

A new 'Song'

EVENT. In a small town on Chesapeake Bay in the 19th century, there are few things more dangerous to be than a runaway slave. James McBride will read from his new novel "Song Yet Sung," about the brave exploits of one Liz Spocott, tomorrow at 7 p.m. at Barnes and Noble, 33 E. 17th St. (212-253-0810, www.bn.com). METRO



MAD move

EVENT. Ten Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonists will address a somewhat lower-brow audience next month by appearing in MAD Magazine. The March issue will feature the 10 winners illustrating a panel each in the piece "Why George W. Bush Is In Favor of Global Warning." METRO



Books

Hopeful romantics

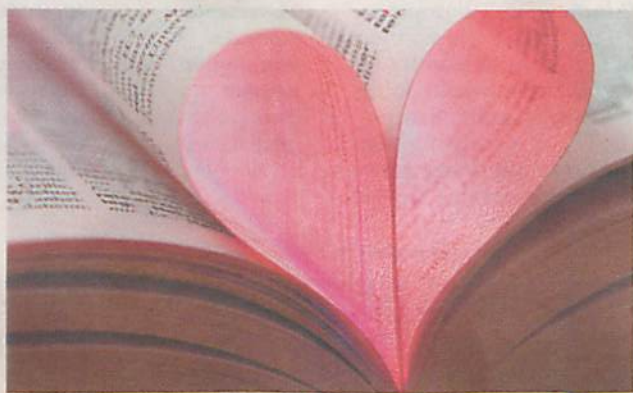
Romance novels are about more than just Fabio and corsets

SARA BRADY
sara.brady@metro.us



GENRE. The romance genre is an easy joke — these are, after all, the books with titles such as "The Future King's Pregnant Mistress" and "Holiday Inn Bed," the kind of books that popularized coverboy Fabio. But it's also the category that makes up a huge percentage of book sales in the U.S. By some estimates, 40 percent of all fiction books sold are romance novels. Like "American Idol" and Disney, romance novels are a massive and lucrative part of American culture.

"Romance goes on, in good times and bad times," says Carrie Feron, vice president and editorial director



at Avon Books, which publishes best-selling authors Susan Elizabeth Phillips and Johanna Lindsey. "During the Depression... people read romance all the time."

Romance novels are as popular as ever, but with some key differences. Fer-

on cites the proliferation of paranormal romances — featuring vampires, fairies and even werewolves — as a recent development. "There's a subcategory called urban fantasy that's become very strong," she says. "These [books have] strong heroines with even

"Romance goes on, in good times and bad times."

Carrie Feron

stronger men, and they're very action-oriented, but they're different from the happily-ever-after romantic historicals."

Sarah Wendell, co-writer of the romance review blog Smart Bitches Who Love Trashy Books, welcomes the changes in the romance genre over the past 15 years. "Thank God there's a lot less rape," she says. "It seemed like every sixth historical novel of the late '80s and early '90s had a rape scene. Now, the heroines are more active, and the hero has to be

emotionally worthy of the happy ending as well."

Despite its popularity and the colossal sales figures of authors such as Nora Roberts and Janet Evanovich, romance writing still seems to occupy an inferior position to literary fiction. "Nora Roberts says [romance novels are] about relationships, emotions and sex and that's a hat trick of easy targets," says Wendell. "I think it's because it's written by women and for women, and that makes it 200 percent more lame in the eyes of society."

However society views it, Wendell and Feron agree the genre is flourishing, especially due to the

L'Affaire Cassie

Wendell and her co-writer, Candy Tan, became inadvertent whistleblowers when Tan and a friend noted suspicious similarities between passages in books by prolific romance author Cassie Edwards and several academic works, including a nonfiction article on endangered ferrets. Edwards and her publishers initially denied any wrongdoing last month; Signet, a division of the Penguin Group, is now investigating plagiarism. There was a happy ending, though, if only for the ferrets: Nora Roberts offered to match donations from readers up to \$5,000, with the money going to Defenders of Wildlife, as a response to the ferret flap.



Roberts

Internet. "Now you know who your readers are and you know what they're saying," says Wendell.

Voices

"My wife's cookies were just too irresistible for him."

V. Sathya, a Malaysian homeowner, on the drug-addled thief who broke into his home, raided the kitchen and then passed out — Goldilocks-style — in the kids' bedroom.



Too big for big day

Not-so-bashful brides-to-be would ideally ask their bridesmaids to sign a contract vowing not to put on weight or get pregnant before the blessed event, according to a new poll from *You & Your Wedding* magazine.

It's Tsunami Tuesday: Run for your lives!

Jared Neumark
letters@metro.us



As it turns out, Iowa and the other small states that cut in front of the rest of us in line won't actually matter. Much like the kid who raced ahead for the ice cream truck then tripped and bloodied his knee, the rest of us can laugh at their embarrassment. That sets the stage for Super Tuesday — or Tsunami Tuesday, as many pundits are calling it. It's a political event so catastrophic, it had to be assigned a national-disaster nickname. (Mark your calendars now for Mudslide Monday and Sonic-boom Sunday.) The only unfortunate thing about 22 states voting on the same day is that CNN and MSNBC won't have 14 hours of coverage to dedicate to each one. The pundits have had so much time to kill, producers have permitted them use of laptops to surf the Web while waiting to promo Tera Patrick's Evan Bayh endorsement.

Speaking of endorsements, the media covers them like they actually mean something.

Letters

Shameful staff

MASSAPEQUA PARK. The members of the "writers' roundtable" in Friday's paper should all be disappointed in themselves, especially the New York writers. All six of the wrongtable participants chose the Patriots over the Giants, sounding like the Giants didn't even have a shot. "There will be more action in the 'Puppy Bowl' than this one," said Sean Quinn on Friday.

Shame on you to not have faith in your New York team that just made not only NFL history but sports history by knocking off the "unstoppable" New England Patriots. The writers wrongtable table didn't even give the Giants a chance with predictions such as 38-17 and 35-17 Pats. **RICHARD MAGLIONE**

31-city champs?

Only the NHL seems to understand that winning the Stanley Cup means just that — that you are "Stanley Cup Champions."

I do not see the winners of the premier leagues of soccer in the world doing anything similar. Sadly, the U.S. has truly mastered the art of offending the rest of the world at any given opportunity.

ANDERS JACOBSON

Phulphilled...

PHILADELPHIA. My name is Donna Lauria and I am a New York Giants fan.

Although I have lived in Philadelphia and supported the Eagles for most of my adult life, I decided it was time to put my energy and support with a franchise that cares about winning. After all, isn't that what pro sports is all about?

I read with interest every one's predictions on the score

Today's debate

Was the Super Bowl the greatest game you've ever seen?

Morgan Wood
23, restaurant manager
Washington Heights
"Yeah. It was a good game."

Molly O'Rourke
23, student
Williamsburg
"It absolutely was. Eli's scramble and the ridiculous catch was the best play of the game."

Joe Minozzi
20, waiter
Williamsburg
"It was a pretty big upset. It was a good game."

