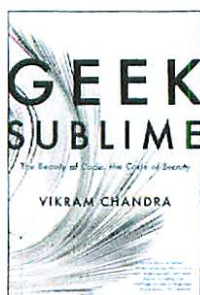
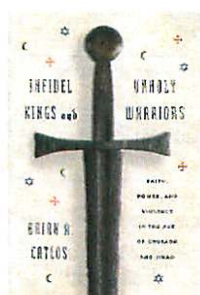


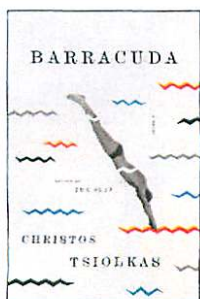
BRIEFLY NOTED



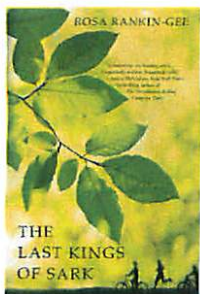
GEEK SUBLIME, by *Vikram Chandra (Graywolf)*. In this dense but rewarding book, Chandra, a novelist, blends memoir, social criticism, and the study of linguistics to consider the claim, put forward by some computer programmers, that writing code is an art form akin to writing fiction. Chandra has done both: “Fiction has been my vocation, and code my obsession.” He acknowledges that the two disciplines share antecedents (rules of grammar and logic dating back to Sanskrit), but emphasizes their differences. Code, for all its potential beauty, has to work; fiction thrives on unexpected outcomes, even on failure. “As a creator, I want to bend and twist the grammar of my world-making,” he writes. “I want to introduce errors that explode into the pleasure of surprise.”



INFIDEL KINGS AND UNHOLY WARRIORS, by *Brian A. Catlos (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)*. This compelling account of the Crusades era debunks the clash-of-civilizations paradigm in which the period is typically cast. Through vivid portraits of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim figures, Catlos depicts an era of interfaith cooperation and fluid identities. In Sicily, Christians prayed inside a mosque before a casket believed to contain the bones of Aristotle; the first analytical treatment of Jewish theology was written in Arabic; Roger II, the Christian king of Sicily, donned the silk and gem-studded regalia of the Islamic elite. Catlos does not overlook the violence of the period but argues that it was stoked more often by money and power than by religion and ideology.



BARRACUDA, by *Christos Tsiolkas (Hogarth)*. Obsession, ambition, and shame drive the protagonist of this absorbing novel. Danny Kelly, nicknamed Barracuda, is a champion swimmer from a working-class family in Melbourne, Australia. His mother is a hairdresser, his father a long-haul trucker. Attending a private school on an athletic scholarship, Kelly is bullied by wealthy classmates. The pool becomes his refuge and domain, where “time did not exist and he was shifting and bending and conquering the water.” The ferocity of his desire to win becomes a poison and threatens to destroy him. Tsiolkas writes visceral, rhythmic, utterly convincing prose, and both the rage and the tenderness of his hero are palpable and frightening.



THE LAST KINGS OF SARK, by *Rosa Rankin-Gee (St. Martin's)*. The first half of this debut novel began as a prize-winning novella and takes place over a single summer on Sark, a tiny tradition-bound island in the English Channel. Jude, the narrator (a young woman, despite her name), has been hired as a tutor for Pip, the shy sixteen-year-old son of wealthy but distant parents; she also meets Sofi, the household's young, Polish-born cook. During the summer, the three form a close and complex bond. The book's second half, set a few years later, is more fragmented in style, shifting perspective among the characters as their paths variously cross and they start to confront adulthood. The novel is both freshly innocent and self-assured—each word seems chosen with extreme care.

million.) The state added fifty-five state parks, more than a hundred hospitals and nursing homes, and two hundred water-treatment plants, and undertook a billion-dollar highway-construction program. Health and welfare programs expanded, and the new Department of Environmental Conservation, which predated the federal Environmental Protection Agency, took on such issues as vehicle emissions, mercury in waterways, and pesticides.

Smith approvingly quotes Neal Peirce, who, in “The Megastates of America” (1972), called Rockefeller “the most remarkable and innovative of the postwar governors,” though Smith acknowledges that some programs, especially Medicaid, exceeded the state's ability to pay for them. Spending since 1959 quadrupled, to \$8.6 billion annually, taxes went up, and so did unsecured debt, all of which would have gone still higher if Rockefeller had persuaded the legislature to pay for fallout shelters in homes and public buildings. He was fixated on the possibility of a Soviet nuclear attack, and took his own survival seriously enough to install shelters under the Executive Mansion, in Albany, and at his homes in Maine, Pocantico Hills, and Manhattan.

Rockefeller was reelected three times, running uninspiring campaigns, during which he was fond of invoking “the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God,” a phrase that eye-rolling reporters abbreviated as BOMFOG. He was helped by facing opponents with worthy credentials but little political talent (among them Robert Morgenthau and the former Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg) and by the willingness of voters to forgive his intermittent pursuit of the Presidency, the job he desired most—“one of the few things beyond Rockefeller's purchasing power,” Smith observes.

Smith doesn't add much to all that's been said and written about the dying embers of Rockefeller's Presidential hopes. Each increasingly unlikely attempt came in the middle of a four-year gubernatorial term, and Rockefeller never had a realistic idea of what was required to be nominated, such as winning actual delegates. His best chance was undoubtedly in 1960—John F. Kennedy thought so, too—but he wavered so