

DEPARTMENTS & COLUMNS

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Massachusetts bookseller praises David Ebershoff's *The 19th Wife*, "that rare book that effortlessly explicates and entertains all at once."

20 Deals

■ Penguin buys book on Supreme Court "packing" ■ Adam Bellow buys Iraq book by Wall Street energy trader ■ Da Capo gets book on NBA champion Celtics.

188 Soapbox by Sarah Schulman

Despite social gains, lesbian lit is increasingly marginalized.

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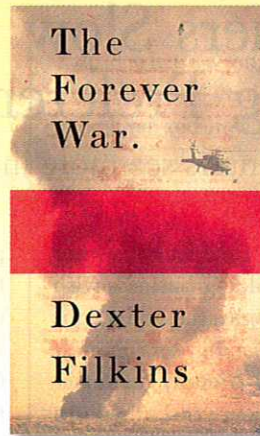


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Publishers Weekly
Pick of the week

War Theater of the Absurd



★ The Forever War

Dexter Filkins. Knopf, \$25 (384p) ISBN 978-0-307-26639-2

Filkins, a *New York Times* prize-winning reporter, is widely regarded as among the finest war correspondents of this generation. His richly textured book is based on his work in Afghanistan and Iraq since 1998. It begins with a Taliban-staged execution in Kabul. It ends with Filkins musing on the names in a WWI British cemetery in Baghdad. In between, the work is a vivid kaleidoscope of vignettes. Individually, the strength of each story is its immediacy; together they portray a theater of the absurd, in which Filkins, an extraordinarily brave man, moves as both participant and observer. Filkins does not editorialize—a welcome change from the punditry that shapes most writing from these war zones. This book also differs essentially from traditional war correspondence because of its universal empathy, feelings enhanced by Filkins's spare prose. Saudi women in Kabul airport, clad in burqas and stylish shoes, bemoan their husbands' devotion to jihad. An Iraqi casually says to his friend, "Let's go kill some Americans." A marine is shot dead escorting Filkins on a photo opportunity. Iraqi soldiers are disconcerted when he appears in running shorts ("They looked at [my legs] in horror, as if I were naked"). Carl von Clausewitz said "war is a chameleon." In vividly illustrating the varied ways people in Afghanistan and Iraq have been affected by ongoing war, Filkins demonstrates that truth in prose. 5 photos. (Sept. 17)