

Recent Releases

Homefront

by Doris Gwaltney SIMON & SCHUSTER, \$15.95

Set in Southern Virginia just before the outbreak of World War II, *Homefront* is a coming-of-age story for young Margaret Ann Motley, whose main worries are getting her own room when her sister leaves for college and keeping her boyfriend's attention away from her cousin. But when the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, a new set of concerns takes their place. Gwaltney's tale of a family dealing with the hardships of war is made even richer through her vivid and accurate depiction of farm life during that era.



Heat: An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta-Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-Quoting Butcher in Tuscany

by Bill Buford KNOFF, \$25.95

An evocative chronicle of Buford's experience as "slave" to Mario Batali in a three-star New York restaurant, Babbo. In a fast-paced, candid narrative, Buford describes three frenetic years of trials and errors, disappointments and triumphs, as he worked his way up the ladder from "kitchen bitch" to line cook. Though *Heat* is primarily a memoir, it also delves into the reasons of why food matters. It is a book to delight in and to savor.

Heat

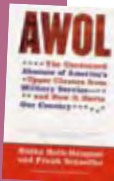
BILL BUFORD

AWOL: The Unexcused Absence of America's Upper Classes from Military Service and How It Hurts Our Country

by Kathy Roth-Douquet and Frank Schaeffer

HARPERCOLLINS, \$24.95

Though military service was once taken for granted as a natural part of good citizenship, it is increasingly the case these days that the people who make, support or protest military policy have no military experience. As a result, the privileged miss the benefits of military service while the military feels under-supported and morally distanced from the rest of the country. In *AWOL*, the authors make an impassioned plea for class integration of the military, by increased incentives or lotto-style draft, whatever is required.



Water for Elephants

by Sara Gruen

ALGONQUIN BOOKS OF CHAPEL HILL, \$23.95

When Jacob Jankowski jumps onto a passing train, he enters a world of freaks and misfits, a second-rate circus struggling to survive during the Great Depression. A veterinary student who almost earned his degree, Jacob is put in charge of caring for the circus menagerie. It is there that he meets Marlena, the beautiful star of the equestrian act, and Rosie, an elephant who seems untrainable until he discovers a way to reach her. Beautifully written, *Water for Elephants* is illuminated by a wonderful sense of time and place, telling a love story between two people in a world where love is a luxury that few can afford.



BOOKS | REVIEWED BY BILL GLOSE

Murder in Wine Country

THE MERLOT MURDERS

Wine has been made in Virginia ever since the first colonists came from England. It is apropos, then, that the idea for a Wine Country Mystery set in Northern Virginia would also originate in England before making its way across the pond. After spending a couple of years in Virginia, Ellen Crosby moved to London with her journalist husband. Friends who came to visit would be introduced to new wines. "My husband is French," Crosby says, "and he would say, 'None of that French wine. You guys really need to learn about Virginia wine.'"

After sampling the various Virginia labels from afar, they flew over to explore the region where the wine they'd been drinking had come from. "We just went to all these different vineyards all over Virginia. It was such a wonderful setting, so completely different from France. Since we lived overseas, I kept thinking I'd write another book with an overseas setting. But when my British agent asked what I had next, what new project, I mentioned I'd really like to set a book in a Virginia vineyard. And she said, 'Write that book!' Of course, I didn't know anything about wine. I mean, other than drinking it, but I thought, 'All right, I will.'"

Crosby dove into the subject, building a personal library on wine making that now fills a bookshelf in her office. She wrote a business story on wine for the *Washington Post* and interviewed every vineyard owner in the region. This gave her some insight into the wine biz, but not enough to fully depict a vineyard's day-to-day operations in a realistic manner; for that she went to the Swedenburg Estate Vineyard in Middleburg and picked the owners' brains. "Juanita and Wayne Swedenburg were just wonderful to me," Crosby says. "Juanita is a chemist by training, and she gave me the best education you could possibly imagine. I have volumes of notes of things she's told me over the years."

In addition to an accurate portrayal of a vineyard's inner workings, Crosby sprinkles in morsels of wine history and literature to make the story educational as well as entertaining. We learn such sayings as, "In water one sees one's own face, but in wine one beholds the heart of another" and "In vino veritas" (in wine there is

truth). When we read about rosebushes planted near the vines, we discover that this dates back to a time when roses were used for more than mere beauty. "The French planted roses with their vines for centuries because both were sensitive to the same pests and diseases. If the roses were suffering it meant the vines would soon be in trouble, too."

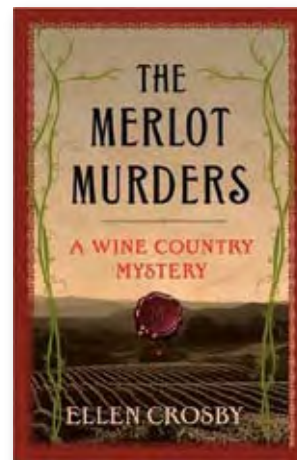
Crosby's love of wine comes through on the page and translates into a fast-paced read. "I

never thought I was so much cleverer than any of my readers," Crosby says, "but I hoped I would have a good enough story that people would want to take the journey with me. I think you have to treat your reader as somebody who is brilliant. They're going to work as hard as they can to figure out who did it, the whole way through."

And, indeed, you will have to work if you expect to figure out whodunit before the final chapters. There are red herrings galore. When Lucie Montgomery's father dies in a "hunting accident," she struggles to keep the vineyard alive. Her two siblings simply want to sell it off, and everyone else in town urges her

to do the same. But when Lucie's godfather is also found dead in a carbon dioxide tank and the vineyard's safe is robbed, Lucie begins to suspect that her father's death might not be an accident. And it seems everyone, including her brother, has a motive for murder.

Though the follow-up title is still pending, *The Merlot Murders* is the first of a two-book deal. "At the moment," says Crosby, "the second book goes by the catchy title, 'Book Two.' When the deal was announced, I got blogged on this mystery website, and this woman said, 'Who can think of a good name for her second book?' The things people suggested were hysterical [suggestions included Pinot Noire, Pinot Grudgio, Nasty Spumante, Ernest and Julio Gallows, and Que Sera Shiraz]. I mean, people have a lot of time on their hands. Because of the first book," she adds with a gusty laugh, "people are always bringing me bottles of Merlot. So maybe I should put champagne in the title."



The Merlot Murders

by Ellen Crosby

(SCRIBNER, \$24.00)