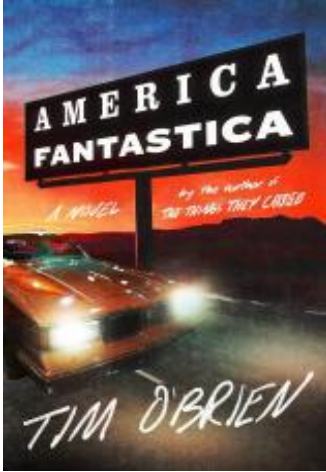


# America Fantastica

by Tim O'Brien

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## About the Book

**An American Master returns: the author of *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED* delivers his first new novel in two decades, a brilliant and rollicking odyssey, in which a bank robbery sparks a satirical romp through a country plagued by deceit? (*Kirkus*, starred review).**

At 11:34 a.m. one Saturday in August 2019, Boyd Halverson strode into Community National Bank in Northern California.

"How much is on hand, would you say?" he asked the teller. "I'll want it all."

"You're robbing me?"

He revealed a Temptation .38 Special.

The teller, a diminutive redhead named Angie Bing, collected \$81,000.

Boyd stuffed the cash into a paper grocery bag.

"I'm sorry about this," he said, "but I'll have to ask you to take a ride with me."

So begins the adventure of Boyd Halverson --- star journalist turned notorious online disinformation troll turned JCPenney manager --- and his irrepressible hostage, Angie Bing. Haunted by his past and weary of his present, Boyd has one goal before the authorities catch up with him: settle a score with the man who destroyed his life. By Monday, the pair reach Mexico; by winter, they are in a lakefront mansion in Minnesota. On their trail are hitmen, jealous lovers, ex-cons, an heiress, a billionaire shipping tycoon, a three-tour veteran of Iraq, and the ghosts of Boyd's past. Everyone, it seems, except the police.

In the tradition of Jonathan Swift and Mark Twain, *AMERICA FANTASTICA* delivers a biting, witty and entertaining story about the causes and costs of outlandish fantasy, while also marking the triumphant return of an essential voice in American letters. And at the heart of the novel, amid a teeming cast of characters, readers will delight in the tug-of-war between two memorable and iconic human beings --- the exuberant savior-of-souls Angie Bing and the penitent but compulsive liar Boyd Halverson. Just as Tim O'Brien's modern classic, *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED*, so brilliantly reflected the unromantic truth of war, *AMERICA FANTASTICA* puts a mirror to a nation and a time that has become dangerously unmoored from truth and greedy for delusion.

## Discussion Guide

1. If you have already read *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED*, you know that a major theme of Tim O'Brien's work is the friction between emotional and factual truth. How does *AMERICA FANTASTICA* explore the theme of truthfulness?
2. We learn early in the novel that when Boyd robbed the bank for \$81,000, he had \$72,000 in his own account. If he evidently wasn't in it for the money, what do you think his true motivation is for the robbery?
3. *AMERICA FANTASTICA* is a classic "on-the-road" narrative, exploring movement through the American landscape, particularly the West. How does the novel play with this genre, whose forbearers range from Twain to Cather to Kerouac and beyond?
4. The book includes several interstitial passages that capture the national zeitgeist, defining the beliefs and feelings of the time. Discuss the role of these passages. What do they add to the story as a whole?
5. The novel is set in 2019-2020 and uses a moment in our recent past to explore the present day. What commentary does the story make about the current state of the country?
6. What is Angie's function in the story? Despite her front of innocence, what can we understand about her deeper motivations?
7. Explore the bond between Boyd and Angie. How does their relationship compare to Boyd's relationship with his ex-wife? What is O'Brien saying about authentic feeling and truth?
8. Where do you see Boyd's journey at the end of the novel? Is there room for happiness?

## Author Bio

Tim O'Brien received the National Book Award for *GOING AFTER CACCIATO*. Among his other books are *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED*, Pulitzer Finalist and a *New York Times* Book of the Century, and *IN THE LAKE OF THE WOODS*, winner of the James Fenimore Cooper Prize. He was awarded the Pritzker Literature Award for lifetime achievement in military writing.

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**Publication Date:** October 24, 2023

**Genres:** Fiction, Satire

**Hardcover:** 464 pages

**Publisher:** Mariner Books

**ISBN-10:** 0063318504

**ISBN-13:** 9780063318502