

suades his townspeople, then surrounding towns, to rise up in revolt against the corrupt nobleman and his henchmen. From start to finish, this is supersmart popular fiction, slick yet stirring, packed with colorful details of medieval life, bursting with unforgettable characters and clever tropes and themes. Pat-

erson's fans will adore this one. (Mar. 3)

Forecast: *More than any Patterson since Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas, this book has the potential to expand the author's already huge fan base. Its tag line alone ("Every thousand years or so, a great adventure comes along...") will draw in browsers, as will a fabu-*

lous cover featuring a gold castle and the title in bold red; anyone who reads one page will be hooked. Expect this to hit #1 with ease.

THE KING OF TORTS

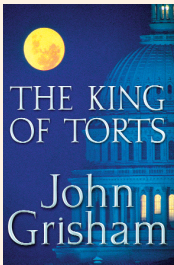
John Grisham. Doubleday, \$27.95 (388p) ISBN 0-385-50804-2

★ Grisham continues to impress with his daring, venturing out of legal thrillers entirely for *A Painted House* and *Skipping Christmas* (the re-release of which this past fall was itself a bold move) and, within the genre, working major variations. Here's his most unusual legal thriller yet—a story whose hero and villain are the same, a young man with the tragic flaw of greed; a story whose suspense arises not from physical threat but moral turmoil, and one that launches a devastating assault on a group of the author's colleagues within the law.

Mass tort lawyers are Grisham's target, the men (they're all men here, at least) who win billion-dollar class-action settlements from corporations selling bad products, then rake fantastic fees off the top, with far smaller payouts going to the people harmed by the products. Clay Carter is a burning-out lawyer at the Office of the Public Defender (OPD) in Washington, D.C., when he catches the case of a teen who, for no apparent reason, has gunned down an acquaintance. Clay is approached by a mysterious stranger, the enigmatic Max Pace, who says he represents a megacorporation whose bad drug caused the teen—and others—to kill. The corporation will pay Clay \$10 million to settle with all the murder victims at \$5 million per, if all is accomplished on the hush-hush; that way, the corporation avoids trial and possibly much higher jury awards. After briefly examining his conscience, Clay bites. He quits the OPD, sets up his own firm and settles the cases. In reward, Pace gives him a present—a mass tort case based on stolen evidence but worth tens of millions in fees. Clay lunges again, eventually winning over a hundred million in fees. He is crowned by the press the new King of Torts, with enough money to hobnob with the other, venal-hearted tort royalty, to buy a Porsche, a Georgetown townhouse and a private jet, but not enough to forget his heartache over the woman he loves, who dumped him as a loser right before his career took off.

Clay's financial/legal hubris knows few bounds, and soon he's overextended, his future hanging on the results of one product liability trial. The tension is considerable throughout, and readers will like the gentle ending, but Grisham's aim here clearly is to educate as he entertains. He can be didactic (" 'Nobody earns ten million dollars in six months, Clay,' " a friend warns. " 'You might win it, steal it, or have it drop out of the sky, but nobody earns money like that. It's ridiculous and obscene' "), but readers will applaud Grisham's fierce moral stance (while perhaps wondering what sort of advance he got for this book) as they cling to his words every step along the way of this powerful and gripping morality tale. (On sale Feb. 4)

Forecast: *Never mind reports of mega-authors whose sales are falling. Despite a grim, unimagined cover and a curious photo of a grizzled author inside the jacket, this one will sell through the roof.*



REPETITION

ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET, TRANS. FROM THE FRENCH BY RICHARD HOWARD. Grove, \$23 (192p) ISBN 0-8021-1736-8

A spy novel about a French agent in 1949 Berlin becomes an oedipal journey into the agent's past and an adventure in unreliable narration in this work by nouveau *roman* pioneer Robbe-Grillet, his first in 20 years. Henri Robin (or so his passport identifies him) is a spy crossing Europe on a train, pondering a mission that has yet to be revealed to him. As he enters the ravaged city, Robin is haunted by flashbacks, even though, ostensibly, he has never been to Berlin before. His assignment, he learns, is to watch a murder that's supposed to take place in an outdoor plaza. Robin observes closely, but when he goes to recount the details, his story is confused and contradictory, and Robin finds himself in the heart of the murder investigation. As the nebulous case plays out, Robin comes to live with the murder victim's wife and adolescent daughter, Gigi, the latter representing a pivotal link to Robin's family history as well as the espionage machinations. Robbe-Grillet shifts back and forth between the criminal investigation, the espionage plot and the playful Freudian analysis of Robin's childhood and subconscious. Extensive footnotes introduce the possibility that Robin may in fact be a lu-

natic. Newcomers braced for surreal narrative lurches will find this an entertaining introduction to Robbe-Grillet's work. As the title coyly suggests, his admirers will find much of this territory familiar, but that only adds another layer of irony to Robbe-Grillet's witty allusions. (Feb.)

BREATHLESS TO CASABLANCA

JAMES DOUGLAS, TRANS. FROM THE GERMAN BY JAMES DOUGLAS, TRACEY J. EVANS AND RICK OSBORNE. Welcome Rain, \$15 paper (448p) ISBN 1-56649-260-2

First published in Germany in September 2000, this spy thriller by Swiss author Douglas (*Zero Philadelphia*) made headlines for its eerily prescient premise, which includes the attempted terrorist destruction of a U.S. aircraft carrier and the bombing of a New York City office building. An al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist mastermind, Yusef bin Golem, wants to sink the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, which is returning home from the Ionian Sea through the Strait of Gibraltar. He diverts U.S. attention with the bombing of a covert CIA communications center in Manhattan. Then, moving his base to the *Shiraz*, a converted supertanker, he heads for Gibraltar, setting in motion a plot to blackmail Nadine Moran, brilliant French cryptologist developing secret codes for the U.S. Navy. Meanwhile, Swiss novelist Stan Polinsky, under suspicion for his uncle's murder, is pondering the uncle's inscrutable deathbed whispers of "Nadine" and the contents of his mysterious red file. The desperate Moran intercepts Polinsky in Zurich and enlists his aid. But which side is she working for? Burdened with superfluous characters, plot twists and a comic book showdown between Polinsky and bin Golem, the novel is also sidetracked by the hijacking of a plane full of high-level American tourists. In spite of these flaws, the thriller is Douglas's strongest work thus far. Though he doesn't yet rank with genre masters, readers will no doubt marvel at Douglas's prophetic vision. (Feb.)

Forecast: *According to promotional materials, the FBI contacted Douglas several days after September 11, intrigued by his premise that a bin Laden-like terrorist might be directing his operations from a ship at sea. The curious backstory and timely material may give sales a boost.*

THE RISING OF THE MOON

EMILE CAPOUYA. Lyons, \$16.95 (120p) ISBN 1-58574-664-9

Capouya (*In the Sparrow Hills*) once again draws on his WWII experience as a merchant marine in this short novel about the wanderings of a highly principled and combative American merchant seaman in his 20s named Mike. The story opens with Mike stranded in France shortly after WWII, having had a falling out with the