

People & Places

Books

Publisher pulls Roth bio

John Grisham pens a basketball thriller

By Rob Merrill

'Sooley,' by John Grisham (Doubleday)
When you've written 35 novels and are working on a streak of 43 consecutive No. 1 New York Times bestsellers, you can write about whatever you want. That's probably the simplest way to explain why **John Grisham's** latest is a basketball story and doesn't feature a single courtroom scene.

It's not the first sports book for Grisham, of course, but it's the first set in the big-time world of college hoops. Samuel Sooley, nicknamed Sooley, is a 17-year-old playing on dirt courts in his native South Sudan when we first meet him. Growing like a weed and with an infectious passion for the game, soon he's in Orlando playing on a team of traveling Sudanese all-stars, showcasing his skills for college coaches.

The joy of a Grisham novel is turning the pages as the plot propels you forward, so I'll avoid revealing too much. Suffice it to say "Sooley" follows the familiar Grisham playbook - short chapters, plenty of foreshadowing, and a rapid-fire prose that's easy to read and hard to put down.

Grisham seems to enjoy moonlighting as a sportswriter. There are entire paragraphs that read like AP game recaps: "Central ripped off a 14-0 run and led by 15 at the half... Sooley grabbed 11 rebounds, for his first double-double... Sooley, still coming off the bench but playing 29 minutes, scored 31 and blocked four shots." He relishes putting words in the mouth of Sooley's fictional coach, who tells his team before their first-ever NCAA tournament game: "Men, we don't deserve respect. Yet. Respect is out there on the floor, just waiting for us to go get it." If they can get the casting right, it'll make an action-packed sports movie.

Harder to recreate in a film adaptation will be the secondary plot of the novel, which focuses on the family Sooley leaves behind in Sudan. When a rebel group burns their village, they join millions of fellow refugees fleeing the country, eventually finding food and shelter in a Ugandan camp. They're never far from Sooley's mind as his basketball career takes flight in America and the juxtaposition of his fame and celebrity with his family's plight back home is the heart of the story.

Fiction

When Sooley's college team, North Carolina Central, qualifies for March Madness, Grisham has a little fun with his fiction and history, writing, "Never in the tournament's storied history had a No. 16 beaten a No. 1." The novel is set in 2016, two years prior to Grisham's favorite team, No. 1-ranked Virginia, losing to No. 16-ranked University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in the 2018 tournament.

It's not spoiling too much to say that Sooley's team makes history in Grisham's world and their dream season continues. The pages turn even more quickly after that, building to a climax that won't leave readers doubting whether this is a John Grisham novel.

The publisher of a highly anticipated and widely discussed biography of **Philip Roth** is pulling the book and cutting ties with author **Blake Bailey**, who faces multiple allegations of sexual harassment and assault. W.W. Norton and Company previously released Bailey's memoir "The Splendid Things We Planned."

"Norton is permanently putting out of print our editions of 'Philip Roth: The Biography' and 'The Splendid Things We Planned,' Blake Bailey's 2014 memoir," the publisher announced Tuesday. "Mr. Bailey will be free to seek publication elsewhere if he chooses. In addition, Norton will make a donation in the amount of the book advance for 'Philip Roth: The Biography' to organizations that fight against sexual assault or harassment and work to protect survivors."

The stunning decision follows reports last week from The New York Times, The New Orleans Times-Picayune and The Associated Press among others that Bailey, who in the 1990s taught eighth grade English in New Orleans, had behaved inappropriately with students and later sought sexual relationships. Two former students and a publishing executive have alleged that he assaulted them. Bailey was quickly dropped by his literary agency, the Story Factory, and Norton announced last week it would pause publication and publicity as it reviewed allegations.

Norton has acknowledged being contacted, anonymously, by a woman in 2018 who alleged that Bailey had assaulted her three years earlier. The publisher never responded directly to the email, sent by Bloomsbury sales and marketing vice president Valentina Rice, and instead forwarded it to Bailey. Rice first went public with her allegations last week in The New York Times and confirmed her account with the AP.

Assault

The alleged assault took place at the home of Times book critic **Dwight Garner**, who was informed by Rice soon after it happened and, at Rice's request, did not until recently tell anyone at the paper. The Times had covered Bailey's book extensively, including a long profile of Bailey that ran in its Sunday magazine. Garner did not review the Roth biography.

"Our critic acted appropriately and ethically by honoring the wishes of his friend, Ms. Rice, who confided in him in 2015 and asked him not to share the allegation," a Times spokesperson told the AP. "And it was at Ms. Rice's request that Dwight spoke with The Times."

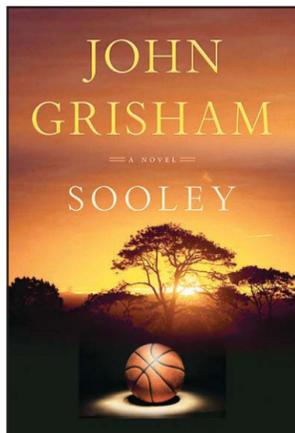
Bailey, whose Roth book came out in early April, has denied any wrongdoing. His attorney, **Billy Gibbens**, condemned Norton, while noting that "Philip Roth" is still being sold overseas.

"Norton made the drastic, unilateral decision to take Mr. Bailey's books out of print, based on the false and unsubstantiated allegations against him, without undertaking any investigation or offering Mr. Bailey the opportunity to refute the allegations," he said in a statement emailed to The Associated Press. "Mr. Bailey's European publishers wisely have not taken such a rash course of action, and Norton's knee-jerk reaction is troubling and unwarranted."

The Roth biography may also remain available in the US as an audiobook, which was released by a separate company, Recorded Books Inc. The audio publisher did not immediately respond to a request from the AP about the book's status. (AP)



Pearl Jam members, from left, Mike McCready, Matt Cameron, Eddie Vedder, Jeff Ament and Stone Gossard appear at a news conference in Mexico City, on July 17, 2003. Pearl Jam should be on the road celebrating 30 years of 'Ten' with a tour. Pearl Jam's postponed European tour was rescheduled for June and July 2022. The delay not only put any plans to celebrate 'Ten' on hold, Pearl Jam has still yet to tour in support of last year's release, 'Gigaton.' (AP)



This cover image released by Doubleday shows 'Sooley' by John Grisham. (AP)



Carlile



Vuillard

Variety

NEW YORK: The Grammy Museum will reopen next month after being closed for more than a year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The museum in downtown Los Angeles announced recently that it will be open to the public on May 21. The museum will launch with three new exhibits — "Motown: The Sound of Young America," "Dave Matthews Band: Inside and Out" and "Y Para Siempre... Marco Antonio Solís."

The museum will open at limited capacity to maintain social distancing, following guidelines provided by LA County. Attendees will be required to wear face masks and have their temperatures checked. The museum will also provide social distancing marks, hand sanitizing stations and a touchless visitor experience.

Free admission will be granted to first responders, health care workers and essential workers through June.

The Grammy Museum is a nonprofit organization through The Recording Academy, which annually produces the Grammy Awards. The museum will celebrate its reopening with a members-only virtual event featuring Grammy-winning singer-songwriter **Brandi Carlile** on May 13. (AP)

LONDON: Books from Europe and Latin America that blur the boundaries of fiction, history and memoir are the final six contenders for the 50,000-pound (\$69,000) International Booker Prize.

The shortlist for the literary award, announced Thursday, includes "The War of the Poor," a story of religion and revolution by France's **Eric Vuillard**, Jewish-Russian family history "In Memory of Memory" by Russian writer **Maria Stepanova** and imaginative short-story collection "The Dangers of Smoking in Bed" by **Argentina's Mariana Enriquez**.

The other finalists are war story "At Night All Blood is Black," by France's **David Diop**, science-themed story collection "When We Cease to Understand the World" by **Chile's Benjamin Labatut** and futuristic workplace novel "The Employees" by Danish writer **Olga Ravn**.

The award, run alongside the Booker Prize for English-language fiction, is given annually to a work of fiction in any

Music

Pearl Jam revisits first studio album

McCready proud of 30 years of 'Ten'

LOS ANGELES, April 28, (AP) — The Pearl Jam songs that would end up as tracks on the "Ten" album were played live at clubs along the West Coast for months leading into the band's first recording session. The potential was there for Pearl Jam to serve as more than an opening act for bigger bands at the time — like Alice in Chains — and it needed an album to support the songs that defined the grunge scene.

"Ten" would soon be born. "This was my first real recording session with a budget of a record company, and the pressures, all that stuff," guitarist Mike McCready said. "I didn't really know about it. I was just stoked to be doing this. I thought our band was great."

Pearl Jam started recording sessions in late March 1991 and the album that launched the band's meteoric rise was released five months later. For McCready, 30 years of "Ten," has gone by as quick as a lightning bolt.

"That was the first time I went, all of us were all firing on all cylinders here," he said. "These are cool songs, we have a great singer. I feel confident in playing with these guys that we could go out and do really well. I didn't know what that meant. We were just starting. I'm seeing old pictures of us from when we first started around that time. We looked very disjointed on stage. What are we doing? We hadn't coalesced yet. But I knew the energy was there."

McCready, bassist Jeff Ament, guitarist Stone Gossard, and singer Eddie Vedder (and drummer Dave Krusen in his lone Pearl Jam album) spent two months recording the album that sold more than 13 million copies in the United States alone.

"I remember we recorded 'Even Flow' like 50 times, or 40, something crazy like that," McCready said. "We could never get the groove right. It was driving everybody crazy. Jeff ran out and got mad and shot baskets. We finally ended up getting the take. I'm not sure if Stone even loves the take

that we got."

Pearl Jam fans loved the take — and the album, and most everything else the band has produced over three decades. They hoped to celebrate 30 years of "Ten" with a tour.

Surprise

McCready played on Pearl Jam's biggest hits with a Stratocaster he splurged on as his first vintage guitar purchase. He recently teamed with Fender and master builder Vincent Van Trigt to recreate the 1960 Stratocaster for sale to collectors down to the last scratch. McCready was startled to learn during the process that his beloved Strat was from 1960 — not 1959. McCready owned the Stratocaster since 1991 and it was part of his collection of vintage 1959 guitars. He loved the era of guitars so much, that he even has a "59" tattoo on his left wrist.

Not so fast.

"It was a psychological rug being pulled out from under my feet," McCready said on a Zoom with The Associated Press. "I still love the guitar. It doesn't matter. But it was a crazy surprise."

McCready played his Strat on almost 800 shows and just about every record — including Temple of the Dog's hit "Hunger Strike" — and said he accidentally picked up the replica three times to play before he realized it wasn't the real deal. He's getting Fender to make him a 1959 model.

He might even get to play it live next year.

On a break because of the pandemic, Pearl Jam's postponed European tour was rescheduled for June and July 2022. The delay not only put any plans to celebrate "Ten" on hold, Pearl Jam has still yet to tour in support of last year's release, "Gigaton."

"We'll get out there again. We'll play," McCready said. "I want to see what songs work on the 'Gigaton' record. That's the thing about playing live. We were just rehearsing, all of it, four days before we canceled the tour."

McCready and Ament only recently

saw each other in person for the first time in more than a year. And Pearl Jam spent its downtime working on its voting campaign, releasing streams of classic performances, and plugging up-and-coming bands that need support (McCready named the Black Tones) more than a veteran, financially-set band like themselves.

The 55-year-old McCready credited 18 years of sobriety to keeping him energized about Pearl Jam and whatever lies ahead.

"I don't why I'm still here, I'm just happy I am," he said. "We still need to work on our communication. But we're aware of all that, so I think we try to do that to the best of our ability. We've been through a lot of different highs and lows. But we've been through it together."

Also:

CLEVELAND: Grammy Award nominated rock & soul duo Black Pumas and Cleveland's own **Machine Gun Kelly** will perform at this week's NFL draft.

The league announced its musical acts for the second and third days of the draft, which is back on the road after being all virtual last year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A massive stage has been constructed near FirstEnergy Stadium and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame to host the three-day event from April 29 to May 1.

Black Pumas will perform after the third round is completed on April 30. Their self-titled debut album was nominated as Album of the Year at the 2021 Grammy Awards.

Machine Gun Kelly, who graduated from Shaker Heights High School on Cleveland's east side, will close the festivities the following day.

Rockers Kings of Leon will help kick off the draft on April 29 before Commissioner **Roger Goodell** tells the Jacksonville Jaguars they are on the clock with the No. 1 overall pick.

language that is translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland.

The contenders often include writers who are widely read in their own languages but less known in English. Four of this year's six shortlisted authors have never been published in English before.

Several internationally renowned writers who were on the 13-book longlist failed to make the cut, including Chinese writer **Can Xue** and Kenyan author **Ngugi wa Thiong'o**.

The winner will be announced June 2, with the prize money split between the

winning book's author and its translator.

British author **Lucy Hughes-Hallett**, who is chairing the panel of judges, said the list showed that some of the most exciting new writing is going on "in the borderlands" between fiction and other genres, such as history and memoir. (AP)



In this March 27, 2021 file photo, people react ahead of a music concert in Barcelona, Spain. A rock concert in Barcelona attended by 4,500 music fans who had passed a COVID-19 screening produced no significant transmission of the coronavirus, event organizers said April 27. (AP) — **Details on Page 12**

RENO, Nev.: Burning Man organizers announced Tuesday they are canceling this summer's annual counter-culture festival in the Nevada desert for the second year in a row because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The San Francisco-based group posted a video on its website that said there are too many uncertainties to resolve in time to hold the event as scheduled Aug 26 to Sept 3 in the Black Rock Desert 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of Reno.

Burning Man CEO **Marian Goodell** said the "difficult decision" is "based on the best information available to us." "We know the need for community has never been stronger. And building community is what Burners do best. We also recognize the pandemic is not over," she said. "We have decided to focus our energy on building Black Rock City 2022."

The Reno Gazette Journal first reported the news Tuesday on its website. The decision was based on a combination of factors, not a single issue, the group said. (AP)