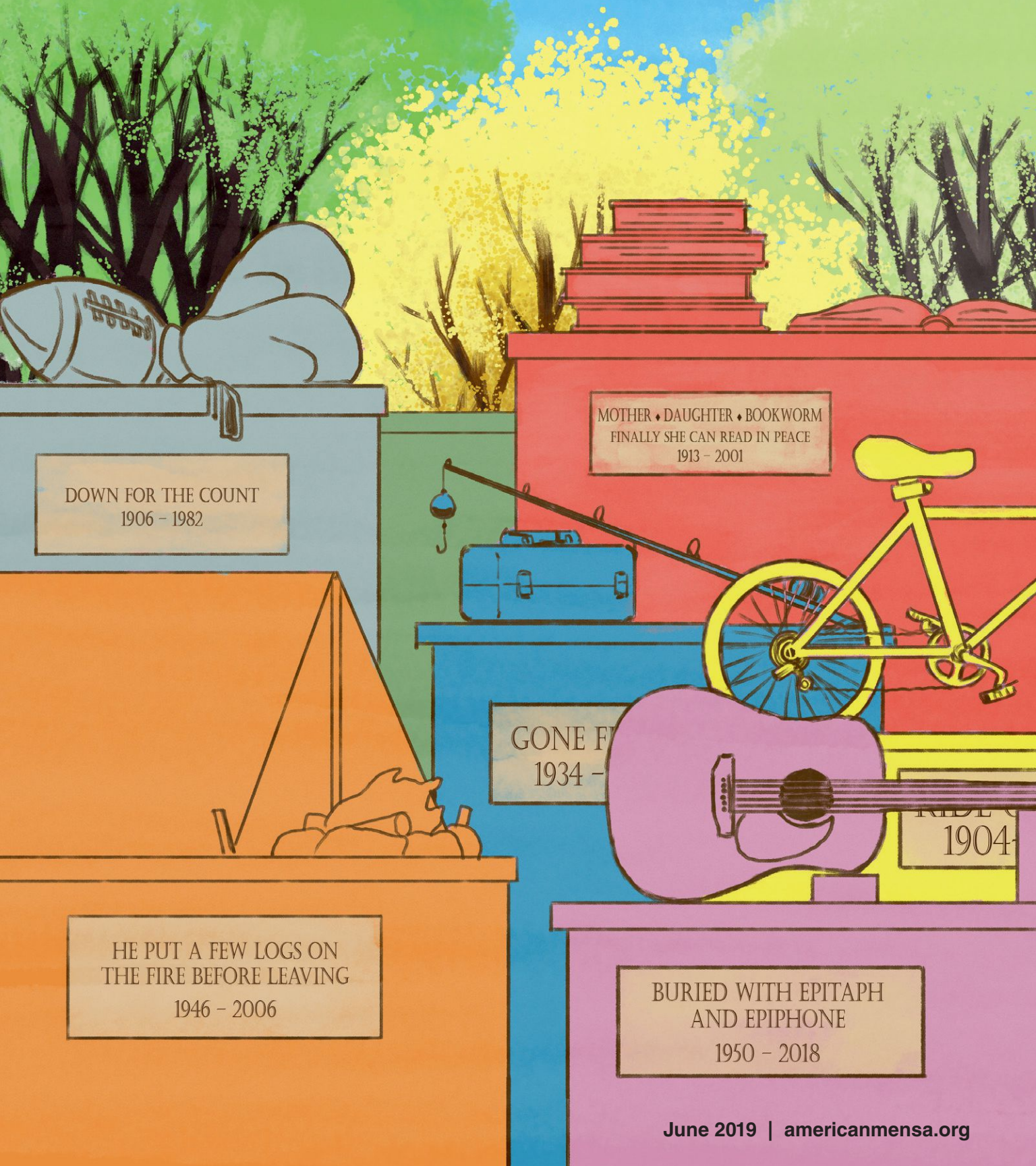


MENSA® | BULLETIN

The Magazine of American Mensa®



DOWN FOR THE COUNT
1906 - 1982

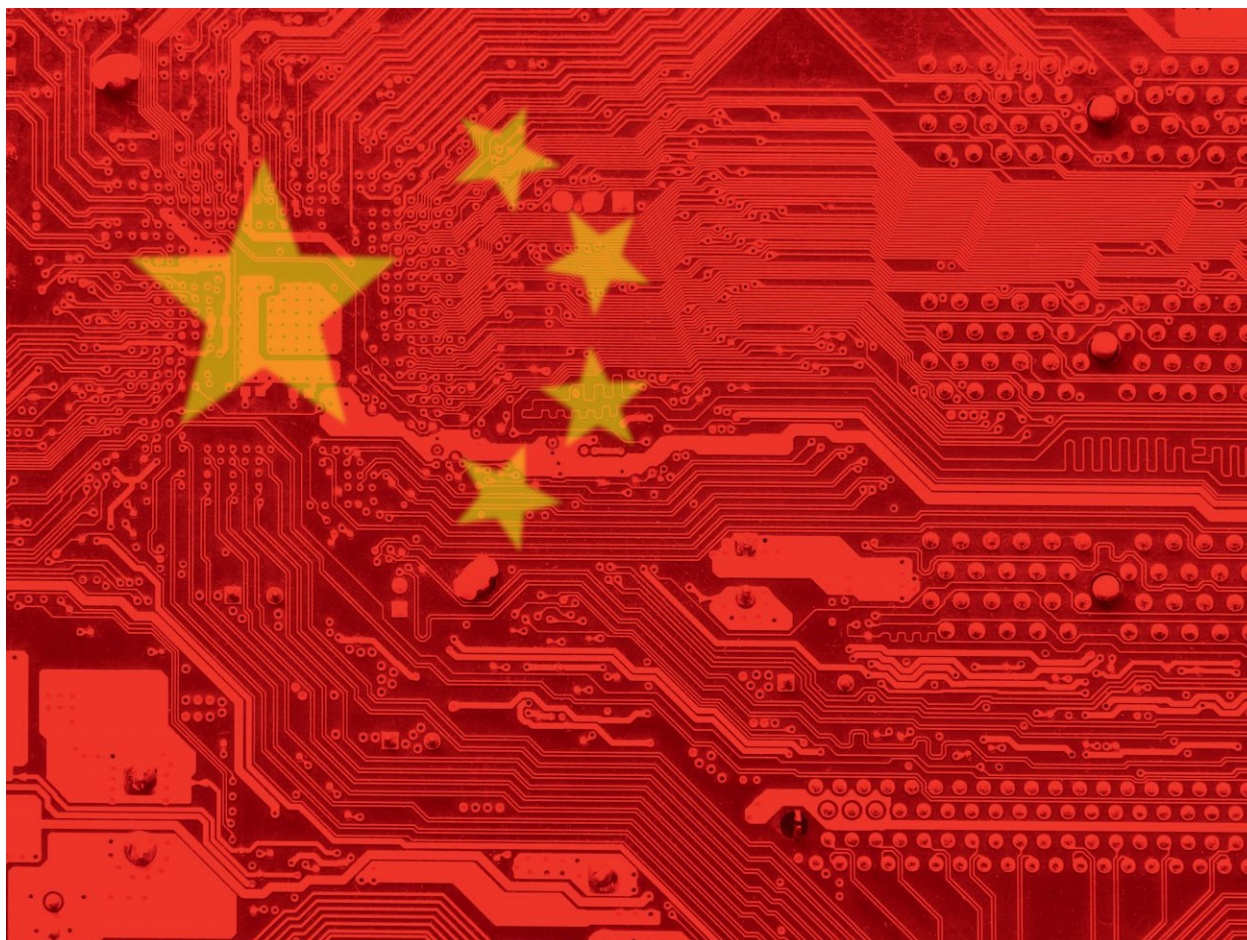
MOTHER • DAUGHTER • BOOKWORM
FINALLY SHE CAN READ IN PEACE
1913 - 2001

GONE F
1934 -

HE PUT A FEW LOGS ON
THE FIRE BEFORE LEAVING
1946 - 2006

BURIED WITH EPITAPH
AND EPIPHONE
1950 - 2018

1904-



"The West may have sparked the fire of deep learning, but China will be the biggest beneficiary of the heat the AI fire is generating." p. 24

FEATURES

24 China Rising in Age of Applied AI

Scrappy entrepreneurs, abundant data, friendly policy, and government funding give Asian superpower an edge

28 Where's the Harm?

Why can't we just discard science we don't like or that conflicts with our faith?

32 Why There Is No Afterlife: A Systems Perspective

People break down just like everything else in the universe

34 Fiction: Too Darn Smart

Will the kid ever learn?

38 Annual Officer Reports

48 2019 Mind Games Winners

STAPLES

- 4 Photography
- 6 Contributors
- 7 Chair's Column
- 8 Volunteers
- 9 Editor's Note
- 10 Letters
- 14 Games
- 16 On Language
- 18 Science Briefs
- 21 Games Answers
- 22 Book Reviews
- 46 Mensa Foundation
- 47 Member Deaths
- 49 Mensa News
- 51 Events
- 53 Classified Ads
- 54 Personal Essay

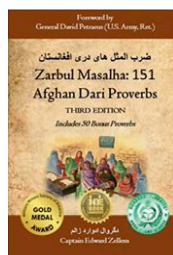


Cover: Richard Lederer challenged Mensans to craft their best epitaphs for this issue's "Looking at Language" column (p. 16), and for the cover artist Jonathan Moore imagines a cemetery where stelaes and monuments are more reflective of our final words.

Passion Projects

True believers deliver when not vexed by verbosity **By Caroline McCullagh**

THIS IS A MONTH for passionate authors. I suppose almost all authors are passionate about their subjects. Why else would they invest so much time in writing? But this month, the authors are even more upfront than usual.



Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs, Third Edition, by Edward Zellem is a pure labor of love done for family and friends that has grown into something bigger. It's now available in more than 100 countries in more than a dozen languages.

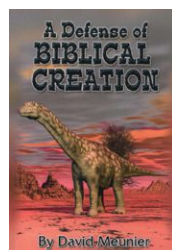
Zellem, a captain in the Navy, learned Dari, one of the two official Afghan languages, before being stationed in Afghanistan for 18 months in 2010-11. While there, he learned how Afghans use proverbs in all aspects of their lives. He started collecting and using them himself and finally published this award-winning book.

The money he earned from it has been invested in Afghan literacy. War has been a constant there for more than 30 years. At this point, because of damage to the education system by the Taliban, only about 30 percent of Afghans are literate. Zellem told the *Christian Science Monitor* about his work: "This book is everything the Taliban is against. It's art, it's images of living things, it's literacy, it's literacy for girls."

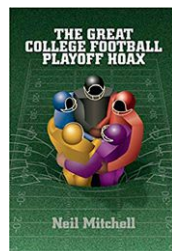
The book, with a foreword from retired Gen. David Petraeus, actually contains 201 proverbs. Zellem acquired 50 more when he put out a call to crowdsource a similar book of Pashto proverbs. Pashto is the second official language. Most Afghans speak both. *Mataluna: 151 Afghan Pashto Proverbs* is the result of that second effort.

The proverbs of *Zarbul Masalha* are set up one to a page. Each proverb appears first in Dari script, then transliterated, then with a literal translation into English, and finally a meaning. Many of the proverbs have American equivalents. You'll see much here that seems familiar, such as "Don't burn a carpet for a flea" or "Write, write, to become a good calligrapher."

You can read this book in maybe two hours, including the interesting introductory material. It will take you a lot longer to think over the rich ideas presented here about our common humanity with people who are so far away and seem so foreign.



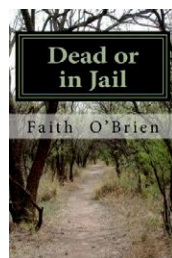
A Defense of Biblical Creation by David Meunier is not really a book I can review, but I will call your attention to it. As I mentioned before, I'm an anthropologist by training, so my bias is strongly with evolution. I will say that this book is more a polemic than a reasonable discussion about the merits of the case for creation and against evolution. Meunier writes, "This book is an attempt to show how the pernicious doctrine of evolution is essentially fraudulent." People who are looking for a reasoned debate will not find it here. Meunier is preaching to the choir.



Neil Mitchell, author of *The Great College Football Playoff Hoax*, is a true believer too. Unfortunately for this review, unlike fellow *Bulletin* columnist Richard Lederer, who is still gnashing his teeth over the Chargers leaving San Diego, when it comes to football, I just say "Huh?"

But that's OK. The people for whom this book is written will recognize it immediately as something they want to read and argue for or against. Mitchell writes, "This little volume disproves, contradicts, refutes, and destroys all arguments against a true 16-team college playoff; and is a must read for all college football fans." He adds, "All arguments against a 16-team playoff are shown to be bogus."

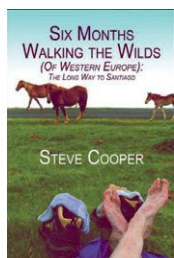
Mitchell's book is well written and well organized. He shows deep knowledge of the subject, probably because of his 62 years of watching college football. Fair warning, though: You have to be reasonably fluent in footballesse.



Another passionate writer is Faith O'Brien. Her *Dead or in Jail* is about the successful techniques she used in her 20 years of teaching remedial reading. The title refers to something one of her students said many years after he took her class – that he'd have been dead or in jail without it.

As with many books written by true believers, the ideas are interesting, the presentation less so. *Dead or in Jail* reads more like a speech than a book. All the way through, I visualized O'Brien standing at a lectern speaking to a group of educators and parents. With tightening and reorganization, I think it would work better as a magazine

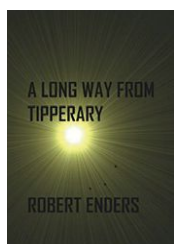
article in a professional journal and would probably get wider distribution.



In 2016, I reviewed *Santiago, Canterbury, Rome: Lessons from the Trail* by Steve Cooper. In thanks, he sent me his previous book, *Six Months Walking the Wilds (Of Western Europe): The Long Way to Santiago*, saying that I didn't need to bother to review it. It immediately got lost in the welter of books in my office.

Just as mysteriously, it recently reappeared, and I couldn't resist the opportunity to call it to your attention.

My fantasy life once included walking the Pacific Crest Trail. Life kept this a fantasy. I had to satisfy my yearning with reading charming books like this one – all the pleasures of walking with a good companion, without the blisters. I recommend it to you.



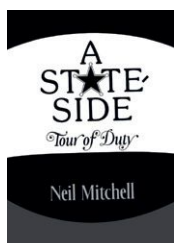
The first book of fiction this month is *A Long Way From Tipperary* by Robert Enders. This was an interesting book in many ways, but ultimately it didn't hold me. It's a war story set in the far-distant future, when the mother planet, Earth, is pretty much a backwater in serious danger of being destroyed. The two

protagonists, Bern and Subiha, are lovers who end up fighting on opposite sides in the war.

Enders has a lot of imagination, but it's inconsistent. For example, he posits a future where there are other races of humans, some green, some blue, in addition to all the colors we have now. He does some interesting things with the racial problems, but ultimately it seems to be a thinly disguised rehash of the problems we have in contemporary America, as does much else in the story.

Some ideas come directly from contemporary pop culture. For example, there's a scene of a "null gravity dodge ball" game that strongly reminded me of the quidditch scenes from the Harry Potter movies.

I think Enders' main problem is that he's seen every science fiction movie ever made and he's trying to pack it all in here. It's just too much.



A Stateside Tour of Duty by Neil Mitchell also has too much packed in, but in this case, it's not overabundant ideas and plot points; it's too much description. But where Enders' book didn't hold me, this one did. It's written in the form of a slice-of-life memoir, and in fact, it's a fictionalized accounting of much of the

author's experience in the Army when he was stationed at an obscure base, Fort Benjamin McCulloch, in Texas during the Vietnam War.

Lt. Nick Moultrie is a draftee who fully expects to be sent to Vietnam after finishing Officer Candidate School and serving a short stint in Texas. He will learn to his pleasure and sorrow that his fate lies in Texas alone. Army service in the trenches in World War I has been described as "months of boredom punctuated by moments of extreme terror." It turns out that service in Texas is not a whole lot different, especially when you're a member of the military police.

Mitchell's style is relaxed and easy to read. It feels like sitting around with a friend who happens to be a good raconteur – but who can also be just a little long-winded at times. For example, in one scene, a fellow soldier and friend tells Moultrie that he's engaged. Moultrie goes home and tells all the information to his wife. Then his wife calls the bride-to-be and they go over the same information again. In another scene, Moultrie takes a required class and lets us know. "The classes started each morning at 0800 hours, took a break from 1200 to 1300, and ended at 1700 hours." I don't care.

I've tried to go this whole column without using the e-word, but a good editor could take the bloat out of this book and make it even better (and shorter) than this 470-page version.



Arcadia by Alexander Plansky is a techno-thriller, but this time in the near future. I reviewed Plansky's first book, *Safari*, in July 2018 and gave it a rave. This one is as good but, if possible, gorier and scarier than the first. Desmond and Jenna are lovers. Jenna works as a tester of ultra-violent video games. She invites Desmond to play a game she's recently

received. A number of game testers who have played this game have participated in ultraviolence in the real world. Desmond begins to have strange and terrifying dreams, hallucinations, and experiences. He sets out to find out what's going on.

I don't care for graphic violence in my entertainment; I don't want to see or read about close-ups of blood dripping. But for those of you who do like that kind of book, I can recommend this one. The plotting and the writing are excellent, and the thrills are really scary. 📖

Unless indicated otherwise, all books reviewed are authored or co-authored by current Mensans, though sometimes using pseudonyms. To submit a book for review, send a review copy, submission form (you can download it from us.mensa.org/bookreviews or request it from bulletineditor@americanmensa.org), and any other relevant press materials to:

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