

Wellington is based not on himself, says the author, but loosely on the lives of three acquaintances: "These were pretty successful professional men not known for being unstable. Yet each had imploded in pretty spectacular fashion," he says. What, then, united Douglas's muses, and morphed them into the narrator, who *Kirkus* called a "borderline-neurotic college professor?" "I was interested in imaginatively exploring the forces that would lead a man with a promising future and calm domestic life to court ruin," says the author. For Wellington, the prospect of a child is a seemingly benign force that sends him on a downward spiral, but, according to Douglas, in an unexpected plot twist, "many of the protagonist's outlandish fears are revealed to be strangely prescient." With a novel that *Kirkus* called "very nearly an American *Lucky Jim*: an acerbic comedy of manners with serious issues at its core," Douglas offers both biting wit and penetrating insight, shedding light on the important matters of "responsibility and veracity in both marital and global relationships."

The Driftless Area

Tom Drury

Atlantic Monthly Press / July / 087113943X / \$22.00

Pierre Hunter, the protagonist of what *Kirkus* called Tom Drury's "sparkling fourth novel," is having a hard time escaping the clutches of his bleak Midwestern home, from which the novel takes its name. "In a way, the title inspired the story," says the author. "We had some 1985 World Book Encyclopedias that I'd bought at a yard sale in Connecticut, and looking up Iowa, I saw this northeastern strip of it called The Driftless Area. I had been through there, crossing the Mississippi from the east, and I knew it was a different sort of terrain." It is there that Pierre nearly drowns in an ice skating accident, falls in love with his beautiful rescuer, becomes acquainted with a dangerous (albeit comically inept) career criminal, and, through him, comes into \$77,000 worth of stolen money, which he then tries to give away. The result, as Drury says, "is what one of my favorite reviewers called 'Midwestern paranormal noir,' which is a genre name I will take any day." Pierre, whom *Kirkus*



The Best of '06 MYSTERIES

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No Good Deeds
Laura Lippman
Morrow/HarperCollins

No Trace
Barry Maitland
St. Martin's Minotaur

The Dead Hour
Denise Mina
Little, Brown

Days of Rage
Kris Nelscott
St. Martin's Minotaur

Still Life
Louise Penny
St. Martin's Minotaur

Blue Shoes and Happiness
Alexander McCall Smith
Pantheon

All Mortal Flesh
Julia Spencer-Fleming
Dunne/St. Martin's Minotaur

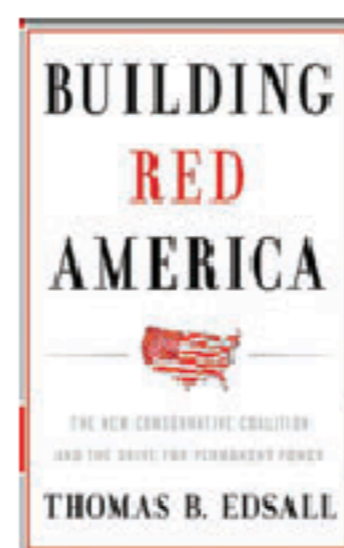
called "a likable loser," is a particularly unlikely hero, but perhaps this is what makes *The Driftless Area* so special: "Drury is a master at showing extraordinary things happening to ordinary people—and it's always a fun ride."

Building Red America: The New Conservative Coalition and the Drive for Permanent Power

Thomas B. Edsall

Basic Books / August / 0465018157 / \$26.00

In what *Kirkus* called "a penetrating examination of the Republicans' permanent campaign" filled with "impressive political analysis [that anchors] electoral trends in the larger demographic, social, business and



moral environment," Thomas Edsall explores the myriad ways in which Republicans have strengthened and secured their power base over the past 40 years. "The GOP has the advantage that roughly 35 to 40 percent of voters describe themselves as 'conservative' while only 25 to 30 percent say they are 'liberal,'" says the author. "As a result, an aggressive polarizing strategy designed to get out base voters works better for Republicans."

Indefensible: One Lawyer's Journey into the Inferno of American Justice

David Feige

Little, Brown / June / 031615623X / \$24.95

The former Trial Chief of the Bronx Defenders, David Feige works through a day in the life of a defense attorney in *Indefensible*, which "offers candid insight into what he characterizes as a pervasively brutal and capricious criminal-justice system," said *Kirkus*. "Feige knows his way around the Bronx's notorious criminal courthouse, and there he represented the frequently handcuffed, never cuff-linked. They were street people, predators from the projects, crack-dealers, wife-beaters, turnstile jumpers, hustlers and killers. And they were seldom innocent. The author was fond of them all and viewed himself as their last hope." "It's a side of the story that's almost never told," says Geoff Shandler, editor-in-chief of Little, Brown. "So much of the literature about courts comes from the prosecutor's side. This is true big-city justice from the point of view of the public defender." The book is a memoir of sorts, loosely framed around a typical (long) work day, following the author from the early morning to late at night. "We jokingly called it 'A Long Day's Journey into Night Court,'" says Chandler. But as Feige attends to the many different cases, he also digresses, broaching topics such as "the skill required in plea bargaining...how to use an autopsy report or a rap sheet...the art of investigation, the mechanics of drug busts and the hard truth that, when the police interrogate, the police always win," said *Kirkus*. "A vibrant, smart, authentic story of a special sort of heroics in which one lawyer does the best he can in a dysfunctional system that too often links 'miscarriage' with 'justice.'"

