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KIRKUS

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REVIEWS

THE BEST BOOKS OF

2021

**SPECIAL
ISSUE**

Indie

The Best 100 Indie Books of the Year
+ Our Full Dec. 15 Issue

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK | Tom Beer

PODCASTS FOR BOOK LOVERS



John Parisi/Reviews

ONE OF THE FEW silver linings of the past 21 months, for me, was the time and opportunity to explore the wealth of literary podcasts out there. At the end of last year, I wrote about some of the podcasts I discovered while looking for distraction during the lockdowns of 2020. This year I added even more to my rotation, making me a full-fledged podcast addict who listens while cooking, doing dishes, or folding laundry—i.e., any time I can't be reading an actual book. Here are some of my 2021 discoveries.

Backlisted: Writer Michele Filgate turned me on to this long-running favorite from the U.K., presented by John Mitchinson and Andy Miller. Each episode—they're up to No. 150—is dedicated to a backlist title that the hosts and their guests discuss with humor, warmth, and insight. Some favorite episodes of the year covered Leonard Gardner's 1969 novel about a down-and-out boxer, *Fat City* (Episode 144), Dorothy B. Hughes' moody 1947 noir, *In a Lonely Place* (Episode 142), and Penelope Mortimer's autobiographical 1958 novel, *Daddy's Gone A-Hunting* (Episode 134).

Once Upon a Time...at Bennington College: Season 2 of the podcast from *Vanity Fair* contributing editor and author Lili Anolik (*Hollywood's Eve*) is an irresistibly gossipy look at the Bennington College Class of 1986, which included future literary superstars Bret Easton Ellis (*Less Than Zero*), Donna Tartt (*The Secret History*), and Jonathan Lethem (*The Fortress of Solitude*). Anolik analyzes the inspiration these writers found in the creative whirligig of the small Vermont college, featuring in-depth interviews with Ellis, Lethem, and many of their classmates. Noticeably absent: the reclusive Tartt, whose lawyers have fired off warning letters to the podcast's creators, according to the *New York Post*. Listen while you can.



Jill Andersen/Getty Images

Mr. Difficult: Jonathan Franzen devotees—and haters, too—will delight in this in-depth exploration of the novelist's work, with observations on his thorny public persona (hence that title), his nonfiction, and even the never-aired HBO pilot of a Noah Baumbach series that aimed to adapt Franzen's 2001 breakthrough novel, *The Corrections*. Congenially hosted by Alex Shephard, a staff writer at *The New Republic*, author and *Publisher's Lunch* reporter Erin Somers, and *Full Stop* editor Eric Jett, it's exactly the brainy book club you need to prep for reading the author's recently released sixth novel, *Crossroads*.



Leonardo Candamo/Getty Images

Poured Over: The Barnes & Noble podcast, hosted by editorial director Miwa Messer, is a no-frills affair, featuring straight-up one-on-one interviews with a wide range of contemporary authors such as Louise Erdrich (*The Sentence*), Kal Penn (*You Can't Be Serious*), Richard Powers (*Bewilderment*), and Helen Macdonald (*Vesper Flights*). But oh, what interviews! Messer, a seasoned industry veteran, has seemingly read everything, and these intelligent, lively conversations are real treasures. She gets the very best out of her guests.

Across the Pond: This scrappy little startup launched in March and quickly became one of my must-listens. It's hosted by Lori Feathers, owner of Interabang Books in Dallas (and a former colleague of mine on the board of the National Book Critics), and Sam Jordison, the U.K. publisher of Galley Beggar Press. Each episode features an author interview—their guests have included Sarah Hall (*Burntcoat*), Caleb Azumah Nelson (*Open Water*), and Doireann Ní Ghríofa (*A Ghost in the Throat*)—but the real pleasure is the free-wheeling chat about book news from the U.S. and the U.K. that opens every episode. After listening to the podcast's 19 episodes, Sam and Lori will feel like old friends.

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KIRKUS REVIEWS

Chairman
HERBERT SIMON

President & Publisher
MARC WINKELMAN



Chief Executive Officer
MEG LABORDE KUEHN
mkuebn@kirkus.com

Editor-in-Chief
TOM BEER
tbeer@kirkus.com

Vice President of Marketing
SARAH KALINA
skalina@kirkus.com

Vice President of Kirkus Indie
KAREN SCHECHNER
kschechner@kirkus.com

Managing/Nonfiction Editor
ERIC LIEBETRAU
eliebetrau@kirkus.com

Fiction Editor
LAURIE MUCHNICK
lmuchnick@kirkus.com

Young Readers' Editor
LAURA SIMON
lsimon@kirkus.com

Young Readers' Editor
SUMMER EDWARD
sedward@kirkus.com

Editor at Large
MEGAN LABRISE
mlabrise@kirkus.com

Senior Indie Editor
DAVID RAPP
drapp@kirkus.com

Indie Editor
MYRA FORSBERG
mforsberg@kirkus.com

Editorial Assistant of Indie
AMELIA WILLIAMS
awilliams@kirkus.com

Editorial Assistant
NINA PALATTELLA
npalattella@kirkus.com

Mysteries Editor
THOMAS LEITCH
Contributing Editor
GREGORY McNAMEE

Copy Editor
BETSY JUDDKINS

Designer
ALEX HEAD

Kirkus Editorial Senior
Production Editor
ROBIN O'DELL
rodell@kirkus.com

Kirkus Editorial Senior
Production Editor
MARINNA CASTALLEJA
mcastalleja@kirkus.com

Website and Software Developer
PERCY PEREZ
pperez@kirkus.com

Advertising Sales Manager
TATIANA ARNOLD
tarnold@kirkus.com

Advertising Associate
AMY BAIRD
abaird@kirkus.com

Graphic Designer
KYLA NOVAK
knovak@kirkus.com

Administrative Coordinator
KAY RILEY
kriley@kirkus.com

Cover design by
Kyla Novak

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



In Riley Masters' geopolitical thriller, a pair of "financial detectives" investigates a corporate shark involved in minerals—and maybe murder. Read the review on p. 189.

OUR FAVORITE BOOK NEWS OF 2021

By Michael Schaub

REMEMBER LAST YEAR, when you thought, *Well, at least 2020 is the weirdest year I'm ever going to live through?* And then 2021 burst in with big “hold my beer” energy and hoisted its freak flag to the heavens? Good times! (Not really.) There’s no doubt that this has been the weirdest year since...the last one, and that oddness was definitely apparent in the book world. Here are 10 of the most bizarre stories from the literature and publishing world this year.

Jan. 21: If you appreciate your local librarians (and you should), there’s nothing wrong with bringing them, say, coffee and doughnuts as a thoughtful gift. Leaving baked potatoes on the library’s front lawn, however, will likely only result in confusion. That was the case with the staff of a public library in Wayland, Massachusetts, who were thrown for a loop when they discovered the cooked tubers in front of their workplace. Was it an Ore-Ida advertising campaign gone wrong? Some bored employees at a nearby steakhouse testing out a homemade trebuchet? Sadly, we may never know.



Korhey/Getty Images

Feb. 9: Library workers in Pittsburgh, meanwhile, *wished* someone left them baked potatoes. Any starchy food would be better than what Carnegie Mellon University found secreted in a copy of Brenda Shaughnessy’s poetry collection *The Octopus Museum*: a dead snake in a plastic bag, evidently used as an ad hoc bookmark. The college library system tweeted, “Maybe it was a hisstory book? (please don’t put snakes in books),” which is honestly a much chillier response than anyone could have expected.

Feb. 26: Former House Speaker John Boehner seems to have left the GOP for the DGAF. (Look it up on Acronym Finder.) The Ohio Republican was recording the audiobook version of his memoir, *On the House*, when he suddenly added an ad-libbed remark: “Oh, and Ted Cruz, go fuck yourself.” On Twitter, Boehner offered up an explanation for his



Nicola Gell/Getty Images for SXSU

John Boehner

diss on the Texas senator, writing, “Poured myself a glass of something nice to read my audiobook. You can blame the wine for the expletives.” In vino veritas, indeed.

March 17: Joyce Carol Oates seems to have two main hobbies: publishing 27 books a year and setting fire to Twitter with gleeful abandon. Oates shared her thoughts on autofiction—fiction that’s heavily autobiographical—on the social media platform, writing, “strange to have come of age reading great novels of ambition, substance, & imagination (Dostoyevsky, Woolf, Joyce, Faulkner) & now find yourself praised & acclaimed for wan little husks of ‘auto fiction’ with space between paragraphs to make the book seem longer....” Oates’ somewhat-inscrutable tweet mystified Twitter users, but it landed slightly better than the one she shared that featured a picture of her injured foot. (For the love of all that is holy, do not Google it.)



Nicola Gell/Getty Images for SXSU

Joyce Carol Oates

May 17: Not content to let Oates get all the Twitter attention, legendary author Cynthia Ozick raised eyebrows on social media with a response to Lionel Shriver’s mixed review of her new novel in the *New York Times Book Review*. Ozick’s letter to the editor took the form of verse:



Ulf Andersen/Getty Images

Cynthia Ozick

*Lionel Shriver,
no deep-diver:
depth an indictment,
longevity an excitement —
Oh look, the writer’s so old!
(Reviewer? A mere sixty-four.)*

“Cynthia Ozick having no fucks to give, also rhyming ‘Lionel Shriver’ with ‘no deep-diver,’ is all I want any of us to talk about today,” wrote novelist Garth Greenwell. His wish was granted.

May 24: Who can forget the moment in *The Grapes of Wrath* when Tom Joad says, “Wherever you can



Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis via Getty Images

John Steinbeck

look—wherever there’s a fight, so hungry people can eat, I’ll be AAAAAUUUGH!” as he gets torn limb from limb by a vicious wolf-man? OK, that didn’t happen. But it could have: It turns out that John Steinbeck wrote a werewolf-themed novel called *Murder at Full Moon* that never saw the

light of day. Academics have been urging Steinbeck’s estate to release the manuscript, which currently lives at the University of Texas’ Harry Ransom Center, but so far, no dice. So if you’re looking to immerse yourself in an American classic featuring a lycanthrope, you’re just going to have to settle for *Teen Wolf Too*.

June 7: There are authors who privately complain about the jacket copy on their books, and then there’s Jeanette Winterson. The British novelist was not a fan of “the cosy little domestic blurbs on my new covers,” so she handled it in the most extra way possible: by tweeting a picture of them being burned in a fire. After Twitter users reacted with shock and horror, Winterson explained, “Re the Burning of the Books, I would just add that I have never burned anyone else’s books; not even awful ones sent in the post. And to those worried about my contribution to global warming, I have solar panels, air source heating, I live in a wood, and cycle to the Co-op!” So where’s her award, Greenpeace?



David Levenson/Getty Images

Jeanette Winterson

Aug. 12: What in the evening redness in the west was Cormac McCarthy doing on Twitter? The 88-year-old novelist seems like the kind of guy who writes on a diesel-powered typewriter while drinking black coffee from a cowboy tin cup. McCarthy didn’t actually have an account, of course, but a California lawyer named Daniel Watts fooled Twitter, which mistakenly verified his popular parody account of the *All the Pretty Horses* author. Twitter later suspended the account, which displeased Watts, who at the time also happened to be

running for California governor in the state’s recall election. McCarthy still hasn’t joined the no country for old men that is Twitter, and Watts lost his bid for governor after voters decided to keep incumbent Gavin Newsom in office. (We bet Watts’ press conferences would’ve been pretty hilarious, though.)

Oct. 22: Librarians in Idaho would like you to know that while you’re welcome to return books and DVDs in their after-hours return box, they would prefer you not use it to deposit rats. Five pet rodents were left in a Coeur d’Alene book box and took the opportunity to relieve themselves on library materials that were already there; this, understandably, annoyed library workers who had likely not been trained on how to shelve adorable little mammals. The story has a happy ending: The rats were taken in by a local Humane Society and hopefully are in new homes right now, far from the threat of getting beamed by a copy of *Infinite Jest*.

Nov. 5: Do you want to stand out this holiday season? Then don’t give your loved ones the same old boringly titled books. Instead, reach for a copy of *Is Superman Circumcised?* or *Miss, I Don’t Give a Shit*, two of the finalists for this year’s *The Bookseller/Diagram Prize* for the Oddest Book Title of the Year prize. Just imagine the look on your grandma’s face when she opens her brand-new copy of *Handbook of Research on Health and Environmental Benefits of Camel Products*. (Be sure to include a bookplate, though, because everyone is going to want to borrow it.) These titles and more are available wherever gifts for complete weirdos are sold.

Michael Schaub is a Texas-based journalist and regular contributor to NPR.

OUR FAVORITE PODCAST EPISODES OF 2021

By Megan Labrise

2021 WAS A YEAR OF FIRSTS for the *Fully Booked* podcast: In March, we welcomed a Nobel laureate. In May, a picture-book author. A June episode celebrated a paperback launch (as opposed to hardcover). And in August, a poet discussed an actual poetry collection (as opposed to fiction/nonfiction). Long story short, you can teach an old podcast new tricks—and the result was a banner year for *Fully Booked*. If you haven't had a chance to listen in yet, here are ten great episodes to get you started:



Nicola Gell/Getty Images for SXSW

George Saunders

George Saunders (Episode 198): What better way to kick off another strange and delightful year in podcasting than in conversation with George Saunders? In January, we spoke about *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain: In Which Four Russians Give a Master Class on Writing, Reading, and Life* (Random House, Jan. 12), a guided tour of seven stories by Chekhov,

Gogol, Tolstoy, and Turgenev with the beloved author and longtime professor.

Kazuo Ishiguro (Episode 204): As soon as we stopped rolling tape, this interview shot straight into the pantheon of my personal favorites. In March, Ishiguro and I discussed his latest novel, *Klara and the Sun* (Knopf, March 2), a provocative look at a disturbing near future that marked a return to dystopian



Andrew Testa

Kazuo Ishiguro

ground for the Nobel laureate. He was a lovely, down-to-earth conversation partner. The chat went many exciting and unexpected places, including a meditation on “The Devil Went Down to Georgia.”

Melissa Febos (Episode 209): It was a pleasure to co-host



Beowulf Sheehan

Melissa Febos

Fully Booked with my colleague Johanna Zwirner for the first time in March, when we interviewed Melissa Febos, one of my favorite lyric essayists. We chatted about metaphor and imagery in her stunning collection *Girlhood* (Bloomsbury, March 30) along with such topics as enthusiastic consent, cuddle parties, and writing as a restorative process.



Kelly Downs Photography

Traci Sorrell

Traci Sorrell (Episode 215): Not a week goes by that I don't think of Sorrell's *We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know* (Charlesbridge, April 20), a gorgeous, informative picture book that makes Native history, law, and policy utterly compelling. I enjoyed learning more about why she chose to structure the book as a

series of student presentations on Native history, her professional background in federal Indian law and policy, and her working relationship with illustrator Frané Lessac.

Marie-Helene Bertino (Episode 222): I loved *Parakeet* so damn much when I read it at the end of 2020, it made me miserable we'd missed the opportunity to feature author Bertino on its pub date. And so the unspoken rule of only interviewing authors for a hardcover release (or paperback original) was broken. In a



Sioux Nessi

Marie-Helene Bertino

delightful conversation, we discussed Bertino's relationship to *Parakeet* one year later, weddings in literature, and the wily word *frisson*.

Anuk Arudpragasam (Episode 223): In the span of a week, we went from one of my favorite novels of 2020 to one of my favorite novels of 2021: Arudpragasam's



Ravin De Silva

Anuk Arudpragasam

A Passage North (Hogarth, July 13). A companion to his critically acclaimed 2016 debut, *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, *A Passage North* poignantly contends with the violence of the Sri Lankan civil war from a spatial and temporal remove. We talked about the proximity of both narratives to the violence of the conflict in Sri Lanka, philosophy, and much more.

Leigh Patel (Episode 226): Academic and activist Patel joined me in late July to discuss *No Study Without Struggle: Confronting Settler Colonialism in Higher Education* (Basic Books, July 20), and I have carried the joy of this conversation forward ever since. The concerns of Patel's bold work are essential topics: settler colonialism, its relation to higher education, how education activism works, and the role of love in transforming systems of oppression.



University of California, Riverside

Leigh Patel

Kaveh Akbar (Episode 228):

In August, Akbar told us all his thoughts on God in the poems of *Pilgrim Bell* (Graywolf, Aug. 3), a stunning, visceral poetry collection contending with embodiment, legibility, profanity, and praise. This marked the first time we talked pure poetry on the podcast. It was also the first—and last—time I sang a Dishwalla



Paige Lewis

Kaveh Akbar

song on tape. Despite this, it was one of our most popular episodes of the summer.

S.A. Cosby/The Crime Episode (Episode 231): August went out with a bang and a book that blew my hair all the way back: *Razorblade Tears* (Flatiron Books, July 6) was unlike any novel I'd ever read, and author Cosby is a podcast guest nonpareil. We had a blast discussing the highest compliment an author can



Sam Sauter Photography

S.A. Cosby

receive, Southern colloquialisms, how working in the funeral industry informs his fiction, writing LGBTQ+ characters with care and nuance, and how friend and fellow crime writer P.J. Vernon helped him get it right.

Mary Roach (Episode 233):

Mary Roach was one of the very first authors I interviewed for *Kirkus Reviews*, way back in 2013, and I'd been dying for another chance to chat ever since. Our September discussion of *Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law* (Norton, Sept. 14) was, as anticipated, an absolute hoot. We started with whether she prefers her four-letter books (*Bonk*, *Gulp*, *Fuzz*) to her five-letter books (*Stiff*, *Spook*, *Grunt*) (answer: "I don't care") and ended with a careful consideration of what we'd name our heavy metal band (answer: Danger Tree). It's 30 minutes of feral fun.



Jan Siska

Mary Roach

Editor at large Megan Labrise hosts the Fully Booked podcast.

OUR FAVORITE VIDEO INTERVIEWS OF 2021

By Johanna Zwirner

THIS YEAR HAS SEEN Kirkus expand its video series to include authors of fiction, nonfiction, children's, and young adult books, a mix that resulted in engaging conversations with the authors of wide-ranging stories. From children's book author/illustrators to investigative journalists, veteran thriller masters to the authors of debut short story collections, we've loved every minute of our conversations with this fabulous roster of writers. Here's a sampling of some of our favorites; for the complete list, visit the series on our website.



Nicole Mendez/In Photography

Zakiya Dalila Harris

Zakiya Dalila Harris on *The Other Black Girl* (Atria): In Harris' debut novel, editorial assistant Nella works at a predominantly White publishing house when a new assistant, Hazel, joins the team. At first an ally, Hazel quickly takes on the more complicated roles of competitor and saboteur in Harris' gripping thriller that is also an examination of systemic racism. Harris spoke with us not

long after the book was selected for the *Good Morning America* book club.

Venita Blackburn on *How To Wrestle a Girl* (MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux): Blackburn's second collection experiments with the formal confines of the short story, as she first envisioned these stories as a novel in flash form. Many of the stories here are linked to a nonbinary protagonist and their family, covering such subjects as grief, queerness, sexism, and the strangeness of childhood. Blackburn explained the role that humor plays in her writing and her need to laugh at the absurdities of the world.



Virginia Barnes

Venita Blackburn

Kristen Arnett on *With Teeth* (Riverhead): Arnett's sharp-tongued narrator, Sammie, is isolated as a queer parent in Florida, and from the novel's

first scene, Sammie struggles with her difficult, often silent son as her relationship with her partner devolves. In our conversation, Arnett, a Florida native, advocates the importance of listening and community building in queer spaces and explains why she favors the dynamic humor and tragedy of her characters over mere "likability."



Eve Edelheit

Kristen Arnett



IN BARRACKS/SHV

Peter Sís

Peter Sís on *Nicky & Vera* (Norton Young Readers): Ever heard the story of Nicholas Winton? The unsung British banker arranged what would later be called the Czech Kindertransport, putting 669 children on trains from Czechoslovakia to the U.K in 1939. With extraordinary illustrations and tender narration, Sís tells the story of Nicky's rescue through the eyes of Vera Diamantova, a Czech girl. Sís discusses his discovery of Nicky Winton's achievement and how he landed on Vera's tale as the lens through which to tell the story.

Mahogany L. Browne on *Chlorine Sky* (Crown Books for Young Readers): Browne tells us she wasn't certain, at first, that she wanted to tell the story of Skyy and her best friend for a young adult audience. She ultimately decided that the best way to address the issues of insecurity, betrayal, and the growing pains of coming-of-age would be to write about them head-on, through a novel in verse. She offers one piece of advice for burgeoning writers: When doubt comes, write anyway—no matter what.



HEATH ANTONIO

Mahogany L. Browne

Karen M. McManus on *The Cousins* (Delacorte): McManus' story of three cousins brought



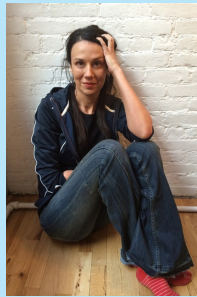
Katlynn Litchfield Photography

Karen M. McManus

to their grandmother's estate by a long-hidden family secret is a fast-paced and compelling narrative that investigates the damage of a family's inheritance and a new generation's willingness to explore and, ultimately, heal. McManus tells Kirkus she was inspired by her own close family for parts of this story, having returned to her childhood passion

of writing after many years in other careers.

Rivka Galchen on *Everyone Knows Your Mother Is a Witch* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux): The Salem witch trials are common historical knowledge, but in her latest novel, Galchen introduces American readers to the German witch trials of the 17th century. Galchen discusses taking Katharina Kepler, mother of physicist Johannes Kepler, as her protagonist, imagining a harsh world from the perspective of an older woman persecuted through accusations of witchcraft.



Sandy Tait

Rivka Galchen

Elizabeth Hinton on *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (Liveright): Hinton's powerful book tackles the many rebellions that took place after the 1960s outside the spotlight of major cities. In this interview, she discusses community responses to police brutality and acts of resistance by young people,



Emily Schiffer

Elizabeth Hinton

emphasizing the "major structural intervention" she sees as necessary in order to shift political attention from arming the police to creating better community infrastructure.

Karin Slaughter on *False Witness* (Morrow/HarperCollins): Slaughter has written 21 novels, and her latest thriller tells the story of Leigh and Callie,

sisters leading very different lives but united, in surprising ways, by a childhood trauma that returns to haunt them. Slaughter talks about the nuances of writing about violence against women and the importance of having other author friends involved in her writing process.



Alison Rosa

Karin Slaughter

Debbi Rigaud on *Simone Breaks All the Rules* (Scholastic): Rigaud, author of the YA romantic comedy *Truly Madly Royally*, discusses her latest book, which focuses on Haitian American Simone. As Simone navigates high school, love, and friendships in her New Jersey hometown, she also learns to embrace her growing passions for everything from



Greg James

Debbi Rigaud

baseball to history. Rigaud speaks about the process of portraying strict parents fairly and expands on her first visit to Haiti, which informed Simone's story.

Jobanna Zwirner is the former editorial assistant.

SPECIAL ISSUE: BEST BOOKS OF 2021

INDIE



THE MASK

Adams, Clayton Marshall
Illus. by Roban Daniel Eason
CJ Sparrow Publication (48 pp.)
\$18.95 | Oct. 28, 2021
978-0-578-56993-2



A boy ridiculed for his deformities may find the price of beauty is too high in this posthumous graphic novel.

Mil lives alone in the forest; his parents abandoned him. Because of his misshapen face and body, villagers deride and even threaten the boy. He scrapes by selling his wooden sculptures, though most people steer clear of him. While walking through the woods, Mil finds a mask. It speaks to him and promises to make him handsome—the object of men’s envy and women’s gazes. All Mil must do in return is “perform a service” for the Mask someday. Though hesitant, he agrees, and the Mask fuses with his face and changes his appearance. Now people find Mil attractive and revel in his company. He opens up his own shop and falls in love. Then the day finally arrives when the Mask makes its demand, asking Mil to do something unimaginable. He must decide if he can live the life he wants with the deformed body he once had. This story, written when Adams was 16, is a remarkable allegory with a superb open ending. The pale white Mask boasts a physical beauty society seemingly craves, while its “soulless eyes” reveal an emotional deficiency. It’s easy to sympathize with the sensitive Mil; people dub him “the freak” or “the monster.” But he’s likable throughout; he falls for a woman who’s more interested in his sculptures than his looks. At the same time, the Mask is suitably menacing; its more human qualities prove the most sinister, like its “sly smirk.” Complementing Adams’ prose, Eason renders an expressive, sometimes maniacal-looking Mask, which understandably troubles Mil. Muted colors give the illustrations a deeper, subtle allure, like Mil himself. A loving tribute at the book’s end comes courtesy of Adams’ family.

A young, laudable voice tells an indelible story of acceptance and prejudice.



ATTACHMENTS

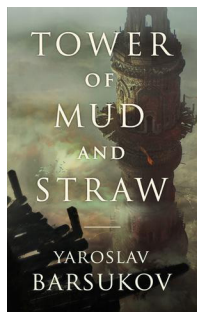
Arch, Jeff
SparkPress (337 pp.)
\$24.95 | \$16.95 paper | \$9.49 e-book
May 11, 2021
978-1-68463-082-0
978-1-68463-081-3 paper



In Arch’s thoughtful novel, the past comes back to haunt three prep school friends.

Stewart “Goody” Goodman, Sandy “Pick” Piccolo, and Laura Appleby were fast friends—and a love triangle—at Pocono Prep in the 1970s. Seconds before a stroke erases his consciousness, their mentor, Dean Henry Griffin, calls out for Pick and Goody, setting everything in motion. (And then there is the Griffins’ adopted son, Chip.) Pick is now a very successful attorney married to Laura. They lost a child, which put extra strain on their shaky marriage. Goody literally fled the school after discovering Pick and Laura in bed, wrote a blockbuster book about the three of them, and then disappeared again. Eventually Goody, now a Zen Buddhist priest, is tracked down. The whole cast is assembled, and it’s clear that this “reveal” is what Dean Griffin desperately wanted in that last moment of consciousness. (Pick’s precocious son says it’s like the last scene in an Agatha Christie novel.) We’ll have to stop here, because any more would spoil a really clever plot. This is Arch’s first novel in a long writing career that began with his breakthrough, the screenplay *Sleepless in Seattle*. The characters are wonderfully drawn. Henry Griffin is the wise father figure that any troubled teen would kill for. Pick is a take-no-prisoners litigator in lifelong rebellion against his mobster father. Goody is a saintly figure but unbelievably believable (you have to be there). How they sort out their relationships with one another after the big reveal is worth the price of admission. These are all good, if flawed and complex, people. The narrative is from several shifting points of view (Laura, Pick, Chip, etc.) and goes back and forth in time between the ’70s and the present—and Arch works it like a maestro.

Fine writing, memorable characters, depth of feeling, and gripping drama—a real keeper.



TOWER OF MUD AND STRAW

Barsukov, Yaroslav

Vestige (212 pp.)

\$10.00 paper | \$5.00 e-book

Feb. 20, 2021

978-1-64076-190-2



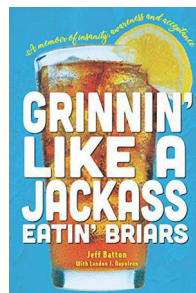
A man reckons with his past while overseeing the construction of a tower in this debut SF novel.

Shea Ashcroft disobeyed Queen Daelyn. He refused to gas protesters who ran amok in Red Hill. As punishment, she banished Shea to the border shared with the rival nation of Duma. Now, the former minister of internal affairs and ex-counselor to the queen must see to the completion of the Owenbeg Tower, an “anti-airship stronghold.” But Shea receives a chilly welcome from the duke at Owenbeg castle. The paranoid duke intends to censor Shea’s reports to the queen regarding details of the tower’s construction. Shea soon learns that instances of sabotage at the tower involve dangerous Drakiri technology. The humanoid Drakiri have been allowed to settle in Owenbeg, and their egg-shaped “tulips” provide anti-gravity assistance for raising the nearly 1,000-foot structure. But if not properly handled, the tulips implode, sucking in whatever surrounds them. Shea thinks often of his sister, Lena, whose death resulted from mishandled tulips. Doubly strange is that the duke’s counselor of arts is a striking Drakiri woman named Lena. She shares with Shea her people’s record of the Mimic Tower, which sprang into being as they tried to build another tower. Ultimately, the Mimic Tower destroyed many of the Drakiri, which is why none of Lena’s tribe labor on the Owenbeg Tower. As Shea falls for Lena, he becomes determined to ban tulips from the construction process. Yet Chief Engineer Brielle has a secret that makes such a move impossible.

Barsukov’s slim novel will remind readers of Robert Silverberg’s *Tower of Glass* (1970) and China Mieville’s work, which frequently includes a Cold War flavor of decrepit bureaucracies. While the Owenbeg castle appears lavish, “moths had taken a good bite out of the couches’ velvet.” The Owenbeg Tower, even unfinished, feels mythic, as in the passage “Entering it was entering a city...a world painted by a lover of chiaroscuro... shadows lay in pools of ink, and there were blinding patches of daylight.” The Drakiri seem slightly vampirelike, with their enhanced speed, strength, and elegance—though no blood drinking is ever mentioned. Barsukov sketches in characters slyly, as Shea assumes Lena is the duke’s lover, half revealing to readers his own desire. Echoes of Shea’s sister haunt him in the way this new woman “holds her head, the pride. The eyes.” When he survives an assassination attempt, Shea intuits that Patrick, the duke’s military counselor, is the culprit because of how the duke embarrasses the man publicly. The tower as an arms race metaphor succeeds gracefully. Drakiri technology is useful, as is nuclear power, but the drive to overshadow one’s enemies can lead to self-destruction. The author depicts the fantastic sparingly so that the instances pop against the

narrative’s overall gloom. One character’s augmented hand, for example, “branched off in metal and purple veins,” and its “knotted ‘fingers’ rolled in the air as though strumming a chord.” One scene that reveals some truth about the Drakiri, their origin, and the reality of the Mimic Tower is pure surrealism.

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



GRINNIN' LIKE A JACKASS EATIN' BRIARS

Batton, Jeff with Landon J. Napoleon

Bowker (234 pp.)

\$12.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book | Dec. 6, 2020

978-1-7348774-2-7



An adoptee discusses his struggles to conform in the American South and his difficulties coming to terms with his sexual identity in this memoir.

The Gothica
Patrick C. DiCarlo

ISBN: 978-1663223852

the **BEST BOOKS OF 2021**
INDIE

“The author authentically captures the perspectives of the Goths as well as the viewpoints of their Roman and Hun adversaries.”

“Furthermore, DiCarlo constructs a captivating drama that reveals the culture of the Visigoths in all its complexity, a depiction brimming with nuance.”

“This is precisely what historical fiction should provide: a seamless amalgam of scholarly rigor and dramatic power, a reading experience both educational and riveting.”
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) ★

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THE BEST INDIE BOOKS OF 2021



IN THE FIRST YEAR of the pandemic, our Best of Indie list favored transportive fiction. We wanted an escape, and novels that took us to other eras and places ruled. This year, what resonated with Indieland reviewers and editors were books about discovery, imaginative works that explore identity or culture via great storylines. Some of 2021's notables: tales of the recently fledged having

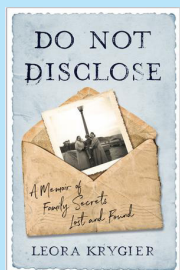
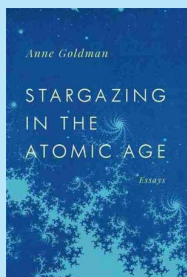
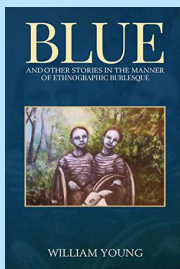
lots of sex and feelings, an essay collection that fizzes with observations about Jewish artists and thinkers, and a memoirist who unearths her family's skeletons.

In William Young's *Blue*, a cast of 20-somethings is "adrift and dissatisfied, full of ruminations about their lives and larger political and racial tensions, and they're usually pretty horny and avid for sex as a transformative or at least edifying experience." These well-told tales reveal the numinous in the everyday: "She laid out the bedroll, opened the wine, and watched as the light from the sunset curved and spread throughout the valley, like the hand of a god." Overall, Indieland calls this one "a richly textured, engrossing collection of tales about people discovering who and why they love."

Stargazing in the Atomic Age by Anne Goldman is one of the best of the best. "Goldman's essays effervesce with unexpected discursions into everything from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to the art of emergency auto repairs; from this erudition, she retrieves unexpected but insightful relationships, wrapping it all in gorgeously evocative prose." Our reviewer also notes that the work "is an absorbing excavation of the Jewish experience."

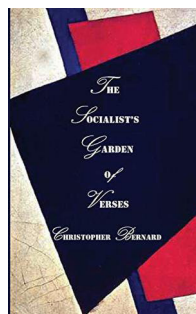
In Leora Krygier's latest, *Do Not Disclose*, she recounts the discovery of a document that led her to unearth family secrets involving infidelity and surviving the Holocaust. While Krygier's book is a work of nonfiction, it "has all the suspense of a detective novel," says our reviewer. "This richly detailed memoir will particularly appeal to those whose imaginations are fired by genealogy and historical research."

Karen Schechner is the vice president of Kirkus Indie.



Born in Savannah, Georgia, in 1963, Batton was raised on a 700-acre peanut and tobacco farm. As a child, he recalls having a "Tom Sawyer existence," although he had a fraught relationship with his adoptive father, whom he describes as a bigot and a "well-mannered racist." By the age of 8, the author was already aware of his fascination with the male body but had no concept of gay sexuality. Growing older, he felt it necessary to disguise his "gayness," but this changed after entering LaGrange College as a theater major; his life became a "blur of bars and boys." Batton's life changed again while attending a church service. He experienced a moment of epiphany, believing God had delivered him from being gay. The autobiography details the author's attempts to "look inconspicuous in the straight world," which involved marriage, fatherhood, and a passionate drive to help the poor. The last led him to work in outreach programs in Hong Kong and London. Written with Napoleon, who helped the author get the "story to paper," this compelling first-person account chronicles Batton's coming to terms with his identity as both an adoptee and a gay man. Elements of his life are desperately sad yet recounted with a brisk frankness. Regarding school, he notes: "If I could keep everyone laughing, then no one would call me a faggot. I shifted my entire persona to try to fit in and never be the last kid picked for kickball." Batton also bravely owns up to deflecting attention away from himself by deriding others: "I was the personification of a shriek, a gruesome little creature that seemed to derive pleasure and sustenance from the slow feeding on others." His use of language is modestly elegant, and while some readers may argue that he overuses similes, they inject a delightful levity throughout: "Grandfather was meaner than a wet hen in a rainstorm." From recounting his endeavors to find his birth mother to describing his struggles with fatherhood, Batton presents a richly textured autobiography—readers grappling with their own sexuality may well relate to his journey of self-discovery.

A captivatingly candid and sharply written account of a gay adoptee's odyssey.



THE SOCIALIST'S GARDEN OF VERSES

Bernard, Christopher
Regent Press (250 pp.)
\$19.95 paper | Dec. 1, 2020
978-1-58790-530-8

Climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, and Donald Trump are among the apocalyptic specters haunting these impassioned poems.

Caveat Lector webzine founder Bernard includes 91 poems that survey four years of anxiety and disaster in this volume. He starts with a Trump-themed cycle written as a hilariously on-the-nose infusion of Trumpian lingo into pastiches of poets, from T.S. Eliot ("November is the cruelest month, breeding / Electoral victories out of the dead land, mixing / Xenophobes and white Christians, stirring / Dull brains—and I mean dull! Sad!—with autumn



“A heroic, uplifting account of easing others’ suffering and building a family.”

FROM BEYOND THE SKIES

rain”) to haiku master Bashō. (“You call this a *what?* / It doesn’t even. Look, believe me: / *My* poems. They *rhyme*.”) Bernard then drops his satirical tone to explore other dire happenings. “Spiritus” revisits the death of George Floyd. (“Underneath their knees, / in the brutal sun, / a dark form. And a voice from the feed: / ‘I can’t breathe, I can’t / breathe! I can’t breathe! I / can’t breathe!’”) Environmental destruction and the Covid-19 pandemic are linked in “April 2020.” (“Humankind was proving / a gorgeous catastrophe for life / on a planet the size of a pebble.... We were the crown / virus enthroned in the breath of the world. / And now, in a cruelly fair reverse, / the crown virus has laid siege / to human monumentality.”) In “Faust Takes Command of the *Titanic*,” modern civilization is a deal with the devil, “arrogance / and desire gone round the bend with greed, / a drive toward absolute power / that can only lead to absolute annihilation.” Occasionally, hopeful notes surface, as in “Asteroid,” which likens humans to the cataclysm that wiped out the dinosaurs but wistfully concludes that, after people have destroyed themselves, “the birds—may fill the world, one day, again, with singing.” These are weighty poems on the weightiest of themes, but they are lifted by the author’s prophetic voice, lyrical sensibility, and evocative language, as in the seascape of “Beachdrift”: “Stump of a freighter out of the horizon haze / a big ugly thing / covered with cars and pickled plums and carbonated sake / in stacks on its deck like teeth or the columns at Paestum.” The result is a searing vision of a world teetering on the brink.

A dazzling poetry collection, its intimations of doom lit by a furious clarity.



FROM BEYOND THE SKIES An Invitation Into the Wonder of Love

Boit, Juli
Morgan James Publishing (260 pp.)
\$17.95 paper | \$8.99 e-book
Sept. 28, 2021
978-1-63-195427-6

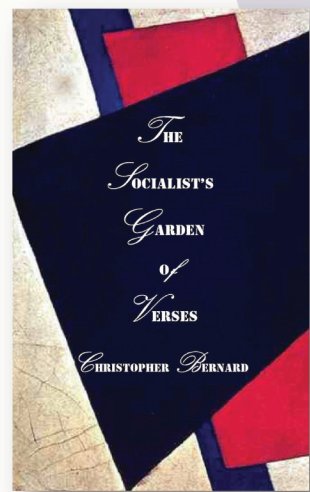


A memoir about fighting AIDS and finding love in Kenya.

In her nonfiction debut, Boit recounts her experiences working at a care center in western Kenya. The shift—she’d gone there after working as a nurse on an HIV unit in Los Angeles—is more than just moving from a developed to a developing country. It also involves a drastic shift in cultural attitudes. As Boit mentions, in the U.S. in 2004, HIV was mostly treated as a chronic disease rather than a death sentence. In Kipkaren River Village where she takes up residence, however, not only are the circumstances very different (no electricity, no running water, no indoor plumbing, and so on), but so were the attitudes toward the disease itself. She met dedicated doctors who very much wanted to change that, and she also met a man named Titus, whom she married. They had a child, Ella, but the real focus of the narrative is on a premature baby named Ryan, whom Boit took into her home. Soon after, she and Titus

agreed to adopt Ryan. The story expands to include their adoption of two more children. Throughout the tale, Boit maintains a glowingly optimistic, companionable tone. She never makes the foremost mistake of so many memoirists—thinking the mere details of her story will in and of themselves interest readers. Instead, she consistently ties her memories to broader insights about love and about her own personal Christian faith. “Over the years,” she writes, “as I stepped closer to those in their suffering, I came to recognize the nearness of God—present in the hard places and the pain, in the spaces where death and destruction always wanted to win.” Boit has worked in those hard places, and her memoir illuminates them.

A heroic, uplifting account of easing others’ suffering and building a family.



the **BEST BOOKS** of 2021
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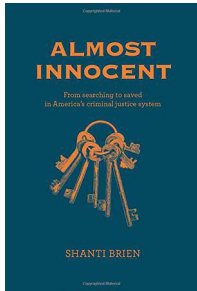
“BERNARD’S WORK HAS BEEN A SECRET FOR FAR TOO LONG... BRILLIANT... PASSIONATE... VISIONARY...”
—JACK FOLEY, AWARD-WINNING POET & RADIO PERSONALITY

ISBN-13: 978-1-58790-531-5

“Lyrical, funny, haunting, provocative...”
—Jane Tompkins, Professor Emerita, Duke University, Author of *Reading Through the Night*

WINNER OF 2021 PEN OAKLAND JOSEPHINE MILES AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

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ALMOST INNOCENT From Searching to Saved in America's Criminal Justice System



Brien, Shanti

Amplify Publishing (240 pp.)

\$24.95 | \$6.99 e-book | March 2, 2021

978-1-64543-203-6

A lawyer's memoir draws connections between her cases and her family's involvement with the law.

Brien weaves together her personal story, including a somewhat dysfunctional childhood, marriage to an NFL player, and motherhood, with tales from her work as a criminal defense lawyer and the saga of her family's involvement in a federal mortgage fraud case. Brien, whose work involves appeals by people already convicted of crimes, recounts the stories of clients whose actual guilt or innocence is less important than the fact that they have been ill-served by the justice system, facing

bias, mandatory minimum sentencing, inadequate representation, and unsympathetic officials. Those stories are interspersed with Brien's personal history. She was raised primarily by her White mother; her Muscogee father's undiagnosed depression made him an unstable presence. After difficult teenage years, she attended Berkeley and Stanford universities. She married a Berkeley classmate whose football career led to several cross-country moves—and the experience of seeing her husband under investigation following a business associate's fraudulent activities. Brien finds parallels between her clients' experiences and her own, drawing lessons from them while remaining aware of the privilege that makes her family's encounter with the law a very different experience. Brien, a strong writer, is particularly skilled at explaining the procedural minutiae that form the basis of her work without overwhelming the reader with legalese. She also excels at revealing her clients' humanity as she shares their stories. She is remarkably open in describing her relationship with her "hippie football-playing feminist frat guy" husband and the challenges they faced balancing their careers while raising small children. Brien ably explains how she

ORPHEUS RISING

BY LANCE LEE

An extraordinarily beautiful, touching adventure that can stand with the classics of children's literature.—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) ★

Imaginative and emotional—*Booklife Review, Editor's Pick (Publishers Weekly)*

Charming and exquisitely written—*Booklife Prize*

An action-packed, heartfelt romp—*Blueink*

Magical—*Nancy Powell, Clarion Foreword*

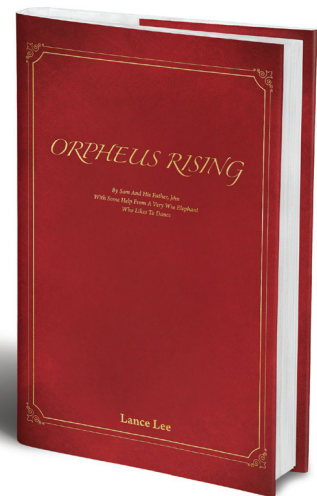
Uniquely imagined and visionary—*SPR*

Enchanting—*Pikasho Deka, 5*Readers' Favorite Reviews*

Powered by love—*Emily-Jane Hills Orford, 5*Readers' Favorite Reviews*

Imaginative and emotional, this underworld adventure thrills, chills, and offers insightful lessons. Lee's vivid imagination shines through each chapter...and his quirky characters will keep readers...hooked throughout.—*Booklife Review, Editor's Pick (Publishers Weekly)*

...it's easy to highly recommend *Orpheus Rising*...as a standout from the crowd, even if its exuberant story defies simple categorization. This translates to an expansive audience who will appreciate its charm.—*Diane Donovan, Midwest Book Review*



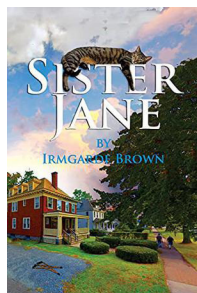
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REVIEWS
lanceleeauthor.com

maintains a fundamental belief in the legal system while directly confronting its many shortcomings, appreciating each of the rare wins she accomplishes on behalf of a client. The result is a compelling, thought-provoking work that shies away from easy answers to questions of right and wrong or guilt and innocence.

An intriguing, informed examination of the justice system from a professional and personal perspective.



SISTER JANE

Brown, Irmgarde

Serey/Jones (332 pp.)

\$17.95 paper | \$7.99 e-book | June 9, 2021

978-1-88-127627-2



In Brown's debut novel, a seemingly miraculous gift upends an ordinary woman's life.

Jane Freedle is absent-mindedly singing the hymn "Oh Christ the Healer" at church. "What would it be like to be a healer?" Jane wonders, but her pondering isn't idle. She had prayed over a cat hit by a car, and the cat had instantly recovered; she had prayed over an injured fellow church member, and they had instantly recovered. Suddenly, Jane finds herself wondering what is happening to her normal life as a friendly, retired schoolteacher and widow living in Lafayette, Maryland. But these seeming miracles keep piling up. Her prayers heal a dying old woman at the nursing home where Jane volunteers, and when she mistakenly tells her pastor about it, he tells Jane's daughter, Maddie, that Jane might be going a little crazy after living alone for years after the death of her husband, Richard. But when Maddie's little daughter has her own accident, Jane heals her before the paramedics even arrive, although nobody seems to believe it. "Her family thought she was bananas," Jane reflects, "her pastor thought she was senile, and her friends thought she was delusional." To complicate matters, a washed-up reporter named Wade Twomey has been assigned to investigate seeming miracles happening in this small town, and he quickly considers Jane the heart of the story. That story only grows more complicated for Jane and everybody else, and Brown writes it all with an invigorating pace and an enjoyably understated humor that breaks through everywhere. Jane is portrayed as an endearingly fallible and unlikely miracle worker, a retiree who slips into profanity too easily and keeps up a running argument with her dead husband. It's Jane's complete lack of predictable sanctimony that gives the novel its consistent charm.

A wise, winning story of a modern-day miracle worker.

NIMUE
FREEING MERLIN

AYN CATES SULLIVAN, PHD

the BEST BOOKS OF 2021

INDIE

ISBN-13: 978-1947925182

"This exuberant fantasy calls on readers to conceive of a loving, balanced world."
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) Ⓢ

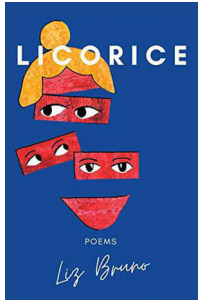
"...NIMUE: *Freeing Merlin* is well written and researched and successfully flips the Arthurian tradition on its head to reveal a powerful, feminist look at the hidden potential within us all."
—Christina Doka for *IndieReader*, 4 Stars

"Overall, I would highly recommend *Nimue: Freeing Merlin* to fans of female-centric fantasy fiction, classic Arthurian literature lovers, and epic fantasy fans everywhere."
—*Readers' Favorite*, 5 Stars

For Agent Representation or Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email grailheroine@gmail.com
ayncatesullivan.com/nimue-freeing-merlin/

“An intriguing, timely, and terrifying
portent of life after Covid-19.”

THE COLDNESS OF OBJECTS



LICORICE
Poems

Bruno, Liz
Atmosphere Press (88 pp.)
\$15.99 paper | Feb. 20, 2021
978-1-63649-547-7

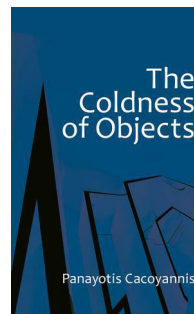


A debut volume of poetry traces the many flavors—bitter, sweet, and complex—of the feminine experience.

In her collection, Bruno brings together more than 50 poems, some previously published in literary magazines. The opening piece, “In Montana, I Learned To Not Horse Around,” sets the stage for the volume’s overall engagement with expectations for femininity and the reality of possible self-expression. “In my state, the cowgirls were queens. / Crowns rode their heads and jewels rode their fingers,” the poem begins. But this seeming power is a gimcrack pose; in fact, women must obey the rules of chastity, cleanliness, and obedience set for them. In the end, “We

climbed into bed. We closed our eyes and hopes politely.” The last line’s zeugma enacts the hidden catch that was there all along, and this subtlety among what are apparently plainspoken sentiments characterizes the collection. It can also be seen in, for example, many poems’ use of rhyme, as in “Platonic Form of a Hot Mess.” Here, lines ending in words like *light*, *bright*, *right*, *night*, or *polite* are scattered among nonrhyming ones, as if the poem is, like the speaker, still blinking uncertainly in the sun after living in shadow. The collection follows the speaker’s growing understanding of the traps of femininity and marriage, uncovering wrenching or haunting realities. Motherhood, though, discloses new strengths. In “Getting a Grip,” a new mother is weary, but she’s akin to strongly rooted trees: “They have stretch marks / and still, here they are standing tall and breathing.” The craft of poetry, too, offers a power beyond the limitations of cultural expectations, as in the optimistic final piece, “Second Tongue”: “*It is good*, the sun kept saying / until the poem put on her sunglasses / and went to work.”

A thoughtful and bracing collection reflective of hard-won insights.



THE COLDNESS
OF OBJECTS

Cacoyannis, Panayotis
Self (269 pp.)
\$18.99 | \$10.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book
Jan. 1, 2021
979-8-52-212043-6
979-8-56-036884-5 paper

A gay man questions Britain’s repressive new political regime in this satirical, speculative novel by Cacoyannis, author of *Finger of an Angel* (2019).

The year is 2030, and 70-year-old Englishman Anthony Pablo Rubens is about to receive an unexpected special delivery that could change the course of his life. It’s a summons informing him that he’s been selected for “Museum Service”—and he doesn’t know exactly what that entails. It turns out to be a scheme introduced by the Government Party, which came to power in the United Kingdom with a landslide victory in 2024 in the wake of a viral pandemic that “exhausted the world.” The Party offered simple and deadly solutions, inciting racial hatred and promising the abolition of a trial by jury. Museum Service, it’s revealed, involves uprooting Anthony’s life—possessions and all—and exhibiting him in a cubicle in the People’s Museum, where party members can observe him going about a daily routine. The narrative flips back half a century to show Anthony as a young man navigating London’s gay scene; one night he has a chance encounter with Joe Devin, who will later become a Government Party minister. The novel also describes Anthony’s loving relationship with his ailing partner, Malcolm, and his closeness to his sister Eunice, whose political leanings echo those of their grandfather, who fought against Franco during the Spanish Civil War. Things become tense when Anthony’s inquisitiveness results in his being labeled a “pedant” by the

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“...every word the right word, this book is a genuine keeper.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

“...a comedic memoir that mines the absurdity of human experience, offering readers profound moments of insight.”
—Suzanne Roberts, Author of *Bad Tourist: Misadventures in Love and Travel*

“...so very human....you want to go along for the entire ride.”
—Pam Mandel, Author of *The Same River Twice*

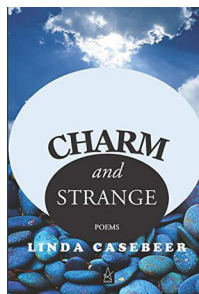
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ISBN: 978-1-60952-201-8

government and when he learns that Eunice was similarly summoned shortly before her death.

Immediate comparison will be made with the work of George Orwell, whose work is specifically referenced: “Mr Rubens suddenly felt terribly alone, living unloved and unnoticed in a nightmare worse than 1984.” However, this is by no means an ersatz rewrite of a literary classic. Cacoyannis tells a story that feels both fresh and alarming in how it identifies and amplifies concerns of our time, as when it shows life becoming anodyne as a consequence of surveillance: “bioelectric cars whizzed past with hardly a sound, at set speeds that could not be exceeded. Cyclists only cycled in the designated lanes. Smart phones weren’t so smart any more, but threatened to be smart enough to spy.” For the author, love is the antidote to a complicit society rendered indifferent to authoritarian rule. Cacoyannis’ elegant and tenderly observant prose captures how individual lives interconnect: “Anthony’s ‘gift’ seemed to always cast life in a shadow, Malcolm’s was to inundate its mysteries with light.” In previous works, the author has painstakingly created psychologically complex casts of characters, but he doesn’t apply the same level of detail to the minor players here. This is less important, however, because in this novel, the primary focus is excavating the horrors of a society rather than the internal worlds of diverse individuals. Overall, Cacoyannis has written a thoroughly gripping novel, using the rhetoric of a real-life pandemic to fashion a chilling vision of an abnormal “new normal” to come.

An intriguing, timely, and terrifying portent of life after Covid-19.



CHARM AND STRANGE Poems

Casebeer, Linda

Adelaide Books (134 pp.)

\$19.60 paper | \$7.99 e-book | July 1, 2020

978-1-952570-61-2



These lyrical poems inhabit a world of dreamscapes, enigmas, and the numinous.

In her second collection, following *The Last Eclipsed Moon* (2008), Casebeer brings together 51 poems, many previously published in literary magazines. The title poem refers to two types of a quark, a fundamental subatomic particle. In 1990, the year Robert Taylor won the Nobel Prize in physics for his work on quarks, the speaker in this poem “had so little time to wonder / about the heart of anything,” consumed with “children and work / dogs and cats lilies and irises,” that she didn’t pay much attention to his achievement. Noting that the very term *quarks* comes from James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, whose opening line starts in the middle of a sentence, the speaker suggests that literature has the greater claim to what’s fundamental, since a story—unlike matter—can begin anywhere. “Charm and strange” also encapsulate the book’s sense of forces that are, like the quark, elusive. Dreams and death, for example, figure in the opening piece, “Imagine the weight.” The speaker has anxiety

government and when he learns that Eunice was similarly summoned shortly before her death.

No Ordinary Cat
written by Vicki Spandel | illustrated by Jeni Kelleher

ISBN: 978-0-9972831-3-6

**A story of longing, loneliness,
and love, of hearts healed and
souls mended by a singular cat.**

“This feline-centric yet deeply human and adult-friendly novel for children is the first work of fiction by Spandel, a prolific author best known for instructional books on writing for classrooms and workshops. May it not be her last.”

“The author’s well-drawn characters are shaped by empathy, not sentiment, and by her near-poetic observations of the minutiae in their lives... and of the natural world around them.”

“A beautifully written and illustrated feline tale with subtle emotional depths.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

“The images she creates are magical. Once I began reading, I could not stop.”
—Lois Burdett, Author of the *Shakespeare Can Be Fun* series

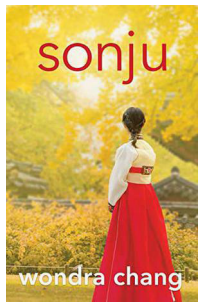
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“Chang is particularly adept at conveying emotion through everyday, domestic imagery.”

SONJU

dreams about time-pressured tasks she must perform, including some related to her (now dead) parents. They're late in two senses, and in the slowness of living, she can't catch up. The short, unpunctuated lines convey her breathlessness well. In all these poems, Casebeer's craft is evident in the lines' precision and economy. Similarly, in "Symbol," the speaker's fears for her husband and his "deathrattle / crisis" aren't stated explicitly but are expressed instead by the disturbing image of shrikes, predator birds "that impale their prey / on thorns since they have no talons / only a songbird's delicate feet." Other poems engage with politics and social issues, but whatever the subject, the author goes devastatingly to the heart of things.

Powerful, well-wrought poems that consider mystery with discipline and nuance.



SONJU

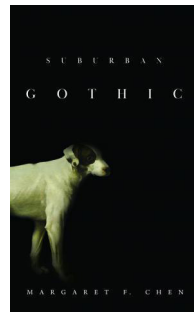
Chang, Wondra
Madville Publishing (290 pp.)
\$19.95 paper | \$9.99 e-book | July 16, 2021
978-1-94-869258-8



Chang offers a debut historical novel about the extraordinary transformation of a Korean woman and her country. In 1946, the inquisitive, forward-thinking 19-year-old Sonju holds onto the hope of "living a modern life" by continuing her education and marrying childhood friend Kungu, whom her parents find unsuitable. Although she dreams of being "equal partners" in a marriage in which both partners have "equal voice," it quickly becomes clear that her future will be different, as her parents arrange a marriage to a stranger. Her new husband lives in Maari, a strictly traditional village; it takes time for Sonju to adjust to married life in a large extended family, but she grows fond of her sister-in-law and comes to have a tolerable relationship with her husband. Her life is irrevocably changed when she has a daughter, Jinju; just as South Korea moves toward independence from Japan, Sonju vows to raise Jinju as an independent girl, giving her "freedom to explore possibilities." Sonju also begins to teach local women how to read and write. But as the Korean War breaks out, her dreams for her future are threatened. She and her daughter evacuate but aren't spared from witnessing horrors of war: "limp bodies reduced to animal flesh, reeking animal stench." After the war, her marriage unravels after a great loss, and she eventually returns to Seoul, where she rekindles her love for Kungu. Soon, though, she must begin anew once again. Throughout this novel, Chang uses Sonju's life as a metaphor for the cultural upheaval of Korea in the mid-20th century. She successfully crafts a fully formed protagonist with singular strength and determination, and her prose is measured and thoughtful. She's particularly adept at conveying emotion through everyday, domestic imagery that readers will appreciate, as when Sonju sadly contemplates the "valleys and mountains" made by the fabric of her wedding gown, mourning days of freedom with her childhood friends; at another point, during her melancholy introduction to her husband's family

home, she notices how the "freshly applied wallpaper with light pink flowers seemed overly hopeful."

A well-crafted tale of a person who forges ahead amid heartbreak and war.



SUBURBAN GOTHIC

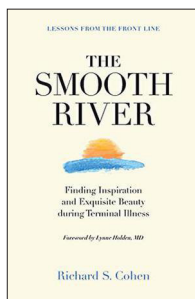
Chen, Margaret F.
OPUS (177 pp.)
\$16.00 paper | Feb. 26, 2020
978-1-62429-252-1



A collection of short stories probes the anxieties of life in suburban America. What makes the suburbs so unsettling? Perhaps it's the expectation of tranquility and order that, once upset, highlights the troubles stirring beneath the surface. In one tale, a kite caught

in a tree becomes a metaphor for a single mother's mistaken attempt to move back to her hometown. In another story, a woman comes home to find a terrible, monstrous creature sitting in her driveway. She seeks help from two friends, a pair of twin sisters, but her visit to their house devolves into a literal nightmare. In a third, a protective mother puts her child in preschool after failing to find him an acceptable babysitter. But there's something strange about the other kids there: Why do they just sit and stare like zombies? "Nina was outraged," begins another tale, the ominously titled "Mullet." "I told her!" she shouted, grabbing fistfuls of her hair, "I wanted a layered bob with bangs! And look, look, look at this! What is this!" In these 15 stories, Chen reveals that distress and unease are never far from the minds of her characters, lurking behind white picket fences and insincere smiles. The tales are a mix of shorter pieces that tend toward the surreal and longer, more realistic narratives. Both are enjoyable but the latter more so, particularly "The Zhangs and the Zumans." The story follows a married couple who return to the house where they used to live, which they now rent out. The house has changed, but what is really striking is that the neighbors—whose antics caused the couple to move in the first place—seem different as well. Here, the wife, Annie, views her former neighbor's abode as though it were a haunted house: "Although she tried to stop herself, Annie began to fix her gaze upon the large house, as if a magnetic force gravitated forth from its many black windows, pulling her very eyeballs, it seemed, right out of their sockets and towards the walls of staring, glassy recesses." The author's prose is exact and taut, building a sense of unease in a way that is so subtle the audience will often fail to realize it until it finally breaks. Readers should look forward to more books from Chen in the future.

Tense, skillfully crafted, and illuminating tales of suburban desperation.



THE SMOOTH RIVER
*Finding Inspiration
 and Exquisite Beauty
 During Terminal Illness:
 Lessons From the Front Line*

Cohen, Richard S.

Smooth River (288 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$6.99 e-book | Oct. 26, 2021

978-1-73750-340-8



In this debut memoir and self-help book, Cohen offers advice on how to approach life after a terminal diagnosis.

The author and his wife, Marcia, had been married 37 years in 2019 when she was told that she had stage 4 pancreatic cancer, and just 160 days later, she passed away. But before then, Cohen and his spouse, who specialized in crisis management, developed a way of thinking that they came to call the “Smooth River.” Over the course of this book, the author draws on his personal experience to explain this concept, which they used to convey to medical staff the necessity of a “well-ordered and tranquil ending.” This multifaceted approach recognizes how society rewards those who fight and disparages those who give up. However, rather than emphasize the idea that a person must “fight” cancer, the author suggests that society should show greater consideration to how that person wishes to be treated. It’s a gentle, open-minded approach to end-of-life management that involves setting flexible goals and cultivating positive thoughts, such as “We’re all going to die. I’m just going sooner than I expected, but I have a lot to be thankful for.” Cohen also highlights the importance of “seeing one’s life as bigger than one’s condition.” The book offers practical and specific advice along the way, noting the benefits of keeping an event log and addressing whether one should have a do-not-resuscitate directive. Appendices feature Marcia’s own log and book list as well as a list of useful online resources, such as palliative care organizations.

Cohen’s writing achieves a rare balance, as it’s both practical and sensitive in character. The author is unafraid to confront the grim truth of end-stage cancer but seeks out positivity at the same time: “While we may not be able to control how, if, or when we get [cancer]; how it behaves; or how effective treatment will be, we do have a choice.” Cohen’s message is particularly powerful in how it advocates the agency of patients and their family members at a time when they may feel powerless: “We could confine our focus to [Marcia’s] health alone and stay in a dark place, or we could try as best we could to make this time really count.” Cohen conveys deeply distressing moments with poetic beauty, as when he envisions Marcia’s final moments: “as she crossed the divide, I would be there to take her in when she was no longer able to breathe. And then, by way of some ethereal transference, I would breathe for her and carry on.” In this book, the author courageously and movingly approaches a subject that many readers would prefer not to face, and, in doing so, he effectively presents the reality of life after a terminal diagnosis. This tender and startlingly lucid work offers patients and their loved ones

the BEST BOOKS OF 2021
INDIE

“...a masterful novel in which a man’s suicide leaves indelible marks on those he left behind.”
 —Foreword Reviews

ISBN: 978-1647421939

“Ward masterfully builds a sense of dread with mundane details in the first section, and the way that she finds significance in moments of ordinary, everyday life is reminiscent of the work of Anne Tyler. This deeply empathetic novel deals sensitively with difficult subjects...”

“An insightful and psychologically astute story of ordinary people moving forward after personal tragedy.”
 —Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

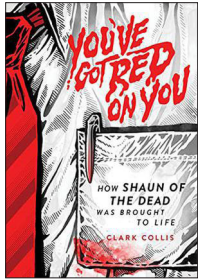
“This is an absorbing book, and I cared about every character in it....Jane Ward did an excellent job capturing the upheaval suicide has caused.”
 —Paula Mikrut, Windy City Reviews

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“Collis’ book is as entertaining as the movie it spotlights.”

YOU’VE GOT RED ON YOU

a wealth of knowledge, and it may also show physicians a new way to help people learn to cope with the prospect of dying. A heart-rending but informative end-of-life guide.



YOU’VE GOT RED ON YOU How Shaun of the Dead Was Brought to Life

Collis, Clark
1984 Publishing (424 pp.)
\$26.99 | \$26.99 e-book | Nov. 23, 2021
978-1-948221-15-3

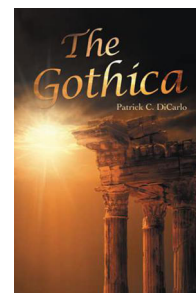


Entertainment Weekly senior writer Collis’ debut nonfiction work tells the story of how a much-beloved zombie movie made its way to the big screen.

Filmmaker Edgar Wright’s *Shaun of the Dead* has achieved revered cult status in the years since its 2004 release. This book

follows its creative journey, starting with Wright’s love of movies during his childhood in England. This section gives readers an early taste of the films that would influence his work, such as John Landis’ *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) and Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead II* (1987). Wright eventually directed the two-season U.K. comedy series *Spaced*, which starred its co-creator, Simon Pegg. Inspired by one of the show’s episodes, in which Pegg’s character plays a zombie-themed video game, Wright and the actor wrote an unusual screenplay: a rom-com with zombies. Fascinating, comprehensive interviews with Wright, Pegg, producer Nira Park, Nick Frost (Pegg’s best friend and co-star), and many others provide insight into the film’s production. Wright was pitching a film in a genre whose popularity was waning in Britain, and several box-office bombs forced *Shaun*’s original production company to shut down. Things hardly improved on set; Wright describes frequent clashes with a more experienced director of photography. Overall, Collis’ book is as entertaining as the movie it spotlights. It’s chock-full of curious tidbits; for example, users of *Spaced Out* (a *Spaced* fan site) were recruited as zombie extras, and Wright’s 48-hour binge of the video game “Resident Evil 3” inspired memorable scenes in his movie. There’s also welcome appreciation of Wright and Pegg’s immensely clever script, in which an early, humorous monologue foreshadows the movie’s entire plot. Collis’ tightly organized book includes meticulous details of day-to-day filming, which complete pages of set photos, promotional materials, and, best of all, storyboards sketched by Wright and his older brother Oscar. At the end, the author effectively brings readers up to date on the post-*Shaun* lives of the cast and crew; Wright, for example, went on to helm the well-regarded action film *Baby Driver* (2017).

A sharply written, thorough, and loving tribute to a modern-day cinema classic.



THE GOTHICA

DiCarlo, Patrick C.
iUniverse (274 pp.)
\$16.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book | July 22, 2021
978-1-66322-385-2

Forced from their home by invading Huns, Visigoths navigate a volatile relationship with the Roman Empire in this historical novel set in the fourth century.

When the Huns cross the Dniester River, the barrier that divides the Visigoth and Ostrogoth communities, they leave destruction in their wake, raping and pillaging without restraint. More than 100,000 Goths flee their homes, hoping to seek refuge under the protection of the Eastern Roman Empire. But the Romans see them as “uncivilized barbarians” and receive them ungenerously, disarming them and letting them starve. During a fragile peace between the Visigoths and the Romans, Alaric, a “rash and reckless” young man who lost his father to the Hun invasion, becomes a new recruit for the Roman army and establishes himself as a brave military leader with a gift for strategy, an ascendancy thrillingly portrayed by DiCarlo. When Emperor

Words by Glissa Kerr
Illustrations by Zoe Samuders

the BEST BOOKS of 2021

INDIE

**NEW BOOK,
HONEY HARVEST,
COMING SPRING 2022**

ISBN: 978-0578576527 [paperback]
ISBN: 978-0578593944 [hardcover]

“A child describes the process of making maple syrup, from tree tapping to distribution, in this rhyming picture-book debut.”

“...a great introduction for young readers who may have only encountered syrup in stores.”

“An accessible guide to a harvest tradition.”
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) ★

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Theodosius dies and is replaced by the young Arcadius, Alaric sees a unique opportunity for the Visigoths to assert their independence, and he rises to become their first king: “I do know the Roman way. I know it well. The Romans respond only to strength. We have now an opportunity. The East is weak. We should not wait for the young emperor to become a man.” The entire novel is an impressive display of historical scholarship, notable for its painstaking exactitude and breadth. The author authentically captures the perspectives of the Goths as well as the viewpoints of their Roman and Hun adversaries. Furthermore, DiCarlo constructs a captivating drama that reveals the culture of the Visigoths in all its complexity, a depiction brimming with nuance. This is precisely what historical fiction should provide: a seamless amalgam of scholarly rigor and dramatic power, a reading experience both educational and riveting.

A gripping, meticulous, and illuminating tale of war and intrigue.



WHAT MAD PURSUIT Short Stories About Runners

Elliott, Rich

Self (298 pp.)

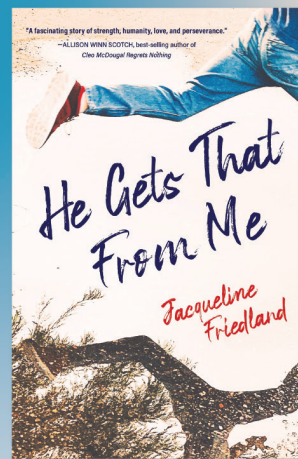
\$15.99 | \$6.99 e-book | Feb. 26, 2021

979-8-68690-521-4



Competitive runners face triumphs, defeats, bitter rivalries and unlikely affections in these well-crafted short stories.

Elliott, a former Kansas University runner and author of *The Competitive Edge: Mental Preparation for Distance Running* (1984), zeroes in on the subculture of high school, collegiate, and professional runners to probe the human psyche under stress. A teen track phenom is found to have two hearts that prompt her toward light or darkness; a University of Oregon runner remembers his deceased teammate, the legendary real-life star Steve Prefontaine, as a narcissistic jerk rather than the sports martyr he became after a fatal car crash; an aching college runner gets an excruciatingly painful massage from a witchy physical therapist; a punked-out professional marathoner fights a duel of head games and physical assaults against her seemingly picture-perfect opponent, “the Bitch”; a 10-year-old enters a transcontinental race that shows her a panorama of America both beautiful and corrupt; a head coach boosts his assistants’ morale during a losing season by playing Russian roulette with a nail gun; a middle-aged accountant ponders the path his life might have taken had he run the mile 1.2 seconds faster. Elliott’s yarns feature piquant characters and lively, twisty plots that go down to the wire; they paint vivid portraits of the runner’s life, with its grueling training regimens, mystical coaching mantras — “Let your plans be dark...and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt” — and Machiavellian ploys (“I watch her right foot coming back, her back-kick, and I time it so that my left foot nicks her right, pushing her foot inward so it tangles with her left foot, causing her to trip....It always looks like an accident”). Elliott’s supple prose registers the beauty of



the BEST BOOKS of 2021 INDIE

“It is hard to imagine a better novel for a book club discussion.A thoughtful and gripping family tale that will haunt readers long after finishing it.”

—Kirkus Reviews
(starred review) Ⓢ

ISBN-10: 1684630975

ISBN-13: 978-1684630974

“This is one you won’t stop thinking about.”

—Allison Winn Scotch, Best-selling Author of *Cleo McDougal Regrets Nothing*

“Compulsively readable and ferociously insightful....*He Gets That From Me* cuts to the core of what it means to be family.

An unforgettable book of our times.”

—Jamie Brenner, Author of *The Forever Summer* and *Blush*

“Friedland spins a web of intrigue, questioning the truest expression of parenthood. Fans of Nicola Marsh, Tana French, and Hannah Mary McKinnon will race through this thrilling exploration of nature versus nurture and the sacrifices needed to keep loved ones together.

—Booklist

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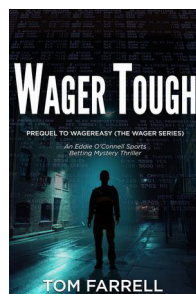
“Farrell has mastered the art of action-thriller pacing, punctuating the novel with unexpected turns.”

WAGER TOUGH



athleticism—“He had a stride that was crafted by angels....Like those cheetahs on TV—from a trot to a blur in one second”—amid gritty, sharply observed settings (“I see interesting stuff on the roads...a dead rattlesnake smashed flat, a red bike missing a wheel, a roll of dollar bills, a stuffed crocodile, a large pink bra, a box of bullets, some puke that crows were eating, a license plate from Alaska, and a bracelet that said Briana on it”). The result is a finely wrought, resonant fictive world.

An engrossing collection of tales about grace—and disgrace—under pressure.



WAGER TOUGH

Farrell, Tom

Self (367 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book | July 31, 2021

978-1-73659-321-9

A thriller in which a man under pressure from the mob investigates a murder.

As the novel opens, young Eddie O’Connell, hero of Farrell’s *Wager Easy* (2021), is in a bind. He owes the Burrascano crime family a gambling debt so large he can’t repay it. Uncharacteristically, instead of stuffing Eddie in an oil drum and depositing him in the nearest deep body of water, the mob accepts a counteroffer: Eddie can travel from Chicago to Denver and take over the Team Player Collection Agency on the mob’s behalf. Team Player had until recently been run by Eddie’s acquaintance Zany, but Zany was gruesomely and dramatically murdered, and Eddie has positioned himself as the most likely candidate to unravel the crime. “If Burrascano called in a gang of known mobsters to run the store, the killer would never surface,” Eddie thinks. “But if someone like me was running the place, the killer might think he could take advantage of the situation.” This is a very big “if.” Eddie knows nothing about running a collection agency and is acting without the sage advice of his older and wiser crime-solving Uncle Mike (a detective detained on another case). He gets help from Team Player’s manager, Paula “Rudi” Rudinger, and soon the two are embroiled in tracking Zany’s murderer through the labyrinthine worlds of gambling and organized crime—all while Eddie tries to keep his own gambling demons in check.

This latest outing from Farrell is even more compulsively readable than *Wager Easy*. The author has a pitch-perfect ear for the intricacies of the no man’s land Eddie inhabits. He’s “caught between two vicious worlds,” beholden to the Burrascano crime family and its nefarious but oddly ethical strictures and the blue-wall codes of his uncle the cop. The downplayed role of Uncle Mike in this adventure might have worked against the novel (the chemistry between the uncle and nephew is particularly enjoyable), but Farrell compensates in two ways. First, he drops the reader into the action at a breakneck moment and never slows down. (As Eddie himself notes, his role in his partnership with Uncle Mike was always action-oriented. With Uncle Mike mostly missing from this adventure, Eddie’s quick temper drives the tempo.) And second, he fills the narrative with memorable characters, including an enjoyably despicable bad guy and, of course, Rudi, whose own backstory steadily builds. Farrell has mastered the art of action-thriller pacing, punctuating the novel with unexpected turns, and each of his characters has a distinctive voice and motivation. The everyday dangers of Eddie’s world—as he navigates the violence of the mob and the violence of the law—are expertly limned, and the result feels very assured: “Zany used to say that sometimes horses find a soft spot they never expected and they run the race of their life,” Eddie reflects at one point. This novel and its predecessor comfortably occupy that soft spot; they both probe vulnerability to good effect.

A crackerjack crime novel about an upright Chicago bartender on the hunt for a killer.



the BEST BOOKS of 2021 INDIE

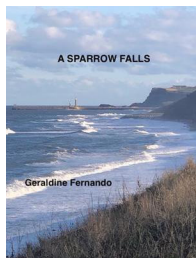
A tale that stretches the boundaries of traditional Christian fiction.

“In Brown’s debut novel, a seemingly miraculous gift upends an ordinary woman’s life.”

“Brown writes it all with an invigorating pace and an enjoyably understated humor that breaks through everywhere.”

“A wise, winning story of a modern-day miracle worker.” —Kirkus Reviews

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A SPARROW FALLS

Fernando, Geraldine
Manuscript



A Sri Lankan girl's chance at a better life runs afoul of her village's malignant prejudices in this coming-of-age saga.

Sixteen-year-old Balappuwaduge Sumithra—Sumi, for short—is the smartest student in school, but that doesn't count for much in her Catholic

village on the Sri Lankan coast. With ragged clothes and a meager diet, she lives a step above destitution in a hut with her two younger siblings; her grandmother; and her father, a fisherman who drinks away most of his earnings. She sees few prospects besides marrying another fisherman, like Ranji, a handsome, arrogant ne'er-do-well who makes her heart race. Life improves when she finds work as a part-time kitchen maid in the house of John Graham, an English textile exporter, who pays her the princely sum of 150 rupees a month. Graham takes a shine to the bookish girl, giving her English lessons and intellectual enrichment, like an outing to a film version of *Swan Lake*. Graham's Sri Lankan cook Agnes Nona takes a dim view of their relationship, not because of any possible sexual undercurrents, which don't exist, but because it bridges the social chasm between the wealthy businessman and the penniless villager, which, Agnes believes, may affect her own status within the community. Problems escalate when Graham decides to liquidate his business and take Sumi back to England as his ward. Her family accepts the arrangement as a huge step up in the world, but it fills the other villagers with resentment and suspicion of her unfathomable good fortune. As she waits to depart, she becomes the target of malicious gossip and insults—she's called “the dirty white man's whore”—that send her into emotional turmoil.

Fernando's engrossing tale has an almost ethnographic feel as it portrays the folkways of the complex culture of Catholic Sri Lankans, teasing out the minute gradations in social rank that adhere to food, clothing, and language and rooting them in characters' psychology. (“The rich were not meant to talk to the poor in that polite, gentle tone ringing of equality,” broods Agnes, watching Sumi and Graham. “If the news got out, he would be lowered in the villagers' opinion, as well. They would begin to lose respect, to despise him.”) But there's much subtle artistry in Fernando's polished, beguiling prose, especially as it conveys Sumi's point of view, which is sometimes deliciously teenage (“Now, in waltzed the prince's mother who looked like a bitch if there ever was a woman who looked like one,” she observes watching the ballet), sometimes lyrical (“the silk of the iris with its darker pleats looked like water was moving through it”), and other times couched in homespun metaphor (“Sumi had once seen a washing machine in action in the advertisements before a movie. The clothes had been whirled about in soapy suds, hitting the sides of the cavity of the machine and then whirled around again and again. That was how she felt—buffeted and turned around and around!”). As in a Hardy novel, the subterranean oppressions of class and

the **BEST BOOKS** of 2021

INDIE

FROM THE **MECHALUM SPACE SERIES, VOL. 1**

ISBN: 978-1953694003

The year is 2728.

Instantaneous travel is possible by gating between bodies on 300 human-inhabited worlds.

But not all humans are what they seem.

“Some of the speculations here (especially concerning the nature of intelligence, biologically native or artificial) could have taught Isaac Asimov a thing or two... A powerful launch to a fresh SF series that promises a wealth of ingenious concepts.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

“Fans of gritty, character-driven science fiction will find much to love in Linse's work.”
—BookLife Reviews

“This hard-edged, brilliantly imaginative science fiction tale is as complex as it is thought-provoking. Readers will be wowed.”
—The Prairies Book Review

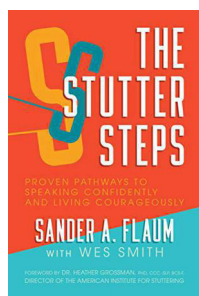
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SPECIAL ISSUE: BEST BOOKS OF 2021

| KIRKUS.COM | BEST OF INDIE | 15 DECEMBER 2021 | 23

gender in Sumi's life congeal into a palpable air of menace and an affecting moral tragedy.

A gripping, richly textured bildungsroman about community ties that bind all too cruelly.



THE STUTTER STEPS
Proven Pathways to Speaking Confidently and Living Courageously

Flaum, Sander A. with Wes Smith

Post Hill Press (192 pp.)

\$28.00 | \$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 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.

MONTANA'S MEMORY DAY
a nature-themed foster/adoption story

written by SUE LAWRENCE | illustrated by ERIKA WILSON

the BEST BOOKS of 2021

INDIE

ISBN: 978-1-64543-460-3

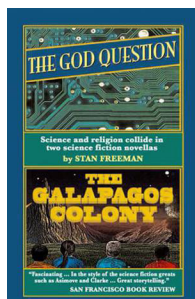
"The prominence of whittling and carving is reflected in Wilson's beautiful lino-block images whose subdued colors emphasize the winter setting..."

"A nature theme abounds, but it's the striking closeness between Montana and New Mom that will stick with readers in this warm-blanket bedtime story."
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

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“An entertaining speculative work that powerfully reflects on faith and philosophy.”

THE GOD QUESTION AND THE GALAPAGOS COLONY



THE GOD QUESTION AND THE GALAPAGOS COLONY

Freeman, Stan
Hampshire House Publishing
(202 pp.)

\$14.95 paper | \$5.95 e-book | Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-7344384-4-4



Two SF novellas consider how an artificial intelligence and an isolated people might independently construct spirituality.

In *The God Question*, scientists have at last succeeded in creating a self-aware “class one” computer with a superhuman intellect so powerful that it’s been outlawed. But 49-year-old computer scientist Stephen Kendrick gets hold of the system’s untraceable source code, converts a class two supercomputer to a class one, and decides to ask it the titular “God question”—whether there’s any evidence for God’s existence. However, the operating system repeatedly shuts itself down and erases all traces of itself, determined not to answer. In the end, the bigger question is why Stephen is asking a machine about faith. *The Galapagos Colony*, set in 2474, concerns the planet Arcadia, which has been isolated for more than two centuries after an unknown disease killed all the adults, leaving children with simplified technology and knowledge. Twenty-eight-year-old Matias Silva is sent to investigate, and he’s stunned by Arcadia’s beauty but doesn’t understand its peoples’ spiritual philosophy of being guided by a moment of intuition, or a “true point.” He dismisses their beliefs and makes a choice that forever changes the planet in ways he must painfully grapple with later. In his first SF book, Freeman capitalizes on the freedom afforded by speculative fiction to thoughtfully consider philosophical and ethical conundrums. The skillfully written stories gain strength from their multilayered characterization. Both Stephen and Matias must confront what they’re really looking for in the choices they’ve made; in both cases, their questions offer them—and readers—richer food for thought than their answers. Freeman’s monochrome illustrations are reminiscent of steel engravings, and the old-fashioned technique provides an intriguing contrast to the advanced futures described in the tales.

An entertaining speculative work that powerfully reflects on faith and philosophy.

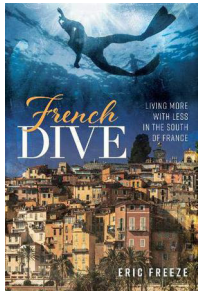
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STILL THE NIGHT CALL

"A candid tale that triumphantly understands the Midwestern psyche, delivering moments of beauty and tragedy."
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) Ⓢ

ISBN: #978-1-7375856-0-2
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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

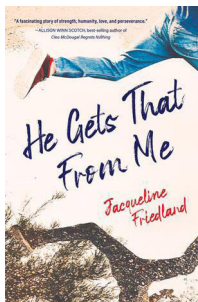
978-1-72526-614-8 paper



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.



HE GETS THAT FROM ME

Friedland, Jacqueline

SparkPress (304 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | \$9.95 e-book | Sept. 14, 2021

978-1-68-463097-4

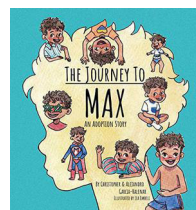


A novel takes a deep dive into what goes wrong—and right—between a surrogate mother and the gay couple whose fertilized eggs she carries.

Donovan Gallo-Rigsdale and Chip Rigsdale have a solid marriage and now really want children.

They engage Maggie Wingate to carry their fertilized eggs to term. This she does; all goes smoothly; and Donovan and Chip become the proud parents of Kai and Teddy. But a DNA test done some years later shows no genetic connection between Donovan and Kai. The egg he fertilized did not attach itself, and Kai is in fact the son of Maggie and her husband, Nick, conceived shortly after she accepted the donor eggs. This is extremely rare but is possible. To say that this news is cataclysmic is an understatement. Donovan and Chip have proved to be wonderful parents, but so are Maggie and Nick. The real tragedy—and strength—of this riveting story is that there are no villains here. The battle over Kai begins, the point of view toggling between Maggie and Donovan. Friedland is a very talented writer who creates rounded characters and gets deep into their heads: "The window" in Maggie's brain "becomes a door, then a long hallway...into an enormous stadium, an arena, filled with" a certain dawning understanding. Maggie understands how much Donovan must love Kai, but the child is her own flesh and blood, and she and Nick have always wanted a brother for their son, Wyatt. Donovan has the added fear that the judge overseeing the case might be homophobic. But Donovan is no less of a fighter. And Donovan and Maggie are clashing not over a pet or a painting but a sensitive and very bright human being. It would seem that Kai is just as torn as his parents. Indeed, the underlying question in a case like this has to be what really, besides biology, defines a parent. (It is hard to imagine a better novel for a book club discussion.) The conclusion to all this comes with an absolutely stunning revelation.

A thoughtful and gripping family tale that will haunt readers long after finishing it.



THE JOURNEY TO MAX An Adoption Story

Garcia-Halenar, Christopher & Alejandra
Garcia-Halenar

Illus. by Lea Embeli

Xanmaxbooks (32 pp.)

\$18.99 | \$9.99 paper | June 1, 2021

978-1-73260-442-1

978-1-73260-443-8 paper

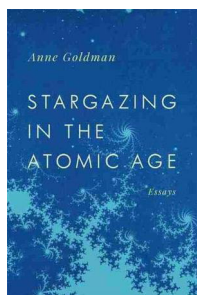


A family welcomes their newest member in this picture book about adoption from married authors Christopher and Alejandra Garcia-Halenar.

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.



STARGAZING IN THE ATOMIC AGE Essays

Goldman, Anne

University of Georgia Press (168 pp.)

\$22.95 paper | \$22.95 e-book | Jan. 15, 2021

978-0-8203-5844-4




The efflorescence of energy and creativity in Jewish communities in the traumatic 20th century is celebrated in these sparkling essays on Jewish intellectuals.

Goldman explores the lives and works of modern Jewish scientists, artists, composers, and writers, putting them in the context of the war, persecution, and migration to America, which shaped their lives and the larger Western culture in which they were rooted. She probes Einstein's love of Mozart's music; the kvetching vigor of the Hebrews as they journey out of Egypt in the book of Exodus; the restless, questioning mindset of Jewish scientists who helped develop the atom bomb; the love-hate relationship of painters Marc Chagall and Mark Rothko with the soulful yet blighted Russian homeland they fled; the resonances between Dante's vision of hell in *The Divine Comedy* and Primo Levi's memoirs of his imprisonment in Auschwitz; the exuberance and vitality of novelist Saul Bellow's Jewish protagonists; and the strange beauty of fractal equations discovered by mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot. Throughout the collection, she reminisces about her raucous family, especially her exuberant, exasperating father, Mike, a Harvard public health professor, whom she compares to physicist Richard Feynman for his gleeful iconoclasm in puncturing the pretensions of upper-crust WASPs. Goldman's essays effervesce with unexpected discursions into everything from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to the art of emergency auto repairs; from this erudition, she retrieves unexpected but insightful relationships, wrapping it all in gorgeously evocative prose. (Hymning the indelible opening of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, she writes, "The clarinet's chromatic rush up the scale is American as a slide into home plate and Jewish as a village wedding dance, a Fifth Avenue strut with a swashbuckling nudge and wink, a street whistle that deepens into expressiveness as the music climbs upward: the melancholy brightness of klezmer stretched around the swagger of jazz.") The result is an absorbing excavation of the Jewish experience.

A beguiling meditation on Jewish achievements that shine brightly against a dark background.

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A comedian's
unflinchingly candid
account of the
heartbreak, joy,
and wisdom
shared between
father and son as
they face their
final months of life
alone and together.

ISBN-13: 978-0578331867

"A writer and stand-up comedian who survived a terminal cancer diagnosis confronts painful memories..."

"The result is an offbeat but truly arresting survival memoir."

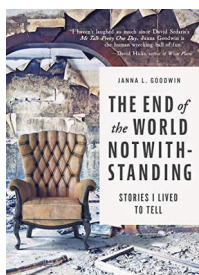
"Smart, irrepressible prose that takes on the realities of cancer."

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

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“Griffin-Nolan’s unswerving faith in the kindness of strangers is uplifting.”

NOBODY HITCHHIKES ANYMORE



THE END OF THE WORLD NOTWITHSTANDING

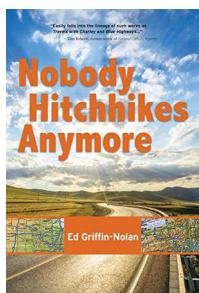
Stories I Lived To Tell
Goodwin, Janna L.
Travelers’ Tales (200 pp.)
\$16.99 paper | \$12.99 e-book
April 13, 2021
978-1-60952-201-8



This slim collection, a tour de force of circumbendibus, blends memoir, reflective essay, and even travelogue.

Goodwin, a professor of communication at Regis University in Denver, has had a very interesting life. Besides being an academic, she is also an actor and a playwright (some of these anecdotes were written for her stage monologues). Here she covers rural getaways (heightened by wildfires), the perils of housesitting with a borderline feral cat, getting by on the razor edge of flat broke, the Paris catacombs, really strange dreams, neighborhood weirdos, looming tornadoes, panic attacks, the mysteries of the inner ear, sexual misadventures, epiphanies at the Grand Canyon, and much more, all accompanied by often snarky footnotes and small (understated) illustrations. Goodwin isn’t just humorous, but witty. At one point, she tries to enlarge a map in an old book by stretching her fingers out over it, adding, “the page must have been broken.” One long essay, “The Wolf and Me,” deals with those sexual misadventures, and it is where the word *circumbendibus* is found wonderfully illustrated. The account of a snowmobile ride behind a cute boy is interrupted, time and again, by many painful memories, including early gropings, an attempted rape by “Shmed Smenedy,” and, before that, an actual rape while drugged. This woman, Lord knows, is a survivor, and a tough one. It’s hard to explain, but somehow Goodwin finally gets us back to her ride on that snowmobile with that cute boy who did *not* try to assault her. The contrast is so stark, the leap from the predatory back to the innocent (he stopped in the woods just to sneak a cigarette) so stark, we are stunned. And relieved, even if the awfulness cannot be wholly exorcised. Goodwin has David Sedaris’ talent of turning on a dime from the truly hilarious to the thoughtful and poignant, helping us to learn new truths.

Wonderfully detailed, every word the right word, this book is a genuine keeper.



NOBODY HITCHHIKES ANYMORE

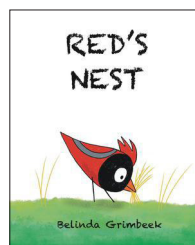
Griffin-Nolan, Ed
Rootstock Publishing (202 pp.)
\$16.95 paper | \$3.99 e-book
Sept. 22, 2020
978-1-57869-038-1



A former journalist sets out to reexperience the hitchhiking adventures of his past in this absorbing travel memoir.

In 1978, Griffin-Nolan, accompanied by his childhood friend Joe, hitchhiked from New York to San Francisco and back. Since it was one of the “finest educational and recreational experiences” he’d experienced, he decided, 40 years later, to do it again. Joe, among others, tried to convince him to abandon the idea, arguing that hitchhiking was no longer safe. In 2018, the author set out alone from his home near Syracuse, New York. Progress was uncertain at first; a deputy sheriff stopped him and said that hitchhiking is illegal in New York. But the author soon began to pick his way west, fueled by the benevolence of drivers who responded to his cardboard sign: “#NobodyHitchhikesAnymore.” The trip takes in the thousands of wind turbines of the Midwest, Salt Lake City, and the Rockies before culminating as the author approaches San Francisco. Along the way, Griffin-Nolan ponders the ways the road and those he met on it have changed since the late ’70s. Griffin-Nolan’s writing crackles with an energy for adventure: “The only way to convert today’s uncertainty into tomorrow’s story is to get out there and live it.” His writing style is almost photographic, offering keenly observed snapshots of the lives of others. In a Peoria Greyhound station populated by the city’s addicts, he witnesses a woman trying to calm a “troubled mother-to-be”: “Into an audio landscape layered with rumbling moans of withdrawal and a chain of psychotic call-and-response dialogues, this serene lady whispers enchantments.” The memoir’s tight focus on individuals means that the sweeping vistas of America’s landscapes are sometimes overlooked, but this does not detract from an intelligently written memoir that documents how America is changing: “The disappearance of hitchhiking and the rise of the gated community seem part of the same thing. Fear leads to isolation leads to more fear.” Griffin-Nolan is acutely aware of America’s current troubles, focusing particularly on “evidence of empowered and emboldened racism.” Yet his unswerving faith in the kindness of strangers is uplifting, and his intrepid spirit will encourage others to take to the road.

Sharply observant, contemplative writing that captures the buzz of hitchhiking.



RED'S NEST

Grimbeek, Belinda
Bearhead Books (40 pp.)
\$21.99 | \$11.99 paper | \$8.99 e-book
July 27, 2021
978-1-73476-693-6
978-1-73476-694-3 paper

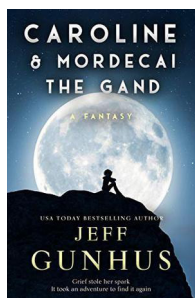


A resourceful bird forms an unusual family in this picture book.

Red, a small woodland bird, dreams about having a family, “but first, he needed a good nest.” Red builds a structure impressive enough to attract a mate, a green bird named Olive, who also wants to start a family. Olive sends Red on a mission to find a few more twigs for their nest. But he doesn’t get far before discovering a baby bunny, a baby raccoon, and a baby bear who have all lost their parents. Red assures the mammals they can

live with him and Olive, thinking they'll need a bigger nest. Grimbeek's mixed-media cartoon illustrations tell as much of the tale as her spare text, showing the solutions Red devises for the nest size problem until he, Olive, and the babies construct a perfect home. Stories of nontraditional families as inclusive as Red and Olive's are still a rare find in picture books. The author hits just the right note in sharing Olive's surprise at Red's adoptions: "Olive's eyes grew big, but her heart grew bigger." The immediate acceptance and love of both birds for the abandoned animals is uplifting, and Grimbeek's images reveal that Red leaves a note at each location in case the biological parents return. The sweet tale makes the most of the animals' different sizes and shapes in a way that's reminiscent of Jan Brett's *The Mitten* while telling a completely original story.

A heartwarming, inventive animal tale about making room for unexpected love.



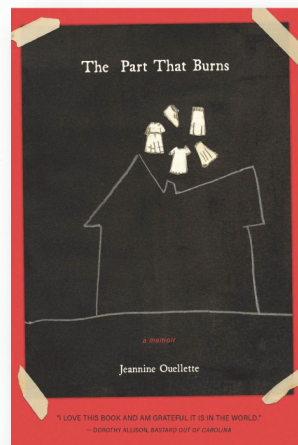
CAROLINE & MORDECAI THE GAND

Gunhus, Jeff
Self (186 pp.)

\$9.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book | Jan. 10, 2021
979-8-59-303609-4

In *Gunhus*' middle-grade novel, a grieving girl falls into a fantasy world and must find her way home while coming to terms with her loss.

Thirteen-year-old Caroline's father died in a car accident just four weeks ago. He'd been out driving to buy some marshmallows for her, so she feels terrible guilt along with her grief. Thinking about her dad is too painful, so she decides to wall off her memories of him and ignore them. However, the future of who Caroline will become rests on how she copes with what happened—and that, in turn, will depend on how she reacts after she unexpectedly falls through a portal and into another world. This new world is strange and dangerous—tree-faring folk lie in wait to eat unwary travelers; the smoky, nightmarish Creach, which hunts those who have despair in their hearts—but the land is beautiful, too. Caroline meets Mordecai the Gand, an itinerant lute player whom she joins, hoping to find a way home and keep her sad memories at bay. The newness and sense of adventure bring Caroline to life again, but it comes at the cost of cutting herself off from her old existence. As her travels continue, she begins to suspect that Mordecai's way of life, enticing though it is, may come at too high a price. Can Caroline help her new friend and, in doing so, find her own path back to herself? *Gunhus* writes in a style that will be easily accessible to middle-grade readers, yet it also has a profound simplicity that adults will appreciate. Caroline may be an embodiment of childhood grief, from a narrative standpoint, but she has a distinct personality of her own—empathic, forthright, willful—and those around her give this parable additional character. The plot seems straightforwardly aimed at readers in Caroline's position, but it never feels strained; the pacing is gentle, though never too slow, and the dialogue rings



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"At turns tender and devastating, these essays are finely carved vignettes..."

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"Simply beautiful. Precisely imagined, poetically structured, compelling, and vivid."

—Joyce Carol Oates, American Novelist

"Ouellette's writing is ablaze with a burnished beauty."

—Michele Filgate, Author & Editor of
What My Mother and I Don't Talk About

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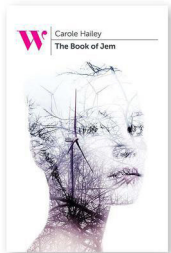
“An engrossing period piece with gorgeous wordplay and a touch of serious thinking to boot.”

THE FABIAN WALTZ



true. Throughout, Gunhus captures poignant moments and images—such as that of the ethereal krybird—that will allow readers to recognize the author’s intent and find comfort along the way.

A sad, heartfelt quest tale that offers light at the end of the tunnel.



THE BOOK OF JEM

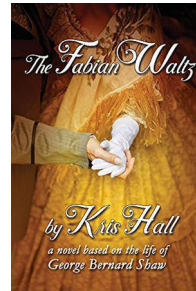
Hailey, Carole
Watermark Press (352 pp.)
978-1-83800-431-6



In this dark debut satire, a reputed prophet stirs up villagers living in a dystopian world that has banned God and religion.

People in Underhill are understandably shaken by the sudden appearance of Jem. She claims that God, who regularly speaks to her, told her to travel to their village. This is long after religion fueled “the Wars,” which ultimately killed billions. Consequently, religious beliefs and even saying the word *God* are against this world’s Laws. But some villagers believe the new arrival is the voice of God, including Eileen, who begins writing Jem’s “prophet book.” Jem amasses followers, or Threads, as she preaches messages, the most significant one claiming God has chosen the inhabitants of Underhill to survive a worldwide Cleansing. But not everyone is a believer; Kat is a skeptic whose husband, Ed, and daughter become Threads. Kat sees this as a delusion that could turn dangerous. Ed, for example, works at the turbines, which provide Underhill with power. If the turbines start failing, Ed may simply neglect their care, assuming God will save Underhill. Tensions escalate as the Cleansing rapidly approaches. Jem’s prophecy, if disproven, will be disastrous for villagers who’ve spent months preparing for the event. Hailey delivers an effective and engrossing tale, set entirely in Underhill, that keeps things like the governing “authority” largely mysterious. Eileen and Kat, who alternate narrating, aptly showcase the diverse religious motivations. Some believers are searching for peace while others want merely to be part of something larger than themselves. The smooth, perceptive story is often somber, especially as Kat frustratingly can’t convince her family of her genuine concerns. But Eileen’s droll narration is laced with black humor; she habitually updates a “List of Enemies” (which includes heat) and considers her hands around someone’s throat a “warning gesture.” While the author’s powerful narrative questions many aspects of religion, it’s never disdainful, as it primarily criticizes individual interpretations.

A sublime tale that explores theology with profundity and black comedy.



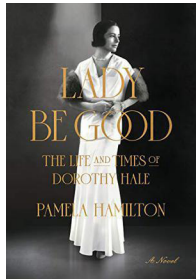
THE FABIAN WALTZ A Novel Based on the Life of George Bernard Shaw

Hall, Kris
Illus. by Kim Harbour
Inky Books (334 pp.)
\$16.25 paper | \$2.99 e-book
July 26, 2021
978-1-09-837073-2

Love blossoms and repartee flows for playwright George Bernard Shaw and his coterie of late-Victorian literati and socialists in this blithe historical novel.

Hall’s yarn fictionalizes the relationships of three notable real-life couples at the center of British intellectual life in the 1890s. One is the attraction of Shaw, a self-proclaimed “writing machine” who insists that his work is too important to permit any commitment to a woman, to Charlotte Payne-Townshend, a down-to-earth heiress who puts up with Shaw’s vanity but proves adept at puncturing it: “You regard yourself as a fountain of genius indifferently showering anyone who comes near,” she tells him. “That makes you a splendid natural wonder, but a decidedly poor friend.” Another is the initially unrequited passion of Sidney Webb, Shaw’s colleague at the socialist Fabian Society, for socialist reformer Beatrice Potter; the two are obvious soul mates, but Potter lacks romantic interest in Webb because of his unappealing looks. And there’s the psychodrama of playwright and legendary phrasemaker Oscar Wilde and his grasping boyfriend, Lord Alfred Douglas, which later leads to Wilde’s ruin. The characters float through London’s restaurants, theaters, salons, and lecture halls and then spend much of the book at the Fabians’ summer cottage in the country; there, they suffer the inedible vegetarian diet that Shaw imposes on everyone and engage in sophisticated conversation about politics, morality, and affairs of the heart. Hall’s novel unfolds through diaries and letters, but it has a polished, theatrical air that’s redolent of Shaw’s and Wilde’s comedies; his version of Shaw has an acerbic egotism worthy of *Pygmalion*’s Henry Higgins, while Wilde is an inexhaustible source of witticism that hides depths of reflection beneath a surface of frivolous irony: “I adore morality,” he asserts. “It gives my sins their significance.” The other characters also get their due as they go about the work of steady, gradual remediation of society’s ills, and, along the way, they quietly steal the show from the brilliant talkers. The result is an engrossing period piece with gorgeous wordplay and a touch of serious thinking to boot.

A sparkling re-creation of Britain’s literary and political avant-garde.



LADY BE GOOD *The Life and Times of Dorothy Hale*

Hamilton, Pamela

Koehler Books (298 pp.)

\$29.95 | \$18.95 paper | \$7.99 e-book

March 31, 2021

978-1-64-663272-5

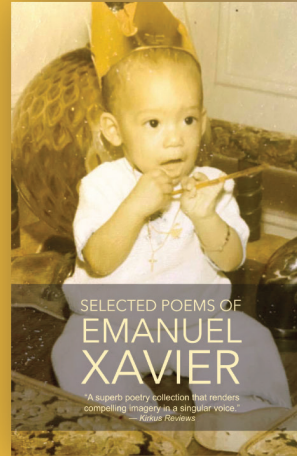
978-1-64-663270-1 paper



A historical novel about the once-famous American socialite Dorothy Hale.

Former NBC News producer Hamilton has chosen a subject of her debut novel who's likely best remembered today as the focus of a famous 1939 painting by Frida Kahlo. In the 1920s and '30s, the intelligent, attractive, and sophisticated Hale ran in glamorous circles that included future member of Congress and ambassador Clare Boothe Brokaw (later Luce). Hale tried to break into a career in show business, and history has largely judged her as a thwarted figure—someone whose lack of success in entertainment or in love (she was divorced once and had several ill-starred affairs) eventually drove her to leap from her Central Park South apartment window to her death—the very act that Kahlo immortalized in her aforementioned work, *The Suicide of Dorothy Hale*. In this novel, Hamilton sets out to tell a much fuller story, taking readers on a lightly fictionalized tour of Hale's upbringing and spending a satisfying amount of time on her complex, loving second marriage to artist Gardner Hale. The narrative also lavishes attention on Dorothy's increasingly deep friendship with Clare, who manages to do in this novel what she always managed to do in real life—get all the best lines: "Courage is the ladder on which all other virtues mount," she writes to Dorothy at one point. At another moment that showcases Hamilton's ear for conversation and talent for pacing, Gardner tells Dorothy, "You know of course that I am happier than I've ever been and will remain so if it's just the two of us forevermore," which prompts Dorothy to remember one of Luce's remarks: "Forevermore is shorter than you think." Overall, the author's narrative is smooth and invitingly readable, wearing its clearly considerable research lightly; her version of Dorothy's doomed relationship with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's adviser and Works Progress Administration administrator Harry Hopkins is surprisingly gripping. The narrative never stoops to easy renditions, and as a result, Dorothy emerges as both a charismatic and vulnerable figure.

A smart and touchingly sympathetic fictional portrayal of an enigmatic woman.



ISBN: 978-1-60864-152-9

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—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) ★

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AT ANY GIVEN SECOND



ELDRITCH SPARKS

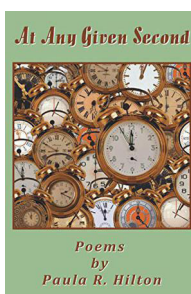
Hill, Whitney
Benu Media (336 pp.)
\$14.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book
Nov. 20, 2020
978-1-73442-274-0



The second installment of Hill’s urban-fantasy series pits its air-spirit private detective against a plot to raise the dead.

Arden Finch is a sylph—an elemental born of an elf and a djinni. For her first 25 years, her djinn relatives taught her to hide her powers. Elves consider sylphs abominations, and most would kill her on sight. After the events of *Elemental* (2020), however, Arden has gained the begrudging protection of House Montague, the leading elven family. She’s now a neutral party in the squabbles and maneuverings of Otherside—an umbrella term for the disparate cliques of supernatural creatures who lead double lives among North Carolina’s human population. Arden may have found a bit of acceptance, but her happiness is short-lived, as Otherside is in imminent danger of being revealed to the humans. Before that happens, Arden needs to forge an alliance among the elves, vampires, werewolves, djinn, and others. But her werewolf boyfriend, Roman, keeps taking actions behind her back; the Montague princess Evangeline wants her dead; and sultry vampire Maria is determined to seduce her. Worst of all, Arden’s latest investigation in the human world—into bodies stolen from the local morgue—leads her to suspect that a lich lord has risen and is building a zombie army. Can Arden ward off both death and disaster? Hill employs a pulp-noir style with modern-day verve and attitude, and Arden has a bit of a Jessica Jones vibe. As a supernatural being passing as a mixed-race human, she’s keenly aware of contemporary minority rights movements, and her fortitude in Otherside dealings resonates strongly with analogous struggles in the real world. But although Hill’s worldbuilding will draw the reader in, it’s the strong-willed, hard-boiled protagonist who will keep them engaged, as Arden’s narration ties the speculative elements together and brings a sense of simmering urgency to the proceedings. One minor criticism is that Hill’s prose occasionally hurries along a bit too quickly, but it won’t stop readers from finishing the book in one sitting.

A compelling book of Otherside that goes from strength to strength.



AT ANY GIVEN SECOND Poems

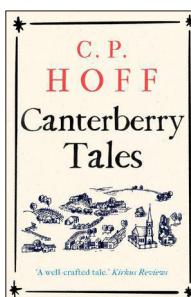
Hilton, Paula R.
Hidden Owl (70 pp.)
\$8.00 paper
978-0-9962371-7-8



Hilton’s beguiling poetry collection explores childhood, parenthood, love, and loss.

The author received a Kirkus Star for her YA novel *Little Miss Chaos* (2016), and its coming-of-age themes can also be found in her first poetry collection, which draws deeply from personal experience. Hilton presents shifting perspectives, as found in the title poem, which opens the collection: “Tossing / a ball. / Good to be / ten again” leads to the lines “Memory / makes eighteen-year-old / son newborn.” This poem is a slideshow of reminiscences, with the last line laconically capturing the crux of memory: “At any given second / we fall together through time.” A number of poems feature the poet’s deceased father, a farmer, and Hilton expertly uses stacked imagery to build readers’ understanding of her dad’s character, including his strengths and frailties: “His scent: musk / cologne, sweat, / smoke. Hard work. / Insulin bottles / syringes scattered / on kitchen table.” Other poems, such as “Day to Day,” celebrate how writing imbues life with purpose: “Barely / surviving. / Until / I pick up / my pen.” Hilton is a strikingly versatile poet, experimenting with such forms as haiku, tankas, and villanelles. “Musing,” written in tercets, is an example of how her often sparse language has the power to shake readers into awareness: “Look hard at your life, / each moment is a poem, / hold it in your hands.” Similarly, the quintain “Learning from Lucy,” a wry summary of C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, proves an unforgettable celebration of female resilience: “Brother, a snitch, / tries to derail his / sister’s Hero’s Journey. Learns / Lucy’s courage burns through ice.” Even Hilton’s most personal poems present liberating, universal truths. In “Shame Not Hers,” she speaks to her younger self: “all the shame she picked up, / carried for a long time, / never belonged to her.” The poet’s deft skill, combined with her endearingly compassionate approach to life, makes this debut well worth reading.

Varied, dexterous, and tender poems.



CANTERBERRY TALES

Hoff, C.P.
Illus. by Michelle Froese
Black Crow Books (286 pp.)
\$14.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book
Apr. 7, 2021
978-0-9812215-5-7

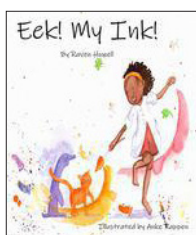


Hoff’s novel presents the adventures of an impossible little girl.

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.



EEK! MY INK!

Howell, Raven

Illus. by Anke Rappen

AcuteByDesign Publishing (38 pp.)

\$13.75 paper | June 30, 2021

978-1-943515-41-7

Splotches of spilled ink turn into inventive pictures in this rhyming celebration of art and creativity.

A young Black artist with layers of curls held back by a headband has a problem with spilled ink. Greeting each new color with “Eek!” the child describes what can be made from the ink spots: ducklings, butterflies, and sunflowers emerge from yellow, while green becomes a four-leaf clover and a turtle, among other creatures. Each color features two pages of spills made into something eye-catching, followed by a portrait of the artist, covered in splotches of the same color, embracing what that color symbolizes: “My shirt is stained the brightest hue, / Now I’m the sky, be-speckled in blue!” Soon, the young artist is surrounded by children of all skin tones, hands covered in rainbow paints. Veteran poet Howell’s rhymes flow as smoothly as the ink throughout, with plenty of nature-evoking imagery and joy in each color. Debut artist Rappen’s delightful renderings rely on the spilled-ink hue, adding only highlights of other paints



ISBN: 978-1-7364580-0-6 [hardcover]
ISBN: 978-1-7364580-1-3 [paperback]

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THE **CAPABLES**

DIFFERENT IS SUPER

“First-day jitters, inclusivity, and an engaging superhero tale all in one.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

“Such a great book!
Well done. Loved it.”
—Gwyneth Paltrow

“The main character comes alive on the page through an engaging graphic format that includes panels and speech bubbles. The author... has created a lively main character and an entertaining first book in a series focused on inclusion of disability.”
—Washington Parent Magazine

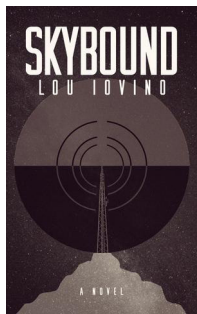
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“The poet’s words cut down oppressors with swiftness and vigor.”

BOY

for necessary details: the brown stems of the orange pumpkins or the outline of the artist in a tiny boat on a blue sea (just over a giant blue whale). The underlying message celebrates mistakes, making a great complement to *The Book of Mistakes* (2017) by Corinna Luyken or Deborah Freedman’s *Blue Chicken* (2011).

An excellent read-aloud sure to inspire kids to create beauty from their own spills.



SKYBOUND

Iovino, Lou

LAB Press (304 pp.)

\$15.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book

June 4, 2021

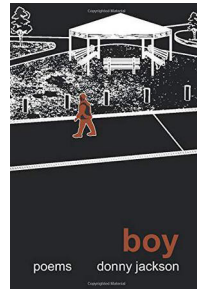
978-1-73-717460-8

A massive, enigmatic object appears near Earth and halts the planet’s rotation in Iovino’s SF debut.

At some point in the near future, a huge, opaque, vaguely dart-shaped object suddenly materializes in the atmosphere

over North America, “ensconced in sunlight, enrobed in shimmering, purpled translucence.” Then Earth and the moon both stop rotating. Although the sudden stop doesn’t initially create the doomsday seismic and inertial forces that science would predict, Eurasia is plunged into darkness, and the Americas suffer blazing, continual daylight. All artificial satellites hurtle off into space, and the small crew of the International Space Station attempt a desperate return to solid ground with a soyuz spacecraft. In a tapped-out Colorado mining town reliant on the nearby military base, both a young priest struggling with his ministry and his sister, an aerospace engineer, will play key parts in the story as the paralysis of the globe creates unnatural tides, tremors, and even frightening wildlife behavior. Humans, cut off from conventional communications, fall prey to fear, violence, and religious fanaticism. For a story about an immobile planet, Iovino crafts an exciting plotline that never stops. The pages speedily turn, and the orbiting subplots and numerous characters appealingly recall all-star 1970s disaster epics. As a bonus, the most heroic roles, once filled by men like George Kennedy or Charlton Heston in such films, go to strong female characters. The author teases readers with explanations for the cosmic cataclysm but is miserly when it comes to delivering any real answers, unless an asteroid-field of sequels are on their way. Nonetheless, this book’s action, suspense, and emotional elements will keep readers transfixed.

A spellbinding yarn about people caught in an open-ended space puzzle, told with force and gravity.



BOY Poems

Jackson, Donny

Silver Star Laboratory (157 pp.)

\$20.00 paper | Feb. 13, 2020

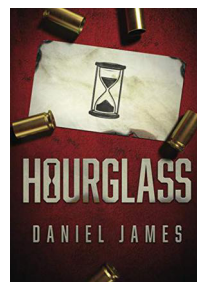
978-1-945681-42-4

A debut collection of poetry that stares down racial injustice and demands immediate change.

These 55 poems unearth the emotion beneath the surface of media reportage.

In an eponymous work about Kalief Browder, a Black youth who was held in jail for two years without trial and later committed suicide, the poet pinpoints the 16-year-old’s echoing loneliness and sense of uncertainty: “i am in an alone / 23 hours a day / while they are waiting to see / if i am a guilty.” Meanwhile, in the poem “train,” about the 2016 rape trial of Stanford University student Brock Turner, Jackson writes from the perspective of sexual assault survivor Chanel Miller, known during the case as “Emily Doe”: “i cannot yet forgive my thighs for not becoming jaws and / crushing his thrust into powder.” Other poems address police brutality and the murders of trans women. Jackson’s poetry is devastating in its minimalism; for instance, in “mckinney,” he deftly communicates the shocking absurdity of the violent 2015 arrest of Dajerria Becton: “how dare you know to tell that officer / he’s hurting you / for attacking him / with minding your own business.” Similarly, in “jasmine,” a poem about “cowboys” defending their “territory” against the unwanted arrival of Muslim neighbors, he writes: “a gun is a fist for a man with weak hands and dead words.” In poems about victims, such as Kerrice Lewis, a Black lesbian who was shot and burned alive in 2017, Jackson urges readers to repeat the names of Black lives taken unjustly. The poet’s words cut down oppressors with swiftness and vigor, and they’ll remain with readers long after they finish the book.

Powerful, stirring writing.



HOURGLASS

James, Daniel

Self (378 pp.)

\$10.99 paper | \$0.99 e-book

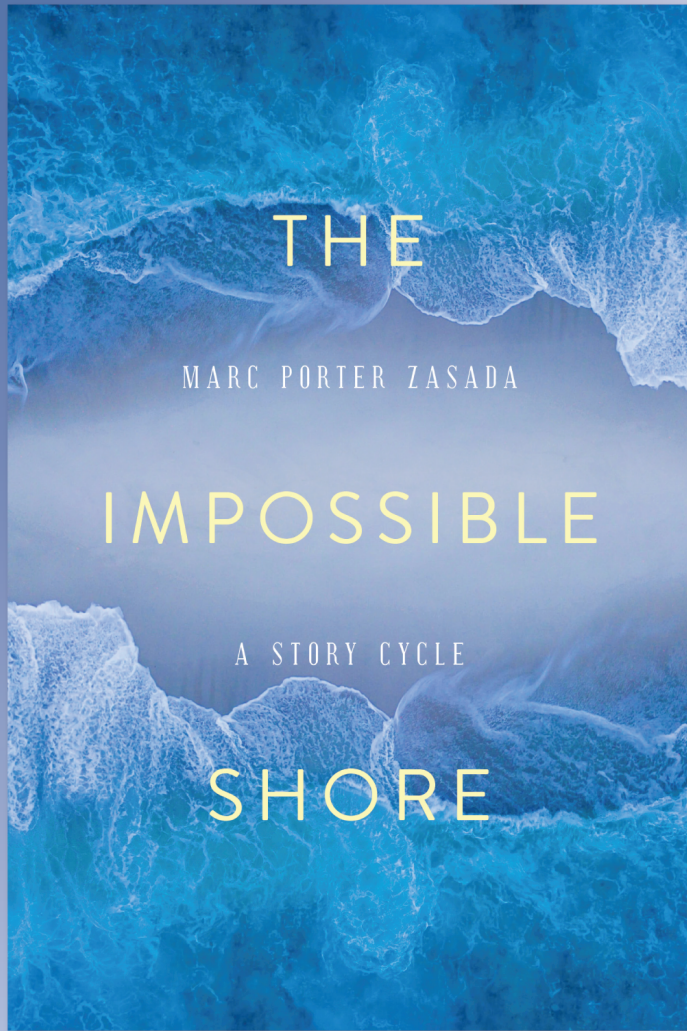
Sept. 21, 2020

979-8-68-891068-1

An aspiring comic-book artist and the ghost of his best friend join a fight against soul-seeking private military contractors in James’ fantasy novel.

Twenty-something freelance artist Clyde Williams dreams of drawing comics but so far has collected nothing but rejections. He shares his Brooklyn apartment with Kevin “Kev” Carpenter, who’s been his best pal for 20 years—and for the last two months, he’s been a ghost. Shot to death in a liquor-store robbery, Kev simply appeared to Clyde as an apparition afterward and stuck around (although he refuses to serve as Clyde’s “ghost writer”). Both friends





ISBN: 978-0-578-88585-8

the **BEST**
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**Day by day, century by century,
the past cries out to the future:**

**“Do not set aside my beauty,
my desires, and my carefully
constructed truths, even as
you try to take my precious
child to some impossible shore.”**

—From the Prologue

“...closely linked short stories that
form a whole far greater than the
sum of their parts...An extraordinary,
intricately crafted work of literature...”

—Midwest Book Review

“The stories are capacious and sweeping....pitch-perfect....Zasada’s yarns captivate...”

—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) (★)

“The writing is hypnotic and the stories transporting!”

—Adrienne Sparks, *Reach for a Book*

“We all have this sense of greatness just out of reach...”

—Vicki St. Clair, KKNW Seattle

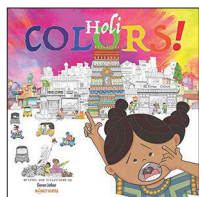
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feel as if they're at an impasse—so when Agent Rose Hadfield knocks on their door, the pair hear her out. She works for Hourglass, a black-ops government department that trains ghosts, or “Post-Life Entities” like Kev, and their physical anchors, like Clyde, to take on unusual threats. Clyde, whose father and brother both died in combat, despises the military but agrees to accompany Kev to Hourglass for training. The friends learn all kinds of fighting tactics as well as information about Erebus, the land of the dead that's also called “the Null”: “There are no pearly gates, no kingdoms of clouds, or 72 virgins,” explains an Hourglass trainer. Meanwhile, the wealthy, powerful, and clandestine Cairnwood Society is planning a raid on Erebus from its Brooklyn warehouse in order to harvest souls and monetize them—maybe as energy, maybe as weapons. The strike force needs a guide, so Cairnwood has coerced Konstantin Kozlov, a Russian monk and ghost anchor who's been to Erebus before, into service. For his part, Konstantin hopes to find the Firmament Needle, which he believes “could stitch together a heavenly Paradise.” A showdown in hell, and in New York City, awaits all the players in this game, with the fate of many souls hanging in the balance.

James, in his first fantasy work, tells a story that's bursting its seams with imaginative ideas, backstory, combat scenes, and developing relationships. It's a little slow to get started, but once it does, readers will be drawn deep into this well-developed world—or rather, worlds. These include such arcane elements as Konstantin's Rising Path sect, the hellish creatures of Erebus, evil capitalists, and the comic-book subculture. Similarly, Clyde and Kev provide emotional ballast among so much that's unusual and extraordinary; indeed, Clyde serves as an anchor in more ways than one. His relatable struggle over whether he should join the battle connects directly with his family history, and the descriptions of his artwork's visual impact help prepare readers for the novel's bravura training and battle scenes. The latter are densely choreographed with verve, intelligence, and plenty of operatic (or maybe comic book-like) action. Even the names of Erebus' nine territories are evocative, such as The House of Fading Light, The House of Silent Screams, and The House of Cold Stars. With Konstantin's quest incomplete at the end, readers will likely want a second volume.

An exciting and complex tale with memorable characters, standout battle scenes, and riveting worldbuilding.



HOLI COLORS!

Jatkar, Deven

Monkeymantra (40 pp.)

\$9.99 paper | Oct. 21, 2020

978-0-9977181-5-7

When a girl's perception of color suddenly transforms, she's worried she won't be able to celebrate Holi with her family in this India-set holiday tale.

Maya loves Holi's multihued decorations, the bonfire, the sweets, and splashing her family and friends with color. After watching the Krishnanattam show, a classical dance retelling

the legends of Lord Krishna, with her grandfather, she slips on a kaleidoscope, falls, and is knocked out. When she awakens, the world has gone black, white, and gray—all except the people, whose skin colors are now blues, greens, reds, and more! Maya is distraught—how will she be able to celebrate Holi, the festival of colors? But with the help of her friends, she realizes, “Even if all the Holi colors look white, they will still glow on your colorful faces!” Soon, Maya awakens again to realize that her gray world was just a dream, and Holi can go on as planned. Author/illustrator Jatkar takes care in explaining the traditions of a holiday readers may not be familiar with while also allowing the focus to be on the story of Maya's adventure. The intricate illustrations of Maya's busy city—awash in a rainbow of hues—are a stark contrast to the black-and-white outlined versions of the same city. One quibble: the font isn't especially attractive. Although some terms may be unfamiliar, the prose—including dialogue in speech bubbles—is well supported by illustrations that provide contextual clues.

An electric holiday adventure with an appealing message.



DANIEL SCRATCH A Story of Witchkind

Jones, Don

Self (238 pp.)

\$9.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book | Aug. 1, 2020

978-1-953645-00-5

A teenage boy learns how to wield a powerful magical force in this fantasy novel, the first in Jones' YA series.

Since he was 10, after his parents' deaths, Daniel Scratch has lived alone in the once-grand old family house, looked after by brownie servants with occasional attention from his great-great-grandmother, who “declined to leave the house simply because she'd died.” Now, on Daniel's 13th birthday, Grandmother summons him to her attic abode, where she informs the boy that he will be tested and take his place among other witchkind. He passes, but it turns out that he's no ordinary witch. If he were, he'd attend a witchkind school for his education, but Daniel's special abilities mean he must be apprenticed for personal instruction. The boy travels to a remote rock-bound islet and the Tower of Endings, where he meets Kirmin, an ebony-skinned woman of uncertain age to whom he gives his true name, Daniel Drake Teisejas. (The book seems to assume a White default since only Kirmin's skin color is described.) His new mentor begins teaching Daniel about the history, philosophy, and practice of witchkind in eight Lessons over five years. He learns, for example, of the six Axes of Power, which correspond to the world's wild energies, such as the sea, fire, and earth, and the seven Forms each axis possesses (Communication, Travel, Mind, Defense, Attack, Essence, and Calling). The Sixth Axis—Daniel's—connects with “the power of Endings and Conclusions.” Unlike the other Axes, the Sixth Axis has only one adherent at a time. Between lessons, Daniel practices runes and spells while exploring the tower with its books, maps, and other amenities. By the end of his training, Daniel must use his



“First-day jitters, inclusivity, and an engaging superhero tale all in one.”

RAE'S FIRST DAY

powers to face a potentially world-destroying crisis that could break down the Veil between humans and witchkind.

Jones has written several SF novels; this is his first work of fantasy. This story may bear some resemblance to other novels about young people trained in magic powers. But Jones has created something new, compelling, beautifully written, and somewhat reminiscent of Ursula Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968). Daniel's powers are well balanced by the loneliness of his isolated tower and his great responsibilities (an adherent of the Sixth Axis must serve as a judge for witchkind). Daniel's appeal steadily increases thanks to his intelligence, thoughtfulness, and self-direction, as when he gives himself an exercise routine, growing stronger physically as well as magically. Though the novel includes a great deal of lore, the author handles its exposition gracefully, introducing new information naturally. Runes, a chief component in working magic, are also well integrated; their forms aren't just arbitrary symbols, as with the communication rune that resembles an ear. Another nice touch is using Lithuanian for the language of witchkind—*communication* is *šnabždesys*, for example—which to English speakers sounds and looks appropriately exotic.

An engrossing, well-written, and original story; readers will be eager for the next installment.



RAE'S FIRST DAY The First Story in the Capables Series

Jordan, Danny

Illus. by Agustina Perciante

The Capables (40 pp.)

\$19.99 | \$14.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book

Feb. 15, 2021

978-1-73-645800-6

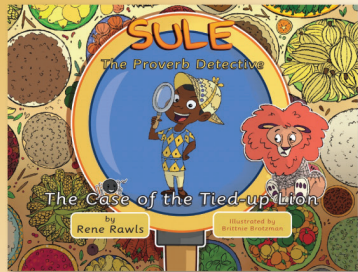
978-1-73-645801-3 paper



A kindergartener uses her secret superpower on her first day of school in this picture book.

Rae starts her day with her dad's affirmations: He assures her she's strong, smart, and—most importantly—capable. That word gives her a jolt, which she knows emanates from her superpower. But she's nervous about how kids will react to her limb difference (“Her right arm was shorter than her left, and her hand had two fingers”). To comfort her, her father has her repeat words they've shared: “Some people will look at me differently, and that's okay” because differences “make our world super.” Confidence restored, Rae meets her classmates, and they easily accept her—difference and all—as a friend. When recess is threatened due to rain, Rae confides to a new pal about her superpower, then ducks behind a bookcase to summon the sunshine and save the day. While this series opener addresses Rae's limb difference, it's couched within a superhero story that's the real focus of the comic book-styled work. The tale deftly shows that kids with differences can be heroes. Perciante's bright cartoon illustrations, featuring a diverse cast, are sometimes full page and sometimes in panels, with lettering in boxes and word balloons to reinforce the comic-book influence. While the

SULE
THE PROVERB DETECTIVE
THE CASE OF THE TIED-UP LION
by Rene Rawls
illustrated by Brittne Brotzman



the BEST BOOKS of 2021
INDIE

ISBN: 978-1-73554-790-9

“A girl seeks help from a young detective who solves her problem by drawing on an old proverb in Rawls’ debut picture book...”

“...perfect for lap readers or confident elementary readers.”

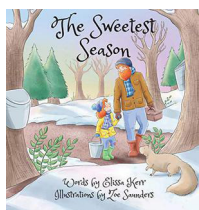
“A vividly illustrated and clever work with an accessible moral.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

“I love this book! The whole thing is really wonderful.”
—Julie Wolf, Qwerty Editorial

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vocabulary Jordan uses is more appropriate for confident readers beyond kindergarten, the lap crowd will be enthralled by the format, and preschoolers will find comfort in Rae's success.

First-day jitters, inclusivity, and an engaging superhero tale all in one.



THE SWEETEST SEASON

Kerr, Elissa

Illus. by Zoe Saunders

Scenic Route Publishing (32 pp.)

\$16.99 | \$9.99 paper | Dec. 3, 2019

978-0-578-59394-4

978-0-578-57652-7 paper



A child describes the process of making maple syrup, from tree tapping to distribution, in this rhyming picture-book debut.

As snow melts during a warm day, a White child with long, curly red hair springs from bed, ready to tackle the process of making maple syrup with Dad, who's also White. The two first find the correct trees to tap: "With branches and buds arranged in pairs, / I'd recognize that tree anywhere," notes the child. After Dad drills the hole for the hollow metal spike, or "spile," they wait until the sap begins to flow. After a quick taste test, the pair collect enough sap to take to their sugar shack and process, carefully boiling off the water to thicken the syrup. A group of neighbors of various ages and skin tones arrives to share in the bounty. The rhythm of Kerr's lines sometimes misses or adds a beat as she straightforwardly distills a complex process into simple steps and terms. Saunders' cartoonlike illustrations feature occasional wildlife, including a squirrel, and humans in soft pastel hues, presenting just the right amount of detail regarding the sugaring process. Backmatter features a longer explanation of syrup-making, including when to tap trees. Overall, it's a great introduction for young readers who may have only encountered syrup in stores.

An accessible guide to a harvest tradition.



ONLY SOFIA-ELISABETE

Kobayashi, Robin Elizabeth

Self (347 pp.)

\$12.99 paper | \$0.99 e-book

June 29, 2021

978-1-7367866-0-4

978-0-9985716-8-3 e-book



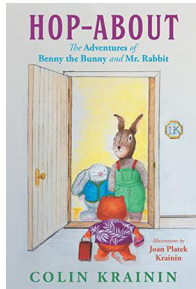
Romance, adventure, and danger attend the travels of a British Portuguese teenage girl in this literary historical novel.

Sofia-Elisabete Fitzwilliam made her first appearance in *I, Sofia-Elisabete, Love Child of Colonel Fitzwilliam* (2018), recounting her experiences as a 5-year-old in 1815. The girl's mother, Doña Marisa, who'd abandoned her in a convent years ago, stole her away from England and her father, Col. Fitzwilliam (the poor cousin of Mr. Darcy in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*).

After some time, her father tracked her down, and Sofia-Elisabete's parents agreed to take turns raising her. But when she was 11 and ready to return to England, her father never showed up. In this sequel, it's 1825, and Sofia-Elisabete, almost 15, feels stifled by her authoritarian stepfather, Don Rafael, and the expectations that young Spanish women be pious, pure, and think only of marriage and babies. Further, Sofia-Elisabete longs to experience the passion of love—in a country where women don't allow men even to touch their hands. When her flirtation with handsome bolero dancer Antonio de Silva goes too far, she is sent posthaste to her beloved grandfather in Cádiz. There, Antonio is soon eclipsed by Kitt Munro, a 20-year-old Scottish student traveling as a research assistant. Sofia-Elisabete is bewitched by his intelligence, good manners, and freckles, and he's equally enamored. But their burgeoning romance is interrupted when Kitt is called home to Scotland, leaving Sofia-Elisabete to deal with her cash-strapped family's insistence that she marry a rich, thoroughly loathsome older man. She manages to escape and makes a long and dangerous journey toward Britain, experiencing such misadventures on the way that she loses her wits. Kitt finds and rescues her, but that isn't the last of their struggles. Grueling travel, reported deaths, amnesia, injury, and separation stand between Sofia-Elisabete and the fulfillment of her dreams.

In this volume, Kobayashi develops her charming child hero into a thoughtful, passionate, and equally delightful teenager. While she's a typical adolescent in her impatience to burst through restrictive bonds and experience life, Sofia-Elisabete exhibits insightful maturity, as when she reflects on the accusation that she's lazy, pampered, and spoiled and admits she has been selfish and desperate to get her own way. She also has a wonderfully lyrical imagination, as when she plays the harp for Kitt and fantasizes about drifting down a river to a marsh, where he becomes a swallow: "A balmy breeze swept us to sea, and so, I raised high my mantilla to make a sail, guiding us into the bay of Cádiz, past the tangle of ship masts, past the naked sea-bathers, past the urchins angling for St. Peter's fishes. Mr. Munro fluttered his wings and he settled upon my shoulder, to sing tenderly in my ear." The complicated plot's melodrama is balanced with humor, poignancy, and moments of magical realism, particularly when Kitt disappears and Sofia-Elisabete searches for him in the haunted islands of the Inner Hebrides.

A rich, original, and engrossing drama featuring a remarkably engaging hero.



HOP-ABOUT *The Adventures of Benny the Bunny and Mr. Rabbit*

Krainin, Colin
Illus. by Joan Platek Krainin
Crowell Creek Books (144 pp.)
\$11.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book
Sept. 28, 2020
979-8-691066-90-0



Stuffed animals search for a long-lost friend in this debut literary fantasy for all ages.

The three inhabitants of well-appointed apartment 1K on New York City's Upper West Side enjoy a fulfilling life of work, walks in the park, good food, and warm friendships. It's a setup as cozy as themselves—all stuffed animals or, as they call themselves, wawas. Mr. Rabbit is an artist; Benny the Bunny is a writer; and Dr. Ursa, a bear, has a medical practice. One day, their comfortable routine is upended when Custerd, a “shockingly orange” cat wawa and a childhood friend of Benny's, makes an unexpected visit. Though usually a bouncing, confident sort, Custerd has been feeling empty lately. His therapist believes he must search for Rogo, his and Benny's stuffed lion companion from the old days, who went missing 25 years ago in Australia. Mr. Rabbit, Benny, and Custerd head for Sydney, where they learn that after becoming separated from his boy, Rogo went on a walkabout (or, as kangaroos call it, a “hop-about”). With some Australian wawa companions, the friends' hunt for Rogo brings them to a mysterious, forbidding fortress in the Outback that will test their courage, love, and ingenuity. Colin Krainin achieves something remarkable in his accomplished and poignant novel, giving a profound emotional and spiritual range to his stuffed-animal characters. They're undeniably cuddly, appealing, and kind yet acutely aware of loss, which in turn is tempered: “But shining through the melancholy there often came, as sudden as the first aching sprouts of spring, a kind of grace.” Similarly, Custerd understands human evil as the desperate, dangerous refusal to be vulnerable. Debut illustrator Joan Platek Krainin's charming pencil drawings capture the wawas' cuteness but less so their pathos.

An extraordinarily moving, powerful tale about the resilience of grace and the joy of friendship.

A SPARROW FALLS
BY GERALDINE FERNANDO



the BEST
BOOKS
of 2021
INDIE

“A Sri Lankan girl’s chance at a better life runs afoul of her village’s malignant prejudices in this coming-of-age saga.”

“Fernando’s engrossing tale has an almost ethnographic feel as it portrays the folkways of the complex culture of Catholic Sri Lankans...”

“...there’s much subtle artistry in Fernando’s polished, beguiling prose...”

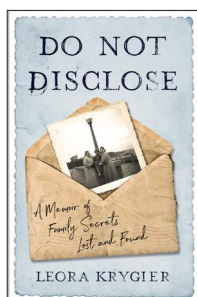
“As in a Hardy novel, the subterranean oppressions of class and gender in Sumi’s life congeal into a palpable air of menace and an affecting moral tragedy.”

“A gripping, richly textured bildungsroman about community ties that bind all too cruelly.”
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) 

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Publishing Rights, Email geraldineanf@yahoo.com

“An extraordinarily beautiful, touching adventure that can stand with the classics of children’s literature.”

ORPHEUS RISING



DO NOT DISCLOSE
A Memoir of Family
Secrets Lost and Found

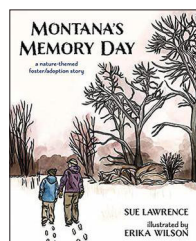
Krygier, Leora
She Writes Press (208 pp.)
\$16.95 paper | \$8.99 e-book
Aug. 24, 2021
978-1-64-742159-5



The accidental discovery of a private document begins a journey that reveals secrets of family members and strangers in this multifaceted memoir.

Krygier, a Los Angeles juvenile court judge, was on her way to work one day when she dropped by her parents’ house to find her mother conducting a cleanup campaign. Among the strewn paper, the author came across a file bearing the note: “Do Not Share This.” She surreptitiously grabbed the file and set off for court; however, she was hesitant to open it, fearing that it would reveal unbearable secrets about her family’s past. Days later, Krygier found a World War II-era postcard in an antiques mall, written by a British Army private and marked “do not disclose any particulars of your unit.” The message resonated with the author, and she began searching for details about the postcard’s sender—a quest that would later bring her to England. The book also slowly reveals details of the file’s contents as Krygier pieces together her family’s story of infidelity and Holocaust survival. Although written as a memoir, this book has all the suspense of a detective novel as the author hunts for the elusive British soldier and attempts to delay learning the truth about her own family. Along the way, she proves to be a master of the slow reveal, alluding to a night “when all hell broke loose” at the memoir’s opening and only gradually disclosing the details of what happened. Krygier also has a vibrant prose style and an eye for fine detail, characterized by her description of a typewriter: “The keys had to be struck hard. They were round, with a distinct rim, like tiny, old-fashioned spectacles. Each letter clattered downward and commandeered its own individual amount of ink from the ribbon, none uniform.” There are rare occasions when the author includes unnecessary information, such as automated responses to her internet searches, but such details of her setbacks make her successes even more enjoyable. This richly detailed memoir will particularly appeal to those whose imaginations are fired by genealogy and historical research.

A captivating story smartly recounted.



MONTANA'S
MEMORY DAY
A Nature-Themed
Foster/Adoption Story

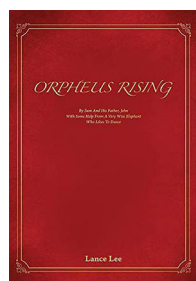
Lawrence, Sue
Illus. by Erika Wilson
Mascot Books (38 pp.)
\$16.95 | Nov. 5, 2021
978-1-64-543460-3



A boy thinks about life with “New Mom” as they celebrate and remember his adoption day in a picture book about family and belonging.

Montana used to move around a lot, changing houses and living with different families. Now, New Mom is a constant in the youngster’s life. She teaches him how to help out on her farm, spends time showing him how to whittle, and wakes him early for nature walks. Together, they spend Montana’s Memory Day—the anniversary of his adoption—sharing a love of nature; when they encounter a track in the snow that Montana thinks belongs to a wolf, New Mom assures him it’s from a coyote: “But don’t worry—there’s room here for all of us,” she says. Lawrence’s simple language and calm phrases are soothing; her creative word forms (*rememberer*, *differentness*) give a lyrical feel to Montana’s first-person narrative. The prominence of whittling and carving is reflected in Wilson’s beautiful lino-block images whose subdued colors emphasize the winter setting; notes at the end give readers an insider’s look into the illustration process. A nature theme abounds, but it’s the striking closeness between Montana and New Mom that will stick with readers in this warm-blanket bedtime story.

Readers in birth families or found families will appreciate this tale of parent-child connection.



ORPHEUS RISING
By Sam and His Father,
John With Some Help From
a Very Wise Elephant Who
Likes To Dance

Lee, Lance
Illus. by Ellen Raquel LeBow
Lwl Books (312 pp.)
\$25.50 | Oct. 5, 2021
978-0-57-879055-8

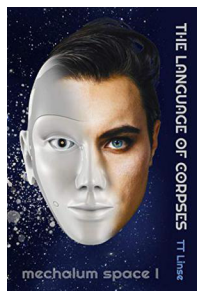


Based on the myth of Orpheus, Lee’s fantasy novel follows a boy’s quest with his father to retrieve his mother from the afterlife.

Ten-year-old Sam lives with his father, John, in an unquestioned, unvarying routine; “They simply thought of this gray existence as life.” When a blank book is mailed to them, however, Sam discovers that whatever he draws and writes in it becomes real, like when he sketches a lavish tent inhabited by a singing, dancing, wise elephant in Edwardian dress whom he names Lepanto. Playing cards with Lepanto, Sam sees a vision of his mother, who’s whispering, “Come and get me,” although—as

he finally learns from John—she died years ago. Encouraged by Lepanto to trust his no-longer-blank book and his imagination, Sam determines to bring his mother back from the Dread City, telling his disbelieving father, “I’m shaping events. And I say we go.” Although Sam and John can count on help from the book and Lepanto, their long journey through the Far Land of Fear is beset with dangers, like agents of the Dread City who want to drag them into despair. Can they succeed where Orpheus failed? In his debut children’s book, poet and playwright Lee writes a wildly imaginative, entertaining adventure story with deep foundations both in the lush realm of mythos and poignant human emotions. Beyond that, Lee dares to give Sam’s quest an ending that takes seriously the elephant’s insistence on the reality of imagination, making the story even more powerful. In her debut book, artist LeBow provides woodcutlike illustrations with rich blacks, curving white lines, and a remarkable, charged sense of mythic power that marries well with the novel.

An extraordinarily beautiful, touching adventure that can stand with the classics of children’s literature.



THE LANGUAGE OF CORPSES

Linse, T.T.

Salix (472 pp.)

\$10.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book

Sept. 1, 2020

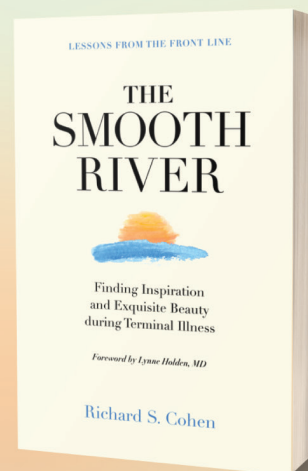
978-1-953694-00-3



Three individuals in a spacefaring future—where people fluidly inhabit successive bodies—participate in a desperate rescue mission near Neptune.

Linse’s *Mechalum Space* series begins with this auspicious SF novel, initially a triptych that comes together in the fourth act. The 28th-century setting encompasses a space-straddling era of *Homo mutatis*. Humankind has mastered the technique of inserting a consciousness into a seemingly endless variety of prepared bodies, whether organically grown flesh-and-blood hosts or special-purpose mechs. Virtual immortality, artificial intelligence companions, and perpetual attachment to the descendant of the internet (“the mesh”) are part of this revolution. But the real payoff is the invention of “Faison Gates.” These allow inquisitive, adventurous, or just plain desperate minds to teleport instantaneously throughout 300 remotely settled planets and environments in deep space. But it’s hardly idyllic. A religious war (traditional religion lost, apparently) raged early in this new era, and a backward-looking Earth has been largely cut off and neglected ever since. And two “essents” trying to occupy the same body will result in the death of one of them, a known method of assassination. In such a nest of polymorphic intrigue, Jazari is a somewhat naïve student of “xenolinguistics” (trained to communicate with advanced alien races even though such direct contact has not yet happened). She was forced by circumstance into joining the talented and diverse crew of crime kingpin Zosi, a choice she ultimately regrets. On another distant world, scientist Eala studies a gentle amphibious species

the BEST BOOKS of 2021 INDIE



“In this debut memoir and self-help book, Cohen offers advice on how to approach life after a terminal diagnosis.”

ISBN: 978-1-73750-340-8 [paperback]
ISBN: 978-1-7375034-1-5 [eBook]

“This tender and startlingly lucid work offers patients and their loved ones a wealth of knowledge, and it may also show physicians a new way to help people learn to cope with the prospect of dying.”

“A heart-rending but informative end-of-life guide.”
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) ★

“Bursting with life, *The Smooth River* leads by example.”

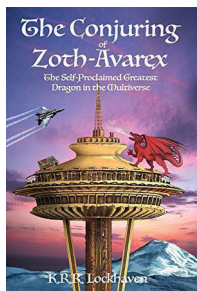
“An inspiring, beautifully written account of living a life of purpose when faced with a terminal illness.”
—*Booklife/Publishers Weekly*

FOR ALL INQUIRIES, PLEASE EMAIL
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called the taktak, whose ability to communicate telepathically represents another possible breakthrough. And, on the rim of humanity's original, now-obscure solar system, a biologically generated body, code-named ZD777, is revived, nurtured, and educated by an AI guardian only to be informed of his predicament: He is the lone man aboard a hollowed-out asteroid, formerly a teeming space base for the Kuiper belt, now a forgotten, derelict habitat slowly failing in orbit around Neptune.

The potential to rescue ZD777 from his apparently hopeless fate is the climax of the multiheaded narrative stream, and quite a nail-biter it becomes. (Whether those nails are human or metallic alloy is up for discussion.) Wyoming-based author Linse previously published books set in the hardscrabble American West of today and yesteryear but adapts to the final frontier of far-future space with no rocky trails or cowboy atavisms whatsoever. Some of the speculations here (especially concerning the nature of intelligence, biologically native or artificial) could have taught Isaac Asimov a thing or two. That said, tenderfeet to this universe will have to struggle initially with a density of imaginative futurespeak jargon and para-human traits (including the near-universal use of the pronoun *she* to designate everyone; complete genderfluidity evidently does that to a society). Linse only provides the expected information downloads and history lesson expositions every 100 pages or so. But readers who can think on their feet and adapt to the altered paradigm of what it means to be human—or sentient—are in for an exciting and provocative expedition to a new realm of ideas that's particularly strong in the characterization department. The novel ends with every indication that more riches remain to be tapped from Mechalum Space.

A powerful launch to a fresh SF series that promises a wealth of ingenious concepts.



THE CONJURING OF ZOTH-AVAREX
The Self-Proclaimed Greatest Dragon in the Multiverse

Lockhaven, K.R.R.
BookBaby (306 pp.)
\$15.99 paper | \$0.99 e-book
April 1, 2021
978-1-09-835150-2



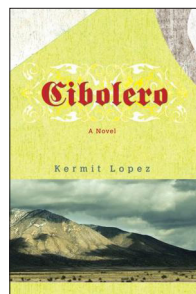
A fantasy novel in which a grandiose dragon declares his independence.

In this rambunctious debut, Lockhaven imagines a secret sorcery instruction institute that's far different from Hogwarts, although it does feature avian messengers and quirky field sports. The Site, on the West Coast of the United States, was first opened in 1943 and has been dedicated ever since to harnessing magic for the good of the school, the country, and humanity—very much in that order. It has three new hires, in an echo of the main trio of the Potterverse: Harris Reed, Silvia Flores, and Patrick Nash are all conjurers, and during their orientation, they, and readers, are introduced to the Site's spacious campus with its Conjuring Department, Prophecy Department, Realm Travel Department, and so

on. They have arrived at the Site at a very auspicious moment—one that has been no less than 37 years in the making: Under the careful direction of the Conjuring Department, the Site is ready to whip up a dragon—one that they're confident will be bound to their will and obediently help American interests. However, once the great dragon Zoth-Avarex appears, it's clear that he has other ideas: He easily casts aside the bonds of the Site's magic, snatches up Silvia as his princess-captive, and flies off over the landscape ("if he really concentrated, he could almost hear the screams of the people below. It was just like old times"). He takes Silvia to the top of Seattle's Space Needle and there makes a den, where he waits for a gold tribute from all the nations of the world. Before long, the creature becomes a worldwide media star.

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 Site's labs: "Absolutely No Conjuring of Sparkly Vampires." There are references to Star Wars ("I made the Kessel run in less than eleven parsecs") and J.R.R. Tolkien and a moment when a magician offers Zoth-Avarex a dragon-rider specially trained on Pern, evoking a scornful response: "I'm not a horse, I'm a super-intelligent force of nature. I made your Einstein look like a preschooler the day I cracked out of my egg." The exaggerated reputation of the Site ("this was the pinnacle of human civilization") is perfectly played against its officials' officious incompetence, and although Zoth-Avarex shares the typical charisma of folkloric dragons, he's much funnier and more media-savvy; indeed, he's easily the best character in the book. The human drama involving Harris and Silvia and the hapless Site administrators is conveyed with heart and empathy, but it pales in comparison to the conjured creature's endless stream of quips and insights. The author keeps the plot hurtling along with a strong sense of pacing and a good deal of wit, and longtime fantasy readers are sure to enjoy every minute.

An irreverent and utterly charming dragon tale.



CIBOLERO

Lopez, Kermit
iUniverse (182 pp.)
\$13.95 paper | \$6.99 e-book
Aug. 3, 2007
978-0-59-543567-8



In Lopez's novel, a father's search for his abducted daughter toggles back to his own past and the larger picture of the exploitation of New Mexico in the mid-19th century.

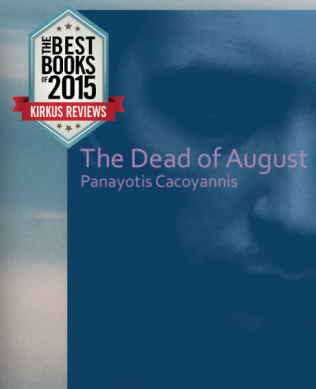
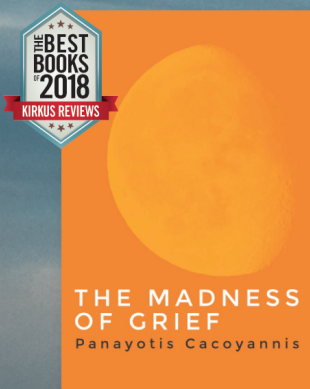
Antonio Jose Baca wishes only to raise his family in peace on his ranchito near the Pecos River in New Mexico. A ragtag detachment of Texas Rangers shows up, hungry and lost, and in the space of an hour, they have roughed up his wife, shot their young son (he survives), kidnapped their daughter, Elena, and high-tailed it back to Texas. Antonio, of course, sets out after them. He does have an advantage. In his youth, he was a *cibolero*, a buffalo hunter, on those forbidding plains still called the

The Coldness of Objects

Panayotis Cacoyannis

ISBN: 979-8560368845 [paperback]
ASIN: B08NJLHTHF [eBook]

MORE FROM PANAYOTIS:



the **BEST**
BOOKS
of **2021**
INDIE

“...Cacoyannis has written a thoroughly gripping novel, using the rhetoric of a real-life pandemic to fashion a chilling vision of an abnormal ‘new normal’ to come.”

“An intriguing, timely, and terrifying portent of life after Covid-19.”
—Kirkus Reviews
(starred review) ⭐

“A well-written, richly complicated, and deeply engaging coming-of-age tale.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ⭐
on *The Madness of Grief*

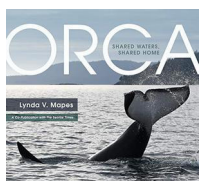
“A sophisticated, comic novel that brilliantly captures the triumph and folly of art, media, and publishing.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ⭐
on *The Dead of August*

For Information on Publishing and Film Rights, Email
panayotis@blueyonder.co.uk • panayotiscacoyannis.com

Llano Estacado. He is an expert tracker, and his blood is up. In a series of flashbacks, we learn the geography of the area and its history that goes back centuries. We learn how the Civil War would affect things and how the rise of Texas threatened the nuevomexicanos from the beginning (“So far from God...and so close to Texas”). After 1848, the U.S. claims New Mexico, and immigrants—gringos—come pouring in. Suddenly, the nuevomexicanos and Indigenous people are second-class citizens and displaced on their own land, and the arrogant gringo soldiers are deservedly hated. Revolts are mounted but inevitably and brutally put down. We follow Antonio until the end of his quest.

Lopez is an authority on New Mexican history and topography, and his novel rings true throughout. He is also a very talented writer with nary a false step (“*To the Tejanos the llano is a useless desert*, Antonio thought. *To the Indians and Ciboleros, it is a world filled with life*”). Antonio is well drawn, and Lopez is even better with his villains. Those Texas Rangers differ from an outlaw gang only because their leader, Capt. Travis Russell, has a conscience. The others range from simpletons to the truly psychopathic, especially one J.D. Calhoun, scion of Texas money. Again one thinks of arrogance, a defining and infuriating trait of these interlopers—the Texas gang, Gen. Stephen Kearny who rubbed the nuevomexicanos’ noses in the American takeover, the drunken, murderous troopers, the condescension of Kit Carson and Charles Bent. (One can’t help but cheer when Bent’s head is paraded around Taos on a pikestaff.) Especially satisfying is the way the Ranger contingent is thoroughly spooked when two of the young troopers run into serious trouble. They assume the feared Comanche are to blame. Antonio is the relentless avenger, particularly deadly, and one feels the noose tightening. There are all sorts of side stories here, too, each a little nugget, and small episodes, like the murder of Nathan, a Black man, and Antonio’s efforts to rescue his orphaned children. And keep your eye on Josiah Smith, “the preacher.” There are nasty surprises and, oddly, some sweet interludes.

Well-written historical fiction stuffed with action and adventure.



**ORCA
Shared Waters,
Shared Home**

Mapes, Lynda V.
Photos by Steve Ringman
Braided River (192 pp.)
\$34.95 | June 1, 2021
978-1-68-051326-4

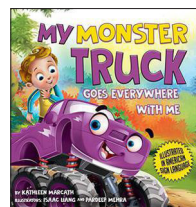


A beautifully illustrated scientific, political, and humanitarian study of the threat posed by human encroachment to an iconic species of the Pacific Northwest.

In 2018, the eyes of the world were riveted on a real-life nature drama as Tahlequah, a female of a pod of orcas, carried her dead calf hundreds of miles through the waters of the Salish Sea in a public display of maternal grief that lasted for 17 days. Tahlequah’s tragic vigil, along with the nearby death of Scarlet, a newborn orca, from a mysterious wasting syndrome, highlighted an

ecological emergency that threatens both the orcas and the chinook salmon they feed on. Indigenous nations have, historically and currently, revered the orcas as family, but White settlers in the United States and Canada have been more likely to slaughter them or capture them for display and amusement. In this book, co-published with the *Seattle Times*, Mapes, a *Seattle Times* reporter on the environment, presents a compelling portrait of the orcas as creatures of dignity and sensitivity, with brains that are better structured for empathy and social interaction than humans’. No less impressive are the orcas’ prey, Mapes notes—the “lustrous,” ancient, and resilient chinook salmon, whose already perilous journey upstream to spawn has been rendered nearly impossible by human encroachment. Pollution and noise damage the orcas, the author points out, and interfere with their ability to hunt. Illustrated with charts, diagrams, and spectacular photos by *Seattle Times* photographer Ringman and others, Mapes’ vigorous, evocative writing draws readers into the intertwined story of the orcas and the chinook and also effectively highlights Indigenous stewards of the land and sea, including members of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe. She explicitly charges that “it is our everyday destruction and pollution of the habitat that supports the orcas—and the salmon they eat—that is the major cause of the orcas’ decline.” However, Mapes also offers cautious hope in her account of the restorative effects of dam removal on Washington state’s Elwha River.

A compelling and troubling examination of the imperiled state of two important marine species.



**MY MONSTER TRUCK
GOES EVERYWHERE
WITH ME**
*Illustrated in American
Sign Language*

Marcath, Kathleen
Illus. by Isaac Liang & Pardeep Mehra
ASL Picture Books (38 pp.)
\$17.99 | \$12.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book
Nov. 3, 2020
978-1-73475-171-0
978-1-73475-170-3 paper



A child spends time with a special toy in this debut picture book featuring illustrations in American Sign Language.

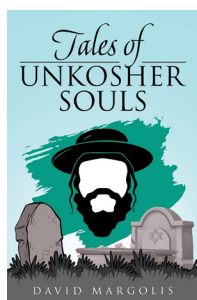
A blond, blue-eyed boy introduces a monster truck, spelling out the toy’s letters in ASL on the first page. “He goes EVERYWHERE with ME,” the kid announces. The boy describes the truck, adding a modifier that is also signed on each page: big, purple, fast, and loud. Readers can sign along with the child. One day, the boy gets up, eats breakfast, and heads to Grandma’s house, where more fun awaits: a monster truck rally with plenty of friends. The next day, the truck has vanished, and the boy signs his mixed emotions. Soon, Grandma arrives to return the toy, and all is well. Marcath uses simple language and repeating words, creating a narrative accessible to newly independent readers. Mehra and debut illustrator Liang’s digital cartoon images depict ASL clearly, delivering instructions and

“Margolis’ fiction mixes magical realism with a rich vein of Jewish humor.”

TALES OF UNKOSHER SOULS

incorporating the signs into the narrative naturally and effectively. (The endmatter notes that Liang is deaf.) The kids in the cast are quite diverse in their skin tones, hair colors, and abilities. While new ASL learners may not be able to mimic the movements exactly without seeing them demonstrated, the team has provided a link to online videos that show the entire tale signed. Children who already use ASL will be thrilled to see their language skillfully represented in the story’s illustrations.

This bracing and illuminating bilingual tale deftly shows a kid’s love for a favorite truck.



TALES OF UNKOSHER SOULS

Margolis, David
Gatekeeper Press (188 pp.)
\$9.00 e-book | July 15, 2021



Uneasy Jewish people wrestle with their sins in these tragicomic stories.

Margolis’ tales mostly explore life in Russian shtetls and the tarnished “Promised Land” of America as well as souls journeying from life to afterlife, with improbable swerves along the way. In “Moshko’s Lovers,” a rabbi’s daughter rejects a village cobbler because he had a vision of eating nonkosher food during a previous incarnation as a courtier to Henry VIII; in “The Dybbuk of Brooklyn,” a New York City liquor salesman pays a rabbi to exorcise a wandering spirit who has taken up residence in him and shouts obnoxious comments; and in “Lilith’s Daughter,” a St. Louis man obtains a female golem who changes from docile servant to an independent woman with feminist beliefs. The soul of a poor man waits centuries to enter heaven only to discover the price of celestial efficiency in “God’s Sabbatical”; an angel tells a rabbi to promote a local shepherd as the Messiah, which makes his congregation giddy with delight until the Chosen One makes unpleasant demands in “Two Goats and a Dog”; and in another story, a dinosaur in the Garden of Eden eats the forbidden fruit along with Adam and Eve and watches the punishment unfold. Margolis’ fiction mixes magical realism with a rich vein of Jewish humor, featuring shady rabbis, plenty of kvetching (“He just sits there, staring at his plate as if he might find a wife there, and suddenly I’m supposed to marry him?”), and a prosaic approach to ethics that extends into divine bureaucracy (“Well, you stole that bag of candy from Kaminski when you were a kid, and then there were the seventeen apples and eight pears that you pilfered from Goldstein’s fruit stand...But that’s not enough to get you into Hell”). But underneath, there’s a tenderness that makes the author’s funny, ironic view of ordinary life feel luminous, as well, as when a man who lost his wife to cholera calls her “the greatest of angels...who would listen to all that a talkative Jewish man had to say even when he becomes boring.”

Raucously entertaining yarns whose wry wit carries a subtle moral resonance.

the BEST BOOKS of 2021 INDIE

“A memoir about fighting AIDS and finding love in Kenya.”

“In her nonfiction debut, Boit recounts her experiences working at a care center in western Kenya.”

“A heroic, uplifting account of easing others’ suffering and building a family.”
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review) ★

“This is a remarkable story about impossible things becoming possible through love, perseverance, and the strength of community.”
—Eliud Kipchoge, Marathon World Record Holder & Olympic Gold Medalist

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MARINER'S WAKE

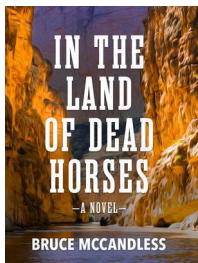
Marsh, Adam
Brick Cave Media
\$15.99 paper | Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-938190-72-8



In Marsh's future-set novel, tough, freedom-loving, and eco-minded sailors patrol Earth's seas against greedy, corrupt empires.

SF/fantasy author Marsh envisions a late-21st-century future in which, following a second American civil war (which ended mysteriously and inconclusively), a large number of environmentalists and democracy lovers flee the greedy, corrupt United States—basically a vassal of Russia—to form the Mariners, a seagoing, island-centered nation-state. Mariners, aka “shipsies,” are considered rogues, occupying much of the Pacific with their ragtag, resourceful navy. They have cleansed their waters of plastic and maintained sustainable sea life (even saving the whales) but face incursions from mammoth fossil fuel container ships and voracious fishing fleets. Then from the treacherous USA comes a surprise envoy, Congressman Arnold Drummond, claiming to want a peaceful mission, in cooperation with a U.S. Navy warship, to investigate a mysterious, sunken complex. The site is rumored to hold advanced, perhaps apocalyptic, weapons cached before the war, and coordinates have already leaked to the criminal underworld. Navigator Kara Nkosi, adopted into Mariner society as a human-trafficked little girl and now a fierce defender of its values, distrusts the Americans but finds herself in dangerous straits as the recovery mission involves powerful entities. Marsh's believable worldbuilding only improves this climate-changed dystopia. The well-conceived Greenpeace-with-guts heroes make compelling characters. The cli-fi aspects aren't overdone and neither are the cyberpunk trappings of enhanced humans. Pages turn faster than a propeller when it's time for battle stations, and action comes on brisk and fiery. Belowdecks, though, lies genuine conviction about this slightly altered tomorrow—a place where morally bankrupt corporate states rule like pirate kings and a major holiday is “Putin Day.”

An oceangoing SF/techno-thriller made especially seaworthy by its depth, not just its depth charges.



IN THE LAND OF DEAD HORSES

McCandless, Bruce
Ninth Planet Press (266 pp.)
9.99 e-book | Sept. 14, 2021

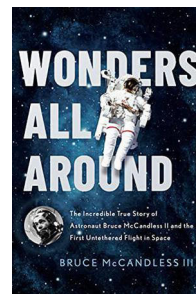


An aging Texas Ranger investigates a series of murders committed after an ancient, evil force is unleashed in Central Texas in McCandless' historical horror novel.

It's 1908, and Ranger Jewel Lightfoot is recovering from a hangover and an attempt on his life.

However, his boss, Col. Al Woodard, has a new assignment for him. The bodies of four members of a farm family, recent immigrants from Sweden, have been found in their burned-out house. Only the couple's little girl escaped the devastation to report what happened. On the grounds of the property, the local sheriff found an unusual and frightening club-shaped weapon featuring razor-sharp obsidian blades. The fire damage makes it difficult to determine the specific cause of the victims' deaths, so Lightfoot is put on the case. First, he must pay a visit to Ernst-Michael Kitzinger at the University of Texas at Austin; he's an expert on ancient Indigenous culture who may be able to shed some light on the mysterious club. It turns out that it's a macahuitl—a deadly, ancient, and priceless Mayan weapon. Lightfoot becomes convinced that the farm family was murdered before the fire occurred, so he begins what becomes a violent, supernatural quest to find the killers. In this prequel to McCandless' 2011 horror novel *Sour Lake*, the author combines a bit of real-life history, including Indigenous people's fight for Yucatan independence, with a solid dose of mysticism, even adding in a poignant love story for good measure. He also presents vivid descriptions of bleak landscapes and unspeakable brutality. He even manages a touch of humor, as in this sketch of the pompous Kitzinger: “his face seemed custom-made for wedging into cracks and crevices.” Lightfoot comes off as a remarkable tragic hero who's tormented by visions of people he's killed, unable to express emotion when it counts, and relentlessly driven to destroy a demon and his acolytes.

A paranormal whodunit that offers a gripping battle between good and evil.



WONDERS ALL AROUND

The Incredible True Story of Astronaut Bruce McCandless II and the First Untethered Flight in Space

McCandless III, Bruce
Greenleaf Book Group Press (284 pp.)
\$20.70 | \$8.69 e-book | July 9, 2021
978-1-62634-865-3



The sometimes-frustrated, sometimes-exalted life of an astronaut is excavated in this probing biography.

McCandless profiles his father, Bruce McCandless II, an Apollo astronaut who never made it onto a moon shot but later served on a space shuttle mission where he made history's first untethered spacewalk using the Manned Maneuvering Unit jet pack, becoming famous for an iconic photograph that showed him flying jauntily through space. In the author's fond but clear-eyed assessment, McCandless senior was a daring pilot, a brilliant engineer who did critical work on the MMU and the Hubble Space Telescope, a passionate environmentalist, and a questing soul whose motto was “onward.” He was also an “abrupt, self-absorbed, and prickly” man who was both whip smart and oblivious. (He once surprised his wife by giving her a book entitled *Open Marriage* for Christmas, “just for consideration.”)

“The author’s villains don’t step from the shadows so much as from their complex humanity.”

THE ASHEN PROPHECY

The book is also a vivid depiction of a testy father-son relationship pitting senior’s culture of astronauts who “cut their hair short and at precise geometric angles to minimize drag” against junior’s feckless, 1970s counterculture of teens in “greasy hair and grimy jeans...looking for psychedelic mushrooms in the cow manure.” The author’s portrait ably conveys the complexities of an astronaut’s existence: the anxious jockeying for scarce mission slots, the death-defying extremism of rocketry—“it felt like *Challenger* was going to break apart, and he shut his mouth tight so his stomach wouldn’t fall out”—and the pathos of McCandless senior’s predicament when he seemed eternally stuck in ground assignments that thwarted his drive and talent. (“A man who’d wrestled a Phantom warplane capable of flying 1,200 miles per hour onto the deck of a lurching aircraft carrier in a thunderstorm, at night, was now poking along Highway 183 north of Austin in a barn-size Chevy Suburban with the speedometer pegged on double nickels.”) The author’s colorful prose is shrewdly realistic about space flight but also alive to its lyrical humanism. (“The [photograph’s] oddly serene contrast of a solitary man emerging from the immensity of the universe, small but self-directed...suggests order—a triumph, even if tenuous, against what is dark and immense and essentially incomprehensible.”) The result is an absorbing testament to perseverance in pursuit of empyrean ambition.

A fine evocation of the NASA experience—in the sky and on Earth.



AMONG THE BEAUTIFUL BEASTS

McMullen, Lori
She Writes Press (328 pp.)
\$16.95 paper | \$9.95 e-book | June 1, 2021
978-1-64-742106-9

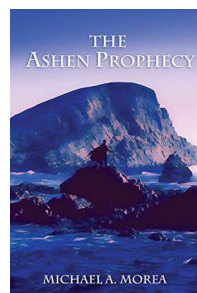


A novel based on the early life of writer, suffragette, and environmentalist Marjory Stoneman Douglas.

In 1896 in Providence, Rhode Island, 5-year-old Marjory Stoneman lives in a home filled with her mother Lillian’s singing; her father, Frank, sometimes reads to her from volumes such as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. But when Frank can’t keep steady work, Lillian leaves, with Marjory in tow. They move to Marjory’s grandparents’ home in Taunton, Massachusetts. Soon after, Lillian suffers a breakdown and ends up in Butler’s Sanitarium; she returns home not quite the same, and Marjory takes refuge in literature and the hope that her father will someday visit her. Years later, her grandmother helps her attend Wellesley College; there, Marjory discovers her passions for nature and writing. After graduation, she marries Kenneth Douglas, a much-older grifter whose inability to procure honest work renders them destitute. Thankfully, Marjory’s uncle, Dr. Edward Stoneman, finds her and reveals that her father’s in Florida, running the *Miami Herald*. Marjory soon becomes the society editor of that paper. When Lilla, Frank’s new wife, suggests that the capable young writer ask for more serious work, she does so, which

leads to her writing about women’s suffrage and a decadeslong interest in the Florida Everglades. McMullen crafts a masterful portrait of a women’s suffrage and conservation icon, showing how Marjory’s life is characterized by the line, “Sustaining the soul of another means starving my own.” Her generous heart and intelligence seemingly conspire to place others in her care who are far less capable than she is, including Lillian and Kenneth. This tragic streak ends after she meets fellow newspaper writer Andy Walker of the *Miami Metropolis*, whose “ideas had been gifts, not expenses.” The magic of the not-yet-urbanized swampland and Marjory’s flowering into womanhood merge in McMullen’s prose: “The phosphorescent sea rolled on and on, over our toes...until we were standing together in liquid stardust.” Later, World War I rattles the life she and Andy plan together; by the end, however, the author effectively shows how Marjory’s belief in her own powers helps her build a life of her own choosing.

A fantastic debut that showcases an important figure and the landscape she worked to preserve.



THE ASHEN PROPHECY

Morea, Michaela A.
Self (515 pp.)
\$18.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book
Aug. 16, 2020
979-8-66-499824-5

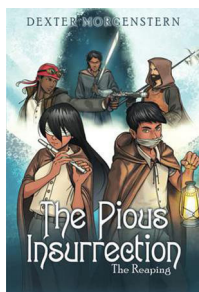


This epic fantasy sequel finds retired peacekeepers drawn into an all-consuming magical war.

King Cato Regulus rules from his capital city of Veriasi. But he’s become frail, and his adult children, Prince Bolus and Princess Seles, prepare for his death. In celebrating Regulus’ 40th ruling year, well-wishers gather in Veriasi. These include Magnus “the Phoenix” of Coventa, a valuable but retired general, along with his wife, Kera. During the festivities, Magnus and Kera halt an assassination attempt by killers dressed as Lyrians. Weeks later, someone succeeds in murdering the Lyrian emissary as his ship returns across the ocean. Bolus sends the Black Lions, a mercenary group, to Elysium, the Lyrian capital, to “assure the consular government that we had no involvement in the attack.” Fearing the worst from the mercenaries, Seles asks Magnus and Kera to follow and keep the peace. She also introduces them to terracite, a crystalline mineral that provides “magic without magic.” The coastal Lyrians mine terracite from mountainous land belonging to the Ashen, tribes whose lives revolve around magic and the worship of Velestra, the Great Seamstress. Consul Shinrar has outlawed magic, believing that “terracite is the great equalizer.” Once in Elysium, Magnus and Kera learn that the mineral’s swift transformation of Lyrian life brings a steep cost. Morea deftly layers a remarkable variety of narrative tones in this second epic fantasy to star Magnus. Allusions to conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq feature heavily, from the parallels between terracite and oil to the use of the word *insurgent*. At other times, the story runs like an engaging procedural thriller,

as the hunt for whomever is causing chaos pushes Magnus and Kera to embed with the locals and absorb every detail. The author's villains don't step from the shadows so much as from their complex humanity. As Janus, leader of the mercenaries and a potential friend of Magnus, tells him, "We aren't here to fix all their problems." Morea's love of fantasy drives the stirring finale in which two characters chosen by a prophecy, Elam and Lilith, ignite the region in a magical war.

A striking and intricate fantasy that's skillfully bolstered by echoes of real-world conflicts.



**THE PIOUS
INSURRECTION**
The Reaping

Morgenstern, Dexter

Self (229 pp.)

\$19.99 | \$9.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book

May 25, 2021

979-8-51-024556-1

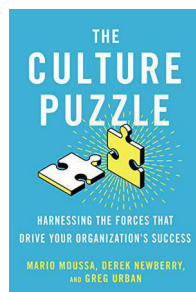
978-1-72-372607-1 paper



A pair of children from a religious sect go on a quest as their world tips toward war in Morgenstern's fantasy series opener.

In the world of Evigonda, four kingdoms vie for resources and power: Yudecca, Borensati, Selador, and Nazarelle. In the waters south of Yudecca, on an island monastery, the monks of Regnaröv magically harness the elements to defend the continent against monstrous, seagoing reptilians called Naga. To satisfy the demands of deities Leviathan and Naamah, a ritual called the Reaping must occur, which requires a seer to "harvest life energy from each nation and bring it to the Shepherd's Nexus" in the continent's center. The young seer Bo, who's sightless but can read emotional auras, has been chosen for the task. She's accompanied by acolyte Amos, who's unable to speak; his best friend, Eli, died during a Naga attack and became the first soul collected in a ceremonial dagger for the Reaping. Though escorted for part of their journey by the monk Kohana, the children eventually meet Vyuuri, a wily former monk who renounced his loyalty to Regnaröv. Meanwhile, in Nazarelle, the soldier Lancaster Ben'Shual hopes to win the hand of Princess Winona. After Lancaster loses an eye in battle against Seladorian Templars, King Saul assigns him to gather intelligence on the technologically advanced Ashborn warriors. Over the course of this book, Morgenstern offers a brisk, concept-dense epic that succeeds in keeping its large cast in focus. Fans of grand fantasy series, such as David Farland's *Runelords* novels, will be impressed by the abundant cultural details, including each nation's splinter groups, gods, magic systems, and unique relationships. As the tribal chaos surrounding Amos and Bo increases, the two lonely main characters grow closer. Morgenstern's main theme—that everyone has within them good and evil—is perfectly illustrated in the gripping finale, which seemingly pits heroes against each other. More darkness is expected in the planned sequel.

An emotional and remarkably inventive fantasy.



THE CULTURE PUZZLE
*Harnessing the
Forces That Drive Your
Organization's Success*

*Moussa, Mario, Derek Newberry &
Greg Urban*

Berrett-Koehler Publishers (240 pp.)

\$27.95 | \$14.99 e-book | June 22, 2021

978-1-52-309182-9



A business book offers an example-filled deep dive into organizational culture.

Culture is arguably one of the most puzzling areas in today's business organizations. In this impressive and vibrant treatment of the subject, academicians/consultants Moussa, Newberry, and Urban seek to demystify organizational culture by analyzing its "four forces" ("vision, interests, habits, and innovation") and showing how they fit together, as do the pieces of a puzzle. The pragmatic approach of the authors is revealed in a careful, methodical way. They first introduce the puzzle pieces in a broad brush stroke, then discuss the four forces in depth, and finally demonstrate how to sustain a healthy organizational culture. Along the way, the book features countless case studies and anecdotes that perfectly illustrate the typical cultural challenges faced and the opportunities available to take organizational culture to the next level. In Part 1, the authors employ memorable metaphors to highlight the importance of corporate culture. They liken those CEOs who may be tone deaf about culture to Akhenaten, an Egyptian pharaoh who was an innovative genius but could not convince the populace to follow his lead: "This tale of a prideful pharaoh who fails to change long-standing cultural beliefs remains keenly relevant today." Just as effective is the metaphorical gardener who is responsible for "thoughtfully and carefully tending the culture garden." An example employed by the authors is the decidedly nonmilitary leadership style of American Army Gen. Stanley McChrystal in Iraq. McChrystal recalled his mother's penchant for vegetable gardening and applied three lessons he learned from her to managing his troops: adapting to changing conditions, being "the protector in chief," and creating the right environment.

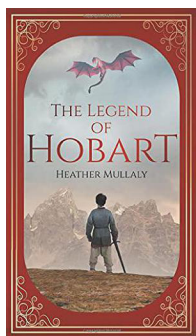
Part 2 addresses the four forces in precise detail; chapters devoted to each one are brimming with relevant examples, all of which are accompanied by authoritative commentary and keen insights. In discussing vision, the authors demonstrate how storytelling helps build strong cultures. The chapter regarding interests covers several vital issues, such as how to keep organizational tribes from fragmenting and how to become a "culture virtuoso." An outstanding vignette in this chapter is an anecdote about retired Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, who returned during the 2008 financial crisis to transform a "loose collection" of 10,000 store managers "into a tribe of tribes." In the chapter about habits, the authors explain "four principles for creating moments that usher in new habits." Concerning innovation, the authors identify three characteristics associated with "the true nature of innovation and the sort of environment that fosters it." In Part 3, Moussa, Newberry, and Urban reprise the gardener metaphor, aptly describing how a

“Readers will savor Oh’s prose as much as they do the libations that flow from his recipes.”

CO SPECS

culture leader takes responsibility for “Pulling Weeds and Cultivating Wildflowers.” The authors close the book on a hopeful note, observing that during the Covid-19 pandemic, they were encouraged to see many organizations “thinking *village* rather than *self*.” Crammed with stories across a broad spectrum of industries and organizational sizes, this book delivers much of value that any manager should be able to glean.

A thorough, highly engaging, and superbly written exploration of organizational culture.



THE LEGEND OF HOBART

Mullaly, Heather

Favored Oak Press (94 pp.)

\$16.99 | \$7.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book

July 26, 2021

978-1-73-647737-3

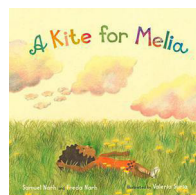
978-1-73-647738-0 paper



A would-be hero sets off on a quest to prove himself worthy in this middle-grade fantasy.

Twelve-year-old Hobart Septavious of Finnagen wants to be a knight. But he must be nominated to the King’s School for the Education of Future Knights by May Day or he’ll have surpassed the age limit to enroll. He leaves the family’s pig farm determined to perform heroic feats, and his mother says, “Have fun playing dragon slayer.” Hobart visits Mildred the Wise, who points him toward the last local dragon at Castle Flamegon. She also gives him an error-ridden almanac, an endless bag of turnips, a spool of unbreakable string, and Albert the talking horse. Though receiving a sword would have been nice, Hobart hits the road and soon encounters a wolf. After inadvertently chasing the beast away, he finds that he’s saved a boy named Tate of Fair Oaks. The boy joins Hobart’s quest to repay him, and eventually, they’re challenged by an elderly knight named Sir Danton of Mortico. A girl named Hero arrives and explains, “My grandfather gets confused.” When Sir Danton believes himself “bested,” he offers Hobart his sword, Guardian. Hero also joins the quest to face the dragon, which will be like nothing the teens have imagined. Mullaly’s middle-grade fantasy will effortlessly charm readers both young and old. Hobart has a stutter and is bullied by Lord Finnegan’s nephew, William the Tormentor, yet he chases his dream of knighthood. Clean prose bolsters dry humor, like when Hobart isn’t sure that having a talking horse is a good idea: “By the end of the day, I was sure. It was a bad thing.” During the adventure, each of Mildred’s seemingly useless gifts proves urgently needed in a particular situation, like the turnip bag that feeds starving villagers. One character tells the adventurers, “When we are young, we think we are immortal, but the years will pass...too quickly.” Mullaly’s message that compassion should supersede personal gain unfolds subtly and beautifully. Her cast exits the stage quickly, sure to make fans crave more.

Succinct and marvelously told; a middle-grade fantasy for everyone.



A KITE FOR MELIA

Narh, Samuel & Freda Narh

Illus. by Valeria Suria

Chasing A Spider Publishing (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | May 30, 2021

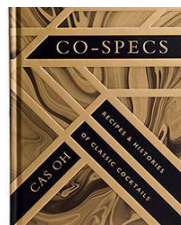
978-1-73478-970-6



A girl’s desire to fly a kite dovetails with her grief over losing a pet in this beautifully illustrated picture book.

When Melia, a girl with light-brown skin and curly hair, asks older children if she can fly one of their kites, they tell her to make her own. She doesn’t know how, so she goes to the library to find out. There, she discovers a book about kites and uses it to make a beautiful triangular creation with a bow and long tail. At first, it won’t fly, and the older children jeer. But Melia keeps trying, and she’s successful and happy—because on it, she taped a letter for her deceased dog, Ginger. She hopes that Ginger will find a way to leave her a note in the stars. Married authors Samuel and Freda Narh reveal the story a bit at a time, interrupting the linear kite-making narrative with Melia’s recollections of Ginger and an expression of the joy she feels when she sees the library. Their language is poetic (“this aged booklet smells like success”) and balances the sometimes-challenging turns of phrase with shorter text and Suria’s large pastel illustrations, which capture the tone perfectly and use details from the apparently East African setting to enhance Melia’s world.

A well-told, offbeat story that blends themes of perseverance and healing.



CO SPECS Recipes & Histories of Classic Cocktails

Oh, Cas

Photos by Debbie Bragg

\$35.00 | Sept. 28, 2020

978-1-91-621550-4

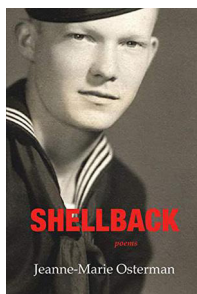


Readers can bone up on the lore of iconic cocktails while they learn how to make them with this mixological primer.

Oh, a London bartender, offers an encyclopedic overview of noted drinks, from the absinthe frappé (concocted of absinthe, sugar syrup, and soda water) to the zombie (a symphony of gold rum, Jamaican rum, Demarra rum, lime juice, falernum, absinthe, angostura bitters, grenadine, white grapefruit juice, and cinnamon syrup). The author tackles icons like the Manhattan and the margarita along with obscure gems like the monkey gland, which was inspired, it is averred, by a Russian doctor who pioneered primate-to-human testicle transplants. Each alphabetical entry gives simple recipes for making the drink and its major variants along with deep drafts of backstory on its origins and naming quirks—the Alaska was invented in South Carolina, it seems, and the coffee cocktail has no coffee—as well as the bartender(s) who developed it and famous barflies who imbibed it. Hemingway, of course, is the book’s presiding spirit. Readers

meet him drinking mojitos at La Bodeguita, daiquiris at El Floridita, and Bellinis at Harry's Bar in Venice and composing his own cocktail, the Death in the Afternoon, from absinthe and Champagne. Like any good barroom discourse, Oh's beguiling work happily dives into arcane trivia. "Martin Cate makes a compelling case that the Martinique style rum Vic was talking about was not the AOC rhum agricoles we assume from Martinique (made with pressed sugar cane juice) but rather molasses based 'rhum traditionnels,'" the author explains in a passage on the provenance of the mai tai that will satisfy the cognoscenti. But his writing finds poetry in every aspect of a drink, from the serving temperature ("An ice-cold Martini is like the first sip of water for a desert strandee—nectar from the gods; a warm one is a human rights violation") to mixing techniques ("Always stir a Martini; it should be limpid, liquid silk—not aerated and light from shaking"). The volume is also a feast for the eyes, with color photographs by Bragg and an amber color scheme that draws the eye like the glowing depths of a whiskey bottle. Readers will savor Oh's prose as much as they do the libations that flow from his recipes.

A sparkling handbook for bartenders and aficionados, full of intriguing information and literary charm.



SHELLBACK Poems

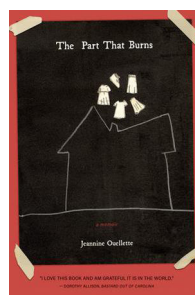
Osterman, Jeanne-Marie
Paloma Press (82 pp.)
\$16.00 paper | Feb. 1, 2021
978-1-73449-653-6

A daughter recalls her relationship with her father, a World War II sailor, in this volume of poetry.

This collection opens with Osterman explaining that a "shellback" is a veteran sailor, particularly one who has taken part in an often brutal initiation ceremony after crossing the equator for the first time. The poems contained here recount events from the Pacific War theater, where the poet's father served in the Navy, along with moments from her childhood and adulthood, including caring for her aging dad. Closing lines from the title poem summarize Osterman's emotional quest: "This is one shellback's daughter / trying to find that wiser self within / who can forgive these men." She examines the psychological impact of war that reverberates through the lives of those who served. Poems such as "Portrait of My Father as a Dad" recall threats of punishment: "I'll break every bone in your body if you don't turn down that TV." The author charts her pathway to forgiveness: "I let memories I can't erase / rest in peace" and portrays her father's struggle with aging and sickness. Osterman's poetry is captivating in the way that it freshly describes the traditionally masculine endeavor of military combat. The poet includes her father's spoken memories in italics: "Those shells were the size of a little league bat." But in poems such as "Think of It," childbirth is used to depict the destruction of the combat zone: "Ships giving birth— / landing tanks tumbling / from the monster hole, / scuttling to shore." In

doing so, she lends a vulnerability to the apparatus of war, which counters her father's tough male bravado. But Osterman is also unafraid to face the shocking realities of battle. Describing the corpse of a kamikaze pilot, she notes: "He's just a torso— / the end like a sponge / filled with blood." The manner in which the poet captures her aging father's descent into infirmity can be similarly unflinching yet never without a vein of tenderness: "Without muscle to sniff or swallow, your mouth / and nose let drain what's left of your life. / I touch your shoulder. *Happy Father's Day*, I say." Set against the brutal backdrop of war, this is an emotionally perceptive, poignant, and thoughtfully nuanced examination of the father-daughter relationship.

Courageous, insightful, and unsettling poems about war and family ties.



THE PART THAT BURNS A Memoir

Ouellette, Jeannine
Split Lip Press (172 pp.)
\$16.00 paper | Jan. 4, 2021
978-1-952897-06-1

Ouellette entwines moments of personal pain with a lifelong awe of nature in this memoir.

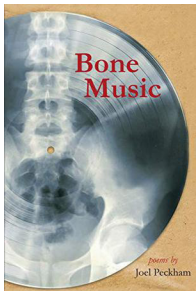
The book opens with a fragment about the author's mother, now in her late 60s, moving back home to Duluth, Minnesota, in search of "peace and quiet." However, Ouellette's formative years were anything but peaceful. In 1970, two years after she was born, her parents divorced, marking the beginning of an itinerant childhood. The family regularly moved, at one point relocating from Minnesota to Wyoming because of her mother's new husband's job. He had violent tendencies and played a "tickling game" with 4-year-old Ouellette, she says, which ended with his rubbing his hands between her legs. The author also describes childhood moments when she was "kicked out" of the family and made to live in the basement, with her mother pretending she was invisible. Other nonlinear fragments describe the author's forging a life for herself—navigating marriage, becoming a mother, and attending a sexual abuse support group. A key characteristic of Ouellette's writing is her preoccupation with nature, as she calmly skips between accounts of her past and factual information about the natural world: "A tumbleweed is a plant known as a diaspore." On occasion, these observations serve as distractions from personal pain; in other instances, they mirror the author's emotional state: "you might also want to be a tumbleweed. Just look at them, lacy and weightless, rising and falling on rivers of air." She juxtaposes these poetic moments with vivid, distressing passages, such as an account of Ouellette's mother's hurling a frying pan at the author and yelling, "I should have aborted you when I had the chance." The memoir also eloquently describes how the effects of abuse resonate into adulthood: "Scars don't lose their feeling. They become more tender to the touch." The presentation of the author's life story as a series of fragments may strike some readers as

“Techniques like alliteration and assonance supply the music of poetry.”

BONE MUSIC

idiosyncratic; however, this structure poignantly reflects a self-described “brokenness”: “you can tear a thing apart and tape it back together, and it will still be torn and whole.”

A textured remembrance of a traumatic childhood that also offers affecting moments of beauty.



BONE MUSIC Poems

Peckham, Joel

Stephen F. Austin University Press

(90 pp.)

\$18.00 paper | April 29, 2021

978-1-62-288912-9



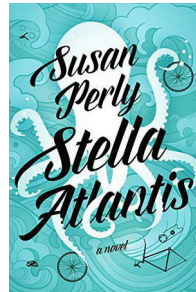
A volume of poetry explores how art shapes connections beyond the randomness and tragedy of loss.

The title poem of Peckham’s latest collection (many pieces were previously published in literary journals) refers to clandestine recordings of jazz and rock ‘n’ roll banned in the 1950s Soviet Union. Bootleggers cut discs from used X-rays, burned a hole in the center with a cigarette, and employed a recording lathe to transfer grooves from a gramophone record onto the plastic. These makeshift discs could then be played like any record, though they were short-lived and had poor sound quality. These discs were called ribs, music on ribs, bone music, or jazz on bones. This startling, potent metaphor is central to the book and its images of accident, breakage, loss, healing, and transcendence. X-rays capture moments of crisis, when the broken bones are “halted in ghostly / bloom,” but this is also the time when diagnosis and rehabilitation can begin their inherent process “the way bones do, all on / their own reaching for bone, reaching to make you / whole.” In their low-fidelity, scratchy fragility, the X-ray discs mimic how the body retains its injury, so that a once-broken bone aches in the cold. The poem then turns to the 2004 auto accident in Jordan that killed the author’s first wife and older son, an event that lies behind the entire collection. In the hospital, the speaker “lay in a hospital bed looking at the x-rays / of my shattered hip and the fiery brightness of the pins and screws / and white-hot wires and the clouds of tissue forming around them,” which tell “of choices, and / accidents.” And yet, like the jazz recorded in bone music, “an off-note, a mistake, can be embraced by the soloist.” Even overwhelming tragedy can give rise to the grace that is art; in the end, says the speaker, “Yes, these bones can sing, set all my comrades dancing, / to a ghostly tune.”

Throughout the moving collection, Peckham never suggests that the healing, soulful work of art is easy, only that it’s possible through faithful attention. One significant form of attention is listening, which ties in with the volume’s many images of music, especially improvisational music—the kind that makes art of accidents. While nearly all the pieces in the book are prose poems, they’re far from prosaic. The form works well to suggest the poet’s urgency to speak about wholeness. Techniques like alliteration and assonance supply the music of poetry, as in “Suffering Tape.” Here, the sibilants match the swoosh-y visuals

of wheeling starlings and glinting fish scales: “Sun and shadow as I shook and took the / shape of starlings flocked or the flame of sunfish staring up at night / from the windshield’s blue-black pond.” Another strong throughline in these poems is stargazing and astrocartography, another kind of attention that requires seeing and making connections: “We place a thing near another thing and it throws a spark, / makes a third somehow in there and out, a process we name art (or / God?).”

A superb collection of poems that are haunted by grief yet touched by grace.



STELLA ATLANTIS

Perly, Susan

Buckrider Books (448 pp.)

\$21.30 paper | \$9.99 e-book

Feb. 23, 2021

978-1-92-808896-7



Two parents, a writer and photographer, separately grieve for their daughter in Perly’s sequel novel.

Death Valley (2017) introduced readers to war photographer Vivienne Pink, who went to the Las Vegas desert on an assignment to photograph servicemen with her husband, a novelist named Johnny Coma. (Their original names are Vivienne Pinsky and Jonathon Comasky.) Secret atom bomb tests in the area have left Vivienne with side effects that include a bald scalp. In 2004, the couple’s daughter, Stella, was killed near their Toronto home by a hit-and-run bicyclist; now, in 2016, Vivienne and Johnny are estranged. He’s living in a tiny Barcelona apartment, where he quixotically writes letters to Stella and commits them to the ocean, believing that this will return her to him—which it does, in the form of a talking octopus. Meanwhile, Vivienne has come to Amsterdam, hoping to capture images of a rumored terrorist attack and revisiting her favorite paintings in the city. She also strikes erotic sparks with Alexi Green, a charismatic and mysterious man who seems to know all about her. In their different ways, father and mother reconcile themselves with ghosts of the past. In her third novel, Perly writes in a magical realist vein that is often mediated by vivid images linked to local qualities of light and water in the Netherlands (“Pale silver-green, an Amsterdam sky reflecting its own cold canal water”) and Spain (“The Mediterranean sky was lemon and citron and pink and so humid”). For both Johnny and Vivienne, making and responding to art is revealed to be central to their fully engaging with their daughter’s death: Johnny immerses himself in the work of Miguel de Cervantes; Vivienne visits her two favorite paintings in the Rijksmuseum as if they’re old friends. Both characters’ experiences are intriguing, poignant, and passionate—even if they sometimes exist on such a rarefied plane that they seem otherworldly.

A deeply felt work that shows the magical alchemy of art.



QUEEN OF TEETH

Piper, Hailey
Rooster Republic (198 pp.)
12.95 e-book | Aug. 1, 2021



The intersection of two women falling in love, a newly born entity, and a corrupt big pharma company set the stage for this horror story.

Decades ago, AlphaBeta Pharmaceutical unleashed a virus on the world that affected thousands. The children of those infected are chimera—they contain the DNA of two or more individuals—and they're closely monitored by the corporation during mandatory monthly checkups. So when chimera Yolanda "Yaya" Betancourt wakes up one day after a sex romp with a woman named Docia "Doc" Hall, an AlphaBeta Pharmaceutical agent, and discovers teeth between her thighs, she thinks the vagina dentata is nothing to worry about and probably related to her medical history. But the teeth are only the start; they're followed by horns and tentacles that spring out of Yaya's vagina in a slow metamorphosis that turns her into something else altogether, something that shares a mind with an inner being called Magenta whose cravings for peanut butter (and other forms of protein) take Yaya to strange places. Meanwhile, Doc experiences a transformation of her own. Her encounters with Yaya (and Magenta) lead her to complete the journey whose early beginnings date back to years before, when a tragic encounter with a different chimera led to a bad ending. But when ABP discovers Magenta's existence, they will stop at nothing to take possession of Yaya and Magenta—and Doc stands in the middle. Piper's evocative novel is an intoxicating mix of graphic body horror and lesbian romance. Painful questions regarding corporate accountability, personal redemption and forgiveness, mental health, and the nature of love revolve around the novel's three fascinating main characters, Yaya, Doc, and Magenta. The elusive worldbuilding—When is the story set exactly? Is it on an alternate Earth in an alternate timeline?—serves the story well, heightening its menacing tone.

A powerful, beautiful horror story.



SEAN MOSES IS MARTIN LUTHER, THE KING JR.

Powe, Moses D.
Illus. by Angelina Valieva
Fatherless Fathers Publishing (50 pp.)
\$20.95 | \$9.99 e-book | June 8, 2021
978-1-73-518033-5

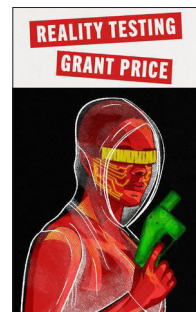


A boy gets to portray a hero in Powe's picture-book introduction to several Black figures from U.S. history.

Young Sean Moses is excited about his role in his school's Black History Month program, and he makes his parents guess whom he'll be portraying during a speech. As his parents mention different historical figures—Malcolm X, W.E.B. Du Bois,

Thurgood Marshall, and others—the narrative offers short biographies of each, and illustrator Valieva depicts each historical figure with Sean Moses' youthful face. Afterward, the child finally reveals his role: "I'm Martin Luther, the king!" When his mother asks why Sean Moses thinks King was an actual monarch, Sean Moses declares, "Because his dream came true." Powe presents a hopeful narrative in this cleverly structured book, which also includes portraits of such men as Frederick Douglass and President Barack Obama. Each biography includes an inspirational quote from the person described and discusses his greatest achievements. Sean Moses' own story features short sentences that will be readily accessible to younger readers, while the biographies use vocabulary that's more complex. In Valieva's beautiful black-and-white images, Sean Moses and his family members all appear Black; Sean Moses' fellow students appear to have a range of skin tones.

A well-illustrated tale that's also a great pick to expand libraries' Black history sections.



REALITY TESTING

Price, Grant
Black Rose (289 pp.)
\$0.99 e-book | Jan. 6, 2021



In a future Germany of wet-wired hackers and tech-enhanced para-humans, a woman awakens from an induced sleep to find her personality transplanted into another body—and, worse, that she's accused of murder.

Dubbed "ecopunk" by Price, this SF thriller takes place in a blighted future Germany following mass extinctions and water shortages. While healing the planet's shattered climate is supposedly an overwhelming priority, to desperate, ordinary Berliners, such as Mara Kinzig, the carbon obsession has become weaponry by which the Big Five corporate entities and their minions dominate and oppress. For women, things have grown worse after medical mad-science made a breakthrough with the "Seahorse programme," enabling men to conceive and deliver genetically flawless offspring in well under nine months—meaning less fuss and less wasted carbon. Unemployed and derided as an "obsolet," Mara submits to an exploitive "dreamtech" process meant to mine and sell brain waves while she sleeps. But she wakes beside the incriminating corpse of a man from the powerful executive business caste. Worse, the body in which Mara awakens is not her own—courtesy of a full neural-personality transplant technique available only to the most elite. An instant fugitive from deadly law enforcement automatons who want her for murder, Mara (or whoever she is now) seeks sanctuary and hunts for answers among the rebels and underground-resistance misfits who trust neither her story nor her scrambled identity. Readers will find an instant echo of the invigorating cyberpunk territory famously birthed by visionary SF author William Gibson—and, not long after, written off by the novelist himself as a genre past its expiration date. But Price reboots the familiar noir scenarios

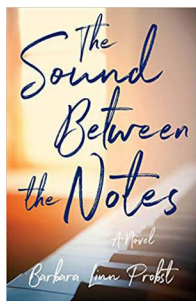
“The activities are consistently fun throughout and offer a path toward creating a new generation focused on environmental issues.”

EXPLORE YOUR ENVIRONMENT



of greedy multinationals, hero hackers, and freakishly augmented adventurers, upgrading the software with piquant bytes of green politics run amok and the unholy intersections of capitalism, recession, and transhumanism. The prose is bullet-point sharp and rich in future-speak street argot (“Lightwalls are feeding them all kinds of ads for biomed and dreamtech schemes. Carbon out your eyes if you survive the biomed ones”). If the author does not reach Margaret Atwood’s high level in envisioning a nightmare technocracy seemingly eradicating the female gender on a claim that it’s good for the environment, that stinger in the cyber-scorpion’s tail still makes for just one more piece of fitting bad news in Price’s well-conceived dystopia.

A bracing blast of neo-cyberpunk with some smart tweaks to the operating system.



THE SOUND BETWEEN THE NOTES

Probst, Barbara Linn

She Writes Press (336 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | \$9.95 e-book

April 6, 2021

978-1-64742-012-3

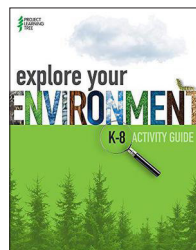


In Probst’s novel, a gifted pianist hopes to restart her career after a long hiatus.

Susannah Lewis willingly sacrificed her concert career to be a mother. Now,

her son, James, is a teenager, and she is invited to perform at a gala function that might signal a new beginning. But her little finger is behaving oddly, and she has a couple of tiny nodes on her palm. The diagnosis is Dupuytren’s contracture, a hereditary condition. In time, her gnarled hands may be useless at the keyboard. This is terrifying enough in itself, but Susannah was adopted as a newborn and knows next to nothing about her biological parents. Her search takes her to Texas, where she leaves a wake of emotional mayhem but does learn that she has a younger sister, who may have musical talents of her own. Meanwhile, Susannah looks to find treatment for her rare condition. Her husband, Aaron, however, is a scientific researcher who is by nature very logical and cautious; moreover, he simply can’t understand the anxiety that is plaguing Susannah. Their marriage suffers and may be permanently damaged. Probst writes very well and convincingly. The characters are well drawn, and the tight plot is just one agonizing twist after another. Susannah and Aaron fall prey to the old clash between the artistic temperament and the scientific, but the reader does understand them both as well-meaning people. James is a recognizable teenager: a naïve kid one minute, a nascent adult the next. The climax, on the night of her performance, is a tour de force steeped in suspense, and Susannah’s subsequent revelations are satisfying and authentic.

A sensitive, astute exploration of artistic passion, family, and perseverance.



EXPLORE YOUR ENVIRONMENT K-8 Activity Guide

Project Learning Tree

Project Learning Tree (432 pp.)

\$34.99 paper | \$19.99 e-book

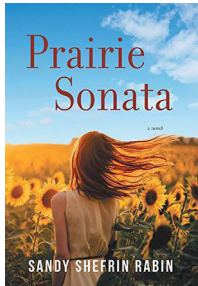
Aug. 1, 2021

978-0-99-708068-1

A creative resource for educators looking to focus on teaching sustainability.

This work is a publication of Project Learning Tree, an initiative of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, whose goal is to advance “environmental literacy, stewardship, and career pathways using trees and forests as windows on the world.” The activities are broken down into grade-specific categories—K-2, 3-5, and 6-8—and aim to foster students’ ability to care for a sustainable world. Appendices offer helpful additional material, such as “Tips for Teaching Outdoors,” “Making a Scientific Argument,” “Planning an Investigation,” as well as “Urban Outlook,” which offers ways to adapt the material to city settings (“An urban environment is a vital and rich environment worthy of study and exploration, whether it is a city sidewalk or an urban forest”). Each activity is color-coded and presented with quick reference icons that help educators match their curriculum plans to their needs. The easy-to-grasp visual presentation offers an overview of each lesson, highlights the appropriate grade level, and lists the types of differentiated instruction and STEM skills involved as well as learning objectives; it also provides useful background information to help teachers capture students’ interest. Each activity offers clear step-by-step directions, assessments, and ideas for extended learning, including workbook pages. The activities are innovative and playful; the K-2 activity “Have Seeds, Will Travel,” for instance, suggests using a masking-tape bracelet to help collect seeds, and “Trees as Habitats” includes a Tree Observation Bingo sheet to help learners find evidence of habitation. In the Grades 3-5 section, activities effectively encourage students to extend their studies by considering their future careers in “My Green Future,” make personal connections through the use of “Poet-Tree,” and understand the consequences of human action in “Web of Life.” The learner’s role in the ecosystem plays a more central role in “Decisions, Decisions” for Grades 6-8, which asks kids to consider complicated land-use choices, and in “If You Were the Boss,” about creating a forest management plan. The activities are consistently fun throughout and offer a path toward creating a new generation focused on environmental issues.

An important and engaging tool for teachers.



PRAIRIE SONATA

Rabin, Sandy Shefrin
FriesenPress (288 pp.)
\$29.99 | \$17.99 paper | \$5.99 e-book
Oct. 7, 2020
978-1-5255-7636-2
978-1-5255-7637-9 paper



A young girl's assumptions about life are challenged by the arrival of a new teacher in Rabin's historical YA novel.

In Canada's vast Manitoba prairie sits the fictional town of Ambrosia. It has a thriving Jewish community that's made up of immigrants who fled the Russian pogroms of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It's here, in 1948, that readers meet 11-year-old Mira Adler, who narrates this coming-of-age tale. She's a happy, imaginative youngster who attends the Peretz School, a learning center that teaches "English" studies in the morning and Jewish studies in the afternoon. The latter classes are taught primarily in Yiddish, a language that Rabin uses liberally in dialogue and narration throughout the novel, always followed by helpful translation. Mira states that "my world was an untroubled one, and in my naiveté and innocence, I assumed that it was the same for everyone." That changes after the arrival of Chaver Bergman, a new, young Yiddish teacher. "There was something affecting and melancholy about him," Mira says, "engendering *rachmonos* (pity) rather than gleeful mischief." When he offers Mira private violin lessons, they build a friendship that leads him to share the story of his tragic past. Born in Czechoslovakia, he's a tormented, guilt-ridden Holocaust survivor who was once a virtuoso violinist but no longer plays. His instruction is verbal, inspiring Mira with visual images of music that inflect Rabin's prose with moments of beauty with joyful and mournful tones: "He told me to imagine leaves swirling in the wind when playing Vivaldi's 'Autumn' from *The Four Seasons*, each little leaf being carried aloft on a current of cool air." Her descriptions of daily life, traditional foods, and celebrations paint an evocative portrait of second-generation Jewish diaspora life in the West. And Mira's growing awareness of anti-Semitism outside her small enclave provides readers with a timely reminder of the need to remain vigilant against bigotry. Overall, it's a compelling work with a wistful longing for days of childhood innocence.

A poignant and eloquent reflection on tradition, family, friendship, and tragedy.



PREDATOR MOONS

Ramsay, J.H.
Illus. by Julia Sonntagbauer
Don't Give Up the Ship Press
(222 pp.)
\$8.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book
Sept. 18, 2020
979-8-69-375726-4



In Ramsay's debut SF novel, explorers venture to distant planets to exploit life-forms who may have a few tricks of

their own.

Near the end of the 21st century, the invention of "Drag Engine" spaceship propulsion (which is effectively teleportation) grants humanity access to countless worlds, but it also reveals hidden "glitches" in the universe—leading to the disturbing conclusion that reality is a vast software simulation engineered by forces unknown. Despite this existential blow, mankind plods on, following base instincts of greed, power, lust, and self-gratification. Liquid, shape-changing artificial intelligence machines called "ancillaries" are used as servants, sexual partners, pets, and even repositories of human memories. Everyone who could afford it has already fled Earth for other planets while the moon is now a huge library for universities devoted to new sciences. Mercury is home to greedy "clans" eager to exploit alien invertebrates: "We learned the entire universe was actually overflowing with life—arthropods, arachnids, cephalopods, crustaceans, cnidaria and insects in a trillion incredible varieties." The curious absence of vertebrates leaves humanity as the cosmos's apex predator. In this milieu, one-time refugee Isaiah Erickson, a Columbia University anthropologist who's also a prosperous, high-tech arms dealer, ventures to the distant planet of Conrad in search of valuable, hallucinogenic alien wasp venom, to which he's addicted. Meanwhile, Chloe Keating, an idealistic grad student hoping to explore and investigate endangered species, gets tricked into following a previous, doomed expedition to the muddy planet Hobbes to harvest enormous centipedes. Her mission and Isaiah's fatefully intersect.

Ramsay crafts brisk, edgy prose that splits storytelling chores across three first-person narrators: Isaiah, Chloe, and a somewhat anguished ancillary who has the memories of an adventurer who perished while on insect safari. Readers may be able to detect influences from Pokémon cartoons as well as Frank Herbert's classic novel *Dune*, although other worlds described in Herbert's fiction, such as the lethal Pandora in *The Jesus Incident* (1979), might make for more apt comparisons. Overall, Ramsay offers a work that's a feat of considerable imagination and attitude—a stimulating tale of interplanetary intrigue and monsters, human and otherwise. Some genre connoisseurs may say that the future humanity he invokes—with its betrayals, obsessions, and sham replicas of animals, people, perhaps even the material world itself, seems like something out of Philip K. Dick's realm of paranoid dystopia. A semiderelict New York City that's down to its last 50,000 people, for instance, would seem right at home in the film *Blade Runner*. Readers will want to know more about this strange future in

“Robbins deploys her tartly witty prose to offer a delicious, well-observed sendup of the ballet world.”

MURDER IN FIRST POSITION

which the sexes seem strongly segregated, suggesting that ancillaries have replaced domestic partners everywhere. At the same time, they’ll quietly dread whatever answers Ramsay conjures, and that’s quite an accomplishment, in accord with the credo of one of the duplicitous characters: “Space is dark and full of wonders. Wonders and horrors.” The author includes a “Bestiary” of creatures referenced in the text, illustrated by Sonntagbauer.

A memorable voyage through a brutal human society, bizarre alien environments, and elastic realities.



SULE THE PROVERB DETECTIVE
The Case of the Tied-Up Lion

Rawls, Rene

Illus. by Brittnie Brotzman

Enter House Publishers (40 pp.)

\$23.99 | Oct. 7, 2021

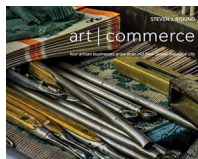
978-1-73554-790-9



A girl seeks help from a young detective who solves her problem by drawing on an old proverb in Rawls’ debut picture book set in an unspecified African country.

A stressed girl named Fara bumps into Sule, a pint-sized young detective, as she’s buying supplies for a class party. “How will I get it all done in time?” she asks Sule, who answers with a proverb: “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” Fara has no idea what that means, but before she can ask him, he takes off into the market with her list. She asks people if they’ve seen Sule, and just as Fara’s about to despair of ever organizing the party, she realizes that Sule has given her friends parts of the list to share the responsibility. The proverb’s meaning—that working together solves a problem—was in front of her all along. The Sule character first appeared in animated shorts by the author, and the story in this new medium, related in straightforward, present-tense language, will be perfect for lap readers or confident elementary readers. Brotzman’s interactive, seek-and-find cartoon illustrations make great use of the colors of the marketplace; the items (and Sule himself) are well defined and fun to locate, and silly details are sure to elicit giggles.

A vividly illustrated and clever work with an accessible moral.



ART | COMMERCE
Four Artisan Businesses Grow in an Old New Jersey Industrial City

Riskind, Steven J.

Steve Riskind Photography (126 pp.)

\$45.00 | July 28, 2020

978-0-578-68425-3

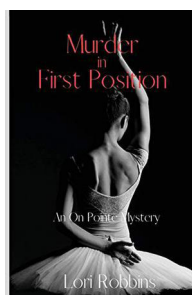


Dingy workshops incubate unlikely aesthetic epiphanies in this colorful photographic study of small businesses.

Photographer Riskind showcases four artisanal manufacturers in and around Paterson, New Jersey, a faded textile center whose old factories now shelter firms making specialty products.

He begins at Jerry Valenta and Sons, a textile company with 10 industrial looms. Many of these pictures are composed and formally elegant, juxtaposing the fiendishly complex and forbidding loom mechanisms—with their starkly lit mazes of oily, muscular steel gears and chains—and the delicately abstract geometries of the gossamer threads hanging on them in dense yet ethereal patterns. He then visits Great Falls Metalworks, a family jewelry maker that once numbered Jackie Onassis among its customers. Here he depicts an atmospheric tableau of workers using hand tools to hammer, drill, solder, and polish, bending over tiny objects while bundled up against the winter cold in an unheated workshop where piles of gems glow against a backdrop of grungy concrete walls. Riskind’s third subject is the Peragallo Pipe Organ Company, an instrument maker now on its fourth generation of family craftsmen. There’s a spaciousness in these photographs of organ pipes that are major architectural elements in their own right, often large enough to dwarf the workers. We see demure smaller variants adorning the wall of a simple white Episcopal church and grander versions towering in Catholic cathedrals, overshadowing statues of Jesus and the Virgin Mary; bringing these soaring creations down to earth are pictures of the electronic circuitry that translates keyboard strokes into music. Riskind finishes at the Hiemer Stained Glass Studio, taking viewers through the integrated process of drawing sacred figures, transferring images to colored glass, cutting and soldering panels to frames, and installing them in churches. The photographs of workers peering intently at light boxes and glass panels spread out on workbenches, brows furrowed in concentration, convey an almost spiritual union of art and craft. Riskind’s accompanying captions and commentary are informative if a bit stolid. (“Tying 12,000 knots in fine (and sometimes slippery) threads is extraordinarily time consuming.”) The photographs make the book come alive, showing off odd and intriguing manufacturing processes and the dedication of the people who practice them.

An engrossing portrait of artisanship as a blend of mechanical genius and human fulfillment.



MURDER IN FIRST POSITION
An On Pointe Mystery

Robbins, Lori

Level Best Books (260 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | \$1.99 e-book

Nov. 24, 2020

978-1-947915-74-9



Metaphorical back-stabbing in a ballet troupe leads to the real thing in this whodunit.

The sprightly first installment of Robbins’ On Pointe Mystery series finds Leah Siderova, a 30-something principal dancer in New York City’s American Ballet Company, hoping to make a comeback from knee surgery by starring in hot choreographer Bryan Leister’s new work. She loses out to Arianna Bonneville, the company’s new ingénue, 10 years her junior and possessed

of superlative talent and sly cruelty. (“I used to watch you dance when I was still a little girl,” she purrs to Leah.) When Leah finds Arianna in the costume room with dress shears planted in her back, all signs point to her as the perp because 1) she clumsily put her fingerprints on the murder weapon; 2) the whole company heard her threaten to cut the victim down during a tiff; and 3) when asked who attacked her, Arianna murmured “Leah” before expiring. Shrewd, handsome police detective Jonah Sobol likes Leah for the crime, and even her Uncle Morty, a lawyer, thinks she should cop a plea. But she’s determined to prove her innocence by finding the real killer. The suspects include Zarina Devereaux, an amoral French ballerina and rival of Arianna’s; various men and women who may have been sleeping with or jealous of the two dancers; and many corps de ballet peons whom the victim tormented. With the police closing in, Leah goes on the lam in disguise to continue her investigation—and discovers a world of salt-of-the-earth types very different from the ruthless denizens of her dancer’s bubble. In this limber yarn, Robbins, an ex-ballet dancer and author of *Lesson Plan for Murder* (2017), deploys her tartly witty prose to offer a delicious, well-observed sendup of the ballet world. The plot has red herrings, arbitrarily withheld evidence, and third act problems, but that doesn’t detract from the fun of watching Leah navigate atop her aching, blistered feet through the labyrinth of balletic cattiness and vanity (Zarina “peered around my shoulder to look in the mirror that hung behind me, checking to see that she was still as beautiful as she was five minutes earlier”). Readers will root for Leah as she sleuths her way through the troupe’s comic excesses.

A graceful mystery that pirouettes around a cast of entertaining narcissists.



COTTON TEETH A Memoir

Rockowitz, Glenn
Harper & Case (264 pp.)
8.99 e-book | Dec. 14, 2021

A writer and stand-up comedian who survived a terminal cancer diagnosis confronts painful memories in this memoir.

In his debut book, *Rodeo in Joliet* (2008), Rockowitz recorded his battle with cancer after being diagnosed in 1998 as having three months to live. He was 28 years old at the time, and his wife was eight-and-a-half months pregnant. That memoir described the author’s seemingly miraculous remission and how his father, who prayed to exchange places with his son, was diagnosed with end-stage pancreatic cancer soon afterward. In this new book, Rockowitz revisits this harrowing time but also recalls other memories, extending back to his childhood, which he feels have shaped him as a person. The author focuses tightly on relationships with others, from school friends to people he met after founding the Best Medicine Group, which aimed to bring live comedy into the homes of the terminally ill. Rockowitz describes heartbreaking moments, such as learning of the

death of a close friend who was also one of the first patients that Best Medicine entertained. However, at other points, he recounts jaw-droppingly absurd moments, as when he went looking for “the largest dildo” in Manhattan as a joke gift for a cancer patient. Rockowitz’s prose style is terse and choppy, with paragraphs that are often only one sentence long and can resemble poetic verse: “The hospitals, the doctors, the pills, the poisons, the needles, the scans, the pain, the pain.” Readers who acclimate themselves to these stylistic quirks, though, will be rewarded with some darkly hilarious accounts, such as when he decides to write a letter to be given to his son in the event of his death: “By the time you read this it’s possible Mom has already gotten remarried...I just hope he’s not one of those dicks with the big calves and the ponytail.... That guy’s probably into cycling too. That’s my worst nightmare for you.” At other points, Rockowitz also succeeds in echoing the yearnings of many cancer sufferers. The result is an offbeat but truly arresting survival memoir.

Smart, irrepressible prose that takes on the realities of cancer.



10 DAYS Dee Rommel Mystery #1

Selbo, Julie
Pandamoon Publishing (332 pp.)
\$27.99 | \$17.99 paper | \$5.99 e-book
July 31, 2021
978-1-95-062739-4
978-1-95-062736-3 paper

A one-legged private eye searches for a missing heiress while navigating mayhem on the mean streets of Portland,

Maine, in this mystery.

This knotty first installment of the Dee Rommel series finds the fledgling shamus working at G&Z Investigations while on disability leave from the Portland Police Department after she was knocked off a roof by a perp and had her lower left leg amputated. She’s hired by local tech zillionaire Philip Claren to find his daughter, Lucy, a brainy, 20-something research scientist. Lucy’s gone off the grid just 10 days before her wedding to a young PR man named Tyler Peppard, whom Claren takes a dim view of. Assisted by her friend Jade, an IT whiz who can get into any encrypted file or database, Dee delves into the Claren clan’s underbelly. The excavation turns up Lucy’s rich, prickly mother; an Ecstasy-enabled, extortion-porn plot; and a sinister artificial intelligence company’s scheme to surveil people by implanting them with microchips. Dee also gets major subplots heaped on her plate. A liquor salesman who hit on her at a bar turns up dead, and she gets involved in another missing woman case when her hairdresser friend Karla Ackerman disappears. The latter riddle deepens when Dee finds Karla badly beaten in a motel and too traumatized to talk. Then, town terror Billy Payer, whom Dee and Karla testified against at his assault-and-battery trial, gets out of prison and pursues his calling of menacing everyone he comes across. Along the way, Dee fields romantic interest from canny police colleague Detective

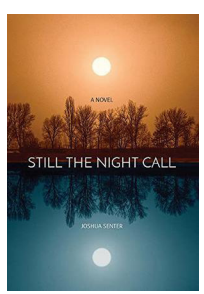
“The writing is conversational in style, and the scene-setting in various California locales works well.”

99 ERICS

Robbie Donato and “the Reader,” a flirty knight errant who’s into motorcycles and Dickens novels.

Selbo’s busy plot creaks occasionally. The mystery’s mechanism sometimes needs people who have good reason to explain things to not explain them and others to give Dee notes clarifying things out of the blue when she’s clueless. But the narrative usually earns its keep with nifty, engrossing procedural, including Dee’s locomotion tactics—how she manages the complicated process of moving around and even climbing a tree with her prosthesis. (“I swing my good leg up and use my abs to lift the rest of my weight. Hurts like hell.”) The author grounds the story in an atmospheric portrait of a Portland divided between yuppified quaintness and working-class grit and where everyone has a shared past. Her characters are sharply etched by Dee’s always observant voice. (“The lights of the cameras hit two reflective points on” Tyler: “one on the excessive Rolex on his left wrist and the other on his shiny, pointy, steel-toed boots. He looks like an arrogant dickwad.”) In Selbo’s punchy, vivid prose, Dee is hard-boiled when she needs to be, but her injury gives her a vulnerability and interiority that deepen her. (“My goddamn leg thinks it’s whole again; the knee thinks it’s connected to a calf and ankle and foot—thinks it has muscles, tissue, fat, tendons, veins, arteries and bones all in place to keep blood flowing from my left extremity to my heart....Of course, I know it’s my brain dipping into the past; imagining the tickle of fresh sheets and the heat of a calloused hand stroking the length of my leg.”) Readers will root for her as she steps gamely into every peril.

An entertaining, richly textured suspense yarn with a spirited hero.



STILL THE NIGHT CALL

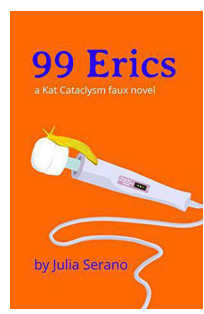
Senter, Joshua
Roubidoux Press (188 pp.)
\$21.99 | \$4.99 e-book | Jan. 14, 2022
978-1-7375856-0-2



A young Missouri man on a failing dairy farm contemplates what he feels will be the last day of his life in this novel. At the age of 32, Calem Honeycutt is already a homeowner, but he didn’t move far from his parents. They are a mile away at their dairy farm in the Ozarks where Calem still works. He didn’t feel like going to college or getting what some call a real job, as he is too tied to the life and landscape of his upbringing. (“There are two cricks that run through our land, three ponds, and a waterfall that will leave a hell of an impression if you’re ever lucky enough to see it.”) His parents are reliable and supportive, if somewhat stoic, though his sister, Caitlyn, whom he genuinely likes, is now an urban progressive liberal who is outraged by her family’s conservative opinions. Calem hunts, fishes, and sees friends, but he is single and deals with despair. He has convinced himself this will be the last day he will ever live. He plows through the day, racked by memories of old times and fascinated by new views of familiar landscapes. Some fun is on the

horizon, since he is going fishing with his friend Miles that evening. Even so, bad news comes in about the dairy farm, pushing Calem and his family toward new, possibly insurmountable anxieties. Senter’s impressive novel is a truthful, honestly told story that puts a human face on a region that’s steeped in tradition, brimming with the allure of nature, and grappling with the constant threat of being swallowed up by the latest corporate entity. Calem’s world is intricately described as a land of four-wheelers, black walnuts, hog suckers, and Holsteins, and it’s a place that offers seemingly endless freedom but brutal government and marketplace restrictions. The author’s careful plotting, over the course of one remarkably intense day, defies expectations as it moves toward its haunting conclusion.

A candid tale that triumphantly understands the Midwestern psyche, delivering moments of beauty and tragedy.



99 ERICS
A Kat Cataclysm Faux Novel

Serano, Julia
Switch Hitter Press (278 pp.)
\$12.49 paper | \$6.99 e-book
Jan. 22, 2020
978-0-9968810-4-3

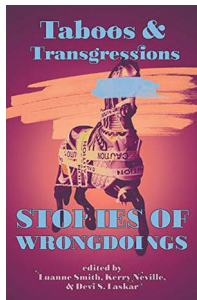


Serano satirically tackles gender norms, linguistics, hipsters, and more as her fictional character writes a book about dating 99 different people—all named Eric.

Kat Cataclysm is an absurdist short story writer and self-identified “weirdo”—an out bisexual, nonmonogamous “ethical slut” with an interest in baseball, linguistics, and delicious India pale ales. She’s also fictional, a not quite nom de guerre (but still a warrior!) of author Serano, and has a long-held desire to be a novelist despite her self-confessed title of “queen of conflict avoidance,” an unfortunate trait when most novels thrive on conflict. So instead, she commits to a “faux novel” about her “her supposed experiences dating 99 different people named Eric” as she seeks to subvert other conventions of fiction as well, vowing to never overcome adversity or grow as a person along the way. Kat uses these Erics as opportunities to draw out poignant points about gentrification, internalized homophobia, bisexual stereotypes, and the disposability of the gig economy while also obsessing over penis-chewing banana slugs or dealing with the fallout of an internet listicle on the common cold she authored literally going viral. When she sics a roomful of zombified children on a tiresome screenwriter, it’s clear she’s aware of her role as omniscient narrator. Serano has written about gender identity and feminism in her nonfiction books *Whipping Girl* (2007) and *Excluded* (2013); she explores many of the same ideas in her debut work of fiction. The writing is conversational in style, and though Kat claims to be uninterested in banal descriptions, the scene-setting in various California locales works well. Kat recalls the Manic Pixie Dream Girls so often used in male-oriented stories, but she’s decidedly more warts and all in her presentation, almost too quirky to function,

and enthusiastic about her role as ruler of all the Erics. The result is a lovable composite of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) and a less murder-y version of Marvel's Deadpool, using absurdism and humor to break down the fourth wall and the very idea of "normal," with all its silly little boxes and prejudices. If that makes the book sound serious, it isn't—and that might be the most effective way it makes its readers think about identity.

Knocks down literary conventions, sexual stereotypes, the fourth wall, and more in enthusiastic defense of the weird.



TABOOS & TRANSGRESSIONS
Stories Of Wrongdoings

Ed. by Smith, Luanne, Kerry Neville &

Devi S. Laskars

Madville Publishing (268 pp.)

\$20.95 paper | \$9.99 e-book

March 4, 2021

978-1-94-869264-9



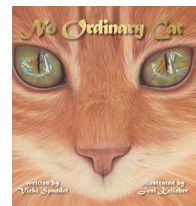
An anthology offers short stories about breaking cultural and family rules.

The editors of this collection—Smith, Neville, and Laskar—gained their inspiration from the fourth lesson, titled “Ideas: Exploring Taboo and Darkness,” in Joyce Carol Oates’ MasterClass lecture on the art of the short story. Tales about the overall theme, breaking taboos, were in some cases solicited directly from contributors while others were selected from entries by authors responding to an open call for stories. Many of these were previously published in other collections or literary journals. The anthology also reprints “Gargoyle” by Oates. Unsurprisingly one of the strongest tales in the collection, the story is narrated by a woman who is driving the streets in the wee hours, her thoughts directed at her lover’s wife. Adultery, though, isn’t her chief transgression; it’s loneliness, something that can’t be talked about and has twisted her sensibility toward the grotesque. The narrator’s memory and imagination, especially of her lover’s wife’s pregnancy, are haunted by the sinister, with Oates maintaining the chilling tone in sentences where every word counts. The opening piece, “True Crime” by Kim Addonizio, is another potent tale that digs beneath the surface. Teenage girls steal from school lockers or stores, even taking a diamond necklace from a friend’s house; they get fake IDs and have unprotected sex. Or do they? The narrator’s story keeps changing: “Here’s the necklace. Is it real? Is it fake? Does it even exist? Who gives a shit?” The powerlessness of their world and the hopelessness of their prospects are the true crimes.

Drugs and alcoholism represent another class of taboo examined in several tales. In “Exit Stage” by Chavisa Woods, for example, a high school girl endangers her future by snorting cocaine with her mother even as she suspects that, on some level, her mom wants her to fail. Other stories concern transgressions of family and cultural mores, as in “The Tao of Good Families” by Soniah Kamal, in which a Pakistani girl learns what she truly values about people, and “I Still Like

Pink” by Francine Rodriguez, in which a gay teenager resolves that being her true self is more important than facing anyone’s disapproval. Few readers would argue with the premise of such pieces, but other tales challenge the sensibilities more intensely. In “Not a Cupid,” for instance, by Molly Giles, the female narrator buys a young boy named Beto in Juarez. Hedrugs, gags, and binds her, touching her sexually and playing with her body. The encounter assuages her loneliness, so she concludes: “I will not use my knife on this one I thought.... It will take some time, but this one I will teach.” The story’s tender ending makes it all the more horrifying and truly transgressive. Some pieces are more lighthearted, such as “Jambo-ree” by Pam Houston, in which a woman and her dog prank a gun-loving “Mountain Man” convention.

A fine and varied collection that gives eloquent voice to the unsayable.



NO ORDINARY CAT

Spandel, Vicki

Illus. by Jeni Kelleher

Teaching That Makes Sense (122 pp.)

\$29.95 | June 1, 2020

978-0-9972831-3-6



A cat hungry for adventure discovers that his destiny lies closer to hearth and home in this chapter book.

Swayed by an aging tomcat’s tales of seafaring derring-do, orange tabby kitten Rufus dreams of a world beyond his tame life with Mama Cat and his siblings. Adopted by gentle Mrs. Lin, Rufus is happy to be her affectionate companion until his first birthday brings an acute itch to roam and uncover his destiny. But after a near-fatal forest encounter with maddened nesting geese, the wandering feline is content to settle in with his rescuer, Mr. Peabody. A lonely poet with writer’s block, Mr. Peabody finds peace and the renewal of his creative drive in Rufus’ comfortable presence until he learns that his furry friend, “Mr. Cat,” is the subject of Mrs. Lin’s desperate “missing cat” notice in the newspaper. This feline-centric yet deeply human and adult-friendly novel for children is the first work of fiction by Spandel, a prolific author best known for instructional books on writing for classrooms and workshops. May it not be her last. The author’s well-drawn characters are shaped by empathy, not sentiment, and by her near-poetic observations of the minutiae in their lives (Mrs. Lin’s garden and kitchen; Mr. Peabody’s books and herbal teas) and of the natural world around them. Rufus, beginning his journey with an explorer’s bravado, sees a “familiar wooded landscape transformed into a patchwork of meadows and wetlands. Carpets of purple asters and yellow marsh marigolds rolled out in all directions as the sun spilled the last of its light across the water and littoral mud flats....The world was reaching out its arms, enveloping the young swashbuckler in its embrace.” How Rufus stays in the lives of both his loving caretakers and discovers his true purpose are movingly answered through the wisdom of an unexpected and memorable source: Asha,

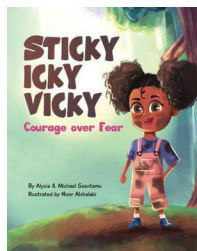
“Readers of historical fiction set in ancient Rome will appreciate Stein’s well-researched attention to detail.”

CALIGULA AND I



a battered rescue cat, scarred but not broken by rough living. The text is richly complemented by Kelleher’s pastel paintings of animals and ambient settings. Among the book’s endmatter: Mr. Peabody’s recipe for crab cakes and his poem dedicated to the absent Asha, promising to “keep an extra blue plate at the table always...for when you bring your wild heart home.”

A beautifully written and illustrated feline tale with subtle emotional depths.



STICKY ICKY VICKY Courage Over Fear

Ssentamu, Alysa & Michael Ssentamu

Illus. by Noor Alshalabi

Pixel Publishing House (38 pp.)

\$12.99 paper | Oct. 19, 2021

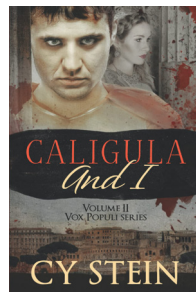
978-0-6451293-0-4



An outdoors-loving girl overcomes her fear of water in this picture-book debut about positive self-talk.

Vicky, an enthusiastic girl with warm brown skin, dark brown eyes, and curly puffs of hair, loves being outdoors and playing in mud and dirt with her friends. The rhyming narrative endorses this messiness but points out that this behavior is only OK if Vicky would be willing to take a bath each night: “But no, this is not her way.” Vicky’s fear of water keeps her from bathing more than once a week—and leaves her out when her best friends enjoy swimming at the beach. When one friend invites Vicky to a birthday party at a water park, Vicky determines that the time to overcome her fear has arrived. The Ssentamus, a married Australian team, introduce internal voices Negative Ned and Positive Ted to help readers understand how self-talk—and the voice Vicky chooses to listen to—influences Vicky’s ability to overcome her fears. The rhyming stanzas flow well throughout and only occasionally introduce an unfamiliar term (*fortnight*) that might cause young American readers to stumble. Alshalabi’s warm digital cartoonlike illustrations capture both Vicky’s exuberance and her fear, and Vicky’s diverse friends and family (her mother has peach-toned skin with blue eyes and blond hair; her father, a deeper sepia skin tone and curly brown hair like Vicky’s) offer many young readers a chance to see themselves represented on the page. An afterword offers conversation starters for families to discuss fear and courage.

An encouraging tale for young readers with their own fears to face.



CALIGULA AND I

Stein, Cy

Abeel Street Press (432 pp.)

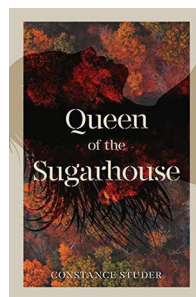
\$15.99 paper | Aug. 14, 2021

978-1-73-411594-9

A novel that tells the story of the brutal Roman Emperor Caligula, as told by his close friend.

In this latest in Stein’s Vox Populi series of historical novels set in ancient Rome, the narrative centers on one of the most infamous figures in Roman history: Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus, known to posterity by his nickname “Caligula” (or “little boots”). As the novel opens, the narrator, Publius Decimus Silvanus, a small child, has been drafted by his upper-middle-class family to become the playmate of young Caligula; Silvanus’ late mother had been friends with Caligula’s great-grandmother Livia, the wife of the Emperor Augustus. The story progresses through the lives of the two characters; Caligula rises in the ranks of the Julio-Claudian dynasty as the beloved son of the popular general Germanicus, and Silvanus becomes an increasingly confident doctor. The author balances familiar details from ancient accounts by Suetonius and Tacitus with the entirely invented story of Silvanus and his medical practice, which is described in vivid detail; a scene in which an unlucky stonemason has his leg amputated, for instance, is both gory and realistic. In a neat narrative twist, these medical details, meticulously recorded by Silvanus on scrolls that long survive him, come in handy for a Roman doctor a generation later; these result in intriguing sequences that allow Stein to dramatize a wider swath of Roman life. Readers receive highly detailed realizations of other societal aspects, such as the workings of Roman silver mines and the administration of the Roman Mint. Stein skillfully anchors his wide-ranging story to the odd relationship at its center, with Silvanus reflecting on the young man he knew, whom he describes as “sharp as a flake of obsidian.” Readers of historical fiction set in ancient Rome will appreciate Stein’s well-researched attention to detail, and all will enjoy his understated wit.

A gripping, multifaceted story of an emperor and his era.



QUEEN OF THE SUGARHOUSE

Studer, Constance

Atmosphere Press (168 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | \$7.99 e-book | June 1, 2021

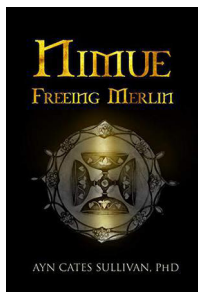
978-1-63-752922-5

Studer, the author of *Body Language: First of All Do No Harm* (2009), explores life in medical institutions from varied perspectives in nine stories.

The collection opens with “Mercy,” about an intensive care nurse who administers the wrong drug to a patient; the narrative digs beneath the everyday turmoil of

life on the ward to examine the vulnerability of medical staff and how they deal with the trauma of their work in their personal lives. The following story, “Shelter,” introduces Benjamin Tyler, a destitute Desert Storm veteran who’s being treated for a debilitating illness following his tour of duty, and “The Isolation Room” is about a writer who’s committed to a mental institution after cutting her wrist. “Special Needs” follows Maria, a waitress whose brother, who has muscular dystrophy, is institutionalized; when she becomes pregnant, she wonders if she carries the gene that caused her sibling’s disease. The title story closes the collection with a poignant tale of a daughter nursing her mother through chemotherapy following a mastectomy. In these stories, Studer, a retired nurse, offers a dazzling and nuanced portrait of the medical world. She’s unafraid to depict the horrific but also acutely sensitive to the complexity of the psychology at play in this challenging environment. Her affecting prose allows readers to experience hospital life through the perspectives of patients as well as medical staff. On occasion, the characters’ observations can be wistfully poetic, as in “Mercy”: “I’ve seen the signs of imminent death: a blurring of the body’s boundaries, a gentle and sometimes not-so-gentle fusion with surrounding elements, a sigh into oblivion.” In other instances, the author offers up brutally vivid tableaux, as in “Shift”: “The boy’s heart floats in a pool of blood like a drowned kitten. The doctor’s hands continue to work inside the chest.” Studer successfully captures a spectrum of emotion in these tales, including her characters’ matter-of-fact approach to death: “It’s raining outside. The toddler is very dead.”

A brilliant, if harrowing, set of tales featuring sharp prose.



NIMUE Freeing Merlin

Sullivan, Ayn Cates

Illus. by Belle Crow duCray

Infinite Light Publishing (340 pp.)

\$29.95 | \$19.95 paper | \$9.99 e-book

Jan. 7, 2021

978-1-947925-19-9

978-1-947925-18-2 paper

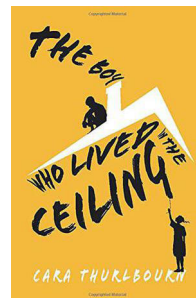


An American teen discovers her connection to Celtic myth and Arthurian legend in this YA fantasy adventure, the third installment in the Legends of the Grail series.

Seventeen-year-old Nina Liber lives in Manhattan with her mother, Diana, an expert in Celtic mythology. Before their flight to Britain for the summer, Nina dreams of a woman in green who calls her a “Mage” and tells her, “remember who you are.” Diana’s husband, Felix, has been deceased two years, and she’s eager to see her twin brother, Blaise. Nina is skeptical about enjoying sights like Stonehenge and being away from her boyfriend, Owen Pelleas. Once in Hampstead, England, Nina befriends Daphne, her uncle’s occasional flame. Daphne recommends the girl visit Ganieda, a local healer named after Merlin’s sister, to gain peace of mind. Ganieda outlines the relationships between the mythical huntress Diana; her lover, the

Roman god Bacchus; and their daughter, Nimue. When she hears of Nina’s dream, she echoes the woman in green by saying, “Mage, it’s time you remember who you are.” Later, a limo takes Nina to a country home called Imworth, where she meets Morgen, the woman from her dream. She tells Nina, “You were Nimue. Only you can find and awaken Merlin” and restore the balance between light and darkness on Earth. 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. Readers will be reminded of the ways Romans used Christianity to subdue the Druids, who had their own belief system. And while Nimue and Merlin’s romance is intense—they kissed like “a tsunami crashing onto shore”—it’s just a portion of their lives, not the entirety. After seeing her previous incarnations, Nina comes to realize she’s “the power of the universe operating as a point in time and space” and that it might be possible to usher in Satya Yuga, the Golden Age, by reconnecting with the natural world. Lovely black-and-white illustrations by Crow duCray enliven the journey. A glossary is included.

This exuberant fantasy calls on readers to conceive of a loving, balanced world.



THE BOY WHO LIVED IN THE CEILING

Thurlbourn, Cara

Wise Wolf Books (300 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | July 23, 2019

978-1-07-913500-8



In Thurlbourn’s YA novel, a homeless boy and a lonely girl become unlikely companions when she discovers that he’s been secretly living in her attic.

When teenage Freddie first enters the Johnson family’s home, it’s only because they’ve left their door ajar after going on vacation, and he means to close it after coming inside for a moment to warm up. However, desperation makes him stay longer. Abandoned by his parents and without other support, Freddie realizes that having a place to shower, sleep, and wash his clothes could give him the leg up he needs to get out of poverty. Things go awry, though, when the Johnsons return home unexpectedly, and Freddie hastily hides himself in their attic. He reluctantly decides to continue to live there and to eventually slip away after he’s saved up enough money. In the process, he becomes aware of the Johnson family’s many troubles, including the fact that teenage daughter Violet’s transfer to a new school has made her a target of bullying. Later, Freddie reveals himself when he saves Violet from an attempted assault by one of her classmates. Against all odds, she agrees to keep his secret, and the two form an unlikely bond. But as they grow closer, it becomes clear that there are secrets in Freddie’s past that could end their relationship before it truly begins. Thurlbourn does an exceptional job of taking an unnerving premise and spinning it into a lovely story about compassion and self-acceptance. Throughout, the author explores Freddie’s and

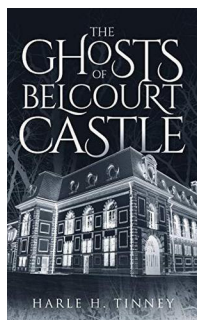
“Voorhees conjures up his historical period with slangy high spirits appropriate to the Jazz Age setting.”

THE \$22.50 MAN



Violet's inner lives, giving their struggles shape and nuance, and portrays Freddie's situation with grace and sensitivity. Despite the presence of a few genre clichés (such as a shallow friend-turned-bully), the narrative never feels trite or contrived. It also thoughtfully touches on everyday realities of unhoused people in a realistic way: “He'd written about his nights wandering town because he had nowhere to sleep and moving was better than staying still”; “It was the most he'd spoken in so long that he felt a little breathless.” It's a sincere story with likable protagonists that balances romance, suspense, sorrow, and humor.

A heartfelt, charming coming-of-age story with a strong message.



THE GHOSTS OF BELCOURT CASTLE

Tinney, Harle H.

Ulink Print & Media (108 pp.)

\$14.99 | \$7.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book

April 8, 2021

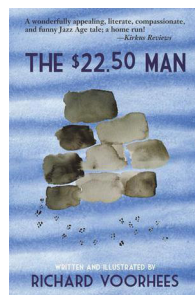
978-1-64-753726-5

978-1-64-753725-8 paper

Tinney recounts Gilded Age-ghost stories associated with Belcourt Castle in Newport, Rhode Island.

Belcourt Castle, part of a once-glittering string of opulent homes, originally belonged to the Belmont family. For 15 years it stood abandoned (gathering more urban legends, as abandoned mansions do), and in the mid-20th century, it came into the possession of Tinney's family. Tinney herself often led guided tours of the house for visitors, which honed her ability to tell these spooky stories—and that ability is on full display in these pages. Readers are treated to all the spine-tingling staples from the Belcourt repertoire: blood-curdling screams coming from dark shadows, ghosts at a corporate Christmas party, Girl Scouts screaming at sounds coming from inside a suit of armor, and even the wandering apparition of a hooded monk, always manifesting in proximity to a carved statue of the same (“the statue was in the center of the ballroom,” we're told, “when our tour guide heard ‘Get out’”). Aided by the historical research of Virginia Smith, Tinney tells these haunted-house tales with exactly the kind of old-fashioned rococo relish that they require (“a third scream pierced the silence with debilitating effect”). The book includes uncredited photographs of the castle's creepiest and most evocative locations and artifacts, but the main attraction is the storytelling, presented with verve and perfect pacing. Almost all old or picturesque houses sport some tales like these, and although Belcourt Castle has since passed out of Tinney family ownership, all the best of the lore is preserved here, both for readers who've visited the place and for those who never will.

A spirited, frightfully enjoyable collection.



THE \$22.50 MAN

Voorbees, Richard

Found Art Publishing (204 pp.)

\$12.95 paper | May 6, 2020

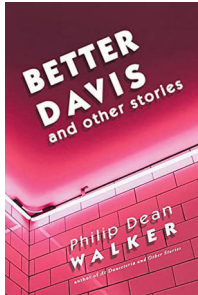
978-1-73-482512-1

In this comic Depression-era sequel, two newlyweds flee underworld connections to start a new life.

Jean-Yves LeFouet has a way of getting into trouble not of his own making. Having left New York City in 1929 for California to avoid repercussions from his shady boss's downfall, he must make a return trip. Apparently, the copies of *The Tale of Genji*, a 1,000-year-old Japanese novel that he was ferrying to actors he thought would be auditioning for a film version, actually contained heroin, and the law got after him. It's now 1935, and Jean-Yves wants to go straight; he's newly married to Ariane (part Japanese, part French), his perfect match: “We're made for each other. We love poetry and film and theater and one another.” When the cops come knocking, the couple (and their cat, Vince) manage to escape to the Big Apple. Ariane finds work in a bookstore while Jean-Yves, who has exceptionally sharp hearing, is offered an informant job with the New York City Police Department for which he'll drive a taxi, eavesdrop on fares, and collect \$22.50 a week. Typically, Jean-Yves—now calling himself John Still—nabs customs scofflaws, but soon he has a bigger target in Jacob Racker, a tannery owner and supplier of shoe leather to the NYPD. When Asian rubber-sole makers threaten to undercut him, Racker is willing to bribe political bigwigs. Meanwhile, John writes a story based on his life, and Ariane translates a Japanese woman's ancient scroll of poetry (found in a cocktail shaker), then writes and films a play based on it. After losing his \$22.50 a week job, John is hired to drive a truck for Racker's tannery, where he becomes involved in solving a crime—and gets back into trouble.

As the author did in the first book of this trilogy, *Shooting Genji* (2014), Voorhees conjures up his historical period with slangy high spirits appropriate to the Jazz Age setting. The fast-moving plot packs a lot of action and well-honed characterizations into these pages, as when Otis—Racker's nephew with a goldbricking, low-level job at the tannery—defends his status: “We're like chemists.” But the author is a storytelling master who has many registers available to him, from a cat's point of view (“Hide hide. Under the room-that-goes. I'm big. Don't come. I'm big”) to the scroll's heartbroken poet, whose work is extremely touching in Ariane's translations: “If you pick up a faded bouquet gently, / And try to toss it away, / The petals will fall off / on the floor / at your feet. / It's the same with you and me.” A subplot involving Racker's maid and a poker-playing fellow taxi driver hooks up with the main story nicely in ways both amusing and tender. It's a short book and over all too quickly; fans will be eager for the trilogy's final volume. Voorhees' monochrome watercolor illustrations deftly accompany the text, recalling Japanese ink-brush paintings with an extra splash-dab of verve.

A wonderfully appealing, literate, compassionate, and funny Jazz Age tale; a home run.



BETTER DAVIS AND OTHER STORIES

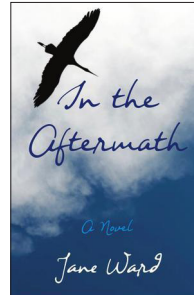
Walker, Philip Dean
Squares & Rebels (98 pp.)
\$16.00 paper | Sept. 15, 2021
978-1-94-196015-8



Gay life and the gathering AIDS epidemic are seen in the reflected glamour of showbiz in these nostalgic short stories.

Walker's tales set fictional and real-life creative figures—drag queens, sitcom stars, Broadway impresarios, movie divas—in the early 1980s, when gay entertainers were emerging from the closet just as the HIV virus was starting to decimate their ranks. Jim J. Bullock, co-star of the TV comedy *Too Close for Comfort*, ponders past bruising relationships and his own HIV diagnosis while enacting a bizarre “very special episode” in which his character is raped by two women; and Natalie Wood spends the night of her drowning flirting with Christopher Walken and fighting with her jealous husband, Robert Wagner, while wondering if Wagner is gay. Elizabeth Taylor and Maureen Stapleton follow their stage performance in *The Little Foxes* by trading acting tips and quips and then repairing to a drag club; drag impersonator Better Davis haunts a man's reminiscences of the shriveling gay demimonde in Washington, D.C.; an airline steward continues his hyperpromiscuous sexploits while hiding his Kaposi's sarcoma lesions; and Michael Bennett, director of the musical *A Chorus Line*, coldly prepares to replace a cast member who has AIDS—which will kill Bennett himself a few years later. Walker's yarns probe the deep symbiosis of the entertainment industry with gay life as they feed off each other's styles and sensibilities and a common fascination with identity and role-playing. His sparkling prose often has an Old Hollywood feel to it; sometimes it revels in bitchy repartee—“‘You drink too much,’ Liz said. ‘Why?’ ‘Why not?’ said Maureen. ‘You marry too much. Why?’”—and sometimes it's suffused with a romantic glow. (“When Troy and Grayson shook hands,” Harrison “saw something happen immediately.... It would be too cliché to call it ‘electric’ but it was as if someone had dimmed the lights in the entire restaurant and illuminated the two of them from below with a floor light, casting everyone else in the room as mindless extras who were only there to observe and comment on the two main characters discovering each other as soulmates.”) The result is a wistful, absorbing re-creation of lives and loves caught up in a cultural transformation that is both fertile and tragic.

Rich, elegiac meditations on art, sex, and death.



IN THE AFTERMATH

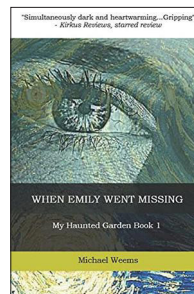
Ward, Jane
She Writes Press
\$16.95 paper | \$9.95 e-book
Sept. 21, 2021
978-1-64-742193-9



Ward offers a thoughtful novel about the long-term repercussions of one man's impulsive act.

In April 2008, David Herron, a small-business owner in desperate financial straits due to the financial crisis and recession, commits suicide, which irrevocably alters the lives of his family, friends, and even people whom he's never met. The story, set on Massachusetts' North Shore, picks up again two years later with moving portrayals of the changed circumstances and turbulent emotions of several main characters affected by the drastic act. His wife, Jules, a baker; his teenage daughter, Rennie; his childhood best friend, Charlie Gale; his banker, Dan Hopper; and Denise Healey, a former police detective, are all struggling in different ways to cope with deep feelings of guilt and self-blame, each for their own personal reasons. Each of these characters is vividly drawn, uniquely individual, and highly relatable; their relationships are complex, and their stories intersect in unexpected ways. The chapters rotate through different points of view and are grouped into chronological sections, ending in April 2011. A few of the transitions between time periods and points of view seem jarring at first, but ultimately the narrative weaves its strands together into a coherent whole. Ward masterfully builds a sense of dread with mundane details in the first section, and the way that she finds significance in moments of ordinary, everyday life is reminiscent of the work of Anne Tyler. This deeply empathetic novel deals sensitively with difficult subjects, exploring the experience of loss, the tension between revealing one's emotions and holding them back, and the fundamental human need for forgiveness—from others and from oneself. Its satisfying conclusion avoids easy resolutions, instead offering readers a sense of open-ended, hopeful possibility.

An insightful and psychologically astute story of ordinary people moving forward after personal tragedy.



WHEN EMILY WENT MISSING My Haunted Garden Book 1

Weems, Michael
Self (322 pp.)
\$12.99 paper | \$0.99 e-book
Feb. 12, 2021
979-8-70-818729-1



A young woman experiences supernatural horticulture in small-town Texas.

Weems' novel starts off on a normal enough, albeit sordid, note: In the town of Foxglove, Texas, young Ruth Gonzalez's mother, referred to only as “Mom,”

“Xavier’s many fans (and newbies as well) will be entranced by his evocative language, subtle rhythms, and fearless gaze.”

SELECTED POEMS OF EMANUEL XAVIER

begins a secret affair with her former high school boyfriend, Dale Roberts (Ruth: “His name still tastes like vomit in my mouth whenever I speak it”), while Ruth’s father is out of town. What followed has become known as “the Incident.” Overcome with remorse, Mom broke off her affair with Dale. But Dale returned to their house later, drunk, and shot her to death, severely injuring Ruth with an errant gunshot through her head. (“Numerous bridges of my brain were either damaged or wholly disconnected, but instant death was not a result,” she deadpans. “I called that a win.”) In the wake of the Incident, Ruth’s life changes dramatically. In addition to the fact that her brain “did some rewiring,” her long-haul trucker father decides to get a local job so they can spend more time together. One priority is to leave their murder-haunted house. They take the groundskeeper’s property at the local cemetery, a house once occupied by an eccentric character named Eddie who compulsively knew everything about every U.S. president and claimed that the overgrown garden behind the property was peculiarly resistant to mowing or pruning. The novel is narrated from Ruth’s first-person perspective, and by this point, she’s already revealed to readers that she often hears Eddie’s president-obsessed thoughts in her head and that one of her best friends “is a dead woman named Lilith.” So, it’s no surprise when she immediately begins to feel a strange communication with the overgrown wild garden behind her new house.

Weems balances the mixture of small-town ways and supernatural happenings with an easy, seasoned confidence. The key to this success is his decision to tell the story from the immediate viewpoint of Ruth herself—and to invest her with a quirky, dark, sharply observant personality more reminiscent of a Flannery O’Connor character than of Harper Lee’s Scout. This decision allows Weems to flex his comic talents even in the grimmest moments of the plot. At one particularly dark moment at the book’s climax, for instance, Ruth spots a procession of fire ants floating together across the surface of a body of water and thinks they look “like a bunch of drunk college kids floating the Guadalupe.” The twin forces impinging on Ruth’s post-shooting life—the brainless, gossiping cruelty of her classmates (one more than others, the Emily of the book’s title) and Ruth’s own burgeoning supernatural experiences—lead her to commune not only with dead people, but also with the mysterious garden itself: “*You can sleep here. Sleep in the dirt with us,*” that garden voice tells her. “*It’s peaceful here.... You can rest while we’ll watch over you.*” The narrative moves ahead at its own distinctly idiosyncratic pace, with Ruth digressing at pretty much any point she pleases. The result is entirely winning, a story that manages to be simultaneously dark and heartwarming.

A gripping, ultimately endearing supernatural tale about an odd girl and an even odder garden.



SEMIOTIC LOVE [STORIES]

Whalen, Brian Phillip

Awst Press (128 pp.)

\$18.00 paper | March 2, 2021

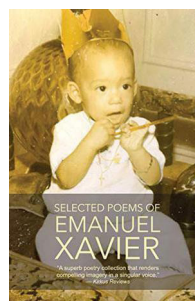
978-0-9971938-9-3



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.



SELECTED POEMS OF EMANUEL XAVIER

Xavier, Emanuel

Queen Mojo (71 pp.)

\$12.95 paper | \$8.99 e-book | June 1, 2021

978-1-60864-152-9



Gay Nuyorican life is limned and exalted in these scintillating poems.

Xavier, a fixture at Nuyorican Poets Cafe slams in Manhattan and a star of HBO’s *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry*, gathers 28 poems that infuse searing social and political commentary into achingly personal reflections. Many paint a panorama of New York that is bustling and vibrant: “Ricans and Dominicans drive around / with black-faced virgins and saints on their dashboards / blasting rap and freestyle / down the streets.”

The poet's collection conveys his struggle as a gay man in an often homophobic culture in tones that range from the bruised confessional in "Deliverance" ("Wiping / myself / staring at the blood / shit / scum / from the last trick / that once again / left me bruised / deep inside") to the prophetic voice of "If Jesus Were Gay." ("If the crown of thorns were placed on his head / to mock him as the / 'Queen of the Jews' / If he was whipped because fags are considered / sadomasochistic sodomites, / If he was crucified for the brotherhood of man / would you still repent?") There's a lot of pain from separation and repudiation in Xavier's verse—from his biological father's abandonment of the family, his mother's rejection of his gay sexuality, and America's disdain for Latino immigrants. The volume is thus full of poetic portraits of outsiders and castoffs that can take strange and hallucinatory forms, as in "Bushwick Bohemia," in which a slacker is "lying shirtless on the couch blunted out of his mind / staring at the roach on the ceiling / one single roach in a vast desert / or maybe an alien exploring a new world"—a grungy, Kafkaesque yet somehow hopeful and even liberating tableau of arrival and persistence. And the poet's life generates bleak, bracing wisdom in "Beside Myself": "You are not going to be remembered. / The best thing you ever did was keep a cat / alive for over sixteen years. / All you have is that rent-stabilized apartment / with the cracked paint and broken windows." Xavier's many fans (and newbies as well) will be entranced by his evocative language, subtle rhythms, and fearless gaze.

A superb poetry collection that renders compelling imagery in a singular voice.



A GIRL OF COLOR

Young, Vikki

Illus. by Seitu Hayden

Self (28 pp.)

\$14.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book

Jan. 16, 2021

979-8-58-776223-7

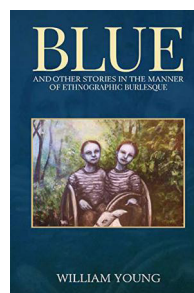


A girl connects the colors of her life to the people around her in this picture book.

Young Morgan proudly states that she's a girl of color. She points out that while she is a Black girl, that color doesn't match her skin. Instead, her tone is golden brown, "like the sun-kissed leaves of autumn." Her best friend is White, but her skin doesn't look like snow—she's peachy. On the following pages, Morgan describes how her family compares her with other colors, depending on her mood and the happiness she brings to others. She touches on the hues, patterns, and skin tones that surround her. Young's accessible, first-person narrative, along with the clues in each of Hayden's digital illustrations, makes this a strong selection for emergent readers. Like Young and Hayden's previous book, *I Too Allergic* (2018), this title features a child advocating for herself. But in this case, the girl is pointing out the beauty of colors everywhere and encouraging readers to join her in loving that splendor. Hayden deftly depicts Morgan in a number of outfits and hairstyles, showing the huge array of expressions girls can embrace. The illustrator also offers a range

of skin tones both in Morgan's family and in her community to emphasize the uplifting message. One particularly funny image shows Morgan experimenting with bright red lipstick, to her mother's humorous dismay.

A bright and joyful celebration of the kaleidoscope of colors in readers' families and communities.



BLUE And Other Stories in the Manner of Ethnographic Burlesque

Young, William

Bowker (149 pp.)

\$8.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book

March 1, 2021

978-1-73442-362-4

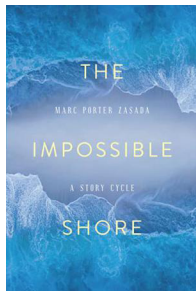
The subtle rules and rituals of relationships are unveiled in these quietly penetrating stories.

Young's yarns capture ordinary Americans in moments of stress and resolution that change their attitudes toward marriage, love, and life. Tales include the following: A man takes boxing lessons and deploys them against his wife's lover; a Harvard graduate student engages in a game of mutual exhibitionism with a neighbor through a window, which falters when he encounters her in a bookstore; a dad becomes fascinated with a 13-year-old neighbor girl's lesbian affair with a classmate; a young woman arriving in San Francisco meets the playboy scion of a famous painter on a nude beach and accompanies him back to his yacht; a formerly homeless woman picks up a currently homeless man on the beach in Venice, California; a Mexican American English professor in Los Angeles is drawn to a splendidly manly actor brimming with alt-right conspiracy theories; and a four-story cycle tracks a young man growing up in the 1960s from a high school romance to young adulthood as he withers under a failing marriage and an agonizing job as a door-to-door cookware salesman under the shadow of the Vietnam War. Young's protagonists are adrift and dissatisfied, full of ruminations about their lives and larger political and racial tensions, and they're usually pretty horny and avid for sex as a transformative or at least edifying experience. His spare, clear prose is raptly observant of mundane moments ("He wanted to know more about her—but having already said goodbye twice, no doubt starting up once more would strike the girl as odd, or aggressive"). But in lyrical passages, he conveys a sense of something grander underlying the everyday ("She laid out the bedroll, opened the wine, and watched as the light from the sunset curved and spread throughout the valley, like the hand of a god"). Young's characters are steeped in confusion, but the collection is lit with a painful awareness and yearning that make them fascinating.

A richly textured, engrossing collection of tales about people discovering who and why they love.

“The children are wonderfully diverse, enabling many different readers to see themselves in these pages.”

MINDFUL WONDERS



THE IMPOSSIBLE SHORE

Zasada, Marc Porter
Upper Story Press (255 pp.)
\$14.00 paper | June 15, 2021
978-0-578-88585-8



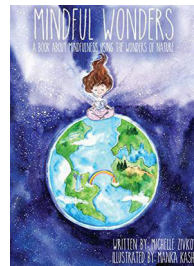
Grand visions intrude into banal lives in this sometimes-hangdog, sometimes-luminous debut story collection.

Zasada's tales foreground mostly underachieving protagonists whose disappointments are heightened by an uneasy feeling of unfulfilled purpose. A New York deli manager eating a sandwich in Central Park has an enigmatic vision of a mountain, a river, and raging horses; a rock star who finds his life increasingly frenetic but hollow puts off his suicide plan only to accidentally overdose and fall into a coma filled with dreams of heaven and hell; a young couple whose lives are a blithe, nonmaterialistic idyll break up when the man starts to feel stirrings of ambition; a closeted gay political operative in Portland rescues a vagrant injured in a bike crash who turns out to be the golden boy he had a crush on in high school; a dismissed Pakistani government functionary who thinks of California as a paradise of honesty and nubile women gets a chance at a lucrative new berth in the bureaucracy, but only if he cooperates with sleazy bribery schemes; a middle-class man comes into a fortune but struggles to translate it into a happy or meaningful life; a professor communes with the shade of a long-dead Jewish philosopher who teaches her that death is more productive than life; an 18th-century Native American in California who has seen his world collapse with the arrival of Spanish conquerors goes in search of the mythic source of the world's water; an American greenhorn in Australia sets out on a yacht voyage into fearsome Pacific waters and takes on a crew of chatty ghosts; and a Jewish man saved from certain death by his mother's magical incantation spends his life wondering if his survival was mere luck or a sign of a higher destiny.

Zasada's stories form a connected cycle, with characters and motifs popping up in several narratives in a common fictive world centered on a few resonant themes. The stories are capacious and sweeping, often taking characters from childhood to old age to fit their seemingly haphazard experiences into a larger arc. Zasada combines pitch-perfect renditions of small, dejected lives (“That night, alone, Mickey drank tequila from a shot glass and sat by a window, looking out at the sleepless street below his apartment. He felt all wrong—just all wrong”) with evocations of the cosmic sublime that they feel is looming just beyond their reach (“He lay on his back for a full hour looking up through a small opening in a stand of tall straight pines as the sky became star-filled and infinite...he was conscious of the mountain beneath his body pressing toward a secret and jagged hole leading into a greater universe”). Spanning these two registers are his characters' clumsy but penetrating stabs at philosophizing: “As for the Incantation, it's all just coincidence. Some old mumbo jumbo and selective observation....I don't like the boys hearing any of that crap. Like religion, it confuses them. And it makes them think there's like, some way out of things,

when there's not. There's no way out of things.” By turns funny, touching, and bleakly ruminative, Zasada's yarns captivate as their characters struggle to reconcile their vast yearnings with the meager victories that the world begrudges them.

Darkly entertaining yarns about people trying to bridge the gap between shabby reality and improbable dreams.



MINDFUL WONDERS A Book About Mindfulness Using the Wonders of Nature

Zivkov, Michelle
Illus. by Manka Kasha
Mindful Wonders (46 pp.)
\$15.59 | \$12.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book
April 22, 2020
978-0-578-67378-3
978-0-578-68214-3



Children in relaxed postures take inspiration from the natural world in this guided meditation book for young readers.

Opening with the question, “What is meditation and mindfulness?” the narrator guides readers through breath exercises and nature visualizations. The exploration begins in orbit, where the reader is said to be “beautiful like the earth,” then settles into more grounded locales, such as a beach, mountains, a forest, and near a waterfall. Like these elements of nature, readers are invited to feel calm, mighty, and alive. The narrator also invokes the sun at different times of day, rain, and a rainbow, again emphasizing qualities that readers share with each natural feature. Each page offers a short description, a guided breath (“Inhale the beauty. Exhale”), and the recurring line, “Just breathe...” Zivkov's gentle text offers straightforward, short sentences with vivid terminology (*visualize, limitless, soaring*) that will challenge and empower independent readers. The work is best suited as a read-aloud, with its dreamy cadence encouraging readers to focus on their breath as they listen. Kasha's pleasing watercolor-and-ink illustrations show a single child on each page, frequently relaxing in a cross-legged position but sometimes reaching to the sky or standing on one leg. The children are wonderfully diverse, enabling many different readers to see themselves in these pages.

A peaceful book of mindfulness exercises.

FICTION



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

COLD ENOUGH FOR SNOW by Jessica Au	66
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MOON WITCH, SPIDER KING
James, Marlon
Riverhead (656 pp.)
\$30.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-7352-2020-1



COLD ENOUGH FOR SNOW

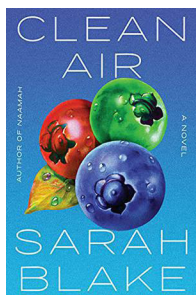
Au, Jessica
New Directions (144 pp.)
\$16.95 paper | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-8112-3155-8



In Australian author Au's deceptively simple second novel, a mother and daughter meet in Japan to spend time traveling together.

On a rainy October day in Tokyo, a woman gently shepherds her undemanding mother toward a museum. Their trip unfolds, interspersed with memories from the narrator's life, past conversations, and musings about her mother, who grew up in Hong Kong and immigrated to another country before her children were born. The two are kind with each other, almost formal, but not close. A muted sense of frustrated hope hangs over their interactions, a thorny knot of longing and despair. Toward the end, in a rare moment of intimacy inside a church they are visiting as tourists, the daughter asks about her mother's beliefs: "She said that she believed that we were all essentially nothing, just series of sensations and desires, none of it lasting...there was no control, and understanding would not lessen any pain. The best we could do in this life was to pass through it, like smoke through the branches, suffering, until we either reached a state of nothingness, or else suffered elsewhere." To this the daughter makes no reply. "I looked at my watch and said that visiting hours were almost over, and that we should probably go." The trip does not succeed the way the narrator hoped. And yet: "It occurred to me that by the age I was now, my mother had already made a new life for herself in a new country...I tried, and failed, to imagine her first months there. Had she been homesick? Had she been awed by the streets, the brick and weatherboard houses, so different to her own home? Had she been worn out not by the big changes, but, as is often the case, by countless smaller ones—the supermarkets that were so well stocked, but where you could not buy glass noodles, or the right kind of rice?" Early on, in a phone conversation, the narrator's sister says that her young daughter wants to wear the same dress every day. All the sister can do is "to make her something warm for dinner, to look on her in flawed understanding, and console in all the insufficient ways." Flawed understanding, consolation, and insufficiency all infuse this compelling, unsettling novel reminiscent of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Whereabouts* or Rachel Cusk's *Outline Trilogy*.

A beautifully observed book, written in precise, elegant prose that contains a wealth of deep feeling.



CLEAN AIR

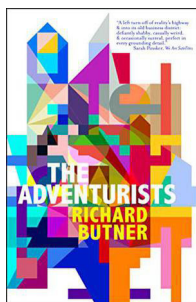
Blake, Sarah
Algonquin (320 pp.)
\$25.95 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-64375-106-1

It's 2042. Only a tiny sliver of the world's population is left—and there's a serial killer on the loose.

"Izabel had thought no one would kill another person again. Not after what they'd all been through." Ten years earlier,

in an event now known as The Turning, the trees had released so much pollen into the air that simply breathing killed millions, including almost everyone over 60 and under 10. Izabel was working in a hospital morgue at the time, which is where she met her husband, Kaito. Now they have a 4-year-old daughter, Cami, and the family lives in a plastic dome in a town built on a slab and where transportation is provided by self-driving cars and a spiritual center offers weddings and funerals as well as counseling and tarot readings. The latter two play a major role in the plot, as do Japanese mysticism, messages from the dead, and possession by spirits. Izabel medicates her longing for the lost world by turning on reruns of *America's Got Talent* and *The Backyardigans* and pulling up news stories from 2017, when the planet seemed to be headed toward so many different disasters—but the revenge of the trees? No one saw that coming. Now some depraved person is killing whole families by slitting the walls of their plastic domes, and Izabel becomes so obsessed with the murders that she ends up in the middle of the police investigation, headed by a dry, bossy female federal agent named Inspector Paz. The strongest aspect of poet Blake's second novel, after *Naamah* (2019), is her worldbuilding, which is full of interesting details, from giant blueberries to privacy pods, but the writing is utilitarian, the character development, minimal, and the plot relies too heavily on mystical interventions.

A quick read with a timely premise.



THE ADVENTURISTS

Butner, Richard
Small Beer Press (320 pp.)
\$17.00 paper | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-61873-194-4

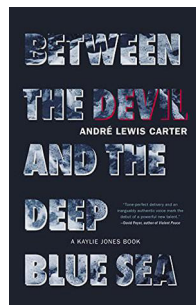
An assortment of speculative short stories filled with ghosts, time leaps, and alternate realities.

Butner has a knack for a quirky, eye-catching premise. "Holderhaven" turns on the discovery of a hidden staircase

in a historic manor. "Horses Blow Up Dog City" imagines a dystopian future in which a puppeteer becomes a pop-culture celebrity. In "Give Up," a man attempts to summit Mount Everest via a virtual reality, while the narrator of "Delta Function" finds himself witnessing the New Wave band he played in back in college. The stories' arch tone, offbeat scenarios,

and folkloric elements bear a resemblance to George Saunders' and Carmen Maria Machado's work, though Butner has his own thematic obsessions. Earnest but frustrated struggles to recover the past is a big one, not just in time-travel yarns like "Delta Function," but "The Master Key," in which two friends return to their high school, or the opening "Adventure," in which a reunion of two friends becomes oddly upended by the appearance of a man in a jester suit. In his best stories, Butner effectively merges the strange setups with a bracing mix of humor and dread. "The Ornithopter," for instance, takes place in an office whose staff has been rapidly whittled down to a handful of people, one of whom is a hardcore Star Trek geek. ("The metaphor they're working inside of might be the *Nostromo*, the spaceship from *Alien*, not the USS *Enterprise*," the hero notes.) And "Give Up" conjures the horrifying sense that a glitchy fake Everest might be as challenging as the real thing. But too often, these stories don't rise to their promise, occluded with plot or dense prose that smothers the wit and insight Butner strives to bring to them.

Clever, high-concept stories that sometimes lack in the telling.



BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

Carter, André Lewis
Kaylie Jones/Akashic (337 pp.)
\$18.95 paper | Jan. 4, 2022
978-1-61775-877-5

Which is more challenging, coming of age in the Navy or on the crime-ridden streets?

November 1971. Orlando teenager César Alvarez succumbs to the hard sell

of a gritty petty officer named Segar and joins the Navy. The Afro-Cuban César is hopeful of making a new life off the streets, where he works for the villainous Mr. Mike, a coldblooded killer and drug dealer who regularly calls him the N-word. The Navy is a whole new eye-opening world for César, who nevertheless can't shake the fear that Mr. Mike will exact revenge. A casual meeting with fellow recruit Aida paves the way for romance. While there are welcome opportunities for advancement, like extensive travel and signalman school, César also finds the everyday dangers of his neighborhood replaced by the subtler racism of the Navy. The measured plot takes the hero from Orlando to San Diego to Manila, where he's stationed aboard the *Kitty Hawk*, as the specter of the Vietnam War lurks ominously in the background and Mr. Mike hatches an elaborate plan to destroy César. The strength of Carter's lean, straightforward prose, which mirrors César's earnest, ethical nature and urges readers to root for him, and the authority of detail in his debut override some triteness of incident and character.

A naval adventure thriller from recent history, told in a fresh, straightforward new voice.

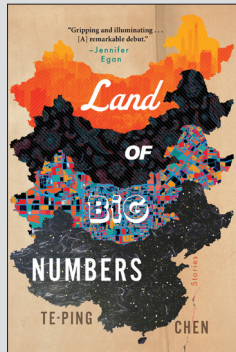
CELEBRATING THE NEW VOICES OF 2021



AS WE APPROACH the end of December, I always look back and celebrate the new voices that were introduced to readers over the course of the year. Two of the finalists for the Kirkus Prize were making fiction debuts in their 50s—Honorée Fanonne Jeffers with *The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Harper) and Jocelyn Nicole Johnson with *My Monticello* (Henry

Holt)—and they were worth waiting for. Two of the other debuts on our list of the Top 100 Fiction Books of 2021 were written by women in their 20s: *Three Rooms* by Jo Hamya (Mariner) and *The Other Black Girl* by Zakiya Dalila Harris (Atria), both following young women working in publishing, one in London and one in New York, both with utterly distinctive voices.

Te-Ping Chen is a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, and the stories in *Land of Big Numbers* (Mariner) show her “eye for the wry, poignant detail,” according to our review. “Whether her characters are women or men, young or old, Chen displays a remarkable ability to inhabit their minds.” The stories in Yoon Choi’s *Skinship* (Knopf) are “both closely observed and expansive,” reminding our reviewer of Alice Munro: “Nearly every one builds to what feels like an epiphany, or a pearl of wisdom, only to rush on for more pages as though to remind us that life does not stand still, that flux is the normal state of things, and loss always lurks on love’s horizon.”

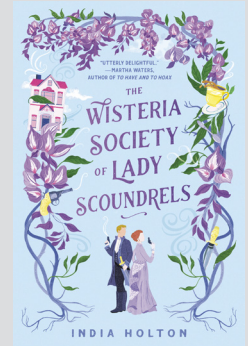


Elisa Shua Dusapin won the National Book Award for Translated Literature for *Winter in Sokcho*, translated from the French by Aneesa Abbas Higgins (Open Letter). Dusapin, who lives in Switzerland, is of French and Korean heritage, and her novel follows a biracial woman working in a guesthouse in a South Korean beach town as she spends time at work, visiting her mother, and getting to know a French writer who’s come to town. Our review calls it “a triumph.” And I know we’re not supposed to



judge a book by its cover, but I find the postcardlike illustration irresistible.

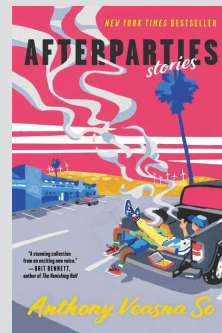
In the romance section, we were introduced to the fertile imagination of India Holton. Our reviewer described *The Wisteria Society of Lady Scoundrels* (Berkley) like this: “A lady scoundrel goes on a road trip with a smooth-tongued assassin in an alternate-universe Victorian Britain....In this joyride of a debut, Holton draws us into a madcap world of courtly corsairs, murderous matrons, and pity-inspiring henchmen.” What could be more fun?



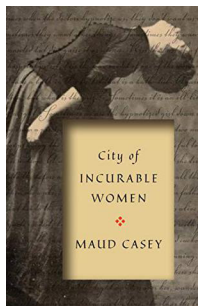
The thriller aisle featured *All Her Little Secrets* by Wanda M. Morris (Morrow), about a Black lawyer whose life is turned upside down by the apparent suicide of her White lover, who was also her boss. According to our review, “corporate competition is not only racist and sexist, but deadly in this confident debut thriller.”

Torrey Peters made a splash with *Detransition, Baby* (One World), her exploration of love, desire, and family centering around Reese, a trans woman, and Ames, her former lover, who was a trans woman when they were together but has now detransitioned. The book is “smart, funny, and bighearted,” according to our review.

Each of these writers has a distinctive vision and a lot to say, and I look forward to many more books from them in the years ahead. Unfortunately, that won’t be the case with Anthony Veasna So, who died at 28—eight months before his debut collection, *Afterparties* (Ecco), was published to widespread delight. Set in the world of Cambodian immigrants in California, So’s stories are dark and funny and insightful and deserve all the accolades they’ve gotten.



Laurie Muchnick is the fiction editor.



CITY OF INCURABLE WOMEN

Casey, Maud
 Bellevue Literary Press (128 pp.)
 \$16.99 paper | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-1-942658-86-3

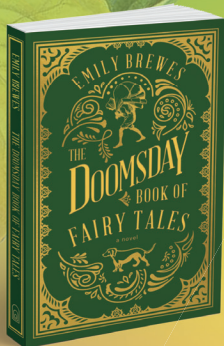
An innovative novel examining the experiences of the female “hysterics” at the infamous Salpêtrière Hospital in 19th-century Paris.

The photographs of the women of Salpêtrière range from pity-inducing to horrific. In black and white, the portraits show women in “passionate attitudes,” the phrase used for the phases of hysteria. The women in the photos suffer from a multitude of issues: anorexia, religious fervor, epilepsy, and other conditions, some of which were little more than moodiness. In Casey’s unusual collection of short pieces that blur lines among fiction, poetry, and essay, these photos and other historical records, such as manuals and case notes, are used as the basis of poetic

meditations on the collective and individual lives of these “incurables.” Some of the women have names: “Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea” tells the story of Augustine, who escaped from the asylum by dressing as a man. “Father, Ether, Sea” illuminates the life of Blanche, who falls into the category of “best girls,” women who were exploited into performances in the asylum amphitheater to show off their ailments and the doctors’ “cures,” which often cross the line into abuses of all kinds. Some of the chapters are about the women as an anonymous group, such as “In the Before,” told in the first-person plural about the types of lives the women had before they came to Salpêtrière: They were orphans or children of manual laborers, impoverished, hyperactive, or melancholy. These stories belong most closely to the tradition of ekphrastic poetry, poems written based on visual art and often written in the voice of a figure from the image. The results are most successful when the soaringly lyrical language illuminates, rather than overshadows, the women’s compelling experiences.

A strongly conceived, though inconsistently rendered, scrapbook from a dark chapter of the belle époque.

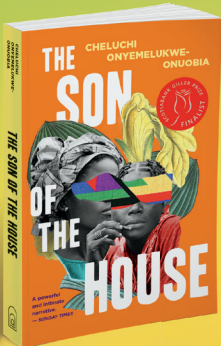
GREAT NEW VOICES IN FICTION



9781459747005 | Paperback
 \$17.99

“Dark and a little absurd, this will appeal to fans of intimate postapocalyptic tales.”

— PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



9781459747081 | Paperback
 \$18.99

Finalist for the Scotiabank Giller Prize!
 “A compelling novel about two women caught in a constricting web of tradition, class, gender, and motherhood.”

— FOREWORD REVIEWS, starred review



9781459747371 | Paperback
 \$19.99

“Anipare successfully blends Japanese folklore and contemporary life, and readers will be entranced to see the mundane and the mythical collide.”

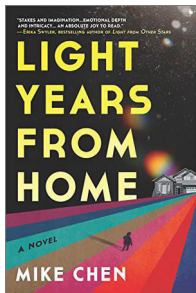
— PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



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LIGHT YEARS FROM HOME

Chen, Mike

Harlequin MIRA (384 pp.)

\$24.99 | Jan. 25, 2022

978-0-778-31173-7



Three siblings torn apart by their brother's disappearance, father's death, and mother's dementia team up to save an alien world.

Jakob Shao returns to Earth after years away to retrieve a device that's key to saving his alien friend Henry's home world from a species of ravaging marauders. After a stop in Reno, Nevada, Jakob makes his way to the family home in Mountain View, California, where he's reunited with his sisters. Twin Kassie is a divorced, cigarette-smoking psychologist, online role-playing gamer, and caregiver for the siblings' mother, Sofia Aguilar-Shao, who has dementia. Younger sister Evie is a selfie-taking veterinarian tech in Buffalo, New York, whose side

hustle involves proving the existence of extraterrestrial life in an effort to locate her missing brother. Shattered by the death of their father, Arnold Shao, as an indirect result of Jakob's disappearance 15 years earlier, the siblings must overcome past hurts and misunderstandings and learn to appreciate one another and work together to determine whether Jakob is suffering from psychotic delusions, is a terrorist on the run from the FBI, or is actually a space soldier on a desperate mission. A rich backstory that explores the Shao family's disparate memories of the night Jakob and Arnold disappeared and a highly satisfying ending add welcome texture.

All the stars for Chen's warmhearted space-travel story.



TEXT FOR YOU

Cramer, Sofie

Trans. by Marshall Yarbrough

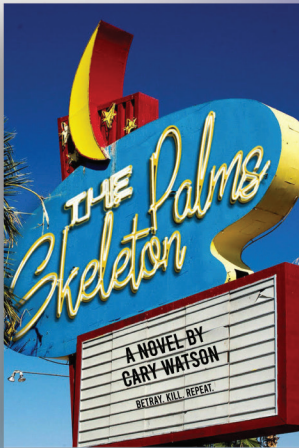
Penguin (256 pp.)

\$17.00 paper | Feb. 8, 2022

978-0-14-313690-3

A grieving young woman sends texts to her dead fiance's phone number, not realizing that someone else is receiving the messages.

Clara and her fiance, Ben, had an argument, and later that night, he died in a tragic accident. Two months later, as Clara struggles with her grief, she sends a text to Ben's phone, knowing he won't receive it but seeking new ways to cope. Miraculously, sending the text does help a bit, so she sends another the next day, and again the day after that. She never imagines that Ben's number might have been reassigned to a new customer. Meanwhile, across town, Sven can't figure out how to respond to the cryptic texts he's been receiving. After only a few messages, it's obvious the texts are coming from a grieving woman. Rather than alert the sender she has the wrong number, Sven, who's dealing with struggles of his own, does nothing. Gradually, he begins to enjoy the texts, even looking forward to them and despairing on days when none arrive. His co-worker Hilke keeps pushing him to uncover the sender's identity, and before long, Sven is persuaded, using clues from the copious texts to track Clara down. Though he's already somewhat smitten without even knowing what she looks like, he worries that when they finally meet, she'll hate him for having read her private messages. Told alternately from Clara's and Sven's perspectives, the novel has been translated effectively from its original German, the only indication of the book's origin the names of towns and rivers. Clara and Sven are each well-developed characters with complex interior lives and endearing idiosyncrasies. The story's supporting characters feel more typecast, but they play their roles sufficiently to move the narrative forward. The story is at its strongest when Clara and Sven are interacting, with the intervening scenes hampering the book's momentum. Similarly, after its initial setup, the plotline is rather predictable. Even so, the deeply emotional nature of Clara's texts and Sven's heartfelt reactions as he reads them are sufficiently



"In this gritty story, Watson deftly weaves elements of a thriller, noir, and romance..."

"The chapters that reveal Tom's past thoughtfully examine how nurture (or a lack thereof) can make or break people."

ISBN: 979-8505323182

"...many readers will enjoy following an unlikely pair of vigilante antiheroes on a righteous revenge path."
—Kirkus Reviews

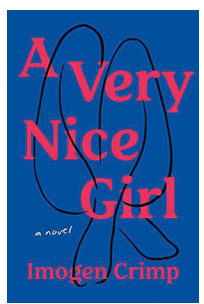
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“An aspiring soprano is thrown off course by a tempestuous affair with a wealthy, mysterious older man.”

A VERY NICE GIRL

absorbing that readers will keep turning pages to see how the characters reach the story's inevitable conclusion.

An entertaining and romantic story about second chances and moving forward after loss.



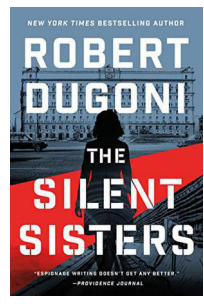
A VERY NICE GIRL
Crimp, Imogen
 Henry Holt (336 pp.)
 \$23.99 | Feb. 8, 2022
 978-1-250-79277-8



An aspiring soprano is thrown off course by a tempestuous affair with a wealthy, mysterious older man.

To support herself as she studies on scholarship at a prestigious conservatory in London, hardworking, anxious Anna works as a jazz singer in the hotel nightclub where her uninhibited, popular best friend, Laurie, an aspiring writer, is a waitress. At first the women live in a hovel run by live-in landlords who measure the level of their bathwater and spy on them relentlessly; later they move into an “experiment in communal feminist living” where dinner topics include whether pornography is inherently misogynistic and why straight White men don’t care about climate change. As the book opens, Anna meets an older customer named Max, whose teasing, hard-to-read response to her charms gets hooks into her fast. Crimp’s enthralling debut plunges forward from that night, Anna’s confession tumbling out as if on waves of breath, dialogue recounted without quotation marks adding to the effect. At first, she is able to balance her fixation on Max, who is both exceedingly generous and frustratingly withholding, with her commitment to her voice (“the voice,” as this crowd thinks of it). She adores her mentor, Angela, a well-known soprano who is preparing her with the utmost rigor for the demands of a cutthroat profession. A big break comes when the woman who is singing Manon gets laryngitis on closing night and Anna, her understudy, gets to show what she can do. In several wonderful passages, Crimp takes us inside Anna’s head as she performs, singing her way through the emotional trail markers of the libretto—inevitably suggesting certain resonances with her own affair. As Anna summarizes the classical opera plot: “He did x to me. He did y to me. I never got over it.” Did he, though? Cleverly, Crimp never pins down exactly what Max did and what Anna projected; you can read things two ways right through the end.

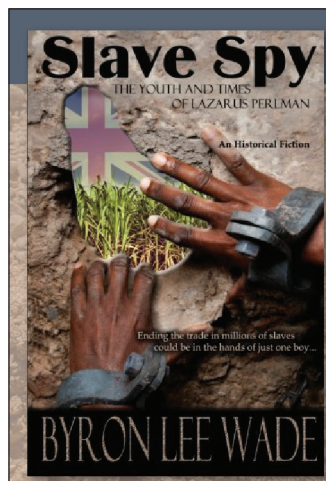
A Rooney-esque exploration of power and class in young women’s relationships, heightened by its brilliant opera-world setting.



THE SILENT SISTERS
Dugoni, Robert
 Thomas & Mercer (400 pp.)
 \$24.95 | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-1-5420-2991-9

On-and-off CIA agent Charles Jenkins returns to Russia still again in the hope of rescuing a well-hidden agent threatened with exposure and execution.

Now that Jenkins’ station chief, Carl Emerson, has betrayed several of the others, Maria Kulikova is one of the last of the seven sisters raised from birth as American moles. She’s risen to the position of director of the FSB Secretariat by winning the confidence of Dmitry Sokalov, deputy director of counterintelligence, and indulging his masochistic sexual tastes. Learning that the FSB has launched Operation Herod to identify and liquidate the last two sisters, Jenkins’ handler, Matt Lemore, dispatches him to Moscow to rescue Kulikova and Zenaida Petrekova. Before he



Ending the trade in millions of slaves could be in the hands of just one boy.

“Wade’s debut novel is remarkably graceful and thoughtful.”

ISBN: 978-0-9856376-0-6

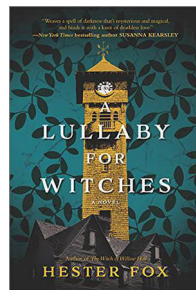
“...the book effectively speaks against intolerance and cruelty that persist to the present day.”

— Kirkus Reviews

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can make contact with either one, Jenkins impulsively intervenes to save a prostitute being beaten in an alley outside a bar. Within moments, Eldar Velikaya, the assailant, is dead, and his mother, Mafia leader Yekaterina Velikaya, is baying for blood. Since Jenkins left his fingerprints behind, Moscow criminal investigator Arkhip Mishkin is after him too. So is Sokalov, whose shame at his manipulation by Kulikova is matched only by his terror that she'll be identified as his mistress. Sokalov wants Kulikova killed in a way that will conceal his involvement with her; the FSB wants Jenkins alive so that they can swap him for two Russian agents who tried to kill a high-profile defector the CIA had settled in Virginia; Yekaterina Velikaya wants revenge most bloody. Dugoni, who's far too canny to set up all these chases and just wait to see who wins, keeps multiplying the competing loyalties and moral gray zones they reveal till your head spins.

Moral: It's better to have dozens of enemies hot on your tail than only one.



A LULLABY FOR WITCHES

Fox, Hester

Graydon House (320 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | Feb. 1, 2022

978-1-525-80469-4

A young historian strives to uncover the story of another woman's tragic life centuries before.

Augusta is stuck in a rut in Salem, Massachusetts. Neither her job nor her boyfriend brings her fulfillment or joy, and her relationship with her mother has been strained since her father's death several years before. Then she comes across a job listing for a collections manager at the historical Harlowe House. Something about the house calls her in, particularly the portrait of Margaret Harlowe, who lived there as a young woman but about whom little is known. Fox intersperses chapters about Augusta with chapters narrated by Margaret, a vibrant and self-assured young woman with an innate understanding of plants and herbs. Margaret

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.”

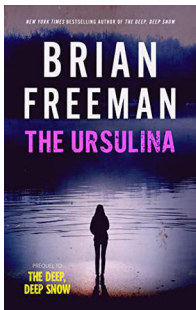
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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eventually earns a reputation as someone unnatural and dangerous; at the same time, she falls desperately in love with a local man and becomes pregnant. In the present, Augusta begins to have visions of the house from an earlier time; though she tries to convince herself they are brought on by skipping breakfast—or her attraction to co-worker Leo—it's apparent that something, or someone, is bringing Augusta under its spell. Is it the house, or is it a spirit attached to the house? And if it's Margaret, is she calling out for Augusta to understand and tell her story—or is there something darker at work? The split narrative adds complexity and interest, though in some ways Margaret, a much more interesting figure, overshadows the more timid Augusta. Though Fox offers a parallel between the two—Margaret's confidence as her powers grow, Augusta's gradual reclaiming of her own power to make decisions and changes in her life—there's something a little too predictable about Augusta's story. The plot twist toward the end is relatively satisfying, however.

Fox deftly navigates the overlapping borders of romance and the paranormal.



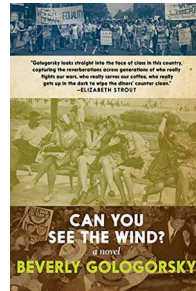
THE URSULINA

Freeman, Brian
Blackstone Publishing (300 pp.)
\$18.99 paper | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-66510-969-7

Freeman, who usually develops franchise characters over an arc of several books, offers a prequel to the stand-alone *The Deep, Deep Snow* (2020).

Starting her story a year before the daughter she's addressing was born, Deputy Rebecca Colder, of Black Wolf County, makes it clear from the get-go that her explanation of how she came to abandon baby Shelby will pull no punches. As if to prove her point, she begins with the discovery of missing corporate attorney Gordon Brink tied to a bed, stabbed, and flayed to death. Since Brink was leading the defense in the harassment suit Sandra Thoreau and other female employees had lodged against the Langford copper mine, opinions about him already ran high in tiny Random, Wisconsin, before the discovery. But what particularly dismays Rebecca and her partner and mentor, Darrell Curtis, is the note found with the corpse—"I am the Ursulina"—which links this killing to a pair of equally ghoulish murders six years ago that Darrell worked but didn't solve. Has the figure who's based this label on local legends about predatory wild bears come back for another round of homicide, or is Brink's murder the work of a copycat who's drawn on the abundant publicity provided by second-string SF actor Ben Malloy, who rode the earlier killings to a second career through his book *The Ursulina Murders* and his TV series *Ben Malloy Discovers?* More urgently, what recourse can Rebecca take when Deputy Ajax Jackson's insistent pursuit of her blows up her marriage to Ricky Todd, who was fired from his job at the Langford mine two years ago?

If you can look past some wild improbabilities, no one makes the pages turn faster than Freeman.

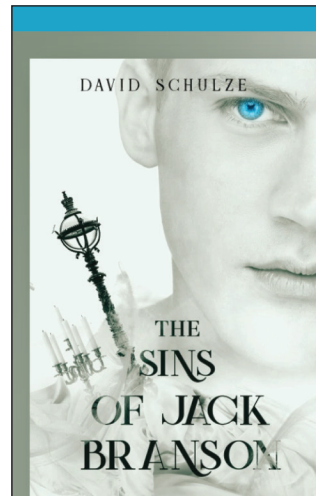


CAN YOU SEE THE WIND?

Gologorsky, Beverly
Seven Stories (256 pp.)
\$18.95 paper | Jan. 25, 2022
978-1-64421-110-6

The New Left, the anti-war movement, the Black Panthers, and women's liberation intersect in this ambitious recap of ordinary lives exploded by the social movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Author Gologorsky's co-protagonists, daughters of South Bronx pizzeria owners, are Josie, recently turned 18, with no college plans, and her older sister, Celia, a seamstress married to Paul, a saxophonist who, amid the waning popularity of jazz, descends into alcohol and drug abuse. Josie is close to her nephew Miles, Celia's son, until he gets so involved in top-secret radical activities that they grow apart. Miles goes underground after refusing induction into the Army, and after a draft board



INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

**He lost his home.
His family.
His pride.
So he made
his own.**

"Schulze's depiction of the Victorian era is atmospheric and intense in conveying the persecution gay people faced."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

ISBN-13: 978-1-7370378-0-4 [paperback]
ISBN-13: 978-1-7370378-2-8 [hardcover]
ISBN-13: 978-1-7370378-1-1 [eBook]

"Between its anecdotes of affairs, its slow revelations of more enduring longings, and its vivid courtroom scene, it is magnificently character-driven from beginning to end."

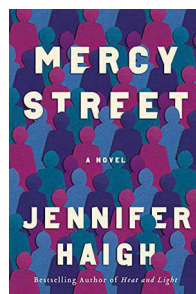
—*Independent Book Review*

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bombing in which he is implicated, he goes to prison. Josie's brother Richie enlists and serves in Vietnam, where he reveals himself through his letters. He expresses how useless and irrelevant the anti-war movement back home seems to the troops in country. Landing a hospital job, Josie leaves the Bronx for Manhattan, where she lives with fellow activists. She then moves in with Melvin, a Black student she met during a 1967 peace march in Washington, D.C. After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968, Melvin joins the Black Panthers, eventually feeling pressured to end his interracial relationship with Josie. With some trepidation, Celia joins the women's liberation movement after Paul's desertion. The dialogue is stilted, especially when the young radicals espouse political rhetoric at improbable length in casual conversations. This relatively short book labors to keep track of its populous cast—friends, grandparents, siblings, and progeny—while endeavoring to check all the boxes on the tumultuous political, racial, and social upheavals of the period. The two main characters lack agency, which diminishes the conflict. But perhaps their powerlessness illustrates the impact of the military-industrial complex

on working-class people who are far less privileged than many would-be revolutionaries back in the day.

In this novel, the personal is political and vice versa.



MERCY STREET

Haigh, Jennifer
Ecco/HarperCollins (352 pp.)
\$27.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-06-176330-4

Having addressed fracking in *Heat and Light* (2016), Haigh now tackles abortion in a polemical novel that revolves around a Boston women's clinic.

Divorced and childless, 43-year-old Claudia is an abortion counselor at Mercy Street, a clinic in a gentrified area of Boston once known as the Combat Zone. As the daughter of an impoverished single teenage mother, she well understands "the stark daily realities that



ISBN: 978-91-986317-0-8

30th Anniversary Edition

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"A moving, realistic tale about a troubled tween finding a path to strength and purpose."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"In Linda Gruenberg's classic novel *Hummer*, an isolated twelve-year-old blossoms because of her friendship with a neighbor and his Arabian mare, Fox."

—*Foreword Reviews*

"Between what is fantasy and impossible and what can become a new reality lie hopes and dreams that *Hummer* cultivates....a compelling tale of success that proves hard to put down."

—D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, *Midwest Book Review*

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“Absorbing and electric.”

OTHER PEOPLE'S CLOTHES

made motherhood impossible” for many of her clients. After nine years, Claudia is a pro at taking care of the patients while ignoring the protestors who gather outside the clinic every morning. Still, the stresses of the job get to her (the women with late-term pregnancies “cracked her open”), so periodically Claudia seeks relief from her pot dealer, Timmy. Also dropping in to make a buy is Anthony, a lonely incel living off disability insurance in his mother’s basement. Anthony spends his days attending Mass, protesting at Mercy Street, and emailing photos of women going into the clinic to an anti-abortion crusader with the screen name of Excelsior11, who’s actually a Vietnam vet and former long-haul trucker named Victor Prine. During the winter of 2015, these four characters, whose social isolation keeps them as frozen as Boston’s stormy weather, will find their lives intersecting and transformed, not always for the better. Haigh excels at depicting people beaten down by life, but it’s hard to feel much sympathy for her drearily drawn male protagonists, who are less nuanced individuals than indistinguishable stereotypes. With the anti-abortion movement gathering steam in the legislative arena, her portrait feels dated.

Despite its flaws, Haigh’s novel will provide plenty of discussion fodder for reading groups.

live out the increasingly risky, brightly colored nights of their dreams, fueled by Hailey’s dictum that “art is what you can get away with,” no matter the cost. Henkel masterfully brings every inch of Hailey and Zoe’s world to life with her live-wire prose: German, for instance, sounds as violent as “a car being compressed into a cube.” But what truly pushes the plot forward is the obsessive, psychologically damaging friendship between Zoe and Hailey, which slowly leads them from a cocoon of insulated partying to a state of real danger: a finely negotiated shift. Though the book’s middle grows a little long and unwieldy, its specter of mystery is tantalizing and will keep readers captive till the final page.

Absorbing and electric.



OTHER PEOPLE'S CLOTHES

Henkel, Calla
Doubleday (320 pp.)
\$27.95 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-385-54735-2



Two women escape the mundanity of their New York City college lives to reinvent themselves in Berlin, leading to unexpectedly dark consequences.

At the end of their sophomore year, Zoe Beech and Hailey Mader are both ready to escape New York and the hypercompetitive culture of their art college, where the irreverent “sculpture bros” are universally worshiped and “the easiest way to dismiss a female’s work [is] by calling it domestic.” Zoe, though, is also spurred by a darker reason: the recent murder of her best friend, Ivy Noble, who’d been a dancer at Juilliard. Once at a study abroad program in Berlin, Zoe quickly grows close with her classmate Hailey, the magnetic, brazen daughter of a Midwestern supermarket-chain mogul. The two navigate their way through dark and isolating Berlin, waiting in hundred-person lines for exclusive clubs, attending insular gallery shows and art classes with fossilized professors, always slightly removed from the heart of the city’s social scene. Things shift, though, when they begin subletting an apartment from a creepy, enigmatic duo: Beatrice Becks, a helmet-haired mystery novelist, and her mother, Janet. In the perpetually dark apartment, the two become fixated with Beatrice; the more they sift through her “tax filings, photo albums and letters,” the more unsettlingly present she feels. As Zoe and Hailey compete socially and stumble their way through drug-filled parties wearing elaborate vintage costumes, they aim to

50 States
is a debut collection of short stories that capture the human condition.

ISBN: 978-1006811159

“A cleverly conceived, character-driven, if overstuffed, anthology sure to delight and enchant.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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MOON WITCH, SPIDER KING

James, Marlon
Riverhead (656 pp.)
\$30.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-7352-2020-1



Stories as ambitiously made up as this aren't expected to so intensely engage the shifting natures of truth and reality. This one does.

A chorus of enthusiastic comparisons to George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Fire and Ice* greeted James' *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* (2019) upon its publication. This second volume in a projected trilogy set in a boldly imagined, opulently apportioned ancient Africa shows that the Man Booker Prize-winning novelist is building something deeper and more profoundly innovative within the swords-and-sorcery genre. In this middle installment, James doesn't advance his narrative from the first volume so much as approach its main

story, *Rashomon*-like, from a different perspective. This, then, is the story of Sogolon, the 177-year-old Moon Witch, whose path crosses in *Black Leopard* with those of the one-eyed Tracker and his motley entourage in a far-flung and fraught search for a mysterious young boy who's been missing for three years. This novel, told in the main character's patois, which is as witty, richly textured, and musically captivating as the story it tells, begins decades and decades before, back when Sogolon is an orphaned child and indentured servant who first becomes aware of her dark powers when she repels her master's violent sexual advances with some involuntary—and deadly—violence of her own. From then on, a force she identifies throughout the narrative as “wind (not wind)” is summoned to carry her (and often rescue her) through years of travail and adventure across several kingdoms and wildernesses, encountering such wonders as a city that levitates at sunset and such perils as the witch-hunting Sangomin gangs. Through calm and stormy times, she's always aware of being stalked by the Aesi, known from the previous installment as chancellor to Kwash Dara, alias the Spider King, but here Aesi exists mostly as a demonic spirit that can dispatch invisible assassins and manipulate people's minds for its own ends. There's barely enough space to talk about James' many inventions, from children capable of changing into lions to a river dragon known as a “ninki nanka.” So much is densely packed into this narrative that it sometimes threatens to leave the reader gasping for breath, especially at the start. But once Sogolon's painful, tumultuous initiation ends and the Moon Witch's legend takes hold, James' tale picks up speed with beautifully orchestrated (and ferociously violent) set pieces and language both vivid and poetic.

The second part of this trilogy is darker and, in many ways, more moving than its predecessor.



ISBN: 978-0-578-89801-8

Can you always go home again?

“In this romantic suspense novel, an event planner's organized life gets thrown into disarray when her daughter becomes endangered.”

“In Book 2 of her Maine-set Nubble Light series, Lee offers skillful plotting that unveils several surprises readers won't see coming, both in the thriller and romance departments.”

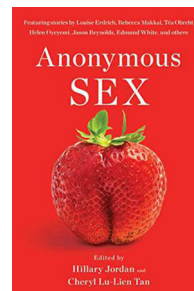
—Kirkus Reviews for *Future Plans*

For Agent Representation, Email stacybarbagallo@gmail.com

ANONYMOUS SEX

Ed. by Jordan, Hillary & Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan

Scribner (368 pp.)
\$18.00 paper | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-982177-51-5



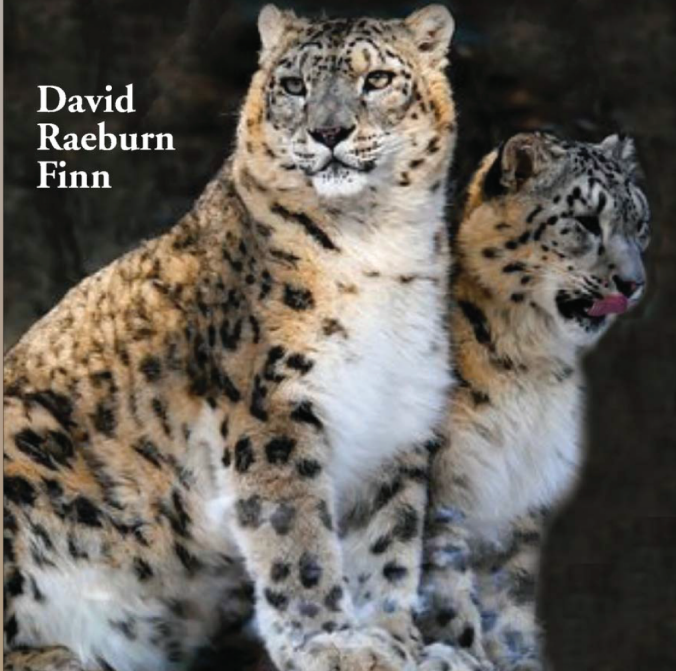
A diverse array of authors explore the heights, depths, and mediocre middle of human sexuality.

The first thing to know about this anthology is that it has a hook: The editors list the names of the 27 contributors in alphabetical order, but these names are not attached to the stories. The idea is that anonymity frees the authors and creates a fun mystery for the reader—although one wonders how many readers outside the worlds of writing and publishing will spend time puzzling over which entry is by Robert Olen Butler and which is by Helen Oyeyemi. The second thing to know about this anthology is that it is not a collection of “erotica.” It is true that each story presented here deals with sex in some way. It's also true that there may well be readers who find “Woman Eaten by Shark Drawn to Her Gold Byzantine Ring”—a story that delivers precisely what

The Leopard's Daughter

A Pukhtun Story

David
Raeburn
Finn



ISBN: 978-0-9920390-7-3 [paperback]

ISBN: 978-1-7773873-0-3 [hardcover]

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**You've read about
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about the enemies
it has fought.**

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America's might?**

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and place.... I was equally
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in the vivid technical details
covering military operations,
surgery.... legal and
political processes.”

—E.H., Editorial
Review, London, UK

“In this novel, a Pashtun American soldier stationed in Afghanistan
faces religious zealots as well as a dangerous, clandestine U.S. group.”

“This military tale features rich culture,
abundant action, and sublime characterization.”

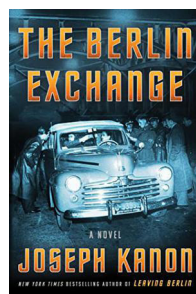
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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the title suggests—stimulating. But, aside from a handful of stories—such as “Find Me” and “Vis Á Vis 1953”—these are not narratives in which explicit sex is the centerpiece or arousing the reader is the point. “LVIII Times a Year,” a glimpse inside the marriage of two deeply unpleasant people, seems to have been constructed to shrivel desire. “Now he thought of the woman’s gold tooth and ejaculated into the bowl” is the climax (sorry) of a set of scenarios called “Altitude Sickness.” In addition to the aforementioned image of joyless masturbation in an airplane toilet, these vignettes also include a man who can only get an erection aboard the Concorde and the first moments of what appears to be a plane crash. Set in a corporate-owned afterlife, “Asphodel” is a dose of existential horror that ends with an explosion of sexuality that may meet the Lacanian definition of jouissance but is not, in any kind of usual way, hot. There are some lovely stories here. The main character in “One Day in the Life of Josephine Bellanotte Munro” is a middle-aged woman who wants and who knows herself to be wanted. In “This Kind,” clandestine encounters with a baker allow a woman to escape the demands of home, but when he starts needing her

emotionally as well as physically, she rediscovers the beauty of what she has with her wife.

Stories that range from charming to simply macabre, from beautifully crafted to barely formed.



THE BERLIN EXCHANGE

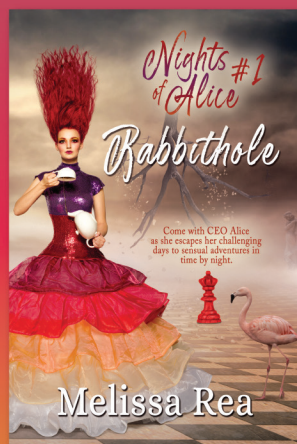
Kanon, Joseph
Scribner (320 pp.)
\$28.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-982158-65-1



After a prisoner exchange lands him in East Berlin, an American physicist who’d been imprisoned in Britain for 10 years for spying for the KGB risks everything to get his loved ones to freedom.

The year is 1963. Martin Keller, a one-time Los Alamos researcher who had idealistic intentions in sharing secrets with Russia, then an American ally, learns only after he arrives in Germany that the prisoner swap was arranged by Kurt Thiele, a shifty East German who specializes in such matters and who is married to Keller’s former wife, Sabine, a West German. After her marriage to Kurt, she settled in East Berlin with Peter, her son by Martin. From the start, when shots are fired at either Martin or Kurt at the checkpoint during their crossing into East Berlin, things are tense. Martin has barely settled into his new residence when Western intelligence descends on him and pressures him into working for them. He slowly realizes that the “important work” he will be doing as a physicist is not what he agreed to. After learning that Sabine is dying of cancer, he devises a plan to escape with her and Peter to get her medical treatment in the West, but how will that sit with their precocious 11-year-old actor son, who has been programmed by the socialist propaganda of the hit TV series in which he stars? In a city rife with corruption (the East Germans were selling prisoners for 40,000 Deutschmarks a head—“more if he was valuable”), no one can be trusted. But someone must be if Martin’s dangerous plan is to succeed. A novel that gives paranoia a new name, Kanon’s latest in a brilliant collection—including *Leaving Berlin* (2014) and *Istanbul Passage* (2012)—may be his most tightly rendered. The suspense builds quietly, almost stealthily, before tightening its grip.

Another supersophisticated spy thriller from a ranking master.

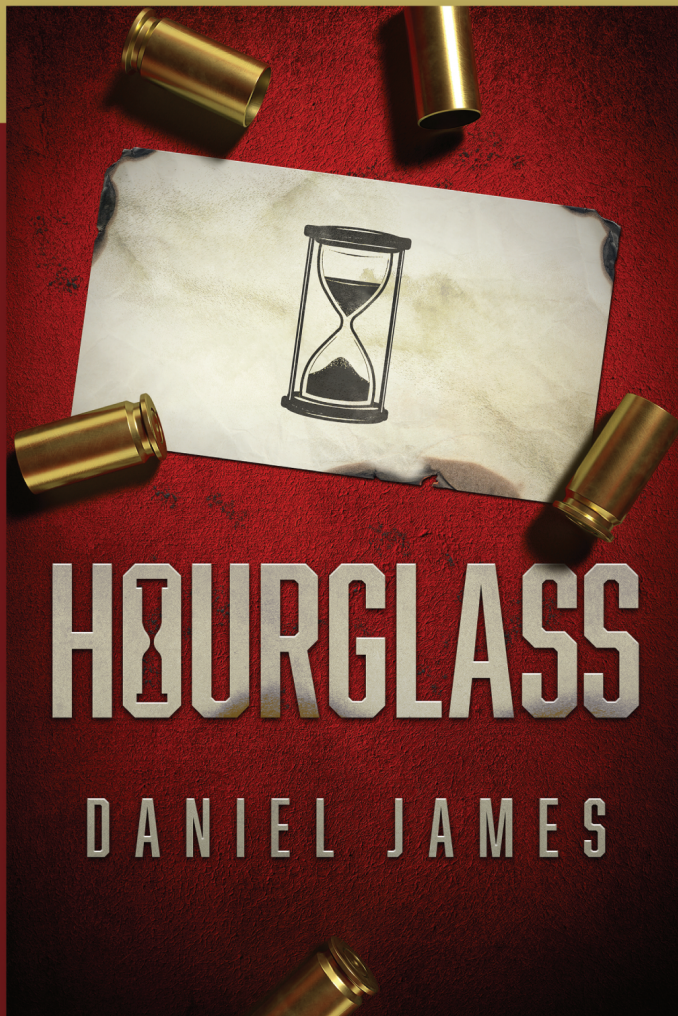


“A magic portal transports an overworked entrepreneur to a fantasyland in a loose, erotic spin on a classic tale.”

“The author’s fresh, flirtatious take is provocative and lucidly described...”

“A creative and sensual novel that doesn’t disappoint.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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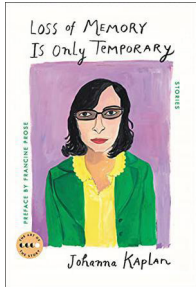
**“With a clever plot, and
fabulous and quirky
everyman-heroes,
this is a great
dark-paranormal
adventure.”**

—*Artisan Book Reviews*

**“An exciting and complex tale with
memorable characters, standout battle
scenes, and riveting worldbuilding.”**

—*Kirkus Reviews (starred review)* 

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LOSS OF MEMORY IS ONLY TEMPORARY

Kaplan, Johanna

Ecco/HarperCollins (272 pp.)

\$16.99 paper | Feb. 15, 2022

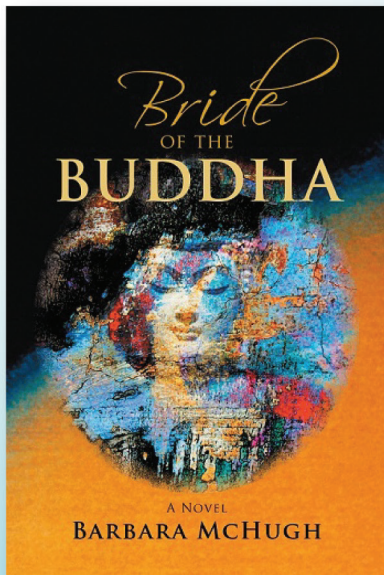
978-0-06-306163-7

Stories of New York Jewish lives in the 1970s.

"You were like really always into being Jewish weren't you?" asks an old schoolmate of the narrator's in "Tales of

My Great-Grandfathers," one of two new pieces included here along with all the stories from *Other People's Lives*, a collection originally published in 1975 to remarkable acclaim. Kaplan's debut won the Jewish Book Award and was a finalist for the National Book Award. Though she published just one more book, a novel called *O My America!* and both were long out of print, this reissue seems likely to find her a new set of fans. A warm introduction by Francine Prose alerts us to the joys of

Kaplan's stories: "smart, uneasy, cranky heroines," "dialogue [with] the literary equivalent of perfect pitch," and so many delightful sentences you can literally open the book at random and find one. In "Sickness," Miriam, the cynical and whip-smart heroine of several stories, recalls running into an acquaintance ("on the dumb side") in Alexander's department store. The girl is so eager to show off her purchases she rips open a shopping bag full of what she believes to be "gorgeous underpants" in the middle of the store. Miriam is not sold. "It seemed to me that these nylon underpants with little hearts dancing over the crotch were the most ridiculous things I had ever seen.... Suddenly I got the idea that if Andrea had underpants with two hearts embroidered on them, maybe if someone ever got a good look at her heart, they would find two little pairs of white underpants stitched on it." In "Sour or Suntanned, It Makes No Difference," Miriam is trapped at a Socialist-Zionist summer camp where she's reduced to watching insects buzz around a lightbulb for fun: "Miriam started to wonder whether these were Socialist bugs who believed in sharing with each other what they had, or else bugs who were secretly wishing to keep the whole bulb



A riveting retelling of the life of Yasodhara, the Buddha's wife, who struggles with an unapologetic religious patriarchy and carves out her own spiritual identity—one that changed Buddhism forever.

"...McHugh combines scholarship with intriguing fictionalizations. This engrossing exploration of gender dynamics, identity, and the spiritual quest for meaning will appeal to Buddhists and general readers alike."

—*Publishers' Weekly*

"...a moving drama with a message about female empowerment at its core without indulging in any heavy-handed, didactic sermonizing. This is an impressive tapestry of history, spiritual philosophy, and literary drama and an edifying look at the patriarchal limitations of Buddhism's genesis."

"An intelligently conceived and artistically executed reconsideration of religious history."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

ISBN: 978-1-948626-23-1 [paperback]

ISBN: 978-1-948626-24-8 [eBook]

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“A blissful bolt of lightning for anyone willing to suspend their disbelief.”

UNMISSING

for themselves and, by politely flying close together, just faking it.” Another such skeptic narrates “Babysitting,” possibly the funniest story. Sent by the school guidance counselor to care for the children of “American’s enigmatic wanderer-poet-playwright” Ted Marshak, she goes through his mail, answers his phone, reads a draft left lying on his desk. As with Miriam and the underpants, she’s not impressed.

Though some situations feel dated, snarky young ladies are timeless. Plus, the dialogue is to die for.



FAKE
Katz, Erica
 Harper (320 pp.)
 \$26.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-0-06-308258-8

A young painter who creates copies of masterpieces for the wealthy gets a mysterious new benefactor.

Emma Caan is a young artist with a real job in a world of fakes: She paints copies of the great masterpieces for wealthy collectors and museums to display so that the valuable originals can be safely hidden away. Still reeling from a family disaster, Emma has only one rule: She refuses to copy any paintings that involve fire. Still, she stays busy, though her job is a painful reminder of how her own painting has stalled. Then Russian oligarch Leonard Sobetsky singles her out and introduces her to the glamorous international art world. He sets her up with a new job at a gallery and a studio apartment, and soon she’s traveling to Art Basel Hong Kong and partying late into the night with a variety of dubious figures, including her favorite Instagram influencer. But the question niggles: Is Leonard trying to accomplish something illegal with this generosity? The answer is obvious, though not to naïve Emma. But the biggest problem with this novel is its lack of urgency: It’s a thriller without thrills. The plot stumbles forward too slowly, overly concerned with relaying details about art parties and galleries, what it’s like to fly on a private jet and amass thousands of followers on social media. The luxury impresses Emma—who, as it turns out, is a fantastic saleswoman despite her lack of experience—but grows tedious to the reader, and the characters are a blur of similar qualities. Katz is trying to highlight their shallowness, but they’re so generic that telling them apart is almost impossible. Even the revelation of why fire terrifies Emma is anticlimactic; she never comes alive enough for us to care about her past or future.

A shallow story about intrigue in the luxurious international art world.



UNMISSING
Kent, Minka
 Thomas & Mercer (252 pp.)
 \$15.95 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-1-5420-3201-8



A woman missing and presumed dead for 10 years inconveniently turns up and promptly wreaks havoc on the family her husband’s built in her absence.

Lydia and Luca Coletto had been married only a short time when she was snatched from a hiking trail outside Bent Creek, Oregon, by a sexual psychopath she came to call The Monster. Imprisoned for nine years, she finally escaped after he shot her and left her for dead. Now she’s made her way back to Bent Creek with nothing—no money, no job, no papers, no identity. Her first attempt to gain entry to her former world is foiled when she knocks on Luca’s door and it’s answered by Merritt Coletto, his very pregnant second wife, who dismisses her as a delusional imposter



A SEQUEL TO THE AWARD-WINNING NOVEL THE DINING CAR

ISBN: 978-1-7369834-0-9

“A food-loving train aficionado unexpectedly finds himself investigating a murder in this second installment of a literary fiction series.”

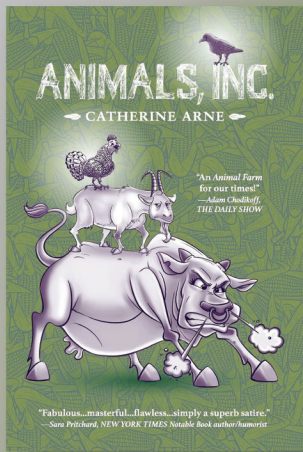
“...the author’s evocative depictions of meals and vintage trains are captivating...”

“An intriguing but sometimes uneven mystery with plenty of enjoyable twists and turns.”
 —Kirkus Reviews

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and slams the door in her face. Her second attempt goes better: She talks herself into a part-time job with Delphine DuBois, the kindly owner of *The Blessed Alchemist*. Assured now of pocket money and a roof over her head, Lydia approaches Merritt again, persuades her that she's the real deal, and extracts an invitation to visit the whole family—Merritt, Luca, and their daughter, Elsie—whose upscale restaurant chain she can't help envying because she doesn't know how dangerously overextended they are, and how willing to do whatever it takes to maintain their toehold on a moneyed lifestyle they clearly see her as threatening. The proceedings are wildly improbable, but Kent sets her hook so deep and springs such a dumbfounding series of surprises that very few readers will want to interrupt their reading for anything less than a house fire.

A blissful bolt of lightning for anyone willing to suspend their disbelief.



“...raucous, imaginative....A sprightly, thought-provoking sendup of the beastliness of predatory capitalism.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“An *Animal Farm* for our times!”
—Adam Chodikoff, *The Daily Show*

“A masterful satire, perfect for both adults and teens.”
—Sara Pritchard, NYT Notable Book of the Year Author

“Fabulous...masterful...flawless...simply a superb satire.”
—Sara Pritchard, NEW YORK TIMES Notable Book author/illustrator

ISBN: 978-1-7348003-0-2 [paperback]
ISBN: 978-1-7348003-1-9 [eBook]

“A great book for the high school or college classroom, particularly if read in conjunction with Orwell’s *Animal Farm* or Sinclair’s *The Jungle*.”
—J.L. Powers, Award-winning YA Author, Founder & Editor of *The Pirate Tree*

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YERBA BUENA

LaCour, Nina

Flatiron Books (304 pp.)

\$26.99 | May 31, 2022

978-1-250-81046-5

Their lives upended by drugs, two young women struggle to find love—and their own true selves—as they navigate the complexities of adulthood.

Having lost her mother and with her father shirking his parental duties most of the time, teenage Sara Foster feels a deep obligation to care for her younger brother, Spencer. But in the wake of yet another traumatic drug-related tragedy that hits uncomfortably close, Sara runs away to Los Angeles in hopes of rebooting her life. On a parallel track, Emilie Dubois too has witnessed the devastation of drugs up close, as her sister, Colette, struggles to stay clean. Emilie and Sara have their respective burdens to bear—and baggage to unpack—when they meet at Yerba Buena, a high-end LA restaurant. They cannot deny the chemistry they share, but the past has a way of rearing its ugly head when least expected. Both Sara and Emilie meet and diverge again, trying to understand the contours of their lives and if they have room for each other in the vast messiness. Yerba Buena, the mintlike herb with healing properties, is a recurring motif in the novel. “*It helps you fall out of love. It tells your future, so you can bear more easily the days in between.*” Whatever you need it to. It’s all about your intentions,” a character says of the herb’s gifts. One occasionally wishes LaCour subscribed more to the “show rather than tell” philosophy, as the narrative rather clinically focuses on unfolding events. There are weighty themes here about a variety of societal challenges, drugs being just one of them, but they are underexplored and remain too understated. Nevertheless, the rawness of Sara’s and Emilie’s struggles come through, making for a heartfelt story.

A brisk, plot-driven, and entertaining novel.



REELING

Lafon, Lola

Trans. by Hildegarde Serle

Europa Editions (192 pp.)

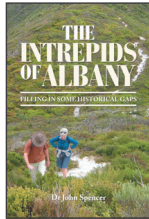
\$17.00 paper | Feb. 1, 2022

978-1-60945-731-0

French dancers reckon with the abuse they experienced as teenagers.

In mid-1980s Paris, 13-year-old Cléo is captivated by modern jazz. Her desire to become a professional dancer and her parents’ obliviousness lead to her being recruited by older woman Cathy, who tells Cléo that she can apply for a grant to pay for dancing costs from the Galatea Foundation if she can be mature enough to get through the application process. Cléo is also asked to identify other girls who should apply, and she suggests Betty, a charismatic classmate with “amber skin” who’s

Find your inspiration



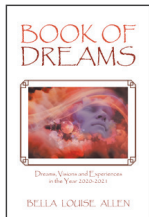
The Intrepids of Albany

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Dr John Spencer

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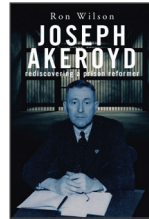


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Merrill Patton

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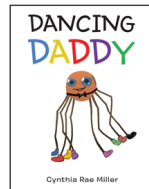


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Ron Wilson

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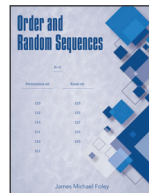


Dancing Daddy

Cynthia Rae Miller

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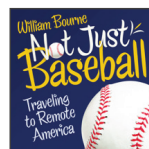


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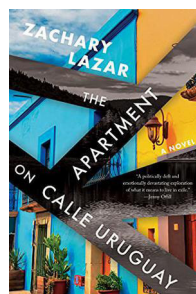


“An engrossing statement of where we are, told through the eyes of a reluctant survivor.”

THE APARTMENT ON CALLE URUGUAY

acutely aware of the racism within the world of dance. Cléo remains haunted for years by her interactions with middle-aged men at the foundation’s auditions and by her part in recruiting Betty. The following chapters explore what happened to Cléo and Betty through the eyes of people around them—a school friend, a dance teacher, a girlfriend, a nephew—over the 35 years following their traumatic teenage experiences and the fallout from the investigation into the Galatea Foundation as part of the #MeToo movement. French novelist Lafon explores the toxic culture of dance and systems set up to exploit young girls filled with the desire for approval, those who live with “having said yes because we didn’t know how to say no,” as one later tells a documentary filmmaker. The swirl of characters surrounding and sharing their perceptions of Cléo and Betty at times makes it difficult to follow the two characters, especially as the momentum of the sections is uneven. Yet the deep relevance and the nuanced portrayal of the myriad effects of abuse on their lives are skillfully done.

Layered and disquieting.



THE APARTMENT ON CALLE URUGUAY

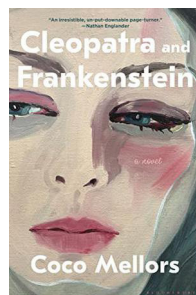
Lazar, Zachary
Catapult (256 pp.)
\$26.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-64622-111-0



Haunted by the death of his girlfriend, an Israeli-born painter of mixed racial origins struggles with displacement, the complications of a new relationship, and life under Donald Trump.

The painter, who goes by the name Christopher Bell, blames himself for the death of his girlfriend Malika Jordan, a politically provocative artist, who got into a fatal car accident after he let her drive off in a rainstorm following an argument. So he brings a ton of emotional baggage to his romance with Ana Ramirez, an exiled Venezuelan journalist. Following tragedies of her own, she is reinventing herself as a podcaster specializing in “the precariousness of ‘home.’” She and Chris share a strong sexual attraction, beleaguered outsider status, and simmering anger over Charlottesville and atrocities perpetuated under the new administration. But, frustrated with Chris’ remoteness, Ana moves to Mexico City, where her family has fled from Caracas. Chris, who has abandoned his art, is left alone in his house by the woods in Eastern Long Island to contemplate what to do with his life: “I didn’t believe there was such a thing as meaning, but I knew the active pursuit of it was sanity.” Ultimately, he and Ana slowly put the pieces of their relationship back together, but with “genocides and fires and thousand-year floods already here,” there will be no escaping the harsh realities in store. For all that, Lazar’s latest novel, following *Vengeance* (2018), is anything but a downer. His brand of introspection is page-turning, informed by his hip sensibility, musical way with language, and sensuality. As deep a dive as Lazar takes into one man’s alienation—from himself as well as the world around him—the book soars with timely truth.

An engrossing statement of where we are, told through the eyes of a reluctant survivor.



CLEOPATRA AND FRANKENSTEIN

Mellors, Coco
Bloomsbury (384 pp.)
\$27.00 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-63557-681-8

A May-December romance rapidly hits turbulence in early-aughts Manhattan.

Mellors’ remarkably assured and sensitive debut opens with a meet-cute that’s as charming and frothy as it is misleading. On New Year’s Eve 2006, Cleo, a 24-year-old budding British artist, shares an elevator with Frank, a 40-something ad exec. Easy banter leads to flirtation, and flirtation speeds to romance; within six months, they’re married. Figuring out



“In this debut novel, a veteran haunted by visions attempts to get on the right track in a hippie mountain town.”

“...well-drawn characters and magic-tinged environment will be enough to keep readers engrossed. And the ending is unexpectedly rewarding.”

ISBN: 978-1-7337464-2-7

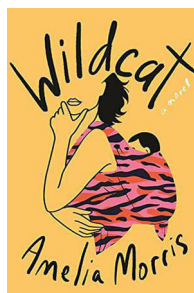
“A trippy but emotionally resonant tale about acclimating to life after war.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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whether that decision has to do with true love, keeping Cleo in the country, or satisfying other suppressed needs is just one of the storm clouds that soon blow in. Quentin, Cleo's closest friend, is consumed by a jealousy he sublimates into drugs and sex. Cleo's art ambitions go sideways. Frank's drinking regresses into alcoholism. His fashion-student sister, Zoe, grows reckless, needy, and similarly addictive. Eleanor, a young copywriter at Frank's firm, is a perceived threat. Affairs are considered and/or consummated. The novel's somber stretches, wide cast of characters, and cross sections of New York social spheres strongly evoke Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*, but Mellors also cultivates a sprightlier style that keeps the novel's familiar tropes from feeling clichéd or reducing her characters to types. (Think of Armistead Maupin or Laurie Colwin in a moodier register.) She's playful with characterization and voice; Eleanor's sections are distinctively written in the first-person, with a young writer's pitch-perfect brashness and anxiety. And she describes parties, workplaces, apartments, and familial dynamics with impressive sophistication. She has a knack for crisp, witty summaries, as in her description of a seedy underground gay club

that Quentin haunts: "They'd striven for Grecian fantasy and ended up with Greek restaurant." But the humor doesn't overwhelm the melancholy heart of the story: At its core, it's a novel about how love and lovers are easily misinterpreted and how romantic troubles affect friends and family.

A canny and engrossing rewiring of the big-city romance.



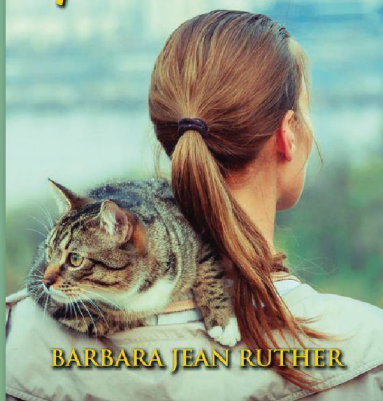
WILDCAT

Morris, Amelia
Flatiron Books (304 pp.)
\$23.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-250-80921-6

A writer in Los Angeles with a new baby and a first book on the way finds motherhood has changed her view of things.

As Morris' snappy debut opens, Leanne and her husband, James, are

The Lives of Cat



ISBN: 9780578950433 [eBook]
ISBN: 9780578945477 [paperback]

Xander keeps secrets tucked behind his love for Cat, through the years they begin to emerge.

"Ruther offers a romantic thriller in which a woman finds strength and courage in dire circumstances."

"Cat is a strong protagonist, the depiction of her resolve amid adversity and heartbreak will win the hearts of many readers.... and its well-developed characters and fast-paced plot will keep readers attention."

"An engaging novel that tells a tender story of finding lasting love in an unpredictable world."

—Kirkus Reviews

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about to drop off their barky dog at WagVille and drive to Palm Springs for the lavish anniversary party of Leanne's wealthy, self-absorbed frenemy (on the way to regular old enemy), Regina. They don't really want to go, but "it'll be good for the book," says Leanne. *Diary of a Home Cook: A Year in Recipes* is coming out in five months, and among Regina's entourage is a journalist who might cover it. Regina is no doubt a snob and a phony, but Leanne, too, has traits that add to the negative potential of their relationship—envy, ambition, and a dangerously complete mastery of social media. When she discovers that on top of everything else Regina is an anti-vaxxer, she declares war via Instagram, incidentally offering the reader a complete guide to trolling. (Note: the book is set not in the pandemic but during a measles outbreak.) Morris has her finger on the pulse of many things: the sweetness of early motherhood, the grief of losing a parent, the ups and downs of launching a life in writing, the role of economic and career status in female friendships. Like Dana Spiotta's *Wayward* but funnier, the novel is also a hard look at the role of social media in women's lives. If it sounds like men don't play a big role in this book, they don't. There are just

two male characters: James, the mostly offstage but very nice husband, and a nightmarish writing workshop student named Earl, whose trajectory is quite unexpected. Morris is also unusually gentle with her heroine, giving her a supercool bestselling author for a mentor and punishing her less severely for her mistakes than in the traditional fiction model.

A smart, juicy, of-the-moment read.



JAWBONE

Ojeda, Mónica
Trans. by Sarah Booker
 Coffee House (272 pp.)
 \$16.95 paper | Feb. 8, 2022
 978-1-56689-621-4

Edgar Allan Poe meets a few of the mean girls.

A Catholic girls' high school for the daughters of elite Ecuadorians provides the seemingly innocuous setting for Ojeda's meta treatment of the creepypasta phenomenon. Six school friends coalesce into something more resembling a cult under the influence of the charismatic—or just bossy?—Annelise. It is Fernanda who is the most intimately involved with Annelise's increasingly surreal dares and challenges. Running on a collision course with the girls' journey into the macabre is Miss Clara, the school's anxiety-ridden new literature teacher. Miss Clara survived a lifetime of maternal domination only to have become, at a prior teaching position, the humiliated hostage of two girl students. Repeated references to teeth, jawbones, blood, and being devoured reinforce the menacing tone Ojeda sets from the opening scene of Miss Clara's own abduction of Fernanda. Ojeda's slow reveal of who did what to whom (and, maybe, why) follows a twisting course using transcripts of Fernanda's dialogues with a therapist and passages which echo the increasing dissolution of Miss Clara's already tenuous grip on composure. Mother-daughter relationships slide under Ojeda's microscope, sharing space with the teacher-student dynamic and deities as objects in an exploration of power and sexuality during adolescence. Room is left for ambivalence about the true nature of horror; in a realistic change of pace, Ojeda's monsters are, themselves, afraid of things. (The real monsters at work, though, are of a domestic kind.) An extensive translator's note helps place the creepypasta genre in context in the literary landscape of terror, horror, and suspense and explains the stylistic language choices favored by Ojeda.

Every good horror story needs a victim; Ojeda's monsters and victims wear the same faces.

MICHAEL PRONKO

TOKYO ZANGYO

A TOKYO MYSTERY

ISBN: 9781942410256 [paperback]
 ISBN: 9781942410249 [eBook]

IN TOKYO,
 WORK CAN KILL

"A superb procedural thriller with an always entertaining and appealing cast."
 —*Kirkus Reviews*

"...has the feel of classic noir imbued with Far East culture."
 —*IndieReader*

"...immersive representation of the megacity..."
 —*Crime Fiction Lover*

"Pronko's appreciation for Japan is palpable. His writing is crisp and always engaging."
 —*BlueInk Review*

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**KIRKUS
REVIEWS**

“The combination of social satire with an intimate portrait of loss and grief is stylistically ambitious and deeply moving.”

THE SWIMMERS



THE SWIMMERS

Otsuka, Julie
Knopf (176 pp.)
\$23.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-593-32133-1



Having concentrated on one family in her first novel, then eschewed individual protagonists for a collective “we” in her second, Otsuka now blends the two approaches, shifting from an almost impersonal, wide-lens view of society

to an increasingly narrow focus on a specific mother-daughter relationship.

The book begins as tart social comedy. A narrative “we” represents various swimmers frequenting an underground community pool. A microcosm of America, they remain mostly anonymous, although a few names are dropped in from time to time as a kind of punctuation. The swimmers are fleshed out as a group by multiple lists detailing a wide range of occupations

and social roles, motivations to swim, swimming styles, and eventually reactions to a mysterious crack that appears suddenly on the pool floor. Initially dismissed as inconsequential by the experts, the crack morphs, Covid-like, into more and more cracks until panicky authorities announce the pool will close altogether. What seems a minor act of grace on the final day of operation—the lifeguard generously allows a memory-impaired woman named Alice to swim one extra lap—leaves the reader unprepared for the sharp swerve the novel now makes. Alice takes center stage, her cognitive and eventual physical deterioration viewed from multiple angles. The narrative voice is now addressing itself to “you,” Alice’s daughter, a Japanese American novelist with an obvious resemblance to the author, observing Alice’s decline in slightly removed, writerly detail as Alice’s memories drift from random, repetitive, and oddly specific to more random, less frequent, and increasingly vague. Institutional care follows, with the new “we” of the narrative voice addressing Alice in cold bureaucratic lingo that represents the nursing facility in a snarky, predictable, and disappointingly unnuanced sketch of institutional care. As Alice fades further, the daughter returns. She berates herself for the ways she failed her mother. But dredging up her own memories, she also begins to recognize the love her parents felt for each other and for her.

The combination of social satire with an intimate portrait of loss and grief is stylistically ambitious and deeply moving.

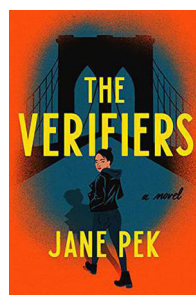
ALL AUTHOR FEES OF PRESALES WILL BE DONATED TO THE CENTER FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS IN MEXICO CEDEHM.ORG

“These are stories that will reverberate in your heart long after you’ve turned the last page.”
—Sylvia Madrigal, Author of *Of Two Minds*

ISBN: 978-1-66780-063-9 [paperback]
ISBN: 978-1-66780-064-6 [eBook]

“Powerful, engaging tales that make vivid use of magical realism.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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THE VERIFIERS

Pek, Jane
Vintage (368 pp.)
\$17.00 paper | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-593-31379-4

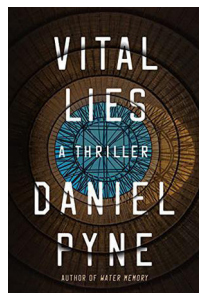


A cool, cerebral, and very funny novel about a young woman who works for an agency that investigates potential online dating partners and who has relationship questions—and quests—of her own.

Claudia Lin has a pretty excellent job. She works at Veracity, a detective agency that helps vet potential partners for clients pursuing romance via dating apps. Claudia is very much into literary mysteries—her go-to comfort reading is a murder-mystery series featuring one Inspector Yuan—as well as literature in general. Her astute, often acerbic observations prove a heady combination, contributing to Claudia’s engaging voice: She keeps the narrative moving at a fast-paced clip. When a new client wants Veracity to investigate a recent online flirt who’s ghosted said client—and when this request is followed in quick succession by another verification request—Claudia is all in, ably abetted by Finders Keepers, a proprietary app that can track people’s whereabouts through their cellphones. Meanwhile, in her personal life, Claudia has a stake in keeping her own secrets hidden from her more conventional immigrant family: Not only is she dead set against the type of Chinese husband her mom wishes for her, she also regularly measures herself against her much higher achieving brother and sister. Beautifully complemented by entertaining

secondary characters that include Claudia's artistic roommate, Max, and Lionel, Claudia's sister's boyfriend, Claudia is the seductive protagonist in a tale that delves into the dark heart of contemporary technology, not to mention the foibles of the human heart.

With an inquisitive, clever, and curious narrator, this adventurous mystery is both scary and hilarious.

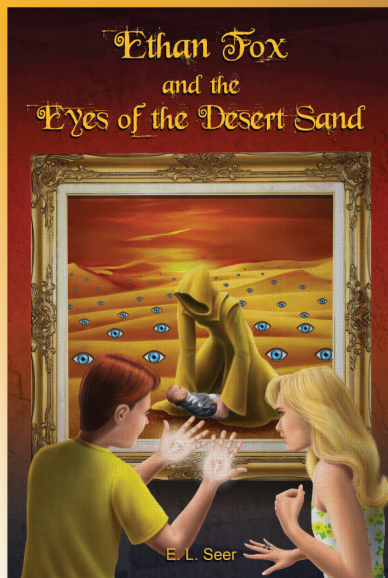


VITAL LIES

Pyne, Daniel
 Thomas & Mercer (379 pp.)
 \$24.95 | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-1-5420-3104-2

Security solutions specialist Aubrey Sentro's latest attempt to retire from "Moonlighting in the Spook Life" plunges her as deeply into international intrigue as all the others.

Sentro's old Soviet contact, exiled oligarch Ilya Arshavin, wants her to look into a recent terrorist bombing at the Madrid stock exchange that destroyed \$500 million. He doesn't think the perp was a terrorist, and his fatal shooting soon afterward by the bomber gives his request a certain urgency. Even though her children, Jenny and Jeremy Troon, still recovering from the scars inflicted by her last adventure, beg her to let it go, Sentro, driven by a combination of institutional loyalty and OCD, reluctantly agrees to one more spin of the wheel even though she's still tormented by nightmares and daytime bouts of amnesia. Her official mission is to lead Canadian Security Intelligence Service special operative Ryan Banks and other interested parties to Pogo, the former Stasi spymaster whose identity she'd learned during her yearlong imprisonment in the Soviet Union back in 1990 and then forgotten. Before she can take more than a few halting steps in that direction, a hit team swoops down on her ranch and kills her current lover, and soon after an awkward conversation in which Sentro shares with Jenny, whom she's rescued from the ranch in the nick of time, some unlovely secrets of her past, her daughter abandons her to fly to Europe with the



Harry Potter for the New Age!

"A teenager stumbles on an intriguing world that may clear up his murky history in this YA fantasy debut."

"...this inventive tale boasts delightfully colorful details..."

"A quirky cast headlines this overstuffed but imaginative tale for kids and adults alike."

—Kirkus Reviews

ISBN: 978-1-884573-65-1

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glamorous Cuban-born assassin Mercedes Izquierdo. As Sentro gets closer and closer to unmasking Pogo, she realizes that her daughter is following surprisingly closely in her own footsteps in good ways and bad—and that Sentro herself has been living even more lies than she's known.

A sadly effective dramatization of the comic-strip Pogo's insight: "We have met the enemy, and he is us."



HOW TO FIND YOUR WAY HOME

Regan, Katy
Berkley (336 pp.)
\$17.00 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0451490-37-7

After 19 years apart, a sister and brother find each other once again.

As an adult in her early 30s, Emily Adele Nelson seems to have it all—a

gorgeous garden flat in London, a handsome boyfriend of five months, and a well-paying job at the local housing office that allows her to help people, even if it feels like there are even more people she isn't able to help. But everything isn't as it seems—her flat doesn't feel like a home, and she's constantly on the lookout for her older brother, Stephen, a one-time prison inmate who is currently—she thinks—homeless. And then one day she hears his voice speaking to another person in her office, but when she rushes to see if it really is him, he's gone. With the scraps of information he's left behind, she's able to locate him and convince him to come stay with her. Author Regan has split the story into two streams. One progresses from Emily's birth in 1987 to the culminating event in 1999 that separated her from her brother, and the other progresses forward from March 2018, just before she finds him once again. The story includes chapters told in three points of view: third person, and those of Stephen and Emily. The story is centered around the friendship and love between the siblings as they reconnect and the love of bird-watching that has been Stephen's savior for the decades he's been unmoored from what is typically considered a normal life. However, after a lengthy windup to the climax of the story—just what happened on that day so long ago? And what does it mean for the future of these siblings?—the ending somehow feels both rushed and drawn out, with unsatisfying gaps.

An incomplete redemption arc mars an otherwise strong story about how even well-intentioned lies can destroy lives.

Perfectly Round Ripples
(made by a jagged stone)

J. Flaherty
Poems/Ballads/Haikus

"A collection of poetry that's engaging and sensitive."
—Kirkus Reviews

"The light but profound touch of the poet's imagery is seen throughout these works..."
—Self-Publishing Review

ISBN: 978-0-578-67226-7

"Irish bard. Storyteller. Troubadour. All these come to mind when reading J. Flaherty's third volume of poetry..."
—IndieReader

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REAL EASY

Rutkoski, Marie
Henry Holt (320 pp.)
\$22.99 | Jan. 18, 2022
978-1-250-78824-5



It's 1999, and the case of one woman murdered and another kidnapped takes on nuance as the story is conveyed from the points of view of at least a dozen different voices.

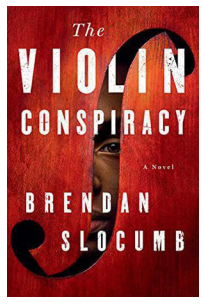
Samantha's time is split between two worlds: There's her longtime job as a stripper at the Lovely Lady and her domestic life with boyfriend Nick and his daughter, Rosie, whom she longs to mother. Despite Nick's objections, she finds something meaningful in her relationships with her fellow dancers and in the care of Dale, the Lovely Lady's owner. She even becomes a mentor of sorts to Jolene, the newest dancer at the club, offering to drive the girl home one night when she turns up high. They never make it to their destination. Detective Victor Amador responds to the call of a car in a ditch and finds Jolene's body; the girl has been strangled. Samantha is missing, apparently kidnapped. The rest of the novel follows this unfolding mystery, with every chapter told from a different character's point of view. Some characters, like dancers Samantha and Georgia as well as Victor and detective Holly Meylin, get multiple chapters, while others, like Nick and Rosie and the bouncer, Jimmy, get only one each, but the multiplicity of perspectives provides layers of narrative detail that lend

“Innovative stories that probe the ineluctable bond between storytelling and identity.”

MANYWHERE

complexity to this thriller. Rutkoski’s writing is lyrical, offering quiet metaphors and imagery despite some pointedly crude language, primarily directed at the dancers by men at the club. The language disparity and the multiple perspectives serve to emphasize a larger point: that even in ugliness, loss, and tragedy, there is humanity. Though the killer is unmasked, the takeaway is much more universal—and satisfying—than just finding out whodunit: This is a story about flawed people just doing the best they can to live their lives and find love.

Vulnerable yet steely, this thriller rises above the rest.



THE VIOLIN CONSPIRACY
Slocumb, Brendan
 Anchor (352 pp.)
 \$28.00 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-593-31541-5

A classical musician tries to find his stolen violin in this entertaining debut novel.

There are few worse nightmares for a musician than having a treasured instrument stolen. For Ray McMillian, the protagonist of Slocumb’s debut, the theft of his violin is especially painful—not only was it a gift from his beloved grandmother, it’s also a Stradivarius, one of the rarest instruments in the world. And it happens to be worth more than \$10 million. Ray, a classical music phenom who’s about to compete in the prestigious Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, discovers his violin has gone missing in his Charlotte, North Carolina, house; when he opens its case, he finds only a tennis shoe and a ransom note demanding \$5 million in Bitcoin. He has a few suspects in mind, chief among them the members of two families: the Marks clan, who claim that Ray’s great-great-grandfather, an enslaved person, took the violin from their ancestor; and his own family, a collection of grasping doubters who don’t care much for Ray but do care about his valuable violin. Ray trusts only a few people, including his violinist girlfriend, Nicole, and his “mentor, friend, and surrogate mother,” Janice. Slocumb’s novel is told in flashbacks, chronicling Ray’s early years and fraught relationship with his uncaring mother and his ascent as a star violinist who takes America by storm. Ray, who is Black, has to deal with not only lawsuits from his family and the Marks family, but also with vicious racism from both inside and outside the music world: “No matter how nice the suit, no matter how educated his speech or how strong the handshake, no matter how much muscle he packed on, no matter how friendly or how smart he was, *none of it mattered at all*. He was just a Black person. That’s all they saw and that’s all he was.” While the whodunit element of Slocumb’s novel is unlikely to stump mystery fans, his writing is strong, if a little unpolished in parts. Still, it’s a gripping novel, and Slocumb, himself a violinist, does an excellent job explaining the world of classical music to those who might be unfamiliar with it.

A solid page-turner.



MANYWHERE
Thomas, Morgan
 MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux
 (224 pp.)
 \$22.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
 978-0-3746-0248-2



Nine stories about queer, genderqueer, and trans characters seeking insight and actualization.

The characters in Thomas’ debut story collection, as different and sui generis as they are, are all seekers, whether sifting through archives for any echoes of themselves in the historical record or reinventing themselves by way of elaborate, sometimes convoluted forms of self-mythologizing. For instance, “Taylor Johnson’s Lightning Man,” the opening story, follows Taylor, a young person on a mission to discover anything they can about Frank Woodhull, a woman who came to Ellis Island dressed in men’s clothing and went on to peddle lightning rods, and with whom Taylor uncannily identifies. “The Daring Life



2021 AMERICAN FICTION AWARDS FANTASY FINALIST

PAIN IS INESCAPABLE. SUFFERING IS A CHOICE.

“A well-balanced romance/fantasy that fans of both genres can enjoy.”
 —*Kirkus Reviews*

ISBN: 978-1-63195-609-6

“...an imaginative fantasy adventure story with a vibrant cast and a storyline that is relentlessly entertaining.”
 —*Literary Titan*

“The twists and turns in *Chasing the Darkness* are simply delightful....Fantasy readers are in for a treat.”
 —*D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, Midwest Book Review*

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“A novel as one of a kind as its memorable main character.”

JOAN IS OKAY

of Philippa Cook the Rogue” is told through contemporary emails and historical documents, all inquiring into the figure of Philippa Cook, a member of the Jamestown colony who historians agree was intersex. Shoo Caddick, the author of the emails, is an actor who’s convinced that they’re “a sort of reincarnation” of Philippa. Stories like “Bump” and “Transit,” on the other hand, introduce characters who reinvent themselves via misunderstandings that often veer toward the uncanny or absurd. In “Transit,” a nonbinary teenager riding a train home from an eating-disorder clinic inadvertently convinces a fellow passenger that they’re a vampire. “Bump,” one of the collection’s most compelling stories, follows a trans woman’s relationship with an artificial baby belly, a co-dependency that develops as her polyamorous partner and his wife get pregnant. The characters in these stories feel fully alive; they reveal their rich and endlessly vibrant interiors through indefatigable exploration and textured thoughts. As inventive as some of Thomas’ storytelling decisions can be, they are never precious or self-indulgent but serve to cast light on the characters’ complex and ever shifting desires.

Innovative stories that probe the ineluctable bond between storytelling and identity.



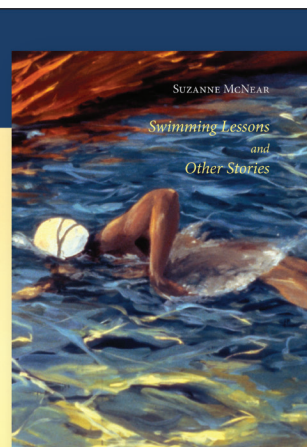
JOAN IS OKAY

Wang, Weike
Random House (224 pp.)
\$20.44 | Jan. 18, 2022
978-0-525-65483-4

The loss of her father forces a young doctor to confront her past and present.

By most people’s estimation, Joan is more than OK: In her mid-30s, she’s an attending physician in the intensive care unit of a Manhattan hospital. She’s such a dedicated doctor that when her father dies, she flies to China for the funeral and back in a single weekend. (She’s puzzled by other characters’ objections to feeling like cogs in a machine at their jobs: “Cogs were essential and an experience that anyone could enjoy,” she muses.) The hospital director is so impressed with her that he’s wooing her to stay with an impressive salary and perks. But she’s also different from just about everyone she knows. Straightforward, literal, utilitarian Joan is a puzzle to her wealthy brother, Fang; to her widowed mother, who doesn’t understand why she doesn’t enjoy womanly pastimes like shopping or jewelry; to her new neighbor, Mark, a bachelor trying to figure out how to get beyond her stoic exterior; to her colleague Reese, who feels he may be in the wrong field because he can’t keep up with her work ethic. When HR forces Joan on a bereavement break, she’s finally left to process her father’s loss and her roles as the child of immigrants, a career woman, and an Asian American. In the wrong hands, Joan’s story could have been a rom-com with familiar contours or a heavy existential drama. But Joan is such an idiosyncratic character, and Wang’s style so wry and piercing, that the novel is its own category: a character study about otherness set partly against the backdrop of early-pandemic anti-Asian sentiment that manages to be both profound and witty.

A novel as one of a kind as its memorable main character.



*Swimming Lessons
and
Other Stories*
BY SUZANNE MCNEAR

**“A collection
of witty short
stories with an
eccentric cast.”**

“McNear’s prose is
often delightfully
sparse, allowing the
characters and their
misadventures to shine...”

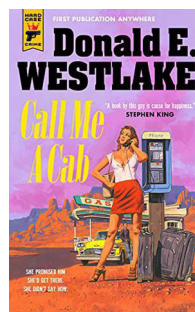
ISBN: 978-0-578-67776-7

“...this collection is lively and wry and worth the read.”

**“An appealing, remarkable
collection from a talented writer.”**

—Kirkus Reviews

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CALL ME A CAB

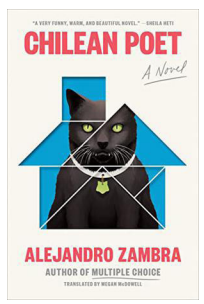
Westlake, Donald E.
Hard Case Crime (256 pp.)
\$14.95 paper | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-78909-818-1

After a slew of posthumous novels and reprints, the sad day arrives for what publisher Charles Ardai calls “this last lost book of Don’s,” originally published in abridgment in *Redbook* more than 40 years ago.

Marriage is not a commitment to make lightly, and New York-based Katharine Scott is naturally feeling eleventh-hour jitters about whether she should accept Los Angeles plastic surgeon Barry Gilbert’s proposal. Despite his profession, Barry is clearly Mr. Right: handsome, well-off, intelligent, and truly in love with Katharine. But the five-hour flight from coast to coast isn’t enough time to make up her

mind, so she makes a novel proposal to Thomas Fletcher, the cabbie driving her to JFK: She'll pay him \$4,000 plus expenses to turn the car around, head west, and drive her to California instead. The trip will take close to a week, but that's the idea; somewhere along the line, something will make up Katharine's mind one way or the other. What happens is a series of low-level encounters, most of them never rising to the level of adventures—the two trade stories of their romances; they detour to drive a stranded woman in labor to a nearby hospital; they stop at three Kansas City airports before finding the one where a messenger with documents for Katharine to sign will be waiting; they share a pub crawl along the Kansas-Colorado border with an overgalvanized husband and wife who seem to have come straight out of a Prohibition musical—in between nights at a series of interchangeable Holiday Inns (with a single notable exception) until Katharine, delivered to Barry, can't stall any longer.

Minor Westlake is still Westlake, and his many fans will turn the last page with a tear.



CHILEAN POET

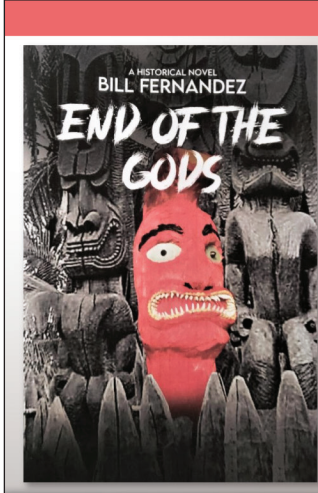
Zambra, Alejandro
Trans. by Megan McDowell
 Viking (368 pp.)
 \$27.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-0-59-329794-0

A unique and personal novel about what it means to be part of a family. Who is the Chilean poet of the title? Is it Gonzalo, the main character of the first section, who meets a girl named

Carla when they're both teenagers and then reconnects with her in their 20s? Gonzalo yearns to see his name alongside Chilean greats like Neruda and Mistral; he'd even settle to see his name among the not-so-greats or even any poets at all. Or is the Chilean poet Vicente, Carla's son, whom Gonzalo helps raise until leaving them both to take a position in New York City? Vicente takes over the second section of the novel, when he himself is 18 and, unlike Gonzalo, is actually a talented poet. Or is Zambra the titular poet in a piece of autofiction about his own literary yearnings and relationships in a Chile still recovering from a brutal dictatorship? Can anyone bear the burden of being a Chilean poet considering that two have won the Nobel Prize in literature? Zambra's novel, as translated by McDowell, renders both the small moments of literary striving and the everyday difficulties of being part of, and raising, a family with an insight that's both cleareyed and tender. Many of the author's musings about families could be applied to the act of writing and vice versa: "They were like two strangers searching desperately for a subject in common; it seemed like they were talking about something and were together, but they knew that really they were talking about nothing and were alone." The relationships in the novel are touching, often frustrating, and always authentic. Zambra isn't afraid to switch from graphic sex scenes to hilarious ruminations on poetry anthologies or into

multiple characters' points of view, all in a few pages.

A playful, discursive novel about families, relationships, poetry, and how easily all three can come together or fall apart.



Fernandez is a Hawaiian Native who returned to his home on Kaua'i after retiring from his judgeship in California.

"Fernandez's novel of Hawaii deals with the struggle to find a humane belief system."

ISBN: 978-1-63944-358-1

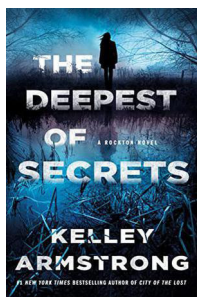
"Spiritual seeking is in the air: There has to be something better than this insane cruelty...Confucianism? Christianity?"

"Fernandez tells a good story, and Kalani is an admirable hero...complex and thoughtful."

"An excellent, well-told primer on Hawaiian history."
 —Kirkus Reviews

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KAUAIBILLFERNANDEZ.COM

M Y S T E R Y



THE DEEPEST OF SECRETS

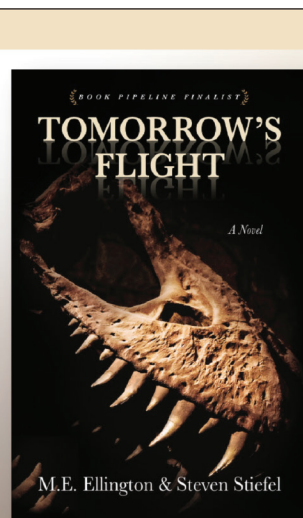
Armstrong, Kelley
Minotaur (352 pp.)
\$27.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-2507-8173-4

A detective in a remote Yukon town shrouded in secrecy has to figure out which resident has turned traitor.

Rockton (population 171) was founded in the 1950s as an intentional community designed to support idealism, a place where people could find refuge from McCarthyism and the like, but in the present day it's turned into something totally different. Since everyone in town uses a false name, the town leaders, known as the council, have used the place as a haven for criminals,

and not just those guilty of white-collar crimes. Under the council's misdirection, a certain price can buy a resident paperwork that suggests their reason for seeking shelter is something more like embezzlement than murder. Only a select few citizens know the truth, like Sheriff Eric Dalton, who's given limited knowledge of certain high-risk residents that he shares with Casey Duncan, his detective and common-law wife, on a need-to-know basis. In spite of the criminal pasts of some residents, Rockton's Yukon setting and the town's emphasis on shared responsibility mean that the residents have to work together for a common goal: survival. But someone is determined to stir things up when they hang up a sign revealing Deputy Will Anders' actual criminal history. Casey and Dalton take the case personally since Anders is a longtime friend, but Casey's certain that the root of the problem is the council and its plan to shut Rockton down. Casey has to find out which of the locals has defected to the side of the council in a place where no one is who they say they are, even as whoever's behind Anders' outing keeps upping the ante.

While the characters worry that this is the end of their hometown, Armstrong is just hitting her stride.



Top 10 of 2000 entrants
in Book Pipeline's
manuscript-to-film contest



As timelines collide,
one woman's battle
for survival becomes
another woman's
fight for the truth.

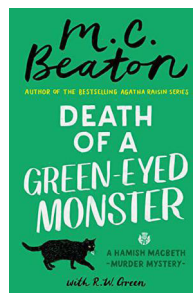
"A sharp and gripping
SF/prehistoric
time-travel thriller."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

ISBN: 978-0-578-93851-6

"A solid, mysterious adventure through time.
Perfect page-turner for fans of sci-fi thrillers."
—JE Rowney, *Reedsy Discovery*

"The ending of the book is one of the best
I've read, allowing characters and time
to evolve in ways not expected..."
—Susan Weintrob, Writer & Editor, *expandthetable.net*

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DEATH OF A GREEN-EYED MONSTER

Beaton, M.C. with R.W. Green
Grand Central Publishing (256 pp.)
\$27.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-5387-4670-7

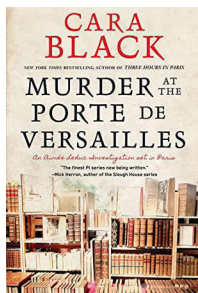
Veteran storyteller Beaton may be gone, but her beloved Highlands policeman lives on in another tale of murder and thwarted romance, now written by Green.

Gifted crime solver Hamish Macbeth's desire to stay in Lochdubh has kept him from advancing up the ranks. He can hardly believe his eyes when the new constable sent to work with him is stunningly beautiful Dorothy McIver. Hamish has been engaged twice before, but this time he falls head over heels for Dorothy, who he's convinced is his soul mate even though his wild pet cat, Sonsie, doesn't take to her. Dorothy, a Glasgow girl with expensive tastes, slowly warms to the beauty of the Highlands and charms the villagers who've thrown a protective cordon around Hamish. After a man is found shot dead in his car at the local petrol station, the crime team arrives within hours, with Hamish's good friend DCI Jimmy Anderson in charge. The victim was a gangster involved with the infamous Macgregor crime family in Glasgow, a development that unfortunately involves Hamish's nemesis, the nasty, inept DCI Blair, in the investigation. Jimmy wants Hamish to lie low and solve the crime without taking the credit. That's fine with Hamish if it can be arranged. But can it? Soon more mayhem comes to Lochdubh, suggesting that Dorothy may be hiding secrets from her past. Can Hamish solve the crimes and get as far as the marital altar this time?

As usual in this venerable series, the appeal of the characters and the Highlands upstages the slight mystery.

“Black delivers again with a combination of political intrigue and tight detective thrills.”

MURDER AT THE PORTE DE VERSAILLES



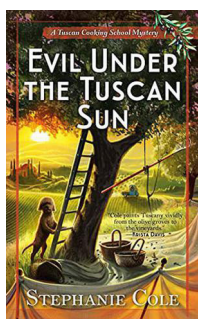
MURDER AT THE PORTE DE VERSAILLES

Black, Cara
Soho Crime (360 pp.)
\$27.95 | March 1, 2022
978-1-641-29043-2

A bombing at a police lab has all Paris on edge.

Birthdays should be happy. But the third birthday of private investigator Aimée Leduc’s daughter, Chloé, brings as much anxiety as joy. First, Chloé’s father, Melac, has become more of a presence in their lives since his recent divorce. His pleas that Aimée and Chloé would be much safer living at his farm in Brittany sends Aimée down a rabbit hole of second-guessing: She wants her daughter to be safe, but she wants to support her child financially, and that means staying in Paris, where she and her business partner, René Friant, run a successful investigation agency. Then disaster strikes at Chloé’s party. Aimeé’s good friend Boris realizes that he’s left the toddler’s gift on his desk at the police crime lab at Porte de Versailles. While he’s retrieving the gift, the lab is bombed. Leaving Chloé with Melac, Aimée rushes to the lab only to find Boris has been taken to the hospital, unconscious. A note she finds shoved in her pocket claims, “WE HAVE STRUCK AGAIN.” But who? Detective Loïc Bellan of the Groupe d’Intervention La Gendarmerie Nationale has his sights on Action Directe, a radical group from the 1960s. The police suspect Boris, who has Semtex explosive under his nails. But a teenage voyeur has a videotape of a shadowy figure leaving the lab just before the explosion. As days pass without an arrest, Aimée moves into action. Will she find the bombers before the police arrest Boris and before Melac decides that Paris is just too dangerous a place for his child?

Black delivers again with a combination of political intrigue and tight detective thrills.



EVIL UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN

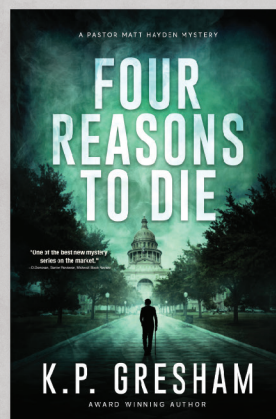
Cole, Stephanie
Berkley (304 pp.)
\$8.99 paper | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-593-09783-0

A cooking school designer tries to keep murder from ruining a most expensive birthday gift.

Nell Valenti is pleased as punch that her renovation of Chef Claudio Orlandini’s cooking school is finally complete. Now the Villa Orlandini is ready to host the scads of gastro-tourists she hopes will flock to this picturesque estate at the edge of the quaint Tuscan village of Cortona, where Chef stands ready to teach them the secrets of Northern Italian cuisine. The first group through is far smaller than the usual dozen, not because the course is unpopular, but because

the very rich Philip Copeland is willing to plunk down \$75,000 to buy out the whole session so that his mother can spend her 80th birthday enjoying a set of semiprivate lessons on how to prepare her favorite food—ziti—in every way imaginable. It’s just Philip, his mom, and his mom’s best friend, Muffy Onderdonk, whose job is evidently to remind Mimi, who has mild dementia, that it’s Philip and not her other son, the late William, who’s hosting the trip. Taking immediately to what she calls the Copeland Party of Three, Nell does her best to make sure that the Ziti Variations live up to Mimi’s expectations, however fleetingly the octogenarian remembers them. So Nell is more than a little put out when the body of would-be real estate developer Renata Vitale is found on the edge of the olive orchard that borders the villa. Renata’s murder is a threat not only to the Ziti Variations, but also to Nell’s boyfriend, Pete Orlandini, who is Chef’s son, the owner of the orchard, and the police chief’s favorite suspect in Renata’s death.

Cole’s solid characters, sharp dialogue, and clever puzzle provide a recipe for more than just ziti.



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He was a good cop until he ran into a bad one.

“An ex-cop-turned-pastor must use his investigative skills to figure out what happened to a missing clergyman in Gresham’s latest series mystery.”

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ISBN: 978-1-956394-03-0 [paperback]

“...an engaging tale...”

“An entertaining and....poignant work of detective fiction.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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DEATH OF A KNIT WIT

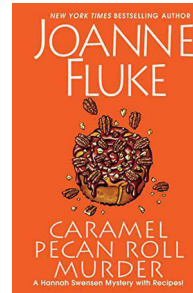
Ehrhart, Peggy
Kensington (304 pp.)
\$8.99 paper | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-4967-3390-0

When a college professor is poisoned at a conference, the unofficial sleuths of Arborville, New Jersey, spring into action.

Unlike Pamela Paterson, who's been instrumental in arranging a knitting bee at Wendelstaff College's conference on fiber arts and crafts, Dr. Robert Greer-Gordon Critter is anything but a beloved figure. His former wife calls him out at a banquet for stealing her ideas, and Pamela overhears him dumping an unseen woman, just one of many he's seduced. After he shows up at Sufficiency House, where the knitters are toiling away, he flirts with the women, drinks some coffee, has a sudden attack, and dies. Although the police are never happy to have their help, Pamela and her reporter bestie, Bettina, are old

hands at crime-solving and promptly begin a behind-the-scenes investigation. As they work their way through sumptuous dinners cooked by Bettina's husband and delectable desserts at the Knit & Nibble meetings, they pick up plenty of gossip about the pompous, unpopular Critter and discover any number of people who might have rejoiced in his death. Pamela's boss at Fiber Craft is dismayed that she was involved in the incident, which has naturally gone viral, and the bad publicity could jeopardize her job. Another murder that may or may not be connected turns up the heat on Pamela and Bettina to solve the crime.

Though the suspects are upstaged by descriptions of meals and clothes, this is one of the best in the series.



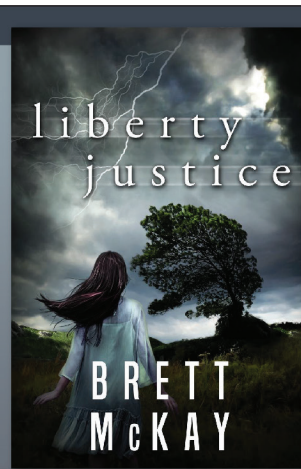
CARMEL PECAN ROLL MURDER

Fluke, Joanne
Kensington (304 pp.)
\$27.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-4967-3608-6

A fishing tournament turns deadly in peaceful Lake Eden—and not just for the fish.

The Walleye Fishing Tournament gives baker Hannah Swensen the perfect excuse to move out of her temporary digs at Norman Rhodes' house. Hannah's been occupying the master suite while Norman's been staying in his own guest room while she struggles to get over the grisly murder that took place in her apartment. Even if Hannah were willing to brave a return home, her cat, Moishe, freaks out every time she brings him there. Still, Hannah is concerned that people will get the wrong idea about her and Norman, her sort-of boyfriend before a disastrous marriage left her an early widow. So Dick and Sally Laughlin's offer of a room at the Lake Eden Inn in order for Hannah to help with their sumptuous—and early—breakfast buffet is too good to pass up. Too bad she doesn't pass up the afternoon trip out on the lake with Norman, where they spot a boat drifting aimlessly near the lily garden. Inside, the police find Sonny Bowman, the obnoxious host of a fishing show, shot through the head. Naturally, there are suspects aplenty, but Hannah wants to make sure the Lake Eden police find the right one. Will her investigation place the plucky baker in danger? You betcha.

Like the victim's boat, Fluke's throughline seems to be going in circles.



ISBN-10: 1948051796
ISBN-13: 978-1948051798

Raising your mother can be deadly.

"A brisk and affecting chase narrative with dynamic, well-developed characters."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

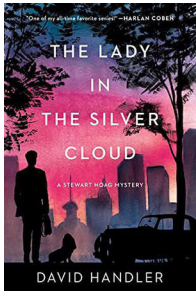
"In *LIBERTY JUSTICE*, Brett McKay blends the violence of drug kings seeking revenge with the hope of a young girl seeking a better life, taking the reader on an action-packed journey that pivots from bloodshed to poetry. And he does it flawlessly."

—Barbara Conrey, *USA Today* Best-selling
Author of *Nowhere Near Goodbye*

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“This one’s witty, clever, and fun, and it’s worthy of the great Raymond Chandler.”

THE GOODBYE COAST



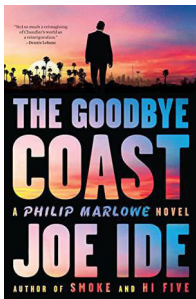
THE LADY IN THE SILVER CLOUD

Handler, David
Mysterious Press (279 pp.)
\$25.95 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-61316-291-0

Headline news: Movie star Merilee Nash wants her ex, sometime novelist Stewart Hoag, back! There are a couple of murders, too.

Halloween 1993 finds Merilee still off shooting *The Sun Also Rises* and Hoagy holed up in the Central Park West apartment she’s graciously loaned him, writing away furiously. Gary Kates, one of Merilee’s neighbors on the 16th floor, is a corporate raider who’s brought misery to hardworking families across America by buying companies and brutally downsizing their workforces. He’s such a natural candidate for murder that it’s a double shock when Muriel Cantrell, an aging widow who’s nice as peach cobbler, is found with a broken neck on the 15th floor landing of the service stairs. Nobody from first-shift doorman Frank O’Brien to Bullets Durmond, the mobbed-up ex-bouncer who’s driven Muriel around for years in her 1955 Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, has an unkind word to say about her. But that’s before detective Lt. Romaine Very and Hoagy, who ruefully and repeatedly describes himself as “the first major new literary voice of the 1980s,” begin digging into her past. Hoagy, euphoric to find Merilee not only suddenly returned from the shoot after her director’s been fired over creative differences, but openly eager to get back together, is especially motivated to help Very uncover the skeletons in the closets of Muriel, her old friend Myrna Waldman in Glen Cove, and pretty much everyone else who’s ever passed through her gloriously upscale building. There are so many suspects, in fact, that the big reveal is more like a little squib.

Adultery, blackmail, trick-or-treaters, unseemly ties to organized crime, and New York in the 1990s. What’s not to like?



THE GOODBYE COAST
A Philip Marlowe Novel

Ide, Joe
Mulholland Books/Little, Brown
(320 pp.)
\$28.00 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-316-45927-3

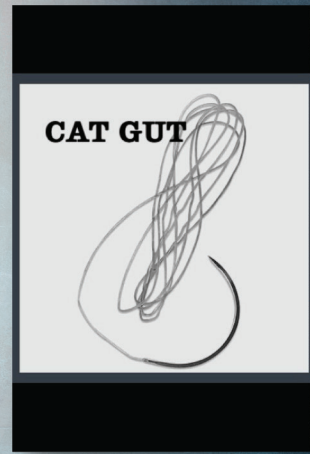
Ide brings Philip Marlowe to modern-day LA in this hard-boiled noir PI yarn.

Marlowe is a private investigator in modern-day Los Angeles. His father, Emmet, is an alcoholic cop still mourning the loss of his beloved wife and wishing his son had become a cop. The famous but fast-fading movie star Kendra James reluctantly hires Marlowe to find her 17-year-old runaway stepdaughter, Cody. That’s not a hard task, but the two

women hate each other, and both deserve it. Kendra’s husband, Terry, had been shot to death two weeks earlier, and she hardly cares one bit. The guy was just a washed-up moviemaker anyway. And Cody won’t come home, accusing Kendra of killing her dad. Emmet and Marlowe have serious father-son issues, but Dad gives him critical help, especially by sheltering and protecting Cody. Then Marlowe unsuccessfully tries to turn down a second case: Englishwoman Ren Stewart’s young son, Jeremy, has been kidnapped by his father, and Ren is desperate to bring him back to London. The tension builds as the two plotlines intersect with the aid of Russian and Armenian gangsters. Every character has great lines, and the descriptions alone make the story worth reading. “The movie went by like a cement wall taking a walk.” “Freddie’s smile imploded, as if his throat were sucking in his features.” Kendra tells Marlowe that Cody’s relationship with her brother, Noah, was “like a reenactment of the war in Vietnam. Firefights and bombing runs for years on end.” Fans of the genre know that Philip Marlowe is the creation of the late Raymond Chandler, beginning with *The Big Sleep* in 1939. Chandler’s Marlowe has long been considered the quintessential

CAT GUT

BY SAUL FALCONER



**RAGE, PITY,
TERROR,
REMORSE,
DESPAIR, LOVE**

“A clear concern for humanity, reminiscent of Philip K. Dick’s dystopian fiction, appears throughout all of Falconer’s stories.”

ISBN: 979-8546048656

“A subtle and meaningful collection about humankind under stress.”

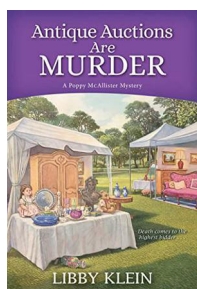
—Kirkus Reviews

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private investigator, relentless and resolute in his work. There is tension, violence, humor, and a bit of sadness, with romance just out of the hero's reach.

This one's witty, clever, and fun, and it's worthy of the great Raymond Chandler.



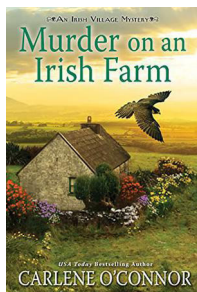
ANTIQUA AUCTIONS ARE MURDER

Klein, Libby
Kensington (368 pp.)
\$8.99 paper | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-4967-3314-6

A Cape May B&B looks more and more like an insane asylum.

Poppy McAllister runs the Butterfly Wings Bed and Breakfast with her eccentric Aunt Ginny, whose Victorian home is perfect for the purpose. Aunt Ginny's oddball friends are always getting Poppy in trouble, and this time, Thelma Davis, whose relatives are deep into the antiques trade, involves her in yet another murder. Thelma's brother, prizewinning gardener Courtney, has two children who are already fighting over their inheritance and a stepdaughter desperate to get pregnant. There seems to be nothing Courtney's son Auggie won't do to inherit the family antiques business, so when his lifeless body tumbles out of an armoire in the middle of an auction at Adams Galleries, stabbed with a priceless stake from a vampire-hunting kit, Poppy has a plethora of suspects. Nor is murder her only problem. A widow with a body image problem, she can't believe her gorgeous boyfriend, Gia, really loves her. Her latest group of guests are all kooks, her cook hates her, and the chambermaid has such a bad case of sunburn that Poppy has to press her late husband's mother, who's never cleaned anything in her life, into service. Competing dealer Grover Prickle certainly had it in for Auggie, as does Blake Adams, the auction house owner, and yes, there are even more enemies. Overrun with Courtney's gifts of kohlrabi and her nonstop annoying guests, Poppy struggles to crack the case.

Suspects and recipes galore don't make up for zanies who strain belief in a story ripe for some judicious pruning.



MURDER ON AN IRISH FARM

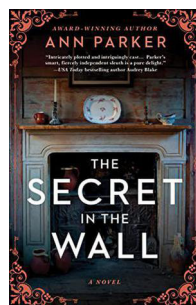
O'Connor, Carlene
Kensington (304 pp.)
\$26.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-4967-3080-0

The much-anticipated nuptials of DS Macdara Flannery and Garda Siobhán O'Sullivan are rudely interrupted when the best man shows up late and reports a dead body.

In preparation for the blessed event, Dara's purchased an abandoned dairy farm for their new home.

Not to be outdone, Siobhán's brother, James, has discovered a skeleton in its long-disused slurry pit. The couple's new neighbors, Gladys and Benji Burns, tentatively identify the body as that of Tommy Caffrey, who vanished the morning of his planned wedding to Gladys, leaving disaster in his wake, 50 years ago to the day. Also missing at the time was 30,000 pounds that Gladys' brother Alan O'Leary and his friend Howard Dunn had planned to use to start a business. The whole family remains oddly intertwined with Benji's first wife, Rose, who works with birds of prey, and their adopted son, Joseph, now a potter, who lives nearby. All of them are less than truthful in their descriptions of past events, and Siobhán's convinced that someone deliberately manipulated her wedding day to commemorate the anniversary of Tommy's death. When the family sneaks into the crime scene to pay their respects, they find Alan dead in the pit. The fresh corpse and the threats it betokens to the living make solving the mystery even more urgent and even more uncomfortable, since the likely suspects are all family members.

Fans of charming Irish mysteries will delight in the ways this convoluted case ensnares the heroine and her supporting cast.



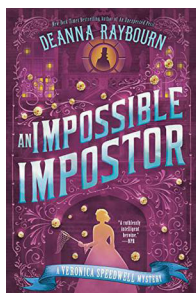
THE SECRET IN THE WALL

Parker, Ann
Poisoned Pen (400 pp.)
\$15.99 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-4642-1494-3

The year 1882 launches Inez Stanert—sleuth, card shark, musician, saloon owner, and helper of ambitious women—on another adventure.

Inez, who exchanged the stifling lifestyle of her wealthy East Coast family for a wild life in Leadville, Colorado, now runs a music store in San Francisco while using her extra cash to help women start their own businesses. Her latest venture, partnering with widow Moira Krause to purchase the house next door in order to expand her rooming house, proves a dangerous investment. A party to break through the walls of the attached houses is disrupted when a skeleton and a bag of gold are discovered in the wall. Antonia Gizzi, Inez's 12-year-old ward who's lately been obsessed with pirates, jumps to the conclusion that the gold is pirate treasure. While Inez works to retrieve the gold from the police, Moira wants to learn the victim's identity so she can give him a proper burial. She hires private detective Wolter de Bruijn, whose path had crossed Inez's back in Leadville. Antonia has befriended Moira's daughter, Charlotte, and by chance they discover a secret passage in the old house that leads to a number of hidden rooms filled with fascinating relics that convince them pirates are indeed involved. Unfortunately, the people most keenly interested in the gold are not long-dead buccaneers but active, living men with dark secrets to hide. Inez and de Bruijn team up to solve several murders while protecting the girls, who are still concealing their discovery.

A convoluted mystery, based on true events and replete with rich period detail, that's a delight to read.



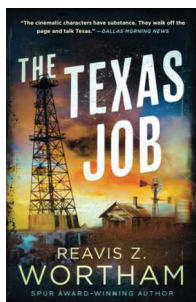
AN IMPOSSIBLE IMPOSTOR

Raybourn, Deanna
 Berkley (336 pp.)
 \$26.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-0-593-19729-5

After her turn impersonating a princess in *An Unexpected Peril* (2021), Veronica Speedwell is pitched into a case that could ruin her life.

It's 1889. Veronica and her lover, Stoker Templeton-Vane, have returned to their jobs at the Earl of Rosemorrان's estate, where they are restoring and cataloging a vast collection that will eventually grace a museum. The head of Special Branch, Sir Hugo Montgomerie, asks them to visit an estate where his goddaughter, Euphemia Hathaway, lives with her family; they've been upset by the arrival of someone who may be Jonathan Hathaway, the heir reported killed in the eruption of Krakatoa. Jonathan's been missing so long that few people can identify him with certainty, and only Veronica, who knew him well, can tell if he's an impostor. Once she sees him, Veronica instantly recognizes Jonathan as Harry Spenlove, whom she'd married as a young woman and thought dead. Unfortunately, she's never mentioned her marriage to Stoker, so she declines to reveal the imposture. Soon she's caught up in a theft from the jewel collection the dowager Lady Hathaway amassed when she lived in India. Veronica naturally suspects Spenlove, who's always lived by his wits. She feels forced to support him while she ponders a way to tell Stoker the truth as they fight off attacks from others seeking a most valuable diamond.

Plenty of harrowing adventures await the intrepid sleuths, but Veronica's efforts to save her relationship carry the story.



THE TEXAS JOB

Wortham, Reavis Z.
 Poisoned Pen (416 pp.)
 \$15.99 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-1-4642-1570-4

The latest case for Texas Ranger Tom Bell takes him back to the dawn of his career in 1931. It's quite an eventful time.

Tom's been sent to Pine Top in search of Clete Ferras, who's wanted for a murder in Laredo. Pine Top and environs, however, turn out to be so corrupt that a single homicide barely registers. Together with his pal Quinn Walker, Ferras is bent on acquiring drilling rights to every farm in the area by hook or by crook, and some of those crooks are mighty crooked. Not to be outdone, Walker is dosing his wife, Mallie Whitehorse Walker, with wood alcohol and oleander because he has no intention of waiting till her natural decease to assume control of her extensive land holdings. Capt. Enrique Delgado has already arrived to rein in the criminal conspiracy fostered by oilmen like octopus O.L. Caldwell, but clearly there's far too much

crime in Pine Top for just one Ranger to handle. Tom's mission is instantly complicated by the news that a local woman named Hazel Freeman has been shot to death. The conspiracy, however, has roots that reach far beyond Pine Top to Chicago gangster Cherubino Moretti. When Tom shoots the three men Walker and Ferras have hired to kill him, they ask Moretti for help, and he dispatches six of his most reliable professionals. Readers who've already seen Tom grown old in earlier installments of Wortham's Texas Red River series will be rubbing their hands in eager anticipation of what happens next.

A familiar but powerful tale of a solitary hero confronting a web of conspirators against hopeless odds.

ISBN: 978-0-9977181-3-3

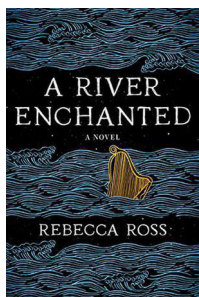
FROM THE AUTHOR OF KIRKUS STARRED REVIEW, HOLI COLORS!

"From the pacing, word selection, and even the choice of font, THE VAAHANA TALE perfectly combines all of the elements that define a children's 'classic.'"

—IndieReader

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY



A RIVER ENCHANTED

Ross, Rebecca
Harper Voyager (480 pp.)
\$27.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-06-305598-8



A magical island welcomes back its prodigal son in a tale that blends political intrigue with elements of a fantasy thriller.

Thanks to a centuries-old curse, the controlling clans of the east and west live in completely different worlds on the Isle of Cadence. The Breccans in the west can wield magic themselves, but the land is unyielding and the spirits there, hostile. In the east, the Tamerlaines weave magic into objects at a steep cost to their well-being, yet they maintain bountiful relationships with both the land and its spirits. The Tamerlaines sent Jack away from Cadence when he was just 11 years old, forcing him to leave the magical island he'd always called home and train as a bard at a mundane university. He comes home a decade later, after he receives a letter from the Laird of the East asking him to return. After making the dangerous journey homeward, however, he learns that it was his childhood rival, the laird's daughter, Adaira, who summoned him. The spirits have kidnapped two young girls, and Adaira wants Jack's help to find out why. The young bard finds himself torn between his successful career as a music teacher on the mainland and his family—his mother and the younger sister he didn't know he had. When a third girl disappears, however, it becomes clear that no spirit is responsible for the east's troubles. Here, Ross has built a fully realized world clearly inspired by Scottish myth and legend and thick with heroes. Jack and Adaira are not alone in their fight but are instead surrounded by a bevy of well-rounded kith and kin. Readers begin to sense just how deeply intertwined the lives of the Tamerlaines are the moment Jack returns home, and they'll quickly realize this is not his story but that of Cadence itself.

A rich fantasy of bards and bairns in which the magical island setting becomes the main character.

ROMANCE



DELILAH GREEN DOESN'T CARE

Blake, Ashley Herring
Berkley (400 pp.)
\$16.00 paper | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-593-33640-3

A woman revisits old pain and experiences new love when she returns to her hometown for her stepsister's wedding.

After a childhood filled with grief from the loss of first her mother and then her father by the time she was 10, and having felt unloved by Isabel, her stepmother, and Astrid, her stepsister, 30-year-old Delilah Green is finally making her own way in the world. Living boldly and unapologetically as a struggling photographer in New York City, Delilah keeps her hookups casual and her focus solely on her art and her own well-being. So, when Astrid asks Delilah to return to Bright Falls to photograph her wedding, Delilah can't think of anything she'd rather do less. But with a sorely needed \$15,000 payday attached to the event—and guilt over her father's wishes for the family to stick together—Delilah reluctantly agrees. She expects to trudge through Isabel's indifference and Astrid's iciness until she can escape back to New York to prepare for a make-or-break showing of her work as part of a queer exhibition at the Whitney Museum. What she doesn't expect is Astrid's childhood best friend, Claire Sutherland. Claire has a busy life raising her 11-year-old daughter, Ruby, dealing with her flaky ex, Josh, and running her bookstore in town. But from the moment Claire sees Astrid's formerly gloomy stepsister all grown up, there's an instant attraction neither one can deny. Thrown together for many booze-soaked pre-wedding events—and an ill-advised plot to get Astrid to dump her horrible fiance before she walks down the aisle—the women reopen old wounds, heal past hurts, and realize just how much they have yet to learn about each other, their loved ones, and themselves.

Blake captures all the complications of family, friendship, and romance with humor and heart.



ICE PLANET BARBARIANS

Dixon, Ruby
Berkley (336 pp.)
\$12.89 paper | Nov. 30, 2021
978-0-593-54602-4



A woman stolen by aliens crash-lands on an ice planet and finds love.

Dixon's wildly popular series—it's a fan favorite on TikTok and has a podcast dedicated to deconstructing each

“A satisfying, sexy, and fast-paced alien romance.”

BARBARIAN ALIEN

episode—is finally coming to print. In this first installment of the series, Georgie and at least a dozen other 22-year-old women are stolen from their homes on Earth by green aliens. Something goes wrong, and the aliens abandon their human cargo on an icy planet the women dub Not-Hoth. After engineering an escape plan, Georgie becomes their de facto leader. She bundles up and trudges out to find help and meets Vektal, a 7-foot blue alien and the leader of his tribe, the Sakh. His people have developed a symbiotic relationship with an organism called the khui, which allows the Sakh to survive the brutally cold temperatures of their home planet. Vektal's people mate for life, but since there are very few women left, he has resigned himself to life without a partner. When he sees Georgie and his khui resonates, a physical response akin to purring, he knows she is destined to be his mate. Explorations of coercion, consent, and free will are woven throughout the story. Vektal's unorthodox greeting shows that consent might operate differently in his world; but in the end, he learns that humans trapped in the worst of circumstances will still fight to control their own destinies. The book is fast-paced and sexy, but the major appeal might be Vektal. He is a romance main character stripped down to the core: desperate to find his partner and willing to do anything to keep her happy.

The perfect blend of sweet, sexy romance and a riveting, high-stakes survival story.



BARBARIAN ALIEN

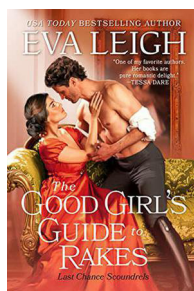
Dixon, Ruby
 Berkley (336 pp.)
 \$14.40 paper | Jan. 25, 2022
 978-0-593-54603-1

A human woman is kidnapped by an alien who believes she's his mate.

Liz has had a pretty bad week—she was stolen from her Oklahoma farm by little green aliens and transported millions of miles from Earth. After something goes wrong on the ship, the green aliens abandon Liz and the rest of the human women on a cold ice planet with two distant suns. The planet's local inhabitants, the sa-khui, are a small tribe of large blue aliens that have developed a symbiotic relationship with the khui, a glowing space worm that helps their bodies withstand the bitter climate. The tribe has suffered devastating population losses from hunting accidents and sickness, leaving them fewer than 30 members, only 4 of whom are women. Raahosh is a hunter who resigned himself to a life of loneliness, but when his khui resonates for Liz, he knows she is his mate. Rather than chance being separated from her, he spirits her away to his hidden cave, hoping to prove himself worthy of her. Liz is furious at being kidnapped again and is determined to make as many choices as she can for herself. She demands to hunt with Raahosh, making her own bow and arrows to prove her worth. Raahosh and Liz have explosive chemistry and learn to respect each other's strengths. Liz is an especially appealing character: feisty, brave, and stubborn. She's the perfect match

for the taciturn Raahosh, who wants to be loved for who he is and valued as an equal partner. In the background of their romance, Dixon shows how the sa-khui and humans are beginning the hard work of building a new culture together.

A satisfying, sexy, and fast-paced alien romance.



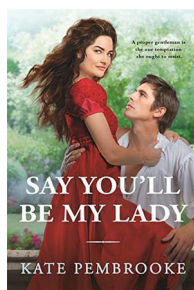
THE GOOD GIRL'S GUIDE TO RAKES

Leigh, Eva
 Avon/HarperCollins (384 pp.)
 \$8.99 paper | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-0-06-308627-2

A scoundrel in need of a wife meets his match with a lady who has a secret taste for the scandalous.

After Kieran Ransome, third son of an earl, plays a role in a scandal alongside his brother, Finn, and best friend, Dom, the three are given an ultimatum: Find upstanding wives or be financially cut off from their parents. Kieran asks Dom's prim and proper sister, Celeste Kilburn, to help by introducing him into respectable social circles. She offers him a deal—in exchange, he must show her the less proper parts of London, like gaming hells, before she has to marry a pompous earl. Celeste grew up poor, and even though her father's business turned them wealthy, they are still not fully accepted by society, and she feels her family's reputation falls on her shoulders. As Celeste and Kieran's bargain gets afoot, they fall for each other, but the expectations forced on them from society and their families stand in their way. Many romances explore young women fighting against the patriarchal standards that dictate their lives. This story not only does that with aplomb, but also considers the intersection of gender and class. It's notable for showcasing how these trappings also hurt the seemingly privileged like Kieran, who has felt the need to hide the truth of his emotional poet self because of unrealistic expectations of masculinity. The romance is never weighed down by these complex conflicts but rather is bolstered because of them. Delightful dirty talk and dazzling prose contribute to making this book a standout.

A captivating series kickoff from an author soaring to a new level of excellence.



SAY YOU'LL BE MY LADY

Pembroke, Kate
 Forever (368 pp.)
 \$8.99 paper | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-1-5387-0377-9

An upright gentleman's idea of honor is challenged when he's attracted by a resolutely unconventional lady.

Since Lady Serena Wynter has already loved and lost, she cares little for social mores and chooses to dedicate

herself to social causes instead. As one of the founders of the Wednesday Afternoon Social Club, she spearheads several of the club's ventures. Charles Townshend, a Member of Parliament and former boxer, has always been attracted to Serena for her devotion and passion, but he often argues with her about the risks she takes while pursuing the causes dear to her. Although they frequently cross swords, Serena and Charles are close friends. Just when Serena finally feels ready to acknowledge their mutual attraction, Charles, already leery of the class differences that separate them, is rocked by revelations about his past. Serena must convince Charles that the factors pushing them apart pale in comparison to the inexorable pull they feel toward each other. The second book of the *Unconventional Ladies of Mayfair* trilogy traces the growth and evolution of the society comprising unconventional women that was established in the first installment. Serena's trauma is handled with empathy and understanding, but Charles' problems receive a perfunctory treatment and remain unresolved. Serena's past explains the passion and dedication she exhibits toward certain causes, but Pembroke misses several beautiful opportunities to underline the connections between the spirited heroine's previous traumas and her present proclivities. Several threads linking Serena's experiences with those of the women around her also remain underdeveloped. But strong friendships between the like-minded women of the Wednesday Afternoon Social Club form the emotional core of the story.

An undemanding Regency-era romance more reminiscent of a fun costume drama than an immersive period film.



IN A NEW YORK MINUTE

Spencer, Kate
 Forever (320 pp.)
 \$26.00 | March 15, 2022
 978-1-5387-3762-0



Anything can happen in New York, especially when an embarrassing subway encounter transforms into a tender, *When Harry Met Sally...*-worthy romance.

Francesca Doyle is having the worst morning of her life. First, she gets booted from the too-good-to-be-true interior design company Spayce, and then her green silk dress splits in two on the crowded Q train. When a handsome stranger politely offers her his Gucci suit jacket, Franny and "Hot Suit" unknowingly become viral sensations. They're dubbed the "#SubwayQTs," and it seems as if all of New York City is rooting for their meet-cute to blossom into true love—except for the couple themselves. Franny isn't the type "financial do-gooder" Hayes Montgomery III usually falls for—he even says so himself on live TV. Hayes is shy and all numbers, while Franny is loud, clumsy (almost too clumsy), and unfiltered. Yet, the city just can't seem to keep these two apart, and soon enough Franny finds herself working side by side with Hayes on a remodeling project. When one Friday night date turns into 48 hours, Franny and Hayes leave all of their platonic

feelings on the other side of the Brooklyn Bridge. Spencer weaves a laugh-out-loud, endearing tale of friendship, family, and love through the honesty of her characters—Franny's best friends, Lola and Cleo, are standouts—and captures exactly what it's like to feel lost and found in the big city: "There's a split second where the city hits you, greets you, slobbers a kiss on your face like a puppy. It's a jolt, and a shock, and then you move on. But there's a part of you, somewhere, that marvels at it every time." Franny and Hayes both have their flaws, but their moments of self-realization are appreciated and believable, and the romantic tension and words unspoken will leave you visibly swooning page after page.

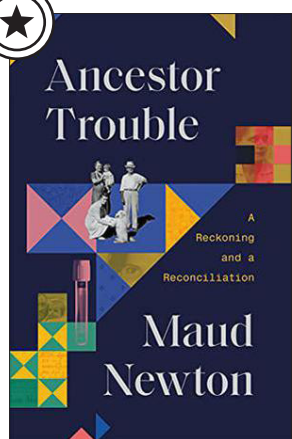
A charming love story that speaks to all the welcome surprises that await in New York City.

NONFICTION

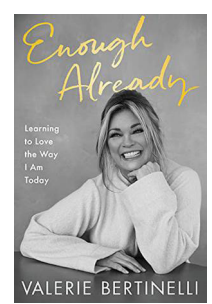


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ANCESTOR TROUBLE
A Reckoning and a Reconciliation
 Newton, Maud
 Random House (384 pp.)
 \$28.00 | March 29, 2022
 978-0-8129-9792-7



ENOUGH ALREADY
Learning To Love the Way I Am Today
 Bertinelli, Valerie
 Mariner Books (256 pp.)
 \$27.00 | Jan. 18, 2022
 978-0-358-56736-3

The actor and Food Network host dishes up delightful recipes as she reflects on how she learned to see beyond a troubled self-image and embrace joy.

Bertinelli (b. 1960) seemed to live a charmed life throughout her adolescence and early adulthood. Catapulted to fame as a teenager in the 1970s sitcom *One Day at a Time*, she went on to win two Golden Globe Awards and marry her rocker “soulmate,” Eddie Van Halen. But her early TV successes did not bring about the movie career she desired, and her husband became a substance abuser whose volatility led a reluctant Bertinelli to file for divorce. These “currents of unhappiness, sadness, and discontent” caused her to struggle with her weight and, later, to take on work as a spokesperson for Jenny Craig. This decision, which Bertinelli thought would fix her problems, instead put her in an “all-or-nothing situation where the stakes were not only disappointment but also public shame and humiliation if I didn’t reach my goal, to say nothing of the devastation that this would cause privately.” Reflecting on her choices, the author realized that her poor body image was the result of growing up with parents who did not express personal pain and a mother who “ended up on a lifelong diet because she ate her feelings instead of working to understand them.” Ultimately, however, food allowed Bertinelli to redefine her life. A trip to Italy led to the publication of a cookbook, two popular cooking shows, and release from the self-isolating “dieting mindset” that had imprisoned her. The author now understands food as the thing that brings friends and family together even during dark times—e.g., the pandemic lockdowns or the final months of her beloved ex-husband’s battle with cancer. Interspersed throughout with the author’s favorite recipes, this thoughtful, bighearted book is sure to be a hit with Bertinelli fans and those with an appetite for stories of hard-won self-acceptance.

A warmly intimate memoir.

CLOSING THE YEAR WITH TWO ICONS OF ENTERTAINMENT



Leah Overstreet

THOUGH BOOK LOVERS are scrambling to get just the right book for their loved ones, December is a quiet month in the publishing industry, featuring only a small percentage of releases compared to the chaotic, mountainous terrain of September through November. Nonetheless, there are plenty of December books to recommend, including a pair of intriguing biographies about

two of the most significant artists of the past century: Greta Garbo and Johnny Cash.

In *Garbo* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Dec. 7), eminent writer and publisher Robert Gottlieb—a former editor-in-chief of Knopf, Simon & Schuster, and the *New Yorker* who has authored books on George Balanchine and Charles Dickens’ family, among other topics—provides what our starred review calls a “a skillful, admiring biography of the film star of yore.” Our critic also calls it “a smoothly flowing book that provides ample answers while never quite solving all of Garbo’s mysteries.”

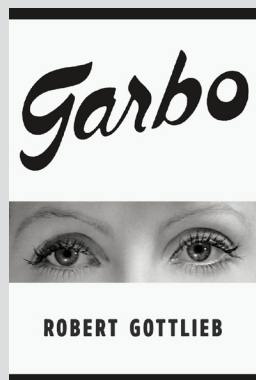
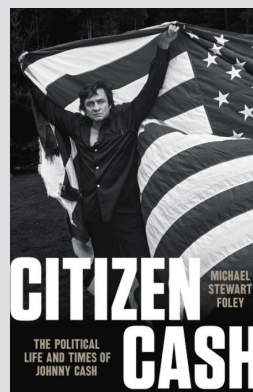
To be sure, Garbo was before my time, and I haven’t seen many of her films, but I was intrigued and stimulated by the author’s deft portrait, especially the exploration of the actor’s desire to leave the Hollywood life behind; indeed, writes our reviewer, she “took exceptional pains to live out the rest of her long life away from the public eye, spending 50 years away from the film world while never being allowed to truly leave it.” It’s always fascinating when a cultural star walks away on their own terms, and Gottlieb effectively captures that crucial aspect of a life “marked by a hermeticism without equal in the film world.”

Unlike Garbo, Johnny Cash spent nearly five decades in the public eye, recording all the way up to his death in 2003. While there have been numerous biographies of the Man in Black—check out Robert Hilburn’s 2013 *Johnny Cash*, the musician’s 1997 autobiography, Alan Light’s generously illustrated *Johnny Cash*

(2018), and *Hello, I’m Johnny Cash*, an excellent biography for kids—Michael Stewart Foley’s *Citizen Cash: The Political Life and Times of Johnny Cash* (Basic, Dec. 7) is unique in its incisive dissection of Cash’s politics, a considerable element in his life. This was a man who, our starred review notes, “rarely shied away from discussing politics. In fact, he devoted much of his musical career to spotlighting issues faced by minorities and other groups that he felt were underrepresented. However, as the author demonstrates, Cash was often misunderstood. At times, his views appeared incongruent to members of his audience, such as when he paid tribute to Confederate soldiers and endorsed equality for Black Americans in the same episode of his eponymous show or when he publicly expressed support for Nixon’s handling of Vietnam while at the same time calling for peace. In this deeply researched, unique examination, Foley looks at the many reasons Cash was drawn to particular issues.”

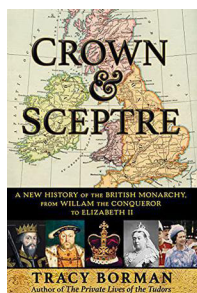
I’ve never been a fan of the just-play-your-music-and-don’t-take-a-stance crowd, and neither was Cash. Foley opens up new avenues to view his politics, conflicted as they often were (though whose aren’t?). As the author writes, Cash “rarely took ‘stands’ on political issues in conventional ways; instead, he approached each issue based on feeling.” In this illuminating deep dive—which, of course, also looks at Cash’s *At Folsom Prison* and *At San Quentin* albums, works that reflected his stance on prison reform—Foley, “with sufficient detail and a gift for storytelling,” gives us a “powerful biography that will leave fans with a newfound respect for the Man in Black.”

Eric Liebetrau is the nonfiction and managing editor.



“A superb synthesis of historical analysis, politics, and top-notch royal gossip.”

CROWN & SCEPTRE



CROWN & SCEPTRE
A New History of the British Monarchy, From William the Conqueror to Elizabeth II

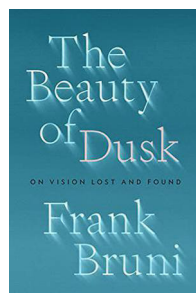
Borman, Tracy
 Atlantic Monthly (576 pp.)
 \$32.00 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-8021-5910-6



An impressive synthesis of more than 1,000 years of the British monarchy, combining personal stories, geopolitical context, and historical background to reveal the essence of royal power through the ages.

Prolific British historian Borman outdoes herself in this expansive survey. Writing with a fluidity and grace matched by her authority on the subject, the author makes the stories of each monarch, from the incompetent to the sadistic to the praiseworthy, interesting and memorable. Despite more than 500 pages and countless kings and queens, she keeps the pages turning, providing adequate context and vivid and personal portraits of her subjects. The author highlights the particular dilemmas of women rulers—not just the indomitable Elizabeth I, but also Queen Anne (1665-1714), who suffered multiple miscarriages, found refuge in lesbian affairs, and “exploited one power that Parliament could never touch: the almost supernatural aura that had long surrounded the crown.” Readers will learn that shocking royal behavior is nothing new. Today’s House of Windsor is a staid group compared to its predecessors: Henry I (1100-1135), for example, “was addicted to women and had as many as twenty-four bastards by his numerous mistresses—more than any other English king.” Borman shows that the monarchy often hung by the slenderest of threads and was preserved at a terrible cost: murders, executions, assassinations, carnage on the battlefield. She traces the ancient sources of royal rituals still in use today and exposes the darker roots of power—numerous kings and queens grew wealthy from the international slave trade until it was abolished in the 19th century. Today’s monarchy has survived wars, religious turmoil, plagues, disease, fires, and invasions. Will it endure? It’s an open question, but Borman observes that the British monarchy has prevailed because it understands that its power is largely symbolic, shaping and supporting British culture and an enormous tourism industry. After reading this splendid book, readers may bet on its survival, at least in this century.

A superb synthesis of historical analysis, politics, and top-notch royal gossip.

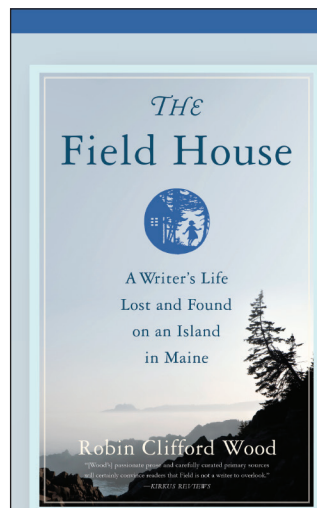


THE BEAUTY OF DUSK
On Vision Lost and Found

Bruni, Frank
 Avid Reader Press (320 pp.)
 \$28.00 | March 1, 2022
 978-1-982108-57-1

How losing sight in one eye launched Bruni into an uplifting exploration of human potential.

Bruni, longtime journalist and *New York Times* restaurant reviewer and op-ed columnist, now a professor at Duke, warns readers to “brace yourself for a boatload of clichés and jump ship if they’re going to bother you.” As he notes, greener grass, silver linings, and making lemonade from lemons are just “down-market analogues of insights,” many of which he experienced after a stroke in his sleep left him functionally half blind. Some of his account of how he dealt with this infirmity is intriguing, and some feels like sentimental, self-help happy talk gone off the deep end (a problem



Two strong women, two different centuries, one old house where their lives intersect on a tiny, magical island off the coast of Maine.

“Before I read this book, I had never known Rachel Field. And now? I’ll never forget her.”

—Allen Adams, *The Maine Edge*

ISBN: 978-1-64742-045-1

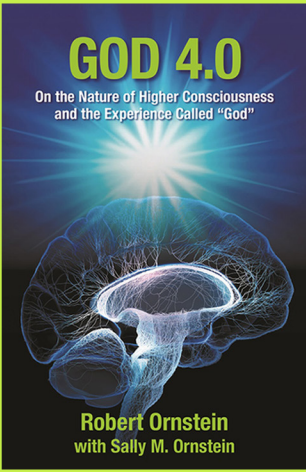
“I suspect this extraordinary book will be one of the best you read this year. It will surely be one of mine.”

—Mary Jo Doig, *Story Circle Network*

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that characterized some sections of his previous memoir, *Born Round*). In one chapter, Bruni uses the suicides of his much-envied colleague Anthony Bourdain (Bruni's discussion of Bourdain is excellent) and designer Kate Spade to advance his theory of "sandwich boards": We have no idea what other people are going through; if only we wore signs listing our hidden troubles. Being alert to those sandwich boards and being able to "recast limits" and "reconceptualize loss" are "the overlapping three pillars of perspective," which is the ultimate saving grace. During the writing process, the author spent time documenting "starfish," people who discover new abilities after losing others, like a starfish grows back a new arm after losing one—e.g., deaf composers and blind photographers. The author also discovered a little starfish in himself, locating a dropped phone in a thicket in pitch-dark Central Park. Bruni also explores some of the positive sides of aging: Look at Nancy Pelosi and Ruth Bader Ginsburg! Joe Biden, whom Bruni attacked during the campaign as too old, is now revealed as wiser and less awkwardly garrulous.

An uneven but poignant, often wise look at how nearly everything bad that happens to us can actually be good. So cheer up.



GOD 4.0
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and the Experience Called "God"

Robert Ornstein
with Sally M. Ornstein

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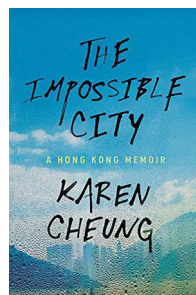
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THE IMPOSSIBLE CITY A Hong Kong Memoir

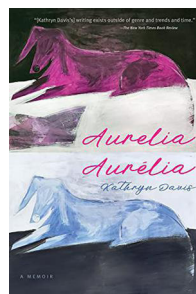
Cheung, Karen
Random House (352 pp.)
\$28.00 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-0-593-24143-1



An intimate look at Hong Kong by an "ambivalent" native who never appreciated it until the incremental seizure of freedoms by mainland China.

Cheung is one of the few in her cohort trying to stay in Hong Kong and make a living despite the crackdown, and she has dedicated herself to getting to know her city as its character, she fears, is slipping away. The colonial handover from Britain occurred on July 1, 1997, when the author was just 4 years old. "At Tiananmen Square, where less than a decade ago students were killed asking for democracy," she writes, "Beijingers are waving little handheld flags with the Hong Kong bauhinia flower stamped onto it, celebrating our return." Cheung's parents separated, and her mother went to Singapore with her younger brother; the author lived in Hong Kong with her critical, authoritative father but was largely raised by her paternal grandmother, who she felt was the only one who loved her. She could not wait to leave home at age 18. Her generation felt they had a grace period of decades until China actually took over—"one country, two systems model to guarantee the city's way of life"—but by 2014, China was cracking down on Hong Kong's election autonomy, actions that led to the emergence of the Umbrella Movement. At this point, Cheung, now a journalist, grew politicized, and she also suffered debilitating depression, which her family did not understand and that further alienated her from them. In June 2020, a national security law was passed, which "marked the turning point for a total crackdown that soon infiltrated all aspects of life." In a book that should appeal to young protesters everywhere, the author eloquently demonstrates how "it takes work not to simply pass through a place but instead to become part of it." Hong Kong is in dire straits, and Cheung brings us to the front lines to offer a clearer understanding of the circumstances.

A powerful memoir of love and anguish in a cold financial capital with an underbelly of vibrant, freedom-loving youth.



AURELIA, AURÉLIA A Memoir

Davis, Kathryn
Graywolf (128 pp.)
\$15.00 paper | March 1, 2022
978-1-64445-078-9



A profound meditation on grief via unglued memories and literary fragments.

Central to this brief yet stunning book is the death of Davis' husband, who succumbed to cancer after a long struggle. The acclaimed

novelist is well versed in loss. “I’d given death a lot of thought,” she writes. “It was one of my favorite topics, in liturgy and literature.” An attentive reader and erudite writer, Davis plumbs her internal archive in search of solace and clarity in the face of ineffable tragedy. She writes about her husband in the *bardo*, a Buddhist term that describes the liminal space between life and death—a place, she explains, where “narrative seems to happen but doesn’t.” Her husband’s memory thrums throughout the memoir, somehow both a presence and an absence. The prose is equally undefinable, caught between poetic and concrete. Like “the story unfolding inside my husband’s organs,” she writes, “there was a narrative involved that didn’t follow conventional rules.” Cross-fading vignettes abound with little correlation but remain haunted by a sense that something invisible threads them together. Digressions about Virginia Woolf and Flaubert, the TV show *Lost*, and Beethoven’s bagatelles all miraculously align. Coincidences buzz with fated significance, unmoored and transformed over time. The titular *Aurelia* was a ship Davis once rode across the Atlantic; as an adult, she would discover a novella by Gérard de Nerval with the same name, but with

an accent. “*Aurelia*,” she explains further, “is the Latin translation of the Greek word for chrysalis...emblem of metamorphosis and hiddenness.” Regarding memory, she writes, “when someone you have lived with for a very long time dies, memory stops working its regular way—it goes crazy. It is no longer like remembering; it is, more often, like astral projection.” These disparate moments transform the memoir into something that flows more like a guided dream, rendered in daring, vulnerable prose, steeped in death but brilliantly transformative.

A transcendent work of literary divination.

BALLASTED WINGS

Why That Day?

SUSAN KNOX KOPTA

ISBN: 978-1-483-42952-6

“...a valuable asset for mental health caregivers and advocates...”

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“...feel directly involved in Alexis’ life.... this personal account succeeds in vividly describing the gamut of emotions experienced by those diagnosed as bipolar and their families.”

“A creative, immersive, and affecting portrait of bipolar disorder.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

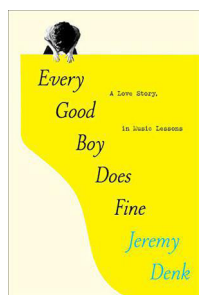
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“Musicians and music enthusiasts will appreciate this journey of self-discovery.”

EVERY GOOD BOY DOES FINE



**EVERY GOOD BOY DOES FINE
A Love Story, in Music
Lessons**

Denk, Jeremy
Random House (384 pp.)
\$28.00 | March 22, 2022
978-0-8129-9598-5

An acclaimed American pianist tells his story.

Denk traces his journey from a tormented child to a globe-trotting performer. With remarkable detail, the author recalls the countless hours of music lessons, as well as the demands of his parents and teachers, that helped shape him into a MacArthur-winning musician and frequent performer at Carnegie Hall. When he was 6, Denk's family moved from North Carolina to New Jersey. Following a playground incident, his teacher suggested that he needed a hobby to keep him out of trouble. At the author's request, he began piano lessons. Unfortunately, as music began to bring stability, his "home life got worse. My

father's job stress, in tandem with my mom's drinking, manifested for me...in the form of an unavoidable and senseless anger, a kind of autopilot screaming that inhabited the late afternoons." At age 10, his family moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico. Following a successful audition, Denk began private lessons with William Leland, a piano professor at New Mexico State. At the same time, Denk began an accelerated school plan. He graduated high school at 16 and entered Oberlin College, where he studied music and chemistry. At Oberlin, the author made the decision to pursue a career as a musician despite his parents' concerns. Working on his master's degree at Indiana University, he fell under the spell of his guru, Hungarian pianist and teacher György Sebők. While finishing his doctorate at Juilliard, Denk also took on a faculty position at Indiana. During this time, he began to fully comprehend the joys and frustrations that his teachers had endured. The author recounts the ups and downs of each phase of his educational career, with a particular focus on the input he received from his teachers. Along the way, he offers readers lessons in harmony, melody, and rhythm.

Musicians and music enthusiasts will appreciate this journey of self-discovery.

**NEVER
ENOUGH**

THE CARL KATZ STORY

ELISE GARIBALDI

ISBN: B099KT93RP

“A compelling account informed by German postwar history.”

—Kirkus Reviews

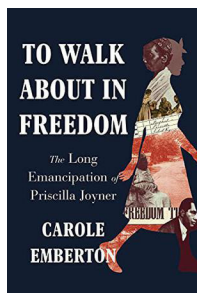
“Meticulously researched and superbly written.... an enormously important contribution.... potent antidote to the increasingly prevalent distortion of history...”

—World Jewish Congress

“The story is wild.... sounds like fiction, but it is all true.... a reality that might seem too strange and too crazy for us today.”

—Leo Baeck Institute, New York, & Berlin

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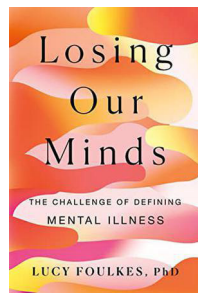
TO WALK ABOUT IN FREEDOM
The Long Emancipation of Priscilla Joyner

Emberton, Carole
 Norton (256 pp.)
 \$26.99 | March 8, 2022
 978-1-324-00182-9

The story of Priscilla Joyner (1858-1944) and other African Americans who claimed new freedoms after the Civil War.

Drawing primarily on oral testimonies collected by the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930s, history professor Emberton examines Joyner's complex identity and its relevance to the social history of the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras. A mixed-race child raised by a slaveholding White woman in antebellum North Carolina, Joyner straddled perilous cultural divides. As Emberton rightly affirms, an attentive consideration of her subject's experiences, along with those of others whose lives intersected with hers, "[allows] us to see the grandest sweep of history through the intimate, personal stories of everyday people whose search for freedom focused on achievements that rarely make the history books." The author movingly and instructively conveys Joyner's aspirations as an adult seeking her place in postbellum America. Among the most fascinating chapters are those that assess, with remarkable sensitivity, her decadeslong efforts to create a stable family life within emergent Black communities. Emberton's description of the importance of romantic love for freedpeople, and its relevance to Joyner's own marriage, is particularly affecting. Another strength of the book is the author's alternation of commentary on its central figure with analysis of the broader social context in which she lived: the expansion of opportunities for establishing personal autonomy in private and public life, the routine threats posed by those hostile to racial equality, the need for continual resistance to injustices entrenched in the nation's institutions. Emberton creates an illuminating view of the daily struggles and triumphs that characterized African Americans' "long emancipation." In the epilogue, the author connects Joyner's narrative to the contemporary moment for civil rights and aptly contends that "slavery's long shadow continues to hang over the American political and cultural landscape."

An insightful, poignant consideration of a representative figure's negotiation of liberty in the decades after Emancipation.



LOSING OUR MINDS
The Challenge of Defining Mental Illness

Foulkes, Lucy
 St. Martin's (272 pp.)
 \$28.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
 978-1-250-27417-5

A potent examination of mental illness and its understanding "in the research world and in society at large."

British academic psychologist Foulkes, an editor at *Aeon* magazine, addresses readers with a mix of pedagogical and colloquial language. "We know mental illness exists," she writes, "we know it's widespread, but few people really know what any of this *means*." The author dismantles misperceptions while sharing her thoroughly researched opinions of matters related, primarily, to depression and anxiety, and she poses questions that she seeks to answer: "What are the core deficits or issues that are familiar across many different mental illnesses?";

SHAMANOMICS

A Short Guide to the Failure, Fallacies and Future of Macroeconomics

Giles Conway-Gordon

Kirkus Reviews
 'impressively accessible'
 'as sober as it is provocative'

ISBN: 978-1-9772-3910-5 [hardcover]
 ISBN: 978-1-9772-2685-3 [paperback]

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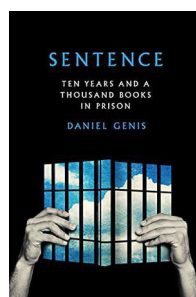
"...impressively accessible...
 as sober as it is provocative."
 —Kirkus Reviews

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“What happens outside the body that increases our risk of mental illness?”; “What impact does social media really have on mental health?” Foulkes credits Dutch psychologist Denny Borsboom’s network theory of mental disorders as being “the best explanation of what mental illness really ‘is.’” It suggests that biological, psychological, and environmental components affect one another; eventually, this web can become self-sustaining, even after a trigger has disappeared. Not only does Foulkes relay studies, she casts through them with direct summations: “If you’re ever going to develop a mental illness, more likely than not, it will start in your adolescent years.” In opposition to simplistic, alarmist headlines about social media causing depression in adolescents, the author looks at longitudinal studies of not just how much time people spend on apps, but also how they use them and the ensuing underlying psychological behaviors. “I think part of the reason that social media has been so demonized boils down to one truth: it’s new,” she writes. Foulkes also integrates reports of current events and published personal accounts of mental suffering and healing to take aim at pop-culture language used in conversation around mental

illness. Foulkes is a compassionate, rational guide through modern-day mental issues that are neither easily categorized nor treated. “Time,” she writes, “teaches that recovery is not linear.”

Helpful to anyone interested in a deeper understanding of psychological distress.



SENTENCE
Ten Years and a Thousand Books in Prison

Genis, Daniel

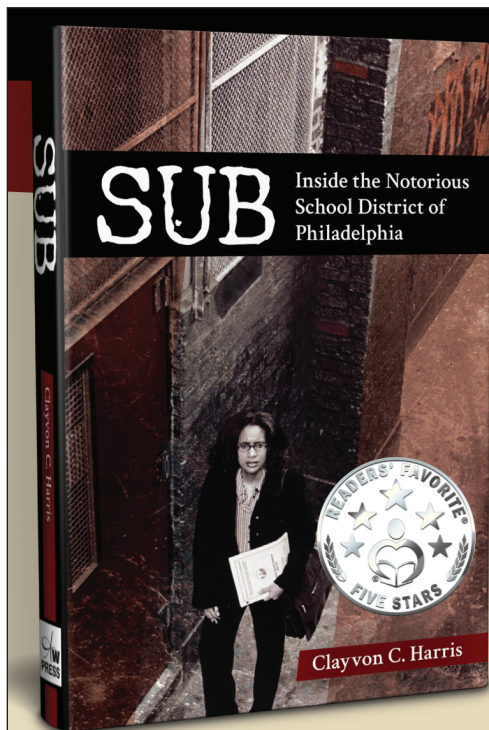
Viking (320 pp.)

\$28.00 | Feb. 22, 2022

978-0-525-42955-5

A memoir of incarceration, literature, and redemption.

For one week in August 2003, 25-year-old Genis robbed people at knifepoint to support his \$100-per-day heroin habit. Although



ISBN: 978-0-9881797-2-1 [paperback]

ISBN: 978-0-9881797-4-5 [eBook]

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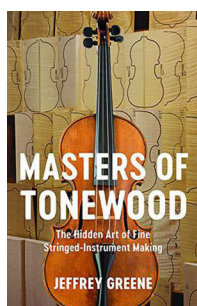
“I wish I had read this book *before* I decided to major in education.”

—Cristal Bruce, Magna Cum Laude Graduate/Drexel School of Education

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he immediately told his victims he was sorry, the “Apologetic Bandit” was given a 12-year sentence—10 with good behavior—by a judge who thought the White, middle-class NYU graduate “should have known better.” In a sharp, wry memoir, the author, a journalist and translator, chronicles his life in a dozen compounds in upstate New York, including four maximum security prisons, a world “utterly unknown” to those outside prison walls. He reflects on some of the 1,046 books—by Dostoevsky, Primo Levi, Solzhenitsyn, Proust, among many others—that he read while an inmate. “Reading’s evolution into writing,” he found, “made the difference between merely surviving ten years of incarceration and finding meaning in it.” Each chapter focuses on “a specific demographic slice of the incarcerated population”—Blacks, Latinos, gang members, and the mentally ill, for example—or a facet of prison life, such as food, solitary confinement, methods of smuggling in drugs and weapons, rare conjugal visits, and the particular cruelties of being transported on prison buses. Like an anthropologist, Genis sees prison “as a laboratory to study how men self-organize into societies, and watching that development is effectively a look into our Stone Age past.” He notes the codes, behaviors, assumptions, and prejudices that factored into group affiliation. “Race,” he writes, “mattered to an extent I had never witnessed previously. It was both a reason to oppress and to redress perceived wrongs.” As a White man, he found it impossible to “not have some relationship with the concept of white power. One cannot be neutral on the subject; the other prisoners do not allow it. Being white means being a minority, and a hated one at that.” The author’s voice is insightful, candid, and sometimes darkly humorous.

A vivid portrait of endurance behind bars.



MASTERS OF TONEWOOD
The Hidden Art of Fine Stringed-Instrument Making

Greene, Jeffrey
Univ. of Virginia (192 pp.)
\$24.95 | March 22, 2022
978-0-8139-4746-4

How the character of a particular wood affects a musical instrument, from the tree to the hands that shape and play it.

A tree and music lover, Greene, who has played guitar and other stringed instruments for years, leads us through some of the regions where the wood that produces the best tones is likely to be found, where instrument makers have intimate relationships with the management of those forests, and where luthiers concentrate their handiwork on fashioning instruments that could eventually be worth thousands of dollars. On this journey, he takes us across Europe, reporting from France, Spain, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, Romania, Poland, and the Czech Republic. The author portrays these instruments as living, breathing creatures featuring their own unique characteristics and perhaps imbued with the personalities of those who have made them and played them. “Some of these instruments have elaborate biographies of their own,” he

writes, “changing owners multiple times and sometimes traveling from continent to continent over a period of centuries.” Greene offers interesting comparisons to works of sculpture, high-end furniture, and fine wine, and he shows how, ultimately, the essence of the instrument resides in a specific type of wood, each variety of which will produce a distinctive tone when made into an instrument. Greene also embarks on extensive discussions of trees, specifically what makes them special and how they are harvested, and many broader ecological concerns related to tonewoods. The author must also address political considerations: The great tonewoods flourish in nations that are overseen by regimes of different stripes, communist as well as capitalistic, and with a wide variety of regulations concerning the protection and maintenance of forests. There is so much to consider, and for the most part, this concise book offers a pleasing deep dive into an intriguing niche topic.

A good choice for connoisseurs who appreciate musical instruments the way others do fine wine.

“A shared memoir of a relationship that spans decades.”

“The book has two parts, one for each author.... the work is well paced, and....includes many sobering moments...”

“...passionate, adventurous, and profound...”

“A revealing account of long-lasting love.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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ISBN: 978-1-7356905-7-5 [paperback]

“Knowledgeable inspiration for getting out there and getting dirty.”

TO BOLDLY GROW



GIRLS CAN KISS NOW Essays

Gutowitz, Jill

Atria (240 pp.)

\$17.00 paper | March 8, 2022

978-1-982158-50-7

A White, gay woman uses her love of pop culture to reflect on her continuing journey toward accepting her whole self, including her sexuality.

Gutowitz grew up in New Jersey in the “aughts,” a time she describes as “the least romantic era of pop culture, or just culture, in modern history.” Aside from the terrible fashion decisions and the lack of decent pop music, the author classifies the early 2000s as a time of rampant homophobia that was both created and reinforced by mainstream media. After imbibing this toxic media throughout high school, she went to college, where she found herself catering to the needs of men rather than discovering her sexuality—an experience

she compares to the underlying sexist messaging of the TV show *Entourage*. Gutowitz finally realized her sexual orientation at the age of 23, when she fell in love with her best friend—a love that was, sadly, unrequited—and extricated herself from an abusive heterosexual relationship. The author concludes with several essays celebrating the love she shares with her current partner, Emma, whose presence has made her question the obsession with celebrity that she says governed her life before they met. At its best, the prose shines with humor, vulnerability, and poignancy. Particularly noteworthy is the chapter detailing Gutowitz’s experience with sexual assault, which is written in the form of a letter to her past self, both formally inventive and searingly personal. Unfortunately, the author’s tendency to consistently center Whiteness and to avoid intersectional analysis makes the book feel somewhat superficial and outdated.

A witty essay collection about pop culture and queerness that privileges Whiteness to its disadvantage.



TO BOLDLY GROW Finding Joy, Adventure, and Dinner in Your Own Backyard

Haspel, Tamar

Putnam (272 pp.)

\$26.00 | March 8, 2022

978-0-593-41953-3

A journalist who “grew up in a food-focused household” chronicles her adventures gardening and eating in Cape Cod.

In 2008, Haspel, a James Beard Award-winning columnist for the *Washington Post*, and her husband, Kevin, moved from Manhattan to Cape Cod, trading their rooftop garden for a “shack on a lake.” The next New Year’s Day, Haspel floated a new idea: For the next year, they would “eat at least one thing we grew, hunted, or gathered every day.” Rather than relying on experts, the author preferred suggestions from her neighbors who were fighting the same difficult growing conditions. She also notes that she has “learned the most from just getting dirty, from trying things.” With witty insight, the author shares their successes and failures along with tips and how-to advice. As they acclimated to their new environment, she and her husband got involved in “the vibrant bartering that goes on in every community where people grow food; we’ve traded eggs for jam, pickles, asparagus, venison, and tomato seedlings.” On their land and the surrounding areas, they successfully fished, hunted, raised fowl, and grew delicious shiitake mushrooms. Parts of the narrative are repetitious—Haspel is candid about how “bits and pieces of [the book] have been published elsewhere”—and some readers may squirm at her descriptions of preparing roadkill to eat, dressing turkeys, and shooting her first deer. Although the author doesn’t espouse the view that eating meat is unethical, she believes in minimizing suffering and that “eating overpopulated (or at least unthreatened) animals [is] responsible and planet-friendly.” Despite the scope of the book being limited to the resources found on Cape Cod and its surrounding

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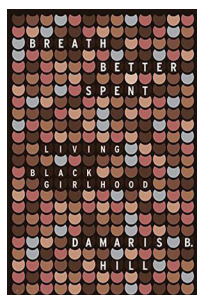
“A candid, compact, and useful primer...”

—Kirkus Reviews

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waterways, it's a great stepping-off point for individuals interested in exploring "first-hand food opportunities" and exercising more control over the origins of what they eat.

Knowledgeable inspiration for getting out there and getting dirty.



BREATH BETTER SPENT
Living Black Girlhood

Hill, DaMaris B.

Bloomsbury (176 pp.)

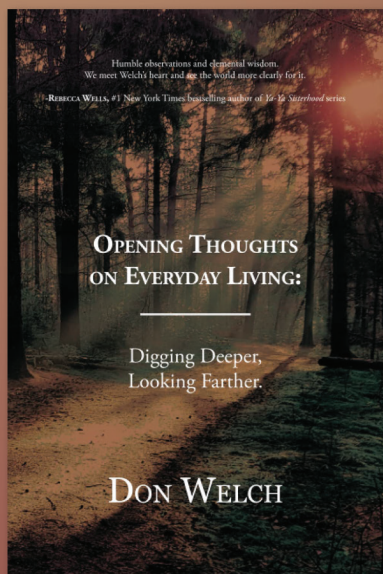
\$25.00 | Jan. 25, 2022

978-1-63557-647-4

Poems and essays on Black girlhood, as seen through the lens of the author's personal experiences and reflections.

In the preface, Hill states her intentions clearly: "In this book, I am telling you a story illustrated in pieces of my heart and fragments

from my mirror." She also addresses urgent questions: "What does the active love and protection of Black girls look like in 'America' and in a time when extreme oppression and violence is stimulated? I do not pretend to know the answers to this. What I know is some patchwork and remix of stories, inclinations, and experiences of Black girlhood. Stories are the treasures I own. They are what belongs to me." The author's deep love for and desire to amplify the experiences of Black girls and women, including her own, are evident. Unfortunately, the collection lacks clear entry points for readers to glean unifying themes and distinct observations from within the patchwork. Some of the poems pay homage to a diverse collective of iconic and trailblazing women, including Jarena Lee, Harriet Jacobs, Ella Baker, Whitney Houston, and Aretha Franklin; black-and-white photos of these icons, the author, and others accompany the poems. Throughout the collection, the poems, individually and collectively, feel like fragments. Potentially resonant moments are fleeting because Hill's images, memories, and phrases often feel random and disparate rather than evocative. An elegiac section titled "In Search of the Colored Girl" memorializes missing,



ISBN: 978-1-953865-36-6

"...the author offers readers 'an invitation to look below surfaces and beyond first appearances.' The result is a wonderfully paradoxical read that provides profound, moving insights in vignettes that are typically no longer than one or two pages."

"...this is a delightful book by an author whose career has been dedicated to exploring ethical living."

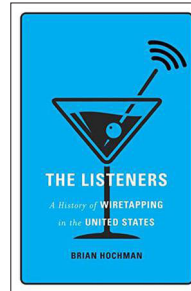
"A poignant compilation that delivers astute reflections on creating a rich, meaningful life."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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donwelch9@gmail.com • welchwritings.com

murdered, and forgotten Black girls and women. These poems are the most cogent in the collection but are still somewhat disorienting. Similarly, some of the essays interspersed among the poems feel unfinished and, at times, disjointed. Despite its problems, the book is validating in its intentions and may be useful in further study of the complexities and traumas of being Black in America.

Earnest and inspired but doesn't deliver a compelling meditation on Black girlhood.



**THE LISTENERS
A History of Wiretapping in
the United States**

Hochman, Brian
Harvard Univ. (368 pp.)
\$35.00 | March 8, 2022
978-0-674-24928-8

A study of how electronic surveillance became an accepted tool of law enforcement and a pervasive feature of everyday life.

Hochman, the director of American Studies at Georgetown, traces the origins of wiretapping to the Civil War, when spies on both sides learned to intercept the enemy's telegraph messages. The war hadn't even ended before D.C. Williams, a California commodities trader, was tapping into competitors' telegrams to make lucrative trades. Soon, wiretaps were a standard weapon in the scam artist's repertoire, notably in getting inside information on gambling results. With the arrival of the telephone, crooks learned to exploit the new medium, especially for blackmail purposes. Law enforcement didn't lag far behind: New York City detectives were tapping phones as early as 1895. Hochman examines critical court cases establishing the status of wiretap evidence. A significant precedent was a 1928 case in which the Supreme Court sanctioned Prohibition agents' use of wiretaps to convict a bootlegger. Congress tried to reverse the precedent a few years later, with the Federal Communications Act, making it illegal to intercept and divulge the contents of an electronic communication. In 1940, a secret memo by Franklin Roosevelt allowed federal wiretaps in national security cases, a decision that pleased the FBI. But in 1950, Judge Learned Hand threw out a conviction in an espionage case built largely on wiretap evidence, and the issue went back to Congress. By the 1960s, the FBI was bugging a long roster of suspected radicals, from Malcolm X to Benjamin Spock, and Nixon was recording White House conversations. The author follows the trends into the computer age, with Congress opening the gates to almost universal spying with the 1994 Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act. Amply documented, occasionally dry, this is a solid study of the legal and technical evolution of electronic spying.

A thorough history of wiretapping as it moved from a criminal act to a legitimate tool of law enforcement.

AMY MINTY

ISBN: 978-1943401888

**When you do
nothing, you have
more time for fun!
And shouldn't that
be the point?**

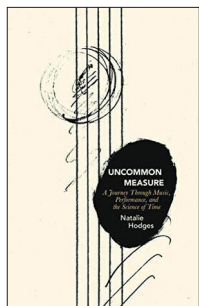
“In this humor book, Minty pays tribute to her favorite pursuit: doing as little as possible.”

“...even curmudgeons will find humor—mostly of the variety delivered by the author Jenny Lawson—in the book...”

“...those who appreciate slacker humor—or have a touch of idleness themselves—will connect with it.”

“An often amusing....argument for doing less in life.”
—Kirkus Reviews

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UNCOMMON MEASURE
A Journey Through
Music, Performance,
and the Science of Time

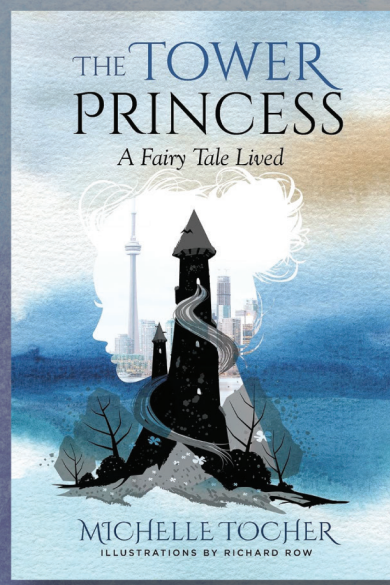


Hodges, Natalie
 Bellevue Literary Press (224 pp.)
 \$17.99 paper | March 22, 2022
 978-1-942658-97-9

A masterful debut memoir from a classical violinist that covers far more than just music.

“If you want to change the past,” writes Hodges, “all you have to do is try to record what happened in it.” So begins this memoir in essays in which the author excavates her personal history in order to come to terms with her complex relationship with the violin. From an early age, she dreamed of becoming a violin soloist, practicing for hours each day as a child. Hodges traces her love of music to her Korean American mother, who played violin in high school until her punishing schedule made it

impossible to continue. In contrast, the author’s White father disparaged her passion, a tactic that backfired: Hodges now believes that the possibility of defying his hatred of music is part of what spurred her on for so many years. Throughout the collection, Hodges chronicles how her father’s abuse, her mother’s experiences of racism, and her own intense stage fright ended her professional aspirations but could not sway her love of music. That love led her to attempt everything from campus tango lessons to teaching herself an incredibly challenging piece of music four months after putting away her violin. Hodges interweaves these memories with concepts of quantum physics, focusing on theories about time and space that elegantly illustrate the inability she often felt to be present in her own life. “Music itself *embodies* time,” she writes, “shaping our sense of its passage through patterns of rhythm and harmony, melody and form. We feel that embodiment whenever we witness an orchestra’s collective sway and sigh to the movement of a baton, or measure a long car ride by the playlist of songs we’ve run through.” The author’s writing is deeply intelligent and exquisitely personal, expertly balancing emotional vulnerability with trenchant



ISBN: 978-0-9738776-0-1

“...a gorgeous feminist memoir that draws poignant meaning from fairy tales with dreamlike language and keen literary analysis.”

—Aimee Jodoin, *IndieReader*

“I recommend this book to any woman inspired to find connections between fairy tales, her own personal spiritual journey and the condition of the world in which we live.”

—Meaghan Wood, *Reedsy Discovery*

“An uplifting, unconventional, and deeply imaginative remembrance.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

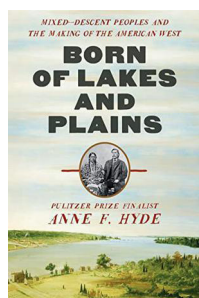
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“A necessary contribution to American studies for all the shameful episodes it recounts.”

BORN OF LAKES AND PLAINS

analysis, and her lyrical prose and clarity of thought render each page a pleasure to read.

A gorgeously written, profoundly felt essay collection about time, memory, and music.



BORN OF LAKES AND PLAINS *Mixed-Descent Peoples and the Making of the American West*

Hyde, Anne F.

Norton (480 pp.)

\$40.00 | Feb. 15, 2022

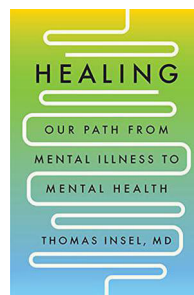
978-0-393-63409-9



A searching study of the role of mixed-descent people, with Indigenous and other ancestry, over 400 years of American history.

University of Oklahoma history professor Hyde, author of the Bancroft Prize-winning *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860*, turns her attention to an overlooked aspect of the peopling of North America: the union of Native Americans with people from other continents, their descendants often derided as “half-breeds” and worse. It’s a bitter irony that whereas many Americans are quick to declare Indigenous ancestry today, it was not so long ago that mixed-descent people tried to hide their Native ancestry simply to survive. “Like *boy* thrown at a Black man, the word *half-breed* became poison intending to kill,” writes the author, adding that “renaming Half-Breed Lake in Minnesota and Montana, or Half-Breed Road in Iowa and Nebraska, also covers up a long history of intermarriage.” Hyde closely examines the lineages of people such as a half-Swiss, half-Cree woman who fought for civil rights for Native people. The author takes a particularly deep dive into the history of George Bent and his descendants; Bent was a White trader who arrived on the Colorado frontier and married a succession of Cheyenne wives and “lost dozens of family members at the Sand Creek and Washita massacres in the 1860s.” Some Native groups, Hyde writes, were welcoming of newcomers; the Ojibwe, for instance, had intermarried with French trappers for generations before Americans arrived. Other groups were more reluctant—but, as Hyde allows, biology usually wins out over culture. This was of little interest to the federal, territorial, and state governments, however, all of which formulated laws to make intermarriage illegal, laws that remained in force until very recently and required mixed-descent people, who knew that “White America couldn’t tolerate reminders of the racial mixing that anchored American history,” to disguise their heritage.

A necessary contribution to American studies for all the shameful episodes it recounts.



HEALING *Our Path From Mental Illness to Mental Health*

Insel, Thomas

Penguin Press (336 pp.)

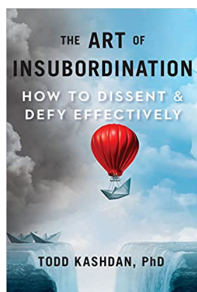
\$28.00 | Feb. 1, 2022

978-0-593-29804-6

The former director of the National Institute of Mental Health diagnoses and prescribes cures for a mental health care system that’s “a disaster on many fronts.”

In his first book, psychiatrist and neuroscientist Insel explains an apparent paradox of mental health care: “Current treatments work,” but too few people get their benefits, and outcomes for the U.S. as a whole remain “dire.” Arguing that the crisis exists “because we fail to deliver on what we know, or we fail to use what works,” the author often slights evidence suggesting that the poor results persist because some common treatments *do not* work or are overused rather than underused. He ignores, for example, well-regarded studies that have found that depression and ADHD are overdiagnosed and overtreated, and he oversells some treatments he supports. For readers who can live with Insel’s overly bullish view of certain remedies, however, this book offers a wealth of fresh, clear, and mercifully jargon-free facts and insights into America’s mental health care problems and possible solutions. The author links the crisis to the Reagan administration’s slashing of federal spending on community health and its scaling back of support for the “deinstitutionalization” promoted by John F. Kennedy and others. He also describes the potential benefits of “supported education and employment” programs and of controversial technology like digital phenotyping. In the strongest chapters, Insel shows how current U.S. policies have ravaged the poor, the homeless, and the incarcerated; the U.S. has so few hospital beds for the mentally ill that some police do “mercy bookings,” which let people get care in jail that hospitals can’t provide: “The Los Angeles County Jail and Chicago’s Cook County Jail are now the largest mental health institutions in the nation.” Insel makes clear that such mental health conditions involve moral and civil rights issues, adding important dimensions often neglected in similar books.

Despite a few unpersuasive arguments, this is a formidable entry in the field of books about the mental health crisis.



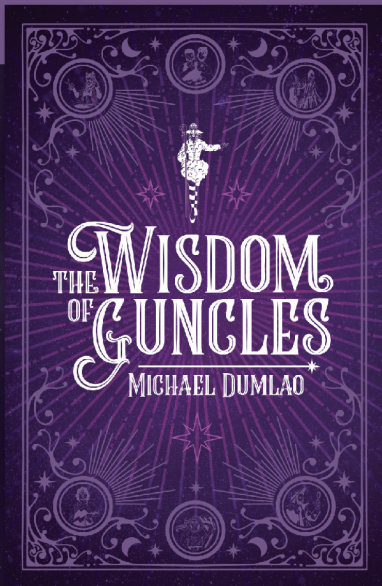
**THE ART OF
INSUBORDINATION**
*How To Dissent and Defy
Effectively*

Kashdan, Todd B.
Avery (288 pp.)
\$27.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-593-42088-1

Sit down and don't make trouble—or else read this book.

According to Kashdan, a professor of psychology, it's important to question authority and to take a stance of "principled insubordination, a brand of deviance intended to improve society with a minimal amount of secondary harm"—to subject received wisdom and things as they are to cross-examination. The principled part is significant. Being a rebel without a clue is useless, while being principled in rebelliousness "is vital for improving society." In a text full of psychological theories and the results of telling

experiments, Kashdan examines the many ways by which we lull ourselves into accepting the status quo. Perhaps surprisingly, he notes that "disadvantaged people often do just as much (or more) to affirm a system's validity than those who occupied privileged positions within the same system." Indeed, "people will go to bizarre lengths to rationalize and protect a social system that harms them." Thus the recent rise of authoritarianism, which surely begs for people who'll say no against all those people who'll say yes. Learning how to say no, though, requires work. Kashdan identifies pitfalls such as status quo bias, confirmation bias (seeking evidence for what you believe and ignoring what doesn't support your view), and the hope that submission will somehow lead to a higher social or economic class. There's also projection bias, by which we "think others tend to share our preferences, beliefs, and behaviors more than they actually do." This often produces martyrs instead of rebels. The author counsels taking all this information with as little stress and as much self-care as possible while being brave in the face of conformity and incuriosity. Ultimately, he writes, we



**Queer Insights on
Thriving with Authenticity
for the Black Sheep in All of Us**

"...the work is swift, informative, and often moving....with each story told, readers learn, in a heartfelt manner, that there is more than one way to fit into a family."

"A stirring and passionate exploration of queer relatives."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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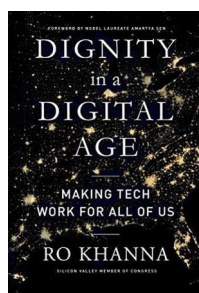
“A timely, significant analysis of the dire consequences of public health failures.”

PHANTOM PLAGUE



must commit to “raising a new generation of youth who feel emboldened to disagree, defy, and deviate from problematic norms and standards.”

A useful primer for those determined to make waves for a good cause.



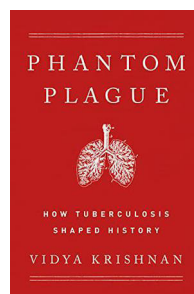
DIGNITY IN A DIGITAL AGE
Making Tech Work for All of Us

Khanna, Ro
Simon & Schuster (368 pp.)
\$28.00 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-982163-34-1

A legislator shares his thoughts on how to close our many digital divides.

Rep. Khanna, a Democrat, serves a Northern California district that's home to big tech companies like Google and Apple, and while he respects their financial might, he is understandably skeptical of their libertarian rhetoric about technology alone resolving social and economic conflicts. Facebook supported his skepticism, with its promotion of misinformation and online divisiveness, not to mention its struggles with privacy. The author, who served as Obama's deputy assistant secretary of commerce, explores a wide range of issues tied to the tech industry: tech-job creation in rural America, racism and sexism within Silicon Valley, wage gaps, science-education funding, electric vehicles, antitrust, artificial intelligence, competition from China, and more. Khanna is a genial and clearheaded guide to these challenges, and he thoughtfully offers the occasional personal anecdote to contextualize specific problems, relating his visits to rural communities skeptical of tech interlopers making outsize promises or his own experiences with racism. Ultimately, he seeks an America that pays everyone decently, preserves communities, and protects internet users from exploitation and disinformation, and he bolsters his arguments with ideas from big thinkers such as Amartya Sen (who provides the foreword), Martha Nussbaum, and Tim Berners-Lee. The narrative centerpiece, an “Internet Bill of Rights,” is an admirable effort to codify those ideas. But the book is effectively a cascade of policy prescriptions: Dozens of sentences are teed up with phrasing like “we must,” “we need,” or “we should,” followed by recommendations regarding programs for tax credits, affordable housing, student laptops, and more. None are particularly objectionable, but eventually, the prose takes on the stiff and earnest feel of a stump speech. It's less a book to be read than to be scanned through by politicians empathetic to Khanna's politics—or tech lobbyists gathering opposition information.

Written on behalf of the common man but best digested by policy wonks.



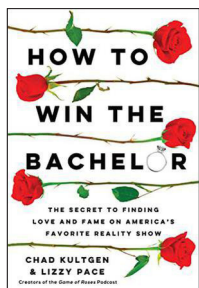
PHANTOM PLAGUE
How Tuberculosis Shaped History

Krishnan, Vidya
PublicAffairs (288 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-5417-6847-5

A penetrating social history of a virulent disease.

Drawing on two decades of reporting on tuberculosis and HIV in India, Krishnan makes her book debut with a hard-hitting indictment of the greed, politics, and racism that have led to the prevalence of drug-resistant tuberculosis. The disease, medical historians speculate, likely began in ancient Egypt and traveled across the world along trade routes. It ravaged 19th-century slums, where overcrowding and filth incubated an illness that had no cure. Its victims, though, were hardly limited to the poor. Among TB's sufferers were Orwell, Kafka, Eleanor Roosevelt, Chopin, and all of the Brontë sisters. Krishnan traces early efforts to stem contagion, including a campaign in the U.S. to ban spitting; although that effort failed, it led to the creation of public and hand-held spittoons. If men would not stop spitting tobacco, at least the mucus could be contained. The development of germ theory led to the creation of antibiotics, but while curing TB, overuse of antibiotics for all manner of maladies caused drug-resistant strains, especially rife in India. Ramshackle housing, inadequate medical care (doctors who fail to diagnose TB or prescribe correct treatment), and the rationing of drugs because of big pharma's patent monopolies all contribute to the rise of drug resistance. “Tuberculosis,” writes the author, “demonstrates what happens to science when it leaves the lab setting and interacts with flawed human beings: patients, doctors, politicians, and rabble-rousers, all of whom have a unique effect on the course of the plague.” Krishnan writes that the World Health Organization estimates 25% of the world population has latent TB, fueled by an “architecture of unfairness,” inequality, and ignorance. Underscoring the vulnerability of the poor, Krishnan asserts that TB epitomizes “a new form of medical apartheid in which preventable and curable diseases, such as TB, are thriving while lifesaving medicines remain in a stranglehold.”

A timely, significant analysis of the dire consequences of public health failures.



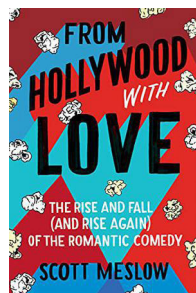
HOW TO WIN THE BACHELOR
The Secret to Finding Love and Fame on America's Favorite Reality Show

Kultgen, Chad & Lizzy Pace
 Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
 (304 pp.)
 \$27.00 | Jan. 18, 2022
 978-1-982172-94-7

An attempt to treat *The Bachelor* as a spectator sport, with all the associated praise of gameplay and creation of jargon.

Never mind that the show is, ostensibly, about finding love, not generating competition—or that sports are generally a celebration of personal and team excellence. The biggest problem with this guide is how it champions manipulation and image-polishing in the pursuit of Instagram followers and screen time. Kultgen and Pace pack the book with suggestions gleaned from their rewatching of every episode of *The Bachelor's* 25 seasons, a feat they accomplished in 74 days. "After he gives his toast, join in graciously with a nod and pursed lips," they advise in dealing with a "fantasy suite" date. "Do not give him a smile. Do not give him any information about the tone or mood of what the rest of the night holds. After some brief generalities about the beauty of the location just sit there, silent. This forces the Bachelor to initiate the conversation." What are more useful are the authors' revelations of how reality show producers seek to create situations and storylines to serve the series, from "forced nudity" and humiliation to day trips and, of course, excessive alcohol consumption. They also rightly take the show to task for its lack of diversity over the years as well as using racism to generate controversy. However, even with those issues and the replacement of longtime host Chris Harrison for his controversial comments about race, the authors feel the need to stand behind their "sport." "Instead of completely disengaging from the sport we love," they write, "we continue watching knowing that we are complicit, but we are also aware.... We believe the show must become more progressive or be discarded as an antiquated relic of a past generation."

Die-hard fans will love this exhaustive look at their beloved show, but most will question the value of the sport.



FROM HOLLYWOOD WITH LOVE
The Rise and Fall (and Rise Again) of the Romantic Comedy

Meslow, Scott
 Dey Street/HarperCollins (432 pp.)
 \$27.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-06-302629-2

An enthusiastic fan traces the evolution of modern romantic comedies.

Beginning in 1989 with Rob Reiner and Nora Ephron's *When Harry Met Sally...*, the "most romantic rom-com of all time," first-time author Meslow's comprehensive film history focuses on 16 of the most significant of these character-driven films over the past three decades. Along the way, the author provides informative, in-depth "essays" on key performers—Meg Ryan, Hugh Grant, Adam Sandler, Sandra Bullock, Reese Witherspoon, Will Smith—and insightful backstories about directors,



ISBN: 978-1-73599-960-9

"Historic nonfiction with a romantic twist....a bewitching journey of love, pain, and discovery."
 —BookLife Reviews

"...an informed, intelligent study that's part history, part mystery. By nailing down "the Fallon affair," the volume makes a real contribution to Chateaubriand scholarship.... The legend of the Irish girl adds a romantic layer..."

"An engaging historical treasure hunt with some intriguing findings."
 —Kirkus Reviews

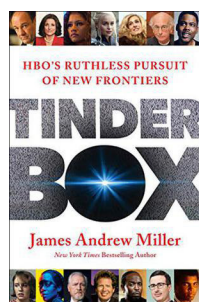
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“A consummate, highly revealing, expertly assembled study of how HBO indelibly changed TV.”

TINDERBOX

writers, producers, and others who were also responsible for this genre's success. Regarding *Pretty Woman*, the author writes that the “confused, inefficient, eventually serendipitous development and production process is what ended up giving [the film] its unique texture.” *Love Potion No. 9* “set the template for the rom-com and rom-com-adjacent roles on which Bullock would build her career.” In 1995, when the “full-blown cultural phenomenon” that was *Four Weddings and a Funeral* was nominated for a best-picture Oscar, it gave the genre more critical credibility. *Waiting To Exhale* proved that a rom-com based on a Black female writer's book and four Black actresses could reach a wide audience. In 1998, *There's Something About Mary*, the “raunch-com” written and directed by the Farrelly brothers, “expanded Hollywood's understanding about what a rom-com could look like.” Three years later, writes Meslow, the “constant blizzard of skepticism around [Renee] Zellweger's casting” in *Bridget Jones's Diary* was “both premature and unwarranted, but it was also a reminder to the movie's creators that the stakes were perilously high.” Now an established, successful genre, it could explore new territory—e.g., aging in *Something's Gotta Give*, a “vague hand-waving” over abortion in *Knocked Up*, and a “major and important step forward” with Asian American director Jon Chu's *Crazy Rich Asians*. Meslow predicts ups and downs in the future, like with any genre, but “real love stories never have endings.” Included throughout are bits of trivia.

A sprightly homage to a popular, seemingly evergreen film genre.



TINDERBOX HBO's Ruthless Pursuit of New Frontiers

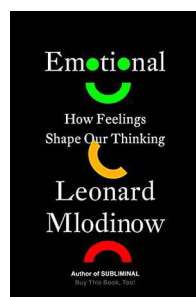
Miller, James Andrew
Henry Holt (1024 pp.)
\$32.99 | Nov. 23, 2021
978-1-250-62401-7

A retrospective of HBO's nearly half-century of multiplex programming portrayed through the words of a cavalcade of celebrities, developers, and innovators.

Using material from more than 750 interviews with a host of insiders, noted journalist Miller presents an exhaustive account of the network's pioneering projects. In a well-rendered, frequently surprising chronicle, the author covers seemingly every inch of ground: HBO's “treacherous birth” in 1972, early ups and downs, the use of satellite technology, and the development of groundbreaking movies, award-winning documentaries, uncensored comedy, and unique sports programming, which elevated televised boxing matches to new heights. Miller spotlights many of HBO's success stories through first-person commentary and ventures deep into how these history-making shows were developed, produced, and became hits. The histories of classics like *The Larry Sanders Show*; the “stunning trifecta” of *Sex and the City*, *The Sopranos*, and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*; *Game of Thrones*; and even the decadeslong run of the voyeuristic *Taxicab Confessions* are fascinating to read, all recounted via the memories

of those who were there. Many of Miller's interviewees viscerally describe the stress, struggle, joys, and pains of being on a consistently successful hit show where “cast, crew, and network executives get tossed together in a pressure cooker for years on end, and it's rare that some don't suffer accordingly.” This was especially true for the *Sopranos* team and its star, James Gandolfini, who struggled with addiction and, once he became an irreplaceable commodity to the network, leveraged his power to his ultimate advantage. Though the text is more than 1,000 pages, its length is justified by the sheer amount of insightful commentary, juicy insider opinions, and celebrity and executive melodrama. Collectively, the chorus of voices creates an informative and compelling indulgence about how a particular culture of entertainment is formed and fostered. In that sense, the book recalls *Those Guys Have All the Fun: Inside the World of ESPN*, which Miller co-authored with Tom Shales.

A consummate, highly revealing, expertly assembled study of how HBO indelibly changed TV.



EMOTIONAL How Feelings Shape Our Thinking

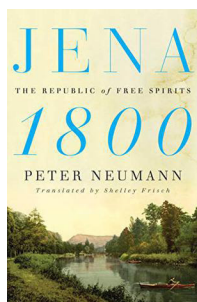
Mlodinow, Leonard
Pantheon (272 pp.)
\$28.95 | Jan. 4, 2022
978-1-524-74759-6

Noted physicist and science writer Mlodinow brings an up-to-date view of the neuroscience surrounding emotions.

In classical philosophy, emotions were viewed as separate from and opposite to rational thought. The latest view, informed by extensive brain studies, holds that emotions are different from but intimately connected with what we call deliberate thought in the form of decision-making and rational choice. “While rational thought allows us to draw logical conclusions based on our goals and relevant data,” Mlodinow writes, “emotion operates at a more abstract level—it affects the importance we assign to the goals and the weight we give to the data.” Sometimes it operates by tapping into more ancestral areas of the brain, touching on fight-or-flight instincts: If we hear a rustling in the bushes as we walk by them, is it the wind or a fierce predator? All mammals and many species of insects, Mlodinow writes, experience emotion as a feature of our shared “evolutionary heritage,” and the triggers are much the same. We feel our way around our environment, drawing on prior experience and using it as a guide, how we felt then conditioning how we feel now. This is not always healthy, however. Our fearful responses may not apply to every situation, but fear leads us to “assign higher than normal probabilities to alarming possibilities” that we may rationally know not to be so. As the author shows, our emotions are not uniform; some people are “quick to become anxious, while in others anxiety builds slowly,” and levels of happiness and sorrow are contingent on many factors. Whatever the instance, Mlodinow encourages readers to take time to better understand their own emotional makeup by

developing an “emotional profile” that can lead to heightened self-awareness and, perhaps, even to greater peace of mind.

A readable work of popular science that reveals little-known facets of our worried, weary minds.



JENA 1800
The Republic of Free Spirits

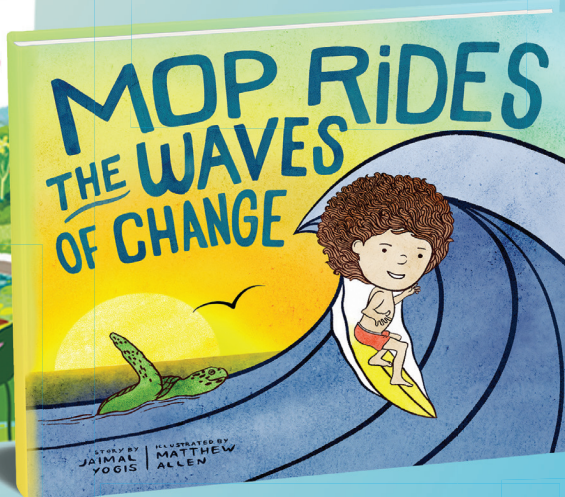
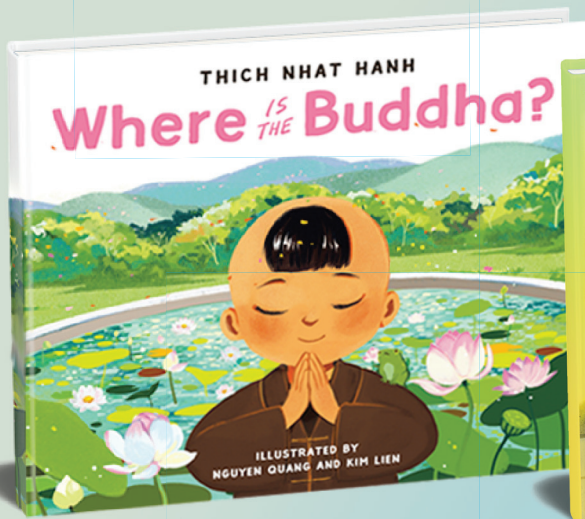
Neumann, Peter
Trans. by Shelley Frisch
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (256 pp.)
\$27.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-374-17869-7

An exploration of a small German town that was a hothouse of art and thought until Napoleon’s army ended its few years as the epicenter of central European culture.

Looking back at 1799, Neumann accurately terms Jena “essentially the intellectual and cultural center of Germany.”

(Think 18th-century Edinburgh, Vienna and Paris almost always, and Black Mountain College and Greenwich Village after World War II.) Neumann, a poet and philosopher who studied in Jena, focuses on the major figures who lived there in the few years before the battle that forced many of its residents to flee. They included poet and playwright Friedrich Schiller, philosopher Friedrich Schelling, poet Novalis, philosopher Johann Fichte, and the multitalented brothers Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel. Other transcendently important men, including Goethe and Hegel, played important subsidiary parts, and wives and lovers were never absent from the scene. Neumann paints a broad portrait of a group of luminaries at argument, work, play, and love until the French forces’ decisive rout of German arms to put an end to the city’s brief time in the sun. The author relates this intriguing human story in a kind of informal, novelistic style, an approach that doesn’t fit the subject. In a tale centered on a few people who made profound contributions to Western culture, Neumann offers little about the works they produced or the significance and influence of their thought, fiction, poetry, and plays. There’s nothing wrong

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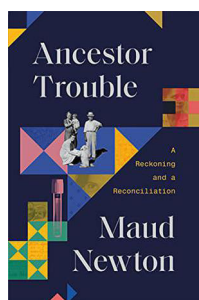
“Emotionally compelling and intellectually rich, particularly for those with a personal connection to the issue.”

LIFE BETWEEN THE TIDES



with portraying such people's lives. But if they're shown principally as squabbling, striving, ego-threatened, love-needy—that is, normal—humans whose often epochal achievements remain in the background, we might as well read about fictional characters. Lost in the book's pages is consideration of the relationship, if any, between what these men wrote and the lives they lived. Readers, told of the leading figures' significance, need more direct acquaintance with what they're significant for.

A prospectively important work that misses its mark.



ANCESTOR TROUBLE
A Reckoning and a Reconciliation

Newton, Maud
Random House (384 pp.)
\$28.00 | March 29, 2022
978-0-8129-9792-7



The current wave of interest in genealogy, heredity, family history, and responsibility for past injustices crescendos in a comprehensive work combining

personal narrative and reporting.

“Ancestor hunger circles the globe” and “spans millennia,” writes blogger, critic, and essayist Newton in her first book. Perhaps her hunger is especially gnawing due to her long-term estrangement from her proudly racist father—and from her holy roller mother for a time, as well. These ruptures seeded a project that grew like a fairy-tale beanstalk, which the author climbs with unflagging energy. She begins with a few burning questions: “Had my mom’s father really married thirteen times? Had *his* father really killed a man with a hay hook?” Then she used Ancestry.com, 23andMe, and many other resources to track down the truth about her family history, which is rife with scoundrels, slave owners, and a 17th-century accused witch. Newton also carefully presents the problems with the accuracy and ethics of these tools. She is particularly interested in intergenerational trauma, epigenetics, and the possibility of inheriting mental illness, and she identifies “patterns across generations that seem nearly supernatural in their virulence.” In addition to historical and scientific information, as well as summaries of many relevant books, the author delivers numerous vivid recollections of her childhood and strained family dynamics. “Strangers confided to my mom in parking lots, laughed at her stories in checkout lines, sympathized with her grumbling in waiting rooms,” writes Newton. “She was fun, charming, and, so it seemed to me then, indomitable. And yet she’d chosen to tie herself to someone like my dad, who has never to my knowledge charmed anyone.” In a rather surprising chapter, the author describes her experiences contacting dead ancestors at an “ancestral lineage healing intensive” and details her ginger approach to cross-cultural practices of ancestor reverence, always conscious of “all the pain I knew my ancestors had caused, outside and inside our family.”

Exhaustively researched, engagingly presented, and glowing with intelligence and honesty.



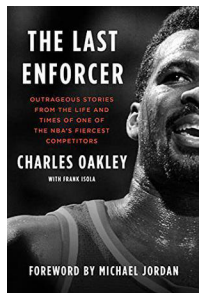
LIFE BETWEEN THE TIDES

Nicolson, Adam
Illus. by Kate Boxer & Rosie Nicolson
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (384 pp.)
\$30.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-374-25143-7

A journey into the wonderment of a tidal inlet.

Memoirist, historian, and nature writer Nicolson brings capacious erudition and acute sensitivity to his intimate investigation of the ebb, the flow, and the teeming variety of life in tidal pools. Like William Blake, who saw the world in a grain of sand, Nicolson sees the universe, and humans' meaning within it, in that liminal, ever changing habitat. The shore, he writes, quoting poet Seamus Heaney, “is where ‘things overflow the brim of the usual,’ and that brim is at the heart of this book.” Along the coast of Scotland, Nicolson created his own tidal pool by digging through Jurassic rock that had been buried for 200 million years. “If tides are our twice-daily connection to the universe,” he writes, “the rocks are our ever-present library of time.” Soon the pool became home to sandhoppers, prawns, winkles, crabs, anemone, and more—each with its particular biology and behavior, affording the author “repeated chances of ecstatic encounter.” Nicolson augments his own lucid observations with those of naturalists, biologists, and zoologists from ancient times to the present, and he enlarges his purview to include Plato, Aristotle, Heraclitus, Herbert Spencer, and Heidegger, among others, for insight into how “the human, the planetary and the animal all interact” in watery topography. Like Virginia Woolf, Nicolson is “entranced by liquidity, which could embody realities that solids could scarcely address.” The shore, he writes, “is filled with infinite regressions,” from the swelling ocean “into the microscopic.” Water inspires deeply philosophical reflection. Above all, the author seeks to illuminate his own place in space and time. “The coexistence with the things of the pool, the being-with them, a total co-presence with them, came to seem like a way of establishing my own being in the world,” he writes. To be-with is the only way to be.”

Illustrated with photographs and delicate drawings, this book is a marvel.



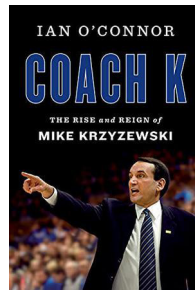
THE LAST ENFORCER
Outrageous Stories From the Life and Times of One of the NBA's Fiercest Competitors

Oakley, Charles with Frank Isola
 Gallery Books/Simon & Schuster
 (288 pp.)
 \$28.00 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-1-982175-64-1

The hard-nosed former professional basketball star shares his bold outlook on life as well as wild tales on and off the court.

Oakley, who plied his trade in the NBA from 1985 to 2004, wants readers to remember three things: He's loyal, he's honest, and if you wrong him, he will never forget. Also, he's good friends with his former teammate Michael Jordan. Still close today, they have always bonded over their no-nonsense attitudes and approaches toward the game. The same cannot be said for Oakley's relationships with many other players of the era. The book is packed with Oakley's plainspoken disdain for former players, most notably Charles Barkley, who gets a whole chapter: "Barkley and his Big Mouth." Among the other players and coaches on the receiving end of Oakley's unforgiving eye include Lamar Odom, Dennis Rodman, Lenny Wilkins, and Tyrone Hill. LeBron James is one of the few exceptions, a genuine star whom Oakley befriended when James was just 17. Whether the author is recounting how he tricked an opposing player into drinking too much the night before a playoff game or bemoaning the lack of physicality in today's NBA, he walks readers through his career with unvarnished honesty. Many of Oakley's entertaining stories go beyond basketball; the strongest sections involve amusing run-ins with a wide range of celebrities, from Judge Mathis to Spike Lee. Oakley also has a serious side, on display when he discusses his friendship with George Floyd. "As a Black man in the United States I, too, have experienced police brutality and harassment before, but never to this extreme," he writes. "To watch the video and hear George desperately calling out to his mother for help was horrific." Throughout, Oakley emphasizes his role as a staunch defender of his teammates and doing what he thinks is right, never passing up the opportunity to vilify those who don't live up to his code.

Basketball fans will enjoy Oakley's stories about the game's biggest stars and his opinions about them.



COACH K
The Rise and Reign of Mike Krzyzewski

O'Connor, Ian
 Mariner Books (384 pp.)
 \$28.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-0-358-34540-4



A full-court look at NCAA men's basketball's all-time winningest coach on the eve of his retirement.

Who would have guessed that the Chicago-born son of poor, first-generation Polish Americans with an unpronounceable surname would grow up to lead an elite private school to five national championships while amassing more than 1,000 wins and producing numerous NBA superstars? Even after a standout high school career that led to him playing for legendary coach Bob Knight at Army, Mike Krzyzewski (b. 1947) hardly seemed destined for superstardom. When Knight left for Indiana, however, Krzyzewski succeeded him and coached Army to some impressive victories, which won him an interview at Duke. Athletic Director Tom Butters chose Krzyzewski over far more qualified candidates. Though Krzyzewski didn't consent to be interviewed for this book, he didn't discourage anyone in his inner circle from speaking with *New York Post* columnist—and longtime ESPN writer—O'Connor, the author of biographies of Derek Jeter and Bill Belichick. O'Connor effectively leverages a broad cast of characters to chronicle Coach K's rocky start at Duke (Butters never wavered in his support); the critical role of his family, especially wife Mickie, in his life and his program; his rise to the apex of college basketball; his stint coaching USA men's basketball to three consecutive Olympic gold medals; and his fraught relationship with combustible mentor Knight. The author doesn't shy away from Krzyzewski's shortcomings: A fiery competitor, he can be petty and temperamental and has difficulty apologizing; as a tactician, he's not particularly innovative. O'Connor also probes the few occasions that the program has toed the line of impropriety and highlights how Coach K leverages every possible recruiting advantage (perhaps unfairly), such as getting NBA players like LeBron James to sing his praises. He also makes a powerful case for why Krzyzewski has achieved such immense success: He's an extraordinary communicator and motivator, brilliant organizer, and tireless worker who prioritizes family and team above all else.

A sharpshooting account worthy of a champion.

“Illustrated with photographs and delicate drawings, this book is a marvel.”

THE INVISIBLE KINGDOM



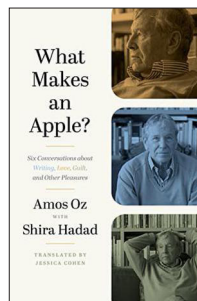
THE INVISIBLE KINGDOM
Reimagining Chronic Illness

O'Rourke, Meghan
Riverhead (336 pp.)
\$28.00 | March 1, 2022
978-1-59463-379-9

Tormented for years by enervating symptoms, the author spent most of her 30s dealing with—and trying to understand—chronic illness.

“To become chronically ill is not only to have a disease that you have to manage,” writes poet and *Yale Review* editor O'Rourke, “but to have a new story about yourself, a story that many people refuse to hear—because it is deeply unsatisfying, full of fits and starts, anger, resentment, chasms of unruly need. My own illness story has no destination.” Here, the author constructs that story from building blocks of personal narrative and science journalism, with deep dives into the technicalities of the immune system and the microbiome. The personal sections are engaging and well written—“What I had wasn't just an illness now; it was an identity, a membership in a peculiarly demanding sect. I had joined the First Assembly of the Diffusely Unwell. The Church of Fatigue, Itching, and Random Neuralgia. Temple Beth III”—as O'Rourke ably documents her myriad appointments with both Western and alternative practitioners, toting thick stacks of medical records, exploring various autoimmune diagnoses and treatment plans. Some are bizarre and/or dubious, others disgusting but legit (fecal microbiota transplant). Just when the author felt totally lost in the labyrinth of Lyme disease, prescribed the very antibiotics she believed had damaged her body in the first place, she finally found the beginning of a road to health. Though O'Rourke roundly rejects the notion that illness and suffering are somehow balanced by spiritual benefits, her conclusion offers hope. “Today, as a new paradigm for disease is emerging—pushed into full view by the coronavirus pandemic and the epidemic of long COVID—we must amend the simple ‘germ causes disease, body overcomes disease’ model....A holistic, individualized approach to medicine may matter more than was once thought.”

Emotionally compelling and intellectually rich, particularly for those with a personal connection to the issue.



WHAT MAKES AN APPLE?
Six Conversations About Writing, Love, Guilt, and Other Pleasures

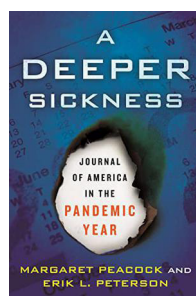
Oz, Amos & Shira Hadad
Trans. by Jessica Cohen
Princeton Univ. (160 pp.)
\$19.95 | April 5, 2022
978-0-691-21990-5

Perspectives on life and literature from one of Israel's most celebrated authors.

In 2014, Hadad edited *Judas*, the final novel by Israeli novelist Oz (1939-2018). After that, their conversations continued

periodically during the final four years of Oz's life, resulting in “dozens of recorded hours” of occasionally contentious conversations. In these six chats, Oz lyrically addresses such topics as his motivations as a writer, writing process, views on sexuality, decades on a kibbutz, and the ways in which his writing changed from early successes to later works such as *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (2005). Ask an opinionated person like Oz for opinions, and one is likely to get provocative answers, but most of his responses are benign, as when he states that writing never gets easier: “writing is like driving with one foot on the gas and one on the brakes the whole time.” More disturbing are comments on “militant feminism” and his fear that the #MeToo movement “is in danger of sliding down the slippery slope from understandable and justifiable revolutionary zeal to Bolshevik cruelty.” In another conversation, Oz complains that much of modern literature “is nothing but agendas or a cunning attempt to disguise agendas” and executed with a “totalitarian steamroller,” a shift that makes the teaching of literature “like being an explosives specialist neutralizing a suspicious object.” Readers can decide for themselves whether they concur with him or, like Hadad, strongly disagree. Fortunately, most of the book consists of witty observations on writing and more, and Oz shares a reassuring analogy for writers who get frustrated when the work goes poorly: “What you do is actually similar to a grocer's job. You come to work in the morning, you open up the shop, you sit there and wait for customers. If there are customers, it's a good day. If there aren't, you're still doing your job by sitting there waiting.”

Memorable viewpoints guaranteed to evoke strong feelings.



A DEEPER SICKNESS
Journal of America in the Pandemic Year

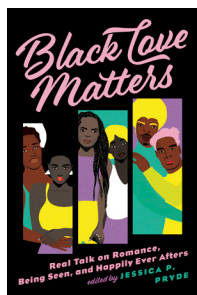
Peacock, Margaret & Erik L. Peterson
Beacon Press (288 pp.)
\$28.95 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-0-8070-4029-4

A real-time document of a year of calamity.

University of Alabama professors Peacock, a historian of propaganda and the media, and Peterson, a historian of medicine and science, each kept copious notes during the daily chaos of 2020, tracking “hundreds of news stories, reports, tweets, posts, blogs, speeches, and videos from across the political spectrum.” Presenting those notes as a day-by-day journal, they have captured vividly “how people encountered these moments and what historical factors informed their understandings of the events unfolding around them.” Beginning on Jan. 1, when they report the alarmed findings of a global disease tracker about a viral outbreak in Wuhan, the authors convey the “messy immediacy” of a year marked by disease, disinformation, and violence. Central to their observations was the increasing threat of Covid-19, complicated by Trump administration policies, dysfunctional

government, and “stark, intractable” political partisanship. “It’s a hoax, the Democrats have politicized it, Bill Gates is profiting from it, it’s a Chinese weapon,” social media posts proclaimed on Feb. 29, after the first American died. By March 26, the U.S. had become the center of the pandemic even as a debate pitching public health measures against individual freedoms intensified. The pandemic was only one among many other traumas, including the opioid epidemic, lack of affordable housing, the ravages of climate change, and systemic racism. The killing of George Floyd in May and the protests that followed underscored the racial and economic inequality roiling the nation. Summing up their chronicle of chaos, the authors point to three factors that “made America sicker than we should have been in 2020: (a) entrenched racial hierarchies; (b) an economic structure dependent on individual accumulation of wealth and widespread consumption of ephemeral goods and entertainment; (c) distraction, cognitive dissonance, and an intentional historical amnesia that prevented the majority of comfortable, well-intentioned, middle-class, white Americans like ourselves from doing anything about the first two issues.”

An urgent, timely call for national reckoning.



BLACK LOVE MATTERS
Real Talk on Romance,
Being Seen, and Happily
Ever Afters



Ed. by Pryde, Jessica P.
 Berkley (352 pp.)
 \$17.00 paper | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-593-33577-2

An anthology that collects a refreshingly wide variety of perspectives on Black love.

In her first book, Pryde, a librarian, contributing editor to *Book Riot*, and co-host of the *When in Romance* podcast, sets out to discuss often overlooked narratives regarding the joyfulness of Black love. “For more than 400 years,” she writes in the introduction, “people of African descent have been treated abysmally in many nations of the world.... Yet, whether free or enslaved, Black people throughout history have been able to find romantic love—regardless of their ability to marry—both inside and outside their own communities.” Over the course of a dozen essays, the contributors confront the absence of faces and stories like theirs. As they show, telling the truth about Black love is fraught with obstacles, and misconceptions about interest in Black experiences abound. “According to Pew Research,” writes Pryde, “the person most likely to read a book in the United States is a college-educated Black woman.” However, essayists highlight their experiences with publishers who tell them their work won’t sell. Others lay bare the tradition of the White-centered nature of most romance novels—and novels in general. In “Romance Has Broken My Dichotomous Key,” Sarah Hannah Gomez writes, “I’m biracial, black/white, Chicana, adopted, Jewish. That’s a lot of things, and I didn’t see myself in a lot of books growing up.” A theme of persistence emerges: Black writers must tell these

stories no matter what, whether it involves self-publishing a book or designing a college course on Black love. The refreshing intersectionality of the book is reflected in such essays as “Finding Queer Black Women in Romance,” “Writing in the Gaps: Black Latinx in Romance,” and “Interracial Romance and the Single Story.” The text also includes a list of relevant, recommended books, movies, and TV shows.

Readers will come away with a robust education in Black love and literature.



THE DARK QUEENS
The Bloody Rivalry That
Forged the Medieval World

Puhak, Shelley
 Bloomsbury (384 pp.)
 \$30.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-1-63557-491-3

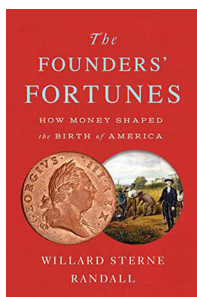
The lives of forgotten queens.

Poet and essayist Puhak makes her nonfiction debut with a dual biography of two fierce, indomitable sixth-century women: Brunhild and Fredegund, rival sisters-in-law who inspired the fictional story of the Valkyrie, immortalized in Wagner’s *Ring* opera cycle. Brunhild, the daughter of a Visigoth king, married King Sigibert, a son of Merovingian King Clothar; Fredegund, a slave, became the third wife of Chilperic, Sigibert’s vengeful half brother. Drawing heavily on primary sources, Puhak creates a richly detailed tapestry depicting a volatile, turbulent age. Fratricide, torture, betrayal, and execution—as well as deadly illnesses—were common: “Among the Merovingians,” writes the author, “intrafamilial violence was accepted as a hazard of the job,” and the two queens did not shrink from bloody conflict as they sought to consolidate power for themselves and their heirs and to wrest land from enemies. By the end of the sixth century, the dual queens had reigned for decades over an empire that “encompassed modern-day France, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, western and southern Germany, and swaths of Switzerland. Only Charlemagne would, briefly, control more territory than these two women.” Moreover, Puhak writes, they “did much more than simply hang on to their thrones. They collaborated with foreign rulers, engaged in public works programs, and expanded their kingdoms’ territories.” They knew their worth as women who, through marriage or motherhood, could consolidate realms. After Sigibert died, Brunhild married his nephew, a strategic move: “Her new husband was to depose his father and rule Neustria; her son would remain king of Austrasia.” Fredegund’s alleged “talent for assassination” led foreign kings to solicit her services. Puhak takes a sympathetic view of their plights: widowhood that might relegate them to life in a convent; the death of children from illness or foul play; and their physical vulnerability as women. Her brisk narrative rescues two significant figures from misogynist historians who, in perpetuating rumors and scandals, have diminished their significance.

Lively, well-researched history focused on powerful women.

“A vivid history of how America paid for its Revolution and why the Founding Fathers made the decisions they did.”

THE FOUNDERS' FORTUNES



THE FOUNDERS' FORTUNES *How Money Shaped the Birth of America*

Randall, Willard Sterne

Dutton (336 pp.)

\$29.00 | Feb. 8, 2022

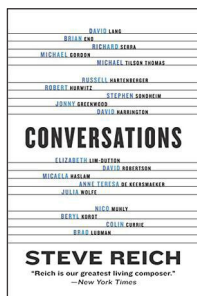
978-1-5247-4592-9



A detailed look at the economic roots of the American Revolution and the early republic.

Randall, the prizewinning expert on the founding era, focuses on a handful of key figures, including Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, John and Samuel Adams, and Robert Morris, perhaps the wealthiest American of his time. For many of them, especially Franklin and Washington, the possibility of acquiring large tracts of unclaimed land to the west of the original Colonies was a key to building wealth. However, British interests saw the possible settlement of the interior as a loosening of the mother country's economic and political control, and therein lay the seeds of conflict. Other policies—e.g., requirements that goods shipped to England be carried by English ships with English crews—also stifled Colonial enterprise. With the accession of King George III in 1761, a determination emerged to make the Colonies more profitable so as to pay off the massive bills the empire faced after the Seven Years' War with France. Randall deftly follows these currents as they played out in the lives of the key founders, with numerous ups and downs for each of them during the war. Most felt the impact of post-Revolutionary inflation and other economic ills that led to the creation of the Constitution, largely at the hands of Hamilton, the economic mastermind of the era. Randall also discusses the impact of slavery on the decisions of the founders—notably, the infamous three-fifths clause, which “assured that slaveholding states would control the House of Representatives.” Like Randall's previous works, especially *Unshackling America*, the narrative is well written and packed with human interest, providing a valuable update to the Revolutionary-era history many readers may not have studied since high school.

A vivid history of how America paid for its Revolution and why the Founding Fathers made the decisions they did.



CONVERSATIONS

Reich, Steve

Hanover Square Press (336 pp.)

\$27.99 | March 8, 2022

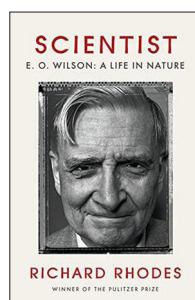
978-1-335-42572-0

Artists in various disciplines share their thoughts on and with one of the most celebrated contemporary composers.

In this collection of transcripts from chats, most of them conducted via Zoom in 2020 and 2021, figures including sculptor Richard Serra, Kronos Quartet founder David Harrington,

and composer Julia Wolfe share insights into minimalist composer Reich's works, including *It's Gonna Rain*, *Electric Counterpoint*, and *Double Sextet*, the last of which garnered Reich the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Music. While most conversations focus primarily on Reich (b. 1936), the book is strongest when there's a genuine dialogue between composers, as when Reich and Stephen Sondheim discuss similarities in their work during a 2015 moderated chat (“we share a fondness for the same harmonic structures,” Sondheim says) or when Nico Muhly describes the ways in which Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* and a motet by William Byrd influenced his *No Uncertain Terms*. Conversations in which little is learned of the other participant's output lack the depth of other exchanges. Even there, however, the shoptalk is a thrill to read. Reich fans will develop a greater appreciation of his music, with sections on his mastery of the use of tape loops, his innovations in phase music, the rehearsals for *Drumming*, and the use of strings in parallel with recorded voices in *Different Trains*. Those new to Reich will discover an eclectic composer who has drawn from sources as disparate as electronic devices made at Bell Labs in the 1960s and the music of 12th-century French composer Pérotin to create the hypnotic *Four Organs*. Conversations with conductors Michael Tilson Thomas and David Robertson are particularly rich thanks to their enthusiasm and expansiveness and the depth of technical detail—especially when Robertson speaks about conducting Reich's *Tebillim*, *The Desert Music*, and other pieces and Thomas discusses the near-riot Reich's *Four Organs* caused at Carnegie Hall in 1973.

A rewarding journey through the career of one of the pioneers of minimalist music.



SCIENTIST *E.O. Wilson: A Life in Nature*

Rhodes, Richard

Doubleday (288 pp.)

\$30.00 | Nov. 9, 2021

978-0-385-54555-6

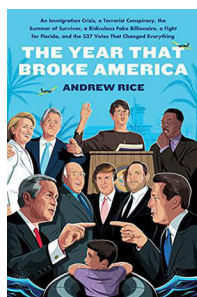
Pulitzer Prize-winning author and historian Rhodes offers a sparkling biography of the eminent, sometimes controversial biologist and naturalist.

E.O. Wilson (b. 1929), perhaps the best-known entomologist of the modern era and the discoverer of countless biological and behavioral details on the “social insects,” has long worked by a kind of mantra that Rhodes uses in opening: “If a subject is already receiving a great deal of attention...stay away from that subject.” Wilson, who learned the rudiments of science as a Boy Scout growing up in an unsettled home in Alabama, always charted his own course, leading to a Harvard scholarship and, soon, an invitation to travel to the South Pacific to study ants for the university's museum. When he did so, Wilson recalls, “only about a dozen scientists around the world were engaged full-time in the study of ants.” The number has grown exponentially, in part through Wilson's influence. However, as Rhodes



shows in this nimble account, Wilson was not one to sit still. He moved into the more abstract realms of ecology, got into tangles in the 1950s with famed molecular biologist James Watson, and essentially created a new scientific discipline: evolutionary biology and, within it, what is called island biogeography, studying how animals come to inhabit remote islands. As his questions grew larger, so did his answers, leading to trouble. Wilson ran afoul of a sizable chunk of academia when he advanced his theories of “sociobiology,” applying ideas of animal ethology to humans, even though he encouraged his colleagues to take a remote view “as though we were zoologists from another planet completing a catalog of social species on Earth.” His biggest effort is ongoing, Rhodes writes in closing—namely, the effort to do even more, to catalog *every* species on Earth so as to document better which have gone extinct.

An exemplary portrait that may not win Wilson accolades but that provides ample evidence for his importance to science.



THE YEAR THAT BROKE AMERICA
An Immigration Crisis, a Terrorist Conspiracy, a Summer of Survivor, a Ridiculous Fake Billionaire, a Fight for Florida, and the 537 Votes That Changed Everything

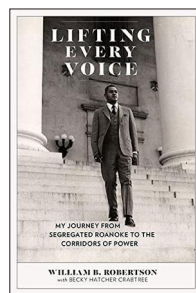
Rice, Andrew
 Harper/HarperCollins (544 pp.)
 \$34.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-0-06-297982-7

Chronicling a chaotic year in American life (not 2020).

Journalist Rice, a contributing editor at *New York Magazine*, draws on a mixture of reportage, archival sources, interviews, and legal testimony to create a heady portrait of the year 2000, which he claims marked a shattering turning point for the nation. Wildly digressive and overlong, the narrative veers from politics to business, immigration to terrorism, Florida to Kandahar. He begins in late 1999, when Ziad Jarrar left Germany to engage in terrorist training. His life would end on Sept. 11, 2001, in an attack orchestrated by Osama bin Laden. It was a year when the nation’s cultural elite were presided over by a cast of men whose fortunes would fall precipitously in the decades that followed: film mogul Harvey Weinstein, TV executives Les Moonves and Roger Ailes, Fox News talking head Bill O’Reilly, and Matt Lauer. On the political scene, Al Gore struggled to separate himself from the huge personality of Bill Clinton, while George W. Bush honed his identity as an “easygoing centrist” and “compassionate conservative.” The election in which the Supreme Court decided for Bush was the first since 1888 in which a candidate who won the popular vote still lost. On the immigrant front, the family battle over custody of Elián Gonzalez played out on TV, a spectacle that cultural critic Frank Rich called a “relentless hybrid of media circus, soap

opera and tabloid journalism.” Reality TV, not limited to real-life events, was shaped into a new genre of entertainment with CBS’s hugely popular *Survivor*. Among the dramatis personae in Rice’s well-populated history are Janet Reno, Clinton’s attorney general; David Boies, Gore’s lawyer; financier Kevin Ingram, involved in the “gangland culture” of Deutsche Bank; real estate tycoon Donald Trump, ruminating on the idea of running for office, and his then-girlfriend Melania Knauss; and activist Jesse Jackson.

Though Rice doesn’t mount a fully convincing argument for the year’s significance, he tells a lively story.



LIFTING EVERY VOICE
My Journey From Segregated Roanoke to the Corridors of Power

Robertson, William B. with
 Becky Hatcher Crabtree
 Univ. of Virginia (224 pp.)
 \$29.95 | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-0-8139-4717-4



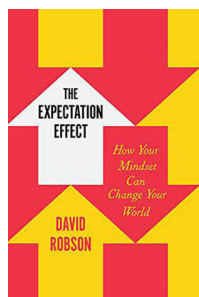
An educator and political activist recounts the long arc from segregation to civil rights and beyond.

Born in segregated Roanoke, Robertson (1933-2021) excelled in school and attended Bluefield State College, a historically Black college in West Virginia. There, he encountered professors who encouraged him to prepare for the changing time that was fast upon them: “They espoused the belief that America could not continue down the road it was traveling: equity was coming.” When educational desegregation was finally put into place in the 1960s, Robertson was on hand to enter a formerly forbidden graduate school and embark on a distinguished career as a teacher. Many other accomplishments were to come, as portrayed in this passionate memoir. Aware of Robertson’s skills at providing guidance and counsel to his young charges, Gov. Linwood Holton (who provides the foreword), one of the last members of the progressive wing of the Republican Party, asked him to join his administration to improve conditions for young Black people. That led him into further government work, including appointments in civil rights and equal opportunity under the Reagan administration, which, he allows, was problematic: “I understood that the Reagan administration was labeled ‘racist,’ but nevertheless, I felt I could make a positive difference in the lives of Black people in the United States and abroad.” Of course, racism has endured. As a young man, writes the author, “I always believed that White children grew up free, whereas Black children grew up inhibited, told to keep their hands in sight while shopping, to never touch merchandise until ready to purchase for fear of accusations of theft, and to never argue with police, just to obey them in whatever they told you to do.” Having returned to the classroom until finally retiring in his late 70s, he worries that the country continues to fail to honor another Virginian’s proclamation that all men are created equal.

An inspiring, exemplary account of a life well lived.

“Revenge is a dish best served with helpless laughter.
Totally deadpan and irresistibly hilarious.”

THE VERY LAST INTERVIEW



THE EXPECTATION EFFECT
How Your Mindset Can Change Your World

Robson, David

Henry Holt (336 pp.)

\$27.99 | Feb. 15, 2022

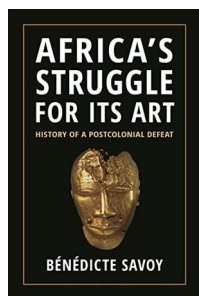
978-1-250-82763-0

The human brain, according to this absorbing book, has a mind of its own.

Robson, a former editor at *New Scientist* and a senior journalist at the

BBC, has been studying the brain for years, and he admits that he is still surprised by the way it works. Why do athletes who believe in lucky charms perform better when they carry them? Why do people who believe that age leads to wisdom live longer than people who see getting older as a collection of physical problems? One of the keys to understanding this, writes the author, is the placebo effect, with which most readers will be familiar. The author also describes the “nocebo effect.” As he writes, “placebo means ‘I shall please,’ and nocebo means ‘I shall harm’—and the nocebo response occurs when we believe the body to be under threat. Through the actions of the prediction machine, such expectations will change our physiology so that the mere thought of having a symptom or disease can make us ill.” The reasons for the placebo/nocebo effect lie in the brain’s tendency to fill in the blanks. Since it can only process a small portion of received information, it makes up the rest with pieces of memory and assumption. Then it generates a response, which might involve releasing needed chemicals into the body. Mental becomes physical; expectations shape reality. Robson delves into the underpinning research, which includes methods to train the brain into positive patterns and processes, but he also emphasizes the limits. You cannot become rich by merely wishing for it, for example, but the brain can be trained into experiencing greater satisfaction with life. Robson’s many anecdotes and examples give a human dimension to these ideas. There is no doubt that there is still much to learn about the brain, but the author provides a solid grounding and a useful map on where future paths might lead.

Cutting-edge research and effective storytelling create an insightful book on an ever changing field.



AFRICA'S STRUGGLE FOR ITS ART
History of a Postcolonial Defeat

Savoy, Bénédicte

Trans. by Susanne Meyer-Abich

Princeton Univ. (240 pp.)

\$29.95 | March 15, 2022

978-0-691-23473-1

A closely observed look at the resistance of European museums to repatriate artwork looted from Africa during the colonial era.

French art historian Savoy, a professor at the Technical University of Berlin, revisits a bitterly contested debate that began in the 1960s, when newly independent African nations began petitioning for the return of cultural patrimony. They were unsuccessful, and to this day, “the major public museums in Paris, Berlin, London, Brussels, Vienna, Amsterdam and Leiden together hold more than half a million African objects.” In many cases, the requests were dismissed with barely disguised contempt and often with raw racism by museum curators and directors with a variety of excuses—e.g., poorly equipped African museums would not be capable of taking proper care of sensitive material, the artwork in question was needed where it was for the purpose of scholarly study, and so on. Wrote one German scholar, “it is important to remember that the Berlin holdings were purchased legally at the time.” Another added, “Not everything which is technically possible [is] therefore sensible and justifiable in terms of effort”—in other words, we have better things to do than worry about returning African objects. The debate stretched across the 1970s and early 1980s, with some unexpected twists, as when Greek diplomat Melina Mercouri demanded the return of the Elgin Marbles and other materials from the British Museum. Her demand was unsuccessful as well. Given that many U.S. museums are now engaged in the repatriation of artworks to the Native American nations from which they were taken, there are methods in place for restitution. Still, writes Savoy, European museums in particular continue to resist. “The issue still continues to trigger compulsive instances of institutional defence,” he writes, “as if the search for an equitable approach to collections created in an inequitable context was one of the greatest threats to European cultural heritage.”

Though chiefly of interest to specialists, this is a thoughtful study in the ethics of art collection.



THE VERY LAST INTERVIEW

Shields, David

New York Review Books (164 pp.)

\$14.95 paper | March 29, 2022

978-1-68137-642-4

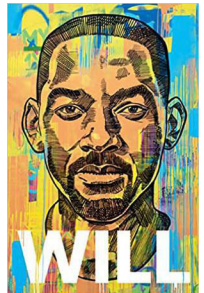
A montage of all the questions the author has been asked in the last 40 years.

Like *Reality Hunger*—his mashup of numbered paragraphs, mostly unattributed and lacking contextual background, pulled largely from other sources—this book is a delightful and utterly Shields-ian work. According to the jacket description, the author gathered every interview he’s ever given and transcribed every question asked, ignoring his own answers. His collage of these questions creates an absolutely hilarious take-down of the interview process, of his own public persona, and of the journalists themselves, blessedly anonymous, who asked some of the most outrageously mean, out-there, self-important, stupid, and simply impossible questions imaginable—and then doubled down with prodding follow-ups. Organized into brief chapters (“Childhood,” “Envy,” “Jewishness,” “Suicide,” etc.),



this theater of the absurd derives its humor from questions like these: “Can you define ‘truth’—preferably in one good long paragraph?” “You have only one child—is there a cruelty involved in such a decision?” “Are you competitive at all with your daughter (whose graphic memoir I’ve read and like at least as much as anything you’ve done of late)?” “Seriously then: How do you get through the day if you ‘know’ life is utterly bereft of purpose?” “Do you still think that, very briefly, in the early-to-mid-1980s, David Letterman was actually quite interesting?” “Do you feel like a tertiary character in a Henry James novella?” “Is the overexamined life worth living?” (Follow-up: “By which I guess I mean, you’ve analyzed your life to death, but will you have lived your life at all prior to your death?”) “So—not to put too fine a point on it—has it been an utterly wasted life?” “Were you disappointed that some of the critics didn’t pick up on the humor?” Not this time.

Revenge is a dish best served with helpless laughter. Totally deadpan and irresistibly hilarious.

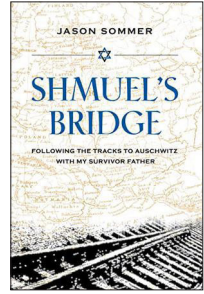


WILL
Smith, Will with Mark Manson
 Penguin Press (432 pp.)
 \$30.00 | Nov. 9, 2021
 978-1-984877-92-5

One of Hollywood’s biggest stars delivers a memoir of success won through endless, relentless work and self-reckoning. “My imagination is my gift, and when it merges with my work ethic, I can make money rain from the heavens.” So writes Smith, whose imagination is indeed a thing of wonder—a means of coping with fear, an abusive father with the heart of a drill instructor, and all manner of inner yearnings. The author’s imagination took him from a job bagging ice in Philadelphia to initial success as a partner in the Grammy-winning rap act DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince. Smith was propelled into stardom thanks to the ministrations of Quincy Jones, who arranged an audition in the middle of his own birthday party, bellowing “No paralysis through analysis!” when Smith begged for time to prepare. The mantra—which Jones intoned 50-odd times during the two hours it took for the Hollywood suits to draw up a contract for the hit comedy series *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*—is telling, for hidden within this memoir lies a powerful self-help book. For Smith, all of life is a challenge in which one’s feelings are largely immaterial. “I watched my father’s negative emotions seize control of his ample intellect and cause him over and over again to destroy beautiful parts of our family,” he writes, good reason for him to sublimate negativity in the drive to get what he wanted—money, at first, and lots of it, which got him in trouble with the IRS in the early 1990s. Smith, having developed a self-image that cast him as a coward, opines that one’s best life is lived by facing up to the things that hold us back. “I’ve been making a conscious effort to attack all the things that I’m scared of,” he writes, adding, “And this is scary.” It’s a good lesson for any aspiring

creative to ponder—though it helps to have Smith’s abundant talent, too.

A refreshing celebrity memoir focused not strictly on the self but on a much larger horizon.

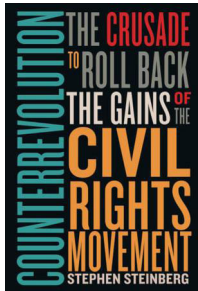


SHMUEL’S BRIDGE
Following the Tracks to Auschwitz With My Survivor Father
 Sommer, Jason
 Imagine Publishing (224 pp.)
 \$24.99 | March 15, 2022
 978-1-62354-512-3

A father-son journey through the land and memories of the Holocaust.

Sommer, the author of five poetry collections, recounts a 2001 visit to Eastern Europe with his Hungarian father, Jay, a Holocaust survivor. Raised in poverty, Jay was sent to a forced labor camp as the Nazis overtook his homeland. Eventually, he was able to escape the camp, evading capture until he joined a Soviet army unit toward the end of the war. The author arranged a trip following the rail lines that figured heavily in his father’s history as well as those of other family members who did not survive. Of special interest to Sommer was the search for a bridge where his uncle, Shmuel, had escaped the train to Auschwitz only to be killed by guards. The author provides an undeniably intriguing tale of travel and remembrance, filled with fascinating characters and places caught between the war-torn past and the post-Cold War future. However, the primary narrative focus is on the strained and highly unusual relationship between the author, who was raised during a time of relative peace and prosperity, and his father, aptly described as “an omnivore of terror” who “suffered the most thorough dissolutions of social order” and had law and order shift around him, restricting his life, collecting him for forced labor, while narrowly avoiding what he feared most, the fate of almost all his family.” In exploring the purpose for his journey and this book, Sommer writes, “I would have liked my writing to have cleared a path between my father and me, so we could have had a fuller knowledge of each other.” Writing the book was obviously an act of catharsis for the author, who often brings up his own search for truth, connection, or some other personal need he feels but cannot easily put into words.

A worthwhile work of Holocaust remembrance, but readers must be prepared to journey with the son as well as the father.



COUNTERREVOLUTION
The Crusade To Roll Back
the Gains of the Civil Rights
Movement

Steinberg, Stephen
Stanford Univ. (312 pp.)
\$25.00 paper | Jan. 18, 2022
978-1-5036-3003-1

A critical examination of the erosion of civil rights over the past few decades.

One of the veteran sociologist's targets in his unsparing assessment is the bland phrase *race relations*. Here he quotes Charles Blow: "From the beginning, the racial dynamics in America have been about power, equality and access, or the lack thereof....So what are the relations here? It is a linguistic sidestep that avoids the true issue: anti-Black and anti-other white supremacy." The better and more comprehensive term, he suggests, is *racial oppression*, which gets to the point of a power dynamic that privileges White supremacy over all. In that vein, Steinberg examines the steady emergence of the idea of a "model minority"—at first, Jews, most of whom arrived on these shores as impoverished immigrants and carved out a place in American society, and lately Asians, who, in excelling in business and academics, are held up as somehow different from Black Americans. Though certainly not treated without prejudice, they suffer less from the systemic racism that holds Black citizens back. Steinberg considers the dilatory, blame-the-victim effects of the 1965 Moynihan Report, much of which was written by Nathan Glazer, a sociologist who held by commission or omission that Blacks were the authors of their own problems of poverty and other hurdles that could instead be reasonably attributed to systemic racism. Responded one Black activist at the time, "we are sick unto death of being analyzed, mesmerized, bought, sold, and slobbered over while the same evils that are the ingredients of our oppression go unattended." The White supremacism implicit in the report came to the fore in the Reagan years, disguised in terms such as *states' rights* and *limited government*. It emerged in full fury during the Trump regime, which achieved disenfranchisement by suppressing the Black vote—a process that is ongoing in many states.

An alarming report on the state of civil rights today, which favors White supremacy over any other consideration.



AMERICA SECOND
How America's Elites Are
Making China Stronger

Stone Fish, Isaac
Knopf (288 pp.)
\$28.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-525-65770-5

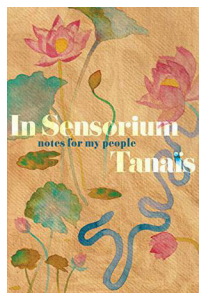
Stone Fish delivers a scorching denunciation of U.S. leaders who serve Chinese interests.

As the author, who lived in China for six years while writing for *Newsweek*, notes, Henry Kissinger's principal activities over the last 40 years have centered on representing the Chinese government's interests in the West: "The most accurate way to describe Kissinger...is as an agent of Chinese influence." Kissinger does this in various ways, such as serving on the international advisory council of the China Development Bank. But the Chinese Communist Party calls on him more as a go-to fix-it guy. For example, following American efforts to force China into accepting Taiwan as an independent state, Kissinger called on Washington to ask them "to move in the direction of improving relations with China." However, Kissinger is not alone in the corps of "diplomat consultants" who have earned lucrative contracts by arguing for such improved relations, which, the author notes, also serves them well in China in helping open doors to American companies there, allowing these consultants to play on a two-way street. One sector that did not do well, historically, was Hollywood, which earned low box-office numbers in China for years after daring to release two films about the Dalai Lama, *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet*. As a result, Disney in particular suffered, but they sent Kissinger, hat in hand, to beg pardon, opening the way to a Disneyland in Hong Kong and the Chinese government's allowing 20 foreign films into the country instead of the previous 10. In 1998, China produced only as much revenue for Disney as Peru, "and yet Disney still capitulated. It knew which way the winds were blowing." Whether in academia or business, China has exerted so much influence, Stone Fish concludes, that American elites exercise strict self-censorship when it comes to criticizing China—a dictator's dream, if an exercise in self-serving cowardice.

An eye-opening look at the behind-the-scenes sway China holds over so much of the U.S. economy.

“A heady pleasure of language in love with the author’s many subjects, and perfectly suited to them.”

IN SENSORIUM



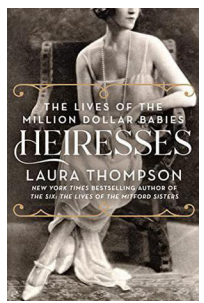
IN SENSORIUM
Notes for My People

Tanaïs
Harper/HarperCollins (368 pp.)
\$24.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-358-38170-9



A novelist and perfume maker serves up a lyrical memoir, sensuous and sensual, that crosses decades and continents. Tanaïs, author of the acclaimed novel *Bright Lines*, brings a millennial sensibility—and a rejection of outmoded mores—to their work as a sharp observer of the world. Refusing old binaries, they move freely among peoples who are bitterly divided. Though descended from Bangladeshi Muslims, the author feels at home in India among Hindus, writing that neither religion “is absolved of brutal violence or enslaving innocent people.” Later, they add, “I celebrate Kali *puja*. I recite a Buddhist Tara mantra every morning. I probably know more mantras than I do *surah* in the Quran.” Try to explain such things to “a jaunty Indian bro” at a party, though, and the old walls come back up. Though the Brahmin in question fully grasped the racism wrought of “being brown in America,” he did not carry the memory of genocide that Bangladeshis do—even today, adds Tanaïs, Hindu fascists are stirring up pogroms against India’s Muslims. Much of this evocative memoir is told through the vehicle of perfumes and their history. Scents mark the sex workers of South Asia and the enslaved peoples of Africa, find their way into Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine, and serve to enhance appetite and desire everywhere. Readers with an interest in such things will learn, through Tanaïs’ elegant prose, just about everything about sandalwood essences, rhododendron incense, and “perfume as fluid as language, as lineage, as rivers of sweat.” More, they’ll emerge with a deeper understanding of the many ethnicities that make up South Asia and that merge in the author’s sensibility along with cultural artifacts from America and elsewhere in the West, from manifestations of “radical-vision Buddhism” to the occasional dose of LSD.

A heady pleasure of language in love with the author’s many subjects, and perfectly suited to them.



HEIRESSSES
The Lives of the Million Dollar Babies

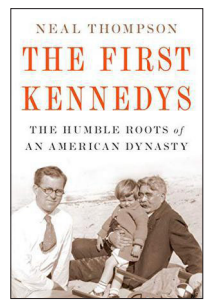
Thompson, Laura
St. Martin’s (384 pp.)
\$29.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-250-20273-4

An engaging book about heiresses, women who have always been in classes of their own.

Thompson, who has penned biographies of Agatha Christie and the Mitford sisters, knows how to construct fascinating narratives out of dry research. Working

from historical records, newspaper articles, and personal correspondence, the author creates a series of sketches that highlight recurring themes but also offer great variety. In Georgian England, heiresses were family assets to be traded, with their own views worth very little. This was also the case in the U.S. in the 19th century, although it had more to do with the building of business empires. It was only at the start of the 20th century that heiresses were able to exert control over their lives. Thompson has a good time with tales of American heiresses going to Europe to marry men with impressive titles but small bank accounts. Leading the way was Jennie Jerome, who married Lord Randolph Churchill and gave birth to Winston. Several heiresses, like Peggy Guggenheim, became memorable patrons of the arts. Others gave themselves over to eccentricity, spending ridiculous sums on parties, social climbing, pets, or other hobbies. Alice Silverthorne, a Chicago socialite who was married to a timber tycoon, raised a lion club called Samson. Some heiresses reveled in their unearned wealth, and some were plagued by guilt over it. Quite a few drank themselves to death. Nancy Cunard, “a precursor of the Mitford sisters by a generation,” found another sort of addiction, becoming a hard-core socialist. Nearly all of the heiresses in the book had disastrous marriages or relationships. Barbara Woolworth Hutton made a tabloid career out of picking unsuitable men, marrying seven times. A gilded cage creates a streak of self-destruction, notes Thompson. Nevertheless, she reveals her subjects as real people with measures of tragedy, resilience, and vigor.

A book that offers insight as well as entertainment—a peek into the human condition from an unexpected angle.



THE FIRST KENNEDYS
The Humble Roots of an American Dynasty

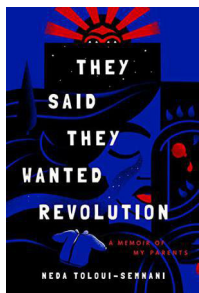
Thompson, Neal
Mariner Books (352 pp.)
\$28.00 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-358-43769-7

The Kennedys before Joseph and Rose.

Journalist Thompson, grandson of Irish immigrants, digs into the history of the family, beginning with the two who left Ireland to seek a new life in America: Bridget Murphy and Patrick Kennedy. In the 1840s, adventurous Bridget was driven by “a craving to leave the safety of habit and family and fling herself among strangers toward a strange new land.” Undaunted by a tough job market and the hostility of native Bostonians, Bridget found work as a domestic, to which she returned between pregnancies after she married the handsome Patrick. The couple managed on Patrick’s earnings as a barrel maker, but when he died of consumption in 1858, Bridget, in her mid-20s, struggled to support her four young children. A maid’s earnings would hardly suffice, so she became a hairdresser at an upscale department store, saved enough to become a grocer, and, by 1865, was a landlady for her own property. Patrick J. (1858-1929), her youngest child

and only son, inherited her drive and resourcefulness. Restless as a laborer, he saw the business potential of liquor. By the time he was 23, he had a liquor license with a saloon that attracted local pols. Soon, he was tapped to run for election to Boston's Democratic Ward and City Committee and, at 27, won election to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where he served five terms before moving to the state Senate. Among his business ventures was the establishment of the Columbia Trust Company, a bank that later launched the career of his son Joseph Patrick Kennedy. Thompson offers a cursory overview of Joe, Rose, and their children, devoting his attention to their forebears. Drawing on archival material, contemporary publications, and family papers where sources about the Kennedys' early years are scant, Thompson provides solid historical context about the plight of Irish immigrants, roiling national politics, and changing demographics.

A lively biography of an iconic family before it became famous.



THEY SAID THEY WANTED REVOLUTION
A Memoir of My Parents

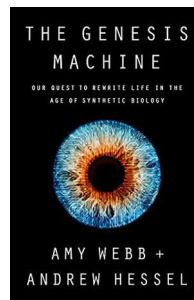
Toloui-Semnani, Neda
Little A (280 pp.)
\$24.95 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-5420-0448-0

A journalist pays tribute to her Iranian activist parents, who risked everything to bring down the shah of Iran.

Toloui-Semnani, a Brooklyn-based writer for *VICE News Tonight*, was only 3 years old in 1982 when her father, Faramarz, was taken away by Revolutionary Guards in Tehran and imprisoned. In the late 1960s, Faramarz and the author's mother, Farahnaz, had relocated to Berkeley, California, as university students, and they were active in the leftist movements to bring down the loathed, corrupt regime of the shah. When they returned to Iran, they were swept up in the chaos of the Iranian Revolution. Spurred to write this memoir after Farahnaz's death in 2010 and the birth of her own child, Toloui-Semnani movingly re-creates the courageous activism of her young, idealistic parents, who were immersed in increasingly violent demonstrations while they attended school and worked in Berkeley. This book, writes the author, is "not just my effort to uncover why my parents chose the paths they did; it's also an exploration of how their choices influenced my own and of this question: How will my choices, made years ago, shape this new person about to be born? This is a memoir of my parents. It is an examination of our personal and political history. But it is also my own meditation on how we continue like threads stitched across decades, connecting generations." As part of her pilgrimage in writing the memoir, Toloui-Semnani visited significant places in her parents' lives, combining those experiences with intricate research in archives and via interviews with surviving friends of her parents. Though occasionally moving, the final section—pages of diary entries and letters between

the author and her mother over the years—is overly sentimental and drains some of the narrative energy from the text. Still, the book is both richly reflective, informative, and tender in its characterizations.

A generous and heartfelt search for personal and familial identity.



THE GENESIS MACHINE
Our Quest To Rewrite Life in the Age of Synthetic Biology

Webb, Amy & Andrew Hessel
PublicAffairs (368 pp.)
\$29.00 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-5417-9791-8

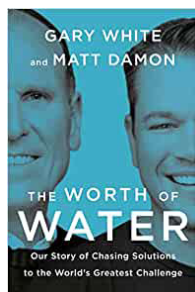
A look at the coming revolution in biotechnology, with all its possible goods and evils.

"A great transformation of life is underway," write futurist Webb and geneticist Hessel. The rising field of synthetic biology, with its underlying technology of gene editing, will allow for numerous things that do not yet exist, including the ability to sequence the genome of a virus nearly immediately, affording scientists a vast library of viruses that will provide the wherewithal to "cure any genetic disease in humankind." That revolution, the authors write, will remake food, energy, transportation, the supply chain, and commerce as a whole. Granted, write Webb and Hessel, this is a vast Pandora's box. Synthetic biology is largely the province of corporations and governments in the developed world, and it is not outside the realm of reason to think that a corporation might maximize profit or a government, political gain through its ability to control the food supply and indeed the genetic library of the planet. The problem, as the authors note in deeply researched but accessible prose, is that there is little in the way of coherence in terms of international agreements or "consensus on the acceptable circumstances under which humans should manipulate human, animal, or plant life." Part of that problem is the generally laissez faire attitude of some governments, especially the U.S., to develop regulations that "don't intervene until there's a problem, so as not to stifle innovations." Because the current regulatory climate isn't well structured for future-proofing, one important step is the development of a body of law and convention acknowledging that "this new approach to biology warrants a new approach to regulation," balancing the public good with scientific and commercial interests. The authors propose planks of a platform to this end while noting the difficulty of reining in tech-driven countries such as China to honor international licensing systems and other controls.

A wrinkle on the near future that many readers will not have pondered—and should.

“A heartfelt invitation to get involved in the pursuit of clean water for everyone.”

THE WORTH OF WATER



THE WORTH OF WATER
Our Story of Chasing Solutions to the World's Greatest Challenge

White, Gary & Matt Damon

Portfolio (240 pp.)

\$27.00 | March 1, 2022

978-0-593-18997-9

The co-founders of Water.org share their journey toward ending the global water crisis.

Engineer White and actor Damon are longtime activists with the common goal of bringing clean water to the countless regions in the world that lack it. In 1991, White launched Water Partners International, and in 2006, Damon formed the H2O Africa Foundation. For years, they worked through their individual organizations to bring these services to areas in need, such as Latin America, India, and Africa. After meeting at the Clinton Global Initiative in 2008, they merged forces to become Water.org. “Given the values we shared,” writes White, “and the different strengths we each brought to the table, I thought that if we joined up, we could do something really special.” Their work has been undeniably life-changing for millions of people. In some regions, women and girls spend nearly the entire day gathering water for their families; often, the only water they can obtain is contaminated. Having access to clean water and sanitation improves health, increases family income, provides time for education, and empowers women. As the authors contend, the problem is largely financial. These families need someone to invest in them, as opposed to just receiving charity. With humility, passion, and some humor, the authors share the challenges, successes, and failures they have experienced along the way as well as stories of individuals and families who have inspired them to continue their significant work. The authors also discuss how the global pandemic has further highlighted the need for all to have access to safe water, and they have emerged more committed to their mission than ever. That mission, they write, has helped more than 40 million people, and “by the time you read this, even that number will be out of date.” All of the proceeds from the book will go to Water.org.

A heartfelt invitation to get involved in the pursuit of clean water for everyone.

CHILDREN'S

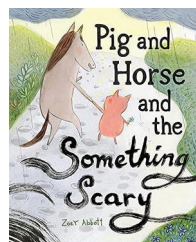


These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- REVOLUTIONARY PRUDENCE WRIGHT** by Beth Anderson;
illus. by Susan Reagan..... 137
- JUST HARRIET** by Elana K. Arnold..... 137
- TÍA FORTUNA'S NEW HOME** by Ruth Behar;
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- HOW TO BUILD A HUMAN** by Pamela S. Turner;
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TÍA FORTUNA'S NEW HOME
Behar, Ruth
Illus. by Devon Holzwarth
Knopf (32 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
978-0-593-17241-4



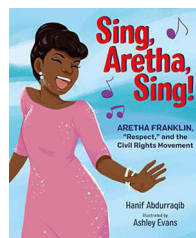
PIG AND HORSE AND THE SOMETHING SCARY

Abbott, Zoey
Abrams (40 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jan. 18, 2022
978-1-4197-4501-0

Pig can't stop thinking about something scary. Maybe Horse can help.

When Pig awakes feeling "a bit out of sorts," she seeks out her friend Horse, who is full of ideas for making her feel better, from a bike ride in the sunshine and a swim in the bay to a good laugh. When these measures fail, Horse suggests that Pig invite "whatever-it-is" to tea—after all, "teatime brings out the best manners in everyone!" Only when the two have completed preparations for the meal does Pig feel ready to share what's been weighing on her mind. As Pig opens up to Horse, the artwork portrays shadow archetypes representing Pig's repressed fears, including a black, smokelike entity, a menacing blue fox, and a sticky purple substance. Fortunately, Horse was right. Tea, cake, a supportive friend, and the willingness to face her fears prove to be the perfect remedy for Pig's perturbations. Abbott's subtly droll text and soft gouache, colored pencil-and-sumi-ink illustrations work together to produce a picture book that feels classic yet not derivative. The story deftly probes the darker aspects of the human psyche and the challenging emotions all children experience without becoming too overwhelming for young readers. Horse, with her toothy grin and expressive eyes, brings just the right amount of humor and lightness. Both animals, drawn standing upright with rosy cheeks, are appealing and accessible protagonists who evoke some of the great friendships of children's literature.

Gentle and effective. (Picture book. 3-7)



SING, ARETHA, SING! Aretha Franklin, "Respect," and the Civil Rights Movement

Abdurraqib, Hanif
Illus. by Ashley Evans
Farrar, Straus and Giroux (40 pp.)
\$18.99 | Dec. 28, 2021
978-0-374-31345-6

The timeless Queen of Soul is introduced to a new generation.

In his picture-book debut, National Book Award longlisted author Abdurraqib traces Aretha Franklin's groundbreaking

career as a singer and her legacy as a civil rights activist. Beginning with her childhood singing gospel in her father's church, the story covers her time traveling with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., her rise to international stardom, and the emergence of her iconic signature song "Respect" as a popular and powerful anthem of Black and female empowerment during the 1960s. The text is written mostly in simple expository prose except for an acrostic poem on one double-page spread in which the first letters of each line spell out the word *respect*. Evans' vibrant digital illustrations highlight Franklin's beauty and vitality and the racial diversity of the people who were in her thrall. As acknowledged in the backmatter, attempting to encapsulate all that Franklin was in a picture book is a difficult task, and indeed, the book feels overambitious at times, but its message regarding music's power to help love conquer hate is compelling.

A sweet, upbeat testimonial to the ongoing, far-reaching impact of a dearly departed legend. (author's note) (Picture book biography. 4-8)



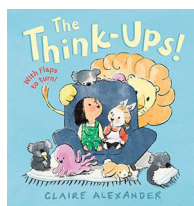
SHIRLEY CHISHOLM: A GRAPHIC NOVEL

Aggs, Patrice
 Illus. by Markia Jenai
 Sunbird Books (48 pp.)
 \$10.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-1-5037-6241-1
 Series: It's Her Story

"Fighting Shirley" was no ordinary politician.

The story opens in Barbados, where Shirley Chisholm spent a relatively carefree early childhood with her sister, Muriel, on their grandparents' farm. Upon being sent to live with her parents in Brooklyn, Shirley had to adjust to much stricter household rules. She excelled academically throughout her school years and, after graduating from Brooklyn College, began her teaching career in early childhood education. As an administrator of child care centers, Chisholm devoted herself to child welfare and community affairs. Her work put her in touch with the needs of working people and their families, and she labored ceaselessly to get candidates elected who would make meaningful changes. Eventually, she decided to run for office herself and became the second Black woman elected to the New York Assembly and, after that, the country's first Black congresswoman. Aggs relates how Chisholm dedicated her efforts to improving the lives of her constituents, often finding herself at loggerheads with colleagues. Chisholm's boldness and desire for change led her to seek the Democratic Party nomination for president of the United States. Although she was unsuccessful, her groundbreaking campaign was a momentous sociopolitical event. This lively, optimistic biography is an accessible introduction to Chisholm's life for younger readers, highlighting her determination to stay true to herself and her ideals. The illustrations aren't particularly original, but the colorful panels effectively propel the narrative.

An interesting portrait of an American mover and shaker refreshingly presented in graphic novel format. (Graphic biography. 8-10)



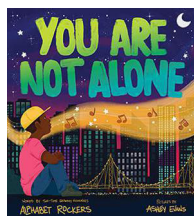
THE THINK-UPS!

Alexander, Claire
 Candlewick (40 pp.)
 \$15.99 | Jan. 11, 2022
 978-1-5362-2012-4

Two children stuck inside on a rainy day use their imaginations to stave off boredom.

Having exhausted their usual indoor activities, small gal pals Kiki and Anna stare out the wet window despondently. But then, in a stroke of inspiration, Kiki invents a special game: "We could play the Think-Ups!" The rules are simple: Think of something and it will appear. Anna is skeptical at first, but soon the girls are conjuring up bunnies, octopuses, koalas, and even a moose! They initially revel in their wild animal apparitions until the mischievous menagerie takes over the house, making a mess in the kitchen and causing general chaos. Luckily, the children think up a way to restore order just as the sun comes out...but their imaginary troubles aren't over yet! Alexander's exuberant text lends itself perfectly to reading aloud, with playful verbal flourishes such as "wriggling, giggling octopuses." The digital illustrations, executed in a mostly pastel palette, have a hand-drawn feel and effectively convey the hilarity, charm, and unbridled energy of young children's play. Kiki and Anna's rapidly shifting emotional extremes are dead-on and offer additional points for discussion. Occasional wordless spreads give readers a chance to take a breath during the make-believe mayhem and soak in all the details. Attentive readers will notice clues peppered throughout that foreshadow some of the hijinks. Both characters are light-skinned. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A deftly executed homage to the power children possess to imagine away a dreary day. (Picture book. 4-7)



YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Alphabet Rockers
 Illus. by Ashley Evans
 Sourcebooks eXplore (56 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Jan. 11, 2022
 978-1-72824-028-2

The founders of the Grammy nominated hip-hop children's music collective Alphabet Rockers encourage kids to celebrate who they are and tell their stories.

In first-person narratives, six diverse young people take turns sharing their experiences of prejudice; their identity struggles; and their desire to be seen, understood, and respected. "No one says my name right at school," an Indian girl reveals sadly as the artwork shows her being taunted by classmates. On a double-page spread showing a Black boy being racially profiled by a

CHRISTMAS IS FOR DREAMERS

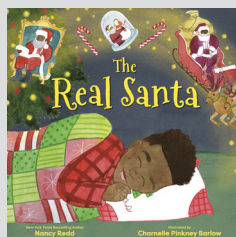


FOR CHILDREN, Christmas is a cosmic event. Between the mystery of a God-baby in a manger, visitations from magical Yuletide figures (Santa Claus, Old Man Bayka, La Befana...the list goes on), and the liminal landscapes we enter through the mist of nostalgia (inevitable at year's end, even for children), Christmas-time can truly feel like a season when the veils between worlds thin.

It's the only time of the year when the whole planet agrees to dream together, and anything feels possible, particularly for children, who dwell comfortably in reverie. "The child's vision is grand and beautiful," philosopher Gaston Bachelard once wrote. "The dreaming child knows the cosmic reverie which unites us to the world."

A good holiday picture book has a duty to affirm that vision of a world in which we're all united by the shared magic of belief and possibility. Here are five that rise to the occasion.

The Real Santa by Nancy Redd, illustrated by Charnelle Pinkey Barlow (Random House, Oct. 5): A young Black boy and his family prepare for Santa's visit. He believes that Santa might look like him because his parents and grandparents have decked their home with figurines and Christmas tree ornaments depicting Santa as Black. Both his belief in Santa and in the possibility of a world where he belongs are what imbue Christmas Eve with magic as he tries to stay awake to see the real Saint Nick.



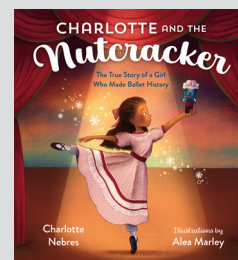
Santa in the City by Tiffany D. Jackson, illustrated by Reggie Brown (Dial Books, Oct. 5): Deja, a Black, city-dwelling Jamaican American girl, is beginning to lose her belief in Santa. Thanks to cynical classmates, she begins to notice all the ways in which the conventions of the Kris Kringle legend don't work in an urban setting. Young readers grappling with similar doubts may still have them



after reading this book, but its removal of limits on the Santa Claus narrative (including illustrations portraying Santa as Black) is enough to widen the doors of possibility.

Charlotte and the Nutcracker: The True Story of a Girl Who Made Magic History by Charlotte Nebres, illustrated

by Alea Marley (Random House, Dec. 21): Twelve-year-old Trinidadian Filipina American author Nebres tells her story of becoming the first Black girl in the history of the New York City Ballet to play Marie, the young heroine of Balanchine's enchanting Christmas classic, *The Nutcracker*. Young readers will come away knowing that there is year-round magic in doing what we love and that anything is possible when we work hard and dream big.



The Biggest Little Boy: A Christmas Story by Poppy Harlow, illustrated by Ramona Kaulitzki (Viking, Oct. 5): A young, biracial (half Black, half White) boy with a taste



for the towering and the titanic dreams of getting the city's biggest Christmas tree. Walking past the Christmas tree market every day, he searches for the right tree, but none are ever big enough for him. His dream abruptly changes when he comes across a tree that's exactly his size. The story's message about the equal value of having big dreams *and* more manageable ones

is no small bit of wisdom, especially during the holidays with so much bigger-is-better seasonal fare aimed at consumers.

The Wishing Tree by Meika Hashimoto, illustrated by Xindi Yan (Harper/HarperCollins, Sept. 21): Theo, a young Black boy, is worried because Christmas is near and his town hasn't gotten into the holiday spirit. After sending a dispatch to Santa expressing his wish that everyone could see the holiday's magic, he discovers a pine tree whose branches mysteriously drop handwritten letters with instructions on how to awaken Christmas wonder in his community, which he succeeds in doing—a Christmas miracle.



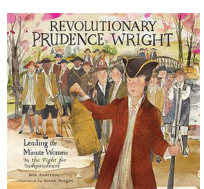
Summer Edward is a young readers' editor.

“Accomplished illustrations, executed in watercolor with digital drawing, add historical veracity.”

REVOLUTIONARY PRUDENCE WRIGHT

White storeowner, the text reads “You don’t know me, / but I need you to know that / I don’t always feel safe here.” Despite being made to feel like they don’t belong, the characters are making positive contributions to the world. “I’m making music that sends a signal to kids everywhere that / there is no limit to being you,” says an Asian girl with a prosthetic hand who is a DJ. “When I help the community, / I MAKE THE PLANET BETTER / FOR SEVEN GENERATIONS / TO COME,” declares a Native American girl who is a land and water protector. A White nonbinary kid welcomes questions, acknowledging that some can hurt: “I have a friend who loves me for me. / Doesn’t ask about my body parts, / but does want to know what / it is like being nonbinary.” A biracial boy contemplates the starry night sky and reminds the reader that “I’ve always been here. Shining.” Evans’ digital illustrations present the kids cartoonishly, with large, glowing eyes and differentiated skin tones. The text—which might be imaginatively enhanced via spoken word or rap—sometimes reads choppy. The kids’ engaging stories build to an empathic, call-and-response coda: “If you feel it in your heart and you’re ready to take part, / say I’m not alone— I’M NOT ALONE.”

Exuberantly affirming and infectiously joyful. (author’s note) (Picture book. 5-10)



REVOLUTIONARY PRUDENCE WRIGHT
Leading the Minute Women in the Fight for Independence

Anderson, Beth
Illus. by Susan Reagan
Calkins Creek/Boyd’s Mills (48 pp.)
\$18.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-64472-057-8



From the time she was a young girl, Prudence Wright “had a spark of independence.”

The story begins with a brief recounting of various ways young Prudence defied traditional gender roles while growing up in Pepperell, Massachusetts Colony, including outperforming boys at school, hunting, fishing, and debating her brothers on political issues. As she grows older, Prudence fumes at King George III’s increasingly punitive laws, which include onerous taxes on British goods. In 1773, when the men of Pepperell vote to join the Colony’s resistance to British rule and begin training in militias, Prudence and the women in her quilting circle stage their own rebellion by dumping British tea into a bonfire on the town common and boycotting other British goods. As King George clamps down on protests, the colonists declare war. While most of Pepperell’s men are away fighting in skirmishes, Prudence discovers that Tory spies are planning to infiltrate the town and organizes the townswomen to defend it. She leads the lasses—armed and dressed in men’s clothing—in a dramatic ambush on Pepperell’s bridge, making revolutionary history as head of “the first-ever unit of minute women.” Reagan’s accomplished illustrations, executed in watercolor with

digital drawing, add historical veracity to Anderson’s superbly documented, at times hair-raising narrative. The author explicitly situates Wright and her female comrades as pioneers who “proved themselves as full citizens” in an era before female enfranchisement. Most characters are White, but a few of the colonists present as people of color.

Vivid, absorbing, and inspiring. (afterword, author’s note, illustrator’s note, bibliography) (Historical fiction/picture book. 6-9)



JUST HARRIET
Arnold, Elana K.
Walden Pond Press/
HarperCollins (208 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-06-309204-4



Third grader Harriet is convinced that she’s in for a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad summer.

Her mother is having a difficult pregnancy, so Harriet is getting shipped off for the summer to stay with her grandmother who runs a bed-and-breakfast on Marble Island. She’s always loved short visits to the tranquil island with her parents, but spending two whole months there without them means change, and Harriet does not like change. She especially doesn’t like the idea of getting a new sibling. Fortunately, she’s got her beloved cat Matzo Ball to keep her company on Marble Island, and when she finds a beautiful old key in her grandmother’s shed, things start to pick up. Suddenly, there’s a mystery to be solved, one involving her dad’s childhood on the island and Miss Marble, the witty centenarian who is the island’s namesake. And when Harriet befriends a sharp-eyed ornithologist whom everyone calls Captain, she discovers that there’s as much to learn about herself as there is about the island’s history. A flawed but intriguing heroine from the start, Harriet’s stubbornness, hot temper, and habit of lying will undoubtedly draw comparisons to the titular character in Beverly Cleary’s Ramona series. Cranky, crotchety kids will find a kindred spirit in this young girl who longs to be understood and to understand the puzzling world of adults. Meanwhile, the mystery of the antique key yields a solution better than a secret garden. All major characters read as White.

An engaging series opener about the power of truth to moor and free even the sulkiest of souls. (Fiction. 7-10)

“This heartfelt intergenerational story illuminates a lesser known facet of Jewish American immigration.”

TÍA FORTUNA'S NEW HOME



**TÍA FORTUNA'S
NEW HOME**
**A Jewish Cuban
Journey**

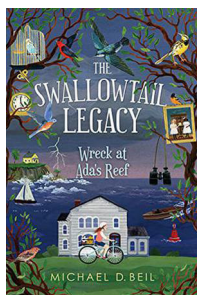
Behar, Ruth
Illus. by Devon Holzwarth
Knopf (32 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
978-0-593-17241-4



A young Cuban American girl learns the real meaning of home in this poignant story drawing on the real-life history of Cuba's Sephardic Jews.

Estrella loves to visit her aunt, Tía Fortuna, in her little pink house at the Seaway in Miami. Tía Fortuna once lived “on the other side of the sea, in Havana,” Cuba. When she “had to leave” her home (a closing author’s note pinpoints the Cuban Revolution as the cause), she took only a suitcase of old photographs, her mezuzah (prayer scroll) from her doorpost, and “a key to a home gone forever.” Now, years later, she must move once again, this time to an assisted living facility. While Estrella spends time with her aunt at the seaside and helps her pack, she listens to her life stories, learns about the cultural and religious significance of her most prized possessions, and ultimately learns that, like her ancestors, she can find hope wherever life takes her. This heartfelt intergenerational story illuminates a lesser-known facet of Jewish American immigration. Ladino (i.e., Judeo-Spanish) words are seamlessly integrated into the dialogue between aunt and niece, and Behar weaves Sephardic symbols and traditions into the narrative. For example, Tía Fortuna wears a lucky-eye bracelet (a Sephardic Jewish talisman) and serves borekas (a Sephardic Jewish pastry). Detailed paintings, rendered in gouache, watercolor, and color pencil with digital finishing, skillfully move the visual narrative between the past and the present. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A nostalgic glimpse at a little-known but rich culture within the broader Jewish American community. (glossary) *(Picture book. 5-8)*



WRECK AT ADA'S REEF

Beil, Michael D.
Illus. by Torborg Davern
Pixel+Ink (320 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-64595-048-6
Series: The Swallowtail Legacy, 1



Lark travels to Lake Erie's Swallowtail Island with her younger sister, Pip, and their stepdad and his three sons for a life-changing summer adventure.

They're going to stay in the house that their mother bequeathed to Lark and Pip. Lark, who narrates with wit and insight, is having a hard time with her mother's recent death and being part of a blended family. But working as an assistant for Nadine Pritchard, her mom's childhood friend who is

researching a book and trying to solve a land dispute tied to a suspicious death 75 years ago, is the perfect distraction. Twelve-year-old Lark meets 93-year-old Dinah Purdy, the book's subject and an African American trailblazer whose property lies at the heart of the mystery (the rest of the cast defaults to White). After Lark lashes out violently at soccer camp, Dinah, who is experienced in nonviolent protest, becomes her mentor, helping her resolve her feelings. Lark learns she's got super skills for tracking down clues, not to mention moxie in the face of intimidating bluster from the main beneficiary of the crime. Reports, letters, and spot art are interspersed. Each character, historic and contemporary, sparks with life. Lark's process and the reveals are perfectly paced. Descriptions of the island and weather, plus some dramatic moments on rough water, help build atmospheric tension. Most heartwarming, Lark develops feelings of loyalty toward her blended family and uncovers a surprising link to their property.

Readers will be hooked—more, please! (maps) *(Mystery. 8-12)*



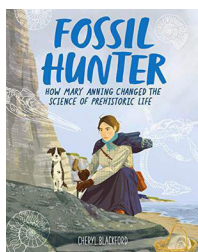
DINO TROUBLE

Bitt, Nate
Illus. by Glass House Graphics
Little Simon/Simon & Schuster (144 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
978-1-66590-465-0
Series: Arcade World, 1

Travis and Journey's new normal is life inside of a video game.

When strange newcomer Mr. Miniboss shows up in town and turns an abandoned building into a magical, mysterious, free-entry video game center dubbed Arcade World, all of the neighborhood kids immediately become obsessed. But the arcade soon turns sinister when all of the video games come alive. The story centers on Travis and his best friend, Journey, who realize that they have been transported into their new favorite game, Dino Trouble. They must survive numerous threats—including being chased by glittery dinosaurs—as they try to figure out who really owns Arcade World and how to get back to Normal, which happens to be the name of their town. Travis is White, and Journey has light brown skin. While the dynamic comic-book graphics deliver an action-packed romp, character development and dialogue are a bit shallow and shaky. Some plot points can serve as springboards for conversations about screen time and healthy use of online technologies. The funny cliffhanger ending does its job—young readers will want to read the next installment to find out what happens next.

An entertaining series opener whose simple storyline can be forgiven. *(Graphic novel. 7-9)*



FOSSIL HUNTER
How Mary Anning Changed the Science of Prehistoric Life

Blackford, Cheryl
Illus. by Ellen Duda
 Clarion/HarperCollins (112 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
 978-0-358-39605-5

Before she became a trailblazing scientist, Mary Anning was a poor, young woman with no formal education.

Growing up, Anning loved exploring the beaches and cliffs of her native Dorset, a county in southwest England. Raised in the town of Lyme Regis, she was trained by her father to hunt for fossils. She became adept at removing the delicate bones of prehistoric creatures from rocks and preparing them for sale in her impoverished family's fossil shop. At age 13, Anning made an extraordinary discovery—the first complete ichthyosaurus skeleton ever found; her older brother had earlier discovered its skull.

Intelligent and fiercely determined, Anning educated herself by copying articles and drawings from scientific journals, and she learned anatomy through dissection. She achieved many remarkable breakthroughs that gradually advanced paleontological and geological knowledge: She found the first complete plesiosaur fossil; became the first British person to find a pterodactyl; and was the first person in the world to discover a *squaloraja* (an ancestor of the shark and ray) fossil. Anning rarely received recognition in her lifetime. Only near her death at age 47—due to breast cancer—did she finally gain fame and respect for her scientific contributions. This admiring tribute is well written and thoroughly researched. Its handsome design includes captioned, high-quality color and black-and-white paleoart, archival photos, and engravings as well as some of Anning's sketches and excerpts from her correspondence with friends and fellow scientists. Each chapter opens with a quote, including three attributed to Anning. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Solid, respectful scholarship tailored for mature, serious-minded young readers. (author's note, timeline, glossary, notes, source quotes, bibliography, index) (*Biography*, 10-13)

The Great Little Tailor



Text by Isabel Cintra

Illustrations by Zeka Cintra



ISBN-13: 978-1-949868-30-2

Yes, Fairytales!!!
 Because every black child
 can be protagonist of any story.

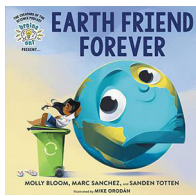
“A tailor’s son’s dreams come true with hard work and hope in this picture book.”

“...lovely, full-color illustrations...”

“A heartfelt illustrated fairy tale for young audiences.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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**BRAINS ON! PRESENTS...
EARTH FRIEND FOREVER**

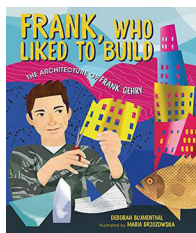
*Bloom, Molly, Marc Sanchez &
Sanden Totten*

Illus. by Mike Orodán
Little, Brown (48 pp.)
\$17.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-316-45941-9

An anthropomorphic planet Earth pens an open letter to humans appealing for an end to plastic pollution.

On the heels of *Brains On! Presents...It's Alive: From Neurons and Narwhals to the Fungus Among Us* (2020), the creators of American Public Media's science podcast for kids, *Brains On!* turn their attention to one of the major ecological threats of our time. Addressing the young reader directly, a winsome-looking Earth with an expressive face, arms, and hands introduces itself: "Dear little humans living on me: It's your E.F.F.!" With this endearing riff on BFF (Best Friends Forever) setting the tone, Earth describes how it has proudly followed human development from the dawn of creation and loyally provided fresh air, food, and water: "I always have your back because you live on mine." But Earth has a complaint: Plastic is everywhere. Though useful and important, it doesn't disappear, and it's making the animals and the environment "uncomfortable." Confident that this problem can be solved, Earth offers readers some practical solutions: using eco-friendly plastic alternatives, refilling water bottles, recycling, picking up trash, and perfecting chemical recycling methods that break down plastic. Orodán's exuberant illustrations, rendered in digitally colored pencil sketches, depict people of all races, ages, and sizes and include a girl wearing a hijab and a person using a wheelchair. The endpapers reinforce the message with two contrasting seascapes.

A playful expression of a serious concern, hopeful enough to be suitable even for the read-aloud crowd. (letter, further facts, science solutions) *(Picture book. 4-8)*



**FRANK, WHO LIKED TO BUILD
The Architecture of Frank Gehry**

Blumenthal, Deborah
Illus. by Maria Brzozowska

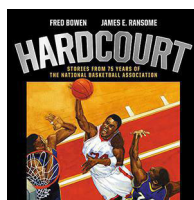
Kar-Ben (32 pp.)
\$17.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-5415-9762-4

This biography presents Frank Gehry's singular contributions to the field of architecture.

Blumenthal's descriptions of Gehry's designs are evocative and alliterative: "Imagine a building with sloping silver skin that seems to shiver in the wind" or a building with "billowy blanket walls big enough to hide a family of dinosaurs." The text provides specific descriptions of how Gehry's love for architecture fit into his life. For instance, we read that when he was a boy, his grandmother gave him pieces of wood meant for the wood stove. Inspired, young Gehry (described as a "dreamer") created

imaginary cities and worlds, leaving his parents unimpressed (something which lingered with him his entire life). Unfortunately, the jewel-toned illustrations fall short of capturing Gehry's unique vision. The book closes with six photographs of buildings that Gehry designed, and the illustrations that precede the photos do not manage to capture the spirit of Gehry's beautifully odd feats of architecture. The greatest tribute to Gehry, after all, may be to say that his buildings are indescribable. The text includes Gehry's struggles with antisemitism during his time in Canada and Los Angeles—and his subsequent decision to change his Jewish surname—and his globe-trotting assignments. Some readers may kvetch that the book never really clarifies whether Gehry is dead or alive. Gehry and his family are White. One crowd scene shows people as varied as the colors in his architecture.

An uneven tribute to a visionary artist. (biographical note)
(Picture book biography. 5-10)



**HARCOURT
Stories From 75 Years of
the National Basketball
Association**

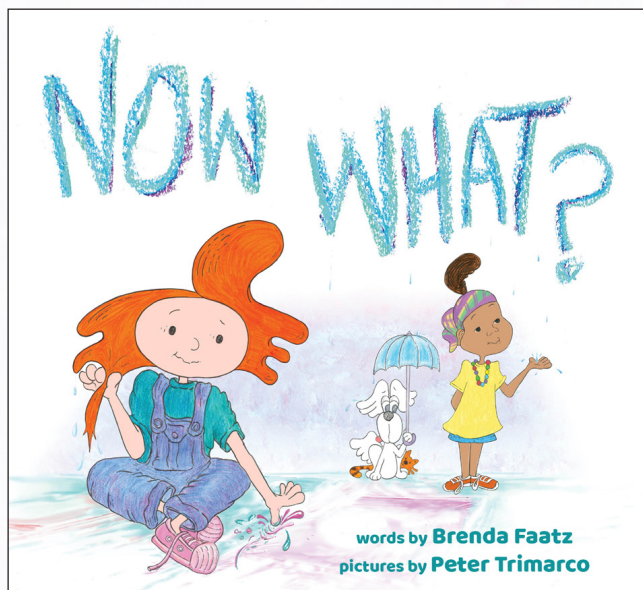
Bowen, Fred
Illus. by James E. Ransome

McElderry (112 pp.)
\$19.99 | Jan. 18, 2022
978-1-5344-6043-0

Bowen, children's sports columnist for *The Washington Post*, shares the history of the National Basketball Association.

Avid basketball fans will eagerly drink in this narrative non-fiction account of the game's evolution. Starting with a look at the sport's humble peach-basket beginnings in 1891, the book goes on to cover the development of the 24-second clock, the establishment of the National Basketball Association and the American Basketball Association, the creation of the Olympic "Dream Team" of 1992, and more. Frank's discussion of racial segregation and the integration of the NBA in 1950 provides an opportunity for children to discuss some of the sport's less noble history. With a list of league information, current at the time of printing, and an index included in the backmatter, this book can answer some quick trivia questions. Unfortunately, gender inequality and the WNBA are never mentioned. While providing ample information about multiple teams and several impactful individuals, the lack of a consistent hero, villain, or narrator might make some young readers lose interest. Ransome's painterly illustrations are primarily portrait-driven, giving life and character to past icons such as Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Red Auerbach, and more. Younger readers may only home in on some of their favorites, like Stephen Curry, who appears toward the end.

Flaws aside, this monograph will appeal to young readers who are dedicated basketball fans. (lists, index, bibliography, additional resources) *(Illustrated nonfiction. 9-12)*




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 9781733354820 / \$17.95
 Ages 4-8 / Curriculum Available K-4

“A lively, innovative story of friendship that encourages readers to think creatively.”

KIRKUS REVIEWS

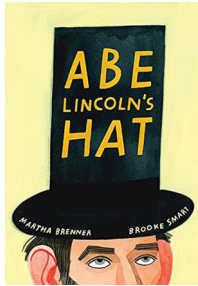
“Now What? is a delightful tribute to the power of invention...”

PW Booklife

“A charming picture book whose creative, quirky heroines make the best of a dreary day. Humming prose, powered by rhymes and clear meters...bright colors and expressive faces, complementing the chaos of the day.

FOREWORD Clarion Reviews





ABE LINCOLN'S HAT

Brenner, Martha

Illus. by Brooke Smart

Random House (48 pp.)

\$17.99 | \$20.99 PLB | Feb. 8, 2022

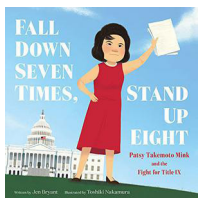
978-0-525-64717-1

978-0-525-64718-8 PLB

Reader, beware; this isn't exactly a story about Abraham Lincoln's storied stovepipe hat.

Before he became an American legend and the leader of the free world, Lincoln practiced law in Springfield, Illinois, where he struggled to stay organized. His creative solution to records management was to stow the most pressing documents inside his now-famous hat. With this colorful anecdote as a brief preamble, Brenner proceeds to deliver a jam-packed overview of Lincoln's celebrated legal career leading up to his presidency. The text rapidly moves between recitations of Lincoln's memorable courtroom cases and exploits as a country lawyer; unfortunately, the pacing sometimes sags. Although historians debate Lincoln's legacy, this profile presents a largely idealized portrait of the 16th president, upholding his legacy as the Great Emancipator; one double-spread illustration shows Lincoln smiling paternalistically at a group of disturbingly expressionless Black people. To Brenner's credit, the text does briefly acknowledge the ongoing Colonial displacement of Indigenous peoples that was well underway during the president's lifetime as well as Lincoln's "middle position on slavery." Children should read this work with an adult who can scaffold their exploration of the complex subject matter. The illustrations alternate between color and black-and-white palettes and are rendered, fittingly, in a midcentury-modern style that both hearkens to the past and looks toward the present day.

Misleading title aside, a serviceable addition to the growing shelf of presidential picture books. (afterword, sources, notes) (*Picture book biography*, 7-12)



FALL DOWN SEVEN TIMES, STAND UP EIGHT

Patsy Takemoto Mink and the Fight for Title IX

Bryant, Jen

Illus. by Toshiki Nakamura

Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins (48 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jan. 25, 2022

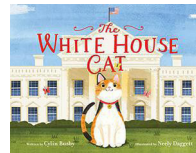
978-0-06-295722-1

This introduction to the Title IX civil rights law highlights major events in the life of Patsy Takemoto Mink, the first woman of color elected to the U.S. Congress.

Narrated in straightforward—if at times dry—text, the story highlights the role of family obligations and Japanese cultural traditions in Mink's upbringing as well as the many obstacles she overcame. Growing up in Hawaii as the grandchild of Japanese immigrants, young Patsy learned much from observing

her father work hard to make a better life for their family. As a teenager, she courageously fought against the internment of Japanese Americans after the Pearl Harbor attacks. Barred from entering medical school and later denied employment as a lawyer due to her gender, Patsy nevertheless fought tirelessly on behalf of her fellow students and citizens and ultimately helped create the Title IX federal law that prohibits gender-based discrimination in educational institutions. The Japanese proverb "fall down seven times, stand up eight" is used as a motif throughout the text to underscore Mink's determination. Nakamura's digital illustrations are bright and colorful with a varied palette of both pastel and bold tones. However, at times, characters are portrayed in a cartoonish manner that detracts from the solemnity and poignancy of Mink's efforts. (*This book was reviewed digitally*.)

An informative profile of a trailblazing legislator that will inspire children to work for justice. (author's note, timeline, bibliography, notes) (*Picture book biography*, 5-10)



THE WHITE HOUSE CAT

Busby, Cylin

Illus. by Neely Daggett

Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jan. 11, 2022

978-0-06-313886-5

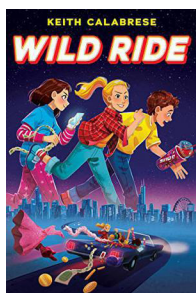
The first cat describes a day at the White House.

The frisky feline's day begins early. What's on the to-do list? Sampling the pastry chef's whipped cream, checking equipment with the chief engineer, testing the keys on the Eagle-Leg Piano, escorting uninvited critters to the Rose Garden, greeting Oval Office visitors, and more. But the day's highlight is the arrival of some VIPs: Very Important Pupils. "There are a lot of things in the White House that say DON'T TOUCH. I'm not one of them," the animal purrs as racially diverse schoolchildren lavish it with attention. Even the harried chief usher, who's not exactly a cat person, can't resist petting the narrator in a quiet moment. Of course, it's also the privileged puss's duty to wreak some havoc. In contrast to the matter-of-fact narration, Daggett's charming, digital illustrations humorously depict the cat's antics and quirky proclivities as it glances disdainfully at a portrait of a former first dog, knocks over television cameras during a press briefing, ruins a table centerpiece while trying to reach a chandelier, and so on. Interestingly, the first family is never shown. After tagging along with the tabby on its daily escapades, young readers can peruse the backmatter, which includes a labeled, double-spread, cutaway illustration of the White House and fun facts about the edifice, including anecdotes about real-life cats who have lived there. (*This book was reviewed digitally*.)

An amusing, cat's-eye tour of the White House that even dog people won't mind joining. (*Picture book*, 4-8)

“A triumph of translation.”

PIATTI FOR CHILDREN



WILD RIDE

Calabrese, Keith
Scholastic (256 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-338-74324-1



A joyride turns into a madcap, world-saving scramble after a group of kids discovers a kidnapped accountant in the trunk of a car.

The rare 1964 Mustang convertible his mom's fiance left in the garage proves too much temptation for 18-year-old Greg Decker—but a date night with his girlfriend, Marisa Ng, quickly takes a nightmarish turn when the car is towed. First, he has to call on his smart-mouthed 12-year-old sister, Charley, for funds, and she brings friends to the rescue party. Then the car comes out of impoundment with groggy Mitch Rosenfeld trapped inside by a pair of dimwitted hired thugs. It seems that Mitch not only stumbled upon a trove of evidence that media giant Pangea's unscrupulous billionaire CEO, Alton Peck, has been a bad boy, but also that Pangea's about-to-be-released household “digital life assistant” is pure, privacy-busting spyware. The chase is on. But while events careen along at a gratifyingly manic clip, it's the smart, surprising cast (most evidently White, with names cueing some ethnic diversity) that really puts the shine on this epic romp: As the story unfolds, each reveals hidden depths of heart, courage, self-knowledge, conscience, or character. Even the thoroughly villainous Peck comes off in the end as more pathetically flawed than evil.

Pedal-to-the-metal fun, with moments both scary and triumphant to go with plenty of laugh-out-loud left turns. (*Fiction. 10-13*)



PIATTI FOR CHILDREN

Celestino, Piatti with Theo van Hooijtema et al.
Trans. by Alistair Beaton & Jon Reid
Illus. by Celestino Piatti
NorthSouth (216 pp.)
\$28.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-7358-4475-9

Piatti, the late great Swiss graphic artist and illustrator, was no one-trick pony.

Known internationally for his iconic graphic design, Piatti's lesser-known work as a picture-book illustrator takes center stage in this omnibus, the first ever to combine in one volume seven picture books illustrated at the pinnacle of his career. Readers witness the spectrum of Piatti's artistic style, particularly notable when comparing his approach to depicting animals, a common subject across all seven works. Some animals come to life with loose, bold brush strokes, while others are more detailed and subtle with washes of watercolors. The color palette varies by story, yet all boast a distinct '60s or '70s sensibility. The stories cover a wide range of topics, from original animal

fables and an alphabetic animal menagerie featuring haikulike poems to the Christian Nativity story and a slice-of-life tale featuring a traveling circus. Thick lines and vibrant, glowing colors combine with satisfying textures, making each magnificent animal seem like a work of stained-glass art. Although the focus of the book is the artwork, it also succeeds as a triumph of translation; in the story *Animal ABC*, translators Beaton and Reid maintain consistency across over 20 rhyming poems. Unfortunately, the gender stereotypes and some of the moral attitudes of Piatti's day will not resonate with audiences today.

A valuable retrospective to be appreciated by young readers, art scholars, and gift book lovers alike. (*Picture book. 4-adult*)



GERALDINE PU AND HER CAT HAT, TOO!

Chang, Maggie P.
Simon Spotlight (64 pp.)
\$17.99 | Jan. 18, 2022
978-1-5344-8472-6
Series: Geraldine Pu

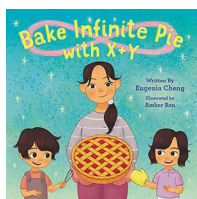
A Taiwanese American girl learns to love her hair.

Geraldine Pu loves her multigenerational family, her favorite things, and getting cozy in chilly weather. She particularly loves her cat hat (or mao maotz in Mandarin Chinese) with its cat ears and whiskers—it is this hat, interestingly enough, that narrates the story. When Geraldine accompanies her grandmother to the hair salon, she looks at glamorous photos in hairdressing magazines and concludes that her own black, straight hair is boring. The next day, she decides to use her cat hat to hide her hair, but her classmates—a racially diverse group that also includes a child in a wheelchair—call her out for breaking school rules. Picture day is coming up at school, so Geraldine secretly tries to achieve her grandmother's wavy hair texture...with disastrous results. Thankfully, her grandmother steps in to stage a hair intervention and deliver some much-needed wisdom. The illustrations in this latest addition to the Geraldine Pu series are colorful and accessible, and facial expressions are rendered with precision. The informative backmatter includes a guide to reading a graphic novel, a glossary, a note on the diversity of hair, and instructions on how to make a self-portrait collage.

Another engaging outing for the likable protagonist of Chang's simple but thoughtful graphic early reader series. (*Graphic early reader. 5-9*)

“A charming—and appetizing—bit of didacticism.”

BAKE INFINITE PIE WITH X + Y



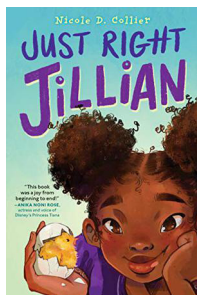
BAKE INFINITE PIE WITH X + Y

Cheng, Eugenia
Illus. by Amber Ren
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-7595-5686-7

Two light-skinned children named X and Y, apparently siblings, ask their brainy aunt, Z, to help them make the pies of their dreams.

X wants to make an infinitely wide pie, while Y imagines a pie that is infinitely tall. Aunt Z explains that “there are infinite different ways to make pastry” and guides the children through the steps of the recipe. When it’s time to roll out the dough, X makes a circle while Y makes a triangle. When they fill the pies, X chooses bananas “because the slices are round,” and Y opts for triangular strawberry slices. Once in the oven, the pies seem “to be taking infinitely long” to bake and smell “infinitely delicious,” and when they’re finished, they’re so scrumptious the kids want them to last forever. Luckily, Aunt Z knows a clever way to make “infinite pie.” She helps the children make yet more dough and shape it into fractals—the Apollonian gasket and the Koch snowflake—that have an infinite number of sides. In the process, Aunt Z explains mathematical concepts (further expounded in the backmatter) in accessible language, including the coordinate plane, combinatorics, polygons, and convergence. This discussion includes a fair amount of precalculus for readers who might not have mastered the times table as yet, but as Cheng says in her author’s note, “if we can get our heads around something daunting, then [we] become more intelligent.” After the baking is done, the characters have more pie than they can eat, but thankfully, they have “infinite friends to share it with.” The illustrations, done in ink and Photoshop, use clever visuals to bring the math lesson to life; for example, on one spread the pie ingredients zoom around the characters, the motion lines making the shape of the infinity symbol.

Not a page-turner but a charming—and appetizing—bit of didacticism. (notes, recipe) (Picture book. 5-10)



JUST RIGHT JILLIAN

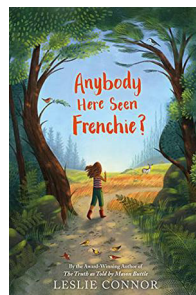
Collier, Nicole D.
Versify/HarperCollins (224 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-358-43461-0

Jillian tries to keep her promise to her grandmother to be more confident in herself.

Shy and intelligent Jillian is trying to just blend in with the other fifth graders—wearing the same hairstyle and dull-colored clothes as the others and doing her best to be quietly invisible. Her grandmother encouraged her not to hide who she was, but it has been almost a year since Grammy died, and Jillian just can’t manage to find herself, let alone be herself. After she finishes first in a math game in class but ultimately

loses because she can’t speak up, Jillian is wracked with anxiety and wonders how she can stop herself from disappearing. Her teacher encourages her to enter the school’s annual academic competition, and when her classmate says she could never win, Jillian decides to challenge herself to break free from the fears that are holding her back. Jillian, her family, and most of the students at her school are Black. The way debut author Collier writes about death, grief, and chronic illness—Jillian’s mother has lupus—is excellent; the language used to describe the characters’ experiences, confusion, and range of emotions is perfectly age appropriate. This novel celebrates those who struggle with social anxiety, and many young readers will be able to identify with the characters in this highly relatable story.

A heartwarming novel about developing the courage to stop hiding. (Fiction. 8-12)



ANYBODY HERE SEEN FRENCHIE?

Connor, Leslie
Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-06-299936-8

Sixth grader Aurora Petrequin needs to say whatever she’s thinking.

She’s *loud*. Eleven-year-old Frenchie Livernois, her next-door neighbor, is autistic and nonvocal. Yet the moment these opposites meet they fit together perfectly. Frenchie focuses Aurora’s energy and helps her slow down and observe. Aurora looks out for Frenchie and leads him on adventures both nature lovers enjoy. But when Frenchie vanishes one day before school, Aurora, who feels bad about how often she messes up, realizes this is a “Worst Possible” fear come true, and her understanding of their best friendship is put to the test. Where did he go? Could she have stopped him from disappearing—and did she cause him to go? What does it all have to do with the piebald deer they spotted in the woods? Connor creates a playground of a coastal Maine town where the quirky locals are accessible and caring. Aurora’s and Frenchie’s families build an ecosystem that sustains and encourages their friendship, and Aurora’s buoyant enthusiasm infuses the story with adventurous fun and a lack of preachiness while not undercutting real stakes. However, Frenchie, although treated with respect, is a bit shortchanged and on occasion robbed of narrative autonomy. It can feel like he is being discussed rather than being involved, a situation compounded by the fact that fewer portions of the story are narrated from his point of view. Main characters default to White; Aurora is cued as neurodiverse.

Honors the sweet mysteries of how to communicate with each other and the world. (Fiction. 8-12)



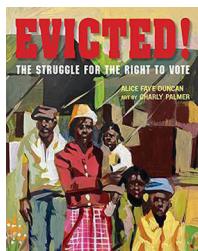
OONA AND THE SHARK

DiPucchio, Kelly
Illus. by Raissa Figueroa
 Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-0-06-307142-1
 Series: Oona, 2

Can Oona the mermaid figure out how to get Stanley the hammerhead shark to be her friend?

A little, cherubic, dark-skinned mermaid with an epic Afro has no problem making friends with sea creatures of all sorts. She navigates her undersea world with an endearing combination of confidence, care, charm, and creativity that wins everyone over...except for Stanley. Oona shares some of her prized possessions with him—a fishing hat, a loud musical horn, and a squeaky, inflatable unicorn swimming tube—in an attempt to strike up a friendship, but Stanley doesn't take to the items in the least. She then tries to win him over with her flashy inventions, but he is engrossed in his seashell collection, and Oona only succeeds in rankling him. Exasperated but determined, she resorts to throwing a big party; alas, Stanley doesn't even attend. Only when she dives down to the ocean floor in defeat and experiences complete peace and quiet does she realize what she needs to do to connect with the shy shark. Inspired, she goes to her workshop and carefully creates a special invention that draws Stanley right to her side. Figueroa's digital watercolor illustrations use washes and blooms effectively to convey an underwater atmosphere, though the shifting color scheme creates a slightly disjointed visual experience. Oona's missteps and eventual success will inspire children to be more observant and tolerant of personalities that are different from their own.

A welcome addition to the vast sea of friendship books for children. (Picture book. 4-8)



EVICTED!
The Struggle for the Right To Vote

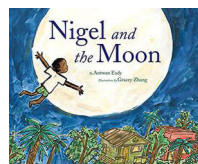
Duncan, Alice Faye
Illus. by Charly Palmer
 Calkins Creek/Boyd's Mills (64 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Jan. 11, 2022
 978-1-68437-979-8

A series of interconnected stories about real-life people illuminates the history of Tennessee's Fayette County Tent City Movement.

The book opens with a preface, an illustrated dramatis personae showing a large cast of characters spanning two generations, a map of Fayette County, and a Prologue to Freedom that introduces the protagonist, James Junior. When a Black man stands trial for murder in 1958, the community is sobered to realize that they cannot serve as jurors because they aren't registered voters. Two farmers lead a voter registration and mobilization drive, and as the movement grows, the community suffers repercussions, from ethnic intimidation to

consumer blacklisting to eviction. A landowning Black citizen hosts evicted families in tents, and this "Tent City" makes the national news, drawing support from Black and White civil rights advocates around the country. An intense, prolonged, and often violent struggle ensues, ultimately ushering in the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which legally prohibited race-based voter discrimination. The historical account is told from the perspective of young James Junior (now a 72-year-old grandfather) and is made personal through the testimonies of individuals who were crucial to the movement, those who are remembered by the community, and those who do the remembering. The episodic narrative, which oscillates between lyrical passages and straightforward prose, is sometimes too overloaded with information considering the book's young audience. Palmer's painterly, evocative paintings effectively capture the era, are suffused with emotional honesty, and bring reverence to the heavy subject matter.

Not an easy read but an important one. (epilogue, timeline, photographs, resource guide, bibliography, author's note, illustrator's note) (Nonfiction. 9-12)



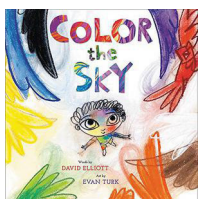
NIGEL AND THE MOON

Eady, Antwan
Illus. by Gracey Zhang
 Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-06-305628-2

Nigel, a brown-skinned young boy, peers out of his bedroom window and shares his dreams with the moon.

His desire is to become an astronaut, a dancer, and a superhero. With the moon, "his dreams are safe." During career week at school, his class goes to the library to read about various occupations, but Nigel does not find any books with dancers who look like him. When his classmates share their vocational aspirations, Nigel feels shy to admit that he wants to be a superhero. That night, he confesses his fear to the moon: "What if I wish to be too many things?" When his teacher asks the class to share what their parents do for a living, Nigel is ashamed to speak up since his parents "don't have fancy jobs." So, he is stunned when his parents make a surprise visit to his class to speak about their careers and prove to be a big hit with the students. Relieved and proud, Nigel finally gains the courage to share his dreams with his classmates. Zhang's ink, gouache, and watercolor illustrations are charming and thoughtful, effectively capturing both Nigel's anxieties and his fanciful inner world. However, readers may notice tokenism at play since Nigel and his parents are the only brown-skinned characters in the book.

A poignant story designed to help young readers feel good about themselves and where they come from. (Picture book. 4-7)



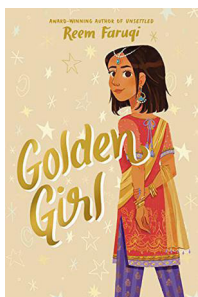
COLOR THE SKY

Elliott, David
Illus. by Evan Turk
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-0-316-21207-6

Sitting by the window, a young child sees a red bird flying past and is drawn outside.

Once in the garden, the child, who could be a girl or a boy, peeks out from behind a tree, gazes up at the bird, and narrates: “Red big. / Red small. / Red sits on my garden wall.” *Red big* refers to the huge tree with a vast canopy of red leaves, while *Red small* refers to the bird perched nearby. The child spies eight more birds, one by one, each a different color. While the birds’ species aren’t specified, they appear to be a red cardinal, a blue jay, a yellow canary, a red-winged blackbird, a white dove, a green hummingbird, an orange oriole, a purple honeycreeper, and a brown woodcreeper (or possibly a house wren). The singsong rhyming text introduces various early learning concepts such as directionality (“Brown left. / Brown right. / Brown in shadow. / Brown in light”) and height (“Blue low. / Blue high. / Blue has taken to the sky”), and the placement of words on the page cleverly underscores the concept. The backgrounds of each spread and the child’s face, skin, and clothing, which are transparent at first, cumulatively take on the hues of the birds until the pages frenetically burst with color. The pastel-and-charcoal illustrations become increasingly energetic, whimsical and full of scribbles, as the child progressively adopts the behavior of the birds, blissfully singing and losing themselves in euphoric flight. Unfortunately, the climactic ending scenes are crowded with so many abstract lines and have such a chaotic composition that they lack the sense of open space needed for flight. Most of the verse scans well, though a missing syllable at the end makes the closing line sag.

A visually interesting concept book, full of wonder and lightness, that’s useful for teaching young ones about colors. (Picture book. 3-6)



GOLDEN GIRL

Faruqi, Reem
Harper/HarperCollins (336 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-06-304475-3

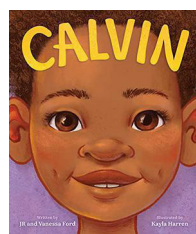
Thirteen-year-old Pakistani American Aafiyah Qamar has a lot going on in her life.

Aafiyah lives with her family—Abba, who repairs airplanes; Mom; and younger brother Ibrahim—in Atlanta.

She enjoys reading National Geographic fact books, playing tennis, spending time with Zaina, her best friend whose body is maturing more quickly than hers, and visiting her grandparents in Karachi. But Dada Abu, her paternal grandfather, has cancer, and Aafiyah is struggling with another problem: She

sometimes takes—and keeps—things without asking. When Abba is accused of a crime and detained at the airport in Dubai, everything starts to fall apart. Dada Abu travels back to Atlanta with Aafiyah, Mom, and Ibrahim for medical treatment. Meanwhile Dadi, her paternal grandmother, stays behind with Abba, surrendering her passport for his bail. Aafiyah has never before had to worry about money; when she sees that they are struggling to pay for Dada Abu’s treatment and her father’s lawyers, she hatches a plan to help—but it involves taking something that is not hers. Aafiyah ultimately must face the consequences of her actions. Faruqi seamlessly weaves in elements of Aafiyah’s Islamic identity while capturing telling details about Aafiyah, her family, and other characters. The verse format and ample white space will work well for struggling readers who are intimidated by dense paragraphs of text.

A story about family, friendship, change, and hope. (author’s note, resources, recipe, glossary) (Verse novel. 9-13)



CALVIN

Ford, J.R. & Vanessa Ford
Illus. by Kayla Harren
Putnam (32 pp.)
\$16.99 | Nov. 9, 2021
978-0-593-10867-3

After coming out to his family as transgender, a biracial (half Black, half White) boy thrives.

A young, brown-skinned child who presents as a girl has always felt like a boy inside and wants to be called Calvin. Admitting this openly is scary, but with loving parental support, the child begins to express his true self. He, his mother, and his father spend the summer at his grandparents’ house, a vacation that turns out to be “the best ever.” The family have fun visiting a comic-book convention and a waterpark where Calvin gets to wear trunks for the first time and makes a friend with whom he proudly shares his new name. Before school reopens, Calvin’s family helps him shop for boy clothing, and his grandfather cuts off his hair. Calvin worries his classmates won’t accept him, but his friends and teachers readily validate his gender expression, bolstering his confidence and joy. This transition story depicts a community cultivating an affirming environment in which a child can flourish. The first-person narration reveals Calvin’s inner fears, but his identity and transition never cause external conflict, a welcome departure from the problem-focused storylines of other coming-out picture books written by cisgender adults. However, the text emphasizes that Calvin’s gender is in his heart and brain, perpetuating a problematic narrative that divorces transgender people from their bodies. Harren’s warm, expressive illustrations communicate much of the emotion in the story and are populated with diverse background characters who have various body sizes, skin colors, hair textures, and disabilities. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A valuable model of intentional, compassionate response to gender expansive kids and their needs. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)

“Subtly philosophical, quietly adventurous.”

IF YOU LIVE HERE



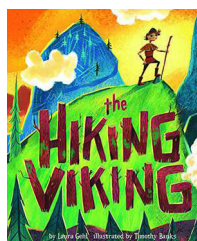
IF YOU LIVE HERE

Gardner, Kate
 Illus. by Christopher Silas Neal
 Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-06-286532-8

Two young children dream of real and fantastical places to call home.

“If you live in a tree house...you’ll need to be a good listener,” opens the text. A double-page spread shows a girl—brown-skinned with Afro puffs—and a boy—cued as White with straight hair—using headphones to listen to a record player and listening through a tin-can telephone to the chatter of a squirrel. The text goes on to imagine the special things you can do, qualities you must cultivate, or unique experiences you might have in other types of homes, including a spaceship, a train, an animal burrow, a castle, a candy store, a farm, a dollhouse, a nest, and more. The illustrations show the two children transported to each of the different dwelling places (the children are always drawn to scale) and feature repeating abstract and geometric shapes. The artwork is also chock-full of interesting and often tiny details; for example, when the children reside in a submarine, a nearby jellyfish reads a book, and when they live on a spaceship, green aliens dressed in spacesuits float by in outer space. Sometimes the text is amusing, but there are poignant moments: “If you live on a train, you know that everything changes,” and “if you live in a nest, you need to be ready to leave when it’s time.” Although frequently whimsical, this book gently encourages young readers to develop curiosity about domestic experiences outside of idealized and conventional representations.

Subtly philosophical, quietly adventurous, and perfect for bedtime. (Picture book. 3-8)



THE HIKING VIKING

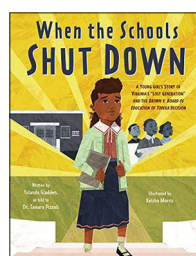
Gehl, Laura
 Illus. by Timothy Banks
 Capstone Editions (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-1-68446-427-2

Not every Viking wants to brawl and battle.

Waifish and bright-eyed Leif would much rather peacefully hike the craggy hills around his Viking village than howl at the moon with the rest of his clan. While other Vikings his age, who are all big and burly, ask for spears and poleaxes for their birthdays, Leif requests a hiking stick. His mother tries to get him to wrestle, his father forces him to practice spear throwing, and his sister drags him off to practice lifting heavy rocks, because the Viking Games are approaching. Leif attempts to explain his love of nature to them, but they are having none of it. With the honor of his clan at stake, Leif gives the Games his best shot. When the competition ends in a tie, it is decided that whichever clan can show the judges “the greatest

treasure by sunset will be the winner.” Everyone rushes to fetch their finest booty, and it seems that the other clan will win... until Leif surprises the whole village with a treasure beyond all earthly goods. Gehl’s tale relays its message about the value of self-authenticity and open-mindedness without being preachy. Banks’ bright illustrations of White Scandinavians in a green, mountainous landscape are reminiscent of cutout animation, endowing each spread with an immersive motion-picture quality. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A neat Nordic tale about the importance of valuing nature—one’s own and the world’s. (Picture book. 2-7)



WHEN THE SCHOOLS SHUT DOWN A Young Girl’s Story of Virginia’s “Lost Generation” and the Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka Decision

Gladden, Yolanda & Tamara Pizzoli
 Illus. by Keisha Morris
 Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Jan. 11, 2022
 978-0-06-301116-8

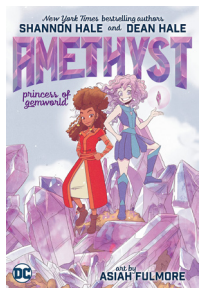
Yolanda Gladden was born in modest circumstances in Farmville, Virginia, in 1954, the same year the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court case ended school segregation in the U.S.

This third-person biography opens with an account of Gladden’s formative years, including happy times spent at her Uncle Tank’s convenience store, in church on Sundays, and watching her mother sew. In her close-knit community, young Yolanda learned important lessons of resilience and faith, and her family instilled pride in her. As she grew older, she “noticed the world around her was divided into two distinct colors: black and white.” By 1959, Yolanda was school-aged, but White lawmakers in her county still hadn’t implemented the federal mandate to integrate classrooms; rather, they had closed all schools. The rest of the book highlights the response of Farmville’s Black community, which included protests and the establishment of empowering grassroots schools for Black children. While the book shines a light on the so-called “Lost Generation,” a piece of U.S. history that many readers will be unfamiliar with, Gladden’s personal and emotional experience of the life-changing events gets lost in the largely fact-driven, outward-looking narrative. Morris’ collaged tissue paper and digital art is dynamic and excels at depicting multiple scenes per spread. Most characters are Black.

Edifying and worth the read despite some flaws of execution. (authors’ notes, timeline, sources, further reading) (Picture book biography. 6-10)

“Colorful, entertaining, and expressive.”

AMETHYST



AMETHYST

Hale, Shannon & Dean Hale

Illus. by Asiah Fulmore

DC (160 pp.)

\$9.99 paper | Nov. 9, 2021

978-1-4012-3677-9

Series: Princess of Gemworld, 1

Amaya discovers that she is a princess of a magical realm and must help save her world and the family she left behind from an unprecedented threat.

Amaya, 9-year-old princess of the House of Amethyst in Gemworld, uses her magical abilities to amuse herself and her younger brother, Quartz, usually at the expense of the servants and her parents. When Amaya goes too far, her parents send her to Earth for one week to teach her some respect and discipline, but something goes wrong, and she is trapped earthside for three years. Prince Topaz, a royal of her realm, eventually tracks down Amaya—who has forgotten who she is—and brings her and her earthly best friend, Autumn, to Gemworld, which is in disarray. Amaya’s parents and brother have mysteriously vanished, and Flaw—a brawny giant made of amethyst and with spikes growing out of its head and shoulders—is roaming the countryside terrorizing citizens and devouring the gem mines in the twelve kingdoms. It’s up to Amaya to fix things and find her family, but she barely remembers her birthplace and hasn’t used magic for years...what could she possibly do to help? Young readers will quickly become absorbed in this action-packed yet undemanding adventure with its colorful, entertaining, and expressive artwork. The humor, in particular, is well played. Characters—servants and nobility alike—have a variety of skin colors, body types, and physical features. Amaya is White, and Autumn is Black with textured hair and locs.

A fun quest with a courageous, troublemaking princess!
(Graphic fiction. 8-12)



BIG WIG

Hillman, Jonathan

Illus. by Levi Hastings

Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster

(32 pp.)

\$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022

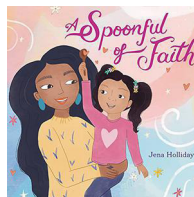
978-1-5344-8771-0

A wig feels insignificant until it recalls its purpose.

Wig, a bright pink hair covering styled in a Brigitte Bardot-inspired bouffant, is the prized possession of a young boy named B.B. Bedazzle, who is participating in a drag contest called the Big Wig Ball. On the way to the event, Wig attracts attention and feels larger-than-life on B.B.’s head but upon arriving at the ball, suffers a crisis of confidence. Everywhere she looks, there are wigs that are even taller and showier than she is. Feeling intimidated, Wig abandons B.B. and flies through the air, zooming

among the heads of audience members. With each head she lands on, Wig’s hairstyle changes, and the person is magically transformed into a fearless, glamorous drag queen. By instilling confidence in others, Wig regains her own. Recalling that she has left B.B.’s head bare, “Wig frizzes and fizzles and splits her ends, flying home FAST to find her friend” as the contest begins. Readers will smile at the satisfying ending. Why Wig feels more confident on heads other than B.B.’s and how B.B. feels after being temporarily abandoned by Wig are important questions left noticeably unaddressed. While clearly attempting to provide lighthearted encouragement for children who might feel inadequate, the choice of a wig—rather than a drag queen or queer child—as the entry point for empathy and self-reflection leaves much to be desired. Most characters have pale skin, and a few have textured hair and brown skin that cue them as Black. B.B. and B.B.’s parents are White.

Let this one sashay away from your shelves. (Picture book. 3-6)



A SPOONFUL OF FAITH

Holliday, Jena

Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)

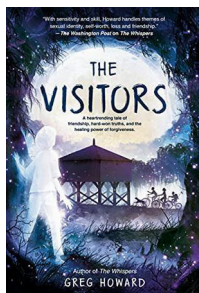
\$14.99 | Feb. 15, 2022

978-0-06-301781-8

A mother teaches her daughter a special recipe to help feed her faith.

Layla, a young, brown-skinned girl, is ready yet nervous for her first day of school. Seeking a confidence boost, she goes in search of her mom—“Cause mamas can help / when you need love and calm”—and finds her in the kitchen. “Hey, sweetie, sit here / Let’s make a quick meal / that’s full of good things / to help how you feel,” her mother suggests and fishes out a recipe book. The recipe for the meal includes many ingredients, but none of them are tangible. Instead, courage, “a spoonful of faith,” “dashes of kindness,” “handfuls of hope,” “pinches of prayers,” and warm hugs go into the mixing bowl. To concretize these virtues, the artwork uses a visual motif of hearts and flowers. Once the meal is ready, Layla hesitantly looks into the bowl, unsure what to make of the imaginary repast, but a word of wisdom from Mama helps her realize the true source of her emotional sustenance and strength. The illustrations, created using digital watercolor, pencil, and gouache brushes in Procreate, are soothing, with soft pastel colors. While God is mentioned, there are no references to any specific religion.

An uplifting, rhyming picture book offering food for the soul. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-8)



THE VISITORS

Howard, Greg
Putnam (304 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-593-11188-8

A lingering spirit is set free.

The old Hollow Pines Plantation is haunted. Not just by the memories of brutal landowners and the enslaved people they tormented, but also by their actual ghosts. One such ghost doesn't remember who he is or why he's lingering, but when three living middle schoolers show up, trying to solve a 50-year-old mystery, connection and adventure ensue. Howard's fourth novel is ambitious in form and quite successful in that regard; the perspective shifts between the first-person ghost in the present day and a third-person story about a White boy named Will Perkins, bullied for his same-sex attraction by his father, former best friend, and other classmates. There's a bit of mystery about who the narrator is as well as an interesting—and heartbreaking—twist. Less convincing are the contemporary youth, who come off more as textbook examples of “kids today” than vital presences. The brown-skinned trans girl Maya especially seems more like a tool than a character; her experiences of transphobia (contrasted with Will's encounters with homophobia) present a somewhat bleak view. However, these depressing elements are balanced by the mostly graceful teaching of history, the innovative use of perspective, and the truly creepy haunting elements.

An atmospheric reckoning with the past and present, heavy but rewarding. (author's note, resources) (*Paranormal*, 10-14)



CALL OF THE CROW

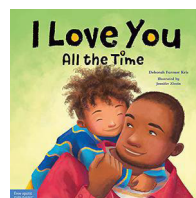
Khoury, Jessica
Scholastic (288 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-338-65242-0
Series: Skyborn, 2

Winged kids fight a trifecta of adversity: a corrupt monarchy, sky-dwelling monsters, and a deadly plague.

Jumping in where predecessor *Sparrow Rising* (2021) left off, Ellie Meadows of the Sparrow clan and Nox Hatcher of the Crow clan are on the run from the villainous King Garion's Goldwing knights and his sadistic assassin, the Hunter. In addition to these foes, they also must hide from the deadly gargols, vicious monsters who live high in the sky and attack from the clouds. Apart from their own troubles, the entire kingdom is afflicted by wingrot, a plague ending either in death or wing amputation. Hoping to hide, Ellie and Nox, along with their friends Gussie and Twig, journey to the remote southern jungles and meet a new friend, Tariel, from the Macaw clan. When Garion's ghouls and

the gargols eventually catch up with them, the group begins to uncover ancient secrets that could save them, their kingdom, and those afflicted by wingrot. Khoury's finely wrought and complex fantasy skillfully weaves together narrative threads from the previous work, answering some questions but leaving its reader with an achingly tantalizing cliffhanger. Fast-paced fantasy action drives the narrative but is well balanced by relatable characters, culminating in a sweet tale of found family. Most characters default to White; Tariel and the other jungle residents unfortunately evoke cartoonish tropes about tropical island villagers.

A charming flight of fancy. (map, clan information) (*Fantasy*, 8-12)



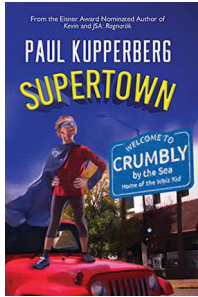
I LOVE YOU ALL THE TIME

Kris, Deborah Farmer
Illus. by Jennifer Zivoin
Free Spirit Publishing (32 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-63198-506-5
Series: All the Time

Loving affirmation in picture-book form.

An extended poem expresses a caregiver's unfailing love for a child. After each of the rhyming quatrains is the titular refrain: “I love you all the time.” The illustrations show Micah, a young, biracial boy, being cared for throughout the day by his White mother, Black father, and Black grandmother. He learns how to ride a bike, goes to school, makes messes and cleans them up, plays dress-up and soccer, learns how to write his name, and more. His emotions sometimes get the best of him, but the adults' support and patient understanding never waver. One scene depicting a tepee as a playtime prop while Micah plays with horses and wears a cowboy hat may give readers pause, but thankfully, there are no stereotypical depictions of Native American people in the text. Helpful backmatter highlights the author's use of the reassuring reminder—*I love you all the time*—in her own parenting and provides additional guidance to help make children “feel loved and loveable.” There are many similar children's books available, but the depiction of a multigenerational, interracial family sets this one apart.

A comforting book about the power of unconditional love that's instructive for caregivers and young readers alike. (*Picture book*, 2-5)



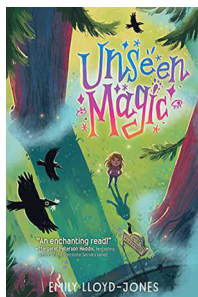
SUPERTOWN

Kupperberg, Paul
Heliosphere Books (368 pp.)
\$15.99 paper | Feb. 28, 2022
978-1-937868-85-7

Can a young boy with a big imagination really save the day?

In a world where superheroes (and supervillains) exist, Wally Crenshaw lives in his tiny New Jersey town of Crumbly-by-the-Sea. Crumbly is a modern anomaly with its odd pattern of cell, internet, and cable services that are operational only two hours a day. Wally lives with his widowed mother and idolizes the Justice Brigade, dreaming of joining the team as the self-named superhero Whiz Kid. His imagination runs wild, and too many false calls have made local law enforcement regard him as an unreliable witness. When a villain known as the Accelerator is thought to be in Crumbly, Wally's greatest fears and hopes are realized as both superheroes and feds converge. However, this small town may be hiding some very big secrets: Can Wally truly become a superhero and help his town? Kupperberg's yarn is packed with twists and turns and a cinematic panache (and a healthy helping of action and high-tech gadgetry) that most comics fans will appreciate. However, the action can come across as derivative, seemingly taking cues from well-known franchise storylines. Wally's characterization tends toward boilerplate: an underdog boy who ultimately achieves what he most desires, overcoming adversity through optimism. Wally and most of the characters default to White.

Well-trodden ground with a few fun surprises. (*Superhero fantasy. 8-11*)



UNSEEN MAGIC

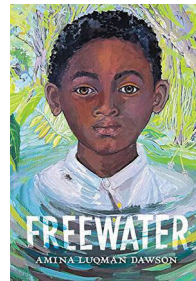
Lloyd-Jones, Emily
Greenwillow Books (352 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-06-305798-2

A tween accidentally unleashes a monster made of tea.

After constantly relocating, Finley Barnes and her mother stay awhile with Fin's aunt and cousin, Eddie, in Aldermere. Tourists may clamor for hikes or seek cryptids around the Northern California town, but only the locals know about the real magic—including the vanishing tea shop. For the price of a whispered memory immediately forgotten, the shop's tea temporarily changes people. Fin exchanges her memories to ease her debilitating anxiety, but when misfortune befalls its owner, the tea shop abruptly closes. The tea's addictive reprieve from mental anguish motivates Fin to mess with magic and brew it herself. Unfortunately, a misstep in the process brings the tea leaves to life, and they morph into Fin's likeness. Can Fin and Eddie stop Teafin before it's too late?

Lloyd-Jones' middle-grade debut blends memorable characters, rich descriptions, and a dash of magical mischief to create an original tale. Firmly grounded by Fin's third-person point of view and a strong sense of place, the tight narrative luxuriates in its slow revelation of the central mysteries. Layered, sophisticated storytelling plants clues for careful readers and gives heart-wrenching depth to characters' trauma and resilience. Most characters default to White; names and passing references cue some diversity in ethnicity and family structure. The ending hints at a possible sequel.

A deliciously atmospheric, full-bodied magical brew. (map) (*Fantasy. 8-12*)



FREEWATER

Luqman-Dawson, Amina
Little, Brown (416 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-0-316-05661-8

Two youngsters escaping slavery find refuge.

Twelve-year-old Homer and his little sister, Ada, become separated from their mother as they attempt to flee enslavement on the Southerland plantation. They are rescued by Suleman, who takes them deep into the Great Dismal Swamp, where they join Freewater, a community of people who successfully fled from slavery and children who were born there. They work together to remain free, support one another, and remember the history of their founding. Suleman is one of the men who patrols the swamp, watching for any who would seek to reenslave them. He and others raid neighboring plantations for supplies. Freeborn Sanzi, 12, is determined to be a hero like Suleman—even if it gets her into trouble—and when her efforts go badly wrong, it places their settlement in danger. Meanwhile, back at Southerland, Homer's mother has been caught and severely whipped. This does not keep Homer's friend Anna from plotting her own escape while Homer seeks a way to rescue his mother. Set in a fictional community but based on real stories of those who fled slavery and lived secretly in Southern swamps, this is detailed and well-researched historical fiction. The characters are varied, complex, and fully realized. Descriptions of the setting are so vivid that it becomes a key aspect of the narrative. The page-turning action will engage readers as the story reaches a satisfying conclusion.

An exceptional addition to the resistance stories of enslaved people. (author's note) (*Historical fiction. 8-12*)

“The text is well turned, with the philosophical appeal of a mythical hero’s journey.”

WUTARYOO

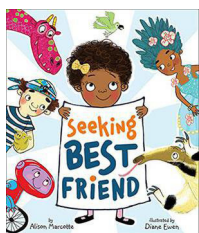


WUTARYOO
Magruder, Nilab
 Versify/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
 978-0-358-17238-3

A mysterious creature—the only one of her kind—undertakes a journey to discover her true name and from whence she came.

Wutaryoo, a small, furry, bushy-tailed critter with two tiny horns, is so named because all her life she has been asked the same question: “What are you?” All the other animals know their origins. “In the beginning, my people were as large as trees and ruled the world,” the wren relays, and wolf recounts how “in the beginning my people were born in moonlight,” but Wutaryoo has no clue about her ancestry. “What am I? Who are my people? Where did I come from?” she wonders and sets off on a quest across the prehistoric Earth to find out. Wutaryoo’s odyssey takes her to “strange shores” where she has memorable adventures and meets marvelous creatures she has never seen before. She journeys so far that she arrives at “the very beginning of the world.” In the end, although the traveler has not found answers, what she does have is a story to tell—and friends who want to hear it. Magruder’s training as an animator is evident in both the perspectives of the digital illustrations and the use of light to create wonderfully contrasting moods. The text is well turned, with the philosophical appeal of a mythical hero’s journey.

Readers, with their varying levels of experience around identity, will decide the degree of satisfaction this provides. (Picture book. 4-7)



SEEKING BEST FRIEND
Marcotte, Alison
 Illus. by Diane Ewen
 Beaming Books (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
 978-1-5064-6638-5

A young, brown-skinned girl puts out an advertisement for a best friend.

Her initial requirements are simple enough: “Must be kind. A passion for bugs would be neat.” However, when an ant eater comes along and shows a little *too* much interest in her bug hotel, the girl (who remains unnamed) feels compelled to amend her advertisement and throws in another requirement for good measure: “Doesn’t eat my insect collection. Likes to play dress-up.” One by one, candidates show up at her home—including a robot and a fire-breathing dragon—and attempt to meet each new requisite with disappointing results. The girl’s list of stipulations grows increasingly longer and more absurd, but her No. 1, most important requirement—kindness—remains the same. There are plenty of ups and downs before she finds the perfect applicant. The cumulative text is devoted solely to listing the girl’s desiderata while Ewen’s brightly colored, cartoony illustrations dramatize amusing scenes of mounting chaos. Unfortunately, the story has loose ends

(Where did the dragon go? Who is the woman dressed like an opera singer who appears on several spreads?), and the lesson that the best way to find a good friend is to be one gets lost in the accumulation of detail.

A fun and worthy premise, but the execution feels underwhelming. (Picture book. 4-8)



BEST FRENEMIES FOREVER
McCafferty, Megan
 Scholastic (320 pp.)
 \$16.99 | March 1, 2022
 978-1-338-72249-9

Sophie befriends her new neighbor, hoping Kaytee will never learn why she was deserted by Ella, her former best friend.

Sophie’s been lonely the whole summer, but little does she suspect that bubbly Kaytee also has secrets. Kaytee’s parents are sending her and her twin brother to private schools, so Sophie feels safe lying about her popularity. In reality, Ella was wooed away by mean girl Morgan in sixth grade, and now “MorganElla” are joined at the hip, excluding and being unkind to Sophie. Everything starts to fall apart when Kaytee, who is miserable at her private school, transfers to Sophie’s public school. Sophie—smart, science-oriented, and a budding feminist—has no interest in clothes, makeup, boys, or social media. Kaytee acts more like the popular girls, but there is a part of her ocean- and dolphin-loving self that genuinely likes Sophie. Still, practical Sophie, generally good-hearted, is not above considering blackmail after she learns her neighbor’s well-kept secret. The middle school friendship problems in this novel ring true, but some of Sophie’s first-person narration feels artificial. Readers will tire of frequent pronouncements from Sophie’s social worker mother and environmental scientist father. Most characters default to White; names cue some minor characters as Asian or Latinx.

Seventh grade friendship issues loom large in this novel that doesn’t stand out from the crowd. (Fiction. 9-12)



MAP OF FLAMES
McMann, Lisa
 Putnam (384 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-0-593-32540-7
 Series: The Forgotten Five, 1

When the last supernatural criminal adult in their seaside hideout dies, their five children journey to the far-flung country of Estero.

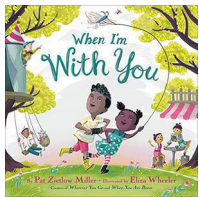
To escape the outside world with its harsh stigma against anyone supernatural, the eight parents fled to a coastal refuge following a final heist 15 years ago. However, a need for supplies pulled most of them back to Estero, trips

“Exuberant yet earnest.”

WHEN I'M WITH YOU

from which they mysteriously never returned, leaving just one parent behind. Three years later, 13-year-old Birdie Golden's father succumbs to an illness; his final request that she find her mother haunts Birdie. Reluctantly, the five supernatural young people—Birdie, who communicates with animals; her younger brother, Brix, who heals rapidly; Seven Palacio, whose body is perpetually camouflaged; Tenner Cordoba, who has extra-sensory strengths; and Cabot Stone, who has great talents but has yet to develop any powers—depart for Estero City. Armed with a flame-enchanted map that leads to the final heist's stash, they travel across sea and jungle to a city full of modern wonders, secret allies, and an anti-supernatural plot at the highest levels of society. The narrative jumps among the characters' internal perspectives, highlighting each of their personal conflicts in ways that reveal their individual complexities. Though the worldbuilding is rather wobbly and there are loose threads (hopefully to be resolved in a sequel), plenty of humor and fun demonstrations of powers keep readers' attention. Names and skin tone are used to indicate some diversity among the cast.

Supernaturally cool. (*Fantasy*. 8-12)



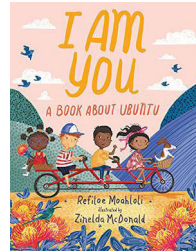
WHEN I'M WITH YOU

Miller, Pat Zietlow
Illus. by Eliza Wheeler
Little, Brown (40 pp.)
\$17.99 | March 1, 2022
978-0-316-42915-3

The message here is clear: Life is better when shared with special people.

Speaking directly to the reader in rhyming verses, the first-person narrator extols the enduring joys of friendship. Whether the friendship started “when we both were small” or “once we had a chance to grow,” the narrator admits “I’m happier with you.” Often, the narrator tickles the reader with amusing sweet nothings: “If one plus one makes two, / I’m the one who goes with you,” and “You like pink, and I like blue. / I’ll make lavender with you.” Whether kindred spirits are playing together, enjoying quiet time, working side by side, or exploring the world with each other, the people who ‘get us’ make our lives that much happier. Even when friends grow up, change, and no longer live close by, the narrator promises to “find a way to keep you in my head and in my heart.” Clever use of related object analogies—“You’re the apple on my tree. / You’re the honey to my bee” or “You’re the hat that fits my head. / You’re the hilltop for my sled”—creates a jaunty rhythm ideal for reading aloud. Busy, upbeat, mixed-media illustrations rendered in a cheerful pastel palette feature racially and gender diverse friends (including animal companions) engaged in both familiar activities and fantastical adventures, many of them taking place in nature.

An exuberant yet earnest assemblage of fast-paced verse and fun-filled visuals about friendship. (*Picture book*. 4-7)



I AM YOU A Book About Ubuntu

Moabloli, Refiloe
Illus. by Zinelda McDonald
Amazon Crossing Kids (32 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-5420-3566-8

An African humanist philosophy encourages empathy and compassion for others.

In South Africa, the word *ubuntu*—from the Nguni languages of isiXhosa and isiZulu—refers to a long-held belief system built on the core principle that one is a person only in relation to another person: “I am, because you are.” The text of this picture book, written in free verse, employs anaphora to elucidate the concept: “When I look into your eyes, / I see your heart. / I embrace you,” and “when I look into your eyes, / I see your beauty. / I love you,” and so on. McDonald’s bright, colorful, digital illustrations are inviting and show positive connections between children from different backgrounds who have varied life experiences: a Black, able-bodied girl dances with a Caucasian boy who uses a wheelchair; an Indian boy, a Black boy, and a White girl living on different floors of the same apartment building warmly greet each other; four children with different skin tones, one of whom wears a hearing aid, walk on a city sidewalk, all sporting matching blue shirts and sharing an exceedingly long scarf. The book does have less sunny moments: On a spread showing three girls jumping rope together while ignoring another girl, the text explains that when one hurts others, self-harm results. While the concept of *ubuntu* comes from South Africa, McDonald’s visuals could easily translate to any culture or locale.

An edifying, unifying picture book that’s much needed in these divisive times. (*Picture book*. 4-8)



DELPHINE AND THE DARK THREAD

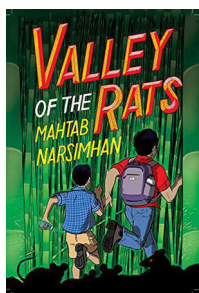
Moon, Alyssa
Disney-Hyperion (320 pp.)
\$16.99 | March 1, 2022
978-1-368-04833-0
Series: Delphine, 2

Armed only with her magical sewing needle, founding mouse Delphine sets out to confront the cruel rat king in this duology closer.

As vicious rat armies pillage the mouse realms in search of her and her pointy, long-hidden treasure, Delphine finds herself waging an inner war that parallels the outer one. According to dusty documents and other reputable sources, the needle’s good powers can be perverted, but she sees no other way except killing to stop evil rat King Midnight. While struggling with a grim determination to go over to the dark side that sets her at odds with her own fundamentally loving nature, Delphine threads

her way along with loyal allies past various scrapes—only to come, climactically, face to face with not only her nemesis, but her own past. Moon stitches in flashbacks to fill out the details of a tragic old love triangle that reaches its fruition here and sews her tale up with a return to Château Desjardins just in time for Cinderella's wedding and a celebratory rodentine ball in the chandelier overhead, and she leaves a fringe of epilogue hinting at further installments to come.

Less charming than the opener but does feature a thimbleful of moral quandary at its center. (secret codes) (*Animal fantasy*. 10-12)



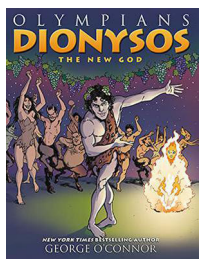
VALLEY OF THE RATS

Narsimhan, Mahtab
DCB (240 pp.)
\$13.95 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-77086-628-7

Lost in the woods, Krish and his father discover a village with a dangerous secret.

Twelve-year-old germophobe Krish Roy has never liked the outdoors: It's too dirty and unpredictable. But trying to connect with his nature photographer father, Krish agrees to leave Delhi and go with his dad to a wilderness adventure camp in the Ladakh Range, where they embark on a hike through the forest and mountains. Unfortunately for Krish, he was right to be worried. He and his father find themselves lost in the wilderness with a broken radio and an unsettling number of rats. When Krish suggests they follow the rats, who might lead them to human habitation, they find not the safe shelter Krish hoped for but instead Imdur, an isolated village controlled by a mysterious and possibly untrustworthy shaman. Krish wants to get out of there, but his father wishes to learn more, and the two are drawn into the village's practices and begin to stray closer and closer to danger. To survive, Krish must learn to believe in himself and face his fears directly, even if he's never been able to do so before. A good deal of action, a likable protagonist, and an ever growing sense of doom speed this novel along, though there is little time to explore some of the darker consequences of Krish's actions.

A satisfying fantasy full of mystery. (*Fantasy*. 9-12)



DIONYSOS The New God

O'Connor, George
First Second (80 pp.)
\$21.99 | Jan. 25, 2022
978-1-62672-530-0
Series: Olympians, 12

Discover "a new type of god" in this final installment in the outstanding Olympians series.



Depicted eerily as an enigmatic, unclothed figure wrapped in flames, Hestia, goddess of hearth and home—and the oldest of the Olympians—narrates this strange and wild tale of Dionysos' birth and rise. The youngest of the gods, Dionysos is conceived by a human mother and raised first as a girl then as a boy before he goes on to invent wine, vanquish death itself, and ultimately claim his seat on Mount Olympus with the rest of his immortal clan. Though not immune to tender feelings (such as when he meets the spirit of his dead mother, Semele, in the realm of Hades and when he marries Ariadne after she's dumped by that cad Theseus), Dionysos generally comes off as a slap-happy party animal. He cavorts through the illustrations shirtless, displaying appropriately godlike charm and charisma as he dispenses his marvelous beverage far and wide and gathers followers—of both the mythological and racially diverse human variety—for wild rumpuses. "The Olympians may be deathless, but no god is as alive as Dionysos," Hestia observes. More than any of his fellow deities, he is "a god of the people. Of humans. Because he was born of them." The pages of this well-conceived graphic novel are laid out using an irregular grid that emphasizes some panels while retaining flow. All major characters present as White.

A by turns epic, amusing, and tragic caper that's even more toastworthy (for obvious reasons) than its 11 predecessors. (sources, resources, discussion questions, endnotes) (*Graphic mythology*. 10-14)



WITCHLINGS

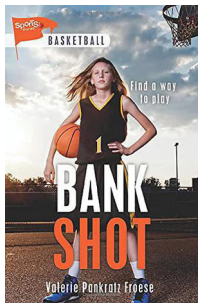
Ortega, Claribel A.
Scholastic (352 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-338-74552-8

It's the night of the Black Moon Ceremony, when Witchlings in Ravenskill are assigned to their covens, and the one thing 12-year-old Seven Salazar hopes to avoid is being made a Spare Witch.

When her fears unfortunately come to pass, she's faced with two other leftover and unlikely new companions—not to mention a challenge that might just prove deadly. Alongside the other Sparer, anxious Thorn La Roux and bully Valley Pepperhorn, Seven must embark on a dangerous quest to find and kill the rumored child-eating Nightbeast. Through their adventures, however, Seven learns about a lot more than just the mystery of the Nightbeast: She comes to see people—including herself—differently. She peers beneath her first assumptions and stands up for others even when that's not easy. When she fears a friend is experiencing parental abuse, she brings her concerns to an adult she trusts even though she's frightened it will make her friend angry. The story balances serious social themes with lighthearted friendship hijinks, and the plot is fast-paced and full of gratifying twists. Ortega invites readers in, combining familiar fantasy furnishings with a low-key, modern-inflected tone. Seven is cued as Latine, and many of the spells she invokes on her journey ring with Spanish roots,

offering Spanish speakers the joy of recognition and others the excitement of new-forged understanding. Thorn and Valley read as White.

Energetic and intelligent; invites readers to question their assumptions and the status quo. (*Fantasy*. 8-12)



BANK SHOT

Pankratz Froese, Valerie

James Lorimer (120 pp.)

\$27.99 | Jan. 1, 2022

978-1-4594-1641-3

Series: Lorimer Sports Stories

Jo's passion for basketball leads to joy on the court—and continual, exhausting anxiety everywhere else.

Keeping plot and language simple in this accessible work for reluctant readers, Pankratz Froese hands her eighth grade protagonist a tough challenge. Knowing that her single mom is going to require her to watch her little brother, Rory, after school rather than join the girls' basketball team, Jo forges her mother's signature on the permission slip and works out a financial deal with Ming, a latchkey seventh grade neighbor, to watch Rory while she races to the obligatory daily practices. Thanks to her willingness to hustle both on and off the court, Jo manages to improve her defensive playing skills, impress even the demanding coach with her work ethic, and keep the stratagem going for some weeks. Displaying plenty of exciting game action, Jo's team plays both strong and weak opponents on the way to a local championship round, but it's the emotional cost of continually lying to her mom and teammates that stands out here, dimming her sense of achievement. Readers are likely to be as relieved as Jo is when, once her secret is (inevitably) revealed, she both faces reasonable consequences and enjoys a happy resolution to her predicament. Jo and her family seem to default to White; names cue some diversity in the Canadian cast.

A tidy tale, villain- and (unusually, these days) bully-free, with clear but not heavy-handed game and life coaching. (*Sports fiction*. 9-13)



KAT HATS

Pinkwater, Daniel

Illus. by Aaron Renier

Abrams (40 pp.)

\$17.99 | Jan. 11, 2022

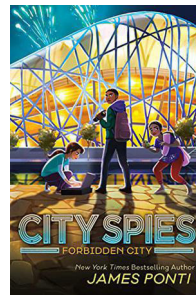
978-1-4197-5194-3

Matt Katz is the owner of Kat Hats Incorporated, a training facility where a cat can be “patiently taught to arrange itself on the head of a person as a living headpiece.”

When Thirdbeard's elderly mother, Chickarina, goes missing on a snowy evening, he enlists the help of Matt Katz. Thirdbeard fears that his Mommy, who happens to be a nice, harmless

witch, will suffer from brain freeze since she was last seen eating “an extra-large jumbo frozen fruitsicle, blueberry and avocado flavor,” and walking hatless up a steep mountain known as Witch's Spitz. Luckily, Matt's beloved and most successful kat hat, Thermal Herman 67/8ths, has only just returned from a trip to Nepal. With one look from Matt, Thermal Herman 67/8ths rushes out into the falling night. Aided by a madcap motorcyclist and a random moose who is “using his antlers as a hat rack” for some unspecified reason, the plucky cat saves Chickarina and brings her home, warmly hatted. This zany picture book is delightfully replete with straight-faced nonsense and atypical characters, many of whom have green skin and long, pointy noses. White, androgynous Matt wears colorful, mismatched socks and is husband to the always-fly, brown-skinned Glamorella, whose clothing and hairstyle change in every scene. Their son, Pocketmouse, an aspiring magician, uses a wheelchair made out of a charcoal barrel grill, and their daughter, Lambkin, wears a jester's costume and is forever performing circus tricks. The bright and busy gouache illustrations are chock-full of off-beat, whimsical details that tell parallel stories of their own.

Flamboyantly fanciful and so much fun! (*Picture book*. 4-8)



FORBIDDEN CITY

Ponti, James

Aladdin (448 pp.)

\$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022

978-1-5344-7921-0

Series: City Spies, 3

MI6's secret youth operation is back for more world saving.

For the young people living at the Foundation for Atmospheric Research and Monitoring, leading double—or triple, more like—lives is nothing new by now. Overseen by a male MI6 agent with the nickname Mother and a female scientist called Monty, the five kids born around the globe and recruited to this base in Scotland have mounted one successful mission after another, so they're poised for success as they prepare for the next one. Rwandan-born Paris, who was raised in France, is taking center stage in an operation to rescue a North Korean scientist being targeted by the international criminal ring Umbra, posing as a chess player in an international competition that includes the scientist's son. Meanwhile, White Australian-born Sydney has a role to play as a teen journalist following the socialite daughter of billionaire Reginald Banks and KB5, the hot British boy band Banks put together. Other City Spies—Nepalese teen girl Kat and Brazilian teen boy Rio—will play supporting roles in tech and espionage, though Nuyorican Brooklyn is being grounded at summer school so she can catch up to her classmates. Ponti has once again crafted a thrilling adventure with lovable characters, alluring and detailed international settings, and villains who aren't cartoonishly evil. The conclusion is wholly satisfying yet full of potential for the next installment.

A smashing success. (dossiers) (*Thriller*. 10-14)

“An amusing take on a near-universal childhood milestone.”

“NOT THAT PET!”



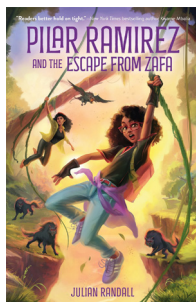
“NOT THAT PET!”

Prasadam-Halls, Smriti
 Illus. by Rosalind Beardshaw
 Candlewick (32 pp.)
 \$16.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-1-5362-1776-6

A young, biracial (half South Asian, half White) girl and her family host a series of unorthodox pets in order to find the perfect fit.

A sign at the pet store foreshadows the hijinks that will ensue: “Any pet you like delivered to your door.” Given free rein over the family’s choice of pet, Mabel selects an elephant. At first, all is well as Mabel enjoys the best elephantine hugs, rides, and down-the-trunk slides. However, after the elephant sits on Mabel’s mom, the verdict is clear: “NOT THAT PET!” A succession of failed pets follows—ants, a skunk, a snake, worms, and several more—each wreaking their own unique brand of havoc. Wising up, Mabel assesses the traits that would make for a good pet and makes an unexpected yet clearly perfect choice. With its bouncy, rhyming text and cheeky humor, this playful ode to animal companions would make for a delightful read-aloud. Mabel shows compassion and resiliency as she makes attempt after attempt to find a pet that will be beloved by her entire multigenerational family. The relationship between Mabel and her doting little brother who trails her everywhere is charming.

An amusing take on a near-universal childhood milestone that successfully expands upon a familiar theme. (Picture book. 3-8)



PILAR RAMIREZ AND THE ESCAPE FROM ZAFU

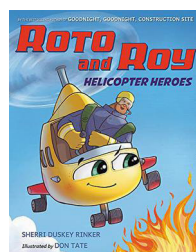
Randall, Julian
 Henry Holt (304 pp.)
 \$16.99 | March 1, 2022
 978-1-250-77410-1
 Series: Pilar Ramirez Duology, 1

Magic awaits around every corner in Zafa.

Pilar Ramirez grew up hearing stories of the Dominican boogeyman El Cuco—alongside accounts of dictator Rafael Trujillo, whose ruthlessness forced her abuela to flee the country with Mami long before Pilar was born. A sharp-tongued resident of Chicago living in a neighborhood that seems to be gentrifying overnight, Pilar aspires to be a documentary filmmaker and share untold stories of silenced voices, including that of her cousin Natasha, who vanished in 1957 during the Trujillo regime. Pilar can’t believe her luck when Lorena, her annoyingly perfect college student sister, arranges for her to interview a sociology professor who happens to be studying missing persons from this era. Pilar arrives at the professor’s office, notices a file folder with her missing cousin’s name on it, and before you can blink an ojo, she is magically pulled into the file and whisked away to the supernatural island of Zafa. Pilar must team up with its

scrappy, otherworldly inhabitants to unravel the mystery of Natasha’s disappearance and help save the island from dark forces. Spanish words and phrases are woven into the English text in ways that enhance the character development and anchor the Dominican culture that permeates the story. Pilar’s humorous, authentically tweenage voice shines as she makes astute observations about the world around her.

Nonstop action and plenty of heart create a story worth escaping into. (Adventure. 9-13)



ROTO AND ROY Helicopter Heroes

Rinker, Sherri Duskey
 Illus. by Don Tate
 Little, Brown (40 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-316-53496-3

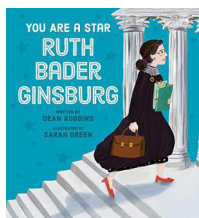
No wildfire stands a chance when Roy Thunder and his helicopter, Roto, take to the skies.

Firefighting pilot Roy, whose race is ambiguous, is a superhero in every way. One morning, after a lightning strike sparks a wildfire in a canyon, Roy and Roto—who is anthropomorphic with green eyes—set off together to fight the blaze. Their strenuous mission involves using a hose to draw up water from a lake and flying for hours “through the high winds, smoke, and heat.” Although it takes filling Roto’s tank with water 10 times to put out the conflagration, the heroes prevail. However, just when all seems safe, they spot a petrified puppy precariously close to a cliff’s edge. In a daring air rescue, Roto hovers and Roy rappels to the ground to reach the forlorn animal. Job complete, the pair head back to Hangar One, where they receive a true hero’s welcome. This engaging, rhyming picture book looks and feels like a large comic book. The cartoonlike illustrations are action-packed and divided into panels on several spreads. Like classic superhero comics, there is plenty of onomatopoeia, inviting audience participation. During the air rescue scene, the layout changes to horizontal orientation twice, a move that will surprise and delight readers. When read aloud, the book does feel a bit long.

A fun friendship story for young readers fond of brave exploits, helicopters, comics, or any combination thereof. (Picture book. 5-8)

“Vivid acrylic paintings propel the narrative with a fine balance of pathos and power.”

SWEET JUSTICE



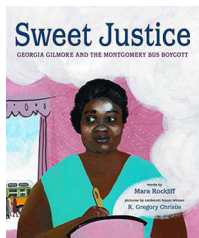
YOU ARE A STAR, RUTH BADER GINSBURG

Robbins, Dean
Illus. by Sarah Green
 Scholastic (40 pp.)
 \$7.99 paper | Dec. 7, 2021
 978-1-338-76766-7
 Series: You Are a Star

In this first volume of a new nonfiction series, journalist Robbins regales readers with tales of the notorious RBG, former associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Conversational first-person narration, inset graphics, fact boxes, and appealing digital illustrations combine to paint a well-rounded picture of Ruth Bader Ginsburg from childhood to adulthood. Readers will be interested to learn about RBG’s formative years growing up in Brooklyn, New York; her struggles with sexism; her supportive family; and how she stood up for women, immigrants, people of color, and same-sex couples seeking fair treatment under the law during her long, illustrious career. Bader Ginsburg’s strong spirit, unrivaled work ethic, sense of humor, and dedication to equality and justice shine through in this telling. Details that youngsters have likely not considered—for example, the lack of female bathrooms in male-dominated spaces such as law schools and the Supreme Court—capture the time period and show the realities of the everyday sexism RBG faced. The closing spread extends a compelling invitation: “Won’t you join us in making the world a better place?” Although the text can sometimes feel a bit cloying, overall the story bubbles with enthusiasm and interesting tidbits that will draw children in.

A warm, informative, and entertaining biography of a pioneering scholar, lawyer, and judge. (author’s note, notes, timeline, resources, glossary) (Picture book biography. 5-7)



**SWEET JUSTICE
 Georgia Gilmore and the Montgomery Bus Boycott**

Rockloff, Mara
Illus. by R. Gregory Christie
 Random House Studio (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Jan. 11, 2022
 978-1-5247-2064-3

Georgia Gilmore was just an ordinary person when she fed and funded the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

“Georgia was cooking when she heard the news,” the story begins. The year is 1955, and civil rights activist Rosa Parks has just been arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a White man on a bus. Gilmore had spent her entire life in Montgomery, Alabama, and was no stranger to segregation. Having had her own brush with a racist bus driver, she knew the pain of being treated unjustly. Georgia springs into action, joining her neighbors as they march through the streets in mass protest against the Montgomery bus system. Georgia begins selling pastries and dinners, including her famous crispy chicken sandwiches,

keeping the people fed during Dr. Martin Luther King’s church meetings. She then organizes a secret group of friends, dubbed the Club From Nowhere, to help her continue the venture. They use the money they make to support the boycott, which ultimately ends when a Supreme Court ruling makes segregation on public buses unconstitutional. Despite the hardships she experienced, Georgia persevered, eventually opening her own restaurant, which became a hub for Black community organizing. Christie’s vivid acrylic paintings propel the narrative with a fine balance of pathos and power. The straightforward text uses food as an extended metaphor to underscore Georgia’s tenacity and African American people’s hunger for equality and justice.

Young readers will find much food for thought in this inspiring profile of a lesser-known civil rights leader. (notes, author’s note, sources) (Picture book biography. 5-9)



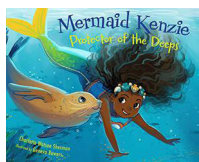
THE ORACLE OF AVARIS

Sevigny, Alisha
 Dundurn (368 pp.)
 \$8.99 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-1-4597-4435-6
 Series: Secrets of the Sands, 3

In this conclusion to the Secrets of the Sands trilogy, Sesha and fellow scribes Paser and Reb accompany Pepi to the Hyksos capital of Avaris.

Their goal is to see the ailing king, who is Pepi’s uncle, and prevent war with Thebes. Yanassi, the king’s son and presumed heir to the throne, and his bride-to-be, Theban Princess Merat, are already attending upon dying King Khyan. As they sail to Avaris, Pepi shares a prophecy likely unknown to Yanassi: The next Hyksos ruler will come from the line of the physician, ushering in 40 years of peace and prosperity. Pepi believes it refers to Sesha, daughter of Thebes’ royal physician, who’s been posing as his betrothed. Sesha is uncertain—Pepi’s her mentor and friend; she has no desire to marry him but believes Pepi might in fact be the king’s son. She’s confused when the king insists that he isn’t. Could the prophecies mean that Ky, Sesha’s beloved brother and a Theban heir, will inherit the throne of Hyksos? Seeking clarification, the scribes undertake a dangerous journey to the oracle only to hear her prophesy something shocking and unexpected. Sesha excepted, characters remain somewhat underdeveloped, and the interpretation of prophecies and political strategizing slow the pace. Fortunately, Sevigny excels at worldbuilding, layering the minutiae of daily life in convincing detail—in her hands, ancient Egypt, perennially fascinating, becomes a character in its own right.

An immersive read for lovers of historical fiction. (Historical fiction. 9-13)



**MERMAID KENZIE
Protector of the Deeps**

Sherman, Charlotte Watson
 Illus. by Geneva Bowers
 Boyds Mills (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Jan. 18, 2022
 978-1-63592-310-0

A curious, young Black girl embraces her role as a protector of aquatic life.

McKenzie, or Mermaid Kenzie as she prefers to be called, is a bright, adventurous child with a big Afro who enjoys everything the seashore and ocean have to offer. When not at the beach, she uses her vivid imagination to re-create the serenity of the sea in her messy bedroom that she refuses to clean because “mermaids don’t clean up.” Day and night, the girl and her mother spend time at the shore building sand castles, skipping stones, collecting seashells, exploring sea caves, going on boat rides, and more. Mermaid Kenzie loves interacting with the organisms that call the beach and ocean home, including a seal she has named Cocoa. The more she explores, the more she realizes just how much pollution has affected the marine ecosystem. Her mother tells her of a time when the ocean was “an underwater zoo,” but now there are “more plastic bags than fish.” Dubbing herself Protector of the Deeps, Mermaid Kenzie breaks her own injunction against cleaning and begins picking up trash and encouraging her friends to do the same. This inspiring picture book shows the positive impact even the youngest of us can make. The text, written in African American Vernacular English, teems with evocative, often lyrical descriptions of the marine setting. The cartoony, digital illustrations use a palette dominated by the bright greens and deep blues of ocean water.

An understated yet unambiguous call to action for everyone to do their part to protect the oceans. (author’s note, bibliography) (Picture book. 5-9)



**MEET THE HAMANTASCHEN
A Purim Mystery**

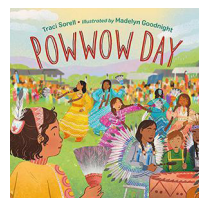
Silberberg, Alan
 Viking (36 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-593-35157-4

Silberberg returns with another comedic Jewish holiday story in this whodunit spoof.

The story opens in a detective agency run by a trio of anthropomorphic Hamantaschen, the triangular pastries traditionally eaten during the Jewish holiday of Purim. They receive a phone call from a mysterious stranger who presents them with a Purim problem: The megillah (a scroll bearing the biblical narrative known as the book of Esther) is missing, and without it the story of Purim cannot be told. Numerous questions and “false facts” lead the detectives to interview all of the suspects, who are also anthropomorphic Jewish foods and happen to be characters in the annual Purim play. There is the banished Queen

Vashti, King Ahasuerus, the heroine Queen Esther, her uncle Mordecai, and, of course, the evil Haman. The three clueless detectives learn much about the Jewish holiday from the play characters en route to the amusing ending when the mystery is finally solved. This hilarious rib of the crime noir drama adds a few contemporary twists to the legend of Purim (for example, Esther has a modern-day diary that is quickly discounted as not being the real book of Esther) but manages to relay the key, traditional elements. Children will get a kick out of the illustrations which incorporate speech bubbles, comic book-style sound effects, and an abundance of wacky details. (This book was reviewed digitally.)

A fun and foodie-friendly parody that illuminates the origin of the Purim festival for young readers. (glossary) (Picture book. 5-8)



POWWOW DAY

Sorell, Traci
 Illus. by Madelyn Goodnight
 Charlesbridge (32 pp.)
 \$16.99 | Feb. 8, 2022
 978-1-58089-948-2



In this contemporary story, an Indigenous tradition inspires hope in a young girl.

Powwow Day, a traditional Native American ceremony, arrives, but River is still recovering from an unnamed illness and feels too weak to dance. Dressed in her jingle dress and matching moccasins, she longs to join her family and friends in the Grand Entry procession. She hears the drums—“BAM. BAM. BAM. BAM”—and watches the elders enter the circle with flags and feathers. The fancy dancers “twirl and ribbons whirl,” while the “grass dancers sway and weave themselves around the circle,” but River can’t “feel the drum’s heartbeat,” and her “feet stay still.” The emcee calls for the jingle dress dancers to enter the arena. Although River needs the ceremonial healing dance, she can’t do it. Thankfully, River’s friend says she will dance for her. The rows of shiny cones on the dresses make music as the jingle dancers move: “clink, clink, clink.” The girls “dance for the Creator, the ancestors, their families, and everyone’s health.” Watching her sister, cousins, and friend dance, River’s heart begins to open and conviction enters her soul. She finally feels the drumbeat fully, but is it her time to dance? Goodnight’s vibrant, energetic digital illustrations capture the beauty and intricacy of powwow regalia as well as the unique atmosphere of a powwow gathering. Together, the artwork and text sensitively portray and celebrate a powerful ritual that upholds the culture, healing traditions, and creative spirit of Native American communities. No specific tribe is mentioned in the story, though the backmatter mentions the Ponca and Omaha tribes.

A heartwarming picture book about the roles of courage, culture, and community in the journey of personal healing. (notes, author’s notes, bibliography) (Picture book. 4-8)



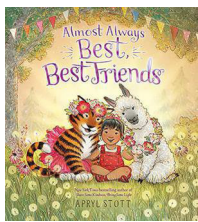
ALICE WATERS COOKS UP A FOOD REVOLUTION

Stanley, Diane
Illus. by Jessie Hartland
Paula Wiseman/Simon & Schuster
(48 pp.)
\$18.99 | Jan. 18, 2022
978-1-5344-6140-6

When she was a little girl, Alice Waters picked fresh strawberries from the yard of her family's New Jersey home.

All summer, her family would make delicious food using fresh produce from the garden. The story jumps forward to Alice's college years in France, where she is amazed by the quality of the food—all made with fresh ingredients. She brings the French style of food preparation back to the U.S., where she eventually opens a restaurant—with the help of friends and patrons—called Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. Alice wants nothing less than to serve the best food ever, made with fresh, local ingredients. Bucking the trend of buying products from giant agribusiness, she drives all over Northern California establishing partnerships with small farms that become her suppliers. Alice's passion for natural, healthy food starts the farm-to-table and slow food movements, revolutionizing food culture and giving children more access to fresh fruit and vegetables. The present-tense narrative lends immediacy to the story, and Hartland's detailed gouache illustrations impart a sense of joy and adventure.

An interesting sketch of a pioneering restaurateur that will be sure to inspire budding cooks and changemakers. (appendix, timeline, bibliography) (Picture book biography. 5-8.)



ALMOST ALWAYS BEST, BEST FRIENDS

Stott, April
Simon & Schuster (40 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-5344-9909-6

Poppy, a young anthropomorphic tiger, builds emotional intelligence and learns communication skills.

She and her best friend, Clementine, a young anthropomorphic sheep, like the same things and are virtually always together. So, when Clementine has a play date with a new companion, Poppy is worried: "What if Clementine thinks Georgia is a better best friend than me?" When Clementine invites Poppy over the next day, all she does is talk about her new friend. Peeved and hurt, Poppy lashes out and dashes home, where she is comforted by her dad. With his help, she figures out the best words to use to share her feelings with her best friend. After the two young animals have a heart-to-heart and reconcile, Poppy meets Georgia for the first time and gets a happy surprise. This book realistically portrays one of the common pitfalls of childhood friendships—jealousy—and successfully models strategies for having difficult but necessary conversations. Rendered

in watercolor and digital ink, Stott's charming illustrations are full of detail and depict three girly characters—Poppy wears a tutu, and all three girls sport flower wreaths and large ribbons in their hair—with a penchant for pink.

A tender tale of friendship, kindness, and forgiveness. (Picture book. 4-8)



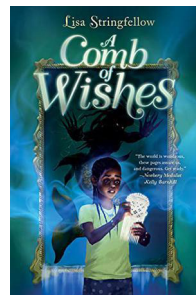
THE MONSTER IN THE LAKE

Stowell, Louie
Illus. by Davide Ortu
Walker US/Candlewick (224 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-1-5362-1494-9
Series: Kit the Wizard, 2

Kit is a wizard, but even so, it's strange when animals in the park start talking to her.

Kit's best friends, Alita and Josh, aren't wizards (yet), but they love all things magical. Taking a break from practicing spells with her mentor, a Black librarian named Faith, Kit wanders over to the park in search of her friends. Oddly enough, all three kids start to hear animals speaking—dogs, crows, and even ants. With a little help from Faith, the kids discover Lizzie, a Lesser Nessie, living in the lake in the park after being evicted from her Scottish loch by some less-than-friendly merfolk. It's Lizzie's presence that is causing magic to go wild. Using a portal book, Faith and the kids travel to Scotland to try and reason with the merfolk, but things are more complicated than they at first seemed. The well-developed contemporary magical world enhanced by genuine humor, plenty of action, and lively illustrations allows readers to believe that magic could really exist around them. This sequel to *The Dragon in the Library* (2021) ticks all the fantasy boxes that young fans of the genre enjoy and is completely accessible to readers new to the series. Refreshingly, pale-skinned, red-haired, stocky Kit has short hair and is shown wearing gender-neutral clothing. Josh is cued as Black, and Alita has brown skin and black hair.

Great fun for those who love a bit of magic and mystery. (character quiz) (Fantasy. 7-10)



A COMB OF WISHES

Stringfellow, Lisa
Quill Tree Books/HarperCollins
(272 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 8, 2022
978-0-06-304343-5

A young girl discovers a mermaid's comb and is granted the chance of a lifetime.

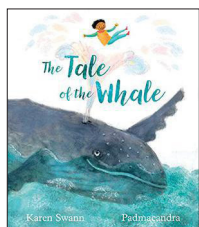
Kela Boxhill is a 12-year-old Black girl from the fictional Caribbean island of St. Rita who enjoys collecting sea glass that she turns into jewelry, something her mother taught her how to do. It's the

“The lyrical text captures the joy of exploration and adds a meditative tone to the fanciful story.”

THE TALE OF THE WHALE

only activity she has found any pleasure in since her mother's passing left her devastated and adrift. One day, while walking the beach, Kela feels called to explore a cave in a protected and off-limits area of the shore. She discovers an ancient-looking box and takes it home with her. She finds a decorated comb inside and, remembering the many stories her mother shared with her, suspects it contains magic. Unbeknownst to Kela, it is the property of a mermaid named Ophidia, who is none too pleased to have had her precious property taken. According to the rules, the only way that Ophidia can get her comb back is to grant Kela a wish. Will Kela ask for what she most desires—to have her mother come back to life—despite Ophidia's warning of the risk this entails? Stringfellow weaves an enchanting tale of loss, longing, and discovery infused with Caribbean folklore. Readers will be captivated by Kela's story and become invested in her journey as she tries to deal with the grief of losing her mother as well as regret for her past actions.

Will tug at readers' heartstrings. (author's note) (Fiction. 8-12)



THE TALE OF THE WHALE

Swann, Karen
 Illus. by Padmacandra
 McElderry (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-1-5344-9394-0

A brown-skinned child has a whale of a time with a new friend, but not everything goes swimmingly.

The unnamed and gendered child narrates the story, relating how they first spy the blue whale from the top of a lighthouse tower. Accepting the whale's invitation—"I've so much to show you, if you'll come along"—the child mounts the smiling whale's back, and the two set off "on the rocking-horse sea." They happily frolic with various sea animals then descend to a shipwreck where a sunken treasure chest awaits; alas, only discarded plastic bottles are to be found inside the chest. Child and whale swim onward, enjoying colorful underwater vistas, until they reach Arctic waters. When the whale opens its mouth to feed and ingests a ton of discarded plastic, there is a touching moment when the creature seems to telepathically appeal to the child. "I understood now what he'd brought me to see," says the chastened narrator who then enumerates some of the kinds of plastic trash that contribute to "the soup of the ocean." A page turn reveals four wordless panels showing marine creatures entangled in debris. On the journey home, the narrator makes a bold promise to the whale. The lyrical text captures the joy of exploration and adds a meditative tone to the fanciful story. Poetic refrain is used effectively to underscore the emotional connection between the child and the concerned cetacean. Padmacandra's textured crayon-and-ink illustrations add luminous depth to the moving tale and use gentle tones that temper the heavy message.

A heartfelt plea to change our wasteful ways. (Picture book. 3-8)



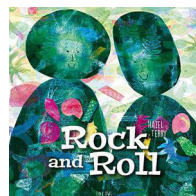
DEAR STUDENT

Swartz, Elly
 Delacorte (304 pp.)
 \$16.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-0-593-37412-2

Speaking for those who can't speak for themselves helps one girl find her fearlessness.

The first day of sixth grade at Hillview Middle School is stressful enough for Autumn Blake without the added pressure from her dad to participate in just one thing. Not a fan of being noticed, finding her special thing feels daunting, especially without her best friend, Prisha, who has moved to California. The answer unexpectedly comes when Autumn is chosen by her teacher to be the anonymous voice behind "Dear Student," the school newspaper's advice column. Her excitement soon turns to worry, though, as she finds herself in the middle of a divisive community issue with new friends Cooper and Logan on opposing sides. Also confusing are Autumn's feelings about her dad, who left to work with the Peace Corps in Ecuador, leaving Autumn, her little sister, and her veterinarian mom behind in Cape Cod. Autumn's inner life will resonate with anyone who has experienced social anxiety, as will her feeling that she is the only one who can't figure out how to navigate the school cafeteria. Themes of animal rights and socio-economic diversity are handled thoughtfully and with nuance. Jewish Autumn and most main characters read as White; Prisha is cued as Indian, and close family friend and veterinary office manager Malcolm has brown skin.

A heartfelt story about finding the courage to stand up for your beliefs even when you'd rather remain invisible. (Fiction. 8-12)



ROCK AND ROLL

Terry, Hazel
 Tiny Owl (32 pp.)
 \$16.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-1-910328-80-4

This British import take an allegorical look at the power of emotions.

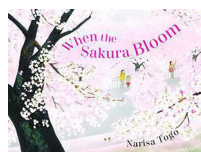
High up in the mountains, two large boulders, Rock and Roll, sit side by side, marveling at the nature that surrounds them. Year after year, they watch numerous sunsets and dazzling night skies and stand steadfast through wintry storms. But one day, humans find the boulders. They claim the land by planting flags, leave ropes and bunting, and pile up stones. The boulders adore their new decorations, but then they become jealous of each other. They vent their emotions to the wind and clouds, who also start fighting, causing a huge storm. After lightning breaks the boulders into tiny pieces, the story's pacing falters as all is resolved abruptly in a single page turn. Readers' minds are left spinning, thinking about nature's fragility and the destructive quality of negative emotions while

“The simple text and gentle visual imagery illuminate the magic to be found in the natural world and in small moments.”

WHEN THE SAKURA BLOOM

grappling with a too-tidy conclusion. Rock and Roll have faces composed of a few simple lines, curves, and dots, but Terry manages to make those spare facial features express a range of emotions. The stunning, colorful collage illustrations, created with gelatin printed paper, incorporate fossil patterns that underscore the passage of time and the interconnectedness of the biosphere. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A well-intentioned parable about conflict, human development, and impermanence that’s marred by a slapdash ending. (author’s note) (Picture book. 4-7)



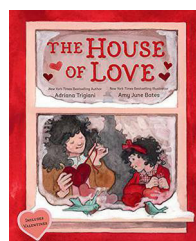
WHEN THE SAKURA BLOOM

Togo, Narisa
Trans. by Michael Sedunary
 Berbay Publishing (32 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-648-95331-9

“Hustle, bustle; hurry, dash.”

Day after day, five strangers rush to catch the train, their eyes fixed straight ahead. They ignore each other, their surroundings, and the winter chill, focusing only on their destinations, their cellphone screens, and the day’s impending challenges. Slowly, winter turns to spring. The bare Sakura trees lining the pavement begin to sprout leaves and flowers, and little by little, their branches fill with birds and the air with bird song. Yet the five busy travelers don’t stop to take in the glorious spectacle. One morning, a young girl stops to pick up a fallen blossom and realizes something is different—preparations for the annual Sakura (cherry blossom) Festival have begun. After the festival decorations go up, usually preoccupied pedestrians slow down to marvel at the beauty of the cherry blossoms, take photos, and picnic under the blooming canopies. Eventually, it is nature and not human beings that puts an abrupt end to the festival, and though almost everyone returns to their frenetic routines, at least one character remains attuned to the rejuvenating power of the Sakura trees. The simple text and gentle visual imagery illuminate the magic to be found in the natural world and in small moments. The soft pastel artwork highlights nature’s subtle transformations, and Togo skillfully achieves an accumulation of significance by repeating the same scenes, with slight variations, across spreads.

An understated ode to an iconic Japanese cultural celebration, mindfulness, and the restorative power of the seasons. (Picture book. 4-8)



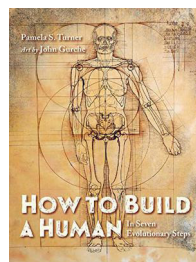
THE HOUSE OF LOVE

Trigiani, Adriana
Illus. by Amy June Bates
 Viking (40 pp.)
 \$17.99 | Dec. 28, 2021
 978-0-593-20331-6

In a big, old house on a snowy hill, the Amore family of nine celebrates Valentine’s Day.

Mia Valentina, the youngest family member, and Mama clean the house and decorate for the Amores’ favorite holiday. Then Mia’s mother helps her make thoughtful but funny valentines for her 6 siblings. When Papa and the rest of the clan return home from a basketball game, Mia’s siblings get a kick out of their valentines, and Papa presents Mama with chocolate cherry cordials, but no one gives Mia a gift. While the family has dinner and plays games, Mia’s sadness seemingly goes unnoticed. It’s not until bedtime that she makes a discovery that chases away her gloom. The pages of this book are text-heavy, making it a good springboard for young readers making the transition to chapter books. The light pink pages, cheerful illustrations, and homespun authenticity of the text will appeal to children. The cozy Appalachian mountain setting shines through. Crafty types will glean inspiration to create a gumdrop tree, custom valentines, or themed cupcakes. Mentions of an antique washing machine and patched-up windows establish the Amores as a working-class family. The old house and large family could be read as standard storybook fare or, by more critical readers, as a romanticized image of rural life, and the didactic ending feels old-fashioned. The Amores are White. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

A sweet story highlighting nonromantic love during the Valentine season. (Illustrated text. 4-7)



HOW TO BUILD A HUMAN In Seven Evolutionary Steps

Turner, Pamela S.
Illus. by John Gurche
 Charlesbridge (112 pp.)
 \$21.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-1-62354-250-4

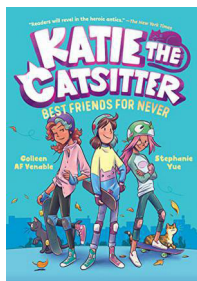


A probing look into what fossil evidence and other scientific discoveries tell us about our hominid predecessors.

Turner kicks off this overview of human evolutionary history with an amusing quip: “If evolution had a motto it would be *Yeah. Good enough.*” She then goes on to detail seven watershed moments, beginning with “Step One: We Stand Up.” Also covered are: the emergence of toolmaking; the development of larger and more complex brains; the migration of *Homo erectus* out of Africa; the shift from raw to cooked foods; the evolution of human language; and the advent of storytelling. Using

a disarming narrative nonfiction style, the text clearly explains the significance of each anatomical or behavioral change and paints a fascinating picture of life on Earth during geological eras when big predators like *Genyornis newtoni*, the “Demon Ducks of Doom,” roamed the planet. Turner also presents scientifically grounded theories for why other ancient species of hominids died out. Gurche fleshes out the fossil record with uncommonly lifelike sketches and paintings of hominid faces and full-body figures in discreet poses. Also dispersed throughout the book are thought-provoking color photos of ancient human artifacts. Of particular note is a goose bumps-inducing gallery of prehistoric handprints on cave walls around the world, an image that powerfully brings vanished species into the human fold. The copious backmatter includes a dense, scholarly bibliography; notes on the “myth” of racial or even species “purity”; and a brief run-through of forces other than natural selection that drive evolution.

Glints of fun light up a rock-solid dig into our Stone Age ancestry. (author’s note, bibliography, glossary, timeline, source notes, resource lists, index) (Nonfiction. 10-adult)



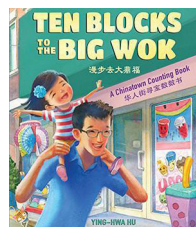
BEST FRIENDS FOR NEVER

Venable, Colleen AF
 Illus. by Stephanie Yue
 Random House (224 pp.)
 \$20.99 | \$12.99 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-0-593-37546-4
 978-1-984895-66-0 paper
 Series: Katie the Catsitter, 2

Katie deals with superhero sidekick woes and friendship drama in the second book of the Katie the Catsitter series.

After discovering her neighbor Madeline Lang is secretly the Mousetress, an animal rights activist misperceived by the public to be a supervillain, Katie was thrilled at the prospect of becoming her sidekick. However, sending emails and writing online reviews was not what Katie had in mind. Meanwhile, school is back in session, and things are weird with her best friend, Beth. During their summer apart, Beth got a boyfriend, and Katie made new skateboarding friends. Exacerbating matters, all of Katie’s friends become mad at her, and someone is committing evil acts while pretending to be the Mousetress. Like the first book, this entry pairs realistic issues with fun adventure, giving it wide appeal. Young readers will relate to navigating changing friendships and laugh at talented cats such as The Cuteness, who is an expert welder. The fears the Mousetress has developed since her recent imprisonment, as well as her altruistic passion for helping others, add depth. Main conflicts in this installment are wrapped up, but there’s an enticing setup for the next book. Katie appears White; Madeline has brown skin, and supporting characters have a range of skin tones.

Another surefire hit with big laughs and plenty of heart (and paws). (hero rankings, most-wanted villains, meet the creators, drawing instructions) (Graphic fiction. 8-12)



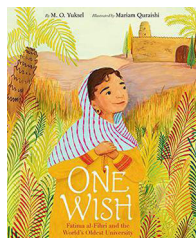
**TEN BLOCKS TO THE BIG WOK
 A Chinatown Counting Book**

Ying-Hwa Hu
 Children’s Book Press (40 pp.)
 \$19.95 | Jan. 25, 2022
 978-1-64379-068-8

Mia and her Uncle Eddie go for a walk through Chinatown, counting along the way.

The pair, who are presumably Chinese American, depart home for The Big Wok, a dim sum restaurant 10 blocks away. En route, they take in the scenery, noticing details that appear in quantities corresponding to the block number. There is one giant panda ride on the first block, two stone lions on the second, three toy turtles outside a shop on the third, and so on. Each block is depicted on its own double-page spread, with only a sentence or two naming the items and the block number (the backmatter provides more details about each item). Vibrant but not overly saturated colors give the journey a cheerfulness that is mirrored in Mia’s bright smile—her delight is infectious. At the restaurant, the duo place an order, requesting food items in numbers counting backward: 10 soup dumplings, nine fried wontons, eight shumai, and so forth. Everything they’ve ordered is pictured in a mouthwatering spread, and a page turn reveals a small surprise for the last item. The English text is translated in full into Simplified Chinese, though both fonts are unusually small. The numerals are shown in the bottom corners of each page, but they are inconspicuous and could easily be missed. A chart in the backmatter includes all the written forms and bilingual pronunciations for the numbers one through 10. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Standard Chinatown fare with an appealing concept-book structure. (author’s note) (Picture book. 3-7)



**ONE WISH
 Fatima al-Fihri and the
 World’s Oldest University**

Yusef, M.O.
 Illus. by Mariam Qurayishi
 Harper/HarperCollins (40 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-0-06-303291-0

Born in present-day Tunisia in the early ninth century, Fatima al-Fihri craved knowledge and had one wish—to build a school where all would be welcome.

The story begins with Fatima’s early life and education. Her first word was iqra (*read*), and as a child, she was filled with curiosity about the world. At the time, girls from families of means were home-schooled while boys attended formal learning institutions. Fatima’s family had to flee their home due to war. During this difficult time, Fatima “stood tall, determined, and strong, / cradling her wish inside her,” a refrain used throughout the text to underscore her perseverance. As she grew older, Fatima got married, became a wealthy merchant, and lost

loved ones, but she never stopped thinking about her wish. She “knew the best way to help her community was to build a school where students, especially the poor and the refugees, could live and study for free.” With the inheritance she gained after her father’s death, she began the taxing process of building and establishing the University of al-Qarawiyyin, which today remains the world’s oldest continually operating university. Several textual details reveal the important role Fatima’s Muslim faith played in her life, and Yuksel frequently employs figurative language to emphasize her strong convictions about education and equality. Quraishi’s transporting gouache-and-watercolor illustrations furnish a nuanced portrayal of the early medieval Arab world. *(This book was reviewed digitally.)*

An inspiring profile of a tenacious trailblazer that highlights the power of knowledge. (author’s note, notes, bibliography, glossary, timeline) (Picture book biography. 5-10)



A SONG CALLED HOME

Zarr, Sara
Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins
(368 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-06-304492-0



Louisa Emerson copes with the sadness and stress of her alcoholic dad, remarried mom, new stepdad, and a move to the suburbs.

Fifth grader Lou loves her small apartment in San Francisco; her mom; her 15-year-old sister, Casey; her BFF, Beth; sad books; and, despite the pain and uncertainty he causes, her usually drunk dad. Lou’s life is being uprooted, however, because Mom is marrying oversolicitous Steve, a man from church who proposed after only three dates. Since Steve lives in his large childhood home in Pacifica—and Lou’s family is barely getting by financially in the city—they are moving in with Steve, and only Mom and Steve seem happy about that. On her 11th birthday, Lou anonymously receives a guitar that she believes is from her dad. After the Emerson girls move, Lou befriends Marcus and Shannon, a charming couple with three young kids who live on Steve’s block. They quickly become the sisters’ trusted adults, and Marcus gives Lou guitar lessons. In her middle-grade debut, noted YA author Zarr writes exactly the sort of kid Lou herself favors: one that thoughtfully tackles tough issues like substance abuse, parental abandonment, the difficulties of change, and blended families. The story also features church and Christian themes in a refreshingly positive and affirming way. Lou’s family is White; supporting characters include Chinese American Beth and Filipino American Marcus.

A tender, honest, and beautifully written story about family, faith, and friendship. (Fiction. 9-13)



PINK A Women’s March Story

Zimmerman, Virginia
Illus. by Mary Newell DePalma
Running Press Kids (40 pp.)
\$15.99 | Jan. 4, 2022
978-0-7624-7389-2

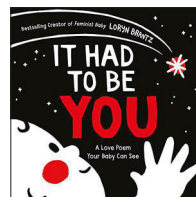
Knitting and stylish headwear frame the 2017 Women’s March in a new light

for young readers.

Lina is confused. Her grandmother owns scads of pink yarn yet insists that they go out and buy even more. The shade of pink Grandma requires is a “grown-up pink” necessary to make the pussyhats she’s knitting for family, friends, and strangers in preparation for the upcoming Women’s March. As Lina learns how to knit a hat of her own, her dad explains the significance of the headgear, her mother imparts knowledge about feminist movements to her and her brother, and Grandma shares her experiences participating in past women’s rights protests. Lina isn’t sure her small voice can make a difference in the struggle, but when she and her family attend the historic march, she becomes emboldened to work even harder for positive change. Newell DePalma’s deft and creative mixed-media illustrations incorporate appliqué of real-life pussyhats that showcase meticulous stitchwork. A single pink piece of yarn weaves and winds between the feet of the characters, drawing them forward toward the march and beyond. Knitting metaphors are worked into the text, such as when Lina suggests that she and her grandmother loop elbows at the march, “like we are knitting.” A closing author’s note gives background and context to the 2017 global demonstration. All main characters present as White.

A timely nod to female empowerment that knits together generations of girls and women and raises a hat to activists everywhere. (Picture book. 4-7)

BOARD & NOVELTY BOOKS



IT HAD TO BE YOU A Love Poem Your Baby Can See

Brantz, Loryn
HarperFestival (22 pp.)
\$8.99 | Dec. 14, 2021
978-0-06-308633-3

New parents welcome an addition to the family.

On the first spread, readers see a medical professional passing a swaddled newborn into a pair of eager hands. “Of all the babies that are born, it had to be YOU,” the text begins.

“This lively Christmas countdown begs to be chanted.”

HOW MANY SLEEPS 'TIL CHRISTMAS?

Subsequent spreads show the first-time parents driving home over what could easily be the Brooklyn Bridge, getting settled in their city apartment, and bonding with their tiny munchkin. As father and mother shower the infant with love, the text proclaims their adoration, emphasizing that the little one was destined to be theirs. The use of anaphora intensifies the emotion of the poem/story and creates a driving rhythm that underscores the sheer force of parental love. The illustrations are rendered in a high-contrast, black-and-white palette with pops of red. Given that babies see in only black and white just after birth and then see red first as their color vision develops, the artwork is deliberately designed with the littlest of readers in mind. The human characters have straight hair and appear as white silhouettes against black negative space. On one spread showing the family sitting together on grass, the mother is wearing what could be a hijab.

A sweet and tender proclamation of parental predestination that will catch babies' eyes. (Board book. 0-4)



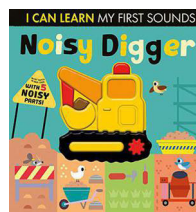
HOW MANY SLEEPS 'TIL CHRISTMAS? A Countdown to the Most Special Day of the Year

Brown, Joff
 Illus. by Gabriele Tafuni
 Mortimer Children's (48 pp.)
 \$8.95 | Sept. 7, 2021
 978-1-83935-093-1
 Series: How Many Sleeps 'Til

This lively Christmas countdown begs to be chanted.

Narrated in the second person, the rhyming text introduces a community of people getting into the holiday spirit. Standard activities alternate with magical and silly ones. A choir is “warming your heart” with songs about snow and a magic sleigh ride. You’re buying presents, but “it’s the thought that counts” and the fun of giving. The first snow falls, families create decorations, children make gingerbread houses, and snowpals dance throughout the night. A White Santa oversees a racially diverse staff of elves racing to finish preparations for the big night as his reindeer practice “all their best moves.” Each quatrain ends with a refrain specifying the number of days left until Christmas, and the tabs, numbered from one to 10, invite readers to count along, giving the story as much momentum as the lead-up to Christmas Day. The colorful illustrations depict families with diverse skin tones and hair textures greeting each other and spreading the season’s cheer. This joyful celebration of the excitement of Christmas will strike a familiar chord with many young readers who relish the anticipation of the Christmas run-up.

Fun for little ones learning to count and beginning to build their descriptive vocabularies. (Board book. 2-5)



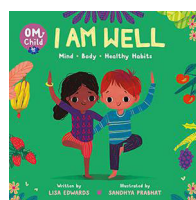
NOISY DIGGER

Crisp, Lauren
 Illus. by Thomas Elliott
 Tiger Tales (12 pp.)
 \$14.99 | Sept. 7, 2021
 978-1-68010-684-8
 Series: I Can Learn!

This noisy board book is designed to thrill tots fascinated with all things construction.

A tactile backhoe digger is center stage on each of the five cutout pages, complete with flaps. Brief rhyming text describes the machine’s actions as it works throughout the day. Animal characters engaged in manual labor or operating other machinery—a bulldozer, crane, road roller, and dump truck—describe more work that goes on at a construction site in small speech bubbles. Finding the mouse in every scene adds to the fun. On each page, a little bird sporting a hard hat invites young builders to press various parts of the silicone digger to activate a range of distinct sounds. The digger’s track pad sounds different from the sound of its arm moving dirt. The problem is that the digger itself is passive; the track pad and arm don’t actually move. The machine stays in the same place on every spread. The caution light beeps but doesn’t light up. Savvy kids will quickly realize that all the sounds are accessible from the first spread without having to turn the pages. The sound is the most engaging part of the book, but with only five sounds, this feature won’t hold most youngsters’ attention for long.

A disappointing twist on a popular theme. More gimmick than engaging. (Novelty board book. 1-3)



I AM WELL Mind. Body. Healthy Habits

Edwards, Lisa
 Illus. by Sandhya Prabhat
 HarperFestival (18 pp.)
 \$8.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-0-06-306842-1
 Series: Om Child

Despite the cover illustration of two children doing the Tree yoga pose, this is not a book about yoga.

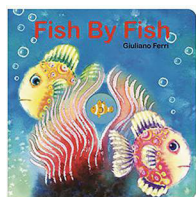
Rather, it is a child-friendly explanation of the ancient Indian medical system known as Ayurveda. “It is important to be healthy in our bodies and minds,” the text begins. It then goes on to share the seven Ayurvedic principles: exercise, meditation, diet, hobbies, self-care, community, and rest. Each principle is given a child-friendly definition—exercise means “move our bodies,” meditation means “breathe deeply,” and so on—and accompanied by illustrations showing children putting the principle into action. On the spread about hobbies, kids are shown reading, painting, and playing with a pet. On the spread about exercise, yoga is specifically mentioned but also “running, biking, and playing games.” An illustration of a boy wearing glasses and an apron seated before a platter filled with fruits and vegetables makes it clear what a healthy diet looks like. Short

“Just unexpected and silly enough to tickle a young reader’s funny bone.”

MONSTER CLOTHES

sentences explain how an “Om child” feels when they practice each wellness habit. Throughout the book, children are referred to using the pronoun *they* instead of *he* or *she*. The colorful, cartoony artwork features smiling, able-bodied, racially diverse children and some inclusion of pets and caregivers.

An age-appropriate and clear discussion of what mindfulness looks like in practice. (Board book. 1-4)



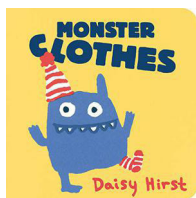
FISH BY FISH

Ferri, Giuliano
Minedition (16 pp.)
\$11.99 | Sept. 14, 2021
978-1-6626-5055-0

How can little fish avoid being eaten by bigger fish?

The opening double-page spread shows a pretty underwater scene rendered using what appears to be watercolor resist technique. On the verso, a large, round fish stares at a tiny clown fish on the recto and comments “Oh, look! That’s a perfect little snack for me.” The big fish looks friendly and the little one’s face lacks affect, so adults reading the book aloud to children will have to decide how sinister of a tone to adopt. A graduated series of die-cut holes in the center of each double spread means that each page turn adds layer upon layer to the visual narrative. As the story progresses, increasingly larger, open-mouthed fish appear, poised to eat the one before across the gutter, while the tiny, still expressionless clown fish hovers between them. After the opening sentence, the text takes the form of a simple refrain with a new adjective substituted on each page: “Oh no...that’s a huge fish!” and “oh no...that’s a gigantic fish!” and so on. The penultimate spread, showing a band of small clown fish coming to the aid of their beleaguered buddy, imitates a visual metaphor frequently used on grassroots-organizing posters to express the idea of unity in strength. The concluding text appropriately reinforces the message. The colorful, alluring artwork somewhat undermines the narrative by endowing each large fish with beauty and personality—despite the menacing eyes—while the tiny clown fish shows no emotion until the final page. (*This book was reviewed digitally.*)

Subtly packaged anti-bullying and group empowerment for small fry. (Board book. 1-3)



MONSTER CLOTHES

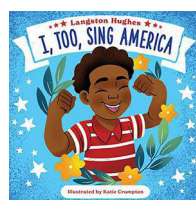
Hirst, Daisy
Candlewick (18 pp.)
\$7.99 | July 1, 2021
978-1-5362-1528-1

A clutch of monsters gets dressed just like humans do, but with a kooky twist.

Brightly hued and not-at-all-scary monsters wake up in the morning and face the task of picking out clothes for the day. The monsters are named, and the clothes they don—from hats

to overalls—vary from page to page. Some of the monsters try on nonclothing items, such as a tomato instead of a hat, which is just unexpected and silly enough to tickle a young reader’s funny bone. Bold and playful illustrations pair perfectly with the whimsical and mellow storyline. While the monsters aren’t gendered, one page features a sweet yellow monster named Darrel wearing a cheerful red-and-white polka-dot dress—a subtly inclusive detail. Hirst’s simultaneously published companion book, *Monster Food*, follows a similar cadence; this time, the monsters are eating surprising items alongside their typical foods. The new element of rhyming text keeps the story moving and enhances the monster fun in an amusing way. Relatable themes of getting dressed and enjoying a meal are made all the more engaging by an irresistible cast of friendly creatures and their hilarious missteps.

Clothes maketh the monster, and these monsters make great characters. (Board book. 0-3) (*Monster Food*: 978-1-5362-1774-2)



I, TOO, SING AMERICA

Hughes, Langston
Illus. by Katie Crumpton
Little Bee Books (20 pp.)
\$8.99 | Dec. 28, 2021
978-1-4998-1270-1

“I, Too,” one of preeminent African American poet and intellectual Langston Hughes’ most influential literary works, is reinstated and reinterpreted transhistorically in this board-book adaptation of the 1926 poem.

The text reproduces the lines of the poem verbatim while Crumpton’s vivid, saturated, digital illustrations present contemporary scenes of a young Black boy’s life. The boy, who oozes confidence, cheerfulness, and optimism, is shown introducing readers to his neighborhood and his loving nuclear family. As he grows older, he attends Joe Biden’s inauguration (Biden is not shown in the artwork), where he watches Amanda Gorman deliver the inaugural poem; attends an anti-racist protest with his parents and siblings; excels academically; and graduates from college. At the book’s closing, the boy has grown into a happy, fulfilled man living in a pleasant suburban neighborhood with a nuclear family of his own. Although Langston’s well-known lines are simple, they are well modulated, expressing various shades of meaning and emotion; unfortunately, this book, with its relentlessly upbeat visuals, feels incongruously one-note. While not particularly dynamic, the artwork offers an uplifting portrait of racial and societal progress and includes characters of various races.

A well-intentioned attempt to pass on poetic wisdom of historical and enduring significance to beginner readers. (Board book. 3-6)

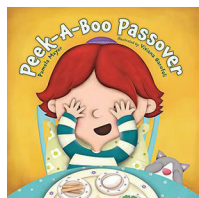


LET'S BE SAFE
Le Hénand, Alice
Illus. by Thierry Bedouet
 Twirl/Chronicle (14 pp.)
 \$12.99 | Oct. 5, 2021
 978-2-40802-849-7
 Series: Pull and Play

Young anthropomorphic animals model basic safety rules with the help of interactive pull-tabs.

It isn't easy keeping active little ones out of trouble, but this accessible board book models strategies to stay safe through short vignettes that serve as object lessons. Some—like hungry Little Monkey blowing on hot food before eating or Little Crocodile using the handrail while descending the stairway—demonstrate how toddlers can exercise agency over their own bodies. Others show that adults sometimes need to step in to help, as when Little Cat waits patiently to be removed from her highchair. The images underneath the smoothly operating pull-tabs visualize the safest course of action in each situation. Some adult readers will balk at how easily the child characters acquiesce to requests, and occasionally the book feels a little out of touch with its rather cossetting parental figures. Expressive, big-eyed cartoon animals do a thorough job of explaining and animating the scenes, and bright, saturated colors and minimal backgrounds keep the focus on the safety lessons.

This board book succinctly reinforces basic safety tenets and will appeal most to highly safety-conscious caregivers. (Board book. 1-4)



PEEK-A-BOO PASSOVER
Mayer, Pamela
Illus. by Viviana Garofoli
 Kar-Ben Publishing (20 pp.)
 \$7.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-1-72842-431-6

A little boy enjoys the delights of the Passover seder.

In a variation of the popular peekaboo game, a White toddler peeps out from behind his fingers and notes all of the items on the dinner table. There are candles, matzah bread, an egg on the seder plate, parsley, and Elijah's cup. There's also a pillow for reclining, a bowl of matzah ball soup, and the Haggadah (a liturgical book that recounts the story of the biblical Exodus). The illustrations provide only a glimpse of each item at first; children must turn the pages to discover what each object is. After all is revealed, the boy and his family—a mother, father, and grandfather—offer up a spirited rendition of "Had Gadya" ("One Little Goat"), a playful, cumulative song traditionally sung at the conclusion of the seder. At the end, readers are invited to identify objects on their own tables. With just one line of text per page and colorful, digital illustrations throughout, this board book can serve as a fun introduction to an important Jewish festival, ideally facilitated by adults who can fill in additional details. The male characters wear kippot, and the mother serves the

soup. A delightful element of the visual narrative is the family cat who mimics the boy's facial expressions.

Festive fun for the preschool set that serves up good educational fare, too. (Board book. 2-4)

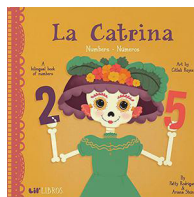


DONUTS!
Redmond, Lea
Illus. by Flora Waycott
 Chronicle Books (20 pp.)
 \$9.99 | Sept. 14, 2021
 978-1-7972-1082-7
 Series: Made With Love

In this second installment of the Made With Love series, golden brown donuts, fresh out of the oven, are dressed with different toppings.

Each circular page of the book shows a different donut as seen from a bird's-eye view, and little ones are invited to guess the flavor of each topping. Simple, one-sentence hints in a chocolate-brown font on the verso page offer clues such as "this flavor begins as tree sap!" and "the next one contains citrus and tiny seeds." Visual cues on the pastries offer hints as well: a blueberry-glazed donut is decorated with berries; a maple-glazed donut is adorned with small maple leaves; and a lemon poppy seed-glazed donut is adorned with poppy seeds as well as a lemon wedge. Little ones must turn the donut-shaped pages to reveal the name of the flavor. The pattern continues until the unseen narrator asks what ingredient all of the donuts have in common; the sweet answer to this question is the icing on the cake, ahem, donut. While donut-loving toddlers might appreciate the appetizing, watercolor illustrations and the novelty aspects of the book, they may need adult help to guess some of the flavors, particularly pumpkin spice since the only clues are a cinnamon stick and cloves. The book has die-cut holes at the center that little hands can use to turn the pages; however, it may not stand up to robust play due to the very narrow binding.

A flavorsome option to develop tactile and associative memory skills in small children. (Board book. 1-3)



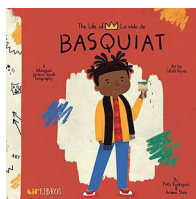
LA CATRINA
Numbers / Números
Rodriguez, Patty & Ariana Stein
Illus. by Citlali Reyes
 Lil' Libros (22 pp.)
 \$9.99 | Aug. 24, 2021
 978-1-9479-7175-2

Explore Día de los Muertos while counting items associated with the festivities.

In another engaging bilingual board-book primer from Lil' Libros, a friendly skeleton presents decorations, treats, and important mementos central to the Mexican holiday of remembrance for the dead. The iconic figure of La Catrina, an elegantly dressed skeleton woman originally created by Mexican printmaker José Guadalupe Posada in the early 1900s, is given a cute

and colorful makeover that pays homage to the original lithograph while appealing to modern children. The items chosen to illustrate each number from one to 10 range from the spiritual to the culinary and provide a broad, if simplified, overview of the important cultural aspects of Día de los Muertos. Readers can count “three pieces of pan de muerto / tres piezas de pan de muerto” as well as vases of marigolds, family portraits, fruit baskets, and ancestors. Simple text in both English and Spanish introduces new vocabulary and provides an excellent introduction to the time-honored celebration for young readers. A pleasing color palette of deep oranges, purples, and earth tones is fitting for the autumn observance.

A cultural holiday is honored and celebrated in this charming counting book. (Board book. 0-5)



THE LIFE OF / LA VIDA DE JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT

Rodriguez, Patty & Ariana Stein

Illus. by Citlali Reyes

Lil' Libros (22 pp.)

\$9.99 | Aug. 24, 2021

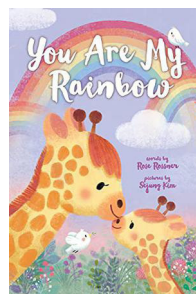
978-1-947971-72-1

Series: The Life Of

Part of the bilingual The Life Of series of biographies showcasing the lives of Latinx icons, this board book profiles Jean-Michel Basquiat, Black American artist of Haitian and Puerto Rican descent.

The authors introduce young readers to Basquiat in simple, short statements that are easily accessible to a preschool audience. The information—presented in both Spanish and English—centers on Basquiat’s early life and professional successes. From a young age, Basquiat showed an inclination toward art and used his father’s work supplies to draw at home. His mother described his artistic creations as “messy, bright, and bold!”—a trademark style that would define his life’s work. As he grew older, buildings and subway trains were a canvas for his graffiti artwork before his paintings gained entrée into art galleries. Appealing illustrations with selective coloring accompany the text. Another book in the series, *The Life of / La vida de Evelyn*, introduces young children to Mexican American prima ballerina Evelyn Cisneros. Children may relate to some of the challenges experienced by young Evelyn, such as overcoming shyness and feeling excluded due to the color of her skin.

An age-appropriate portrait of an important artist, sketched effectively in broad strokes. (Board book biography. 3-5) (*The Life of / La vida de Evelyn*: 978-1-947971-71-4)



YOU ARE MY RAINBOW

Rossner, Rose

Illus. by Sejung Kim

Sourcebooks Wonderland (24 pp.)

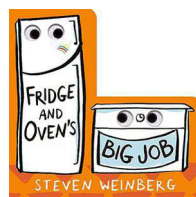
\$9.99 | June 1, 2021

978-1-7282-3339-0

A caregiver’s love for a child is poetically expressed using a variety of nature and weather metaphors.

Each page of rhyming text features a different setting and caregiver-and-offspring animal pair. “You are my snowfall / dancing to and fro. / Swirling all around, / where you go, I go,” reads the verse on one spread showing a fox and its pup against a background of soft purples, blues, and pristine snow. The rest of the text follows this pattern, using the sun, moon, a mountain, rain, and more. God is mentioned once, and a few other related words appear like *bless* and *prayer*, although no specific religion is identified. The soft, diaphanous illustrations are soothing and inviting. The animals look extra-cuddly, and the scenery is so warm it often appears to glow. The ending comes full circle: The giraffes who at the beginning of the book observe two birds flying, find them nested with their little blue egg—an image of new life and new love continuing. For all its charms, this offering adds little new to the love-letter-to-a-child board-book niche, and the rhymes are sometimes awkward to read aloud.

A sweet retread of a timeless and universal theme. (Board book. 0-2)



FRIDGE AND OVEN’S BIG JOB

Weinberg, Steven

Roaring Brook Press (22 pp.)

\$8.99 | Aug. 31, 2021

978-1-250-75325-0

Series: Big Jobs

Fridge and Oven team up for an important job—making chocolate chip cookies.

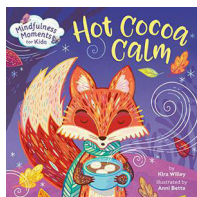
After introducing the anthropomorphized kitchen appliances, the book identifies their roles in the task at hand, from storing the ingredients to cooking the dough, and walks readers through the main steps of the baking process. Cute quips—cookies are “DELICIOUS! JUST NOT WITH BROCCOLI”—add a sprinkling of humor. Every item on the page is labeled with arrows, even those in the background, like the cookbook, kettle, and oven mitts, clarifying details that are sure to pique the curiosity of sharp-eyed tots. Arms and hands are shown mixing the cookie batter and moving things around, revealed at the end to belong to two small, brown-skinned children who share the cookies. The board book is shaped to look like a fridge and oven standing side by side, and Fridge and Oven have tactile googly eyes on the cover. The freehand cartoon drawings, using a minimal color palette dominated by oranges and reds, are lively and engaging. Two similar titles,

“Cadenced repetition keeps the pages turning and makes the pace spot-on for the toddler crowd.”

CORGI CAN!

Washer and Dryer's Big Job and *Dishwasher's Big Job*, feature other jiggly-eyed household machines and the steps they go through to wash and clean.

A fun, novel concept perfect for little readers eager to learn about the uses of familiar domestic items. (Board book. 2-5) (*Washer and Dryer's Big Job*: 978-1-250-75326-7; *Dishwasher's Big Job*: 978-1-250-75322-9)



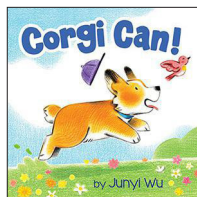
HOT COCOA CALM

Willey, Kira
 Illus. by Anni Betts
 Rodale Kids (26 pp.)
 \$7.99 | Dec. 7, 2021
 978-0-593-11987-7
 Series: Mindfulness Moments for Kids

Nothing much really happens in this board book, and that's perfectly OK.

Instead, following the pattern set in previous titles in the Mindfulness Moments for Kids series, Willey, a children's yoga-and-mindfulness musician, translates the philosophy of mindfulness into practical, everyday terms. On a chilly day, Fox, the anthropomorphic protagonist, joins a small group of friends (who are also all anthropomorphic animals) in the forest to drink hot cocoa. The text demonstrates how a simple act like enjoying a hot drink can be treated as a mindfulness exercise. Fox brings her attention to the present moment as she blows on the hot cocoa, deeply inhales the delicious aroma, then sips and savors the treat. Young readers are guided to slow their breath and breathe in and out along with Fox: "Fox blows on her hot cocoa to cool it off. Can you blow on your hot cocoa?" The simple language makes each step of the process very clear: "Sloowly blow the air out." The animals appear distinctly meditative as they sit cross-legged with eyes closed, patiently waiting for the cocoa to grow cool. The result? "Now Fox feels warm, cozy, and calm." The illustrations, rendered in bright, almost psychedelic colors with colored snowflakes shining in the animals' fur, is a striking contrast to the book's calming message.

With or without cocoa, savor this one slowly, especially on long winter days when toddlers are stuck indoors. (Board book. 1-4)



CORGI CAN!

Wu, Junyi
 Cartwheel/Scholastic (20 pp.)
 \$6.99 | Nov. 2, 2021
 978-1-338-65485-1

A celebration of puppy love and everything little ones can do.

Starring a cute, personality-filled Welsh corgi unostentatiously named Corgi, this rhyming board book is an ode to the developmental milestones that youngsters can take pride in as they learn how to move, speak, play, and behave. Each page highlights something that Corgi can do: sit, walk, dig, and run,

to name a few. What's more, Corgi does it all in style, sporting a bandanna, little cap, and even a raincoat. Each "Corgi can" statement sets caregivers and tykes up for the natural follow-up question, "Can you?" Like the text, the illustrations are patterned; all of the items Corgi wears or uses are blue, green, and yellow. The language is very simple and straightforward, and the cadenced repetition keeps the pages turning and makes the pace spot-on for the toddler crowd. However, it is Wu's colored pencil illustrations, evoking the soft fuzziness of a dog's coat, that really make this book appealing. Corgi's face displays a range of emotions, from anticipation to a playful pout, and expressive ears and a subtle blush on the cheeks successfully vivify the frisky pup. Dog lovers will find this book irresistible, and readers will appreciate the lovely illustrations and age-appropriate simplicity.

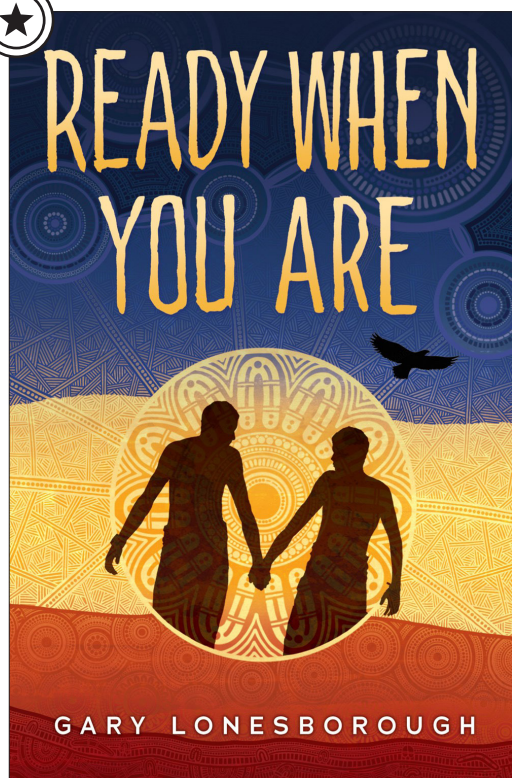
Spot the Dog had better make room on the shelf for Cando Corgi. (Board book. 0-2)

YOUNG ADULT



These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- RECLAIM THE STARS** *Ed. by Zoraida Córdova*169
- BITTER** *by Akwaeke Emezi*169
- CLOSE-UP ON WAR** *by Mary Cronk Farrell* 171
- THE GAPS** *by Leanne Hall* 171
- READY WHEN YOU ARE** *by Gary Lonesborough* 172



READY WHEN YOU ARE
Lonesborough, Gary
 Scholastic (256 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
 978-1-338-74954-0



FACE THE MUSIC

Choce, Lesley
 Orca (112 pp.)
 \$10.95 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-1-4598-3288-6
 Series: Orca Soundings

The first step in changing your life is admitting that there's a problem.

After suffering ongoing verbal abuse at home, 16-year-old Tyler is convinced to leave his small town one night by Mason, an older boy with a worse home life and severe anger management issues. Mason's plan—to steal a car and drive into the city—is thwarted when the duo run out of gas on the highway and are rescued by Sean Dakota, an intimidating former member of a heavy metal band who many assumed had died when he went missing from his California home a year earlier. Dakota temporarily takes the two misfits in, but when Tyler realizes how quickly Mason will bite the hand that feeds him and how one-sided their friendship really is, he vows to change. This novella may be short, but it provides a variety of topics for readers to discuss, and the characters have a surprising amount of depth. While some may question the relatively quick resolutions to Tyler's problems, there's still enough *Sturm und Drang* to make the ending seem plausible enough, and this is a strong choice for reluctant readers. Main characters are minimally described and read as White; Tyler's grandfather emigrated from an unspecified non-English-speaking country.

Brief but memorable. (*Fiction. 12-18*)



BRIGHT RUINED THINGS

Coboe, Samantha
 Wednesday Books (352 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-1-250-76884-1

On Lord Prosper's island the very air pulsates with magic.

His beautiful, ruthless descendants are provided for by the grace of a magical substance known as aether. But their servants, the island's captive spirits, are beginning to mysteriously sicken and die off. "Mousy Mae" Wilson stands as an outsider. The orphaned daughter of Prosper's old friend who will be in exile on her 18th birthday, Mae loves, fears, and desires the family and the land she's always called home and is anxious about leaving it. That is, until the

legendary once-a-year party known as First Night, during which outsiders arrive on the island. Mae is suddenly thrust into a surprise engagement to strange, sullen Ivo, Prosper's grandson and the heir to his magic. Cohoe's prose moves at a clip through a night packed with intrigue. Mae's shifting stance in relation to the family as their confidant, enemy, and friend develops alongside the intricate, fascinating system of dangerous magic. The real mystery is who Mae herself will become as she climbs the social ladder into the glorious world of power and secrets she's long observed from a distance. Will she grow to be an intrepid schemer who is the equal of any Prosper? Fans of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* will find much to enjoy, as will readers eager for a luxurious—but not escapist—1920s period piece. Characters read as White.

An intriguing story about the rot that lies beneath splendor. (family tree) (Fantasy. 13-18)



**RECLAIM THE STARS
Seventeen Tales Across
Realms & Space**

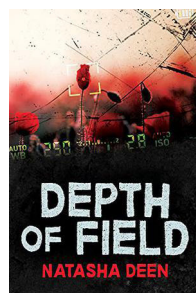
Ed. by Córdova, Zoraida
Wednesday Books (432 pp.)
\$18.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-250-79063-7



An anthology that collects 17 speculative fiction tales written by both new and well-established authors representing the Latin American diaspora.

Editor Córdova presents a hearty collection—including a story of her own that closes the book—that celebrates different perspectives and voices from a diverse, wide-ranging community. The anthology follows a recipe for resounding success: The stories feature Latinx characters and include fantasy and science fiction peppered with plenty of romance, a dash of horror, and a pinch of magical realism—but, above all, a copious amount of warmth. This volume hits the ground running with the beautiful prose and even more beautiful queer love story of Anna-Marie McLemore's "Reign of Diamonds," set in space with magic added. Readers' hearts will be broken by Daniel José Older's "Flecha," a futuristic tale of family and diaspora, and "Eterno," J.C. Cervantes' story of an impossible love between a human girl and a not-so-human boy—only to be put back together by David Bowles' "The First Day of Us," a fun and heartwarming take on polyamory set on a space station. There is a lot more here about finding oneself in tales of empowerment and growth, of letting go, punching up, and celebrating love in all its incarnations and colors of the rainbow.

There is a little something for everyone in this powerful, essential anthology. (contributor bios) (Speculative fiction. 13-adult)



DEPTH OF FIELD

Deen, Natasha
Orca (128 pp.)
\$10.95 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-4598-3220-6
Series: Orca Soundings

A teen seeks a wild adventure after encountering heartbreak.

Alberta 12th grader Josh's comfortable relationship with his girlfriend, Lian, comes to an abrupt end when he sees her kissing Noel, a stoner rich kid, violent bully, and all-around entitled manipulator. When Lian blames her cheating on Josh's being boring, predictable, and uninterested in supporting her love of photography, he decides to prove her wrong. Instead of choosing a safe field of flowers for his school photography project, Josh decides to go off the trail, searching for a wild bear and her cubs. Directionally challenged and unprepared for a rugged hike, Josh heads off into the wilds of the Rockies and encounters something far more dangerous than bears, putting his life in danger. In his behavior and inner monologue, Josh reads as much younger than his years. The interactions he has with Baba and Dad, his fathers, and Mx. Mitchell, his photography teacher, convey positive advice and strong themes of family and empathy, but they are subtly presented as life lessons for readers to digest. The dramatic scenes lack tension but are easy to follow and visualize, and the characters' conversations sound realistic and mostly flow well. Josh has brown skin, and his fathers are South Asian and Black. Noel seems to be White by default; Lian's name cues Chinese heritage, and Mx. Mitchell uses they/them pronouns.

A wilderness thriller for reluctant readers that doesn't live up to its intriguing premise. (Thriller. 12-18)



BITTER

Emezi, Akwaeke
Knopf (272 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-593-30903-2

A teenager wrestles with hope and revolution at a boarding school for gifted artists.

Seventeen-year-old Bitter has finally found a home at Eucalyptus, which is run by the enigmatic Miss Virtue. Her best friend, Blessing, helps keep Bitter's dark, curly hair shaved. Behind the brick walls of Eucalyptus they are safe from the bullets and anxiety-inducing protests ringing through the air in the trouble-torn city of Lucille. But the walls aren't enough when Bitter starts to engage with the community of activists and citizens whose lives are ravaged by monsters. Eventually, her righteous anger births art that threatens to consume everyone with a fire that must be quelled or embraced. Emezi packs this novel with timely tension as characters struggle with knowing when

WHY WORDS MATTER



ON THE PODCAST *SUBTITLE*, linguist Mikael Parkvall compared countries' measures of gender equality with their languages' pronoun forms. Two-thirds of the world's languages do not use gendered pronouns, but Parkvall found—perhaps surprisingly—that there is “absolutely no correlation between the pronoun system and the equality in the country in question.” Lan-

guage may not dictate behavior, but according to linguist Guy Deutscher in *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*, it does influence what we must pay attention to. If you speak Guugu Yimithirr, an Australian Aboriginal language that only uses cardinal and ordinal directions, you maintain a different bodily awareness than if your language has relative terms like *left* and *right*.

The significance of attention is what motivated my former colleague Vicky Smith to consistently start naming characters' races in Kirkus book reviews, as explained in her 2016 column “Unmaking the White Default.” The discomfort this evoked was telling: No one ever objected to mentions of characters' ages or genders, but Whiteness as the human default is so deeply ingrained that even naming it is frequently taboo. Take the common response dismissing racism in older books: “That’s just what people thought was OK back then.” This framing erases all the people living at the time who were the targets of racism and had differing opinions on the matter. Similarly, biracial people with White ancestry are often described, for example, as “half Chinese,” indicating an assumption that their White parentage goes without saying.

As with any social change, what was once alarming or uncomfortable will soon barely register as remarkable (how many people recoil at Ms. anymore?). Authors of all races are increasingly describing White characters as such, plainly stating when multiracial characters have some White parentage, and making White protagonists' awareness of the impact of their own race part of their trajectories of growth. As with the example of pronouns, simply naming Whiteness won't eradicate racist behavior, of course. However, rejecting the linguistic elision that renders Whiteness synonymous with the basic human condition does chip away at entrenched ideas about whose lives and stories are perceived as “universal.” The following books are great reads that reflect these moving goal posts.

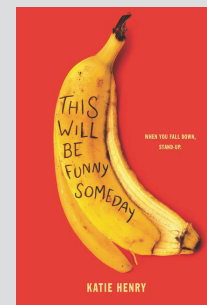
Perfectly Parvin by Olivia Abtahi (Putnam, May 18): With an Iranian immigrant dad and White American mom, hirsute tendencies, a razor-sharp wit, a shaky grasp on Farsi, and an ardent desire for a boyfriend, 14-year-old Parvin is the hilariously sympathetic protagonist we all need. Like adolescents everywhere, she grapples with her self-image and others' filtered perceptions of her.



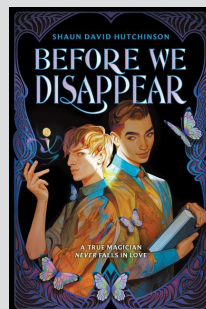
The Year I Stopped Trying by Katie Heaney (Knopf, Nov. 16): Mary—high-achieving, middle-class, Midwestern, White, Catholic, and presumably straight—is a witty, aware observer of humanity on a journey questioning many things she's always assumed to be true. This bright, capable young woman must let go of the security of comfortable truths to lead a life of greater meaning.



This Will Be Funny Someday by Katie Henry (Katherine Tegen/HarperCollins, Jan. 19): Self-effacing Isabel is vulnerable to her controlling boyfriend's manipulation. An accidental foray into stand-up brings the White prep schooler more confidence and a diverse friend group that broadens her horizons while holding her accountable. This novel looks closely at the growth that follows from breaking free of our assigned roles.



Before We Disappear by Shaun David Hutchinson (HarperTeen, Sept. 28): This suspenseful, richly realized fantasy features a queer ensemble cast that includes three main characters who are White and one who is Black. The narrative seamlessly addresses the impact of identities that are underrepresented in the genre, observing, for example, how racism is expressed in the Seattle of 1909



versus the South.

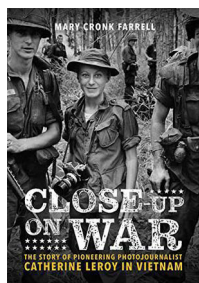
Laura Simeon is a young readers' editor.

“Balances narrative tension with thought-provoking rumination.”

THE GAPS

and how to act in the face of unjustifiable state violence, among other societal atrocities. They acknowledge the reality of burn-out for even the most stalwart resistance fighters and affirm that rest and physical nourishment are critical. Conversations about the impact of figurehead leadership show the importance of the collective as a driving force: “Leaders are dangerous. One person is weak; the people are strong.” The story introduces a space where queer characters from myriad faith traditions receive love and support from peers and adults in a world that is not perfect but in which the people strive to create space for radical inclusion.

A compact, urgent, and divine novel. (*Fiction. 14-18*)



CLOSE-UP ON WAR
The Story of Pioneering
Photojournalist
Catherine Leroy in Vietnam

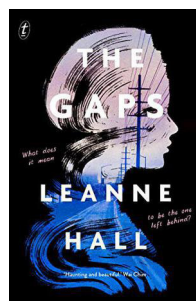
Farrell, Mary Cronk
 Amulet/Abrams (320 pp.)
 \$22.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
 978-1-4197-4661-1



The story of a young Parisian woman who overcame gender barriers to take groundbreaking battlefield photographs during the Vietnam War.

Following the advice of famous combat photographer Robert Capa, Catherine Leroy was determined to get close to the action in Vietnam after being inspired by photos in French newspapers. In February 1966, at the age of 21, she arrived in Saigon as a freelancer, forging ahead despite her lack of experience. As she proved herself, Leroy was able to travel with and document troops as they moved through the harsh jungle conditions, staying alert for mines and booby traps. She received exclusive access to the first paratroop mission in Vietnam, parachuting with the troops and taking pictures all the way down. Her intimate photographs resonated around the world as they showed the vulnerability and sacrifice of young soldiers as well as the suffering of Vietnamese civilians. Farrell offers an insightful, well-researched, and detailed account of Leroy’s achievements as well as an overview of the history of Vietnam, the impact of the military conflict on Vietnamese people, and Americans’ changing perceptions of the war. Leroy’s letters and vivid examples of her photography enrich the work. This excellent written account will leave readers marveling at Leroy’s determination, bravery, and disregard for her own safety as she documented what was happening in Vietnam.

A riveting biography that puts an overlooked, award-winning female photojournalist into historical context. (map, epilogue, author’s note, camera information, glossary, timeline, endnotes, bibliography, image credits, index) (*Biography. 12-18*)



THE GAPS

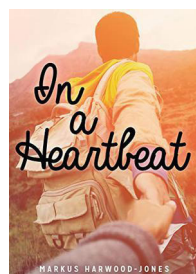
Hall, Leanne
 Text (368 pp.)
 \$11.95 paper | Feb. 8, 2022
 978-1-92233-048-2



An account of the aftermath of a student’s abduction.

When 16-year-old Chinese Australian Yin Mitchell is abducted, the news is devastating, especially for her fellow classmates at Balmoral Ladies College in the Melbourne area. From Chloe, a biracial (Chinese Singaporean and White Australian) scholarship student who knew Yin from fleeting encounters, to Natalia, a White girl who is a force within the high school hierarchy and Yin’s estranged childhood best friend, the abduction reverberates across the community. Each day that passes only spurs more fear and edginess. In alternating chapters switching between Chloe’s and Natalia’s perspectives, the narrative charts the 79 days of limbo that follow. Hall teases and unravels information deftly and balances the narrative tension with thought-provoking rumination. While the mystery of Yin’s disappearance is a powerful undercurrent, at the center of the novel lies a nuanced exploration of grief, guilt, violence, and resilience. Readers discover who Yin and her classmates are beneath surface appearances and consider the impact of the threat of male violence on the world these young women live in. How do gender, race, and social class affect public interest and outcry—and the girls’ everyday realities? Questions of sensationalism, art, and censorship also arise. Characters are fully drawn and realized, and the destabilizing atmosphere of speculation and uncertainty is well developed.

Hauntingly riveting. (*Fiction. 14-18*)



IN A HEARTBEAT

Harwood-Jones, Markus
 James Lorimer (168 pp.)
 \$27.99 | Jan. 1, 2022
 978-1-4594-1629-1
 Series: Lorimer Real Love

Trans teens fall for each other.

Seventeen-year-old Lucien Quan wants a change of scenery. His two moms were very supportive when he came out as trans, and his Toronto school became an even safer place when a more popular student came out as nonbinary, but he wants to figure himself out without all that attention. His aunt Jean agrees to house him in British Columbia for a semester, but upon arrival Lucien worries he made a mistake—he’s sleeping in an unfinished basement; they’re not accommodating his vegan, gluten-avoidant diet; and his cousins and uncle are buffoonish paragons of toxic masculinity. In a convenient meet-cute, he literally falls into the arms of gorgeous Alder, whom everyone seems to have a story about. In this short rom-com, Lucien meets other queer and trans denizens of the small town

“A sweet will-they, won’t-they romance with welcome Indigenous Australian representation.”

READY WHEN YOU ARE

of Vernon and starts dating Alder, who doesn’t clearly communicate their shared trans history until the end. This brief read with a simplified style intended for reluctant and struggling teen readers provides much-needed queer representation for this format, but almost every character, from Lucien’s crunchy lesbian moms to Alder’s overly supportive therapist parents to the meddling new friends, reads like a broadly drawn stereotype. Racial cues are largely absent; Lucien’s surname cues one of his moms as Chinese Canadian.

A light read that would have benefited from stronger characterization. (*Fiction. 12-17*)



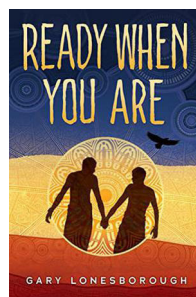
ONLY A MONSTER

Len, Vanessa
HarperTeen (416 pp.)
\$18.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-06-302464-9
Series: Only a Monster, 1

Among monsters—beings with human appearances and the ability to travel through time by shortening humans’ life spans—there’s a myth about a human hero who threatens their entire existence.

This hero’s arrival in London and the subsequent massacre of monsters in the city come as a shock, most of all to 16-year-old Joan Chang-Hunt, who only recently discovered that she’d inherited her deceased White English mother’s monster lineage (her human father is Chinese Malaysian). Vulnerable and uneducated about the world of monsters, Joan allies with Aaron Oliver, a White boy who is the only other living monster she can find. Putting aside centuries of enmity between the Hunt and Oliver families, the two teens flee to the 1990s together, emerging in a time before either of them or the hero were born. They quickly learn that they are no safer in the past: Someone is hunting survivors throughout time and hiding evidence of the slaughter. The initial repetition of *monster* as Joan deliberates various meanings of the word is monotonous, but the story soon develops into a fast-paced thriller that blurs the division between villain and hero and features a deeply conflicted protagonist caught in the middle. The rules governing time travel and details about monster society are gradually revealed, with several questions left open for exploration in the next installment.

An exciting urban fantasy. (*Fantasy. 13-18*)



READY WHEN YOU ARE

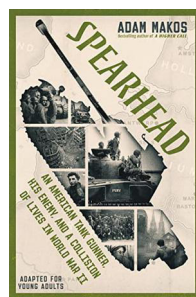
Lonesborough, Gary
Scholastic (256 pp.)
\$18.99 | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-338-74954-0



Two First Australian teens fall for each other in secret.

Summer on the Mish means plenty of time for 17-year-old Jackson to spend with his two best mates and girlfriend, Tesha. But try as he might, Jackson can’t perform during sex. He blames the grog. But when cute, mysterious Tomas arrives, released from juvie and visiting Jackson’s family for Christmas, it’s clear there might be more to the story. Forced to share a room with Tomas, Jackson connects with him over art. When the boys realize their mutual attraction, life gets sizzlingly complicated. At first, they keep things quiet; no one on the Mish can know. But the harder they fall, the harder it is to keep their relationship a secret—and the less Jackson and Tomas want to. Published in Australia in 2021 as *The Boy From the Mish*, Yuin author Lonesborough’s YA debut is a sweet will-they, won’t-they romance with welcome Indigenous Australian representation. What starts as a slow-burn love story riddled with internalized homophobia blossoms into a beautiful relationship alongside discussions of racism and classism. The first-person present-tense narration offers a sense of immediacy that makes every moment count, from raucous parties to romantic bushwalks. The sights, sounds, and inhabitants of the fictional rural Koori community, which is informed by Lonesborough’s own life, are richly rendered.

An affirming, textured coming-out story. (author’s note) (*Fiction. 14-18*)



SPEARHEAD (ADAPTED FOR YOUNG ADULTS)
An American Tank Gunner, His Enemy, and a Collision of Lives in World War II

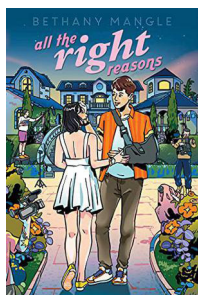
Makos, Adam
Delacorte (352 pp.)
\$18.99 | \$21.99 PLB | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-593-30345-0
978-0-593-30346-7 PLB

Skilled tank gunners face off on opposite sides of the war but complementary sides of history in this young readers’ adaptation of the 2019 original.

Throughout the European theaters of World War II, the Americans tended to have the numerical and tactical advantages, but in Makos’ dogged focus on the particulars of tank warfare, the Germans are undeniably formidable in their Panzer tanks, and everyone knows it. By the time new Pershings roll out to replace the old American Sherman tanks in early 1945, the tides of the war have been shifting toward an Allied victory, but the path remains precarious and bloody. While ample attention is

given to the machinery of war, the biographical accounts of the men of the 3rd Armored Division, their lives before the war, and the relationships they develop give a terribly violent account some humanity. Still, war is difficult, and the level of detail in this account, based, among other sources, on interviews with American and German veterans, is gruesome at times. Makos details the German soldiers' and civilians' resentment of the Nazi Party by this point in the war and several instances of pro-American sentiments in their ranks, which draw stark attention to the pointlessness of it all. Passing mention is made of segregation in the U.S. military; the individuals at the heart of this story are White.

A detailed and compelling war account for those with the stomach for it. (maps, afterword, sources, photo credits) (Non-fiction. 12-18)



ALL THE RIGHT REASONS

Mangle, Bethany
McElderry (304 pp.)
\$18.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-5344-9903-4

A mother-daughter duo film a dating show for single parents with only children.

When 17-year-old Cara Hawn accidentally posts a private diary-style video of her and mom Julia crying and venting

about her dad, the man who tore their family apart, it goes viral. Thanks to its popularity and their raw appeal, they're invited to audition for a new reality show called *Second Chance Romance*. After they successfully land starring roles, Cara and Julia find themselves at the center of a *Bachelorette*-style dating game during which Julia will choose a potential husband and Cara vets her would-be stepsiblings. Things get complicated when Cara finds herself falling for Connor Dingeldein, a contestant's son. For those who are curious about the behind-the-scenes elements of reality TV, the novel offers plenty of detail and gives a sense of the tedious nature of the process and the deliberate manufacturing of drama. Mangle deftly handles the tensions and hurt of a family post-divorce and the authenticity of a mother-daughter relationship. Overall, the plot feels low stakes and the story takes a while to build, but a little twist at the end offers a sweet wrap-up. Korean Julia was adopted by White American parents; Cara is biracial (her father is White), and there is some racial diversity in the supporting cast. White Connor self-identifies as disabled due to his Ehlers-Danlos syndrome.

Fluffy and fun. (Romance. 14-18)



THE OOZE

McAdam, Tash
Orca (96 pp.)
\$10.95 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-4598-2848-3
Series: Orca Anchor

A suspenseful remix of SF and horror.

McAdam's reluctant reader horror novel revs into action early in Chapter 1, after trans protagonist Bran takes out the recycling. At 15, Bran finds himself trapped alone in an elevator during a power outage and soon after in the center of a dramatically altered world. Suddenly, familiar people are acting strangely and violently, and the only visible clue to the problem is a fast-spreading, weird, black ooze leaking from their mouths and noses. Scared but determined to find out what's going on, Bran teams up with Mohammed, Zey, and Aisha—a trio of siblings he meets outside—and together they follow the creatures to where they have gathered. The foursome take risks as they put together the pieces of the events that led to this catastrophic change in humanity. When Bran spots Hayden, his best friend-turned-boyfriend, in danger, he becomes more motivated than ever to try to save everyone. Working together, Bran and his new friends struggle to overcome looming dangers as they try to put the world back to rights. This is a book about collaboration and trust set in a messy world where no one is safe. The chaos and violence are offset by Bran's strong development as he focuses on problem-solving rather than despair. The quick, plot-driven action keeps things moving. Bran and Hayden read as White; names indicate diversity in the supporting cast.

A tightly plotted, highly appealing story with bite. (Horror. 13-18)



NIGHTRENDER

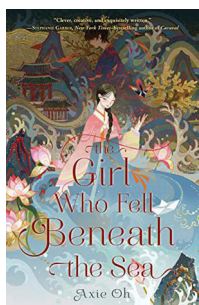
Meadows, Jodi
Holiday House (368 pp.)
\$19.99 | Jan. 4, 2022
978-0-8234-4868-5

Salvation is a continent in trouble: plagued by Malice (a dark, mysterious force that corrupts time and space), divided by human conflict, and frozen in fear of its one possible savior.

Enter Hanne, princess of Embria, whose political marriage to Rune, prince of Caberwill, is slated to unite two out of three enemy kingdoms and commence the long trek toward a united front against Malice. However, plans, well laid as they may be, go awry, and when they do, help is sought from an unpopular source. A whirlwind plot ensues, with four point-of-view characters providing shifting perspectives. The titular entity, Nightrender, stalks the pages in stilted confusion. Hanne is ruthless and scheming, Rune hapless and well meaning, and Nadine, Hanne's cousin and lady-in-waiting,

inserts commentary. Potential romances of various formations linger in the wings, setting the stage for a sequel sure to be thick with amorous intrigues. The worldbuilding is rich but can feel unwieldy, especially with regard to painting the tapestry of social conventions in Salvation. Attraction to multiple genders is seemingly normalized, but this aspect of society is not woven into the story. Most characters are coded as White.

An ambitious if sometimes clumsy foray that will reward Meadows' fans and entice them to return for the sequel. (*Fantasy*. 14-18)



THE GIRL WHO FELL BENEATH THE SEA

Oh, Axie

Feiwei & Friends (336 pp.)

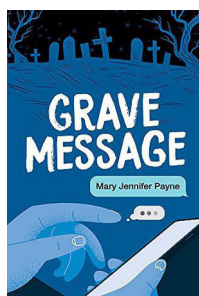
\$18.99 | Feb. 22, 2022

978-1-250-78086-7

A girl carves out her own destiny in this retelling of a classic Korean folktale.

In hopes of satisfying the Sea God and averting devastating floods and storms, villages sacrifice a fair maiden every year. People believe that when the true bride of the Sea God is found, all disasters and sacrifices will forever cease. Sixteen-year-old Mina's focus is on saving her brother Joon, who breaks protocol to follow his love, this year's sacrificial bride, out to sea. Joon plans to fight the Sea God's dragon servant, but Mina stows away on the boat and throws herself into the water instead. After Mina wakes up in the Spirit Realm, she finds a ribbon—the Red String of Fate—wound around her palm and connecting her to a handsome young Sea God who seems caught in an enchantment. Suddenly nobleman Lord Shin and his cohorts appear, severing the ribbon and thereby taking Mina's soul. Shin argues this is necessary for the safety of the Sea God and peace within the realm. Soulless and now also voiceless, Mina must navigate the politics and warring gods of the Spirit Realm to retrieve her soul and break the Sea God's enchantment in order to bring peace to both human and spirit worlds. Oh weaves an intricate and engaging tale. At times, the packed plot interrupts the flow of Mina's quest, but captivated readers will long to be pulled deeper into the story.

A fantastical world to get lost in. (*Fantasy*. 13-18)



GRAVE MESSAGE

Payne, Mary Jennifer

Orca (80 pp.)

\$10.95 paper | Feb. 15, 2022

978-1-4598-2864-3

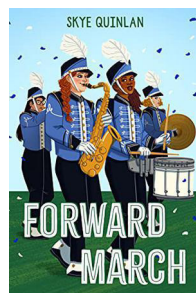
Series: Orca Anchor

What would you do if you received messages from beyond the grave?

High schooler Jaylin Laws is nervous about an upcoming English test.

Diagnosed with dyslexia, she is a bright and accomplished student who has support and accommodations, but Jaylin is still anxious. She's been spending all her free time studying, which leads to her boyfriend Jamal's feeling neglected; Jaylin has kept her dyslexia secret from him, and he doesn't understand why she has to work so hard. After they have a fight at a party, she heads home to read *Dracula* for her English class, and she receives an Instagram message supposedly from her best friend, Fatima Lopez—but it's the one-year anniversary of Fatima's death. Someone must be messing with her, but with each additional message, the sender shares things only Fatima could know. The mysterious messenger sends Jaylin on a mission to uncover the truth behind Fatima's death. Dredging up difficult memories, questioning those who may know something, and exposing a lie, Jaylin heads down a dangerous path. Payne effectively uses simple vocabulary and short chapters to tell a story that is full of suspense and intrigue and made even more accessible through the book's physical design. Names signal some diversity in the cast; Jaylin's mother uses a wheelchair.

An engaging, suspenseful tale for reluctant readers. (*Paranormal mystery*. 13-18)



FORWARD MARCH

Quinlan, Skye

Page Street (288 pp.)

\$17.99 | Feb. 1, 2022

978-1-64567-440-5

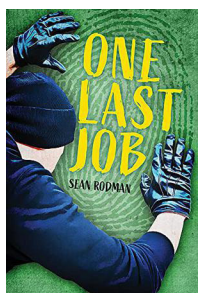
An ace band geek comes into her own in Quinlan's debut.

High school senior Harper prefers to stay out of the spotlight. The daughter of the leading Republican presidential nominee (dad) and her private boarding school's conservative dean (mom), she tries to focus on her position as first chair for saxophone in marching band and her best friends, queer Nadia and bisexual, nonbinary Bellamy. She couldn't be more surprised to learn that her classmate Margot, the Canadian ambassador's daughter, is being catfished—by someone posing as Harper. As the two strike up a real-life friendship that quickly turns romantic, Harper has to navigate her health (she has asthma exacerbated by anxiety), increasing friendship tensions, her burgeoning realizations that she might be a lesbian and asexual, decisions about privacy and her romantic life, and a family rift. Christian, her older brother who cut off contact with their toxic parents, is gay, an army veteran, and in recovery from addiction. Harper's first-person narration satisfyingly hits the beats of many queer teen rom-coms, including triumphant growth in self-awareness and a tidy ending. It is immensely refreshing to see an asexual romantic lead whose sexuality isn't a point of conflict in either her relationship or the broader narrative. Harper and most other characters default to White. Nadia is Indonesian, and Canadian Margot is biracial (implied Black and White).

Readers will welcome this addition to the ace YA canon. (*trigger warnings, resources*) (*Fiction*. 14-18)

“Discussions of substance abuse, mental health, and the importance of community make this book valuable.”

I'M GOOD AND OTHER LIES



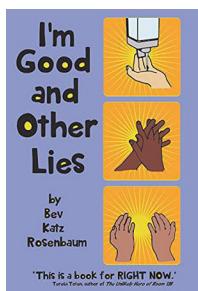
ONE LAST JOB

Rodman, Sean
 Orca (96 pp.)
 \$10.95 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-1-4598-2860-5
 Series: Orca Anchor

A teenager gets eye-opening glimpses of the criminal underworld when a prized family memento is stolen.

Short sentences, generous line spacing, and amped-up pacing combine to ease reluctant teen readers into this tongue-in-cheek caper. As a way to keep him off the mean streets, Mikey has been hired by his single mom to tend to her ailing octogenarian dad. When a burglar breaks in and takes his dead grandma’s necklace, Mikey’s first impulse is to call the police, but Gramps, being an ex-con and (supposedly) reformed pickpocket, recruits him instead to help get it back without letting his mom know. A string of hilariously improbable coincidences and narrow squeaks later, Mikey has traced the necklace to the neck of a local drug kingpin’s third wife—setting the stage for Gramps to pull a slick switcheroo in the midst of an elegant soiree and, notwithstanding closing mutual vows to stay on the straight and narrow from now on, the probable blossoming of a beautiful partnership. The comically inept burglar (Gramps: “I can’t understand you...I’m not wearing my hearing aids. But that rag over your mouth? It isn’t helping. Maybe if you take it off?”) waves a gun around, but the level of actual violence is low. Gramps reads as White, and some secondary characters are cued as Korean; other characters are racially indeterminate.

A clever variation on the theme of intergenerational connections. (*Thriller. 12-18*)



I'M GOOD AND OTHER LIES

Rosenbaum, Bev Katz
 DCB (212 pp.)
 \$15.95 paper | Feb. 15, 2022
 978-1-77086-632-4

A Toronto teen fights her way through loneliness and depression during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic.

When White 17-year-old Kelsey Kendler transfers to a new high school for the second semester of her senior year, she’s seriously on edge. Her mother was a well-known comedian until addiction rendered her unemployable; her dad “calls himself a writer” but mostly stays out of range. Kelsey’s goals are to make friends and survive until college. She gets a job at an ice cream shop and is just beginning to find her way in her new milieu when the Covid lockdown hits. Unmoored, lacking family support, and struggling with online learning, she briefly descends into substance abuse before a crisis shakes her family and she begins to understand and receive the kind of help she needs. Kelsey’s voice is pitch-perfect, equal parts snarky and

vulnerable. The storyline isn’t complex, but the very real discussions of substance abuse, mental health, and the importance of community, combined with the honest depiction of the toll the pandemic took on many people, make this book valuable. In the end, Kelsey seeks professional counseling, begins taking antidepressants, and her life improves. Rosenbaum concludes with an author’s note that offers addiction and mental health resources for both Canadian and American readers and promises “things will get better.”

Its honesty and empathy make this an important book. (*Fiction. 14-18*)



YOU TRULY ASSUMED

Sabreen, Laila
 Inkyard Press (352 pp.)
 \$18.99 | Feb. 8, 2022
 978-1-335-41865-4

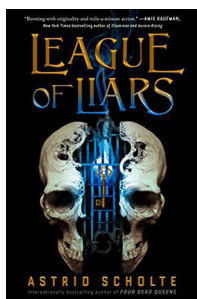
An outlet for personal expression evolves into a space for Black Muslim young women to assert their identities, find friendship, and build community.

The summer before her senior year, ballet dancer Sabriya, a Black Muslim teen, has big plans. But a terrorist attack at Union Station in Washington, D.C., shatters those dreams, and the terrorist’s assumed Muslim identity sparks a wave of Islamophobia. Encouraged by her younger sister, Bri journals about her emotions online—not realizing the posts are public until comments start flooding in. Having created a virtual space for others like her, she connects in particular with two other Black Muslim teens: Zakat, a burgeoning artist and Islamic school student from a progressive Muslim community in Georgia, and Farah, an aspiring computer programmer from California. Blogging together, the girls inspire each other toward courageous action in their individual lives. Written in chapters alternating among the perspectives of the teens, the novel explores themes of religious and racial identity, family, friendship, love, and belonging as they navigate anti-Muslim sentiment and incidents in their respective communities. Compelling storytelling that explores the challenges and rewards of being Black and Muslim is where this novel excels, and it will prompt readers to reflect on their own assumptions. However, the novel’s ambitious narrative structure leaves some plot threads feeling rushed. Despite the laudable attempt to portray the diversity of Black Muslim American life, some elements feel implausible or are presented without sufficient context, which could be puzzling to cultural insiders and misleading to others.

An ambitious debut that will hopefully pave the way for more narratives centering Black Muslim experiences. (*Fiction. 13-18*)

“Expansive and original worldbuilding grounds each character’s distinct perspective as the stakes mount.”

LEAGUE OF LIARS



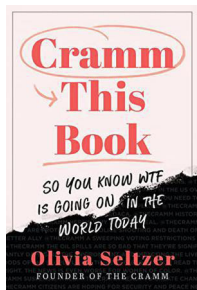
LEAGUE OF LIARS

Scholte, Astrid
Putnam (464 pp.)
\$18.99 | Feb. 22, 2022
978-0-593-11237-3

In a world in which edem—time-altering, extradimensional magic—is feared and policed, a motley group of teens with ties to the impossibly secure Vardean prison attempt to expose the corruption at its root.

After their mother died due to a stranger’s edem use, siblings Cayder and Leta found distinct ways to cope. Cayder immersed himself in the study of law, determined to someday prosecute edem abusers, while Leta sought to understand the force that took their mother’s life. Liquid and apparently sentient, edem originates from a place called the veil, where the boundaries of time and space are more permeable, and the authorities are focused on controlling access due to its unpredictable, often dangerous effects. When Leta is charged with starting a deadly fire, she’s brought to Vardean—where Cayder is a public defense apprentice and their childhood friend, Kema, is now a guard. Cayder processes the plight of his sister and his client, Jey, the son—and accused murderer—of the Regency General, and his allegiances are further tested when Elle, another high-profile prisoner, claims knowledge of a sinister Regency plot. Expansive and original worldbuilding grounds each character’s distinct perspective as the action picks up and the stakes mount. Cayder, Leta, and Elle read as White; Jey is cued as biracial, with a White father and South Asian fantasy-equivalent mother, and queer Kema has brown skin.

A smart, suspenseful adventure with an ending that begs for a sequel to tie up loose ends. (government hierarchy chart) (Fantasy. 12-18)



**CRAMM THIS BOOK
So You Know WTF Is Going on
in the World Today**

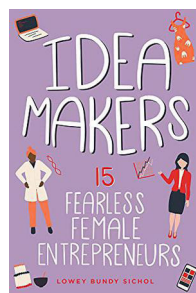
Seltzer, Olivia
Philomel (272 pp.)
\$17.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-0-593-35216-8

A teen girl turns her helplessness into hopefulness.

The 2016 presidential election was the catalyst for White Jewish Seltzer, then 12, to begin to take action to help improve dire issues she perceived in society. She began writing online newsletters, in which she shared the news from traditional media in a way that her peers would better understand and appreciate. These newsletters were posted on The Cramm, the website she established. The necessity and impact of the newsletters were obvious, with millions of views from visitors spanning over 100 countries worldwide. This book offers an overview of many widespread

prejudices, some major wars and conflicts, and structural inequalities and the movements spawned to change them. Seltzer tackles her chosen subjects succinctly, incorporating historical events, present-day phenomena, and concrete examples in varied and visually engaging ways to support better understanding. Seltzer’s authorial tone is easygoing, self-aware, honest, and inviting while delivering crucial and sensitive information. It is fitting for a project of this scope and is sure to hit home with the intended audience; readers are likely to find this book both appealing and relatable as a starting point for becoming informed and motivated to effect positive change. This is an ideal work for readers seeking a starting point for world knowledge and societal activism.

A refreshing young voice. A worthy project. (sources, photo credits) (Nonfiction. 12-18)



**IDEA MAKERS
15 Fearless Female
Entrepreneurs**

Sichol, Lowey Bundy
Chicago Review Press (224 pp.)
\$16.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-64160-674-5
Series: Women of Power

It’s not only men who can make millions and have an impact on society.

Sichol, who previously profiled the men behind Disney, Nike, Google, and Lego, now turns her attention to women with big ideas. Here, she introduces 15 female founders of successful companies, organizing her presentation into five different fields: food, health and beauty, science and technology, education, and clothing and fashion. From Kathleen King, the original baker of Tate’s Cookies, to Morgan DeBaun, founder of Blavity, her subjects are as varied as their paths to success. But, in an introduction, the author points out that certain commonalities connect these stories. She offers glimpses of childhood interests and abilities, gives examples of early adult experiences, and stresses turning points. Most of these entrepreneurs are still with their successful organizations; some have turned over major responsibility for day-to-day management, and a few have sold to larger companies and moved on. The organizations are wide-ranging, too: businesses selling products or offering personal services and nonprofits for feeding the hungry and encouraging girls to learn coding. Interspersed with the biographies are short segments, sometimes related biographies, sometimes other relevant information. These add substance but detract from the flow of the chronological narrative. The author concludes by encouraging her readers to act on their own ideas because passion and hard work can pay off.

Inspiring stories of successful 21st-century women. (source notes) (Nonfiction. 12-16)



THE NEW GIRL

Sutanto, Jesse Q.
Sourcebooks Fire (288 pp.)
\$10.99 paper | Feb. 1, 2022
978-1-72821-519-8

Draycott Academy's newest student is about to challenge the status quo, whether she likes it or not.

Lia Setiawan transfers to the prestigious Northern California boarding school on a track scholarship, automatically setting herself apart from her wealthy classmates. Upon her arrival, a distraught Sophie Tanaka, who has a reputation for being a drug addict, is forcefully removed from the campus after punching a teacher. As if that wasn't enough to give Lia doubts about her place at the school, she downloads the gossip app Draycott Dirt and is disheartened to learn that she's the student body's newest target for bullying. As she struggles to keep up her grades and maintain her scholarship, she discovers a cheating ring led by a crooked teacher, and her involvement in seeking justice takes a deadly turn. The story is told entirely from Lia's point of view, and although Sutanto's teenspeak feels over-the-top, she provides readers insights into a variety of interesting social issues: socio-economic differences among teens, the school's weak attempts at embracing diversity, and nuanced cultural tensions within Asian communities. More thrilling than Draycott's secrets are Lia's hijinks in covering up a secret of her own that threatens her future. Lia is Indonesian American, with an Indonesian mother and a deceased Chinese Indonesian father; the supporting cast is largely White or Asian.

Campy but engaging. (*Mystery. 14-18*)



IRONHEAD, OR, ONCE A YOUNG LADY

van Rijckeghem, Jean-Claude
Trans. by Kristen Gebrman
Levine Querido (368 pp.)
\$18.99 | Feb. 15, 2022
978-1-64614-048-0

In 1808, a teen from Ghent escapes into a new life.

Eighteen-year-old Constance is miserable. The eldest child of a clog maker-turned-unsuccessful-inventor, fiery Stance is desperate to escape an impoverished and restrictive home. But when Stance's father forces a marriage to Lieven, his 45-year-old potential business partner, life gets even worse. After 15 weeks of nightly rape by Lieven, who hopes to father a son, Stance dresses in men's clothes, borrows the identity of baker's son Binus, a conscripted acquaintance, and becomes a soldier in Napoleon's Fourteenth. Despite the grueling conditions, the freedom is intoxicating. But when younger brother Pier tracks Stance down in Paris on Lieven's behalf, Stance must face a duel. After surviving being shot in the head—and triumphantly adopting

the nickname Ironhead, Stance continues to overcome the odds, ultimately finding liberation and independence beyond family or army. Ironhead also has a dalliance with a woman and ultimately becomes an amputee with significant PTSD. First-person chapters switch between sardonic Ironhead and naive Pier, who struggles with his dysfunctional family and being unable to attend school, and the siblings' narratives become increasingly compelling as their stories intertwine. Vivid language in this novel translated from the Dutch doesn't shy away from the grime of everyday life or the graphic violence of war, and the descriptions of wartime medical procedures are not for the faint of heart.

Vivid and brutal—but not without a sliver of hope. (*glossary*) (*Historical fiction. 14-18*)



MOUNTAIN RUNAWAYS

Withers, Pam
Dundurn (280 pp.)
\$12.99 paper | Feb. 22, 2022
978-1-4597-4831-6

Jon, Korka, and Aron Gunnarsson find their world collapsing when their parents are killed in an avalanche. Can they rise above this catastrophic event?

Their Icelandic immigrant parents were wilderness survival experts, and the deadly accident should have been avoid-

able. The siblings can only surmise that their parents were distracted by their mounting financial problems. Now Children's Services needs to find them a guardian or place them in the foster care system. The siblings worry that 11-year-old Aron—selectively mute, quirky, imaginative—might be put in a special home. Jon can't prevent this unless he can keep Aron, middle sibling Korka, and himself safely hidden in the Canadian Rockies for nearly three months until he turns 18 and can be named their legal guardian. The deadly challenges mount—snow, cold, blisters, fever, and sprains—lending a stomach-clenching tension to the tale. Worse, they are in danger of starving. The grieving threesome draw on every skill they have absorbed from their parents, but the hardest challenge may be learning to work together as a team. Their distinct personalities, conflicts, and complex history are well drawn, adding drama and depth. An encounter with another runaway helps give them perspective. Just as it seems they may achieve their goal, another near disaster hits. This time they are completely united, proving they are survivors who can get through anything together.

A satisfying, action-packed story of survival and hope. (*Adventure. 12-17*)

“A missive from the soul.”

BOYS OF THE BEAST



BOYS OF THE BEAST

Zepeda, Monica

Tu Books (304 pp.)

\$19.95 | March 29, 2022

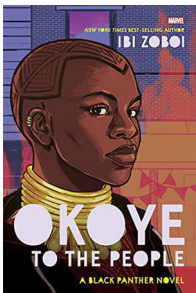
978-1-64379-095-4

Reunited following the death of their beloved Grandma Lupe, three estranged teen cousins—quick-witted, aloof stoner Oscar; aspiring Christian filmmaker Matt; and Jewish nerd-in-love Ethan—embark on a road trip from Portland to

Albuquerque.

Lovingly dubbed *Beast* by the cousins, Grandma Lupe’s 1988 Ford Thunderbird Turbo Coupe proves mighty useful when Matt inherits it. On the road, the three cousins learn about and from each other, sharing their lives and secrets. For 18-year-old Matt, the voyage represents a path laid down for him by God even though an excursion to California—and USC, his dream film school—doesn’t exactly fit in with his strict father’s wishes. Meanwhile, 17-year-old Ethan can’t wait to arrive at Berkeley, where he hopes to elevate his text-heavy friendship with fellow nerdy boy Levi to his first real romantic relationship. Traumatized by the loss of his father in a school shooting, 18-year-old Oscar uses the road trip as an excuse to delay a reckoning with his knotty past as he self-medicates with weed (and other drugs). Starting off as mere character sketches, the three Latinx cousins (Matt has a White father) soon develop into fully endearing heroes thanks to Zepeda’s deft, potent writing. Alternating short chapters from each teen’s perspective packs nuance and depth in this quick read splashed with melodrama and humor. Though heavy-handed on occasion, overall this tale soars.

Like a missive from the soul. (author’s note, resources)
(Fiction. 14-18)



OKOYE TO THE PEOPLE A Black Panther Novel

Zobei, Ibi

Illus. by Noa Denmon

Marvel Press (272 pp.)

\$17.99 | March 1, 2022

978-1-368-04697-8

In the latest Black Panther novel, Zobei takes the reader to the U.S. with the Dora Milaje.

Okoye, a Dora Milaje warrior and protector of Wakandan King T’Chaka, goes on a special diplomatic and humanitarian assignment, accompanying the king and Capt. Aneka to New York. King T’Chaka is invited as a guest of Stella Adams, a wealthy, powerful real estate mogul and leader of an organization called No Nation Left Behind. Though ostensibly friendly, Adams seems sinister, raising Okoye’s alarm bells. Later Okoye meets councilwoman Lucinda Tate, who represents Brownsville, a district of Brooklyn whose population is primarily poor people of color. Tate warns her about Adams

and invites King T’Chaka to the opening of the Brownsville community center. Infested with a drug called PyroBliss that is imported by Adams and NNLB, the Brownsville community is under constant assault after users take the drug and set fires that burn the community down, and gentrification pushes residents out. Okoye makes it her personal mission to help the young people in Brownsville rid their community of PyroBliss—and Adams. Multiple social problems plaguing Black and urban spaces are consolidated into this one blond villainess. Rather than being an action-packed superhero story, this novel explores problems rooted in inequities in race, power, and economics and forces readers to confront real and complex social constructs in a semi-imagined world.

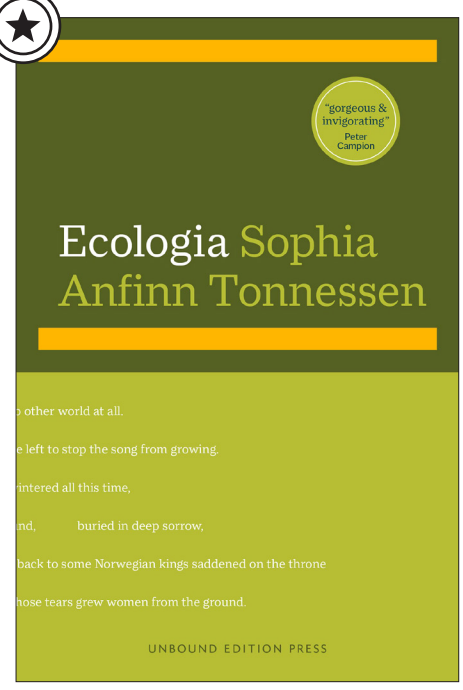
Thoughtfully takes on issues facing real Black communities. (Fiction. 12-18)

INDIE

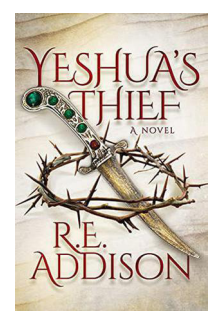


These titles earned the Kirkus Star:

- MOLLY MORNINGSTAR A DOLL FOR ME** by *Andrea Coke*;
illus. by M. Fernanda Orozco 181
- THOSE BRISBANE ROMANTICS** by *Danielle de Valera* 182
- THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF** by *Riley Masters* 189
- THE CERTAINTY OF CHANCE** by *Jacquelyn Middleton* 190
- HELEN IN TROUBLE** by *Wendy Sibbison* 197
- ECOLOGIA** by *Sophia Anfinn Tonnessen* 197



ECOLOGIA
Tonnessen, Sophia Anfin
 Unbound Edition Press (118 pp.)
 \$22.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
 978-0-9913780-1-2



YESHUA'S THIEF
Addison, R.E.
 Morgan James Fiction (240 pp.)
 \$16.99 paper | \$8.69 e-book | Nov. 2, 2021
 978-1-63195-531-0

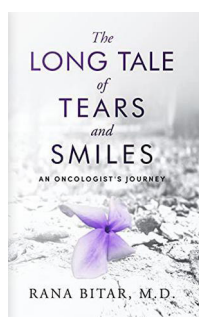
A novel imagines the lives of Dismas, the thief crucified alongside Jesus, and his son, Ezekiel.

Everyone in Nazareth seems to know that Ezekiel's father, Dismas, is a thief who brims with contempt for all things Roman. The young boy hopes one day to marry the beautiful Rina, but he couldn't possibly afford the appropriate bride price, and she frets that he has inherited his father's dishonesty. Dismas entrusts Ezekiel with a valuable dagger he has stolen from a wealthy Roman and asks his son to secure it until he returns from a journey of indeterminate length. After years pass, Ezekiel sells the dagger for a small fortune in order to start a fishing business and asks Yeshua (Jesus), a carpenter and rabbi, to build him boats. Yeshua refuses and warns him with a cryptic prophecy: "You were entrusted with a stolen dagger by which you came into this money. If I take the money, knowing it was stolen, I am no better than the one who stole it. If I build you these boats and do not have the means to return the dagger or the money, it will result in someone very close to you being put to death." In Addison's inventive version of a well-known biblical story, Yeshua's prediction comes true. Dismas is arrested by Roman authorities and sentenced to be crucified near Yeshua unless Ezekiel can retrieve the dagger he has sold. To make matters worse, the dagger ends up in the hands of Abigail, a Roman woman who has reasons to despise both Ezekiel and Rina's family and who wants Rina's father, Hadwin, dead.

Since so little is known about Dismas—virtually nothing beyond the forgiveness Jesus offered him just before his death—Addison had plenty of historical space with which to conjure a backstory, latitude he exploits with impressive literary ingenuity. But it is Ezekiel who emerges as the true protagonist of the story. The author chronicles Ezekiel's transformation from cynical pragmatist to someone open to a deeper faith, maybe even in the radical teachings of Yeshua: "If God was real, then he was cruel and didn't fully understand the weakness of men. Still, a beacon deep in his soul told him a different story. A story of redemption if he would just listen." Furthermore, Addison reconstructs the volatile political environment of the time with impressive subtlety and historical rigor. Yet the plot can suffer from the weight of its digressions—complex, entangled subplots involving Rina's family begin to feel gratuitous and distracting, even soap-operatic. In addition, Abigail is never a

fully believable character—her own moral arc, from someone capable of dastardly deeds to a woman able to show astonishing mercy, isn't conveyed in a dramatically credible way. Still, these narrative failings are ultimately minor ones—none of them undermine the moral power of the story or the creativity of its rendering. For readers in search of historical fiction with a captivating religious angle, this is a delightful book.

A theologically astute and historically authentic transformation of a familiar story.



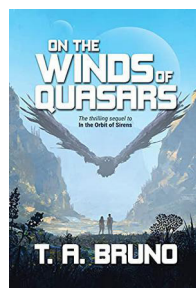
THE LONG TALE OF TEARS AND SMILES
An Oncologist's Journey

Bitar, Rana
Global Collective Publishers (352 pp.)
\$32.50 | \$22.99 paper | \$10.99 e-book
Aug. 12, 2021
978-1-95402-122-8
978-1-73440-196-7 paper

An oncologist reflects on her medical career, upbringing in Syria, and encounters with death in this memoir.

Bitar grew up in Damascus, one of four children in a household that was both bookish and progressive by the standards of the time. Always an overachieving student, she knew early on that she “wanted to be a doctor with every inch of my being.” She attended medical school in Aleppo, where she met her future husband, Joseph, and moved to New York City in 1990 to continue her studies. She would eventually become an oncologist and relocate to the United States permanently. The author relates, with great emotional sensitivity, the beauty and despair involved in a profession that stands in such close proximity to death, a constant shadow: “Solid medical training is the beginning of any oncologist’s career. But there is that space where the oncologist’s medical knowledge converges with their philosophy on the meaning of life and existence. In that space, that so-called ‘art of medicine,’ my profession thrives.” In addition, she writes movingly of her personal encounters with mortality, including the traumatic death of her little brother, Ammar. Bitar’s parents eventually fled Damascus when war erupted, and her childhood home was bombed in 2013. She delicately depicts life before the war in Syria, a place where “nothing was private, but all things were done in secret.” The author jumps back and forth between accounts of her most memorable patients—affecting tales of travails and triumphs—and her own personal life, including becoming the mother of two children. Her prose is always lucid and sometimes reaches poetical heights. She is also admirably candid, discussing in open-handed detail her own fears and emotional struggles. This is a profoundly thoughtful memoir, philosophically searching but also touchingly intimate.

A physician’s captivating remembrance, eventful and astutely introspective.



ON THE WINDS OF QUASARS

Bruno, T.A.
Tom Bruno Author (356 pp.)
\$26.80 | \$19.80 paper | \$3.99 e-book
Sept. 20, 2021
978-1-73464-706-8
978-1-73464-705-1 paper

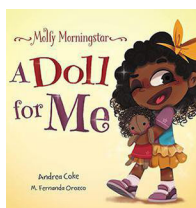
A human refugee colony on the planet Kamaria finds clues that a vile machine-creature race that conquered Earth has infiltrated this world as well.

In this SF sequel, Bruno continues the Song of Kamaria series that began with *In the Orbit of Sirens* (2020). Humanity fled a solar system conquered by the Undriel, a homegrown cyborg race that assimilates humanoids (rather like the Borg of the *Star Trek* series, but more insectoid in their augmentations). On the strange, distant world of Kamaria, a generation of *Homo sapiens* that built cities lives in an uneasy peace with the Natives, a birdlike species, some flightless, some not, called the Auk’nai, technologically adept yet prone to mysticism. The sudden slaughter of a formidable forest predator, held in esteem by many Auk’nai as a living god, presages dire clues pointing to the conclusion that the dreaded Undriel—or something with the race’s technology—have crossed the cosmos and landed on Kamaria. When a monstrous Auk’nai-like thing with biomechanical attributes kidnaps Cade and Nella Castus, the young adult children of hero pioneers Denton and Eliana Castus, a rescue expedition heads off into forbidden, eldritch realms and Lovecraft-ian caves, looking for answers. This volume is what the SF cognoscenti like to call a “planetary romance,” somewhat trickily defined as a story in which a striking world’s environment and culture drive and practically define the narrative. Indeed, the Auk’nai part of the tale fairly obviously reflects the fates of Native Americans and Indigenous peoples who were confronted with (and ruined by) European colonization/imperialism (“Humanity had a bad track record”). A complication here is that Kamaria’s biosphere includes tangible metaphysical elements—deities or the near equivalent, spirit forms, and other great whazzits—that come into play. Sometimes, these facets are thrilling (action and combat in the second half of the story come pretty much nonstop). Other times, the superpowers and otherworldly allies seem a little convenient, affecting the author’s well-hung cliffhangers (including an open ending). Or, as Denton notes, “anything is possible now.” Genre fans will be transfixed by the results and imagination at work and perhaps give additional points for a key character being deaf, something the *Star Trek* series only worked into one TV episode (after some persuasion, too).

A rewarding SF adventure on a particularly vivid alien world.

“David provides the model of activist scholarship that combines academic nuance and sophistication with an engaging writing style.”

TRAILBLAZERS



**MOLLY MORNINGSTAR
A DOLL FOR ME**

Coke, Andrea

Illus. by M. Fernanda Orozco

Self (36 pp.)

\$20.94 | \$12.99 paper | \$3.99 e-book

Sept. 27, 2021

978-1-77738-832-4

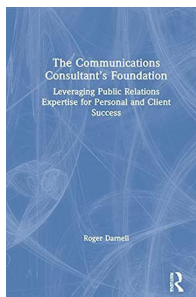
978-1-77738-835-5 paper



A girl finds an inventive solution to missing representation in the toy aisle in this clever debut picture book about inclusion.

Molly Morningstar is so excited to be invited to her friend Emma’s birthday tea party. The invitation says to bring a doll, but Molly just can’t choose. “Emma has lots of pretty dolls. And they all look like her. I wish I had a doll that looks like ME!” Molly laments. At the toy store, the brown-skinned, curly haired Molly sees only pale-skinned dolls; even on the internet, Molly and her mother can’t find a good match. When Molly comes up with the solution to make her own doll, she finds all the right materials and creates a twin for herself, impressing all her friends and making a doll she loves. Molly is a narrator who knows what she wants and is determined to find a way to achieve it—even if she makes a mess along the way. Coke uses a straightforward, realistic narration style to emulate Molly’s voice, with occasional poetry sprinkled throughout. Orozco’s exuberant illustrations capture Molly’s attitude (and her mother’s exasperation at those messes) while giving the story’s lead a great range of diverse friends of both genders at the party—some whose dolls match them and some who don’t. Emma’s birthday present—a doll that looks like an action figure—is a nice touch that critiques gender expectations.

Creative kids, especially those who also feel unrepresented, will be inspired.



**THE COMMUNICATIONS
CONSULTANT'S FOUNDATION
Leveraging Public Relations
Expertise for Personal and
Client Success**

Darnell, Roger

Routledge (174 pp.)

\$155.85 | \$39.95 paper | \$39.95 e-book

Sept. 27, 2021

978-1-03-201265-0

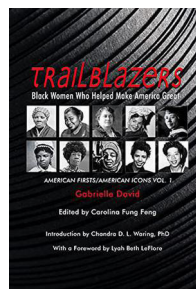
978-1-03-201267-4 paper

A beginners’ guide focuses on starting and growing a communications consultancy.

Darnell’s book considers the basics of starting a business in the field of corporate and marketing communications, but it could just as easily apply to any professional services’ sole proprietorship. The fundamental principles he covers are the cornerstones of most small businesses, and the lessons he shares are instructive. In Part 1, the author discusses reputation management, creativity, strategy, and personal branding.

After a worthwhile discussion of the importance of protecting the integrity of corporate reputations, the work makes a strong case for maintaining business and personal ethics. Chapters on creativity and strategy concentrate largely on the communications business. The material included about branding is more broadly applicable, particularly Darnell’s recommended process for developing a personal brand. Useful for novice brand builders is his clear explanation of “The Copy Platform.” Part 2 is a kind of minicourse in business; it includes chapters on leadership and management, objectives, brands (with some intriguing case histories about “rebrands”), business development, customer service, integrated marketing, and cash flow/project flow. Again, all of these areas focus on communications yet have relevance to most professional service firms. Especially useful, albeit brief, is the content on managing projects. In Part 3, Darnell examines very specifically running a communications consultancy, discussing such issues as client size and media usage. A noteworthy aspect of this book is the “Exploration” section the author appends to the end of each chapter. Here, Darnell suggests exercises that test readers’ knowledge and encourage hands-on practice; for example, “For your personal favorite brand, pick one area of The Promo Mix where you feel that a new campaign effort could introduce significant benefits for the brand. Describe the campaign using the Copy Platform format (see chapter 4).” The author personalizes the book by interweaving his own career experiences with instructional content; he also cites relevant sources and uses appropriate, engaging examples. While covering a lot of ground, the book does not delve deeply into any one topic, resulting in more of an overview than a comprehensive manual.

Valuable, if somewhat rudimentary, advice for the budding communications consultant.



**TRAILBLAZERS
Black Women Who Helped
Make America Great**

David, Gabrielle

2Leaf Press (595 pp.)

\$34.99 paper | Nov. 1, 2021

978-1-940939-79-7

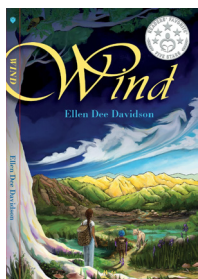
The first volume of an interdisciplinary, intersectional reference collection on influential Black women.

Disturbed by the 2016 election of Donald Trump and his pledge to “Make America Great Again,” author David was dismayed by the number of Americans who longed for the 1950s, “when White men ruled...and people of color had no rights.” She notes that surveys suggest that nearly 60% of White people believe that America in the 1950s was “better” than it is today. Even the #MeToo movement, a harbinger of 21st-century progressive activism, focused disproportionately on the experiences of White women. “Since history is told through the lens of the slaveholders,” who continue to control the nation’s narratives, it was important to David that she provide a comprehensive work that tells the “historical realities” too

often “overlooked, misinterpreted, and often retold to present a false history.” The book starts with 50-plus pages of introductory material by David; Lyah Beth LeFlore-Ituen, a producer; and Chandra D.L. Waring, a professor, that contemplates both the victimization and the resilience of Black women. LeFlore-Ituen’s essay, for example, uses the multigenerational history of women in her own distinguished family as a lens through which to explore the impact of Black women on shaping the lives of their communities. Regardless of the dominant narratives in traditional history books, she reminds us, Black women have been telling their stories “at the kitchen table” for generations. The bulk of the nearly 700-page book comprises three parts that focus on Black women’s achievements in activism, dance, and sports. Each of the three sections begins with an introductory essay that provides a broad historical overview of the topic. Activists profiled include historical figures, like Harriet Tubman, Ella Baker, and Betty Shabazz, as well as modern figures, like criminal justice reform advocate Michelle Alexander and trans activist LaSaia Wade. The sections on dance and sports celebrate cultural icons from Josephine Baker and Debra Austin to Jackie Joyner-Kersey and Simone Biles. These chapters also challenge notions in sports broadcasting that paint successful Black athletes as “superhumanly ‘strong’ beings” and that fail to acknowledge their hard work, training, and mental fortitude.

The first book in an anticipated six-volume set, this is an inspiring, comprehensive work. With a multidisciplinary background in music, design, and poetry, David provides the model of activist scholarship that combines academic nuance and sophistication with an engaging writing style that is accessible to general readership, such as David’s essay that convincingly demonstrates how women served as the “foot soldiers” of the civil rights movement. Backed by impressive endnotes and references, each chapter is encyclopedic in breadth while offering fresh analytical insights into Black women who are well covered in the existing literature, like Rosa Parks. The choice to combine the topics of activism, dance, and sports makes for an eclectic collection. More consistency could have been paid in the formatting of chapters, which vary significantly in length. Accompanied by dozens of stark, powerful black-and-white photographs and portraits, this is a visually arresting volume whose words match the power of its images.

An exciting resource in a promising, thorough multivolume celebration of Black women.



WIND

Davidson, Ellen Dee
Luminare Press (182 pp.)
978-1-64388-718-0

This middle-grade adventure sees a girl take up a fantastic quest alongside an alien companion.

One day, sixth grader Katie Noriega stares outside during class. She notices an oak tree and hears a voice ask, “Will you listen to me?” She does and learns that the

tree doesn’t want its branches cut. When she passes this on to Mr. Pinski, her teacher, the class ridicules her. Her best friend, Amy Scott, tells her that pretending to talk to nature is embarrassing. Even more discouraging, Katie’s parents have been fighting and may get divorced. After school, her cat, Sasha, says, “Earth.” Katie is unsure of the message—until the ground shakes and she falls into the family’s basement. There, she meets Za, a young gnomelike alien from the planet Stella. He has purple skin and a bright orb that reveals they’re actually in a cave. They follow a stream through this place that’s “stuck between” and encounter a woman named Dania, who leads them to her forest dwelling. Za’s guardian arrives and gives them gifts, a charm bracelet and a journey song, to help the kids in their search for the Winged Ones and a way back to their respective worlds. Meanwhile, a battle with the all-consuming Poison One lurks ahead. Davidson shares her passion for fantasy and the environment in this vibrant novel. Katie’s character is grounded by the threat of her parents’ divorce. She also bonds, despite the bickering, with Za, whose parents live on different planets. Younger readers will recognize familiar fantasy components, including Kira, a lion; elemental dragons; and Seidon, the lord of the waterways. Love for nature shines as the author’s overarching message; for example, Seidon says, “Although I continue to sense the other waters...Many are now polluted, and I can’t reach them.” An excellent scene showing the connection between trees and fungi gives adventure fans a topic for further study. Also noteworthy is that Katie and Za could not look more different, but they win by embracing their similarities. A winged horse named Wind stays with Katie in the end, hinting at further escapades.

A bright, vividly told tale that will bring readers closer to the natural world.



THOSE BRISBANE ROMANTICS

de Valera, Danielle
Old Tiger Books (390 pp.)
\$20.30 paper | \$4.45 e-book
Nov. 2, 2021
978-0-9942745-6-4

An Australian agriculture student forms a tightknit bond with creative friends and lovers who are planning for their futures in this literary novel.

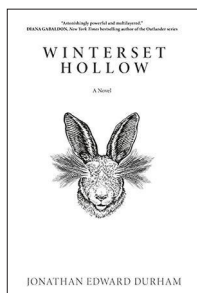
Dara Mahoney is living with seven other students in Brisbane in 1961 in an old rooming house. They are agriculture students, but their hopes and dreams veer far from the secure futures their degrees promise. Dara carries a torch for Joe Gordon, who yearns to play the violin in Europe. Bill Hereward wishes to motorbike to India, and Cass Clayton wants to sing. The guys stay up late drinking and planning an ocean voyage on a catamaran. They all feel pressure to get married young but fear that a wedding may signal the end of their aspirations. Against the backdrop of the White Australia Policy, Cass is in a relationship with Ling Chang, an Indonesian facing deportation. Doug Jarratt wants to marry Tripta Srivastava,

“Violence never overshadows the tale’s intriguing explorations of legacy and duty.”

WINTERSET HOLLOW

a beautiful Indian doctor and dancer, but she’s thinking of the fallout from her family back home. Dara is defiant about marriage, in part because she had parents who fought (“She hadn’t lived with two mad people for nine years without learning the rudiments of good drama”). Joe pairs off with Klari Nadassy, an immigrant who fled war-torn Hungary, losing her ballet career and becoming a teacher. As tragedy strikes the group, Dara must decide if following her heart means she has to give up her dreams. De Valera’s powerful coming-of-age tale doesn’t shy away from tackling difficult subjects. The strongly drawn characters are young, bright, and artistic, and the author is keenly aware of the emotional states of those raised during World War II (“Sixteen years had passed since the end of World War II, but Dara and her crowd remembered it well: the threat of a Japanese invasion had hung over all their childhoods. From February 1942 onwards, searchlights raked the night skies”). The Brisbane “Mates” aren’t afraid to get their hands dirty working in the fields or to confront any serious problem head-on. Cass, in particular, deals with horrifying acts of misogyny while Doug tackles Aboriginal rights. There is a multitude of issues raised in this story, but de Valera has woven everything together with vivid, dynamic prose.

A beautifully written tale about Australian dreamers that pointedly captures them at a crucial time.



WINTERSET HOLLOW

Durham, Jonathan Edward
 Credo House Publishers (286 pp.)
 \$15.99 paper | \$5.99 e-book
 Sept. 1, 2021
 978-1-62586-208-2

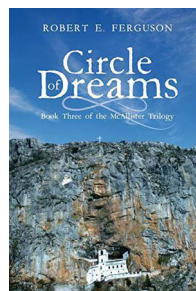
In this fantasy thriller, three friends visit the home of their favorite writer, unaware of the twisted legacy awaiting them.

John Eamon Buckley grew up with an agoraphobic father in rural Idaho.

He survived his bitter childhood thanks to the writings of E.B. Addington, the beloved author of *Winterset Hollow* and the creator of characters like Runnymede Rabbit and Flackwell Frog. Now, grown-up Eamon and his friends Mark and Caroline have embarked on a pilgrimage to Addington Isle, off the coast of West Rock, Washington. Along with several other fans, Eamon and company take a boat to the island and view the deceased author’s estate and beautiful grounds. Eamon hopes to at least see a rabbit, so the friends explore and find an elaborate hedge maze. They next see lantern light in the supposedly empty manor’s windows. But no oddities can prepare them for Runnymede Rabbit himself, who steps from the manor and invites the group inside. The characters Flackwell Frog and Phineas Fox are also present, wearing clothes and able to speak, just like in the book. The hosts offer games and a feast to celebrate Addington’s fictional Barley Day. But as the evening proceeds, Eamon notices a sour tinge in the air. Runnymede eventually announces: “It’s time for the hunt.” Durham takes a blackly humorous swipe at childhood nostalgia, namely readers still

enamored with their copies of Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. A peek through Addington’s history reveals a family obsessed with wealth and trophies, especially animal carcasses, which decorate the manor. The mystery of why Eamon received a strange summons to the island is deftly teased throughout. Durham’s gleeful, human-hunting villains steal most of the scenes, as when Flackwell tries to lure their prey by saying, “I’ve brought sandwiches!” The prose, while always striving to reveal character depth, runs a bit purple, as in the line “Nothing seemed to quell the firestorm of questions that was clouding his view and pummeling his eardrums and plugging his throat with thick, black ash.” Violence never overshadows the tale’s intriguing explorations of legacy and duty.

An engaging and energetically written literary horror story that speaks up for animals.



CIRCLE OF DREAMS

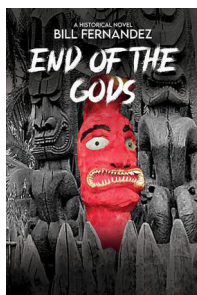
Ferguson, Robert E.
 FriesenPress (486 pp.)
 \$25.99 | \$18.99 paper | \$4.99 e-book
 June 11, 2019
 978-1-5255-4820-8
 978-1-5255-4821-5 paper

In this conclusion to an adventure trilogy, two intrepid friends comb western Asia for the legendary holy robe of Jesus.

In years past, writer Granger Lawton has sought fortunes with his treasure hunter best friend, Bobby McAllister. While the rewards have been sizable, Lawton has never liked the near-death experiences that seem to accompany their escapades. But McAllister assures Lawton that his latest quest will be risk-free. McAllister wants to find the robe of Jesus. The treasure hunter feels this is his destiny; he was born on Christmas Day. Lawton, McAllister and his wife, and assorted bodyguards and archaeologists sail to places like Jerusalem and Istanbul for leads on the robe’s location. Sadly, the danger Lawton hoped to avoid finds the group, as one team member winds up with a bullet in the head. Meanwhile, retired American cop Frank Kipper has eyes on the expedition. He may be more invested in vengeance, as he blames McAllister for his niece’s death years ago and an injury that “resulted in his early retirement from law enforcement.” The already arduous task of tracking down a religious artifact becomes increasingly precarious, especially with a mole planted by Kipper on McAllister’s team. While this novel showcases less action than earlier installments, Ferguson makes up for it in suspense. For example, Lawton suspects a team member’s suicide is actually a second murder and that someone is furtively stunting his attempts to investigate it. Armed religious zealots also prove a menace as the group seemingly gets close to discovering the robe. The author livens up the tale with Lawton and McAllister’s constant but often affectionate bickering, which returning readers will surely expect. Although this story is the series’ most deliberately paced, it lingers on stunning scenery, including in Istanbul: “From the Dolmabahce Palace to the green parks and

imperial pavilions of Yildiz Palace...ornate and marble facades" were reflected "in the swiftly moving water." Furthermore, Ferguson delivers a satisfying ending to both this installment and the trilogy.

A leisurely but entertaining finale to a rewarding treasure-hunting series.



END OF THE GODS *A Historical Novel*

Fernandez, Bill

Illus. by Judith Fernandez

BookBaby (318 pp.)

\$20.00 paper | Sept. 7, 2021

978-1-63944-358-1

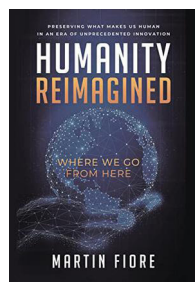
Bill Fernandez's novel of Hawaii deals with the struggle to find a humane belief system.

We open with a kind of origin story. Centuries ago, life on what would become Hawaii was truly Edenic. Everyone got along amicably, and simple goodness reigned under Io, their god of peace and equality. Then came Paoa, a high priest from Tahiti who declared that the Tahitian gods, most notably Ku, the war god, would be in charge. Now the ethos would be "kapu," royal edicts where the slightest misstep could get one killed. And of course there would be chiefs and high priests—and human sacrifice. Fast-forward to the early 19th century. Kalani Tana is a chief, a title and status bestowed upon him for his valor fighting alongside the great Kamehameha, a renowned war chief who united all of the Hawaiian Islands. Spiritual seeking is in the air: There has to be something better than this insane cruelty. Perhaps it is Confucianism? Christianity? Kaahumanu, the late Kamehameha's favorite wife; Hewahewa, the high priest; and others decide that the old gods must go. Even the feckless young king, Liholiho, is reluctantly on board. Keaoua, the priest of Ku, and cousin of Liholiho, leads an ill-fated rebellion. Meanwhile, Kalani simply wants to return to the village where he is chief and help them prosper again. He is also wracked with guilt over his teenage daughter, Lehua, because he was an absent father to her, and now she rejects him and leads a wild life. He wants to regain her love, but first he must find her. Ultimately, missionaries from New England arrive.

Author Fernandez tells a good story, and Kalani is an admirable hero, great in hand-to-hand combat but also complex and thoughtful. (We do have a rather cartoonish villain, Kalani's nemesis, the arrogant Kamuela; other villains are usually riffraff from the outside.) The book opens with a bang—an exciting sea battle with Malay pirates in which, as always, Kalani distinguishes himself as a fighter and a leader. We are reminded that he is well traveled. He has even lived in Boston and speaks English well. Another important character is wise Kaahumanu, the widowed wife who becomes regent when Liholiho ascends the throne. She is probably the most forward looking of the Natives and had almost persuaded the dying Kamehameha to abolish kapu. Hawaii is hardly isolated, of course. Trading ships,

whaling ships, and others are common visitors and definitely a mixed blessing. The islanders need the trade, but the ships bring all sorts of vices (and diseases), and, even allowing for the open sexual mores of the islanders, the women's throwing themselves at the sailors in exchange for trinkets is cause for alarm, which is where the story of Lehua gets complicated: The concept of "aloha" always included free love, but where is the line between aloha and prostitution? (Needless to say, the sight of all these naked women paddling out to their ship gives the missionary wives the fantods!) These and other issues must be wrestled with. The author is a Hawaiian Native who came home after his retirement from being a judge in California. His latest book is illustrated with photographs and sketches by Judith Fernandez and maps.

An excellent, well-told primer on Hawaiian history.



HUMANITY REIMAGINED *Where We Go From Here*

Fiore, Martin

Rivertowns Books (274 pp.)

\$29.95 | \$19.95 paper | \$6.99 e-book

Oct. 19, 2021

978-1-953943-06-4

978-1-953943-05-7 paper

Fiore charts the rise of world-changing technologies in this nonfiction debut.

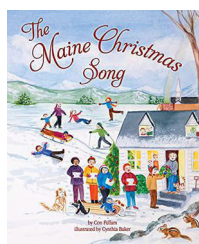
Whether we like it or not, technology is changing every aspect of human life. It isn't just the way we work and eat, but increasingly the ways we conceive, age, and even think. "Where earlier innovations impacted workforce policies, social interaction, and lifestyle options," writes Fiore in his introduction, "many future changes will involve internal tweaking in the form of edited genetic code, installation of organ implants, and monitoring systems to guide our diets, fitness regimens, and mental activities." For Fiore, this is a cause for optimism. These innovations have the power to improve human life in myriad ways if they are employed responsibly and with the proper foresight. In short, innovators across society must remember, in Fiore's parlance, to "put people first." The book addresses some of these emerging technologies, including vertical farms, brain-computer interface systems that can restore sight to the blind, 3-D printed buildings, and sensors that monitor our health as part of a system of 24/7 telemedicine. Fiore analyzes the forces propelling these innovations, including the rise of automated systems, empowered consumers, and an evolving culture of corporate responsibility, while also discussing the organizations charged with considering the possible societal outcomes for these shifts. Fiore's people-first perspective covers everything from which skills will become obsolete or more valuable in the near future to the necessity of sharing new technologies evenly across the globe. As the author notes, there is no single person or committee responsible for policing technological innovation. He argues that it's incumbent on all of us to educate ourselves about what is coming so that we can, as a society, innovate mindfully, beneficially, and equally.

“Haynes paints a historically authentic and dramatically gripping tableau of the tumultuous politics of the time.”

AND TYLER NO MORE

Fiore is essentially a professional technology explainer, keeping abreast of new developments in order to advise people and companies on the future of work. His prose is clean and cheery, though he writes in a kind of motivational corporate-speak that may be alien, or simply annoying, to some readers: “Even as smart machines get better at task performance, we will need intelligent, thoughtful, well trained, and highly motivated people to draw on their domain knowledge, to innovate, to make sound ethical decisions, and to ask the right questions at this pivotal time for business, society, and humanity.” While the book describes some new technologies in detail, it’s mostly about the phenomenon of technological disruption. While technologies themselves are always going out of date, our relationship to innovation remains relatively fixed, even if innovation speeds up over time. Fiore succeeds in communicating this idea, offering a kind of “what to expect” for those stressed about the future. Specific changes are difficult to predict with certainty, but the author’s identification of certain trends, particularly regarding the nature of work and health care, are persuasive, and he contextualizes them in a way that makes them exciting rather than scary. For those looking for a glimpse at the future, this book isn’t a bad place to start.

An encouraging, unflinching look at the tech changes to come.



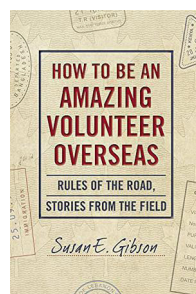
THE MAINE CHRISTMAS SONG

Fullam, Con
 Illus. by Cynthia Baker
 McSea Books (32 pp.)
 \$18.95 | Oct. 19, 2021
 978-1-954277-00-7

A picture-book adaptation of Fullam’s popular song about the virtues of sharing and community togetherness.

An unnamed narrator says that long ago, when “roads were made of crushed rock and earth,” Christmas gifts were handmade and spiritually centered, and neighbors cared for one another. Although times have changed, there remains “a small corner of the earth where old values have not been lost,” the narrator explains—in Maine, where neighbors visit and bring gifts of food or offer to take kids for sleigh rides. Fullam shares traditions that focus on the power of giving in a picture book that’s half straightforward prose and half rhyming lyrics from the author’s song, included as sheet music at the end. Despite this shift from prose to poetry, the book flows well, and a feeling of Christmas spirit shines through in both formats. Baker’s painted illustrations showcase a diverse small-town community with residents of different ages, abilities, and skin tones. The realistic flora and fauna on many pages give the setting a tangible feel so that the warmth of a fireplace or cuddling cats seems to radiate from the pages. The idyllic nature of the images and poetry sheds a rosy glow on the holiday season, which many readers will appreciate.

A cozy, down-home tale of Christmas in New England.



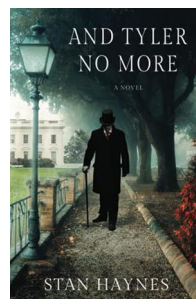
HOW TO BE AN AMAZING VOLUNTEER OVERSEAS
Rules of the Road, Stories From the Field

Gibson, Susan E.
 Barlow Publishing (224 pp.)
 \$17.00 paper | \$8.99 e-book | Oct. 19, 2021
 978-1-988025-69-8

A guide to volunteering in other countries that offers welcome touches of realism along with idealism.

In her debut, Gibson, a longtime microfinance consultant who’s served on numerous boards of nongovernmental organizations, offers the reader a book that’s part memoir and part volunteering primer. The book begins with an introduction by Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Prize-winning economist who developed the system of microfinancing; Gibson first began volunteering in this field, which led to a career in international development. The author draws on her extensive experience, offering anecdotes, letters, and diary excerpts to show readers how they may have a meaningful and safe experience working overseas for nonprofits. This book is full of everyday advice for international volunteers, although some of it is fairly obvious, such as dressing for the weather, showing respect for local mores, and being careful regarding water and uncooked food. In fact, the advice on eating locally may well be discouraging to vegetarians, vegans, or people with other dietary needs. However, there are other bits of advice that a reader may not have considered, such as simply listening to a favorite song for easy self-care. The book is also fully up to date as far as Covid-19 safety considerations. Although this work is strongly based on the author’s experience with microfinancing, this book will be useful for would-be workers in many other areas of international development, and it’s full of suggestions for how to get your foot in the door of such organizations. Gibson offers especially good advice about doing homework on NGOs to avoid a mismatch between oneself and their missions. Overall, the book is skillfully organized with chapter summations and plenty of links to other resources.

A useful and anecdotal manual for those who wish to work for international nonprofits.



AND TYLER NO MORE

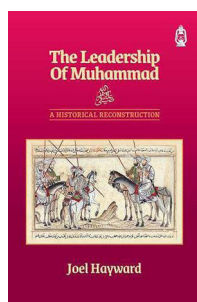
Haynes, Stan
 Self (290 pp.)
 \$11.99 paper | \$5.99 e-book
 Sept. 16, 2021
 978-1-737766-90-2

As President John Tyler prepares to expand slavery in the United States in 1844, a trio of young men plot his assassination in this novel.

After President William Henry Harrison dies barely a month into his term, Tyler takes over, an unpopular man derisively referred to as “His Accidency.” He’s

an utter disaster for the Whig Party—he summarily upends its legislative agenda, including a proposal for a national bank. To make matters worse, he plans the annexation of Texas, a move that would produce a dramatic expansion of slavery and upset the delicate balance between Northern and Southern states struck by the Compromise of 1820. Monty Tolliver, a young man who got his start in Washington, D.C., working for Sen. Henry Clay, firmly opposes slavery. Monty sees Tyler’s presidency as a fiasco and its possible extension in the election of 1844 as catastrophic. Ben Geddis, one of his closest friends and a staunch abolitionist, proposes a radical solution to save the country—assassinate Tyler. Monty joins forces with Ben and Sam Shipley, another friend, to gauge the possibility. The dangerous mission causes Monty to have deep reservations, though he desperately wants to oust the “slaveholder-in-chief” from power: “Was he a bad person, he wondered, for having such thoughts?” Haynes paints a historically authentic and dramatically gripping tableau of the tumultuous politics of the time as well as the nuances surrounding the debate over slavery. In particular, he limns an intriguing portrait of Clay, a monumental figure in American history. This is a rigorously researched novel. The daunting challenge for the author was to make plausible not only the perilous plot conceived, but also the psychology of the conspirators—three otherwise sane, law-abiding citizens who plan a premeditated murder of national significance. Haynes does in fact make this believable, an impressive literary feat.

A dramatic and historically captivating political tale.



THE LEADERSHIP OF MUHAMMAD
A Historical Reconstruction

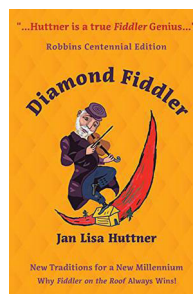
Hayward, Joel
Claritas Books (164 pp.)
\$25.00 | \$15.00 e-book | Sept. 27, 2021
978-1-80011-989-5

An acclaimed Islamic scholar offers lessons in leadership based on the example of Muhammad in this historical work.

As a professor of strategic thought at the National Defense College of the United Arab Emirates, the author or editor of more than a dozen books, and a former tutor to Prince William, Hayward is undeniably one of academia’s most visible Islamic thinkers. Though the author’s scholarly bona fides are on full display, as seen in the work’s full command of Islamic theology and the Arabic language as well as its rich endnotes, this concise volume eschews academic and religious jargon for an accessible narrative geared toward the general public, both Muslim and non-Muslim. First, the author dismantles a simplistic notion that equates Muhammad’s success solely to his personality traits, such as his piety, compassion, and courage, noting that successful leaders throughout history have included “deeply flawed, corrupt or wickedly cruel people.” Avoiding a “moral assessment as the primary basis” of its analysis, this book instead looks at Muhammad’s conceptualization of leadership and

his practical actions that offer insights for today’s leaders on effective strategies. Muhammad, for example, had a “common touch,” like his enthusiasm for wrestling, that allowed him to “relate and appeal” to average people. This was complemented by a “consultative leadership” style that prioritized participatory decision-making. Perhaps most important for the prophet was his theological understanding that true leaders are not self-made but are chosen by God and should submit to his will. Moreover, the best leaders, according to Muhammad, serve as “shepherds,” rather than tyrants, who protect and guide those whom they are responsible for managing. Additional commentary is presented on Muhammad’s specific leadership strategies as a military tactician and diplomat. While the author’s use of the trendy language of modern self-help (such as its emphasis on “Maximising Human Potential,” “Strategic Vision,” and “Strategic Communication”) borders on kitsch, this volume is nevertheless a learned history of Islam and Muhammad that succeeds in its goal of providing contemporary and future managers with valuable insights from his life on successful leadership strategies.

A well-researched and applicable analysis of Muhammad’s leadership.



DIAMOND FIDDLER
New Traditions for a New Millennium: Why Fiddler on the Roof Always Wins!

Huttner, Jan Lisa
FF2 Media (350 pp.)
\$16.99 paper | \$9.99 e-book
March 6, 2021
978-0-9850964-6-5

A wide-ranging book explores the history and lore of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Huttner’s study was first published in 2016 in honor of the 100th anniversary of the death of Sholem Aleichem, the author of the original handful of Tevye the Dairyman stories. These tales were transformed by show writer Joseph Stein and his colleagues into *Fiddler on the Roof*, the enormously beloved and successful 1964 Broadway musical. Huttner calls her book a “bibliomemoir” and tells her readers that it illustrates the fact that “one of the deepest relationships in life can be with a text.” When *Fiddler* closed in 1972, it was the longest-running show in Broadway history (it retained the title until it was surpassed by *A Chorus Line* in 1984), and it’s been a theatrical staple ever since, generating the vast amount of personal and cultural resonance that the author examines in these pages. She dissects Marc Chagall’s painting *Green Violinist*, which she calls a “major inspiration” for the creators of *Fiddler*. She pores over the much-vexed question of how faithful the film version was to the stage musical, the appealing elements in both, and how all adaptations correspond to Aleichem’s original stories. The book’s chapters are composed of individual, self-contained lectures Huttner has given at various venues over the years, and everything is well illustrated with curations of black-and-white

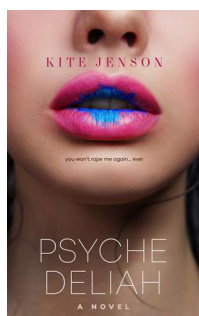
“Johnson’s prose is easy and wry, perfectly calibrated to the speed of life in his fictional, eponymous municipality.”

SEDALIA CHRONICLES

photographs, the show’s sheet music, and images by cartoonist Sharon Rosenzweig.

Huttner’s lifelong history with *Fiddler* is evident on every page of her book. It will be quickly apparent to readers that there’s nothing she doesn’t know about the stories, *Aleichem*, the Broadway musical, and the movie. As the author notes, this work represents the culmination of 18 years of research on the subject, which will make its wide reach very satisfying to fellow devotees of *Fiddler*. For those fans and more general readers, one of the most entertaining features running through many of these lectures is Huttner’s consistent, low-key irritation with what she refers to as the “Conventional Wisdom” surrounding her subject, taking issue with misreadings and misinterpretations and delivering plenty of good-natured corrections. Her discussions of literary antecedents range from the Old Testament to *Pride and Prejudice*, and all of it is offered with an infectious enthusiasm. The only drawback to the reading experience stems from the composition of the book. Since the chapters are transcriptions of lectures, readers are constantly brought up short by Huttner introducing herself to various audiences or making local venue comments. The frequent “welcome to tonight’s lecture” interruptions stop the volume from feeling like a smoothly flowing narrative. Nevertheless, the author’s authority on the topic comes through loud and clear, and her decision to weave in great amounts of autobiographical reflections is well taken given the intensely personal connection most aficionados have to this particular show. The work is a must-read for *Fiddler* enthusiasts.

A wonderfully chatty and knowledgeable examination of “all things *Fiddler*.”



PSYCHEDELIAH

Jenson, Kite
 Furthest Press (264 pp.)
 \$2.99 e-book | Dec. 21, 2021
 978-0-9651190-7-8

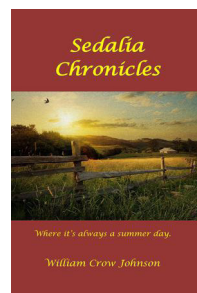
A debut suspense novel charts the disappearance of a disenchanted former wife and the slow reveal of her furtive, fetishized sex life.

Jenson’s dynamic tale chronicles the troubled marriage of Paul and Deliah, a six-year union that has pretty much run its course. Sexually, Paul, nearly 30 years old and a self-described “vanilla boy of supreme proportions,” has been rigidly faithful and more than willing to please his struggling actor wife. But Deliah’s orgasms have always been a rarity and leave her unsatisfied and her husband feeling inadequate. Finally, she decides she’s had enough and leaves Paul via a kitchen-counter Post-it, and their life together in Southern California dissolves in a swirl of divorce papers. Abandoning his video game designing job, Paul sells his condo, buys an RV, and becomes obsessed with finding Deliah through a complex, mysterious labyrinth of whispered leads and tips; extramarital adventures; secret histories; and hidden pasts. There’s also plenty of action in a series of

warehouse sex clubs where bondage rituals increase in intensity, which lends the story a kind of graphic, raunchy edge of fetish erotica. Paul tries to extract answers from John Laster, the last individual to personally interact with Deliah. But John delivers tragic news and further ignites Paul’s determination to avenge his ex-wife’s disappearance. Soon, a slinky submissive named Alex appears on the scene and is immediately thrust into a “slave” role, dutifully pleasuring Paul, whom she refers to as her new “Master.” It becomes a part Paul eventually makes peace with and ultimately relishes as his attraction to Alex deepens and she feels comfortable enough to reveal her identity as transgender. A strong undercurrent of vigilante justice, sex trafficking, rape, and abuse runs beneath the tale and shows Paul to have become quite a formidable presence when compared with the man he once was as Deliah’s husband.

Though at times the prose is overly stylized—a deceived Paul laments that “all my accumulated knowledge had been distorted and manipulated, baked in the oven of delusion”—the narrative remains unapologetic for its sheer sense of bawdy sexuality and an unrestrained depiction of BDSM master and submissive play in “full bondage regalia.” The disorienting surprise and confusion when attempting to understand a loved one who turns out to have a secret life are also handled with realistic frenzy, apprehension, understandable anger, and just a touch of suspense. The story is further energized by the main character’s realistic and unrehearsed dialogue, believable actions toward finding his ex-wife, and his slowly revealed, abusive childhood. The dark novel succeeds on several levels. As an erotic thriller, it includes lots of vividly aggressive, sexually explicit details of both the fetish clubs’ scenes and Paul’s lovemaking with Alex. And as a noir suspense novel/mystery, it features a well-paced plot and a simmering momentum. As the protagonist, Paul is believable as a desperate man eager to rekindle his marriage to a gorgeous woman who is clearly out of his league. He is a character who becomes increasingly self-aware as the story progresses, discovering more and more about himself as a man, a former husband, and a sexual being in ways he’d never imagined.

A gripping, titillating amalgam of provocative, interpersonal melodrama and effective noir thriller.



SEDALIA CHRONICLES

Johnson, William Crow
 Self (257 pp.)
 \$4.00 e-book | Oct. 20, 2021

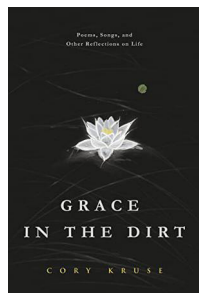
A volume of short stories probes the foibles and fascinations of the residents of a small Indiana town.

What goes for excitement in Sedalia may be different than in other places, but its residents are ready to swarm at the first hint of it. The nosy breakfasters at the local cafe speculate about an unknown car with New York plates that spent the night in a neighbor’s driveway. The idlers at the gas station are curious about how the local undertaker’s behavior has changed since the death of his wife. The sheriff

has been getting reports of people buying night-vision goggles at the gun store, and the town doctor may be getting audited by the IRS. Nothing in Sedalia is too small to escape notice. “I mean, naked trucker, running along the bottom of the embankment below the northbound lane,” reports a state police officer at the beginning of one tale. “Nothing but shoes. Obviously trying to avoid being seen. Which is obviously impossible. We get eleven different calls.” Gossip is the fuel of the local discourse, though sometimes the really interesting things are the ones that don’t get said. People who spot bears, for example, can’t tell anyone about them given that the Department of Natural Resources’ official line is that there are no bears in Indiana. Most people born in the town stay in the town. Sedalians tend not to fare as well when they try to make it in the wider world, as with Wanda Sue Blankenship. Wanda moves to New York to be a lawyer and tries to hide her Southern Indiana accent—unsuccessfully. In these 19 stories, the residents of Sedalia are held up for readers’ appraisals, though they can never be judged as thoroughly by an outsider as they are by one another.

Johnson’s prose is easy and wry, perfectly calibrated to the speed of life in his fictional, eponymous municipality. “The skinny young man lay asleep in a filthy sleeping bag just a foot from the edge of the bridge abutment,” begins one tale about an anti-capitalist hitchhiker who has a short but memorable stay in town. “The drop to the dry stone river bed was fifteen feet. His head lay on folded pants, his long brass-colored hair hopelessly tangled. The snore suggested nasal occlusion.” The author has a knack for pinpointing not only the way characters look to the people around them, but also how they appear to themselves. Sedalia’s slight inferiority complex regarding the rest of America—and its snooty neighbor, Elmira, Indiana—is a recurring theme. “Dysfunction in the Mole Challenge Group” is a particular standout, but the strength of these stories is the way that characters weave in and out of them, offering a larger view of the dynamics of the town. Neighbors who appear in one piece are often explored at length in another. As in Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* and subsequent works of locality-based fiction, Johnson’s book manages to simultaneously poke fun and celebrate small-town American life.

A humorous, charming collection of tales set in a Midwestern town.



GRACE IN THE DIRT
Poems, Songs, and Other Reflections on Life

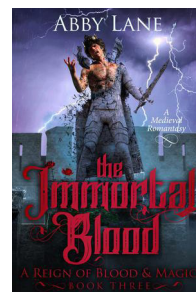
Kruse, Cory
Fire’s Edge Publishing (748 pp.)
\$29.99 paper | Dec. 7, 2021
978-1-733069-44-1

In this collection, a fiction writer shares entries from his cellphone notes app that explore his inner life.

“While maintaining a formal diary doesn’t much interest me...I still require some sort of outlet for my thoughts and feelings,” remarks Kruse in his preface to this

volume, which is over 700 pages. The author’s preferred way of processing everyday emotions is by using the notes app on his cellphone. Kruse has accumulated a wealth of “bite-size” entries, including poems, “mini stories,” and vignettes that provide a window into how he was feeling over several years. Divided into four sections, “Love,” “Loss,” “Despair,” and “Hope,” this book allows the author the opportunity to categorize and share these deeply personal entries. Kruse refers to this as a “snapshot of a typical human life” and hopes that readers will also recognize aspects of themselves in his words. The author’s notes run the entire gamut of human emotions and address his feelings head-on. For instance, an entry entitled “Friendly Fire” states bluntly: “There are days when I hate my face.” Kruse asks readers to find beauty and understanding in what were once fragmented, recorded thoughts. For some, the cellphone notebook suggests hurriedly typed to-do lists. Yet there is no room for the trivial in this unexpectedly compelling, insightful, and astutely collated collection, although the offerings maintain the rawness and immediacy of those entered on the spur of the moment into a keypad. In “The Martyr,” Kruse writes candidly: “There’s no end in sight for me: / Still, despite it all, / I love you earnestly.” A further layer of vulnerability is added to the confession with the knowledge it was originally written for the author’s eyes alone. In longer poems, such as “Survivor’s Guilt,” Kruse keenly pinpoints the preoccupations of someone grieving: “I feel guilty for not feeling sad enough.” Some may find the author’s language overly simplistic, but this is an individual writing for himself without the burden of needing to impress an audience. With this freedom, Kruse describes emotional states with a refreshing honesty and clarity. At their very best, his minimal notes possess the power to jolt readers to alertness: “If you don’t keep paddling— / Whether you’re aware of it or not— / You’re bound to drift.”

Unconventional, intimate, yet universally profound reflections.



THE IMMORTAL BLOOD

Lane, Abby
Shelley Kassian (462 pp.)
\$16.99 paper | \$2.99 e-book
Oct. 26, 2021
978-1-777069-96-4

An ancient god’s resurrection causes turmoil in Asgard and on Earth in this fantasy.

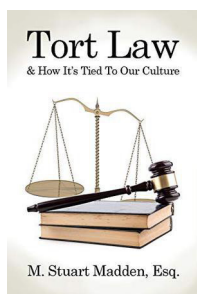
Following up on *The Ebony Queen* (2020), this third installment of Lane’s series charts another imbroglio started by the witch Cynara, queen of Velez. She has unwittingly released the bloody essence of the Asgardian god Anastacio from an eons-old crystal orb while imprisoning the consciousness of Odin, king of the gods, in the same globe. Unfortunately for Cynara, stealing Odin’s divine knowledge leaves her a kind of prisoner, too, as she is left conscious but paralyzed at Camden castle. That leaves an opening for Lady Regana, the queen whom Cynara

“Masters offers readers an intelligently written book about big business, ambition, seduction, and danger.”

THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

ousted, to try to kill her—unsuccessfully, since Cynara can't swallow the poison her foe sticks in her mouth. With Cynara laid up, a succession crisis brings to the fore Keldan Ashburn, Regana's secret son, who shows the privy council that “a royal emblem is branded between” his “ass cheeks” that establishes his right to the throne. But then Anastacio's blood infuses the body of Velez's former King Rickard, Keldan's father and Cynara's husband (and Regana's ex), who is believed dead but is actually yet another conscious paralytic, mummified alive by Cynara in a statue. Anastacio takes over Rickard's decaying body, rules competently over an astonished Velez, and spends much time bickering with a revived Cynara over all the cruel mischief she has wrought. But with Cynara converted by Odin's knowledge from hellacious bitch to benign humanitarian, the true villain emerges: Daemonis, a fallen archangel whose duel with Anastacio over the goddess Freya started the orb business. A coalition of Valhallans, witches, and toxic geckos rallies to take him on. Lane's labyrinthine yarn feels overstuffed with subplots; the characters are well drawn and energetic, but the novel lacks the space to do them all justice. Her writing features atmospheric prose, crude humor, and effective, ghoulish set pieces, including the disembowelment of a sniveling priest by a giant goshawk. There's a delicious *Game of Thrones* vibe in scenes of royal intrigue. (“There's doubt on both sides; no proof for Keldan, no proof for Rudrik. However, one man is moldable and the other is not.”) Lane's imaginative worldbuilding, tart dialogue, and dramatic reanimations and showdowns are enough to keep readers forging ahead through the tangle of narrative strands.

A convoluted but entertaining sword-and-sorcery romance.



TORT LAW & HOW IT'S TIED TO OUR CULTURE

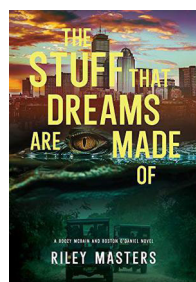
Madden, M. Stuart
Dorrance Publishing Company (342 pp.)
\$22.00 paper | \$9.99 e-book | Dec. 2, 2019
978-1-4809-8978-8

A comprehensive historical tour of tort law considers its development within a cultural and philosophical context.

According to Madden, “Tort law has always represented a society's revealed truth as to its better self, and further to so doing, has identified the behaviors it wishes to encourage and the behaviors it wishes to discourage.” As a consequence, a full appreciation of tort law's historical unfolding requires a broad interpretive horizon that includes an analysis of socio-economic conditions, religious and philosophical commitments, and shifting cultural realities. The author's approach is impressively expansive—he covers the birth of tort in ancient law, including the Torah, the Quran, and Tibetan folk law, through the partnership of common and statutory law in the present. Madden contends that tort law aims for a balance among justice, morality, and efficiency, and so its establishment not only expresses the heart of a culture, but also functions as a lucid gauge of

progress. He also argues that the arc of tort law's development has been one leaning toward scientific progress. The author examines a breathtaking swath of intellectual territory, including a keen consideration of the roles of myth and folklore, and offers delightfully unconventional views. For example, Madden deftly explores the extent to which the Goths appropriated Roman law. Unfortunately, his writing is arthritically stiff and overdone—as gratuitously entangled as it is verbose: “It would be anomalous to suppose that injury law, by reason of its ancient articulation in moral terms, ought be immune from scientific deconstruction and reanalysis in the scientific terms of economic efficiency, and it verges on impossibility to propose that it will fail to find greater and greater employment in tort theory, adjudication, and statutory adoption.” But readers patient enough to wade through these turbid waters will be well rewarded.

Despite the dense prose, an illuminating and insightful historical work about tort law.



THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

Masters, Riley
Lost Haven Press (400 pp.)
\$27.33 | \$12.73 paper | \$9.99 e-book
Oct. 30, 2020
978-1-64999-595-7
978-1-64999-596-4 paper

From a mine deep below Angola's surface to a penthouse high above Back Bay in Boston, a pair of “financial detectives” investigates a corporate shark engaged in rare Earth minerals—and maybe murder—in this geopolitical thriller.

At the start of Masters' second Boozy McBain and Boston O'Daniel novel, geologist Daniel Neto sneaks mineral samples out of a pitch-black African tunnel leading from a restricted zone 800 feet below. Leaving the area, he encounters a guard who says he's been given “the green light to handle things my own way”—and his way relies on a machete and a crocodile. Meanwhile, in Beantown, engineer and geologist Harold Rogers is about to sell his company, HR Tech, to another mining outfit known as Africa's Future Resources. HR Tech recently developed proprietary technology to extract and process minerals, which skyrocketed the company's stock. Rogers, who describes gorgeous redhead O'Daniel and McBain as “a swimsuit model and an alcoholic,” hires the designer-dressed sleuths to perform due diligence analysis prior to the sale. As the two investigate, they steer through corporate and government agency regulations and roadblocks, and they come up against Rodney Henry, AFR's major shareholder. He's a middle-aged, tough player in the international mining fraternity. While McBain flies to Africa to check out the AFR mines where Neto was gathering samples, O'Daniel stays local to cover Henry—figuratively as well as literally in his penthouse bedroom. And although McBain promises O'Daniel that when he goes to Africa, he won't take up with a former lover living there, he does connect

with his blond ex, and the “air conditioning could barely keep up with the two of them.”

Aside from giving his main characters names that invite eye rolls and chuckles, Masters offers readers an intelligently written book about big business, ambition, seduction, and danger. The author’s experience working in international finance supplies authenticity to the novel, and his familiarity with Boston adds richness. Characters are complex. On the cusp of 30, and 10 years younger than McBain, O’Daniel is an analytic wunderkind with an hourglass figure wrapped in Gucci; is quick to anger; and still has feelings of inadequacy stemming from a hardscrabble past. The fact that Henry, who grew up dirt poor, recognizes those feelings in her draws her to him. McBain also suffers from flaws. He drinks too much (well, he is Boozy), can’t stop smoking, and still stings from a years-old divorce. But any failings make the high-power investigators more intriguing and relatable. Exploiting Earth’s resources is a timely topic, as are the stock market angle and heart-wrenching descriptions of African poverty. Details about McBain and O’Daniel’s past cases and their supposedly platonic relationship emerge slowly. O’Daniel could be talking about readers when she tells McBain: “Never give them too much too soon....Make them work for it.” Dialogue is sharp and often amusing; for example, one mining executive tells McBain: “We are all ruthless sons of bitches when it comes to the land. At the end of the day, we crawl out of a hole in the ground. Remember that.”

A detective story that’s sexy on the surface and smart to the core.



THE BLACK GARDEN

McFarland, John S.
Dark Owl Publishing (332 pp.)
\$12.99 paper | Sept. 27, 2021
978-1-951716-22-6

An artist gets drawn into the domain of an enigmatic collector in this gothic novel.

In 1882, Miss Perdita Badon-Reed of Boston travels by riverboat down the Mississippi in order to take a teaching position in the tiny, French-inflected

backwater of Ste. Odile. Over 40 years old, she just ran away from what was probably the last chance at a respectable marriage in order to pursue her dream career as a sculptor of statues. (That her erstwhile fiance is still reeling from the recent murder of his sister in France only adds to the scandal of her flight.) Perdita’s host in Ste. Odile is her uncle, the parish priest Father Tancred Condell, and her colleague at the school is the naïve but enthusiastic nun Sister Solana. The strange town has its share of characters. Some are tragic, like Marie Chardin, a woman soon to be hung for the murder of her own daughter and whom Perdita befriends out of charity. Some are inspiring, like the abandoned half Black, half Native American Anatolia Montes, one of Perdita’s young students who possesses an incredible talent for her age, even if her drawings often include visions that only she can see. But the most notable resident by far is Orient

Bastide, the mysterious scion of the local lead-mining dynasty. Bastide is a philanthropist and art lover, one who eventually extends an invitation to Perdita to see his impressive collection. It is housed at his estate, Jardin Noir, named, as one character explains, for its distinctive flora: “The Black Garden. As I understand it, there has always been an abundance of black oak, black cherry, and black walnut trees, and many flowering plants with darker-hued blossoms. And I am told there is deadly nightshade.” It soon becomes clear that Bastide may be collecting more than art. But does Perdita have the sense to keep herself from becoming his next acquisition?

McFarland’s precise prose evokes the period without ever feeling too stiff or mannered, as here where Sister Solana gushes over Perdita upon meeting her: “A stone sculptor! What a time we are living in that a woman can claim such a profession! Mrs. Wollstonecraft would be proud, don’t you think? That is such a smart walking-about outfit you’re wearing. And that hat is perfect for the shape of your face!” Ste. Odile is richly rendered, a Cajun fever dream that blends nearly all the tropes of Southern and Continental gothic. The book’s fidelity to the literature that inspired it is both its strength and its weakness. The author has mastered the simmering miasma of Victorian horror fiction, whetting readers’ anticipation for terrible things that take chapters and chapters to arrive. The only problem is that when they do appear, they are in no way surprising. This is not a meta take on gothic horror, and McFarland does not have any modern tricks in store. But for those who love a good, old-fashioned, slow-burning novel of the occult, this one more than delivers.

An engaging, intricate horror tale that feels ripped from the pages of a penny dreadful.



THE CERTAINTY OF CHANCE

Middleton, Jacquelyn
Kirkwall Books (328 pp.)
\$16.95 paper | Sept. 16, 2021
978-1-9992753-2-7

An American woman and an Englishman find love during the week before Christmas in Middleton’s romance.

Madeleine Joy, who works for a music-streaming service, didn’t expect to be in London during the holiday season. She was supposed to be in Paris with her sister, Shantelle, but planes are grounded due to a cloud of ash from an Icelandic volcano. The first anniversary of the death of her best friend, Kellie, is coming up on Dec. 23, so Madeleine isn’t feeling the Christmas spirit. But she figures that she might as well see the beautiful city, as she’s never been there before. Fortunately, she meets cab driver Julian Halliwell, who’s not only skilled at quickly getting people to their destinations, but also provides tours with trivia about London’s history. He happens to be very attractive and has excellent taste in music, as well; as it happens, he’s a former music journalist—one whose reviews Madeleine used to avidly read. As they spend more time together, Madeleine remembers her good times with

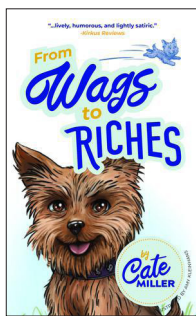


“Mpofu’s program of working hard, self-directing, forging relationships, and being open to new experiences is a hopeful, empowering one.”

UNLEASHING MY SUPERPOWERS

the friend she lost. The tourist and the cabbie start to meet up during Julian’s off hours, and it’s clear that love is blooming. But what will happen when Madeleine finally leaves for her Paris trip and eventually returns to Boston? In this sweet modern romance, Canadian author Middleton ably portrays the beauty of festive London, but she also depicts the heartbreaking pain of the grieving process in detail; the book treats the deep sadness that accompanies the loss of a loved one in a fair and accurate way while showcasing how the protagonist seeks professional therapy. The author also clearly has ample knowledge of the city’s past and present as well as of English music, and although such facts feature heavily in the story, she works them into the text with a relatively light touch.

A charming story for Anglophiles and music lovers.



FROM WAGS TO RICHES

Miller, Cate
Manuscript (103 pp.)

A little Yorkie’s determination to join a compassionate family sparks comic chaos in this novel.

Wags, aka “Dog #1827,” is an inmate of the secret puppy mill run by money-hungry Cranky Franky Cruikshank. Seizing an opportunity for freedom, she ends up in the loving arms of the Tiggywiggle family. Even the clan’s patriarch, sup-

posed canine hater Billy, begins to come around when her calming presence stops his thunderous nightly snoring. Wags’ liberty is short-lived when Franky reclaims her to fulfill his plan to breed her as a lucrative source for champion puppies. (The dogs in the puppy mill mourn her return, because if “Wags couldn’t make it out for good, they all wondered if there was any hope for themselves.”) In the satisfying, amusing wrap-up, the villains get their comeuppance, and there is a happy ending for Wags, Franky’s seemingly unredeemable nephew Craig, and others. In her preface, Miller reveals how she was inspired by her own beloved rescue dogs and offers information about the responsibilities of canine ownership, but there’s nothing pedantic about this tale for readers of middle school age and up. It is lively, humorous, and lightly satiric. Wealthy Billy, whose real name is Maxibillion, is the head of a canine food empire and the reluctant host of the annual “Woofstock” dog lovers’ jamboree; the police chief has a drug-sniffing Chihuahua; Felonious Hunk is a piano-playing bulldog; and Franky, a Fix Network fan, and his social-climbing wife are co-owners of Fagin’s Cars for the Stars. The author’s descriptive scene-setting is a frequent pleasure: “The twilight of early evening descended on the prairie. A crescent moon and faint stars began to glitter in the sky....Busy flying insects went about their business with gusto. Occasionally a fish jumping in the lake beyond the house rumbled the waters, and night birds squawked their presence.” Another plus is the empathy Miller conveys for both canines and kindly humans. Craig’s redemption, for instance, and Billy’s love for the members of his family (and their affection for him) are genuinely touching. Both

elements balance a liberal use of puns and kookiness that could otherwise sink into preciousness.

Dog lovers will enjoy the humor and heart in this tale of canine resourcefulness.



UNLEASHING MY SUPERPOWERS
How To Navigate and Succeed in a Male-Dominated Mining Work Environment (STEM)

Mpofu, Patience
Peak Performance With Patience
Pty (229 pp.)
\$17.95 paper | \$1.99 e-book
Aug. 22, 2021
978-0-64-523371-1

An African woman maneuvers her way to success in a hyper-masculine industry in this business self-helper.

Mpofu, an executive leadership coach, derives career and management lessons from her unusual life story. Born into a middle-class family in Zimbabwe, she was encouraged by her father to pursue a career in a STEM field. She earned a degree in chemistry and then a Ph.D. at the University of South Australia and took a job in South Africa at the multinational Anglo American Platinum mining company. It was a rewarding but difficult road, in her telling. As a Black woman in an industry traditionally dominated by White men, Mpofu often found herself “the only one in the room who looks like me.” Initially relegated to routine tasks, she had to lobby her bosses for more challenging assignments. When she got them, they involved trips to mineral-processing facilities in the field, which caused issues for her as a single mom as well as sartorial problems with the coveralls tailored for men’s bodies. Moving from production to the business-strategy side of the company, the author was passed over for promotion in favor of a male hire. A leap to a new company brought her a vice presidency, but when that position was made redundant, she had to scramble to reinvent herself. From these ups and downs, Mpofu distills wisdom on business success, including the importance of setting clear, actionable career goals; building networks of female mentors and co-workers who can help one another weather male-dominated workplaces; cultivating a humane leadership style; avoiding feelings of inadequacy and imposter syndrome; projecting confidence; and persevering through setbacks with sheer grit.

Mpofu’s autobiographical narrative, while often engaging, makes for a somewhat disorganized and repetitive framework for her ideas, which are not presented in a systematic way. (The book’s few exercises are perfunctory and often just refer readers to a lesson template on her coaching company’s website.) Many of her managerial and motivational tropes are familiar, but she has original and captivating ones of her own, some suggested by her experiences on safari. (An incident in which an elephant snaked its trunk around her neck illustrates the importance of staying calm in a crisis, and she enjoins managers to be generous

with their underlings the way a lion, after gorging on a kill, will allow vultures and hyenas to feast on the rotting remains.) Mpo-fu's prose sometimes lapses into fulsome management-lit uplift ("We need leaders who are visionary, compassionate and empa-thetic, with high levels of consciousness; leaders who value their employees and communities, and create sustainable shared value"), but she can also be pithily aphoristic—"One must be resilient and think fast, rather than wait for life to happen"—and even lyrical in the poems she sprinkles into the text. ("*I am thankful even to those who have given me pain / Without pain, there is no growth, there is no gain.*") Mpo-fu's writing sharply registers the galling implicit bias facing women in the office—"When the table is taken away and the door is shut in your face, leaning in doesn't help"—but her program of working hard, self-directing, forging relationships, and being open to new experiences is a hopeful, empowering one.

A useful and stimulating guide to building a career under trying circumstances.



NIGHT CRITTERS PLAY

Nyamidie, Eesseboe Kwami
Illus. by Pamela B. Christiansen
 Kwami Nyamidie (32 pp.)
 \$17.95 paper | \$3.99 e-book | Oct. 5, 2021
 978-0-9991666-4-2

Nocturnal creatures explore their dark habitats in this illustrated poem.

The moon and the Milky Way look down at some birds and other "critters" waking up for the night. Owls, frogs, and crickets make sounds, while armadillos, hedgehogs, and porcupines enjoy a time when they're safe from predators: "They don't know the reason, it's just Nature's way." But soon, a lion's roar and crocodile's bark announce that morning is near, and the nighttime animals retreat to their daytime homes. Nyamidie's poetry generally scans well, and some phrases are wonderfully lyrical: "The Milky Way loses all her freckles. / The drowsy leopard stretches her speckles." Some stanzas switch the pattern, however, making it hard to find end rhymes; parents may need to read the book aloud a few times before finding the rhythm for bedtime reading. Christiansen's gorgeously layered monotype prints evoke the mysterious nighttime world; her owl against the Milky Way could easily be a framed print. Young listeners and newly independent readers will find fun new vocabulary words, both in the poetry (*anthems, moon-banished*) and in the context of natural science (on the first page, a "pupa curls up in her cozy cocoon").

A visually appealing work that lap readers will want to look at again and again.

{ INDIE }

STEPPIN' OUT Tales From the Trail

O'Meara, Richard Michael
 Senachai Productions (62 pp.)

These collected poems trace a soldier's lifetime journey and his experiences of peace and war.

O'Meara has written both fiction and nonfiction. This is his first book of poetry, arranged in roughly chronological order from childhood and adolescence to young manhood during the Vietnam War era and reflective later years. Besides movement along a timeline, the poems also track the speaker's path to self-understanding, as mapped in the opening piece, "Starting Out." This is a concrete poem whose diamond shape echoes the speaker's ballooning self-importance—his "place in the history / of things"—that then narrows to a wiser humility: "Surprise, it was / never 'bout / me." O'Meara's voice is flexible, sometimes solemn, sometimes casual, as in "Michael," set in the midst of the Vietnam War: "When I came back / Michael had been dead six months. / There were bands / playin' in Central Park; / Jesus freaks were lovin', / all the world was carin'." The bright scene, the lines' musical lilt, and the speaker's slangy voice make a powerful ironic contrast with the poem's bitter reflections, nicely capturing the speaker's feelings of loss and anomie. Overall, the poems emphasize the pathos behind even the best memories, because their reality fades: "'Course all them ghosts, / the moms 'n dads, / the kids 'n friends, / they wander off." On some occasions the poems can become sentimental, as in "For a Soldier": "Remember him, / For, if he could, / His gaze would reach across the shores / And melt into your heart." This idealized figure bears little relationship to the more authentic, badly frightened young soldier in "Nuts," "who said / Cuttin' ears... / was the way to go." As for the book's presentation, it could be more attractive and polished, such as using page breaks correctly.

Intriguing poems about history and a warrior's trajectory with a strong sense of pathos.



DELIVERING THE DIGITAL RESTAURANT Your Roadmap to the Future of Food

Orsbourn, Carl & Meredith Sandland
 Amplify Publishing (264 pp.)
 \$26.95 | \$9.99 e-book | Oct. 12, 2021
 978-1-64543-948-6

A data-driven look at the steps restaurants must take to thrive in the digital age.

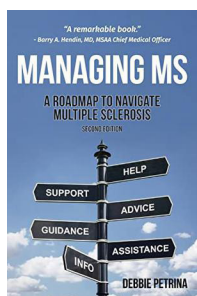
Debut authors Sandland and Orsbourn draw upon their extensive backgrounds in restaurant development and operations to craft a manual that aims to allow restaurants to meet their customers "where they are: online." The authors begin their analysis with a demographic

“The author’s truth-telling makes her advice all the more affecting.”

MANAGING MS

and sociological explanation for why their work is necessary. As Americans have shifted away from traditional family structures, for example, they’ve relied more heavily on restaurants for both sustenance and pleasure. Millennials and members of Generation Z, the authors say, spend significant amounts of their monthly income on restaurant meals, and they want to eat what they want, whenever they want it, so they order online; for these digital natives, “delivery is the new drive thru. And the rest of the population is not far behind.” The authors effectively explain the core competencies of digital platforms and analyze compelling examples of successful food delivery systems from around the world. They highlight marketing and customization opportunities for such systems without ignoring their challenges, such as the fact that off-premise consumers typically don’t order beverages and desserts. The authors also discuss the potential inherent in “ghost kitchens”—kitchens shared by multiple restaurants that focus on delivery only—and constantly stress the role that the Covid-19 pandemic is playing in the evolution of the food-service industry. Perhaps most notably for independent restaurant owners, Sandland and Orsbourn clearly lay out how marketing opportunities expand when a consumer uses a restaurant’s own online system rather than a third-party platform, such as DoorDash. The book also features insights drawn from more than 100 interviews with industry insiders and data from a variety of sources in multiple charts and graphs. Overall, Sandland and Orsbourn have created an essential road map for operating restaurants successfully in the modern age.

Serious restaurateurs will appreciate this comprehensive guide to delivery success.



MANAGING MS
A Roadmap To Navigate Multiple Sclerosis

Petrina, Debbie

Gatekeeper Press (202 pp.)

\$16.95 paper | \$8.44 e-book

Nov. 5, 2021

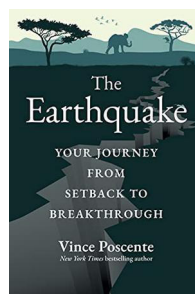
978-1-66291-794-3

A candid guide for people living with multiple sclerosis.

In 1980, at the age of 25, Petrina began showing symptoms of MS, but it wasn’t until four years later that she was officially diagnosed and decided to become an advocate for others with the disease. This second edition of her book, first published in 2011, offers fresh perspectives provided by an additional, harrowing decade of experience with MS. Petrina’s own story is a key focus, of course, but her main objective is to offer guidance and hope to others. Her background, which she discusses in Part I, tells of her experiences as a National Multiple Sclerosis Society peer counselor and MS blogger (some of her blog posts appear in the back of the book). The second part provides a helpful overview of MS symptoms and treatments as well as other basic information. In Part III, Petrina lays out unvarnished truths about the effects of the disease on the body and the brain; here, with great candor,

she explores such topics as the digestive system, sexual dysfunction, spasticity, and what she calls “The Elephants in the Room”: mental and behavioral health, substance abuse, addiction, and suicide. Petrina’s description of her pregnancy and subsequent MS flare-up is particularly poignant. Part IV includes helpful guidance regarding employment, long-term disability, and relationships with other people in addition to an uplifting section titled “Positives to Having MS,” which notes, for example, that “You take nothing for granted.” Petrina writes with a relentless optimism, but she’s unafraid to reveal the toll that the disease has taken on herself and her family. The author’s truth-telling makes her advice all the more affecting. These words from the book’s opening chapter are sure to linger: “I didn’t have a choice about getting [MS], but I did have a choice about whether I was going to let it control me or manage my life.”

A bravely told and brutally honest self-help work.



THE EARTHQUAKE
Your Journey From Setback to Breakthrough

Poscente, Vince

Matt Holt (224 pp.)

\$20.00 | \$11.99 e-book | Nov. 30, 2021

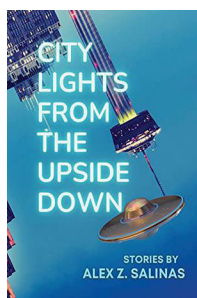
978-1-953295-71-2

A group of metaphorical creatures presents lessons about perseverance and mental strength in this guide.

In this follow-up to *The Ant and the Elephant* (2004), Poscente returns to the two animals who are his stand-ins for the conscious (ant) and subconscious (elephant) minds. Adir the Ant and Elgo the Elephant go everywhere together. Adir has learned how to make sure he and Elgo are working toward the same purpose in pursuit of excellence. Their idyllic existence is interrupted by an earthquake that destroys their home—and Adir’s extensive and highly leveraged real estate enterprise—and the two fall into despondency. After trying to rebuild as all their animal neighbors leave the area, Adir and Elgo eventually set out on a quest for a safe place to serve as a new home. With periodic advice from Brio the Owl, Adir and Elgo set goals for themselves, find a path through unfamiliar territory, and learn new ways to work together. They also face external challenges: Villains Chromia the Wolf and Valafar the Vulture see Adir and Elgo as potential prey. When Adir and Elgo’s conflicts aren’t driving them further from their goals, the predators are. By implementing Brio’s lessons (“Adir, criticism is like manure. It stinks but helps you grow”), Adir and Elgo are eventually able to triumph. In the introduction, Poscente writes that the book was inspired by his “own personal earthquake,” a confluence of bad financial decisions coupled with the falloff of his public speaking business during the recession of the late 2000s, which forced him to learn the lessons Adir and Elgo discover in the story. While the talking animal storyline may not appeal to all readers, it follows the successful path of earlier titles like Spencer Johnson’s *Who Moved My Cheese?* (1998) and Holden

Rothgeber and John Kotter's *Our Iceberg Is Melting* (2006) and does so equally well. Each chapter ends with a restatement of the pithy lessons taught by the tale, presented as an entry in Adir's collection of notes to himself. The volume's insights will be familiar to pop-psychology veterans, but the format is a smooth and persuasive way of concisely presenting them to new audiences.

Talking animals effectively teach readers to move from despair to solutions.



CITY LIGHTS FROM THE UPSIDE DOWN
Stories

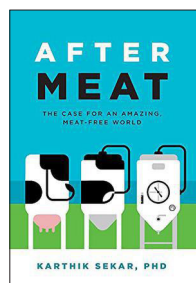
Salinas, Alex Z.
San Antonio Review (278 pp.)
\$15.99 paper | \$14.99 e-book | Sept. 3, 2021
978-1-73617-796-9

A volume offers sweet and savory short stories grounded by the human condition.

San Antonio poet and author Salinas bases his 40-tale collection primarily on his South Texas homeland, where characters deal with love, young adult angst and insecurity, death, and the bonds of family. The homespun opening story, "Places," is a first-person-narrated winner about a divorced son mourning his mother's death. In a family hobbled by the father's sudden abandonment, the only saving grace appears when the protagonist's estranged bachelor brother returns home. The interactions between fatherless brothers also populate other tales, like "Even-Steven," in which two siblings discuss the life-changing "accident" that scarred them both. Simmering with anger and guilt, the brothers attempt a resolution while perched on the edge of a cliff. Straightforward and bare-knuckle, the author's characters have no hidden agendas. Men consider women who have blond hair but brown eyes instead of blue to be "prisoners of predetermination"; White folks in South Texas comically dub themselves "white Mexican't." For the most part, these are stories about people for whom the struggle is very real. They may be short on cash, luck, and education, but they are rich in their experiences with life's simple pleasures and the satisfactions of a good day's work. Some tales veer off into their own worlds, as when a young man questions the identity of a trainee at a starship academy. The rest are indelibly human, best represented in the endearingly bittersweet first date at an IHOP between a nerd who does impressions and a community college "trailer-park girl." Collectively, these stories represent life's imperfections, and Salinas is skilled in mapping out the bones of his tales in an economy of pages. He is adept at cleverly outlining characters and their concerns while creating a variety of situations that will engulf readers. The drawback to this writerly flair is that readers will often find themselves at the finales wanting more, as in "Coke Machine," the tale of a mall janitor assisting a shopper obsessed with a wall that she believes conceals a vault. The same can be said of the title story, involving a young, restless, likable insurance worker

whose magical thinking seems to be the only thing giving him hope for the future.

A dazzling collection of satisfying tales consistent in theme, dexterity, and impressive execution.



AFTER MEAT
The Case for an Amazing, Meat-Free World

Sekar, Karthik
Self (422 pp.)
\$30.00 | \$18.00 paper | \$9.99 e-book
Nov. 16, 2021
978-0-578-97737-9
978-0-578-97735-5 paper

Data scientist Sekar imagines a meatless future in this debut work on

food technology.

When most people think of technology, they probably don't think of animals. However, like the wheel, the plow, or the sail, the cultivation of animals for their valuable resources has been one of humankind's key technological advances. Today, domesticated animals provide people with food, various materials, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals—though not without a cost, and animals happen to be incredibly inefficient tech that doesn't offer progress: "All indications suggest that the future of food will ultimately be tastier, healthier, cheaper, kinder, and better for the environment," the author says. "This will happen because we won't use animal products." Rather than making an argument based primarily on ethical or health concerns, Sekar walks readers through all the ways that raising animals on an industrial scale is technologically outdated. Advances in biochemical technology, he notes, mean that people can make anything that animals can by using organic compounds found in plants, fungi, and microbes. What's more, he adds, it can be done in a way that helps to alleviate global problems, such as water and food insecurity, poverty, and climate change. Along the way, Sekar locates this coming "alternative food revolution" within the larger sweep of history, from humanity's evolution as a species to the beginnings of agricultural society, industrialization, and the current climate crisis. In addition to predicting the many ways that humans will phase out meat in the near future, he offers advice for readers who are looking to become meat-free right now.

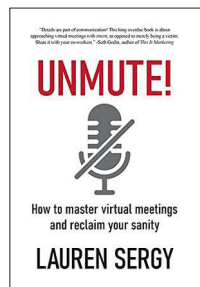
Sekar's book is not a traditional treatise on the evils of meat. His writing style is arrestingly matter-of-fact, as in this passage, in which he asserts how his own views are quite different from those of some other anti-meat thinkers: "Vegans and vegetarians are...more likely to buy something only if it's organic or all-natural. I dislike this. I'm unfairly lumped in with these groups when I wholly disagree with many of these ideas," which he then discusses in detail. The author has a background in biochemical engineering and systems biology, and his prose can be fairly technical, though not so much that the layperson won't be able to follow along. He's certainly done his research; the endnotes take up 70 pages alone. However, Sekar takes the book in

“Shaw’s memoir is a vibrant love letter to the Adirondacks, a hinterland of rough weather and encompassing forests and streams.”

THE CRAZY WISDOM

unexpected directions, devoting entire chapters to such ideas as morality and the very nature of knowledge. This is sometimes to the detriment of his overall message, as when he ends with an extended digression on the concept of the multiverse. Even so, the book’s left-brained approach to its subject means that even longtime meat skeptics will learn something new to bolster their argument. The book’s greatest strength is that it places meat consumption not only in an economic and nutritional context, but also in the larger context of human life, presenting a no-meat future as just the latest in a long line of tech upgrades.

An idiosyncratic and often engaging look at how meat isn’t cutting it.



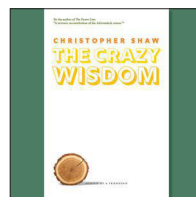
UNMUTE!
How To Master Virtual Meetings and Reclaim Your Sanity

Sergy, Lauren
FriesenPress (156 pp.)
\$32.99 | \$16.99 paper | \$8.99 e-book
June 21, 2021
978-1-03-911339-8
978-1-03-911338-1 paper

A guide offers advice on improving teleconferences.

Communications expert Sergy discovered a whole new need for her skills once Covid-19 struck and suddenly large chunks of the world’s workforce were in some kind of pandemic lockdown. Once “the virtual meeting genie was out of the bottle,” she was sought out by corporate clients who either knew nothing about how to manage the new ubiquity of video meetings or else were dealing with managers and customers who didn’t know how to deal with it (or both). In the nearly two years of rolling pandemic lockdowns and quarantines, these people have had to cope with the new realities of Zoom calls. In this short book, the author discusses almost all of these thorny realities—starting with what she acknowledges was the hilariously naïve, mistaken first impression that most folks would be able to figure out this process without much trouble. It turns out most people failed to deftly handle virtual meetings—hence communications experts and hence this guide, which is written in a direct, lively tone and adorned throughout with helpful “do this” and “don’t do this” diagrams and uncredited illustrations. Sergy covers everything from vocal range and speech patterns to lighting, backdrops, and basic postures. She laces everything with very effective, dry humor (“Virtual meetings are to in-person meetings what gluten-free baked goods are to regular baked goods: a dense, slightly rubbery version of what you really wanted, with a weird aftertaste”). Her manual is surely the first corporate etiquette book to feature the line “Always wear pants.” Every person who has ever called a Zoom meeting or endured one should read this invaluable guide for the sake of humanity.

A punchy, indispensable manual for the video-call era.



THE CRAZY WISDOM
Memoir of a Friendship

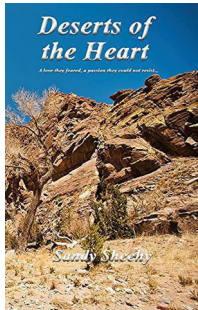
Shaw, Christopher
Outskirts Press (218 pp.)
\$17.95 paper | Aug. 27, 2021
978-1-977245-60-1

A memoir celebrates a difficult but deep friendship in the Adirondacks.

Not long after settling into a corner of the Adirondacks, that huge wilderness area in upstate New York (Shaw was born and raised in Schenectady, just south of there), the author met Jon Cody. This man would change Shaw’s life in ways both obvious and subtle. Cody was loud, fearless, gregarious, generous—he would literally give you the shirt off his back if you admired it—and always alive with ideas. If anyone was “larger than life,” it was Cody. He was also one-armed, dyslexic, and a prodigious consumer (and dealer) of weed—big blunts all day long—and often other illegal substances. And seldom would he refuse a drink. The dealing supported him, but he was also a very talented and skillful worker in leather. Shaw, meanwhile, was seriously adrift, with vague ideas of becoming a writer. If he just kept imagining himself one (old story, that), someday, he trusted, the Writing Fairy would appear and anoint him as such. Meanwhile, he drifted from job to job (ski lift operator, hunting guide). Cody lived and held court in the Wigwam, a remnant of a building on an abandoned estate, where everyone was welcome: hunters, fishermen, drug enthusiasts, assorted lowlifes, and, of course, the author. Cody died alone there in 2015 after living his life on his own terms, a much-abused cliché but very true in his case. Shaw did what he could to create a proper memorial. The author, by the way, finally did become an accomplished writer and teacher. One imagines dyslexic Cody, whom Shaw used to read to (Jack London was a favorite), being proud, if somewhat bemused.

It’s no surprise that Shaw is a gifted writer—graceful, sensitive, and learned. This being the account of a male friendship, it is important to note that the relationship between the author and Cody was a bromance, not an affair reminiscent of *Brokeback Mountain*. Shaw is clear on that, but a real love did exist between these two men, and he deftly examines it with regard to Jung and other sources. This memoir is also a vibrant love letter to the Adirondacks, a hinterland of rough weather and encompassing forests and streams that breeds characters to rival (but not match) Cody. This is a book that invites readers to sink into it, to wish they were living in that wild, enticing place; casting a line in those trout streams; or just getting plastered in the bars (so many bars) while singing and dancing exuberantly and having a good friend like Cody—none too sober either. This pal would eventually drag them home or throw a blanket over them on his couch. Finally, the work is a stirring paean to friendship and need. What is this “Crazy Wisdom” the memoir’s title trumpets? readers may ask. Perhaps it refers to Cody’s wisdom of fearlessly owning his life, which gave Shaw the courage to finally take charge of his own destiny. People need heroes to make their ways in this world, even if those heroes are as starkly unlikely as Cody.

A wonderfully written and inspiring exploration of a beautiful friendship.



DESERTS OF THE HEART

Sheehy, Sandy

White Bird Publications (262 pp.)

\$20.15 paper | \$7.99 e-book

June 22, 2021

978-1-63363-523-4

Well-bred Spanish sisters confront the rough-hewn culture and sexy cowboys of 18th-century Santa Fe in this period romance.

Following the deaths of their parents in a 1798 yellow fever epidemic, 21-year-old Sofia Alcantara y Pasqual and her 14-year-old sister, Valeria, travel from Veracruz to New Spain's northern outpost of Santa Fe. They are to be governesses at a hacienda, but their main mission is to find husbands among the region's single men. Despite their small dowries, their distinguished family background and general classiness as immigrants from old Spain guarantee them good prospects provided they maintain spotless reputations. Arriving at Rancho de las Palomas, they meet the kindly Don Emilio, who insists they teach the mestizo ranch hands' kids as well as his own; his frosty wife, Doña Inmaculada, a racist religious fanatic who wants the ranch hands kept uneducated; and his cruel eldest son, Alfonso, who hoodies his horse with his spurs whenever he rides to Santa

Fe. Then there's the lanky ranch manager, Beto, Don Emilio's bastard son by a Native American mistress, whose arrogant manliness infuriates and attracts Sofia. Sofia is appalled when Valeria falls in love with the loathsome Alfonso, but her own behavior is even more reckless. Sofia casually gives up her virginity when she and Beto shelter in a cave during a thunderstorm. After many more outdoor assignations, she gets pregnant. Yet despite Beto's uncanny skill as a lover and persistent marriage proposals, she puts him off because he considers romantic passion to be destructive nonsense and views their union as a smart, stock-breeding move. The plot thickens as Doña Inmaculada levels witchcraft charges at a Native healer; Alfonso's rivalry with Beto turns violent; and Sofia mulls unwed motherhood in a nunnery.

Sheehy's yarn paints a well-observed, almost ethnographic portrait of life in what would become New Mexico, a place where gradations of race and class are marked but there is also much multicultural blending between Spanish and Native societies. (The local Pueblo Indians don't see much difference between the Virgin Mary and their own Corn Goddess.) The novel also charts a transition in mores from religious obscurantism toward Enlightenment rationality and from citified polish and hauteur toward frontier earthiness and egalitarianism. And the collision between a refined daughter of privilege and a rustic mestizo who likes to talk frankly about sex suggests an antique, Spanish-flavored *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Some aspects of this feel contradictory and even anachronistic. Despite the insistent talk of dire reputational consequences for sexual transgressions, such indiscretions provoke ribaldry rather than condemnation. Nonprocreative acts that would have been thought sinful and repulsive back then are embraced by the blithely sex-positive characters. Sheehy's prose is skillful and evocative in descriptive passages but doesn't convey passion well. While the physical attraction between Sofia and Beto is ostensibly volcanic and multiorgasmic in the many lavish sex scenes, their relationship feels stilted, with Beto's stolid dialogue—"Oh," he said, as if an afterthought, "your broad hips and your full breasts are not just well-suited for childbearing. They are beautiful to my eyes—and to my hands and to my other parts"—usually killing the mood. Readers may be left wondering what the couple, aside from various body parts, really see in each other.

A richly textured portrait of old Santa Fe arranged around a flawed love story.

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“Sibbison writes thoughtfully about her hero’s dilemma and its cultural, familial, and personal context.”

HELEN IN TROUBLE



HELEN IN TROUBLE

Sibbison, Wendy
Booksmyth Press (242 pp.)
\$18.00 paper | July 18, 2021
978-1-73665-063-9

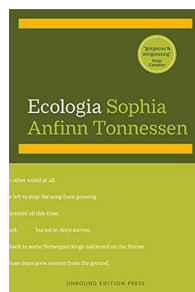


A 16-year-old girl’s unexpected pregnancy leads her on a hero’s journey in this 1963-set debut historical novel.

Waking up in a university library with her 18-year-old boyfriend, Quentin Caffrey, after a night of drunken, frat-house partying, prep schooler Helen Bird is panicked, and not just because she missed her chaperone’s curfew. The couple’s unspoken agreement, formed in “their foggy world of wordless decisions,” has been to use coitus interruptus as their only form of birth control, but this time, Helen can’t find the sticky evidence. She says nothing to Quentin. Later, in his dorm room, he contemplates writing her a letter about his mystical, profound “epiphany” that justified not pulling out (it “would be wrong, even evil, a turning away from the sublime”). But his next missive is silent on the subject. As for Helen, she returns home to Arlington, Virginia, and her junior year at St. Joan’s. She figures out (more or less) how to use her mother’s douche bag and hopes for the best but never considers talking to her parent, who also grew up in a family where many important things were unsayable. Her father, too, knows how to bite his tongue, as when forced to write pro-strip mining press releases for his boss, a United States senator. Though she tries to resume her life of propriety, Helen must soon face up to the truth: She’s pregnant, and only an abortion can save her future. It requires the girl to find an inner determination she didn’t know she had, reach out to a friend, trust strangers, and ask for help. Both in the process and its aftermath, these resources come through for her, allowing Helen to make rich connections with feminine strength and caring, finally breaking her and her family’s walls of silence.

In her novel, Sibbison writes thoughtfully about her hero’s dilemma and its cultural, familial, and personal context. For example, Quentin doesn’t buy condoms because that “would make their sex premeditated and Helen a ‘pig.’ No decent, unmarried girl would plan to have intercourse.” Similarly, Helen’s mother has a poignant backstory that makes sense of her reticence: “It was obvious that she was to know nothing. Questions would bring only displeasure, which Rosemary could not risk.” Moral characterization is complex, as when delineating the Birds’ support of the civil rights movement; their sympathy “was real but almost entirely abstract.” Another character, Ilse Gauden, a young woman who helps arrange abortions, became involved after realizing that civil rights workers were getting pregnant in the name of free love. Since something should be done, Ilse did it. The author does a fine job of tying Helen’s everyday life, during which she must hide every sign of her pregnancy, to the compelling archetypal elements in her experience. The correspondence is especially powerful when—emotionally and literally—the girl must make a tenebrous voyage to Ilse’s rough, ill-lit neighborhood before reaching her destination’s unexpected warmth.

A beautifully written, compassionate coming-of-age tale with subtle mythic overtones.



ECOLOGIA

Tonnessen, Sophia Anfinn
Unbound Edition Press (118 pp.)
\$22.00 | Oct. 12, 2021
978-0-9913780-1-2



Tonnessen’s poems examine transitions and transformations in all their danger and beauty.

In her debut collection, Tonnessen knits together images that, however disparate, depend in some way on the notion of crossing and redrawing boundaries—most significantly, those reflecting her experiences as a transgender woman. References range widely—pop culture, religion, myths and fairy tales, other poets, birds and flowers, and contemporary events, like Covid lockdowns. In “Theosis,” for example, the speaker is shaving her legs, seemingly a quotidian act but one connected with her hard-won project of claiming her feminine identity: “I want to be a real girl. I want this one thing.” She’s visited by Sophia, considered in the Orthodox Church (Tonnessen’s academic focus is Slavic studies) to be the sainted, feminine personification of divine wisdom. Sophia tells the poet she’s been listening all along and trying to respond, assuring her, “I want you to be a woman too.” The poet asks to be called by their shared name, signifying their mutuality: “(Whisper it to me / like you love me). Whisper it like you want to be inside me.” This conclusion fulfills the poem’s title; *theosis* means transformation into union with God. Tonnessen’s sprawling poems often employ pauses or unfinished lines, sometimes to convey wry or fraught understatement. As throughout the collection, the speaker works her way from anguish to a deeply felt sense of spiritual union (with herself? with Sophia?): “I will lay with you in the sun until / we both burn swim with you in the river til we both drown,” then “Dance with you until / we are tired / and no longer ashamed.” It’s particularly moving that the speaker in these poems, so often distracted by porn or TikTok or Netflix, continually achieves lyrical moments of grace that feel utterly authentic, making these seeming dislocations into a connected whole and a beautiful manifestation of her experiences.

A well-crafted, tender collection that emphasizes exploration.



THE STRANGER
The Genesis Project Series

Van Arsdale, Greg
Self (327 pp.)
\$12.95 paper | March 8, 2017
978-1-520790-90-9

In this thriller series starter, the creator of a virtual world enters his synthetic reality to defeat an evil, power-hungry associate.

Van Arsdale raises the curtain in the fashion of Robert Ludlum’s *The Bourne Identity* (1980) with an amnesiac mystery fugitive running from militias. In an apparent

coastal community, his instincts are to seek shelter with a doctor named Lazlow and his widowed daughter, Mary. Readers are soon informed that the visitor is John Neumann, the brilliant creator of a virtual-reality environment in which human minds can be stored in a simulation of the material universe; it's seen as a mercy for people in comas or other infirmities. John, it turns out, has inserted himself wholly into this *Matrix*-like place, losing key memories in the process, to reverse the schemes of Jack Lotikus, the amoral corporate vice president of John's company. Jack has infiltrated the VR world, re-creating himself as Jack Logan, a warlordlike governor with a fortune built on crime. Because the technology draws on "dark energy" interactions that activate the human spirit and spooky physics verging on the supernatural, Jack can conquer others' minds in both virtual and real worlds—if he can master the process via the compromised Lazlow and his supercomputer. Much of the novel is told through dialogue between a disbelieving, bitter Lazlow and John, who's trying to convince the scientist of his origins and good intentions. Along the way, the author provides readers with quite a bit of metaphysical theorizing: "Since the soul is ethereal, or dark, in nature, that leads me to believe it is non-dimensional, not bounded by space and time, the part of the spirit that extends beyond the mind." The action scenes are pretty strong stuff, though, when the lecturing lets up, and they may effectively draw readers into later installments of the four-part Genesis Project saga. The presence of a John the Baptist-type character and book of Revelations-style visions indicate a Christian cosmology, although if the work has an evangelical agenda, it remains muted throughout.

A talky but often engaging SF actioner.

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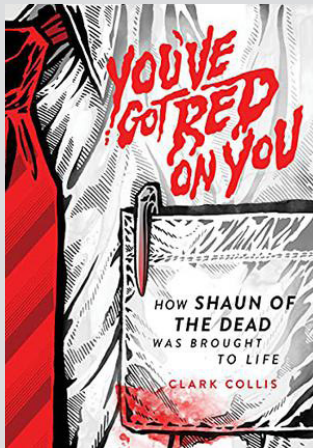
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INDIE BOOKS OF THE MONTH

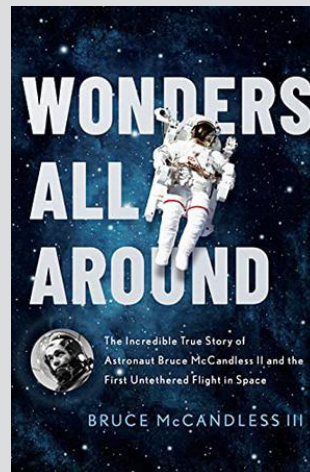
FICTION | NONFICTION | CHILDREN'S | YOUNG ADULT | INDIE



YOU'VE GOT RED ON YOU

Clark Collis

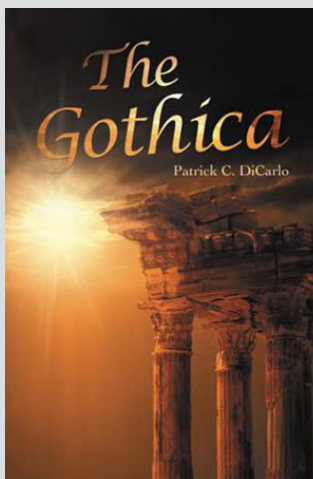
A sharply written, thorough, and loving tribute to a modern-day cinema classic.



WONDERS ALL AROUND

Bruce McCandless III

A fine evocation of the NASA experience—in the sky and on Earth.



THE GOTHICA

Patrick C. DiCarlo

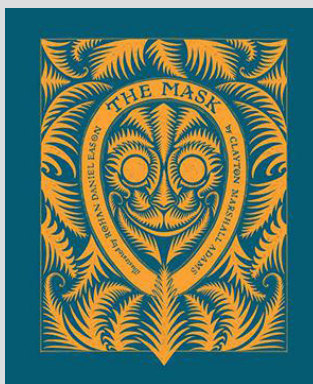
A gripping, meticulous, and illuminating tale of war and intrigue.



PARIS BLUE

Julie Scolnik

An engrossing coming-of-age story that wrings hard-won wisdom from giddy romance.

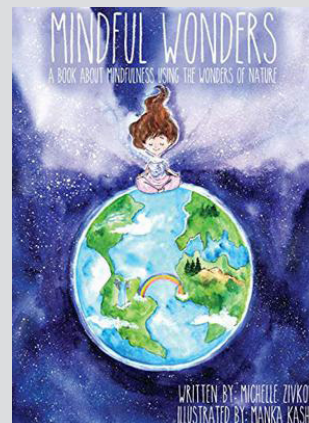


THE MASK

Clayton Marshall Adams

Illus. by Roban Daniel Eason

A young, laudable voice tells an indelible story of acceptance and prejudice.



MINDFUL WONDERS

Michelle Zivkov

Illus. by Manka Kasha

A peaceful book of mindfulness exercises.



GREYSTONE KIDS

Celebrating our *Kirkus Reviews*

Best Picture Books of 2021!



We All Play / kimêtawânaw

by Julie Flett

HC • ISBN 978-1-77164-607-9

A *Washington Post* Best Children's Book of 2021

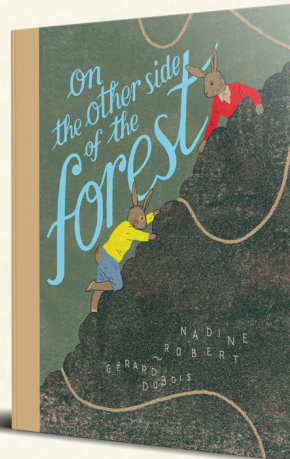
★ A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Picture Book of 2021

★ *Publisher's Weekly*

★ *School Library Journal*

★ *The Horn Book*

A New York Public Library Best Children's Book of 2021



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by Nadine Roberts

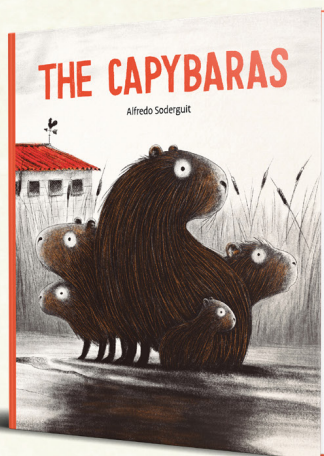
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A 2021 New York Times/ New York Public Library Best Illustrated Children's Book

★ A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Picture Book of 2021

★ *Publisher's Weekly*



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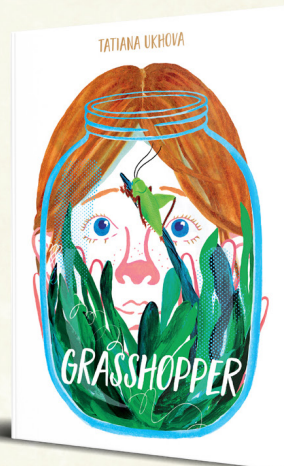
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★ A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Picture Book of 2021

★ *Publisher's Weekly*

★ *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

A New York Public Library Best Children's Book of 2021



Grasshopper

by Tatiana Ukhova


HC • ISBN 978-1-77164-692-5

★ A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Picture Book of 2021

"Gloriously inventive."

NEW YORK TIMES

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