[Q&A]

PW TALKS WITH JOHN VAILLANT Into the Wild

Man and tiger face off in Siberia's boreal forests as an Amur tiger turns man-eater and begins methodically selecting and stalking victims in The Tiger (Reviews, May 17).

The book contains such vivid descriptions that, initially, I (wrongly) assumed you were present at the expeditions tracking the tiger. How did you recreate those scenes? The men charged with investigating

[the tiger's killing of a poacher] treated the case and its evidence forensically, as one would a murder. I wanted read-

ers to feel this tiger as the people in this story did, and all of their extensive video footage, notes, maps, and diagrams, combined with my own interviews and visits to the scenes, allowed for visceral recreations. You're conspicuously absent as a character in

the book—why did you

leave yourself out?

It would have been easy to turn this into a first-person reporter's travelogue, and it was tempting because the place is so colorful and remote. But I stifled that impulse early on. This story, in my view, represents an almost mythic drama with many timeless, universal themes, and I didn't want to dilute that in any way.

Your subjects acknowledge that the tiger can easily destroy them, but they insist it is a "protector, a just animal." Does this perspective say more about the tiger or about how Russians tend to look at nature?

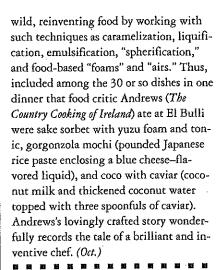
That's a wonderful, difficult question, and I think I spent the entire book trying to answer it! Wherever people live closely with tigers, sharing the land as

opposed to dominating it, there tends to be this kind of attitude. I think it stems from a combination of the tiger's spooky sentience and potency, and the experience of those who encounter this energy on a regular basis. Finding fresh tiger tracks around your outhouse is a very unsettling experience: you know she's there, but where? If the

> gecosystem is intact, those tracks are likely all you'll

This story seems poised on the fault lines of many hot topics—the ravages of the "free" market, climate change, China's resource consumption. Is there cause for optimism? The short answer is a qualified yes. In Primorye,

tigers may be better protected than humans. For three generations, brave individuals have advocated for Amur tigers, and over the course of the 20th century (the most traumatic period in Russian history), Russians restored the collapsing tiger population. Since perestroika, however, the combination tive laws against poaching, and rapid habitat loss is proving lethal to tigers and the prey on which they depend. In the end, it comes down to money and political will, both of which are in short supply at the moment. Nonetheless, in this Year of the Tiger, I believe Primorye, of all places in Asia, represents the tiger's best chance for a wild, safe, and stable coexistence with -PARUL SEHGAL humans.



Herding Donkeys: The Fight to Rebuild the Democratic Party and **Reshape American Politics**

Ari Berman. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, \$26 (288p) ISBN 978-0-374-16970-1

Berman plumbs the roots of Barack Obama's 2008 victory, reaching back four years to a failed Democratic presidential campaign that left loyalists dispiritedand the White House, Congress, and a majority of state legislatures in Republican control. Berman, a correspondent for the Nation, describes how the drama and sordidness of the Clinton years left many Democrats feeling that "their party had lost its compass, and just maybe its soul." Enter insurgent upstart candidate Howard Dean, who revived a 50-state campaign strategy that failed to net him the White House, but energized a populist political base and harnessed its energy with the Internet and a "plethora of new tools that would fundamentally change political campaigns and the nature of public communication." Obama ran using a similar blueprint, and the book's accounts of Democratic revival in traditional Republican strongholds read well, making political organizing an exciting, inspiring process—but Berman's insider perspective obscures some of the broader conditions, notably growing disenchantment with Republican policies that also contributed to Obama's victory. Berman covers the tactical and strategic shifts within the Democratic party that have reconfigured the national political calculus, to the point where the GOP must mimic their approach in the coming congressional elections. (Oct.)

of a porous border with China, ineffec-

See the review at www.publishersweekly.com/thetiger