

er who was evidently underwater on two crammed houses, confided to the camera about the day she faced a *Hoarders* cleanup crew: "Just waiting for them to blindfold me and tie my hands behind my back." The thought of some of her most-loved things—a kid's tutu, a piece of broken tile—being treated as garbage, was "like somebody punched me in the stomach."

No wonder novelists, playwrights, and filmmakers are drawn to these morbid stories. Hoarding and narrative seem to go hand in hand: "They have a story about every single thing they touch," sighs one therapist featured on the show. Russ, a hoarder who appeared on A&E's companion show *Obsessed*, considers any secondhand items "keepsakes" or "antique." To shed them would dishonor—even injure—the family and friends he associates with the stuff.

One of the saddest *Hoarders* scenes to date replays the tragedy of turn-of-the-century goldbugs, who would put their fortunes in metal only to find it cheapened by inflation and paper money. Paul, an Alabama hoarder, is offered a half-penny per pound for his life's collection of scrap metal. (On two acres, he keeps 100 lawnmowers, 40 to 50 refrigerators, some 70 cars, and a school bus.) He's been hoping to make 40 grand. This rate will net him three. He sobs.

In her viral video *The Story of Stuff*, Annie Leonard grappled with planned obsolescence and enforced consumption. The popularity of her work suggests that consumers are in a reflective mood and are beginning to doubt the American imperative to spend, acquire, and discard in rapid cycles. Maybe it's the declutterers, hawking their pricey services and custom closets, who are really the shady characters. Writers increasingly tend to represent hoarders like the Collyers and the Beales as resistance fighters—resourceful stewards protesting with the bulk of their hoards a cruel system of wastefulness and disposability.

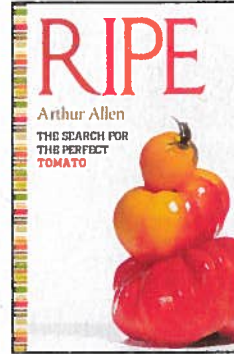
Hoarders' season two premiere drew 3.2 million viewers—an A&E record. The show is a hit. And unlike other new shows on beleaguered broadcast television, it appears to have no trouble attracting ads. On a recent rerun of the original pilot, "Linda & Steven," a Big Lots spot shows a young couple standing curbside and comparing their new home to the decked-out houses around it. "I think we need some stuff?" the husband prompts. She can hardly contain her reply: "I think we need a lot of stuff!" ■

BOOKS

Ripe: The Search for the Perfect Tomato

By Arthur Allen. *Counterpoint*.

The latest in a wave of single-serving foodographies (*Cod, Salt, Banana*, etc.), *Ripe* investigates the tomato's transformation from fresh vegetable to industrial ingredient. Allen's most disturbing discovery is the use of anti-ripening genes that keep tomatoes perpetually firm—perfect for McDonald's burgers, canned pizza sauce, and long stays in produce bins. Too bad they're often tasteless. But as one tomato tycoon quips, "A poor tomato is better than no tomato at all." —Ben Buchwalter



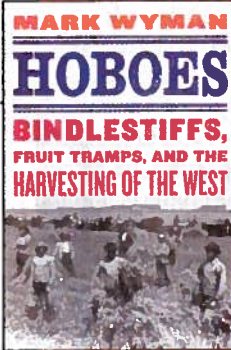
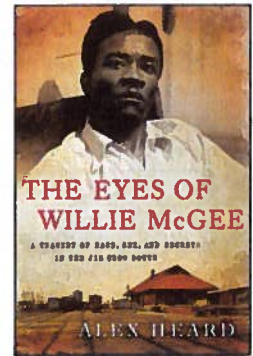
The Eyes of Willie McGee: A Tragedy of Race, Sex, and Secrets in the Jim Crow South

By Alex Heard. *HarperCollins*.

In 1945 in Laurel, Mississippi, a black man named Willie McGee was accused of raping a white woman named Willette Hawkins. Despite inconsistencies in the trial testimony that suggested that Hawkins had fabricated the story to cover up an extramarital affair with McGee, an all-white jury convicted him, and a judge sentenced him to death. In *The Eyes of Willie McGee*, journalist and Mississippi native Alex Heard tells in fascinating detail how this small-town trial snowballed into a landmark battle of the burgeoning civil rights movement.

Communist Party lawyers got wind of the case and took up McGee's appeal, arguing that his sentence was the result of racism—a white man would never be executed for rape. Over nearly six years of new trials and stays of execution, celebrities including William Faulkner and Norman Mailer advocated on McGee's behalf. But to no avail: McGee was executed in 1951.

Heard is a great storyteller and a meticulous historian, yet his real triumph was convincing both McGee's and Hawkins' descendants that [continued on page 72]



Mumble in the Jungle

How to talk like a bindlestiff

Back before John Hodgman made hobo names ironic, hoboes were anonymous laborers who crisscrossed the country in search of work. And as historian Mark Wyman writes in his new book, *Hoboes: Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), they carried some heavy lingo with them:

Hobo: Origins unknown, but possibly derived from the English term "hoe boy" (for a farm servant) or a contraction of "Ho! Boy!" Also known as 'boes, bums, bindlestiffs, floaters, drift-ins, beeters,

harvest gypsies, and almond knockers.

Freighting: Riding the rails. Preferable to "counting ties"—walking them.

Bulls: Guards hired to keep hoboes off freight trains.

Bo-teaser: A heavy pin attached to a long cord; dragged beneath moving boxcars by bulls trying to severely injure hoboes hiding there.

Jungle: The area near railroad tracks where hoboes slept, ate, and hid from bulls.

Snowdiggers: Hoboes who went south to Texas during the winter.

Buranketto boys: Japanese migrant hoboes who took their name from their blankets.

Mission stiffe: A hobo who got food from religious charities like the "Starvation Army."

Scissorbill: A hobo who wouldn't object to being treated badly.

[continued from page 69] he “wasn’t in this to take sides, push a political view, or set them up to be humiliated.” It’s their tales of how the case affected them that bring this complicated, emotionally charged story to life. —*Kiera Butler*

Manufacturing Depression: The Secret History of a Modern Disease

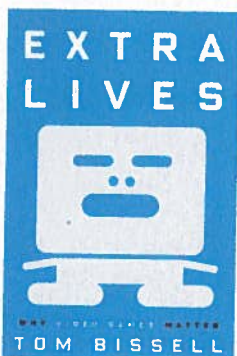
By Gary Greenberg. *Simon & Schuster.*

In the hands of Big Pharma, medicating melancholy translates to cold cash. But for Greenberg, a psychotherapist, it goes deeper than that: The overselling of chemical cures has left our Prozac nation unable to distinguish between run-of-the-mill sadness (which doesn’t need a pill) and genuine illness (which may need more than just meds). Even so, “I’m not worried that antidepressants will turn us into mind-numbed, smiley-faced zombies entirely,” he writes. “The drugs aren’t that effective, at least not yet.” —*Adam Weinstein*

Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter

By Tom Bissell. *Pantheon.*

Video games are supposed to rot your brain, but this thoughtful and funny game-by-game memoir makes a convincing case that virtual adventures can be as emotionally resonant as the real thing. For Bissell, gaming is truly a mind-expanding experience: “You constantly find things, constantly learn things, constantly see things you could not have imagined.” He counts the 30 coked-up hours he spent playing *Grand Theft*



Auto—and appreciating its surprisingly traditional moral code—among his most treasured memories. —*Jen Phillips*

FILM

Casino Jack and the United States of Money

Magnolia Pictures. 120 minutes.

Five years on, the Jack Abramoff scandal seems like a distant memory. But the new

documentary from director Alex Gibney (*Taxi to the Dark Side*) portrays the rise and fall of the right-wing superlobbyist as a colorful prologue to the new era of unrestricted corporate campaign cash.

Casino Jack traces Abramoff’s early career as a College Republican alongside Ralph Reed and Karl Rove, as well as his farcical turn as the producer of an anti-Soviet action movie. The humor wears off when he arrives on K Street in the early ’90s, shilling for sweatshops in Saipan and extracting enormous fees from Indian tribes. By the time Abramoff hires a lifeguard to front a company that will launder millions in kickbacks, you have to at least admire his ambition. The film skims over the unraveling of Abramoff’s empire, but Gibney is clear that his downfall didn’t end the corruption. Abramoff’s exploitation of the system was unprecedented, but he didn’t invent it. —*Jascha Hoffman*

Strange Powers

Flix Films. 85 minutes.

The indie pop band the Magnetic Fields is best known for 69 *Love Songs*, a three-

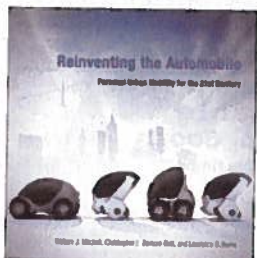
The MIT Press

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