



Independence Day

Richard Ford

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A visionary account of American life--and the long-awaited sequel to one of the most celebrated novels of the past decade--*Independence Day* reveals a man and our country with unflinching comedy and the specter of hope and even permanence, all of which Richard Ford evokes with keen intelligence, perfect emotional pitch, and a voice invested with absolute authority.

Independence Day Details

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Author : Richard Ford

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From Reader Review Independence Day for online ebook

George-Icaros Babassakis says

Το μεγαλε?ο του Ricahrd Ford: τ?χατες δεν συμβα?νει τ?ποτα, κι ?μως συμβα?νουν τα π?ντα.
Σπουδα?ος συγγραφ?ας, σπουδα?ο μυθιστ?ρημα.

Lauren Cartwright says

Glutton for punishment that I am, after reading (and strongly disliking!) Ford's first Bascombe novel I soldiered on with the hope that "Independence Day" was, indeed, worthy of the Pulitzer Prize. After just a few chapters I realized that Ford had a formula: several chapters of Bascombe's narcissistic ramblings coupled with (surprise!) a life-changing event that shocks Bascombe into engaging with his family and the world around him about 60 pages from the end. I'm not on the Pulitzer panel, but in my opinion they made a huge mistake by awarding this hack this highly-coveted prize.

Bill says

There are isolated moments of real insight here and it's a shame they're lost in such a meandering, pointless story. The book is strongest when it shows the impact that a realtor has on the lives of his clients -- something I hadn't really considered previously. The story of the Markhams, how the compromises they must make in settling for the home they can afford instead of the one they really want is a powerful metaphor for the lives of these two people, for the choices they've made and how they will live out their remaining years. It's about making tough decisions and being honest about yourself and your situation in life. I would have loved to see this as a short story. Unfortunately, the novel has little else to offer. The protagonist's insights into his own life are fairly shallow and repetitive (if I had to read the term "Existence Period" one more time I was going to put the book down for good). Pulitzer prize? Come on.

Jacob says

I rarely find myself thinking "wow, I hated that book." Often times the last few sentences of a book I've struggled through make me seriously reconsider whether or not I actually disliked it at all. But I can confidently say that this is by far the most aggravating, pretentious and boring book I've ever read. The entire book is essentially monologue and inner-workings, which I'm typically more than happy with, but the stuff Ford presents feels absolutely contrived and ridiculous. The main character is stale and has typical middle aged thoughts, while simultaneously being incredibly delusional about father-son relationships. His son's motivations make little to no sense and I never, ever, EVER, want to talk about real estate with anyone again. Ever. Please god, don't pick this up. Don't do it. Don't let the fancy award draw you in. I speak not its name as I can't believe its designation was bestowed upon this heinous book.

Devon says

Eh. I'm torn about this book. There's no denying Ford is a good writer but I never really connected to the story. I just didn't feel much of anything for any of the characters, they all felt flat and one dimensional despite the overwhelming amount of detail he writes about them. This novel is like a song that is technically perfect but fails to inspire any real feeling.

Daniela says

Frank Bascombe 2.0

"...quando si è giovani il proprio avversario è il futuro; ma quando non lo si è più il proprio avversario è il passato e tutto ciò che si è fatto nel passato, e il problema è riuscire a sfuggirgli"

Katerina says

Okay, it's high time I gave up on this [terribly smug] masterpiece of an American novel.

Paul Bryant says

Well, sometimes I have to wonder if I'm on the right planet. Never has a book been so praised - and by the right people - as this one and The Sportswriter - so I gave this one a go and found myself in a hot muggy sauna of smugness, breathing in the profoundly self-satisfied atmosphere of this guy Bascombe - self-satisfied in spite of failed marriages, bad relationship with son and all that, one of those deeply wise, mature, creased lived-in face type guys who you instinctively trust - sorry pal, not me though, I kept turning the pages hoping that at some point Tony Soprano would drive round the corner like a bat out of hell in a four by four and in a tragic case of mistaken identity him and Chris would jump out, grab this guy Bascombe and bundle him into the boot, drive off like crazy bastards into the nearby woods and bury him where only wolverines and badgers would pick over his wise old bones.

Maria Bikaki says

"Το λυπηρ?, φυσικ?, με την εν?λικη ζω? ε?ναι ?τι διακρ?νεις στον ορ?ζοντα να ?ρχονται πρ?γματα στα οπο?α δε θα προσαρμοστε?ς ποτ?. Τα αναγνωρ?ζεις ως προβλ?ματα, ανησυχε?ς στο ?πακρι γι αυτ?, προβλ?πεις, πα?ρνεις προφυλ?ζεις και κ?νεις δι?φορες διευθετ?σεις, λ?γοντας στον εαυτ? σου ?τι πρ?πει να αλλ?ζεις τον τρ?πο με τον οπο?ο ?κανες μ?χρι τ?ρα τα πρ?γματα. Μ?νο που δεν το κ?νεις. Δε μπορε?ζ. Κατ? κ?ποιον τρ?πο ε?ναι ?δη πολ? αργ??. ?σως ε?ναι κ?πι ακ?μα χειρ?τερο: ?σως αυτ? που βλ?πεις να ?ρχεται απ? πολ? μακρι? δεν ε?ναι πραγματικ? αυτ? που σε φοβ?ζει αλλ? τα επακ?λουθα του, και αυτ? που φοβ?σαι μ?πως συμβε? ?χει ?δη συμβε?. Αυτ? μοι?ζει στην ουσ?α με τη συνειδητοπο?ηση ?τι ?λοι εμε?ς δεν πρ?κειται να ωφεληθο?με απ? τις σπουδα?ες πρ?σφατες προ?δους της ιατρικ?ς επιστ?μης, ωστ?σο τις επικροτο?με ελπ?ζοντας

?τι κ?ποιο εμβ?λιο θα ε?ναι εγκα?ρως ?τοιμο και νομ?ζοντας ?τι τα πρ?γματα μπορε? ακ?μα να βελτιωθο?ν. Μ?νο που και ως προς αυτ? ε?ναι πολ? αργ?. ?τσι ακριβ?ς η ζω? μας τελει?νει πριν καιν το καταλ?βουμε."

Διαβ?ζοντας τα παραπ?νω λ?για στην αρχ? του βιβλ?ου λ?ω ?πα εδ? ε?μαστε ο τ?πος ?χει πολλ? και ενδιαφ?ροντα να μας πει. Φαιν?ταν να ?χει μελετ?σει καλ? την ανθρ?πινη ψυχοσ?νθεση και ?λα ?δειχναν ?τι θα ?ταν να πολ? ενδιαφ?ρον βιβλ?ο για τη ζω? και τις δυσκολ?ες της και για το π?ς αγωνιζ?μαστε για να τις ξεπερ?σουμε και να την κ?νουμε λ?γο πιο υποφερτ?. ?λα καλ? μ?χρι εδ? αλλ? εδ? κ?που ξεκιν?νε και τα προβλ?ματα και ?ρχισαν τα ζ?ρια. Δ?σκολο βιβλ?ο. Δ?σκολο γιατ? πρ?πει σε ?λη σχεδ?ν τη δι?ρκεια του βιβλ?ου να ζ?σεις με την λογικ? ?τι στην πραγματικ?τητα δεν συμβα?νει τ?ποτα το ιδια?τερο εν? στην πραγματικ?τητα ο κ?σμος του ?ρωα μας ε?χε γυρ?σει αν?ποδα. Εδ? αρχ?ζει η ?νσταση μου. Πολλ?ς φορ?ς ?νιωσα ?τι π?ω να συνδεθ? με τον ?ρωα εν? δε μπορ? να πω ?τι συμφωνο?σα π?ντα με τις κιν?σεις του, ? τα λεγ?μενα του για την ακρ?βεια ?λεγα απ? μ?σα μου ρε φ?λε μας δουλε?εις, τι ζ?ρι τραβ?ς ?λα να σου πω τα δικ? μου να δο?με ποιος θα κερδ?σει αλλ? τελοσπ?ντων εκε? που π?λευνα να τον καταλ?βω μου ?ρχιζε μια ακατ?σχετη φλυαρ?α που ?λλοι θα την ?βρισκαν πολ? γοητευτικ? εμ?να ?μως αναγνωστικ? με πα?δεψε πολ? γιατ? ?νιωθα? ?τι ?χανα την οπο?α σ?νδεση προσπαθο?σα να αποκτ?σω με τον ?ρωα. Υπ?ρχαν πραγματικ? κ?ποιες τ?σο μα τ?σο ενδιαφ?ρουσες μεμονωμ?νες στιγμ?ς που μου τραβο?σαν το ενδιαφ?ρον που ?μως χ?νονταν και αποδυν?μωναν στα μ?τια μου π?ντα το κε?μενο απ? την τ?σο λεπτομερ? περιγραφ? καταστ?σεων. Δηλαδ? εντ?ξει μη γελι?μαστε η θεματικ? ε?ναι σπουδα?α. ?λοι μας τουλ?χιστον εγ? προσωπικ? χω βι?σει το ?διο υπαρξιακ? κεν? με τον ?ρωα, εχω αναρωτηθε? εξ?σου για αποφ?σεις σημαντικ?ς που χρει?στηκε να π?ρω στη ζω? μου και ναι προσπ?θησα να βρω απαντ?σεις σε ερωτ?ματα για να μπορ?σω να π?ω παρακ?τω. Αυτ? ?μως ?ταν και συνεχ?ζει να ε?ναι μια δικ? μου προσωπικ? μ?χη στα πλα?σια της αυτοβελτ?ωσης μου ?ταν ?μως προσπαθε?ς ?λο αυτ? να το βγ?λεις σε ?να βιβλ?ο θα περ?μενα ιδ?ως ?ντας τ?σο καλ?ς γραφι?ς να περν?ς αυτ? τη μ?χη, αυτ? την αγων?α για να ξαναβρε?ς ?να ν?ημα ?παρξης και στον αναγ?στη και εμ?να προσωπικ? δε μου το π?ρασε στο βαθμ? που θα ?θελα. ?να συνολικ? ενδιαφ?ρον βιβλ?ο που ?μως δε με ?γιτ? στο βαθμ? που ?θελα και περ?μενα.

Abraham says

Really a Virtuoso performance. Ford, in this book does right what I have always felt that Delillo fails at, which is the endless and minute description of events exactly as they unfold from within the subjective consciousness of the protagonist. It's a technique which, in this case, renders the main character overwhelmingly human by virtue of the flood of details corresponding, in quality, quantity, and pace, with my own experience of how events unfold. Ford's artifice disappears under the flood of particularities, and only a second reading of one detail or other makes clear that the author is more than talented in his description, he is a virtuoso, capable of avoiding repetition and cliche while flooding the reader with image after image and thought after thought. At the end of the book one realizes that the 3-day Independence Day structure has, in fact, been tightly woven around a set of ideas about independence, one's connection to the world, and the question of one's own innate value, as referenced to contemporary (1980s) politics and the thoughts of the founding fathers...

Jordan Hill says

Richard Ford's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Independence Day*, in my eyes, officially marks the author as the last and possibly greatest GMN* of the twentieth-century. I was impressed but not blown away by the first novel in his trilogy, *The Sportswriter*, in which we meet Frank Bascombe, a complicated and difficult-to-pin-down ex-marine and failed novelist who turns to sportswriting after the devastating death of his son and his subsequent divorce. *The Sportswriter* is indebted to Updike's Rabbit franchise in all the right ways--most notably for its elevation and near religious worship of the quiet, mundane banalities of suburban American life. Like most of Updike's heroes, Ford's protagonist Frank Bascombe is manly and solipsistic, but also open-minded and deeply introspective. He is a liberal, though one who will neither censor his thoughts nor succumb to political correctness. In his thoughts Frank is something of a chauvinist, but by his actions he reveals himself to be basically a big softie. Where Ford diverges from Updike, however, is in his creation of intelligent, strong-willed female characters who are fierce and intransigent, providing important counter-points to Frank's limited outlook and perspective.

Independence Day is a departure in many ways from *The Sportswriter* in that it deals with the complexities and entanglements of a changing United States approaching the millenium. Although Frank's interaction with this change--which includes race and class tensions, divorce, and fear of an approaching housing-market correction (Frank is now a realtor in Haddam, New Jersey)--is somewhat awkward and forced, the novel feels less claustrophobic and certainly less solipsistic for Ford's efforts. In this way, Ford evades Franzen's famous criticism of Updike in the *Paris Review*--claiming that the author fails to deal with "the bigger postwar, postmodern, socio-technological picture," rendering him "a classic self-absorbed sixties-style narcissist." To me, this charge has always seemed a bit unfair. For dealing with rapid and violent change by clinging to stability and escaping into a kind of dreamy, reflective solipsism seems a natural and fairly innocent reaction to new and overwhelming realities. Frank, despite his quiet dreaminess and searching nature, has come a long way since the death of his son Ralph and his divorce, as well as his resignation from sportswriting. He is now determined to right the mistakes of his past, and decides that this should come in the form of helping his delinquent son Paul right his own sagging path. Thus the plot of *Independence Day* centers on an epic weekend road trip between a flawed father and his troubled son, first to the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, MA, then to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY.

The first half of *Independence Day*, however, focuses on the days leading up to this trip, as we are introduced to "Frank the realtor." Getting involved with realty is one of the ways Frank, in his mid-life, decides he can "give back" to the community. In an effort to change perceptions and enlighten the WASPish residents of Haddam, New Jersey, Frank even begins buying and fixing up houses in "colored" neighborhoods and recommending them to his closed-minded clients. In fact, realty works as a superb metaphor, and one which Frank uses as a vehicle for examining America and his own community. In *The Sportswriter*, Frank inhabits a world that, as Barbara Ehrenreich puts it, is "just large enough for his personal tragedies and philanderings and not an iota of anything else."** In *Independence Day*, one gets the overwhelming sense that Frank is trying to make room--not for anyone or anything in particular, but for something nonetheless. Despite its preoccupation with social engagement and "making room," *Independence Day* is also a kind of hazy, leaf-blown meditation on independence and self-reliance, both in the individual and larger historical sense. Frank even goes so far as to bring Becker's *The Declaration of Independence* and Emerson's "Self-Reliance" along on the Hall of Fame road trip, hoping his son will be inspired enough to soak up some wisdom. But things don't go at all as planned and both books end up sadly relegated to the back seat of the car.

With *Independence Day*, it is important not to allow the overt themes of independence, self-reliance, change, and civic virtue to cloud the novel's prodigious aesthetic virtues. Ford, more a poet than a novelist, is able to capture delicate and seemingly mundane nuances with painterly precision and psychological acuity. In language that is almost musical, Ford captures what it sounds like to be stuck in a drab hospital waiting room

in Oneonta, New York, as the nurses are changing shifts; what it feels like to be waiting for a response in a phone booth at midnight after telling your partner you love them for the first time; or what it smells like to march in a sweaty Independence Day parade in Haddam, New Jersey. But it's not just external details. As Frank's subconscious mind wanders, the reader feels content to follow along gleefully. For example, as Frank sells a home to Phyllis and Joe Markham, a boring and frumpy middle-aged couple, he muses:

"I gaze in puzzlement at her ill-defined posterior and have a sudden, fleeting curiosity about, of all things, her and Joe's sex life. Would it be jolly and jokey? Prayerful and restrained? Rowdy, growling and obstreperous? Phyllis has an indefinite milky allure that is not always obvious--encased and bundled as she is, and slightly bulge-eyed in her fitless, matron-designer clothes--some yielding, unmaternal abundance that could certainly get a rise out of some lonely PTA dad in corduroys and a flannel shirt, encountered by surprise in the chilly intimacy of the grade-school parking lot after parents' night."

The narrative, though not exactly stream-of-consciousness, is delivered in the first-person present. Frank's voice, no matter what he is doing or relating, is always intimate, but tends to drift in between levels of conscious and sub-conscious thought--in other words, between the stuff not realized, the stuff only discreetly realized, and the stuff that has been fully realized and is therefore fashioned self-consciously to please.

Frank, throughout the novel, is engrossed in a new life phase he calls "the existence period," which sounds rather deep but is really no more than a mature phase, the resigned acknowledgement that there are things in his life he cannot control. All efforts to look backward or forward in life during this period are substituted for an overriding imperative to simply be, to "exist." What we learn in the end is that Frank is becoming an adult. He is looking both inward and outward at the things he may be able to influence and giving these things a sincere effort. In this way, Independence Day gives us a mere slice--a weekend, in fact--of Frank's breezy, wandering, introspective existence. However, just as independence and a sense of "the mystery of things" are important to Frank, so these qualities seem to matter doubly to Richard Ford; and although we come to share an intimate weekend with Frank Bascombe, there is, as with all great literary protagonists, a kernel of mystery regarding the man's inner life that is left fully intact, and which the reader can never quite bring into focus.

*Coined by the late David Foster Wallace, the term Great Male Narcissist (GMN) has come to signify a class of talented, if mostly self-absorbed post-war writers--including Roth, Mailer, Updike, and sometimes even Franzen--whose novels fixate shamelessly on sex, work, death, and their own self-consciousness.

**Not that her review of Independence Day was in any way negative! Ehrenreich, who was critical of The Sportswriter, had this to say about Independence Day:

"Most reviewers of Independence Day have concluded that Richard Ford is one of the great American writers of our time. Surely they underestimate him. Anybody who can keep the reader going through 451 pages about a holiday weekend in the life of a New Jersey realtor--a weekend in which nothing much happens except for some pitstops at the Baseball Hall of Fame, the Vince Lombardi Rest Stop on the New Jersey Turnpike, and other locations that I experience, even in literary form, as personal hell--is more than a great writer of our time. He may be the greatest writer of all time."

Yiannis says

?νας μεγ?λος συγγραφ?ας κι ?να σπουδα?ο βιβλ?ο.

Makis Dionis says

Ωρα?ος και δεμ?νος λ?γος, ειρωνας εκε? που πρ?πει. Το απλ?νει ωρα?α κ αποκρυσταλ?νει/αποκαλ?πτει την μικροαστικ? μιζ?ρια της αμερικ?νικης ενδοχ?ρας των 80'ζ....?ταν ο Μπους ο πρεσβ?τερος αποτελε? επιλογ? επειδ? δεν υπ?ρχει κ?τι ?λλο πιο ενδιαφ?ρον ...?σο ωρα?ος κ να ναι ο πινακας, με τ?τοιο θ?μα π?σο να σ' αγγ?ξει δηλαδ?;

Nancy says

More morose than his previous incarnation in the "Sportswriter," Frank Bascombe returns as the amazingly well-drawn protagonist with the incredibly compelling inner voice. He never quite connects with the people around him and is always to a degree dissembling to his friends and family. Only the reader understands his rich philosophies and the complex reactions he has to events as they unfold in his life. Kudos to Richard Ford for creating a character so real that I feel as if I've gained an intimate friend.

Jonathan Francisco says

I first saw this book during one of my religion classes in college. My seatmate, who is now a good friend of mine, brought it with him. I asked him if a certain movie was adapted from the book, and he firmly answered "no". This was also the first time I got interested with books that have won the Pulitzer. Now Ford is, no doubt, a good writer. I love every minute Bascombe spent with his son. I can feel the tension between them, and Bascombe's want to make it work, the relationship. It saddened me because as far as I could remember, during his "sportwriter" days, they had a connection. Then a death in the family sort of changed everything. Plus the divorce. When I think about the book, what would always comes to mind was the last scene, when Bascombe received a call from someone he wasn't sure who. The other party didn't talk and was making weird noises. He talked to the person still, telling the other party he was all right. That broke my heart for reasons still unclear to me, even to this day.

• • • — — • • • says

- Κονσταντ?ν, τι περ?που υπ?θεση ?χει π?νω-κ?τω ;
- Το δρ?μα της ?παρξης και του θαν?του
- Συγγ?μη ρε Κονσταντ?ν, π?θανε τ?ποτα, γιατ? δεν μιλ?νε ;
- Ε?ναι ατμοσφαιρικ?...
- ΚΑΛΕ ! ΚΑΛΕ ΑΥΤΟΙ ΚΟΚΑΛΩΣΑΝΕ !
- Σ?πα, κουνι?ται ο ?νας, για κ?τσε μπορε? και να μιλ?σει, θα μας τρελ?νει τ?ρα
- Σταματ?στε, σας ε?πα ε?ναι υπαρξιακ? το δρ?μα...

Steve says

Like Frank Bascombe, Ford's protagonist, I'm middle-aged and sometimes given to contemplation. And while I wouldn't consider Frank a role model, I do give top marks to the book. I give it bonus points for:

- Inner thoughts that are meaningful and articulate--the kind that make you say, "Wish I'd thought of that, had I the brainpower to do so."
- Ford's wonderful writing style--descriptive without being obtrusive.
- Taking on a tough topic: the plodding years of middle age--what he calls the Existence Period.
- An undercurrent of empathy despite it all.
- Hints that though Frank is smart, Ford himself is even smarter. It's almost like Ford has an omniscient meta-voice backing Frank's 1st person account. Readers get clues that Frank's self-awareness extends only so far, and he's more human because of it.

Thanks to my friend Robert for recommending it to me.

Glenn Sumi says

Another Home Run in the Frank Bascombe Series

Okay, let me just say it: Richard Ford's fictional alter ego, Frank Bascombe, seems more real to me than many people I know.

How is this possible? In *Independence Day*, the second and most celebrated of his four Bascombe books – it won the Pulitzer Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award in 1996 – Ford shows that he knows everything about this charming, flawed and oh-so-relatable Everyman, including things Frank wouldn't want him, or anyone, to know.

The result is another masterpiece of realistic fiction, a chapter in Ford's Great American Epic.

After the midlife crisis suggested at the end of *The Sportswriter* ((view spoiler)), Frank, now 44, is back in Haddam, NJ, having (re-)purchased his old house, and is selling real estate (he's, ahem, a "Residential Specialist"), casually dating a new (more age-appropriate) woman, and maintaining a couple of homes he's rented out, as well as a hot dog place he's bought and refurbished.

His ex-wife Ann (she was called "X" in *The Sportswriter*) has married an established, sexagenarian architect and they're living in an expensive Vermont suburb with Ann and Frank's two children, Clarissa and Paul. (You'll recall a third, Ralph, died in childhood.) At 15, Paul is acting out, with two recent violent incidents under his adolescent belt, one involving his step-dad.

Paul's disturbing behaviour has made Frank suggest a Fourth Of July weekend road trip, a sort of archetypal father-and-son odyssey. They're going to visit the baseball and basketball halls of fame. And maybe between

consuming junk food, trying out their sports skills and cracking jokes, they'll discuss some serious stuff. But can Frank, who's kind of a kid himself, dispense any worthy advice?

At the same time, Frank's dealing with many other things: hot-and-cold clients; tenants who are behind in the rent; the memory of a former girlfriend whose murder was never solved; his unresolved feelings for Ann...

This book, longer and denser but no less readable than *The Sportswriter*, has a leisurely pace, with lots of detours to phone booths to talk, check or leave messages (remember: this was before cellphones became ubiquitous), and a couple of haunting trips to motels, one involving a murder.

You can feel Ford reaching slightly for his metaphors about independence and how to live a worthy life. But the writing throughout is stunning. Here are some examples:

...when you're young your opponent is the future; but when you're not young, your opponent is the past and everything you've done in it and the problem of getting away from it.

Unmarried men in their forties, if we don't subside entirely into the landscape, often lose important credibility and can even attract unwholesome attention in a small, conservative community. And in Haddam, in my new circumstances, I felt I was perhaps becoming the personage I least wanted to be and, in the years since my divorce, had feared being: the suspicious bachelor, the man whose life has no mystery, the graying, slightly jowly, slightly too tanned and trim middle-ager, driving around town in a cheesy '58 Chevy ragtop polished to a squeak, always alone on balmy summer nights, wearing a faded yellow polo shirt and green suntans, elbow over the window top, listening to progressive jazz, while smiling and pretending to have everything under control, when in fact there was nothing to control.

Ford has set the book at a fascinating time, 1988, with the country recovering from an economic downturn (sound familiar?) and the upcoming Dukakis vs. Bush presidential election on everyone's minds. The country is on the brink of becoming really divided, in a way that would – that will? – upset Frank's natural Southern civility and sense of equilibrium. And Ford's writing about race also feels more contemporary, especially since Frank repeatedly referred to African-Americans as "Negroes" in the first book.

The central section, involving Frank and Paul's road trip, contains some of the most painful, honest prose I've ever read about fathers and sons. One climactic scene literally made me cry out, it was so difficult to read. But Ford understands the straight male psyche so well.

I've now read more than 800 pages about Frank Bascombe in less than two weeks. Um, *Frank-ly*, I need a break from being inside his head. I'll definitely finish the other two books. I want to know what happens, in the same way that I'd like to catch up with people I haven't seen in years.

But these books contain wise and truthful observations about life in the late 20th century and early 21st that are solid and substantial as rock. They'll still be around when I'm ready to read them.

Mark says

I'm already getting ready for the brickbats on this one, but after reading more than one glowing review of Richard Ford's work, I tackled this one first, and I found that I disliked the main character so much that no amount of storytelling finesse about real estate in New Jersey and other exigencies of modern life could change my mind. And in this case, I had the feeling that Ford is a lot like his central character, so that gave me the kind of bad taste that has just put me off him permanently.

Jessica says

I wouldn't say this is a book for all readers or all occasions, but it really was the perfect book for a rainy Fourth of July weekend when I was stuck at home alone with my dog, laid up and non-ambulatory after some improperly stacked firewood fell and crushed my toes.

I liked this better than *The Sportswriter*, though I did find some characters and conversations tiresome and can see how lots of people wouldn't get into this book. I got deeply into it, though, because it's one of those long novels in which not a whole lot happens but which allows you to occupy totally another person's life and mind. So instead of lying glumly on the couch all weekend with my foot wrapped in towels and ice while America joyfully celebrated its birthday outside, I got to tour New Jersey, Connecticut, and New York State, and rather than just being an immobilized, bored, and crabby version of me, I got to see what it was like to be Frank Bascombe for a change.

Not that there's anything particularly fabulous about being Frank Bascombe, but sometimes it's nice to be someone else. In *Independence Day*, we pick up a bit later than we left off with Bascombe the last time we saw him, at the end of *The Sportswriter*. It's now Independence Day weekend in 1988, and Bascombe has entered what he calls his "Existence Period," drifting through his forties while working as a real estate agent in his beloved Haddam, NJ. Bascombe is a basically good-natured poster child for easy American privilege: straight, white, well-off, and more or less content in his suburban idyll, despite a few bumps in the road -- a deceased child, the divorce he hasn't been able to recover from, a brutally murdered ex-girlfriend. He's existing, quite nicely, doing mostly fine.

But... Okay, there is no "but" here. This isn't a novel about conflict or rupture or surprising and unexpected turns of events. For me it really was just about living inside someone else while he goes about a more interesting weekend than the one I'd had planned for myself. Instead of icing his purple toes and limping pathetically around the dog park, Bascombe has to show a house to a difficult couple of clients, run a few Haddam business errands, visit his girlfriend on the Jersey Shore, and take his troubled adolescent son on a bonding trip to the basketball and baseball halls of fame. The majority of the book is Bascombe driving around the Northeast in his Crown Vic and having conversations with various characters, with whom he generally tries to share moments of meaningful human connection, with varying degrees of failure.

It's really plain to me that I would've hated this book had I tried to read it at most earlier stages of my life, which I wouldn't have, because it's about a divorced realtor living in suburban New Jersey, and that's not the kind of novel I ever used to want to read. Note that there are no tricks here: you shouldn't read *Independence Day* if that thumbnail description sounds awful to you! This was one of those novels that made me realize

I've officially become a boring grownup with interest in and empathy for boring grownup concerns: there were pages in here that were the main character's thoughts about real estate, and I found them fascinating. Ditto his thoughts on parenting, aging, mortality, and divorce. This book is not for the spritely or young at heart, and my enjoyment of it marks some yet-unnamed midlife Period of my own.

Without worrying too much about irresponsibly sweeping gender essentialism, I'll say that this book's representation of masculinity and being male was really interesting to me. Bascombe reminds me in certain ways of my father (who's from New Jersey) and my husband (who loves sports), and there was a lot about his character that seemed to represent and partly explicate some of what I find opaque and mysterious about many men. So I did get a kick out of that.

I also loved all the landscapes and descriptions of place. I can't remember the last book I read that transported me with such vividness to places I almost knew but didn't -- I'm pretty familiar with that part of the country, but I haven't been to Cooperstown (really hope to go, someday) or to Haddam (which doesn't exist), though now I definitely feel that I've seen them and the other places in here as well. And I hugely appreciated that on this homebound July Fourth weekend, which otherwise could have been an even more depressing wash.
