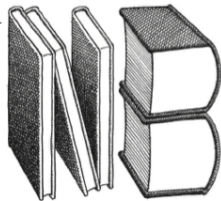


**The Times Literary
Supplement
« NB » by James
Campbell
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Pulp fiction

As every alert reader knows, the only literary prize worth having is our own All Must Have Prizes Prize. Eligibility is restricted to published authors who have never won or been shortlisted for a prize. The field is shrinking before our eyes. It becomes harder and harder not to be nominated for a book award. On a single day last week, we received notification of five prizes, one for historical fiction (shortlist of thirteen), another for a second book of poetry. The prize-phobic author has nowhere to turn. The Los Angeles Times Book Prizes consist of eleven categories, with five books in each: that's fifty-five authors taken out of contention for the All Must Have Prizes Prize at a stroke.

An award that always catches our fancy is the Prix de la Page 112, administered from Paris by "Grand Sachem" Claire Debru and friends. From a shortlist of eleven, the judges select the novel with the most alluring page 112. It is less whimsical than it sounds, as Ms Debru points out. Page 112, she tells us, serves as a reliable index for the integrity of the whole. "In the majority of cases, page 112 represents a decline in the attention paid to the writing of the novel", and perhaps the editing and production of it as well. With the mind focused on completing the book, "the author is by then apt to allow his or her style to slacken". The editor and even the proofreader are equally in danger of losing concentration by p112. There is no question of the jury reading only that page, however; they begin there and, if hooked, read the book in full. Among the shortlisted novels are *Des Ames simples* by Pierre Adrian, *Face au Styx* by Dimitri Bortnikov, *Les Souhais ridicules* by Pauline Klein, *Terreur* by Yann Moix, and *Sanglier* by Dominique Rameau.

Unsurprisingly, we haven't read any of them, but we have the effrontery to call in an alternative candidate: the enjoyable *Babylone* by Yasmina Reza, published by Flammarion last year. We turn to p112: the dreadful central event has already taken place, but is only now outlined for the reader. Jean-Lino and his wife Lydie return to their apartment, above that of the narrator where they have attended an agreeable soirée. Generally a timid soul, Jean-Lino is flush with triumph, having entertained the guests with his account of Lydie's food faddism. Back at home, Lydie turns on him. It gets darker – and, in a horrid way, funnier. And there it all is on p112.

The winner of the official Prix de la Page 112 will be known on March 29. The alternative victor has just been announced.