Jonathan Safran Foer and Nathan Englander reinterpret the Haggadah

Look at pretty pictures! Photo books proliferate

In this week’s booklet

BY KODI SCHEER

Modern Medicine

BY KODI SCHEER

Frank Langella drops names
I say, in part, “Rolling along and real on so many levels.”

Billy says, in part, “A hell of an old-fashioned read.”

The book is the collaborative effort between Rick Kaempfer and Brendan Sullivan. I have known them both for a long time, and Petersen is related by marriage to Sullivan.

“We wanted blurbs from people we respected and more importantly knew,” says Sullivan.

Kaempfer has known Sullivan one another for decades, since both were young producers working for some of the biggest stars in local radio.

From the later 1980s until 2003, Kaempfer was a producer for the Steve Dahl and Garry Meier show and later for John Landecker. Since then he has been a full-time writer and prolific one, writing for a number of online sites of his creation, including Chicago Radio Spotlight (chicagoradiospotlight.blogspot.com), a series of interviews with local radiofolk (myself included), and Just One Bad Century, which is comprised of a website (justonebadcentury.com) and blog (justonebadcentury.blogspot.com) devoted to the history of the Chicago Cubs. He contributes pieces to Shore magazine and The Beachwood Reporter. He also published two books, 2004’s “The Radio Producer’s Handbook,” co-written with John Swanson, and a novel, “Severance,” in 2007. He lives in Mt. Prospect with his wife, Bridget, and their three sons.

For more than a decade, Sullivan was the creative producer for Jonathon Brandmeier. He has also done some acting and appeared in TV commercials and worked in advertising sales. Since 2001, Sullivan has run his own company, Corporate Creativity Coach (creativity-coach.net), that helps organizations, as he says, “create more innovative solutions, more successful creative ideas, and a healthier, more collaborative work environment where talented people can flourish.” He has worked for such clients as Kellogg’s, Harley-Davidson, Sara Lee, PepsiCo and Marriott Hotels and Resorts. He lives with his wife, Susan, and their four children in Chicago.

“I really liked Rick’s novel and I like him,” says Sullivan. “I began to wonder if some of the techniques I use in my corporate work — improv, brainstorming — might help create a novel.”

And so he approached Kaempfer. “I really do enjoy sitting in my basement, leading the solitary writer’s life,” he says. “But radio is a very collaborative medium, and Brendan and I just get along really well... So I thought, ‘What the heck!’ and we started this experiment.”

They began in January 2009, talking on the phone and e-mailing. Eventually they started meeting at the Catalyst Ranch, a most remarkable meeting/event space in the

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— Brendan Sullivan, above right, with Rick Kaempfer

There has not been a book published — or likely to be published in the future — that contains jacket quotes from the pair of aging, pretty good golfers named Rick Kogan and William L. Petersen. But there we are; myself and the great stage actor and television (“CSI”) star, offering praise for the novel “The Living Wills.”

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— Brendan Sullivan, above right, with Rick Kaempfer

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‘Starters’ is dystopian sci-fi at its best

SUSAN CARPENTER

I t has often been said that youth is wasted on the young. ‘In Starters’, the outstanding young adult novel from debut author Lisa Price, that premise is pushed to an apocalyptic limit — that’s only possible in sci-fi, as wealthy geeks rent the bodies of nubile teens.

The novel is set in Chicago — the Waveland Bowl plays a big part — and spans a bit more than three decades. “It is,” says Kaempfer, “three intertwining stories about how two seconds can change lives forever.”

They were pleased with what they created and decided to move ahead. They considered going the conventional publishing route and finding an agent who would then find a publisher. They quickly realized the means that today’s publishing business and so Kaempfer started his own firm, with long-time pal and business partner David Stern, a sales and marketing executive. It is called Eckhartz Press, its name combining the first names of the men’s fathers, Eckhard and Fritz, respectively.

They had complete control of the process, from the typique to the cover art (original work by Chicago artist/musician Jon Langford). And almost immediately I started getting original work by Chicago artist/musician Jon Langford. (See the Sidewalks chats with authors from our Fiction series. This week’s Fiction installment: “Modern Medicine” by Kodi Scheer.)

In this clever and creepy tale with faint echoes of “The Stepford Wives” and “The Hunger Games,” 16-year-old Callie Wilson is desperate. She and her 7-year-old brother, Tyler, along with quasi-love interest Michael, have been squatting in a vacant apartment, having lost their parents years earlier to the Spore Wars. Callie’s brother is ill, but she doesn’t have the funds to take care of him. If she can get them both to the hospital, she may be able to avoid the “Spore Wars” all together.

The obvious question is, “If you are so desperate for medical treatment, how can you possibly afford books?” The answer is, Callie begins to fall in love with a teen she meets while renting her body. She also gains a non-human carwash to rid her of street grime. She’s then living like a rich person. She also has the power to control the action.

“The only thing better than a terrific concept is one that is well executed as “Starters.” Readers who have been waiting for a worthy successor to Suzanne Collins’ “The Hunger Games” will find it here. Dystopian sci-fi at its best.” — Elizabeth Taylor will lead the discussion. Fiction fans can catch up on their work before attending the second and final book event.

acprent@tribune.com

MEMBERS CHAT | EMILY RABOTEAU

Emily Raboteau, author of ‘Bernie and Me’ last week’s fiction story, will join us again for a live chat at noon on Wednesday. Elizabeth Taylor will lead the discussion. Raboteau is in the middle of her novel, “The Professor’s Daughter,” and the creative nonfiction work, “Searching for Zora,” forthcoming from Grove Press in January 2013. She teaches a creative writing class at the City College of New York.

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West Long, where Sullivan had previously worked with some corporate clients. (See the Sidewalks chats with authors for more about Carolyn Reis.)

That is where I met the author.

“She would get here every month or so,” says Sullivan. “It was tough to find time to meet with seven kids between us. When we were here, we never wanted to leave. All work.”

“Because of who we worked with in radio we wanted to work with critics,” says Kaempfer. “We know how to take it and not take it personally. We have a great respect for the critics.”

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