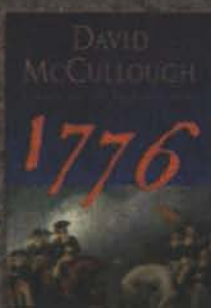
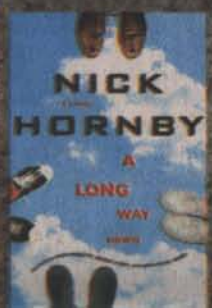
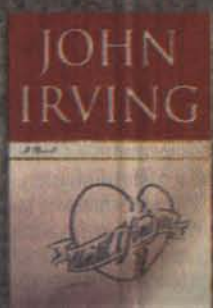
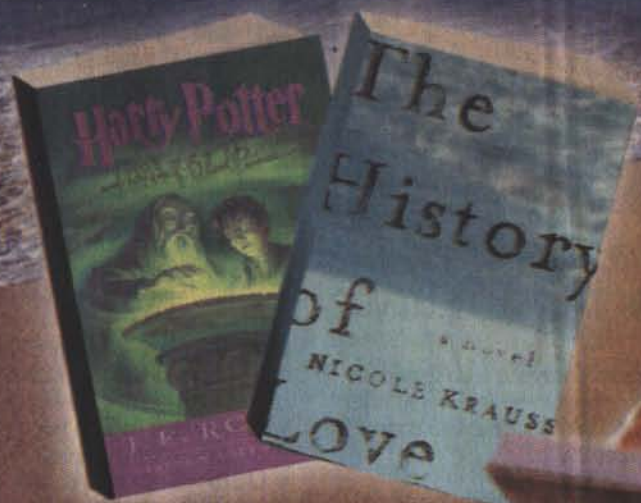


# The Book Review

SUNDAY, JUNE 19, 2005 • PAGE E5

## BEACH READS

From a long list of hot Summer books, here are some 'best bets'



### REGIONAL INTEREST

## Oh, what an alluring web she weaves

Reviewed by David Marshall James

### SPIDER BLUE

by Carla Damron

Bell Rosa Books, 294 pages, \$25.95

**"SPIDER BLUE" BEGINS** with a murder spun from a web of drug dealing and street-gang warfare.

Social worker Caleb Knowles shows up at the scene of a suburban housewife's brutal stabbing. His girlfriend is a close friend of the victim's neighbor. Then, more violence jolts fictitious Westville, S.C. — seemingly random shootings at the textile mill.

The clinic where Caleb is on staff is swamped, owing to the influx of mill employees seeking counseling over the workplace deaths.

Because the local police department relies on the clinic to evaluate suspects, Caleb also must interview the mill triggerman. Caleb's professional challenges are compounded again when he is assigned the murdered housewife's 4-year-old daughter.

Damron, a Columbia clinical so-

cial worker, develops realistic characters whose emotional entanglements and depths of despair are rendered all the more penetrating by her "just plain folks" portrayals.

Her facility with male characters is especially notable. The relationship between Caleb and his deaf older brother, Sam — at the center of her first mystery, "Keeping Silent" — contributes a fine counterpoint to the darker proceedings.

In addition, Caleb's occupation allows for an array of compelling secondary characters: his two colleagues, a hospital physician, a compassionate female detective and the clinic's patients, including a striking young woman with a most intriguing past.

Caleb may be an "ordinary Joe" of a protagonist, but Damron's carefully constructed plot and thoughtfulness about social ills contribute to a noteworthy work.

Should her mystery series command the attention it deserves, she has the talent to play on a much broader stage.

James is a Columbia writer.

