

Pigs at the Trough: How Corporate Greed and Political Corruption Are Undermining America

by Arianna Huffington

(2003, Crown Publishers, 275 pages, \$22)

I really like listening to Arianna Huffington argue with people on NPR. She's articulate, witty—and she's got attitude. Unfortunately, this does not translate to print. Though her facts are straight and reveal one hell of a story (even if you'd already suspected a lot of this stuff, the statistics on how much corporations benefit from lobbying and how little the "public good" is considered by anyone are shocking), many of them get lost in the midst of clichés like the two-page description of "CEO-ville," ending with, "It's a cushy, exclusive enclave that has broken away from the rest of the Republic, where the motto is 'Land of the free, home of the off-shore tax shelter.'"

The Unfinished Twentieth Century

by Jonathan Schell

(2001, Verso, 128 pages, \$19)

This book contains two essays, the second of which is extremely relevant and insightful. Do not bother reading the first essay; I will encapsulate it for you here: Everyone, from politicians to the media to the American public, forgot about nuclear proliferation as soon as the Cold War was over. Thus, the defining point of our times will be what happens next—either we will look back on the end of the Cold War 50 years from now as the beginning of an even larger arms race, or governments will come to their senses and agree to disarm. Schell repeats that simple thought a gazillion times and draws a totally unnecessary and lengthy parallel to *Heart of Darkness*. The second essay, on the other hand, is well-written, packed with facts, and full of clever analysis of the nuclear power balance.

The Lovely Bones

by Alice Sebold

(2002, Little, Brown & Co., 336 pages, \$21.95)

Could Sebold get her ass any more kissed for this book? Having picked it up after the media blitz, I was expecting to be supercritical of *The Lovely Bones*, the way you are when everyone tells you that a movie's the best they've seen and then you're set up for nothing but disappointment. No dice. It's a good, fast read, and the first fifty pages are simply written and truly powerful. The narrator, a 14-year-old rape and murder victim, tells her story looking down from heaven—a heaven that for her consists of high school, *Cosmo*, and lots of friendly dogs. The book does digress into extremes along the way, and there are a few subplots (lesbian obsessions, etc.) that come out of nowhere, but all in all, it's well worth picking up. **Amy Westervelt**

