.

As Phillips explained, "We created a magazine we wanted to read."

Though each issue will feature "book-by-book profiles" of classic authors and publishing news, the magazine's staple is a survey of current literature that provides a synopsis of a given book, excerpts from its reviews in established critical journals—including The Times' Book Review—and a consensus of opinion represented by the familiar star-based rating system. (Five stars indicate a classic, "one of the best of its kind;" one marks a book that is "not worth your time.")

Booker Prize-winner Ian McEwan's latest novel, "Atonement," gets 4½ stars; Richard Posner's "Public Intellectuals: a Study of Decline" gets just one.

"I think that our approach is drawn from what we've learned about the integrative potential of the Web," said Phillips. "To use the new media term, we are 'aggregating content,' and obviously the Web spurred some of those ideas for us. But what we are trying to do is also a reaction to the increasing marginalization of book coverage in so many magazines and newspapers. In that sense, we're a publication for people who want to come home to books but have made other media choices for a long time and now are intimidated by the considerable investment of time learning about books requires. There's an ocean of book choices but a puddle of advice on what to read."

Bookmarks' first regular bimonthly issue will be available on newsstands in September. In the meantime, copies of the preview issue can be obtained by sending an e-mail to [preview@bookmarks magazine.com](mailto:preview@bookmarks magazine.com).



# LIBRARY JOURNAL

## □ MAGAZINES □

October 28, 2002

BY MICHAEL COLFORD

### Bookmarks: Your Guide to the Best in Books

2002. bi-m. \$24.95. Ed: Jon Phillips. Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc., 63 Bovet Rd., No.108, San Mateo, CA 94402; www.bookmarksmagazine.com. Illus. adv. Aud: GA (Subject: Publishing & Book Trade. Issue examined: Premiere issue, Summer 2002)

As with *The Week*, one of LJ's Best Magazines of 2001, *Bookmarks* acts as some-



thing of a clearing-house for book reviews. The attractive, colorful new launch is aimed at the avid reader, with a guide to the best in books from the latest releases to time-honored classics. The "reviews" section of *Bookmarks*

is the central focus here. Divided into fiction and nonfiction, then further subdivided by genre and subject, this new book guide is drawn together by researching major book reviews from newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. Quotes are culled from these sources, rankings are listed, and an overall status is assigned the work based on external reviews. A neat summary pulls the reviews together. A handful of titles are spotlighted with a more detailed review, information about the author, and sidebars with additional facts. Classic authors and their works are profiled and commented upon. Author's reading recommendations round out the journal's review/opinion forum. The one flaw to this otherwise sterling launch is what it has not included; while crime genre and sf are represented, the omission of the romance genre, a category of books with a large readership, is clearly felt and should be corrected in future issues. All public libraries should take a look.

# SF WEEKLY

**Books**  
What took  
them so long?  
Hundreds of book  
reviews distilled  
into one easy-to-  
read magazine.

August 28, 2002

## Books



WRITING ON THE WALL

### Critical Mass

A new book magazine aims to  
be the *Cliffs Notes* of reviews

BY KAREN ZUERCHER

**I**t is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single reader in possession of a good review, must be in want of a book. With apologies to Jane Austen, I must disagree. Reviews are sometimes useful — you'll find two immensely useful ones below, in fact — but they're not necessarily the reason to pick up a book. I'm drawn to a new novel or collection of essays at least as much by a favorable review as by a friend's recommendation, an author name I recognize, even a handsome cover design. A quick read of a volume's first page usually tells me whether I'll enjoy the whole thing more reliably than some stranger's opinion does. Still, reviews are fun to read on their own merits — sometimes more fun than their subjects.

Despite shrinking book review sections in newspapers around the country, information about new titles and authors isn't hard to find. Between *Booknotes* on TV, online reviews at Amazon.com, and favorites lists like the *Book Sense 76*, you could spend all your time reading about books rather than reading books.

Meanwhile, any reputable newsstand carries enough book-related magazines to bow the sturdiest literary shelf. As with Harry Potter's Every Flavor Beans, there's one for each taste. Beyond the *New York Review of Books*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, and their ilk, there are numerous publications about books and the people who write them, in particular the somewhat hokey *Pages*, out of San Diego (not a hotbed of literary activity), the slick *Book* (New York), and the artsy-smarty *Bookforum* (also New York). Every one of these is a good read, in its own way, and each approaches the genre a bit differently.

Stepping into this fray is a new glossy published out of San Mateo —

also not a hotbed of literary activity — that promises to pull all of these review sources together into one neat, easy-to-read package. *Bookmarks* wants to be “your guide to the best in books,” as the cover of its preview issue says. Strangely, it just might work.

To understand *Bookmarks*, you need to understand its competition. *Pages* — “The magazine for people who love books” — focuses more on genres and writers than on specific books, and it doesn't run much critical commentary. John Hogan, its personable, eager editor in chief, explains that the bimonthly just hit newsstands a year ago. Even so, subscription “response has been great.” But when I ask what *Pages'* editorial focus is, his reply — “That's a good question” — speaks volumes. *Pages* isn't quite sure what it is.

On the other end of the spectrum, the bimonthly *Book* knows exactly what it is, and it doesn't need some damned tag line to tell you. An editor's note explains that it's “... a magazine that covers the reading life” by “telling stories that no one else will.” That vague smugness plays out on the stylish matte pages, filled with nonendemic ads (for such companies as Lexus and Bose) and East Coast-style celebrity profiles (Ethan Hawke, out with his second novel, stares from the cover of the July/August 2002 issue). Senior Editor Adam Langer calls the approach — “like *Premiere*, pop culture through the portal of film” — “staggeringly successful.” If a bookstore carries only one of these magazines, it'll carry *Book*. A marketing deal with Barnes & Noble (which also has an interest in the magazine) doesn't hurt, either.

The covers of *Bookforum* tell its story: cool illustrations, stylish photos, and the tag line “the book review for art, fiction & culture.” Published by the same folks who bring you *Artforum*, the quarterly has a funky square format and a roster of impressive critics. Its editor in chief, Andrew Hultkrans, has an irreverent yet thoughtful outlook on the business of cultural commentary. “*Book* is an *In Style* magazine for the literary world,” he writes in an e-mail, “not an organ of serious criticism.” *Bookforum* “aspires to the level of intelligence in [the *New York Review of Books*]' criticism, but [we] like to keep enough air in the room for humor, the occa-  
continued on page 39



Magazine Dreams: *Bookmarks* joins the cadre of publications for readers.





**Books**  
What took  
them so long?  
Hundreds of book  
reviews distilled  
into one easy-to-  
read magazine.

August 28, 2002

## Book Magazines

continued from page 37


sional bizarre piece or writer, and younger voices, tastes, and ideas." It's unapologetically creative.

*Bookmarks*, the young local upstart, lacks some of the style of *Book* and the wit of *Bookforum*, but it has something no one else has: breadth. It polls the reviews of about 500 books from 20 sources (newspapers across the country, niche pubs like *Business Week* and *Entertainment Weekly*, and general-interest magazines), quotes from them, summarizes them, and then assigns a star rating to about 60 books per issue based on the overall impression. *Slate*, the online magazine, has a similar feature, called Summary Judgment, in which a writer culls quotes from various sources to give a general impression of "what critics are saying." The parallel to an online publication is not surprising, given that *Bookmarks'* founders, Publisher Allison Nelson and Editor Jon Phillips, come from the dot-com world; it's also an apt analogy for the bimonthly's busy, perky approach. And it seems to have hit a nerve.

The "preview" issue of *Bookmarks*, dated Summer 2002, hit newsstands in late June. By mid-July, Nelson and Phillips were sending out 70 to 100 copies a day — not a huge number, but impressive for a newbie with no advertising (not even inside its own pages), no marketing, and no office (Nelson and Phillips work out of their homes and use a lot of freelancers). The problem that *Bookmarks* solves, as Phillips sees it, is that there are so many places to get book reviews that it's "hard to get consensus" on what to read: "It's a lot of work, even for a literature freak like me." He has "a house full of books" and reads a laundry list of magazines ("No one reads as many magazines as Jon," Nelson says) but still feels overwhelmed. *Bookmarks* aims to boil it all down into bite-size synopses. It's the *Cliffs Notes* of book reviews.

Phillips has loftier goals, too: He wants *Bookmarks* to appeal to nonreaders, to "get more people interested in reading." Maybe the magazine will be "a step on the way to reading — to the library, the bookstore, the book." That's a bit of a stretch, to my mind. I'm not convinced that people who don't read books are going to pick up a magazine about books, even if it promises to make choosing titles easier. But I do think *Bookmarks* is on to something, as we'll see when its first official issue comes out in October.

Reviews are fun to read, but we don't always trust them. They're too subjective: Who is this person who hated Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (which, according to *Bookmarks*, got two stars from Brooke Allen in the *Atlantic Monthly*) but loved Ali Smith's *Hotel World* (four stars from Allen)? *Bookmarks* exposes that subjectivity and attempts to tame it by comparing it with the subjectivity of others. As the preview issue states on Page 3, "Applying ratings to works of art is frustratingly reductionist. It is also helpful in navigating through such a myriad of choices." *Bookmarks* does not seem to have its own opinion, which is unfortunate, but this may change as Nelson and Phillips become more confident. It does, however, have an angle, and that's more than can be said of most of its competitors.

Send bookish events, publishing oddities,  and lit crit to [Karen.Zuercher@sfweekly.com](mailto:Karen.Zuercher@sfweekly.com).

# The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

August 6, 2002

# LIVING



► **Good reads:** The mission of new magazine Bookmarks is to help people decide what they should be reading. Newsstand, E10

**THE NEWSSTAND** / DON O'BRIANT, [dobriant@ajc.com](mailto:dobriant@ajc.com)

## Bookmarks new

New magazines continue to pop up on the stands even as established publications fall by the wayside. This month, **Bookmarks** (\$4.95) debuts with a preview issue featuring profiles of authors, recommendations from writers and a compilation of book reviews from major newspapers, magazines and the Internet. Each book is rated according to a star system. Editors Allison Nelson and Jon Phillips say their mission is to help readers decide what they should be reading now by having the best reviews in one handy magazine.



# street

## Miami

July 26, 2002

### BOOK SMARTS

With August just around the corner, you've only got one more month of summer reading, then it's time to stash Janet Evanovich and James Patterson and get back to being the literary scholar that you are. Right. Most of us don't have time to decide between Corn Pops and Frosted Mini-Wheats, let alone browse Barnes & Noble and the pages of the *New York Times* Book Review section in search of an interesting read. Wanting to re-introduce the wonderful world of books to a generation



that has become completely Web-engrossed, Harvard business grads Allison Nelson and Jon Phillips decided to create **Bookmarks**, a bi-monthly mag claiming to be "for everyone who hasn't read everything." No literary stone goes unturned — everything from Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* to this past spring's "It" novel, Ian McEwan's *Atonement* — as Bookmarks is the answer to what Nelson and Philips call a marginalization of book coverage. Two-hundred-fifty

reviews in the preview issue. Read reviews or subscribe (one year/six issues: \$24.95) online at [bookmarksmagazine.com](http://bookmarksmagazine.com).



# San Mateo County Times

## BOOKS

### Bookmarks navigates world of books, authors

■ New magazine says it's "For Everyone who Hasn't Read Everything"

by Emily Fancher

CONTRIBUTOR

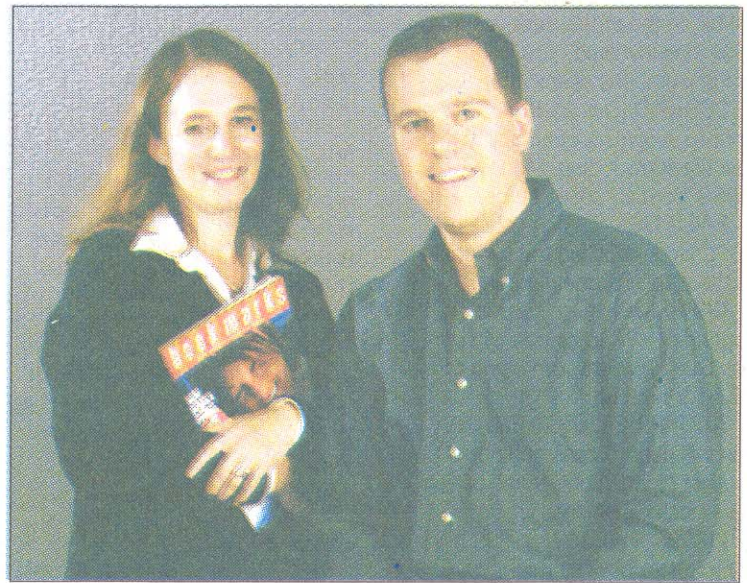
JON Phillips and Allison Nelson, bibliophiles and old friends who met at Harvard Business School, know their way around bookstores and libraries. But they say they often felt overwhelmed by choices and needed help navigating the literary landscape.

So the partners created Bookmarks, a San Mateo-based glossy magazine about books, to guide readers through Oprah's Book Club selections, Pulitzer

prize-winners and the difference between John Grisham and John McPhee.

Bookmarks, which will hit newsstands in mid-October, is one part author profiles, one part book reviews and one part readers' and authors' favorites lists.

The magazine's tagline — "For Everyone who Hasn't Read Everything" — belies its democratic, yet witty take. The articles are written for an intelligent, educated audience, says Phillips. He expects some of the magazine's audience to be book aficionados and others to be readers entering the literary marketplace with trepidation.



JOHN GREEN — Staff

ALLISON NELSON and Jon Phillips are co-founders of Bookmarks Magazine.

"We're the Consumer Reports of books," says Phillips. "People read tons of book reviews trying to figure out what to read, and as a result they

spend less time reading."

Publisher Nelson and editor Phillips met at Harvard Business School in the mid-1990s

See **BOOKMARKS**, Living 6

## San Mateo partners start book-readers' magazine

### ► BOOKMARKS, Living 1

and both moved to the Bay Area after graduation. They worked for technology companies before launching the magazine together last year.

Avid readers, the friends wanted more meaningful and flexible work after surviving the dot-com meltdown and then starting new families. They both have 2-year-olds and newborns and run the magazine from their respective homes — Phillips lives in San Mateo, and Nelson lives in Marin County.

"We were brainstorming about what to do, and we wanted something creative that we could bring our business experience to," says Phillips.

These technology industry alumni have enough faith in this start-up to fund it themselves. They do everything from an-

swering the phones to writing articles and handling publicity.

In July, the partners distributed 10,000 copies of the magazine's 64-page preview issue to gauge public reaction before the fall launch. The preview issue has profiles of classic writers — John Steinbeck and Nobel Prize-winner V.S. Naipaul — as well as spotlights on contemporary authors such as literary novelists Ian McEwan and William Kennedy and scientist scribe Stephen Jay Gould. Science fiction recommendations by award-winning author Connie Willis are also part of the mix.

The magazine's book reviews are the most innovative aspect of the project. The reviews summarize other critics' opinions, excerpting reviews from the L.A. Times, The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and elsewhere to convey a consensus about a work. About 60 capsule

reviews in each issue are culled from more than 600 original reviews.

The preview issue was the result of market research by Nelson, a former management consultant who's worked in business development, and Phillips, who has extensive marketing experience. While fine-tuning the idea for the magazine, they distributed surveys to friends and reading groups and held five focus groups during a month in parts of the Bay Area. They said they talked to a broad range of readers, from retirees to book group members to mothers and software engineers.

Two other general interest magazines about books are currently on the newsstands: Pages and Book. Pages, based in San Diego, has a circulation of 100,000. Book, based in New York, was launched four years

ago and now boasts a million circulation, thanks in part to a marketing partnership with Barnes & Noble. Book focuses on feature stories more than reviews.

Nelson and Phillips won't reveal how many subscribers have signed up for six issues a year at \$24.95, but they are surprised how quickly business has picked up.

"As long as the integrity of the product is still there, we hope and believe it will grow," says Nelson.

Nelson and Phillips say they don't mind being outside of the literary circuit.

"The New York book world thinks if you're not there, you don't exist," says Phillips. "Because we're in California we probably don't get invited to as many parties."

"And," adds Nelson, "we keep getting labeled as dot-commers."



# MEDIA LIFE

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www.medialifemagazine.com August 15, 2002

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## MAGAZINES

### Bookmarks, able guide to good reading

*Ranking new books with stars and review excerpts*

By Jeff Bercovici

As every good Information Age dweller knows, too much information can be just as troublesome as too little.

In recent years that axiom has served as the premise for a number of magazine launches, from Yahoo Internet Life and Lucky to The Week. All of them, not coincidentally, involve some mixing of old media and new media principles.

Now comes Bookmarks, a soon-to-launch title that brings an internet-era concept (aggregating content) to an old medium (magazines) in service of a much older medium (books).

Bookmarks doesn't officially hit newsstands until next month, but a preview issue is on sale at a number of bookstores and has been circulating to libraries and media outlets.

The magazine's mission is to help people figure out which of the thousands of books published every year they ought to be reading.

It does so by excerpting reviews from a slew of publications, including The New York Times, the Atlantic Monthly, Salon.com, The New Yorker, Newsweek, Esquire and Entertainment Weekly.

Each of the 60 books featured in the preview issue of Bookmarks is presented in the form of a short blurb followed by a sampling of "Critical Insights" culled from reviews and a "Critical Summary" that attempts to establish some kind of consensus evaluation. That consensus earns the book a rating on a scale of 1 to 5 stars, with one being "not worth your time" and five being "one of the best of its kind."

"Applying ratings to works of art is frustratingly reductionist," reads a disclaimer under the explanation of the rating system. "It is also helpful in navigating through such a myriad of choices."

That kind of tone—simultaneously high-minded and slightly self-effacing—suffuses Bookmarks, which was started in San Mateo, Calif., by two Harvard Business

School graduates, Jon Phillips and Allison Nelson.

"Starting a literature magazine is tough," says Phillips, who serves as editor. "People give you blank and sympathetic stares when you tell them that's what you're doing."

At least Bookmarks has the benefit of a relatively unique approach. The online magazine Slate attempts to distill critical opinions of books, movies and records in its "Summary Judgment" column, but its blurbs don't offer much to go by.

More similar is the approach taken by The Week, which, however, only reviews a couple of books in each issue. Like Bookmarks, The Week relies primarily on other news outlets for its insights, allowing it to operate with a very small editorial staff.

"I wouldn't say we were inspired by The Week, but I definitely see some parallels between what they're doing and what we're doing," says Phillips.

Bookmarks generates still more low-cost content with a section called "Have You Read?," in which readers write in to recommend their favorite books.

The preview issue also includes feature articles on John Steinbeck and V. S. Naipaul providing an overview of their respective oeuvres.

The magazine enters bimonthly publication when its first official issue goes on sale in September. Phillips says the magazine's immediate goals include introducing more graphics and space to its design, which is currently rather text-heavy and dense, and attracting some advertising. With no advertising in the preview issue, Bookmarks relies for the time being on circulation, resulting in a relatively high cover price of \$4.95.

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*-Jeff Bercovici is a staff writer for Media Life.*