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Shelf Awareness for Readers for Friday, August 29, 2014

“Right now, no matter where you are, you are a single choice away from a new beginning.”
—OPRAH WINFREY



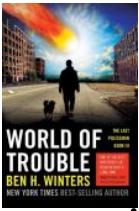
From My Shelf

A Dose of Dystopia

Think dystopian novels are played out? Think again. Some authors are doing incredible things in this genre, inventing worlds strikingly like our own and yet terrifyingly different, worlds that capture the imagination in new and interesting ways. And while we wait eagerly for the final volume in Justin Cronin's Passage trilogy, a dose of new dystopia can't possibly hurt.

Edan Lepucki's *California* made headlines when [Stephen Colbert urged his viewers](#) to make it a bestseller in the midst of the Amazon-Hachette battle. And it worked! Lepucki's novel takes place in a California devastated by natural disasters, with a cast of characters aiming to build a utopian society, and is complex, multilayered and downright compelling.

Where Lepucki's characters aim to build a utopia, the people in M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts* just want to survive. Cast out of their secluded barracks after an attack by a rebel faction, unlikely compatriots—a handful of soldiers, a teacher, a doctor and a young girl named Melanie—flee across what was once England, hoping to find refuge near the former London. The only catch: they have to avoid herds of "hungries" along the way. Yes, it's a zombie novel, but it's like nothing you've ever read.



Ben H. Winters's Last Policeman trilogy, which culminates in *World of Trouble*, takes a different tack, giving us a world that is not *yet* ruined by disaster--though it's due to be struck by a meteor in less than a year. Some people "go bucket list," running off to fulfill their wildest dreams, some loot, some go to work everyday. But police are no longer available to patrol, engineers no longer available to maintain roads, tech companies no longer available for Internet service. Against this pre-apocalyptic background, Winters sets a series of whodunit mysteries that prove to be more about the philosophical and moral implications of the coming end of the world than who actually did it--though that doesn't stop Detective Hank Palace from trying. --[Kerry McHugh](#), blogger at [Entomology of a Bookworm](#)

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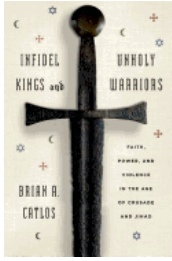
Discover: A meditative collection of short, accessible memoirs documenting the meaning of clothing.

Princeton Architectural Press, \$24.95, hardcover, 9781616892760

History

Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors: Faith, Power, and Violence in the Age of Crusade and Jihad

by Brian A. Catlos



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Popular conceptions about the role of religion in the Middle Ages take two basic forms. One version looks at the medieval world in terms of crusade, *jihad* and pogrom: a violent collision between mutually intolerant communities of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, with long-term consequences for the modern world. The alternate vision, popularized in works such as María Rosa Menocal's *The Ornament of the World* and focused on medieval Spain, is that of *La Convivencia*--a culture of mutual tolerance and reason. In *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors*, religious historian Brian A. Catlos (*The Victors and the Vanquished*) convincingly argues that neither interpretation adequately addresses the shifting political, economic and religious alliances of the Mediterranean world from 1050 to 1200.

Catlos looks at the complex relationship between politics and religious identity in the medieval Mediterranean through the stories of men who straddled communal boundaries in pursuit of power. Muslim and Christian kings made alliances against common enemies. Latin Christians went on crusade against other Christians. Sunni Muslims declared *jihad* against Shiites. Jews served as governors, generals and administrators in both Muslim and Christian kingdoms--and in one case came close to ruling a Muslim state. Mercenary warriors, including the legendary El Cid, switched sides whenever it was in their own interest.

Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors is a fascinating and complex account of diversity, collaboration and conflict in the period when medieval Christianity met the Islamic golden age. --[Pamela Toler](#), blogging at [History in the Margins](#)

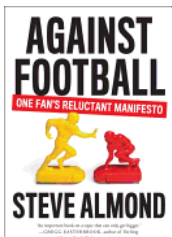
Discover: Realpolitik in the medieval Mediterranean.

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$28, hardcover, 9780809058372

Sports

Against Football: One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto

by Steve Almond



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