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Donald Stanley on Books

The Backhand Prizes



No year-end accumulation of book choices would be complete without a nod to those ladies and gentlemen who have distinguished themselves in ways that defy such adjectives as "best" or "most" or even "least."

Here, then, are plaudits for experiments of questionable enterprise and improbable execution.

1. The Legion of Honor, Third Degree to Leon Uris who, in "Topaz," revealed that he was privy to secrets that could save France from being gobbled up by Russia except that the old soldier in charge is so deaf he can't listen to the evidence.

2. The Holden Caulfield Award for permissive parents to Norman Mailer who, in "Why Are We in Vietnam?", indulged the year's most improbable teen-age narrator in the year's most insufferably boring monologue.

3. The Horatio Alger Award for a young man setting goals despite insuperable obstacles — and reaching them — to the hero of John Rechy's "Numbers," who vowed to have 30 homosexual affairs during a 10 day visit to Los Angeles, and did.

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4. The Billy Jo Award for original creation of an instant folk hero. To Sylvia Meagher who, in "Accessories After the Fact," sees in Lee Harvey Oswald a figure of "personal pride and dignity."

5. The Order of Nero for distinguished fiddling while civilization is zapped. To Jules Roy, author of "Journey Through China," who spent much of his time inside the world's most unreported great power worrying about the state of emotions of one Brigitte, with whom he was having a May-December affair.

the subject) tells how Dear Scott intended to program her for the life of the intellect. Sample: "Scott allowed three weeks for History of France 100 B.C. to 1st World War."

9. The CIA Cross for patriotic misinterpretations to Richard Tregaskis who, in "China Bomb," said Peking was too poor to waste an H-bomb on anything except our 7th Fleet — just before they touched the first one off in a desert.

10. The Garbo, awarded to those whose legends fare best in obscurity. To James Jones, for "Go to the Widow Maker," and Charles ("Lost Weekend") Jackson for "A Second-Hand Life."

Recommended

NONFICTION

Six Seconds in Dallas. By Josiah Thompson. Geis, \$8.95. The most painstaking research yet into what the camera revealed on Nov. 22, 1963. You can disagree with Thompson and still wish the Warren Commission had been as thorough.