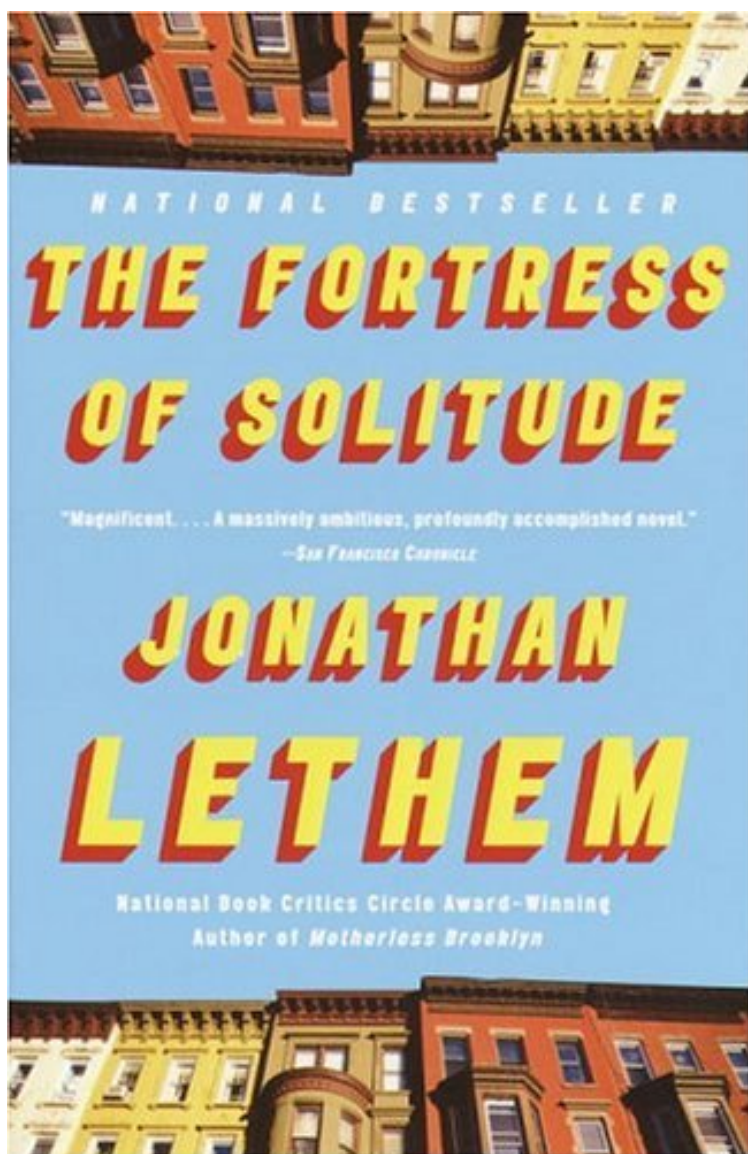


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The Fortress of Solitude



Par Jonathan Lethem
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Par Jonathan Lethem : **The Fortress of Solitude** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Fortress of Solitude:

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Description : Description du produitThis is the story of two boys, Dylan Ebdus and Mingus Rude. They are friends and neighbors, but because Dylan is white and Mingus is black, their friendship is not simple. This is the story of their Brooklyn neighborhood, which is almost exclusively black despite the first whispers of something that will become known as "gentrification."This is the story of 1970s America, a time when the most simple human decisionswhat music you listen to, whether to speak to the kid in the seat next to you, whether to give up your lunch moneyare laden with potential political, social and racial disaster. This is the story of 1990s America, when no one cared anymore.This is the story of punk, that easy white rebellion, and crack, that monstrous plague. This is the story of the loneliness of the avant-garde artist and the exuberance of the graffiti artist.This is the story of what would happen if two teenaged boys obsessed with comic book heroes actually had superpowers: They would screw up their lives. This is the story of joyous afternoons of

stickball and dreaded years of schoolyard extortion. This is the story of belonging to a society that doesn't accept you. This is the story of prison and of college, of Brooklyn and Berkeley, of soul and rap, of murder and redemption. This is the story Jonathan Lethem was born to tell. This is THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE. From the Hardcover edition.

Presentation de l'auteur A New York Times Book EDITORS' CHOICE. From the National Book Critics Circle Award-winning author of *Motherless Brooklyn*, comes the vividly told story of Dylan Ebdus growing up white and motherless in downtown Brooklyn in the 1970s. In a neighborhood where the entertainments include muggings along with games of stoopball, Dylan has one friend, a black teenager, also motherless, named Mingus Rude. Through the knitting and unraveling of the boys' friendship, Lethem creates an overwhelmingly rich and emotionally gripping canvas of race and class, superheros, gentrification, funk, hip-hop, graffiti tagging, loyalty, and memory. "A tour de force.... Belongs to a venerable New York literary tradition that stretches back through *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *A Walker in the City*, and *Call it Sleep*." -- *The New York Times Magazine* "One of the richest, messiest, most ambitious, most interesting novels of the year.... Lethem grabs and captures 1970s New York City, and he brings it to a story worth telling." -- *Time* Extrait FROM CHAPTER 7... It was entirely possible that one song could destroy your life. Yes, musical doom could fall on a lone human form and crush it like a bug. The song, that song, was sent from somewhere else to find you, to pick the scab of your whole existence. The song was your personal shitty fate, manifest as a throb of pop floating out of radios everywhere. At the very least the song was the soundtrack to your destruction, the theme. Your days reduced to a montage cut to its cowbell beat, inexorable doubled bass line and raunch vocal, a sort of chanted sneer, surrounded by groans of pleasure. The stutter and blurt of whata tuba? French horn? Rhythm guitar and trumpet, pitched to mockery. The singer might as well have held a gun to your head. How it could have been allowed to happen, how it could have been allowed on the radio? That song ought to be illegal. It wasn't racist you'll never sort that one out, don't even start so much as anti-you. Yes they were dancing, and singing, and movin to the groovin, and just when it hit me, somebody turned around and shouted Every time your sneakers met the street, the end of that summer, somebody was hurling it at your head, that song. Forget what happens when you start haunting the green-tiled halls of Intermediate School 293. September 7, 1976, the week Dylan Ebdus began seventh grade in the main building on Court Street and Butler, *Wild Cherrys Play That Funky Music* was the top song on the rhythm and blues charts. Fourteen days later it topped *Billboard's* pop charts. Your misery's anthem, - number--one song in the nation. Sing it through gritted teeth: **WHITE BOY!** Lay down the boogie and play that funky music til you die. When Dylan Ebdus first spotted Arthur Lomb the other boy was feigning pain in the far corner of the schoolyard. At some distance Dylan heard the cries and turned from the entrance of the school to look. Catching sight of Arthur Lomb was like noticing the flight and fall of a bird across a distance of -leaf--blurred sky, that flicker at the corner of vision, the abrupt plummeting. Like the flying man too, something Dylan did and didn't wish to have noticed. It occurred at that moment of slippage after the bell had rung and the gym teachers who patrolled the yard had returned inside, ahead of the flood of students, so the yard became a lawless zone, that terrible sudden reframing of space which could happen anywhere, even inside the corridors of the school. Nevertheless it was a clumsy mistake for the boy now cringing on the ground to be caught so far from the yard's entrance, a mistake Dylan felt he couldn't forgive. He wouldn't have forgiven it in himself. Arthur Lomb fell to his knees and clutched his chest and keened. His words were briefly audible across the depopulating yard. **I can't breathe!** Then, each syllable riding a sharp insuck of air, **I!** Pause. **Can't!** Pause. **Breathe!** Arthur Lomb was pretending asthma or some other weakness. It was an identifiable method: preemptive suffering. Nobody could do much with a kid who was already crying. He'd become useless, untillable soil. He had no spirit to crush and it was faintly disgusting, in poor taste. Anyway, this weirdly gasping kid might not know the rules and talk, tattle to some distant cloddish figure of authority what he imagined had been done to him. He might even be truly sick, fucked up, in pain, who knew? Your only option was to say dang, white boy, what's your problem? I didn't even touch you. And move on. Dylan admired the strategy, feeling at once a cool quiver of recognition and a hot bolt of shame. He felt that he was seeing his double, his stand-in. It was at least true that any punishment Arthur Lomb endured was likely otherwise Dylan's, or anyway that a gang of black kids couldn't knock Dylan to the pavement or put him in a yoke at the exact moment they were busy doing it to Arthur Lomb. From that point on Arthur Lomb's reddish hair and hunched shoulders were easy to spot, though he and Dylan had different homerooms, and schedules which kept them from overlapping anywhere except the schoolyard at lunch hour. Arthur Lomb dressed in

conspicuous striped polo shirts and wore soft brown shoes. His pants were often highwaters. Dylan once heard a couple of black girls serenading Arthur Lomb with a couplet he hadn't himself elicited since fourth grade, snapping their fingers and harmonizing high and low like a doo-wop group: the flood is over, the land is dry, so why do you wear your pants so high? Arthur Lomb carried an enormous and bright blue backpack, an additional blight. All his schoolbooks must be inside, or maybe a couple of stone tablets. The bag itself would have tugged Arthur Lomb to the ground if he'd stood up straight. As it was the bag glowed as a target, begged to be jerked downward to crumple Arthur Lomb to the corridor floor to enact his shortness-of-breath routine. Dylan had seen it done five times already before he and Arthur Lomb ever spoke. Dylan had even heard kids chanting the song at Arthur Lomb as they slapped at his reddened neck or the top of his head while he squirmed on the floor. Play that fucking music, white boy! Stretching the last two words to a groaning, derisive, Bugs--Bunniesque whyyyyyyyboy! There were just three other white kids in the school, all girls, with their own girl factors to work out. One shared Dylan's homeroom, an Italian girl, black-haired and sullen and tiny, dwarfed by the girls all around them who exploded with hormonal authority. The black and Puerto Rican girls had risen to some other place where they were rightly furious at anything in view, jostling at one another and at the teachers in a rage of sex. However, their very size offered an approach: it was feasible to pass unseen below. Homeroom was a place for honing silence in a theater of noise and so the Italian girl and Dylan never spoke. As for Arthur Lomb, Dylan supposed he and the other boy had been kept apart intentionally by some unseen pitying intelligence, to avoid making both more conspicuous in their resemblance. This was a policy Dylan endorsed heartily, whether it existed outside of his own brain or not. Even at that remove, Arthur Lomb bore the mingled stink of Dylan's oppression mixed with his own, so that it was hard to tell where one began and the other left off. Dylan wasn't in any hurry to get closer. Really, he wanted no part of Arthur Lomb. It was the library where they finally spoke. Dylan and Arthur Lomb's two homerooms had been deposited there together for a period, the school librarian covering some unexplained absence of teachers for an afternoon, a blip in the routine nobody cared about anyway. Most kids sent to the library never arrived there, ended up outside the building instead, taking the word as a euphemism for class dismissed. So the I.S. 293 library was drab but peaceful, an eddy of calm. Below a poster advertising *A Hero Aint Nothin But a Sandwich*, a book the library didn't actually offer, Dylan placed himself against a wall and flipped open issue number two of the Marvel Comics adaptation of *Logans Run*. As the period ticked away glacially, Arthur Lomb buzzed him twice, squinting to see the title of the comic, then pursing lips in false concentration as he mimed browsing the half--empty shelves nearby, before stepping close enough for Dylan to hear him speak in an angry, clenched whisper. That guy George Perez can't draw Farrah Fawcett to save his life. This was a startling allusion to several bodies of knowledge simultaneously. Dylan could only glare, his curiosity mingled with the certainty that he and Arthur Lomb were more objectionable, more unpardonable, together than apart. Up close Arthur Lomb had a blinky agitated quality to his features which made Dylan himself want to knock him down. His face seemed to reach for something, his features like a grasping hand. Dylan wondered if there might be a pair of glasses tucked in the background somewhere, perhaps in a side pocket of the monumental blue backpack. Dylan hurried the comic book into his binder. He'd bought it on Court Street at lunchtime and debated allowing it to be seen inside the school, a breach of general good sense. It was a lousy comic, though, stiff with fidelity to the movie, and Dylan had decided he wouldn't care anymore than he'd be surprised if it was taken away. This, a conversation with his homely double, wasn't the price he'd expected to pay. But Arthur Lomb seemed to sense the dent he'd made in Dylan's attention and pressed on. He smirked again at the comic book where it had vanished into the binder. Seen it? What? *Logans Run*. Fuck you looking at? Dylan wanted to shriek at Arthur Lomb, before it was too late, before Dylan succumbed to his loneliness and allowed himself to meet Arthur, the other white boy. Not yet, Dylan said instead. Farrah Fawcett is a fox. Dylan didn't answer. He couldn't know, and was only chagrined that he even knew what Arthur Lomb was talking about. Don't feel bad. I bought ten copies of *Logans Run* #1. Arthur Lomb spoke in a hurried whisper, showing some awareness of his surroundings, but compelled to spill what he had, to force Dylan know to him. You have to buy number ones, it's an investment. I've got ten of *Eternals*, ten of 2001, ten of *Omega*, ten of *Ragman*, ten of *Kobra*. And all those comics stink. You know the comics shop on Seventh Avenue? The buildings on that corner are all brand new because a plane crashed there, you heard about it? A 747 tried to crash-land in Prospect Park and missed, no kidding. Big disaster. Anyway, that shop is an a-hole. I stole a copy of *Blue Beetle* #1 from him once. It was pathetically easy. *Blue Beetle* is Charlton, you ever hear of Charlton Comics? Went out of business. Number ones a number one, doesn't matter. You know *Fantastic Four* #1 goes for four hundred dollars? The *Blue Beetle*

might be an -all--time record for the stupidest character ever. He was drawn by Ditko, guy who created Spider Man. Ditko cant really draw, thats the weird thing. Makes everything look like a cartoon. Doesnt matter, its a number one. Put it in plastic and put it on the shelf, thats what I say. You use plastic, dont you?Of course, said Dylan resentfully.He understood every word Arthur Lomb said. Worse, he felt his sensibility colonized by Arthurs, his future interests co-opted.They were doomed to friendship. FROM CHAPTER 8

Three weeks earlier, Dylan Ebdus had stood on the slate in front of Mingus Rudes stoop, waiting. Women trudged little kids to kindergarten at the Y or moved alone up Nevins to the subway. Two gays from Pacific Street tugged leashed dachshunds, in another world. A bunch of black girls swept up from the projects to gather Marilla, who was in high school now, at Sarah J. Hale, down on Third Avenue. They shared a cigarette for breakfast, rumbled around the corner in a ball of smoke and laughter. All under the angled morning light, distant Jersey haze, merry solvent-factory stink getting you mildly high, the pillar of the Williamsburg Savings Bank clock tower organizing the sky, time different on its two visible faces but either way it was time to go, today the first day of school everywhere in the world, possibly. This day when summer ended was as hot as summer, even at eight in the morning.Only one thing wrong with this picture, as the block cleared, the bus breathed past, a dog barked in a cycle like code. Dylan standing in long pants and with his backpack full of unruined binder pages and dumb pencils and hidden glasses and still-virgin El Marko. He felt like an apple skinned for inspection at the new school, already souring in the sun. Those dogs could tell and probably anybody else too, he stank of panic.If Mingus Rude would walk with him up Dean Street to Smith or Court, walk through the doors of the school with him, side by side, it might be different.Dylan went to the shuttered basement window and rapped. Minguss own entrance under the stairs had no doorbell.Dylan should have planned it with him in advance, he saw now.Up the stoop, he rang the bell.He rang it again, shifting in his Keds, anxious, time ticking away, the day and the prospect of seventh grade rapidly spoiling with him in the sun.Then, like an irrational puppet, panicked, he leaned on the doorbell and let it ring in a continuous trill.He was still ringing it when the door opened.It wasnt Mingus, but Barrett Rude Junior in a white bathrobe, naked underneath, unhidden to the street, arms braced in the door, looking down. Face clotted with sleep, he blinked in the slanted, scouring light. He lifted his arm to cover his eyes with shade, looking like he wanted to wave the day off as a bad idea, a passing mistake.Hell you doing, Little Dylan?Dylan took a step back from the door, to the first step down.Dont never be ringing my doorbell seven in the morning, man.MingusYoull see Mingus at the got-damn school. Barrett Rude was waking into his anger, his voice like a cloud of hammers. Get out of here now.Seventh grade was where it turned out when you finally joined Mingus Rude in the main building Mingus Rude was never there. As if Mingus walked another Dean Street to school, another Court Street, had actually all this time gone to another I.S. 293 entirely. The only evidence in the opposite direction was the proliferation of dose tags on lampposts and mailboxes and on trucks which moved wearily through the neighborhood, Minguss handiwork spread in a nimbus with the school building at the center. Every few days, it seemed, produced a fresh supply. Dylan would covertly push a forefinger against the metal, wondering if he could measure in the tackiness of the ink the tags vintage. If his finger stuck slightly Dylan imagined hed followed Mingus by minutes to the spot, barely missed catching him in the act.For three weeks Mingus Rude was like the flying man, a rumor with himself Dylan couldnt confirm. Minguss vacancy from his own schooldays, and from Dylans, was the secret premise of an existence which was otherwise unchanged except by being worse every possible way. Seventh grade was sixth grade desublimated, uncorked. It was the Lord of the Rings trilogy to sixth grades The Hobbit, the real story at last, all the ominous foreshadowed stuff flushed from the margins and into view. It wasnt for children, seventh grade. You could read the stress of even entering the building in the postures of the teachers, the security guards. Nobody could relax in such a racial and hormonal disaster area.Bodies ranged like ugly cartoons, as though someone without talent was scribbling in flesh.The biggest shapes were the angriest. Thats what they were, shapesbetween hiding your glasses and averting your gaze you were Mr. Magoo now. The less you met anyones eyes the less chance youd ever risk doing it, a self-fulfilling program.Chinese kids had apparently gotten some warning well in advance, and had thoroughly disappeared.Puerto Rican or Dominican kids seemed to be tiptoeing away from the scene of everything. They decorated themselves differently and spoke more Spanish each passing hour. The way they occupied space in homeroom or gym class they were there and not there, an operation of mass adjacency.The scariest fights were between two black girls.On Court Street and Smith Street it wasnt even clear who was and wasnt in your school. Other bodies floated around, loose elements. A couple of black kids might corner you and ask, You Italian or a white boy? and all youd know for sure was not to point out that the Italian kids were

white. A black kid might be scared of something, might be watching his back on Court like an Italian kid watched his on Smith, but whatever they were scared of it was never going to be you. Anyway, no Italian kid wouldve answered Im Italian. Hed have said fuck you think I am? Or just grabbed his dick through his pants and sucked his teeth, flared his nostrils. You, you were a million miles from any such procedure. More in the market for a case of fake asthma.....Arthur Lomb and his mother lived on Pacific Street between Hoyt and Bond, the far side of the hospital. Arthurs block was eerie, kidless, no bus, the hospitals laundry stack cascading silent white steam to the sky, the bodega on the corner another sidewalk congregation of old men on milk crates but graver, less amused, less musical than Old Ramirezs bunch. On Pacific the men grumbled in some middle distance, leathery fingers shifting dominoes across felt. Everything on Pacific including a gray cat darting across the street seemed farther away and more pensive. The block might have been the Bermuda Triangle of Boerum Hill, a space arranged the precise distance from the Gowanus Houses, the Brooklyn House of Detention, and Intermediate School 293 to fall under no domain whatsoever. Not a long-term solution to anything, Arthur Lombs stoop nevertheless formed a kind of oasis on certain October afternoons when he and Dylan would tiptoe there unharassed and set out a chessboard under the furling shadow of the hospitals steam. Youre in Winegars science class, huh? I feel sorry for you. Hes a worm. You see the way he toys with his mustache when hes talking to the Puerto Rican girls with developed breasts? It makes me want to vomit. Doesnt matter, pretend you like him. Science teachers your ticket out of here, thats my view. Dont move that bishop, its the only thing keeping me from crushing you. I told you a thousand times, link your pawns. Arthur Lomb sat with one leg folded under his body like a kindergartner. His monologues were all brow-furrowed and lip-pursed, craven machinations cut with philosophical asides and vice versa. His jabber had a glottal, chanted quality, seemingly designed to guide you past the territory where you might wish to tell him to shut up already or even to strike him, into a realm of baffled wonderment as you considered the white noise of a nerds id in full song. Arthur Lomb had been at Saint Anns until the day his parents divorced and his mother could no longer afford the private school. Now he was intent on getting into one of the specialized public high schools, one of those with academic requirements, entrance exams. Arthur Lomb never pined for the lost school behind him, for the company of other white children whom Dylan could only surmise had loathed him in their way as acutely as the black kids at 293. He was all grim necessity, a soldier in open ground casting for his next foxhole. Only thing that matters is the test for Stuyvesant. Just math and science. Flunk English, who gives? The whole report card things a joke, always was. I havent gone to gym class once. You know Jesus Maldonado? He said hed break my arm like a Pixy Stix if he caught me alone in the locker room. Gyms suicide, frankly. Im not stripping down to my underwear anywhere inside the four walls of this school, Im just not. If I have to BM, I hold it until after school. Arthur Lomb and his mother lived in an apartment on the top floor of a brownstone and Arthur Lomb had the back bedroom. His comics were stacked on low shelves in neat piles, all in plastic. He handled them with somber disdain, and radiated disapproval when Dylan turned pages too quickly to have read certain essential thought balloons. Though carefully archived, his comics bore faint marks where Arthur Lomb had place thin paper over the pages and traced the breasts of the Wasp and Valkyrie with a ballpoint pen. The resultant page of blue parenthetical breasts was stashed like secret Chinese writing in Arthur Lombs desk drawer. There Dylan found it one day while Arthur Lomb prepared a plate of graham crackers. Just pass that test. Your life depends on it. You think this is bad, wait until high school. If you dont get into Stuyvesant or at least Bronx Science youre dead. Thats how the test works, highest scores get into Stuyvesant, next highest Bronx Science, Brooklyn Techs a last resort. Sarah J. Hale or John Jay, those places are practically like prison. A teacher got shot at Sarah J. Hale, it was on TV. Algebra, geometry, biology. Get Winegar to give you a practice test, Im telling you out of kindness. Make him think you like him. Say you want to enter some kind of project in the science fair. You dont really have to do it. If he knows you want to go to Stuyvesant maybe hell call someone. Do whatever it takes. On the same shelves as his comics Arthur Lomb kept mass market paperback editions of Al Jaffes Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions and Dave Bergs The Lighter Side. The snippy irony of the Mad Magazine cartoonists seemed perfectly matched to Arthurs bitter views, everything funny in a not-funny-at-all kind of way. Sarcasm as something you practiced like karate. Later concealing your mute fury when nobody fed you the opening lines. Arthur Lombs bedroom windows faced the rear entrances and neglected, ailanthus-choked backyards of the stores on Atlantic Avenue, the rear windows of apartments above the stores, the Brooklyn House of Detention above the rooftops, the municipal buildings and courts of downtown Brooklyn behind the jail, the trace of Manhattans high teeth visible past downtown Brooklyn. Arthur Lomb gazed out of his bedroom with a pair

of binoculars. Fading evenings after their inevitable chess, Arthur and Dylan would gaze through the binoculars in turn, spying on nothing in particular, in silence for once, until Arthur snapped on his radio, which was tuned to an AM station permanently playing Dream Weaver or Fly Like an Eagle. Mostly, though, they sat on the stoop, studying Pacific Streets failure to acknowledge its connection to Bond or Hoyt. On certain summer days they might have made up the contents of a diorama in the Museum of Natural History on the Upper West Side, creatures shot by Theodore Roosevelt, then stuffed and mounted in a case: Dylan Ebdus, Arthur Lomb, Homo sapiens, Pacific Street, Brooklyn, 1976. Days were falsely still, gelled in slow motion, Dylan not thinking of Mingus Rude or Dean Street at all, just studying the gray cat as it skittered under a car, the hypnotic tumbling cloud of hospital steam, the mailman reading magazines on another stoop halfway down the block, wondering how long weird detachment could cover losing a thousand chess games in a row to Arthur Lombs blunt but remorseless rook play. Arthur Lomb using both hands to knead sensation back into his folded-under leg, brain whirring behind consternated gerbil eyes as he dialed up another digression. It makes no sense to be a Mets fan, not when you look at the facts. Few people our age have actually considered the record, but the Yankees are simply the greatest team in the history of baseball based on sheer championships, players in the Hall of Fame, etcetera. The whole Mets thing is a very recent development. But so many kids like you have fallen for it hook, line, and sinker. I maintain you cant argue with the Yankee legacy. Hmm. Youve probably wondered why I always wear shoes. I had a pair of Pro Keds and some kids took them from me, made me walk home in my socks if you can believe it. My mother bought me another pair but I keep them at home. My sources tell me Pumas are actually whats coming next. If you go in for that sort of thing: wearing what everyones wearing just because theyre wearing it. I dont, really. Hmm. Mel Brookss funniest film is The Producers, then Young Frankenstein or Blazing Saddles. Terri Garr is hot. I feel sorry for any kid who hasnt seen The Producers. My dad took me to all the humor movies. The best Panther is probably Return. The best Woody is Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex. Positioning, positioning, Arthur Lomb was forever positioning himself, making his views known, aligning on some index no one would ever consult. Here was Dylans burden, his cross: the accumulated knowledge of Arthur Lombs smug policies on every possible question. The cross was Dylans to bear, he knew, because his own brain boiled with pedantry, with too-eager trivia ready to burst loose at any moment. So in enduring Arthur Lomb Dylan had been punished in advance for the possibility of being a bore. Develop your pawns or Hulk Will Smash. Now and again Dylan saw a shutter wink open, a glimpse into the furnace of anger inside Arthur Lomb. Dylan didnt mind. He regarded himself as deserving, according to the same principle of similars which had dictated their friendship in the first place. Just as Dylan should absorb the ennui of Arthurs poseurdom because of that kernel which thrived inside himself, so again with those glimpsed coals of rage. I couldnt help but notice the other day you were talking to that Mingus Rude kid after school. Ahem, keep your eye on the board, youre going to be shocked again. Its going to be bad for your health until you learn to start castling. As I was saying, I noticed you talking to Mingus Rude, hes an eighth grader, howd you get to know him? Not that hes in school much, huh. Still, it must be advantageous to be friends with, hurrh, that sort of person. Arthur Lombs speech bore like a small puckered scar a characteristic hitch of intaken breath in that place where hed omitted the word black from a sentence but not from the thought which had given rise to the sentence. And that hitch of breath, it seemed to Dylan, was Arthur in a nutshell, making such show of a card unplayed that he tipped his whole hand. Howd you know Minguss name? Dylan heard himself say. Hed been concentrating on the game for once, waiting for Arthur to castle as he always ostentatiously castled, but ready this time, with something in store. Distracted, hed blurted a question which confessed his possessiveness of Mingus, his jealousy. Listen to Arthur Lomb for a month of afternoons and your own talk would be stripped of disguises, that was the price youd pay. Oh, various kids talk about him, said Arthur airily. Dylan couldnt imagine which various kids would ever be seen speaking to Arthur Lomb in school, as opposed to browsing his pants pockets for loose change. Dylan himself shunned Arthur inside the school building, only met up with him afterward for their mutual creeping to the safety of Pacific Street. He understood Arthurs acceptance of the humiliation of Dylans silent treatment at school as a clear measure of Arthurs desperation and loneliness. So, which various kids? Yeah, well, I knew him before, said Dylan, shutting up before it was too late. Let Arthur fish. Dylan advanced his knight in reply to Arthurs castling. He made the move lackadaisically, but his heart pounded. Arthur was blind to knights, it had only taken the first thousand games to see it. Before what? said Arthur with thin sarcasm. He pushed a pawn absently, scowling past Dylan and the chessboard, toward Hoyt Street, perhaps mentally groping for a suitable Snappy Answer. Check, said Dylan. Now Arthur frowned at the board, his eyes racing hectically to

consider this unanticipated turn. Is this pawn here or here? he asked. What? Arthur pointed, Dylan leaned in. Suddenly the board rattled, jarred at the corner. Then the ripple among the chessmen became an explosion, and the board was lost, pieces tipping, rolling, Arthurs doomed king clattering atonally down the stoop toward the street, revealed as plastic. Look what you made me do, said Arthur Lomb. You knocked it over. Arthur opened his palms: sue me. I was going to beat you. Now well never know. You win every time and you couldnt stand letting me beat you once! Arthur Lomb stroked his chin thoughtfully. Actually, I do think we were headed for a stalemate. You shouldnt get overexcited, Dylan, it may be a while before you beat me. But your game is improving. I congratulate you. Youve definitely picked up a few things. Speaking of which, har har, would you pick up that king? My leg seems to have fallen asleep. From the Hardcover edition. From Publishers Weekly If there still remains any doubt, this novel confirms Lethem's status as the poet of Brooklyn and of motherless boys. Projected through the prism of race relations, black music and pop art, Lethem's stunning, disturbing and authoritatively observed narrative covers three decades of turbulent events on Dean Street, Brooklyn. When Abraham and Rachel Ebdus arrive there in the early 1970s, they are among the first whites to venture into a mainly black neighborhood that is just beginning to be called Boerum Hill. Abraham is a painter who abandons his craft to construct tiny, virtually indistinguishable movie frames in which nothing happens. Ex-hippie Rachel, a misguided liberal who will soon abandon her family, insists on sending their son, Dylan, to public school, where he stands out like a white flag. Desperately lonely, regularly attacked and abused by the black kids ("yoked," in the parlance), Dylan is saved by his unlikely friendship with his neighbor Mingus Rude, the son of a once-famous black singer, Barnett Rude Jr., who is now into cocaine and rage at the world. The story of Dylan and Mingus, both motherless boys, is one of loyalty and betrayal, and eventually different paths in life. Dylan will become a music journalist, and Mingus, for all his intelligence, kindness, verbal virtuosity and courage, will wind up behind bars. Meanwhile, the plot manages to encompass pop music from punk rock to rap, avant-garde art, graffiti, drug use, gentrification, the New York prison system-and to sing a vibrant, sometimes heartbreaking ballad of Brooklyn throughout. Lethem seems to have devoured the '70s, '80s and '90s-inhaled them whole-and he reproduces them faithfully on the page, in prose as supple as silk and as bright, explosive and illuminating as fireworks. Scary and funny and seriously surreal, the novel hurtles on a trajectory that feels inevitable. By the time Dylan begins to break out of the fortress of solitude that has been his life, readers have shared his pain and understood his dreams. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.