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PAPERBACKS

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a degree of freedom he didn't know outside.

Any good?

This *Is How* is a chilly book. One admires the economy of language and the vision with which it was executed, without ever warming to the central character.

In her own words

"Three weeks ago my fiancée, Sarah, was standing at the top of the stairs when she said, 'I can't marry you, it's over,' and when she was halfway down, I called out her name, but she didn't stop, didn't so much as look at me, just said, 'Please don't follow me'. I wanted to push her down the stairs, make the kind of impression I didn't know how to make with words. I got this sentence in my head, over and over, 'You broke my heart and now I've broken your spine'."



The Worst Date Ever
 by Jane Bussmann
 (Pan, £7.99)

What happens?

Jane Bussmann was a British comedy writer floundering in LA. Having gone to America to make it as a scriptwriter, she was instead reduced to celebrity journalism ("Kate, about the movie. How did you get in shape for the role of Iris Murdoch?"). When she reads about the work of John Prendergast, conflict resolution expert, she both fancies him and wants to become like him. She travels to Uganda to meet Prendergast, only he isn't in the country. Deciding to wait for him in a grotty town near the conflict between government and guerrilla forces, Bussmann uncovers a war crime.

Any good?

The humour is as black as the situation Bussmann finds herself inadvertently drawn into. You feel there's an odd truth about the modern world being revealed by the juxtaposition of celebrity interviews and warlord atrocities.

In her own words

"When I started out in Hollywood, I'd meet the star and order a Diet Coke like them to look friendly. Now I drank margaritas as fast as it's possible to drink, nodding and agreeing that it is indeed cheaper to co-lease a private Gulfstream jet than fly your entourage first class. Tequila rocks: if I closed my eyes I could imagine I was working in a Mexican whorehouse instead."



Security
 by Stephen Amidon
 (Atlantic, £7.99)

What happens?

The small, quiet New England town of Stoneleigh is rocked when a young student at the local college reports a sexual assault. Suddenly the mutual trust that sustained the town is ripped apart as suspicion and paranoia take hold.

Any good?

The writing is unflashy and the concept is strong, and there are sly stabs of humour. The ending's a bit theatrical. Otherwise, it's a smart look at what post-9/11 paranoia is doing to the States.

In his own words

"Misinformation continued to swirl throughout campus for the remainder of Monday. Even before nightfall, the seldom-used college safety escort was besieged by calls, and maintenance men could be seen double-checking the blue-light safe stations. The normally invisible campus police were now everywhere, asking any male who didn't look like a student to show some ID. Chalkings detailing grim statistics about the frequency of sexual assaults covered nearly every walkway. Someone else was writing *I Am Afraid* everywhere".

Colin Waters

