

# Nothing Novel to Success Of Times Books in 1995

**W**HEN MIKE WALLACE sought out Marlin Fitzwater in New York last month to berate the former White House press secretary for criticizing him and "60 Minutes" in a new book, reports of the stormy encounter were more of the same for Times Books.

The division of Random House, which published Fitzwater's "Call the Briefing!," a juicy memoir of his work for George Bush and Ronald Reagan, continued to distinguish itself this past year by producing news-making books about media, politics and current events.

The publisher's output included the best-seller "In Retrospect," former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's debate-provoking account of his role in conducting the Vietnam War, and "In Confidence," a Cold War memoir by longtime Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. William Prochnau's "Once Upon a Distant War" has won attention for its history of the brash correspondents who covered the Vietnam conflict during its infancy.

Among Times Books' new line of business titles is Wall Street Journal columnist Thomas Petzinger Jr.'s "Hard Landing," subtitled "The Epic Contest for Power and Profits That Plunged the Airlines into Chaos."

"We have a kind of journalistic background — to approach books like good stories," explained Times Books publisher Peter Osnos. "We take advantage of what's in the news and try to give it a more lasting quality in book form."

Osnos, 52, a former editor and foreign correspondent with The Washington Post, joined Random House in 1984, when the company acquired Times Books from The New York Times. He has published two presidents — Boris Yeltsin, whose "The Struggle for Russia" came out last year, and Jimmy Carter, who had a best-seller in 1995 with a volume of poetry, "Always a Reckoning." Carter, in fact, was responsible this year for another departure from Times Books' nonfiction policy: He and his daughter, Amy, an illustrator, collaborated on a new children's book, "The Little Baby Snoogle-Fleejer."

"For presidents, we make exceptions," Osnos said.

On the schedule in the next few months are "Hot Air: All Talk, All the Time" by Washington Post media columnist Howard Kurtz and "Nightline: History in the Making and the Making of Television" by Ted Koppel and Kyle Gibson.

Osnos also has plans later on to bring out two books sure to command media interest — a memoir by human-rights activist Harry Wu about his clandestine trips to China and another by Markus Wolf, the mysterious figure who ran the East German spy service.

"I'm basically still in the news business," Osnos said.

## A Review of the Racks

Publishers often pay the big bucks, but they can't guarantee that anyone will read the "big books." Hyperion paid a reported \$1 million for three novels tied to "Myst," the popular CD-ROM fantasy game. The first one, "Myst: The Book of Atrus" by David Wingrove and the game's creators, brothers Rand and Robyn Miller, did not appear among the top 150 sellers in the country listed last Thursday by USA Today. On the other hand, Nicholas Evans' "The Horse Whisperer," which earned the Briton a \$3 million advance from Dell Publishing, survived some brutal reviews and has spent nearly four months on the best-seller lists. There are 750,000 copies of this meaning-of-love novel in print — and Evans is scheduled to appear on Oprah Winfrey's TV show tomorrow. Next to brave the big-bucks buildup: David Baldacci's "Absolute Power," a political thriller that Warner Books is bringing out in January after paying the first-time novelist \$2 million . . .

Among the magazines launched in 1995 were Virtual City (cyberspace), Fast Company (business), This Old House (build-it-yourself), LottoWorld (lotteries), Time Out New York (stuff to do), The Weekly Standard (politics, conservative division) and George (politics, glossy division). Mirabella, discontinued by News America Publishing Co., was resurrected by Hachette Filipacchi Magazines. To come in 1996: American Legacy, a quarterly review of African-American history being copublished by Forbes Inc. . . .

Villard Books, a division of Random House, displayed a deceptively magical touch in 1995 with two pieces of literary merchandise. "O. J.'s Legal Pad," a \$9.95 comedy piece created by Henry Beard, John Boswell and Ron Barrett, rose above the waves of print spawned by the O. J. Simpson case to become a best-seller (with more than 350,000 copies in print). Evelyn McFarlane and James Saywell's "If. . . (Questions for the Game of Life)," a squat-sized \$9.95 hardcover, is interactive but nonelectronic, designed to generate living-room chatter with 500 questions, such as "If you had to pick the worst meal you've ever eaten, what would it be?" A little book that could, it has 126,000 copies in print . . .

Within weeks of the Simpson verdict, most of the major legal eagles in the case had lucrative book contracts — Marcia Clark (Viking Penguin), Johnnie Cochran (Ballantine), Christopher Darden (Regan-Books), Robert Shapiro (Warner) and Alan Dershowitz (Simon & Schuster). The question: Will trial watchers care as much in 1996 as they did in 1995? . . .

There was no new technothriller this year from the master of the genre, Tom Clancy, who may have been preoccupied with those marital woes reported by the gossip columns. Clancy sells so many books that the gross national product may dip as a result of his absence. Although that absence apparently will continue through 1996, Clancy has a deal with The Putnam

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