



thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Monday

Phyllis Chesler discusses her memoir, "An American Bride in Kabul" (Palgrave Macmillan).

Tickets \$18 for nonmembers. At 7:30 p.m., Temple Avodah, 3050 Oceanside Rd., Oceanside; 516-766-6809, avodah.org/study/adults



Tuesday

Singer, songwriter and poet **Jewel** signs copies of her new children's book, "Sweet Dreams" (Paula Wiseman Books/Simon & Schuster). At 5 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Former Texas congressman **Ron Paul** signs copies of his new book,

"The School Revolution: A New Answer for Our Broken Education System" (Grand Central Publishing).

Wristbands will be distributed starting at 9 a.m. Event at 7 p.m., Barnes & Noble, Country Glen Center, 91 Old Country Rd., Carle Place; 516-741-9850



Wednesday

Garden City author **Nelson DeMille** speaks and signs copies

of his new book, "The Quest," (Center Street). At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



Saturday

Marina Gottlieb Sarles discusses her book, "The Last Daughter of Prussia" (Wild River Books), registration required.

At 1 p.m., East Hampton Library, 159 Main St., East Hampton; 631-324-0222, easthamptonlibrary.org

reviews

Pinko pals make red Rose blue

DISSIDENT GARDENS, by Jonathan Lethem. Doubleday, 366 pp., \$27.95.

BY TOM BEER

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Rose Zimmer — the hyper-opinionated Queens Communist at the heart of Jonathan Lethem's dizzying new novel — has everything but a big eleven o'clock number. And it isn't hard to imagine this suffocating, stymied matriarch belting out her own proletarian rendition of "Rose's Turn" from "Gypsy." Lethem's Rose is monstrous and overbearing but never less than human in her outsize hungers and bitter disappointments.

"Dissident Gardens," the 10th novel from the author of "Motherless Brooklyn" and "The Fortress of Solitude," opens in the Queens housing development of Sunnyside Gardens in 1955, as an ad hoc committee of functionaries descends on Rose's apart-



Jonathan Lethem, author of "Dissident Gardens"

ment to drum her out of the party. "Here was Communist habit, Communist ritual," Lethem writes. "The living-room trial, the respectable lynch mob that availed themselves of your hospitality while dropping some grenade of Party policy on your commitment." Rose's sin? "They were troubled by her associations" — specifically, her extramarital affair with black

cop Douglas Lookins.

From there, "Dissident Gardens" sweeps back and forth in time, introducing Rose's daughter, Miriam, who resists her mother but is also yoked to her, Miriam's father having been dispatched by the Party to East Germany. Miriam will forge her own sensibility and politics in the earnest folk music scene of Greenwich Village in the mid 1960s, marrying Tommy Gogan, an Irish folk singer.

There's Cicero Lookins, the gay whiz-kid son of Rose's cop, mentored by Rose for an Ivy League future; and Sergius Gogan, Miriam and Tommy's son, orphaned by his parents' far-flung political commitments; and even Lenin "Lenny" Angrush, Rose's second cousin, who dreams of a socialist baseball team, the Sunnyside Pros.

Lethem is a master of the set piece chapter — such as the one where precocious 14-year-old Miriam sneaks a Columbia boy into the Sunnyside Gardens apartment;

their discovery by Rose has nearly apocalyptic ramifications. Or a later chapter that captures Tommy's marijuana-fuzzed enchantment by Miriam at the beginning of their courtship: "Her attentions had seemed to him like a glorious bottle into which he'd hoped to slip himself and then expand, like a model ship. . . . Instead, he felt like a lightning bug, zooming inside only to be swallowed, rebounding against the impassive glass, pulsing a small light so as not to be lost inside."

It's hard to beat prose like that, and Lethem delivers, page after page. The novel occasionally groans beneath the weight of its many characters and their many quirks, some more engaging than others. And for a novel about political engagement, the characters' beliefs don't get much of an airing. None of that detracts from the abundant pleasures in "Dissident Gardens," a big, unromantic valentine to one unorthodox, only-in-New York family.

Ghostbusters slain; ghosts didn't do it

HELP FOR THE HAUNTED, by John Searles. William Morrow, 362 pp., \$26.95.

BY MARION WINK

Special to Newsday

The title of John Searles' captivating third thriller, "Help for the Haunted," refers to the headline of a personal ad run by the late Sylvester Mason when he and his wife set up shop as Christian ghostbusters. In the years preceding their shooting in a church — a scene that opens the book — the couple became well-known due to a muckraking book by a local reporter.

The events surrounding her parents' murder are narrated by Sylvie, 14, now in the care of her troubled sister Rose, 19. The girls live in squalor on Butter Lane, near Baltimore, where empty foundations

gape like missing teeth. They eat Popsicles for every meal and wear tank tops through the winter. With her parents' accused killer in jail awaiting trial, the only adult paying attention to Sylvie's situation is the county teen drug counselor, Mr. Boshoff, though straitlaced Sylvie has more in common with her heroine, Jane Eyre, than with any of his other clients.

Sensing trouble between the sisters, Boshoff brings Sylvie a Sharon Olds poem with the line "I learned to love the little things about him, because of all the big things I could not love" and suggests she try to apply it to Rose. But Sylvie can't think of anything, and her attention is distracted by a newspaper lying at the top of the wastebasket. "Witness Surfaces Who May Clear Suspect in Killing of Famous Maryland Couple."

Sylvie was waiting outside

in the car when her parents were shot; when she ventured into the darkened church to find them, a bullet whizzed by her ear and she passed out. It was she who pointed the finger at Albert Lynch, a former client of her parents'. But now that he has an alibi, the police bring her back in for questioning.

Sylvie is already keeping a

secret — it was Rose who phoned her parents and asked them to come meet Lynch that night, though her sister has never explained this satisfactorily. Now Sylvie wonders if it really was Lynch she saw. The police give her a weekend to decide whether she will retract her testimony.

Those 66 hours are filled with suspense as Sylvie pursues her own investigation, finally unraveling her family's many secrets. This involves both classic horror elements (a malevolent rag doll, a stolen diary, a hatchet, a scary basement) and contemporary ones (a prescription for Vicodin). Searles controls the plot with a sure hand and wraps up the situation on Butter Lane in a satisfying and believable way. The darkest secrets in this book are not paranormal at all, but chillingly ordinary.

