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# The next Franzen?

## Budding authors poised to write a chapter on literary and financial success

By MICHAEL GILTZ

worth reading.

Every editor with a bottom line to watch years for the surprise-hit novel, a book that garners rave reviews, vaults onto best-seller lists and establishes name-brand prestige for its author.

In other words, a novel to be proud of that also makes big bucks and leads to serious attention and sales in years to come.

They don't just want blockbuster fakes like Charles Frazier's "Cold Mountain" or John Berendt's "Midnight in the Garden of Good & Evil."

What they want is Jonathan Franzen's "The Corrections," a National Book Award winner and best seller, a novel that will undoubtedly boost Franzen into publishing's higher plains of modern masters, up there with greats like John Irving, Tom Wolfe and Philip Roth.

Here are our picks for the best new writers poised to follow Franzen into the winner's circle. They won't all make it, but they're all

**David Ebershoff, "Pasadena"** (Random House; August): Surely, if anyone looks ready to repeat Franzen's breakout, it is Ebershoff.

He's based in New York, has many ties to the publishing community (Ebershoff heads the Modern Library imprint), received excellent reviews for his beguiling debut novel, "The Danish Girl," and got kind words for his short-story collection, "The Rose City."

His newest book, "Pasadena," is an ambitious, sweeping tale set in the early 1900s, with just the right mix of intellectual heft and storytelling verve.

Ebershoff is good-looking, to boot, which is always useful when your book breaks out and you're asked to appear on TV with *Charlie Rose*.

**Haven Kimmel, "The Solace of Leaving Early"** (Doubleday; June): Kimmel hopes to make it to the big time through the back door, via a successful memoir.

Her book "A Girl Named Zippy" detailed small-town life in Mooresland, Ind., with, yes, zip and humor.

Now, this North Carolinian could well capitalize with her debut novel, a John Irving-like mix of murder, a failed novelist and glimpses of the Virgin Mary.

**Jonathan Coe, "The Runners' Club"** (Knopf; February): Coe is a major figure on the U.K. literary scene, having published two scathing funny and moving satires, "The House of Sleep" and "The Winslow Legacy."

His take on the '70s in Birmingham, England, is equally accomplished. Now, he needs the kind of positive reviews that will help bring his wicked humor to a wide American audience. A clever-looking cover helps.

**Jane Green, "Bookends"** (Broadway; June): Green is also a well-reviewed big seller in Great Britain, though more along the commercial lines of "Bridget Jones's Diary." She



writes sexy, funny novels with an emotional punch, and her American publishers have given her previous novels "Mr. Maybe" and "Jemima J" appropriately sexy and funny campaigns. "Bookends" was her biggest U.K. success to date (350,000 copies and counting), so it's only a matter of time before readers discover her as a beach read they couldn't be ashamed of devouring.

**Mareel Moring, "The Dream Room"** (William Morrow; February): Moring, who is a best-selling author in the Netherlands, hopes to become a big name in the United States by thinking small.

His compact new novel — about a boy in the '60s who builds model airplanes, reads cookbooks with delight and watches his family fall apart — is just 128 pages and tiny in size, like earlier small-format successes "Einstein's Dream" and "The Bridges of Madison County."

Moring is sure to get better reviews than "Bridges," thanks to the raves for his most recent book, "In Baby-land."

**Kim Deitch, "The Boulevard of Broken Dreams"** (Pantheon; August): With the breakout commercial and critical success of graphic novelists Chris Ware and Daniel Clowes (not to mention the iconic status of R. Crumb), this is an ideal time to give Deitch the mainstream push he's never received.

His novel — set in New York City in the 1930s — is a playful tale of an animation studio whose biggest star, *Waldo the Cat*, is unexpectedly real.

Deitch has been a force in this genre for more than 30 years, and the weight of his impressive career should get him plenty of press.

**Stephen L. Carter, "The Emperor of Ocean Park"** (Knopf; June): Yale law professor Carter has nothing but high expectations to

build on for his much-anticipated debut novel.

He's written seven well-received books of nonfiction (including "Civility"), but this weighty 672-page tome about an upper-crust East Side family is his first foray into fiction.

Most books, even well-reviewed ones, sink without a trace. But the buzz is already building for this one, so Carter is certain to receive lots and lots of attention.

**Gabe Hudson, "Dear Mr. President"** (Knopf; August): This member of the McSweeney's mafia (home of Dave Eggers, best-selling author of "A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius"), hopes to turn his prime placement in the New Yorker's fiction issue into the first step toward big success for his offbeat collection of eight stories and a novella.

Short-story collections are never supposed to sell, and novellas are almost unheard of, but Hudson hopes to emulate the breakout success of humorists like David Rakoff and David Sedaris.

Of course, any of these authors could end up like **Colson Whitehead**. His debut novel was "The Intentional" work "The Underground." He followed it last year with the ambitious, swaggering novel "John Henry Days," a book that solidified his reputation among the cognoscenti but didn't quite make it to a broad audience.

"John Henry Days" comes out in paperback in May from Anchor, yet another chance for people to discover one of the brightest talents around.

Whitehead lives in Brooklyn, where he is presumably working on his next book, fully realizing he could break out at any time or simply settle for the eternal tag given the talented few who get all the acclaim but none of the sales: a writer's writer.



Clockwise from below: The buzz is already building for Stephen L. Carter's novel; David Ebershoff blends intellect and sound storytelling in his new book; Jane Green has hit it big in Britain in a "Bridget Jones" way; and Colson Whitehead has a solid reputation among the cognoscenti.



From left: Jonathan Coe could match his U.K. fame in the States; David Kimmel follows her successful memoir with a debut novel; and Gabe Hudson mines Dr. Seuss' territory.