



FILM

First-time director Denise Di Novi loves the 'messiness' of female experience.

Page D2

STARLIVING

FILM REVIEW

Quips and bullets fly in excessive 'Free Fire.'

Page D3

Houston Chronicle Life & Entertainment

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BOOKS



Courtesy photo

Dianne K. Salerni is the author of the "Eighth Day" series.

Former teacher writes intriguing fantasies for tweens

By Alyson Ward

In Dianne K. Salerni's popular "Eighth Day" books, there's an extra day wedged between Wednesday and Thursday — and most people don't know anything about it.

The series begins with 13-year-old Jax Aubrey, who discovers he has access to the eighth day. He then learns there are people trapped in that universe, existing only one day a week.

Salerni's books for middle-graders are full of action and mystery, with likable characters and some intriguing connections to the Arthurian legend. She'll be in Houston Sunday to talk to young readers as part of Inprint's Cool Brains! reading series, which gives kids the chance to meet their favorite authors.

Getting inside the heads of her young characters is second nature to Salerni, because she taught fourth- and fifth-graders for 25 years. Those years in the classroom, she said, "gave me a lot of perspective on how kids behave."

Salerni got the idea for the Eighth Day series from a family joke. When her daughters would ask their dad if they could go somewhere or do something, he'd put them off by saying, "We'll do it on Grunsday." Grunsday was just a made-up name for a day that didn't exist, but Salerni started thinking: What if Grunsday were real?

She launched her career **Young continues on D3**

Author appearance

Dianne K. Salerni will discuss the Eighth Day series and her other books.

When: 3 p.m. Sunday
Where: Meyerland Performing and Visual Arts Middle School, 10410 Manhattan

Information: Free; 713-521-2026, inprintheouston.org

TELEVISION



HBO

Julia Louis-Dreyfus is Selina Meyer in "Veep." Now in its sixth season, "Veep" has earned Louis-Dreyfus five Emmys.

Making TV great again

What would the commander in chief think of these fictional presidents?

By Ellen Gray
PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

BEFORE we elected "Celebrity Apprentice" star Donald J. Trump to the Oval Office, TV presidents had only Jed Bartlet (Martin Sheen) of "The West Wing" to measure themselves against.

It wasn't much of a contest — only David Palmer (Dennis Haysbert) of "24" came close — which may be why most TV presidents are no longer even trying to win the popular vote. It's enough just to get our attention.

As HBO's "Veep" has returned for a sixth, side-splittingly cynical view of life inside the Beltway, we hail Julia Louis-Dreyfus' (now former) President Selina Meyer and other current TV commanders-in-chief.

President Trump, who knows a thing or two about grabbing focus, probably doesn't have time to watch his fictional counterparts. But what if he did? Here's what might interest him.



CBS

Keith Carradine in "Madam Secretary"



ABC

Kiefer Sutherland in "Designated Survivor"

Selina Meyer

Actor: Julia Louis-Dreyfus
Show: "Veep"

Where to find her: 9:30 p.m. Sundays on HBO

Known for: Inflated ego, foul mouth, chronic ineptitude, and, now, after having

American people and Congress, for lasting only a short time in an office to which she was never elected.

What might interest (or annoy) Trump: In "Veep"-world, Meyer, not Trump, was the 45th president. (She

Television continues on D2



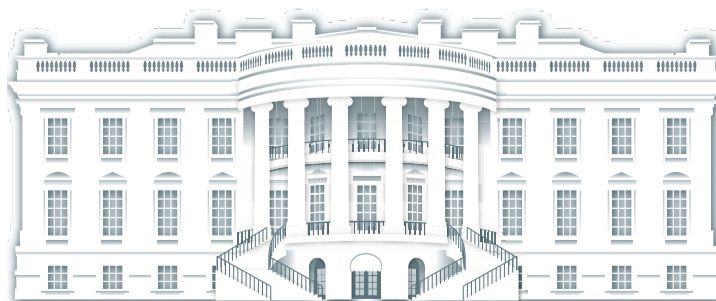
Showtime

Elizabeth Marvel in "Homeland"



Netflix

Kevin Spacey in "House of Cards"



Charles A. Apple and Ken Ellis illustration / Chronicle

Young readers become invested in Salerni's characters

Young from page 14

as an author in a backward sort of way, self-publishing her first novel in 2007. Two years later, an independent Hollywood producer contacted her about the movie rights, and about the same time, an editor at Sourcebooks offered to re-release the book. So Salerni sold the film rights, found a publisher, "and then I went looking for an agent."

Her first two books, "We Hear the Dead" and "The Caged Graves," were aimed squarely at teens, but Salerni has found that middle-grade novels are her sweet spot.

In YA stories, she said, "the characters all seem to be filled with such angst. They think everything is the most important decision they've ever made."

Middle-grade characters, meanwhile, "are just kids. They make mistakes all the time, and they know they make mistakes all the time. It's like, 'I messed that up. I guess I need to do it again.'"

Salerni left teaching a

few years ago to be a full-time writer, but she still likes to spend time with young people: She does Skype chats with school classes, and replies to every kid who sends her an email.

She often receives astute, complicated questions from young readers deeply involved in the series.

"They really get invested in the characters, and they don't want it to be over because it's like they're losing their

friends," she said.

"The Morrigan's Curse," published in 2016, is the third — and, at least for now, final — book in the Eighth Day series.

But Salerni is still writing; she just finished a ghost story and is now at work on what she calls "a supernatural mystery."

She'll read some of her work Sunday and answer questions, and she'll talk about the research she does for each book.

"That's not as boring

as it seems," she said. "Part of my research was to go to Mexico and climb the Pyramid of the Sun.

It's like slideshows of my vacation."

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