

Featuring 298 Industry-First Reviews of Fiction, Nonfiction, Children's and YA books

KIRKUS

VOL. LXXXIX, NO. 11 | 1 JUNE 2021

REVIEWS

SPECIAL!
SUMMER READS ISSUE

Featuring 48 Hot Books We Love

With Sunny Hostin, Maggie Shipstead,
Lucky Diaz, and Real Housewives dish

Plus book recommendations from 6 YA superstars



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK | Tom Beer

Summer Books: Ready, Set, Read



John Parakeas

ONE OF THE ADVANTAGES of being a book junkie is that our pastime knows no season—winter or summer, pandemic or no pandemic, we're going to be reading. Still, the 13 weeks between Memorial Day and Labor Day have a special association with our pursuit. We have long, idle vacation days to fill up and pools and beaches where we can plant ourselves with a book. And if the rest of the world joins in? So much the better.

But a serious book junkie doesn't approach the sport in a haphazard, whatever-book-falls-in-your-lap way. Reading lists must be drawn up. Here's mine:

Somebody's Daughter by Ashley C. Ford (Flatiron, June 1): "Sure to be one of the best memoirs of 2021" proclaims our starred review, so you can be sure this is at the top of my

summer reading list. The first book from the writer known to many of us as @iSmashFizz on Twitter recounts her difficult coming-of-age in Fort Wayne, Indiana, during which her father was incarcerated, serving a 24-year sentence. His letters to her became a refuge, but when he writes to let her know he is being released, she must confront a parent she doesn't really know.

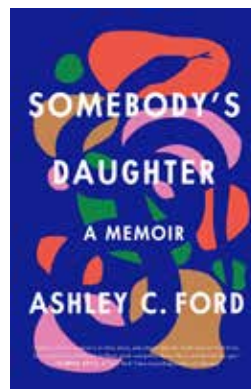
The Chosen and the Beautiful by Nghi Vo (Tor, June 1): I'm a sucker for all things Gatsby—F. Scott Fitzgerald's masterpiece, both imperfect movies, even the eight-hour stage version set in a drab office where an actor reads every word of the text aloud. So how could I resist Vo's retelling, which makes Jordan Baker the narrator and recasts her as queer and Asian. Plus, there's magic. "Unique, well-developed, and haunting," says our starred review.

Everyone Knows Your Mother Is a Witch by Rivka Galchen (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, June 8): I'm sold by the title alone, but it doesn't hurt that Galchen (*Atmospheric Disturbances*, *American Innovations*) is one of the most unpredictable and gifted writers of fiction today. Her latest—"dazzling in its humor, intelligence, and the richness of its created world," according to our starred review—is about a real-life 17th-century witch hunt involving the mother of astronomer Johannes Kepler.

Fox & I by Catherine Raven (Spiegel & Grau, July 6): This memoir by a biologist living off the grid in Montana recounts the friendship she developed—friendship is the only word for it—with a wild fox that appeared on her property every day at 4:15 p.m. Helen Macdonald's *H Is for Hawk* remains one of my favorite memoirs of recent years, and this book promises similar insight into the relationship between humans and animals.

Summer Fun by Jeanne Thornton (Soho Press, July 27): I love novels about fictional rock bands (Dawnie Walton's *The Final Revival of Opal & Nev* is an early 2021 favorite), so I'm eager to get my hands on this story about a young trans woman living in a trailer in the New Mexico desert who is obsessed with the Get Happies (think Beach Boys) and their legendary unreleased album from the 1960s. The novel is composed of letters that Gala writes to the band's Brian Wilson-like frontman.

Afterparties by Anthony Veasna So (Ecco, Aug. 3): Anticipation for this story collection is bittersweet, since the author died unexpectedly in December at the age of 28. So's ruminative story "Three Women of Chuck's Donuts"—about a Cambodian woman who runs the titular shop and her two daughters—appeared in the *New Yorker* in early 2020, offering a taste of the quiet epiphanies that await in this first and, tragically, last book from a young talent.



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The Kirkus Star is awarded to books of remarkable merit, as determined by the impartial editors of Kirkus.



A school project combines with a magical piece of furniture to loose Blackbeard on modern-day suburban Maryland in **Victor Piñeiro's** rip-roaring fantasy. Read the review on p.110.

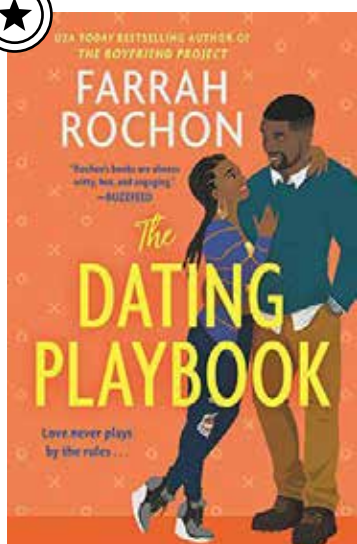
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FICTION



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

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THE DATING PLAYBOOK
Rochon, Farrab
 Forever (384 pp.)
 \$15.99 paper | Aug. 17, 2021
 978-1-5387-1667-0



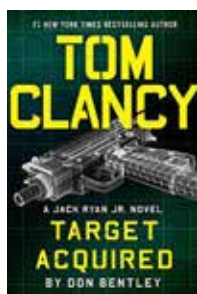
GHOSTS

Alderton, Dolly
 Knopf (320 pp.)
 \$26.95 | Aug. 3, 2021
 978-0-593-31985-7

A 32-year-old single woman in London copes with disappearances: Her married friends have been swallowed up by reproduction, her father is succumbing to dementia, and she's about to see what kinds of guys are on dating apps.

Nina Dean is just returning to the fray of dating after a period of conscious singlehood following a long-term relationship. She's never been on a dating app and has never heard of "ghosting." Her only remaining single friend, a colorful character named Lola who's quite desperate to settle down, has to explain: "Number of schools of thought," she said, with the command of an academic. "Most commonly, it is thought to have come from the idea that you are haunted by someone who vanishes, you don't get any closure." The dread the reader feels for Nina upon reading this is borne out in spades by the pessimistic plot of this nonetheless amusing novel. A popular columnist and podcaster in Britain, Alderton tackles many of the same themes in her fiction debut that she addressed in her essay collection, *Everything I Know About Love* (2018). At the end of the day, the author's strengths are more those of an essayist than a novelist. Nina is a bit of an odd character—a food writer who doesn't seem to care much about food or writing—and the plot is fairly predictable except for a ferocious sex scene that seems to have fallen into this book from some other novel. These failings are outweighed by Alderton's funny formulations and essayistic insights: "Being a heterosexual woman who loved men meant being a translator for their emotions, a palliative nurse for their pride and a hostage negotiator for their egos." "I'd noticed this was a thing that people did when they got into their thirties: they saw every personal decision you made as a direct judgement on their life."

Yes! Yes! Yes! (This is the sound of Alderton's millennial demographic, reading her book.)



TOM CLANCY TARGET ACQUIRED

Bentley, Don

Putnam (432 pp.)

\$18.39 | Jun. 8, 2021

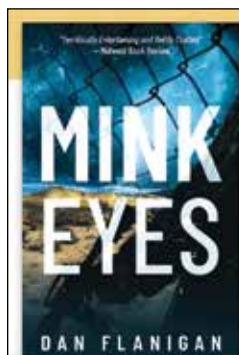
978-0-593-18813-2

Bentley keeps Jack Ryan Jr.'s life exciting in this latest grand-scale Tom Clancy adventure.

Ryan is in Tel Aviv on an "asset-validation exercise" for a private company referred to as The Campus, and he takes time to hang out at the beach. There, he sees a woman with a child who he can tell is autistic, and he saves her from a knife-wielding attacker. She's flummoxed; who'd want to hurt *her*? When mother and son leave, Ryan wants to return the boy's dropped Captain America toy. "What could go wrong with that?" he muses naïvely. Only three hell-raising threats in one day. Almost immediately he meets agents from Israeli security, Shin Bet. Who is he? What's

he doing there? But though he doesn't lie about his name, no one ever exclaims, "Wow, you have the same name as the U.S. president. Any connection?" Anyway, Chinese State Security is also interested in the woman, and Jack doesn't know why. And then mother and son are kidnapped. True to the Clancy style, what begins as the attempted return of a toy mushrooms into a threat of global conflict—"no good deed goes unpunished" is an apt cliché. Other enemies include Iran's Quds Force, an apocalyptic cult—and some smart jihadis, because "the dumb jihadis died a long time ago." Ryan is a fierce warrior when the need arises, and he refuses a direct order to return to the U.S.: "Sorry, sir...no can do. I've got two innocents still at risk—a mother and child." So even when the bad guys try to crucify him, "nobody did cornered junkyard dog better than Jack." Meanwhile, an airborne threat may destroy Tel Aviv. The story has some nice wordplay, with helicopters "clawing for altitude like homesick angels," and the F-35 being "part ballerina, part racehorse, and all killer." While on the ground "blood flowed and bones broke," and a female fighter jock has the final say.

Fast, furious Clancy fare, fun even though you already know who wins.



ASIN: 1733610308

MINK EYES BY DAN FLANIGAN

YOU DON'T SEND AN ANGEL TO DO A DIRTY JOB.

"...thrilling, edge-of-your-seat scenes fill many pages of this enjoyable novel."

—Kirkus Reviews for *Mink Eyes*

"A terrifically entertaining and deftly crafted mystery..."

—Midwest Book Review for *Mink Eyes*



ASIN: 1733610359

THE BIG TILT BY DAN FLANIGAN

NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED.

"...Flanigan manages to conjure deft, hard-boiled, but literary prose that's reminiscent of Raymond Chandler's best work. A gritty and eloquent crime novel."

—Kirkus Reviews for *The Big Tilt*

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Eight Pleasures for the Season



THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING special about summer reading. This year will feel a bit different than last; after spending the past 15 months close to home, the world is opening up, and reading might be the last thing on your mind. Still, getting absorbed in a book is one of the pleasures of the season, and there are plenty of great choices to throw in your bag wherever you're heading.

The Other Black Girl by Zakiya Dalila Harris (Atria, June 1): This sharp satire goes behind the scenes at Wagner Books, where for the past two years Nella Rogers has been the only Black person in the room. Now, another Black woman has been hired, and Nella gets an anonymous note: "Leave Wagner now." Our starred review calls it "dark, playful, and brimming with life."

Golden Girl by Elin Hilderbrand (Little, Brown, June 1): When I interviewed Hilderbrand last year, she told me about her work in progress, and it sounded bonkers in the best possible way: The main character is a Nantucket novelist who's been killed by a hit-and-run driver. A sympathetic guide to the afterlife lets her spend one last summer watching her loved ones and giving them a few "nudges." As our starred review says, "If novelists are auditioning to play God, Hilderbrand gets the part."

The Great Mistake by Jonathan Lee (Knopf, June 15): If you've never heard of Andrew Haswell Green, the driving force behind the construction of Central Park and other New York landmarks, you wouldn't be the only one. Lee's wonderful novel will make you want to find out more—and not just because it begins with Green's murder. Our starred review calls it "a highly satisfying mix of mystery and character portrait."

Suburban Dicks by Fabian Nicieza (Putnam, June 22): Former FBI agent who's now a stay-at-home mom? Check. Newspaper reporter whose biggest stories

are behind him? Check. This debut novel has all the elements of a standard suburban mystery, but it also features a flawless satirical voice and "a diverse cast of voices," as our starred review says. "Delightfully irreverent and so very entertaining."

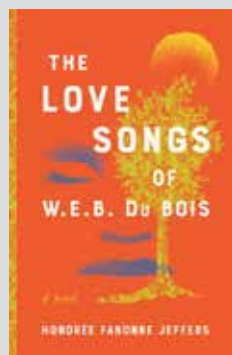
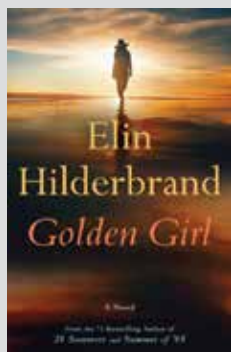
Lorna Mott Comes Home by Diane Johnson (Knopf, June 29): After 20 years in France, our heroine has had enough of her husband's peccadilloes and returns home to San Francisco to spend time with her adult children. Our starred review says, "Everything one looks forward to in Johnson's books is delivered in abundance here: nimble plotting, witty narration, edifying juxtaposition of French and American cultures."

Build Your House Around My Body by Violet Kuper-Smith (Random House, July 6): Winnie is the child of a White American father and a Vietnamese mother who moves from the U.S. to Saigon to teach English—then she disappears. As our starred review says, "Drawing from genres as diverse as horror, humor, and historical fiction, Kupersmith creates a rich and dazzling spectacle."

The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois by Honorée Fanonne Jeffers (Harper, July 27): Here's the long, immersive novel you need, the story of Ailey Pearl Garfield, a historian who delves deep into the history of her own Black ancestors in Georgia. Our starred review says, "If this isn't the Great American Novel, it's a mighty attempt at achieving one."

Damnation Spring by Ash Davidson (Scribner, Aug. 3): This atmospheric novel will transport you to the redwood forests of Northern California, where Rich Gundersen is trying to balance his work in the logging industry with his wife Colleen's growing concern that chemicals used by Rich's company are contributing to her miscarriages. Our starred review says, "As thoughtfully as Davidson establishes these dilemmas, she's equally skilled at writing an outdoorsy adventure novel."

Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.





DAMNATION SPRING

Davidson, Ash

Scribner (464 pp.)

\$24.21 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-1-982144-40-1



Big business, protesters, and working-class loggers clash in this environmentally savvy debut.

Davidson's novel takes place in Northern California forest territory between 1977 and 1978, as Rich Gunderesen, a fourth-generation logger, is poised to make a big profit: He's just purchased a stretch of land full of old-growth redwoods whose sale could provide security for his family, which is smaller than he'd like; he and his wife, Colleen, have one son, Graham (nicknamed Chub), but as the story opens she's just had another in a string of miscarriages. Other crises soon emerge. Anti-logging protesters are trying to halt work and are suspected of having left a child's skull in the forest to prompt an investigation. Colleen, a midwife, witnesses an increase in stillbirths, many with serious deformations. Daniel, a researcher and Colleen's ex-boyfriend, suspects chemicals sprayed by the timber company are responsible, but any delay to investigate threatens Rich's plans to cut down and sell the redwoods. Davidson researched this milieu deeply but with an eye toward making every discovery feel natural and unforced. By shifting perspectives among Rich, Colleen, and Chub, she reveals not just the conflicts among loggers, protesters, and companies, but the growing stress within the family. The family of Colleen's sister, Enid, whose husband is working an illicit tree-poaching scam, adds another layer of tension. (And Colleen can't help but resent that Enid's brood is ever growing: "Enid uncrosses her legs for two minutes and a baby pops out.") As thoughtfully as Davidson establishes these dilemmas, she's equally skilled at writing an outdoorsy adventure novel in which logging threatens the lives of workers with snapped cables and everybody else via landslides. Thematically, it's a strong work of climate fiction, but it's rooted in age-old man-versus-nature storytelling.

An impressively well-turned story about how environmental damage creeps into our bodies, psyches, and economies.



THE PRESIDENT AND THE FROG

De Robertis, Carolina

Knopf (224 pp.)

\$25.00 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-593-31841-6

A former Latin American president reminisces on his remarkable life.

In Kirkus Prize finalist De Robertis' new novel, the unnamed former president of a Latin American country is interviewed by a journalist. Inspired by the life of José Mujica, the former president of Uruguay, the novel's 82-year-old

protagonist—affectionately dubbed the "Poorest President in the World"—lives in a humble home with his wife and dogs and tends his infamous garden. As he sits down with the Norwegian interviewer, the former president finds himself drawn to her and wonders if he should share the deepest secret of his life, which he dubs "the story of the frog." The narrative oscillates between the present-day interview (set shortly after the 2016 U.S. election) and memories of his past. A former guerrilla and revolutionary, he spent years of his life as a political prisoner in solitary confinement. Kept in a deep underground hole, the former president endured unspeakable torture and struggled to mentally persevere through the isolation. Unwilling to let the dictatorship win, he fought the urge to retreat from reality: "Every time temptation slunk toward him, he found himself rattled by *and yet*." Just when he feels on the edge, a raucous frog appears in his cell begging to hear his memories ("*I want stories. Want to eat your stories*"). Reluctantly, the protagonist tells the frog about his past, including losing his father, learning to garden, falling in love, and organizing a revolution. In stunning, clear-eyed prose, De Robertis writes beautifully about

MANTIS
MULHENNEY & POOLE

STEVE ZELL

ISBN-13: 978-0-9847-4689-7
ISBN-10: 0984746897
LCCN: 2021902810

"A fast-paced thriller with superb new and returning characters."
—Kirkus Reviews

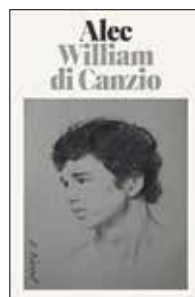
"Fans of character-driven thrillers with passionate action will revel in *Mantis*."
—BookLife Reviews

"...a thrill ride that combines the past and present in a way you will never forget."
—Feathered Quill Book Reviews

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storytelling, justice, and hope amid brutality. In one particularly moving section, the protagonist tells the frog about the youth-led revolution born from a dream of justice. They wonder what their beloved country, on the verge of a dictatorship, could be if it was remade in a new image: “*What if, what if, what if* was the refrain of their great song.” In this slim novel, De Robertis sketches a portrait of a man who never stopped fighting for the betterment of himself, his country, and the world.

A timeless and timely exploration of power, revolution, and survival.



ALEC

di Canzio, William

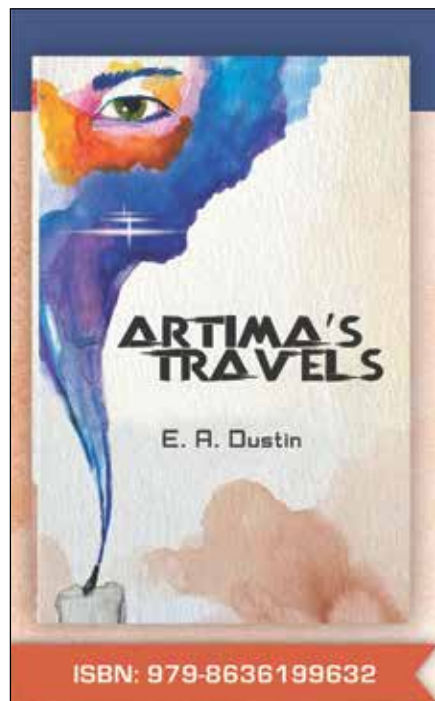
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (336 pp.)

\$27.00 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-374-10260-9

A sequel to E.M. Forster's posthumous novel, *Maurice*.

Set circa 1912, written in 1912-13, and published posthumously in 1971, *Maurice* tells the story of a young man of the English upper-class who struggles to understand, then accept, then find love in a society in which homosexuality is a crime. Working with the same characters, di Canzio's debut revises certain blind spots in Forster's original—especially as they relate to Alec, Maurice's lover. In *Maurice*, Alec is less of an independently realized character than an apotheosis, the final embodiment of Maurice's long search for requited love. Enter di Canzio. He inverts the classist structure of *Maurice* by giving Alec a prolonged backstory and then retelling



“A software engineer perfects a system that delivers fragrances vividly over computers, but is her programming responsible for a deadly military mishap?”

“An engaging....near-future techno-thriller with a strong hero battling sexism.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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"A compassionate snapshot of one Syrian refugee's struggle to plot a course for home."

WHAT STRANGE PARADISE

the story of Alec and Maurice's courtship from Alec's perspective, going so far as to reproduce verbatim much of Forster's dialogue. But di Canzio doesn't stop there. He further amends the Maurice-Alec tale by extending the timeline, something that Forster, who tried to turn the two men into happy woodcutters, abandoned when it became clear that no young men, regardless of their sexual preferences, could be happy together in the English countryside during World War I. Picking up where Forster left off, di Canzio takes us to the Somme (with Alec) and Gallipoli (with Maurice), yanking the characters forward into the turbulence that Forster spared them. Will the lovers survive? Will they remain capable of love after witnessing such senseless violence? Will the green future Forster wanted for them still exist after the war? Though groundbreaking in its time for its positive portrayal of same-sex love, *Maurice* is inhibited by its highly visible agenda: The author's intention for the book (that Maurice, a gay man, finds true love) is telegraphed from the first pages to the last, and every detail is in cold service to this goal. Unfortunately, though his prose is enjoyable and his book's relationship to Forster's original will bring real delight to readers who read the two back to back, di Canzio's novel suffers from a similar failing. As Alec confidently diagnoses the inequities of his day, he begins to feel outside his own time period, the emanation of an author more interested in serving neat denunciations of Alec's historical moment than in investigating whatever interior muddle that moment might stir up in Alec's character. This may not bother some readers. But for those looking to feel embedded in the period, di Canzio will disappoint.

Fast, fluent, and enjoyable—but unconcerned with evoking the lived experiences of the characters.



WHAT STRANGE PARADISE

El Akkad, Omar

Knopf (256 pp.)

\$25.95 | Jul. 20, 2021

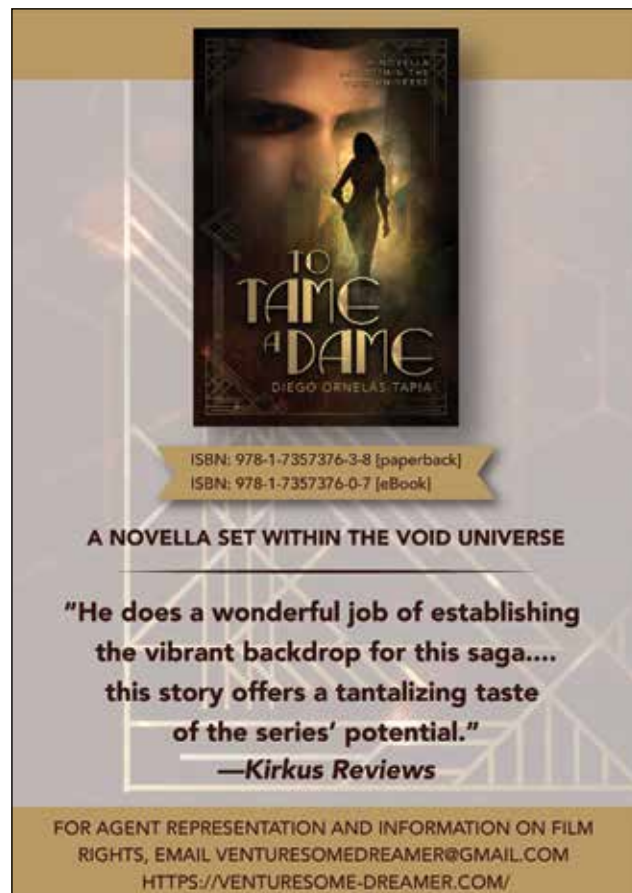
978-0-525-65790-3

A migrant boy finds an unexpected ally in his accidental voyage across the sea.

In recent years, images of discarded life jackets piling up on the shores of Greek islands have shocked the world, as migrants from the Middle East pursue uncertain futures in Europe or elsewhere in the fabled "West." In this timely, captivating novel, El Akkad dramatizes the story of one such traveler: Amir Utu, a 9-year-old boy who unwittingly undertakes the turbulent journey. After accidentally boarding a repurposed fishing boat heading north from Alexandria, Amir must contend with punishing seas, unpredictable weather, exhausting hunger, and an eventual storm that leads to the overcrowded ship's capsizing. In chapters that alternate between Amir's harrowing, multiday voyage and his fortunate encounter with Vanna, a teenage islander, upon washing ashore, El Akkad pieces together the strands of Amir's story, past and present, as they lead up to and diverge from that fateful moment at sea. El Akkad's compelling,

poetic prose captures the precarity and desperation of people pushed to the brink, and the wide-ranging dialogue levels frequently trenchant critiques (Americans are "comfortable with violence, not sex. Sometimes they just get the two confused") even as it produces a few admittedly didactic monologues (a smuggler lectures the migrants: "You are the temporary object of their fraudulent outrage"). This is an equally incisive, if more conventional, novel than the author's debut, *American War* (2017).

A compassionate snapshot of one Syrian refugee's struggle to plot a course for home.



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“Ophelia finally gets some agency in this contemporary reboot of *Hamlet*.”

THE KING OF INFINITE SPACE



THE KING OF INFINITE SPACE

Faye, Lyndsay

Putnam (384 pp.)

\$27.00 | Aug. 10, 2021

978-0-525-53589-8

Ophelia finally gets some agency in this contemporary reboot of *Hamlet*—with a few characters from other Shakespearean works thrown in for good measure.

When she was engaged to Benjamin Dane (the novel's *Hamlet* character), Lia was an alcoholic performance artist. Now, after their very bad, very final breakup, she creates flower arrangements for the Three Sisters Floral Boutique, managed by a trio of strange ladies who might well have wandered in from *Macbeth* and who seem to put those bouquets to magical use. Lia also finds herself appearing in Ben's dreams as he anguishes over the recent death of his father, owner of the New World's Stage Theatre, and the swift remarriage of his mother, Trudy, to brother-in-law Claude. To help him

prove Dad wasn't a suicide, Ben summons his grad school buddy Horatio, who's still getting over the one-night stand with Ben that sent him scurrying back to London. The upending of gender stereotypes continues: Claude seems too much of a nonentity to be a murderer while it's increasingly apparent that smooth-as-silk Trudy will stop at nothing to get what she wants. Benjamin's philosophical ramblings, unfortunately, make it obvious that contemporary prose rarely has the savor of Shakespeare's verse, but Bardolators will enjoy the clever changes Faye rings on his storylines and characters. (Robin Goodfellow is far more sinister than he was in *Midsummer Night's Dream*.) Readers attracted to the book by Faye's stellar track record with historical mysteries will find she's got the same knack for wicked surprises that she demonstrated in her terrific trilogy about 19th-century NYC "copper star" Timothy Wilde (*The Fatal Flame*, 2015, etc.). She dishes out two fabulous plot twists: one very much in keeping with the original *Hamlet*, one that reveals Machiavellian hidden depths in a bloviating minor character. The ending is just as bloody as Shakespeare's and nearly as poignant.

Smart and suspenseful; top-notch popular fiction.

CAPTAIN OF THE TIDES GUNNER MORGAN



Charles D. Morgan
With Jacque Hillman

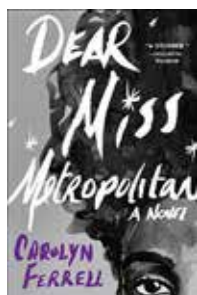
ISBN: 978-1-7333626-8-9

Set Sail with a Navy Hero

“An impeccably researched
and engaging tale of an
authentic war hero.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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DEAR MISS METROPOLITAN

Ferrell, Carolyn

Henry Holt (432 pp.)

\$27.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-250-79361-4

The author of the story collection *Don't Erase Me* (1997) explores the lives of girls who have been kidnapped and tortured in her debut novel.

Fern's mother works nights at the hospital, where she steals pills. Gwin loves the musician Prince, which is a source of conflict between her and her deeply religious mother. Fern barely remembers her father. Gwin never knew hers, but she did have Mr. P. until he decided to leave her mother. Fern and Gwin find each other when they are both being held captive by a man who keeps them in chains, beats them, and rapes them for years. Later, a third girl will join them. Before she was abducted, Jesenia had an abusive boyfriend; after she was abducted, she had her captor's baby. The first part of this novel shifts between the girls' early lives and their experiences as prisoners in Queens, New York. There are also glimpses of what happens when they are free again. Ferrell's blend of stream-of-consciousness with dark fairy-tale elements is inventive but only fitfully effective, and sections narrated by other voices—including the journalist whose advice column, for reasons that are not at all clear, gives this book its title—are more confusing than illuminating. The second half of this novel is less repetitive than the first, but it also makes less sense. There is, for example, a very long chapter that seems to be Jesenia's daughter's answers to questions she's being asked before she can be released from the hospital after a suicide attempt. There are footnotes. It's not difficult to envision this chapter as a powerful short story, but it's a challenge to read after having endured the first half. Ferrell is asking a lot of her audience. What she gives is sometimes too much, sometimes too little.

A punishing read in terms of both content and style.



ROBERT LUDLUM'S THE BOURNE TREACHERY

Freeman, Brian

Putnam (384 pp.)

\$28.00 | Jul. 27, 2021

978-0-525-54265-0

Nothing is ever as it seems when deadly enemies clash in the latest entry in the long-running Ludlum series continued by Freeman.

As his many fans already know, Jason Bourne has neither memory nor past because of a gunshot that nearly killed him. His secretive employer, Treadstone, has him protecting Grigori Kotov, a Russian ex-double agent and former KGB killer who is plotting to overthrow Putin. Throughout Bourne's adventures, he leaves a trail of beautiful women

behind, casualties of his complicated, messy world. The latest is the heavily tattooed and unbelievably sexy spy Nova, thought to have been killed in an Estonian harbor explosion three years ago. Bourne's frightful and worthy foe is Lennon, whom the CIA wants him to kill and who thinks his frequent Beatles references are amusing. There's also the Gaia Crusade, a group of hyperenvironmentalists who believe that world leaders are raping Mother Earth and who will kill to protect her. "Praise Gaia," their members say. The past, or lack thereof, is the recurring theme threading through the whole series and plaguing the hero. The past either didn't exist or was never over, but the apparently contradictory thoughts come to the same thing. Anyway, Bourne had better deal with the present, which is filled with bloody violence and the prospect of great sex. All those tattoos, oh my. But as the title says, there's treachery. And Lennon has surprises for Bourne and for the reader. This is a tightly plotted, complex yarn with the fast pace that will keep readers flipping the pages. Never mind that it's formulaic; readers won't care. Of course Bourne will never recall his past. Of course he'll face mortal combat with an evil equal. And of course a

"This debut collection of 10 short stories boasts elements of magic, SF, and compassion."

"...filled with rich details.... delightful.... an impressive range of characters..."

"Quietly absorbing tales with indelible characters."
—Kirkus Reviews

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ISBN: 978-1-943471-40-9

beautiful, strong, intelligent woman will enter his life, but she won't change it. The man's a good guy, but he's also a killer.

This may wind up on the big screen, but don't wait for the movie. It's a fun read.



FAR GONE

Girard, Danielle

Thomas & Mercer (345 pp.)

\$15.95 paper | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-5420-1825-8

Girard ties up some of the threads left hanging in the first book of her Badlands series, *White Out* (2020).

Fourteen-year-old Hannah Visser arrives for her babysitting job high on pills. Hiding in a closet, she watches in horror as the parents of Tiffany Garza, her infant charge, are shot dead. Afraid to go to the police, she escapes with Tiffany

by stealing the family car and driving to the hospital where her father, Dr. Charles Visser, is working in the ER. Seeing nurse Lily Baker in the parking lot, she leaves the baby on the ground and drives off. Lily's still dealing with the consequences of her abduction and torture by serial kidnapper Derek Hudson. A car accident after her escape shattered her memory, but she's made a friend in Kylie Milliard, the only police detective in Hagen, North Dakota. As Kylie works the murder case, she learns that a DNA sample found on Tiffany's crib has a familial match to Lily's. In fact, she is identified as the daughter Lily doesn't remember bearing. Slowly Lily's memory starts to reveal bits and pieces of the traumatic past that had been hidden from her. Meanwhile, as Hannah desperately seeks a place of safety, only determination and the high from her remaining pills keep her ahead of the killer tracking her.

A thriller seasoned with plenty of action, angst, and multiple viewpoints.



I WAS NEVER THE FIRST LADY

Guerra, Wendy

HarperVia/HarperCollins (240 pp.)

\$26.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-06-299074-7

What begins as one fictional Cuban woman's examination of her personal life expands into a broader, deeper consideration of what it means to be Cuban, both for those who left since Castro took power and for those who stayed.

Not coincidentally, Nadia, the protagonist, shares the author's last name, and, as in Guerra's earlier coming-of-age novel, *Everybody Leaves* (2012), the similarities between author and character feel purposeful: They're both diarists with careers in the arts, both have parents who were also artists in post-revolutionary Cuba. As the novel opens, Nadia is searching both psychologically and physically for her mother, who deserted Cuba in 1980, leaving behind her husband and 10-year-old daughter for reasons Nadia has never fully known. Thanks to a grant for artists, Nadia travels to Europe, where she receives contradictory information from her mother's former friends and lovers. Readers begin to see Nadia's unnamed mother as a stand-in for Cuba: deeply flawed yet adored at her peak, now in failing health and living in Russia. Nadia decides to care for her mother and has her brought back to Havana, where she arrives with pages of writing related to a novel that was never published because it was deemed politically dangerous back in 1980—not unlike Guerra's mother Albis Torres' own poetry. Nadia's endlessly solipsistic observations have been dominating the narration, but now the tone shifts to her mother's clear-eyed mini history lesson about the revolution via fragmented notes about her privileged girlhood in late 1950s Cuba, her adoring platonic relationship with Che, and her mentorship by historical figure Celia Sánchez, lovingly presented here as an altruistic saint, the most important woman in the revolution, and Fidel's closest confidante. A third tonal shift occurs as Nadia reports on a visit

**Reality TV Sucks.
It's About to
Get Worse.**

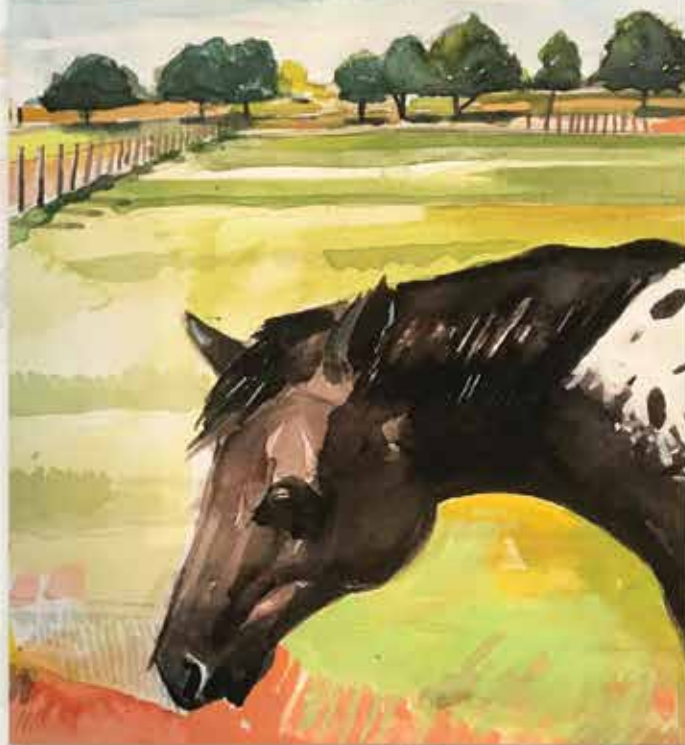
*"Schild's prose is
light and smooth,
animating comic
book-loving Mick's
bitter voice..."*

**"An enjoyable, cranky
novel about an unwilling
unscripted television actor."**
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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APPALOOSA SKY

K. BLANTON BRENNER



ISBN-13: 978-1734336818
ISBN-10: 1734336811

**APPALOOSA SKY
LIES IN A GENRE
SOMEWHERE BETWEEN
NANCY DREW AND SEX
AND THE CITY.**

"An enjoyable, well-written,
action-filled novel that
follows a not-so-typical
Texan family through
decades of life experiences."

—Sublime Book Review

"Because of the vivid characterization and heart-pounding
action, I am rating Appaloosa Sky by K. Blanton Brenner
4 out of 4 stars. I loved this book, and I can't
recommend it highly enough."

—Online Book Club Review

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WORDS WITH...

MAGGIE SHIPSTEAD

The author traveled the world researching *Great Circle*, her novel about an aviatrix. But don't ask her to fly an airplane

BY LAURIE MUCHNICK



Courtesy of the author

IF YOU'VE READ Maggie Shipstead's first two, tightly focused novels—*Seating Arrangements*, a comedy of manners about a wedding on an island in Maine, and *Astonish Me*, set in the world of professional ballet—you'd be prepared to love her next book. But you wouldn't have expected a sprawling 593-page barn burner that somehow includes a 1914 trans-Atlantic cruise, Prohibition-era Montana, a great house in the English countryside during World War II, Alaska, Hawaii, the South Pole, and present-day Hollywood. *Great Circle* (Knopf, May 4) tells the stories of Marian Graves, an early aviatrix who was lost during an around-the-world flight in 1950, and Hadley Baxter, the former teen idol who's set to play her on film. Sprawling yet beautifully constructed, it's completely engrossing and, as our starred review said, "so damn entertaining." I spoke to Shipstead by Zoom from her home in Los Angeles; our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

When you started *Great Circle*, did you know it was going to be this complicated? Or did it just spiral out of control?

No, it spiraled out of control, 100%. I wrote the first draft of *Seating Arrangements* in eight months, *Astonish Me* went from being a short story to selling in five months, so I thought I'm someone who writes books really fast. Like, it takes me less than a year to write a book. And so in some way, this was a rude awakening. And I don't plan or outline. I just knew I wanted to write a book about a female pilot who disappears while trying to fly around the world north to south. And I usually need another element, so the story of Hadley, the movie star, became that. So I had those two pieces, and then I just started at the beginning, and it was kind of like building a house without a blueprint. Two years in I could tell I was less than halfway through a draft, and I had 400 pages, and that was really overwhelming. And I had to just accept that the only way out was through.

Where did the idea of the female pilot come from?

That I can actually pinpoint. In 2012, I'd been traveling in New Zealand, and at the airport in Auckland is a statue of this pilot Jean Batten. In the '30s, she was the first person to fly solo from London to Auckland. I was in edits on *Astonish Me* at that point, and a different project had just kind of died on me so I was casting around for an idea. I saw the statue, and I thought, *Oh, I should write a book about an aviatrix*. I didn't start working on it for another two years, but I had it in the back of my mind.

You did research in libraries and archives and traveled to the far ends of the Earth for this book. Are there any other really unusual types of research you did?

One really serendipitous thing that happened was I was in Missoula, and I was hanging out at this little aviation museum at the airport. And these two guys came in, they were wheeling out a historic aircraft, and they kind of casually said to someone at the desk, *Tell that*

lady, if she wants to come, she can come. And I was like, *Me?* And they're like, *Come on.* So I went out. And they were taking out a 1927 Travel Air 6000, which is the plane I ended up having Marian learn to fly. And we flew a few laps around the Missoula Valley, and I got the perfect vantage point in the perfect plane. And it just came out of nowhere.

Do you fly yourself, or did you try it for the book?

I didn't. The one time I've been sort of at the controls of a plane was in a glider, so no engine, and the pilot was behind me, and I found it very spooky. I also have really poor spatial relations. For a pilot, I don't think that's a great fit.

There are so many descriptions of icy places while Marian is flying in Alaska and over the poles, and they were so vivid even at times when she could hardly see anything. Was that challenging?

Well, I remember my editor making some notes in the margins that were just "Enough!" So I guess I generated a surplus of that. It's a very specific sort of knowledge, and the more you get to know about these places where the landscapes are very stark, the more you see. One thing I really wanted to see was the ice sheet where Marian briefly gets stuck. I didn't go into the Antarctic interior, but I did a story for *Outside* on the pilots who do the U.S. airlifts in Antarctica. In the summers they go and train in Greenland, so I flew on a cargo plane from New York to Greenland with them. I got to talk to pilots who fly in these conditions, and they all talk about that white-on-white and how disorienting it is. We landed on the ice sheet in Greenland's interior, which looks like Antarctica, because it's a flat disc of white to the entire horizon. And I'm not sure I could have imagined that accurately even though it's a very simple idea. But just the dome of the sky and that perfect horizon you don't really see anywhere else except maybe on the ocean.

Then there's this whole other strand of the novel about Hadley in Hollywood. Did you know from the beginning that you needed to have these two different threads?

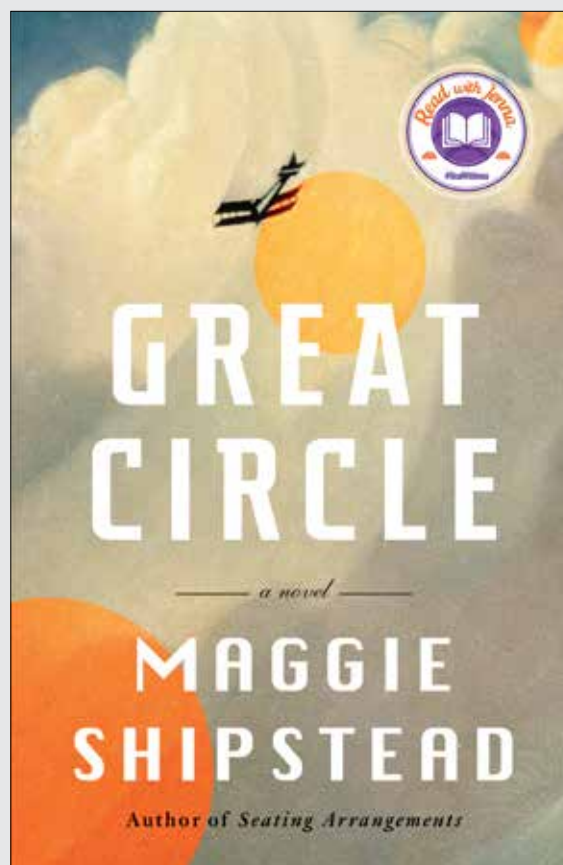
It came within about a month of when I started writing, so pretty early. I'd written an unrelated short story that had a similar voice to Hadley's, that intense first-person voice riffing on Hollywood tropes. I wanted her there for a couple of reasons. One was, I just liked the voice, and I like talking about LA. It was a way to bring in some humor and a different sort of sharpness. Without it, the book would be sort of this uniform loaf of historical fiction and would be much more

earnest, and this cuts through that a bit. And it was also a way of getting at this idea that we all experience our own lives and that what we can know about any other life is incredibly limited. And so this idea that Hadley's trying to portray Marian, and she's trying to figure out who Marian was—and the reader knows, because the reader's been in Marian's life. And so you can see this disconnect and the way things get distorted over time and what people project on other lives. So I wanted that other lens and another tone, and I also just thought it would be fun.

Is there anything you'd like readers to take away from the book?

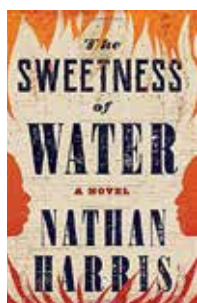
I think, separate from the book, it's worth thinking about what you want—I'm obsessed with seeing things in the world, seeing landscapes or seeing different wildlife, things like that. And so I think it's worth thinking about what you want to see in your life and what you want to witness. And obviously, that drives Marian, and it's different for everybody. Some people just want to see things at home, and that's fine. But I think it's a worthwhile question.

Great Circle received a starred review in the Jan. 15, 2021, issue.



to Miami, where exiles consider their reassembled version of Cuba more authentic than the Cuba where Nadia chooses to remain despite dramatic changes over the next decade.

Guerra's novel is a grand if bittersweet valentine to Cuba, and maybe her mother.



THE SWEETNESS OF WATER

Harris, Nathan

Little, Brown (368 pp.)

\$28.00 | Jun. 15, 2021

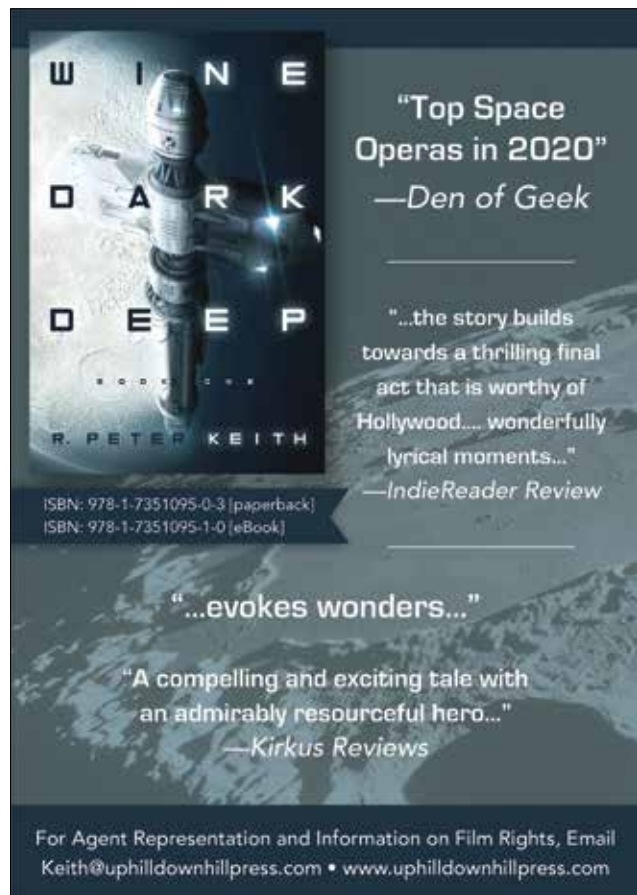
978-0-316-46127-6

Though the Civil War is over when this novel opens, the threat of violence and the persistence of bigotry still loom over a Georgia town.

Somewhere between the Confederacy's surrender at Appomattox and the beginning of Reconstruction, George Walker and his wife,

Isabelle, live alone and emotionally estranged from each other on their family homestead just outside the village of Old Ox. They are mired in grief over the presumed death of their only son, Caleb, a missing Confederate soldier. At this low point in the Walkers' lives, Prentiss and Landry, Black brothers freed from slavery, wander onto the couple's barren land seeking little more than temporary shelter on their northbound trek in search of their mother, who was sold away from them in childhood. George reaches out to the two Black men for help in restoring his farmland with a peanut crop. In return, he offers to pay them whatever he can to help subsidize their journey. Warily, the brothers agree to George's request, and eventually the three of them succeed in coaxing plants from the reluctant ground. Then one windy morning, Caleb returns home bearing an ugly facial scar and stories of his incarceration in a Union prison camp. What he doesn't tell them is that he was beaten with a rifle butt by his captors because he'd deserted his own side and in the process, also deserted his wealthy boyhood friend and secret lover August Webber, now also a war veteran returned to Old Ox and soon to wed a local girl by a prearranged agreement. Despite his fury over Caleb's betrayal and his impending marriage, August rekindles their romance, which sets off a series of tragic events involving murder, injustice, and, eventually, wholesale destruction. Throughout the tumult, all three members of the Walker family discover reserves of unexpected courage and resolve—and one can't help believing that if most of the other characters carried within them the empathy and grace displayed by the author of this compelling postbellum saga, most of the awful things that happen to them and their immediate surroundings would have been avoided.

An impressive debut by a storyteller with bountiful insight and assurance.



BLOOD KIN

Hilton, Matt

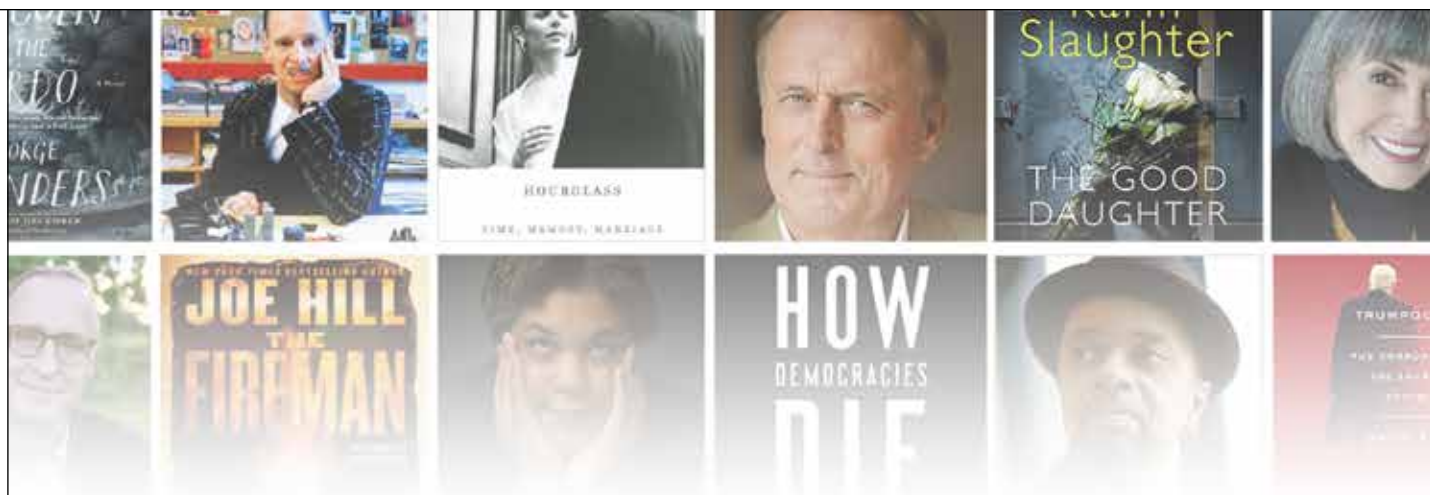
Severn House (240 pp.)

\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-7278-9096-2

Relocated Cajun Nicolas "Po" Vilere and his more respectable partner, Tess Grey, are tossed into a mission to rescue Po's ex-lover and her son from a brutally misogynistic commune in Portland, Maine.

Time was when Po and Elspeth Fuchs were closer than close. But in the 10 years since Elspeth broke it off with him, Po hasn't seen her—until their unexpected reunion is witnessed by Tess, who's not pleased by what looks like billing and cooing to her. Realizing that his former lover is in some kind of trouble, Po manages to slip her a business card identifying Tess as a licensed private eye. Unfortunately, a meeting in which Elspeth says her abusive husband, Caleb Moorcock, has been following her ends abruptly when Tess' pointed question about which of her beaux might have fathered Elspeth's 10-year-old son, Jacob, leads Elspeth to take the boy, stalk out, and head on down the road,



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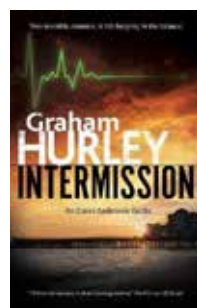
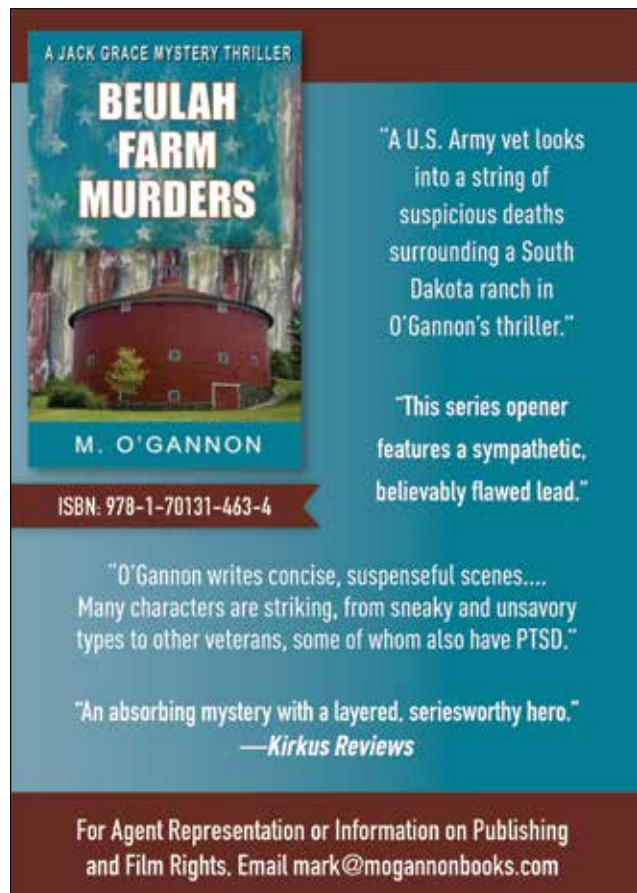
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**KIRKUS
REVIEWS**

from which the two are promptly grabbed by Caleb and his pal Jeremy Decker and spirited out of Portland to the cultish commune presided over by Caleb's father, Eldon Moorcock. Po's initial reconnaissance of the place turns into a rescue attempt that not only fails to free Elspeth, but plunges her into even hotter water with the Moorcocks. So Po, Tess, and their buddy Pinky Leclerc mount a more determined effort to free Elspeth. There are complications this time, too, but nothing that will upset or surprise fans of the franchise.

Not up to much, this.



INTERMISSION

Hurley, Graham

Severn House (256 pp.)

\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-7278-5002-7

An actress struggles to save an old flame who may not be worth saving.

Enora Andressen had been looking forward to a juicy role in *Dimanche*, a police thriller scheduled to begin shooting in France. When Covid-19 puts the project on indefinite pause, she's willing to flout Boris Johnson's national lockdown rules in response to Hayden Prentice's invitation to Portsmouth to keep vigil over his old friend Dave Munroe as Munroe battles the virus in the ICU of the local hospital. Enora and Prentice share a past as well as a son, Malo, now in his 20s, born of a single encounter aboard a friend's yacht. Munroe was Prentice's tame copper back in the days when he ran with the 6.57 Crew, an outfit that earned him plenty, none of it legal. But when the virus strikes Prentice himself, what's left of his fortune isn't nearly enough to keep him in his apartment with round-the-clock nursing, in-home ventilators, and professional deep-cleaning services, all provided by a stereotypically inscrutable man named Mr. Wu. Since Prentice absolutely refuses any other course of treatment, it's up to Enora to figure out how to parlay the remainder of Prentice's ill-gotten gains into the quarter of a million it will take to pay for his preferred medical regimen. And it's up to the reader to figure out why a smart, talented professional would think it's her duty to cater to the whims of a spoiled, imperious ex-lover who can't think of anything but what he wants.

This early example of Covid fiction does not bode well for the genre.



THE MISMATCH

Jafari, Sara

Dell (368 pp.)

\$17.00 paper | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-593-35717-0

A recent college graduate struggles to reconcile her Iranian Muslim heritage and immigrant family dynamics with her British life and boyfriend.

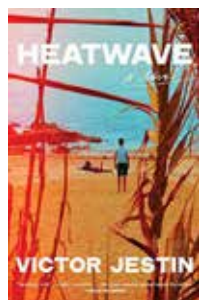
Soraya Nazari doesn't know what she wants. Her family wants her to be a good Muslim girl, but her father and siblings aren't good models, her scientist mother complains about her husband but wants her daughters to fit into old molds, and Soraya herself is confused about how to inhabit her faith. When Magnus Evans, a popular rugby player and fellow graduate from her university cohort, shows an interest in her, she convinces herself that seeing him is just practice for getting over her hang-ups. But as Soraya and Magnus draw closer, another narrative unfolds in flashbacks—the story of how Soraya's parents, Neda and Hossein, fell in love

"An effective philosophical novel that uses hip-hop to tell a story of prison life and how rhyme can lead to redemption."

THIS LIFE

in Iran in the 1970s and how migrating to England unraveled their marriage. While the contemporary story is a familiar new-adult drama of young people starting their professional paths in a big city, making romantic gaffes, and weaning themselves away from family neuroses, Soraya's relationships to Islam and immigrant culture add a layer to the standard arc, calling to mind works like Uzma Jalaluddin's *Ayesha At Last*. Simultaneously, the interspersed chapters of how Neda and Hossein's love fractured as migration and racism had their ways with them, followed by Hossein's descent into substance abuse and the mysterious absence of their oldest daughter, read more like women's fiction, with its female protagonist's troubled personal life and her journey to overcoming patriarchy. Its effect on Soraya, namely her emotional skittishness and existential angst, is explained convincingly—particularly through an explosive incident of domestic violence—and it's clear that her story is about discovering herself before she commits to a man. The novel also dislodges Whiteness from its typical central position in both genres, with Soraya's friends being people of color with distinctive personalities.

Two stories juxtaposing the lives of a mother and daughter across two cultures; the former leaves a bigger impression.



HEATWAVE

Jestin, Victor

Trans. by Taylor, Sam

Scribner (112 pp.)

\$22.00 | Jun. 29, 2021

978-1-982143-48-0

Here's a book that reminds us in no uncertain terms that film noir would not exist without the French.

This may sound strange in relation to a story whose foul deed takes place at the

beach and is committed by a teenager. But the lineage is there, in the language, in the staccato sentences, and most of all in the fatalism, the sense that we have no control and this is simply the way it had to be. The teenager is Leo, vacationing with his family and friends at a popular campsite in the southwest corner of France. The very first sentences spell out the reason for Leo's feeling of doom: "Oscar is dead because I watched him die and did nothing. He was strangled by the ropes of a swing, like one of those children you read about in newspapers." Leo didn't kill Oscar, but he didn't help him, either, and he didn't hesitate to bury him on the beach. They liked the same girl, and, well, stuff happens. The short novel unfolds like an adolescent version of Camus' *The Stranger*, as Leo spends pages considering the senselessness of what happened and feeling the weight of life's ennui. The author is 26 and not too far removed from his antihero's demographic and concerns, the everyday life here interrupted by death and guilt. At its best the book cranks out short, terse sentences like machine gun fire: "All was calm on this side of the dune. The tents and the bungalows were lost in the shadows. The only light came from the condom vending machine. 'Protect yourself,' it said." At its worst, it gets two-dimensional

and repetitive, descriptive on the surface but limited in scope. At the least, it's a calling card for what should be a bright career.

The fates are up to no good in this ennui-filled story of passive crime and guilt.



THIS LIFE

KunQuest, Quntos

Bolden/Agate (250 pp.)

\$18.00 paper | Jun. 8, 2021

978-1-57284-282-3

The first novel by KunQuest, an artist and inmate at the Louisiana State Prison in Angola since 1996.

Nineteen-year-old Lil' Chris walks into Angola ready to serve his life sentence on his own terms. He's not interested in friends or advice from the older "victs" and is ready to defend himself against whatever violence comes his way. Rise

ISBN: 978-1-67844-994-0

Be careful what you chase...

"A busy but breezy swashbuckling caper awash in intrigue and headlined by two indefatigable heroes."

—Kirkus Reviews

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has been in Angola for more than 10 years after being transferred from a juvenile facility and is also serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. The two men quickly develop a respect for each other based on their ability to freestyle rap, and Rise is determined to help Lil' Chris become a leader and role model for the other inmates. For Rise, surviving in prison isn't about physical strength. The key to survival is philosophical, historical, and legal education, and he's earned the respect of his peers by mentoring dozens of prisoners over the years. As Lil' Chris' freestyles draw him more attention, another group of inmates with a darker, more bitter worldview tries to recruit him to their ranks. The narrative roams among the characters in a close third-person point of view that creates a widescreen vision of the claustrophobic life behind bars. Readers will learn about the history of Angola, the daily grind of life in the different cell blocks (each with their own levels of freedom), and the difficulty of picking vegetables on the prison's farm, and they will be treated to pages and pages of blistering rap lyrics. The lyrics aren't about showing off; the rapping is necessary for these characters to hold on to their souls. "Somehow [Lil'

Chris] is conscious that these conditions are meant to kill something inside of him. He knows this because he feels whatever it is struggling to live." KunQuest never veers into exploitation. The characters may be suffering from the mental, physical, and psychological violence of long-term imprisonment, but they find solace and complex relationships in community and art.

An effective philosophical novel that uses hip-hop to tell a story of prison life and how rhyme can lead to redemption.



CHARLES A. SALTER

THE FLIGHT OF THE SCHIMMERPLOTZ

ISBN-13: 979-8586045812

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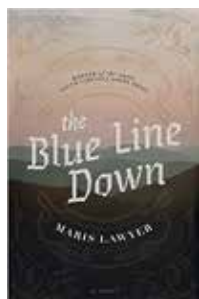
"As the first volume of an action-adventure series, the book is winningly inviting. The two heroes go from one mishap to another...always with Brex supplying the exposition and Jacks delivering the snappy comebacks. Readers will be eager for more. An exciting and fast-paced time-travel fantasy starring an action odd couple."
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"A rugged debut novel about a young man fleeing from a violent life."

THE BLUE LINE DOWN



THE BLUE LINE DOWN

Lawyer, Maris

Hub City Press (268 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | Jun. 22, 2021

978-1-938235-84-9



A rugged debut novel about a young man fleeing from a violent life.

The Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency was a (real-life) vicious, predatory outfit dedicated to stamping out unions at the barrel of a gun. In this captivating debut novel we meet Jude Washer, a lost 24-year-old West Virginian who joined the group for all the wrong reasons (as if there could be right reasons). The year is 1922. Jude's father had been a mean drunk and coal miner who pushed Jude's 10-year-old brother to an early death. He was also a union organizer, and Jude, bent on not just destroying his dad, but scorching the very earth he stood on, learned to see red when he saw unions. The problem is, Jude also has a soul, even though he tries to drown it with moonshine from his flask, and the Baldwin-Felts, generally speaking, do not. The book has some wonderfully chilling set pieces, including a horrific raid on a mining camp full of workers who are perfectly willing to shoot back. This is where Harvey Morgan, a new recruit Jude is training, decides he's had enough, and Jude must decide if he'll continue down his blood-stained path or look for something resembling atonement. This fork in the road is neither broad nor simple; the author tells her story through small actions and stripped-down language, building momentum one page at a time and foregoing big gestures. Her descriptions of the rugged land of the Blue Ridge Mountains ground the action in detail, carved out word by word. You care for Jude, a decent man doing the wrong thing, and when he flees his murderous colleagues with a badly wounded Harvey, you want a new life for him even when you know it won't be easy and there's a price to pay for past sins. This is rugged writing with a moral compass and a tarnished hero slowly trying to come clean.

Stripped-down language and propulsive storytelling keep these pages turning.



IMMEDIATE FAMILY

Levy, Ashley Nelson

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (192 pp.)

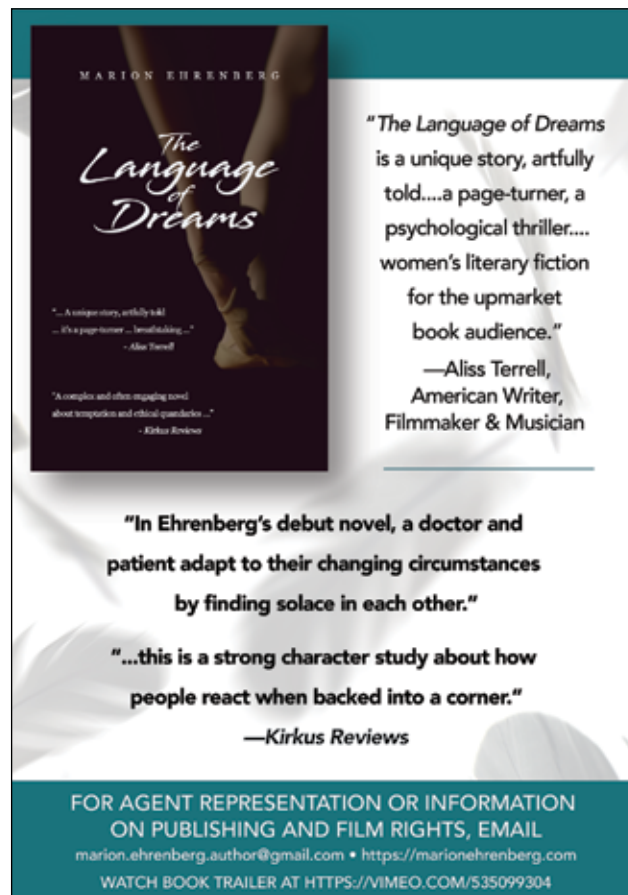
\$26.00 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-374-60141-6

When she is asked to speak at her brother's wedding, a woman finds she has a lot to say.

"Sometimes when I picked up books from young writers at the library, I'd want to tear all the pages, chew them, and spit them out. Get a job! I would tell the characters. Money and blood never seemed to concern them." Money and blood are major concerns in Levy's debut novel, in which an unnamed

narrator tells her brother all the things she wants him to know before she makes her wedding speech. Her brother, Danny Larsen, born Boon-Nam Prasongsanti, is the only named character in the book—the rest are "our mother and father," "your brother-in-law," "your bride." The narrator was 9 when she went with her parents to Thailand to adopt a 3-year-old from an orphanage. Among the immediate difficulties: He was dangerously malnourished; they didn't speak a word of Thai; he was terrified of their father. Her parents threw themselves wholeheartedly into the project of raising him, including making him a Life Book as recommended by the agency. The template for this book includes suggestions like "*We don't know what the woman who gave birth to you in [Korea/India/Thailand] looked like, but because you are so [handsome/cute] we imagine that she must have been very beautiful.*" Racism and bullying became problems as soon as Danny went to school, but one thing went perfectly: The sister who was so excited to get a new sibling was rewarded with adoration. She would find messages in her shoe: "*To my sister. Your [sic] the best sister in the whole world. From Danny Larsen.*" But as Danny grew into adolescence, he drifted away and also



WORDS WITH...

SUNNY HOSTIN

The co-host of *The View* brings readers to Martha's Vineyard for *Summer on the Bluffs*, her first novel

BY BETHANNE PATRICK



Miller Mobley

YOU KNOW SUNNY HOSTIN best from *The View*, where she elegantly spars with co-hosts Whoopie Goldberg, Sara Haines, and Joy Behar (who gives her advice “more than occasionally”). An attorney who has worked as a public defender, Hostin began her media career on Court TV and continues to report for ABC News as a senior legal analyst and correspondent. However, Hostin also established herself as a writer with her 2020 memoir, *I Am These Truths*, and this year she’s releasing her first novel, *Summer on the Bluffs* (Morrow/HarperCollins, May 4), the saga of a wise older woman, her three goddaughters, and the Martha’s Vineyard home they all cherish. Hostin spoke over Zoom from her own home in Connecticut; the conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Let’s start with Martha’s Vineyard, an island you clearly know well.

My dad actually introduced me to the Vineyard because he used to work at Colgate Palmolive, and he would hear some of his colleagues discussing their homes there—and these were Black colleagues. He’d say, “I hope one day we’ll be able to get there, or at least you’ll be able to get there.” I was first invited on a trip to Oak Bluffs, the traditionally Black part of the island, by the Jack and Jill organization when I was a teenager. I mean, I was a kid from the South Bronx, and I got on the ferry and I saw all these African Americans—and they were wealthy. I’d never experienced anything like that. I kept returning, and once I got married, I introduced my husband to the Vineyard, and our kids have grown up going there. My book, if I’m honest, is a love letter to Martha’s Vineyard.

Your protagonist, Ama, brings together incredible people at her home, the Chateau LaVeau, named after Marie LaVeau from Ama’s home city of New Orleans.

It was one of the only places where African Americans were allowed to buy beachfront property, and so you had luminaries socializing, like Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy West, so many others. Fast-forward and you have the Obamas there. My daughter recently made sure she didn’t have any basketball tournaments conflicting with her planned August stay because, suddenly, you’re in a place where you have the majority of kids who look like you. You don’t experience that anywhere else.

Tell us more about Ama, the character at your book’s center.

Ama has worked hard for everything she has. She’s an elegant woman who is also complicated. And because she has worked hard and because she has been the first, and usually the only, Black woman in her positions—for example, as a trader on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange—I think it was really important for her that her house reflect

someone who has earned the ability to have beautiful artwork, the ability to have luxurious fabrics. I wanted to show readers that this is a world in which wealthy African Americans do have and enjoy fine art and antiques.

Ama and her husband, Omar, are able to create community at a very high level and not simply because they are people of means, right?

At this point, I am invited to, and I host, these kinds of events, so I wanted to write about intentional community. We can be so attached to our devices, and sometimes, as in this past year, we're afraid to be communal. Why have all of this wealth if you don't share quality time with a community of people you love and respect? Tanya and Spike Lee, whose home I've visited on Martha's Vineyard, do this so well. While the Obamas have to be a little more guarded, their children host parties that ours have attended, and Sasha has even worked at one of the local restaurants.

I don't want to forget to ask you to talk about Omar. If Ama is the brains, he's the beating heart of their intentional family.

That was important to me, because my father and I are very close, and he's in many of the characters, but above all in Omar and Carter, whom readers will meet later in the book. What I love about them is that they're not intimidated by strong, self-determined women. Omar is happy to let Ama shine, to let her stand up front, to support her. But he is not weak. He's quite strong. He's noble of character. He's a man of few words, like my father and my husband.

You're successful a few times over. Why a novel?

I always wanted to write not just one novel, but a lot of novels. I'm a voracious reader. I start a couple of books, then want to read another one, and then I bookmark that one and read something else. It's really special to be able to create worlds and inhabit them. I dream a lot, vivid dreams, and I write them down and have been doing so since I was 12. I'm a natural storyteller, and that's really what you do as a prosecutor, too. You tell stories.

How was writing fiction different from writing memoir?

Writing my memoir was a painful experience, because it's hard to write about yourself! Writing this novel was pure joy. One of the reasons I chose this type of book is because I was covering really sad stories, police shootings and protests, and I had to read a lot of background material. But when I fly, I like to read light stuff. I want to read like fun, fun things. And I would go into the bookstores and there was nothing that centered around women of color. Although it's fiction, it is kind of based on my life, things I've experienced and my friends have experienced, including marital struggle, color-

ism, and career choices.

So much happens in *Summer on the Bluffs* that it seems there might be more to come?

Well, it is a three-book deal, so there's definitely more to come. However, this time it will be set in Sag Harbor. You'll see some of these characters but also some new ones. Olivia, one of my *Bluffs* characters, will find a wonderful father figure based on the de facto mayor of Sag Harbor, Bill Pickens, whom I know very well.

What else does Sunny Hostin do that we need to know about?

Part of the reason there's so much food in *Summer on the Bluffs* is that I'm a cook and actually part owner in a Caribbean fusion/French/soul food restaurant called Alvin and Friends in New Rochelle, New York. It's really a community place where people have their parties, their birthdays and bar mitzvahs, and more. But I have to mention the development company I've started, which is backed by Disney—not too shabby! Also, this novel has been picked up by ABC Studios and Octavia Spencer's production studios to be made into a series. If I can help bring more Black joy into entertainment, I'm thrilled.

Bethanne Patrick reviews for a number of publications and is working on a memoir. Summer on the Bluffs was reviewed in the May 15, 2021, issue.



“Four young nuns wind up running a halfway house full of quirky characters.”

AGATHA OF LITTLE NEON

began to steal from their parents, eventually developing a compulsion that had huge consequences for everyone in the family—except him. This story unfolds in parallel with an account of the narrator’s very painful and brutally medicalized experience with infertility. As the misery grows, the reader wonders... are they going to consider adoption? By the end of the book, it’s clear that this narrative is a way of finding the answer to that question.

Levy captures elusive ideas and intense emotions about transracial adoption and infertility.



AGATHA OF LITTLE NEON

Luchette, Claire

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (288 pp.)

\$26.00 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-374-26526-7

Four young nuns wind up running a halfway house full of quirky characters in Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

Four Catholic sisters live with the elderly Sister Roberta in upstate New York. All on the edge of turning 30, the young women are at loose ends: Their day care is shuttered, and Sister Roberta is retiring. However, the four women refuse to be parted: “We were fixed to one another, like parts of some strange, asymmetrical body: Frances was the mouth; Mary Lucille, the heart; Therese, the legs. And I, Agatha, the eyes.” Eventually, the Buffalo diocese decides to transfer them to Rhode Island, where they are put in charge of running Little Neon, a “Mountain Dew”-colored house for residents trying to



ISBN: 978-1-72210-439-9

**ONE MOMENT CAN
CHANGE A LIFE FOREVER.**

**“A poignant and compelling
narrative of a boy’s search
for connection and meaning.”**

—Kirkus Reviews

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get sober and get back on their feet. When the local Catholic high school needs someone to teach geometry, the sisters volunteer Agatha, who is labelled as the quietest but the smartest of the quartet. As Agatha immerses herself in her new life, she finds the residents of Little Neon, from parolee Baby to Tim Gary, whose disfigured jaw prevents him from finding love, open her eyes to new realities, as do her colleagues and students at the high school. Eventually, Agatha can no longer ignore that the church, and most of all she herself, is changing. Luchette's novel, her first, is structured in small chapters that feel like vignettes from a slightly wacky indie film. The book is frequently vibrant with resonant images: Agatha learning to roller skate in Little Neon's driveway or a resident drunk in a sequined dress riding a lawnmower through the snow. But even though the book feels light, Luchette does not turn away from the responsibility of examining the darkness undergirding the institution of the Catholic Church.

A charming and incisive debut.



THE SUBSEQUENT WIFE

Masters, Priscilla

Severn House (256 pp.)

\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-7278-5059-1

In a departure from her several series, Masters produces a stand-alone set in a small city in the middle of England and imbued with darkness and a creeping fear.

Jen Lomax has hungered for a normal middle-class life ever since her selfish parents left her to fend for herself, putting paid to her hopes for a scholarship to university. Her friends encourage her to find Mr. Right, but her dating history has gone from bad to worse. She's been working at a low-paying elder care job until she gets fed up, quits, and stumbles into a much better job at a self-storage unit, where she's happy to be bored. The customers, who range from friendly to nasty, include Steven Taverner, an attractive but shy older man (is he married, divorced, or widowed?) who rents a unit for some boxes and bags marked "Margaret." Slowly Steven gets to know Jen. He offers her shy compliments and eventually an expensive, brand-new dress that he plucks from his unit as a gift. Jen's curiosity about Steven gradually overwhelms her. As she imagines increasingly fanciful stories about his past, he continues to give her gifts that seem to have belonged to the elusive Margaret and finally asks her for a date. Although her friends all warn her to be careful, she's seduced by the lifestyle of Steven, who has a good job and owns a house, and keeps seeing him despite his weird sexual preferences. Despite many warning signs, she marries him only to find herself immersed in a horror story.

The tension builds slowly but inexorably as the heroine uncovers shocking revelations.



RED TRAITOR

Matthews, Owen

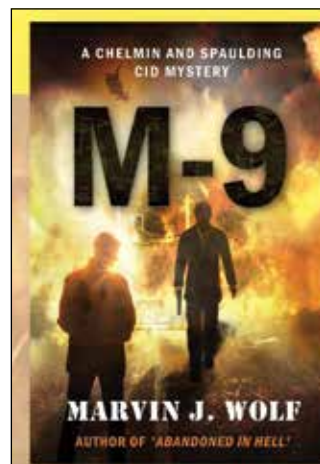
Doubleday (336 pp.)

\$27.95 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-0-385-54342-2

A fictionalized account of the Cuban missile crisis from the Soviet perspective.

Fresh from a triumphant case involving a Soviet nuclear superbomb, Alexander Vasin of the Special Cases directorate of the KGB is attempting to catch a high-level spy. Oleg Morozov of the GRU is believed to be passing secrets to the Americans, but all Vasin's efforts to uncover the traitor have so far yielded nothing. Vasin feels a particular urgency to succeed because his own boss, Gen. Orlov, is locked in mortal bureaucratic combat with Morozov's boss, Gen. Serov. As Vasin pursues his quarry, he uncovers evidence that the Politburo has authorized the shipment and installation of nuclear missiles in Cuba. In a separate plot development, a flotilla of four Soviet



ISBN: 978-1687742254

ASIN: B07WW2922H

"...an easily read, fast-paced story where you almost cannot turn pages fast enough."

—John Russell,
Military Writers
Society of America

"Wolf has created an intriguing odd couple in this first volume of his new series....The well-drawn Rudy and Will are the winning foundation on which this intricate thriller is built."

—Kirkus Reviews

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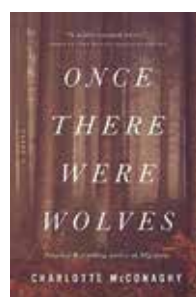
“One woman’s mission to rewild the forests of Scotland with wolves yields far-reaching personal consequences.”

ONCE THERE WERE WOLVES



submarines, each one carrying a single nuclear torpedo in addition to its conventional torpedoes, is deployed toward Cuba. As Vasin uncovers more and more of this unsettling situation, he comes to believe that the American government needs to be informed, and he begins to try to use Morozov as a conduit. The discovery of the missiles in Cuba precipitates a diplomatic crisis, but cooler heads eventually prevail over the hawkish Soviet faction. The submarines, however, present another threat. Submerged and beyond communication, they do not require confirmatory orders to use their weapons, and when the U.S. “quarantine” corrals them, the possibility of a nuclear exchange looms. Matthews has done solid historical research—in many cases his characters bear the names of the actual participants—and the fictionalization is deft, but his need to represent all the moving parts detracts from the effect of the whole. Though the matter is momentous, less might have been more.

A pretty good thriller in an informative historical setting.



ONCE THERE WERE WOLVES

McConaghy, Charlotte
Flatiron Books (272 pp.)
\$27.99 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-1-250-24414-7

One woman’s mission to rewild the forests of Scotland with wolves yields far-reaching personal consequences.

Wildness in all of its forms is the central theme of McConaghy’s second book, which circles the lives of twin sisters Inti and Aggie Flynn as Aggie trails Inti, who’s a biologist, from Australia to Canada and, eventually, Scotland. Inti and her colleagues hope that reintroducing wolves to the ecosystem will promote reforestation after the lumber industry has robbed the Scottish Highlands of timber, having seen success with similar projects in Yellowstone National Park. McConaghy’s powerful debut, *Migrations* (2020), dealt similarly with a woman determined to preserve a valence of wildlife while struggling with the violence and isolation of such a task, and some of the same tensions prevail here, as it becomes increasingly clear that the menacing wildness of wolves often pales in comparison to the cruelties of which humans are capable. Inti and Aggie are close to the point of codependence, having moved from place to place together and survived Aggie’s struggles with domestic violence in her marriage. McConaghy cleverly withholds the details of a trauma that has left Aggie without speech while Inti’s anger at the plight of the wolves and the local people’s resistance to their rewilding carries the narrative at a breakneck pace. All throughout, the language hews to the poetic: “Tiny leaves shimmer green...the color of ripe Colmar pears, Irish pitcher apples, and the glittering mineral called uran-mica.” Inti has a tendency to overidentify with the wolves she is struggling to help, and there is no shortage of emotional and physical violence here, but the payoff is the glimpse of gentleness and humanity that we spot through Inti’s and Aggie’s eyes.

A lovely, gripping tale about a world that could be our own.

What happens when a weapon empowered by God falls into the wrong hands?

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- Kirkus Reviews

“A few like Ray Griggs are given special talents and known as storytellers.”
- Gerald R. Molen, Academy Award Winner
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“It contains all of the exciting components of a Dan Brown, James Rollins, and Clive Cussler book rolled up into one..”
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A GINGERBREAD HOUSE

McPherson, Catriona
Severn House (288 pp.)
\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-0-7278-5001-0

McPherson shows four women’s lives colliding in a life-or-death struggle in Scotland.

Tash Dodd works at her parents’ trucking firm, where she stumbles upon something that horrifies her. Apparently her father’s business includes human trafficking. She plans to force him to turn over the business to her and then turn him in. Meanwhile, at a meeting of the Nine Lives League, Ivy, a middle-aged woman seeking a cat for companionship, meets Kate, who says that Ivy looks exactly like her

TOWER OF MUD AND STRAW



YAROSLAV
BARSUKOV

ISBN: 164076190X

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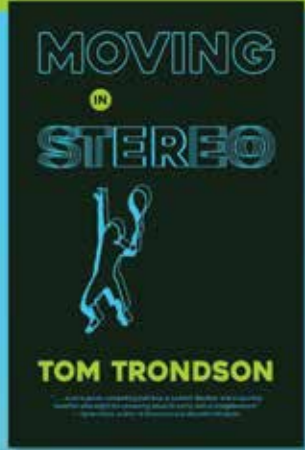
*“This marvelous SF tale about dangerous technology
offers sublime stretches that will warrant revisiting.”*

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) (★)

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sister, Gail, and, suggesting that they might be twins, invites her to their unusual home in Hephaw, West Lothian. Martine is a woman of mixed race who's searched her whole life for the identity of her father. At a genealogical meeting, she meets Kate, who claims to know who her father is and invites her to her house to meet her sister, Gail. Laura, an attractive woman in search of a fairy-tale life, tries an unusual dating service and is invited to a dinner dance at the home of Kate and her sister. Ivy, Martine, and Laura are all taken captive, drugged, and kept in a dank, putrid basement. Although they've all been reported missing, the police don't look very hard until Tash, who's been working for various van companies, goes on the run after her father refuses to give up control and ends up in an apartment overlooking an odd house in Hephaw. Trapped while investigating, she and the three brave captives plot to escape.

A disturbing story of madness and fortitude that grabs your attention from Page 1.



"A THROWBACK 90S TALE WITH A COMPELLINGLY DYSFUNCTIONAL TENNIS-PLAYING PROTAGONIST."
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"A CROSSCOURT WINNER."
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HOW TO FIND YOUR WAY IN THE DARK

Miller, Derek B.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (368 pp.)

\$22.99 | Jul. 27, 2021

978-0-358-26960-1

With the Nazi threat as backdrop, a series of family tragedies, criminal violence, and antisemitic acts animate this New England-set prequel to Miller's debut, *Norwegian by Night* (2012).

A year after small-town Jewish boy Sheldon Horowitz's mother and aunt were killed in a theater fire, his father is killed when a truck runs his vehicle off the road. Twelve-year-old Sheldon, who survives the crash, is convinced it was no accident. Even after moving from rural Massachusetts to Hartford to live with his widowed uncle, he is determined to track down the murderous driver and avenge his father's death. Just how capable this introspective boy is of vengeance (and how shaken he is by the deaths in his family) is revealed when he sets fire to his house to frame as arsonists the Jew-hating siblings who, as salesmen for his father's pelt business, stole from him. At the behest of his best (and only Jewish) friend, Lenny Bernstein, Sheldon escapes to a Jewish resort in upstate New York, where he gets a job as a bellhop and becomes perilously involved in a case of stolen jewels, and Lenny sets his sights on becoming successful as a confrontational stand-up comic. Sheldon's older cousin Abe, obsessed with disproving the weak Jewish stereotype, takes a darker path. After his father, an accountant at the Colt Armory, is set up to take the fall for a bunch of missing guns, Abe exacts revenge on his father's boss. He then escapes to Canada to join the Royal Canadian Air Force with hopes of killing Nazis. There's a lot to enjoy in this sprawling book, which brings a Huck Finn-ish humor to its coming-of-age story. But with its overstated themes and tendency to dictate the characters' thoughts and feelings rather than elicit them, the novel compromises its emotional impact.

A novel whose entertaining parts don't make for a satisfying whole.



GONE BY MORNING

Miller, Michele Weinstat

Crooked Lane (336 pp.)

\$27.99 | Aug. 10, 2021

978-1-64385-740-4

Two women who share a relationship so secret that one of them doesn't know about it hunt a killer who will stop at nothing to preserve his own secret.

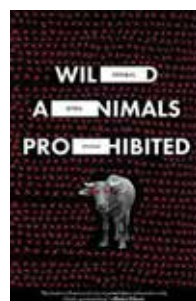
Even under normal circumstances, nobody much cares when a call girl is killed. So the NYPD's indifference to the murder of Sharon Williams is no surprise, especially since her corpse is found the morning after out-of-town sociopath Jackson Mattingly plants a pair of bombs in the subway stations at Times Square

"A collection of inventive, experimental short stories."

WILD ANIMALS PROHIBITED

and Penn Station that leave dozens dead and paralyze the city. But even though she barely avoided becoming a victim of the Subway Bomber herself, retired madam Kathleen Harris cares more about Sharon, a former employee who called her wanting to meet shortly before she was spirited away from outside the building Kathleen owns. She asks Emily Silverman, a neighbor in her apartment building whom she helped get a plum job in Mayor Derick Sullivan's press office, to find out more about the case. But there's something Kathleen isn't telling Emily: that she's Emily's grandmother, a one-time crack addict who spent five years in prison. Emily doesn't know about Kathleen because her own mother, divorce attorney Lauren Cintron, slammed the door on the mother she's convinced abandoned her and doesn't know Kathleen has wormed her way into Emily's life. As Kathleen and Emily struggle to trace Sharon's last movements, they have no idea that her death is about to lead to a high-profile crime that will make headlines all over the city and send Kathleen back to jail.

Mary Higgins Clark with teeth, even if the biggest surprises come early on.



WILD ANIMALS PROHIBITED

Misra, Subimal

Trans. by Ramaswamy, V.

Open Letter (282 pp.)

\$15.95 paper | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-948830-35-5

A collection of inventive, experimental short stories by Bengali author Misra.

Following the American publication of Misra's *This Could Have Become Ramayan Chamar's Tale: Two Anti-Novels*, this volume of short fiction offers readers a broad range of the author's work. Dating from the 1970s and '80s, these stories include everything from everyday happenings to politically charged takes on the uncanny and terrifying. "Radioactive Waste" opens with a tryst between two lovers but juxtaposes that with scenes from folklore and gut-wrenching moments from war. Philosophical passages collide with scenes out of a horror novel, including sections focusing on a predatory creature:

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"Once complete darkness envelops the place, it emerges, it searches for raw humans." This spirit of parallel narratives also arises in "A Gem of a Man," in which a story about a long-lived man known as Bucket Baba alternates with a fable about how humans got their life span to begin with. The structural risks and intellectual riffs aren't the only strengths to be found here. Misra is also skilled at evoking precise details within a scene, as in this passage from the opening of "Secret Vrindavan": "A dark-skinned five-year-old girl wearing only a red string-band on her waist chewed on a raw guava and tried to press close to the glass window of the colourful box." And some of the stories take bolder structural risks; in "Will You Preserve Your Chastity, Aparna?" which concerns itself with desire and intimacy, the text gives way to a table at one point, accentuating the skewed connection between narrator and reader.

There's a lot to admire and savor in these challenging works.



**War is good
for business...**

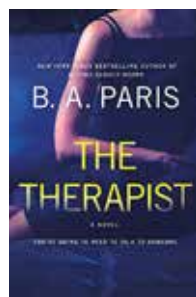
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THE THERAPIST

Paris, B.A.

St. Martin's (304 pp.)

\$27.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

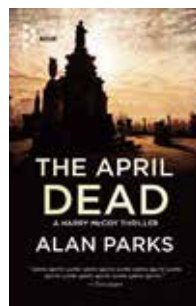
978-1-2502-7412-0



Having just moved to London with her partner, a woman seeks to discover the truth behind the murder/suicide of her home's previous occupants.

Alice is a 35-year-old freelance translator who has recently uprooted herself from her cottage in Harlestone and moved to London to live full time with Leo, her long-distance partner of a year and half. They were previously able to see each other only on weekends, and this move is supposed to be the start of the rest of their lives. Upon moving into The Circle—as their gated cul-de-sac of 12 houses is called—things just seem a little off, and Leo doesn't want Alice getting involved with the neighbors or inviting them over. But invite them she does, and Maria and Tim, Tamsin and Connor, Eve and Will, and Cara and Paul all accept her invitation on the neighborhood group chat to join her and Leo for drinks in their garden. But when Alice discovers that an uninvited guest—a man she'd thought was Tim—has shown up and then disappeared without anyone else seeing him, her hackles are raised. And then she discovers that her home's previous occupant—Nina, a therapist with the same name as her own beloved dead sister—was brutally murdered in the house and that Nina's husband, Oliver, killed himself when he was arrested for the crime. Alice is determined to get to the bottom of the murder and discover just what her neighbors in The Circle are hiding. Author Paris has done a masterful job of upping the creep factor in this volume, hinting at the secrets that everyone is hiding and peeling back, layer by layer, the story of what happened to Nina and Oliver as Alice goes through her day-to-day life and struggles to make new friends and deal with her suspicions. As in her other books, Paris has created complex, flawed characters who grapple with death, obsessions, and fear as they try to live their lives.

This enthralling book is a mystery, a thriller, and an exploration of how trust—or the lack of it—can color relationships.



THE APRIL DEAD

Parks, Alan

World Noir (416 pp.)

\$17.00 paper | Aug. 3, 2021

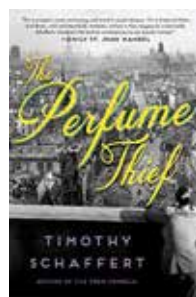
978-1-60945-687-0

Overworked Scottish cops probe a strange series of bombings in the mean streets of Glasgow.

April 12, 1974. Detective Harry McCoy and partner Douglas Watson are called to a flat where a "stupid bugger" has blown himself up trying to make a bomb. The bloody crime scene wreaks havoc with McCoy's weak stomach. Though he's only 32, the righteous McCoy suffers from a peptic ulcer. Wattie

is struggling to adjust to family life: His girlfriend, Mary, a former reporter, has limited patience with his failure to embrace his parenting responsibilities for Duggie, their new baby. Then Andrew Stewart, an American, buttonholes McCoy at the local pub and tries to enlist his help in finding his son, Donny, who's gone AWOL from the U.S. Navy base, but McCoy says he can't help him; the next morning, though, Stewart talks his way into going along with McCoy on a road trip to Aberdeen to pick up crime boss Stevie Cooper, just released from prison, whose friendship McCoy leverages to obtain valuable info. Their colorful jaunt is cut short by another bombing, this time of a cathedral. Then Cooper becomes the prime suspect in a murder, driving a temporary wedge between Wattie and McCoy. Parks depicts 1970s Glasgow with depth, scope, and authenticity. The pace is deliberate, but the lean, muscular prose is matched by a deep dive into character and the seamy side of the city. When evidence identifies Donny Stewart as a person of interest in the bombings, his absence makes him look guiltier. Links to Northern Ireland hint at a much larger operation and more bombings in the offing.

A full-bodied immersion into Glasgow's gritty past.



THE PERFUME THIEF

Schaffert, Timothy
Doubleday (368 pp.)
\$27.95 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-0-385-54574-7

Nightlife goes on in Schaffert's ornate tableau of Nazi-occupied Paris.

Schaffert's narrator, Clementine, is presumably in her 70s, though she's not talking. A Nebraska native, Clem is self-described as queer and has long preferred the persona of a dapper dandy. Settling in Paris after a long history of thievery in the United States, and one monumental and disappointing love affair with another person known only as M, she dares not return to the U.S., where too many warrants await. In France, she exploits her other signature talent, perfumery. Her chief competitor, Pascal, has disappeared, which is no surprise since Paris has been seized by the Nazis and Pascal is Jewish. Pascal's Left Bank hôtel particulier now bivouacs aging Nazi kingpin Voss, who, as a

A COMPULSION TO LUNACY BY DANIEL BINGHAM



A compulsion to Lunacy

"In this debut literary novel, a pill-popping malcontent fails spectacularly to be the man he wants to be."

"A strangely readable, if somewhat amorphous, tale of contemporary White male stagnation."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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member of the old guard, clings desperately to his rank. Zoé, Pascal's daughter, sings torch songs incognito in a cabaret attached to a bordello. Lush description of scents and extravagant lists of everything from butterflies to poisons underscore Clem's prodigious powers of observation, but the novel's beautifully rendered atmosphere is no substitute for suspense and conflict. The aesthete Voss and the loutish but lovelorn Lutz, whose unwilling mistress Zoé becomes, are not particularly menacing though they're Nazis, and the terrors of the Occupation—the dispossession and removal of the city's Jews, the hunger, the cruelty of the occupiers and the co-optation of the occupied—are mostly offstage. There are nods to the Resistance—but even here, misplaced whimsy obtains: for example, tobacco-scavenging nuns branch out into helping prostitutes flee south, disguised in habits. In what passes for an overarching plotline, Voss and Clem form an uneasy alliance to ferret out Pascal's hidden perfumer's diary as part of a double-cross which begins as fanciful and ends as anticlimactic. For most of the novel, Clem, her young protégé Blue, and her friend Day, also a chanteuse, seem to be enjoying themselves far too much for the setting.

A discordantly frothy vision of Paris' darkest chapter.



**AN URBAN
PLANNING MYSTERY**

"...this urban planning thriller carves out its own genre..."
—Self-Publishing Review

"...an engrossing story of how development challenges, changes, and threatens long-held values and different generations."
—Midwest Book Review

**"An entertaining, many-layered mystery with an engaging hero."
—Kirkus Reviews**

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HALF SICK OF SHADOWS

Sebastian, Laura

Ace/Berkley (448 pp.)

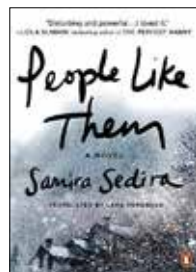
\$27.00 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-0-593-20051-3

The Lady of Shalott narrates this new take on King Arthur, focused on a group of young people struggling to find their places in the world.

Arthur has lived in Avalon for so long that many of his people believe him to be no more than a myth. When Uther Pendragon's death calls his heir home to Albion, Arthur leaves the land of the fey with a small contingent of allies: his best friend, Lancelot; his betrothed, Gwen; his half sister, Morgana; and the young seer, Elaine, perhaps better known as Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, who has lived at Camelot before. A chilly reception in his father's lands turns grimmer when the would-be king learns that Uther has named his bastard son, Mordred, as his heir in Arthur's absence. When Merlin delays Mordred's coronation to make way for a set of trials—each designed to prove that Arthur is worthy of his father's throne—his friends dedicate themselves to his campaign, at least for a time. Destiny has a propensity for getting in the way, however, and the story soon shifts, not unpleasantly, to focus on the three young women—Elaine, Morgana, and Gwen—as they make their own ways in a world that fears their magic and mysticism. Sebastian's characterization is strong; each of Arthur's friends bolster one of his weaker qualities—and do it well—and the young prince's impostor syndrome will ring true to almost any reader. The novel remains relatively faithful to source materials from Malory and the French poets, though the eagle-eyed may spot an anachronism or two. Although the large central cast often requires an excessive amount of pace-hindering dialogue, the end result is one that Arthuriana buffs and newcomers alike can enjoy.

A thoughtful, crisp take that brings just the right amount of newness to the timeless legends readers know and love.



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

Sedira, Samira

Trans. by Vergnaud, Lara

Penguin (192 pp.)

\$17.00 paper | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-14-313627-9

A horrific real-life quintuple murder in a sleepy French village inspired this novel.

What would it take to provoke extreme savagery in a seemingly normal person? This is the question Anna Guillot explores after her husband, Constant, kills five members of the Langlois family—Bakary, Sylvia, and their three children—in a fit of extreme rage. For a long time, the residents of the placid French village of



"A Lucky Jim for the millennial woman; blistering, darkly comic, and splendidly written."

THE LIFE OF THE MIND

Carmac haven't felt any real threats. They watched the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris at a remove, through televised media coverage. All that changes when Bakary Langlois arrives with his family. Not only is Bakary Black, he is also rich, a markedly different social class than most other Carmac residents. His custom-built chalet is a source of envy, especially for Constant, his neighbor. Anna narrates two stories: One looks back at her husband's early days as a promising pole vaulter whose athletic dreams are crushed by a nasty accident while the other details the systematic resentment that builds in an already fractured Constant, whose perceived indignities are compounded when Anna finds work as a maid at the Langlois chalet. Then the cauldron of simmering resentment boils over when Bakary swindles Constant out of his parents' life savings: 8,000 euros. In her first novel to be translated into English, Sedira packs a powerful punch, exploring the class-race divide through Constant, Anna, and the rest of the town's residents. The graphic murders stand in stark contrast to Sedira's subtle accounting of Constant's tortured path. At the center of the tragedy is complicity: Constant is never made to realize that a bad hand might

be crippling but not reason enough to take it out on the perceived "other."

Deeply unsettling yet compulsively readable.



THE LIFE OF THE MIND

Smallwood, Christine

Hogarth/Crown (240 pp.)

\$27.00 | Mar. 2, 2021

978-0-593-22989-7



The protagonist of Smallwood's debut novel endures the humiliations of life as a contingent faculty member.

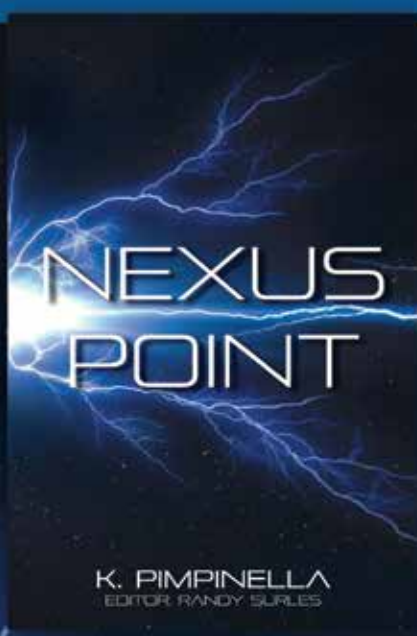
As the novel opens, Dorothy is on the toilet. She's in the midst of a miscarriage, and she has chosen to undergo this outside a hospital setting. As weeks go by, she tracks her continued bleeding, harboring this personal secret as she contends with her precarious position as a nontenured humanities

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STORY LOOKS AT YOU AND SAYS, 'HOLD MY BEER.'"
—SETH COMIRE, WWW.IHEARTSCIFI.COM

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SF TALE FULL OF TIME PARADOXES AND FILLS
IT OUT WITH SOLID CHARACTERIZATIONS
AND A PARTICULARLY AGONIZED HERO."
—KIRKUS REVIEWS



ISBN: 978-1-5255-9547-9

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Ph.D. She muses about cultural representations of the apocalypse—her current research interest—as she endures her own small apocalypse, and though she thinks and reads and writes ad nauseum about the global version, she suffers her own in silence, examining her bodily processes with mild interest. She even keeps her miscarriage from her two therapists—one of whom she has enlisted to help her work on her relationship with the other. At an academic conference in Las Vegas, she navigates the awkwardness of relationships within academia, whether it be with the adviser she will gladly abase herself to impress, a cohort member she once slept with, or a friendship with a strong undercurrent of competitiveness and jealousy. The novel's satirical edge—unflinching but never mean—lies in the stark contrast between the lofty ideas that constitute Dorothy's day-to-day professional existence and the private humiliations of the body, of being human, that she keeps to herself. She approaches every experience and emotion with all the hyperactive wit and self-reflexivity of a professional overthinker. Dorothy's interiority can be an exhausting place to reside, making the reading experience a bit claustrophobic at times—but that's

precisely the point. Smallwood's talent for psychological acuity shines through here as she paints an achingly familiar portrait of someone who spends too much time in her own mind. All of this is buoyed by Smallwood's luminous prose, which heralds the arrival of a real talent.

A *Lucky Jim* for the millennial woman; blistering, darkly comic, and splendidly written.



A WOMAN OF INTELLIGENCE

Tanabe, Karin

St. Martin's (384 pp.)

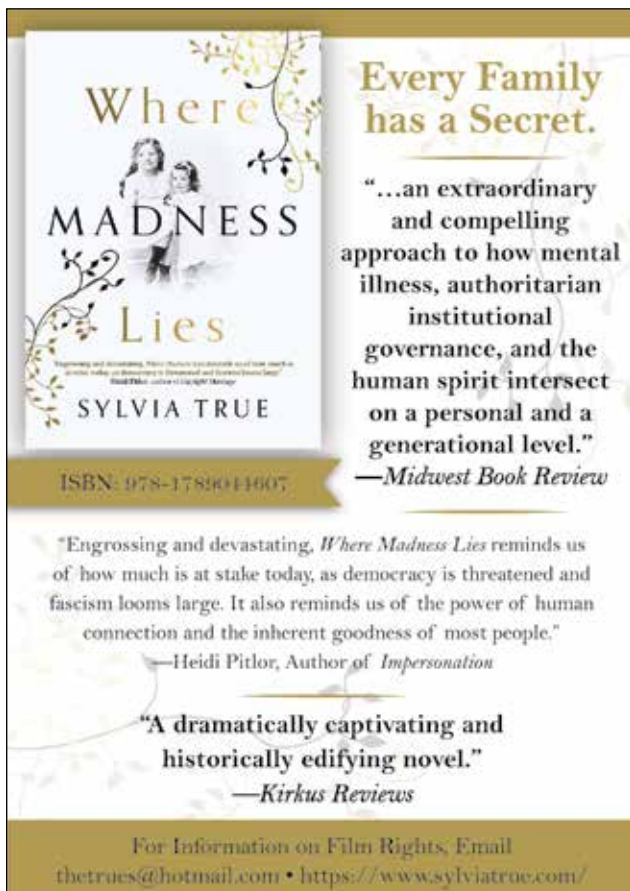
\$27.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-2502-3150-5

A well-off young mother is recruited as an undercover agent by the FBI in this historical thriller.

Post-World War II New York is a great place to be young and single, if you're Katharina West. The multilingual Columbia graduate lands a dream job as a translator at the U.N. and spends nights and weekends with her girl squad downing cocktails and entertaining suitors. For Rina, that ends when she marries Tom Edgeworth, an impossibly handsome, charming, rich pediatric surgeon. A few years later, Rina is ensconced in a swell Fifth Avenue apartment, she's the mother of two little boys, and she's miserable. The babies overwhelm her, and Tom has become a workaholic bully who expects her to have no life beyond her family. She's drinking a lot. One day after she has a public meltdown, she's approached by Lee Coldwell, an FBI agent with an interesting proposition. Jacob Gornev, an old college beau of hers, is a communist and Soviet agent. Would she like to help the FBI investigate him? To Rina, this sounds like even more fun than her U.N. job, and in the midst of the 1950s Red Scare, she feels she'd be doing her patriotic duty—so what if it involves lying to her husband? Seeing Jacob again stirs up old feelings, but she's even more stirred by Turner Wells, an undercover FBI agent who, he tells Rina, is “only the tenth Negro they ever let play the game.” The game, though, will turn deadly, as such games do. Tanabe crafts the historical setting convincingly, and, although the dialogue can sometimes veer toward mini-lectures, the novel moves at a brisk pace even as she weaves together the stories of Rina's domestic dilemmas and her adventures as an undercover agent. Perhaps the most subversive thing about the twinned stories is this: how well the masks and performances Rina puts on as wife and mother prepare her for the world of espionage.

Being a traditional 1950s wife and mother turns out to be perfect training for spycraft.



"With magic creeping in around the edges, this is a unique, well-developed, and haunting *Gatsby* retelling."

THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL



THE BLACKMAILER'S GUIDE TO LOVE

Thurm, Marian
Delphinium (240 pp.)
\$26.95 | May 25, 2021
978-1-953002-00-6



A juicy roman à clef sympathetically imagines two young women on opposite sides of an extramarital affair.

"It is 1978 and Mel is twenty-five years old"—and like her creator did at that time, she works at a magazine which seems to be *Esquire* for a jerk who seems to be Gordon Lish, who recklessly edits the stories of a man who seems to be Raymond Carver. Also like Thurm, Mel is about to have her own first story published in the *New Yorker* at the age of 25, and she will go on to write "stories mostly in the present tense, mostly about the infinite ways, large and small, in which her characters manage to disappoint one another"—a perfect description of the selection of Thurm's stories written between 1979 and 2021 and just published as *Pleasure Palace*. And after she endures the events that begin on April 14, 1980, when she finds an angry note from another woman in her husband's backpack, Mel knows that "she will, the instant she's good and ready, write the only [novel] she's certain she is capable of writing...she's already confident of the title: *The Blackmailer's Guide to Love*." It turned out to be Thurm's ninth novel, actually, and in addition to evoking the experience of the betrayed young writer, it also fully imagines that of her nemesis. The plight of Julia Myerson unfolds in chapters that alternate with Mel's. Abused as a child, divorced from an awful man, unable to make progress on her dissertation, Julia is cobbling together a living as a dog walker and a caregiver to an elderly couple. After her longtime therapist commits suicide by jumping off a bridge, she becomes the patient of Charlie Fleischer, a caring psychologist with a sweet face, a warm smile—and a wedding ring. "She's not stupid: she's fully aware that falling for your therapist is a 'thing,' that it's something that happens all the time, every day of the week. But that doesn't render what she feels for Charlie any less meaningful, any less potent, does it?"

Beautifully written, both sharp and bighearted, funny and true.



THE CHOSEN AND THE BEAUTIFUL

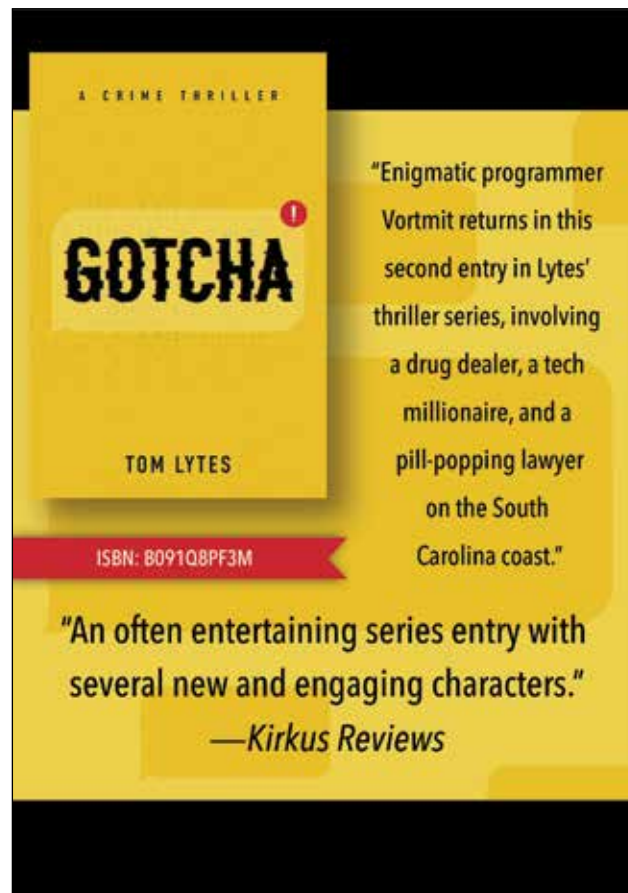
Vo, Nghi
Tor (272 pp.)
\$23.99 | Jun. 1, 2021
978-1-250-78478-0



Jordan Baker recounts the story of Daisy Buchanan and her ill-fated relationship with Jay Gatsby.

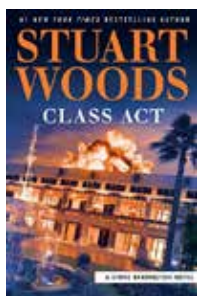
Jordan, born in Vietnam, was adopted by the Bakers as a child,

launching her into a world of old money and magic different from her own. Generally regarded as a curiosity, Jordan has made the best of her situation, kissing boys and girls and overindulging on imported bottles of demoniac, taking care not to dwell for too long on the things that make her different. After the deaths of her guardians, Jordan moves to New York City, where she reunites with her friend Daisy; meets Daisy's cousin Nick Carraway, newly returned from the war; and learns that Jay Gatsby, whom she and Daisy knew in Louisville, is Nick's neighbor. But Gatsby is different: lacking in something and single-mindedly focused on winning Daisy back. Between magic-filled parties at Gatsby's house and whispers of dark bargains, Jordan watches the relationship between Daisy and Gatsby unravel over the course of the summer, at the same time struggling with her own relationship to Daisy and eventually coming to question her place in their society. Vo has crafted a retelling that, in many ways, surpasses the original, adding logic and depth to characters' motivations while still—uncannily—unspooling the familiar story. Astonishingly crafted, with luscious prose and appeal



for both fans of the original and those who always felt *The Great Gatsby* missed the mark.

With magic creeping in around the edges, this is a unique, well-developed, and haunting *Gatsby* retelling.



CLASS ACT

Woods, Stuart

Putnam (336 pp.)

\$28.00 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-593-33166-8

Has Stone Barrington finally bedded a woman too lethal?

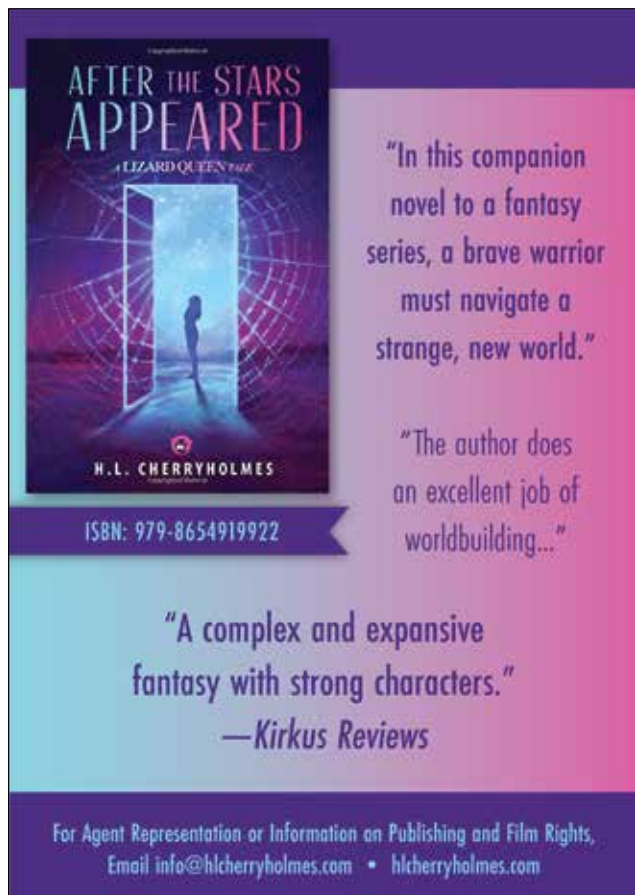
Readers eager to find out will have to make it past the opening movement, in which the New York attorney most welcomed at high-end establishments is

unaccountably eclipsed by Mickey O'Brien, a retired NYPD detective whose gambling problem has gotten him into serious

trouble with both his creditors and his mother, restaurant heiress Louise O'Brien O'Brien, who swears this is the very last time she'll bail him out. She showers him with money she was going to leave him in her will, and Mickey, breaking every rule in the suspense writer's playbook, pays everybody off. Fans who've noticed Woods' recent habit of pairing with other writers might suspect that these opening chapters had been ghostwritten if Mickey didn't instantly indulge in Stone's favorite habits: binge-buying upscale lifestyle commodities and seducing the women making them (and themselves) available. Tired, happy, and sexually sated, Mickey abruptly recedes, clearing the way for Stone to step back into the escalating tussle over who has the strongest claim to the \$1 million the late criminal mastermind Eduardo Buono gave Jack Coulter, back when he was Johnny Fratelli, to watch Buono's back in *Sing Sing*. At length Stone's path crosses that of nightclub singer Hilda Ross, who moonlights as a contract killer. Other limbs cross, and consigliere Sal Trafficante, who works with Don Antonio Datilla and plays with Hilda, takes baleful note. Will Sal kill Stone? Will Stone kill Sal? Will Hilda kill one or both of them? The only way to resolve these burning questions, it seems, is to bring in Mickey O'Brien one last time.

No more shapeless than usual but definitely weirder.

M Y S T E R Y



"In this companion novel to a fantasy series, a brave warrior must navigate a strange, new world."

"The author does an excellent job of worldbuilding..."

"A complex and expansive fantasy with strong characters."

—Kirkus Reviews

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MUCH ADO ABOUT NAUTICALING

Allan, Gabby

Kensington (304 pp.)

\$15.95 paper | Jul. 27, 2021

978-1-4967-3106-7

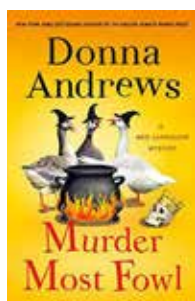
Forget the people. Santa Catalina Island is the star of this series debut.

Whitney Dagner left a lucrative but stressful life on the mainland and returned to Santa Catalina to open a gift

shop and help run her semiretired grandparents' glass-bottom boat business. Goldy and Pops enjoy life while Whit and her brother, Nick, conduct boat tours, including one for the Chamber of Commerce's Person of the Year, the deeply unpopular Jules Tisdale, whose spacey wife, Tracy, is an old friend of Nick's. In the middle of a series of tours, Nick vanishes, but he returns in time to discover Jules floating under the boat. After an initial interview, the cops fasten on Nick as the killer, and Goldy and Pops ask Whit to prove him innocent. Another problem arrives in the form of Whit's ex-boyfriend Felix Ramirez, whom the local police have just hired as a diver. Not sure how she feels about Felix, Whit still accepts his help and that of her roommate, Maribel, who also works for the police. The manipulative Tracy had convinced Nick she was being abused by Jules, giving

him a sadly plausible motive for murder and a reason to hide while a desperate Whit checks out the alibis of myriad people who might have wanted the obnoxious Jules dead.

Allan supplies an appealing hero, a meager mystery, and a glorious setting.



MURDER MOST FOWL

Andrews, Donna

Minotaur (320 pp.)

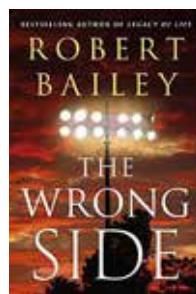
\$26.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-1-2507-6016-6

Still another group of historical reenactors wreaks havoc on Caerphilly, Virginia, where bedlam already reigns supreme.

Drama professor Michael Waterston's decision to rehearse the D.C. theater company Arena Stage's new production of *Macbeth* might have seemed a good idea at the time. But it's reopened old scars in Drama's running battle with Caerphilly College's English department and forced Drama into an uneasy alliance with History that's already showing some strain. Case in point: a deeply misbegotten invitation to the Dystopian Alternate Realities Krew to establish Camp Birnam, an 11th-century Scottish reenactment. DARK leader Calum MacLeod, ne Christopher Miller, is clearly off the rails. So is documentary filmmaker Damien Goodwin, who's both a nuisance and a crank. Celia Rivers, the production's Lady Macbeth, is beset by mounting digestive distress, and the mean girls led by Gina, the Second Witch, seem intent on outdoing the three weird sisters. And of course there's the obligatory vandalism of property and mistreatment of animals. Following a screening of a Goodwin supercut video that delights in catching everyone from self-anointed Shakespeare professor Desmond Philpotts to Russ Brainard, who plays Banquo, in embarrassing situations, the documentarist is bashed to death with his own camera. Luckily, Michael's battle-hardened wife, ornamental blacksmith Meg Langslow, is on hand to help police chief Henry Burke and senior deputy Vern Shiffley overcome the curse of the Scottish play, sift through layers and layers of mischief, and choose from among all these zanies the perpetrators of a surprisingly expansive flock of actual crimes.

Fans will appreciate the helpful final chapter, which indicates exactly which malefactors have earned which legal punishment.



THE WRONG SIDE

Bailey, Robert

Thomas & Mercer (368 pp.)

\$15.95 paper | Aug. 3, 2021

978-1-5420-2593-5

African American lawyer Bocephus Haynes accepts a second case guaranteed to set him against pretty much everybody of all races in Giles County, Tennessee.

Minutes after her last tender moments with star high school running back Odell Champagne, Brittany Crutcher, the lead singer for the rising teen band Fizz, leaves a note in his locker telling him she's leaving the next morning for LA after signing a solo contract that will leave Fizz out in the cold along with Odell. When he sees the note, Odell, having just dominated the intervening football game and heard Fizz crush the halftime show, is enraged, so when a sanitation worker finds Brittany dead in the back of a school bus the next morning, her

The towering new novel from the Jim Harrison of the East.

"The Power Line is steeped in the primal reality of geography and a near-reverential sense of place."
—Seven Days, Burlington, VT

ISBN: 1977232132

"A haunting story told with quiet, emotional power."
—Kirkus Reviews

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“When an Austen conference brings fans to town, a bookstore owner finds herself trapped in a Christie-style plot.”

DEATH & SENSIBILITY

head smashed in by a beer bottle, it's no surprise that Odell's prints are all over it or that Chief Deputy Sheriff Frannie Storm arrests Odell for murder. Facing certain conviction, Odell begs Bo Haynes, whom he's idolized ever since Bo's own football days at Giles County High, to defend him. Bo takes his sweet time before committing himself, realizing that although both the victim and the defendant are Black, there are difficult racial currents at work. Also, taking the case will antagonize everyone from District Attorney General Helen Lewis to Israel Crutcher, Brittany's father, who vows violent revenge against anyone who sides with Odell. And there turns out to be good reason for his hesitation, for his own search for an alternative suspect in Michael Zannick, the White manager who landed Brittany's contract in return for the usual personal accommodations, is torpedoed when Zannick produces an alibi from a wholly unexpected source.

Social tensions redoubled by race intensify a workmanlike mystery.



DEATH & SENSIBILITY

Blake, Elizabeth

Crooked Lane (336 pp.)

\$26.99 | Aug. 10, 2021

978-1-64385-730-5

When an Austen conference brings fans to town, a bookstore owner finds herself trapped in a Christie-style plot.

A fan of all things Austen, Erin Coleridge is delighted to go to the York Grand Hotel to help plan the Jane Austen Society's conference. Her nearest and dearest friend, Farnsworth Appleby, is delighted too, but part of her excitement is seeing that York detective Peter Hemming has sent Erin a welcome bouquet complete with an Austen pun. Farnsworth loves the idea that the two may have a chance at romance after pairing on a previous mystery in *Pride, Prejudice, and Poison* (2019). This time around, mystery blooms before any romance can get started when conference speaker Barry Wolf dies, apparently of a heart attack, before his keynote address. Erin, who must find a replacement speaker, suspects that Barry's death may be murder. As in so many quaint English mysteries, there are more suspects than crimes. Barry appears to have been unpopular with both his ex-wife, Judith, and his current wife, Luca, but Erin is pretty sure he has more acquaintances with motives. Before she can dig in too deep, a member of the hotel staff is killed. Could Barry have connections to the hotel? Is this an unfortunate coincidence? Or is something else afoot? Even though Hemming implores her to stay safe and stay out of it, Erin can't resist poking around with Farnsworth, only dimly aware that the two may dig up more than they can handle.

It's no Austen, but it still does the job of providing a good time.



DEATH IN CASTLE DARK

Bond, Veronica

Berkley (288 pp.)

\$7.99 paper | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-593335-87-1

An actor's new gig is so interesting it almost gets her killed.

Though Nora Blake is sorely disappointed when she fails to land a role she was sure was hers, a chance comes up to work in a sophisticated mystery dinner theater at an amazing castle not far from her Chicago home. Her reservations are overcome by the fact that part of her compensation includes a beautiful room and bounteous board in a stunning setting. The guests all act as detectives and follow the actors around the castle as they drop clues to the murder. The castle is owned and run by charismatic Derek Corby and his brother, Paul, and the actors all seem pleasant enough—especially bubbly Connie, who becomes an instant friend to Nora. Nora's debut goes well, and she feels

BEAR BONES
MURDER AT ALPINE BEAR MEAT

A BEAR LANSING MYSTERY
Charles Cutter

ISBN: 978-1950659562

“Part mystery, part ode to the last best places, Cutter's prose captures the best of what is always slipping away.”
—Glen Young, *Bear River Literary*

“Captivating characters augment a taut, alluring mystery.”
—Kirkus Reviews

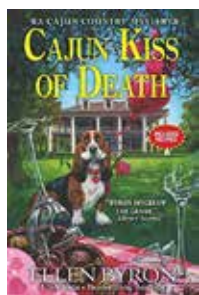
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on Publishing and Film Rights, Email
Charles@CharlesCutter.com • www.CharlesCutter.com

“*Bear Bones* is full of well-depicted courtroom scenes that really come to life and could easily be adapted for television.”

—Ray Walsh,
Lansing State Journal

more comfortable as she learns more about the other actors and meets a most attractive gardener. Disaster strikes in the second play, though, when Nora finds a cast member murdered in the chapel and learns that the castle's gardener is Detective John Dashiell, who's been undercover on an unrelated mystery. Nora has no plans to become a sleuth, but circumstances and curiosity force her to investigate. The actors and staff all seem to be hiding something, but because they're actors, it's hard to tell who's telling the truth. And the calming kittens Nora's recently adopted are no help at all when she's targeted by the killer.

A promising new series with a charming heroine, plenty of romance, and a generous portion of red herrings.



CAJUN KISS OF DEATH

Byron, Ellen
Crooked Lane (320 pp.)
\$26.99 | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-64385-738-1

A fancy new night spot causes an upscale uproar in a sleepy Southern town.

The opening of Chanson's Cajun Kitchen is a mixed blessing for the citizens of Pelican, Louisiana. The Crozat Plantation, managed by Magnolia Marie Crozat-Duran, is bustling, with members of the kitchen's copious staff packed in for the long haul. Maggie's mom is not so thrilled, since she's pretty sure celebrity chef Phillippe Chanson has stolen the recipe for her renowned calas (fried-rice fritters). Abel Garavant, owner of Abel's Home Cookin', is spitting fire because Chanson's catfish po-boys bear a striking gustatory likeness to his own secret recipe for fried catfish. And JJ, proprietor of Junie's Oyster Bar and Dance Hall, is even madder. Not only is Chanson's luring away many of Junie's best customers with ridiculous deals on Gulf oysters, but someone's left enough unbagged garbage outside his restaurant to cause the health inspector to shut it down. Things get even worse when Phillippe is killed in a boating accident caused by a faulty thermostat and ruled nonaccidental in the ensuing police investigation. Now Maggie's new husband, detective Bo Durand, has to decide which of the generally likable suspects he's going to lock up for Phillippe's murder. Which means that Maggie has to take a break from her art lessons as well as from her own search for the mystery man (or woman) who's been playing her with unwanted Valentine gifts to track down the real killer.

Byron's gutsy heroine makes quick work of the case so the good times can roll again.



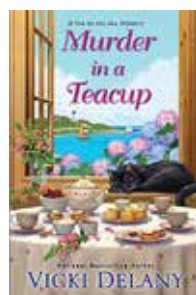
JIM HANVEY, DETECTIVE

Cohen, Octavus Roy
Poisoned Pen (256 pp.)
\$14.99 paper | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-4642-1503-2

Seven adventures, first collected in 1923, of the world's most unprepossessing detective.

As Leslie S. Klinger's introduction makes clear, Cohen (1891-1957) doesn't present much more mystery in his stories than the long-running TV series *Columbo* does, for the criminals are known from the beginning in every instance. In fact, Jim Hanvey—a homely, sleepy-eyed hick—isn't so much a crime solver as a crime preventer whose caseload minimizes violent crimes against persons in favor of crimes against property: confidence games, fraud, grand larceny. The formula is consistent: Hanvey is set against some thief or trickster who instantly recognizes him as the country's greatest detective but is convinced he can be outwitted this time. "I never lie to a crook," Hanvey guilelessly tells one client. "It ain't fair." Oftentimes, the crooks don't lie to him either—at least not in private. The results of their slow-motion mental duels are less whodunits than cat-and-cat tales in which the predators circle each other with placid self-assurance. Although Hanvey drolly underplots the bank robbers in "Fish Eyes," he's a step ahead of the jewel thief in "Homespun Silk," the securities thief in "Common Stock," and the swindling suitors in "Caveat Emptor" and "The Knight's Gambit." When the gang of robbers in "Helen of Troy N.Y." and the fence passing himself off as a wealthy socialite in "Pink Bait" try their hands at more elaborate plots, the stories are more complicated but no more entertaining, for their enduring appeal lies in the simple pleasures of watching the underdog outwit a succession of mostly veteran thieves who should really know better.

Modestly but genuinely amusing.



MURDER IN A TEACUP

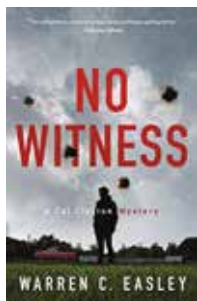
Delany, Vicki
Kensington (304 pp.)
\$26.00 | Jul. 27, 2021
978-1-4967-2509-7

A tea shop owner and her feisty grandmother take on another murder case.

Lily Roberts is owner and chief pastry chef at Tea by the Sea, located on the property of her grandmother Rose Campbell's B&B overlooking Cape Cod Bay. Rose is delighted to welcome the extended family of her old friend Sandra McHenry, but it's soon clear that there are tensions among the group, which includes Sandra's son, Brian, and his wife, Darlene; their son, Lewis, and his wife, Julie-Ann, and their two whiny teens; and Brian and Darlene's wealthy daughter, Heather

French, who's footing the bill. Heather's also invited Ed and Trisha French, her late husband's brother and sister-in-law, who come from the same Iowa town as the McHenrys but are no fans of theirs. Despite Heather's willingness to spend whatever it takes to get everyone to enjoy the vacation, disaster strikes when Ed falls ill after eating at Lily's tearoom. When he dies in the hospital, poison is suspected. Tea by the Sea is shut down and all Lily's food removed by the police, forcing Lily to don her deerstalker before her business is ruined. With help from the attractive English gardener; her best friend, Bernie; and her flamboyant grandmother, Lily explores the family dynamic to see which of Ed's relatives wanted him dead.

Quirky characters, a lovely setting, and a surprising denouement make this second installment a charmer.



NO WITNESS

Easley, Warren C.

Poisoned Pen (272 pp.)

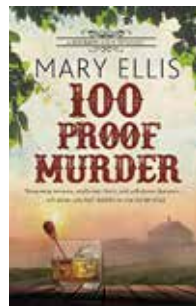
\$15.99 paper | Aug. 1, 2021

978-1-4642-1443-1

Social justice takes center stage when an Oregon lawyer takes a case at the intersection of immigration and investigation.

Cal Claxton's law office in Dundee, about 25 miles outside of bustling Portland, is a bread-and-butter practice, working a wide gamut of cases ranging from criminal court to disputes between divorcing pet parents. But Cal's a longtime social justice advocate and pro bono lawyer for those who need him, too, and he definitely has enough work to share when an eager young man shows up at his door looking for a job. Timoteo Fuentes has hustle and business cards and declares that he can't wait to work for Cal. Under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, Timoteo is grateful to have opportunities his parents never had as they lived their lives under the radar, and he shares some of his story with Cal. Before Timoteo's work can begin in earnest, however, tragedy strikes: His sister, Olivia, is gunned down while trying to pick him up at work. Now Timoteo needs more than Cal's support as an employer; he needs his investigative skills to figure out who had a motive for killing Olivia. In fact, he could use the help of Cal's latest lady friend, Zoe, a counselor who might be able to support his mother in her grief. Surprised by his own interest in Zoe beyond the case, Cal wonders if he's finally ready to get serious about a woman or if he'll continue to let the ghost of his wife figuratively haunt his love life.

Not enough mystery in this installment of an otherwise solid series.



100 PROOF MURDER

Ellis, Mary

Severn House (208 pp.)

\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-7278-9100-6

A journalist lands her second case of murder.

Travel writer Jill Curtis' last trip ended with her solving a homicide, reuniting her grandmother and Aunt Dot, and falling for State Trooper Nick Harris, who works out of the Louisville post. Now Jill and Michael Erickson, her videographer pal, are in Louisville to write a story on the bourbon industry. Her visit to Parker Estate Distillery is derailed when the master distiller dies the day before their appointment. Jill still meets Alexis Scott, the dead man's daughter, and they strike up an instant friendship when Alexis confides her fears that her father was murdered and asks Jill for advice. Alexis has to battle her mother, Rose Parker Scott, a cold woman who seems in a rush to get her husband's body cremated, in order to get the police to look at the case. Alexis helps open doors for Michael while Jill spends time helping her and earning Rose's enmity. Although Nick wishes that Jill would mind her own business, he uses his contacts to dig up information on the Scott family and possible enemies. The reading of the will brings big surprises, headlined by the revelation that Alexis has an elder brother, and sparks fly. Since Nick's busy dealing with his mother, who's recently developed dementia, and helping his family make hard decisions about her future, Jill must go it alone.

Romance, mystery, and bourbon mix nicely in this fast-paced cozy.



THE TRUTH OF IT ALL

Florio, Gwen

Crooked Lane (336 pp.)

\$27.99 | Aug. 10, 2021

978-1-64385-857-9

A beleaguered defense attorney catches a case from hell.

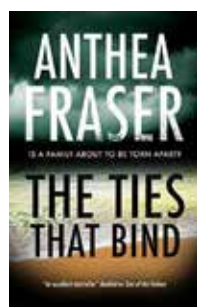
Julia Geary is an Iraq War widow. Although she has a job as a public defender, it doesn't pay much, so she and her toddler son, Calvin, live with her mother-in-law, Beverly Sullivan, a former farm girl who prides herself on having earned a place among Duck Creek's elite. Beverly seems to blame Julia for her son's death even though enlisting was Michael's idea, not his wife's. And Julia's widowhood is a mixed bag. It makes Chief Public Defender Bill Decker loath to lay her off when times are tough, but it lands her a case no one wants: defending Muslim immigrant Sami Mohammed, a high school senior accused of raping classmate Ana Olsen during soccer practice. Once news gets out that Julia's defending Sami, her life swiftly tanks. Her personal information is spread over social media, leading angry

“Readers will never look at life after death, or whatever it is, the same way.”

HALF DEAD

neighbors to protest outside her house. Her son is thrown out of preschool, leaving Grandma Beverly, shunned by her bridge club, to babysit. Sami won't tell her anything, and Ana claims it was too dark to see her assailant. Although much of Julia's tale is a boilerplate litany of assaults on the righteous by the self-righteous, Florio invests her characters with enough humanity, along with touches of humility, to make it worth the read.

In the end, justice is done.



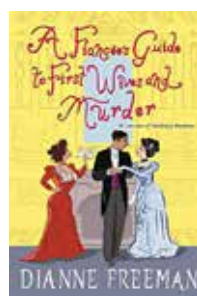
THE TIES THAT BIND

Fraser, Anthea
Severn House (208 pp.)
\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-0-7278-5058-4

An exciting stand-alone by the creator of the Rona Parish series, including *Sins of the Fathers* (2018).

Jess Tempest is the oldest daughter of Fleur and Owen Tempest, who are throwing a big party for their middle daughter Cassie's 18th birthday. Jess' cousin Patrick can see that something's bothering her, but he has no idea how serious it is. Before the party, Jess had returned to her flat in Bristol for a book, found a dead man on the floor, then hid in a closet while two unknown people came into the apartment and spirited the body away. In the meantime, the party is dampened by the fact that Fleur's brother, Justin Linscott, and his wife, Kathryn, are going through some rough waters that even their son, Patrick, who's madly in love with globe-trotting Tasha Crombie, notices. Family friend Jenny Barlow, her husband, and their two children are also on the verge of a nasty domestic crisis. Now that a corpse identified as an Australian has washed up on the shore, Jess is afraid she'll be in danger if the killers know she heard them at work, so she tells the police only that she saw the man entering her building. Although Tasha recognizes both the dead man and Jess' flatmate, Maggie Haig, as people she'd met in Australia, it's some time before, urged on by Patrick, Jess finally tells the police the truth, a decision that puts her in a dangerous position.

A page-turner showcasing how lies from the past can create turmoil and peril in the present.



A FIANCEE'S GUIDE TO FIRST WIVES AND MURDER

Freeman, Dianne
Kensington (304 pp.)
\$26.00 | Jul. 27, 2021
978-1-4967-3160-9

In 1899 London, an aristocratic duo is forced to sleuth again.

American-born Frances, Countess of Harleigh, a widow with a young daughter, is eagerly anticipating her wedding to

the Honorable George Hazelton when their peace is shattered by the arrival of Inspector Delaney and Irena Teskey, a young woman claiming to be George's wife. Unfortunately, the scene is witnessed by gossipy Alicia Stoke-Whitney, in whose bed Frances' first husband died. Irena's been arrested for throwing a stone at a visiting Russian grand duke she claims is her cousin. Irena, who seems to have a vivid imagination, says she's an actress who co-owns a London theater and that she met George when he saved her from kidnappers. Her wild tale proves to be mostly true except for the part about being married to George, who does secret work for the government. Irena turns out to be the daughter of a Grand Duke and an unnamed aristocratic British woman; when she discloses that she's been receiving threatening letters, Frances reluctantly takes her in and the Prince of Wales tells George to investigate. The next surprise is the arrival of Mr. Bradmore, who's legally married to Irena but wants a divorce. When Irena's found strangled in Frances' garden, gossip is already rife, and the engaged couple are destined to be shunned by society unless Frances can find the killer.

Amusing social mores in Victorian England make for a highly entertaining mystery.



HALF DEAD

Graham, Brandon
Crooked Lane (336 pp.)
\$27.99 | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-64385-822-7

A brain-damaged professor of Russian literature inserts himself into the search for Chicago's Magnificent Mile Strangler, with surprisingly weird results.

Calvert Greene thinks he's dead because the car crash that killed his wife, Meredith, and nearly killed him a year ago left him with Cotard's syndrome, a malady that makes him feel as if he's living in a post-mortem haze while his vital functions slowly ebb. Desperate to learn the truth about the accident before his mind shuts down for good, he signs himself out of the New Horizons facility just as rookie detective Whistler Diaz is assigned the case of Anna Beth Harpole, a San Francisco travel consultant in town for a convention whose early morning jog was ended by someone who choked her to death. Working with, and sometimes against, *Text Block* feature reporter Monica, who calls herself Moe, Whistler, who fancies himself another Frank Serpico, links the visitor's untimely death to the murders of Precious Sharpe, Maria Reyes, and Virginia Flores. Meanwhile, Calvert, clearly unable to return to his teaching post at the University of Chicago, takes a job at the other end of the social scale as a trainee with Bug Off, an operation dedicated to controlling the bedbug population at the city's luxury hotels. Graham weaves an inventive web: a foursquare serial-killer plot peopled with head cases, some benign, some not so much.

Readers will never look at life after death, or whatever it is, the same way.



HARDCASTLE'S SECRET AGENT

Ison, Graham

Severn House (208 pp.)

\$28.99 | Jun. 1, 2021

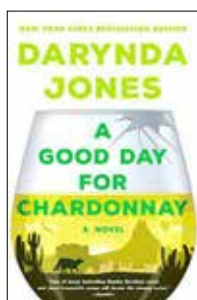
978-0-7278-5034-8

Ison, who died last December, rounds off the period procedural series starring Divisional DI Ernest Hardcastle by presenting his son with a brace of murders in the opening months of World

War II.

Whoever's been burglarizing the citizens of Kingston and Surbiton has made off with so few valuables that Deputy Assistant Commissioner Charles Marriott, Hardcastle's former sergeant, wonders if the intruder has been looking for something else. He plucks his old boss's son, DI Walter Hardcastle, from the Flying Squad, installs him as the new Divisional DI of Wandsworth Division, and presses him to look for a pattern beneath the break-ins. The stakes are abruptly raised when Frank and Helen Roper catch the burglar at work in their home and are shot dead for their trouble. But the patient, exhaustive inquiries launched by Hardcastle and his unit go nowhere—unlike Hitler's forces, who march into Poland, provoking England's belated declaration of war, and begin to menace England in a series of bombing attacks. The discovery of presumed Abwehr officer Konrad Fischer, who's pulled from the Thames still tangled in a parachute, seems promising but isn't. Months pass before cinema usherette/working girl Joyce Butler is bashed to death and one of her mates is strangled. The sprawling investigation continues to thresh through a cast of dozens, not one of whom comes to life. Nor (spoiler alert) do the murders turn out to be connected to one another. Don't you hate it when that happens?

A decidedly muted farewell to a long-running franchise.



A GOOD DAY FOR CHARDONNAY

Jones, Darynda

St. Martin's (400 pp.)

\$27.99 | Jul. 27, 2021

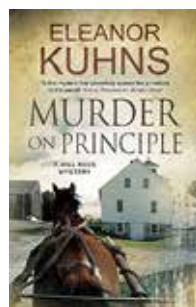
978-1-2502-3311-0

The continuing adventures of a conflicted New Mexico sheriff and her daughter, who's too smart for her own good.

Sunshine Vicram was abducted for five days as a teen and then, nine months later, delivered a daughter who's both the delight of her life and the bane of her existence. Sunshine's been in love with Levi Ravinder, her kidnapper's nephew, her whole life. Levi's risen above his family's criminal background to become a wealthy man, but unanswered questions about the kidnapping keep them apart. Because large chunks of her memory of the event are still missing, Sunshine's

still working to unearth her past even as she takes on cases plaguing the little town of Del Sol, the latest a near-fatal stabbing in which Levi intervened and was hit by the suspect's pickup truck. Sunshine doesn't know that the incident will give her a lead in the disappearance of a young boy, a case she worked while a police officer in Santa Fe. And she's not the only hard worker. Fifteen-year-old fireball Auri, who wants to be just like her mom, is scrutinizing an old woman she thinks is a serial killer. The investigation lands her and Cruz De Los Santos, the young man she loves, into deep trouble. Sunshine's past, present, and future are all at stake as she struggles to unravel a tangled web of deceit.

A hilarious amalgam of mystery, hot sex, and comedy of errors. Can't wait for the next episode.



MURDER ON PRINCIPLE

Kuhns, Eleanor

Severn House (224 pp.)

\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-7278-5007-2

As Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams battle for the presidency, slave catchers roam as far as Maine to ply a sordid but legal trade.

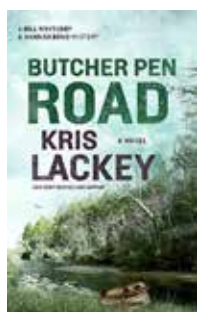
Weaver Will Rees, who's lent a hand to Constable Rouge in the past, can't refuse when Rouge asks for help investigating the murder of a man found in the woods by Brother Jonathan, Elder at Zion, during his search for a cow missing from the Shaker herd. Rouge, who runs an inn, knows the dead man as Randolph Gilbert, who's hunting escaped slaves. Rees has been no friend of slave catchers ever since he and his wife, Lydia, journeyed south to help his friend Tobias, a free Black man, rescue his wife, Ruth, who had been abducted by slave catchers and sold in Virginia. When they all returned to Maine, they brought with them Sandy, an escaped slave who could pass for White, and her baby, Abram. Soon Gilbert's boss, a vengeful young Southern lady, turns up with more slave catchers and a burning hatred for Sandy. Gilbert was strangled and stabbed but also had smallpox, a grave danger to the small community. The local doctor's nephew has recently returned from Edinburgh, where he learned to vaccinate with cowpox, and Rees inoculates his family with the aid of a friend who currently has cowpox. When Rouge falls ill, he begs Rees to take over his job. After a second slave catcher is murdered, Rees is caught between his abhorrence for the slave trade and his reverence for the law.

A complex mystery that focuses on the institutional racism still sadly ingrained in the nation's psyche.



"An impeccably written tale laced with humor and featuring unorthodox, believable detectives."

BUTCHER PEN ROAD



BUTCHER PEN ROAD

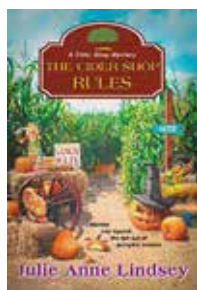
Lackey, Kris
Blackstone (208 pp.)
\$25.99 | Jul. 13, 2021
978-1-982689-27-8



A body found dead in a creek marks the beginning of a complex case for Chickasaw Lighthouse Police Sgt. Bill Maytubby.

Maytubby is far from your average cop. Educated in the classics at St. John's College in Santa Fe, where he also learned to fly planes, he's a health food-chomping advocate for tribal concerns. His favorite partner in detection is Johnston County Deputy Hannah Bond, an unusual woman herself. The dead man, who's wearing expensive fly-fishing gear that doesn't fit him, is discovered far from a public access area in a little creek on the property of Deborah Laber and her son, Jason, who's deaf and may have been a witness to the crime. Maytubby, an excellent tracker, finds large, smooth footprints at the scene and two marks of a wheeled cart ending near an old car with no belts or battery. Meanwhile, after wrecking her missing husband's truck, an intoxicated Tula Verner complains about her husband's affair to Maytubby and Hannah, and a man on disability hefts big blocks of stone to build a replica of Roman Jerusalem while trying to steal his neighbor's land. The state police push Maytubby and Hannah aside to concentrate on Tula when the dead man is identified as her husband, but the independent pair, undeterred, follow a trail leading to Texas and probable Medicare fraud. Deborah and Jason become targets and hide at Hannah's house while she and Maytubby pursue an oddly incompetent but deadly gang of criminals.

An impeccably written tale laced with humor and featuring unorthodox, believable detectives.



THE CIDER SHOP RULES

Lindsey, Julie Anne
Kensington (336 pp.)
\$8.99 paper | Jul. 27, 2021
978-1-4967-2351-2

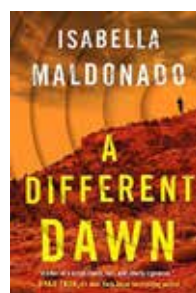
A shrewd West Virginia businesswoman's curiosity becomes life-threatening.

Winona Mae Montgomery saved her granny's orchard, built up her own cider shop and event business, and gained quite a reputation as a sleuth after helping

the new Blossom Valley sheriff solve several murders. Said sheriff is the object of her desire, but she's not sure if he returns her regard. Potter's Pumpkin Patch is having a jam-packed Fall Family Fun Day when Winnie and Dot, her bestie, arrive to pick up some decorations for her granny. A distracted Mr. Potter loads her order as they pay, and while they're in town for a sweet treat, they meet a Civil War reenactor who looks amazingly like Sheriff Colton Wise—whom Winnie calls when

she discovers Potter dead in the bed of her pickup. Blake Wise, Colton's younger brother, is another sheriff who pitches in to help and flirt with Winnie. Everyone but Colton thinks that Winnie should investigate, and she admits that she's addicted to crime-solving despite his reminders that she was almost killed during her first case. On top of this new crime, Colton's worried about Samuel Keller, a murderer he arrested who's now escaped and set his sights on Colton. In the course of the investigation, Winnie meets Colton's family and gets to know him so much better that not even the death threats she gets from Keller can quench her curiosity.

A down-home cozy with plenty of likable characters, budding romance, and a clever mystery.



A DIFFERENT DAWN

Maldonado, Isabella
Thomas & Mercer (363 pp.)
\$15.95 paper | Aug. 10, 2021
978-1-5420-2278-1

Nina Guerrero, the Warrior Girl of the FBI, is packed off with the rest of her unit to Phoenix to pursue a serial killer who evidently strikes once every four years.

Orthopedic surgeon Tom Doyle and his wife, ophthalmologist Meaghan Doyle, have been brutally murdered along with their infant daughter. What could the motive possibly be for a crime that's clearly been planned down to the last detail? The Llorona case, which takes its name from the Latino tale of La Llorona, the weeping woman who seeks revenge on her unfaithful husband by killing their children and herself, swiftly balloons into something even more sinister when Nina's team connects the crime to a remarkably similar series of triple fatalities—father, mother, baby daughter—that began 28 years ago in Phoenix before crisscrossing the country, every single one of them committed on Feb. 29. A data-driven search for clues identifies an obvious candidate for the role of the Leap Day killer, but when the team arrives to take him into custody, he's been murdered too, apparently by someone whose slow-moving calendar has suddenly lurched into overdrive. As if these complications weren't confounding enough, Nina, whose troubled early years already provided a pregnant backstory for her debut in *The Cipher* (2020), realizes that she has a much more personal connection to the Leap Day killer than she ever could have imagined.

A horrifying crime, cat-and-mouse detection, aha moments, and extended suspense, more or less in that order.



SCARRED

Oldham, Nick

Severn House (224 pp.)

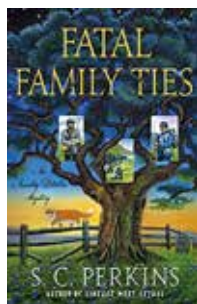
\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-7278-5014-0

Now that he's retired, DI Henry Christie finally gets a chance to close one of his very first cases.

It's 1985, and PC Christie is at the point of taking in Thomas Benemy, who's clearly shoplifting perfumes to order on a grand scale even though he's only 13, when he's coshed from behind and wakes up to find Tommy and his unidentified accomplice gone. Shortly after Henry pays a call on Trish Benemy, Tommy's hard-used mother, her son disappears, never to be seen again. The following year, Henry, now a newly minted Detective Constable, is called on the carpet as the likeliest person to have passed a pair of suspects in the abduction and murder of two children the tools they used to end their lives in the nick. It's not until 2020, when he signs a six-month contract to serve as a Civilian Investigator with the Blackpool CID's Cold Case Unit, that the threads begin to come together. First Henry gets to hear the scarifying source of the scars that disfigure the body of his sergeant, Debbie Blackstone. Then he learns of the suicide of Trish Benemy, which turns out to be murder. He and Blackstone close in on Ellis Clanfield, a serial rape suspect who has the same unusual tattoo that Henry remembers Tommy sporting, only to see him snatched from custody by sexy solicitor Hortense Thorogood. Incredible as it seems, things rapidly get even worse before all the loose ends (and there are many) are tied up.

An episodic, felony-strewn stroll down Memory Lane.



FATAL FAMILY TIES

Perkins, S.C.

Minotaur (336 pp.)

\$26.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-2507-8964-8

A Texas-based genealogist takes on a deadly case.

Self-employed genealogist Lucy Lancaster is enjoying her renewed relationship with FBI Special Agent Ben Turner when a former colleague shows up with a problem. Camilla Braithwaite is not Lucy's favorite person. Abrasive and snarky, she and her two acolytes made Lucy's life miserable when she worked at a university library. Now a journal has published an article accusing Camilla's well-respected ancestor Charles Edward Braithwaite of being a coward and deserter who lied about his Civil War service. Camilla wants Lucy to prove the charges false. Lucy agrees to take the job and begins researching—a tough job, as Civil War records are notoriously spotty. Camilla's family is even facing a frivolous lawsuit by a family who claims that money spent entertaining Charles

ruined them financially. The family tree is widely spread, and the branch belonging to Charles' daughter is hard to track down. But Lucy perseveres in hope of finding part of an ugly triptych that's a family treasure. Camilla owns one panel. Another belongs to her Uncle Charlie, who by accident discovers under the nondescript panel a stunning depiction of a battlefield. Lucy asks her friend Helen Kim, an art restorer, to take a look at it, but Uncle Charlie is smothered and the panel stolen before Lucy can pick it up. Fortunately, Ben has time off and can help Lucy with what turns out to be a most dangerous search.

Genealogists and history buffs will delight in the minutiae of this torturous tale of hate and greed.



WHEN ALL LIGHT FAILS

Silvis, Randall

Poisoned Pen (400 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | Aug. 3, 2021

978-1-72822-358-2

Lovers and former Pennsylvania State Troopers Ryan DeMarco and Jayme Matson work to establish the paternity of a child no one's much wanted until now, when she's wanted in all the wrong ways.

The sudden, violent resolution of the cliffhanger ending of *No Woods So Dark as These* (2020) leaves DeMarco, Jayme, and State Trooper Daniella Flores licking the very different wounds they received in the encounter and Silvis in no hurry to present them with a new case. When a client does approach them to do some private investigation, his request seems almost timid. District Court Judge Emeritus J.D. Morrison has gotten a letter from 9-year-old Emmaline Barrie of Branch Township, Michigan, asking whether he's her father. Could DeMarco discreetly procure a DNA sample from Emma so that Morrison, who'd never heard of her before, can determine which of the three men who'd spent an eventful night with Jennifer Barrie 10 years ago is her father? DeMarco accepts the case, packs his RV, and heads with Jayme to Michigan, where they're both entranced by the girl, whose mother's rapid decline from suspected Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease has sent her to the hospital, where she's in a medically induced coma, and left her daughter in the custody of her irresponsible, alcoholic Grandma Loey. But because they're more and more troubled by the judge's demand that they keep their mission secret in order to avoid compromising the three candidates for fatherhood, DeMarco decides to cancel his agreement with Morrison and go to work pro bono to answer the same question on Emma's behalf. It's a bighearted decision with disastrous consequences.

A soulful, deeply felt story less invested in the mystery at hand than in the mysteries of the universe.

“A series kickoff that augurs well for more juicy Chaucer escapades.”

THE KNIGHT'S TALE



GRAVEYARD FIELDS

Tingle, Steven

Crooked Lane (288 pp.)

\$26.99 | Aug. 10, 2021

978-1-64385-686-5

A Charleston cop-turned-private eye desperate to put the big city behind him buries himself in picturesque Cruso, North Carolina, and finds that crime and danger are just as plentiful in God's country.

A disagreement at gunpoint with his brother-in-law, Sgt. Greg Evans of the Charleston PD, has made Davis Reed persona non grata with his landlady and sister, Laura, whose husband he left in a coma, and made him yearn for an unspoiled place where he can roost undisturbed and write a book about the 1946 crash of a B-25 airplane into the side of Cold Mountain. He rents a cabin from Haywood County Sheriff's Deputy Dale Johnson, who shares his taste in home-brew and heavy metal, but he's still plagued by his need for Xanax chased by beer and his anger-management issues. When Reed finds a set of keys along a mountain trail, he's determined to restore them to their owner, who seems to be remarkably reluctant to claim them. While he's waiting, he befriends mechanic Floppy Johnson, whose grandfather claimed to have found a chest of gold near the crash site. He strikes up a possible romance with improbably named bar owner Diana Ross. And he gets on the wrong side of both Deputy Skeeter Norris and his boss, Sheriff Royce Byrd. First-timer Tingle deftly evokes both a very particular sense of place and his hero's irritated inability to finish anything he starts, though Reed's limitations as a sleuth—his habit of trusting all the wrong people gives a new dimension to Dale's question, “You don't get around to much, do ya?”—make him a better companion than leader.

A beer- and pill-soaked idyll whose hero seems equally unlikely to succeed as a novelist or a detective.



THE KNIGHT'S TALE

Trow, M.J.

Severn House (224 pp.)

\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-1-78029-135-2

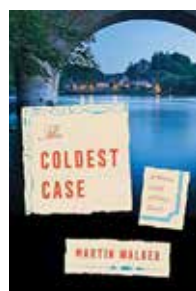
Geoffrey Chaucer turns sleuth to solve the murder of the Duke of Clarence.

In the middle of the 14th century, the well-educated Chaucer, not yet a renowned poet, earns a comfortable living as Comptroller of the King's Wool-lens. When Lionel, the Duke of Clarence,

suddenly dies, Sir Richard Glanville summons Chaucer to court to assist with the funeral arrangements. Lionel had already received a bit of unearned notoriety as the brother of Edward the Black Prince. Now Chaucer arrives to find a bizarre circle of mourners, including Lionel's viperish widow, Lady Violante;

her brother, Giovanni Visconti; and Lionel's new chaplain, Clement, whom no one much likes. It seems also that gold digger Blanche Vickers paid Lionel a visit on the afternoon of his death. Chaucer's dim initial view of this group is confirmed when he visits salty washerwoman Joyce, an old friend brimming with court gossip. When Joyce takes custody of Lionel's beloved wolfhound and gives Ankarette some of Lionel's wine, as he was wont to do, the dog dies. Chaucer's realization that Lionel was poisoned turns the circle of mourners into a rogues' gallery of suspects he investigates with the help of Glanville and Joyce. Trow, whose Kit Marlowe stories have proven his ability to make historic characters feel contemporary and relatable, drops names like Becket, Canterbury, and John of Gaunt as if they were modern celebrities and gives his second-string historic characters vivid personalities. Another murder adds urgency to the investigation.

A series kickoff that augurs well for more juicy Chaucer escapades.



THE COLDEST CASE

Walker, Martin

Knopf (336 pp.)

\$25.99 | Aug. 3, 2021

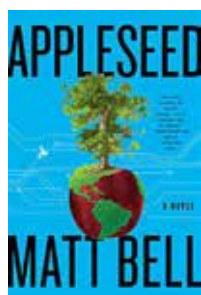
978-0-525-65667-8

St. Denis chief of police Bruno Courreges helps his mentor solve a case that's puzzled him for decades.

Chief Detective Jalipeau, known to his closest friends as J-J, keeps a skull on his desk in the South of France. Not as a memento mori but as a reminder that as far as he's risen, there's still one case—his first—that he's been unable to solve. Then Bruno gets a brain wave. While looking at displays of Neanderthals in the local museum, he wonders: Why can't whoever restored these primitive folk help J-J reconstruct Oscar, as he calls his bony souvenir? Bruno tracks down anthropologist Elisabeth Daynès, who recommends Virginie, a graduate student who's ready for a new challenge. While Virginie is hard at work re-creating Oscar's musculature, Bruno has a second idea. Why not trace Oscar's DNA through modern data banks? He quickly gets a hit and just as quickly hits a wall. Oscar had a son, a soldier named Louis Castignac, who was recently killed in action in Mali. As Castignac's half sister, Sabine, who happens to be a gendarme, helps Bruno try to figure out who her brother's biological father was, Bruno deals with a host of other entanglements. His cousin Alain is getting married. His basset hound, Balzac, has just sired a litter, and he wants to choose two perfect homes for the puppies he will receive as a stud fee. His journalist friends Gilles and Jacqueline have caused a stir by publishing articles about the Rosenholz dossier, a secret document containing names of French agents who worked for the Stasi. Perhaps most urgent, drought has threatened St. Denis with wildfires, and Bruno must band together with the other villagers to protect their farms and their homes.

An overdose of subplots blunts the impact of the main event.

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY



APPLESEED

Bell, Matt

Custom House/Morrow (480 pp.)

\$27.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-06-304014-4

An epic novel about saving the planet that blends science fiction, mythology, and techno-thriller.

The third novel by Bell considers the Earth's fragility from three perspectives. One thread, set in the late 1700s, fol-

lows Nathaniel and Chapman, two half brothers planting apple trees across Ohio. A second is set in the near-ish future as global warming has become irreversible except for a massive corporation's plan to cool the Earth by clouding the lower atmosphere. The third is set in a far-future ice age as a cyborg heads to Black Mountain, near what was once Las Vegas, on a quest to "reset" the Earth. That's all ambitious enough in itself, but Bell adds a lot of symbolic freight to underscore the interconnectedness of humans and nature. Chapman, for instance, is a faun, capable of shifting from human form to that of a hooved satyr-like creature; the cyborg, C-433 (named for how many times it has regenerated itself), is a glitchy mix of humanoid and tree. In the near-future narrative, the Earth-cooling effort is led by megacorporation Earthtrust, which has purchased the western half of the United States and filled the east with indentured-servitude farms built on the biomass it's hoarded. That section of the novel is the weakest and most rote, featuring Earthtrust's leader and her former lover-turned-revolutionary engaging in potted debates about climate ethics. Still, Bell is gifted with the kind of imagination that avoids predictable apocalyptic fiction; you root for C-433 to succeed as a person, even if it's not quite a person. Bell cleverly combines the novel's plot threads in the book's late stages, and despite the elliptical structure, his central message hits home: The world as we know it is past saving if we need a monopolist to save it.

A flawed but admirably big-thinking attempt to make readers rethink climate and climate fiction.



THE ICE LION

Gear, Kathleen O'Neal

DAW/Berkley (304 pp.)

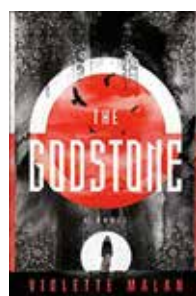
\$26.00 | Jun. 15, 2021

978-0-7564-1584-6

Prehistoric young warrior Quiller must choose between helping her best friend, Lynx, survive his spirit quest in the glacial wilderness or saving her newly formed family from the Rust People.

When lions attack Lynx's camp, leaving only him alive, Quiller must convince the Sealion People elders that Lynx is not a coward who abandoned his people—for which the punishment is death. Nightbreaker, the lions' giant and unusually intelligent pride leader, seems to have protected Lynx during the attack, so Quiller argues that he must be a spirit helper with a quest for Lynx. Maybe he's even the mysterious old man who appeared during and after the attack, in a different form. Her ploy works, and the elders abandon Lynx on the Ice Giants, huge glaciers, to seek Nightbreaker's guidance or die trying. Lynx has never been good at hunting or battle, so Quiller promises to defy the elders and help him. Before she can, she finds four children in an enemy village ravaged by disease and predators. After adopting the Rust People children, she must choose between finding Lynx or protecting her new family. Meanwhile, despite almost dying several times, Lynx finds the mysterious old man Dr. John Arakie. He shows Lynx there's truth to the old stories about gods leaving Earth and disappearing underground when the ice came but needs Lynx to become part of the story for humanity to survive. Gear brings her vast knowledge of prehistoric cultures to this climate-fiction tale with beautiful and engaging worldbuilding. However, there are many seemingly contradictory and confusing details that may make it hard for readers to find their footing early on. Just enough hints and promises of revelation are doled out—often in exposition thinly disguised as “there's an old story that says...”—to make readers hang on for answers. However, the big reveal after the slow and meandering buildup isn't much of a surprise and only adds more unanswered questions—all to set up a sequel.

A loose, beautiful tapestry of a tale that would be more satisfying if woven tighter.



THE GODSTONE

Malan, Violette

DAW/Berkley (304 pp.)

\$27.00 | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-7564-1627-0

Only a cabinetmaker and a healer can prevent total destruction. Luckily, neither is who they say they are.

When Arlyn gets the letter asking him to come help open his late cousin's vault, he knows something is wrong.

"Warmth and humor leaven an emotionally intense romance."

INCENSE AND SENSIBILITY

For one thing, Arlyn doesn't believe Xandra is dead. And even if he were, he'd never want his vault opened because there's something dangerous inside. So Arlyn must go to the City and secure the vault. His friend Fenra, a healer, will go with him—and try to uncover what Arlyn isn't telling her about this artifact he claims is powerful enough to un-Make the world. Not to mention how he knows so much about practitioners when most mundanes know, and notice, next to nothing about their magic. Both Arlyn and Fenra have plenty of secrets, and as they travel toward this confrontation, we gradually learn who they really are and what's truly at stake. Malan does out the details of this fascinating world sparingly, keeping the reader engaged in the many mysteries, including why and how the level of technology seems to change as the travelers move through different Modes along the Road. Well-drawn characters and a quest that's eventually revealed to be as epic as they come add depth to the story, but the standout here is this strange, highly original world. Exposition is so minimal that it does take a while to really understand what's at stake, but the unusual worldbuilding and air of mystery are enough to draw the reader in.

An original, enigmatic fantasy about reluctant heroes drawn into a quest to save the world.

easily takes to village living, winning over everyone she meets, and the chemistry between them continues to blossom. Once they arrive in London, though, the social distance between them is too great for any further relationship even though they ache to be together. Caldwell's examination of the gray areas in the Regency class system has its appeal, and Rafe and Edwina are well-developed examples of the ways in which the rules of the time could be flexible, if only in the hands of the powerful. Rafe's conflicting motivations and the chemistry between the hero and heroine are both well drawn, though at times the plot can feel a bit paint-by-numbers. Still, it's a perfectly serviceable Regency that will satisfy Caldwell's fans, who can look forward to future entries in the All the Duke's Sins series.

A Regency featuring two workaday characters.



INCENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Dev, Sonali

Morrow/HarperCollins (400 pp.)

\$15.99 paper | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-06-305180-5

An ambitious politician is forced to examine his past when trauma sends him to a scrupulously honest yoga instructor for help.

Indian American gubernatorial candidate Yash Raje is in the throes of a closely contested campaign in California when a rally is derailed by bigotry and violence. Yash escapes relatively unscathed, but when he learns that Abdul, his bodyguard and friend, continues to battle for his life in the hospital, he is too numb and shaken to resume work. Since he clearly needs help, his family recommends yoga therapist and stress management coach India Dashwood. But meeting each other is bound to be painful for India and Yash: After a night of deeply personal and intense exchanges a decade ago, their fledgling relationship ended abruptly. Although India has a lot on her plate, her natural generosity and Yash's obvious plight mean that she cannot turn him away. As India gently prods him into reconciling with a traumatic past, Yash begins to see his present with sharp clarity. But he must make some hard decisions before he can create the future he has envisioned. The third installment in Dev's series of modern-day Jane Austen adaptations revolving around the Rajes, an aristocratic Indian family, is a riff on *Sense and Sensibility*. Yash and India are consistently endearing in their commitment to creating an egalitarian and empathetic world: India is steadily compassionate but refuses to be a pushover while Yash's burning ambition has not charred his emotional core. Dev demonstrates a sharp understanding of privilege as she tackles the issues of racism and social justice. But this acuity renders her erasure of caste politics, especially as she references Hindu mythology, especially stark.

Warmth and humor leaven an emotionally intense romance.

ROMANCE



ALONG CAME A LADY

Caldwell, Christi

Berkley (336 pp.)

\$7.99 paper | Aug. 24, 2021

978-0-593334-91-1

Two by-blows fall in love on the fringes of the ton.

For many years, the Duke of Bentley has ignored his three illegitimate children, and they're fine with that, especially his oldest son, Rafe Audley. Rafe has made an honest living for himself

in Staffordshire as a foreman in the coal mines, taking pride in providing for his siblings and the men who work for him, and he chooses to ignore the sudden rush of men sent by the Duke to bring him to London. But he can't ignore the latest messenger: Miss Edwina Dalrymple. Not only is she a woman, but she's more stubborn than anyone he's ever met. And with good reason: She herself is secretly a bastard and only maintains her precarious place in the world by training the children of nobility to prepare for their entrance into "Polite Society." There's no way she's going to give up her chance to win the approval, and ample payment, of a duke and his new duchess. After realizing she won't be easily run off—and having a few steamy moments with her—Rafe agrees to return to London with Edwina if she can learn to fit into Staffordshire first. To his surprise, she



SO WE MEET AGAIN

Park, Suzanne

Avon/HarperCollins (368 pp.)

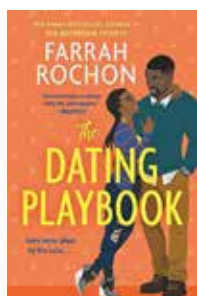
\$15.99 paper | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-06-299071-6

A young professional finds her life drastically upended when she loses her job and is forced to move back home with her parents only to find inspiration from her former childhood rival.

Jessica Kim has been putting in her dues at her thankless Wall Street job for a while now, but when she's unceremoniously fired (over Zoom, no less), she has to give up her lease and move back to her hometown of Nashville and in with her parents. Of course, right when life seems to be at its lowest is when she unexpectedly encounters Daniel Choi, a former classmate and pastor's son now all grown up and working as a successful lawyer. The lingering tension between them isn't entirely rooted in old competitive tendencies, either. When Daniel gives Jess the idea for a new professional endeavor—livestreaming Korean cooking tutorials—she hardly expects that her mother will crash the party or that their on-camera dynamic will become an overnight viral sensation. But as Jess' channel skyrockets in popularity, she'll have to decide what's worth prioritizing: family and the guy she might be falling for or building her brand. Jess' career success is achieved rather quickly, and she surmounts the limited obstacles a bit too easily, but the plot is packed with mirth and mouthwatering meal descriptions, and the book addresses the heavier subjects of workplace sexism and racism with deftness and care. Ultimately, the relationships, both romantic and familial, are what make this novel such a satisfying experience.

A charming contemporary romance with heart, humor, and home cooking.



THE DATING PLAYBOOK

Rochon, Farrah

Forever (384 pp.)

\$15.99 paper | Aug. 17, 2021

978-1-5387-1667-0

An injured football player hoping to return to the NFL falls in love with his personal trainer.

Jamar Dixon was the star of his high school and college football teams, but a devastating knee injury cut his NFL career short in his first season. Although some doctors predicted he would never play again, Jamar is determined to prove them wrong. He hires Taylor Powell, an independent personal trainer, to get him into shape. Jamar hopes to keep his dreams of a big, splashy return a secret for as long as possible. Taylor knows fitness and nutrition, but she can't land the jobs she wants without a college degree. Working with Jamar is the opportunity of a lifetime, and Taylor hopes the prestige of

working with an NFL player will eventually boost her flailing business into solvency. Taylor and Jamar pretend to be dating to keep the plan under wraps, but their training sessions and fake dates only amplify their explosive chemistry. Rochon creates realistic and interesting personal dilemmas for each character while still keeping the romance front and center. Jamar's best friend died in high school, and he still carries grief and guilt for his role in the tragedy. Taylor struggles with financial insecurity, which she keeps secret out of shame and the fear of disappointing her high-powered family. The romance between the two is charming and well developed. They are well matched as competitors and workout partners, but it's her emotional care of his wounded soul and his staunch support of her dreams that make them winning partners.

This football romance is a total knockout: funny, sexy, and full of heart.



NONFICTION



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

THE ESSENTIAL KERNER COMMISSION REPORT

Ed. by Jelani Cobb with Matthew Guariglia 58

SAVED BY A SONG *by Mary Gauthier* 60

BLACK BOX *by Shiori Ito; trans. by Allison Markin Powell* 67

CARRY ON *by John Lewis* 72

THE AMERICAN WAR IN AFGHANISTAN *by Carter Malkasian*... 73

DEMOCRACY RULES *by Jan-Werner Müller* 74

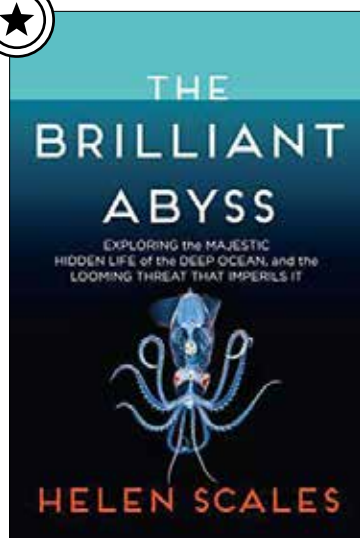
PASTORAL SONG *by James Rebanks* 76

TILL THE END *by C.C. Sabathia with Chris Smith* 77

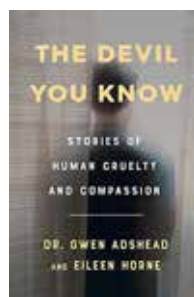
THE BRILLIANT ABYSS *by Helen Scales* 78

THE MAN WHO HATED WOMEN *by Amy Sohn* 79

COMMITTED *by Adam Stern* 80



THE BRILLIANT ABYSS
*Exploring the Majestic
Hidden Life of the Deep
Ocean and the Looming
Threat That Imperils It*
Scales, Helen
Atlantic Monthly
(288 pp.)
\$27.00 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-0-8021-5822-2



THE DEVIL YOU KNOW
*Stories of Human Cruelty
and Compassion*

Adshead, Gwen & Horne, Eileen

Scribner (320 pp.)

\$28.00 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-982134-79-2

A physician recounts stories from her years at Broadmoor, Britain's premier psychiatric institution.

Over a working life of more than 30 years, Adshead has served patients at Broadmoor, a place with "a history of housing some of the UK's most notorious violent criminals." As in the U.S., mental health facilities in Britain have been starved of funds in recent years, and those violent criminals are shut away instead in ordinary prisons, where they become predators and prey. Writing with Horne, Adshead notes that 70% of prisoners in the U.K. "are estimated to have at least two mental health issues, ranging from depression to substance misuse and addiction or psychosis." While most people with mental health issues are not criminals, those who are often pose difficulties in securing treatment and taking medications. Before delivering a series of sometimes-discomfiting case studies of serial murder, child abuse, infanticide, and other horrific acts, Adshead observes that nations that have experienced military occupation, such as Norway and Holland, have been the most progressive in treatment of the mentally ill, perhaps because they consider mentally ill criminals to be ill first and criminals second. The protagonists of her case studies would seem to fit this description, though dark passages abound—e.g., an inmate who seemed to be on the path to recovery but committed suicide: "Ian had been unable to come to terms with himself, and in his mind, death became his best or only option." Adshead's interest is not lurid, though there are lurid episodes, and her overarching goal is to secure more funding for better treatment. "I wish for my psychiatric great-grandchildren to look back on this period as if revisiting medieval times...[which] did little to help people fix or rediscover their minds, inside and outside of institutions."

A welcome contribution to the literature of crime and rehabilitation.

Nonfiction Summer Reads for Everyone

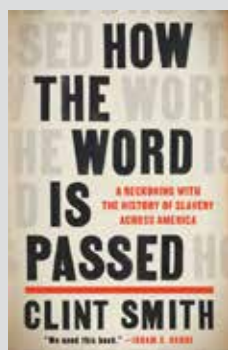
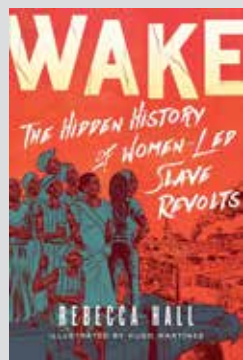


With the summer season approaching, it's time to shed our blankets, sweatpants, and creative Zoom backgrounds and emerge from our collective pandemic slumber. What better way to soak in the sun while remaining socially distanced than reading a book outside? Here are eight nonfiction books to appeal to many reading tastes, from current affairs and politics to nature

on land and in the sea. All quotes come from the starred Kirkus reviews.

The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America by Carol Anderson (Bloomsbury, June 1): "The author of *White Rage* (2016) returns with a powerful consideration of the Second Amendment as a deliberately constructed instrument of White supremacy....An urgent, novel interpretation of a foundational freedom that, the author makes clear, is a freedom only for some."

Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts by Rebecca Hall; illustrated by Hugo Martínez (Simon & Schuster, June 1): "A vividly illustrated account of Black women rebels that combines elements of memoir, archival research, and informed imaginings of its subjects' lives....The black-and-white illustrations nicely complement the text and elevate the artfulness and the power of the book, which begins and ends with scenes depicting women-led revolts aboard a ship Hall calls the *Unity*."



How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America by Clint Smith III (Little, Brown, June 1): "A Black journalist and poet calls for a reconsideration of the way America teaches its history of slavery....For this book, the author traveled to nine sites, eight in the U.S. and one in Dakar, Senegal, 'to understand how each reckons with its relationship to the history of American slavery.' The result is a devastating portrait with unforgettable details....A brilliant, vital work."

The Plague Year: America in the Time of Covid by Lawrence Wright (Knopf, June 8): "In his characteristically rigorous and engrossing style, Wright documents innumerable episodes of ineptitude and malfeasance....Maddening and so-

bering—as comprehensive an account of the first year of the pandemic as we've yet seen."

What White People Can Do Next: From Allyship to Coalition by Emma Dabiri (Perennial/HarperCollins, June 22): "In this follow-up to her excellent debut, *Twisted* (2020), Dabiri once again pulls no punches, offering a sharp, relevant critique and deconstruction of racial categorizations, particularly the common assumption of White people as the default norm....A must-read for anyone seeking to be an agent of much-needed societal change."



The Sound of the Sea: Seashells and the Fate of the Oceans by Cynthia Barnett (Norton, July 6): "In this well-researched, consistently illuminating work, the author smoothly combines environmental science and cultural history to trace the origins and decline of mollusks....The author also takes us around the world" in this "absolutely captivating nature book."

Seek You: A Journey Through American Loneliness by Kristen Radtke (Pantheon, July 6): "Radtke's second graphic memoir feels almost custom-made for the social-distancing era: She explores our need for connection and touch and the negative social and personal effects of isolation. But the book is a much broader and deeply affecting study of loneliness, uncovering the host of ways our craving for community manifests itself in ways that are sometimes quirky and sometimes terrifying....Superb."



Pastoral Song: A Farmer's Journey by James Rebanks (Cushman House/Morrow, Aug. 3): "A beautifully written elegy to traditional farmers and farming methods....Guided by the knowledge passed down by his family and recent advances in sustainable technology, the author continues his journey, slowly salvaging his tiny corner of the world to create a legacy for his children and the future. A lovely cautionary tale filled with pride, hope, and respect for the land and its history."

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.

"A damning political polemic of a controversial administration mired in failed leadership."

THE PRINCE



PHOSPHORESCENCE *A Memoir of Finding Joy When Your World Goes Dark*

Baird, Julia

Random House (320 pp.)

\$27.00 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-593-23691-8

A cancer diagnosis sparks a journalist's quest for awe and wonder.

Nothing forces a reevaluation of the meaning of life more than the distinct possibility of death, which is what happened to Sydney-based journalist Baird. "In the vortex of cancer," she writes, "all other sounds drown out, and you hear only the beating of your heart, the drawing of your own breath, the uncertainty of your footfalls." In these philosophical ruminations, Baird explores how sickness and trauma can create a kinship with others in similar circumstances, allowing us to move forward despite all the pain, fear, and anxiety. Writing about her love of swimming in the ocean, she explains the awe of seeing phosphorescence in the water and compares the experience to our own internal light, which keeps us going at our darkest hours. She discusses how some people are inherently good and emit a joyfulness that makes them "glow" and how scientists have begun studying the source of happiness in our bodies. "Life is tempestuous and life is precious," writes the author, "and recognizing that those two are twinned is part of the secret of the truly phosphorescent." Among the dozens of other topics she addresses throughout this emotional, introspective book: how exposure to nature is essential for our health; the profundity of experiencing awe ("Awe can fuel adrenaline, but it is the result of more than danger, risk, and speed: It is about witnessing something spectacular and rare"); the importance of quiet in our lives; and why the stories of women, people of color, and the LGBTQ+ communities are as vital as those involving White men. Baird skillfully intertwines her personal journey with some research and scientific data, constructing a backdrop for these reflections that readers can apply to their own journeys. It's impossible to read this book and not sense a shift in one's thinking about happiness, joy, and a range of other emotions.

Graceful, expressive meditations on many of life's intangibles.



THE PRINCE *Andrew Cuomo, Coronavirus, and the Fall of New York*

Barkan, Ross

OR Books (200 pp.)

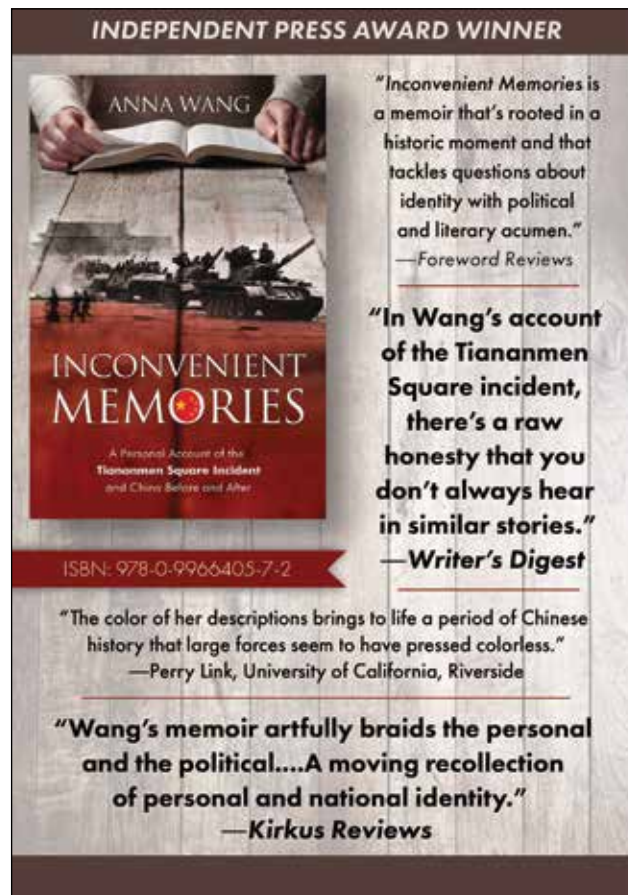
\$20.00 paper | Jun. 22, 2021

978-1-68219-410-2

The heights and depths of a tumultuous governorship.

In this corrective to Cuomo's cherry-picked account of his (mis)management,

American Crisis, veteran journalist Barkan, who has covered Cuomo as a journalist at City Hall for eight years, urgently chronicles the governor's crushing fall from grace amid the relentlessly grim backdrop of the virus. In lucid, declarative prose, the author cites numerous incidents that have contributed to the deterioration of Cuomo's administration, beginning with a State Attorney General's report in early 2021 demonstrating that "his Department of Health had severely undercounted nursing home deaths." This contradicted previous declarations that New York was at forefront of Covid-19 containment. Then came allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct from six women, including several former aides. Barkan dissects the Covid fiasco in a clear timeline showing the spread of the virus across America on the heels of the Trump impeachment proceedings. The author acknowledges that though the governor would never be as beloved as his father, Mario, he garnered widespread admiration for his initial "management" of the growing pandemic. Dubbing his subject a "deft tactician," Barkan recounts Cuomo's early disbelief in the lethality of the virus, before he enforced strict quarantine measures



INDEPENDENT PRESS AWARD WINNER

ANNA WANG

"Inconvenient Memories is a memoir that's rooted in a historic moment and that tackles questions about identity with political and literary acumen."
—Foreword Reviews

"In Wang's account of the Tiananmen Square incident, there's a raw honesty that you don't always hear in similar stories."
—Writer's Digest

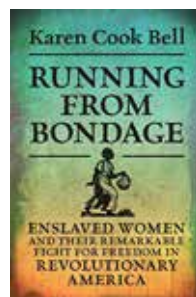
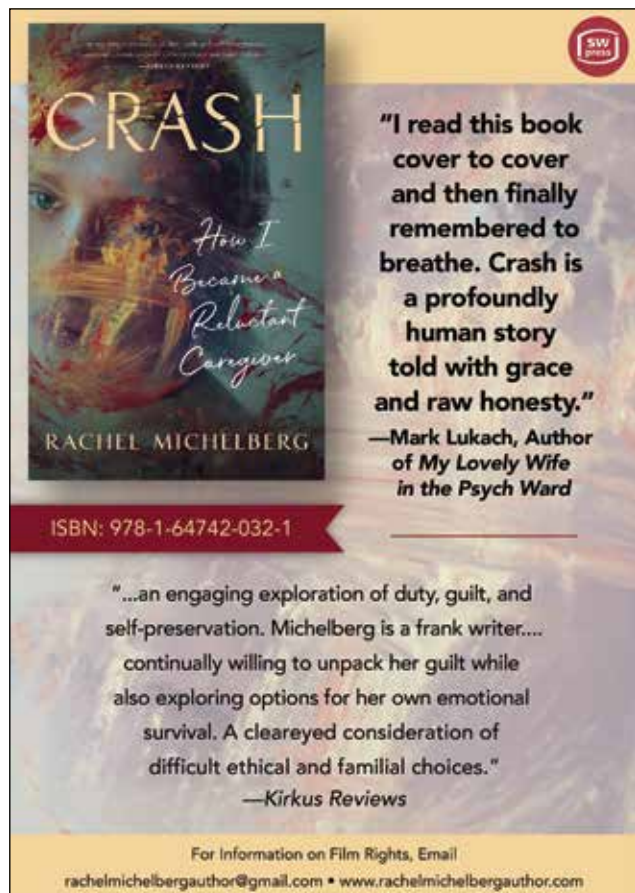
ISBN: 978-0-9966405-7-2

"The color of her descriptions brings to life a period of Chinese history that large forces seem to have pressed colorless."
—Perry Link, University of California, Riverside

"Wang's memoir artfully braids the personal and the political....A moving recollection of personal and national identity."
—Kirkus Reviews

as infections skyrocketed. His attempts at damage control—e.g., touting minimal infection rates and low elderly mortality counts during press briefings—backfired, however, as a federal probe discovered startling statistics that contradicted Cuomo’s proclamations. In conclusion, the author digs further back into the administration to reveal missteps he believes directly contributed to the catastrophe, including deep cuts in health care spending, tax hikes, and the closings of “hospitals that could have treated patients in the outer reaches of New York City as the coronavirus first struck.” Based on original reporting and expansive interviews, this slim, scathing book convincingly debunks Cuomo’s “false narrative of triumph” and, in exacting detail, reveals the corrupt side of present-day New York government.

A damning political polemic of a controversial administration mired in failed leadership.



RUNNING FROM BONDAGE Enslaved Women and Their Remarkable Fight for Freedom in Revolutionary America

Bell, Karen Cook

Cambridge Univ. (224 pp.)

\$24.95 | Jul. 1, 2021

978-1-108-83154-3

Addressing the historical “silence” around Black enslaved women fugitives.

In a scholarly study derived from meticulous research, historian Bell digs deeply into advertisements for fugitive slaves that appeared in periodicals across Colonial America. In addition, she picks through an impressively varied set of other relevant primary sources “such as petitions, letters, county books, parish records, official correspondence, diaries, and plantation records,” seeking “to restore human dignity to a group of persons who have long been denied their dignity.” In a five-part study, each presenting an actual case of a fugitive woman slave, the author moves chronologically, beginning in pre-Revolutionary America, and she shows how slaves gradually responded in greater numbers to the increasingly vocal rhetoric of emancipation and fled their enslavers, in both the North and the South. The most instances of fugitive flight occurred at the height of the Revolution, writes the author, “due to the breakdown of oversight and state authority.” Many fled to the British side as a result of Lord Dunmore’s Proclamation of November 1775 as well as the Philipsburg Proclamation issued by British Army Gen. Sir Henry Clinton in June 1779, both of which “offered freedom to slaves who would aid the Loyalist cause.” The author extracts these inspiring stories from the text of the advertisements, which revealed physical and personality characteristics of the women as well as details about clothing and companions. The charts and statistics demonstrate a host of sobering facts—e.g., that despite the Revolutionary rhetoric and growing “anti-slavery sentiment,” the number of slaves in the U.S. Colonies doubled from 1760 (325,000) to 1790 (698,000). Ultimately, Bell effectively situates Black enslaved women’s flight into the larger narrative of slave resistance, providing a useful addition to the academic literature that may find a narrow audience among early American history buffs.

Scholarly, to be sure, but the author’s archival excavation is to be commended.



I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ME A Memoir

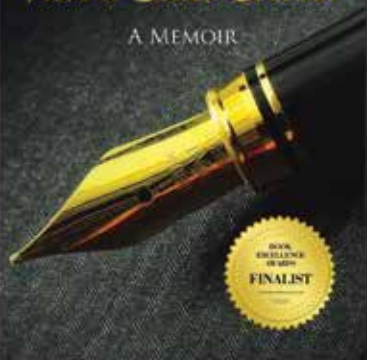
Brady-Davis, Precious
Topple/Little A (266 pp.)
\$15.99 | Jul. 1, 2021
978-1-5420-4430-1

A memoir from an “effeminate” Black boy who survived a dysfunctional childhood and adolescence to emerge into a life of “Black excellence” as a proud trans woman.

Brady-Davis grew up as a biracial, gender-nonconforming boy in Omaha. He was 2 years old when his birth mother, Tammy, lost custody of him and two siblings due to neglect. An extended series of stays with relatives and foster parents ensured a tumultuous adolescence. Church services and youth groups offered some consolation until he was called out on his apparent homosexual leanings during a Pentecostal service. Although he enjoyed “boy” activities such as kickball, he was also drawn

to “brazen acts of femininity” such as wearing women’s shoes. In high school, his “queerness and penchant for performance” led him to theater and leadership groups focused on social justice issues, both of which he embraced fully. “I allowed myself to be more than just one version of myself,” writes the author. “I refused to uphold tenets of faith that prescribed bigotry.” Now identifying as Precious, the author found herself in community service, the drag community, and LGBTQ+ groups. Declaring drag not “the only way to express my feminine gender-nonconforming identity,” Precious began living as an out trans woman in Chicago, working in HIV prevention and as a coordinator for homeless youth. By 25, in “full blossom as a trans woman,” she was directing a full portfolio of diversity initiatives at Columbia College Chicago. Meeting Myles Brady, a trans man and outreach worker for trans youth, “shattered” her preconceptions of Black masculinity. They became a “power couple” in their trans community and married in 2016. In an epilogue set three years later, the author chronicles how they became pregnant through in vitro fertilization, and they took part in a TV special about trans pregnancy. Now in a new position at the Sierra Club, the

Defining Moments of a Free Man from a Black Stream A MEMOIR



ISBN-13: 978-1948820703

“Throughout this inspiring, skillfully crafted chronicle, Douglas emerges again and again as a man who approaches problems with equal measures of logic and concern for others....His vibrant memoir will undoubtedly serve as a beacon of hope and a source of motivation to those of any race or nationality who seek a clear pathway upward.”

—Barbara Bamberger Scott, RECOMMENDED by the *US Review*

“An often bracing reflection on racial discrimination and bias.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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"A substantive contribution to the history of psychology."

THE ORPHANS OF DAVENPORT

author is a shining example of a proud Black trans woman, celebrating genderqueerness in her work and personal lives.

An inspiring memoir of nonconformity.



F*CK IT, I'LL START TOMORROW

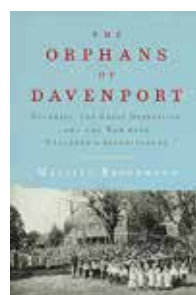
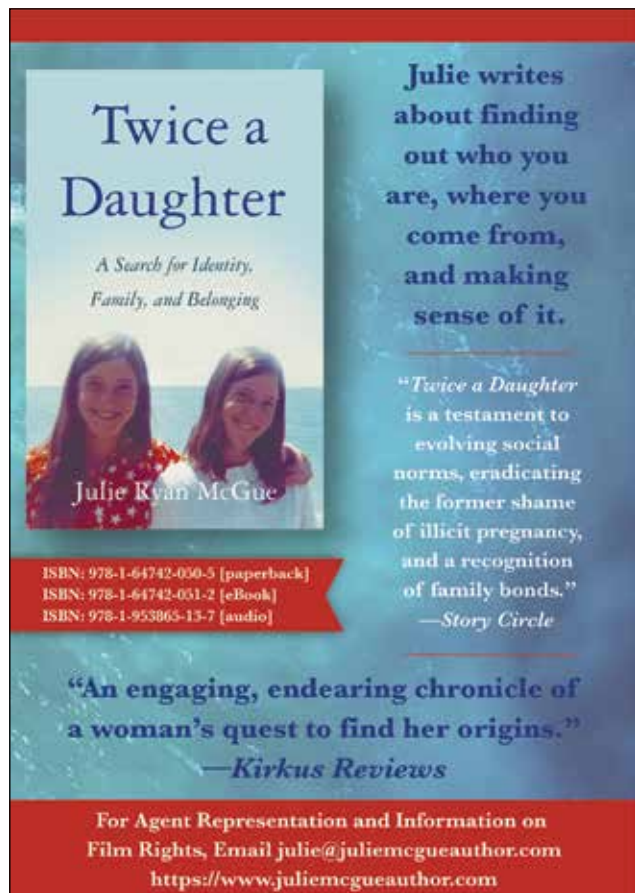
Bronson, Action
Photos by Stephens, Bonnie
Abrams (184 pp.)
\$26.00 | Apr. 20, 2021
978-1-4197-4478-5

The chef, rapper, and TV host serves up a blustery memoir with lashings of self-help.

"I've always had a sick confidence," writes Bronson, ne Ariyan Arslani. The confidence, he adds, comes from numerous sources: being a New Yorker, and more specifically a New Yorker from Queens; being "short and fucking

husky" and still game for a standoff on the basketball court; having strength, stamina, and seemingly no fear. All these things serve him well in the rough-and-tumble youth he describes, all stickball and steroids. Yet another confidence-builder: In the big city, you've got to sink or swim. "No one is just accepted—you have to fucking show that you're able to roll," he writes. In a narrative steeped in language that would make Lenny Bruce blush, Bronson recounts his sentimental education, schooled by immigrant Italian and Albanian family members and the mean streets, building habits good and bad. The virtue of those habits will depend on your take on modern mores. Bronson writes, for example, of "getting my dick pierced" down in the West Village, then grabbing a pizza and smoking weed. "I always smoke weed freely, always have and always will," he writes. "I'll just light a blunt anywhere." Though he's gone through the classic experiences of the latter-day stoner, flunking out and getting arrested numerous times, Bronson is a hard charger who's not afraid to face nearly any challenge—especially, given his physique and genes, the necessity of losing weight: "If you're husky, you're always dieting in your mind," he writes. Though vulgar and boastful, Bronson serves up a model that has plenty of good points, including his growing interest in nature, creativity, and the desire to "leave a legacy for everybody."

The lessons to draw are obvious: Smoke more dope, eat less meat. Like-minded readers will dig it.



THE ORPHANS OF DAVENPORT

Eugenics, the Great Depression, and the War Over Children's Intelligence

Brookwood, Marilyn
Liveright/Norton (336 pp.)
\$28.95 | Jul. 27, 2021
978-1-63149-468-0

A psychologist with experience in public education limns the 20th-century conflict over intelligence that raged for decades.

Brookwood makes her book debut with a revealing and thoroughly researched history of the long and fierce controversy about whether intelligence is inherited or influenced by environment, a debate in which eugenicists played a prominent role. Convinced that intelligence is hereditary and that people of low intelligence—particularly Blacks, immigrants, and the poor—should be barred from procreating, they advocated for sterilization of women who scored low on IQ tests, showed evidence of mental illness, suffered from alcoholism, or engaged in prostitution. By the 1920s, all states had laws permitting involuntary sterilization. Brookwood centers her attention on two groundbreaking psychologists: Howard Skeels and Marie Skodak, based at the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, who, in the 1930s, compared the IQ's of children raised in overcrowded orphanages, where they were isolated and ignored, with children either adopted or sent to live in an institution for women diagnosed as mentally deficient, where they received loving

attention by the inmates. In contrast to the prevailing assumption that IQ was innate, Skeels and Skodak found remarkable improvement among children placed in a nurturing, stimulating environment. As soon as their findings were publicized, they were viciously attacked by the influential psychologist Lewis Terman, who insisted that intelligence was an "innate, unmodifiable entity." Threatening his reputation, Skeels and Skodak remained in his crosshairs until his death in the 1950s. Drawing on a dozen rich archives, Brookwood meticulously documents the scholarly dispute, which played out in journals and at conferences, and she reports many intriguing case histories of individual children, including those involved in a longitudinal study that Skeels and Skodak conducted, under the auspices of the National Institute of Mental Health, when the subjects were adults. That study confirmed their findings; other studies, too, testified to the benefit of preschool movements and lay the groundwork for efforts such as Head Start.

A substantive contribution to the history of psychology.



COUPLE FOUND SLAIN
After a Family Murder

Brottman, Mikita
Henry Holt (256 pp.)
\$27.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-250-75744-9

An account of the aftermath of a violent crime.

Brian Bechtold was 22 when he killed his parents in 1992. After a week or two on the run, he turned himself in to the police. Bechtold was eventually diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia; he was ruled "not criminally responsible" for his crime and spent almost three decades in a psychiatric hospital. In the introduction, Brottman, a writer and psychoanalyst, claims that while "most true crime stories focus on the buildup to the crime, the incident itself, and the quest for justice," this book—an account of Bechtold's institutionalization—"is about another part of the story, the part that begins when the verdict is announced, the sentence handed down." That overture begins the author's plea on Bechtold's behalf. Throughout his time at the Clifton T. Perkins Hospital Center in Maryland, Bechtold maintained that while he had certainly suffered from a mental illness at the time of his crime, he had since recovered. He tried to convince hospital staff of his health, attempted to escape, and took the hospital to court—all to no avail. Brottman, who met Bechtold while teaching a Focus on Fiction class at Perkins, is clearly on his side. The author's meticulous research is evident throughout, and she mostly handles the information deftly, making for a smooth narrative populated by a variety of colorful characters. Her lack of objectivity is the book's major flaw, and it leads to statements like the following, which describes Bechtold's reluctance to take increased doses of medication: "He'd done perfectly well on the low dose and felt mentally stable." Perfectly well according to whom? Bechtold has an obvious stake in maintaining his own sanity. The doctors at Perkins

DOGVERSATIONS

Conversations with My Dogs

DAVID LESWICK

ISBN: 978-1-5255-5157-4 [paperback]
ISBN: 978-1-5255-5156-7 [hardcover]

"I appreciated the friendly atmosphere
and lively sense of humour of your book.
It reminded me of Bill Watterson..."
—Guy Langevin, Editor
of *PhotoLife Magazine*

"In this debut compilation of humorous
conversations and colorful photographs, three
adorable dogs say the darnedest things."

"...these simple exchanges are squeaky clean
and appropriate for the entire family."

"A cute, fun frolic for tail-wagging fans."
—Kirkus Reviews

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WORDS WITH...

BRIAN MOYLAN

The Real Housewives recapper shares all the dish in his new book on Bravo's reality TV juggernaut

BY STEPHAN LEE



LAURA LEWIS

TO THOSE WHO CAN'T IMAGINE why anyone would spend their time watching a bunch of rich (or faux rich) women getting dressed up, flaunting their wealth, and arguing nonstop: We get you. The Real Housewives isn't for everyone. But there are legions of Bravo-obsessed fans who can't get enough, who dissect every epic feud, choice in wig, and melodramatic moment like grad students in comparative literature.

That's why it's big news in the Housewives fandom that Brian Moylan, arguably the foremost living Bravo historian, is publishing *the Housewives: The Real Story Behind the Real Housewives* (Flatiron, May 25). Moylan is celebrated for his rhapsodic, trenchant, sometimes-surrealist recaps on *Vulture*, and he brings that same attention to this account of the enduring relevance and appeal of the reality TV juggernaut from inception to present day. Moylan took the time to—in the words of Bravo mensch Andy

Cohen at every Housewives reunion—"unpack" the unexpected drama of writing this book, since it wouldn't be a Housewives book without drama. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How did you go about researching this book? It must be hard to infiltrate the Bravo fortress.

I have a good relationship with Bravo because they still send me screeners for recaps and have invited me to a bunch of events, so I reached out to the PR team and was like, "Hey, I'm gonna do this book—just so you know, it's happening." We talked about maybe partnering up and them helping me get interviews and promote it, and eventually they presented an offer to my editor saying they wanted 10% of every book sale and total editorial control of the marketing. We were like, "No thanks." So then they called all of the Real Housewives past, present, and future, and were like, "Don't talk to this guy."

Wow. How did you pivot from that?

The book evolved a little bit from my initial outline, but I think for the better, because I ended up focusing a lot more on the fans and the impact the show has—why we're so into it, which I find a lot more interesting. And also, I mean, there've been 15 years of Housewives, gossip, and drama. You can't get into every little thing or else we'd have a whole encyclopedia. Encyclopedia Dramatica, I guess.

Yet you still managed to get great access, both with on- and off-camera talent.

Housewives who talked off the record and aren't named in the book were especially forthcoming [laughs]. I would talk to [former Housewives] Kristen Taekmann [*New York City*] and Carrie Deuber [*Dallas*] on the record, but yeah, it was mostly reach-

ing out either through other journalists, friends who are podcasters, then DMing people on social media and stuff like that. But there were a lot whom I reached out to who either immediately said no or said they have to check with Bravo about every interview they do...so there were a lot who fell out. Probably, in total, I talked to about a dozen Housewives.

What were some of the burning questions from Bravo fans that you wanted to answer once and for all?

I'm always fascinated by the money—the capitalistic, financial aspect of it. One of my goals was to answer all the questions that fans have about the shows, which are mostly the same questions that I have about the shows. How much do they get paid? Who pays for the cast trips? We kind of know, but Bravo won't let us totally know. And I wanted to be like, "Here's the answer," so we can move on to the next.

As someone writing about the Housewives, you have to criticize and poke fun at them, but you've also formed relationships with some—you even appeared on *Beverly Hills* as the co-writer of Erika Jayne's book, *Pretty Mess*. How do you balance that?

I have always tried to keep them a little bit at arm's length, but then when I ended up starting Erika Jayne's book, I went to my editor at *Vulture* and was like, "Is this gonna mess up the recaps?" And they were like, "It shouldn't be a big deal as long as you're [upfront about it]." But the fans will take any opportunity to be like, "Brian's Erika's employee, and he'll do whatever she says!" I learned that no matter how critical I was of her, they were never going to be happy, so it's kind of a lose-lose situation. But I have found every Housewife I've talked to is, in person, exactly who they are on the show. So yeah, I try to bring as much integrity to the reality television recap as I possibly can, because that's what we really need: journalistic integrity...in our recaps. [Laughs.]

The world is a very different place from the one *Real Housewives* debuted to in 2006. What do you think about the way it's evolving, especially regarding diversity of the casts?

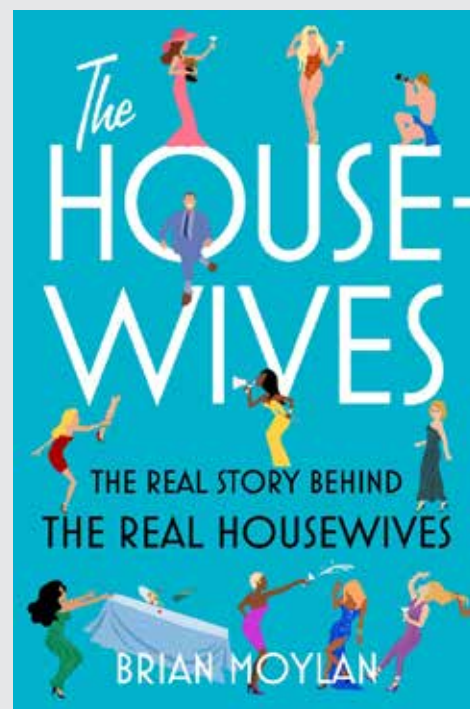
One of the academics I talked to who studies race and reality television said it's not just about adding a Black cast member or an Asian Housewife here—

it's recalibrating the whole thing. I think it's great that we have people like Porsha Williams and Kandi Burruss [*Atlanta*], who are working not just for inclusivity on the shows, but behind the scenes and at Bravo and are really driving these discussions. If you can learn a lesson from *Housewives*, great. I don't suggest learning a lot of your lessons from *Housewives*, but if that's what's gonna get through to you, great.

If you were to tell a *Housewives* newbie a city to check out first, which one would it be?

I always say *New York*. *New York* has never had a bad season. But currently, no one is better than *The Real Housewives of Potomac*. What's really interesting about *Potomac* is that the cast hasn't really changed that much, so they have these deep, complicated relationships, and there's tons of drama. And they also find a way to have these really trenchant discussions about race and representation in a way that I think is really interesting. I finally got my husband to start *Potomac*, and he was like, "Why have I not been watching this?" And I was like, "Bitch, how many times do I have to tell you it's the best one?!"

Stephan Lee is the author of K-Pop Confidential. The Housewives is reviewed on Page 73.

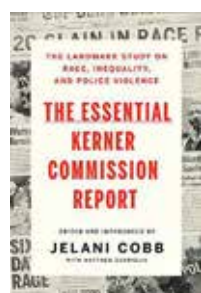


“A welcome new version of a publication that is no less important now than it was in 1967.”

THE ESSENTIAL KERNER COMMISSION REPORT

claimed that Bechtold was paranoid, and while Brottman shows effectively that forced hospitalization could make anyone seem paranoid, she fails to prove that, in this case, both could have been true at the same time.

A quick and intriguing read marred by a lack of objectivity.



THE ESSENTIAL KERNER COMMISSION REPORT

Ed. by Cobb, Jelani with

Guariglia, Matthew

Liveright/Norton (224 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | Jul. 27, 2021

978-1-63149-892-3

A timely distilled version of the powerful report on racism in the U.S.

Created by Lyndon Johnson's executive order in 1967, the Kerner Commission was convened in response to inner-city riots in cities like

Newark and Detroit, and its findings have renewed relevance in the wake of the George Floyd verdict and other recent police brutality cases. The report, named for Otto Kerner, the chairman of the commission and then governor of Illinois, explored the systemic reasons why an “apocalyptic fury” broke out that summer even in the wake of the passage of significant civil rights and voting acts—a response with striking echoes in recent events across the country. In this edited and contextualized version, *New Yorker* staff writer Cobb, with the assistance of Guariglia, capably demonstrates the continued relevance and prescience of the commission's findings on institutionalized discriminatory policies in housing, education, employment, and the media. The commission was not the first to address racial violence in the century, and it would not be the last, but the bipartisan group of 11 members—including two Blacks and one woman—was impressively thorough in its investigation of the complex overarching social and economic issues at play. “The members were not seeking to understand a singular incident of disorder,” writes Cobb, “but the phenomenon of rioting itself.” Johnson wanted to know what happened, why it happened, and what could be done so it doesn't happen “again and again.” Of course, it *has* happened again and again, and many of the report's recommendations remain unimplemented. This version of the landmark report features a superb introduction by Cobb and a closing section of frequently asked questions—e.g., “How come nothing has been done about these problems?” The book contains plenty of fodder for crucial national conversations and many excellent ideas for much-needed reforms that could be put into place now.

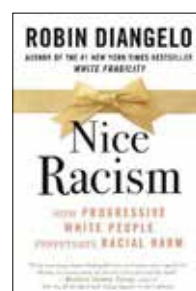
A welcome new version of a publication that is no less important now than it was in 1967.

“This book should come with a warning: reading this book will change your personal and professional life for the better whether you are a professional engineer, an engineer in training, an engineering student, or not even an engineer.”
—Dr. Bernard Amadei, Founder of Engineers Without Borders USA

ISBN: 978-1-64538-141-9

“A well-written tribute to engineering projects and the volunteers who run them.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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NICE RACISM How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm

DiAngelo, Robin

Beacon Press (224 pp.)

\$24.95 | Jun. 29, 2021

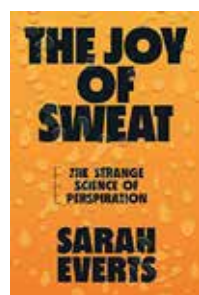
978-0-8070-7412-1

The author of *White Fragility* suggests that with friends like White progressives, people of color need no other enemies.

In opening, DiAngelo recalls a Black friend who, for various reasons, was finding it uncomfortable to address White audiences. Observing her and the group before her, “I saw a metaphor for colonialism.” A Black person was doing the hard work of interpreting racism, and a White audience was receiving her insights without breaking a sweat themselves. DiAngelo makes very good points simply in noting how difficult White people—especially those who consider themselves progressive and who bill themselves as colorblind and open to friendships across the racial divide—find it to actually hear about the issue of racism. That issue is central, because “our identities are not separate from the white supremacist society in which we are raised.” In

that regard, merely maintaining that he or she is “nice,” well-intended, and open-minded does little good. DiAngelo writes that her aim is not to explain Black people to White audiences but instead to “teach white people about ourselves in relation to Black and other people of color.” One way to engage is to become an active learner with an eye not simply to nonracism but to anti-racism, to recognize that there really is such a thing as White privilege, and to build “authentic cross-racial relationships.” The author provides enough proscriptions that a reader might feel as if a minefield of potential faux pas lies between good intention and meaningful action. But that’s just the point, and she’s certainly willing to own the assumptions and mores of her progressive kin. “As white people,” she writes, “we tend to focus on the personal impact of receiving feedback on our racism without acknowledging the cost to BIPOC people for *giving us* this feedback.” Altogether, it’s a valuable primer to be read alongside the work of other anti-racist activists such as Ibram X. Kendi and Johnnetta Cole.

A pointed reminder that good intentions aren’t enough to break the cycle of racism.



THE JOY OF SWEAT
The Strange Science
of Perspiration

Everts, Sarah

Norton (304 pp.)

\$26.95 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-393-63567-6

A popular-science treatment of an overlooked area of study.

Perspiration is neither a fashionable body secretion nor of much interest to publishers, so most readers have not encountered a book on the subject, but science writer and journalism instructor Everts fills that gap admirably. She begins with a few jolts. A resting human produces as much heat as a 60-watt light bulb, which is usually more than we need. Evaporating fluid consumes heat, a process that keeps us cool. Through several million tiny sweat glands, we extract fluid from the blood and spread it over the skin. Odorless until bacteria act on it, it develops a smell, unique to every individual. Though repulsive to most Americans, in other parts of the world it is considered unobjectionable and sometimes interesting. Few readers will skip the chapter on the history of deodorants, an American invention. Outside of humans, sweating is uncommon. Horses and most monkeys and apes sweat; other animals pant, roll in mud, stay in the shade, or work at night. The sole purpose of human sweat is to cool the body; despite the common belief, it doesn’t remove waste or toxins, so excessive sweating has no health benefits. Throughout, Everts mixes facts with interviews and encounters with sweat-related activities across the world: Smell-dating is a real thing, as are sauna theaters, where several hundred naked spectators watch a performance in a 185-degree arena. Fingerprints are an impression left behind by sweat, and their chemical analysis may reveal

other valuable forensic information. Everts interviewed a man who underwent surgery to treat massively excessive sweating, a fairly common medical condition. A rare genetic mutation produces children born without sweat glands; if not discovered early, they can die of heatstroke. The author’s prose is sometimes flippant and dense with amusing asides, quips on stinkiness, and embarrassing encounters, but she delivers a solid education.

Fascinating information for tolerant readers.

Gift of the Swan
The Swans of Swan Lake Iris Gardens
Julie Gochnauer

ISBN: 978-1735769615

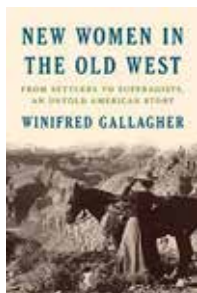
“A debut collection of full-color photographs, inspirational quotes, and information about the breathtaking waterfowl of Swan Lake Iris Gardens in Sumter, South Carolina.”

“This lovely, easily browsable assemblage also contains some compelling information that may be useful to young students.... A peaceful stroll for waterfowl lovers.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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“A powerful memoir that says as much about Gauthier and her eventful, trailblazing life as it does about her music.”

SAVED BY A SONG



NEW WOMEN IN THE OLD WEST
From Settlers to Suffragists, an Untold American Story

Gallagher, Winifred
 Penguin Press (304 pp.)
 \$28.00 | Jul. 20, 2021
 978-0-7352-2325-7

Journalist Gallagher looks beyond the archetypes of the cowgirl and the bonneted prairie homesteader to show the vast range of contributions made by women of the Old West.

By 1914, with the 19th Amendment still six years away, women in 11 of 14 Western states had “secured full enfranchisement before the women of even a single state back East.” This was no coincidence. Gallagher shows that between the 1840s and 1920, women had unique freedoms in the region that extends from the Great Plains to California, which was less burdened than the East “by tradition, precedent, and an

entrenched, oppositional establishment.” New opportunities arose from an egalitarian “all-hands-on-deck” Western ethos and from energizing social forces like the Populist Party and temperance movement. Women gained further benefits from the Homestead Acts (which gave free land to female heads of households) and the tuition-free coeducational colleges created by the Morrill Land-Grant Acts. This upbeat account of the changes abounds with brief stories of trailblazers like Zitkala-Sa, a Sioux writer and musician; Elizabeth Piper Ensley, a Black teacher who founded the Colored Women’s Republican Club; and Jovita Idár, a critic of “Juan Crow” laws and the first president of the League of Mexican Women. At times, Gallagher casts her subjects in flat, modern terms, such as writing that one of them “prioritized” or had “skill sets.” Yet the stories mostly transcend occasional banalities. One of the most inspiring involves Luna Kellie, who, as an impoverished Nebraska homesteader, grew “too malnourished to produce adequate milk for two of her babies, who died.” Undaunted, she joined the Farmers’ Alliance and published the progressive *Prairie Home* newspaper on a press in her bedroom. “Somehow,” writes the author, “she crammed politics into her already packed schedule of farm chores, care of her eleven offspring, temperance activities, and duties at her Methodist church.”

A mostly engaging account of how the West was won for women from all walks of life.

Invest like a Futurist

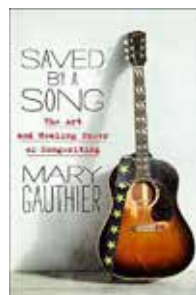
“A wide-ranging guide to the paradoxes of investing.”

“...clear, intriguing, and always readable language.”

“An inclusive and deeply detailed overview of the investing world.”
 —Kirkus Reviews

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ISBN: 978-1-09834-122-0



SAVED BY A SONG
The Art and Healing Power of Songwriting

Gauthier, Mary
 St. Martin’s Essentials (256 pp.)
 \$27.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
 978-1-250-20211-6

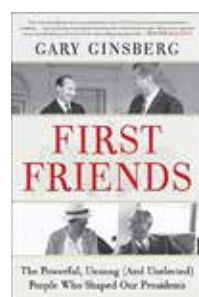
An acclaimed singer/songwriter digs soulfully into her craft.

A great song can capture time and place, conjure elaborate fictions, and convey deep, emotional truths. This collection unveils how a master managed many of her most memorable pieces, like a magician revealing all of her tricks. It’s no surprise that Gauthier (b. 1962), best known for the moving folk songs of *Mercy Now* and her concept album about her adoption, *The Foundling*, is an authoritative writer. Though the details of her life that inform her stunningly straightforward song “I Drink” are interesting to read, knowing them doesn’t really magnify the song’s impact once you’ve heard it. However, when the author shows her editing process for the song, making the symbolism stronger and switching points of view, it’s a lesson that’s hard to forget. Gauthier brings that sharp honesty to a variety of songs and the topics that inspired them, whether it was her decision to leave the restaurant business to become a songwriter, her knack of picking the wrong women for relationships, or losing friends to the AIDS crisis. She also brings it to the artistic process. “Storytellers have power; they are not voiceless victims,” writes the author. “In a song we are given the authority



to be the writer of the story instead of the paper it is written on." She explains how she uses that authority to help military veterans take control of their experiences and turn them into something useful by helping them express themselves as songwriters. "There is something sacred in the electricity that surges between song and songwriter," writes Gauthier. "Lightning rod in hand, I follow flashes of ideas and inspiration. My work is to be a receiver." She does that work well as a songwriter and now as an author.

A powerful memoir that says as much about Gauthier and her eventful, trailblazing life as it does about her music.



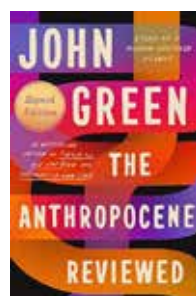
FIRST FRIENDS
The Powerful, Unsung (and Unelected) People Who Shaped Our Presidents

Ginsberg, Gary
Twelve (352 pp.)
\$30.00 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-5387-0292-5

A Clinton administration insider delivers a fruitful survey of the roles that close friends have played throughout presidential history.

Ginsberg comes to his subject by way of a long-ago spell of volunteering for the presidential campaign of Gary Hart, who had one well-known confidant in actor Warren Beatty and a lesser-known one in old friend and chief of staff Billy Shore, who "seemed to be Hart's alter ego, someone with the right combination of intensity yet inner calm to keep an often pen-sive candidate switched on." So it is across the span of presiden-cies: Thomas Jefferson had his Billy Shore in fellow Virginian James Madison, who himself would become president but who contented himself in remaining in Jefferson's shadow even as he made substantial contributions to the Constitution. Woodrow Wilson had his "First Friend," as Ginsberg dubs the occupant of that unofficial but influential role, in a diminutive Texan named Edward Mandell House, whose views neatly aligned with Wil-son's in most regards and who hand-picked many of the players in the Wilson administration. So it was with Vernon Jordan, Bill Clinton's closest friend, who served numerous functions, from helping select staff members to warding off a post-Lewinsky affair threat of divorce on the part of the first lady. Perhaps most affecting in this series of portraits is, curiously enough, Richard Nixon's friendship with Bebe Rebozo, a Cuban exile and influential banker who was seemingly glad to play "a sub-servient role" but who also knew how to deal with Nixon's dark moods. Ginsberg does nothing to improve Nixon's reputa-tion as he recounts how the president eventually brought the straight-arrow Rebozo into the criminal conspiracy that ended his tenure in the White House—with Rebozo urging Nixon not to resign until the very end. There's no real thesis in Ginsberg's capably spun story, but there are plentiful insights.

A fresh, well-written take on the lives of our presidents.



THE ANTHROPOCENE
REVIEWED
Essays on a Human-Centered Planet

Green, John
Dutton (304 pp.)
\$28.00 | May 18, 2021
978-0-525-55521-6

The bestselling author offers a mis-cellany of essays on life and letters in an environmentally fraught time.

Green, who admits to a certain amount of OCD, opens charmingly with a telling instance: It took him 30 days to cre-ate a path through the woods behind his Indianapolis home to reach a treehouse less than a minute away: "It took me a month to build a fifty-eight-second walk in the woods." He might well have conjured the critic Morse Peckham, who once observed that a futile activity isn't so futile if it puts off recognizing its own futility. It's one of few bookish allusions Green misses in this

WHO DO WE BECOME
WHEN WE'VE LOST THE
THINGS THAT DEFINED US?

Still Moving A MEMOIR BY LINDA DURHAM



Humanitarian, world traveler, and visionary...from her days as a Playboy Bunny, to climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, and working with orphans in Africa, Durham's spirit shines through.



A ranging, rich
collage of memory
and reflection.

—Kirkus Reviews

LindaDurham.us

“An empathetic and well-characterized book that will add complexity to debates about mass incarceration.”

LOVE LOCKDOWN

pleasing book of essays personal and cultural. The author notes that we are at a moment when everything is rated thanks to the pernicious influences of Amazon and Yelp and such; Green calls a bout of labyrinthitis “an unambiguously one-star experience.” The ratings continue: He gives humankind a four-star chance of surviving the present era of mounting catastrophes, the Anthropocene. His register of references is far-ranging. Among dozens of other topics, he discusses Shakespearean evocations of clouds, the origins of the “pathetic fallacy” in the writings of John Ruskin, and the world’s largest ball of paint, which can be found not far from Green’s home. There are fine moments throughout, as when the author writes appreciatively of Indianapolis as a place he loves “precisely because it isn’t easy to love” or when he ponders the social basis of genius, by which artists such as Michelangelo flourished because others were making advances in the study of human anatomy and Julius Caesar “became a dictator because...over time the empire’s soldiers felt more loyalty to their military leaders than to their civilian ones.” In a treat for die-hard fans, each copy from the first print run will be signed by the author.

A grab bag, but one that repays reading and reflection and a pleasure throughout despite occasionally dark moments.



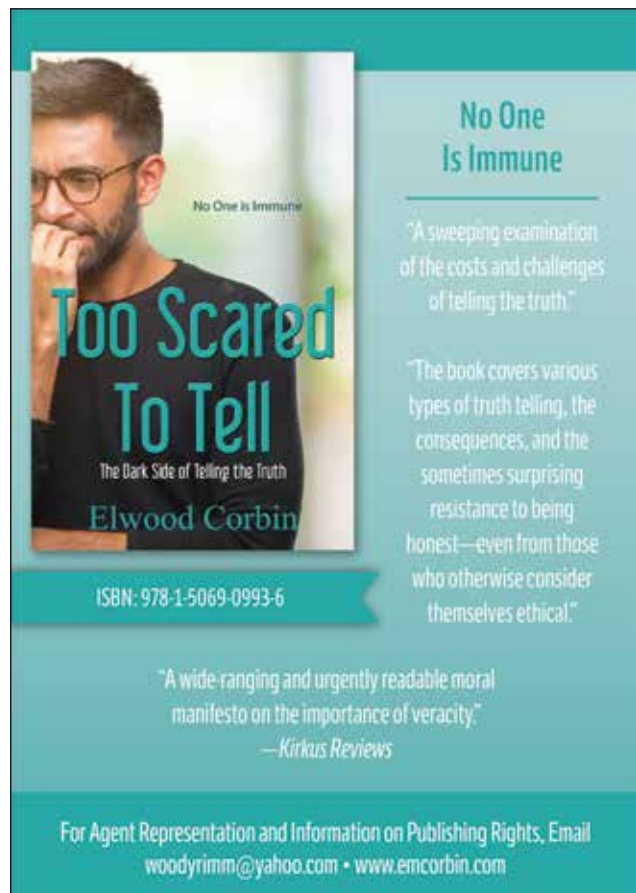
LOVE LOCKDOWN
Dating, Sex, and Marriage in America's Prisons

Greenwood, Elizabeth
Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
(288 pp.)
\$27.00 | Jul. 13, 2021
978-1-5011-5841-4

Compassionate inquiry into the hidden phenomena of prison relationships, particularly the “MWI” (Met While Incarcerated) demographic.

Greenwood was inspired by her own correspondence with a jailed white-collar criminal she met researching her first book, *Playing Dead*: “Could you find love and vivacity in the ugliest of places? And what are the prisons we erect for ourselves?” She frames these inquiries against the grim reality of this country’s incarceration rate (the highest in the world) and its disproportionate effect on poorer individuals and communities of color. At the same time, the author observes that MWI “prison wives” are often middle-class Whites who are drawn to church service groups or prisoner pen-pal websites, a phenomenon that serves as an example of the complex social realities uncovered here. Greenwood opens with the marriage of ex-soldier Jo to Benny, an affable recidivist with a disturbing background of domestic violence, and alternates between the arc of their tumultuous, ultimately successful union and those of several other couples. These include a retired Canadian diplomat who wed and then split from an American woman convicted of murder, a trans woman and a bisexual African American man serving time in the same institution, and a couple who stayed together following the prisoner’s wrongful conviction being overturned, who “still came home with all the trauma of anyone who has spent almost half his life in prison.” The resilience of MWI spouses is personified throughout by Jo, who observes, “I don’t have any problem waiting for him to come home from prison. Because he’s my husband.” Greenwood makes good use of interviews with prisoners, academics, and others, and the writing is observant, humorous, and even sensuous, as when the author and Jo attend a conference for prisoners’ families and hear frank talk about the realities of frustration and conjugal visits. “For once, they are in a place where people understand,” writes the author. “They needn’t pretend or defend.”

An empathetic and well-characterized book that will add complexity to debates about mass incarceration.





SLEEPER AGENT
The Atomic Spy in America
Who Got Away

Hagedorn, Ann
 Simon & Schuster (272 pp.)
 \$28.00 | Jul. 20, 2021
 978-1-5011-7394-3

The biography of a Soviet spy whose story may be new even to history buffs.

The son of a Russian-Jewish immigrant who settled in Iowa, George Koval (1913-2006) grew up in a middle-class family, performed brilliantly in high school, graduated at age 15, and enrolled in the University of Iowa to study engineering. Unlike most American Jews, Koval's parents welcomed the 1918 Bolshevik Revolution, and by the time the Depression overwhelmed the nation, George was a dedicated communist. In 1932, George and his family immigrated to the Soviet Union, where he entered the elite Mendelev Institute in Moscow to study chemistry. His talents caught the attention of Soviet army intelligence, which recruited him and sent him back to America, where he enrolled at Columbia University. As accomplished as he had been in Moscow, Koval impressed the army after being drafted in 1943 and found himself part of the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where he kept Moscow informed. He did the same after his transfer in 1945 to Dayton, Ohio, where polonium was assembled into the triggers essential to nuclear explosions. In an intriguing narrative, journalist Hagedorn emphasizes that Dayton was as important as Oak Ridge and Los Alamos in the creation of the atomic bomb. After the war, Koval returned to New York. Although he no longer engaged in weapons research, the Cold War had begun, and defections of Soviet agents had exposed several of Koval's contacts. Still off the official radar, he returned to Russia in 1948. The final 50 pages of the book are the most fascinating. Despite Soviet reports extolling Koval's work, he received no rewards. Unable to find work, he wrote a pleading letter to the director of Soviet intelligence. The result was a modest teaching position at the Mendelev Institute, from which he retired after 35 years on a pension so meager that he applied (unsuccessfully) for U.S. Social Security benefits in 1999. Learning this and fearing bad publicity, Russian intelligence raised his pension.

An eye-opening account of perhaps the Soviet Union's most successful sleeper agent.



THE COMFORT BOOK

Haig, Matt
 Penguin Life (272 pp.)
 \$22.00 | Jul. 6, 2021
 978-0-14-313666-8

Bestselling author Haig offers a book's worth of apothegms to serve as guides to issues ranging from disquietude to self-acceptance.

Like many collections of this sort—terse snippets of advice, from the everyday to the cosmic—some parts will hit home with surprising insight, some will feel like old hat, and others will come across as disposable or incomprehensible. Years ago, Haig experienced an extended period of suicidal depression, so he comes at many of these topics—pain, hope, self-worth, contentment—from a hard-won perspective. This makes some of the material worthy of a second look, even when it feels runic or contrary to experience. The author's words are instigations, hopeful first steps

“An impressively thorough survey of the development of biotechnology and the potential dangers it poses.”

“A technically precise and philosophically thoughtful treatise.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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WORDS WITH...

HAYDEN HERRERA

In *Upper Bohemia*, the acclaimed biographer of Kahlo and Noguchi writes another life story—her own

BY MARION WINIK



Blair Resika

IN 2016, HAYDEN HERRERA, now 80, began filling yellow pads in longhand with the story of her unusual, terrible, magical childhood in New York City, Mexico City, and Cape Cod during the 1940s and '50s. A year later, she began to type the manuscript that became *Upper Bohemia* (Simon & Schuster, June 22) into a computer.

As the Pulitzer Prize-nominated biographer of Frida Kahlo, Arshile Gorky, Isamu Noguchi, and Henri Matisse, Herrera had toiled for decades in archives and libraries. As she explained in a Zoom conversation from her home on Cape Cod, "I was forever running around interviewing people and transcribing interviews. Noguchi took more than 10 years, Kahlo about five. The process of writing a memoir, which

mainly involved calling my sister Blair to discuss this or that, seemed a pleasure."

So did assembling the dozens of beautiful black-and-white-photographs that accompany the text, including the cover image of the sisters leaning out of their father's ragtop jalopy. Another car that plays a key role is the "Coche de Mama," a Chrysler woody in which their mother drove the girls from Provincetown to Mexico City in 1950.

Plans for publication unfurled perfectly until March of last year, when *Upper Bohemia* became one of the books delayed by the uncertainties of Covid-19 lockdown. Herrera responded with less angst than most authors. "I was at our house in Vieques and I just decided, well, I'm going to be here for a long time." And she got out those yellow pads and wrote a novel—something "I'd always wanted to do but never had the guts to—about trying to get out from under my mother's influence and freeing myself by forgiving her."

Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Your mother coined the phrase "upper bohemians" to describe her circle. What did she mean?

Both my mother and father came from wealthy families—my father was a Boston Brahmin, and my mother's great-grandfather founded Cornell University—that lost all their money in the Depression. Despite their privileged backgrounds, their values were not materialistic at all. Both loved art, both painted, both

had numerous love affairs, and both were married five times. Their friends were mostly writers and architects and musicians, and people didn't care what you wore, particularly if it was a little handwoven Mexican something. In fact, my parents didn't always wear clothes. They were both physically beautiful people; they loved their bodies and enjoyed showing them on the beach.

Our reviewer notes that you avoid the “self-pity common in this type of memoir, allowing readers directly into the experience.” Was this a conscious effort on your part?

No! It's funny, I was brought up not to express rage but I felt as if some rage came through. My mother, as you've read, was a really selfish, narcissistic woman who was not attentive to her children. In writing about her I suppose I'm trying to get over being angry, which I think a lot of people have to do.

Also, as a child, you don't know how life is supposed to be, so even if it's really peculiar—which our lives were, getting dragged around from place to place, left to our own devices—one doesn't judge, one just follows along. Perhaps that's what comes through.

Who are your influences as a memoirist?

Mary Karr is so direct, her memoirs are so clearly written, they go straight into your heart.

I also love the way Sally Mann used photographs in her memoir, and I was glad to be allowed to use them as she did, interspersed through the story. It would have been a completely different book if they'd been clumped in a separate section, as we do in biographies.

I also read Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*, which I expected to love but didn't. I felt it was indirect, all over the place. It irritated me. As I remember, in the first part, he talked endlessly about his aristocratic family background. I couldn't figure out why he thought the reader would care.

That's the sort of thing your mother would eschew. Will there be a sequel?

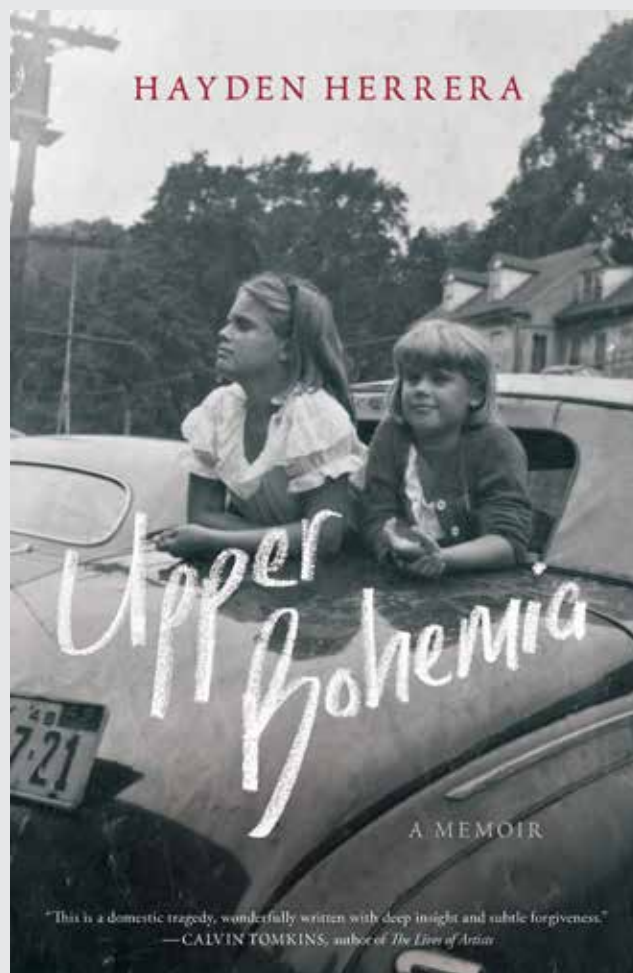
I haven't done anything with it yet, but it's already written. From age 12 to 21—teenage miseries. I was

sent to Putney, a progressive school in Vermont, and my mother actually had to remove me because I was so depressed.

Is your mother your great subject?

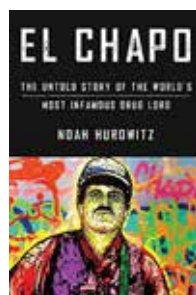
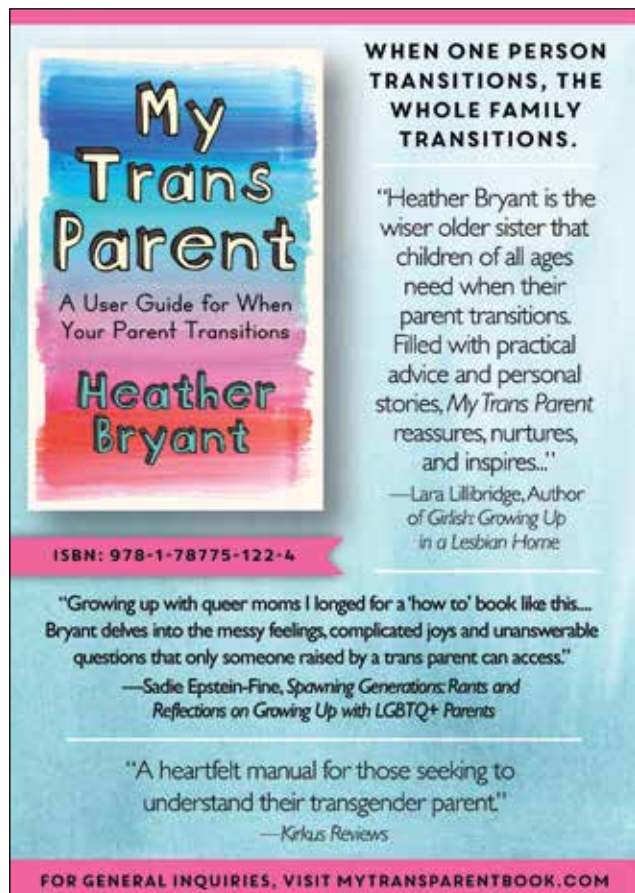
I wish I could get away from her! No matter how many books I write to forgive and escape her, she stays inside of me. It's as I say in the memoir, when she died in 1995 at the age of 86, something enormous, like sunshine, like the pull of gravity, went out of my life. But only for a while: I can still see and feel the golden glow radiating from her formidable strength.

Marion Winik is the author of The Big Book of the Dead and other titles. Upper Bohemia received a starred review in the Feb. 15, 2021, issue.



toward illumination. Most chapters are only a few sentences long, the longest running for three pages. Much is left unsaid and left up to readers to dissect. On being lost, Haig recounts an episode with his father when they got turned around in a forest in France. His father said to him, "If we keep going in a straight line we'll get out of here." He was correct, a bit of wisdom Haig turned to during his depression when he focused on moving forward: "It is important to remember the bottom of the valley never has the clearest view. And that sometimes all you need to do in order to rise up again is to keep moving forward." Many aphorisms sound right, if hardly groundbreaking—e.g., a quick route to happiness is making someone else happy; "No is a good word. It keeps you sane. In an age of overload, no is really yes. It is yes to having space you need to live"; "External events are neutral. They only gain positive or negative value the moment they enter our mind." Haig's fans may enjoy this one, but others should take a pass.

A handful of pearls amid a pile of empty oyster shells.



EL CHAPO
The Untold Story of the World's Most Infamous Drug Lord

Hurowitz, Noah

Atria (288 pp.)

\$30.00 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-982133-75-7

A fast-paced study of the infamous, now imprisoned Mexican drug lord and the social structures that supported and

enabled his rise.

Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán (1957), who headed the Sinaloa drug cartel for decades, may have flattered himself with comparisons to Jesús Malverde, a Mexican counterpart of Robin Hood. Freelance journalist Hurowitz writes that Guzmán, like other drug lords, "certainly distributed portions of their illegal largesse after hitting it big," funding infrastructural improvements that weren't entirely selfless—e.g., a new road leading to poppy and marijuana fields in the Sierra Madre. The author makes an important point early on: Guzmán was able to accumulate such wealth and power thanks to the market north of the border, "the world's largest consumer of illicit drugs." Indeed, it is American involvement that conditions the entirety of the drug trade, which has relied on a kind of symbiosis with the Mexican government: The drug kingpins support the politicians, the politicians support the drug trade if only by ignoring it. With the collapse of one-party rule in Mexico and the emergence of several competing cartels, the drug trade became a government unto itself, and few were more vigorous in amassing power than Guzmán. Hurowitz's portrait of Guzmán is a touch overlong and sometimes repetitious—e.g., when he writes, multiple times, of Guzmán's "beady" or "beady little eyes." Still, his tale of Guzmán's rise and vicious rule is comprehensive, as is his account of how Guzmán, rightly paranoid thanks to the willingness of his lieutenants to sell him out, was finally captured and brought to the U.S. "His final act is playing out now, in a tiny cell in a supermax prison on the windswept high desert plains of Colorado," writes Hurowitz, adding that the drug trade is essentially unaffected by his removal. "In Mexico," he writes, "the story goes on without him."

Readers won't look at the war on drugs the same way after reading Hurowitz's damning account.

“A memoir about sexual assault written with devastating moral and emotional clarity.”

BLACK BOX



BLACK BOX
The Memoir That Sparked Japan's #MeToo Movement

Ito, Shiori

Trans. by Markin Powell, Allison

Feminist Press (288 pp.)

\$17.95 paper | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-952177-97-2



A Japanese journalist's story of surviving rape and kick-starting Japan's

#MeToo movement.

In 2015, Ito was an ambitious young journalist making a name for herself by reporting on serious international issues in more than 60 countries around the world. She agreed to have a meal with Noriyuki Yamaguchi, the Washington bureau chief of the Tokyo Broadcasting System; the two had met in 2013 when Ito was working at a piano bar in New York City to support herself while attending journalism school. Yamaguchi had promised

to help Ito with her career, and the meeting was ostensibly to discuss a possible internship. The prospect required that she leave Japan, where she had a job at Reuters. Instead of discussing immigration issues and the process of securing a visa for her travel, Yamaguchi plied Ito with drinks, which Ito suspects that he drugged. After blacking out, she woke up in a strange hotel room to find Yamaguchi raping her. Regarding the violent assault, the author writes viscerally: “Intellectually, I thought I had understood, but I had not realized what a devastating and destructive act it is. Something had been brutally obliterated.” Ito spent the next several years desperately seeking justice while dealing with the cruelties of Japan's policing system. At one point, for example, the police forced her to reenact the assault using a life-sized doll in the police judo studio; during the process, the police asked her inappropriate questions about her virginity. Eventually, unsatisfied with the police, Ito decided to conduct her own journalistic investigation into the events of that night, determined to find out—and document—what really happened. This unflinching, heavily researched book shimmers with vulnerability, introspection, and purpose as the



ISBN: 978-1950647033

“A combat veteran’s astute
look at the Vietnam War,
both captivating and
emotionally forthcoming.”

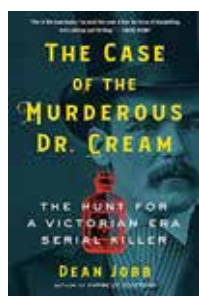
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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author skillfully lays the facts alongside the physical and emotional tolls they had on her.

A memoir about sexual assault written with devastating moral and emotional clarity.



THE CASE OF THE MURDEROUS DR. CREAM
The Hunt for a Victorian Era Serial Killer

Jobb, Dean

Algonquin (416 pp.)

\$27.95 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-61620-689-5

A lively account of an early international serial killer's crimes.

In his latest, journalist and creative nonfiction professor Jobb richly embellishes his grim central tale with carefully researched setting, detail, and social mores of

the late Victorian era, elegantly contrasted with his eponymous fiend, Thomas Neill Cream (1852-1892), "a doctor from Canada" and "a new kind of killer, choosing victims at random and killing without remorse." Many readers will make comparisons to H.H. Holmes from *The Devil in the White City*. However, writes Jobb, "by the time Holmes claimed his first victim in 1891, and long before the infamous Jack the Ripper terrorized London in 1888, Cream was suspected of killing as many as six people, most of them deliberately poisoned with tainted medicine." Cream is an unsavory cipher, a foppish, dissolute sociopath masquerading behind the authority of a doctor. His well-to-do family perceived his dangerous tendencies, sending him to England after an 11-year prison sentence for poisoning his alleged mistress's husband in small-town Illinois and following earlier killings in Canada and Chicago for which he'd evaded responsibility. Yet, once back in England, Cream continued his murderous ways, poisoning several prostitutes and sending blackmail letters impugning others for his crimes, a narcissistic tell that later provided evidence for his conviction. Though "the adventures of Holmes and Dr. Watson made detection look easy," in reality, forensic detection was in its infancy. Jobb ably portrays the early investigators who used often derided scientific approaches to bring Cream to justice, including a Scotland Yard detective who traveled to America to piece together Cream's past, "an investigation that would expose more crimes and furnish even more evidence of the doctor's capacity for cruelty and murder." Eventually, Cream was hanged following conviction in a highly publicized trial in London, leaving as his legacy dismay mingled with social reflection. "Four poisonings committed under Scotland Yard's nose...suggested a shocking lack of vigilance."

A vivid, engaging revival of a forgotten Victorian villain.

THE SEVEN GRACES OF AGELESS AGING
how to be young as late in life as possible

JASON ELIAS

ISBN: 978-0-9966542-3-4

"I'm sitting under a spreading maple, my dog at my side, and Jason Elias's marvelous *Seven Graces* in my lap. What a comfort! What a joy!"
—Dan M. Klein, Author of *Travels with Epicurus*

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"The Seven Graces of Ageless Aging will uplift and inspire all who read it. It belongs not only on your shelves but in your hands where you can absorb its good wisdom and share it with your friends.... It's a plethora of gold for any age!"
—Jack Canfield, Co-Author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, & Author of *The Success Principles*



HOW Y'ALL DOING?
Misadventures and Mischief From a Life Well Lived

Jordan, Leslie

Morrow/HarperCollins (272 pp.)

\$26.99 | Apr. 27, 2021

978-0-06-307619-8

The actor and surprise Instagram phenomenon dishes on his career, his past, and his foibles.

Before the pandemic, Jordan was best known as a diminutive scene-stealer with supporting roles in *Will and Grace*, *Boston Public*, *The Help*, and *American Horror Story*. But as he relates early in this casual, good-natured memoir, his flirty and funny gay-uncle personality also made him a perfect fit for Instagram, which rewards colorful personalities who are quick with a zinger; he went from zero to 5.5 million followers in less than a year. Virality hasn't gone to his head, though, and the prevailing mood here is one of humility and self-deprecation. He interweaves run-ins with the likes of Lady Gaga, Carrie Fisher, and Dolly Parton with recollections of his childhood in east Tennessee (where he fumbled to understand his sexuality), his early professional stumbles, and past addictions. Most of his

stories are of the breezy, funny-incident variety—you can picture him relating them on a talk-show couch (or an Instagram video)—and his descriptions of other actors are unstintingly polite to the point of cliché. (Vicki Lawrence is “wonderfully loving, exceptionally talented”; Gaga was “beautifully brought up.”) But it’s not all fluff. In a chapter about Truman Capote, Jordan recalls how the author’s gay persona, after terrifying him at first, appealed to him and led to an ultimately disastrous effort to portray him onstage. A homophobic incident at his local Starbucks prompted him to recall his volunteer work with AIDS patients during the crisis. In the closing chapter, the author nicely balances a sweet and sour tone, venting his heartbreak at the Orlando Pulse shooting while relating his inexpert attempt to toss a first pitch at a baseball game shortly after.

A lightweight but inviting clutch of remembrances from an outsize personality.



FREEDOM

Junger, Sebastian

Simon & Schuster (160 pp.)

\$25.99 | May 18, 2021

978-1-982153-41-0

The bestselling author explores the lure of nomadism.

At the age of 51, childless and soon to be divorced, Junger spent much of one year walking 400 miles alongside railroad lines in the eastern U.S. with a changing cast of three companions and his dog. They called their trek “the Last Patrol”: an escape, “a temporary injunction against whatever was coming,” and an interlude of freedom from the restrictions and demands of conventional life. Because the swaths of property alongside railroad lines were “the least monitored” land in the country, it seemed a safe choice for the wanderers, who did not want to be mistaken for vagrants. “Most nights,” Junger notes, “we were the only

SECRET WARRIOR
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“An evocative, critical work of cultural history that brings the near past alive.”

THE BELLE ÉPOQUE

people in the world who knew where we were.” The author’s contemplative, digressive narrative combines vivid details of the walk, which was completed in several segments, with political, social, and cultural history; anthropology; and science. He ruminates on nomadic society, hunter-gatherers, Indigenous peoples, the perilous escapes of runaway slaves, various wars, and conflicts that include Cain’s jealousy of Abel and Ireland’s Easter uprising. Sometimes these musings involve considerations of freedom; not always. “Throughout history,” he writes, “good people and bad have maintained their freedom by simply staying out of reach of those who would deprive them of it. That generally meant walking a lot.” Nomadism has romantic appeal for Junger, just as, he claims, it has had for “the settled world.” To hunter-gatherers, working the land seemed a form of subservience; nomadic societies, asserts the author, were more equitable than societies centered around land ownership. Among hunter-gatherers, “although leaders understandably had more prestige than other people, they didn’t have more *rights*.” Although the trip did not yield epiphanies, Junger finally arrived at a place where he

decided to stop wandering and step into his future. It was time “to face my life.”

A meandering chronicle of a year on the road.



THE BELLE ÉPOQUE A Cultural History, Paris and Beyond

Kalifa, Dominique

Trans. by Emanuel, Susan

Columbia Univ. (256 pp.)

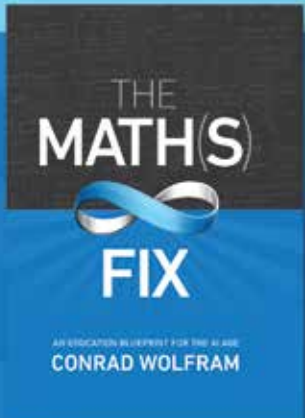
\$30.00 paper | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-231-20209-1

The subject of this book should draw in American readers interested in modern life, Paris, French society, and modern print and film culture.

Paris in the first half of the 20th century was an exhilarating wonderland packed with delightful elements of culture and society: the Metro, Debussy, Stravinsky, Picasso, Matisse, Proust, the Moulin Rouge, courtesans, haute couture. All of it brought “a feeling of lightness and joie de vivre, implying a universe of shared pleasures,” so writes Kalifa (1957–2020), former director of the Center for Nineteenth-Century History at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, in this appealing, scholarly cultural history of the Belle Époque. That the era’s very name summons images of Maurice Chevalier, Edith Piaf, and Leslie Caron is part of the author’s story. So is his portrayal of how the era’s imagery “flowered” and fueled a kind of “Parisian triumphalism” well into the 1960s. Those images, he argues, are indelible parts of how we view the French capital even today and play a role in France’s well-known current emphasis on heritage and “patrimony,” in which this book now assumes its own place. So appealing were images of the Belle Époque that the Nazis succumbed to them during their 1940s occupation of France while the French, condemned later for doing so, used them to please their occupiers. That’s the academic current underlying the narrative—its depiction of the reality that culture’s use and recollection can be as significant as culture itself. American readers, especially those who came of age after World War II, will quickly call up Toulouse-Lautrec posters on their walls and memories of first touring Paris. Kalifa gives those memories historical footings and explains their origins, providing a useful, informative portrait for scholars and Francophiles alike.

An evocative, critical work of cultural history that brings the near past alive.



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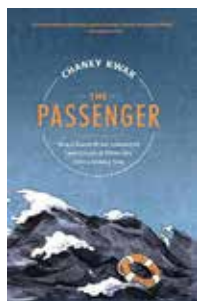
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THE PASSENGER
How a Travel Writer Learned
To Love Cruises & Other Lies
From a Sinking Ship

Kwak, Chaney

Godine (160 pp.)

\$18.95 | Jun. 8, 2021

978-1-56792-697-2

The memoir of a travel writer on assignment aboard a sinking cruise ship.

During a storm on March 23, 2019, the *Viking Sky* suffered engine failure and began drifting toward the jagged shore of Norway. While facing death and hoping to be rescued, Kwak took an inventory of his life and wished for "any normalcy" he could find. With a mix of candor and cynicism, the author details his family's history and his estranged relationship with his German partner of 16 years. Kwak also laments having to soothe them while he was involved in a major crisis. Having become disillusioned with his career, the author shares a history of

cruise ship disasters, and he comments on the hypocrisy and hierarchy of cruise ships, particularly those that cater to the wealthy, noting how crew members cheerily tidied up and attempted to entertain the passengers while they were on the verge of capsizing. Checking the news, he was also disturbed by social media reporting on his cruise ship's predicament in real time as well as disgusted with the notion of his documenting the disaster for the sake of an assignment. He then becomes philosophical regarding the randomness of fate. Making a comparison between the state of the ship and his life, he writes, "what you see isn't always the truth. The staff can keep buffing the surface, but everything is breaking down beyond the skin of this capsule." Around 27 hours after the ordeal began, the ship was able to dock in Norway with the assistance of tugboats. At this point, Kwak expresses gratitude for a second chance and decides it's time to make significant changes in his personal life. The author goes on to share the changes he made after returning to San Francisco as well as details from his interviews with the ship's crew and rescue workers.

A down-to-earth, relatable examination of career and life choices.

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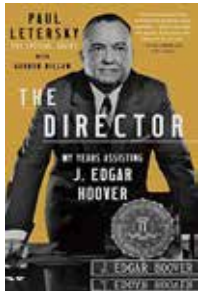
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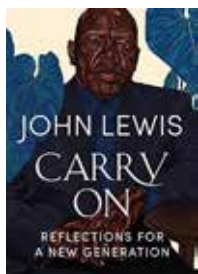
THE DIRECTOR My Years Assisting J. Edgar Hoover

Letersky, Paul with Dillow, Gordon L.
Scribner (320 pp.)
\$28.00 | Jul. 13, 2021
978-1-982164-70-6

An admiring but not uncritical account of Letersky's years in the FBI's innermost circles.

J. Edgar Hoover (1895-1972) has long been supposed to have been a closeted gay man who was vigorous in suppressing other gay men out of shame. If not that, then he is alleged to have been seen wearing women's clothing and calling himself “Mary.” As to the first charge, Letersky, Hoover's former assistant, notes that all of American society seemed to be arrayed against gay people in Hoover's day. “It wasn't fair, it wasn't right, but that was the tenor of the times, and you can't single out Hoover for being part of it.” But what of Hoover's apparently close relationship with assistant director Clyde Tolson? Just two bachelor friends, Letersky maintains. The author is right to insist that the question is no one's business—unless, that is, it has any bearing on how Hoover conducted his criminal investigations. In this regard, Letersky allows that Hoover “could be vindictive, closed-minded, hypocritical, a man of intense hatred and eternal grudges” who just happened to keep private files that may or may not have contained black-mailworthy material. We won't know because “Miss Gandy,” the author's colleague, destroyed those private files after Hoover died. Letersky presents himself as a loyal member of the FBI who disagreed then—and now—with some initiatives, such as COINTELPRO, the campaign to discredit leftist and anti-war organizations. The author also sheds light on Hoover's well-known antipathy for Martin Luther King Jr. “Much of what the Bureau did regarding King was unethical,” he writes, “some of it was only quasi-legal, and some of it was illegal as hell.” Elsewhere, Letersky calls W. Mark Felt, the “Deep Throat” of Watergate, “a notorious sycophant and an insatiable schemer” while William C. Sullivan, another senior executive, was “the source of many of the most vicious stories about the Director,” stories that are fascinating in their own right.

A fly-on-the-wall portrait of Hoover's last years as America's top cop, of interest to students of crime—and rumor.



CARRY ON Reflections for a New Generation

Lewis, John
Grand Central Publishing (240 pp.)
\$22.00 | Jul. 13, 2021
978-1-5387-0712-8

More hard-won wisdom from the late congressman, civil rights icon, and co-author of the indispensable March series.



In this collection of short observations on topics ranging from courage to patience to sports, Lewis (1940-2020) lays bare the vision and stratagems that sustained him through his lifelong, often brutal struggle for Black liberty. The author will long be remembered as a champion for Black equality as well as common decency and peace. One of the standout advocates of nonviolent political action, Lewis sought out “good trouble, necessary trouble”—such as that displayed by Rosa Parks, who “knew in her heart [that she] was right”—when the forces arrayed against Black civil rights bared their teeth. At the same time, he writes, “destruction doesn't work. Rioting isn't a movement. We must be constructive and not destructive. Chaos is sowing more division and discord.” Violence, writes the author, only serves to drown out injustice, surrendering the higher moral ground. As he demonstrates throughout, Lewis was a force for compassion, empathy, dignity, and self-worth, constantly pursuing justice reform, speaking out in the face of fear, and moving forward in the faith that good can come from principled, collective action. Lewis expresses himself with clarity, authenticity, and humility, all of which can be applied in nearly every arena, including health care (“a human right”), voting (“VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE VOTE. Write that in capital letters in your notes. All over the page. Remember the time when the right to vote was denied us? I do”), the environment (“We have a moral obligation to do what we can to preserve and save this little piece of real estate”), and immigration (“Welcome home. America wants and needs you”). The author's courage and conviction are crystal clear, and it's also evident that he never feared death because he knew that his life had purpose.

A bright, morally unwavering worldview from an exemplary human being.



BREATHING FIRE Female Inmate Firefighters and the Front Lines of California's Wildfires

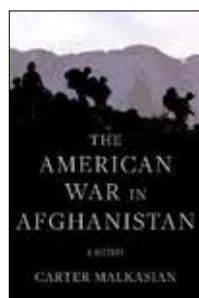
Lowe, Jaime
MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux
(320 pp.)
\$27.00 | Jul. 27, 2021
978-0-374-11618-7

A detailed and infuriating depiction of America's inhumane practice of deploying inmate firefighters.

In this expansion of her work for the *New York Times Magazine*, journalist Lowe delves into the stories of the incarcerated women fighting California's frequent, deadly wildfires. At great personal risk, these women remain prisoners as they battle flames and endure grueling physical challenges. The author traces the histories of women in different “camps” across the state, illustrating the overrepresentation of women engaged in this extremely dangerous work. Even as they risk their lives fighting fires, they receive a negligible amount of training compared to “free” firefighters. The numbers of incarcerated firefighters are shocking: “Depending on the year, inmate firefighters make up as much as 30

percent of California's wildland fire crews." Lowe chronicles her discussions with a wide range of women. Some believe in the program's ability to prepare inmates for new ways of life, providing access to nature and employable skills. Many others point out the exploitation of their labor, sexual abuse, drug use, and constant danger. The stories share horrifying, dehumanizing parallels with slave labor—especially analogous given the disproportionate number of American prisoners who are Black. However, Lowe does not examine race until halfway through the book, which weakens the critical and rhetorical power of the story as a whole. The eventual list of myriad ways the prison system differentially targets Black Americans would be more effective if this analysis framed the critique rather than being compartmentalized midway through. Nevertheless, Lowe writes compellingly, including appropriately heartbreaking details of these women's lives, what is taken from them, and how they risk their lives for \$2.56 per day. This is a story of 21st-century chain gangs in the star-studded hills of Malibu battling the consequences of climate change and of a country lost in the mire of seemingly endless mass incarceration.

A disturbing portrayal of America's exploitative prison system and the incarcerated women fighting California's wildfires.



THE AMERICAN WAR IN AFGHANISTAN A History

Malkasian, Carter
Oxford Univ. (\$44 pp.)
\$34.95 | Jul. 1, 2021
978-0-19-755077-9

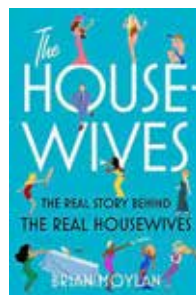


Comprehensive history of the longest armed conflict in U.S. history.

In his third book, Oxford-trained historian and former State Department official Malkasian gives the most thorough account of the war in Afghanistan to date. Spanning more than 18 years and three American presidents—George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump—the conflict is now winding down, but in a way that many find disappointing. In the first three chapters, he lays the scene of Afghan culture and society. Malkasian argues that America's war in Afghanistan is part of the broader upheaval sparked by the Soviet-Afghan War, begun in 1978 and fought between Soviet-backed Communists who took power in a coup and the resistance fighters to whom the U.S. supplied over \$1 billion in funds and arms as part of Cold War containment. In the middle chapters, Malkasian gives a blow-by-blow of American phases of the war, beginning with the period from the initial invasion after 9/11 through the 2003 Iraq War. Then came the 2006 Taliban offensive that triggered the troop surge of 2007. The author gives the most detailed coverage to Obama's surge, which included 140,000 troops (compared to Bush's 30,000) and was marked by various resets and reallocations. Malkasian focuses on the southern province of Helmand, where he spent nearly two years as a civilian adviser. In the final chapters, the author looks at Trump's drawdown and the 2019-2020 peace

talks. Malkasian is clear on why those talks succeeded: "It is not the battlefield stalemate or diplomatic prowess. It is Donald Trump....More than other any other US politician, he was willing to buck criticism and demand that the United States leave." Perhaps the war wouldn't have been so costly if this had happened sooner, but Malkasian concedes that there was never an easy way out. Mismanagement, tribalism, and refusals to leave have all fed "the combat experience of a generation of US servicemen and women." For the Afghan people, the experience has been nothing short of catastrophic.

A sweeping, deeply researched account that will gratify specialists and nonspecialists alike.



THE HOUSEWIVES The Real Story Behind the Real Housewives

Moylan, Brian
Flatiron Books (304 pp.)
\$27.99 | May 25, 2021
978-1-250-80760-1

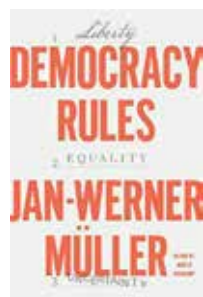
Behind the scenes of one of TV's most absurd spectacles.

Any history of the Real Housewives franchise would have to be messy. This inconsistent account certainly embodies that odd legacy. Sometimes, Moylan's writing is gloriously entertaining, especially in his recaps of classic moments from Housewives history—e.g., Teresa Giudice flipping tables or Aviva Drescher removing her artificial leg and tossing it into the middle of "famed New York eatery Cipriani." Here's how Moylan, a self-described "Real Housewives anthropologist" who has been recapping the show for more than a decade for *Gawker* and *Vulture*, describes *Atlanta* Housewife Kim Zolciak before she battles frenemy NeNe Leakes: "She's also sporting a cheaper wig than usual, her original nose, and lips without the filler that would turn them into balloon animals." Sometimes, Moylan takes interesting detours into the online world of Housewives fans, real-life encounters at the BravoCon convention, or a Puerto Vallarta Hyatt for "Vacation With Vicki," a weekendlong event with *Orange County* Housewife Vicki Gunvalson. Unfortunately, many of those bright and shiny moments are clouded by a lack of direct sources and vague identifiers like "according to someone working on the show at the time," and many of the early chapters are packed with tortured attempts to explain things without quoting anyone in a position of power at Bravo who could directly answer simple questions. It's not until near the end that we learn the reason: "Bravo did me the favor of contacting every single real Housewife, past, present, and possibly future, and told them they were not allowed to talk to me." That's a gutsy reality check for a book that sets out to reveal the inner workings of reality TV. It also helps explain the numerous knocks against Bravo executive Andy Cohen. But in a meta way, it still sort of works.

Moylan gives the flawed, delightfully weird reality series the flawed, delightfully weird history it deserves.

“An essential examination of what democracy is and can be, how it can be abused or strengthened, and how we can move forward.”

DEMOCRACY RULES



DEMOCRACY RULES

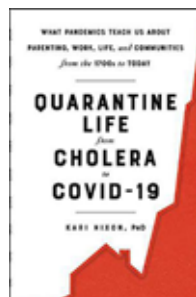
Müller, Jan-Werner
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
(256 pp.)
\$23.36 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-0-374-13647-5



An introduction to democracy as a concept, taking readers through its origin, processes, and components.

Princeton social sciences professor Müller begins by stressing that his latest book—after *What Is Populism?* (2016)—“is not a political manual” and that, despite significant setbacks, “democracy does still rule—in the sense that plenty of people around the globe view it as deeply desirable.” In this fascinating, readable work, the author helps readers understand exactly how democracy is meant to work. Meticulously researched and clearly spelled out, the narrative demonstrates what democracy is and isn’t, and Müller also includes a coda entitled “Five Reasons for Democratic Hope (Not Optimism).” Each section explores a specific aspect of democracy, including representation, governance, infrastructure, disobedience, borders, and others. The author reminds us that “we are all in favor of learning from history, but we implicitly assume that only good people learn from it,” and he emphasizes that anti-democratic governments work hard to look democratic on the surface. If we seek to understand democracy, we must also acknowledge the lure and strategies of both populism and authoritarianism. “Populism is not uniquely responsible for polarization,” writes the author, “but it’s important to understand that populists’ key strategy simply *is* polarization.” Throughout the book, Müller provides historical context and many examples of when democratic principles are undermined or ignored. While “parties and media provide the essential infrastructure of democracy,” Müller shows why it’s crucial that they are not only autonomous, but accessible to every citizen, and he also delves into the pitfalls of social media. For such an all-encompassing, often messy, and contentious subject, the author maintains a concise, consistently informative narrative that explains key terms and theoretical frameworks in a way that should engage a wide audience.

An essential examination of what democracy is and can be, how it can be abused or strengthened, and how we can move forward.



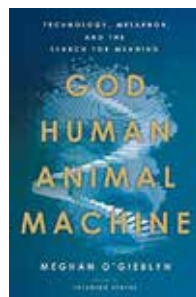
QUARANTINE LIFE FROM CHOLERA TO COVID-19 *What Pandemics Teach Us About Parenting, Work, Life, and Communities From the 1700s to Today*

Nixon, Kari
Tiller Press/Simon & Schuster (304 pp.)
\$26.99 | Jun. 15, 2021
978-1-982172-46-6

A breezy take on plagues and peoples by a writer with a “disease fascination.”

Nixon, a professor of medical humanities, scans history to find support for a series of tweet-ish theses: “Listen. To. Women.” “Contagion is community.” “The kids are not all right.” There are worthy if obvious points throughout. The author, a mother of two, worries about when schools will reopen and what the benchmark for that will be: “And I mean an evidence-based benchmark, not simply a choice made because we’re tired of being careful.” She is also good at holding up a mirror to social norms that deserve to be remade, including our willingness to overlook the bad things of the world, including plagues and famine, as long as they’re not happening to us, and the American tendency to be driven by fear. On the latter point, Nixon rightly observes that if we are truly to be free of any risk of contracting a communicable disease, we’d need to lock ourselves in our houses, isolate, and spend our time sanitizing and overcooking everything in sight. “This sounds like a sad and hollow existence to me,” she observes—and never mind that several survivors of the 1918 influenza pandemic whom she quotes counsel modern-day plague navigators to do just that. Apart from a few witty notes on our history of “surviving plague after plague,” Nixon’s points have been addressed by many other writers in the current flood of pandemic-related literature, and her suggestion at the end that we all make nice with vaccine deniers and other enemies of common sense is cloying: “I’m convinced that the differences I see on the surface are red herrings meant to divide us, to distract us from the ways we could be banding together.” Peace and love are all well and good, but even better is a shot in the arm.

A nonessential entry in a crowded field.



GOD, HUMAN, ANIMAL, MACHINE *Technology, Metaphor, and the Search for Meaning*

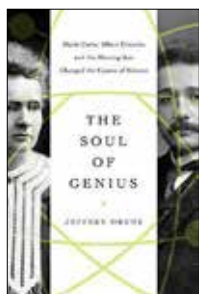
O’Gieblyn, Meghan
Doubleday (304 pp.)
\$26.95 | Aug. 24, 2021
978-0-385-54382-8

An exploration of how technology has co-opted the metaphors of religion, with uncanny and discomfiting results.

Essayist O’Gieblyn is a former Bible school student who lost her faith, but living in the real world is no escape from

spiritual discourse, especially when it comes to the internet. Much of this intellectually wide-ranging, occasionally knotty book turns on the ways we reflexively apply religious imagery to online life, “constantly, obsessively enchanting the world with life it does not possess.” The author begins her considerations concretely, discussing her relationship with an Aibo, a robotic dog loaded with convincingly doggy idiosyncrasies; bonding with the machine, she wonders if humans are built “to see life everywhere we look.” And if that’s irrational, what’s the rational approach? To a surprising degree, she finds, scientists can’t escape a kind of modified God-talk despite their learnedness and rigor. They speak of “emergence” of group consciousness online, ponder the mystical unknowability of matter in quantum physics, or propose that we might all be living in a computer simulation, a theory O’Gieblyn reads as old creationist wine in new bottles. The author is a whip-smart stylist who’s up to the task of writing about this material journalistically and personally; her considerations encompass string theory, Calvinism, “transhuman” futurists like Ray Kurzweil, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, which features “a moral drama that for me has lost none of its essential power.” Though sometimes overly digressive, toward the end the author sharpens her concern that “enchanting” the internet risks our being blind to how it exploits us: “We are indeed the virus, the ghost in the machine, the bug slowing down a system that would function better, in practically every sense, without us.” The machines aren’t alive, but that doesn’t mean they’re not taking over.

A melancholy, well-researched tour of faith and tech and the dissatisfactions of both.



THE SOUL OF GENIUS
Marie Curie, Albert Einstein,
and the Meeting That
Changed the Course of
Science

Orens, Jeffrey

Pegasus (336 pp.)

\$28.95 | Jul. 6, 2021

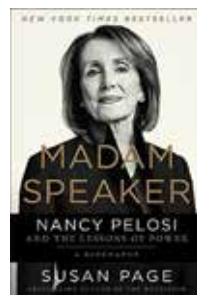
978-1-64313-714-8

Dual biography of “the two brilliant individuals who have made the greatest impression on people across the world when they think of science.”

The meeting was the iconic first 1911 Solvay Conference in Brussels, attended by many geniuses besides the two in the title. Orens, a former engineer and executive with Solvay Chemical, presents portraits of Einstein and Curie that will not replace a focused individual life—see Walter Isaacson’s *Einstein* (2007) and Susan Quinn’s *Marie Curie* (1995)—but it’s a good read. Ernest Solvay (1838-1922) was a wealthy Belgian industrialist who, like Alfred Nobel, his contemporary, became a philanthropist for scientific causes. Still held every three years, Solvay conferences assemble elite physicists and chemists to discuss a significant problem. Einstein and Curie met at the first and remained friends, although their research never overlapped.

As such, Orens skips back and forth as he recounts their lives. Not yet a scientific superstar, Einstein was a central figure at the 1911 meeting, the goal of which was to explain newly discovered quantum phenomena that didn’t make sense. His epic 1905 papers are mostly known for proposing relativity, but one explained that an electron could behave as a particle and energy wave at the same time. A groundbreaking discovery at the birth of quantum mechanics, this “photoelectric effect” (not relativity) won Einstein his Nobel Prize. It was among the first proven phenomena to contradict Newton’s laws, and scientists are still trying to reconcile these quantum effects and classical physics. Curie discovered radium, by far the most radioactive element. Although she didn’t discover radioactivity (a common error), she explained it as a consequence of a breakdown of the atom itself—not, as some theorized, a sort of chemical reaction. Fiercely dedicated, ambitious, and workaholic, she overcame poverty and the almost universal prejudice against educated women to become the first internationally famous woman scientist.

A painless introduction to two of the 20th century’s greatest geniuses.



MADAM SPEAKER
Nancy Pelosi and the Lessons
of Power

Page, Susan

Twelve (448 pp.)

\$32.50 | Apr. 20, 2021

978-1-5387-5069-8

The dazzling achievements of a trailblazing politician.

Page, Washington bureau chief for *USA Today*, draws on a prodigious number of interviews with figures including Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Newt Gingrich, Ilhan Omar, and John Boehner; Nancy Pelosi’s colleagues, friends, co-workers, and adversaries; and interviews with Pelosi herself to create a balanced, informative biography of a woman widely hailed as “a master of the inside game of politics.” Born in Baltimore in 1940, Nancy D’Alessandro grew up steeped in public service. Her father was a Maryland Congressman and later Baltimore’s mayor; her savvy, ambitious, pragmatic mother “organized the grass roots.” Politics, Page notes, was “the family business.” A year after graduating from Trinity College in 1962, she married Paul Pelosi, and in 1969, the couple and their growing family moved to San Francisco for Paul’s work. While raising five children, Pelosi became involved in local politics, prompting San Francisco’s mayor to tap her for the city’s library commission. At the age of 35, Pelosi “discovered that she liked having an official position, being able to convene hearings, to cast votes. She began to think about her possible political role in a different way.” In 1987, she won her first election. Early in her career, in Armani suits and stiletto heels, Pelosi was “routinely underestimated” by the male-dominated political world. But she quickly, and repeatedly, demonstrated her power: She was supremely organized, adept

“A lovely cautionary tale filled with pride, hope, and respect for the land and its history.”

PASTORAL SONG

at fundraising, and laser-focused on success. A major force in passing the Affordable Care Act, Pelosi, Obama told Page, is “tougher than anybody in the world.” As one reporter put it, she wielded “an iron fist in a Gucci glove.” Page elaborates on Pelosi’s impressive public career rather than on her personal life. “I’m as private a person as there is, a shy one,” Pelosi told Page, when she deemed a question intrusive. Private, to be sure; shy, not believable.

A brisk, well-researched life.



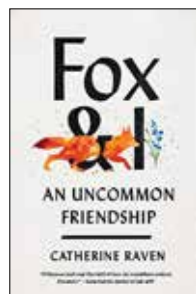
SWAN DIVE *The Making of a Rogue Ballerina*

Pazcoguin, Georgina
Henry Holt (272 pp.)
\$27.99 | Jul. 27, 2021
978-1-250-24430-7

Behind the scenes with an acclaimed ballerina.

At 14, Pazcoguin, who had been dancing since she was 4, won a scholarship to the summer program at the School of American Ballet, launching her on a path to join the New York City Ballet. In her brisk, spirited debut memoir, the author recounts her experiences in the competitive, hierarchical ballet world, from the “elitist cult” of the corp de ballet to her promotion as the “first Asian American woman soloist in the history of the company.” Despite talent, ambition, and hard work, Pazcoguin became frustrated that racial stereotypes barred her from roles she coveted. “Need an ambiguously ethnic, badass female?” she recalled. “It’s Paz to the rescue!” Even in *The Nutcracker*, she found that she was assigned to the B cast, composed of people of color, while the A cast featured lighter-skinned dancers. She directs unmitigated anger at former NYCB director Peter Martins, who “wanted me in a cage, to be okay with his idea of what a dancer who looks like me should be.” After he criticized the size of her thighs, she went to a doctor who prescribed that she eat 720 calories per day for the next four months. Trained to find everything wrong with her body, she came to see herself as a “monster,” eventually spending \$10,000 on liposuction. “As I’ve grown older and wiser,” she reflects, “I can see that the younger me twisted sacrifice into something darker. Especially when it came to Peter’s subjective view of what my body should look like.” Despite the abusive culture that Martins fomented, Pazcoguin never lost her passion for ballet. Besides performing throughout the world with other companies, she danced on Broadway in *Cats*: a challenging role and a window on a more nurturing culture than she had known on the ballet stage.

A lively chronicle of dedication and joy.



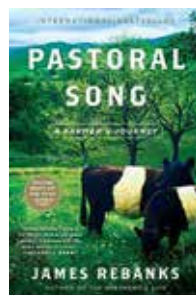
FOX & I *An Uncommon Friendship*

Raven, Catherine
Spiegel & Grau (304 pp.)
\$28.00 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-954118-00-3

The touching memoir of a biologist who befriended a fox in the wilderness.

Raven fled an abusive home at age 15, entering college at 16. Following her passion, she moved to the mountains of Montana, where she worked as a park ranger before earning her doctorate in biology. She built a small cottage in a valley and began leading a solitary life, working for the National Park Service and teaching classes online and in the field. According to the author, she never felt lonely, but she did long to fit in somewhere. One day, she noticed that a fox would show up outside her cottage at the same time each day. Based on her academic training and professional experiences, she had always avoided humanizing wild animals. However, something was special about this fox, and the two soon developed a bond. At first, Raven felt the need to defend their relationship to her colleagues and students, fielding their frequent and targeted questions. She also continually pondered relocating to a city where she could obtain a good-paying academic job with health insurance. But the more time she and the fox spent with each other, the more the author learned about herself and was able to let go of many of the conventional ideas that had been ingrained in her mind by society. With a scientific depth of examination accompanied by lyrical language, Raven explores the development of the bond between the fox and herself as well as the natural habitat surrounding her home, including the responsibilities of landownership. She also includes relevant references from literature that have inspired her views (she also read passages out loud to the fox). As the author charmingly explains, their relationship continued to grow deeper, providing her with a sense of purpose—until a natural tragedy struck her remote area of wilderness, forever altering the trajectory of her life.

A heartfelt meditation on the power of nature and a touching homage to a beloved wild friend.



PASTORAL SONG *A Farmer's Journey*

Rebanks, James
Custom House/Morrow (304 pp.)
\$28.99 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-0-06-307327-2

A beautifully written elegy to traditional farmers and farming methods.

In his second book, named by the *Sunday Times* as the best nature book of 2020 in the U.K., Rebanks begins by recounting his youth on his grandparents’ farm in the Lake District of England, tagging along with his grandfather as he



did his work, teaching him the “old ways.” He compassionately describes riding along in the tractor as “black-headed gulls follow in our wake as if we are a little fishing boat out at sea.” He also shares fond memories of picking blackberries and making jam with his grandmother. “My grandmother was an expert at turning the things the farm grew, harvested and reared into meals,” writes the author. “Almost everything she cooked was home-grown, seasonal and local.” Over the years, however, Rebanks witnessed the lamentable transformation of the land as corporations began buying local farms and introducing “modern” technologies. By the time he inherited the family farm, most of the local farmers and workers were gone, there were no worms in the fields, and the stone barns, walls, and hedges had been ploughed in the name of progress. The tools and practices introduced decades earlier had taken their toll, and much of the damage was irreversible. Even as people became more obsessed with food, they remained disconnected from the land. People worried about what they should eat and wanted options, but they had little knowledge regarding how to sustainably produce food. “I had inherited a complex bundle of economic and ecological challenges—and that, perhaps, was what it really meant to be a farmer,” writes Rebanks in this eloquent tribute to a vanishing way of life. Guided by the knowledge passed down by his family and recent advances in sustainable technology, the author continues his journey, slowly salvaging his tiny corner of the world to create a legacy for his children and the future.

A lovely cautionary tale filled with pride, hope, and respect for the land and its history.



YEARBOOK

Rogen, Seth
Crown (272 pp.)
\$28.00 | May 11, 2021
978-1-984825-40-7

Everyone’s favorite stoner recalls his childhood, youth, and first stirrings of Hollywood success.

“My friends are thrilled when their kids *don’t* shit all over their floors,” writes Rogen. “As an adult, I get little to no praise for doing the same.” It’s a characteristic line; Rogen leans heavily on the seven words with which George Carlin made so much hay, with a dash of Borscht Belt shtick (“The hardest part about being Jewish is...the grandparents”) and some occasional high-concept material. The author reveals that he inherited a touch of his father’s Tourette’s mixed in with his mother’s gentleness, the blend of which resulted in a kind of easygoing ADHD best treated with lashings of marijuana. When he learned that a teenage friend had smoked pot with her brother, he asked how it felt. “It burns your throat like crazy,” she replied, to which Rogen responded, “Awesome.” Other drugs come and go in these pages—MDMA, for one, which can certainly make a pitch meeting difficult. And then there’s this: “If you’ve ever been grocery shopping while an inhuman amount of hallucinogenic mushrooms are [sic] aggressively taking over your system, you know that shit ain’t easy.” Indeed. Rogen’s not

inclined to badmouth, though from time to time, his critical bone is tickled (“all the movies to come out of *Project Greenlight* fucking suck butt”). He also makes it clear, through encounters with the likes of Kanye West, Nicolas Cage, and George Lucas, that Los Angeles is the world headquarters of eccentricity bordering on madness. As a good Canadian, too, Rogen can’t help but get in a few digs at the rest of the country, as when he considers the reluctance of the federal government to legalize pot, “because it’s just too effective a way to persecute minorities and keep prisons full, which are things that they love to do in America.”

Fans of Rogen will enjoy his laid-back, whimsical memoir.



TILL THE END

Sabathia, C.C. with Smith, Chris
Roc Lit 101 (288 pp.)
\$28.00 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-0-593-13375-0



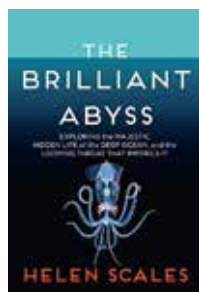
One of the best pitchers of his generation—and often the only Black man on his team—shares an extraordinary life in baseball.

A high school star in several sports, Sabathia was being furiously recruited by both colleges and professional teams when the death of his grandmother, whose Social Security checks supported the family, meant that he couldn’t go to college even with a full scholarship. He recounts how he learned he had been drafted by the Cleveland Indians in the first round over the PA system at his high school. In 2001, after three seasons in the minor leagues, Sabathia became the youngest player in MLB (age 20). His career took off from there, and in 2008, he signed with the New York Yankees for seven years and \$161 million, at the time the largest contract ever for a pitcher. With the help of *Vanity Fair* contributor Smith, Sabathia tells the entertaining story of his 19 seasons on and off the field. The first 14 ran in tandem with a poorly hidden alcohol problem and a propensity for destructive bar brawls. His high school sweetheart, Amber, who became his wife and the mother of his children, did her best to help him manage his repressed fury and grief about the deaths of two beloved cousins and his father, but Sabathia pursued drinking with the same “till the end” mentality as everything else. Finally, a series of disasters led to a month of rehab in 2015. Leading a sober life was necessary, but it did not tame Sabathia’s trademark feistiness. He continued to fiercely rile his opponents and foment the fighting spirit in his teammates until debilitating injuries to his knees and pitching arm led to his retirement in 2019. This book represents an excellent launching point for Jay-Z’s new imprint, Roc Lit 101.

Everything about Sabathia is larger than life, yet he tells his story with honesty and humility.

“A beguiling journey into the ocean’s deep, a wondrous landscape full of mystery and adventure.”

THE BRILLIANT ABYSS



THE BRILLIANT ABYSS
Exploring the Majestic Hidden Life of the Deep Ocean and the Looming Threat That Imperils It

Scales, Helen

Atlantic Monthly (288 pp.)

\$27.00 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-8021-5822-2

An investigative foray into the world of deep-sea waters with a veteran marine

biologist.

“This is without a doubt a golden era for deep-sea exploration,” writes Scales in this beguiling journey into the ocean’s deep, a wondrous landscape full of mystery and adventure: “Here lie entire ecosystems shut away in the dark that are based around the chemical powers of microbes, where worms are nine feet long, crabs dance, and snails grow suits of shiny metal armor.” At the same time, however, the ever increasing knowledge of the abyss leads to further evidence that there is money to be made by harvesting the resources held there. Scales begins by describing the deep sea’s uniqueness and biodiversity. She examines many of its miraculous denizens, such as the “bone-eating snout flower,” found off the coast of Sweden; the ultra-black fish; and gossamer worms, which “wriggle elegantly in tight pirouettes through the water.” Scales also discusses such features as seamounts, coral beds, and hydrothermal vents as well as chemical reactions such as bioluminescence and chemosynthesis (the dark equivalent of photosynthesis). Tracking the massive circulatory patterns of the ocean currents, the author demonstrates how they are disrupted by the forces of climate change, and she looks into possible medical advances that could originate from the ocean floor, including chemotherapy ingredients, genetic-testing materials, and new antibiotics. As in her two previous books, *Spirals in Time* and *Eyes of the Shoal*, Scales offers crisp, engaging prose, linking everything together in an accessible, entertaining manner. With plenty of scientific research to back her up, the author displays legitimate concerns about a wide variety of maladies, including plastic waste, raw sewage, oil spills, radioactive elements, and deep-sea mining, which “pose[s] dangerous risks to biodiversity and the environment, on timescales and intensities that cannot yet be fully quantified but could be catastrophic and permanent.”

A captivating nature tour and a convincing warning that “the deep needs decisive, unconditional protection.”



THE CRUELTY IS THE POINT
Essays on Trump's America

Serwer, Adam

One World/Random House (384 pp.)

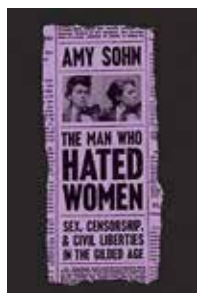
\$28.00 | Jun. 29, 2021

978-0-593-23080-0

A cogent examination of the challenges America faces.

In a vigorous collection of more than a dozen essays, award-winning journalist Serwer, a staff writer at the *Atlantic* and former fellow at the Shorenstein Center at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, considers the social and ideological forces that led to Trump’s presidency and, without intervention, will continue to shape American society. Most essays, drawn from pieces published since 2016, are newly contextualized, and Serwer includes additional pieces on immigration, politics within the American Jewish community, the destructive impact of police unions, and the past and future of American authoritarianism. He argues persuasively that racism lies at the heart of Trumpism. Although the media focused on economic anxiety to account for Trump’s rise and continuing appeal, “the movement,” he asserts, “cannot be rescued from its bigotry,” which was intensified by Obama’s presidency. Trump’s supporters have found what they deeply wanted: “a president who embodies the rage they feel toward those they hate and fear, while reassuring them that that rage is nothing to be ashamed of.” Serwer underscores the prevalence of cruelty in American life, which Trump exacerbated. In “The Cruelty of the Covid Contract,” he sees that Trump’s refusal to deal with the pandemic was essentially racist. “The lives of disproportionately black and brown workers are being sacrificed to fuel the engine of a faltering economy, by a president who disdains them,” he writes. “This is the COVID contract.” In examining the claims of nativists and White supremacists, Serwer traces the roots of White nationalism to the American eugenics movement that influenced immigration policy in the 1920s and later fed Nazi ideology. In “The Cruelty of the Code of Silence,” he excoriates police unions for promoting the image of the police “as the lone barrier between civilization and barbarism,” characterizing the people they are meant to defend and protect as violent and uncontrollable.

A strong contribution to conversations about racism, injustice, and violence, all of which continue to plague this country.



THE MAN WHO HATED WOMEN *Sex, Censorship, & Civil Liberties in the Gilded Age*

Sohn, Amy

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (400 pp.)

\$28.00 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-250-17481-9



How the reactionary Christian ideology of one government official contributed to the suppression of women's reproductive freedom for decades.

In this important work of biographical history, novelist Sohn traces the career of Anthony Comstock (1844-1915), special agent to the U.S. Post Office and secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. For more than 40 years, Comstock, a deeply Christian dry goods seller from Connecticut, harassed and imprisoned many of the important pioneers in the birth control movement. "He became convinced that obscenity, which he called a 'hydra-headed monster,' led to prostitution, illness, death, abortions, and venereal disease," writes the author. In 1873, with the aid of well-heeled YMCA leaders, he was able to pass the Comstock Act, which "made the distribution, selling, possession, and mailing of obscene material and contraception punishable with extreme fines and prison sentences." Wielding this law, he doggedly pursued freethinking, activist women and their supporters as they attempted to speak and write about women's bodies, sexual matters, and abortion. These activists included the sisters Victoria C. Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin, stockbrokers, spiritualists, and "free lovers"; Angela and Ezra Heywood, printers and writers; abortionist Ann "Madam Restell" Lohman, who committed suicide rather than be prosecuted; Dr. Sara B. Chase, who, in defiance, named her popular birth control device the "Comstock Syringe"; Ida Craddock, a spiritual consultant and writer on happy marital sex, who also killed herself when prosecuted; Emma Goldman, anarchist and birth control activist; and Margaret Sanger, who took on Comstock in court and prevailed in starting the first birth control clinic in Brooklyn. Throughout this immensely readable history, Sohn fashions sympathetic narratives of these women's lives and underscores their invaluable sacrifices for a vital cause. Many readers will be appalled to learn that literature about birth control was once considered obscene.

Stellar research in women's history, especially crucial due to recent threats to abortion rights across the country.



ALWAYS CRASHING IN THE SAME CAR *On Art, Crisis, & Los Angeles, California*

Specktor, Matthew

Tin House (386 pp.)

\$17.95 paper | Jul. 27, 2021

978-1-951142-62-9

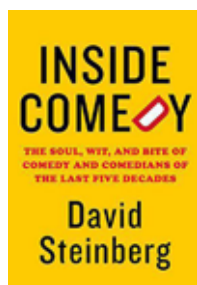
Many people think we reveal more about ourselves by discussing favorite movies and music than when we talk about our own lives. Specktor tests that theory in his unusual new memoir.

The author, a founding editor of the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, tells the story of a difficult period of his life by writing about the creative people (and their work) that he was drawn to at the time. His picks serve to illuminate both his character and state of mind at the time, and they include actor Tuesday Weld, musician Warren Zevon, critic Renata Adler, and directors Hal Ashby and Michael Cimino, whom he tackles together. A skilled critic himself, Specktor offers useful context for some of his choices—e.g., explaining the work of husband-and-wife filmmaking team Frank and Eleanor Perry for today's audience: "If *The Swimmer* was the fevered delirium of suburbia in decline—a noted inspiration, much later for the television series *Mad Men*—then Sue Kaufman's *Diary of a Mad Housewife* was the chronicle of that decline from the inside out: *Mad Men*, if January Jones's Betty Draper were the protagonist of that show, with her husband Don nothing but a condescending, insufferable satellite." Specktor also explains how his admiration for *Five Easy Pieces* screenwriter Carole Eastman is wrapped in his conflicted thoughts of his screenwriter mother and his own stalled screenwriting career. Those personal moments are the strongest in the book—how Zevon's music was the soundtrack to a painful family moment, how an ailing friend connected him to Weld's work, how he idolized Thomas McGuane, whose work "cemented in place what had begun with Fitzgerald: my wish to strike sentences into being." But whenever he reveals a bit of himself, Specktor quickly pulls back to the comfort of film history or deep descriptions of his Hollywood neighborhood.

Specktor delivers interesting pieces of criticism, reporting, and self-help in this unique memoir, but the whole falls short.

“Engrossing, indelible, and brimming with genuine humanity.”

COMMITTED



INSIDE COMEDY
The Soul, Wit, and Bite of
Comedy and Comedians of
the Last Five Decades

Steinberg, David

Knopf (352 pp.)

\$29.95 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-525-52057-3

A half-century survey of the comedic landscape.

Steinberg has a gift not only for stand-up and improvisational comedy, but also for the rhythms and mores of show business more generally. Born in Winnipeg, the author left pre-rabbinical studies during his teens. While in college in Chicago, watching Lenny Bruce inspired him to invent his own brand of socially conscious stand-up, and he joined the famed Second City troupe alongside Joan Rivers, Alan Arkin, Mike Nichols, and Elaine May. Steinberg went on to a hugely successful comedy career that included 30 years of stand-up, 140 appearances on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*, directing successful sitcoms (*Seinfeld*, *Mad About You*, etc.), and producing and hosting *Inside Comedy*, his series of one-on-one conversations with more than 75 comedians. Along the way, he got to know just about everybody of importance in the comedy world, many of whom appear in these pages. The author charts a throughline of comics from the Borscht Belt to the *Ed Sullivan Show* to the *Tonight Show*, highlighting the work of Milton Berle, Sid Caesar, Don Rickles, and countless others. As a writer on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* in the late 1960s, Steinberg saw how CBS censors tried to shut down political humor. Now, as an elder statesman of entertainment, he reflects on “more than a good life, a dream built on laughter.” Because the author interviewed his roll call of comedians for the *Inside Comedy* series, parts of the book read like transcripts, but beyond all the name-dropping and off-color anecdotes is a real love for the craft and its giants. Via dozens of memories from the leading lights of comedy over the past 50-plus years, Steinberg effectively expresses his “reverence for and experiences with Groucho Marx and George Burns and their world, for stand-up comedy, comedians in clubs and on television, and those who excel at being both actors and comedians.”

A lifelong story of comedy and its brilliant careers, told by a consummate insider.



COMMITTED
Dispatches From a
Psychiatrist in Training

Stern, Adam

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (320 pp.)

\$26.00 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-358-43473-3

The highs and lows of a grueling four-year psychiatry residency.

As Stern notes in this dynamic debut memoir, though he was armed with the empathetic drive to “become an expert in the human condition,” he was unprepared for the difficult work he would face. After graduating from SUNY Syracuse, he matched with the residency program at Harvard Medical School in 2010. The author writes about how he was intimidated after being paired with classmates from more prestigious medical schools, but as the son of a cardiologist, high expectations were established early, which only added to the pressure to outperform the 14 other residency scholars in his class. After several shaky introductory shifts, Stern found his footing in a work environment characterized by elaborate clinical processes, murky treatment ethics, nagging self-doubt, and sheer physical exhaustion. Eventually, the author got worn down by weeks of consecutive overnight shifts handling the “firestorm” of a full patient caseload in the psych ward and rotation schedules in the emergency department. Nonetheless, Stern remained committed, and he was also able to find romantic fulfillment with a fellow resident, Rachel, who later became his wife. As the author vividly captures the urgency, chaos, and eerie fascination involved with the treatment of mental illness, he also candidly shares numerous patient portraits, which provide some of the most moving and disturbing moments in the book. Stern capably handled patients plagued with severe anorexia, manic depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, but he was still blindsided by some of the unique, situational “stuff we never covered in med school.” The combination of patient case studies and medical trainee journal creates an intense reading experience and an eye-opening appreciation for medical professionals charged with psychiatric care. Residents and those contemplating a career in mental health will find much to glean from this spirited memoir of dedication and dogged determination.

Engrossing, indelible, and brimming with genuine humanity.



ACROSS THE AIRLESS WILDS
The Lunar Rover and the Triumph of the Final Moon Landings

Swift, Earl

Custom House/Morrow (320 pp.)

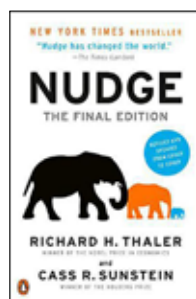
\$28.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-06-298653-5

An overlooked achievement in the initial series of moon landings gets a well-deserved spotlight.

Though the later landings are often overshadowed by the first, journalist Swift shows us their significant accomplishments. He reminds readers that during the first three landings, the moon walkers literally walked, wearing clunky spacesuits that limited their mobility and kept them close to the lander. Each of the final three missions arrived with a truly extraordinary vehicle, a superlight, four-wheeled, battery-powered rover capable of carrying two astronauts over an area the size of Manhattan. A footnote in thick histories of space travel, the rover was designed with the primitive technology of the time, blew through its budget, and threatened to overshoot its deadline by months. Still, it changed everything about the missions. In the enthusiasm following the 1962 announcement of Apollo, NASA assumed that Americans would go to the moon, stay, and explore. Swift delivers a long, often hair-raising description of the technical marvels—transporter, fliers, mobile laboratories, and even jetpacks—that planners considered, many of which would require a separate rocket launch. By 1967, in an ominous forecast of what was to follow, Congressional budget-cutters had regained their influence, and all were cancelled. Recognizing that astronauts wouldn't accomplish much on foot, engineers proposed a miniature vehicle, folded up and stored under the lunar lander. Work did not begin until 1969, months after the first landing, and the contract required completion in 18 months. This was not nearly enough time. Nothing (schedule, budget, weight, design) went as planned, and Swift describes the mad scramble that followed. This section contains more technical details than readers require, but few will give up, and their reward is a happy ending. The vehicles worked beautifully, and the three final missions produced an avalanche of findings that would have been impossible without them.

An expert account heavy on technical details but still a pleasurable reading experience.



NUDGE
The Final Edition

Thaler, Richard H. & Sunstein, Cass R.

Penguin (384 pp.)

\$18.00 paper | Aug. 3, 2021

978-0-14-313700-9

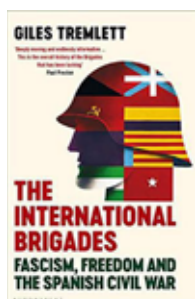
A fully revised version of the 2008 bestseller about making decisions.

Thaler and Sunstein advocate what they call “libertarian paternalism,” by which consumers and citizens can be “nudged” to make decisions of their own will that guide them and society toward a more perfect union. For instance, they write, “nudges”—usually matters of design in presenting the choices to be made, from whether to tip a cab driver to combatting the deleterious effects of climate change—can be coupled with other mechanisms, including taxes and even outright bans. In the case of Scandinavian countries, for instance, drunken driving is discouraged through high taxes on alcohol, nudges of various kinds to shame drink-impaired drivers from getting behind the wheel, and harsh penalties for anyone caught driving drunk. As for climate change, “we will need jackhammers and bulldozers, with pocketknives helping where they can.” In other words, every tool helps, from nudges that encourage people to lighten their carbon footprints to cap-and-trade agreements. The authors argue effectively against what they call “required choice,” preferring instead for vendors and governments to provide transparent information, such as labeling products that contain shellfish or peanuts so that those allergic to them can avoid buying them. Still, they allow, there are instances in which required choice is the best solution: One should be able to choose whether to buy one kind of canned soup over another but perhaps not to dictate the ingredients of every restaurant meal. In the spirit of Donald Norman’s *The Design of Everyday Things*, which they cite, Thaler and Sunstein deliver a spirited argument to enable well-informed people to overcome various biases and “probabilistic harms” to do what is best for them and, in the present case, their fellow “American Humans.”

Students of design, politics, economics, and many other fields will delight in these provocative discussions.

“Students of the dismal science will enjoy this well-written account of a clash of titans.”

SAMUELSON FRIEDMAN



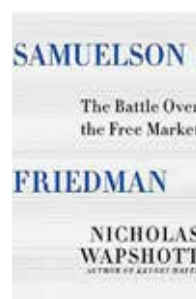
THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES
Fascism, Freedom and the Spanish Civil War

Tremlett, Giles
Bloomsbury (720 pp.)
\$30.00 | Jul. 20, 2021
978-1-4088-5398-6

A longtime chronicler of Spanish affairs offers a new history of that country's civil war.

In 1936, when Spain's generals rose in revolt, the country resembled a banana republic, although it was actually a parliamentary democracy in which many parties shared popular left-wing beliefs. While the government dithered, workers, activists, and even visitors fought the rebels in many areas, especially the large cities. No historian can definitively explain why these events became a rallying cry for the battle between democracy and fascism, but *Guardian* contributor Tremlett, a skilled researcher and solid writer who has lived in Spain for two decades, delivers a fine history. Answering an appeal, Hitler dispatched 15,000 rebel troops from Africa. “This single action,” writes the author, “together with the constant flow of arms and ammunition that both Hitler and Mussolini now provided, saved the generals.” Still preoccupied with appeasement, Britain's government proposed a nonintervention agreement; though other governments signed, Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin “openly flouted it.” Assembling, transporting, training, and arming perhaps 40,000 volunteers required more organization than any movement except communism possessed, so it played an outsized role in what became the International Brigades. However, the mixture of ideologues, laborers, adventurers, exiles, and migrants did not pledge allegiance to the communist cause, and Stalin paid as much attention to eliminating rival left-wing Spanish parties as in fighting Franco. Tremlett delivers an expert, squirm-inducing account of their minimal training, inadequate equipment, sometimes incompetent leadership, and performance, which ranged from suicidally brave to cowardly. Most of the book consists of a nuts-and-bolts description of two years of fighting, a steady stream of names, places, movements, and small-unit actions that may overwhelm general readers. In September 1938, in the forlorn hope of shaming the rebels into doing the same, the Loyalist government announced that all foreign troops would be sent home. No nation, including the Soviet Union, welcomed them back, and Hitler's 1939 invasion of Poland did not change official opinion that these volunteers were “premature anti-fascists.”

An iconic war receives a definitive if painful history.



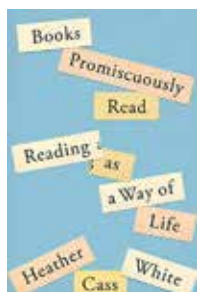
SAMUELSON FRIEDMAN
The Battle Over the Free Market

Wapshott, Nicholas
Norton (320 pp.)
\$28.95 | Aug. 3, 2021
978-0-393-28518-5

Broad-ranging dual biography of two diametrically opposed economists and their influence on current theory.

The author of a previous pairing of the intellectual forebears of his present subjects—John Maynard Keynes and Friedrich Hayek—Wapshott recounts the rise to prominence of Paul Samuelson (1915–2009) and his ideological counterpart, Milton Friedman (1912–2006). Both grew up under similar circumstances, the worldly children of Jewish immigrants, and both arrived at a nearly opposite view of economics, particularly as an instrument of politics. The two were well aware of each other when *Newsweek* hired both to write an alternating column on economics. Samuelson originally declined, having earned a substantial income from his textbook on economics, which remained a standard into the 1970s. Finally, he relented after being paid the modern equivalent of \$98,600 for a mere 17 pieces. “Finding an articulate, young economist who would counter Samuelson's viewpoint would not be easy,” writes Wapshott, but finally *Newsweek* brought Friedman on board. By then, Friedman had already laid out the bare bones of modern libertarianism, which holds that the free market regulates itself and government has little if any role in it, or indeed in daily life. Samuelson, meanwhile, was an exponent of the quantitative easing and other interventions that Keynes had brought to bear on the Depression. The two remained grudgingly admiring rivals for five decades. Though Samuelson considered Keynes the greatest economist in history, alongside Adam Smith and Léon Walras, Friedman remained convinced that “all attempts to temper the market, however well intended...were doomed because they hampered the efficient operation of capitalism, which, when left to its own devices, was sure to maximize the benefits to society.” Though Friedman's libertarianism remains influential, particularly among conservatives, it is not unalloyed: He favored legalizing drugs and diminishing the military, for instance. Samuelson's view was tested and found largely correct, though, with the Great Recession of 2008, when, as a British newspaper put it, “it was Samuelson's prescriptions, rather than Friedman's, that carried the day.”

Students of the dismal science will enjoy this well-written account of a clash of titans.



BOOKS PROMISCUOUSLY READ

Reading as a Way of Life

White, Heather Cass

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (176 pp.)

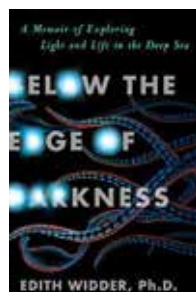
\$25.00 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-374-11526-5

A book that encourages the reading of other books, preferably with abandon.

In this meditation, White, an English professor who has edited several collections of Marianne Moore's poetry, urges those inclined toward a literary life to fully embrace that inclination. Devoted readers know how books can expand consciousness, but how many start their days with them? Rather than an activity to engage in after we crawl into bed (if we have the energy), the author suggests an unabashed approach. The problem is that many of us were taught to make reading another task to tackle. "Reading without purpose is playful," writes White, "and play is not easy for adults." While it's correct to infer from the title that the author believes in guilt-free reading trysts, she seems less inclined toward romps with books lowbrow as well as high. Her arguments draw mostly on literary titans, as she quotes frequently from the likes of Emily Dickinson, Don DeLillo, and *Don Quixote*. Only some of the quotes are attributed in the body of the text. While White makes a note of this structural element, discerning readers may tire of flipping to the back pages. Meanwhile, the language at times strains to be lofty: "Alert, relaxed, keen, and unguarded, the reading self easily occupies an otherwise elusive and fleeting state of awareness in which no answer need be final, no one moment need be decisive. In that fluid medium insight is free to gather and effloresce." Throughout, White seems less interested in making new readers than emboldening the already well-read. Herein lies its strength, including when the author takes up counterarguments. For example, reading has downsides—when we outsourced our memory onto the pages of books, we began to remember stories less vividly—and it's not for everyone. Yes, everyone deserves the right to literacy, but not all souls hunger for *Middlemarch*. So don't look down your noses at nonreaders.

A mixed bag that will end up in the book sacks of the literature-inclined—not unintentionally.



BELOW THE EDGE OF DARKNESS

A Memoir of Exploring Light and Life in the Deep Sea

Widder, Edith

Random House (352 pp.)

\$28.00 | Jul. 27, 2021

978-0-525-50924-0

An entertaining voyage to the bottom of the sea.

In her first book, Widder, a veteran marine scientist and co-founder of the Ocean Research & Conservation Association, offers a captivating, watery-world personal memoir about exploring bioluminescence ("pure magic of living light") and an urgent plea to protect the world's largest ecosystem. As she laments, we're "managing to destroy the ocean before we even know what's in it." The author was hooked immediately after learning about bioluminescence. In 1982, on her first ocean expedition, she saw a vast array of "outlandish" bioluminescent sea creatures "about which most people knew almost nothing." Since then, Widder's career has been filled with dramatic highlights. On a 1984 expedition, she took her first deep water dive, to 800 feet, in the *Wasp*, a 2,000-pound metal suit in which she "oscillated like a tea bag on a string." She was "awestruck and baffled" by the lights she saw at the edge of darkness. Her second dive (1,831 feet) set a world depth record for the *Wasp*. Widder followed up that feat with a single-person submersible dive in *Deep Rover*, a 3.6 ton, "five-foot-diameter acrylic sphere with five-inch thick walls." On that dive, she filmed phenomenon never seen before in such detail. "I was sitting," she writes, "in the middle of a bioluminescent minefield!" After experiencing a harrowing near-death event due to a leaking sphere, with U.S. Navy support, a dive to 2,420 feet yielded further amazing discoveries, and another dive undertaken with the Discovery Channel and Fidel Castro's support resulted in a TV documentary. A special camera she developed allowed her to fulfill a goal of her lifetime, to be the first to film "the world's most famous invertebrate," the massive giant squid, "in its natural habitat." Widder's enthusiastic, joyful memoir amply describes the "wonder and exhilaration of discovery."

Inspiring for science-loving readers and environmentalists young and old.

“An unsettling exploration of the history and cultural influence of air conditioning and refrigerants.”

AFTER COOLING



AFTER COOLING *On Freon, Global Warming, and the Terrible Cost of Comfort*

Wilson, Eric Dean

Simon & Schuster (448 pp.)

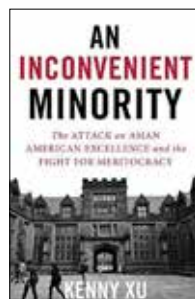
\$28.00 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-982111-29-8

An unsettling exploration of the history and cultural influence of air conditioning and refrigerants.

In his first book, journalist and educator Wilson shows us how “studying cooling can help us understand global heating,” offering an important reminder about the problems associated with refrigerant chemicals. “We’ve launched nearly ungraspable amounts of refrigerant into the stratosphere without thinking,” he writes, “and still, we hardly notice them.” Hailed as a miracle when it was introduced to the public in 1930, Freon quickly became the world’s leading refrigerant because, unlike its predecessors, it was nontoxic and nonflammable. But chemists discovered that Freon destroys the stratospheric ozone layer. In a move still hailed as the single most successful international agreement, the 1987 Montreal Protocol required nations to phase out ozone-depleting chemicals. Refrigerants are now chemically related to Freon but much less harmful to ozone. So what’s the problem? It turns out that the entire Freon family consists of potent greenhouse gases—thousands of times more so than the carbon dioxide created from burning fossil fuels. Having absorbed this shocking information early on, readers may expect Wilson to sound the alarm and urge climate activists to pay attention. Although that’s an ongoing theme, the author has not written a polemic but rather a philosophical attack on the free market and capitalism, which drive our obsession with personal comfort. According to Wilson, this began in 19th-century America with industrial cooling, invented for factory owners who had no interest in workers but needed to “condition” air to benefit machines and products. After World War II, technical progress and the use of Freon produced home and auto air conditioners. Postwar housing, featuring picture windows, concrete floors, and low ceilings, “required air-conditioning,” and public spaces emptied as people sealed themselves inside. Wilson maintains that this love of personal comfort, regardless of community and environmental costs, is a mark of “escalating imperialism, spreading capitalism, the accelerating exploitation of workers, [and] the continuation of racist and classist ideas about the value of certain bodies over others.”

Wilson occasionally overreaches but nonetheless provides ingenious food for thought.



AN INCONVENIENT MINORITY *The Attack on Asian American Excellence and the Fight for Meritocracy*

Xu, Kenny

Diversion Books (288 pp.)

\$27.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-63576-756-8

How Asian Americans have been ill-served by policies of diversity and inclusion.

Journalist Xu, who writes for the *Federalist*, *Washington Examiner*, and other publications, offers a strident critique of Critical Race Theory, which, as James Lindsay writes in the foreword, “openly denigrates a key American virtue—merit, that combination of talent and hard work that makes for genuine, well-earned success,” and in consequence has had “a disproportionate impact on one racial minority group in the United States more than any other: Asian Americans.” CRT posits that systemic racism victimizes people of color. According to Xu, it focuses on Black and Latinx groups—people considered “minorities” by liberals and the left—while excluding Asian Americans, who, despite being non-White, have achieved upward social mobility because they prize education and aspire to excellence. Xu shares anecdotes of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans who, despite stellar academic performance, especially in math and science, were rejected by elite colleges—as he was, by Princeton; he took a scholarship at Davidson—or even less prestigious schools, in favor of Black or Latinx students who were not as well prepared but were recruited for the “cosmetic additions they make to the university aesthetic.” Even in the tech world, Xu has found, Asians are not considered “diverse” but instead are exploited and underpaid relative to Whites and kept out of leadership roles. Mandates for diversity and inclusion, he argues, are “anti-meritocratic” and undermine “the very principle of objective meritocracy on which this country became a global powerhouse of excellence.” Writing as a warning “about what happens when elite discrimination is legitimized and abetted by the world’s most powerful institutions,” Xu contributes to the ongoing debate about inequality, injustice, and racism that informs recent books such as Daniel Markovits’ *The Meritocracy Trap* and Michael Sandel’s *The Tyranny of Merit*.

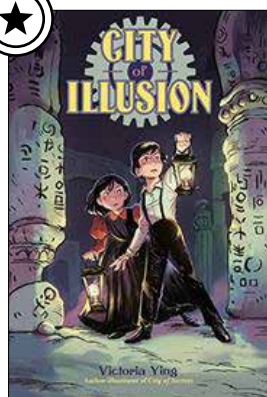
An ardent defense of meritocracy.

CHILDREN'S



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- CROSSING THE STREAM** by Elizabeth-Irene Baitie 87
- JOSEPHINE AGAINST THE SEA** by Shakirah Bourne 88
- LILLA THE ACCIDENTAL WITCH** by Eleanor Crewes 91
- SHARICE'S BIG VOICE** by Sharice Davids with Nancy K. Mays; illus. by Joshua Mangeshig Parwis-Steckley 94
- TERRIFIC!** by Sophie Gilmore 100
- BAD SISTER** by Charise Mericle Harper; illus. by Rory Lucey 100
- LOOKING UP** by Jacob Kramer; illus. by Stephanie Scholz 104
- WHEN GRANDFATHER FLEW** by Patricia MacLachlan; illus. by Chris Sheban 106
- TEN THOUSAND TRIES** by Amy Makechnie 106
- TIME VILLAINS** by Victor Piñeiro 110
- I LOVE INSECTS** by Lizzy Rockwell 112
- EXCEPT ANTARCTICA** by Todd Sturgell 115
- MY MONSTER MOOFY** by Annie Watson; illus. by Eric Zelz 117
- CITY OF ILLUSION** by Victoria Ying 118
- FOREVER THIS SUMMER** by Leslie C. Youngblood 118



CITY OF ILLUSION
Ying, Victoria
Illus. by the author
Viking (256 pp.)
\$20.99 | Jul. 27, 2021
978-0-593-11451-3
Series: City of Secrets, 2



MY VOICE IS A TRUMPET

Allen, Jimmie
Illus. by Johnson, Cathy Ann
Flamingo Books (32 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021
978-0-593-35218-2

Explores different ways one's voice can be used.

The unidentified narrator begins by chronicling different types of voices: "loud and proud," "soft and sweet," "patient and wise," and more. The Deaf community is included in both text and art, and sign language is alluded to: "There's a voice that is silent / but STILL CAN BE HEARD / with hands that move / to speak EVERY word." The vibrant, colorful art presents an array of children of different races and skin tones. Unfortunately, this well-meaning book does not cohere. The art in some spreads does not appear to augment or even connect to the text. For example, the lines "I'LL SAY NO TO HATE / by using this voice / and ALWAYS CHOOSE LOVE — / a magical choice" are illustrated with a spread of four children: one playing the trumpet, another singing, one with a drum major's hat and baton, and the final child skateboarding. Readers may be confused by how these images apply to the text since they have no direct relation to saying no to hate or choosing love. Spreads with children holding protest signs feel disconnected to the present moment with no Black Lives Matter or BLM-related signs depicted. Some text excludes nonbinary children, asserting "we're SISTERS / and BROTHERS."

Aspirational—but not quite ascending to the inspirational. (Picture book, 3-5)



I DON'T WANT TO BE SMALL

Anderson, Laura Ellen
Illus. by the author
Philomel (32 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021
978-0-593-11731-6

A red-spectacled Black youngster has had it with being small!

Everyone in class can whoosh around on the big rides at the fair while this kid is stuck twirling about on the boring kiddie rides. It's humiliating trying on older brother's hand-me-downs: None of them fit. Fed up, the kid flings Teddy Bear into the air—and into a tall tree! How to rescue Teddy? Gorging on greens to force a growth spurt just produces gas. Emulating a potted flower just gets the narrator

Highlights of the Summer Crop



GROWN-UPS SEEKING to share inspiration and start conversations with the kids in their lives have plenty to choose from in this summer's crop. Here are eight that are good for rainy days and warm summer nights.

Sharice's Big Voice by Sharice Davids with Nancy K. Mays, illustrated by Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley (Harper/HarperCollins, June 1): Davids, a member of the Ho-Chunk

Nation, is one of the first Native women elected to Congress and the first lesbian to represent Kansas there. Here she draws a direct line from her talkative childhood with a military mom to her career serving Native people as a lawyer and now a politician. The Ojibwe Woodland artist's pictures underscore her determination.

Dear Librarian by Lydia M. Sigwarth, illustrated by Romina Galotta (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, June 1): First revealed in an episode of NPR's *This American Life*, this love letter to libraries and librarians celebrates the welcome the author found as a child when her family was homeless. In the library's children's room, surrounded by books, the White child blooms and finds her calling.

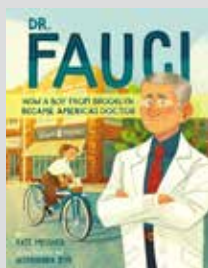


Areli Is a Dreamer by Areli Morales, illustrated by Luisa Uribe (Random House Studio, June 8): The author, a beneficiary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, relates her story of leaving Mexico, where she lived with her abuela, and traveling to the United States to join her parents.



Morales' restrained yet emotive text combines with Uribe's sensitive illustrations to capture an experience shared by so many.

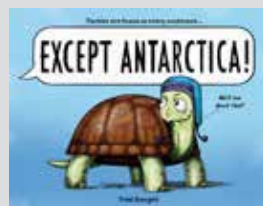
Dr. Fauci by Kate Messner, illustrated by Alexandra Bye (Simon & Schuster, June 29): Kids wondering what the now-beloved public health administrator might have been like before he went gray can find out here. From worrying about his Italian immigrant grandfather's soul through his work on HIV/AIDS to his efforts



to bring Covid-19 under control, he's been taking care of others all his life.

Best Day Ever! by Marilyn Singer, illustrated by Leah Nixon (Clarion, June 29): An enthusiastic puppy relates the events of the titular day, spent with her boy, a brown-skinned child who uses a wheelchair. Her excitement vibrates off the page as she describes their fun, a bath that follows a gleeful roll in a dead fish only temporarily dimming it. Readers will suspect that for these two, every single day is the best day ever.

Except Antarctica! by Todd Sturgell (Sourcebooks eXplore, July 6): A confident narrator asserts that turtles can be found on every single continent but Antarctica. However, a very determined turtle intends to change that, recruiting a string of animals the narrator is equally certain do not occur in Antarctica to join its expedition. Sturgell imparts a fair amount of information along with lots of laughs in this metafictional outing.



Hardly Haunted by Jessie Sima (Simon & Schuster, July 20): The author of *Not Quite Narwhal* (2017) again explores themes of being true to oneself, this time with a Halloween-flavored tale. Their protagonist here is an anxious house who knows she should have people living in her—but doesn't. Is she haunted? She does make lots of spooky noises.

Maybe she can keep quiet, but that's hard. Is there another way?



Brayden Speaks Up by Brayden Harrington, illustrated by Betty C. Tang (Harper/HarperCollins, Aug. 10): The author, then 13, became the star of the 2020 Democratic National Convention when he spoke there, having bonded with then-candidate Joe Biden over their mutual "bumpy speech." This picture book describes how the White youngster copes with his stutter and how he prepared for his big speech.

Vicky Smith is a young readers' editor.

"This richly textured contemporary story set in Ghana highlights timely issues."

CROSSING THE STREAM

muddy and wet. Teddy is doomed. Along comes a White-presenting girl who towers over the narrator, but even she can't reach the beleaguered bear. The kid gets another idea. What if the narrator climbs on her shoulders? Voilà—success! Teddy, the narrator, and the girl become bosom buddies, regardless of their height disparity. "So yes, I am small, / But now I don't mind. / I've made a new friend, / and she's mightily kind!" Alas, Anderson's perky (some might say cutesy) rhyme scheme isn't enough to overcome the plot holes (where did that tree come from, anyway?) and the fact that this Black child needs the help of a White kid to solve the problem. Moreover, the story indicates no benefits to being small—despite the flap copy's promise of reinforcement of self-esteem. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Well-intentioned but clumsily executed. (Picture book. 5-8)



MEL THE CHOSEN

Aragno, Rachele

Illus. by the author

Trans. by Di Montorio, Carla Roncalli

Random House Graphic (208 pp.)

\$20.99 | \$12.99 paper | \$23.99 PLB

Jul. 20, 2021

978-0-593-30124-1

978-0-593-30123-4 paper

978-0-593-30125-8 PLB

Mel, angry at adults who never listen, is pulled into a magical world where she learns she's the Chosen One.

Chasing her cat across the rooftop of her apartment building, the bespectacled redhead falls into a neighboring home, where a white-bearded old man is taking tea with three talking animals wearing 19th-century clothing. They've been waiting for her, they explain eagerly, because only she can break the curses of Malcape the Magnificent, who turned young Otto into the old man Mel sees before her. Mel's journey past animal tea parties and magical royals has illustrations that sometimes evoke Wonderland or Oz. The text doesn't always make clear sense in context, perhaps a result of the translation from the original Italian, and many narrative elements are dropped when they're no longer useful for the allegory. (Whatever happens to Otto's talking-animal friends? Why doesn't the Book of Return, which brings the dead back to life, remain important?) But gorgeous color and action are what keep pages turning, not the quest itself. Memories are rendered in sepia or black and white while the magical land of Here&Now is richly saturated. The interplay between different color schemes, sometimes within a single panel, plays deliciously with mood. The often wordless two-page spreads cleverly evoke movement or the passage of time. Some signage and sound effects are not translated, though meaning is always clear from illustration. All human characters are White.

Dynamic, evocative color and movement easily carry this allegorical fantasy wherever the text is weak. (Graphic fantasy. 7-11)



CROSSING THE STREAM

Baitie, Elizabeth-Irene

Norton Young Readers (224 pp.)

\$17.95 | Jun. 8, 2021

978-1-324-01709-7

Twelve-year-old Ato has longed to visit the island of Nnoma, a highly protected bird sanctuary that his late father helped build, in this latest title by award-winning Ghanaian author Baitie.

If he and his friends Dzifa and Leslie put together a successful environmental project, they could earn one of the rare opportunities to see Nnoma, and they embark on growing vegetables using organic pesticides. Ato has other things on his mind too: His mother recently announced that he would be spending weekends with Nana, his paternal grandmother. This was unexpected since tensions developed between the two women after his father's death and he hasn't gone to her house in years. Ato is also aware of financial problems at home. The one thing that seems to lift his mother's spirits are conversations with the Prophet, a spiritual figure with growing influence in their community. Despite feeling close to Nana, who visits on special occasions, Ato is uneasy because of gossip and warnings about her. However, his grandmother's stories gradually answer questions Ato has about his father and make him determined to uncover secrets in his community. This richly textured contemporary story set in Ghana highlights timely issues around the environment and exploitation of the poor. The well-developed sense of place and natural dialogue create an immersive reading experience, and Ato and his friends, especially fearless Dzifa, are engaging as they discover the courage to push for truth.

A powerful coming-of-age story of self-discovery and overcoming fear. (Fiction. 9-12)



ALL BODIES ARE GOOD BODIES

Barkla, Charlotte

Illus. by Salcedo, Erica

Little Hare/Trafalgar (24 pp.)

\$15.99 | Jul. 1, 2021

978-1-76050-393-2

Told in rhyme, this book celebrates body parts such as hands, eyes, and noses.

"I love hands. Hands that are white and hands that are brown. / Freckles mean sunshine has sent kisses down," begins this simple story of body acceptance. Barkla's well-meaning effort describes a range of body parts and offers examples of how they might appear. Children with a variety of skin tones, hair textures, facial expressions, and racial presentations fill alternating pages. Though an effort is made to uplift marginalized attributes, the messaging is shallow and keeps conventional characteristics squarely in the center. Illustrator Salcedo's art places a White-presenting child with mostly normative features as the

“Jo’s investigation is compelling and suspenseful as it delves into Afro-Caribbean mythology.”

JOSEPHINE AGAINST THE SEA

protagonist, with non-normative bodies coming across as an afterthought. For example, in the spread celebrating “giant legs, tiny legs, hairy or smooth,” Barkla writes that “some legs are really quick, others don’t move.” An accompanying image shows a yoga-posing child wearing a prosthetic leg; as the joints reveal, the leg is certainly in motion. Meanwhile, of the five other kids rendered in the spread, four are slender and pale-skinned; the child who uses a wheelchair elsewhere in the book is nowhere to be seen. Readers looking for an accessible, body-positive picture book will find Tyler Feder’s *Bodies Are Cool* (2021) to be an excellent choice. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

All bodies are absolutely good bodies; unfortunately, not all books on the subject are. (*Picture book. 3-7*)



JOSEPHINE AGAINST THE SEA

Bourne, Shabirah
Scholastic (304 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-338-64208-7



In a small village in Barbados, folklore comes to life, putting Josephine and everyone she loves in danger.

Jo can’t stand to see her widower fisherman father with other women, going so far as relentlessly pranking them and scaring them all away. The two are an otherwise tightknit father-daughter duo who struggle a bit to make ends meet. Everything changes when Mariss comes along and simply can’t be scared away; though no one else seems to notice, Jo immediately finds this woman as terrifying as zombies, vampires, and spinach! Mariss moves in and unsettles their lives in peculiar and unexplainable ways. Bourne adeptly makes Jo’s anxieties both realistic and sympathetic. As Mariss has a hypnotic effect on everyone, carefully plotted pieces of something larger and more sinister come into focus. A last straw for Jo is that Mariss can negatively affect her cricket batting. She has to be a Mami Wata (water goddess) or a River Mumma (mermaid) or something else. Maybe. Jo’s investigation, with the help of her best friend and the library, is compelling and suspenseful as it delves into Afro-Caribbean mythology. Still, when it becomes clear that the stakes are her father’s happiness and, ultimately, his life, the mystery woman’s most threatening power may be how convincingly she’s able to gaslight an 11-year-old and isolate her from everyone and everything important to her.

A heart-wrenching adventure with big laughs and well-earned surprises. (*Fiction. 9-14*)



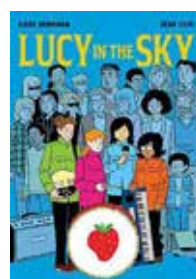
GENERATION MISFITS

Bowman, Akemi Dawn
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (352 pp.)
\$16.99 | Jun. 29, 2021
978-0-374-31374-6

Fandom and interpersonal struggles combine in this story of middle schoolers who form an unlikely bond.

Lonely Oregon 11-year-old Millie Nakakura has been home-schooled by intense parents who pressure her to excel at the flute, something she has grown to hate. They finally allow her to enroll at an arts academy, where she is overwhelmed by teachers’ unstated expectations. Socially adrift, she finds solace in her passion for Japanese pop quintet Generation Love. Then she meets Tina “Zuki” Suzuki through after-school J-Club. The club of two grows to five as social misfits Ashley Seo and Rainbow Chan and popular girl Luna Acevedo find their way in. But it’s not smooth sailing: Zuki is hiding serious problems at home, Ashley and Luna have an obviously tense history, Luna keeps her participation secret from her queen bee friends who viciously bully vegan Rainbow, and Millie lies to her parents about her failing grades and forbidden extracurricular activity. Their decision to enter a school show as a Generation Love cover act complicates matters; figuring everything out involves self-awareness and genuine contrition. At times the characters’ voices sound too mature for sixth grade, but everyone in this well-paced story grows emotionally, showing what loyal, courageous, and humanly imperfect relationships look like. Millie is half Japanese (her other half is not specified); other characters’ ethnicities are cued by their surnames, and Ashley is nonbinary.

A sincere story about being true to oneself and others. (*Fiction. 9-12*)



LUCY IN THE SKY

Brinkman, Kiara
Illus. by Chiki, Sean
First Second (304 pp.)
\$21.99 | Jul. 27, 2021
978-1-62672-721-2

A seventh grader and her friends form a band. Will it all come together?

When Lucy Sutcliffe comes across her parents’ old vinyl records, it’s the start of Beatlemania for the young drummer. Inspired by the Fab Four, Lucy and her best friends, Vanessa Takahashi and Rupa Khanna, are three-fourths of the way toward having a rock band. They just need a guitar player—and classmate Georgianna Birk might be it. While Lucy bonds quickly with the new member, the rest of the band does not click as easily. Beginning in the fall of 2012 and taking place over the course of the school year, readers see all the day-to-day ups and downs of middle school life. Brinkman deftly captures how friendships ebb and flow. In addition to changing friendship

dynamics and tensions, family is a strong focus, and bridging it all and providing comfort is music. Snippets from The Beatles' catalog and other classics often reinforce the narrative. The vibrant color palette of Chiki's art feels contemporary while also evoking the 1960s. Effective, dynamic use of panel variations and white space complement Brinkman's text. Lucy and Georgianna present White; Vanessa and Rupa are cued as Asian.

An honest coming-of-age story with extra appeal for music lovers. (afterword, soundtrack) (Graphic fiction. 9-13)



CICI'S JOURNAL

Chamblain, Joris

Illus. by Neyret, Aurélie

First Second (160 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-62672-247-7

Series: Cici's Journal, 1

A young girl's imagination meets wholesome, kid-centered storytelling in this sweet graphic novel.

In this cleverly illustrated story, readers meet 10-year-old Cici, who lives with her mother in a picturesque village with friends. An avid diarist, she wants to be a writer when she grows up. One day, while in the forest treehouse she has built with her best friends, she spies an unusual sight: a mysterious older man, accompanied by a parrot, carrying paint cans through the forest. She and her friends set out to figure out both the man's identity and his secret, hidden deep in the forest behind a looming stone wall. What follows is a tender story involving a zoo, animals, helping others, and the powers of art and kindness. Curiosity, imagination and teamwork take center stage. Most characters, including Cici, present White, though characters of color are present in peripheral roles. While Cici's story is told primarily by a third-person narrator, the text's key visual innovation is to periodically insert illustrated excerpts from Cici's diary as well as newspaper clippings and photographs of events in the story. The final pages include a space for readers to contribute an illustration. While the clunky, at-times saccharine dialogue might be off-putting to some, the colorful and charming mystery at the center of the text will render this infelicity inconsequential for most.

May have younger readers beginning their own writing, painting, or scrapbooking adventures. (Graphic mystery. 8-12)



LOST AND FOUND

Chamblain, Joris

Illus. by Neyret, Aurélie

Trans. by Smith, Anne & Smith, Owen

First Second (240 pp.)

\$22.99 | \$15.99 paper | Jul. 20, 2021

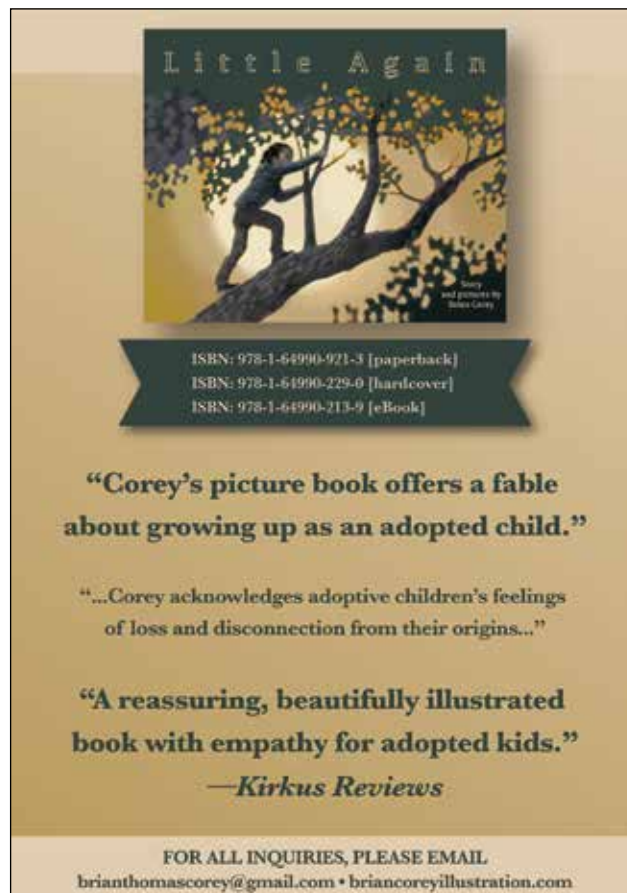
978-1-250-76339-6

978-1-250-76340-2 paper

Series: Cici's Journal, 2

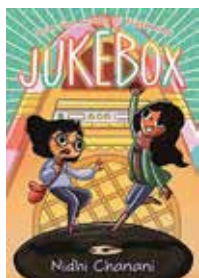
A 12-year-old aspiring writer seeks answers in this graphic mystery from France.

In this sequel to *Cici's Journal* (2021), readers become reacquainted with a slightly older but still winsome and intrepid Cici. Now in middle school, Cici lives in a small village with her single mother. Cici wants to be a writer when she grows up, and her journal becomes not only integral to that pursuit, but also a vehicle for opening communication with her mother following a painful rift. While the mysteries Cici encounters—a highly personal scavenger hunt, a mansion with a hidden secret—are



powerful page-turners, this book is really about history, trauma, reconciliation, and the deeply interconnected lives of the people in Cici's orbit. Readers see Cici's inquisitiveness grow, driving her to take on bigger and more mature subjects, including lost love, parental death, traumatic memory loss, hidden pain, and boundaries. The self-conscious whimsy of the text and luminous beauty of the art contrast with some of the heavier topics. The series' signature style continues to be a triumph, as the book-within-a-book feature is much expanded in this volume to include diagrams, asides from Cici, doodles, notes, and even recipes. Cici and most other characters are White; one of her closest friends comes from a Black family that has a recurring presence in the story.

Movingly shows how human life contains more mysteries than any hidden room or secret code. (*Graphic mystery*. 10-13)



JUKEBOX

Chanani, Nidhi
 Illus. by the author
 First Second (224 pp.)
 \$21.99 | Jun. 22, 2021
 978-1-250-15636-5

Shaheen's dad is missing. Music, which bonded them over the years, now seems to be the cause of their separation.

Twelve-year-old Shahi and her journalist father, an avid record collector, have connected through music for as long as she can remember, although lately he seems to pay attention to it more than he does to her. Until the day Shahi's dad gets lost in music—literally. Shahi and her cousin, Tannaz, set out to find him by sleuthing after hours inside the local record store, where he and Earl, the store's owner, were last seen. They discover a massive jukebox, which they come to realize is magical, as it transports them back in time whenever it plays a record. Hopping in and out of time to attend legendary concerts seems to have led to both men's disappearance. Now Shahi and Naz need to figure out if there is a way to bring them back. The story highlights the eras and contributions of notable Black musicians including Bessie Smith, Nina Simone, James Brown, and Marvin Gaye. Chanani's illustrations of the family's San Francisco neighborhood as well as the historical settings are delightfully colorful and vibrant, and her attention to detail is impeccable. She weaves musicality into her exploration of personal relationships, creating a world where music connects us all. Shahi has Italian and Bangladeshi heritage; Naz is Bangladeshi American and bisexual, and Earl is Black.

Captivating and lyrical. (playlist, author's note) (*Graphic fiction*. 10-14)



MY BODY IS A RAINBOW The Color of My Feelings

Chopra, Mallika
 Illus. by Burton, Izzy
 Running Press Kids (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021
 978-0-7624-9904-5

Feelings link with colors in conjunction with meditation techniques.

Children are enjoying a meadow. They're chasing butterflies, examining ladybugs, eating ice cream, feeling the breeze, reclining on the grass. The racially diverse kids seem simultaneously peaceful and energized. Chopra connects physical sensations with emotions: "Have you ever felt butterflies in your stomach when you are scared...?" (The notion that butterflies might also indicate excitement is missing, though tingling hands could be such an indicator.) Asserting that "when you know how your body reacts to your feelings, you can control your reactions and feel powerful," the text assigns a color for each feeling and a suggestion for control. Breath awareness is yellow. Red wafts through the scene about groundedness: "Feel your bottom resting under you. Do you feel how the chair or floor is strong and stable?" Readers who don't know their chakras may find some surprises. Coding safety as red is nonstandard in the U.S. (doesn't red signal *danger* or *stop*?), as is, arguably, coding the heart-based feelings of happiness and sadness as green; these striking hue associations could be difficult to jump into—or they could be the hook. There's some murkiness and irregularity in the connections among metaphor, physical sensations, and emotional feelings. However, Burton's illustrations of swirling colors, keen-edged characters, just enough rainbows, and gently enchanting backgrounds—bananas and pie float through yellow's "I am strong" spread—really do bring a sense of wonder and power.

Despite some vagueness and inconsistency, this visual treat could be surprisingly successful for self-soothing. (*Picture book*. 4-9)



PARANORTHERN And the Chaos Bunny A-Hop-Calypse

Cooke, Stephanie
 Illus. by Costa, Mari
 Etch/HMH (240 pp.)
 \$24.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
 978-0-358-16899-7

A young witch learns the truth of her powers when she accidentally opens a portal to a realm full of chaos bunnies that threaten to take over her world.

Abby is a witch in training who spends her days helping out her mom by caring for her younger sister, Ella, and working in the family's magical cafe. When Abby isn't helping her family, she is hanging out with her group of supernatural friends, Gita (a

“A hopeful, joyous ending makes this story one to savor.”

LILLA THE ACCIDENTAL WITCH



wolf-girl), Silas (a pumpkinhead), and Hannah (a ghost). When Abby accidentally opens up a portal, unleashing chaos bunnies into their dimension, her friends help her as she learns to understand her powers and close the portal. The cartoon-style artwork and cozy fall colors set the tone for a fun and heartfelt adventure. The illustrations effectively use facial expressions, motion, and variety in panel layout to emphasize the action, emotion, and humor. While the story is sweet, it unfortunately takes on a more complex plotline than it can comfortably handle in a single volume. Abby and her family read as Black with no indication of Native heritage; her use of sage for cleansing can read as appropriative. Brown-skinned hijabi Hannah's ethnicity is not specified, and, confusingly, her grandmother uses a pet name for her that is normally used by fathers in Arab-speaking cultures.

An enjoyable story about magic, friendship, and being true to yourself. (latte recipe) (Graphic fantasy. 8-12)



LILLA THE ACCIDENTAL WITCH

Crewes, Eleanor

Illus. by the author

Little, Brown (304 pp.)

\$24.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-316-53884-8

Finding out she's a witch isn't the only revelation Lilla has about her identity while she's away from home.

Thirteen-year-old Lilla and her older sister, Dani, fly to Italy to spend time with their aunt. For Dani, this means reuniting with the Italian boy she likes, but Lilla feels uncomfortable thinking about boys and love: She has always felt different, but she's shocked when a mysterious book magically appears and reveals she's a witch. The book helps her learn to use her new powers and teaches her about supernatural beings. What she doesn't know is that something dangerous is lurking, and the only way to be safe will be to accept truths about herself and



ISBN: 978-1-7339130-7-2

“An entertaining spin on a classic message of kindness, sprinkled with a little magic that will entertain younger audiences.”

—Booklife Reviews for *The Little Witch*

“...it delivers a powerful message about treating strangers with kindness.”

—Kirkus Reviews for *The Little Witch*



ISBN: 978-1-7339130-1-0

“This bewitching story gives young readers a chance to exercise their supernatural muscles and experience a classic birthday party with a modern twist.”

—Booklife Reviews for *The Little Witch's Birthday Party*

“An early-reader fantasy tale that portrays a strong friendship.”

—Kirkus Reviews for *The Little Witch's Birthday Party*

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WORDS WITH...

LUCKY DIAZ

With his new picture book, the children's musician celebrates the summer pleasures—and ethnic diversity—of Los Angeles

BY VICKY SMITH



NOTHING SAYS “SUMMER” like the frozen treat known as a paleta, and with their new picture book, *Paletero Man* (Harper/HarperCollins, June 1), author Lucky Diaz and illustrator Micah Player take kids to the Koreatown neighborhood of Los Angeles “in the hottest month, / on the hottest day.” Pocketing a handful of dinero, their young protagonist follows the siren call of Paletero José—past Tío Ernesto and his tamale cart, past Ms. Lee’s Korean BBQ, past Frank in his bike shop—but readers notice what the eager paleta-seeker does not: Cash and coins are falling through a hole in their pocket with every step. Dinero perdido, how will this kid get that longed-for paleta? Diaz, frontman of the Latin Grammy-winning Lucky Band, takes his bouncy song

“Paletero Man” and turns it into a quest that celebrates both the ethnic diversity of LA and the sweet, simple joy of a paleta in the park. Together with his wife, Alisha Gaddis, Diaz has been performing for kids for over a decade, but this is his print debut. He and his family split their time between LA and Columbus, Indiana, where he spoke with us via Zoom. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

What drew you to performing for children?

I started performing for children inadvertently. Our eldest daughter, Ella, is going to be 18 this year. When she was a young child, I was a session musician in LA, like a lot of other folks. I was trying to find a way to communicate the idea of creating as something that comes naturally. And in doing so, I just started writing songs with her together during bathtime. We’d put her in the bath, and I’d sit with an acoustic guitar [and] play. From that, we started making up songs. I’d say, “Hey, we’re gonna write a song about a character, let’s pick an animal.” And she’d say, “How about a bear?” And I’d say, “Great. What color is the bear? What is the bear going to do today?” That led to making a little group of songs. And then my wife said, “You should record those songs.” Months go by, and I found that Sirius XM was playing our music. Mindy Thomas there was instrumental in exposing it. I never set out to do children’s work, but I’m so grateful to do it.

How did you find Micah Player? Your relationship goes back almost 10 years now.

We met because we always had a menagerie of artists and creators coming in and out of our house. We had a connected friend named Tilt Tyree who came over, and Alisha said, “Hey, look at what Lucky’s doing,” and right away Tilt said, “Oh, my gosh, you need to meet my friend Micah Player.” Somehow when Micah and I met, it was just really electric. It was very special to fin-

ish the book at the time that we did, because Tilt just passed away this year. Tilt's actually in the book, in the last scene at Echo Park. We felt somehow he was with us. I hope there are many more collaborations [with Micah] to come.

How did "Paletero Man" go from being a song to a narrative?

They are two very different things. I wrote the song several years [ago]. We were living in Koreatown in Los Angeles. We'd [found] this park, and we were having this experience with the paletero man there. Alisha was the one that said, "Hey, you should write a story about what this experience is and our little ecosystem of all the street vendors." Over the course of about six months, I just started writing a story. Who is this? Who's this character? What is his quest? I write in stanzas, [and that works] for a children's picture book. It rhymes, and it has a musicality that maybe doesn't exist in other literature. I got it to a place where I was really proud of it. I sent it to my agent, and at that same point, I sent it to Micah. He was very surprised that it was so different from the song and that it was a whole story. I was so thrilled that HarperCollins said, yes, we have to get Micah to do this.

This is a very dark time for immigrants. Feeling first-hand racism, seeing the racism my own parents and family have faced, it was important for me to tell a story about a hero like the paletero man, a dreamer, right? Los Angeles is a real epicenter of dreams. The little heroic act of providing that service is something that really speaks to me, because I think that we can all get behind paletas and ice cream cones and the simple joy of seeing your kids so happy.

I love "LA is an epicenter of dreams."

My dad, who was an immigrant, lived on the same city block that my family was living on [years later]. It all came full circle for me to be able to connect with my dad's own story of coming here as an immigrant and me being the child of an immigrant and having my own child and trying to communicate that to her. It's part of the whole dream.

You very consciously integrate Spanish into the English text.

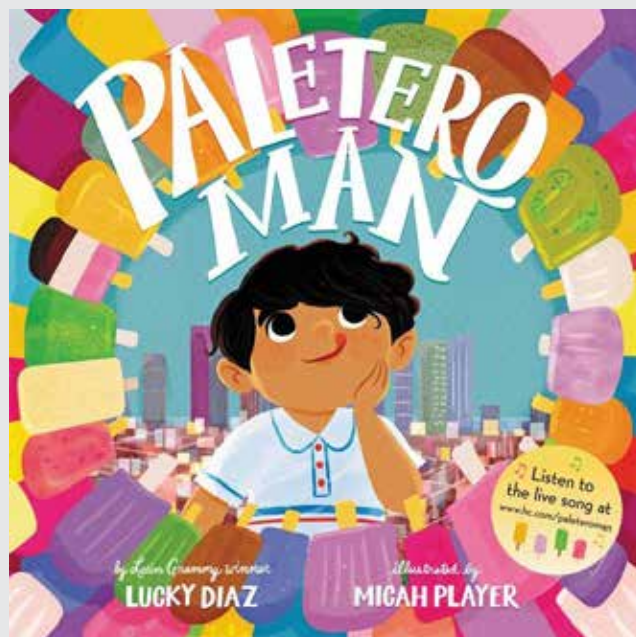
I call myself a pocho, which is basically a displaced person. It used to be a very derogatory term, basically like a Mexican that's displaced or doesn't know where they are. But [now it's] more of an empowerment. And being a pocho, I had a very difficult time connecting culturally. When my parents came here it was very important

to them for us to assimilate into American culture, for us not to have accents. But it was also important for us to have Mexican culture. So as a young person, it was very confusing. And I [felt] for a long time, kind of a shame, like, I'm Mexican, [and] everyone speaks really ill of them. If I look back on my life and creating children's work, it's been a healing experience to be proud of being a Chicano pocho.

I've often been told, "Oh, I love your songs, they're so great, but you're not speaking Spanish," or "Your Spanish is incorrect." And I say, "Well, then you don't understand what it is I'm trying to do. Because I'm trying to have fun with language." And it's so important that other culturally mixed, racially mixed kids and families [read] this text and see themselves in it, because this is the reality of our evolution of a cultural identity.

I say "tamale" in the text—it's Anglicized Spanish, because in that neighborhood, that's what you say: "I want a tamale." She doesn't say, "I want a tamal," [the singular of "tamales" in Spanish]. That's the truth, and it's very controversial, I'm learning. Many people have many opinions. But I can say that I'm sincere about the usage. This is how I use language. It's definitely where I come from as a Spanish speaker, as an English speaker, as a code-switcher, as a Mexican, as an American. This book speaks to my pocho-ism.

Paletero Man received a starred review in the May 1, 2021, issue.



“Rich, vivid illustrations by Ojibwe Woodland artist Pawis-Steckley are delivered in a graphic style that honors Indigenous people.”

SHARICE'S BIG VOICE

everything that encompasses who she is. This gentle yet somewhat spooky story deftly balances realistic plotlines of sisterhood, growing up, and sexual orientation with fantasy elements of magic and unusual creatures. The Italian setting, with bits of the language peppered in, is richly portrayed. Muted colors fill crisp, unlined panels on white pages that match the soft tone of the story, and minimalistic facial features highlight the characters' emotions. The magical moments are particularly visually compelling with their glowy light. A hopeful, joyous ending makes this story one to savor. Main characters read as White; the sisters' aunt's boyfriend is Black.

Growing up and coming out are slightly scary but wonderfully magical in this appealing and optimistic tale. (*Graphic fantasy. 8-12*)



SECONDHAND DOGS

Crimi, Carolyn

Illus. by Manwill, Melissa

Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (256 pp.)

\$16.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-06-298918-5

The arrival of a new dog threatens the stability, happiness, and safety of an established pack.

Gus, the first dog adopted by Miss Lottie, watches out for her growing pack of homeless canines: Tank, an aging bulldog; Roo, a nervous, hyperactive hunting dog; and Moon Pie, an engaging young pug. He appreciates Quinn, the neighbor boy who helps Miss Lottie care for her animals, and even gets along with Ghost, the elusive cat. When Miss Lottie introduces Decker, a confident, sleek, arrogant new dog, Gus knows it's his job as pack leader to approve each new member, but he hesitates, as Decker unaccountably triggers negative feelings. With the other dogs waiting, Gus indecisively acquiesces, but his misgivings soon prove justified. A toxic bully, Decker rapidly undermines Gus, maligns Tank, intimidates Roo, and tricks Moon Pie into running away. Suddenly, Miss Lottie's happy family shatters, and Gus knows he must rally everyone to search for missing Moon Pie before it's too late. The story unfolds from the multiple, alternating perspectives of Gus, Tank, Roo, Moon Pie, Decker, Ghost, Miss Lottie, and Quinn as their personal backstories and motivations gradually emerge, adding depth and insight. Pervading themes of bullying, leadership, loyalty, and family—among humans and canines alike—raise important issues while the comic-style illustrations feature character cameos and highlight key scenes. Human characters default to White.

A sensitive, satisfying, and intriguing canine tale. (*Animal fiction. 8-10*)



SHARICE'S BIG VOICE A Native Kid Becomes a Congresswoman

Davids, Sharice & Mays, Nancy K.

Illus. by Pawis-Steckley, Joshua Mangeshig

Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jun. 1, 2021

978-0-06-297966-7

A big personality with a voice to match, Sharice listens to her heart to find her own path.

In this autobiographical account, U.S. Rep. Sharice Davis shows how she's always liked to talk and ask questions. She learned early that “good conversation can make people happy” and that “the best way to learn about people is to listen to them.” When Sharice's mother told her that they were members of the Ho-Chunk nation, who call themselves “People of the Big Voice,” she knew she was on the right path. Sharice wanted to follow in her Army sergeant mother's footsteps and be “a person who serves others,” so she worked hard at everything she did, excelling at customer service and perfecting martial arts training. Eventually this led her to law school and then to work with Native American tribes. “That's when,” she tells readers, “I had a bold, brave idea that would need my big voice, my ability to listen, and my ability to take a punch.” Deciding that government needed many different voices, she ran for Congress and won the election, becoming one of the first Native women in Congress and the first lesbian to represent Kansas. Rich, vivid illustrations by Ojibwe Woodland artist Pawis-Steckley are delivered in a graphic style that honors Indigenous people. The bold artwork adds impact to the compelling text. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Demonstrates that everyone's voice matters and needs to be heard. Powerful stuff! (author's note, illustrator's note, cultural note) (*Picture book/memoir. 5-10*)



VIVI LOVES SCIENCE

Derting, Kimberly & Johannes, Shelli R.

Illus. by Murray, Joelle

Greenwillow Books (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-06-294606-5

Series: Loves Science

Fans of the series that began with *CeCe Loves Science* (2018) will enjoy this beach-themed exploration.

Vivi, a girl with light-brown skin and big, curly, brown pigtails, loves to study nature, particularly the ocean. She's especially excited when her science class takes a field trip to the beach. Her lab partner, Graeme, a Black-presenting boy, creates a wish list for them: finding seashells, hunting crabs, looking for eels, and seeing a dolphin. Their teacher, Ms. Cousteau, a brown-skinned woman with dark brown locs, leads off the adventure with a lesson on tide pools. The brightly colored images rival those of Dreamworks or

Disney in cuteness and charm while also providing information. When Ms. Cousteau teaches the students about different kinds of sharks, the illustrations provide a visual contrasting the bigger and smaller species she describes. As Ms. Cousteau guides the students in creating aquascopes, her instructions are accompanied by an illustrated guide for young readers to create their own, complete with a list of materials and instructions. Equipped with a checklist, Vivi and Graeme enthusiastically explore, best practices for safe (for both humans and wildlife) beachcombing effortlessly folded into the narrative. Backmatter includes a glossary of science facts and instructions on how to create temporary tide pools. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A nifty way to help young learners see the beach through the lens of science. *(Picture book. 4-8)*



TINY BARBARIAN

Dyckman, Ame

Illus. by Spires, Ashley

Harper/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-06-288164-9

This book's rallying cry to "CON-QUEREVERYTHING!" will ring true for small warriors-to-be.

Tiny has always been small, but he wasn't a barbarian until earlier today. While out with his well-meaning parents (who make the mistake of telling him he can be anything he wants when he grows up), young Tiny spots something. An advertisement for a film about a barbarian gives Tiny a purpose. Merrily he constructs his own barbarian outfit—a horned colander is key—and proceeds to lay siege to the dragon (hose), troll (trash can), and giant broccoli (shrub) in the backyard. But fighting monsters during the day is one thing. Can Tiny now overcome his fear of the dark? Or is this the end of his warrior ways? With its joyous battle cries and subtle repeated beats, this story makes for a rollicking read-aloud. Spires imbues Tiny with as much, if not more, personality and vibe as any of the fantastical creatures that dot these pages. Other visual elements, like the dad cooking and taking on bedtime duty, eschew the usual stereotypes. Consider pairing with *Great, Now We've Got Barbarians*, by Jason Carter Eaton and illustrated by Mark Fearing (2017), for a truly tough storytime. Tiny's dad presents White, and Tiny himself and his mom have slightly darker skin.

Prepare for the hearts of your kids to be conquered once and for all. *(Picture book. 3-6)*



I CAN MAKE A TRAIN NOISE

Emberley, Michael

Illus. by Fitzpatrick, Marie-Louise

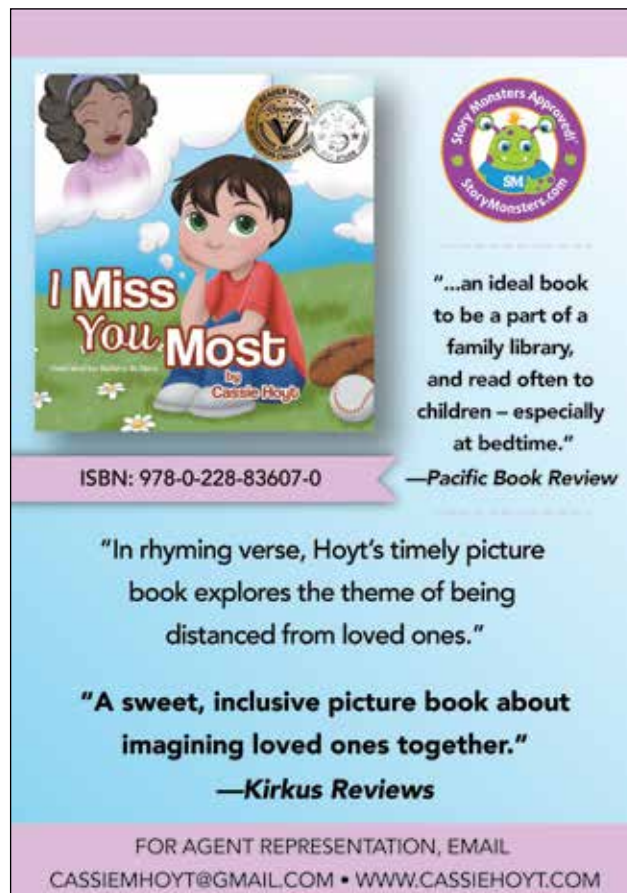
Neal Porter/Holiday House (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-8234-4496-0

A child's abundant imagination transforms a coffee shop into an adventure on an intercity train.

The child, bundled up in winter attire, enters a coffee shop with parents and a baby sibling. The shop is nestled under a railway bridge abutment; as the family enters the shop, a train zooms by overhead. This prompts the child to say: "I can make a train noise." The child repeats this with increasing enthusiasm, imagining everyone in the shop standing and lining up like cars on a train. Next, the walls of the shop become a train; the condiments on the table become the buildings it passes; and the child is at the train's controls. The child repeatedly chants, "I can make a train noise, now, now" or a variation thereof. Changes in type size and placement, punctuation, and sentence rhythm are



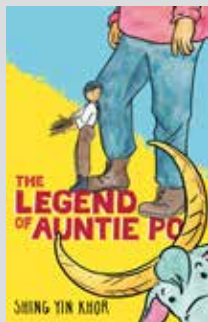
Eight Hot Reads for Summer

IT'S SUMMERTIME, and the reading is easy, with a fizzy mix of novels and nonfiction, both graphic and prose, on offer. Here's a selection to take middle graders from June into August.



Rez Dogs by Joseph Bruchac (Dial Books, June 8): Opening as the Covid-19 epidemic locks down the United States, the Abenaki author's latest novel finds Malian's short winter visit with her grandparents on the Penacook reservation extended through spring. As she contends with online learning and missing her parents, a stray dog and her grandparents' stories offer her comfort and deepen her sense of her Native identity.

The Legend of Auntie Po by Shing Yin Khor (Kokila, June 15): A Chinese American girl in a 19th-century Sierra Nevada logging camp spins tall tales in this richly textured graphic novel. Drawing upon legends like Paul Bunyan, Mei tells stories that bring comfort and hope to workers braving hazardous conditions, exploitative bosses, and xenophobic sentiments. Her crush on another girl adds sweetness to this resonant story.



Can You Hear a Penguin Fart on Mars? And Other Excellent Questions by Jim Benton (HarperAlley, June 29): The first in the Jop and Blip Wanna Know graphic nonfiction series, this humorous title gives young readers two robot guides to help them learn the answers to some of life's big questions. With exquisite gravity they examine the matter, revealing lots of cool facts along the

way and always respecting the principle that "everything is worth knowing!"

Bad Sister by Charise Mericle Harper, illustrated by Rory Lucey (First Second, July 13): This memoir offers an honest—and ultimately hopeful—look at sibling conflict and family dynamics. From rough play that leads to physical and emotional



wounds to parental behavior that exacerbates a tenuous and ambivalent relationship, the graphic format is an ideal way to express the emotional intensity of these episodes from the popular author's childhood.

Ocean's Revenge by Gavin Aung Than (Random House, July 20): After their adventures in *No Adults Allowed* (2020), the Super Sidekicks are back and ready to save the world. When humanity is threatened by an angry Mother of Seas, Junior Justice, Flygirl, Dinomite, and Goo realize that the key to keeping land-dwellers safe is preserving the oceans first.



Fangs for Having Us by Nancy



Krulik, illustrated by Harry Briggs (Aladdin, July 20): What Ms. Frizzle did for science and technology in the Magic School Bus books, Ms. Frogbottom is doing for geography in this new chapter-book series. A bat sighting at science camp leads the students of Class 4A to Transylvania and Dracula's castle via their teacher's magic map. And then Ms. Frogbottom disappears....

Black Boy Joy: 17 Stories Celebrating Black Boyhood edited by Kwame Mbalia (Delacorte, Aug. 3): A group of noted Black men and nonbinary people came together to create this multigenre, multiformat collection. From Jason Reynolds to Lamar Giles, Jerry Craft to Varian Johnson—and many more—these talented creators lend their voices to comics, poetry, and short stories that entertain and uplift Black boys and those who love them.



Paola Santiago and the Forest of Nightmares by Tehlor Kay Mejia (Rick Riordan Presents/Disney, Aug. 3): This sequel reunites readers with a science-minded Mexican American girl who is plunged into a world of folklore and magic. After wrestling with (surely mythical?) La Llorona in *Paola Santiago and the River of Tears* (2020), Pao is back, and so are the supernatural threats. Luckily she's got her chupacabra puppy by her side.

Laura Simeon is a young readers' editor.

“This terrific novel effectively uses history as a backdrop for both entertaining readers and posing questions about science and society.”

A DISCOVERY OF DRAGONS

employed to mimic the train's speed, making this a story that begs to be read aloud. The spreads are filled with details; scenes in the cafe give readers peeks at people's thoughts via speech bubbles filled with visuals. Assured lines convey the horizontal movement of the train, which makes for compelling page-turns. The clipped pace of the narrative delights. Readers may be left wondering how much of the adventure springs from the child's imagination—the concluding cafe scene is slyly suggestive. The child and family are White; the cafe is filled with people with a range of skin colors. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Exhilarating. (Picture book. 3-6)



A SMILE

Follereau, Raoul
 Illus. by Hadadi, Hoda
 Pajama Press (24 pp.)
 \$17.95 | Aug. 10, 2021
 978-1-77278-227-1

Smiling children transform all they

meet.

Using brightly colored forms, cheerful collage illustrations provide a lively, child-centric, visual context for this uncredited English adaptation of the poem “Un sourire,” attributed to Follereau, a French humanitarian who worked with people who had Hansen's disease. Opening with smiling parents waking their children in the morning, the simple text reminds readers “a smile costs nothing” and can be given to others. “A smile only takes a moment, / But its memory lasts forever,” the poem goes on. Walking to school, the children enter a neighborhood bakery where their smiles provoke laughter, proving smiles generate happiness and keep businesses running. A sad-looking, well-dressed, older businessman enters the bakery and leaves smiling. He shares coffee with a tired young man outside, showing no one's too rich or poor to need or receive a smile, which is a “sign of friendship,” providing a “moment of rest for the weary.” Carrying a huge birthday cake, the smiling children proceed to school, where their preoccupied teacher breaks into a huge grin when her pupils (all smiling) surprise her with a birthday party. The poem appropriately closes with a reminder to be generous with smiles while, outside the bakery, the now-smiling young man plays his violin to delight the children. Characters are depicted with varying skin tones and racial presentations; the two protagonist children present White.

A joyful, infectious celebration of the transformative power of a smile. (biographical note) (Picture book. 4-7)



A DISCOVERY OF DRAGONS

Galvin, Lindsay
 Chicken House/Scholastic (288 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Jul. 1, 2021
 978-1-338-71444-9

Eleven-year-old Syms Covington is the ship's fiddler and naturalist Charles Darwin's assistant as they voyage on the HMS Beagle.

Their journey takes them to the Galápagos Islands, where Darwin finds evidence that leads to his theory of natural selection. While all the characters in the story are based on real people, Galvin spins this historical foundation into an imagined adventure. Rowing back to the Beagle after collecting specimens, Darwin is tossed overboard by a sudden storm. Syms jumps in to save him but is swept away, washing up on another one of the Galápagos Islands, half drowned, with no supplies, and surrounded by empty ocean. Six adventure-filled days later, in which, among

Walter the Willy Walleye
 by BOB ALLEN
 Illustrated by SCOTT ALBERTS
 ISBN: 978-0-692-10292-3

Share the joy of fishing, with kids!

“Congratulations Bob Allen for putting together a great kids outdoor picture book that offers realism & excitement to educate everyone that looks through it, even adults!!!”
 —Mark Martin, Fresh Water Hall of Fame Angler

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WORDS WITH...

SACHIKO KASHIWABA & AVERY FISCHER UDAGAWA

The veteran Japanese children's author and her translator discuss bringing *Temple Alley Summer* to American readers

BY LAURA SIMEON



Sachiko Kashiwaba

IN *TEMPLE ALLEY SUMMER* (Restless Books, July 6) by Sachiko Kashiwaba, translated by Avery Fischer Udagawa, and illustrated by Miho Satake, fifth grader Kazu needs to pick a summer vacation project for school. Two strange things happen: He spots a ghost leaving his house, and when she appears in his classroom, it's as if everyone else has always known her. Then he sees an old map of his neighborhood that shows a mysterious temple whose name references bringing the dead back to life. Researching this temple becomes Kazu's summer project, one that leads to friendship with the ghost girl, the unraveling of a family mystery, a hilarious love/hate relationship with a cranky old lady, and a quest to find the ending to an unfinished fantasy story from decades ago. This charming story is both a layered, profound reflection on living life with purpose and a funny, suspenseful book with all the hallmarks of classic middle-grade literature. Kashiwaba, a veteran Japanese author whose 1975 debut inspired Studio Ghibli's classic animated film *Spirited Away*, spoke with us over Zoom from her home in Morioka, Japan; Christine Gross-Loh interpreted.

Kodansha Ltd

Udagawa lives in Nonthaburi, Thailand, and spoke with us separately over Zoom. The conversations have been edited for length and clarity.

Kashiwaba san, how did you become a children's author?

Sachiko Kashiwaba: I've always loved books, and when I entered pharmaceutical school, I knew that as my studies advanced, I wouldn't have as much time for myself. So in the first two years, I tried to do things I liked. My friends did activities like painting or mountain climbing; I started writing children's books. Later, as I worked as a pharmacist, I also published here and there, and when my children were born, I started working as a children's author as my main profession. At first, I wrote purely for my own pleasure—and even after I became a full-time author, I retained that feeling of enjoyment.

This book deals with some serious subjects such as the meaning of life and facing death.

SK: I think the fact that we have both the world we live in and another world out there is what makes for a rich existence, and I always believe that it's when we strive to expand our own world to include that other one that we



Avery Fischer Udagawa

Abbie Boudreaux

can achieve a sort of happiness. Many readers have told me that it made them think more deeply about life and existence, and that's left me with the impression that there are a great many young people who, through reading my book, were compelled to ponder life more seriously. This book came out [in Japan] the year of the [Tōhoku] earthquake [of 2011]. I happened to publish this book about life and death during a year when many people lost their families and wished for their loved ones to return to them. I hope it reaches readers who have lost loved ones and wish this kind of story could really happen. I'm very excited to be published for the first time in America. Life is precious no matter what country you're from, what kind of child you are. So it would make me very happy if, even just a little bit, this message comes through for American children who read my book.

You have been writing for young people for decades, so you have seen a lot of changes in children's lives. Has this affected your writing?

SK: I haven't changed the way I write for young people, though it's true they certainly have changed over the years. If I compare them to the way young people were when I was their age, the ways they think, live, look at the future—in all these ways they are quite different. Children today rely on visual things that provide immediate gratification; it's so much easier to play video games. They don't have as much experience of listening to their parents or grandparents tell stories—folktales and family memories—and the fun of imagining the world someone is telling you about. I hope to create stories that can overcome these obstacles.

Avery, what drew you to translate this book?

Avery Fischer Udagawa: I had the opportunity to translate a short story by Sachiko Kashiwaba for *Tomo*, an anthology of YA stories that came out a year after 3/11 [the March 11, 2011, Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami], and I really appreciated the work by her that that exposed me to. *Temple Alley Summer* stood out to me as a page-turner. On rereading, I saw many great themes: friendship, agency, bravery by “average” kids, death as part of life, community.

The novel is deeply embedded in Japanese culture and yet feels universal in so many other ways. How did you balance this as you were translating?

AFU: I've learned to look at the goal of each passage—and the overall story—and if explaining a cultural element was going to be necessary to tell the story, then I would try to do so as stealthily as possible so it wouldn't stop the flow. But if there was [something] that was going to need a lot of explanation and maybe was incidental, then I would drop it or pull the bits out that were important to the story. There

were also places where I could add in flavor that evoked the original. For example, in keeping with the book's subtle humor around zombies, there's a place where Kazu sleeps soundly that I was able to call the “sleep of the dead,” a phrase not in the Japanese [original]. My husband is Japanese, and our girls are obviously experts in kidspeak, so I did go through the book with them, and it was a little bit like being squeezed in a vise between my husband's notes about fidelity to the Japanese and the kids' “Mom, we do not say that!”

Countries where the majority of people speak English are notorious for having so few works in translation.

AFU: What I've noticed raising children outside the U.S. is there's so little mirror literature for them. My kids read largely in English, [and] they've read more about life in New York City than in Thailand. I don't cherish illusions that a global reading diet vanquishes all our prejudices—Japan is a legendary importer of global children's literature, yet my biracial kids have experienced prejudice there. [But] we plant the seeds in children that we hope will grow, and if we want to humanize young people of other nations for our kids then we need to get stories, plural, from writers in many groups and cultures. Discussions of diversity in U.S. publishing, which are necessary and long overdue, typically refer to U.S. authors writing in English, yet young readers are growing up in an interconnected world that needs them to have a wider view, so I hope we can think big and include translations. Some prominent Japanese books have elements that English-language publishing dislikes—a fair amount of exposition, episodicity, or characters not the age we expect in certain age categories. I hope we can broaden our minds about what books can be and how they can work, because children are very open.

Temple Alley Summer received a starred review in the May 1, 2021, issue.

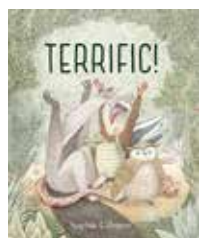


“Individual eyes and faces are expressive, personable, and somehow hilarious without being caricatured.”

TERRIFIC!

other things, Syms is befriended by an intelligent lizard he dubs Farthing and survives a volcanic eruption, he is rescued by the crew of the *Beagle*. But now Syms has a secret that he tells only Darwin—who doesn’t believe him—and as events transpire, Syms must choose between loyalty to his employer or his principles. Originally released in the United Kingdom as *Darwin’s Dragons* (2021) with a much more original and appealing cover that better reflects the contents, this terrific novel effectively uses history as a backdrop for both entertaining readers and posing questions about science and society. Characters are cued as White.

A rip-roaring adventure exploring themes of friendship, loyalty, and bravery. (author’s note, list of characters and places, author interview, timeline, reading list) (Historical fiction. 8-12)



TERRIFIC!

Gilmore, Sophie

Illus. by the author

Greenwillow Books (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-06-302518-9

Five friends—Turtle, Badger, Ant-eater, Mandrill, and Owl—want to do something together.

They want to do something “terrific,” as Turtle suggests, but finding an activity they can all enjoy is not easy. They earnestly consider various pursuits—climbing termite mounds, hanging by toes, digging, swimming through reeds, flying—each a pleasure for at least one but not for all. Gilmore’s palette, filled with greens and browns, is subdued and light, and the faces and bodies of her characters fill the page in a way that is lively and disarming. The disparate group is wonderful to look at, with its variety of shapes and colors of fur, feathers, or shell. The mandrill adds both color and gravitas to this elegant assemblage of sub-Saharan animals. The individual eyes and faces are expressive, personable, and somehow hilarious without being caricatured. When Snake comes along, the rock python has its own idea about togetherness, and it’s not a particularly appealing one. “It’s terrific to swallow an animal whole,” Snake whispers, conveying something shiveringly creepy along with the truth that some activities need not be considered at all. Still, the group of five is reminded in that moment, perhaps inadvertently, that eating together is something friends can enjoy (as long as they are not eating one another). Owl’s round belly hints that Snake contributed in some way to the feast.

Pretty terrific, indeed, and visually marvelous. (Picture book. 3-6)



BAD SISTER

Harper, Charise Mericle

Illus. by Lucey, Rory

First Second (240 pp.)

\$19.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-250-21906-0

From the day baby Daniel arrives, crying so loudly that it hurts Charise’s ears and absorbing her mother’s attention, Charise starts growing into her role of bad sister.

The popular children’s author highlights rough-and-tumble episodes from their childhoods that scar her and her brother, literally and figuratively. Charise plays wildly, tricks her little brother, and enjoys her power. Often Daniel gets hurt, and her parents insist she should know better. The selected stories and details shared here reveal volumes about the family’s dynamics. The siblings’ escalating antics are captured in clean, colorful panels that often end with moving illustrations in moody blues conveying Charise’s isolation, frustration, and guilt. Readers will relate to the rivalry, ambivalent feelings, and raw honesty—and they, unlike Charise’s parents, will see the full picture: It takes two to tango; sometimes four, counting their parents’ roles in exacerbating everything. As Daniel grows and Charise matures, the dynamic changes as well. Charise admires Daniel’s social skills which she feels she cannot match, partly due to her undiagnosed prosopagnosia, or face blindness. Over time she begins to treat Daniel better, especially after reaching a turning point when she clearly sees the lasting consequences of her behavior. By the end, they become partners, with the power to forgive. This is a powerful story of growth, self-awareness, and genuine insight into family relationships. Most characters read as White.

Cathartic proof that childhood provides lessons for a lifetime and that change is possible. (Graphic memoir. 8-12)



EL CUCUY IS SCARED, TOO!

Higuera, Donna Barba

Illus. by Perdomo, Juliana

Abrams (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-4197-4445-7

Ramón has a frenemy in El Cucuy, an anxious boogeyman.

Nothing is the same since Ramón and his family—and El Cucuy—have moved. The house is different, the night noises are different, and the new school will definitely be different. How can El Cucuy’s howling and growling frighten the boy when there are much scarier things out there? Will the school be too big? Will the kids make fun of how he speaks? Will he make any friends? He misses his old home, and so does El Cucuy—being uprooted is no fun at all. The frenemies take turns reminiscing about the good old days and reminding each other about when they were each brave and



strong. Glowing red eyes in the closet? Who cares! Scratching at the window? Nothing a good loud rendition of “Cielito Lindo” can’t overcome. Before anyone can say “boo”—or “¡buuum!”—they’re arm in arm, brave and smiling. Higuera’s back-and-forth dialogue serves to defuse the duo’s mutual fear of the unknown with a point-by-point analysis of each potentially scary scenario. Spanish phrases are peppered throughout (one phrase in error); while there is no glossary, most should be accessible to readers who don’t speak the language. Perdomo’s whimsical illustrations portray El Cucuy as a hairy, fanged-but-cute dumpling of a monster, a far cry from the more anthropomorphic and mega-frightening creature of Mexican folklore.

This exploration of children in transition reminds readers that change can make even El Cucuy insecure. (author’s note, illustrator’s note) (Picture book. 4-7)



KYLE'S LITTLE SISTER

Jeong, BonHyung

Illus. by the author

JY (240 pp.)

\$13.00 paper | Jun. 22, 2021

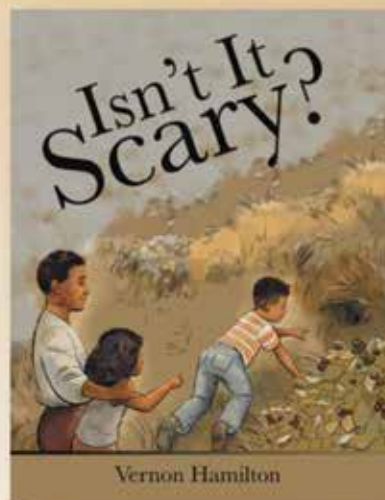
978-1-975316-54-9

Series: Kyle's Little Sister

How would you like living in a shadow?

Sixth grader Grace knows that starting middle school is going to be tough.

New classes, new students, and, worst of all, being labeled as Kyle's little sister. Kyle is two years older and seemingly perfect: athletic, good looking, and popular. Everyone expects Grace to be the same, but unfortunately, being shy, quiet, and awesome at video games doesn't compare. Fortunately, Grace has Amy and Jay, her two best friends, by her side. When the three girls get into a big fight, Grace has to navigate middle school by herself. A girl named Cam takes Grace under her wing and brings Grace into her friend group.



Vernon Hamilton

ISBN: 9781480889170 [paperback]

ISBN: 9781480889163 [hardcover]

ISBN: 9781480889187 [eBook]

This picture book follows two African-American children as they learn about the natural habitats of animals, and connect each to the comfort and security of the children's own home and family.

"Isn't It Scary" is not scary at all. It is all about defusing fear and emphasizing the importance of home – for humans and all creatures."

—J. R. Harris, Member of the Explorers Club, and Author of *Way Out There: Adventures of a Wilderness Trekker*

"...full-page illustrations skillfully portray the dark-skinned family and naturalistic animals and backgrounds in rich shades of brown, gold, and aqua that contribute to the story's nurturing feel. A warm hug of a tale that comforts and informs."

—Kirkus Reviews

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They are nice to Grace, but they start bullying Amy, to Grace's discomfort. When Amy and Jay make up, Grace is left out in the cold, especially as she suspects Cam may have ulterior motives for befriending her. Everything resolves itself in the end, with Cam's true motives coming to light, friendships being mended, and the realization dawning that Kyle may not be so bad. The manga-style illustrations successfully magnify the range of feelings expressed in the story while the text and image placement effectively enhance the drama and conflicts. The color palette, with light purples, peaches, and blues, lifts Grace's brooding storyline with a playful feeling. Most characters present White; Jay reads as Black.

A story of friendship and sibling rivalry that will resonate with many readers. (character profiles) (Graphic fiction. 9-12)



HOW TO BE BRAVE

Johnson, Daisy May
Henry Holt (288 pp.)
\$16.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-250-79608-0

A rare and valuable duck, a kidnapping, mysterious notes to decipher, and plenty of baked goods propel the action from an English boarding school to the Amazon.

Orphaned Elizabeth attends the School of the Good Sisters, where she has many good friends—and one notable foe. Elizabeth finds a duck with a broken wing, which she mends before she frees it. Fast-forward to find Elizabeth raising her daughter, Calla, with little money but lots of love. An opportunity arises for Elizabeth to travel to the Amazon to study *Mallardus Amazonica*, the same species of duck as the one she rescued years earlier. Calla is packed off to the Good Sisters, where one teacher is a former friend of her mother's. The pace quickens when Elizabeth is kidnapped in a nefarious plot and Calla's classmates and the Good Sisters band together in a rush of mayhem and mischief to rescue her. Sweet treats, classic books like *Ballet Shoes*, and the intrigue of secret tunnels add to the atmosphere. The narrator, one of the nuns at the school, puts herself squarely in the action and fills the pages with footnotes, humorous, whimsical asides that are integral to the story. Fans of Eva Ibbotson, British baking shows, and boarding school stories will happily immerse themselves in this cozily familiar setting. Main characters present as White.

An entertaining and humorous adventure. (Fiction. 10-12)



THE OTHER SIDE OF LUCK

Johnson, Ginger
Bloomsbury (240 pp.)
\$16.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-68119-655-8

A girl raised in opulence and a poor boy cross paths and, through one another's eyes, find their own strengths.

Eleven-year-old Una is the firstborn child of the Magister Populi of Antiquitilla. Her mother died several years earlier, and her father has been absorbed in grieving, leaving her yearning for familial love. Meanwhile, Julien, who lives in poverty, is learning to identify every plant in the kingdom from his loving yet ailing Baba, who was Una's mother's gardener. Una experiences the world through her nose, while Julien doesn't understand the sense of smell but has a special ability to hear plants. The sensory differences between the two children are interesting, and they work together to find the elusive silva flower—for which Una's father has set a reward—before it can be located by dangerous marauders. Each child has deeply personal reasons for hoping to find it. The lyrical prose captures a fairy-tale setting, although occasional cartoonish hijinks and stylized, excessively formal dialogue from the children feel jarring. The flow of the book is in snapshots—short, focused chapters jumping from character to character, palace to bog. Frequent coincidences and the tidy ending detract from the hard-fought growth Una and Julien achieve through their own efforts. Physical descriptions of characters are few, although Una and her family are cued as Black, and several references to natural Black hair feel othering.

A fascinating premise set in a unique sensory world that almost delivers. (Fiction. 8-12)



RACHEL TAKES THE LEAD

Kaye, Marilyn
Holiday House (160 pp.)
\$16.99 | Jul. 13, 2021
978-0-8234-4610-0
Series: The Spyglass Sisterhood, 2

A shy 12-year-old runs for seventh grade representative against a popular mean girl.

Rachel Levin-Lopez, a White-presenting Latinx girl, has two very overprotective moms. Before Rachel was even born, Mom and Mami had lost another daughter to a tragic accident, so now she's the only seventh grader who's not allowed to walk to school alone. But for the first time, timid Rachel has friends: the Spyglass Sisterhood—ordinary Ellie, who is White; blunt and brilliant Kiara, who is Black; and sarcastic goth Alyssa, who is of South Asian descent. She and her friends have discovered that the telescope in Ellie's house sometimes reveals people's wishes and fears. Despite this magical element, the plot is grounded in

“Khoury’s worldbuilding is gripping and complex, tethering her adroitly rendered tale to today’s most important issues.”

SPARROW RISING

familiar middle-grade themes; it serves mostly as a frame for a series of events in which Rachel finds a lost dog and gains some confidence. Kiara has nominated a reluctant Rachel to be the class representative, as her ideas for the role really are pretty great. With some cheerleading from the sisterhood, Rachel learns to speak up for herself at home and school both. The dialogue often reads far more like an adult’s than a 12-year-old’s, and Rachel’s opponent is cartoonishly vapid, but overall it’s a decent character arc—and Rachel gets to keep the dog. The characters’ diversity is mostly superficial; racial identity is not plumbed.

Pleasant enough. (*Fantasy*. 9-11)



OUT TO SEA

Kellock, Helen

Illus. by the author

Thames & Hudson (32 pp.)

\$17.95 | Jun. 15, 2021

978-0-500-65236-7

Grieving for her grandmother, a young girl is washed away in a sea of tears.

Sweet remembrances of Nana are not enough; Lara’s tears overwhelm her.

They fill her room and carry her away: through town and far out to sea. She feels completely alone and unable to recall her grandmother’s essence or even ever feeling happy. For a long time she remains deep in the vast sea of her misery, unaware of anything surrounding her. At last she notices something outside herself. There is a bit of light and the soft glimmer of a pearl, which makes her realize that not every good thing has been washed away. She also sees the marine life around her and feels less alone. Memories of Nana and love return, and she heads for home. Kellock treats Lara’s despair kindly and with great compassion, employing language and syntax that are gentle and expressive. Lara’s feelings are never dismissed, and she is not promised that sadness and grief will be eliminated; nevertheless, a sense of hope prevails. The sea metaphors are beautifully depicted in the dreamscapes, with swirling dark blues at times of deepest sadness, then glowing golds and pink as Lara begins to heal. A nice touch allows Lara to see some of the benign sea creatures in her bedroom. Readers will commiserate with Lara and, perhaps with their grown-ups’ help, gain insight into their own experiences with grief. Lara and Nana (in a photograph) both present White.

Lovely, touching, and tender. (*Picture book*. 6-10)



SPARROW RISING

Khoury, Jessica

Scholastic (288 pp.)

\$16.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

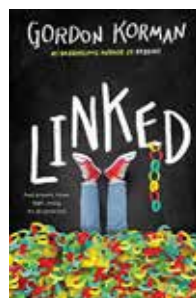
978-1-338-65239-0

Series: Skyborn, 1

In a fantasy world with a rigid hierarchy, a young, winged girl yearns to soar to greater heights.

In this series opener, winged people live in Clandoms, divided along avian lines and further bifurcated into high and low types. Ellidee Meadows is a Sparrow, one of the low clans whose members are farmers, and an orphan since her parents were killed by a gargol, one of a species of fearsome stone creatures who hide behind clouds. Ellie dreams of becoming a Goldwing, the Clandoms’ elite defenders. There has never been a Sparrow Goldwing before, but Ellie believes that if she works hard and stays true, she has a real chance to compete in the Race of Ascension and earn a spot as an initiate. Her plans take a turn when she meets Nox, a Crow; Twig, a boy with Mockingbird and Crane parents (and therefore a stigmatized piebald); and Gussie, a Falcon. The three steal a mysterious stone and soon find themselves on a thrilling adventure through lands where no one is what they seem. Each has faced some sort of discrimination within their divided kingdom, and their stories should resonate with a wide spectrum of readers. Khoury’s worldbuilding is gripping and complex, tethering her adroitly rendered tale to today’s most important issues, including racism, classism, privilege, and systemic oppression. Expect high demand for the next installment. Ellie, Nox, and Twig seem to be White by default; Gussie has brown skin.

Enthralling. (map, clan information) (*Fantasy*. 8-12)



LINKED

Korman, Gordon

Scholastic (256 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-338-62911-8

A community transformed by swastikas, and the response.

Chokecherry, Colorado, is a small town with a lot going on. A group of paleontologists from Massachusetts have set up a research station after fossilized dinosaur poop is discovered in the area. Some residents still whisper about the Night of a Thousand Flames in 1978, when Ku Klux Klan members flocked to the area and burned crosses. And the local media is sent into an uproar when Michael Amorosa, a Dominican boy and one of the few students of color, discovers a swastika painted on a wall at Chokecherry Middle School. Told in alternating perspectives, the story follows the students as they embark on a lengthy tolerance-building curriculum, come up with an art project to commemorate Jewish

“Kramer uses simple language and restrained, matter-of-fact tones that accentuate the wonder.”

LOOKING UP

victims of the Holocaust, deal with an out-of-town YouTuber who wants to go viral with his commentary on the story, and learn more about themselves and their family histories. The only Jewish girl, Dana Levinson, helps Lincoln Rowley study for his bar mitzvah after he learns that his maternal grandmother, rescued and raised by nuns as a Christian, was the sole member of her family to survive the Holocaust. While the story is engaging, with many twists and turns, the different voices blend together, and emotional depth takes a back seat to educational goals. There's a lot to ponder here about mistakes, intention, the difference between ignorance and hatred, and religious identity.

Provocative yet cautious. (author's note) (Fiction. 9-14)



JILLIAN VS PARASITE PLANET

Kornher-Stace, Nicole

Illus. by Brown, Scott

Tachyon (224 pp.)

\$17.95 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-61696-354-5

On Take Your Kid to Work Day, Jillian feels like the luckiest kid in the class—because her parents go to space for their jobs.

Of course, at 11, she's too young to go with them, but she's determined to get as close as she possibly can to “all that sweet, sweet space magic.” Her parents lead her on a tour of the StellaTech facility (state of the art for the year 2113), even introducing her to SABRINA, a “Semi-Autonomous Bio-Reconnoitering Intelligent Nanobot Array,” who's got wit beyond its programming. Jillian's eagerness for adventure, hunger for information, and utterly relatable anxiety make her an instant classic middle-grade protagonist. It's the best surprise of her life when her parents take her through the StellaTech portal to an alien planet—and the worst when they crash-land, green worms dissolve most of their supplies, and her parents barely survive. Until their portal back to Earth opens, Jillian has to keep them all alive. Good thing she's got SABRINA's quippy help: “You just think Earth is normal because you're used to it. Trust me, biped, Earth is completely bonkers.” Mentions of Earth's grim climate reality flesh out the worldbuilding, but the story is hopeful. A few choice black-and-white illustrations also add lighthearted absurdity. Jillian and her parents read as White.

Problem-solving has never been such a wild ride. (afterword) (Science fiction. 8-12)



LOOKING UP

Kramer, Jacob

Illus. by Scholz, Stephanie

Flying Eye Books (60 pp.)

\$18.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-912497-68-3

A portrait gallery of telescopes large and small, earthbound or in space, both currently at work and planned for the near future.

Kramer uses simple language and restrained, matter-of-fact tones that accentuate the wonder of what telescopes have revealed and are revealing about our universe. He begins by explaining that telescopes actually “look back in time” and are designed by and for people who “want to look at things that are farther than mountains, and see more colors than human eyes can see.” The book goes on to describe the astronomical processes that produce each of those “colors,” from infrared to gamma rays, and what they can tell us. Tech-minded readers will also learn how instruments from Galileo's simple tube to the specialized likes of NASA's Chandra space telescope work. Using a serigraphic style, Scholz mixes sweeping, starry vistas lit by grand images of planets, black holes, and other sky phenomena with big, blocky views of each type of telescope—all mingled with helpful diagrams, earthly flora and fauna, and groups of human sky watchers diverse in age and race. Though the recent collapse of the giant Arecibo radio telescope renders the admiring nod it receives here poignantly moot, young readers will come away with a basic understanding of how different sorts of telescopes enhance what the naked eye can tell us about the nature of the cosmic light show overhead.

An eye-opening—and eye-widening—overview, memorably illustrated. (index) (Informational picture book. 7-10)



FANGS FOR HAVING US!

Krulik, Nancy

Illus. by Briggs, Harry

Aladdin (144 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$5.99 paper | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-5344-5403-3

978-1-5344-5402-6 paper

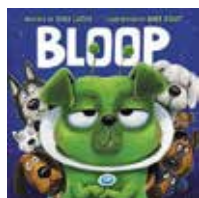
Series: Ms. Frogbottom's Field Trips, 3

The students of Class 4A end up in a vampire's castle during a magical field trip.

Class 4A is no ordinary classroom. With Ms. Frogbottom and her magic map, there is never a dull moment. As this adventure opens, the kids are enjoying a night at science camp when a bat flies overhead. As the conversation inevitably turns to vampire bats and vampires, Ms. Frogbottom takes out her magic map to whisk them away on a memorable field trip. In a blink of an eye, the students find themselves in Transylvania. While at a cafe, they meet the groundskeeper of Bran Castle, the inspiration for the castle in *Dracula*. He offers them a

special tour of the castle, which Ms. Frogbottom gladly accepts. Soon the kids meet Mr. Liliac, master of the castle, and that's when things get really weird. Emma swears Mr. Liliac is a vampire because he had no reflection in the mirror—and then Ms. Frogbottom disappears....Narrated by fact-loving student Sofia, this third series installment reads like a chapter-book version of the Magic School Bus, introducing geography via local legends. More silly than scary, the story is a mixture of history, magic, and adventure. Laced throughout the text are both boxes with fast facts and black-and-white images. The students appear to be of different races, and Ms. Frogbottom is a woman of color.

A fun choice for chapter-book readers who like legendary creatures. (glossary) (*Fantasy*, 6-9)



BLOOP

Lazar, Tara

Illus. by Boldt, Mike

Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)

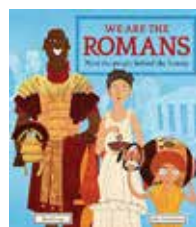
\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-06-287160-2

An extraterrestrial who looks like a dog tries to prove his mettle by conquering Earth.

Bloop, a green ET that resembles a pug with antennae, is next in line to rule Planet XYZ. He tries but fails to follow the emperor's "rules, regulations, and robots," but the illustrations show the chaos that follows in Bloop's chaotic, albeit joyful, wake. "Bloop! Too many bloopers" the emperor proclaims and banishes Bloop to the "crazy planet" Earth. Readers can assume the emperor is Bloop's father, given the resemblance. If Bloop can conquer Earth, the emperor reasons, his worthiness to rule XYZ will be proved. Bright colors and characterizations in a cartoon-esque style take center stage. On Earth, Bloop has trouble reigning supreme. Bloop interprets the way humans care for dogs as an indicator that dogs rule the planet, so he focuses on learning their secrets. Sadly, the dogs pay no attention to him, and Bloop is still making "too many bloopers" according to the emperor. He commands Bloop to pretend he's an Earth dog. In the end, Bloop must choose between his cushy new home where he rules the roost—and receives plenty of love and affection—and his old world. It's no contest. Bloop's human family appears to be interracial, with a Black father, White mother, and mixed-race child.

Easy laughs. (*Picture book*, 4-6)



WE ARE THE ROMANS Meet the People Behind the History

Long, David

Illus. by Fatimaharan, Allen

Welbeck Children's (64 pp.)

\$12.95 | Jun. 29, 2021

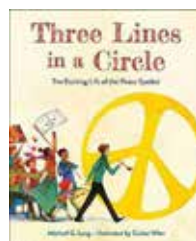
978-1-78312-605-7

Series: We Are the...

Nineteen Romans, from an emperor to a gladiator, introduce themselves in this cross-sectional view of an ancient society.

In Fatimaharan's cartoon portraits, even the enslaved speakers smile, and some, like the gladiator and legionary, are downright gleeful. A startling exception is a formerly enslaved seamstress who now laments that she must work with rough wool and linen rather than fine fabrics. Along with portraying six women, including a professional scribe and an import/export merchant, the artist employs a diverse palette for skin tones. However, since everyone here except the emperor Trajan is fictional, there's no reason to conclude that either the racial or gender mix is historically accurate. Long gives each member of the gallery a name and a few personal details, but their tonally similar first-person descriptions of their lives and work are so generic that readers will have a hard time telling them apart or catching any sense of what daily life in those days might have actually been like. A closing section of general background, just as superficial, features a timeline that misleadingly bills the fall of Rome in the West as "the end of the empire," profiles of pagan deities but no mention of those of other major religions, and Latin translations of common phrases like "What time is it?" with no pronunciation guidance.

Bland and sanitized. (map, glossary, list of sites and museums, index) (*Informational picture book*, 8-10)



THREE LINES IN A CIRCLE The Exciting Life of the Peace Symbol

Long, Michael G.

Illus. by Vélez, Carlos

Flyaway Books (40 pp.)

\$18.00 | Aug. 31, 2021

978-1-947888-32-6

A simple sketch that holds so much.

Gerald Holtom first designed the peace symbol in 1958. But this celebration begins with Gerry, a tall, thin man with pale skin and a mop of shaggy brown hair, at his drafting table, hoping to "draw his dream." Without any historical context, Long explains in his free-verse text that this man's dream is "a world without bombs." Gerry draws three lines and encloses them in a circle. He shares the design with others, and one person says, "It doesn't mean a thing, / and it will *never* catch on." However, it definitely does. It begins in England but swiftly travels, showing up in rallies and marches across the world. It

stands for “peace / for all / and especially for / Black people / and / Brown people / women / and / poor people / LGBTQ+ people / and / people with disabilities.” Long strengthens readers’ connection to the symbol by ending with those three lines in a circle “catching on, / fighting on, / moving on... / TO / YOU.” Vibrant throngs of all kinds of people fill the pages. The inspiration behind the design is buried in the backmatter (though hinted at in the illustrations), and much more of its history is revealed there, but the spare text echoes the spare symbol. It stands powerfully on its own.

Grounded in the discussion of a design, the heart of peace beats on. (timeline) (*Informational picture book. 4-8*)



HUGO SPROUTS AND THE STRANGE CASE OF THE BEANS

Loren, John

Illus. by the author

Harper/HarperCollins (48 pp.)

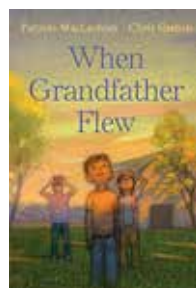
\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-06-294116-9

The end justifies the beans in this rollicking rhyming tale of giant ambition.

Child genius Hugo Sprout has an invention for every possible need, whether it’s an invisible tricycle or a canine translation device. However, when it comes to movies, roller coasters, and getting picked for kickball, Hugo is consistently deemed too small. No matter. After his father extols the virtues of beans, the boy creates a legume-infused growth potion that has the ability to expand Hugo to monstrous proportions. Unfortunately, the larger he grows, the worse his behavior. Will he see how his poor choices are the only thing truly big about him? Although the occasional squishy rhyme makes its way onto the page, Loren’s ear for cadence is utterly divine (few would have the where-withal to rhyme “flapjack-o-matic” with “remote-control had-dock”). With the book blessedly free of fart jokes in spite of the proliferation of beans on the page, it’s the art that really pops off the page. The illustrations are packed with hundreds of tiny details that will appeal to kids and adults alike. Fans of classic Looney Tunes may see many visual callbacks while the plot and rhymes harken back to old-school Dr. Seuss. Hugo and his family present as White; their community is diverse. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Fast, furious, and funny, this book is one to grow on. (Picture book. 4-7)



WHEN GRANDFATHER FLEW

MacLachlan, Patricia

Illus. by Sheban, Chris

Neal Porter/Holiday House (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | Jul. 27, 2021

978-0-8234-4489-2

A child believes a cherished relative has returned after death in the form of the man’s favorite bird.

Emma recounts becoming, along with older brother Aidan, an avid bird-watcher under their beloved grandfather’s tutelage. However, it’s Milo, the family’s youngest, who’s most attuned to Grandfather and his keen understanding of birds. Milo just gets Grandfather’s deep respect for his favorite bird, the bald eagle, and its command of the skies. When Grandfather loses his eyesight, his grandchildren and nurse help him continue with his hobby, describing birds they see while he names them. Then tragedy occurs. Returning from school one day, the children realize Grandfather’s gone. Suddenly, instinctively, Milo runs outdoors, calling to his parents and siblings, and breathlessly points to an eagle flying overhead, observing all it surveys—including the family. “Grandfather flies!” Milo shouts, then watches in awe as it flies away. This poignant, tender tale, economically told, brims with love and kindness, not to mention respect—for elders and for nature—and is sure to evoke empathy among readers and listeners. Kids who’ve lost close family members may feel reassured that memories of their loved ones will persist in a sweet manner. The gentle, textured illustrations, created with watercolors, pastels, and pencil, are lovely, depicting the various birds named herein with colorful majesty. All family members have pale skin. Endpapers include grayscale sketches of the seven birds named in the story.

Warm, calming, affectionate, quietly soaring. (Picture book. 4-8)



TEN THOUSAND TRIES

Makechnie, Amy

Atheneum (256 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-5344-8229-6

Eighth grader Golden Maroni diligently practices for soccer greatness while worrying about his father’s degenerative illness.

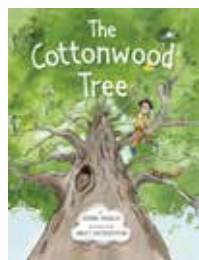
Golden is the smallest boy on his coed soccer team, but he’s fast and determined. He believes that after spending 10,000 hours practicing and playing soccer, he’ll eventually achieve mastery of the game, like his legendary idol, Lionel Messi. Soccer is his entire family’s favorite sport—his father is a former soccer pro, and his parents are popular and successful local school coaches. But this year is different: Not only is it Golden’s final shot at captain

“At its heart are the devotion and powerful connection between loved ones that transcend species and death.”

THE CAIMAN

and leading his team to the championship, but it's 18 months since his beloved father was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. An optimist, Golden believes that with hard work and positive thinking his dad can beat ALS. When Golden and his best friend, Benny Ho, discover their mutual bestie, Lucy Littlehouse, might be moving to Maine, Golden refuses to accept that fact either. The author poignantly explores Golden's conflicting emotions as he learns to care for his dad, help his mom and three sisters, and come to terms with the prospect of loss. Most characters are coded as White; Benny is Chinese American and experiences racist abuse from rival teams.

A heart-tugging and uplifting story about never giving up—on the soccer field, on loved ones, and on life. (Fiction. 9-13)



THE COTTONWOOD TREE

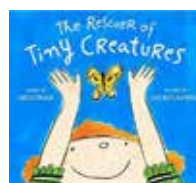
Mangus, Serena
Illus. by Semirdzhyan, Anait
 Tilbury House (40 pp.)
 \$18.95 | Jun. 15, 2021
 978-0-88448-856-9

A single cottonwood tree gives its autobiography from seed to 80th “birthday” while text in a smaller font provides additional information about cotton-

woods and their ecosystems.

The cottonwood's voice is conversational and has a gentle rhythm for a pleasing read-aloud—possibly in two sessions for the littlest listeners. Even without the additional text, readers learn plenty from the cottonwood's descriptions of such phases as seed, sprout, seedling, sapling, and mature tree as well as from its descriptions of landing in good soil; pushing off its seed coat and stretching; and being a friend and helper to insects, birds, and mammals. Each double-page spread includes a two-sentence litany of summary and affirmation, as in—after explaining about nesting birds—“I am nature's nursery. I am a cottonwood tree.” Paralleling the tree's growth is that of a young, pale-skinned boy. His return visits over the years are interspersed with the tales of animal interactions. In one passage that tenderly veers from hard facts, the man, now grown, tells his daughter (also pale-skinned) a Cheyenne and Arapaho tale about the connection between stars in the sky and cottonwoods. The ending is a reassuring reminder of life's eternal cycles. All members of this riparian ecosystem—and the visiting humans—come alive in the line-and-color artwork, which includes a variety of perspectives and employs a unifying, soothing color palette. The accessible extra text for older readers includes cottonwood statistics, duck behaviors, and natural history, among other facts.

Sincere and life-affirming. (author's note, glossary) (Picture book. 6-9)



THE RESCUER OF TINY CREATURES

Manley, Curtis
Illus. by Cummins, Lucy Ruth
 Roaring Brook (48 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Jun. 8, 2021
 978-1-250-24671-4

All critters deserve protection—even icky ones.

So believes Roberta, whose self-appointed job it is to rescue unloved creepy-crawlies. Classmates scoff, but she's undeterred, ensuring that bees, worms, beetles, spiders, and others of their ilk—many-legged or legless—are not trampled or otherwise mistreated. Her kindheartedness isn't always appreciated: Mom won't allow a snail in her garden, and a dragonfly can bite. Then comes the day when not only spiders, but classmates and teacher require rescuing. When a horde of “stripy specks with legs” invades her classroom, Roberta springs into action with a nifty idea that entails her enlisting the aid of a classmate proficient at origami. What happens next not only involves the safe rescue and release of numerous baby spiders, but also earns new respect among Roberta's mates for tiny creatures—and, especially, for Roberta and her knowledge. An added bonus is a budding new friendship. This charming, understated tale will encourage young readers and listeners to reevaluate their own ideas about creatures they might have previously ignored or disliked. Interesting facts about some creatures occur unobtrusively throughout the narrative. Roberta and her family present White, and the lively illustrations depict other humans as racially diverse; rescuees are equally diverse and appealing. The backmatter includes information about Roberta's creatures and instructions for creating a paper origami box. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A welcome portrayal of a young female undaunted by bugs and slime. (Picture book. 4-8)



THE CAIMAN

Manrique, María Eugenia
Illus. by París, Ramón
Trans. by Brill, Amy
 Amazon Crossing Kids (40 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Jul. 1, 2021
 978-1-5420-3158-5

A nostalgic memory of adoption, affection, and loyalty offers opportunities to ponder the nature-versus-nurture question.

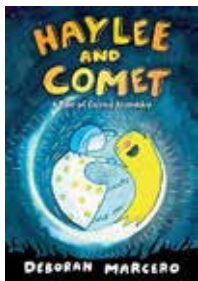
Scrolling past potted plants and a newborn caiman, the opening spread promises an intriguing story. Immense alligators floating in the foreground are hunted for their skins while diminutive human figures along the river bank define the middle ground, establishing distance and perspective against a city's architecture in the background. The trim size (7 inches high by 12 inches long) and landscape orientation are instrumental in shaping the narrative as Night grows from a baby caiman into her full size after the town jeweler and watchmaker Faoro takes

“With deadpan delivery, Martin’s humor is well balanced and fast paced.”

HOW TO MAKE A FRIEND

her home. Night is the star attraction as would-be customers line up to pet her and neighborhood children arrive to play. (One grows up to become the author, according to her bio.) Although Faoro builds a freshwater pool for Night’s accommodations, the premise of domesticating wildlife may feel problematic to some contemporary readers, particularly when Night “show[s] off” gold-capped fangs at Faoro’s wedding. Nonetheless, at the heart of this retelling are the devotion and powerful connection between loved ones that transcend species and death. The illustrations evoke meticulous ink paintings that leverage negative space to focus on the vibrant palette and nuanced textures without cluttering the composition or imaginative spaces suggested by the layout. Characters are depicted with paper-white skin and black or gray hair. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A poignant visual narrative does double duty to carry this translated tale honoring a lasting bond. (biographical note)
(Picture book. 5-8)



HAYLEE AND COMET A Tale of Cosmic Friendship

Marcero, Deborah

Illus. by the author

Roaring Brook (72 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jun. 1, 2021

978-1-250-77439-2

Series: Haylee and Comet, 1

Two unlikely friends crash into each other’s orbit.

Haylee makes wishes at every opportunity. Her favorite method is wishing on falling stars—if she is quick enough to see them. When Haylee has a “very special wish” one day, she looks for a star and wishes “as hard as she could” to find a friend. An anthropomorphic comet (aptly named Comet) plummets down and reveals having made the very same wish. They become fast friends in the two short stories that follow. In “The Friend Ship” the pair finds a “build-your-own Friend Ship kit” and gets to work, each building half of the vehicle. In “The Surprise,” Haylee gifts Comet with a flower to celebrate their “three-day friend-iversary,” and they build a garden of comets. Marcero’s intricate linework and lush yellows and blues effectively translate her skills as a picture-book illustrator into the graphic early reader format. But the night scenes are where her use of colors and shadows flies off the charts. Playful dialogue and sweet truisms about friendship mimic many of the odd-couple narratives out there, but the comet-human pairing is mighty distinctive. Using a mix of captions and speech bubbles, the comics format never exceeds 10 panels per double-page spread. Haylee’s skin and straight hair are tinted blue while Comet is bright yellow with a bulbous, orange nose. A sequel will release in October 2021. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A clever premise made (nearly) stellar by its art. (Graphic early reader. 6-9)



HOW TO MAKE A FRIEND

Martin, Stephen W.

Illus. by Aserr, Olivia

Clarion (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-328-63184-8

An amusing self-help manual on building robots—and friendships.

“Making a friend can seem like a scary, impossible task. But trust me—with the right power tools and a basic understanding of Advanced Robotics, it’s easy!” A smiling kid with a black bob and safety goggles hauls around sheet metal, cables, and a blow torch in preparation for a friendship-construction project. Guiding the little engineer is a book from the library, a *How To Make a Friend* manual with a retro color scheme and illustrations, which provide snippets of wisdom as the text of the book. The visuals feel like a 1970s cartoon, jaunty and geometric, creating an upbeat vibe from which one can almost hear the silly sound effects. The kid’s parents peek into the bedroom as the protagonist hides a chunk of plutonium from them. With deadpan delivery, Martin’s humor is well balanced and fast paced, and it has at its core some very real advice accompanying the exuberant visuals. Friendships can ebb and flow, and there are times when one should walk away from a relationship, especially if the friend starts hanging around with the wrong crowd—that could destroy the city! The technically savvy young protagonist proves to be a smart problem-solver, finding more than just books at the library. Both kid and parents are people of color. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

So entertaining that the good advice slips right in. (Picture book. 5-8)



HENRY AT HOME

Maynor, Megan

Illus. by Marley, Alea

Clarion (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jun. 29, 2021

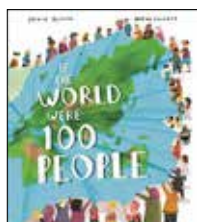
978-1-328-91675-4

Siblings learn to adjust to a new normal when big sister Liza starts kindergarten and little brother Henry must learn to get along without her.

Henry and Liza, a brown-skinned sibling pair with kinky-curly brown hair, have been together “as long as there had been Henry and Liza.” They read, explore the outdoors, play, and get haircuts and flu shots together. One of their favorite things to do is to visit their Best Place under the Twisty Tree, but as its yellowing leaves—a prominent theme throughout—portend, things are about to change. When Liza gets a new backpack, Henry learns that not only is he not old enough to go to school, but his skills at writing, drawing, and using scissors are not enough to gain him entry. As leaves flutter down around him, Henry lets out a “ROARRRRRR!” The theme of leaves

continues on the wallpaper as Henry storms upstairs to a blanket fort in which “no kindergartners [are] allowed!” Working through his anger, Henry discovers that there are lots of things he can do without Liza. As he gets lost in his imagination, a process delightfully played out in Marley’s empathetic cartoons, he starts to enjoy himself and realizes there may be some benefits to Liza’s absence. This book deftly explores a topic not often seen in the back-to-school genre: the experience of the younger sibling. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A solid addition to the back-to-school shelves. *(Picture book. 3-5)*



IF THE WORLD WERE 100 PEOPLE
A Visual Guide to Our Global Village

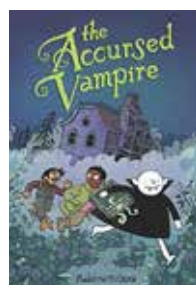
McCann, Jackie
Illus. by Cushey, Aaron
Crown (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$20.99 PLB | Jul. 6, 2021
978-0-593-31070-0
978-0-593-31071-7 PLB

When the world’s population is reduced to 100 people, similarities and differences become dramatically visible.

Budding mathematicians, economists, sociologists, and ecologists will all find something useful in this percentage-based look at human life on Earth. Reducing the world’s population of (roughly) 8 billion humans to a community of 100 souls allows readers to wrap their heads around some pretty big concepts: genetic diversity, geographic dispersal, and humanitarian themes such as living conditions (20 people don’t have safe homes), access to clean water (29 people don’t have such access), and wealth distribution (just 10 people control 85% of the world’s wealth). Each of 11 double-page spreads discusses a specific topic, and a final spread helps readers consider questions about our future. A colorful cast of unbrowed characters representing the world’s population fills each page, and the range of skin tones, hairstyles, garb, abilities, weight, and age will help readers understand just how diverse the human population can be. Astute readers will note that the same characters do not appear on every page, and some illustrations present noticeably fewer than the titular number. Educators may find the book a useful addition to their shelves, and the book may serve as a springboard for discussions or projects. A bibliography of digital sources appears at the front of the book to aid readers in understanding how the statistics in the book were compiled. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Statistically fascinating. *(Informational picture book. 7-10)*



THE ACCURSED VAMPIRE

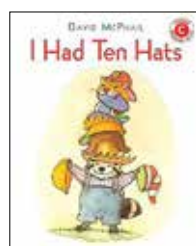
McGrane, Madeline
Illus. by the author
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(176 pp.)

\$22.99 | \$12.99 paper | Jul. 20, 2021
978-0-06-295435-0
978-0-06-295434-3 paper

At the command of a cruel witch, a vampire child seeks a stolen grimoire of dangerous power in this graphic paranormal fantasy.

Long ago, Dragoslava, a White, hairless vampire, drank the blood of an old, White woman, a witch in disguise who promised to “rend [their] flesh and sinews to crawling worms” unless Dragoslava agreed to serve her. When the witch demands that Dragoslava hunt down her stolen grimoire and curse the thief, their only two friends, Quintus (a Black vampire prince) and Eztli (a presumed Nahuatl vampire with bird feet), want to help them. However, two unlikely allies, an adult vampire (depicted with pale skin) and her witch girlfriend (depicted with darker skin and curly hair), complicate the three young vampires’ feelings about their quest. In order to fulfill the witch’s task, Dragoslava may have to betray people who matter to them. Underneath the magical conflict, the characters encounter themes of abuse, prejudice, and belonging. Although the evil witch wields frightening power, the real harm she causes comes from manipulation and unkindness toward those who trust her. Her curses are not the only threat to Dragoslava and their friends. Another unexpected enemy hides hatred for vampires behind small-town niceness. Quirky art and characterizations balance the heavier aspects of the narrative. Queer representation within the story is prevalent and casual, and the satisfying resolution emphasizes the joy of chosen families.

A mischievous and treacherous adventure. *(Graphic paranormal adventure. 8-12)*



I HAD TEN HATS

McPhail, David
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (32 pp.)

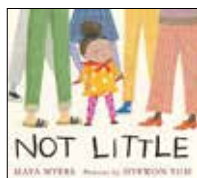
\$15.99 | Jul. 20, 2021
978-0-8234-4859-3
Series: I Like To Read

A raccoon loses their collection of hats and needs help finding them.

With a rack filled with hats, the raccoon narrator is ready for just about any occasion. Double-page spreads show scenes of the raccoon wearing different hats, each with a related outfit. The same repeated phrase captions the pages, with swapped adjectives (“I had a rain hat”; “I had a sun hat”). In addition to the rain and sun hats, the raccoon has a snow hat to keep them comfortable in all weather. The raccoon also has hats for their other activities: biking, playing

baseball, doing construction work, painting, pretend play (as a cat), firefighting, and—of course—going to bed. As the story cycles through the various hats, the past-tense repetition of *had* clues readers in that something is about to happen. The wind (an anthropomorphic cloudy) blows all the hats away! Can readers help the raccoon find them? This simple story uses only 22 words and one variant. Four words are repeated multiple times, giving plenty of support to beginning readers. Though the hats are introduced one by one, the wind blows them off when the raccoon wears them all stacked—which, while narratively confusing, works well conceptually. McPhail's signature line-and-color style makes this cozy concept book-turned-seek-and-find warm and inviting. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

So much more than just a hat rack—fun! (*Early reader. 4-8*)



NOT LITTLE

Myers, Maya

Illus. by Yum, Hyerwon

Neal Porter/Holiday House (40 pp.)

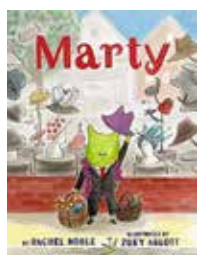
\$18.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-8234-4619-3

A small girl makes a big difference.

"I may be small, but I'm not little," Dot informs readers, chafing at others' attitudes toward her. She presents as a child of color with light-brown skin and dark hair, which Yum cleverly styles in a bun on top of her head to add some height in the energetic colored-pencil art. She is the smallest person in her interracial family and the smallest person in her class—until Sam arrives. "He might even be smaller than I am," thinks Dot when the teacher introduces him to the class. He appears to be of Asian descent, and he seems nervous at his new school. Sadly, it turns out his anxiety is well founded when "the mean boy," a much-taller White boy, picks on him in the cafeteria. Dot intercedes, using her words to interrupt the bullying and then to defend herself when the mean boy says, "What are *you* going to do about it, little girl?" Yum is at her expressive best when Dot shifts from an anxiety-ridden state depicted with a bullseye of concentric circles surrounding her to a spread devoid of background as Dot bellows from across the gutter at the boy, "I'M NOT LITTLE!" Sam offers thanks and admiration, not to mention his friendship, to bring the story to a satisfying close.

Sure to be a big hit. (*Picture book. 3-6*)



MARTY

Noble, Rachel

Illus. by Abbott, Zoey

Holiday House (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-8234-4662-9

Marty, a small Martian, acclimates to Earth with the help of a considerate human.

Marty, who dislikes being called an

"alien," lives "undercover." In order to avoid being spotted as the outsider he is, he becomes a "master of disguises." The gag for readers is that, despite his elaborate costumes, no one ever quite calls him out on his green skin: "Marty can fool anyone" in the diverse community where he lives. (These costumes include occupations and activities: cowboy togs, business suit, and swimsuit, among others; the kimono, which indicates an assumption of racial identity, is an unfortunate misstep.) A joyous costume parade makes him feel included, if only momentarily. When he dresses as a rock star and performs at an open-mic event, he rises to fame—only to have his true identity discovered by the paparazzi. An attentive, compassionate White child in the community steps in to help ("I think we can fix this") by inviting Marty to move in (after securing parental permission) and safeguarding Marty as he begins to move through his community as the Martian he is. The brightly colored cartoon illustrations are inviting, and there's abundant situational humor—Marty watches movies to learn how humans behave, for instance. The protagonist is an endearing, empathetic character, and the book's resolution is genuinely touching. That a bystander steps in to seek and ultimately provide "a safe place" for Marty serves as a superb example of allyship, all wrapped up in an entertaining story that makes its point gracefully.

Charming. (*Picture book. 4-10*)



TIME VILLAINS

Piñero, Victor

Sourcebooks Young Readers

(336 pp.)

\$16.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-72823-049-8

Series: Time Villains, 1



Historical guests come to dinner and chaos ensues in this uproarious debut.

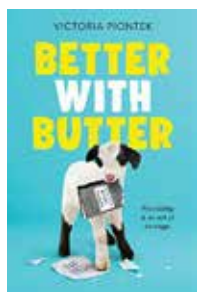
Twelve-year-old Javier Santiago's not doing so well at Finistere, his slightly cool, slightly weird semi-castle of a school in suburban Maryland. He's at risk of failing sixth grade and falling behind his brainiac, history-obsessed best friend, Wiki. Then comes the annual all-school project: invite three guests, living or dead, to dinner, then write an essay. For a budding chef like Javi, that's a piece of cake. Trouble arises when Javi uses his family's magical antique dining room table to accidentally pull his guests into the present day, including the infamous Blackbeard, who escapes before he can be sent back in time. Blackbeard wants to use the table to summon his fearsome crew and enact his plans to take over the modern world. Worse yet, the dreadful pirate is hilariously popping up all over Finistere, working as the school groundskeeper to ensure the success of his sinister plans. With the help of Brady, Javi's tough-as-nails younger sister, the boys work to take down Blackbeard while uncovering the school's mysterious secrets. Featuring a diverse cast led by the Puerto Rican siblings and Haitian American Wiki, grand doses of humor, and an irreverent take on some of history's well-known figures, Piñero's book scores with this tale of friendship, magic,

"Tweens will love Marvel's candid narration."

BETTER WITH BUTTER

and adventure. A breakneck pace and Javi's colorful narration hold things together as the thrilling zaniness piles up.

Magnificent. (list of characters) (*Fantasy*. 8-12)



BETTER WITH BUTTER

Piontek, Victoria

Scholastic (320 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-338-66219-1

Getting through rough times is better with a friend.

Marvel McKenna has issues, specifically generalized anxiety disorder that is affecting her ability to complete sixth grade. That, combined with an embarrassing moment in front of the entire school, subsequent bullying from classmate Jamie, and a fear that she's not bonding with her often absent Navy father, creates an oppressive environment that's stifling Marvel. The sweet taste of hope arrives with Butter, a myotonic—or fainting—goat Marvel courageously saves from Jamie and a group of older students who are tormenting her. When Marvel learns about emotional support animals, she makes it her mission to officially turn Butter into one so she can keep her permanently and feel as brave at school as she does when she's taking care of her new goat bestie. This story set in a suburb near San Francisco is engaging; tweens will love Marvel's candid narration as she slowly transforms into a healthier version of herself. Readers who value realism may roll their eyes once or twice at the number of lucky breaks Marvel has with Butter, but those looking for a feel-good beach-read vibe will have few complaints. Main characters default to White.

A charming story. (*Fiction*. 9-12)



HAND IN HAND

Proctor, Katie

Fawkes Press (260 pp.)

\$10.99 paper | Jun. 8, 2021

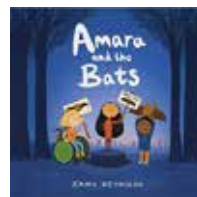
978-1-945419-54-6

In South Carolina in 1945, 12-year-olds Hazel Jackson and Lily Wagner may as well be from different worlds.

Hazel, a Black girl, lives on the "colored" side of Mayfield while Lily, a White girl, lives in the White part of town. Ma Maybelle, Hazel's grandmother, works for Lily's family, and Hazel begins to help her grandmother out at her job over the summer. When Lily's father takes down the "Whites Only" sign from the front entrance of his grocery store, White locals are none too pleased. Lily's best friend is even ordered to stay away from her. With helping to raise her younger siblings, Hazel has known grown-up responsibilities for most of her life. So even though Ma brings her along to help at the Wagners', she hopes that it will give Hazel some freedom to be a carefree child.

After forming a close friendship thanks to their love of reading, both girls begin to see different aspects of life. Lily's eyes are opened to the causes and impacts of segregation while Hazel begins to see that she can be a hero and affect change in her own way. Approaching mature subjects through accessible language, Proctor relays a story about harsh, uncomfortable realities while maintaining a thread of hope and compassion. This book introduces themes of standing up for what's right, allyship, and forgiveness.

A beautiful, sometimes-bittersweet story of friendship overcoming racial obstacles. (author's note, suggested reading) (*Fiction*. 10-12)



AMARA AND THE BATS

Reynolds, Emma

Illus. by the author

Atheneum (48 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-5344-6901-3

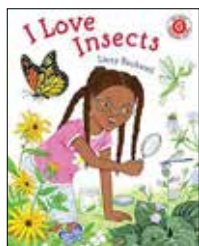
A girl is moved by her love for bats—unique, increasingly endangered, and unfairly vilified creatures.

Amara's love for bats began when one was rescued from the attic of her old home. When Amara, her single mom, and her older brother, Samir, move, she cannot wait to see the bats of her new town. To her disappointment, none show up at dusk. She learns about habitat loss from a park ranger and also reads in a magazine about children taking action to protect wildlife and the environment around them. Amara decides to do the same and, together with new school friends, campaigns to create a natural reserve for bats in the park. Even after it's established, the bats do not come for a long, long time, but Amara tries to stay brave and hopeful. At last, there is good news. The book is illustrated with child-friendly cartoons that help readers see bats as Amara does, and it's full of informative, fun, and engaging messages about bats, such as what it takes for them to thrive and the food chains they're part of. The community is diverse; one adult wears a headscarf, and one child uses a wheelchair. Amara and her family have light-brown skin and dark hair. The story is followed by several well-designed pages full of bat-related facts and suggestions for protecting them. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A captivating book about nature, bats, and environmental activism. (*Picture book*. 4-8)

“Hamaker’s artwork offers just the right amount of zany energy.”

THE CURSE OF THE CRYSTAL CAVERN



I LOVE INSECTS

Rockwell, Lizzy
Illus. by the author
Holiday House (32 pp.)
\$15.99 | Jul. 20, 2021
978-0-8234-4759-6
Series: I Like To Read



In her latest science-focused picture book, Rockwell offers perspectives from two kids with opposing opinions about insects.

A Black girl with long braids and glasses announces her love of insects while a boy of Asian descent, who drops his sandwich running from two houseflies, says he hates them. Throughout this picture book, which teems with color and motion, the girl focuses on the positives, like their beauty, role as pollinators, and benefits to the soil, as the boy highlights the negatives, like their penchant for stinging, the ugliness of insects like fleas, and the damage some such as aphids do to plants. Readers can decide for themselves whether the two protagonists find some points of agreement. The final double-page spread illustrates all of the insects that appear in the book and invites readers to revisit earlier pages to find them, including butterflies, beetles, bees, a mosquito, a cricket, and more. This informational early reader employs a controlled vocabulary that intentionally repeats words and phrases to facilitate independent reading. Many recognizable insects appear in the book, like the field cricket and the bumblebee, but Rockwell also includes some, such as the little wood satyr butterfly and the cucumber beetle, that will pique curiosity and encourage budding entomologists to explore further to learn about bugs they’ve never met.

A fun, educational science book that thoughtfully portrays kids of color engaging with and learning from nature and each other. (Informational early reader. 4-7)



THE CURSE OF THE CRYSTAL CAVERN

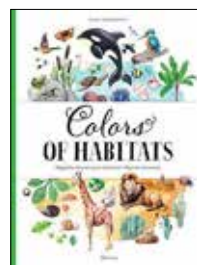
Sedita, Francesco & Seraydarian, Prescott
Illus. by Hamaker, Steve
Viking (176 pp.)
\$18.99 | \$12.99 paper | Jul. 13, 2021
978-0-425-29189-4
978-0-425-29190-0 paper
Series: The Pathfinders Society, 2

“Plus Ultra!” The young Pathfinders—Kyle, Beth, Vic, Harry, and Nate—push forward to unravel the mysteries of Windrose Valley and its enigmatic protector, Henry Merriweather.

The adventure resumes where it left off at the end of series opener *The Mystery of the Moon Tower* (2020). Having uncovered a secret staircase in a forbidding cave, the Pathfinders descend into an immense crystal cavern and follow the pawprints of Merriweather’s faithful pup, Asher. With the treasures they’ve discovered in hand, including Merriweather’s journal, the five explorers navigate an underground trail network in search of

Windrose’s mythic treasure. Danger lurks in every nook: towering, threatening waves, weird weather, onerous puffs of noxious air, and a fearsome creature known as Creeper. As the Pathfinders solve Merriweather’s riddles and scour the local historical society’s archives for more clues, they unearth a sinister plot to exploit Windrose’s minerals (and perhaps more). Like its predecessor, Sedita and Seraydarian’s plot packs a ton of humor, mystery, and action to enthrall fans of fantastical fun adventures. A diverse set of characters—new and old—as well as a commitment to the series’ weirdness, magical forays into time warps, and an appreciation for historical curiosities continue to make this tale a worthwhile endeavor. Hamaker’s artwork, meanwhile, offers just the right amount of zany energy in its paneling and its eye-catching use of colors and secondary details. A fabulous cliffhanger ending will leave readers wanting more.

Marvelously clever and cool. (*Graphic fantasy*. 8-12)



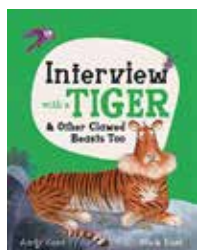
COLORS OF HABITATS

Sedláčková, Jana & Sekaninová, Štěpánka
Illus. by Konečná, Magdalena
Albatros Media (32 pp.)
\$14.95 | Jun. 29, 2021
978-80-00-05934-1
Series: Nature’s Wonderful Colors

An invitation to see and appreciate how 12 generic habitats exhibit distinctive color schemes.

Konečná’s painterly approach comes through strongly, as each spread features a populous array of finely brushed images of flora and fauna topped by a row of 12 large, labeled daubs that identify most of the hues found beneath—though not all of them, which rather vitiates the thesis. Within the crowded “polar regions” habitat, for instance, the artist uses seven different blues, three whites, and, visually adjacent to both, “frozen grass” and “winter breath,” but warmer reds, browns, and yellows in both flora and fauna go unremarked. Also, in severe contrast to the sober, respectful tone of the art, the succinct narrative (in an uncredited translation from Czech) tends toward rhapsodic fancies more ludicrous than lyrical: “A-oo, taiga, the cold beauty of the North—we fall at your feet!”, “Fragrant *oranges* put their ears to the lips of *olives*.” (Italicized words refer to depicted plants and animals.) Like the colors, the wildlife is all labeled...if in a florid cursive script that less-confident readers may struggle to decipher. Still, none of the highlighted colors (or at least their names, which are standard ones) are used more than once, and their very arrangement atop each spread offers lessons in color harmonies that are reinforced by a discussion and color wheel on the final pages.

Thematically moot but likely to fascinate both budding painters and lovers of wild creatures and spaces. (*Informational picture book*. 7-10)



INTERVIEW WITH A TIGER & Other Clawed Beasts Too

Seed, Andy

Illus. by East, Nick

Welbeck Children's (48 pp.)

\$12.95 | Jul. 31, 2021

978-1-78312-647-7

Series: Q&A

Imagined interviews with 10 wild animals reveal more than just the facts.

With the help of an ingenious invention and a large dose of imagination, Seed talks with animals from all over the world about their lives. The premise that these are his studio guests may draw readers into this mix of fact and fancy. Bengal tiger, wolf, giant anteater, honey badger, jaguar, polar bear, lion, giant armadillo, snow leopard, and three-toed sloth each take their turn to answer the usual sorts of questions, about their looks, their favorite foods and eating habits, and their families and friends, as well as some surprising ones. Much humor comes from the different personalities reflected in their replies: The wolf is ill-tempered; the snow leopard is erudite and must keep rephrasing his answers for the interviewer's understanding; the sloth can't stop cracking jokes. Illustrator East's cheerful cartoon creatures add to the fun. The giant anteater poses like a media star, licking up termites with his superlong, spit-covered tongue. "I know, I'm beautiful, aren't I?" The honey badger is impressively fierce (though, sadly, the "bees' nest" supposedly depicted is really a wasps' nest). The polar bear balances precariously on bits of disappearing ice. Most of these animals state that habitat-destroying humans are a major problem. This English import ends with a reminder to readers that some of these "guests" are endangered, suggesting a variety of ways to help. A final quiz will cement a few fast facts.

Entertaining and modestly enlightening. (Nonfiction. 6-10)



DEAR LIBRARIAN

Sigwarth, Lydia M.

Illus. by Galotta, Romina

Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)

\$18.99 | Jun. 1, 2021

978-0-374-31390-6

A love letter to a children's librarian.

Title notwithstanding, this fond semi-memoir focuses not so much on how a librarian fostered a love of books and reading (though there is some of that) as on how a library changed one child's life. Looking back on a time when her large, White family had no house or home aside from overcrowded temporary lodgings with relatives, the correspondent recalls discovering her local library. Within, there was space enough for all, toys and a puppet stage amid the shelves, a large window for people-watching, and a welcoming children's librarian (also White, clad in a skirt and a fuzzy cardigan). The librarian was always good for a warm hug, listened to what she said, and made her feel "safe and happy."

Inspired to give others the same sort of "Library Home," the child (like the author) grows up to be a librarian, and in closing scenes she appears as a cardigan-clad adult, tending attentively to a racially diverse group of smiling young visitors. Along with portraying both librarians as calm, self-confident sorts, Galotta enriches the nostalgic undertones with glimpses of lush flowers, tiny robots, a dragon, and other imaginary elements. In an afterword with photos Sigwarth describes the reunion recorded on the NPR program *This American Life* that sparked her tribute. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

A cogent, warming reminder that public libraries have always been more than just repositories for books. (Picture book. 6-8)



WE LOVE SON HEUNG-MIN A Guide to the Soccer Superstar

Stead, Emily

Welbeck Children's (80 pp.)

\$9.95 paper | Jul. 31, 2021

978-1-83935-042-9

Son Heung-Min, forward for the Tottenham Hotspurs and captain of the South Korean national team, is indeed a

soccer superstar.

Starting his career at the age of 16 at FC Seoul, he was quickly discovered by Europe, known for having the best players and soccer leagues in the world. Over his career he has played in Germany and England, played in a Champions League final, and in 2019 was nominated for the Ballon d'Or, the oldest and most prestigious individual award for soccer players. This nonfiction book, heavy on photos and stats and very light on sustained narrative, follows Son's soccer career with quotes that offer an inside look, keeping readers engaged while learning fast facts about their favorite goal scorer. (They can test retention of those facts with a mini quiz that follows the narrative.) Every page is decorated with fun red, white, and blue graphics that set off the numerous photographs of Son on the playing field or spending time with fans. There is even a page devoted to his military service for the Republic of Korea, where he earned the Pilsung prize as the top performer among the 157 trainees of his cohort. This enthusiastic account emphasizing Son's sterling character will inspire readers to stay humble and work hard doing something they love. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Fun, exciting, and perfect for young soccer fans. (Nonfiction. 8-12)



THE OKAY WITCH AND THE HUNGRY SHADOW

Steinkellner, Emma

Illus. by the author

Aladdin (256 pp.)

\$20.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

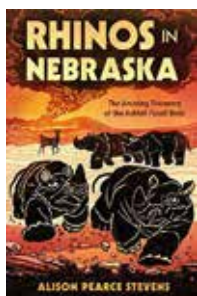
978-1-5344-3149-2

Series: The Okay Witch, 2

Moth Hush, the Okay Witch, is back for another adventure, grappling with middle school bullies and magical mayhem in this second series installment.

Moth Hush is still coming to terms with the revelation of her witchy heritage and magical abilities, but winter break is over, and it is time to head back to school and peers who were cruel even before magic entered her life. When Moth discovers an ancient charm that promises to grant her the confidence and social charisma that she lacks, it seems too good to be true. With the help of the charm, Moth soon finds her star rising, even receiving a nomination for the honor of Founderella, to be crowned at the Valentine's Ball. Use of the charm has one major downside, however, as it invites the interference of a shadowy demonic presence. In a climax that is part *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* and part *Carrie*, Moth must face down not only the demon from the charm, but her own personal demons as well. Moth, who presents as Black and whose family traces its roots to a small fictional island off the Iberian coast, is a relatable hero readers can't help but root for. While she grapples with the usual middle school angst surrounding identity, self-esteem, and where she fits in, she also forces the town and readers to confront issues of racism and privilege that are as pervasive in the town of Founder's Bluff as they are in real life.

Magical and charming. (*Graphic fantasy*. 10-14)



RHINOS IN NEBRASKA The Amazing Discovery of the Ashfall Fossil Beds

Stevens, Alison Pearce

Illus. by Huynh, Matt

Godwin Books/Henry Holt (144 pp.)

\$19.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

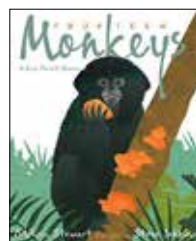
978-1-250-26657-6

Scientific investigation of a quarry in Nebraska reveals that 12 million years ago it was a very different world.

Science writer Stevens describes the process of finding and identifying a treasure trove of extinct animals—full skeletons—buried in volcanic ash from an eruption in today's Idaho. There were rhinos, horses, camels, saber-toothed deer, birds, turtles, and even bone-crushing beardedogs. She recounts the ways scientists have worked together and separately since 1953 to excavate specimens, date ash layers, deduce animal behavior, figure out their environment, and identify the volcano. Poison Ivy Quarry became Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park, where

fossils continue to be revealed but are left in place; visitors can observe the ongoing research. Realistically, she includes some of the hiccups and dead ends. She introduces scientists, interns, and students from various fields. Her clear exposition includes examples of the clues that inform their deductions about the animals and their environment, helping readers understand how these researchers arrive at their conclusions. She explains less-familiar techniques, concepts, and equipment such as topographic maps, radioactive dating, convergent evolution, scanning electron microscopes, plate tectonics, and ground-penetrating radar. Specialized vocabulary is printed in boldface and defined both in context and in a glossary. Huynh's brush-and-ink paintings are an inspired addition to this account of the work of re-creating a long-distant history; there are also helpful black-and-white photographs.

Welcome evidence that paleontology is about more than dinosaurs. (author's note, resources, acknowledgments) (*Non-fiction*. 9-14)



FOURTEEN MONKEYS A Rain Forest Rhyme

Stewart, Melissa

Illus. by Jenkins, Steve

Beach Lane/Simon & Schuster (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-5344-6039-3

Introducing a fascinating primate community.

Fourteen different species of monkeys live together harmoniously in the tropical splendor of the Manú National Park in southeastern Peru. Readers learn that these delightful creatures maintain their peaceful co-existence due to the varying altitudes at which they live among the trees and because of their different sizes, diets, and behaviors. Information abounds: Each species, aptly shown in an arboreal setting, is introduced and identified via a charming boldfaced couplet on facing pages of double-page spreads. Verses that mostly scan well present very basic facts about diet, habits, locomotion, and/or vocalizations; text set in a smaller font provides more-substantive information; pronunciation guides are provided where needed. For younger readers, the book may first be enjoyed via rhymes alone. Supplementing the rhymes and informative paragraphs in each spread is a small image of a tree against which an orange circle indicates the height in the rainforest where each monkey lives. Jenkins' signature splendid illustrations, cut- and torn-paper collages, realistically depict the monkeys as colorful, lively, wide-eyed, winsome, and endearing; fur appears palpably plush. A page that requires a 90-degree turn at the conclusion elaborates on the altitudes in the rainforest at which the various species dwell; backmatter material includes thumbnail pictures and additional facts about all the monkeys featured. (*This book was reviewed digitally*.)

Captivating, informative, and useful as a browser and learning tool for primate aficionados. (sources, bibliography) (*Informational picture book*. 4-8)

"Vivid, wildly imaginative illustrations add wonder and excitement."

EXCEPT ANTARCTICA!



EXCEPT ANTARCTICA!

Sturgell, Todd

Illus. by the author

Sourcebooks eXplore (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-7282-3326-0



An earnest narrator attempts to impart facts about animals that are seen on all continents with the exception of Antarctica.

When a turtle hears that its species has no presence there, it refuses to accept the fact and immediately announces its departure for Antarctica. The startled narrator demands that it retreat to its original page but is ignored. As more animals are told that they too are not represented on that continent, the narrator is faced with total rebellion, completely losing control of the endeavor. No number of warnings that they will not survive in that climate, nor ridicule, nor threats, can keep an owl, a dung beetle, a snake, a mouse, a bee, and a frog from joining the turtle in the mad expedition. After an astonishingly inventive journey, the travelers joyfully arrive in Antarctica, to the amazement of its penguins. But they soon discover that the narrator is right about the frigid, unbearable climate, and they head for home, leaving a surprise twist involving a penguin. The swiftly rising, maniacal tone is highlighted by different, boldfaced types assigned to the narrator and the animals. Vivid, wildly imaginative illustrations add wonder and excitement to the proceedings. Readers will laugh out loud at the animals' recalcitrance and the narrator's frustrations, all the while absorbing a great deal of information.

Delightful and hilarious. (further information, map, glossary) (Picture book. 4-9)



TWITCHY WITCHY ITCH

Tey, Priscilla

Illus. by the author

Candlewick (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-7636-8981-0

In an effort to clean her house, a young witch goes too far.

Expecting her two "witchy neighbors" for tea in 10 minutes, Itch worries her house might be a "wee bit too twitchy" and "too itchy," so she frantically dusts and sweeps. With only four minutes remaining, Itch decides there's still too much itching and casts a spell ordering the "itching and twitching, be gone with a swoosh." As the clock chimes "tea o'clock," witch Fidget arrives, and "things in the house [start] to scramble and shift." Itch feels her brain itch and her fingers twitch. Then witch Glitch appears, and "things in the house [start] to slip and slide," causing Itch to itch and twitch even more. Itch swooshes another house spell, eliminating the "fidgeting" and "glitching" but also removing Fidget and Glitch. Alone in her spell-cleaned house, Itch wonders if she should just abandon her spells and enjoy her fidgeting and glitching guests. With

the clock repetitively ticking away, the text evokes urgency and frenzy, effectively reinforced by lively, comic illustrations populated with kinetic scenes of Itch dusting, sweeping, and swooshing spells. Itch's house bristles with squiggly black lines representing her itching and twitching. When Fidget arrives, she appears blurred, and Itch's possessions visually scramble and shift; exaggeratedly pixelated Glitch seems to physically slip and slide along with everything in Itch's house. All three witches appear White.

Cleverly rendered lesson in the perils of witchy house-keeping. (Picture book. 4-7)



BACK-TO-SCHOOL BLITZ

Torres, Jennifer

Illus. by Flores, Vanessa

Harper/HarperCollins (96 pp.)

\$15.99 | \$5.99 paper | Jun. 1, 2021

978-0-06-305945-0

978-0-06-305944-3 paper

Series: Twins vs. Triplets, 1

A straight-laced boy deals with a mischievous pair of twins and a set of triplets in this series opener.

Poor, rule-following David! He'd been looking forward to the best school year ever on his first day of third grade. Thanks to his parents and school principal, he would never again have to be in the same class with his next-door neighbors, the Romero twins—or Travieso Twins, as David and his mom call them due to their troublemaking proclivities. Alas, David doesn't realize his new neighbors include a set of triplets. Mischievous triplets. When the Benitez kids try to take charge of the tower on the school playground that's been claimed as Twin Territory, a veritable war of the multiples begins. Hijinks ensue, and all the kids suffer, albeit in entertaining ways. David will have to step outside his comfort zone if he ever wants to enjoy some peace and quiet. Statements meant to encourage transitioning readers appear at the end of many chapters. Supported by textual naming conventions, Flores' art portrays a racially diverse neighborhood and classroom; her characterizations are expressive and animated. David, the twins, and the triplets are cued as Latinx. Torres excels with this well-paced early chapter book that both respects her readers' abilities and doesn't pander to them.

A good choice to grow any early chapter book collection. (activities) (Fiction. 5-8)

“The author structures the plot adeptly, spinning organically from each point of conflict to create a brisk and propulsive read.”

WEIRD KID



WORLD IN BETWEEN
Based on a True Refugee Story

Trebinčević, Kenan & Shapiro, Susan
Clarion (384 pp.)
\$16.99 | Jul. 27, 2021
978-0-358-43987-5

The 1992 Serbian invasion and subsequent massacre of Muslims and Catholics in Bosnia comes out of the blue for 11-year-old Kenan.

One day he's playing soccer with his friends, and the next, they're treating him like an outsider. His teacher, Mr. Miran, threatens to shoot him in the street. Why? Because Kenan is Muslim. And so begins his story of survival. Escaping Bosnia with his family, after passing through checkpoints with the constant fear of being thrown into internment camps, they land in Vienna as refugees, stripped of all their belongings. Once financially and socially thriving, now they survive on the generosity of strangers, shepherded from home to home. Just as Kenan is adapting to Vienna, learning German and memorizing the trolley routes, his family is brought to small-town Connecticut. While his parents begin minimum-wage jobs, Kenan starts school and learns to deal with language barriers and bullying, all the while keeping up with the progression of the war in Bosnia. The question of whether they can ever return home never once leaves his mind. Based on true events in Trebinčević's life, this account reflects aspects of the stories of millions of refugees fleeing war. At times, the level of detail feels excessive and the story too drawn out, but this title shows how, despite cultural and geographic differences, people everywhere are sometimes drawn to malice but more often to generosity and good.

Shows how, for refugees, the struggle for survival doesn't end when you leave home. (author's note) (*Fiction. 8-12*)



IT COULD BE WORSE

Tsarfat, Einar
Illus. by the author
Candlewick (40 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021
978-1-5362-1791-9

Two shipwrecked sailors hold different viewpoints about their situation.

Out on the open ocean, Albertini (brown-skinned, with dark hair, wearing a knitted cap and blue sailor stripes)

and George (white-skinned, with bright orange hair and a blue sweater) float on a fragment of their ill-fated ship. The placid, empty ocean shows no sign of other sailors nor other parts of the ship. It begins to rain, but just on them: a narrow, personalized storm. Albertini shouts, “This is so unfair!”—but: “It could be worse,” counters chin-up George. A chain of cartoonishly bad (and lackadaisically disparate) events unfolds: Flying fish drop diarrhea on them; mermaids wearing onesies sing a song

that gets stuck in their heads; a sea anemone pulls them to the ocean's floor; a whale swallows them down into its belly, where they find Rodin's The Thinker, Pinocchio, and telephones from various bygone eras among other esoterica. Each event distresses poor Albertini while chipper George repeatedly murmurs that things could be worse. The refrain begs for an ending with a strong (and pattern-relevant) punch, swerve, or affirmation, but none comes. Instead, several implausible strokes of luck—overly casual luck that the text never acknowledges—reunite Albertini and George with their multiracial crew and the inexplicably restored (though not whole) components of the missing ship. Tsarfati's wiry illustrations lean on concept more than aesthetic or visual engagement.

This could be worse...but it could be better. (*Picture book. 4-8*)



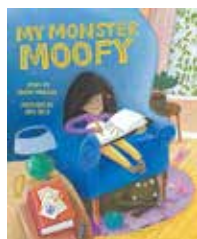
WEIRD KID

van Eekhout, Greg
Harper/HarperCollins (208 pp.)
\$16.99 | Jul. 20, 2021
978-0-06-297060-2

A middle school misfit finds his people.

Jake Wind isn't exactly an ordinary 12-year-old. For one thing, his dad's a proctologist. For another, Jake isn't actually human. Jake is a shape-shifting pile of goo, one discovered by his parents late one night and brought up as a human in Cedar Creek View, Arizona. As Jake enters middle school with his ever changing body, odd things start happening around town. Sinkholes open up everywhere, people behave strangely, and Jake is the only person in town who can hear a slight, constant hum. With the help of new pal Agnes Oakes, Jake sets off to discover the source of all these oddities, hoping to find some answers. Jake and Agnes make for compelling protagonists, fully shaded with character, drive, and an engaging relationship. The author structures the plot adeptly, spinning organically from each point of conflict to create a brisk and propulsive read. Nothing is too drawn out, nor are readers ever ahead of Jake and Agnes when it comes to discovering the strange source of Cedar Creek View's abnormalities. The result is an exciting and intriguing twist on science-fiction tropes often overcooked by lesser hands. Jake's parents are both of Dutch and Indonesian heritage, and when in human form, Jake presumably resembles them; Agnes is White.

A standout SF adventure. (*Science fiction. 8-12*)



MY MONSTER MOOFY

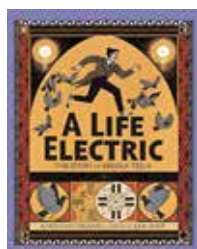
Watson, Annie
 Illus. by Zelz, Eric
 Tilbury House (36 pp.)
 \$18.95 | Jun. 15, 2021
 978-0-88448-801-9



Moofy, the monster who lives under the unnamed protagonist's bed, is a complex creature of many, many talents.

He has quick reflexes and is a master of disguise. Despite his fearsome, sword-sharp teeth, he can also be silly, resembling a rug more than a monster. Moofy also has a softer side. He loves to help make muffins, to read books, and to gaze at the moon. Moofy's tendency to create chaos does not deter his adoring fans, who shower him with attention and high-fives. Moofy, it turns out, is not just any monster: He is the protagonist's cat—and their best friend. The cleverly over-the-top text utilizes a variety of literary devices to describe Moofy's colorful life and personality, organically and effectively introducing young children to concepts like metaphor, simile, alliteration, allusion, hyperbole, and rhyme. The protagonist is endearing, and their affectionate perspective renders Moofy's antics delightful to behold. The watercolor illustrations, which utilize a gentle pastel palette, perfectly complement the text: Each picture shows a few more details about Moofy, helping readers realize that Moofy is actually a cat. The protagonist is depicted with beige skin and dark, straight hair. The examples of each device are clear, accurate, and child friendly, making this book an excellent resource for an elementary language-arts classroom or an ideal gift for a young, budding writer. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A delightful picture-book introduction to poetic devices. (glossary) *(Picture book. 4-8)*



A LIFE ELECTRIC The Story of Nikola Tesla

Westergaard, Azadeh
 Illus. by Sardà, Júlia
 Viking (40 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Jul. 27, 2021
 978-0-593-11460-5

A portrait of the remarkable inventor as inquisitive, clever, and kindhearted.

As a boy, Nikola Tesla lavished attention on his family's many fowl and was astonished by static electricity produced by stroking his cat's fur. Tesla's passion for reading and interest in electricity led to his immigration to the United States to work with Thomas Edison. The description of Tesla's sudden insight about alternating current is nicely handled, with a patent drawing on the facing page, and the Goethe poem that helped inspire him is included in the backmatter. Westergaard briefly recounts the contentious relationship between Tesla and Edison. Sardà's comical illustration here has each genius perched on a pedestal, arms and legs flailing as they

engage in furious argument. Sardà's marvelous artwork includes borders and motifs suggesting art from what is now Croatia, Tesla's homeland, while depictions of the Chicago exposition and the New York skyline employ the decorative art style of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. All the people in them are White. The financial arrangement with George Westinghouse that aided Tesla's success at the Chicago world's fair of 1893 later left him penniless. The loneliness and indignity of Tesla's poverty in old age here is portrayed not so much as eccentricity but as the kindness of an elderly man toward city birds, a return to the simplicity of childhood. An extensive author's note fills in the complex picture of Tesla's life.

A fine introduction, handsomely illustrated. (sources) *(Picture book/biography. 7-11)*



THE VERDIGRIS PAWN

Wishengrad, Alysa
 Harper/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
 \$16.99 | Jul. 13, 2021
 978-0-06-290805-6

Power, truth, and revolution for the middle-grade set.

In the Land, Himself rules with military force. The wealthiest citizens live in Topend; the middle class live in Upper and Lower Middlelands, names that also describe their income levels. Everyone else scrapes by in the Bottom, which is still reeling from the battles when Himself ruthlessly went after anyone who could make charms, including his own wife. Beau, Himself's heir, lives in ignorance in the Manor until a chance meeting with smart, talented Cressi shows him the true cost of his comfort, including the starving children taken by the Manor to pay their parents' debts. When Cressi is imprisoned, Beau takes off with plucky Nate in search of a real-world ace—the mastermind figure in the chesslike game of Fist—to help him save Cressi and make the world fairer. Cressi, meanwhile, has her own adventures (and is the clear winner in every one). Everything and everyone's being a take on a trope, combined with tissue-paper-thin worldbuilding, leads to an almost allegorical feel, as if it's all a game of Fist played out with people. The lack of true obstacles (despite grim backstories, everything on-page works out) makes for an unexpectedly light take on young teens overthrowing a despotic government. Limited physical descriptions point to a White default.

Simple but charming. *(Fantasy. 8-12)*



CITY OF ILLUSION

Ying, Victoria

Illus. by the author

Viking (256 pp.)

\$20.99 | Jul. 27, 2021

978-0-593-11451-3

Series: City of Secrets, 2



Is unity possible in a nation divided?

In this follow-up to *City of Secrets* (2020), best friends Hannah and Ever are visiting the nearby city of Alexios, a place that “specializes in illusions.” Each city in their world is rumored to have its own giant robot called a Megantic; Hannah and Ever found their city’s Megantic, naming it Oskar after their home. While they must leave Oskar during their travels, Hannah brings along his voice-activated remote in case of emergency. While in Alexios, the pair have an encounter with a mysterious street magician named Chifa and her companion, Tanan, whom they learn are working for Vash, their power-hungry nemesis, who wants control of all the Megantics for his own nefarious doings. While Vash craves absolute power, Hannah and Ever know that working together may be their only hope; can they convince Chifa and her gang to align with them before it’s too late? Ying’s command of story and dazzling art come to life in this intricately woven tale that deftly incorporates secret societies, giant robot fights, spies, magic, and the power of acceptance without ever feeling bogged down. While the steampunk setting calls to a bygone era, the messaging is exceptionally contemporary. Her cast of characters is diverse; main characters Hannah and Ever present with Asian features.

Important, engrossing, and altogether necessary. (*Graphic fantasy*. 7-12)



FOREVER THIS SUMMER

Youngblood, Leslie C.

Little, Brown (336 pp.)

\$16.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-7595-5520-4

Series: Love Like Sky



A tween’s summer is spent making new friends and memories—and a difference for her family and community.

Georgiana Matthews is an 11-year-old Black girl who lives in Snellville, Georgia, but is spending the summer in Bogalusa, Louisiana, with relatives: Her mother’s Aunt Vie has Alzheimer’s, and the toll it’s taken on her family is significant. Georgie wishes for more opportunities to help out, such as working at Aunt Vie’s renowned diner and the freedom to explore the area on her own, but her overprotective mother is resistant. Discontented, hopeless, and bored, Georgie decides to take the initiative and organize a talent contest to raise funds for the Alzheimer’s Foundation in honor of her great-aunt. She enlists the help of 12-year-old Markie Jean, a girl who works at the diner and who

was formerly fostered by Aunt Vie, and Georgie’s best friend, Nikki, who arrives for a surprise visit. So begins Georgie’s summer of newfound independence, friendship, and adventure, during which she discovers truths about herself and her family. Youngblood’s writing fluidly delivers a compelling narrative imbued with historical and cultural context. The novel highlights the significance of kinship and fighting for what you believe is right. The strong pacing and peppering of historical events and pop-culture references will have readers increasingly invested with each turn of the page. Most characters are Black.

A heartwarming story with an inspiring message about creative youth activism. (*Fiction*. 9-13)



STONE STAR Fight or Flight

Zub, Jim

Illus. by Dunbar, Max & Grundetjern, Espen

Dark Horse (136 pp.)

\$19.99 paper | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-5067-2458-4

Series: Stone Star, 1

Creatures and giant robots battle in space.

In this graphic science fiction series opener, Dail, a brown-skinned, humanlike orphan with oversized ears, is a thief on the asteroid Stone Star, which is currently moored on the purple planet Quell. Arena fights between monsters and gladiators (armed with weapons and huge mechs called effigies) upon the Stone Star are broadcast throughout the galaxy, showing some warriors’ climb to fame and victory while others meet a violent end. Dail’s best friend, Kitzo, a green-and-blue-skinned creature, is forced to fight a monster in the Death’s Door Brigade, and Dail’s effigy, Durn, jumps in to intervene. In the process, Dail discovers latent powers that could make him one of the fiercest gladiators in the universe. Told in quickly moving episodic chapters, Zub’s tale is intricate and complex, dropping readers right into its unfamiliar interstellar world, building it along the way but doling out exposition in, at times, frustratingly small pieces. However, the breakneck action and recognizably fun science-fiction tropes more than make up for this stumble. A tantalizing cliffhanger should entice further interest in this series, with its shades of Star Wars and The Hunger Games. Dunbar’s art is rendered with an impressive cinematic flourish, augmented by blazingly beautiful colors by Grundetjern.

Promising. (*Graphic science fiction*. 10-14)

"True to the title, the pages are filled with colorful and inviting illustrations."

ISABEL AND HER COLORES GO TO SCHOOL

BACK-TO-SCHOOL PICTURE BOOKS



ISABEL AND HER COLORES GO TO SCHOOL

Alessandri, Alexandra

Illus. by Dawson, Courtney

Sleeping Bear Press (40 pp.)

\$16.99 | Jul. 15, 2021

978-1-5341-1063-2

A first-day-of-school story steeped in vibrant imagery.

Isabel is anxious about her first day at Honeytree Elementary. Isabel speaks Spanish and doesn't understand much English—she is scared of everything that could go wrong. Mami encourages her to be brave, and Isabel joins the class even though the swirl of language in her new classroom sounds harsh to her ears. Isabel compares the sound of English to the cold and stormy hues of her blue and white crayons, and Spanish to the more inviting pinks, yellows, and purples. A friendly student welcomes Isabel, but they have a hard time connecting across their language differences. Coloring time brings Isabel comfort and the realization that she might have a strategy for talking to her new friend that doesn't require language at all. Isabel finds hope, and the English that surrounds her begins to sound less intimidating. Spanish words punctuate the English narrative throughout, and the full text of the story in Spanish is included on each page in a bright box. True to the title of the book, the pages are filled with colorful and inviting illustrations. Isabel and Mami have brown skin and curly hair, and her new friend presents Black; Isabel's teacher and other classmates are racially diverse. This story affirms the experiences of English language learners while encouraging empathy for others. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Readers will root for Isabel and her colorful new beginning. (glossary) (Picture book. 4-8)



HOW TO SPOT A BEST FRIEND

Birdsong, Bea

Illus. by Fleming, Lucy

Rodale Kids (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jun. 1, 2021

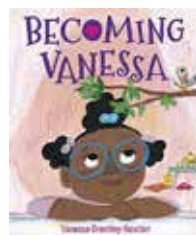
978-0-593-17927-7

On the way to school, a child lists all the qualities that differentiate a best friend from a friend.

When the narrator announces, "Today, I will find a best friend!" Mama is a little dubious. It's just the first day of school, after all. This kid is confident it will happen "like that!" and proceeds to describe what makes a best friend. A regular friend may lend a crayon, but "a best friend lends you a brand-new, extra-sharp green crayon. Even if you're drawing a tree with 3,811 green leaves." Similarly, regular friends sit next to you at storytime, help you build block towers, and swing with you; best

friends hold your hand if the story is scary, rebuild fallen towers with you, and push you on the swings. As the child, who, like Mama, presents White, continues the litany, the illustrations alternate between views of the child and Mama and the scenarios the child describes being played out at school, with a different member of the class occupying the best-friend role in each. These classmates are racially diverse; two wear glasses, and one uses a wheelchair. By the end, readers may be a little worn down by the level of self-sacrifice expected of this hypothetical best friend, but the child's final statement that the "number one, guaranteed best way to spot a best friend" is "to be a best friend, too" promises reciprocity.

Hopeful, if a little relentless. (Picture book. 4-7)



BECOMING VANESSA

Brantley-Newton, Vanessa

Illus. by the author

Knopf (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jun. 15, 2021

978-0-525-58212-0

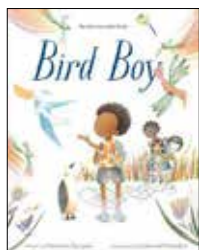
Vanessa's first day of school doesn't go as planned, but she learns that what makes her special is not on the outside.

Vanessa is nervous about her first day of school. What if the other kids don't like her? She and her mom decide she can choose an outfit that will showcase her personality and invite the other children's interest in her. All decked out in her tutu, feather boa, shiny shoes, and favorite cap, Vanessa feels ready. But at school, her outfit doesn't have quite the desired effect. And when it's time to write her name, she finds herself wishing her name were shorter and easier to write. At home, Vanessa doesn't want to tell her parents about her day. The next morning, she puts on a plain outfit and complains about her long name with two S's. But when her mother tells her the meaning of her name—it means "metamorphosis," says her mom—Vanessa realizes that she is special even without her unique accessories, and she learns to relate authentically with her peers. This classic school story offers a full range of emotions and situates this life-loving Black child in affirming family and school settings. The illustrations use variety in texture, color, and composition to effectively draw readers into the energy on the page and to hold interest to the beautiful last endpaper. Vanessa's classmates are racially diverse.

A welcome addition to every shelf. (Picture book. 3-8)

“Gentle illustrations use textures and color schemes to blend imagination with reality.”

BIRD BOY



BIRD BOY

Burgess, Matthew

Illus. by Maydani, Shabrizad

Knopf (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$20.99 PLB | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-984893-77-2

978-1-984893-78-9 PLB

Nico isn't like all the other children, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing.

Nico knows he is different. He is new at school, and he isn't sure what to do to be included. But he knows what he likes to do. He likes to watch insects marching or to sit in the grass and feel the sun on his face. As he sits still, birds begin to visit him. When the other children see this, they name him Bird Boy. Nico knows they are making fun of him, and it hurts. But as he thinks about the name, he finds himself smiling. He imagines himself as an eagle soaring, a penguin diving, a hummingbird hovering, and all sorts of birds in action. Throughout the day and into the night, he imagines and plays. Eventually, other children notice his kindness and his freedom, and he makes first one friend and then another. This heartwarming tale about a Black boy who feels free to be himself and finds genuine friendships by doing so offers realistic hope and encouragement for children who feel different to accept their authentic selves. Gentle illustrations use textures and color schemes to blend imagination with reality for a delightfully surreal journey through Nico's world. His classmates are mostly kids of color, and one uses a wheelchair.

A lovely celebration of individuality. (Picture book. 3-8)



PRINCIPAL TATE IS RUNNING LATE!

Cole, Henry

Illus. by the author

Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-06-302574-5

What will happen to Hardy Elementary school when reliable Principal Tate runs late?

Principal Tate, a large white hen, holds everything together at school, cheering the students and making sure things run smoothly. But this morning, as the buses pull up and the school day starts, Principal Tate is missing. (Readers saw her under the hood of her car at the side of the road after the title page.) All sorts of small animals enter the school for their day, and problems enter with them: Someone is being teased; someone else is throwing up. There are visitors and parents waiting for Principal Tate; there's a fire drill planned, and here comes the school board for their meeting! Before things descend into chaos, the staff and students spring into action, solving problems by sharing art, song, books, and food and by making phone calls. By the time the hero—bus driver Mr. Morales (a brown terrier)—shows up with Principal Tate, the school has proven that “it’s a place of community, / working so beautifully, together in

unity.” The rhyming text feels a bit forced, and while the pileup of urgent situations is both a bit arbitrary and over-the-top, it builds momentum and suspense to keep the pages turning. The artwork is busy with few contrasting colors, requiring some extra focus to identify the all-animal characters mentioned in the text. Emotions and relationships are visualized and engaging. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A sweet message for school communities. (Picture book. 4-8)



LITTLE GHOUL GOES TO SCHOOL

Czekaj, Jéf

Illus. by the author

Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jun. 15, 2021

978-0-06-244111-9

Little Ghoul is nervous for her first day of school: What if everything is nice?

Her mother assures her little green daughter that everything and everyone will be perfectly awful. But when she wakes up, the weather is sunny and warm, not rainy and cold as she had hoped. The bus driver is smiling and kind instead of terrifying. The principal welcomes everyone with a smile. And it is all downhill from there: Nothing is as horrible as she had hoped. Finally, a boy actually shakes her hand and asks to be friends, sending Little Ghoul screaming. Thankfully, Little Ghoul wakes up to find that this awful experience was just a nightmare. As her mom sends her off, the weather is indeed cold and rainy. Her teacher is “hideous,” lunch is “repulsive,” and the librarian, the same creepy Ms. Shelley as in her dream, lets her know that “everything [will] be all right.” Little Ghoul's fears, loves, and habits will induce many grossed-out giggles, and the story may serve as a clever anxiety-reducing tale for little ones who are nervous about starting school themselves. The illustrations are as entertaining as the text, adding a layer of humor with the reversal of what's delightful and what's fearful in the perspective of this oddly endearing little monster. The children and teachers in Little Ghoul's nightmare are racially diverse humans; with the exception of Ms. Shelley, a woman of color, her waking reality is populated by (not-too-scary) monsters. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

An adorably soothing introduction to the potential terrors of school. (Picture book. 4-6)



1, 2, 3, OFF TO SCHOOL!

Dubuc, Marianne

Illus. by the author

Trans. by Ghione, Yvette

Kids Can (24 pp.)

\$17.99 | May 4, 2021

978-1-5253-0656-3

In anticipation of kindergarten next year, a curious child follows their animal neighbors to each of their schools for the day.

Pom, a White child with a pointy, red hat who lives in a tree, may not start kindergarten until next year, but their animal friends have told them all about their schools. With their schoolbag packed and a new pair of shoes, Pom sets off on an adventure to check out the schools for themself. Starting with the busy mice, Pom then visits rabbits, frogs, foxes, bears, sloths, squirrels, wolves, turtles, and hedgehogs. Every location introduces a new school-related activity, including bus rides, field trips, music, gym, lunch, napping, cleaning up, and after-school pickup. Apart from Pom, only three other nonanimal characters appear in the illustrations, including Momo (Pom's caregiver), and all of them have pale pink skin like Pom's. The narrative does not assign a binary gender to either Pom or Momo. The double-page illustrations, alive with tiny details and references to popular children's stories, demand up-close exploration. Bits of dialogue scattered across the pages, although not essential to understanding the story, highlight student perspectives about daily routines. Despite the disappointing lack of racial diversity, Pom's ease and inquisitive nature combine with the distance provided by the focus on animals at school to create a gentle preview of a big life change. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Imported from France, a whimsical peek at a new experience. (Picture book. 3-5)



THE GIGGLES ARE COMING!

Eliopoulos, Christopher

Illus. by the author

Dial Books (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-593-10931-1

In this companion to *The Yawns Are Coming!* (2020), the first day of a new school year brings an attack of the giggles.

Our narrator, a small Black child, is anticipating a fun new year, with best friend Noodles as a classmate. They meet a new friend, Ruby, and do some exploring in the classroom. They are listening to their teacher when the narrator whispers something silly to Noodles. That's when it happens. All of a sudden, the giggles are coming! A crowd of small, yellow monsters surrounds the three friends, who try, wide-eyed, to resist. Hiding from them doesn't work. Neither does ignoring them. One by one, the friends fall to the influence of the giggles. And then there's an enormous guffaw, the flying chuckles, and a giant, rolling laugh. By the time these monsters are through with the classroom, everyone is rolling on the floor laughing. As with *The Yawns Are Coming!*, the premise of this story is familiar to many. Unlike *The Yawns*, however, it is harder to get invested in this story and feel the power of the humor. Eliopoulos' cartoon illustrations of a fairly diverse classroom (Noodles, Ruby, and the teacher all present White, however) are engaging enough to keep the pages turning. Perhaps the giggles are just a bit too obvious, making this book fall flat for all but the silliest of readers. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

May induce chuckles for some. (Picture book. 3-7)



SOUNDS LIKE SCHOOL SPIRIT

Fleming, Meg

Illus. by Cummins, Lucy Ruth

Dial Books (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-593-10832-1

This raucous read-along brings school spirit to every moment of the school day.

A diverse group of young students enter the school building, some looking excited, some worried or sad. The book's text starts up a chant: "We say BOOK, you say BAG... / Book! Bag! Book! Bag!" The narrative continues with chants about familiar school sights, from nametags to the lunch line, "Alpha! Bet!" to class pet. These call-and-response chants alternate with rhyming couplets about school behavior: "Taking turns and standing tall. / That's the spirit. Let's PLAY BALL." Students find seats, have circle time, play, share, learn together, and create a sense of school spirit as they go through their day from drop-off to pickup. The irresistible rhythm of this chant will have a participatory storytime up and running quickly. The type highlights the words to be chanted, so young readers can see the participatory lines as they arise. The illustrations use bright streaks of color and generous white space to match the energy of the text, and the depiction of diverse humans is refreshing in this season's animal-heavy list of school stories. Character details offer opportunities for children to notice and guess what some of the children may be feeling. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

This celebration of school spirit is sure to get the energy flowing. (Picture book. 3-8)



WHEREVER YOU'LL BE

Guttman, Ariella Prince

Illus. by Godbout, Geneviève

Flamingo Books (32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-0-593-20653-9

A young child wakes up early in the morning, greeting cat, dog, and mother.

Together, mother and child get ready, for work and school respectively. Before they part, the mother reminds her youngster that even though they will be in different places all day, they will both be holding each other in their thoughts. The remainder of the book shows how the mother and child lead parallel days in their separate worlds. While the young child learns a new song, the mother walks into her office with earbuds in, presumably also listening to music. The mother has lunch and snack with a colleague while the child has lunch and snack with school pals. The tot fingerpaints while the mother and her colleague do paperwork. In the evening, the parent and child reunite, eager to find out about each other's days. The book's gentle, rhyming text tells a lyrical story about love, growth, and family. The illustrations, which utilize a soothing pastel palette, cleverly highlight the parallels between the

lives of adults and children. The pictures feature diverse supporting characters—one of the mother's colleagues and one of the child's classmates appear to be Black while other characters are racially ambiguous—but the story centers a White family with heterosexual parents and thus breaks no real new ground. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A sweet, simple story about family love. (Picture book. 2-5)



MIGHTY READER MAKES THE GRADE

Hillenbrand, Will

Illus. by the author

Holiday House (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-8234-4499-1

Series: Mighty Reader

It's the day of the state test, and the students need help from Mighty Reader to fight their fears, calm their nerves, and remember their skills.

Lulu, a young anthropomorphic dog, wakes up in bed, upset because she's overslept on the day of the state test. She stumbles out the door to find the world transformed. Scary beings embodying her fears surround her: an oversized pencil, a fire-breathing book, a sinister eye that glares from a triangle atop a stack of different books. Lulu cowers by a fire hydrant, hoping to be rescued before the fears can take her brain away. Mighty Reader, a dog superhero, shows up just in time, with a special T-shirt and reading technique. The fears are tamed, and the day is saved. Now, in an abrupt turn of events, Lulu wakes up from this nightmare ready to face the real test. At school, the teacher has calming stations prepared, but the students need Mighty Reader to get ready for the test. With a combination of panels and full-page illustrations, and more speech bubbles than narrative text, this book reads like a comic and feels like one too, with its fast dramatic action. The didactic lesson about reading techniques (take turns reading, "talk the pictures," etc.) is given a full spread before the students are shown quietly taking the test with smiles on their faces—a mixed message that gives the ending an odd feeling. Despite the chaotic structure and awkward ending, this book will likely help some students acknowledge anxiety about tests, a first step to conquering it.

A wild ride with oddly assimilated educational substance. (Picture book. 5-9)



NORMAN'S FIRST DAY AT DINO DAY CARE

Julian, Sean

Illus. by the author

NorthSouth (32 pp.)

\$17.95 | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-7358-4414-8

A small dinosaur discovers that day care isn't scary at all.

Plainly written to purpose, this first-day episode features a dino so tiny that viewers will have as much trouble as his puzzled classmates do spotting him in the first picture, peering out from behind the teacher's leg. Norman initially disappears into a bucket of pencils or beneath a cushion whenever addressed. "I really want to join in, Miss Beak," says little Norman, "but I feel shy." "It's okay to be shy," she replies. "It's a special part of who you are." But Norman is so surprised to learn that even the comparatively humongous Jake has stage fright ("But you're so big!") "It doesn't mean my fears are small") that his reserve is broken at last—and, after the two team up for a magic show, Norman understands that he has courage inside as well as shyness. The narrative's precocious language may leave similarly timorous young listeners unmoved, but Julian's small, diverse groups of fetchingly drawn dino-tots happily stacking rocks outdoors or engaged in other social activities inside beneath the pterodactyl teacher's calm but watchful eyes (and also a wall poster wordlessly promoting the notion of evolution) promise a reassuringly positive experience.

Openly agenda driven, but easy on the eyes and low key in tone. (Picture book. 3-5)



LITTLE BAT IN NIGHT SCHOOL

Lies, Brian

Illus. by the author

HMH Books (32 pp.)

\$14.99 | Jun. 29, 2021

978-0-358-26984-7

Series: Bat Book

After a rough start, Little Bat's first night at school is all he hoped it would be.

Little Bat is all ready for school. His supplies are laid out, including his new "batpack" with a rather leggy snack inside. He is so excited he can hardly sleep. But soon night falls, and it is time for Mama Bat to bring him to school. The school is bigger than Little Bat expected, but the teacher, a raccoon named Mrs. C., welcomes him right in. His classmates are all other night creatures: raccoons, owlets, a ferret, and some other bats who aren't very friendly. When Little Bat flies into a cubby to hide, he finds another student hanging upside down too, an opossum named Ophelia. They become friends, and the rest of the night improves. The little creatures learn together, play together, and listen to a story until the sun starts to rise and it is time to go home. Lies' distinct artistic style brings the characters to life, showcasing personalities, relationships, and action against a largely white background. The ups and downs of the classroom are captured with delicacy and sensitivity, a useful model of the changing social dynamics that can turn strangers to playmates and new adults into trusted teachers. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Quiet and hopeful, this animal-themed school story rings true. (Picture book. 4-6)

"Little Blue is a brave, helpful, and hopeful character young readers will root for."

TIME FOR SCHOOL, LITTLE BLUE TRUCK



SCHOOL IS COOL!

Moyle, Sabrina
 Illus. by Moyle, Eunice
 Abrams Appleseed (32 pp.)
 \$16.99 | Jul. 13, 2021
 978-1-4197-5110-3
 Series: Hello! Lucky

The transition from a relaxing summer to the first day of school isn't so bad when you realize that school is cool.

Assorted happy animals are relaxing on the beach, enjoying the summer day, when they stop short and realize that the first day of school is tomorrow. The rhyming text addresses readers in second person while the animals go through the motions on the page, starting with worrying about what school will be like and whether they'll fit in. The narrator encourages and guides "you" through your first day of getting ready, getting to school, finding your teacher, and saying goodbye to your caregiver before learning, playing, trying new things, and expanding both mind and social life in the different settings and activities you'll encounter at school. The text—two rhyming couplets per spread—is upbeat and fast paced, and the bright, cheerful illustrations depict animals of many kinds with smiling faces getting along joyfully. Children nervous about starting school will have something to look forward to after reading this ode to the institution. Pair this one with other books on being kind and inclusive so that the school community can actually reflect the ideal presented here. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An enthusiastic, aspirational stage setter. *(Picture book. 3-6)*



MY SCHOOL STINKS!

Scharnhorst, Becky
 Illus. by Patton, Julia
 Philomel (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
 978-0-593-11652-4

Wildwood Elementary School is full of wild animals.

A child is trying the deep breaths and happy thoughts recommended by Mom and Dad to prepare for the first day of school, but so far it isn't working. At school, the child is surrounded by wild animals: a stinky desk mate (skunk), a biting locker buddy (crocodile), and an "unbearable" ursine teacher. The child tries pretending to be sick to avoid going back, but Mom and Dad don't buy it. As the days go on, being dropped from the monkey bars by the monkeys, being picked over by a gorilla, and being invited to eat lunch with a crocodile give way to friendlier experiences. The things that made the child hate Wildwood Elementary are transformed into positives—friendships and helpers. The only challenge left is parents night! The text is written in a first-person narrative as diary entries in a faux handwritten type set on notebook paper. The protagonist, a child with huge glasses, tiny eyes, and energetically unkempt straight hair, is visibly transformed from a constant worrier to a happy kid. The protagonist and parents, the only humans in

the story, present as White. This story has an amusing tongue-in-cheek quality in which the text can be read as exaggeration but the pictures bear out the child's perspective. For children accused of having wild imaginations, this is an affirming treat. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

Just might convince complaining children that their school isn't so bad after all. *(Picture book. 3-8)*



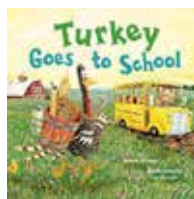
TIME FOR SCHOOL, LITTLE BLUE TRUCK

Schertle, Alice
 Illus. by Joseph, John
 HMH Books (32 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Jun. 29, 2021
 978-0-358-41224-3

Little Blue Truck learns that he can be as important as the big yellow school bus.

Little Blue Truck is driving along the country road early one morning when he and driver friend Toad come across a big, yellow, shiny school bus. The school bus is friendly, and so are her animal passengers, but when Little Blue Truck wishes aloud he could do an important job like hers, the school bus says only a bus of her size and features can do this job. Little Blue Truck continues along, a bit envious, and finds Piggy crying by the side of the road, having missed the bus. Little Blue tells Piggy to climb in and takes a creative path to the school—one the bus couldn't navigate—and with an adventurous spirit, gets Piggy there right on time. The simple, rhyming text opens the story with a sweet, fresh, old-fashioned tone and continues with effortlessly rhythmic lines throughout. Little Blue is a brave, helpful, and hopeful character young readers will root for. Adults will feel a rush of nostalgia and delight in sharing this story with children as the animated vehicles and animals in innocent, colorful countryside scenes evoke wholesome character traits and values of growth, grit, and self-acceptance. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A terrific choice for the preschool crowd. *(Picture book. 3-7)*



TURKEY GOES TO SCHOOL

Silvano, Wendi
 Illus. by Harper, Lee
 Two Lions (40 pp.)
 \$13.95 | Jul. 13, 2021
 978-1-5420-2364-1
 Series: Turkey Trouble, 5

Turkey is excited and ready for the first day of school—but will they let the farm animals in?

The farm children, Max and Millie, both White, are "super-excited" for the first day of school. The farm animals have heard all about it, and they are excited too—especially Turkey, who drills the other animals on their school skills as the big day approaches. But when the school bus arrives, the animals are told to stay at the farm. They hitch a ride in a pickup and spend the whole day devising different plans to get inside the school

“The text is upbeat and enthusiastic, with rhyming verses set to a loose rhythm that is easy to read aloud.”

HOW TO BE KIND IN KINDERGARTEN

building. Turkey tries disguising himself as a backpack, a book, a cafeteria worker, and even a soccer ball, but he is always discovered and sent out. Finally, the animals learn how to use the first-week-of-school theme, “Farm Days,” to their advantage. The text is full of silly puns and animal sounds that liven up the reading. The animals’ outsider perspective on the classroom full of children having an exciting day of learning and fun is an entertaining thought experiment for young children, though animal lovers may balk at the exclusion of the hopeful barn dwellers. The watercolor-and-pencil illustrations feature quirky characters with wide eyes and expressive features and a relatively diverse class of children. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A cute twist on both the farm and school themes. *(Picture book. 3-8)*



**HOW TO BE KIND IN
KINDERGARTEN**
A Book for Your Backpack

Steinberg, D.J.

Illus. by Hammond, Ruth

Grosset & Dunlap (32 pp.)

\$8.99 | \$5.99 paper | Jun. 29, 2021

978-0-593-22694-0

978-0-593-22672-8 paper

Kindergarteners get a crash course on practicing kindness.

The text is addressed to child readers, who are told that their “great big heart[s]” and “great big mind[s]” make them able to be kind. Readers are then treated to a tour of the settings a kindergartener will experience at school, including the hallway, the classroom, lunchtime, recess. In each setting, there are moments when other children who are depicted might need a touch of kindness: a helping hand, an invitation to play, a turn with a toy, an apology. Readers are reminded of kind gestures that can make situations better. The spare illustrations are full of joyful energy, showing a diverse classroom of expressive kids with an array of different skin tones and hair textures, a hijab-wearing girl, and a child in a wheelchair. The text is upbeat and enthusiastic, with rhyming verses set to a loose rhythm that is easy to read aloud. Adults and children will have fun reading this primer together, as both preparation for and reminder of the social situations children will face. The positioning of readers as the book’s subject enables thoughtful discussion and mental role-playing for effective social-emotional learning. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A helpful addition to any kindergarten shelf. *(Picture book. 4-6)*



KALAMATA'S KITCHEN

Thomas, Sarah

Illus. by Edwards, Jo Kosmides

Random House (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$20.99 PLB | Jul. 6, 2021

978-0-593-30791-5

978-0-593-30792-2 PLB

Kalamata, who is about to start a brand-new school, is trying to figure out how to be brave.

She remembers a time she and her family visited a spice market in India where, when faced with the intimidating crowd and all of the new sights and sounds and smells, Kalamata’s curiosity got the better of her nerves. Maybe, Kalamata thinks, if she can remember how she channeled that bravery, she can find the courage to be OK with going to school tomorrow. Kalamata climbs under the kitchen table with her stuffed-animal alligator, Al Dente, and works some under-the-table magic to transport herself back to the spice market. In her fanciful imagination, the stalls full of delicious ingredients transform into multicolored mountains, curry-leaf jungles, and even fluffy snowstorms. By the time she is ready to return to her hideaway under the table, Kalamata has found her courage—as well as her sense of adventure. The book’s vivid collage illustrations feature saturated hues and a female protagonist with dark skin and black, textured hair. The text is lyrical and poetic, conjuring clever and unexpected images that invoke all five senses. The plot, however, feels unfinished, particularly since there is no clear reason why Kalamata’s visit to the spice market results in her subsequent bravery, making the change in her character unconvincing. A final spread offers a map of India and some facts about cooking and spices.

A beautifully illustrated, lyrical picture book with an underwhelming plot. *(Picture book. 4-8)*

YOUNG ADULT



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

WALLS by L.M. Elliott; illus. by Megan Behm.....128

HANI AND ISHU'S GUIDE TO FAKE DATING
by Adiba Jaigirdar 137

WHEN WE WERE STRANGERS by Alex Richards.....142

THE RIVER HAS TEETH by Erica Waters.....145



THE RIVER HAS TEETH
Waters, Erica
HarperTeen (400 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021
978-0-06-289425-0



WHEN ALL THE GIRLS ARE SLEEPING

Arsenault, Emily
Delacorte (448 pp.)
\$17.99 | \$20.99 PLB | Jul. 13, 2021
978-0-593-18079-2
978-0-593-18080-8 PLB

Haley, a senior on scholarship at an exclusive prep school, is hunting a ghost that may just be hunting her.

The year before, Haley's former best friend, mean-spirited Taylor, jumped to her death from her dorm window. The administration wrote it off as a drug-induced suicide, but Haley isn't so sure after Taylor's brother sends her a video Taylor recorded on her phone shortly before her demise. After all, almost everyone agrees that the senior dorm is haunted by the Winter Girl, the ghost of a young woman in white. Now Haley embarks on serious research, dipping into the school's archival materials, interviewing alumnae and previous employees, and talking to other students about their experiences. Her increasingly revealing explorations serve as a counterpoint to brief chapters that appear to be from the unhappy, vindictive ghost's point of view. Since Haley abandoned Taylor shortly before her death, she feels a strong sense of responsibility for what happened, but is that guilt misplaced or, as the ghost accuses, *did* she make her jump? Although the creepy dorm and its unhappy residents are richly evoked, none of the default White characters except first-person narrator Haley are well enough developed to fully flesh out the story or support the surprising—and fairly implausible—climax.

Ghost story or mean girls running amok? Either way, still a page-turner if light on characterization. (Thriller: 14-18)



I'M NOT HOLDING YOUR COAT My Bruises-and-All Memoir of Punk Rock Rebellion

Barile, Nancy
Bazillion Points (192 pp.)
\$14.95 paper | Jun. 29, 2021
978-1-935950-20-2

An award-winning educator recounts her role in the early days of the American punk and hardcore scenes—experiences that, four decades later, shape how she teaches.

Barile's childhood was severely circumscribed: In her suburban Philadelphia home, her father ruled with threats of physical

Hot YA Summer Reads of 2021



LOOKING FOR A GREAT BOOK to pick up this summer? There are a number of superlative choices coming our way. You can't go amiss with the eight below.

One Great Lie by Deb Caletti (Atheneum, June 1): Prolific, acclaimed author Caletti's latest follows 18-year-old aspiring writer Charlotte, a White American girl who embarks upon the summer of

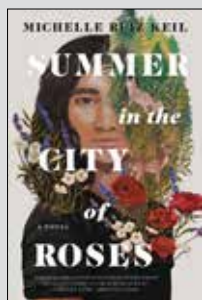
a lifetime: being mentored by the man whose books have shaped her life—in Italy, no less. But the dream turns sour when she realizes that he is an exploitative predator targeting the young women in the program.

Instructions for Dancing by Nicola Yoon (Delacorte, June 1): Following earlier runaway successes, this new romance from Yoon is something to celebrate. Centering Black teens Evie and Xavier and featuring light magical elements, the story includes dance lessons, attraction between opposites, questions of trust and betrayal, and the rewards that come from knowing pain but risking your heart anyway.



All Our Hidden Gifts by Caroline O'Donoghue (Walker US/Candlewick, June 8): An Irish author makes a foray into YA with this atmospheric novel about teenagers in Ireland who experiment with tarot cards. The story, which features diversity in ethnicity, sexual identity, and sexual orientation, weaves together folklore, social conflict, religious tension, and a missing student in a suspenseful paranormal tale that takes on contemporary struggles.

Summer in the City of Roses by Michelle Ruiz Keil (Soho Teen, July 6): Keil's debut, *All of Us With Wings* (2019) made a splash, and her sophomore novel, set in Portland, Oregon, is an original, queer blend of magical realism, punk music, Greek mythology, and folklore. Siblings Iph and Orr Santos Velos are separated when their father sends sensitive Orr away to boot camp; Iph sets out in pursuit.



XOXO by Axie Oh (HarperTeen, July 13): Pivoting from her science-fiction Rebel Seoul duology, Oh offers a

charming take on romance and family. When Korean American cellist Jenny goes with her mother to Korea for the first time, the last thing she expects is that Jaewoo, the charismatic boy she met and flirted with at home in Los Angeles, not only attends her new school, but is a huge K-pop star.

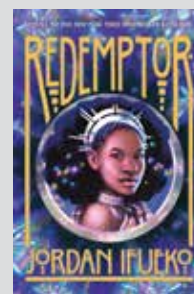


In the Wild Light by Jeff Zentner (Crown, Aug. 10): Known for his un-



forgettable, heartbreaking portraits of rural Appalachia, Zentner's latest follows a boy tragically affected by the opioid crisis and his best friend, a girl with big dreams. When Delaney's scientific discovery goes viral, she's offered a New England prep school scholarship. She accepts on the condition that Cash is included, forcing him to make a life-changing decision.

Redemptor by Jordan Ifueko (Amulet/Abrams, Aug. 17): This much-anticipated duology closer follows up on Ifueko's hit West African-inspired fantasy debut, *Raybearer* (2020). The rich worldbuilding continues the adventures of Tarisai, who faced a shocking revelation about her origins and purpose in life. Now she has become empress, developing all the powers that go along with her Raybearer status, yet she is haunted by spirits and faces almost unbearable pressure and responsibilities.



Living Beyond Borders: Growing up Mexican in America edited by Margarita Longoria (Philomel, Aug. 17): This remarkable anthology presents the writing and art of a broad range of Mexican American contributors who offer teen readers honest, heartfelt, and inspiring work in formats that include short stories, autobiographical essays, comics, and poetry. These voices weave their diverse perspectives together to form a tapestry that celebrates a community and its rich heritage.

"A heartfelt voyage through time and space."

THE HERO WITHIN

punishment, and at her mostly White Catholic school, nuns bullied students into submission. Music became her escape, and it's no wonder that Barile eventually found her way to punk music; its rejection of mainstream ideologies and expectations was liberating and validating. Barile's narrative pushes past the long-held belief that women in punk and hardcore music waited on the side, holding their boyfriends' coats while the men moshed in the pit. To the contrary, she became the manager of a popular Philly hardcore punk band, a wild ride recounted in vivid and lively detail. Barile has a clear, approachable voice that she uses to tell myriad great stories, including how she became pen pals with Patti Smith's mother, got a sloppy smooch from Iggy Pop, and ran into the Clash on the street. The book is filled with satisfying extras, such as numerous personal photos that bring the era to life for today's readers, as well as a lengthy playlist and a foreword by Dischord Records founder Ian MacKaye. The connection between her punk days and her desire to empower students, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, adds additional depth.

A must-read for music history buffs, punk fans, and educators. (*Memoir. 14-adult*)



THE HERO WITHIN

Barnes, Rodney
Illus. by Espiritu, Selina & Fitzpatrick, Kelly & Napolitano, Tom
 Oni Press (144 pp.)
 \$14.99 paper | Jul. 13, 2021
 978-1-62010-936-6
 Series: Quincredible, 2

Black teen superhero fights a powerful property developer over the rights to sacred ground.

Quinton West is slowly returning to normal high school life after helping his fellow enhanced heroes save the world, although New Orleans sustained significant damage. Quin's crush, Brittany Barnes, recently lost her botanist aunt, Adélaïde, during a meteor shower. Meanwhile, another mystery is unfolding within Quin's own bedroom. Lately, he's had strange, vivid dreams that seem to be directed by an unknown woman. He sets out to investigate one of the landmarks he remembers from such a dream and runs into aggressive security at Jean Lafitte National Park, where developer Mr. Deveraux, proud great-grandson of prominent slave owner Jonathan Deveraux, plans to turn it into commercial property. Deveraux must be hiding something. After superhero colleague Glow finds a confused Quin sleeping at the construction site, Quin is even more determined to find the truth behind the mysterious dreams and whatever Deveraux is hiding. The second volume in the Quincredible series presents the same warm, vibrant characters and bold, expressive artwork. Espiritu's strong lines paired with Fitzpatrick's colors make every page pop. Barnes takes Quin through difficult internal struggles, such as mustering the will to keep fighting even when there's a new evil to face each day. No matter how hard he gets knocked down, Quin's friends and

family always reach out a hand to pull him back up.

A heartfelt voyage through time and space. (*gallery*)
 (*Graphic fantasy. 12-18*)



RISING LIKE A STORM

Bhabhena, Tanaz
 Farrar, Straus and Giroux (432 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Jun. 22, 2021
 978-0-374-31311-1
 Series: Wrath of Ambar, 2

When the treacherous Shayla murders King Lohar, she becomes the Queen of Ambarvadi—and none of her subjects feel safe.

According to prophecy, the only ones who can end Queen Shayla's brutal reign are Gul, the famed Star Warrior, and Cavas, Gul's lover. Under the guidance of Subodh, a Pashu king dedicated to justice, Gul and Cavas train to use their magic together against Queen Shayla. But before they can hone their craft, Shayla sends her army to attack Gul, Cavas, Subodh, and the Legion of the Star Warrior, a group of women faithful to Gul and Amar, the rightful king of Ambarvadi. Cavas is captured, and Gul and her army are forced to flee through the dangerous desert. While Cavas is imprisoned in Shayla's castle and tortured, Gul and her army remain determined to fulfill the prophecy and return Ambarvadi to its rightful owner—but can Gul do it without Cavas, who is her magical complement, lover, and best friend? The story is told through alternating perspectives, the most satisfying of which is Shayla's, whose voice is the most distinctive. The final third of this novel offers the fastest pace and the most reveals. The richly built, South Asian-inspired world will be best appreciated by readers familiar with *Hunted by the Sky* (2020), the first book in the duology.

A compelling mythology-based fantasy. (*map, glossary, author's note*) (*Fantasy. 14-18*)



THE BETRAYED

Cass, Kiera
 HarperTeen (304 pp.)
 \$16.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
 978-0-06-229166-0

Lady Hollis flees her country after her new husband is killed.

In *The Betrothed* (2020), Hollis fell in love with Silas, the son of an Isolten family who sought asylum from their cruel king, and chose him over her intended match, King Jameson. Since Silas, his father, his brothers, and her parents have been killed, she decides to travel to Isolte with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Formerly primarily interested in dresses, dancing, and romance, Hollis now proves her mettle. Etan, Silas' cousin, arrives to escort the family, and he clashes with Hollis from the moment they meet. The society

“A sensitive exploration of cogent themes in a richly detailed historical setting.”

WALLS

they live in, modeled after medieval Europe, with castles, tournaments, kings, queens, and nobles, generally follows traditional gender roles, but Hollis sometimes breaks through the accepted boundaries. When Etan wants to lead a revolt against his own King Quinten, who is just one of the novel's major betrayers, Hollis uses her wits to get the evidence needed to convince others that he is guilty of crimes against his own people. She bravely returns to Coroa to confront King Jameson when she finds out that he, too, has carried out unspeakable crimes. Hollis and Etan's verbal wars are fun, predictably leading to love, but the political intrigue sometimes drags the novel down. Characters default to White.

Fans of the previous entry will enjoy following the story of a young woman who changes the fates of two countries. (*Historical romance*. 13-16)



SMALL FAVORS

Craig, Erin A.

Delacorte (480 pp.)

\$16.99 | \$19.99 PLB | Jul. 27, 2021

978-0-593-30674-1

978-0-593-30675-8 PLB

An isolated mountain town faces inhuman threats and a reckoning.

Eighteen-year-old Ellerie is the beekeeper's daughter in Amity Falls, a town with a curious past—legend has it the founders were plagued by monsters and so hung Bells along the forest line to keep them out. After an emergency draws her parents away, Ellerie's left taking care of her family—her twin brother and two younger sisters. When monsters in the woods, long thought gone, prevent supply runs, the town faces crucial shortages of things like medicine, ammunition, and general store goods. Meanwhile, aside from the monsters in the woods, other bad omens like deformed animals and ruined crops plague the town and add to its struggles to prepare for winter. Amid the claustrophobic atmosphere, acts of sabotage sow mistrust among the townspeople and uncover every last grudge. The nonspecific historical setting and creepy woods are well used, be it in eerie moments or in the details of beekeeping and the homesteading lifestyle. During the plot's slow build, Ellerie's interpersonal storylines (a budding romance with a young trapper, growing distance between her and her twin, and more) ground readers between the escalation of outward dangers. The biggest twist may be obvious, but the escalation to the wild climax provides a fun ride to an abrupt ending. Ellerie's family and most of the town default to White.

An engrossing combination of the supernatural and human psychology. (list of families) (*Horror*. 12-18)



THE TAKING OF JAKE LIVINGSTON

Douglass, Ryan

Putnam (256 pp.)

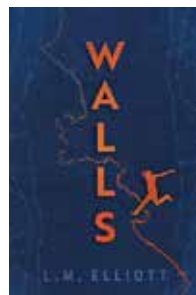
\$14.65 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-984812-53-7

Eleventh grader Jake Livingston fights for survival when the ghost of a school shooter starts to haunt him.

Besides dealing with being the only Black kid in his grade, Jake also must contend with the ghosts he sees every day. Remnants of the “dead world” envelop every aspect of his waking life, ghosts distract him in school, he astral projects at night, and now he's the target of a particularly incensed spirit. Sawyer Doon, a White boy who committed a mass shooting at a neighboring high school, has set his sights on Jake, seeking to possess his body and commit more atrocities from beyond the grave. Newfound friends Fiona Chan and Allister Burroughs, a new Black student at St. Clair Prep, assist Jake in his quest to vanquish Sawyer and protect those he loves. Meanwhile, diary entries from Sawyer himself pepper the novel, offering a glimpse into what can drive someone to violence. Jake, who is gay and dealing with the stress of being closeted, not only manages supernatural antagonists, but everyday racism and microaggressions as well. His experiences supply crucial social commentary and insight into the ways discrimination can isolate and depress young adults. Lush and emotive prose chronicles Jake's journey, though the novel's short length and brisk pace leave some crucial aspects of the plot feeling underdeveloped.

Spooky, atmospheric, and layered. (*Paranormal*. 12-18)



WALLS

Elliott, L.M.

Illus. by Behm, Megan

Algonquin (352 pp.)

\$19.95 | Jul. 27, 2021

978-1-64375-024-8

Young people, separated by politics and ideology, search for common ground.

Berlin, 1960. His dad's latest tour of duty brings 15-year-old Drew and his family to a city divided—a fact brought home by meeting his cousin Matthias who lives in the city's Communist-controlled section. As the teens warily circle each other, conflicting in temperaments as well as doctrinaire views of each other's cultures but gradually building bonds, Elliott both fills in the historical background—aided by Behm's mixing of period photos, contemporary news, and pop-culture notes—and crafts a tale of rising tensions that culminates in a suspenseful climax that catches Drew on the wrong side of the east-west barrier that literally springs up overnight and forces Matthias into an agonizing choice between family and freedom. Along with tucking in provocative incidents, like the ugly scene when



a pair of drunken GIs spot a Black serviceman and his White German fiancée, the author gives readers food for thought by asking them to envision living under a regime in which neighbors might be informers and then having just such secret accusations leveled both against Matthias and, on the U.S. side, Drew's parents too. An afterword points to similarities between the Khrushchev-led Communists' disruptive sowing of fear and suspicion in 1960 and Putin's in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. The cast mostly presents as White.

A sensitive exploration of cogent themes in a richly detailed historical setting. (sources, photo credits) (*Historical fiction*. 12-16)



UNTETHERED

Flanders, KayLynn

Delacorte (464 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$20.99 PLB | Jul. 20, 2021

978-0-593-11857-3

978-0-593-11858-0 PLB

Series: Shielded, 2

The royal families of Hálendi and Turia come together once more to fight against the threat of ancient mages who seek to control the entire Plateau in this

sequel to *Shielded* (2020).

A royal wedding in the neighboring kingdom of Riiga proves to be a trap designed to lure the kings of both Hálendi and Turia, but the newly crowned King Ren of Hálendi manages to evade it. Meanwhile, Princess Chiara of Turia, herself possessing no magic, formulates a plan to find her kidnapped father and prove herself useful to her family. Ren volunteers to go after her and agrees to help her with her quest. In the process, they discover that what the mages are really after are the keys to the mythical Black Library, which contains long-hidden powerful artifacts and records of ancient mages' knowledge—and that they will use any means at their disposal to find these keys and the location of the library itself. This sequel introduces welcome new characters as well as bringing Jenna, Enzo, and Mari back into the fold, and the villains become more developed characters. While slow to start, the adventure shifts back into gear in the second half with plenty of action sequences amid the chaste, blooming romance that develops between Ren and Chiara. Characters' skin tones range from pale to olive.

A sequel that delivers on the worldbuilding set up by its predecessor. (*Fantasy*. 12-18)



FAKING REALITY

Fujimura, Sara

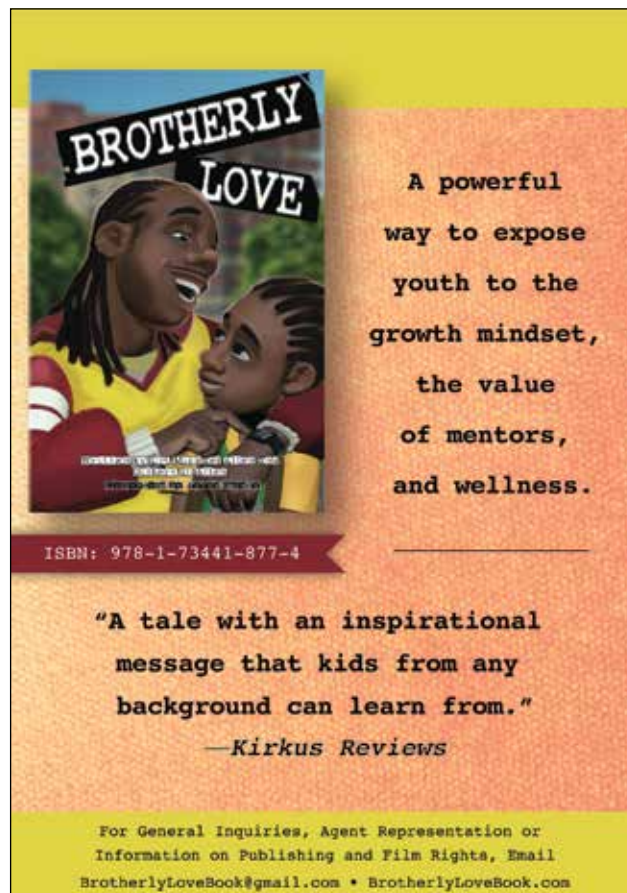
Tor Teen (320 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-250-20410-3

A reality star who fiercely guards her personal life ponders risking it all for true love.

Dakota McDonald has been famous since the moment her parents revealed on their hit renovation show that they were expecting her. But after having her childhood meticulously documented on television, America's "DIY princess" longs to be a regular teen. Despite that, Dakota reluctantly agrees to turn her upcoming birthday into a special episode complete with corporate sponsorship and begins auditioning telegenic potential dates, who will earn \$5,000 for their efforts. Complicating matters is Dakota's childhood friend (and secret crush) Leo Matsuda, whose family owns her favorite restaurant. Like



BEHIND THE BOOK

BLACKOUT

The novel's six bestselling authors answer our questions about collaborative writing, summer reading, and more

BY TOM BEER

IT'S A CLASSIC URBAN SUMMERTIME SCENARIO: The temperature rises, everyone is running air conditioners full blast, and the power goes out. *Blackout* (Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins, June 22) takes it as the jumping-off point for a young adult novel constructed of interlinked stories about Black teens in love, all leading up to a Brooklyn block party. The roster of contributing authors reads like a who's who of YA fiction: Dhonielle Clayton, Tiffany D. Jackson, Nic Stone, Angie Thomas, Ashley Woodfolk, and Nicola Yoon. We emailed the collaborators to ask them about their own blackout experiences and the books that keep them entertained, with or without electricity.

The power is out: No TV, no video games, and your phone is rapidly losing juice. What favorite book will we find you reading by flashlight?



Dhonielle Clayton

Dhonielle Clayton: You'll find me rereading Leigh Bardugo's Grishaverse series so I can escape to cold Ravka!

Tiffany D. Jackson: My blackout baes already know...the Twilight series. Always sucks me out of a funk.

Nic Stone: *The Mothers* by Brit Bennett.

Angie Thomas: Anything that Jesmyn Ward writes. I would truly read her grocery list.

Ashley Woodfolk: *Tiny Beautiful Things* by Cheryl Strayed.

Nicola Yoon: *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

Have you ever experienced a serious blackout? What did you do to occupy yourself?

Dhonielle Clayton: The last blackout I experienced was after Hurricane Sandy hit New York City and we lost power downtown. I napped and read books.

Tiffany D. Jackson: During Hurricane Sandy, I started writing *Allegedly* while eating sandwiches and soup.

Nic Stone: I haven't, but I'm 99% sure that I would just try to find somewhere to take a nap until the power came back on. Never forego an opportunity to nap!

Angie Thomas: During and after Hurricane Katrina, we experienced a serious blackout.

We were without power for several days. There was a massive heatwave that followed the storm, and Mississippi is humid already, so with no air conditioning we were pretty miserable. I read a lot of books and wrote stories on a notepad. I spent a lot of time in my mom's car, too, blasting the AC and listening to the radio for updates.

Ashley Woodfolk: During Hurricane Sandy I was living in Hoboken, New Jersey, and we were out of power for days. We watched movies on our laptops until they died, then read, and cooked canned food over the stove like we were camping.



Nicola Yoon

Nicola Yoon: Nothing that lasted more than 24 hours. The last blackout we had in Los Angeles, my family and I lit candles, got our book lights out, snuggled up, and read.

What's the new book you're most looking forward to reading this summer?

Dhonielle Clayton: I'm most excited to read *Blood Like Magic* by Liselle Sambury.

Tiffany D. Jackson: *Excuse Me While I Ugly Cry* by Joya Goffney.

Nic Stone: *Instructions for Dancing* by our Queen, Nicola Yoon!

Angie Thomas: *Instructions for Dancing* by Nicola Yoon.

Ashley Woodfolk: I technically already read it, but I can't wait to own *Rise to the Sun* by Leah Johnson.



Nic Stone



Ashley Woodfolk

Nicola Yoon: *While We Were Dating* by Jasmine Guillory.

Favorite summer reading spot?

Dhonielle Clayton: The beach.

Tiffany D. Jackson: The beach with a cold Coca-Cola.

Nic Stone: As close as possible to water: pool, beach, lake.

Angie Thomas: The beach! Specifically, in a tropical location where the water is super blue and the sand is practically white.

Ashley Woodfolk: My terrace, with my dog right beside me.

Nicola Yoon: On my backyard couch.

Activity you've most been looking forward to doing once everybody is vaccinated and we're mingling again?

Dhonielle Clayton: A huge dance party.

Tiffany D. Jackson: I cannot wait to go dancing. There is nothing like a New York City summer rooftop party.

Nic Stone: As dorky as it sounds, going to book festivals!

Angie Thomas: Traveling! I miss airports.

Ashley Woodfolk: Eating out! I've missed restaurants so much. And museums. I can't wait to spend a rainy day wandering around one.

Nicola Yoon: I'm looking forward to actually mingling! Also, I really miss getting to meet readers and chat and hug.

Favorite part of working on a collaborative novel?

Dhonielle Clayton: The best part is getting to have a mind meld with such brilliant women. There's no problem we can't solve together.

Tiffany D. Jackson: Our insane group text discussing ideas and swooning over each other's stories.

Nic Stone: Seeing how amazingly talented my beloved friends are!

Angie Thomas: Six heads are better than one.

Ashley Woodfolk: The way we were all able to play to our strengths and bounce ideas off each other. It was collaborative in every sense of the word.

Nicola Yoon: The group chat! Seriously, though, I loved just getting to work with some of the most talented writers in the world. How lucky am I?

Most challenging thing about a collaborative novel?

Dhonielle Clayton: Coordinating and making sure everyone remembers everything to pull through their stories.

Tiffany D. Jackson: Being so far away from each other.

I'm *dying* to have a sleepover party with my boos.

Nic Stone: Making sure our stories align and coordinating schedules for stuff.

Angie Thomas: Coordinating the locations, the times, and the character relationships.

Ashley Woodfolk: Scheduling anything together! Everyone is so busy.

Nicola Yoon: I have to say I'm surprised at how seamless it all was. We all had the same goal: to write joyful love stories about Black kids. We all kept that goal in mind and just wrote our hearts out.

What do you hope readers of *Blackout* come away with?

Dhonielle Clayton: That they deserve to have a great love story.

Tiffany D. Jackson: That they are delicate, beautiful, flawed things who are worthy of magical love.

Nic Stone: Hope! And a solid reminder that love really can overcome anything. Oh, and ooey gooey feeeeeeels inside, ha!

Angie Thomas: That they are just as deserving of a beautiful love story as anyone else.

Ashley Woodfolk: A feeling of joy and worthiness that lasts and lasts.

Nicola Yoon: I hope they fall in love with themselves, who they are now and who they can be.

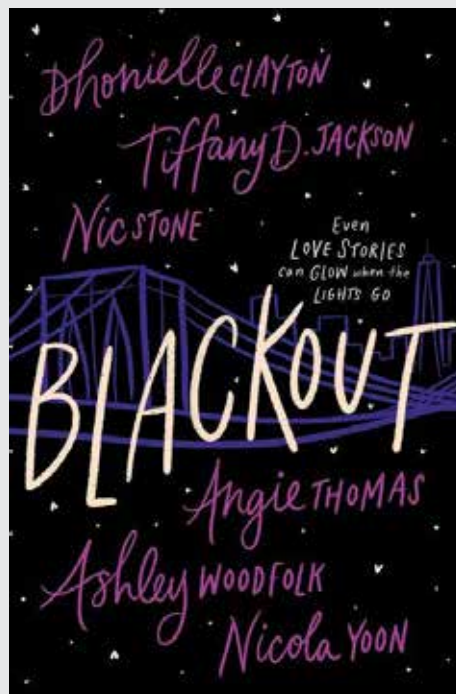
Blackout was reviewed in the May 15, 2021, issue.



Angie Thomas



Tiffany D. Jackson



Dakota, who has a White father and Japanese/White mother, Leo is biracial (his father is from Japan, and his mother is a White American), and the two have always bonded over their love of Japanese culture. When Leo begins dating a classmate, Dakota struggles with jealousy even as she continues her staged courtship. While HGTV fans may wish there were more home renovation scenes, the moments detailing the pressures of being a teen girl in the public eye shine. Glimpses into Japanese American history and experiences, including the recounting of Dakota's grandmother's time in an internment camp and the discrimination her grandparents experienced as an interracial couple in the 1950s, ground the characters and story. Fans of Japanese food and pop culture will also find much to enjoy.

An unconventional tale of evolving relationships and self-knowledge. (author's note) (Fiction. 14-18)



THE DIRE DAYS OF WILLOWWEEP MANOR

Garrity, Shaenon K.

Illus. by Baldwin, Christopher

McElderry (224 pp.)

\$21.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-1-5344-6087-4

A girl gets sucked into a doomed, gothic-themed universe.

Obsessed with gothic romances like *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, book-

worm Haley sees her moment to shine when, while on her way home from school, she spots a mysterious man drowning. Her heroic efforts to rescue him transport her to a gothic manor straight out of the novels she holds dear. She awakens in Willowweep Manor, where she meets foreboding housekeeper Wilhelmina, young lords Laurence and Cuthbert, and resident ghost Cecily. It emerges that middle brother Montague, whom she saved earlier, is missing. The brothers recruit Haley to help them save their gasket universe—a small universe that acts as a safeguard to protect the larger one in the multiverse—from the Bile, manifested here as a sinister friar, that threatens to take over. She must repair the Infernal Device that keeps their universe safe. Though each individual has prescribed roles according to various literary conventions, they must decide to act differently if they wish to save their worlds from evil. The dark color palette fits perfectly with the mystery and many gothic tropes; Baldwin effectively uses varied perspectives to create dramatic visuals. This well-paced and humorous graphic novel will appeal to readers looking for a triumphant story about being in charge of your own narrative. Haley is Black; the inhabitants of Willowweep read as White.

A delightfully spirited adventure. (Graphic fantasy. 12-16)



THE GREAT BIG ONE

Geiger, J.C.

Little, Brown (384 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-7595-5539-6

A young man struggles to be his true self against a backdrop of looming natural disasters in this contemporary novel.

Seventeen-year-old Griff is an introverted, thoughtful, and talented pianist who is used to being sidelined by his self-assured twin brother, Leo, who has more than once gone after girls he is interested in. Griff's feelings come to a head when he falls hard for Charity, with whom he, Leo, and their goofball friend, Thomas, start a band after unexpectedly running into her at a concert. The fictional Oregon community where they live was decimated by a tsunami in the 1960s. The brothers' participation in the Lost Coast Preppers, a group that works to develop warning systems and disaster plans, includes involvement with a radio station, an element that ties into an interesting, if at times confusing, plotline about the source of a mysterious signal they pick up. Lyrically told in the third person over three parts, this tale of first love, music, grief, and identity takes unexpected turns. Meandering phrases and sentence fragments mesh effectively with the more whimsical elements, though the style doesn't work as well in some of the action-oriented passages. Most major characters are White; Charity is Dominican and Black.

An occasionally muddled but earnest and original coming-of-age story. (Fiction. 14-18)



THEY'LL NEVER CATCH US

Goodman, Jessica

Razorbill/Penguin (336 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 27, 2021

978-0-593-11432-2

Edgewater is famous for two things: the unsolved murders of three teen cross-country runners 10 years ago and the events of the previous summer when Stella Steckler did something unforgivable to a competitor.

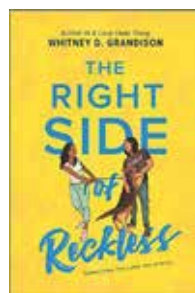
Cross-country runners and sisters Stella and Ellie are brutal, tender—and out for blood when it comes to one another. Stella is focused on running as her ticket out of town and into college on a sports scholarship; her similarly gifted younger sister is slowly making her way into the top spot on their high school team. When newcomer Mila Keene joins the team, the sisters become entangled in a complex and ambivalent dynamic with her. When Mila goes missing while out on a run, it throws the sisters, their team, and the whole town into upheaval. Alternating first-person perspectives between Stella and Ellie, this thriller lays out two primary narratives—that of Mila's heartbreaking case and the relationship between Stella and

“The chemistry between the protagonists is palpable and swoonworthy.”

THE RIGHT SIDE OF RECKLESS

Ellie—and expertly layers them with a cold-case murder mystery and an exhilarating sports tale. This novel is also a thoughtful examination of socio-economic challenges, the impact of crushing personal secrets, and the ways female athletes suffer under the weight of misogyny, especially when they are aggressively competitive. Most characters read as White; the Steckler family is Jewish, and Stella is queer. Naomi, Mila’s best friend, is Korean American and lesbian.

A deftly layered sports thriller populated with fierce girls. (Thriller: 14-18)



THE RIGHT SIDE OF RECKLESS

Grandison, Whitney D.

Inkyard Press (352 pp.)

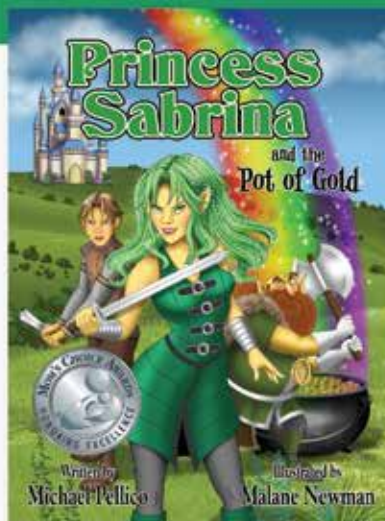
\$18.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-335-40248-6

Opposites attract when a rebellious boy meets a rule-following girl.

Guillermo Lozano is a 17-year-old Mexican American high school junior. Fresh out of juvie, he’s down to his last chance to make changes and turn his life around for the better. Regan London is a 16-year-old Black 11th grader, a good girl with a strict ex-cop father who does what is expected of her—even if it is not always what she wants. Between his past record and having Mrs. London as his community service supervisor, Guillermo should not even be thinking of getting involved with Regan. But as fate would have it, the two teens find their lives intertwined, and they realize that resisting the pull they feel toward each other is easier said than

Mom’s Choice Award Winner



ISBN: 978-1-73391-303-4

“Teenage friends and family help a princess save her magical kingdom from nefarious leprechauns in this delightful middle-grade graphic novel.”

“A well-drawn, young cast trounces adversaries.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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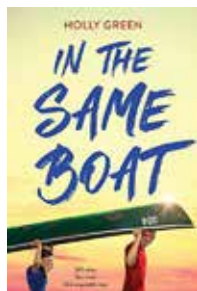
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“An engaging story with an endearing narrator.”

IN THE SAME BOAT

done. Grandison transports readers into the shoes of the two well-developed main characters with language that proficiently conveys their thoughts, emotions, and distinct personalities. This novel applies an honest, endearing lens to common teen experiences, from making mistakes to making amends, finding yourself, and falling in love. The chemistry between the protagonists is palpable and swoonworthy. Familial and platonic bonds also play a significant role in highlighting the story's message that there are second chances in life, and, while risky, some risks are worth taking. Readers will find themselves rooting and falling for Guillermo and Regan.

An adorable teen romance. (playlist) (Romance. 14-18)



IN THE SAME BOAT

Green, Holly
Scholastic (368 pp.)
\$18.99 | Jul. 20, 2021
978-1-338-72663-3

After last year's failure, 17-year-old Sadie Scofield is determined to successfully paddle the entire 265-mile length of the Texas River Odyssey.

Sadie narrates a tale combining the physical obstacles and exertions of a grueling two-and-a-half-day canoe race—from river source to coastal Seadrift—with equally entertaining strands revealing her memories, opinions, and, especially, her shifting feelings stemming from new insights. Sadie's father was her teammate last year, but they were forced to withdraw when she was injured. This year, the family has prepared for Sadie and her 19-year-old brother, Tanner, to race together, carrying on a tradition of Scofield participation in the competition. Unexpectedly, Tanner deserts her for another team and underage Sadie's only chance to race is to accept an offer from Cully Hink—the son of her father's boating rival and friend-turned-enemy. Sadie and Cully had been best friends until their fathers' feud; since then, they have treated each other badly. Over the course of her journey—and during a heart-to-heart with her father at its end—she revises earlier, false impressions, exhibiting real growth. This debut presents a convincing, resilient voice in Sadie, who expresses her thoughts on everything from Ruth Bader Ginsburg to sexuality and environmentalism. The story also offers well-researched details of the world of competitive paddlers, a portrayal of emotional abuse, a cast of interesting characters, and humorous touches. Main characters default to White.

An engaging story with an endearing narrator. (author's note) (Fiction. 14-18)



AFTER THE INK DRIES

Gustafson, Cassie
Illus. by Viece, Emma
Simon & Schuster (416 pp.)
\$19.99 | Jul. 20, 2021
978-1-5344-7369-0

A girl struggles to understand what happened the night she was assaulted while one of the boys involved wrestles with the role he played.

The morning after a party, Erica wakes half naked in an unfamiliar room with the names of boys and lewd words written all over her body. The last thing she recalls is her hope for a blossoming new relationship with Thomas, the soulful lacrosse player she'd been crushing on since she transferred to her new high school. Relieved not to find Thomas' name on her body, Erica tries to make sense of what happened and avoid the humiliation of everyone else finding out before she does. Meanwhile, in alternating segments, Thomas attempts to repress his own memories of his involvement in what transpired. Before long, graphic photos and videos start to circulate among their classmates, causing ripple effects that affect their relationships and their mental health as Thomas grapples with his guilt and Erica's despair deepens. Weighty themes of sexual assault, bullying, and suicidal ideation are conveyed through Erica's and Thomas' extensive interior monologues, yet despite this, their characters don't feel fully three-dimensional. The narrative is interspersed with illustrated panels from Erica's webcomic about her alter ego, Erica Strange, which do not add significantly to the story. Most major characters are White.

A story about sexual assault that takes an unusual approach. (resources) (Fiction. 14-18)



THE QUEEN WILL BETRAY YOU

Henning, Sarah
Tor Teen (368 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-250-23746-0
Series: Kingdoms of Sand and Sky, 2

The Princess Bride meets *Game of Thrones* in this follow-up to 2020's *The Princess Will Save You*.

Tucking in a red wedding to clue in the clueless and occasional summaries to help everyone else keep up, Henning picks up the action from the end of the last volume and pushes her gender-swapped homage to William Goldman's fantasy classic to a gore-splashed happy ending. Alas, fun as it may be to work through a tale rich in thinly disguised references (“My name is Ulara Vidal. You killed my mother”), panting romance, and so much royal back-and-front-stabbing that readers will surely be moved to wonder, along with a secondary character, “what in the stars is wrong with you people?” the action seems incidental to ruminations,

ramifications, and analyses, mostly about incidents from years past—with more than enough sudden, gap-filling flashbacks, lines like “the body fell with a moist thud,” and outright fudging (quicksand with tunnels underneath? Really?) to impart a distinct sense of authorial I’m-just-making-this-up-as-I-go. There’s also a certain disconnect in the agenda to end the oppressive, albeit peace-maintaining, patriarchy that drives the three bloody-minded queens and around which the story revolves. The cast presents as White except for the residents of one nation who are described as having burnished brown skin.

No dragons but plenty of fierce women hacking their ways to power and true love. (*Fantasy, 14-18*)



THE TRUE STORY OF A MOUSE WHO NEVER ASKED FOR IT

Herreros, Ana Cristina

Illus. by Lópiz, Violeta

Trans. by Roberts, Chloe Garcia

Unruly (108 pp.)

\$22.95 | Jun. 22, 2021

978-1-59270-320-3

A traditional folktale is reworked into a feminist parable.

In this translated work from Spain, Herreros tells the story of a “very neat and very hardworking” white mouse who builds herself a house. Seeing that she is unmarried and a homeowner, various animals aggressively pursue her until she finally agrees to marry the kitten, who “seemed the most defenseless.” Her kitten-husband becomes increasingly predatory, emotionally and physically abusing her until, finally, “he ate her all up.” A powerful wordless finale of double-page, full-bleed spreads shows a brown-skinned, black-haired woman in a white dress cleaning



ISBN: 978-1951069063

A SPOOKY-FUN ADVENTURE!

“Unique and imaginative, *Ghost Hunters: Bones in the Wall* blends middle grade angst with a big helping of the heebee jeebies. A sure hit for fans of R.L. Stine.”

—James R. Hannibal, Award-Winning
Author of *The Lost Property Office*

“An inventive, fast-paced tale brimming with chills, thrills, and heart. Perfect for fans of *Lockwood & Co.*”

—Henry H. Neff, Author of *The Tapestry Series*

“Young readers should find themselves deeply engrossed.... absorbing supernatural tale of change and coping.”

—Kirkus Reviews

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BEHIND THE BOOK

THE SUMMER OF LOST LETTERS

Family history—and a love of happy endings—inspired Hannah Reynolds' debut YA novel

BY ALEX HEIMBACH



Nedahness Greene

HANNAH REYNOLDS ISN'T AFRAID of a happy ending, despite what she's been taught. When a college professor questioned if the central couple of her story should be together, she was both confused and insistent. *Of course they should.* "Growing up I only wanted to read books about women, and I wanted them to end well," she says. "That made me feel so much better as a reader and as a person, so that's what I want to do in all my writing."

Reynolds' debut YA novel, *The Summer of Lost Letters* (Razorbill/Penguin, June 15), certainly fits this description. When 17-year-old Abby Schoenberg finds love letters in a box of her grandmother's things, she discovers that there is a lot she doesn't know about the past. Curious about this lost piece of family history, she decides to spend the summer on Nantucket and see what she can learn about the man who wrote to her grandmother all those years ago. Once on the island, she finds more than she'd bargained for, including a friendly golden retriever, a historical paper trail, and an unexpected connection with the grandson of the man her O'ma loved.

The story was inspired by Reynolds' own family and personal history. Like Abby, Reynolds grew up outside of Boston, had the same group of friends for her entire childhood, and worked in a bookstore. Reynolds particularly wanted to emphasize the different types of meaningful relationships she's had rather than focusing only on romance. "When I think about the really important relationships in my life, one of them is with my parents and with my mother.... There's so little that you wouldn't do for these people," she says. The question of what you would do if forced to choose between a beloved family member and the possibility of romantic love ends up forming the novel's core emotional conflict.

Reynolds takes a wide view of intergenerational relationships, and the book tackles not just Abby's relationships with her mom and grandma, but also their relationship with each other. Reynolds' grandmother—like Abby's—is a Holocaust survivor who came to America during the war. "I looked at my grandmother's story—she was this young girl in Paris who was hidden during the Holocaust in a Catholic boarding school—and I thought this was [a] deeply romantic storyline, and I wanted to know everything," she says. There was a lot her grandmother wouldn't discuss, however, including an entire period of five or so years. Reynolds' curiosity about that time, and her grandmother's story in general, inspired Abby's quest for answers in the novel. She even made a similar journey of discovery, traveling to Paris the year after she finished college.

Reynolds' perspective on her grandmother's story has shifted as she's gotten older. "When I was a kid, I thought my grandmother's story was really romantic and sweeping," she says. "As an adult, [I'm] very impressed by my mother." Where her grandmother was at the mercy of historical forces, Reynolds' mother actively pursued the life she wanted, earning scholarships to Brandeis and Harvard and building a life with a man she loved.

To Reynolds, that agency is what makes for an exciting story and is a big part of why she loves to read (and write) romance novels. "Romance is such a happy genre and such an empowering genre," she says. "Reading all these books about women who went out and lived their best life actually made me want to do that too."

But wanting her characters to get a happy ending doesn't stop Reynolds from talking about complicated topics. "You can be happy and uplifting and also deal with serious contemporary issues," she says. In *The Summer of Lost Letters*, those issues are refugee rights and climate change. Writing about people fleeing the Holocaust at the end of the Trump era, Reynolds wanted to emphasize the contemporary parallels. She admits that it's harder to know what to say about climate change when it can feel so overwhelming—especially in a place like Nantucket that is rapidly losing coastline—and that despair is something the characters grapple with.

Incorporating activism and politics was particularly important to Reynolds because she wanted to illustrate the thoughtfulness she's observed in today's teens. "I am always so impressed by them, by the conversations they're bringing to the table, by the things they care about, by their deep awareness and deep passion about both the climate and politics," she says.

That fire and spark is what makes Reynolds excited to write for and about teenagers, whether they're trying to save the world or figure out their relationships. "I think that young adult fiction and romance go hand in hand because I think of them both as genres of optimism," she says. "Characters go after what they want, and they get to be happy."

Alex Heimbach is a writer and editor in Portland, Oregon. The Summer of Lost Letters was reviewed in the May 1, 2021, issue.



up and moving on from the aftermath of a violent disturbance in her apartment. Deceptively simple, midcentury-style illustrations use a muted color palette of red, blue, gray, beige, white, and black to focus on the details of domestic objects before widening the lens to the bigger picture. A QR code allows readers to visit a website where they may read the Balearic original and some contextual notes. Without gaining this familiarity with the source material and its cultural connotations, readers may be confused or frustrated by the book's metaphor, including unpacking what it means to ask for it, the text's emphasis on the protagonist's virtuous cleanliness and tidiness, and the choice to illustrate the mouse as paper-white, which risks perpetuating whiteness as a symbol of purity and goodness.

An unusual title useful for college classrooms or as a niche gift. (Picture book. 16-adult)



HANI AND ISHU'S GUIDE TO FAKE DATING

Jaigirdar, Adiba

Page Street (352 pp.)

\$17.99 | May 25, 2021

978-1-64567-257-9



Pretending to like one another turns into something more in this charming take on love, family, and personal integrity set in Dublin.

The only two brown girls in their year, Hani and Ishu, while both Bengali, are hardly friendly—and worlds apart. Hani is Bangladeshi Irish and in with the popular crowd, her Muslim faith brings comfort, and she is out to her family as bisexual. Ishu is Indian Irish and a studious, prickly misanthrope; an atheist from a Hindu family, she's queer and closeted. Being friendless and living in the shadow of her perfect older sister, Nik, are difficult for Ishu. Hani's two White best friends, Aisling and Dee, make her feel like she must hide her true self or be rejected. When Nik announces, to their parents' horror, that she's leaving medical school and getting married, Ishu seizes the chance to score points by running for Head Girl. Meanwhile, Hani comes out to her friends, who disdainfully dismiss her bisexuality as theoretical. Distressed, Hani blurts out that she is dating Ishu—who agrees to go along with the ruse if Hani helps her become popular enough to win the Head Girl vote. Deception, reflection, revelation, and hard-won growth ensue. Jaigirdar's layered exploration of the many identities and relationships that make up our messy, complex, lovable selves is handled with a deft touch against the background of a delightfully romantic storyline enhanced by perfect pacing and well-rounded characterization.

An intelligent, insightful, and utterly swoon-y coming-of-age story. (Romance. 12-18)

“Quirky, contemplative, and nostalgic.”

SUMMER IN THE CITY OF ROSES



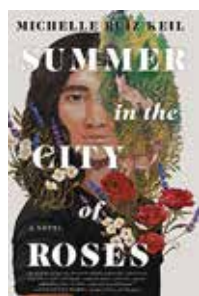
RISE TO THE SUN

Johnson, Leah
Scholastic (336 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-338-66223-8

Queer Black girls fall in love at a summer music festival.

When dating the top basketball recruit in Indiana turns disastrous, ruining her socially, emotionally, and in her mother's eyes, perpetually in love 16-year-old Olivia Brooks begs her best friend, Imani Garrett, to take a summer road trip to the Farmland Arts and Music Festival in Georgia. Imani agrees on one condition: Olivia cannot hook up with anyone on the trip. Meanwhile, Toni Jackson is heading to Farmland for the first time without her musician-turned-roadie dad, who was killed 8 months ago. Joined by her best friend, Peter Menon (whose surname cues him as Indian), Toni is trying to figure her life out—college or something else? She believes that if she performs in the festival's Golden Apple amateur competition, the truth will become clear. The four meet in Georgia, and when all the solo slots in the competition are full, Toni and Olivia agree to enter as a duo and help each other with their individual quests—Toni's to perform on stage, Olivia's to be distracted from the upcoming judicial hearing over violating behavior by her ex-boyfriend and to win the prize of a much-needed car. Although Imani and Peter feel more like devices than well-developed characters with substantial relationships to the protagonists, the exploration of Olivia's tendency to adapt to others' expectations of her is wonderfully nuanced, and her relationship with Toni is delightfully swoon-y.

A solid sophomore novel celebrating love that begs for a soundtrack. (Fiction. 14-18)



SUMMER IN THE CITY OF ROSES

Keil, Michelle Ruiz
Soho Teen (336 pp.)
\$18.99 | Jul. 6, 2021
978-1-64129-171-2

Two siblings try to find each other in this queer and feminist journey.

Headstrong Iphigenia Santos Velos often advocates for her sensitive brother, Orestes, shielding him from the harsh whims of those who don't understand him. But when their mother leaves to attend an artist residency and their father can't handle taking care of Orr on his own, he sends him to the Meadowbrook Rehabilitation Center for Boys. Learning of this decision prompts Iph to run away from her father, disturbed by his betrayal. Then, lost in an unfamiliar area of Portland, Oregon, she runs into the charming and genderqueer George, who assists Iph in finding her bearings. Meanwhile, Orr escapes the wilderness boot camp, falling in with a group of punk rockers

who graciously allow him to stay with them in their pink house named Penelope. Both Iph and Orr decide not to return home, instead seeking one another while unearthing new sides of themselves during a transformative summer. Set in the early '90s, this novel with mythological influences captures the mystical, feminist wonder of the City of Roses' underground scene. Through its enchanting, dual storylines, readers spend considerable time with Iph's and Orr's inner thoughts, making this an intimate and observant character study. Iph and Orr are Mexican and Greek, and the supporting cast is diverse all around.

Quirky, contemplative, and nostalgic. (Fiction. 15-adult)



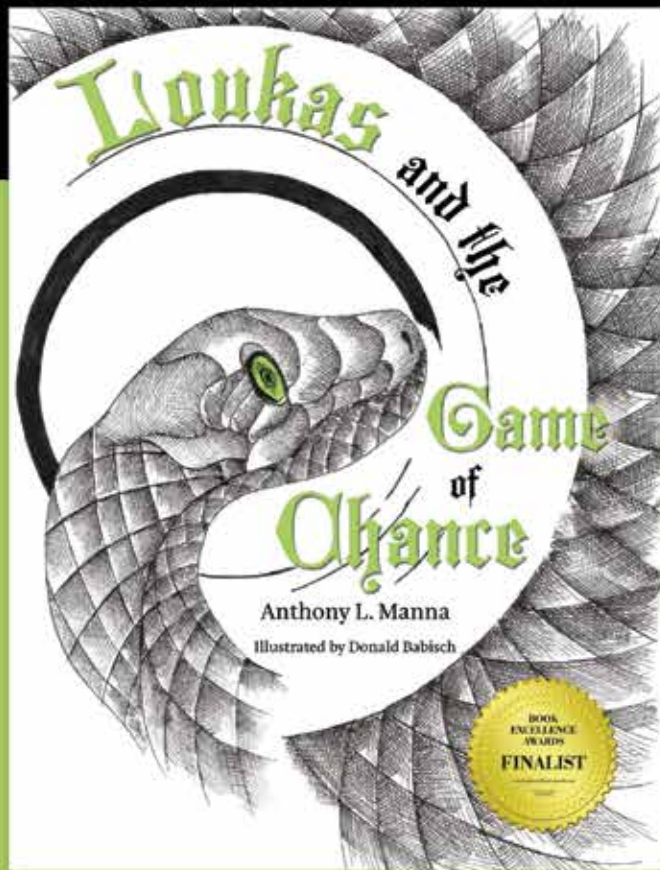
SIX CRIMSON CRANES

Lim, Elizabeth
Knopf (464 pp.)
\$16.99 | \$21.99 PLB | Jul. 6, 2021
978-0-593-30091-6
978-0-593-30092-3 PLB
Series: Six Crimson Cranes, 1

Girl meets magic. Hijinks ensue.

Shiori'anma, Princess of Kiata and eldest daughter of Emperor Hanariho, is the intrepid protagonist in this folktale retelling. About to turn 17 and be married off to a third-rank barbarian lord, Shiori desperately looks for ways out of the engagement. Her emerging talents in forbidden magic and a run-in with a young shape-shifting dragon help to pass the time before she is doomed to relocate to the cold North. Things take an even worse turn, however, when she uncovers her step-mother's secrets. As a consequence, her six brothers are cursed into assuming the form of cranes by day. Shiori is whisked away and coerced into silence, for every word that escapes her lips will mean the death of one of her brothers. She must learn to survive on her own and use her wits and hard-won experience to save both her family and country. Readers here revisit the East Asian-inspired world established in Lim's *The Blood of Stars* duology. Despite a few hiccups in the logic of the magic, the author cleverly maintains the basic structure of this well-known European folktale type while weaving in rich elements of Asian mythology, including dragon pearls and the goddess of the moon. The exploration of complicated family dynamics is a particular strength, especially the challenging of the evil step-mother cliché.

Part exciting adventure, part thoughtful coming-of-age novel, this story retells and overturns familiar tropes. (map) (Fantasy. 13-17)



ISBN: 978-1-68401-433-0

"A wealthy man discovers the consequences of selfishness and the possibility of redemption in a middle-grade fantasy inspired by Greek folktales."

"...a lyrical story of bravery and redemption anchored by a courageous and resilient protagonist."

"A splendid folktale that may appeal to fans of short stories and folklore."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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Anthony@anthonymannabooks.com**



YOU CAN'T SAY THAT!
Writers for Young People
Talk About Censorship, Free
Expression, and the Stories
They Have To Tell

Ed. by Marcus, Leonard S.
 Candlewick (240 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Jul. 13, 2021
 978-0-7636-9036-6

Thirteen prominent authors of children's and young adult literature talk about one thing they all have in common: All have been the targets of attempts to ban or remove their work from schools and libraries.

Editor Marcus, a noted scholar who interviewed each writer, focuses his introduction on the history of censorship, including a simplistic summation of controversies around *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that spells out the N-word. Each author discusses their work, their personal history, and the reasons why they've been censored. Some, like Robie H. Harris and Susan Kuklin, came under attack for discussing sexuality and gender identity. Others, like Angie Thomas and Katherine Paterson, met with objections to swearing (in Thomas' case, likely a cover for objections to political content). R.L. Stine faced accusations of his books' promoting the occult. All the authors are positioned as important, powerful voices attacked by conservative censors, and the title may leave readers with the belief that any and all objections are equally wrong. Not taken into account are the subjects of librarians' weeding collections of titles that may contain offensive stereotypes or booksellers' deciding whether to stock books criticized for representation seen as harmful. While the text is accessible to middle schoolers, the content may be more interesting for adults in education and the publishing industry, though it disappointingly lacks a fully balanced spectrum of views and sacrifices complexity for a uniform message.

A calm, cohesive take on a hot-button issue. (source notes, selected reading, index) (Nonfiction. 13-adult)



CURSES

McBride, Lish
 Putnam (448 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Jul. 20, 2021
 978-1-984815-59-0

A "beastly girl" meets a handsome boy in a tongue-in-cheek fairy-tale universe vaguely reminiscent of Victorian England.

Not a typical member of the fairy-born aristocracy, Merit has horns, fur, and a tail. Unless she finds a love match or marries a suitor her mother chooses before her next birthday, she will keep them forever. Compared to some in her curse support group, though, she's not so unfortunate; a tincture of a certain herb from her

family's lands can restore her normal form for a few hours. As penance for his mother's theft of the herb, Tevin, a magically charming con boy, promises to help Merit secure a worthy partner. Merit and Tevin's sweet romance grows naturally from their friendship, but supporting characters provide the most entertainment—especially Tevin's sharpshooting lesbian cousin, Val. In fact, Merit and Tevin match so easily that it's hard to feel a lot of tension or suspense. Plus, their stalwart crew of friends always seems more than capable of handling the garden-variety villain, an ambitious queen. Sassy chapter titles and the odd cheeky aside infuse the traditional setting with some humor. Refreshingly, marriage equality seems to be the law of the land, and one culture in this world does not believe in binary genders. Most characters are coded as White; there is some diversity of skin tone in the cast.

Earnest and amusing. (Fantasy. 12-16)



THE STORY KING

Mikalatos, Matt
 Wander (448 pp.)
 \$24.99 | Jun. 8, 2021
 978-1-4964-4785-2
 Series: The Sunlit Lands, 3

The Sunlit Lands are unraveling.

A year has passed since the events of *The Heartwood Crown* (2019), and readers find the surviving characters scattered and still looking for answers. Madeline's sacrifice broke all magic and bonds, the aftereffects of which the Elenil, Scim, and humans work to reconcile. Some attempt to rebuild, some fight for a new way, while others look for scapegoats. Jason Wu, Darius Walker, Shula Bishara, and Gilenyia will uncover the mysteries behind the creation of the Sunlit Lands and the terrible secret of the Elenil in order to overcome the pain of their personal tragedies. The setting of the story is heavily influenced by recent events and social debates: It weaves in themes and discussion around false truths and those who believe them without seeking further, the systemic nature of White privilege, extremism (the Vain Boys are a group akin to the Proud Boys), and the dangers of being Black in contemporary America—and even touches upon the problem of Asian Americans being treated like a monolith. Christian references are similarly a part of the fabric of the story. Though at times heavy-handed in expressing political views, the novel highlights many important historical and current issues within a fantasy-world context. This trilogy closer will best be appreciated by readers familiar with the earlier volumes.

A satisfying conclusion to a rich world of story. (cast of characters) (Fantasy. 13-17)

"Rich worldbuilding, political intrigue, and prickly, passionate characters."

WHAT WE DEVOUR



THE WHALER'S DAUGHTER

Mikorenda, Jerry

Fitzroy Books (264 pp.)

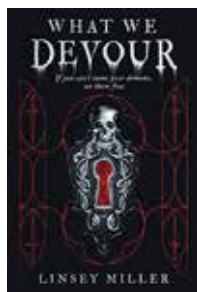
\$17.95 paper | Jul. 24, 2021

978-1-64603-070-5

In pre-World War I Australia, 12-year-old Savannah Dawson wants to be a whaler like her father.

She knows whaling is in her blood, however, as a girl, she is stuck as a cook's helper. Given the chance, she would gladly follow in her father's footsteps even though that is how both her brothers lost their lives. Her mother has also passed away, and her absence is palpable. Through her new friend, Figgie, an Indigenous boy whose real name is Calagun—Savannah renames him after an ineffectual attempt to pronounce it—she learns about Indigenous beliefs positioning orcas as the guardians of the Earth and the need to live in harmony with nature. As she comprehends the balance between whaling and the beasts of the deep, she has increasingly cryptic dreams. Meanwhile, industrialization is encroaching thanks to wealthy American investor Jacob Bittermen, who wants to introduce factory processes to whaling. Savannah, who is White by default, is a well-developed, three-dimensional character who starts off only caring about her own goals but grows through her friendships. Whaling terms and Australian slang add atmosphere and pull readers deeper into the colorful world. Unfortunately, the Indigenous characters feed into tropes of mystical guides. Figgie is not as well rounded as Savannah; his actions support her journey of self-discovery, but apart from that, he does not appear to have a purpose in the story.

A strong sense of place and an appealing protagonist cannot overcome outdated stereotypes of Indigenous people. (list of abbreviations, glossary) (Historical fiction. 12-14)



WHAT WE DEVOUR

Miller, Linsey

Sourcebooks Fire (352 pp.)

\$9.99 paper | Jul. 6, 2021

978-1-4926-7925-7

In a declining world in which humans can access the power of banished demigods through self-sacrifice, a girl with a secret becomes a catalyst for change.

Long ago, the humans who served and sacrificed to the Noble and the Vile overthrew them and claimed their magic. Now, the Crown, peerage, and common council maintain control over the noblewrought and vilewrought with intricate contracts and magical bindings. Lorena is the only living dualwrought—possessing both creative and destructive wrights—besides the Crown herself. Unlike the Crown, she's unbound and untrained. Free from the limitations of formal contracts, Lorena prefers nonphysical sacrifices like memories over gory self-mutilation. After a

chance encounter with the Crown's infamous vilewrought heir, Alistair, lands her in his laboratory researching a mysterious Door that is hungry for human sacrifices, Lorena must choose between the quiet life she's built and the values she holds dear. The text's anti-capitalist thrust is grounded in depictions of extreme economic stratification, including Lorena's memories of childhood poverty and her mother's untimely death, as well as her growing awareness of how those who crave power like hers don't grasp the sacrifices required. Excellent asexual representation in Lorena, rich worldbuilding, political intrigue, and a cast of prickly, passionate characters round out the satisfyingly complex plot. Particularly masterful are the shifts in Lorena's narrative perspective that reflect the sacrifices of significant memories. A White default is assumed for primary characters.

Mind-bending and incisive. (map) (Dark fantasy. 16-adult)

"...in a chilling plot twist, Kevin learns a freeing lesson about trust and communication and the author offers a teaser of more tales to come."

ISBN: 978-1-7364895-0-5

"An adventure that delivers plenty of suspense, a lively tween voice..."
—Kirkus Reviews

For Information on Film Rights, Email
www.murrayrichter.com • murray@murrayrichter.com

“A moving portrayal of grief, family, and the complexity of different perspectives.”

WHEN WE WERE STRANGERS



XOXO

Oh, *Axie*

HarperTeen (352 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-06-302499-1

A driven young woman learns to balance expectations and priorities with heart and passion.

A vivid, comical scene of everyday life in Koreatown introduces narrator Jenny Jooyoung Go, a high school junior and classical cellist aiming for a top conservatory. While her single-minded focus yields technical perfection, competition judges deem Jenny lacking in soulful spark. Her Uncle Jay advises her to experience more of life and broaden her horizons. An opportunity soon beckons, and the plot unfolds like a mini-drama amid the Los Angeles Korean Festival, launching Jenny and her new acquaintance, Jaewoo, on an accidental adventure that foreshadows romance. When her mom, a widowed immigration lawyer, needs to return to Seoul to care for her dying mother, Jenny negotiates to go along for her first visit to Korea. Attending Seoul Arts Academy, Jenny witnesses the institutional grooming of K-pop idols—including (surprise!) classmate Jaewoo, who, as it turns out, is popular band XOXO's lead singer. She also shares in the student performers' duty-bound lives: Behind the glamour, they are burdened with obligations to their communities that can require sacrifice of their personal happiness. Themes of responsibility, regret, and reconciliation weave through the intergenerational dynamics in Jenny's family, adding dimension and depth. The author incorporates Korean honorifics to convey a conversational tone and signal dialogue occurring in both languages.

K-pop helps a cellist develop musically and emotionally in this novel filled with humor and theatrics. (Fiction. 13-17)



WHEN WE WERE STRANGERS

Richards, Alex

Bloomsbury (304 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-5476-0364-0

A 17-year-old girl is devastated by her father's death and the secrets she learns after his passing.

Evie Parker returns home from the hospital following her father's sudden death from a heart attack to find his belongings packed up. Realizing he had been about to move out and heartbroken, angry, and worried for her mom's well-being, Evie unpacks everything and keeps her discovery secret. This snap decision marks the start of a difficult journey, one that involves struggling with her already fraught relationship with her mother while they both grieve—and discovering that her father had a much younger lover named Bree. Despite the support of her best friend, Juana,

and the new friends she makes in the summer photography course she joins (including the incredibly cute Declan), Evie starts to spiral when she finds out that Bree is pregnant. From Evie's growing passion for photography, her strained relationship with her mom, her loving friendship with Juana, and her charming romance with Declan to some incredibly difficult, harrowing encounters with Bree, the author crafts a beautiful exploration of a family torn apart by secrets and grief. Written through the lens of a messy, complex teen girl, this is a story infused with humor, hope, and a lot of heart. Evie and Bree are presumed White; Declan is Japanese and Irish American; and lesbian Juana is coded as Latinx.

A moving portrayal of grief, family, and the complexity of different perspectives. (Fiction. 14-18)



CAST IN SECRETS AND SHADOW

Robertson, Andrea

Philomel (400 pp.)

\$18.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-0-399-16423-1

Series: Loresmith, 2

In the sequel to *Forged in Fire and Stars* (2020), Loresmith Ara continues to seek out the gods so she can access the Loresmith Forge.

Betrayed by Prince Eamon, Ara and her companions push onward. The hunt for the gods' sacred sites takes them across new landscapes—from tropical jungle to farmland to treacherous fens—and illustrates the urgency of stopping the Vokans from devouring the world. Meanwhile, Liran and Eamon offer their views of ArchWizard Zenar through stories of treason, regrets, and atrocities. The at-times overwritten and purple prose, combined with a lengthy scavenger-hunt storyline, promises a long-haul series. In between bursts of action as the characters face their trials, the quest serves as a backdrop for psychological storylines. Some threads, like those of characters who are grappling with the complicated feelings of being betrayed by a loved one, are more successful than others, such as the interruption of Ara's increasingly steamy romance. Romance is a heavy focus, and there is a secondary romance between two women. Despite the emphasis on weapons, finding alternatives to violence when possible is a refreshing theme. Racial diversity is linked to fantasy-world geographical areas and doesn't seem to have real-world analogs; characters have a range of skin tones from light to dark.

A world-expanding improvement on its predecessor. (map) (Fantasy. 14-18)





THE SILVER BLONDE

Ross, Elizabeth

Delacorte (400 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$20.99 PLB | Jul. 27, 2021

978-0-385-74148-4

978-0-375-99006-9 PLB

A literary take on film noir during Hollywood's golden age.

It's 1946. While young men were off to war, 17-year-old Clara Berg landed a job as vault runner at major filmmaker Silver Pacific studios. After spending a year taking film reels to and from the locked, fireproof archive, Clara, who loves the film industry, has landed a promotion to apprentice editor. While tidying up after a plan to meet for drinks with her screenwriter and war veteran friend, Gil, falls through, she finds Barbara Bannon, controversial star of the current production, dead in the vault. The next day she learns that it was actually Barbara's stand-in, Connie Milligan, who was killed. The police believe Bannon was the intended target, but Clara feels otherwise, especially as she begins to remember disturbing fragments from her own childhood in Nazi Germany. Ross' novel brings working life on a movie set vividly to life. Clara's investigations rely a bit too much on coincidence, and the final peril ends with a fizzle, but overall, the mystery keeps readers guessing. Side plots involve antisemitism in America and Germany, American isolationism, the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, and Leni Riefenstahl (a woman known as Hitler's girlfriend and filmmaker who really did travel to California in 1938 in an unsuccessful attempt to sell her works to the American market). All named characters are White.

Captures a time as well as a place: intelligent and thought-provoking. (author's note, glossary, filmography) (*Historical mystery*. 12-18)



THESE HOLLOW VOWS

Ryan, Lexi

HMH Books (464 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-0-358-38657-5

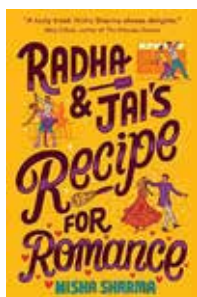
Brie risks the deadly land of the Fae to save her sister.

Brie doesn't trust many people other than Jas, her eternally hopeful sister, and Sebastian, mage apprentice and Brie's secret love (as if she had time for romance). Brie struggles to meet the payments for the magical contracts binding their lives to Madame Vivias, supplementing her cleaning work by stealing from the rich. While the land of Faerie tempts other girls with word of a castle, a lavish ball, and a fae prince seeking a wife, Brie mistrusts the creatures who capitalize on humanity's greed. When Jas' contract is sold to the fae, Brie braves the golden Seelie queen's court, meets the noble Prince Ronan, and travels on to the Unseelie king's

shadow court. In the process she discovers love, historical secrets, atrocities, and her own hidden strength. While many elements regarding the fae and a love triangle will feel familiar to fans of the genre, and the magic could have been more fleshed out, discussions of power, inequity, trust, and hope expand the worldbuilding in refreshing ways. Similarly, consideration of the balance between truth and secrets, lies and stories, is intriguing as it's applied to characters, relationships, and historical lore. Despite certain predictable reveals, the plot itself, which starts off slowly, picks up and is pleasantly convoluted with multiple satisfying surprises. Major human characters read as White.

An entertaining fantasy set in a world that readers will want to revisit. (*Fantasy*. 13-16)





RADHA & JAI'S RECIPE FOR ROMANCE

Sharma, Nisha

Crown (336 pp.)

\$18.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-553-52329-4

Seventeen-year-old Radha Chopra has always loved kathak, a classical dance form from North India.

Because of her dedication and hard work, Indian American Radha is world famous—and burned out. She no longer knows if she's dancing for joy or for her mother, Sujata Roy Chopra, who pressures Radha to excel so that she doesn't experience the same regret she feels for leaving her own acclaimed dance career behind two decades before. When Radha refuses to compete in the finals at an international championship in London, her mother is furious. Although Radha is sure that her kathak career is over, she makes a deal with her mother: She will leave Chicago to spend her senior year at an arts academy in Princeton, New Jersey. If Radha works hard and gives dancing one more shot, Sujata promises that she can make her own decisions at the end of the year. Radha is sure that she will give up dance until she meets Jai Patel, a working-class Punjabi Gujarati American boy who is the captain of the school's Bollywood dance team. Radha quickly falls for Jai—but is their romance enough to make her also fall for dancing all over again? This entertaining novel alternates between Jai's and Radha's third-person perspectives. Changes in their relationship, and between each of them and their immigrant families, are well paced, authentic, and page-turning. Both characters are well developed and easy to root for.

A perceptive and textured romance. (*Romance*. 14-18)



ALL THESE WARRIORS

Tintera, Amy

HMH Books (336 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-0-358-01241-2

Series: All These Monsters, 2

The sequel to *All These Monsters* (2020) picks up seamlessly where the last one finished.

Clara and her faithful teammates are still killing scrabs—ferocious predatory monsters—in London, despite the devastating murders of their leader, Grayson, and three other teammates. Scrab numbers are down, but the recruits are in desperate need of respite. Nonetheless Clara remains loyal to the fight and her friends in team seven, even if it means orbiting the same universe as Julian, her former team leader, an explosively angry, controlling ex who physically assaulted her and is now relentlessly emailing her, seeking redemption. Clara's emotional recovery from her traumatic relationship with Julian takes the main stage. Her emancipation from this abusive relationship is powerful, but the

novel feels cluttered by the scrab plot, which drags at times due to a substantial decrease in action. The large cast of characters that was endearing in the earlier title does not receive further development, and readers may find it hard to track who is who and why they matter. Nonetheless, those invested in Clara will be heartened by her vulnerable journey of growth—and her ultimate success—in developing mutually loving relationships with her best friend, Maddie; distant brother, Laurence; and love interest, Edan. Clara and Laurence are Mexican and White; the first title described a diverse supporting cast.

A disjointed yet satisfactory duology closer. (*Science fiction*. 14-18)



BREEDER

van Rijswijk, Honni

Blackstone (200 pp.)

\$19.99 | Jul. 13, 2021

978-1-09-409980-4

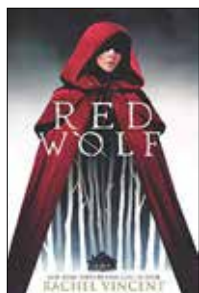
The Corporation runs everything inside the Wall.

If you're not part of the Corp, you're in debt to them and there is no escape. Will Meadows and his Ma live in Zone F, where Will attends school and works long hours at the desalination plant. Ma gets him his daily doses of Crystal 8, starving herself to be able to afford the drugs. When they run out, Will is forced to become a Breeder runner in the Gray Zone in exchange for a supply of Crystal. In a world where environmental degradation has left most people infertile, Breeder runners smuggle young girls and women into the Incubator, where they are branded, forcibly inseminated, and made to give birth. The smugglers get a cut of the profits. While in the Gray Zone, Will meets Alex, an escaped breeder disguised as an undocumented Wall Kid. When Will is captured by the Corp, he thinks his life is over, but the corruption of the Gray Corps may offer a way out. Will has to find a way to save himself and Alex—or die trying. This short, fast-paced novel set in a futuristic yet terrifyingly familiar world is perfect for fans of Marie Lu's *Legend* series. Readers will find themselves fully immersed in the bleak Corporation landscape and the lives and fates of those struggling to survive. Main characters are cued as White.

An absorbing tale of survival in a post-apocalyptic future. (*Dystopian*. 14-18)

“Potent, atmospheric, and wholly satisfying.”

THE RIVER HAS TEETH



RED WOLF

Vincent, Rachel

HarperTeen (368 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-0-06-241162-4

A red-cloaked girl encounters (were) wolves.

Born and raised in Oakvale, a small town surrounded by a beast-riddled and ever encroaching dark wood, 16-year-old Adele Duval enjoys her provincial life. She hopes to wed and raise children with Grainger Colbert, spend time with her sister and mother, and overcome rumors of the Duval family curse. However, on a trip to see her Gran in the wood, Adele unexpectedly transforms into a redwolf and learns she is now a lycanthropic guardian like her mother and grandmother. To her dismay, Adele also learns that she's long been betrothed to Maxime Bernard, a handsome carpenter from Ashborne who is privy to her secret superpowers. Tasked with protecting villagers and travelers against the *other* monsters of the dark wood, Adele relishes her new powers but struggles with her new responsibilities and romantic prospects. The beasts in the woods—often heard rather than seen, per the best horror conventions—may eat people, but faced with hard decisions and hard-line villagers, Adele discovers that humans can be equally dangerous, particularly to independent and unconventional women. Pivoting from her contemporary thrillers, Vincent offers a richly detailed, old-fashioned fantasy with a dash of horror set in a pre-industrial Francophone European countryside populated by White characters. Vincent's contemplation and dissection of monstrosity elevates this retelling above a crowded field but dilutes its insights with regrettably generic tropes.

A dark and intriguing fairy-tale adaptation. (*Fantasy*. 14-18)



THE RIVER HAS TEETH

Waters, Erica

HarperTeen (400 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jul. 20, 2021

978-0-06-289425-0



When girls start disappearing in a Tennessee nature park, a family of local witches worries they'll be blamed.

The Lloyds have lived on the Bend—an area bordering a river and the nature park—for generations, and the land is imbued with their Scottish forebears' magic. The Bend, not their bloodline, is the source of the Lloyds' power, but lately it's felt corrupted, making their spells go awry and frightening off all but the most desperate customers. So when Natasha Greymont asks for help finding her missing sister, Rochelle, Della Lloyd is reluctant. The Greymonts' wealth and status should grant them access to resources Della can't even imagine, and solving the mystery may in turn destroy Della's own family. But

Natasha isn't what she seems, and the two girls, both White, are irresistibly drawn together. Alternating chronological perspectives map their shift from antagonism to trust. There is a familiar, genuine rapport that grounds the recurring theme of chosen family between Natasha, who's bi, and her pansexual best friend, Georgia Greer, who is cued as Black, as well as with Rochelle's best friend, Margo Yoon, who is Korean and pansexual. This genre-blending contemporary thriller offers a searing indictment of men who prey on women while the book's fantasy elements offer a form of revenge and resolution. The broad narrative strokes that address the book's intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender will prompt important conversations by readers.

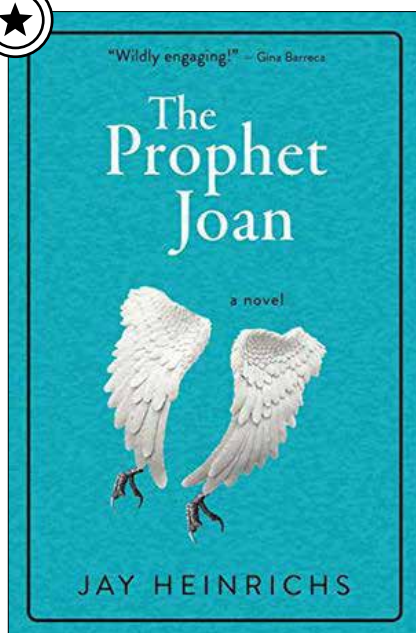
Potent, atmospheric, and wholly satisfying. (*Thriller*. 12-18)

INDIE



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- THE STUTTER STEPS** by Sander A. Flaum 152
- FRENCH DIVE** by Eric Freeze 158
- THE JOURNEY TO MAX** by Christopher Garcia-Halenar & Alejandro Garcia-Halenar; illus. by Lea Embeli 158
- THE PROPHET JOAN** by Jay Heinrichs 159
- CANTERBERRY TALES** by C.P. Hoff; illus. by Michelle Froese 160
- SEMIOTIC LOVE [STORIES]** by Brian Phillip Whalen 167



THE PROPHET JOAN
Heinrichs, Jay
 Gavia Books (384 pp.)
 \$16.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book
 Mar. 18, 2021
 978-1-73672-660-0



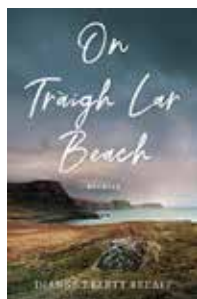
ALL BONES ARE WHITE

Allen, Carlo Perez
 Manuscript

A melancholy immigration memoir exploring the author's rocky journey searching for his identity in the United States.

Allen was born in Mexico in the early 1950s, the youngest of three siblings. When he was 5, his mother, Camerina Perez, a secretary working for General Electric Mexico, married her handsome White American boss, Bill Allen. Camerina and her children traveled to Buffalo, New York, Bill's hometown. Bill adopted Allen, his 12-year-old sister, and his 9-year-old brother. Bill had a mission: His children would assimilate and become Americans. To that end, he renamed them: "That was the end of Oscar Perez, Cesar Perez, and Eugenia Perez. From that day on, we were Charles Perez Allen, Donald Perez Allen, and Eugenia Perez Allen." Days later, the family set up home in a suburb of Syracuse, New York, in what would become a series of moves that would challenge Allen's equilibrium. He began kindergarten the next day. "I didn't speak a word of English," Allen writes, "and couldn't pronounce my new name." But with the encouragement of his first two American friends, Allen dedicated himself to learning this new language, becoming fluent within two years. And then the family moved back to Mexico for two years, where he was teased for speaking Spanish with a "gringo" accent. Easy-flowing prose captures the young child's many fears and his imagination, and his descriptions of his grade-school years are evocative. Although his narrative is ultimately one of triumph—with Allen finding his calling in teaching disadvantaged children—many of the stories involve discrimination, tragedy, and loss, both within and outside his family. Unfortunately, Allen is sparing with dates, leaving readers to use cultural references to determine his age during certain key events. What is clear is that for two decades he wrestled with his identity.

A poignant, frequently captivating, and timely portrait.



ON TRAIGH LAR BEACH Stories

Beeaff, Dianne Ebertt

She Writes Press (248 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | \$9.95 e-book

Oct. 13, 2020

978-1-63152-771-5

In Beeaff's linked short stories, a writer searches for inspiration among the objects littering a Scottish beach.

After her novella unexpectedly wins a prestigious prize, author Erica Winchat finds herself with an impressive two-book deal—and a crushing case of writer's block. "I'm stagnant with fear," she confesses to the reader. "I'm empty, deficient, inept. I've nothing to say and no words to say it with." She and her husband have traveled to a village on a remote Scottish island, where Erica combs the beach, hoping that the landscape will stir her creativity. She discovers her muse in beach trash, of all things—objects that have washed up on the island's shore. A packet of arthritis pills reveals the story of a certified nursing assistant at a convalescent home who takes a patient's treatment into her own hands. A plastic cigarette lighter summons the night an aging Broadway actress, fresh off her comeback performance, encounters a pair of tourists in a park. A camera's lens cap invokes the tale of a photographer who hears strange noises in the mist while taking pictures of Newfoundland's oldest lighthouse. The book concludes with a novella about music fans who converge at the Chicago concert of the Scottish band they love only to find themselves in the midst of a tragedy. Beeaff weaves beautiful sentences, particularly when describing locations, as when Erica and her spouse ride a ferry between two of the Hebrides: "the small boat beat against the wind and the waves through one of the loneliest stretches of the planet I've ever seen. Distant black islands dulled with the rain. Plumes of spray nibbled at their base." The 12 stories that make up the first section of the book are little more than vignettes, fizzling away before a narrative can take root; the aforementioned novella is the highlight of the collection, although it ultimately drifts into melodrama. Overall, the book's form is an intriguing experiment that doesn't quite seem to achieve its potential. Even so, Beeaff's prose is of such high quality, page to page, that readers won't want to put it down.

An ambitious, ocean-spanning collection of objects and tales.



SUBSTANTIAL JUSTICE

Ben-Horin, Daniel

Rare Bird Books (232 pp.)

\$26.00 | \$11.49 e-book | Jul. 14, 2020

978-1-64428-112-3

A recently reunited couple navigates the complex aftermath of a murder in Ben-Horin's debut thriller set in 1985.

After local marijuana grower and controversial community-radio host Yosh Steinmetz is brutally murdered in Ukiah, California, local law enforcement initially think the crime is a drug deal gone bad. However, Yosh rankled many members of the community with his radio show, as he was happy to tackle any local issue and speak out against whomever he saw fit. This included Ukiah's racist and antisemitic Rev. Footman, who over- sees a cabal of White supremacists. Spider Lacey, a Vietnam veteran and car mechanic, discovered Yosh's bloody corpse, which he surmised was the handiwork of "an army or an automatic weapon"; Spider had just gotten back together with Siobhan, with whom he fell in love 10 years prior. They separated when Siobhan moved to New York City for law school. Now she's an environmental lawyer investigating a case in Ukiah, and as she and Spider rekindle their relationship, they become entangled in the murder case, which may be connected to political corruption. In this remarkable first novel, Ben-Horin offers adept prose with plenty of moments of humor. For example, when Spider and Siobhan check out an online forum for private investigators, the author describes it as consisting "of a single aspiring P.I. who enjoyed assuming different personas and engaging in coruscating dialogues with himself." The major characters are all fully realized, down to their small quirks, such as Spider's love of his video cassette recorder and his distaste for television commercials. The sociopolitical setting is also intricately woven into the story, as when it's revealed that the woman who takes over Yosh's business, Julie Choate, first met him through a network of political activists.

A deftly composed and highly enjoyable crime story.



PRINCESS PINECONE AND THE WEE ROYALS

Bernstein, C.C.

Illus. by Yazici, Irem

Teton Mountain Publishing (42 pp.)

\$25.00 | Jan. 7, 2021

978-1-73573-281-7

Five animal friends learn to embrace empathy in Bernstein's debut picture book.

Princess Pinecone, a bunny; Duchess Daffodil, a mouse; Archduke Acorn, a cat; Lady Log, an owl; and Lord Lilypad, a frog, find a gray ball that turns out to be wizard Yairf Dogratherf, who ate their daisies, not knowing they belonged to anyone. All the "wee royals" distrust him except Princess Pinecone,

Equipped for the Summertime



READING A NOVEL set in another universe and/or millennium sweetens the effects of a summertime escape. These starred SF and fantasy novels, which range from post-apocalyptic survival stories to reimagined Celtic myths, are full of androids, aliens, and intergalactic battles. A day off and any of the below titles would provide a potent cure for reality.

Set in a future Germany, *Reality Testing* by Grant Price teems with cyborgs and machine-enhanced humans. Identity theft takes on new meaning when a woman awakens to find herself transplanted into another body. This inventive world, where sexism, climate devastation, and capitalism have run amok, is “a bracing blast of neo-cyberpunk.”



It’s the timeless story of humans



versus alien overlords in *Last Star Standing*. Not all the aliens are evil, though. One tiny, fuzzy “gromeline” is a smart, brave soul that helps out the humans. Our reviewer says that debut author Spaulding Taylor “tempers his bleak, post-apocalyptic fictional world with...energetic narration and darkly comic humor.”

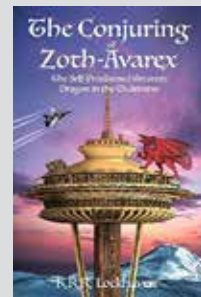
In the complex SF novel *Tower of Mud and Straw*, tulips are exploding devices akin to tiny black holes, and towers are anti-airship structures. Yaroslav Barsukov’s debut earned a rave from our reviewer, who says this “marvelous SF tale about dangerous technology offers sublime stretches that will warrant revisiting.”



Sure, *The Language of Corpses* might not *sound* like a summer read, but T.T. Linse’s novel is pure escapism—a space-traveling adventure whose cast members inhabit various bodies and in which cyberhumans and immortality are the norm. “Some of the speculations here (especially

concerning the nature of intelligence, biologically native or artificial) could have taught Isaac Asimov a thing or two,” notes our reviewer.

J.B. Curry’s fantasy/romance set in 1933 stars an albino Chicago private eye with an unusual power—he can disappear into and travel within shadows. His new client has her own unique skill—she can kill a man with a touch. Our reviewer calls *Shadow & Poison* “a torrid, atmospheric fantasy that satisfies on all fronts.”



K.R.R. Lockhaven’s *The Conjuring of Zoth-Avarex* follows a dragon who becomes a worldwide media sensation after three apprentice magicians conjure him into reality. Our reviewer says, “Lockhaven impressively controls all of this fun from the very first page, offering an endless array of allusions to canonical fantasy literature as well as quite a few

snide asides, such as a sign tacked up in one of the...labs: ‘Absolutely No Conjuring of Sparkly Vampires.’”

A 17-year-old Manhattanite discovers her connection to Celtic mythology on a summer trip to England in *Nimue*, Ayn Cates Sullivan’s YA novel. “Sullivan might have written a fantasy in which her lead throws punches while hunting for relics. Instead, she’s more faithful to Merlin’s complex mythology than to the genre’s tropes,” says our reviewer.



Enemy Combatant doesn’t meet the traditional definition of fantasy, but David Winner’s lead is living in a fantasy world; he believes that with enough righteous indignation he can right many of the world’s colossal wrongs. Our reviewer says, “The author’s subtle, intelligent characterization makes clear that however well-earned Peter’s rage against the machine is, that machine is also a convenient target that allows him to displace intolerable emotions or avoid honest self-evaluation.”

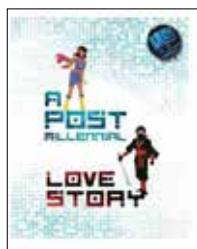
Karen Schechner is the vice president of Kirkus Indie.

"A smart, funny take on readers' love affair with technology."

A POST-MILLENNIAL LOVE STORY

who invites him to tea. The next day, her back has a hump, and before long, so do her pals'. As the princess helps to find medicinal plants, Daffodil apologizes for being rude to her and the wizard (she and others initially called the princess a hunchback). When they bring clovers to Yairf, their humps hatch fairy wings, and Yairf Dogratherf (whose name is an anagram for "Fairy Godfather") delivers a final message. Bernstein's uncomplicated story is charming, although its tone sometimes borders on twee. Princess Pinecone is an unflappable protagonist, and millennial parents will smile at an apparent passing reference to a Black Eyed Peas song. Talented Turkish fiber artist Yazici's delightful stitchwork reveals an intricate, pastel-colored paradise, with delicately hand-embroidered lily pads, dragonflies, butterflies, and textured plants of all kinds.

A sweet bedtime story with gorgeous images.



A POST-MILLENNIAL LOVE STORY

Books, Graffiti

Graffiti Books (248 pp.)

\$13.99 paper | \$6.99 e-book

Jun. 13, 2019

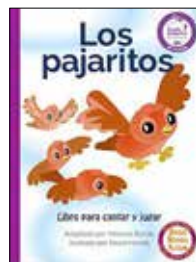
Teenagers dive into—and rebel against—a brave new world of virtual reality in this satire.

This lightly dystopian yarn imagines a near-future Sherman Oaks, California, where a self-conscious, post-Millennial generation of adolescents experiences everything from schooling to dating to fantasy wrestling matches with Godzilla in immersive VR. Teens rarely leave the swivel chairs and "helmets" in their bedroom VR pods, and social hierarchies separate "on-sync" cool kids from "non-sync" losers based on the fashionableness of the "virskin" avatars they design. Bullied for attending his high school Virskin Ball in an intentionally hideous virskin of mutilated body parts and a bearded baby head, 15-year-old Brix Leveque seeks vengeance by redoing his avatar as a ninja warrior complete with well-honed virtual fighting moves. He trains a misfit army of "Bleeding Heart Ninjas" to stage attacks on pillars of the VR world. Even more subversive is Divya Sinha, who was raised by a flawless virtual simulation of her dead mother, Carol, that the VR corporation Reincarnate crafted from the woman's diaries and social media footprint. In homage to Carol, Divya has started an "Organic People" movement that tries to wean kids from VR (hardcore devotees unplug from their pods for up to one hour each day) and reveres icons of the previous millennial generation like an older Justin Bieber, who is now worshipped as the Millennial Prophet. When Divya starts recruiting Brix's Bleeding Heart followers, he leaves his ninja adventures and hauls his pasty, flabby body into the alien dimension of the real world to challenge her—and possibly start a romance.

Books' speculations on a VR-saturated future sometimes hit false notes—real teens would find Brix's baby Frankenstein virskin way cooler than his ninja persona. But the author's conjectures do capture unsettling aspects of how digital life is

supplanting a real world that seems increasingly flat and boring by comparison while poking well-aimed fun at the callow grandiosity of kids caught up in online fantasias. ("When Brix finished the 10-minute course, he felt like he knew the entire history of ninjas.") The raucous story shines less as a forecast about a post-Millennial generation than as a spoof of the ridiculousness of the present-day millennial generation, embodied by arch-millennial Bieber, a tornado of self-obsession and melodrama about nothing as he recalls the trauma of receiving mean tweets. It's an upfront novel of ideas, with writing that tends toward a sociology seminar—"Are you saying that the virtual world is a benevolent class system where people should accept their place in the hierarchy for the sake of larger harmony?"—and characters who sometimes feel as if they are there to make a point rather than live their lives. Fortunately, the tale is also full of pitch-perfect put-downs of everything from millennials' narcissism—perusing Carol's digital archive, "Divya adored the selfies, endless mosaics of the face, filtered and augmented to mimic what teenage Carol considered ideal Millennial beauty: duck-face, the left shoulder slightly tilted"—to their vacuous rectitude. ("If only she were a Millennial!" muses Divya. "They had character. When young, they stood for principles like 'disruption,' 'monetization,' 'start-up,' and 'swiping.'") The result is a smart, funny take on readers' love affair with technology.

An entertaining sendup of millennials' folkways and the digital rabbit holes they might plunge into.



LOS PAJARITOS Libro Para Cantar y Jugar

Borrás, Yolanda

Illus. by Hicock, David

I'm Bilingual! Languages Through Music (32 pp.)

\$15.00 paper | Apr. 16, 2016

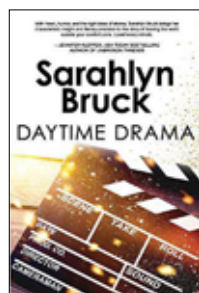
978-0-692-82256-2

A debut Spanish-language picture book introduces new vocabulary to young readers.

In this tale, Borrás uses a song adapted as text to present a number of action verbs. The story follows a variety of animals through their movements: birds fly, fish swim, horses trot. The verbs are repeated several times in each spread—"Los caballitos que van por el campo trotan, trotan, trotan, trotan, trotan" ("The horses who go through the field trot, trot, trot, trot, trot")—giving children plenty of opportunities to make use of new words. Bright, cartoonlike illustrations by Hicock accompany the text, showing a dynamic group of animals gamboling their ways across the page. The book is clearly intended as a teaching tool, and a series of suggestions for companion exercises follows the tale. The author explains how the work can be used for counting practice, music performance, and the refinement of motor skills, among other things, with complete descriptions and resources provided for each exercise. While the story's plot is minimal, the eye-catching images and the rhythm of the song will likely appeal to many of the youngest readers, though older children who

appreciate a more complex tale may find the structure repetitive. The book teaches kids a number of useful vocabulary words and can serve as an enjoyable and age-appropriate teaching tool for Spanish-language learners.

A colorfully illustrated, engaging tale that teaches Spanish through a song.



DAYTIME DRAMA

Bruck, Sarahlyn

TouchPoint Press (189 pp.)

\$15.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book

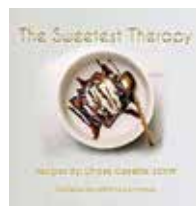
Mar. 1, 2021

978-1-95-281620-8

Bruck offers a novel about a soap opera actor who tries to follow her dreams.

Callie Hart is a caring mother, a loyal girlfriend, and a talented, veteran actor on the soap opera *Napa Valley*. However, unlike her “fiery, independent” character, Jessica Sinclair, Callie has a penchant for playing it safe, and when she learns that her soap has been canceled, her once-predictable future becomes a great unknown. At the same time, Jonah, her 12-year-old son whom she’s tried to protect from show business, begins to seek his own path, going on auditions without her permission. Meanwhile, Jonah’s irresponsible father, guitarist “Dirty Al” Karpowicz, asks Callie for an increase in his quarterly payments, for which he long ago gave up his parental rights; Jonah doesn’t even know his dad’s identity. Even Callie’s relationship with her current boyfriend, *Napa Valley* head writer Paul Kinder, grows fraught due to her reluctance to let him deeper into her life. Fortunately, Callie draws inspiration from the love of her loyal fans and learns to tap into her inner Jessica Sinclair. As she tries to save her show, she learns to take even bolder risks in life, opening her eyes to new possibilities for herself and those she loves. Bruck’s story is satisfying from beginning to end, and readers will particularly enjoy watching Callie’s transformation into a hero who rallies her admirers, overcomes adversity, and learns to dream bigger. Although much of the work is playful in tone, Bruck also tackles some serious subject matter along the way, such as the discrimination faced by middle-aged women in entertainment fields. Deftly defying convention, Bruck also gives her protagonist a boyfriend who’s younger than she is but whose eagerness to commit surpasses her own. The fact that Bruck provides the characters, even Dirty Al, with satisfying endings makes the book even more enjoyable.

A fun, frothy tale that will leave readers excited for a sequel.



THE SWEETEST THERAPY

Cassine, Chase

Photos by Williford, Devonte

Williams Commerce (84 pp.)

\$25.99 | May 7, 2021

978-0-57-883129-9

A licensed clinical social worker and therapist from New Orleans combines his therapeutic knowledge with baking tips in this cookbook.

Cassine was overwhelmed by grief after the death of his mother, Connie, in 2017, due to complications from metastatic breast cancer. While mourning, he came across an article that recommended learning a new skill to help cope with grief. He turned to baking, and it proved to be a therapeutic and empowering experience; it even became a kind of mindfulness practice for him. At the start of the book, Cassine shares grieving advice and 16 affirmations before diving into a list of baking essentials and tips. A recipe for “Nanny’s Banana Pudding”—a dish described as “luscious, delicious, and creamy with immense feelings of nostalgia”—comes courtesy of his paternal grandmother. He invents a simplified version of the classic New Orleans Chantilly cake, re-creates the sour-cream cheesecake of his childhood, and debates the pronunciation of *pecan* (he’s partial to “PA-kawn” versus “PEE-can”) before offering up a recipe for the sweet, nutty pie. Traditional bread pudding gets an upgrade with the use of croissants, and “A Streetcar Named Strawberry Vanilla Cake” serves as an ode to old movies he used to watch at his grandparents’ home. This cookbook is sure to inspire readers to get in the kitchen and create. The recipes are easy enough for novices but so diverse that more experienced foodies will find something new to add to their dessert repertoires. The author’s instructions are clear and succinct and interspersed with Williford’s full-color photographs of beautifully plated food. Personal stories preceding each recipe add an extra layer of depth to the sweet treats and will help readers connect with the author’s experience. Overall, the book flows well with the exceptions of narrative meditations on the New Orleans Second Line (a historical parade tradition) and jazz music, which feel slightly out of place in this food-based work.

A sincere exploration of how baking can not only satisfy a sweet tooth, but also heal a grieving soul.



TRUSTED EYE

**Post-World War II
Adventures of a Fearless
Art Advocate**

Chidester, Claudia Fontaine

Fontaine Archive (300 pp.)

Jan. 1, 2021

978-0-9888358-2-5

A biography of Virginia Fontaine, a key player in the German art scene following World War II.

Virginia “Ginny” Fontaine nee Hammersmith was born in 1915 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was encouraged to take a

"A savvy, psychologically rich novel of tech-based intrigue."

COLD WALLET

passionate interest in art by her paternal grandfather, Paul Hamersmith, a "well-known etcher of Wisconsin landscapes" and founder of an engraving company. Fontaine eventually matriculated to the Yale School of Fine Arts but never earned a degree; there she met her future husband, Paul Fontaine, a painter, and resigned herself to giving up painting herself. She never gave up her love of art, however, a lifelong obsession. Fontaine married Paul in 1940. In 1942, he was drafted into the Army and was sent to Frankfurt, Germany, a city destroyed by the war and under Allied occupation. Fontaine joined him, and she quickly became active collaborating with the Jewish underground helping Jews resettle in Israel and then as a central figure in the German art world. Fontaine helped scores of artists languishing under an occupation that made selling and exhibiting art exceedingly difficult. Chidester, Fontaine's daughter, focuses her study on Fontaine's years in Germany but also touches on her struggles to balance work and motherhood, the assistance she gave to those persecuted by "rabid anticommunists," and her personal battle with alcoholism. A vivid recollection of Fontaine's fascinating life emerges—one that the author allows to be conveyed largely through Fontaine's letters, a strategy that provides her with a measure of objectivity despite her obvious love and admiration for the subject. As Ann Reynolds aptly puts it in her foreword: "Her book, then, is not a memoir; it is a biography that subtly frames primary documents so that Virginia Fontaine's voice draws the threads of her own life together to tell a history that we all need to hear." Moreover, the book is brimming with beautiful photographs of both people and artwork.

A thoughtful biography of an important figure in art history, handsomely adorned with photographs.



A SPY IN QUARANTINE

Eglise, Thomas

Eglise Press (400 pp.)

\$15.95 paper | \$2.99 e-book

Jan. 10, 2021

978-0-578-81884-9

An American college student becomes unwittingly embroiled in espionage in this debut novel.

University student Takis Soulivakis uses his intelligence for profit—charging people to write their papers. It's relatively harmless work until two graduate student "clients" die from gunshots to the head. The students had published an article on Thomas Fielding, who had gone out in public after a false negative Covid-19 test. Though Takis' name wasn't on the article, he wrote and even researched most of it, interviewing a list of individuals a potentially infected Fielding had contact with. As Takis is positive this is why someone assassinated his clients, he eventually fears he'll be next. Meanwhile, a United States agency investigates the murders and concentrates on Fielding's contacts from the article, though what specifically it's looking for isn't immediately clear. Even as they suspect a ghostwriter, the agents won't easily identify Takis, who prides himself on maintaining

anonymity. This makes him perfectly suited for playing the spy game and staying ahead of anyone wanting to question him—or take him out. Takis ultimately teams up with Rachel Cullen, a client's girlfriend, and, as covertly as possible, tries unmasking the killer before the culprit can track him down. Eglise's tongue-in-cheek espionage tale puts an amateur spy in precarious circumstances. But while Takis and Rachel occasionally find themselves in undisputed danger, the story is consistently humorous. The protagonist, for example, who anonymously communicates with agents as "Nobody," sets up a meeting at a local McDonald's and cleverly manages to stay hidden. The narration likewise brims with smart quips: "Plagiarism was, at base, a foul thing, eroding what decency was left in the pliable young souls struggling to survive the wiles of innumerable errant professors." Mystery (involving the unknown killer and a possible mole in the agency) drives much of the tale, with surprises throughout, including unexpected details about Fielding's contacts. The story culminates in a final act that, while somewhat muted, is certainly memorable.

A diverting thriller featuring a shrewd, unorthodox spy.



COLD WALLET

Fenwicke, Rosy

Wonderful World (352 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | \$1.99 e-book

Mar. 20, 2021

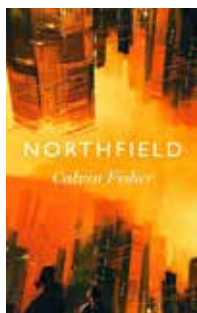
978-0-473-55940-3

After the death of her husband, a young woman inherits his business and discovers the dark side of internet entrepreneurship in Fenwicke's thriller.

The author sets up her novel as a conflict between Jess Cullinane, the wife of entrepreneur Andrew Cullinane, and Henry Turner, Andrew's best friend and business partner in Vaultange, a cryptocurrency exchange. When Andrew dies from ulcerative colitis complications during his honeymoon with Jess in Fiji, she discovers that he bequeathed her millions in assets and control of Vaultange, cutting Henry out of his expected company inheritance. However, Jess is forced to rely on Henry's expertise even as he deals with urgent money-related troubles of his own. To accent the tension between them, Fenwicke organizes the novel using third-person perspective for Jess and first-person narration for Henry's flashbacks, which detail his involvement with organized crime. Although the novel focuses mainly on Jess, Henry's narration unexpectedly contributes the most lively and memorable prose, as when he recalls when Murray Chambers, a professional money launderer, and his henchmen violently broke into his apartment in mid-December "to wish me the compliments of the season, minus the Christmas spirit," or when he tells of stealing a man's clothes and sandwich, dropping "crumbs in my wake like a modern-day Hansel." The novel contains relatively few familiar thriller tropes, such as car chases or murders, instead choosing to rely on technological credibility—as when it make sense of its title, defining *hot wallet* as online funds and

cold wallet as offline money storage. Overall, it's an intelligent and offbeat contribution to the genre that will appeal to its fans.

A savvy, psychologically rich novel of tech-based intrigue.



NORTHFIELD

Fisher, Calvin

Self (338 pp.)

\$13.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book

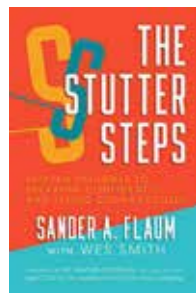
Nov. 12, 2020

978-1-7923-4656-9

A freelance armed security guard in a post-apocalyptic North America tries not to lose his humanity—or his life—as he becomes embroiled in violent action against the power-hungry, ruling “Network.”

Fisher's debut SF combat novel has a hero in Mark Northfield, a former military man who survived a vaguely described attack on the United States 10 years earlier that effectively destroyed most of the world's civilization. The globe is shrouded in a deadly yellow atmosphere that kills in seconds. But in North America, populations manage to survive in cities ruthlessly overseen by the Network, an organization that outfits people (the ones who can pay, anyhow) with breathing masks and filters. Haunted by recurring thoughts of his dead young wife and the horrors he has seen, Northfield dwells on the dangerous outskirts of Network territory, taking occasional mercenary gigs to provide security escorts from community to community. He is especially on guard against “Yellowbacks,” a cultlike bandit gang with its own respiratory apparatuses. Yet even in battle, Northfield still strives for altruism and ethical behavior—one of the few to do so in a savage milieu. Then, he is tricked into accepting a Network task to assassinate a stranger—to refuse the job means Northfield's elimination by the dictatorship's unsubtly named “Death Corps.” It is no surprise when Northfield learns his target happens to be no ordinary, enemy-of-the-state dissident but one who holds the key to reversing the deadly climate change (the lethal airborne toxin is not chemical but rather a nanotechnology smart weapon). Once Northfield decides which side he is on and where to go, the plot becomes a rather basic A to B mission, albeit with much cinematic action and scintillating John Woo-style gun battles. And the hero, a conscience-wracked Lutheran, argues at length with other characters or in interior monologues with his beloved's memory and a silent Almighty about moral equivalency, mercy, and the right thing to do. (“Everyone's a dog that eats each other out here,” a man says to Northfield. “Sometimes you don't have a choice in it all. Sometimes doing bad things is what you gotta do.”) Even if the straightforward plot makes few deviations, newcomer Fisher's prose is sure-footed, and the combo of God, guts, and guns should especially appeal to readers of “prepper” SF.

A rousing SF tale that stars a warrior hero with a strong moral center.



THE STUTTER STEPS ***Proven Pathways to*** ***Speaking Confidently*** ***and Living Courageously***

Flaum, Sander A. with Smith, Wes

Post Hill Press (192 pp.)

\$19.45 | \$9.99 e-book | Jan. 26, 2021

978-1-64293-653-7



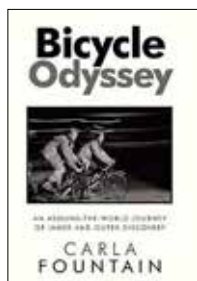
A comprehensive plan for dealing with a stutter.

“Everyone who stutters,” writes debut author and consultant Flaum early on in this book, “has similar stories of those awful experiences that made us realize we were ‘different’ and easily teased and mocked.” The broader personal and psychological circumstances surrounding stammering, the author contends, can often be just as important as the difficulty itself. As Dr. Heather Grossman, one expert, comments in the book, “the core problem of stuttering is actually made up of all the things that person does in order not to stutter.” These “avoidance tactics” include passing up social gatherings, relying only on texting rather than talking on the phone, and replacing a difficult-to-say word with an easier one even when the difficult word is the one you really want. However, people who've dealt with stuttering can attest that such tactics don't always work. Flaum examines an array of alternatives, including a counterintuitive approach of intentionally stuttering a bit, which can help one relax; some people, he says, “feel stuttering on purpose for their first few words helps them feel more in control of their speech. It also helps reduce their fear of stuttering involuntarily, so they see no reason to hide it.” Another method, he writes, is so-called “easy stuttering,” in which one tries to “catch” the moment when a stutter occurs and draw it out slightly—again, in order to relax and feel a sense of control. The author describes these and other approaches in detail over the course of this work.

Flaum, who has firsthand knowledge of stuttering, includes commentary from an array of other experts, including language pathologists and speech therapists, in order to provide his narrative with additional professional heft. He also draws on his own considerable experience to smoothly contextualize the information for those readers who may be unfamiliar with the challenges of speech difficulties. He also makes a wise decision to include ample testimony from people who struggle with stuttering themselves, as his most likely audience is made up of these people and those who love and support them. These sections have the effect of personalizing the experience of speech difficulties and clarifying their larger psychological effects: “Keep in mind, this is not about recovery from *stuttering*,” one such testimonial asserts. “We are recovering from *shame*.” These personal insights from lived experience effectively bring the book to life, and their quality is matched by the range of Flaum's advice and the humanity of his own prose. He addresses some of the everyday obstacles that people dealing with stutters face, such as unfamiliar surroundings and the physical stress of anxiety, as he assesses various approaches to speech therapy; for each of these strategies, Flaum lays out the facts in a clear and upfront

manner, assessing each type of therapy for strengths and weaknesses in a way that readers are sure to find valuable. Overall, Flaum delivers an encouraging guide that will make his target readership feel accepted and heard.

A compassionate and highly readable overview of therapeutic approaches to stuttering.



BICYCLE ODYSSEY
An Around-the-World
Journey of Inner and
Outer Discovery

Fountain, Carla

BalboaPress (346 pp.)

\$39.95 | \$21.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book

Oct. 7, 2020

978-1-982256-18-0

978-1-982256-16-6 paper

A married couple embarks on a mammoth cycling adventure across Europe, Africa, and Asia in Fountain's debut travel memoir.

In the summer of 1991, the California-based author and her then-husband, Dermot, quit their teaching jobs and set off on a yearlong cycling trip that began in London, England, and ended in Bali. The journey was an opportunity for them to reconnect with their roots; because of her African heritage, Fountain "longed to visit sub-Saharan Africa" while Dermot wanted to visit his ancestral homeland of Scotland. Their travel plans were often fluid, constrained only by the departure times of pre-booked connecting flights. Throughout this book, the author extols the benefits of slow travel as she describes her adventures in Europe, which included following the Mediterranean coastline from France into Spain and camping near Salvador Dalí's house in Cadaqués. In Kenya, the couple visited a Maasai village and awoke one night to find hippos surrounding their tent. In India, they navigated dangerous roads and glimpsed the Himalayas in Nepal. But although the journey brought the two cyclists closer to nature, the strain of travel exposed fault lines in their relationship. Fountain emphasizes the importance of "chance encounters with exceptional people" during their trip, and she expertly captures the intimacy of such moments. In a Kenyan shop, for instance, the author and her husband encountered a woman with "warm, friendly eyes" speaking "Nandi or Swahili," which another local translated into English; their dialogue about their backgrounds is compelling, and their parting is genuinely moving: "The woman took my hand. 'It is so good that Blacks and Whites can sit together in the same room and talk.'" Given the enormity of the trip, Fountain often economizes on description ("Dalí's house with its egg motifs"), which makes the memoir feel rather hurried; however, when the author chooses to elaborate, her descriptive style has a crackling energy: "Two groups of men and drummers played music most of the night while one man sang and danced....Sizzle—biss! Sparklers, spinners, and flares lit up the darkness." The book is illustrated with maps and includes a budget and sample of trip expenses.

A highly readable remembrance despite its generally unadorned approach.



FRENCH DIVE
Living More With Less
in the South of France

Freeze, Eric

Slant (286 pp.)

\$35.00 | \$20.00 paper | \$9.99 e-book

Nov. 23, 2020

978-1-72526-615-5

978-1-72526-614-8 paper



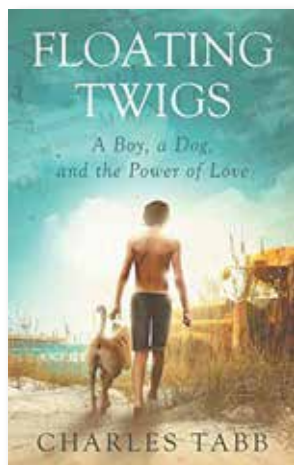
A big American family decamps to a tiny French apartment in this vibrant memoir.

In 2014, Wabash College English professor Freeze, the author of *Invisible Men* (2016), and his wife, Rixa, packed up their four kids, ages 1 through 7, and moved from Indiana to a 700-square-foot apartment in a 14th-century building in the French coastal city of Nice. Many Niçois were surprised that the couple had moved such a large clan to the cramped, touristy, overpriced city, but there were compensations, such as the bustling street life, gracious squares, and small stores; superb cheeses; and the pellucid blue Mediterranean. Much of the book recounts the family's nest-building during a long renovation, assisted by a string of colorful construction workers; the narrative centerpiece is a hilariously surreal account of the Freezes' appearance on the reality show *House Hunters International*, reenacting a grossly fictionalized, melodramatic version of the house hunting they'd done just months before. Threaded throughout are Freeze's adventures in spearfishing as a way to get free food for his family, and the scenes of his epic dives depict both his intense guilt about "the violence of the thing I was prepared to do" and gripping, Hemingway-esque action as he stalks wary fish: "A roucaou finned its way toward me....It was still out of range but it didn't seem to see me as a threat. It came closer. Three feet, two. My lungs were on fire." Freeze's limpid prose blends vivid travelogue and family portraiture with a defense of France's simpler lifestyle as well as a clear-eyed critique of the country's flaws, including racist treatment of African migrants: "Our benign and welcoming conversation with the immigration officer...was a stark contrast to the shouting matches and aggression that we heard in adjacent rooms."

A captivating and insightful meditation on making a home among strangers.

20 GREAT INDIE BOOKS WORTH DISCOVERING

[SPONSORED]



FLOATING TWIGS

by Charles Tabb

"A boy encounters hostility and hope in Tabb's debut coming-of-age novel."

A poignant and compelling narrative of a boy's search for connection and meaning.



GHOST HUNTERS: BONES IN THE WALL

by Susan McCauley

"A bereaved boy discovers that he can see ghosts in this middle-grade novel."

A straightforward but well-structured and absorbing supernatural tale of change and coping.

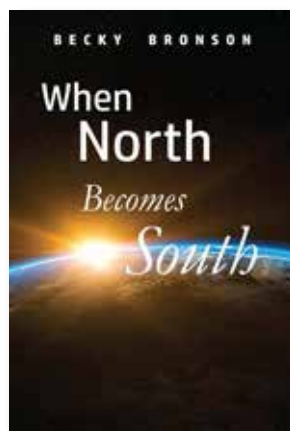


SHALLCROSS: ANIMAL SLIPPERS

by Charles Porter

"A man who hears voices joins a colorful alliance of South Florida eco-warriors."

An unforgettable tale with rich and moving connections, poetic storytelling, and an inimitable style.



WHEN NORTH BECOMES SOUTH

by Becky Bronson

"A superstorm switches Earth's magnetic poles and shuts down electrical power grids all over the world in this novel by Bronson, author of *A Life Well-Lived* (2018)."

An engaging triptych on the subjects of borders, climate change, and technology dependence.

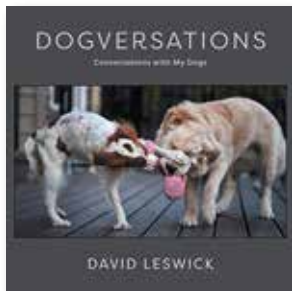


BURY HIM

by Doug Chamberlain

"A veteran recounts his harrowing experiences as a Marine commander during the Vietnam War."

A combat veteran's astute look at the Vietnam War, both captivating and emotionally forthcoming.



DOGVERSATIONS

by David Leswick
Photographs by the author

"In this debut compilation of humorous conversations and colorful photographs, three adorable dogs say the darnedest things."

A cute, fun frolic for tail-wagging fans.



GIFT OF THE SWAN

by J.R. Gochbauer

"A debut collection of full-color photographs, inspirational quotes, and information about the breathtaking waterfowl of Swan Lake Iris Gardens in Sumter, South Carolina."

A peaceful stroll for waterfowl lovers.



ELEMENTAL

by Whitney Hill

"A superpowered private detective is drawn into a murky power struggle in Hill's debut urban fantasy novel."

Hard-boiled adventure and snappy worldbuilding in the shadowy margins of the everyday.

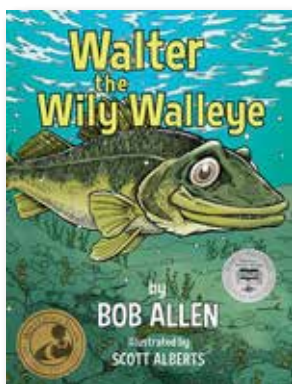


GOTCHA

by Tom Lytes

"Enigmatic programmer Vortmit returns in this second entry in Lytes' thriller series, involving a drug dealer, a tech millionaire, and a pill-popping lawyer on the South Carolina coast."

An often entertaining series entry with several new and engaging characters.



WALTER THE WILY WALLEYE

by Bob Allen
Illus. by Scott Alberts

"A clever fish narrates this playful, picture-book ode to the 'game' of fishing."

Parents hoping to take their kids on fishing trips will find some fun, rhyming encouragement here.

20 GREAT INDIE BOOKS WORTH DISCOVERING

[SPONSORED]

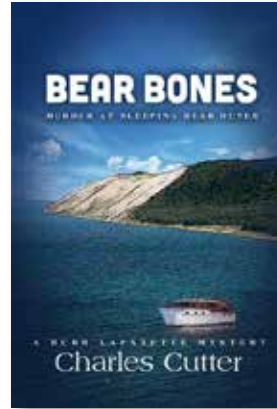


M-9

by Marvin J. Wolf

“Two unlikely partners find themselves in the crosshairs of a ruthless international gang in this thriller.”

Strange circumstances throw together a detective duo in this riveting, complex tale.

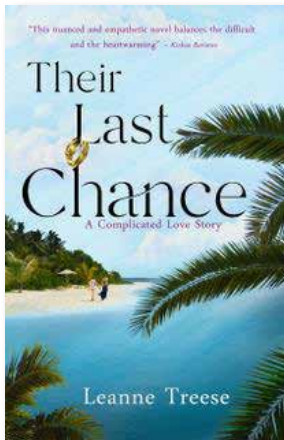


BEAR BONES

by Charles Cutter

“A Michigan litigator tackles a murder case, coming to the aid of a man charged with killing his wife, in this fourth installment of a legal series.”

Captivating characters augment a taut, alluring mystery.

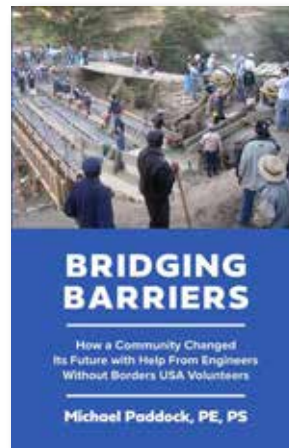


THEIR LAST CHANCE

by Leanne Treese

“A debut literary novel focuses on a troubled couple’s relationship dynamics.”

A clever, incisive character study that explores romance and strife.

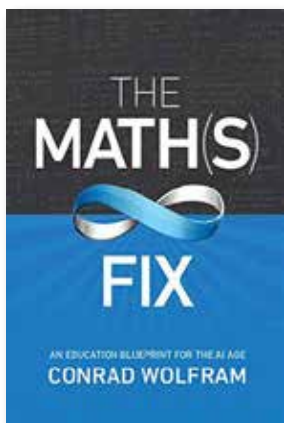


BRIDGING BARRIERS

by Michael Paddock

“An engineer celebrates a quirky leader behind several public works projects in Guatemala.”

A well-written tribute to engineering projects and the volunteers who run them.



THE MATH(S) FIX

by Conrad Wolfram

“An argument for reevaluating concepts and methods in mathematics education.”

A solid and thoughtful educational analysis.

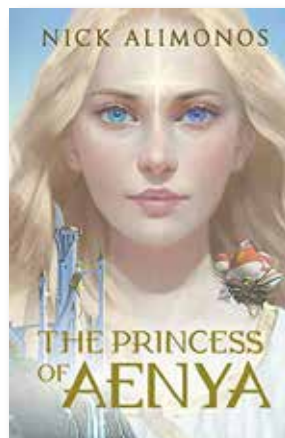


THE AWAKENING OF MAGIC

by Christian Boustead

"The first installment in a fantasy series in which a young woman discovers a world of supernatural beings."

A consistently engaging tale of werewolves, elves, and a girl with unexpected powers.

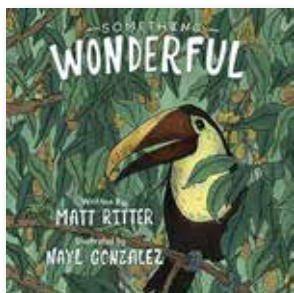


THE PRINCESS OF AENYA

by Nick Alimonos

"An epic fantasy focuses on a brutal usurper and a princess on the run."

A heroine's trials make for a winding, bloody adventure with plenty of surprises.

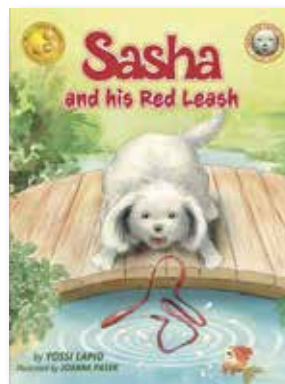


SOMETHING WONDERFUL

by Matt Ritter
Illus. by Nayl Gonzalez

"An illustrated children's book about the interconnected life cycles of tropical rainforest plants and pollinators."

A gorgeous-looking lesson that will satisfy kids and parents alike.



SASHA AND HIS RED LEASH

by Yossi Lapid
Illus. by Joanna Pasek

"Author Lapid and illustrator Pasek launch a new rhyming picture-book series starring a playful puppy who wants to roam free."

A book featuring a charismatic pooch and a likable owner that's sure to attract young readers.



THE HOME FRONT

by DW Hanneken

"When a prisoner-of-war camp is set up outside a Wisconsin town, a young woman whose husband is in the Army must manage the family farm and deal with the temptation of a new romance."

An engaging homefront tale with a likable female lead and a few surprises.

“A sincere, approachable, and heartwarming glimpse into the adoption experience.”

THE JOURNEY TO MAX



THE JOURNEY TO MAX
An Adoption Story

Garcia-Halenar, Christopher & Garcia-Halenar, Alejandro
Illus. by Embeli, Lea

Xanmaxbooks (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | \$9.99 paper | Jun. 1, 2021

978-1-73260-442-1

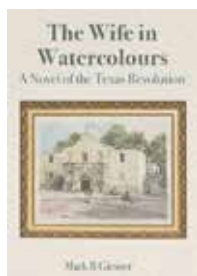
978-1-73260-443-8 paper



A family welcomes their newest member in this picture book about adoption from married authors Christopher and Alejandro Garcia-Halenar.

In a tale told from the perspective of their eldest son, Xander, the Garcia-Halenars recount the process of adopting their second child, Max. The text introduces readers to the members of the family and their reasons for wanting another family member as well as the difficult, disheartening process of searching all over the United States to find their new family member. In a surprise twist, a young pregnant woman in their own city of Miami seeks out the authors to be the parents of her son after he's born: "Just when we were ready to give up," Xander narrates, "she found us. She chose us!" The love that Max's family feels for him leaps off the page, in part due to vibrant watercolor illustrations and clever page compositions by illustrator Embeli. In clear, charming language, the authors have Xander describe the excitement that he shares with his parents as well as their joy in watching Max grow into an exuberant little boy. The Garcia-Halenars also emphasize their gratitude and admiration not only for Max's birth mother, but also for their large extended family. The result is a sincere, approachable, and heartwarming glimpse into the adoption experience.

A sweet, lovingly rendered tale with delightful images.



THE WIFE IN WATERCOLOURS
A Novel of the Texas Revolution

Giesser, Mark R.

Self (184 pp.)

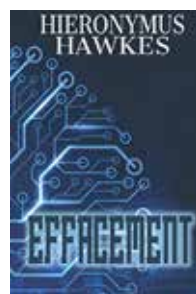
\$8.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book | May 7, 2021

The brutality of war meets the theater of the absurd in this historical novel set in Texas during its rebellion against Mexico.

In 1835, Texas, still a part of Mexico, is a place where Americans go for a fresh start and European immigrants arrive, hoping to make their fortunes from promotional offerings of vast tracts of land. The two central protagonists, "Señorita" Charlotte Vernon, originally from Surrey, England, and Harry Birchfield, a cobbler from the Whitechapel section of London, alternate narration, she aligned with the Mexicans and he with the Texans. And occasionally, even Davy Crockett gets to helm a few lively and sardonic chapters from the Alamo. Charlotte is a 30-something single artist, rescued from a New Orleans jail by Captain of Artillery Andreas Gerber, a Swiss mercenary hired by the Mexican army. Andreas

brings Charlotte to Texas with him, where she is conscripted to paint battle scenes portraying the Mexicans in all their military glory. Meanwhile, Harry just wants to claim his acres of land and establish a cotton plantation that will bring him a life of leisure. He did not anticipate war with Mexico would be part of the bargain. But he takes charge of a decrepit cannon, originally given to the citizens of Gonzales by the Mexican government for defense against Comanche raiders. Now the Mexicans want it back; the ragtag volunteer Texas army wishes to keep it for the revolution; and Harry winds up a recruit. In this offbeat and melancholy tale, Giesser has a fine ear for language, and his characters speak in the jargon and cadence suiting their origins and stations. Readers get to know them primarily through dialogue filled with quips and musings. But the audience will have to pay close attention to follow the timeline. The novel opens in June 1836, just months before the book ends. Then it jumps back to 1835, filling in bits and pieces gradually, always holding back enough to keep things intriguing, albeit sometimes confusing. Although there is plenty of history and a smattering of politics to be found here, this is essentially an engrossing, character-driven tragedy.

An engaging tale offers a bit of farce, a touch of love, and quixotic characters.



EFFACEMENT

Hawkes, Hieronymus

Self (404 pp.)

\$24.99 | \$14.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book

Mar. 27, 2021

979-8-72-861870-6

979-8-70-184171-8 paper

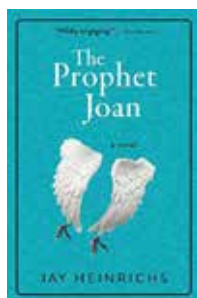
In this SF thriller, brain chips are supposed to keep people healthy and connected to society—but they may be killing some of them.

In a post-privacy United States, virtually everyone has a Vitasync neurochip installed at the base of their brain. These technological marvels connect people to apps such as MyPharm, which treats small health problems, and a vast digital overlay of visual information. The chips record one's experiences into a "lifelog," which is illegal to tamper with and makes one a citizen who can hold a job and open a bank account. One day, Cole Westbay wakes to find his apartment trashed and his chip stolen. Without his connection, he feels like a "junkie coming down from a bad trip." Cole works for BioNarratus, the company that's cornered the neurochip market. He's also the protégé of Lounis Belrose, one of the world's most powerful people. Cole had been researching why several senators, judges, and other key figures have been meeting early ends and how this may be connected to Vitasync's latest software patch. After Cole asks a neighbor to call the police for him, he's arrested for the crime of "effacement," or having an offline lifelog. When Lounis bails him out of jail—instead of Cole's girlfriend, Tesla Carrick, who also works for BioNarratus—Cole starts to suspect that something shady is going on. At a pawn shop, he hunts for Augmented

Reality glasses to reconnect to the world, and he later meets Eva Spangler, an attorney who reveals to him an aspect of society that he'd never dreamed possible.

Hawkes superbly extrapolates what our technology-dependent and pandemic-stricken world might be like a dozen years from now. Despite the illegality of effacement, a large segment of the population is shown to live off the grid, divested from modernity by economics or circumstance; Cole is so ensconced in a busy realm of digital engagement that he has no idea these people even exist. Yet the author also shows that the protagonist does have a heart, although he's given it to Tesla, a narcissist who's wary of commitment. Eva, who drives sports cars, is skilled with a gun, and has a killer smile, becomes Cole's—and the reader's—guide through Control, Alt, Delete, a secret group that cherishes privacy. Hawkes occasionally embraces a hard-boiled tone in his prose, as in the line, "Being in the cell was a bit like being in a casino, with no clocks and no change in the lighting. But he had more to lose than a bet, and no one was bringing him cocktails." The author mentions a "Great Pandemic" in connection with cruise-ship horrors, but Hawke's descriptions of people's dwindling social skills are more intriguing; many use "quints," for example—digital projections that have replaced physical handshakes as greetings. Although the assassin hunting Cole, Phillip Chestnut, seems robotic, other characters show notable agency. A somewhat-winding journey on snowmobiles and through a courtroom brings readers to an enjoyably unexpected finale.

A thriller with capable heroes that portrays a future that feels scarily near.



THE PROPHET JOAN

Heinrichs, Jay

Gavia Books (384 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book

Mar. 18, 2021

978-1-73672-660-0

A 14-year-old girl tries to make sense of a raven's announcement that she's a prophet in Heinrichs' novel.

Call her Jonah. The former Joan Mudgett adopted her father's name after he disappeared—the same day her mother was murdered, more than a year ago. She's certain that he had nothing to do with the crime, and she wants only to find the true "evil doer." It's now early January, and Joan lives alone in the family house at the foot of Jumper Mountain in New Hampshire, helped out by her teacher and friend, Mary Sullivan. When she's not rereading *Moby-Dick*, she often patrols her surroundings on skis; on one such outing, she's greeted by a talking raven who says, "I am Gabriel, come to appoint you humanity's most sacred voice." According to the raven, her prophecies are supposed to "create a favorable carom, a swerve, a divergence" to steer humanity away from terrible events. After other kids at school start a rumor that she hears voices, she's pressed for predictions, so she makes some at random, expecting them to come to

nothing—but they appear to come true instead. Joan decides to admit that she really is a prophet, with her message being that the world is too noisy: "Think how much more you can learn by shutting up. Being quiet." As the quietness movement hilariously snowballs (and is monetized), Joan finally learns the truth about her parents. Heinrichs has also written three nonfiction books on rhetoric, and his debut novel is utterly engaging and complex as it combines comedy, tragedy, a coming-of-age story, social commentary, timely reflections on the Covid-19 pandemic, and scintillating philosophy about the biosphere. As the raven says, humans miss the beauty of other species' communications: "You are surrounded by creatures who compose poetry and sparkling dialogues with smells, colors, shadows, and eloquent pauses." Joan's outsize impact on world events is made more plausible by her enormous charisma, courage, and independence over the course of the novel.

A profound, witty, and compassionate work with a compelling protagonist and message.



CANTERBERRY TALES

Hoff, C.P.

Illus. by Froese, Michelle

Black Crow Books (278 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book

Apr. 7, 2021

978-0-9812215-5-7

Hoff's novel presents the adventures of an impossible little girl.

Seven-year-old Celia Canterbury is already a legend in her little town of Happy Valley, well known for her obstreperous ways and independent mind. She prides herself on her precociousness: "In my mind, precocious was far better than polite. There was no joy in being polite." When Celia's long-suffering grandmother Nan packs her off to stay with Old Lady Griggs for an afternoon, she starts to learn more about her own mysterious origin story. She knows that she was abandoned at the hospital, but she's never been able to get any adult to divulge more details. At first, Old Lady Griggs seems more forthcoming. "After you were born," she tells Celia, "whole pages were devoted to you and your inauspicious birth." Over the course of her visits to Old Lady Griggs, and after multiple consultations of a meticulously maintained scrapbook, Celia gradually finds out more about her past, and in the process, Hoff spins a yarn about pre-modern small-town American life that glows with affection. The prose is smooth and consistently funny, and Celia is a delightful character. The author also makes a storytelling decision that will be familiar to the many fans of Sue Townsend's *Adrian Mole* series or Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*: She gives Celia a quirky, forceful, and unmistakably adult voice. The narrative, which includes occasional black-and-white line drawings by Froese, is, by turns, touching and uproarious—as when Celia puts her hair in pigtails by using a stapler—and Hoff is always ready with well-executed humor: "[Nan] never wears her teeth when she's gardening," Celia tells Old Lady Griggs at one point. "She thinks

it's best not to let the plants know her true intentions." The combination of warm nostalgia and a sharp, modern sensibility is perfectly managed, and the promise of future volumes will please readers who want to spend more time in Happy Valley.

A well-crafted tale of a precocious child.



DENIED
A Kelly Pruett Mystery

Keliikoa, Mary

Camel Press (226 pp.)

\$15.95 paper | \$5.99 e-book

May 11, 2021

978-1-60381-783-7

A novice private investigator looks into the disappearance of her friend's father in this second installment of a mystery series.

Derailed (2020) introduced 32-year-old Kelly Pruett, whose father died and left her his Portland, Oregon, private detective agency, R&K Investigations. She'd never handled anything like a murder case before but successfully untangled a mystery while uncovering family secrets and facing danger that left her with a bullet wound. Now it's May, some months afterward, and Kelly is weighing whether to continue as a private eye or find a safer job when Stephanie Jacoby, an old high school friend, shows up, asking for help finding her missing father, Vince. He's been out of touch since Thanksgiving. Though Kelly fails to find Vince at his deserted house, she does discover a severed finger—not his, it turns out—in the kitchen trash. Tracking down leads related to Vince's gambling habit uncovers links among a bowling alley, a racetrack, a trucking company where he worked, the enterprise's bookkeeper (also his money-lending landlady), and a projected water park of political and economic importance. As Kelly also juggles family matters and a new romance, her sleuthing again puts her in peril. As she did in her first Pruett novel, Keliikoa deftly marshals the story's twisty interconnections, doing a fine job of keeping readers oriented as things march toward an ending with several surprises in store. Kelly is an appealing character, smart and hardworking as she feels her way through, and her PI work is nicely balanced by complications in her personal life. These include the difficulties of dating a new man under the eyes of her neighboring ex-mother-in-law and a reappraisal of her father, who left her feeling betrayed in Book 1.

A solid sequel with a relatable detective and an enjoyably knotty plot.



HOUSE OF SLEEP

Kelly, Brad

Manuscript (312 pp.)

\$12.00 paper | \$4.50 e-book

979-8-59-312863-8

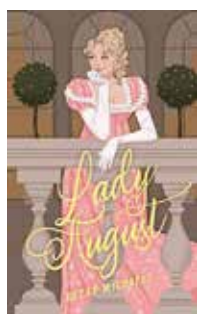
In this debut gothic novel, a woman attempts to discover the meaning of her dreams.

Lynn is fascinated by her dreams, though her engineer fiancé, Mike, is quick to dismiss them: "Dreams are just your brain sorting through irrelevancies, determining what goes in which folder, what gets tossed." Because of his skepticism, she doesn't bother to tell him when she dreams of him dying in a flash of splinters and glass. Then, the next day, Mike is killed in a car accident. Despite her training—Lynn is a therapist at a mental health clinic—she can't get over her sense of grief, even after a year passes. A friend recommends she attend a retreat at the House of Sleep, a Victorian mansion that serves as a center for dream remembrance and interpretation. It is run by a guru known as DM, the Diving Man, a figure with a mysterious past who possesses a secret government drug called the One that serves as the basis for his treatment. There, Lynn becomes one of his Sleepers, as the community of monk-like students is known. It is also there that she meets Daniel, a haunted young man in whom Lynn—and DM—quickly takes an interest. Lynn and Daniel have an unexpected connection: He may be just the person she needs to finally put her sorrow to bed. But first they may have to contend with whatever it is that DM has planned for them. Kelly's prose is wonderfully moody, as here when Daniel comes to after an attempted exorcism by his Christian father: "Daniel did wake up—gradually, out of vaporous, ghostly dreams about dying—and lay awhile collecting evidence that night had come. His face was stiff and swollen with water—the best and failed effort of his father's god to oust the demon." The author succeeds in creating a creepy, paranoid atmosphere in which readers will often be left to wonder just what is true, what is false, and what is dangerous. DM is a captivating villain, though at times his monologues border on camp. There are moments when the plot drags, and the book is perhaps 50 pages longer than it should be. Even so, Kelly has created an indisputably original—and mind-bending—story using some classic gothic elements.

A cerebral and inventive tale exploring the power of the subconscious.

"An enthralling, contemporary tale of man versus machine."

A.I.



LADY AUGUST

Michaels, Becky

Mildred Press (310 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book

Mar. 30, 2021

978-1-73514-013-1

In Michaels' Regency romance, a young woman becomes an unexpected heiress.

Young August Summer is languishing in a low-intensity relationship with handsome curate Henry Fitzgerald, who seems to be in no hurry to marry her. Into

this uneventful life comes an unexpected bombshell. From his deathbed in the countryside, Lord Bolton instructs his solicitor, Samuel Brooks, to seek out his nonmarital daughter—August. Lord Bolton has never seen the girl, but he fears he will not rest in peace if he doesn't acknowledge and care for her, so he plans to install her at his ancestral home of Linfield Hall, 30 miles outside of London, right alongside his other children, Charles and Rosamund. He intends to establish her in his world by, among other things, settling an enormous fortune on her (society loves an unexpected heiress, he quips). Samuel is initially appalled by the arrangement; he's doubtful that such a drastic change will be in anybody's best interest. Nevertheless, he carries out his commission and contacts August, who's astonished—and naturally worried about how her half siblings will react to her arrival at the hall. Her sudden vulnerability affects Samuel more than he expected. When readers initially meet him, he's opposed to the idea of marriage, but he finds his feelings for August steadily blooming even though his ambivalence is only deepened when his task expands to acclimating August to the rarefied atmosphere of the very rich. Their growing attraction is complicated by her half brother's decision to consign August to the care of her aunt, a dowager duchess dogged by rumors of her own.

The novel is a welter of plotlines and classic Regency tropes. Michaels dives straight into some of the best-known romance conceits, from the Cinderella aspects of August's sudden rise from poverty to the oddball relationship with an unconventional older character to the confirmed-bachelor-finds-his-true-love device. Michaels imbues these storytelling elements with verve; the book's narrative drive is strong even in its opening moves and only grows stronger as the tale builds. The main characters are all drawn with a clear, vibrant energy, and even the book's villains, including, to an extent, August's half brother, are given a refreshing complexity. Michaels' strongest gift is pacing. The book jogs along from ball to dinner to carriage ride, and even the scenes in which characters pause and talk manage to contain a good deal of plot furthering. There are darker plot points along the way—Michaels doesn't shy away from some of the uglier aspects of her time period—but these moments fall away. And although the basic architecture of that plot is very straightforwardly simple—"going from the governess to member of the ton was no easy feat" neatly sums up the bulk of it—it's pursued with a zest that makes for easy, pleasant reading, all moving with propulsive certainty to pretty much exactly the climax that seasoned Regency readers will expect.

An intelligent, involving story of a Regency Cinderella finding a new life and true love.



THE GIRL IN THE GOLD DRESS

Paik, Christine

Illus. by Lin Park, Jung

Imagilore Publishing (34 pp.)

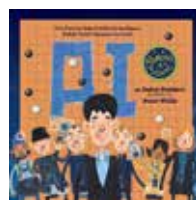
\$23.95 | May 24, 2021

978-1-954109-11-7

A Korean American girl learns the history of the gold dress she plans to wear in a talent show in this picture book.

Hannah is anxious about her Korean dance performance for her school talent show. A huge worry is her ostentatious peach-and-gold dress: "It was too different. Too Korean." Noticing her discomfort, her mother tells her the story of her great-grandmother's hanbok fabric business in Korea. The woman had to flee North Korea during the war. She needed to bring her fabrics with her but could not carry many bags; instead, she wrapped hanbok silks around her body under her coat, including a peach-and-gold one. Before moving to America, she gave the new store owner in Seoul instructions never to sell the peach-and-gold hanbok unless a girl named Geum Chun requested it. When Hannah was born, her great-grandmother gave her a Korean name—Geum Chun—so that she could eventually claim the dress. Armed with this knowledge, Hannah dazzles at the talent show. While questions remain—why did Hannah never learn this secret before?—the emotional arc of Paik's story is neat and the message affirming for children seeking connections with immigrant histories that feel remote. Lin Park's acrylic paintings offer detailed, realistic portraits of Hannah, her mother, and the bright silk fabric and sketchier pictures of the historical narrative. The titular dress is rendered in stunning gold paint.

An engaging, accessible narrative of immigration, resilience, and connections between generations.



A.I.

How Patterns Helped Artificial Intelligence Defeat World Champion Lee Sedol

Pattison, Darcy

Illus. by Willis, Peter

Mims House (34 pp.)

\$23.99 | \$11.99 paper | Jun. 8, 2020

978-1-62944-181-8

978-1-62944-184-9 paper

An artificial intelligence program beats a champion in this nonfiction illustrated children's book.

In March 2016 in Seoul, Lee Sedol of South Korea competed with AlphaGo, an AI program, in Go, a board game where players capture patterns on a grid using stones. Sedol, the "Go world champion," was confident he would win, and the British DeepMind team, the creators of AlphaGo, wondered if the AI was

ready to compete against such an adept human player. A diverse group of reporters and spectators packed the event. Everyone was shocked when AlphaGo (a DeepMind member moved the stones on the AI's behalf) won the first two rounds. Sedol was stunned. Following AlphaGo's third win, some people worried that AI "would soon be smarter than humans." But Sedol "went big, trying to take a large territory, in an all-or-nothing play," and beat the AI in the fourth round. Still, AlphaGo triumphed in the final round, proving that AI "could learn tasks and, at times, do them better than humans." Although the surprising result left many people wary about the power of AI systems, "everything AlphaGo did was because humans had created and programmed it. AlphaGo beat Lee Sedol, but it also helped him to think in new, creative ways, to see the world differently." The engaging story offers useful information and insights about technological advancements. Pattison emphasizes how computers and AI impact the world. The book also includes kid-friendly explanations of AI, showing how AlphaGo was trained to recognize patterns, and bios of Sedol and DeepMind. The work will especially be enjoyed by young readers interested in technology, programming, or gaming. Willis' emotive illustrations provide charming elements like collaged details and patterned, textured backgrounds. Many show scenes of the intense competition, sometimes including speech bubbles.

An enthralling, contemporary tale of man versus machine.



BLOW OUT THE CANDLE WHEN YOU LEAVE

Pettway, Kevin

Cursed Dragon Ship Publishing

(336 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book

Jun. 26, 2020

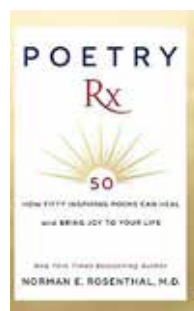
978-1-951445-10-2

This second book in Pettway's *Misplaced Mercenaries* series sees a diamond-in-the-rough imposter king defend his city from political intrigue and military incursion.

Carrying on from the events of *A Good Running Away* (2019), ex-mercenary Keane has been accepted as king of Greenshade. He has married the princess—now Queen Megan—and rules as best he can over a Great Council of devious, squabbling noblemen. Keane's sister in arms, the fearsome ex-mercenary Sarah, acts as his bodyguard while also receiving magical instruction from Finnagel, the city's resident sorcerer. Keane and Sarah have landed on their feet, but they are not yet out of the woods. When Keane arrived at Treaty Hill, he was impersonating Prince Despin Swifhart of Tyrrane. That nation has now discovered the deception. With armed reprisal imminent, Keane sends Sarah and Finnagel on a diplomatic mission to shore up Greenshade's treaties with the neighboring kingdoms. In their absence, Keane is left vulnerable. Megan is pregnant. More so than ever before, Keane feels a genuine allegiance to his adopted kingdom. But the enemy is at the gate, and Greenshade's allies have turned in favor of Tyrrane. Worse, there are forces within the capital of Treaty Hill working to betray the city. Can Keane

outmaneuver the backstabbers and keep his wife, unborn child, and kingdom safe? While the book is something of a bridging installment in the series (Sarah's mission in particular does not further the plot in any great way), the developing storylines afford plenty of opportunities for character development and exploration of a diverse world. Separating Keane and Sarah allows each to shine. Megan emerges as a second strong female character while Sarah's new companions, Cassius and the troll Grohann, are well realized. Pettway's prose has a lightness of touch often missing in epic fantasy. The dialogue is frequently vulgar but inventively so, disavowing realism with an eye instead to humor. The chapters are short, often ending in quips, and the novel as a whole moves quickly and confidently. Overall there is much here to like.

A puckish, free-wheeling take on the sword-and-sorcery genre.



POETRY RX How 50 Inspiring Poems Can Heal and Bring Joy to Your Life

Rosenthal, Norman E.

G&D Media (380 pp.)

\$30.00 | \$19.95 paper | \$14.98 e-book

May 4, 2021

978-1-72-250506-6

978-1-72-250546-2 paper

A motivational book shows how poetry can be a balm for the soul.

Sometimes even doctors must look to art for consolation. Psychiatrist Rosenthal has observed the ways poems have helped his patients through times of difficulty, giving voice to certain feelings while offering a way forward. "The idea of this book is that poetry can not only inspire and delight, but can actually help you feel better, soothe your pain, and heal psychological wounds," writes the author in his introduction. "In short, as the book's title suggests, poetry can act as a kind of medicine." Rosenthal has collected 50 short poems that he finds therapeutic, covering a wide range of situations and emotions. Each chapter includes a poem as well as a brief essay on the question that the piece addresses. Chapter 1, for example, features Elizabeth Bishop's famous poem "One Art" ("The art of losing isn't hard to master") followed by a discussion of loss from a psychological and biological perspective. Rosenthal includes a list of takeaways ("Accept the loss"; "Beware all-or-none thinking") as well as biographical information about Bishop and a note about the poem's villanelle structure. The poetry includes English language classics by the likes of Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, W.B. Yeats, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Derek Walcott as well as a few translations from Rumi, Antonio Machado, Salvatore Quasimodo, Anna Akhmatova, and Constantine Cavafy. Rosenthal's breakdowns of the poems are clear and therapeutic, as here, where he discusses Steve Smith's "Not Waving But Drowning," about a man who drowned without anyone realizing he needed help: "We seek explanations to reassure ourselves that the dead

"An engaging and detailed portrait of a 20th-century woman and the communities she tended."

BLOOMING IN WINTER

are somehow different from us; we look for some reason to blame them. They did something wrong, which luckily we are clever enough to avoid." The poets skew White and male, perhaps in part because the pieces are all quite old. The only living poets included in the book are Wendell Berry and Gillian Clarke (both currently octogenarians). That said, the selected poems are excellent and highly accessible, and Rosenthal uses them as a platform for readers' self-investigations.

An insightful work that finds therapy in poetry.



PICNIC FOR PARROTS

Sojka, Allison

Illus. by the author

Lapis Jay Press (40 pp.)

\$15.99 | \$8.99 paper | \$7.99 e-book

Feb. 16, 2021

978-1-73614-030-7

978-1-73614-032-1 paper

A cupcake-craving parrot plays a game of telephone to get a treat in this sweet picture-book debut about friendship and sharing a meal from author/illustrator Sojka.

Red is the quietest of a group of parrot friends as well as the host of a potluck picnic. When Red spies a favorite dessert, the parrot knows that unless action is taken, the "pineapple cupcakes with kiwi cream icing" will be eaten. Too shy to get one, Red asks Blue to help. Blue's only too happy to be of service but just can't find "pineapple cupcakes with jellybean icing." So Blue asks Green, who searches for "lime-apple cupcakes with jellied-green leaf rings." The message's bungling continues until the friends sheepishly admit they couldn't find Red's requested dessert—but would the pineapple cupcake with kiwi icing do? Sojka uses a deep green background, with hints of leafy detail, to contrast with the birds. Each parrot is uniquely colored and boldly outlined. Red's hunched posture indicates the bird's insecurity, which is only relieved on the final page. The rhyming couplets amusingly portray the parrots' squawking, and their outlandish treats, featuring beetles and crickets (as well as assorted sweets fit for human consumption), are a delight.

With fun-to-read-aloud phrases and high-contrast illustrations, this tale of friends and food takes the cake.



ISLE OF DRAGONS

Thompson, L.A.

Self (384 pp.)

\$13.95 paper | \$2.99 e-book

Dec. 7, 2020

979-8-57-192617-1

A teenage girl sets out on a mission to a mystical island to save her father in Thompson's opening work of a planned YA fantasy trilogy.

Sixteen-year-old Jade of House Sol is a member of the nobility and part of a kingdom undergoing

political strife due to recent attacks by dragons. She finds her life upended after authorities arrest her father, Carison Sol, on spurious charges. Thompson clues readers in to her protagonist's nascent magical powers, and she may need them as she sets out to locate the Isle of Dragons, where she heard that her dad is being held prisoner. Along the way, Jade encounters siblings Miria and Dan, whose missing parents were experts on dragons, and she teams up with them to find the fabled island that gives the novel its name. Although Thompson portrays characters' motivations simplistically, there's a vivid sense of action throughout the work, which includes dragon confrontations. A midnovel flashback provides some insight into Jade's character, but she's often a cipher without a great deal of interiority whereas Miria, on her own personal quest to discover where she belongs, burns with an intensity that propels the narrative forward. Although the author doesn't develop the work's villains at length, one pursuer—Kaylen, a young woman who's scarcely older than Jade—pops up in some of the more memorable action sequences, and her ambitious nature offers an intriguing counternarrative to the rescue tale. The dragons are smaller and often less dangerous than some of their fantasy cousins, but they have an intriguing connection to magically inclined humans, including Jade and Miria, who must tame one to make it to the Isle of Dragons. The conclusion opens up new avenues of adventure for sequels.

An earnest, action-packed debut that promises future character development and complexity.



BLOOMING IN WINTER

The Story of a Remarkable Twentieth-Century Woman

Valois, Pamela

She Writes Press (265 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | \$2.99 e-book

Jun. 29, 2021

978-1-64742-116-8

A biography focuses on a venerable woman who left her mark on Berkeley, California.

"Where did Jacomena Adriana van Huizen come from, and how did she become Jackie Maybeck?" Valois asks before launching into her story about the life of her close friend and sometime landlord. Born to Dutch immigrants, van Huizen arrived in California as a young child at the tail end of the gold rush, and her parents fell in love with the countryside east of Berkeley. The family became friendly with the Maybecks, introducing van Huizen to her future husband, Wallen, and future father-in-law, Bernard, a visionary architect who designed more than 150 distinctive buildings in the area. The Maybeck clan would rotate between Bernard's different houses as it weathered cultural shifts, the Depression, and wars—with Jackie Maybeck and her husband eventually creating their own street named for their daughters: "Maybeck Twin Drive." Valois documents every move, property, and mood of her subject throughout these changes, leading up to the moment that the author

herself met Maybeck as a warm, welcoming widow devoted to art and her family's properties: "My chore is the hill. I feel that I am the last of the Maybecks." Valois' careful selection of quotes from Maybeck's contradictory, "Rashomon-like" diaries are deployed to great effect, furthering the vision of a charming woman anyone would love to know. (Most intriguing are the author's interpretations of Maybeck's lengthy story "Journey: Small Adventure" as a thinly disguised autofiction about time spent in Europe after World War II.) Valois is overly concerned with the details of who lived where and when at times, to the detriment of her biography's main strength: the familial communities centered on Maybeck and her Berkeley homes. But the author's deep respect for the woman shines through on every page. In the end, the account feels like a nostalgic conversation about a deeply loved mutual friend.

An engaging and detailed portrait of a 20th-century woman and the communities she tended.



STAND A LITTLE OUT OF MY SUN

Voss, Angelyn Christy

Nature's Light Press (310 pp.)

\$14.95 paper | \$7.99 e-book

Aug. 4, 2020

978-1-73472-600-8

In this debut novel centered on a Greek American family in 1950s Chicago, a girl tries to protect her brother from danger.

The story opens in 1981, when Sophie is a kindergarten teacher. A student reminds her of a boy she once knew, which causes her to recall distant memories in 1956, when she was 12 and her brother, Niko, was almost 9. Their household is a tense place; their parents are constantly at each other's throats, and their father drinks too much. When Sophie calls them "damn idiots" for their behavior, her dad slams her against the wall. In this abusive environment, she's the only one looking out for young Niko. She yearns for the love and comfort that her grandparents offer her, but her dad despises his Greek in-laws; Niko, however, reveres his father and desperately wants to help him work on cars in the garage. The boy proves to have a sharp mind and physical dexterity, so he takes part in his father's illegal dealings with Taki, a conniving uncle, and Vitto Biducci, "the most feared thug on the East Side." One night, they assign Niko to steal valuables from locked cars. As his involvement in criminal activities escalates, so does the reader's sense of dread. The 1956 storyline simmers with tension, but Voss sometimes jumps to other eras to chronicle other characters' stories, such as that of Elena, Sophie's great-grandmother, as she travels to America by steamship with five children in tow. Sophie's parents' backstories receive attention, as well, but these sections aren't as engaging as the main plot. Still, the prose is always excellent, as when Voss offers vivid glimpses of the urban landscape: "In the darkening sky, Sophie saw the flaming smokestacks of the steel mills light up the night." Characters are equally well drawn:

"She looks like a cartoon in the funny papers," Sophie's cousin George says about his aunt who's dressed up for a family outing. Overall, the text is entertaining and vibrant, rich with details of Greek American culture, '50s and '60s Chicago, and distinctive members of Sophie's clan and community.

An elegant and often compelling multigenerational drama.



A VANISHING KIND A Memoir of Dr John Wamsley in Conversations

Wamsley, John & Davey, Stephen L.

BalboaPressAU (214 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book

Oct. 29, 2020

978-1-5043-2292-8

A maverick environmentalist recounts saving nearly extinct animals in Australia.

In 2003, Australia's prime minister named Wamsley Environmentalist of the Year. Wamsley's memoir, one co-written with Davey, refreshingly touches on relevant portions of the environmentalist's childhood and zeros in on what readers want to know: Who is this controversial environmentalist, and what was his impact on the preservation of endangered animals and plants? In excerpts from recorded interviews, Wamsley says: "I would gladly give my soul to the devil, to roast in hell for an eternity, if I could save one species of wildlife in exchange." Davey makes cameo appearances in the story, describing the environmentalist as "unique and disciplined." Wamsley's radical work drew strong criticism. A segment of animal welfare activists vilified him as the "cat-hat man" after he wore a hat made of a large feral cat pelt to an award ceremony. The shock value drove his point home that feral cats and foxes posed an existential threat to certain marsupials (among them kangaroos, wallabies, platypus). The book explores the hot-button ethical issue of whether killing one species of animal to preserve another is justified. The co-authors feel strongly that it is, and Wamsley refers to the practice in scientific terms (*prey switching*) and notes that he "only shot one cat" in his lifetime. In 1969, Wamsley created Warrawong, an animal sanctuary. The author also protected the indigenous trees and plants in Australia's natural habitats. To his surprise and delight, certain plants that produced a continuous supply of nectar attracted native birds year-round. Wamsley went on to establish a network of wildlife sanctuaries across Australia. The book includes period photographs and editorial cartoons from local newspapers.

A well-crafted story about a commitment to conservation.

“Watson’s prose is filled with vivid worldbuilding details while still managing to feel urgent and punchy.”

THE RISKS OF DEAD RECKONING



WIPE THE SLATE CLEAN
The Story of Nester the Pester

Ward, Lauretha

Illus. by Mehra, Pardeep

Mind Shape Up (20 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$12.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book

Apr. 21, 2021

978-1-7351898-2-6

978-1-7351898-1-9 paper

A bully works on changing his ways in Ward’s picture book.

Nester often steals his classmates’ homework, pushes them around, and throws tantrums. One day, his teacher reads a story about a regretful bully whose behavior forced a classmate to switch schools, and as a result, Nester feels sorry about his own actions. That night, he prays and promises to be “kind and strong.” The next day, Nester’s teacher encourages him to apologize to the other kids. They appreciate his gesture and agree that they’d “rather have fun” than “hold a grudge.” Nester tries to be kinder and cultivates friendships. In rhyming text with religious sentiments (“a touch of God’s love”), Ward’s book tackles a common school scenario. The author thoughtfully emphasizes how one’s actions affect others and shows how one may forgive people who are trying to make amends. Mehra’s charming, cartoonlike illustrations depict characters with expressive faces and large, round eyes as well as lively school settings, including a playground with a basketball court. Readers will enjoy intriguing details, such as the fact that the classroom’s wallpaper is decorated with pictures of backpacks, globes, and school buses. Nester and his teacher have dark skin and dark hair, and the other students show a range of skin tones. A glossary and discussion questions are included.

An empathetic work about kindness and forgiveness.



THE RISKS OF DEAD RECKONING

Watson, Felicia

D. X. Varos (236 pp.)

\$18.95 paper | \$4.99 e-book

Mar. 16, 2021

978-1-941072-89-9

A starship’s crew responds to a curious distress signal coming from unknown space in this third installment of an SF series.

Lt. Naiche Decker of the *Lovelace* is used to serving on the same starship as her father, but now her boyfriend, Lt. Cmdr. Talako Jacoway, is aboard as well. There are plenty of upsides to having Tal around, but it’s also led Decker to think seriously about the sort of future she wants after her service in the Uniterae Defense Corps ends. Before she has time to come to any decisions, the *Lovelace* receives a very peculiar distress call from the generational starship *Valiant*. What’s so strange? The entire crew of the *Valiant* is known to have perished in an accident 200 years earlier, for one. For another, the technology

transmitting the call is far beyond anything humans are aware of. For a third, the call doesn’t appear to have been meant for human ears. “Well, that does pose a question, Captain,” voices one of the ship’s officers. “Do we make the *prudent* move of heading directly home...or go chasing after this...ghost?” Wary of a trap but excited by the opportunity to make contact with a new alien species, the captain and crew of the *Lovelace* proceed to the source of the transmission. They head to the previously unknown moon of Tolu, where they find, among other things, the survivors and descendants of the *Valiant* crew—very out of touch with the situation in the rest of the galaxy—and a species of ship-sized, acid-spewing birds. The stranded humans share the moon with several groups of unfriendly aliens, but the real mystery is the so-called Lignatians: an advanced species that has provided the survivors of the *Valiant* with its technology. The fate of those survivors—and now the *Lovelace* crew—may rest in Lignatian hands.

Watson’s prose is filled with vivid worldbuilding details while still managing to feel urgent and punchy: “Decker nearly started to laugh, on the edge of hysteria, when at that moment, Lindstrom attempted to hail them. She ignored her comm-link and put a protective hand on Con’s unconscious body. Naiche used her most menacing tone to warn, ‘I am taking my friend to our ship. If you try to stop me—I will kill you all. I swear I will.’” Though the book is preceded by two others, the story is self-contained enough for those new to the series to hit the ground running. Decker is a matter-of-fact protagonist: An adrenaline junky, she’s easily bored, quick to jump into action, and loyal to her friends. The crew of the *Lovelace* is large and filled with colorful, complementary personalities, including a dog, Corpsman Kayatennae, whose barks sometimes scare away alien beasts. The tale is thoroughly in the tradition of Star Trek, both in its tone and its value, and fans of that franchise will enjoy Watson’s Roddenberrian world. Despite the premise, the novel never gets too dark or too mysterious—to the disappointment, perhaps, of some readers—but the plot is propulsive and well paced. The result is pure space opera, nothing more or less.

A richly imagined and immersive starship tale.



THE ZEE FILES

Wells, Tina with Smith, Stephanie

Illus. by Jamison, Veronica Miller

West Margin Press (167 pp.)

When her family moves to London, an American teen adjusts to a new school in this middle-grade novel.

Previously, 12-year-old Mackenzie Blue Carmichael, called Zee, detailed her seventh grade escapades in the five-volume Mackenzie Blue series. Now a year older and in the eighth grade, the red-haired, blue-eyed, olive-skinned Zee faces a major life change because her father’s job is taking the family to London from Los Angeles. Besides leaving behind sunny skies for London fog, Zee must say goodbye to Chloe Lawrence-Johnson, her best friend from

Brookdale Academy. Another big change is that Zee will be attending a boarding school, The Hollows Creative Arts Academy, in the Cotswolds. That's a bit intimidating, but the school has some huge advantages, especially its focus on the arts. She can concentrate on her singing and songwriting while studying academic subjects. Plus, her Brookdale friend Ally Stern now lives in Paris, just two hours away. Despite her anxieties, Zee makes several friends quickly. Unexpectedly, she is taken into the charmed circle of Izzy Matthews, a popular YouTuber, and hits it off with the school's hottest ninth grade boy, the posh Archibald "Archie" Saint John the Fourth, a fellow songwriter. But hurdles remain, such as staying in touch with Chloe across time zones. Ally, too, has been mysteriously distant, canceling a planned Paris rendezvous for unclear reasons. Wells (now writing with Smith) continues the Mackenzie Blue series under a new umbrella title. Transplanting Zee to England allows for a fresh array of challenges and adventures, and American readers will likely enjoy learning about cultural differences with Britain. (Some references are off target; for example, the name St. John isn't spelled "Saint John.") Zee has a lively voice that makes her sound like a friend any teen would like to have, although few readers will be able to relate to the characters' wealthy lives. Teens own expensive, high-status items like Alexander McQueen sneakers, and their school is so far out of reach for most that it might as well be Hogwarts. These elements are certainly entertaining as an aspirational fantasy, though Zee's

troubles seem lightweight indeed among so much privilege. The fast-paced plot ends rather abruptly just as it feels as if Zee's story is really getting started; the tale continues in Book 2. Jamison supplies monochrome illustrations that deftly convey the teens' expressive emotions.

An enviable hero and appealing wish fulfillment that's spiced with teen-friendship drama.



SEMIOTIC LOVE [STORIES]

Whalen, Brian Phillip

Awst Press (128 pp.)

\$18.00 paper | Mar. 2, 2021

978-0-9971938-9-3



Whalen's debut collection spotlights everyday American people who've lost family, love, and meaning.

In the opening story, "The Father Bell," the narrator recalls his beloved late father lounging in a hammock. His dad swinging like a bell creates a lasting image. These tales teem with loss: A sister succumbs to drug addiction; a relationship withers. Tragedies and regrets haunt these characters. In "Dog," a man leaves his pet at a no-kill shelter but cannot forget the dog's howls. This same narrator returns in a later story, and his decision torments him. The 23 stories are concise, but each creates an impact. "Men," for example, comprises a batch of lively single-sentence accounts of seemingly random males: "Kirk left home after college, married a circus acrobat, enrolled in divinity school, and has dreams of one day starting a 'church for misfits' back in Buffalo." The author often finds something notable about the ordinary. In "Broadcast," a New York homeless man unknowingly serenades the narrator. In "Saudade," memories of a sister who died include her conspiracy theory that members of a boy band are actually robots. The humor is subtle, save one profound tale of a father's dinner-table flatulence. The title (and longest) story best exemplifies this book's strongest theme—painful backstories. "We broke up," the story begins. "People saw it coming." Apparently so did the couple: In alternating narrative perspectives, they lament their many differences. But in the end, it's clear they tried to understand one another and, perhaps, never stopped trying. They're just two of this collection's remarkable characters whose ostensibly conventional lives are nothing short of fascinating.

Alluring, enlightening, and unforgettable stories.

This Issue's Contributors



ADULT

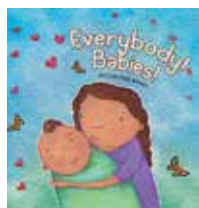
Colleen Abel • Stephanie Anderson • Poornima Apte • Mark Athitakis • Diego Báez • Colette Bancroft • Kevin Blankinship • Amy Boaz • Catherine Cardno • Tobias Carroll • Lee E. Cart • K.W. Colyard • Miranda Cooper • Dave DeChristopher • Kathleen Devereaux • Melanie Dragger • Elspeth Drayton • Lisa Elliott • Roberto Friedman • Glenn Gamboa • Janice Harayda • Natalia Holtzman • Jessica Jernigan • Jayashree Kamblé • Damini Kulkarni • Carly Lane • Tom Lavoie • Judith Leitch • Peter Lewis • Kirk MacLeod • Zoe McLaughlin • Gregory McNamee • Sarah Morgan • Jennifer Nabers • Liza Nelson • Mike Newirth • Mike Oppenheim • Sarah Parker-Lee • Jim Piechota • Steve Potter • Carolyn Quimby • Lloyd Sachs • Bob Sanchez • Richard Santos • Gene Seymour • Linda Simon • Wendy Smith • Margot E. Spangenberg • Mathangi Subramanian • Tom Swift • Chris Vognar • George Weaver • Marion Winik • Johanna Zwirner

CHILDREN'S & TEEN

Rashaa Al-Sasah • Maya Alkateb-Chami • Autumn Allen • Sandie Angulo Chen • Sumaia Awad • Kazia Berkley-Cramer • Elizabeth Bird • Ariel Birdoff • Kimberly Brubaker Bradley • Nastassian Brandon • Christopher A. Brown • Ann Childs • Alec B. Chunn • Amanda Chuong • Julie Danielson • Maya Davis • Brooke Faulkner • Ayn Reyes Frazee • Jenna Friebe • Nivair H. Gabriel • Sally Campbell Galman • Lakshmi Gandhi • Laurel Gardner • Judith Gire • Carol Goldman • Melinda Greenblatt • Ana Grilo • Julie Hubble • Kathleen T. Isaacs • Wesley Jacques • Deborah Kaplan • Megan Dowd Lambert • Kyle Lukoff • Kaia MacLeod • Meredith Madyda • Joan Malewitz • Michelle H. Martin PhD • J. Alejandro Mazariegos • Kirby McCurtis • Jeanne McDermott • Sierra McKenzie • Kathie Meizner • Mary Margaret Mercado • Cristina Mitra • Sabrina Montenegro • R. Moore • Mya Nunnally • Tori Ann Ogawa • Hal Patnott • Deb Paulson • John Edward Peters • Susan Pine • Rebecca Rabinowitz • Kristy Raffensberger • Gloria Repolesk • Amy B. Reyes • Leslie L. Rounds • Stephanie Seales • John W. Shannon • Karyn N. Silverman • Laura Simeon • Mathangi Subramanian • Jennifer Sweeney • Deborah D. Taylor • Jenna Varden • Janani Venkateswaran • Christina Vortia • Yung Hsin • Leslie Stall Widener • Dorcas Wong • Bean Yogi • Jenny Zbrizher

INDIE

Alana Abbott • Marie Anello • Kent Armstrong • Jillian Bietz • Darren Carlaw • Charles Cassidy • Antonio Gonzalez Cerna • Anthony Cooke • Michael Deagler • Stephanie Dobler Cerra • Steve Donoghue • Jacob Edwards • Jackie Friedland • Justin Hickey • Tracy Kelly • Ivan Kenneally • Alexis Lacman • Barbara London • Dale McGarrigle • Justin Mellette • Rhett Morgan • Sarah Rettger • Darlene Ricker • Erica Rivera • Walker Rutter-Bowman • Hal Schriev



EVERYBODY! BABIES!

Williams-Breault, Beth

Tellwell Talent (26 pp.)

\$15.99 | \$9.99 paper | Nov. 24, 2020

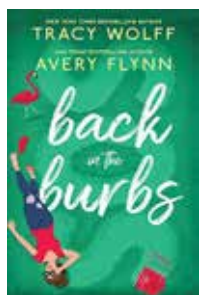
978-0-228-83856-2

978-0-228-83855-5 paper

Diverse families enjoy a day at a park in this picture book.

Visiting a park, a mother and her baby notice the people around them. Mommy points out that all families are unique. For example, some babies are accompanied by two moms, and others are with two dads. The pair also sees that several babies are with one parent or have brothers or sisters (or both) and that some families even include pets. The narrator explains that families have different backgrounds, too. Many speak various languages or hail from other countries. Although “families come in many different colors, shapes, and sizes,” they do have similarities. “A family loves each other!” Featuring simple language and concise sentences, Williams-Breault’s charming tale deftly celebrates diverse family structures. The book emphasizes individuality while underscoring shared traits like love, thoughtfulness, and kindness. The cheerful, uncredited illustrations have a nice hand-drawn quality, with bright colors and textured, painted backdrops. Detailed scenes span entire pages, showing people of all ages, ethnicities, skin tones, and abilities as they partake in activities such as walking pets, cavorting on the playground, feeding birds, and more. A few images emphasize aiding others, including a boy helping a girl tie her shoelaces. Some characters wear Covid-19 masks. The pictures also display whimsical touches, such as swirls and red hearts surrounding a mother as she embraces her baby.

An inclusive and sweet tale for young readers.



BACK IN THE BURBS

Wolff, Tracy & Flynn, Avery

Entangled: Amara (400 pp.)

\$15.99 paper | \$7.99 e-book

Mar. 30, 2021

978-1-68281-569-4

A young woman in the midst of a nasty divorce inherits a dilapidated house and decides to try her luck living in a new town in this novel.

Thirty-five-year-old Mallory Martin Bach has hit rock bottom. As a result of her soon-to-be-ex husband’s adulterous behavior, she’s lost not only her marriage, but also her home and even her job. Making matters worse, Mallory’s favorite aunt, the only family member who really understood her, has just died. The book opens with the reading of the will and the bombshell that Aunt Maggie has bequeathed her large house to Mallory. With few other options, Mallory decides to leave Manhattan and try living in suburban Huckleberry Hills, New Jersey. When she arrives in the neat and tidy neighborhood, she finds her new house is barely habitable.

In addition to the many structural repairs the home requires, every room is filled to the brim with evidence that Maggie suffered from an extreme hoarding obsession. As Mallory begins the onerous process of clearing out the house, she meets the bossy but handsome neighbor across the street, Nick Holloway, whom she finds as enticing as he is infuriating. As Nick begins to prove himself rather helpful, she warms to him. The only problem is that Mallory has already promised herself she will never become reliant on another man. When it feels like Nick is starting to get too close, Mallory has to decide what she really wants out of her new life. Told entirely from Mallory’s perspective, the narrative displays a quirky, conversational tone that is consistent throughout. Full of witty banter, flirtatious glances, and sexy smirks, the interactions between the characters are lively and engaging. Despite the light tone of the prose, the novel deals with weighty topics, including emotionally abusive relationships, mental health, aging relatives, and self-doubt. At the same time, the story also highlights many of the ridiculous aspects of suburban living with humor and sass. From nonsensical housing association rules to the jewelry parties that occupy young mothers, Wolff and Flynn don’t miss an opportunity to poke fun at the burbs. Although the trajectory of the tale is predictable, the journey to its inevitable conclusion is solidly entertaining.

Romantic comedy fans will be delighted by this fun story about relationships and suburban living.



FROM FARMS TO INCUBATORS The Story of Nester the Pester

Wu, Amy

Craven Street Books (230 pp.)

\$24.95 paper | \$19.99 e-book | May 4, 2021

978-1-61-035575-9

A debut agriculture book offers an introduction to women changing the field.

In this volume, a companion to her 2016 documentary, Wu profiles women working in agriculture who are revolutionizing the industry. Twelve women are the subjects of their own chapters, and there are 11 shorter profiles in the book’s final chapter. The author presents women from a variety of sociocultural and educational backgrounds who work in different aspects of the industry, including as farm managers, data scientists, biologists, and software engineers. The women are primarily based in the United States, but Wu also includes several from other countries. The profiles explore the women’s personal and professional backgrounds, the insights that led to their discoveries and innovations, and how they see their roles in the companies they run. Although many of the women are involved in highly specialized research and technical work, the author makes their activities both intriguing and comprehensible to readers with no knowledge of the agriculture sector (Thuy-Le Vuong “developed an extraction method that retains the nutrients from the red-melon fruit while avoiding the use of organic solvents”). Readers who are more interested in the business side of agriculture will also find plenty of noteworthy tidbits, as the profiles examine the

“A fast-paced thriller with superb new and returning characters.”

MANTIS

companies themselves, from finding startup funding and leasing lab space to managing and mentoring. Wu does an excellent job of delivering many different aspects of the agriculture industry and explaining how the women featured in the book fit into the broader context of the field. The text is generally well crafted and engrossing, and even readers who have never before considered how the temperature of a beehive is a representation of its overall health or calculated how many days of fodder are available in a given pasture are likely to be both captivated and informed by it. A wealth of photographs taken by Wu and contributed by the book's subjects give readers a clear picture of who these women are and what they do.

A well-written and engaging look at leaders in agriculture.



A WHISPER CAME

Yocum, Keith

Self (250 pp.)

\$12.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book | Apr. 29, 2021

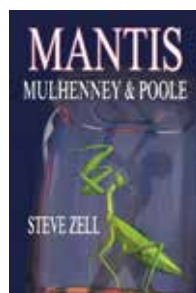
978-0-9978708-8-6

A strange death sets a tourist town on edge in this taut thriller.

A charter captain and his customer discover a body floating near Chatham, Massachusetts. What captures the medical examiner's attention is the dead woman's old-fashioned clothing. Thanks to a *Boston Globe* editor's affinity for Cape Cod articles, reporter Stacie Davis gets assigned the story. She grudgingly heads to Chatham only to discover that authorities have little new information. So she spends her time writing several features about the Cape. One is about a supposedly haunted lighthouse near where the body was found. Trying to avoid a needy ex-boyfriend and to get another story, Stacie meets with handsome Capt. Carl Lane. The reporter convinces him to take her to the

lighthouse at night. After a bizarre evening, the captain goes back to the lighthouse to attempt a phone call and is attacked. In a series of implausible events, he develops amnesia following the attack and can't back up Stacie's version of what happened, so the authorities view Stacie as a suspect—an overeager reporter attempting to fabricate an exciting story. She must unearth the connection, if there is one, between the Jane Doe case and the attack on Carl before she gets charged for the attack herself. In his latest thriller, Yocum has created a spirited protagonist for a potential new series. She is too curious for her own good and knows how to manipulate people to get results. Yocum, who himself worked at the *Boston Globe*, uses that experience to bring the newspaper industry to life for the reader. Yocum is also a Chatham resident and turns that seafaring town into a character as well, with its history and citizens front and center. The novel effectively juggles various perspectives—those of the lead, the locals, and law enforcement—giving the reader different takes on the mystery.

An incisive, suspenseful series launch with a promising sleuth.



MANTIS

Mulhenney & Poole

Zell, Steve

Tales From Zell (207 pp.)

\$30.00 | \$14.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book

Mar. 10, 2021

978-1-73674-301-0

978-0-9847468-9-7 paper

An investigative reporter and a forensic pathologist work together in this 1960s-set thriller.

A torso washes ashore on a California beach. Medical examiner Sara Poole connects this homicide with another recent murder. The victims, both male, died during sex and are covered in bites (evoking the title). Just weeks ago, Sara investigated a string of murders in Arizona, where she met reporter Deanne Mulhenney. The women, whose friendship might morph into romance, reunite to track the killer. The murders continue, and the clues get stranger. Sara believes the bites are human but the teeth aren't real (dentures, perhaps). Meanwhile, a shocking headlining story—Robert F. Kennedy's assassination—sidetracks Deanne, although she helps Sara as much as she can. The narrative gives readers an early introduction to Alena, who's committing the murders while working for a crime family that may turn on her, worried that she's "freelancing." Regardless, Alena targets Deanne and Sara once Deanne's articles link the killer's various homicides. Zell's energetic sequel to *True Creature* (2019) bounces among perspectives. Zell ably develops the heroes' delightfully complicated relationship; there's definitely love but not necessarily commitment. Alena, however, is this book's most indelible character. A WWII experiment has twisted her family lineage, and she struggles with a condition that makes her both sympathetic and terrifying. She's even involved in a too-brief subplot—dissension among the villains—that could fill a novel on its own. Alena's murders are, of course,

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KIRKUS REVIEWS (ISSN 1948-7428)

is published semimonthly by Kirkus Media LLC,

2600 Via Fortuna, Suite 130, Austin, TX 78746.

Subscription prices are:

Digital & Print Subscription (U.S.) - 12 Months (\$199.00)

Digital & Print Subscription (International) - 12 Months (\$229.00)

Digital Only Subscription - 12 Months (\$169.00)

Single copy: \$25.00.

All other rates on request.

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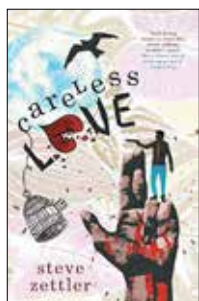
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violent and, unsurprisingly, sometimes graphic. Her very presence generates suspense, particularly in the final act, when it's clear she's after Sara and/or Deanne.

A fast-paced thriller with superb new and returning characters.



CARELESS LOVE

Zettler, Steve

Vine Leaves Press (274 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book

Mar. 10, 2021

978-1-92-596558-2

In this literary novel, a man seeks to uncover the vacation romance that resulted in his birth.

In 1979, Grace Rolston flies to Hawaii not long after her Hollywood director husband asked her for a divorce. Grace was carrying on a not-so-secret affair, to be sure, but Nick Rolston is no easy man to live with. She's planning to do a bit of soul-searching on Oahu, but she packs a .38 revolver in her suitcase just in case the trip doesn't go as planned. Alone on the veranda of the Picking Club, she asks a brooding man for a cigarette. Well, the first thing she asks him is actually "What happened to your finger?" Peter Lee Corbet is missing a finger. He says it's a long story. Everything with Lee is a long story. He doesn't have a cigarette, but he leads Grace on an adventure to bum one from the kitchen staff, and so begins a whirlwind romance between two damaged people far from home. Years later, shortly before her death, Grace tells her adult child that he is not, in fact, Nick's son as he's always assumed. That son, who narrates the novel, resolves to discover the truth of what happened in Hawaii: How Grace and Lee came together and why he has never heard of the man until now. Zettler's prose is razor-sharp, especially the dialogue: "Lee had never disclosed any specifics about the day he lost his finger. No one ever seemed to get the details.... 'It's depressing as hell and it's never going to bring Cokely or Hanratty back to their families. Not in a million years. So what is the goddamned point?' " The author excels at hinting at his characters' backstories in a way that provides them with uncommon depth and whets readers' appetites to learn more. The audience can more or less guess where things are going, but the journey is surprising and worthwhile. For a book with a premise straight out of an Elvis Presley song, it packs an unexpected emotional punch.

A powerful tale of the many ways love can go wrong.

FULLY BOOKED

Recent highlights from Kirkus' weekly books podcast

BY MEGAN LABRISE

Episode 203: Paisley Rekdal, author of *Appropriate: A Provocation* (W.W. Norton), on her decision to write a book about cultural appropriation:

"An editor from Norton reached out and said, 'Would you want to write a book about this?' And I said, 'No! Not at all. That sounds like a total social disaster.' But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that as a teacher myself—and I've been teaching for over 25 years—this is a conversation that keeps coming up over and over and over, in every creative writing classroom I've ever taught and in so many of the literature classes I've taught: What are the lines when we're talking about appropriation? What's the difference between adaptation and appropriation? What's the difference between something that's a racist portrayal and something that we might accept as a nonracist or an anti-racist portrayal? Is it OK to write outside your boundaries?"



Austen Diamond

Episode 212: Hanif Abdurraqib, author of *A Little Devil in America: Notes in Praise of Black Performance* (Random House), on what awakens his interest as a cultural critic:

"I'm always looking for the small nuances in the performance, right? I'm big on audience watching and audience reactions. I'm really in love with the reality of people witnessing something for the first time that they never thought they'd see, something spectacular. I enjoy being a party to the spectacular, you know? One of my favorite live performances is *Little Richard Live in Paris*....I always tell people watch it, because it's one of the great live performances in music history, I think.

And a part of what makes it so good is that you get these great shots of the audience, watching Little Richard in awe, and realizing that they're seeing something that they never imagined they'd be able to see."



Megan Leigh Barnard

Episode 211: Lauren Hough, author of *Leaving Isn't the Hardest Thing* (Vintage), on how her life changed after the publication of her viral essay "I Was a Cable Guy. I Saw the Worst of America":

"Kind of everything changed and nothing changed. I was still working at the bar, but I was talking to editors and producers, and—'Hey, hold on, dude, can I see your ID?' And people were coming in to talk to me, which was always kind of a hostage situation. Because I'm at work, so I can't leave, and there are [fans] standing in front of me telling me their life stories. It was a little bit bizarre, to say the least. But yeah, I mean, nothing else changed. I was still failing out of creative writing and still working at a bar for a long time. Until I sold the book and finally was able to quit that, so I had time to write it."



Megan Leigh Barnard

Editor at large Megan Labrise is the host of the Fully Booked podcast. Find new episodes every Tuesday on Apple Podcasts and Spotify or at kirkusreviews.com/podcast.

APPRECIATIONS | Gregory McNamee

Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* at 20



Beowulf Sheehan

THE GODS OF THE GREEK pantheon jealously intervened in human affairs. They were jealous, period. They took sides in human wars, raped and killed, imposed outsize penalties on their foes, lured mortals into sin, and then merily butchered them. Yet, somehow, Greeks built temples to those gods—at least until the next batch of gods came along.

The premise of Neil Gaiman's beguiling novel *American Gods*, published 20 years ago this month, runs along just those lines. Like all Americans, the gods are immigrants. Unlike Americans, the gods have very long memories. Says their leader, the Norse god Odin, "We have, let us face it and admit it, little influence." He adds, "Old gods, here in this new land without gods."

But there are gods here, new ones, to whom we now build temples: Technology, Finance, Pro Sports, Pop Culture. And those gods are coming after the man whom Gaiman bestows with the thinly disguised name Mr. Wednesday.

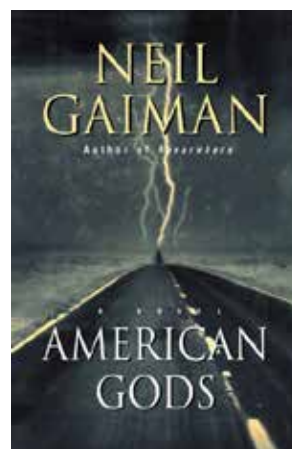
Mr. Wednesday figures in the story early on, for he knows and controls all. He is waiting for a sturdy but internally wounded fellow named Shadow, who,

thanks to good behavior, has been sprung from prison early. Shadow has been counting down the days until he can see his wife, Laura, but just as he is packing his prison duffel, she dies in a car crash.

Or does she? A grieving Shadow soon finds out even as Gaiman introduces us, one by one, to aggrieved gods from all over the world. There's Mr. Wednesday's associate Mr. Nancy, the West African spider god. There's Bilqis, the avatar of the biblical Queen of Sheba. There are gods from ancient Egypt, Native American deities, the Black god of the ancient Slavs, a leprechaun who's a whiz at deadly magic. All of them, as Mr. Wednesday says, "exist in the cracks at the edges of society." And from there, they prey on humans, rape and kill, bewitch and bamboozle even as Odin plans a long con on gods and mortals alike.

There's not enough room, even on so vast a continent as America, to accommodate so many jealous gods from so many eras. Gaiman's novel builds, steadily and assuredly, from skirmish to Götterdämmerung, with occasional visits from a spectral Laura and plenty of grotesque violence. One minute readers of *American Gods* find themselves in a seedy roadside tavern, the next in an otherworldly labyrinth. And though Gaiman writes with great good humor, at every turn very bad things lie in wait for us.

The Greek pantheon, writes Roberto Calasso in *Literature and the Gods*, awaits its restoration: All we have to do is look into the ancient texts, into *The Odyssey* and *The Bacchae*, believe in those gods, and they'll be back. Shadow, after having been subjected to the tortures of the damned as only the Norse can deliver them, reckons that he doesn't belong in Valhalla because he didn't believe in the gods. Answers the Egyptian god Thoth, "It doesn't matter that you didn't believe in us.... We believed in you." All that remains is to choose your gods wisely, Gaiman's novel instructs—and hope they'll leave you alone.



Gregory McNamee is a contributing editor.

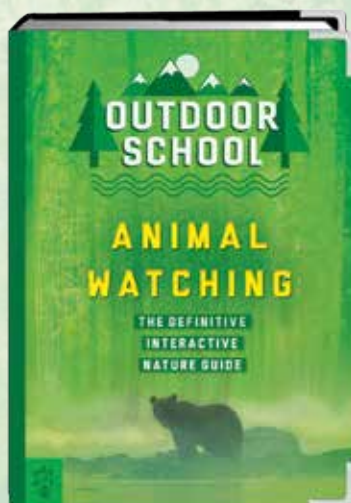
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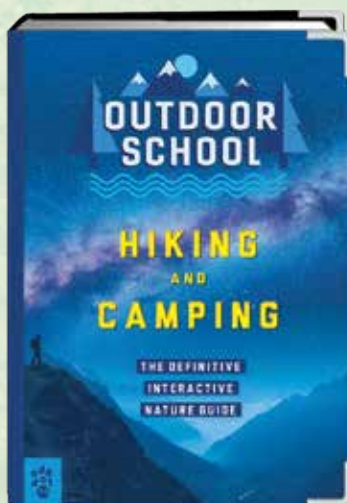
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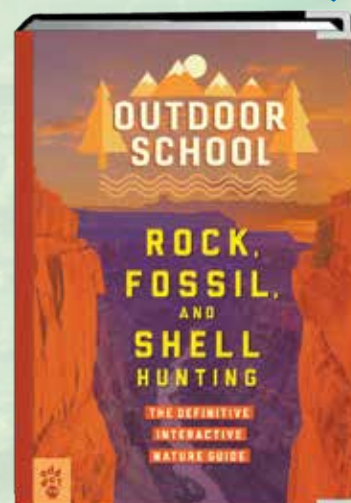
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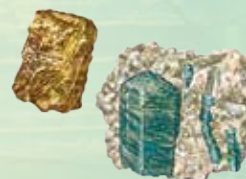
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—Kirkus Reviews



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—Kirkus Reviews



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