

Reviews

Fiction

★ **The Imperfectionists**

Tom Rachman. Dial, \$25 (288p) ISBN 978-0-385-34366-4

In his zinger of a debut, Rachman deftly applies his experience as foreign correspondent and editor to chart the goings-on at a scrappy English-language newspaper in Rome. Chapters read like exquisite short stories, turning out the intersecting lives of the men and women who produce the paper—and one woman who reads it religiously, if belatedly. In the opening chapter, aging, dissolute Paris correspondent Lloyd Burko pressures his estranged son to leak information from the French Foreign Ministry, and in the process unearths startling family fare that won't sell a single edition. Obit writer Arthur Gopal, whose "overarching goal at the paper is indolence," encounters personal tragedy and, with it, unexpected career ambition. Late in the book, as the paper buckles, recently laid-off copyeditor Dave Belling seduces the CFO who fired him. Throughout, the founding publisher's progeny stagger under a heritage they don't understand. As the ragtag staff faces down the implications of the paper's tilt into oblivion, there are more than enough sublime moments, unexpected turns and sheer inky wretchedness to warrant putting this on the shelf next to other great newspaper novels. (Apr.)

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