

shadow that darkens the whole globe? Not the shadow of the City of the Dead?"

"Not even that."

Those shadows and more haunt the pages of "The Krampus and the Old, Dark Christmas," Al Ridenour's gleefully erudite study of the more gruesome and ancient traditions associated with the holiday. A member of the anarchic cultural network the Cacophony Society, known for staging Dadaist happenings for unsuspecting audiences, Ridenour here turns his attention to a rite with a more venerable pedigree: the annual appearance of the Krampus, a hairy, horned, chain-toting biped that resembles a Wookiee on a bender.

"Christmas requires the darkness," Ridenour reminds us in his introduction. "Come late December the child's world of consensual reality begins to dissolve — magic elves crouch and spy in suburban homes, still-moist pines are suddenly hauled indoors, and parents whisper and sleepwalk through rituals they can't explain." Primarily

of eldritch creatures hid. Along with more familiar goblins and little people there were demon goats, the seductive and sinister mist woman *Nebelfrau* and *Seelvogel*, a soul-stealing bird. The Wild Hunt roamed the skies from Norway to the Czech border, led by a hunter who might be Odin or Satan, depending on your perspective. Beaked *Perchten*, frightening female figures who appear at Epiphany, probably derive from far more archaic beliefs. Ridenour serves as a nimble guide to these varied origins and many more, showing how over millennia they became part of a complex pan-European mythology that continues to resonate in popular culture, especially around the Christmas holidays.

No stranger to childhood terrors, Maurice Sendak gave Americans a 20th century vision of Krampus in "Where the Wild Things Are," which looses monsters with the command "Let the wild rumpus start!" More recently, they may recognize Krampus from the 2015 horror flick that bears his name or

the book "Krampus: The Yule Lord" by the artist-illustrator Brom released that same year.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, his image adorned impressively perverse — and popular — Austrian holiday cards, bearing the message *Gruß vom Krampus!* (Greetings from Krampus!) These might depict a lasciviously long-tongued, whip-bearing Krampus stuffing terrified children into a sack or leering at modishly dressed young women.

Today, Austria's mountainous Gastein Valley may be Krampus Central (although Ridenour has organized a number of Los Angeles events, including a Krampus Ball and a Krampus Play). In the Gastein Valley, Krampus accompanies a costumed St. Nicholas on the saint's household visits, on or around his Dec. 6 feast day. Fore-runner of the American Santa Claus, St. Nicholas carries a staff



Feral House

# More fall nonfiction: hit songs, war's cost

By NATIONAL BOOK REVIEW

## Anatomy of a Song

The Oral History of 45 Iconic Hits That Changed Rock, R&B and Pop

Marc Myers

Grove Atlantic, \$26

"My Girl" by the Temptations; "Please Mr. Postman" by the Marvelettes; "Respect Yourself" by the Staple Singers. These are among the exuberant songs and glorious artists that are the subject of Myers' engrossing book, which features mini-chapters on each hit single, along with brief oral histories, chronologically arranged. These essays and interviews first appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, and gathered together here they add up not only to a first-rate playlist but a rich history of both the music industry and the baby boom era.

## Our Revolution

A Future to Believe In

Bernie Sanders

Thomas Dunne Books, \$27

Released in the aftermath of this year's dramatic election and written in his trademark unvarnished style, Vermont senator and presidential aspirant Sanders'

modesty: the post-campaign book. Many candidates publish autobiographies when they are starting a run for office. But it was after the votes had been counted that Sanders released this account of his childhood in New York, his college years in Chicago, his time in Vermont, Washington, D.C., and on the campaign trail. That is likely because of the second part of the book, in which Sanders lays out his policy ideas, could chart a

larly progressive path for more participatory Senate Democratic leadership.

## What Have We Done

The Moral Injury of Our Longest Wars

David Wood

Little, Brown, \$28

Wood's series in the Huffington Post on severely wounded veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan won a Pulitzer Prize in 2012; he brings his deeply humane sensibility to this book about the "moral injury" caused by war. Not to be confused with post-traumatic stress disorder, moral injuries transpire, in Wood's account, when one feels that killing another human being is a violation of the social order. Wood, who has been reporting on conflict for more than three decades, delves into the emotions of those who feel ethically conflicted after following orders and how those in combat try to recover from their experiences, especially when resources to help them are scant.

## The Attention Merchants

The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads

Tim Wu

Knopf, \$28.95

In this compelling new book, Columbia Law School professor Wu, who coined the phrase "net neutrality," surveys the battle for human attention from the early days of print to the current world of digital media. Wu traces this war for eyeballs from the penny press era, through the midcentury age of advertising's *Mad Men*, up through today, when Facebook and Google are reigning supreme. Deeply knowledgeable about the digital landscape and possessed of considerable insight and wit, Wu recognizes the importance and power of digital media, but he also shines a light on the dangers inherent in the new world order — the loss of privacy and the commodification of human attention spans.

who hide behind the dining table. "Today, of course," one of Ridenour's informants assures us, "they have to be much more careful about good floors, and mind that they don't scratch furniture or knock down lampshades with their horns."

The highlight of these celebrations, and those in other parts of Austria and Germany, are parades or unscheduled appearances of the *Krampuspass*, or Krampus troupe — groups of people wearing elaborate furry outfits that can weigh 80 pounds, along with beautifully hand-carved wooden masks that cost \$1,000 or more. They're also outfitted with weapons — usually chains and whips — as well as heavy bells that warn of their approach.

Increasingly, women play the role of Krampus. But traditionally this is a guy thing, because of the physical demands of the costumes and the choreographed, if very real, violence that can ensue during the annual *Krampuslauf*, or

Hand's most recent novel is "Hard Light."

## Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 3

The War Years and After: 1939-1962

Blanche Wiesen Cook

Viking, \$40

First ladies are having a moment. In her third volume of Eleanor Roosevelt's life, Cook focuses on the final years of World War II, chronicling how the Roosevelts' marriage grew frosty and then how the widowed Roosevelt crusaded for world peace. In this final installment of her definitive biography, Cook presents a complex version of her subject. She captures Roosevelt's rigidity but also portrays her real devotion to racial equality and genuine interest in breaking down color lines in both her friendships and in powerful institutions.

The National Book Review is an independent online book review founded by Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor.