

Their lives are a vicious cycle

In Chris Cleave's latest novel, bikers are rivals at the Olympics — and in love

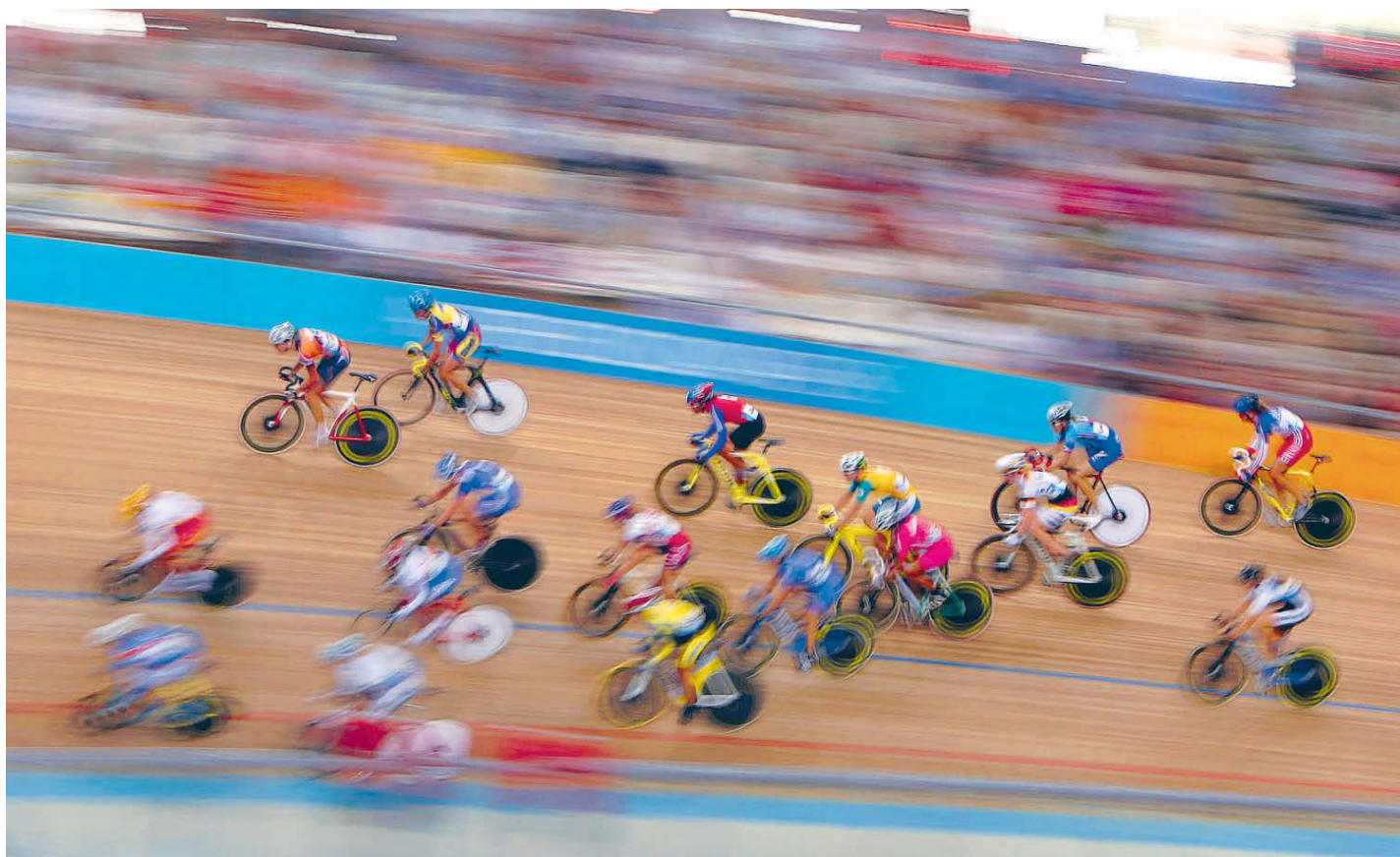
GOLD, by Chris Cleave. Simon & Schuster, 324 pp., \$27.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

'Gold," the third novel from the author of the extraordinary, hugely popular "Little Bee" and its powerful predecessor, "Incendiary," tells the story of a love triangle between world-class bicyclists as it evolves over 13 years, from when they meet in training as teenagers through their third and last Olympics.

Zoe Castle and Kate Meadows are classic frenemies — rivals not only for gold medals but for the affections of Jack Argall, a good-looking Scottish rider. After some dithering over his options, Jack ends up marrying sweet, simple Kate, while aloof, troubled Zoe goes on to lead a lonely life. When the novel opens, she has just moved to a penthouse apartment purchased with sponsorship money from Perrier. Right out the window, she can see one of the billboards: "her own face, 20 feet high, her big green eyes framed with green hair and green lipstick. Her hand, the nails painted green, was holding a bottle of Perrier dripping with condensate. *Best served cold*, said the text."

Zoe treats most people



GETTY IMAGES PHOTO, 2004

NOW ONLINE
Read more reviews,
author interviews
and literary news
newsday.com/books

badly, and one doesn't feel too sorry when a one-night stand posts rude comments and lewd pictures on Facebook.

Kate and Jack have troubles, too — their 8-year-old daughter, Sophie, has leukemia, is undergoing chemotherapy and becomes sicker and sicker during the run-up toward the

2012 games in London. Lost in and comforted by her rich "Star Wars"-based fantasy life (as usual, Cleave does a wonderful job with children and their superheroes), Sophie desperately tries to hide the evidence of her worsening illness to avoid further troubling her parents and disturbing their training.

Sophie has her Jedi knight; Kate and Zoe have their source of strength and wisdom in coach Tom Voss, an ex-athlete who has devoted his life to training the two girls. Young Kate spends a break between seasons reading novels: "She felt sorry for Anna Karenina and Clarissa

Dalloway and Holly Golightly that they couldn't simply phone their coach, and glad that she herself would never get so tangled up in life's knots." Not unexpectedly, as "Gold's" story of competition, sabotage and sacrifice unfolds, the older Kate will get as tangled up as all of them, and Voss can do little about it.

While "Gold" is every bit as good (and not dissimilar to) a juicy Jodi Picoult, it is not in the same class as Cleave's first two novels. For one thing, while the third-person narration is perfectly serviceable, part of the wallop packed by "Incendiary" and "Little Bee" has to do with the

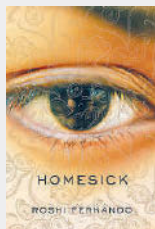
unforgettable voices of their first-person female narrators. No such feats of ventriloquism are brought off here. And though Olympic training and childhood leukemia are serious issues, this ends up being a more forgettable book than the earlier two, which covered tragic situations of global importance and wedged them deep into your brain.

Cleave has the extremely rare power of making you smile with lively language and clever observations while he is thoroughly, irreparably breaking your heart. That trick doesn't come off here. "Gold" takes the bronze.

WHAT'S NEW

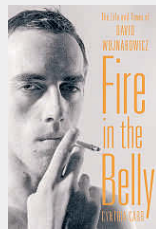
HOMESICK,
by Roshi Fernando
(Knopf, \$24.95)

A collection of linked stories, from a debut author, about Sri Lankan immigrants making their lives in London. For fans of Zadie Smith and Jhumpa Lahiri.



FIRE IN THE BELLY,
by Cynthia Carr
(Bloomsbury, \$35)

Provocative gay artist David Wojnarowicz died of AIDS in 1992. Carr's biography vividly depicts a downtown New York art scene that is no more.



TIGERS IN RED WEATHER,
by Liza Klausmann
(Little, Brown, \$25.99)

This first novel, by the great-great-granddaughter of Herman Melville, traces the impact of a murder on one Martha's Vineyard family in the late 1950s.

