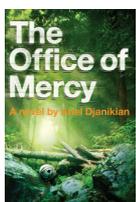


valuable how-to for the wanna-be canner. Time to break out the Ball jars, ladies. —JENNIFER CACICIO



**THE OFFICE OF MERCY:**  
**A Novel**

By Ariel Djanikian

(Viking)

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

The title of Ariel Djanikian's first book, *The Office of Mercy*, is as disturbing as it is ironically fitting. Using a fresh, effortless, descriptive style, Djanikian projects us into a futuristic world wiped clean by a man-made devastation called the Storm. The year is 305, life is self-contained in America-Five—one of many inhabitable domes—food is grown in the Department of Agriculture, and people are grown in the Office of Reproduction. Outside the domes, tribes of excluded families wander looking for food and shel-

ter, thus the function of the Office of Mercy, which governs the elimination of these “suffering” tribes with instant, painless blasts. Our dome-grown heroine, 24-year-old Natasha Wiley, works in the Office of Mercy and, in an unprecedented occurrence, is permitted to actually go outside with a reconnaissance group to inspect the last sweep. What she discovers during her mission causes her to realize why she's slept fitfully her entire life.

Djanikian puts us through the ethical ringer, creating a civilization that “would not have come about by the haphazard forces of nature and the Pre-Storm political history, but fathered by the grace of reason, ethics, and science alone.” Which isn't to say there's not also a good deal of juice here, too—Natasha totally busts an actual move on her superior, as opposed to resorting to passive cybering.

—WHITNEY DWIRE



**A TEASPOON OF EARTH AND SEA:**  
**A Novel**

By Dina Nayeri

(Riverhead Books)

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

Tehran-born Dina Nayeri knows all about being split between two worlds—her family immigrated to Oklahoma when she was ten. In *A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea*, Nayeri returns to 1980s Iran to tell the story of twins Saba and Mahtab, who are obsessed with American culture. After Mahtab and her mother mysteriously disappear, 11-year-old Saba is convinced that they have moved to America without her. As she grows up, Saba imagines Mahtab's life unfolding parallel to hers in America, while Saba struggles within the confines of a small village in post-revolutionary Iran.

Nayeri is telling two stories

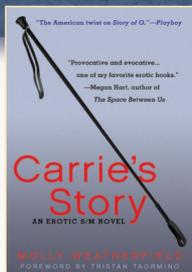
here: the never fully satisfied fairy tale of twins suddenly and violently separated, and the far more interesting story of Saba's life in Iran. As Saba grows up, Nayeri touches on such topics as feminist revolutionary groups, queerness in Iranian culture, Islamic universities, secret Christians, arranged marriages, and the risks of the black market—topics that I wish had been more fully explored, though the glimpses are more than captivating.

Above all, *A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea* is about storytelling. Saba tells stories about Mahtab; the local village women tell traditional folk tales; and Saba's father lies to the village *mullah* to hide his illegal Christian faith. All are powerful forms of storytelling that blur the line between truth and lies, or *raast* and *dorooah*, immersing the reader in the dangers and delights of 1980s Iran. —ERIKA W. SMITH

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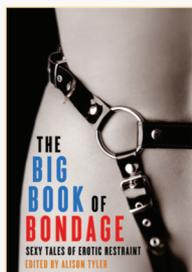
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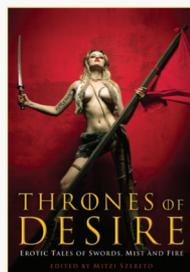
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