



Kelsey Dake

## 8 (Very Long) The One-Sentence Review of Michael Chabon's 'Telegraph Avenue'

His new novel about the Bay Area features an entire chapter that's a single sentence. Game on, Chabon

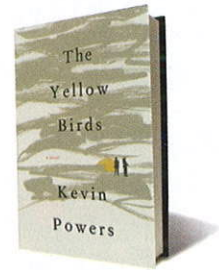
Long sentences are all the rage (see Jonathan Franzen's 307-word effort in *Freedom*) and so are nerdy comic-book allusions (Jonathans Lethem and Ames), and Michael Chabon does plenty of both in his new novel, *Telegraph Avenue*, and being a master of all he surveys, he can pull off a stunning twelve-page sentence—thus encouraging copycat hacks who don't realize it's easier said than done—and he can do homages to Tarantino and *Shaft*, and he can write the best similes in town (a car's old paint job looks "like a slice of Oscar Mayer bologna after two months in the refrigerator"), and he can spin an almost-plausible web of interconnected neighbors in the Bay Area's post-racial, post-gay, post-modern would-be utopia—to wit: Archy Stallings, who represents

black, funky Oakland, a man whose great appetites include vintage-vinyl jazz and soul, which he sells through Brokeland Records in partnership with Jewish manic-depressive Nat Jaffe, who represents white, crunchy Berkeley; their wives, Gwen and Aviva (whose parallel partnership in a midwife business affords Chabon some gentle mockery of "hopeless Berkeletude"); Archy's washed-up kung fu star father; ex-quarterback Gibson Goode, the nation's fifth-richest black man, whose planned Dogpile megastore will surely be the nail in Brokeland's coffin; two teenage hipster boys in a gay interracial relationship; and even, briefly, state senator Barack Obama—but what Chabon *can't* quite do is find the groove of vitality and emotional ballast that made

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## DEBUT NOVEL OF THE MONTH 'THE YELLOW BIRDS' BY KEVIN POWERS

An Iraq-war vet's Iraq-war novel.



→ Iraq-war veteran Kevin Powers traded the bloody plains of Tal Afar for a poetry fellowship at the University of Texas, and his debut novel is an unusually spare and lyrical war story. A bravura opening, narrated by Private Bartle, makes you wonder if the lyricism will distract or glamorize, but it turns out to be essential. Not that there isn't development or suspense: The mystery of what killed

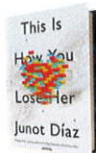
Bartle's war buddy, small and moody Private Murphy, and Bartle's possible complicity, unfold briskly and brutally, and the characters are sketched with as much heart as economy. Like the Iraq heat, which "had the surprising effect of reducing one to tears in an instant," *The Yellow Birds* skulls along, detached and undemanding, until all of a sudden you turn a page and find yourself weeping. —B.K.

*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* such a transcendent experience, and so maybe that masterpiece was the culmination of Chabon's talent, after which, like Radiohead post-*OK Computer*, he went seeking ever-more-impressive challenges, in this case building a beautiful, prismatic maximalism of description and tone, a sly meditation on appropriation as the real engine of integration, and an excellent rationale for twelve-page sentences—something impossible not to admire but a little bit harder to love. —BORIS KACHKA

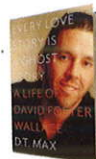
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## THE SUPER-DUPER SENTENCE SAMPLER

Consider it an *amuse-bouche* for your brain: We've plucked the best bits from four big books out this month



**Best Writing About a Booty**  
*This Is How You Lose Her* by Junot Díaz  
"You, Yuniór, have a girlfriend named Alma, who has a long tender horse neck and a big Dominican ass that seems to exist in the fourth dimension beyond jeans. An ass that could drag the moon out of orbit. An ass she never liked until she met you."



**Best Writing About a Blown Deadline**  
*Every Love Story Is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace* by D. T. Max  
"I'm mortified to have essentially lied to you about 4/15; the date seemed an almost GOP-ishly staid and conservative projection back in January. I now want to say late April or May. I'm not saying this: I'm saying I want to say it."  
\*From a letter that Wallace wrote to his book editor about *Infinite Jest* in 1994.



**Best Writing About Rappers/Urology**  
*Trouble & Triumph*\* by T.I.  
"All my life I'd bust a nut before I'd ever get to fucking. One look at the pussy and I'd pop." "That's no problem for a preacher, Slim, that's something for a urologist. I got a good one back in Palm Beach, Dr. Meyer Nussbaum."  
\*This is a novel, people. T.I. wrote a NOVEL.



**Best Writing About Scoring**  
*My Heart Is an Idiot: Essays* by Davy Rothbart  
"And yet, some part of me also rejoiced at the strangeness of life, at its darkly comic twists and turns, which had stranded me as a kid at a birthday party chasing unrequited love for a girl I'd never get, and then fifteen years later deposited me beside the same pool to sip a beer, having just railed that same girl's sister under the watchful eight eyes of a lurking tarantula."