



[BOOKS]

The Masculine Mystique

In his new book, *Parks and Recreation* star (and now author) **NICK OFFERMAN** sheds light on what it means to be a man.

NICK OFFERMAN HAS LONG BEEN VIEWED as the epitome of all that is man. After all, it was his ample facial hair, affinity for meat and woodworking ways that inspired his burly *Parks and Recreation* character, Ron Swanson. Now, in his new book, *Paddle Your Own Canoe: One Man's Fundamentals for Delicious Living* (Dutton Adult, \$27), the 43-year-old comedian and actor takes readers behind the mustache to reveal his testosterone-laden secrets.

The book serves partly as a memoir, with Offerman detailing his early life on his family's farm in Minooka, Ill., and his humble beginnings on the standup and improv scenes. But *Paddle Your Own Canoe* is just as much a guidebook for life, containing meaningful and humorous insights the funnyman has gleaned through the years. "Basically, this book boils down to how an average human ... like myself, relying solely on warped individuality and a little elbow grease, can actually rise from a simple life of relative poverty to one of prosperity, measured in American dollars and Italian band saws, sure, but more importantly, laughter, wood shavings, and kisses," he writes in the book's introduction.

Readers will come away with an assurance that, underneath all the beefy bravado of his public

persona, Offerman is the ultimate man's man behind the scenes too. For instance, the actor, who now lives in Los Angeles, where he runs a working woodshop, names his father and uncles as his greatest role models because they taught him how to use tools, work hard and do a job right.

But perhaps what makes Offerman so widely beloved by men and women alike is that he's not afraid to embrace his softer side. The proud owner of three poodles and a college transcript that boasts two semesters of ballet, Offerman even admits to loving to sew. "I find sewing to be very empowering," he says. "I'd love to knit if I had time. Essentially, they're just tying knots on a very small scale — sometimes it's with a needle and thread, and sometimes it's with a quarter-inch boat rope in my woodshop."

In talking to Offerman, one learns that, perhaps above all else, a man's man is humble. When asked what inspired him to write his book — which he dedicated to his wife, comedian Megan Mullally — Offerman answers: "I have had a very lucky run of great teachers in my life, and I have found myself with the opportunity to pass along some of the lessons I've learned from them to others — and make people laugh at the same time, if I can." —KRISTY ALPERT

In Short



Full Fathom Five: Ocean Warming and a Father's Legacy

By Gordon Chaplin
(Arcade Publishing, \$25)

Don't let the subtitle throw you off. Yes, the framework for this noteworthy memoir is the return of journalist and conservationist Gordon Chaplin to his childhood home in the Bahamas to see how the marine life is faring 50 years after his father's landmark scientific study, *Fishes of the Bahamas*. But at its heart, this is an achingly beautiful tale of longing: for a father's approval, a mother's affection, a love lost at sea and the serene beauty of the underwater world, as it was in Chaplin's childhood and remains in his memories.

—KRISTIN BAIRD RATTINI



To the Letter: A Celebration of the Lost Art of Letter Writing

By Simon Garfield
(Gotham Books, \$28)

Simon Garfield's latest tome is a love letter to letters — you know, that ancient art of putting pen to paper and stamp to envelope. Confident that "the last letter will appear in our lifetime," Garfield's homage takes us from recently unearthed ancient Roman letters all the way to our inbox and how email has changed our writing style. The result is a detailed and whip-smart chronicle of correspondence that begs the question: What will happen to our understanding of the past (and ourselves) if we measure our thoughts in byte-size characters rather than long, flowing hand? "Without letters," he writes, "we risk losing sight of our history, or at least its nuance."

—KIM SCHMIDT