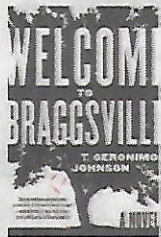


# War re-enactment gets a satirical skewering



FICTION: SATIRE

## Welcome to Braggsville

by T. Geronimo Johnson  
(Morrow)

ter's degree there.) In this strange place, "where the elsewhere unimaginable was mere mundanity," D'aron arrives like some Southern-fried Candice, dazzled by the foreign nomenclature, the "designer-sneaker Zapatistas" and the rainbow of races.

Of course, satirizing this politically correct world is tantamount to euthanizing fish in a cruelty-free barrel, but Johnson is better at mocking academia than anybody since David Lodge, and his narration has such athleticism that you feel energized just running alongside him — or even several strides behind.

His sentences are long and jaggy, sparked with tray cultural references. He dips unpredictably into other characters' voices, collaging their jokes and et phrases, nesting ironies within ironies. He hints between first and second person, he moonwalks into history, he spins from comedy to tragedy to editorial in a single paragraph. In short, Johnson does things you don't think are advisable, which makes success all the more awesome.

But "Welcome to Braggsville" isn't all linguistic acrobatics at the expense

of its characters. Johnson writes about D'aron with real heart. He cradles this young man's innocence and sympathizes with his desperation to fit in — which D'aron finally does during the second semester, when he meets a group of oddballs who call themselves "the 4 Little Indians" (ironical reclamation of racist tropes is *so empowering*). There's Louis, a Malaysian American from the Bay Area, who wants to be "the next Lenny Bruce Lee, kung fu comedian"; Charlie, an African-American from Chicago who looks like he's on the football team; and Candice, who claims she's part American Indian and can out-outrage even the most self-righteous posers. (Don't discount Johnson's Apache middle name.)

The whole novel turns on a stray comment in a class called "American History, X, Y, and Z: Alternative Perspectives": D'aron mentions that his hometown stages a Civil War re-enactment every year during its Pride Week Patriot Days Festival.

The class is shocked. "They'd heard tell of Civil War re-enactments," Johnson writes, "but they were still occurring? The War Between the States was another time and another country. As was the South. Are barbers still surgeons? Is there still sharecropping? What about indoor plumbing? Like an old Loo-ney Tunes skit, Tex Avery tag ensued. Charlie gawked at Louis, who gawked at Candice, who generously suggested it as a capstone project to the professor, who Googled the event and announced that it coincided with spring break. Serendipity has spoken."

From that bizarre premise hangs a story that will shock and disturb you. The trip to Braggsville — population 712, once a contender for the capital of Georgia — offers Johnson a chance to descend into the fetid pool of Southern pride that still romanticizes the antebellum era. D'aron's parents and neighbors are perfectly pleasant people who just happen to have black lawn jockeys in their yards and racist bumper stickers on their trucks. It's all in fun

— *Don't you get it?* "Everybody knows that the black people who live way off on the other side of town in the Gully are happy there. And that enormous Confederate flag wrapped around the watchtower? Just a symbol of civic pride. Yes, the town's Civil War "re-enactments were reinstated back in the 1950s in response to mandated integration," but that doesn't mean those nostalgic battle skits have anything to do with slavery. The war

was about states' rights, don't you know?

In light of new research from the Equal Justice Initiative about the prevalence of lynchings and the country's demonic success at rendering them historically invisible, this extraordinary novel could not be more relevant. With young D'aron, Johnson forces us to consider our determined ignorance and naivete. Part of growing up in America, he knows, is learning how to negotiate that national amnesia.

## Local Best Sellers

The Denver area's best-selling books, according to information from the Tattered Cover Book Stores, Old Firehouse Books in Fort Collins and the Boulder Book Store.

### FICTION

1. All the Light We Cannot See, by Anthony Doerr
2. The Girl on the Train, by Paula Hawkins
3. The Whites, by Richard Price writing as Harry Brandt
4. Trigger Warning: Short Fictions and Disturbances, by Neil Gaiman
5. A Spool of Blue Thread, by Anne Tyler
6. The First Bad Man, by Miranda July
7. The Sacrifice, by Joyce Carol Oates
8. Dreaming Spies, by Laurie R. King
9. As Chimney Sweepers Come to Dust, by Alan Bradley
10. S., by J.J. Abrams and Doug Dorst

### NONFICTION

1. The Motivation Manifesto, by Brendon Burchard
2. Buy, Hold, and Sell: The Investment Strategy That Could Save You From the Next Market Crash, by Ken Morais
3. Bold: How to Go Big, Create Wealth and Impact the World, by Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler
4. Wes Anderson Collection: The Grand Budapest Hotel, by Matt Zoller Seitz
5. Leaving Before the Rains Come, by Alexandra Fuller
6. Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End, by Atul Gawande
7. The Life-Changing Magic

of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing, by Marie Kondo

8. Soldier Girls: The Battles of Three Women at Home and at War, by Helen Thorpe
9. Evolving Ourselves: How Unnatural Selection and Nonrandom Mutation are Changing Life on Earth, by Juan Enriquez and Steve Gullans

10. Getting to Yes with Yourself: and Other Worthy Opponents, by William Ury

### PAPERBACK FICTION

1. The Secret of Mago Castle Paperback, by Rebecca Tinkle
2. Lexicon, by Max Barry
3. The Rosie Project, by Graeme Simsion
4. The Storied Life of A. J. Fikry, by Gabrielle Charbonnet
5. The Ocean at the End of the Lane, by Neil Gaiman

### PAPERBACK NONFICTION

1. Animals Make Us Human: Creating the Best Life for Animals, by Temple Grandin
2. The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, by Daniel James Brown
3. A Year Without Fear: 365 Days of Magnificence, by Tama Kieves
4. Lost Restaurants of Denver, by Robert and Kristen Autabee
5. Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America, by Charlotte S. Waisman and Jill S. Tietjen

## National Best Sellers

Publishers Weekly, week ending Feb. 22. By Nielsen BookScan.

### FICTION

1. The Girl on the Train, by Paula Hawkins
2. All the Light We Cannot See, by Anthony Doerr
3. Obsession in Death, by J.D. Robb
4. The Nightingale, by Kristin Hannah
5. Private Vegas, by James Patterson and Maxine Paetro
6. A Spool of Blue Thread, by Anne Tyler
7. The Whites, by Richard Price
8. Motive, by Jonathan Kellerman
9. The Accidental Empress, by Allison Pataki
10. Gray Mountain, by John Grisham

### NONFICTION

1. The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up, by Marie Kondo
2. Killing Patton, by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard
3. The 20/20 Diet, by Phil McGraw
4. Being Mortal, by Atul Gawande
5. The Food Babe Way, by Vani Hari
6. Majors' Mask 3D Collector's Edition, by Prima Games
7. Believer, by David Axelrod
8. Yes Please, by Amy Poehler
9. Money: Master the Game, by Tony Robbins
10. Gods, Guns, Grits, and Gravy, by Mike Huckabee

— The Associated Press