

# Aloft: Study of suburban alienation

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prizes are so arbitrary. Many good people don't win. Only one person wins the Pulitzer Prize, but there is more than one great book."

**How much of the experience of writing is a process of discovery for you, and how much is mapped out from the beginning of the project?**

"You know the broad strokes, the colors of it, the basic song of it — a few of the big things that happen. Aside from that, you don't know. The word-by-word-by-word is completely improvised and accidental — you can suddenly write something you really like and have to make a U-turn.

"Being a novelist is being a person of faith. Not in God, but in all of your thinking, reading, learning, in a humane passion that's going to make some sense somehow. . . .

"You have to have faith in whatever experience you have, the internal rhythms, and write toward something. I always tell my students it's like how plants have a thing toward the sun, a tropism — that's what writing is like."

**In Aloft, you've shifted your narrative perspective from that of cultural outsiders to someone who very ostensibly belongs. What led to this change?**

"I feel like I'm writing the same story: about a disconnect between self and society and culture. It seems that Jerry is on the inside, but he's not. I didn't want to write about a white guy who's in the center of his culture — that wouldn't be a good book!

"On the surface and even in most of this consciousness, he is at the heart of the matter, but I try to expose the fact that his kids are biracial, that the culture is marching on without him. It's partly to do with his age, but a person like him can feel alienated.

"In some ways it was harder to write. I had to find a bit more nuance,

so that made it harder to write than the previous books. Jerry's outside of all the things that matter."

**Detachment is a persistent theme in your writing. Why do you think this topic is so important?**

"I don't think I'm a person who's terribly detached. I think my wife and kids would say I'm not that way. But the civilized, prosperous Western world is getting that way, more and more. The suburbs have spread everywhere.

"Part of that is the dream of a region of safety, of security and privacy — all those things equal detachment from what's really going on. If I look at my books from a larger perspective, that's what I'm writing about. What scares Jerry is that he's not really alive. Though he's safe, or comfortable, he's not really alive. It's like being at the wheel of the SUV — that's the perfect metaphor — we barely know when we hit things. It's such a big car, we're using up resources, but we've decided to cloister ourselves above it all. We don't really know what's going on at ground level.

"Jerry's plane and the SUV are basically the same metaphor for that."

**Having chosen a very American context for Aloft, to what extent do you consider it to be a uniquely American story?**

"It's a pretty darn American book! But the funny thing is that my foreign publishers have been so enthusiastic about it, I think it's actually a problem in a lot of advanced civilizations. In western Europe there's more mobility, people are not living in the same place they grew up or where their grandparents are buried — it's this same feeling, this fantasy of mobility and independence. The whole world is being suburbanized."

"My French and German and English publishers all seem to respond to Jerry in the same way, spooked in

the same way, so something must be going on there that's similar."

**As cultural and racial identities become increasingly blurred, do you think future generations are destined to a sort of cultural homelessness, or do you envision other roots of identity (like family) become stronger?**

"My feeling is that, indeed, we'll be cultural nomads. . . . Now we have the 'Butterscotch Generation' — people who can't categorize themselves. So what's left? Community? Unfortunately, community is also dissipating; we live in gated communities, places where we don't have a lot of interaction with each other, no town centers.

"What's left? I do think it's family. I think it has to be. One thing I learned while writing Jerry — he looks around himself. When he looks at his father, he can clearly see where he comes from, but he looks at his kids and is unsettled, trying to understand what they see when they look at him. His daughter Theresa tells him he's the last white man alive.

"We're disconnected — what remains is blood, or at least the idea of blood. I can't see how that wouldn't happen.

"I see that in my own children: They ask what they are. They are partly Korean, Belgian, Italian. It's almost their choice. Culture is when you don't have a choice. You grow up in a land, speak the language, that's where you're from. . . . It's becoming more about how you choose how to self-define, self-directed."

**Do you have somewhere you call home?**

"Well, we moved around a lot. I've only lived here for a year and a half, and I have no desire to leave. My family is comfortable here, so maybe this will become home."

*Jessica Slater is technology editor at the Rocky Mountain News.*

# Saud: In 'House,' the ties that bind are unhealthy ones

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Never before had a president's personal fortunes and public policies been so deeply entwined with another nation."

The ties haven't necessarily benefited Americans. For example, he documents how the Saudis bought off terrorists in their own country: "(The Saudis) made deals with militant groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, agreeing to fund them in return for a promise not to wreak havoc on Saudi soil." He argues that Saudis supported terrorists in the United States and that they used their petrodollars to make powerful friends and influence important people.

All this may seem like the wild-eyed fantasies of a conspiracy buff, except that Unger ap-

proaches his subject dispassionately and scrupulously backs up virtually every assertion he makes. Much sloppier work has passed for legitimate journalism.

By the time he's through, the reader is left wondering just what else we don't know about how we meddle in the affairs of other, sovereign countries — and how much we allow them to meddle in ours.

We may never know all the answers, but credit Unger for at least asking the questions. *House of Bush, House of Saud* makes you wonder when our elected representatives will do the same.

*Dan Danbom is a freelance writer living in Denver.*

# Ethics: Loaded for bear, Bush-basher takes on barrel of fish in 'Good and Evil'

Continued from 31D  
risk the lives of many people, including innocents," Singer writes, he also contends that to allow ourselves to be swayed by those emotions is a betrayal of true ethical behavior and tantamount to murder.

The world is far too complicated to yield to this sort of thinking. Singer proposes a rationality unavailable not just to politicians but, I suspect, even to saints. That doesn't mean this book is a waste of time. Far from it — it presents arguments not just about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (which, though he hedges his bets a bit, Singer tentatively con-

cludes was both unethical and illegal) but about Bush's economic and education policies, arguments that help to clarify the weaknesses and failures of the present administration.

Ultimately, though, Singer seems too far removed from the arena in which he's chosen to fight. I prefer the gritty, down-and-dirty combat favored by such columnists as Molly Ivins, Maureen Dowd and Paul Krugman. They know full well that in a mud fight, no one gets to go home with clean hands.

*Duane Davis is a freelance writer living in Littleton.*

## CROSSWORD PUZZLE

■ Answers on Page 33D

### ACROSS

- 1 Movie sirens
- 6 Ginger or cloves
- 11 Maxim
- 16 Window sticker
- 21 Abrasive mineral
- 22 Actor Warren —
- 23 Energize
- 24 Delight
- 25 *The Thinker* sculptor
- 26 Europe-Asia divider
- 27 Trap
- 28 Second to none
- 29 Charade players
- 31 Nevada resort
- 33 Samms of *General Hospital*
- 35 Help-wanted abbr.
- 36 Was, to Caesar
- 37 Sgts.
- 39 Tentlike dwellings
- 41 Uxmal site
- 43 Aims
- 46 — yoga
- 48 Affirmative
- 49 Ballpark event
- 52 Hauled into court
- 54 Has occasion for
- 56 Smart
- 60 Snapshot-takers
- 62 Fishhook part
- 64 Hurler
- 66 Statue of a god
- 67 Flight board info
- 68 Less than seldom
- 70 Zhiwago's beloved
- 72 Goddess of flowers
- 74 Sheik's garment
- 75 Sale-tag disclaimer (2 wds.)
- 77 Warty critter
- 79 Guardian's charge
- 81 Storage unit
- 83 Parachute fabric
- 85 London streetcar
- 87 Backpack contents
- 89 Driving hazard
- 90 Vain male
- 92 Scheme
- 94 Pack away

- 96 Disfigure
- 97 Drumming sound (hyph.)
- 101 Ostrich cousins
- 103 Sonic bounce
- 105 Cuban dance
- 109 Oversight
- 111 *Puppy Love* singer
- 113 Zen riddle
- 115 Joist
- 116 Baby wear
- 117 Command
- 119 Flank
- 121 Off in the distance
- 123 Attorney's deg.
- 124 Oklahoma town
- 126 Kept
- 128 Brood
- 130 Talkative feline
- 132 Rises rapidly
- 134 Mideast nation
- 136 Your highness
- 138 In a row
- 139 Scamp
- 141 Ticked off
- 143 Bash into each other
- 145 Improve (2 wds.)
- 149 Private teacher
- 151 Observed
- 152 Pre-stereo
- 156 Record, as mileage
- 157 Geological divisions
- 159 Direct
- 161 Waxy flower
- 163 Fury
- 165 Mollycoddle
- 167 Staffers
- 169 Inca Empire locale
- 170 Clamor
- 171 White-water craft
- 172 Metaphysical poet
- 173 Slice
- 174 Avarice
- 175 Golf clubs
- 176 RBI, ERA, etc.
- 177 Land units

- 7 Ministers
- 8 "Give — — rest!"
- 9 Druid
- 10 Term paper
- 11 Loser (hyph.)
- 12 Breakfast nooks
- 13 — Gardner of films
- 14 *Primal Fear* star
- 15 Grant, to Lee
- 16 Writes graffiti on
- 17 Yale student
- 18 Editor's insert
- 19 On a voyage (2 wds.)
- 20 Drop a hint (2 wds.)
- 30 Competitor
- 32 "What?"
- 34 Very, in Veracruz
- 38 Blunt end
- 40 Mantel
- 42 — spumante
- 44 Roman tyrant
- 45 Finalize
- 47 Former teen
- 49 Vast expanse
- 50 Easy victim
- 51 Online note (hyph.)
- 53 Tie
- 55 Get nosy
- 57 Spud state
- 58 Coveted prize
- 59 Forest clearing
- 61 Kilt-wearer
- 63 Crow
- 65 Horse handler
- 69 Doc Holliday's friend
- 71 War god
- 73 Vows venue
- 76 Lobby furnishings
- 78 Broad valley
- 80 Go steady
- 82 Bush
- 84 " — — fast!"
- 86 One of the Three Bears
- 88 Music genre
- 91 Sock purchases
- 93 Wimple-wearers
- 95 Stop, to a horse
- 97 Pajama-coverers
- 98 Acid in proteins
- 99 Shinbone
- 100 Currently
- 102 Thumb through

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- 104 Louts
- 106 Brawl
- 107 Light, strong wood
- 108 Fossil resin
- 110 "When pigs fly!"
- 112 Turmoils
- 114 Carpentry chore
- 118 Word on an invoice
- 120 Spectacular
- 122 Invade
- 125 Plumbing problem
- 127 False belief
- 129 Valentine archer
- 131 Memory trigger
- 133 Blurred
- 135 Noxious weeds
- 137 Hot-plate coil
- 140 Bulldog's cousin
- 142 Female deer
- 144 Rental contracts
- 145 Informal usage
- 146 Privilege
- 147 Prize marble
- 148 *My Cousin Vinny* star
- 150 Pores over
- 153 Less modern
- 154 Brother's child
- 155 Caravan halts
- 158 Practice for the ring
- 160 Civil disorder
- 162 Wine valley
- 164 Capt.'s heading
- 166 Plastic — Band
- 168 Court evidence, maybe